

CREOLES, ACTS OF IDENTITY, AND EDUCATION: CELEBRATING ROBERT LE PAGE'S CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Weekend Workshop at the LSA Institute
Stanford University, Room 420-041, July 15, 2007

MORNING SESSION

Chaired by Suzanne Romaine

- 9:00-9:15: **Pauline Christie** (*University of the West Indies - Mona*):
Introduction to Robert Le Page's Work
- 9:15-9:45: **Walter Edwards** (*Wayne State University*): Le Page's
Theoretical Framework and Its Influence on Recent
Sociolinguistic Models
- 9:45-10:15: **John Rickford** (*Stanford University*): 'Problems to be faced':
Le Page's Theoretical and Applied Legacy to Sociolinguistics
and Creole Studies.

BREAK

- 10:30-11:00: **Jeff Siegel** (*University of New England*): Diffusion and
Focussing in the Emergence of Creole Languages
and Their Use in Education
- 11:00-11:30: **Marlyse Baptista** (*University of Georgia*): Educational Issues
in Creole Languages
- 11:30-12:00: **John Baugh** (*Washington University in St. Louis*): Plantation
English: Identity, Education, and Equity in the United States

LUNCH (Lakeside Dining Hall, Lagunita Court)

AFTERNOON SESSION

Chaired by Sarah Roberts

- 1:30-2:00: **Pauline Christie** (*University of the West Indies - Mona*):
Caribbean Connections in the Sociolinguistics Arena: Robert
Le Page's Case Studies of Acts of Identity
- 2:00-2:30: **Suzanne Romaine** (*Oxford University*): Acts of Identity,
Performativity and Communities of Practice
- 2:30-3:00: **Marcyliena Morgan** (*Stanford University*): Dances of
Identity on the English-Speaking Caribbean Floor

BREAK

3:15-3:45: **Kathryn Shields Brodber** (*University of the West Indies - Mona*): Acts of (Non)-Identity in Verbal Domestic Disputes in Jamaica

3:45-4:15: **Silvia Kouwenberg** (*University of the West Indies - Mona*): Africa in Jamaica: the Akan-dominance myth

4:15-4:45: **Hubert Devonish** (*University of the West Indies - Mona*): Nationalism, the State, and Creole Language Identity

6:30: DINNER (Mango Caribbean, 435 Hamilton Avenue)

ABSTRACTS

Educational issues in creole languages

Marlyse Baptista (*University of Georgia*)

This talk will address issues of orthographic standardization and orthographic choices in Caribbean societies and will focus on how such choices may correlate with creole identity and may reflect competing views where social, symbolic and political values interplay. Such choices will be explored within the contexts of Haiti, Jamaican and Curacao.

Plantation English: Identity, education, and equity in the United States

John Baugh (*Washington University in St. Louis*)

This presentation will explore some of the common and dissimilar linguistic and educational circumstances that have emerged from socially stratified language contact on American plantations; that is, on the mainland and in Hawaii. The linguistic consequences of the African slave trade are compared and contrasted with language diversity on Hawaiian plantations. Ensuing educational consequences are explored regarding students who speak AAVE and HPE, along with matters of linguistic and cultural identity that are central to Le Page's scholarship.

Caribbean connections in the sociolinguistics arena: Robert Le Page's case studies of acts of identity

Pauline Christie (formerly *University of the West Indies – Mona*):

Robert Le Page's observation of linguistic variation in the Caribbean during the 1950s sowed the seeds which grew into his unorthodox ideas on the nature of language and on the individual speaker's role in the formation of community norms. The Caribbean also provided him, two decades later, with testing grounds for his Acts of Identity hypothesis. Belize (then British Honduras) and St Lucia, the locales he selected for his two large-scale surveys of the early 1970s, are relatively complex linguistically. The former is also ethnically diverse. Le Page was convinced that in both countries the search by language users for new individual and social identities was being influenced at the time of his surveys by the approach of political independence, making them ideal for his purpose.

The paper will examine briefly, through the hindsight of a member of the original team nearly forty years later, the broad aims of the surveys and their empirical justification. The relevance of Le Page's approach for the contemporary language situation in the Caribbean will also be discussed, highlighting his contribution to "creole sociolinguistics".

LePage's theoretical framework and its influence on recent sociolinguistic models

Walter F. Edwards (*Wayne State University*)

Le Page's (1974) presentation of his "acts of identity" hypothesis provides the principal ingredients of a comprehensive theory of language learning, language use and language variation. This model places the activity of language learning in the control of the speaker, positing that in all cases he/she responds to the available linguistic options, chooses from these options on the basis of his/her social, cultural, and political self interest as members of defined, or undefined social groups. The model correctly assumes that a cognitively healthy individual who is a member of a society or community, or aspires to be a member, is fully capable of internalizing the multidimensional socio-cultural milieu in which language is embedded and can continuously make behavioral choices, including linguistic choices, consciously or subconsciously to align himself/herself with or distance himself/herself from targeted groups. Le Page et al. tested this model in Cayo District, a multilingual, multiethnic and weakly polarized community in Belize in two seminal studies (1972, 1974). The theoretical apparatus that Le Page and his associates use include a cluster analysis program which tracks individuals as their linguistic and other behaviors align them with this cluster of individuals or the next. The effect is a dynamic model that's responsive to the multidimensionality of sociolinguistic behavior.

This paper will review the main results of the Cayo study (without explicating the complexity of the cluster analysis program) then show how the Le Page model is applicable to some of my work in Guyanese Creole and Detroit AAVE. I will also attempt to show that more recent sociolinguistic theories, including accommodation theory (e.g. Giles and Smith 1979), social network theory (e.g. Milroy and Milroy 1992), Community of Practice theory (e.g. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) include ideas that were subsumed in the Le Page "acts of identity" model.

Africa in Jamaica: the Akan-dominance myth

Silvia Kouwenberg (*University of the West Indies - Mona*)

Students of Jamaican language, culture and history have long held that speakers of Akan (more popularly known as either Twi, Kromanti, or Ashante) were a dominant presence in early English Jamaica, and had a foundational impact on Jamaica's language and culture. Le Page, in his memoirs, claims that he was convinced of the dominant Akan contribution to Jamaican lexicon by his long-time collaborator Cassidy. However, a study of the provenance of slaves in 17th-century English Jamaica, does not support this view. Nor is it fully supported by considering those vocabulary items in Jamaican Creole which derive from African sources, as such a study turns up as many items from African sources other than Akan. Akan influence, it appears, postdates the formative period of Jamaican language. So which African languages are at the basis of Jamaican Patwa?

This paper aims to sketch the ethnolinguistic origins of the slave population in early English Jamaica (1655-1700), and thus provide a starting point from which it may be possible to answer this question. In order to do so, I consider a combination of sources, including not only the documented direct trade (both licit and illicit), but also intra-Caribbean migration, intra-Caribbean (illicit) trade, and raids on non-English possessions.

Dances of Identity on the English-Speaking Caribbean Floor Marcyliena Morgan (*Stanford University*)

This paper explores acts of identity among a group of Caribbean women pensioners in London through an analysis of an overlapping conversation that reveals interaction and linguistic skills that are at once obvious yet spectacular. First, indirectness is pervasive in the African Diaspora and is one aspect of language that unites African Diasporan speech communities. Secondly, the act of conversational overlap and "cross talking" frames and signals an indirect exchange. Structurally, this frame introduces a mixture of creole language features, London vernacular English, and conversational moves to determine who leads across overlapping interactions. In these interactions, an alignment occurs so that partners are picked to follow a speaker's lead. Conversational turns are not sequential but determined by the interactions and topic of the lead speakers. Others follow in relation to the topic and leaders and sometimes followers switch partners. Interactions move from overlapping to crosstalking as partners emerge who in turn introduce both linguistic and conversational signals that align with overlapping conversations.

The senior women of this Caribbean speech community in London exemplify Le Page's argument concerning language and identity in that they demonstrate that "Idiosyncratic behavior reflects attitudes towards groups, causes, traditions but is constrained by certain identifiable factors; and the identity of a group lies within the projections individuals make of the concepts each has about the group" (1985:2). Within the elaborate conversation structure identities are introduced, explored and in some cases denied.

'Problems to be faced...': Le Page's Theoretical and Applied Legacy to Sociolinguistics and Creole Studies.

John Rickford (*Stanford University*):

In 1968 Robert Le Page published an article entitled "Problems to be faced in the use of English as a medium of education in four West Indian territories" that had a profound impact on me. Its account of the ways in which Linguistics could help us understand and reduce the hurdles that creole speakers face in schools that required literacy in standard English was inspiring, and helped to persuade me to switch from Literature to a self-designed major (and academic career) in Sociolinguistics. In the years since then, I have read many other works by Le Page and discussed his *Acts of Identity* model with several cohorts of university students. In this paper I will reflect on what I consider his theoretical and applied legacy to the fields of sociolinguistics and creole studies, using as a fulcrum the first four words of his (1968) article: "Problems to be faced ...". Le Page was exceptionally and refreshingly honest about his failures as well as his successes, and I will endeavor to emulate him in this assessment.

On the applied front, Le Page's insight into the educational challenges faced by vernacular and creole speakers, his recognition that teachers generally do not understand these problems, and his proposals that contrastive analysis and other strategies be employed to help students and teachers alike remain as fresh and relevant as ever. At the same time, one problem to be faced is that Le Page (and contemporary sociolinguistics and creole collaborators like Frederic Cassidy and David DeCamp) did

not go significantly beyond the programmatic level in dealing with the educational issues, and it was left to others (e.g. Dennis Craig, Hubert Devonish, Jeff Siegel and William Labov) to take us further. On the theoretical front, Le Page's detailed (1961) account of socio-historical factors in the development of Jamaican Creole provided an early model of the importance of socio-history in understanding synchronic variation and change, one that has been well adopted and augmented by such creolists as John Singler, Philip Baker, Chris Corne, and Sarah Roberts. Le Page's most significant theoretical contribution to the field was the *Acts of Identity* model developed by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985). This was significantly ahead of its time and represents the only truly socio-psychological model in sociolinguistics. Among its virtues is the primacy it affords to individual agency; among the problems to be faced with this model, however, is the need to pay greater attention to internal linguistic factors and to constraints on the abilities of individuals and groups to modify their linguistic behavior to resemble those with whom they wish to identify.

Acts of Identity, Performativity and Communities of Practice

Suzanne Romaine (*Oxford University*):

Robert Le Page's ideas about languages being acts of identity and his related notions of projection, focusing and diffusion owed much to his experience in creole-speaking communities of the Caribbean, in particular his surveys conducted in Belize and St. Lucia (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985). Some of his ideas about creoles illuminating what was normal rather than deviant or special as far as language was concerned occupy center-stage in debates today about creoles and language evolution.

In my presentation I will show how Le Page's notion of languages as acts of identity also relates to currently popular theorizing within gender studies and sociolinguistics about the nature of identity. In particular, I will establish linkages between acts of identity and current thinking about performativity and communities of practice. Languages, like identities, are made and brought into being through repeated performances in communities of practice.

Diffusion and focussing in the emergence of creole languages and their use in education

Jeff Siegel (*University of New England [Australia], and University of Hawai'i*)

Robert LePage has given us the notions of diffusion and focussing, linguistic processes closely associated with social processes involved in the disintegration and reconstruction of identities. The first part of this paper describes how these notions apply to the model of mixing and levelling in the emergence creole languages, especially in the transmittal and retention of substrate features.

LePage and Tabouret-Keller also describe how the use of a highly focussed "standard" as the language of formal education leads to the stigmatisation of vernaculars such as a creole languages. The second part of this paper suggests ways that LePage's insights can be adopted to the school curriculum to help teachers and students deconstruct entrenched linguistic ideologies.

Acts of (non)-identity in verbal domestic disputes in Jamaica

Kathryn Shields-Brodber (*University of the West Indies - Mona*):

The space in which verbal disputes take place is multidimensional in a number of ways, including the social identities which participants display or negotiate within that space; the stances they take to each other as they define the space; the discourse strategies they employ in their development of conflict within the space; and the extent to which they keep the space private or open it to others.

Using examples from audio recordings of domestic disputes in Jamaica as the data, this paper will present a qualitative analysis of some of the acts of (non)identity which interlocutors perform as they participate in conflictual conversations. It will address issues such as the ways disputants shape their interactional space; their positioning in relation to each other and in relations to others who are incorporated within the space; the linguistic devices which they employ in their positioning and the social and functional markings associated with them; and the ways in which they sustain or change their personae as they converse within the space. The analysis will be multidimensional, incorporating, where relevant, for example, notions of projection / focussing / diffusion, accommodation / divergence, and alignment / footing.