

Preverbal Markers in Hawaiian Creole English

Linguists call the creole language of Hawaii, “Hawaiian Creole English” (HCE). By its native speakers, it is referred to as “Pidgin”. It has Standard American English (SAE) as its lexifier. HCE is a relatively recently developed creole, arising in the early 20th century, whereas most other creoles have their roots centuries earlier. Nonetheless it shows many of the features shared by other creole languages.

This paper will focus on one of these common features shared by most creoles, the expression of tense, modality, and aspect, TMA. Bickerton (1981) states that creoles typically mark TMA by using independent markers rather than inflectional verbal affixation. Specifically, this paper compares the schema for the TMA markers proposed by Bickerton in 1981 and a later schema proposed by Sakuda and Siegel in 2003; it will also refine the latter schema by more fully describing three of the new marker categories that Sakuda and Siegel introduce.

Bickerton, TMA Marker Analysis

Bickerton (1981) described the general linguistic feature of TMA marking in creole languages. Specifically, he spoke of the *anterior* tense marker, the *irrealis* mood marker, and the *nonpunctual* aspect marker. His observation is that these markers uniformly appear in this order in creole languages. Hence, the designation TMA, to indicate the ordering as well as the function.

HCE was one of the languages that Bickerton (1981) used when he described these markers. Specifically, in HCE, he cites the *anterior* marker **bin**¹²³ (been), the *irrealis* marker **go** (go), and the *nonpunctual* marker **ste** (stay).

¹ The examples in the paper are drawn from a number of sources. The orthography used for HCE varies quite widely. Some of the examples use acrolectal (SAE) spellings, slightly modified to express the phonological variation from SAE. Other examples use Oddo notation, which is a more phonetic representation. It can typically be read loosely as IPA. In general, this paper will preserve the orthography that was used in the source.

² The currently more common *anterior* marker is ‘wen’. Bickerton (1981) claims this is phonologically derivable from the older ‘bin’ marker. Other researchers (Velupillai, 2003) suggest that ‘wen’ derives from (went) rather than (been), the commonly accepted source for ‘bin’.

³ In these examples, the preverbal markers are indicated by **bold**, where the main verbs are indicated by *italics*.

Here are some examples of these markers taken from Bickerton, 1981. First, their use individually as compared to sentences without the markers.

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|-----|--|-------------------|
| (1) | he <i>walk</i> .
He walked. | (Bickerton, 1981) |
| (2) | he bin <i>walk</i> .
He had walked. | (Bickerton, 1981) |
| (3) | he go <i>walk</i> .
He would walk. He will walk. | (Bickerton, 1981) |
| (4) | he stay <i>walk</i> .
He is walking. He was walking. | (Bickerton, 1981) |

Some more examples, showing that TMA markers can also be combined.

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|-----|---|-------------------|
| (5) | he bin go <i>walk</i> .
He would have walked. | (Bickerton, 1981) |
| (6) | he bin stay <i>walk</i> .
He was walking. He had been walking. | (Bickerton, 1981) |
| (7) | he go stay <i>walk</i> .
He would be walking. He will be walking. | (Bickerton, 1981) |
| (8) | he bin go stay <i>walk</i> .
He would have been walking. | (Bickerton, 1981) |

Also, typical of creole languages, HCE shows differences in the meanings of the preverbal markers before two different classes of verbs: stative and non-stative, sometimes termed dynamic. Bickerton (1981) and others have noted that non-stative verbs cannot take the *nonpunctual* marker.

- | | | |
|------|--|-------------------|
| (9) | he <i>love</i> .
He loves. | (Bickerton, 1981) |
| (10) | he bin <i>love</i> .
He loved. | (Bickerton, 1981) |

- (11) he **go** *love*. (Bickerton, 1981)
He would love. He will love.

- (12) he **bin go** *love*. (Bickerton, 1981)
He would have loved.

As you can see, there are a few differences between the stative and non-stative verbs, besides the lack of the non-punctual marker. The base (bare) form of the verb is generally understood as present tense, rather than simple past as in the case of non-stative verbs. Otherwise, one can almost consider the stative as a subset of the paradigm for the non-stative verb.

HCE as a Creole Language

HCE, as a language, has maintained strong, on-going contact with its lexifier SAE. This contact has introduced broad variety in the realization of the creole. The HCE one hears can vary from speech which is virtually indistinguishable from the acrolectal SAE through to basolectal forms which are generally unintelligible to speakers of SAE. Bickerton (1975) described this modification of the creole language toward the acrolect and the resulting range of forms of creole speech, the *post-creole continuum* as a process of *decreolization*. Others have used a more general term, *creole continuum*, to refer the variable forms of the creole. This term does not imply the “erosion” of the creole toward the acrolect.

One aspect of the creole continuum for HCE is the breakdown of the typical preverbal TMA marker system, with the introduction of other verbal forms. Interestingly, in the case of HCE, this includes very little inflectional marking in the verb itself. What is seen is the introduction of the present progressive suffix **-ing** and some suppletive past tense forms such as **sed** (said) rather than **wen** *se*.

- (13) She *talking* to herself. (Lum, 1998)
She is talking to herself.

- (14) Shi *sed* shi **wen** *smok* om. (Sakoda & Siegel, 2003)
She said she smoked it.

Sakoda and Siegel Verbal Marker Schemata

In fact, the simple and elegant TMA markers described by Bickerton (1981) have been replaced by a much more complicated system described by Sakoda and Siegel (2003). Here they describe the preverbal markers for stative verbs as:

Tense	Modal	<i>chrai</i>	Auxiliary	Main verb
wen gon yustu	kaen laik haeftu sapostu	chrai	ste stat pau	<i>stative verb</i>

Figure 1: Preverbal VP Structure for Stative Verbs, Sakoda & Siegel (2003)

There is a similar chart for non-stative verbs, which they term ‘active’.

Tense	Modal	SV	<i>chrai</i>	SV	Auxiliary	SV	Main verb
wen gon yustu	kaen laik haeftu sapostu gata beta	go kam	chrai	go kam	ste stat pau	go kam	<i>active verb</i>

Figure 2: Preverbal VP Structure for Active Verbs, Sakoda & Siegel (2003)

A cursory comparison of the two charts shows that the non-stative verb markers can be viewed as a subset of the stative verb markers. The discussion in Sakoda and Siegel treats the two sets of markers in a combined format as well.

A quick glance at this table highlights several marked differences from the system that Bickerton had described. Let’s discuss these changes by first considering what is shared between these two charts. Starting immediately left of the main static verb, the first change is cosmetic only, the use of ‘Auxiliary’ to mark ‘Aspect’. This column includes the *nonpunctual* marker **ste** (stay) as described in Bickerton (1981), but also the *inchoative* marker **stat** (start) and the *completive* marker **pau** (Hawaiian, finish).

- (15) Wat yu **ste** *it*? (Sakoda & Siegel, 2003)
What are you eating?

(16) I **wen start** *eating* the Raisinets all one time. (Yamanaka, 1998)
I started eating the Raisinets all at once.

(17) Jesus **pau** *use* all dis kine story fo teach. (Da Jesus Book: Matt 13:53, 2000)
Jesus had finished these parables.

The modal column seems that it may have replaced Bickerton's mood column. However, the contents are quite different than the *irrealis* marker **go** described by Bickerton (1981). Here we see a *potential* marker **kaen** (can), a *desirative* marker **laik** (like), a *hortative* marker **haefvu** (have to), and a weaker *hortative* marker **supostu** (supposed to). Clearly this shows the effect of decreolization, as these markers are very similar in form and usage to the corresponding SAE modals.

(18) You **can** *tell* she smot. (Kearns, 2000)
You can tell she's smart.

(19) Herod **wen laik** *kill* him. (Da Jesus Book: Matt 14:5, 2000)
Herod wanted to kill him.

(20) All da time you **have to** *try* your best. (Lum, 1998)
You always have to try your best.

(21) Dey **suppose to** *wash* um. (Da Jesus Book: Mark 7:3, 2000)
They must wash them.

Closer to a true mood marker is the column labeled simply **chrai**. The marker **chrai** patterns like the modals in that it follows the tense marker and precedes the aspect marker. However, unlike the modals, which cannot co-occur with other modals, **chrai** can be used with a modal and follows it.

(22) I **like try** *explain* something to you. (Kearns, 2000)
I want to try and explain something to you.

The basic sense of the **chrai** marker is two-fold. One it expresses 'optionality' (22), the other a mild imperative (23).

(23) Faye, **try wait!** (Kearns, 2000)
Faye, wait a minute!

Finally, we have the tense column with the *anterior* marker **wen**⁴ (went), the *future* marker **gon** (going), and the *historic habitual* marker **yustu** (used to). Once again, the decreolization of HCE seems evident in the forms for these tense markers. In fact, the *new* markers mirror the form and usage of the corresponding SAE constructions.

- (24) Dey **wen** *cut* down da mango tree. (Tonouchi, 1998)
They cut down the mango tree.
- (25) You **goin** *born* one boy. (Da Jesus Book: Luke 1:31, 2000)
You will give birth to a boy.
- (26) Wel a *ged* wan fren a **justu** *wrk* wit. (Velupillai, 2003)
Well, I have a friend I used to work with.

Now, let us continue by considering the differences between Figures 1 and 2. First, a minor point, there are some new modal markers, **gata** (got to) and **beta** (better) both of which are *hortative* markers, like **haeftu** and **supostu**.

- (27) Okay, but I **gotta** *eat* early. (Tonouchi, 1998)
Okay, but I have to eat early.
- (28) So, you **betta** *do* um! (Da Jesus Book: Matt 5:33, 2000)
Make good all your pledges.

As described by Bickerton (1981), the TMA markers appear in a fixed order. (29) shows that the tense marker precedes the modal marker. (30) shows the ordering of tense before aspect markers. And, (31) shows the modal before aspect order.

- (29) Shi **wen sapostu** *klin* da haus. (Sakoda & Siegel, 2003)
She was supposed to clean the house.
- (30) De **gon ste** *plei* da gem tumaro. (Sakoda & Siegel., 2003)
They'll be playing the game tomorrow.
- (31) Yu **sapostu ste** *mek* da rais awredi. (Sakoda & Siegel, 2003)
You were supposed to have made the rice.

⁴ As noted before, **wen** seems to have replaced the older anterior marker **bin** in modern HCE, with the exception of dialectal variation. On Kauai, the form **bin** is still heard.

This use (31) of the **ste** marker is interesting in that it clearly demonstrates **ste** as a non-punctual marker, rather than progressive as in (30). In use with ‘accomplishment’ verbs, it may indicate not the on-going work to accomplish the goal, but rather the on-going state of having accomplished that goal. It is rendered as the English perfect, ‘to have made’.

The Serial Verb Categories in Sakuda and Siegel

A more substantive difference is the inclusion of the columns marked “SV”, serial verb, at three different places within the schema for non-stative verbs, Figure 2. It is interesting to note that the elements in these three columns labeled “SV” are uniformly the two entries **go** and **kam**. It is also worthy of note that Muysken and Veenstra (1995) state that HCE does not have serial verbs in the same sense as a number of other creole languages do.

If this is the case, then how should one analyze these markers **go** (go) and **kam** (come)?

In examining similar structures, Rizzi (1997) talked about the fine structure of the ‘left periphery’, that is, the various different kinds of mark-up that may occur at the leading edge of the VP structure. His work, as well as that of many other syntacticians, suggests that these different positions actually perform different functions. The rest of this paper will examine cases of multiple preverbal markers in the syntactic literature to try to tease apart the functions of these reported serial verbs, **go** and **kam**.

One should note that **go** and **kam** as markers form a closed class. There are only these two “serial verbs” in HCE. The very characteristic might well prompt one to consider this pair of words as candidates for a functional category, rather than a lexical.

Let's us begin by considering the rightmost SV column. In this location, these markers seem to function deictically, indicating directionality. One sees a similar function in the adstrates⁵ Korean and Japanese. In Korean, ‘gada’ *go* [가다] and ‘oda’ *come* [오다]. These are used in many compound verb pairs: ‘nagada’ *exit, go out* [나가다] and ‘naoda’ *emerge* [나오다]; ‘deureogada’ *take away* [들어가다] and ‘deureooda’ *hand in* [들어오다]. Similarly in

⁵ While both Korean and Japanese are relatively later adstrates into HCE, the time difference is only about a decade, particularly for Japanese. While this suggestion of grammatical input from later adstrates is less typical, the use of ‘go’ and ‘come’ as deictic verbs is certainly not limited to these two languages among the adstrates of HCE.

Japanese, ‘kuru’ *come* [来る] and ‘iku’ *go* [行く], in compounds such as ‘motte kuru’ *bring* [持って来る] and ‘motte iku’ *take away* [持って行く].

- (32) We can **go** *find* dah treasure and take ‘em. (Pak, 1998)
We can go and find the treasure and take it.
- (33) Mo bettah he **come** *play* handball wit us. (Lum, 1999)
It’d be better if he came to play handball with us.
- (34) So da worka guys **wen go** *check out* all da roads. (Da Jesus Book: Matt 22:5, 2000)
So, the servants went out into all the byroads.

This is a most interesting position because here they come *to the right* of the aspect markers, as shown in (35) and (36). This is an uncharacteristic place for any sort of verbal marker, since the commonly accepted theory suggests that aspectual marking is closest to the verb. Indeed this deictic reading for **go** and **kam** does seem more like a serial verb construction.

- (35) Shi **ste go** *bai* wan baeg rais. (Sakoda & Siegel, 2003)
She’s going to buy a bag of rice.
- (36) Ai **ste go** *si* da gai. (Sakoda & Siegel, 2003)
I keep going to see the guy.

The other uses (positions) for the verb **go** seem to have different usage, as one would expect based on Rizzi (1995). The other positions do not show evidence of **kam**, as noted in Sakoda and Siegel (2003).

As an example, Sakoda and Siegel (2003) observe that **go** can express *intention*.

- (37) Wai yu **go** *du* daet? (Sakoda & Siegel, 2003)
Why did you go and do that?

Here the intentionality associated with **go** has more or less modal force. One could almost gloss it as ‘and, why did you want to do that?’

Sakoda and Siegel (2003) point out that **go** can also function as an *irrealis* marker, indicating an unplanned future or hypothetical action.

(38) Yu **go ste** *go*; ai **go ste** *kam*. (Sakoda & Siegel, 2003)
You go ahead (keep going); I'll be coming (afterwards).

(39) Mobeta wi **go tel** *hr*. (Sakoda & Seigel, 2003)
It would be better if we tell her.

Moreover, Sakoda and Siegel (2003) show **go** as a future marker, in the same vein as the tense marker **gon**.

(40) Ai **go kam** tomorrow. (Sakoda & Siegel, 2003)
I'll come tomorrow.

The interpretation proposed by this report (so far) is as follows: The future reading for **go** will be taken as an alternate form for the given future marker **gon**. The “SV” column to the right of aspect contains the deictic (serial?) verbs **go** and **kam**. For the other two columns marked “SV”, one is the *irrealis* marker **go**, and the other is the *intention* marker **go**. The question then becomes which of these “SV” columns is which. Sakoda and Siegel provide examples to tease these apart.

(41) Ai **like chrai go cam mek** kukis with yu. (Sakoda & Siegel, 2003)
I want to try to come and make cookies with you.

(42) Ai **go chrai du** om fo yu. (Sakoda & Siegel, 2003)
I'll try to do it for you.

Sakoda and Siegel analyze (41) as “**go** indicates an unplanned future action, and **kam** indicates motion toward the listener.” So the *irrealis* reading follows **chrai**. Then the *intention* reading is the **go** the precedes **chrai**, which is consistent with the sense of (42).

A Modest Proposal

My proposal is that the preverbal entities shown in this chart are all TMA-type markers. Thus, the entries marked in this chart as ‘SV’ (serial verb) are, in fact, TMA markers. Thus, this is consistent with other analyses of HCE as lacking the serial verb construction. Furthermore, I propose that the chart be relabeled as follows.

Namely, the lowest projection that had been marked as serial verb is a *deictic* projection. In this layer, we have both **go** and **kam** as potential markers. The projection that had been labeled as serial verb immediately to the right of **chrai** is now interpreted to be the *irrealis* projection. The one which comes to the left of **chrai** is marked as the *intention* projection. These latter two landing sites accommodate only the morpheme **go**.

Tense	Modal	Intention	chrai	Irrealis	Aspect	Deictic	Main verb
wen gon yustu	kaen laik haeftu sapostu gata beta	go kam	chrai	go kam	ste stat pau	go kam	<i>various active verbs</i>

Figure 3: Proposed Preverbal VP Structure for Active Verbs

By the creation of the new categories of *intention* and *irrealis*, this set of distinctions can be sidestepped. That is, the membership of the category accurately reflects the available items for use within that projection of IP.

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