

ABSTRACT

A Linguistic Description of Definiteness in Trinidadian French-lexicon Creole

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This work focuses on Trinidadian French-lexicon Creole, henceforth TFC, a dying variety of Lesser Antillean French-lexicon Creole. The aim is to describe pragmatic, semantic and syntactic definiteness and provide a model which unifies the role of all three in interpreting reference strings. The data for the description and model is chiefly taken from discourse pieces gathered during linguistic fieldwork and it is analyzed within the Functionalist theoretical framework.

In the model of TFC definiteness that I present, definiteness in the first instance is pragmatic. Pragmatics causes the speaker to ascertain whether or not the hearer is able to identify the referent. Pragmatic definiteness is synonymous with the cover term 'Identifiability.' Pragmatic definiteness gets realized in the syntax of the language via noun phrase reference strings. Each noun phrase in a string of co-referent noun phrases is marked for its syntactic definiteness, or lack of syntactic definiteness. If the speaker presumes that the hearer will not be able to identify the referent then the first reference is stated and if the speaker assumes that the hearer will be able to identify the referent then the first reference is implied. First reference, whether stated or implied, is indefinite. Indefiniteness is synonymous with 'Unidentifiability.' An indefinite reference produces a mental representation of the entity or class of the entity and signals to the hearer that the referent is new to the discourse. Stated first reference takes the form of a Bare NP or a Yon + NP construction. The former reflects pragmatic indefiniteness and the latter syntactic indefiniteness. Subsequent references in the reference string are syntactically definite. Syntactic definiteness is manifested in five constructions—NP + *la* constructions, demonstrative constructions, possessive constructions, personal pronouns and proper nouns. Semantics causes the hearer to ascertain what or who can be identified, and keeps the referents in a co-referencing sequence equal in meaning throughout the discourse. The indefinite/definite contrast which is represented by first reference and subsequent reference is accounted for by Jakobson's (1971) Markedness Theory. Definiteness is marked and indefiniteness is unmarked.

This work produces a model which illustrates the need to keep the levels of language separate in any discussion of definiteness. It does so by describing how two separate syntactic forms can share one Identifiability interpretation. Importantly this work illustrates that pragmatics is the most important element in the system of TFC definiteness. In the end, the study provides a record of TFC as it is contemporarily spoken in Trinidad and the new observations presented in the description and model should give scholars an opportunity to re-examine issues relating to cross-linguistic definiteness and Creole studies in general.

Keywords: Nicole A. Scott, Trinidad, French-lexicon Creole, Pragmatics, Semantics, Syntax, Identifiability, Reference, Markedness