



PA2.2 - Variation and Multifunctionality in Cape Verdean Creole

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I. The form-meaning mismatch

Cape Verdean Creole (CVC) is the oldest living creole:

superstrate substrates

Portuguese + Wolof, Temne, Mandinka

- This project investigates 1:0 form-meaning mismatches.
- E.g. the verbal marker *ta* expresses habitual, progressive and irrealis, but for a certain group of speakers it conveys no clear semantic meaning.

N trabadja onti

1SG work yesterday

"I worked yesterday"

N ta trabadja onti

1SG TMA work yesterday

"I worked yesterday"

- *Ta* exemplifies a broader typological pattern found in many creoles: morphosyntactic underspecification.
- Other markers that exhibit variation in their grammatical function are kabesa (reflexive) and sata (progressive).

Research questions:

- How do different speaker groups use the verbal marker *ta*, and what social meanings are indexed through its variation?
- What does the usage of ta reveal about language change and grammaticalisation for CVC?

I. Methodology and hypotheses

Methodology:

- Usage-based approach, field-based methods
- Data gathered through elicitation and spontaneous speech
- Speakers profiled by age, gender, rural/urban.

Hypotheses:

- $ta \rightarrow$ structurally obligatory in certain VPs, even no clear aspectual or modal meaning.
- Patterns of vacuous usage are shaped by sociolinguistic factors, e.g. speaker's age, gender, place.
- Ta also functions as a social index, signalling style, identity, or group affiliation — not just grammatical meaning.

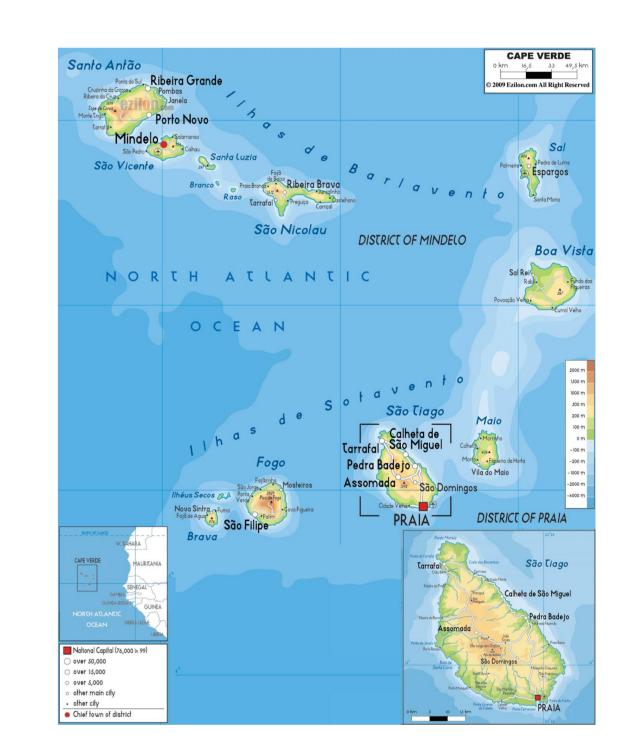
III. Expected results and discussion

Vacuous usage of ta signals 1:0 form—meaning mismatch

Factor	Predicted Pattern	Interpretation
Age	Younger speakers	Innovation,
	(~under 30) use <i>ta</i>	grammatical
	vacuously more often	reanalysis
Region	Urban speakers use ta	Standardisation,
	more broadly,	Portuguese influence
	including vacuous	
	contexts	
Discourse	Spontaneous speech	Unmonitored, natural
	shows more vacuous	grammar
	ta than structured	
	elicitation	

Discussion

ta is undergoing a process of semantic bleaching — where the original aspectual meaning is weakened or lost — while becoming structurally entrenched as part of the VP.



IV. Consequences and follow-up questions

- The core challenge is understanding why certain forms end up losing their semantic content or function.
- Social meaning can explain cases like the morphosyntactic variation in Cape Verdean Creole. However, there are cases where discourse-related structures seem to become syntacticised over time, leading to a complete loss of content.
- An interesting case is the purely syntactically motivated movement of the verb, which has sometimes been linked to the loss of certain discourse particles in many Indo-European languages.
- Focusing on one or possibly a group of Indo-European languages, Cohort 3 will investigate the interaction between particles, syntax, prosody, and information structure, with attention to the consequences of diachronic processes for meaning mapping onto form.