

THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPLEMENTATION IN SARAMACCAN

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The topic of this paper is a change that has taken place between the early 19th and the 20th century in the complementizer system of Saramaccan (SA), a 'radical' creole spoken by the Saramaka Maroons in Surinam. The complementizer *va* used to introduce object clauses in these texts has been replaced by *táa* in 20th-century SA. This development is compared to the situation in Sranan (SR), a plantation creole which, even though it is genetically related to SA, differs from it in terms of the sociohistorical matrix of its development.

creoles, Saramaccan, Sranan, Maroon creoles, plantation creoles, creole formation, complementation, nativization

1. INTRODUCTION¹

The topic of this paper is the historical development of complementation in Saramaccan

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(SA), in particular a change in the selection of the complementizer that took place between the early 19th and the 20th century. SA is a so-called 'radical' creole, spoken by the Saramaka Maroons who live in the interior of Surinam. The Saramaka Maroons are the descendants of slaves who escaped from the plantations in the late 17th and early 18th century and created their own communities in the Surinam rain forest. The linguistic analysis is based on an examination of all (N=122) complements of utterance, cognition and perception verbs occurring in two early SA manuscripts. One of these manuscripts consists of ten letters – known as the 'Saramaka Maroon Letters' – written between 1790 and 1818 by a young Saramaka called Christian Grego. The letters signed 'Johannes Alabi' were also written by Grego, but they were dictated to him by Alabi, an illiterate fellow Saramaka. Grego and Alabi were among the first Saramaka to be converted to Christianity. The other manuscript is a Saramaccan translation of chapters 1 through 14 of the Acts of the Apostles, made by a Moravian missionary, I.L. Wietz, around 1793 (Voorhoeve & Donicie 1963:108). Together these two sources yield a corpus of around 16,500 words.

The Saramaka Maroon Letters² represent one of the very few cases of early creole texts written by *native speakers*. The variety of Saramaccan used in these letters is heavily influenced by Sranan (SR), the plantation creole with which SA is historically related. This is probably a result of the fact that Grego learned how to read and write from the Moravian Brethren, a group of German missionaries who began proselytizing in Saramaka in the mid-1760s, using not only SA but SR as well in their contacts with the Saramaka. In these letters, SR and SA words are sometimes used in free variation. Some of the most frequent examples are the following pairs (the SA word is mentioned first): *bi/ben* (tense marker), *dilda* (determiner), and *dalgi* ('give', dative marker). Sometimes both members of a pair are used interchangeably within one and the same letter. Although in general function words are much less easily borrowed than content words, in almost half of the cases the items concerned belong to the former category. For more information, see Arends (1995c).

Wietz's SA translation of Acts was published by Schuchardt (1914) in an edition which was based on the earliest known version of the text rather than on Wietz's original manuscript, which is lost. Schuchardt worked from a *copy*, which was made in the 1880s especially for this purpose (Schuchardt 1914:1), of a *revised version* (from 1805) of Wietz's original translation. It should be emphasized that Schuchardt did *not* have the 1805 manuscript, which is now located at the Moravian Archives in Utrecht, at his disposal. As noted by Voorhoeve & Donicie (1963:108), the Moravian Archives in Paramaribo contain an additional fragment of Acts, which is part of the same translation. This fragment contains chapter 13:34-52 as well as the entire chapter 14. Together these two parts of the translation cover approximately half of the entire text of Acts. Apparently, the translation never proceeded beyond chapter 14 (cf. Schuchardt 1914:1). Since Schuchardt's edition of Wietz's translation contains many deviations from the 1805 manuscript, including errors relating directly to the topic under investigation (confusion of *vo* and *va*), the present analysis is on the 1805 manuscript itself, including the additional fragment referred to above.

This study is part of a project whose ultimate aim is to produce a descriptive grammar of

² Three of these letters were published in Arends & Perl (1995:383-87); an integral edition is in preparation.

early Saramaccan, based on a large corpus of late-18th-century texts (see Arends, 1995a). It is a contribution to the young but growing field of 'historical creolistics,' which favors an empirical approach to creole formation based on the investigation of early textual data rather than on extrapolations from present-day varieties (cf. Arends, 1995d). The fact that a detailed study of the development of complementation in SA's 'sister language,' SR, is available (Plag, 1993, 1995) makes it possible to investigate the development of both creoles from a comparative perspective. This is especially interesting as SR and SA belong to sociohistorically very different types of creole, SA being a maroon creole while SR is a plantation creole. Plantation creoles and maroon creoles differ not only with regard to the social setting of their speech communities but also in terms of their demographic development. One of the demographic variables that may have linguistic relevance is the rate of nativization, i.e. the rate at which an African-born population is replaced by a locally-born population. As will be shown below, nativization among the Maroons was much faster than it was among slaves. The differential demographic development of these two communities makes it possible, in principle at least, to approach the question as to what role demographic factors play in creole formation from a comparative perspective. The sociohistorical matrices of the formation of SR and SA will be discussed in section 2, while the historical development of their complementizer systems is the topic of section 3.

2. THE SOCIOHISTORICAL MATRIX OF CREOLE FORMATION

Although no historical documents are known that contain figures on the proportion between the African-born and locally-born segments of the Saramaka population in the 18th-century, there is sufficient information available on the basis of which this proportion can be estimated. Due to limitations in the data, these calculations are subject to two restrictions: first, they can be made for two years only, 1702 and 1749; second, they apply to the *entire* Maroon population, which from ca 1730 onwards includes not only the Saramaka but the Ndjuka tribe as well, whose formation began around that time (Hoogbergen 1990:73). Since by 1749 the proportion of locally-born among the latter, due to the fact that they began to form almost 50 years later, most likely was lower than it was among the Saramaka, the incorporation of the Ndjuka in these calculations has a negative effect on the proportion of locally-born. In other words, the proportion of locally-born among the Saramaka was probably higher than appears from the calculations below.

As noted by Hoogbergen (1990:71), '[b]ased on information received from the plantations, the authorities in the districts – the so-called *burgher-kapiteins* – held a record of all 'runaway' or 'returned' slaves.'³ On the basis of these records, Hoogbergen estimates the number of runaways per year at 0.5% of the entire Surinamese black population in that year. However, only one third of these (i.e. 0.17%) stayed away from the plantations permanently. The fact that reliable figures (based on head tax records⁴) of the black population for the 1702-1749 period are available (see Arends 1995b:259), makes it possible to calculate the numbers of permanent runaways in this period by projecting the 0.17% figure on these figures (see Table 1):

³ *Burgher-kapitein* (lit. 'civil captain') was the highest rank in a *burgher militia* (lit. 'civil militia').

⁴ Due to underreporting, these figures should be raised by approximately 10% (Arends 1995b:257-58).

Table 1: Estimated numbers of permanent runaway slaves in Surinam (1702-1749)

	Number of Blacks at beginning of period	Estimated number of permanent runaway slaves per period
1702-09	9,345 ⁵	127
1710-19	12,109	214
1720-29	13,604	265
1730-39	18,190	361
1740-49	23,666 ⁶	402
	Total	1,369

Addition of 10% (because of underreporting) yields a total number of around 1,500 permanent runaways for the entire 1702-1749 period.

A reliable estimate of the proportion of locally-born among the Maroon population in 1749 is possible if we dispose, in addition to the 'immigration' figures in Table 1, of population figures for the 1702-1749 period. These figures are provided by Hoogbergen, a leading scholar in Surinam Maroon history, who estimates the number of Maroons present in Surinam in 1702 and 1749 at 1,000-1500 and 6,000, respectively (1990:73, 75). Since the same author, in a later publication (Hoogbergen 1992:39), gives 1,000 as the number of Maroons in 1702, we will proceed from that figure.⁷ By combining population figures and immigration figures, the number of locally-born Maroons in 1749 can be estimated at some 4,500, i.e. 3/4 of the Maroon population.⁸ This figure is in agreement with Price's (1976:34) estimate that around 1770, i.e. 20 years later, 'about 99% of the Saramaka

⁵ Since no figure is available for the year 1702, I have taken the mean of the figures for 1700 and 1705.

⁶ Since no figure is available for the year 1740, I have taken the mean of the figures for 1735 and 1744.

⁷ Van der Meiden (1987:109), referring to a letter written by Governor Mauricius in 1750, estimates the total number of Maroons around this time at 3,000. The difference may be explained by the fact that some Maroon areas (especially the Eastern and North Eastern regions, where new Maroon tribes such as the Ndjuka had started to form recently) are included in Hoogbergen's calculation (p. 75) but not in Van der Meiden's (p. 109).

⁸ This figure is calculated as follows. The difference between the Maroon population in 1749 (6,000) and in 1702 (1,000) is 5,000. Subtraction from this figure of the 1,500 newcomers who joined the Maroon groups in this period, yields 3,500. However, part of these newcomers were not alive anymore in 1749, say one third, i.e. 500. Part of the original population of 1,000, almost all of whom were African-born (Price 1976:32), was not alive anymore in 1749 either, say half, i.e. 500. Therefore, we have to raise the number of 3,500 locally-born with an extra 1,000, yielding 4,500 locally-born. This means that roughly three quarter (4,500 out of 6,000) of the Maroon population in 1749 had been born in Surinam.

population would have been Suriname-born.'

For the plantation population a very different picture emerges. On the basis of Van Stipriaan's (1993:341) calculations, based on plantation records for a sample of 5,555 slaves, the percentage of locally-born slaves in 1749 can be estimated at a maximum of 1/4.⁹ This means that by 1750 the nativization among Maroons had progressed at least three times as far as it had among slaves. The fact that the nativization rates of the two populations among whom SA and SR emerged differ so markedly, provides an opportunity to empirically assess the role of nativization in creole formation, a matter on which much disagreement has arisen lately (cf. Bickerton, 1992; Singler, 1992; Arends, 1993, 1995b; Baker, 1995).

Another demographic dimension along which Maroon and slave communities differ from one another is the composition of the substrate. As a result of the fact that the Saramaka population nativized at such a high rate, the African languages spoken by the African-born post-1700 arrivals probably did not have a strong influence on SA. This means that the only African languages that could have exerted substrate influence on SA are those that were spoken by the African-born founders of the Saramaka community, i.e. Gbe and Kikongo (see Arends 1995b:240-53). In the case of Sranan, due to its much lower rate of nativization, other (groups of) African languages, such as Akan, Kimbundu and Kru, which were not introduced into Surinam until the second quarter of the 18th century, may have exerted substrate influence as well.

Finally, a few words will be said about the different social environments in which the formation of SR and SA took place. The stereotypical view that plantations and Maroon villages were completely isolated from the rest of the colony needs some correction. As shown in Arends (*to appear*), not only slaves but, to a smaller extent, Maroons as well had a number of opportunities to maintain contacts with other Blacks. An example of this is the temporary residence of Maroons on plantations, e.g. for the purpose of trade, to prepare a escape, or simply to meet relatives and friends. Slaves would also sometimes join a Maroon group for a limited period of time, a phenomenon known as *petit marronnage*. Although the number of contacts with Whites must have been small, one opportunity was provided by the residence of so-called *posthouders* (representatives of the colonial government) and missionaries in Maroon communities from the 1760s onwards. Also, as a result of the peace treaties concluded in the 1760s, some members of the Maroon communities were required to stay as *ostagiërs* (hostages) in Paramaribo for some years after which they would return to their villages. Finally, especially after the conclusion of the peace treaties, Maroons would sometimes visit Paramaribo in order to buy or sell goods. Some of these visits lasted for considerable stretches of time, as in the case of Johannes Alabi, the 'intellectual author' of some of the Maroon letters, whose stay in Paramaribo in 1768 lasted as long as six months (Price 1990:101). All this shows that, even though the Maroon villages were relatively isolated both from the plantations and from Paramaribo, their inhabitants were not completely cut off from contact with the rest

⁹ Since the proportion of locally-born slaves was 29% for the 1750-1769 period and 48% for the 1780-1809 period, an estimate of 25% for 1749 seems realistic. The 25% estimate is supported by the fact that Beeldsnijder (1994:125), based on plantation inventories for a sample of 2,062 slaves, calculates the proportion of locally-born slaves in the 1730-1750 period at 16.2%, a figure which, due to inaccuracies in plantation inventories, was probably higher in reality.

of the colony.

3. COMPLEMENTATION IN EARLY SARAMACCAN

On the basis of an analysis of Schuchardt's edition of Wietz's translation of Acts, Byrne (1988:357) claims that complementizers did not exist in early SA. Quite surprisingly, however, the word *va*, which will be shown here to function as a complementizer in Wietz as well as in the Maroon Letters, is completely ignored in Byrne's analysis. Both texts contain numerous instances of *va* used as a complementizer, especially in complements of so-called *verba sentiendi et declarandi*, which for the sake of convenience will be referred to as 'SED verbs' in the remainder of this paper. To the class of SED verbs belong utterance verbs such as *takki* 'say,' cognition verbs such as *sabi* 'know' and *membre* 'think,' and perception verbs such as *jeri* 'hear' and *si* 'see.' The occurrence of *va* in SED complements unambiguously shows, *contra* Byrne, that complementizers were an established category in late-18th-century SA syntax.

Before we proceed to a discussion of complementation in early SA, it may be useful to give an overview of the different uses of *va* and related forms, not only as complementizers but as prepositions as well, in the early and modern varieties of SA and SR. It should be noted that, in accordance with German spelling practices, the 'v' in *va* represents a voiceless rather than a voiced consonant, as appears from other spellings that appear frequently in 'German' SA and SR texts, such as *vo* for *fo* and *varreweh* for *farawe*. In other words, the written form *va* represents /fa/ rather than /va/. The complementizer category in Table 2 does *not* include SED complements since these, with the exception of early SA, use a complementizer which is different from the preposition (see Table 3).

Table 2: Forms and functions of FA/FO/FU¹⁰ in Saramaccan and Sranan

	Early SA	Modern SA	Early SR	Modern SR
Preposition ¹¹	FA, FO	FU	FA, FO, FU	FU
Complementizer	FA	FU	FA, FO, FU	FU

As appears from this table, both early SA and early SR use one or more complementizers which are also used as prepositions, while in their modern varieties they both use one and the same form to express both functions.

With regard to SED complements the situation is different in several respects. First of all,

¹⁰ The capitalized forms FA, FO and FU are used in order to abstract away from spelling differences such as *va* / *fa* (FA), *vo* / *fo* (FO), and *foe* / *fu* (FU).

¹¹ The prepositions FA, FO, and FU express genitive and dative functions.

both SA and SR in their early and modern varieties allow the possibility of leaving the complementizer unexpressed, as in (1). Second, in both early and modern SR and in modern SA the only overt complementizer used to introduce SED complements is a form derived from the verb *taki* 'say,' as in (2) and (3). This is not the case, however, in early SA, where the only overt complementizer introducing SED complements is *va*, as in (4).

- | | | |
|-----|--|-----------|
| (1) | <i>dem sabbi Ø wi no habbi wan lehriman</i> (Grego 1815: 11 ¹²)
they know COMP we not have a teacher
'they know we don't have a teacher' | Early SA |
| (2) | <i>mi sábi taa a búnu</i>
I know COMP it good
'I know it is good' | Modern SA |
| (3) | <i>wan libisomma membre, takki, hem kann helpi hem sreft, a kori hem sreft</i> Early SR
(Schumann 1783:130)
a person thinks COMP he can help himself he cheats himself
'if somebody thinks he can do without God he is wrong' | |
| (4) | <i>mi sabi, va unu bi du di sondi</i> (Wietz 1805:12)
I know COMP you TNS do the thing
'I know you did it' | Early SA |

In other words, early SA and early SR are complementary in their selection of overt SED complementizers: while early SA only has *va*, early SR only has *taki* (cf. also 5 and 6). In their modern varieties, however, the two languages have converged in that they both only use a form derived from *taki* as an overt complementizer.

- | | | |
|-----|---|----------|
| (5) | * <i>mi sabi taki a bun</i> ¹³
I know COMP it good
'I know it is good' | Early SA |
| (6) | * <i>mi sabi va a bun</i>
I know COMP it good
'I know it is good' | Early SR |

The distribution of SED complementizers in the early and modern varieties of both languages is presented in Table 3:

¹² Each sample sentence is followed by a code for author, year and number of page (Wietz) or letter (Maroon Letters).

¹³ The asterisk preceding this and the following sentence indicates its non-occurrence in the corpus rather than its ungrammaticality (which cannot be assessed, of course).

Table 3 Complementizers used with SED (utterance, cognition and perception) verbs

	Early SA	Modern SA	Early SR	Modern SR
\emptyset	+	+	+	+
FA	+	−	−	−
TAKI	−	+	+	+

Note: Data for early Sranan are based on Plag (1993).

Although the use of a preposition-like complementizer *fu* in SED complements is not allowed in modern SA (cf. 7), the early SA complementizer *va* may have left a trace in modern SA *fá*, as in (8), which, however, seems to be used only sporadically.

- | | | |
|-----|--|-----------|
| (7) | <i>*mi sábi faa (=fu-a) búnu</i>
I know COMP-it good
'I know it is good' | Modern SA |
| (8) | <i>unu sábi fá mi 'a kína u m'é gó a di kamíá alá</i> (De Groot 1977:56)
you know COMP I have taboo for I ASP go LOC the place there
'you know I am not allowed to go there' | Modern SA |

As noted earlier, in both SA and SR the complementizer in SED complements may remain unexpressed (cf. 1 above). In their early varieties, however, the two languages differ markedly in the frequency with which zero-complementation is used. It occurs in 73% of the cases (205/278) in the pre-1800 SR sources examined by Plag (1995:134), but in only 23% of the cases in my early SA corpus (28/122). If the assumption that both languages started from a stage where zero-marking was the preferred or perhaps even the only option, as is the case in many pidgins (Mühlhäusler 1986:161-62), by the end of the 18th century SA had progressed further on its way towards marking complementation explicitly than SR. A tentative explanation for this may be found in the differential nativization rates, which, as was shown above, was much higher among Maroons than it was among slaves.

With regard to the SED complementizer *va* in early SA, an obvious question is: where does it come from? One possibility is that it is derived from the early SA preposition *va*, as seems to be the case for the modern SA (and SR) complementizer *fu* (cf. Table 2 above). In fact, this derivation has been proposed for a number of other English-based creoles as well in which *fu* (or a similar form) is used both as a complementizer and as a preposition (cf. Washabaugh, 1980). However, an important difference between the early SA complementizer *va* and the complementizer *fu* in modern SA and SR (and other creoles) is that the latter is restricted to manipulative complements as in (12) and to subject clauses as in (13) (Byrne 1987:124-140), while early SA *va* is used both in these contexts (cf. 10 and 11) and in SED complements (as in 4, repeated here as 9; cf. also 7 above).

- (9) *mi sabi, va unu bi du di sondi* (Wietz 1805:12) Early SA
I know COMP you TNS do the thing
'I know you have done that'
- (10) *a begi dem, va dem da hem wan sondi* (Wietz 1805:10) Early SA
he beg them COMP they give him a thing
'he begged them to give him something'
- (11) *...effi a reti na feesi va Gado, va wi harka unu morro, kuma Gado* (Wietz 1805:16) Early SA
...if it right in face of God COMP we listen you more than God
'...if it's right in God's face that we listen to you more than to God'
- (12) *mi hákisi en faa (=fu-a) nján dí kási* (Byrne 1987:124) Modern SA
I ask him COMP-he eat the cheese
'I asked him to eat the cheese'
- (13) *a de fanóndu fu dí wómi wóoko a dí wósu* (Byrne 1987:125) Modern SA
it is important COMP the man work LOC the house
'It is important for the man to work in the house'

An important argument in the derivation of the complementizer *fu* from the preposition *fu* in English-based creoles is its occurrence in manipulative (esp. purposive) complements. The fact that in early SA *va* is used not only with manipulative matrix verbs but with SED verbs as well, suggests that *va* does not have its origin in the preposition. An additional argument for a non-prepositional origin of the complementizer *va* may be found in the fact that, when the genitive and dative functions are expressed by different forms (as in Wietz, where *va* is used for the former and *vo* for the latter), the complementizer *va* is homophonous with the genitive, not the dative. Since universally speaking, complementizers are derived from dative rather than genitive prepositions (Plag, 1993), one would expect the SA complementizer to be homophonous with the former rather than the latter, which is not the case. We may, therefore, have to look for a non-prepositional origin of *va*.

As appears from examples (2) and (4) above, early SA *va* in SED complements performs exactly the same function that is performed by *táa* in modern SA. This suggests that *va* may be derived from the SA verb *fa* (< Portuguese *falar* 'speak, say'¹⁴), just as *táa* is derived from *taki* 'say.' As appears from Schumann (1778 s.v. *fa*), early SA did have a verb *fa* 'talk, chat.' A connection between complementizer *va* and verbal *fa* in early SA is supported by the fact that a verb *fa* 'say' is used as a complementizer in some Portuguese-based creoles, such as Fa d'Ambu and Angolar:

- (14) *m sé fa e sxa dantsyi* (Post 1992:162) Fa d'Ambu
I know that he PART ill
'I know he was ill'

¹⁴ Note that, although English is the main lexifier of SA, a substantial part of the SA lexicon is derived from Portuguese. A derivation for modern SA *já* (cf. 8) from Portuguese *falar* has been proposed earlier by Alleyne (1980:95).

- (15) *kompā ka fala ngwara fa am fala...* (Maurer 1995:112) Angolar
 friend TMA say guard that I say...
 'friend, go tell the guard that I say...'

Whatever the merits of the etymology of early SA *va* proposed here, in its later development SA followed a path that had been taken by SR before, namely the expression of the SED complementatizer by a form derived from *taki*. A possible explanation for the replacement of *va* by *taki* in SA may be found in the influence on SA from SR, where *taki* was increasingly used as a complementizer in the 19th century (Plag 1995:134). As was shown above, contacts between Maroons and plantation slaves were more numerous than has usually been assumed and many Saramakas acquired SR as a second language, at least passively. This appears from the fact that by the middle of the 19th century Saramakas had sufficient knowledge of SR for the Moravian missionaries to be able to instruct them in SR rather than in SA (Wulfschlägel 1855:287). That SR influence on SA was not restricted to content words but extended to function words as well, appears from the Maroon Letters, where SR function words such as *ben*, *da* and *gi* are used interchangeably with their SA equivalents *bi*, *di* and *da*.

The replacement of the complementizer *va* by *taki* may have been facilitated by the fact that in early SA a verb *taki* often occurs in environments which are conducive to grammaticalization, namely between an utterance verb such as *haksi* 'ask' or *pikki* 'answer' and a complement in direct speech, as in (16) and (17):

- (16) *dem haksi Hem, dem takki: Massra ju sa hoppo kondre va Israel djusnu?* Early SA
 (Wietz 1805:1)
 they ask him they say: master you shall lift country of Israel now?
 'they asked him, they said: Master, will you lift up the land of Israel now?'
- (17) *Petrus pikki takki: Ananias, va hu heddi ...* (Wietz 1805:18) Early SA
 Peter answer say: Ananias for what reason ...
 'Peter answered and said: Ananias, why ...'

This type of environment easily leads to the grammaticalization of *taki* into a complementizer, as appears from the development of *taki* in SR (Plag 1993, 1995).

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has taken a comparative perspective on creole formation by examining early linguistic as well as extralinguistic data for two creoles which, although they are historically related, belong to two ecologically different types of creole. It is shown not only that, contrary to earlier claims, complementizers were a well-established category in early SA, but also that the complementizer *va* was replaced by (a form derived from) *taki* between the 18th and the 20th century. This development seems to be the result of external factors (interference from SR) as well as internal tendencies (grammaticalization of *taki*). The fact that zero-complementation is much more frequent in early SA than in early SR is tentatively explained by making reference to the differential nativization rates of the two speech communities. Finally, the differences between early SA and modern SA revealed in this study indicate once again that early textual data are indispensable for a proper understanding of creole formation.

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