

MISSISSIPPI AND TECHE CREOLE

A demographic and linguistic case for separate genesis in
Louisiana

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a detailed examination of the early socio-demographic history of Louisiana with particular focus on European and slave settlement in the French and Spanish periods. On the basis of these demographics as well as some textual evidence it is argued that despite theoretical predictions to the contrary, a Creole language did emerge and 'jell' *in situ* in the period 1719-1770. Instrumental in the creation of this language, which was spoken in settlements along the Mississippi River, were those African slaves who had arrived 1719-1731. Demographics also suggest that the Creole spoken to the west of the Atchafalaya River, unsettled until the 1760s, was the product of a semi-separate genesis. An examination of the relativization strategies of modern representatives of the two Creoles (PC and BB) in addition to the number of differences noted by Klingler (1992) suggest that this was indeed the case.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AN	Archives Nationales
BB	Breaux Bridge Creole
CrFr	Creole French
DO	Direct object
GEN	Genitive
IO	Indirect object
LC	Louisiana Creole
Mau	Mauritian Creole
MC	Mississippi Creole
NP	Noun phrase
PC	Pointe Coupée Creole
PREP	Prepositional object
RC	Relative Clause
Rel	Relativizer
S1/S2	Sentence 1/2
Sey	Seychelles Creole
SU	Subject
TA	Tense Aspect (marker)
TC	Tèche Creole
TEMP	Temporal

INTRODUCTION

Baker's work on Mauritian since 1982 (v. Baker 1982, 1984, Baker and Corne 1982, 1986) has demonstrated the crucial importance of **detailed** demographic studies of individual societies in which Creoles languages came about.

His exhaustive research on the socio-demographic history of Mauritius has suggested a picture different from that previously painted by Chaudenson (1974, and, later, reiterated in 1979).

Interestingly it was in this 1974 work, *Le lexique du parler créole de la Réunion*, that Chaudenson first underlined the importance of a knowledge of demographics for understanding how a Creole emerged. His failure, however, to study these demographics in sufficient detail led him to the erroneous supposition that Réunionnais (or 'bourbonnais') was the progenitor of all the Isle de France Creoles.

Baker's (1982) convincing refutation of this claim on the grounds that Mauritius was not, as asserted by Chaudenson, settled from Réunion, but had rather a different socio-demographic history, led to his formulation of the 'events' hypothesis (1982, 1984) and gave rise to something of a polemic in Creole studies.

While the controversy raged, more in-depth research on the respective settlement histories of Mauritius and Réunion was carried out, and as a result we are now very well informed as to the social conditions prevailing in the former (v. Papen 1978, Baker 1982, 1984, Baker and Corne 1982, 1986) and the latter (v. Chaudenson 1974, 1979, 1992, Cellier 1985) in the periods relevant to the evolution of their respective languages.

In the light of new information, both Baker (1990, 1992, 1993) and Chaudenson (1992) have, to differing degrees, modified their hypotheses which today, at least vis-à-vis the general evolution of the societies in question, share some common ground.

The intrinsic polemic, whether Creole French represents a continuation of French (i.e. 'français avancé' cf. Chaudenson 1979, 1992) or a separate language 'created' by large numbers of slaves without a community L1 (cf. Baker 1992, 1993), however, remains firmly intact.

Jennings' recent study of Cayennais (1993, and in press) based on limited archival work in Paris and previously unexploited published material has indicated that a lot more work of a demographic nature needs to be carried out if we are to understand the exact social and linguistic situation in some colonies.

In his re-working of Baker's (1982, 1984) 'events' hypothesis and Bickerton's (1984) pidginization index he has come to the conclusion that differences in Creole languages are 'quantifiable and can be compared on a relative index of creolization whose poles are the substrate and the superstrate' (Jennings, in press).

In view of Jennings' work, then, it was decided that an in-depth socio-demographic study of Louisiana might account for the oft-mentioned heterogeneity of the Creole language spoken there (v. Broussard 1942, Phillips 1979, Neumann 1985, Marshall 1991, Valdman 1992).

Taking advantage of a short stay in Paris, I managed to undertake some archival (Archives Nationales) and library (Bibliothèque Nationale, Bibliothèque de la Marine) research on the demographic and settlement history of Louisiana.

Unfortunately, due to lack of time and financial constraints, this research was of a limited nature. Much of the enormous amount of

material available, particularly in the Archives Nationales, is still to be exploited. The results of this initial research, however, are embodied in the first part of this thesis.

As an aside, the extensive archival work of Gwendolyn Midlo Hall (1992) should be mentioned. Her excellent book *Africans in Colonial Louisiana* abounds with information useful to the creolist, although it must be said that most of it is gathered from a historical and/or socio-political viewpoint as opposed to a linguistic one. While, then, her work has done much in the way of filling many of the yawning gaps in the literature concerning the Colonial history of Louisiana, especially from an African-American perspective, its appearance does not preclude further investigation and/or exploitation of her sources from the point of view of Creole genesis.

Let us return, however, to the study at hand. As indicated above the first part of this work concerns the demographic and settlement history of Louisiana. Evidence brought to light in this section suggesting the likelihood of two separate, or at least semi-separate Creole geneses in Louisiana, is tested against linguistic data in section 2. This linguistic data is drawn from Klingler's recent (1992) study on Pointe Coupée Creole (PC) and Neumann's (1985) work on Breaux Bridge Creole (BB).

Working upon the principle that any given area of Creole syntax examined from a slightly different angle is likely to provide new information as regards to the evolution and/or development of a language, it was decided to undertake both a synchronic and diachronic study of relative clause constructions in Louisiana Creole(s).

The choice of relativization strategies, however, is not as arbitrary as it might seem. In the course of correcting Ehrhart's (1993) mis-analysis of relativization in Tayo, Corne discovered that the speech of the G3s (the principal subjects of Ehrhart's study) was marked by their frequent use of

modern relativization structures, leading him to conclude that relative clauses emerged in the formative period of Tayo's development.

In view of this, I began collecting data on the relativization strategies in several varieties of Creole French. Starting out with nineteenth century texts, I looked at Baissac (1888) and Anderson (1885) for Mauritius, Parépou for French Guiana, and Fortier (1895), Broussard (1942) and Neumann (1987) for Louisiana. Moving on to the modern texts I examined a number of Mauritian 'novels', including Asgarally (1977 and 1979), and Chiffone (1979) as well as Carayol and Chaudenson's (1978) collection of Indian Ocean 'contes'. The modern Guyannais story, *Sigré Bounyan Wara*, provided data for twentieth century French Guianese Creole, as did Neumann's (1985) 'étude morphosyntaxe' and texts of Breaux Bridge Creole for modern Louisiana Creole.

Out of all this exhaustive data gathering, some interesting patterns began to emerge. While the three Creoles differed in the way each handled relative clause constructions, there was an amazing degree of correlation within each language between the nineteenth century and modern texts (that is to say modern Mauritian was like nineteenth century Mauritian etc).

In the meantime, Chris Corne, having moved on to the study of relative clauses in Réunionnais, had been able to account for the peculiar optionality of the Réunionnais relativizer in all cases by a somewhat convoluted and inferential argument that claimed its introduction via Malagassy in the formative period of this language's evolution (v. Corne, in press, b).

Relative clauses, then, given their apparent early emergence in at least these Creole languages, seemed an ideal area of grammar to examine in an attempt to add some linguistic support to the conclusions drawn from the socio-demographic evidence.

This study starts with a brief outline of the early exploration of Louisiana and covers the period from the country's 'discovery' by the Spanish to the French establishment of a beachhead at Biloxi Bay in 1699.

Chapter 2, largely based on research done in the Paris archives and the Bibliothèque Nationale, examines in detail the early years of the colony up to the Louisiana Purchase. Primarily concerned with the origins and social circumstances of the European immigrants, population growth, mortality rates and conditions within Louisiana are also considered therein.

The linguistic implications of this European settlement are discussed in chapter 3.

Chapter 4 concerns the slave trade to Louisiana and is essentially in two parts. The first section deals with what I have termed 'the first wave' of slave importations (i.e. those slaves who were brought into French Louisiana by the Company of the Indies 1719-1731). Details of their ethnic origins, their arrival and their subsequent distribution in the colony are examined. The emergence of a slave culture within Louisiana is also given some attention.

The second part of chapter 4 looks at the 'second wave' of slave arrivals which commenced c. 1777-1782. Unfortunately due to the dearth of documentation surrounding the Spanish slave trade to Louisiana (for comments on this v. Hall 1992) this section is of a more superficial nature than the one preceding. It does, however, outline the ethnic origins of this second group of slaves which are broken down, essentially, into two groups: Africans and Creoles from Saint-Domingue.

Chapter 5 comprises a discussion of the above socio-demographic events and conditions and considers the facts with respect to Creole genesis in Louisiana. Both Baker (1982, 1984) and Chaudenson's (1992) theories are explored with respect to the situation in Louisiana and both

are rejected. Similarly, Valdman's (1992) hypotheses based largely on those previously elaborated by Chaudenson (1974, 1979) and Hazaël-Massieux (1990), are shown to be ill-founded.

Conclusions drawn from the demographic evidence presented above are tested against linguistic data in chapters 6 and 7. Statements on the relativization strategies of PC and BB are produced and results compared. A statement on relative clauses in nineteenth century LC is then made and discussed in the light of anomalies in the modern data.

Concluding notes are made in chapter 8.