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# Presentational *nana* constructions in Reunion Creole: from broad focus cleft to monoclausal construction (24 p)

(2 blank spaces 12p before name of authors)

Anonymous (16 p)

University of Nowhere (12 p)

John.Johnson@unowhere.edu (12 p)

(1 blank space)

Anonymous2 (16 p)

University of Somewhere (12 p)

Li.Lisdóttir@usomewhere.edu (12 p)

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## Abstract

This paper discusses a cluster of related constructions in Reunion Creole involving *nana* 'have'. Focusing on a broad focus construction that is functionally equivalent to the *il y a*-cleft of French, I argue that a once bi-clausal cleft has developed into a monoclausal broad focus construction in Reunion Creole. I present a Role and Reference Grammar analysis of both the bi-clausal cleft and the monoclausal construction, and in the former, I explain how the cleft relative clause differs from restrictive relative clauses. (max. 200 words)

**Keywords:** Reunion Creole, broad focus, cleft construction, existentials, relative clauses, Role and Reference Grammar.

## 1. Introduction

Reunion Creole (RC) is a French-lexified creole language spoken on the Indian Ocean island of Reunion. The language was formed via the reshaping of spoken varieties of French between the 16th-18th centuries, with influences of Malagasy and, to a lesser extent, Tamil and Bantu languages (see Chaudenson 1974; Carayol, Chaudenson & Barat 1984; Baker & Corne 1986; Cellier 1985; Holm 1989, 2004; Corne 1999; Bollée 2013; Watbled 2020). RC has a cluster of related constructions involving *nana* ‘have’. In this article, I focus on one construction within this cluster, illustrated in (1), which is functionally comparable to the *avoir* clefts of French, illustrated in (2).<sup>1</sup>

- (1) Hier soir nana un num privé la tel amwin  
 Yesterday night have INDF number. private PRF phone 1SG  
 ‘Last night a private number phoned me’ (Cougnon 2012)
- (2) Y’a le téléphone qui sonne !  
 PF-have.3SG DEF telephone REL ring.3SG  
 ‘The phone’s ringing!’ (Lambrecht 1988a: 137)

The aims of the paper are two-fold. The first aim is to argue that RC’s *nana*-construction in (1) may once have been a bi-clausal cleft but the synchronic data indicate that it has developed into a monoclausal construction, where *nana* is the marker of a broad focus construction, rather than being a copula. The second aim is to offer syntactic analyses of both the monoclausal construction in (1) and the bi-clausal cleft from which it has developed. On the one hand, this article contributes to documenting the grammar of RC, and on the other, it fills an important gap in our understanding of a family of related constructions, namely, broad focus clefts. The syntactic analysis of such structures is important for our understanding of the difference between restrictive relative clauses and cleft relative clauses, in that the cleft relative clause in these broad focus clefts is not analysed as a true subordinate clause as are restrictive relatives.

The article is laid out as follows. In Section 2, I give a definition of broad focus clefts, distinguishing them from related constructions; in Section 3 I present the RC data on *nana* constructions, outlining the evidence that the construction in (1) is monoclausal. In Section 4 I offer syntactic analyses of broad focus presentational constructions using the Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) framework, which is briefly introduced in Section 4.1. In Section 5, I conclude. The data for this study come from a corpus of written and oral materials compiled by the author, detailed in Appendix A. I indicate in brackets the genre of the text or recording of all examples coming from the corpus.

## 2. Broad focus clefts and their delimitation

### 2.1. Definition of broad focus clefts

<sup>1</sup> This article uses the Leipzig glossing abbreviations, with the following additions: FIN = finite, PF = proform.

Clefts are bi-clausal constructions that express a single proposition, consisting of a copular verb, a clefted constituent and a relative-like clause (sometimes called a ‘pseudo-relative’).<sup>2</sup> The clefts that have received the greatest attention in the literature are specificational clefts exhibiting narrow focus over the clefted constituent, known as *it*-clefts in English and *c’est*-clefts in French:

- (3) C’est Jean qui me l’a raconté. French  
 It=is Jean who me it=has told  
 ‘It’s Jean who told me.’ (Bonan & Ledgeway 2023: 2)

Their RC equivalent, illustrated in (4), is composed of a BE copula (*sé*), a clefted constituent (*lo sistèm*) and a cleft relative clause, which is optionally marked with a relative marker in RC (see Author 2023a for a description of RC’s *sé*-clefts).

- (4) Sé lo sistèm (ke) lé mal roganizé .  
 COP DEF system REL be badly organised  
 ‘It’s the system that’s badly organised.’ (Newspaper)

A property of clefts is that they exhibit bi-clausal syntax but express a single proposition, and thus have a monoclausal counterpart with the same truth conditions (Lambrecht 1994: 22). For example, the cleft construction in (4) has the same truth conditions as the simple sentence in (5).

- (5) Lo sistèm lé mal roganizé.  
 DEF system COP badly organised  
 ‘The system is badly organised.’

*It*-clefts and their cross-linguistic equivalents are described as specificational as they specify a value (the clefted constituent) for a variable in the cleft relative clause (e.g. Declerck 1988; Lambrecht 2001; Pavey 2004; Destruel 2013). The information in the cleft relative clause is backgrounded.<sup>3</sup>

The topic of this article is broad focus clefts, which, like narrow focus ones, contain a copular verb, a clefted constituent and a cleft relative clause.<sup>4</sup> Unlike narrow focus clefts, their cleft relative clause is not presupposed, but, rather, contains the main assertion of the sentence. Such clefts, illustrated in (6a) and (6b), are found particularly frequently in spoken French (e.g. Lambrecht 1988a; Karssenberg 2017; Karssenberg & Lahousse 2017, 2018), where they are termed *avoir*-clefts (or *il y a*-clefts).

- (6) a. Il y a mon fiancé qui danse.  
 EXPL PF have.3SG POSS.1SG.M fiancé REL dance.3SG  
 ‘My fiancé is dancing/There’s my fiancé who’s dancing’ (French)

<sup>2</sup> See section 4.3 for the differences in the syntactic analysis of restrictive relative clauses and cleft relative clauses of the broad focus type.

<sup>3</sup> Though there exists a type of *it*-cleft, ‘informative presupposition’ clefts, in which the information in the cleft relative clause is not presupposed (see Prince 1978; Lambrecht 2001; Hasselgård 2004; Dufter 2009; Karssenberg & Lahousse 2018 among others).

<sup>4</sup> They may also contain a cleft pronoun preceding the copula, as in French, cf. *il* in (6a) and *J(e)* in (6b).

(Karssenbergh & Lahousse 2018: 516)

- b. J'ai mon pied qui me fait mal.  
 1SG=have.1SG POSS.1SG.M foot REL 1SG.ACC do.3sg bad  
 'My foot hurts/ I have my foot that hurts.' (French)  
 (Lambrecht 2001: 508)

The function of the *avoir*-clefts in (6a) and (6b) is not to specify a value for a variable but, rather, to report an event or introduce a new referent and predicate something about it (Lambrecht 1988a; Karssenbergh & Lahousse 2018). While French *avoir*-clefts share the property of *c'est*-clefts of being 'de-cleftable' (see e.g., Lambrecht 1988, 2001; Dufter 2006), i.e., having a monoclausal counterpart, that monoclausal counterpart may not always be pragmatically acceptable (Lambrecht 1988a: 115; Karssenbergh 2018: 23). French has two relevant constraints which can lead to that effect: a dispreference for lexical subjects (Lambrecht 1987, 1988a) and for pre-verbal subject focus (e.g., Lambrecht 1994: 22; Larrivé 2022). It has been argued that the cleft construction allows those constraints to be satisfied, where their monoclausal counterparts would not (e.g., Lambrecht 1986, 2001). Such constraints are primarily a feature of the spoken French language, which is why, given that the French Creoles were formed via the intense and prolonged contact between spoken varieties of French and the various native languages of enslaved populations (see Zribi-Hertz 2022), an investigation of clefting in these languages may offer further insights into these constructions, which are still poorly understood not only in creole languages. Before examining whether RC has broad focus clefts, I distinguish them from two related constructions.

## 2.2. Distinguishing broad focus clefts from related constructions

Broad focus clefts must be distinguished from both narrow focus clefts and existential constructions that contain a relative clause.<sup>5</sup> Existentials are defined by Bentley, Ciconte & Cruschina (2015: 2) as "constructions with noncanonical morphosyntax which express a proposition about the existence or presence of someone or something in a context" (see also McNally 2011). An existential construction containing a relative clause is exemplified for RC in (7).

- (7) Dann la komine Bras Panon nana in zoli lékol  
 in DET commune Bras Panon have INDF nice school  
 i apèl Ma Pensée  
 FIN call my thought  
 'In the commune of Bras Panon, there is a nice school that is called *Ma Pensée*'  
 (Magazine)

Existentials are composed of an expletive, a proform, a copula, a pivot and a coda, though the only obligatory part of the construction is the pivot (Bentley, Cruschina & Ciconte 2015: 2), which is the post-copular noun phrase *in zoli lékol* in

<sup>5</sup> Note that not all authors do distinguish presentational clefts from existentials; see for example, Carlier & Lahousse (2023), who argue for a unitary analysis of these structures.

(7). The existential construction in (7) contains a copula (*nana*) and a coda (in the form of a relative clause), but no expletive or proform. While at first sight it appears similar in form to the construction in (1), containing *nana* ‘have’ and a (zero-marked) relative clause, it differs in function. The function of the sentence in (7) is not to report that the school is called *Ma Pensée*, but instead to assert that the school exists; the name of the school is simply additional information. The relative clause can thus be omitted in the case of (7) but this is not the case in (1), reflecting a property of broad focus clefts noted in the literature, namely that the cleft relative clause cannot be removed (e.g. Choi-Jonin and Lagae 2005: 6). The function of (1) is not to state that a private number exists, but that the speaker was called by someone on a private number (i.e., to report an event).

The second related construction that must be distinguished from a presentational/event-reporting *nana* construction (equivalent to an *avoir* cleft in French) is a narrow focus *nana*-cleft. RC’s narrow focus *nana*-cleft is equivalent to a narrow focus *avoir/there*-cleft (for which, see Lambrecht 1988a, 2001; Pavay 2004; Davidse & Kimps 2016; Verwimp & Lahousse 2017; Karssenbergh 2018; Karssenbergh & Lahousse 2017, 2018; Davidse, Njende & O’Grady 2023). Such clefts exhibit narrow focus over the clefted constituent, much like the *sé*-cleft, and are illustrated in (8) for French and (9) for RC.

- (8) “How I Met Your Mother” c’est génial, y’a aussi  
 How I Met Your Mother it-be.3SG great PF have.3SG also  
 “Lost” qui est bien.  
 Lost REL be.3SG good (French)  
 “‘How I Met Your Mother’ is great, there’s also “Lost” that is good’  
 (Karssenbergh & Lahousse 2018: 533)

- (9) Na ali i sava, é Tida.  
 have him FIN go and Tida  
 ‘There’s him that’s going, and Tida.’ (Reunion Creole)  
 (Conversation, Baude 2010)

Narrow focus *nana*-clefts, like narrow focus *sé*-clefts (cf. (4)), specify a value for a variable, but they do so non-exhaustively, unlike the *sé*-cleft; the non-exhaustivity is evident in example (9) by the addition of *é Tida* ‘and Tida’. What differentiates such narrow focus clefts from broad focus clefts, is that the cleft relative clause is presupposed: it does not contain the main assertion of the sentence like a broad focus cleft does. Another difference between the presentational/event-reporting *nana* construction and both existentials containing a relative clause (7) and narrow focus *nana* clefts (9) regards the pivot or clefted constituent. In broad focus presentational/event-reporting clefts, the clefted constituent is always a subject in the cleft relative clause (Lambrecht 2002: 172; Doetjes, Rebuschi & Rialland 2004: 532), but this restriction does not exist for the clefted constituent of narrow focus clefts or the pivot in an existential construction with a relative clause. Lambrecht (2002: 175) argues that the clefted constituent is (virtually) always subject in the cleft relative clause of a broad focus cleft because a key feature of this construction is that it encodes a semantic subject (of the cleft relative clause predicate) as an object (in the first clause of the construction) in order to make it focal and avoid its construal as a topic.

Previous research has analysed broad focus clefts in terms of their information structure and discourse function, largely focusing on French (e.g., Lambrecht 1986, 1988a, 1988b, 2000, 2002; Choi-Jonin and Lagae 2005, Verwimp & Lahousse 2017; Karssenbergh & Lahousse 2017, 2018; Karssenbergh 2018; Carlier & Lahousse 2023).<sup>6</sup> Little attention has been paid to their description in other languages or their syntactic analysis, both of which this article addresses. In presenting a syntactic analysis of broad focus clefts, I distinguish the cleft relative clause found in these structures from restrictive relative clauses and thus contribute to our understanding of a lesser-studied member of a family of related constructions. In the next section, I present the RC data.

### 3. Nana constructions in Reunion Creole

RC's *nana* construction, equivalent to the event-reporting/presentational *avoir* clefts of French (cf. (2), (6)), is illustrated again in examples (10) and (11).

- (10) Hier        soir    nena   un    num    privé   la   tel    amwin  
 Yesterday night have INDF number. private PRF phone 1SG  
 'Last night a private number phoned me' (Cougnon 2012)

- (11) Na        in        fanm   lavé    done amwin inn!  
 have   INDF   woman have.PST give 1SG   one  
 'A woman had given me one!'  
 Lit. 'There is a woman that had given me one!' (SMS)

The presentational/event-reporting *nana* construction involves the verb 'have', whose paradigm is given in Table 1.<sup>7</sup> As illustrated in the Table, the long forms of the present tense form *nana/nena* can be shortened to *na*, which is what we find in example (11) above.

**Table 1.** Paradigm of the verb 'have' in RC

Past	<b>navé</b>	<b>lavé</b>
Present	<i>na(na)/(nena)</i>	<i>la</i>
Future	<i>nora</i>	--
Conditional	<i>noré</i>	--

There are both *n*-forms and *l*-forms of the verb 'have' (cf. Table 1), whose comparative distribution has scarcely been discussed in the Reunion Creole literature (though see Watbled 2014: 11). The *l*-forms *la* and *lavé* are found as auxiliaries in compound tenses (12a-b), while the *n*-forms are generally reserved for the expression of possession (13a) and existence (13b), though note that *n*-forms *nora* and *noré* are

<sup>6</sup> Though for English, see Davidse, Njende & O'Grady (2023), and for Italian, see Karssenbergh et al (2017); Cruschina (2018); Carlier & Lahousse (2023).

<sup>7</sup> Note that while RC verbs inflect for tense, they do not inflect for person/number.

found as auxiliaries too, where there is no *l*-form. The *l*-forms are also possible for expressing possession and existence.<sup>8</sup>

- (12) a. Nou la komans mié organiz anou  
 1PL PRF start better organise 1PL  
 ‘We have started to better organise ourselves.’ (Newspaper)
- b. mwin lavé vu in gramoun  
 1sg have.PST see INDF old.person  
 ‘I had seen an elderly person’ (Conversation, Baude 2010)
- (13) a. nou na tout lo bann zouti  
 1PL have all DEF PL tool  
 ‘We have all the tools’ (Newspaper)
- b. néné in bonpë kalité kaz kréol  
 have INDF lot type house creole  
 ‘There are lots of types of creole house’ (Magazine)

In this section, I shed some further light on the distribution of these forms. I argue that the copula found in true event-reporting/presentational constructions is *na(na)*, which is losing its copular verb properties in this construction. The presentational/event-reporting *nana* construction, illustrated in (10) and (11), has no overt relative marker, which raises the question of whether these constructions are in fact bi-clausal or not. In the remainder of this section, I argue that they are not bi-clausal, and that, therefore, the broad focus presentational *nana* constructions are, while functionally equivalent to French broad focus *avoir*-clefts (cf. (2), (6), (6)), not to be considered clefts under the definition adopted here (cf. section 2) as they are, crucially, not bi-clausal.

### 3.1. Evidence for monoclausality of presentational *nana* constructions

I found 202 putative *nana* constructions in the corpus. On the basis of my corpus data, I argue that, while the broad focus presentational/event-reporting *nana* construction in (10) and (11) may have derived from a French *avoir*-cleft (given that French was the largest input language in the formation of RC)<sup>9</sup>, it has become monoclausal in RC, owing to the lack of relative marking combined with the loss of copular verb properties of *nana* in the construction. I begin with the lack of relative marking in section 3.1.1.

#### 3.1.1. Lack of relative marking

Relative clauses are typically zero-marked in RC, but patterns of zero-marking depend on the function of the missing element in the relative clause, zero-marking being overwhelmingly favoured in subject relatives (Author 2019, 2023a, 2023b), as

<sup>8</sup> Impressionistically, *l*-forms are less frequent than *n*-forms in this function but their comparative frequencies have not been measured.

<sup>9</sup> Regarding the origins of the form *nana* itself, it likely derives from French *il y en a* ‘there are some’.

illustrated in Table 2, the data for which come from the same corpus, detailed in Appendix A.

**Table 2.** Patterns of relative marking in restrictive relative clauses in RC corpus

	<i>Proportion zero-marked</i>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Subject</b>	81%	232
<b>Object</b>	66%	114
<b>Oblique</b>	12%	42
<b>TOTAL</b>	69%	388

The function of the relativised element in a broad focus cleft is virtually always subject (cf. section 2.2). Of the 202 putative *nana* constructions in the corpus, there were 173 in which the pivot was a subject in the following relative clause, and, in line with the patterns of relative marking in restrictive relative clauses (cf. Table 2), 88% of those were zero-marked. Examining the 20 examples that were marked, none were functioning clearly as presentational/event-reporting constructions but, rather, fall into a classification as one of the two lookalike constructions outlined in section 2.2: existentials containing a relative clause (14) or narrow focus *nana* clefts (15).

- (14) le      kréol euh      nana      bokou euh      ki                      parl      pa  
       DEF    creole euh      have    lots      euh      REL-FIN            speak NEG  
       vréman              le      créole korèk  
       really                DEF    creole correct  
       ‘creole, euh there’s lots euh who don’t really speak correct creole’  
       (Baude 2010)

- (15) Preceding context: ‘more talk for nothing while they will rest wrapped up in  
       The colonial, political decisions in our country’  
       nora                      aryink                      wa      sanzé                      povréman.  
       have.FUT            nothing-REL    FUT    change                      really  
       ‘There will be nothing that changes really’ (Newspaper)

Examples such as (14) are difficult to classify because, on the one hand, this construction can be de-clefted to form a monoclausal sentence without changing the meaning of the sentence. On the other hand, this example is certainly open to an existential classification because the function of the sentence is plausibly an assertion about the existence of a quantity of people who do not speak “correct” creole. I return to the issue of distinguishing between these two constructions in section 3.1.2.2. As for example (15), the construction is more clearly a narrow focus cleft; the preceding context gives some indication that the information in the cleft relative clause is part of the presupposition rather than the main assertion; the function of the sentence is to focalise *aryin* ‘nothing’.

There were no examples with a clearly presentational/event-reporting function and a marked relative clause. The observation alone that this construction is zero-marked is not evidence that the construction is monoclausal in itself, but this feature combined with the loss of verbal properties of the copula in the construction, discussed



in the next section, means there is no reason to consider the presentational/event-reporting construction bi-clausal in RC.

### 3.1.2. Frozen copula

The constructions discussed in this article have in common their use of the copula *nana*, whose full paradigm was given in Table 1. In this section, I argue that in the presentational/event-reporting construction, the verb *nana* occurs only in the present tense (section 3.1.2.1) and the form *nana* cannot be negated in this construction (section 3.1.2.2).<sup>10</sup> These are taken as signs that *nana* loses its verbal properties in this construction, to the effect that *nana* is no longer analysed as a copula and instead functions as the marker of a broad focus construction (cf. section 4.2).

#### 3.1.2.1. Tense

The distribution of the forms of the copula in *nana* constructions in the corpus is given in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Forms of the copula in *nana* constructions in the corpus

Tense	Form	Tokens
Present	<i>na</i>	135
	<i>nana/néna</i>	44
	<i>la</i>	7
Past	<i>navé</i>	6
	<i>lavé</i>	8
Future	<i>nora</i>	2

Table 3 shows that the most frequently found forms are the present tense forms *na* and *nana* (these forms are interchangeable in presentational/event-reporting constructions).<sup>11</sup> The present-tense forms are found even when the cleft relative clause verb is tensed:

<sup>10</sup> I acknowledge that the absence of negation might be seen as a property of the broad focus/presentational construction, but in section 3.1.2.2. I point out that these constructions can be negated in special circumstances, yet we do not find *nana* negated in this construction, because, I argue, it is a construction marker not a copula.

<sup>11</sup> One existential context has been identified where *na* and *nana* are not interchangeable: the full form *nana* is required when there is no visible post-copular noun phrase as in (i), and the construction is interpreted as referring to an indefinite animate or inanimate referent (see Author 2023: 272-273). Such constructions are existentials, not broad focus presentational/event-reporting clefts.

- (i) *Nana i mèt sinter nwar*  
 have FIN put belt black  
 ‘There are (people) who wear a black belt’ (Baude 2010)

- (16) Ant désanm 1985 é zanvié 1986 na minm in  
 between December 1985 and January 1986 have even INDF  
 délégation lo MIR lavé parti an Libi, (...)  
 delegation DEF MIR have.PST go to Libya  
 ‘Between December 1985 and January 1986 there’s even a delegation of the  
 MIR that went to Libya, (...)’ (Newspaper)

Again, the majority of examples where a tensed copula was found were classified as either existentials with a relative clause or narrow focus clefts.<sup>12</sup>

- (17) é lavé bokou d'gens ki parlé kom sa  
 and have.PST lots of people REL-FIN s peak.IPFV like tha  
 kan ou lété marmay  
 when you be.IPFV child  
 ‘and were there lots of people who spoke like that when you were a child?’  
 (Baude 2010)
- (18) Eské tous les gens i konésé ou bien eské  
 Q all DEF people FIN know.IPFV or well Q  
 lavé inn i konésé ?  
 have.PST one FIN know.IPFV  
 ‘Did everyone know or was there one who knew?’ (Baude 2010)

Example (17) is clearly bi-clausal not only due to the tensed copula, but also the relative marker. However, it is not a presentational/event-reporting construction: the sentence is about the existence of a quantity of people who speak a certain way. Example (18) is clearly not a presentational/event-reporting sentence either as the cleft relative clause is presupposed. Further evidence that the copula is losing its verbal properties comes from negation, discussed in the next section.

### 3.1.2.2. Negation

Alongside *na* and *nana*, there is a third present tense form: *la* (cf. Table 1). While *la* occurs infrequently in *nana* constructions (cf. Table 3), its occurrence is associated with negation, which is present in 6/7 (86%) examples of *la* in *nana* constructions in the corpus, illustrated in (19).

- (19) mwin lé paré pou to tosh bann moustik la pa  
 1SG COP ready to hit PL mosquitos have NEG  
 zot i sa anpèsh amwin pass in bon vakans!!  
 3PL FIN FUT prevent 1SG spend INDF good holiday  
 ‘I’m ready to whack the mosquitos, there’s not them that’s going to stop me  
 from having a good holiday!!’ (Blog post)

By way of comparison, only 10/187 (5%) examples exhibited the negation over the copula when the copula was an n-form (*na/nana/navé/nora*), which indicates that *la* may be a specialised copula for negation in this construction. Examining those

<sup>12</sup> I discuss those that could not be classified as such in section 4.3.

examples where we find a negated *n*-form, it is clear that they are either narrow focus clefts (20) or existentials (21).

- (20) Mé na pwin riynk sa la parl osi koripsion  
 but have NEG only DEM PRF speak also corruption  
 su lo dosié  
 on DEF file  
 ‘but there’s not only that which pointed to corruption on the file’ (Newspaper)

- (21) na poin inn relizion ke lé plis ke l’ot.  
 have NEG one religion COM COP more COMP DEF-other  
 ‘there’s not one religion that is more than another’ (Baude 2010)

The fact that we do not find *na(na)* negated in these constructions lends support to the argument that *nana* is not a copular verb in the construction, but rather, a construction marker, which is why it cannot be negated. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that there are noted restrictions on negation found in the broad focus presentational/event-reporting construction (Lambrecht 2002: 174; Karssenbergh 2018: 41-44), which may explain why negation of *nana* in these constructions is not found in the corpus. For example, Lambrecht (1986) notes that the French sentence in (22) is infelicitous (cf. example (2) for comparison):

- (22) \*Y’a pas le téléphone qui sonne. (French)  
 PF-have.2SG NEG DEF telephone REL ring.3SG  
 ‘The phone’s ringing!’ (Lambrecht 1986: 118)

However, Karssenbergh (2018: 41-44) shows that there is not a blanket ban on negation in such clefts, offering example (23) as a counterexample, among others.

- (23) *quand on surf sur le net le temps passe vite donc on passe plus de 4 h sans s’eb redre compte surtout quand y’a pas ma mere qui me cris dessus :-C et qui m dit que j’ai trop tardé lol LOL*  
 ‘When you surf online, time goes by quickly, so you spend more than 4 hours without realizing it, especially **when there isn’t my mother who yells at me** :-C and who tells me it’s taking too long lol LOL’ (French; Karssenbergh 2018: 42)

Explaining the conditions of acceptability of negation in presentational/event-reporting clefts, Karssenbergh (2018), building upon Nahajec (2012), argues that it is perfectly possible to report the absence of an event if the occurrence of that event is usual. This is what we find in example (23). Returning to the classification of *nana* constructions adopted here (cf. section 2.2), if a sentence reports the absence of something in a context, then we might consider concluding that it is instead an existential, which, expressing a proposition about existence or presence in a context, can also predicate absence of something in a context. Therefore, the negated presentational/event-reporting constructions may better fall under the umbrella of

existential constructions if they are about the absence of an event that usually occurs in a given context.

While in section 2.2 I presented a clear distinction between presentational/event-reporting clefts, existentials that contain a relative clause, and narrow focus clefts, the discussion and examples presented in this section highlight that existentials and presentational clefts are not always easily distinguished, and in fact, different authors appear to draw a line between them at different points, or indeed not at all. From an onomasiological perspective, Carlier & Lahousse (2023) argue for a unitary treatment of locatives, existentials and presentational clefts with *il y a*, extending Koch's (2012) hypothesis of location and existence being expressing by a global concept of EXISTENCE-LOCATION, to also include presentational clefts within this broad concept. While presentational clefts do not always express a location in a concrete sense, Carlier & Lahousse (2023: 172) argue that they "present the existence of a new event...with respect to the spatio-temporal parameters of the preceding discourse". This idea sits within a growing body of work that argues that sentence-focus sentences, while being all-new in information structural terms, do not lack a topic (see Bianchi 1993, Erteschik-Shir 1997; Benincà 1988; Calabrese 1992; Saccon 1993; Lahousse 2007; Parry 2013; Bentley & Cruschina 2018; Bentley & Ciconte 2024). I argued that presentational/event-reporting clefts and existential constructions do exhibit differences, particularly if we consider the most prototypical examples of each of them, yet, in the examples presented in this section, we have seen that the boundary between these two constructions is not always clear. The RC data are actually broadly in line with Carlier and Lahousse's (2023) argument: these authors consider locatives, existentials and presentational clefts to constitute subtypes of one construction, which they place on a scale of grammaticalisation, where presentational clefts are the most grammaticalised and locatives the least. While their focus is on the similarities between the constructions, my focus here is on their differences. The RC data lend some credence to their argument concerning grammaticalisation (at least with respect to existentials and presentational clefts; I leave aside locatives here), as the presentational/event-reporting cleft in RC exhibits signs of grammaticalisation, where *nana* is no longer a copula but a marker of a broad focus presentational construction. This will be expanded upon in the analysis presented in the next section.

#### 4. Syntactic analysis of Reunion Creole's *nana* constructions

The aim of this section is to provide an analysis of the broad focus presentational/event-reporting *nana* constructions exemplified in section 3. I begin by briefly introducing the key tenets of the RRG framework in section 4.1, which will be used in the analyses presented in the subsequent sections.

##### 4.1. Role and Reference Grammar

Role and Reference Grammar (RRG; Bentley et al. 2023; Van Valin and LaPolla 1997; Van Valin 2005, 2008 and others) is a monostratal theory of language which seeks linguistic explanation in terms of a bi-directional linking algorithm between a syntactic representation and a semantic representation, which can be influenced by information structure. Given that there is only one level of syntactic representation – which

represents the sentence as it is found – the framework does not permit empty syntactic positions or movement operations. Syntactic structure in RRG is represented in terms of a layered clause structure containing universal positions, which are semantically motivated in terms of the distinction between predicating and referring. There are three layers of the clause: the nucleus, which contains the predicate; the core, containing the predicate and its arguments; and the clause, which contains the predicate, arguments and non-arguments. Any of the three layers may be modified by a periphery, which hosts non-arguments.<sup>13</sup> This will be illustrated in the next section, where I present the monoclausal analysis of broad focus *nana* constructions.

#### 4.2. Monoclausal broad focus construction

In section 3.1 I argued that RC's presentational/event-reporting construction is, unlike its French counterpart, monoclausal. The evidence for this analysis was the lack of relative marking combined with the loss of *nana*'s verbal properties in the construction, together resulting in a lack of evidence for bi-clausality in this construction. I will use example (24) to illustrate the analysis, which is given in Figure 1.<sup>14</sup>

- (24) *nena* un num privé la tel amwin  
 have INDF number private PRF phone 1SG  
 'Last night a private number phoned me' (Cougnon 2012)

**Figure 1.** Syntactic representation of a monoclausal broad focus *nana*-construction

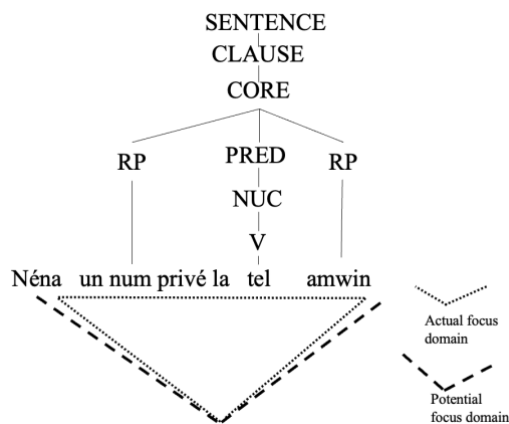


Figure 1 illustrates a simple sentence in RC, where *néna* is not attached to the constituent projection (the lexical tree representing the syntactic structure). That *néna* does not occur in the syntactic representation reflects the assumption that it does not appear in the semantic representation of the sentence: in RRG, the linking between syntax and semantics is governed by what is known as the Completeness Constraint,

<sup>13</sup> In addition to those universal positions, there are non-universal positions, which are motivated by word order and pragmatic considerations in a given language.

<sup>14</sup> The label RP designates a Reference Phrase. An RP is a referring expression that serves as the complement of a verb or ad-position (typically described as NPs or DPs in other frameworks).

meaning that everything that appears in the core of the syntactic representation must occur in the semantic representation (see Van Valin & LaPolla 1997: 325; Latrouite & Van Valin 2023). The semantic representation in RRG centres around a lexical decomposition of the predicate, which relies on Vendler's (1967) Aktionsart classification of verbs. The semantic representation of (24), which contains an activity predicate, is given in (25).

(25) **do'** ( $x$ , [**ring'** ( $x$ ,  $y$ )])

The variable  $x$  is filled with the value *un num privé* and the variable  $y$  with *amwin. Néma*. *Néma* does not contribute anything to the semantics of the construction: it is semantically bleached of its existential meaning, which indicates evidence of grammaticalisation. Rather than a copula, I argue that it has instead developed into a construction marker of a broad focus presentational/event-reporting sentence. RRG postulates that the grammar of a given language includes, alongside the general linking principles, a number of constructional templates (Van Valin & LaPolla 1997: 430-436), and *nana* will appear as a requirement of the construction in the relevant template. Therefore, while I have maintained the distinctness of the presentational/event-reporting construction with respect to the narrow focus cleft and existentials containing a relative clause, the evidence of grammaticalisation of this structure is broadly in line with Carlier & Lahousse's (2023) argument that presentational clefts are further along a grammaticalisation cline than existentials. In the next section, I present an analysis of the broad focus cleft construction from which this monoclausal construction is likely to have derived, which shows that the grammaticalisation has resulted in a simpler structure.

### 4.3. Broad focus cleft construction

I have argued that a once bi-clausal cleft has become monoclausal in RC, and in this section, I provide an analysis of that bi-clausal cleft. Although the data largely point towards the conclusion that the presentational/event-reporting structure has become monoclausal in RC, I found remnants of the bi-clausal structure, in the two examples in (26) and (27), both of which happen to come from the older section of the corpus.

(26) (...) navé                      mon    fils    la            pas  
                  have.PST            POSS    son    PRF        pass  
                  '(...) there was my son that came by' (Baude 2010)

(27) (...) lavé                      le        tan                      té        in        peu        gaté  
                  have.PST            DEF        weather            IPDV    INDF    bit        spoiled  
                  '(...) there was the weather that was rubbish' (Baude 2010)

Neither (26) nor (27) can be analysed as monoclausal as the copula is inflected for tense in both instances. They also do fulfil the function of a presentational/event-reporting construction and cannot instead be classified as narrow focus clefts or existentials. The syntactic analysis of broad focus, presentational/event-reporting clefts has been little discussed in the syntactic literature, and I thus aim to fill an

important gap by offering such an analysis. I will do so using example (27), whose syntactic representation is given in Figure 2.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 2.** Syntactic representation of a broad focus cleft in RC

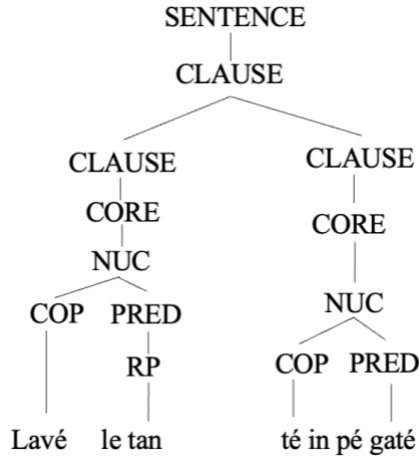


Figure 2 exemplifies not a subordinated structure but a structure exhibiting what is known in RRG as clausal co-subordination. In addition to subordination and co-ordination, RRG posits a third type of clause linkage, termed co-subordination (Ohori 2023: 536; Van Valin 2023: 71). Co-subordination describes a linkage context in which one unit (in this case, a clause) is dependent on another, but not embedded within it like a subordinate unit is. It differs from co-ordination in that one of the units is not entirely independent: it shares operators (cf. footnote 14) with the unit it depends on at the level of the juncture (i.e., at the layer level: clause, core or nucleus). For the broad-focus cleft, which is a case of clausal co-subordination, the relevant operators are at the level of the clause: they share tense and illocutionary force. It is clear that the two clauses in a broad focus cleft share illocutionary force, for example, as the second clause could not be interrogative if the first is declarative. Further indication that co-subordination is an appropriate analysis for broad focus clefts is that the second clause is dependent on the first for the interpretation of one of its arguments (*le tan* ‘the weather’ in (27)). The semantic representation of broad focus *nana*-clefts is the same as its monoclausal counterpart because they are truth-conditionally equivalent, it is only their focus structure that differs (see Bentley, Ciconte & Cruschina 2015: 158). This means that there are two predicates in the syntactic representation, yet in the semantics, there is only one. It is the predicate of the cleft relative clause that assigns semantic roles and thus appears in the semantic representation. This highlights that, in the case of broad focus clefts, the syntactic representation does not match the semantics, as the clefted constituent is a predicate in the syntactic representation but not in the semantic representation. However, clefts are perfect examples of where syntactic structure is driven not only by semantics, but by pragmatics too. The clefted

<sup>15</sup> Note that *le* and *in pé* do not attach to the syntactic representation as they are what RRG terms ‘operators’, and link to their own, operator projection. Operators are functional categories such as tense, negation, definiteness, illocutionary force etc. (cf. Van Valin 2023: 33-42). The operator projection is left out of the syntactic representation in Figure 2 because it is not relevant for the present purposes.

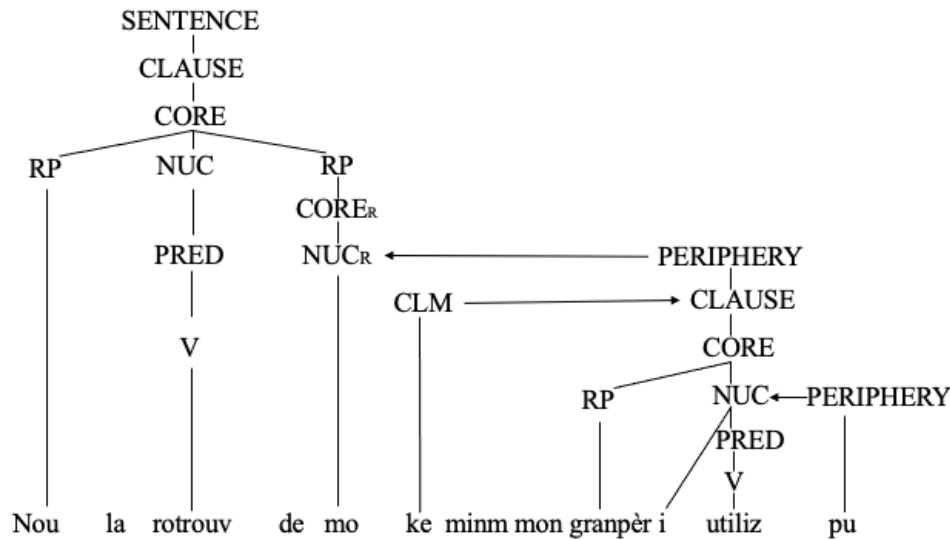
constituent in the presentational *nana* cleft is a pragmatic predicate (in the sense of Lambrecht 1994), being (part of) the focus of the sentence, but not a semantic predicate. The fact that it already does not assign semantic roles in the true bi-clausal cleft construction makes it easy to see how the copula grammaticalises to the extent that it no longer is a predicate in the syntax either.

A comparison of the broad focus cleft structure with that of a restrictive relative clause, like that in (28), further illustrates why co-subordination is preferable for broad focus cleft relative clauses and captures the difference between the two types of apparently similar clauses.

- (28) Nou la rotrouv d mo ke minm mon  
 1PL PRF find INDF word REL even POSS.1SG  
 granpèr i utiliz pu.  
 grandpa FIN use NEG  
 ‘We found words that even my grandpa doesn’t use anymore.’ (YouTube sketch)

The syntactic representation of example (28) is given in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.** Syntactic representation of a restrictive relative clause in RC



Restrictive relative clauses are treated in a similar way to adjectives in attributive function as they are both nominal modifiers (Van Valin & LaPolla 1997; Pavey 2004; Van Valin 2005; Van Valin 2012; París 2023). In the syntactic representation, they are found in the periphery of the nucleus of a Reference Phrase because they are an optional modifier rather than a core argument (Van Valin & LaPolla 1997: 497). A Reference Phrase (RP) is a referring expression that serves as the complement of a verb or ad-position (typically described as NPs or DPs in other frameworks). RPs also have a layered structure, parallel to that of a clause (cf. section 4.1), which can be modified at any layer by a periphery. The periphery is reserved for optional elements, which reflects the fact that a restrictive relative clause can be removed. However, to return to our objective of comparing restrictive relative clauses



with the relative-like clause of a presentational/event-reporting cleft, it can hardly be said that the cleft relative clause of the latter is optional: it contains the main assertion. This illustrates why it would not be appropriate to analyse cleft relative clauses in the same way, in a periphery.

## 5. Conclusion

In this article, I discussed RC's *nana* constructions with a presentational/event-reporting function. I argued that, while being functionally equivalent and deriving from a French *avoir* cleft, they have developed into a monoclausal construction, where *nana* has grammaticalised, losing its verbal properties and its existential meaning. I offered syntactic analyses of the bi-clausal cleft and the resulting construction, which is simpler by virtue of being monoclausal. In my bi-clausal analysis, I highlighted the differences between the cleft relative clause of a presentational/event-reporting cleft and a restrictive relative clause and thus contributed to an important gap in our understanding of a family of related constructions.

## Acknowledgments

Acknowledgements go here.

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.453>.

## Appendix A

**Table 1:** Sources

Source	Date
<b>Written</b>	
Blog: <i>Oté</i> <a href="https://www.temoignages.re/chroniques/ote/">https://www.temoignages.re/chroniques/ote/</a>	2019
Brochure: Expo 2015 “Nout Manjé” <a href="https://lofislalangkreollarenyon.re/expo-2015-nout-manje/">https://lofislalangkreollarenyon.re/expo-2015-nout-manje/</a>	2015
Play script: “Pou in grape létshi” <a href="https://www.reunionnaisdumonde.com/IMG/pdf/piecetheatrecreole.pdf">https://www.reunionnaisdumonde.com/IMG/pdf/piecetheatrecreole.pdf</a>	2009
Children’s Story: “Ti Pierre èk le Lou” <a href="https://conservatoire.regionreunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/LIVRET-TI-PIER-EK-LO-LOU-POUR-MISE-EN-LIGNE-.pdf">https://conservatoire.regionreunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/LIVRET-TI-PIER-EK-LO-LOU-POUR-MISE-EN-LIGNE-.pdf</a>	2016
Children’s Story: “La femme devenue vache” <a href="https://www.ethnographiques.org/2013/Honore">https://www.ethnographiques.org/2013/Honore</a>	2013
Magazine: 7 editions of <i>Kriké</i> <a href="https://pedagogie.ac-reunion.fr/lvr-ecole.html">https://pedagogie.ac-reunion.fr/lvr-ecole.html</a>	2014-17
Newspaper: 19 editions of <i>Fanal</i> <a href="http://fanal.lorganisation.org/">http://fanal.lorganisation.org/</a>	2015-20
SMS4Science Corpus: 12,000 SMS <a href="http://www.lareunion4science.org/">http://www.lareunion4science.org/</a>	2008
<b>Oral</b>	
Documentary film clips	
“Zourné internacional la lang matèrnèl 2017” <a href="https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6a1gd3">https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6a1gd3</a>	2017
“Zourné internacional la lang matèrnèl 2018” <a href="https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6fwmf1">https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6fwmf1</a>	2018
Baude (2010) oral corpus of RC <a href="https://cocoon.humanum.fr/exist/crdo/meta/cocoon-fd48c512-26d0-3bd3-b02b-4ae995285d05">https://cocoon.humanum.fr/exist/crdo/meta/cocoon-fd48c512-26d0-3bd3-b02b-4ae995285d05</a>	
19 interview recordings	1970-1978
9 interview recordings	2005
Radio clip: conversation between Bruno & Francky ( <i>Radio Free Dom</i> )	2020
TV programme: <i>Koz Pou Nou</i> (1 episode) “ <i>Koz Pou Nou</i> avec J Huges Lucian et Francky de <i>Free Dom</i> ”	2019
YouTube comedy sketches (by <i>Le Letchi</i> ) “Tonton Politicien” <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRRcp4bSesA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRRcp4bSesA</a>	2020
“Celui qui défendait la musique réunionnaise” <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2IB1Sh9ebs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2IB1Sh9ebs</a>	2016