The case of Aspect in Bequia Creole – a variationist perspective.

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In this presentation I discuss some methodological decisions underlying the treatment of aspect in a variationist analysis of tense marking in Bequia Creole (St. Vincent and the Grenadines). One of the goals is to answer the question researchers face when coding for aspect, especially in the studies involving language variation, namely, ‘how much context is needed for the correct interpretation of aspectual categories?’. Given their reduced or sometimes absent system of overt tense marking, creoles are considered as aspect-prominent rather than tense-prominent, which makes them an ideal case study for the current analysis (Alleyne 1980, Singler 1990, Sankoff 1991).

Three approaches towards coding aspect are tested: (i) lexical, which considers the lexical properties of surface forms (Rappaport & Levin 1998, Levin & Rappaport 2005), (ii) grammatical, where the whole VP is considered with its internal objects (Comrie 1976, Dahl 1985) (iii) sentential, which includes the elements surrounding the verb in a sentence (Verkuyl 1972, Smith 1991). Each of these levels is analysed as an independent variable in the quantitative study of variation between bare verbs (1) and verb inflections (2) within the past temporal reference of Bequia Creole.

The data comes from a set of sociolinguistic interviews with two generations of Bequia speakers from three communities identified in previous research (Meyerhoff & Walker 2007; Walker & Meyerhoff 2006; Walker, Meyerhoff & Daleszynska 2009, Daleszynska 2009). The results should determine which level of aspectual analysis outlined above accounts most significantly for the variation within tense marking among these different
communities and age groups. Moreover, the results will contribute to establishing a replicable coding scheme for the studies of variation where analysis of aspect is necessary.

Examples:

(1) Bare verbs:

Her aunt take her from me when she was living in Saint-Vincent, take her to school over there, so she grow up with her aunt. (PF09: 250)

(2) Inflected verbs:

Well, when hurricane passed we actually went on the beach to watch how much the waves come in. (MPCh: 158)

References


