

On the structuring role of grammaticalized morpho-syntactic features

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The paper proposes a detailed analysis of French Lexifier Creole (FLC) DPs and argues that the micro-parametric variations observed in the distribution of their determiners result from the differing grammaticalization patterns of their morpho-syntactic features, specifically person and number. ‘Semantic Bleaching’ is here re-interpreted as a change in the ‘*Interpretability*’ of morpho-syntactic features: From ‘*Interpretable*’ (cf Chomsky 1998), i.e. providing ‘valuation’ and behaving as ‘goals’, features become ‘*Un-interpretable*’ with consequent structuring effects: they require ‘valuation’/checking, becoming ‘probes’ that motivate phrasal movement within the DP structure.

FLC present both a notable uniformity in their determiner inventory -- most FLC have as indefinite determiner *en/yon* derived from the French *un*, as definite *la*, and as demonstrative *sa/ta (la)* -- but, as seen below, the syntactic distribution of these forms varies greatly across FLC as illustrated in table 1. Yet distributional uniformity is also found in FLC DP with some (indefinite) determiners invariably occurring in pre-nominal positions. These striking similarities and differences raise important empirical and theoretical questions at the core of current theorizing on linguistic variation. Do the observed order variations reflect distinctions in the functional architecture of nominal constituents, as originally suggested for sentences by Ouhalla (1991) among others, or do FLC DP have a single common underlying functional architecture? If so, how can the observed variation be accounted for? Are there common syntactic operations behind the observed variations and if so, do the distributional differences derive from morpho-syntactic distinctions in the determiners despite apparent similarity in form?

The paper proposes an analysis of the observed distributional variety in FLC DP built on two central assumptions: **1)** That FLC nominal projections have a common basic architecture and **2)** that the observed variation stems from extensive but highly constrained phrasal movements inside the proposed DP architecture that are driven by differences in the grammaticalization of the morpho-syntactic features of superficially similar determiners. I first provide evidence for a common underlying architecture for FLC DP paralleling in essential respects the functional architecture developed for DP within the recent generative literature (cf. the cartographic approach Cinque 1999). The comparative creole data are shown to provide strong empirical support for the existence of a number of distinct functional projections hierarchically organized in a fixed order (DP/DefP > DemP/AgrP > NumP > NP). The distinct orders are systematically derived from a cascade of phrasal movements governed by a single generalization: (G1) *FLC nominal functional heads must have filled specifiers*. (G1), I propose, derives from two minimalist assumptions: A. DP are phases Chomsky (1998,2001) B. Interpretable/Valued Phi features must be accessible outside nominal phases. The Phase Impenetrability Condition (Chomsky 2001) dictates that information can be accessed only at the edge of phases. For DP, this means that if the feature information they carry is relevant for sentence computation (Agree), it must either be on the head or in the specifier of the topmost DP projection or be made accessible through head movement (fusion) to D or phrasal movement to its Spec. The key idea here is that the order variations observed in FLC DP result from the interplay between these requirements on feature accessibility and grammaticalization. Given (G1), much of the order variation observed among the FLC determiners can be predicted from their status as lexical specifiers (XP) or as functional heads (X^0), a choice that, I argue, reflects the variable degree of grammaticalization of their person/ number features. Grammaticalization commonly implies ‘Semantic Bleaching’, here re-interpreted as a change in the interpretability of morpho-syntactic features: *Interpretable lexical* features providing valuation (goal) become *un-interpretable functional* features seeking valuation (probe). Accordingly, a determiner with *interpretable* features merges in a Spec position (= pre-XP) and values a corresponding *un-interpretable* features in the DP architecture, while a determiner with *un-interpretable* features merges as a head (probe) that triggers checking/valuation through XP movement to its Spec, resulting in a constituent final position (post-XP). The paper motivates ‘Semantic bleaching’ by a semantic comparison of FLC determiners. The grammaticalization of definiteness is shown to involve an increased dependence of ‘determined reference’ on the discourse

context (Farkas 2002) modeled as the loss of interpretability of a person feature. The grammaticalization of number correlates with a change from collective to distributive plurality.

Table 1.

	Singular		Plural	
Reunion C	Def/DemNP (def)	La/sa NP (la)	Dfpl/Dempl (PL) NP (def)	Le/se (ban) NP (la)
Sechelles C	Dem NP	Sa NP	Dem PL NP	Sa ban NP
MauritianC	Dem NP Def	Sa NP-la	Dem PL NP Def	Sa ban NP-la
Antillean C	NP Dem Def	NP-sa-(l)a, NP-ta-(l)a	PL NP Dem Def	Se NP-sa-(l)a, Se NP-ta-(l)a
Guadeloup C	NP DefDem	NP-la-sa	PL NP Def Dem	Se NP-la-sa
Guyana C	Dem NP Def	sa NP la	Dem NP PL Def	Sa NP-y(e-l)a
Haitian C	NP Dem Def	NP-sa-a	NP Dem PL	NP-sa-yo

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