Dimensions of Definiteness in French Based Creoles

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Research Questions: While a longstanding debate in the semantic and philosophical literature continues to oppose *familiarity* based (Heim 91) and *uniqueness* based (Russel 05) accounts of definiteness, Schwarz (2009) recently argued that both are equally needed for languages that harbor two distinct forms of definite articles, side by side (eg. Fehring). As described in typological works, so called strong and weak definites differ both in their phonological (in)dependence and their uses. Whereas strong definites keep their phonological integrity across contexts, and are used when the identification of referents relies on the immediate, specific context of utterance (pragmatic definiteness), weak definites tend to encliticizes in certain contexts (preposition) and are used when referent indentification succeeds independently of the specific context of utterance used (semantic definiteness). Schwarz (2009) argues for a formal semantic reanalysis of these contrasts that emphasizes the dimension of familiarity/anaphoricity for strong definites, (cast in terms of an anaphoricity index in a DP internal situation variable), and that of uniqueness for weak ones. The question still arises of whether these contrasts exemplified with competing definites in a single language are also found cross-linguistically in distinct languages, and, more generally, of whether these distinct dimensions of definiteness suffice to carve out the cross-linguistic space. To begin addressing this issue, this paper examines the case of the French Based Creole (FBC) determiner '*la*' which provides the interesting contrasting example of a largely identical definite form spanning across several distinct languages. The paper offers both a detailed quantitative and qualitative empirical exploration of the characteristic uses of the determiner '*la*' in three distinct FBC, Mauritan Creole (MauC), Martinique Creole (MC) and Réunion Creole (RC) and sketches a formal semantic description of how the uses of '*la*' are carved out, confronting the competing semantic model of definiteness in Schwarz (2009) to that of Wespel(2008), which distinguishes kinds of definites along dimensions that relies on how the nature of the nominal description (sortal (*the book*) vs. functional (*the president of the US*)) determines accessibility to an unambiguous referent, by resorting, or not, to a situation variable anchored to the immediate situation or to a topic situation. That is, in Wespel's account, different ways of restricting the discourse domain to allow access to a unique referent is what is paramount in determining dimensions of definiteness, not familiarity and uniqueness.

Data set: French Based Creoles (FBC) are well known for the conspicuous similarities and striking differences that their determiner systems manifest. On the one hand, FBC employ a rather limited set of almost identical lexical determiners, on the other hand, their syntactic orders summarized in (1) display remarkable diversity, as does their discourse uses.

Reunion C	**Dfpl/Dmpl (PL)**> NP > (def)	Le/se/(bann)**NP** (la)
Seychelles C	**Dem PL** > NP	Sa bann **NP**
Mauritian C	**Dem PL** > NP > **Def**	Sa bann **NP**-la
St Lucie	**PL** > NP >**Dem Def**	Se **NP** sa-la
Martinique C	**PL**> NP > **Dem Def**	Se **NP**-ta-la,
Guadeloupe C	**PL** > NP > **Def Dem**	Se **NP**-la-sa
MesoLouisiana C	**DefPL**> NP > **Dem(def)**	Le **NP** sa-la
BasiLouisiana C	NP > **Dem PL**	**NP**-(sila) ye
Guyana C	**Dem** > NP > **PL Def**	Sa **NP**- ye-la
Haitian C	NP > **Dem Def/PL**	**NP**-sa- (l)a/yo

While on the syntactic front, following Déprez(2007) among others, there is now solid consensus that the distinct orders all derive from a common syntactic base, much less is understood about the nature of the semantic diversity that underlies the uses of these common determiners. The paper analyses the uses of the determiner '*la*' in a comparative corpus of 4 texts which are all translations of the same literary work

The Little Prince by Antoine de St Exupery in the three distinct creoles, along with their lexifier version. The chosen corpus is particularly suited for this narrow semantic comparison because it is mostly narrated in the first person, in an informal style directed to both adult and child audiences, and it contains a significant number of dialogues. At the outset, form distinctions in the realization of the definite determiner are immediately apparent. Thus while '*la*' clearly preserves its phonological integrity across contexts in Mauritian Creole (MauC), the opposite is true in Martinique Creole (MC) where the very book title *Ti Prens **Lan*** displays contextual vowel nasalization. (Interestingly, however, the MC form displays a slightly less affected variant than Haitian Creole (HC), where nasalization also affects the consonant [la]= ***nan*** in addition to the vowel.) These phonological oppositions suggestively mirror the language internal strong/weak article distinctions described above. In some FBC, (Mauritian, Guyanese, Guadeloupean Creoles) the determiner is phonologically independent, in others (Martinique, Haitian) it is not. The question of interest here is: do these form distinctions correlate with the semantic distinctions cursorily described above, and formally modeled in the works of Wespel and Schwartz. The paper argues that they do.

Methods: Determiner use is manually coded throughout the texts for distinct categories. To allow a theory neutral coding that provided a sufficiently fine-grained classification, the following categories, adapted from Himmelmann (1997) were used:

Pragmatic/familiarity /sortal definiteness
1. Situational: **a.** Deictic: give me the hammer **b**. Shared**:** the sun, the boss…
2. Anaphoric: A man and a woman entered. The woman sat down
3. Associative: **3a: part-whole** The village…the church**, 3b: relational** A car… the driver
Semantic/ uniqueness/functional definiteness
4.Description (superlative, number ordinal , relatives, relational): the first/best story
5. Generic/Kind: The cat is a domesticated animal

Partial Results (MauC): The total number of definites is about 1/10 of singular definites in the original French text. (64 *la* in MauC vs 604 sing def in French). The bulk of '*la*' uses correspond to pragmatic definiteness (76%) being either direct anaphoric uses =**2** (68%)(coded as such when N present within the 3 previous sentences) or situational deictic uses =**1a**, where the situation corresponds to the universe of the story (e.g *fler la*, the little prince's rose, *renar la,* the fox in the story). In type **3a** contexts, no determiner occurs. (*Sa danpi ki nou ti trouve la pa ti parey kouma lezot dan dezer… Tou dan lord: **pouli, seo, lakord**. That well we found was not like others in the desert… Everyting was in order. The pulley (of the well), the pail, the rope*). This is a characteristic part-whole bridge context, where, as Shwartz shows, a weak determiner is required in Fehring. Likewise, in contexts **4** & **5**. Interestingly, type **1b** contexts also lack a determiner (*Bizen atann **soley** kouse. We must wait for the sun to set*), which is unpredicted in Wespel's approach but predicted on Schwartz' analysis. Together, these preliminary results, developed in the paper, support Schwarz's approach. MauC *'la'* is a strong determiner overwhelmingly used in anaphoric and familiar contexts. The paper reveals very different results in MC, also shown to differ from HC and Réunion Creole.

References: Déprez,V.2007.Nominal Constituents in French Lexifier Creoles. Probing the structuring role of grammaticalization:'*JPCL*.22:2,263-307. **Heim**, I.1982.The semantics of definite and indefinite noun phrases.Ph.D. UMass**. Himmelmann**, N.1997. Deiktikon, Artikel, Nominalphrase: zur Emergenz syntaktischer Struktur .Tübingen: Niemeyer. **Russell**, B.1905. On denoting. *Mind* 14:479–493. **Löbner,** S.1985. Definites. *Journal of Semantics* 4:279–326. **Schwarz**, F.2009. Two Types of Definites in Natural Language.Ph.D. UMass. **Wespel,** J. 2008.Descriptions and their domains; the patterns of definiteness marking in French related creole. Ph.D. Stuttgart.