A NOTE ON DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TENSE-ASPECT SYSTEMS OF KRIKO AND ENGLISH

M. V. DIACHKOV
Moscow University

The English-derived creole language Krio is the mother tongue of descendants of the liberated Africans who live in Sierra Leone (mostly in urban areas), in the Banana and the Bontha Islands, and in and around Bathurst (Gambia). Certain linguists believe that Krio is spoken as a first language by an estimated 120 thousand people (cf. Hymes 1971:517).

The tense-aspect system of the verb in Krio differs from that in English. The finite verb in Krio can be used both as a stem-verb and with tense-aspect markers which are separate auxiliary words (free morphemes). As a rule, a finite stem-verb (i.e., verb without markers, since it has no paradigmatic forms) expresses momentary non-resultative action referred to past and not related to the moment of speech. In English this meaning is normally expressed by the Past Indefinite Tense. Thus, the Krio sentence: Jon go (wu) skul yestade, corresponds to the English one: John went to school yesterday.

The same meaning can be expressed in Krio also by adding the tense marker bin, whose etymology can be traced back to the past participle of the English verb be (cf. Jones 1968: 85). However, since the finite stem-verb as it is can express this meaning, the marker bin is an optional one. For example: Rabbit bin get smal fam = Rabbit get smal fam = The Rabbit had a small farm. That means that a Krio speaker, if he does not sufficiently master English, can underdifferntiate the English Present and Past Indefinite Tenses.

There is a tendency in Krio to develop another meaning of the tense marker bin, that of indicating that one non-resultative action referred to past precedes another non-resultative action also referred to past. For example: Mi bojpihin bin go-wa-la nado, den i go skul = My son had walked outside, then he went to school. This meaning of the marker bin corresponds to one of the meanings of the English Past Perfect Tense.

The addition of the marker go, whose etymology is traced back to the English verb go (cf. Jones 1968:86), to the finite stem-verb corresponds to the English Future Indefinite Tense. Since the Krio marker go is irrelevant
to person, a Krio speaker can underdifferenciate the auxiliary verbs shall and tell in English. Cf.: A go ka na ya — I shall come here and I go ka na ya — He will come here.

The aspect marker don, whose etymology is traced back to the past participle of the English verb do (cf. Jones 1968:86), expresses the resultativeness of the action referred to present, past or future, according to the context. Completion or non-completion of the resultative action is also determined according to the context. For example:
(a) present:
A don jas rid boku pepa — I have just read many newspapers.
(b) past:
Yu don rid boku pepa we a ka na ya — You had read many newspapers when I came here.
(Completion or non-completion of reading is not indicated in both sentences).
(c) future:
Bai me mont i don rait pat pa in wok — By May he will have written a part of his paper.
(Completion or non-completion of writing is not indicated in the sentence).

So the marker don with a finite stem verb corresponds to the English Present, Past and Future Perfect Tenses. As the action is referred to future, the marker don can be grouped with the marker go. For example: Bai me mont i don rait pat pa in wok = Bai me mont i go don rait pat pa in wok. The marker group bin don has a quite specific meaning, it indicates that a resultative action was completed before a certain moment in past (after reaching the result). For example: Tinkya yu bin don tap na oif kompaun biko yu ka na yoso — It seems, you had lived at the compound of the chief before you came here. Therefore the sentence: I had stayed at home for two hours when you telephoned me (at the moment of the telephone call the speaker was at home) can be translated into Krio only as: A don tap na oso fo bo to auw we yu telefon mi. The use of the marker bin preceding don is impossible in this case.

The Krio tense-aspect marker de, whose etymology is not quite clear (cf. Jones 1968: 86 and Dillard 1973: 100), has several meanings, all of them related to its ability to develop momentary actions in time. The marker de indicates:
1) habitual, recurrent actions in present:
Mi bojikin de go skul sori de — My son goes to school every day.
2) general statements:
Pleni pipul dom de tok Krio na Salum — Many people speak Krio in Sierra Leone.
3) actions in progress referred to present, past or future:
(a) present:
A de rid dis buk ya fimo — I am reading this book just now.
(b) past:
We den de go, den si wa pamiri we bin get plenti pamain pan am — As they were going, they saw a palm-tree which had much juice in it.
(c) future:
We a de si saqin, a de fagot bout Fritsin smol smol — As I see something, I'll be gradually forgetting about Freetown.

While the action in progress is referred to past or future, the marker bin or go, respectively, can be optionally used preceding the marker de. For example: Cf. above: We den bin de go, den si... and We a go de si saqin, a go de fagot bout ....

The marker group don de is used only to emphasize a progression of a resultative action referred to present, past or future. This group cannot be combined with the tense markers bin or go. For example:
(a) present:
Dis tem Ram don de kip bak — At this time (now) the Ram has been keeping back (He has already retreated, but continues his movement).
(b) past:
We Rabit infir bin si se Lepet don de veks, naim i ton — As the Rabbit himself saw that the Leopard had been worrying, then he succumbed.
(c) future:
A don de don1 afa tu aver — I have been finishing in two hours.

The marker group bin go has a modal meaning of non-real wish or supposition, e.g.: If a bin get rait sus, a bin go war am — If I had good shoes, I should have worn them (but I haven’t).

The tense-aspect markers in Krio have different combinability with one another. They can be grouped as follows:
1. The marker bin precedes all the other tense-aspect markers,
2. The marker do precedes the markers don and de,
3. The marker don precedes only the marker de, and
4. The marker de is closest to the stem-verb (and sometimes even tends to behave like an affix).

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REFERENCES


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1 The notion verb don “finish” is homonymic to the aspect marker don.