Morphophonological variation in Haitian Creole: the case of 3SG  
Session 5: Subject Pronouns
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Among French-based creole languages, Haitian Creole is the one with the highest degree of standardization. The written norm, Standard Haitian Creole (SHC), is based on the speech of monolinguals of the capital area, Port-au-Prince, rather than on the variety (kreyòl swa) of the politically and economically powerful bilingual minority (Valdman 2005). For instance, the front rounded vowels and postvocalic /r/ of the latter are absent from SHC, which is spreading to the rest of the country through the media and the educational system.

In order to evaluate the diffusion of SHC, a sociolinguistic study of Northern Haitian Creole (NHC) was conducted in Cape Haitian, the second largest town, and surrounding rural areas, whose spoken variety diverges most from SHC. In addition to stereotypical features such as the possessive kin a + pronoun (vs. SHC pa + pronoun), we uncovered several NHC features – some of which were first described in Étienne (1974) – still in widespread use in Northern Haiti. In this presentation, we focus on the most frequently occurring variable, the third person singular pronoun (3SG), which alternates between SHC li/l, and NHC i/y.

Using a corpus of 24 speakers, we show that SHC li, has yet to replace NHC i, which is preferred by a large proportion of community members (90%; n=2,806). A preliminary analysis of the data also indicates that the variability of 3SG is affected by both linguistic (syntactic) and social (sex, age, location) factors. More specifically, the SHC variant occurs (quasi-) categorically after the introducer se ‘it is’, as in (1a), and after certain prepositions, as in (2b).

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(1a)    Se li ki vin isit jou sa a.  ‘It is he who came here that day.’
(1b)    ? Se i ki vin isit jou sa a.
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(2a)    Mari fin achte sa pou li.  ‘Mary ended up buying that for him.’
(2b)    ? Mari fin achte sa pou y.
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The NHC variant is also used to a lesser degree by urban speakers, which may be due to their greater exposure to speakers from other areas of Haiti, to the media (especially television), and closer contact with middle class bilingual speakers who are more influenced by the standard emanating from Port-au-Prince.

This presentation contributes to the study of linguistic variation in creole languages, an emerging area of research in sociolinguistics, by examining the impact of language standardization on the speech of local communities.