

The future / non-future split in Vincentian Creole: Evidence from the interpretation of bare verbs

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The bare form of verbs in Vincentian Creole can be described as ambiguous between past and present or, more accurately, to use Eide’s formula, “inherently underspecified as to whether it denotes present or past” (Eide 2006: 349). I argue that Vincentian Creole makes a future/non-future tense distinction. This is based on the categorisation proposed by de Haan (2010) who states that languages that use the same form for past and present make a future/non-future tense opposition, while those that combine present and future make past/non-past opposition (see also Comrie 1985). Although this typology seems simplistic from the outset, I elect to apply the classification here as a first approach to the study of future tense in Vincentian Creole. In this language, as in other English-based creoles (see Maurer et al. 2013), tense is not marked by means of inflectional morphology on the verb, but rather periphrastically, as summarised below.

Time reference	Stative predicates		Dynamic predicates
	Verbal	Adjectival	
Past	<i>Shi bin de ya</i> 3SG PST LOC-COP here ‘She was here.’	<i>I gyel bin sik</i> DEF ART girl PST sick ‘The girl was sick.’	<i>I gyel opnu I windo</i> DEF ART girl open DEF ART window ‘The girl opened the window.’
Present	<i>Dem luhv komes</i> 3PL love gossip ‘They love gossip.’	<i>I gyel sik</i> DEF ART girl sick ‘The girl is sick.’	<i>I gyel a opnu i windo</i> DEF ART girl PROG open DEF ART window ‘The girl is opening the window.’
Future	<i>Mi go hei baut yu</i> 1SG FUT hear about 2SG ‘I will hear about you.’	<i>I shiit go drai kwik</i> DEF ART sheet FUT dry quick ‘The sheet will dry quickly.’	<i>I gyel go opnu i windo</i> DEF ART girl FUT open DEF ART window ‘The girl will open the window.’

These examples show that in absolute (deictic) tense (Comrie 1985), an unmarked predicate does not obtain a future tense interpretation: only readings in the past (for dynamic predicates) or present (for non-dynamic predicates) are available (see Bickerton 1981, Holm 1988/1989, Winford 20, among others). I therefore describe the semantic consequences arising from the ability of bare predicates to extract different temporal readings. I will analyse data from other English-based creole to support the claim that the stative / non-stative distinction is irrelevant in the case of a future/non-future tense distinction.

References

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