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Kreol Morisien as a Bantu language

Kreol Morisien (KM) is a French-related creole spoken on Mauritius. It arose in a out of contact between typologically very diverse language groups. The major part of the slave population involved in the creation of KM were speakers of Malagasy and several (Eastern) Bantu languages (Allen 2008, Baker 2008). It is also clear from historical research that these languages were present in the colony long after the abolishment of slavery (Larson 2009). This means that KM emerged in a highly multilingual setting, which is in line with recent proposals on the importance of processes of bilingual convergence and pattern replication leading to substrate effects in creoles (Muysken 2015). The leading question in this paper, therefore, is to what extent we find traces of these language groups in the ensuing creole. We discuss three areas of grammar: (i) article incorporation; (ii) serial verb constructions; (iii) verb alternation. The conclusion is that from the perspective of linguistic typology KM is best viewed as a Bantu language.

Article Incorporation. The form of the incorporated article in KM does not vary at random (Baker 1984). In particular, it seems to underlie a process of Vowel Harmony (VH: Strandquist 2005). A process of VH has also been documented in a wide range of Bantu languages (Hyman 1999). We show that these VH processes are different in nature: (i) Bantu: progressive VH, verbal domain; (ii) KM: regressive VH, nominal domain. Instead we argue for Bantu influence in terms of co-occurrence restrictions on vowel combinations inside the root, which is a general trait of Bantu languages (Odden 1996). French articles in essence were reanalyzed as part of the KM root on the basis of their resemblance to noun class prefixes, noun class systems being a very common property of Bantu languages.

Serial Verb Constructions (SVC). Aikhenvald (2006) distinguishes between single marking and concordant marking serializing languages. We show KM is of the latter type for subject marking as well as tense/aspect marking, limiting the discussion to directional SVCs (cf. Syea 2013). Comparing KM with Malagasy, we further show that both languages exhibit an adjunction-type of serialization at the level of TP. Serialization at the level of TP gives these constructions surface properties that differ from classical SVCs, which involve serialization at a lower level (cf. Veenstra & Muysken 2017). The concordant marking of tense/aspect in KM is argued to be a direct reflex of Malagasy. The concordant marking of subjects, on the other hand, we argue is due to influence from Eastern Bantu languages. We show that KM and Shangaci (P312) pattern similarly with respect to subject marking, as well as the split between SVCs and restructuring contexts. The conclusion we draw is that the syntax of Mauritian Directionals mirrors Bantu as well as Malagasy syntax.

Verb Alternation. In KM and in Eastern Bantu languages we find two alternating verb forms (termed conjoint/disjoint in the Bantu literature) expressing the same TMA semantics but differing in the relation with what follows (Henri 2010, Van der Wal & Veenstra 2015 on KM, van der Wal & Hyman 2016 on Bantu languages in general). Although the origin of the alternation is due processes of second language acquisition (Becker & Veenstra 2003), we argue that processes of bilingual convergence account for the properties we find in KM. Van der Wal & Veenstra (2015) compared the synchronic properties of the alternations in KM and the relevant Bantu languages of northern Mozambique (Bantu P), and concluded that it is the syntactic basics of the Bantu alternation that motivated the persistence of the alternation in KM, and that semantic-pragmatic effects of Focus are indirectly involved with the alternation, only surfacing in the deviations from the canonical use.

We show that their generalization only holds for core arguments, but when non-selected material is taken into the equation the role of information structural factors are the sole determinants of the alternation, which seem to be more in line with what we find in the relevant Bantu languages.

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