A Novel Feature of the complementizer system in Cabo Verdean Creole

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Synopsis: This paper argues that the complementizer system in Cabo Verdean Creole (CVC) is a novel system, which cannot be solely derived from the source languages such as Wolof and European Portuguese (EP), and that the complementizer in CVC is recombined (cf. Aboh 2015; 2020) and becomes a novel functional heads.

Wolof: Wolof, which is one of the substrates of CVC, shows what's called the null form *wh*-expressions. Torrence (2013) proposes that null wh-phrase moves to the [spec,CP] in Wolof and the distribution of the -u form (complementizer) depends on what kind of wh-phrase it is (e.g., animacy) and where it is from (i.e. the syntactic position).

(1) K-u ñu gis?
CL-*u* 3PL see
'who did they see'

(2) L-u ñu gis?
CL-*u* 3PL they see
'What did they see' (Torrence 2013: 164)

Wolof also shows that the complementizer agreement is obligatory for the highest CP clause, while agreement in the lower CPs is optional (following Torrence (2013), we assume that *k-u* agrees with the null *wh*-element (which is represented as wh_{k_i} in the examples below), whereas *l-a* does not).

(3) Optional complementizer agreement in Wolof

a. [wh_{ki} k-u Kumba wax [ne k-u Isaa defe [ne k-u Maryam dóór t_{ki}]]]?
[WH CL-*u* kumba say [that CL-*u* isaa think [that CL-*u* Maryam dóór t_{ki}]]]
'Who did Kumba say that Isaa thought that Maryam hit?'

b. [wh_{ki} k-u Kumba wax [ne l-a Isaa defe [ne l-a Maryam dóór t_{ki}]]]?
[WH CL-*u* kumba say [that XPL-COP isaa think [that XPL-COP Maryam dóór t_{ki}]]]
'Who did Kumba say that Isaa thought that Maryam hit?'

c. [wh_{ki} k-u Kumba wax [ne l-a Isaa defe [ne k-u Maryam dóór t_{ki}]]]?
[WH CL-*u* kumba say [that XPL-COP isaa think [that CL-*u* Maryam dóór t_{ki}]]]
'Who did Kumba say that Isaa thought that Maryam hit?' (Torrence, 2013, 258,(66))

The complementizer system in EP: In the case of a *wh*-object sentence (see (4)), a *wh*-phrase is fronted with a cleft form and the complementizer is realized as *que*. I assume here with Kato (2013) that the *wh*-formation involves a cleft formation, as in (4).

(4) O que é que ele disse?
DEF that is that he said
'What did he say?'

(5) Quem viu João
who saw John
'Who saw John?' (Kato 2013)

In (5), the *wh*-phrase is fronted without a complementizer being realized.

CVC: In CVC, *Ma* obligatorily appears after illocutionary verbs, while the other CVC complementizer, *ki* cannot.

(6) João fra-m ma/*ki/*Ø Maria kupra libru.
John told+me C Maria bought book
'John told me Mary bought the book' (Baptista and Obata 2015: 171, (32))

However, when the *wh*-phrase is fronted, the complementizer is realized as *ki*, not as *ma*.

(7) Kenhi ki fra-m kuze ki/*ma/*Ø Maria kunpra?
who C told+me what C Maria bought
'Who told me what Mary bought?' (Baptista and Obata 2015: 171, (33))

Baptista and Obata (2015) argue that "[t]he complementizer *ma* changes to *ki* iff a *wh*-phrase is interpreted at its Spec position; in other words, if a *wh*-phrase is interpreted in the embedded Spec-CP, then *ki* must appear" (Baptista and Obata 2015: 172). In the matrix clause, the complementizer *ki* is realized for both wh-subject/object extraction, as a result of agreement with the complementizer.

(8) Kenhi ki odja João?
who ki see João
'Who saw João'
(Baptista and Obata 2015: 158, (1a))

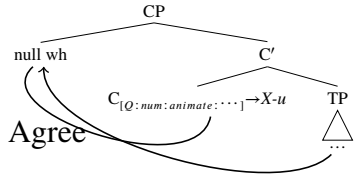
(9) Kuze ki João odja?
what ki João see
'What did you say'
(Baptista and Obata 2015: 158, (2a))

	Wolof	CVC	EP
Wh-fronting with a cleft form	yes	no	yes
An agreed complementizer form	*k-u/l-u*, etc.	*ki*	*que*
Agreement optionality	yes (for embedded clauses)	no	no

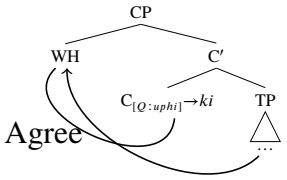
Table 1: The summary of the complementizer agreement system in Wolof, EP, and CVC

Proposal: Following Aboh's (2015;2020) approach that features in Creole can emerge through the recombination of features from source languages, we argue that feature recombination takes place on the C head, and CVC develops its own unique complementizer agreement system. Complementizer agreement also present in Wolof, but in CVC an overt wh-phrase has to be in [spec,CP] to agree with the complementizer *ki* (Baptista and Obata 2015). The syntactic structures for Wolof, EP, and CVC are shown below.

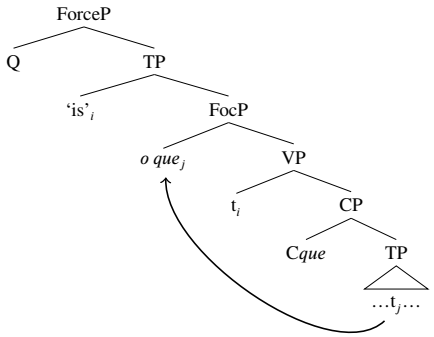
(10) Wolof



(11) CVC



(12) European Portuguese



Wolof, C has more specific features in terms of the number-feature and the animate-feature, and the morphological realization of the complementizer depends on the type of null wh-phrase (and where the wh-phrase is base-generated) where X in X-u represents the variable. In EP, I assume with Kato (2013) that wh-fronting with *que* is a cleft formation where the wh-phrase moves to [spec, FocP] (a part of the left periphery, Rizzi 1997). In this case, it is not clear whether there is an element that agrees with *que*. In CVC, there is less specification of the features on C since the morphological realization of the complementizer is always *ki* whenever an overt wh-phrase is in its [spec,CP], though the phi-features still have to agree with the wh-phrase. The nature C in CVC, therefore, cannot come from solely from Wolof nor EP, which leads us to the idea that the functional head C is recombined, which results in a novel functional feature.

Selected References: Aboh, E.O. 2015. The emergence of hybrid grammars: Language contact and change. CUP. ‖ Baptista, M and M. Obata. 2015. Complementizer-Alternation in Creole Languages: New Evidence for Spec-Head Agreement. PAPIA, São Paulo, 25(2), 155-176. ‖ Kato, M.A. 2013. Deriving "wh-in-situ" through movement in Brazilian Portuguese, 175-192. In (eds.) Camacho-Toboada et al. Information structure and agreement, 175–192. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. ‖ Torrence, H. 2013. Clause Structure of Wolof: Insights into the Left Periphery. John Benjamins.