

What you see is not always what you get:

Apparent simplicity and hidden complexity in creole languages*

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McWhorter (this volume) makes two very strong claims. The first one is stated in the title of his article: “The world’s simplest grammars are creole grammars”. The second one appears to come as a consequence of the first: “Creole grammars constitute a synchronically identifiable class”. This second claim builds on McWhorter’s (1998: 790) earlier claim according to which creole languages constitute a “synchronically definable typological class”. In this paper, I provide an alternative way of addressing the issues of the alleged simplicity of these languages, and of the so-called similarity between them. The following three questions will be discussed in turn. First, what do creole languages really have in common? Second, why do creoles tend to be isolating? Third, why do creole languages tend to look simpler? These questions will be addressed from the point of view of the relexification account of creole genesis in Lefebvre (1998) and the references cited therein. Section 4 weighs apparent simplicity against hidden complexity. Section 5 considers McWhorter’s hypothesised creole typological features in light of the previous discussion. It will be shown that the features proposed by McWhorter as identifying creole languages are derivable from a sound theory of how creole languages come about. Section 6 concludes the paper.

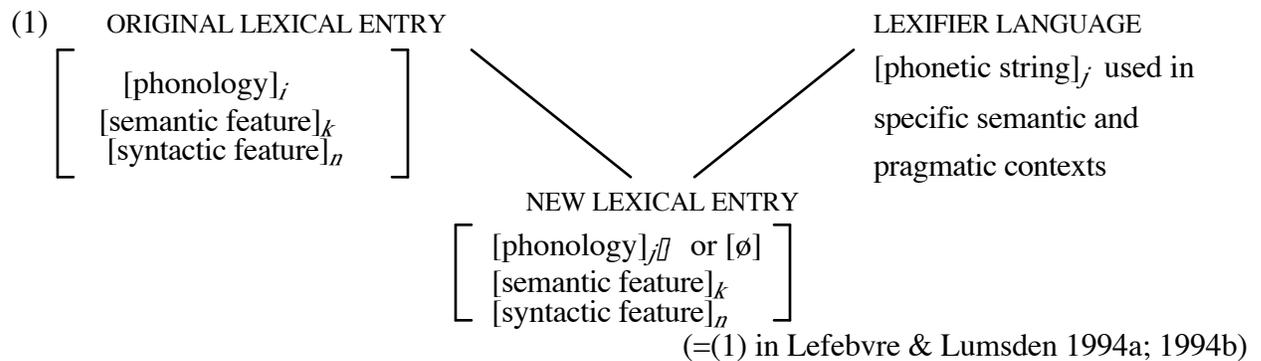
1. What is it that is similar among creole languages?

One way of addressing the issue of the similarity between creole languages is to ask whether they form a typological class. In my view, they do not. In the paragraphs that follow, I substantiate this claim on the basis of the research on creole genesis that I have been conducting over the last twenty five years.¹

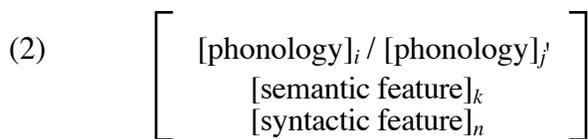
When we started this research, our basic assumption was that it should be possible to account for the formation of creole languages in terms of the same processes that are at work in language genesis and language change in general; that is: relexification, a cognitive process that has been shown to play a role in the formation of mixed languages (see e.g. *Media Lengua*, see Muysken 1981); reanalysis, a major process in linguistic change (see e.g. Heine & Reh 1984); and dialect levelling, a process that has been shown to take place when dialects of the same languages come into contact (see e.g. Trudgill 1986).

Our hypothesis (see e.g. Lefebvre & Kaye (eds.) 1986; Lefebvre & Lumsden 1989a; 1994a; 1994b; Lefebvre 1998, and the references cited therein) was that the creators of a creole language, adult native speakers of substratum languages, use the properties of their native lexicons, the parametric values and the semantic interpretation rules of their native grammars in creating the creole. On this hypothesis, the bulk of a creole's lexical entries is created by the process of relexification. Two other processes, fed by the output of relexification, dialect levelling and reanalysis, also play a role in the development of the creole.²

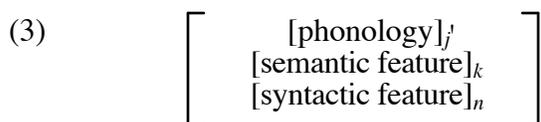
Relexification applies in creole genesis when speakers of several substratum languages are targeting the same superstratum language (Lefebvre & Lumsden 1994a). The process was first defined by Muysken (1981: 61): "Given the concept of lexical entry, relexification can be defined as the process of vocabulary substitution in which the only information adopted from the target language in the lexical entry is the phonological representation." In Lefebvre & Lumsden (1994a; 1994b), the process has been represented as a two step process: copy and relabel, involving the specifications in (1). (For a detailed description of the representation in (1), see Lefebvre 1998: 16–18.)



In a lexicon that is in the process of being relexified, each lexical entry acquires a second phonological representation that is derived from the lexifier language. As is shown in (2), following Mous's (1994) proposal, at a certain point in the process, each lexical entry has two phonological representations.



In the history of an early creole community, at some point, the substratum languages cease to be spoken. The original phonological representations are no more used. Consequently, they eventually disappear from the lexicon. The new lexical entries thus have the semantic and syntactic properties of the original ones, and phonological representations derived from a phonetic string in the superstratum language. This is represented in (3).



The nature of the process of relexification predicts that the creole lexical entries will have phonological representations derived from the superstratum language and syntactic and semantic properties derived from the substratum languages.³

The hypothesis was tested on the basis of Haitian creole. The test of the hypothesis consisted in a detailed comparison of the lexicon and grammar of Haitian creole with those of its contributing languages: French, its superstratum language, and Fongbe, **one** of its

substratum languages.⁴ The details of the threeway comparison are extensively reported on in Lefebvre (1998). The results of the linguistic test show that, to a large extent, the hypothesis is supported by the data. In the paragraphs that follow, I provide an overview of the results of this comparative study, so as to provide the reader with some background information for the discussion that follows on the issues at stake in this article. The nominal structure, the tense, mood and aspect markers, the parameters and the verb doubling phenomena will be discussed in turn.

The data in (4) provide an overview of French nominal structure. They show that, in this language, the definite determiner, the possessive and the demonstrative determiners all precede the head noun, and that there can be only one of these per noun phrase. Singular and plural forms are contrasted in (4b) showing that plural is encoded in a bound morpheme in French.

- (4) a. * le mon ce crabe FRENCH
 DET POSS DEM crab
- b. { le/les } crabe FRENCH
 { mon/mes }
 { ce/ces }
- ‘ { the } crab(s)’
 { my }
 { this }
- (from Lefebvre 1998: 78)

The Haitian and Fongbe nominal structures are illustrated in (5). In both languages, the determiners all follow the head noun. In both languages, a possessor phrase, a demonstrative term, the definite determiner and the plural marker may all co-occur within the same nominal structure. In both languages, the plural marker is an independent morpheme.

- (5) krab [mwɛn ø] sa a yo HAITIAN
 àsón [nyɛ tòn] éb ó lê FONGBE
 crab me GEN DEM DET PL
 ‘these/those crabs of mine (in question/that we know of)’
- (from Lefebvre 1998: 78)

The Haitian and Fongbe nominal structures thus contrast in the same way with the French nominal structure with respect to word order, co-occurrence restrictions of determiners, and

with respect to whether the plural marker is a free (in Haitian and Fongbe) or a bound (in French) morpheme.

Furthermore, with the exception of their phonological representations, the properties of the definite determiners are the same in Haitian and in Fongbe; these properties contrast in a systematic way with those of the French definite determiner. These contrastive properties are summarised in (6) based on the detailed description in Lefebvre (1998: 79–84).

(6)	FRENCH [+definite] determiner	HAITIAN/FONGBE [+definite] determiner	
	– Pre-nominal	– Post-nominal	
	– marked for gender and number	– unmarked for gender and number	
	– allomorphs: <i>le/la/les/l'</i>	– allomorphs: <i>la, a, an, nan, lan/ɔ́, ɔ́n</i>	
	– anaphoric and cataphoric	– anaphoric	
	– partitive <i>du/des</i>	– no partitive	
	– obligatory with generic or mass nouns	– impossible with generic or mass nouns	
	– no bare NPs	– bare NPs	
	– *Det [relative clause] N	– N [relative clause] Det	
			(=(11) in Lefebvre, in press c)

Moreover, the definite determiners involved in the Haitian and Fongbe nominal structures also play a crucial role in the clause structure of these two languages, as is exemplified in (7). (For an extensive discussion of these facts, see Lefebvre 1998: 219–247).

(7)	a. Li rive a	HAITIAN
	b. É wá ɔ́	FONGBE
	‘He has arrived’ (as expected/as we knew he would)	

The definite determiner plays no role in the structure of French clauses.

A Haitian or Fongbe nominal structure may contain a noun followed by the plural marker only, as is shown in (8). In such a case, the structure is interpreted as definite.

(8)	krab yo	HAITIAN
	àsón lê	FONGBE
	crab PL	
	‘the crabs’	
	* ‘(some) crabs’	(=(31) in Lefebvre 1994a)

Comparable data are impossible in French.

The data in (9) show that Haitian and Fongbe both allow for bare NPs.

- (9) M' achte krab. HAITIAN
 N' xò àsón. FONGBE
 I buy crab
 'I bought (some) crabs.' (= (32) in Lefebvre 1994a)

Bare NPs are not allowed in French.

The data in (10) show that in both Haitian and Fongbe, when the definite determiner and the plural marker co-occur within the same nominal structure, the definite determiner must precede the plural marker.

- (10) krab la yo / * yo a HAITIAN
 àsón ó lè / * lè ó FONGBE
 crab DET PL
 'the crabs (in question)' (= (33) in Lefebvre 1994a)

Finally, in both languages, there is variation among speakers with respect to the possibility of co-occurrence of the determiner and the plural marker. Crucially, the patterns of variation are the same in both languages. Two slightly different grammars have been reported on in the literature. They are summarised in (11).

- | | | |
|----------------|---|---|
| (11) | HAITIAN | FONGBE |
| G ₁ | where <i>la</i> and <i>yo</i> can co-occur
(d'Ans 1968:105; Faine 1937:83;
Fournier 1977:43; Goodman 1964:45;
Joseph 1989:201; Lefebvre & Massam
1988:115; Ritter 1992:207–209; Sylvain
1936:35; Valdman 1978:1994–1995) | where <i>ó</i> and <i>lè</i> can co-occur
(Brousseau & Lumsden 1992:22;
Lefebvre 1998:85) |
| G ₂ | where <i>la</i> and <i>yo</i> cannot co-occur
(DeGraff 1992:107; Joseph 1989:201;
Lumsden 1989:45) | where <i>ó</i> and <i>lè</i> cannot co-occur
(Agbidinokoun 1991:49) |

The French and Haitian paradigms of deictic terms are also strikingly different, whereas the Haitian and Fongbe paradigms of deictic terms are strikingly parallel. Due to space limitations, suffice to say here that, while French has eleven deictic terms that can be involved in the nominal structure, Haitian and Fongbe have two. These are shown in (12).

- | | | |
|------|---------|--------|
| (12) | HAITIAN | FONGBE |
| | sa | (é)ló |
| | sila | (é)né |

In Lefebvre (1997; 1998: 89–101), it is extensively argued that the properties of the two Haitian terms are not the same as those of the French lexical entries which were the source of the phonological representation of the Haitian ones (*ça* and *cela/celui-là*, respectively); it is further extensively argued that the two Haitian terms do have the same distributional and syntactic properties as the Fongbe corresponding ones. Furthermore, in Lefebvre (in press^a), it is shown that in both Haitian and Fongbe, there are three semantic interpretation patterns (identified below as G1, G2 and G3, where \square is a variable that can take the values + or –) for the pairs of deictic terms. These are shown in (13) and (14), respectively. Crucially, these patterns are identical for Haitian and Fongbe.

(13)	G1	sa [+ proximate]	sila [– proximate]	HAITIAN
	G2	sa [\square proximate]	sila [– proximate]	
	G3	sa [\square proximate]	sila [\square proximate]	

Sources: G1: Tinelli (1970:28); Goodman (1964:51). G2: Lefebvre (1997) [see also data in Sylvain (1936) and in Étienne (1974)]. G3: Férère (1974:103), Valdman (1978:194), Valdman *et al.* (1981) and Joseph (1989) and my own fieldnotes.

(14)	G1	(é)lé [+ proximate]	(é)né [– proximate]	FONGBE
	G2	(é)lé [\square proximate]	(é)né [– proximate]	
	G3	(é)lé [\square proximate]	(é)né [\square proximate]	

Sources: G1: Anonymous (1983), Segurola (1963) and my own fieldnotes. G2: Lefebvre (1997). G3: My own fieldnotes.

The data discussed in (4)–(14), show the remarkable parallel that exists between the nominal structures of Haitian and Fongbe. As is extensively argued in Lefebvre (1998: 89–101; in press a), the extraordinary similarity that exists between the functional categories of the Haitian and Fongbe nominal structures follow from relexification.

In Haitian creole, the verb of a finite clause is invariant. In French, however, the verb of a finite clause obligatorily bears inflectional morphology encoding tense, mood, aspect, and person and number. None of the verbal morphology found in French has made its way into Haitian. Haitian follows the pattern of its West African (non-Bantu) substratum languages in having invariant bare verbs. In both Haitian and Fongbe, temporal relationships, mood and aspect are encoded by means of markers occurring between the subject and the verb.

The inventory of the TMA markers of Haitian is quite parallel to that found in Fongbe. (See Bentolila 1971; Lefebvre 1996; 1998: 11–140). This is shown in Table 1.⁵

Table 1. The inventory of TMA markers in Haitian and in Fongbe

ANTERIOR		IRREALIS		NON-COMplete			
• Past / Past perfect		• Definite future		• Habitual		• Imperfective	
H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F
te	kò	ap	ná	—	nò	ap	dò...wè
		• Indefinite future					
		H	F				
		a-va	ná-wá				
		• Subjunctive					
		H	F				
		pou	ní				

(=(115) in Lefebvre 1996:181)

Both languages have a marker which encodes anteriority. Both lexically distinguish between definite and indefinite future. The definite future markers are used to convey the speaker's attitude that the event referred to by the clause will definitely take place in the near future. By contrast, the indefinite future markers are used to convey the speaker's opinion that the event referred to by the clause might eventually or potentially take place at an undetermined point in the future. The fact that speakers of Haitian distinguish between definite and indefinite future is widely documented in the literature (*cf.* Valdman 1970; 1978; Spears 1990, and the references therein). For Fongbe, this distinction is pointed out in Anonymous (1983:IV,13). Both languages have a marker glossed as “subjunctive” for convenience. This term subsumes the three meanings of *pou* and *ní* respectively: both may be interpreted as ‘must’, ‘should’ or ‘may’. Both languages have a form which encodes imperfective aspect. As can be seen in Table 1, there is a one-to-one correspondence between the preverbal markers in the two languages, except that Fongbe has one encoding the habitual aspect, and Haitian does not. In Lefebvre (1998: 111–140) it is argued that, while the phonological representation of the tense, mood and aspect markers of Haitian are derived from French phonetic strings, their semantic and syntactic properties follow the details of the corresponding substratum lexical entries.

At the beginning of this paper, as part of the hypothesis on creole genesis, it was stated that the creators of a creole use the parametric options of their own grammar to assign a value to the parameters of the language that they are creating. The hypothesis predicts that, where the parametric values of the substratum and superstratum differ, the creole should have the same parametric value as the substratum languages. With one exception (discussed below), the three-way comparison in Lefebvre (1998: 349–374) supports this general hypothesis. As can be seen in Table 2, at the time the research was conducted, parameters were formulated in terms of correlations between the availability of functional categories and a related syntactic phenomenon. As has been pointed out in Lefebvre (1998: 387), the parametric options set in the creole are the result of its creators' reproducing the properties of the functional categories of their own lexicons through relexification. The correlations discussed in Lefebvre (1998: 349–374) are summarised in Table 2. (For each parameter, the proposer of the correlation is mentioned within square brackets).

Table 2. Comparison of the parametric options in the three languages under comparison

Availability of	FONGBE	HAITIAN	FRENCH
(A) Verb raising to INFL (correlates with inflectional morphology on the verb) [Pollock 1989]	–	–	+
(B) Serial verbs (correlates with lack of derivational and inflectional morphology) [Baker 1991; Muysken 1988]	+	+	–
(C) Double-object constructions (correlates with availability of Genitive case in nominal structures) [Johnson 1991]	+	+	–
(D) Negative quantifiers as NPs (correlates with availability of bare NPs) [Déprez 1999]	+	+	–
(E) Verb-doubling phenomena (correlates with the properties of the determiner system) [Lefebvre 1998: 363–374]	+	+	–

(=Table 13.7 in Lefebvre 1998: 387)

As can be seen in Table 2, the parametric options of Haitian systematically contrast with those of French and follow those of substratum languages of the type of Fongbe.

Koopman (1986) observes that other subsets of data, which can also be formulated in terms of parametric options, show similar behaviour. For example, she remarks that in Haitian, as in West African languages, headless and infinitival relative clauses are not available. This contrasts with French, where both types of relative clauses are available. Koopman further points out that, in contrast to French, where the set of phenomena referred to as quantifier float is available, Haitian and West African languages lack such phenomena.

There is one exception to the general pattern reported on in this section: whereas both French and Fongbe are null subject languages, Haitian is not. In recent literature, it has been proposed that languages with syntactic clitics should be considered null subject languages (see e.g. Jaeggli 1984; Hulk 1986; Roberge 1990). Both Fongbe and French have syntactic clitics, but Haitian does not (see Lefebvre 1998: 148–157 and the references therein). Since syntactic clitics did not make their way into the creole, as will be further discussed below, the value of the null subject parameter had to be reset (see Lefebvre 1998: 349–351).

Verb-doubling phenomena involve four constructions which contain what looks like an exact copy of the predicate: temporal adverbial, as in (15), causal adverbial, as in (16), factive clauses, as in (17) and the predicate cleft construction, as in (18).

(15) TEMPORAL ADVERBIAL

Wá	Jan	wá	(tróló)	bò	Màrí	yì.	FONGBE
Rive	Jan	rive		(epi)	Mari	pati.	HAITIAN
	arrive	John	arrive	as-soon-as	and	Mary	leave
	‘As soon as John arrived, Mary left.’						(=(1) in Lefebvre 1994b)

(16) CAUSAL ADVERBIAL

Wá	Jan	wá	útú	Màrí	yì.	FONGBE	
Rive	Jan	rive		Mari	pati.	HAITIAN	
	arrive	John	arrive	cause	Mary	leave	
	‘Because John arrived, Mary left.’						(=(2) in Lefebvre 1994b)

(17) FACTIVE

Wá	dě̀è	Jan	wá	ó	víví	nú	nò	tòn.	FONGBE
Rive	∅	Jan	rive	a,	fè	manman	li	kòntan.	HAITIAN
	arrive	OP	John	arrive	DET	make(-happy)	for	mother	his
	‘The fact that John arrived made his mother happy.’								(=(3) in Lefebvre 1994b)

(18) PREDICATE CLEFT

	Wá	wè	Jan	wá.	FONGBE
Se	rive		Jan	rive.	HAITIAN
it-is	arrive	it-is	John	arrive	
	'It is arrive that John did (not e.g. leave).'				(=(4) in Lefebvre 1994b)

It is a well known fact that, while verb doubling phenomena are attested in Haitian and in West African languages, they are not attested in French (see Koopman 1986, Lefebvre 1998 and the references cited therein). Moreover, as is demonstrated in Lefebvre (1998: 363–374), the properties of the verb doubling constructions in both Haitian and Fongbe are strikingly similar.

The overview of data pertaining to major subsystems of the grammar shows Haitian creole shares major properties with its substratum languages. Data showing that Haitian creole lexical entries reproduce the semantic divisions of their substratum languages, in spite of the fact that their phonological representations are derived from French phonetic matrices, may be found in Lefebvre (1998; 1999), in Lumsden (1999), and in the references cited in these publications. In Lefebvre (1998: 248–301), it is shown that, to a great extent, the syntactic properties of Haitian verbs also correspond to those of the substratum languages rather than to those of French. The inventory and the properties of the Haitian derivational affixes are also argued to be extremely similar to those of the substratum languages rather than to those of the lexifier language (see Lefebvre 1998: 303–333, and the references cited therein). The principles governing the concatenation of words into compounds in Haitian also appear to follow the substratum languages (see Brousseau 1988; 1989; Lefebvre 1998: 334–349).

It thus appears that the Haitian lexicon manifests the semantic and syntactic properties of its substratum languages. Similarly, Haitian reproduces the principles of concatenation and the parametric values of its substratum languages. Abstracting away from the phonological representations of the Haitian lexical entries, it appears that Haitian creole manifests the typological features of the Gbe (here represented by Fongbe) and other West

African languages, the substratum languages, rather than those of French, the lexifier language.

Now, if relexification has played a central role in the formation of Haitian creole, it is logical to hypothesise that this cognitive process has also played a major role in the formation of other creole languages. By hypothesis, then, these other creoles would also reproduce the properties of their substratum languages. In his comparison of Solomons Pidgin with its source languages, English, the lexifier language, and Kwaio, an Austronesian substratum language, Keesing (1988) shows extensively that Solomons Pidgin does reproduce the properties of its Austronesian substratum languages.

Keesing (1988:11–2) writes:

Sitting on a Solomon Islands mountain in 1977, reading Derek Bickerton's review article on "Pidgin and Creole Studies" (1976), I was led to think more seriously than I ever had about the history and structure of Solomon Islands Pidgin. I had earlier been struck, when I had learned Solomon Pidgin in the 1960s through the medium of Kwaio, an indigenous language I already spoke fluently, that this learning task mainly required learning Pidgin equivalents of Kwaio morphemes. The syntax of Solomon Pidgin was essentially the same as the syntax of Kwaio, although somewhat simpler and lacking some of the surface marking; in most constructions, there was a virtual morpheme-by-morpheme correspondence between Kwaio and Pidgin. (This was not just an odd local process of calquing: the Pidgin I was learning in terms of Kwaio was spoken with only minor variations throughout the southeastern and central Solomons, although it was everywhere adapted to local phonologies.) Although most of the Pidgin lexical forms were ultimately derived from English, I found this largely irrelevant to my language-learning task. The semantic categories they labeled corresponded to Kwaio ones, not English ones; grammatical morphemes corresponded to Kwaio ones, not English ones. Thus semantically

- b. *Olketa* *bae-i* *go.* SOLOMONS PIDGIN
 FP (them) FUT-SRP (3pl) *go*
 ‘They will go.’ (from Keesing 1988:114)

While *olketa* in the pidgin derives its phonological representation from the English expression ‘all together’, it has the meaning and uses of the substratum strong personal pronoun *gila* ‘them’. While *bae* in the pidgin derives its phonological representation from a reduced form of the English expression *by and by*, its meaning and uses correspond to the substratum lexical entry *ta-*, a future marker. As in the substratum language, the future marker of the pidgin is marked for a third person pronominal form. This pidgin form is derived from the English *he*, but it does not share the uses of the form it is phonologically derived from; it does, however, share the properties of the substratum forms, as can be observed by comparing the (a) and (b) sentences in (19).

So, the relexification account of creole genesis predicts that Atlantic creoles will reproduce the properties of their West African substratum languages, while Pacific ones will reproduce those of their Austronesian substratum languages. Atlantic and Pacific creoles are thus expected to differ in the same areas of lexicon and grammar as West African and Austronesian languages do among themselves. For example, while the pronominal system of Solomons pidgin reproduces the singular, dual, plural inclusive and exclusive first person plural distinctions of its substratum languages, as was mentioned above, Haitian also reproduces the particularities of its substratum languages. Consider the paradigm of personal pronouns in (20).

- | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|------------------|-------------|----|----------------|-------------------------|----|--------------|------------------------|
| (20) a. | FRENCH | | b. | HAITIAN | | c. | FONGBE | |
| | <i>moi</i> | ‘I, me’ | | <i>mwen</i> | ‘I, me’ | | <i>nyè</i> | ‘I, me’ |
| | <i>toi</i> | ‘you (sg.)’ | | <i>ou/[wu]</i> | ‘you (sg.)’ | | <i>hwè</i> | ‘you (sg.)’ |
| | <i>lui/elle</i> | ‘he/she/it’ | | <i>li</i> | ‘he/she/it/
him/her’ | | <i>é(yè)</i> | ‘he/she/it
him/her’ |
| | <i>nous</i> | ‘we/us’ | | <i>nou</i> | ‘we/us/you (pl.)’ | | <i>mí</i> | ‘we/us/you (pl.)’ |
| | <i>vous</i> | ‘you (pl.)’ | | <i>yo</i> | ‘they/them’ | | <i>yé</i> | ‘they/them’ |
| | <i>eux/elles</i> | ‘they/them’ | | | | | | |
- (from Valdman *et al.* 1981) (=18) in Brousseau 1995)

While French has six forms, Haitian has only five. Like in Fongbe, in Haitian, the same form serves as both first and second person plural (for further discussion, see Lefebvre 1998: 141–143). Likewise, verb doubling phenomena of the type in (15)–(18) are only found in those creoles for which the substratum languages have them. Thus, while Atlantic creoles have these constructions, inherited from their substratum languages, Pacific creoles do not have them because their substratum languages do not have them. Consequently, on the relexification account of creole genesis, creole languages cannot be argued to be typologically similar. Rather, what appears to unite creoles of different geographical areas is the main process —relexification— by which they come about.

In spite of this rather categorical conclusion, there is, nonetheless, one feature that creole languages appear to share: it is the fact that they tend to be isolating languages. I now turn to the discussion of this point.

2. Why do creole languages tend to be isolating?

The observation that creole languages tend to be isolating languages goes back to Schuchardt (1979) and Hesseling (1933: 166). It is also found in Hagège (1985: 139). Mufwene (1986; 1990; 1991) shows that this tendency appears to hold even when the contributing languages are not isolating ones. For example, he documents the fact that Kituba, a creole language that has emerged almost exclusively from contact among agglutinative Bantu languages, is an isolating language. “Kituba has selected Kikongo’s seemingly marked periphrastic alternative over the more common and apparently unmarked agglutinating system” (Mufwene 1990: 112). More recently, McWhorter (1998: 792) has proposed that lack of inflectional morphology is a feature of the creole prototype.

How does the relexification account of creole genesis handle the fact that creoles tend to be isolating? The answer to this question lies in the way that functional category lexical entries acquire a label in creole genesis. According to Lefebvre & Lumsden (1994a; 1994b), this is achieved in one of two ways. First, since the creators of a radical creole do not identify the functional categories of the superstratum language, because they do not have

enough exposure to the language, they do not relabel the functional category lexical entries of their own lexicon on the basis of those of the superstratum language; rather, they relabel them on the basis of *major*-category lexemes (e.g. nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs and prepositions) of the superstratum language. For example, the postnominal definite determiner of the Haitian substratum languages in (5) has been relabelled on the basis of a French postnominal adverb (see Lefebvre 1998: 78–84). Likewise, the tense, mood and aspect markers of the substratum languages of Haitian in Table 2 have been relexified on the basis of French periphrastic expressions (see Lefebvre 1996; 1998: 11–140).

The absence of syntactic pronominal clitics in a creole whose contributing languages all have syntactic pronominal clitics (as is the case of Haitian, as we saw above) can also be argued to follow from this perspective. The following scenario is proposed in Brousseau (1995) for Haitian, which does not have syntactic pronominal clitics in spite of the fact that both its superstratum and substratum languages have syntactic pronominal clitics. Brousseau hypothesises that the creators of Haitian relexified the clitics of their own lexicon using French strong personal pronouns. Note that these French forms were also used to relabel the lexical entries copied from the strong pronouns. So, on this hypothesis, the copied lexical entries of all three Fongbe first person singular pronominal forms were relabelled on the basis of French *moi*, yielding *mwen* in Haitian, as is shown in (21) (where the syntactic features [+/- argument] stand for strong and clitic forms, respectively).

(21)		FONGBE	HAITIAN
a.	[1st], [-plural], [+argument]	nyè	mwen
b.	[1st], [-plural], [-argument], [+nominative]	ùn	mwen
c.	[1st], [-plural], [-argument], [-nominative]	mì	mwen

Consequently, in the incipient creole, there would be three homophonous forms for the first person singular pronominal lexical entries. The availability, in the incipient creole, of the lexical entries in (21) would enable the creators of Haitian who had both strong and weak pronominal forms in their original lexicons to reproduce these forms in the creole. However, using the same superstratum string to relabel several lexical entries copied from the

substratum language(s) yielded redundancy in the newly created lexicon. Brousseau (1995) thus further hypothesises that the three homophonous lexical entries in (21) were reduced to one, with their common features, yielding a single Haitian lexical entry unspecified for the features [±argument], where ± is a variable that can take the values + or –, and [±nominative], where ± is a variable that can take the values + or –. The reduced lexical entry is shown in (22)

(22) /mwɛn/: [1st], [–plural] HAITIAN

The fact that the lexical entry in (22) is underspecified for the feature [±argument] also enabled the creators of Haitian, who had both strong and weak pronominal forms in their original lexicons to produce these forms while speaking the creole. Whether the first generation of Haitian native speakers was exposed to the data in (21) or (22), they had no clue, however, for distinguishing between strong and weak forms on the basis of the data. Presumably, they observed the same form in all contexts where a pronominal was used by the adult population. Furthermore, Brousseau (1995) points out that the context *par excellence* where the clitic and the strong forms were distinguished in terms of word order in the original grammar —that is, in nominalisations— had been abandoned in the early creole. It is thus reasonable to conclude that the first generation of Haitian native speakers could not deduce the availability of syntactic clitics on the basis of the data that they were exposed to. Still according to Brousseau (1995), presumably, the first generation of Haitian native speakers interpreted these data as in (23).

(23) /mwɛn/: [1st], [–plural], [+argument] HAITIAN

Thus, in modern Haitian, there are no syntactic clitics. The fact that syntactic clitics did not enter the creole can thus be derived from how relabelling is hypothesised to proceed in the case of functional category lexical entries in creole genesis.

A second way by which a functional-category lexeme can acquire a label in creole genesis is through reanalysis. As will be seen in the next section, under specific circumstances, it may happen that such a lexeme cannot be relabelled at the time

relexification is taking place. In this case, the copied lexical entry is assigned a null form, represented by \emptyset in the schema in (1). As has been proposed in Lefebvre & Lumsden (1992; 1994b), a functional category lexical entry that has been assigned a null form at relabelling may be signalled by a periphrastic expression. For example, a lexical entry having a temporal/aspectual meaning but a null phonological representation may be signalled by the use of an adverb with a similar meaning. The periphrastic expression may later become the phonological representation of the lexical entry initially assigned a null form, through the process of reanalysis. Such cases are reported in the literature (for an example from Tok Pisin, see Sankoff 1991).

The fact that creoles are generally isolating languages thus follows from the relexification account of creole genesis described above. Since the functional-category lexemes of creole languages derive their phonological forms from major-category lexemes in the superstratum language, or from reanalysis, and since these categories are typically free morphemes, it follows that creoles will tend to be isolating languages (see Lefebvre & Lumsden 1994a; 1994b).⁶

3. Why do creole languages look simpler?

McWhorter (this volume), states that creole languages are simpler than both their lexifier and substrate languages. On the relexification account of creole genesis assumed here, the issue of the alleged simplicity of creole languages can only be taken up in terms of a comparison of a creole with its substratum languages. This is thus the methodology that I will adopt in addressing the question at stake in this section. Are creole languages really simpler than their substratum languages? Or do they just happen to ‘look’ simpler? In the paragraphs that follow, I present a way of looking at the data that support the second alternative.

In my view, creole languages only look simpler than their substratum languages. And the fact that they look simpler than their substratum languages lies in the fact that, due to constraints associated with the process of relexification, there are more covert lexical entries

in creole languages than there are in their substratum languages. By covert lexical entry, I mean a lexical entry that is required by universal grammar but that is phonologically null. In practical terms, this means that such a lexical entry has a syntactic function that can be argued for, but that it is not pronounced. A case in point would be the accusative case in English. This case is required by universal grammar (see Chomsky 1981), but in English it is covert, unlike in other languages, such as Quechua, that have overt case morphology. Another relevant example involves the optional pronunciation of the complementiser *that* in English, as in *John said \emptyset he would come*. There is a consensus in the literature that, when the complementiser *that* is not pronounced in a sentence of the aforementioned type, the syntactic position is nonetheless filled by the features of this complementiser, and the covert complementiser plays a syntactic role in the structure of the clause. In light of this preliminary discussion, I now turn to the discussion of phonologically null lexical entries produced at the time the process of relexification is taking place in creole genesis. It will be shown that phonologically null lexical entries are the results of constraints involved in relabelling.

According to Muysken (1981: 62), relexification is semantically driven. “For relexification to occur, the semantic representations of source and target language entries must partially overlap; otherwise, the two entries would never be associated with each other. Other features of the two entries may, but need not, be associated with each other.” In Lefebvre (1998: 17), I take the position that, in relexification, copying may apply to all lexical entries and that it is relabelling that is semantically driven. Thus, only those functional categories that have some semantic content (e.g. determiners, demonstrative terms, etc.) may be assigned a new label during relexification. Functional categories that have no semantic content (e.g. case markers, operators, etc.) are copied but they are not relabelled; they are phonologically null or covert ; they are represented by zero in the schema in (1). Practically speaking, this means that these lexical entries are not pronounced. As is pointed out in Lefebvre (1998: 17–18), the claim that functional categories may be

assigned a null form at relabelling is independently motivated by the fact that, in natural languages, functional categories required by universal grammar are not always spelled out, as we saw above on the basis of data drawn from English.

In this respect, consider the Haitian and Fongbe nominal structures in (5), reproduced as (24) for convenience.

(24)	krab	[mwen	ø]	sa	a	yo	HAITIAN
	àsón	[nyè	tòn]	éló	ó	lê	FONGBE
	crab	me	GEN	DEM	DET	PL	
	‘these / those crabs of mine (in question / that we know of)’						

The possessive phrase that follows the head noun of these structures is comprised of a pronoun and a case marker. The case marker is overt in Fongbe but covert in Haitian (see Lumsden 1991). Since case markers do not have semantic content, the Fongbe case marker could not be relabelled, and thus, the copied lexical entry from this substratum case marker was assigned a phonologically null form at relabelling. On the basis of syntactic tests, Brousseau & Lumsden (1992) argue that Fongbe *tòn* has the properties of Genitive case (=’s in English) rather than those of Objective case (=of in English). Lumsden (1991) argues that the Haitian possessive phrase has the same properties as the corresponding Fongbe one. He thus identifies the phonologically null case marker as Genitive.

Another example of a functional category that could not be relabelled because it does not have semantic content involves the operator found in relative and factive clauses. This operator is lexical in Fongbe but it is covert in Haitian, as is illustrated in (25) involving factive clauses.

(25)	Wá	děè	Jan	wá	ó	...	FONGBE
	Rive	ø	Jan	rive	a	...	HAITIAN
	arrive	OP	John	arrive	DET		
	‘The fact that John arrived ...’						
	(=(3) in Lefebvre 1994b)						

The properties of the Fongbe operator are extensively discussed in Kinyalolo (1993) and in Collins (1994). In Lefebvre (1998: 203–205), it is argued that the Haitian null form in (25)

(27)	FONGBE	HAITIAN	ENGLISH- OR DUTCH- BASED CREOLES
	<pre> NP / \ pronoun N -dèè </pre>	<pre> NP / \ pronoun N ø </pre>	<pre> NP / \ pronoun N -selful/-self/-seéi </pre>
		(Kinyalolo 1994)	(Lefebvre 1998)

Thus, phonologically null lexical entries in a creole may result from the fact that the superstratum language does not have an appropriate form to relabel a copied lexical entry.

As can be seen from the above examples, there are more covert forms in the creole than there are in the substratum languages. As has been pointed out in Lumsden (1995), this makes the creole lexicons look “simpler” than the original lexicons. Furthermore, lexical entries that are not required by universal grammar, and that cannot be relabelled due to either one of the two constraints discussed above, may simply be abandoned. This is the case, for example, of the logophoric pronoun of the Haitian substratum Gbe languages (see Lefebvre 1998: 147). A logophoric pronoun is a pronoun that has no independent reference. Because they are not semantically independent, logophoric pronouns cannot be relabelled. There are no arguments that would support an analysis according to which there would be a null logophoric pronoun in modern Haitian. Therefore, in this case, it is simply assumed that the lexical entry has been lost. Cases of this type also make creole lexicons look simpler than the original ones. (For an extensive discussion on phonologically null forms in Haitian creole, see Lefebvre 1998: 378–381.)

4. Apparent simplicity and hidden complexity

In this section, I would like to call the reader’s attention on some semantic interpretative facts showing that ‘what you see is not always what you get’ and that ‘what you see is sometimes simpler than what you in fact get’.

Consider the predicate cleft construction in (28).

events. These facts, and others of the same type that are discussed in (Lefebvre 1998, in press¹⁰), show that some Haitian grammatical properties are more complex and certainly more opaque than a “simplicity” approach to creole languages would lead one to believe.

5. McWhorter’s list revisited

McWhorter (this volume) provides a list of fourteen features that he claims will never be found in a creole language. As he puts it: “Crucially: One would find a great many of the above features in the lexifier and substrate languages that were spoken by the creators of these creoles”. In the theory of creole genesis advocated in the previous sections of this paper, the creators of a creole do not have enough access to the superstratum language to learn the functional categories of that superstratum language. Thus, on this approach, the lexifier language is not pertinent to explain the absence, in creole languages, of the list of items (almost all related to functional categories) provided by McWhorter. Only the substratum languages are pertinent for the discussion of this list. So, in the paragraphs that follow, I discuss McWhorter’s list with respect to the substratum languages of Haitian, mainly Fongbe, and occasionally, other West African languages. Then, I propose a global evaluation of these features.

None of the substratum languages of Haitian have ergative case; but even if they did, on the theory of relexification outlined in this paper, ergative case would have been assigned a null form at relabelling, and thus, it would not be visible in the incipient creole. Gbe languages do have evidential markers (see Lefebvre & Brousseau to appear). As is shown in Lefebvre (1998: 213–217), Haitian has a subset of those. Inalienably possessed objects must appear in the Genitive case in Fongbe (see Lefebvre & Brousseau to appear). As we saw in (5), due to the semantic constraint on relabelling, Genitive case is covert in Haitian and so there is no way to tell whether inalienably possessed objects occur in the Genitive or in the Objective case. Fongbe does not have switch reference, inverse nor obviative marking. If it did, it is unlikely that these morphemes would have made their way into Haitian because, provided that they have enough semantics to be relabelled, there may not be any

appropriate French phonetic string to relabel the substratum morphemes. Fongbe, like the other Gbe languages, does not have verb raising to INFL, as we saw in Table 2, and thus, it does not manifest verb second phenomena, nor the syntactic asymmetries between matrix and subordinate clauses that go with them. As we saw in Table 2, verb raising to INFL (and eventually to a higher position in the syntactic tree) correlates with inflectional morphology on the verb. As we saw in Table 2, Haitian follows the pattern of its substratum Gbe languages with respect to this parametric option: neither have inflectional morphology on the verb. As for subjunctive marking, Gbe languages encode this mood by means of a preverbal marker. As we saw in Table 1, this preverbal marker was reproduced in Haitian by relexification. Gbe languages present a few cases of syntactic clitic movement (see Lefebvre & Brousseau to appear). As was shown in section 3, syntactic clitics are not reproduced in a creole as a consequence of how relabelling proceeds in the case of functional-category lexemes. It follows that, unless a creole develops syntactic clitics, clitic movement will not be found in incipient creoles.

McWhorter claims that creoles will manifest only an SVO word order. As is shown in Lefebvre & Brousseau (to appear), Fongbe manifests a surface word order that is SVO in some contexts (mainly finite clauses) and OVS in others (mainly nominal and nominalised structures). In Lefebvre & Lumsden (1992), it has been proposed that word order in a creole will be established in the following way. Because the creators of the creole are aiming to reproduce the superstratum sequences they are exposed to and since they are able to identify the major category lexical entries, the word order of major category lexical items and major constituents in the creole will follow that of the lexifier language. However, because the creators of a creole do not have enough exposure to the superstratum language, they cannot identify its functional-category lexemes; when they relexify the functional-category lexemes of their native lexicons, they keep their original directionality properties. Hence, these items are predicted to have the same word order as in the substratum languages. The Haitian data presented in Lefebvre (1998) show that this hypothesis is borne

out. The data in Table 1 and in the nominal structures in (5) constitute examples in point. (For further discussion of this issue, see Lefebvre 1998: 388–390.) Additional evidence for this claim comes from Berbice Dutch. Kouwenberg (1992) reports that Eastern Ijo, Berbice Dutch's main substratum language, is underlyingly an OV language. Dutch, the lexifier language, is also underlyingly an OV language. Berbice Dutch itself is a VO language. Kouwenberg explains this situation as follows. In Dutch simple clauses, the verb moves to INFL such that, at surface structure, Dutch simple sentences exhibit the order SVO. According to Kouwenberg, the creators of Berbice Dutch perceived this word order and hence established the word order SVO for the creole.⁸

Gbe languages used to have noun classes; the latter are attested by frozen forms in the modern varieties. Whether these noun class prefixes were still productive at the time Haitian creole was formed is unknown to me. The fact that Haitian creole does not have noun class prefixes, however, suggests that noun class prefixes were probably no longer productive in Gbe at the relevant time. This claim is supported by the fact that all the productive morphology of Gbe has been reproduced in the creole, as is extensively demonstrated in Lefebvre (1998: 303–334, and the references cited therein). Finally, while Fongbe has phonological tones, Haitian creole does not (see Cadely 1994).

This terminates the discussion of each feature in McWhorter's list on the basis of Haitian and its substratum languages. I now turn to a more global evaluation of the facts discussed above.

I begin with the facts that are not in agreement with McWhorter's claim. The Haitian data involving the subjunctive and the evidential markers constitute counter-examples to McWhorter's claim. The fact that Haitian does not manifest verb second phenomena is irrelevant to its being a creole. As we saw earlier, the availability of this option in a particular grammar correlates with the availability of inflectional morphology in that particular grammar. Other languages, not identified as creoles, lack inflectional morphology, and hence, verb movement to INFL and, in some cases, to COMP. Chinese is a case in point. In

turn, the presence of this feature in McWhorter's list is in contradiction with the property that he claims characterises the items in his list: "Crucially, none of these factors require inflectional morphology for their occurrence in a grammar, and thus their absence is not an epiphenomenon of isolating typology" (McWhorter, this volume). Consequently, the features in this first group should be dropped from McWhorter's list of features that are excluded from creole languages.

A second group of features comprises those that can be derived from the relexification account of creole genesis outlined in the previous sections. For example, all the features that are related to case marking (that is, lack of ergative case, lack of genitive case, and lack of particular case distinction for inalienable possession) are derivable from the semantic constraint on relabelling; on this constraint, case markers are not relabelled in relexification, and thus, they are predicted not to be overt in the incipient creole. Likewise, under the condition that they have enough semantics to be eligible for relabelling, markers or morphology involving switch, obviative or inverse reference cannot be relabeled for lack of appropriate material in the superstratum language. Similarly, the lack of clitic movement in creoles follows directly from the lack of syntactic clitics in these languages. As we saw in section 3, the lack of syntactic clitics in a creole is derivable from the way relabelling is hypothesised to proceed in creole genesis. The fact that creoles are SVO languages is also derivable from the proposal concerning how word order is established in creole genesis contexts, even in cases where contributing languages are SOV. So, all the features in this second group are derivable from a sound theory of how creole languages come about.

Finally, the absence of tones in creole languages may be due to the mixed character of these languages. For example, as is argued in Brousseau (in preparation), the accentual system of Haitian represents a principled compromise between the tonal system of its Gbe substratum languages and the extremely simple accentual system of French. Likewise, the phonological system of Haitian represents a principled compromise between the phonology of its contributing languages. This is just like the relexified lexical entries which represent a

principled compromise between the properties of the substratum lexical entries and those of the superstratum language (see (1) and (3)).

On the basis of this global evaluation of McWhorter's list, my conclusion is the following. The first group of features should be removed from the list because they do not stand in the face of the counter-examples that have been presented on the basis of Haitian. The second and third groups of features should be retained. These are the one that can be derived from the relexification account of creole genesis presented in earlier sections of this paper.

6. Conclusion

The central thesis advocated for in this paper is that creole languages are not so “simple” as they may look on the surface. It was shown that the creators of creole languages are adult native speakers who use the properties of their own lexicons and grammars in creating the creole. The bulk of a creole's lexicon is thus created through the process of relexification. This account of creole genesis predicts that creoles reproduce the properties of their substratum languages, in such a way that creoles from different geographical areas will manifest the same type of differences among themselves as their respective substratum languages do. It was proposed that what appears to unite creole languages of all geographical areas is the main process—relexification—by which they come about. In spite of this strong conclusion, it was shown that creole languages appear to share at least one feature in the fact that they tend to be isolating languages. It was argued that this property of creole languages follows from the relexification account of creole genesis. Regarding the issue of simplicity per se, it was shown that, due to constraints associated with the process of relexification—the fact that relabelling is generally semantically constrained, and the fact that relabelling is, in particular, constrained by what the superstratum has to offer to relabel a copied lexical entry—there are more covert lexical entries in creole languages than there are in their substratum languages. This makes creoles “look simpler” than the original lexicons. Semantic interpretation data were presented showing that apparent simplicity may

hide effective complexity. Finally, the evaluation of the features proposed by McWhorter (this volume) to be absent from creole languages led to an interesting conclusion. Putting aside the few features that should be removed from the list, it is possible to derive the other ones from a theory of creole genesis based on the major process that is a work in creole formation. A list that comprises features that seem heterogeneous at first glance thus acquires some motivation when related to the process that creates the languages under discussion in this special issue.

Notes

* The content of this paper builds on a public debate on issues in creole studies between myself and John McWhorter. The debate took place March 22, 2001 at the University of California at Berkeley. I want to thank Suzan Ervin-Tripp, Dan Slobin and all the participants to this debate for their comments and insightful questions. I want to thank Bernard Comrie, David Gil and Frans Plank for their comments on a first version of this paper. Thanks to Andrée Bélanger who helped format it. The research underlying this paper was financed by CRSH, FCAR and FIR-UQAM.

¹ In the course of this research, I had several major collaborators whom I wish to thank for their contribution at some point or other: Jonathan Kaye, Diane Massam, John Lumsden, Anne-Marie Brousseau.

² For an extensive discussion on these two processes and on how they interact with relexification in creole genesis, see Lefebvre (1998) and the references cited therein, and Lefebvre (in press a).

³ As has been pointed out in Lefebvre & Lumsden (1994a), this account of creole genesis is a further development of the second language acquisition theory of creole genesis (see e.g. Schumann 1978; Andersen 1980; Thomason & Kaufman 1991, etc.); it is claimed that, in creole genesis, involving situations where there is little access to the superstratum language, the process of relexification is used by speakers of the substratum languages as the main tool for acquiring a second language: the superstratum language.

⁴ Due to various constraints, we had to limit the detailed study of the substratum languages of Haitian to one language. On the basis of non-linguistic factors, Fongbe was chosen as the substratum language to be studied in detail. In no way does this methodological choice entail that Haitian is Fongbe relexified. (For a thorough discussion of the methodology of the research and the validity of the linguistic test, see Lefebvre 1998: 52–77, and the references cited therein.)

⁵ The inventory of TMA markers in Haitian and Fongbe is established in Lefebvre (1996) on the basis of syntactic tests which set the preverbal markers apart from modal and aspectual verbs. First, they all occur between the subject and the verb. Second, preverbal markers occurring in the same column in Table 1 are mutually exclusive, showing that they are in a paradigmatic relationship. Third, while modal verbs do allow for deletion of their VP complement, preverbal markers do not (for Haitian, see Koopman & Lefebvre 1982; Magloire-Holly 1982; Spears 1990; for Fongbe, see Lefebvre 1996). Fourth, most of the preverbal markers in Table 1 have no meaning outside of the TMA system. Finally, the TMA markers may combine to form complex tenses (see Lefebvre 1996).

⁶ Mufwene (1989:24) accounts for the isolating character of creole languages by appealing to the notion of salience: “With regard to the issue made here, viz., explaining why periphrasis is generally preferred to inflections in PCs, I submit that salience should do.” The proposal advocated in our research is somewhat similar to Mufwene’s, for *major* categories may be viewed as “salient” when compared with *minor* categories. As is pointed out in Lefebvre (1998: 48), however, the proposal in Lefebvre & Lumsden (1994a) is more specific, since it links the observed facts to the processes that generate them, namely, relexification and reanalysis, and to the linguistic material on which these processes apply in creole genesis.

⁷ For an extensive discussion of these facts, see Lefebvre (1998: 159–171). The idea that the lexical entry copied from the substratum *-self* anaphor could have been assigned a phonologically null representation at relabelling is attributable to John Lumsden (research seminar, Fall 1993). The further development of this idea is mine.

⁸ As noted by Kouwenberg (1992), however, Berbice Dutch has postpositions. This should come as no surprise since Dutch also has postpositions. The fact that Saramaccan has postpositions (*cf.* Muysken 1987) when its English lexifier language does not, however,

constitutes a counter-example to the proposal in Lefebvre & Lumsden (1992) on how word order is established in an incipient creole. The latter data require further investigation.

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