THE ACQUISITION OF ASPECT MARKING IN ENGLISH BY NATIVE SPEAKERS OF CREOLE

Arlene Clachar
University of Miami, Florida
aclachar@miami.edu

This paper examines the plausibility of the Primacy of Aspects Hypothesis (POA) when it is applied to the interlanguage of Creole speakers who are acquiring English as a second dialect. The POA asserts that emerging verb inflections in learners' interlanguage are governed largely by aspectual distinctions inherent in the verb. That is, as verb morphology appears in interlanguage systems to mark temporality, it is not evenly spread across all verbs, but rather, it initially marks lexical aspect — the temporal properties germane to the lexical meaning of the predicate (Robison 1995; Andersen & Shirai 1996; Bardovi-Harlig 1999). The purpose of the study is to investigate whether nascent English inflections do align with lexical aspectual categories in the interlanguage of Creole speakers in the same manner as is postulated by the POA. This investigation is prompted by the fact that Creoles (the subjects’ L1) do differ from the other natural languages that have been researched in cross-sectional studies on the POA. The differences highlighted in this study include the lexico-semantic and morphological features of Creoles in the Anglophone Caribbean, as well as the particularities of the Creole continuum. The findings reveal that in earlier stages of acquiring literacy skills in standard English, Creole-speaking learners do not align English verbal morphology with lexical aspectual categories in a manner that is congruent with that posited by the POA. However, at the high-intermediate to the advanced levels of proficiency, Creole speakers exhibit a distributional bias in verbal morphology consistent with that asserted by the POA.

Background: The hypothesized relationship between the acquisition of temporal semantics and Creole languages

This study arose out of a perceived need to foster an integration between Creole language research and second language acquisition (SLA) research. More specifically, the study sought to investigate how the linguistic research on Creole languages, on the one hand, and the research on the acquisition of English temporal expression (specifically, the acquisition of aspect marking) on the other, can enable researchers and teachers to understand the nature of the challenges that Creole speakers face in acquiring English as a second language (L2). We have a rather thorough documentation on Creole studies and a principled explanation
for the genesis of Creole languages. Similarly, there is extensive documentation on the acquisition of aspect marking in English by speakers of various languages (Romance and other Indo-European, as well as non-Indo-European languages): from the very early stages, to the basic communicatively functional stage, to the emergence and spread of early acquired verbal morphology to mark aspect (Bardovi-Harlig 1999). However, these two areas of research have remained largely separate. The goal of this study is to explore how the existing research on Creole languages can inform SLA research. The purpose of the study is to examine the effect of LI (in this case the Creole language) on the learning challenges faced by Creole speakers in their acquisition of aspect marking in English.

Creole speakers have remained underrepresented in the SLA research focused on the acquisition of temporal semantics, namely, tense and aspect marking in English interlanguage, even though tense/aspect verbal morphology has occupied a focal place in the curricula of most language-instruction programs. The current study, one of a series on the acquisition of English by native speakers of Creole, is offered as a pioneering attempt to understand how Creole speakers acquire aspect morphology in standard English as they develop writing skills with the aim of identifying unique literacy challenges. Since this study represents the initial phase of systematic research on the acquisition of specific English structures by native speakers of Creole, it seems logical to begin by focusing on the expression of temporality because it is so basic to human communication. Moreover, the acquisition of temporality — tense and aspect systems — is influenced more by universal cognitive principles inherent in temporal semantics than by classroom instruction (Bardovi-Harlig 1996). In fact, Robison 1995 found that aspectual distinctions tend to approximate cognitive universals and are cognitively more prominent than tense distinctions. In other words, learners associate emerging verbal inflections with the inherent aspectual categories of verbs because they appear to be more salient than tense distinctions.

The study is also motivated by the concern that Creoles do represent unique languages and differ from other natural languages in their historical evolution. While most languages evolve slowly, responding mainly to pressures found within a largely monolingual population, Creoles are the result of social confrontation of many languages and the genesis of a Creole language is rather abrupt (Lumsden 1995). Creoles also differ considerably from any single one of the parent languages that contributed to their origin and, furthermore, they develop these distinctions in a fairly short period of time under unusual socio-historical conditions. As would be expected, the genesis of Creole languages is reflected in their linguistic structures, and Creole speakers, due to their Creole LI, might exhibit a distinct route with respect to the acquisition of aspect marking in their English interlanguage from that articulated in the SLA literature. The following section highlights four major distinctive characteristics of Creole languages and the concomitant justification for studying the emergence of aspect marking in Creole speakers’ English interlanguage.

There is a consensus among linguists that Creoles, because of their unusual socio-historical emergence, tend to share four major properties. First, Creole lan-
guages have many structural features in common and as a result, these commonalities cannot be due to similarities among the languages of Western Europe (the languages of colonization) or accidental. Second, Creole languages have simpler internal structures than other languages. There is a general belief among linguists that Creoles are phonologically, morphologically, and syntactically simpler than other languages. Third, Creoles are often assumed to have more mixed grammars than other languages: there appears to be a parallel between language and ancestry when alluding to Creole grammars. It is believed that in the same way that Creole speakers have 'mixed' African, European, and Asian ancestry, the languages they speak represent a linguistic admixture of European lexicon along with African and Asian morphology, syntax, and semantics (Muysken & Smith 1995:9). Fourth, Creoles often exhibit a much higher degree of internal variability than other languages. They are believed to be dynamic and analytic language systems (unlike their Romance and other Indo-European counterparts, which have synthetic language systems) and Creoles are usually in constant interaction with their lexifier languages (the languages that provide the greatest portion of their lexica) in the same speech community.

It seems reasonable to assume that if the Creole L1 has a simplified internal linguistic structure, a grammar system representative of an admixture of the morphology, syntax, and semantics of West African and Asian languages, and a high degree of internal variability (a conglomerate of linguistic factors that distinguishes Creoles from other natural languages), then the route for the acquisition of temporal semantics in the L2 might be different from the acquisitional route taken by non-Creole speakers. The following section focuses on the research that has been conducted on temporal semantics and gives: a) a brief overview; b) operational definitions related to the research; and c) seminal research that has led to current perspectives on temporal semantics, specifically the Primacy of Aspect Hypothesis. The following section discusses some major factors pertinent to Creoles that are speculated to influence how Creole speakers acquire temporal semantics.

Research on temporal semantics in SLA: A brief overview

Much of our understanding of how second language learners use the L2 to structure discourse rests largely on our understanding of how they construct an interlanguage of temporal semantics. In other words, there is a strong connection between discourse and the inherent temporal properties of utterances or sentences. Thus, interest in the acquisition of temporal expression in L2 interlanguage has grown enormously over the past two decades with intense scrutiny on the order of acquisition of verbal morphology to mark aspect. This is partly due to the fact that research on the acquisitional order of aspect marking has been useful in understanding literacy challenges of L2 learners. For example, with respect to written narratives, many L2 learners exhibit differential aspect marking for information that is foregrounded versus that which is backgrounded (Housen 1993).

There is also general consensus that emerging verbal inflections to mark aspect in learners' interlanguage appear to operate in ways that are distinct from
the target language (Robison 1995). This emergence of verb inflections, which has come to be variously known as the Primacy of Aspect Hypothesis (Robison 1990), the Aspect Hypothesis (Bardovi-Harlig 1992), as well as the Defective Tense Hypothesis (Andersen 1991), holds that nascent verb inflections are governed largely by aspectual distinctions inherent in the verb. That is, as inflections appear in interlanguage systems, they are not evenly spread across all verbs, rather, they mark lexical aspect — the temporal properties germane to the lexical meaning of the predicate. Learners of English, for example, tend to use the per- fective aspect (past) most frequently with predicates marking ‘telic’ events that have an inherent end point as in (1) and the present participle is associated most with events of indefinite duration as in (2):

1. But then he telled the story, as like to say it seems the truth. [= But then, he told the story as if it were true.] (S18:113-4)

2. I want you to running in the marathon to support my organization. 
   [= I want you to run in the marathon to support my organization.] (S23:124-5)

In short the Primacy of Aspect Hypothesis asserts that verbal inflections in early interlanguage systems function primarily as markers of lexical aspect irrespective of the target language.

This association of verbal inflections with lexical aspect initially appeared in studies of first language acquisition (Bronckart & Sinclair 1973; Antinucci & Miller 1976; Bloom, Lifter, & Afitz 1980). Subsequent research identified parallel correlations in untutored second language acquisition (Kumpf 1982; Flashner 1982). Robison 1995 examined oral interview data elicited from tutored ESL Spanish-speaking students representing four proficiency levels and found a similar acquisition profile. Additional support has come from cross-sectional studies focusing on instructed ESL learners from a variety of language backgrounds. Bardovi-Harlig 1992, for example, studied the written and oral interlanguage of 135 adult learners at six levels of proficiency, from beginning to advanced, who represented such native languages as Arabic, Japanese, Spanish, Korean, Thai, Chinese, Portuguese, Turkish, Indonesian, Persian, Russian, and Swedish. These cross-sectional studies have also revealed the pattern posited by the Primacy of Aspect Hypothesis that an emerging verbal inflection initially marks a given aspectual category and then spreads to adjacent categories, expanding by one semantic notion at a time (Andersen 1991; Andersen & Shirai 1996).

Definitions

This paper examines the premises of the Primacy of Aspect Hypothesis (hereafter POA) based on the written interlanguage of Creole speakers acquiring writing skills in English. The main purpose of the study is to investigate whether Creole speakers do evidence a similar acquisitional pattern of verbal inflections as is dictated by the POA. More specifically, the study focuses on how speakers of an English-based Creole use verbal morphological inflections to mark aspectual categories when acquiring writing skills in English as a second dialect. Even
though learners can also employ other means to signal temporality such as adverbials, the study will limit temporality to explicit morphological encoding of aspect. Both tense and aspect are terms referring to the concept of temporality. Tense denotes temporal deixis and locates a situation in relation to some reference of time, usually the time of the utterance — past, present, or future. On the other hand, aspect is not concerned with locating a situation in relation to some reference of time, but rather characterizes ‘different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation’ (Comrie 1976:3). For example, the difference between she is singing and she was singing is that of tense because the contrast of is and was indicates the distinction between the two with respect to the time of the utterance. However, the difference between she sang a song and she was singing a song, is that of aspect, because the difference focuses on how the action of singing is interpreted by the speaker: the former views the situation in its entirety, whereas the latter conceptualizes the situation as having phases (Comrie 1976).

There are two types of aspect: grammatical aspect and lexical aspect. Grammatical aspect is the term for aspectual distinctions that are specifically marked by grammatical devices such as auxiliaries and inflections. The English progressive aspect and the perfective-imperfective aspect in Spanish and French are examples of grammatical aspect. Lexical aspect (Andersen 1990) refers to the semantic properties located in the meaning of the verb or verb phrase, irrespective of any grammatical marking or time reference. In other words, lexical aspect captures semantic properties such as whether a verb or verb phrase denotes an action with ‘inherent duration like talk and sleep’, is punctual with an inherent end point like recognize and arrive, or has features of both duration and a specific end point like build a house and paint a picture’ (Bardovi-Harlig 1999:342). Bardovi-Harlig 1999 also points out that the same verb may indicate differential grammatical aspect as in he was singing and he sang, but its inherent lexical aspect remains identical. In these two predicates, sing has inherent duration whether the grammatical aspect is past progressive or simple past.

These conceptual distinctions in lexical aspect have been classified by Vendler 1967. He noted four basic distinctions inherent in the semantic properties of verbs or predicates: punctual, telic, activity, and stative. Punctual predicates describe situations or events that occur instantaneously and can be reduced to a single point in time (e.g., recognize, die, reach an agreement, arrive). Telic predicates denote situations or events that have some duration, but have clear end points (e.g., walk a mile, make a cushion, construct a monument, write an essay). Activity predicates refer to situations or events that have duration, but with arbitrary end points, and are homogeneous in nature (e.g., run, play, dance). Stative predicates denote situations that have no dynamics and continue without the infusion of effort or energy (e.g., love, hate, want) (Andersen & Shirai 1996).

As illustrated in Table 1, Andersen (1991:311) mapped these four basic distinctions into four categories of lexical aspect based on Vendler’s 1967 classification of the inherent semantic properties of verbs.
Table 1:
Semantic properties for the four categories of lexical aspect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semantic Properties</th>
<th>Lexical Aspectual Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctual</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telic</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Andersen 1991:311)

Examining the Table, it can be seen (as is articulated in the literature related to the POA) that although telic has some duration, punctual and telic both share the feature of having a clear end point. A punctual differs from the other semantic categories in that it is not durative; stative is distinct from the other three semantic categories in that it is not dynamic. Therefore, the four lexical aspectual categories seem to have 'an implicational relationship' and create 'a linear classification of lexical aspect' (Robison 1995:346).

Previous research

Evidence of the POA phenomenon has surfaced repeatedly in both L1 and L2 acquisition. In the area of L1 acquisition, Bronckart & Sinclair 1973 observed that French verb forms that adults use to mark tense appear to express aspect in the speech of very young children. Through elicitation tasks, these researchers demonstrated that children employed the past form (the perfective) for most situations that had a specific inherent end point, and mainly the present for situations/events with no clear end result. Other researchers such as Antinucci & Miller 1976 observed parallel results in their examination of longitudinal data elicited from seven Italian children. Before the age of two, the past tense inflection was used almost exclusively with telic verbs and activity and state verbs were not marked by the past tense inflection. Bickerton 1981 explained these findings by appealing to a language ontogenesis that postulates the existence of two innate aspectual distinctions: stative/dynamic (state/process) and punctual/durative (punctual/ nonpunctual). He used the data from the above two studies to support the punctual/durative distinction in young children. He proposed that Anglophone children conceptualize this distinction by initially employing -ing to indicate durative events and the irregular past forms to signal punctual events. In addition, he pointed out that Anglophone children distinguish between stative and dynamic events by not using -ing with stative verbs.

In the arena of second language acquisition, case studies have found similar correlations based on evidence from learners from a variety of language backgrounds. These learners used target inflections to mark aspektual categories in nonnative ways. Seminal research on the POA focusing on untutored learners and recent research on the POA have provided proof of the influence of aspec-
tual distinction even with learners in instructional settings. Current studies on the POA have been extended to include foreign language learners (Bardovi-Harlig & Bergström 1996; Salaberry 1999) as well as tutored foreigners learning the languages of the respective host countries (Shirai 1995; Shirai & Kurono 1998). In addition, these studies have made use of a wide variety of elicitation tasks such as oral and written personal and impersonal narratives, cloze passages in written discourse (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds 1995), and exercises on grammatical judgment (Shirai & Kurono 1998).

Robison 1990 found that adults learning English generally marked punctual verbs with the past inflection and activity verbs with the progressive inflection when verbal morphology appeared in their interlanguage. Similarly, Kaplan’s 1987 study showed that college students of French as a foreign language used the preterite to indicate perfective events and the present to mark the imperfective. These findings were also supported by Giacalone Ramat & Banfi 1990 and Bayley 1994, who observed a distributional bias in the use of verbal morphology in the interlanguage of Chinese students learning Italian and English respectively. Bayley’s study of Chinese learners of English as a second language, evidenced a perfective-imperfective aspectual contrast — the perfective aspect marker (unlike the imperfective aspect marker) showed an affinity for past events, an observation that was consistent at all levels of proficiency.

The POA has been further endorsed by recent cross-sectional studies. Focusing on the acquisition of Spanish as a second language by university students. Salaberry 1999 noted that learners at the beginning level used the preterit inflection only for punctual verbs. Intermediate-level students used the imperfective, but only with nonpunctual verbs, while still limiting the preterit to punctual verbs. The most advanced students employed both inflections with verbs in each aspectual category, however, the majority of punctual verbs were still marked perfective, and most nonpunctual verbs were marked imperfective.

Bardovi-Harlig 1992 made use of cloze passages to elicit verbal inflections from English learners representing several language backgrounds at six different proficiency levels. She observed that learners distinguished two punctual verbs from three durative verbs using the progressive/nonprogressive inflectional distinction, punctual verbs being marked for the simple past more frequently than durative verbs. Similarly, Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds 1995 found that at all levels of proficiency, a higher incidence of accurate use of past tense with punctual and telic predicates than with stative and activities.

The findings in these SLA studies parallel the pattern for first language acquisition (Robison 1995). The emergence of verbal morphology to mark aspectual categories in interlanguage systems has been conceptualized by the POA as follows (cited in Andersen & Shirai 1996:533):

1. Learners first use perfective (past) marking on punctual and telic verbs, eventually extending use to activities and statives.
2. In languages that encode the perfective/imperfective contrast, the imperfective appears after the perfective, and imperfective marking begins with statives, extending next to activities, then to telic and punctual predicates.

3. In languages that have progressive aspect, progressive marking begins with activities and then extends to telic and punctual predicates.

4. Progressive markings are not incorrectly overextended to statives.

Thus, the underlying premise of the POA is that when verbal morphology emerges, the acquisitional pattern is clear: the perfective (past) first marks punctual and telic verbs and eventually spreads to activities and statives; the progressive aspect first marks activities and then extends to telic and punctual predicates; the progressive aspect is not incorrectly overextended to statives. In addition, Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds 1995 observed the use of the present or base with statives. The question now becomes: Do Creole learners evince the same acquisitional pattern of verbal inflections as is dictated by the POA?

Motivation to explore this question stems from the fact that there are some major factors pertinent to Creoles that might influence how Creole learners use inflectional morphology to mark lexical aspect in their interlanguage. Following is a description of the linguistic-oriented characteristics of the Creole speaker and implications of these characteristics for the premises of the POA.

**Creoles: The product of language systems in contact**

Creoles arose from contact among typologically very different languages, such as West African, East Indian, and European languages, during the slave trade and plantation periods of the 17th and 18th centuries. Although much of the vocabulary of Creoles is taken from European languages (English in the case of the Creoles in the Anglophone Caribbean and French in the case of the Francophone Caribbean), their underlying grammars come mainly from West African languages. For example, in the Anglophone Caribbean, Creoles have a predominantly English lexicon drawn from the lexifier language, British English (a factor that explains why Creole speakers continue to label their language as English), but have morphological and syntactic systems showing considerable affinities with many West African languages, such as Twi and Ewe. These Creoles also lack a morphological inflectional system to mark tense and aspect. Therefore, although the Creoles show a lexical affinity with the standard English variety (hence English-based Creoles), they manifest an incongruence with the verbal inflectional system of the standard.

This linguistic phenomenon is likely to create a blurring or even confusion on the part of the Creole-English-speaking learner concerning what constitutes the Creole and the creolized varieties on the one hand, and the standard English variety, on other. It is hypothesized that the Creole speaker may have specific challenges aligning standard English inflections with lexical aspect categories,
thus, exhibiting a distinct pattern of aspect marking from that posited by the POA. (For further discussion, see the section 'Rationale for the study', below.)

The Creole continuum

Another important characteristic that is related to Creole speakers in the Anglophone Caribbean is the unique sociolinguistic environment in which they acquire their native Creoles. This environment has been described as a Creole continuum representing a range of speech varieties from the basilect (most conservative Creole), to the mesolect (intermediate, less creolized varieties), to the acrolect (the standard variety) (see De Camp 1971; Alleyne 1980; Rickford 1987). Below is a brief description of the Creole continuum along with its speculated effect on the acquisition of verbal inflections to mark lexical aspect in Creole learners' interlanguage.

The Anglophone Caribbean represents a linguistic contact zone in which Creole languages evolved as a consequence of European-controlled plantations that brought Africans, as slaves, in contact with European colonizers. The resulting languages were an admixture of the syntax, morphology, and phonology of West African languages and the lexicon of British English — thus, the term English-based Creoles (Nero 1997). The history of slavery and British colonization in the Caribbean has 'forced' the continuous interaction of standard English and Creoles into an unequal relationship that has 'privileged' the standard variety and prejudiced the Creole variety (Nero 1997:7). This interaction of the two varieties has led to what De Camp 1971 calls a Creole continuum. The underlying notion of the continuum is that there is no clear-cut division between the Creole and the standard. Instead, there is a spectrum of speech varieties ranging from the basilect (the Creole in the strict sense), to the mesolect (the intermediate creolized varieties), to the acrolect (the standard variety). Most people in the Anglophone Caribbean speak either the basilect or the creolized varieties of English (the mesolect), but consider their language to be English because Creoles and creolized varieties of English are linked to low social status.

The particularity of the Anglophone Caribbean continuum is that it consists of polar varieties, (the Creole and standard English), which are typologically and genetically distinct from one another. There are intermediate speech varieties that lie between the Creole and standard English poles of the continuum. The phenomenon of the continuum exists in countries like Jamaica, Antigua, and Guyana and is characterized by tremendous variability. That is, any variable, whether it be phonological, morphosyntactic, or lexico-semantic, can have as its variants, features that are identifiable with the conservative Creole variety, features identified with the standard variety, and several other variants diagnostic of the intermediate zone of the continuum. These intermediate variants are generally representative of a scale of different approximations to standard English or, conversely, approximations to the Creole with respect to their formal characteristics and grammatical features. One way of interpreting the continuum as it exists in Jamaica, Antigua, and Guyana is in terms of three codes (Creole, intermediate, and standard English) and then in terms of a ‘gradual shading-off’ from one end of this scale to
the other by a ‘series of minimal shifts at all grammatical levels’ (Alleyne 1980:192). In this systematic shading-off, linguistic features that can be traced to a West African historical origin (the Creole or basilectal forms) are gradually substituted by English-like structures (the acrolectal forms).

Sometimes there is no clear-cut code to identify which variant in the continuum is closer to standard English than the other. For example, in the variation *mi ben kom ~ mi did kom ~ mi kyeem* ‘I came’ (perfective past to mark a punctual event), the second alternant is not closer to standard English than the first, even though most people would assume so. On the contrary, in the variation *mi a kom ~ mi da kom ~ mi komin ~ a komin* ‘I am coming’ (progressive to mark activity predicates), the third and fourth variants are clearly closer to English than the first two (see Alleyne 1980).

It should be noted that variations such as those mentioned above are not logically ordered, nor are there discrete groups of speakers identified with ordered registers represented by the above variations. The fact is that a speaker will sometimes use *mi ben kom ~ mi kyeem* or even *ay kem* (the standard acrolectal variety). The same speaker will variably use *mi a kom*, alongside *mi da kom*, *mi komin*, *a komin*, or even the standard acrolectal variety *aym komin*. Thus, there is a tremendous amount of bidirectional style shifting along the continuum as the need arises to adjust to social context or to assert social and ethnic solidarity or distinctiveness. This means that in the speech of English-based Creole speakers in the Anglophone Caribbean, a given lexical aspectual category can have several variants representing the basilectal, mesolectal, and acrolectal varieties.

The above description of the Creole continuum in countries like Jamaica, Guyana, and Antigua suggests that native speakers of Creole may evidence a pattern for aspect marking distinct from that submitted by the POA. As stated earlier, English-based Creoles in the Anglophone Caribbean show similarity at the lexical level with the standard English variety, but draw much of their morphology and syntax from West African languages. It is, therefore, speculated that these Creole speakers, in acquiring writing skills in standard English, may process the temporal features resident in the lexical meaning of the verb in order to mark lexical aspect, but may not align the standard English morphological inflections with lexical aspectual categories in ways that have been posited by the POA.

This study examines the plausibility of the POA based on written English data collected from Jamaican Creole speakers who are acquiring writing skills in English as a second dialect in an adult basic education program. The major purpose of the study is to investigate whether developing English inflections align themselves with lexical aspectual categories in these subjects’ written interlanguage, as is dictated by the POA. While previous research has focused largely on cross-sectional studies of aspectual marking in the interlanguage systems of learners acquiring English as a second or foreign language, this paper takes the position that because English-based Creoles show lexical similarity to the standard English variety, manifest a great deal of morphosyntactic affinity with West African languages, and lack morphological inflections, its speakers may provide
additional factors likely to put the underlying premises of the POA under further scrutiny. In other words, Creole speakers' written interlanguage will be examined in order to ascertain whether emerging inflections mark aspectual categories in the way proposed by the POA. In addition, the effect of the Creole continuum on the subjects' written interlanguage will be examined in order to explain the possible role that the continuum plays in the manner in which inflections are associated with lexical aspectual categories.

Rationale for the study

Most studies supporting the tenets of the POA have focused on how acquirers of English as a second or foreign language use inflectional morphology to mark lexical aspect in their developing interlanguage systems. This study takes the position that Creole learners acquiring writing skills in the standard English variety may exhibit a distinct pattern from that postulated by the POA as they use standard English inflections to mark lexical aspectual categories in their developing interlanguage.

This speculation is based on the fact that there are characteristics of pertinence to the Anglophone Caribbean that are likely to influence how the Creole learner of standard English uses English verbal inflections to mark lexical aspectual categories. First, for the Creole-English learner, the linguistic system to be acquired — standard English — represents a dialect rather than a distinct language, as was the case in previous research supporting the POA (see Alleyne's 1980, 1987 discussion on English-based Creoles as dialects of English). Creoles in the Anglophone Caribbean have a predominantly English lexicon (a factor that partially explains why Creole speakers continue to label their language as English), but have morphological and syntactic systems that show affinities with those of West African languages. These Creoles also lack morphological inflections to mark temporality. In other words, unlike standard English, the Creole verb stem is largely unmarked for tense and aspect: the various meanings that the zero form may express are determined by context (Winford 1997). For example:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Yesidey} & \quad \text{Jan} \quad \text{waak} \quad \text{a mayl.} \\
\text{Yesterday} & \quad \text{John} \quad \text{walk (Ø past)} \quad \text{a mile} \\
\text{Yesterday} & \quad \text{John walked a mile.}
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Him} & \quad \text{ben} \quad \text{claym} \quad \text{op} \quad \text{ina di tri.} \\
\text{He} & \quad \text{anterior} \quad \text{climb up in the tree.} \\
\text{He} & \quad \text{climbed the tree.}
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Mi} & \quad \text{a} \quad \text{pik} \quad \text{plom} \\
\text{I} & \quad \text{progressive} \quad \text{pick} \quad \text{plum (Ø plural).} \\
\text{I} & \quad \text{am picking plums.}
\end{align*}
\]

Thus, the Creoles show a lexical affinity with the standard English variety but, unlike English, lack an inflectional morphological system.

The confluence of this linguistic phenomenon is a blurring or even confusion on the part of Creole learners concerning what constitutes the Creole and
the creolized varieties on the one hand, and the standard English variety on the other, when they become involved in a formal learning situation. It is hypothesized that these Creole speakers, in acquiring writing skills in standard English, may process the temporal features resident in the lexical meaning of the verb, but may not align the standard English morphological inflections with lexical aspectual categories in ways that have been posited by the POA.

The second factor that may affect the emergence of inflections marking aspectual categories in Creole learners’ interlanguage is the Creole continuum. As stated earlier, the continuum is characterized by tremendous variability. The same speaker will variably use *mi don iit ~ mi did iit ~ mi iit ‘I ate’* (perfective aspect to mark a punctual event) or *mi a iit ~ mi da iit ~ mi iitin ~ a iitin ‘I am eating’* (progressive aspect to mark activity). This means that in the speech of a Jamaican Creole speaker, a given lexical aspectual category can have several preverbal variants representing the basilect, the mesolect, and the acrolect. If we allude to the One-to-One Principle that learners expect each new morpheme to have only one meaning and function (Andersen 1993) and a prototypical meaning for each tense and aspect morpheme (Giacalone Ramat 1997), then we might predict challenges for Creole learners when they are exposed to standard English, since the Creole L1 has several preverbal variants to mark one aspectual category. In other words, since each tense or aspect inflection in English is associated with a prototypical meaning, learners are expected to infer a prototypical meaning for each inflection from the standard English input, such as ‘action in progress at that moment’ for progressive marking, ‘completed action’ for perfective past marking, and ‘continued existence’ for present marking. The import of this is that Creole speakers who come from an L1 background in which there are several preverbal variants to mark one aspect category might be constrained by the One-to-One Principle to associate an English inflection with its prototypical meaning.

**Research questions**

This study attempts to investigate the underlying premises of the POA in terms of the formal characteristics of English-based Creoles as well as the sociolinguistic particularities of the Creole continuum. The following specific questions are addressed:

1. In the acquisition of writing skills in English as a second dialect by Creole speakers, how is lexical aspect marked in the early distribution of verb morphology? That is, do Creole learners mark lexical aspect categories in their written interlanguage in a manner distinct from that posited by the POA?

2. What verbal morphology pattern emerges in their written interlanguage at different stages of the acquisitional process?

3. What justifications can be offered for the observed developmental pattern?
Subjects
The subjects were 37 Jamaican Creole speakers enrolled in an adult basic education program. In order to identify clear acquisitional profiles of the subjects, two distinct groups at very different stages of the acquisition process were identified — intermediate-level students who had been enrolled in the program for 14 months, and high-intermediate to advanced students who had been in the program for approximately 27 months. All subjects ranged in age from 19 to 25. They were shown a 19-minute silent film and asked to retell the story in writing. They were given one hour and fifteen minutes to complete the assignment. The 37 writing samples were used to rank the subjects on the basis of their use of past verb morphology in obligatory contexts (see Table 2). The intermediate-level subjects' scores ranged from 25-49 and 50-69 representing cohorts 1 and 2, and the high-intermediate to advanced subjects' scores ranged from 70-79 and 80-89 representing cohorts 3 and 4. This division of subjects allowed for a more effective comparison across groups.

Coding procedures
Following Bardovi-Harlig & Bergström 1996, each verb was coded according to morphology: perfective past; progressive (past/ present/ and O progressive); simple present; and base forms. All verbs that were marked for the perfective, including overgeneralized forms such as caught and singed were coded as perfective. Verb forms were coded as past and present progressive if they indicated was/were and is/are distinctions along with the –ing participle. Instances of the participle without the auxiliary, such as O + sleeping were coded as O + progressive. Simple present forms reflected the third person singular morpheme (she sleeps/goes), and base forms were not marked (she sleep/go). Verbs such as cost and put, whose past and base forms cannot be differentiated, were excluded from the data. There were four lexical aspectual categories to which each verb phrase was assigned: punctual, telic, activity, and stative. This classification was used by Bardovi-Harlig & Bergström 1996 and is adopted in Table 3.

Results and discussion
Spread of perfective-past marking
The POA was partially upheld: there was no distributional bias of the perfective past for punctual, telic, and activity verbs in cohorts 1 and 2, that is, the subjects at the intermediate level with lower writing proficiency in English. However, in cohorts 3 and 4, the high-intermediate and advanced subjects, there was evidence of the POA. For cohort 1 (see Table 3), punctuals, telics, and activities showed basically the same level of perfective past marking with 38%, 36.6%, and 33.6% of all verbs carrying the perfective past, respectively. Cohort 2 also exhibited the same trend with punctuals, telics, and activities carrying 50.2%, 49.7%, and 47.2% of the perfective past, respectively. In cohorts 1 and 2, the perfective marking is applied to punctuals, telics, and activities in nontarget-like grammatical contexts:
Table 2: Percentage use of verb morphology scores in obligatory contexts and number of predicates per subject. Mean number of verbs per narrative: 55.4.; total number of verbs: 2,053.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COHORTS</th>
<th>SUBJECTS</th>
<th>% OF VERB MORPH</th>
<th># PREDICATES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohort 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort 2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort 3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort 4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>80.3</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. While they talked on the phone, Iris was studying for the exam and Sonia played in the garden ...

2. ... And her brother helped her with the homework, during that time they worked on the car and played the music so loud.

3. He is not working anymore and it seem that he studied all the time even though his wife not worked either.

4. My impression [sic] was that he prepared the breakfast and baked the bread when the daughter entered the house ...

5. ... They talking for a while and during that time she also talked to the girl who did her homework. At the same exact [sic] moment those who talked also looked at what the televishon [sic] showed.

6. ... While she lived in the city, her two sons were operating the biznes [sic] and saved a lot of money. For this reason, during the time while she worked in the city, they enjoyed themselves very much at the same time ...

In both cohorts states showed no use of the perfective. Basically, what this reveals is that in the earlier stages of acquiring literacy skills in standard English, the Creole learner does not align English verbal morphology with lexical aspectual categories in a manner that is congruent with that posited by the POA. However, at the high-intermediate and advanced levels of proficiency, the effects of the POA become apparent.

This observation appears to constitute counterevidence to the tenets of the POA, which posits that as perfective marking emerges, it does not spread evenly across all aspectual categories, but spreads from punctual and telic verbs and eventually extends to activity and stative verbs. What we observe with Jamaican Creole speakers who exhibit a lower level of writing proficiency in English is an even spread of the perfective past across all aspectual categories (punctual, telic, and activity verbs). On the contrary, cohorts 3 and 4 (the most proficient groups) exhibited primacy of aspect distributions for punctual, telic, activity, and stative verbs. Table 3 shows that for cohort 3, there was greater use of the perfective for punctuals (86.5%) and telics (79.2%) than for activities (50.7%). Statives had the lowest percentage (43.6%). Cohort 4 also exhibited the same primacy of aspect distributions: predominant use of the perfective for punctuals (84.1%) and telics (81.3%); and eventually spreading to activities (56.3%). Again, states showed the lowest marking (47.1%).

In an attempt to explain the counterevidence to the premises of the POA observed with the less proficient Creole speakers, it is essential to allude to the structure of the Creole as well as to the theoretical import of the Creole continuum. Jamaican Creole, an English-based Creole (the subjects' L1), shows a lexical affinity with the standard English variety, but, unlike the standard, it lacks inflectional morphology to mark aspectual categories. It seems, therefore, that these Creole-speaking subjects are able to accurately identify temporal semantic distinctions in aspectual categories because of lexical similarity of the base form of the verb in both the Creole and the standard. However, since the Creole lacks an
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort 1</th>
<th>Cohort 2</th>
<th>Cohort 3</th>
<th>Cohort 4</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P5.3</td>
<td>P3.3</td>
<td>P5.3</td>
<td>P3.3</td>
<td>P5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7.3</td>
<td>P5.3</td>
<td>P7.3</td>
<td>P5.3</td>
<td>P5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9.3</td>
<td>P7.3</td>
<td>P9.3</td>
<td>P7.3</td>
<td>P7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11.3</td>
<td>P9.3</td>
<td>P11.3</td>
<td>P9.3</td>
<td>P9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P13.3</td>
<td>P11.3</td>
<td>P13.3</td>
<td>P11.3</td>
<td>P11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P15.3</td>
<td>P13.3</td>
<td>P15.3</td>
<td>P13.3</td>
<td>P13.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3: Distribution of verb morphology across lexical aspectual categories in percent*
inflection system to mark aspect, when Creole-speaking learners are exposed to English inflections in formal learning situations, they are likely to use these inflections indiscriminately. In other words, what we are probably observing with Creole speakers (at the earlier stages of acquiring writing skills in English) is the affixing of English inflections indiscriminately across lexical aspectual categories. Therefore, punctual, telic, and activity predicates show the same level of perfective marking: there is no distributional bias in which the perfective marks punctual and telic predicates first and then eventually spreads to activity and stative predicates.

The more proficient Creole learners (high-intermediate and advanced), who exhibited the effects of the POA, are more likely to look for iconicity between form and function, a phenomenon that tends to promote functional differentiation. That is, more proficient learners do look for associations between form and function. This process takes on a great deal of significance in understanding why the more proficient learners showed primacy of aspect distributions: the more learners use language to construct discourse, the more proficient they become, and, therefore, the more they are likely to make productive inferences about a prototypical meaning for each inflection and use the inflection with verbs that most closely share its meaning (the Relevance Principle, see Andersen & Shirai 1994). This process may be in contrast to that used by the less proficient learners.

A second plausible reason for the observed counterevidence to the POA among Creole speakers at the intermediate level (cohorts 1 and 2) may be attributed to the effects of the Creole continuum. As stated earlier, the continuum is characterized by tremendous variability. This means that in the speech of a Jamaican Creole speaker, a given aspectual category has several preverbal variants to mark the perfective past — aspectual categories in the Creole are not marked by morphological inflections as in standard English, but by preverbal particles. It would seem, therefore, that when Creole speakers are exposed to the standard variety in a formal setting, they do not identify the affinity of specific inflections for verbs of particular aspectual classes. Also, the One-to-One Principle (Andersen & Shirai 1994) that learners expect a prototypical meaning and function for each aspect inflection, such as ‘completed action’ for perfective marking, has some explanatory power. If we rely on this Principle, it may be that the less proficient Creole learners do not make functional differentiation with respect to inflections for verbs of different lexical aspectual classes, since in the Creole continuum, a given aspectual category has several preverbal variants. Moreover, at the lexical level, Creole verbs show a great deal of similarity with those of the lexifier language (standard English), but mark a given aspectual class not by a specific morphological inflection (as is the case with standard English), but by the use of several preverbal variants. The result is the blurring of the distinctness between aspect morphology and lexical aspectual categories when the Creole-English learner is exposed to the standard in a formal setting. This blurring may lead to the indiscriminate affixing of the perfective across lexical aspectual classes such that punctual, telic, and activity predicates show the same level of perfective marking, resulting in the observed countereffects of the POA. It is only later, at the high-
intermediate and advanced levels, when Creole-speaking learners are more proficient (as we observed with cohorts 3 and 4), that they are able to match features that are semantically congruent (such as telicity, perfectivity, and pastness) and use morphology that is relevant to the verb closest to the verb. Thus, punctuals and telics are marked by the perfective past first, and then later, activities are marked. In other words, the POA effects begin to emerge.

Spread of the progressive marking
The POA posits that as the progressive emerges, it marks activity verbs first and then extends to punctual and telic verbs. Table 3 indicates that in cohorts 1 and 2 (the learners with less writing proficiency in English), the progressive marking does not show a distributional bias. In cohort 1, the progressive is used in 20.1% of activities, 17.2% of punctuals, and 17% of telics. In cohort 2, activities show only a slightly higher use than punctuals and telics (30.1%, 29.8%, and 25.4%, respectively). This pattern represents counterevidence to the spread of the progressive as postulated by the POA (see Bardovi-Harlig, 1999). Cohorts 1 and 2 applied the progressive to punctuals, telics, and activities in nontarget-like contexts:

7. It appear that she was recognizing what happening in the house but they are not noticing her ... they were arriving too late to stopping anything.

8. I think that the businessman [sic] reaching an agreement with her but she was deciding not to accept [sic] the offer.

9. ... Because they were making a garden and building the wall in three weeks.

10. At that time she went inside and was writing a note to her friend then she finished and was playing the music and singing ...

Subjects in cohorts 1 and 2 applied the progressive in contexts that generally require third person singular marking:

11. The wife work very hard ... she is working ten hours a day, is going to college to study and looking after a family ...

12. I am not quite shure [sic] about what his job is but I know that an owner usually is managing the finansiz [sic] of his own store.

13. ... Based on what I remember, he is working in his mother's shop everyday and he studying half of the time at a near institute.

The bare progressive (Ø + progressive) emerged very early, but contrary to what Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds 1995 found for the lowest-level learners in their study, the past progressive was much more dominant than the present progressive in the written data produced by the Creole speakers. Of all verbs exhibiting the progressive, 39.4% (cohort 1) and 36.8% (cohort 2) were past progressive compared with 26.2% (cohort 1) and 22.1% (cohort 2) for the present progressive. The higher proficiency cohorts (3 and 4) showed no evidence of Ø + progressive.
but, like the lower-level learners, the past progressive remained dominant. This dominance of the past progressive is probably due to the proliferation of punctu- als and telics, which are typical of narratives. It is also worth pointing out that in Creole cultures where story telling plays a central role, the structure of narrative discourse is salient. Thus, the high percentage of past progressive in the data (contrary to Bardovi-Harlig & Reynold's 1995 findings) may be attributed to morphosyntactic features of oral narratives in Creole English.

With respect to the more proficient learners, the progressive showed clear primacy of aspect effects for activity predicates. In other words, activity predicates appeared with the highest level of progressive marking (41.2% for cohort 3 and 39.2% for cohort 4), followed by punctuals (8% for cohort 3 and 10.3% for cohort 4) and telics (12.1% for cohort 3 and 8.1% for cohort 4). The results indicate that Creole speakers at a higher level of proficiency exhibited an acquisitional pattern of progressive aspect marking consistent with the tenets of the POA. However, as stated earlier, the postulates of the POA were not observed with Creole learners at the lower level. Like the perfective past, the progressive marker in Jamaican Creole has several variants (diagnostic of the Creole continuum) to mark a given lexical aspectual class (a ~ da + V; + V + {-in}; dida + V). Since there are several variants of the progressive marker (unlike English), it seems plausible to assert that when Creole speakers are exposed to standard English in a formal setting in the early stages, they may have difficulty identifying and abstracting a prototypical meaning and function for the English progressive aspect marker. As a result, it may be challenging in the earlier stages of the acquisitional process to assign the progressive marker to features that are semantically congruent with activity predicates, such as 'that which connotes dynamicity and duration'. Therefore, activity verbs do not attract the progressive marker any more than punctual and telic verbs — a phenomenon that has led to counterevidence to the POA observed among the Creole speakers with the lowest writing proficiency in English. Once Creole-speaking learners are able to infer a prototypical meaning for the progressive and identify features semantically congruent with activity predicates, then activities are more likely to attract the progressive marker than are telic and punctual predicates, thus exhibiting the effects of the POA.

Present and base forms
In the four cohorts none of the aspectual categories showed an affinity for thirdperson singular marking (-s). The only noticeable use of the -s-marking appeared with state verbs and was accounted for by 5 subjects in cohort 3 (37.4%). In these specific cases -s differentiates state verbs from nonstates:

14. . . . And she wants him to building a house for her in the city but he loves the rural area and made the decision to lived there.

15. The friends likes to write letters among themselves. . . .

16. . . . Then the woman sees how she can helps her son and recognized the idea and so she talking to the lawyer to planning the documents.
The appearance of s-marking with states in this study, albeit slight, seems to concur with Bickerton's 1981 claim that in the morphosyntactic systems of many Creole languages (among them Hawaiian Creole English, Guyanese Creole English, Sranan, and Saramaccan), the stem form of stative verbs expresses present tense. This phenomenon may explain why the Creole-speaking learners in this study linked the emerging s-inflection to states. Of the four aspectual categories, the base forms occurred predominantly with states for the two lower-level cohorts (77.6% for cohort and 88.1% for cohort 2 — see Table 3). Since stative verbs connote a timeless situation that continues to exist, it seems feasible to assert that Creole-speaking learners are not likely to mark state verbs, hence the strong affiliation of base forms with state predicates.

Conclusion

The important finding in this study is that the morphological structure of Creole languages, as well as the Creole continuum may have contributed to counterevidence to the POA in the earlier stages of the acquisition of English as a second dialect. From the morphological perspective, Caribbean English Creoles have a predominantly English lexicon but, unlike the lexifier language, English, they lack morphological inflections to mark aspect. The effect of this linguistic phenomenon is a blurring of distinctness between the two codes (the Creole and the standard) or even confusion on the part of Creole-English-speaking learners concerning what constitutes the Creole and the mesolectal varieties on the one hand, and the standard English variety on the other, when they are exposed to standard English in a formal academic setting. Based on the analysis of the data elicited from the subjects, it appears that Creole learners in the earlier stages of acquiring the written form of standard English as a second dialect, tend to process the temporal features resident in the lexical meaning of the verb (since the Creole verbs show lexical affinity with those of the standard variety), but do not align the standard English morphological inflections with lexical aspectual classes in ways posited by the POA (since the Creole morphological system for marking aspect is incongruent with that of the standard). This blurring of distinctness between the two codes, the Creole and standard English, may have led to the indiscriminate affixing of inflectional morphology across aspectual categories. This explanation is also supported by Wolfram & Schilling-Estes (1998:287):

When two systems are highly similar, with minor differences, it is sometimes difficult to keep the systems apart. ... In some ways, it may be easier to work with language systems that are drastically different, because the temptation to merge overlapping structures and ignore differences is not as great.

The Creole continuum appears to be an influential factor in the observed counterevidence to the POA. The continuum is characterized by tremendous variability in that a given aspectual category is marked by several preverbal variants. Therefore, it seems plausible to submit that in the earlier stages of acquiring English as a second dialect, Creole-speaking learners have challenges identifying and abstracting a prototypical meaning and function for each inflectional aspect...
marker and matching it to features that are semantically congruent with the respective aspectual category.

The most proficient Creole learners did exhibit a distributional bias of verb morphology with aspectual categories, i.e., the effects of the POA. As learners become more proficient, the semantic import of the aspectual categories becomes more salient and, therefore, learners begin to associate emerging inflections with the meaning inherent in the aspectual classes. In other words, the learner tends to link an inflection with a verb according to its closeness to the meaning of the verb. This explains, as Andersen 1993 states, why morphological inflections match up with lexical aspectual categories in the manner that is postulated by the POA: the inflection to mark the perfective past connotes completeness, and, thus, is associated with punctuals and telics; the progressive inflection implies duration and, therefore, is associated with activity predicates; the present s-marker is closest to states, since both indicate a timeless situation that continues to exist. It seems, therefore, that there are cognitive principles underlying the aspectual categories that tend to exert more influence over the learners’ interlanguage than do the linguistic features of the Creole and the Creole continuum. However, in the earlier stages, the role of interference from the Creole and the mesoelectal variants diagnostic of the Creole continuum appears to be more influential than cognitive principles.

REFERENCES

—. & ——. 1996. The primacy of aspect in first and second language acquisition: The pidgin-creole connection. Handbook of Second Language Acqui-


