Relexification: A Process Available to Human Cognition

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0. Introduction

This paper is about the cognitive process of relexification. Various representations of this process have been proposed in the literature (see e.g. Muysken 1981; Lefebvre and Lumsden 1994a, 1994b; Mous 1995). For the purpose of this paper, I will assume a definition along the lines of Mous' proposal. Given a lexical entry of a language_i of the type in (1a), with a phonological representation, semantic features, and syntactic features, relexification can be seen as the addition of a new phonological representation to this lexical entry. As can be seen in (1b), this new representation is taken from a language_j. Note, however, that the new phonological representation is identified as j' rather than as j because the new phonological representation is adapted from language, on the basis of language, as is extensively discussed in Lefebvre (1998:16-18) and in Brousseau (in preparation). During a certain period of time, the lexical entry has two phonological representations. In a creole genesis context, eventually, the original phonological representation ceases to be used. The resulting lexical entry has the properties illustrated in (1c)—that is, a phonological representation derived from language_i and semantic and syntactic properties derived from language_i. The process of relexification thus produces new lexical entries that have mixed properties; these properties are mixed in a principled way.

(1) a. Original lexical entry of a language $_i$

/phonology/_i
[semantic feature]_i
[syntactic feature]_i
etc.

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b. Addition of a new phonological representation, taken from a language,

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/phonology/<sub>i</sub> /phonology/<sub>j</sub> [semantic feature]<sub>i</sub> [syntactic feature]<sub>i</sub> etc.
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c. Loss of the original label resulting in a mixed lexical entry

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\begin{pmatrix}
/\text{phonology}/_{j} \\
[\text{semantic feature}]_{i} \\
[\text{syntactic feature}]_{i} \\
\text{etc.}
\end{pmatrix}
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Relexification constitutes an optimal way of creating a new lexicon in a relatively short period of time. This process has been shown to play a role in the formation of mixed languages such as Media Lengua (see e.g. Muysken 1981), Mechif (see e.g. Bakker 1992), and Ma'a (see e.g. Mous 1995). The global results of 25 years of research at UQAM that I conducted with various colleagues (see e.g. Lefebvre and Kaye 1986, Lefebvre and Lumsden 1989a) show that relexification has also played a major role in the formation of creole languages (see Lefebvre 1998, and the references therein), and that the nature of the process explains the principled division of properties between the contributing languages of a given creole.

Our research consisted of a systematic comparison of the lexicon and grammar of Haitian creole with those of its source languages: French, the superstratum language, and Fongbe, one of the substratum languages. Although there were several languages spoken in Haiti at the time the creole was formed, an in-depth study of one substratum language was preferred over a superficial overview of several of them. The various facets of this methodological choice are extensively discussed in Lefebvre (1998:52-77). Note, however, that, as per the historical research carried out by John Singler for our research (see e.g. Singler 1996), the Gbe languages, Fongbe among them, were predominant in Haiti at the time Haitian creole was formed.

In this paper, I show that the process of relexification explains the principled division of properties of the Haitian lexicon between its contributing languages, French and the West African languages. First, I consider major category lexical entries. Second, I discuss the functional categories involved in the nominal structure. Finally, I examine the consequences of the availability of relexification to human cognition.

1. Lexical Semantics

Consider the nouns in (2). The Haitian lexical entries all have two meanings. For example, the noun *plim* means both 'feather' and 'hair'. When we look at the corresponding French lexical entry, we see that the Haitian form is derived from the French; hence, Haitian *plim* is phonologically derived from French *plume*. But

the French lexical entry has only one meaning, and therefore it cannot be the source of the extra meaning associated with the Haitian lexical entry. Where does the extra meaning in the Haitian lexical entry come from? When we look at the corresponding Fongbe lexical entry, we see that the latter has the same two meanings as the Haitian one. This suggests that the substratum lexical entry is the source of the semantic properties of the Haitian one. The nature of the process of relexification predicts the data in (2): lexical entries of the type of the Fongbe ones have been relexified on the basis of French, yielding Haitian lexical entries which have phonological representations derived from French and their other properties derived from the substratum languages.

(2)	HAITIAN plim 'feather' 'hair'	FRENCH plume 'feather'	FONGBE fún 'feather' 'hair'
	vyann 'meat' 'edible animals' (complement of the verb 'to kill')	viande 'meat'	làn 'meat' 'edible animals' (complement of the verb 'to kill')
	dife 'fire' 'brand'	(du) feu 'fire'	myòn 'fĭre' 'brand'
	tèt 'head' 'roof'	tête 'head'	tà 'head' 'roof'
	van 'wind' 'air'	vent 'wind'	jòhòn 'wind' 'air' (from Lefebvre 1998:71)

The verbs in (3) illustrate the same phenomena.

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(3)
        HAITIAN
                                                           FONGBE
                                   FRENCH
        ansasinen
                                   assassiner
                                                           hù
            'to murder'
                                      'to murder'
                                                               'to murder'
            'to mutilate'
                                                               'to mutilate'
        gade
                                   garder
                                                           kpón
            'to watch over/
                                       'to watch over/
                                                               'to watch over/
           take care of'
                                      take care of'
                                                               take care of'
            'to keep'
                                       'to keep'
                                                               'to keep'
                                      regarder 'to look'
            'to look'
                                                               'to look'
                                                               'to imitate'
            'to imitate'
                                       imiter 'to imitate'
        gade
                                   regarder
                                                           kán
                                      'to concern'
                                                               'to concern'
            'to concern'
                                      'to look'
                                                            qbà (-kpó)
         kase
                                   casser
            'to slim down'
                                                               'to slim down'
            'to break'
                                      'to break'
                                                               'to break'
         kraze
                                   écraser
                                                           kîjá
            'to break to pieces'
                                      'to destroy'
                                                               'to break to pieces'
            'to break in
                                      'to crush'
                                                               'to break in
            spreading'
                                                               spreading'
            'to disperse'
                                                               'to disperse'
                                                         (from Lefebvre 1999:69-79)
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The process of relexification also explains why some French lexical entries have not made their way into Haitian creole. Consider the personal pronouns in (4). Haitian has five personal pronouns with a single entry serving as both first and second person plural. The Haitian forms are phonologically derived from French. But French has six personal pronouns. Why did Haitian end up with only five forms? The answer to this question is predicted by the relexification hypothesis. Fongbe has only five forms with one form serving as both first and second person plural. The creators of Haitian who had a paradigm of personal pronouns of the Fongbe type only had five lexical entries to relexify and so they did. This explains why the extra French form did not make its way into Haitian.

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(4)
       a.
           FRENCH
                             b. HAITIAN
                                                       FONGBE
           moi 'me'
                                 mwen 'I, me'
                                                       nyè 'I, me'
           toi 'you (sg.)'
                                  ou/[wu] 'you (sg.)'
                                                       hwè 'you (sg.)'
           lui/elle 'he/she/it'
                                 li 'he/she/it/him/her' é(yè) 'he/she/it/him/her'
           nous 'we/us'
                                 nou 'we/us/you (pl.)' mî 'we/us/you (pl.)'
           vous 'you (pl.)'
           eux/elles 'they/them' yo 'they/them'
                                                       yé 'they/them'
                      ((b) from Valdman et al. 1981, (c)=(18) in Brousseau 1995)
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The paradigm of wh-words provides a similar example. As can be seen in (5a), French has eight or nine wh-words, depending on whether que and quoi are considered to be allomorphs or separate lexical entries. The Haitian wh-words in (5b) have phonological representations that are derived from French. But Haitian has only four wh-words. Questions from other positions have to be rendered in wh-phrases, as shown in (5b'). Why have not all the French wh-forms made their way into Haitian, and why did Haitian end up with these exact four lexical entries and not others? Again, the process of relexification provides an answer to both of these questions. As is shown in (5c), the paradigm of Haitian wh-words presents the same inventory of wh-words as the Fongbe one, and both languages express questions from other positions by means of wh-phrases made up of similar elements: a wh-element meaning 'which' and a noun (for a discussion on the difference in morpheme and word order between Haitian and Fongbe, see Lefebvre 1998:171-183, and the references cited therein). The relexification hypothesis also explains why the other French wh-words did not make their way into Haitian: the creators of the creole did not have these extra lexical entries in their lexicon to relexify.

(5)	a.	lequel/laquelle/lesquels/lesquelles	'which one(s)'	FRENCH
		qui	'who'	
		que/quoi	'what'	
		où	'where'	
		quand	'when'	
		comment	'how'	
		combien	'how much/how m	any'
		pourquoi	'why'	
	b.	ki-lès	'which one'	HAITIAN
		(ki-)sa	'what'	
		kouman	'how'	

b'. ki mounn (=(5) in Brousseau 1995) (which person/who' HAITIAN

'how much, how many'

ki bagay 'which thing/what'
(ki) kote/ki bò 'which place/where'
ki jan 'which manner/how'
ki kalite 'which kind/how'

konbyen

ki lè 'which time, moment/when'

pou ki(-sa) 'for what/why'

c.		HAITIAN	FONGBE	
	wh-words:	ki-lès	dè-tέ	'which one'
		(ki-)sa	(é-)té/ànî	'what'
		kouman	něgbòn	'how'
		konbyen	nàbî	'how many/much'
	wh-phrases:	ki mounn	mè té	'which person/who'
		ki bagay	nǔ tέ	'which thing/what'
		(ki) kote/ki bò	fi (tέ)	'which place/where'
		ki jan	àlò té	'which manner/how'
		ki kalite	àlòkpà té	'which kind/how'
		ki lè	hwènù té	'which moment/time/when'
		pu ki(-sa)	(é)té ú(tú)/	'what cause/why'
			àni ú(tú)	
			(from Lefebvre 1998:171-183)

The Haitian compounds in (6) all refer to body parts. The words that are compounded are all phonologically derived from French. But in French, the corresponding body parts are referred to by means of simplexes. The latter did not make their way into Haitian. Why does this situation obtain? Again, this is predicted by the relexification hypothesis. As is shown in (6), Fongbe refers to these same body parts by means of compounds. Again, the creators of Haitian did not have simplexes to relexify in these cases. This explains why the French simplexes did not make their way into Haitian. The data in (6) further show that the creators of Haitian used the principles of word concatenation of their native

the creators of Haitian used the principles of word concatenation of their native languages in forming the compounds that we find in Haitian, for the Haitian compounds in (6) are formed on the model of the Fongbe ones (for a discussion on the ordering of words in Haitian and Fongbe compounds, see Lefebvre 1998:339-342, and the references therein).

(6)	FRENCH	HAITIAN	FONGBE	
	lèvre 'lip'	po-bouch 'skin-mouth'	nù-fló 'mouth-skin'	ʻlip'
	narine 'nostril'	twou-ne 'hole-nose'	àòntin-dó 'nose-hole'	'nostril'
	cil 'eyelash'	plim-je 'hair-eye'	wùn-dà 'eye-hair'	'eyelash'
	nuque 'nape'	dèyè-kou 'back-neck'	kò-gúdó 'neck-back'	'nape'
	crâne 'skull'	kalbas-tèt 'calabash-head'	tà-ká 'head-calabash'	'skull'
		or tèt-kalbas		

(from Brousseau 1989)

In a similar fashion, and as can be seen in (7), where French has simplexes, Haitian has compounds referring to people having certain characteristics. Again, the Haitian compounds are built on the model of the substratum language.

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(7)		FRENCH	HAITIAN	FONGBE	
	a.	chauve	tèt-chòv	tà-súnsún	'bald (person)'
			(tête-chauve) 'head bald'	'head-bald'	
	b.	personne-	tèt-chaje	tà-gbà	'problematic (person)'
		problème	(tête-troublé) 'head-troubled'	'head-troubled'	
		1			(1-1: 1 ())
	c.	aveugle	je-pete	nukun-tən-nə	'blind (person)'
			(oeil-pété) 'eye-burst'	'eye-burst-ATT'	
	d.	audacieux	je-chèch	hŏn-wùn	'audacious (person)'
			(oeil-sec)	6.1	•
			'eye-dry'	'clear-eye'	
	e.	prétentieux	je-fò	nùkún-kèn	'pretentious (person)'
			(oeil-fort) 'eye-strong'	'eye-strong'	
	f.	entêté	tèt-di	tà-mè-sién-tớ	'stubborn (person)'
		or tête-dure	(tête-dure)		
			'head-hard'	'head-in-hard-A	
				(fi	com Lefebvre 1998:336)

The distribution of light verb constructions versus simplexes in the three languages under comparison constitutes yet another example of relexification. As is shown by the examples in (8), Haitian has a series of light verb constructions. The Haitian examples parallel the Fongbe ones. The Haitian and Fongbe data contrast with French which uses simplexes to refer to the same notions. Again, the French simplexes in (8) did not make their way into Haitian because the creators of Haitian did not have corresponding simplexes to relexify. And again, the concatenation of light verbs and their objects in Haitian follows the pattern of the substratum language.

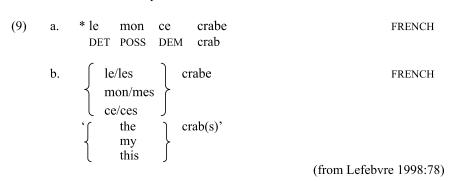
(8)	a.	bat	men	HAITIAN
		xò	àsî	FONGBE
		hit	hand	
		'to ap	plaud/to clap'	
		appla	udir	FRENCH
		'to ap	pplaud/to clap'	

b.	bay	chenn		HAITIAN
	ná	kàn		FONGBE
	give	chain		
	'to wir	nd (e.g. a clock)'		
	remon	ter		FRENCH
	'to wir	nd'		
c.	manje	kòb		HAITIAN
	d ú	àkwέ		FONGBE
		money		
	'to spe	nd'		
	dépens	ser		FRENCH
	'to spe	nd'		
d.	mete	digo		HAITIAN
	đó	àhò		FONGBE
	put	indigo		
	'to tie-dye'			
	teindre	2		FRENCH
	'to tie-	dye'		
		•	(from Lefebvre 19	999:80-81)

The examples in (2)-(8) all illustrate the fact that relexification has played a role in the formation of Haitian creole. Having examined various cases involving major category lexical entries, I now turn to the discussion of the functional categories involved in the nominal structure.

2. Functional Categories Involved in the Nominal Structure

The data in (9) provide an overview of the French nominal structure. They show that in this language the definite determiner, the possessive, and the demonstrative determiners all precede the head noun, and that there can be only one of these per noun phrase. Singular and plural forms are contrasted in (9b) showing that plural is encoded in a bound morpheme in French.



The Haitian and Fongbe nominal structures are illustrated in (10). In both languages, the determiners all follow the head noun. In both languages, a possessor phrase, a demonstrative term, the definite determiner, and the plural marker may all co-occur within the same nominal structure. In both languages, the plural marker is an independent morpheme.

(10)krab [mwen ø] yo **HAITIAN** lê tòn] élá ó FONGBE àsón ſnyὲ crab me GEN DEM DET PL 'these/those crabs of mine (in question/that we know of)' (from Lefebvre 1998:78)

The Haitian and Fongbe nominal structures thus contrast in the same way with the French nominal structure with respect to word order, co-occurrence restrictions of determiners, and with respect to whether the plural marker is a free (in Haitian and Fongbe) or a bound (in French) morpheme.

Moreover, with the exception of their phonological representation, the properties of the definite determiners are the same in Haitian and in Fongbe; these properties contrast in a systematic way with those of the French definite determiner. These contrastive properties, discussed at length in Lefebvre (1998:79-84), are summarized in (11).

(11)FRENCH [+def.] determiner HAITIAN/FONGBE [+def.] determiner pre-nominal post-nominal marked for gender and number - unmarked for gender and number allomorphs: le/la/les/l' - allomorphs: la, a, an, nan, lan/5,5n anaphoric and cataphoric anaphoric partitive *du/des* no partitive obligatory with generic impossible with generic or mass nouns or mass nouns no bare NPs bare NPs *Det [relative clause] N - N [relative clause] Det

Furthermore, the definite determiners involved in the Haitian and Fongbe nominal structures also play a crucial role in the clause structure of these two languages, as is exemplified in (12) (for an extensive discussion of these facts, see Lefebvre 1998:219-247).

(12) a. Li rive a HAITIAN
b. É wá 5
'He has arrived (as expected/as we knew he would).'

A Haitian or Fongbe nominal structure may contain a noun followed by the plural marker only, as is shown in (13). In such a case, the structure is interpreted as definite. Comparable data are impossible in French.

(13)	krab	yo	HAITIAN
	àsón	lê	FONGBE
	crab	PL	
	'the c	abs'	
*	''(som	e) crabs'	
			(=(31) in Lefebvre 1994)

The data in (14) show that Haitian and Fongbe both allow for bare NPs. Bare NPs are not allowed in French.

The data in (15) show that in both Haitian and Fongbe, when the definite determiner and the plural marker co-occur within the same nominal structure, the definite determiner must precede the plural marker.

Finally, in both languages, there is variation between speakers with respect to the possibility of co-occurrence of the determiner and of the plural marker. Crucially, the patterns of variation are the same in both languages. Two slightly different grammars have been reported on in the literature. They are summarized in (16).

(16)**HAITIAN FONGBE** G_1 where la and yo can co-occur where δ and $l\dot{\varepsilon}$ can co-occur (d'Ans 1968:105, Faine (Brousseau and Lumsden 1937:83, Fournier 1977:43, 1992:22, Lefebvre 1998:85) Goodman 1964:45, Joseph 1988:201, Lefebvre and Massam 1988:215, Ritter 1992:207-209, Sylvain 1936:55, Valdman 1978:1994-1995) G_2 where la and yo cannot co-occur where δ and $l\dot{\varepsilon}$ cannot co-occur (DeGraff 1992:107, Joseph (Agbidinoukoun 1991:149) 1988:201, Lumsden 1989:65)

The French and Haitian paradigms of deictic terms are also strikingly different, whereas the Haitian and Fongbe paradigms of deictic terms are strikingly parallel. Due to space limitations, suffice to say here that, while French has eleven deictic terms that can be involved in the nominal structure, Haitian and Fonge have two. These are shown in (17).

(17) HAITIAN FONGBE sa (é)ló sila (é)né

In Lefebvre (1997, 1998:89-101), it is extensively argued that the properties of the two Haitian terms are not the same as those of the French lexical entries (*ça* and *celui-là*, respectively) which were the source of the phonological representation of the Haitian ones; it is further extensively argued that the two Haitian terms do have the same distributional and syntactic properties as the Fongbe corresponding ones. Furthermore, in Lefebvre (in press), it is shown that in both Haitian and Fongbe, there are three interpretive patterns (identified below as G1, G2 and G3) for the pairs of deictic terms. These are shown in (18) and (19), respectively. Crucially, these patterns are identical for Haitian and Fongbe.

(18)G1 sa [+ proximate] sila [- proximate] **HAITIAN** G2 sa [α proximate] sila [- proximate] G3 sa [α proximate] sila [α proximate] Sources: G1: Tinelli (1970:28), Goodman (1964:51) G2: Lefebvre (1997) [see also data in Sylvain (1936) and in Étienne (1974)] G3: Férère (1974:103), Valdman (1978:194), Valdman et al. (1981), Joseph (1989), and my own field notes

(19) G1 (é)ló [+ proximate] (é)né [- proximate] FONGBE G2 (é)ló [α proximate] (é)né [- proximate] G3 (é)ló [α proximate] (é)né [α proximate] Sources: G1: Anonymous (1983), Segurola (1963), and my own field notes G2: Lefebvre (1997) G3: My own field notes

The data discussed in this section, (9)-(19), show the remarkable parallel that exists between the nominal structures of Haitian and Fongbe. As is extensively argued in Lefebvre (1998:89-101, in press), the extraordinary similarity that exists between the functional categories of the Haitian and Fongbe nominal structures follows from relexification.

3. Theoretical Consequences

On the basis of a small set of data, involving minor as well as major syntactic category lexical items, I have shown that the process of relexification explains in a straightforward way the mixed properties of the Haitian lexicon. A more exhaustive comparison of the three lexicons under study may be found in Lefebvre (1998, 1999, in press, and the references therein). My conclusion is that the process of relexification has played a major role in the formation of Haitian creole. I extend this conclusion to other creoles as well. I assume, however, that the quantity of relexified lexical entries may vary between creoles due to variable factors such as the amount of exposure to the superstratum language, etc.

The fact that relexification can be argued to have been at work in various cases of mixed languages and of creole languages argues that this mental process is available to human cognition. It is used as a means of creating new languages in a relatively short time. The fact that it exists and the very nature of the process support Sproat's (1985) and Pranka's (1983) proposal that phonological representations are stored independently in the brain. By definition, the process is used by speakers who already master the properties of a mature lexicon, hence by adults. This challenges the claim that adults have a marginal role in linguistic change (for a discussion of this point, see also Hopper and Traugott 1993:21). The process creates hybrid languages straying from the normal course of linguistic change. This poses a problem for the genetic classification of the languages so formed. If it is the case that relexification is a major process in creole genesis, it calls into question the assumption that all creole languages are alike, as is advocated in Bickerton (1981, 1984). Indeed, due to the very nature of the process, creole languages reproduce the semantic and syntactic properties of their substratum languages.

 $^{^2}$ For a thorough discussion on the complexity of the linguistic situations in which relexification applies in creole genesis, showing that Haitian is not simply a relexified version of Fongbe, see Lefebvre 1998:15-50, in press). For a discussion of the other processes involved in creole genesis, see the same sources and the references cited therein.

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