The emergence of the determiner system in Mauritian Creole: A syntax semantics mapping

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Abstract
This paper describes the emergence of new functional items in the Mauritian Creole (MC) noun phrase, following the loss of the French determiner system when superstrate and substrate languages came in to contact. The aim of the paper is to show how the new language strived to express the universal semantic contrasts of (in)definiteness and singular vs. plural. The process of grammaticalization of new functional items in the determiner system was accompanied by changes in the syntax from French to creole. An analysis within Chomsky’s Minimalist framework (1995, 2000, 2001) suggests that these changes were driven by the need to map semantic features onto the syntax.

1. Introduction

1.1 From French to creole

Mauritian Creole (MC) is a French-based creole, with strict SVO word order like its lexifier, but lacking inflectional morphology, which was lost on contact. Early in the genesis of MC, the singular French definite articles (le/la) and the partitive determiner (du), incorporated into a large number of the nouns that they modified, e.g.:

- Le roi (the king) → lerwa (king)
- La fenêtre (the window) → lafnet (window)
- (De) la farine (flour) → lafarin (flour)
- Du monde (people) → dimun (person, people)

Not all nouns ended up with an incorporated article, but the French determiner system collapsed, and the immediate consequence was that, in the early creole, all nouns were bare, yielding ambiguous interpretations between [±definite] singular and [±definite] plural interpretations, as shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>MC</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count nouns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>singular [−definite]</td>
<td>une table</td>
<td>latab</td>
<td>a table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>singular [+definite]</td>
<td>la table</td>
<td></td>
<td>the table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plural [−definite]</td>
<td>des tables</td>
<td></td>
<td>tables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plural [+definite]</td>
<td>les tables</td>
<td></td>
<td>the tables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass nouns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[−definite]</td>
<td>de l’eau</td>
<td>dilo</td>
<td>water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[+definite]</td>
<td>l’eau</td>
<td></td>
<td>the water</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: [±definiteness] and singular plural features are lost in the very early creole
It seems that the French determiners, which serve to mark the semantic contrasts of (in)definiteness and singular vs. plural were not recognized as separate morphemes, but were taken to be an integral part of the nouns that they modified (Chaudenson 1981, Baker 1984, Grant 1995, Strandquist, 2005). Initially, these semantic contrasts were not overtly expressed; awkward periphrastic constructions were used, or the interpretation of nouns was simply derived from the context. However, over a period of some 150 years, from the mid 18th century to the end of the 19th century, new functional items emerged in the creole determiner system, namely:

- The singular indefinite determiner enn, derived from the French un/un. It is equivalent to English 'a/an'.
- The specificity marker la, which modifies both singular and plural NPs. It is most likely derived from the French locative adverb là. La is post-nominal, while all other determiners are pre-nominal.
- The plural marker bann, derived from the French bande ('group'). It is unspecified for the feature [±definiteness].

I propose that a phonologically null definite determiner, represented as δ, was present very early in the creole.

1.2 Outline of this paper

In Sections 2, 3 and 4, I present data from early MC texts, to show how the various determiner elements gradually emerged to express the semantic contrasts of (in)definiteness and singular vs. plural. Section 5 comprises the syntactic framework adopted for this analysis, and in Section 6 I give brief definitions of relevant semantic features. Section 7 comprises the analysis, Section 8 looks at previous work on the subject, and Section 9 concludes this paper.

2. Historical background

2.1 From 1750 to 1820 - Bare nouns and the demonstratives ça ... là

(1) Mô couri bitation (Pitot 1805)
   1.SG run house
   run to (a/the) house/s
   Je courru vers une/la/des/les maison/s

(2) vendé cosson, vendé tabac (Pitot 1805)
   sell pig sell tobacco
   I sell (the) pigs, I sell (the) tobacco
   Je vends des/les cochon, je vends du/le tabac

(3) n'apas loptal, n'apas sourzin? (Pitot, 1805)
   NEG hospital NEG surgeon
   Is/Are there no hospital(s), is/are there no surgeon(s)?
   Il n’y a pas d’hôpital/hôpitaux, il n’y a pas de chirurgien(s)?

- In (1) bitation is ambiguous between [±definite] singular or plural.
- In (2), both the count noun i and the mass noun tabac are ambiguous between a [±definite] interpretation
- In (3) loptal and sourzin, which are both indefinite, are ambiguous between a singular and plural interpretation.
When referring to a specific individual, or referent which was present in the situational context, the demonstrative ça, derived from the French demonstratives ce/ces was used with the demonstrative reinforcer là, exactly as in French:

(4) ça blanc là li beaucoup malin (Grant 1749)
   DEM white DEM 3.SG much clever
   This white man is very clever
   Ce blanc là est très malin

While in French these demonstrative particles occur with both singular and plural NPs, they seem to occur only with singular NPs in the early creole. Furthermore, neither ça nor là was independent of the other, unlike in French, where the demonstratives ce/ces can be used independently of the 'demonstrative reinforcer' là:

(5) Li bon ça bondié là qui dans vous paye... ? (Pitot 1805)
   3SG kind DEM god DEM COMP in 2SG.F country
   Is he kind this God who is in your country ...?
   Est-ce qu’il est bon ce Dieu (là) qui est dans votre pays ... ?

2.2  The demonstratives ça and là - 1820 onwards

From 1820 onwards, ça and là start being used on their own with both singular and plural [+definite] NPs, and this transitional stage reflects a gradual weakening of the deictic features of ça, which becomes ambiguous between a demonstrative and a definite determiner as shown in (6):

(6) mais ça bonne-année qui passé (Dated 1822, in Chrestien 1831)
   but DEM/DEF year COMP pass
   But that/the year that went by
   Mais cette/l’année qui s’est écoulée

The weakening of ça happened in tandem with the reanalysis of là, but what exactly is the function of là and why does this particle eventually prevail over ça as specificity marker, given that ce/ces etc. are strong demonstratives in French, encoding features of definiteness and specificity?

While in French, and in the early creole, only an NP can intervene between a demonstrative and its reinforcer, là starts to appear in a clause final position as shown:

(7) ça grand pié dibois pian Aughiste conné là (Dated 1818, in Freycinet 1827)
   DEM big tree wood smelly Auguste know DEM/SP
   This big foul smelling tree that Auguste knows
   Ce grand arbre puant (là) qu'Auguste connait

This is the first example of ça + NP + relative clause + là, where both ça and là have scope over the head noun, here pié. This patterns with the use of these particles in modern MC. Around the same period, là starts being used on its own, without the pre-nominal demonstrative ça. In (8), its interpretation may be ambiguous between a specificity marker, or a locative adverb:
Comment doumonde entré dans dibois
as people enter in wood
As people enter the woods
Comme les gens entrent dans la forêt

en montant piti laravine là! (Freycinet 1827)
by climbing small ravine SP/there
by climbing that small ravine/the small ravine which is there
en montant par cette petite ravine/la petite ravine qui est là

But there is no doubt in (9) that là is used to mark Torti, which has a discourse antecedent, as referential:

(9) Et Torti là touzours marcé (Dated 1822, in Chrestien 1831)
and tortoise SP still walk
And the tortoise keeps walking
Et la tortue marche toujours

The data from this early period also suggest that là occurred only with singular NPs, as was noted with the demonstratives ça... là. However, despite the reanalysis of this particle as a marker of referentiality or specificity, bare nouns could still be interpreted as [+definite] and referential, as in (10):

(10) Bonhomme Flanquère corce li, tire so lapeau méte sec.
old.man Flanquère peel 3.SG take 3.SG.POSS hide put dry
Old man Flanquère peeled it, took off its hide, put it to dry.
Francoeur l’écorche, tire sa peau et la met à sécher.

Lhère lapeau fine sec, bonhomme prend lapeau là, (Baissac 1888: 45)
when hide PST dry old.man take hide SP
When the hide had dried, the old man took that hide,
Quand la peau est sèche, le bonhomme la prend, (Baissac 1888 :44)

Both lapeau and lapeau là are [+definite] singular, and refer to the same previously introduced discourse antecedent. It must be assumed, therefore, that là encodes an additional feature of specificity which is not present in the phonologically null determiner. In order to better understand the function of là/la, we need take a look at other changes that take place in the MC determiner system, and how semantic contrasts of (in)definiteness and singular vs. plural, come to be marked on noun phrases.

3. The indefinite determiner from 1818 onwards

The first use of the indefinite determiner ein, eine, éne, ène, enne (enn in Modern MC), derived from the French indefinite article un/une (a/an), appears in texts from 1818 onwards, to unambiguously mark nouns as [–definite] singular, as in (11):

(11) mo lipié marcé lahaut enne brance sec (Dated 1818, in Freycinet 1827)
my foot walk on a branch dry
I stepped on a dry branch
J’ai posé le pied sur une branche sèche
Bare nouns, however, still remain ambiguous between [+definite] singular or [±definite] plural interpretations, as shown in the following examples:

(12) mo siv larivières pour saute laut coté (Dated 1818, in Freycinet 1827)
1.SG follow river to jump other side
I follow the river to jump on the other side
Je suis la rivière pour sauter de l'autre côté

(13) Vous, ça qui blancs appell dimonde agile (Dated 1818, in Freycinet 1827)
2.PL that which whites call people agile
You, whom the white men call nimble
Vous, que les blancs disent agiles

(14) y.en.a Zizes dans tous quartiers (Nicolay 1835)
have judge in all district
There are judges in all districts
Il y a des juges dans tous les quartiers

Where the following interpretations are (pragmatically) assigned to the bare nouns:
larivières is [+definite] singular in (12)
blancs is [+definite] plural in (13)
zizes is [–definite] plural in (14)

4. Plural marking

4.1 Definite plural – ‘Tout/tous’ from 1820 - 1855

The occurrence of post DP là, without ça to mark singular NPs as referential coincides with the first use of the universal quantifier tout/tous (‘all’) to mark plurality, as in (15):

(15) Quand nous sorti dans l’églize Tout blancs guetté nous passé (Dated 1822, in Chrestien 1831)
when 1.PL come.out in church all white watch 1.PL pass
When we come out of the church the white men watch us go by
Quand nous sortons de l'Eglise les blancs nous regardent passer

Given that tout/tous is a universal quantifier, it marked plurality on [+definite] NPs only.

4.2 Indefinite plural – ‘eine bande’ 1850 onwards

From 1850 onwards we see the appearance eine bande, derived from the French une bande de (‘a group of’), minus the preposition, being used to express an indefinite number or quantity, i.e. [–definite] plural, as shown in the following examples:

(16) Arla satte vini coté enne lotre bande noir apré coupe canne (Dated 1850, Chaudenson 1981)
thus cat come near a other group black MOD cut cane
Thus the cat comes by another group of slaves who were cutting cane
Voilà que le chat arrive auprès d’une autre bande de noirs en train de couper la canne
When first used, *ein band* was most likely interpreted as an indefinite NP as in French *une bande*, but was gradually reanalysed as a proportional quantifier, with the meaning *beaucoup* (‘many’, ‘a lot of’, ‘lots of’) as in (18):

(18) *é éne band lot* (Anderson 1885:14)
and one group other
and many others
‘et bien d’autres encore’ (1955: Ch.15, l.30, p.1479)

This reanalysis of *éne band* as [–definite] plural marker may well have motivated the use of *band* to mark definite plural NPs.

4.3 *Simply plural – shifting from tout/tous to bann, 1885 onwards*

Towards the end of the 19th century, *band* starts being used on its own, replacing *tout/tous* as a marker of plurality, as in (19):

(19) *li ti anvoy band so domestic* (Anderson 1885:19)
   3.SG PST send PLU 3.SG.POSS servant
He sent his servants
‘Il envoya ses serviteurs’ (1955: Ch.22, l.3, p.1489)

Given that the original source document has *ses serviteurs* and not *tous ses serviteurs*, *bann* has been glossed simply as plural marker on the noun, despite the fact that it quantifies over the PossP, *so domestic*.

In (20), *band* immediately precedes the noun that it modifies (as in modern MC), and the plural NP occurs between the demonstratives *ça...là*. This represents a transition from universal quantifier to plural marker, a change only made possible by the grammaticalization of *la* as a specificity marker on both singular and plural NPs:

(20) *Namcouticouti qui té faire vous tout ça bande malices là* (Baissac, 1888: 107)
   Namcouticouti who PST make 2.SG.F all DEM PLU mischief SP
It is Namcouticouti who has played all these tricks on you
‘C’est Namcouticouti qui vous a fait tous ces tours-là’ (Baissac 1888 :106)

By the end of the 19th century, some 150 years after the initial contact between superstrate and substrate, the MC determiner system finally stabilized into what is currently used today. The process of grammaticalization of *bann* and *la* was complete. This did not happen in isolation, but as the data suggests, there was a dynamic interplay of lexical items vying for a role in the emerging determiner system.
5. Theoretical framework

5.1 Assumptions of the Minimalist Program

My syntactic analysis is within the framework of Chomsky’s Minimalist Program (MP) (1995, 2000, 2001), which makes the assumption that the human Language Faculty (LF) is an optimal system, comprising an initial state which is genetically determined, and is uniform for the species. The theory of this initial state is referred to as universal Grammar (UG), which provides a fixed system of principles, and differences between languages are accounted for in terms of parametric variations.

For each particular language, the cognitive system consists of a lexicon and a computational system, which is strictly derivational. The derivation of a particular linguistic expression involves a choice of items from the lexicon, and a computation that combines them into a phonetic and a semantic component. These represent the only two interface levels, also referred to as Phonetic Form (PF) and Logical Form (LF), and which account for the phenomena of sound and meaning respectively.

The lexicon specifies the elements that the cognitive system selects and integrates to form linguistic expressions, by the recursive application of the operations Merge, Move and Agree. The operation Merge concatenates two syntactic objects and projects the categorial feature of the head, while the operation Move is triggered to satisfy the checking requirements of a lexical resource.

Relations are stated in terms of X-bar structure, which assumes binary branching only. Syntactic structures are built up using general rules such that each phrase consists of a head (X), a complement (YP) and specifier (ZP) as in the schema below. The two basic relations are the Specifier-head relation of ZP to X, and the head-complement relation of X to YP:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{XP} & \quad \text{ZP} & \quad \text{X'} \\
\text{ZP} & \quad \text{X} & \quad \text{YP}
\end{align*}
\]

Source: Chomsky (1995:172)

The (MP) assumes that items are selected from the lexicon and enter a derivation fully inflected with their phonological, semantic and formal features. The lexicon comprises lexical items, such as verbs, nouns and adjectives, and functional items, such a complementizers, tense and determiners.

Functional items are the locus of formal semantic features, which are the triggers of syntactic derivations needed for convergence at the interface, where all phonological and semantic features must be interpretable, i.e. yielding Full Interpretation (FI). They are Probes (P), with uninterpretable features, while lexical items are Goals (G), whose features are interpretable. Probes seek, and value matching features on a Goal in order to eliminate their uninterpretable features. If conditions are satisfied, uninterpretable features delete. Derivations must be optimal, satisfying certain natural economy conditions and convergent derivations satisfy the principle of FI. Agree is the operation that establishes a relation between a Probe and a
matching feature on a Goal, to check and delete uninterpretable features. However, the basic ‘economy of derivation’ assumed in the MP is that operations are driven by necessity: they are “last resort”, applied if they must be, not otherwise.

The notions of economy and optimality apply to both the derivations and the occurrence of features. Optimally, a feature occurs on a head only if that yields new scopal or discourse related properties. Another Minimalist assumption which is relevant to my analysis is Chomsky’s (2001) assumption that the Faculty of Language takes scopal and discourse related properties to be ‘edge phenomena’, hence involving c-command. In order to minimize the search, the uninterpretable features of a Probe (α) must be in an appropriate relation to the interpretable features of a Goal (β), i.e. the P-G relation must be local, as in the configuration below:

(22) \[
\begin{array}{c}
\alpha \\
\alpha \rightarrow \alpha \\
\alpha \rightarrow \alpha \\
\alpha \rightarrow \alpha \\
\alpha \rightarrow \alpha \\
\alpha \rightarrow \alpha \\
\alpha \rightarrow \alpha \\
\alpha \rightarrow \alpha \\
\alpha \rightarrow \alpha \\
\end{array}
\]

If conditions are satisfied, the uninterpretable features of P delete. Finally, ‘Probes and Goals must be active - once their features are checked and deleted, these elements can no longer enter into an Agree relation’ (Chomsky 2001: 15, italics in original).

5.2 The DP Hypothesis

I adopt Abney’s DP Hypothesis (1987) whereby the D(eterminer)P(hrase) is the maximal category projected by the class of determiner elements, and heads the noun phrase (DP). Determiners vary according to the nouns that they select as complements (e.g. count or mass nouns), and they assign to the nouns with which they combine, the semantic features of (in)definiteness, deixis, specificity, etc. Determiner elements are Probes, whose uninterpretable features are eliminated in the course of a derivation, by matching features on lexical items, which are the Goals.

I propose a highly inflected noun phrase structure, where each functional item, with its own semantic features, heads its own projection. In the case of MC, the projections within the DP, which are relevant to this analysis, include the Specificity Phrase (SpP), the Definiteness Phrase (DefP), the Demonstrative Phrase (DemP), the Number Phrase (NumP), and the Noun Phrase (NP).

A final assumption, which is important for my analysis is that, although languages vary according to whether or not they may omit an overt determiner, I assume that ‘DPs can be arguments, NPs cannot’ (Longobardi 1994: 628), though D may be a phonologically null element.
6. Semantic Definitions

This section comprises brief definitions of the semantic features that are relevant to my analysis, namely, (in)definiteness, specificity and deixis.

6.1 (In)Definiteness

I adopt the Familiarity Theory of Definiteness which assumes that definiteness expresses the discourse pragmatic property of familiarity (Jespersen 1933, Christophersen 1939, Karttunen 1971, Heim 1983, 1988, Kamp 1984). Thus, indefinite NPs introduce new referents in the discourse, while definite NPs pick out particular elements that the hearer can identify, either by information supplied in the discourse, or through shared knowledge. Indefinites cannot have antecedents in the discourse, whereas definites must.

Definite singular NPs include proper names, possessive NPs, demonstrative NPs, referring pronouns and nouns marked by the definite determiner. These are *the* in English, *le/la/les* in French. When the definite article is used, "the speaker must always be supposed to know which individual he is thinking of; the interesting thing is that the *the*-form supposes that the hearer knows it, too. For the proper use of *the*, it is necessary that it should call up in the hearer's mind the image of the exact individual that the speaker is thinking of." (Christophersen 1939: 28).

6.2 Specificity

Specificity and non-specificity have traditionally been defined as properties of indefinite NPs when they occur in sentences with operators such as modals, propositional attitude verbs and other quantificational NPs. This can lead to an ambiguous interpretation of some utterances, such as (22):

(23) Paul wants to buy a monkey.

However, the following utterances leave no room for ambiguity:

(24) a. **Specific**
    Paul wants to buy [a monkey]. He saw it at the market yesterday

b. **Non-specific**
    Paul wants buy a monkey. He will look for one at the market.

In the case of indefinites, contextual information dispels the ambiguity with regard to their [±specificity] feature. While in (23a), Paul has a specific monkey in mind, this is not the case in (23b). A specific NP refers to a particular individual, while a non-specific NP simply refers to a class of objects or to any individual fitting the description denoted by the NP, and no particular individual is referred to.

Although I am not be concerned with the specificity contrast of indefinites in this paper, the above examples serve to demonstrate an important feature of specificity, namely that of 'existential commitment'. A specific NP can be pronominalized, as shown by the co-
indexation, in (23a). This is not possible in the case of a non-specific NP, as particular reference and existential commitment are both lacking.

Definite NPs can also be [±specific], and as with indefinite NPs, this contrast is not morphologically marked in English or French. ‘Specificity is a phenomenon distinct from definiteness, and while the definiteness of the NP can be determined from the determiner in languages like English, specificity cannot be so determined’ (Enç 1991:16). While definiteness expresses the discourse pragmatic property of familiarity, ‘specificity mirrors a more finely grained referential structure of the items used in the discourse. A specific NP indicates that it is referentially anchored to another discourse object’ (Von Heusinger 2002: 245). This view is shared by Enç (1991), and Pesetsky (1987) who coins the term d-linking (discourse linking) to define the phenomenon of specificity.

On the basis of the above definitions, I equate specificity with referentiality, or ‘direct anaphora’, all of which encode an element of discourse deixis (which is not always present in the case of [+definite] NPs).

6.3 Deixis

Deixis is defined as the way in which the reference of certain elements in a sentence is determined in relation to, either a discourse participant, or to a the specific time and/or place of the discourse (or utterance). In many languages, they are commonly introduced by a demonstrative, but in MC, post nominal la has deictic force, and can be translated as either the N or that N depending on the context.

7. The analysis

7.1 Evidence for a null definite determiner

Given that the definite determiner is a phonologically null element, and that, in the early creole, the interpretation of nouns was mostly derived from the context, it is difficult to determine when this first manifested itself in the creole. In the following examples, the bare nouns are unique nouns, thus [+definite] singular, and, in French, require the definite article, but not so in MC:

(25) L’her solé lévé, (Freycinet 1827)
    When the sun rose,
    Quand le soleil se leva,

(26) Bon.Dieû été faire le.ciele avec la.terre, (Lambert 1828)
    God   PST make heaven with earth
    Dieu a créé le ciel et la terre

Evidence for a null determiner is based on the assumption that DPs can be arguments, NPs cannot (Longobardi 1994). The fact that the bare nouns in above examples are all arguments of verbs suggests that they are DPs as opposed to NPs.
7.2 The weakening of ‘ça … là’

This analysis clearly accounts for the weakening and reanalysis of ça/sa from strong demonstrative to optional demonstrative reinforcer. I propose that speakers of the early Creole did not identify the separate functions of the demonstratives ça and là, and that the gradual weakening of pre-nominal ça was due to the presence of the phonologically null determiner, which was already marking definiteness. Such an analysis complies with economy and optimality requirements of the MP, which stipulate that an item should occur in the syntax only if necessary. Once D had projected to assign check and value the definiteness features of the NP, there was convergence, and therefore no further requirement for another functional item (ça) with matching features to project.

With regard to modern MC la, it is not unreasonable to assume that the French demonstrative reinforcer là, the distal marker of deixis, which is homophonous with the French locative adverb là, assumed the role of marking first deixis, then was reanalyzed as a specificity marker. Whatever its function, on the grounds of economy and optimality, it must be assumed that la encodes semantic features which are not present in the other determiners.

7.3 The plural maker ‘bann’

The reanalysis of bann, from contentful lexical item to universal quantifier and finally to plural marker, can also be explained in terms of other changes that happened in the determiner system. We have seen in (19), repeated here as (21) and represented in (22), that band functions like the universal quantifier, having scope over the PossP so domestic:

(21) li ti anvoy band so domestic (Anderson 1885)
he had sent all his servants

(22)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{QP} \\
\text{Q'} \\
\text{PossP} \\
\text{Poss'} \\
\text{NP} \\
\text{N'} \\
bann/tous \\
\text{so} \\
\text{domestic} \\
\text{all} \\
\text{his} \\
\text{servants}
\end{array}
\]

In the above example, bann immediately c-commands the possessive pronoun so, which is a head, and thus intervenes between the Probe (bann), and its Goal (domestic). Compare (21) to this modern MC example:

(29) Li ti dir so bann zom (Virahsawmy 2005)
He had told his men
Il avait dit à ses hommes
The Probe had to move closer to its Goal, into its minimal checking domain, in order to check and delete its uninterpretable feature [+plural] by valuing a matching feature on the NP. This change happened soon enough, as shown by another example from the same period:

(31) éne dan band profit (Anderson 1885:14)
    one in PLU prophet
    One among/of the prophets
    ‘Quelqu’un des prophètes’ (1955 : Ch.16, l.14, p.1480)

The transition from universal quantifier to plural marker was almost complete by the end of the 19th century. In modern MC, bann is unspecified for [±definiteness] as shown in (26) where it marks an indefinite NP in the existential construction with ena:

(32) De zour apre ti ena bann long reportaz dan lagazet, (Virahsawmy 2005)
    two day after TNS have PLU long commentary in newspaper
    Two days later, there were long articles the newspapers
    Deux jours après, il y avait de longs reportages dans les journaux

This further change into a pure marker of plurality, unspecified for [±definiteness] was made possible by both the presence of a null [+definite] determiner, and the ensuing grammaticalization of la, which, by the end of the 19th century, was marking specificity on both singular and plural NPs.

It may be that this needed to happen to satisfy the economy and optimality conditions imposed by FL, and which are stipulated in the Minimalist framework as follows: ‘P & G must be active, but once their features are checked and deleted, these elements can no longer enter into an Agree relation’ (Chomsky, 2001). Once the plural feature of the Probe bann had been checked and deleted, this element was no longer active to check and delete the further feature of definiteness.

7.4 The proportional quantifier ‘ennbann’

Following the reanalysis of bann as plural marker of both definite and indefinite NPs, ennbann (I propose one morpheme) became somewhat redundant as a marker of [–definite] plural. When first used, éne/ein band very likely retained its French interpretation as a collective noun, meaning a group. I propose that it was subsequently reanalyzed as a proportional quantifier, having scope over its complement NP. Compare (16) and (18) repeated here as (27) and (28) respectively:
Thus the cat comes by another group of slaves who were cutting cane.

and many others

The changes can be represented as follows:

\[ [\text{DP éne [NP bande [NP N]]}] \rightarrow [\text{QP ennban [NP N]}] \]

*Ennbann* survives in modern MC, where it functions like a proportional quantifier, with the meaning ‘many’, ‘a lot of’, ‘lots of’, ‘several’ (*plusieurs, beaucoup de*).

### 6.5 The Specificity marker ‘la’

The reanalysis of *là* as a marker of specificity, together with its DP final position, represents a significant divergence from the lexifier, namely:

- In French all determiners must precede the nouns they modify, while in MC the specificity marker is post nominal.
- The French demonstratives *ce/cet/ces* etc. can occur on their own, without the demonstrative reinforcer *là*, but the reverse is ungrammatical.
- In MC, the specificity marker *la* can occur without the demonstrative *sa*, but the reverse is ungrammatical.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>Modern MC</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cette tortue</td>
<td>torti là</td>
<td>the/that tortoise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cette tortue là</td>
<td>sa torti la</td>
<td>this tortoise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*tortue là</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*sa torti</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Comparison of demonstratives in French and MC*

While French *là* specifies the deictic value of *ce/ces* etc. as distal, MC *sa* reinforces the deictic value of *la* as proximate.

The grammaticalization of these particles was accompanied by a change in their syntax. It is not possible in modern MC to have *la* intervening between the NP and its modifiers, as was the case in the early creole (and in French). In modern MC, *la* must be DP final. Example (6), repeated here as (31) illustrates this point:

(36) *Li bon ça bon Dieu là qui dans vous paye, hein?* (Pitot 1805)
*Li bon sa Bondie ki dan u pei là, ...* Modern MC
*Li bon sa Bondie la ki dan u pei*
*Il est bon ce Dieu (là) qui est dans votre pays, hein?*

While DP is the highest projection in French, I propose that the highest projection in the MC noun phrase is the Sp(ecificity)P(hrase) which is headed by *la*. The Probe *la* has strong specificity features which motivate movement of the NP (the Goal) to its specifier to value its
matching feature. All modifiers of the NP - adjectives and relative clauses are ‘pied-piped’ along, deriving the clause final position of la.

When the demonstrative *sa* is also present, it is similarly attracted to the specifier of *la*, together with the NP and its modifiers. In the following example from modern MC, the DP final *la*, like *sa*, has scope over the NP headed by the noun *zom*, and not over the preceding NP headed by *lamer*, which is embedded in the relative clause.

(37) Sa zom ki okipp partaz delo lamer la (Maingard 2002: 81)
DEM man COMP look.after distribution water sea SP
This man who looks after the distribution of sea water
Cet homme qui s’occupe du partage de l’eau de mer

(38)

'sThe operation of pied-piping picks up the adjunct along with everything else in the category it identifies' (Chomsky, 2001:21). The NP and its modifiers (such as adjectives and relative clauses) are analyzed as a complex quantifier expression, and the whole NP forms a constituent. The determiner identifies the type of quantification, while the NP and its modifiers restrict the range of the quantifier to the kind of thing to be considered.

8. Previous work on the subject

To my knowledge, the occurrence of a null determiner has not been identified in the grammar of MC. In current dictionaries and grammars, post-nominal *la* is defined as a marker of definiteness (Syea, 1996), as a specificity marker (Diksyoner krel angle, 1984), and as a definite determiner, equivalent to the French definite article *le/la/lies* (Baker & Hookoomsing, 1987, Virahsawmy 2004). However, I maintain that post-nominal *la* in MC is not equivalent to the French definite article - it has retained the deictic features of its source, and consequently, it cannot be used with generic nouns, or unique nouns:

(39) Le singe aime la banane (French)
Monkeys like bananas
Zako kontan banann (MC)
When the noun is modified by *la*, it refers to a specific monkey, which must have a discourse antecedent, or be known to discourse participants:

(40) zako la kontan banann
monkey SP like banana
That monkey likes bananas
Ce singe aime la banane

Neither can the specificity marker be used with unique nouns::

(41) la lune
the moon
lalin
lalin la
(French)
(MC)

The post-nominal position of *la* has presented a challenge in terms of accounting for the distribution of determiner elements on both sides of the nominal constituent. All 'determiner' elements, such as the indefinite determiner, number, plural marker, etc., precede the noun phrase, except for *la* which is post nominal and clause final. Rochecouste (1997) justifies its post-nominal position in terms of a head final parameter for this functional item only. This view is also adopted by Lefebvre (1994) for Haitian Creole, which has a similar post-nominal and post-clausal 'determiner'. I find the argument of head parametric variation within the same language unacceptable on the grounds of learnability – it is not exactly a 'minimal' or 'optimal' concept that would facilitate language acquisition.

All dictionaries agree that *enn* is the singular, indefinite article, but not all agree on the definition of *bann* as a marker of plurality. Ledikasyon pu Travayer (1984) define this morpheme as article, equivalent to English *the* in the plural. This definition fails to account for its occurrence in existential sentences which admit only indefinites, as in:

(42) Ena bann lisyen dan lakaz
have PLU dog in house
There are (some) dogs in the house
Il y a des chiens dans la maison

This is an easy mistake, considering that the definite determiner is a null element. The plural marker *bann* heads NumP and is unspecified for [±definiteness]. A [+definite] plural noun phrase in fact is $\delta + bann + N$.

Finally, none of the dictionaries has an entry for the proportional quantifier *ennbann* as one morpheme.

9. Conclusion

The above analysis suggests that the emergence of a determiner system in MC was driven by the need to map semantic features onto the syntax. However, given that the creators of the creole did not interpret the French determiners as functional items, the question is, how did they access the semantics associated with these morphemes? This work so far leaves open this question, but provides evidence that the new creole strived for the means to express them.
The process of grammaticalization outlined above yields an effective and economical system of determiners, which are able to express, without redundancy, all the semantic features that could no longer be expressed in the early creole immediately following the loss of the French determiners. The syntactic ‘economy’, and the resulting semantic transparency of the new determiner system support Chomsky’s assertion that Language is optimal system that strives for convergence at the interface by the most economical means (2000).

Summary: Features of determiners at various stages of MC

The tables below summarize the developments in the determiner system from 1750 to the present:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>un/une + sing. N</td>
<td>le/la + sing. N</td>
<td>des + plural N</td>
<td>les + plural N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750 -</td>
<td>δ + N</td>
<td>δ + N</td>
<td>δ + N</td>
<td>δ + N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820 -</td>
<td>cena + N</td>
<td>δ + N</td>
<td>δ + N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855 -</td>
<td>cena + N</td>
<td>δ + N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885 -</td>
<td>cena + N</td>
<td>δ + N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>en + N</td>
<td>δ + N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>a/an + singular N</td>
<td>the + singular N</td>
<td>δ + plural N</td>
<td>the + plural N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Marking of [+definiteness], singular and plural in MC from 1750 to the present

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>[+specific] singular</th>
<th>[+specific] [+deictic] singular</th>
<th>[+specific] plural</th>
<th>[+specific] [+deictic] plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>ce/cet(te) + singular N</td>
<td>ce/cet(te) + sing. N + ci/là</td>
<td>ces + plural N</td>
<td>ces + plural N + ci/là</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>N + la</td>
<td>sa + N + la</td>
<td>bann + N + la</td>
<td>sa + bann + N + la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>that + sing. N</td>
<td>this + sing. N</td>
<td>those + plural N</td>
<td>these + plural N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Marking of deixis/specificity on singular and plural NPs in modern MC

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Abbreviations

1.PL - 1st person plural pronoun
1.SG - 1st person singular pronoun
2.PL - 2nd person plural pronoun
2.SG - 2nd person singular pronoun
2.SG.F - 2nd person singular pronoun, formal form of address
3.PL - 3rd person plural pronoun
3.SG - 3rd person plural pronoun
ASP – Aspect
COMP - Complementizer
D – Determiner
DEF - Definite
DEM - Demonstrative
DP - Determiner Phrase
FL - Faculty of Language
G - Goal
H - Head
LF - Logical Form
MC - Mauritian Creole
MOD - Modal
NEG – Negation
NOM – Nominative Case
NP – Noun Phrase
NumP – Number Phrase
OCC - The occurrence of a feature
P - Probe
PF - Phonetic Form
PLU – Plural
POSS – Possessive
PST - Past Tense
QP – Quantifier Phrase

Notes

1 Determiners also serve to mark gender in French, but this is not relevant to my analysis as gender is not a grammatical feature of nouns in MC.
Anderson translated the Bible from French into creole. The French gloss in this example is the original text from the Bible.

These gradual changes are tabulated at the end of this paper.

I use the term DP for the syntactic constituent ‘noun phase’. Thus the terms DP and ‘noun phrase’ are interchangeable. The term NP refers to the descriptive content of a noun phrase, which is the argument of D.

I propose that *bann* is generated in the specifier of Num(ber)P(hrase). It is the phonological expression of the feature [+plural] associated with the Number node. *Bann* and cardinal numerals are in complementary distribution.

The specificity marker *la* in MC is more likely derived from the French locative adverb *là* than from the homophonous demonstrative reinforcer, despite the similarity between the two demonstrative constructions. The contrast between the French proximate and distal demonstrative reinforcers *ci* and *là*, for example, never shows up in the creole.

Unless a specific instance of the moon is being referred to.

Demonstratives rather than definite determiners, as they were used to mark deixis.

I propose that the particles *ça* and *là* mark specificity, while the phonologically null determiner marks definiteness.

Where *tout/tous* is a universal quantifier, as in French.

Where *so* is the 3rd singular possessive pronoun, temporarily used to mark definiteness/specificity, when there was a need to single out a unique referent in the discourse. Its use as a definite determiner disappeared following the grammaticalization of the plural marker *bann*, but *so* survives in modern MC as an emphatic determiner on both singular and plural NPs.