1.0 Introduction

The term 'Creole French' is a cover term for a number of languages which have in common a range of features. Their lexicon is largely derived from, variously, seventeenth, eighteenth, or nineteenth century varieties of French. In their morphology and syntax they show varying degrees of change, at least some of which are due to the influence of other languages (which are usually referred to in the creolistic literature as 'substrate' languages, French being the 'superstrate' or 'lexifier'). They are the mother-tongue (or L1) of the communities which speak them. They are widely subjected, by both their own speakers and by Francophones, to negative value judgements.

These languages are spoken in widely separated parts of the world, and have in common another feature: in all cases it is possible to say that prior to a given date for a given language, that language did not exist, but that after another given date, it did. It may be that in the current state of our knowledge, it is not always possible to say exactly what those dates are, but it is usually possible to come within a decade or so. Such gaps in knowledge are diminishing as on-going research uncovers archival and other material pertaining to the settlement history, demographic and social and even sometimes (albeit partially) linguistic, of the communities concerned. That is to say that these languages, as well as many other creoles and pidgins of diverse lexical provenience (Spanish, Portuguese, English, Dutch, German, to name only those of European lexicon), are different from other languages which have evolved over long periods of time. Historical linguistics has to come to grips with the fact that a linguistic system can be relatively stable over a long time, with periods of relatively rapid change. In the history of the Romance languages, such periods of stability or change are fairly well documented: by fits and starts, from place to place, Vulgar Latin became today's Romance by processes of continuous language transmission from generation to generation, with assorted influences from the languages of the conquered, the conquerors,
and the neighbours all interacting with 'normal' internal evolution. In the case of the Creole French languages, there is usually a break of greater or lesser degree in the continuity of language transmission. The result of this is that the grammar of these languages is not, by and large, a 'normal' outgrowth of that of French, or not entirely.

All these hedges ('usually', 'by and large', 'not entirely') are necessary, because this question is at the centre of considerable disagreement, and is the focus of this paper.1

The various Creole French languages are, like the various overseas varieties of French, a consequence of the European colonial diaspora. Specific traits of, say, Acadian French or Mauritian Creole can be accounted for by the detail of the settlement history of the community concerned. The French nationals involved in the colonial adventure were generally people of relatively modest condition who were not speakers of Standard French (or its seventeenth (etc.) century predecessors). Depending on the specific circumstances from place to place and from time to time, they were (i) francisants, (ii) patoisants, (iii) semi-patoisants/francisants. In all the French colonies, the then-current form of what for want of a better term may be called Standard French was the language of the elite and of officialdom, but the vernacular, at least initially, was the result of dialectal leveling processes producing a common core linguistic system.

The first stages of any colony were, as Chaudenson (1992) has shown, slow and difficult, with small populations and poor social and economic conditions. In some colonies, there was a small population of slaves, typically distributed unevenly: some colonists had none, others only one or two, and one or two colonists had a larger number of slaves. In general, the 'community language' was the locally-evolving form of French, and it may be assumed that new arrivals in the colony, free or enslaved, had ample opportunity to acquire a variable but high degree of competence in that speech form.

As the colony developed, there was a passage from small-scale exploitation to larger-scale plantations necessitating a considerable labour

1 An early and considerably shorter version of this paper, under the title of 'Birth and growth of Creole languages', was presented to the Classics Interdepartmental Seminar (University of Auckland, 4 August 1993). Prudentia readers unfamiliar with the field of Creole Studies will find Holm (1988) a useful introduction.
force. This led to the arrival of large numbers of slaves, usually from Africa and usually representative of a large number of mutually unintelligible languages. Their linguistic diversity in turn led to a major problem of communication, not only in master/slave interaction, but also inter-slave communication. It may be assumed with confidence that there were always some slaves who attained a high level of L2 competence in the masters' brand of French (house-slaves, for example) but that for most, learning French was just not an option.

It is approximately at this point in the story that theories of creole language genesis begin to diverge. The 'continuativist' model (Chaudenson 1992) claims in essence that the speech form(s) evolved by the slaves in the early sociétés d'habitation (the small-scale, early operations) were the target language of the new arrivals, whose subsequent influence thereon, while perceptible and often traceable to the influence of substratal languages, did not affect profoundly the pre-existing speech form(s): they were in effect approximations of approximations, but still direct outgrowths of French. The 'creativist' model (Baker 1992, 1993), on the other hand, claims that as a given society evolved demographically in certain ways, the communicative needs of the huge majority of non-Francophone slaves led to the creation of a new language which shows a clear break in the continuity of transmission (of French or derived speech forms) from generation to generation (cf. Baker & Corne 1986).

There is not (now) much significant disagreement between these two models with respect to the general lines of the evolution of the societies concerned, although some recent work (e.g. Jennings 1993 and in press) suggests that a lot more demographic research needs to be done to allow an assessment of precisely what happened, socially and linguistically, in some colonies. The essential point is whether Creole French represents a continuation of French (in some form) or not.

There is similarly some measure of agreement that the Creole French languages spoken today are the result of a number of largely independent acts of genesis. While it is true that the French colonial world has throughout its existence been the theatre of inter-colonial transfers (of personnel, of vocabulary, of realia, of techniques), and while there is clear evidence that deliberate transfers of 'seasoned' slaves were made to help newer colonies to establish themselves more rapidly and efficiently than would otherwise have been the case, it is equally clear (at least, on present information) that some creole languages developed more or less in isolation from the others. Baker (1987) distinguishes five distinct genesces:
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(i) Antillean (Guadeloupe, Martinique, Dominica, St. Lucia, Trinidad, with Haiti being a case of one or perhaps more semi-independent developments), (ii) Reunion, (iii) French Guiana, (iv) Louisiana, (v) Isle de France (Mauritius, Seychelles, Rodrigues). Although this scenario can be modified in minor ways (for example, it is known that there was an input from Reunion in the evolution that early Mauritian Creole underwent in Seychelles) and filled in with finer-grained detail, the only omission is that of Tayo, a variety of Creole French which emerged in the Melanesian village of St-Louis in New Caledonia in the nineteenth century.2 There may well have been, as Chaudenson (1992) underlines, some degree of transfer among some of these, but there is sufficient evidence of a linguistic nature, diachronically and synchronically, to support at least the five (six, if Tayo is included) distinct dialect groupings underlying Baker’s proposal.

Let us assume that these ‘dialect groupings’ are, in broad terms at least, uncontroversial, and use three of them in an attempt to characterize the notions of continuity and creation. The three that will be considered here are Reunion Creole, Mauritian Creole, and Tayo, representing languages which emerged, respectively, in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.

2.0 Reunion

The island of Reunion in the Indian Ocean was first settled in 1663 by small numbers of Frenchmen and Malagasy men and women. For most of the rest of the century, the island community was a classic example of a société d’habitation. There were gradual human accretions, including ‘Indo-Portuguese’ women, Indians, French, and Malagasies, and slavery was instituted towards the end of the century. 1690 marks the beginning of a classical, slave-based, colonial society, with the slave trade, mainly from Madagascar but also from Africa, beginning to develop. The ‘White’ population (including in fact a considerable number of people of mixed Franco-Malagasy or Franco-Indian descent) was in the majority until about 1715.

Thanks to the discovery of a single sentence (Chaudenson 1974:444) which can be fairly accurately dated to around 1722 (Baker &

2 First described by Corne (1989b).
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Corne 1982:6, note 3), we can be sure that the first half-century or so of Reunion's continuous settlement saw the emergence of a language which was in effect a dialectally leveled form of French showing distinct traces of Malagasy influence. The sentence concerned is this:

(1) Moin la parti marron parce qu'Alexis l'homme de jardin l'était qui fait à moin trop l'amour
'I ran away because Alexis the gardener was making love to me excessively'

This sentence has three features characteristic of modern Reunion Creole: the contrasting subject/object forms of the first person pronoun, mweñ/amweñ; the perfect tense formation constructed of the present tense of the auxiliary verb /AVOIR/ (a defective verb in most varieties of modern Reunion Creole in that the infinitive is usually replaced by the verb ganye) and the past participle parti; and the imperfect tense constructed with lete kì.

This last feature is highly significant. Note that k is the relative subordinator, and i is a verb marker. The relative subordinator in Reunion Creole is, in most contexts, optional (and thus we find nowadays, for the imperfect, not only lete kì, but also lete i, te kì, and te i; for details and discussion, v. Corne, in press (b)). This optionality of the relative subordinator is in fact a Malagasy influence, the Malagasy relativizer (i)zay being also optional. That Malagasy should have influenced the developing local variety of French in Reunion at this early period is unsurprising given the contact situation involving mainly French and Malagasy speakers living together in domestic or semi-domestic conditions in a société d'habitation.

The eighteenth century saw considerable changes in the population. There was a massive development of the slave trade from around 1720, with Malagasies predominating until 1756, complemented thereafter by arrivals from Mozambique. It was as late as 1808 before Africans made up 42% of the population. Figures for 1735 give an indication of the composition of the slave population: Malagasies 58%, Creoles (locally born, usually wholly or partly of Malagasy descent) 28%, Indians and Africans about 10% each.

There is unfortunately a relative lack of attestations of early Reunion Creole, and it is only in the nineteenth century that there are texts of any substantial length (Chaudenson 1981). In fact, the full modern tense/aspect system of the language is not attested until 1930 (Baker & Corne 1982:229). This modern system, while it contains (sometimes in
slightly altered phonological form) almost the entirety of all previously attested structures, also displays a number of procedures which compete with those structures which, on the basis of the 1722 attestation, one can reasonably infer to have been present at that time. For example, the modern Reunion Creole sentence:

(2) *mwen le vye* ‘I am old’

is clearly a direct, albeit simplified, continuation of French (*moin vest vie/vieux*), and as such may be assumed to have existed ca. 1720. It is a little less convincing to argue that the modern:

(3) *mweh la fini vye* ‘I have finished old’ (=‘I am old’)

is a direct continuation of French, in spite of the clear French etyma involved. Even less convincing in this respect is the modern:

(4) *mweh fin vye* ‘I COMPLETIVE old’ (=‘I am old’)

Such structures seem to involve a non-French view, semantically speaking, such that non-durative statives such as *uye* ‘old’ require the presence of the Completive particle *fin*(*i*) in order to convey that a previously non-obtaining state has come into being. It so happens that just such a requirement obtains in Malagasy and the Bantu languages (Malagasy is a member of the Austronesian language family: no relation to the Bantu family). That is to say, a fortuitous convergence of semantax in the substratal languages spoken by most of the eighteenth century slave population of Reunion led to the introduction of what is, from the French point of view, a new semantax. How was this introduction effected? We are here at the point of rupture of ‘normal’ language transmission from generation to generation: large numbers of people transferred features of their L1 into their L2 versions (partial, pidginized) of Reunion Creole. Since they are using these varieties essentially to communicate amongst themselves, such transferred features will not, if there is convergence from L1 to L1 as illustrated by the Bantu and Malagasy use of the Completive that we have just seen, pose any kind of communicative problem. In the Reunion case, this break in transmission, this introduction of non-French elements, did not however result in the emergence of a new code independent of the pre-existing (ca. 1720s) vernacular.

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3 This claim, that a substantial number of L2 speakers effect such transfers of convergent features (in the various L1s involved, and betimes in the superstrate), is central to my view of creolization. Briefly: the first generation (G1) consists of people obliged to use superstrate lexicon in order to communicate, producing L2-influenced pidgins; Members of G2 are (often) bilingual in one (or more) of the G1 L1s and in the ‘community language’ (the range of G1 pidgins), which undergoes ‘repair’ (Mühlhäusler 1980), including the incorporation of convergent elements and substratal ‘cryptotypes’
That modern Reunion Creole consists of a continuum of competing usages, of which the above is a small sample, is a function of the demographic evolution of the community and of the timing of certain crucial demographic events (Baker & Corne 1986). The detail of these need not concern us here. It is sufficient to note that a continuum survived in Reunion, ranging from Standard French to those varieties of Reunion Creole which are (like sentence (4) above) rather different therefrom, and that the kind of speech form represented by sentence (1) is what had emerged as the vernacular of the community after about three generations or some fifty-odd years. The subsequent modifications illustrated by (3) and (4) can be seen as later developments which, while they have perturbed the pre-existing (and, one assumes, relatively stable?) system, have not fundamentally changed it.4

The language known by its speakers and by linguists as 'Reunion Creole' is to be seen as a continuation of French (dialectally leveled), with a Malagasy substrate, subsequently subjected to processes of pidginization and creolization. Because of social factors, these processes did not proceed far (i.e. long) enough to produce a clear break in language transmission and the emergence of a new and relatively homogeneous language, functioning as a code distinct from both French and the original (1720s) Reunion vernacular. Reunion Creole today is therefore a unique blend of continuation and of language creation. It has a number of features which derive from French. Apart from (parts of) its tense/aspect system, it has vestigial gender in the article system, for example. It has also a number of features which it shares with other varieties of Creole French, in particular that which emerged on the neighboring island of Mauritius in the eighteenth century.5

(Manessy 1989); G3 consists of speakers, often monolingual, of the new language.

4 This statement is a simplification of a complex reality. In fact, it is possibly the case that future research will show that such variation is distributed in function of geographical and social space. The linguistic situation in Reunion is highly sensitive to such parameters (cf. the pilot 'geophonology' of Staudacher-Valliamée 1992).

5 It is not, however, mutually intelligible with either French or Mauritian Creole.
3.0 Mauritius

The island of Mauritius, also in the Indian Ocean, was colonized by the French in 1721. Development proceeded much more rapidly there than it had done in Reunion, the sociéte d'habitation phase lasting there for a bare decade, if that. Within a decade, the number of slaves was already greater than the number of non-slaves, as Mauritius moved into the second phase of its development as a sociéte de plantation. In part, this rapid development was fostered by the sending of experienced personnel from Reunion for a brief period at the beginning of settlement, although few if any remained more than a few months. Slave imports on a massive scale from about 1730 onwards were mainly from Madagascar and East Africa, with a few from elsewhere. By 1780, there were already more locally born slaves than members of the ‘ruling class’. White immigration was from France, not Reunion.6

Following the abolition of slavery in 1835 (by which time Mauritius had become a British possession), Indian indentured labour was brought in on such a large scale that within 30 years they made up 2/3rds of the island's population. About 70% were speakers of Indo-Aryan languages, mainly from north east India.

Seychelles was settled, mainly from Mauritius but also from Reunion, from the 1770s. Thereafter, most arrivals seem to have come from East Africa. Rodrigues was settled from 1792, all permanent settlers coming from Mauritius, but again with some early Reunion input. No slaves were taken directly to Rodrigues. While there are minor dialectal differences which allow Rodrigues Creole and Seychelles Creole to be clearly distinguishable from both Mauritian Creole and each other, all three may be referred to as dialects of Isle de France Creole, the language which evolved in Mauritius (formerly called Isle de France) essentially between ca. 1730 and 1770.

The demographic and social history of the island was such that a typical pidginization/creolization situation (v. note 3) obtained from ca. 1730. Some 50 years/3 generations later, Isle de France Creole had emerged and jelled as a distinct language, co-existing with the lexically related local variety of French. There is textual evidence to support this

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view (a newspaper advertisement concerning a missing slave who does not understand Creole in 1773, sporadic use of Creole in Court records from 1777; v. Baker & Corne 1986), and the dialect split of ca. 1770 and then 1792 point in the same direction.

It is not claimed that by 1770 or so Mauritian Creole was the language observable today. There are more early texts extant for Mauritian Creole than for Reunion Creole, and they make possible the tracing of the language’s development after its emergence and jelling. In this context, ‘jelling’ is taken to mean the establishment of a core system which is the L1 of the first generation (G3) of monolingual speakers. In the community as a whole, there will continue to exist a range of variation, since members of G3 co-exist with, variously, speakers of the superstrate, members of the original G1 and G2, and subsequent arrivals (later G1 pidginizers and their G2; brand-new G1 pidginizers - of Creole, not French, by this stage). Some of this is deducible from the early texts, on linguistic grounds, but the broad picture is derived by inference from comparison with Tayo, to which we shall come in due course.

Two brief examples of the kind of linguistic data involved will illustrate. The first person singular pronoun in all texts which purport to represent the speech of slaves is mo as subject, mwa as non-subject (written moi). In a few texts which predate 1840, mwa occurs in both contexts. Similarly, with respect to a morpho rule which deletes the final vowel of certain classes of verbs in certain syntactic contexts, texts from 1805 to 1878 display a variable application of the rule, with a consistently higher rate of application in ‘slave’ texts as opposed to ‘master’ texts, as well as a progression towards obligatory status over time. (For details, v. Baker & Corne 1982:67-72, 217-221.)

To illustrate the inferential, comparative data, let us consider the tense/aspect marking system and relative clauses. In Tayo, as we shall see, there is evidence that a system of marking temporal and aspectual distinctions of verbs by means of preposed particles is only now, some 130 years after first settlement, beginning to develop, and that such distinctions are optional. In contrast, Tayo has stable and rather complex procedures of relativization and thematization which follow Melanesian patterns (albeit somewhat simplified). Tayo had emerged and jelled no later than 1920, and has been in existence for about 100 years. After a similar time span, Mauritian Creole had progressed considerably further in developing a tense/aspect marking system. If textual attestations are any guide, single preverbal markers emerged in the initial formative period (ca.
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1730-1780-ish) and shortly thereafter (fini: 1734, 1784, 1805; va: 1777, 1805; eie: 1779, 1816; te and pu: 1818), while combinations of markers are attested a little later (te fini: 1822; te apre and va fini: 1839). Now, the very fact that both Tayo and Mauritian Creole appear to have got off to a rather slow start in the development of tense/aspect marking, whereas Tayo has a stable and complex system of relativization and thematization, suggests two things: firstly, that while tense distinctions, if necessary, can be handled by means of adverbs (‘now’, ‘tomorrow’, etc.), relativization procedures are somehow ‘more necessary’ to have in your linguistic repertoire than tense distinctions; and secondly, that the relativization procedures of modern Mauritian Creole should have been in place by about the end (if not earlier) of the formative period. This is not quite borne out by the early texts. The first relative clauses attested in 1805 concern only obligatory subject relativization using ki. The modern obligatory subject relativization with ki, and optional direct object relativization with ki or Ø is attested from 1818, the genitive ki son NP from 1820. Nevertheless, these attestations suggest that, since after about a century of their respective lives, both Mauritian Creole and Tayo have/had stable patterns of relativization, and since the Tayo ones derive from the formative period (direct and indirect access to Melanesian conceptualizations), it may be inferred that the Mauritian Creole patterns also emerged during its formative period.

If it is accepted that Mauritian Creole emerged and jelled in that roughly 50 year/3 generation formative period in the eighteenth century in demographic conditions which by definition rendered access to French next

7 Note the contrast with Reunion Creole, which after 50 years of settlement had two past tenses (perfect and imperfect) which are still in use today. These attestations for Mauritian Creole may however be misleading as to the timescale involved. Note that all three Isle de France dialects share the same system, which suggests that this system was well established by about 1770, or 1790 at the latest. The difficulty here, of course, is the fact of continuing contacts between Mauritius, the Metropole, on the one hand, and Seychelles and Rodrigues, the dependencies, on the other. Since transfers of personnel continued throughout the late eighteenth and the entire nineteenth centuries, it is safer to assume that all three evolved together at roughly the same rate.

8 Aspectsual distinctions are trickier, and it may be that this explains to some extent the earlier appearance or higher frequency of aspectual particles in early Mauritian Creole and in Tayo (assuming aspectsual values of Irrealis and Completive for va and fini respectively).
to impossible for most people, the question is to what extent is Mauritian Creole a continuation of French in any non-vacuous sense. In an obvious sense, it is: the bulk of its lexicon is French, and it has a number of constructions which are derived from French, such as the ‘sylleptic dual’ (nu de Zañ ‘John and I’, literally ‘we two John’). Many structures appear to be natural enough simplifications of assorted French complexities: loss of gender and number, loss of inflexions and conjugational endings of verbs, loss of elements cliticized to the verb (atonic pronouns, negative ne), regularization of word order, and so on. In short, as Chaudenson (1992) claims, nothing particularly startling, and all the kinds of things one finds in petit nègre and xenolectal styles of French.

There is however one major respect in which Mauritian Creole has to be seen as fundamentally different from French, and that is in its capacity to have taken on board conceptualizations alien to French, a capacity presumably attributable to the massive destructuration consequent upon pidginization. We have seen the development of the preverbal particles marking tense and aspect. The great majority of foreign-born slaves who acquired Isle de France Creole in the latter part of the eighteenth century had a Bantu language as L1. East African Bantu languages generally have an elaborate system of preverbal temporal and aspectual markers. It can be shown that the present-day Mauritian Creole set of contrasts in the tense/aspect marking system (six particles, which can occur singly or in combinations—in a fixed order—of up to three particles) constitute a subset of those found in East African Bantu languages (Baker & Corne 1986); there is some convergence with Malagasy, which also has preverbal tense/aspect marking in the usual Austronesian fashion. It can also be shown that the exceptionally high incidence in the Isle de France dialects of word-initial syllables derived from a French article (dizef ‘egg’ < Fr des oeufs) is similarly attributable to East African Bantu influence (Baker & Corne 1986). Less clear, because

9 This construction is not, of course, a Standard French one, but remains extant in regional varieties thereof (Baker & Corne 1982:96-97).

10 Agglutinated etymological articles occur in all varieties of Creole French, as they do in borrowings from French in other languages (e.g. Bislama, Chinook Jargon), possibly as a function of French stress patterns and the relative frequency of certain article—noun combinations in French. The high frequency of the phenomenon in Isle de France Creole (some 600+ nouns, as opposed to between 100 and 200 in the Creole French languages of the
of convergence with the superstrate and because of the widespread occurrence of similar structures in languages as diverse as Japanese, Hebrew, or Russian, is the African inspiration of verb fronting for focus (Corne 1987). Even less clear, because of possible universal strategies, is the case of reflexives. In the pidginization phase, the French cliticized pronouns were lost, being replaced by tonic forms (Fr je te vois > moi vois/r toi), one-argument reflexive (pronominal) constructions became simply intransitive verbs (Fr je me souviens > moi souvien > Mauritian Creole mo suvini), and two-argument reflexives (i.e. ‘real’ reflexives involving transitive verbs) were handled either by the use of a co-referential pronoun (unmarked for reflexivity) or by lexical means. For example, ‘I shall kill myself’ comes out in Mauritian Creole as (5a) or (5b):

(5a) mo pu tuy mwa
(5b) mo pu tuy mo lekor (lit. ‘my body’)

The use of ‘my body’ corresponds to a Malagasy pattern, and Chaudenson (1974) claims a French model. Whatever the facts of the matter regarding reflexives, they illustrate as aptly as the other structures mentioned the semi-vacuum prevailing: the destructuring (from the French point of view) of the pidginizing process left rather bare bones waiting to be fleshed out with whatever raw materials were to hand.

It is probable that much of the rebuilding took place early in the formative period, even if it is not possible to prove this beyond all doubt. But quite a lot happened later on, too. We have seen that massive arrivals modified Reunion Creole in the eighteenth century. In Mauritius, the huge Indian immigration of the nineteenth century has left undeniable traces in Mauritian Creole. One such is the ‘distributive numerals’ construction (Corne 1983), and another probable contribution is the GsoN genitive construction which competes with the (inherited) NG pattern

Caribbean area, and a mere handful in Reunion Creole) probably reflects the lack of articles in Bantu languages and the obligatory class prefixes (unstressed) of nouns.

11 There are various patterns in the Isle de France dialects. In one typical pattern, the verb is fronted but there is no deletion at the extraction site:

(i) malad li ti ape malad ‘he was getting really ill’
   ill he Past Progressive ill
(Stative adjectives occur as predicate head, i.e. function as verbs.)

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(Corne 1986). These contributions seem, on present information, to have had somewhat less impact on Mauritian than the Reunion case might have led one to expect, perhaps because of the fact that immigrants usually learn the local community’s language (the usual language shift over three generations).

Mauritian Creole, in sum, appears to be a new creation. It includes inherited (from French) features, and it shares a number of features with Reunion Creole which do not appear to be French in origin. Some of these may be shared innovations, although it is not possible to be sure. For example, a pluralizer *ban* occurs in both, but is attested first in Mauritius; the final vowel truncation rule already mentioned exists in very similar form in both, but again is attested first in Mauritius (Baker & Corne 1982). If Reunion Creole is seen as one of many inputs to the formation of Mauritian Creole, rather than as a or THE major input (cf. Chaudenson 1992), then features shared by the two languages and which are not derivable from French can be ascribed to the similar composition of the involuntary immigrant population of the eighteenth century in both islands (i.e. parallel independent innovations, a concept more or less likely depending on the complexity of the innovation considered).

If there remains a tinge of doubt as to the ‘new creation’ status of Mauritian Creole, because of gaps in the linguistic record, because of more or less legitimately differing interpretations of the settlement history, because of disagreement about how to interpret and account for the linguistic facts we do have, because inferential arguments and analogical reasoning are so often astray, or for any other reason, there is one creole language which is beyond question a new creation. We turn now to Tayo.

4.0 St-Louis, New Caledonia

The Melanesian village of St-Louis and the associated Indigenous Reserve, some 15 km from Nouméa, are in a sense European artefacts. The village came into being through the activities of the Marist missionaries. Prior to 1855, there was no permanent Melanesian settlement in the immediate vicinity.

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13 Syea (ms) suggests rather an internal development, but, if he is correct, then that development was undoubtedly triggered by perturbations wrought in the distribution of the possessive adjective by the acquisition of Mauritian Creole by L1 speakers of Indo-Aryan languages.
vicinity, the New Caledonian 'Far South' being sparsely inhabited by two tribal groupings speaking closely related languages/dialects. In 1856, the Marists established a reduction (a village for new converts and training centre for catechists) with Melanesians from Touho, speakers of a Centre-North language. Trouble with local Kanaks forced them back to the previously established reduction at La Conception, some four or five kilometres distant, but a second, successful attempt saw St-Louis permanently set up in 1860. Thereafter, progress was rapid: the building of the church, boarding schools for young Melanesians and part-Melanesians of both sexes, a saw-mill, rice paddies, cane-fields, vegetable gardens. The Touho people established a village, and other groups of Melanesians settled nearby, without however assimilating to the Touhos. By 1868, approximately 200 people were living in or near the village. Most pupils from the mission school settled in the village instead of leaving to proselytize their home tribes. In the following years, there were continuing small accretions of individuals and groups. By 1923, the village's geography reflected the tribal origins of many of its inhabitants, with four distinct quarters, each with a different and mutually unintelligible ancestral language.

According to oral tradition, the Melanesian languages at St-Louis were still in use ca.1920, but children born thereafter had mainly a passive knowledge: their L1 they considered to be the emergent Creole. They used this as-yet unnamed language with their parents, who spoke it to a greater or lesser degree (their parents being members mainly of G2), but lacked often a common language with their grandparents.

Apart from whatever contact there may have been with French (and other) settlers in the vicinity,14 the prime causes of this situation were the intra-village communicative needs of people of differing linguistic

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14 There were some settlers who had come from Reunion to establish sugar plantations, and they had brought with them 'Mal'bares', Indians from either Reunion or, more probably, directly from India. This raises the possibility of some Reunion Creole input in the formation of Tayo (Chaudenson, in press). Ehrhart (1993 and personal communication; v. also Ehrhart & Corne, in press) claims that contact with these was slight. Chaudenson points out a number of apparently Reunion Creole lexical items in Tayo, but these exist also in New Caledonian French. He also shows a number of what appear at present to be rather superficial resemblances of morphology and syntax between Tayo and Reunion Creole. The jury is still out on these questions, but there can be little doubt that any Reunion Creole influence was minor.
backgrounds, and the fact that the first generation couples of St-Louis frequently consisted of males from the original tribal regions and females, mostly of mixed Kanak-European descent, from the Mission Girls' School whose French is reported as being very good and who frequently acted as interpreters for their men in contacts with the Administration.

This brief sketch shows that at St-Louis in the nineteenth century there obtained a situation very similar to that of eighteenth century Mauritius. There are of course differences: no slavery, no Malagasies or East Africans, more opportunity to maintain Melanesian cultural traditions, less regional variation in the French input(s). The similarities, however, predominate. While there was no société d'habitation phase at St-Louis, the settlement starting off with a huge majority of Melanesians, the linguistic consequences of the Girls' School may be seen as the sociolinguistic equivalent thereof. There was the rapid constitution of a society comprised of people speaking mutually unintelligible languages and exposed to L1 French and a range of L2 versions of French. While some small degree of contact with the original tribal areas was maintained, this was very slight and St-Louis existed (and still exists) in a geographic and social ghetto situation, a sort of island within an island. And the most striking similarity of all is that within 50 years/3 generations, a creole language had emerged and jelled.

Ehrhart's description (1993) is based on work carried out with a representative range of informants at St-Louis in 1989 and 1990, but what is significant for our current purposes is that a lot of her work was with tribal elders who are representatives of G3.¹⁵ This means that for Tayo, unlike either Mauritian or Reunion Creole, we know what the language is like at G3 and we can see it evolving over subsequent generations. The first 50 years or so are partially accessible via oral tradition, while the remainder of the language's life span to date is open to direct observation. While much work remains to be done, it is obvious that Creole French is in a peculiarly privileged position from a comparative point of view.

Tayo shares with other varieties of Creole French a range of features. Among these are features inherited from the lexifier language. Two examples: (i) a focussing construction, se NP ki VP 'it is NP who/which VP', which competes with Melanesian-inspired thematization

¹⁵ All of her published oral texts were produced by members of G3. For an extensive sociolinguistic description, v. Ehrhart (1993:15-84).
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procedures (Corne, in press); and (ii) the usual small set of French
preposed adjectives are also preposed in Tayo, as they are in other Creole
French languages. Other features shared by Tayo and other varieties of
Creole French are apparently universal, or nearly so, in pidgin and creole
languages. For example: (i) the negator pa generally precedes the
predicate but follows the subject; (ii) there is no passive construction
using agentive PPs; (iii) reflexives are generally handled by unmarked
pronouns.16

Tayo having arisen in a situation characterized by an urgent need to
solve a major problem of intra-community (and inter-ethnic/inter-tribal)
communication and being in this respect a close parallel to Mauritian
Creole, it is not surprising that, like Mauritian Creole, Tayo is a new
creation rather than a continuation of French. The Melanesian dimension
is evident at all levels. In the lexicon, words of non-French origin are, on
present information, rather sparse, but most such are from the Melanesian
languages present at St-Louis.17 The phonology, while simpler than that
of New Caledonian Melanesian languages, includes /c/ (fic/'tired'),
prenasalised voiced stops, and Melanesian suprasegmentals. In syntax,
perhaps the most striking feature is the complexity of the pronominal
system, which not only includes a set of dual pronouns along with the sets
of singular and plural pronouns but also works in a clearly Melanesian
fashion, with dependent and independent pronouns, marked and unmarked
subject indexing pronouns, and post-posed possessives (Corne 1990, in
press (a)). Equally striking although much less obvious to casual
observation are the patterns of relativization and thematization. Relative
clauses are subordinated using sa; as subject, sa is obligatorily followed
by an indexing pronoun; as non-subject, sa is followed by an NP subject
+ an indexing pronoun le unmarked for person or number or by a subject
pronoun, and there are other details. An example:

(6) tule goyav sa wawa le pla:te 'the guavas that Grandma
    pl guava Rel grandmother Index plant
Thematization uses the pronoun le and an optional focussing element se:

16 What Tayo does not show is a number of features predicted by Bickerton’s
(1981, 1984) bioprogram hypothesis (TMA marking, verb fronting for focus,
serialization not attributable to Melanesian semantics, fronting of
interrogatives, ...).

17 Church influence is apparent in pater ‘(biological) father’, mater ‘mother’.
and, as already mentioned, competes with a French-derived pattern using relativization with *ki*:

(8) *se twa ki fe* ‘it is you who do’

Although Tayo is essentially an SVO language, the Melanesian VSO pattern is retained in sentences with a stative predicate head. Thus, (9a) illustrates the usual unmarked word order for this context, while (9b) shows the marked order of thematicization (cf. (7) above):

(9a) *le fu lia* ‘he’s crazy’
    Index crazy 3sg

(9b) *lia lefu* ‘HE is crazy; it is he who is crazy’
    3sg Index crazy

These examples will suffice here. Together they give a clear idea of the profound difference between French and Tayo, and of the considerable difference between Tayo and the other brands of Creole French.

When one compares the Tayo structures of Melanesian inspiration with their counterparts in the two principal Melanesian input languages (Drubéa and Cemuhi), one is immediately struck by the complexity of the Melanesian systems, against which Tayo seems child’s play, and by the fact that the Tayo systems are almost the lowest common denominator of those systems. Thus it appears that St-Louis oral tradition, which claims that

Before, all they did was express the Melanesian language in French, because there were people from all over. It was a translation into French of the language. (Ehrhart 1993:27; my translation)

is in fact a partially accurate view of what was going on. It claims in effect that Tayo is merely relexified Melanesian. To the extent that it is accurate, it is accurate because, precisely, all the Melanesian languages involved agree broadly on how any decent, self-respecting grammar should be organised, and differ only on details, and it is this convergence which has promoted the transfer into Tayo of Melanesian cryptotypes. It is an inaccurate view, of course, in that it ignores entirely the syntactic contribution of the other major, French, input to the formation of Tayo.

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18 For details and discussion, v. Corne, in press (a).
Tayo, then, emerged and jelled by G2/G3, shows clearly the assorted strands which went into its make-up, showing evidence of convergence operating to produce Melanesian types of patterns and also evidence of syntactic input from the lexifier, in G3 at least and possibly earlier. There can be no doubt that what we can observe today, after roughly a century of Tayo’s existence, is a new creation based not on the lowest common denominator of the various grammars involved but on a selection of features from them woven together in a new way.19

Tayo is subject to on-going influence from French. It is impossible to predict whether this will in time result in Tayo’s looking more like, say, Mauritian Creole by the elimination of Melanesian-inspired features (an outcome which is to a considerable extent dependent on social attitudes to the language by its speakers), but one future trend at least can be outlined. Tayo does not at present have a well-developed tense/aspect marking system (Ehrhart 1992, 1993). Generally, the bare verb is used, with adverbs and adverbial constructions providing indications where the discourse context renders these necessary or desirable. There are however a number of preverbal elements which do occur.

One is ete. It usually has the meanings ‘have/had been’, ‘went’ (i.e. it has the same meanings as the perfect and pluperfect tenses of Fr être or the imperfect of Fr aller), but in what Ehrhart characterizes as ‘decreolized’ contexts (1992:239) we can see the potential for the development of the value of Past:

(10) la te a:sat ‘she was pregnant’
3sg Past pregnant

The morpheme fini and its variants hni, ni do appear to have the status of a preverbal marker. Their value is either Completive or Past, in which latter case they are replaceable by d/a (< Fr déjà). The morpheme va and its variants wa, a also seem to have this status. Their value is Future. There is a Progressive marker atra de, but its distribution is restricted largely to non-stative contexts. In the speech of young people, a marker ke (ultimately < Fr rien que) seems to be developing a Punctual value. Finally, note that these embryonic markers do not, as already noted,

19 The precise nature of the conceptual mechanisms involved in this process are unclear, but seem to go beyond some of those hitherto proposed (universals of L2 acquisition, the bioprogram hypothesis, etc.). One possible line of enquiry, which as far as I am aware has not yet been explored, is Pawley’s (1985) speech formulae approach to language.
combine with each other, and are never obligatory. It may be the case that this system will evolve into something resembling the tense/aspect marking systems of other varieties of Creole French. An interesting question is why Tayo should be, compared with Mauritian Creole, so tardy. No answer is currently available, but a possibility is that the Melanesian tense/aspect systems, which at first glance do not appear to overlap very neatly, were simply too disparate to allow of a ‘common denominator’.

4.0 Discussion

Of the three languages considered here, only Reunion Creole can be seen as a continuation of French. The vernacular which evolved in the seventeenth century (sentence (1) above) is a new form of French resulting from dialectal leveling and influence from a Malagasy substrate. The eighteenth century saw a partial, incomplete creolization of the vernacular, but social factors prevented the emergence of an autonomous creole, and today a continuum of usages exists.

Mauritian Creole and Tayo, however, are new languages without genetic affiliation in the usual sense (Thomason & Kaufman 1988), in the creation of which French is one input amongst others. The relative weight of the French input no doubt varies according to the homogeneity or otherwise of the other inputs, the relative size of all the speech communities present during the formative period, the social status of their members in the society, and so on. In the case of Tayo, the presence of French-speaking women and the role of the Mission as employer and spiritual guide were factors which may have served to kick-start Tayo into life, as in a Melanesian context the more likely outcome of the (pacific)

20 This may take some time. For Cayenne Creole, preliminary findings suggest that this language, which can be shown to have emerged and jelled by around 1700, did not arrive at its present-day tense/aspect marking system until the latter half of the nineteenth century (although we remain largely ignorant of anything about the preceding evolution of the system) (Jennings 1993).

21 It may be compared, at this stage of its development, with Pitcairn English, which was the L1 of G2 by the time the Pitcairn community’s total isolation from the outside world came to an end after some 20 years (one generation). Pitcairn’s substrate was Tahitian.
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bringing together of tribes is egalitarian bilingualism (a characteristic of traditional Melanesian culture). The relative homogeneity of the Melanesian languages, as well as the status of at least two of them, explain the pervasive Melanesian organisation of Tayo syntax. In the case of Mauritian Creole, it may be surmised that the institution of slavery was itself a determining feature in the imposition of at least the lexicon. The role of the substrate languages is clear, as has been seen, but Malagasy and East African Bantu languages are structurally very different. The etymological article agglutination suggests that the latter were important enough to contribute to morphology, but the preverbal particles of tense and aspect seem to suggest that only the fortuitous convergence of Bantu and Malagasy allowed this African feature to surface in the new language. Indeed, given the massive majority, first of Malagasies and then of East Africans in Mauritius during and immediately after the formative period, one might a priori be surprised at the relative lack of syntactic procedures ascribable to either (group of) substrate languages. Clearly, given a lack of convergence or homogeneity, the lowest common denominator prevails; where there is overlap, a positive linguistic contribution to the building process is possible.

Mauritian Creole and Tayo are alike in that they represent the lowest common denominator possible for their respective formative periods and their respective societies. Mauritian Creole has had sufficient time to change, either by normal processes of internal evolution or through syntactic borrowing (as in the case of the distributive numerals).


23 The Touho people had the status of ‘first occupants’, and indeed the Chief initially came from their ranks, but they were also interlopers in Drubéa/Numèë territory.

24 In this regard, note the different status of lexicon and morphology from that of syntax. All non-Francophone immigrants to Mauritius (West Africans, East Africans, Malagasy, Hakka Chinese, Indo-Aryans, Dravidians, English, ...) contributed to the Mauritian Creole lexicon (Baker 1982).

Even if the view sketched here, that convergence is a necessary condition, is erroneous, and the preverbal marking system is in fact entirely of African inspiration (ignoring here the convergence with French analytical structures), the fact is that Mauritian Creole is ‘less African’ than, say, Haitian Creole.
For some of those varieties of Creole French which have remained in contact with the lexifier, there is clear evidence of on-going French influence on the grammar. For example, Mauritian Creole reflexives show a clear evolution over time from a predominant coreferential so lekor ‘his body’ strategy with transitive verbs only to a predominant use of unmarked pronouns with both transitive and intransitive verbs; Martinique Creole shows a broadly similar evolution (Corne 1989a). Often, as in this case, it is possible to trace such changes over time, either because the change is relatively recent or because for a given variety of Creole French we are fortunate to have an abundance of texts (usually, these are mainly nineteenth century texts). But for languages whose earlier states remain undocumented or for changes which took place early in the piece, we cannot know, except by inference, the nature and extent of lexifier influence on syntax. This has led to misperceptions in some quarters as to the relative ‘Frenchness’ of some varieties of Creole French.

The Tayo example strongly suggests that no assumptions about the nature of a creole emerging from its formative period are safe in the absence of detailed study of the settlement history. As new creations, creole languages are sensitive to a wide range of factors, and cannot be understood without reference to them.

In particular, it is unwise to extrapolate from one case and build a theory of creolization on that basis. Yet that is precisely the flaw in the continuativist position, which takes French as the starting point and sees Creole French as the result of approximations of approximations. Implicitly, Reunion Creole is the model. In Phase I, the société d’habitation, rulers and ruled live and work in close association, and from this interaction comes a ‘first generation’ creole (the 1720s vernacular French - in my view, its creolization is yet to come, in the eighteenth century). In Phase II, the société de plantation, large numbers of slaves produce approximations of the first generation creole, and a ‘second generation’ creole is born. Such a scenario is nonsense for Tayo, where Phase I simply did not exist. It looks better for Mauritius. There, the first decade of settlement was obviously too short a time for a first generation creole to form, but this problem is obviated by the personnel brought in (briefly) from Reunion, so that Mauritian Creole is supposed to be a second generation creole, an approximation of Reunion Creole.
Chaudenson (1992) argues his case forcefully, but overlooks the significance and/or the chronology of some of his own evidence.25

The creativist position, in contrast, starts from the point at which an urgent need for 'interethnic' communication comes into being. Any preceding period is significant only insofar as it provides information about possible inputs to the creative process (creolization). For example, the creation of Cayenne Creole included some variety of Portuguese or pidginized Portuguese (Jennings 1993). By definition, the creativist position sees each act of creole genesis as a unique event, and attempts to account for the linguistic result in terms of the particular society's social history.

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25 In fairness to Chaudenson, the text of his book was largely completed before any data on Tayo had reached the public domain (Come 1989b). But no such excuse exists for his persistently ignoring diachronic linguistic data published by Philip Baker and myself, jointly or severally.


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