

Jessica asked me to introduce Aboh & DeGraff, which it's my honor to do since one of them has been my friend for about 10 years and the other for nearly 20. But then I remembered that according to Grice, communication is supposed to be informative, so I can't rely on the causative meaning of *introduce* which is the default for semanticists (as in sentences like *Mary only introduced Bill to Sue*). It's not possible for me to *introduce* DeGraff in this sense, because he has taught for more than a decade in the very department under whose present location we are now sitting, and as for Aboh, he has been a frequent visitor, and worked here as a professor just a year ago, when the two of them developed the material you're about to hear in the form of a graduate seminar.

But the verb *introduce* also denotes an activity, roughly 'to lead into a performance', and this meaning is more Gricean today, in other words I can cooperatively set the scene for this talk by describing its intellectual background through biographical notes about the speakers.

I first met Michel at a conference in Chicago in 1990, when we were both still students -- he was doing computational linguistics at Penn with Mitch Marcus. We quickly realized that we both rejected the unspoken claim which was the *raison d'être* of the conference itself, and which he has subsequently labeled and critiqued as *creole exceptionalism* -- the notion or ideology that the similarities among languages which are called "creole" for sociohistorical reasons, are so profound as to entail that their comparison with each other is a necessary step for research on their individual grammars. Of course this set of human languages does share some nonrandom similarities, especially in terms of the etymological paths of their closed-class lexical items, but the interest of these is perhaps more on the side of e-language, and maybe not even that because, as Mufwene has long observed, there's much less parallelism in the historical evolution of so-called creoles than is generally believed. Either way, "creoles" don't seem to form a significant class with respect to morpho-syntax and semantics from an i-language perspective, and recognizing this as a speaker-linguist of Haitian, Michel did not restrict his choice of comparanda in the creolist vein, working instead on topics like nominal predication, negation and copulas where he found greater i-language similarity with languages like Irish. He presented some of this work in our 1995 Niger-Congo comparative syntax and semantics workshop at BU and has been an honorary Africanist at least from that time.

Aboh was *introduced* to me in both senses in 1998 when Cinque forwarded a copy of Aboh's dissertation which had just been completed at Geneva, and which was eventually revised into a book in the Oxford comparative syntax series edited by Kayne. Given the preceding sentence, there's no prize for guessing that Aboh's book deploys the analytical tools of cartography and antisymmetry and relies on Romance and West Germanic as comparanda, but there's more: Aboh's thesis undertakes other comparisons in keeping with his intellectual responsibility as a speaker linguist, by juxtaposing his own language Gun-Gbe with others of the Gbe cluster, some of which such as Ewe-Gbe have been more extensively studied. He also participated in one of the Niger-Congo workshops, helping to compare Gbe in particular with Yoruba, a neighboring language which by good luck happens to be spoken in Aboh's own family. To round out the picture, when Aboh joined the linguistics faculty in Amsterdam about 9 years ago, he inherited some of the preoccupations bequeathed to that department by Pieter Muysken, among which is a progressive dialect of creolistics that denies the traditional claim of typological unity based on presumed demographic similarity. This institutional interest brought Aboh across the Atlantic to Surinam for fieldwork.

Now I hope you can see not just how the present work arose, but also how all linguistic analysis is comparative one way or another, although the choice of comparanda -- probably including the comparison of any natural language with a given metalanguage such as formal syntax or Fregean meaning postulates for that matter -- is far from inevitable, but depends on the goals of analysis. Now these speaker-linguists have chosen to compare Haitian and Gbe with the help of the concept of "trans-Atlantic Sprachbund"-- a term which appears in their MIT course description of 2008 followed by a question mark, but in the title of today's talk the question mark is gone, and maybe they will tell us why.