

Surinamese Creole TMA and substrate influence

Donald Winford

In this paper, I address the still controversial question of the relative roles of substrate and superstrate input in creole formation. I compare the tense-aspect systems of two Surinamese creoles, Sranan Tongo and Paamaka, with those of six selected Gbe languages, to determine the extent to which the latter may have contributed to the emergence of the former. I argue that the Surinamese creoles share a common ancestry, due to common inputs and processes of restructuring. I assume that creole formation was a process of second language acquisition involving three primary factors:

- Input from versions of the superstrate languages (English and Dutch).
- Input from West African languages, particularly the Gbe family.
- Internal developments.

The comparison of the tense-aspect systems is based primarily on elicited data collected in Suriname and Benin in the last two years. I employed a modified version of Dahl's (1985) questionnaire, which was designed to compare TMA systems crosslinguistically. Data were obtained for each of the TMA categories in the relevant languages. The goal of the study is to determine the set of categories that are common to the two Surinamese creoles, and whether and to what extent this common set can be attributed to Gbe influence. Further questions I address include:

- Can all similarities between Sranan Tongo and Paamaka be explained in terms of substrate influence?
- What role did internal developments play in each case?
- Were there different lines of development in the two creoles due to external influence or other factors?

The framework I use for the comparison of TMA systems is based on Dahl's (1985) and Bybee et al's (1994) studies of TMA crosslinguistically. Following Dahl, I assume that each TMA category has a meaning that consists of several components, one or more of which is "basic" or "dominant" with regard to other "secondary" meanings. Additionally, each TMA category may have different discourse functions and interpretations, one of which is "primary" by contrast with more peripheral uses. Close similarity in meaning and use between categories in the creoles and the substrate language would be strong though not conclusive evidence of influence from the latter.

The discussion is meant to test the following hypotheses:

- Categories that are shared across the (dominant) substrates are most likely to be retained in the creoles.
- Surface structures common to the (dominant) substrates (means of expression - preverbal, periphrastic, etc) will be retained in the creole.

- Superstrate forms whose syntax (positioning) and semantics (partly) match those of substrate functional heads will be selected to express the functional categories of the creole.

The findings indicate that Gbe played a significant role in the emergence of several core tense-aspect categories in the creoles, including Imperfective and Perfect aspect, and the unmarked (Perfective) verb. However, other categories, such as Future and Past tense, and modals like *sa* and *kan*, have to be explained in terms of internal developments, or external (mostly Dutch) influence. There are also parallels with Gbe in the combinatory possibilities of TMA auxiliaries found in these creoles. Finally, I discuss the implications of the findings for theories of creole formation.