The development of the nominal domain in creole languages: A comparative-typological approach

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It has repeatedly been pointed out in the literature that the distributional properties of elements that are identified as indefinite determiners in creoles are very different from those of the indefinite articles in their superstrates. In Germanic and Romance languages, indefinite articles invariably mark indefinite singular NEs that are headed by count nouns regardless of whether they are used to refer to specific individuals or objects or to denote Kinds. This is illustrated in examples (280) and (281) below. While the italicized NEs in (280a) and (281a) are specific, in (280b) and (281b) the same NEs may have both a specific and a non-specific interpretation. The latter is favored in the given context.

English (my data)

(280) a. I’ve got a cat and a dog. The cat is black and the dog is white.

    b. I would like to have a cat and a dog when I grow up.

Spanish (my data)

(281) a. Tengo un gato y un perro. El gato es negro y el perro es blanco.
    ‘I have a cat and a dog. The cat is black and the dog is white.’

    b. Quisiera un gato y un perro cuando sea grande.
    ‘I would like to have a cat and a dog when I grow up.’

In many creoles, the use of indefinite determiners with NEs headed by nouns that denote discrete entities (and thus appear identical to Germanic and Romance count nouns with regard to their lexical semantics) is variable. In chapter 7, we have seen that creole languages behave differently from their superstrates with regard to the expression
of individuation. While in Germanic and Romance languages individuation is always expressed overtly (which implies that indefinite singular count nouns always occur with an indefinite determiner, regardless of their specificity value), in creoles overt marking of individuation is not required in order for an NE to be interpreted individually. While indefinite determiners may be used to convey individuated singular reading, their use in this function is optional. If indefinite determiners are not required to mark indefinite NE as individuated and singular, the question arises as to what other factors govern their distribution.

Several researchers (e.g., Bickerton 1981; Givón 1981, 1984; Aboh 2004c, 2006) claim that the distribution of indefinite determiners in creoles is sensitive to specificity. According to these researchers, overt indefinite determiners in creoles are only used with specific indefinite NEs, while non-specific NEs surface unmarked.

In chapter 4, I distinguish between semantic specificity, which is measured in terms of scope, and pragmatic specificity, which appeals to the state of mind of the speaker (crucially, his/her referential intent). The accounts of determiner use in creoles define specificity as a pragmatic notion. According to Bickerton, not only NEs that don’t have a specific referent but also NEs that have a specific referent whose exact identity is either unknown to the speaker or irrelevant to the point at issue are treated as non-specific and occur with a zero-determiner. While Givón uses the term referentiality instead of specificity, his definition of referentiality parallels the definition of specificity used by Bickerton. As already mentioned in chapter 4, crucial in Givón’s analysis of the distribution of referential indefinite determiners is the distinction between semantic and pragmatic referentiality. While the former stands for the supposed existence of the referent in the universe of discourse, the latter stands for speaker referential intent. Speaker referential intent depends on the importance of the specific identity of the referent for the point at issue. Givón observes that while pragmatic referentiality usually corresponds to semantic referentiality, it is ultimately the pragmatic referentiality that determines whether an NE will have an overt determiner or not. Aboh’s definition, inspired by Ionin’s (2006) analysis of specificity, also appeals to the speaker’s state of mind and referential intent.

The three authors cited above propose rather different accounts of the development of the specificity-based pattern of indefinite determiner use in creoles. Bickerton maintains that marking specificity instead of definiteness represents an unmarked option in UG. Givón proposes a grammaticalization-oriented account of the distribution of indefinite determiners in creoles. Based on a comparative analysis of a number of languages, he argues that the use of indefinite determiners with specific indefinite NEs only represents an early stage in the grammaticalization of the indefinite determiner. Aboh, on the other hand, argues that the distribution of indefinite determiners in a number of Atlantic Creoles (Haitian, Saramaccan, and Sranan) replicates the specificity-based pattern found in Gbe (Fongbe, Ewegbe, and Gungbe), their main substrate languages. The distribution of the indefinite determiner in Gbe languages is illustrated in example (28) repeated here as (282):
As examples (282a-b) show, in Ewe, the specific indefinite determiner ádë is only used when the speaker has a particular referent in mind. When the referent is unknown, the NE occurs without a determiner.

In this chapter, I intend to verify the claim with regard to the role of (pragmatic) specificity in the distribution of indefinite determiners in creoles and address the question of whether the distributional properties of creole indefinite determiners may be attributed to language universals or to substrate influence.

Considering that the pragmatic definition of specificity appeals to such subjective categories as speaker knowledge and referential intent, the question arises as to how one can establish whether or not an NE is pragmatically specific based on the written corpus data. Below, I list the objective criteria that can be used in order to establish the pragmatic specificity value of NEs. Firstly, all pragmatically specific NEs are always also semantically specific. Thus, only semantically specific NEs may qualify for being pragmatically specific. Semantic specificity can be objectively measured in terms of scope. As observed in chapter 4, the availability of wide and narrow scope interpretations depends on the syntactic environment in which an NE occurs. For instance, as observed in chapter 4, NEs that occur in the factive environment are semantically specific and all NEs that occur in the scope of negation are semantically non-specific. The type of the proposition does not, however, always unambiguously determine the interpretation of an NE as a specific or non-specific unambiguously. For instance, NEs that occur in the scope of modals, conditionals or future tense may be interpreted as specific as well as non-specific. In addition to that, not all semantically specific NEs are also pragmatically specific. Thus, in order to establish whether or not one is dealing with a pragmatically specific or pragmatically non-specific NE, one has to rely on contextual clues. As observed in Givón (1981, 1984), Pesetsky (1987), Aboh (2004b), and Ionin (2006), as well as some other research into specificity, specificity is tightly related to topicality. Specific NEs typically introduce new discourse topics. Subsequent mentions of the referent may, therefore, be taken as a “physical” measure of specificity. I will therefore use examples of topical, recurring NEs to illustrate the marking of pragmatic specificity.
8.1 Creole indefinite determiners as specificity markers

In most of the creoles under study, one finds numerous examples that suggest that pragmatic specificity determines the distribution of indefinite determiners in creoles. This is illustrated in examples (283)-(300), which illustrate the specificity-based pattern of determiner use as it is described in the introduction to this chapter.

Jamaican Creole (Sistren 1986: 23, 148)

Specific

(283) When me look up di road, me see one man a come down
when 1SG look up DEF road 1SG see IND man PROG come down
like sweet boy. He have on felt hat, and him a carry walking stick
like sweet boy 3SG have on felt hat and 3SG PROG carry walking stick
umbrella. He say: “Morning, Miss Essie”.
‘When I looked up the road, I saw a man coming down like a sweet boy. He was wearing a felt hat and he was carrying a walking stick umbrella. He said: “Morning, Miss Essie”.

Non-specific

(284) …for she did waan me fi have man wid car.
‘…cause she wanted me to have a man with a car.’

Sranan (Voorhoeve 1962: 58, 78)

Specific

(285) A ten da da i bj-abi wan man, den ben-kar Bakbort
DEF time DEM then 2SG PST-have IND man 3PL PST-call Bakbort
a skoro. But man dat ben-ogi…
PREP school but DEF.SG man DEM PST-naughty
‘At that time you had one guy they called Bakbort at school. But that man was naughty…’
Non-specific

(286) den man dat n a nen.
DEF.PL man DEM NEG have name
‘Those men don’t have a name/names.’

Tok Pisin (Mühlhäusler et al. 2003: 115, 110)

Specific

(287) Em nau, wanpela man i go stap long longwe ples. Orait wanpela
And now IND man PM go stay PREP faraway place then IND
meri i go na lukim dispela man. <…> Na man ya laik givim
woman PM go and see DEM man and man DEM want give
kaikai long dispela meri.
food PREP DEM woman
‘There was this man who went to a distant place and stayed there. Then this
woman went and saw this man. And this man wanted to give food to this
woman.’

Non-Specific

(288) Meri tu i ken tok sapos yu gat tok.
woman too PM can talk if 2SG have speech
‘The women too can talk if they have something to say.’

Berbice Dutch (Kouwennerg 2007: 440)

Specific

(289) …iši bi iši ma kopu kui an iši kopu-te en kui…
1PL say 1PL IRR buy cow and 1PL buy-PFV IND cow
‘we said we would buy a cow and we bought a cow’

Non-Specific

(290) …iši bi iši ma kopu kui an iši kopu-te en kui…
1PL say 1PL IRR buy cow and 1PL buy-PFV IND cow
‘we said we would buy a cow and we bought a cow’
Haitian Creole (Hall 1953: 73, 105)

Specific

(291) You abitâ t-ap-dêsân nâ-maché avèk you bourik épi IND peasant PST-PROG-descend PREP-market with IND donkey and you kabrit. Trouvé li vini pasé dévâ twa volé. Youn nâ-twa IND goat happen 3SG come pass before three thief one PREP-three mésié yo di: “Sa nou parié m-ap-prâ kabrit-la. You dézièm man DEF.PL say what 2PL bet 1SG-PROGR-take goat-DEF IND second di: “Si ou prâ kabrit-la, mwê-mêm m-ap-prâ bourik-la’’. say if 2SG take goat-DEF 1SG-self 1SG-PROG-take donkey-DEF “A peasant was going down to market with a donkey and a goat. It happened that he came across three thieves. One of the three men said: “What do you bet if I get the goat?” A second said: “If you get the goat, I’ll get the donkey.””

Non-specific

(292) Mwê grâgou, bâ mwê moso viân.
1SG hungry give 1SG piece meat
‘I am hungry, give me a piece of meat.’

Papiamentu (Kester ans Schmitt: 118, 112)

Specific

(293) Mi a kumpra un bolo.
1SG PST buy IND cake
‘I bought a cake.’

Non-specific

(294) Maria kier kasa ku brasileño.
Maria want marry with Brazilian
‘Marian wants to marry a Brazilian.’
Cape Verdean (Lucchesi 1993: 95; Baptista 2007: 72)

Specific

(295) Primeru ta parse ũ varil n’ or, n’ aza du sew,
First IPFV appear IND barrel PREP air PREP wing of sky
kome varil ta fladu di zpli.
as barrel IPFV call of zeppelin
‘Firstly a barrel would appear in the sky, and the barrel was called zeppelin.’

Non-Specific

(296) Si bu ten terenu di fase, bu ta pidi djuda.
If 2SG have terrain to make 2SG IPFV aks help
‘If you have a terrain to make, you can ask for help.’

Santome (Alexandre and Hagemeijer 2007: 55, 48)

Specific

(297) N tê ũa mosu ku ũa mina mwala. Mina sa ni kwarenta
1SG have IND boy and IND child woman Girl COP in forty
tal. Mosu sa ni xinkwenta. 
something boy COP in fifty
‘I have a boy and a girl. The girl is in her forties. The boy is fifty.’

Non-specific

(298) Inen san se è, toma kopu da mu.
DEF.PL lady DEF EMPH bring glass give me
‘Hey ladies, bring me a glass.’

Diu (Cardoso 2009:155, 132)

Specific

(299) Ū jungly jat vey i amar-o pe d-ikol lion
IND jungly jat come.PST and tie-PST leg of-DEM lion
e-r pu kum-e a el.
COP-PST PURP eat-INF DAT 3SG
‘A jungly jat came and tied the leg of the lion, he intended to eat him.’
8.2 Indefinite determiners with non-specific NEs

While the data presented in 8.1 seems to suggest that specificity plays an important role in determining the marking of indefinite NEs in many of the creoles under study, the specificity criterion does not apply categorically. In virtually all of the creoles under study, including many of the creoles cited in section 8.1, the indefinite determiner may also occur with non-specific NEs.

Examples below illustrate the use of indefinite determiners with non-specific NEs in Jamaican Creole, Sranan, Tok Pisin, Berbice Dutch, Haitian Creole, Papiamentu, Cape Verdean Creole, Santome and Diu Portuguese. In section 8.1, it was demonstrated that non-specific NEs in these creoles may surface determinerless. Examples (301)-(308) show that they may also occur with an indefinite determiner.

Jamaican Creole (Sistren 1986: 215, 143)

(301) Me threaten Ole Massa seh me a go look one bad man
1SG threaten Ole Massa COMP 1SG PROG go look IND bad man
fi deh wid.
PURP COP with
‘I threatened Ole Massa that I was going to look for a bad man to be with.’

(302) Me aunty never have a man, so she do all a di work fi
1SG aunty NEG.PST have IND man so 3SG.F do all of DEF work for
her-self
3SG.F-REFL
‘My aunty did not have a man, so she did all the work herself.’

23 Jamaican Creole indefinite determiners wan and a are not identical with regard to their distributional properties. The differences between the two determiners will be discussed in detail in section 8.5.2.
Sranan (De Drie 1985: 18)

(303) Dan mi ben suku fu bay wan pikin boto nanga wan pikin srepi
    then 1SG PST search to buy IND small boat with IND small tug
    fu mi srefi.
    for 1SG self
    ‘Then I was looking if I could by a little boat with a small tug for myself.’

Tok Pisin (Mühlhäusler et al. 2003: 234)

(304) Longpela taim na mi lukim wanpela naispela meri olsem yu ia.
    Long time and 1SG look IND nice woman like 2SG FOC
    ‘For a long time I have been looking for a nice woman like you.’

Haitian Creole (Hall 1953: 75)

(305) S-ou pa-rété, m-ap-ba ou you kal.
    If-2SG NEG-stop 1SG-FUT-give 2SG IND beating
    ‘If you don’t stop, I will give you a beating.’

Papiamentu (Kester and Schmidt 2007: 122)

(306) Mi no a mira un mancha riba suela.
    1SG NEG PST see IND spot on floor
    a. ‘I didn’t see a particular spot on the floor.’
    b. ‘I did not see any spots on the floor.’

Cape Verdean Creole (Baptista 2007: 65)

(307) Ora k’ e subi, bu ta panha-l, bu abri-l k’ un garafa.
    hour REL it raise 2SG IPFV take-it 2SG open-it with IND bottle
    ‘When it is raised, you open it up with a bottle.’

Diu (Cardoso 2009: 217)

(308) Ŭ istor… kwɔl a kɔt-a?
    IND story which IRR.NPST tell-INF
    ‘A story…Which one should (I) tell?’

Thus, many of the creoles cited in section 8.1 as examples of languages with specificity marking, realize specificity variably, allowing for both zero and overt marking of non-specific indefinite NEs. Although in this study I did not perform a
systematic quantitative analysis of the data, a first approximation suggests that the frequency of the overt indefinite determiner with non-specific NEs differs across the creoles, as well as across different varieties of the same creole. For instance, overt marking of non-specific NEs appears to be more frequent in Jamaican Creole than in Sranan. On the other hand, while in the Sranan data from Voorhoeve (1962) I hardly encountered any instances of the indefinite determiner with non-specific NEs, in the data from De Drie (1985) they are abundant.

In a number of creoles under study, the overt marking of both specific and non-specific indefinite NEs represents the default option. The occurrence of indefinite NEs without an overt determiner is largely restricted to a few specific syntactic contexts (see section 8.4). These creoles include Negerhollands (309)-(310), Afrikaans (311)-(312), Lesser Antillean Creole (313)-(314), Mauritian Creole (315)-(316) and Chabacano (317)-(318).

Negerhollands (Rossem and Van der Voort 1996: 268, 256)

Specific

(309) Een tid da ha een noli. Am ha kaa koo hou, am
one time there have IND donkey 3SG have PERF come old 3SG
na kan werak.
NEG can work
‘Once upon a time there was a donkey. He had grown old, he could not work.’

Non-specific

(310) …am fo gi am nu fo di crop twee ton suku mi twalof
3SG MOD give 3SG now for DEF crop two barrel sugar with twelve
patakón mi een kui.
patakón with IND cow
‘…he had to give him now for the crop two barrels of sugar with twelve patakón
and a cow’
Afrikaans (Scholz 2011b,a)

Specific

(311) Onder die dooie-s is ’n federale regter met meer as 40 jaar ervaring.

Among DEM dead-PL COP IND federal judge with more than forty year experience

‘Among the dead there is a federal judge with more than forty years of experience.’

Non-specific

(312) Vrou-e se aspirasie is om te trou, as hulle kan, met ’n man wat beter opgelei is, meer verdien…

Woman-PL POSS aspiration COP PURP to merry if 3PL can with IND man REL better educated COP more earn

‘Women’s aspiration is, if they can, to marry a man who is well-educated, earns more…’

Lesser Antillean (http://creoles.free.fr/Cours/lespri.htm)

Specific

(313) Mé, koman zòt pé travay kon sa san chanté on ti chanson?

but how 3PL can work like DEM without sing IND little song

‘But how can you work like this without singing a little song?’

Non-specific

(314) Mé, mi on bèl ti chanson zòt pé chanté: “dan a Zanba kasé…”

but here.is IND nice little song 3PL can sing tooth PREP Zanba break

‘But here is a little song you may sing: “Zanba’s tooth broke…”’
Mauritian Creole (Guillemin 2009: 176, 71)

**Specific**

(315) *Ein' gros cerf* qui té bête.
   IND big stag COMP PST stupid
   ‘There was a big stag who was stupid.’

**Non-specific**

(316) Alors, mo pena *enn zarden*?
   so 1SG NEG IND garden
   ‘Don’t I have a garden, then?’

Palenquero (Friedemann and Patiño 1983: 198, 222)

**Specific**

(317) Es’ é *un mujé* lo ke sé bibiba por ayá por el Prado… *Ese mujé* á sé jumaba mariuana… *el* á teneba nuebe moná baron, *ese mujé*.
   DEM COP IND woman it that REFL live PREP there PREP DEF Prado… DEM woman IPFV REFL smoke marijuana 3SG IPFV have nine child male DEM woman
   ‘This was a woman who lived over there, in El Prado. This woman smoked marijuana. She had nine sons, this woman.’

**Non-specific**

(318) Nda=mi *un tragito* d=ese kammante ke á ten mucho kaló.
   give=1SG IND mouthful of=DEM painkiller because it have many hot
   ‘Give me a mouthful of this painkiller because it is very hot.’
Chabacano (McKaughan 1954: 218, 219)

**Specific**

(319) Abia **un reina** ke ya perde su anilyo de brilyante. Ya have IND queen REL PST loose 3SG.POSS ring of diamond PST manda le kon todo su mana basilyo asta kon el mana order 3SG OBL all 3SG.POSS PL subject up.to OBL DEF PL animal buska el anilyo.
animal look.for DEF ring
‘Once upon a time there was a queen who lost her diamond ring. She ordered all of her subjects including the animals to look for the ring.’

**Non-specific**

(320) Ya kontesta el aninipot si pwede kon=ele dale **un lus** PST answer DEF firefly if can OBL=3SG give IND light ke pwede ele karga… REL can 3SG carry
‘The firefly answered that if possible he would like her to give him a light which he could carry.’

### 8.3 No indefinite determiner with specific indefinite NEs

In a few creoles under study, the occurrence of the indefinite determiner is variable not only with non-specific but also with specific indefinite NEs. Zero-marked specific indefinites appear to be particularly frequent in Tok Pisin, and are also not rare in Haitian Creole (at least as far as the data I have consulted are concerned).

**Tok Pisin** (Mühlhäusler et al. 2003: 233)

(321) Mi painim **naispela meri** na mi gat traipela laik long=en. 1SG find nice woman and 1SG have big desire PREP=3SG
‘I found a nice woman and I like her very much.’
Haitian Creole (Hall 1953: 74)

(322) Mama-m té-bâ-m ti-plat pou-té-mâjé. Ti-kouzé-m-nâ
mama-1SG PST-give-1SG little-plate for-PST-eat little-cousin-1SG-DEF
vini prà ti-plat mwê, l-alé avèk lakay li épì lâdêmê li
come take little-plate 1SG 3SG-go with house 3SG then next.day 3SG
môté lakay mama-m avèk ti-pla-la…
go.up house mother-1SG with little-plate-DEF
‘My mother had given me a little dish for eating. My little cousin came and took
my little dish; he went with it to his house and then the next day he came up to
my mother’s house with the little dish…’

Cases of zero-marked specific indefinites were also attested in Sranan (Bruyn 1995) and in Cape Verdesian Creole (Baptista 2007) (although, according to Lucchesi (1993), all specific indefinite NEs are regularly marked by the indefinite determiner in Cape Verdesian Creole).

8.4 Contexts that favor bare NEs

In some contexts, where Germanic and Romance languages typically use overt indefinite determiners, creoles favor bare nouns. These contexts are considered below.

8.4.1 Predicate nominals

Attributive predicate nominals (including complements of the copular verb ‘become’ and equatives ‘like’ and ‘as’) are often cited as a type of context where creoles tend to use bare NEs. In the creoles under study, one also finds many examples of bare NEs in these contexts. Such examples are given below under (323)-(328).

Jamaican Creole (Sistren 1986: 16)

(323) She a murderer!
3SG.F COP murderer
‘She is a murderer!’

Sranan (Voorhoeve 1962: 57)

(324) Ma da u b-e-poti su lek dulpal.
But then 1PL PST-IPFV-put shoe like goalpost
‘But then we put shoes as a goalpost.’
Tok Pisin (Mühlhäusler et al. 2003: 235)

(325) Em longpela rot.
3SG long road
‘It’s a long road.’

Berbice Dutch (Kouwenberg 2007: 446)

(326) Da hiri so eke drai-te poteg man.
COP here FOC 1SG turn-PFV old man.
‘This is where I got old.’

Palenquero (Friedemann and Patiño 1983: 199)

(327) El era mucha buena persona.
3SG COP many nice person
‘She was a very nice person.’

Diu Portuguese (Cardoso 2009: 165)

(328) Leslie bey piken baba e.
Leslie COP.NPST very small baby COP.NPST
‘Leslie is a very small baby.’

Although zero-marking of predicate nominals is generally more common than the use of overt determiners, in some creoles, indefinite determiners are also not infrequent in this context.

Jamaican Creole (Sistren 1986: 137)

(329) me woulda like be a nurse.
1SG would like COP IND nurse
‘I would like to be a nurse.’

Sranan (DeDrie 1985: 17)

(330) Mi granma ben de wan potti frow.
1SG grandmother PST IPFV IND poor woman
‘My grandmother was a poor woman.’
Tok Pisin (Sankoff and Mazzie 1991: 19)

(331) Em wanpela wantok bilong mipela ia.
   3SG IND friend POSS 1PL FOC
   ‘He is a friend of ours.’

Berbice Dutch (Kouwenberg 2007: 447)

(332) Jack wa da en loi took.
   Jack PST COP IND lazy child
   ‘Jack was a lazy child.’

Diu Portuguese (Cardoso 2009: 154)

(333) Jacob ū kob.
   Jacob COP.NPST IND snake
   ‘Jacob is a snake.’

In those creoles where the indefinite determiner does not seem to show sensitivity to specificity (see section 8.2), the occurrence of predicate nominals with an indefinite determiner represents the majority pattern or is categorical. Examples from these creoles are given below:

Afrikaans (Scholz 2011b)

(334) Ek wil liwer ’n huisvrou wees.
   1SG want rather IND housewife COP.INF
   ‘I’d rather be a housewife.’

Lesser Antillean Creole (http://creoles.free.fr/Cours/lespri.htm)

(335) mamèl-a-ou, ggosè a on zéléfan
   udder-POSS-2SG big PREP IND elephant
   ‘Your udder is big like an elephant.’

Mauritian Creole (Guillemin 2009: 172)

(336) Mo enn esklav lager.
   1SG IND slave war
   ‘I am a slave of war.’
8.4.2 Complements of prepositions

Bare indefinites are also often found inside PPs.

Sranan (Voorhoeve 1962: 57)

(338) ...mi ma mek mi a prenasi.
1SG mother make 1SG PREP plantation
‘My mother made me on a plantation…’

Jamaican Creole (Sistren 1986: 4)

(339) Mama sleep on a wood bed wid mattress mek up a banana mama sleep on IND wood bed with mattress make up PREP banana trash stuff inna crocus bag.
trash stuff in crocus bag
‘Mama slept on a wooden bed with a mattress made of banana plant stuffed in a crocus bag.’

The tendency is observed in many creoles (as well as in other languages of the world with variable indefinite determiner use). In one of the creoles under study, the omission of determiners with complements of prepositions is nearly categorical. This creole is Chabacano. While the indefinite determiner in this creole regularly occurs with argumental NEs (regardless of their specificity value), examples of the indefinite determiner with complements of prepositions are extremely scarce, zero determiner being the default marking option in this syntactic context. Grant (2007) makes the same observation based on his data.

Chabacano (McKaughan 1954: 209-210)

(340) Si komachíng ya kohe kon kabáw y kyere ele machaka kon DEF monkey PST catch OBL turtle and want 3SG smoke OBL kabáw kon palo.
turtle with stick
‘Monkey caught Turtle and wantd to smash Turtle with a stick.’
8.5 Discussion

In this section, the observations made above will be interpreted in the light of the issues of creole genesis and development. In the introduction to this chapter, I presented the universalist and substratist accounts of the distribution of indefinite determiners in creoles. Both accounts are based on the generalization that creole indefinite determiners only occur with specific indefinite NEs. As observed in section 8.1, the distributional properties of the overt indefinite determiners in the creoles under study can in many cases indeed be captured in terms of specificity. However, in none of the creoles does the distribution of the indefinite determiner fully conform to the specificity-based pattern. The indefinite determiner also occurs with non-specific NEs. The frequency of indefinite determiner use in this context differs across creoles. While in some of them the specificity value of an NE nearly always determines whether or not the overt indefinite marker is used, in other creoles the indefinite determiners appear less sensitive to the specificity-based constraint and tend to behave like a general marker of indefiniteness. In a few creoles from the latter group, the distribution of indefinite determiners closely resembles the distribution of indefinite articles in Germanic/Romance languages. On the other hand, there are also creoles where the indefinite determiner is used variably not only with non-specific but also with specific indefinite NEs.

Since indefinite determiners in the creoles under study do not always obey the specificity-based constraint and sometimes even appear to be completely insensitive to it, neither the universalist nor the substratist accounts of indefinite determiner use can fully account for the data considered. In view of the fact that the creoles under study display both similarities and differences in the way they use indefinite determiners, it appears that the distributional properties of indefinite determiners in these creoles have been shaped by a combination of universal and language-specific factors.

8.5.1 Specificity-based pattern: unfinished grammaticalization or substrate influence?

Looking at the development of nominal markers in creoles from the perspective of the break-in-transmission creolization scenario, one could suppose that Germanic/Romance indefinite articles did not survive during the development of the creole, thus making it possible for bare (determinerless) nouns to be used in all argument positions. The exact referential properties of such NEs relied on the discourse, situational context or the knowledge of the world. As creoles became the major means of communication in creole communities which were acquired as L1 by the children born in the colonies, there emerged functional pressures to express referentiality (and individuation) overtly.

The indefinite determiner is one of such means. Like in most languages of the world, in creoles, the lowest numeral ‘one’ was recruited to perform this grammatical function. According to Givón (1981, 1984), ‘one’ is uniquely fit to perform the function
of the indefinite determiner. Being a quantifying expression, it implies referentiality (since having quantity implies having existence/reference) without implying prior familiarity. Therefore, it is suited for the introduction of new referents into discourse. On the other hand, it can also give the interpretation of ‘one of the type’ and it can thus make it possible for the hearer to identify the referent as a representative of a certain type by its connotational or generic properties.

Although the development of indefinite determiners from ‘one’ represents a universal grammaticalization path, languages may differ in the extent to which this process of grammaticalization has proceeded. According to Givòn (1984), one can distinguish the following stages in the development of ‘one’ into an indefinite determiner:

Stage 0: no systematic coding of indefinite specific vs. non-specific NEs
Stage I: ‘one’ or its reduced variant marks indefinite specific NEs only
Stage II: ‘one’ or its reduced variant marks indefinite specific and some non-specific NEs
Stage III: a reduced variant of ‘one’ marks all indefinite NEs

According to this scheme, ‘one’ first goes through the stage where it only marks specific indefinites, and then expands its distribution to non-specific NEs.

According to Givòn (1981, 1984), creoles manifests Stage I of this development. Although this generalization is not supported by the data considered in this chapter, one could still assume that the sensitivity to specificity observed in the distribution of indefinite determiners in some of the creoles under study is the heritage of the Stage I state. Such a scenario is, however, not supported by the available diachronic data.

For instance, Bruyn’s (1995, 2007) diachronic research into the distribution of the indefinite and definite determiners in Sranan also leads her to question the validity of Givòn’s proposal. Bruyn observes that the indefinite determiner wan was already used as a marker of indefinite singular NEs in the earliest available sources. Already at this stage, which reflects the state of affairs about one hundred years after Sranan is assumed to have emerged, wan occurred with specific indefinite as well as with non-specific NEs. Further, Bruyn observes that the distribution of this marked has not significantly changed over time. While one could still hypothesize that the major developments in the function of wan took place prior to the stage reflected in the earliest available sources, given the apparent lack of any substantial developments after 1765, such a hypothesis appears improbable. While this incomplete evidence from one creole is not sufficient to disprove Givòn’s analysis, it challenges the idea that creoles start out at Stage 0 and then gradually undergo unidirectional development towards later stages.

24 In order to avoid confusion I will substitute the term “referentiality” use by Givòn with the term “specificity” adopted here.
As an alternative to unfinished grammaticalization, one could look at the
development of the specificity-based pattern of indefinite determiner use from the
perspective of substrate influence. As pointed out by Lefebvre (1998) and Aboh (2004c,
2006), the sensitivity of (in)definite determiners to specificity observed in some Atlantic
creoles shows close resemblance to the principles of indefinite determiner use found in
Gbe languages. However, it is questionable whether the similarity between the creoles
and their substrates in this respect can be interpreted as evidence of substrate influence.
Specificity represents a universally prominent constraint on the distribution of indefinite
determiners and it has been attested in many unrelated languages of the world such as
Hebrew, Chinese, Turkish, Russian, and Samoan, to give just a few examples. The
sensitivity of the indefinite determiner to specificity has also been observed in some
creoles that are not historically related to Gbe languages, such as Berbice Dutch or
Hawaiian Creole (Bickerton 1974). The research into L1 and L2 acquisition of
determiner systems in languages like English shows that both children and adults whose
L1 does not have determiners make a common mistake of using the English determiners
to mark specificity instead of definiteness (Ionin et al. 2004, 2008; Schaeffer and
Mathewson 2005). All this suggests that it is unlikely that substrate influence played the
crucial role in the development of the specificity-based constraints on the indefinite
determiner use in Atlantic Creoles.

I therefore conclude that sensitivity to specificity observed in the distribution of
indefinite determiners many creoles derives from the universal principles of reference
marking and discourse organization. This conclusion holds regardless of whether or not
the distribution of indefiniteness markers evolved according to the scheme postulated by
Givón.

8.5.2 Definiteness-based pattern: grammaticalization or superstrate
influence?

The accounts of the distribution of indefinite determiners in creoles discussed in the
introduction to this chapter mainly focus on their specificity-based behaviour. The
current state of affairs in the creoles under study is, however, much more diverse. In
none of the creoles does the distribution of the indefinite determiner fully conform to the
specificity-based pattern. While in some creoles specificity plays an important role in the
choice between an overt indefinite determiner and zero, in other creoles, indefinite
determiners tend to behave like general markers of indefiniteness. On the other hand,
there are also creoles where the indefinite determiner is used variably not only with non-
specific but also with specific indefinite NEs.

One way to account for the development of creole indefinite determiners
towards the definiteness-based pattern is from the perspective of grammaticalization the
way it is envisaged by Givón. The majority of the creoles, in which the indefinite
determiner occurs systematically with specific indefinites and variably with non-specific
Nes, can be placed somewhere in-between Stage I and Stage II. While some creoles, for
instance Jamaican Creole, appear to be closer to Stage II, others, like Berbice Dutch, are closer to Stage I. A number of creoles, such as Negerhollands, Afrikaans, Mauritian, Palenquero and Chabacano, appear to come close to Stage III. On the other hand, the irregular marking of specific indefinites observed in a few creoles, including Tok Pisin and Haitian Creole, is a phenomenon that goes back to Stage 0.

While Givón’s analysis predicts that languages with specific indefinite markers will at some point develop towards the definiteness-based pattern, it does not explain the diversity we observe across creoles. Another question is of course whether the grammaticalization analysis is supported by the diachronic data.

The present study does not include diachronic analysis. The results of the diachronic research into the distribution of indefinite determiners available for a few of the creoles considered here, also lead to rather diverse observations with regard to the grammaticalization scenario envisaged by Givón (1981).

For instance, Guillemin’s (2011) study of the development of the determiner system of Mauritian Creole shows that while in the early creole (to be more precise, prior to the beginning of the 19th century) there was no grammatical indefiniteness marking, in the modern Mauritian, the indefinite determiner *enn* is used with both specific and non-specific indefinite NEs. Although from Guillemin’s research it follows that at some point in the history of the creole the numeral *enn* became grammaticalized as an indefinite determiner, it is unclear whether the grammaticalization of *enn* proceeded following the steps postulated by Givón.

In their study of (in)definiteness marking in Tok Pisin, Sankoff and Mazzie (1991) observe that while in the data from the first half of the 20th century there is an overall trend towards the increase in the overt marking of NEs in comparison to the early stages of the language (the second half of the 19th century), where nouns most frequently occur in their bare form, their research into the development of *wanpela* as a marker of referential indefinite nominal expressions between 1920 and 1970 shows that the use of this marker is not systematic and that there was no change in any direction over this period of fifty years. The authors conclude that Tok Pisin does not show the grammaticalization of *wanpela* as a dedicated marker of specific indefinite NEs. In other words, they observe no tendency in the development of Tok Pisin towards stage I of grammaticalization of the indefinite determiner that is assumed to be characteristic of the prototypical creole determiner system.

As already observed in section 8.5.1, similar observations are made by Bruyn (1995, 2007), who does not observe any unidirectional developments in the distribution of the indefinite determiner *wan* in Sranan, which is used as a marker of specific as well as non-specific indefinites in the earliest available sources. In accordance with Givón’s grammaticalization scenario, one could expect an increase in the use of the indefinite determiner with non-specific NEs. No such increase is, however, observed in Sranan.

Summing up, the gradual grammaticalization of the indefinite determiner proposed by Givón does not provide a fully adequate model to account for either synchronic or diachronic creole data. Based on the evidence considered here, I conclude
that while grammaticalization of indefiniteness marking through the reanalysis of a form derived from the numeral ‘one’ does take place creoles, it is not clear whether the distributional properties of creole indefinite determiners can be fully accounted for in terms of grammaticalization.

I believe that the main drawback of Givon’s account is in the assumption that the development of ‘one’ into the indefinite determiner is unidirectional and that in each language it starts out at Stage 0 and is directed towards the final Stage 3. In assuming this, Givon overlooks the fact that the indefinite determiner is used not only as a marker of the indefinite reference, but also as a means to express individuation and singularity (see chapter 7) and that there are languages where the distribution of the indefinite determiner remains at the intermediate Stage 1 for ages.

Further, in addition to universal functional pressures (i.e., the necessity to express referentiality, individuation and number) that set in motion the process of grammaticalization, the development of the discourse-semantic and distributional properties of indefinite determiners in creoles may be influenced by a number of external factors that characterize the environment in which these creoles have developed and are spoken. Specifically, the development of indefinite determiners towards general indefiniteness markers can be accounted for in terms of superstrate influence. Below, I shall illustrate the importance of this factor based on what is known about the history and the socio-linguistic profiles of the creoles under study focusing on the case of Jamaican Creole.

In addition to allowing for singular indefinite NEs to occur without a determiner, Jamaican Creole has two overt indefinite determiners: a and wan. This variation is an instance of the variation between the acrolectal and basilectal forms typical of the Jamaican Creole mesolect. Although such variations are often considered to instantiate language-externally motivated code-switches, the distribution of allegedly competing basilectal and acrolectal forms often appear to be linguistically constrained (Patrick 1999, 2009; Bobyleva 2009, 2011b). The linguistic aspects of the variation between a, wan and zero, have interesting implications for the discussion of the factors underlying the development of the distributional properties of indefinite determiners in creoles.

Bobyleva (2009) performed a study of the linguistic distribution of the indefinite determiners in Jamaican Creole based on the corpus data sourced from Sistren

The contemporary linguistic situation in Jamaica is often cited as a typical example of the post-creole speech continuum. Throughout its history the creole has co-existed with English, which has always remained the official language of Jamaica. As a result of the continuous contact between the two languages, combined with the pressures from English as the model of correctness and the language of bigger opportunities, very few (if any) Jamaicans use the “deep”, basilectal creole captured in Bailey (1966). The speech of the majority of creole speakers, depending on their socio-economic status, level of education, urban vs. rural background (and perhaps a bunch of other factors), can be placed somewhere in between the basilect and the local standard of English (cf. Patrick 2005). This “in-between” variety (or, according to some scholars, varieties) is referred to as mesolect. This latter is linguistically characterized by the variation between the seemingly basilectal, acrolectal and mesolectal forms.
(1986), fifteen women’s life stories transcribed from tape around 1980. With the exception of four stories, told in Jamaican English, the rest of the data could be characterized as Jamaican Creole mesolect. The authors of the eleven stories in the mesolect use all the three forms of the indefinite determiner in their speech, with varying relative frequencies. The study aimed to find out whether the Jamaican Creole indefinite determiners were sensitive to specificity and whether the specificity constraint applied equally to *wan* and *a*? Three hypothetical scenarios appeared possible:

In the first scenario, depicted in figure 8.1a both overt indefinite determiners are sensitive to specificity. In the second scenario, figure 8.1b, only the basilectal forms, i.e. *wan* and zero, distribute in accordance with the specificity-based principle, while *a* occurs in accordance with the rules of English and is therefore not sensitive to specificity. In the third scenario, in figure 1c, the grammar is mixed, the specificity constraint applies variably, and the three markers are used interchangeably.

The data analysis has shown that specific indefinite NPs are always overtly marked in Jamaican Creole either by means of *wan* or by means of *a*; non-specific indefinite NEs may appear with *wan* or *a* or without an overt determiner. Thus, it appears that while the zero indefinite determiner in Jamaican Creole is restricted to non-specific NEs, *wan* and *a* may be not categorically restricted in terms of specificity.

However, the quantitative analysis of the distribution of these two markers shows that they are not used in the same way. It appears that out of 141 tokens of *wan*, 85 (that is 60%) occur with specific indefinite NEs and 56 (that is 40%) occur with non-specific NEs. As for *a*, out of the total of 447 tokens, only 122 (that is 27%) occur with

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26 By “creole grammar” I refer to the alleged prototypically creole indefinite determiner use described by Bickerton (1981) and Givón (1981, 1984).
specific indefinites, the remaining 225 (that is 73%) are found with non-specific NEs. This clearly shows that specificity has a larger impact on the distribution of *wan* than on the distribution of *a*. The investigation of the role of factors such as animacy and syntactic position, which are related to specificity, gave conforming results. Specific indefinites typically introduce new discourse topics. A prototypical topic is human. The form *wan* occurred with NEs referring to humans in 47% of cases, with animate NEs (referring to non-humans) in 1% of cases and with inanimate NEs in 52% of cases. In case of *a*, the distribution between this semantic groups was 20%, 2%, and 78%, respectively. Also, *wan* appeared to favor NEs in subject position, while *a* was more frequent with objects and complements of prepositions. Unlike *a* and zero, *wan* never occurred with predicate nominals in my data.

Summing up, these findings indicate that the specificity constraint has a larger impact on the distribution of *wan* than on the distribution of *a*. The distribution of the indefinite determiners in Jamaican Creole can be schematically represented in the following way:

![Figure 8.2. The distribution of wan, a and zero in Jamaican Creole.](image)

The distribution depicted in Figure 8.2 lies in-between the hypothetical scenarios 8.1b and 8.1c.

What do the results of this study tell us about the factors underlying the development of discourse-semantic properties of indefinite determiners in creoles? I

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27 This finding is in contrast with Bailey (1971) who provides examples of *wan* in the following context:

Jamaican Creole (Bailey 1971: 346)

(i) Im ena *wan* priti gyal fi-truu
    3SG PST IND pretty girl PREP-true
    ‘She was a really nice girl.’
believe that the distributional differences between the creole and the English-like forms of the indefinite determiner in Jamaican Creole show evidence of superstrate influence. Specifically, the fact that the distribution of the creole form *wan* is closer to the alleged creole prototype while the distribution of the English-like form *a* shows more affinity with the distribution of the indefinite article in English is likely to result from the fact that the discourse-semantic and distributional properties of these forms have been influenced by the English indefiniteness-based pattern of determiner use to different extents.

A comparison between Jamaican Creole and Sranan supports this conclusion. The two creoles have the same superstrate and similar substrates, but the amount of contact with the superstrate is very different. While Jamaican Creole developed in a continuous contact with English, in Surinam, the direct influence from the varieties of English spoken by the British has only lasted for thirty years. Surinam started out as an English colony in 1651, but as early as 1667 it was conquered by the Dutch. By 1680 almost all British slave-owners left the colony with their slaves. The slave population of Surinam, however, continued speaking the English-based creole, and Dutch influence hardly penetrated beyond the level of lexicon. The different amount of contact with the superstrate has had a significant impact on the linguistic properties of the creole languages developed in Jamaica and Surinam. Jamaican Creole, in particular its most widely spoken mesolectal variety, shows much more affinity with English than Sranan. This may be also observed in the distribution of the indefinite determiners: while in both creoles, the indefinite determiners may appear with specific indefinite as well as with non-specific NEs, the occurrence of the indefinite determiner (both *a* and *wan*) with non-specific Nes is relatively more frequent in Jamaican Creole than it is in Sranan (at least, as far as the data I have consulted are concerned).

Jamaican Creole is not the only language in the sample where the tendency to use the indefinite determiner as a general indefiniteness marker can be claimed to result from superstrate influence. Other languages that appear to display superstrate influence in this respect are, for instance, Afrikaans and Chabacano. Both languages developed in a quite extensive contact with their superstrates (see chapter 2). Also, the rapid development of Mauritian *enn* into the general indefinite determiner attested by Guillemin (2009) may be related to the influence from French (cf. Mahadeo 1981).

I believe that the discussion in this and the previous section illustrates that while the development of some kind of indefinite marker from the numeral ‘one’, as well as the tendency to use this marker with specific indefinite NEs and in order to disambiguate between individuated and non-individuated and singular and plural readings are universally driven, the extension in the use of the indefinite determiner to the cases of non-specific indefinites may be also due to a number of individual factors such as, for instance, contact with the superstrate. In contrast to the pure grammaticalization analysis, the analysis that takes into account both universal functional pressures and contact-induced change allows us to account not only for cross-
creole similarities but also for the variation with regard to the use of indefinite determiners observed among creoles.