

Introducing relative clauses in Mauritian Creole

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In general, relative clauses in MC may be introduced either by an overt complementizer KI or by what we assume to be a null complementizer. This alternation is not affected by the [\pm animate] nature of the relativised noun phrase.

- (1) Mala pa kontan latab/ lapin (ki) Pol inn aste .
M. NEG like table rabbit COMP P. PERF buy
'Mala does not like the table / rabbit that Paul has bought.'

In cases of complementizer optionality, several factors have been identified which constrain this alternation (English, Montreal French), among which intervening material between the head noun and the relative clause or the avoidance of ambiguous structures (Bolinger 1972). The matter is further complicated by the fact that speakers vary as to the acceptability of null Cs. In our analysis of complementizer alternation, we suggest that the referential status of the relativised noun is to be taken into account. We agree with the proposal made by Bolinger according to which a lexical complementizer is used « to enhance restrictiveness » (1972 : 68).

In the determiner system of Mauritian Creole, the postnominal determiner LA has been described as a specificity marker : it is used when the referent is familiar and/or has been already introduced in the discourse. Some speakers do not accept a null COMP if the relativised NP is determined by LA.

- (2) Bann turis apresje lotel { \emptyset /ki} Andre inn uver Black River la.
PL tourist like hotel COMP A. PERF open B.R. DET
'Tourists like the hotel that/which Andre has opened in Black River.'

Similarly, restrictive clauses whose head NP are specific indefinite must have a lexical COMP if the relative clause is essential in limiting the set of individuals to those who fit the description. On the other hand, in cases where the restrictiveness of the relative clause is weaker, KI is optional. The specificity effects that we find in MC relative clauses argue for a close relationship between the Determiner and the COMP position : they indirectly justify the D-complement analysis of relative clauses proposed by Kayne (1994).

References

- Bolinger, Dwight. 1972. *That's that*. Mouton.
Kayne, Richard S. 1994. *The antisymmetry of syntax*. MIT Press.