

Syntactic change in Abidjaneese French

Katja Ploog (ERSS à Bordeaux)

Abidjaneese popular French has acquired some notoriety in the scientific world during the seventies. But in spite of its very well-known sociolinguistic emergence context (a highly heterogeneous contact in urban area, French becoming mother-tongue), we still do not know the factors that condition its actual structures. Furthermore, the research about variation and specially about this non-standard variety is generally not interested in syntactical considerations. In fact, its approach poses serious methodological problems because of a high variability. The aim of my communication is to show how it is possible to initiate a description of the syntactical change of Abidjaneese French.

The analysis is based on about 20 hours of spontaneous speech produced by young Abidjaneeses ; the corpus has been integrally retranscribed in a data-base of 10000 propositional units, systematically annotated (morphologic form and syntactic constituents) and analysed. The description is based on derivational framework, which conceives the structure elaboration from a deep predicative structure. After a short inventory of the structure types gathered (concerning null-arguments and co-occurrence of clitics) my work sheds some light on the internal articulation of the Abidjaneese system by focussing on the pragmatic elaboration of the Abidjaneese verb and the structure of its actants.

My communication tackles in details the structural hypothesis of change. We notice that some of the reorganizations (for example the limiting of the preverbal clitic constituents) also exist in other spoken varieties of French and in French Creole languages. Even if its quite impossible to prove this hypothesis, in this case we can imagine that the reasons of change are inherent to the goal language. Some other structural particularities may derive from the various linguistic or cultural substrata, specially the subcategorisation of nouns, which is very close to West African languages. Furthermore, it may be asked whether a part of the change is due to universal cognitive and 1 or general discursive constraints, like the reanalysis of subject-verb agreement.