Lexical Borrowing, Creolization and Basic Vocabulary

George L. Huttar

1. Introduction*

This paper is concerned with two sets of questions, one from semantics and cognitive linguistics, one from diachronic linguistics and in particular creole studies. From the cognitive-semantic side, we are dealing with issues of “basic” vocabulary: what sorts of lexical items, or, more precisely, what sorts of concepts, are, in some useful sense or other (say, psychologically more salient), more “basic” than others? From the diachronic linguistics side, the issues concern likelihood of change through contact: “For what sorts of concepts are lexical items most readily replaced by items from new sources, and which ones are more resistant to such replacement?” or, “For what sorts of concepts do lexical items reflect earlier contact, and which ones later contact?”

Drawing primarily on data from a creole language, the paper attempts to suggest answers to both kinds of questions by relating the two to each other, exploring how the “basicness” of a lexical item may be related to its amenability to replacement under language contact.

It is nothing new, of course, to claim that the “basicness” of lexical items may be correlated with how easily they are replaced in a language contact situation. As Thomason and Kaufman (1988:74) put it, “we know of no exceptions — and would be astonished to find any — to the rule that nonbasic vocabulary is always borrowed first.” They offer no definition of “basic vocabulary”, it apparently being taken for granted that we all know and agree what the term means — presumably the sorts of concepts reflected in “Swadesh” or similar lists commonly used in comparative reconstruction (see, e.g., Bynon 1977:267-268).

The most studied creole languages arose as a result of contact between the language of a socially dominant group (such as plantation owners and overseers), the “superstrate”, and the languages of a number of socially oppressed groups (such as slaves), the “substrate”. Such creoles usually have

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1994 meeting of the Linguistic Association of the Southwest. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of these workpapers for their comments, which have greatly improved the present version.
lexical items clearly derived from both superstrate and substrate sources. Let us assume for now — the assumption will eventually be challenged in §4 below — that the substrate languages represent in some sense an earlier stage of the creole that eventually emerged. In that case identifying the sorts of concepts for which creoles tend to use superstrate-derived forms, and those for which they use substrate-derived forms, gives us a way of answering our question about which sorts of lexical items are more amenable to replacement from new sources.¹ In addition, some creoles, such as those of Suriname, have had contact with a number of superstrate languages in succession during their history. Since it is often possible to identify from which superstrate language a particular lexical item is derived, these languages provide an additional way to answer that same question, to the extent to which the order of contacts with the various superstrate languages is known.

2. Historical background

Ndyuka is the creole language spoken by one of six groups of “Maroons” or “Bush Negroes” in the former Dutch colony of Suriname on the northeast coast of South America. The Ndyuka society was formed by slaves escaping from plantations in Suriname’s coastal area primarily in the first few decades of the eighteenth century. In its phonology, lexicon, and semantic organization Ndyuka shows many resemblances to languages of West Africa. Its syntax likewise has many features also found in many languages of West Africa; some of these, however, may be due at least in part to the operation of universal rather than substratal factors.

We are concerned in this paper with lexical items in Ndyuka from four major sources: English, Dutch, Portuguese, and various African languages. (We leave aside French and, to begin with, various Amerindian languages.²) African languages involved include Bantu languages from as far south as Angola, through Kwa and other languages of the Slave and Gold Coasts (today’s Benin, Togo, and Ghana), to languages of the Windward Coast (the Senegambia and southeast from there).

Controversies regarding the relative timing of input from all these languages into Ndyuka (and other creoles of Suriname) have centered around English and Portuguese. Both of these languages were spoken in Suriname either before or during the period during which the Ndyuka society was founded. The first permanent European settlement in Suriname was established

¹ This study can thus be seen as a step toward filling in the details of Mühlhäusler’s (1986) necessarily brief treatment, in which it is pointed out that the proportion of lexical items from substratal sources is likely to be higher in some semantic domains than others, and (233-234) that marked terms are more apt to come from the substratum. On this latter principle, see Frake (1971).
² Amerindian languages contributing to Ndyuka lexicon are chiefly Cariban, but include Arawakan and Tupi languages as well.
by the British in 1651. Significant numbers of Portuguese-speaking plantation owners had arrived by 1667, the year the British ceded Suriname (and some of present-day Guyana) to the Dutch. On the other side of the Atlantic, there is evidence for both English- and Portuguese-based contact languages being used at various times and in various areas between Europeans and those with whom they were interacting in the slave trade. In light of this history, some (e.g., Herskovits 1931, Voorhoeve 1973) have emphasized the contact with Portuguese in Africa as a source of Portuguese-based lexical items in Suriname, particularly in Saramaccan; others (e.g., Schuchardt 1914, Goodman 1987) have seen the contact with Portuguese on certain Suriname plantations (and Brazilian ones before that) as the main source; and others (e.g., Price 1976) have argued for significant Portuguese input into Suriname creoles both in Africa and in the New World.

By contrast, the sequence of English and Dutch contact for the Suriname creoles is quite straightforward: for the most part (ignoring twentieth century English input), English contact ceased before Dutch contact began. Thus looking at the English- and Dutch-derived lexical items in the Suriname creoles provides data about which sorts of items are likely to be acquired first by a nascent creole; conclusions there can then be applied to the question of to what extent the Portuguese input preceded or followed that of English and Dutch. And given our assumption that substrate items are retentions of some sort while superstrate items are “borrowed”, examination of the distribution of substrate (e.g., African) and superstrate (e.g., English, Dutch, Portuguese) items in the lexicon of a creole sheds light on what sorts of lexical items are more readily borrowed, which ones more resistant to borrowing.

3. Lexical borrowing

The phenomenon of lexical items within the same general domain coming from two or more different sources is of course not limited to creoles. A well known example is that of domestic animal names in English, in which French-derived terms refer to the meat of various animals, while “native” (Germanic) terms refer to the animals themselves. We know that the French-derived items entered the language later than the others did. It is also reasonable to assume (for a language whose speakers’ experience included daily contact with the animals themselves, not merely their meat) that the concepts of the animals themselves are semantically more basic than the concepts of prepared (by butchering, cooking) parts of the animals. This, then, would be a case where later lexical items are less basic than earlier ones — or where more basic items are more resistant to replacement through borrowing — as Thomason and Kaufman claim is always the case.

This conclusion, however, depends on the assumption that names (or concepts) of animals are more “basic” than names (or concepts) of cooked animal parts. While this assumption is probably defensible on the basis of salience, let us look at a domain where the status of “basic” concepts and terms...
can be more firmly established, though not without controversy: that of color terms.

4. Color terms

Berlin and Kay (1969) provide evidence that the existence of terms in a language to distinguish certain colors implies the existence of terms to distinguish certain other colors. Thus a term for ‘red’ implies terms for ‘black/dark’ and ‘white/light’. A term for ‘yellow’ or ‘green’ implies one for ‘red’, etc. In terms of occurrence of color terms in various languages, this can be expressed thus: fewer languages have lexical items distinguishing ‘red’ from other colors than have items distinguishing ‘black/dark’ and ‘white/light’; fewer languages have lexical items distinguishing ‘yellow’ or ‘green’ from other colors than have an item for ‘red’; etc. Using this implicational hierarchy, let us consider the more widespread terms as more basic. Thus ‘black’ and ‘white’ are more basic than ‘red’, ‘red’ is more basic than ‘yellow’ or ‘green’, etc. We are not defining “more basic” as “occurring in more languages”, merely claiming that color (and eventually other) terms that occur in more languages are in fact more basic than other terms. Thus the definition of “basic” can still be in terms of some other characteristic, such as cognitive or some other sort of salience.³

In Garifuna, an Arawakan language with Cariban elements spoken in the Gulf coastal region of Central America, terms for ‘yellow’ and ‘green’ are derived from Spanish, while more basic ‘white’, ‘black’, and ‘red’ are not, presumably deriving from Arawakan or other Amerindian sources (Fleming 1966:308). In the creole Ndyuka, ‘black’ is from English, ‘red’ probably is, and ‘white’ fits correspondences with both English and Dutch; but less basic ‘blue’ and ‘green’ are unequivocally from Dutch, a language which, as mentioned above, played a role in the development of Ndyuka later than did English (see Figure 1). Likewise ‘light brown/light purple’ is almost certainly from Dutch.

³ Note that this use of “basic” only partially coincides with that of Berlin and Kay.
In both of these cases, Garifuna and Ndyuka, we find support for the principle that more basic terms are more resistant to replacement from borrowing, thus representing earlier stages of a language — in the case of creoles, earlier known contact.

But could we not interpret the data from Ndyuka color terms in exactly the opposite way? That is, that the more basic terms are more open to replacement? The argument would run this way: more basic ‘black’, ‘white’ and ‘red’ derive from English, while less basic ‘blue’ and ‘green’ derive from Dutch; contact with English preceded contact with Dutch; therefore it is the first, more basic set of terms that was more readily replaced, while the less basic ones resisted replacement during the earlier, English-contact period.

One way out of this impasse is to appeal to the qualitative difference between the initial formation of Ndyuka, when English was the main superstrate language involved, and subsequent development of the language, when Dutch played that role. In other words, we now question our earlier assumption that the substrate languages represent an “earlier stage” of a creole. The idea here is that we cannot really talk of “replacement” in the usual sense when a language is a-borning, for it is not clear just what if anything is being replaced when a language is just getting started. That the most basic color terms in Ndyuka are from English would not, then, provide evidence that more basic terms are less resistant to replacement, but rather evidence for the notion that when a new language is being produced under creolization, basic terms will be the first to enter the stable lexical stock of the language.

There is in fact some evidence that even in the case of English terms for ‘black’, ‘white’, and ‘red’ we are not dealing with pure replacement in the sense of all African terms having been lost. Namely, the Ndyuka ideophones intensifying these three concepts appear to be retentions from African color terms: fànn, the ideophone associated with ‘white’, for example, is phonetically very close or identical to ‘white’ in some languages of West Africa. In addition, a Bantu root for ‘white’ shows up as Ndyuka pemba, a white clay used ritually. Likewise the Ndyuka ideophones associated with ‘black’ and ‘red’, píí and nyànn, respectively, appear to derive from Bantu forms for ‘dark’ and ‘red’.

Looking at a later stage in the language, we can also ask whether the entrance of Dutch-derived color terms into Ndyuka is in fact replacement: were there English-derived terms for ‘green’ etc. in the language that were then replaced by Dutch-derived ones? Ndyuka does in fact have a reflex of English green in the tree name giinati ‘greenheart (Tabebuia serratifolia)’, but this name could easily have been derived as a whole from Eng. greenheart, attested since 1756, rather than as a compound of giin + ati < green + heart.4 We have no evidence for reflexes of blue, purple, or brown.

Another approach to deciding between these two interpretations of the English- and Dutch-derived Ndyuka color terms is to look at the substrate-derived color terms. Unfortunately, Ndyuka has few if any such color terms.

---

4 The Ndyuka reflex of Eng. heart is ati.
Two possibly substrate-derived terms are "taya" ‘yellow’ and "tyuwi" ‘gray, pastel’. Sparse and uncertain as these data are, they can be used to support either the notion that less basic terms are more resistant to replacement, or that less basic terms are less likely to be taken up early into the stable lexicon of an emerging creole.

Before we look at some other lexical domains, where does all this speculation based on data from color terms leave us? It appears that in the formation of a creole, more basic terms are more likely to become part of the lexicon established among native superstrate and substrate speakers alike, and that these terms will generally be derived from the superstrate. Less basic terms may enter the lexicon during subsequent development of the creole or may simply be retained from the substrate (or derived from an adstrate — Amerindian sources in the case of Ndyuka).

Why should it be the more basic lexical items that are likely to stabilize first, and to derive from the superstrate? While there may be universal cognitive factors at work, a reasonable explanation is also available in the social setting in which creoles, at least plantation creoles, have arisen: masters and slaves had more occasion to communicate with each other about some concepts than others. Terms for concepts most likely to be referred to regularly would be more apt to stabilize early, and would be more apt to be drawn from the language of the socially dominant party. Which concepts are most likely to be regularly referred to in a particular communication situation is presumably determined partly by cognitive salience (which may apply to color terms), and partly by the specific requirements of the varied relationships among the communicators — in the case of plantation creoles, the business of operating and working on a plantation, with whatever aspects of daily living entailed by such activities involve verbal interaction between overseers and underlings. In invoking this notion of “social salience” we are applying to within-domain differentiation of lexical items a principle adduced elsewhere (Huttar 1985) in explaining inter-domain differentiation: why some lexical domains in a creole are more apt to include mostly superstrate-derived terms, and other lexical domains mostly substrate-derived terms.

5. Kinship terms

Let’s now try to get some light on these questions by looking at other domains: what about kinship, or what about ethnobiological classification? In kinship, let us assume that blood (consanguineal) relations are more basic than marriage (affinal) relations. Possible bases for this assumption are the fact that everyone has blood relatives, but not everyone has relatives by marriage; one is born with blood relatives, but only later acquires relatives by marriage. Let us also assume, perhaps with less justification, that closer relations (as measured by counting

---

5 Some evidence for this assumption is the fact that it is English terms for siblings, not for cousins, that are the etyma of Ndyuka ‘brother/male cousin’ and ‘sister/female cousin’. That is,
nodes between Ego and Alter in a genealogical tree) are more basic than those farther removed. The most basic consanguineal terms, then, would be those for parents and for children, with those for siblings next. Then come grandparents and grandchildren, and aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews after that. The criterion of node counting is difficult to apply directly for affinal kin, since one may share no common recent ancestor with one’s affines. Instead, I’ll assume that spouse is Ego’s closest affinal kinsperson, and simply parallel the consanguineal ranking after that: parents- and children-in-law next, siblings-in-law after that, followed by grandparents- and grandchildren-in-law. (That still leaves us with no basis for deciding how basic ‘co-wife’ is relative to other kin terms.)

Looking at Figure 2, we see that of the closest kinship categories, the terms for ‘mother’ and ‘father’ are African (there is no generic term for ‘parent’); that for ‘child’, Portuguese; those for ‘daughter’ and ‘son’ are compounds from English and Portuguese (uman pikin ‘female child’, man pikin ‘male child’). Terms for ‘sister’ and ‘brother’ are from English (there is no generic term for ‘sibling’). Terms for ‘grandparents’ and ‘grandchildren’ are all compounds from Portuguese and African sources: gaandda ‘grandfather’, gaanmma ‘grandmother’ (cf. gaan ‘big, old’ < Portuguese gran); pikin pikin ‘grandchild’. Terms for ‘aunt’ and ‘uncle’ are from Portuguese, while those for nieces and nephews are compounds from Portuguese and English (sisa pikin ‘sister’s child’, baala pikin ‘brother’s child’, with sex of child unspecified).

| Various African languages: | m(a)má ‘mother’; d(a)dá, p(a)pá, tatá ‘father’
| Portuguese: | mai ‘mother-in-law/daughter-in-law’ < mae ~ ‘mother’
| | pai ‘father-in-law/son-in-law’ < pai ‘father’
| | tiyu ‘uncle’ < tio ‘uncle’
| | tiya ‘aunt’ < tia ‘aunt’
| | pikin ‘child’ < pequenino ‘small child’
| | muyee ‘wife’ < mulher ‘woman’
| English: | baala ‘brother/male cousin’ < brother
| | sisa ‘sister/female cousin’ < sister
| | man ‘husband; man; person’ < man
| | uman ‘wife; woman’ < woman
| Dutch: | swagi ‘spouse’s sibling; sibling’s spouse’ < zwager ‘brother-in-law’
| English/Dutch: | meti ‘co-wife; wife’s mother’s mother; spouse’s sibling’s spouse;
| | sibling’s spouse’s sibling’ < E mate / D maat

Figure 2. Some Ndyuka kin terms

the expansion of the range of referents of the Ndyuka terms from the narrower range of the English terms has been from closer kin to more distant kin, not the reverse.

6 Tone patterns of those terms that also resemble European terms argue for an African rather than a European source. See Huttar 1985, 1986.
The closest affinal kin are wife, with terms from both E and P, and husband, with one term from E. Next are parents-in-law and children-in-law; these terms in Ndyuka are from Portuguese. Next are sibling’s spouse and spouse’s sibling; the term for these is from Dutch (swagi). More distant from Ego are spouse’s sibling’s spouse and sibling’s spouse’s sibling, the term for which, meti, may be from E or D, possibly even from E meat (cf. meti ‘meat, animal’).

That Portuguese-derived words show up in the terms for nearest of kin among both consanguineal and affinal kin lends support to the hypothesis that the eventual founders of the Ndyuka society came to the New World having already learned either Portuguese or, more likely, a Portuguese pidgin. On the other hand, that ‘uncle’ and ‘aunt’ derive from Portuguese while more basic ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ are from English, argues for Portuguese influence into Ndyuka lexicon also in Suriname.

That the more distant affinal concepts of sibling’s spouse and spouse’s sibling are referred to by a term derived from Dutch, swagi, while the terms for the closer ones, uman, man, mai, and pai, derive from English and Portuguese, supports the notion of less basic terms stabilizing later in the history of a creole, as we saw with the Ndyuka color terms. Similarly, the fact that no Dutch-derived items are found among the terms for consanguineal kin, but only among the terms for affinal kin, which are less basic, is consistent with this same principle.

On the other hand, the presence of apparently African-derived terms for parents is problematic, running counter to the hypothesis that the most basic items in a particular domain are most likely to come from superstrate sources. This particular case is probably complicated by the great similarity in forms for ‘father’ and ‘mother’ in African languages from a wide geographical area, as well as between African and the relevant European languages.

6. Ethnobiology

We look briefly now at some domains of ethnobiology, i.e., terms for plants and animals. While Berlin (1976) cum suis have argued that the most basic (i.e., psychologically most salient) terms are at the level of the folk genus, Wierzbicka (1985) has advanced arguments that call that assumption into question. So there is no generally accepted understanding of what is “basic” in these domains.

---

7 Two additional terms we have not considered here, afó and totó, ‘great grandparents’ or ‘ancestors’, may also derive from Portuguese, although there is also some evidence for their being of African origin.

8 "In the light of the evidence now available it seems clear that no universal claims about the psychological salience of all folk genera are justifiable. The fact that in English, animal folk genera are psychologically basic, but folk genera in the domain of birds, fishes or trees are not, is sufficient to establish this" (Wierzbicka 1985:160).
In Ndyuka most of the generic terms — life forms, in Berlin, Breedlove and Raven’s (1973) terms — are from English (or Dutch), while most of the species names are from African and Amerindian (Cariban, Tupi) sources. (In dealing with animal names we must also bring in the “adstrate”: Amerindian languages that played a part in the development of Ndyuka, primarily if not exclusively of its lexicon.) Genus names are from both superstrate and sub- and adstrate sources. A few examples are given in Figure 3.

| meti ‘animal, mammal, meat’ < E meat | bon ‘tree’ < D boom |
| foo ‘bird’ < E fowl | udu ‘tree’ < E wood |
| sineki ‘snake’ < E snake | gaasi ‘grass’ < E grass |
| todo ‘toad, frog’ < E toad | (< D gras?) |
| fisi ‘fish’ < E fish (< D vis?) | tetei ‘vine’ = ‘string’ |
| mila ‘ant’ < D mier ‘ant’ | < E tie + reduplication |
| babé ‘butterfly’ < A (cf. Baule abebé ‘butterfly’) |
| makonkón ‘grasshopper’ < A (cf. kiKongo ma-kénko ‘grasshoppers’) |

Figure 3. Some Ndyuka general plant and animal terms
(A=African, D=Dutch, E=English)

Let’s look in more detail at some terms for mammals, as shown in Figure 4. Some of the common phrases designating subsets of mammals are busi meti ‘jungle animal’, doti meti ‘ground animal’, tapu meti ‘top animal’, and fo futu meti ‘four leg animal’, all of English origin. Some doti meti (ground-dwelling animals) are named by terms of European origin: dia ‘deer’, a genus term that includes awoyo dia, a particular kind of deer; bofoo ‘tapir’ < D buffel (E buffalo?). But more are named by terms of Amerindian or African origin: pingo ‘white-lipped peccary’ and pakila ‘collared peccary’ are both from Cariban; tamanúwa ‘giant anteater’ is from Tupi (Wayampi?); kapasi ‘armadillo’ is from Cariban, while bongó ‘kind of armadillo’ has possible sources in both Kwa and Bantu languages.

Tapu meti, animals living up in the trees, include a few referred to by terms of European origin: soó ‘sloth’ < E sloth; loili ‘kind of sloth’ < D lúiaard ‘sloth’; babun ‘howler monkey’ < E baboon; mongi ‘monkey’ < E monkey. But of these, at least babun, and probably soó and mongi, are genus names. Specific types of babun are called siná and ndópi; various kinds of monkeys (mongi?) are called kesikési, afoítye, yaakalú, dyankwána, kusií, and mamangína, none of which have obvious European sources. Kwata ‘black spider monkey’ is from a Tupi language, quite possibly Wayampi (Huttar 1989).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Kongo</th>
<th>Dutch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>meti ‘mammals’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gandá meti</td>
<td>E meat</td>
<td>ngánda, E meat</td>
<td>village/domestic animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>busi meti</td>
<td>E bush, meat</td>
<td></td>
<td>jungle animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fo futu meti</td>
<td>E four, foot, meat</td>
<td></td>
<td>four-footed animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doti meti</td>
<td>E dirt, meat</td>
<td></td>
<td>ground-dwelling animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dia</td>
<td>E deer</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘deer’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kuyáku</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘kind of deer’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>awoyo dia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘kind of deer’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bofoo</td>
<td>D buffel</td>
<td></td>
<td>’tapir’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pingo</td>
<td>Cariban pindyo</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘white-lipped peccary’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pakila</td>
<td>Cariban pakira</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘collared peccary’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tamanuva</td>
<td>Tupi (Wayampi?)</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘giant anteater’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kapasi</td>
<td>Cariban kapasi</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘armadillo’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bongó</td>
<td>Kwa or Bantu</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘kind of armadillo’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tapu meti</td>
<td>E top, meat</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘arboreal animals’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soó</td>
<td>E sloth</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘sloth’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loili</td>
<td>D luaard</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘kind of sloth’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>babun</td>
<td>E baboon</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘howler monkey’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siná</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘kind of howler monkey’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ndópi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘kind of howler monkey’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mongi</td>
<td>E monkey</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘monkey’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kesikesi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘kind of monkey’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>afoítse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘kind of monkey’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yaakalú</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘kind of monkey’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dyankwána</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘kind of monkey’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kusí</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘kind of monkey’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mamangína</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘kind of monkey’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kwáta</td>
<td>Tupi</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘black spider monkey’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4. Some Ndyuka terms for mammals**

(A=African, D=Dutch, E=English)

The general picture emerging here is that substrate- (and adstrate-) derived terms are used for the most specific concepts, while superstrate-derived terms are used for more general ones, such as genera and lifeforms. But other factors than the generic-specific cline, such as cultural salience, must be taken into account, since presumably Dutch-derived *mila* ‘ant’ is on the same level of specificity as African-derived *babe* ‘butterfly’ and *makonkon* ‘grasshopper’. Ants are indeed important in Ndyuka culture because of their ability to inflict pain, while butterflies and grasshoppers are culturally less important. Linguistic evidence for the greater salience of ants than of grasshoppers and butterflies in Ndyuka life is the fact that there are many lexical items for specific kinds of ants, but few if any for specific kinds of butterflies or grasshoppers.  

9 The same holds for another domain we have not looked at here: the generic term *dansi* ‘dance’ < E *dance*, while none of the names of specific traditional dances clearly derive from European sources, and several very probably have African etyma. (Some modern dances, *kaseko* < Fr *casser corps* and *aleke* < Alex, do have European-derived names.)
A reasonable way to integrate this notion of cultural salience with that of the generic-specific dimension is to posit that terms corresponding to the same (class of) referents may be at different levels of specificity in different cultures. Thus the concepts of ‘ant’, ‘grasshopper’, and ‘butterfly’ may be at the same level of specificity in American English culture, while ‘ant’ may be less specific than ‘grasshopper’ and ‘butterfly’ in Ndyuka culture.

In regard to the “basicness” of terms of various degrees of specificity, the interpretation just proposed implies that just which level in a given classificational hierarchy is the most basic one may vary from culture to culture. Yet within a given hierarchy in a given language we may still consider the more generic terms to be more basic than the more specific ones. If that is the case, then the data from Ndyuka in general appear to support the notion that more basic items are more apt to derive from the superstrate. With regard to various superstrate sources, there is little that can be deduced, although it may be noted that the English-derived term for ‘tree’, udu, also means ‘wood’, and in that sense is more generic, hence more basic, than the Dutch-derived bon — again, the more basic term stabilized earlier in the developing creole.

7. Conclusions

The data considered in this paper support the claims that (1) more basic vocabulary — i.e., terms for more basic concepts — becomes a stable part of a new creole earlier than less basic vocabulary; (2) superstrate-derived items make up a greater proportion of more basic vocabulary than of less basic vocabulary; (3) in ethnobiological domains, the most basic level in a generic-specific series of levels is determined at least partly by culture-specific factors, rather than being the same level across all cultures or languages, or even across all domains within one culture or language; and (4) in ethnobiological domains, more generic levels are more basic than more specific levels. There is also some evidence for the notions that consanguineal kin terms are more basic than affinal ones, and that terms for kin closer to Ego on a genealogical tree are more basic than terms for more distant kin.

Finally, specifically for Ndyuka, we have some evidence from kin terms for an early (i.e., while slaves were still in Africa) significant input of Portuguese-derived items, rather than Portuguese input being limited to Suriname alone.

George L. Huttar is Adjunct Professor of Linguistics at the University of Texas at Arlington and Vice President for Academic Affairs at the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

References

Berlin, Brent

Berlin, Brent, Dennis Breedlove and Peter H. Raven

Berlin, Brent and Paul Kay
1969 *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bynon, Theodora

Fleming, Ilah

Frake, Charles O.

Goodman, Morris

Herskovits, Melville J.

Huttar, George L.


Mühlhäusler, Peter

Price, Richard

Schuchardt, Hugo
1914  *Die Sprache der Saramakkaneger in Surinam.* Amsterdam: Johannes Müller.

Thomason, Sarah Grey and Terrence Kaufman

Voorhoeve, Jan

Wierzbicka, Anna