

A Comparative Analysis of the Functions of the Preverbal Markers 'Bin' and 'Go' in Jamaican Post-Creole and Hawaiian English

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ABSTRACT

Pidgin and Creole languages are probably not recent innovations in human linguistic history. It is likely that ancient Egyptian, Sumerian, and Chinese soldiers and merchants used variations of Pidgin to communicate with the so-called "barbarians" they encountered at the borders of their empires. Hall (1966:3)

The objective of this study is to explore the function of the markers "bin" and "go" in both Jamaican Post-Creole and Hawaiian English. To address this, the researcher has reviewed the works of Bickerton, Mufwene, Todd, Day, and Tsuzaki. Specifically, the study aims to determine whether "bin" functions as a marker of the simple past in Jamaican Post-Creole and Hawaiian English, or it serves a different function. Observations from Bickerton and Day will be central to this analysis. Another key question is whether the marker "wen," derived from "bin," results from tense neutralization, as suggested by Day, or from the process of decreolization, as proposed by Bickerton. Additionally, the study explores whether "go" functions as a marker or simply as a regular verb. To achieve these objectives, the research reviews existing literature and studies related to this topic. The findings indicate that both Jamaican Post-Creole and Hawaiian English use the markers "bin" and "go." While "bin" typically signals the past tense, it cannot be considered merely a marker of the simple past. Bickerton's suggestion to label it as "anterior" seems more accurate. However, this analysis has some limitations, as "bin" is sometimes used with non-stative verbs while still indicating the simple past. Bickerton attributes this to cultural factors rather than linguistic ones, which introduces some ambiguity. The conversion of "bin" to "wen" in Hawaiian may be linked to either the process of decreolization or tense neutralization. Day emphasizes the importance of recognizing decreolization, as it involves significant changes to Creole features, such as the adoption of standard features or sound modifications. The similarity between "bin" and "wen" in terms of neutralization supports the idea that their conversion may be part of the decreolization process. The Hawaiian marker "go" appears to signal the future, conditional mood, and direction. However, its ambiguity suggests that such exceptions are inherent in all languages.

Keywords: Pidgin and Creole, Jamaican Post-Creole, Hawaiian English.

I. Introduction

Pidgin and Creole are two types of languages that emerged during the Middle Ages and are spoken in various parts of the world. They developed as a result of contact between speakers of different languages. A Pidgin is a simplified language with a limited vocabulary and basic grammatical structure, created to facilitate communication between groups that do not share a common language. When a Pidgin becomes the native language of a speech community, it evolves into a Creole. At this stage, its structure expands to incorporate a more complex lexicon and syntactic system, allowing it to express a full range of human experiences. This suggests a process through which a Pidgin develops into a Creole, as well as a subsequent stage in which a Creole undergoes further influence from one of its donor languages, a phenomenon known as the post-Creole continuum. De Camp (1974:38) uses the term "**post-Creole continuum**" to describe the gradual transition between a Creole language and the standard variety of one of its donor languages. Todd (1974:3) defines a Pidgin as "a marginal language that arises to fulfil certain restricted communication needs among people who have no common language."

When we examine the syntax of Pidgin languages, we find that it is less complex and less flexible than the structure of the languages in contact. This is because Pidgin languages develop with a limited vocabulary, primarily for basic communication to meet specific needs.

Todd (Ibid) suggests that a Creole language emerges when a Pidgin language becomes the primary language of a speech community. However, to better understand the definition of a Creole, it is important to recognize that while a Creole retains the basic structure of its Pidgin predecessor, it must also develop the capacity to express the full range of human experience. This includes a richer lexicon and a more complex syntactic system.

The post-Creole stage is a more developed form of Creole that incorporates features of a standard language. This transformation occurs when a Creole language interacts with one of its donor languages, a process known as decreolization. During this process, different degrees of Creole merge with the standard language, resulting in a continuum that includes Crolect, upper Mesolect, Mesolect, lower Mesolect, and Basilect. These terms represent varying levels of linguistic development, ranging from Creole to the standard language. The following diagram illustrates the progression along this continuum.

| | | | | | | |
|--------|----------|----------------|----------|----------------|---------|------------------|
| Creole | Basilect | Lower Mesolect | Mesolect | Upper Mesolect | Crolect | Standard English |
|--------|----------|----------------|----------|----------------|---------|------------------|

(Bickerton, D.,1975:84)

II. Research Questions

This study examines the function of the preverbal marker 'bin' in Jamaican Post-Creole, investigating whether it serves as a simple past tense marker or has a broader grammatical role. Additionally, it explores the evolution of 'bin' into 'wen' in Hawaiian English, analysing the linguistic factors driving this change. Furthermore, the study investigates the role of the marker 'go' in both Jamaican Post-Creole and Hawaiian English to compare its grammatical functions across these varieties.

III. Literature Review

1. Jamaican Post-Creole

Pidgin and Creole English have been in contact with various non-Creole English varieties for over three hundred years, influencing them to the extent that new varieties of non-Creole English have emerged. Some of these varieties are closer to Standard English, while others remain more aligned with Creole, which originally developed from Pidgin. Education has played a significant role in the process of decreolization, leading to the adoption of many Standard English features in Creole. Jamaican Creole has already undergone this process and has reached the post-Creole stage, where interaction between different varieties of English continues (Todd, pp. 63–64).

Todd and Cassidy offer differing perspectives on the existence of Creole varieties. Todd emphasizes their natural emergence, whereas Cassidy attributes their existence to two primary conditions. The first is the arrival of many Africans from diverse linguistic backgrounds who were unable to preserve their African languages or acquire fluent English. The second is the influence of education, as those who did not receive formal schooling in England struggled to learn proper English. However, over the years, profound social changes have pushed Jamaican English toward the more educated end of the linguistic spectrum (Cassidy, 1971, pp. 204–205).

2. Hawaiian English

The status of Hawaiian English has attracted the attention of many linguists, as they differ on how to classify it—whether it should be considered a pidgin, a creole, or a dialect of the English language.

Tsuzaki (1971: 330) divides the basic systems of Hawaiian English as follows: In my version of the coexistence view, the basic systems of Hawaiian English (HE) consist of (1) an English-based pidgin, (2) an English-based creole, and (3) a dialect of the English language, which in turn is divisible into (a) a non-standard variety and (b) a standard variety. System (1) will be referred to as Hawaiian Pidgin English

(HPE), system (2) as Hawaiian Creole English (HCE), and system (3) as a Hawaiian dialect of English (HDE), with (3a) as Non-standard Hawaiian English (NSHE) and (3b) as Standard Hawaiian English (SHE).

As we see above, the issue of classifying Hawaiian English—whether it is more closely linked to Standard English or to pidgin and creole varieties—motivates many linguists. Only by studying this variety of English from different perspectives might one might reach a decisive conclusion.

3. The Function of the Preverbal "Bin" in Jamaica

There is a common belief that the preverbal marker "bin" in Atlantic Creole is a marker of the simple past tense. However, Bickerton's study on Guyanese Creole shows that "bin" behaves differently and is not an indicator of the simple past tense.

"I shall here demonstrate that 'bin' behaves differently from a simple past marker in at least one Creole (Guyanese) and that there is strong evidence for supposing that its Guyanese function is common if not universal in Anglo-Creole generally" (Bickerton 1979: 309).

Bickerton disagrees with the notion that "bin" should be considered a marker of the simple past. He argues that in Guyanese Creole, where many linguistic features are common among Anglo-Creoles, "bin" behaves differently than a simple past marker. According to Bickerton's analysis, there is a distinction between stative and non-stative verbs. He argues that if "bin" is generally considered to indicate a time preceding the reference time, it may indicate the simple past for stative verbs. However, for non-stative verbs, it must indicate a time before the past, resembling the English pluperfect. He provides the following examples:

A. With stative verbs:

Di dakta se di iskeep a naro maasin wel mi na bin wan sen Mesiji hoom tel dem da mi in jaatong in hospital.

Well, I did not want to send a message home to tell them (his family) that I was in Georgetown in the hospital.

B. With non-stative verbs:

Bot happen so non a dem neva kom. Tu taim awi he am wan taim J-----son se dem black piipl bin stapi kza fi biit am anting.

Twice we heard it (the warning drum)... One time, J-----son said that either coming or going, those Black people had stopped his car to beat him up or something.

Bickerton interprets the meaning of "bin" as indicating a time preceding the reference time. However, he also demonstrates that "bin" with non-stative verbs does not always need to be translated as the English pluperfect. He provides the following example:

Dem bin get wud plau lang taim - bin a plau raisfil an deey tu kom dem bin get aksin an dem bin get plau an...

In the old days, they got wooden ploughs, they ploughed the rice field, and then later on, they got oxen and (iron) ploughs. (Bickerton 1997: 309)

Bickerton links cases of what he calls "non-English pluperfect" to cultural factors. He explains that the function of "bin" in this case reflects a comparison between old and new methods of ploughing.

Furthermore, Bickerton refers to the function of tense in Indo-European languages, where time is measured from a single fixed reference point, such as "now." According to him, if an event occurs before this point, it is considered past. However, he argues that this is not the only way to measure time:

"However, this is far from being the only way of measuring time. Time can be measured without reference to (now) or the speaker; the state and the actions that form the subject of discourse can themselves serve as reference points, and their position in time relative to one another, rather than relative to a single fixed point, can determine how they will be marked for tense. Such a system would replace the past distinction with one which we may call anterior" (Bickerton 1997: 310).

To resolve this ambiguity, Bickerton uses the term *anterior* to refer to the more recent of any state or action. Thus, he considers "bin" an anterior marker.

Mufwene supports Bickerton's proposal of using the term *anterior* to explain the function of "bin" and "go." He states: "The first could be a true morphological inflection whose sole function as a sentential time adverb (with pre-verbal occurrence) is to indicate anterior past reference" (Mufwene 1983:160).

4. The Function of the Preverbal “bin” in Hawaii

The function of the preverbal "bin," which in Jamaica indicates the past tense, converts in Hawaii into "wen." This process of conversion has become the subject of various interpretations. Day, in reference to the past tense of Hawaiian English, names this process "tense neutralization" in order to sustain his suggestion regarding the function of this preverbal, he states: "By this term, I mean the neutralization of the past tense to the unmarked, or present tense. This occurs in connection with another past tense or past time adverbial in a clause, which usually precedes, in surface structure, the tense that is neutralized" (Day 1975:307).

Day demonstrates that the past tense is formed by placing the past tense marker (wen) before the verb. E.g., *Oh! I (wen) grab am up.* I picked it up. (Day 1975:306)

However, he does not generalize this process of inserting "wen" before all verbs to form the past tense. Only verbs that are used in standard English and verbs that show ablaut and other vowel changes in Standard English (SE) are supposed to be included in this process.

Yet, there are some cases where the verbs are not preceded by "wen" but still refer to the past tense in the underlying structure, and they appear in the present tense in surface structure.

E.g.:

So hi wen daon daen opin da doa a trean te drag da gea aot. So he went down and opened the door and tried to drag the guy out (Day 1973:307).

Thus, both verbs ("opin" and "traen") are not preceded by either "wen" to indicate the past for the first verb, or "was" to indicate the past progressive for the second verb. Day considers it a mystery if the case of these two verbs is not an example of tense neutralization.

E.g.:

in doz deiz in hana. In those days in Hana. (Ibid: 308)

The phrase "in those days" obviously indicates the past tense. Day calls this case the underlying structure sequence of past time verbal.

Bickerton relates the conversion of "bin" to "wen" to the process of decreolization. "...the decreolization process eventually turns the anterior marker into one simple past tense, but, just as in Guyana, this process cannot take place until the first-phrase marker (bin) has been entirely replaced by the second-phrase marker, 'wen'" (Bickerton 1980:7).

However, Bickerton does not neglect the existence of "bin," which is still used by some native speakers. He means that the function of "bin" is still anterior, just like its function in Jamaica when distinguishing between stative and non-stative. He suggests the same function for "wen" in Hawaii.

5. The Status of the preverbal "Go" in Jamaica

Mufwene, referring to time reference, emphasizes the distinction between realis and irrealis tense, a concept suggested by Bickerton. He supports this suggestion by discussing the marker "go," which he considers the only tense marker that functions as a regular verb in both Jamaican Post-Creole and Guyana Creole. This is because the marker "go" appears not only in the delimited form "ago," but also in non-auxiliary combinations (Salikoko S. Mufwene: 158).

For example:

- *Mi ago a skuul nou, mi kyann kom (fi) si yu.* "I am going to school now; I can't come to see you."
- *Mi sun go aposafis fi sem mi leta.* "I am going soon to the post office to send my letter." (Mufwene: 158)

Mufwene concludes that "go" is a regular verb and cannot simply be regarded as a subsequence, as it indicates subsequence only through regular verbal complementation. If we consider it a tense marker, we find support for this interpretation in its Standard English translation, as well as its alternation with the acrolectal-based form *wi* and the forms *gwain* and *gwe*, which are morphological adaptations of the acrolectal "be going" (Mufwene: 158).

Mufwene also provides an example from Jamaican Creole, suggesting that "go" may serve a different function beyond subsequence, such as a directional verb. He states:

For example:

- *Yu a go si Brenda?* "Are you going to see Brenda?" (Mufwene: 158)

A directional verb seems to be a universal candidate for assuming the role of a subsequence marker, particularly where no specialized morpheme exists to exclusively perform this function (Mufwene: 159).

6. The Status of the preverbal "Go" in Hawaii

Bickerton describes the marker "go" as an "irrealis" and explains this function through the functional relationship between the markers "stay," "go," and "bin." "Stay" is considered a non-punctual marker, while "go," an irrealis marker, can indicate either the future or a conditional situation.

For example:

- A. *When he comes up, I go bring him down* (future).
- B. *So far as fire... slim chance, no, not unless somebody go dance around* (conditional) (Bickerton: 5-6).

Bickerton references Tsuzaki's claim, in which Tsuzaki states that "bin" precedes "go" and "go" precedes "stay," as predicted in the Hawaiian ideal system. However, Bickerton also mentions instances where "go" follows "stay" rather than preceding it. The first case in Hawaiian English (HE) is:

- *No, shit I wen for stay figure.*
- English translation: *Would have been figuring on.*

The second case in HE is:

- *Kanak guys all us guys wen stay go drink.*
- English translation: *Used to go and drink* (Ibid).

Bickerton argues that this is clearly not the unrealistic "go," but it may be related to either or both the English "go" or the Caribbean English directional "go" (Ibid: 9).

1. *You can see how the cow and the cart walk go and walk come.*
(travelled away and back again)
2. *You get truck for come and carry am go a rice mill.*
(take it to the rice mill) (Ibid).

The second "go" (go2) introduces ambiguity in the following sentence:

1. *I go sell am.* (I shall sell it.)
2. *I wen/bin go sell am.* (I went and sold it.) (Bickerton: 9).

It is unclear whether "go" in the second sentence means:

- A. *I shall sell it.*
- B. *I went and sold it* (Bickerton: 9).

Bickerton views this ambiguity as a significant weakness in the Hawaiian system, particularly when "go" is treated as stative and used with "bin/wen" to refer to the simple past.

IV. Methodology

This theoretical research examines the functions of "bin," "wen," and "go" in both Jamaican Creole and Hawaiian English. The investigation primarily relies on studies conducted by various linguists, including Bickerton, Day, Todd, Mufwene, and others. The researcher has extracted and analysed their data to identify key findings, assess weaknesses, and highlight plausible results. In particular, the study explores the similarities in the functions of these preverbal markers in both Jamaican Creole and Hawaiian English.

V. Discussion

Pidgin and Creole English varieties worldwide can generally be classified into two main groups: Atlantic and Pacific Pidgin and Creole. Both groups exhibit clear syntactic and historical connections. However, these subgroups are not entirely isolated from other varieties. For instance, all Atlantic varieties demonstrate a certain degree of correspondence with the coastal languages of West Africa, a phenomenon that is not observed in the Pacific varieties.

Hawaiian English shares characteristics with both Jamaican Post-Creole and Hawaiian English. The use of the markers "bin" and "go" illustrates the similarities between these two varieties. In Jamaican English, the preverbal "bin" is commonly considered to mark the simple past tense. However, Bickerton challenges this interpretation, arguing that "bin" marks the simple past for stative verbs and the pluperfect tense for non-stative verbs. As a result, Bickerton categorizes "bin" as an "anterior marker," a function supported by Mufwene.

In Hawaii, the preverbal "bin" has undergone a shift to "wen," although some speakers continue to use "bin." Day attributes this shift to the process of neutralization, while Bickerton views it as a result of decreolization. Regarding the function of "wen" in Hawaiian English, Day suggests that it indicates the simple past only when used with verbs that belong to standard English or verbs exhibiting ablaut patterns. However, there are instances where "wen" is omitted, yet the structure still refers to the simple past tense in the underlying structure, even though the surface structure reflects the present simple tense. Day interprets these cases as instances of tense neutralization.

Regarding the use of "go" in Jamaican English, Mufwene supports Bickerton's view on tense distinction, specifically the "realis" versus "irrealis" distinction. He considers "go" to be the only regular verb functioning as a tense marker in this context. In Hawaiian English, the marker "go" is assumed to be a non-punctual irrealis marker, indicating either the future or a conditional aspect.

VI. Conclusion

It seems clear to me that the preverbal "bin" indicates the past tense. However, it is difficult to categorize it simply as a marker of the simple past, as there are instances where "bin" clearly signals the past perfect tense. Therefore, I find Bickerton's suggestion of calling it "anterior" to be highly logical, particularly when considering its use in both stative and non-stative contexts.

The transformation of "bin" into "wen" in Hawaii raises two possible explanations: either as a result of decreolization or tense neutralization. I believe this change is more closely linked to the process of decreolization, due to the similarity in pronunciation between the initial sounds of "bin" and "wen."

The marker "go" in Jamaican English remains ambiguous. Unlike Hawaiian "go," which functions as a clear marker for future and conditional tenses, the Jamaican "go" behaves more like a regular verb and is typically not used in a delimited form. Nonetheless, it still shares some resemblance to Hawaiian "go" in its indication of future and conditional contexts.

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