Patterns of subject-object coreference in Seychelles Creole

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1. Introduction

In Seychelles Creole (Sey) there are two patterns of subject-object corefer-ence. The first pattern uses a possessive adjective (POSS) coreferential with the subject, plus the noun *lekor* 'body'.[2] The other pattern uses an object pronoun (PRON) coreferential with the subject. These two patterns overlap partially, but occur basically in a complementary distribution.

This paper is part of a survey of Creole French reflexives being undertaken by Ingrid Neumann-Holzschuh and myself with a view to elucidating certain issues concerning the emergence and evolution of Creole languages. The present paper is descriptive and does not address these matters. It follows the first instalment, a synchronic and diachronic study of Mauritian Creole (Mau) reflexives (Corne, in press). It complements that study, Sey and Mau being closely related dialects of Isle de France Creole (Baker & Corne 1982, 1986). In spite of the close parallels between Sey and Mau in their handling of reflexivity, and also the significant differences between them, comparative material is confined here to occasional brief comment[3].

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[2]Nouns referring to body parts also occur, e.g. *leker* 'heart' in *i dir dah soh leker* 'he says to himself'.

[3]The description of Sey is based on data derived from various written sources (Bollée 1977, Corne 1977, published folktales, newspapers, personal letters), from field notes made in 1974 in Seychelles, and from work undertaken from time to time with Seychellois expatriates resident in New Zealand. All these data were checked in 1987 against the intuitions of a young Seychellois newly arrived in New Zealand. I thank Mr William Zarine most sincerely for his willing help. He is fluent and literate

2. Transitive verbs.

2.1 POSS *lekor*. The basic Sey reflexive (R) pattern consists of the coreferential possessive adjective + *lekor*. Some examples:[4]

1. *anu pa aṁbet nu lekor* 'let us not fool ourselves'

2. *i ana boṅ ledaṅ pur defan soṅ lekor* 'he has good teeth to defend himself with'

3. *moṅ ti war zot pe moṅtre zot kapasite eksprim zot lekor* 'I saw them showing their ability to express themselves'

4. *moṅ pa kone ki manyer moṅ pu esplik moṅ lekor* 'I don't know how I shall explain myself'

5. *sa pwasoṅ i n kros soṅ lekor* 'the fish (has) hooked itself'

6. *pa tuy u lekor* 'don't kill yourself'[5]

Verbs constructed with POSS *lekor* include: *amar/e* 'tie' (*amar soṅ lekor* 'get into a predicament'), *aṁpwazon/e* 'poison', *aṁbet/e* 'fool', *bles/e* 'wound', *dedye* 'dedicate', *defan* 'defend', *devlop/e* 'develop', *ed/e* 'help', *e(k)splik/e* 'explain', *e(k)sprim/e* 'express', *goṅfle* 'inflate', *eṅvit/e* 'invite', *fatig/e* 'tire', *gard/e* 'keep', *koriz/e* 'improve'[6], *kony/e* 'bump (something which is already

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in Kreol and English and has a reasonable oral and written command of French. He arrived in New Zealand direct from Seychelles in February 1987 to begin his first year of study at the University of Auckland. The sole responsibility for any errors of fact or interpretation here is as always all my own, and cannot be imputed either to Mr Zarine or to any of my other Seychellois friends and consultants.

[4]The transcription of Sey used here is *lortograf-linite*, cf. Corne, in press. I trust I may be forgiven for declining to use the official orthography of the Republic, which uses digraphs (*ou* for *u*, *gn* for *ny*) and marks subphonemic nasality (e.g. *annan* 'have' for my *ana*). Such features make its use a little difficult for at least this non-native speaker.

[5]And by extension, 'don't work too hard', cf. American English 'don't bust your ass'. Fauchois (1986:102) gives an example of *kwi soṅ lekor* 'cooks'. While my own consultants reject this out of hand, *kwi* can indeed be used transitively, and the sequence (which we may assume Fauchois recorded from a native speaker) presumably means 'cooks itself'.

[6]When -R, that is, not reflexive, this verb means 'chastise, correct'.

sore)', *krosle* 'hook', *kuple* 'cut', *lavle* 'wash', *lisle* 'lick', *noyle* 'drown', *pan* 'hang', *pen* 'paint', *pompte* 'inflate; praise', *respekte* 'respect', *sarzle* 'load', *servi* 'serve', *trample* 'dip, dunk', *tromple* 'deceive', *tuyle* 'kill', and *zetle* 'throw'.

2.2 PRON + *mem* 'emphasis' co-occurs with POSS *lekor* or with a coreferential PRON. This gives what may be called an 'adversative' implication. 7 - 10 illustrate:

7. *i n koriz soh lekor* 'he improved himself' (no implication of any outside agency)

8. *i n koriz* $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} soh\ lekor \\ li \end{array} \right\}$ *li-mem* 'id.' (implies that someone else has previously tried, unsuccessfully)

9. *i pa kone ki manyer i pu esplik soh lekor* 'he doesn't know how he'll explain himself'

10. *i pa kapab esplik li li-mem* 'he (himself) can't explain anything about himself, either'[7]

2.3 While POSS *lekor* is the procedure used for reflexivity, i.e., an originally lexical procedure has been grammaticalized,[8] the noun *lekor* retains its meaning 'body'. This fact can be exploited, by contrasting POSS *lekor* with PRON:

11. *eh zen i gany loportinite devlop* $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} soh\ lekor \\ li \end{array} \right\}$ 'a young person has the opportunity of developing him/herself'

Here *li* implies overall intellectual, social, and physical development, while *soh lekor* means physical development only.

12. (a) *u pa kapab tini u trahkil?* 'can't you shut up?'

    (b) *u pa kapab tini u lekor trahkil?* 'can't you stop fidgeting?'

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[7]In 8, 10 *li* alone, i.e. without *li-mem*, gives a -R reading ('chastise him / her', 'explain it').

[8]For the originally lexical status of POSS *lekor*, v. the discussion on early Mau (Corne, in press).

13. *i sahti li rezete* 'she feels(herself) rejected' (emotionally, *soh lekor)[9]

14. *al lav u / u lekor* 'go and wash yourself/ your body'[10]

Cf. also 3.23 below.

2.4 PRON. The other reflexive pattern is the use of a corefential object pronoun, e.g.

15. (= 11) *eh zen i gany loportinite devlop li* 'a young person has the opportunity of developing him/herself'

16. (= 21) *moh pu al pan / noy mwa* 'I'll go hang / drown myself'

2.41 Some transitive verbs occur in my corpus only with PRON. In at least some cases there is clearly a semantic basis for this:

17. *zot ti diviz zot ah pti grup* 'they divided themselves into small groups'

18. *nu bezweh met nu ahsam* 'we must join together'

In 17, *lekor* 'body' gives a ludicrous reading, in 18 a presumably lascivious one. However, such pragmatic reasons for using PRON are not always obvious:

19. *zot in grup zot dah Lig Arab* 'they grouped themselves (together) in the Arab League'

20. *nu ti kler nu aswar ek delwil* 'we lit ourselves (i.e. our houses) at night with/by oil'

2.42 Other verbs allow both PRON and POSS *lekor*, with no obvious semantic difference along the lines of the one described in 2.3 above. POSS *lekor* is apparently the preferred pattern, particularly in the third person, where the

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[9]Compare 13 with the following: *i sahti li / soh lekor fre* 'she feels cold'. Since 'cold' is physical, *lekor* may be used here (in fact, *i gany fre* 'she is cold' would be a more likely spontaneous utterance). 12 and 13 may be compared to French *se tenir* Adj, *se sentir* Adj.

[10]*al lav u lekor* contrasts with *al benye* 'go and bathe'. *lav/e* requires *li*, *lekor*, or a specific NP (body part), but *beny moh lipye 'bathe my feet' (but v. note 10).

pronouns *li* '3sg' and *zot* '2/3pl' tend to give a -R reading. Examples:

21. *moñ pu al pan / noy mwa / moñ lekor* 'I'll go hang / drown myself'

22. *i peñ li / soñ lekor avek soñ lapeñtir blañ* 'he paints himself with his white paint' (*li* = +/-R, *lekor* preferred)

2.43 Transitive verbs with an attribute of the complement are generally constructed with PRON:

23. *i n deklar li sarpañtye* 'he declared himself / made himself out (to be) a carpenter'

24. *moñ kwar mwa maleñ* 'I believe myself to be cunning'

25. *moñ pa truv mwa vilen* 'I don't think / find myself ugly'

26. *ki manyer u sañti u, moñ frer?* 'how are you feeling, brother?'

However, POSS *lekor* is possible in specific cases, as with *tini* in 12 above, for example.

3. Intransitives, pseudo-transitives, and transitives.

3.1 Pseudo-transitives. Sey has a number of verbs which are essentially intransitive, but which may co-occur with PRON, but never with POSS *lekor*. I refer to such verbs as 'pseudo-transitive'. The PRON (*u*) is frequent in the imperative, while the verb alone tends to be used elsewhere. Examples:

27. *beny (u) vitma* 'bathe quickly'[11]

28. *u pa pu mel (u) dañ koñversasyoñ* 'you won't get involved in the conversation'

29. *reste (u) dañ u pti kweñ* 'stay put (in your little corner)'

30. *anu rasañble (nu)* 'let us come together, assemble'

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[11] For some speakers, *beny/e* is a transitive verb. For others, the only transitive use is *beny soñ lekor añtye / añtye soñ lekor* 'bathe one's whole body'.

Similarly, *demerd u* 'sort it out yourself', *depes u* 'hurry up', *mazin u* 'just think', *arañz u* 'get your act together', etc. Two observations may be made here. First, most such cases correspond to a French pronominal verb (*se baigner, se mêler, se démerder*, etc.). This is also, by and large, the case for the verbs discussed in 3.2 below. Second, in 29, the use of PRON in the imperative is strongly reminiscent of the Reunionese 'emphatic pronominal imperative' (Cellier 1985:216-7, 590): *travers au!* 'cross!', *mazin au!* 'just think!', *mañz au!* 'eat!'.[12]

3.2 The variation zero vs. PRON that occurs with intransitive / pseudo-transitive verbs carries over to the large class of Sey verbs which are +/- transitive. These verbs may occur alone, or with PRON (especially, but certainly not exclusively, in the imperative), or with POSS *lekor*, usually with no significant change of meaning:

31. *moñ pu aloñz* $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \textit{-e} \\ \textit{mwa} \\ \textit{moñ lekor} \end{array} \right\}$ *ler moñ fatige* 'I'll lie down when I'm tired'

here, *aloñze* is intransitive, and *aloñz moñ lekor* is transitive. But in *aloñz mwa*, the verb can be seen as either transitive or pseudo-transitive. Similarly: *abitye* 'habituate', *amiz/e* 'have fun', *ambruy/e* 'get entangled', *get/e* 'look (at)', *grat/e* 'scratch', *kasyet* 'hide', *komport/e* 'behave', *miltipliy/e* 'multiply', *preparl/e* 'prepare', *reduble* 'double', *sañz/e* 'get dressed / changed', *trakas/e* 'worry'.

In practice, the above characterization is a little too general. There are some restrictions, exceptions, and specialized meanings, some of which I now discuss.

3.21 The pronouns *li* and *zot* are sometimes interpretable only as -R, and are therefore excluded:

32. *sa ki nu n komañse, i n vrema miltipliy* $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \textit{-e} \\ \textit{*li} \\ \textit{soñ lekor} \end{array} \right\}$ 'what we began has truly multiplied'

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[12] For a brief discussion of Reunionese influence on Sey syntax, v. Baker & Corne 1982:114-5, 208.

3.22 With some verbs, POSS *lekor* has the specific meaning of 'sexual parts':

33. (a) *i pe get (li) dañ laglas* 'he is looking (at himself) in the mirror' (-*li* is preferred, since +*li* = +/-R)

    (b) *i pe get soñ lekor dañ laglas* '(s)he is admiring his/her (own) sexual charms in the mirror'

34. (a) *kasyet u byeñ* 'hide well'

    (b) *kasyet u lekor* 'cover yourself decently'[13]

3.23 With some verbs, the PRON 'self' vs. POSS *lekor* 'body' distinction (2.3 above) interacts with the transitive - pseudo-transitive patterning:

35. (a) *i bezweñ kapab abitye (li) avek moñ manyer* 'he'll have to be able to get used to my ways'

    (b) *fode pa u abitye u (lekor) ek kalu* 'you must not habituate yourself / your body to toddy'

3.24 Some verbs are exceptions. For some, what may be seen as the original patterning has resulted in homonyms. Thus *degaz/e* as an intransitive (and pseudo-transitive) verb means 'hurry up':

36. *i bezweñ degaz* $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{-}e \\ li \end{array} \right\}$ *si i pa le mañk soñ bato* 'she must hurry if she doesn't want to miss her boat'

while the transitive expression *degaz soñ lekor* means 'relieve bodily pressure (urinate, vomit, orgasm, etc.)'.

The pattern is slightly different with *debruy/e*. As a transitive verb constructed reflexively with POSS *lekor* or PRON, it means 'extricate oneself (from a difficulty)'; as an intransitive verb (*PRON) it means 'hurry':

37. *debruy u (lekor)* 'sort it out yourself, get yourself out of it'

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[13]Note the idiomatic sense of *al kasyet u lekor* 'be quiet; you're talking rubbish'.

For other verbs, there are various constraints on the occurrence of one or the other pattern. In some cases there is an obvious semantic constraint. For example, with *raz/e* 'shave', PRON is acceptable (in context) with a +R (i.e. reflexive) reading, but POSS *lekor* gives a different (and in real terms unlikely) reading, 'shave one's (whole) body' (cf. 2.3 above). In other cases, the restrictions are arbitrary. For example, *reduble* 'double' cannot occur in 38 without either PRON or POSS *lekor*:

38. *i tultaṅ reduble li / soṅ lekor* 'it doubles (itself) each time, constantly' (of a geometric progression)[14]

4. Datives

Datives may be +R. There appear to be three constructions relevant to the present discussion.

4.1 Benefactive Dative. PRON is used exclusively, but some speakers prefer to avoid the construction:

39. *moṅ pu aste (mwa) de-trwa butey kalu* 'I'll buy (me) some bottles of toddy'

My corpus contains examples of the benefactive dative with the following verbs: *araṅz/e* 'arrange', *aste* 'buy', *gany/e* 'get, receive', *kup/e* 'cut', *rod/e* 'look for', *vol/e* 'steal'.

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[14]Such gaps must have a reason, but my present information does not suggest an explanation. For instance, since the following are all acceptable sentences, why is POSS *lekor* unacceptable in (ii)?

(I) *moṅ a kapab debaras daṅ sa graṅ laṅbara ki moṅ ladaṅ komela* 'I'll be able to get out of the mess I'm in at present'

(II) *apre ki nu n reisi debaras nu (*lekor) daṅ sa sistem* 'after we succeeded in getting out of that system'

(III) *debaras u lekor* 'sort it out yourself, get yourself out of it'

4.2 In verbal expressions consisting of Verb + Noun, PRON is used exclusively:

40. *u n rahd u koht sa ki u n fer?* 'did you realize what you did?'

4.3 With transito-dative verbs[15], POSS *lekor* and PRON both occur, except for *li* and *zot* which are always -R:

41. *Zorz pe deman* { *soh lekor* / **li* } *si Bil pu vini* 'George is wondering whether Bill will come'

42. *don u (lekor) eh pweh pur sak repohs ki u gany byeh* 'give yourself one point for each answer you get right'

5. Reflexives in Seychelles Creole ca. 1900

The only 'old' Sey text known is R. Young's translation (Young 1983) of Marbot's Martinique Creole versions (Marbot 1846, v. Jardel 1985, Corne forthcoming) of La Fontaine's fables. Young's text dates from around the turn of the century. An examination of this work yielded the following data.

There are thirteen verbs constructed reflexively. The distribution is as follows:

- + transitive, with POSS *lekor*: *batle* 'flagellate' (p.38), *defan* 'defend (13), *degazle* 'save' (24), *fwetle* 'whip' (15), *gohfle* 'inflate' (11, 12), *lwe* 'rent' (34)[16], *privle* 'deprive' (38), *zetle* 'throw' (44);

- + transitive, with PRON: *devwe* 'devote' (33), *sarzle* 'load' (12);

- + transitive, attribute of the object, with PRON: *kwar* 'think, believe' (42), *truvle* 'find, think' (15, 46);

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[15]That is, verbs which strongly require a dative complement.

[16]In context, *lwe soh lekor* means 'to rent out one's services'. In modern Sey, *lwe soh lekor* would be used in the literal sense 'rent out one's body', referring to prostitutes (*fam-de-vi, taksi, piteh*).

• - transitive, with PRON: *reste* 'remain, stay' (53).

This rather meagre collection is nonetheless useful. The data are completely consistent with modern Sey: with transitive verbs, POSS *lekor* is preferred, PRON is available but of limited distribution, the intransitive verb *reste* co-occurs with coreferential PRON *u* in the imperative. Insofar as any conclusions can be drawn, the evidence of Young's text suggests that with respect to reflexivity, Sey has remained rather stable for some seven or eight decades. This contrasts with Mau, v. below.

6. Concluding remarks

Sey handles subject - object coreference by means of two partially overlapping strategies. The basic procedure is the productive utilization of what was clearly, originally[17], a coreferential NP strategy, i.e. a purely lexical approach, using POSS *lekor*. In restricted contexts, PRON is also used. Where there is overlap, such that both constructions may occur, there is either a basic semantic difference, or the verb itself is bicategorial (+/- transitive).

Both Mau and Sey allow PRON with a class of verbs which are basically intransitive. Such verbs in general correspond to French pronominal verbs (Creole *depesle*, French *se dépêcher*) whose pronoun is semantically either rather attenuated or empty. In both Isle de France dialects, the PRON corresponding to the French pronoun occurs often in imperatives, less frequently in other contexts. It seems likely that it is in fact the imperatives (cf. French *dépêchez-vous*) which initially promoted PRON use. However, in Sey, there is also the Reunionese pattern mentioned in 3.1, that of the 'emphatic pronominal imperative'.

The most salient difference with reflexives between Sey and Mau is that in modern Mau POSS *lekor* is by and large restricted to rather concrete or physical contexts, *lekor* retaining always the sense of 'body'[18]. In other contexts, PRON is used, and so Mau has a less restricted use of PRON than does Sey. In Sey, as has been seen, the POSS *lekor* construction is used consistently as

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[17]See the discussion concerning Mau reflexives and their development in Corne, in press.

[18]Or almost always; in fact, it occurs with some verbs of emotion as well.

the usual, unmarked reflexive[19], whereas PRON is more restricted in its use than in Mau. It is probably fair to suggest that Mau was evolving towards a system very close to the Sey one – or perhaps had done so by around the turn of the century: nineteenth and early twentieth century evidence does not contradict this supposition. It appears to be in relatively recent, twentieth century times that the domain of PRON has been extended in Mau due to a societal evolution which has made access to French both more desirable and easier (for details and discussion, v. Corne, in press). The differences between Mau and Sey are not major. On the whole, a reflexive construction in one will be understood in the other, occasionally with comic effect. But the differences are real, and ultimately will need to be accounted for. They are probably a function of the differing social histories of Seychelles and Mauritius, and if so, a close examination of the other major Isle de France Croele dialect, Rodrigues Creole, may provide the necessary confirmation.

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[19]In prepositional phrases, *(av)ek* 'with' favours POSS *lekor*, but other prepositions allow PRON, PRON-*mem*, and POSS *lekor* under conditions yet to be studied.