

## Neo-uniformitarianism and creole languages

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### Abstract

Taking the Blasi et al (2017) paper as a starting point, I will identify some major flaws and contradictions in that paper, followed by my own and other people's studies on comparisons between (1) creole languages and their lexifiers; (2) creole languages and their substrates (3) creole languages and non-creole languages of the world.

The empirical results in Blasi et al. are in line with a neo-uniformitarianist stance. Neo-uniformitarianism takes as its point of departure that the linguistic processes that were at work in the past are the same in the present, but it acknowledges that different and uncommon circumstances may lead to different and uncommon processes and results. It means that special historical events lead to special types of languages, one of them being creole languages. This goes against the Mufwenian approach to what he calls uniformitarianism, when he and his followers claim that there is only one pattern of language change (see the papers in Aboh & Mufwene 2025). See Walkden (2019) for a discussion of different views of uniformitarianism.

There are specific socio-historical events that have led to the emergence of creole languages. The horrors of forced population displacement and forced labour in multilingual colonial settings that led to the genesis of these languages should not be equated with the smoothness of intergenerational language transmission in more stable societies, as has been done by some uniformitarianists.

### **Strongly recommended reading beforehand:** (Blasi, Michaelis & Haspelmath 2017)

Blasi, Damián E., Susanne Maria Michaelis & Martin Haspelmath (2017): Grammars are robustly transmitted even during the emergence of creole languages. *Nature Human Behaviour* 1(10). 723–729. doi:10.1038/s41562-017-0192-4.

It can be downloaded here:

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319470388\\_Grammars\\_are\\_robustly\\_transmitted\\_even\\_during\\_the\\_emergence\\_of\\_creole\\_languages](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319470388_Grammars_are_robustly_transmitted_even_during_the_emergence_of_creole_languages)

References:

Aboh, Enoch Oladé & Salikoko S. Mufwene (Hrsg.) (2025): *Uniformitarianism in language speciation: from creolistics to genetic linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Blasi, Damián E., Susanne Maria Michaelis & Martin Haspelmath (2017): Grammars are robustly transmitted even during the emergence of creole languages. *Nature Human Behaviour* 1(10). 723–729. doi:10.1038/s41562-017-0192-4.

Walkden, George (2019): The many faces of uniformitarianism in linguistics. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 4(1) doi:10.5334/gjgl.888.