1 Introduction

Dany Adone and Astrid Gabel

"Syntax lies at the very heart of what it means to be human" (Bickerton & Szathmary 2009: xviii). It has been argued that no other species has been able to acquire a rudimentary syntax, thus reinforcing the view that acquiring syntax is a unique ability of humans (Bickerton & Szathmary 2009). The present volume describes the current state of the discussion on syntax with a special focus on Creole languages. It sheds light on the relevance of syntax in Language by bringing together scholars from the fields of language evolution, language acquisition and development of young languages, that is, Creoles.

Our goal is not to provide a detailed overview on the role of syntax in each field. Rather, we aim to highlight some of the discussion on syntax, in Creole languages and beyond, that has emerged over the years as a result of Derek Bickerton's influential work. A closer look at the three fields of Language through the lens of Creole languages reveals the importance of Bickerton's contributions from his ground-breaking work *Roots of Language* in 1981 to his book *More than Nature Needs: Language, Mind, and Evolution* in 2014. Although some of Bickerton's provocative ideas are controversial, they have successfully generated in-depth debates with long-lasting effects on all of the three fields mentioned above. Notwithstanding the progress achieved, many questions on the nature, emergence and development of syntax still remain.

The volume is organised into three parts and consists of an introductory chapter followed by fifteen chapters. Some chapters in this volume could fit well into more than one part of the book. As such the divisions in this volume should be regarded as a loose guidance. In Part I, we have chapters concerned with the emergence and development of syntax in natural languages which are of central interest to Language Evolution.

In Chapter 2, Arbib places the old debate over whether the protowords of protolanguage may often be holophrases or are more akin to words of current languages within the context of Bickerton's changing views on the emergence of languages from protolanguages. He traces Bickerton's ideas from the Universal Grammar with default parameters approach of the Language Bioprogram Hypothesis via the 'just add Merge' account of *Adam's Tongue: How Humans Made Language, How Language Made Humans* to the replacement of Universal Grammar by a notion of Universal Bases of Language in

More than Nature Needs: Language, Mind, and Evolution. As a counterpoise, Arbib considers the Mirror System Hypothesis of the evolution of the language-ready brain in which, starting from protowords, words and constructions akin to those of modern languages emerged via cultural evolution with fractionation of holophrases playing a crucial (but not the only) initial role.

In Chapter 3, Carstairs-McCarthy explores Jackendoff's suggestion that exuberant compounding of the kind that is possible in English may be a 'coelacanth of language', that is a relic of a pre-syntactic stage of linguistic evolution. In support of this view, he contrasts English compounding possibilities with those of other Germanic languages and French, where compounds typically involve more than mere juxtaposition. The peculiar characteristics of compounding help to explain the ambiguity of the term 'lexical', used to mean both 'listed in the lexicon' and 'relating to words'.

Givón (Chapter 4) presents an evolutionary hypothesis suggesting that the earliest rigid word order in human language must have been (S)OV. The hypothesis is supported first by synchronic distributional data suggesting that the vast majority of known language families can be easily reconstructed to SOV on purely internal grounds. Unlike the vast majority of VO languages, SOV languages show no reconstructible traces of any prior VO word order. What is more, a non-contact-induced drift from VO to OV has yet to be conclusively documented. Givón offers a cultural-communicative explanation for why the early evolved word order of human language must have been SOV, as well as why it has been drifting away from that early order ever since, first to free (pragmatically determined) word order, then to V-first (VSO, VOS) and eventually to SVO. Why some languages have never undergone this drift remains an open question, perhaps related to isolation and/or cultural conservatism.

In Chapter 5, Roberge presents Bickerton's creolisation as a catastrophic single-generation process that obtains from first language acquisition in abnormal circumstances. In the 'interesting' cases, at least, a pidgin provides the primary linguistic data, and an innate biological programme of linguistic competence shapes the result. On this view (i) the formation of these languages points directly to humankind's biological capacity to create language should the normal generation-to-generation means of transmission be disrupted; and (ii) creoles provide the most direct window possible on the properties of the human language faculty. In his chapter Roberge chronicles the development and reception of Bickerton's creole and pidgin windows on the origin and evolution of language in our species through their entire arc. While posterity has firmly rejected Bickerton's creole window on early human language, Roberge argues that the pidgin window, at least, holds some heuristic potential, though a great deal of work remains to be done.

In Chapter 6, O'Grady discusses a recurring theme in Bickerton's work on Creoles which focused on his observation, now somewhat controversial, that their morphosyntactic properties are surprisingly similar, which he attributed to a 'language bioprogram' bearing a close resemblance to Universal Grammar. O'Grady explores a different line of reasoning by considering the role that processing pressures play in the syntax of Creoles – and of human language in general. Drawing on data from anaphora and negation, both of which are well-documented core syntactic phenomena in natural language, he argues that their signature properties are shaped by considerations of computational efficiency and economy that can be traced to the need to minimise the burden on working memory.

Part II brings the Acquisition of Syntax in certain populations to the fore in spite of the scarcity of studies. The chapters therein address questions related to human learnability of language and syntax, especially the ability of humans to acquire language to which they are exposed or not, as witnessed in the case of Creole children, twins and home signers.

De Lisser and Durrleman (Chapter 7) focus on Bickerton's hypotheses about language acquisition. Whether articulated in terms of the Language Bioprogram or in terms of the default parameter settings of Universal Grammar (1981, 1984, 1999, 2014, 2016), the hypotheses predict that proto-typical Creole features will emerge in early stages of child productions. This view thus leads them to expect target-inconsistent utterances during the acquisition of non-Creole languages where such features are not present, and target-consistent utterances in the acquisition of Creole languages. The investigation tests the second of these predictions for negation via an eighteen-month longitudinal study of the spontaneous production of six Jamaican-speaking children between the ages of 18 and 23 months at the start of the research. The findings reveal an absence of target-inconsistent options for the expression of negation, suggesting that children acquiring Jamaican are knowledgeable of the rules governing negation from their earliest negative utterances, be they sentential, constituent or anaphoric. Taken together, these findings suggest that the acquisition of negation in Jamaican follows Bickerton's predictions, which are also in line with the more general claim that Negative Concord (NC) is a default choice explored in early stages of child grammar regardless of the target (Moscatti 2020; Thornton 2020).

In a second chapter (8), De Lisser and Durrleman explore the syntax of missing subjects in the acquisition of Creole languages by children. They focus on two Creoles – Jamaican, a non-null subject language, and Morisyen, a language which allows null subjects in certain contexts. The results of both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses reveal striking similarities in the L1 acquisition of subjects in both Jamaican and Morisyen. Both languages start out with a grammar displaying predominantly target-inconsistent missing subjects,

which later shifts to a grammar involving an overwhelming number of overt subjects. This development of subjects in the grammar of Creole-speaking children can be accounted for by the modified version of the Truncation approach in terms of the Spell-out mechanism (De Lisser et al. 2016). The initial structure reflects Universal Grammar, a system providing the option of truncation, and which gives rise to subject drop.

In Chapter 9, Adone focuses on home signs, bringing to light the acquisition process against a background of 'normless' language environment (Bakker, Chapter 10, this volume) and in the absence of exposure to a 'conventional language model' (Adone 2005). She thus discusses what absence of exposure means when looking at children home signers. In comparison to previous work, Adone shows that absence of a conventional language model does not mean complete absence of input. She argues that children 'scan' their environment for input and use every bit of language-related information as input. Adone further argues that the verb chains in children home signers' initial grammars develop into adult-like serial verb constructions. This development can be interpreted as evidence for the view that children exploit input to the best of their ability to 'create language'.

In Chapter 10, Bakker discusses the syntactic development in twin grammars. Twins and other young children are sometimes reported to create their own languages, sometimes called autonomous languages. The grammars of these languages are quite rudimentary, and the lexicon is derived from the language(s) spoken around them. Bickerton claimed that Creoles share structural properties because the languages have been created by children. Bakker looks at the structures of documented autonomous languages and compares them with Creole languages. It appears that the autonomous languages have more in common with pidgins than with Creole languages, structurally, even though they are created by children, like Creole languages. The twin situation influences the rudimentary properties of the autonomous languages.

The chapters in Part III present different perspectives on how syntactic structures develop in Creole languages. The study of syntax in Creole languages provides the reader with some insightful views into the development of relatively young languages.

Taking as a point of departure Bickerton's view that admixture is one of the chief characteristics of Creole languages (Bickerton 2008), the objective of Baptista and Sedlacek's chapter (11) is to bring to light the tight connections between the congruent forms observed across Creole languages (Baptista 2006, 2009, 2020; Faraclas 2012; Faraclas et al. 2014) which have been argued to result from speakers' perception of similarities between the languages in contact and Weinreich's notion of interlingual identification. A close review of interlingual identification (as it was laid out in Weinreich 1953) and how the concept has been applied and experimentally tested in both situations of

bilingualism (Flege 1991) and multilingualism (Kresić and Gulan 2012) attest to how speakers use their native language as the mould through which they shape differently their interpretation of the same linguistic element in another language. As a result, the chapter argues that interlingual identification is ground zero for language mixing and language change.

In Chapter 12, Déprez argues that Bickerton was amongst the first linguists to propose a list of properties hypothesised to be common to all Creole languages in his groundbreaking *Roots of Language* (1981). While this list of properties has sometimes inspired research promoting Creole languages as unique, Déprez argues that Bickerton's original view should better be understood as a claim that these properties were possibly universal properties of language at least abstractly and as such instantiated the roots of all languages, not just Creole ones. In her contribution she revisits and reassesses Bickerton's observations about the generality of negative concord as a common property of Creole languages and beyond, sorting out what remains of his legacy in this domain from what has been discovered since then about the nature of negation and negative dependencies in Creole languages. She bases herself more specifically on a detailed comparison of the French-based Creoles, but appeals as well to other ones to confirm patterns discovered there or to complete them with additional possibilities.

Chapter 13 by Véronique compares the use of bare and determiner marked NPs in Indian Ocean Creoles (IOCs) which consist of Seychelles, Mauritian and Réunion Creole. These three main IOCs share closely related overt indefinite, definite, demonstrative and plural determiners and the use of bare NPs. Réunion Creole is the only IOC which has a specific use for prenominal markers: definite singular *lo*, definite plural *lé* and indefinite plural *dé*. The three Creoles exhibit many similarities in the expression of nominal reference, but they do not grant the same categorial status to markers *-la* and *sa*. As such the chapter discusses the significance of this difference for nominal reference in the three languages involved. It concludes that grammatical affinities between IOCs do not exclude functional differences due inter alia to the grammaticalisation of definite determiners.

In Chapter 14, Gabel takes a look at Serial Verb Constructions (SVCs) in Kreol Seselwa (KS), a Creole language spoken on the Seychelles. She argues that SVCs are part of KS grammar and that they can best be captured by a continuum approach since they show prototypical and non-prototypical semantic and syntactic properties. Furthermore, SVCs in KS have different distributions depending on spoken and written language as well as production and perception. Finally, she shows that SVCs in KS are subject to age variation thereby exhibiting a potential development in the syntax of KS.

Chapter 15, by Alexandre and Swolkien, takes a look at reflexive constructions in the emergent variety of Cape Verdean Portuguese (CVP). They argue

that the close contact between Cape Verdean Creole (CV) and CVP has some impact on the reflexive patterns available, but also that Cape Verdean speakers reconfigure the features of the reflexive construction of their native language (CV) into CVP. These observations are supported by two experiments – a sentence repetition task and a cloze test. Results show that there is significant variation in using reflexive constructions in CVP, indicating grammatical unsteadiness, but *se* 'SELF' omission is the preferred strategy.

In Chapter 16, Mayeux offers a new perspective on the notion of decreolisation which is also a possible path in the life cycle of a Creole language. Creoles in contact with their lexifiers are famously supposed to undergo decreolisation, a process Bickerton termed a 'special case' (1980: 113) of contact-induced change. The proposition that Creoles undergo a 'special' process of language change has been roundly critiqued by several scholars, not least because decreolisation has seldom been strictly defined or tested with diachronic data. Bickerton, however, sought a rigorous definition for what he critiqued as a 'tinkertoy concept' (p. 111), arguably providing the only specific model of the structural mechanisms supposedly underlying that process. This chapter takes earnestly his suggestion that linguists should strictly define and test the diachronic mechanisms shaping decreolisation. In so doing, this chapter presents evidence against his Creole-specific approach to language change which treats decreolisation as a 'special case'.

To sum up, the chapters gathered in this volume are a testimony to Bickerton's influence on the respective fields. Far from being the last word on syntax, we hope that this volume will stimulate further interest in the study of syntax which has implications in any discipline dealing with language.

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