

# DELEGITIMISING CREOLES AND MULTIETHNOLECTS: STEREOTYPES AND (MIS-)CONCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE IN ONLINE DEBATES

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## *ABSTRACT*

Youth languages in urban multicultural settings that are often labelled “multiethnolects” have received growing attention in the last two decades. In public debate, they are sometimes described as a step towards imminent “creolisation.” Judgements about Creoles and multiethnolects that form part of public debates show considerable similarities on many levels: Laypersons’ metalinguistic commentary reveals that these two types of languages are held in low esteem in public opinion. They are sometimes seen as the results of linguistic decay with “impoverished” grammars that are allegedly a hindrance for mental and moral development of the speakers and also a sign for the lack thereof. In addition, research on these languages has been dismissed as a “waste of resources” given that it does not contribute to a desired refinement of language. An analysis of 1,240 comments about multiethnolects and Creoles in online discussions shows that contact phenomena trigger demands for purity and conservation that reproduce commonplace arguments from standard language ideology. The aim of this paper is to shed light on shared discourse patterns in Creole societies (Jamaica, Trinidad, Réunion, Mauritius) on the one hand, and European societies (Germany, Norway, the Netherlands) on the other. Such a comparative perspective reveals how standard language ideologies can be adapted in different contexts as means of delegitimising entire speech communities.

**Keywords:** multiethnolects, Creole languages, standard language ideology, delegitimation

## *RESUMEN*

Las variedades juveniles de contextos urbanos multiculturales, corrientemente llamadas “variedades polilectales” han capturado el interés de varios estudios en la últimas décadas. En el foro público, se describen como variantes próximas a la criollización. Por cierto, existen similitudes en valorización de las lenguas criollas y las variedades multilectales en el foro público. Para los que no son especialistas sobre estos temas, ambas variantes gozan de poco prestigio en comentarios metalingüísticos. En

ocasiones, éstas se describen como el resultado del decaimiento y empobrecimiento de las gramáticas de otras lenguas, lo cual, según estas creencias, repercute en el poco desarrollo moral y mental de sus hablantes, o la falta completa de éste. Por otra parte, el estudio de estas variantes se describe como un “gasto innecesario de recursos económicos”, ya que, según éstos, no aportan al desarrollo de la excelencia en el lenguaje. Este trabajo analiza 1,240 comentarios sobre variedades multilectales publicados en la red cibernética. Éstos muestran que fenómenos de contacto lingüístico suscitan reclamos de conservación y pureza lingüística sustentados por creencias comunes típicas de la ideología de la lengua estándar. El propósito de este trabajo es ilustrar los patrones comunes a los discursos en sociedades criollas (Jamaica, Trinidad, Reunión y Mauricio) y en sociedades europeas (Alemania, Noruega y Países Bajos). Este punto de vista comparativo demuestra que las mismas ideologías sobre el lenguaje pueden adaptarse a contextos lingüísticos distintos para deslegitimar comunidades lingüísticas enteras.

**Palabras clave:** multietnolectos, lenguas criollas, ideología de la lengua estándar, deslegitimación

#### RÉSUMÉ

Depuis deux décennies environ, on s'intéresse de plus en plus à des phénomènes de langage d'adolescents qu'on désigne désormais comme « multiethnolectes » et qui ont émergé dans un contexte de contacts culturels et linguistiques urbains. Dans la sphère publique, on les décrit parfois comme un pas vers la « créolisation » des langues européennes. Les débats sur les multiethnolectes et celles sur les langues créoles sont similaires à bien des égards : Ces langues souffrent d'une dépréciation énorme dans l'opinion publique, elles sont vues comme les résultats d'un déclin linguistique, elles auraient des grammaires appauvries, et elles seraient non seulement un obstacle au développement mental et moral de leurs locuteurs mais aussi un signe du manque de ceci. Souvent, la recherche sur ces langues est critiquée comme un gaspillage de ressources car elle n'aurait pas le résultat souhaité, notamment une protection et un raffinement des langues. A l'aide d'une analyse de 1.240 commentaires sur des multiethnolectes et des langues créoles dans des discussions en ligne, cet article montre que des phénomènes de contact linguistique provoquent des demandes de pureté et de conservation qui reproduisent des arguments usuels de l'idéologie des langues standardisées. Cet article offre une analyse des mécanismes discursifs partagés dans des sociétés créoles (Jamaïque, Trinité, La Réunion, île Maurice) et dans des sociétés européennes (Allemagne, Norvège, Pays-Bas). Une telle perspective comparative démontre comment les arguments idéologiques sont utilisés, dans des contextes différents, comme moyens de délégitimation d'une communauté entière de locuteurs.

**Mots-clés** : multiethnolectes, langues créoles, idéologie des langues standardisées, délégitimation

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## 1. Introduction

In recent times, new forms of youth language have emerged in urban multicultural settings in the context of post-war migration, for example in Northern and Western Europe.<sup>1</sup> These varieties or styles, often labelled “multiethnolects,” have received growing attention in the last two decades from both linguists and the public at large.<sup>2</sup> Adolescent communities in post-industrial European cities shaped new forms of languages which in some cases have received rather descriptive designations like *London Multicultural English* in the UK, *Københavnsk multiethnolect* (‘Copenhagen multiethnolect’) in Denmark, *Kiezdeutsch* (‘neighbourhood German’) in Germany, and *straattaal* (‘street language’) in the Netherlands and Belgium; other denominations are clearly depreciative, such as *Kebabnorsk* (‘Kebab Norwegian’) in Norway, and *Türkendeutsch* (‘Turk German’) or *Kanak språk* (‘wog lingo’) in Germany (Jaspers/Mercelis 2014; Wiese 2014:7-8; Androutsopoulos 2010:186-187, 2007:125-128; Appel/Schoonen 2005:85; Kulbrandstad 2004). Multiethnolects are used as an in-group form of speech by adolescents of widely varying ethnic backgrounds, including youth that grew up in monolingual families where the majority languages of the respective countries are spoken.<sup>3</sup>

For the most part, public interest in multiethnolects and Creoles coincides with a more general discourse about language preservation and the alleged need to protect languages from imminent ‘damage.’ Conservative and right-wing commentators in Germany have compared multiethnolects to Creoles claiming that *Kiezdeutsch* is the first step towards ‘creolisation’ of German and suggested that its further development has to be stopped immediately to prevent further harm to the already enfeebled language. The magazine of a German association of language purists states in the lead paragraph of a featured article about *Kiezdeutsch* that creolisation supposedly “creates losers”:

This is because a Creole language can emerge from a Pidgin as pronunciation, lexicon and grammar of several languages mix. Indeed, over time, a new language is created. This way, the dream of multilingualism becomes a nightmare of language policy. Supporting creolisation obstructs the language losers’ way to education and integration into the

German people. The social losers remain sealed off and create their own world with their own undifferentiated language.<sup>4</sup>

Aus einer Pidginsprache kann nämlich eine Kreolsprache erwachsen, in der sich Aussprache, Wortschatz und Grammatik mehrerer Sprachen miteinander vermischen. So bildet sich im Laufe der Zeit tatsächlich eine neue Sprache. Der Traum von der Mehrsprachigkeit wird so zum sprachpolitischen Albtraum. Die Förderung der Kreolisierung verbaut den Sprachverlierern den Weg zur Bildung und zur Eingliederung ins deutsche Volk. Die sozialen Verlierer bleiben unter sich und bilden eine eigene Welt mit einer eigenen undifferenzierten Sprache.

Also in the debates in Creole-speaking countries, parallels are sometimes drawn between Creoles and youth language, though comparisons of this kind are rather rare:

Creole is not a language, in contrast to Breton. It is like Verlan in the suburbs, nothing more. (REU-2010-3-52; see part 2 for an explanation of the quotation codes)<sup>5</sup>

Le créole n'est pas une langue contrairement au Breton. C'est comme le Verlan dans les cités, pas plus.

Multiethnolects show salient features representing recent language change and language contact that distinguishes them from their respective standard languages (Wiese 2013; Opsahl/Nistov 2010; Keim 2010:450-452; Nortier 2001:20ff.). Additionally, they share a range of grammatical characteristics that resemble those of Creoles. These similarities still await further documentation and analysis.<sup>6</sup>

In the past decade, multiethnolects have received considerable attention in places where the public is usually not particularly interested in language issues, and the arguments put forward largely resemble those that form part of discussions about the status of Creoles in postcolonial societies where they are spoken. However, structural similarities are unlikely to explain why debates about the two groups of languages take similar shape. There seems to be an obvious link between Creoles and multiethnolects in the eyes of non-linguists despite one very significant distinction: multiethnolects are a phenomenon of youth language whereas Creoles are native languages used throughout all age groups in most Creole-speaking societies. In some cases, Creoles are even the opposite of youth language. For example, in societies where the use of Creole is drastically diminishing, it is usually only spoken by older generations. By *Creole*, I refer to the rather 'canonical' cases of languages that emerged in settings of European colonial expansion through absolute social hierarchies. As a result of language change under these particular circumstances, Creoles are clearly distinguishable from their European and non-European base languages, both structurally and

sociohistorically.

In this article, I will carve out the most apparent parallels in public discourse about Creoles and multiethnolects and subsequently offer an explanation on an ideological level rather than a grammatical one. The delegitimation of a form of language ultimately serves the goal to exclude a particular speaker group from the supposedly legitimate, i.e. socially dominant, part of society.<sup>7</sup> Svendsen (2014:51) describes this as the use of language as “a substitute subject in processes of social differentiation.” I focus on *how* the discourses on multiethnolects and Creoles are similar and in the conclusion offer some preliminary thoughts on *why* they are similar. The comparison will draw on data from online discussions about language change and language variation in several Creole-speaking countries of the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean and in several European countries.

To date, discourse analyses of debates about multiethnolects take into account one case at a time (Svendsen 2014; Wiese 2014; Cornips *et al.* 2006), while larger comparative work is lacking. As far as Creoles are concerned, the literature on popular metalinguistic reflection is a little more extensive. Studies dealing with individual languages or societies prevail also in creolistics (e.g., Farquharson 2007, Mühleisen 2009:40ss. for Jamaica; Fleischmann 2008 for the Seychelles; Schnepel 2004:129ss. for Guadeloupe; Reutner 2005 for Martinique; Bachmann 2005 for Papiamentu). However, a few publications are available that compare the situations in several Creole-speaking societies, though they remain limited to Creoles with the same European base language in the same region (see Prudent 1980 and Bébel-Gisler 1981 on discourses about French-based Creoles in the Antilles; Mühleisen 2002 on English-based Creoles of the Caribbean).

On a more abstract level, recent discussions in creolistics have shown that metalinguistic thought on creolisation and the structures of Creole languages within linguistics is not free from bias and prejudice either (e.g., DeGraff 2005; Mufwene 2008:93-102). Metascientific research of this kind has helped raise awareness for an increased need of reflexivity in speaking and writing about linguistic and, ultimately, human difference. In order to sustain such a level of awareness and reflexivity, it is all the more necessary to also understand the workings of metalinguistic discourse outside academia.

## 2. Data collection and some quantitative remarks

In order to document language attitudes in several countries I chose an approach that allows broad comparison while not making any strict quantitative claims. The analysis is based upon a collection of comments

made by readers in discussion sections of online media and the websites of newspapers that maintain web versions and are also available as traditional print products.<sup>8</sup> The composition of the sample can be described, following Herring (2004), as one combining sampling by theme and by time with sampling by convenience. The comments considered were gathered from discussions dating from 2008 to 2014. They were all posted as reactions to news articles dealing with language, more precisely with multiethnolectal youth languages or Creole languages. Within this thematic frame and time span, the data had to be collected from the available resources and platforms, given that language-related issues generally are not widely represented in media coverage. This made it difficult to opt for mainstream media only or to exclude regional press in favour of larger national titles. The data sources therefore include the websites of both quality and tabloid press as well as online-only news portals and the website of a regional television station.

Despite this heterogeneous composition of data sources, online debates present a certain number of advantages over other ways of investigating language ideologies. Firstly, they represent a part of what one may call a ‘published opinion,’ that is to say, statements visible for a certain audience whose members may deduce their own positions on language issues from these statements, either by adopting or by rejecting them. Secondly, the internet offers an easily accessible space for individuals to present their opinion to a large number of readers. The opportunity to make statements anonymously online can trigger a certain readiness to ‘frankly speak one’s mind’ which might result in a more faithful representation of explicit attitudes and ultimately a less prominent distance between explicit and implicit attitudes.<sup>9</sup>

The aim of this article is not to draw a complete picture of language ideologies in the respective countries, nor to find out which ideologies actually prevail. Instead, I will focus on those statements used to delegitimise the contact languages in question, regardless of whether these statements are exceptional or represent a widely accepted opinion.

Table 1 provides an overview of the data.

I collected extensive data for one case per area, i.e. Jamaica for the Caribbean, La Réunion for the Indian Ocean, and Germany for Europe. These three cases are most suitable for an in-depth examination as data is abundantly available. In order to complete the picture and to allow for a broader comparison, I included data from Trinidad and Tobago, Mauritius, Norway, and the Netherlands. The case of London Multi-cultural English would have been interesting to study, but since also laypersons are usually aware of the direct influence of Jamaican Creole on the British multiethnolect, it would be difficult to tell apart ideological conceptions attached to Creoles from those targeting multiethnolectal

<b>Table 1: Composition of the dataset</b>					
<b>Code</b>	<b>Languages</b>	<b>Countries</b>	<b>Number of comments collected</b>	<b>Number of comments with delegitimising statements (%)</b>	<b>Sources</b>
<b>Caribbean</b>					
<b>JAM</b>	<b>Jamaican Creole</b>	<b>Jamaica</b>	1,042	280 (26.9%)	<i>Jamaica Gleaner, Jamaica Observer</i>
TRI	Trinidadian Creole <sup>10</sup>	Trinidad & Tobago	91	10 (11%)	<i>Trinidad Express</i>
<b>Indian Ocean</b>					
<b>REU</b>	<b>Réunionnais</b>	<b>La Réunion</b>	1,267	208 (16.4%)	<i>Le Quotidien, Journal de l'île de la Réunion, info.re, zinfos974.com</i>
MAU	Morisyen	Mauritius	244	92 (37.7%)	<i>L'Express, Le Mauricien</i>
<b>Europe</b>					
<b>DEU</b>	<b>Kiezdeutsch</b>	<b>Germany</b>	1,367	604 (44.2%)	<i>KiDKo/-E<sup>11</sup></i>
NED	Straattaal	Netherlands (Belgium) <sup>12</sup>	141	19 (13.4%)	<i>RTV Rijnmond, nu.nl</i>
NOR	Holmliansk <sup>13</sup>	Norway	84	27 (32.1%)	<i>Dagsavisen, Aftenposten, VG, Dagbladet</i>
<b>Total</b>			4,236	1,240 (29.27%)	

youth language.

Quotations from the collection are encoded with a three-letter abbreviation for the country (first column in the table) followed by the year of publication of the article to which the comment was posted. The rest of the code identifies the individual comment within the corpus.<sup>14</sup>

The fourth column in the table above indicates the total number of reader comments collected. The fifth column shows how many of these comments could effectively be included in the analysis because they contained at least one statement with delegitimising content. I counted as 'delegitimising content' any posts that implicitly or explicitly exclude Creoles or multiethnolects from the category of 'full-fledged'

languages. Comments that are not retained for analysis include those that express an exclusively positive view of the languages under debate, those that are completely off topic, and those that express agreement with a delegitimising comment made by another user without providing an own argument (e.g. a simple “yes, you are right”). For the analysis, I gathered a total of 1,240 comments that explicitly make use of one of the arguments described in the following sections. It is important to note that figures in column 5 do not claim to be in any way statistically representative for the overall presence of delegitimising positions in the countries under scrutiny. The percentage exclusively indicates the composition of the data set.

The news coverage that triggers language-related debates is usually similar from one Creole-speaking area to another. Articles sometimes give an account of projects for standardisation; in addition, they may report on cultural events or publications in or about Creole, or on measures to introduce Creole in education or its use in official contexts.<sup>15</sup> Some of them address widespread concern about language change, mainly in connection with contact phenomena between the Creole and the local standard language. These two last areas are mirrored in the press coverage about multiethnolects where education is a constant object of dispute and discomfort as recent effects of language contact and change regularly create indignation (Androutopoulos 2010), including opinions concerning the alleged loss of linguistic competency among pupils.

With the help of illustrative examples, I will give a synthesised comparison of the debates in the three different areas. In order to break down the arguments put forward in the debates, I deconstruct the statements and reconfigure them into prototypical units as discursive patterns that regularly appear jointly, essentially following a Foucaultian approach to discourse analysis (Foucault 1969, 1971). However, in contrast to a strict Foucaultian reading of discourses, this paper reconciles the notion of *discourse* as a way of creating or reproducing power relations and truths through speaking and writing with the notion of *ideologies* as “overall, abstract mental systems that organize [...] socially shared attitudes” (van Dijk 1995:18). *Attitudes* in this sense are beliefs about specific phenomena of social life that, taken together, can cluster according to a comprehensive ideological structure (van Dijk 2001:16). The online comments I analyse, then, are part of a metalinguistic discourse that manifests attitudes towards the results of language variation or change (i.e. Creoles or multiethnolects). These attitudes are shaped by an ideology that conceives a hierarchic, exclusive, and homogeneous vision of society. Discourse analysis as such is especially prolific for the analysis of anonymous online comments, as it can do without attributing a statement

to an individual's personal background, authorship, or agency.

The discursive patterns in the metalinguistic comments can be classified into four categories.<sup>16</sup> First is the idea that Creoles and multiethnolects cannot look back to a historical heritage. They are portrayed as undeserving newcomers on the language scene which cannot claim equal rights and therefore can't pretend to the same status as "real" languages or dialects. Second is the misconception that the grammars of multiethnolects and Creoles are products of decay and thus do not follow the necessary rules of a full-fledged language and ultimately hinder speakers' mental and communicative capacities. Third is the belief that languages should be kept apart in order to protect standard languages from mixing, an idea often accompanied by the assertion that resources should be used to promote only those languages that are seen as economically profitable. Finally, as products of decay, the very existence of Creoles and multiethnolects is deplored to the point that linguists are expected to invest more efforts and commitment to the fight against these languages.

### 3. Heritage and historical authority

The designation of Creoles and multiethnolects as 'languages,' 'dialects,' 'styles,' or other linguistic sub-categories is a very frequent matter of debate. Especially in the comments about Kiezdeutsch, its status as a dialect of German is almost unanimously denied (Wiese 2014:8-9). Even more drastically, some users want to exclude multiethnolects or Creoles from the realm of language altogether. The arguments put forward are very similar even though the posters commenting on multiethnolects don't seem to have a deeper knowledge, if any, about Creoles, and vice versa.

This misuse of a language does not even deserve an own word... (DEU-AFB000526\_07)

*Dieser Missbrauch einer Sprache hat nichtmal einen eigenes Wort verdient...*

But it is a fact that adolescents sometimes can't make the difference any more between *straattaal* and "real" language. (NED-2013-1-12)

*Maar het is een feit dat jongeren soms straattaal niet meer kunnen onderscheiden van "echte" taal.*

Our Creole is not even a dialect and even less a regional language. (REU-2012-7-12)

*Notre créole n'est même pas un dialecte et encore moins une langue régionale.*

I hate to break your bubble. Patois is not a language. (JAM-2012-1-3)

The scope of linguistic concepts is somewhat wider as far as Creole languages are concerned.<sup>17</sup> While the discussion about multiethnolects mainly revolves around the label ‘dialect,’ the debates about Creoles additionally include the question of whether they can be considered independent ‘languages.’ It is often unclear if statements like the last one are to suggest that Creoles merely are sub-varieties of their colonial base languages, or if the comment implies that it is not a language at all in the sense that it is altogether unsuitable for human communication. Both interpretations are possible in the context of assertions about ungrammaticality and mental hindrance (see section 4 below). The concept of ‘language’ in this sense is usually closely linked to the fact that a written norm is due to exist for a form of speech to be considered a ‘real’ language. Thus, varieties that so far have not been codified in written form are tautologically denied the status as languages because they allegedly are not suited for written use (Mühleisen 2002:214-224, Hazaël-Massieux 1993:89-108).

An argument that both discussions about Creoles and multiethnolects draw on in connection with the given status or label is that of history.

Dialects are languages that have grown out of the early times of German history and that are “independent,” for example Frisian or Low German. (DEU-MFO120224\_13)

*Dialekte sind aus der Frühzeit der deutschen Geschichte gewachsene Sprachen und dann auch „eigenständig“. z.B. Friesisch oder Plattdeutsch.*

For me, this idiom that emerged from the milieu of immigrants is a slang (which is not even that new). It doesn’t have anything to do with the ancestral dialects. (DEU-AVD120128\_04)

*Für mich ist dieses aus dem Migrantenmilieu hervorgegangene Idiom ein (gar nicht nicht mal so ganz neuer) Slang. Mit den angestammten Dialekten hat er rein gar nichts zu tun.*

Placing this degeneration on the same level with our dialects is an enormous depreciation for them. (DEU-MDE120129\_12)

*Diese Entartung auf eine Stufe mit unseren Mundarten zu stellen, wertet diese enorm ab.*

As these quotes show, the legitimacy of a variety is mostly deduced from its historical continuity. Only a language that can look back to a long history deserves to enter the categories ‘dialect’ or ‘language:’ “[i]t should possess a continuous unbroken history, a respectable and legitimate ancestry and a long pedigree” (Milroy 2001:548-549). Even within research about Creoles, the notion of a ‘short’ or ‘long’ history is a matter of discussion (Krämer 2013b; DeGraff 2001:234ff.; Mufwene 2005:47).

Additionally, the language at hand has to be on the right side of history. It is obvious how some of the commentators in Europe, especially those in the Kiezdeutsch debate, make use of terms like “ancestral” or “degeneration” (literally: “Entartung,” a term very much associated with eugenic ideologies in the Third Reich). This way, they introduce the factor of genealogy into the argument and follow a logic that deduces hierarchies from descent. Only those varieties that are of old age and exhibit the desired cultural heritage may bear the title of ‘language’ or that of a ‘dialect’ attached to one such language. It is often said that traditional dialects have ‘grown naturally’ in order to stress that multiethnolects or Creoles in some way violate the natural way of language evolution. In French Creole societies, disagreement revolves around the term “patois,” which is also a very widely used designation for Jamaican Creole. In French, this label does not only imply microspatial dialectal variation but also a wide range of mostly negative connotations like the backwardness and crudeness of peasantry (Boyer 2013).

As a parallel, these hierarchies correlate with the speaker groups typically associated with the varieties under discussion. Multiethnolects are ascribed to a prototypical immigrant adolescent with Arabic, Middle Eastern, or Turkish background. This hypothetical group is constructed as the part of society that arrived last in a long history of the ‘indigenous’ European population. As such, they are excluded from the seemingly homogenous society and the language they are associated with provides yet another example for this principle of rejection.

In Creole-speaking areas, the historical context of language change and the emergence of the society is just as much reflected in the present-day debates. In these cases, the history of slavery features prominently in comments.

I have always believed that some of those who are advocating the use of patois instead of standard english are conspirators of evil. They are able to switch from one to another with ease at any given time. If they have to conduct business internationally they can do it. What they desire is to be able to do it for those how have no command of english—to control them, to be their masters and the others their slaves. They remind me of the slave masters—using the brutes. (JAM-2012-4-44)

The colonisers and the commanders simply created the Creole in order to impose their domination to the slaves. From then on, everything is linked: Those who want to impose Creole today are in a direct line with those who imposed it back then. (REU-2010-1b-10)

*Ce sont les « colons » et les komandèrs qui ont créé de toute pièce le kréol pour imposer leur domination aux esclaves. A partir de là, tout devient relatif : ceux qui veulent imposer le kréol aujourd’hui sont dans la droite*

*ligne de ceux qui l'ont imposé jadis...*

As a consequence, policies for an extended use of Creole are rejected as measures that supposedly perpetuate social inequalities established since colonial times and stabilise the divide between the influential standard-speaking elites and the underprivileged masses:

They want to lower the level of our children in order to be able to 'command' them one day. (REU-2012-9-11)

*Ils veulent abaisser le niveau de nos enfants pour pouvoir les « commander » un jour ...*

Patois is the language of mentally enslaved Jamaicans, who have an emotional (pathetic) understanding of the world. (JAM-2014-2-26)

This last comment clearly shows how the different motives interact: Creole is associated with oppression, either historically or in present-day social structures. It is attached to emotionality as opposed to the rationality of languages like French or English (Krämer 2014:91). In this line of thought, Creole will not be able to shake off its intrinsic connection with oppression, a symbol it bears, so speaking Creole is equated with succumbing to domination and debasement. In more detail, concrete measures like the establishment or even the suggestion of a spelling norm are immediately rejected as instruments which serve the overarching goal of controlling the masses and mentally incapacitating them.<sup>18</sup> Even in cases where activists advocate the use of Creoles for the benefit of underprivileged parts of the society, distrust of the elites prevails.

While it is undoubtedly true that creolisation and slavery are historically linked, the concept of oppression is also brought up by users in the multiethnolect debates. In this context, recent immigration is construed as a history of 'colonisation' of Europe. Very frequently, these arguments coincide with expressions of fear of an imminent 'islamisation' and the menace of 'infiltration' by foreigners (often called *Überfremdung*, literally 'over-alienation,' in right-wing public discourse in Germany).

Within the language debate, this fear is connected to the observation that multiethnolects are spoken not only by adolescents whose immigrant background is seemingly obvious but also by youth who come from monolingual families that have been living in the country for many generations.<sup>19</sup>

What I find strange is when Dutch people start speaking straattaal. (NED-2012-1-28)

*Wat ik pas vreemd vind als een nederlander straattaal begint te praten.*

Kebabnorsk is a lack of culture that simply destroys adolescents' language everywhere in Norway, also of those who are ethnically Norwegian. (NOR-2011-1-1)

*Keabnorsk er en ukultur, det ødelegger rett og slett språket til Ungdommer rundt i Norge, også de som er etnisk norske.*

What the professor ignores is the fact that German youth in those neighbourhoods take a ‘stealth’ attitude. They are a minority in the streets and the schoolyards and have to keep a low profile so they won’t take a hit. Of course they also accommodate linguistically. Conclusion: There are those who can’t do better, and those who don’t want to and will soon be unable. (DEU-MFO120213\_01)

*Was die Professorin [...] ausblendet, ist die Tatsache, dass die deutschen Jugendlichen in diesen Bezirken eine „stealth“-Haltung eingenommen haben. Sie sind auf der Straße und im Schulhof in der Minderheit und müssen sich bedeckt halten, da sie sonst auf die Zwölf kriegen. Da passt man sich eben auch sprachlich an. Fazit: die einen können nicht besser, die anderen wollen nicht und werden es verlernen.*

These developments are interpreted as signs of a growing escalation while ‘foreigners’—identified as the speakers of multiethnolects—allegedly impose their language even on those who initially would have had the chance to acquire ‘good German’ or ‘decent Dutch.’ Posters sometimes link arguments like these to a history of ‘invasion,’ e.g. the Turks at the gates of Vienna or the Moors in Spain, in order to substantiate the claim that immigrant language represents a general ‘will for domination.’ Such a scenario of threat and danger is by no means exclusive to the anonymous voices in online comments, as it is just as much supported by national news coverage in Germany where “[e]thnolects are metaphorically constructed as a spreading virus or an alien force, while German is placed as a victim in need of protection” (Androutsopoulos 2010:195).

The observation that adolescents from a monolingual background speak multiethnolects contradicts the assumed homogeneity of the constructed speaker group.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, it confirms the motif of decay and threat to linguistic integrity the same way colonial philologists feared that the ‘natural’ language order was disturbed when they observed that Creole languages were spoken not only by slaves and their descendants but also by speakers who were categorised as ‘mixed’ or ‘white.’ In an ideological setting where standard languages are still seen as a *conditio sine qua non* of the stability of the modern nation state, the emergence or emancipation of non-standard varieties such as Creoles and multiethnolects is felt to be a direct threat to national unity or, in the case of younger postcolonial nations, as undermining the ongoing process of nation building. The equation that one nation is to be identified with one (standard) language often culminates in comments like this one:

We are Dutch! So speak Dutch! (NED-2012-2-4)

*WIJ zijn nederlanders!!!! dus spreek NEDERLANDS!!!*

Nationality is immediately tied to language, and the call to speak Dutch in this context implies that *straattaal* obviously is not part of this language. Not only are the norms of the standard languages felt to be perpetual, but also the choice of the national language(s) is to remain the same even in an increasingly multilingual society.

#### 4. Grammar and potential

A very basic misconception among non-linguists in Europe holds that both multiethnolects and Creoles are the results or signs of linguistic decay. While most multiethnolects are not commonly known in the Caribbean, the idea that Creoles are ‘corruptions’ of European colonial languages is clearly translated by a number of comments like those quoted below. Compared to the respective standard varieties, their grammars are believed to be irregular or unsystematic. Some users participating in the online discussions portray grammatical differences that distinguish Creoles or multiethnolects from the standard languages as mistakes proving the speakers’ alleged inability to correctly use the standard language.

Besides, Creole doesn’t have any established structure, basis, rules, grammar. (REU-2010-1a-57)<sup>21</sup>

*De plus le créole n’a pas de structure, de base, de règles, de grammaire établies.*

There is no creole in Trinidad and Tobago. What you have is bad grammar and mis pronunciations. Dialect is not bad grammar, nor is bad grammar creole. (TRI-2012-5-11)

It is not a dialect when I speak a language wrongly because I’m unable to learn it correctly! (DEU-MDE120129\_05)

*Es ist kein Dialekt, wenn ich eine Sprache falsch spreche, weil ich nicht in der Lage bin, sie richtig zu sprechen!*

As a part of this argument, commentators often stress the internal variation of the language at hand.

Creole has no rules; the evidence: it’s even different from one side of the island to the other. (REU-2012-3-15)

*Le créole n’a pas de règles, la preuve, il est déjà différent d’un côté de l’île à l’autre.*

The fact that also sub-varieties follow their own systematic grammar is often overlooked. Posters see internal variation as chaotic, arbitrary, and resistant to regulation—something which is only achieved with an established normative grammar and spelling. A number of different arguments based upon stereotypical assumptions about the speakers underpin the idea that multiethnolects and Creoles lack grammar.

Multiethnolects and Creoles share a number of grammatical features such as the possibility to use bare noun phrases and to leave out prepositions in directive and locative constructions (Aboh / DeGraff 2014; Bobyleva 2013:205-209; Wiese 2012; Auer 2013:31-36), or the use of morphologically invariable existential verbs or particles which in some cases might even lack an expletive subject (Wiese/Duda 2012).<sup>22</sup> Such constructions are in sharp contrast to the grammars of the standard languages and therefore easy to interpret as mistakes or deviations.

Sometimes, the speakers of Creoles or multiethnolects are believed to be unwilling to learn to speak 'properly'. In the case of multiethnolects that are strongly associated with stereotypical conceptions of immigrants (Wiese 2014:14-17), commentators interpret this unwillingness as a refusal to integrate into the majority culture and society. Thus, the prototypical speakers of multiethnolects are construed as

a group of unwilling persons who do not (want to) become proficient in the Dutch language. (NED-2012-2-2)

*een stel onwillige personen, die de Nederlandse taal niet machtig (willen) worden.*

Kebabnorsk was exclusively developed by immigrants who can't learn or don't fancy learning, or who have parents who don't bother to teach their children good enough Norwegian. (NOR-2008-1-25)

*kebabnorsk er ene og alene utviklet av innvandrere som ikke evner, gidder, eller har foreldre som tar seg bryet med å lære ungene sine godt nok Norsk.*

Commentators from Réunion and Jamaica speculate about the motivations of pupils who are not (yet) proficient in standard French or English while others ascribe laziness to the whole speech community, regardless of the individual's age:

In order to speak correct French, you have to make a bit of an effort. It's the convenience of not learning French which seduces the pupils, not the will to preserve their language! (REU-2009-3-4)

*Seulement pour parler un français correct, il faut faire un peu d'effort... c'est la facilité de ne pas apprendre le français qui séduit les élèves et pas la volonté de préserver leur langue !*

I know that most of this current generation is very lazy, and that is why they do not want to make an effort to learn to speak and write proper English. (JAM-2014-7-12)

Most of the words spoken in Patois are due to inability of our people to properly call the words through lack of the proper exercise of the tongue. This also makes us spell badly, hence words like "weh," "gwaan," and "gweh." Obviously these are lazy versions of the real words. (JAM-2014-3-189)

While factors like laziness and the lack of willpower are purportedly located in the speakers' character, an equally degrading argument is put forward about their mental abilities. Both the arguments drawing on moral and cognitive differences between the speakers of contact languages and those of standard varieties date back to similar statements in, for example, nineteenth-century philology when linguistic structures were explained by essentialised categories like race and ethnicity (Krämer 2014, 2013a).

Commentators frequently express the conviction that speakers of multiethnolects or Creoles lack the necessary intelligence to acquire the seemingly more complex structures of the standard. These views can go as far as to suggest pathological problems with the production or acquisition of language (Wiese/Krämer 2013).

What are we saying about the aptitude and intelligence of our nation's children when we make proposals that children will more easily understand the material being taught if it were presented in patois? (JAM-2011-1-90)

By all means, don't bother speaking Norwegian. It's probably a bit exhausting for a simple soul. (NOR-2008-1-23)<sup>23</sup>

*Må jo for all del ikke snakke Norsk. Er nok litt slitsomt det for en enkel sjel.*

I can't believe that somebody with an IQ above 20 can speak this way. Those people are not only completely dumb but also stupid like a slice of toast. (DEU-MSN120208\_43)

*kann doch net wahr sein, das jemand mit nem iq von über 20 so reden kann. solche leute sind nicht nur total bescheuert sondern auch noch dumm wie nen toastbrot.*

Such arguments often take a particular tautological turn: While the grammars of multiethnolects and Creoles are supposed to represent the mental setup of the speech community, they allegedly also make any further mental development impossible. Thus, they become both cause and result for intellectual inequalities ascribed to the stereotypical speaker groups:

Logical thinking is supported by a well-structured language that serves as a basis, because you always think the way you communicate. (DEU-MFA120228\_04)

*Logisches Denken wird von einer gut strukturierten Sprache als Basis unterstützt, denn man denkt auch wie man kommuniziert.*

a person is a prisoner of the language they speak... languages are designed to influence thought. (JAM-2014-3-214)

As far as the alleged inability to correctly use the standard language is concerned, it is often difficult to tell if the commentators claim that

the speakers are cognitively deficient or if the inability is due to a lack of acquisition or education. Both views are reflected in prototypical statements with the common core of asserted linguistic shortcomings.

The mutual influence of language and cognition has been a long-lasting debate in linguistics, language philosophy, and the cognitive sciences. It seems that these debates, as a sort of simplified and popularised Sapir-Whorf-motive, turned into a widespread conviction of mutual and absolute determination of speaking and thinking. This determinism is particularly linked to the lexicon. The overall equation seems to be that what cannot be named cannot be thought, and that a language basically is the sum of its lexemes. If this sum is too small—in some cases, even an exact figure is given—or restricted in any other way, so must be the variety as such and hence its speakers:

Réunion Creole, which is our nice local dialect, hardly counts more than 2,000 words. (REU-2009-4-4)<sup>24</sup>

*[...] le créole réunionnais étant notre patois sympathique local qui ne compte guère plus de 2 000 mots.*

The slang of “Kiezdeutsch” only allows verbal activities that are limited to the expression of 200 words. (DEU-MSO120329\_123)

*Der Slang des „Kiezdeutsch“ lässt gerade mal Tätigkeiten verbal zu die sich auf eine Ausdrucksweise von 200 Wörtern beschränkt*

This idea clearly contradicts the principle that any variety has both the potential to expand its lexicon according to the communicative needs of its speakers as well as a multitude of strategies (e.g., derivation, composition or borrowing) for doing so.<sup>25</sup> Commentators express doubts about the capacity of Creoles or multiethnolects to serve for communication in domains usually reserved for standard languages, for example, education, science, art, and literature. Instead, the vocabulary of both multiethnolects and Creoles is seen as intrinsically linked to aggression, crime, and bad manners (Wiese 2014:16-18).<sup>26</sup>

In some survey Trinidad and Tobago’s dialect was rated among the top 10 sexy dialects on the planet. How useful is that when one has to exchange ideas in finance, medicine, engineering, law and so on requires a separate study. (TRI-2012-3-6)

Patois is a reflection of the aggressive and hostile Jamaican culture; a culture that has no respect for rules and laws. [...] Patois is a measure of the degree of hate, which we have for each other. (JAM-2014-2-26)

A considerable part of the vocabulary consists of: son of a bitch, less frequently but also existent: little daughter of a bitch, fuck, wank, and besides, they all address each other as “Alter” [...]. (DEU-MPN120229\_54)

*Ein wesentlicher Teil des Wortschatzes besteht aus: Hurensohn eher seltener, aber auch anzutreffen: kleine Hurentochter ficken wixen und außerdem reden sie sich gegenseitig nur mit „Alter“ an [...].*

People who speak Kebabnorsk make a bad impression on me because they don't seem to care about anything and they only strive to make other people's lives a misery. Their language indicates that! (NOR-2011-1-21)

*Dessuten gir folk som snakker kebabnorsk meg et dårlig inntrykk, fordi de virker som de gir blaffen i alt og bare er ute etter å ødelegge for andre. Språket deres tyder jo på det!*

Specific items of the lexicon are cited as indicating the intrinsic potential for aggression, as are some phonological particularities like rhythm or intonation (Svendsen/Røyneland 2008:71-72). Such comparisons of Creole or multiethnolectal structures as opposed to the standard languages operate with a clear-cut dichotomy. While the vernaculars are associated with (uncontrollable) emotion and informality (Farquharson 2007:257), the standard is seen as the language of reason and reflection. The idea that Creoles or multiethnolects do not lend themselves to rationality leads back to the notion of mental inhibition. A language which is unsuitable for formal discourse purportedly renders a speakers' mind incapable of formal thinking.

The rejection of Creole as a teaching medium and school subject is linked with such fears of damage to the mental development of pupils and to the aesthetic and canonical integrity of the standard language itself. In order to maintain such integrity, a language needs to have the potential to be conserved and to perdure over a long period of time in a written medium. Creoles, in contrast, are seen as intrinsically linked to the long-lasting oral traditions of Creole-speaking cultures:

But you cannot standardize a spoken dialect. Patois is NOT a written language. How do you standardize that? (JAM-2014-3-135)

In my opinion, Creole has to remain a dialect of oral rather than written communication. (MAU-2012-3-18)<sup>27</sup>

*Me dapre mwa kreol bizin res enn dialek de kominikasyon plis oral ki ekri.*

Despite the fact that written practices do exist—a fact known to some posters, but not all—a common deduction is that Creoles as such can and should only be used orally and therefore are neither able nor appropriate means of fulfilling the requirements of a written (standard) language. At the same time, posters dismiss writing Creoles because an oral language supposedly loses its flexibility and natural character if it is fixed and printed on paper.

In the debates about multiethnolects, the role of written language

is somewhat less prominent. One motive specific to Germany is the spelling reform in the 1990s and 2000s, which is sometimes brought up in discussions about Kiezdeutsch:

In connection with the spelling reform and insufficient knowledge of spoken and written German in a part of the population resistant to learning, it's no surprise that this "German of stupidity" is running rampant. (DEU-MFO090527\_04)

*Im Rahmen der Rechtschreibreform und mangelnder Deutschkenntnisse in Wort und Schrift bei einem lernresistenten Teil der Bevölkerung wundert es nicht, daß dieses „Dummdeutsch“ immer weiter um sich greift.*

This user combines two of the preferred issues of language purists. In cases like this one, the arguments are linked rather superficially via a general dismay about language change in which not even the written standard remains stable and fixed. Traditionalists regard the norms as a betrayal of a well-established good taste, even though the spelling reform had an extremely limited scope. Within this mindset, they see variation—and especially variation in written language—as a problem to be avoided at all costs.

The discussions about spelling norms for Creole languages bring up an interesting question that is rarely asked even in linguistics: from which point on can a language count as “standardised”? In some post-colonial societies, for example in the Anglophone Caribbean, it is not even completely clear what exactly the speech community considers ‘the standard.’ Some speakers acknowledge the emergence or existence of a local standard of English while others continue to only accept British or American English as the model with most authority (Deuber 2013).

The Cassidy proposal for writing Jamaican Creole, for example, is known to quite a number of users in the fora I consulted, and some argue that this language has therefore been standardised already—or at least that the proposal as such shows that the language can be standardised. Others hold that the proposal was never officially recognised nor widely adopted or used. Standardisation and changes in norms are potentially endless processes. The posters operate with vague and superficial, sometimes even uninformed views of ‘standardisation’ going from writing down a language on paper for the first time ever to introducing legally binding regulations. Therefore, these very general ideas of what ‘standardisation’ might mean for the development of a language can provide a wide range of arguments for or against the recognition of a variety. This is ultimately the factor that makes standard language ideology strong and effective in these contexts as it operates with a highly flexible idea of a ‘standard’ that allows very different projections.

## 5. Purity and resources

The image of a language is often influenced by the market value that is associated with it. Mastering a world language with high prestige is seen as a precious qualification while mastering one with a smaller number of speakers, maybe one without a written standard, is considered to be a drawback, and learning it a waste of time. Many commentators argue that Creoles should not be taken into account in education because it is more important to teach the children languages they can use later in their professional careers.

If the minister for education dropped Kreol for Spanish, German, Italian or Hindi as optional subjects what a glittering bullet that would be on the CV of job seekers in the hotel business. (MAU-2011-2-8)

The Jamaican need a job and food to put on the table. Patois will not help us. (JAM-2011-1-17)

While no attempts have been made to use multiethnolects as media of education or to teach them as subjects, there are projects that aim at improving the linguistic self-perception and confidence of non-standard speakers in school.<sup>28</sup> Opponents of such projects argue that it is wrong to encourage the use of multiethnolects and other forms of non-standard language with the authority of the educational system because they are also seen as a hindrance on the work market.<sup>29</sup>

Straattaal is nice until you have to apply for a job in a company. (NED-2013-1-85)

*Leuk straattaal, totdat je moet solliciteren voor een baan binnen een bedrijf!*

I can promise you one thing, you don't do yourself a favour speaking Kebabsk in a job interview. (NOR-2008-1-27)

*For en ting kan jeg love deg, du stiller ikke spesielt bra i et jobbintervju snakkene kebabsk.*

Accordingly, posters ask that schools increase their efforts to do away with these forms of language instead of endorsing the use of multiethnolects. The debates in Europe, the Caribbean, and the Indian Ocean resemble each other with regard to the conviction that multiethnolects or Creoles are an impediment to a successful career because they supposedly block the way to a correct and complete use of standard language. The underlying assumption is that recognising the vernacular can only be done at the expense of competences in the standard languages and that achieving this goal is only possible if the resources available for language teaching are strictly limited to those forms of language deemed worthy of investment.

So the powers that be should not be side-tracked from the real issue that

is to find novel and creative ways of getting our people and especially our children to learn and use the English language; after all it is the language of business, development and education today. (JAM-2011-1-57)

Arguments like these disregard the fact that an important role of education is to help the speakers develop their competence to choose from a wide repertoire of linguistic resources. In order to do so, one aim of language teaching should be to raise awareness of the appropriate way of speaking in a particular situation rather than accepting that a specific variety is always taboo regardless of its communicative functionality. This last statement in particular shows that there is a simplified vision of language teaching which increases competition between the languages instead of recognising their interconnection and making productive use of the openness and fluidity of communicative resources. Posters see this competition not only as one involving time and money, but also as a conflict on a cognitive level. They assume that the human brain should not be “overloaded” with an excessive volume of languages (conceived of as countable units) and that the multilingual mind should by all means be trained to keep the languages apart.

I have seen Jamaican students who have migrated to the U.S. placed in the English as a Second Language program, because they are mixing the local dialect (patois) with the standard English. Therefore, I welcome this initiative for more stringency to be placed on the use and teaching of English in schools in Jamaica. (JAM-2014-3-251)

If teachers and pupils don't make such efforts to strictly separate languages, the language skills involved supposedly suffer from it. This idea also surfaces in comments about multiethnolects:

Their Turkish is just as bad as their German. Basically, they speak a mix of both, but they aren't really proficient in neither of them. (DEU-MPN120229\_92)

*Deren Türkisch ist oft genau so schlecht wie ihr Deutsch. Im Grunde sprechen viele einen Mischmasch aus beidem, aber keines können sie richtig.*

In this case, Kiezdeutsch does not even play a direct part in the competition which is fought out between ‘full-fledged’ German and ‘full-fledged’ Turkish. In contrast, the Creole languages are seen as directly conflicting with the respective standard languages. Posters frequently state that there is no need to teach Creole in school because the children already speak it, so that cognitive as well as economic resources should be saved for teaching other languages that are deemed more important.

But why waste time teaching kids something that they already know all they need of patois, they speak it fluently. [...] We have a lot more serious issues in schools, such as ensuring competency in English and Mathematics. (JAM-2011-1-40)

I speak Creole very well even though I never learned it at school, however, I was very good at dictations back then. (REU-2009-2-19)

*Je parle tres bien le créole pourtant je ne l'ai jamais appris à l'école, par contre j'étais assez calé en dictée à l'époque.*

Statements like these perpetuate the view that education is mainly about teaching children facts and techniques that are unknown to them, while helping them develop the competences they bring along in the first place counts as a less important pedagogical goal. One of the techniques that posters feel should be taught to learners is how to maintain absolute separation between the languages they know or acquire in order to avoid mixture. After all, the idea of mixture implies an unsystematic combination of elements from different languages—an effect which itself leads back to a very basic motive: that of a lack of structure and grammar. It is very common for members of a speech community to believe that a native speaker as such is not automatically competent in the language they speak unless they are taught the canonical use of the standard language, i.e. the production of formal texts and utterances according to codified norms (Milroy 2001:537). The two comments quoted above seem to contradict this view at first glance because they confirm the speakers' ability to fully use the local Creole language. However, they still suggest that complete competence in the respective European language can only be achieved by teaching prescriptive rules in school.

## 6. Research and protection: The (supposed) responsibility of linguistics

Many users address academia directly and call upon linguists as well as teachers and politicians to put an end to the presumed process of linguistic decay. Even institutions that actually are explicitly responsible for language planning and standardisation face criticism of this kind (Reyes 2013:345-347). It is seen as a noble duty for linguistics to make sure that the standard language thrives and that it be kept safe from 'damaging' tendencies such as language contact and language change.

Instead of embracing this load of linguistic rubbish, the linguists should attend to the aberrations as we see them in marketing speak and also in journalism, and establish order. (DEU-MSO120329\_107)

*Anstatt den gequirkten Sprachunsinn gut zu heißen, sollten sich die Sprachforscher mal der Irrwege, manifestiert im Marketingsprech und auch im Journalismus, annehmen und dort für Ordnung sorgen.*

Many commentators accuse linguists of not caring about language and knowingly letting it perish. Statements like these convey an interesting misconception about academic practice as such, especially linguistics.

Posters argue that the mission of linguistics should not be the description and analysis of linguistic phenomena, but mainly language planning, language policy, and ideally language purification. Critics expect linguists to leave the 'ivory tower' and to apply themselves to more socially relevant work. Yet, they attack projects like the development of new tools and methods in language didactics and efforts to raise awareness about diversity and variation because they feel that these steps promote rather than prevent language change. Often enough, linguists withdraw from conflict, stating that their primary task is to document and describe languages while they are, in fact, actors in a social process and involved in political questions (Milroy 2001:538).<sup>30</sup>

Criticism of work by linguists is not only attached to attitudes towards language or non-standard language in particular. Very often it is also directed at the very necessity and relevance of their work:

It is an issue of politics that the dialect hypothesis is promoted with funding by the federal government, i.e. with the tax payer's money. (DEU-AFB000830\_01)

*Es ist ein Politikum, weil die Dialekt-These mit Mitteln der Bundesregierung, also mit Steuergeldern gefördert wird.*

I am Creole and I think that if we made a referendum about this so-called Creole language, which for me is nothing but a *patois*, this would put an end to these research costs that ruin La Réunion. (REU-2012-5-6)

*Je suis une créole et je pense, que comme moi, si on faisait un référendum sur la soi-disant langue créole, qui pour moi n'est autre qu'un patois. Cela mettrait fin à toutes ses dépenses de recherche qui ruine la Réunion.*

These people with too much time on their hands, too much public money to waste, too much money paid to them, too little fortitude to fight the good fight (to teach English, tackle illiteracy, and teach teachers how to teach Standard English). (JAM-2011-1-28)

Comments like these show that the public knows about the scarcity of funding resources in most countries. It is important, though, to distinguish between a general debate about which research projects might seem important for a society and consequently should receive more economic support, and discussions about the general illegitimacy of an object of research. The target of such a comment most likely is not only the researcher and his or her budget, but indirectly the language they are investigating and the speakers of this language.

Even though linguistics seems to suffer from a shockingly bad image among the internet users involved in these debates, they still adopt arguments and terminology from a wide range of research areas in linguistics. This is reflected in the debates about the distinction or non-distinction of

concepts such as *language* or *dialect*. It becomes also visible in the use of very specific concepts that were brought up in linguistics and have made their way into public debate. One such concept is that of ‘semilingualism:’

What we speak is a mixture of bad English and bad Patois. I’ve heard it described as being ‘semi-lingual in two languages.’ (JAM-2014-2-52)

Terrible. The Germans don’t speak German any more, and the Turks don’t speak Turkish. Two half languages together don’t add up to a real one. (DEU-MDT120218\_01)

*Schrecklich. Die Deutschen können kein deutsch und die Türken kein türkisch mehr. Zwei halbe Sprachen ergeben nicht eine richtige Sprache.*

The idea of being ‘semilingual’ is essentially based upon the assumption that there is some sort of objective level of perfection that a speaker of a language can achieve. Contact phenomena with other languages like code switching or the use of spontaneous loan words are often seen as a sign that the person does not achieve a perfect level of proficiency in either of the languages. The communicative productivity of such phenomena is not acknowledged and the imagined level of total fluency is conflated with speaking a flawlessly pure version of it (Wiese 2011). The term ‘semilingualism’ was initially brought up in linguistics and it apparently became widely known because it supports established views on multilingualism. Linguistic research distanced itself from the concept at a rather early stage already (Martin-Jones/Romaine 1986) while public discourse holds on to it (Hinnenkamp 2005:61-65).

While the concept of semilingualism and the notion of language behind it are the same in the two debate genres, one difference needs to be stressed. In the discussions about Creoles, the two languages involved in the presumed situation of semilingualism are the Creole language itself and the local standard language. It is assumed that there is a way of speaking Creole ‘completely’ or ‘properly’ and that intermediate forms of speech like those that occur in a continuum setting are harmful for both the language and the speaker. Interestingly, this notion of an ideal ‘correct’ or ‘complete’ use of Creole clearly contradicts the widespread conviction that Creoles lack structure and coherence. In the multiethnolect debates, the two languages concerned are the local standard and the heritage languages of immigrants, i.e., the multiethnolect itself is only the presumed product or manifestation of semilingualism.

Another example of a term taken from linguistic research which is still going strong in public debates is that of the so-called *restricted code*, initially introduced into linguistics in the 1970s and very frequently mistaken as an authoritative concept that supposedly shows how linguists themselves distinguish between varieties with different communicative or even cognitive potentials:

Members of a group always orient themselves downwards. This has been discovered already with the language model ‘elaborated and restricted code’. The elaborated speaker can—and will—accommodate to the simple level of the restricted speaker, while the restricted speaker a) cannot and b) doesn’t even want to rise to the higher linguistic level. (DEU-MPN120229\_60)

*In einer Gruppe wird sich immer nach unten orientiert. Das hat man ja schon damals bei dem Sprachmodell „elaborierter und restringierter Code“ festgestellt. Der elaboriert Redende kann - und wird - sich auf die schlichte Ebene des restringiert Redenden herunterbegeben, während der mit dem restringierten Code das a) nicht kann und b) es gar nicht will, in die höhere Sprachebene aufzusteigen.*

As linguists, we should be highly aware of the consequences and even of the possible or impossible distortions of arguments we make in scientific publishing, especially in communication to a larger public, and of the possible misuse of terms and concepts we develop. The debates about Creoles and multiethnolects show that it is extremely difficult for the linguistics community to clarify or nuance terms and notions once they take a different signification outside academia. Scholars from linguistics have intervened on different levels and tried to influence the debates. Members of the local universities in Creole-speaking countries, for example, directly contributed with statements both in the discussion fora and with guest columns or interviews, as have colleagues in Europe who are involved in research on multiethnolects. We readily take advantage of opportunities to participate in the debates, yet we seem to be unable to convince an important component of the general public. This shows that discursive patterns can be so deeply rooted that they continue to be used in ways invalidated by linguistic research. Discussions like these often do not focus on an exchange of facts and arguments, but they rather constitute a perpetuation of what can be said because it has been said many times before and it confirms an established view of the world that tautologically confirms an established view of language and vice-versa.

## **7. Conclusion: Standard language ideology and paradoxical recognition**

The similarities between debates about multiethnolects and Creoles are striking. As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, these statements do not necessarily represent the predominant discourse. The well-analysed example of public discourse in Jamaica shows, however, that much of what has been said in the discussions corresponds to patterns that are expressed by journalists and politicians (Farquharson 2007). Sometimes the patterns are recombined, which can lead to many

a contradiction within a single statement even though the posters do not necessarily notice it. Discursive patterns seem to act independently to some extent so that they can be reassembled conveniently, regardless of the coherency of the complete comment or statement.

In the European societies described here, negative views of multiethnolects are probably even more widespread and public expressions of such views more accepted than negative views on Creoles in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean. As a possible explanation, it is worth noting that the varieties under discussion are still different in the way that multiethnolects are phenomena of youth language whereas Creoles are spoken across all age groups. The discourse patterns illustrated above underpin the overall conception of social dominance theory as a set of “prejudice, beliefs, ideologies, and attributions as *legitimising myths* that serve to justify discrimination of members of low status groups and preferential treatment of members of high status groups with the aim of maintaining and enhancing group-based hierarchies” (Küller/Wolf/Zick 2010:207). These legitimising myths that make up standard language ideologies are essentially the dialectical obverse of the delegitimising statements about multiethnolects, Creoles, and other forms of non-standard speech. They serve as a surface of justification for unequal treatment between dominant and weaker social groups, the latter ones being associated with vernacular language use. This, however, makes it all the more astonishing that the discussions take such a similar shape, given that the discourse about multiethnolects is mainly one about *other* speakers (or rather, those constructed as *the others*) while the debates about Creoles are conducted within the speech community itself—one might even speak of an internalised process of ‘self-othering.’ In La Réunion and Jamaica, for example, Creole speakers are in the demographical majority. Yet, also posters who explicitly state that they are native speakers of Creole reproduce arguments which portray their mother tongue and hence its speakers, themselves included, as inferior or less significant than the language introduced through colonisation.

The debates about multiethnolects and Creoles are linked by one common and very potent factor: standard language ideology (Milroy & Milroy 1999, Vogl 2012). As a very clear-cut basic principle, standard language ideology posits that “[t]he standard form becomes the legitimate form, and other forms become, in the popular mind, illegitimate” (Milroy 2001:549). Such views on standard languages and their (constructed) non-standard counterparts remain powerful (Hüning 2013).

Both Creoles and multiethnolects challenge the ideological assumption that language follows long-standing rules, and that language contact is an exceptional phenomenon that should be avoided. Even though any language even in its fixed and standardised form shows multiple

traces of contact, the two forms of non-standard language described both represent a much more palpable history of contact which is seen as a defining factor or what these varieties represent. This perceptible background in language contact makes it easy to project the wish for purity and conservation of the standard languages and ultimately also the desirable homogeneity of a society in a nation state upon a specific and clearly defined variety. Much of what is expressed in the comments about multiethnolects and Creoles correlates with commonplace statements about language variation and change in other societies and countries where the preservation or protection of the standard is also considered necessary for maintaining national cohesion (Vukotić 2014; Reyes 2013). The fact that standard language ideology is this similar in Europe and post-colonial societies raises the question of whether these views on language might be an ideological ‘export’ of the colonial era. They were shaped at a time when the idea of linguistic homogeneity concurred with attempts to strengthen the emerging European national states, just as colonialism was subject to mechanisms of intra- and international power relations (Hüning / Krämer, forth.).

Delegitimising argument patterns can even be found in statements that take a principally positive stance towards the language at hand. As a sort of *paradox recognition* (Dreesen 2014), it is said that Creoles or multiethnolects may have a value of their own, as an in-group means of communication or in the context of folklore and private life, and yet they can’t pretend to the same status as the traditional standard languages. Such seemingly positive statements can, for example, be used as counter-arguments against accusations of racism and therefore fit a broader context of denying attitudes of essentialist hostility (van Dijk 1992). Disapproving of languages is a convenient strategy of diverting from underlying attitudes against a group of persons prototypically associated with the varieties in question.

Such positions are frequently expressed in historical texts, for example in the context of colonial philology in the nineteenth century or in European dialectology of the same period (Krämer 2013, 2014). Already at that time, delegitimising language ideologies in the colonies were shaped by the predominant model of linguistic conceptions in Europe. The similarities between attitudes towards Creoles and multiethnolects, therefore, are anything but a coincidence. Both inside and outside Europe, the influential concept of the coherent nation state called for homogeneity and the containment of anything ‘deviant’ by fixed power relations. Even contradictory or conflictive ways of containing the ‘other,’ (e.g., linguistic, cultural, or religious assimilation or exclusion) serve this overarching goal of maintaining the (fictitious) homogeneity of the nation. The striking parallels in the discourses about

Creoles and multiethnolects call for further investigation into how the historical development of language ideologies in Europe and its colonies overlapped, how they co-evolved, and whether they may have developed independently.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I thank the reviewers and the editors of this special issue as well as my colleagues in the research group for their input that helped to improve and sharpen the points made in this paper. I also thank Magdalena von Sicard for her lucid remarks on the first draft and the final version of this article. All remaining shortcomings are, of course, my own.
- <sup>2</sup> It often seems difficult to apply the term ‘variety’ to multiethnolects due to their open structure and interaction with other forms of informal speech (see Auer 2013:20-22). Despite this terminological inadequacy, I will use the term ‘variety’ out of convenience to refer to multiethnolects and Creoles alike.
- <sup>3</sup> Cf. Auer (2013:18-20) for a description of the processes marking the transition between ethnically marked forms of speech (‘ethnolects’) and features that transgress clear-cut associations with an ethnically defined speaker group (‘multiethnolects’).
- <sup>4</sup> “Stammeldeutsch ist kein neuer Dialekt” (“*Stammer-German is not a new dialect!*”). In: *Deutsche Sprachwelt*, No. 47, spring 2012.
- <sup>5</sup> Breton is a Celtic language spoken by a minority in the region of Brittany, Western France. *Verlan* is a term used to designate contemporary French youth language that mainly draws on rule-based strategies like inversion or syllable metathesis in order to differentiate in-group forms of speech from standard language.
- <sup>6</sup> See, however, Harris / Rampton (2002) for important limitations and precautions in the use of models taken from creolistics to describe or compare other phenomena of linguistic or cultural contact. For a first attempt to trace back features of multiethnolectal to L2 features of ‘pidginised’ Swedish in comparison to other Pidgins and Creoles, see Kotsinas (2001:149-153).
- <sup>7</sup> For the concept of delegitimation as a mechanism of social exclusion cf. Bar-Tal (1990).
- <sup>8</sup> Discourse analyses of news content have been carried out before to

a larger extent, cf. e.g. Svendsen (2014), Androutsopoulos (2010), Farquharson (2007). Extracting language ideologies from Web 2.0 content seems to be a much less widespread approach. For first attempts in this area see Tan (2012) about Mandarin and other Chinese languages in Singapore, Reyes (2012) about reactions to proposed language reforms in Spain, and Vukotić (2014) with a comparative analysis of language ideologies in Norway, Lithuania, and Serbia.

- <sup>9</sup> See Tan (2012:342-344) for a discussion of the possibilities and limits of using online debates as a source for information about language ideologies.
- <sup>10</sup> The debates in Trinidad usually do not extensively concern the historical French-based Trinidadian Creole. “Trinidadian Creole / Trinidadian English” therefore refers to the English-based Creole of Trinidad.
- <sup>11</sup> KiDKo/E is a corpus of online comments and e-mails in which multiethnolectal German is discussed, see Wiese (2012ff. *et al.*). The corpus is a supplement to KiDKo, a corpus of annotated spontaneous speech in Kiezdeutsch collected, annotated and made available by a research project directed by Heike Wiese at Potsdam University within the collaborative research centre “information structure” (SFB 632). The corpora and more information about its composition can be retrieved from <<http://www.kiezdeutschkorpus.de/corpus3.html>>. In order to keep the data sample comparable for the present analysis, I only used the reader comments in KiDKo/E, excluding the personal e-mails. It has to be noted that some of the comments in KiDKo/E appeared in media with a clear right-wing stance that attract a more radical readership than newspapers aimed at a general public like those in the other countries.
- <sup>12</sup> Multiethnolectal Dutch youth language has been documented both in the Netherlands and in Flanders. The comments in the collection were taken from sources in the Netherlands.
- <sup>13</sup> In order to avoid derogatory labels like *Kebabnorsk*, I provisionally opted for the designation *Holmliansk*, even though it is not commonly known or widely accepted because it only refers to a single multiethnic neighbourhood of Oslo.
- <sup>14</sup> Ex.: “JAM-2011-4-76” is a reader comment to an article from Jamaica published in 2011. Comments from Germany begin with DEU- followed by its code within the Kiezdeutsch corpus in order to make the source accessible in the online database of KiDKo/E.

- <sup>15</sup> Migge/Léglise/Bartens (2010) discuss the advancement of Creole in education in different Creole-speaking societies and the ideological opposition that the introduction of such measures are facing.
- <sup>16</sup> Wiese 2015 applies a similar method, though including the complete data set of KiDKo/E, and comes to a different classification of discursive topoi.
- <sup>17</sup> Cf. Migge/Léglise (2006) for the relation between labels for languages or varieties and the attitudes attached to them in French Guiana.
- <sup>18</sup> Cf. the similar analysis in Farquharson (2007:251-252) for the case of Jamaica.
- <sup>19</sup> For the motivations to adopt multiethnolects as an in-group form of speech see, among others, Jaspers/Mercelis (2014:215-217).
- <sup>20</sup> Appel/Schoonen (2005) found that youth from a monolingual Dutch background even make more use of multiethnolectal speech than e.g. adolescents with a Moroccan or Turkish background.
- <sup>21</sup> All translations of comments are my own. The spelling of the original comments was preserved.
- <sup>22</sup> Cf. the data in the *Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures* (APiCS) about expletive subjects with existential verbs <<http://apics-online.info/parameters/64#2/30.3/10.0>> and the use of possession verbs as existentials <<http://apics-online.info/parameters/78#2/13.9/10.0>>.
- <sup>23</sup> This statement appeared in June 2013 as a comment to an article published in 2008 as the discussion stretched sporadically over a long period of time.
- <sup>24</sup> In a different discussion more than one year later, the same commentator estimates the number of words at “less than 3,000” (REU-2010-5-6).
- <sup>25</sup> See King (2014) for an example of expansion in the lexical field of mobile technology in Tok Pisin.
- <sup>26</sup> Interestingly, Appel/Schoonen (2005:90, 113) quote youth from the Netherlands saying that the use of loanwords from other languages than Dutch even serves to tone down aggression in utterances that are otherwise perceived as too direct or offensive.
- <sup>27</sup> Interestingly, this comment was written in Creole with a particularly phonographic spelling.

- <sup>28</sup> See the projects *The many sides of German* ([www.deutsch-ist-vielseitig.de](http://www.deutsch-ist-vielseitig.de)) in Germany, *MLE-MPF* <<http://www.mle-mpf.bbk.ac.uk/Home.html>> in the United Kingdom and France, *Kompetanse for Mangfold* <[uit.no/forskning/forskningsgrupper/gruppe?p\\_document\\_id=362881](http://uit.no/forskning/forskningsgrupper/gruppe?p_document_id=362881)> in Norway.
- <sup>29</sup> This topos was particularly strong in the media debates in Norway, cf. Svendsen (2014:41-48)
- <sup>30</sup> See Brunstad (2000), Klein (2014) for elaborate accounts of the inherent conflict, exemplified by debates in Norway and Germany, between the descriptive and normative role of linguistics in processes of creation or conservation of language norms. See Migge/Léglise (2006:329-330) for the role of linguists in shaping the conceptions associated with the term *Takitaki* in French Guayana and Suriname. Sebba (2007) extensively discusses the social implications of debates about and creation of spelling norms and the role of linguists in such processes.

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