

## A SOCIO-HISTORICAL APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF PORTUGUESE CREOLE IN WEST AFRICA

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The monogenetic theory of the origin of European-based pidgins and creoles rests upon a thesis which carries the chain of development back to Sabir, the Lingua Franca of the Mediterranean, in the Middle Ages and later. The most important link was Pidgin Portuguese, whose speakers were the most important in the early slave trade and in general European maritime expansion. Italian – especially Genoese – merchants and seamen, the earliest users of Sabir, were in especially close contact with Portuguese merchants and sailors throughout the fifteenth century. The multilingual situation and the compact socio-economic unit constituted by whites on the Atlantic coast of Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries provide an explanation of the transmission.

In the field of study of Atlantic Creole languages (one of the fields which has aroused, at present, the greatest amount of interest among specialists because of the breadth and complexity of the problems it poses), there stands out as an especially controversial question the one relating to the genesis and formation of these linguistic phenomena. Regarding the theoretical contents of this concept, see de Granda (forthcoming). In my own approach (unlike other treatments such as those of Ian Hancock, who uses the same term), Atlantic Creole dialects are all those which originate, *directly or indirectly*, with the Portuguese Creole protodialect-system of West Africa. This concept logically excludes what Nida and Fehdereau (1970) call “indigenous pidgins”.

For some years, the classical polygenetic theory, based on the hypothesis of similar and parallel processes of structural simplification, whose main standardbearer is Hall (1958, 1962, 1966), has been seriously questioned by the partisans of a new theoretical attitude. This new and opposing theory postulates the common derivation of the now lexically diverse Atlantic Creoles of Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania (de Granda, forthcoming), from a proto-Creole or a proto-Pidgin identifiable with the Portuguese Creole formed on the west coast of Africa in the fifteenth century. On this basis, and through processes of relexification (Stewart, 1962; Taylor, 1963) which would preserve the basic features