

Nana constructions in Reunion Creole: from bi-clausal cleft to monoclausal broad focus construction

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In this talk, I present an RRG analysis of *nana* constructions in Reunion Creole, a French-based Creole spoken on the Indian Ocean island of Reunion. I focus on the broad focus construction illustrated in (1), which is comparable in function to the better known *avoir* clefts of French, illustrated in (2).

- (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' (Lit. 'last night there is a private number that phoned me') (SMS corpus, Cougnon 2012)
- (2) *Y'a le téléphone qui sonne !*
PF-have.3SG DEF telephone REL ring.3SG
'The phone's ringing!' (Lit. 'There is the phone that is ringing') (Lambrecht 1988: 137)

Avoir clefts are similar to the well-studied *c'est* and *it*-clefts (e.g. *It was John that baked the cake*) in that they are bi-clausal constructions which express a single proposition, but unlike *c'est/it* clefts, *avoir* clefts are typically associated with broad focus rather than narrow focus. *C'est/it*-clefts are described as specificational sentences as they specify a value for a variable (Lambrecht 2001; Pavey 2004), whereas the function of *avoir* clefts is described as presentational or event-reporting because they either introduce a new referent into the discourse and then predicate something about that referent, or they report an event (Lambrecht 1988). The relative clause in an *avoir* cleft contains the main assertion rather than presupposed information.

I argue that Reunion Creole's *nana* construction in (1) was once a bi-clausal cleft construction but has developed into a monoclausal construction, where *nana* is a broad focus construction marker rather than a copula. Evidence for this comes from a corpus of written and oral speech; the lack of relative marking in these constructions combined with the loss of *nana*'s verbal properties in the construction means a bi-clausal analysis is not justified. Given that I take bi-clausality to be a defining feature of clefts, I do not analyse the Reunion Creole construction in (1) as a true cleft. By means of comparison, I present syntactic analyses of both the monoclausal examples like (1), and bi-clausal broad focus clefts from which I argue the monoclausal construction has developed.

The monoclausal analysis is straightforward: a default syntactic template for simple sentences is used, and *nana* is a construction marker, not part of the syntactic projection. On the other hand, I propose that bi-clausal broad focus clefts be analysed as cases of clausal co-subordination, based on the following observations: the second clause relies on the first for the interpretation of one of its arguments, the two clauses share clausal operators, but the relative clause is in focus and contains the main assertion of the sentence so it is not a true subordinate clause, placed in the periphery, as other relative clauses are (see e.g. Van Valin & LaPolla 1997; Pavey 2004; Van Valin 2012; París forthcoming). Very few remnants of the bi-clausal broad focus cleft remain in my Reunion Creole data, but this analysis may be applicable to other languages like French, where the structure is a bi-clausal cleft.

In presenting an analysis of broad focus *nana* constructions like those in (1), I distinguish it from two closely related constructions: narrow focus *nana* clefts (equivalent to English narrow focus *there*-clefts) (3) and existentials with a relative clause (4).

(3) **Narrow focus *nana*-cleft**

Na ali i sava
have 3SG FIN go
'There's him that's going'

(4) **Existential with a relative clause**

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

Although the three constructions in (1), (3) and (4) are at first sight similar in form, involving *nana* and, in the case of (3) and (4), an (often zero-marked) relative clause, they have different semantic and discourse-pragmatic properties, which will be outlined briefly in the talk. A crucial difference lies in their discourse function: the monoclausal *nana* constructions in (1) are presentational or event-reporting (i.e. functionally equivalent to broad focus clefts), narrow focus *nana*-clefts serve to assert the existence of a value for a variable (following Pavey's (2004) analysis of the equivalent narrow focus *there*-clefts), and existentials "express a proposition about the existence or presence of someone or something in a context" (Bentley, Ciconte and Cruschina's 2015: 2). This talk therefore builds upon Pavey's (2004) and París's (forthcoming) work on narrow focus cleft constructions, and Bentley, Ciconte and Cruschina's (2015) work on existentials, addressing an important gap in our understanding of this family of related constructions, namely, the distinct analysis of broad focus clefts.

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