

# Presentational *nana* constructions in Reunion Creole: from bi-clausal cleft to monoclausal construction

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## Abstract

This paper discusses a cluster of related constructions in Reunion Creole involving *nana* ‘have’. Focusing on a presentational 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.

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

## 1. Introduction

Reunion Creole (RC), also known as Renyoné or Réyoné, 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 *na(na)* ‘have’.<sup>1</sup> In this article, I focus on one construction within this cluster, illustrated in (1), which is functionally comparable to the broad focus *avoir* clefts of French, illustrated in (2), and henceforth referred to as presentational clefts.<sup>2</sup>

(1) SMS corpus, Cougnon (2012)

Hier	soir	néna	un	num	privé	la
yesterday	night	have	INDF	number	private	AUX.PRF
tel	amwin					
phone	me					

‘Last night a private number phoned me’

(2) Lambrecht (1988a: 137)

Y'a	le	téléphone	qui	sonne !
PF-have.3SG	DEF	telephone	REL	ring.3SG

‘The phone’s ringing!’

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 *na(na)* 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, presentational 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 presentational clefts is not analysed as a true subordinate clause as are restrictive relatives and cleft relative clauses of specifical clefts.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Nana* can also be realised as *néna* or *na*. *Nana* likely derives from French *il y en a* ‘there are some’.

<sup>2</sup> This article uses the Leipzig glossing abbreviations, with the following additions: FIN = finite, PF = proform.

<sup>3</sup> By ‘true subordinate clause’, I mean a clause that is both dependent on another clause and embedded within it – see Section 5.3.

Presentational clefts are a type of broad focus construction (also known as sentence-focus, all-focus or thetic sentences), which differentiates them from the better-studied specifical clefts, which exhibit narrow focus (cf. Section 3.1).

The article is laid out as follows. In Section 2, I introduce the data used for the study. In Section 3, I give a definition of presentational clefts, distinguishing them from related constructions; in Section 4 I present the RC data on *nana* constructions, outlining the evidence that the construction in (1) is monoclausal. In Section 5 I offer syntactic analyses of presentational constructions using the Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) framework, which is briefly introduced in Section 5.1. In Section 6, I conclude.

## 2. Data

The data for this study come from a corpus of written and oral materials gathered by the author, detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Corpus materials

Source	Date	Size (words)
<b>Written</b>		<b>239,706</b>
Blog: <i>Oté</i> (11 posts)	2019	3993
Brochure: Expo 2015 “Nout Manjé”	2015	3561
Play script: “Pou in grape létshi”	2009	1745
Children’s Story: “Ti Pierre èk le Lou”	2016	921
Children’s Story: “La femme devenue vache”	2013	1653
Magazine: 7 editions of <i>Kriké</i>	2014-17	5080
Newspaper: 14 editions of <i>Fanal</i>	2015-20	24,771
SMS4Science Corpus: 12,660 SMS (Cougnon 2012)	2008	197,982
<b>Oral</b>		<b>69,935</b>
Documentary film clips		
“Zourné internasional la lang matérnèl 2017”	2017	728
“Zourné internasional la lang matérnèl 2018”	2018	518
19 interview recordings (Baude 2010)	1970-1978	40,049
5 interview recordings (Baude 2010)	2005	20,952
Radio clip: conversation between Bruno & Francky ( <i>Radio Free Dom</i> )	2020	905
TV programme: <i>Koz Pou Nou</i> (1 episode)	2019	4858
2 YouTube comedy sketches (by <i>Le Letchi</i> ):		
“Tonton Politicien”	2020	937
“Celui qui défendait la musique réunionnaise”	2016	988
<b>Total</b>		<b>309,641</b>

The corpus is composed of materials gathered by author, supplemented with two pre-existing corpora: a corpus of SMS messages (Cougnon 2012) and an oral corpus of conversation recordings, *Corpus de la Parole* (Baude 2010). The oral materials were transcribed using the linguistic annotator software ELAN. As seen in Table 1, the written section of the corpus contains representation of a variety of genres and styles, from informal SMS messages and blog posts to more formal texts including literature and newspapers. Note that the written component of the corpus makes up approximately three quarters of the corpus.

As is the case for many understudied languages, there are no large corpora available for RC. The corpus described in Table 1 totals 309,641 words. Given that the corpus is fairly small, the pieces of evidence presented in the article are not always supported by a statistically significant number of tokens. In the remainder of the article, I indicate in brackets the genre of the text or recording of all examples coming from the corpus.

### 3. Presentational clefts and their delimitation

#### 3.1. Definition of presentational clefts

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>4</sup> The clefts that have received the greatest attention in the literature are specificalational clefts exhibiting narrow focus over the clefted constituent, known as *it*-clefts in English and *c'est*-clefts in French:

(3) French, Bonan & Ledgeway (2023: 2)

C'est	Jean	qui	me	l'a	raconté.
it=is	Jean	who	me	it=has	told
‘It’s Jean who told me.’					

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

(4) Newspaper

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

Since clefts express a single proposition with bi-clausal syntax, they 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).

<sup>4</sup> See section 5.3 for the differences in the syntactic analysis of restrictive relative clauses and cleft relative clauses of the broad focus type.

(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 specifical as they specify a value (the clefted constituent) for a variable in the cleft relative clause (e.g. Declerck 1988; Lambrecht 2001; Pavé 2004; Destruel 2013). The information in the cleft relative clause is pragmatically presupposed – in other words, it is assumed that the hearer either already knows the information or can take it for granted (Lambrecht 1994: 52).<sup>5</sup>

In this article I focus on presentational clefts, which, like specifical ones, contain a copular verb, a clefted constituent and a cleft relative clause.<sup>6</sup> Unlike specifical clefts, their cleft relative clause is not presupposed, but, rather, is part of the pragmatic assertion, that is, it contains the “new” information that the hearer comes to know, believe or take for granted after hearing the utterance (Lambrecht 1994: 52). Such clefts, illustrated in (6), 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) French, Karssenberg & Lahousse (2018: 516)  
 Il y a mon fiancé qui danse.  
 EXPL PF have.3SG my fiancé REL dance.3SG  
 ‘My fiancé is dancing/There’s my fiancé who’s dancing’

The function of the *avoir*-cleft in (6) 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; Karssenberg & Lahousse 2018). This construction is therefore often referred to as a ‘presentational cleft’.<sup>7</sup> Clefts have the property of being ‘de-cleftable’ (see e.g., Lambrecht 1988, 2001; Dufter 2006), i.e., having a monoclausal counterpart; however, the monoclausal counterpart of a French *avoir*-cleft may not always be pragmatically acceptable (Lambrecht 1988a: 115; Karssenberg 2018: 23). French has two relevant constraints which can lead to that effect: an avoidance of pre-verbal subject focus and a dispreference for lexical subjects as compared with pronominal ones (e.g., Lambrecht 1987, 1988a, 1994: 22, 2010; Larrivée 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). There is a crosslinguistic tendency for elements of cleft constructions to grammaticalise into focus markers (e.g. Heine & Reh 1984; Harris & Campbell 1995 (Chapter 7); Creissels 2021; Hartmann 2021). Grammaticalisation has been at the centre of discussions on the development of creole languages (see, for example, Plag 2002; Baker & Syea 1996;

<sup>5</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>6</sup> The cleft construction may also contain a cleft pronoun preceding the copula, as in French, cf. *il* in (6). The cleft pronoun is typically described as an expletive subject pronoun (e.g. Karssenberg 2018).

<sup>7</sup> In my use of the term ‘presentational clefts’, I include both the event-reporting clefts and those that present a new referent and predicate something about them.

Bruyn 2008), with some arguing that grammaticalisation is accelerated in creole languages (e.g. Michaelis and Haspelmath 2020). Further investigation of clefting in the French Creoles – languages formed via the intense and prolonged contact between spoken varieties of French and the various native languages of enslaved populations (see Zribi-Hertz 2022) – may therefore offer further insights into these constructions, which are still poorly understood not only in creole languages. Before examining whether RC has presentational clefts, I distinguish them from two related constructions.

### 3.2. Distinguishing broad focus clefts from related constructions

Presentational clefts, which are broad focus, must be distinguished from both narrow focus clefts and existential constructions that contain a relative clause.<sup>8</sup> Existentials are defined by Bentley, Ciccone & 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) Magazine

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*’

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 & Ciccone 2015: 2), which is the post-copular noun phrase *in zoli lékol* in (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 presentational 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 cleft, which is broad focus, is a narrow focus cleft with the same copula. 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; Karssenberg 2018; Karssenberg & Lahousse 2017, 2018; Davidse,

<sup>8</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.

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) French, Karssenberg & Lahousse (2018: 533)  
 “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  
 ““How I Met Your Mother” is great, there’s also “Lost” that is good.’

(9) Reunion Creole, Conversation, Baude (2010)  
 Context: conversation between a mother and daughter. The mother says she is going dancing this evening and the daughter asks who she is going with. The mother explains that she is going with her friend and her friend’s cousin, who is in the army. They then enter a conversation about the cousin’s annual leave, before the mother returns to the original question of who is going:  
 Na ali i sava, é Tida.  
 have him FIN go and Tida  
 ‘There’s him that’s going, and Tida.’

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’. I will refer to this type of cleft as a non-exhaustive specifical cleft. While they both exhibit *na(na)*, what differentiates such clefts from presentational clefts is that they are narrow focus and the cleft relative clause is presupposed: it is not part of the main assertion of the sentence like it is in a presentational cleft. Another difference between presentational clefts and both existentials containing a relative clause (7) and non-exhaustive specifical clefts (9) concerns the pivot or clefted constituent. In presentational 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 specifical clefts (exhaustive or non-exhaustive) 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 presentational 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.

Table 2 summarises the distinctions between narrow focus clefts, presentational clefts and existentials discussed in this section. These were used as guidelines for distinguishing between the constructions in the corpus analysis, though note that the distinctions were not always clearcut in practice (cf. example (17)).

**Table 2. Criteria for distinguishing between three constructions.**

	Presentational cleft	Narrow focus cleft	Existential construction
<b>Function</b>	Introduce a referent into the discourse and predicate something about it or report an event.	Specify (non-exhaustively) a value for a variable.	Express a proposition about the existence, presence or lack of something in a context.
<b>Distinguishing criteria</b>	Can be de-clefted to a monoclausal SV (subject-verb) counterpart.	Can be de-clefted to a monoclausal SV counterpart.	No SV counterpart.
	Relative clause cannot be removed as it is part of the main assertion.	Relative clause can be removed.	Relative clause can be removed.
	The function of the antecedent of the relative clause must be a subject.	The function of the antecedent of the relative clause can be non-subject.	The function of the antecedent of the relative clause can be non-subject.

Previous research has analysed presentational 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; Karssenberg & Lahousse 2017, 2018; Karssenberg 2018; Carlier & Lahousse 2023).<sup>9</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 presentational 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.

#### 4. *Nana* constructions in Reunion Creole

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

<sup>9</sup> Though for English, see Davidse, Njende & O’Grady (2023), and for Italian, see Karssenberg et al (2017); Cruschina (2018); Carlier & Lahousse (2023).

The presentational *nana* construction<sup>10</sup> involves the verb ‘have’, whose paradigm is given in Table 3.<sup>11</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 3.** Paradigm of the verb ‘have’ in RC

Past	<i>navé</i>	<i>lavé</i>
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 3), whose comparative distribution has scarcely been discussed in the literature on RC (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 found as auxiliaries too, where there is no *l*-form. The *l*-forms are also possible for expressing possession and existence.<sup>12</sup>

(12) a. Newspaper

Nou la	komans	mié	organiz	anou
we AUX.PRF	start	better	organise	us

‘We have started to better organise ourselves.’

b. Conversation

mwin	lavé	vu	in	gramoun
I	have.PST	see	INDF	old.person

‘I had seen an elderly person’

(13) a. Newspaper

nou na	tout	lo	bann	zouti
we have	all	DEF	PL	tool

‘We have all the tools’

b. Magazine

néna	in	bonpë	kalité	kaz	kréol
have	INDF	lot	type	house	creole

‘There are lots of types of creole house’

In this section, I shed some further light on the distribution of these forms. I argue that the element *na(na)* that is found in presentational constructions has lost its copular verb properties. The presentational *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

<sup>10</sup> In this section, I argue that the RC *nana* construction in (10) is monoclausal. Given that I take bi-clausality to be a defining feature of clefts, I refer to RC’s *nana* construction as a presentational construction rather than a cleft.

<sup>11</sup> Note that while RC verbs inflect for tense, they do not inflect for person/number.

<sup>12</sup> Impressionistically, *l*-forms are less frequent than *n*-forms in this function, but their comparative frequencies have not been measured.

they are not bi-clausal, and that, therefore, presentational *nana* constructions are, while functionally equivalent to French presentational *avoir*-clefts (cf. (2), (6)), not to be considered clefts under the definition adopted here (cf. section 3) as they are, crucially, not bi-clausal.

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

I found 202 putative presentational *nana* constructions in the corpus. Using the diagnostics outlined in Section 3.2, I classified 98 of these as genuine presentational *nana* constructions (and not existentials or narrow focus *nana*-clefts), 52 of which were found in the written component and 46 in the oral component.<sup>13</sup> Normalised per million words, the written component contained 217 and the oral component 658, meaning the presentational constructions were three times more frequent in the oral component of the corpus. This indicates that RC's *nana* constructions are in line with French *il y a*-clefts in being more frequent in informal speech than the written language (cf. Karszenberg 2018: 96).

The monoclausal analysis of *nana* presentational constructions is supported by two kinds of evidence: the lack of relative marking and the loss of copular verb properties of *na(na)* in the construction. I begin with the lack of relative marking in section 4.1.1.

##### 4.1.1. 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 (McLellan 2019, 2023b), as illustrated in Table 4, the data for which come from the same corpus, detailed in Section 2.

**Table 4.** 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

When subject and object relative clauses are marked in RC, they are marked with a relative complementiser *k(e)*, which is invariant, cannot be preceded by a preposition and also optionally introduces complement clauses (see McLellan (2023b, c) for a comprehensive overview and analysis of the system of relative markers).

<sup>13</sup> Note that where an example was open to a presentational or an existential interpretation, I kept it in the group of presentational rather than excluding it as an existential – cf. (17) below as an example.

## (14) Comedy sketch

Nou la rotrouv de mo **ke** minm mon granpèr  
 we AUX.PRF find INDF word REL even my grandpa  
 i utilize pu.  
 FIN use NEG

‘We found words that even my grandpa doesn’t use anymore.’

Oblique relative clauses, which are preferably marked (cf. Table 4), can also be marked with *ke* (15) or, alternatively, a relative pronoun (16), which is required if the preposition is not stranded, since *ke* cannot be preceded by a preposition (McLellan 2023b: 112).

## (15) Newspaper

Po lo 2-3 moun moin lé finn kroizé, é **ke**  
 for DEF 2-3 person I COP COMPL cross and REL  
 moin la koz ansamm, (...)  
 I AUX.PRF speak with

‘For the 2-3 people I met and that I spoke to, ...’

## (16) Magazine

(...) lo group maloya Maronér Koméla ansanm kisa  
 DEF group maloya Maronér Koméla with REL  
 li sort de lalbom.  
 he release two album

‘the maloya group with whom he released two albums’

The function of the relativised element in the cleft relative clause of a presentational cleft is virtually always subject (cf. section 3.2). Of the 202 putative presentational *nana* constructions in the corpus, there were 176 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 4), 90% of those were zero-marked. Examining the 18 examples that were marked, none were functioning clearly as presentational constructions but, rather, fall into a classification as one of the two lookalike constructions outlined in section 3.2: existentials containing a relative clause (17) or narrow focus *nana*-clefts (18).

## (17) Conversation

le kréol euh nana bokou euh **ki**<sup>14</sup> 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’

<sup>14</sup> The form *ki* found in this example is simply a case of the invariant relative marker *ke* being followed by the finiteness marker *i*; it is not a subject relative pronoun akin to French *qui* (see McLellan 2023a, b).

(18) *Newspaper*

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'

Examples like (17) 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 4.1.2.2. As for example (18), 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 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 *na(na)*, discussed in the next section, means there is no reason to consider the presentational construction bi-clausal in RC.

#### 4.1.2. *Frozen copula*

The constructions discussed in this article have in common their use of the element *nana*, whose full paradigm was given in Table 3. In this section, I argue that in the presentational construction, *na(na)* occurs only in the present tense (section 4.1.2.1) and the form *na(na)* cannot be negated in this construction (section 4.1.2.2).<sup>15</sup> These are taken as signs that *na(na)* loses its verbal properties in this construction, to the effect that *na(na)* is no longer analysed as a copula and instead functions as the marker of a presentational construction (cf. section 4.2).

##### 4.1.2.1. *Tense*

The distribution of the forms of the copula in *nana* constructions in the corpus is given in Table 5.

<sup>15</sup> I acknowledge that the absence of negation might be seen as a property of presentational clefts, but in section 4.1.2.2. I point out that these constructions can be negated in special circumstances, yet we do not find *na(na)* negated in this construction, we find a different form of the copula – *la* – which appears to be a specialized form for negation. I argue that we do not find *na(na)* negated in this construction because it has become a construction marker and is no longer a copula (cf. Section 5.2).

**Table 5.** Forms of the copula in *nana* constructions in the corpus

Tense	Form	Tokens
Present	<i>na</i>	127
	<i>nana/néna</i>	55
	<i>la</i>	6
Past	<i>navé</i>	4
	<i>lavé</i>	8
Future	<i>nora</i>	2

Table 5 shows that the most frequently found forms are the present tense forms *na* and *nana* (these forms are interchangeable in presentational constructions).<sup>16</sup> The present-tense forms are found even when the cleft relative clause verb is tensed:

(19) Newspaper

Ant désanm 1985 é zanvié 1986 na minm in  
 between December 1985 and January 1986 have even INDF  
 délégasian 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, (...’)

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>17</sup>

(20) Conversation

é lavé bokou d'gens<sup>18</sup> ki parlé  
 and have.PST lots of people REL-FIN speak.IPFV  
 kom sa kan ou lété marmay  
 like that when you be.IPFV child  
 ‘and were there lots of people who spoke like that when you were a child?’

<sup>16</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 McLellan 2023b: 272-273). Such constructions are existentials not presentational clefts.

(i) Conversation

*Nana/\*na i mèt sinter nwar*  
 have FIN put belt black  
 ‘There are (people) who wear a black belt’

<sup>17</sup> I discuss those that could not be classified as such in section 5.3.

<sup>18</sup> In examples (20) and (21), there are instances of code switching into French, which is frequently found in RC: the NP *boko d'gen* (20) and *tous les gens* (21). The lexical items in these NPs are French words with counterparts in RC, and the structure is French.

## (21) Conversations

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?’

Example (20) is clearly bi-clausal not only due to the tensed copula, but also the relative marker. However, it is not a presentational construction: the sentence is about the existence of a quantity of people who speak a certain way. Example (21) is clearly not a presentational construction either as the cleft relative clause is presupposed.

The emergence of a default present tense copula in cleft constructions has also been found in other languages such as French and Portuguese (cf. Lambrecht 1986; Ambar 2005; De Cesare 2017), so this feature is not surprising in RC. However, additional evidence from negation, discussed in the next section, further supports the argument that *na(na)* is losing its verbal properties in this construction, to the extent that it is no longer a copula. Moreover, what differentiates RC’s *nana* construction from its French counterpart is the absence of a relative marker alongside the loss of verbal properties of the copula, which points towards a monoclausal analysis for RC but not for French.

#### 4.1.2.2. Negation

Alongside *na* and *nana*, there is a third present tense form: *la* (cf. Table 3). While *la* occurs infrequently in *nana* constructions (cf. Table 5), its occurrence is associated with negation, which is present in 5/6 (83%) examples of *la* in *nana* constructions in the corpus, illustrated in (22).

## (22) Blog post

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

By way of comparison, only 10/188 (5%) examples exhibited 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. Examining those examples where we find a negated *n*-form, it is clear that they are either narrow focus clefts (23) or existentials (24).

## (23) Newspaper

Mé	na	pwin	riynk	sa	la	parl	osi	koripsion
but	have	NEG	only	DEM	AUX.PRF	speak	also	corruption
su	lo	dosié						
on	DEF	file						

‘but there’s not only that which pointed to corruption on the file’

## (24) Conversation

na poin inn relizion ke lé plis ke l'ot.  
 have NEG one religion COMP COP more COMP DEF-other  
 'there's not one religion that is more than another'

The fact that we do not find *na(na)* negated in the presentational constructions lends support to the argument that *na(na)* is not a copular verb in the construction, but rather, a construction marker, which is why it cannot be negated. However, given the low number of tokens, further research on patterns of negation in these constructions would be beneficial. It is also important to point out that there are noted restrictions on negation found in presentational clefts (Lambrecht 2002: 174; Karssenberg 2018: 41-44; Gaeta 2023: 123), which may explain why negation of *na(na)* in these constructions is not found in the corpus. For example, Lambrecht (1986) notes that the French sentence in (25) is infelicitous (cf. example (2), which is not negated, for comparison):

## (25) French, Lambrecht (1986: 118)

\*Y'a pas le téléphone qui sonne.  
 PF-have.2SG NEG DEF telephone REL ring.3SG  
 'The phone's ringing!'

However, Karssenberg (2018: 41-44) shows that there is not a blanket ban on negation in such clefts, offering example (26) as a counterexample, among others.

## (26) French, Karssenberg (2018: 42)

*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'

Explaining the conditions of acceptability of negation in presentational clefts, Karssenberg (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 (26). Returning to the classification of *nana* constructions adopted here (cf. section 3.2), 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.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the negated presentational constructions may be better classified as existential constructions if they are about the absence of an event that usually occurs in a given context.

<sup>19</sup> As pointed out by a reviewer, 'there' seems to have a deictic function in example (26), which supports an existential analysis. However, another reviewer points out that the definiteness of the clefted NP lends support to a presentational analysis, as definite NPs are known to be restricted in existentials (cf. Bentley, Ciccone & Cruschina 2015: 161). This illustrates that further work is needed to better understand the boundary between existentials and presententials.

While in section 3.2 I presented a clear distinction between presentational clefts and existentials that contain a relative clause, they are not always easily distinguished. In fact, different authors appear to draw a line between existentials and presentational clefts 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 expressed 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 altogether (see Bianchi 1993, Erteschik-Shir 1997; Benincà 1988; Calabrese 1992; Saccon 1993; Lahousse 2007; Parry 2013; Bentley & Cruschina 2018; Bentley & Ciccone 2024). I argued that presentational clefts and existential constructions do exhibit differences, particularly if we consider the most prototypical examples of each of them, yet, in some of the examples presented in this section, we have seen that the boundary between these two constructions is not always clear (cf. example (17)). 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 cleft in RC has clearly grammaticalised, as *na(na)* is no longer a copula but a marker of a broad focus presentational construction, which is monoclausal. This will be expanded upon in the analysis presented in the next section.

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

The aim of this section is to provide an analysis of the presentational *nana* constructions described in section 4. I begin by briefly introducing the key tenets of the RRG framework in section 5.1, which will be used in the analyses presented in the subsequent sections.

### 5.1. 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>20</sup> This will be illustrated in the next section, where I present the monoclausal analysis of presentational *nana* constructions.

## 5.2. Monoclausal presentational construction

In section 4.1 I argued that RC's presentational *nana* 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 (27) to illustrate the analysis, which is given in Figure 1.<sup>21</sup>

(27) **SMS**

néna	un	num	privé	la	tel	amwin
have	INDEF	number	private	AUX.PRF	phone	me
'Last night a private number phoned me'						

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

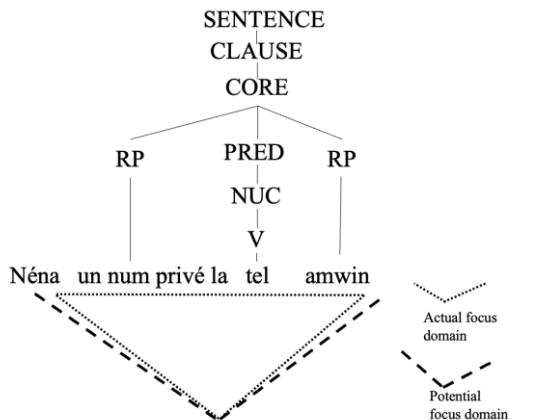


Figure 1 illustrates a simple sentence in RC, where *néna* is not attached to the constituent projection (the lexical tree representing the syntactic structure). That *néna* does not occur in the syntactic representation reflects the assumption that it does not appear in the semantic representation of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

<sup>20</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>21</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).

classification of verbs. The semantic representation of (27), which contains an activity predicate, is given in (28).

(28) **do'** (x, [ring' (x, y)])

The variable *x* is filled with the value *un num privé* and the variable *y* with *amwin*. *Néna* does not enter into the lexical decomposition 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 presentational construction, which is broad focus like its cleft counterpart. 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 *na(na)* will appear as a requirement of the construction in the relevant template. Therefore, while I have maintained the distinctness of the presentational 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 presentational cleft from which this monoclausal construction is likely to have derived, which shows that the grammaticalisation has resulted in a simpler structure.

### 5.3. Presentational 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 construction has become monoclausal in RC, I found remnants of the bi-clausal structure, in the two examples in (29) and (30), both of which happen to come from the older, oral component of the corpus.

(29) Conversation

(...)	navé	mon	fils	la	pas
	have.PST	my	son	AUX.PRF	pass
‘(...)' there was my son that came by'					

(30) Conversation

(...)	lavé	le	tan	té	in	peu	gate
	have.PST	DEF	weather	IPFV	INDF	bit	spoiled
‘(...)' there was the weather that was rubbish'							

Neither (29) nor (30) can be analysed as monoclausal as the copula is inflected for tense in both instances. They also do fulfil the function of a presentational construction and cannot instead be classified as narrow focus clefts or existentials. The syntactic analysis of presentational clefts has been little discussed in the syntactic

literature, and I thus aim to fill an important gap. I will illustrate the analysis with example (30), whose syntactic representation is given in Figure 2.<sup>22</sup>

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

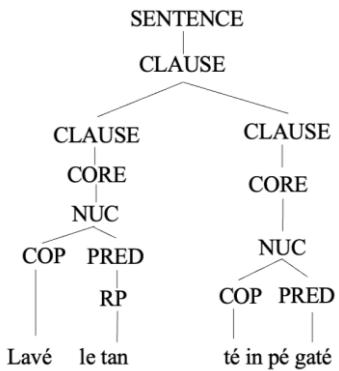


Figure 2 exemplifies not a subordinated structure but a structure exhibiting what is known in RRG as clausal co-subordination. In addition to subordination and co-ordination, RRG posits a third type of clause linkage, termed co-subordination (Ohori 2023: 536; Van Valin 2023: 71). Co-subordination describes 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 22) with the unit it depends on at the level of the juncture (i.e., at the layer level: clause, core or nucleus). For the presentational 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 presentational 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 presentational clefts is that the second clause is dependent on the first for the interpretation of one of its arguments (*le tan* ‘the weather’ in (30)). The semantic representation of a presentational cleft is the same as its monoclausal counterpart because they are truth-conditionally equivalent, it is only their focus structure that differs (see Bentley, Ciccone & 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 presentational 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 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

<sup>22</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.

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 presentational cleft structure with that of a restrictive relative clause, like that in (31), further illustrates why co-subordination is preferable for presentational cleft relative clauses and captures the difference between the two types of apparently similar clauses.

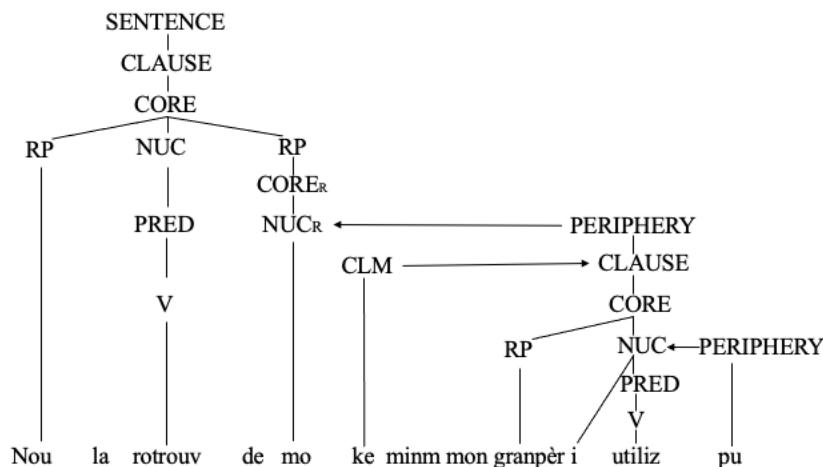
(31) YouTube sketch

Nou	la	rotrouv	d	mo	ke	minm	mon
we	AUX.PRF	find	INDF	word	REL	even	my
granpèr	i	utiliz	pu.				
grandpa	FIN	use	NEG				

‘We found words that even my grandpa doesn’t use anymore.’

The syntactic representation of example (31) 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 (RP; cf. footnote 21) because they are an optional modifier rather than a core argument (Van Valin & LaPolla 1997: 497). RPs also have a layered structure, parallel to that of a clause (cf. section 5.1), 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 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.

A key advantage of the RRG framework for analysing cleft structures is the emphasis that it places on the equal weight of syntax, semantics and pragmatics, and, crucially, their interaction, which the construction-specific treatment allows you to capture more effectively than in a compositional treatment. As noted above, there are

mismatches between the syntax and the semantics in that there are two predicates in the syntax but only one in the semantics, as the bi-clausal structure expresses a single proposition. However, RRG allows this mismatch to be accounted for with reference to the strong influence of pragmatics in these constructions: one of the syntactic predicates of cleft constructions is a pragmatic predicate, but not a semantic one.

## 6. Conclusion

In this article, I discussed RC's *nana* constructions with a presentational function. I argued that, while being functionally equivalent and deriving from a French *avoir*-cleft, they have developed into a monoclausal construction, where *na(na)* 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 cleft and a restrictive relative clause and thus contributed to an important gap in our understanding of a family of related constructions.

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