

SAK-RELATIVES IN REUNION CREOLE: LIGHT-HEADED OR FREE?

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OUTLINE

I. Introduction

I. Reunion Creole

II. Free relatives

II. Data

III. Interrogative pronouns vs *sak* in free relative clauses

IV. What is *sak*? (and its variants?)

V. Three types of *sak*-relative

VI. Syntactic representations

VII. Conclusion

I. INTRODUCTION



OpenStreet Map

500 km

REUNION CREOLE: SOCIOLINGUISTIC BACKGROUND

- Lexifier: French
- Other input languages: Malagasy and, to a lesser extent, Bantu languages (Corne 1999: 73) and Tamil (Watbled 2020: 155).
- The majority of the population (~800,000) speak Reunion Creole (ReuC) as a mother tongue, alongside French.
- Traditionally, Reunion is described as a diglossic context.
- There is a particularly high degree of variation in Reunion (varieties existing across a continuum from standard French to basilectal ReuC) (Bollée 2013)

REUNION CREOLE: LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND

- ReuC, unlike the other French creoles, retained some verbal inflection (temporal/aspectual), but there is no inflection for number/person.

(1) Zot *i* manzé in kari.
3PL FIN eat.IPFV INDF curry
'They were eating a curry.'

In addition to via inflection, tense/aspect can be marked via preverbal markers (TMA markers), which is more characteristic of creoles.

(2) Zot té *i* manz in kari.
3PL IPFV FIN eat INDF curry
'They were eating a curry.'

REUNION CREOLE: LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND

- Pronominal objects occupy the same post-verbal position as non-pronominal ones:

(3) *Ou la apèl amwin*

2SG PRF call ISG

‘You called me.’

- ReuC allows clauses with no subject:

(4) *Kèl zèpisse Ø i mèt dann kari ?*

which spice FIN put in curry

‘Which spices does one put in curry?’ (Brochure)

(5) *Kan zot la giny zot retrét [...], Ø la artourn dan zot péi*

when 3PL PRF gain their pension PRF return to their country

‘When they got their pension, [...], (they) returned to their country’ (Newspaper)

FREE RELATIVE CLAUSES

- Free relative clauses (FRs) are clauses that take the place of a phrasal constituent in a sentence, forming a referential phrase.

(6) I like [**what** you bought].

- In many languages, free relative pronouns are identical to interrogative pronouns (Posner 1985; Caponigro 2003; Van Riemsdijk 2006 among others).

FREE RELATIVE CLAUSES

Semantic interpretations:

- **Definite-like**

(7) *Jie ate what Adam cooked*

= *Jie ate the food that Adam cooked.* (Caponigro 2003: 48)

- **Universal-like**

(8) *Whatever Adam presented sounded plausible.*

= *Everything Adam presented sounded plausible* (Šimik 2020: 9)

- **Free choice**

(9) *I'll eat whatever you have.*

≠ *I'll eat everything you have.*

LIGHT-HEADED RELATIVES (CITKO 1999; 2004)

Relative clauses with a light antecedent in the sentence, 'light' meaning the antecedent is pronominal rather than lexical.

(10) a. *Jan czyta to co Maria czyta.* Polish
Jan reads this what Maria reads
'Jean reads what Maria reads.'

b. *Jean lit ce qu' il aime* French
Jean reads this that he likes
'Jean reads what he likes.'

Citko (2004: 97)

FREE RELATIVES IN REUNION CREOLE

The most common way to form a free relative in ReuC is with one of the following forms: *sak*, *sat*, *sék*, *sét* and *sad*.

- (11) *Sat té là* *la valid in Konstitision*
FR IPFV there PRF ratify INDF constitution
'Those who were there ratified a constitution' (newspaper)
- (12) *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)

FREE RELATIVES IN REUNION CREOLE

- (13) *Mi rozèt pa sèt mon kamarad i di.*
ISG reject NEG FR my compatriot FIN say
'I do not reject what my compatriot says.' (interview)
- (14) (...) *apré sék bann gramoun-la i di.*
according.to FR PL old.person-DEM FIN say
'(...) according to what the elderly people say' (Baude 2010)
- (15) *Tikok i mazine osi sad Tikarl la di ali lot-kou.*
little-cockerel FIN think also FR little-Carl PRF say 2SG other-time
'Little-cockerel is also thinking about what Little-Carl said to him the other time.' (children's story)

Are Reunion Creole's *sak*-relatives light-headed or free?

DEMONSTRATIVE SAK/SAT/SÉK/SÉT/SAD

- The same five forms are also found in a demonstrative context:

(16) *Pran loto-la, sak/sat/sék/sét/sad papa lé kasé.*
take car-DEM DEM father COP broken
'Take that car, Dad's is broken.' (Armand 2014;
confirmed in interviews)

II. DATA

- Corpus study: 267 examples
- Questionnaire (44 responses, May 2021)
- 44 interviews (June 2021 - April 2022)

III. INTERROGATIVE
PRONOUNS VS SAK IN FREE
RELATIVE CLAUSES

Pronoun	Attestations in the corpus
<i>sak</i>	69
<i>sat</i>	164
<i>sét</i>	0
<i>sék</i>	12
<i>sad</i>	0
<i>kisa</i> 'who'	1
<i>kosa</i> 'what'	10
<i>ousa</i> 'where'	11

IV. WHAT IS SAK (AND WHAT ARE ITS VARIANTS)?

- Not an interrogative pronoun
- Occurs in a relative clause context
- Also occurs in a demonstrative context

RELATIVE SAK/SAT/SÉK/SÉT/SAD

(17) *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)

- This function is likely to have originated from French *ça que* 'that(DEM) that(COMP)'

RELATIVE SAK/SAT/SÉK/SÉT/SAD

sa is a demonstrative pronoun

(18) *Dan lo kozé lu la fé po nout zournal (zot va*
in the speech 3SG PRF do for our newspaper 2PL FUT
trouv sa dann paz 2-3)

find DEM on page 2-3

‘in the speech that he did for our newspaper (you will find that on pages 2-3) (...)’ (Political party newspaper)

k(e) is an optional relative complementiser in headed relatives

(19) *nou la retrouve de mot ke mèm mon granpèr i utilis pu*
IPL PRF find INDF word REL even my grandpa FIN use NEG

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

(YouTube sketch)

DEMONSTRATIVE SAK/SAT/SÉK/SÉT/SAD

- The same five forms are also found in a demonstrative context:

(20) *Pran loto-la, sak/sat/sék/sét/sad papa lé kasé.*
take car-DEM DEM father COP broken
'Take that car, Dad's is broken.' (Armand 2014;
confirmed in interviews)

This function is likely to have originated from French *ça de* 'that of'.

DEMONSTRATIVE SAK/SAT/SÉK/SÉT/SAD

- This pronoun cannot stand alone – it must be followed by the possessor NP (as in the previous example) or by an adverb *la*:

(21) *Trap sak/sat/sék/sét/sad-la.*

catch DEM

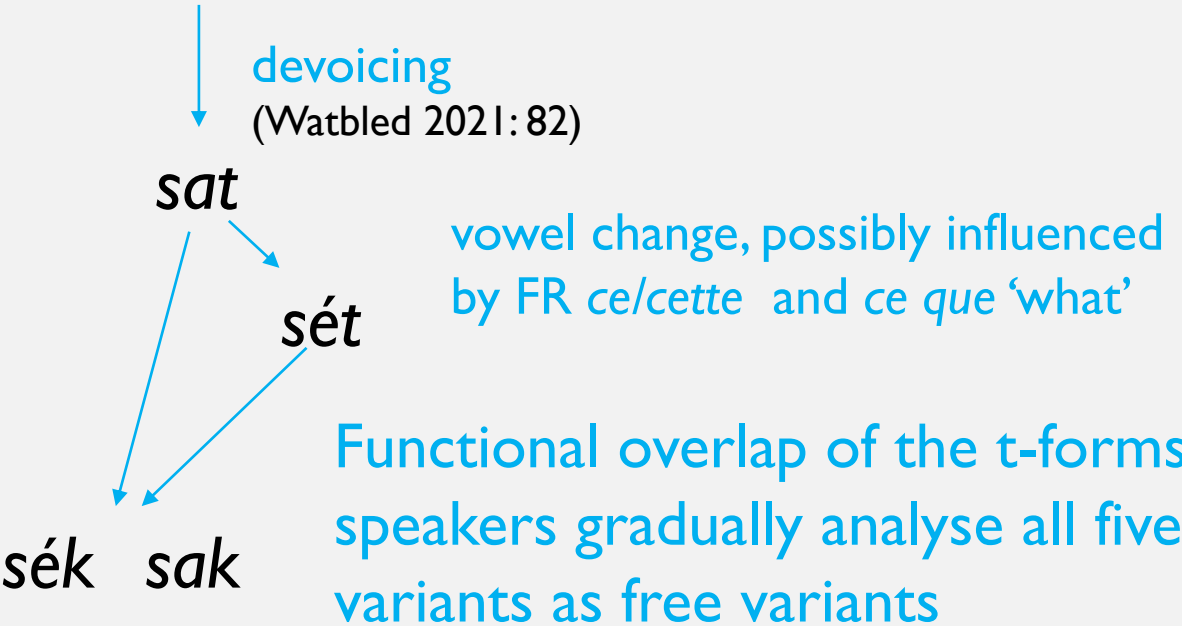
‘Catch that/this one.’

(Albers 2019: 267; confirmed in interviews)

SPECULATIONS ON HOW THESE FIVE FORMS EMERGED IN BOTH CONTEXTS

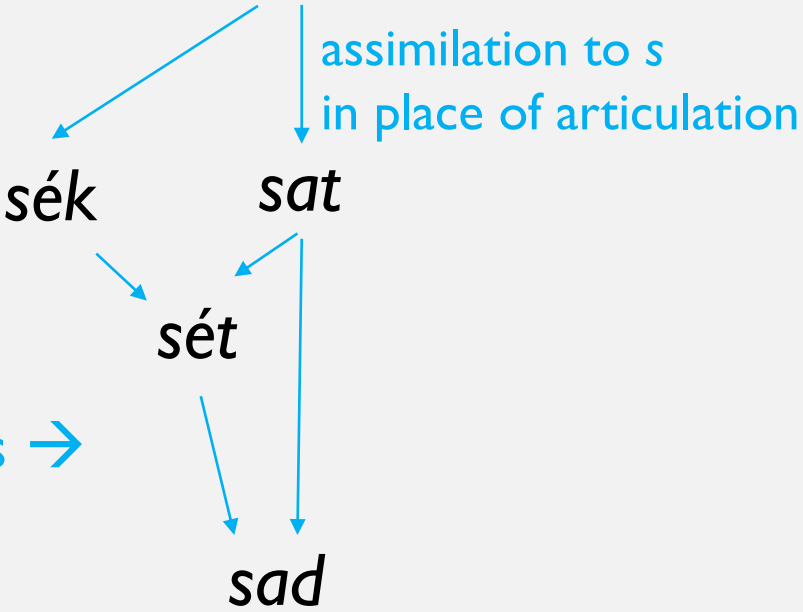
Possessed demonstrative

ça de (FR) → *sad* (ReuC)



Relative clause

ça que (FR) → *sak* (ReuC)



V. THREE TYPES OF SAK- RELATIVE

TYPE I: SA + K?

If *sak*-relatives originate in a light-headed relative clause structure involving *ça que*, does this structure still exist?

SA + K REANALYSED AS SAK?

- Orthographic choices of native speakers: 1/52 cases of *sak* from a written source is written as one word (the remaining example as *sa-k*)
- Interview comments that “*sak/sat* etc are one word”
- Diessel (1999b: 11): coalescence with other free forms is a phonological criterion for diagnosing the grammaticalization of demonstratives

COMPARISON WITH HEADED RELATIVES

- Headed relatives are very often zero-marked in ReuC, but *sa*, for many speakers, cannot occur as the light head of a zero-marked relative, it must be followed by *k*.

(22) **Zot i pé invit sa Ø zot i vé.*
3PL FIN can invite DEM REL 3PL FIN want
'They can invite who/those that they want.'

(23) *Zot i pé invite lo mouné Ø zot i vé.*
3PL FIN can invite DEF people REL 3PL FIN want
'They can invite the people they want.'

COMPARISON WITH HEADED RELATIVES

- I found 3 exceptions in the corpus (of 253 examples), where *sa* occurs alone in a relative clause:

(24) *Toutsat nou fé lé kalké su sa zot la desid po zot.*

all.what IPL do be modelled on PRO 3PL PRF decide for 3PL

‘Everything we do is modelled on what they have decided for themselves.’ (Political party newspaper)

- In such cases, either *sa* has to be analysed as a light head of a zero-marked relative
- OR, perhaps a new innovation

THREE TYPES OF SAK-RELATIVE

Light-headed relatives

Type 1

headed by *sa*
sa [k/∅ ...]

Type 2

headed by
sak/sat/sad/sék/sét
sak/sat/sad/sék/sét [k/∅ ...]

Type 3

True free relatives

sak/sat/sad/sék/sét
is a free relative pronoun
[*sak/sat/sad/sék/sét* ...]

EVIDENCE FOR TYPE 2 SAK-RELATIVES,
WITH *SAT/SAK/SÉK/SÉT/SAD* AS HEAD

(25) *Sat/?sak ke mwin la vu yèr lété shèr.*
DEM REL ISG PRF see yesterday COP.IPFV expensive
'The one I saw yesterday was expensive.'

- Example (25) was accepted by 9/14 (64%) participants with *sat*, and 1/14 (7%) with *sak*.
- No such examples were found in the corpus or in the literature.

EVIDENCE FOR TYPE 2 SAK-RELATIVES,
WITH *SAT/SAK/SÉK/SÉT/SAD* AS HEAD

- (26) *Lo fiy, sat/sak pou ki ou ékri in shanson, lé zèn.*
DEF girl DEM for REL 2SG write a song COP young
'The girl, the one for whom you are writing a song, is young.'

TYPE 2 SAK-RELATIVES, WITH
SAT/SAK/SÉK/SÉT/SAD AS THE HEAD

If there is evidence of a light-headed structure with *sat/sak/sék/sét/sad* as a demonstrative head, could we propose that *sak*-relatives all have this light-headed structure but usually with a zero-marked relative?

TYPE 2 SAK-RELATIVES, WITH SAT/SAK/SÉK/SÉT/SAD AS THE HEAD

Four major pragmatic uses of demonstratives (Himmelman 1996; Diessel 1999b):

1. Exophoric → refer to an entity in the speech situation e.g. *this* cut on my leg hurts
2. Endophoric
 1. Anaphoric/tracking → refer to a previous NP in discourse e.g. *I saw a woman on the street yesterday. This* woman came up to me...
 2. Discourse deictic → refer to a proposition in the discourse e.g. *My friend got made redundant. That* really shocked me.
 3. Recognitional → have a referent whose identity is recovered via shared knowledge e.g. *those* people we met the other day

TYPE 2 SAK-RELATIVES, WITH
SAT/SAK/SÉK/SÉT/SAD AS THE HEAD

- (27) *Navé dot té i koz pa dutou-dutou kréol, kisoï sak zot*
have.IPFV other IPFV FIN speak NEG at.all-at.all creole that.it.be DEM their
paran lavé pa transmèt azot la lang, (...)
parent have.IPFV NEG pass.on 3PL DET language
'There were others that didn't speak any creole at all, be that those whose
parents had not passed on the language, (...)'

DETERMINATIVE RELATIVES (HIMMELMANN 1997; DIESSEL, 1999)

- The demonstrative acts as the head of a relative clause, but it does not have any of the principal functions of a demonstrative (exophoric, anaphoric, discourse deictic, recognitional) (Diessel 1999)
- The head is semantically empty and serves as an anchor for the following relative clause (Himmelman, 1997)

(28) *Those who backed a similar plan last year hailed the message.* (Himmelman 1997)

DETERMINATIVE RELATIVES

- Diessel (1999b) considers the presence of determinative relatives to be an early sign of grammaticalization.
- We find plenty of them in ReuC:

(29) *Zot i protèz pa sat lé atèr.*
3PL FIN protect NEG FR COP on.ground
'They do not protect those who are on the ground.'

FREE CHOICE SAK RELATIVES

(30) “If I won the Freedomillion...

Mi astéré sak mon fami i vé

ISG-FIN buy.COND what my family FIN want

‘I would buy whatever my family want.’

(31) *Ma maryé èk sak mi vé.*

ISG-FUT marry with who ISG-FIN want

‘I will marry whoever I want.’

FREE CHOICE SAK RELATIVES

- When asked to translate (32a) from French into ReuC, a participant produced (32b):

(32a) *Il tombe amoureux de quiconque il rencontre.*
3SG fall. 3SG in.love PREP whoever 3SG meet.3SG
'He falls in love with whoever he meets.'

(32b) *Lu tomb amoro de **sat** lu kwaz.*
3SG fall in.love PREP whoever 3SG cross
'He falls in love with whoever he meets.'

SAK IN FREE ADJUNCT FREE RELATIVES

- Free adjunct free relatives have a concessive interpretation and can be paraphrased with a “No matter...” clause (Izvorski 2000; Van Riemsdijk 2005)
 - (33) Whoever comes to the party, I will be happy.
(=No matter who comes to the party, I will be happy.)
- Light-headed relatives are reportedly not permitted in free adjunct free relatives (Izvorski 2000; Citko 2010; Cinque 2020)
 - (34) *Those who come to the party, I will be happy.

SAK IN FREE ADJUNCT FREE RELATIVES

- (35) *Sak i vyin, mwin sra kontan.*
FR FIN come ISG be.FUT happy
Intended: 'Whoever comes, I will be happy.'

THREE TYPES OF SAK-RELATIVE

Light-headed relatives

Type 1

headed by *sa*
sa [k/∅ ...]

Type 2

headed by
sak/sat/sad/sék/sét
sak/sat/sad/sék/sét [k/∅ ...]

True free relatives

Type 3

sak/sat/sad/sék/sét
is a free relative pronoun
[*sak/sat/sad/sék/sét* ...]

VI. SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE

- How can these *sak*-relatives be represented syntactically?

ROLE AND REFERENCE GRAMMAR (RRG)

- RRG (Van Valin & LaPolla 1997; Van Valin 2005; 2008; Bentley et al. forthcoming) is a monostratal approach to grammar which places equal weight on the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic components of grammar.
- Reference Phrases (RPs), typically NPs/DPs in other frameworks, are referring expressions that serve as an argument of a verb or adposition. They have a layered structure, parallel to a clause.

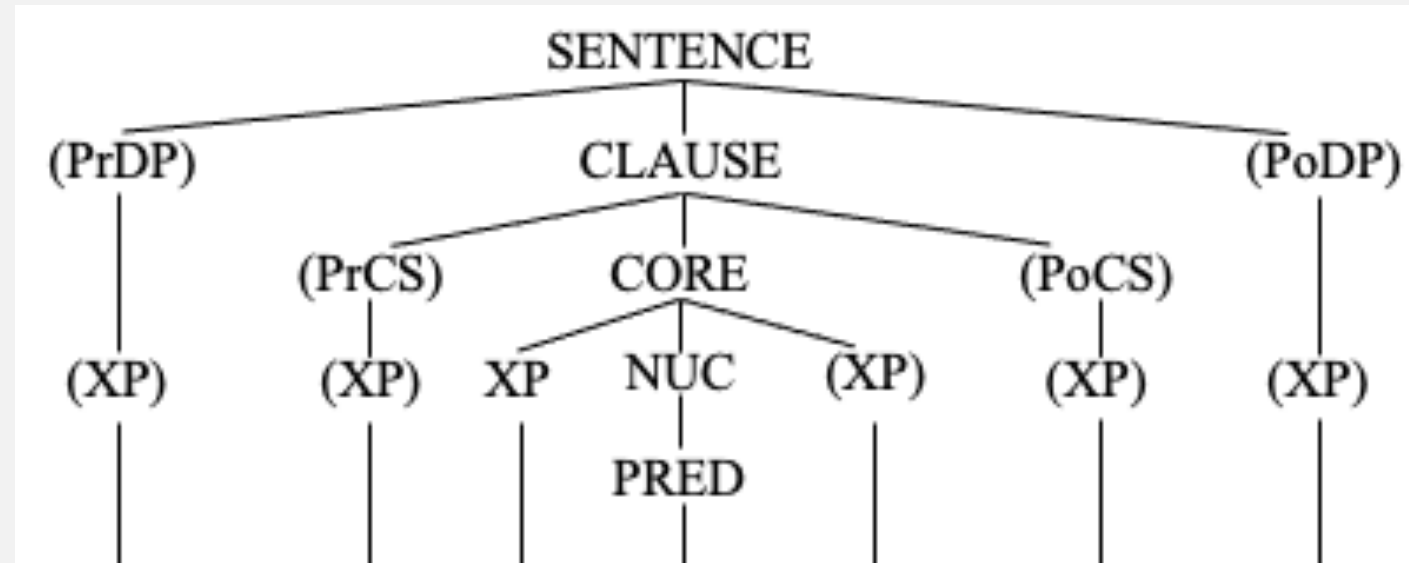
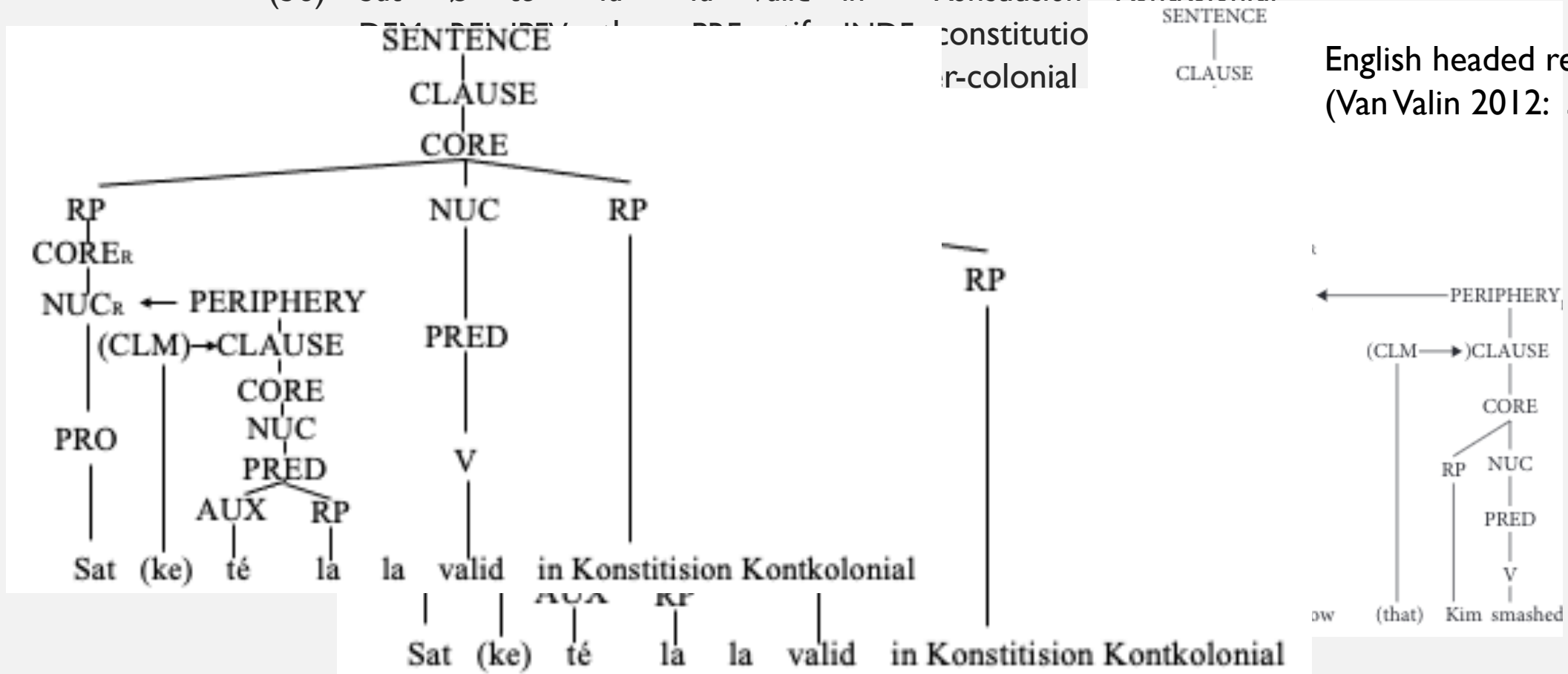


Figure 1: Constituent projection of the layered structure of the clause in RRG

LIGHT-HEADED RELATIVES

(36) *Sat* \emptyset *té* *la* *la* *valid* *in* *Konstitision* *Kontkolonial*



English headed relative clause
(Van Valin 2012: 56)

Figure 2: Syntactic representation of light-headed relative clause

FREE RELATIVES

(37) *Mi astéré sak mon fami i vé*
 ISG-FIN buy.COND what my family FIN want
 'I would buy what(ever) my family want.'

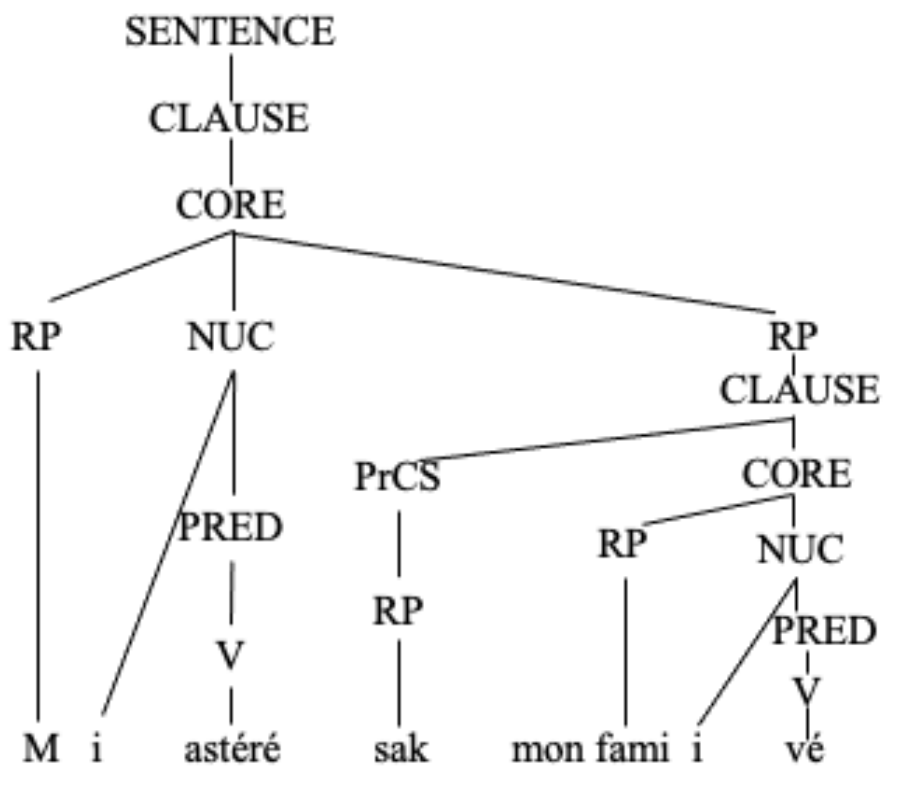


Figure 3: Syntactic representation of a free relative clause

LIGHT-HEADED VS. FREE RELATIVES

LIGHT-HEADED RELATIVES

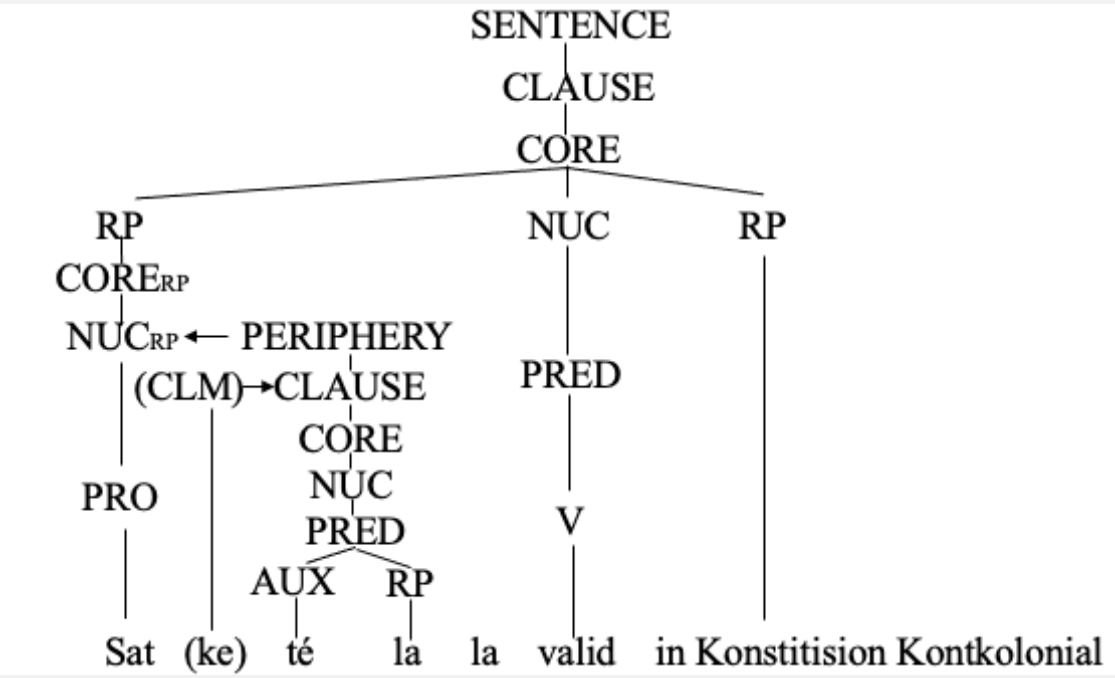


Figure 4

FREE RELATIVES

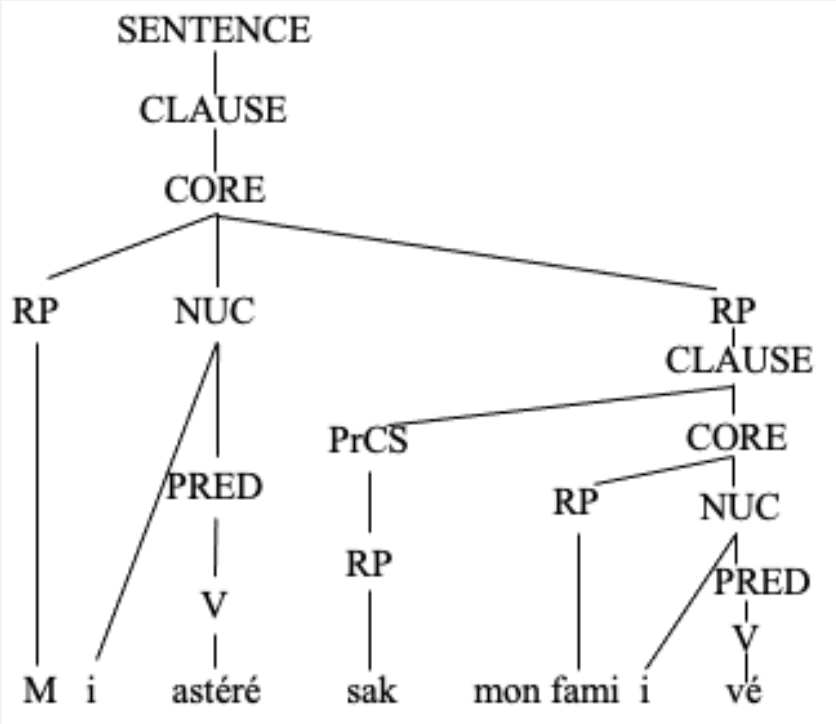


Figure 5

VII. CONCLUSION

- ReuC's free relatives appear to have originated as light-headed relative clauses with a light antecedent *sa*.
- The five forms *sak*, *sat*, *sék*, *sét* and *sad* developed into new demonstrative pronouns.
- The existence of the new demonstrative pronouns led to the question of whether we have a second light-headed structure, with those pronouns as their head.
- However, *sak*, *sat*, *sék*, *sét* and *sad* seem to be developing into true free relative pronouns.

THANK YOU!

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APPENDIX A:
CORPUS
SOURCES

Table A.1.: List of corpus sources

Source	Date
Written	
Blog: <i>Oté</i>	2019
Brochure: Expo 2015 “Nout manjé”	2015
Children’s play script: “Pou in grape létshi”	2009
Children’s story: “Ti Pierre èk le Lou”	2016
Children’s story: “La femme devenue vache”	2013
Magazine: 7 editions of <i>Kriké</i>	2014-17
Newspaper: 19 editions of <i>Fanal</i>	2015-20
SMS4Science Corpus: 12,000 SMS	2008
Oral	
Documentary film clips:	
“Zourné international la lang matérnèl 2017”	2017
“Zourné international la lang matérnèl 2018”	2018
Baude (2010) oral corpus of KR	
19 interview recordings	1970-78
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”	2020
“Celui qui défendait la musique réunionnaise”	2016