



HAL
open science

PERSONAL MARKERS OF JAMAICAN AND MARTINICAN

Nicole Arsenec

► **To cite this version:**

Nicole Arsenec. PERSONAL MARKERS OF JAMAICAN AND MARTINICAN. 2020. hal-02910349

HAL Id: hal-02910349

<https://hal.science/hal-02910349>

Preprint submitted on 1 Aug 2020

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

PERSONAL MARKERS OF JAMAICAN AND MARTINICAN

Dr Nicole ARSENEC

Independent researcher

A **contrastive approach** of **personal pronouns**, **subjective** and **objective** as well as **possessive determiners** in Creoles from Jamaica (JC) and Martinique (CM) opposed to corresponding morphemes of their lexifiers, English and French can point out specific structures and functionings in Afro-American languages.

This approach don't intend to be exhaustive. Extracting the morphemic personal markers [in French, « indices » referring to CREISSELS (1991 : 195)] on the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axis in a **synchronic perspective** to identify the similarities of their systemic organization.

The choice of these two Creoles, JC, an English Lexical Based Creole (ELBC) and CM, a French Lexical Based Creole (FLBC), can be as relevant as, they belong to different lexifiers, according to PARKVALL (2000 : 2).

In this perspective, the method of Beryl L. BAILEY (1966 : 6) who doesn't separate Creole languages in categories determined by different lexifiers, seems the most pragmatic. After the manner of BAILEY, the examples in Jamaican Creole and Martinican Creole belong to the **basilect** in order to avoid interferences between English and Jamaican, between French and Martinican.

1 Subjective personal pronouns

The following Table 1 is illustrating the present tense conjugation of the verb « to sing » in French, in Martinican, in Jamaican and in English languages.

The same tense of verb in these four languages can point out differences and similarities.

Table 1 : Personal pronouns and Conjugation

	French	Martinican	Jamaican	English
1	<u>je</u> chante	mwẽ ka fãte	mi a sing	I sing
2	<u>tu</u> chantes	u ka fãte	yu a sing	you sing
3	<u>elle/il/on</u> chante	i ka fãte	im a sing	<u>she/he</u> sings
4	<u>nous</u> chantons	nu ka fãte	wi a sing	we sing
5	<u>vous</u> chantez	zõt ka fãte	uno a sing	you sing
6	<u>elles/ils</u> chantent	jo ka fãte	dem a sing	they sing

The two pairs of languages present two main differences : English and French involve flexions and gender markers whereas invariable verbs and pronouns characterize Jamaican and Martinican.

It could seem necessary to consider English and French regional varieties as superstratic influences in JC and CM but, according to CASSIDY & Le PAGE (1967 : xxxviii), the phonetical structure of XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries regional English have been reshaped in African languages phonological matrix like Twi, Ewe... This mixed linguistic structure generates Creole language, the mother tongue of the widest majority of Jamaican speakers.

This point of view is as relevant as this type of linguistic change is not limited to phonological field because etymons of personal markers, even when phonetical items of their superstrats are still in use, don't keep the same functionings.

For example, the fourth person personal marker in CM :

	P4	P5
CM	/nu/ ~ /zõt/	
Fr	/nu...+ ð / ~ /vu...+ e/	

In French, a discontinuous morpheme [P4 /nu + ð/] of the fourth and fifth persons [P5 /vu + e/] involve obviously a structure different from the corresponding pronominal single moneme in Creole languages as JC (wi ~ uno) and CM (nu ~zõt). Its meaning is no more determined by a distinctive opposition which was defining its significant in so far as the verb remains invariable instead of flexional in French (/~ð#/ ~ /-e#/).

1.1 Flexional and Invariable verb

Comparing the conjugation of this tense of verb can point out two different systems of personal markers. One, functioning in Creole languages, and another one in European languages. In Martinican or in Jamaican, the personal pronoun is the only one marker of the person: six different morphemes for six persons are verbal personal subject pronouns. In French, they are equivalent of nine personal pronouns and six flexions added to pronouns included in discontinuous morphemes. In English, seven personal subject pronouns and one third person flexion : P3 (-s#), different from five other persons : P1, P2, P4, P5, P6 : (-Ø#).

So, Table 1 is making obvious a flexional system characterizing French and English while in Jamaican and in Martinican, a single **personal pronoun** is the distinctive marker of the person and the verb remains **invariable**, no matter if the lexical base is French or English.

1.2 Gender ~ Neutrality

Only **one personal pronoun** of the verb is used in Martinican or in Jamaican Creole as personal marker for each and every person of the conjugation, **male or female**, according to PARKVALL (2000).

Table 2 : Pronouns and Persons

	Personal SUBJECT pronouns				
Person	The speaker is referring to :	Jamaican	English	Martinican	French
1	Himself	mi	I	mwẽ	Je
2	Discussion partner	yu	you	u	tu
3	A person	im / i	he/ she	i	il/ elle
	An animal	i	it		on
4	A group including the speaker	wi	we	nu	nous
5	A group including the discussion partner and excluding the speaker	unu	you(pl.)	zõt	vous
6	A group excluding the discussion partners	em	they	jo	ils/ elles

In English or in French, third person pronouns (P3 she/he – elle /il) and sixth person pronouns (P6 ils / elles) in French, involve a masculine or feminine gender marker.

2 Personal object pronouns

The **same personal pronouns** are used as **subject or object** of the verb in Creole languages from Jamaica or Martinique.

Each syntactic position is determining their respective function.

JC mi tell dem “I told them” Engl.

CM mwẽ di jo ”Je leur ai dit” Fr.

P1 - say - P6

They can be exchanged without any modification of the verbal group.

JC dem tell mi “They told me” Engl.

CM jo di mwẽ ”Ils/Elles m’ont dit” Fr.

P6 - say - P1

In English and in French two different paradigms of personal pronouns depend on the function as subject or object of the verb :

English: They > Them = 2 ↔ 1 dem : Jamaican

French : Ils/Elles > Leur = 2/3 ↔ 1 /jo / : Martinican

SUBJECT OBJECT

Creole words are invariable, with no inflectional endings, and grammatical relations are expressed by means of particles or purely tactical devices. BAILEY (1966 : 6)

3 Variations of pronouns

3.1 In Jamaican

3.1.1 Phonetical pronunciation

Like in numerous African substratic languages, only one pronoun significant of the third person (P3) : *im*, is functioning in Jamaican (JC). No matter if it refers to a masculine or a feminine gender, this **significant** remains **invariable**, there is not any gender variation.

No matter if it refers to an animate, an inanimate or even a personified subject, « it », in English, the third person significant remains identical according to ADAMS (1991 : 21).

So that no distinctive opposition between these pronouns can determine the existence of another phoneme belonging to the phonological system.

The nasal consonant /-m #/ following the oral vowel : /i- / induces a regressive nasalization and often produces only one nasal sound :

JC [im , him , ĩ , hĩ] /im/ « she / he »

In Jamaican, different degrees of nasalization of a vowel can be observed before a final nasal consonant.

No matter which phonetical vocalic sound is pronounced, BAILEY (1966 : 15) choice is a transcription of relevant distinctive phonological features in the vocalic system.

Nevertheless, nasalization seems so widespread in Creole languages that it is considered as a characteristics of these linguistic systems. This type of variations is also quoted by ALLEYNE (1980 : 36) :

JC [ĩ] ~ [ĩm] ~ [ĩn] « he »

These optional variations don't belong to the phonological system but to the phonetical pronunciation.

3.1.2 Shift - Register change

Another kind of **variations** belong to the diglossic situation as a shift from **basilectal** to **acrolectal** register.

The pronoun referring to a feminine subject can be shaped on the English pattern : « she ». But, most of the time only one pronoun JC /im /, can be changed to a feminine /har/ belonging to a register situated between the basilect and the acrolect : the **mesolect**.

Table 3 : Shift – Register change and Pronouns in JC

JC	Basilect: /im /	“he” ou “she”	Invariable
	Mesolect: im ~ har	“he” ~ “she”	masculine ~ feminine
	Acrolect : im ~ shi	« he » ou « shi »	masculine ~ feminine

CASSIDY (1961 : 54)

According to CASSIDY (1961: 55) « *As one moves from the folk end of the scale toward the Standard end, the paradigm of pronouns is gradually amplified : he and she are among the first to be added, then her; the rest come decidedly later.* »

The mesolectal register introduces a gender marker of the third person, and this morpheme is closer to the English pattern in a mesolectal register.

	Mesolect		Acrolect
JC	har	>	shi « she »

In Jamaican, Personal markers of the first person (P1) and of the fifth person (P5) are probably issued from African languages, according to CASSIDY (1961: 54):

Table 4 : Etymons of JC

JC	P1	<i>mi</i>	-	<i>me</i> (me, my)	Twi and related languages from Ghana.
	P5	<i>uno / unu</i>	-	<i>unu</i>	Ibo , language of Nigeria

CASSIDY (1961 : 54)

No matter which language they are coming from, pronouns are generally based on the personal object pronouns of the English etymon.

P1 *mi* < « me » / P3 *im* < « him » / P6 *dem* < « them »

The third person present a shift due to a change of register, and is based on the personal subject pronoun.

Table 5 : Registers and Variation of pronouns in JC

	Pronoun	English etymon	Jamaican
Basilect	<i>im</i>	< « him » Object	Mek im gwaan ! « Make her go on ! »
Mesolect	<i>im ~ har</i>	< « her »	Mek har gwaan !
Acrolect	<i>im ~ shi</i>	< « she » Subject	Mek shi gwaan !

In Jamaican, as soon as the register get closer to English, the acrolectal pronoun of the third person is switching with an etymon coming from the English personal subject pronoun : « she ». The mesolectal register assimilates the personal object pronoun. But it cannot be used as a subject : in a subjective function it would be *ungrammatical* (**har a go**). As well as the sixth personal pronoun, *dem* from : « them », can shift sometimes with a personal subject pronoun, *dey*, from : « they » in English :

P6 *dem* > *dey*

This last morpheme, *dey*, is scarce and cannot be used as a subject. At the opposite, *dem* which can get both functions, verbal Subject and Object of the verb, *dey* is exclusively a verbal Object.

SUBJECT JC **Dem** a baal fi wata. « **They** are bawling for water.” Engl.

OBJECT Gi **dem** some! “ Give **them** some!”

So, usually the more frequent significant in JC (*dem*) corresponds to two different functions : Subject « they » and Object « them » in English.

JC dem “they” or “them”

The different English etymons involved in JC mesolectal or acrolectal register are determined by the diglossic situation changing from one register to the next one, *shift*, belonging to sociolinguistics.

3.2 In Martinican

3.2.1 Phonetical pronunciation

The first personal pronoun (P1) presents some variations on a phonetical level :

CM P1 /mwẽ/ > /mõ/ > /mã/ > /ã/ DAMOISEAU (1979: 109)

3.2.2 Contextual variation – Allomorphes

CM u ãme mwẽ « Tu m’aises » / yu lob mi « You love me » JC
mwẽ ãme w « Je t’aise” / mi lob yu « I love you » JC

CM i malad pase mwẽ ”Il est plus malade que moi”
mwẽ malad pase j ”Je suis plus malade que lui”

The phonemic context can determine the type of **contextual variations**, as **allomorphes**.

CM nu ka wε w « Nous **te** voyons » - nu ka wε j « Nous **le** voyons »
nu ka bat u « Nous **te** battons » - nu ka bat li « Nous **le** battons »

According to BERNABE (1983 : 327), it is a case of « *sandhi* ».

Sandhi: *Phonet.* This word borrowed from Indian grammar, is referring to phonetical changes in initial or final position of a word (...) Sandhi is involved in a process of assimilation. (Trad) Nicole MOUTARD, *DDLL* (1974 : 291)

Table 6 : Pronouns and Allomorphic variations in CM

2 nd person	P2 /-u #/ → CM	/ i bat u /	[- C # + / u / > / - u # /]
		/ i wε w /	[- V # + / u / > / - w # /]
3 rd person	P3 / li #/ → CM	/ i bat li /	[- C # + / li / > / - li # /]
		/ i wε j /	[- V # + / li / > / - j # /]

These **allomorphes** can be distinctive to identify tonic and clitic forms depending on phonemic context, according to Guy HAZAEL-MASSIEUX (1972 : 145). This distinction is not attested in JC, there is no evidence that such an opposition is functioning in Jamaican.

However, optional variation in JC and allomorphes in CM don't determine distinctive units. So, free variation of JC and contextual variations in CM don't call into question the different functions of the personal markers in JC and CM. Consequently, the number of paradigms in Jamaican and Martinican remains the same.

4 Possessive determiners

The syntactic position of possessive determiners is referring to *Some Similarities of Afro-American Speech in Specific Lexical Bases*, ALLEYNE (1980 : 11/13), no matter where they are on the syntactic axis.

JC « his, her, its rice” im rais - divi li “son riz” CM

The same morpheme can be personal subject pronoun, personal object pronoun or possessive determiner, depending of its syntactic position in the sentence.

See the following Table7 : Personal pronouns and Possessive determiners

Table 7 : Personal pronouns and Possessive determiners in JC and CM

Jamaican	A	dem	gi	mi	yu	buk	« They gave me your book »
	B	yu	gi	mi	dem	buk	« You gave me their book »
	C	mi	gi	yu	dem	buk	« I gave you their book »
	D	dem	gi	yu	mi	buk	« They gave you my book »
Martinican	A	jo	ba	mwẽ	liv	u	« Ils m'ont donné ton livre »
	B	u	ba	mwẽ	liv	jo	« Tu m'as donné leur livre »
	C	mwẽ	ba	w	liv	jo	« Je t'ai donné leur livre »
	D	jo	ba	w	liv	mwẽ	« Ils t'ont donné mon livre »

The **same morphemes** are used as **personal markers** or **possessive determiners** even if the determiner is before the determined item in JC and after it in CM : particular syntactic feature depending on the different substratic origins of these languages, referring to Morgan DALPHINIS (1985) and Martha ROBERT (1981).

These examples point out a single paradigm in Martinican Creole instead of three different paradigms in French. As well as a single paradigm in Jamaican Creole instead of three in English.

English : They - Them - Their : 3 ↔ dem : **Jamaican**

French : Ils/Elles - Les - Leur : 3/4 ↔ jo : **Martinican**

SUBJECT OBJECT

JC mi kyaan drink mi kaafi so « I can't drink my coffee so »

CM mwẽ pasa bwε kafe mwẽ kōsa « Je ne peux pas boire mon café ainsi »

See yhe following Synthetic Table.

Table 5 : Synthetic table of Personal markers

English			French		
Pr Subject	Pr Object	Possessive Det.	Pr Subject	Pr Object	Possessive Det.
I	me	my	je	me, m'	mon,ma,mes
you	you	your	tu	te, t'	ton,ta,tes
he,she,it	him,her,it	his,her,its	il,elle,on	se, s'	son,sa,ses
we	us	our	nous	nous	notre,nos
you	you	your	vous	vous	votre,vos
they	them	their	ils,elles	leur	leur,leurs

Jamaican

mi
 yu
 im / i
 unu
 wi
 dem

English: 20

Jamaican: 6 / 7

Martinican

mwẽ
 u /w
 i / li
 nu
 zot
 jo

French : 30 / 33

Martinican: 6 / 7

This synthetic table presenting personal pronouns in two different functions : subject and object, as well as possessive determiners is pointing out **one paradigm** in **Jamaican**, **one paradigm** in **Martinican**, whereas **three paradigms** are functioning in **English** as in **French**.

In both Jamaican and Martinican, half a dozen morphemes are respectively corresponding to twenty items in English and thirty in French : that is the question.

5 Reflexive pronouns

One specific verbal form of traditional French grammar is classified among « pronominal ». Different from « reciprocal » expressing mutual action or relation of a plural subject (Children fought, now they kiss), the « reflexive » form involving a morpheme referring to the verbal subject whose action affects the same subject, the personal object and subject pronouns referring to the same person :

Fr. Pierre regarde Pierre dans la glace > Pierre se regarde dans la glace.

J. DUBOIS & R. LAGANE (1973 : 115)

Engl. He hurt himself

The Concise Oxford Dictionary [1975 : 576]

Reflexive verbal forms have been quoted in Martinican Creole and Jamaican Creole.

5.1 Reflexive verbal forms

5.1.1 In JC

In JC, a reflexive form involves a reflexive morpheme *-self* postposed to the personal pronoun, according to CASSIDY (1961) « *The folk speech, like Standard, forms reflexive pronouns by adding -self to the personals : meself, weself, and the rest : i.e. « A wen im ben hat imself ? » - When did he hurt himself ?*

BAILEY (1966) illustrates this use of reflexive pronouns in JC :

(1) JC di biebi-dem kyaan fiid demself « The babies can't feed themselves »

Def-baby-P1-Neg/can-feed-P6refl

(2) JC mi an Jien wi dres wiself « I and Jane will dress ourselves »

P1-Conj-Jane-Prosp-dress-P4refl

(3) JC wa-mek yu an Jaaj wudn bihiev unusef a choch ?
 why - P2 -Conj -George-would/Neg-behave - P5refl - Prep-church
 « Why wouldn't you and George behave yourselves in church ? »

(4) JC di hag a wala imself ina di mod
 Def-hog-Prog-wallow-P3refl-Prep-Def-mud
 « The hog is wallowing itself in the mud »

On a semantic point of view it seems obvious that the subject and the object of these actions are identical, as -babies cannot feed themselves (1), for example.

The reflexive : *self* in JC is shaped on the English pattern but doesn't involve plural marker as an opposition between singular and plural in English (self ~ selves). Consequently, only the personal pronoun is the marker of the person and the number : plural or singular in JC.

A reflexive form is functioning as well in CM.

5.1.2 In CM

But, in CM the order is reversed in the syntHEME :

The morpheme significant of the reflexive marker : /kɔ / « corps » (self) is before the personal pronoun forming a **metonymic pronoun**.

CM /mwẽ ka gade kɔ mwẽ adã glas la/ PINALIE (1992 : 140)
 P1- Prog-regarder-P1refl- Prep-miroir-Def
 « Je me regarde dans la glace »

CM /se zafɛ <u>kɔw</u> /	CM /i kupe <u>kɔj</u> /
Cop-affaire-P2refl	P3-couper-P3refl
« ça <u>te</u> regarde/ c'est ton affaire »	« Il <u>s'</u> est coupé »

CM /nu ka gade kɔnu adã miwɛ a/

PINALIE (1992)

P4-prog-regarder-P4refl-prep - glace-def

« Nous nous regardons dans la glace »

CM /kuvɛ kɔzɔt/

« Couvrez-vous »

couvrir-P5refl

Some of these examples can hardly be classified exclusively as reflexive or reciprocal.

CM /se mun tala pa ẽme kɔjo/ « Ces gens ne s'aiment pas » BERNABE (1983)

P1-gens-Dem-Neg-aime-P4refl

Table 9 : Reflexive pronouns in JC - CM

	JC	CM
P1	myself	kɔ mwẽ
P2	yuself	kɔ w
P3	imself	kɔ j
P4	wiself	kɔ nu
P5	unuself	kɔ zɔt
P6	demself	kɔ jo
	JC [Pr + self] - [kɔ + Pr] CM	

5.2 Emphatic form

The same morphemes can be involved in emphatic form in JC, according to CASSIDY (1961) « *The same forms are used intensively, but the most characteristic intensive is simply self used after the noun and pronoun* : « *Gravel self cyaan harder* »- *gravel itself can be harder* ; « *Me self do it* » - « *I myself did dit.* »

JC [N + self / Pr + self]

In CM, the construction of this emphatic form is shaped on the French pattern, postposing the reflexive morpheme /mēm/ « même » (self) after the noun or the pronoun :

CM /mwẽ mēm ; u mēm ; li mēm/ « moi-même ; toi-même : lui-même »
« myself » ; « yourself » ; « himself »

This emphatic form can be fronted :

CM /mwẽ mēm # mwẽ pa te la/ « Moi-même, je n'étais pas là » BERNABE (1983)

CM /li mēm # i pa tãŋ ajẽ / « Lui-même, il n'a rien entendu »
« He himself did not hear anything »

The emphatic form can be included inside the sentence :

CM /pjɛ le li mēm ale fɔɖfɔãʂ/ PINALIE (1992)

« Pierre veut que lui-même aille à Fort-de-France »

« Pierre himself wants to go to Fort-de-France »

CM [Pr + / mēm/]

JC [Pr + self] ou [N + self]

The same morphemes are involved in an emphatic or a reflexive verbal form in JC and CM. But, in Jamaican this morpheme can be postposed after the noun. This syntactic position has not been attested in Martinican.

6 CONCLUSION : Personal markers

This approach of **personal markers** in Creole languages from Jamaica and Martinique, as **personal subject pronouns, personal object pronouns, possessive determiners**, is obviously pointing out that Jamaican Creole lexically based on English and Martinican Creole lexically based on French involve **morphosyntactic similar features** which cannot be found neither in English nor in French.

These related similar features in Jamaican and Martinican couldn't be generated by the lexical base languages, English or French. If we consider the specific verbal system (TMA), syllabic structure, serial verbs, topicalization and other characteristics, they can be considered as **distinctive features** to determine a new **family of languages**, Afro-American referring to ALLEYNE (1980)

Concerning **reflexive pronouns**, JC presents invariable pronouns shaped on the English pattern while CM involve **metonymic pronouns** as well as Haitian, Papiamentu, other Creoles and African languages.

REFERENCES

- Adams, Emilie. (1991) [1992] *Understanding Jamaican Patois, An introduction to Afro-American Grammar*. Kingston: Kingston Publishers
- Alleyne, Mervyn (1980) *Comparative Afro-American: An historical-Comparative Study of English-Based Afro-American Dialects of the New World*. Ann Arbor: Karoma.
- Bailey, Beryl (1966) *Jamaican Creole syntax. A transformational Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

- Bernabé, Jean (1983) *Fondal Natal. Grammaire basilectale approchée des créoles guadeloupéen et martiniquais*. Paris : l'Harmattan.
- Cassidy, Frederic G. (1961) *Jamaica Talk, Three hundred Years of the English Language in Jamaica*. London: Macmillan
- Cassidy, Frederic & le Page, Robert (1967) *Dictionary of Jamaican English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Creissels, Denis (1991) *Description des langues négro-africaines et théorie syntaxique*. Grenoble : ELLUG
- Dalphinis, Morgan (1985) *Caribbean and African languages. Social history, language and education*. London : Karia Press
- Damoiseau, Robert (1979) *Etude syntaxique du créole d'un locuteur martiniquais unilingue*, Paris : PhD Dissertation.
- Dubois, Jean & Lagane, René (1973) *La nouvelle grammaire du français*. Paris : Larousse
- Hazaël-Massieux, Guy (1972) *Phonologie et Phonétique du créole de la Guadeloupe*. Paris : PhD Dissertation.
- Mounin, Georges Dir. (1974) *Dictionnaire de la linguistique*. Paris : PUF DDL
- Parkvall, Mikael (2000) *Out of Africa: African Influences in Atlantic Creoles*
London: Battlebridge Publications.
- Pinalie, Pierre (1992) *Dictionnaire élémentaire Français-Créole*. Paris : l'Harmattan.
- Ridler, Vivian (1964) [1975] *Concise Oxford Dictionary of current English*. Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Robert, Martha (1981) "Identifying the African Grammatical Base of the Caribbean Creoles. A typological approach". In: *Historicity and Variation in Creole Studies*. Ed. By Arnold Highfield & Albert Valdman, 1981. Ann Arbor: Karoma Publishers Inc. U.S.A.