

## Completive markers in Caribbean creoles. Handout Winford

### 1. Introduction

The use of completive markers has been documented for a wide variety of creoles of different lexical affiliation throughout the world.

In all cases, these markers derive from a verb meaning “finish”, for example, *done* in Caribbean English creoles (CECs); *kaba* (< Port *acabar* “finish”) in the Surinamese creoles, Papiamentu, etc.; and *fin(i)* (< Fr *finir*) in French-lexicon creoles.

- (1) SN a. Te mi mama komoto a gron kon, dan a nyan kaba. (34A: 5)  
when my mother come LOC ground come, then the food finish  
'By the time my mother came back from the garden, the food was finished'

It is generally accepted that the aspectual use of the verbs meaning “finish” emerged via processes of contact-induced grammaticalization in many cases, but in others primarily due to internal processes

Grammaticalization of *done* (Bickerton 1975)

*terminative 'finish' > 'completive' > temporal priority 'already'*.

Grammaticalization of *fin(i)* (Detgers 2000)

Terminative > resultative > ‘completely’

- (2) Seychelles Fr Cr Anu ale, mô dalô, u n gâje  
IMP:1PL go my friend, you RESULT gain  
“Come on, my friend, you have enough now.” (Michaelis S, 1993:73)
- (3) Mauritius Mon Dié, moi fini bête  
“My God, I’m completely stupid”

In Jamaican Creole, completive marker *done* occurs in both preverbal and post-VP position. It can yield two different interpretations, a [+anterior] sense a [+completion] sense. (Durrleman 2000, p. 215).

With post-VP *done*, only the “finished” or [+completion] meaning is possible (ibid.)

- (4) Im nyam i’ done  
S/he eat it done  
a. ‘\*S/he already ate it’  
b. ‘She finished eating it (up)’

When *done* occurs preverbally with dynamic verbs, it can yield both interpretations, as shown in the following example (Durrleman 2000, p. 215).

- (5) Im done nyam i  
S/he done eat it  
a. ‘S/he already ate it’

b. 'S/he finished eating it'

Furthermore, only *done* in its [+anterior] sense can be used with stative verbs like *nuo* 'know' (p 217).

- (6) Im done nuo seh mi like im  
a. 'S/he already knows that I like her/him'  
b. '\*S/he finished knowing that I like her/him'

According to Durrleman (p. 218), JC *aredi* "already" is the adverb corresponding to *done*[anterior], and following Cinque (1999: 94), each has as "its core meaning [... ] one of temporal priority [... ], in fact, one of precedence with respect to a reference time.

The development of completive markers like JC *done* into adverbials with the sense of "already" represents a further stage in the grammaticalization process described by Detges.

As he points out, another inference that is often triggered by use of Completive markers in their use to express a resultant state is the sense that the event is ALREADY finished (Detges 2000, p. 141)

- (7) Louisiana Me li te fini muri (Neumann 1985:235)  
But 3sg PAST COMPL die  
'But he was already dead'

Detges (p. 140) suggests that "this inference is regularly brought about in situations where speakers react to some counter-expectation on the hearer's side.

This path of grammaticalization is the one that seems to have been followed in most creoles, including Sranan Tongo and Trinidadian Creole (TC), which are the focus of the present paper.

#### Kaba in Sranan and done in TC.

Sranan employs the Completive marker *kaba*, which generally occurs in sentence (or VP-) final position, though it can also occur immediately after a verb as well as after temporal expressions.

- (8) Dus mi ben go a wan tu suma kaba.  
so I PAST go LOC one two person already  
'So I'd already gone to one or two people.

On the other hand, main verbal *kaba* can take both verbs and NP objects as its complement.

- (9) Dus .. a man ben kaba rij, a man ben kaba rij *helemaal*  
so..the man PAST finish ride, the man PAST finish ride completely  
'So.. the man had finished driving, he had finished driving completely.

Interestingly, only post-VP *kaba* in Sranan has undergone change into an adverbial equivalent to “already”, while pre-verbal *kaba* remains a verb meaning “finish”.

In addition, post-verbal *kaba* is compatible with both stative and dynamic predicates, while preverbal *kaba* cannot occur with statives.

This is the mirror image of how preverbal [+anterior] *done* and post-VP [+completive] *done* are used in Jamaican Creole.

In Trinidadian Creole, both the verb *done* “finish” and the completive marker *done* occur in preverbal position.

This means that *done* is sometimes ambiguous between a main verb ‘finish’ and a completive aspect marker.

- (10) John done eat he food.  
‘John has finished eating/ already eaten his food.’

In cases involving negation, *done* is limited to main verbal use.

- (11) I eh done eat yet.  
"I haven't finished eating yet"

In other cases, the aspectual meaning prevails.

- (12) a. They done buy a house (already).  
b. She done find the ring wha' she did lose (already).

In both creoles, the completive marker is compatible with a range of predicates of all types, not just stative and dynamic verbs, but also progressives, and even copula-type constructions with nominal, adjectival and locative predicates.

- (13) TC a. She done a big woman, she know wha' she doin'.  
"She's already a mature woman, she knows what she's doing"  
b. He done rich, but he still want more money.  
"He's already rich, but he still wants more money"  
c. We done have two house and a car.  
"We already have two houses and a car"  
d. The baby done sleeping, doh wake she up.  
"The baby's already sleeping, don't wake her up"

- (14) SN a. Ma yu sabi fa den suma fu Flora de kba.  
but you know how the-pl person of Flora COP already.  
'But you know what Flora people are like already.  
b. Te wan mama abi pikin kba, a pikin musu nyan. (49A: 9)  
when one mother have child already, the child must eat

'When a mother has children already, the children must eat.'

- c. Oh ma yu musu du wan sport yere want yu si fa yu fini fini kba (16A: 16)  
oh but you must do one sport hear because you see how you fine fine already  
'Oh, but you must practice a sport right, because you see how you're skinny  
already.'

### **The status of *done* and *kaba***

*Done* and *kaba* have both been described variously as markers of “completive” (Winford 1993, 2000), “terminative” (Mufwene 1984:209) “resultative perfect” (Stolz 1987) or a subtype of PERFECT (Winford 2000).

Most scholars seem to agree that the meaning conveyed by the markers is similar to that of English *already*.

### ***Already* versus the Perfect.**

The differing views of the meaning of *already* reflect the various positions taken on the meaning of *done* and *kaba*.

Given such disagreement, it is worth asking whether *done* and *kaba* are indeed the equivalent of *already*, or closer in meaning to the Perfect.

van der Klok & Matthewson (2015) pose precisely the same question for the Javanese marker *wis*, which has been described variously as a perfective or past tense marker, a perfect aspect marker, and a marker denoting *already*” (2015: 173).

As they note, “English *already* and the perfect are acceptable in many of the same environments, since both refer to an event prior to the utterance time without relying on a specific past reference time” (2015:172).

They therefore propose the following diagnostics to distinguish *already* from perfect aspect:

- (i) Truth-conditional equivalency in interactions with negation (or the duality of *already*)
- (ii) An “earliness” implication
- (iii) Inchoative interpretation with stative predicates;
- (iv) Compatibility with adverbs specifying a past time interval
- (v) The “Extended Now” interpretation

### **Diagnostics for *done* and *kaba* versus the Perfect (to be completed)**

The following diagnostics seem to best establish that *done* and *kaba* differ from the English Perfect in the following respects, suggesting that they behave more like *already*:

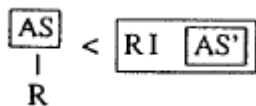
1. The completive markers both involve duality.
2. They have an earliness implication in some contexts
3. They are compatible with adverbials referring to a past time interval.
4. They don't allow an Extended Now interpretation (They lack lifetime effects).
5. The other diagnostic (inchoative interpretation with stative predicates) also seems to apply to the Completive markers.

### **The semantics of *already*.**

The semantics and communicative functions of English *already* have been described in detail by L. Michaelis (1992, 1996).

She argues that the adverb “not only encodes the existence of a given state at the reference time [the Already State or AS – DW], but also presupposes that the inception of the state is anterior to an interval of a special type ..... the Reference Interval (RI)” (1996:485).

In addition, the RI includes a state of the same situation type as the AS, which she refers to as the AS'.



The RI itself “can assume different identities in different contexts” (p. 479), leading to different interpretations of *already* that are “derived from the interpretive instructions provided by the linguistic and extralinguistic context” (ibid.).

This approach allows Michaelis to distinguish various communicative functions of *already*.

1. **Priority to process** (p. 488)  
(e.g. *Why would you need a permanent? You already have curly hair*).
2. **Comparative priority**.  
(e.g. *The guests who were still present gossiped about the ones who had already left*.)
3. **Priority to expected eventuation**.  
(e.g. *When we arrived, at noon, he was already drunk*)
4. **Priority to further accretion**

(e.g. *He was already pretty chubby as a teenager, and now I'm afraid he's tending toward obesity*)

5. **A completive function**, indicating completion of one stage in a sequence of development. (Eg. *He's already gone for the day. Can I take a message?*)

6. **A function similar to that of *previously***, marking completion of an event prior to the reference time.

(e.g. *Those muppets will live on in shows already taped by Henson*)

### **Communicative functions of *done* and *kaba***

Several of the communicative functions identified by Michaelis are also performed by *done* and *kaba*.

#### 1. Priority to process:

(15) TC She done so skinny, and she want to go on a diet.  
She's already so thin, and yet she wants to go on a diet.

(16) He done stinkin rich and he still want more money  
'He's already filthy rich, and he still wants more money.

#### 2. Comparative priority

So far, I haven't found examples of this communicative function of either TC *done* or SN *kaba*. It's possible to create equivalents in TC, however.

3. Priority to expected eventuation. (p. 492) A state of affairs (the AS) exists prior to the time at which it is expected to exist (the RI).

The following Sranan examples appear to me to be cases of early eventuation, conveying some sense of counter-expectation

(17) C: [to S] Taki odi, taki odi, noh. Regi doro. Tape 1B, page 38)  
Say hello, say hello, then. Regi arrive.  
"Say hello, say hello. Regi has arrived.

S: Mi taki odi **kaba**, tog.  
I say hello already, okay.  
'I already said, hello, okay?'

(18) CONTEXT. SPEAKER LENT ONE OF HIS SYRINGES TO A FRIEND WHO THEN UNEXPECTEDLY LENT IT TO SOMEONE ELSE. (Tape 8A, 327-8)

Dan a pisi ten dati mi go teki a sani na a man a man leni wan man a sani.  
Then the piece time that I go take the thing at the man the man lend one man the thing.  
“Then when I went to take my stuff at the man, it turns out he lent it to someone.”

Mi taki, "Mi gi yu a sani esde dan tide yu leni wan man **kaba**.  
I say, "I give you the thing yesterday then today you lend one man already.  
“I said, “I gave you the thing yesterday, and you already lend it to someone?”

HERE, *KABA* SEEMS TO HAVE THE SENSE OF “SO QUICKLY AND UNEXPECTEDLY”. THIS SEEMS SIMILAR TO COUNTER-EXPECTATION, SUGGESTING THAT THE LENDING TOOK PLACE PRIOR TO WHAT MIGHT BE EXPECTED.

(19) CONTEXT: TALKING ABOUT AN INFESTATION OF BED BUGS. (Tape13B, 243)

Te, te a fyofyo beti yu, yu didon, fa yu si mi dyompo,  
when when the bug bite 2s 2s lie\_down how 2s see 1s jump  
‘And when the bug bites you when you lie down. You should see how I jump up.’

a fyofyo waka kon a beti yu **kaba**. Ma meki yu seki seki.  
the bug walk come 3s bite 2s already but let 2s shake shake  
‘The bug crawls on you and bite you. And if you move’

A kibri **kaba**, yu suku en yu no fanga.  
it hide already 2s look\_for it 2s NEG catch  
‘It hides and if you look for it, you wouldn’t find it.’

HERE *KABA* SEEMS TO CONVEY A SENSE OF THE SWIFTFNESS AND SUDDENNESS OF THE BED BUG ACTIVITY.

4. Priority to further accretion: “*Already* indicates that a state exists to a pronounced degree prior to any advancement along a property scale for that state.

Again, I found no clear examples of this function in my TC and SN data. However, it’s possible to construct examples similar to the one provided by Michaelis.

A possible example is the following from TC:

(20) Ah done forget meh hat, now ah forget meh umbrella too.  
‘I already forgot my hat, and now I’ve gone and forgotten my umbrella too.’

I would suggest that the AS in this case is the speaker’s forgetfulness at the time he left his hat behind. The RI is the interval in which he can’t find his umbrella. The AS’ is the continuing state of forgetfulness, representing a more pronounced degree of the state of forgetfulness.

The argumentative force of the assertion is to emphasize the speaker's state of exasperation at his forgetfulness.

**Primary functions of *done* and *kaba*. Completion with dynamic predicates.**

In Sranan, the most typical uses of *kaba* that I have so far found in my data involve functions 5 and 6, as identified by Michaelis:

**5. A completive function**, indicating completion of one stage in a sequence of development. (Eg. *He's already gone for the day. Can I take a message?*)

IN THIS CASE, THE SPEAKER WANTS TO DEPICT STAGES IN HER PROGRESS TOWARD SALVATION. (TAPE 1B. PAGE 12)

(21) Yu e si, mi no taki mi e de **kaba** ma mi de *bezig* mi e meki muyti.  
You (e) see, I no say that I be already but I be busy I (e) make effort  
"As you can see, I'm not saying I'm already there. But I'm engaged, I'm trying hard"

Ma mi teki Jezus **kaba** yere ma mi e kibri e smoko . Ma di Gado si na hangri fu mi ati  
But I take Jesus already, right, but I (e) hide (e) smoke. But when God see the hunger of  
"In spite of the fact that I had taken Jesus in my life, I hid the habit. But when God saw the hunger of my heart"

Ja, mi *getuig* fu a sani disi tu tron **kaba** di a yepi mi, mi de *zeker* taki na tu tron  
Yes, I witness of this thing two times already he help me, I am sure that be two time  
"Yes, I testified of this. He helped me twice already, I'm certain it's twice."

**6. A function similar to that of *previously***, marking completion of an event prior to the reference time.

(22) CONTEXT: SOMEONE HAS CALLED TO SAY A WORKER IS DRUNK ON THE JOB

A man ben dringi **kba**.

'The man had been drinking already [before he came to work]'

(23) Ma mi taigi Hertoch **kaba** taki a musu e kon vaker. (Tape 1A, line 101)  
'But I told Hertoch already that he must come more often'

(24) Libi a tori, man. Libi a sani a pasa **kaba**. (Tape 13A, 686-7)  
leave the story TW leave the thing it happen already  
'Don't worry about it. Let the matter rest, it has already happened'

**The pragmatics of *done* and *kaba*: Argumentative force.**



As Michaelis (1996:500) points out, “certain functions of *already* can be used in the service of particular argumentative goals.”

The same applies to *done* and *kaba*. The following is a preliminary account of some of their pragmatic functions.

(25) TALKING ABOUT YUGOSLAV GANGS IN HOLLAND. (TAPE 8A, 442-3)

Mi yere den man e kon na Holland nanga den Yugoslaven. Mi yere san den  
I hear those man (e) come tio Holland with the Yugoslavians. I hear what those  
I’ve heard they come to Holland with the Yugoslavians. I’ve heard that what those

man dati e du. Mi yere pikin pikin moni den man trowe yu **kaba**.  
man that (e) do. I hear little little money those man throw you already.  
guys are doing? I’ve heard for a small amount of money they are ready to do away with  
you.

EMPHATIC *KABA* = ‘WITHOUT FURTHER ADO’? OR “BEFORE YOU EXPECT IT”.  
EMPHASIZING HOW QUICKLY THEY DISPATCH YOU FOR VERY LITTLE REASON.  
THIS SEEMS TO BE RELATED TO EARLY EVENTUATION.

(26) CONTEXT: THE SPEAKER HAS BEEN TRYING TO MAIL GOODS TO A  
CUSTOMER BUT HIS AGENTS HAVE PROCRASTINATED (TAPE 8A. LINE 179).

Den suma no abi deki ati tog, noso den sani disi ben *post* o langa **kaba**.  
The people no have courage, right. otherwise the thing these (ben) mail how long already.  
‘They don’t have courage, otherwise these items would have been mailed long ago.’

HERE, *KABA* SEEMS TO EXPRESS EXASPERATION OR FRUSTRATION.

(27) CONTEXT: THE SPEAKER HAS AN ENCOUNTER WITH AN INDIAN  
POLICEMAN WHO WAS OPENLY DRUNK ON THE JOB. (TAPE , PAGE 9)

Mi taki, no yungu, brada. Mi taki, luku yu drungu **kaba**. *Dus*  
I say, no man, brother. I say, look you drunk already. So  
‘ I said, no man. I said, look you’re already drunk so

*eigenlijk* yu, yu yu, a *lot* fu yu pasa **kaba**.

infact, your, your, your, the fate of you already pass.

‘in fact fate (?) has already passed.’

*KABA* SEEMS TO EMPHASIZE THE ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING DRUNK.

(28) CONTEXT: SAME AS ABOVE. CONVERSATION CONTINUES

A: Den man no abi bisi, na so den man gwentu **kaba**.

Those man no have care, be so those man accustom already

They don't care, that's how they are.

C: Yu no kan *waarschuw* so wan man.

You no can warn so wan man.

You can't warn such a person

*KABA* OF DISAPPROVAL: *KABA* IS USED TO EMPHASIZE THE FACT THAT PEOPLE LIKE THE DRUNK POLICEMAN CAN'T HELP THEMSELVES. THE COMMENT BY C CONFIRMS THIS.