

The grammatical elements in Negerhollands: loss, retention, reconstitution

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For a long time, Hans den Besten and I have shared an interest in the grammar of Negerhollands. This is also the area in which we have published together. Running the risk of embarking upon too ambitious an enterprise, which may therefore produce too superficial results, I want to return to an old question in Creole studies, namely the nature of the grammatical elements in the Creole languages. If we characterize Hans' work as the happy result of a successful combination of philology and syntax, this note will be very disappointing, since it ignores, at its own risk, much of philology and syntax. Thus it can best be seen as a plea for help and advice from Hans, and an invitation to further discussions

The question of Creole grammatical elements has been approached from a number of angles in recent years:

Loss in pidginization (Mühlhäusler 1974, Schumann 1978). In this paradigm the question is raised how the break in the transmission chain due to incomplete (second) language learning lead to the loss of specific morphemes, particularly verbal and nominal inflections, and which morphemes may be acquired and then retained in the new resulting variety.

Reconstitution and the bioprogram (Bickerton 1988; Carden and Stewart 1988). In Bickerton's research, the question is focused upon how properties of our innate linguistic capabilities (the language bioprogram) determine which grammatical items lost due to incomplete learning will be reconstituted automatically and quickly, and which items may take a long time to be reconstituted, if this happens at all. The bioprogram approach assumes that there is a set of core notions and categories (certain Tense Mood Aspect distinctions, pronominal reference, nouns and verbs) that are part of the core human linguistic structures, while others (other Tense Mood Aspect distinctions, anaphoric reference, adpositions) are more peripheral or indeed superfluous.

Grammaticalization and contact (Heine et al., 1991; Bruyn 1995). In this tradition, the way certain Creole grammatical elements have resulted from the rapid grammaticalization of content words in the lexifier languages is explored. Thus adverbs may have developed into auxiliaries, locative expressions into adpositions, etc. The paths of development are called

grammaticalization chains. The language contact perspective adds to this the idea that these grammaticalization chains may have already existed in the contributing West-African languages (this is far from implausible) and have been relexified lock stock and barrel into the resulting creoles.

Here I want to address the question from yet a fourth perspective, namely more fine-grained typologies of grammatical elements, such as the one in Van Hout & Muysken (1994) or Muysken (2000), or the one in Myers-Scotton and Jake (2000a,b) and Myers-Scotton (2002). Beginning with the latter, Myers-Scotton distinguishes four categories of morphemes, depending on the way they are accessed psycholinguistically and on their grammatical features:

Table 1 Categories of morphemes in Myers-Scotton (2002)

<i>Type of morpheme</i>	<i>Syntactic definition</i>	<i>Level of access or selection</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Content morpheme	Assigns or receives thematic roles; does not involve quantification over variables	Directly selected at the lemma/mental lexicon level	horse, walk, busy, under, but
Early system morpheme	Does not assign or receive thematic roles	Indirectly selected at the lemma/mental lexicon level	the, listen to , plural -s, my
Bridge late system morpheme	Refers to grammatical information inside the maximal projection of head	Selected at the formulator/functional level	of, possessive -s,
Outsider late system morpheme	Refers to grammatical information outside the maximal projection of head	Selected at the formulator/functional level	third person -s, grammatical case markers

In Muysken (2000), based in part on Van Hout and Muysken (1994), a different approach is taken. Ten features typical of at least some core functional elements are listed:

- has an abstract meaning
- belongs to a closed class
- is not formed through derivational morphology
- contains at most one phonological foot
- cannot be modified by an adverb or adjective
- is paradigmatically organized in terms of opposed values on certain features
- has suppletive forms
- has an obligatory complement
- frequently occurs without stress
- is a bound form

On the basis of these features, a hierarchy of elements can be formulated, with on top all elements with a minimum number of these properties. A first approximation of this hierarchy for Dutch is given in Table 2.

Using this hierarchy as a starting point, I now turn to the Negerhollands data, collected from a number of sources: Van Diggelen (1978), the word lists in Stein (1996) and Van der Voort (1996), and the texts collected in Van Rossem & Van der Voort (1996). In the following overview of grammatical elements in Negerhollands, retained elements are unmarked, elements borrowed from other languages (Papiamentu, English, West-African) are in bold, and elements reconstituted in other ways from Dutch morpho-lexical material are in italic. Elements reconstituted on the basis of borrowed morpho-lexical material are in bold italic. Elements absent in Negerhollands are marked with a hyphen (-), and lacking data are simply left blank.

Before going on, I should mention that there are considerable methodological difficulties, particularly because the sources cover a time span of 250 years, and reflect different varieties (slave, planter) of Negerhollands. Also, spellings are far from consistent. Bearing these limitations in mind, the list of elements in the Appendix can be established, arranged from highly grammatical to very little grammatical.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this list. First of all, borrowings are not very frequent, and fairly randomly distributed through the list of categories. Second, we find

Table 2 Hierarchy of elements based on the different factors involved in determining the status of categories (based on Muysken 2000)

nouns
adjectives
verbs
concrete adverbs
numerals
complex prepositions
abstract adverbs
interjections
simple prepositions
quantifiers 2
semi-auxiliaries
subordinators
quantifiers 1
abstract prep.
question words
coordinators
complementizers
strong pronouns
modals
negation
weak pronouns
demonstratives
auxiliaries
articles
diminutives
nominal plurals
case markers
verbal agreement
adjectival agreement

restitutions mostly in specific, often highly structured, categories, such as auxiliaries and semi-auxiliaries, pronouns, question words, the *something/nothing* class of quantifiers, as well as in the complex prepositions and nominal plural. As to loss without reconstitution, it appears that most inflectional distinctions have been lost (with the exception of third person possessive), and that most other categories have been retained. Non-flectional categories that have been lost include the Dutch weak pronoun system (including *er*), the indefinite article, demonstratives, and the passive auxiliary. As to grammaticalization, it appears as complementary to borrowing in the process of reconstitution.

There is a very rough hierarchy among the categories listed of the following type:

lost << lost and reconstituted << retained

However, this hierarchy is by no means perfect, which is not surprising given the fact that the hierarchy is established on the basis of the interaction of ten independent interacting variables.

As to the four categories of morphemes established in Myers-Scotton (2002), again there is a fairly good match: all late outsider system morphemes are lost, as well as some late bridge system morphemes. However, the morphological status seems more decisive than the semantic nature of the element in question: none of the case distinctions has survived in the creole, except third person possessive.

It may well be that the paradigmatically structured categories that have been reconstituted show the effect of the substrates: the reconstituted patterns may well be reflexes of patterns found in the West-African languages concerned.

Appendix

Dutch

Negerhollands

adjectival agreement

-e

-

verbal agreement

-t

-

-en

-

ge-	-
pronominal case	
ik 'I'/mijn 'my', mij 'me' etc.	-
exc. zijn 'his'	si
pronominal gender	
hij 'he' / zij 'she'	-
nominal case	
's 'genitive'	-
nominal plural	
-s / -en	- <i>sender, -sel</i>
diminutive	
-tje	only lexical combinations
articles and nominal gender	
de, het 'the'	<i>di</i>
een 'a/an'	-
auxiliaries and copula	
hebben 'have'	<i>(h)a</i> 'past'
worden 'passive be/become'	-
zullen 'shall'	<i>sa(l)</i> 'future'
zijn 'be'	bin/wēs/mi <i>kā</i> 'completive, resultative' <i>kan</i> 'iterative, habitual' <i>le/lo</i> 'progressive, future'
deictic elements	
deze 'this'	-
dat 'that'	-

	sta ‘that’
dan ‘then’	dan
hier ‘here’	hieso
daar ‘there’	daar

weak pronouns

'k, je, ie, 'm 'I, you, he, him'	-
er	<i>di</i> (in expletive contexts)

negation

niet ‘not’	no
geen ‘no (attr.)’	no
nee ‘no’	neen

anaphors

zich ‘reflexive’	<i>si</i>
zelf ‘self’	sel
elkaar ‘each other’	malkander/malkaar

focus markers

-	da ‘focus particle’
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modals

moeten ‘must’	mut
kunnen ‘can’	kan
willen	wil
	<i>mankē</i> ‘need’

strong pronouns

ik, jij, hij, zij, wij, jullie, zij	<i>mi, ju, am, ons, jen(der), sender</i>
‘I, you, he, she, we, you , they	

complementizers

dat ‘that’	da(t)
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of 'if'	<i>as</i>
om 'for'	<i>for</i>
te 'to'	-
	<i>se</i> 'say'

coordinators

en 'and'	
of 'or'	
maar 'but'	maar
want 'since'	since

question words

wie 'who'	<i>awi(di)</i>
welke 'which'	<i>wa(t)</i>
waar 'where'	<i>apē</i>
wat 'what'	<i>wagut</i>
hoe 'how'	
waarom 'why'	<i>awamā</i>

abstract prepositions

van 'of'	<i>fa(n)</i>
aan 'to'	-
door 'by'	-

quantifiers 1

iets 'something'	<i>een gut</i>
niets 'nothing'	<i>niet een gut, niemendal</i>
iemand	<i>een volk</i>
niemand 'nobody'	<i>niet een volk</i>
ergens 'somewhere'	
nergens 'nowhere'	<i>na</i> <i>niet een plek</i>
ooit 'ever'	<i>ooit</i>
nooit 'never'	<i>nōit</i>

adverbial subordinators

als 'if'	as
toen 'when'	toen
omdat 'since'	
terwijl 'while'	derwil, voordoor, so long
hoewel 'although'	maski , wel

semi-auxiliaries

gaan 'go'	
doen 'do'	
	<i>gi</i> 'give'
	<i>kō, kom</i> 'come, become'
	<i>lastā, tā</i> 'let'

quantifiers 2

enkele, 'any'	
sommige 'some'	enige, parti, sommige
alle 'all'	all/allemaal/allegaar
altijd 'always'	elkereis, altid, idertid
iedereen 'everyone'	elk, ider, elkeen, idereen

simple prepositions

in 'in'	ini (rare)
met 'with'	mi 'with'
onder 'under'	ond@
uit 'out'	it
over 'over'	ōbu
op 'on'	op
tot 'until'	tee
voor 'for'	fo
zonder 'without'	sonder
bij 'with, by'	bey
	<i>kant</i> 'side, besides'

rond ‘around’

astu ‘after’

na ‘locative’

verbal particles

in ‘in’

op ‘up’

mee ‘with’

aan ‘on, at’

uit ‘out’

over ‘over’

voor ‘for’

an

ūt

interjections

ja ‘yes’

of zo ‘or so’

dus ‘thus’

zo ‘so’

ja

soo

abstract adverbs

direct ‘directly’

ook

weer

even ‘just’

nu ‘now’

al ‘already’

dē ‘always’

okā ‘also’

weeraan ‘again’

even

recht ‘exactly’

noe

al

degree and quantitative adverbs

bijna ‘almost’

zeer ‘very much’

alleen ‘only, alone’

beide ‘both’

alteveel

alleen

all twee

meer 'more'	meer
minder 'less'	minder
meest 'most'	meest
minst 'least'	mindest
maar 'just, only'	maar
erg 'very'	goe, muschi

complex prepositions

behalve 'apart from'	
binnen 'inside'	<i>((n)a)bini</i>
buiten 'outside'	<i>nabiti</i>
boven 'above'	<i>(na)bo(no), na bobo</i>
	<i>afo fa(n)</i> 'in front of'
beneden 'below'	amolē
als, gelijk 'like'	glik, liek

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