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### **Jacques Arends' model of gradual creolization\***

Hugo C. Cardoso

#### **1. Introduction**

While Jacques Arends' research primarily dealt with the Surinamese Creoles<sup>1</sup>, his findings and proposals were far-reaching; he was an active participant in the overall debate on the formation of creole languages, into which he brought sound historical data as well as the theoretical tools necessary for their incorporation. For a recent observer of Creole Studies, some of the main themes in Jacques Arends' research may now seem commonplace, but a look at the debates raging in the field in the 1980s and 1990s makes it clear that Jacques at the forefront of several theoretical and methodological advancements in the study of pidgins and creoles. This survey deals with just one of these; it is my purpose to contextualize Jacques Arends' concept of what came to be known as 'gradual creolization' and link this particular line of research with several associated ideas and methods to be found in Jacques' work.

Even though the topic of the present volume concerns only this particular aspect of Jacques' work, his central contribution to the field of creole studies, there are several other sides to Jacques' intervention both scholarly and humanitarian. One that deserves to be highlighted was his work on the adequacy of the linguistic tools used in The Netherlands and worldwide to assess the origin claims of asylum-seekers. Concerned with the consequences of such forensic linguistic analyses, Jacques became increasingly involved in drawing the attention of both linguists and the

public in general to the issue; in order to stimulate the involvement of professionals, he organized a dedicated workshop during the 2003 SPCL annual meeting and co-edited a section in a specialist journal (Eades and Arends 2004).

Most scholars working on Creole Studies will associate the work of Jacques Arends not only with the development of a theory of gradual creolization but also the championing of demographic studies concerning the formative settings of creole languages (see e.g. Arends 1989, 1995b, 2001, 2008) and an unparalleled emphasis on the collection, study and dissemination of primary, archival sources (e.g. Arends and Perl 1995, Arends 2002b). In reality, all these primary streaks of the author's research bear on each other; they are best interpreted as essential building blocks for what Jacques envisaged as "*une théorie historique de la créolegènèse*" (a historical theory of creole genesis; Arends 2002: 145). Opposing what he saw as the de-historicization of the debate on creole genesis – manifest in formative scenarios devoid of concrete socio-historical context and the disregard for diachronic archival data – he called for a model that a) approaches creole formation as a process taking place in (a specific) time, and b) does not conflict with historical evidence (see Arends 2002a, 2002b). Although Jacques drew attention on these concerns time and time again, two programmatic texts published in 2002 (2002a, 2002b) make it clear that, in his view, the creolization process was at the time still "sometimes conceptualized – somewhat paradoxically – as an 'a-temporal' process, a process to which the dimension of time is irrelevant. [...]", to which he adds that "now that substantial amounts of historical and diachronic evidence have become available it is simply unwarranted to maintain this kind of ahistoricism." (Arends 2002b: 58).

The remainder of this article describes the concrete way in which Jacques' historical perspective materialized in a model of gradual creolization.

## 2. Context

Jacques' work on a model of gradual creolization was sparked by the debates raging within the field of Creole Studies in the 1980s. It is therefore convenient to begin by invoking some of the threads of discussion, concepts and key studies that appeared prior to his own contribution. For practical purposes, the year 1989 will be taken as a *terminus ante quem* for this section; this was the year Jacques' doctoral dissertation set out his model of gradual creolization, even though he had by then brought out two articles (Arends 1986, 1987) in which the concept was already outlined – see section 3.1.

### 2.1 The debate prior to Jacques Arends' work

The most notorious debates within Creole Studies in the 1980s were those sparked by Bickerton's controversial claims that the first generations of creole speakers, faced with inadequate input, rely on an innate language module to transform a pidgin into a full-fledged creole. The model of creolization subjacent to the *Language Bioprogram Hypothesis* (henceforth LBH, see Bickerton 1984) equated this process with the *nativization* of a pidgin (an instantiation of the traditional *pidgin-to-creole cycle* as proposed, e.g., in Hall 1966) and defined it as *abrupt* – in that it takes place within a generation – and *universal* in its output, i.e., yielding comparable linguistic results in comparable sociohistorical settings.

The reactions to Bickerton's LBH and associated subproposals posed a number of questions concerning creole formation, two of which are particularly relevant for the discussion at hand; one refers to the *speed* and exact process of nativization, and another concerns the methodological assumption (not restricted to the LBH) that modern creole data can be assumed to be representative of the *early stage(s)* of the language.

Traditional conceptions of the pidgin-to-creole cycle contemplated no intermediate stage between a pidgin (characterized as flexible and incomplete, with no native speakers) and the ensuing creole, which in contrast was said to have a more stable, expanded grammar as well as a community of native speakers (e.g. Hall 1966). However, Todd (1974) introduced the notion of *extended pidgin*, therefore admitting that, given the appropriate social circumstances, a pidgin may undergo functional expansion without nativization. While Bickerton (1984) insisted on an abrupt transition, earlier work – most notably that of Sankoff on Tok Pisin (1977, 1980) and her colleagues (Sankoff and Laberge 1973, Sankoff and Brown 1976) – had already called this concept into question.<sup>2</sup> Sankoff's documentation of Tok Pisin's structural development reinforced the role of L2 speakers in expanding a (pidgin) language's grammatical system, as they found that the development of overt marking for previously unexpressed grammatical categories (viz. future tense and relativization) in Tok Pisin was set in motion as much by its first L1 speakers as by the vast L2-speaking community. Their proposal, influential for Jacques' concept of grammaticalization, was that a pidgin will expand its grammatical tools in response to an expansion in its functional domains with or without nativization, or as Sankoff put it:

A language used in a multiplicity of social and communicative contexts, and which carries much of the “communicative load” for numbers of speakers will develop grammatical machinery appropriate to its needs. (Sankoff 1977: 122)

One of the scholars to take up the issue of nativization again was John Singler, who proposed that a thorough survey of the patterns of migration, demographic provenance, birth/death rates and the social contexts of early plantation societies may disfavor scenarios of the sudden nativization of a pidgin. One case study concerned Jamaica (Singler 1986), where an extended period of slave import from Africa suggests that “the slow nativization of plantation colonies made for the

slow nativization of plantation creoles” (1986: 142), amounting to an extended pidgin stage (1988, 1990); this argument not only reintroduced an element of gradualness into formative scenarios but also reinforced the substratist case.<sup>3</sup>

The debate of the pidgin-to-creole cycle as delineated by the LBH met the issue of diachronic change in the work of Carden and Stewart (1988), whose ‘gradualist’ proposal owed much to Jacques’ own research on the diachrony of Sranan (Arends 1986). Carden and Stewart (1988) posited that, if indeed a generation of children create a maximally unmarked system with resort to universal structures as proposed by the LBH, then this system should be particularly resistant to subsequent change.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, they found documentary evidence that the Haitian system of reflexives and anti-reflexives developed over a period of 200 years through waves of innovation and dissemination, a path of change that seemed “to be in the direction of simplicity and typological unmarkedness instead of the superstrate” (Carden and Stewart 1988: 44-45).

Demographic considerations were paramount in the theoretical debates of the 1980s, in particular since Philip Baker’s (1976, 1982) fine-grained demographic reconstruction of the formative stages of Mauritian. Some of the conceptual array developed by Baker fed into the LBH proposal in the form of the *Pidginization Index* (PI), a formalism aimed at appropriating demography to explain a creole’s relative ‘depth’. The significance of socio-historical information was, therefore, already being debated by the time Jacques Arends began his scientific production; as shown below, however, he was to place particular emphasis not only on the integration of such data in scenarios of creole formation but also on the need for scholars to actively engage in unearthing primary material.

### **3. Jacques Arends’ contribution**

#### **3.1 A model of gradual creolization**

The work Jacques developed for his doctoral thesis (Arends 1989), defended at the (then Catholic) University of Nijmegen, is pivotal in laying the foundations of his view on creolization. Jacques' theory of creole formation is fully spelt out in his thesis, although by then part of his research results had already come out in a 1986 article on the development of Sranan's equative copula, in which the author took the clear stand that 'creolization would not be a discrete, one-generation process, but rather one which is gradual, extending over a number of generations' (1986: 117). Jacques' doctoral research was an important contribution to the development of theory, as it challenged the LBH's fundamental assumption of creolization as a single-generation event and also the perspective of several scholars for whom the history of Sranan included a moment of abrupt creolization (e.g. Voorhoeve 1973, Seuren 1984). In accordance with Jacques' quest for a historically informed model of creolization, support for a gradual scenario for the formation of Sranan stemmed from two different sets of evidence, collected through rigorous study of primary sources: a) diachronic linguistic data, and b) demographic and socio-historical data.

The dissertation's diachronic study of the development of Sranan's copula system, comparative constructions and clefting strategies – on the basis of written records dated 1718 and later – revealed a clear developmental progression shaping two of these domains, viz. the copula system and comparative constructions. Jacques interpreted such cases of radical restructuring as counter-evidence to “the, mostly implicit, premise that creole languages, as they are now, present a reliable picture of what they were like at the time of their genesis” (Arends 1989: 89), partly attributed to “wishful thinking” (*idem*) as it does away with the need for minute historical research.<sup>5</sup>

Bringing in socio-demographic evidence, Jacques suggested an extended formative period for Sranan from 1650 to *circa* 1750, therefore spanning several generations. Considering the low ratio of Suriname-born to imported slaves between 1671 and 1750, he posited that “during

the first 75 years of its existence Sranan was more of a pidgin than a creole” (1989: 121) and sought support for an extended pidgin phase from such cases as that of Tok Pisin (see above). Jacques’ model of creolization as put forward in his doctoral dissertation therefore contemplated:

- a. the possibility of an extended pidgin stage;
  - b. the initial moment of ‘creolization’, i.e. the first-generation process of Creole genesis;
  - c. ‘late creolization’, i.e. language-internal development after the initial moment of ‘creolization’ [the term ‘transcreolization’ is introduced as a cover term for both b) and c), i.e. a transgenerational model of creolization];
- in accordance with (and if sanctioned by):
- d. demographic and socio-historical factors.

According to this model, (trans)creolization is to be seen “as an incremental process, a process in which each following stage builds on the previous one” (Arends 2002a: 58), driven by L2 acquisition of the language (e.g. by incoming African-born slaves, both children and adults, in the case of Suriname; see Arends 1994) as well as a community of locally-born L1 learners that was initially relatively marginal. Jacques’ extension of what was traditionally called ‘creolization’ to incorporate what he termed ‘late creolization’ was innovative, but the model did not do away with an “initial, first-generation creolization” event (Arends 1989: 90). This moment was defined as “the stage when the units that are used as building blocks in the construction of a creole are selected from the lexifier, adapted to the emerging creole, and integrated into its structure” (Arends 2002a: 57), in which the “sub-processes” of *selection*, *adaptation* and *integration* come together to compose the “super-process” of creolization. The emphasis placed on the first stage of creolization is reminiscent of Mufwene’s (1996, 2001) *Founder Principle* in that it is believed to shape the (diachronically dynamic) creole in a

particularly determinant way; notice for that matter the following proposal, which concerns the departure of a number of English-owned slaves from Suriname following the Dutch occupation in 1667:

Although in absolute numbers this emigration is almost negligible, the fact that it took place in what was not only the very earliest stage of language formation in Surinam, but perhaps also a crucial one in terms of language transmission, gives it *an importance which rises above sheer numbers*. (Arends 1995b: 236; my italics)

The process of creolization was further envisaged as “a differential (as opposed to monolithic) process, taking place at a different speed for different domains of syntax” (Arends 1993: 374). This notion reflected Jacques’ observation that, out of the three domains of syntax analysed in Arends (1989), clefting seems to have ‘settled’ considerably faster than the others.<sup>6</sup>

### **3.2 Research methodology**

While the previous section clarified that Jacques’ concept of gradual creolization undermined some of the basic assumptions of the LBH, this must not be taken as denial of universal tendencies in creole formation; with regard to the universalist vs. substratist debate prevalent at the time, Jacques assumed an intermediate position. Jacques considered that either approach was incomplete and insufficient to explain Creole formation:

[...] both factors can be supplemented by others. As regards internal factors one can think of semantic transparency, language universals (in the Greenbergian sense) and, in a transgenerational model of creolization, language-internal development (i.e. late creolization). An important external factor is made up by the relevant extra-linguistic, especially historical and demographic

variables, such as mortality, natality and composition of the population. In my opinion it is unwarranted to exclude such potentially important elements from the discussion. (Arends 1989: 88-89)

This excerpt demonstrates one of Jacques' central methodological concerns in his pursuit of a historically informed theory of creole formation, viz. the integration of carefully researched "extralinguistic (i.e. sociohistorical and demographic)" (Arends 2002: 54; see also Arends 1995a) data in studies of creolization. Although, arguably, socio-historical and demographic accuracy is required for any model of creolization, it is more so within a gradualist framework; a transgenerational process of creolization encompasses possible demographic fluctuation and movements, with potential linguistic implications. Jacques' opinion that no model (including a gradualist model) can be expected to explain by default all instances of creole formation implies the necessity to assess creole genesis *on a case-by-case basis*; consider his cautionary remark on Hawaiian Creole English (HCE):

Bickerton's conclusion "... that the deficit between pidgin and creole was filled in a single generation by the first locally born group to be exposed to pidginized English" [...] may perhaps be justified for the particular case of HCE, but this does not mean it is also valid for the other Creole languages.<sup>7</sup> (Arends 1989: 115-116)

Two types of historical evidence are called for in assessing a transgenerational formative scenario. Ideally, sociohistorical evidence must be complemented with diachronic linguistic data. Accordingly, Jacques emphasized the need for accurate archival research into potential records of language use; he dedicated enormous effort to uncovering and editing this type of (typically hardly accessible) archival data, as

exemplified by his work on a collection of late 18<sup>th</sup>-century Saramaccan letters (Arends and Perl 1995) or his collaborative work on Surinamese court records (van den Berg and Arends 2004). Jacques considered the study of primary sources to be absolutely crucial in approaching the issue of creole formation; in his words, the fact that a given piece of research builds “on primary evidence (i.e. archival documents) adds significantly to their reliability” (Arends 2001:291, 292).

### **3.3 Theoretical implications**

A logical follow-up on a transgenerational (gradual) model of creolization is to emphasize “language-internal change” and also putative universals of “untutored second language acquisition” (Arends 1989: 90), in particular when dealing with a demographically volatile society characterized by a high rate of immigration. In radical contrast to the LBH, Jacques drew attention to the preponderance of *adult* L2 acquisition in the incremental speciation of Sranan:

Het creoliseringsproces was gedurende de eerste 100 tot 150 jaar meer een kwestie van incomplete tweede-taalverwerving door elkaar snel opvolgende cohorten vooral volwassen, in Afrika geboren slaven dan van eerste-taalverwerving door de eerste generatie(s) in Suriname geboren slavenkinderen. (Arends and Muysken 1992: 49)

[During the initial 100 to 150 years, the creolization process was more a matter of incomplete second-language acquisition by cohorts of mostly adult, African-born slaves in quick succession, than of first-language acquisition by the first generation(s) of Suriname-born slave children.] (Transl. HC)

Despite this focus on adult L2 acquisition, Jacques made two important points concerning the role of children in the process of linguistic change.

The first one was that, according to the records, many children were imported from Africa in slave shipments (Arends and Muysken 1992), but these too would be L2 learners of the creole given that, depending on their age, they “came equipped with something varying between a basic knowledge and a more or less complete command of some West African language(s)” (Arends 1994: 118).

The second observation was that a transgenerational model of creole formation can accommodate at any given time both a population of L2 learners and an element of L1 acquisition by locally-born children. The differential weight of these factors (L1- or L2-acquisition) in shaping a particular creole is only retrievable from demographic data and is construed as *dynamic*, i.e., sensitive to changes in population patterns. For Arends and Muysken (1992), a possible interpretation of demographic factors as a measure of *speed* of nativization refers to the time-gap between the foundation of a given settlement and Event 2 in Baker’s (1982) terminology – i.e. the moment the number of locally-born slaves (L1 learners) equals that of African-born slaves (L2 learners). Baker’s Event 2 therefore functions as a temporal boundary to the authors’ working notion of ‘nativization’, which can in turn be used as a tentative measure of procedural speed in that slow population nativization corresponds to slow linguistic nativization and vice-versa.

In Jacques Arends’ model of creole formation, ‘nativization’ is not automatically equivalent to ‘creolization’, nor does it constitute a clear-cut transition between a pidgin and a creole. In fact, while creolization was defined by the LBH as the single moment in which a pidgin is nativized by its first speaker(s) – whose demographics “might be as low as one” (Bickerton 1991: 38) – Jacques accepted that the temporal and conceptual boundaries of ‘creolization’ in his model are less rigid; the process of individual nativization is deemed non-crucial, and strong emphasis is instead placed on communal (and therefore time-anchored) processes of language dissemination and stabilization.<sup>8</sup>

Concerning the debate on the temporal characteristics of creole formation, Arends clarified that a procedural account may be either

gradual or abrupt depending on one's definition of such fundamental notions as 'creolization' and 'language' (see Note 5). As the present volume testifies, this debate is far from exhausted, with several contributors echoing Jacques' position that gradual and abrupt standpoints may be nothing but different ways to interpret the same phenomenon. The tools the various authors use to address this issue testify to the fact that Jacques' solidly data-driven methodology is as relevant today as ever. As shown in the introductory chapter to this volume, the contributors make positive theoretical strides which, in tune with Jacques' proposals, take on board essential insights provided by accurate diachronic research and sociohistorical evidence. They collectively draw attention on how different conceptions of the process of creolization inform the selection of data for analysis, and how this in turn shapes conclusions regarding the timeline of creole formation.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For major work on the Surinamese creoles (Sranan and Saramaccan in particular), see e.g. Arends (1989, 1995b, 1999) as well as Arends and Perl 1995. Publications such as Arends, Muysken and Smith (1995), and Arends and Carlin (2002) also engage with the linguistic landscape of Suriname. However, reducing Jacques' concern to the Surinamese domain would be unwarranted; the larger outlook of his interests is conveniently demonstrated by such articles as Arends and Muysken (1992) or Arends *et al* (2006). For an overview of Jacques'

research interests and a complete list of his publications, see Carlin and Smith (2005), and Bruyn (2007).

<sup>2</sup> For contemporary work from a similar standpoint, see e.g. Taber (1979), Mühlhäusler (1979, 1980, 1986), Charpentier (1979), Todd (1979), Jourdan (1985a, 1985b), Samarin (1986), Faraclas (1987), and Siegel (1987); also, for a review of the debate on the implications of the notion of an ‘extended pidgin’, Jourdan (1991).

<sup>3</sup> Contemporary work exploring the role of substrate includes Alleyne (1980), Boretzky (1983), and the contributions in Muysken and Smith (1986). It is no surprise that gradualist scenarios are often accompanied by research into the contribution of the substrate, as some of the socio-demographic conditions demonstrated in such cases (continuing arrival of substrate speakers, slow nativization of population, long period of language contact) are such that they also facilitate extensive influence of substrate languages. It must be said, however, that this close link is circumstantial and not a logical necessity. For Chaudenson, for instance, the fact that creolization proceeds through a gradual series of approximations of approximations to the main lexifier (Chaudenson 1002) does not result in a particularly high emphasis on the role of the substrate (see also discussion in Mufwene 2001ff). In addition, a gradual scenario is in no contradiction with the role of universals (cognitive universals, L1/L2 acquisition) or internal processes of change – see e.g. Hazaël-Massieux (this volume) concerning neutralisation of competition between equivalent syntactic structures, and Clements (this volume) on recent instances of grammaticalization.

<sup>4</sup> Bickerton dismisses this as a misinterpretation. In Bickerton (1981: 46), he concedes that creoles are affected by ‘internal change’ as much as any other language and their present state may therefore not correspond to their earlier stages.

<sup>5</sup> In response to Jacques’ findings, Bickerton (1991) proposed a distinction between ‘creolization’ as an abrupt process and the subsequent dissemination of the creole across the population, and asked whether the developments unearthed in Arends (1989) are to be included

in the event of creolization or should be seen as processes of post-creolization language change. Arends and Bruyn (1995: 114) made the point that the question is in fact pre-theoretical and depends on one's definition of 'creolization'. See also Bickerton (1992) for a similar position. Several contributions in this volume support this idea.

<sup>6</sup> See also Singler (1990: 646) for similar scepticism that all components of a creole's grammar are equidistant from its lexifier(s).

<sup>7</sup> The theory of HCE's abrupt formation has been hotly disputed; recent socio-demographic as well as linguistic research, in particular that by Siegel (2000, 2007) and Roberts (2000), has produced evidence that the formation of HCE extended over at least two generations.

<sup>8</sup> See Singler (1992) for a comparable position.