

Dimensional progression and the emergence of *pro*-drop in creole languages

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For many years creolists – with the noteworthy exception of De Graff (1993), Sycia (1993), Adone (1994) and Lipski (1994) – paid little or no attention to *pro*-drop phenomena in creole languages. Roberts (1999) among others was even convinced that the insertion of referential null arguments is generally ruled out in creole languages due to the morphological poverty of their conjugational paradigms. By now, however, many researchers engaging in creolistics and other subfields of linguistics have realized that null pronouns are an integral part of many creole pronoun systems (cf. e.g. Meyerhoff 2000, Baptista 2002, Nicolis 2007, Neeleman & Szendrői 2007, Durreleman-Tame 2008, Wratil 2011). But much too often they try to fit the detected null elements into the popularly accepted theories of *pro*-drop or at least use their findings for a slight modification of the latter. The fact that most null arguments occurring in creole languages do not conform to the prototypical null pronoun *pro* postulated in the recent generative frameworks escapes their notice in such cases. Of course, creole languages vary as to which specific types of null arguments they exhibit. But most creole null subjects have in common that their development is in some way related to the dimensional progression of verbal, pronominal or even nominal paradigms. As I will illustrate, they do not unconditionally differ in this respect from less noticed null arguments occurring in several non-creole languages.

In a number of Atlantic creole languages, as for example in Haitian Creole (cf. de Graff 1993), in Cape Verdean Creole, (cf. Baptista 2002) and in some non-standard varieties of Saramaccan (cf. Veenstra 1996) procliticized weak subject pronouns have gained properties of verbal functional markers but retained some pronominal features on their grammaticalization path to functional agreement morphemes. I will show that, as a result, new subject null forms emerged that are not able to refer freely but are part of a complex pronominal DP (cf. Déchaine & Wiltschko 2002, Poletto 2008) the extracted clitic head of which checks *phi*-features on the functional head T. Since, in contrast to non-pronominal overt subject DPs ((1a)), stressed pronominal items co-occur with such clitics ((1a,b)), the special development of the weak subject pronouns in the languages concerned has not only brought about a new distinctive subject agreement paradigm but has also led to the disappearance of the homonymy between object and strong subject pronouns.

(1) Cape Verdean Creole

- a. *El_i / **pro_i** / *João_i e_i bebe se vinhu.* b. *Bo_i / **pro_i** bu_i sabê es koza drete.*
he John 3SG(CL) drink his wine you 2SG(CL) know DET thing well
'HE/ he/*John drank his wine.' 'YOU/ you know this thing well.'

Likewise in Bislama, an Oceanic creole language, the grammaticalization from personal pronouns to verbal markers (cf. Crowley 1990, Meyerhoff 2000) has gone hand in hand with the rise of null arguments. The distinctive marking of subject and object personal pronouns ((2)) has been transferred from the Bislama 3rd person pronominal paradigm to the system of verbal markers. As a consequence the inventory of verbal functional categories increased while at the same time, due to the emergence of null subjects and null objects ((3)), the pronoun system has partly gained a morphological weak-strong distinction. Because of this

change Bislama nowadays belongs to the numerous creole and few non-creole languages whose null pronouns are identified by their lack of any PSE (*Participant in Speech Event* (Halle 1997)) features.

<p>(2) Early Bislama <i>Aftadat i it im</i> then he eat it ‘Then he ate it.’ (Garnier 1867:194)</p>	<p>(3) Modern Bislama <i>Hem / yutufala / pro i laekem mitufala / ragbi / hem / pro</i> (s)he you both PRM like-TRNS we both rugby her/him/it (S)HE/ Both of you/ (S)He like(s) the two of us/ rugby/ her/him/IT/ <u>it</u>.’</p>
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The change and stabilization of morphological differential subject and object marking has also played a decisive role in the rise of *pro*-drop in the pacific VSO creole language Chabacano and in Early Guyanese Creole, an Atlantic creole language with relatively free word order spoken at the beginning of the 20th century – although in another way. Whereas in Chabacano a case marker has come into being (Steinkrüger 2006) ((4)), in Guyanese Creole a verbal transitive marker has arisen (Rickford 1987) ((5)). In both languages the new markers indicate that their right adjacent category is the direct object or – at least in Guyanese Creole – its respective trace or copy. Accordingly non-overt external arguments have become recognizable as being a subject *pro* that is identified by its co-indexation with a preceding DP that refers to the discourse topic.

<p>(4) Chabacano <i>Ya lyama el rey / éle / pro konel baw...</i> PERF call DET king (s)he OBJ.DET turtle ‘The king/ (S)HE/ (S)He called the turtle...’</p>	<p>(5) Early Guyanese Creole <i>two peppa pro gi’e um</i> two peppers give TRNS ‘I will give two peppers.’ (Cruickshank (1905))</p>
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Especially in Chabacano, as a result of this, not only distinctive object pronouns ((6)) but also a new set of weak subject personal pronouns have complemented the former pronoun system. With that Chabacano is partly reminiscent of the creole languages Seychellois, Réunionnais and Mauritian Creole spoken on the Seychelles and Mascarene Islands in the Indian Ocean (cf. e.g. Corne 1978, Adone 1994, Michaelis 1994), where discourse-oriented null subjects of main verbs specified by any tense, mood or aspect marker represent a new dimension within the paradigm of personal pronouns. Moreover, two types of indefinite null pronouns have emerged in Chabacano ((6)) and Mauritian Creole ((7)) (Syea 1993, Lipski 1994). I will elucidate that these null arguments have to be regarded as an additional enrichment of the corresponding pronoun system as they are the only unambiguous representations for generic and specific indefinite subject pronouns.

<p>(6) Chabacano <i>Ta mata pro konele akí na Zamboanga</i> IMPERF kill OBJ-he here in Zamboanga ‘<u>Some people</u> killed him here in Zamboanga.’</p>	<p>(7) Mauritian Creole <i>pro van puasō dā bazar.</i> sell fish in market ‘<u>One</u> sells fish in the market.’</p>
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Hence, in my talk I will argue that the null arguments occurring in various creole languages show differences in their grammatical function, their reference, their definiteness, their identification and even in their pronominal and structural properties. Most of them are a necessary result of and/or a fruitful contribution to the functional specialization of creole paradigms.