The Sociolinguistics of Non-Equicomplexity

The idea that all languages are equally complex was at one time very much the conventional wisdom amongst academic linguists. Their view was particularly strongly argued for in the context of uninformed public opinion, which held to the view that some languages really were more "primitive" than others. However, this "equicomplexity hypothesis" was always implicitly rejected by sociolinguists, creolists and dialectologists who had learnt that language contact led to simplification. It was obvious to them that, if the same language could be more or less simple at different points in time, then different languages could be more or less simple at the same point in time. This talk will discuss what exactly the social determinants of linguistic simplicity and complexity might be.