

58th Annual Meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea
- Call for Abstracts -

Morphological boundaries in Creole languages

Workshop organisers:

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Keywords: affixes, words, inflection, word-formation, clitics, Creoles

Submission Guidelines:

Provisional abstracts (300-word, excluding references) for 20-minute presentations should be submitted by **10 November 2024** to aluis@fl.uc.pt and susanne.michaelis@uni-leipzig.de. We will inform all presenters of a preliminary acceptance of their abstracts before the workshop proposal is submitted to the SLE by 20 November 2024. If the workshop proposal is accepted, presenters will be asked to submit a 500-word abstract in EasyChair by 15 January 2025.

Workshop description:

Early research on Creole languages, often influenced by theories of pidginization and simplification, generally emphasized syntactic and phonological features, while morphological structures were perceived as minimal or even absent in many Creoles. This view posited that Creoles developed under conditions of rapid language formation, which favored a reduction in morphological complexity. As a result, the idea that Creoles are largely analytic or isolating languages lacking inflectional marking remains widespread in Creole studies (e.g., McWhorter 1998, 2005; Thomason 2001; Parkvall 2008; Daval-Markussen 2013; Siegel et al. 2014; Velupillai 2015).

However, more recent research has challenged this oversimplified perspective, recognizing that Creole morphology is more complex and diverse than previously thought (Kihm 2003; Plag 2003, 2008; Luís 2015, 2018). For instance, it has been shown that many Creole languages retain certain morphemes from their lexifier languages, albeit often in modified forms. In Haitian Creole, for example, some derivational affixes are preserved from French but reanalyzed or recombined in novel ways. This suggests that, rather than undergoing wholesale reduction, Creole languages have been shaped by more intricate processes of retention, adaptation, and innovation.

A key factor in understanding the morphological structures of Creole languages lies in the role of spelling conventions, which are often poorly adapted to mirror primarily

spoken languages. Researchers may be misled into believing that grammatical markers separated by spaces are free forms ("words"), while those written together with their hosts must be bound forms ("affixes"/"clitics"). These orthographic assumptions also tend to obscure linguistic change, such as reanalysis and grammaticalization, reinforcing the oversimplified idea that Creole languages are inherently analytic and lack morphological richness. It is crucial to move beyond superficial orthographic cues.

Not only do the existing written records often not reflect the complexities of spoken forms, but the lack of oral corpora and high-quality transcriptions also remains a significant obstacle in the study of Creole morphological boundaries. By prioritizing the collection and annotation of oral data and refining analytical criteria, we can move beyond these limitations and more effectively challenge the "simplicity" narrative, which inaccurately portrays Creole languages as morphologically impoverished.

Recent research has also emphasized the importance of accounting for lexifier and substrate biases in comparative studies of Creole languages (Michaelis 2020). When genealogical and areal biases are carefully controlled, and the spectrum of Creole languages is broadened beyond the traditionally studied varieties, researchers can more accurately analyze morphological boundaries. Comparative methods, which rely on systematic comparisons across languages, are particularly useful in this context as they help avoid overgeneralizations.

Against this background, the workshop aims to bring together scholars investigating various morphological processes in genealogically diverse Creole languages, particularly with regard to their relationships with lexifiers and substrates. The workshop will foster discussions that reassess the distinction between free forms and bound forms in Creole morphology, exploring the complexities of morphological evolution and language change in these contact settings. We invite contributions on how processes such as grammaticalization, reanalysis, and innovation shape the morphological structure of Creole languages and how these processes can be understood in the broader context of contact linguistics and morphological theory.

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Free forms and bound forms in Creole morphology and the distinction between words, affixes and clitics;
- Criteria for identifying morphological boundaries based on spoken corpora;
- Reanalysis and innovation in Creole morphology;
- Synchrony and diachrony in Creole morphology, including processes of grammaticalization;
- The impact of language contact on Creole morphology in multilingual contexts;
- Comparative studies involving multiple Creoles as well as comparisons between Creoles and their contributing lexifiers or substrates;

- The role of corpora in Creole studies: building, sharing, and utilizing spoken data for morphological analysis;
- Best practices for transcribing and annotating Creoles to capture the nuances of the spoken language.

References

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