

A SHIFT IN NOUN DENOTATION TRIGGERS A NEW DETERMINER SYSTEM: THE CASE OF MAURITIAN CREOLE

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Early in the genesis of Mauritian Creole (MC), the quantificational determiners of its lexifier language, French, incorporated into a large number of the nouns that they combined with, resulting in the occurrence of bare nouns in argument positions, yielding (in)definite, singular, plural and generic interpretations. These early changes were accompanied by the loss all inflectional morphology, as well as the loss of the French copula, and that of the Case assigning prepositions *à* (of) and *de* (of) which are used in partitive and genitive constructions respectively.

I argue that these changes triggered a parametric shift in noun denotation, from predicative in French to argumental in MC, and account for the fact that MC has a very different determiner system from its lexifier. My analysis is motivated by both Longobardi's (1994) claim that only DPs can be arguments, NPs cannot, and Chierchia's (1998) seemingly incompatible claim that N can be an argument when it is Kind denoting.

I propose that MC nouns are lexically stored as argumental, Kind denoting terms, which share some of the distributional properties of English bare plurals, such as their ability to occur in argument positions without a determiner. The new quantificational determiners are analyzed as 'type shifting operators' that shift Kinds and predicate nominals into argumental noun phrases.

The differential behaviour of MC count vs. mass nouns is accounted for in terms of the Number argument which must be realized for common count nouns. Some seemingly 'bare' nouns comprise a phonologically null definite determiner equivalent to French *le/la* and English *the*. Subject-object asymmetry of count nouns in MC provides evidence for the occurrence of this null element which requires licensing in certain syntactic environments. The Specificity marker *la*, which serves to mark anaphoric definiteness, is shown to be a 'last resort' means of licensing the null definite determiner.

My syntactic analysis is within Chomsky's (1995) Minimalist framework and a Formal Semantics (Partee 1986), both of which stipulate legitimate operator variable constructions. The loss of the French quantificational determiners, and that of the copula meant that early MC lacked overt sources of quantification at both the nominal and clausal levels. I identify the new sources of quantification that arise in order to establish the referential properties of nouns, and I show how these various strategies are linked to the means by which the semantic features of Definiteness, Deixis, Number and Specificity are expressed, and also the means by which the syntactic function of predication is realized.

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