

Revisiting Creole Inflection: Tense and Aspect in Guadeloupean and Cabo-Verdean Creoles

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Early work on Creole languages identified a tense-aspect distinction obtained between stative vs non-stative (or dynamic) verbs (e.g. [Bickerton, 1975](#)). Indeed, in some Creoles, bare stative verbs are traditionally described as expressing present reference in contrast with bare non-stative verbs which get past reference. Examples (1) from Guadeloupean Kréyól and (2) from Cabo-Verdean Kriolu illustrate this property.

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| (1) Kréyól | (2) Kriolu |
| a. an manjé
1SG eat
'I ate' | a. N kumi
1SG eat
'I ate' |
| b. Misyé ni lajan!
man have money
'The man has money!' | b. Kel ómi la ten dinheru!
DEM.SG man there have money
'That man there has money!' |

The distinction is assumed to result from the process of creolization, constituting as such a latent universal. In Bickerton's later work, and in the field in general, the distinction came to be viewed as purely semantic, rather than a lexical feature, and a property of the verb phrase rather than of the predicate as a lexical item, hence dismissing any kind of morphological implications the phenomenon might have.

In this paper, we show that, contrary to general assumptions, this property is an inheritance from the Niger-Congo contributors to Guadeloupean Kréyól and Cabo-Verdean Kriolu. We argue that, from an 'inflectional' perspective, both languages conceptualize viewpoint aspect in a way that is homologous to many of the languages of the Niger-Congo family in that they distinguish marked actional classes of two-phase verbs (see [Botne, 2003](#); [Polančec, 2021](#)), exemplified in (3-4).

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| (3) Akan | (4) Kréyòl |
| a. ɔ-re-wu
3SG-IPFV- die
'S/he is dying' | a. i ka mò
3SG IPFV die
'S/he is dying' |
| b. w-a-dɔ
3SG-PRF-die
'S/he has died' or 's/he is dead' | b. i mò
3SG die
'S/he has died' or 's/he is dead' |

In many Bantu languages and the two creoles, most states are encoded as inchoatives rather than as "pure" states (for Bantu, see [Persohn, 2018](#); [Crane and Persohn, 2019, 2021](#)). That is, depending on context, the same verb form can refer to either an ongoing state or to the entry into a state (5,6).

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| <p>(5) Southern Ndebele</p> <p>a. Ikomo i-non-ile
cow SP-grow.fat-PFV.DJ
‘The cow is fat’ or ‘the cow got fat’</p> | <p>(6) Kréyòl</p> <p>a. i kòlé
3SG PFV
‘S/he is angry’ or ‘s/he got angry’</p> |
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The additional combination of Tense-Aspect-Mood (TAM) markers with the lexical verb thus provides a complex picture of the tense-aspect systems in these languages, where the obtained multi-word expressions do not necessarily constitute a compositional whole. Non-compositionality, along with other diagnostic tests including sandhi effects and the requirement of a host, among other factors, overwhelmingly support an inflectional periphrastic account of TAM marking in these languages.

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| <p>(7) Kréyól</p> <p>a. an ka manjé
1SG KA eat
‘I am eating.’</p> <p>b. Misyé ka mò ka ri!
man KA die KA laugh
‘The man is dying of laughter’</p> | <p>(8) Kriolu</p> <p>a. N ta kumi
1SG eat
‘I eat’ (Habitual)</p> <p>b. N sa (ta) kumi
1SG SA (TA) eat
‘I’m eating’</p> <p>c. N ta kumeba
1SG TA eat-PST
‘I had been eating’ (imperfective)</p> |
| <p>(9) Kiyombe</p> <p>a. Ndi-sûmb-a
1SG-buy-FV
‘I bought’</p> <p>b. Ndi-n-sumb-a
1SG-PRS-buy-FV
‘I buy/am buying’</p> | <p>(10) Tuwuli</p> <p>a. é-tà bàyíkò
3SG-shoot monkeys
‘He shot monkeys’</p> <p>b. é-nyina awã
3SG-know place
‘He knows the place’</p> |

As such, TAM markers need not receive a strict isomorphic representation between form and meaning. Rather their meaning is determined within the context. Our account is compatible with usage-based accounts of language and provides additional insights into the genesis of Creoles languages.

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