

THE SUBSTRATUM OF ANNOBONESE CREOLE

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The substratum theory, while regarded as antiquated and oversimplified by some modern historical linguists, seems to be necessary to explain the influence of certain West African languages on the Creole Portuguese of Annobon. Features which match West African languages but no known variety of Portuguese include vowel harmony, the breaking or deletion of consonant clusters, the canonical syllable structure, palatalization of consonants, replacement of /r/ by /l/, absence of the passive transformation, the nature of negation, the copula, several aspects of word order, and several types of lexical item including ideophones.

Some linguists have rejected or still completely reject the concept of the existence of substratum influences. Thus, Bloomfield wrote in 1935:

There is no sense in the mystical version of the substratum theory, which attributes changes, say, in modern Germanic languages, to a "Celtic substratum" – that is, to the fact that many centuries ago, some adult Celtic-speakers acquired German speech.

However, when the members of a language community acquire a new language, either as a pidgin or as a mother tongue, whether creole or not, it is to be expected that their speech patterns will color their interpretation of the acquired language. In the Iberian peninsula, the Celtiberian languages spoken before the Roman conquest and the advent of Latin form a substratum which will have influenced the development of Latin into Portuguese and Spanish.

A parallel may be drawn between the influence of the substratum in the formation of languages, and mother-tongue interference in individuals who are acquiring or have acquired the second language in a bilingual community. In a bilingual situation, a contrastive study of the two languages in contact is a useful framework with which to arrive at an understanding of errors in the second language and to formulate corrective procedures. However, an error analysis shows that the language problems are often unpredictable from a contrastive analysis. Thus, in attempting to avoid what he realizes is negative transfer from his mother