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Ce qui chez lui constitue le mérite le plus personnel ce sont les affinités inattendues qu’il a aperçues entre des sujets qui semblent s’exclure.

S. Antoniadis on Hesseling

In the Netherlands the figure of Dirk Christiaan Hesseling has been largely forgotten. The largest modern Dutch encyclopedia, the twenty-volume *Grote Winkler Prins*, does not mention him at all. Another devotes only a few lines to him. Worse yet, reading the most comprehensive modern history of Dutch linguistics, Bakker and Dibbets’ *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Taalkunde* (1977), one looks in vain for his name.

Yet Hesseling is one of the few Dutch linguists whose essays are translated and published in English. He enjoys a solid reputation in the growing field of pidgin and creole. In this introduction we will try to reconstruct how this paradoxical situation came to be.

Unlike his contemporaries Schuchardt, Coelho, and Adam, all of whom approached creole studies from the field of Romance languages, Hesseling was not a Romance scholar. In fact, he studied Greek, and it is through his study of the development of koïne Greek from the older Attic dialects that he approached the problem of language mixture.

He was born in Amsterdam in 1859 into a well-to-do merchant’s family. Not being inclined toward commerce himself, he got his family’s permission to study classics in Leyden, at that time the foremost Dutch university. After a brief stint as a high school classics teacher in Delft, and a few trips to the Mediterranean, he went to Paris. There he studied modern Greek with Legrand and
Psichari. He also met the young French scholar Hubert Pernot, who was to be his life-long friend and collaborator on projects dealing with the development of Greek.³

Hesseling spent most of his adult life in Leyden where he was appointed lecturer (“privaatdocent”) in 1893 and where he held the chair of Byzantine and Modern Greek from 1907 to 1929. He was a friend of C. C. Uhlenbeck, who held the chair of Germanic languages at the same university, and he was the brother-in-law of J. J. Salverda de Grave, a prominent French scholar. Hesseling died in 1941, an 82-year-old still actively engaged in scholarship.

One gets the impression of a not unworldly gentleman-scholar who travelled a considerable amount within Europe and who felt most at home in French, besides Dutch. He participated actively in the cultural life of his times, as we can glean from his articles on more general topics in De Gids, a leading cultural journal. He was also the editor of the linguistic journal Neophilologus.

As was the case with many scholars of his era, Hesseling’s knowledge of languages was encyclopedic; we find references to all stages of English, French, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Russian, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and several other languages. It is unclear, however, whether he considered himself more of a Greek scholar or more of a creole scholar.

As the former, his publications are wide-ranging: from his 1886 doctoral thesis, De usu coronarum apud graecos capita selecta (Selected Chapters on the Use of Wreaths Among the Greeks), to anthologies of modern Greek literature and translations of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus late in life. His primary interest was in documenting the complete continuity in Greek culture from classical times to the twentieth century. He does this by tracing certain themes through Greek literature of all ages, by stressing the role of Byzantium, and by tracing the development of the Greek language.⁴

Despite his cultural interests, Hesseling would certainly have agreed to the label of “linguist.” It was mentioned above that he came to study creoles through his interest in koine Greek, and indeed his work on both is inspired by the same ideas. Without
going into detail, we will cite two examples of this reciprocal influence. In one article, at the time highly controversial but later accepted by many scholars, he explains the peculiar characteristics of the Tsakonian dialect of Greek by claiming that it was creolized at some stage. In another, he appeals to the “inner form” of Hebrew to explain the exceptional use of a particular construction in the Septuagint. His experience in attempting explanations of language mixture in Afrikaans and Negerhollands (Virgin Islands Creole Dutch) made his attitude more flexible and his methods more original than those of other classical scholars who had recourse only to the more orthodox techniques of classical philology and historical linguistics.

Since the essays in this volume deal almost exclusively with this topic, we will now turn to Hesseling’s work on creole languages. First, we will trace the broad outlines of his intellectual development. Then we will discuss Hesseling’s views on linguistic evolution: his theory about the origin of Afrikaans and his interpretation of the process of creolization. Finally, we will try to place Hesseling in a contemporary perspective and thereby evaluate his work.

It seems clear, for reasons indicated below, that Hesseling first started working on Afrikaans, on which he published a major work in 1899, in order to gain a clear perspective on the development of languages in general and Greek in particular. It is not clear what role his family’s colonial experience may have had in this matter, nor to what extent he was influenced by Schuchardt’s article on Malayo-Portuguese, published in 1890.

In any case, it is clear that his study of Afrikaans led him to Negerhollands, Papiamentu, Canadian French, and the study of creolization processes in general. Taking all of his major work into account, we can reconstruct the course of Hesseling’s research in the schema on the following page, Hesseling’s Investigative Development. The broken lines represent possible influences; the solid lines refer to intellectual links between works. Of course Hesseling’s actual development was much more complex
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1880
- Study in Leyden
- Visits to Greece
  - Legrand, Psichari
  - Schuchardt

1890
- koine Greek
  - Charos 1897
  - Afrikaans 1897-1899
  - Negerhollands 1905
  - Dutch in Ceylon 1910

1900
- Byzantium 1911

1910
- Modern Greek Literature 1921
- French in Canada 1923

1920
- Greek Culture 1927
- Epictetus 1933
- Creolization 1934
- Papiamentu 1933

1930

1940

HESSELING'S INVESTIGATIVE DEVELOPMENT
and showed numerous links between his work on Greek philology and his creole investigations. Also, the interrelations among the various aspects of his study of Greek culture have undoubtedly been misrepresented.

To understand why Hesseling became so interested in creole languages, we could start by considering the following paragraph taken from his review of Rodolfo Lenz’ fascinating book on Papiamentu (1933):¹⁰

The genesis of human language ("de menselike taal") is a psychological problem that no single language will ever solve, but from creole one can best learn how a given language emerges from old data ("gegevens") and develops, because here something takes shape at a high speed, in a past recognizable to us, something which is the product, in other cases, of many centuries, with a very obscure past in its background. Then one understands how language mixture works, how lateral thoughts are involved in everything, and how inaccurate it is to speak about linguistic laws.

Here we find many of the central elements in Hesseling’s linguistic thought:

1. A central question in linguistics is the historical one: how did languages emerge? This question is more essential than the contemporary preoccupation with the way languages function.

2. Creole languages constitute a paradigmatic case of linguistic genesis, and have the advantage of having emerged in historical times.

3. The highly idiosyncratic, even freakish, processes operative in the genesis of creoles are characteristic of language genesis and change in general. For this reason, the preoccupation of the Junggrammatiker with universal processes of linguistic change is an idle one.
In fact, Hesseling agrees completely with Schuchardt in the latter's opposition to Neogrammarians' doctrine, as he goes on to state in a passage immediately after that cited above. His own work in Dutch philology (limited to the analysis of particular lexical items) abounds with arguments involving idiosyncratic sociocultural data, appeals to connotations of words, accidental phonetic resemblances between words, etc. General processes of phonological or phonetic change are rarely appealed to, though not ignored.

In his essay, *Language and Society* (1907), Hesseling agrees with Meillet that society has an extremely great influence on the development of a language, with all its irregularities and idiosyncracies. He wants to emphasize:

> How necessary it is to form a correct representation of the society of the so-called “wild” nations, before one starts philosophizing about linguistic processes in a very remote past.

Note that in Dutch the word *philosophize* has bad connotations.

Hesseling's techniques were always philological. He deals with texts, not with the immediacies of spoken language. Still, he is fully aware of the central position of the vernacular, as when explaining the decay of Dutch in Ceylon he declares: "[the language] spoken at home gains the upper hand in the struggle of languages."12

The most striking example of the Dutch scholar's sociolinguistic bent is found in an article on *Jargons and Secret Languages* (1913) where the relationship between specialized jargons and argots is explained in terms of the communicative needs of the groups of speakers involved.13 Specialized jargons evolve unconsciously as groups of professionals, artisans, scientists, etc. talk among themselves. Argots are jargons carried one step further, for in addition to specialization a semiconscious secretive element is introduced.

Interestingly enough, Hesseling criticizes the descriptions of argot existing at the time for being too confined to matters lexical,
and for assuming a homogeneous "basilectal" (to use a modern term) argot. He pleads for modern sociolinguistic methods:

What seems especially necessary to me for further study is a long series of overheard texts, in order to find out in which way the argot words are actually mixed into the main language . . . . If one had a sufficient number of such overheard texts, one would be able to comment on the frequency of specific words, on the connection of the thoughts, and on the logic of the speakers.

Before discussing Hesseling's own views on the origin of Afrikaans, it may be useful to sketch the state of progress in creole studies around the turn of the century. The first major article on creole was by the Portuguese scholar Adolpho Coelho in 1880. It dealt mostly with the Portuguese-based creoles of Africa. Two years later there is an article by Lucien Adam, of a general nature and stressing the importance of substrata in the genesis of creole languages, and a first article by Hugo Schuchardt dealing with one of the Portuguese-based creoles. With the exception of two important articles on Saramaccan and on the lingua franca, Schuchardt had completed his major work on creole languages by 1900. Its primary focus is on the Portuguese-based creoles, which he treats in no less than twelve articles, but there are also a few articles on Pacific English pidgin and French in Southeast Asia. Possibly Schuchardt's most brilliant work was on Malayo-Portuguese, in which he traces the historical development of Portuguese in the East Indies, and the influence of Malay on it. This work probably inspired Hesseling's theory on the origin of Afrikaans. This theory will now be represented in some detail.

The language spoken by the slaves that were brought in large numbers to the Cape after 1658 was either Malayo-Portuguese, i.e. the broken Portuguese with Malay elements that formed the lingua franca of the East Indies (the remnants of which were described by Schuchardt), or the very similar Portuguese jargon
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used in the West African slave trade. On the Cape this type of Portuguese-based pidgin or jargon came into contact with Dutch, and the special social circumstances of the sudden and intimate confrontation between the two languages caused the simplification of forms that characterizes Afrikaans in comparison with Dutch itself.

Although Malayo-Portuguese was not the only factor involved in the simplification process, it is clearly the main one. The influence of the languages of the indigenous peoples of South Africa, e.g., the Hottentots, was rather restricted, primarily because the contacts with these people were of quite a different nature.

Hesseling repeatedly stressed that the resulting language, Afrikaans, was not a creole, but a language that stopped halfway in the process of creolization because of changing social conditions and the conservative influence of newly-arrived groups from Holland.

Among the features of Afrikaans which can be attributed to Malayo-Portuguese influence we find:

a. the definite article die (a demonstrative pronoun in Dutch), presumably a relexification from Malayo-Portuguese ackel, in turn derived from Portuguese aquel;

b. possessive constructions of the form Peter his son;

c. ons as the first person plural pronoun—Malayo-Portuguese had one form for the subject and object at the same time, and ons is the Dutch object pronoun;

d. loss of inflection in the verb.

Although Hesseling never claimed that Afrikaans was a creole (which would have been considered the ultimate insult), he always emphasized its partly non-European origin. One can imagine that Hesseling’s views were never very popular in white South Africa itself; they were in conflict with the precepts of an all-white nationalist and racist ideology.

Especially in Hesseling’s later work we find a clear and well-articulated theory of creolization.18 Although he clearly distinguished between a trade-jargon or pidgin as an auxiliary language on the one hand and a creole as the native language of a speech
community on the other, Hesseling did not give much weight to the distinction between the processes of pidginization and creolization. His central concern was simplification of forms, which he saw both in the formation of a common Negro jargon on board the slavers and in the subsequent origin of a creole during contact with white colonists and slave owners.

If we compare the views of Adam, Coelho, and Schuchardt with those of the Dutch scholar, we find him to be in agreement mostly with Coelho. Two issues separate him from Schuchardt and Adam: substratum influence, and the "baby talk theory." We will turn to substratum influences later. First we will discuss the "baby talk theory," an issue which keeps creolists divided up to the present day, apparently. Schuchardt thought that the source of simplification was the "foreigner talk" of the model language speakers, the whites. Hesseling considered the broken language of the learners, the slaves, the primary source.

But even on this point Hesseling leaves room for the opposite point of view: the masters partially adopt the broken language of their social inferiors to make themselves better understood. In theory it may be feasible to distinguish between adaptation (by the inferiors) and borrowing (by the speakers of the model language or by children learning their language from black nurses), but in practice the two processes interact and flow together.

Two conditions, one social and one linguistic, are a *sine qua non* for creolization: the clash between two languages and their dissimilarity. When one of these conditions is not met, something different from creolization (= simplification) occurs. The language clash arises from a sudden need to communicate extensively in daily life; one of its most extreme manifestations prevailed in slavery. The main part of the institutionalization of the simplified forms resulting from this language clash is done by children.

It was noted before that Adam claimed that creole languages are really African or Asian languages disguised with a European lexicon. Hesseling does not share this point of view. The syntax of African languages, their most characteristic component, differs
too much from that of creole for this to be the case (e.g., the so-called nominal classifiers of the Bantu languages and the serial verbs of the Kwa group).

The multiplicity of the African languages involved in the contact situation neutralized their influence rather than strengthened it, and what remains is their greatest common denominator.

Among the cases of direct African influence in Papiamentu and Negerhollands, we find:19

a. The use of the third person plural pronoun as a nominal plural suffix: -sender in Negerhollands, -nan in Papiamentu.

b. The use of aspect particles. In Negerhollands these are the following: le ‘durative’, lo ‘near future/durative present’, (h)a ‘past’, sa(l) ‘future’, ka ‘perfective’.

c. The placement of all articles immediately before the verb.

d. A general tendency to use double and periphrastic forms.

Hesseling was rather cautious in attributing particular elements to substratum influence, especially in comparison with his contemporaries. Nonetheless, even the few things in Negerhollands and Papiamentu that he claims to be due to African substratum influence and those elements, listed above, in Afrikaans which he attributes to Malayo-Portuguese, could well be the result of a general process of creolization.

In several modern articles Hesseling is credited with originating the monogenetic hypothesis, which holds that some version of the Portuguese pidgin used in the Atlantic and Indian oceans during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was, in fact, the common ancestor of all or most of the creole languages existing today.20 This suggestion is motivated by the emphasis Hesseling placed on Portuguese data, but the present authors could not find any passage in Hesseling’s work which would warrant such a conclusion.

It is true that the Dutch scholar stressed the importance and distribution of Portuguese both in the East Indies (including the Cape) and in the West African slave trade. He even argued that Angolan and Guinese slaves who were brought to the Cape in 1658 had learned the Portuguese-based lingua franca in West Africa or on board the ship which brought them.
In relation to Negerhollands, however, Portuguese is only men­tioned as the possible source of some lexical items:

Furthermore, in every creole dialect one can expect Portuguese words from the nautical and slave language that was widely distributed along the Gold and Slave Coasts.21

Hesseling explained the creolization of Dutch in the Virgin Islands and of Spanish on Curaçao as resulting from contact with the African mother tongue of the slaves.

The similarities between Afrikaans and the varieties of Dutch once spoken in the East Indies and Ceylon can possibly be explained by the existence of a general Indo-Dutch, from which they are all derived; this Indo-Dutch already contained elements of Malayo-Portuguese. Another possibility is that these similarities are due to general factors of creolization and similar circumstances of emergence.

The similarities between Afrikaans and Negerhollands must be attributed to the fact that both languages developed under the influence of substratum languages. The differences between the two are due to the fact that (a) creolization of Dutch stopped halfway in the case of Afrikaans; (b) slightly different Dutch dialects were involved; and most importantly (c) creolization of Negerhollands was caused by languages besides Malayo-Portuguese.

The similarities between Negerhollands and Papiamentu can be accounted for by referring to similar substratum languages, general characteristics of creolization, and by extensive borrowing from Papiamentu to Negerhollands.

Finally, we can say that the monogenetic hypothesis is nowhere present in Hesseling's work. What is present is the idea of relexifi­cation, in the discussion of the Malayo-Portuguese origin of Afrikaans, and emphasis on the historical importance of Portuguese pidgin.

Having briefly reviewed Hesseling's contributions to the theory
of creolization and to the study of Afrikaans, we will try to evaluate his work and place it in a contemporary perspective. While the Malayo-Portuguese hypothesis for the origin of Afrikaans was revived, defended, and strengthened by Valkhof, Hesseling's work on creoles has hardly influenced modern research at all, although he is often referred to deferentially. This is probably because his work relates mostly to Negerhollands and Afrikaans and because his writings were in Dutch.

Nonetheless, Hesseling’s work constitutes a complete and relatively authoritative theory of creolization in its own right, a theory which is less ambiguous than Schuchardt’s, and which curiously enough is in agreement with the modern consensus on most points. Thus the emphasis on the role of incomplete language learning and on the transition from pidgin to creole is now generally accepted. The point of the importance of “baby talk” remains controversial, and we should concede that Hesseling probably underestimated the role of the base languages, African and Asian. This is probably partly because he had not studied such relatively “African” creole languages as Sranan Tongo or Haitian.

The monograph on Negerhollands remains a classic, although de Josselin de Jong’s texts probably offer more reliable data for the Negerhollands of the beginning of this century. Likewise, Hesseling’s work on Afrikaans is still important. If his work sometimes appears unsatisfactory because clear conceptual distinctions (e.g., between pidgins and creoles, among different kinds of simplification, between borrowing of outer and inner form) are blurred, we must realize that only a small part of modern creole research conforms to the standards which we would like to impose on Hesseling.

It is an interesting, albeit very tricky, mental exercise to try to place a person in one’s own time, and to imagine him or her making the choices demanded by contemporary intellectual life. If we would do so in the case of Hesseling, he would surely appear as a sociolinguist, and as a proponent of Labovian “street linguistics,” rather than of “closet linguistics.” In his own time his concerns were considered marginal; now they would be considered central.
In a sense, Hesseling was very much between two worlds, "at the turning point of two centuries," to use the phrase coined by the Dutch historian Jan Romein. He was a classical scholar who much preferred spoken modern Greek and Italian to their classical ancestors. Yet he was a philologist who never got around to doing fieldwork at a time when Boas and his students were already studying the native languages of North America actively.

Similarly, Hesseling is suspended between the world of classics and the world of creoles. His intellectual development must have seemed haphazard and eclectic to his contemporaries. The obituary written by his brother-in-law Jean Jacques Salverda de Grave is careful to point out both the unity and the continuity of his work and to defend Hesseling against the accusations of fickleness and irresponsibility in skipping from discipline to discipline, from language to language.24

It is for these reasons, possibly, that Hesseling has been largely forgotten in the Netherlands. Even if his work was sometimes a bit less solid than that of some of his contemporaries, it was more daring and more original. Let the present volume testify to that.

Pieter Muysken
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NOTES

4. A review of Hesseling’s work on modern Greek and Byzantine culture is given in: G. H. Blanken, “Prof. Dr. D. C. Hesseling als Neo-graecus en Byzantinist,” *Neophilologus* 26 (1941), pp. 246-55. Among his many publications on Greek language and culture we mention here: *Charos, ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis des neugriechischen Volksglaubens* (Leiden-Leipzig, 1897); *Byzantium* (Haarlem, 1902), translated into French as *Essai sur la civilisation byzantine* (Paris, 1907); “De Koine en de oude dialekten van Griekenland,” in *Med. Kon. Ak. v. Wetensch.*, 4e reeks, VIII, 2 (1906), pp. 133-69; *De betekenis van het Nieuwgrieks voor de geschiedenis der Griekse taal en der Griekse letterkunde* (Leiden, 1907), his inaugural lecture summarizing a good portion of his work on Greek; *Uit Byzantium en Hellas* (Leiden, 1911); *Geschiedenis der Nieuwgriekse letterkunde* (Haarlem, 1921); *Uit Hellas’ heden en verleden* (Haarlem, 1927).
der Nederlandse taal in Amerika (Leiden, 1905); also, of course, the articles brought together in this volume.


12. “Overblijfsels van de Nederlandse taal op Ceylon,” TNTL 29 (1910), pp. 303-12; also in this volume.


16. A fairly complete bibliography of Schuchardt’s work on creoles is to be found in the reference cited in note 2.


18. This theory is developed in his monographs on Afrikaans and Negerhollands, but particularly in “Hoe ontstond de eigenaardige vorm van het Kreoools,” Neophilologus 17 (1933), pp. 209-15, also in this volume; “Gemmengde taal, Mengeltaal, Kreools en Kreolisering,” De Nieuwe Taalgids 28 (1934), pp. 310-22.


