

"Is the Creole Prototype Hypothesis Wrong?"

John McWhorter

Since the introduction of the Creole Prototype hypothesis in 1998, much of the controversy it has occasioned has centered on a question as to whether it is scientifically appropriate to reconstruct creoles as born as pidgins, rather than as results of only moderately transformational second-language acquisition or as simply mixtures of "features" from assorted languages coming together. This presentation first outlines traits in creoles that reveal their origin in pidgins. Then, the talk refines the characterization of the Creole Prototype's three features, regarding inflectional morphology, tone, and compositionality of derivation-root combinations. The inflectional component is refined to incorporate Booij's (1993) distinction between contextual and inherent inflection and Kihm's (2003) proposal that inflectional morphology can be either bound or free. The tonal stipulation is refined in view of traits of Mon-Khmer phonology that distinguish these languages from creoles despite their analyticity, and the grammatical uses of tone in some creoles such as Papiamentu and Principense. Finally, for the derivational component, an account is proposed for the noncompositionality of reduplicated forms that have been observed in many creoles. The conclusion is that there remains a synchronic characterization possible only in languages recently born from pidgins, and impossible of older (i.e. most) languages.