



Pragmatic markers and *verba dicendi*: An investigation of Mauritian Creole

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ABSTRACT

Offering a detailed investigation of three Mauritian Creole pragmatic markers based on one of the *verba dicendi*, *dir* 'say', in a corpus of spoken discourse, this article sets out to offer a preliminary insight into a category of elements that, to date, is mostly unexplored. By applying a methodology inspired by Canonical Typology, each marker is scored against a set of defined features, identifying their most and least prominent uses, and a detailed and comprehensive description of their functions is given. Reflecting on their synchronic properties, the article also considers their diachronic development and reflects on their very different evolutionary paths and stages of grammaticalization.

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1. Introduction

Since the publication of Schiffrin's (1987) ground-breaking book, studies on pragmatic markers (PMs) have recognized time and again that they elude grammatical classification, making their function strictly dependent on the context in which they are used. Furthermore, they do not have a single 'meaning', but instead take on different functions determined by their surrounding context: multifunctionality is, therefore, at the heart of their essence.¹

In spite of their elusiveness, or perhaps because of it, PMs have received increasing interest from different theoretical angles addressing questions ranging from issues of internal classification (e.g., Waltereit and Detges, 2007; Degand et al., 2013; Fedriani and Sansò, 2017), to inquiries into their syntactic and semantic (e.g., Bayer and Struckmeier, 2017; Urgelles-Coll, 2011) as well as prosodic properties (e.g., Crocco et al., 2023), to investigations into their diachronic development (starting with Brinton's, 1996 seminal work, and subsequent research; recently, Heine et al., 2021). The latter trend, especially, has generated a rich and varied body of research, highlighting the fertile and promising results that can be achieved by applying general principles of semantic change to these elements (Sweetser, 1990; Traugott and Dasher, 2002; Fischer, 2013). A prominent approach featuring in research framed within these terms is the search for patterns and general tendencies that can account for the emergence of their various functions. Within grammaticalization studies, this has been pursued by focusing on the nature and properties of the original lexical item (or source) and/or construction from which they developed

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¹ We choose the label *pragmatic marker* to refer generally to all markers that express some sort of information that goes beyond the propositional level. This is not meant to reflect a specific analysis or distinction from other similar items labelled variously as *discourse markers*, *modal particles*, *discourse connectives*, etc. See Lewis (2011:419–420) for a discussion on the possible pitfalls of using more specific labels.

(e.g., Abraham, 1991a, 1991b, 2020; Ghezzi and Molinelli, 2014; Lansari, 2020; Mosegaard Hansen, 2008; to name a few). This approach, typical of analyses of a semantic and/or pragmatic nature, echoes aspects of Bybee et al.'s (1994:9–12) notion of 'source determination', according to which the semantic meaning of the source that undergoes grammaticalization ultimately determines the resulting meaning: for them, source meanings are derived from the pool of 'basic, irreducible notions' to do with cognitive concepts such as existence, possession, movement in space, etc.

From a more general perspective, a large amount of research has focused on PMs based on the same element, be it a given grammatical category (e.g., verb, adverb, etc.) or a specific lexical item. Noteworthy, in the French tradition in particular, is the rich presence of studies on PMs based on the so-called *verba dicendi* 'verbs of saying', of which *dire* 'to say' is the most prominent exponent. These encompass both synchronic (e.g., Authier-Revuz, 1995; Steuckardt, 2005, 2018; Fuchs, 2007; Khatchaturyan, 2008; Frenckel, 2016; Gómez-Jordana, 2009; Anscombre, 2005, 2010; Saunier, 2012; Pérez, 2013) and diachronic investigations (e.g., Steuckardt and Niklas-Salminen, 2003; Vassiliadou, 2005; Rodríguez Somolinos, 2008; Anscombre, 2014; Oppermann-Marsaux, 2014). Among the various functions that PMs based on *dire* can perform (e.g., introduce reported speech, represent different voices, attribute knowledge to external (i.e., non-speaker) sources, express mitigation, cf. Gómez-Jordana et al., 2015:6), a recent study has identified as their 'essential characteristic' the ability to signal that the speaker's commitment to the propositional content that follows (or precedes) is problematic (Lansari, 2020:8). That is, expressions based on *dire* act, loosely, as metalinguistic mitigators. The source of this shared property is traced back to the etymology of the verb *dire* and its original Proto-Indo-European root *deik, *dik meaning 'designating, exposing', that semantically epitomizes the act of speaking as a process leading from the invisible (i.e., thoughts) to the visible (i.e., words). The shift between visibility and invisibility is the reason why assertions introduced by *dire* are 'never equivalent to simple assertions' (Frenckel, 2015:96, translated by Lansari, 2020:32).

Creole languages offer an interesting term of comparison for the study of grammaticalization, both in terms of pace (the process seems to happen much faster, e.g., Plag, 2002; Bakker, 2008:43) and modality (different types of grammaticalization can be identified, e.g., ordinary, instantaneous, and apparent, Bruyn, 1996). The intense and extensive situations of language contact are responsible for both the acceleration seen in the first stage of grammaticalization, i.e., functionalization, the process by which content items become function items (Michaelis and Haspelmath, 2020:1117), and the mechanisms that are at play (Bruyn, 1996:29–31). 'Apparent' grammaticalization is of particular interest, since it refers to cases in which the process did not result from 'a stepwise, language-internal process of grammaticalization' (Bruyn, 2009:323) in the Creole, but in the source language,² and the item/structure was simply borrowed as a finished product.

Although a great deal of research on pragmatic markers now exists, not all languages feature as prominently. Most of the research has focused on large European languages, with very little attention on their varieties (Leukert and Rüdiger, 2021), and even less on Creoles which arose from contact with these languages (e.g., Furukawa, 2010; Migge, 2020; Winckler, 2008). In addition, most research into pragmatic marking in Creoles so far has focused on their emergence rather than their synchronic functions.³ This study therefore contributes to expanding our understanding of pragmatic markers by turning to an understudied group of languages.

We present a comparative investigation of three Mauritian Creole (MC) PMs all containing the verb *dir* 'say': *dizon*, *koumadir* and *savedir*. Its primary focus is to offer a detailed description and analysis of their synchronic pragmatic behavior based on close investigation of a corpus of spoken, semi-spontaneous data, providing a preliminary insight into an area that remains to date mostly unexplored. A particular point of interest is the exploration of whether mitigation is a shared function between them. Finally, based on the observed synchronic facts, the article also reflects on the distinct evolutionary paths of these markers, and their different levels of grammaticalization.

The choice of MC is motivated first and foremost by how little is known about its PMs, with Chady's (2018) thesis being the first to explore this topic. Chady (2018) focusses on the interactional sociolinguistics of three marker types: *be/ben* 'well', *sipa* (*ki*) 'whether/dunno' and forms similar to *koumadir* 'like' (*koumsa/comme ça/koumadir/wadire/on dirait/ondire/komsidire/comme si*)⁴ in French, hybrid, and Creole contexts. *Koumadir* is the only marker that overlaps with this study. Although Chady's (2018) study is primarily sociolinguistic, she mentions functions such as saving face and correction, which we investigate in more detail.

Secondly, there is a comparative dimension, in that MC has a linguistic relation to French, and hence a shared etymology of *dir*, but also its independent development. French was the language of the first colonizers, and it was spoken in Mauritius alongside many other languages/families including Malagasy, Niger-Congo, Bantu, Indo-Aryan and Dravidian⁵ as MC emerged around 1770 (Baker and Fon Sing, 2007). Initially, French proficiency was limited to the Franco-Mauritian elites and those who worked closely with them, but compulsory education in the 20th century led to widespread sustained multilingualism in French and/or English alongside MC (Stein, 1982). This multi-layered, intense, and extensive language contact with French has

² Bruyn (1996, 2009) exemplifies the term 'apparent' grammaticalization through functions based on substrate language(s). As we will see, apparent grammaticalization can also occur when the source language is the lexifier.

³ See Singler (1988), however, for an exception.

⁴ The other potential pragmatic markers in MC we are aware of in addition to those investigated by Chady (2018) are *ale* 'go/come on', *anfin* 'well' and *bon* 'well', all of French origin.

⁵ Although these languages could have influenced the development of the PMs in question, especially *koumadir*, as we will see, it lies outside the scope of this article to evaluate their contribution, not least because of the paucity of reliable sources on the status of those languages at that time as well as the notorious difficulties in identifying with certainty the effects of individual language contact.

played an important role: although not the specific focus of this contribution (for a comprehensive discussion see [Davidson and Paoli, in preparation](#)), reference to the potential effects of language contact is made in section 3.1.6 and in the conclusions.

The specific choice of the three markers, *koumadir*, *dizon* and *savedir*, is motivated by their relative frequency in spoken discourse, and by the fact that they all contain a form of the MC verb *dir* 'to say', making them an interesting term of comparison for the many markers based on *dire* that have already been investigated in French. The considerable number of PMs based on *dir(e)* must be linked to its high frequency (it is reportedly the fourth most common French verb, and in our MC corpus it is the third most common).⁶ In fact, of the 15 MC PM that we're aware of, half of them are based on *dir*. Although the impact of frequency on grammaticalization is notoriously difficult to identify and quantify, a significant relational link between the two has long been suggested ([Bybee, 2006](#)): the development of grammatical elements emerges from repeated use, and through repeated use they continue to evolve. Accordingly, we would expect a PM that has been in use in the language for a long time and is highly frequent to show the most advanced degree of grammaticalization.⁷ Moreover, we would expect the verb *dir* itself to have progressed further in terms of bleaching of its original meaning in those markers that have been in the language the longest. Both considerations, as we will see, have an important bearing on broader questions relating to the path of grammaticalization of *dir* in these PMs (e.g., is *dir* undergoing/has it undergone a change that is determined by some general and abstract cross-linguistically established patterns or inherent properties? Is each marker to be investigated individually, taking into consideration not just the verb itself but also the way in which the marker was acquired into the language and the effects of language contact? Has *dir* reached the same degree of grammaticalization in all markers?), and, ultimately, on the current functions of these MC PMs.

The article is structured as follows: section 2 offers an overview of the methodology of both data collection and analysis, and section 3 an in-depth discussion of each marker and some reflections on possible diachronic factors that have contributed to their shaping. We conclude with some remarks on the more general debate about the source of functions of PMs, suggesting directions for future work in section 4.

2. Methodology

2.1. Data collection

The data on which this study is based are derived from semi-spontaneous conversations between pairs of native MC speakers conducted and recorded online (via Microsoft Teams) by a local Research Assistant in Mauritius.⁸ Most of the conversations took place between people who knew each other: the high degree of familiarity allowed for a spontaneous and relaxed exchange, natural flow of the conversation and an informal register, essential elements of naturalistic speech.⁹ The dialogic contexts were also crucial for obtaining the type of data we sought: each session discussed a 'big question', chosen from a set of suitably selected topics, and the participants expressed their own subjective views and engaged with their conversational partner's. Examples of these include 'Should footballers earn more than nurses?', 'Can you choose to be healthy?', 'Are real-life friends better than online ones?', all specifically chosen for not being personal or sensitive in nature and for not having a straightforward right or wrong answer that would elicit highly dialogical responses. A total of forty participants took part, of which the majority were aged between 20 and 30, with 3 participants in the 55+ age bracket. In all conversations there was a degree of code-switching (MC and French), the extent of which varied from speaker to speaker, but generally depended on their relative linguistic competencies.

2.2. Data analysis

All the instances of *dizon* (43) and *savedir* (39) occurring in our corpus were analyzed and included in the statistical calculations. However, since *koumadir* occurred a total of 410 times (10 times as frequently as the others), only 10% of these were randomly selected to ensure balance across the three markers.

The data have been analyzed adopting an approach inspired by Canonical Typology (cf. [Bond, 2019](#)), an established method that has proved particularly effective in obtaining a fine-grained picture of complex phenomena that necessitate a simultaneous analysis of disparate properties (e.g., at different levels of linguistic description). It consists of identifying parameters of variation (i.e., our 'features') relevant to the phenomenon investigated, and scoring the data against them: the resulting picture is a bird's eye view of a given linguistic phenomenon.

⁶ The *Dictionnaire des fréquences du CNRS* reports that it follows *être* 'to be', *avoir* 'to have' and *faire* 'to do/make'. In our own MC corpus, *dir* 'to say' is even more frequent, being third in line after *ena* 'to have' and *fer* 'to do/make'.

⁷ Throughout the article, we use the more general term 'grammaticalization' even where there may be grounds to adopt the more specific 'pragmaticalization'. Although we are aware that using one instead of the other can have different theoretical implications, we refrain from engaging with the debate, and use 'grammaticalization' (and grammar) in their broadest possible interpretation (cf., for example, [Kaltenböck et al., 2011](#); [Heine et al., 2013](#)).

⁸ We express our deepest gratitude to Ludovic Othello and acknowledge his pivotal role in securing participants and running the discussions, as well as producing the transcriptions.

⁹ The project was granted Ethical Approval (Ref: R79790/RE001). The conversations (20 in total) were recorded online between March and May 2022, each lasting between 15 and 30 min, amounting to over 10 h of recordings, and 71,000 words of transcribed text.

Canonical Typology is typically used cross-linguistically, but in this study, we have used it in a novel way, applying it to a set of markers *within the same language*. Our aim was to obtain a fine-grained representation of the totality of features that are represented in each instance of usage of each PM, and to maximize comparability within and across all markers. The outcome is a detailed, qualitative overview of the characteristics of each marker, which formed the basis for a small quantitative analysis of their typical and atypical properties.

Fig. 1 shows an example of how the process worked. Each instance of *dizon* was scored against the features, and the presence of each feature was noted with a 1. Crucially, each example was interpreted within its extended context.

The choice and definition of the features is explained in the next section.

Interview	Topic	Example	Position	mitigation	lack of precision	incompleteness	insufficient evidence	saving face	expansion	paraphrasing	example	additional info	phatic	correction	hesitation	word searching	planning filler	literal meaning
1 nurse vs P1	ale	dizon li ena 10-2-an lexper	left						1		1		1					
1 nurse vs P2	Fini galoup 4 km	dizon li fer s	mid						1		1							
1 nurse vs P1	ou nou apel infirmie	dizon. K	right	1				1					1	1				
1 nurse vs P1	dizon ki li travay dan dan enn	left		1	1								1					
1 nurse vs P2	Dizon sa 10 dernie zane kan li	left		1	1								1					
1 nurse vs P2	30 zour dizon...	right											1	1				
1 nurse vs P2	Dizon 5-an de sela nou ti ankc	left		1	1								1					
1 nurse vs P2	Mo rapel dizon fek...	mid		1	1													
1 nurse vs P1	Bann 'footballer' zenes-la zot	mid		1	1													
1 nurse vs P1	'de foot' 16-an a dizon...Piff!	mid		1	1													
2 money-h P2	Dizon sa... dizon sa 'dans l'	left																1
2 money-h P1	Dizon nou dir li klerman	left																1
4 pey men P1	'Disons admettons' kan tc	left							1		1		1					
4 pey men P1	Kasiet sa to to to donn en ?								1		1							
4 pey men P1	'Disons quand on te dema	left							1		1		1		1	1		
6 langaz P1	enn langaz 'disons' ki ti 'cc	mid							1		1		1		1	1		
9 lekol P1	uh 'd'ingénierie' 'disons' g	mid												1	1	1		

Fig. 1. Extract of *dizon* analysis in excel.

2.3. Features

Fundamental to the Canonical approach is the identification of a set of features against which the variation of a given phenomenon is evaluated. The starting point for this process was the comprehensive array of possible functions of PMs offered by Bazzanella (2001, and subsequent work): her detailed taxonomic model was integrated with additional extracts from studies on similar markers in French and cognates in other Romance languages,¹⁰ and on close scrutiny of each use of the markers in our corpus. In considering these functions, we grouped together those that Bazzanella (2001:238) labels *meccanismi di modulazione* 'mechanisms of modulation'. These have to do with the expression of uncertainty and lack of precision, both in terms of the propositional content and of the choice of individual words (which may be lacking in precision, relevance, or pertinence), caution or social consideration. They were identified as expressions of 'mitigation', that is, a weakening of the speech act (Caffi, 2005:2), and loosely correspond to Lansari's (2020) problematic commitment. Similarly, the rest of the functions were also grouped according to their more general purpose: we adopted the macro features *expansion*, which involves building upon the previous utterance (either through paraphrasing, giving examples or providing additional information), *hesitation*, comprising of word searching and planning filler, (*self-*)*correction* and *phatic function* (an expression of social or emotive bonding with the interlocutor). A final feature, *literal meaning*, was also considered as a useful measure in assessing the level of grammaticalization of the PMs. The addition of larger categories was helpful at the analytical stage in that it favored a broader vision of the main functions performed by the PMs, and, in the case of *mitigation*, made the results directly comparable with the studies on *verbs of saying* PMs, Lansari's in particular.

The list of features that were identified as expressions of parameters of variation is presented in Table 1: for clarity, for each of the features recognized in the literature we have selected an intuitive label offered with a definition and a reference to the author(s) who adopt(s) them.

¹⁰ We consulted Crible and Pascual (2020) for French *je vais dire* and Spanish *digamos*, Fiorentini and Sansò (2017) for Italian *voglio dire*, Steuckhardt (2018) for French *disons*, *comme on dit* and *c'est à dire*, Delahaie (2015) for French *dis*, *dis donc* and *disons*, and Bazzanella (1990) for Italian *diciamo*. Lansari (2020), Steuckhardt (2018) and Delahaie (2015) analyze these PMs also in terms of belonging to the *verbs of saying* group.

Table 1

List of features.

Feature	Reference	Definition
Mitigation	Caffi (2005:2–3)	Making speech acts weaker.
Lack of precision	Bazzanella (2001:234) Prince et al. (1982)	The propositional content is not exact (cf. adaptors, that signal loose readings of a lexical expression, and rounders, which indicate imprecise numerical values).
Incompleteness/lack of relevance	Bazzanella (2001:240)	A possibly incomplete, inadequate or completely irrelevant utterance.
Insufficient evidence	Caffi (1999)	A shield that weakens the epistemic force of the utterance, because of insufficient evidence.
Saving face	Goffman (1955)	Maintaining own, and/or others' positive public image in social interaction, avoiding conflict.
Expansion	Authors' definition	Providing more information about an element.
Paraphrasing	Bazzanella (2001:248)	The relation between two given elements is maintained but formulated using different wording.
Example	Bazzanella (2001:248–;249)	One element is expanded with a real or hypothetical example.
Additional information	Authors' definition	One element is expanded with additional information/further details.
Hesitation	Butterworth (1975:84)	Delay in producing one's turn.
Planning filler	Bazzanella (2001:234)	Used to hold the floor while having difficulties in constructing the turn, or: finding the desired word.
Word searching	Bazzanella (2001:235)	The relation between two given elements is not maintained, and the preceding element is replaced by the same speaker.
(Self-)Correction	Bazzanella (2001:248)	Inclusion of the addressee, looking for shared ground, phatic.
Phatic/inclusion of hearer	Bazzanella (2001:236)	
Literal meaning		

2.4. Statistical analysis

Before turning to the individual PMs, a note on statistical analysis. The numerical results from scoring the data against the chosen features was fed into chi-square tests. Working with categorical data means that a chi-square test of independence can establish if, and to what extent, the presence or absence of a feature is correlated with a given marker. As an example, let's consider whether there is a correlation between the feature '(self-)correction' and the marker *dizon*. A contingency table (Table 2) compares the proportion of instances in which it occurs with *dizon* compared with other markers.

Table 2

Example of contingency table for chi-square analysis.

	(Self-) correction present	(Self-) correction absent
<i>Dizon</i> (n = 43)	6 (14%)	37 (86%)
Not <i>dizon</i> (n = 80)	2 (3%)	78 (97%)

We can see that the presence of (self-)correction is somewhat higher with *dizon* than the other markers, but it's still low and shows a similar proportion to the other markers. When we run a chi-square test, this confirms that the presence of correction is not significant (ns) for *dizon*. If a different feature was present in 86% of the *dizon* examples, but the other markers remained the same as for correction (3%), the chi-square test would come back as highly significant.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. *Dizon*

3.1.1. Overview

Dizon, the MC cognate of French *disons* 'let's say', has been adapted into standard MC orthography and is found in the *Diksoner Kreol Morisien* (the official Mauritian Creole Dictionary). In our corpus, *dizon* occurs 43 times, that is 0.6 instances per 1000 words.

Previous research has identified the following major functions of Metropolitan French *disons* (these are reported using the terminology in Table 1):

- Mitigation (Saunier, 2012)
- Expansion (Saunier, 2012; Steuckardt, 2018)
- Phatic (Saunier, 2012)
- Hesitation (Delahaie, 2015)
- Correction (Steuckardt, 2018)

Interestingly, a further mitigation subtype (lack of precision, more specifically a ‘rounder’) is listed as *on ne dit pas* ‘should not be said’ by the Académie Française. Considering the general prescriptive tendencies of l’Académie, for this usage to be acknowledged it must be relatively common in spoken French, suggesting an established trend:

- (1) *Cela s’est passé il y a, **disons**, dix ans.*
That happened, *let’s say*, 10 years ago.

As we will see below, the main functions of MC *dizon* closely match the usages of Metropolitan French *disons*, suggesting that this marker has been borrowed into MC already fully grammaticalized. Table 3 summarizes the results for *dizon*: the figures are to be understood as the frequency with which each feature is expressed with that particular function out of the overall usage, bearing in mind that, due to the multifunctionality of MPs, the overall sum exceeds 100.

Table 3
Feature percentages for *dizon*.

	<i>dizon</i> <i>n</i> = 43
Overall mitigation	23.26%
Lack of precision	20.93%
Incompleteness	0.00%
Insufficient evidence	0.00%
Saving face	2.33%
Overall expansion	65.12%
Paraphrasing	0.00%
Example	65.12%
Additional info	0.00%
Overall hesitation	9.30%
Word searching	9.30%
Planning filler	0.00%
(Self-)Correction	13.95%
Phatic	55.81%
Literal meaning	6.98%

3.1.2. Mitigation: lack of precision (21%)

Within mitigation, the main function of *dizon* is to express lack of precision of the propositional content. In Brinton (2008) and Mihatsch (2009) this function is known as ‘approximation’, a parallel usage deemed ‘incorrect’ by the Académie Française for French *disons* (Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française, 2022). In our data, this ‘lack of precision’ feature is prevalent with numbers (cf. ‘rounders’), an example of which is given in (2):

- (2) Conversation 1 - Should footballers earn more than nurses?

- P2 Li anfin mo konn dimounn mo konn
She, well, I know a person, I know
- P2 enn dimounn koumadir mo kone li’nn travay apepre pandan 12-z-an...
a person, how to say, I know she has worked for about 12 years
- P2 Korek? Dan tou seki kote medikal lopital... Tousala...
OK? In the medical side of a hospital... all that...
- P2 Ek mam-la inn tous enn lapey mo krwar
And this person was getting a salary of I think
- P2 Rs 6000 pandan 10-z-an apepre... Korek?
around 6000 rupees for 10 years... OK?
- P2 **Dizon** sa 10 dernie zane kan li ti pe dir mwa we li ti pe trase...
Let’s say these last 10 years, when she was telling me she was getting by...

At first P2 says he knows someone who has worked in the medical profession for about 12 years, then revises this to 10 years with the hedge *apepre* ‘approximately’, before introducing this timeframe a second time preceded by *dizon*.

3.1.3. Expansion: exemplification (65%)

The function for which *dizon* scores the highest is exemplification, which is also the only type of expansion correlated with it in our corpus. In (3) *dizon* introduces a hypothetical situation:

(3) Conversation 16 - Can money buy happiness?

- P2 Ale '**disons**' to'nn al zwe lotri-la
OK let's say you've gone to play the lottery
- P2 Dan lasemenn to'nn gagn '60 million' enn kout
during the week and you've won 60 million all of a sudden

By way of comparison, in Canadian French *disons* was found to be used most with actual (74%), rather than fictional examples (43%). This tendency to be used with actual examples is not reflected in our data: however, the hypothetical scenarios in our corpus are rather realistic and offer not just plausible but probable situations. Furthermore, Canadian French *disons* is in decline due to competition with the much more frequent *comme* in contexts of exemplification (Vincent, 1992:155).

3.1.4. (Self-)Correction (14%)

A minor usage of *dizon* is self-correction: in (4) P1 corrects his own *mazorite* 'majority' with *enn bon parti* 'a good number'.

(4) Conversation 16 - Are in-person friends better than online ones?

- P1 Anfet si koumadir relasion-la li koumanse 'online' apre
In fact, if, like, the relationship started online then
- P1 develop fas a fas mo pa panse li enn zafer mal
develops face-to-face, I don't think it's a bad thing
- P1 Mo'nn konn
I've got to know
- P1 mazorite anfin pa mazorite **dizon**
the majority, well not the majority let's say
- P1 enn bon parti de mo bann
a good number of my
- P1 konesans an se moman mo'nn konn zot
acquaintances at the moment I got to know them
- P1 par 'online' avan
online first

3.1.5. Phatic (56%)

The use of *dizon* in its inclusive function is frequent: by drawing on relevant shared knowledge, *dizon* increases the social closeness between speaker and hearer. Here, P2 refers to their shared memory of being at university together.

(5) Conversation 1 - Should footballers earn more than nurses?

- P1 Me kan nou get Moris kan to get 'coût de la vie d'Maurice'...
But when we look at Mauritius, when you look at the cost of living in Mauritius
- P1 Sa dernie 10-z-an-la...
Those last 10 years
- P2 Huh!
Huh!
- P1 Pff! Mem pa dernie 10-z-an, nou dir sa dernie 5-an-la!
Pff! Not even the last 10 years, we're saying the last 5 years!
- P2 Dernie 5-an-la mem 'man'... Dernie 5-an...
Even the last 5 years man... the last 5 years...
- P2 Mwa mo pa kone si to rapel ankor sa dernie 5-an-la li'nn...
I don't know if you still remember those last 5 years, it's...
- P2 **Dizon** 5-an de sela nou ti ankor liniversite.
Let's say 5 years ago, we were still at university.

Phatic function is also significant for French *disons*. Discussing Metropolitan French, Saunier (2012:31–32) comments on the contribution that the first-person plural affix *-ons* makes, *dis* ‘you.sg say’ and *dites* ‘you.pl say’ being very far from producing the same effect, i.e., the emphasis on the ‘dilation’ of the speaker, rather than on its individuality.¹¹ This results in the speaker distancing themselves from their utterance, as well as, with the inclusion of the hearer, sharing responsibility for it. Although MC verbs are not inflected for tense, person, or number, *dizon* is used as a phatic marker, suggesting that it has been borrowed in its totality, of form as well as of functions, that is, as a formulaic, unanalyzable PM rather than as a compositional element. This is consistent with the general modalities of borrowing (cf. Heine et al., 2021:212, ‘Borrowing means that a [PM] is taken as a form-meaning unit from one language and inserted in another language’).

3.1.6. Conclusion for *dizon*

From the range and proportion of features expressed by *dizon*, we conclude that it closely follows the way in which it is used in Metropolitan French. There are grounds to analyze *dizon* as a recent, direct borrowing from French which has not (yet) become nativized: it is absent from all historical MC texts¹² (dating from the 1700s) and modern written texts too, suggesting a borrowing possibly dating to the last few decades. It is likely a case of ‘apparent’ grammaticalization (Bruyn, 1996, 2009), as the grammaticalization process that turned it into a PM did not take place in MC itself, but in French: it was then borrowed directly into MC as a fully formed PM. A tendency for the borrowed PM to come from the more dominant or ‘prestigious’ language in a situation of language contact (cf. Grant, 2012) may suggest that the adoption of *dizon* in MC reflects the speakers’ social aspirations.

Although *dizon* can be used to express mitigation, and it does so in 23% of its occurrences, exemplification and phatic are its most canonical usages.

3.2. Koumadir

3.2.1. Overview

In MC, *kouma* and other variants dating from the 1700s until today (*comment*, *coment*, *coument*, *coman*, *côment*, *côma*, *coma*, *kuma*) appear to be derived from French *comment* ‘how’. However, *kouma* can also function as a marker of similarity, more like French *comme* ‘like’, and has done so since at least 1818.¹³ These two functions have therefore coexisted in *kouma* possibly from the very early stages of the language, and certainly from the beginning of written attestations. Although *comment dire* ‘how to say’ exists in Metropolitan French, it seems to be used only with its literal meaning and carries no pragmatic function. However, it is certainly possible that *comment dire* in 1700 Mauritian French, as well as its equivalent in the mother tongues of the enslaved, could have influenced the development of MC *koumadir*: scant evidence from this period makes it difficult to test such a hypothesis.

Already in 1831, we see MC’s usage surpassing literal meaning with a paraphrasing function:

(6) 1831

Parlez zautres pécès **comment dire** à confesse

‘Speak your sins, **that’s to say**, confess’

By the end of the 1800s we see *comment dire* used in a different structural position. Instead of linking two propositions which are paraphrased/reformulated, *comment dire* appears in the middle of a proposition, directly after a verb, between the verb and its object:

(7) 1888

Létemps là loulou dans niaze senti coment dire so lécorps

The time then wolf in clouds felt PM POSS body

napas bien

NEG good

‘When the wolf in the clouds felt, how to say, his body wasn’t well’

This usage seems very likely to be a ‘filler’, a word used when hesitating about what to say next and wanting to maintain one’s turn, which is indicative of a later stage of grammaticalization (Heine, 2013:1240).

In comparison to *dizon*, *koumadir* is ten times more frequent in our corpus (occurring 6 times in 1000 words). Here we present a comparable number of instances. Table 4 gives an overview of the results for *koumadir*.

¹¹ According to Benveniste (1966:235, quoted in Saunier, 2012), the first-person plural ending expresses an amplified or diffused person, where the boundaries of the individual are fuzzier.

¹² Old texts can be found at: <http://concordancemmc.free.fr>.

¹³ In a story called ‘The Hunter’ (1818) in MC with notes and a translation in French, we find the sentence *mo marce comment ici comment ça* ‘I walk here and there’ literally ‘like this like that’ (cf. French *comme ça* and a footnote from the same story translates MC *comment* as French *comme*).

Table 4
Feature percentages for *koumadir*.

	<i>koumadir</i> n = 41
Overall mitigation	19.52%
Lack of precision	4.88%
Incompleteness	2.44%
Insufficient evidence	0.00%
Saving face	12.20%
Overall expansion	51.22%
Paraphrasing	19.51%
Example	24.39%
Additional info	7.32%
Overall hesitation	56.10%
Word searching	12.20%
Planning filler	43.90%
(Self-)Correction	4.88%
Phatic	0.00%
Literal meaning	4.88%

3.2.2. Mitigation (20%)

Koumadir is used to express mitigation in a similar proportion to *dizon* (approximately 20% and 23% respectively), but unlike *dizon*, which is mainly used for lack of precision (21%), *koumadir* exhibits a much wider range of functions. In addition to lack of precision (5%), we also see lack of completeness (2%), and saving face (12%).

Starting with lack of precision, we return to the discussion of whether footballers should be paid more than nurses. Crucially, in Mauritius, footballers are paid a relatively small salary which is comparable to that of a nurse, so the colossal difference we see in a European context does not apply.

After spending some time discussing how difficult it is to be a footballer in Mauritius, P2 comes to consider the merits of a nurse, and he uses *koumadir* as a disclaimer that what follows are not his final thoughts. P2 is working through them as he speaks, witness the immediately preceding context (i.e., *mo pa kone* 'I don't know'), indicating that the use of *koumadir* is related to this processing in action:

(8) Conversation 1 - Should footballers earn more than nurses?

P2 Me apre

But then

P2 mo pa kone enn parti mwa **koumadir** dir mwa sa kote humain-la

I don't know, a part of me, how to say, is saying about the human side (of)

P2 enn ners.

a nurse.

P1 Li ed enn zenn madam 'accoucher'

She helps a young woman to give birth

P2 We! Li sov lavi.

Yes! She saves lives.

A further type of mitigation at the social level is saving face (12%). In (9), extracted from the same conversation as above, P2 doesn't want to be seen as not liking sport or football, atypical for a man, after suggesting that footballers are not as deserving as nurses: the use of *koumadir* mitigates what follows. He then expands on this, offering further thoughts on how these days we're appreciating the importance of healthcare workers more than before.

(9) Conversation 1 - Should footballers earn more than nurses?

P2 Pa dir ki mo pa... Mo pa kontan spor mo pa kontan 'football' okontrer me...

Don't tell me that I don't... I don't like sport, I don't like football. On the contrary, but...

P2 **Koumadir** lavi zordi zour

How to say, life these days

P2 sa pe montre enn sartin valer ki nou bizin

it is showing a certain value that we need

P2 dimounn la pou lasante.

people for health.

3.2.3. Expansion (51%)

A significant proportion of *koumadir* is used for expansion. In 51% of its occurrences, *koumadir* introduces examples that further explain/clarify what has just been asserted. According to our classification, expansion can be further differentiated in additional information, paraphrasing and exemplification. Exemplification counts for 24% of the instances of expansion, compared to the 65% of *dizon*. In (10), two sisters are discussing whether we should all speak the same language, and the conversation moves towards different types of MC. *Koumadir* precedes an example of a stereotype about a certain spoken variety.

(10) Conversation 6 - Should we all speak the same language?

- P1 Apre ena bann stereotip **koumadir** bann dimounn ki
 *Well there are the stereotypes, **how to say**, people who*
- P1 res inpe lor lakot zot ena enn lot laksan
 live more on the coast, they have a different accent
- P1 bann dimounn ki
 the people who
- P2 Inpe pli nazal.
 [It's] a bit more nasal
- P1 We exakman, donk...
 Yes exactly, so...

In (11), from a mixed French-MC conversation, *koumadir* is used with a paraphrasing function (which it had in nearly 20% of the examples). Discussing whether money can buy happiness, P2 uses *koumadir* to reformulate the preceding French phrase *dans la mesure du possible* 'in as far as possible' using MC.

(11) Conversation 2 - Can money buy happiness?

- P2 Li pa enn zafer 'sinequanone' me mo le dir
 It's not an absolute condition, but I mean
- P1 'Absolu'
 Absolutely
- P2 'Dans la mesure du possible'
 In as far as possible
- P2 **Koumadir** si to pe kapav kontrol sertin eleman dan to lavi
 ***How to say**, if you're able to control certain elements in your life*
- P2 A be li ti a swetab
 Well, it would be desirable

3.2.4. Hesitation (56%)

The most typical usage of *koumadir* is as a marker of hesitation, that is, *koumadir* is a filler, both a planning filler (44%) and a word searching filler (12%).

In the following conversation, two brothers are discussing their exercise habits and body goals and *koumadir* is used extensively throughout. In (12), *koumadir* is used once by P1 and twice by P2 with different functions. P1 says he runs more quickly, but then realizes he doesn't mean this exactly, so uses *koumadir* as a planning filler while he works out what he wants to say. His brother (P2) is following his train of thought and initiates a repair section, summarizing his own understanding of what the brother means by paraphrasing this 'running for longer' as 'gaining endurance'.

(12) Conversation 20 - What are your body goals?

- P1 mo ti pe manz lamwatie lasiet, aster mo manz enn lasiet net.
 I used to eat half a plate, now I eat a full plate
- P1 Mo lan- mo galoup mo mars pli vit.
 I um- I run I walk quicker
- P1 Mo galoup pli boukou
 I run much more
- P1 pa mo galoup pli vit me **koumadir** mo gagn
 *Not I run quicker but **how to say** I get*
- P1 mo galoup pandan pli boukou letan.
 I run for a longer time
- P2 **Koumadir** inn gagn plis landirans
 ***How to say** you've gained more endurance*

When *dizon* was used with hesitation, it only appeared with a 'word searching' function, so 'planning filler' seems to be more specialized to *koumadir*.

3.2.5. Conclusions for *koumadir*

Koumadir is the most frequently occurring PM, and its functions are varied and much broader than those expressed by *dizon*: we see some expression of mitigation (20%), but its most typical usages are hesitation and expansion.

The frequency with which *koumadir* occurs and the range of functions it has are reminiscent of English 'like', especially in its filler usage. It is accepted that mature PMs commonly develop into a 'filler' (Heine, 2013:1240), and this function is clear with *koumadir*. The fact that the filler function is significantly more prevalent with *koumadir* than *dizon* suggests that *koumadir* is more firmly established than *dizon* and is further along its grammaticalization path. Furthermore, old texts from the 1800s show *koumadir* already used with several different mitigating and expansion functions, and since there does not seem to be a clear equivalent PM in French, there are grounds to claim that this is a native MC marker that has followed its own grammaticalization path independently.

3.3. *Savedir*

Savedir comes from the French *ça veut dire*, literally 'that wants to say', i.e., 'that means'. It occurs at a similar rate to *dizon* (0.5 instances per 1000 words); however, since in most of its uses it has a literal meaning, it is not clear that it is a full PM (yet). There are some grounds to consider it as an *emerging* marker, in that our corpus shows examples of it acting at both propositional/content and subjective levels.

As far as we know, French *ça veut dire* is not usually considered a PM, and Chady (2021) does not include *savedir* in the range of Mauritian markers that she examines. However, the related, personal French form *je veux dire* 'I mean to say' is classified as a 'punctor' (loosely corresponding to the PM category) by Vincent and Sankoff (1992).

Unlike the other two markers, *savedir* does not seem to be used in mitigation contexts at all, and in a very small number of examples it is used as a filler.

3.3.1. Expansion (44%)

One of the most prominent functions of *savedir* is expansion, more specifically, paraphrasing (26%). In (13), P1 starts his utterance with *savedir* and paraphrases what P2 has just said, namely that Rs 8000 is one month's pay.

(13) Conversation 1 - Can money buy happiness?

- P2 enn swar li li bizin koumadir so Rs 8000 pou 31 zour.
 one evening she needs, how to say, her 8000 rupees for 31 days
- P1 **Savedir** so enn mwa lapey
 ***That means** one month's pay for her*

The second most prominent type of expansion that *savedir* expresses is offering additional information (15%). Both of these show clear overlap with its literal meaning.

3.3.2. Literal meaning (79%)

The most frequent use of *savedir* is with its literal meaning, which it exhibits to a much greater extent than the other two markers. Part of this meaning also seems to go a step further, implying a logical consequence following a sequence of arguments. In the following extract, two food critics are discussing whether Mauritian cuisine will be lost in the future due to outside influences.

(14) Conversation 3 - Will Mauritian cuisine be lost due to foreign influences?

- P2 souvan se 'la cuisine mauricienne' donk rar to trouv enn Morisien
 often it's Mauritian cuisine, it's rare that you see a Mauritian
 ki ki ouver enn restoran me ki ki se lakwizinn 'western' koumadir
 who who opens a restaurant which is 'western' cuisine, how to say,
 ouswa lakwizinn ki sorti 'de l'Europe'...
 or cuisines that come from Europe
- P1 'Yeah'...
 Yeah
- P2 Souvan li lakwizinn Morisienn, **savedir**, ena ena enn parti ki pa
 *Often it's Mauritian cuisine, **therefore**, there is a part which isn't*
 perdi ofet. Ena enn parti ki reste to konpran se se se se dan
 lost in fact. There is a part that remains, you see, it's it's it's it's in
 bann ka se dan bann ka presi...
 those cases, it's in exactly those cases

Rather than paraphrasing what A means or giving additional information, here *savedir* is used to draw a logical conclusion (B), that part of Mauritian cuisine isn't lost because of (A), most Mauritian restaurant owners make Mauritian food. Although we classify this under 'literal meaning', it is clear that its function is more than establishing the equation of two propositions, and it could be considered a further step towards grammaticalization and the expression of subjectivity.

3.3.3. Development of *savedir* in MC

A glance at the historical texts does not reveal any instances of *savedir*, suggesting that, like *dizon*, it is a more recent introduction. There are, however, signs that the marker has developed further: although *savedir* is the most common form, MC also allows *vedir*, without an overt subject.

(15) Conversation 13 - Is the Mauritian education system appropriate?

- P2 kan mo dir ti dimounn, **vedir** bann ti zanfan
 'when I say little person, (I) mean the little children'

(16) Conversation 13 - Is the Mauritian education system appropriate?

- P2 To enn tifi to enn ti garson ki **savedir** enn enn enn
*You're a little girl, a little boy. What **does that mean** a a a*
- P2 tifi. **Pa vedir** met li dan moul dir li to bizin met zis
*little girl. (That does/I do)**n't mean** put her in a mould, tell her you just have to wear*
- P2 blouz zip pa met mini pa met isi pa met laba non be
zipped blouses, don't wear miniskirts, don't wear this or that. No, well
- P2 fer li konpran tou seki
make her understand everything
- P2 vinn avek.
that goes along with it.
- P2 Kouma to lekor fonksione
How your body works
- P1 We we we we we.
Yes yes yes yes yes.

The form (*pa*) *vedir*, from which the pronominal subject *sa* has been removed, is of particular interest, since it could either be interpreted as 'that (doesn't) mean(s)' or 'I (don't) mean' (cf. French *je veux dire*). The absence of the overt subject creates the possibility for the expansion of its meaning: that is, it is a potential bridging context, i.e., a context in which both the old and the new meaning are possible (cf. Evans and Wilkins, 2000; Heine, 2002). This offers the speaker the opportunity to express their subjective interpretation of something (cf. English *I mean*): *savedir* goes from the objective 'that doesn't mean' to the subjective 'I don't mean'. Whilst *savedir* 'that means' is factual, what follows *pa vedir* in (16) is a personal view about what the speaker believes to be an important approach for girls in education.

Furthermore, the form used here, *pa vedir*, shows a high degree of integration into MC, both because subject omission is not possible in French and because the French negative *pas* would be placed between *veut* and the main verb *dire* in spoken French: *ça (ne) veut pas dire*.

However, not all instances show such a consistent degree of integration. There are two examples of negation of *savedir* which include a subject: the first one, *sa pa vedir*, conforms to MC word order (negation-verb); the second one, *sa ve pa dir*, is more analogous to (spoken) French word order (modal-negation-verb), as in *ça veut pas dire*. This variation points to *savedir* still being rather fluid as an MC form, the extent of its integration possibly varying from speaker to speaker, and their level of competence in French. What we do see, however, is that *savedir* is not treated as a chunk, since MC still requires *sa* 'it/that' to be separated from the main verb *vedir* 'mean' when it is negated. The fact that speakers are able to analyze *savedir* in terms of its components, suggests that, as a linguistic unit, it scores rather low on the cohesion parameter (cf. Lehmann, 2015:130–132), indicating a low level of grammaticalization, confirmed by its high frequency in its literal meaning. *Savedir* cannot yet be considered a fully-fledged PM but is on its way to becoming one.

3.3.4. Conclusions for *savedir*

Unlike *dizon* and *koumadir*, *savedir* is primarily used in its literal meaning to express an equivalence between two elements or a logical conclusion, and it can function as an expansion marker. Additionally, it seems to be developing a further use: without an overt subject (i.e., *vedir*) it can express a subjective view, suggesting that this form of the phrase may be developing into a PM, seemingly similar to English 'I mean'. Therefore, although the *form* is clearly a borrowing from French, *savedir* is developing autonomously and following a path of grammaticalization that may result in its acquiring PM status. Table 5 offers a summary of the results for *savedir*.

Table 5
 Feature percentages for *savedir*.

	<i>savedir</i> n = 39
Overall mitigation	0.00%
Lack of precision	0.00%
Incompleteness	0.00%
Insufficient evidence	0.00%

(continued on next page)

Table 5 (continued)

	<i>savedir</i> n = 39
Saving face	0.00%
Overall expansion	43.58%
Paraphrasing	25.64%
Example	2.56%
Additional info	15.38%
Overall hesitation	2.56%
Word searching	2.56%
Planning filler	0.00%
(Self-)Correction	0.00%
Phatic	0.00%
Literal meaning	79.49%

3.4. Overview of the quantitative findings

Let us return to the overall results for the three markers, reproduced side by side in Table 6.

Table 6

Comparative overview of feature percentages for all markers.

	<i>dizon</i> n = 43	<i>koumadir</i> n = 41	<i>savedir</i> n = 39
Overall mitigation	23.26%	19.52%	0.00%
Lack of precision	20.93%	4.88%	0.00%
Incompleteness	0.00%	2.44%	0.00%
Insufficient evidence	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Saving face	2.33%	12.20%	0.00%
Overall expansion	65.12%	51.22%	43.58%
Paraphrasing	0.00%	19.51%	25.64%
Example	65.12%	24.39%	2.56%
Additional info	0.00%	7.32%	15.38%
Overall hesitation	9.30%	56.10%	2.56%
Word searching	9.30%	12.20%	2.56%
Planning filler	0.00%	43.90%	0.00%
(Self-)Correction	13.95%	4.88%	0.00%
Phatic	55.81%	0.00%	0.00%
Literal meaning	6.98%	4.88%	79.49%

Starting with the three macro features of mitigation, expansion and hesitation, *dizon* and *koumadir* express similar levels of mitigation overall, yet *koumadir*'s uses are spread more thinly; *savedir* doesn't convey mitigation at all. Within mitigation, the feature 'insufficient evidence' turns out not to be relevant for any of the three markers. *Dizon* and *savedir* both show a high level of expansion, whilst *koumadir*'s is lower, and again spread more thinly. Lastly, *koumadir* expresses more hesitation in comparison to *dizon* and *savedir*.

Turning to mitigation, out of the three markers *dizon* expresses the highest degree at 23%, but mitigation is not its most canonical feature; *savedir* doesn't express any.

Although there is certainly a degree of overlap in the functions that these markers can perform, on the basis of the features analyzed here, there are no grounds to claim that there is a single feature or even a small set of features that unite them all: they each exhibit different tendencies regarding the distribution of features across their usages.

The outcome of chi-square tests that were run on the frequency results, reported in Table 7, gives a very clear sense of whether the association of a marker with the expression of a feature is statistically significant.¹⁴

¹⁴ ns = not significant, the number of stars shows the level of significance (*** is more significant than *) and the (+) and (–) show whether the presence (+) or absence (–) of the feature is significant.

Table 7

Summary of chi-square results for all markers.

	<i>dizon</i>	<i>koumadir</i>	<i>savedir</i>
Overall mitigation	ns	ns	ns
Lack of precision	ns	ns	ns
Incompleteness	ns	ns	ns
Insufficient evidence	ns	ns	ns
Saving face	ns	ns	ns
Overall expansion	ns	ns	ns
Paraphrasing	ns	ns	ns
Example	*** (+)	ns	*** (–)
Additional info	ns	ns	ns
Overall hesitation	ns	*** (+)	ns
Word searching	ns	ns	ns
Planning filler	ns	*** (+)	ns
(Self-)Correction	ns	ns	ns
Phatic	*** (+)	* (–)	* (–)
Literal meaning	* (–)	** (–)	*** (+)

It is immediately apparent that there is no overlap between the significant features of any marker and crucially, none of the mitigation features are significant for any of the markers. Expansion is not significant for any of the markers overall, but within this category the feature ‘example’ is highly significant for *dizon*, and its absence is highly significant for *savedir* (that is, *savedir*’s low affinity for this feature is significant). The only marker which is highly significant in hesitation contexts is *koumadir*, in particular as a ‘planning filler’. ‘(Self-)correction’ is not significant for any of the markers. ‘Phatic’ and ‘literal meaning’ show clear tendencies towards one marker, almost to the exclusion of the other two. ‘Phatic’ is clearly associated with *dizon* and in fact its absence is significant for *koumadir* and *savedir*, whilst ‘literal meaning’ is the exclusive domain of *savedir*.

Savedir/vedir contributes a further consideration: here the verb *dir* has formed a complex unit by combining with a form of the French verb *vouloir* ‘want’¹⁵ and yielding a different meaning, ‘mean’. Perhaps, then, such an inclusion in the group of *verbs of saying* is illicit, given that here we have a compositional meaning from which *dir* cannot be extracted as an independent semantic unit.

This, added to the uncertainty of the PM status of *savedir*, highlights the risk of potentially invalidating our results due to its inclusion in the calculations: the tests were therefore rerun just on *dizon* and *koumadir*, with no significant differences for the evaluation of mitigation nor the overall conclusions drawn from the data.¹⁶

There is therefore statistical confirmation of the lack of any shared feature among the markers, forcing us to conclude that *verbs of saying* PMs in MC do not display any group characteristics.

4. Conclusions

This paper set out with three interrelated goals. The first one, to offer a detailed description of the functions of three MC PMs, *dizon*, *koumadir* and *savedir*, all containing a form of the verb *dir* ‘to say’. The second, to reflect on the origins of their synchronic properties, with a view to testing the idea that *verbs of saying* PMs share a mitigatory function. Thirdly, to explore how their distinct evolutionary paths have affected the trajectory of their grammaticalization processes.

As well as providing a wealth of newly collected, semi-spontaneous spoken data, this article has presented a preliminary investigation in an area that to date remains mostly unexplored in MC. We presented an overview of the most canonical features of these three PMs, illustrating their functions with examples from rich dialogic conversations. We found that *dizon* is primarily used for exemplification with a phatic function, *koumadir* shows a broader range of functions, with over half of the examples showing expansion and hesitation, and *savedir* is predominantly used with literal meaning, although it is developing a subjective function when it occurs without a subject.

Regarding the hypothesis that PMs based on verbs of saying would share certain features, our results showed that neither mitigation, nor any of the other features investigated, were common across the markers. This suggests that their source verb *dir* has not played a determinant role in their development, each having followed its own developmental path leading to its unique set of properties. There is ample evidence that confirms the cross-linguistic validity of general trends and patterns established in grammaticalization studies, especially with respect to the development of meaning and function. It stands to reason that such robust generalizations should, at least to a degree, also hold for the development of PMs; however, the evidence afforded by both synchrony and diachrony is complex and suggests particularly frequent non-linear trajectories. For

¹⁵ Note that *ve* from French *veut* ‘want’ does not exist in MC on its own and must be combined with *dir* to form *vedir* ‘to mean’. The verb ‘to want’ has an independent form in MC: *oule*, which can be used with *sa* ‘it’ and *dir* ‘to say’ *sa oule dir* ‘that means’ with a literal meaning, too.

¹⁶ We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this. Mitigation remained ‘ns’ and there were some minor changes in significance levels; literal meaning was no longer significant, but the absence of hesitation and planning filler became significant for *dizon*.

this reason, only considering the etymology of one element in the grammaticalizing expression as the source of its essential functions is too reductive.

Finally, it seems that the time of contact and different stages of grammaticalization each PM had when it entered Creole can better explain their different developments. It is clear that the verb *dir*, which entered MC in the 18th century to combine with *comment/comme* to create *koumadir* and develop into a uniquely MC PM, is quite different from the *dir* in *dizon* and *savedir*, markers that appeared in MC at a much later stage: *dir*'s semantic bleaching in *koumadir* is significantly further advanced than in *dizon*, and even more so than in *savedir*, to the extent that *koumadir* can also function as a filler.

There are further factors that need to be considered in the quest to identify general tendencies and patterns in the development of functions in PMs: grammaticalization pathways do not always follow the same trajectory (cf. Rosemeyer and Grossman, 2021); high frequency of usage, as well as language contact, to which PMs seem to be especially open (Andersen, 2014:19), all play a significant role in speed, modality and direction of language change, and grammaticalization in particular. We have seen that MC *dizon* appears as a clear instance of borrowing of a ready-made, already grammaticalized marker in the totality of its functions and form, closely resembling Bruyn's (1996, 2009) apparent grammaticalization. *Koumadir* has developed independently from French, and *savedir*, although sharing its literal meaning with French *ça veut dire*, is more integrated into MC than *dizon* and is developing in a unique direction.

There are many driving forces that contribute to the developmental trajectory of grammaticalizing elements: the picture that results from this preliminary investigation into MC PMs suggests a great degree of variation, in terms of the many synchronic features that these markers express, but also in the way the markers themselves originated and evolved. The linearity of connection between the original source and the resulting element that is repeatedly seen in many instances of semantic change is affected, especially in the case of PMs, by other factors, resulting in complex pictures and, in the specific case of borrowing from another language, in discontinuous paths of grammaticalization.

Future studies, especially on the role played by grammaticalization in the ensuing development of borrowed PMs, promise to offer fruitful insights into what patterns may be possible and emerge from situations of language contact.

Credit roles

Sandra Paoli: Conceptualization; Formal analysis; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Supervision; Roles/Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing.

Hannah Davidson: Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Roles/Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing.

Ethical approval

The project was granted Ethical Approval (Ref: R79790/RE001) by CUREC. The conversations (20 in total) were recorded online between March and May 2022, each lasting between 15 and 30 min. Written consent was obtained from each participant, who also received a reward equal to £5.

Referee suggestion

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

We have included the R scripts as an appendix.

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Appendix I

It is good practice to make R scripts available when code is used to be transparent about how the chi-square results have been calculated. It is included here.

R script for chi-square analysis

```
library(data.table)
library(tidyverse)

markers = fread(file = "marker_features_chi-sq2.csv")
view(markers)
#markers = markers[markers$marker != ""]
# convert all empty cells to 0, any cell with ANY data will become 1
apply(markers[, 6:21], 1, function(x){
  newdata = as.numeric(!is.na(x))
}) -> new_markers
new_markers = as.data.frame(t(new_markers))
names(new_markers) = names(markers)[6:21]
markers[, 6:21] <- new_markers
names(markers)
unique(markers$marker)

calculate_chisq = function(df, marker, feature){
  df$markerornot = (df$marker==marker)
  conttable = table(df$markerornot,df[[feature]])
  print(paste("-----", marker, feature))
  print(conttable)
  dft = as.data.frame.matrix(conttable)
  true0 = dft[2, 1]
  true1 = dft[2, 2]
  false0 = dft[1, 1]
  false1 = dft[1, 2]
  print(true1)
  if (!is.null(true0) & !is.null(true1)) {
    if (true0/(true0 + false0) > true1/(true1 + false1)) {
      direction = "0"
    } else {
      direction = "1"
    }
  } else {
    direction = "one column missing!"
  }
  res = chisq.test(conttable)
  p1 = 0.05 / 42
  p2 = 0.01 / 42
  p3 = 0.001 / 42
```

```

if (res$p.value < p3) {
  stars = "****"
} else if (res$p.value < p2) {
  stars = "***"
} else if (res$p.value < p1) {
  stars = "**"
} else {
  stars = "ns"
}
print(res)
return(data.table( marker = marker, direction = direction,
  chisq = res$statistic, pval = res$p.value, corrected_pval =
p.adjust(res$p.value, method = "BH", 42),
  is.sig = stars, corrected_siglevel = p1, sep = "-"))
}
features=names(markers)[6:21]
dizon = sapply(X = features, FUN = function(x){calculate_chisq(df=markers,marker =
"dizon", feature = x)})
koumadir = sapply(X = features, FUN =
function(x){calculate_chisq(df=markers,marker = "koumadir", feature = x)})
savedir = sapply(X = features, FUN = function(x){calculate_chisq(df=markers,marker
= "savedir", feature = x)})
#on_va_dire = sapply(X = features, FUN =
function(x){calculate_chisq(df=markers,marker = "on_va_dire", feature = x)})
datasum = rbind(dizon, koumadir, savedir)
write.csv(datasum, "chisq_discourse-marker-table2.csv")

```

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