

On the conceptual role of number marking in French Based Creoles

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In languages like English, plural-marking is necessary to express plurality. Without a plural morpheme, count-nouns cannot denote more than one entity. This, however, is not general cross-linguistically. In many languages with a plural morpheme, plural-marking is not required for plural denotation, e.g. Haitian Creole (1). Plural-marking is also commonly absent when a plural numeral co-occurs with a noun:

- (1) *Jan te achte (de) chwal*
"John bought (two) horse*(s)"

Comparable facts obtain in other French based Creoles (FBC). In this respect, plural-marking in these Creoles is clearly not 'obligatory', creating ambiguities. Functionalists have conjectured that, in many cases, non-linguistic factors suffice to resolve these ambiguities. From this perspective, Creole languages are regarded as marking number 'economically', i.e., only when the communicative situation calls for it. One important fact, however, constitutes a puzzle for such views: plural-marking in HC (and other FBC) is commonly associated with definiteness/specificity, i.e. 'discourse or situation known' expressions referring to '**familiar**' entities. The puzzle is then: if the functional goal of plural-marking is disambiguation, why should it occur with expressions presupposed to be known by either or both, the speaker and hearer? If an expression is 'known', its number is too. Thus FBC-plural-marking clearly does not serve to resolve ambiguities on the number denotation of unfamiliar entities. For Borer (2004) nouns denote mass concepts that need to be 'portioned-out' or 'individuated' before being counted, and it is the role of grammatical number (or classifiers) to accomplish this individuation. On the basis of a study of the semantic, syntactic and conceptual properties of grammatical number in FBC (centrally HC) this paper argues that languages differ in the way they individuate nouns and that, as a consequence, the role of number is distinct. The idea explored here is that number is not the only 'criterion of individuation' languages rely on: *spatialization*, i.e. location in discourse space/time, offers another viable option. Count nouns, I propose, are the syntactic association of a '**criterion of identity**' (a standard of sameness Geach) with a '**criterion of individuation**' that makes minimal parts accessible to syntax. This 'criterion of individuation' can be achieved through morphological number, classifiers, or *contextual spatialization*, an operation pairing individuals with unique location indices. In languages like HC, using contextual spatialization, plural-marking is not used for individuation but for *re-identification* of specific individuals, i.e. for *tracking* 'same' linguistic individuals in changing (discourse) contexts. Plural-marking, I propose, signals *identity to previously individuated entities*. On this view, the FBC definiteness/specificity restriction follows: only 'recurring' entities need be marked for identity with previous occurrences. A formal account of number (2) vs. spatial (3) individuation is proposed:

- (2) Number I: $\lambda w \lambda x \lambda n [R_w(x, K) \& \text{Min}(x, K) \& \text{OU}_w(K)(x) = n$

The x that are minimal realizations of a kind and that number in n

- (3) Spatial I: $\lambda w \lambda x [R_w(x, K') \& \text{Min}(x, K') \& L_c(x)]$

The x that are minimal realizations of a kind and have an individuating location.

And the paper discusses how this view sheds interesting new light on the properties of plural-marking in languages like HC vs. English as summed up in Table 1.

Table 1

	HC	Eng
# marking is 'optional'	yes	no
# is general	yes	no
#Agreement outside DP	no	yes
#Agreement inside DP	no	yes
# Definiteness restriction	yes	no
Mass/count	yes	yes