

# FOREGROUNDING AND BACKGROUNDING IN HAITIAN CREOLE DISCOURSE

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## 1.0. Introduction

Focus and emphasis in language can be thought of as the result of grammatical processes which mark more important from less important information.<sup>1</sup> Studies of focus, particularly those falling under the rubric of generative grammar (Rochemont 1986), have typically concentrated on the sentence level of grammar. However, equally important distinctions are, of course, made in the grammars of languages on the discourse level.

Until recently, attention to emphasis in creole language studies was concerned principally with the discourse level and with narratives, as opposed to other kinds of discourse. The concern has been with what has been termed "foregrounding/backgrounding" (Hopper 1979, Givón 1982, Pollard 1989, Jaganauth 1988). Others have used closely related terms such as "figure/ground" (Waugh 1986). Foregrounded material (in narratives) is that which carries the main line of action and follows the real world sequence of events. Foreground clauses tend overwhelmingly to be independent clauses. Their informational structure is such that there is a high level of topicality in the subject, while the predicate is the focus of the sentence. Backgrounded material is that which digresses from the main line of narrative, provides explanations of main events, interrupts the action continuity of the narrative's main line, and frequently presents quoted or reported speech of story participants (Givón 1982:119).

In the treatment of Haitian Creole (hereafter HC) which follows, I will deal principally with Givón's (1982) work, since it alone makes claims concerning HC (although there are, of course, other works dealing with other creole languages). In important ways, Givón's model of emphasis (foregrounding/backgrounding) in creole narrative discourse hinges on his analysis of what has been referred to as the classic or typical tense-mood-aspect (TMA) system. The following discussion will point out how the HC TMA system differs from the classic one described by Givón (1982) and Bickerton (1975, 1976, 1981), on whose description Givón's is largely based.

Givón's (1982) discussion deals mostly with Hawaiian Creole English (HCE); in it is the assertion that HC behaves in essentially the same way as HCE in terms of the syntax and semantics of the TMA system and discourse functions of the TMA markers. Givón considers both languages to share the classic system (in meaning and function – the morphemes are different). However, since the HC TMA system does not actually correspond to the so-called classic model, a question arises as to whether the discourse functions of the HC TMA markers are as Givón described them.

In what follows, I will first discuss Bickerton's classic creole TMA system and then briefly discuss Givón's, which differs slightly. I will subsequently show how the HC system differs. Fourth, I will review Givón's claims concerning the narrative discourse functions and pragmatics of the various verb forms participating in the TMA system. Then, I will consider the issue of whether Givón's claims about discourse and pragmatic phenomena hold for HC, given that the HC system is not exactly what he and Bickerton attribute to HCE. My evaluation of the transferability of those claims will be based on an analysis of HC conversational texts, prepared from tape-recorded conversations which contain narratives, among other types of discourse. Finally, I will present remarks concerning diachronic change in the HC TMA system and other broader issues.

## 2.0. Bickerton's TMA Model

In this section, I will discuss the semantics of Bickerton's classic creole preverbal marker system. He has stated (1974, 1976, 1981) that in the "typical" or "classic" creole system, which HC shares with several other creoles (e.g., HCE, Guyanese Creole English (GCE), Sranan and Saramaccan), the "ranges of meaning of the particles are identical" (1981:58).<sup>2</sup>

Bickerton (1981) describes the meaning of the stem form of verbs as follows: stative verbs express present tense; that of active (nonstative) verbs, past tense. His characterization of HC *te* is anterior (p. 58), signifying that it marks past-before-past tense for active (nonstative) verbs and past for stative verbs. He acknowledges that this description is indeed a rough one (p. 306, fn. 5), referring the reader to Bickerton (1975, Ch. 2). There he notes, dealing with GCE – purportedly with the same TMA semantics as HC – that the meaning of the anterior marker with stative verbs is indeed straightforward. Difficulties arise, however, with active verbs (1975: 35). Since the stem form of these verbs is past tense, one would expect the anterior marker to indicate past-before-past. Bickerton goes on to remark that this frequently is the case; however, in other cases, remote past rather than past-before-past is signaled.

The meaning of the irrealis *va* is described by Bickerton (1981:58) as expressing future and conditional. He states (1976) that irrealis markers additionally express subjunctive mood, the gist of his remarks being that irrealis includes the three

notions just mentioned: futurity, conditionality, subjunctivity, and related imports. More specifically, he states (1975: 42) that the irrealis system includes all situations (events and states) which have not actually occurred, but provides no useable elaboration of what subjunctivity involves. According to Bickerton, *ap* (allomorphs: *apr*, *ape*, *pr*, *pe*), the HC nonpunctual marker, expresses progressivity and habituality.

The semantics of the preverbal marker system are presented in Table 1 (adapted from Valdman 1977:177):

	Punctual	Nonpunctual	
	stem form	<i>ap</i>	Nonanterior
Realis	<i>te</i>	<i>t ap</i>	Anterior
	<i>a</i>	<i>av ap</i>	Nonanterior
Irrealis	<i>t a</i>	<i>t av ap</i>	Anterior

Table 1: The semantics of the preverbal marker system.

The semantics of the marker combinations, following Bickerton, is mostly additive. So, for example, *t+ap* signals anterior and nonpunctual, as the remarks above would indicate. The semantics of combinations involving *te* and *va* is not quite so transparent. These two form not only the future-in-the-past (e.g., *M te di m t a pati* 'I said that I would leave'), as one might expect by "adding" the meanings of each marker, but also the conditional. The semantics of the other combinations is straightforward given what has been stated: *av ap* is basically a future progressive and *t av ap* is a counterfactual conditional progressive or a future progressive-in-the-past.

Bickerton (1981:58) notes that although some of the combined forms have disappeared from some creoles, all of the combinations are attested for Sranan and HC. (His remark on HC is based on Hall 1953 and is confirmed by my data.) As will be indicated in the discussion below, the semantics of the HC preverbal marker system based on my analysis of HC data is in some respects different from that of Bickerton's.

3.0. Givón's TMA Model

As noted above, following Bickerton's claims, HCE, HC, and other classic creoles should have the same preverbal marker semantics. However, Givón's analysis of HCE and mine of HC show differences from Bickerton's classic system. In Table 2 these differences are outlined.<sup>3</sup> Also included is an itemization of the most important differences among Bickerton's classic system, HCE (according to Givón) and HC based on my analysis.

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Marker		Semantics <sup>4</sup>	
HCE	HC	HCE (Givón)	HC (Spears)
zero	zero	past action present state  future conditional <sup>5</sup>	past action, past state present state, present action (habitual aspect)
stay	apr	nonpunctual (i.e., pro- gressive & habitual)	nonpunctual  future indicative, conditional indicative future-in-the-past indi- cative
go	va	future, conditional, irrealis, imperative	future subjunctive, conditional subjunctive, future-in-the-past sub- junctive
bin	te	anterior ( i.e., past & pluperfect)	anti-perfect

Table 2: The "classic" and HC TMA systems.

Several comments should be made concerning Table 2:

1. It does not deal with marker combinations which are not crucial for the purposes of this paper (see Spears 1990, 1993).
2. The statements apply mainly to unembedded or independent clauses and conditional sentences in HC; there are complications when one deals with dependent clauses.
3. The zero form, with respect to tense, is essentially nonfuture. The aspectual meanings it may express in various contexts depend largely on the stativity of the verb and tense and need not concern us here. In Table 2, however, I have sorted out stative and active verb contexts to indicate more explicitly how my analysis differs from Bickerton's, in which stativity plays a greater role. Note in particular that the HC zero form can be used, unlike Bickerton's classic zero form, for present actions (habitual aspect) and past states.<sup>6</sup>

Givón (1982:120,121) notes that the stem form in HCE can also be used in future and conditional clauses. Bickerton (1975:30ff) states that this indeed occurs, but as an exception to the basic pattern. Givón's comment about conditionals with stem forms seems to be covered by Bickerton's exception, but Givón's exception concerning stem forms with future meanings is not covered in Bickerton's discussion of stem form futures (1975:31). Moreover, the HC stem form can be used in

conditionals (complexities I will not discuss), but not as a future in independent clauses, another difference from its HCE counterpart (in Givón's analysis).

Bickerton (1975:30ff) discusses an entire group of exceptions involving modal, dependent, and various other types of clauses with GCE stem forms. My claims for HC, purportedly the same classic system as GCE and HCE, are not based on these "exceptional" clauses, so they are in no way weakened since they account for independent, nonmodal clauses.

4. For *ap* and *va*, several contextual meanings are indicated; these are listed separately because no single terms cover both. In addition, no one contextual meaning is primary, neither quantitatively nor from the standpoint of the syntactic environments in which they occur. Neither are any of the contextual meanings semantic extensions of others as far as is discernible from our present understanding of HC grammar. Note that *ap* takes future and nonfuture readings contextually. As a future, it is distinguished from *va* in that it evinces indicative mood and can also be used in other ways, namely in conditional sentences (Spears 1987, 1989a, 1990).

Givón labels HCE *go* as irrealis, which conforms to Bickerton's model. Since HC *ap*, the analog of HCE *stay*, serves as a future along with *va*, the analog of HCE *go*, there is no reason to label *va* as irrealis since futurity is within its domain. He also uses the term "iterative," among others, to describe *stay*, but I have omitted it because it confuses rather than clarifies. Suffice it to say the term "nonpunctual" covers the aspectual notions of progressivity and habituality, following the now more commonly used terminology of Comrie (1976).

5. Several HC verb forms can be used for different types of imperative, and, no doubt, in HCE also. Thus there appears to be no reason to single out *go*, as Givón does, as having an imperative use. He mentions only one type for which HCE *go* is used, namely the *go*+V imperative, e.g., (HCE) *Go ask the guy for downpayment* 'Go ask the guy for a downpayment' (Givón 1982:123). In Table 2, I have left out Givón's characterization of HCE *go*+V imperative.

#### 4.0. Givón's Model of Foregrounding/Backgrounding

In Table 3, Givón's claims concerning the narrative discourse functions of the TMA markers are given along with their functions.<sup>7</sup>

Marker	Semantics	Narrative Discourse Function
zero	past action  present state future conditional	<i>foreground</i> : main line of narrative action; events in real world sequence
<i>stay</i>	nonpunctual (i.e., progressive & habitual)	<i>background</i> : side trips; describes habitual or short-term states which form temporal and explanatory frame for main events
<i>go</i>	future, conditional, irrealis, imperative	<i>background</i> : used as probabilistic statements in interruptions of main line action; appears frequently in quoted/reported speech, or complements of "think verbs" (123), of narrative participants
<i>bin</i>	anterior (past, pluperfect)	<i>background</i> : appears as 'look-back' in trips; reverses the real world event sequence; used frequently in presupposed/embedded clauses such as V-complements, REL-clauses and ADV-clauses

*Table 3: Creole TMA markers – Semantics & discourse functions.*<sup>8</sup>

Concerning Table 3, note the following points made by Givón (1982):

1. It is not unusual for the subject or topic of background sentences to differ from that of the foreground sentences in a narrative.
2. The various marker combinations, not being zero forms, are found in the background material of narratives.

### 5.0. Discourse in HC

The extended HC narrative presented below provides a basis for evaluating Givón's model of foregrounding/backgrounding, which, as noted, should apply to HC since it is a "classic" or regular creole. Of primary interest is the question of whether the differences in the HC TMA system, presented above, lead to differences in the discourse functions of the markers. (Of course, there might have been discourse differences even if HC had the same TMA system.) If there are discourse differences between HC and HCE, there is the question of to what extent they might be due to differences in the HC TMA system. My concern in this study is principally with stem forms and the marker *te*. Note additionally that in Givón's (1982) study, some of the terms for portions of narratives are not carefully defined. However, the text of the article makes clear how the terms are used. In any case, I define such terms.

The text below is from four native speakers of HC from Port-au-Prince. The conversation was tape-recorded in 1985 and transcribed by a participant who served as a field worker under my direction. All of the speakers had lived in Port-au-Prince until adulthood; one was visiting the U.S. Each line of text is accompanied by four

lines of explanatory material. The lines are ordered as follows: line a – discourse notes, line b – notes on meaning, line c – HC (in the IPN, official orthography), line d – morpheme-by-morpheme gloss, and line e – free translation. No effort has been made to standardize spelling. The orthography was used to obtain a somewhat narrow transcription. Spaces are left between morphemes except in the case of certain idioms, which are hyphenated.

Observe that the main narrative of the principal speaker is broken in places by comments from the others. On line a, "F"s in the passage mark the predicates of those clauses or sentences that are *foregrounded*. They are chronologically ordered and express events. Dependent clauses and conditional sentences are in parentheses.

HC Narrative Text

Section 1

(BT 58.5)

- 1a. F1  
b. PRES PST  
c. P: *Oo! M kwè (m pati vandredi, swa jèdi ou*  
d. INT 1sg believe 1sg leave Friday be-it Thursday or  
e. Oh! I believe I left Friday, maybe Thursday or
- 2a. F2  
b. PST  
c. *vandredi.) Samdi m al lopital. (Sa k pase),*  
d. Friday/ Saturday 1sg go hospital/ that REL happen  
e. Friday. Saturday I went to the hospital. What happened was,
- 3a. F3  
b.  
c. *mwen-menm, mwen rive...*  
d. 1sg-self 1sg arrive  
e. myself, I arrived...
- 4a.  
b.  
c. B: *Pati... Ayiti w al lopital lan (sic)?*  
d. leave/ Haiti 2sg go hospital DET  
e. You left...You went to the hospital in Haiti?
- 5a.  
b.  
c. M: *Non.*  
d. No  
e. No.
- 6a. EXP1 LB1  
b.  
c. P: *Non, isi. (Pandan m nan prizon an,) mwen jwenn...*  
d. No here/ During 1sg in prison DET 1sg find  
e. No, here. While I was in the prison, I found...

- 7a. RESTART LB1
- b. *Se te menm pòblèm sa yo (k te genyen). (Kòm si si*  
d. COP ANT same problem DEM PL REL ANT have/ as if if  
e. There had been the same problems (the same problems had kept  
reoccurring). Like, if
- 8a. ELAB1
- b. PST HAB PST HAB
- c. *gen dis nèg Latibonit, dis nèg sa a fè pati*  
d. have ten guy Artibonite ten guy DEM DET make party  
e. there were ten guys from Artibonite, those ten guys would  
form an Artibonite
- 9a. ELAB1a
- b.
- c. *Latibonit). Yo dis nèg pa yo a. (Si youn gen*  
d. Artibonite/ 3pl ten guy POSS 3sg DET/ if one have  
e. group. They would be their own ten-guy group. If one had
- 10a. ELAB2
- b.
- c. *kont avèk on nèg (ki soti nan Sud), egal se*  
d. hassle with DET guy REL come from South then COP  
e. a hassle with somebody who comes from the South, then it was
- 11a.
- b.
- c. *tout nèg Latibonit yo (ki gen kont a (sic) nèg la) ).*  
d. all guy Artibonite DET REL have hassle with guy DET/  
e. all the Artibonite guys who had a hassle with the guy.

Note first the discourse structure of Section 1 in Table 4:

F1
F2
F3
EXP1 (elliptical sentence)
LB1
RESTART LB1 <i>te</i> (COP PST/PLP)
ELAB1 zero (active PST HAB)
ELAB1a zero (predicate NP PST HAB)
ELAB2 zero (COP PST HAB)
N: 1. Where there is no verb form information, the verb is active, stem form, PST PFV
2. Copulae occur in cleft constructions



<hr/>	
<i>LEGEND</i>	
INTR	Introduction
F	Foregrounded constituent
EXP	Explanatory constituent
LB	Look-back
RESTART	Restart of the constituent noted
ELAB	Elaborative constituent
PFV	Perfective
PLP	Pluperfect
PST	Past
HAB	Habitual
COP	Copula
N: Background material is indented to the right of the material it comments on.	
<hr/>	
<i>Table 4: Discourse structure of Section 1.</i>	
<hr/>	

Table 4 captures the hierarchical structure of Section 1. We see that there are elaborations of elaborations, elaborations of foregrounded material, etc. *Elaborations* add amplifying details to what has already been said in another way. *Explanations* provide reasons and clarify. *Look-backs* break the chronological sequence sustained by the foreground material; they refer to a time before the insequence events. Observe that ELAB1a elaborates the nature of the group already mentioned. Even LBs are somewhat complicated. LB1 looks back to the period of imprisonment, specifically back to its beginning; but the LB also covers that part of imprisonment after the hospital visit. So, in a sense, it looks back and forward. EXP1 could of course be considered not part of the narrative since it is in answer to another speaker's question. But that question itself pertains directly to the narrative and its structure; consequently, it would be difficult not to consider it an integral part. It would be socially unrealistic to require that narratives, as a genre, be uninterrupted. No doubt there are subtypes which have this quality, but certainly not all narratives.

First off, we notice all foregrounded predicates are in the stem form, and they are past events. However, so are three out of five background constituents, i.e. all material that is not foregrounded. The two nonzero forms: (RESTART LB1), which has *te* and can be interpreted either as a past or a pluperfect, and the elliptical sentence (EXP1). If RESTART LB1 is interpreted as a past, the temporal context would be the time the speaker was in prison; if interpreted as a pluperfect, the temporal context would be the period from arrival in prison to the point of going to the hospital. The sentence is glossed, somewhat arbitrarily, with a pluperfect, past-before-past, since the verbs are in *te*. Section 1 shows additionally that HC has past tense stative verbs in the zero form (*gen*, line 7). Notice also the past habitual *fê*, line 8, which has no nonpunctual marker.

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Givón and others describe the very strong tendency of foregrounded material to be in main clauses, but consider F1. Not belief, but leaving Friday is the situation at issue; and that situation is expressed by a predicate complement, the clausal complement of the verb *kwè* 'believe'. Presumably, any dependent foreground clauses would be clausal complements of cognition and communication predicates since they tend to show main clause traits (Green 1976).

## Section 2

(BT 60.2)

12a.

b.

c. *Monchè, pou wè, on nèg (ki pa kapab...) Li pa*

d. my-friend for see DET guy REL NEG able 3sg NEG

e. Man, it was something to see, a guy who couldn't...he

13a. INTR

ELAB1

b. STAT PST

c. *kapab rele, li pa kab al nan telefon (pou l*

d. able call 3sg NEG able go to telephone COMP 3sg

e. couldn't call, he couldn't go to the telephone to call

14a.

F4

b.

c. *rele on moun), epi l bay on nèg dis kòb*

d. call DET person and 3sg give DET guy ten cent

e. somebody and he gave a guy ten cents

15a.

b.

c. *(pou fè kòl la pou li).*

d. COMP make call DET for 3sg/

e. to make the call for him.

16a.

b.

c. B: *Ya.*

d. INT

e. I see/OK/ah

17a.

b.

c. O: *Nèg la menm rele...*

d. guy DET self call

e. So the guy made the call.

(BT 61)

18a.

b.

c. M: *Ki sa k fè l pa kab rele a ?<sup>9</sup>*

d. WH that REL make 3sg NEG able call DET/

e. Why couldn't he make the call?

- 19a. EXP1  
 b.  
 c. P: *Li pa konn (kòman (pou l rele)).*  
 d. 3sg NEG know how COMP 3sg call/  
 e. He didn't know how to call.
- 20a.  
 b.  
 c. M: *O.... en-en*  
 d. INT INT  
 e. I see
- 21a.  
 b.  
 c. P: *(Konny a la a, lè nèg la al fè kòl la pou*  
 d. now DET there DET when guy DET go make call DET for  
 e. At that point, when the guy went to make the call for
- 22a.  
 b.  
 c. *li, epi moun nan (li te bezwen nan kay la )), l pa*  
 d. 3sg and person DET 3sg ANT need in house DET 3sg NEG  
 e. him; and, the person he wanted in the house, he didn't
- 23a. F5 LB1  
 b. PLP  
 c. *jwenn moun nan nan kay la e yo gentan reponn*  
 d. find person DET at house DET and 3pl already answer  
 e. find him in the house; and they had already told
- 24a. F6  
 b.  
 c. *misye (ke moun nan pa la), egal li kontinye*  
 d. guy COMP person DET NEG there nevertheless 3sg continue  
 e. him that the person wasn't there; nevertheless, he kept
- (BT 62)
- 25a.  
 b.  
 c. *pale avèk lòt moun (li jwenn nan). Egal, nèg la (k te*  
 d. talk with other person 3sg find DET/ so guy DET REL ANT  
 e. talking with the person who had answered. So, the guy who had had
- 26a. F7  
 b.  
 c. *bay fè kòl la), li pa pale li menm. (Konny a*  
 d. have make call DET 3sg NEG talk 3sg self/ now DET  
 e. the call made, he didn't talk himself. So
- 27a. F8  
 b.  
 c. *lè misye fin pale), li di misye (se pou misye*  
 d. when guy finish talk 3sg say guy COP MOD guy  
 e. when the guy finished talking, he told the guy; he had to

28a.

F9

b.

*remèt li dis kòb li). Misye di: "Monchè, m*

d.

return 3sg ten cent 3sg/ guy say man 1sg

e.

return him his ten cents. The guy said, "Man, I

29a.

b.

*pa ka remèt ou dis kòb ou. Ou ban (m fè*

d.

NEG able return 2sg ten cent 2sg/ 2sg have 1sg make

e.

can't give you back your ten cents. You had me make

30a.

b.

*oun kòl pou ou, oke). (M te mèt pa jwenn moun*

d.

one call for 2sg OK/ 1sg ANT MOD NEG find person

e.

a call for you, OK. Even if I didn't find the

31a.

b.

*nan... M pa jwenn moun nan, egal, (depi yo te*

d.

DET 1sg NEG find person DET so after 3pl ANT

e.

person... I didn't find him, so, after they picked

(BT 63)

32a.

b.

*reponn mwen), dis kòb la t ap pèdi," baay*

d.

answer 1sg ten cent DET ANT NPCT lose thing

e.

up, the ten cents would be lost." And so

33a.

F10

b.

*konsa). Misye di: "Non, ou pa t dwe pale menm*

d.

like-that guy say no 2sg NEG ANT MOD talk even

e.

it was. The other guy said, "No, you shouldn't have even

34a.

b.

*dutou. Egal, ou pale, se pou ou remèt mwen dis*

d.

at-all/ so 2sg talk COP MOD 2sg return 1sg ten

e.

talked at all. So, you talked, you have to give me back

35a.

b.

*kòb mwen."*

d.

cent 1sg/

e.

my ten cents.

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INTR	zero stative PST
	ELAB1 zero stative PST
F4	
F5	
	LB1 zero active PLP
F6	
F7	
F8	
F9	
	B zero stative PRES
	B
	B <i>te</i> , ( <i>depi te</i> active PLP) <i>t ap</i> active
	COND IND PFV
	B (Incorporated into the sentence above)
F10	
	B <i>te</i> stative PST
	B
	B zero COP (stative) PRES
N: 1.	Where there is no verb form information, the verb is active, stem form, PST PFV

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LEGEND

COND	Conditional
IND	Indicative
B	background clause, not subclassified
N:	Background material is indented to the right of the material it comments on.

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Table 5: Discourse structure of section 2.

In Section 2,<sup>10</sup> the foregrounded clauses have past perfective active predicates, as would be expected. The background material in the *introduction* introduces a new participant into the narration, as is common. It refers to a "state ... necessary for understanding motives, attitudes, etc." (Hopper 1979: 217). A very interesting trait of this and other background clauses is that it has a stem form verb which is associated with foreground clauses. However, these background zero verbs are generally stative and not active past perfective as foreground clauses. Indeed, out of ten background clauses (the two clauses of the conditional sentences are considered as one), eight have stem form verbs (including the modal copula construction *se pou*, which can take a marker, e.g., *se te pou*). Three of these eight stem forms are active past perfective, the type of verb form associated with foreground clauses.

The generalization in looking at Sections 1 and 2 as well as other portions of the text is that HC background clauses tend to have stem form predicates (whether they are stative or active), unless they are temporal, in which case they have a strong tendency to bear preverbal markers. For example, in LB1 (line 23) *reponn* 'answer, respond' is pluperfect, referring back to the time of F5; but the verb does not carry

the anterior marker *te*, as one might expect with an adverb such as *gentan* and in lookbacks. *Te* and *gentan* 'already' do co-occur in HC, but not in this instance.

## 6.0. Conclusion

The HC nonpunctual marker *ap* rarely occurs in narratives, and when it does it is typically in combination with *te*. Givón notes that the nonpunctual marker typically describes habitual or short-term (i.e., continuous - Comrie 1976) states which form the temporal and explanatory frame for main events. Of course, there is no need in such cases for the HC nonpunctual<sup>11</sup> marker to appear since active predicates in the stem form may express habituality, and stative stem form predicates may express continuousness.<sup>12</sup> Thus the broad range of meaning that the stem form has allows it to occur in more contexts than the HCE stem form, leading to a preponderance of stem forms in the HC narrative. A net effect of this is that HC does less in the way of using verb form differences to distinguish foreground from background clauses, at least as defined herein. More to the point, basically only stem forms occur in foreground clauses, while stem and any other verb form can occur in background clauses.

This observation leads to the question of whether we might do better to define background and foreground differently for HC. Perhaps a modified definition applied to texts such as that above would show stem forms as occurring in and only in foreground clauses. However, given the background clauses in which stem forms occur in the above texts, it can be easily seen that the basic conceptual content of the foreground/background distinction would have to be vitiated to bring verb form/discourse functions in line with Givón's (1982) claims specifically or other similar ones.

Without adducing further information on the semantics of HC verbal forms, it is clear that HC's failure to conform to Givón's (1982) claims owes to the stem form's occurring in both punctual and nonpunctual contexts, to use Bickerton's terms. Indeed, claims about foregrounding/verb form correlations have often involved verb forms which roughly fit the punctual/nonpunctual semantics Bickerton has discussed in his work on creoles (e.g., Romance perfective and imperfective forms).

Elsewhere (Spears 1987, 1993) I have demonstrated that the meaning of the HC stem form is rather broad in comparison to other creoles. Essentially it is nonfuture and nonprogressive. Thus there are only two global restrictions on its occurrence: it cannot occur in future tense and progressive aspect contexts in independent clauses, but it may occur in all mood contexts, with certain syntactic restrictions. As noted, the reason it does not serve ONLY to forge the sequential backbone of the narrative in foreground clauses is that it may express contextually certain submeanings of the aspectual category *imperfective*. Consequently, the behavior of the HC stem form is simple to explain with respect to foregrounding/backgrounding.

Since the other verb forms occur in background clauses, these forms follow basically what other studies of narrative foregrounding and backgrounding indicate. In their case, there is nothing to explain, so to speak. *Te* in particular serves to remove a situation from the sphere of the present (or some posterior reference time); it can thus be characterized as an "anti-perfect." Among its primary discourse functions in both narrative and nonnarrative contexts is clarification (Spears 1993). This characterization of *te* shows that it is highly suitable for background clauses and highly unsuitable for foreground clauses.

Perhaps the key issue with regard to foregrounding/backgrounding is whether, indeed, HC grammar recognizes such a distinction through verb forms at all. As I indicated above, HC does to some degree, but there is not a strict correspondance between morphological categories and pragmatic ones (namely foregrounding/backgrounding). In other words, the pragmatic categories we are dealing with do not entirely explain the grammatical behavior of the morphological verb forms.

Without a doubt, pragmatic notions are necessary for explaining verb forms in *te* as compared to stem forms in HC, and the same can be said for most if not all verb forms in all languages. By *explain* I mean describing contexts of occurrence and predicting where they will and will not occur. Even Germanic simple pasts, to take one example, whose use qua past tense markers seems straightforward, tend to alternate with simple present forms (used as historic presents). Explaining this requires recourse to pragmatic notions. To explain the HC antiperfect marker *te* (anterior marker in Bickerton's framework), pragmatic notions such as clarification and information organization must be used. Thus, the fact (given our present knowledge of HC grammar) that the notions of foregrounding and backgrounding do not adequately explain the occurrences of stem and *te* verb forms does not by any means imply that pragmatic notions are unnecessary for determining their distribution. They are necessary, as are grammatical notions of practically all types. Consequently, as Waugh & Monville-Burston (1986:846) note, "Discourse analysis should not supplant, but rather complement, more traditional semantic analysis" (and, as we should add, grammatical analysis of other kinds).

Based on the foregoing discussion, there is nothing indicating that HC verb forms do not derive from discourse. The complications that arrive in attempting to explain all their occurrences and nonoccurrences – complications requiring not only pragmatic but other kinds of grammatical analysis – can well be seen as arising out of the palimpsest created by diachrony. This palimpsest creates exceptions, instances of grammatical arbitrariness and variation, among other phenomena.

Finally, it has been claimed "that the foreground-background distinction is a universal of some kind, one that may be realized formally in a number of different ways, depending on the language concerned" (Hopper 1979:217). This claim is not empirical as stated: it is not precise enough to be testable. In any case, we can note only that a discourse analysis of the zero and *te* forms (see above and Spears 1993)

shows that the foreground/background distinction is inadequate for explaining their behavior.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, narrative discourse and, more specifically, foreground/background analyses are only some of several types which must be carried out in order to understand verb forms in creole and other types of language.

### NOTES

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2. He no longer stands fully behind the semantic claims about preverbal markers, although the claims concerning the number of preverbal markers and their sequencing remain.

3. For more detailed discussions of the semantics of the HC TMA markers, see Spears (1987; 1989a,b; 1990).

4. Here, to simplify the discussion, I follow Givón in his use of the term *semantics*.

5. The example provided (Givón 1982:121) has the zero form in the conditional hypostasis (*if*) clause.

6. However, the zero form can be used for present punctual actions, e.g. using a punctual verb such as *fwape* 'to knock, hit' to express a punctual action as it is carried out. This is a special case, though, of the type I generally overlook in this paper in order to streamline the discussion.

7. For similar treatments of other languages, see of Hopper (1979), Waugh & Monville-Burston (1986), Tagliamonte & Poplack (1988), Fleischmann (1985), Labov & Waletzky (1967), Wolfson (1979), Schiffrin (1981), and Silva-Corvalán (1983), Pollard (1989) and Jaganauth (1988). Only Pollard and Jaganauth deal in detail with focusing in narratives of what are indisputably creole languages.

8. Adapted from Givón (1982:119, Table 1).

9. "Strictly speaking," this sentence has a relative clause, but this is the normal syntax for questions of this type.

10. The text is broken up into two sections to facilitate discussion only.

11. *Nonpunctual* in this context is used to identify one of the three preverbal markers in a cross-creole context, not characterize its semantics. Remember that the "nonpunctual" marker also marks future tense; when doing so, it does not imply nonpunctuality.

12. The stem form does not express progressivity; the nonpunctual marker *ap* must be used.

13. Note that *te*'s may be optionally deleted following an initial one (Spears 1993). Their non-occurrence in these instances has nothing to do with foregrounding.

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