

9.6. AFRIKAANS

Controversy about the development of Afrikaans has been sharper than for any other putative creole, largely (apparently) for political reasons. The extreme positions are these: (a) Afrikaans developed out of Dutch exclusively through internally-motivated changes of a type found in Dutch dialects of Europe and/or in other Germanic languages; and (b) Afrikaans is a creole, the result of relexification of a Portuguese-based creole with, maybe, some influence from Hottentot (i.e., Khoisan), Malay, and other languages spoken in and around Cape Town during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Between these two extremes are various intermediate positions, such as the view that Afrikaans is a semi-creole which arose partly through internally-motivated changes in Dutch but partly through influence from other South African languages. We have not carried out independent study either of the linguistic features of Afrikaans or of its social history; our comments on the case therefore rest entirely on secondary sources. We offer them here for their possible methodological

value. In particular, it seems to us that the published social and linguistic facts about Afrikaans have not been sufficiently studied together, as a package, to see what conclusion best fits them. This case study is based on an unpublished section of the original version of Thomason (1980a).

Certainly Afrikaans seems at first glance to be an unlikely candidate for creole status, because the socially dominant core of its speech community is now, and always has been, the descendants of the original Dutch settlers at Cape Town after its founding in 1652. The Dutch colonists could reasonably have been expected to pass their language on to their descendants in a continuous unbroken process of normal transmission, in sharp contrast to, say, the transmission of Portuguese by Portuguese slavemasters to enslaved Africans. However, Valkhoff's careful study (1966) of the external history of Afrikaans shows that the process of transmission of Dutch in the Cape Colony was not as clear-cut as one might have assumed. Our sketch of this history is based on Valkhoff's account.

Two major factors complicate the picture. First, chronologically speaking, is the fact that few Dutch women accompanied the first Dutch settlers to Cape Town. A natural consequence of this situation was that, in the first twenty years of the Cape Colony, some 75 percent of the children born to female slaves were fathered by Dutch colonists (Valkhoff, 206). (Valkhoff refers to documentary evidence that refutes "the persistent legend"—fostered, by implication, by Afrikaners who hated the idea of miscegenation—"that the Cape Coloured had been begotten only by passing sailors, not by the White colonists themselves" [75].) Now, the slaves were Asian and would have been speaking a Portuguese-based Creole and/or Malay, and the Dutch, according to Valkhoff, would also have known Portuguese and/or Portuguese Creole. Nevertheless, the language passed on to these children—whose descendants later formed the Cape Coloured community—was a form of speech with Dutch vocabulary.

Valkhoff's claim is that the Dutch learned by the children must have been very heavily influenced by Portuguese Creole in particular—that, in effect, the transmission process was not normal, since the children's slave mothers would have spoken at best broken Dutch. Valkhoff estimates that 45 percent of the nearly four million current (as of 1966) speakers of Afrikaans are coloureds, which means that the coloureds' influence on the further development of Dutch in

South Africa could have been considerable if the early proportions of coloureds to whites were similar.

Meanwhile, the second complicating factor entered the picture once white families settled in numbers in the Cape Colony. It was common practice for Dutch mothers in southern Africa and the East Indies to turn over the duties of bringing up their children to servants. From these servants the children learned both Portuguese Creole and Dutch but, according to an eighteenth-century German traveler named Kolbe, the servants' poor command of Dutch meant that the children were learning "from the outset a very pitiful Dutch" (cited by Valkhoff, 176). By 1685, high officials of the Dutch East India Company were expressing fears that the broken Dutch which had become established, especially among White children, "would prove to be ineradicable" (209). In this way, Valkhoff believes, Portuguese Creole (and perhaps also Hottentot, whose speakers were prized as interpreters for their linguistic skills) interference features found their way into the Dutch of South Africa.

The transmission process, as Valkhoff describes it, would have been bent rather than broken in the early years of Cape Colony Dutch. Valkhoff points to the "advanced" (i.e., more creole-like) Afrikaans of certain subgroups of the coloureds as evidence of coloured participation in the process; he also remarks on the continued influence of High Dutch on Afrikaans as spoken by whites. Some recent comments by Hans den Besten (personal communication, 1984), however, indicate that the distinction between the Afrikaans of coloureds and the Afrikaans of whites is by no means so simple. White farmhands in the West Cape, he observes, speak the same type of Afrikaans that West Cape Coloureds speak—a dialect which is, moreover, hard for Afrikaners from the East Cape to understand, thanks primarily to several sound changes that have occurred in West Cape Afrikaans. He also points out that the high "bookish" style of spoken Afrikaans is relatively easy for Dutch speakers to understand, while the "deep," or colloquial, register of spoken Afrikaans is very difficult for Dutch speakers to follow.

When we look at the linguistic features of Afrikaans, we find no obviously marked features from any language other than Dutch. One possible exception to this generalization is the double negative marker, which den Besten (1985) suggests as a Khoisan interference feature. Another possible exception is the development of nasalized

vowels, e.g., *ons* [õ:s] 'we, us' (Lockwood 1965:208), which could have arisen under Portuguese influence. We also find more marked features of Dutch grammar in Afrikaans than we find from the vocabulary-base language in any languages that are uncontroversially classed as creoles; even possible semi-creoles such as Réunion Creole, which might have as much French grammar as Afrikaans has Dutch grammar, also have features from substrate languages in addition to their French features. The information we give below about Afrikaans structure comes from Lockwood (1964:208 ff.)

A number of phonological changes from Dutch to Afrikaans simplify the phonological inventory. An example is the loss of voiced fricatives through merger with their voiceless counterparts.

Morphological simplification has occurred to some extent in nominal inflection and to a great extent in verb inflection. Nouns and plural personal pronouns lack case distinctions, though singular personal pronouns retain the Dutch distinction between the subject and object cases. In verbs, Dutch itself has a more analytic system than some other Germanic languages, such as German; but Afrikaans has lost all personal endings and much of the tense system, so it is much more analytic even than Dutch. The Dutch preterite has been lost except in auxiliaries, and the original perfect has become the ordinary Afrikaans past tense (cf., analogous changes in French, southern German, Yiddish, Italian, etc.). The past participle is now derived from the present stem, and Afrikaans has entirely lost the characteristic Germanic distinction between strong and weak verbs. Among Lockwood's examples (210) are these: *ek, ons* (etc.) *skryf* 'I, we (etc.) write'; *ek, ons* (etc.) *het geskryf* 'I, we (etc.) wrote, have written'. Lockwood (210) says that the loss of Dutch structure has not impoverished the expressive possibilities of Afrikaans, because new verbal constructions have developed, e.g., a periphrastic progressive aspect construction: *ek was aan die skryf* 'I was writing' (literally 'I was on the write').

The syntax of Afrikaans, according to Lockwood, is similar to that of Dutch. The main innovations he mentions are the double negative and a few Malay features, e.g., a reduplication process. The lexicon is mainly Dutch, though there are numerous English loanwords; there are also a few Malay loanwords and some African words for "purely African objects and conditions" (210 f.).

Opponents of Hesseling's original suggestion (1897, 1923) (and of Valkhoff's, following Hesseling) that Afrikaans arose by (semi-) creolization with "Malayo-Portuguese" are assiduous in their efforts to identify all features of Afrikaans with dialect developments in European Dutch. But many of these identifications are of dubious historical value, since they do not occur in clusters in one or more dialects that can be shown to have been spoken in the Cape Colony during the formative period of Afrikaans. That is: it is not enough to show that a particular change is a possible development in a Dutch dialect; in order to connect a feature of Afrikaans with a particular dialect feature in Holland or Belgium, one must show that speakers of the relevant European dialects were present at the relevant time in sufficient numbers to have influenced the development. Such a demonstration will be most convincing, moreover, when it involves the development of arguably marked features. In any case, the drastic inflectional simplifications and consequent remodelling of Dutch structures in Afrikaans are not typical, as a set of changes, of any European Dutch dialect or dialect group. To argue that Afrikaans arose by a series of perfectly ordinary internally motivated changes from Dutch flies in the face of everything we know about ordinary rates of internally-motivated change. We do not suggest that we can specify precise rates of change, but rather that the changes from Dutch to Afrikaans, apparently during the early years of the Cape Colony, were much too extensive to have arisen solely by internal means in the elapsed time. However, as we observed above, they show little positive interference from any other languages, as far as we can tell; nor are Afrikaans structures similar in detail to structures of most abrupt creoles with European lexicons.

Neither the social situation nor the linguistic facts, therefore, seem to support a claim that Afrikaans is a creole in origin. Both sets of facts do support the claim that speakers of other languages shifted to Dutch in the years following the founding of Cape Town, and that the children of Dutch fathers and, later, of Dutch mothers and fathers learned a form of Dutch that was significantly different from the Dutch spoken natively by adult Dutch settlers. The essence of the difference appears to lie in the simplification of the inflectional systems, and the (concomitant?) emergence of analytic constructions to take the place of certain inflectional features that were lost. In

terms of our framework, this looks like a failure to learn the most difficult features of the target language during a process of language shift, if one is willing to accept the Dutch children's "bad Dutch" as the first stage in the TL population's acceptance of the shifting speakers' errors. The absence of many accompanying interference features from adult learners' original native languages is, we believe, explained in part by the continuing influence of native Dutch speakers on Afrikaans as it developed and in part by the fact that the learners' languages—Malay, Portuguese Creole, and Hottentot and other African languages—were sufficiently diverse typologically that their combined effect would have been to promote the emergence only of unmarked structures, not of marked ones. On this view, Afrikaans is historically a descendant of Dutch, as the Afrikaners claim, because it preserves a significant portion of Dutch structures in all its grammatical subsystems, even (though much reduced) in the morphology. But its development into a separate language was in fact heavily conditioned by nonwhites who learned Dutch imperfectly as a second language.

Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics

Sarah Grey Thomason

and

Terrence Kaufman

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