

Subject null arguments in creole languages

Previously it was believed that creole languages obligatorily require overt subject pronouns - notwithstanding some exceptions such as null expletive subjects - as a result of the lack of verbal inflection in these languages. Even if this holds true for the great majority of creole languages (cf. APiCS), more recent studies have shown that this is not the case of many Asian and Indian Ocean creoles, in which pronominal subjects are frequently "omitted".

This study provides an account of subject pronoun usage in creoles focusing on a number of creoles that represent different areal patterns. Our sample includes the Atlantic creoles of San Andrés, Nicaragua, Berbice Dutch and Cape Verdean, the Indian Ocean creoles of Réunion and Mauritius, Diu Indo-Portuguese, and Philippine Creole Spanish.

Given the shallow chronological depth of these contact languages - which often involve lexifier languages with variable subject marking -, the creoles under survey offer an ideal corpus for studying the processes involved in the evolution of null subjects.

As Wratil (2011) has shown, the occurrence, distribution and development of null subject pronouns is not necessarily connected with characteristics of verbal inflection or with word order. By consequence, we turn to discourse as the main explanatory factor. We shall explore the discourse properties and other factors in verbal semantics that favor the occurrence of null subjects in our sample. We also use Travis and Torres Cacoullós' (2012; 2013a; 2013b) cross-linguistic generalizations based on constraints on variable subject realization, especially in cases not optimally catered for by the definitions presented in the APiCS database. Nevertheless, our results confirm that substrate/adstrate influence is the main factor which affects the expression of subjects in creoles.

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