The book entitled “Creoles, their substrates, and language typology”, edited by Claire Lefebvre, and published by John Benjamins Publishing Company, includes a diversity of approaches and topics related to the role of the substrate in the emergence of creole languages. In this volume, 29 languages are described with respect to their different structural components and their relation to the substrate and adstrate languages, previously identified as substrate languages. The contributions range from descriptions of Atlantic Creoles to those in Asia and the Pacific. The volume includes research that follows quantitative, qualitative, and theoretical approaches to the analysis of genetic relations between creoles and other languages. The titles of works are as follows:

PART I: Claire Lefebvre, “The problem of the typological classification of Creoles”;


Ternate Chabacano”; June Jacob & Charles E. Grimes, “Aspect and
directionality in Kupang Malay serial verb constructions: Calquing on the
grammars of substrate languages”; Umberto Ansaldo, “Sri Lanka Malay and
its Lankan adstrates”; Peter Slomanson, “Dravidian features in the Sri Lankan
Malay verb”;

PART IV: Mark Donohue, “Papuan Malay of New Guinea: Melanesian
influence on verb and clause structure”; Harold Koch, “The influence of
Arandic Languages on Central Australian Aboriginal English”; Jennifer
Munro, “Roper River Aboriginal language features in Australian Kriol:
Considering semantic categories”; Harold Koch, “Substrate influences on New
South Wales Pidgin: The origin of –im and –fela”; Angela Terrill. “Limits of
the substrate: Substrate grammatical influence in Solomon Islands Pijin”; Jeff
Siegel, “Substrate reinforcement and the retention of Pan-Pacific Pidgin
features in modern contact varieties”; Sarah J. Roberts, “The copula in
Hawai’i Creole English and substrate reinforcement”; Barbara Sandeman,
“‘On traduit la langue en français’: Substrate influence in the TMA system of
Tayo”;

PART V: Bernard Comrie, “Creoles and language typology”.

The common theme to the volume is the proposition of a partial structural
continuity between creoles and their substrates, or what Kiparsky (2004: 332)
calls “system-conforming speech variants (that) have a selective advantage
which causes them to be preferentially adopted.” The range of phenomena
described provides plenty of evidence to support different proposals about the
specific mechanisms that enable some features (rather than others) to become
part of a creole's grammar. Those interested in creolistics, historical linguistics,
as well as language typology will find insightful analyses and detailed
descriptions of creoles that address some of the main questions on language
change and creole genesis. Although the content of the papers, by and large,
supports the hypothesis that there is continuity between the substrate
languages and creoles, there are numerous papers that question an
oversimplification of this relation.

EVALUATION

The volume consists of five sections, three of which comprise the majority of
the contributions on creoles, encompassing geographical areas where different
substrates play an important role. Part I includes an introduction by the editor,
Claire Lefebvre, who describes the scope of the volume as well as the
problems related to the classification of creole languages. The editor explains
that the broad selection of languages with different substrates should show
“that the creation of pidgin and creoles involves the same processes” (p. 7).
She concludes that: “the bulk of the data argue that Creoles are best typologically classified with their substrate languages” (p. 7).

Part II – Creoles spoken in Africa and the Caribbean – includes nine papers, ranging from studies on Santome, Portuguese-based Creoles, Kriyol, Saint Lucian Creole, Haitian Creole, Saramaccan, Papiamentu, Belizean Creole, Nicaraguan Creole, Providence Creole, and San Andrés Creole to the last paper on Palenquero. The first paper, by Hagemeijer and Ogie (pp. 37-60), focuses on verb serialization and related phenomena in Santome, suggesting there is a “partial substrate transfer” from Èdó (p. 57). In the second paper, Lang (pp. 61-80) argues that verbal constructions provide evidence that Wolof is the main substrate for the Portuguese Creole of Santiago Island (Cape Verdean Creole). His paper describes how competing grammatical morphemes survive in combinations like “sa ta” for the progressive. On the other hand, according to Kihm’s paper on Kriyol (pp. 81-103), it is difficult to evaluate the role of the substrate in determining NP and VP creole structures. Kihm’s work questions, more than any other contribution to the volume, the role of substrate languages in Creole formation. The most puzzling issues for him is why their influence is said to be selective in matters of structural transfer.

Following an approach based on L2 acquisition research, Brousseau (pp. 105-125) makes a case for the “hybrid character” (p. 105) of Saint Lucian and Haitian Creoles, where consonant systems match patterns from the superstrate, while the vowel systems correspond to the substrates’. Lefebvre’s (pp. 127-153) paper compares three creoles (Haitian Creole, Papiamentu, and Saramaccan) with similar substrates (Fongbe as representative of these) and different lexifiers, concluding that an analysis of syntactic constructions confirms there is a larger role of the substrate than that of the superstrate in creole genesis. Following her own proposals on “relabelling” (Lefebvre 1998), she states that the selectional properties of creole verbs correspond to those of verbs in the substrate, while their phonological representation derives from the superstrate. Following similar reasoning, Migge (pp. 155-179) describes in detail the complexity and unevenness of the substrate influence on creole formation. She shows how Suriname Creoles might have inherited most tense, mood, and aspectual (TMA) categories from Gbe, but indicates that these creoles also incorporated structures and elements from the superstrate if the substrate did not provide a lexical entry for them. Migge’s work relies partly on previous studies of grammaticalization regarding the creation of future constructions (Bybee et al. 1994). Geneviève’s paper (pp. 181-200) focuses on counterfactuals in Belizean Creole by looking into the areal phenomena shared by West African (WA) languages, but more specifically Gbe phenomena, as the possible sources for the past-future preverbal modality markers in Belizean. All these papers study specific grams or segments in Creoles that have correlates in the substrate languages.

In a different perspective, Bartens’ paper (pp. 201-224) undertakes a typological approach to the description of substrate properties in Nicaraguan, Providence and San Andrés Creoles. With the aid of the APiCS (Atlas of
categories, the author carefully explains Twi’s influence on these English-based Creoles, concluding that only a third of the 120 features described by APiCS show any correlations between these creoles and their substrate. Finally, Schwegler’s paper (pp. 225-249) summarizes previous work on Palenquero, pointing out the role of Kikongo and other WA languages in the emergence of Palenquero structures.

The papers in this section describe the role substrates play in the genesis of African and Caribbean Creoles from different perspectives. There are those that claim close similarities between creoles and their substrates (Hagemeijer & Ogie, Lang, Brousseau, Escure, Migge, Schwegler, and Lefebvre); and those who indicate scanty and partial influence of the substrate (Kihm and Bartens). The papers in the next section of the volume (Part III) illustrate cases of substantial influence of Asian substrate languages on local creoles.

The section – Creoles spoken in Asia – starts with a paper by Zhiming (pp. 253-270), which introduces a quantitative analysis of passive particle frequency in different types of discourse registers in Singapore English, and its relation to substrate influence (Chinese and Malay). Zhiming’s contribution is unique in the collection since it develops a strictly quantitative approach to Creole semantics. In the following paper, Lim (pp. 271-287), starts off with a contact-based approach within the language ecology paradigm, and proposes that Singlish is actually changing and becoming a tone language due to its contact with Sinitic languages (p. 281). This proposal departs from the standard tone-to-stress shift described by diachronic typology (Salmons 1992: 274), and supports the spreading of tone as an areal phenomenon. Ansaldo, Matthews, and Smith (pp. 289-301) suggest feature transfer from the substrate in China Coast Pidgin, and conclude that: “The grammar of CCP can thus be accounted for first and foremost in terms of syntactic and semantic feature transfer from Cantonese.” These papers claim that Sinitic languages play an important role in the genesis of phonological and morphosyntactic structures of local creoles.

The role of the languages of the Philippines is central to the description of Mindanao Chabacano (particularly Zamboangueño), according to Grant’s typological analysis (pp. 303-324). His paper underscores the problem of using the concept of “substrate” in the case of Zamboangueño, a language currently in contact with Central Philippine languages and Spanish. The same problem arises in the case of Ternate Chabacano, described by Sippola (pp. 325-336), which shows patterning with its adstrate, Tagalog, in the case of clausal negation and the negation of existentials and possession. Jacob and Grimes (pp. 337-366) describe serial verb constructions in Kupang Malay; and the influence from local vernaculars, rather than standard Malay, on constructions indicating directionality and other aspectual distinctions. This paper has a strong typological component based on Dowty’s distinction between active and non-active verbs (or Aristotle’s verbs of kinesis and energeai). Moreover, this paper shows how serial constructions can encode...
mood and aspectual (aktionsarten) distinctions, pointing towards one of the typical sources of TMA markers (Claudi 1988: 71): the grammaticalization of a serialized verb.

Ansaldo has another paper in the collection, in this case, on Sri Lankan Malay, which shows changes towards an agglutinative morphological type in the nominal system, changes that the Founder Principle can explain, according to the author’s assessment. Slomanson’s paper (pp. 383-409) deals with the role of Dravidian in the Sri Lankan Malay verbal system. He discusses the typological relation between preverbal markers and word order. His insightful analysis not only includes a definition of complexity, but also describes how the presence of preverbal markers is “exceedingly rare” (p. 399) in OV languages, like Sri Lankan Malay. These papers describe features that are not listed as prototypical of creoles by most studies. These also show that these languages have a diversity of structural possibilities to encode the same grammatical functions.

A last set of papers (Part IV), on Creoles spoken in the Pacific, includes descriptions of Papuan Malay, Central Australian Aboriginal English, Australian Kriol, New South Wales English, Solomon Islands English, Pan-Pacific Pidgin, Hawai’i Creole English, and Tayo. The first paper, by Donahue (pp. 413-435), on Papuan Malay, shows how this language “more closely replicates the structures of local Papuan languages than it does the varieties of Malay, representing its lexifier languages” (p. 433). Its serial verb constructions and inflectional morphology, among others, show the role of Papuan languages, the substrate, in its genesis. Harold Koch (pp. 437-460) depicts dyadic terms and the semantic category of “motion” in verbs in Central Australian Aboriginal English as forms that are “replicated” from the substrate, Kaytete.

The following paper (Munro, pp. 461-487) discusses “Transfer Constraints”, associated with L2 acquisition, and how these determine which features in the TMA system, pronominal system, and case marking of Australian Kriol originate in the substrate (different aboriginal languages). Munro explains how this approach (“Transfer Constraints”) overcomes some of the shortcomings pointed out by Mufwene (1990) for substratist approaches. Another very interesting paper by Koch (pp. 489-512) suggests that, based on null verbal objects from Australian native languages, speakers of New South Wales Pidgin have reinterpreted the English object pronouns “him” and “it” as bound transitivity markers: “-im” and “-it”. This is a compelling explanation that relies on speaker perception. Terrill’s (pp. 511-529) paper, like Munro’s, relies on Siegel’s (1999) proposals regarding substrate transfer. She analyzes the influence from Oceanic substrate languages on a set of syntactic constructions and pronoun paradigms in Solomon Islands Pijin; and concludes that stability, uniformity, or processes of simplification cannot explain substrate transfer. However, “Transfer Constraints” that operate in the process of creole formation can explain it. Siegel (pp. 531-556), in his analysis of Pan-Pacific pidgin features, proposes that some widespread features survive while
others do not thrive in emerging Creoles due to “availability constraints” paired with “substrate reinforcement” [“a particular variant has a corresponding feature in a numerically or socially dominant substrate language or languages” (p. 532)].

Other proposals of “substrate reinforcement” are put forward by Roberts (pp. 557-573), who accounts for grams representing location, existence, and possession in Hawai’i Creole English. Her paper criticizes bioprogram hypotheses and analyses based on “single-source theories” for being inadequate in explaining the source of feature diversity in Hawai’i Creole English. Sandeman (pp. 575-595), on the other hand, analyses Tayo, a French-lexified contact language, and the role Oceanic languages have in the emergence of its TMA system and grams, which she describes as differing “quite radically from that of many other creoles” (p. 594).

The last paper of the collection (Part V), by Bernard Comrie (pp. 599-611), is a general assessment of the role of typological analyses in the study of creoles. His paper restates one of the most important questions in the field: “[…] do creoles (and pidgins, and mixed languages […] constitute a structurally unified set of languages?” (p. 599) Comrie relies on APiCS to describe instances of so-called “simplification”, “substrate influence”, “superstrate influence”, and “relative clauses”. He concludes that the detailed studies of this volume, together with the work conducted with APiCS, are important efforts in the right direction. However, he points out the need of conducting more research on creole structural features.

This paper collection demonstrates how rich and complex the analyses are which have been conducted in this field over the years. Moreover, the diversity of approaches provides an expert with an overview of modern research in creolistics. Its organization shows coherence and care in selecting the topics and authors.

The contribution of this publication to creolistics certainly overcomes by far a few shortcomings. Although some papers include terminology such as “simplification”, “hybrid”, and “mixed” languages, which have been described by some as controversial (De Graff 2001) and “not very enlightening” (Dimmendaal 2011: 238), the use of these concepts is accompanied by detailed explanations of their use in the analysis of these languages. Although not all papers reach conclusions based on typological generalizations, their detailed descriptions provide a basis for this type of analysis. This is particularly relevant in analyses of verbal constructions, which comprise the majority of the papers in the volume. Some papers could also provide clearer statements on the relation between genetic relations and the typological classification of creoles and their substrates. This relation, as stated in previous work (Greenberg 1974), is not a direct one. The fact that two languages are genetically related does not necessarily mean that these are typologically related. However, the papers focus their descriptions on features shared by creoles and their substrates that cannot result from an autonomous development. Sometimes, as some of the papers indicate, the use of the word
“substrate” does not necessarily represent the state of native languages at the time of creole genesis. Nevertheless, these are areas that require further documentation and research on the linguistic reconstruction of substrates.

The breadth and depth of these analyses suggest that creoles and their substrates hold complex relations beyond calquing, or copying of linguistic structures and lexical material. This compilation is the result of years of work by each of these researchers, encompassing an amount of data and analyses hard to summarize in a volume, and, in all fairness, even less so in a book review.

References