

Induction of French structures into Creole grammar in the French overseas

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- I. Presentation of the study
- II. Theoretical models
- III. Examples of syntactic phenomena
- IV. Synthesis

State of the art

Few readily available corpora for French-based Creoles spoken in the « Départements Français d'Amérique » (Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane)

Written works (ex. Raphaël Confiant, Georges Mauvois, Thérèse Létin ...)

Highly heterogeneous « web » corpora (chats, forums) – uneasy to store & edit

Few oral transcripts (exc. in Ludwig, Telehid, Bruneau-Ludwig, 2001)

Few studies on the linguistic aspects of the contact phenomenon itself (parasitic phenomenon for “pure” creolists)

Exc. Goury, Léglise & Klinger (eds.) 2005; Sobotta 2006

Creole spoken on the radio : last study in the French Lesser Antilles 1993 (DU/LCR Daniel Dobat, U.A.G.)

Few electronic transcriptions

I	I.1	◐◑
	I.2	◑◑
	I.3	◑◑
II	II.1	◑
	II.2	◑
	II.3	◑◑◑
III	III.1	◑
	III.2	◑◑◑◑
	III.3	◑◑◑◑
	III.4	◑
IV	IV.1	◑

Present study

Corpus collected and transcribed by two students of the *Language Studies* master programme, in Martinique (Université des Antilles et de la Guyane) : Christelle Lengrai and Juliette Moustin

Part of the CELIA (*Centre d'Étude des Langues Indigènes d'Amérique*) *Language Contact* corpus, presently under standardization process

corpus collection on miscellaneous radio or TV broadcasts in Martinique

between october 2005 and february 2006

4h40 broadcast transcribed, 35 000 words

I	I.1	●■
	I.2	○○
	I.3	○○
II	II.1	○
	II.2	○
	II.3	○○○
III	III.1	○
	III.2	○○○○
	III.3	○○○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

Lesser Antilles French Creole

Genetic status: French-based Creole language

Lexicon : at least 90% French (Grammar : quite different)

Origin and relationship:

Genesis (Chaudenson 1992, Mufwene 2005): a linguistic community originally speaking French (or more accurately some *koiné* of French dialects) grows with the incremental input of heterogeneous non-French-speaking people (African slaves). First it grows slowly, then very quickly (language evolution “loses ground”), and eventually gets stable → Creole

Relationship: there is (arguably) a family of related French-based Creole dialects in the Atlantic/Caribbean area, from Louisiana to Guiana (Pfänder 2000): Louisiana (nearly extinct), Haiti, Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, Saint-Lucia, Trinidad (extinct), French Guiana, Brazilian state of Amapá

Official status: regional language in France (cmp. Haiti)

Ecolinguistic competition with the lexifier language (cmp. Saint-Lucia, Dominica)

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	◐○
	I.3	○○
II	II.1	○
	II.2	○
	II.3	○○○
III	III.1	○
	III.2	○○○○
	III.3	○○○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

Evolution of the sociolinguistic ground

Stable situation until the first half of the 20th century:
“classical” diglossia (Ferguson 1959) (cmp. Creole in Haiti)

Language demographics: majority of Creole speakers, minority of bilingual Creoles/French speakers, no French monolinguals (among the locally born)

Domains of use: the two languages are used in distinct spheres, and each one of them is unchallenged in its sphere

Present situation: regional language within the frame of the French state, in its first stage of regression (cmp. Occitan a few decades ago)

Language demographics: hardly any monolingual Creole speaker, generalized bilingualism, development of a “quasi-monolingualism” in French in parts of the population (March 1996, Barreteau 2006)

Domains of use: the borders are not so clear-cut anymore: Creole is spoken on the radio, and informal conversation among friends can occur in French (Sobotta 2006)

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●■
	I.3	○○
II	II.1	○
	II.2	○
	II.3	○○○
III	III.1	○
	III.2	○○○○
	III.3	○○○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

Rise of Creole in the media

From the seventies onward, Creole has been playing a part in the mass media in the French West Indies and Guiana (Pulvar 2005) ...

first as a social proximity marker — or derision (depending on the public) — with respect to “petit peuple” ...

it gradually comes along with movements claiming cultural (and political) rights, in a context of:

Socio-economic crisis in the FWI (fall of the sugar cane industry), and ...

Wake of consciousness for regional identity (like in other French regions).

Later it becomes common, then unnoticed.

Paradoxically, this rise of Creole in the public sphere is taking place at the same time as the beginning of an actual decline.

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	◐○
II	II.1	○
	II.2	○
	II.3	○○○
III	III.1	○
	III.2	○○○○
	III.3	○○○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

Who's mirroring whom? (*Kreolenspiegel*)

Radio hosts speak Creole to be more intimate with the public

Reciprocally, the public (esp. the young) speaks Creole like they hear it on the radio

→ Mirror game : who is imitating whom ?

Radio broadcasts are comparable to a virtual *agora*, a marketplace where everyone looks how the others behave (linguistically) and gets ready to align their own behaviour (cmp. consumer behaviour in economy; Pulvar 2005) ...

→ From a sociolinguistic standpoint it's an interesting node of the "language diffusion network" to look at ...

... even if it does not reflect actual language use in the local communities ...

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●■
II	II.1	○
	II.2	○
	II.3	○○○
III	III.1	○
	III.2	○○○○
	III.3	○○○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

Sociolinguistic models: diglossia vs. continuum

Two systems model (classical diglossia, Ferguson 1959) :

CREOLE // FRENCH

→ BUT: Interferences are hard to account for

Continuum model (Prudent 1981, see also de Rooij 1994) :

CREOLE ↔ FRENCH (everything is interlect)

→ BUT: Which system are linguists describing?

Double continuum model (Bernabé 1983, MCHM 1996) :

CREOLE CONTINUUM (basic Creole ↔ frenchified Creole)

FRENCH CONTINUUM (standard French ↔ creolized French)

→ Two systems, both having a great internal variability

Two systems, and some non-native varieties (Sobotta 2006) :

CREOLE (L1) VAR / CREOLE (L2) // FRENCH (L2) / FRENCH (L1) VAR

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●●
II	II.1	◼
	II.2	○
	II.3	○○○
III	III.1	○
	III.2	○○○○
	III.3	○○○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

The interlect, *live*

*C'est le fait que vèn a pé subi des stress les plus **diverses**, des stress répétés comme par exemple le fait que ou ka manipulé des charges plus ou moins **lourd**, ou bien des charges pli léjè mais de manière fréquente, ou pé ni an environnement ki pé, ki ka favorizé mauvaise circulation an, par exemple, le fait que ka fè cho, le fait que ni humidité, le fait que ou ka travay, par exemple, adan an navion éti ou ka ni des différences de pression ki ka exercé ko yo au niveau (Ø) circulation et au niveau ko'w, sé pou sa lé moun ki ka voyajé ében yo sav bien ke lè ou adan avion-a sa ka rivé'w de manière épisodique, de manière rare, mais ou ka santi quand-même que lè ou asiz adan avion-a, lé ou asiz adan avion-a pendant wité d'tan eh bien jamb ou ka vini lou et que souvent si ou tiré soulié'w adan avion-a eh bien ou pa a rivé mété soulié-a an didan pié'w paske pié i gonflé et que soulié-a limenm i pa gonflé i pa dilaté ko'y.*

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●●
II	II.1	●
	II.2	◼
	II.3	○○○
III	III.1	○
	III.2	○○○○
	III.3	○○○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

Contact linguistics models: convergence or decreolization?

Creole and French in the Antilles are in a situation of structural convergence (Winford 2003, chap. 3) favoured by bilingualism (*stable* or *unstable*?) and code mixing

Antilles local French is connected with the larger mass of the French-speaking community

→ French moves less towards Creole than Creole does towards French

Some term this situation *decreolization* (Bickerton 1980), but the notion has been criticized (discussion in de Rooij 1994): it is meant to imply ineluctability, which is not universally true

De Graff (2005) suspects the notion of decreolization is an instance of “creole exceptionalism”

(the idea that creoles are doomed to merge into their lexifier is connected to the idea that they are intrinsically impaired)

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●●
II	II.1	●
	II.2	●
	II.3	◐○○
III	III.1	○
	III.2	○○○○
	III.3	○○○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

Contact linguistics models: convergence and attrition

Thomason & Kaufman (1988: 98-99) about creole/lexifier convergence:

(1) it may be favoured by typological proximity, or at least by lexical relationship;

(2) it is favoured by intensity of contact anyway;

(3) it follows the usual trends (speakers borrow lexicon, and then structure that comes along);

(4) “decreolization” is a complex mixture of borrowing (lexifier into creole) and shift (linguistic consequences of attempts to shift to lexifier);

(5) when it comes to attrition, it also follows the usual trends (loss of structure due to lack of practice)

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●●
II	II.1	●
	II.2	●
	II.3	●◻○
III	III.1	○
	III.2	○○○○
	III.3	○○○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

Contact linguistics models: convergence though code mixing

Myers-Scotton (2002: 184) about causes of language shift:

“A [...] reason for speakers to shift languages is more speculative: the model that current speakers use themselves may develop a composite *Matrix Language* as its frame, based on more and more abstract grammatical input from the dominant language in the picture. At some threshold point, speakers may just drop the composite and shift to the dominant language. This means that shift is not necessarily gradual for many speakers in the final analysis. **It may be that speakers reach a point where speaking a variety with much bilingual input in the grammatical frame means too much ‘cognitive weight’.**”

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●●
II	II.1	●
	II.2	●
	II.3	●●■
III	III.1	○
	III.2	○○○○
	III.3	○○○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

« Le créole n'a pas de grammaire » (folks wisdom)

Creole still largely remains an oral language, and there is no prescriptive grammar taught at school

(*Précis de grammaire créole* : Bernabé 2003)

This leaves room for a large internal variation (de Rooij 1994)

Variation axes may be diatopic (e.g. town/land), diastratic (e.g. basilect/acrolect), or a combination of both (Bernabé 1983)

Here we only have access to the variation parameters witnessed in the present radio corpus, which erases diatopic variation (one seldom knows where the people who speak on the radio come from), and does not let much diastratic variation get through

→ something close to “unconstrained” (?) variants in the system

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●●
II	II.1	●
	II.2	●
	II.3	●●●
III	III.1	◼
	III.2	○○○○
	III.3	○○○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

Reflexivity in Antilles French Creole (1)

1. Non reflexive verbs in Creole (traditionally):

I ka promènè (cmp. French *je me promène*)
 3SG IMPF stroll
He's strolling

Man ka alé benyen (cmp. French *je vais me baigner*)
 1SG IMPE go bathe
I'm going to bathe

Joseph, lèvé! (cmp. French *Joseph, lève-toi!*)
 Joseph stand
Joseph, stand up!

Déchaine & Manfredi 1994, Damoiseau 1999: *réflexivité inhérente*; Muysken & Smith 1994: *null form reflexivity*. I (like Zribi-Hertz & Glaude 1997) prefer to think: simply *non reflexive verbs!* (the presence of a null reflexive is postulated by comparison with another language where the verb is reflexive)

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●●
II	II.1	●
	II.2	●
	II.3	●●●
III	III.1	●
	III.2	◼○○○
	III.3	○○○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

Reflexivity in Antilles French Creole (2)

2. Reflexive grammaticalized NP (self-accusative) « ko + POSS »:

Adan di i séré ko -y pas i wè i té tou ni
 Adam say 3SG hide body -3SG.POSS because 3SG see 3SG PAST all naked
Adam said he hid himself because he saw he was naked

Jenn -an lé ba ko -y balan
 Young DEF want give body -3SG.POSS impulse
The young person wants to get in motion

(Cases of “real” accusativity)

3. Archaic form with bare pronoun:

Ou ka alé benyen 'w (Guad)
 2SG IMPF go bathe -2SG
You are going to bathe

Alé sizé 'w (Guad)
 Go sit -2SG
Go get seated

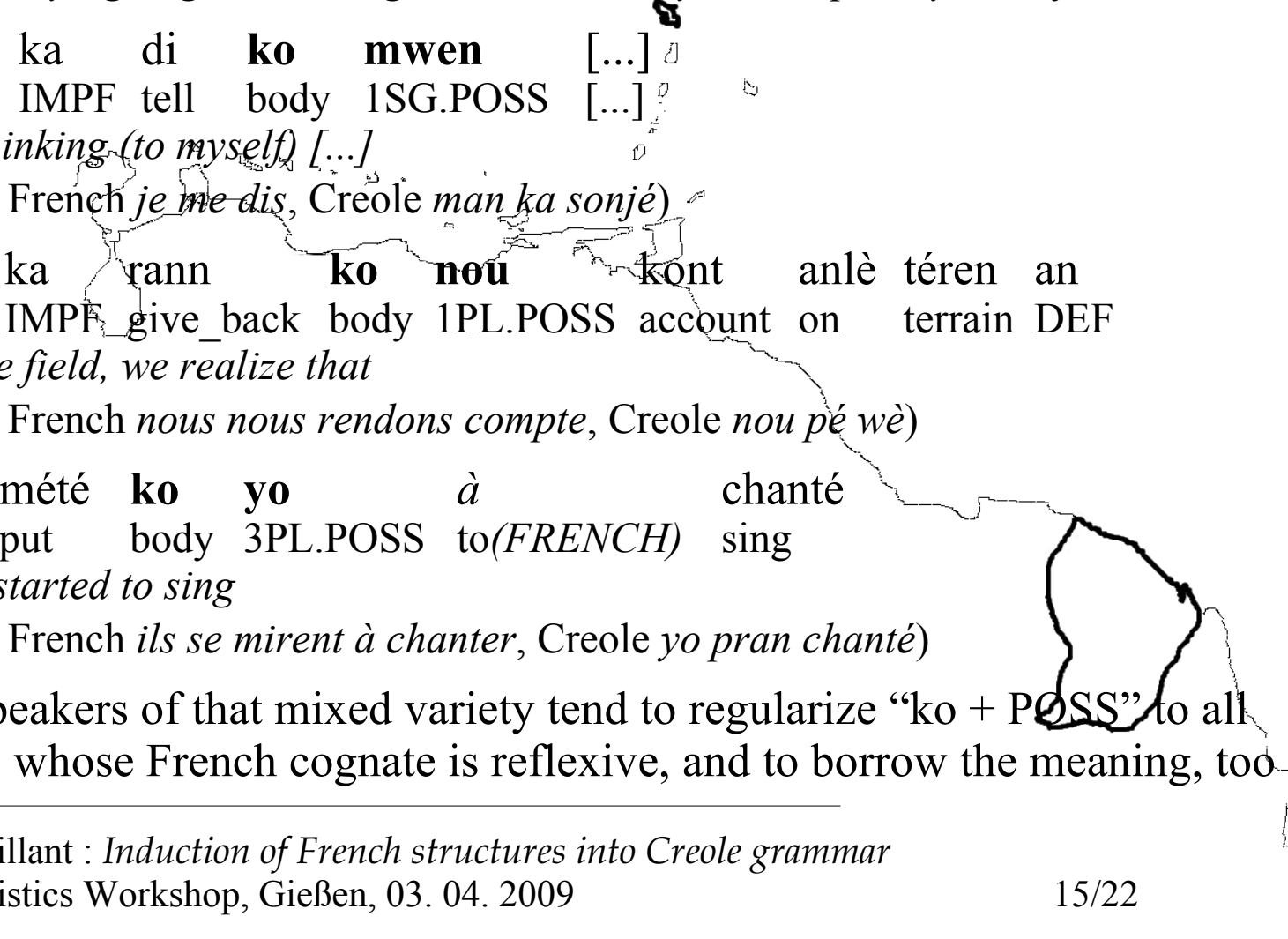
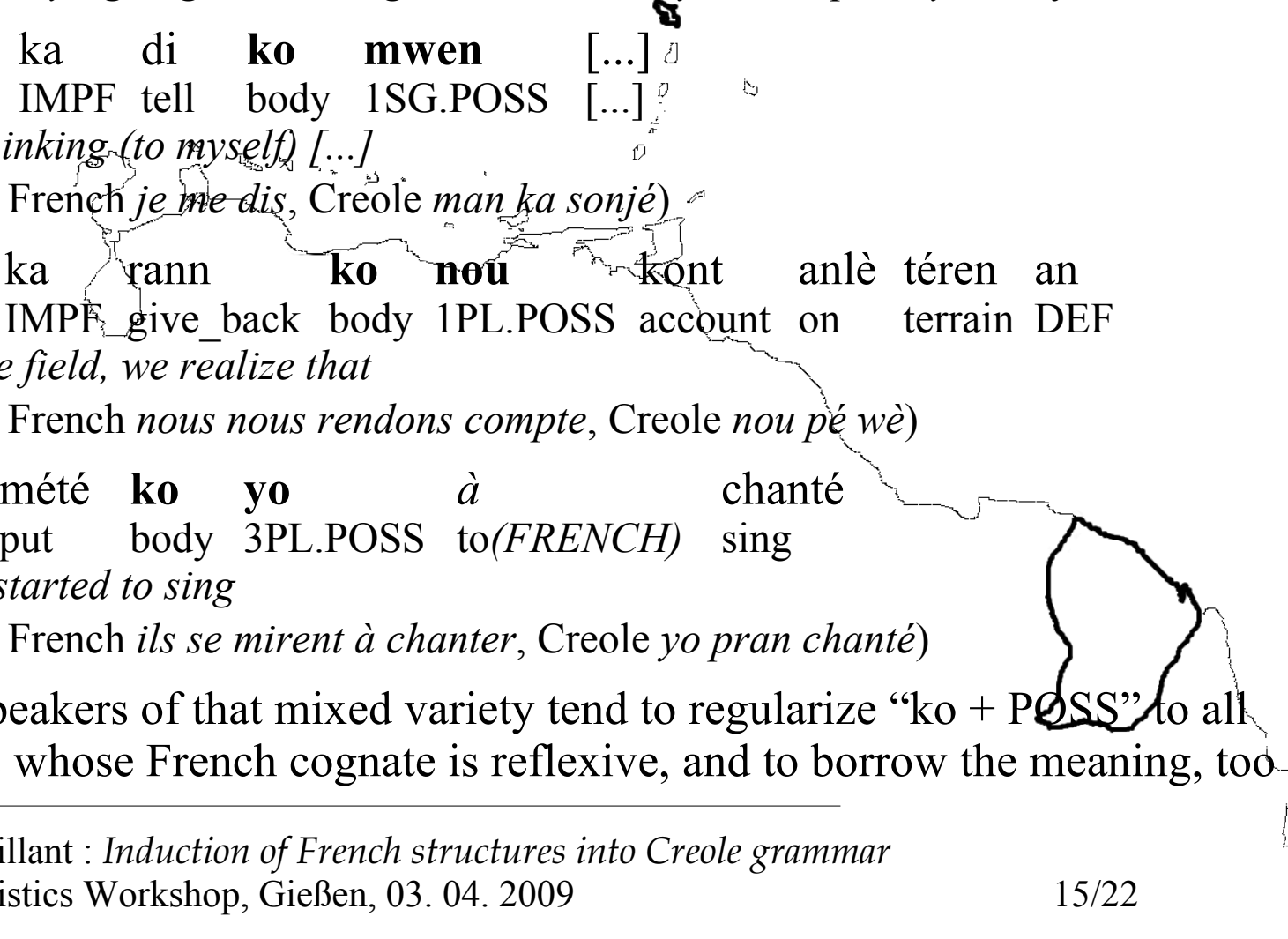
(Archaic in Martinique and Guiana; still to be heard in Guadeloupe, reported to be in steady use for certain verbs in Haitian (Déchaine & Manfredi 1994))

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●●
II	II.1	●
	II.2	●
	II.3	●●●
III	III.1	●
	III.2	●◻○○
	III.3	○○○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○



Use of “ko + POSS” in the Lengrai-Moustin corpus

Ou ka eséyé rantré adan an lojik ka permet ou esprimé **ko 'w**
 2SG IMPF try get_in into INDF logic IMPF allow 2SG express body -2SG.POSS
You're trying to get into a logic which allows you to express yourself

Man ka di **ko mwen** [...] 
 1SG IMPF tell body 1SG.POSS [...] 
I'm thinking (to myself) [...]
 (cmp. French *je me dis*, Creole *man ka sonjé*)

Nou ka rann **ko nou** kont anlè téren an
 1PL IMPF give_back body 1PL.POSS account on terrain DEF
On the field, we realize that
 (cmp. French *nous nous rendons compte*, Creole *nou pé wè*)

Yo mété **ko yo** à chanté
 3PL put body 3PL.POSS to(FRENCH) sing
They started to sing
 (cmp. French *ils se mirent à chanter*, Creole *yo pran chanté*)

→ Speakers of that mixed variety tend to regularize “ko + POSS” to all verbs whose French cognate is reflexive, and to borrow the meaning, too

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●●
II	II.1	●
	II.2	●
	II.3	●●●
III	III.1	●
	III.2	●●◻○
	III.3	○○○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

What happened to *my body*?

Observable phenomena:

- “PAT” borrowing of French reflexive
- Frequent calque of contemporary French set expressions
- (even more) semantic bleaching of the “genuine” reflexive construction *ko + POSS*

→ A case where there is as much structural borrowing as lexical borrowing (opposite to what is expected in classical situations of “borrowing under cultural pressure” (Thomason & Kaufman 1988))

→ Rather symptomatic of language shift, but goes as if French speakers were shifting to Creole!

→ Attrition

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●●
II	II.1	●
	II.2	●
	II.3	●●●
III	III.1	●
	III.2	●●●■
	III.3	○○○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

Expressing the plural of nouns

French system

le Haïtien (DEF +N.SG)

un Haïtien (INDF +N.SG)

les Haïtiens (DEF +N.PL)

des Haïtiens (INDF +N.PL)

(received) Creole System

Ayisien-an (N +DEF) : *postposed singular def. det.*

an Ayisien (INDF +N)

sé Ayisien-an (PL + N + DEF) : *preposed plural def.*

Ayisien (N) : *plural indefinite and generic degree*

(« ravèt pa ka ni rèzon douvan poul »)

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●●
II	II.1	●
	II.2	●
	II.3	●●●
III	III.1	●
	III.2	●●●●
	III.3	◼○○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

Attested constructions in the Lengrai-Moustin corpus

lé + N : man li **lé** pawol ki manniè bondié **kréé** nonm

lé oditè ka palé kréyol

[...] sa yo kriyé *interactivité* an fwansé épi **lé** zoditè

lé + N + DEF : **lé jenn-lan** pa lé travay pou anyen

lé moun-lan ka palé

dé + N : **dé** moun ka poté **dé** chaj (*plural indefinite*)

Expressing the plural of nouns: variation and choice

Great variation in the possibilities to express the plural

For the plural definite, the *sé + N + DEF* form is classically described as the only “genuine” Martinican construction

Yet in the Lengrai corpus, there are 133 occurrences of *lé* vs. 92 occurrences of *sé*.

French influence: obvious

... along with other factors:

(1) diatopic variation (*lé* used on the East Coast of Martinique)

(2) variation has plausibly always been there, recent French influence is simply exerting more pressure on one end of the variation space

Future of the plural marking system: elimination of variation?

Not necessarily, functional specialization might take place.

[...] **sé moun -lan** té kontan, soutou **lé moun -lan** ki soti lot bò
 PL1 people DEF PST happy espec. PL2 people DEF REL come from other side
The people were happy, especially those people coming from abroad

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●●
II	II.1	●
	II.2	●
	II.3	●●●
III	III.1	●
	III.2	●●●●
	III.3	●◻○○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

Relative clause

Subject case: pronoun “ki” (< fr. *qui*) is (nearly) always used

dé moun **ki** ka palé kréyol osi

BUT : ni dé moun Ø ka palé ba zot an fwansé (*rare but possible*)

Object case:

French system: le potage **que** j'ai mangé était chaud (mandatory)

Creole system: soup-la Ø man manjé a té cho (optional)

OR : soup-la **ke** man manjé a té cho

Examples from the corpus :

oswè-a man ka risouwrè [...] Sonia Mark di la Soso Ø tout moun konnet
yo kontan trouvé bagay **ke** moun ka fè

→ Use of the obj relative “ke” tends to spread. It seems plausible to assume that this is under French influence (*que*).

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●●
II	II.1	●
	II.2	●
	II.3	●●●
III	III.1	●
	III.2	●●●●
	III.3	●●◻○
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

Subordinate clause

French system:

je pense **que** tu es venu

Creole system:

man ka pansé Ø ou vini

OR : man ka pansé **ke** ou vini

Examples from the corpus :

man ka pansé Ø pa ni jenn ankò

1SG IMPF think NEG have young still

I think there is no youth anymore

mwen ka pansé ke lé bay ki *important c'est de cerner les causes déclencheuses*

1SG IMPF think that PL thing REL *important it is to spot the cause. PL triggering F.PL*

I think that what is most important is to spot the triggering causes

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●●
II	II.1	●
	II.2	●
	II.3	●●●
III	III.1	●
	III.2	●●●●
	III.3	●●●□
	III.4	○
IV	IV.1	○

Remarks on the contexts of occurrence

Use of the pluralizing morpheme “lé”, to express the plural of nouns, is more frequent in the sub-corpus *Discussion about the media*: nouns which mostly occur in the plural definite form in French (e.g. *les médias*, *les auditeurs* ...: collective nouns) are borrowed in their plural form, and with their article (concurrent forms: *lé oditè*, *lé zoditè*)

In the corpus, the “ke” object relative pronoun occurs, in the majority of cases, right behind French words, or French sounding words

→ grammar follows lexicon (Thomason & Kaufman 1988)

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●●
II	II.1	●
	II.2	●
	II.3	●●●
III	III.1	●
	III.2	●●●●
	III.3	●●●●
	III.4	◻
IV	IV.1	○

Synthesis

1. In the regions of Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana, which are administratively and politically ruled by France (unlike Haiti, Dominica, or Saint-Lucia), a widespread Creole/French bilingualism leads to a situation of intensive contact
2. In many layers of society, and for various semantic domains, speaking Creole implies intensive code mixing with embedded French
3. The Creole lexicon is open to the French lexicon: every French word is a potential Creole word (not the other way)
4. The Creole syntactic system has many available alternative forms on a given number of variation axes (e.g. reflexivity, pluralization, relative pronouns, complementizers ...). On every axis, the alternative variant which is structurally closer to the French preferred form tends to increase in probability: the spreading of French-like structures is favoured by induction.

I	I.1	●●
	I.2	●●
	I.3	●●
II	II.1	●
	II.2	●
	II.3	●●●
III	III.1	●
	III.2	●●●●
	III.3	●●●●
	III.4	●
IV	IV.1	◻

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