

Is grammaticalization in Creoles interesting?

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In the occasional research on the possible intersection between creole studies and grammaticalization, a general conclusion has been that what appears to be grammar-internal grammaticalization in a creole is generally modelled on source language equivalents. For example, Bruyn (1996) argued that the use of talk as a complementizer in Sranan Creole is traceable to the like usage of the talk verb in West African languages spoken by Sranan's creators; scholars such as Mufwene (1996) have concurred.

I will argue that in fact, grammaticalization has much more often been an independent process in creole languages. My demonstration case will be Saramaccan Creole, based mainly on English and the Niger-Congo language Fongbe. In this creole, Fongbe played a crucial role in providing various constructions through direct transfer at the time of genesis, such as serial verb constructions, as well as direct borrowings such as focus marker *wɛ*. However, amidst the Saramaccan constructions analyzable as derived from stepwise grammaticalization, as opposed to transfer, almost none can be traced to Fongbe models.

This includes the bulk of the tense-mood-aspect system; a paradigm based on the intersecting function of new information markers and temporal conjunctions; negator and copula morphemes; and nascent evidential constructions and accusative marking.

The implication is that grammaticalization in creoles is not simply a matter of continuations of source language processes, a claim in line with the common but questionable idea that creole genesis has been mistaken as a process connected to second-language acquisition to any unusual degree, and that a model of creole genesis need only stipulate the combination of source language features. Rather, a creole language is a laboratory of grammar-internal grammaticalization processes. Grammaticalization has taken place with unusual rapidity: note that it would be impossible to identify a like degree of grammaticalizations in English, Portuguese or Dutch over just the past three hundred years.

I will argue that the reason for this prolific grammaticalization is that in a language born recently of a pidgin-level variety, there is an unusually large space for grammaticalizations to occur, given that in new languages of this kind, so often a newly emergent distinction will have no pre-existent competitors.

Bruyn, Adrienne. 1996. On identifying instances of grammaticalization in Creole languages. *Changing meanings, changing functions*, ed. by Philip Baker and Anand Syea, 29-46. London: Westminster Creolistics Series.

Mufwene, Salikoko. 1996. Creolization and grammaticization: what creolistics could contribute to research on grammaticization. *Changing meanings, changing functions*, ed. by Philip Baker and Anand Syea, 5-28. London: Westminster Creolistics Series.