

# How much Tense is needed? the mixed response from Capeverdean

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**IF** INVESTIGADOR FCT

# The language

- Capeverdean is a Portuguese-based Creole, the mother tongue of virtually all inhabitants of the Republic of Cape Verde and of most Cape Verdeans living abroad (estimated 1 million)

# The language

- it has two main varieties, roughly associated with the two most populated islands of the archipelago:
  - the Sotavento variety, developed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in Santiago
  - the Barlavento variety, developed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, in São Vicente, when the first permanent community of speakers settled in the island (Swolkien 2014)
- these varieties are also spoken in other islands, with some variation of their own, but the data presented here are from these two
- there are many interesting features of variation at the phonological level, but these will not be accounted for in this study

# The language

- Regarding lexical items, Swolkien (2014: 257) says, on the evolution of the São Vicente (CVSV) variety:
  - ✓ “there is transfer of Portuguese features”
  - ✓ “a number of Sotavento features have been lost”
  - ✓ “[this loss] led to a greater multifunctionality of markers and reinforced the role of adverbs in determining tense and aspect in CVSV”

# Goals

- most part of this talk: a case of linguistic variation
- questions about the need of a Tense projection
- proposal of a current language continuum:
  - at least one feature as evidence for TP in the oldest variety
  - in the youngest variety, things are more complicated

# Assumptions

- **On language variation**

➔ it involves “alternative ways of 'saying the same thing’”  
(Labov 1969:738, fn20)

➔ Borer-Chomsky conjecture (Baker 2008:156):  
All parameters of variation are attributable to differences  
in features of particular items (e.g. the functional  
heads) in the lexicon.

➔ variation, in the ‘Labovian’ sense, involves  
“underspecification in the mapping between  
[functional] categories and morphological  
forms” (Adger & Smith 2010)

# Two levels of description

- (i) the strategies of the language to convey past, present (and some future)
  
- (ii) other syntactic properties connected with a TP projection:
  - categories that require a Spec,TP position (e.g. expletive subjects)
  - contexts related to Case distinctions
  - finite vs. non-finite forms

# Functional categories in previous proposals for the Santiago variety

- ◆ Baptista (2002)
  - ✓ Complex functional structure, with AgrP, AspP, MoodP and TP
  
- ◆ Alexandre (2009)
  - ✓ Functional structure includes TP and AspP
    - “CVC seems to have aspectual markers (e.g., *ta* for imperfective,  $\emptyset$  for perfective, *sa ta* for progressive, etc.) and a temporal marker *-ba* (for anterior or past tense)” (Alexandre 2009: 23)
  
- ◆ Alexandre *et al* (2013)
  - ✓ On the verb movement in Capeverdean and in Kryiol, there is TP and AspP
    - “aspectual information is prominent in Creole languages”



# Point of departure for the current study (1)

- ◆ Pratas (2007, 2010, 2012, 2014), also for the Santiago variety
  - ✓ No such thing as a set of prototypical creole features  
(cf. Bickerton 1981, 1984)
  - ✓ A compositional approach to the expression of tense, mood, aspect
  - ✓ Each morpheme got the label T for “temporal” – a convenient general label at the time, because it was difficult to delimit a strict function for each of them.

# Point of departure for the current study (2)

- ◆ Pratas (2010, later refined in 2012, 2014)
  - ✓ a zero morpheme conveys readings equivalent to the Perfect; thus, the bare verb interpretations traditionally described as simple past are now described as, for instance, *N ø kume pexe*. “[now] I have eaten fish.” (Pratas 2010:229) \*

\* cf. the null Perfect analysis proposed in van de Vate (2011) to explain the difference in temporal interpretation between stative (present) and non-stative (past) verbs in Saamáka, another Creole language; in Capeverdean, the relation between the zero morpheme and the temporal readings of states vs. non-states is not as straightforward.

# Specific points about this Perfect (1)

- this proposal assumes that the salient opposition in Capeverdean is between the Progressive and the Perfect, rather than between the Imperfective and the Perfective (in the terms defined in the works by Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria).
- the Progressive and the Perfect are here taken to be semantically complex categories, which involve certain temporal characteristics (Smith 1991).

## Specific points about this Perfect (2)

- this Perfect proposal considers two different states resulting from the past situation, which still hold at the topic time:
  - (i) a resultant state, which is “an abstract state of the event’s ‘having occurred’” (Portner 2011:1230) or the ‘post-time’ as in Klein (2014); this is the case for the eventives and some types of statives;
  - (ii) a result state, which is part of the event structure (Moens & Steedmand 1988; Smith 1991); this is the case for statives like some instances of *sabe* ‘know’
- unlike the English Perfect, this reading is not incompatible with adverbials like ‘yesterday’

## Specific points about this Perfect (3)

- The Perfect analysis does not apply to other states, like *sta duenti* 'be sick' (stage-level) or *e altu* 'be tall' (individual-level, and also not to modals like 'may' or 'must', which seem not to have a complex internal structure – the bare forms of these always have a present interpretation.

# Language variation regarding temporal interpretation: some details

➤ **The two main linguistic varieties are here represented by:**

❖ Sotavento: data from the inland of Santiago

(Pratas 2007, 2012b and Brüser & Santos 2002)

❖ Barlavento: data from São Vicente

(Pratas 2012b and Swolkien 2015)

# what may look like tense markers

- **Past:** topic time before the time of utterance (Klein 1994, 2010)
- ✓ in Santiago, the suffix *-ba* seems a true past marker
- ✓ in São Vicente there are the preverbal allomorphs *tá / táva*, but their contribution is not as clear-cut

# Temporal reading for the different morphemes

		present	past
Santiago	perfect	∅ V	∅ V- <i>ba</i>
	progressive	<i>sata</i> V	<i>sata</i> V- <i>ba</i>
	habitual	<i>ta</i> V	<i>ta</i> V- <i>ba</i>
São Vicente	perfect	∅ V	<i>tinha</i> + participle
	progressive	<i>ti ta</i> V / <i>ti te</i> V	<i>tá te</i> V / <i>táva te</i> V
	habitual	<i>ta</i> V / <i>te</i> V	<i>tá</i> V / <i>táva</i> V

In Santiago, *-ba* shifts the Topic Time into the past in all these cases

In São Vicente, we also have past distinctions, but they result from different combinations



# Common vs. distinct features in the two varieties

- One common feature with two aspects, here presented as A (reading of the bare verb forms) and B (effect of adding preverbal *ta*)
- One distinct feature regarding past morphology

# Common feature A. - temporal reading of bare forms

(1) *N sabe konta ti sen.* [present reading]  
1SG know count PREP one.hundred  
'I know how to count until one hundred.'

(2) a. *E ben kasa.* [past reading]  
3SG come home  
'He has come home.'

b. *E kridita na spiritu.* [past reading]  
3SG believe in spirit  
'He believed in spirits.'

## Common feature B. - the preverbal morpheme *ta* [tə]

(3) *N ta sabe konta ti sen.* [future reading]  
1SG TA know count PREP one.hundred  
'I will know how to count until one hundred.'

(4) a. *E ta txiga tardi.* [present reading]  
3SG TA arrive late  
'He arrives late.' [habitually] or 'He will arrive late.'

b. *Nha amigu ta kridita na spritu.* [present reading]  
POSS friend TA believe in spirit  
'My friend believes in spirits.' or 'will believe'

- ✓ So, given the right context, the forms in (4) may also have a future reading.
- ✓ Also, note the different aspectual readings, according to the lexical aspect of the predicates – with 'believe', we don't have the habitual reading, it is just current present (it is a stative).



# Distinct feature - Santiago: verbal affix *-ba*

In the absence of *ta* – cf. (1) and (2).

(5) *N*      *sabe**ba***      *konta*      *ti*      *sen.*      [past reading]  
1SG    know:BA      count      PREP    one.hundred  
'I knew / used to know how to count until one hundred.'

(6) a. ... *mi* *N*    *odj**aba***    *algen*      *ta*    *faze.*      [past perfect reading]  
1SG 1SG    see:BA    someone    TA    do  
'... I had seen someone doing it.'

b. ... *e*      *kridit**aba***      *na*      *spiritu.*      [past perfect reading]  
3SG    believe:BA    in      spirit  
'... he had believed in spirits.'

✓ As is common cross-linguistically, the sentences in (6) always need a context.

# Distinct feature - Santiago: verbal affix *-ba*

And with *ta* – cf. (3) and (4)

(7) *Si e kontaba kasi nu ta sabeba* [conditional]  
if 3SG tell:BA lie 1PL TA know:BA  
'If he told any lies, we would know...' [non-stative]

(8) a. *E ta txigaba tardi.* [past habitual]  
3SG TA arrive:BA tarde

'He used to arrive late.' or 'would arrive'

b. *Nha amigu ta kriditaba na spritu.* [past habitual]  
POSS friend TA believe:BA PREP spirit

'My friend believed in spirits.' or 'would believe'

✓ given the right context, the forms in (8) may also have a conditional reading.

# Distinct feature - Santiago: verbal affix *-ba*

- So, as said before: *-ba* on the verb marks a shift into the past.

# Distinct feature - Santiago: verbal affix *-ba*

The effect is the same in the Progressive:

- (9) a. *Miriam, bu sata kume bolu antis di djanta?* [present]  
Miriam, 2SG PROG eat cake before of dinner  
'Miriam, are you eating the cake before dinner?'
- b. *Miriam, bu sata kumeba bolu antis di djanta?* [past]  
Miriam, 2SG PROG eat:BA cake before of dinner  
'Miriam, were you eating the cake before dinner?'

# Distinct feature - São Vicente: no postverbal *-ba*

- Some cases of “suppletive forms” (Swolkien 2014):
  - The equivalent to the sentences in (5) and (6) – past and past perfect, overtly marked only by *-ba* – is here obtained with:
    - ✓ *sabia* (5)
    - ✓ *tinha* + past participle (5a) and (5b) [periphrastic construction]

These forms are identical to Portuguese:

- *sabia*: ‘knew’, ‘used to know’
- *tinha*: ‘had’, ‘used to have’



# Distinct feature - São Vicente: no postverbal *-ba*

➤ Preverbal morpheme *táva* or *tá* [ta]

- Meaning equivalent to the one in (8a), past habitual:

(9) *N tá / táva trabadja parmanhan.*  
1SG TA / TAVA work in.the.morning  
'I used to work in the morning.'

✓ it may also be conditional, given an adequate context.

# Distinct feature - São Vicente: no postverbal *-ba*

➤ Preverbal morphemes *ti ta/te* and *táva ta/te*

- Meaning equivalent to the one in (9), present and past progressive:

(10) a. [...] *bo ti ta miá asin?*

2SG PROG meowing like that

‘[...] you are meowing like that?’

b. *Kes tropa táva te kore.*

DET troop PROG.VA run

‘The troops were running.’

# (repeated) Temporal reading for the different morphemes

		present	past
Santiago	perfect	∅ V	∅ V- <i>ba</i>
	progressive	<i>sata</i> V	<i>sata</i> V- <i>ba</i>
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In Santiago, *-ba* shifts the Topic Time into the past in all these cases

In São Vicente, we also have past distinctions, but they result from different combinations

# **Syntactic motivations for TP in both varieties (data here from Santiago)**

- Finite vs. non-finite distinction
- Expletive subjects
- Nominative Case distinctions
- Other possible arguments

# Finite vs. non-finite morphological distinction?

✓ **NO**

- Both in modal and control contexts,  
the embedded (presumably non-finite) verb is non-marked

(11) a. *N pode papia ku bo.*

1SG can speak with 2SG

'I can speak with you.'

b. *N kre papia ku bo.*

1SG want speak with 2SG

'I want to speak with you.'

# Expletive subjects?

✓ NO

(12) a. *Sata txobe na Lisboa.*

PROG rain in Lisboa

‘It is raining in Lisboa.’

b. *Ten tres katxor na nha rua.*

have three dog LOC my street

‘There are three dogs in my street.’

In Pratas (2007), Costa & Pratas (2013): Capeverdean is a partial null subject language, with no referential subjects in root clauses but with expletive null subjects in all contexts.

But what if there is nothing at all?

# Nominative Case distinctions?

✓ NO

(12) *Dja bu / Dja-u sabe ma Djon ta konta kasi tudu dia.*  
DJA-2SG know COMP Djon TA tell lies all day  
'You know that John lies all the time.' (Pratas 2007: 133)

The common phonological leaning of the subject clitic onto *dja* (a type of adverbial that marks a kind of perfective meaning) results in a clitic form typical from object positions – thus, we may conclude that there is no obligatory morphological marking for subject clitics.

## Some additional arguments (1)

- In negated predicative constructions, a present copula (taken to have the only function of marking tense) may be omitted

(13) *Djon (e) ka spertu.*

Djon COP NEG smart

‘Djon is not smart.’



## Some additional arguments (2)

- In non-active constructions in Santiago, there is no auxiliary; the only temporal morpheme may be analysed as a non-active (passive) marker, which may convey a meaning also corresponding to the Perfect, with the particularity of having distinct present and past forms:

(14) a. *Maria tradu di trabadju.*

Maria taken of work

‘Maria has been fired.’ [she is unemployed now]

b. *Maria trada di trabadju [mas e torna podu].*

Maria taken of work [but 3SG go.back put]

‘Maria had been fired [but she has been readmitted].’

# Hypothesis (1)

- ❖ **regarding variation related to a tense projection**
- ✓ Capeverdean today: there is a language continuum
  - from a variety in which a tense (TP) projection is needed (at least for *-ba*)...
  - ...to a variety where this need is reasonably called into question

## Hypothesis (2)

- So, what we clearly need in both varieties is a projection for
- ✓ **modal** preverbal *ta*
  - *ta* has a type of modal function, since it either participates in future oriented readings or converts eventive predicates into a type of states (habituals)

(Pratas 2010, 2012)

## Hypothesis (3)

- ... and a projection for:
- ✓ **aspect**, with either the (covert) Perfect or the (overt) Progressive
  - the tense features of both the Progressive and the Perfect in São Vicente still need do be better described and explained – for future work
  - the distinct forms in these varieties will be approached under the view that there is an “underspecification in the mapping between [functional] categories and morphological forms” (Adger & Smith 2010)

## Hypothesis (4)

- Then, regarding a **tense** projection (as said before):
  - the Santiago variety seems to have it – even with a very reduced role, only to accomodate *-ba*
  - in the São Vicente variety there seems to be no evidence that favors it, so far

# For the near future

## Investigate the following:

- more variation/varieties in between these two dialects
- sociolinguistic distribution of this variation
- role of language contact in its diachronic path
- in case of intra-speaker variation, possible language attitudes determining individual choices  
(also possibly related to the enduring contact with Portuguese, the language of the colonizer)

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