

Creoles and Markedness : An Appraisal

1. Introduction

Two properties are commonly predicated of creole languages : they are said to be “simple” languages, and they are said to be “unmarked” languages. Whereas “simple” is an ordinary word replete with polysemy and often derogatory connotations, “(un)marked” is a technical term the applicability of which should always be a decidable matter.¹ Things are not so easy, however, because “(un)marked” actually has more than one meaning or use (see Moravcsik & Wirth 1986 ; Battistella 1996).² First, there is the meaning the term was given in phonology and morphology when it was first introduced by Trubetzkoy (1939) and then extended by Jakobson, whose compact definition we may quote : “One of the essential properties of phonological correlations consists in the fact that both members of a correlation pair are not equivalent : one member includes the relevant mark, while the other does not ; the former is thus defined as marked, the latter as unmarked” (Jakobson 1932/1966 : 22, my translation ; also see Anderson 1985 : 106f.).³ Creole languages are certainly not unmarked in the sense that they would include only unmarked phonemes, an obvious falsehood. Nor is it true that semantico-syntactic categories are never morphologically (overtly) marked in creole languages. No examples are necessary to support this claim. Also note that some creole languages present highly marked syllable types, e.g. Haitian *plim* ‘feather’ with a branching onset and a branching rhyme (see Kaye & Lowenstamm 1981).⁴

Another sense of markedness is statistical (see Greenberg 1966). Properties observed in most, ultimately all known languages are said to be unmarked ; properties which only occur in a minority subset of languages are regarded as marked. Here, markedness criteria are no longer limited to phonology and morphology. For instance, having nouns and verbs certainly is an unmarked property since no known language seems to be entirely devoid of this contrast. Having a clear-cut open class of adjectives, on the other hand, may be considered a marked trait, since in many languages words denoting qualities of entities are formally and syntactically nondistinct from nouns (e.g., Arabic) or verbs (e.g., Mandarin Chinese, Wolof). The Indo-European languages with their attributive adjectives showing special inflections (when they inflect as in German or Russian) and entering a particular construction with the noun they modify, distinct from both noun-plus-noun and noun-plus-relative clause constructions, seem definitely to belong to a minority. I chose this example on purpose because, as it turns out, Indo-European-based Creoles

¹ Simplicity and markedness certainly are related issues, but not in a self-evident way, so I will entirely eschew this aspect of the problem (for a recent debate, see McWhorter 2001 and other contributions to the same volume).

² The literature about markedness is so huge that it would be impossible to review even a significant portion of it in such a short article. I will therefore draw heavily on Battistella (1996), probably the most thoroughgoing study of the concept and its history to date.

³ *Eine der wesentlichen Eigenschaften der phonologischen Korrelation besteht darin, dass die beiden Glieder eines Korrelationspaares nicht gleichberechtigt sind : das eine Glied besitzt das betreffende Merkmal, das andere besitzt es nicht ; das erste wird als merkmalthaltig bezeichnet, das zweite als merkmalllos.*

⁴ To be sure, French accepts even more marked syllable types which Haitian rejects : compare French *presque* /\$presk\$/ ‘almost’ with a branching coda to its Haitian reflex *pres* /\$pres\$/ or *preske* /\$pres\$ke\$/.

can hardly be considered unmarked according to the criterion it sets, insofar as they seem to share a well-defined adjective category with their lexifiers (see, e.g., Damoiseau 1996 and DeGraff to appear on Haitian).⁵

Finally, there is a third sense of markedness, clearly emerging from the following quotation from Chomsky (1981 : 126) :

[...] it is reasonable to suppose that UG, understood to be one aspect of the genetically-determined human biological endowment, determines a set of core grammars, and that what is actually represented in the mind of an individual even under the idealization to a homogeneous speech community would be a core grammar with a periphery of marked elements and constructions. A core grammar, once again, is determined by fixing the parameters of UG in one or another of the permitted ways.

Chomsky exemplifies his point by noting that *John read his books* is unmarked with respect to UG because the possessive pronoun *his* is free in its governing category, i.e. the NP [his books], as it may be coindexed with *John* or with some other person not mentioned in the sentence. In contrast, *They read each other's books* is marked because the anaphor *each other* is not bound within the NP [each other's books]. Markedness so understood would appear to be a theory-internal concept, since it has to do with the way theoretical principles, here the binding module of GB theory, are supposed to apply. Yet, there is a connexion with the previous, statistical sense, insofar as UG-marked constructions can be shown to be rare constructions as well, as pointed out by Chomsky himself (1981 : 140-141).⁶

If the proposition that Creoles, or rather Creole grammars are unmarked is a true one, it clearly has to be in this latter sense only, not in the sense of substantial or formal markedness in correlation pairs as defined by Jakobson, since, as mentioned, creole languages do show marked phonemes, or syllable types, or categories (e.g., adjectives), and they are not devoid of overt (morphological) marking of grammatical properties (e.g., transitivity in Tok Pisin verbs). What unmarkedness implies, then, is that Creoles should contain no “peripheral”, noncore constructions, with the possible upshot that all the constructions they do contain are common across the world's languages. I say “possible” because the correlation between being unmarked-core and being widespread is not a necessary one. One may conceive of a state of affairs such that core grammar properties are actually represented in only a small group of languages, including the Creoles or perhaps comprising them exclusively, whereas all other languages would resort to peripheral devices for these properties.⁷ The likeliest cause for such a state of affairs is language change. Of course, the empirical task of showing that the minority grammars do express core grammar might prove formidable, but this is a different issue than the point of principle I am now making.

These reflections invite us to consider again the Bickertonian view that creole grammars directly express the genetic programme (“Bioprogram”) for language. At first glance this view simply removes the issue, since it makes creole languages unmarked by definition. But note that this distinctive character of creole grammars

⁵ With two differences the significance of which remains to be assessed : (i) adjectives seem to constitute a closed, albeit large, class ; (ii) predicative adjectives do not require an overt copula.

⁶ As a matter of fact, very few languages, and certainly not the Creoles, have a “pure” anaphor similar to English *each other*.

⁷ See the discussion of markedness and frequency in Battistella (1996 : 49-53).

follows from the very special way in which they are supposed to have emerged, viz. in a situation where primary data “provide no basis for the setting of parameters” (Bickerton 1999 : 55). The hypothetical state of affairs just described then becomes the one to be expected. In all situations but the creole situation children are exposed to primary data that do not necessarily, and more often than not do not actually reflect the *default* parameter settings of the unaltered Bioprogram. A somewhat paradoxical consequence is then that creole languages turn out to be (statistically) marked by the very fact of being unmarked amidst languages all of which were marked (pun intended) by the scars of history. Nothing of importance follows from it, however, because – and this is the gist of Bickerton’s 1999 article – the whole markedness issue simply is irrelevant for creole languages if the Bioprogram is assumed.

All this points to a deeper issue. The logic of markedness makes it a binary, or at most ternary relation : [+] contrasts with [–], and both may further contrast with [u], i.e. unspecified for the property in question. True, this claim can be challenged. Battistella (1996) shows that in the transition from the Jakobsonian to the Chomskyan paradigm markedness lost its strictly binary character and became multivalued. Yet, it remained a generally acknowledged truth that there must be at most one unmarked (or least marked) option, insofar as having several unmarked members in the contrast would definitely void the notion. But note it would be as severely voided if the number of marked (or less unmarked) options was allowed to have no upper boundary and to vary in an unconstrained fashion. In other words, for there to be a meaningful contrast, the marked options must be *limited* in number and, more importantly, they must bear a *definite inherent relation* to the unmarked option. This contrast of $u = 1$ vs. $\{m\}$, $\{m\}$ a closed set whose members can be predicted given u , and vice-versa, we may call extended binarism.

A different type of relation is set up by the concept of default which Bickerton uses. If one instantiation of a given property, say anaphoricity, is by default, i.e. obligatorily chosen *unless* there is a definite reason not to choose it, then there is no a priori limit on the number and types of the nondefault instantiations of the property. To put it another way, [+voice] uniquely contrasts with [–voice] ; unmarked Nominative contrasts with all marked cases, but they count as one unit as far as markedness is concerned. Should we agree, on the other hand, that *each other’s books* is a marked construction, it does not tell us what would be the unmarked construction to express the same idea. The possibilities are numerous : using a phrase that is semantically, but not syntactically a reciprocal anaphor (cf. French *Ils ont lu les livres les uns des autres* – not bad, but not great !), explicating the problem away (cf. French *Chacun a lu le(s) livre(s) de l’autre / des autres* or, more ambiguously, Guinea-Bissau Portuguese Creole *Kada un ley libru di utru*), affixing a reciprocal morpheme to the verb (cf. Wolof *Jëfleente nañu lu gâccelu ci seeni cér /do-Recipr Aux-3pl what be-shameful with their-pl limb/ ‘They did shameful things to each other with their limbs’ – Church 1981 : 299), etc.⁸ More important than the sheer number of alternatives is the fact that they do not form a natural class by any standard.*

⁸ Notice the Wolof example is not actually equivalent to *They read each other’s books* because it means that each did shameful things to the other(s) with his/her own limbs. Similarly, French *Ils se sont lu leurs livres*, which is structurally quite close to the Wolof expression, means that each read his own book to the other(s) and cannot mean that each read the other’s book. But see *Ils se sont volé leurs livres*, which does mean that each stole the other’s book(s), thus showing how complex this area really is.

This of course raises the issue of *syntactic* markedness. Does the notion make sense? An important question in general, but a vital one from our standpoint since, as we saw, creole putative unmarkedness can only be sustained if constructions are considered, that is at the syntactic level. It is therefore a crucial step to determine whether the relevant concept for syntax is markedness as in phonology and morphology, or the much less constrained notion of default.⁹ Two rather different views of syntactic variation and acquisition follow. Under one view, UG includes a set of ideally binary parameters whose values must be set to [+] or [-] by the children in accordance with the primary data they perceive.¹⁰ Since the values are not preset in the child's mind, and being marked is not a reason for a value not to be chosen, it follows that syntactic parameters cannot be set in the absence of processable primary data. Under the other view, in contrast, one value or instantiation of the parameter is given by default, that is to say the child is born with it. This is the one s/he will select unless some cue in the primary data (perhaps in the sense of Lightfoot 1999) forces her/him to modify the default setting in a certain way.

The crucial upshot of the latter view is that it allows for language acquisition in the absence of primary data or, more accurately, in the presence of radically degenerate, unprocessable primary data, possibly reduced to no more than a syntactically unstructured vocabulary – the bare minimum, it seems, since children do not create words or signs *ex nihilo*.¹¹ (Why it is so is a fascinating question that ought to be pursued – for sign language, see Kegl et al. 1999 ; Newport 1999) There is thus an inherent connexion between the choice of default over markedness and the possible abruptness of creolization or language emergence in general, i.e. the assumption that children can tap their language faculty directly when the primary data they are exposed to are degenerate beyond what is usually the case. In return, the fact that full-fledged language does emerge in such adverse conditions – and the best evidence so far is for sign language – is an indication that viewing the Creoles as unmarked languages is not the correct approach.¹²

I will now examine a recent proposal by Roberts (1999), who purposes to demonstrate the unmarkedness of creole languages with respect to a number of main syntactic phenomena, chief among them verb movement, on which I will focus. Notice that in agreement with the foregoing reasoning Roberts's conclusion is that creole languages arose through ordinary, if somewhat extreme language change, thus excluding the possibility of language (re)creation from UG. As he puts it, "The view that creoles, or any class of languages that one might be able to identify pretheoretically, have some kind of privileged relationship with UG is one of which I

⁹ A third possibility that figured prominently in early generative grammar is that markedness is (part of) an evaluation metric over whole grammars (see Battistella 1996, Chapter 4). It does not seem to be directly relevant to our problem. A final eventuality is that neither is relevant, with the implication that syntax varies quite freely. I will not consider it as it is inconsistent with the basic assumptions that sustain the present work.

¹⁰ It is a disputed issue whether open parameters are present in the core grammar component of UG or only in the periphery (on this distinction, see Chomsky 1981). As Battistella (1996 : 81-82) points out, if core grammar is supposed to include only fixed parameters (i.e. principles) it turns out to be the default relative to periphery. For markedness to remain a useful concept, core grammar must also include open parameters.

¹¹ See the discussion on languages of twins in Bickerton (1990 : 190-191). Children also make up secret words parasitic on their native vocabulary, but that is a different issue. By *ex nihilo* creation I mean, e.g., generating words by freely running the innate phonological component of grammar in order to name things (i.e., *not* glossolalia), which does not strike me as a theoretical impossibility.

¹² Unless "unmarked" actually means "default" (see fn. 10).

am skeptical [...] creoles have exactly the same relationship to UG as any noncreole language” (p. 302).

My aim in reviewing Roberts’s argument is to show that they do not carry through, and that the verb’s position in the Creoles he studies and more generally can be accounted for in ways that do not appeal to markedness. I will particularly rely on Williams’s (1994) reassessment of Emonds’s (1978) and Pollock’s (1989) analyses of the differences between English and French in this respect.

2. Verb movement or no : a test for syntactic markedness ?

The assumption that French finite main verbs and auxiliaries move (i.e. raise and adjoin) to the head of the inflectional projection IP whereas English finite main verbs stay in their basic position and only auxiliaries move is founded on well-known contrasts involving predicate adverbs and the negation. *Jean (n’)embrasse pas souvent Marie* (*/Jean (ne) pas souvent embrasse Marie/) thus makes a contrast with *John (does not) often kisse(s) Mary* (*/John kisses not often Mary/), while *Jean (n’)a pas souvent mangé de chocolat* (*/Jean (ne) pas souvent a mangé de chocolat/) shows the same order Auxiliary < adverb/negation < nonfinite main verb as does *John has not often eaten chocolate* (*/John not often has eaten chocolate/).¹³ The same parallelism is further observed in *(Ne) pas manger de chocolat est mauvais pour la santé* (*/manger (ne) pas.../) and *Not to eat chocolate is bad for your health* (*/to eat not.../).¹⁴

Roberts’s account for this evidence relies on Chomsky’s (1993) theory of features. The functional category I contains V (verb) strong or weak features whose function “is to check the morphological properties of the verb selected from the lexicon” (Chomsky 1993 : 28). Strong features as in French are phonologically “visible”, i.e. PF should interpret them, but it cannot because they are not directly associated with phonological matrices. Therefore, they must overtly attract the main verb in order to be spelled out with it.¹⁵ Weak features as in English have no phonological visibility, so they need not overtly attract the main verb to be eliminated, and economy sees to it that they do not attract it overtly (checking takes place covertly at LF). Strength being correlated with the distinctive power of V-features, there is a relation, albeit not a straightforward one, between it and relative “richness” of inflection.¹⁶ That is why the auxiliaries *have* and *be* still move overtly

¹³ Actually the French data given by Pollock (1989) and accepted by Roberts (1999) are strongly idealized, perhaps to a serious degree. To my and other native speakers’ ear sentences like *Marie souvent embrassait son père avant de partir pour l’école* ‘Mary often kissed her father before leaving for school’ are perfectly acceptable, and show no sign (e.g., intonational) of *souvent* not being in its “normal” syntactic position. Various factors seem to play a role, such as the precise scope of the adverb, idiosyncrasies of particular adverbs, and the tense of the main verb (as the contrast finite vs. nonfinite is certainly too crude). I leave this as a caveat.

¹⁴ Notice however that predicate adverbs and the negation part company here in French, since both *Il faut manger souvent du chocolat* and *Il faut souvent manger du chocolat* ‘You must eat chocolate often’ are fine.

¹⁵ More accurately, in order to be eliminated (“checked out”) so that what is delivered to phonology in the position of I, i.e. the inflected verb, is a legitimate PF object. Recall that Chomsky (1993) assumes fully specified lexical representations (*kissed* is a lexical item).

¹⁶ It is not straightforward because relative richness implies that V-features are strong, but the reverse is not true (see Roberts 1999 : 292).

to I in Modern English, because they are more richly inflected than main verbs and modals.¹⁷ The difference does not exist in French.

Given this, it seems a natural, nay a necessary step to assume that weak V-features are unmarked and strong V-features marked. Now consider the following Haitian examples from Roberts (1999 : 304-305) and DeGraff (1997 : 68, 75) :

- (1) Bouki deja pase rad yo (Roberts's 23ii, DeGraff's 7a)
 Bouki already iron cloth the.Pl/3pl
 Bouki has already ironed the(ir) clothes
- (2) Boukinèt pa renmen Bouki (Roberts's 24ai, DeGraff's 40a)
 Boukinèt Neg love Bouki
 Boukinèt does not love Bouki

Haitian is clearly parallel with English and shows an equally obvious contrast with French : cf. *Bouki repassa déjà le linge* (* /déjà repassa/);¹⁸ *Boukinèt (n') aime pas Bouki* (* /pas aime/). DeGraff (1997 : 68-70) demonstrates the same parallel or contrast with other time or quantifying adverbs such as *toujou* 'always', *preske* 'almost', *trè* 'a lot', etc. Roberts's and DeGraff's conclusion is therefore that Haitian like Modern English and unlike French lacks V-to-I movement, from which Roberts draws the additional conclusion that Haitian like Modern English instantiates the unmarked parameter setting for V-feature strength. And the causes for the change from Early Modern French to Haitian are the same as those for the change from Middle to Modern English, viz. loss of inflections and the presence in I of a class of verbal elements – auxiliary *have* and *be* and *do*-support in English, TMA markers similar to auxiliaries in Haitian – leading the child to infer that main verbs need not move, hence do not move.¹⁹

There are several problems with this account. One is that it cannot be empirically generalized beyond French-based Creoles – assuming all of them to behave like Haitian in this respect, for which there is no clear-cut evidence to date.²⁰ English-based Creoles of course are irrelevant. The obvious source of supportive data are the Portuguese-based Creoles. Unfortunately Pollock's tests for I-to-V movements do not readily apply to Portuguese. First, Portuguese has a preverbal negation that gives no clues as to verb movement (cf. *O João não passou a roupa a ferro* 'John did not iron the clothes'). Secondly, adverb placement in Portuguese is a complex matter. Directly relevant for us is the fact that adverbs unambiguously modifying the predicate *may* precede the main verb (cf. *O João sempre passa a*

¹⁷ According to Roberts (1985 ; 1999 : 293) modals and "dummy" *do* are base generated in I. The status of main verb *have* and *be* remains a moot point.

¹⁸ Although it is stylistically awkward I use the simple past *repassa* here in order clearly to show the adverb's position after the main verb (compare *Bouki a déjà repassé*, to which I return).

¹⁹ The fact that English auxiliaries move over the negation (cf. *Bouki is not ironing the clothes*) while Haitian TMA markers stay below it (cf. *Bouki pa ap pase rad yo*) is attributed to agreement morphology which forces *have* and *be* to raise to Agr_S (subject agreement). Haitian TMA markers / auxiliaries, in contrast, are entirely uninflected. Another, possibly more momentous difference is that English main verbs *are* inflected despite being immobile (cf. *Bouki ironed the clothes*) unlike Haitian main verbs (cf. *Bouki pase rad yo* with the same interpretation).

²⁰ See, e.g., Gadelii's (1997 : 195-202) careful study of Lesser Antillean French Creole which suggests that items like *ja* 'already' (= Haitian *deja*) actually are "aspectuals" rather than typical adverbs, and that identifying the latter class in these languages is not such an easy job as one might wish it to be.

roupa a ferro ‘John always irons the clothes’ – see Costa 1996), again offering no primary evidence that V has to move to I.²¹

Portuguese-based Creoles, in particular Capeverdean, reflect this state of affairs (see Baptista 1997). Negation in Capeverdean precedes main verbs and all TMA markers as shown in (3) (Baptista’s 25a, p. 192) :

- (3) João ka sta kume karni
 John Neg T eat meat
 John is not eating meat

This looks quite like Haitian *Jan pa ap manjé vyann*, thus suggesting a weak V-feature in I, but it says nothing as to the hypothesis that creolization basically is unmarking, since Portuguese is just as unmarked (if that is what there is to it) : cf. *O João não está a comer carne*. There is one exception, however, and that is the copula *e* ‘is’ which *precedes* the negation :

- (4) João e ka nha pai (Baptista’s 29a, p. 193)
 John is Neg my father
 John is not my father

The reverse order **/ka e/* is ungrammatical. Baptista’s account for this is by assuming that *e* is unique in that it involves a 3rd person feature which forces it to raise up to Agr_S, much like English auxiliaries. This may or may not be the case.²² Whatever the truth is, Roberts would have to agree that Capeverdean exhibits markedness precisely where his theory expects none. (Note we are dealing with main verb *be* in 4).

Adverb placement is equally inconclusive. Baptista (1997 : 87-91) distinguishes six classes with respect to this parameter. For instance, class I *senpri* ‘always’ and class II *kalmamenti* ‘calmly’ may occur in all the bracketed positions shown in (5) and (6) (Baptista’s 34a-c and 35a-c, p. 88-89)

- (5) (Senpri) João (senpri) bebe (senpri) vinhu (senpri).
 (always) John (always) drink (always) wine (always)
 John always drank wine.
 (6) (Kalmamenti) João (kalmamenti) skuta se fidju (kalmamenti).
 (calmly) John (calmly) listen his son (calmly)
 John calmly listened to his son.

Baptista points out that clause-initial *senpri* – and presumably preverbal *senpri* as well – quantifies over the event (John’s wine-drinking was constant, but he may have drunk other liquids besides) whereas postverbal *senpri* quantifies over the predicate [drink wine] (whenever John drank, it was wine), and clause-final *senpri* is neutral between these two interpretations. The position of *kalmamenti*, in contrast, does not influence the meaning, which is always that of the English translation of (6).

²¹ It is not to deny that main verbs move in Portuguese (that is, if movement is retained as an explanatory device in general) since such things as interrogative inversion are found in the language (cf. *Passou o João a roupa a ferro ?* ‘Did John iron the clothes ?’). The point is there is no test for specific V-to-I movement.

²² If checking person features was enough to induce overt verb movement, we would expect all person inflected verbs to raise above the negation, contrary to fact (cf. Portuguese).

These data are significant on several counts. First, they demonstrate that the relative position of the verb and the adverb cannot be considered the mechanical consequence of moving the former over the latter for reasons that have nothing to do with the adverb's scope. (The same is probably true for English and French – see Costa 1996 and fn. 13). Secondly, even keeping to the V-feature account, Capeverdean would appear now marked (*João bebe senpri vinhu*), now unmarked (*João senpri bebe vinhu*), exactly like its lexifier (cf. *O João bebe sempre vinho*, *O João sempre bebe vinho*).

Portuguese-based Creoles thus seem to offer no independent support to Roberts's markedness account of the formation of Haitian from French. Nor do, it seems, Berbice Dutch (see Kouwenberg 1994 and Lightfoot's 1999 : 168-170 account of why Berbice Dutch is an SVO language with two OV lexifiers, Dutch and Ijo) or Arabic-based Creoles such as Nubi (see Owens 1985), into which I have no space to enter.

The second difficulty lies in the fact that DeGraff's (1997) data on which Roberts bases his account are no less idealized than Pollock's (1989) about French. It is true that adverbs such as *deja* 'already' or *toujou* 'always' precede main *bare* verbs. But DeGraff (1997) does not say anything about their position vis-a-vis TMA markers. According to Joseph (1999) the possibilities are the following :²³

- (7) Minis la (deja) ap (deja) li diskou a (deja).
 minister the (already) T (already) read speech the (already)
 The minister is already reading the speech.

With resultative adverbs such as *gravman* 'gravely' possibilities are even more numerous :

- (8) Ansa sen an (gravman) te (gravman) blese (gravman) doktè a (gravman).
 murderer the (gravely) T (gravely) wound (gravely) doctor the (gravely)
 The murderer gravely wounded the doctor.

Adverbs of time like *raman* 'rarely' may also occur in all these positions, and clause-initially as well. Adverbs like *òdinèman* 'usually', in contrast, are more limited, as they can only occur postverbally and at the end of the clause : cf. *Bouki pase (òdinèman) rad yo (òdinèman)*.

No sweeping generalization may therefore be countenanced. The relative position of verbs, TMA markers and adverbs crucially depends on the semantics of the adverbs, not on some blind syntactic mechanism. A significant observation, moreover, is that all the positions shown in (8) are similarly accessible to the equivalent French adverbs, except the leftmost one (cf. *L'assassin (*gravement) a (gravement) blessé (gravement) le docteur (gravement)*). Assuming that Haitian TMA markers (here *te* [Past]) and French auxiliaries (here *a* 'has') occupy the same syntactic position, all we may conclude with some certainty, then, is that French auxiliaries unlike Haitian TMA markers must move over adverbs. This difference, however, has nothing to do with V-feature strength of I, since auxiliaries are in I. (It may be related to agreement, but see fn. 22.) The proper generalization about surface order for French is thus that predicate adverbs follow the first finite verb, be it an auxiliary or a main verb, hence *Jean a souvent embrassé Marie* vs. *Jean embrasse*

²³ I am grateful to John Lumsden for bringing Joseph's thesis to my attention.

souvent Marie.²⁴ Even that may well be a hasty generalization because *Jean souvent embrasse Marie*, whatever its precise status, certainly cannot be branded as ungrammatical, *pace* Pollock (1989). But let us go by it for the moment.

It suggests an alternative explanation for the position of Haitian *deja* and like adverbs (since no global explanation covering all adverbs is possible or desirable). Suppose that two topological fields are open to these adverbs : a final external field that seems to be always available for all types of adverbs, and an internal field I call the *verb cluster* after Kathol (2000) (for this concept of topological field, see Höhle 1986 ; Heltoft 1992 ; Kathol 2000). For Haitian, we may define the verb cluster as everything that occurs between the negation *pa* and the main verb. Leaving the unselective final field aside, we conclude that adverbs like *deja* must be inserted in the verb cluster. *Deja* may thus precede TMA markers provided it is not higher than the negation, the leftward boundary of the verb cluster (cf. *Minis la (*deja) {vc pa (deja) ap li} diskou a*) ; and it may follow them provided it does not cross the rightward boundary, the verb (cf. *Minis la {vc pa ap (deja) li} (*deja) diskou a*). Rather than invoking verb movement to explain the position of *deja* before bare main verbs as in (1), we will therefore simply consider that *deja* is inside the verb cluster there as well, but TMA is not overtly marked (e.g., *Bouki {vc (pa) TMA (deja) pase} (*deja) rad yo*).

Why do *deja* and adverbs in its class show such partiality to the verb cluster ? The reason may be semantic : *deja* ‘already’, *toujou* ‘always’, *janm* ‘never’, as well as process quantifiers like *preske* ‘almost’, *trè* ‘a lot’, *two* ‘too much’, etc. clearly belong to the tense-aspect domain. On the other hand, *òdinèman* ‘usually’ is also clearly aspectual, but it is excluded from the verb cluster, whereas *gravman* ‘gravely’, a manner adverb not obviously related to aspect or mood, may occur in it. Other factors must therefore come into play. This is not to surprise us, however, with such a complex, multicomponent matter as adverb placement.²⁵

What should seem uncontroversial, in any event, is that the difference between Haitian and French in this matter cannot be one of markedness. No binary contrast of an elementary feature will account for such a complex distribution. The notion of field I used seems to open a more fruitful avenue. A crucial observation already mentioned is that French does not look so different from Haitian when Inflection is overtly expressed by an auxiliary. This is true with adverbs (compare *Jean est déjà venu* with *Jan deja vini* ‘John already came’), and it is also true with the negation (compare *Jean (n’)est pas venu* with *Jan pa vini* ‘John did not come’). Received wisdom has it that French does not accept /*Jean déjà est venu*/ contrary to Haitian (cf. *Jan deja te vini* ‘John had already come’), but, as mentioned, this is far from being a hard-and-fast fact.²⁶

What this suggests – I must leave it as a mere suggestion here – is that the verb cluster in French is defined as in Haitian, but it is bounded on the left by *ne*

²⁴ But keep in mind that *Jean a embrassé souvent Marie* is also grammatical, as are *Jean a embrassé Marie souvent* and *Souvent Jean a embrassé Marie*, with subtle informational nuances between the various constructions.

²⁵ It is certainly not accidental that *òdinèman*, *gravman*, *man*-adverbs in general, probably are relatively recent borrowings from French, while *deja*, *toujou*, etc. must be as old as the Creole itself.

²⁶ *Jean souvent a embrassé Marie* has the same status as *Jean souvent embrasse Marie*. It is not ungrammatical, and the most that can be said about it is that it probably requires a more particular context than does *Jean a souvent embrassé Marie* to be felicitous. (Note : more particular does not mean “more marked”, except in a very loose use of “marked”.)

viewed as a scope marker following Williams (1994).²⁷ Again according to the same author, French *pas* in [(ne) ... V pas] constructions is an adverb with the subcategorizational property that it cannot precede Tense.²⁸ The distributional properties of *pas* follow, in particular the strong ungrammaticality of */Jean (ne) pas vient/, where Tense is fused in the main verb, so *pas* is forced out of the verb cluster. (That such fusion results from V-to-I movement remains as a theoretical possibility, but the point is that negation and adverb placement does not necessarily support it.) Louisiana Creole data, which have been the object of recent detailed scrutiny (see Neumann 1985 ; Rottet 1992 ; DeGraff 1997 ; Becker & Veenstra 2001), demonstrate the same point. Under the assumption that long forms are uninflected for Tense whereas short forms include Tense, the contrast of *mo pa mōzhe* ‘I didn’t eat’ vs. *mo mōzh pa* ‘I don’t eat’ appears fully parallel to the Colloquial French contrast of *J’ai pas mangé* vs. *Je mange pas* : “overt” T precedes *pa/pas*.²⁹ By itself *Mo pa mōzhe* gives no clue as to the position of *pa* vis-à-vis Tense. Other data show it to follow Tense and to precede Aspect (cf. *Mo te pa ape mōzhe* ‘I was not eating’ – compare dialectal French *J’étais pas après manger*), thus leading to the full generalization that in Louisiana Creole like in French the negative adverb *pa/pas* follows Tense, which is covert in *Mo pa mōzhe* as in Haitian *M pa manje*.³⁰

As noted by Williams (1994), French *pas* is also a head in addition to being an adverb (cf. his example *Jean est arrivé pas heureux* ‘Jean came not happy’, where *pas*’s headhood and local scope over the adjective are shown by the fact that *ne* would be ungrammatical). It probably was another crucial factor triggering the reanalysis whereby Haitian *pa* came to occupy the position of the evanescent scope-marking head *ne* of French.

There is no conclusive evidence, then, that negation and adverb placement depend on verb movement, in particular because the arguments in favour of verb movement based on this placement are weak, not to say false. Robert’s (1999) assumption that Creole languages represent the unmarked option in this respect is therefore inconclusive to the same extent. His other arguments leading to similar inferences in other respects will be examined in the next section.

3. Markedness or default ?

In a pioneering article about morphosyntactic markedness Muysken (1981b : 451) proposes the following : “ [...] interpretation which leads to a lack of parallelism in complexity between the syntax and Logical Form is marked, interpretation which preserves the parallelism is unmarked.” And he adds : “At this point we can do no

²⁷ A type 1 negative marker in the terminology of Rowlett (2001), to whose more detailed study I direct the reader.

²⁸ Williams (1994) makes it a general property of French adverbs that they cannot precede Tense. However, as we saw, this generalization cannot be maintained. In fact, many of the French examples which Williams stars, e.g. *Jean récemment parlait à Pierre* (p. 191), I and other native speakers find acceptable. Not preceding Tense must therefore be a special property of *pas* and a few other adverbs such as *toujours* and *jamais*.

²⁹ I put scare quotes around “overt” because Louisiana Creole short forms under this interpretation seem to represent a case of subtractive morphology, a rare but attested phenomenon (see Anderson 1992 : 64-66 ; and Kihm 2001).

³⁰ The difference between Louisiana Creole and Haitian is thus that Tense never incorporates into the verb in the latter. I am grateful to Tonjes Veenstra for discussing Louisiana Creole data with me.

more than regard it as the starting point for further research.” This seems to be a valuable starting point, indeed, with a little reformulation.

Given a (hopefully falsifiable) theory of Logical Form (LF) or semantic representations more generally, parallelism with morphosyntax is something that can in principle be assessed unambiguously. That is to say, there ought to be one and only one way for it to obtain. In contrast, the ways in which morphosyntax and semantics mismatch cannot be bounded a priori. We expect them to be limited, and empirical research shows that they are indeed limited, but it also shows that even within such narrow boundaries there is room for rich variation. This suggests the same point as we made before, namely that markedness is not the proper notion to be used. Rather than unmarked, parallelism in complexity between syntactic and semantic representations is the default setting, which children apply unless they get evidence that it does not apply. Let me illustrate this point by taking up again the issue of verb placement with respect to the negation and adverbs.

Let us assume an overall architecture of grammar basically as in the theory of Distributed Morphology (see Halle & Marantz 1993). The semantic component of grammar – i.e., as distinct from, although related to general semantics or cognition – is the lexicon.³¹ The lexicon is the universal repertoire of language-relevant concepts, of which there are two sorts : substantial and functional. Substantial concepts have denotations in some worlds (entities, events, etc.) and they may be called *roots*. Functional concepts are semantico-logical representations operating on roots and/or other functional concepts (e.g., negation, Tense, etc.). The picture is sketchy and obviously too crude, but it will suffice for our purposes.

Lexical elements, i.e. roots and functional concepts, combine in the lexicon or in syntax. Syntax is not distinct from LF (see Brody 1995) and it may be viewed as a template organized by the relation “A c-commands B” (A^B), where the relevant notion of c-command is *asymmetrical* c-command as in Kayne (1994) (also see Chametzky 2000 for the centrality of c-command as a syntactic relation). Syntactic objects built up from (possibly complex) lexical elements inserted in the template are interpreted at the morphosyntactic interface (Spell Out) where the relation A^B is translated into the relation “A linearly precedes B” ($A < B$) and the elements (or “feature bundles”) are associated with phonological matrices. Spell Out takes place as soon as a syntactic object is assembled which the morphological component interprets as a free form (see Beard 1995 ; Chomsky 1999).

Let us now suppose, reasonably enough it seems, that the default setting for grammar is one where complexity is minimized, i.e. one where there is parallelism à la Muysken (1981b), i.e. isomorphism, between lexical concepts and their syntactic/LF organization, and the linearized phonological layout of these concepts.³² Departures from parallelism leads to more or less complex homomorphisms (see definitions in, e.g., Partee et al. 1990 : 203-205, 253). Negation is surely a functional lexical element. As such, the default syntactic/LF object including negation is such that negation c-commands what it operates upon and linearly precedes it after Spell-Out. Considering that ‘I did not see you at the party’ does not negate the nuclear predicate {see you}, but the tensed predicate {Past {see you at the party}}, it follows that negation defaultly c-commands and precedes Tense. Consequently, Haitian *M pa*

³¹ This view can be traced backed to Borer (1983) as noted by Bickerton (1999 : 56).

³² I should insist that isomorphism between *lexical* concepts and surface forms does not in any way imply one-to-one mapping from semantic structures which, as Seuren & Wekker (1986) correctly remark, is not a reasonable condition to impose upon natural language. On isomorphism also see Hyams (1986).

te wè ou nan pati-a does indeed represent the default structure which we may assume children are born with. In other words, the default setting for the functional lexical element [Negation] is to treat it as a *head* c-commanding the Tense head. In Haitian both heads can be immediately delivered to morphology because they are associated with free forms, again probably the default case as it warrants isomorphy.³³

If the primary data the child is faced with do not match the default setting, she has to adjust to whatever these data turn out to be as long as they fall within the range of what is possible for human languages. Were we in a logic of markedness, the adjustment would be wired-in as well. That is to say, the child's innate core grammar would also include alternative settings to fall back on as soon as the primary data tell her she cannot choose the unmarked option. Minimal exposure to unexpected data, perhaps one occurrence, should then be enough to trigger the switch, since the mechanism is supposed to be there and ready to ignite.³⁴ But how do we explain Haitian? Obviously, children were exposed to some sorts of French data – where would they have got *pa* from otherwise? – which must have included cases of “marked” negation placement, as in *Je comprends pas* ‘I don't understand’.³⁵ Yet, they staunchly kept to the “unmarked” option, or rather the default setting, despite all indications that they should not, also from the substrate if it played a role here (see fn. 35).

What this points to is that rather heavy exposure to nondefault data is actually required before children give up the innate setting,³⁶ which in turn suggests that the alternative solution they finally settle on is not previously available in their minds as such. What is present is grammatical architecture, i.e. possible lexical elements and possible ways to combine them, that filters out any solution incompatible with it – a state of affairs that can only occur when primary data are hopelessly degenerate or children are not exposed to real language at all, that is precisely in situations leading to creolization.³⁷

According to Roberts (1999), as we saw, French is marked because it moves finite verbs over the negation and some adverbs. As we also saw, however, arguments for verb movement, at least as far as negation and adverb placement is concerned, do not go through, and other accounts, e.g. as in Williams (1994), may be preferable. An alternative account in terms of default might then run as follows.

³³ Note that being a free form does not mean being usable in isolation, but it means not being an affix (not being a bound form). Phonological clitics, which *pa* and *te* apparently are, qualify as free forms (see Beard 1995).

³⁴ Apparently, French children say /dü/ with two marked phonemes as soon as they hear it, and they do not try /ti/ instead. Such a state of affairs corresponds to what Pinker (1989) calls “default markedness”.

³⁵ Even if the input was mainly or only pidginized French, it is unlikely that negation placement would have been different in the pidgin from what it is in French. No change occurred, for instance, in Abidjan Pidgin French in this respect (cf. *Leminis i pey pa kurā* /minister 3sg pay Neg electricity/ ‘Ministers do not pay for electricity’ – see Abolou 1994 : 244). Note moreover that negation placement is also nondefault in Haitian's probable substrate Fongbè, where it is clause-final (see Ndayiragije 1993).

³⁶ What Pinker (1989) calls “strength markedness”.

³⁷ This is not to say that all languages bearing the name “creole” arose in this way. Although it is probably too crude, Bickerton's distinction of “fort” vs. “plantation” Creoles is relevant here. For a discussion see Kihm (1995). Tayo appears especially interesting for the present discussion as it is a “mission Creole” which emerged in a few years in the second half of the 19th century, and which deviates from French exactly like Haitian as far as negation placement is concerned, although profound differences are observed in other domains.

Lexical elements have no category by themselves.³⁸ Default categorization for [Negation] is as a negative head, a particle (meaning perhaps “no category”). French departs from defaultness because it categorizes [Negation] as an adverb, linearized relative to Tense, i.e. the main verb if it is tensed or the auxiliary, by a special rule as all adverbs are ($V_T/V_{Aux} < Neg$).³⁹ This is the grammar for Colloquial French to which children are likely to be exposed first. Later, when they already have switched from the default setting, they learn there is another negative element, call it [Negation Scope], spelled out *ne*, that they may insert (but are not obliged to, stylistic considerations apart) in the position where they would have put negation had they been allowed to.⁴⁰

Clearly, the initiators of Haitian (or of any French-based Creole) never had access to *ne*. Nor were they sufficiently exposed to French to give up the default setting, with which they aligned /pa/ having recognized it as the phonological form of [Negation]. They may have been helped in this alignment by cases where French *pas* not operating on Tense is indeed categorized as a negative head. In contrast, as we saw, the grammar of negation in Louisiana Creole is basically the same as in Colloquial French, indicating longer exposure to the lexifier language or, more radically, that creolization proceeded along a different route than it did in Haitian and other French-based Creoles.

Other traits of creole languages which Roberts sees as hallmarks of unmarkedness can be explained by the logic of default. An obvious one are preverbal TMA particles which, in the present framework, constitute morphological free form realizations of functional lexical elements syntactically inserted in a c-commanding position with respect to the VP.⁴¹ The lexifiers, in contrast, have the nondefault option of merging or fusing these lexical elements with the verb, an operation that may take place in morphology or in the lexicon.⁴² Note that such merger or fusion does not offer solid arguments for verb movement in any event, since we do need to assume pre- or postsyntactic operations to explain why English verbs are inflected though they show no sign of moving (see Halle & Marantz 1993 ; Embick & Noyer 1999). Moreover, the default character of preverbal TMA particles is strongly

³⁸ For instance, roots become verbs if they combine with the functional element *v*, nouns if they combine with *n* (see Marantz 1997).

³⁹ The implication is that linearization is then not a translation of c-command as in the default case, which means it is itself nondefault in accordance with the nondefaultness of categorization. Within such nondefaultness considerations of markedness may come into play as far as diverse types of adverbs are concerned (see Cinque 1999 : 128f.). For scope issues see Williams (1994). Another interesting implication which I can only suggest here is that the default instantiation for adverbials would be as particles or auxiliary verbs as is the case in many languages, whereas English or French type adverbs are actually nondefault. Given the way Spell Out proceeds in the present framework, it should not be a problem to have special linearization rules in the morphological component, although the proposal still has to be worked out in detail.

⁴⁰ I am not aware that there are specific enquiries into this matter, but it seems safe to wager that many French speakers never actively acquire this item. Nor are French children likely to encounter before school the few relic expressions where *ne* may function as sole negation (cf. *Je ne saurais dire* ‘I could not tell’).

⁴¹ Perhaps these particles should be categorized as verbs similar to the auxiliary verbs of English or French. I am not sure there is such a crucial matter here, though. What is important in my view is that Haitian *ap*, e.g., represents the spell-out of the fusion of a lexical element whose meaning is, say, [Progressive], whatever that covers, with the lexical element *v* (or a member of the set of lexical elements {*v*}) verbalizing roots. Insofar as *ap* may thus be analysed as something like {Prog {*v*}}, it may indeed be called a verb.

⁴² I would rather assume the latter to be the case, but I cannot elaborate on this here. Strictly speaking, merger or fusion is with *v*, that merges or fuses with a root (see preceding footnote).

supported by the fact that they are present in Arabic-based Creoles, where it does not seem they can be accounted for by substratal influence as has been argued, not unreasonably but not entirely convincingly, for Haitian (see Lefebvre 1998). I will return below to the issue of the interpretation of these particles or of the main verb when no TMA marker appears.

SVO order may also be considered the default setting, and that is the gist of Kayne's (1994) approach to phrase structure. Alternative orders are nondefault rather than marked because deriving them involves more than switching the value of a discrete feature from minus to plus (see, e.g., Nash & Rouveret 1995).

I will have little to say about the other features Roberts considers unmarked, viz. the absence of referential null subjects, i.e. the fact that Creoles are not "pro-drop" languages except in cases such as Haitian *Te fè frèt* /T make cold/ 'It was cold' (Roberts 1999 : 312), and the absence of complement (nonphonological) clitics (cf. Haitian *Bouki renmen li* 'Bouki loves him/her/it' vs. French *Bouki l'aime* – Roberts 1999 : 313).⁴³ Roberts links the possibility of referential null subjects to the marked process of V-raising to Agr necessary to identify the features of the null subject *pro*. As he himself remarks, however, not all languages with V-raising exploit the possibility – for instance, French doesn't – which shows that other factors are active at the very least, thus opening the door to other accounts that might dispense with V-movement altogether. Let me just add that the distribution of nonreferential null subjects in Creole languages is more complex than Robert's examples suggest. Capeverdean seems to allow them more or less in the same conditions as Haitian (cf. *Sta faze kalor oji* /T make heat today/ 'It's hot today' – Baptista 1997 : 299). Closely related Kriyol of Guinea-Bissau, in contrast, does not permit null subjects in such sentences, but it requires a generic noun, not an expletive pronoun, as a subject (cf. *Kaw kinti awos* /place hot today/ 'It's hot today' – Kihm 1994 : 49-50). Only with the raising verb *parsi* 'seem' is a null subject acceptable : cf. *Parsi kuma Jon sta na ospital* 'It seems that Jon is in the hospital', the equivalent of Baptista's (p. 300) example *Parse ki João sta na ospital* (see Kihm 1994 : 237-239). In this case, however, the null subject is arguably not *pro*, but a variable.

As for clitic complements, it is indeed conceivable that they imply more movement than nonclitics. But again having arguments always in the same position irrespective of whether they are pronouns or full nouns appears a reasonable and expected default setting.⁴⁴ The conditions presiding over clitic placement, on the other hand, may be so complex, with (European) Portuguese a good case in point, that they can hardly be made to depend on a simple marking mechanism.

Finally, we must address an issue that figured prominently in debates about Creoles and markedness, namely whether they represent the unmarked case as far as the expression of tense, mood, and aspect (TMA) is concerned. There are two questions here. As we saw, expressing in the sense of morphologically realizing TMA as free form verbal particles fusing a TMA meaning/lexical element with *v* (see fn. 41) probably constitutes the default setting in this domain. But that leaves open the case of *finite bare verbs*, i.e. uninflected verbs not in the scope of an overt verbal particle which nonetheless receive a TMA interpretation. Those verbs are unmarked in the material sense that no bound or free marker is present to which the function of

⁴³ Hyams (1986) actually considers pro-drop the default case because she analyses pronouns as sets of phonologically null features in D-structure, so not having them on the surface maximizes isomorphism. This is not the view of isomorphism defended in the present framework.

⁴⁴ One should probably make an exception for interrogative arguments (wh-expressions), for which fronting seems to be the default setting (see Kihm 1993).

bearing the interpretation can be assigned. Hence the question of whether the TMA meaning or value finite bare verbs are given is also an unmarked one and, by extension, whether the overall TMA system of Creole languages, including overtly marked values, is unmarked with respect to some conceivable universal set of binary TMA values. The issue is addressed in such early works as Bickerton (1981) and Muysken (1981a).

I will not really comment on these works. Muysken shows that Bickerton's attempt to align all creole systems on an unmarked set of three binary values, [α anterior] for tense, [β irrealis] for mood, and [γ nonpunctual] for aspect, does not do justice to the actual complexity of the facts, and his conclusion has been repeatedly confirmed in subsequent works (see, e.g., Kihm 1994 about the TMA system of Kriyol). What seems well established, on the other hand, is that finite bare verbs are always given the same values, i.e. indicative-simple past-perfective or indicative-present-imperfective.⁴⁵ In all languages, allotment depends on the verb's aspectual class in the sense of Dowty (1979) : bare verbs referring to states cannot be past, whereas bare verbs referring to activities or telic eventualities may be (cf. examples (1) and (2) – also see Holm et al. 2000). Languages differ as to the possible interpretation of activity or telic eventuality bare verbs. In Kriyol, for instance, they only have simple past perfective meaning (cf. *Jon kebra karu* 'Jon broke the car') ;⁴⁶ in Haitian, simple past perfective and present imperfective are both possible, but the latter requires special contexts such as the presence of a generic object (cf. *Bouki vann chat-la* 'Bouki sold the cat' vs. *Bouki vann chat* 'Bouki sells cats' – see DeGraff to appear).

Although marking conventions can be used, what seems to be really at issue, then, is how bare verbs one knows to be finite should "normally" be comprehended given their inherent meanings.⁴⁷ It is a question of default interpretation, in other words. In the framework we are applying, it is possible to be even more specific. A bare verb consists in the combination of a root and the functional lexical element v , i.e. $\{v \{R\}\}$, and nothing more. Since roots are categorially unspecified, aspectual classes must be a property of v , meaning that the lexicon includes a set $\{v\}$ whose members are endowed with distinctive aspectual properties (see Arad 1999). Not only does v set the aspectual class of the resulting verb, but it defines the roles born by the potential arguments of $\{v \{R\}\}$. Both these angles of v 's function are inherently linked, since it is well-known that the external argument of a state verb, for instance, does not bear the same role as the external argument of an activity verb : the latter may be called a Causer, while the former is an Experiencer or an Undergoer depending on the semantics of the root which also enters the computation.⁴⁸

The concept of causality is an excellent candidate for being part of the genetically determined cognitive endowment of the human species (and other animal species as well, probably). Its basic tenet is that there is no cause without an effect

⁴⁵ I use Muysken's (1981a) labels for tense and aspect. In Muysken's framework, both the perfective and the imperfective are unmarked, and the simple past is the least marked after the present.

⁴⁶ Present imperfective requires an overt marker (cf. *Jon ta kebra karu* 'Jon breaks the car [every time he drives it]') distinct from the progressive marker (cf. *Jon na kebra karu* 'Jon is breaking/will break the car').

⁴⁷ In the absence of inflection, knowing that a verb is finite or not seems to depend primarily on whether it has an overt subject.

⁴⁸ Verbs may also shift aspectual classes depending on the argument structure they are inserted in (see Dowty 1979). I take no stand here concerning the form of the lexical syntax in which these relations are instantiated (see, e.g., Grimshaw 1990 ; Hale & Keyser 1993 ; Pustejovsky 1996 ; Ramchand 1997).

(no smoke without fire), which implies that in the ordinary world our minds are genetically geared to causes are known or imagined from their observed effects (see Pinker 1997, Chapter 5). Therefore, it seems rather natural that in the absence of an explicit indication to the contrary, in the default case, verbs referring to activities should be interpreted as simple past, i.e. as describing a state of affairs where the effect of the activity is accomplished and visible (cf. “John broke the car”). States, in contrast, must be inferred from an examination of the experiencer or undergoer, hence the present as the default interpretation (cf. “John loves Mary”).

If the foregoing speculations, crude and sketchy as they are, make some sense, we should not be surprised that such default interpretations are not accessible in the languages that served as lexifiers for the Creoles. Indeed, in these inflected languages, Indo-European and Semitic, verbs are never bare in the sense the adjective is used here, i.e. they never consist of merely the root and *v*. More lexical functional elements have to accrue to this basic combination before a verb is formed that may be syntactically inserted and morphologically interpreted.⁴⁹

4. Conclusion

Let me first repeat what constitutes the thrust of this article : the hypothesis that creole grammars are globally unmarked must be rejected by the very logic of markedness theory, which implies a priori sets of one unmarked and one or more marked values for every feature, with an inherent relation between the unmarked and the marked. Such sets do not seem to exist for core morphosyntactic properties. What there is instead is a default setting for these properties, which I assume to be innate, and an indefinite array of nondefault settings which children can only acquire by being exposed to processable primary data.

The obvious question to ask, then, is that of the extension of the default grammar resulting from the mingling of all default settings, which Creole languages are taken to manifest. Two questions are hereby subsumed : (a) Do all the languages we call Creoles equally embody the default grammar, if at all ? (b) To what degree of detail is the default grammar specified, and/or does it potentially provide for all the morphosyntactic properties of natural languages ? The first question harks back to the old and as yet unsettled debate whether Creole languages are a natural class calling for one theory of their origin, or whether different sociohistorical situations made for distinct geneses (see, e.g., Bickerton’s distinction of “fort” and “plantation” Creoles alluded to above). In Kihm (2000) I argued for a mixed answer : Creole languages as a whole are characterized by the fact that their initiators had to rely on their innate grammatical capacities more than is usually necessary, which accounts for the parallel divergences from the lexifiers (e.g., common recourse to preverbal particles). But this “more than usual” may itself be to various degrees, and so many particular factors have to be entered into the calculus that the outcome may indeed look like “order from chaos” (see Lang 2000 ; for the degree of particularity of the factors involved, see Singler 2000).

The second question is tougher – also more exciting – and I will do no more here than briefly illustrate what it points to. An intriguing and rarely discussed peculiarity of Creole languages is that they are more diverse in their nominal systems than they are in their verbal systems. To take one example, French-based Creoles

⁴⁹ This is certainly true even of English where no finite category is entirely devoid of inflection.

have a postposed definite determiner, which is a departure from isomorphism.⁵⁰ Kriyol, on the other hand, has no definite determiner at all, again a departure from isomorphism if we assume the innate lexicon includes a functional element [D] having definiteness, however it is defined, as its content. This difference seems to be rooted in the fact that the Creole initiators were unable to parse the definite articles of the respective lexifiers, French and Portuguese, for phonological reasons.⁵¹ When French was the lexifier, however, there was an easily parsable item they could use to spell out [D], viz. the postposed deictic *là* of *cet homme-là* ‘that man’ or (colloquial) *l’homme là* ‘the man in question’. No such item was available in Portuguese, so [D] remained unrealized in Kriyol.⁵²

Individual Creoles appear thus to be heavily dependent on idiosyncratic features of the lexifiers for the structure of their noun phrases. What this suggests is that there may be no default setting in this domain. That is to say, the default grammar would not specify the inner structure of arguments, whereas it is rather prolix as far as the inner structure of the predicate is concerned.⁵³ If there is some reality behind this speculation, which would be an interesting insight into the language faculty, it is noteworthy that only a reasoning in terms of default is able to open it for us.

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⁵⁰ Since D c-commands the NP, we expect D < NP as the default case.

⁵¹ Hence the frequent amalgamation of the article or part of it in the French-based Creoles (cf. Haitian *lanmè* ‘sea’ < *la mer*, *zanmi* ‘friend’ < *les amis*, etc.). No such amalgamation of the Portuguese article *o/a* is observed in Kriyol, probably because it would yield words beginning with a vowel, which the phonotactics of Kriyol (as well as of surrounding Atlantic and Mande languages) strongly disfavours. It occurs, in contrast, in the Gulf of Guinea Creoles (cf. Principense *umátu* ‘bush’ < *o mato*).

⁵² This can be interpreted in several ways. I take it to mean, not that Kriyol has a null determiner (in the sense of null subject), but rather that [D] is not activated in the particular selection from the innate lexicon the language makes – which does not mean Kriyol cannot express definiteness, a semantic category not uniquely linked to the lexical element [D].

⁵³ This, note, is a different hypothesis than assuming UG to be divided into a core and a periphery.

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