

# Acknowledgements

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**The Syntax and Semantics of a Determiner System: A case study of Mauritian creole**

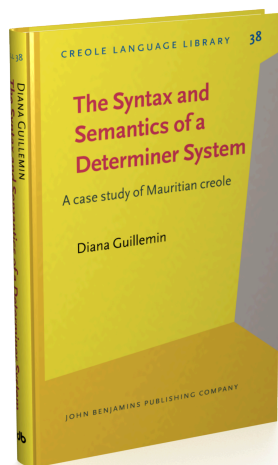
**Diana Guillemin**

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# Acknowledgements

In his *Étude sur le patois créole mauricien*, Charles Baissac observes that “Le créole n’est, on le voit, ni une langue ni un dialecte” (1880: XLVI). Despite his disparaging opinion of this language, we are fortunate that he faithfully recorded the tales of two elderly native speakers, *ppâ* Lindor and *mmâ* Télésille, and also provided French translations of their stories in his collection of folktales published in 1880 and 1888.

I was similarly fortunate to have enjoyed the gift of storytelling of an elderly creole speaker, to whom I dedicate this work. Simone was of Malagasy descent. She had been orphaned and brought up in a convent, where she was taught to read and write. The volume of *A thousand and one nights*, and the *Contes* of Charles Perrault, held in the convent library, would have been well thumbed by the time she left to marry, and was sent to work as a domestic. Simone would no more have time to read, but the minute details of every story were etched in her memory, stored in creole, the language in which she would recount them, over and over again.

The magic words *Ti ena enn fwa*, which can be both *Il était une fois*, or *Il y avait une fois*, opened Sesame’s doors into a world where princesses were *zoli zoli terib*, where Cinderella’s glass slippers had morphed into *sulye saten*, and Aladdin’s oil lamp into *enn lalamp petrol*, ... Simone exploited to the full “l’originalité de la langue (qui) est tout entière dans le pittoresque de l’expression. L’image avant tout” (Baissac 1880: XXXVIII).<sup>1</sup>

While these stories may have provided her with a much needed means of escaping her harsh reality, they triggered in me a passion for the creole language, and an obsessive need to better understand its grammar. Given that most of its vocabulary is from French, not only why, but how did it end up with a grammar which is so different from that of its lexifier?

This work is an adaptation of my Ph.D. dissertation, and I have many more people to thank. First and foremost, I thank Mary Laughren for her guidance. I am also grateful to her, as to Rob Pensalfini and Gillian Whitlock, for supporting my applications for the various grants which made possible the realization of this project. I thank Philip Baker, Anthony Grant and Marilys Guillemain, whose

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1. “the originality of the language which lies entirely in its colourful expressions. First and foremost it resorts to imagery.”

interest in my work was a real source of inspiration. Special thanks also to Philip Baker for making available a digitized version of early Mauritian Creole texts, without which this work would not have been possible. I was fortunate to have had access to the staff and resources of the University of Queensland Library, and I am grateful to the liaison librarians, Michael Fagg and Ryan Weymouth, as well as the staff of the Document Delivery Service for their generous support. Finally, this work has benefited from comments by Enoch Aboh and Giuseppe Longobardi, to whom I express my sincere gratitude.

Although I am a native speaker of Mauritian Creole, I have not altogether relied on my own intuition, and when in doubt, I have sought grammaticality judgments from other native speakers. My informants are all native speakers, born in Mauritius, who have lived there for most of their life. They are of varying ethnic backgrounds, and of varying age groups. My thanks go to Vasili Coopamah, Adeline de Souza, Véronique Davy, Charles Jean, Sylviane Moollan and Dev Virahsawmy for their patience with my questions and valuable insights into MC. I am also indebted to all of the above, as well as to Renée Asgarally, Marie-Rose Auguste, Marie-Line Domaingue, Pierrette Jean and Jan Maingard, for their generous gifts of resources in modern MC.

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