Handout # 5

Caribbean Creole Front Focussing

Normal Meaning	Emphasis of Subj.	Emphasis on Obj.	Emphasis on Verb
Di bwai du it	A **di bwai** du it	A **it** di bwai du	A **du** di bwai **du** it
Gason a fè sa	Sé **gason** a fè sa	Sé **sa** gason a fè	Sé **fè** gason a **fè** sa
E yu hasí e'	Ta e **yu** hasí e'	Ta **ele** e yu hasí	Ta **hasí** yu **hasí** e'

Conclusion

Some Questions

You may look at all of the above and wonder why it is that these languages, one with its vocabulary coming from English, another from French and a third from Spanish-Portuguese, would show such similarities in structure. In the areas of the pronoun systems, as well as how their nouns and verbs are treated, these languages seem more similar to each other than any one of them is to English, French or Spanish-Portuguese. If you are wonder why should this be the case, you are in good company. This question has been one that has puzzled Creole linguists for over a century. Two theories have been put forward. One is that all of these similarities are the result of influences from the West African languages spoken by the earliest users of Creole on the Caribbean slave plantations. The problem is that West Africa has hundreds of languages with a wide range of different structures. Which West African languages and is it conceivable that the same West African languages would have had the same levels of influence amongst slaves owned by the British in Jamaica, the French in Haiti and the Spanish-Portuguese Jews in the Dutch owned islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao? This theory is known as African Substratum Theory and is associated with a well known Caribbean Creole linguist, Mervyn Alleyne.

The other theory is that the process of language mixing on these plantations, with people from a vast number of different backgrounds in West Africa, produced a special situation in which children born into such a society reinvented language from scratch. This reinvented language had all the original and basic features of human language which explains why these languages so resemble each other. This is known as the Language Bioprogram Hypothesis associated with a prominent Creole linguist, Derek Bickerton.

You have seen some of the evidence for these theories above. What do you think? With whom do you agree?

been doing it' or *im en du it* 'he did it/ he had done it'. Note now that we have combinations of the past tense marker, *en*, with the aspect marker, *a*, in the form of *en a*. Similar combinations occur with the past tense marker *té* and the continuative aspect marker, *ap*, in Haitian Creole, to form *té ap*. Along similar lines, Papiamentu combines its past tense marker *taba* with its continuative aspect marker, *ta*, to form the combination, *taba ta*.

Caribbean Creole Tense and Aspect

Completive	Continuative	Past Completive	Past Continuative
English			
The boy did it	the boy is doing it	the boy had done it	the boy was/had been doing it
Jamaican			
Di bwai du it	di bwai **a** du it	di bwai **en** du it	di bwai **en a** du it
Haitian			
Gason a fè-l	gason a **ap** fè-l	gason a **té** fè-l	gason a **té ap** fè-l
Papiamentu			
E yu hasí e'	E yu **ta** hasí e'	-	E yu **taba ta** hasí e'

Front Focussing

What is sometimes called 'front focussing' is another example of the importance of speaker perspective in human language. It is possible to focus on any noun or pronoun in the sentence by moving it to the beginning of the sentence and having it marked by what is referred to as the **focus marker**. You can think of this as a pointer which the speaker is using to indicate to the listener that it is that or that word that I wish to emphasise. The focus markers in the respective languages are *a* or *da* for Jamaican and other English lexicon Creoles, *sé* for Haitian and other French Creoles, and *ta* for the Spanish-Portuguese Creole language, Papiamentu. Below are some examples from the three languages we have been using. In the first column, we get the sentences with the normal, non-emphatic meaning. In the second column, we get the sentence with the emphasis on the subject noun. In the third column, we get the emphasis on the object pronoun which is moved frontwards so that it could appear immediately after the focus marker. When one wants to focus on the verb in these languages what is done is to have the verb appear immediately after the focus marker at the beginning of the sentence and also at its usual place in the sentence. This is seen with the examples in column 4.

is usually a marker coming before the verb that tells us about this continuing relationship. For English Creoles such as Jamaican, Antiguan and Guyanese, this marker is usually *a* or *da*, for certain varieties of Jamaican and Antiguan, *de*, and for Belizean most commonly *di*. For French lexicon Creoles, the form is either *ap* for Haitian, or *ka* for St. Lucian, Dominican, Guadeloupean and Martiniquan.

When the relationship between the predicate and the subject is viewed as complete, we have what is known as **completive aspect**. This we see in an English sentence such as 'He has done it'. The act of doing is viewed by the speaker as complete. Most Caribbean Creoles signal this relationship with the bare verb, with no marker before it. One exception is Papiamentu which has the form *a* coming before the verb to mark it as completive. There is a special emphatic completive in each of the main languages being used as examples, *don* in Jamaican Creole, *fini* in Haitian Creole and *kaba* in Papiamentu.

Tense

Even though most people think they know what tense is from grammar books, it has a very specific definition. **Tense** refers to the perspective the speaker has on time. Anytime you speak and you use the word 'now', it refers to the time you are speaking. Your 'now', your present time, is whatever time you are speaking. **Present tense** therefore refers to a predicate which gives information which has present relevance to the speaker. The sentence 'He is doing it' has present relevance to the speaker. It means that, at the time of speaking, the 'he' is carrying out the activity of doing. The other sentence, 'He has done it' is also present. Surprised? Yes, 'He has done it' is also present because the speaker is saying that, at the time of speaking, at the present time, the action has been completed. The difference between 'He is doing it' and 'He has done it' is that the former is perceived to be continuing whilst the speaker is talking, whereas the latter is perceived to have ended by the time the speaker is talking. It is a difference in aspect, not a difference in tense, contrary to what you may have read in any grammar book. In the Caribbean Creole languages being used as examples, items that are viewed as present tense take no marker whatsoever. The difference between *im a du it* and *im du it*, is one of aspect, with *a* in the first case indicating that the predicate is perceived by the speaker as marking an act which is continuing at the time of speaking. The absence of *a* in the second case indicates that the action is considered to have ended at the time of speaking.

As for **past tense**, this refers to actions which are viewed as occurring prior to the time of speech. Since this is not a discussion about the English tense system, we will skip discussion of the difference between the English simple past or preterite 'He did it' and the remote past 'He had done it'. In Caribbean Creoles, there is one single past marker, which indicates that, from the perspective of the speaker, the action, whether continuing or complete, is viewed as taking place with reference to some point in time before the time of speech. It is thus that we get sentences in Jamaican like *im en a du it* 'he was/had

inherited from African languages, and if so which ones? Were the same African languages influential in Jamaica, Suriname, Aruba and Haiti? Or was it something about the conditions under which these languages were formed that has brought out these similarities in structure?

Predicate Marking

Linking Subjects With Predicates (The Copula)

A noun in the subject can be linked to four different kinds of predicator. These are verbs, adjectives, nouns and adverbs of place. We will deal with the system for linking subjects with verb predicates in the next section. Here we will concentrate on the remaining three, adjectives, nouns and adverbs of place. The linking elements are known as the **copula,** and takes the form, in English, of the various forms of the verb 'to be', e.g. 'am', 'is', 'are', 'was', 'were'. A common view is that English lexicon Caribbean Creole syntax is that it is different from English because it is a simplification of English. Let us examine the following sentences involving the use of copulas, comparing their Creole forms and their English translations.

i)	Yu a di man	'You are the man'
ii)	Yu de ya	'You are here'
iii)	Yu fat	'You are fat'

The English lexicon Creole sentences use *a* before a noun phrase predicate such as *di man* 'the man' in (i), to signal the link between it and the subject, *yu*, i.e. to mark the equational copula. In (ii), where the predicate is a locational adverb, *ya* 'here', the linking form is *de*. In (iii), where the predicate is an attribute, *fat*, there is a requirement that there be no linking form. Creole speakers, therefore, need to be conscious of whether the predicate is a noun phrase, as in (i), a location as in (ii) or an attribute as in (iii), to select the appropriate copula or linking form. By contrast, as can be seen by the English translations, a single copula form, the appropriate form of the verb 'to be', here, 'are', is employed. In the area of copula choice, it is English actually that has the much simpler system.

Aspect

Caribbean Creole languages mark predicates for what is known as '**aspect**'. Aspect is the perspective we take on the predicate, deciding whether its relationship to the subject is an ongoing one, i.e. **continuative** or **progressive**, or whether it is one which is complete. Thus, in the English sentences 'He is doing it' and 'He was doing it', his relationship with the act of running is a continuing or ongoing one. The English '-ing' form at the end of the verb tells us that the relationship is ongoing. In Caribbean Creole languages, it

definite article such as 'the' in English, along with the plural '-s' attached to the end of the noun. In Caribbean Creoles, when we refer to more than one member we get the use of the definite article, such as 'di' preceding the noun, and the third person plural pronoun, such as 'dem' in the English Creoles, following the noun.

To understand how and why Creole differs from English, one needs to remember and important point. Pronouns represent nouns and are like them in many ways. Third person pronouns, as in English 'he' and 'they', refer to persons or things known to the speaker and hearer but not participating in the conversation. In the sentence, 'The boy did it', the speaker is implying that the identity of the boy is known to both speaker and hearer. 'The boy' can be replaced with 'he' here to produce, 'He did it', again meaning person whose identity we know. Similarly, in the sentence, 'The boys did it', 'the boys' could be replaced by the pronoun 'they' as in 'They did it', again speaking about persons whose identities the speaker and hearer know. There is an overlap between pronouns and nouns. This is made very obvious in Caribbean Creole languages. For evidence of this, check the highlighted definite plural markers below against the markers for third person plural in the tables above. You should see a pattern. In each case, the third person plural pronoun is the same as the form being used to mark a definite noun as plural. In Caribbean Creole languages, whether they are English lexicon, French lexicon or Spanish-Portuguese lexicon, when one wishes to speak about more than one entity whose identity the speaker and hearer knows, they put after the noun the pronoun meaning 'third person plural', whether it be *dem*, *yo* or *nang*.

The Behaviour of Caribbean Creole Nouns

Lang.	*Generic*	*Indefinite (Sing.)*	*Indefinite (Plur.)*	*Definite (Sing.)*	*Definite (Plur.)*
Eng.	Boys did it	A boy did it	Two boys did it	The boy did it	The boys did it
JC.	Bwai du it	Wan bwai du it	Tuu bwai du it	Di bwai du it	Di bwai **dem** du it
HC	Gason fè li	Yon gason fè li	Dé gason fè li	Gason a fè li	Gason a **yo** fè li
Papia.	Yu a hasí ele	Un yu a hasí e(le)	Dos yu a hasí e(le)	E yu a hasí e(le)	E yu **nang** a hasí e(le)

It is worth noting for the definite plurals that proper nouns can be pluralised in ways not possible in English, French, Spanish or Portuguese. Proper names such as *Bil* 'Bill', *Sita* 'Sita', etc. can be pluralised to produce *Bil dem*, *Sita dem*, etc. which can be translated as 'Bill/Sita and friends/family'. In Papiamentu too, one can get *Bil nang* not meaning 'Several Bills' but 'Bill and his friends/family'. Languages tend to behave quite differently. Therefore, in Jamaican or any other English lexicon Creole, an indefinite noun phrase such as *bluu buk* cannot be pluralised by the addition of *dem* to form **bluu buk dem*. By contrast, English can pluralise 'blue book' to produce 'blue books'. The fact that Caribbean Creole languages seem to resemble each other more in their structure than they do the European language they have drawn most of their vocabulary from, has been the subject of fascination for linguists for over a century. Are these features