

## **Morphologically marked passivization in Atlantic Creoles**

This paper assesses the (un)markedness of morphologically marked passivization in creole languages in the Atlantic area.

The idea for this paper originated in a study of passivization in Papiamentu, the native tongue of the ABC Islands. Papiamentu is characterized by a passive built up of an auxiliary verb (*ser* or *wòrdu*) and the past participle of a verb (e.g. *mi ta wòrdu/ser yamá* 1s-IMP-AUX-called ‘I’m being called’). This European-like morphologically marked passive is generally thought of as “unique among Caribbean creoles” (Kouwenberg & Murray 1994:37). Markey & Fodale (1980:11) take it a step further, sustaining that Papiamentu is “the only Atlantic Creole (...) with a full passive”. The view that the Papiamentu passive is exceptional in a cross-creole perspective is furthermore expressed by scholars such as Dijkhoff (1993:19), Sanchez (2005:76), Kriegel (2006:131) and Winford (2008:25). Recently, Crowley affirmed: “Passive morphology typically fares badly in pidgins and creoles. Papiamentu, however, constitutes a partial exception (...)” (2008:82).

The present paper, however, argues that, on closer inspection, the Papiamentu passive is not as idiosyncratic as is commonly believed. Of course, the use in Papiamentu of the superstrate-derived passive auxiliaries *ser* (< Spanish *ser*) and *wòrdu* (< Dutch *worden*) creates an instant impression of exclusiveness. However, various scholars (e.g. Eckkrammer 2004; Sanchez 2005) have convincingly shown that these passive auxiliaries integrated quite recently in Papiamentu; therefore, an assessment of the typological markedness of the Papiamentu passive will only yield objective results when focusing on the markedness of morphologically marked passivization in general, rather than on the possible use of passive auxiliaries.

With the aid of a variety of creole grammars as well as Holm & Patrick’s (2007) *Comparative Creole Syntax*, then, this paper provides an overview of morphologically marked passivization in Atlantic Creoles. Though for various creoles the picture is not quite clear – in some cases, for instance, it is not clear whether the morphologically marked passive found in a certain creole is confined to the creole’s acrolect or not –, this paper will reach the conclusion that morphologically marked passives (such as the one that characterizes Papiamentu) are less unique among (Atlantic) creoles than is generally held.