

SUBJECT NULL ARGUMENTS IN CREOLE LANGUAGES

**Time and Space in Linguistics:
Interdisciplinary Computational Approaches &
Cross-Creole Comparisons**

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AIMS OF THE STUDY

1. Identify patterns of subject pronoun usage in creoles
2. Focus on creoles that represent different areal patterns and feature different sub-/ adstrate languages
3. Make use and assess the suitability of the *Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures* (published in September [print] and October [online] 2013), and other materials
4. Compare with the constraints presented by Travis & Torres Cacoullos (2012), Torres Cacoullos & Travis (2013a; 2013b; 2014) for Spanish and English
 - Although “[s]ubject expression has been considered a paradigmatic case for grammatical convergence in studies of US Spanish [...], [a] statement of Spanish-English dissimilarity must **distinguish cross-linguistically valid patterns from particular ones** pertaining to the language pair.” (Torres Cacoullos & Travis 2014: 1)
 - Valid also for the creoles under survey!
 - Furthermore, even if it is shown that while the factors affecting subject expression may be similar, **even closely related languages differ** with regard to subject expression rates and subject expression in formulaic constructions. (Posio 2012: i)
 - Conclusion of Torres Cacoullos & Travis (2014: 16): *yo* and *I* expression presents some clear differences and therefore constitutes an appropriate linguistic variable to ascertain convergence.

FRAMEWORK

- **The occurrence, distribution, and development of null subject pronouns is not necessarily connected with characteristics of verbal inflection or with word order (Wratil 2011).**
- **Dryer (2011) based on typological evidence from WALS supports this view.**
 - Evidence against pro-drop:
 - Languages that require a pronoun in subject position are fairly infrequent and the approach could be characterized as Anglo-centric.
- **An alternative view has been proposed (e.g. Van Valin and LaPolla 1997: 331):**
 - The affixes themselves are the real subjects of the clause for languages where pronominal affixes on verbs are the normal expression of pronominal subjects, even in clauses in which there is a separate nominal subject.
 - The separate nominals are not really subjects, but noun phrases in apposition to the pronominal affix on the verb.

ON THE TERMINOLOGY/VALUES OF THE EXPRESSION OF PRONOMINAL SUBJECTS

- **Traditional division**

- pro-drop languages
- non-pro-drop languages

- **WALS**

- obligatory pronouns in subject position
- subject affixes on verb
- subject clitics on variable host
- subject pronouns in different position
- optional pronouns in subject position
- mixed

- **APICS**

- obligatory pronoun words
- pronoun affixes
- optional pronoun words
- subject pronouns in different position
- mixed behaviour of pronominal subjects

- **Torres Cacoullos & Travis (2013b)**

- non-null subjects
- partial null-subject
- null-subject
- discourse/radical pro-drop

NULL SUBJECTS IN CREOLE LANGUAGES 1

- **General assumption due to the focus on Atlantic creoles: *Creole languages require obligatorily overt subject pronouns as a result of the lack of verbal inflection in these languages.***
 - However, the relation between null subjects and verbal inflection is much-debated. (cf. Wratil & Gallmann 2011: 7-9)
- **To which extent can sub-/adstrate influence shape or alter fundamental patterns of creole syntax such as licensing null subjects? (Lipski 1999)**
- **Main exception in creoles (almost) across the board: null expletive subjects with existential verbs (cf. Haspelmath & the APiCS Consortium 2013: 253)**

NULL SUBJECTS IN CREOLE LANGUAGES 2

- **Lipski (1999)**
 - **No single mechanism for null-subject usage among Romance-lexifier creoles**
 - both areal substratal traits, cases of pragmatic ellipsis within the European lexifier, and possible local innovations
 - null constants tied to surrounding discourse
- **Wratisl (2009)**
 - **Pronominal null arguments in Atlantic creoles**
 - Overt weak pronouns lost their referential properties and turned into functional agreement markers by reanalysis.
 - **Topic-worthiness of referents in Indian Ocean creoles**
 - Null arguments do not result from any change of the verbal functional morphology.
 - **Homonymy flight** has a considerable influence on the null arguments in languages whose pronoun system originally lacks morphological strong-weak or case distinctions.

METHODS

- **typological comparison using the APiCS database**
 - 76 pidgins, creoles and mixed languages
- **further case studies in a sample of creoles**
 - different areal clusters, lexifiers, and substrate languages
- **qualitative data collection**
 - secondary materials (grammars, articles) and mainly narrative texts (when available)
 - variable sample sizes and text types due to lack of a comparable corpus and access to spoken corpora
- **comparison of obtained results**

SAMPLE FOR CASE STUDIES

San Andrés C

Cape Verdean

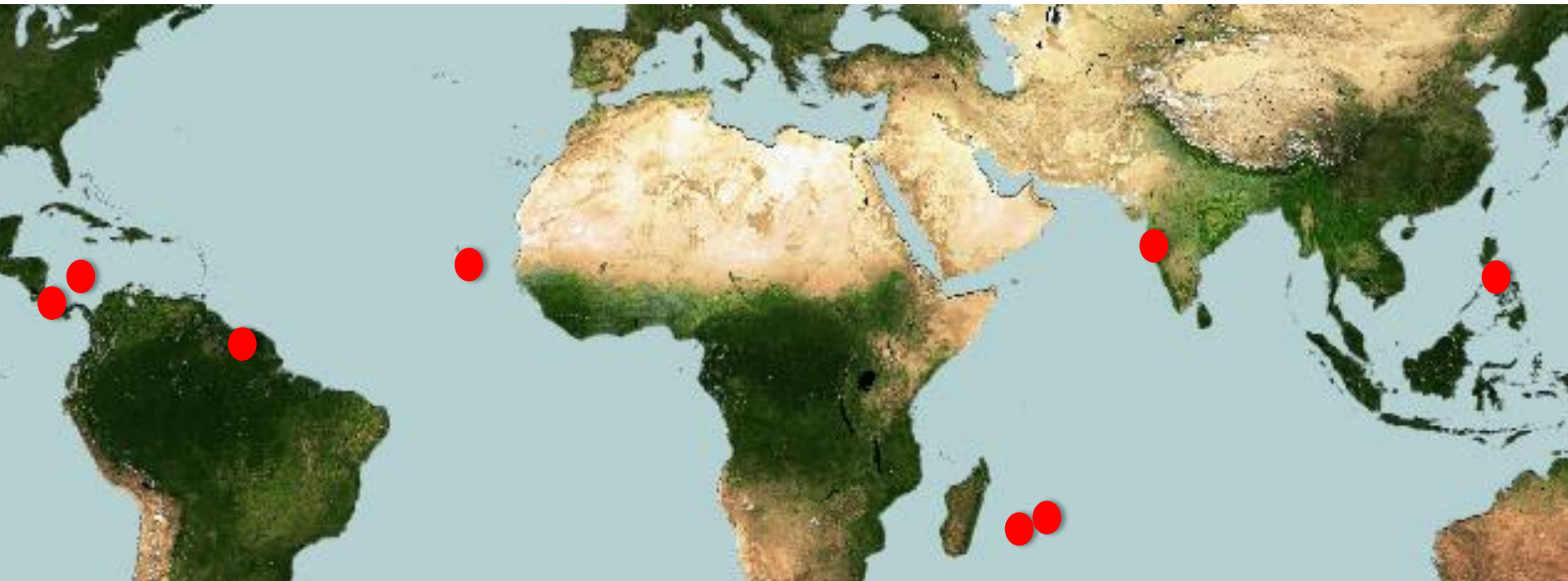
Mauritius

Diu I-P

Chabacano

Nicaraguan C Berbice Dutch

Réunion



www.opencyclemap.org

geographical area	creole	main substrate languages	main lexifier	sources besides APICS
Caribbean	San Andrés Creole	Western Kwa languages, especially Twi-Fante	English	Bartens 2003, field recordings
Caribbean	Nicaraguan Creole	Western Kwa languages, especially Twi-Fante	English	field recordings
Caribbean	Berbice Dutch	Eastern Ijo	Dutch	Kouwenberg 1994
West Africa	Cape Verdean	West-Atlantic (Wolof, Fula, etc.); Mande (Malinke, Bambara, etc)	Portuguese	Baptista 2002
Indian Ocean	Réunion Creole	Malagasy	French	Barat, Carayol & Vogel (1977)
Indian Ocean	Mauritian Creole	Malagasy	French	Baker 1972
South Asia	Diu Indo-Portuguese	Gujarati	Portuguese	Cardoso 2009
South East Asia	Philippine Creole Spanish	Tagalog, Hiligaynon	Spanish	Sippola 2011, Miravite & al. 2009

NULL SUBJECTS ACCORDING TO THE APICS

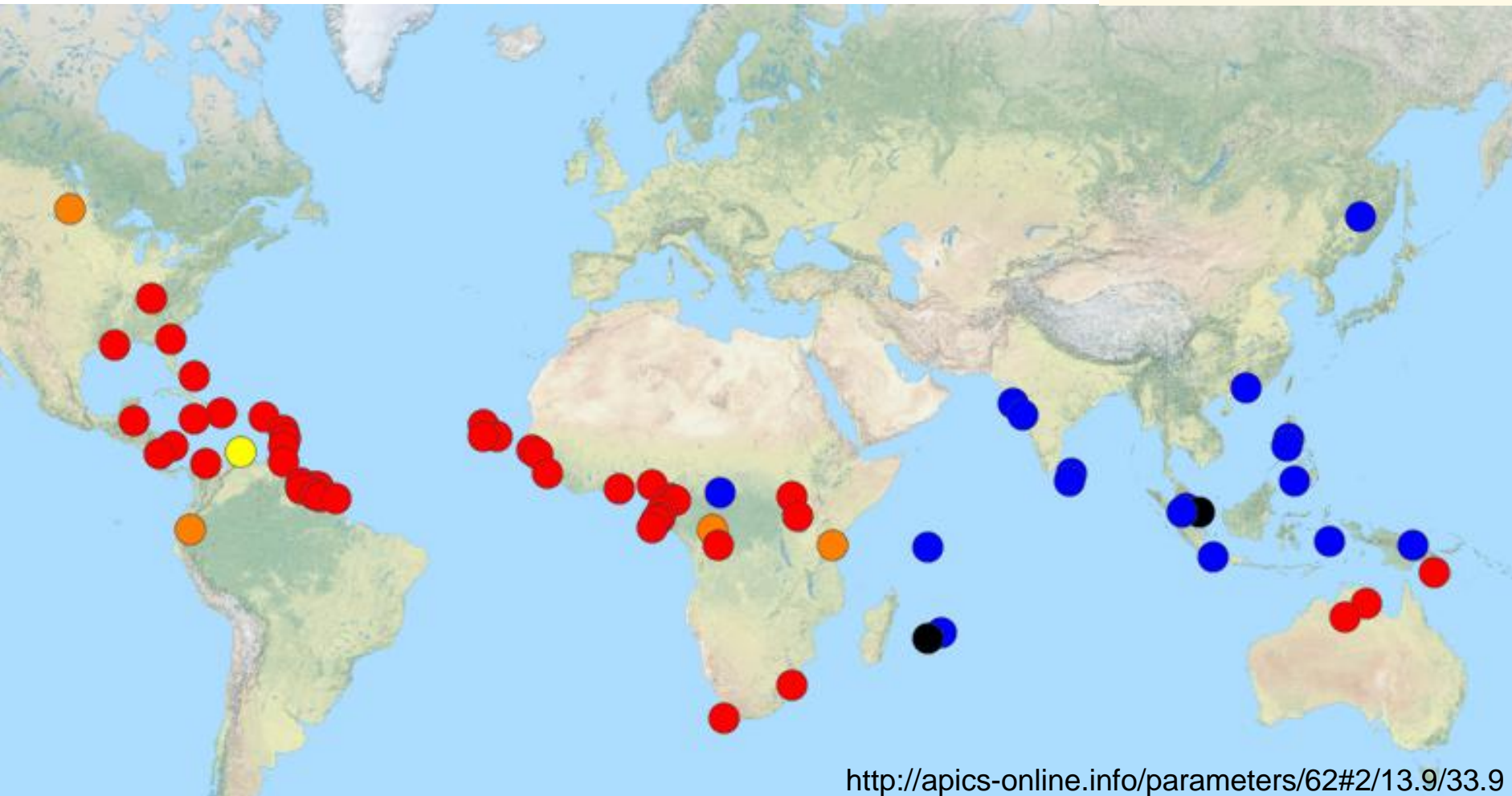
	Pronominal subjects	Expletive pronouns with existential verbs	Expletive pronouns in the 'seem'-construction
San Andrés	obligatory	no	yes
Nicaraguan	obligatory	minority	yes
Berbice Dutch	obligatory	minority	does not apply
Cape Verdean	obligatory	no	no
Réunion	mixed	no	no
Mauritian	optional	no	half
Diu	optional	no	does not apply
Philippine Creole Spanish	optional	no	no

EXPRESSION OF PRONOMINAL SUBJECTS. APICS 62

Values

●	Obligatory pronoun words	49
●	Pronoun affixes	4
●	Optional pronoun words	18
●	Subject pronouns in different position	2
●	Mixed behaviour of pronominal subjects	3

Representation: 76



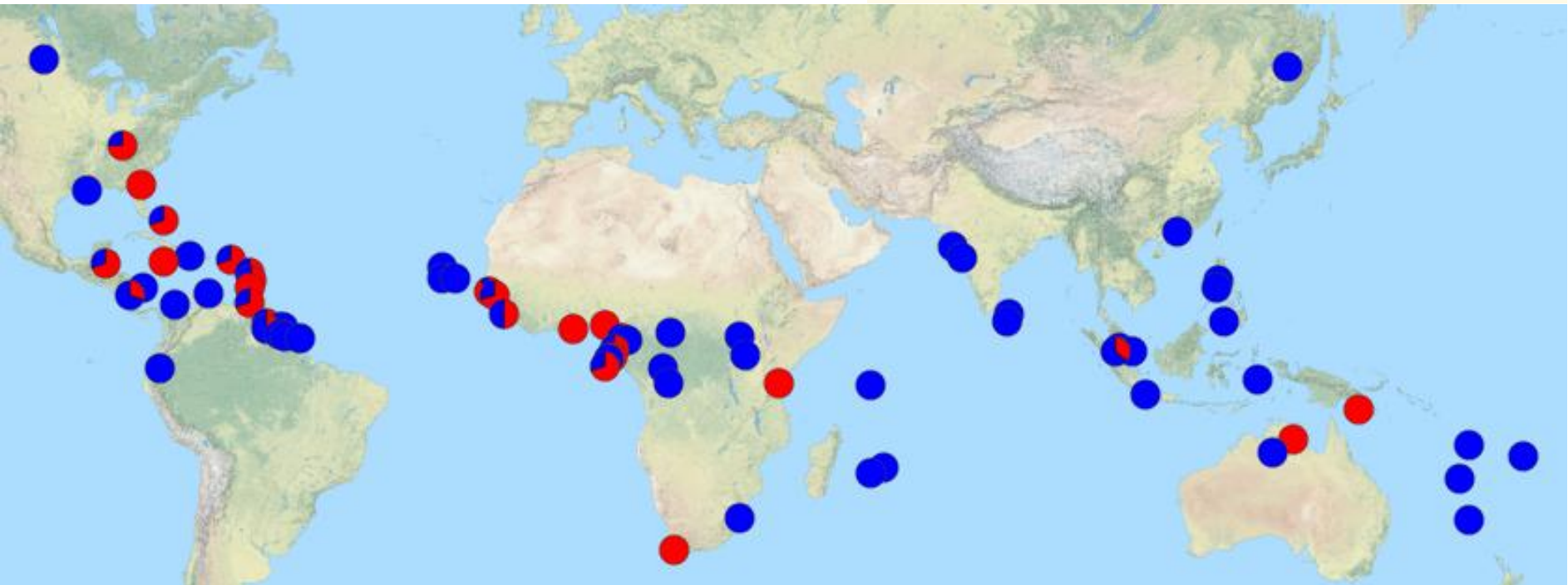
<http://apics-online.info/parameters/62#2/13.9/33.9>

ATLANTIC CREOLES

- **Non-null subject languages pace Torres Cacoullos & Travis (2013b)**
 - obligatory pronouns in subject position
 - languages in which simple sentences with pronominal subjects normally if not obligatorily contain a pronoun in subject position
 - unexpressed subjects in non-null subject languages "have special properties that distinguish them from the canonical null subjects" (Roberts & Holmberg 2010: 5)
- **Importance of the bi-clan effect (also convergence) for cross-creole comparisons (Michaelis 2014)**

NULL EXPLETIVE SUBJECT OF EXISTENTIAL VERB. APICS 64

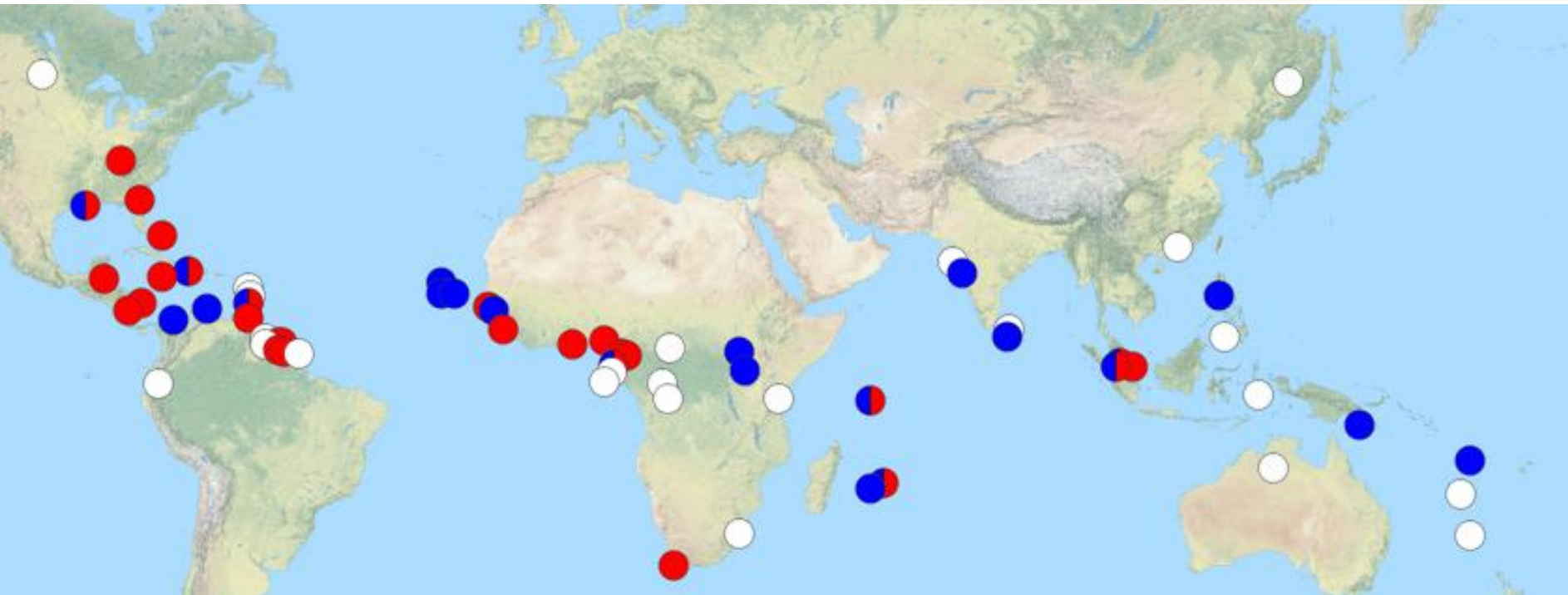
	excl	shrd	all
● An expletive subject is used	10	17	27
● An expletive subject is not used	48	17	65
Representation:			75



<http://apics-online.info/parameters/64#2/18.0/10.0>

EXPLETIVE SUBJECT IN 'SEEM' CONSTRUCTIONS. APICS 63

	excl	shrd	all
● An expletive subject is used	20	8	28
● An expletive subject is not used	15	8	23
○ 'There is no 'seem' construction	26	0	26
Representation:			69



<http://apics-online.info/parameters/63#2/18.0/5.1>

A MORE FINE-GRAINED LOOK AT NULL SUBJECTS

- **Null subjects do exist even in the creoles for which the APiCS-value is "obligatory pronoun words" [in pre-TMA/predicate position].**
- **The occurrence of null subjects is constrained by**
 1. **Discourse factors**
elliptical structures
 2. **Verbal semantics**
 3. **Substrate/adstrate influence**

REASONS FOR ELLIPSIS

- **Concatenation of verbal projections: the subject of the events described in sequence is understood to be identical to the subject of the first event.**
 - Coordination is a cross-linguistic tendency in the unexpression of subjects.
 - The same applies to subject continuity. (Torres Cacoullos & Travis 2013a; 2013b)
 - No switch reference
 - But this works both ways, i.e., both the expression and the unexpression of subjects
 - Interdependency of subject continuity and priming (Posio 2012: 23; Torres Cacoullos & Travis 2013a; 2013b)
- **A subject may also remain unexpressed in account of consecutive action involving known participants in which the subject changes**
- **Topic persistence** (Givón (1983: 17): “topic continuity”)
 - But: are concatenation and topic persistence distinct strategies? (cf. Kouwenberg 1994: 180-181)
- **Discourse formulas (Sippola 2011)**

CONCATENATION OF VERBAL PROJECTIONS

1. Ternate Chabacano

Pero, el manga hénti di akí na Báhra,
But DEF PL people of here LOC Bahra

si ta-priguntá Ø, kósa ta-platiká Ø, el ta-hablá lótru,
if IPFV-ask wha IPFV-speak REL IPFV-say 3PL

báhra, no chabakánu.
Bahra NEG Chabacano

‘But the people from here, Ternate, if they are asked what do they speak, what they say is Bahra, not Chabacano.’ (Sippola 2011: 265)

FURTHER EXAMPLES

2. Nicaraguan Creole

Ai iz a tiicha we tek mai likl piknini dem an [Ø] go aan di biich... an Ø tiich dem tu lov di plies weh de kom fram..

'I am a teacher who takes their little students and goes to the beach... and teaches them to love the place they come from.' (Bartens field recordings)

3. Cape Verdean Creole

<i>Kantu</i>	<i>ki</i>	<i>Lion</i>	<i>di</i>	<i>matu</i>	<i>ben</i>	<i>góra,</i>
When	COMP	lion	of	wood	came	then

Ø txiga, Ø fla:...

arrive say

'When the Lion came from the woods, he arrived and he said...'

(T.V. da Silva, 1987: 123 cited in Baptista 2002: 258)

CONSECUTIVE ACTION INVOLVING KNOWN PARTICIPANTS

4. Berbice Dutch

<i>Ø drefte</i>	<i>alma</i>	<i>gutu,</i>	<i>krikteni...</i>	<i>gutu</i>	<i>ji</i>
dress-PF	all	thing	get-PF=3pl	thing	for
<i>dekeni</i>	<i>mu, Ø mute</i>	<i>Ø bi</i>	<i>main</i>	<i>ju</i>	
take=3pl go	go-PF	say	mind	2sg	

"(They) dressed and so on; **(they)** got their thing to carry them there; (they) went; (she) said: be careful." [AH 010788:25] (Kouwenberg 1994: 180)

TOPIC PERSISTENCE

5. Berbice Dutch

Də minggijapu das gu sa, Ø kã ku
The water-NOM-PL HAB big so can catch
kɛnɛ, jɛis, mini ju oko
person yes swallow 2SG too

‘The water ones (referring to a water snake) are this big.
(They) can catch people, yes, even swallow you. [BB
290288:p4] (Kouwenberg 1994: 181)

DISCOURSE FORMULA

6. Philippine Creole Spanish: Ternate Chabacano

ØTa-hablá na istórya

IPFV-say LOC history

'It is said in the history...' (Sippola field recordings)

7. Philippine Creole Spanish: Zamboanga Chabacano

Si Ø pregunta lang, porque awra makapeste pasya

if ask just why now unpleasant take.a.stroll

si aga?

if early

'If [you/we/whoever] just ask, why is it now unpleasant to take a stroll early.' (Miravite & al. 2009: 66)

NULL SUBJECTS: NO DISCOURSE EXPLANATION POSSIBLE?

8. San Andrés Creole

Ø *Gaan Barranquilla and wan nia ailant iz Pravidens.*

go.ANT Barranquilla and one near island COP.PRS Providence

'I have been to Barranquilla and a nearby island called Providence.' (Bartens 2003: 45)

- English allows for unexpressed subject pronouns in intonation unit-initial position! (Torres Cacoulios & Travis 2013a: 10-11; 2013b; 2014: 16)
→ lexifier language influence!

9. Mauritian Creole

Ø *In pas en zurne dah bwa.*

in pass one whole-day in wood

'She'd spent the whole day out in the woods...' (Baker 1972: 165)

- Mauritian is a creole with optional null subjects.

VERBAL SEMANTICS

10. Philippine Creole Spanish: Ternate Chabacano

Kayá lang a-matá Ø kun-éli.

because.of just PFV-kill OBJ-3SG

'He was killed only because of that.' (Sippola 2011: 264)

- For example, in Mauritian Creole verbs of movement and *dir* 'to say' frequently take null subject pronouns. Nevertheless, a quantitative approach is needed in order to be able to say more on this.
- Spanish favors expressed subjects (at least in 1st sg)
 - with cognitive verbs (Bentivoglio 1987:50-54; Travis & Torres Cacoullos 2012; Torres Cacoullos & Travis 2013b)
 - with stative verbs (Posio 2012: 47) → connected with the focusing of attention on either the subject referent or on other participants in the event
 - interdependency turn-initial position and cognitive verbs (Travis & Torres Cacoullos 2012: 734-737)
 - cf. also the formulaic construction *yo creo* (Travis & Torres Cacoullos 2012: 739-741) and the sensitivity of formulaic sequences to frequency effects (Posio 2012: 4)
 - NB: subject pronouns may or may not constitute a single category (Torres Cacoullos & Travis 2014: 1)
 - Indeed, "1sg has a unique role in interaction as a reference to the speaker" (Torres Cacoullos & Travis 2013a: 2)

OTHER DISCOURSE/PRACTIC FACTORS

• Contrast

- (negative) polarity
 - heightens the probability of English but not Spanish subject expression
- foregrounding vs. backgrounding
 - Spanish: preterit = foregrounded > unexpressed subject; conditional, imperfect, subjunctive = backgrounded > expressed subjects; present > no effect (Silva-Corvalán 2001: 161-163)
- ≠ switch reference (Travis & Torres Cacoullos 2012: 742)

• Emphasis

- stance marking
- turn-initial position
 - heightens the probability of English but not Spanish subject expression

EVALUATION OF APiCS: THE CASE OF CAPE VERDEAN CREOLE

- Cape Verdean Creole is presented as a language featuring obligatory subject pronouns in the APiCS.
- However, Baptista (2002: 255-266) informs us that
 - Argumental pronouns can also be null.
 - In addition, “Null subjects of individual-level predicates are recoverable as 3rd person singular argumental pronouns *e/* or *e*. In contrast, null subjects of stage level predicates may be interpreted as 1st, 2nd or 3rd person.”
- **As a result, Baptista proposes that Cape Verdean is actually a (radical) pro-drop language.**
 - Discourse/radical pro-drop language pace Torres Cacoullos & Travis (2013b)
- **Berbice Dutch is likewise presented as a language featuring obligatory subject pronouns in the APiCS but also features null pronouns (see above).**

EXPLETIVE NULL SUBJECTS WITH EXISTENTIAL VERBS

- **Most of the creoles studied require expletive null subjects with existential verbs. Cf. Baker (1972: 100) on Mauritian Creole:**
 - “*Subjective*. A verb is termed 'subjective' if the predicate in which it occurs is immediately preceded by an NPS. (Almost all verbs are thus 'subjective', the only commonly-met exception being /*ena*/'be', 'exist', see below.)”
- **Nicaraguan Creole features some overt expletives as a result of decreolization.**
- **The same cannot be claimed for Berbice Dutch which likewise has overt expletives.**

EXAMPLES 1

11. Réunion Creole

Ø *Lavé in pti garson.*

have.PST ART.INDF small boy

‘There was a small boy.’ (Barat, Carayol & Vogel 1977: 13)

- This is the beginning of a story and immediately follows the initial formula “Kriké, kraké...”.

12. Mauritian Creole

Ø *Ti pe fer so terib...*

ANT PROG make hot very...

‘The weather was very warm...’ [‘It was very hot.’] (Baker 1972: 181)

EXAMPLES 2

13. San Andrés Creole

Ø Gat four big siel.

have four big sail

'It had four big sails.'

14. Berbice Dutch

o hab en taumama danga

3SG have ART.INDF snake-mother there

'There is a 'snakemother' there (i.e. a snake spirit).'
(Kouwenberg 1994)

EXPLETIVES IN THE 'SEEM'-CONSTRUCTION

16. Nicaraguan Creole

Ih luk laik noubadi gat wi fa pei main

3SG look like nobody get 1PL for pay mind

bot nou wid dis nyu govament...

but now with DEM new government

'It looked as if nobody could make us care but now with this new government...' (Bartens field recordings)

- This construction is relatively infrequent in narratives and may have to be elicited.
 - What kind of data is being collected by creolists/linguists?

A BRIEF COMMENT ON SUB-/ADSTRATE INFLUENCE

- **Hypothesis: substrate/adstrate influence is the main factor which affects the expression of subjects in creoles.**
- **The hypothesis is largely born out by our data. Note, however, the role of convergence as well!**
 - Cf. the bi-clan effect (Michaelis 2014)
- **Dryer (2011) on the expression of pronominal subjects:**
 - Optional pronouns in subject position in South East Asia
 - Affixes on verbs in Europe and Caribbean.
 - Obligatory pronouns in Northern Europe, Caribbean, West Africa and occasionally in SE Asia.

CONT'D

- **Lexifiers:**
 - English, French and Dutch are non-pro-drop, Portuguese and Spanish pro-drop languages.
- **The variable expression of pronominal subjects e.g. in Mauritian is due to sub-/adstrate influence.**
- **The almost categorical use of explicit subject pronouns in San Andrés and Nicaraguan Creole is, on the other hand, a result of convergence.**

CONCLUSIONS 1: THE APICS DATABASE

- **excellent general picture**
 - rich source of examples and references
- **limitations for comparative studies**
 - limitations of the definitions
 - feature selection and design is not always explicit
 - pragmatics?
- **inclusion of both traditional creoles and other contact languages**
- **interpretation and double checking of “statistical” results is required**

CONCLUSIONS 2: NULL SUBJECTS IN CREOLES

- **The expression of pronominal subjects is**
 1. conditioned by the sub-/adstrate languages, but also
 2. manifests the effects of convergence.
- **Existential verbs take null subjects across the board whereas lexifiers and sub-/adstrates vary in this respect.**
 - Innovation
- **Variable results for the 'seem'-construction**
 - The mentioned problem of the discourse types traditionally collected by creolists
 - And feature selection of the APiCS

TYPE OF DATA USED

- **Data collection procedures have to be considered**
 - cf., e.g., Bailey & Tillery (2004); Saarikivi (pers. comm.)
 - **Virtually all speakers of the creoles under survey are at least bilingual!**
 - **We have sociolinguistic data on our informants (San Andrés and Nicaraguan Creole English, Philippine Creole Spanish) but not on the data gathered from other sources**
- **Note also that the grammar of discourse is developed “on-line”! (Travis 2007: 132; Hopper 1998)**
 - **Genre**
 - cf., e.g., Silva-Corvalán (2001); Travis (2007)

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THANK YOU

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