Grammaticalization paths in creole & non-creole languages: the case of passive

Recent debate on the creole uniqueness issue has focussed on the structural characteristics of creoles vs. non-creole languages. Another line of attack, bruited by McWhorter 2010, is to look at whether the relationship between a creole and its lexifier could result from the types of historical change seen in non-creole languages.

Previous work on contact-induced change vs. creolization suggests that most common grammaticalization in language change (even contact-induced change) involves reassigning the function of grammatically consistent elements, so that, for example, verbal markers remain verbal markers, nominal markers remain nominal markers. In creolization, however, it is often the case that grammatical elements are recruited from further afield: verbal markers from adverbial expressions, nominal markers from adjectives, verbs, pronouns, etc. (Smith 2001). The basis for this difference is that creole creators have limited access to the grammar of the superstrate & must recruit grammatical elements by the process of abduction (Andersen 1973).   Certainly, non-creoles can also grammaticalize elements from further afield, but the hypothesis is that they do so less frequently than creoles..

The present study tests the validity of this hypothesis through an examination the grammaticalization paths for passive in creole and non-creole languages, drawing on Holm et al.'s (1997) survey of the source of creole passive structures, the APiCs database, and various studies of non-creole languages.

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