Decreolisation in Martinican creole: a perceptual study
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Introduction
- Martinican Creole is a variety of Antillean Creole spoken in the French overseas department of Martinique (Fennig, Lewis and Simmons, 2016), and has been subject to the whims of French language policy (Adrey 2009).
- Only received official protection and teaching provisions from the early 2000s (Léglise and Migge, 2008).
- Limited studies have been done on the language.
  - French and creole exist as a diglossia, cf. Ferguson (1959) - both are reserved for different situations.
  - Lefebvre (1974) found limited evidence of the traditional creole continuum (cf. DeCamp 1971, Bickerton 1973) - French and creole are distinct languages on the island.
  - Prudent (1981) refers to interlecte, a form of constant code-switching between Martinican Creole and French, use of calques, mixed forms, etc.
  - Bernabé and Conflant (2002) refer to decreolisation taking place in Martinican Creole, and hope language education provision will stop it from happening.
- Vaillant (2009) - analysed recordings from radio shows and found the following features.
  - Use of a reflexive pronoun - optional in Martinican Creole, obligatory in French.
  - Of the five factors mentioned in research question two, only three had any significant effect on the distribution of results.
    - Significance of gender against stimuli with no reflexive pronoun - \( x^2(2, N = 120) = 5.107, p = 0.0238 \)
    - Significance of gender against stimuli with a reflexive construction - \( x^2(3, N = 120) = 4.429, p = 0.0353 \)
    - Significance of age against stimuli with no reflexive construction - \( x^2(2, N = 120) = 1.266, p = 0.2652 \)
    - Significance of education against stimuli with no reflexive construction - \( x^2(3, N = 120) = 6.962, p = 0.0038 \)

Research questions
1. Is there a perceptual preference for the morphosyntactic features outlined in Vaillant (2009), which could provide further evidence of decreolisation?
2. Do the following factors have any influence of a person’s perceptual preference for certain features?
   - Age
   - Gender
   - Education in creole
   - Attachment to the island
   - Attitude towards creole

Methodology
- Modified form of matched guise test, based on Freywald et. al. (2011)
  - The test played short and simple sample sentences to compare the acceptability of sentences with the features from Vaillant (2009) to those without them.
  - Instructions were recorded and played to participants to avoid potential literacy issues from aforementioned lack of education provision.
  - Stimuli also included filler sentences considered normatively correct and incorrect, to prime participants and prevent scale bias.
  - Participants rated each sentence from 1 to 5, with 1 being acceptable and 5 being unacceptable.
  - Sentence ratings then tallied up and chi-squared tests were carried out - ratings were collapsed into binary categories as per Blake and Cutler (2003).
  - Participants filled in a questionnaire to collect demographic information, as well as information on use of Martinican Creole, and responses to questions about language attitudes.
  - Also provided a space for further comments, to try and obtain qualitative data.

Results
- 57 out of 60 positive responses for using a relative pronoun, versus 37 out of 60 without.
  - \( x^2(2, N = 120) = 19.64, p = 0.001 \)
- 38 out of 60 positive responses for using a reflexive construction, versus 57 out of 60 without.
  - \( x^2(2, N = 120) = 18.24, p = 0.001 \)

Discussion
- One variant adopted from French was considered acceptable, but the other unacceptable - decreolisation might therefore be the wrong answer.
- Some sentences potentially demonstrate semantic or structural effects.
  - Sentences with \( ki \) were negatively rated where the noun was a subject, positively in the stimulus where the noun was an object.
  - Vaillant originally referred to calques of reflexive verbs - the stimuli here were not calques.
- Overall, there were a majority of positive responses, supporting Prudent’s concept of interlecte – different varieties considered equally acceptable in the context of constant code-switching.
- Women more likely to reject sentences without a relative pronoun and with reflexive constructions.
  - Younger and more educated participants more likely to reject reflexive pronouns - effects of language provisions mentioned in Bernabé and Conflant?
  - Study would merit repetition with more stimuli, a larger sample, and a production counterpart, as well as investigating other demographics.

References

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