The interplay of inherent tendencies and language contact on French object clitics: An example of variation in a French Guianese contact setting

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Abstract: Standard and non-standard variations relating to object clitics in the French spoken in French Guiana (in contact with Guianese Creole) may be explained by three combined factors: linguistic and typological tendencies and contact-induced transfer. This paper determines the exact role each of these may play. It shows that the pronominal system is a particularly non-stable domain specific to Romance languages and that clitic variation is due to an inherent tendency within French to the reduction of paradigms. When this tendency encounters the reduced pronominal paradigm of French Guianese Creole, it creates a snowball effect that reinforces the inherent tendency. The present-day language contact situation produces a higher frequency of variation; it increases the productivity of variation and spread of innovative forms.

Keywords ongoing variation, multiple causation, inherent tendencies, contact-induced transfer, frequency, clitics, French

In multilingual settings, it is readily assumed that observed variation in language A is due to language contact or to linguistic transfer from language B. In Creole-speaking areas in particular, where a Creole language is in contact with its erstwhile lexifier, the explanations immediately proposed by linguists, teachers, or speakers for observed variation in one or other language are either de-Creolization (when the Creole language A appears to be moving toward closer resemblance to its lexifier language, meaning that features of language B are being transferred) or (new) Creolization (when

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variation in the erstwhile lexifier language B appears to result from contact with Creole language A).

Examples of variation relating to the object clitic pronoun in the French spoken in French Guiana, where it is in contact with French-based Creole languages, show that before seeking an explanation involving language contact (or Creolization / de-Creolization / new Creolization) alone, we should also examine the role of inherent tendencies in French; and if these outcomes can be explained both by inherent tendencies and by language contact, we have to figure out the exact role that each of these factors may play. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the interplay of inherent tendencies and contact-induced transfers in the appearance of ongoing variation phenomena in the process to design a methodology.

This paper first makes preliminary comments on the methods and data used, then focuses on variation affecting object clitics in the French spoken in French Guiana. It goes on to present the traditional explanation in terms of outside influence, before proposing an explanation that focuses on inherent tendencies in French. I will demonstrate that French tends to react in the same way in many other contact situations. Lastly, I show how these two different explanatory factors complement each other.

1. Frame, methodology and data collection

This paper deals with linguistic variation in language contact settings. In line with the work done by variationists, the term "linguistic variation" is used here rather than "language change" although some authors use the term "change" to describe innovation in a linguistic system (Stolz 2006). Following the sociolinguistic variationists, variability is not haphazard; there exists a certain "orderly heterogeneity" (Weinreich, Labov & Herzog 1968), and variation is structured. However, social structure will not be correlated here with linguistic structure although it would certainly be interesting to follow the kind of approach to this topic taken by Eckert (1989, 2001); but it is not the focus in this paper.

I am interested in ongoing linguistic variation as an indicator of processes of change that are currently taking place, whatever the final outcome of the change may be. It is important to distinguish the innovation stage both from that of the spread of the innovation (where change is taking place but its outcome is still unknown) and from that of the completed change (see Léglise & Chamoreau, this volume). In many cases, the change that takes place has a significant relation to the norm. In this paper, however, we observe standard and non-standard forms that are competing with standard, normal forms. These variants are present simultaneously. I am interested here specifically in this simultaneous presence and in the very possibility of the existence of these forms, thus raising questions about what is presupposed by variationist theory. The idea is to attempt to explain how

these forms can emerge by looking at the linguistic material itself and the facts of language contact and multilingual environment.

We shall see how a group of multilingual middle school students employs certain forms that are in competition with the standard forms, focusing on the role of language contact and the variation inherent in the expression of these forms. I make the assumption that the forms these students use may foreshadow ways in which French will be spoken in French Guiana in the future, because they belong to the largest social or age group of the population. French Guiana is an overseas department of France in South America, in which French is the official language and is used in schools, generally as the sole medium of instruction. But there are thirty other mother tongues throughout the territory, some of them being lingua franca as well.[1] For a detailed description of the sociolinguistic situation in French Guiana, see Léglise (2007); for a discussion of transcription decisions and methodological choices related to the study of the French spoken in French Guiana,[2] see Léglise (2012).

Data for this study were collected in the city of Cayenne among teenagers in middle school who have been multilingual speakers of French and Guianese Creole since childhood. Some also occasionally speak, or have some knowledge of Haitian Creole, Brazilian Portuguese, and English-based Creoles. The corpus consists of ten hours of recordings of spontaneous peer interactions in different situations and with various interlocutors (among teenagers in the playground, in interactions in the classroom, and in fairly informal discussion groups with the researcher present). Although French is in contact with many languages in French Guiana, the data constituting our corpus seem to provide the best source for studying variation in spoken French in terms of the contacts between French and French-based Creoles. In French Guiana 60% of the population is under the age of 25, and since mass public education is a recent phenomenon, study of their practice of French and of variations in that practice may provide clues to potential local developments in that language, now emerging or to come in the future.

We are lucky to have available many studies of standard French and its varieties, both for metropolitan or European French[3] and for the French spoken in so-called peripheral areas (Valdman 1979; Robillard &

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[1] Native languages as Amerindian languages (Apalai, Kali'na, Lokono or Arawak, Pahikhwene or Palikur, Teko or Emerillon, Wayana, Wayampi), Creole languages as French-based Creoles (Guyanese Creole, Antillean Creole from Martinique and from Guadeloupe, Haitian Creole), English-based Creoles (Sranan Tongo, Saamaka and Eastern Maroon Creoles as Nengee Tongo or Ndjuka, Aluku and Pamaka), Colonial languages as English, Dutch, Spanish and (Brazilian) Portuguese and more recent Migrant languages as Hmong, Hakka, Mandarin Chinese etc.).
[2] This term seems to me better than the "spoken French of French Guiana" or "Guyanese spoken French" that would institute it as a stable and identified variety which it is not.
[3] From the initial research by Frei (1929) to a number of present-day studies summarized in particular by Gadet (1997a, 1997b, 2003).

Béniamino 1993).[4] With respect to some specific linguistic domains, it seems to be possible at this stage to understand[5] what I would call the syntactic variability of the French language – corresponding to its areas of greater or lesser stability due to the fact that some areas are more receptive to variation than others. As we will see below, the pronominal paradigm and proclitic system is one of them, it constitutes a specific non-stable domain, that is, a domain that includes lots of variations over time and space in French. Speaking of the syntactic variability of a language and of specific non-stable domains is a slightly different position than the long tradition speaking of fragility or "weak points of the linguistic system" (Meillet 1912) discussed by Béniak & Mougeon (1984, 1989) and Chaudenson 1986) or Houdebine (1985), who wrote of "stable and non-stable co-existing structures in a language".

A focus on the phenomena of variation in a corpus presupposes, methodologically speaking, that there exists a "reference French" (*un français de référence*) to which we can compare the recorded structures and expressions. In our particular case this would be a spontaneous spoken reference French containing a number of commonly found or ordinary structures. The question of the reference or standard of comparison poses many problems (Francard 2000), but in order to formulate our own description we will treat as our reference the existing descriptions of common spontaneous speech ("un oral de tout venant") (Blanche-Benveniste 1990; Gadet 1997b) and the corpora of spontaneous spoken language that have already been analyzed.

It is therefore in terms of their distance[6] from ordinary descriptions and from the previously analyzed corpora that the recordings have been analyzed in order to identify phenomena of variation (the absence or presence of a clitic, the presence of variants). These phenomena appear "interesting" or "surprising" (Blanche-Benveniste 1993) to linguists in so far as they are common or uncommon in other corpora of spoken French described by or known to them. This in turn is related to their frequency, whether actually measured or only guessed at by linguists who encounter the phenomenon observed. Indeed, as we shall see, there is very little by way of measurable frequency for the phenomena under consideration here.

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[4] Cf. Thibault (1979) for French spoken in Quebec, Manessy & Wald (1984) for French in sub-Saharan Africa, and Mougeon & Béniak (1989, 1991) for French in Ontario.

[5] In spite of the expansion of research on syntax, this has to be a medium- or long-term goal, given the lack of horizontal studies and of large comparative corpora.

[6] I use "distance" in the non-pejorative sense of "intervening space." I am not, however, adopting a centre-periphery model in which the "standard" practices are those common in metropolitan France while practices exhibiting variation come from an undefined elsewhere. I believe, on the contrary, that variety of usage is observable everywhere and a priori will occur on all levels at which variation is usually perceived – situational, social, geographical, etc. (Gadet 1998; Oesterreicher 1988) – and that its occurrence calls for explanation in French Guiana as elsewhere.

Finally, here I adopt a panlectal (or pan-dialectal) approach to variation (Chaudenson, Mougeon & Béniak 1993), that is, I look at regular variation in Standard spoken French and in all possible varieties of French by comparing the diversity of French usage across time and space, in order to take into account all the variables that are present in French and expressed in time- and place-dependent variants. I will assume in particular that if the observed variations correspond to items already documented in other varieties of French, they may perhaps correspond to evolving tendencies in French, in which case I would lean toward the hypothesis that these are intra-systemic variations.

2. Standard French pronominal morphology and proclitic system

The French pronominal morphology is said to be rich and complex, as presented in table 1 because, at the exception of *nous* and *vous*, most of the pronouns have different forms when they are joint or dislocated, when they are subject or object, and sometimes also when they are used as direct or indirect objects. These are vestiges of the former pronominal declension.

row	Number	person	JOINT FORMS				DISLOCATED FORMS
			SUBJECT	DIRECT OBJECT	INDIRECT OBJECT		
1	SINGULAR	1st	*je*	*me*			*moi*
2		2nd	*tu*	*te*			*toi*
3		3rd	*il, elle, on*	*le, la*	*lui*	*y en*	*lui, elle*
							lui, elle (-même)
				se			*soi (-même)*
4	PLURAL	1st	*nous*				
5		2nd	*vous*				
6		3rd	*ils, elles*	*les*	*leur*	*y en*	*eux, elles*
				se			*eux, elles (-mêmes)*

Table 1: traditional representation of the system of French pronouns
(from Riegel, Pellat & Rioul 1994: 199)

Concerning the object joint forms – or clitics, note the elimination of the distinctiveness between direct (1a) and indirect (1b) functions for *me*, *te*, *se*, *nous* and *vous* whereas the 3rd person pronoun presents accusative forms for the direct (*le, la les*) (2) and dative forms for the indirect (*lui, leur*) (3)[7].

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[7] When referring to the morphology of the pronouns, I use the terms "accusative" and "dative", when referring to their syntactic function, I use the term "direct" and "indirect".

(1) a. Il   me   connait
     NOM.3MS   ACC.1S   know.PRES.3S
     'He knows me'

     b. Il   me   parle
     NOM.3MS   DAT.1S   talk.PRES.3S
     'He talks to me'

(2) a. Il   le   connait
     NOM.3MS   ACC.3S   know.PRES.3S
     'He knows him'

     b. Il   la   connait
     NOM.3MS   ACC.3FS   know.PRES.3S
     'He knows her'

     c. Il   les   connait
     NOM.3MS   ACC.3P   know.PRES.3S
     'He knows them'

(3) a. Il   lui   parle
     NOM.3MS   DAT.3S   talk.PRES.3S
     'He talks to him/her'

     b. Il   leur   parle
     NOM.3MS   DAT.3P   talk.PRES.3S
     'He talks to them'

The dative forms *lui* and *leur* are considered to synthetically replace (concurrently with *y* and the dislocated[8] forms *à lui, à elle(s), à eux*) a dative complement introduced by the preposition *à*, as in (4-6).

(4) a. Il   parle à son chat
     'He talks to his dog'

     b. Il   lui   parle
     NOM.3MS   DAT.3MS   talk.PRES.3S
     'He talks to it/him'

(5) a. Elle appartient à ses enfants
     'She belongs to his/her children'

     b. Elle   leur   appartient
     NOM.3FS   DAT.3P   belong.PRES.3S
     'She belongs to them'

(6) a. Elle   pense à ses enfants
     'She things to his/her children'

     b. Elle   pense   à eux
     NOM.3FS   think.PRES.3S   to PRO.3P
     'She thinks to them'

The joint forms are generally[9] treated as proclitics and the pronominal system is seen as an instance of position class morphology, where collections of items compete for realization in a single position (Bonami &

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[8] Dislocated forms are noted as PRO.
[9] But see Miller (1992) or Miller & Monachesi (2003) among others who argue that French pronominal clitics are best analyzed as inflectional affixes.

Boyé 2007: 293). It is usually assumed that the proclitic system can be captured using a series of six position classes, as in table 2.

1	2	3	4	5	6
[1s,nom] **Je**	*[1s,acc/dat]* **Me**	*[3ms,acc,nonref]* **le**	*[3s,dat,nonref]* **lui**	*[loc]* **y**	*[de]* **en**
[2s,nom] **Tu**	*[2s,acc/dat]* **te**	*[predicative]* **le**	*[3p,dat,nonref]* **leur**		
[3ms,nom] **Il**	*[3,acc/dat,ref]* **se**	*[3fs,acc,nonref]* **la**			
[3fs,nom] **Elle**	*[1p,acc/dat]* **nous**	*[3p,acc,nonref]* **les**			
…	*[2p,acc/dat]* **vous**				

Table 2: traditional description of the proclitic position system
(adapted from Perlmutter 1970: 226 and Bonami & Boyé 2007: 293)

3. Variation involving French object pronouns in French Guiana

Two phenomena affect object pronouns in the French spoken in French Guiana.

First, the corpus generally includes few dative object pronouns and no examples of the dative form *leur* are recorded. In the third person plural, the accusative object pronoun *les* seems to replace *leur*, as in (7a) [10] instead of (7b) and (8a)[11] instead of (8b):

(7) a. *on   les   disait*
     INDEF.3S   ACC.3P   say.IMPF.3S
     'We said to them'

  b. on   **leur**   disait
     INDEF.3S   DAT.3P   say.IMPF.3S
     'We said to them'

(8) a. *on   les   donnait   des insultes*
     INDEF.3S   ACC.3P   give.IMPF.3S   insults
     'We gave insults to them'

  b. on   **leur**   donnait des insultes
     INDEF.3S   DAT.3P   give.IMPF.3S   insults
     'We gave insults to them'

Though, the valency of the verbs does not seem to be modified. When the object is a noun phrase, it is introduced by the preposition *à,* see (9) and (10). In pronominalization however, the distinction between direct and

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[10] The utterrances part of the corpus are in italics. Elements of interest are in bold. Examples and contrasts with standard forms are given in normal style.
[11] Note that an alternative standard wording would be "on les insultait".

indirect objects apparently disappears (in particular in the third person plural), since only one single form (*les* – henceforth ACC/DAT) is observed

(9)   *on les disait / on les donnait des insultes / ils allaient dire ça aux profs*
'we said to them / we gave insults to them / they went to say that to the teachers'

a.   *ils   allaient dire ça   aux profs*
NOM.3MP went to say that   PREP the teachers
'They went to say that to the teachers'

(10)   *quand tu   les   réponds   /   à tes parents*
when   NOM.3MP ACC/DAT.3P respond.PRES.2S   PREP your parents
'When you respond to them / **to** your parents'

We may note the tendency to use, especially in the third person plural, the accusative form of the clitic pronoun (as in (7a, 8a) and (10)) where one would expect a dative form. In the ten hours of recordings, the dative pronoun *leur* was never used. It was systematically replaced by the form *les*. Interestingly, there are a number of occurrences of the pronoun in the third person singular, *lui*, as a dislocated form, as in (11a) – where it is not repeated in the verb phrase such as (11b) could have been – and as a joint form, as in (12). However, almost all of these latter occurrences are found in excerpts from classroom sequences that have the form of narratives (cf. (13)), as if in that context automatic usages were brought into play that are not found in everyday conversation.

(11) a.   *lui   /   ils   ont peigné ses cheveux avec un râteau*
PRO.3MS they   combed his hair with a rake
'Him / they combed his hair with a rake'

b.   lui   /   ils   **lui**   ont peigné les cheveux avec un râteau
PRO.3MS they   DAT.3S combed the hair with a rake
'Him / they combed his hair with a rake'

(12)   *des fois quand je   lui   dis des choses/   elle comprend pas*
sometimes when I   DAT.3S tell things   /   she understands not
'Sometimes when I tell her things / she understands not'

(13)   *docteur Colombo oui et **lui**_PRO a / et **lui**_PRO / il **lui**_DAT a expliqué son problème / et le docteur le docteur **lui**_DAT a dit / qu'est-ce que qu'est-ce qu'il a pris pour pour ça / et il **lui**_DAT a dit qu'il a pris des médicaments périmés et des médicaments pour chat*
'Dr. Colombo yes and him has / and him / he explained his problem to him / and the doctor the doctor said to him / what did he take for for that / and he said to him that he took expired medicines and medicines for cats'

If we look at the paradigm of all the pronouns, we find instances of all persons, except for the dative pronoun *leur* (Table 3).

number	Person	JOINT FORMS			DISLOCATED FORMS
		SUBJECT	DIRECT OBJECT	INDIRECT OBJECT	
SINGULAR	3rd	*il 216* *elle 53*	*le 46* *la 5*	*lui 13*	*lui 14*
			se 33		
PLURAL	3rd	*ils 146*	*les 14*	*leur 0* **les 12**	*eux 24* *elles 2*
		elles 14	*se 8*		

Table 3. Use of the pronouns in the corpus

Second, we note the repeated absence of anaphora of the object pronoun, especially in the case of the accusative and dative forms of the third person singular and third person plural, as in examples (14) and (16), realized instead of (15) and (17).

(14) a. − *et la carte pour Lisa / tu   Ø   as déjà écrit ?*
                                 NOM.2S   has already write.PASTP.M.S
    −'and the postcard for Lisa / you wrote Ø already?'

    b. − *oui / c'est Angelica qui Ø a*[12]
    −'yes / this is Angelica who has Ø'

(15) a. − et la carte pour Lisa / tu   **l'**   as déjà écrite ?
                                 NOM.2S ACC.3F.S has already write.PASTP.F.S
    −'and the postcard for Lisa / you wrote it already?'

    b. − oui / c'est Angelica qui **l'**   a   [**l'** = the postcard]
                        Angelica who   ACC.3FS have.PRES.3S
    −'yes / this is Angelica who has it'

(16)   *les insultes / voilà c'est comme si elle nous forçait à Ø dire*
       'the insults / yes it is as if she forced us to say Ø'

(17) a. les insultes / voilà c'est comme si elle nous forçait à **en** dire
       'the insults / yes it is as if she forced us to say some of them

    b. les insultes / voilà c'est comme si elle nous forçait à **les** dire
       'the insults / yes it is as if she forced us to say them

    c. les insultes / voilà c'est comme si elle nous forçait à **les lui** dire
       'the insults / yes it is as if she forced us to say them to her

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[12] In this interaction it seems to me that the utterance is to be interpreted as: "Yes, it is Angelica who has it (in her possession)" and not as "Yes, it is Angelica who has (written) it." A reader of this article has commented that if it was the participle "written" that was elided, we would also have the diachronic trace of a syntactic object. An argument in favor of the interpretation I am proposing is the presence of the word "yes," as compared with "No, it is Angelica who has," which we would have to read as "It is Angelica who has (written it), not me."

d.   les insultes / voilà c'est comme si elle nous forçait à **lui en** dire[13]
'the insults / yes it is as if she forced us to say some to her

This absence of pronominal anaphora can be described as a classic case of ellipsis (Bally 1944), understood as the omission – syntactic, stylistic, or discursive – of an essential constituent, in this case a constituent required by the verb. For example, Fonagy (1985) notes the utterance made by a gardener as he nodded toward a tree: *J'abats? (I cut down?).* Traditionally these cases of ellipsis are distinguished from the possibility that certain verbs, in addition to their transitive constructions, such as *je ne mange pas ça (I do not eat that)*, can be "constructed intransitively," as in *ce soir, je ne mange pas ∅ (tonight I do not eat ∅)*, where the zero marker has the effect of "indeterminate" meaning (Blanche-Benveniste 1981). In the corpus, these ellipses are observed with regard to object pronouns, as in the exchange in (16) – to be compared with the modified forms in (17), which are also possible and probably expected – or in the exchange in (18), to be compared with (19) also possible:

(18) a.   − *tu peux nous dire heu la mygale ? / ce qui s'est passé avec la mygale / avec cette araignée ?*
          −'can you tell us, uh, the tarantula? what happened with the tarantula / with this spider?'

   b.   − *il y a un élève qui ∅ a touché*
        −'there is a student who touched'

(19) a   il y a un élève qui   **l'**   a touchée [**l'** = la mygale, the tarantula]
                          who   ACC.3F.S   have.PRES.3S touch.PASTP.F.S
        'there is a student who touched it'

   b.   il y a un élève qui   **y**   a touché [**y** = à ça, at it][14]
                          who   LOC   have.PRES.3S touch.PASTP.M.S
        'there is a student who touched [at] it'

In each case, we observe the absence of pronominal object anaphora (with a direct function in (18 and 19), either with a direct or indirect function in (17)). In (17) we see the range of pronominal anaphora that is possible but not expressed.

Again, it is not the valency of the verbs that seems to be affected, as is shown by the noun phrases surrounding the verb (cf. Léglise 2012 for a discussion of the valency of the verbs), but rather the system of clitic pronouns.

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[13] Or else "des insultes, … voilà c'est comme si elle nous forçait à lui en dire," "*insults / yes it is as if she forced us to say some to her.*"

[14] "y" is called "adverbial clitic" by the traditional literature – it replaces noun phrases (generally non human but see (27c) for a human referent) introduced by the preposition *à* and by other locative propositions.

4. Interference as a traditional explanation

The first explanation that comes to mind for anyone familiar with the way French Creoles function is that we have here a case of interference, or alignment of the structure of French with that of Creole. For example, Damoiseau (2003: 52-53) puts forward an explanation in these terms to account for what he calls the "mistakes" in the use of pronouns made by Creole speakers when they speak French. It should be noted that the examples given concern both singular and plural third person pronouns. Note the paradigm of pronouns in Creole, as follows:

number	person	
SINGULAR	1st	mo
SINGULAR	2nd	to
SINGULAR	3rd	i (li)[15]
PLURAL	1st	nou
PLURAL	2nd	zot
PLURAL	3rd	yé

Table 4. Paradigm of pronouns in French Guianese Creole

"The use of French pronouns is difficult for a Creole speaker … Most common errors consist in the use of the direct forms *le la les* instead of the indirect *lui leur*. This is due to the fact that a certain number of very common verbs go into an indirect construction in French and into a direct one in Creole:

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F       Il  lui écrit              Il  leur obéit
            IO                         IO
        he writes him            he obeys them


Cr      I ka ékri li              I ka obéyi yé
          DO                        DO
        *Il l'écrit               *Il les obéit" (Damoiseau 2003: 52-53)[16]
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The valency of these verbs in Guianese Creole is supposedly thus applied to that of the same verbs in French, producing the same unexpected forms in standard French – which are judged to be "incorrect" by Damoiseau (2003: 65) – that we observe in the corpus:

> "Types of interference by Creole in French (Creole structure Verb + direct object, French structure Verb + indirect object)
> *il ne **l**'obéit pas   * *He did not obey him (he)*

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[15] "Li" is found as a short form "i" as a subject and sometimes "l'" as an object.

[16] Damoiseau notes with an "*" preceding the sentence the forms he considers as incorrect in (standard) French. They are of the same kind of what I call "variants" in my corpora.

*elle ne **la** répond pas * *She does not respond her*

*je **les** ai déjà dit   * *I have already said them*

*elle **les** a téléphoné * *She telephoned them"* (Damoiseau 2003: 65)

Damoiseau explains the appearance of these forms as the result of a mechanism of interference that supposedly affects the valency of the verbs. The forms that exhibit variation in French would thus be produced by analogy with the structure of verbs in Creole.

While the variation that concerns the elimination of the direct / indirect distinction has been discussed in this comparative grammar of Creole and French, as in a number of other works on Creole-speaking areas, the absence of pronominal object anaphora does not seem to have been discussed in this context except in terms of the "problem" posed by the pronouns *y* and *en* for Creole-speaking learners, as in this passage:

"Sometimes the Creole-speaking learner does not use the *en* or *y* in French:

Elle a des enfants ?	*Oui, elle a deux
'Does she have children?'	'* Yes, she has two'
Je vais en ville.	*Tu vas aussi ?
'I am going into town.'	'*(Are) you going too?" (Damoiseau 2003: 55)

Here again, this is said to be "an instance of the alignment of the French construction with that of Creole" (2003: 66).

That Guianese Creole is interfering into French is a tempting explanation, given the presence of language contact. However, three major objections - or at least constraints on the scope of its explanatory force - can be advanced against an analysis that invokes only the role of language contact.

– First, in my corpora, in a significant number of cases, verbs are constructed with an indirect object (that is to say using the preposition *à*) when that object is a noun phrase. It thus seems to me problematic to claim, as does Damoiseau, that interference takes place at the level of the valency of the verbs. If this were the case, it would be possible to have utterances such as (20b) alternating with (20a) or (21b) instead of (21a). But the corpus records no such examples. This means that the elimination of the direct / indirect distinction takes place only at the pronominal level, thus only at the morphological level in the clitic paradigm, not at the syntactic level.

(20) a.   je dis ça **à** mes parents
            'I say that to my parents'
     b.   *je dis ça Ø mes parents
            'I say that my parents'

(21) a.   je réponds **à** ma sœur que je suis pas d'accord
        'I say to my sister that I disagree'

    b.   *je réponds ∅ ma sœur que je suis pas d'accord
        'I say to my sister that I disagree'

– Second, the position of the object clitics does not vary in our corpus: it does indeed correspond to the preposed position of the proclitic objects in French. There is no instance of utterances of the type (22b) or (23b) which would be "calqued" on the structure of Creole (22c) or (23c), where the pronoun is postposed relative to the verb, at the same place as the noun phrase.

(22) a.   il   **lui**   écrit
        NOM.3S   DAT.3S   write.PRES.3S
        'He writes him'

    b.   *il   écrit   **lui**
        NOM.3S write.PRES.3S   DAT.3S
        'He writes him'

    c.   i   ka   ekri **li**
        PRO.3S IMPERF write ACC.3S
        'He writes him'

(23) a.   *il*   **les**   *répond*
        NOM.3S ACC/DAT.3P   respond.PRES.3S
        'He responds to him'

    b.   *il   répond   **les**
        NOM.3S respond.PRES.3s ACC/DAT.3P
        'He responds to him'

    c.   i   ka   réponn **yé**
        PRO.3S IMPERF respond ACC.3P
        'He writes him'

We thus cannot argue that the structure of the Creole sentence has been imposed on the structure of spoken French. Indeed, according to Moravcsik (1978),[17] when a grammatical element is borrowed, its position in the source language is borrowed along with it. But this is not what is happening here.

– Third, if interference is the only explanatory factor invoked, then the same phenomenon would be seen in every person of the verb. Given that the first, second, fourth, and fifth persons are identical in the direct and indirect forms, we cannot know what is really happening in those persons. However, in the case of the third person singular, my corpora have no examples of variation or replacement by an accusative pronoun (*le/la* for *lui*). It is in fact surprising that the interference phenomenon only occurs in the third person plural. We will return to this below.

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[17] The examples he offers are of postpositional languages borrowing prepositions from prepositional languages.

5. Inherent tendencies as an explanation

The manifestation of inherent tendencies, developing independently of the language contact setting, is another possible explanation for the occurrence of these variants. To bring these tendencies to light requires observing regular variation in spoken French, both in metropolitan France and elsewhere, looking at all the possible varieties of French from the standpoint of panlectal variation. By observing variation affecting the language over time and space, we can bring out the regularities and tendencies that are specific to the language and recur regardless of the situation (a child's acquisition of the language, a student's learning of the language, a process of creolization, a situation of language contact, a situation of attrition, etc.). In this section I focus on panlectal variation in spoken French, particularly as it affects clitic pronouns. I look first at descriptions of the varieties of French spoken in France and then of the varieties of French spoken elsewhere.

The elimination of the direct / indirect distinction for object pronouns has not, to my knowledge, been discussed with respect to contemporary metropolitan spoken French. However, it is well documented in several African varieties (Frey 1993; Prignitz 2006), as shall see below. The absence of pronominal anaphora, however, is documented for spoken French in metropolitan France for a great number of transitive verbs, especially during question-answer interactions (Fonagy 1985; Gadet 1992; Lambrecht & Lemoine 1996; Larjavaara 2000). The following examples are taken from Gadet (1992: 65), who finds a tendency in "popular" spoken French toward the disappearance of pronouns, especially where there is a series of clitics and in the case of the pronominal object:

(24) a. *on lui a demandé ses papiers / elle ∅ avait pas sur elle*
         'She was asked for her papers / she did not have ∅ with her'

    b. on lui a demandé ses papiers / elle **les** avait pas sur elle
         'She was asked for her papers / she did not have them with her'

(25) a. *les verres en cristal / je l'achète mais je me ∅ sers pas*
         'Crystal glasses / I buy it but I don't use ∅'

    b. les verres en cristal / je **les** achète mais je m'**en** sers pas
         'Crystal glasses / I buy **them** but I don't use **them**'

(26) a. *il a toujours abusé de la parole /il fallait ∅ lui couper*
         'He always talked too much / he had to be cut'

    b. il a toujours abusé de la parole / il fallait **la lui** couper
         'He always talked too much / he had to be cut off'

We also know that in informal varieties of spoken French, the object clitics are candidates for ellipsis when there is more than one in a row (Chaudenson 1998); *le la les* can be dropped before *lui* and *leur* as in (27),

which are found in the form (27b) or (27c) even with verbs which take an obligatory direct object[18].

    (27) a.   il faut   **le**   **lui**   dire
                       ACC.3S   DAT.3S
             'He has to be told it'

        b.   il faut   **lui**   dire
                       DAT.3S
             'He has to be told'

        c.   il faut   **y**   dire
                       LOC/DAT.3S
             'He has to be told'

One can connect these observed uses with two generalizations resulting from the comparison made by syntacticians between spoken French and written French, although these writers acknowledge that conclusions in this area can only be based on subjective impressions. First, the phenomenon of ellipsis seems to be characteristic of spoken language in general (Judge & Healey 1985), and second, with respect to verb constructions ellipsis appears to be the most important difference between the spoken and written forms (Greidanus 1990: 79). Greidanus says that "in spoken language, the first, second, and third arguments are often missing (especially the second and third). The speaker may omit a component if the context contains sufficient information about the missing argument. What we see at work here is probably a principle of economy." She also says that while it is possible to quantify these omissions for the argument on the left of the verb being conjugated (*i.e.* generally the suject), quantifying the second and third arguments (*i.e.* direct and indirect objects) seems difficult if not impossible. In the case of the second argument, it is often impossible to say whether we are dealing with a usage requiring a single argument for the verb or a usage requiring two arguments of which the second is missing. Thus, in example (28), does the verb *expliquer* take two arguments of which the second is missing, or does it take a single argument?

    (28)   S'il y a un mot anglais qui explique (?∅= cela) mieux que le français
              ben autant l'employer
              'If there is an English word that explains (?∅= that) better than French
              then might as well use it'

In any case, we see that these phenomena are often found in spoken French generally, not only in a "popular" metropolitan variety or in my corpus from French Guiana. However, the examples recorded in the corpus are

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[18] For Bonami & Boyé (2003: 296), examples such as (27b) cannot be treated as a simple case of direct object drop: the possibility of not realizing the accusative complement is correlated with the presence of the clitic *lui*. They consider that it is accounted for if we assume that *lui* counts as a realization of both the accusative and the dative in this context, *i.e,* in our case (27)a would be an alternate realization of the morphosyntactic information expressed by (27)a.

surprisingly frequent compared to other corpora in spoken French, giving the linguist something to think twice about.

From the panlectal standpoint, it is interesting to consider the varieties of learner and the data produced relating to language acquisition. We see that the omission of pronominal object anaphora is well documented in data relating to L1 and L2 acquisition of French. The acquisition of object clitic constructions in French also sets in considerably later than that of other functional categories such as subject clitics or determiners (White 1996; Jakubowicz *et al.* 1997). The variations observed largely concern the placement of the clitic in the utterance, but also the omission of the clitic pronoun object both by children (monolingual or bilingual) and by learners of a second language.[19] Grüter (2006b) in particular reports omission rates of 35% to 55% of direct[20] object clitics in French as a second language, in various contexts (spontaneous and elicited speech) by children and adolescents.[21] This gives us a benchmark for measuring the variability of the object pronoun in French.

If, again from a panlectal standpoint, we look at the varieties of French spoken outside France, we see that the two types of phenomenon observed in the corpora from French Guiana (the elimination of the direct / indirect distinction and the absence of pronominal object anaphora) have been observed in other varieties of spoken French. In particular, these phenomena have been noted in several varieties of French spoken in Africa.[22] Queffélec (2004) notes that changes in valency are often put forward as the most typical characteristic of the syntactic development of the varieties of French found in Africa. In that case we are seeing a "successful" development. Other writers refer to what might be called greater lability or possibility of variation. Manessy (1994) notes an "indifference to transitivity" in the case of some verbs, an explanation adopted by Prignitz (2006) to account for the following examples, collected in Ouagadougou (analysis and contrast to expected standard forms are mine):

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[19] See especially Jakubowicz *et al.* (1997, 2000) and Grüter (2006a) on the pronominal paradigm and the omission of the object by children; the work done by White (1996) and Grüter (2005, 2006b) on the omission of the object in French L2; and Tuller (2000) on the omission of the object pronoun by deaf speakers.

[20] Although Grüter does not distinguish between direct and indirect objects, all the examples provided concern direct object clitics, so I infer that the omission rates concern direct object clitics.

[21] These numbers are significant because as we shall see the criterion of the frequency of the phenomenon seems an important one. However, we do not have data for the frequency of omissions in "ordinary" French. These studies (in psycholinguistics or generative grammar) take written standard French as their point of departure, which is problematic for the approach adopted here. Grüter notes that "occasional omissions" are possible in spoken French, but as no quantitative data exist, it is impossible to base anything on this remark.

[22] We have chosen here to make use of varieties from Africa since these phenomena are extensively recorded and described. Similar phenomena have also been noted in the Indian Ocean, for example (Mauritius, Reunion).

(29) a. *quand il est venu on   l'   a donné   un logement*
      when he came   INDEF.3S ACC.3S give.PAST.3S a house
      'when he came someone gave he a house'

    b. quand il est venu   on   lui   a donné   un logement
      when he came   INDEF.3S DAT.3S give.PAST.3S a house
      'when he came someone gave him a house'

(30) a. *là je ne peux pas répondre ∅ ça*
      'there I cannot reply this'

    b. là je ne peux pas répondre **à** ça
      'there I cannot reply to this'

(31) a. On a eu beaucoup de fonctionnaires qui n'ont pas voulu ∅ rejoindre quand on a eu notre indépendance et qui sont restés
      'We had a lot of officials who did not want to join when we got our independence and who stayed'

    b. beaucoup de fonctionnaires qui n'ont pas voulu **nous** rejoindre…
      'a lot of officials who did not want to join us'

    c. beaucoup de fonctionnaires qui n'ont pas voulu **les** rejoindre…
      'a lot of officials who did not want to join them'

    d. beaucoup de fonctionnaires qui n'ont pas voulu rejoindre **leur pays**
      'a lot of officials who did not want to join their country'

(32) a. *quelqu'un qui est habitué à l'argent maintenant il n'∅ a plus o il va tout faire maintenant pour ∅ avoir / il a assassiné plein de filles comme ça*
      'Someone who is used to having money now he has no more oh he will do everything now to have ∅ / he has killed a lot of girls like that...'

    b. maintenant il n'**en** a plus / il va tout faire maintenant pour **en** avoir
      'now he has no more / he will do everything now to have **some**'

These examples are heterogeneous, but illustrate variations in the expression of arguments functioning as syntactic objects. (29a) contains an accusative form (instead of a dative form) whereas (31a) and (32a) constitute examples of absence of pronominal object anaphora and (30a) shows the absence of the preposition *à*, transforming an indirect object into a direct one. Prignitz (1996: 559) says that in the French spoken in Burkina Faso "we can do without a direct object in almost any oral utterance, the context being sufficient to make clear the subject under discussion". She seeks to analyze utterances (31) and (32) as instances of change in the valency of a verb that is transitive but used intransitively (Prignitz 2006). Frey (1993: 256) notes similar phenomena with respect to noun use in the French spoken in Burundi: "some verbs become transitive and take a direct object through regular suppression of the preposition: *sympathiser quelqu'un* (for 'sympathiser avec'), *téléphoner quelqu'un* (for 'téléphoner à'), *tricher un examen* (for 'tricher à'), etc. Others become transitive and take an indirect object: *confondre à* (for 'confondre'), *s'égaler à* (for 'égaler'). Still others are used with an "absolute" or intransitive construction, such as *échanger* (normally taking an object, as in 'échanger des idées') or *débattre* (for

'débattre sur')." Queffélec (2004) also observes the same type of phenomenon in the French spoken in Congo and notes that the change of valency is often associated with a semantic change: *marier une femme* ("to marry a woman") means "to get married to her" and not "to give her in marriage" (the standard French meaning), for example. Various situations are possible: a transitive verb that generally requires an indirect object may become in Congolese French either a transitive verb requiring a direct object (*demander quelqu'un* instead of *demander à quelqu'un*), or a transitive verb taking an absolute form (*animer* for *mettre de l'animation*), and a transitive verb that generally requires a direct object may become a transitive verb requiring an indirect object (*informer à quelqu'un*), or an intransitive verb may become a transitive verb requiring a direct object (*gueuler quelqu'un* instead of *engueuler quelqu'un*).

In Abidjan, Ploog (2002) observes frequent instances of ellipsis that she proposes to treat as "argument holes" as a name for the positions that remain unfilled for subject or object. The difference between the variations recorded in France and the variety found in Abidjan is that the "spontaneous" reduction in the number of arguments that is possible in spoken French seems to be becoming "stabilized" in Abidjan French. She also notes "the reduction of object clitics to one single paradigm, *le / la / les*" as in example (33a), and records few instances of the indirect forms: "the occasional appearances of *lui* are very similar to overcorrections" by children who have had some schooling (analysis and contrast to expected standard forms are mine).

(33) a.   *sa maman*   ***la***   *donné*   *de jolis habits* ...
      her mother   ACC.3FS   give.PASTP.M.S pretty clothes
      'her mother has given her pretty clothes …'

    b.   sa maman **lui**   a donné …
                DAT.3S   GIVE.PAST.3S
      'her mother has given her…'

Ploog goes so far as to propose the hypothesis that there are "no more actant clitics in Abidjan French,"[23] but simply a prefix that attaches itself to the verb. We could propose an alternative transcription to (33a), as in (33c) which would then be compliant to other analyses as (29)[24].

(33) c.   sa maman **l'**   a donné de jolis habits …
      her mother ACC/DAT.3S give.PAST.3S…
      'her mother gave her pretty clothes…'

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[23] "One part would be reabsorbed into the verbal prefix [la / le / l] which would express agreement of person; the other part would be restructured in a way that strengthens a semantic split intrinsic to the components, in terms of the feature [+- human]" (Ploog 2004: 97-98).

[24] This would also permit to treat the verbal form "a donné" as a standard form, as in (33b) and (33c), instead of (33a).

We see that the variations identified in French Guiana – the omission of the object clitics and the use of accusative clitics with transitive verbs that require indirect noun phrase - are also recorded in several varieties of French spoken in Africa. However, we also see that the possible variations are more extensive in Africa, since a restructuring of transitivity has been observed in both directions DO> IO, IO> DO, and both DO and IO> Ø, both for nouns and for clitics (DAT> ACC ; ACC<DAT ; ACC or DAT> Ø) . In French Guiana, our corpora only include examples of variation in the system of clitics: DAT> ACC for the third person plural, and ACC or DAT> Ø for the third person singular and plural. At the current state of observation and corpus development, variations in French Guiana illustrate a partial restructuring of the system of object clitics and not, as we saw above, syntactic restructuring that affects the very concept of transitivity, which seems to be recorded in several varieties in Africa, or even - if one follows the hypothesis proposed by Ploog (2004) - the restructuring of the pre-verbal inflectional system.

All these writers note the influence of local or contact languages on the variety of French that each of them has observed. But it cannot be insignificant that the very same features of the language system are exhibiting variation at different places on the globe, where the various types of French are in contact with languages that are typologically very different. This leads us to wonder how much of this variation and restructuring is due to language contact and how much results from mechanisms of internal change in French.

6. The pronominal paradigm: a special non-stable domain in French and in other Romance languages

The variations observed in my corpora are not specific to the situation of language contact in French Guiana or in Cayenne in particular. As noted above, similar variations have been observed in other varieties of French that are in contact with different languages, as well as in spoken "French French" – which might be labeled "popular" or "everyday" – recorded in metropolitan France. It seems to me that this reveals a particularly non-stable domain of the French language, one conducive to the expression of variation. It has in fact been observed that

> "[Pronouns] are a sensitive zone in French morphology, because they are a point at which the synthetic logic of Latin, more or less preserved in Old French, runs up against the transition to the analytic logic of modern French, a trend more common in popular usage. The system of pronouns is very elaborate, in that most of the time the forms represent functions, and also vary in gender and number in the third person. They are too elaborate, speakers seem to think: the direction is toward reduction of the paradigm."
> (Gadet 1992: 62)

In the case we are concerned with, since the clitics functioning as direct and indirect object are identical for the first and second persons in both singular and plural, we can conclude that we are witnessing a regularization of the system of clitics in French Guiana (moving from the dative toward the accusative forms): the forms of the third person plural have already adopted the accusative form, *les*, and the dative forms of the third person singular, *lui*, are little used and restricted purely to more formal teaching situations - which could mean their gradual abandonment in favor of the accusative forms (*le, la, l'*). One can suppose that the third person plural was the first to be affected because it has the most complex and extensive paradigm of forms, and because the dislocated form *eux* (a form used relatively often in our corpora) does not match that of the dative (*leur)*. In contrast, the existence of the identical form *lui* for both dative and dislocation in the third person must surely play a role in this form's greater current resistance to the mechanisms of reduction of the paradigm and of regularization.

In general object pronouns in Romance languages form a zone conducive to linguistic variation and change. Miller & Monachesi (2003) observe that there is a great degree of variation in the behavior of clitics among the Romance languages. They say this domain constitutes a field of investigation particularly rich for synchronic and diachronic variation studies among this group of related languages. Null object constructions are recorded in a number of Romance languages, and cases of stylistic or discursive ellipsis have been observed in a number of varieties, including Brazilian Portuguese and American varieties of Spanish. In the case of Spanish, the varieties spoken on the Iberian peninsula also exhibit the elimination of distinctions of gender and case (that is, of direct and indirect), and the various standard uses are so called after the third person pronouns: leísmo, laísmo, and loísmo.

The American varieties of Spanish, in contact with different American Indian languages, also exhibit similar developments. The work of Garcia Tesoro (2005) in Guatemala shows the spread of the use of the direct clitic form of the third person *lo* to refer to singular and plural, masculine and feminine. Distinctions of gender and number are thus eliminated for object clitics. In some varieties of Spanish spoken in Ecuador and Paraguay, the omission of the object clitic and the elimination of the direct / indirect distinction, as in the varieties of French spoken in various African countries, have also been observed. According to Palacios Alcaine (2005) what seems to be happening is a gradual restructuring of the pronominal system, which would first have affected gender, with the elimination of the feminine / masculine distinction, then case, with the elimination of the accusative / dative (or direct / indirect) distinction. Thus there is seemingly a progression from the expression of direct forms to that of indirect forms, and then to the absence of expression: ACC>DAT > Ø.

The development of similar phenomena in other Romance languages seems to me a convincing argument[25] in favor of the role of inherent tendencies (of a language or a group of languages), and enables us to identify particularly non-stable zones in historically related linguistic systems.

7. **Final remarks**

I have shown that on the one hand, the variations observed in the use of object clitics in the French spoken in French Guiana are identical to, or developing in the same direction as, variations observed in a number of other varieties found in French-speaking countries, and that they are in line with the tendencies in spoken French in metropolitan France – and perhaps with tendencies in other Romance languages. On the other hand, the forms expressed in the French spoken in French Guiana may be produced by analogy with Guianese Creole, which is also spoken there.

I propose the following hypotheses, which pulls these explanatory factors together.

1. The variation observable in the forms of object clitics corresponds to a tendency for French based on the principle of paradigm regularization and related to what Frei (1929) called the "need for economy" or "analogy." In other words, faced with a complex and irregular clitic paradigm (no accusative / dative distinction at the 1st and 2nd person but a distinction for the 3rd), speakers tend to reduce this complexity by rarely or never using the date and irregular forms of the 3rd person (singular and plural), or by regularizing them on the model of the other four. These phenomena are also observed in a number of varieties of French, but to our knowledge there has been no systematic description of them. To date, they are described as "lability of the valency of the verb" or "greater possibility of variation" in the different French varieties and not in terms of the restructuring of a clitic paradigm.

2. The forms that bear witness to this tendency echo the system of Guianese Creole, which is a pronominal system with a reduced number of forms with no distinction between nominative, accusative or dative (we may suppose that these forms became reduced when it came into contact with the other languages that led to the genesis of the Creole language). This creates a snowball effect (Thomason 2001) that reinforces the tendency in French.

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[25] A diachronic study of these languages, starting with Latin, would provide additional arguments.

3. As a result, the current contact situation (in which the speakers' linguistic resources exhibit a non-stable domain in the expression of object clitics in French and a reduced pronominal system in Guianese Creole) produces an unusually high frequency of observed variations, especially the omission of the object clitic in numerous instances, and variations that go beyond those usually observed in ordinary French (the reduced diversity of forms for the third person plural).[26] It has been noted that language contact plays the role of "activation" (Clark 1994), "frequential copying" (Johanson 2002) or "enhancement of an already existing feature" (Aikhenvald 2006: 22) that is, if languages in contact share a feature or construction, language contact may increase its frequency or productivity. Here we see a slightly different but related phenomenon, the productivity of variation and spread of innovative forms in a specific grammatical zone in contact settings. The effect of variation here is to 'give access' to non-stable grammatical zones where language contact may then enhance the productivity of variation within a specific domain (here, the object clitics).

4. And lastly, the explanation of this reduction of diversity of object clitic forms – which affects only the third person plural in our corpora – seems to depend on factors specific to the pronominal system of French. This is probably the most fragile point in the clitic system, since the third person plural has the greatest number of different forms in French. Following this logic, and drawing also on considerations of frequency, the pronouns *lui*, *en*, and *y* ought also to undergo a number of variations, either in other contemporary corpora or possibly in future usage.

This proposed explanation could be described as an instance of "multiple causation" (Thomason & Kaufman 1988) combining internal and external factors in language evolution. Pointing out that several factors, both inter- and intra-systemic, are to be taken into account to explain the phenomena, certainly puts the emphasis on the complementary nature of the explanations sought. But simply identifying several factors does not seem to me to be adequate. We need a multi-factorial theory and an analysis of the processes and their origins, which in turn requires discovering how these factors operate, how they fit together, and how they interact in speech and in language.

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[26] I continue to use the word "variation" here, rather than linguistic change, because of the normative attitude toward the French spoken in French Guiana (in particular the "metropolitan" norm transmitted in the schools), but also because of the absence of recognition that there exist true varieties of the language in which forms like these would be acknowledged as local and legitimate.

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