

## Free relative clauses in Reunionese

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This study proposes an RRG account of free relative clauses in Reunionese, a French-lexified creole language. Free relatives (FRs), also known as headless relatives, differ from headed relatives in that they do not have an antecedent in the sentence. Rather than modifying an antecedent, they function either as arguments of a predicate (1a), or as adjuncts (1b), in the matrix clause.

- (1) a. John will cook [**what** you like].  
b. [**Whatever** you like], you will like John's cooking.

Cross-linguistically, the free relative pronouns of a language are often identical to the interrogative pronouns in that language, and FRs can have a universal or a specific interpretation (e.g. Caponigro 2003).

Besides Corne (1995), little attention has been given to the relative system of Reunionese. This study presents fresh data from a corpus gathered by the author, where several genres are represented, including radio, comedy, children's stories, blogs and newspapers. The corpus study finds that FRs in Reunionese are usually introduced by *sak* or *sat*, which are thought to be phonological variants (Armand, 1987).

- (2) a. *Ti-Pierre té i agard trankilman [ sak té i espas]*  
little-Pierre IPFV FIN watch peacefully FR IPFV FIN happen  
'Little Pierre was peacefully watching what was happening.' (Children's story)
- b. [*Sat té la*] *la valid in Konstitision*  
FR IPFV there PRF ratify INDF constitution  
'Those who were there validated a constitution.' (Newspaper)

*Sak* and *sat* can both be interpreted as having animate or inanimate referents and both appear in argument or adjunct FRs. Importantly, *sak/sat* are not found in interrogatives, though they appear to be related to Reunionese interrogative pronouns (*kisa* 'who', *kosa* 'what', *ousa* 'where', *kansa* 'when'). Only *kosa* and *ousa* are attested as free relative pronouns, and they appear infrequently in the corpus in this function.

In his discussion of the distribution of relativiser *k* in Reunionese headed relatives, Corne (1995) notes that *k* is obligatory following the pronoun *sa*, though doesn't describe these constructions as FRs. Indeed, they may be analysed as light-headed relatives in the sense of Citko (2004), having a pronominal antecedent. In this talk, I consider the possibility that *sak* and *sat* are developing into true free relative pronouns, though they have originated from a light-headed relative construction. On the light-headed account, these constructions have the same syntactic structure as headed relatives (cf. Van Valin 2012), the antecedent being *sa*. On the free relative pronoun account of *sak/sat*, FRs are RP clauses in which *sak/sat* are pronouns

found either in a pre-core slot (since they are always fronted) or in a core argument position. I hence discuss whether a pre-core slot is justified for Reunionese in these constructions.

On the one hand, this talk will build upon the theoretical discussion of FRs in RRG (cf. Paris forthcoming, Abdoulaye 2011, Van Valin & LaPolla 1997), shedding light on the syntax and semantics of FRs in a lesser-studied language. On the other hand, the talk provides the first RRG analysis of Reunionese syntax.

### References:

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