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Bare Nouns in Creoles and beyond: a syntactic-semantic study of Kriyol Bare Noun Phrases based on a cross-linguistic comparison and the theoretical implications.
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My research focuses on the bare noun in Kriyol, the Portuguese-based Creole of Guinea-Bissau. The purpose is both descriptive and theoretical in nature. Starting from the work of Kihm (1994, 2007), my study aims at exhaustively describing the behavior of this nominal from both the syntactic and the semantic perspectives. I follow Kihm (2007) in defining the bare noun as mere root form without any specification for number and for gender, which is (neither) preceded (nor followed) by any determiner. Most of times the noun appears bare: this will be not surprising if we consider that Kriyol has no definite determiner at all. Furthermore, this language almost completely lacks nominal inflectional morphology, except for the plural marker number -(*i*)*s*. In principle, the bare noun may receive many different interpretations, but it does not cover the whole range of possible readings. As a tendency, the bare noun is interpreted as (non)specific singular definite in subject position and as (non)specific (in)definite mass, or rather undefined for number, in object position. In case of plurals, the subject position requires the overt pluralization of the noun via the suffix –(*i*)*s*, whereas if the subject is an indefinite singular, especially if specific, the indefinite determiner *un* tends to precede the noun. If it is nonspecific, then *un* may be left out: apparently, (non)specificity plays here a crucial role. On the other hand, the object position seems to allow a freer occurrence of bare nouns with respect to (real) mass, mass in the sense of undefined for number, and singular and plural indefinites. In case of definiteness, there are two options: we may find either the bare noun or the noun preceded by the demonstrative *kil*. Also in this case, specificity seems to be involved: indeed, if the definite object is specific, it is preferably introduced by *kil*. With respect to overt plural morphology, animacy also plays a pivotal role, as already noted in Kihm (2007): hence, humans and animals with higher cultural value are more likely to be overtly pluralized. From a theoretical perspective, the widespread use of bare nouns in Kriyol finds explanation in the absence of an overt definite determiner and in the more or less restricted use of overt plural morphology. The same happens in many other creole languages as well as in noncreoles such as Russian and Mandarin Chinese, as opposed to Romance or Germanic languages, which do have overt determiners. I consider this variation the result of a parameter regulating the presence/absence of overt determiners (see Longobardi 1994, Chierchia 1998).

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