

## Null arguments and their role in the development of creole paradigms

Contrary to the long upheld assumption that creole inflectional paradigms are too impoverished to permit the insertion of referential null subjects (cf. Roberts 1999 among others), subject null arguments are an integral part of many creole pronoun systems. As I will show, these null elements do not conform to the prototypical null pronoun *pro* postulated in the framework of the P&P Theory. That is because they are either not definite or, according to their binding properties, not fully pronominal or, if they are definite and pronominal, they are not recoverable via the inflectional morphology of the finite verb. Creole languages vary as to which specific types of subject null arguments they exhibit. However, all creole null arguments have in common that their development is in some way related to the morphological improvement of inflectional paradigms.

In a number of the 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 illustrate that, as a consequence, new subject null forms emerged that are not able to refer freely but rely on their being bound as anaphors by the quasi-pronominal agreement morphology of the finite verb. Since, in contrast to non-pronominal overt subject DPs, all overt strong subject pronouns co-occur with those functional markers (1), the special development of the weak subject pronouns in the languages concerned has not only brought about a new fully distinctive agreement paradigm but has also led to the disappearance of the homonymy between object pronouns and strong subject pronouns. In all creole languages whose equative copula has evolved from a 3SG subject pronoun (cf. Arends 1986; Ichinose 1993) and still exhibits pronominal features such A-bound subject null-arguments also occur. Their anaphoric properties are reflected in their exclusive 3SG *phi*-feature specification and their complementary distribution with overt weak 3SG subject pronouns (2).

(1) Cape Verdean Creole

$El_i / *Jo\tilde{a}o_i / pro_i e_i$                        $t_i$  *fika ku povu la.*  
 HE João                      3SG(PRON) stay with people there  
 “HE / \*João / he stayed there with the people.”

(2) Sranan

$Yu / Anansi / *a / pro a$                       *mi boi.*  
 you Anansi he COP my boy  
 “You / Anansi / he are / is my boy.”

In several non-Atlantic creole languages, as for instance in Chabacano (cf. Lipski 2001), in Rabaul Creole German (cf. Volker 1986) and in the present-day French-based languages Seychellois, Réunionnais and Mauritian Creole (Michaelis 1994) weak subject pronouns obtain a null representation in TMA-marked clauses as soon as their *phi*-feature content is recoverable by their association with a prominent discourse topic (Adone 1994). I will elucidate that, in accordance with the *Subset Principle* (Halle 1997), which requires the insertion of the most specific exponent into a given morpheme, those null pronouns are generally preferred to their overt weak counterparts in colloquial speech because they decisively differ from the strong forms and therefore contribute to the deletion of homonymous forms from the paradigm of the definite subject pronouns. In some Atlantic English-based creole languages, where object topicalization and focusing simply involve fronting of the object phrase to the clause initial position (cf. Rickford 1987) such discourse oriented null pronouns have been introduced owing to the grammaticalization of the 3SG object pronoun to a verbal transitive marker that guarantees the identification of the syntactic object (3). Moreover, two types of indefinite null pronouns have come into existence in some of the non-Atlantic creole languages mentioned above (cf. Sycia 1993; Lipski 1994) (4). I will show, 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.

(3) Guyanese Creole (Cr.1905)

...*two peppa pro gi'e um.*  
 two pepper give TRNS  
 “Two peppers I’ll give you.”

(4) Mauritian Creole

(a) *pro van puasō dā bazar.*  
 sell fish in market

(b) *pro fin koke Anand so loto.*  
 PERF steal Anand his car

“One sells fish in the market.”                      “Someone has stolen Anand’s car.”

Thus, the introduction of null subjects into creole languages sometimes follows from the rise of new verbal categories and always results in the enrichment of the corresponding pronoun system. It has to be concluded that homonymy flight and the increase of inflectional dimensions have a considerable influence on the prevalence and the specific development of null arguments in creole languages.