Introduction: Focus and Grammatical Relations in Creole Languages

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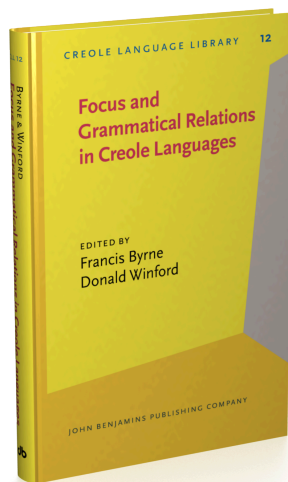
INTRODUCTION: FOCUS AND GRAMMATICAL RELATIONS IN CREOLE LANGUAGES

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1.0. Introduction

The seminal works of Ross (1967), Schachter (1973) and Chomsky (1977), as well as many subsequent important publications,[1] were significant in identifying, classifying and explicating the broad range of mechanisms and processes that human language utilizes in syntactically emphasizing sentence-level constituents. In addition to the better-known syntactic structures such as right and left dislocation, topicalization, and clefts and pseudoclefts, there are also many other phenomena such as intonation, stress, and reduplication, among others, which independently, or in concert with the above syntactic mechanisms, serve to highlight sentence-level constituents.

This volume has as its topic, then, the types of constructions and devices which creole languages utilize to achieve constituent emphasis. While keeping in mind that *focus*, a pertinent term in the title of this chapter and volume, represents a specific syntactic process and contitutes one means to achieve such emphasis, we additionally use the term here in a broad and general sense to encompass the entire range of phenomena found in creole languages. Among these interests, besides the repertoire of devices mentioned above and their viability and features in creole grammars, are subsidiary but critical phenomena commonly discussed in the theoretical and general linguistic literature. These include the correlation between morphological and syntactic properties of *wh*-like forms in focus structures, the pre-clausal nature of these constructions, the status of empty or pronominally-filled slots in clauses-proper, pragmatic and discourse considerations, questions of logical form, scope, movement (or its absence), emphasis and emphatic devices in a general and specific sense, and focus and/or emphatic effects on other domains of grammar.

In addition to the above issues, also pertinent are a number of less well known and often creole-specific phenomena, several of which have only fairly recently been adumbrated in these languages. These include verb emphasis (including what scholars label in this volume as predicate clefting, verb focus and predicate doubl-

ing) and focus marking (the marking of focused constituents by copular-like elements, pronominals, and/or deictic determiners and other specifiers). Additionally of interest to creole studies are substrate/superstrate focus patterning and idiosyncratic peculiarities of different creoles.

This volume will concentrate on the above and many other concerns and thereby elucidate, without any one theoretical viewpoint taking precedence, a number of the pertinent questions associated with focus in creole languages. In this way, the volume represents some of the latest thinking in the field from multiple linguistic perspectives and should thereby be of interest not only to creolists and linguists of whatever pursuasion, but also to general linguistic theory.

2.0 Focus and Grammatical Relations

Among creole languages, there are on the whole fewer formal devices to syntactically emphasize constituents than in older, longstanding languages with more diachronic depth.[2] The most common and basic means of syntactically achieving such emphasis, generally, is the formal focus process itself as exemplified in (1b).

1a) *mi bói   dí   ganía*   Saramaccan (Byrne 1987)
    I   cook the chicken
    'I cooked the chicken.'

  b) [dí **ganía**$_i$ [$_S$ *mi bói* ec$_i$]]
     the chicken   I   cook
     'I cooked THE CHICKEN.'

In its basic form, the above structure is characterized by the focused constituent appearing in preclausal position, either through movement (Saramaccan: Byrne 1987) or base-generation (Tok Pisin: Sankoff 1993, Woolford 1977), and is coindexed with an empty category (ec) in a clause proper. There is also no comma intonation as is found with topicalization.

Despite the apparently straightforward processes and the fewer mechanisms available to many creoles to achieve focus-like effects,[3] constituent focus in these languages nevertheless is a far more variable and complex phenomenon than previously thought primarily because of co-occuring morphology. A somewhat common hypothesis in the 1970s and '80s was that creole preclausal focus consists of cleft-like structures with a It is X that/wh S-type schema, with the focused items being base-generated in S" or its configurational counterpart.[4] Analyses of this kind gave attention to the common presence in some creoles of certain forms (quite often homophonous with copulas) which appear with many constituent-types upon clause-initial focus (neutrally labeled here as FMs). Consider, for example, the data from Krio, Caribbean English Creole (CEC) and Seselwa.

2a) *snek   kil   am*   Krio (Alleyne 1980)
    snake   kill   him
    'The smake killed him.'

b) **na** *snek kil am*
FM ...
'THE SNAKE killed him.'

3a) *i   kil   di   uman   wid   wan   naif*   CEC (Winford 1993:265)[5]
he kill the woman with a   knife
'He killed the woman with a knife.'

b) **a**   *wid   wan   naif   i kil di uman*
FM   with a   knife ...
'It was with a knife that he killed the woman.'

4a) *divan   ti   abat   bann   fler*   Seselwa (Bickerton 1993:194)
wind   Tns knock   the   flower
'The wind knocked the flowers down.'

b) (**se**) *bann fler   (ki)   divan ti abat*
FM...   ...that...
'It's the flowers that the wind knocked down.'

(2-4b) underscore one of the analytic problems in dealing with such data: namely, the determination of the categorial status of various FMs. The copula-like *na/a/se* FMs above could easily be categorized as actual copulas and a cleft-like *it is-*X analysis would be a natural conclusion. With such an analysis, however, it would be necessary to posit pronominal or *wh*-operators, or complementizer-like forms, following the focused constituent even though they may never overtly appear in the language.

Other creolists have questioned the cleft-like account and concluded that such structures are actually more like focalizations (in the specific sense of a formal syntactic device). From this approach, scholars such as Byrne (1987), Koopman (1984), Lefebvre & Massam (1988) have viewed focused constituents as being preclausal operators in the same way as *wh*-items. That is, based on a variety of evidence (involving factors like subjacency, subordinate preclausal landing sites, the lack of copular-like formatives in pre-position, empty categories, and the absence of comma intonation following the affected constituent), the focusing of NPs and PPs, for example, would be the result of the same process as question formation and relativization, among other *wh*-type phenomena.

The problem with the analysis is the difficulty in accounting both for the FMs in (2) through (4) and the postposition pronominals shown in (5) and (6), which often appear when there are no copular-like elements in pre-position.

5a) *mi bói   dí   ganía*   Saramaccan (Byrne 1987)
I   cook   the   chicken
'I cooked the chicken.'

b) *dí   ganía   (hen)   mi bói*
the   chicken (IT) ...
'I cooked THE CHICKEN.'

6a) *jæpan   gaiz   no giv   a   hæng*   Hawaiian Creole (Bickerton 1977)[6]
Japan   guys   no give a   hang
'Guys from Japan don't give a hang.'

b) *jæpan gaiz* **dei** *no giv a hæng*
   Japan   guys   THEY ...
   'GUYS FROM JAPAN don't give a hang.'

To account for data like (2) through (6), Bickerton (1981), Byrne (1987) and Sankoff & Brown (1976), among others, postulate that the various focus appendages are actually pre- and postpositioned constituents of the focused items and appear within the same superordinate preclausal node, as shown in (7).

7) [$_{NP}$ *dí ganía* hen [$_{S}$ *mi bói*]]
   'I cooked THE CHICKEN.'

For a number of reasons, however, the above analyses may not be the best approaches to creole preclausal focus. One of the strongest arguments, among many, against the view is that there are also a variety of items homophonous with locatives and/or demonstrative/determiners (i.e. deictics) which often appear either alone or with pronominals in focus environments and which may represent a more common creole pattern. Thus, for example, Tok Pisin *ia*, from English *here* (see Sankoff & Brown 1976), variably follows focused items such as [*pikinini* ia [S ...]] 'that child/ little one', and the Haitian Creole determiner *la* (and morphophonemic variants) co-occur with selected fronted items (see Lefebvre et al. 1982, Lefebvre & Massam 1988, Lumsden 1990). In Saramaccan, for its part, *dé* from locative *dé* 'there' (but lacking a locative interpretation in focus contexts – see Byrne 1990) is found immediately following the focused element and preceding the pronominal operator as in (8).

8) *dí   dágu$_i$*   (**dé**)   (**hen**$_i$)   *mi náki*   Saramaccan
   the   dog   FM   IT   I hit
   'I hit the dog.'

In fact, the creole deictic strategy with focused constituents may be even more common than intimated above. In returning to the pre-position copular-like elements in (2) to (4), there is good reason to believe, according to Pieter Seuren (personal communication), that at least some of the forms were and possibly still are demonstratives. Similarly, Mervyn Alleyne (personal communication) notes that many native speakers of Caribbean creoles never interpret the items under question as copulas, but more as determiners.

The above facts, together with the widespread use of demonstrative/determiner and/or locative-like formatives to introduce a wide array of subordinate clause-types (relative, temporal, locative, and reason clauses, among others – see Byrne 1988) lead to the conclusion that some previous analyses might benefit from re-examination. A major objective of this volume, therefore, is to explore creole preclausal structure, focus processes/mechanisms and associated grammatical relations and implications in a number of geographically diverse creoles and from a variety of analytic and theoretical approaches, both from the perspective of the sentence and that of discourse. In regard to the latter, Geneviève Escure (1988, personal communication) notes that one of the most prominant and immediately noticeable

features of Belize Creole English discourse is the extremely frequent use of focus structures in everyday speech. While there is no statistical survey available, it would not surprise us if focus patterns were likewise a highly prominant feature of the everyday speech in other creole communities as well. With this the case, it is imperative for an adequate treatment of focus within these langauges that aspects of discourse phenomena be included.

Another aim of the volume is to determine or at least explore the range of structures which serve to focus and/or emphasize constituents in creole languages. Two obvious areas which need more elaboration are predicate clefting and the role of NP-type movement/raising as a method of focus/emphasis. With regard to the former, there is some doubt as to whether predicate clefting involves the actual movement of a verb as postulated by Koopman (1984) or if the preclausal constituent is perhaps a nominalization or a verb copy as Hutchison (1989) contends and is illustrated in (9).

9) $soti_c$ *m te* $soti_v$ Haitian Creole (HC) (Hutchison 1989)
   go   I Tns go   (c=copy, v=verb)
   'I had gone out.'

Also of interest in the realm of predicate clefting is the presence of preclausal FMs in verb emphatic constructions such as in CEC in (10) and HC in (11).

10) **a**   **gi**   *Jan bring fuud* **gi**   *dem*   CEC (Winford 1993:275)
    FM   give John bring food give them
    'John bought food (and) GAVE (it to) them.'

11) **Se soti**   *m te*   **soti**   *ki*   *fè*   *ou pa   t   wè   mwen*   HC (Hutchison
    it-is leave   I Tns leave   Comp make you not Tns see me   1989)
    'It's because I had gone out that you didn't see me.'

In (10) and (11), *gi* 'give' and *soti* 'leave' occur with the copula-like forms *a* and *se*, respectively (as is normal in CEC and selected other geographically grouped creoles), but does not in (9) (or a situation like Saramaccan in which the absence of an FM in predicate cleft structures is categorical).

One of the questions raised especially by (9) and (11) is whether there are two distinct processes involved in their formation. Relatedly, also pertinent to our concerns is the (possible) relationship between the kinds of structures in (9) through (11) and copy complements, cognate objects of verbs, and focused nominalizations as in (12) through (14), respectively, from HC and Krio.

12) *Ou mèt* **dòmi** **dòmi** *ou si ou vle*   HC (Hutchison 1989)
    you put   sleep   sleep   you if you want
    'You can sleep if you want to.'

13) *Kite l*   **kouri** *ti*   **kouri** *li*
    let 3sg. run   small run   3sg.
    'Let him run his little run.'

14) *Noto komon*   **kray** *mi* **bin** **kray**   Krio (Alleyne 1980)
    not common cry   I   Tns   cry
    'I really cried.'

While the issues and possibilities for analysis of creole focus processes and properties are numerous, and certainly more than has been touched upon in this short discussion, the papers found in this volume will illuminate many of the queries. It should also be emphasized that different interpretations are always possible for the same data, and some papers will view certain phenomena quite differently. However, this is as should be expected; it reflects sophistication and a healthy level of debate which can only move a discipline forward.

All in all, our aim for the volume is first and foremost to illuminate and present as much as possible about a single but highly important area of creole grammar from a number of different perspectives. As is appropriate, then, the scholars included here all have an abiding interest in creole languages, and of equal importance for our objectives, are specialists in diverse areas of linguistics. Specifically, the papers are divided into five sections, each reflecting the particular subarea or theme which the respective authors develop. The first, with papers by Victor Manfredi, Pieter Seuren, and Claire Lefebvre & Elizabeth Ritter, confronts the issue of predicate or verb focus. The papers in the second, by Salikoko Mufwene, Gillian Sankoff, Alain Kihm and Olásopé Oyèláràn, analyze various syntactic and semantic aspects of the focus process itself. The third section, with contributions by Derek Bickerton and Francis Byrne & Alexander Caskey, presents analyses on the significance and status of the complex morpho-syntax, particularly pronominals, which co-occurs with creole focus. In the fourth, Geneviève Escure and Arthur Spears orient focus within the important sphere of discourse organization. And finally, in the fifth section, John Lumsden and Pieter Muysken discuss various aspects of grammatical relations which, potentially, have the capacity for emphatic reference.

NOTES

1. More recent work on aspects of syntactic emphasis (i.e. focus in a broad sense) include, among many others, Aissen (1992), Cinque (1983), Higgins (1979), Huck & Na (1990), Knowles (1986), Koopman (1984), McCray (1982), Roberts (1991) and Rivero (1980).

2. That contemporary creoles are new languages, and variously formed anywhere between the 16th and 20th centuries, is fairly uncontroversial and has widespread general consensus. A major controversy in their formation emanates from disagreement in how these languages originated, not that they are relatively new.

3. Bickerton (1993:191-92) notes that few creoles have topicalization mechanisms, with focus being the prodominant syntactic device to achieve constituent emphasis. We would like to add, as we do in the text, that focus is the prodominant, and often the only process in these languages.

4. See for example Bickerton (1986), Jansen, Koopman & Muysken (1978), and Mufwene (1987), among others.

5. (3-4a) from CEC and Seselwa is our reconstruction based on the attested data in (3-4b).

6. Like (3-4a), (6a) is likewise a reconstruction based on the attested data in (6b).

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