13 Haitian

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13.1 Introduction: origin, present status, relation with other creoles

Of all the Caribbean creoles, Haitian has the largest number of speakers, almost six million. These live in the western part of the island of Hispaniola (the eastern part is the Dominican Republic) as well as in many other parts of the Caribbean and North America. There has been a steady exodus of political refugees and emigrants throughout the eighties and early nineties, and hence a number of Haitian diaspora communities have developed. The Republic of Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the Americas and the country has suffered a great deal of political oppression and unrest since it became independent in 1804.

In 1697 the French took over control of Haiti from the earliest colonizers, the Spanish. It is not clear precisely when Haitian Creole emerged, but by 1728 there was a slave population of 50,000. At the time of independence slavery was abolished. Since then, Haitian has been the main language of the country, with French retaining the status of official language, though spoken only by a minority. In recent years, Haitian has gained prestige as a language of literacy, and it now has an official orthography.

13.2 The study of Haitian

Haitian is one of the best-studied creole languages, as one might expect from its historical and demographic importance. Nonetheless, there is also considerable controversy surrounding it. This controversy was first clearly articulated in two works from the thirties: S. Sylvain (1936) and J. Faine (1937). In Sylvain’s book, the claim is voiced that many features of Haitian are African in nature. Faine, on the other hand, ascribes most features of the creole to French dialects, notably those of Normandy. The section on further readings mentions more recent work.

13.3 Phonology and lexicon

Haitian has a symmetrical seven vowel system:

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The consonants are equally unremarkable:

(2) 

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
  p & t & k \\
  b & d & g \\
  f & s & ŵ \\
  v & z & ž \\
  m & n & ñ \\
  l, r \\
\end{array}
\]

A prominent feature of Haitian phonology is nasal assimilation, as described in Tinelli (1981).

13.4 Grammar

We will illustrate a number of the grammatical features of Haitian with the aid of proverbs and riddles, pointing out aspects of the grammar and the lexicon, and mentioning a few of the studies that have been carried out on Haitian.

13.4.1 Tense/mood/aspect

Consider first a riddle:

(3) Gran-papa-m t-ap-kondi you lame, 
    grandfather-1SG PAST-PR-lead one army
    you lapli bare-l, li rale sab-li,
    one rain overtake-3SG, 3SG draw saber-3SG
    you solda pa-mouye;
    one soldier NEG-wet
    poul ki kouvri ptit li ak-zêl li.
    chicken REL cover little 3SG with wing 3SG

    'My grandfather was leading an army, a rainfall overtook him, he pulled out his saber, not
    one soldier got wet: a hen covering her chickens with her wings.' [Hall 203]

In this example there is the sequence of preverbal particles \textit{t-ap} /\textit{te ap}/ 'past tense progressive'. These are among the most frequent tense/aspect elements in Haitian.

Notice further that in (3) the form \textit{lame} 'army' etymologically contains the French article, as in French \textit{l'armée}. This is a typical feature of many French creoles. The 3SG object pronoun \textit{l} is phonologically enclitic upon the verb. Notice finally that the possessive pronoun \textit{li} occurs after the noun.
Lumsden (1993), basing himself on seminal work by Damoiseau (1988), shows that the interpretation of TMA markers depends on the aspectual verb class they combine with. There are three classes to be distinguished: dynamic verbs, resultative verbs, stative verbs. For instance, aspect marker *ap* is interpreted as future or present progressive if it is combined with a dynamic verb. The combination with a resultative or a stative verb results in a future interpretation only. The tense marker *te* also allows for different interpretations. Dynamic verbs yield a past perfect interpretation, resultative verbs allow either a past or a past perfect interpretation, while stative verbs only have a past interpretation.

Spears (1990) also notes the ambiguity in the interpretation of the aspect marker *ap*. He contrasts it with the mood marker *(a)va*, which also marks future. According to him, the semantic difference between *ap* and *va* corresponds to the dichotomy indicative-subjunctive.

In addition to the proto-typical TMA markers, we also find a group of markers that can be termed auxiliaries. The main insight of Magloire-Holly (1982) is that these markers interact differently with TMA-markers. The modal auxiliary verb *dwe* is ambiguous between a deontic and an epistemic reading. This ambiguity disappears when *dwe* is combined with tense markers. If it precedes the tense marker, it has an epistemic interpretation (*she must have come*). If it follows the tense marker, it has a deontic one (*she could come*).

Damoiseau (1988) observed that the tense interpretation of dynamic verbs depends on the specificity of their object. The contrast, termed the factitive effect by Africanists, is the following: when the object is specific, the bare verb is interpreted as past, but with a non-specific object, it is interpreted as non-past (habitual). This contrast is not found with stative verbs.

13.4.2 Noun phrase
Consider now the following:

(4) Rat kay manje pay kay.
    rat  house  eat  straw  house
    'The rats of the house eat the straw of the house.' [Hall 198]

In this example we notice that the genitive is formed with a simple postposed possessor noun. That this can be recursive is shown in the following example:

(5) Kabrit gade je mèt kay avan l-antre.
    goat  look  eye  master  house  before  3SG-enter
    'The goat looks at the eye of the master of the house before he enters.' [Hall 198]
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See Lumsden (1989) for a full exposition of the internal structure of noun phrases. In particular he focuses on cooccurrence restrictions involving determiners, genitive NPs and the plural marker. It also includes a discussion of the different realizations of genitive case in Haitian.

13.4.3 The marker *pou*

An important element in the grammar of Haitian is the marker *pou*. Consider first:

(6) Li pa-jam tro ta pou chen anraje.
    3SG NEG-ever too late for dog go mad
    'It’s never too late for a dog to go mad.' [Hall 192]

In this example *pou* is a subordinator, while in the next two examples we see *pou* as a modal verb, marking obligation.

(7) Lê rich jete, pou-pòv ranmase: tach palmis.
    When rich throw, for-poor pick up: spathe palm
    'When the rich man throws it away, the poor man must pick it up: spathe of a palm tree.' [Hall 209]

(8) Têt ki abitie pote chapo pou-li pote.
    head REL be-used wear hat for-3SG wear
    'A head which is accustomed to wear a hat should wear it.' [Hall 195]

Notice *ki* as a relative clause marker when the subject is relativized. The same was already seen in (3). See Koopman & Lefebvre (1981) for an overview of the different uses of the morpheme *pou*.

13.4.4 The determiner

Much attention has been paid to the determiner in Haitian:

(9) M-mande fè yon kou t-kouto sou-yon tab.
    1SG ask do one cut little-knife in-one table
    Mwe koupe pen-a, banan-la, vian-la
    1SG cut bread-DET, banana-DET, meat-DET
    men gen yon bagay ki di mwen
    but there be one thing REL say 1SG
m-pa kapab koupe li
1SG-NEG able cut 3SG
se-enpe mwen oblije pran la-dan: diri
FOC-a little 1SG obliged take there-in: rice
'I asked to do the cutting at a table, I cut the bread, the banana, the meat, but there was a
thing which told me I couldn’t cut it, [and] it was only a little I was obliged to take thereof:
rice.’ [Hall 209]

In this example we see the use of la and a (the form is phonologically determined) as
determiners with definite noun phrases. In (9) we can discern another part of the pattern
of noun phrase marking. Generic noun phrases are unmarked, indefinites can be marked
with yon.

Furthermore, (9) illustrates the use of se as a focus particle, and of pa as a preverbal
negation marker. DeGraff (1993) is the first complete study on negation. He shows that there
is negative concord. Different negative elements do not cancel each other’s negative force.
He compares the Haitian system with the French system and shows that despite the phonetic
resemblance Haitian pa and French pas do not behave syntactically alike. Rather, pa has
to be equated with French ne with respect to its syntactic characteristics.

An example in which se and pa are combined is (10):

(10) Se pa pou-tèt you pen ou pèdi tout you foundo.
FOC NEG for-head one bread 2SG lose all one oven
'It’s not for the sake of one loaf that you lose a whole ovenful.’ [Hall 199]

The periphrastic expression pou tet is used for ‘for the sake of’.

13.4.5 Predicate doubling
In many Haitian sentences, the verb is doubled:

(11) Gran-papa-m gen youn pitit, li mèt ale an-Frans,
grandfather-iSG has one child, 3SG allow go LO-France
toune li toune li jwen pitit-la chita mem plas dlo rivière, sous.
turn 3SG turn he find child-DET sit same place water river, source
'My grandfather has a child, he can go to France, when he comes back he finds the child
sitting in the same place: river water, spring (water).’ [Hall 208]

Here toune li toune represents one of the forms of predicate doubling in Haitian. Notice
further that *gen* is used here as the verb of possession, ‘have’, while in (10) it functions as existential ‘there is’.

(12) Abiye kon li abiye, kan midi sone fôk bourik Sen-Domeng rani
dress how 3SG dress, when midday strike must donkey S.D. bray
‘However he may be dressed, when midday strikes the donkey from Santo Domingo has to
bray.’ [Hall 196]

In this example there is a different use of predicate doubling (also called predicate cleft), indicating contrast. Consider also:

(13) Piti kon yo fam piti, li toujou kapab okipe you kay.
little how one woman little, 3SG always able occupy one house
‘No matter how small a woman is, she can always take care of a house.’ [Hall 189]

Here a structure with adjective doubling occurs, rather similar to the previous example.

Lefebvre (1994) distinguishes four types of predicate doubling. Two of them are used in adverbial clauses, either temporal or causative, respectively (14a) and (14b). The two other constructions are factive clauses (topic relativization in Sebba’s (1987) terminology) in (14c) and predicate cleft (14d):

(14) a. Rive Jan rive Mari pati.
    arrive John arrive Mary leave
    ‘As soon as John arrived, Mary left.’

b. Rive Jan rive Mari pati.
    arrive John arrive Mary leave
    ‘Because John arrived, Mary left.’

c. Rive Jan rive a fe li kontan.
    arrive John arrive DET make 3SG happy
    ‘The fact that John arrived made her happy.’

d. Se rive Jan rive.
    It-is arrive John arrive
    ‘It is arrive that John did (not e.g. leave).’

For a discussion of the analysis of such constructions, see the chapter on fronting.
13.4.6 Reflexives

Another subject of much interest is the forms the reflexive can take in Haitian:

(15) Sèl pa bezwen vante tèt-li.
salt NEG need boast head-3SG
'Salt doesn’t need to boast of itself.' [Hall 200]

This is an example where tèt li is used as a reflexive. Reflexives have been studied in two recent articles by Carden & Stewart (1988) and Déchaine & Manfredi (1994). See further chapter 22.

13.4.7 Double objects, serial verbs, and prepositions

As in other creole languages, there is a complex relationship between the marking of double objects, and the use of serial verbs and prepositions. Consider first:

(16) Kan ou jwe ak-ti-chen, la ba ou pis.
when 2SG play with-little-dog, 3SG give 2SG flea
'When you play with a puppy, it gives you fleas.' [Hall 200]

Here we notice the use of a double object construction with ba ‘give’. The occurrence of this construction in Haitian is remarkable given that the lexifier language, French, does not allow this construction, at least not with noun phrases. The verb ba also occurs in serial constructions:

(17) Men li, al pran-l ba mwen: lombraj.
here 3SG, go take-3SG give me: shade
'There it is, go get it for me: shade.' [Hall 201]

This riddle contains an example of serially used ba ‘give’; here it marks benefactive. While in this example the literal meaning of ‘giving’ is still there, this is not the case in the next riddle:

(18) Gran-papa-m rete an-le, li lage you asiet ba mwen
grandfather-1SG stay in-air, he drop one plate give me
li tonbe a-tè pa-kase, li tonbe nan-dlo li kase: papie.
3SG fall LOC-earth NEG-break, 3SG fall in-water 3SG break: paper
'My grandfather stayed in the air, he dropped a plate on me, it fell on the earth and didn’t break, it fell into the water and broke: paper.' [Hall 202]
Here the object of *ba, mwen*, is in no way the beneficiary.

Consider now (19):

(19) Pa-kokc makout pi ro pase men ou.

\[ \text{NEG-hang basket more high pass hand 2SG} \]

'Those don't hang a basket higher than your hand.' [Hall 198]

In this example *pase* 'pass' is used in a serial verb construction to mark a comparative. Notice, however, that the adjective, perhaps redundantly, receives the degree marker *pi*.

Serial verb constructions are well-studied in Haitian. Wingerd (1977) is based on natural data and contains a frequency-analysis. Déchaîne (1988) contains the most elaborated classification of the construction. She argues for a lexical analysis in which the two verbs are somehow semantically merged. Law & Veenstra (1992) and DeGraff (1993) opt for a syntactic analysis.

Dialect variation seems to exist with respect to the possible range of serial verb constructions. Déchaîne (1988) reports that Haitian only allows for theme serials and not for instrumental serials (see chapter on serial verb constructions). In Lefebvre (1989) the occurrence of instrumental serials is limited to very specific contexts. It only occurs with verbs involving change of location (and not change of state). Furthermore, the action has to be accidental and involves only pragmatically inappropriate instruments:

(20) a. Kwafe a pran sizo koupe zorey mwen.

\[ \text{hairdresser the take scissor cut ear 1SG} \]

'The hairdresser cut my ear with a scissor.'

b. *Jan pran sizo koupe cheve-m.

\[ \text{John take scissor cut hair-1SG} \]

'John cut my hair with a scissor.'

Law & Veenstra (1992), on the other hand, found that Instrumental-serials are possible across-the-board. Verbs involving change of location as well as change of state can participate in the construction.

Notice the extensive use of prepositions in many of the examples in this chapter. In contrast with creoles such as Saramaccan and Sranan, Haitian and other French creoles are quite rich in prepositions.
13.4.8 Passive

Notice the use of an unmarked passive in (21)-(22):

(21) Met kabrit mande kabrit, plen pa plen se-bay-li.
master goat ask goat, full NEG full FOC-give 3SG
‘If the goat’s master asks for the goat, pregnant or not pregnant she must be given [back] to him.’ [Hall 194/5]

(22) Rakata fè klwa, nan-gine tande: loraj.
noise make ‘clwa’, in-Africa hear: thunder
‘The noise goes “clwa”, it is heard in Africa: thunder.’ [Hall 201]

In (21) bay ‘give’ and in (22) tande ‘hear’ must be interpreted as passives. In contrast, the passive meaning in (23) is conveyed by using an indefinite third person plural pronoun yo in an active sentence:

(23) Se sou chen mèg yo wè pis.
FOC LOC dog thin 3PL see flee
‘It’s on a thin dog that the flees can be seen.’ [Hall 193]

These examples also provide further illustration of the focus marker se.

13.4.9 Other general creole features

(24) Kat je kontre, manti kaba.
four eye meet, lie stop
‘When four eyes meet, lying stops.’ [Hall 190]

Notice the Portuguese word (very general in creoles) kaba here, in its literal sense of ‘stopping’, rather than as an adverb indicating accomplishment or perfective. Another general creole feature illustrated in (24) is the use of a preposed conditional or adverbial clause without conjunction.

(25) Mwen pase you kote; mwen wè blan k-ap-niche dèyè nèg:
I pass one place: I see white ASP-ASP-lick behind black
chodie ki sou-dife.
kettle REL LOC-fire
‘I passed by a place [where] I saw a white man licking a Negro’s behind: kettle on the fire.’ [Hall 204]
In this example we see that the complement of the perception verb *we* 'see' is marked by continuous aspect *k-ap*, similar to English *-ing*. This is quite common in the Caribbean creoles. Notice that the bare form *pase* 'pass' is interpreted as a simple past here. Consider finally a complex example:

(26) Gran-pap-m gen you ban pitit, men yo te radi, 
grandfather-1SG have one group little, but they TNS insolent 
pou-li-te-sa pini yo, li dekouvri kay li te-ba yo 
for-3SG-TNS-know punish 3PL, 3SG uncover house 3SG TNS-give 3PL 
rete-a; dan yo rete grigne nan-soley: lè you riviè chèch 
stay-DET tooth 3PL stay grin LOC-sun; when one river dry 
roch yo lan-soley. 
stone 3PL LOC-sunz 

'My grandfather had a lot of children, but they were insolent; in order to be able to punish them, he uncovered the house he had given them to stay in; their teeth remained grinning in the sunz: when a river bed dries the rocks in the sun.' [Hall 205]

This example reveals a number of the complexities of Haitian subordination. We see a purposive clause introduced by *pou* which at the same time has a (resumptive) lexical subject *li* and a past tense marker *te*; the latter makes the purposive clause somewhat hypothetical ('so that he might be able to'). Then there is a somewhat complex relative clause [*li te-ba yo rete-a*], marked by the determiner *a* (from *la*), but without an overt relative introducer; finally there is a serial construction *rete grigne* 'stay and grin'.

13.4.10 Relative clauses
Relative clauses not marked with an overt complementizer only occur with non-subjects. We saw above that with subjects, we find the relative marker *ki*. Consider also the following example:

(27) Papa-m gen de ti-nèg k-ap-fan bwa tout lajoune 
father-1SG have two little-boy REL-ASP-split wood all day 
li pa jwen bwa yo fan: je. 
3SG NEG find wood 3PL split: eye 

'My father has two little boys who are splitting wood all day long, [but] he never finds the wood they split: eyes.' [Hall 207]

In this example the difference between relative clauses where the subject has been relativized
(with \(k\) or \(ki\) as in ... \(ti\)\(-n\)\(eg\) \(k\)-ap\(-fan\) ...) and those where the object has been relativized (without \(k\) or \(ki\), as in ... \(bwa\) yo \(fan\) ...) is clearly indicated. This pattern has been interpreted by Koopman (1982) as indicating that the subject position is not licensed by the inflectional elements in a clause. \(ki\), therefore, is required as a licenser of that position. She posits it in the complementizer position. The subject/object asymmetry with respect to the presence of \(ki\) has been used in a number of analyses of Haitian syntax. Law (1994), for instance, has used it to show that there is a nominative/accusative distinction despite the fact that pronouns exhibit the same surface form in the different cases. Extraction from nominative case-marked positions requires \(ki\), but extraction from accusative case-marked positions does not.

13.4.11 The relation between the verb and the position of the tense elements

In (28) the placement of \(pa\)-janm before \(envite\), rather than after it as in the French \(il\ n'\ invite jamais une poule\), suggests a profound difference between Haitian and French (DeGraff and Dejean 1994). In Haitian, the verb does not move to the auxiliary or inflection (\(infl\)) position, and remains in the verb phrase, adjacent to the object.

(28) Lè ravêt vlé fè dans, li pa-janm envité poul.

\[\text{hour cockroach want make dance, 3SG NEG-never invite chicken}\]

‘When a cockroach wants to have a dance, he never invites a chicken.’ [Hall 197]

Thus \(envité poule\) in (28) remains a single constituent. In French, the root \(invit-\) is moved, in the analysis of DeGraff & Dejean (1994), which builds on much recent work in the generative tradition, to the auxiliary or inflection position, where it is fused with the tense and agreement morphemes. Since it has to cross \(jama\)\(is\) while being moved, the latter ends up between \(invite\) and \(une\ poule\). In summary:

(29) French: \([invit-]\) jamais \([e]\) une poule

Haitian: \(infl\) \(pa\)-janm envité poul

13.5 Variation

A major issue in the study of Haitian concerns variation. Valdman (1978:287-299) gives a useful overview. There are three main dialects: northern, including Cap-Haïtien, central, including the capital Port-au-Prince, and southern. In addition to numerous lexical differences, there is some phonetic and morpho-syntactic variation. The northern variety tends not to nasalize the determiner: instead of southern \(baton\)-\(an\) ‘the stick’ we have \(baton\)-\(la\).
From the perspective of grammar, the most important feature of the northern variety is a postposed possessive marked with *a* (rather than null as in the rest of Haitian), as in *papa a i* ‘his father’ rather than *papa li*, the southern and central form. The southern variety is characterized by the form *pe* ‘continuative’ instead of *ap* or *ape*. There is evidence that the dialect of the Port-au-Prince area is the prestige form, and that some Haitians are bi-dialectal in their native dialect and the prestige variety. As noted by Valdman, a thorough study of syntactic dialect variation in Haitian still remains to be done. Carden & Stewart (1988) have used Haitian dialect evidence about the distribution of reflexive forms in Haitian dialects to argue for an early stage in Haitian without an overt pronoun/anaphor distinction.

Stylistic variation in Haitian manifests itself through vowel elision in the pronouns or vowel merger. Thus we have [l gô kaj] for *li gen un kaj* ‘(s)he has a house,’ in casual style. A third dimension of variation concerns the amount of French influence. Thus rural Haitian will have [i] where urban Frenchified Haitian may have [y], as in [diri] versus [dyri] ‘rice’.

Further reading

Robert A. Hall’s valuable *Haitian Creole. Grammar, Texts, Vocabulary* (1953) places the study of Haitian within the framework of American structuralism. Albert Valdman has been enormously influential in stimulating the study of Haitian Creole in the United States, and his *Le créole: structure, statut, origine* (1978) is a comprehensive introduction to the language, although his book has the curious feature that it treats the various French-lexifier creoles as belonging to one system. Tinelli (1981) is one of the few book-length treatments of any creole phonological system. Yves Déjean, working in Port-au-Prince, has contributed a number of important studies about grammatical and educational aspects of Haitian.

The work of Claire Lefebvre and her research team at the Université du Québec à Montréal has been very influential in setting new standards for syntactic analysis, and in pushing the substrate hypothesis for Haitian to its logical conclusion. Recently researchers such as Rosie-Marie Déchaine, Viviane Deprez, and Michel DeGraff have been presenting increasingly sophisticated studies of Haitian syntax within the framework of GB theory. Singler (1990a, 1992a,b) has carried out careful historical demographic studies that are possible now with fuller access to the archival materials.