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Introduction

Pidgins and Creoles and Tense-Mood-Aspect

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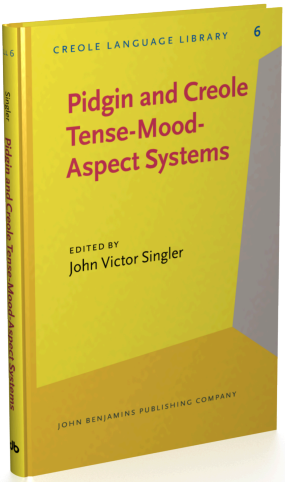

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Introduction: Pidgins and Creoles and Tense-Mood-Aspect

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The shared properties of creoles lie at the heart of contemporary creole studies. Strictly speaking, the question of creole genesis is paramount. But no hypothesis of creole genesis is seriously considered that fails to account for the phenomenon of shared properties.

One area of the grammar of creoles where shared properties have long been noted is in the expression of tense, mood, and aspect (TMA). Van Name (1869-70) and Schuchardt (1882) both comment on TMA particulars that are shared by creoles with different lexical bases. In the mid-twentieth century, Thompson (1961) and Taylor (1971) also draw attention to TMA. In particular, as summarized by Muysken (1981), they observe the following about the preverbal TMA particles characteristic of creoles:

> (a) each Creole language tends to have three of them: a past tense marker; a potential mood marker; and a durative aspect marker.
> (b) when we find more than one particle accompanying a verb, the particles always occupy a fixed order: tense, mood, aspect, main verb. The combinations of the particles are interpreted in fixed, and rather complex ways (1981:183).

William Labov, in a 1971 manuscript, also notes the shared properties of creoles with regard to tense. In his manuscript (published in this volume), Labov observes that highly rudimentary pidgins are able to express time relations by the use of temporal adverbs. He then addresses the question of **why** creole languages develop a grammatical mechanism for marking tense. In his answer Labov moves away from the monogenetic explanation of shared properties that underlies Thompson's and Taylor's work to one grounded in functional universals.

In 1974 Derek Bickerton published "Creolization, Linguistic Universals, Natural Semantax and the Brain". (Originally published in the *University of Hawaii Working Papers*, the article was republished in Day 1980. The references that follow are to the version that appeared in Day's volume.) With the distribution of Labov's manuscript and especially with the publication of Bickerton's article, TMA became the pre-eminent site for the discussion of the phenomenon of the shared properties of creoles and for the debate about its explanation.

Bickerton's article compares the TMA systems of Sranan, Guyanese, Haitian Creole French, and Hawaiian Creole English. The languages are alike in that in each "the zero form marks simple past for action verbs and nonpast for state verbs" (1980:5). There are three preverbal markers, occurring in the order noted above, i.e. tense, mood, aspect. The three preverbal markers express anterior tense, irrealis mood, and nonpunctual aspect. Further, the collocations of the preverbal markers have fixed meanings.

Clearly Bickerton's analysis of the TMA system falls within the tradition of Taylor and Thompson. From a TMA perspective, his most important departure from their work is his identification of what he calls an Anterior — rather than a Past — tense. He links this to the action/state distinction and asserts that a marker of anteriority "indicates past-before-past for action verbs and simple past for state verbs" (1980:5). The effect of an action/state distinction upon tense had been noticed before for West African languages (cf. Welmers and Welmers 1968, Welmers 1973) but not applied to creoles.

Bickerton uses the similarities in TMA as evidence for a linguistic-universals explanation of creole genesis. He develops his theory further in subsequent work, especially Bickerton (1981, 1984a, 1984b), positing the language bioprogram hypothesis (LBH). Bickerton's view holds that the setting in which creole genesis occurs is characterized by linguistic chaos and insufficient access for the learner to the target language; in an atmosphere in which linguistic transmission has been disrupted, child language learners fall back on the language bioprogram.

Particularly in *Roots of Language* (1981) but in subsequent works as well, Bickerton has continued to use TMA as evidence for the LBH. Further, he has argued that, inasmuch as not all social settings led equally to the strongest type of creolization, it is not appropriate to assign equal weight to the evidence from all creoles. (In Bickerton 1984a he proposes an

implicational scale for the degree of "radicalness" of creoles.)

If Bickerton's theory of creole genesis is fundamentally correct, then it does follow that it is necessary to restrict the type of creoles whose evidence can be considered. Thus, it would be appropriate to exclude "fort creoles" (Chaudenson's 1979 "*créoles endogènes*"), since the continued presence of another language for the community would have precluded the existence of the linguistic void that is a precondition for the fullest operation of the bioprogram. For that reason it would be appropriate to concentrate on "plantation creoles" (Chaudenson's "*créoles exogènes*"). Even within the group of plantation creoles, it would be necessary to recognize that the degree of linguistic deprivation, hence degree of reliance upon the bioprogram, would vary.

This attention to the cultural matrix of creole genesis (the term comes from Alleyne 1971) has shaped the examination of creole TMA in the post-1974 period. Thus, for example, when Muysken (1981) presents data from six languages as evidence for his assertion of the inadequacy of Bickerton's (1974) account, Bickerton (1981) dismisses evidence from three of the languages out of hand because of their social history. As noted, this rejection is consistent with the larger theory of the language bioprogram.

However, creolists have in general rejected the LBH, at least in its strongest form, as the principal means of accounting for the shared properties of creoles. One of the problems with the hypothesis lies in the implausibility of the version of history that it requires (cf. Singler 1986 for a discussion of this with respect to the Caribbean). If the LBH becomes untenable as an explanatory device for the shared properties of creoles, then it follows that the exclusion from consideration of all but the most radical creoles is also untenable.

Even if the LBH were itself fully tenable, there would be problems with Bickerton's assertion that the creole TMA system, especially as described in Bickerton (1974), represents the unmarked case. To begin with, Bickerton's prototypical creole TMA system is based solely on creoles whose superstrate languages are Indo-European. (The LBH does acknowledge the role of the superstrate in creole genesis; it is the role of the substrate that it explicitly denies.) A broader spectrum of creoles is needed in order to see if the shared properties in question are to be found when the superstrate languages are non-Indo-European. Further, even the original four creoles whose shared properties form the basis for the prototypical creole TMA system do not, upon further examination, entirely conform to

that system: in the present volume, the article by Spears shows that Haitian Creole departs from the prototype in significant ways.

The primary alternative to the LBH has been a theory of creole genesis that acknowledges the role of the substrate and that views substratal influence as interactive with influence from the lexifier language (the superstrate) and with linguistic universals. Such a view differs from the LBH not only in its inclusion of the substrate as a contributor to creole genesis but also in its emphasis on pragmatic as well as grammatical universals. If the communicative circumstances in which creoles arose highly favored certain linguistic strategies, recognition of this contributes to an understanding both of creole genesis and the shared properties of creoles. While Bickerton does not claim "that the LBH specifies the **only** means through which novel linguistic structures can arise" (1984b:174, emphasis Bickerton's), the more that pragmatic universals can explain, the less necessary and less likely a strong form of the LBH becomes. Further, a theory of creole genesis that accounts for the shared-properties phenomenon must also acknowledge the diversity of pidgin and creole linguistic behavior. This diversity may itself be principled, arising for example from differences among pidgins and creoles in the nature of the social setting in which they evolved and/or differences between them in the degree of homogeneity of their substratal input. (And differences between them may also be explained by differences in their respective substrates or superstrates.) In this light, the examination of a wide — rather than a narrow — range of pidgins and creoles becomes crucial.

A separate issue with regard to TMA and its impact on theories of creole genesis involves the degree to which creole TMA systems have changed over time, i.e. since genesis. It is implicit in Bickerton (1984a, 1984b) that the creoles under study have not changed significantly since genesis. On the other hand, Bickerton acknowledges in *Roots of Language* that "once you turn a completive loose in a classic creole TMA system, the only consequence must be a drastic remodeling of that system" (1981:94). An ongoing issue, then, not only for Bickerton but for all creolists is the relation of the contemporary TMA system in a particular language to the TMA system of an earlier time.

With the caveats noted and whatever the explanation of creole genesis, in a book about pidgin and creole TMA systems it is appropriate to return to Bickerton's 1974 article: as a study of creole TMA, it remains seminal. The articles in the present volume are testimony to its importance. In them

and in almost all studies of individual pidgin and creole TMA systems since 1974, comparison with Bickerton's prototypical creole TMA system is the diagnostic, the starting point from which further analysis proceeds.

The present volume contains Labov's 1971 article "On the Adequacy of Natural Languages: I. The Development of Tense", followed by seven articles on TMA in individual pidgins and creoles. The languages under discussion form a diverse group. Their lexifying languages are English, French, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, and the Bantu language Kikongo. Geographically, the range includes West and Central Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. The social histories of the languages in question vary as well. There are the *créoles exogènes*: in each case a massive displacement of diverse peoples gave rise to the setting in which the creole arose. These are Haitian Creole (represented here by the article by Spears), Papiamentu (Andersen), Berbice Dutch (Robertson), Hawaiian Creole English (Labov), and Capeverdean Crioulo (Silva).[1] In the case of Kituba (Mufwene), there has been no massive displacement; it arose from a Kikongo-based lingua franca. As such, Kituba represents a type of *créole endogène*.[2]

Finally, three pidgins are discussed in the volume: Tok Pisin (Labov), Kru Pidgin English (Singler), and Eighteenth Century Nigerian Pidgin English (Fayer). The three have very different histories: Tok Pisin is in the process of undergoing nativization, while Kru Pidgin English has existed as a pidgin for almost two centuries without nativizing. The Eighteenth Century Nigerian Pidgin is that of a diary kept in pidgin by an Efik merchant who did not speak (or write) English.[3]

The way in which the individual pidgins and creoles of the present volume conform to and depart from Bickerton's prototypical creole system can be illustrated by looking at each of them with regard to anteriority. As noted above, Bickerton's identification of the Anterior tense is one of the most important contributions of his 1974 study. Unlike the tense systems of their Western European lexifier languages, those of the creoles that he examined do not mark **absolute** tense. That is, Comrie (1985:1) defines tense as "the grammaticalisation of location in time" of a situation. (**Situation** is Comrie's cover term for events, states, processes, and the like.) In a system of absolute tense, tense locates a situation with reference to the moment of speaking. Thus, the English Past tense locates a situation as occurring prior to the moment of speech. In contrast to systems of absolute tense are ones of **relative** tense. A "pure" relative tense is one in which a situation is located vis-a-vis a reference point, which in turn is ordinarily

established within the discourse. These "pure" relative tenses, ones that make no reference whatever to the moment of speaking, are apparently rare in main clauses cross-linguistically; they seem to be most often restricted to non-finite verbs and/or subordinate clauses. More common than the "pure" relative tenses are ones that relate a situation to a reference point that is in turn established relative to the moment of speech. These are not "pure" relative tenses (Comrie calls then "absolute-relative" tenses), but they have ordinarily been designated as relative (and are considered so here): Bickerton's Anterior is a case in point, at least for nonstative verbs. He defines it as "past-before-past" for actions. That is, the Anterior tense in his prototypical system locates an action as occurring prior to some reference point, this reference point in turn having occurred prior to the moment of speaking.

Of the seven individual languages under study in this volume, Haitian Creole and Eighteenth Century Nigerian Pidgin conform to Bickerton's characterization, Haitian Creole with *te* and Eighteenth Century Nigerian Pidgin with *was*.[4] Capeverdean Crioulo also has a marker of Anterior tense, one that corresponds to Bickerton's semantic characterization; however, it is a verb suffix, *-ba*, rather than a preverbal marker.

If the prototypical creole Anterior were a "pure" relative tense, it would show up on simple past events in those instances where the moment of speaking is the reference point. This is not the case in Bickerton's system (the zero verb obtaining here) nor in the languages noted — Haitian Creole, Eighteenth Century Nigerian Pidgin, or Capeverdean Crioulo. It is, however, what obtains in Kituba. There the Anterior marker (as in Capeverdean, a suffix) is present when the event occurs prior to the reference point, regardless of whether the reference point is in the past or is the moment of speaking itself. In other words, for Kituba and for Bickerton's creole prototype alike, when the reference point is in the past, the Anterior tense is used. But when the reference point is the moment of speech, the creole prototype uses the zero verb while Kituba uses the Anterior form.

Finally, the remaining three languages — Berbice Dutch, Papiamentu, and Kru Pidgin English — do not have a special Anterior tense. Instead, Berbice Dutch has a Past AUX (as well as a Completive AUX and a Perfect suffix); Papiamentu has a marker of Perfective aspect (*a*) and a marker of Past Imperfective (*tabata*); and Kru Pidgin English has neither Past nor Anterior tense.

These seven languages, then, provide a spectrum: they range from the languages that express creole anteriority with a preverbal marker to those that do not mark anteriority at all. (For those that do not mark anteriority at all, the question arises as to whether they **no longer** mark it or whether they **never** marked it.)

With regard to mood and aspect, certain terms ought to be clarified. **Irrealis** mood, according to Bickerton, refers to "'unreal time' (= futures, conditionals, subjectives, etc.)" (1980:6). In fact, the usual focus of studies of mood in creole languages — especially as part of tense-mood-aspect — has been on futures and conditionals alone. (In the present volume, Spears sets out an **indicative:subjunctive** opposition in Haitian Creole and Robertson discusses the broader range of modality in Berbice Dutch.)

With regard to what Bickerton and, following him, creolists generally term nonpunctual: in terms of the study of aspect more generally, the term **imperfective** is more widely used. That is, Bickerton's punctual:nonpunctual opposition is usually (if not invariably) a perfective:imperfective opposition. Perfectivity, according to Comrie,

> . . . presents the totality of the situation without reference to its internal temporal constituency: the whole of the situation is present as a single unanalysable whole, with beginning, middle, and end rolled into one . . . (1976:3)

Imperfectivity, then, views the internal temporal constituency of a situation. In Comrie's framework the basic division is between **habitual** and **continuous**. The latter then divides into **progressives** (nonstates) and **nonprogressives** (states). Because states are inherently (rather than variably) imperfective, the perfective:imperfective opposition does not apply to them; and they are not normally marked for imperfectivity. Thus, the fundamental types of imperfective aspect subject to overt marking are habitual and progressive, and it is Bickerton's claim that a single preverbal AUX marks both.[5]

A crucial feature of Bickerton's system is the neat compartmentalization of tense, mood, and aspect; they are presented as three discrete entities. However, as Chung and Timberlake note:

> The different temporal locations of an event — past, present, and future — are inherently correlated with differences in mood and aspect. Hence there is a correlation between future tense and non-actual potential mood [Bickerton's irrealis] and, by implication, between non-future tense and actual mood. An event that is ongoing at the speech moment has not been com-

> pleted. Hence there is a correlation between present tense and incompletive . . . aspect and, by implication, between past tense and completive . . . aspect (1985:206).

For the European-lexifier pidgins and creoles at least, it is the interaction of these three constituents — specifically, tense and aspect but also aspect and mood — that has given rise to the pidgin and creole TMA systems furthest from Bickerton's prototype. The articles that follow make this point in diverse ways.

In concluding, it is appropriate to make directly a point that has been implicit in the discussion of how individual pidgin and creole languages treat the Anterior tense and how they react to the interaction of tense, mood, and aspect. This point is implicit as well in the articles that follow, particularly when those articles are taken as a whole. Namely, while pidgin and creole systems share critical properties, they also show a farreaching diversity. Thus, to relate creole TMA to issues of creole genesis and issues of TMA theory, it is necessary to take into account not only the unity but also the diversity of tense-mood-aspect in pidgin and creole languages.

Notes

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1. As Silva notes, Cape Verde had no native population prior to its discovery by the Portuguese. However, the nature of Portuguese-African interaction there seems to have differed in crucial ways from that which occurred in the Caribbean and Hawaii; consequently, Capeverdean Crioulo's history appears to resemble more nearly the history of *créoles endogènes* than is true of the other *créoles exogènes*.

2. For formal evidence of pidginization/creolization in Kituba, the reader is referred to Mufwene 1988.

3. A further point about the languages under study is that two of them — Berbice Dutch and Kru Pidgin English — are characterized by unusually homogeneous substrates. Eastern Ịjọ is the dominant substrate language for Berbice Dutch, and Western Kru languages, particularly Klao and Grebo, are dominant for Kru Pidgin English. In each case there has been a recent study of the impact of substratal homogeneity on the speech variety (Smith, Robertson, and Williamson 1987; Singler 1988).

4. The discussion that follows is of the seven languages described in individual chapters and does not inlcude Labov's treatment of tense in Hawaiian Creole English and Tok Pisin.

5. **Iterative** is distinct from **habitual** and **durative** from **progressive** (cf. Comrie 1976), as the following sentences from Spears's article illustrate:
   (i) *He is sitting motionless in the living room right now.* (progressive, durative)
   (ii) *He is hitting the nail with the hammer.* (progressive, iterative)
   (iii) *This statue used to stand in Central Park.* (habitual, durative)
   (iv) *He used to hit the bullseye.* (habitual, iterative)
   However, creolists' tendency to equate and/or twin habitual with iterative and progressive with durative reflects the fact that these distinctions are not ones ordinarily utilized in pidgins or creoles and, therefore, not ones crucial to an understanding of creole TMA.

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