The Emergence of a Determiner System: The Case of Mauritian Creole

Diana Guillemin
The University of Queensland

In the early stages of creolization, a large number of French determiners incorporated into the nouns that they modified. The immediate consequence was that Mauritian Creole (MC) had only bare nouns with ambiguous interpretations between [±definite] singular and plural interpretations. Gradually, new determiners emerged to mark those semantic contrasts, but bare nouns still occur in the creole, with a definite singular interpretation in some syntactic environments, providing evidence for a phonologically null definite determiner, equivalent to the French definite article. Post-nominal ‘la’ in MC, which has been defined as a definite determiner, is argued to be a Specificity marker, which occurs only with referential NPs. The process of grammaticalization of new functional items in the determiner system was accompanied by changes in the syntax of the noun phrase from French to creole. A feature driven analysis within Chomsky’s Minimalist framework (1995, 2001) suggests that these changes were driven by the need to map semantic features onto the syntax.

Keywords: article, creole, definiteness, determiner, Mauritian Creole, Minimalism, semantics, specificity, syntax

1 From French to Creole

1.1 A New Determiner System

Early in the genesis of MC, the French definite articles (le/la/les) and the partitive determiner (du), incorporated into a large number of the nouns that they modified, e.g.:

- Le roi (the king) → lerwa (king)
- La fenêtre (the window) → lafnet (window)
- (De) la farine (flour) → lafarin (flour)
- Du monde (people) → dimun (person, people)

---

1 Abbreviations used in this paper: δ - phonologically null definite determiner, 1.PL - 1st person plural pronoun, 1.SG - 1st person singular pronoun, 2.PL - 2nd person plural pronoun, 2.SG.F - 2nd person singular pronoun, formal form of address, 3.SG - 3rd person plural pronoun, ASP - Aspect, COMP - Complementizer, CP - Complementizer Phrase, D - Determiner, DEF - Definite, DefP - Definiteness Phrase, DEM - Demonstrative, DemP - Demonstrative Phrase, DP - Determiner Phrase, FI - Full Interpretation, FL - Faculty of Language, G - Goal, H - Head, IP - Inflectional Phrase, LF - Logical Form, MC - Mauritian Creole, MOD - Modal, MP - Minimalist Program, NEG - Negation, NOM - Nominative Case, NP - Noun Phrase, NumP - Number Phrase, P - Probe, PF - Phonetic Form, PP - Prepositional Phrase, PL - Plural, PM - Predicate Marker, POSS - Possessive, PST - Past Tense, QP - Quantifier Phrase, Spec - Specifier, SpP - Specificity Phrase
In the case of count nouns that are vowel initial, it was the plural form of the noun starting with /z/, as a result of liaison with the ‘s’ of the plural determiner, which incorporated into the noun, e.g.:

- Des/les animaux (animals/the animals) → *zanimo* (animal)
- Des/les histoires (stories/the stories) → *zistwar* (story)

Not all nouns ended up with an incorporated article, but the French determiner system collapsed, and the immediate consequence was that, in the early creole, all nouns were bare, yielding ambiguous interpretations between [±definite] singular and plural interpretations. It seems that the French determiners, which serve to mark the semantic contrasts of (in)definiteness and singular vs. plural were not recognized as separate morphemes, but were taken to be an integral part of the nouns that they modified (Baissac 1880; Chaudenson 1981; Baker 1984; A. Grant 1995; Bollée 2004; Strandquist 2005).\(^2\) Initially, the interpretation of nouns was simply derived from the context, but over a period of some 150 years, from the mid 18th century to the end of the 19th century, new functional items emerged in the creole determiner system, namely:

- The singular indefinite determiner *enn*, derived from the French *un/une*.
- The demonstrative *sa ... la* derived from the French *ce/ces ...là*.
- The specificity marker *la*, which is derived either from the demonstrative reinforcer\(^3\) *là*, or from the homophonous locative adverb *là*. While all other determiners are pre-nominal, *la* is DP final.
- The plural marker *bann*, derived from the French *bande* ('group'). It is unspecified for the feature [±definiteness].
- The proportional quantifier *ennbann* derived from the French *une bande* ('a group')\(^4\)

Despite the emergence of these new determiners, bare nouns continue to occur in the creole, yielding different interpretations in various syntactic configurations. In existential constructions, for example, which admit only indefinites (Milsark) bare nouns are [–definite] plural, as with the nouns *pyes teat*, *sant* and *poem* in the following example:

1)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ena pyes teat, sant, poem. (Legallant 51)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PST  have play song poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There were plays, songs, poems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il y avait des pièces de théâtre, des chansons, des poèmes.(^5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

\(^2\) Determiners also serve to mark gender in French, but this is not relevant to my analysis as gender is not grammaticalized in MC.

\(^3\) The term ‘demonstrative reinforcer’ was coined by Bernstein (1996) for the post nominal demonstrative particles. They are the proximate marker *ci* and the distal marker *là*, as in *cet homme ci* (this man), *cet homme là* (that man).

\(^4\) There are many other quantifiers that developed from French lexical items, but I will only look at *ennbann* in this paper.
However, when bare count nouns occur in some argument positions, as, for example, when they are the object of a preposition, they are singular and [+definite], as with *deba* in 2):

2) *Dan deba reprezantan LPT ti propose ki ...* (Ah-Vee 37)
In the debate, representatives/the representative of the LPT proposed that ...
Dans le débat, des représentants/le représentant de la LPT ont/a proposé que

In his typological study of ‘Articles’, Himmelmann comments that “count nouns cannot be used in core argument positions without a marker for definiteness or specificity” (832), a view shared by Longobardi, who derives the principle that “DP can be an argument, NP cannot”, though D can be a phonologically null element (628). Thus, the occurrence of a bare noun in an argument position is evidence for the presence of a null determiner. In the case of MC, this null element (which I will represent as $\delta$ for expository purposes) has the feature [+definite], which it assigns to its complement NP. It is interesting to note at this stage that $\delta$ forces a singular interpretation of the bare noun.

The occurrence of bare nouns in the creole represents a significant divergence from its lexifier, where all nouns, with few exceptions, must occur with a determiner. And while all determiners in French are pre-nominal, MC has post-nominal *la*. In this paper, I look at the gradual changes in the form and meaning of the new determiners in MC, and argue that the changes from French to creole was driven by the need to map semantic features on to the syntax, resulting in a change in the architecture of the noun phrase.

My syntactic analysis is within Chomsky’s Minimalist framework (1995, 2001), which makes the assumption that functional items are the locus of semantic features that trigger movement in the syntax, by attracting lexical items with matching features. I argue that Definiteness and Specificity are different semantic categories that have different projections in the syntax. While the contrast $[\pm$specific] is not marked in French (nor in English), it is marked on definite NPs in MC, where *la* is the lexical realization of Specificity. Given the limited scope of this paper, I will only look at count nouns.

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 comprises the ‘Historical background’ where I present data from early MC texts to show how the various determiner elements gradually emerged in

---

5 In all my examples, I will give a morpheme by morpheme gloss in line 2, the English translation in line 3 and a French equivalent in line 4. When the translations are by other authors, e.g. Baissac (1888), or are original texts from the Bible, I have put them in quotation marks, and given the source of these quotations. Sources are given for all examples, except when the material is my own (I am a native speaker of MC).
the creole. In Section 3 I present the syntactic framework adopted for this analysis, and give brief semantic definitions of Definiteness and Specificity to support my claim that they are distinct phenomenon. Section 4 comprises my analysis, where I also look at previous work on the subject. Section 5 concludes this paper.

2 Historical Background

2.1 From 1750 to 1820 - Bare Nouns and the Demonstratives ‘ça … là’

In the first instantiations of the creole, following the collapse of the French determiner system, bare nouns occur in various syntactic configurations, and their interpretation is mostly derived from the context. In 3) *bitation* is pragmatically interpreted as [+definite] singular; in 4) *cosson* as [−definite] plural, while the mass noun *tobacco* is also [−definite]. In 5) *loptal* and *sourzin*, are both indefinite, and are ambiguous between a singular and plural interpretation, but are pragmatically interpreted as the former.

3) Mô couri *bitation* (Pitot 80)
1.SG run village
I run to the village
Je cours vers le village

4) vendé *cosson*, vendé *tabac* (Pitot 81)
sell pig sell tobacco
I sell pigs, I sell tobacco
Je vends des cochons, je vends du tabac

5) n’apas *loptal*, n’apas *sourzin*? (Pitot 81)
NEG hospital NEG surgeon
Isn’t there a hospital, isn’t there a surgeon?
Il n'y a pas d'hôpital, il n'y a pas de chirurgien?

In some of the very early texts when referring to a specific individual, or referents that were present in the situational context, the demonstrative *ça*, derived from the French demonstratives

---

6 Most of the examples in the historical section are from a digital corpus of early MC texts dating from 1749 to 1929, compiled by Philip Baker, who has been collecting and collating materials from the National Library of Mauritius and the Mauritius Archives for over 30 years. This corpus is one of the most comprehensive available. The authors of these early texts are considered to have been well versed in the creole; consequently, the linguistic examples are assumed to be genuine attestations of the spoken creole of the period (Baker p.c. 2007). Examples from this digital corpus will include authors’ names and dates, but no page reference.
ce/ces was used with the demonstrative particle là, exactly as in French, except that in MC, the same form /sa/ was used with both singular and plural NPs:

6) ça blanc là li beaucoup malin (C. Grant 77)
DEM white DEM PM much clever
This white man is very clever/these white men are very clever
Ce blanc là est très malin/ces blancs là sont très malins

7) Li bon ça bondié là qui dans vous paye... ? (Pitot 81)
3.SG kind DEM god DEM COMP in 2.SG.F country
Is he kind this God who is in your country...?
Est-ce qu'il est bon ce Dieu (là) qui est dans votre pays ... ?

8) ça grands l'habitations là qui dans vous zordres (Chrestien)
DEM large settlement SP COMP in 2.SG.F.POSS orders
these large settlements that are under your jurisdiction
ces grandes habitations qui sont sous vos orders

The use of these demonstrative particles in the very early creole patterns as in French, where only a noun intervenes between a demonstrative and its reinforcer unlike in modern MC, where la occurs in a clause final position. The first instance of a NP + relative clause occurring between ça and là, is dated 1818, and documented by Freycinet in 1827:

9) ça grand pié dibois pian Aughiste conné là (Freycinet)
DEM big tree wood smelly Auguste know DEM/SP
This big tree with foul smelling wood that Auguste knows
Ce grand arbre au bois puant qu'Auguste connaît là
Sa gran pye dibwa santi pi ki Ogist kone la (Modern MC)

In the first uses of these demonstrative particles, neither ça nor là was independent of the other, but, from 1820 onwards, ça starts being used on its own to mark plural definites, as in 10), where it is equivalent to French plural demonstrative ces:

7 I had interpreted ça blanc là as singular, but Philip Baker writes: ‘I think ça blanc là li beaucoup malin is actually plural. The speaker is referring to the white crew as a whole and the tacking (?) movements the ship had to perform in order to enter Port Louis harbour (difficult because the wind blows the wrong way) which the speaker interpreted as a deliberate effort to confuse slaves as to the direction which they had travelled from Madagascar. But I could be wrong’ (p.c. May 1 2007).
DIANA GUILLEMIN

10) tout sa pêchés qui mo y-en-a dans mon licaire (Lambert)
    all DEM sin COMP 1.SG have in 1.SG.POSS heart
    tous ces sins that I have in my heart

Around the same period, là starts being used on its own, without ça, and this represents a change in the function of this morpheme. In the next example, its interpretation is ambiguous between a specificity marker, and a locative adverb:

11) Comment dou-monde entré dans dibois en montant piti
    how person enter in wood by climbing small

    la-ravine là! (Freycinet)
    ravine SP/there
    As someone entered the forest by climbing up the/that small ravine there!
    Quand quelqu’un entre dans le bois en montant par cette petite ravine là!

    But there is no doubt that là, in the next examples, is used to mark Torti and Bourriqu’ as referential NPs. They both have discourse antecedents:

12) Et Torti là touzours marcé (Freycinet)
    and tortoise SP still  walk
    And the tortoise keeps walking
    Et la tortue marche toujours

13) Bourriqu’ là, moi dir’ vous, content comment lèRoi (Chrestien)
    donkey SP 1.SG tell 2.PL happy as king
    The Donkey, I tell you, is as happy as a king
    La Bourrique, je vous dis, est heureuse comme un roi

    It is interesting to note that a noun marked by là is always singular, unless it is also modified by a numeral:

14) Pour dés blancs là di-leau vini dans son
    For two white SP water come in 3.POSS

    la-bouce (Chrestien)
    mouth
    As for the two white men, they start to salivate
    Quant aux deux blancs, l’eau leur vient à la bouche
Despite the use of là to mark Definiteness and Specificity, bare nouns could still be interpreted as [+definite] and referential, as in 15):

15) Lhère lapeau fine sec, bonhomme prend lapeau là, (Baissac 1888: 45)
When the hide has dried, the old man takes that hide,
Quand la peau est sèche, le bonhomme la prend, (Baissac 1888:44)

Both lapeau and lapeau là are [+definite] singular, and refer to the same previously introduced discourse antecedent. It must be assumed, therefore, that là encodes an additional feature of specificity which is not present in the phonologically null determiner. In order to understand the function of là/la, we need take a look at the other changes that take place in the determiner system, and how other semantic contrasts come to be marked on noun phrases.

2.2 1818 Onwards - The Indefinite Determiner ‘enn’

The first use of the indefinite determiner ein, eine, ëne, ène, ène, enne (enn in Modern MC), derived from the French indefinite article un/une (a/an), appears in texts from 1818 onwards, to unambiguously mark nouns as [–definite] and singular, as shown:

16) mo li-pié marcé la haut enne brance sec (Freycinet)
my foot walk on branch dry
Je marche sur une branche sèche

17) Dans son la-bousse eté gard’ enne bibasse (Chrestien)
in 3.SG.POSS mouth PST keep a loquat
Dans sa bouche gardait une bibasse

Bare nouns, however, still remain ambiguous between [+definite] singular or [±definite] plural interpretations, as shown in the following examples:

18) mo sive larivièrè pour saute laut’ cotè (Freycinet)
1.SG follow river to jump other side
Je suis la rivière pour sauter de l’autre côté
19) Vous, ça qui blancs appell dimonde agile (Freycinet)
2.PL that which whites call people agile
You, whom the white men call nimble
Vous, que les blancs disent agiles

20) y.en.a Zizes dans tous quartiers (Nicolay)
have judge in all district
there are judges in all districts
il y a des magistrats dans tous les quartiers

Where the following interpretations are (pragmatically) assigned to the bare nouns:

- larivière is [+definite] singular in 18)
- blancs is [+definite] plural in 19)
- zizes is [–definite] plural in 20)

2.3 Plural Marking

We have seen that in the early 19th century, ça was functioning as a plural demonstrative, i.e. it marked NPs that were both plural and referential. We also find the universal quantifier tout/tous ('all') used as a plural [+definite] determiner, equivalent to French les, when the NPs are not referential, or are not present in the situational context:

21) Quand nous sorti dans l'églizeTout blancs guetté nous passé (Chrestien)
when 1.PL come out in church PL white watch 1.PL pass
When we come out of the church the white men watch us go by
Quand nous sortons de l'église les blancs nous regardent passer

22) Tous zên’ lè-rats à*ster sorti pour badiné (Chrestien)
PL young rat then come out to frolic
The young rats then come out to frolic
Les jeunes rats à ce moment sortent pour badiner

Given that tout/tous is a universal quantifier, it could only mark [+definite] plural. From 1850 onwards we see eine bande, derived from the French une bande de (‘a group of’), minus the preposition, being used to express an indefinite number, i.e. [–definite] plural:
23) Arla satte vini coté enne lotre bande noir apré coupe
thus cat come near a other group black MOD cut

canne (Aristide 123)
cane
Thus the cat comes by another group of slaves who were cutting cane
Voilà que le chat arrive auprès d’une autre bande de noirs en train de couper la canne

24) E éne gran band dimoune ti sivré li, (Anderson 3)
and a great group person PST follow 3.SG
‘And great crowds followed him’ (Matthew, Ch.4, v.25)\(^8\)
‘De grandes foules se mirent à le suivre’ (Matthieu, Ch.4, v.25)

When first used, *ein band* was most likely interpreted as an indefinite noun phrase, and the adjective *gran* could occur between the determiner and the noun. However, *ein band* is gradually reanalysed as a proportional quantifier, with the meaning ‘several’, ‘some’, ‘many’ (Fr. *plusieurs*, *quelques*, *beaucoup de*). In the following example, *ein band* is ambiguous between an indefinite NP and a quantifier:

25) Semb’ *ein band’ p’tits miletons (Lolliot)
together a group small mules
Together with a group of young mules / several young mules
Ensemble avec une bande de petits muletons/ plusieurs petits muletons

But in Anderson’s translations of the Bible into creole, the source documents provide evidence that *éne band* functions as a proportional quantifier, and not as a noun phrase:

26) é éne band lot (Anderson 14)
and many other
‘and many others’ (Matthew, Ch.15, v.30)
‘et bien d'autres encore’ (Matthieu, Ch.15, v.30)

27) coman mouton dan milié éne band loulou (Anderson 8)
like sheep among some wolf
‘like sheep into the midst of wolves’ (Matthew, Ch.10, v.16)
‘comme des brebis au milieu de loups’ (Matthieu, Ch.10, v.16)

\(^8\)‘Matthew’ and ‘Matthieu’ stand for *The Gospel According to Matthew* and *L’Évangile selon Saint Matthieu* respectively.
This reanalysis of *éne band* as [–definite] plural marker may well have motivated the use of *band*, to mark NPs that are both definite and plural, replacing the universal quantifier *tout/tous*. This happens towards the end of the 19th century:

28) *li ti anvoy band so domestic*  
   3.SG PST send PL 3.SG.POSS servant  
   ‘He sent his slaves’  
   (Matthew, Ch.22, v.3)  
   ‘Il envoya ses serviteurs’  
   (Matthieu, Ch.22, v.3)

The original French text has *ses serviteurs* (‘his slaves’) and not *tous ses serviteurs* (‘all his slaves’). Consequently, *bann* has been glossed simply as plural marker, despite the fact that it quantifies over the PossP, *so domestic*. The use of *band/bann* preceding the possessive pronoun is ungrammatical in modern MC, where this morpheme must always immediately precede the noun that it modifies, as in the following examples from the same period:

29) *éne dan band profet*  
   one in PL prophet  
   ‘one of the prophets’  
   (Matthew, Ch.16, v.14)  
   ‘quelqu’un des prophètes’  
   (Matthieu, Ch.16 v.14)

30) *Namcouticouti qui té faire vous tout ça bande malices*  
   Namcouticouti who PST make 2.SG.F all DEM PL mischief  
   là  
   (Baissac 1888: 107)⁹  
   SP  
   It is Namcouticouti who has played all these tricks on you  
   ‘C’est Namcouticouti qui vous a fait tous ces tours-là’  
   (Baissac 1888: 106)

In 30) *bande* occurs between *ça .. là*, and is simply marking plural, not definiteness. By the end of the 19th century, the MC determiner system had stabilized into a form which is still currently used today. The process of grammaticalization of each of the functional items described above did not happen in isolation, but as the data suggests, there was a dynamic interplay of lexical items vying for a role in the emerging determiner system.¹⁰

---

⁹ This is, to my knowledge, the only occurrence of *bande* as a plural marker in Baissac (1888).
¹⁰ These gradual changes are tabulated at the end of this paper.
3 Syntactic Framework

3.1 Assumptions of the Minimalist Program

My syntactic analysis is within the framework of Chomsky’s Minimalist Program (MP) (1995, 2001). I assume the reader’s familiarity with generative syntax and the MP, and I will only briefly outline those assumptions that are relevant to my analysis.

The MP assumes that items are selected from the lexicon and enter a derivation fully inflected with their phonological, semantic and formal features. Well formed expressions are derived by the recursive application of the operations Merge, Move and Agree. Merge concatenates two syntactic objects and projects the categorial feature of the head, while the operation Move is triggered to satisfy the checking requirements of a lexical resource. Thus, syntactic structures are built up using general rules such that each phrase consists of a head (X), a complement (YP) and specifier (ZP) as in the schema in 31) below. The two basic relations are the Specifier-head relation of ZP to X, and the head-complement relation of X to YP:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{XP} \\
\text{ZP} \\
\text{X'} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{X} \\
\text{YP} \\
\end{array}
\]

(Chomsky 1995:172)

Functional items, such as Determiners, Complementizers and Tense, are the locus of formal semantic features. They are referred to as Probes (P), whose features are uninterpretable, while lexical items (nouns, verbs, adjectives) are Goals (G), whose features are interpretable. Agree is the operation that establishes a P-G relation, and the operation Move is triggered by the need to eliminate uninterpretable features, to yield Full Interpretation (FI). The principle of FI specifies that an expression must contain all, and only those features which are relevant for convergence at the interface. The only interface levels are Phonetic Form (PF) and Logical Form (LF), the levels at which phonological and semantic features are interpretable, and they account for the phenomenon of sound and meaning, respectively.

At any point in the derivation, Spell-Out can apply, to split the derivation in two tracks, deriving PF and LF. Movement to PF is overt, and movement to LF is covert. The point at which Spell-Out occurs is a parametric variation, dependent on feature strength. Strong features must be eliminated before Spell-Out, while weak features can wait till LF.
Notions of economy and optimality apply to both the derivations and the occurrence of features. Operations are driven strictly by necessity; they are defined as ‘last resort’, applied if they must, not otherwise. Optimally, a feature occurs on a head only to yield new scopal or discourse related properties and the uninterpretable features of a Probe ($\alpha$) must be in an appropriate relation to the interpretable features of a Goal ($\beta$), i.e. the P-G relation must be local, as in the configuration in 32) below:

$$32) \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{XP} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{X'} \\
\downarrow \\
\alpha \\
\downarrow \\
\text{YP} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{Y'} \\
\downarrow \\
\beta
\end{array}$$

If conditions are satisfied, the uninterpretable features of P delete. Finally, “Probes and Goals must be active - once their features are checked and deleted, these elements can no longer enter into an Agree relation” (Chomsky 2001: 15, italics in original). I assume a highly inflected noun phrase, where each semantic feature heads its own projection. I argue for separate Definiteness and Specificity projections, and, in support of my claim that they are distinct semantic categories, I provide brief definitions in the next section.

### 3.2 Definiteness and Specificity

In the World Atlas of Language Structures, Dryer identifies two broad functions of definite descriptions, as follows:

There are broadly two functions associated with definite articles. One of these is an anaphoric function, to refer back to something mentioned in the preceding discourse. The other is a nonanaphoric function, to refer to something not mentioned in the preceding discourse but whose existence is something that the speaker assumes is known to the hearer.

(154)

The view that Definiteness expresses the discourse pragmatic property of Familiarity is shared by the proponents of the “Familiarity Theory of Definiteness” (Jespersen; Christophersen; Karttunen; Heim 1983, 1988). Jespersen identified several ‘Stages of Familiarity’, ranging from complete
unfamiliarity, which corresponds to indefiniteness, where an indefinite article is used, to complete familiarity, as with proper nouns, where the use of a definite article is made redundant. In between those two, are a number of stages of what Jespersen terms ‘near complete familiarity’ and for which English (and French) uses the definite article. They include:

(a) Direct anaphora - where a referent has previously been introduced in the discourse, as in:

\[33\] \text{I bought a book … the book …} \\
\text{Mon’n aste enn liv … liv \textit{la} \ (Modern MC)} \\
\text{J’ai acheté un livre … le livre \ (French)}

(b) Associative anaphora - where reference is connected to a previously mentioned entity:

\[34\] \text{I read a book … the author} \\
\text{Mo’n lir enn liv … so loter \ (Modern MC)} \\
\text{J’ai lu un livre .. l’auteur \ (French)}

(c) Situational uses, where the identity of the referent is clear from the situational context:

\[35\] \begin{align*}
\text{a. The President of the Republic} & \quad \text{b. Pass me the salt} \\
\text{Prezidan} & \quad \text{Lariblik} \\
\text{Le Président de la République} & \quad \text{Pass moi le sel} \ (Modern MC)
\end{align*}

(d) With fixed concepts, such as unique nouns:

\[36\] \begin{align*}
\text{The sun and the moon} & \quad \text{The sun and the moon} \\
\text{Soley e later} & \quad \text{Le soleil et la terre} \\
\text{(Modern MC)} & \quad \text{(French)}
\end{align*}

English and French use a definite article for (a), (b), (c) and (d), while MC makes a clear distinction in the case of direct anaphora, where the NPs are both [+definite] and [+specific]. This analysis suggests that Definiteness and Specificity are distinct phenomena. While specific NPs refer to a particular individual, non-specific NPs simply refer to a class of objects, or to any individual fitting the description denoted by the NP. Both Strawson and Donnellan explain this contrast in terms of the referential, or identifying, vs. the attributive, or denoting uses of definite descriptions. In her paper on the Semantics of Specificity, Enç notes that ‘while the definiteness of the NP can be determined from the determiner in languages like English, specificity cannot be so determined’ (16).
4 The Analysis

4.1 The Indefinite Singular Determiner ‘enn’

In its development from the numeral *enn* into an indefinite singular determiner, this particle in MC follows the ‘seemingly universal process by which the numeral ‘one’ becomes a marker for singular-indefinite nouns’ (Givon 1981: 35). Givon claims that this development proceeds via a number of steps, the first being that it is used to mark only referential-indefinite nouns, and the terminal stage represented by English, where ‘one’ marks non-referential nouns in all environments’ (1981: 48). He uses a number of diagnostics to determine the stages of grammaticalization attained, such as the environments in which they occur, e.g. as predicates:

37)  
John is a teacher  (non-ref)  (Givon 1981: 48)  
Zan profeser  (modern MC)  
Jean est professeur  (French)

38)  
John is a teacher I met last year (ref)  (Givon 1981: 48)  
Zan *enn* profeser ki mo finn rankontre lane dernyer  (modern MC)  
Jean est un professeur que j’ai rencontré l’année dernière  (French)

The fact that the indefinite article occurs only when the NP is referential suggests that MC *enn*, like French *un/une* has not yet reached the ‘terminal’ stage of grammaticalization.\(^\text{11}\)

4.2 The Null Definite Determiner \(\delta\)

The fact that bare nouns in MC can yield a definite interpretation has been noted by Baker (2003), Bollée and Deprez. However, the specific environments that license the occurrence of this null element have, to my knowledge, not been formally analyzed. In order to account for the singular feature of the definite NP in argument positions, I propose that \(\delta\) forces count nouns to raise to the head of the Number Phrase, which is specified for the contrasting features \([\pm\text{plural}]\). The default for Num\(^0\) is singular, unless the plural marker *bann* is also present in the specifier of NumP, as in the representation in 39) below:

\(^{11}\) For other diagnostics used to determine the stage of development of the numeral ‘one’ into an indefinite article, see Givon (1981).
In the above configuration, *bann* is simply the lexical realization of the feature [+plural] associated with the Number node. It is in complementary distribution with cardinal numerals, and like the indefinite *enn*, it occurs only with count nouns.

### 4.3 The Plural Maker ‘*bann*’

The morpheme *bann* is generally defined simply as a plural marker (Baker and Hookoomsing; Virahsawmy; Carpooran), except for Ledikasyon pu Travayer, who define *bann* as an article, equivalent to English *the* in the plural. This latter definition is probably motivated by the [+definite] feature of *bann* + N in argument positions, e.g.:

40) *ki sorti dan geto et ki exprim lavi dan *bann*  
who come in ghetto and who express life in PL

*getto* (Romaine 128)  
ghetto  
who come from ghettos and who express life in *the ghettos*  
qui sortent des ghettos et expriment la vie dans *les ghettos*

However, the definition of *bann* as definite plural determiner fails to account for its occurrence in existential sentences, as in 1). The [+definite] feature of *bann* + N in argument positions is due to the occurrence of δ, which forces the count noun to raise to Num°. The presence of *bann* in SpecNumP assigns the feature [+plural] to the NP, as in 40). This also accounts for the fact that *bann* always immediately precedes the noun that it modifies.
4.4 The Proportional Quantifier ‘ennbann’

Following the reanalysis of bann as plural marker of both definite and indefinite NPs, the indefinite NP enn bann became somewhat redundant as a marker of [–definite] plural. When first used, éne/ein band very likely retained its French interpretation as a collective noun, meaning a group, but was subsequently reanalyzed as a proportional quantifier, having scope over its complement NP. The changes can be represented as follows:

\[
41) \quad [\text{DP éne} \ [\text{NP bande} \ [\text{NP N}]]] \rightarrow [\text{QP enn bann} \ [\text{NP N}]]
\]

I propose one morpheme for the proportional quantifier enn bann, for which there are no entries in any of the dictionaries or grammars of MC. In modern MC, it functions like a proportional quantifier with the meaning ‘many’, ‘a lot of’, ‘lots of’, ‘several’ (plusieurs, beaucoup de). However, enn and bann obviously still function as separate morphemes in MC, and when string adjacent, they have the meaning ‘one of’, as in the (b) example below:

\[
42) \quad a. \quad \text{Ennbann zanfan} \quad \text{b.} \quad \text{Enn bann zanfan}
\]
\[
\text{many} \quad \text{child} \quad \text{one} \quad \text{PL} \quad \text{child}
\]
\[
\text{Many children} \quad \text{Beaucoup d’enfants} \quad \text{One of the children} \quad \text{Un des enfants}
\]

In the case of one morpheme, the stress is on the seconde syllable, and in the case of two morphemes, the stress is on enn.

4.5 The Demonstrative ‘sa ... ‘la’

The weakening of sa from demonstrative to a simple marker of deixis is of particular interest given the well documented path to grammaticalization of demonstratives into definite articles (Kramsky; Givon 1978; Greenberg; Traugott; Diessel; and Heine and Kuteva). In MC, the use of sa without la is ungrammatical. While French là specifies the deictic value of ce/ces as distal, MC sa reinforces the deictic value of la as proximate:

\[
43) \quad a. \quad *\text{Sa} \quad \text{bebet} \quad b. \quad \text{Bebet la} \quad c. \quad \text{Sa} \quad \text{bebet la}
\]
\[
\text{DEM} \quad \text{insect} \quad \text{insect DEF/SP} \quad \text{DEM insect SP}
\]
\[
\text{The/that insect} \quad \text{This insect} \quad \text{Cet insecte} \quad \text{Cet insecte là}
\]

Sa can only be used on its own only when the noun is modified by a relative clause, as in:
44)  

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sa</strong></td>
<td><strong>de-trwa</strong></td>
<td><strong>referans</strong></td>
<td><strong>istorik</strong></td>
<td><strong>ki</strong></td>
<td><strong>mo</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEM</td>
<td>few</td>
<td>reference</td>
<td>historical</td>
<td>COMP</td>
<td>1.SG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Hookoomsing 26)

cite

Those few historical references that I have cited

Ces quelques références historiques que j’ai citées

The weakening of çà may have been a consequence of the presence of δ, which was already marking definiteness, and to the reanalysis of là as a marker of specificity. Such an analysis complies with economy and optimality requirements of the MP, which stipulates non-redundancy of the occurrence of features.

4.6 **The Specificity Marker ‘la’**

In their *Dictionary of Mauritian Creole*, Baker and Hookoomsing define *la* as a ‘Particle semantically very similar to ‘the’, which marks the specificity of a noun or noun phrase’ (170). Syea claims that it is derived from the French adverbial suffix *là*, which has now ‘degrammaticalized’ into a clitic marking definiteness’ (171). In their Dictionary of Mauritian Creole, Ledikasyon pu Travayer define *la* as a suffix ‘denoting specificity’ (131). The term ‘suffix’ suggests that it is not categorized as an independent morpheme, and this explains the frequent use of a hyphen between the NP and *la* in current literature. But, its definition as a ‘suffix’ fails to account for the occurrence of this morpheme when it is disjoint from the noun that it modifies, as in 45), where it modifies the head noun *lang* and not the verb *rantre* which immediately precedes it:

45)  

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tu</strong></td>
<td><strong>sa</strong></td>
<td><strong>bann</strong></td>
<td><strong>lang</strong></td>
<td><strong>ki</strong></td>
<td><strong>pe</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all</td>
<td>DEM</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>language</td>
<td>COMP</td>
<td>ASP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Rungoo 98)

All these languages that are being introduced

Toutes ces langues qui sont introduites

Rochecouste justifies the post-nominal position of *la* in terms of a head final parameter for this functional item only. This view is also adopted by Lefebvre and Massam for Haitian Creole, which has a similar post-nominal and post-clausal ‘determiner’ *la*. The argument of head parametric variation within the same language, however, is not exactly a ‘minimal’ or ‘optimal’ concept that would facilitate language acquisition.

I propose that the Probe *la* has strong features of Specificity which motivate phrasal movement of a DefP (δ + NP) or a DemP (sa + NP) to its specifier. All modifiers of the noun, such as
adjectives and relative clauses are also raised to the specifier of SpP, deriving the clause final position of *la*. In the following example from modern MC, the DP final *la*, like *sa*, has scope over the NP headed by the noun *zom*, and not over the preceding NP headed by *lamer*, which is embedded in the relative clause.

46) *Sa zom ki okipp partaz delo lamer la* (Maingard 81)

DEM man COMP look after distribution water sea SP

This man who looks after the distribution of sea water

Cet homme qui s’occupe du partage de l’eau de mer

“The operation of ‘pied-piping’ picks up the adjunct along with everything else in the category it identifies” (Chomsky 2001: 21). In this case, the noun and its modifiers (adjectives and relative clauses) are analyzed as a complex quantifier expression, and the whole NP forms a constituent. This movement is a ‘last resort’ operation, one that must occur before Spell-Out, to eliminate the strong Specificity features of *la*.

47) [Diagram of tree structure]

I assume the SpP to also be present in the French DP, but Specificity is a weak feature in French. Checking is at LF and there is no morphological reflex in the syntax.

5 Conclusion

The process of grammaticalization outlined above yields an effective and economical system of determiners, which are able to express, without redundancy, all the semantic features that could no
longer be expressed in the early Creole immediately following the loss of the French determiners. The above analysis suggests that the emergence of a determiner system in MC was driven by the need to map semantic features onto the syntax. However, given that the creators of the creole did not interpret the French articles as functional items, the question is, how did they access the semantics associated with these morphemes? This work so far leaves this question open, but provides evidence that the new creole strived for the means to express them.

**Works Cited**


Strandquist, Rachel Eva. Article Incorporation in Mauritian Creole. MA. University of Victoria, 2005.


## Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>un/une + sing. N</td>
<td>le/la + sing. N</td>
<td>des + plural N</td>
<td>les + plural N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC 1750 - 1820</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>δ + N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>δ + N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ça + N + là</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC 1820 - 1855</td>
<td>éne/eine + N</td>
<td>δ + N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>ça + N + là</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N + là</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC 1855 - 1885</td>
<td>éne/eine + N</td>
<td>δ + N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>tout/tous + N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N + là</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern MC</td>
<td>en+ N</td>
<td>δ + N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>δ + bann + N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>réne/eine band + N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>a/an + sing. N</td>
<td>the + sing. N</td>
<td>plural N</td>
<td>the + plural N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Marking of (In)definiteness on Singular and Plural NPs in MC Nouns from 1750

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>[+definite] [+]specific singular</th>
<th>[+definite] [+]specific plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>le/la/ce/cet(te) + singular N</td>
<td>les/ces + plural N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern MC</td>
<td>δ+ N + là</td>
<td>δ + bann + N + la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>the/that + singular N</td>
<td>the/those + plural N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Marking of Definiteness and Specificity on Singular and Plural NPs in Modern MC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>[+definite] [+]specific [+]deictic singular</th>
<th>[+definite] [+]specific [+]deictic plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>ce/cet(te) + singular N ci/là</td>
<td>ces + plural N ci/là</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern MC</td>
<td>sa + N + là</td>
<td>sa + bann + N + la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>this/that + singular N</td>
<td>these/those + plural N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Marking of Definiteness, Specificity and Deixis on Sing. and Pl. NPs in Modern MC

12 Where so is the 3rd singular possessive pronoun, temporarily used to mark definiteness/specificity, when there was a need to single out a unique referent in the discourse. Its use as a definite determiner disappeared following the grammaticalization of the plural marker bann, but so survives in modern MC as an emphatic determiner on both singular and plural NPs (Guillemin 2007).

13 Là is used only for NPs that are both [+definite] and [+specific] - see Figure 3.
Author/s: Guillemin, Diana

Title: The emergence of a determiner system: the case of Mauritian Creole

Date: 2007


Publication Status: Published

Persistent Link: http://hdl.handle.net/11343/34881

File Description: The emergence of a determiner system: the case of Mauritian Creole