
TENSE AND ASPECT IN CAYENNE CREOLE

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Abstract

A detailed diachronic study of the lexically French Cayenne Creole of French Guiana reveals that the preverbal tense-aspect marker system differs significantly from the system that Bickerton (1974, 1981) claims to be typical of creole languages. The study also concludes that the system evolved significantly over more than a century. The roles and evolution of two distinct irrealis markers over 150 years are examined, and found to indicate an evolution of the marker system that began with the ‘nonpunctual’ marker and then added the ‘irrealis’ marker. Analysis of the ‘anterior’ marker shows that this was the last to be added to the system. Despite occurring several generations after the genesis of the creole, the evolutionary trends in the predicate marker system clearly indicate that the system as it is today bears little resemblance to the way the first speakers of Cayenne Creole marked tense and aspect.

1. Introduction¹

Cayenne Creole developed from contact between French settlers and their African slaves in the South American plantation settlement of French Guiana.² It was the native language of the French colonists’ children by 1743, and of the slaves’ children at least a generation earlier. Cayenne Creole probably emerged between 1690 and 1710, or thirty to fifty years after the first slave ship brought Africans to the colony (Jennings 1995). Dialects of the new language arose in the 19th century when colonisation expanded beyond

Cayenne into other regions of French Guiana, and when speakers of the lexically French creole of Martinique settled in parts of the colony (see Corne 1971 for a description of the Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni variety). In the last few decades, the influence of standard French, notably in broadcasting, has led to the decreolisation of the language. Fauquenoy-Saint-Jacques (1978:4) has heard this decreolised version described by its speakers as ‘mauvais créole’ [bad creole] or ‘guyanais corrompu’ [broken Guianese], but the language has recently acquired a wider function as a lingua franca between recently-arrived non-francophone immigrant communities (Schlupp 1997:5-6). In this paper the term Cayenne Creole will be used to refer to the Cayenne dialect of French Guianese Creole before the period of decreolisation.

The first recorded phrase of Cayenne Creole comes from 1744, and others from 1797 and 1824. The principal 19th century sources are an 1848 abolition proclamation (Sournia 1976:3-8), a grammar accompanied by fables, songs and poems (Saint-Quentin 1872) and a novel written in a conversational and familiar style, *Atipa* (Parépou 1885). Principal 20th century sources are the studies of Horth (1948), Saint-Jacques-Fauquenoy (1972), Contout (1973), Peyraud (1983) and Schlupp (1997). Other French Guianese Creole dialects are described by Corne (1971) and Tobler (1983). Modern literary sources used in this paper are Lohier (1980), Bricault (1976) and Francius and Chanol (1987). Note that the authors’ original spelling will be used in all examples in this paper.

Cayenne Creole conforms to all definitions of a creole language. For example,

Creoles are languages born of the European colonisation of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in societies, generally insular, where the arrival of large numbers of slaves, made indispensable by agro-industrial development, modified the mode of transmission of the European language. (Chaudenson 1995:93, my translation)

Bickerton (1981: 4) states that a language is a creole if it arose ‘out of a prior pidgin which had existed for not more than a generation’ in a population ‘where at most 20 per cent were speakers of the “dominant” language and where the remaining 80 per cent were linguistically diverse’. Corne (1995: 121) has suggested that the term ‘creole’ is ‘fundamentally useless’ since ‘there are no “Creole languages” in a linguistic and typological sense’. Indeed

most recent definitions of creoles refer to sociohistorical and demographic criteria rather than linguistic ones (e.g. Baker and Corne 1986). Nevertheless, a number of creole languages share apparently similar linguistic features, especially in the way they mark tense and aspect. Such creoles usually arose rapidly in a European slave-based plantation colony, generally in the Americas or the Indian Ocean during the 17th and 18th centuries, from language contact between Africans and Europeans, where the former substantially outnumbered the latter. Cayenne Creole fits this historical description, and this paper investigates whether its tense-aspect system conforms to the Bickertonian model.

2. The ‘typical’ tense-aspect system

For this paper, the ‘typical’ tense-aspect system corresponds to a list of similar features cited by Bickerton (1974: 5-6, 1981: 58), based on his comparison of Sranan, (lexically English) Guianese, Haitian and Hawaiian Creole. Bickerton has apparently compared the modern systems of these languages, as if they had not changed since their inception. These features are as follows:

- (a) The zero form marks simple past for action verbs and nonpast for state verbs.
- (b) A marker of anterior aspect indicates past-before-past for action verbs and simple past for state verbs.
- (c) A marker of irrealis aspect indicates ‘unreal time’ (= futures, conditionals, subjunctives, etc) for all verbs.
- (d) A marker of nonpunctual aspect indicates durative or iterative aspect for action verbs, and is indifferent to the nonpast/past distinction. This marker cannot normally co-occur with state verbs.
- (e) All markers are in preverbal position.
- (f) All markers can combine, but in an invariant ordering, which is: anterior + irrealis + nonpunctual.
- (g) The meaning of anterior + irrealis is ‘an unrealised condition in the past’ (Bickerton 1974: 5-6).

- (h) The meaning of anterior + irrealis + nonpunctual is ‘an unrealised condition in the past, of a nonpunctual nature’ (Bickerton 1974: 5-6), something like *if only X would have gone on doing Y ...*
- (i) The meaning of anterior + nonpunctual is ‘a durative action or series of nondurative actions taking place either before some other event under discussion, or during a period of time regarded as definitely closed’ (Bickerton 1974: 5-6).
- (j) The meaning of irrealis + nonpunctual is ‘a nonpunctual action occurring in unreal time’ (Bickerton 1974: 5-6) e.g. a future progressive.

Bickerton (1981: 58) further notes:

The tense particle expresses +anterior (very roughly past-before-past for action verbs and past for stative verbs), the modality particle expresses +irrealis (which includes futures and conditions), while the aspect particle expresses +nonpunctual (progressive-durative plus habitual-iterative). The stem form in isolation expresses the unmarked terms in these oppositions, i.e. present statives and past non-statives.

Modern French Guianese Creole (and its Cayenne dialect) appears to conform to Bickerton’s system with its three preposed markers: *te* for anterior, *ke* for irrealis, and *ka* for nonpunctual. Only six combinations of the possible eight are attested (see Table 1); ‘irrealis + nonpunctual’ and ‘anterior + irrealis + nonpunctual’ are rare or unattested in many creoles. However, 19th century Cayenne Creole differs in several ways from the Bickertonian system, as will be discussed below.

The system as outlined in Table 1 ignores many other aspectual markers, such as the completive *fin* or *fini* that are present in a number of lexically French creoles, and may give the impression that the three-particle system is closed. These other markers may encroach on the semantic domain of one of the three principal particles, and in some cases replace it. Thus the additional particles can be responsible for diachronic variations in the creole (see e.g. Baker 1994: 77 for Mauritian Creole).

ANTERIOR	IRREALIS	NONPUNCTUAL	FORM
-	-	-	<i>V</i>
-	-	+	<i>ka V</i>
-	+	-	<i>ke V</i>
-	+	+	<i>*ke ka V</i>
+	-	-	<i>te V</i>
+	-	+	<i>te ka V</i>
+	+	-	<i>te ke V</i>
+	+	+	<i>*te ke ka V</i>

Table 1: Bickerton's tense-aspect system applied to Cayenne Creole

3. The zero or unmarked form

The zero form indicates the speaker's unmarked perspective of an action. In Cayenne Creole, this is punctual and thus completive. Should the perspective be modified, a marker, usually but not necessarily *te*, *ka* or *ke*, is added to indicate the change:

1. *Atipa levé, li payé Sazi et pis li soti.*
 Atipa get up 3sg pay Sazi and then 3sg leave
 'Atipa got up, paid Sazi and then he left.'
 (Paré pou 1885:86)
2. *Anglai pran Yapoc, yé mené monopère alé.*
 English take Oyapock 3pl take priest go
 'The English have taken Oyapock and have taken the priest away.'
 (Saint-Quentin 1872:95)

Some verbs in the zero form appear neither nonpunctual nor completive:

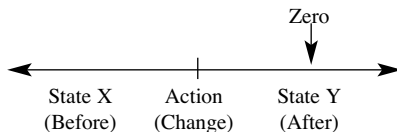
3. *Mo trouvé li temps, pou nous changé li.*
 1sg find 3sg time for 1pl change 3sg
 'I think it's time we replaced him.'
 (Paré pou 1885:76)

4. *Mo oulé palé zòt.*
 1sg want speak 2pl
 ‘I want to speak to you.’
 (Saint-Quentin 1872:67)

Traditionally a distinction is made between these verbs (‘statives’) and other verbs (‘nonstatives’). This distinction may have been created to account for the different tenses used when translating into French or English stative verbs (‘present’) and nonstatives (‘preterite’), but such a distinction is not necessary in Cayenne Creole. A better approach is to assume that verbs can be both stative and nonstative. Every verb has a dual meaning: it describes both an action and the state that results from the action.

In Figure 1, State X has been terminated by a punctual action and a new state Y has come about. The zero form of the verb—the speaker’s normal perception of this situation—lies in State Y. From this perspective, the action is punctual and State Y is progressive. The verb refers both to the action and to State Y (the consequence of the action).

Figure 1: The zero form



The zero form of the verb *soti* in (1) means ‘he left’ (nonstative) and ‘he is no longer in the building’ (stative). *Mo trové* in (3) means ‘it is my opinion that’ (stative) and ‘I have formed my opinion’ (nonstative).

4. The marker *ka*

According to Bickerton, the nonpunctual aspect marker indicates progressive and habitual aspect. Cayenne Creole conforms to this system.

4.1 Progressive aspect

Progressivity, ‘the combination of continuous meaning and nonstativity’ according to Comrie (1976:38) is shown in (5) and (6):

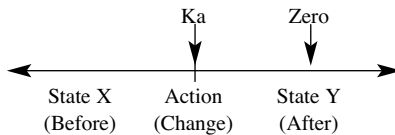
5. *Nous criole, ca changé, qué temps, kou toute langue.*
 1pl Creole *ka* change with time like all language
 ‘Our Creole changes over time like all languages.’
 (Paré pou 1885:12)

6. *A vrai ça zaffai la, doumandé Wacapou?*
 be true dem business/thing det ask Wacapou

Coument, to ca doumandé mo, si ça vrai, réponne Atipa.
 What 2sg *ka* ask 1sg if dem true reply Atipa
 ‘‘Is that true?’’, asked Wacapou. ‘‘What, you’re asking me if it’s
 true?’’ replied Atipa.’
 (Paré pou 1885:20)

Normally, the change (action) from one state to another (X to Y) is punctual. In (5) and Atipa’s reply in (6), the speaker sees the action as being in progress, with no indication of completion or of the existence of State Y. It is therefore nonpunctual, having internal structure. To indicate this change of perspective, the speaker marks the zero form with *ka*. Figure 2 shows the shift of perspective from State Y to the interior of the action.

Figure 2: Shift of perspective brought about by *ka*



In the Bickertonian system, ‘stative’ verbs cannot normally occur with the nonpunctual marker; phrases such as (7) are claimed to be exceptions.

7. *Mó ka savé* .
1sg *ka* know (something)
'I am beginning to understand.'
(Saint-Jacques-Fauquenoy 1972:81)

The speaker wants to show that the act of understanding is not yet over; the point of reference moves from State Y to within the action. This movement is marked by *ka*, just as it would be for any other verb, 'stative' or 'nonstative'. Like any other verb, *savé* 'to know something', refers to both the state (of knowledge, of having learnt) and to the action (the passage from ignorance to understanding).

Ka once had a function that did not conform to the 'typical' tense-aspect system. In the late 19th century, it also marked the future negative (Saint-Quentin 1872:139), presumably representing the continuation of a current state, rather than a new action that would change the state. But for more than a century, *ke* has been the marker of the future negative.

4.2 *Habitual aspect*

When the same action is repeated, State X is followed by State X, with no indication of State Y.

8. *Sanmedi (...) mo ca fronmein yé pou moune pas vòlò yé.*
Saturday 1sg *ka* close 3pl for people neg steal 3pl
'On Saturdays (...) I lock them up to stop people stealing them.'
(Parépou 1885:126)

In (8), for example, we have no indication of the other days of the week when State Y would exist. The action of locking up has begun, but is not yet over. The point of reference is within the action and *ka* is therefore used to indicate this change of perspective.

5. The marker *ke*

5.1 *Function*

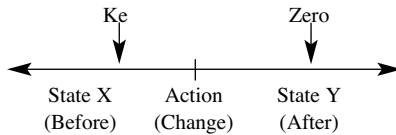
The modern irrealis marker in 20th century Cayenne Creole, *ke*, conforms to the Bickertonian system. It marks events that have not happened or may not happen:

9. *Li ké vini sasé so soumaké.*
 3sg *ke* come look for poss money
 ‘He will come looking for his money.’
 (Bricault 1976:136)

10. *Mo pa savé si li ké rété.*
 1sg neg know (something) if 3sg *ke* stay
 ‘I don’t know if he will stay.’
 (Francius and Chanol 1987:15)

The unrealised events are the action and the subsequent State Y. The point of reference is thus situated in Event X. To show this change of perspective from the zero form, the speaker uses the irrealis marker (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Shift of perspective brought about by *ke*



5.2 *Wa*: The predecessor of *ke*

While *ke* appears to be a typical irrealis marker, it did not emerge until more than a century after Cayenne Creole developed. Saint-Quentin’s 1872 grammar states that *wa* is the future marker (1872:133). Horth (1948:28) stated that *wa* was the archaic form of *ke*. In 19th century texts the two markers coexist, with *wa* dominating, but covering different semantic domains. *Ke* marked close or definite futures, while *wa* indicated distant futures and hypothetical conditions:

11. *To ké prend quichose ké nous; apré, nous wa soti.*
 2sg *ke* take something with 1pl after 1pl *wa* go out
 ‘You’ll have something [to eat] with us; then we’ll go out.’
 (Paréou 1885:158)

12. *Bongué wa aidé to, réponne bonhomme la; mo ké prié pou to.*
God *wa* help 2sg reply man det 1sg *ke* pray for 2sg
“‘God will help you’”, replied the man. “I will pray for you.”
(Paré pou 1885:172)

Other lexically French creoles also differ from the Bickertonian system. In Tayo temporal adverbs, and other strategies, are used to express an unrealised event. There is no fixed irrealis morpheme (Corne 1990: 23–24). Antillean creoles had a wide range of future markers during the 19th century (Hazaël-Massieux 1986:120), presumably because there was no fixed irrealis marker in the aspectual system. Recent studies of Mauritian have shown that the marker of close future *pu* is gradually replacing irrealis marker *va* (Hazaël-Massieux 1992; Touchard and Véronique 1992; Baker 1993).

The French Guianese Creole-based Karipúna—spoken by Amerindian groups now living in Brazil—was acquired between 1830 and 1870 when these groups were refugees in the south of French Guiana (Tobler 1983). During this period, *wa* and *ke* were present in Cayenne Creole, yet the only irrealis marker in Karipúna is *ke*. This suggests the following possibilities:

- (a) There were separate dialects of French Guianese Creole only six generations after its emergence. This is unlikely given that almost all the European and African population was based in and around Cayenne from 1650–1850.
- (b) There were several independent creole geneses (cf. Valdman 1992), one of which resulted in Cayenne Creole, while another served as the model for Karipúna. Again, this is unlikely given the concentration of population in Cayenne.
- (c) Most probably, there was no fixed irrealis marker, and other strategies were used to express unrealised events. Gradually one of these came to predominate and became integrated into the aspectual system. The flux in the marking of unrealised events shows that the ‘typical’ system is certainly not adhered to by many lexically French Creoles in this domain.

6. The marker *te*

Te is aspectual in nature. It indicates, like the other markers, a change in the reference point of the speaker, and not a change in time. This change is from the normal position (zero form) to a state which has no link with the action and state described by the verb:

13. *Yé beaucoup té viré caba, bò di oune qui mourì la.*
 3pl many *te* turn already side of one rel die det
 ‘Many of them had already turned to another [candidate] who later died.’
 (Paré pou 1885:82)

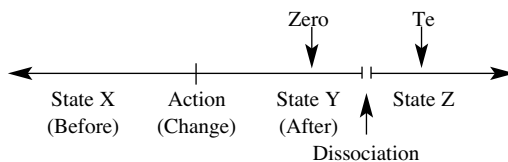
14. a. *Mó malad.*
 1sg sick
 ‘I’m sick.’
 (Saint-Jacques-Fauquenoy 1972:81)

14. b. *So fanm té malad.*
 poss wife *te* sick
 ‘His wife was sick.’
 (Bricault 1976:36)

In (13), the action of changing allegiances (‘turning’) and the state of being a supporter of another candidate (‘having turned’) is not linked to the speaker’s point of reference. The candidate’s death marks the dissociation. The speaker describes the action from a new state (State Z in Figure 4).

(14) shows us the effect of marking a ‘stative’ verb with *te*.

Figure 4: Shift of perspective brought about by *te*



Te is not an anterior marker in Cayenne Creole, as we can see from (15), in which Atipa talks of a market-vendor who is now dead or retired:

15. *Li fait ça commèce la, si longtemps,*
3sg do dem commerce det such long time

qui nom Vitoai calou, té rété pou li.
that name Victoire Calou *te* stay for 3sg
'She did that job for so long that she became known as
Victoire Calou.'
(Parépou 1885:26)

For Atipa, Victoire's work is punctual with no internal structure; *fait* is thus in the zero form. We are still in the state where the work has been accomplished, so *te* is not needed. If *te* were a marker of anteriority, it would mark *fait* and not *rété* because the work preceded the name.

The change of state brought about by Victoire's death or retirement means Atipa's point of reference is dissociated from the time when Victoire received her nickname of Calou (cf. in English, where the change is also purely aspectual: from 'she has become known as' to 'she became known as'). *Te* in this case is similar to Spears' (1993:262) 'anti-perfect' marker for *te* in Haitian, in the sense that it marks a situation no longer relevant to the present situation (State Z).

7. Combinations of preverbal markers

Bickerton's system allows four combinations of the three preverbal markers, of which two are found in Cayenne Creole: *te ka* and *te ke*. These combine logically. *Te ka* involves a double shift of the normal point of reference. The action is seen as being progressive (*ka*) from the dissociated State Z (*te*). Similarly, *te ke* is the same as *te* followed by *ke*. In older texts, *te wa* is found; the same differences between *ke* and *wa* apply for *te ke* and *te wa*.

8. The origins of the markers

8.1 The marker *ka*

The origins of the preverbal markers are an important guide to the evolution of Cayenne Creole. Among the numerous possible origins of *ka* (Table 2), Amerindian languages can be ruled out. Early censuses for Cayenne show an extreme minority of Amerindian slaves on large plantations. It would be difficult to see how these slaves, or the local groups of Amerindians who traded with the colonists, could have had such an influence on the structure of the Creole. The influence of their languages would appear to be limited to lexical influences, in particular to the names of some trees and animals.

LANGUAGE	FORM	FUNCTION
Carib ¹	<i>ka</i>	imperfective aspect
Mende (Senegambia) ²	<i>kaka</i>	habitual marker (postposed)
Mandingo (Senegambia) ²	<i>ka</i>	prefix of the perfect
Serer (Senegambia) ²	<i>xan</i>	prefix of the future
Mandinka (Senegambia) ³	<i>ka</i>	progressive and habitual marker
Wolof (Senegambia) ²	<i>nga, nge</i>	present continuous marker
Vai (Senegambia) ⁴	<i>kè</i>	to do
Efik (Cameroon) ²	<i>ke</i>	progressive marker
Hausa (Nigeria) ²	<i>kan</i>	habitual marker
Godié (kru) ⁵	<i>kù</i>	progressive marker
Portuguese ³	<i>ficar</i>	to stay, to be
Portuguese ³	<i>cá</i>	adverb 'here'
São Tomense ²	<i>ka</i>	habitual marker
French ⁶	<i>qu'à</i>	e.g. 'tu n'as qu'à obéir'
French ²	<i>capable</i>	adjective 'capable'

SOURCES:

¹Taylor, cited in Goodman (1964: 84); ²Goodman (1964: 84–6); ³Holm (1988: 154–6);

⁴Westermann and Bryan (1952: 44); ⁵Marchese (1986: 63); ⁶Germain (1980: 107).

Table 2: Possible origins of *ka*

Given the large number of languages in West Africa and the complex aspect-based verbal marker systems that feature in most of these languages, it is not difficult to find particles having a similar form and function to *ka*. Before a hasty conclusion that the source of the marker has been found, one must take note of Bickerton's (1981:48) comment: 'To most substratomaniacs, the mere existence of such similarities constitutes self-evident proof of the connection'. The majority of the possible African language sources in Table 2 are from the Senegambian region, but most of the African slaves during the first forty years of slavery in Cayenne (1660–1700) were taken from Gbe-speaking areas (especially the Fon and the very similar Gun languages) in modern-day Benin, and not from the Senegambian region. The African influence on the form of *ka* is not proven. Although there are many similarities of function between the predicative systems of Gbe languages and Cayenne Creole, the form of the preverbal marker *ka* did not come from these African languages.

Since *ka* exists only in French or Portuguese lexically-based creoles and not in English ones which had a similar African input, a European language is therefore a possible origin. Cayenne was settled in 1654 by Portuguese-speakers who began the settlement's slave-based sugar economy. Francophone settlers did not arrive until 1667 (Jennings 1999). In the French islands of the Lesser Antilles, the sugar industry was developed by lusophone refugees in the 1650s. Since *ka* is also found in both Lesser Antillean Creoles and Cayenne Creole, Portuguese is a probable origin for *ka*. If this origin were correct, it would suggest that *ka* was present at the time Cayenne Creole emerged.

Other hypothetical origins include *ka* in the Portuguese lexically-based Sao Tomense and Principense (see Maurer 1997 for the role of *ka*), although it is difficult to see how it could have been transmitted only to the French islands of the Lesser Antilles and to Cayenne. Germain (1980: 107) has proposed the French *qu'à* (loosely translated as 'only have to') followed by a verb. However, this form would probably not have been used often enough for it to have served as a model. French *capable* is another candidate. In Haitian, *kapab* and *ka* are both used in positions between the negative marker and the verb. This is the normal position of a verbal marker and would facilitate incorporation into a verbal system:

16. *Li pa kapab rele.*³
 3sg neg *kapab* call
 'He couldn't call.'
 (Spears 1993: 270)

17. *M pa ka remèt ou dis kob ou.*
 1sg neg *ka* give back 2sg ten cents 2sg
 'I can't give you back your ten cents.'
 (Spears 1993: 271)

In modern familiar French, schoolchildren use *cap*:

18. *Je suis cap faire ça.*
 1sg be *cap* do that
 'I can do that.'

8.2 The marker *ke*

The origin and evolution of the form of *ke* is clearly shown in 19th century Cayenne Creole texts. An 1848 proclamation uses *kallé* and *ké* (Sournia 1976) and Saint-Quentin (1872) uses *ké*, *k'é* and *k'alé*. These variations show the marker *ka* preceding *ale* 'to go'. *Ka* must therefore have developed before *ke*.

19. *Mo k'alé proméné.*
 1sg *ka+ale* walk
 'I'm going out for a walk.'
 (Saint-Quentin 1872:31)

Guadeloupean Creole shows the same trend (Hazaël-Massieux 1986), and Carrington (1984: 118) cites *kaj* as the irrealis marker in Saint-Lucian. Given the textual evidence of the evolution of *ke* in both Cayenne and the Antilles, it is surprising to see other origins proposed, such as a Portuguese origin (Hull 1979:207) and a Senegambian origin (cited by Hazaël-Massieux 1986:115).

8.3 The marker *wa*

Wa is no doubt from French *va* (< *aller* 'to go'). The change of *v* to *w* is not unique to this item, as we also find examples such as *wle* < *vouloir* 'to want' and *we* < *voir* 'to see'. It is more plausible than Horth's (1948:11) suggestion of the English preterite *was*.

8.4 The marker *te*

This form comes from *été* or *était*, past forms of the French verb ‘to be’, and it is found in almost all lexically French creoles. This marker was not incorporated into the preverbal marker system of Cayenne Creole at the same time as *ka* and *ke*. The evidence for this comes from the appearance of the negative marker *pa* (or *pou*) between *te* and the verb in nineteenth century texts:

20. *Tig jou-la té malagòch, é li té pa jamen pouvé trapé viand.*
Tiger day-det *te* clumsy and 3sg *te* neg never can catch meat
‘That day Tiger was clumsy and couldn’t catch anything at all.’
(Saint-Quentin 1872:73)

21. *So femme té pou ca vini, la dégrad, souvent.*
poss wife *te* poss *ka* come the market often
‘His wife didn’t often go to the market.’
(Parépou 1885:36)

22. *Mo pas savé meinme, si to té pas baille coup.*
1sg neg know even if 2sg *te* neg give hit
‘I don’t even know if you weren’t involved in the fight.’
(Parépou 1885:106)

23. *Si Bosobio té la, li té pou ké comprendne oune mot.*
If Bosobio *te* there 3sg *te* neg *ke* understand one word
‘If Bosobio were there, he wouldn’t understand a single word.’
(Parépou 1885:158)

Examples (20–23) show *te* was not initially an integral part of the verbal system, but rather an auxiliary. The position of the negative morpheme also contradicts the assertion that ‘in Creoles, the negative morpheme is inserted directly after the subject, before any verbal or auxiliary element’ (Bickerton 1981:192).

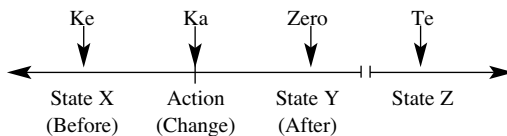
9. The evolution of the preverbal marker system of Cayenne Creole

The preverbal marker system of 20th century Cayenne Creole differs significantly from that of the 19th century and, by extension, of that of 1700. A three-particle preverbal marker system was not present when Cayenne Creole emerged. Bickerton's tense-aspect description does not, therefore, fit the initial Cayenne Creole system. All three markers have undergone some changes since the 19th century:

- *Ka* used to mark the future negative.
- *Ke* is a modern replacement of *wa*. *Ke* emerged after *ka* and entered the system as a marker of probable situations (close futures), gradually assuming the functions of *wa*.
- *Te* as an auxiliary was not fully incorporated into the marker system until the twentieth century. It was the last of the three markers to be incorporated, although it existed outside the system before then.

Evidence from other creoles suggests that the gradual evolution of tense and aspect systems may be common (see Baker and Corne 1986: 174–175 and Arends 1993:375), though Hawaiian Creole English is an exception (Roberts 1999). In the evolution of a creole, it may be that many auxiliaries are employed initially to express changes in the normal reference point of a verb. From these auxiliaries, a simplified system evolves. For creoles developed by people of West African origin—such as in the majority Fon-speaking slave community of Cayenne in the late 1600s—the system is simplified along aspectual lines. The most simplified aspectual system has a normal reference point (State Y, zero form), a point in State X (*ke*), a point in State Z (*te*) and a point within the action itself (*ka*) (see Figure 5). It may be for this reason that

Figure 5: The aspectual system of Cayenne Creole



creole languages, as they evolved towards a simplified system from a more complex system involving many auxiliaries, tend to develop a system resembling that proposed by Bickerton.

Although French provided the forms for the preverbal aspectual markers of Cayenne Creole, it is doubtful that it provided the functions. It would be unreasonable to exclude the possible influence of the aspectual systems of Fon and Gun, whose speakers made up 100% of Cayenne's African-born slaves in 1660 and about 50% in 1700 (Jennings 1995). Further research will determine the possible impact of the Gbe linguistic cryptotype or *vision du monde* 'perception of things' (Manessy 1989:89) on the aspectual system of Cayenne Creole.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Terry Crowley and two anonymous reviewers for their help with this paper.
- 2 A comment on the spelling of French Guiana is warranted. While French Guiana is written in English with *i*, British Guyana is written with *y*. The spelling of both in French is invariably with *y*, i.e. Guyane.
- 3 *Te* is often omitted in Haitian once the setting has been established.

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