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1 Introduction

The question of the relationship between stativity and past marking in Caribbean English Creoles (CECs) has been subject to much controversy in the literature. This distinction between stative and non-stative verbs is said to be crucial for analyses of past marking in Creole languages. The main issue involves the use of anterior (relative past) as well as zero-marking to convey past time reference. There has been disagreement over (a) the semantics and function of zero-marking as well as the relative past marker; (b) the way these types of marking interact with other the discourse context and the inherent lexical aspect (aktionsart) of the verb. This paper is part of my current work on past time reference in Belizean Creole (BC) in which I examine two main aspects of this debate: first the semantic function of the relative past and its relation to the unmarked verb in BC, and second, the discourse function of the relative past marker and the unmarked verb.

In this paper I focus on the discourse function of the relative past and the unmarked verb. Three types of spontaneous speech data will be examined: Genre A, in which the speaker has total control of the context and the topic; Genre B, in which the discourse context and topic is controlled, and Genre C, in which the discourse topic is fixed and the context is preset. I propose that a comparison of this sort not only allows for a more controlled quantitative analysis in which frequencies can be tabulated, but there can also be a precise description of the discourse contexts in which the relative past and the unmarked verb occur.

2 Overview

2.1 Past Marking and Stativity

Bickerton's (1975, 1984) claims that the unmarked verb always expresses present with statives and past with non-statives and that the relative past (anterior) marker expresses (absolute) past with statives and past-befo-
past, with non-statives, have met with recent challenge. Jaganauth (1987), Pollard (1989), and Winford (1993, 2000), for example, argue that unmarked statives often convey past reference in certain discourse contexts. Likewise Gooden (2000 ms) showed that stativity\(^2\) is not the sole deciding factor between an ‘absolute past’ meaning and a ‘past-before-past meaning’. Both stative and non-stative verbs in the BC data examined were used to express past time reference.

2.2 Meaning and Uses

In a relative tense system, such as is employed by Creoles, an event/situation may be marked as past with the moment of speech (S) or with some other reference point in the past (cf. Comrie, 1985). Given that Creoles have a relative tense system, an approach which takes into consideration morphosyntactic information as well as discourse or contextual information is preferable to one which does not. It is therefore necessary to make a distinction between the meanings expressed by the past tense category: the dominant meanings, which we find represented in its canonical uses, and the secondary meanings, which we find represented in the discourse\(^3\) (Dahl, 1985).

2.3 Past Marking in BC

According to Winford (2001), BC like other Caribbean English lexified Creoles (CECs) has two categories of tense; RELATIVE PAST\(^4\) is one and FUTURE the other. In examining the relative past tense I will focus attention on past-time reference where the situation/event is past in relation to the moment of speech, absolute past, and where it is past in relation to another past event, past-before-past. I will examine the ways in which these meanings are expressed by the unmarked verb and the relative past marker in discourse.

Relative past is expressed in BC by the auxiliary *mi* and appears preverbally, e.g. *mi* gat, *mi* liv in example (1) below.

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\(^2\) Through application of ‘typical’ tests for stativity in which stativity was treated as a feature of the lexical aspect (aktionsart) of the verb (Dowty ms, 1975, Smith 1995, 1997, Lakoff 1966, Mufwene 1983, 1984), it was shown that that some verbs, example, stance and relationship verbs, are nonstative, in a Creole context despite their classification as stative by some researchers (cf. Tagliamonte and Poplack 1993, Tagliamonte, 1998).

\(^3\) For example, in English ‘future time reference’ can be expressed by the PROGRESSIVE TENSE.

\(^4\) I use small caps here to distinguish between the grammatical categories and the semantic notions which are represented in lower case italics.
(1) Timi gat plees op ya we mii an hii mi liv
   he had a place up here where he and I lived (dwelled)  (DW)

The prototypical use of this category (dominant function) in Winford's view (2000) is to distance some situation from the reference point being focused on in the discourse. As shown in (2), unmarked verbs also occur in BC and can be used to express 'absolute past' temporal reference though they have other functions and express other types of temporal reference as well (cf. Winford 2001).

(2) Ti ðisi di koakanat di hang dung an den ðawaan wan
    She saw the coconut hanging down and then she wanted one.  (DW)

3 Data and Methodology

The data described in this paper are spontaneous speech data from two sources, D. Winford's database (DW), based on fieldwork done in Bermudian Landing and from my own (SG) fieldwork in the same community and in Belize City during July 2000. From the DW database there is one speaker, age 58, and from the SG database there are 3 speakers, ages 16, 58 and 62. All informants reported use of BC and English, with English used only in formal settings such as church services. Elicitation sessions were carried out in informal settings, e.g. informants' homes, to facilitate use of BC.

In Genre A (DW), the speaker had complete choice over the topic and context of the discourse. The interviewer/fieldworker merely facilitated the flow of the conversation with minimal responses or questions to prompt the continuation of speech. In Genre B (SG), the context and topic are controlled. I used a set of fifteen pictures depicting a story which took place in the past. The pictures were organized in terms of the sequence of occurrence of events in the story. Informants were told that the story was real and depicted events that took place in the past. They examined the pictures for 5 minutes and were allowed to ask questions for clarification after which they were asked to retell the story while being tape-recorded. Informants were allowed to look at the pictures while telling the story. In Genre C (SG), the speaker had no control over the topic. A subset of the informants had difficulty retelling the picture-based story; these were typically older informants who had little or no formal education. In this case a discourse topic was cho-

5 The data is transcribed in broad phonemic transcription.
sen for discussion through direct questions about past events surrounding the ‘days of the ferry’.  

4 Past Time Reference Interpretation

4.1 The Tense Locus

Chung and Timberlake (1985) describe tense as a directional temporal dimension, having a privileged point or interval of time called the tense locus. Tense therefore locates an event in time by comparing the position of the (event) frame with respect to the tense locus, which can be any point along the time dimension. Here I use the term tense locus (TL) to designate the point in time in relation to which an event/state is perceived as past. In a relative tense system the TL is some point in time given by the context, which may or may not be the moment of speech (S). An event is located at, before or after the TL. Gooden (2000 ms) showed that identifying the tense locus in the discourse is not always straightforward. It is not the case that it is always established by the time reference of another verb in the same or adjacent sentence. It is also not the case, as illustrated in (3), that the reference verb/clause has to precede (syntactically) the affected verb/clause.

(3) A: Di mi doro na oso esde, mi bradi gi mi moni
   ‘When I arrived home yesterday, my brother gave me money’
B: Baka di a dringi a dresi a koso wan heri yuru
   ‘After he drank the medicine he coughed for a whole hour’

(Winford 2000)

Winford explains this as a case in which the speaker regards both the events as past relative to S and thus sees no need to distance one from the other. Interpretation of time reference is therefore based on the nature of the relationship between the tense locus and the event/state. So the event/state can

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6 Before roads to Belize City were constructed, people commuted by river using first canoes (dori) then a ferry.
7 This is suggested in Tagliamonte and Poplack’s (1993) analysis in which verbs were coded for temporal reference based on one of five potential relationships with the preceding ‘reference verb’; posterior, anterior, coincidence, repetition, and reorientation. For example, verbs which occurred in sequential order with Event 1 ordered before Event 2 were coded as posterior. e.g. When i sen, the vessel ’round her ruder touch2 the bar (Tagliamonte and Poplack 1993:179)
be anterior to the reference point, simultaneous with it, or posterior to it (cf. Chung and Timberlake 1985:203 on event frame).

4.2 The Interpretation of Past/Meaning of Past

When the TL coincides with S, this gives an absolute past temporal reference (Comrie 1985:65). The diagram in (4) below is a temporal schema for 'absolute past' interpretation. The line represents time; the situation with an 'absolute past' time reference is therefore located prior to S where the TL is equal to S. The example in (5) illustrates.

(4) Schema: Situation/Event-----TL=S------time

(5) A: Yu memba da kriezi haus dē yuustu ha da Barrack Road de? Do you remember that crazy house (asylum) they used to have at Barracks Road there?

B: Wich kriezi haus? Da Barracks? Which crazy house (asylum)?

A: da Barracks

B: yes

A: Unu yuustu go rown de an ple an faas wid dē kriezi piipl dē? Did you (pl) used to go around there and play and interfere with (tease/make fun of) the crazy people?

B: No wi doz go rown de, wi mi ha1 wan fren mi gaan2 iin de, i stepfaada mi chap op3 i ma rait an di gial gaan kriezi, we doz go de go luk fi shi, siem wi go luk fu meri go rown...mi deh striet da Barracks4

Observations: The statives (ha1 and deh4) and the non-stative (gaan2) refer to absolute past situations as in the preceding examples. The implicature is that the situations being referred to by the verbs no longer have cur-
rent relevance. The non-stative *chap-op*\(^8\) expresses *past-before-past* meaning. The tense locus is situated in the past and the situation in question is located prior to it (cf. Comrie 1985, Dahl 1985). As shown in (6), the situation with a ‘past-before-past’ temporal reference (1) is located prior to another situation which establishes the reference point (2), and which is itself in the past and hence located after S. The parenthesis around the equal sign indicates that the TL may be some other reference point in the past, established by the discourse context:

(6) Schema: \[l--------Situation\_1------Situation\_2 (=) TL---S--l\]

\[---------time-----------------------------\]

**Summary:** The relative past marker and the unmarked verb are both used to locate a situation prior to S. Where the reference point is the moment of speech, we have an ‘absolute past’ temporal reference. Where the reference point is a past situation and another situation precedes it temporally, we have ‘past-before-past’ temporal reference. One remaining issue is what determines the choice of *mi* in some cases and the unmarked verb in others. We look at the discourse context below in an effort to find out why this is so.

## 5 The Discourse Function

### 5.1 Background

As noted above, examining the use of the relative past marker and the unmarked verb in discourse is important for unearthing more information on the breadth of their uses. In fact a number of researchers have identified differences in the uses of the relative past marker and the unmarked verb in discourse (Pollard 1989, Youssef and James 1999, Winford 2001, among others). Pollard, for example, claims that in Jamaican Creole, unmarked verbs typically present foreground information while the relative past marker usually presents background information. Youssef and James (1999) report similar functions for the unmarked verb (non-remoteness interpretation) and the relative past marker (remoteness interpretation) in Tobagonian Creole. Applying quantitative analyses, Tagliamonte (1998) shows that in narratives in early St. Kitts Creole ‘bin’ occurs most frequently in backgrounded information.

\(^8\) Note that the distinction here could be one of telicity. While *gaan* is non-stative it is also atelic whereas *chap-op*, also non-stative, is telic.
Given these observations, we might reasonably expect to find similar patterns in the BC narratives shown below. Background information gives a backdrop to the main storyline; explanatory material necessary for interpreting the events of the story e.g. time, place, characters (Schiffrin 1981; Wallace 1982, cited in Pollard 1989) (orientation) and may also indicate the value of events in the narrative (evaluation). Foreground information on the other hand, advances the storyline or indicates the main points of the story (complicating action). The narratives are divided in sections along these lines, with the unmarked verbs indicated by $\emptyset$ and verbs and copulas with $mi$ in boldface for ease of reference.

5.2 The Data

5.2.1 Genre A: Speaker controlled context and topic

In this extract the speaker describes apparent sibling rivalry, which resulted in one child living outside the home with someone else.

(5) Wen ai $\emptyset$ kom$_1$ huom ai $\emptyset$si$_2$ we dah mi di problem$_1$ wid S. an i tuu breda dem, 5 dah laik de neva laik a, K and L, an ai $\emptyset$ si$_4$ it an we ai had waz tu du ai had waz tu muuv$_5$ fran mai Ma wid S but wen ai $\emptyset$ muuv$_6$ fran mai Ma wid S ai $\emptyset$ muuv$_6$ owt ai $\emptyset$ kom$_7$ ya. Ai mi liv$_9$ op iina waa opstiez bifo ai $\emptyset$ muuv$_9$ ya an S kudn stie wid mi kaaz i mi tuu smaal ruum$_{10}$, so ai $\emptyset$ lef$_{11}$ S 15 dah Mis S. When I came home I saw (perceived) what the problem was with S and his two brothers. It was as if they never liked him, K and L, an I saw it an what I had to do I had to move from my Ma with S but when I moved from my Ma with S I moved out, I came here, I lived in an upstairs (building) before I moved here and S couldn't stay with me because there were two small rooms so I left S at Miss S.

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$\emptyset$ I use narrative here in a broad sense to cover a range of genres including stories, reports, and plans, among others (cf. Ochs 1997).
Observations: In the clause ‘ai mi liv op iina wa opstiez bifo ai muuv ya’, the non-stative ‘liv’ which is marked by mi expresses ‘past-before-past’ interpretation. The temporal conjunction, ‘bifo’ is being used by the speaker to set the events of living in an upstairs building (V8-liv) before the event of moving (V9-muuv). All the unmarked verbs refer to foreground information, the marked verb (8) and copulas (3 and 10) describe information that can be regarded as background information setting the scene for the speaker’s description of the problem. This pattern is also observed in Genre B as is shown below.

5.2.2 Genre B: Controlled topic and context

This extract describes the activities of a disobedient child and the consequences of his disobedience.

(8) Billy mi di plie baal kaa ..
Billy mi de autsaid a hi haus
Ødi plie baal an siëtaim i Ødi
plie baal i son mi hat å hi mi...
å hi mi di tink bowt go da
biich fi gö swim
so den Billy Øgaan iinsaid gâ
aks i ma if hi ku go swim. Wel
i ma Øse dat ok...i ku go swim
bot siemtaim hi Ødi tink bowt
fi go klaim mango chrii tu. So
i ma Øtel å hi ku go swim bot
hi kyää go klaim i mango chrii
taa i dienjaros an i ku get hert.
So den Billy Øgaan pan i biich an Billy Østaat

Billy was playing ball because...
Billy was outside of his house
playing ball and at the same time
he was playing ball the sun was
hot and he was... and he was thin
king about going to the beach to
swim.

So then Billy went inside to ask his
mother if he could go to swim.
Well his mother said that ok...he
could go to swim but at the same
time he was thinking about going
to climb mango trees too. So his
mother told him he could go to
swim but he could not go to climb
mango trees because it is danger-
ous and he could get hurt. So then
Billy went on the beach and Billy
started
to play when he was on the beach,
now he met his friend Derrick and
he and Derrick started to play
cricket on the beach. After that
Billy got tired of playing cricket so
he told ‘let’s go to the mango tree
to pick some nice mangoes because
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mango kaa de luk raip rait, nau ā juusi'.
So den di son mi di go iin. Eniwie hi no di studi dāt. Hi Ógaan bai di mango chrii. I Østanop front a it ā i Øtink i Ødi rimemba hau i ma Øtel ā i ku go swim bot kip awie fram di mango chrii. Hi no di studi dat hi di Øtink bowt hau juusi di mango an hau nais.... i:wā ties....so gā ahed an hi Ógaan an hi

Østaat tu pik dung mango fi hi an i fren Derick. I Østaat tu pik dung mango nau. Derrick Østaat to iit. An den..hi Ødi swing pan di mango chrii nau i Ødi chrai ek iself di shuo Derrick hau hi ku swing pā chrii. So nau afa hi Øswing pan chrii.... i Øgaan an i Øklaim di chrii an iivin mi di kom iin. Hi no di studi dat. Hi jus Ødi showtop Derrick an Øtel Derrick hau hi deh pan di mango chrii an hi kud du dis ā dat pan di mango chrii. Nau i Øgaan an i Ød r a p an i Øbos...skriepop i nii an i Øbus i tuo an den afa dat i Ørimemba i ma Øtel ā yu kud swim bot kip awie fram di, mango chrii bikaa i dienjaros. So nau i Øgaan huom an i Østaat tu krai an i Øtel i ma we Øhapen. I Øtel i ma hau hi mi di klaim di mango chrii they look ripe right now and juicy'.

So then the sun was going down. Anyway he was not paying attention to that. He went to the mango tree. He stood up in front of it and he thought, he was remembering how his mother told him he could go to swim but to keep away from the mango tree. He was not paying attention to that he was thinking about how juicy the mango (would be) and how nice....it would taste....so he went ahead and he went and he started to pick mangoes for himself and his friend Derrick. He started to pick mangoes now. Derrick started to eat and then he was swinging on the tree and he went and he climbed the tree acting up himself showing Derrick how he could swing on the tree. So now after he swung on the tree he went and he climbed the tree and evening was coming. He was paying no attention to that. He was just shouting to Derrick and told Derrick how he was on the mango tree and he could do this and he could do that on the mango tree. Now he went and he fell and he burst...scraped up his knee and he burst his toe and then after that he remembered his mother told him ‘you could swim but keep away from the mango tree because it is dangerous. So now he went home and he started to cry and he told his mother what happened. he told his mother how he was climbing the mango tree and he
scraped his knee and and burst his toe. So his mother held her head and his mother started to bawl and his mother told him. ' Do you remember I told you not to go on that mango tree. Remember I told you it is dangerous'. He never listened so all he could do was cry now. So his mother told him well you deserve it since you went on the mango tree and I sent you to swim..you are not to do any of them. You will not swim again....you have learnt your lesson.

Observations: All of the unmarked verbs in this extract mark foreground information. Following the pattern observed for other CECs, the seven instances where mi is used in the text (lines 1-5, 25, 45) all mark background information. However, a different pattern is seen in Genre C.

5.2.3 Genre C: Controlled topic

In the extract below, the conversion is between myself and a 58-year-old farmer about the ferry that used to be operated in the village more than 15 years prior to our conversation (lines 16-18).

(9) SG: So yu eva go dung de pan i feri? Michéél se dé ...di feri yuustu go kraas, dung bai Misa Paul.

RJ: Yes a yuustu werk de tu, werk an di feri tu

SG: Hau dat werk?

RJ: Wel.. yu kud tek a luk...a hav wǎn uol wan rait ya.... Wà gai niê Alan Silasi an hi...wǎn kooli

So did you ever go down there on the ferry? Michel said they...the ferry used to go across, down by Mr. Paul.

RJ: Yes I used to work there too, work on the ferry too.

SG: How does that work?

RJ: Well... you could take a look...I have an old one right here.... A guy called Alan Silasi and he...a kooli

gai an hi jraa...di feri i tel mi se iz laik dis [looking at painting on the wall] yes, iz di onli ting fi rimemba guy and he drew...the ferry and he told me that it is like this [looking at painting on the wall]
hi an dis da kupl yiaaz nau. Dis abaut nier fiftiin.. muor dan dat bikaaz feri diez don lang taim.

SG: So wen di piipl kom yasó we yu du?. [pointing at painting]

RJ: ..so aal a dē haus ya da weh mi de uova riva an den dis mihnagy stump de a waata said

weh paa yu Øtel mi yu mi di bied an waā lagwud stump de rait dung de..iida dis wan ar dis wan

[pointing at picture] An dis a Ødi feri, dis a Ødi tuu tong, den dis'a Ødi waiya, di kieblop den...dat' da i lli haus op da tap pan å.

Den yu a tun å so..laik tuu bāaj yu no.

SG: ok

RJ: ..an den yu tun an dēn..an yu si hau di waiya string kraas wei di, riva? An a rait so i mi stie bai, kuzn..ongkl Paul de..ahaa..rait bai di waata said. Yu going dung yu supuos fi si dis..waa big aiyan bai kuzn Jean de:

SG: Oh!.....mi siit an a wanda a wah

RJ: Aah yes yes! ..ahaa..i kyari di, kiebl

SG: So dē put di kyaa: dem pān de ar wa

RJ: Yes, yes.... but den, di chuck, yes, it is the only thing to remember him (by) and this is a couple years now. This is about, nearly 15...more than that because ferry days are long gone.

SG: So when the people come right here, what do you do? [pointing at painting]

RJ: ..so all of these houses right here that were across the river an then this mahagony stump is on river bank, where you told that you were bathing and a logwood stump is right down here....either this one or that one

[pointing at picture] And this is the ferry, these are the 2 tongs then this is a wire being cabled up then that is the little roof on top of it.

Then you turn it so.....like 2 barges you know.

SG: ok

RJ: ..and then you turn and then...and you see how the wire is strung across the river? And that is exactly how it was beside cousin..uncle Paul there, ahaa right at the river bank. (If) you are going down you are sup­posed to see this...a big iron beside cousin Jean there.

SG: Oh!.....I saw it an I was wondering what it was.

RJ: Aah yes yes! ..ahaa..it car­ried (supported) the cable

SG: So they put the cars on there or what..?

RJ: Yes, yes.... but then the
di kyaa dem go ya, chuk, di kyaa

dem go op ya, chuk an aal, chuk

but nat

bus, no bus chuk, a& kaa aha bi-

kaaz if a mi feri diez de& big ik-
wipment di kom uova ya kudn

kom pan da feri

SG: Tuu hevy?

RJ: Dë tuu hevy ahaa karek

SG: So piipl go pan de

RJ: Yes afta wen...i du so an kyari

ova di chuk an den di piipl dë kum

owt. Di piipl dën kum owt

ān waak dung di sië kut we yu go

web yu bied..wen yu go dung tu

waata said ya.

SG: A rait ya mi bied, rait de

RJ: Yes, yes! Yes yu si, yu si hau

ting werk owt...dis a di lagwud

stump we de rait dung de nau..

no chruu....den dis a Ø wā kau pen

we mi uova de op paa di Chaini dē

liv rait nau. Wā big

kau pen fi Misa Russell, di sië gai

we gat di bus dē, Misa Russell we

nië Tuts...ahaa a fi hi

pa mi hav waā paascha uova di

riva so dis a Ø i kau pen, di bwai

jraa di kaupen tu..si di

haus iin di mhmmm..si wā neks lii

haus we mi de uova de tu. Den dis

a wā kanuu we dē mi gat saida

truck, the cars go here, truck, the
cars go up here, trucks and eve-

ding but not

buses, no buses trucks and cars
aha because if it were ferry days

those big equipment that are

coming over here (now) could

not come on that ferry

SG: Too heavy?

RJ: They are too heavy, ahaa

correct

SG: So people go on there

RJ: Yes after when...I do this

and bring over the truck and

then the people come out. The

people come out and

walk down the same path

where you go to bathe...when

you go down to the riverside

here

SG: It is right here that I bathe,

right there

RJ: Yes, yes! Yes you see, you

see how things work out! ...this

is a logwood stump that is right

down there now

isn't true......then this is cow pen

that was over there up where the

Chinese people live right now. A

big

cow pen for Mr. Russell, the

same guy who has the buses Mr.

Russell who is called Tuts...ahaa

it is his

father who had a pasture across

the river so this is his cow pen.

The boy drew the cow pen

too...see the

house in the mhmmm...see an-

other little house that was over

there too. Then this is a canoe
dis....... Di bwai we ..... kō rait
iinya an jraa...rait owt hau di Ber-
mdian Landing feri mi ....laik
hau i mi stie. Di yunga jenarieshan
dē no nuo wat iz a feri......

that they had
beside this... The boy... came right
in here an drew... drew what the
Bermudian Landing ferry was
like.
The younger generation they do
not know what a ferry is. [SG]

Observations: In lines 29-31 all the copulas are zero-marked and the meaning is present as the speaker is, looking at a picture of the ferry, which is painted on the wall. If we compare this to clause in lines 74-76, we see that where as the physical descriptions have present tense interpretation, the things being described, e.g. their location, no longer have current relevance, so the speaker distances them from S with the use of mi (‘absolute past’ interpretation). The same is true for the clause in line 81, Mr Russell’s father no longer has a cow pen across the river (absolute past) but the picture of it is still on the wall (present):

The speaker also gives background information to orientate the listener as to which Russell is being referred to lines 77-79. Notice however, that it is the foreground information, of the ownership of the cow pen, which is marked by mi and the background information, which is unmarked. This seems to go against Pollard’s and other researchers claims, however, if we bear in mind that from the speaker’s viewpoint it is the foreground information that no longer has current relevance and must necessarily be distanced from S, then we can begin to understand the choice of mi in this case. Mi is used to the indicate remoteness of the situation being described whereas zero indicates the relevance of the situation to speech time. The speaker knows it is no longer the days of the ferry (line 16-18) and in fact offers an evaluation of what would have happened if that were the case lines 55-58.

As shown in (10), another speaker MY (female, 62) talking about the days of the ferry uses the unmarked verb to mark foreground information.

(10) SG: So yu on di chruk an di chruk go on di feri?
MY: ahaa. Bot yu Øhav taim wen di chruk Økom ova:
wen i drai...an i miebi kud kyari yu to St.Paal, ahm
Rancho Delorez, Flowas Bank, but wen i Ø rien i
kyaan du it bikaaz wi no Ø

So you are on the truck and the truck goes on the ferry?
aha. But you had times when the truck came over when it was dry (season)...and maybe it could take you to St Paul’s (Bank) ahm Rancho Delorez, Flowers Bank, but when it rained it could not do it because
6 Summary and Discussion

As shown, both the relative past marker and the unmarked verb can be used to present foreground and background information in discourse. Whereas this might suggest that there is variation, the more important question is what governs the speakers’ choice of past marking. The observations here suggest that the speaker’s assessment of the situation (viewpoint) is relevant for the assignment of ground and consequently use of the relative past marker or the unmarked verb. Problematic cases remain, e.g. lines 25-26 ‘weh paa yu Òtel mi yu mi di bied’ where you told me you were bathing. This is background information so that the listener can locate the tree stump. Both verbs indicate absolute past time reference yet one is marked, the other is unmarked: Additional examination of spontaneous-speech data coupled with more detailed discourse analysis will only enhance our understanding of past-time reference in Creole languages.

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222 Oxley Hall
1712 Neil Avenue
Columbus OH 43210
sgooden@ling.ohio-state.edu