

Missing Subjects in Mauritian Creole: *pro* or Voice?

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
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Department of Linguistics  
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## Abstract

Root clauses without an overt subject have often been analyzed as having a phonetically null but syntactically present pronoun *pro*. In this dissertation, I investigate constructions in Mauritian Creole that surface without overt subjects. In Mauritian Creole, finite clauses can surface without overt thematic subjects under certain conditions. Specifically, agents of transitive and unergative clauses can remain covert. When these agents are unpronounced, they can be interpreted as referring to people either generically or arbitrarily. I argue that, rather than containing an unpronounced pronominal *pro*, these Mauritian constructions arise from the specification of a non-active Voice head. That is, constructions in Mauritian Creole without overt subjects are like passive (i.e., non-active) constructions in that the covert subject is not a syntactically present DP but a variable introduced by the non-active Voice head.

I review the existing null subject language typology and find that Mauritian Creole subjectless constructions pattern most like those found in what researchers refer to as *semi-null subject* languages. I additionally review a typology of non-active Voice constructions. Given that Voice is the head that introduces external arguments, I pursue a hypothesis according to which Voice is responsible for covert subjects in Mauritian Creole. I show that an analysis in which these constructions have *pro* cannot account for the requirement that (thematic) subjectlessness is

restricted to verbs that take external arguments. I also show how, under my account, the generic versus arbitrary readings of the external argument variable arise. The prediction of my account is that verbs that do not combine with a Voice head do not take implicit subjects, and as I show, this prediction is borne out with unaccusative and stative verbs.

The analysis I propose has consequences for a variety of theoretical domains. First, the universality of the Extended Projection Principle is brought into question. Second, my proposal challenges how some believe structural case is assigned. Finally, if my proposal is correct, then not all subjectless clauses contain *pro*. As such, I question the validity of positing *pro* for other languages that have similar constructions, namely those in semi-null subject languages.

Dedicated to anyone and everyone who believes there's no light at the end of the tunnel.

You can do this.

## Acknowledgements

“Emilia, when will you be done?”

“Emilia, when will you be done?”

“Emilia, when will you be done?”

Omg, I’m done. Now, leave me alone!

I say this partly in jest. It has been a long road to get to the finish line, but this doesn’t mean I haven’t enjoyed many steps of the way. Having to close this chapter of my life is not easy.

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convinced that the inflectional domain had some larger part to play. Diane, thanks for just always being so genuine and encouraging. Lisa Travis, how did you get so cool? I would meet with Lisa when I was living in Montreal about data that I found in Mauritian Creole that interested me. She'd ask questions, I'd ask, "why didn't I think of that?", then I'd go try to find answers. Thanks for always being so thorough and for being just a fun person to talk to. You also got me through a few difficult moments during my dissertation, and I'm very grateful; I'm not sure you were aware. Susana, thank you for all the hard-hitting questions. I need to be kept on my toes. Susana made this dissertation stronger by always asking the questions I didn't anticipate. You may not understand this, Susana, but I really appreciate it. Also, I really love ribbing you. Your laughter is contagious. A massive thank you also goes out to Keir Moulton and Ileana Paul for their invaluable feedback on my work. I appreciate that you also challenged me, and I would have expected nothing less.

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## Abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
ACC	accusative
ASP	aspect
DEM	demonstrative
DET	determiner
IMPRS	impersonal
IPFV	imperfective
IRR	irrealis
IRR1	<i>pu</i>
IRR2	<i>(a)va</i>
MASC	masculine
NEG	negation
NOM	nominative
PART	partitive
PERF	perfect
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PRS	present
PRT	particle
PST	past
PTCP	participle
REAL	realis
SG	singular
SUBJ	subject

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Overview of Thesis

In this thesis, I argue that subjectless constructions in Mauritian Creole have passive-like structures. Mauritian Creole permits thematic external arguments, but not internal arguments, to remain unpronounced under certain conditions. I argue that a *pro*-drop analysis cannot capture the subjectless phenomena in Mauritian Creole. I propose instead that Voice distinctions are responsible for whether an external argument is overt or covert. That is, active Voice in Mauritian Creole requires an overt subject while non-active (i.e., passive-like) Voice introduces a covert, or implicit, external argument. Further, I will argue that the interpretation of covert external arguments derives, in part, from the feature bundles of the non-active Voice heads. In addition, I posit that “null subjects” in what Barbosa (2011a, b; 2019) calls *semi-null subject languages* may be better explained by non-*pro*-drop accounts. I also aim to contribute to the ongoing body of work on non-active Voice heads, research on null-subject clauses, and the expanding literature on Mauritian Creole.

In this chapter, I present a very brief history of Mauritius and the Mauritian language. I then provide some grammatical facts about Mauritian Creole that will be relevant to my analysis and set out my assumptions about the inflectional spine of Mauritian Creole. I then present the theoretical framework within which my proposal will be situated.

### 1.2 Mauritius and Mauritian Creole

Mauritian Creole is spoken in Mauritius, an island on the Indian Ocean approximately 1,600 kilometers east of continental Africa and about 800 kilometers east of the coast of Madagascar.

The island is said to have been uninhabited prior to the Portuguese discovering it in 1512 (Holm 1989: 396). The Portuguese turned out to have little interest in the island, ultimately leaving it without establishing a colony (Addison & Hazareesingh 1984: 3). The Dutch arrived in 1598, giving it the name it has today after Prince Maurice of Nassau of the Dutch Republic (Seuren 1995: 532). Mauritius was on a shipping route between India and The Cape of Good Hope, and was used by the Dutch as a provisioning station (*ibid.*). The Dutch left Mauritius in 1710 after losing interest in India (Seuren 1995: 532) and two unsuccessful attempts to establish a settlement (Strandquist 2005: 31).

In 1715, French colonizers, who were already in neighbouring Réunion and Rodrigues, claimed Mauritius after the departure of the Dutch (Strandquist 2005: 32). French settlers began to arrive in 1721 from Réunion and, later, directly from France (*ibid.*). It was during this time that enslaved labourers started to be brought from neighbouring Réunion, Madagascar, and West and East Africa (Baker & Corne 1982; Seuren 1995: 532). Documents from the mid-1700s refer to a ‘*langue créole*’, indicating that by then, Mauritian Creole was in existence (Baker & Corne 1986: 169; Sycé 2013: 9).

In the early 18th century, most enslaved labourers in Mauritius were West African or Malagasy (Holm 1989: 397). However, by the end of the century, the largest group of enslaved labourers were from East Africa (Strandquist 2005: 32), taken to Mauritius from ports in what are today Mozambique, Tanzania, and Kenya. The people in this last wave are said to have all been speakers of Bantu languages (Strandquist 2005: 32-3). Many of these people were marched to the ports for up to thirty days from their inland homes (Strandquist 2005: 33) and thus may have been speakers of any of the hundreds of Bantu languages spoken in those areas, ultimately bringing those languages to Mauritius (*ibid.*).

In 1810, the British took control of Mauritius from the French (Addison & Hazareesingh 1984: 45; Syea 2013:9). The French, however, were permitted to continue living there, including speaking their language and maintaining their customs (Addison & Hazareesingh 1984: 45). Slavery was officially abolished in 1835 (Seuren 1995: 532), after which indentured labourers were brought by the British from India along with traders from China (Syea 2013: 10). This, of course, also brought several more languages to the island.

Mauritius gained independence from Britain in 1968, and its linguistic diversity persists to this day. While Mauritian Creole is the language spoken at home by 90% of the population (Statistics Mauritius 2022), English is the official language of government and education, and French is the language of media, business, and politics (Syea 2013: 10). Moreover, many Mauritians speak heritage languages such as Bhojpuri, Hindi, Tamil, Hakka, and Mandarin (Statistics Mauritius 2011), which, according to Mauritian Creole speakers, contributes to the variation in the language.

### 1.3 Relevant Facts about Mauritian Creole

Mauritian Creole is a French-lexifying language and a fascinating one to study, first because of its rich contact with several typologically unrelated languages. It is also relatively understudied; in fact, within Mauritius, it only entered the school curriculum in 2012 (Florigny 2015: 2). Third, the phenomenon I examine in this thesis – subjectless constructions in Mauritian Creole – has not received a comprehensive formal syntactic analysis. Before turning to those constructions, I first outline some relevant syntactic properties of Mauritian Creole.

### 1.3.1 Word Order and TMA

Mauritian Creole has SVO word order and uses overt marking for tense, mood, and aspect (TMA). The five TMA markers of Mauritian Creole are listed in (1). Syea identifies the markers that express futurity, namely *pu* and *(a)va*, as mood markers following Enç’s (1996) and others’ suggestion that the future is not a tense but a marker of irrealis mood. Adopting this view, I gloss them as IRR.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) TMA markers  
(adapted from Syea 2013: 128)

<b>TMA markers</b>		
TNS	<i>ti</i>	‘past’
IRR	<i>pu</i>	‘definite future’
	<i>(a)va</i>	‘indefinite future’
ASP	<i>(f)inn</i>	‘perfect’
	<i>(a)pe</i>	‘imperfective’

These markers are morphologically independent and appear before the verb, as shown in (2). The TMA markers appear in a fixed linear order, also shown in (2);<sup>2</sup> (3) shows the specific order. There is no person, number, or gender agreement on verbs (Syea 2013:34), as shown in (4).

<sup>1</sup> Syea (2013) glosses these markers as MOD. I use IRR here instead to avoid confusion between (future) mood and modality expressed by other elements. For example, *kapav* (‘can’) in (i) is a modal verb and not part of the TMA marker inventory.

i. Zan kapav lir liv la.  
John modal read book the  
'John is able to read the book.'

<sup>2</sup> While not all possible orders with all TMA markers are illustrated here, all grammatical clauses follow the order in (3) below.

- (2) a. Dev **ti** **pu** **finn** manz so lasoup  
 Dave PST IRR1 PERF eat 3POSS soup  
 si ti ena pli disel ladan.  
 if PST have more salt inside  
 ‘Dave would have already eaten his soup if there had been more salt in it.’
- b. \*Dev **pu** **ti** **finn** manz so lasoup  
 Dave IRR1 PST PERF eat 3POSS soup  
 si ti ena pli disel ladan.  
 if PST have more salt inside
- c. \*Dev **finn** **ti** **pu** manz so lasoup  
 Dave PERF PST IRR1 eat 3POSS soup  
 si ti ena pli disel ladan.  
 if PST have more salt inside
- d. \*Dev **finn** **pu** **ti** manz so lasoup  
 Dave PERF IRR1 PST eat 3POSS soup  
 si ti ena pli disel ladan.  
 if PST have more salt inside

(3) SUBJ > TNS > IRR > ASP > V

- (4) a. mo/to/li bwar labier.  
 I/you/(s)he drink beer  
 ‘I/you/(s)he drink(s) beer.’
- b. nu/zot bwar labier.  
 we/they drink beer  
 ‘We/they drink beer.’

(Syea 2013: 34)

The present tense is expressed by the absence of any overt TNS or IRR element. Such clauses, if eventive, are interpreted as present habitual, as in (4) and (5).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Stative predicates will be discussed in subsequent chapters.



- (5) a. Zan travay dan lekol.  
 John work in school  
 'John works in a school.'
- b. Mari vann banann.  
 Mary sell banana  
 'Mary sells bananas.'

(Syea 2013:106)

As shown in (6), *ti* marks the simple past tense.

- (6) a. Zan ti lir zurnal gramatin.  
 John PST read journal morning  
 'John read the newspaper this morning.'
- b. Mo ti comans manz plis legim.  
 1SG PST start eat more vegetable  
 'I started to eat more vegetables.'

In the absence of any other TMA item in the clause, the marker *pu* contributes a future reading to the clause, as shown in (7).

- (7) a. Li pu vini (dan fete).  
 3SG IRR1 come (in party)  
 'S/he will come (to the party).'
- b. Julie pu manze kan so kamarad telefone.  
 Julie IRR1 eat when 3POSS friend call  
 'Julie will eat when her friend calls.'
- c. Sam pu al labutik demain.  
 Sam IRR1 go store tomorrow  
 'Sam will go to the store tomorrow.'

(A)*va* patterns syntactically in very much the same way as *pu*. Semantically, however, it differs slightly. While it also contributes a future reading to the clause, clauses with (A)*va* are interpreted to describe eventualities that are less certain to arise, as shown in (8) and (10). This is why Syea

(2013) distinguishes *pu* and *(a)va* as definite and indefinite future markers, respectively, as listed in (1). Structurally, these two markers occupy the same position and thus cannot co-occur, as shown in (12).

(8) Mo            va        zwenn twa            demin.  
 1SG.NOM    IRR2    meet    2SG.ACC        tomorrow  
 ‘(Should the conditions suit us,) I will meet you tomorrow.’

(9) Mo            pu        zwenn twa            demin.  
 1SG.NOM    IRR1    meet    2SG.ACC        tomorrow  
 ‘I will meet you tomorrow (for sure).’

(10) Mo            va        lir        liv        la.  
 1SG.NOM    IRR2    read    book    the  
 ‘([Indeterminate about whether]) I will read the book.’  
 (Speaker is not speaking with specific intention.)

(11) Mo            pu        lir        liv        la.  
 1SG.NOM    IRR1    read    book    the  
 ‘I am (definitely) going to read it.’

(12) a. \*Zan    pu        va        dormi.  
           John    IRR1    IRR2    sleep

b. \*Zan    va        pu        al        labutik        la.  
           John    IRR2    IRR1    go        store        the

According to the speakers I have consulted, *(a)va* is rarely used these days. Younger speakers have varying judgments on constructions containing this marker. The consensus, to the extent that one exists, is that the use of *(a)va* expresses a lack of certainty about the future.

*Pe*, the imperfective/incompletive marker, expresses that the event described is ongoing, as in (13).

- (13) a. Mo pe manz bann legim.  
 1SG IPFV eat PL vegetable  
 'I am eating vegetables.'
- b. Dernie tan la, Chloe pe anpran ziska tar dan librari.  
 These days the, Chloe IPFV learn until late in library  
 'These days, Chloe is studying late at the library.'

The marker (*f*)*inn* is variably referred to as a marker of completion or perfectivity (e.g., in Adone 1994, Syea 2013, Carpooran 2019) to denote that an event has come to an endpoint and its internal properties are not at issue. However, clauses containing the marker (*f*)*inn* are often translated into English with the perfect.<sup>4</sup> For example, in (14), the second instance of (*f*)*inn* certainly denotes that the event of firing is completed. In (15), however, (*f*)*inn* does not necessarily mark the event as complete. Given that it is frequently translated with the perfect and the fact that it does not necessarily mark an event as completed, I gloss (*f*)*inn* as PERF and consider it to be a perfect marker rather than a perfective marker.

- (14) Marie inn travay preske enn an  
 Mary PERF work almost a year  
 kan zot **inn** met li dehor.  
 when 3PL PERF put 3SG out  
 'Mary worked almost a year when they fired her.'
- (15) Mo'-**nn** vinn isi pandan 10 banane.  
 1SG-PERF come here for 10 year  
 'I've come here for 10 years (and I'm still coming).'

(Henri & Kihm 2015, cited in Davidson 2020: 37)

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<sup>4</sup> See Davidson (2020) for a discussion of (*f*)*inn* and the definitions that have been proposed for it.

Like the two irrealis markers, the two aspect markers, *pe* and *(f)inn*, are in complementary distribution, as shown in (16). I therefore assume that they spell out the same head, which I label

Asp.

- (16) a. \*Zan **inn** **pe** fair lexercis pendant  
 John PERF IPFV do exercise for  
 trwa zer ek li tuzur pa fatigue.  
 three hour and 3SG still NEG tired

Intended: ‘John has been exercising for three hours and still isn’t tired.’

- b. \*Zan **pe** **inn** fair lexercis pendant  
 John IPFV PERF do exercise for  
 trwa zer ek li tuzur pa fatigue.  
 three hour and 3SG always NEG tired

Intended: ‘John has been exercising for three hours and still isn’t tired.’

### 1.3.2 TMA markers and how they combine

Most combinations of the Mauritian Creole TMA markers are possible as long as they appear in the T>M>A linear order. The combinations produce the interpretations that would generally be expected. For example, *ti* and *pe* together have a past progressive reading, illustrated in (17), while *ti* and *(f)inn* together are translated with the English past perfect, as shown in (18).

- (17) Li ti pe kondir.  
 3SG PST IPFV drive  
 ‘She was driving.’

- (18) Zot ti finn arive sa ler la.  
 3PL PST PERF arrive that hour the  
 ‘They had arrived by that time.’ (Syea 2013: 113)

*Pu* and *(f)inn* together convey a future perfect interpretation, as demonstrated in (19).

- (19) Zot pu finn dormi sa ler la.  
 3PL IRR1 PERF sleep that hour the  
 'They will have slept by this time.' (Syea 2013: 113)

*Ti* and *pu* together are used to express an event/situation as counterfactual. In English, they are together translated as *would*, as shown in (20).

- (20) Sam ti pu faire crepes, me nou p-ena diseuf.  
 Sam PST IRR1 do crepes, but 3PL NEG-have egg  
 'Sam would make pancakes but we don't have eggs.'

When it comes to the irrealis markers and *pe*, there is some speaker variation. For some, *pu* and *pe* cannot combine; though this may be due to pragmatics: one consultant tells me that for the two to combine, there needs to be some definitiveness that the event described will hold. For those that have *(a)va* in their vocabulary,<sup>5</sup> *(a)va* is the preferred form for a future imperfective reading. For other speakers, *pu* and *pe* co-occur freely. This is illustrated (21).

- (21) a. Zot va/%pu pe dormi sa ler la.  
 3PL IRR2/%IRR1 IPFV sleep that hour the  
 'They will be sleeping by this time.' (adapted from Syea 2013: 113)
- b. %To pu pe travay demain dez air.  
 2SG IRR1 IPFV work tomorrow two hour  
 'You will be working tomorrow at 2 o'clock.'

Finally, all three types of TMA markers can appear together, indicating that all three functional heads can be projected together, as shown in (22).

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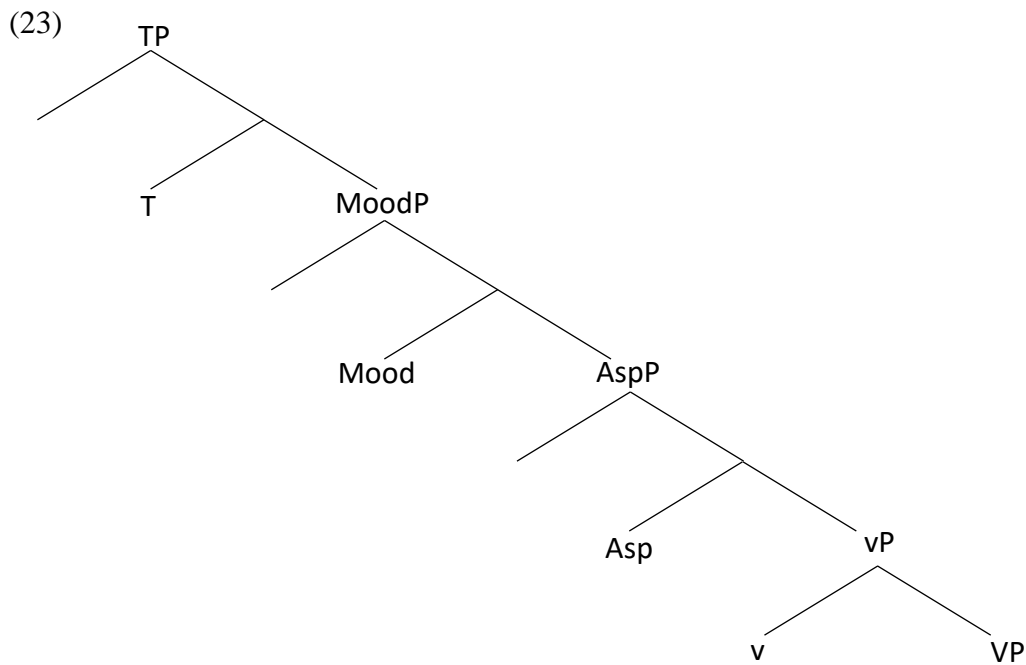
<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, the consultant I just mentioned does not have the "indefinite" irrealis marker *(a)va* in her lexicon.

- (22) Li ti pu finn arive sa ler la.  
 3SG PST IRR1 PERF arrive that hour the  
 ‘S/he would have arrived by this time.’ (Syea 2013: 113)

Next, I turn to the syntactic structure projected by the INFL heads.

### 1.3.3 The Inflectional Spine

Syea (2013: 132) proposes that Mauritian Creole tense, mood, and aspect markers head separate projections above vP, as shown in (23). His proposal for their order stems first from the fact that the TMA markers appear in a strict linear order. Further, following den Besten (1983) and Rizzi (1997) (cited in Syea 2013: 132), he assumes that tense must appear above both mood and aspect because he also assumes that C requires morphosyntactic information from T, which it can only acquire if T is local to C (Syea 2013: 133).<sup>6</sup> I will refer to the structural sequence of TMA heads as the inflectional spine.



<sup>6</sup> For Syea (2013), C and T must have a tight relationship because the choice of complementizer in a clause depends on the finiteness of the clause. For Syea, finiteness is strictly whether a clause can bear tense.

I assume that the grammatical subject of a clause is the constituent that resides in the specifier of the highest projected inflectional head. How the subject – whether it is an external argument, internal argument, or something else – gets to that position may be due to Extended Projection Principle (EPP) requirements or Nominative case assignment. I discuss this, along with other properties of the INFL domain, in Chapter 4. For the purposes of Chapters 2 and 3, I assume the fully articulated INFL domain proposed by Syea, as shown in (23), adding only VoiceP as an intermediate projection between vP and AspP.

#### 1.4 Theoretical Framework and Data Sources

The analysis to be presented here is based on the theoretical foundation of Minimalism (Chomsky 1995, 2000) and Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993; Embick & Noyer 2007). In Distributed Morphology, the syntax operates on feature bundles (i.e., lexical items) taken from the lexicon or created in the syntax, combined in terminal nodes. Importantly, syntax has no access to either phonological or semantic information, only to syntactic features. Once the syntactic structure has been derived, the structure is transferred to the phonetic interface (PF) to be paired with morphophonological representations (vocabulary items or VIs), and to the conceptual-intentional (C-I) interface, where it is semantically interpreted.

The data for this research come mainly from various consultants. I connected with these consultants in different cities in Mauritius, including Port Louis and Grand Baie, along with Montreal and the Greater Toronto Area in Canada. All consultants were born and raised in Mauritius. In addition, data were taken from publications, for example, Syea (1993, 2013, 2017), Adone (1994), and Guillemin (2014). Further, I consulted Glosbe, an online dictionary that

contains much Mauritian text translated to English. All the data were placed in a corpus where they were coded for factors including TMA marking, type of adverbial, and verb valency.

### 1.5 The structure of the thesis

In chapter 2, I describe subjectless constructions in Mauritian Creole in detail. I review the existing literature that has dealt with subjectlessness in Mauritian Creole, noting that there is, as of yet, no comprehensive theoretically informed account. I review the null-subject typology along with proposals aimed at capturing the differences among the null-subject distributions found in various *pro*-drop languages. I argue that a *pro* analysis for Mauritian Creole does not fit clearly into the *pro*-drop typology and that it exhibits constraints not generally found with pronouns. I then provide a typology of non-active Voices cross-linguistically and suggest that a Voice-based account of subjectlessness in Mauritian Creole is a better path to pursue.

In Chapter 3, I present the basic assumptions underlying a Voice-based account of subjectlessness in Mauritian Creole and then turn to the Voice system I propose for Mauritian Creole. I first address how basic active constructions with overt subjects in Mauritian Creole are generated and then present my analysis for subjectless constructions with, specifically, thematic implicit subjects. I also discuss how my analysis can account for subjectlessness in constructions where an overt subject in a language like English would be an expletive. In Chapter 4, I return to the topic of semi-null subject languages, which I describe in Chapter 2, and posit that *pro*-drop analyses for some of those languages may also not be suitable.



## Chapter 2 Subjectlessness

### 2.1 Covert subjects

In some languages, such as English and, arguably, French, non-imperative root clauses require a phonetically overt subject even when the subject is non-thematic. This is illustrated in (24) through (27), where the thematic subjects in (24) and (25) and the expletive subjects in (26) and (27) must be pronounced.

- (24) a. Kioko/she went to the store.  
b. \*went to the store

(25) *French*

- a. Il                    parle                    français.  
   3SG.MASC        speak.3SG.PRS French  
   ‘He speaks French.’

- b. \*Parle                français.  
   speak.3SG.PRS French

(Roberts 2019: 193)

- (26) a. It is hot in here.  
b. \*is hot in here

(27) *French*

- a. Il                    fait                    chaud ici.  
   3SG.MASC        do.3SG.PRS        heat        here  
   ‘It is hot here.’

- b. \*Fait                chaud ici.  
   do.3SG.PRS        heat        here

In contrast, there are languages that permit non-imperative root clauses to surface without overt subjects. In fact, it appears that these languages are more numerous than those that require an overt subject. The World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS, Dryer 2013) shows that

languages with pronominal subjects typically expressed by affixes on the verb (437 languages) outnumber those with obligatory overt pronominal subjects (82 languages). European Portuguese and Spanish, for example, allow pronominal subjects to be omitted in root clauses, as illustrated by the European Portuguese example in (28).

- (28) Chegaram.  
 arrived-3PL  
 ‘They have arrived.’ (Barbosa 2011a: 551)

According to Barbosa (2011a: 551), we know there must be a syntactically active subject in (28) because that subject can bind an object anaphor just as an overt subject can, as in (29a).

- (29) *European Portuguese*  
 a. Feriram-se a si mesmos.  
 hurt.3PL-SE to themselves  
 ‘They hurt themselves.’ (Barbosa 2011a: 552)  
 b. Eles feriram a si mesmos.  
 3PL hurt.3PL to themselves  
 ‘They hurt themselves.’

Since at least Jespersen (1924), rich person and number agreement on the verb have been thought to license unpronounced pronominal subjects, since the richly specified morphology on the verb provides enough information to recover the referent of the covert subject. Jespersen puts it as follows:

*In many languages the distinction between the three persons is found not only in pronouns, but in verbs as well . . . in Latin . . . Italian, Hebrew, Finnish, etc. In such languages many sentences have no explicit indication of the subject, and ego amo, tu amas is at first said only when it is necessary or desirable to lay special stress on the idea ‘I, thou’.*

(Jespersen 1924: 213, quoted in Roberts & Holmberg 2010: 3 and Roberts 2019: 192)

Perlmutter (1968, 1971), in an extensive study of null-subject phenomena, postulated the null-subject constraint in (30).

- (30) *Any sentence other than an imperative in which there is an S that does not contain a subject in surface structure is ungrammatical.*

(Perlmutter 1968:204, cited in Roberts 2019:193)

This constraint was proposed for non-null subject languages, like English and French, whose agreement morphology is not rich enough to identify the referent of a null subject pronoun. In contrast, the constraint was stipulated not to hold in languages like Spanish, where null subjects are permitted in surface structure in finite clauses. This constraint implies that there should be only two types of languages with respect to null subjects: either (30) holds or it does not. In languages where (30) does not hold, the subject need not be realized at PF.

In Government-Binding Theory, *pro* was proposed as a phonologically null nominal category unspecified for  $\phi$ -features (Chomsky 1981; Rizzi 1982). In null-subject languages, *pro* was licensed by I(nfl), which would case-mark it and supply it with  $\phi$ -feature values. The relation between *pro* and the Infl head accounted for the rich agreement observed in languages that consistently exhibit referential null subjects.

*Pro* became difficult to maintain once uninterpretable and interpretable features were introduced by the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995, 2000). Under Minimalism, NPs/DPs are said to have interpretable person, number, and gender features, while these  $\phi$ -features are uninterpretable and, thus, unvalued in I/T. Because under Minimalism, uninterpretable features need to be valued before being transferred to the semantic and phonological components, there was a natural tension between a featurally unspecified *pro* and I/T, neither of which can provide

the other with  $\phi$ -features. In light of this tension, those working on null subject languages have reverted to the idea that *pro* may in fact be what Perlmutter had proposed – a fully specified pronominal that simply lacks any PF realization (e.g., Holmberg 2005; Roberts 2010, 2019; Barbosa 2019).

Empirically, however, complications remain. In addition to languages that do not permit null subjects (non-null subject languages) and those that seemingly permit them across the board (consistent null subject languages), there are three other types, listed in (31):

- (31) a. Discourse *pro*-drop/Radical null-subject languages:  
allow null subjects but exhibit no subject-verb agreement whatsoever,
- b. Partial null-subject languages:  
allow null subjects but have less rich agreement and exhibit restrictions on which subjects can go unpronounced,
- c. Semi-null subject languages:  
allow non-thematic null subjects and/or impersonal null subjects.

In addition to the types of languages listed in (31), there are languages – e.g., Finnish, as will be shown in section 2.4 – that have rich agreement on the verb but do not allow consistent null subjects. If rich subject-verb agreement is what ensures that the referent of an unpronounced subject is recoverable, then one would not expect null subjects in radical null-subject languages but would expect them in any language with rich agreement, contrary to what has been observed.

As noted above, semi-null subject languages permit subjectlessness when there is no thematic subject, or when the understood subject is indefinite and/or simply non-specific (Barbosa 2011a,b, 2019). I will show that, descriptively, Mauritian Creole fits best with this group of languages, if indeed they constitute a well-defined class. However, I will argue that at

least in Mauritian Creole, subjectless constructions arise, not from a structure containing a null pronoun, but rather from properties of the Voice head. Consequently, I will suggest that the subjectless constructions of semi-null subject languages do not necessarily contain the null element *pro*. This would imply that they are not, strictly speaking, pro-drop languages at all.

I now turn to subjectless constructions in Mauritian Creole.

## 2.2 Subjectlessness in Mauritian Creole

Mauritian Creole permits, and sometimes requires, that certain constructions surface without an overt subject. In clauses with weather verbs, as in (32), and adjectival predicates with clausal arguments, as in (33), the expletive *li* ('it') is optional.

- (32) a. (li) fer so deor.  
 it make hot outside  
 'It's hot outside.' (Syea 2013:40)
- b. (li) pe fer nwar boner aster.  
 it IPF make dark early now  
 'It's getting dark early now.' (Syea 2017: 334)
- (33) a. (li) posib zot finn arive.  
 it possible they PERF arrive  
 'It's possible that they have arrived.' (Syea 2013:40)
- b. (li) difisil pu fer li konpran.  
 it difficult for make 3SG understand  
 'It's difficult to make him understand.' (Syea 2017: 334)

Unlike weather-verb constructions, existential clauses cannot have overt subjects at all.

Mauritian Creole existential constructions are formed with the verb *ena* ('have'). Examples (34) and (35) show that an existential reading of a clause with *ena* can arise only if *ena* has no overt subject. As illustrated in (35b), the third-person pronoun *li*, which is interpreted as an expletive in

(32) and (33), can only receive a definite third-person reading with *ena*. (35b) thus conveys possession and is not existential.

(34) (\*li)    ena            enn    sat    lot    pie.  
           it    have        a    cat    on    tree  
           ‘There is a cat on the tree.’ (adapted from Syea 2013:40)

(35) a.    Ena    enn    lisyen   kot    mwa.  
           have   a        dog    at    1SG  
           ‘There is a dog at my place.’

b.    Li    ena    enn    lisyen   kot    li  
       3SG   have   a        dog    at    3SG  
       ‘S/he has a dog at her/his place.  
       NOT ‘There is a dog at her/his place.’

Non-expletive (henceforth *thematic*) subjects in Mauritian Creole can sometimes be covert in non-existential main and embedded clauses. Specifically, verbs that take agents allow their agents to be suppressed or implicit, much as in English passives. These implicit agents, however, can receive only generic or arbitrary readings (Syea 2013: 33). The generic interpretation of an implicit agent is like indefinite ‘one’/‘people’ in English, which can include the speaker as part of their reference, as in *One eats/people eat breakfast in the morning*. The arbitrary interpretation is like indefinite ‘they’/‘someone’ in English, whose referent excludes the speaker, as in *They make great films in Hollywood*. These implicit agents are always understood as human, and they cannot be interpreted referentially in out-of-the-blue contexts.

The sentence in (36a) lacks an overt matrix subject, while (36b) lacks an overt subject in its embedded clause. Note that neither subjectless clause in (36) has any TMA marking. In both cases, these clauses predicate something of people in general; that is, they are generic in the

sense intended by Syea. (36b) also shows that the implicit agent in the embedded clause is not referential: it cannot be interpreted as co-referential with the matrix subject.

- (36) a. Vann pwason dan bazar.  
 sell fish in market  
 ‘One sells fish in the market.’ Or ‘Fish is sold in the market.’<sup>7</sup>
- b. Mo ti dir [vann pwason dan bazar].  
 I PST say sell fish in market  
 ‘I said that one sells fish in the market.’ OR ‘I said that fish is sold in the market.’  
 (Syea 2013: 33)
- NOT: ‘I said that I sell fish in the market.’

Now consider the main and embedded clauses in (37), which have imperfective aspect. The implicit agents in these sentences receive an arbitrary reading. As in (36b), the implicit agent of the embedded clause in (37b) cannot be co-referential with the matrix subject.

- (37) a. **Pe** vann pwason dan bazar.  
 IPFV sell fish in market  
 ‘Someone/people is/are selling fish in the market.’
- b. Mo ti dir [**pe** vann pwason dan bazar].  
 I PST say IPFV sell fish in market  
 ‘I said someone/people is/are selling fish in the market.’ (Syea 2013: 33)
- NOT: ‘I said that I am selling fish in the market.’

To avoid confusion between a) syntactically projected but phonologically unrealized pronouns and b) arguments that are understood but not syntactically projected, I will henceforth make the following terminological distinctions: The term “null subjects” will be used to refer to phonologically null pronouns that occupy the syntactic subject position, while other arguments

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<sup>7</sup> Transitive subjectless constructions in Mauritian Creole are variably translated in English as passives and actives. Examples from my own consultants have the translations my consultants provided. I also keep the translations for the examples taken from the cited sources. In Chapter 3, it will become clearer why the English translations of Mauritian Creole subjectless constructions sometimes take passive form.

that are understood, but not known to be syntactically projected in arguments positions, will be characterized as “implicit arguments”. This distinction will make it possible to discuss Mauritian Creole subjectless clauses without seeming to presuppose that they contain actual null subject pronouns. The sentences in (36) and (37) thus have implicit agents, or implicit external arguments, but not null subjects. The term “covert subject” will also be used as a cover term to mean either a null subject or an implicit external argument; it implies no particular analysis.

In Mauritian Creole, (thematic) subjectlessness is possible only with verbs that take external arguments. In other words, transitive and unergative verbs permit implicit subjects, but, as I will show, unaccusatives do not. The interpretation of the implicit subjects depends on the valency of the verb and on the presence or absence of adverbial<sup>8</sup> modification to the clause. I discuss transitive, unergative, and unaccusative verbs below.

### 2.2.1 Transitive verbs and subjectlessness

As shown in (36) and (37), transitive verbs permit covert subjects. Their interpretation, however, depends on two other factors: whether the clause contains adverbial modification, and whether the clause is marked as imperfective. For example, without any adverbial modification, the sentence in (38a) is ungrammatical, as shown in (38b). Notice also that the implicit subjects in (36) and (38a) are interpreted generically; these implicit subjects cannot be read as arbitrary.

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<sup>8</sup> I use the term “adverbial” in its semantic sense here; in fact, most of the modifiers in my data are syntactically PPs.



(38) *Transitive, Simple Present*

a. *Adverbial*

Vann pwason dan bazar.  
sell fish in market  
'People sell fish at the market.'

i.e., It is a property of the market that people in general sell fish there.

b. *No adverbial*

\*Vann pwason  
sell fish  
Intended: 'People in general sell fish.'

When a transitive clause is marked as imperfective, as in (39), the implicit agent can only be read as arbitrary, whether or not the clause contains an adverbial modifier. In this case, it appears that a generic interpretation of the covert subject would give rise to a clash with the episodic aspectual property of the clause. According to Slabakova & Montrul (2003: 166-7) these restrictions in interpretation are regulated by a semantic universal under which the pronominal subject of a habitual/generic sentence gets a generic reading, and the pronominal subject of an episodic sentence will get a more specific reading (and, importantly, not a generic one).

(39) *Transitive, Imperfective*

a. *Adverbial*

**Pe** vann pwason dan bazar.  
**IPFV** sell fish in market  
'They/someone are/is selling fish at the market.'

b. *No adverbial*

**Pe** vann pwason.  
**IPFV** sell fish  
'They/someone are/is selling fish.'

In contrast with clauses in the simple present or the present imperfective, the covert subject of a transitive clause marked as past, perfective, or irrealis can be interpreted as either generic or arbitrary, as in (40) through (42).<sup>9</sup>

(40) *Transitive, Past, Adverbial*

a. *Generic*

Ti repar loto kot bazar lontan.  
 PST repair car by market long.ago  
 ‘People repaired cars by the market long ago.’

b. *Arbitrary*

Ti repar enn loto kot bazar.  
 PST repair a car by market  
 ‘They/someone repaired a car by the market.’

(41) *Transitive, Perfect, Adverbial*

a. *Generic*

Zeneralman, finn vann pwason dan bazar lontan.  
 Generally PERF sell fish in market long.ago  
 ‘In general, fish was sold at the market a long time ago.’

b. *Arbitrary*

Finn vann enn pwason enn timama avan.  
 PERF sell a fish a moment before  
 ‘A fish was sold a moment ago.’

(42) *Transitive, Irrealis, Adverbial*

a. *Generic*

Pandan 50 an, pu vann bann zanimo dan bazar.  
 During 50 year, IRR1 sell PL animal in market  
 ‘For 50 years, animals will be sold at the market.’

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<sup>9</sup> The covert subjects of the b. examples in (40) to (42) can only be read as arbitrary; a generic reading of the covert subjects would be incompatible with the indefinite singular direct objects. The examples are provided to show that the covert subject with these TMA markers can receive either reading.

b. *Arbitrary*

Dan	50	an	exakteman,	pu	vann	enn	elefan
in	50	year	exactly,	IRR1	sell	a	elephant
dan	sa	bazar	la.				
in	DEM	market	the				

‘In 50 years exactly, an elephant will be sold in this market.’

### 2.2.2 Unergative verbs and subjectlessness

Like transitive verbs, unergative verbs permit covert subjects. However, there is an important difference between transitives and unergatives. While the implicit external arguments of transitive clauses can receive generic or arbitrary interpretations, the covert subject of an unergative must be read generically. This is shown in (43).

(43) *Unergative*

a. *Simple present, Adverbial*

travay	dir	dan	sa	pey	la.	
work	hard	in	that	country	the	
'People work hard in that country.'						[Generic]
NOT: ‘They work/someone works hard in that country.’						[Arbitrary]

b. *Past, Adverbial*

ti	travay	dir	dan	sa	pey	la.
PST	work	hard	in	that	country	the
'People worked hard in that country.'						[Generic]
NOT: ‘They/someone worked hard in that country.’						[Arbitrary]

In unergative constructions, adverbial modification is necessary; otherwise, the implicit subject does not receive an interpretation. Notice that both (43a) and (43b) contain such a modifier: *dan sa pey la*. The specific type of modifier – locative, instrumental, purpose, etc. – does not seem to matter. (44a) and (44b) show that in the absence of such a modifier, the generic interpretation is impossible.

(44) *Unergative, Simple Present*

a. *Adverbial*

Priye dan legliz.

pray in church

‘People pray in church.’

(i.e., it is a property of the church that people pray there.)

b. *No adverbial*

\*Priye.

pray

Intended: ‘People pray.’

(i.e., it is a property of people that they pray.)

Note that the imperfective unergative examples in (45), which are otherwise identical to the sentences in (44), are both ungrammatical. We saw, in the transitive examples in (39), that covert subjects in imperfective clauses must be interpreted as arbitrary. However, a striking difference between transitive and unergative clauses is that unergatives never permit arbitrary implicit agents.

(45) *Unergative, Imperfective*

a. *Adverbial*

\*Pe priye dan legliz.

IPFV pray in church

Intended: ‘They/someone are/is praying at church.’

b. *No adverbial*

\*Pe priye.

IPFV pray

Intended: ‘They/someone are/is praying.’

*Pe*, in (45), requires an arbitrary interpretation of the implicit argument and an episodic interpretation of the clause. However, since unergative clauses with implicit agents must be generic, and a sentence cannot be simultaneously generic and episodic, the presence of an adverbial does not improve (45a).

### 2.2.3 Subjectlessness and verbs that take cognate objects

Some unergative verbs in Mauritian Creole can optionally take cognate objects – internal arguments that have similar meaning to or have the same morphological stem as their selecting verb (Sailer 2010: 195). The verb and cognate object together behave like a regular transitive construction. Some examples of English verbs with cognate objects are shown in (46).

- (46) a. She fought a good fight.  
b. Chloe was dancing a lively dance.  
c. He lived a good life.

In Mauritian Creole, verbs that can optionally take cognate objects behave as one might expect with respect to subjectlessness: without the cognate object, the verb behaves like an unergative, and can only take a generic covert subject when the clause is modified; with a cognate object, the clause patterns with transitives, and the covert subject can receive a generic or arbitrary reading. The former is shown in (47), and the latter in (48).

(47) *No Cognate Object, Adverbial*

a. *Simple present*

Sante dan legliz. [Generic]  
sing in church  
'People sing at church.'

b. *Imperfective*

\*Pe sante dan legliz. [Arbitrary]  
IPFV sing in church  
Intended: 'They are singing at church.'

(48) *Cognate Object, Adverbial*

a. *Simple present*

Sant sante dan legliz. [Generic]  
sing song in church  
'People sing songs at church.'

- b. *Imperfective*  
 Pe sant sante dan legliz. [Arbitrary]  
 IPFV sing song in church  
 ‘They are singing songs at church.’

For the purposes of the analysis to be presented in Chapter 3, I treat constructions with cognate objects as transitives and constructions like those in (47) as truly intransitive in that they do not take an internal argument.<sup>10</sup>

#### 2.2.4 Subjectlessness and verbs that do not take external arguments

Unlike transitives or unergatives, unaccusative verbs never allow a covert subject, whether the intended reading is generic or arbitrary, whether or not there is an adverbial modifier, and regardless of the tense or aspect of the clause, as shown in (49).<sup>11</sup> This suggests that there is something special about the external argument position or the head that introduces the external argument: external arguments, but not internal arguments, can be covert.

(49) *Unaccusative*

- a. *Imperfective, Arbitrary, Adverbial*  
 \*Pe noye dan sa lak la  
 IPFV drown in that lake the  
 Intended: ‘People are/someone is drowning in that lake.’
- b. *Simple present, Generic, Adverbial*  
 \*Noye dan sa lak la.  
 drown in that lake the  
 Intended: ‘People drown in that lake.’

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<sup>10</sup> A thorough discussion on cognate objects and verbs that take them is outside the scope of this thesis. The way they behave in Mauritian Creole leads me to believe that at least in Mauritian Creole, the lexical semantics of the verb and the Voice head work in tandem to derive structurally sound transitive and unergative clauses.

<sup>11</sup> While I do not provide a complete set with all possible tense, aspect, adverbial, and possible covert subject interpretation combinations here, it is true across the board that unaccusatives do not permit their internal arguments to remain unpronounced.

- c. *Imperfective, Arbitrary, No adverbial*  
 \*Pe noye  
 IPFV drown  
 Intended: 'People are/someone is drowning.'
- d. *Simple present, Generic, No adverbial*  
 \*Noye.  
 drown  
 Intended: 'People drown.'
- e. *Perfect, Arbitrary/Generic, (No) adverbial*  
 \*Finn noye (bizarman).  
 PERF drown mysteriously  
 Intended: 'People/they have drowned mysteriously.'

Unaccusatives will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 3. There I will show that some unaccusative verbs permit their internal arguments to remain low. For now, it suffices to say that unaccusatives, which typically surface with their internal argument in subject position, never permit that argument to go unpronounced.

Stative predicates, like unaccusatives, cannot take covert subjects under any circumstances.

(50) *Stative, Simple Present, Generic, Adverbial*

\*Kontan zot/li dan bann fete parski zot/li komik.  
 love 3PL/3SG at PL party because 3PL/3SG funny  
 Intended: 'People love them/her/him at parties because they're/(s)he's funny.'

(51) *Stative, Past, Arbitrary/Generic, Adverbial*

\*Ti kontan zot/li dan bann fete kan zot/li ti zenn.  
 PST love 3PL/3SG at PL party when 3PL/3SG PST young  
 Intended: 'They/people loved them/her/him at parties when they were/(s)he was young.'

Below, I summarize the Mauritian Creole subjectless facts just presented.

### 2.2.5 Brief summary

The following two tables outline the contexts in which covert subjects are permitted in Mauritian Creole. Table 1 shows the possible combinations of verb valency with TMA markers and overt clausal modifiers. ‘GEN’ and ‘ARB’ indicate the interpretations an implicit subject can have under the conditions listed; the asterisk indicates that such a construction is ungrammatical.

TABLE 1. Implicit thematic subjects

	Transitive			Unergative			Unaccusative		
	PRS	PST/PERF/FUT	IPFV	PRS	PST/PERF/FUT	IPFV	PRS	PST/PERF/FUT	IPFV
<b>ADV</b>	GEN	GEN/ARB	ARB	GEN	GEN	*	*	*	*
<b>no ADV</b>	*	ARB	ARB	*	*	*	*	*	*

Table 2 gives the contexts in which overt expletive subjects may appear.

TABLE 2. Expletive subjects

<b>Existential</b>	<b>Weather verb/ Adjectival predicate</b>
(*SUBJ)	(SUBJ)

While covert subjects have been described in the literature on the grammar of Mauritian Creole and on French-derived creoles more generally, there has been no comprehensive account of how they are licensed. In the next section, I describe the accounts that have been proposed.

### 2.3 Mauritian Creole Subjectless Constructions in the Literature

While subjectless constructions in Mauritian Creole have been described in the literature, the significance of the verb’s argument structure has not been discussed, as transitive verbs have dominated the discussion. For example, Syea (1993) does not discuss specifically how intransitives disallow arbitrary null subjects. Rather, he assumes that it’s a reflex of the



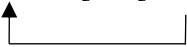
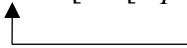
subjectless transitive constructions being “semantic passives” – a view compatible with what I will propose in Chapter 3. My understanding of his view is that passives require at least two arguments: one to demote and one to promote. Since intransitives only have one argument, an intransitive verb could not participate in such an operation.

In general, the thematic implicit subjects in Mauritian Creole have been claimed to be either instances of a variable or little *pro* in INFL. Adone (1994) claims that null subjects are licensed by overt INFL markers, and the null subject is identified by an abstract operator in the C domain. However, this account wrongly predicts that overt TMA markers should always be required for the licensing of a null subject. As shown in (36) and (43a), Mauritian Creole does have present tense habitual/generic constructions with covert subjects but no TMA markers. Syea (1993), on the other hand, proposes that null subjects in Mauritian Creole are instantiations of a [-dependent] *pro* in the syntax. His feature [-dependent] encodes the fact that this *pro* cannot have an antecedent. He stipulates that this *pro* raises in LF to get an existential (what I am calling “arbitrary”) reading while remaining low for a universal (what I am calling “generic”) reading, though the formal details are not made clear. Finally, Lipski (n.d.) suggests that the implicit subject in Mauritian Creole is a *null constant*, which, following Rizzi (1994, cited in Lipski n.d.), is [-pronominal], [-anaphoric] and [-variable]. Essentially, these are null referential expressions, subject to condition C of the binding theory. They therefore cannot be bound, and null subjects in embedded clauses therefore cannot co-refer with any argument in the matrix clause.

More recently, within the Minimalist framework, Syea (2013) maintains the view put forth in Syea (1993) that the Mauritian Creole null subject is a syntactically active element. For him, the (habitual) present tense contributes to the generic reading of this null subject element, whereas the progressive aspect marker contributes to its existential reading. The markers in INFL

are therefore responsible for the interpretations of the covert subjects. He also notes that adverbs play a part in contributing to the reading of a generic covert subject. While Syea acknowledges the relevance of aspect and adverbials in licensing subjectlessness in Mauritian Creole, they do not play an explicit role in his explanation of subjectless constructions.

Syea posits that the generic reading of covert subjects can be captured by assuming that there is an adverbial operator in the head of CP; however, the specifics of how this operator is within the C head while also being an adverbial are never made clear. This operator is said to attract Tense. If the operator bears generic quantification, it assigns a generic meaning to the clause and the subject. If it has existential quantification, it assigns an existential reading to the same elements. Syea (2013: 38) schematizes this as in (52).

- (52) a. [C OP<sub>GEN</sub> [TP [T Ø] [VP fer rom ar kann]]  
  
 ‘People make rum from sugar cane.’
- b. [C OP<sub>SPEC</sub> [TP [T *pe/ti*] [VP fer rom ar kann]]  
  
 ‘They are making/made rum from sugar cane.’

It is unclear, however, what prevents the generic operator, for example, from binding a clause containing progressive aspect along with its null subject, wrongly giving a generic interpretation of sentence like (37) above. Further, when an overt adverbial is present, the generic operator is said to bind the tense feature on T, the covert subject, and the temporal feature on the adverb. This wrongly suggests that only temporal adverbials should be able to license generic null subjects in Mauritian Creole. As was shown in (36) above, other adverbials can license generic covert subjects. Under Syea’s account, one would have to stipulate that all adverbials, non-temporal and temporal alike, bear temporal features.

Syea argues, based on Manzini and Roussou's (2000) theory of control, that despite being unpronounced, the covert subjects in Mauritian Creole are syntactically present. Syea assumes that the closest argument to the embedded clause in a control structure inherits the thematic features of the lower predicate, and the lower predicate itself does not have a syntactically projected subject. Thus, in a sentence like (53), there is no syntactically projected subject in the embedded clause, and *Zan* inherits the thematic features of both the main and the embedded predicates. It is in this way that *Zan* is interpreted as the subject of both clauses.

- (53) *Zan le [fer rom ar kann.]*  
 John want make rum with sugar.cane  
 'John wants to make rum from sugar cane.' (Syea 2013: 39)

For Syea, there must be a syntactically present subject in the embedded clause of (54) because the main subject *Zan* cannot be interpreted as the subject of the embedded clause. His reasoning is that the syntactically present embedded subject attracts the thematic feature of the embedded predicate, while the matrix subject attracts the thematic feature of only the matrix predicate.

- (54) *Zan dir [fer rom ar kann.]*  
 John say make rum with sugar.cane  
 'John says one makes/people make rum from sugar cane.' (Syea 2013: 38)

Syea assumes that the null subject in Mauritian Creole subjectless constructions bears interpretable phi features, which value the corresponding uninterpretable, unvalued phi features on T. At PF, the pronoun undergoes deletion, following Holmberg (2005) and Roberts (2007). He speculates that this deletion applies optionally to elements that lack a D feature, for example, arbitrary *zot* ('they'). It is this optional deletion operation, in combination with an EPP that may be either strong or weak, Syea suggests, that is responsible for covert subjects in Mauritian

Creole. With generic or arbitrary subjects, if the EPP is strong and triggers the subject to move, the subject is pronounced; if the EPP is weak, the subject remains where it first merges and is deleted. As for expletives, following the same line of thinking, Sycia simply assumes that the EPP is weak with existential constructions but may be either weak or strong with weather verbs and certain adjectival predicates. When weak, the expletive is absent, but when strong, *li* appears in subject position. This account describes, but does not explain, the distribution of covert subjects, since the results are effectively stipulated by ad hoc specifications, such as a weak versus a strong EPP.

Sycia's deletion operation may be able to capture the fact that *zot* and its null equivalent are not licensed in all the same contexts, i.e., null subjects in Mauritian Creole do not freely alternate with *zot*. What it cannot explain, at least without further stipulations, is why covert subjects with an arbitrary reading are restricted to transitive constructions even though the external arguments of transitive and unergative verbs are first merged in the same position. Moreover, he does not address the role overt adverbials play in licensing the generic reading of the covert external arguments. Looking back at Table 1, this proposal does not capture many of the observations.

As noted in section 2.1 above, a typology of null-subject languages has been developed in recent years. This typology consists of four classes. One class, referred to as *semi-null subject* (see Biberauer 2010; Barbosa 2011a,b; Barbosa 2019), includes languages that permit only certain subjects to be dropped; that is, subjects that are either expletives or non-referential and indefinite. In what follows, I lay out the null subject language typology and briefly review the analyses that derive languages whose covert subjects have only arbitrary or generic readings. I will show that the typology does not fully accommodate Mauritian Creole covert subjects. I then

turn to a discussion of non-active voice types, pursuing the idea that semi-null subject languages, which most closely resemble Mauritian Creole in the distribution of covert subjects, are perhaps not true null-subject languages at all. Instead, I propose that the constructions typically considered to have null thematic subjects do not have syntactically projected subjects *per se*. Rather these clauses have non-active Voice. In other words, I will argue that the best way to account for subjectless constructions in Mauritian Creole is not by stipulating that they contain a covert subject DP. Rather, they do not have DP subjects at all. With respect to semi-null subject languages as a class, I propose that they be reanalyzed by looking at properties of Voice.

#### 2.4 Null-subject languages and how Mauritian Creole does not belong

Languages that permit null subjects have been divided into four types: *consistent null subject languages*, *partial null subject languages*, *radical null subject languages*, and *semi-null subject languages*. In this section, I describe these language types, and show how Mauritian Creole fits best within the semi-null subject language type, but question whether the constructions claimed to have null subjects in semi-null subject languages contain *pro* at all.

Consistent null-subject languages, like Spanish and European Portuguese, share several properties, including rich agreement inflection on the verb. They also permit a subject pronoun with definite reference to be unpronounced in any person-number (e.g., 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> person + SG/PL) combination. (Roberts 2019: 199). An example from Spanish is given in (55).

- (55) Estoy        limpiando        la        casa.  
       be.PRS.1    clean.PRS.PTCP    the     house  
       ‘I am cleaning the house.’

Mauritian Creole does not permit a covert subject, regardless of person or number, to receive specific definite reference in out-of-the-blue contexts. However, such an interpretation is permitted in contexts where, for example, sentence fragments would be appropriate in English. In Mauritian Creole, the equivalent of (55) would require a context where the referent of the unpronounced subject is immediately recoverable. For example, a Mauritian Creole speaker could provide (56b) as a response to a question.

(56) a. Ki u pe fer?  
 what 2.SG IPFV do  
 ‘What are you doing?’

b. Pe netway lakaz.  
 IPFV clean house  
 ‘Cleaning the house.’

(adapted from Syea 2017: 335)

In addition, arbitrary/generic null subjects in consistent null-subject languages generally require the use of a special marker, such as *si* in (57). Omitting the marker *si* results in a perfectly grammatical sentence, but it cannot have the arbitrary reading. The covert subject in the clause without *si* strictly receives a definite referential reading.

(57) *Italian*

Qui non (si) può fumare.  
 Here NEG (SI) can.3SG.PRS smoke.INF  
 ‘Here one can’t smoke.’ (with *si*)

‘Here s/he can’t smoke.’ (without *si*) (adapted from Roberts 2019: 200)

In Mauritian Creole, no special marker is needed to license a covert third-person subject with arbitrary interpretation, and definite, referential readings are impossible except in sentence fragments like (56b).

Partial null-subject languages, like Brazilian Portuguese and Finnish, differ in several ways from consistent null-subject languages. First, Brazilian Portuguese and Finnish permit null definite first- and second-person pronominal subjects in finite clauses but disallow definite third-person null subjects in root (i.e., matrix) clauses in out-of-the-blue contexts; this is shown in (58). That is, there is a constraint on the person of the null definite subject pronoun. Also worth noting is that the Finnish data in (58) shows rich person and number subject agreement on the verb, distinguishing all six possible subjects. Hence, rich agreement alone cannot fully determine the possibility of dropping (definite) subject pronouns.

- (58) a. (Minä) puhun englantia.  
 (I) speak.1SG.PRS English  
 ‘I speak English.’
- b. (Sinä) puhut englantia.  
 (You) speak.2SG.PRS English  
 ‘You (SG) speak English.’
- c. \*(Hän) puhuu englantia.  
 (S/he) speak.3SG.PRS English
- d. (Me) puhumme englantia.  
 (We) speak.1PL.PRS English  
 ‘We speak English.’
- e. (Te) puhutte englantia.  
 (You) speak.2PL.PRS English  
 ‘You (PL) speak English.’
- f. \*(He) puhuvat englantia.  
 (They) speak.3PL.PRS English (Roberts 2019: 208)

Partial null-subject languages also permit indefinite third-person null subject pronouns, in which case they receive an impersonal reading. However, Mauritian Creole differs from these

languages in restricting covert thematic subjects to the third person with an arbitrary or generic interpretation only.

In radical null-subject languages, null arguments are more pervasive than in consistent null-subject languages, as both subjects and objects can be covert, as shown in (59). Unlike partial null-subject languages, radical null subject languages place no person restrictions on null pronouns. In addition, in these languages not only are null arguments widespread but there is no agreement marking at all.

(59) *Mandariin*

a. kanjian            ta        le  
     see                he        ASP  
     ‘He saw him.’

b. Ta     kanjian        le.  
     He    see            ASP  
     ‘He saw him.’

(Huang 1984: 533)

In embedded contexts, as shown in (60), the null subject in the lower clause in a radical null-subject language can be bound by the matrix subject. This is not possible in Mauritian Creole, where the thematic implicit subject of an embedded clause can receive only an arbitrary or generic reading, as shown in (61).

(60) *Chinese*

Zhangsan<sub>i</sub> shuo [*pro*<sub>i</sub> bu renshi Lisi].  
 Zhangsan say            not know Lisi  
 ‘Zhangsan said he didn’t know Lisi.’

(Syea 2013:38)

(61) *Mauritian Creole*

Mo ti     dir     [vann pwason            dan    bazar].  
 I    PST   say   sell   fish                    in    market  
 ‘I said that one sells fish in the market.’ OR ‘I said that fish is sold in the market.’  
 NOT: ‘I said that I sell fish in the market.’



Moreover, unlike radical null-subject languages, Mauritian Creole disallows object drop, unless the reference of the dropped object is easily retrievable from the context (Syea 2013: 43). This is shown in (62).

- (62) a. Li pa ti donn twa liv la?  
 3SG NEG PST give 2SG book the  
 ‘Didn’t s/he give you the book?’
- b. Li ti done.<sup>12</sup>  
 3SG PST give  
 ‘S/he gave it to me.’ (‘S/he did.’)  
 LIT: ‘He gave.’ (adapted from Syea 2013: 43)

Finally, semi-null subject languages are those where definite referential covert subjects are impossible. In some, expletive and arbitrary/impersonal subjects may be covert, while in others, only expletives can be covert – some optionally and some obligatorily (see Biberauer 2010; Barbosa 2011b). Icelandic and Cape Verdean Creole, illustrated in (63) and (64), have been claimed to be semi-null subject languages.

- (63) *Icelandic, arbitrary null subject*  
 Nú má fara að dansa.  
 now may go to dance  
 ‘One may begin to dance now.’ (Sigurðsson and Egerland 2009: 169)
- (64) a. *Cape Verdean Creole, null expletive*  
 sta faze frio.  
 is making cold  
 ‘It is cold.’ (Baptista 1995:9)

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<sup>12</sup> Ditransitive verbs permit both the direct and indirect objects to drop in sentence-fragment contexts.

b. *Cape Verdean Creole, generic null subject*

na veron, ta korda sedu.  
in.the summer ASP wake early  
'In the summer one wakes up early.'

(Barbosa 2019: 511)

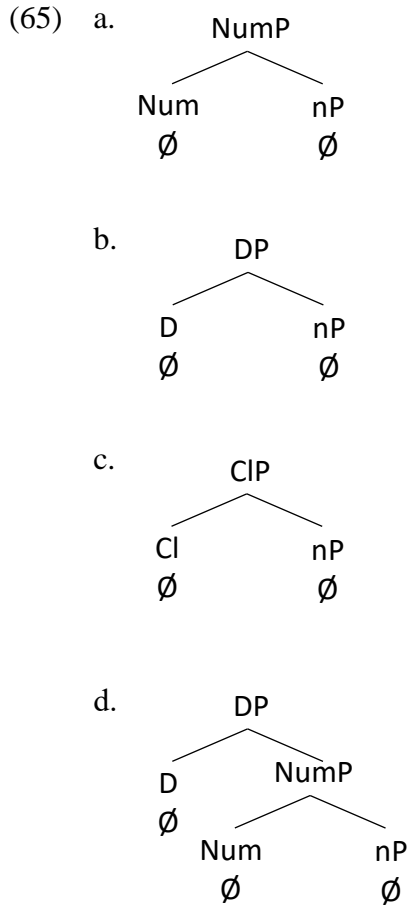
Among the various types of null-subject languages, Mauritian Creole seems to be the most like this last group. Mauritian Creole doesn't permit referential null subjects except in sentence-fragment contexts, it has null expletives, and where covert thematic subjects are permitted, they must be interpreted as generic or arbitrary. In the next section, I review how covert subjects, particularly those interpreted as generic or arbitrary, have been accounted for.

## 2.5 Recent analyses of covert subjects

Barbosa (2019) proposes that the null subjects in at least partial, radical, and semi-null subject languages can be accounted for by a single mechanism. She proposes that each such language has *pro*, a minimally specified nP anaphor whose head *n* lacks a root: [<sub>NP</sub> *e*]. Semantically, this proform simply means 'entity', introduces a variable, and is a function of type <e,t>. By default, it has syntactic gender and number (singular) features and a semantic [+human] feature. A phonologically null argument arises when this rootless nP is bare or is selected by a null number, D head, or a classifier,<sup>13</sup> as in (65a,b,c). (65d) shows the structure of an nP selected by a Num head, and the NumP selected by a D head.

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<sup>13</sup> Barbosa (2019) proposes a null classifier but provides the structures for only (65).



Indefinite null subjects – those that receive generic or arbitrary readings – arise when the nP remains within the vP/VP. As a predicate, the minimal nP combines with the verbal predicate by Predicate Modification, which Barbosa calls a case of semantic incorporation.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Barbosa follows the Davidsonian view that verbs introduce an event variable. In generic clauses, this event variable is bound by a generic operator (GEN). This operator, when present, also binds the null pronoun, which then receives a quasi-universal reading. This account derives the interpretations in the embedded clauses in (66) and the root clauses in (67).

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<sup>14</sup> The variable introduced by the nP falls within the scope of existential closure and is bound by existential quantification. See also Chung & Ladusaw's (2004: 4) operator of predicate restriction.

- (66) a. *Brazilian Portuguese*  
 Eu acho que vende cachorro quente na praia.  
 I think that sell.3SG dog hot at.the beach  
 ‘I think that hot dogs are sold at the beach.’ (Barbosa 2019: 506)
- b. *Cantonese*  
 Ah John waa hai Jinggwok jiu gong Jingman.  
 PRT John say in England need speak English  
 ‘John says that one/he needs to speak English in England.’ (Roberts 2019: 229)
- (67) a. *Brazilian Portuguese*  
 Aqui conserta sapatos.  
 here repair.3SG shoes  
 ‘Shoes are repaired here.’ (Kato 1999: 5, cited in Barbosa 2019: 504)
- b. *Japanese*  
 Haru-ga kure-ba, tabi-ni de-taku-naru.  
 Spring-NOM come-when trip-DAT leave-want-become  
 ‘When spring comes, one wants to go on a trip.’ (Roberts 2019: 229)

In both partial null-subject languages, like Finnish in (68a), and radical null-subject languages, like Mandarin in (68b), finite embedded clauses may contain definite null subjects. In partial null-subject languages, the embedded null subject must be bound by an antecedent in the higher clause.

- (68) a. *Finnish*  
 Pekka<sub>i</sub> väittää [että hän<sub>i/j</sub>/pro<sub>i/\*j</sub> puhuu englantia hyvin].  
 Pekka claim.3SG.PRS that he speak.3SG.PRS English well  
 ‘Pekka claims that he speaks English well.’ (Roberts 2019: 209)
- b. *Mandarin*  
 Zhangsan<sub>i</sub> xiwang[<sub>e<sub>i</sub></sub> keyi kanjian Lisi].  
 Zhangsan hope can see Lisi  
 ‘Zhangsan<sub>i</sub> hopes that [<sub>e<sub>i</sub></sub>] can see Lisi.’ (Huang 1984: 538)

For Barbosa, the definite interpretation in these cases arises because the bare nP moves out of the vP/VP, and therefore out of the scope of Existential Closure. As a result, the nP is type-shifted to

an individual (i), resulting in a referential reading of the null subject. The same mechanism can also apply to the minimal nP in root clauses.

Recall that semi-null subject languages permit only non-referential null subjects, that is, null impersonal or generic subjects, and null expletives. In some of these languages, the expletives can only be non-thematic ‘true’ expletives, while in others both ‘true’ expletives and ‘quasi-argumental’ (e.g., weather-*it*) expletives can be null. Cape Verdean Creole patterns as expected for a semi-null subject language: definite pronominal subjects cannot be covert, as shown in (69).

- (69) \*(El) ta trabadja duro.  
 he ASP works hard  
 ‘He works hard.’ (Baptista 1995:10)

Quasi-argumental and impersonal null subjects are possible, as shown in (70) and (71).

- (70) Sta faze frio.  
 is making cold  
 ‘It is cold.’ (Baptista 1995: 9)

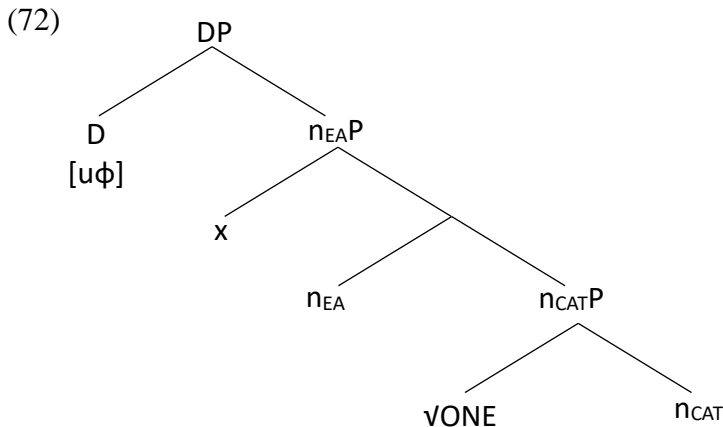
- (71) Na veron, ta korda sedu.  
 in.the summer ASP wake early  
 ‘In the summer one wakes up early.’ (Barbosa 2019: 511)

Barbosa (2019: 520) hypothesizes that languages like Cape Verdean Creole “that lack the resources needed for [type-shifting] to apply [to the null nP] only have quasi-argumental and impersonal null subjects (semi pro-drop).” She does not specify what the missing resources are. As for null expletives, it has been argued that stipulating an expletive *pro* is untenable as it is motivated entirely by the assumption that the EPP is universal (Wurmbrand 2006; Biberauer 2010). In line with this view, Barbosa assumes that without further evidence, the EPP in

languages with no overt expletives does not require the presence of a null expletive in SpecTP. In such languages, therefore, only theta-role bearing nominals, including quasi-arguments (like weather *it* in English), can be realized as rootless nPs.

Roberts (2019) adopts the semantic specification proposed by Barbosa for the minimal nP, specifically her proposal that the minimal nP is a predicate that undergoes semantic incorporation into the clausal predicate, thereby functioning as a predicate modifier. However, his analysis of the nP diverges from Barbosa's in the structural properties of the nP and in how *pro* is licensed. He makes this move because type-shifting has been criticized as too powerful an operation (Higginbotham 2008; Ramchand 2008, 2011; Pietroski 2005, 2011; Tsoulas 2017: 196, all cited in Roberts 2019). He proposes instead that the Bijection Principle (Koopman & Sportiche 1982) plays the main role in licensing *pro*. The Bijection Principle bans vacuous quantification, i.e., a quantifier must have a variable within its scope to bind. The principle also bans free variables – all variables in a derivation must be bound. In Roberts' analysis, existential closure and type-shifting are unnecessary.

The structure Roberts proposes for the nP is shown in (72), where ONE denotes any individual in domain D.



He distinguishes two nP heads, one of which ( $n_{EA}$ ) introduces an external argument, while the other ( $n_{CAT}$ ) is the categorizing head. The variable  $x$  merges as the external argument of  $n_{EA}$ . Following Williams (1981, 1994), Roberts proposes that the variable receives an external theta role from the nominal root, with which it is co-referential. The coreference results in  $x$  ranging over individuals in the domain, but as a variable, it must be bound. Once valued,  $x$  is the referential index of the null pronoun. The variable itself is otherwise considered to be simply an acategorial lexical item with no formal features or properties other than being of type  $\langle e \rangle$ .

Regarding arbitrary/impersonal null subjects, Roberts presents a distinction originally made by Cinque (1988) for two arbitrary interpretations of the Italian form *si*: ‘quasi-universal’ and ‘quasi-existential’. He applies the distinction to arbitrary pronouns, which he claims have the properties listed in (73) and (75) (Roberts 2019: 261-2). English examples of each are listed in (74) and (76).

(73) *Quasi-universal arbitrary pronouns*

- a. are incompatible with specific/bounded time reference, e.g., they cannot appear in the present perfect;
- b. are incompatible with the existence of a single individual satisfying the description;
- c. typically have an inclusive interpretation, i.e., can be interpreted to include the speaker;
- d. are not restricted to external arguments.

(74) *Examples of quasi-universal ‘one’ in English*

- a. One makes their bed every morning.
- b. One should brush their teeth after every meal.

(75) *Quasi-existential arbitrary pronouns*

- a. are compatible with specific time reference;
- b. are compatible with the existence of a single individual satisfying the description;
- c. cannot be interpreted to include the speaker;
- d. are restricted to the external argument.

- (76) *Examples of quasi-existential 'they' in English*
- a. They make movies in Hollywood.
  - b. They are developing a new vaccine for the flu.

The two interpretations, quasi-universal versus quasi-existential, are licensed differently. The quasi-universal reading, Roberts proposes, is licensed through binding between a GEN operator in the left periphery of the clause and the variable in *pro*. Furthermore, for Roberts, *pro* appears in SpecTP whether it is an underlying external or internal argument.

As for quasi-existential readings of a subject, Roberts observes that in various languages, whether or not they permit null subjects, only external arguments can receive a quasi-existential reading. For example, Jaeggli (1986b) has shown that English external versus internal arguments exhibit this contrast: the external arguments in (77) are ambiguous between a referential and an arbitrary reading, but the subjects of (78) originate as internal arguments and can only be read referentially.

- (77) a. They sell cigarettes at gas stations.  
b. They don't allow dogs on the beach.
- (78) a. They are arrested all the time by the police.  
b. They exist without any water on this planet.  
c. They arrive really tired after such a long trip.

For Roberts (2019: 260), this quasi-existential interpretation is licensed through some form of Agree between Asp and the variable in *pro*. Roberts employs unselective binding – where a quantifier binds any open variables within its scope – between the functional head and *pro*. When the variable in *pro* is unselectively bound by Asp and there is no intervening head, *pro* receives an arbitrary reading. The variable cannot be bound by Asp in an unaccusative construction because, following Higginbotham (1985), vPs contain an event argument structurally merged



higher than the internal argument, and the event argument intervenes between Asp and the variable. Conversely, in transitives and unergatives, Asp can bind the variable in *pro* presumably because the event argument merges lower than the external argument.

The account that I will propose here builds on some of the ideas presented above. First, the behaviour of implicit subjects in Mauritian Creole can be categorized according to Roberts' distinctions given in (73) and (75), except that quasi-universal ('generic') and quasi-existential ('arbitrary') readings are both restricted to external arguments. I show that the valency of the predicate is relevant to the possibility of these readings: while the implicit external arguments of transitive verbs may have either generic or existential interpretations, the implicit external arguments of unergative verbs can only be read as generic. I will argue that the variable is not a null pronominal in an argument position, but rather resides in a Voice head (cf., Jaeggli 1986a, Baker et al. 1989, Bruening 2013, Legate 2014, Šerekaitė 2020). I will show that the Asp head interacts with the readings of the implicit subjects, and that a generic operator is the source of the generic interpretation, when there is one. Moreover, contra Roberts (2019) but following Barbosa (2019), I will argue that Existential Closure does play a role in deriving some of the interpretations that arise in Mauritian Creole subjectless constructions.

## 2.6 Non-active Voice

Given that Mauritian Creole thematic implicit subjects in Mauritian Creole can only be external arguments, and assuming, following Kratzer (1996), that external arguments are introduced by a Voice head, it is worth exploring the idea that covert subjects in Mauritian Creole arise in the

Voice domain. In this section, I explore the different types of non-active constructions described in the literature.<sup>15</sup>

Passive constructions are commonly thought to have the two core properties listed in (79).

- (79) a. They contain the [internal argument] of the corresponding active clause in subject position.  
b. They suppress the logical subject or express it as an oblique dependent.  
(Jespersen 1924)

Comrie (1977) shows that not all passives exhibit property (79a), the ‘promotion’ of the logical object to subject position. Instead, the definitional property of a passive is (79b), namely, that the logical subject is ‘demoted’ either by not being expressed at all, or by arising adverbially. If Comrie’s characterization is correct, then a variety of different constructions can be classed as passive. These include personal and impersonal passives, as well as middles, which also contain suppressed initiators/agents.

### 2.6.1 Personal Passives

So-called ‘personal’ passives have both of Jespersen’s core properties. As Blevins (2006) states, this type of passive involves the detransitivizing of a transitive active construction. Thus, the canonical personal passive appears with lexical verbs that minimally assign two thematic roles. For example, in English and German, as shown in (80) and (81), the subject of the active clause corresponds to the optional oblique in the passive. The object of the active corresponds to the subject of the passive. It is thus often said that the thematic subject is ‘demoted’ to an oblique,

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<sup>15</sup> See also Legate (2021) and Oikonomou & Alexiadou (2022) for typologies of ‘non-canonical passives’.

whereas the internal argument is ‘promoted’ to subject position. In German, an accusative object of an active clause, as in (81a), bears nominative case in the passive, as in (81b).

- (80) a. *Active*  
 Ruddiger ate the kibble.
- b. *Personal passive*  
 The kibble was eaten (by Ruddiger)
- (81) a. *Active*  
 Der            Beamte hat den            Vorschlag    abgelehnt.  
 the.NOM      official has the.ACC      proposal      rejected  
 ‘The official has rejected the proposal.’
- b. *Personal passive*  
 Der            Vorschlag wurde      (vom            Beamten)      abgelehnt.  
 the.NOM      proposal was      (by+the.DAT official)      rejected  
 ‘The proposal was rejected by the official.’ (Blevins 2006: 477)

In English control contexts, the suppressed agent can license agent-oriented modifiers and control the covert subject of a clausal adjunct, as illustrated in (82), where (82a) and (82b) contain agent-oriented modifiers and (82c) contains an adjunct with a covert subject.

- (82) a. The snow was shoveled **carefully** over the carcass.  
 b. The rug was beaten **with zeal**.  
 c. The boat was sunk **to collect the insurance**.

Thus, it is consistently true of personal passives that the thematic external argument of a transitive active clause is suppressed yet syntactically active in a passive; if it is expressed, it appears in an adverbial phrase.

Jaeggli (1986a) and subsequently Baker, Johnson & Roberts (1989) analyze the passive morpheme *-en* in English as an argument. For Baker et al., this argument is generated in INFL. Importantly, the argument is assigned (or “absorbs”) the external theta-role. As an argument, it needs to be assigned case and receives its case from the verb. The theme, no longer able to receive case from the verb, moves to grammatical subject position to get its case there. The account of subjectlessness in Mauritian Creole to be proposed in Chapter 3 has a basis in these ideas, primarily that a head can absorb the external argument theta-role. This amounts to claiming that the head is an argument itself or, as I will argue, that the external argument resides in the functional head.

### 2.6.2 Subjectless Passives

Some languages permit passives to be formed with intransitive verbs as well as with transitives in what are sometimes called ‘subjectless passives’. In these constructions, the subject in the active clause is suppressed. If there is an internal argument, it does not move to fill the grammatical subject position. Subjectless passives of unergatives, lacking an internal argument, have an empty subject position. While the communicative effect of a personal passive, as discussed above, is to suppress or demote an agent and promote a theme or patient, it seems that the effect of the subjectless passive is to foreground the activity described in the clause rather than the participants. Subjectless passives can also be used to convey indefinite or generic statements (Blevins 2006: 237). Example (83) shows a German unergative active clause and its

subjectless passive counterpart. Notice in (83b) that the *by*-phrase is optional, and there is apparently nothing in subject position.<sup>16</sup>

(83) a. *Active*

Einige Leute haben auf der Straße gejubelt.  
some people have in the street celebrated  
'Some people celebrated in the street.'

b. *Subjectless Passive*

Auf der Straße wurde (von einigen Leuten) gejubelt.  
in the street was by some people celebrated  
'There was celebrating (by some people) in the street.' (Blevins 2006: 236)

In a subjectless passive, the demoted or unexpressed external argument is always interpreted as human (Blevins 2003: 480). In principle, this could be either the cause or the effect of subjectless passives being restricted to verbs that require volition or, more specifically, human volition. This is especially clear from the fact that unaccusative verbs cannot appear in a subjectless passive construction, as illustrated by the German examples in (84).

(84) a. Einige Leute sind auf der Straße geblieben.

some people are in the street remained  
'Some people have remained in the street.'

b. \*Auf der Straße wurde (von einigen Leuten) geblieben.

in the street was (by some people) remained  
Intended: 'There was remaining by some people in the street.'

(Blevins 2006: 237)

Overall, the properties that distinguish the subjectless passive from the personal passive are as follows. In subjectless passives, the internal argument does not move into subject position, *by*-

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<sup>16</sup> German speakers do not consider *by*-phrases to be as felicitous in subjectless passives as they are in personal passives (Blevins 2006: 236).

phrases are less felicitous, unergative intransitives can passivize, and the agent is understood to be human and indefinite.

### 2.6.3 Impersonal Passives

Like the subjectless passive, the impersonal is a passive-like construction that does not require the promotion of an internal argument to grammatical subject position. The object of a transitive verb in an impersonal construction remains low in the structure and bears a case that normally marks objects, often accusative or partitive (Blevins 2003: 482). The impersonal is also characterized by default subject agreement marking, glossed as IMPRS on the verb. In the Estonian example in (85), the object remains low, marked for partitive case. Similarly, in (86), the object in the Polish impersonal remains low, and bears accusative case.

- (85) Siin ehitatakse uut maja.  
 here build.PRS.IMPRS new.PART house.PART  
 ‘Here they are building a new house.’  
 (Tuldava 1994: 273, cited in Blevins 2006: 238)

- (86) Znaleziono niemowlę w koszu.  
 found.IMPRS baby.ACC in basket  
 ‘They found a baby in the basket.’ (Lavine 2005: 23, cited in Legate 2014: 98)

The suppressed subject of an impersonal construction is interpreted as an unspecified human being or people in general (Blevins 2006: 237). (87) and (88) compare the active and impersonal constructions using the Estonian verbs for ‘fight’ and ‘travel’.

- (87) a. *Active*  
 Poisid kaklesid õues.  
 boys fight.PST.3PL outside  
 ‘The boys were fighting outside.’

- b. *Impersonal*  
 Õues kakeldi.  
 outside fight.PST.IMPRS  
 ‘People were fighting outside.’ (Blevins 2003: 483)

- (88) a. *Active*  
 Homme sõidan linna.  
 tomorrow travel.PRS.1SG town.ILLA  
 ‘I will travel to town tomorrow.’ (Blevins 2003: 484)

- b. *Impersonal*  
 Homme sõidetakse linna.  
 tomorrow travel.PRS.IMPRS town.ILLA  
 ‘One is/they are travelling to town tomorrow.’

The requirement that the agent be interpreted as human is particularly clear in (89) and (90).

There, the impersonal forms with non-human initiators are ill-formed (Blevins 2006: 238). In the Estonian examples in (90), *hauguma* (‘to bark’) in (90a) takes on a metaphorical interpretation with an understood human subject. However, in (90b), *aeguma* (‘to expire/elapse’) can apply only to inanimate subjects, making (90b) unacceptable.

- (89) *Polish*  
 a. Rodzono dzieci w domu.  
 born.IMPRS children.ACC in home  
 ‘They bore children at home.’  
 b. \*Ociełono/ okocono się.  
 calved.IMPRS cubbed/kittened.IMPRS REFL  
 Intended: ‘There was given birth to a calf/cub/kitten.’  
 (Lavine 2005: 21, cited in Legate 2014: 97)

- (90) *Estonian*  
 a. Õues haugutakse.  
 outside bark.PRS.IMPRS  
 ‘One barks outside.’ (Torn 2002: 95, cited in Blevins 2003: 484)

- b. \*Aegutakse/aeguti.  
 expire.PRS.IMPRS/PST.IMPRS  
 Intended: ‘One expires/expired.’ (Blevins 2003: 484)

Impersonal passives differ from personal passives in that they can be formed with intransitive verbs, both unergative and unaccusative. They also differ from subjectless passives in that subjectless passives cannot be formed with unaccusative verbs. (90a) above is an example of an impersonal unergative construction. With unaccusative impersonals such as (91), the suppressed subject must, as expected, have a human referent. Impersonal morphology may also appear on auxiliaries that combine with non-verbal predicates. This is shown in the Finnish example in (92) and the Breton example in (93), where again the suppressed subject must be human.

- (91) *Estonian*  
 Tullakse ja minnakse.  
 come.PRS.IMPRS and go.PRS.IMPRS  
 ‘They [=people] come and go.’ (Tuldava 1994: 273, cited in Blevins 2003: 484)

- (92) *Finnish*  
 Suomessa ollan niin toisia.  
 Finland-in be.IMPRS.PRS so serious.NOM.PL  
 ‘In Finland, we/they/people are so serious.’  
 (Shore 1988: 159, cited in Blevins 2003: 487)

- (93) *Breton*  
 Alies e vezer klañv.  
 lots PRT one.be sick  
 ‘One is often sick.’ (Anderson 1982: 24, cited in Legate 2014: 100)

In further contrast to personal passives, impersonal passives are not fully grammatical with an oblique agent. For example, Estonian speakers judge sentences like (94) as questionable, but they are becoming increasingly common in the language (Blevins 2003: 486 and sources cited there).



(95b) shows that an agentive *by*-phrase is impossible in the Polish impersonal, unlike the Polish personal passive.

(94) *Estonian impersonal*

?Tartu	ülikool	asutati	Gustav II Adolfi	poolt.
Tartu	university	found.PST.IMPRS	Gustav II Adolf.GEN	by

‘Tartu University was founded by Gustav II Adolf.’

(Tuldava 1994: 273, cited in Blevins 2003: 486)

(95) a. *Polish personal passive*

Jan	był	obrabowany	przez	nich.
Jan.NOM	was	robbed.3SG.M	by	them

‘Jan was robbed by them.’

(Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002: 103)

b. *Polish impersonal*

Jana	obrabowano	(*przez	nich).
Jan.NOM	robbed.IMPRS	(*by	them)

‘They robbed Jan (\*by them).’

(Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002: 104)

Finally, at least in Polish, the suppressed subject in an impersonal can control PRO, as shown in (96). Recall that this is also possible in English personal passives, as was shown in (82) above.

(96) Na wzgórzu      zaczęto      [PRO budować      dom].  
on hill              begun.IMPRS      PRO build.INF      house.ACC

‘They began to build a house on the hill.’ (Lavine 2005: 106, cited in Legate 2014: 97)

To summarize, impersonals differ from the passive and passive-like constructions reviewed so far in that their suppressed subject necessarily receives an indefinite human interpretation.

Furthermore, impersonals do not require the internal argument to appear in subject position. It therefore receives object case, and oblique agents are largely disallowed.

#### 2.6.4 Grammatical Object Passives

A fifth passive-like construction is what Legate (2014) calls the *grammatical object passive*. In this construction, the verb bears passive morphology, but the internal argument remains in grammatical object position and bears accusative case. The object cannot raise to subject position before the participle. Compare the Icelandic personal passive in (97a) with the Icelandic grammatical object passive in (97b). In the personal passive, the internal argument raises to subject position, bears nominative case, and triggers agreement on the participle. In the grammatical object passive, the internal argument is low, bears accusative case, and does not trigger agreement on the participle. (98) further shows that the object cannot raise to subject position.<sup>17</sup>

(97) a. *Personal passive*

Strákurinn var laminn.  
boy.NOM.DEF was beaten.M.SG.NOM  
'The boy was beaten.'

b. *Grammatical object passive*

Það var lamið strákin.  
EXPL was beaten.DFLT boy.ACC.DEF  
'The boy was beaten.' (Legate 2014: 86-7)

(98) \*Stundum var strákin lamið.  
sometimes was boy.ACC.DEF beaten  
Intended: 'Sometimes, the boy was beaten.' (Legate 2014: 87)

Examples of personal and grammatical object passives in Ukrainian are shown in (99). As in Icelandic, the internal argument of the grammatical object passive is marked for accusative case

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<sup>17</sup> The adverb *stundum* is used to satisfy the verb-second requirement of the language (Legate 2014: 87).

rather than nominative, though in Ukrainian it occurs in sentence-initial position.<sup>18</sup> Note, however, that unlike in the personal passive, neither the auxiliary nor the participle in the grammatical object passive agrees with the internal argument.

(99) a. *Personal passive*

Cerkva	bula	zbudovana	v	1640	roc'i.
church.F.NOM	be.PST.F	build.PTCP.F.SG	in	1640	year
'The church was built in 1640.'					(Sobin 1985: 654)

b. *Grammatical object passive*

Cerkvu	bulo	zbudovano	v	1640	roc'i.
church.F.ACC	be.PST.N	build.PTCP	in	1640	year
'The church was built in 1640.'					(Sobin 1985: 653)

Despite the similarities, grammatical object passives in Icelandic and Ukrainian differ in two ways. In Ukrainian, grammatical object passives permit oblique agents. As in personal passives, these are adjuncts marked with instrumental case, as in (100). *By*-phrases are questionable in Icelandic grammatical object passives, as shown in (101).

(100) *Ukrainian*

a. Cerkvu bulo zbudovano Lesevym.  
 church.F.ACC be.PST.N build.PTCP Lesiv.INS  
 'The church was built by Lesiv.' (Sobin 1985: 658)

b. Tabir bulo zajnjato amerykans'kym  
 camp.ACC be.PST.N occupied.PTCP American

vijs'kom.  
 troops.INS

'The camp was occupied by American troops.' (Lavine 2013: 188)

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<sup>18</sup> The pre-verbal position of the direct object is likely due to object shift, which in Ukrainian is correlated with a specific interpretation of the object referent (Mykhaylyk & Ko 2008: 145; Antonyuk & Mykhaylyk 2022: 124).

(101) *Icelandic*

? Það var skoðað bílinn af bifvélavirkjanum.  
EXPL was inspected car.ACC.DEF by car.mechanic.DEF  
'The car was inspected by the car mechanic.'  
(Legate 2014: 89)

Additionally, while the implicit initiator can control embedded PRO in Icelandic, as shown in (102), it cannot in Ukrainian, as shown in (103) (Legate 2014: 155).

(102) *Icelandic*

Þá var raðið tvo men án þess  
then was hired two.ACC men.ACC without it  
  
að hafa næga menntun.  
to have enough education

'Then, somebody who didn't have enough education hired two men.'

(Or 'Two men were hired without [the hiring agent] having enough education.')

(Legate 2014: 154)

(103) *Ukrainian*

\*U misti počato [PRO buduvaty vovo cerkvu].  
in city begin.PTCP PRO build.INF new church.ACC  
'They began to build a new church in the city.'

(Lavine 2005: 12, cited in Legate 2014: 155)

I now turn to the middle, which, under Comrie's definition of passive, is classified as passive-like.

### 2.6.5 Middles

Middles do not typically fall under the scope of passives or passivization. However, because the defining property of passives assumed here is only the suppression of an external argument, it is appropriate to discuss middles as well. Cross-linguistically, middles are said to express the genericity of an otherwise eventive predicate, ascribing a dispositional property to the understood object, which is either promoted to subject position by syntactic movement or base-

generated there (Lekakou 2005: 1). Alexiadou (2014), following Levin (1993), adds that middles also lack a specific time reference, are understood to have an unexpressed agent, and tend to – or must in some languages – include an adverbial or modal element. (104) illustrates middle constructions in various languages, exhibiting the properties just listed.

- (104) a. This book reads easily.
- b. *Dutch*  
 Dit boek leest makelijk.  
 this book read-3SG easily
- c. *German*  
 Dieses Buch liest sich leicht.  
 this book read-3SG REFL easily
- d. *French*  
 Ce livre se lit facilement.  
 this book REFL read-3SG easily
- e. *Greek*  
 Afto to vivlio diavazete efkola.  
 this the book read-NONACT.3SG easily  
 ‘This book reads easily.’ (Lekakou 2005: 10)

As with personal passives, middle constructions generally contain only transitive verbs (Kit 2014: 6). However, unlike personal passives, at least in English, middles cannot be formed with ditransitive verbs. This is shown in (105); compare the ungrammatical middle constructions in (105) with the well-formed passives in (106).

- (105) a. \*Money gives (to) victims of natural disasters easily.  
 b. \*A cup of coffee offers (to) a guest easily. (Kit 2014: 6)
- (106) a. Money is given to victims of natural disasters.  
 b. A cup of coffee is offered to a guest.

Oblique agents do not pattern consistently in middles. For example, they are not permitted in English and German middles, as shown in (107) and (108), but are fine in Greek middles, as shown in (109).

(107) \*Plates break easily by John. (Alexiadou 2014: 25)

(108) Das Buch liest sich (\*von den meisten Lesern/irgendwem) leicht.  
 the book reads REFL by the most readers/anyone-DAT easily  
 ‘The book reads easily (\*by most reader/anyone). (Lekakou 2005: 39)

(109) Afto to vivlio diavazete efxarista (apo opiondipote)  
 this the book read-NAct-IPFV-3SG with-pleasure by anyone  
 ‘This book reads with pleasure by anyone.’ [lit.] (Alexiadou 2014: 25)

Finally, the implicit agent of an English middle is unable to control PRO in purpose clauses (Alexiadou 2014: 21), as shown in (110). However, French appears to permit this type of control, as shown in (111). Similarly, in German, the implicit agent seems to be able to control into purpose clauses as well, as shown in (112), though judgement varies from speaker to speaker (Lekakou 2005: 40).

(110) \*Walls paint best to protect them against the rain. (Lekakou 2005: 34)

(111) Une usine, ça se brûle pour toucher l’assurance.  
 a factory, this REFL burn-3SG for collect-INFIN the-insurance  
 ‘Factories, they can be burned down to collect the insurance.’ (Lekakou 2005: 26)

(112) a. Dieses Buch liest sich gut, um sich auf die  
 this book reads REFL well for REFL on the  
 Prüfung vorzubereiten.  
 exam to.prepare-INFIN  
 ‘This book reads well to prepare for an exam.’ (Lekakou 2005: 40)

- b. Das Buch liest sich nur um einzuschlafen gut.  
 the book reads REFL only for to.fall.asleep-INFIN well  
 ‘The book reads well only in order to fall asleep.’ (Lekakou 2005: 40)

### 2.6.6 Brief summary

We have seen that there are a variety of non-active Voice constructions (or ‘non-canonical passives’), and that what they have in common is that their external arguments are covert.

Table 3 below summarizes the properties of the constructions discussed in this section (shaded cells are where no information is available). It also shows how subjectless constructions in Mauritian Creole compare. It is apparent that subjectless Mauritian Creole constructions bear similarity to both subjectless passives and grammatical object passives.

TABLE 3. Non-active Voices

	Personal Passive	Subjectless Passive	Impersonal Passive	Grammatical Object Passive	Middle	MC covert EAs
<b>NOM theme</b>	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
<b>Theme in subject position</b>	YES (optional in Icelandic)	NO	NO (but see Finnish)	NO (but see Ukrainian)	YES	NO
<b>Theme agrees with verb</b>	YES		NO	NO	YES	NO (no agreement morphology)
<b>ACC theme</b>	NO		YES	YES	NO	YES
<b>Theme in object position</b>	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
<b>Agentive <i>by</i>-phrase</b>	YES	NOT TOTALLY FELICITOUS	NOT TOTALLY FELICITOUS	DEPENDS ON LANG	DEPENDS ON LANG	NO
<b>Indefinite human agent</b>	NOT NECESSARILY	NECESSARILY	NECESSARILY			NECESSARILY
<b>Transitive verbs</b>	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
<b>Unergative verbs</b>	NO	YES	YES		NO	YES (if EA is generic)
<b>Unaccusative verbs</b>	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
<b>Implicit agent can control PRO</b>	YES		YES	DEPENDS ON LANG	DEPENDS ON LANG	YES

Subjectless passives, to my knowledge, have not yet received a full analysis. Legate (2014: 106-107) proposes that grammatical object passives have some sort of intermediate structure between canonical passives and impersonals. Key to her analysis is that *by*-phrases can saturate the reference of available phi-features, and a DP or set of phi-features in the specifier of

Voice are sufficient for Voice to license accusative case. That is, she proposes that canonical passives contain phi-features on the passive Voice head itself, which restrict the reference of the external argument. *By*-phrases are permitted to saturate the external argument on the Voice head, while accusative case is not available for assignment to the theme because Voice does not project a specifier position. Impersonals, on the other hand, have a full DP (D merged to a  $\phi$ P) in the specifier of Voice, which “saturates” the external argument position. It is in this way that a *by*-phrase cannot enter to saturate the external argument role, and the subject is proposed to be the impersonal pronoun *pro*. Because Voice projects a specifier, accusative case is licensed. Legate argues that in grammatical object passives, Voice projects a specifier occupied by a  $\phi$ P. Thus, *by*-phrases are licensed, and accusative case, too, is permitted.

Legate’s (2014) analyses of the non-active Voices just discussed offer several possible explanations for the Mauritian Creole covert thematic subject data presented in section 2.2. Let’s consider the non-active Voices on a scale from more passive-like to more impersonal-like, with grammatical object passives in the middle, as Legate does. Like grammatical object passives, covert subject constructions in Mauritian Creole bear properties of both canonical passives and impersonals. Like impersonals, the covert subjects of Mauritian Creole subjectless constructions receive only arbitrary or generic interpretations. In addition, accusative case is assigned to the internal argument and *by*-phrases are largely dispreferred. Unlike impersonals, however, unaccusative verbs in Mauritian Creole do not permit covert subjects. This is a property that subjectless constructions in Mauritian Creole share with canonical passives. The question, then, is whether the covert subjects of Mauritian Creole are instances of *pro*, as in impersonals, or a set of phi-features (what I will consider to be an open variable) that need to be saturated, as in canonical passives and grammatical object passives. Further, given that Legate (2014) employs a



version of Burzio's Generalization (Burzio 1986: 178) in which Voice must project a specifier in order to also assign accusative case, the question of whether Voice in Mauritian Creole subjectless constructions projects a specifier is also raised.

With the above observations in mind, along with the typology of *pro*-drop languages, I present two possible hypotheses to account for the subjectless Mauritian Creole data described in section 2.2. I set the traditional assumption that subjectless constructions have *pro* against the more novel one: that subjectlessness in Mauritian Creole arises from non-active Voice.

## 2.7 The implicit subject in Mauritian Creole

Returning to Mauritian Creole, subjectless constructions in Mauritian Creole resemble subjectless passives in two ways: the internal argument remains low, and they are impossible with unaccusative verbs. Additionally, subjectless constructions in Mauritian Creole tend to disallow agentive *by*-phrases,<sup>19</sup> and the implicit subject gets an indefinite or generic human interpretation (Blevins 2006: 480-1). Thus, while a null-pronoun account might be made to work, it is worth exploring whether subjectlessness in Mauritian Creole arises from a voice alternation like one or more of the voice alternations just discussed. I consider these two hypotheses below.

The two hypotheses differ principally in the status of the external argument, specifically in whether it is syntactically projected. Bhatt and Pancheva (2006) contrast properties of unaccusatives, which do not have external arguments, and properties of passives, which have implicit external arguments, to show that a passive clause has syntactically accessible but unpronounced external argument. I use some of these diagnostics here to show that the implicit

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<sup>19</sup> There's some inter-speaker variation here.

external arguments of subjectless constructions in Mauritian Creole do participate in certain syntactic processes and thus must be syntactically accessible.

First, implicit agents in English passives can control the PRO subject of an adjunct clause, as in (113a). Unaccusatives, which do not have external arguments, don't participate in the same kind of control relation, as shown in (113b). The idea here is that only syntactically active arguments can control PRO.

- (113) a. The boat was sunk to collect the insurance.  
 b. \*The boat sank to collect the insurance.

(Manzini 1983, cited in Bhatt & Pancheva 2006: 561)

In Mauritian Creole, the implicit agent can control PRO in complement and adjunct clauses, as shown in (114) and (115). In these examples, the matrix subject is not overt, yet the subjects of the embedded and matrix clauses are interpreted as coreferential.

(114) *Subject control into complement clause*

- a. Pe refiz [travay pou ti saler] de-no-zour.  
 IPFV refuse work for small salary these days  
 'They are refusing to work for little pay these days.'
- b. Finn bliye [fer eleksion] lane dernier.  
 PERF forget do election year last  
 'They forgot to hold the elections last year.'

(115) *Subject control into adjunct clause*

- a. Finn plas tablo la lor miray [pou gete kouma  
 PERF place painting the on wall for see how  
 li paret laba].  
 3SG appear there

'The painting was placed on the wall to see how it looked there.'<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Recall that speakers sometimes translate subjectless Mauritian Creole sentences using the English passive.

- b. Finn organize lasal la [avan invit bann anplwaye  
 PERF organize room the before invite PL employee  
 la rantre].  
 the enter

‘The room was organized before inviting the employees in.’

Along the same lines, unaccusatives should be incompatible with agentive adverbials because they have no agents. If a construction permits an adverbial like *deliberately*, *on purpose*, etc., it must be associated with an agentive argument. (116a) shows that the English passive is compatible with an agentive adverbial, while (116b) shows that an unaccusative is not.

- (116) a. The boat was sunk deliberately.  
 b. #The boat sank deliberately. (Bhatt & Pancheva 2006: 561)

(117) shows that subjectless constructions in Mauritian Creole marginally permit agentive adverbs, suggesting that the implicit agent is syntactically accessible.

- (117) ?Inn kul bato la par ekspre.  
 PERF sink boat the for purpose  
 ‘The boat was sunk on purpose.’

Alexiadou et al. (2015: 20) use the licensing of instrumental PPs as an additional test for the presence of an implicit external argument. Here, too, the idea is that instruments need to be under the control of an agent. This is shown by the fact that the unaccusative in (118b) cannot take an instrumental PP, while the same PP can appear in the passive which is assumed to have an implicit agent.

- (118) a. The window was broken by John with a hammer.  
 b. \*The window broke with a hammer.

Instrumental PPs are compatible with subjectlessness in Mauritian Creole, as shown in (119).

- (119) a. Fer pina kolada avek enn blender.  
make piña colada with a blender  
'People make piña coladas with a blender.'
- b. Ti pe fer pina kolada avek enn blender.  
PST IPFV make piña colada with a blender  
'They were making piña coladas with a blender.' (= arbitrary 'they')

So, there is evidence that an external argument is syntactically accessible in Mauritian Creole subjectless constructions. There are two ways this could be true: it could be a null pronominal in an argument position, or it could be a variable that must be bound.

The question, then, is whether the implicit agent is a null pronominal (the *pro* hypothesis) or a variable in a Voice head that needs to be bound (the Voice hypothesis). I begin by considering the adequacy of the *pro* hypothesis.

### 2.7.1 Hypothesis 1: Mauritian Creole has PRO/*pro* subject pronouns in subjectless constructions

According to the first hypothesis, subjectless constructions contain a syntactically present but unpronounced agent phrase in structural subject position. If this pronoun can have the same reference as overt forms with arbitrary/generic readings, e.g., (*bann*) *dimoun* ('person'/'people'), *kikenn/enn dimoun* ('someone'), *zot* ('they'), we would expect that the null pronoun is acceptable wherever the overt counterpart can appear. As shown in (120) and (121), this is not the case.

- (120) a. \*Ti pe danse.  
PST IPFV dance  
Intended: 'They/someone were/was dancing.'

- b. Zot ti pe danse.  
 3PL PST IPFV dance  
 ‘They were dancing.’

- (121) a. \*Finn mor.  
 PERF die  
 Intended: ‘They/someone have/has died.’

- b. Kikenn finn mor.  
 someone PERF die  
 ‘Someone died.’

Moreover, recall that Roberts (2019) claims that null subjects may receive arbitrary reference only if they are external arguments, whereas the generic interpretation is available for both underlying external arguments and underlying internal arguments (e.g., unaccusative subjects). In Mauritian Creole, however, all covert thematic subjects must be underlying external arguments. Another complication is that the arbitrary interpretation is completely unavailable for covert subjects of unergative verbs. This sensitivity to the valency of the verb is completely unexpected under the *pro* hypothesis.

Given the unexpected asymmetry between transitive and unergative covert subjects in Mauritian Creole, I now turn to the possibility that Voice is the source of Mauritian Creole missing subjects, which will be explored in detail in the next chapter, where I present additional arguments that the Voice hypothesis is superior to the *pro* hypothesis.

### 2.7.2 Hypothesis 2: Mauritian Creole subjectlessness derives from non-active Voice<sup>21</sup>

It is commonly accepted that the external argument is introduced by the Voice head (Kratzer 1996). Given the variety of non-active voices cross-linguistically and even language-internally, it

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<sup>21</sup> With this hypothesis, I do not intend to rule out the possibility that Mauritian Creole has *pro*. With respect to the constructions under investigation, the idea is that the properties that license covert agents live in Voice.

is possible that there are different non-active Voices in Mauritian Creole, perhaps one more passive-like and the other more impersonal-like. It could be that each type of construction contains a Voice head that contains an external argument, each with different properties. Additionally, since Voice is part of the verbal domain, the two Voice heads could in principle each impose their own restrictions on the valency of the verbs they select. I pursue this hypothesis in the next chapter and ultimately argue that Mauritian Creole has two active Voice heads and two non-active Voice heads, the latter being present in constructions with implicit external arguments.

Chapter 3  
The Proposal

In this chapter, I compare two possible analyses of subjectlessness in Mauritian Creole: 1) it arises from the Voice system (the Voice analysis), and 2) it arises from the presence of a phonetically null pronoun in subject position (the *pro* analysis). I do this by discussing how each analysis fares in explaining the data presented in section 2.2, which I summarize just below. Ultimately, I will argue that the Voice analysis is superior to the *pro* analysis for Mauritian Creole.

Tables 1 and 2, repeated from section 2.2.5, summarize the distribution of covert subjects in Mauritian Creole.

TABLE 1. Implicit thematic subjects

	Transitive			Unergative			Unaccusative		
	PRS	PST/PERF/FUT	IPFV	PRS	PST/PERF/FUT	IPFV	PRS	PST/PERF/FUT	IPFV
<b>ADV</b>	GEN	GEN/ARB	ARB	GEN	GEN	*	*	*	*
<b>no ADV</b>	*	ARB	ARB	*	*	*	*	*	*

As we saw in Chapter 2, transitive verbs permit covert subjects. An adverbial modifier is required for a generic reading of the covert subject but not for an arbitrary reading. An arbitrary reading of the covert subject is impossible in the absence of overt TMA marking, and a generic reading of the covert subject is impossible in the presence of imperfective marking.

With respect to intransitive verbs, unergatives permit generic, but not arbitrary, covert subjects. As in subjectless transitive constructions, adverbial modification is required in an unergative clause for a generic reading of the covert subject. Unergatives with imperfective marking disallow covert thematic subjects altogether. Unaccusatives, unlike unergatives, do not permit covert thematic subjects under any circumstances. I will show that as predicted by the

Voice hypothesis, structures that do not contain Voice – that is, unaccusatives and statives – cannot take covert thematic subjects.

In section 3.4, I turn to the question of expletives in Mauritian Creole. Recall that existential constructions in Mauritian Creole never take any overt subjects at all, while weather verbs and some adjectival predicates can optionally take the overt expletive *li* ‘it’.

TABLE 2. Expletive subjects

Existential	Weather verb/ Adjectival predicate
(*SUBJ)	(SUBJ)

First, however, in section 3.1, I lay out the theoretical assumptions that form the basis of the analysis of overt and implicit external arguments in Mauritian Creole. In section 3.2, I turn to root clauses with overt subjects, proposing that overt external argument DPs appear with active Voice heads. In section 3.3, I argue that subjectless clauses have non-active Voice heads that contain an implicit external argument, much like the implicit agent of English passives. The implicit external arguments in Mauritian Creole subjectless clauses, I propose, are variables carried by the non-active Voice heads.

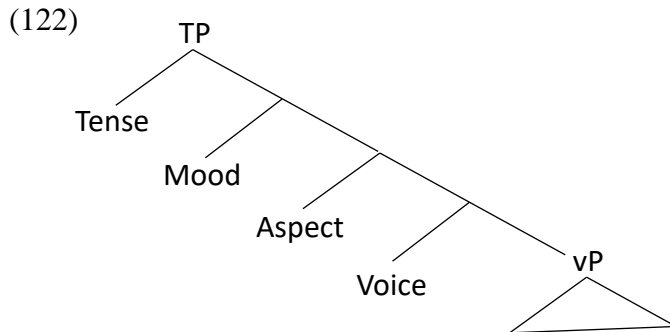
### 3.1 Basic assumptions

In this section, I outline my assumptions regarding the functional heads that make up the Mauritian Creole INFL domain, how case is assigned, the roles of Voice and *v*, how viewpoint aspect is derived, and how variables are bound in Mauritian Creole.



### 3.1.1 The inflectional domain in Mauritian Creole

As foreshadowed in chapter 1, following Syea (2013), I assume the fully articulated INFL structure shown in (122).



I assume that the functional heads in the INFL domain of Mauritian Creole – Tense, Mood, Aspect – are always specified in a root clause. However, for the sake of simplicity, in the remainder of this thesis, the trees presented will not necessarily show all of these projections. It should be assumed that any root clause illustrated contains all three TMA heads.

### 3.1.2 Case

I assume that structural case is assigned to a DP by a local functional head (Chomsky 2000, 2001).<sup>22</sup> In a transitive clause, the object receives accusative case from the Voice head. The idea that Voice assigns accusative case follows Burzio (1986: 178), who proposed that verbs that assign a theta role to the external argument are also responsible for assigning accusative case.

Kratzer (1996) subsequently proposed that Voice is the functional head that introduces the

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<sup>22</sup> Another approach in the literature is Dependent Case Theory (Marantz 1991; Woolford 2003; McFadden 2004; Preminger 2014), which holds that accusative (and ergative) case assignment depends on the presence of a c-commanding DP with structural case. That is, assignment of accusative case or ergative case depends on the presence of a c-commanding/c-commanded DP bearing an unmarked case, e.g., nominative. I do not employ this approach here.

external argument and assigns accusative case. I will further stipulate that if a functional head has a case feature, that case must be assigned.<sup>23</sup> This stipulation is required to correctly account for the Mauritian Creole data, as will be shown in section 3.2.<sup>24</sup>

### 3.1.3 Voice and v

In addition to assigning accusative case, as noted above, Voice introduces the external argument, and assigns it a theta role. Voice is a separate head from v (Kratzer 1996, Pytkänen 2008, Alexiadou et al. 2015, and much subsequent work). I assume that v is a category-assigning head (Marantz 1997). v also introduces an event variable (Davidson 1967; Higginbotham 1985) and in Mauritian Creole, as in many languages, moves into Voice (Bowers 2002).

### 3.1.4 Principle of Non-simultaneity of Points

I assume Cowper's (1999; see also Cowper 2005) Principle of Non-simultaneity of Points to account for the fact that in Mauritian Creole, a clause in the simple present does not receive a reading in which the event described necessarily holds at the time of the clause's utterance. Rather, the simple present tense in Mauritian Creole attributes a general property to the subject of the clause that holds at a time that includes the clause's utterance time.

Cowper argues that the default viewpoint aspect in English is perfective, whereas in a language like French, it is imperfective. This comes from the absence of any imperfective marking in French to indicate that an event is ongoing, as in (123), while in English, overt *-ing*

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<sup>23</sup> This is akin to what some refer to as the Inverse Case Filter (see Bošković 1997), though my understanding is that this filter also requires the case-assignee to be local to the case assigner.

<sup>24</sup> This is not unlike the transitivity condition on Voice in ergative languages such that case-assignment by Voice depends on whether the verb takes an object. That is, Voice cares about the valency of the verb (Massam 2006; Woolford 2006; Legate 2012; c.f. Baker & Bobaljik 2017).

marking is required to convey the same aspect, as in (124a). The simple present in English instead conveys a habitual or generic reading, shown in (124b).

(123) Pauline écrit une lettre.  
Pauline write.PRS.3SG a letter  
'Pauline is writing a letter.' (Cowper 1999: 218)

(124) a. Pauline is writing a letter.  
b. Pauline writes a letter (whenever she needs to communicate with her children).

Following Cowper (1998, 1999), I assume that a finite TP needs to be indexed to what she calls the 'Discourse Anchor' – a point in time, usually the moment of speech. A situation denoted by the verbal domain is thereby situated relative to the Discourse Anchor. A perfective eventive clause in English is said to constitute a moment, or a temporal point, rather than an interval. Thus, in a simple present tense sentence, the event – a point itself – must be situated relative to another point: the Discourse Anchor. The Principle of Non-simultaneity of Points (Cowper 1998: 10), however, states that "no tense morpheme or other functional element in any language can impose simultaneity on two temporal points." It is for this reason that an example like (124b) does not indicate that Pauline is writing a letter at the moment of speech, or at any specific point in time really. Effectively, it has a stative interpretation, describing a property of Pauline. Imperfective marking, on the other hand, picks out an interval in time throughout which the event takes place.

(125) shows that Mauritian Creole patterns like English in this respect. In Mauritian Creole, the simple present conveys a generic or habitual meaning, as in (125a), while an overt marker is required in order to indicate an ongoing event, as in (125b).

- (125) a. Mari kwi pwason.  
 Mary cook fish  
 ‘Mary cooks fish.’
- b. Mari pe kwi pwason.  
 Mary IPFV cook fish  
 ‘Mary is cooking fish.’

I therefore assume that the default aspect in Mauritian Creole, as in English, is perfective, and that Mauritian Creole *pe*, like the English progressive, marks imperfective aspect.

### 3.1.5 Quantification and binding

Because imperfective aspect in Mauritian Creole requires an event, I assume that imperfective marking contains an existential quantifier.<sup>25</sup> This quantifier comes with a restrictive clause that specifies the event denoted in the clause as extending over an interval. This is based in part on the fact that in Mauritian Creole, stative verbs cannot freely combine with the imperfective marker, as shown in (126). That is, *pe* requires an event-denoting verb. I discuss this in depth in section 3.3.4 and Chapter 4.

- (126) a. \*Li pe konn so tab.  
 3SG IPFV know 3.POSS table  
 Literally: ‘S/he is knowing his tables.’
- b. ?Li pe tann nuvel lor radio.  
 3SG IPFV hear news on radio  
 Intended: ‘S/he is hearing news on the radio.’ (Syea 2013: 115)

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<sup>25</sup> See Kratzer (1996), who follows Higginbotham (1985), and believes existential quantification can be built into the semantics of an inflectional head, e.g., T. The quantifier on the head then quantifies the event argument. Roberts similarly (2019: 260) takes Asp to be a head capable of unselectively existentially quantifying over variables.

I further assume that a generic operator GEN can optionally appear on phrases, whether DPs, PPs, etc.<sup>26</sup> For example, GEN may appear on a locative phrase like “in this store” in (127).

(127) [<sub>PP</sub> In this store], people buy vegetables.

The standard assumption is that GEN is an adverb of quantification that can bind event and individual variables (Slabakova & Montrul 2003: 174; Corblin 2013: 354; Dobrovie-Sorin 2013: 94). I assume that rather than an adverb *per se*, GEN is a quantifier that can adjoin to a phrase. As an adjunct on a phrase, it need not bind anything within that phrase itself; GEN can bind any free variables that are c-commanded by the phrase it appears within. The effect of GEN in a situation like (127), then, is twofold. It binds any free variables within its scope, and it makes the propositional content of the clause a property of the location denoted by “in the store”, as indicated by the paraphrase in (128).

(128) It is a property of this store that people generally buy vegetables there.

I adopt Kratzer’s (1989: 155) ban on vacuous quantification which states that for every quantifier, there must a variable for it to bind. I also assume that quantifiers bind unselectively; that is, a quantifier may bind any variable within its scope (Lewis 1975). Further, I assume Existential Closure (Heim 1982), under which any free variables at the point of spell-out are existentially quantified. Finally, I assume that VoiceP is a spell-out domain; it is spelled out once the head that merges with it is fully projected.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> This differs from how Diesing (1992) and Krifka et al. (1995) treat generic binding of variables. Specifically, in my analysis, the individual and event variables can be bound by GEN within its nuclear scope without the need for anything to syntactically raise to SpecTP and/or semantically lower to the verbal domain. This is contrary to the commonly held belief that GEN lives in the left periphery.

<sup>27</sup> This assumption is stated as concretely as possible so as to be interpretable as needed in the reader’s preferred theory of syntactic phases.

### 3.2 Overt subjects and active Voice heads

As noted above, I assume that Voice introduces an external argument and assigns it a theta role. I also assume that Voice assigns accusative case, and that if a head has case to assign, that case must be assigned. Under these assumptions, the Voice heads that combine with transitive and unergative verbs must be specified differently: the transitive Voice head introduces an agent and assigns case to the object, while the unergative Voice head introduces the agent but lacks the accusative case feature.

I therefore propose that Mauritian Creole has the two active Voice heads<sup>28,29</sup> in (129), distinguished by the presence or absence of the accusative case feature. (129a) is the unergative Voice head, which selects a verb that does not take an internal argument. (129b) is the transitive Voice head, which requires a verb that takes an internal argument to receive accusative case. Both Voice heads project a specifier, where the external argument is introduced. The D feature in (129) is used to indicate that the Voice head takes a DP specifier.

- (129) a. *Unergative active Voice head*  
Voice  
[ $\theta$ , D ]

---

<sup>28</sup> Instead of “different Voice heads”, one can prefer to think of the Voice heads I propose as a single Voice head with different feature bundles. This would not affect the proposal to be made.

<sup>29</sup> See Nash (2022) for an analysis of unergatives in Georgian whose external arguments are introduced by a different Voice head than the Voice head that introduces the external arguments of transitives. Massam (2009) similarly has proposed that the external arguments of unergatives and transitives are introduced by different heads in Niuean, where the higher, transitive, head introduces the agent, and the lower, unergative, head assigns case to a doer or theme DP that moves into its specifier. These heads are proposed to capture absolutive and ergative case-assignment. One might wonder why my analysis does not have the covert subjects of unergatives introduced by a different head, in a different position from the covert subjects of transitives. The key is that accusative case assignment in the Mauritian Creole transitive subjectless constructions is in complementary distribution with the obligatory generic interpretation of the covert subjects in the Mauritian Creole unergative subjectless constructions, hence my proposal that the covert subjects of both transitives and unergatives come from Voice alone rather than two completely distinct heads.

b. *Transitive active Voice head*

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{Voice} \\ \left[ \begin{array}{c} \theta, D \\ \text{ACC} \end{array} \right] \end{array}$$

The following subsections describe the derivations of clauses with overt subjects and show how the co-occurrence restrictions between the various TMA markers and generic versus episodic readings are accounted for. Having shown how the mechanisms introduced in the previous section work in clauses with overt subjects, I turn, in section 3.3, to clauses with covert subjects.

### 3.2.1 Unergative clauses with overt subjects

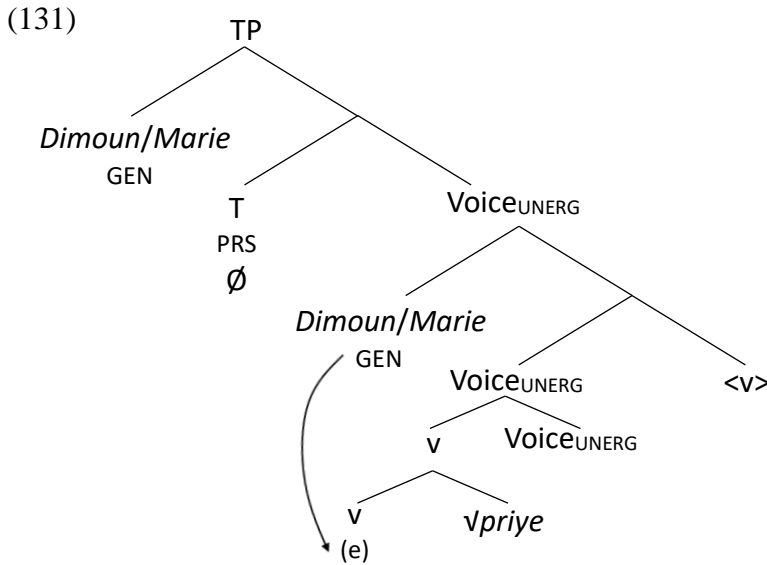
Consider the unergative sentence in (130), which has an overt subject. The clause is interpreted as habitual/generic, and the predicate identifies a property of the subject: it is a property of people in general that they pray. I assume that the habitual/generic reading arises because the event variable introduced by *v* is bound by a generic operator GEN. In the case of (130), GEN is associated with the subject DP *dimoun/Marie*: it is a (generic) property of people/Mary that they pray/she prays. Recall that I assume GEN can adjoin to a phrase without binding anything within that phrase itself. Thus, GEN on the external argument binds the event variable before the external argument moves out of VoiceP to ultimately reside in the specifier of T. The structure<sup>30</sup> of the sentences in (130) is shown in (131).

- (130) a. Dimoun        priye.  
          people        pray  
          ‘People pray.’

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<sup>30</sup> While I believe that all inflectional heads are projected in root clauses, even when they have no overt exponence in a clause, I do not show fully articulated structures in this chapter for the sake of simplicity and clarity.

- b. Marie priye.  
 Mary prays  
 ‘Mary prays.’



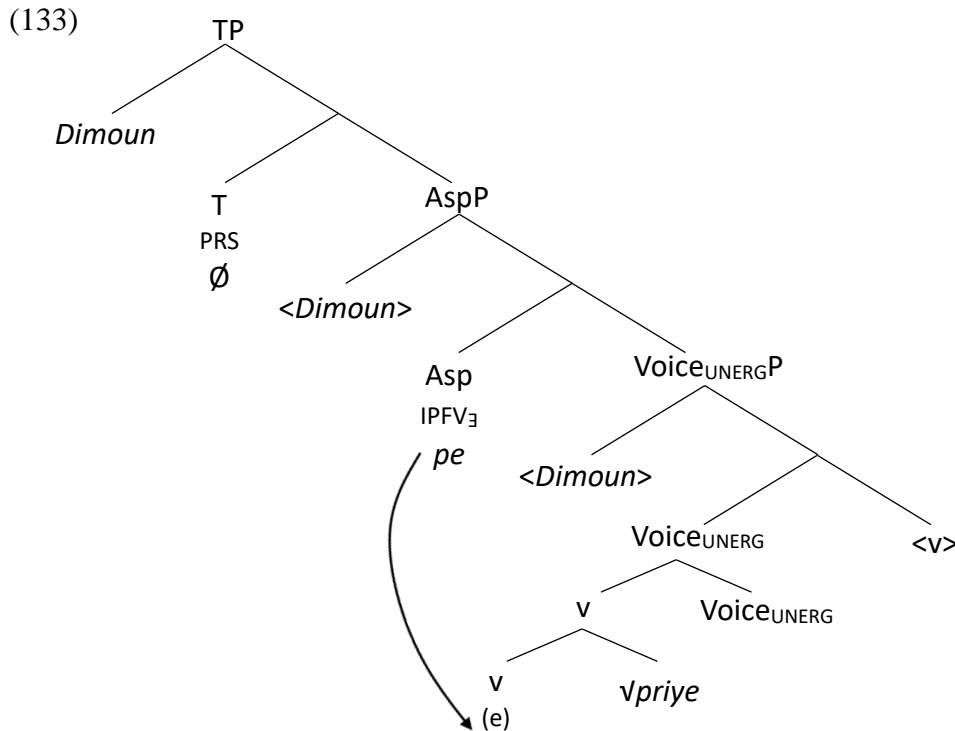
In (131), if GEN did not appear on the subject, the event variable on *v* would be free at the point of spell-out. At the point of spell-out, the event variable would then be bound by Existential Closure, which binds any variables that remain open (Heim 1982). In this case, the event would be interpreted as a moment. Recall that *T* in the present tense denotes a moment as well, specifically the moment of speech. However, the principle of non-simultaneity of points prohibits two moments from coinciding. Consequently, an interpretation of the clause in which the event holds at utterance time is not possible. The only possible interpretation is a generic/habitual one, which requires the event variable to be bound by a generic operator.

A clause with imperfective marking, like the one in (132), gets an eventive reading. I propose that the imperfective marker itself bears an existential quantifier as part of its semantics. When it binds an event variable, it further specifies that the event denoted is an interval. That



quantifier binds the event variable in *v*, giving it an existential, eventive interpretation. The structure of (132) is given in (133).

(132) *Dimoun pe priye.*  
 person IPFV pray  
 ‘People are praying.’



While GEN could in principle appear on the subject DP, it would be incompatible with the structure in (133). Notice that the event variable on *v* is within the scope of the existential quantifier on the imperfective marker and would therefore be bound by that quantifier. With vacuous binding banned and no free variables for GEN to bind from SpecVoiceP, its presence would cause the derivation to crash. Another impossible scenario would be if GEN on the subject DP were to bind the event variable on *v* before the existential quantifier on the imperfective marker could. In this situation, it would be the existential quantifier vacuously binding, causing the derivation to crash. Hence, GEN cannot appear in (133).

Notice that the Principle of Non-simultaneity of Points is not violated in (133). This is because the imperfective morpheme introduces an interval throughout which the event takes place. Because T is anchored at the moment of speech, which itself is a point in time, the moment of speech is included in the interval introduced by the imperfective marker.

With the past, perfect, and irrealis markers, clauses can be ambiguous between episodic and generic readings. (134) shows this with the perfect marker, *(f)inn*. The examples in (135) show these readings more saliently.

(134) Dimoun    finn    priye.  
           person    PERF    pray  
           ‘(Some) people have prayed.’ OR  
           ‘People (generally) have prayed.’

(135) a. Dimoun        finn    fek    priye    asterla        [Episodic]  
           person        PERF    just    pray    now  
           ‘(Some) people have just prayed now.’

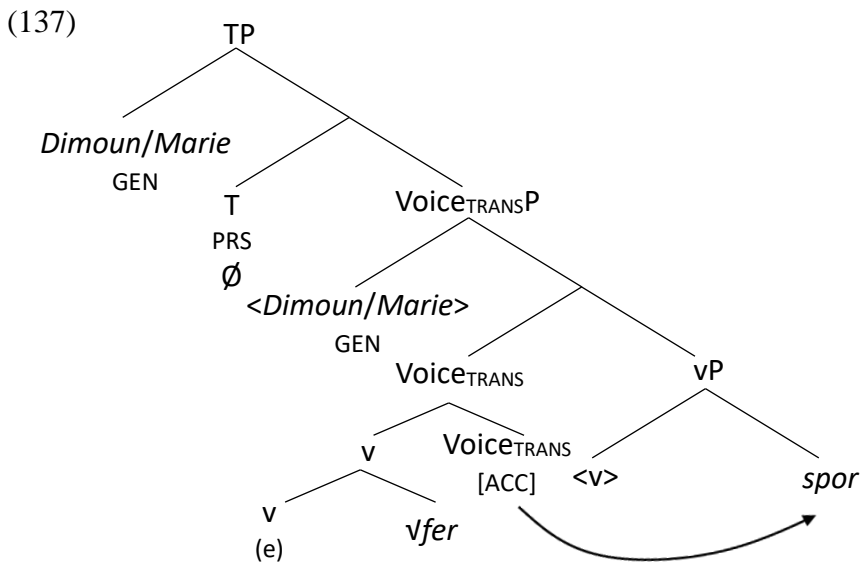
          b. Dimoun        en        zeneral        finn    priye    [Generic]  
           person        in        general        PERF    pray  
           ‘People in general have prayed.’

In sentences (134) and (135), GEN is truly optional. Unlike with the imperfective marker, which carries its own existential quantifier, the past, perfect, and irrealis markers do not carry any quantifiers. Thus, they are compatible with phrases that have GEN and scope over the event variable on *v*. If GEN appears on the subject, then it binds the event variable, and the clause is interpreted generically. Without GEN, the event variable gets existentially bound through existential closure.

### 3.2.2 Transitive clauses with overt subjects

The inflectional heads in transitive constructions behave just as they do in unergatives. GEN is required on the overt subject of a simple present clause like (136) to bind the event variable on *v*, just as it was in (130) above. The structure of (136), given in (137), shows that the transitive Voice head assigns case to the internal argument.

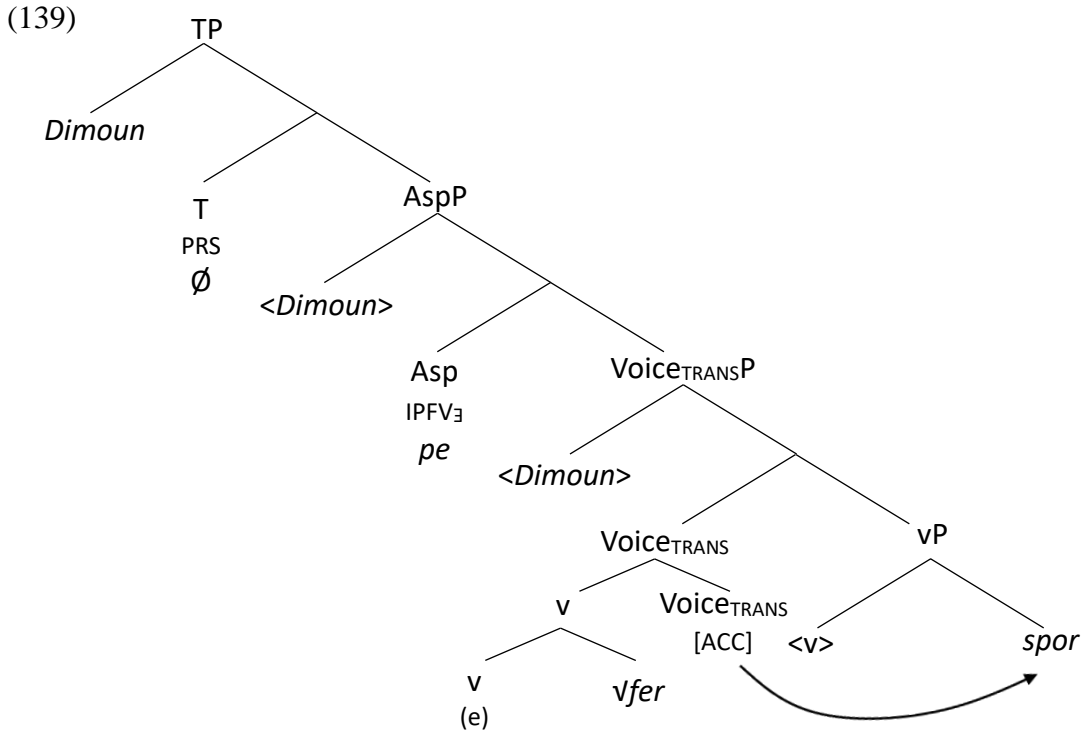
- (136) a. Dimoun        fer        spor.  
           person        do        sports  
           ‘People play sports.’
- b. Marie fer        spor.  
               Mary do        sports  
               ‘Mary plays sports.’



An imperfective Asp head in an active transitive construction like (138) forces an eventive reading of the clause, just as it did in the unergative clause in (132). The existential quantifier on the imperfective head binds the event variable on *v* and specifies that the event takes place over an interval. Also as before, the subject of the imperfective clause cannot carry the generic

quantifier GEN, because either GEN or the existential quantifier on Asp will have no free variable to bind.

- (138) Dimoun pe fer spor.  
 person IPFV do sports  
 ‘(Some) people are playing sports.’



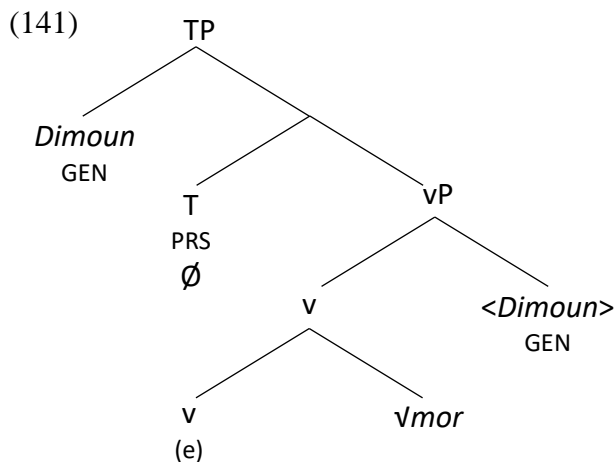
Here, as in (137), the voice head assigns accusative case to the internal argument.

### 3.2.3 Unaccusative clauses with overt subjects

Let us now consider whether unaccusative clauses like (140), which have neither external arguments nor accusative objects, have a Voice projection. Voice introduces the external argument, assigns it a theta role, and assigns accusative case to the internal argument, if there is one. Unaccusative clauses do not have external arguments and do not have accusative internal

arguments. I therefore assume, following Alexiadou et al. (2015), that unaccusative clauses lack Voice altogether. Under this view, the structure of (140) is as shown in (141).

(140) *Dimoun mor.*  
 person die  
 ‘People die.’



We saw in section 2.2 that unaccusative verbs disallow covert subjects altogether. I will argue in the next section that this follows from the fact that unaccusative clauses always lack a Voice head.

In Chapter 4, I discuss grammatical subjects and how they ultimately reside in SpecTP, in addition to discussing the EPP, nominative case, and how the inflectional domain of an active clause differs from the inflectional domain of a non-active clause with respect to those properties. First, I present my proposal of how subjectlessness arises in Mauritian Creole.

### 3.3 Subjectlessness and non-active Voice

In this section, I take the tools introduced in section 3.1 and applied to account for the data in section 3.2, and use them to explain how covert thematic subjects arise in Mauritian Creole. To

account for finite constructions with implicit external arguments in Mauritian Creole, I propose that the language has two non-active Voice heads in addition to the two active Voice heads. The contrast between the active and non-active Voice heads I am proposing is similar to the difference between Legate’s (2014) Acehnese passive Voice head, which contains the phi-features of the initiator, and a Voice head that projects an external argument specifier.<sup>31</sup>

Recall that transitive constructions allow a wider range of covert subjects than unergatives do: unergative verbs permit only generic covert subjects, whereas transitives permit both generic and arbitrary ones. I propose that the transitive non-active voice head, as part of its semantics, introduces an open external argument variable, as shown in (142) (cf., among others, Jaeggli 1986a, Baker et al. 1989, Bruening 2013, Legate 2014, and Šereikaitė 2020). This variable is semantically specified as [+human]; recall that covert subjects are necessarily human in Mauritian Creole. This property is not unusual cross-linguistically, as was shown in section 2.6. As an open variable, it needs to be bound by an operator. If there is no suitable operator in the clause, it is bound and interpreted existentially upon spell-out by Existential Closure. The transitive non-active Voice head also has accusative case to assign.

(142) *Transitive non-active Voice head*

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{Voice} \\ \left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{x, Human(x)} \\ \text{ACC} \end{array} \right] \end{array}$$

I propose that the unergative non-active voice head differs from its transitive counterpart in two ways. First, it lacks the accusative case feature and thus cannot appear in transitive clauses. Like the transitive non-active voice head, it introduces an external argument variable that is

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<sup>31</sup> Legate (2014) also proposes that the Voice head of Icelandic grammatical object passives projects a  $\phi$ P specifier, which is ultimately unpronounced.

semantically specified as [+human]. However, the unergative non-active voice head also contains a GEN operator that binds that variable, as shown in (143). Šereikaitė (2020), following work by Schäfer (2017) on medio-passives, similarly proposes a voice head with a lexically existentially bound variable for what she calls ‘active existential’ constructions in Lithuanian.

(143) *Unergative non-active Voice head*

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{Voice} \\ \left[ \text{GEN}(x), \text{Human}(x) \right] \end{array}$$

The generic operator that binds the variable is part of the inherent content of the unergative non-active Voice head. As part of the lexical entry of the Voice head, the generic operator does not take scope outside that head. It thus does not bind further. The variable in the same head is inherently bound and thus not free for any other binding.

Šereikaitė’s reason for proposing a Voice head with a lexicalized quantifier in Lithuanian active existentials is that active existential constructions are incompatible with agentive *by*-phrases. Some have argued that passives are derived with a Voice head containing an external argument variable that is existentially bound by a quantifier elsewhere in the structure, e.g., through Existential Closure or by a *by*-phrase containing an overt agent (Roberts 1985; Bruening 2013; Legate 2014). For Šereikaitė, the fact that active existentials disallow agentive *by*-phrases suggests that the voice head of the active existential comes into the derivation with an external argument variable already bound. Like Lithuanian active existentials, Mauritian Creole subjectless constructions tend to disallow *by*-phrases. Unergatives disallow them altogether, as shown in (144), which is expected if the Voice head is as shown in (143). The picture is less clear with transitives, where there appears to be some variability; I discuss this in section 4.5 below. When they do occur, they can bind the external argument variable like any other adverbial.

(144) \*Priye      dan    legliz ar      dimoun.  
           pray        in     church by    person  
           Intended: ‘Church is prayed at by people.’

As non-active voice heads that contain an external argument variable, neither of the heads in (142) and (143) projects a specifier (Alexiadou 2014). Formally, this follows from the fact that the variable in the head itself saturates the external argument theta-role.

In the next subsection, I show how the readings of implicit subjects in unergative constructions arise and how the unavailable readings are ruled out.

### 3.3.1 Subjectlessness in unergatives

Recall that phrases may optionally bear a GEN operator. In (130) and (136), GEN is borne by the overt subject of the clause. I assume that GEN is an unselective binder and thus binds any open variable within its scope (Lewis 1975). When GEN has an open variable within its scope, it binds that variable, giving a generic interpretation of, say, an event. If there is no GEN on any phrase scoping over an event variable on *v*, then the event is existentially quantified, either via Existential Closure or by imperfective aspect. I showed in section 2.2 that for an unergative to arise without a subject, an adverbial modifier is necessary. I argue below that this adverbial is necessary in order to host GEN, consequently binding the event variable in a way compatible with the lexically bound external argument variable. As was also shown in section 2.2, unergative verbs cannot take arbitrary implicit subjects. Implicit external arguments are thus possible with unergatives only if they are interpreted generically, and there is an adverbial modifier to host GEN, which binds the event variable, as in (145) and highlighted in Table 4. The structure of (145) is given in (146).

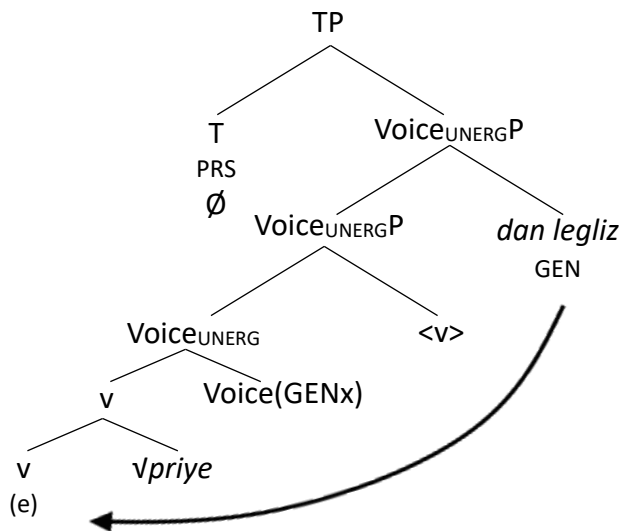


TABLE 4. Subjectless simple present unergatives

	Unergative		
	PRS	PST/PERF/FUT	IPFV
ADV	GEN	GEN	*
no ADV	*	*	*

(145) Priye dan legliz.  
 pray in church  
 ‘People pray at church.’

(146)



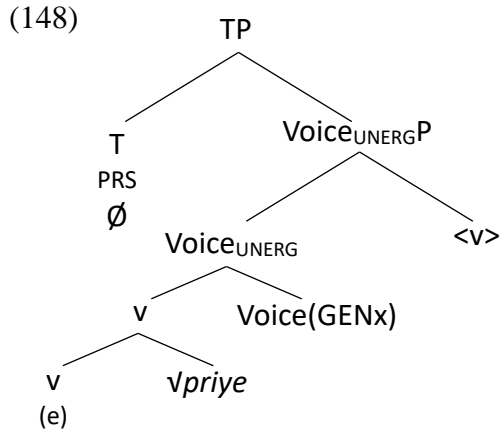
Because the adverbial *dan legliz* hosts GEN, GEN binds the event variable, and the event and implicit external argument are read generically. Thus, a simple present construction like that in (145) is grammatical.

I proposed in (143) that the non-active unergative Voice head, unlike the non-active transitive Voice head, introduces an external argument variable that is lexically bound. In other words, the head contains both a variable and a GEN operator binding that variable, and this GEN cannot take scope outside the Voice head itself. This means it cannot bind the event variable in *v*. If the clause did not contain an adverbial, or if the adverbial did not bear a generic quantifier, the

event variable would be bound by Existential Closure upon spell-out of VoiceP. I assume that an existentially quantified event cannot have a generically quantified external argument and vice versa (Slabakova & Montrul 2003). Under this proposal, the existential event and the generic external argument in (146) would lead to semantic incoherence between the generic subject and the episodic predicate, rendering the clause semantically ill-formed. When an adverbial with GEN is present, as in (146), the generic operator on the adverbial binds the event variable, thereby matching the quantification in Voice.

If the adverbial did not carry a GEN operator, or if the adverbial were altogether absent, the event variable would be bound through Existential Closure, giving the clause an episodic interpretation. With the (perfective) event being interpreted existentially, there would be a violation of the Principle of Non-simultaneity of Points, as discussed in 3.1.4. T, anchored to the moment of speech, and the present tense on T indicating that the event occurs at a point in the present, is not possible. Unlike the clauses with overt subjects discussed earlier, unergatives with covert subjects have no subject DP that could carry a GEN operator. The only option, then, is for there to be an adverbial in the clause to introduce a GEN operator that can bind the event variable. This analysis, if correct, can account for the fact that unergatives with covert subjects cannot surface without an adverbial or some other constituent that can host the GEN operator. This is shown in (147) and (148).

- (147) \*Priye.  
pray  
Intended: 'People pray.'

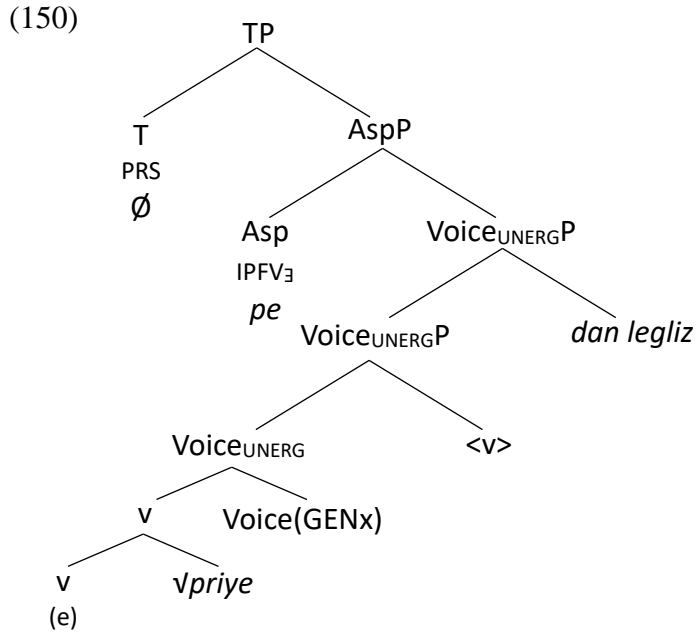


Similarly, an unergative construction with imperfective marking, such as (149) and highlighted in Table 5, cannot take an implicit external argument, whether or not there is an adverbial, and whether or not the adverbial contains a generic operator. The structure of (149) is given in (150).

TABLE 5. Subjectless imperfective unergatives

	Unergative		
	PRS	PST/PERF/FUT	IPFV
ADV	GEN	GEN	*
no ADV	*	*	*

(149) \*Pe priye (dan legliz).  
 IPFV pray (in church)  
 Intended: ‘Some people are praying (at church).’



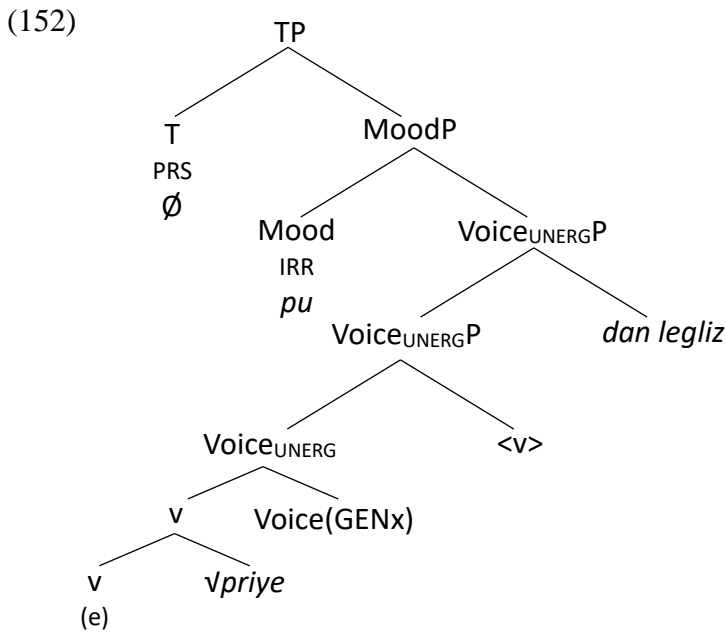
As noted, the sentence in (149) is ungrammatical whether or not it contains an adverbial, and whether or not any adverbial present carries a generic quantifier. The core problem is the incompatibility between the generic external argument in the Voice head and the existential quantifier in Asp, which must bind the event variable. This combination leads to semantic incoherence. The problem is slightly more subtle if a GEN-bearing adverbial appears. In that case, GEN on the adverbial binds the event variable, leaving the existential quantifier in Asp with nothing to bind. Such a derivation is ruled out by the ban on vacuous quantification.

Other TMA markers, as has been shown above and again in Table 6 below, allow either generic or eventive readings of a clause. However, since the implicit subject in the unergative Voice head is lexically bound by GEN, only the generic reading is possible for unergative clauses. Consider, for example, the sentence in (151), whose structure is shown in (152).

TABLE 6. Subjectless past, perfect, and future unergatives

	Unergative		
	PRS	PST/PERF/FUT	IPFV
ADV	GEN	GEN	*
no ADV	*	*	*

- (151) Pu priye dan legliz.  
 IRR pray in church  
 ‘People will pray at church.’  
 (i.e., ‘In general, people will pray at church in the future.’ [Generic]  
 NOT ‘There are people who, in the future, will pray at church.’ [Episodic])



The adverbial is required here, and it must bear the generic quantifier. Otherwise, the same problem arises as in (147): a simple present clause without a generic quantifier. Without the generic quantifier, Existential Closure binds the event variable, and there is a mismatch between the existential quantification of the event variable and the generic external argument variable. The same problem arises for a clause that has the past tense or the perfect marker, as in (153) and (154) below.

- (153) Ti priye dan legliz.  
 PST pray in church  
 ‘People prayed at church.’  
 (i.e., ‘People used to pray at church.’ [Generic]  
 NOT ‘Someone/some people prayed at church (at an unspecified time).’ [Episodic])
- (154) Finn priye dan legliz.  
 PERF pray in church  
 ‘People have prayed at church.’  
 (i.e., ‘In general, people have prayed at church.’ [Generic]  
 NOT ‘There are people who have prayed at church.’ [Episodic])

In the sentences in (153) and (154), if there is an adverbial scoping over *v* and the adverbial bears a generic operator, the operator can bind the event variable on *v*. The result is well-formed: a generic unergative clause with a generic implicit subject. If there were no generic quantification to bind the event variable, the event variable would be interpreted existentially through Existential Closure. The quantification of the event variable and the quantification of the external argument variable would then be mismatched, giving semantic incoherence. In sum, arbitrary implicit subjects are not permitted with unergative verbs because the unergative non-active voice head contains a lexically bound generic external argument, and the event must bear the same quantification.

Let us briefly consider how a *pro* analysis would fare with the data just discussed. In such an account, rather than a non-active Voice head containing a lexically bound external argument variable, the clause would have an active Voice head with *pro* in its specifier. Assume that *pro* has an open variable, as Roberts (2019) and Barbosa (2019) propose for generic and arbitrary implicit subjects. Recall that for an arbitrary reading, the variable in *pro* must either be bound by Existential Closure (Barbosa 2019) or undergo agreement with Asp (Roberts 2019). VoiceP has been argued to be a phase (Aelbrecht 2010; Aelbrecht & Harwood 2015; Harwood 2015), with

Existential Closure binding open variables at the point of spell-out; I follow Diesing (1992) here in assuming that the VP is the domain of Existential Closure, where her VP corresponds to my VoiceP, a spell-out domain (see Baker & Vinokurova (2010) for a similar approach). If Existential Closure binds the variable in *pro*, which resides within the clause-internal phase, then we would expect *pro* in external argument position to receive an arbitrary reading. However, we have seen that this is not possible with unergative verbs in Mauritian Creole. That is, Barbosa's account, as it stands, cannot explain why the arbitrary reading of an implicit external argument is possible only with transitive verbs in Mauritian Creole. The same could be said of an account in which a functional head like Asp is responsible for existentially binding *pro* in SpecVoiceP. The main problem is that neither type of *pro* account captures the fact that the valency of the verb plays a large role in determining whether an arbitrary interpretation of the implicit subject is possible. The Voice account, while admittedly stipulating that the transitive and unergative non-active Voice heads have slightly different external argument variables, nonetheless locates the quantification difference in the head that is also responsible for determining the transitivity of the clause.

For Roberts (2019), the generic reading of *pro* comes from the pronoun's variable being bound by GEN in the left periphery. We have seen that unergatives permit generic implicit subjects as long as the clause contains adverbial modification. I have also shown that the same holds for implicit subjects of transitive clauses. If Voice introduced a *pro* with an open variable, certainly that variable could be bound upon movement of *pro* into SpecTP, if *pro* did indeed move to SpecTP. However, in Mauritian Creole, there is very clearly a link between adverbial modification and the generic reading of *pro*, a link that would be mysterious under such an analysis. Moreover, assuming that the verbal domain contains an event variable that must be

bound, it is unclear how that event variable would receive generic quantification. If VoiceP is a phase and is therefore spelled out before the left periphery is projected, then under a *pro* account, the event variable would remain open or perhaps be existentially bound through Asp, the former being impermissible and the latter leading to a clash in quantification of the subject and event.

### 3.3.2 Subjectlessness in transitives

The non-active Voice head that I propose for subjectless transitive constructions in Mauritian Creole is given in (155). This head introduces a human external argument variable as part of its semantics. Unlike the unergative non-active Voice head, the variable introduced by the transitive non-active Voice head is free and requires an operator to bind it. Also, unlike the unergative non-active Voice head, this head must assign accusative case.

$$(155) \text{ Voice } \left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{x, Human(x)} \\ \text{ACC} \end{array} \right]$$

We saw in section 2.2 that transitive verbs permit both arbitrary and generic implicit external arguments. As with the unergatives, an adverbial is required for a generic interpretation of the event when the subject is implicit. This is because without an overt subject, there needs to be some other phrase to host GEN.

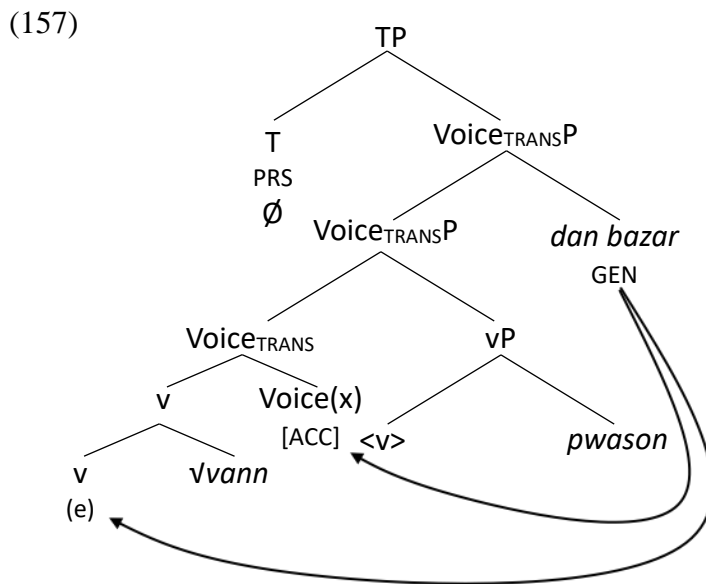
A simple present subjectless clause like the one in (156) describes a property of the location denoted by the adverbial. Only a generic reading is possible for both event and individual variables; Table 7 shows this. The structure of (156) is shown in (157).



TABLE 7. Subjectless simple present transitives

	Transitive		
	PRS	PST/PERF/FUT	IPFV
ADV	GEN	GEN/ARB	ARB
no ADV	*	ARB	ARB

(156) Vann pwason dan bazar.  
 sell fish in market  
 ‘People sell fish at the market.’



In (157), the quantifier GEN appears on the adverbial. Recall that GEN is an unselective binder.

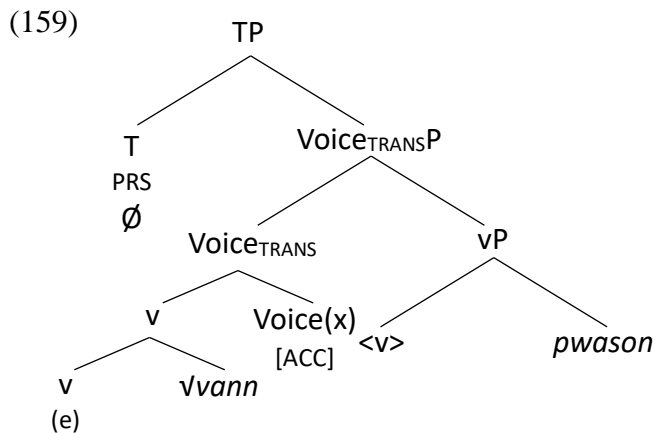
In (157), GEN binds both the external argument variable in Voice and the event variable in v.

Consequently, the event and the implicit subject are both interpreted generically. As in the simple present tense constructions discussed in sections 3.2 and 3.3.1, the principle of non-simultaneity of points disallows a structure in which there is no generic operator. If there were no GEN in (157), the event and individual variables would both be bound through Existential Closure, giving a representation that violates the principle of non-simultaneity of points. Recall that the

simple present tense in Mauritian Creole, as in English, cannot co-occur with an existentially bound event variable; such a representation would require that the two moments be marked as simultaneous by a grammatical element, which is not possible. Thus, the semantics of the construction requires the presence of the generic operator here.

The sentence in (158), which has the structure in (159), helps illustrate why the clausal adverbial containing GEN is necessary to derive a licit transitive clause with an implicit external argument. In (158), there is no constituent that can host the GEN operator since the subject is not syntactically projected and there is no adverbial PP. When VoiceP is spelled out and Existential Closure applies, the external argument variable receives an existential reading, while the event variable is interpreted to denote a specific event. Because T is in the present tense, the event (a temporal point) must hold at the moment of speech (which is also a temporal point), again violating the principle of non-simultaneity of points.

- (158) \*Vann pwason.  
 sell fish  
 Intended: ‘People (in general) sell fish.’

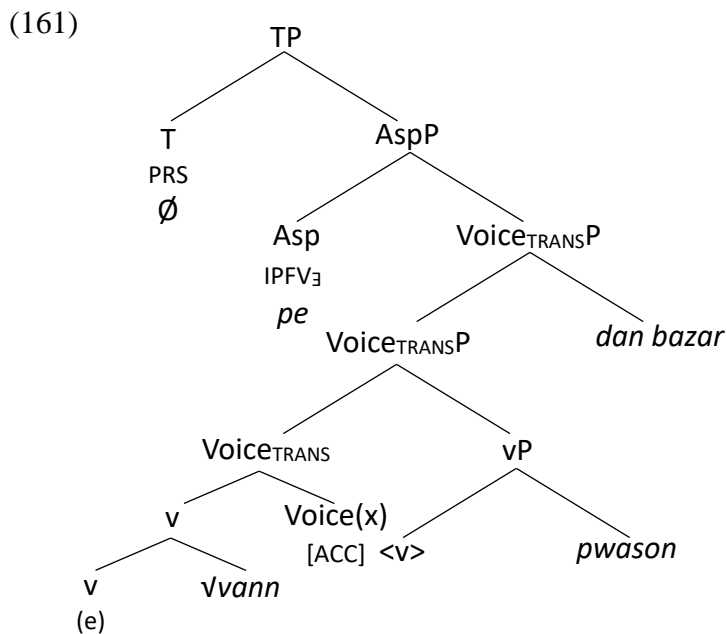


In contrast, an imperfective transitive clause permits only an arbitrary reading of the implicit external argument and an episodic reading of the event. This is highlighted in Table 8. In a clause like (160), whose structure appears in (161), the adverbial that adjoins to VoiceP does not bear a generic operator. It is the existential quantifier on the imperfective Aspect head that binds the variables on both Voice and v, giving them existential interpretations – episodic for the event and indefinite arbitrary for the implicit subject.

TABLE 8. Subjectless imperfective transitives

	Transitive		
	PRS	PST/PERF/FUT	IPFV
ADV	GEN	GEN/ARB	ARB
no ADV	*	ARB	ARB

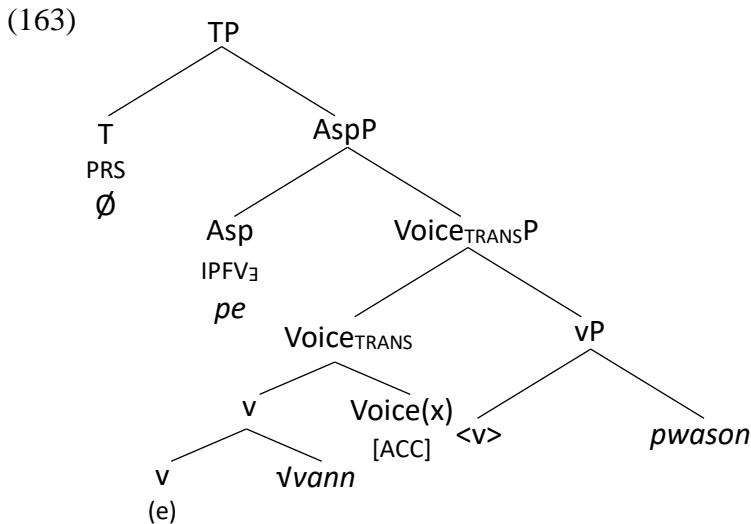
- (160) *Pe vann pwason dan bazar.*  
 IPFV sell fish in market  
 ‘Someone/some people is/are selling fish at the market.’



What happens if the adverbial in (161) happens to carry a GEN operator? GEN would bind both open variables as it does in (157). However, in (161), this situation would leave the existential quantifier on Asp with nothing to bind, giving vacuous quantification. Conversely, if the quantifier on Asp were somehow to bind the variables, the generic operator would have nothing to bind. And if each operator were to bind one of the variables, the result would be semantically incoherent. A sentence like (160) thus cannot receive a generic interpretation.

The unmodified imperfective clause in (162) is accounted for in the same way. The existential quantifier on the imperfective marker binds both event and individual variables, giving rise to the eventive reading of the clause and the arbitrary interpretation of the implicit external argument.

(162) *Pe vann pwason.*  
 IPFV sell fish  
 ‘Someone/some people is/are selling fish.’



While the simple present and imperfective transitive clauses with implicit subjects are unambiguous, as they are with overt subjects, we saw in section 3.2 that the past, perfect, and

irrealis morphemes are compatible with either generic or arbitrary readings of covert subjects. This is highlighted in Table 9. Since an overt subject can carry a GEN operator, the generic interpretation is available even without an adverbial, as in (130) in section 3.2. With subjectless transitives, provided that an adverbial is present to host GEN, past, perfect, and irrealis clauses are also ambiguous, unless they also contain the imperfective marker. This can be seen in (164), with the past tense marker and an adverbial modifier.

TABLE 9. Subjectless past, perfect, or future transitives

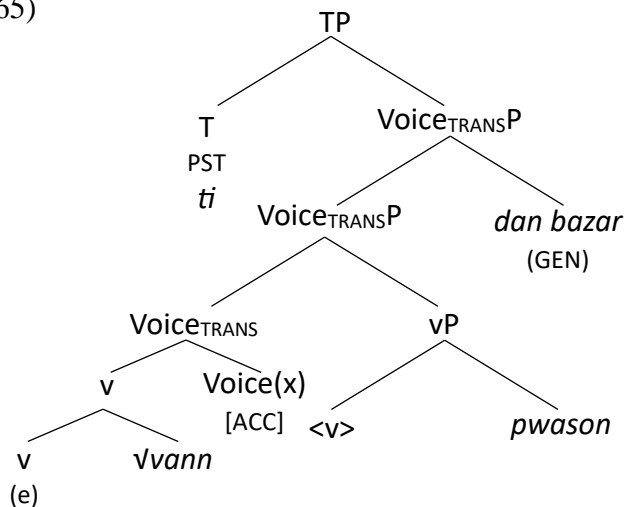
	Transitive		
	PRS	PST/PERF/FUT	IPFV
ADV	GEN	GEN/ARB	ARB
no ADV	*	ARB	ARB

(164) *Past tense transitive*

Ti vann pwason in market.  
 PST sell fish dan bazar

‘(Some) people sold fish at the market.’ [Existential EA and event] OR  
 ‘Fish was (i.e., used to be) sold at the market.’ [Generic EA and event]

(165)



This clause is well-formed either with or without GEN on the adverbial. If GEN is present, it binds the event and individual variables, and both the event and implicit external argument receive a generic reading. The generic implicit subject of this sentence is interpreted to have habitually sold fish prior to the moment of speech. In the absence of a generic operator on the adverbial, both variables are bound through existential closure. In that case, the clause describes a specific event in the past involving an arbitrary external argument. The same pattern holds with the irrealis and the perfective marker, as illustrated in (166) and (167).

(166) *Irrealis transitive*

a. *Generic EA and event*

Pu vann pwason dan bazar dan lavenir.  
 IRR1 sell fish in market in future  
 ‘People (in general) will sell fish at the market in the future.’

b. *Existential EA and event*

Pu vann pwason dan bazar demin gramatin.  
 IRR1 sell fish in market tomorrow morning  
 ‘People will sell fish at the market tomorrow morning.’

(167) *Perfect transitive*

a. *Generic EA and event*

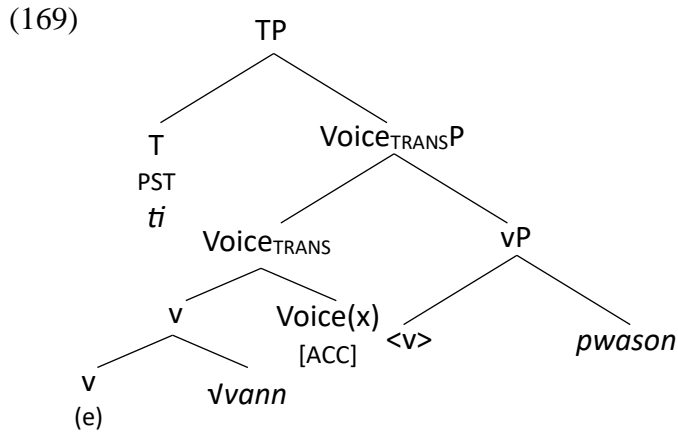
50 an desela, finn vann bann zanimo dan sa bazar la.  
 50 year ago, PERF sell PL animal in DEM market the  
 ‘50 years ago, animals were sold in this market.’

b. *Existential EA and event*

50 an desela, finn vann enn elefan dan sa bazar la.  
 50 year ago, PERF sell a elephant in DEM market the  
 ‘50 years ago, an elephant was sold in this market.’

When the subject is implicit, and there is no clausal modifier, as in (168), the clause contains no possible host for GEN, and the implicit external argument can only receive an arbitrary reading.

- (168) *Ti vann pwason.*  
 PST sell fish  
 ‘Some people/someone sold fish.’  
 NOT ‘People (in general) sold fish.’



Note that an analysis like that of Syea (2013) or Roberts (2019), in which GEN occurs in the left periphery, would predict that the implicit argument should be able to receive a generic reading in sentences like (168). With *pro* in SpecTP, GEN in the C domain should be able to bind the variable in *pro*. The generic reading of the implicit external argument, however, is just not available in a sentence like (168).

Under the account proposed here, the variables in *v* and Voice in (169) are both within the scope of Existential Closure and will thus be existentially bound, giving an arbitrary external argument and an eventive clause.

Returning to the null-pronoun hypothesis, in which the covert subject is a *pro* in the specifier of VoiceP, there is no apparent reason that the possibility of a covert subject should depend on the valency of the verb. Why should arbitrary *pro* be disallowed in unergative but not transitive clauses? One could, in theory, propose that there are different *pros* in the two constructions. This would seem implausible, though, as external arguments do not typically

dictate whether the verbal domain contains an internal argument. Rather, this is the job of the functional head that potentially assigns accusative case, which I have assumed to be Voice. Therefore, it is more likely that Voice, and not *pro*, is the locus of subjectlessness in Mauritian Creole, as I have proposed.

### 3.3.3 Subjectlessness and unaccusatives

Under the account proposed here, implicit subjects are external argument variables in the Voice head. Unaccusative clauses in Mauritian Creole are predicted not to allow covert subjects at all, as unaccusative verbs do not have external arguments. I noted above that not having external arguments and accusative case not being assigned in unaccusatives suggests that unaccusatives may simply lack VoiceP. If there is no VoiceP in unaccusative constructions, and if VoiceP is the source of subjectlessness in Mauritian Creole, it follows that unaccusatives should not permit covert subjects. Unaccusatives in Mauritian Creole underscore the importance of distinguishing thematic external arguments from structural subjects. As we have seen, covert “subjects” in Mauritian Creole can only be thematic external arguments. We have not yet considered whether the sole argument of an unaccusative clause is a structural subject.

As it turns out, there is speaker variation as to the surface position of the internal argument of an unaccusative verb in Mauritian Creole; some verbs are more flexible than others. For example, *ariv(e)* ‘to happen/occur’ allows its argument to appear either before or after the verb. While unaccusative clauses in Mauritian Creole usually have the theme high in the clause, typically in grammatical subject position, as in (170a) and (171a), some verbs, for some speakers, also allow their sole argument to remain in a post-verbal position, as in (170b) and (171b).



- (170) a. Enn aksidan inn arive.  
 a accident PERF happen  
 ‘An accident happened.’
- b. Inn ariv enn aksidan.  
 PERF happen a accident  
 ‘An accident happened.’
- (171) a. Lalimier soley finn aparet.  
 light sun PERF appear  
 ‘Sunlight appeared.’
- b. %Finn aparet lalimier soley.  
 PERF appear light sun  
 ‘Sunlight appeared.’

In English, some unaccusative clauses have post-verbal arguments. In these cases, the expletive *there* appears in subject position, for reasons usually attributed to the EPP (Chomsky 1981). Like the Mauritian Creole sentences in (170b) and (171b), the English constructions in (172) are variably accepted by English speakers.

- (172) a. There arrived many guests (at the party).  
 b. There appeared a blemish (on the surface of the vase).  
 c. There occurred a riot (on the streets of Laredo). (Hale & Keyser, n.d.: 1-2)

Recall from section 2.2 that Mauritian Creole does not have a *there*-like expletive. Existential constructions, like those in (173), are formed with the verb *ena* – which in non-existential constructions means ‘have’ and is therefore glossed as such – and no overt grammatical subject. The expletive *li* is not permitted, as shown in (173a,b). (173c,d) show that the past, irrealis, and perfective markers can appear in these constructions.

- (173) a. (\*li) ena voler dan lavil.  
 3SG have thief in town  
 ‘There are thieves in town.’ (Syea 2017: 334)

- b. (\*li) ena enn lisyen kot mwa.  
 3SG have a dog at 1SG  
 ‘There is a dog at my place.’ (Syea 2017: 240)
- c. **Ti** ena ankor boukou travay pou fer...  
 PST have more much work to do  
 ‘There was much work to be done...’  
 (<https://glosbe.com/en/mfe/there%20was>)
- d. Touletan **finn** ena problem lor later, ek  
 always PERF have problem on earth, and  
 touletan **pu** ena problem.  
 always IRR have problem

There has always been trouble on earth, and there always will be.’  
 (<https://glosbe.com/en/mfe/there%20has%20been>)

Unaccusatives in Mauritian Creole and in English can be similarly accounted for in that both, for some speakers, are (arguably) structurally akin to existentials and permit the theme to remain low. For those who accept English sentences like those in (172), either the theme or the expletive can appear in SpecTP to satisfy the EPP in English. In Mauritian Creole, where the EPP (if Mauritian Creole has this property at all) does not seem to impose the same requirements as in English, there is nothing overt occupying the grammatical subject position of existentials or unaccusatives with a low theme.

### 3.3.4 Statives

We saw in section 2.2 that stative predicates in Mauritian Creole do not allow implicit subjects.

Examples are provided in (174).

- (174) a. \*(Dimoun) kontan bann komedien dan bann fet.  
 person love PL comedian in PL party  
 ‘People love comedians at parties.’

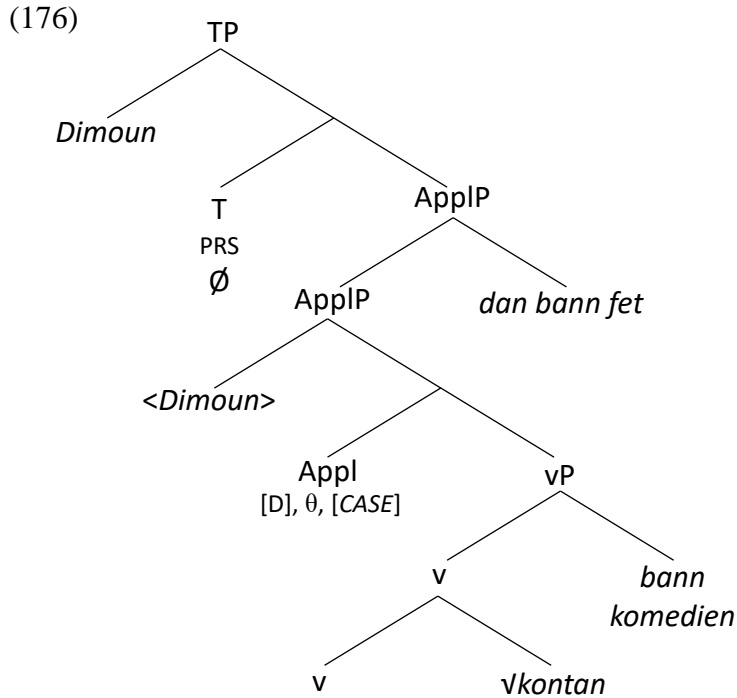
- b. \*(Dimoun)    ti        kontan bann komedien    dan    bann    fet.  
           person        PST    love    PL    comedian    in    PL    party  
           ‘People loved comedians at parties.’

So far, I have accounted for implicit subjects of eventive transitive and unergative verbs and their sensitivity to transitivity, TMA, and the presence/absence of an adverbial PP. The subjectlessness of those clauses in Mauritian Creole is also evidently tied to the eventivity of a clause – the implicit external arguments are necessarily initiators of an event. This is clear from the fact that stative predicates, even if transitive, do not permit implicit subjects. The stative verbs shown in (174) take experiencer external arguments.

This can be accounted for by assuming the theta role hierarchy in (175) (Belletti & Rizzi 1988). What (175) says is that the agent theta role is assigned in a structural position higher than the one where the experiencer role is assigned, which in turn is higher than the position where the theme role is assigned, following Pylkkänen (2002).

(175) Agent > Experiencer > Theme

Implementing this assumption, I propose that the external arguments of statives are merged in the specifier of a phrase lower than VoiceP. Specifically, I propose (contra Kratzer’s (1996) stative Voice head) that stative constructions in Mauritian Creole do not contain VoiceP. I propose that instead, in a stative like (174a), the experiencer external argument is introduced by an Appl head, as in (176).



I assume that this Appl head, like Appl heads in general, provides a case feature, which in this instance licenses the internal argument. I do not specify which case is assigned by the Appl head because as in English, Mauritian Creole morphological case distinctions are visible only in some pronouns. The only overt case distinction is found with the first- and second-person pronouns, namely between nominative case and accusative/oblique case. I assume here simply that the Applicative head assigns case to the theme in stative constructions.

Also worth mentioning is the absence of an event variable on *v* in a structure like (176). Following Davidson (1967), I assume that states do not contain event variables. I take statives to denote situations with no defined beginning or end points. Thus, in the simple present tense, the state is interpreted to hold at the moment of speech without the need for any quantifier.

The fact that stative constructions disallow implicit subjects follows from the hypothesis that the locus of subjectlessness is Voice. Under this hypothesis, if a construction has no Voice

head, it cannot have a null thematic subject. Therefore, just as with unaccusative verbs, without VoiceP, statives cannot take implicit subjects.

### 3.4 Expletives

There are two kinds of expletives, known in English as *it*-expletives and *there*-expletives. In Mauritian Creole, *it*-expletives, shown in (177) to (179), are optionally realized by the pronoun *li*, which is also used for third person singular reference, as shown in (180).

- (177) a. (Li) fer so deor.  
 it make hot outside  
 ‘It’s hot outside.’ (Syea 2013:40)
- b. (Li) pu fer soley dimen.  
 it IRR make sun tomorrow  
 ‘It will be sunny tomorrow.’ (Syea 2017: 126)
- (178) (Li) paret Zan bye ris.  
 it appear John very rich  
 ‘It appears that John is very rich.’ (Syea 2017: 127)
- (179) a. (Li) posib zot finn arive.  
 it possible they PERF arrive  
 ‘It’s possible that they have arrived.’ (Syea 2013: 40)
- b. (Li) difisil pu fer li konpran.  
 it difficult for make 3SG understand  
 ‘It’s difficult to make him understand.’ (Syea 2017: 334)
- (180) Li ti lir bann lartik dan nou bann piblikasion.  
 3SG PST read PL article in 1PL.POSS PL publication  
 ‘S/he read articles in our magazines.’

However, overt *there*-expletives do not occur in Mauritian Creole. An existential construction is given in (181); its English counterpart would require the overt expletive *there*. Mauritian Creole existential constructions are formed with the verb *ena*. These constructions never have an overt

grammatical subject, as illustrated in (181a) with expletive *li*. Because the form *li* is homophonous with the third-person singular pronoun in Mauritian Creole, a clause like the one in (181) with *li* as its subject is interpreted as in (182). That is, *li* in combination with *ena* is interpreted referentially, and *ena* is translated as ‘have’.

(181) (\*Li) ena enn lisyen kot mwa.  
 it have a dog at 1SG  
 ‘There is a dog at my place.’

(182) Li ena enn lisyen kot li.  
 3SG have a dog at 3SG  
 ‘S/he has a dog at her/his place.’ NOT ‘There is a dog at her/his place.’

(Syea 2017: 240-1)

In this and the previous chapters, I have shown that the only arguments that can be implicit in Mauritian Creole are agents, i.e., thematic external arguments introduced in VoiceP. In this chapter, I have proposed that this fact stems from non-active Voice heads that introduce necessarily human external argument variables. In the preceding section, I explained how my Voice analysis accounts for the inability of unaccusatives and statives to take implicit subjects – they don’t take agentive arguments. Nothing that I have argued thus far precludes constructions that do not take thematic arguments, like (179) and (181), from surfacing without a DP in grammatical subject position. The question of whether null expletive pronominals exist in Mauritian Creole can be posed, but that is a separate question from the one I have been answering in this chapter. If my proposal for thematic implicit subjects presented above is taken seriously, there is no reason to believe Mauritian Creole has a null expletive or even that TP necessarily has a specifier. Subjectless constructions, as I have been arguing, do not require anything to appear in SpecTP. It follows, then, that existential constructions in Mauritian Creole do not have an overt non-thematic subject because SpecTP in Mauritian Creole does not require

one. Along the same lines, expletive *li* is optional in sentences like those in (177) through (179) because there is nothing barring it from being introduced. I discuss this in more depth in the next chapter, returning to the conversation about semi-null subject languages.

### 3.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I proposed an analysis of finite subjectless constructions in Mauritian Creole. Specifically, the analysis involves two non-active voice heads, one licensing subjectless unergative clauses and the other licensing subjectless transitive clauses. I argued that the Voice hypothesis provides a better explanation of the Mauritian Creole subjectless data than the *pro* analysis, which would be unable to account for the data without further ad-hoc stipulations. I also showed how this approach captures the fact that unaccusatives cannot take implicit subjects. Finally, I explained how my analysis does not exclude existential, weather, and adjectival predicate constructions from surfacing without overt expletive subjects.

In the next chapter, I discuss some consequences of the proposal made here and address some areas for future investigation.

## Chapter 4 Subjectlessness and the Inflectional Domain

In this chapter, I turn to some consequences of the proposal presented in Chapter 3 and some possible directions for future work. Specifically, I first return to the class of semi-null subject languages, how Mauritian Creole relates to them, and whether they should in fact be considered a separate type of languages with an unpronounced *pro* subject. I also discuss expletives in Mauritian Creole and their optionality. I take another look at the inflectional domain of Mauritian Creole and show that more work is needed in order to establish the semantic (and possibly syntactic) role the marker (*f*)*inn* plays in clauses. Finally, I return to the status of agentive *by*-phrases in the language.

### 4.1 A return to the null-subject typology

One of the main conclusions to be drawn from the account proposed in Chapter 3 is that not all apparent null-subject languages contain *pro*. I have argued that Mauritian Creole is not a null-subject language at all in the traditional sense. Rather, apparent null subjects of Mauritian Creole arise from the specification of two non-active Voice heads.

In Chapter 2, I presented the null-subject typology proposed in the literature. Specifically, in section 2.4, I described the properties of consistent null-subject languages, partial null-subject languages, radical null-subject languages, and semi-null subject languages. The general properties of each of these types are summarized in (183).

#### (183) *Null-subject language types*

- a. Consistent null-subject languages: permit referential null subjects in a variety of contexts.



- b. Partial null-subject languages: permit referential null subjects but with restrictions, e.g., with respect to person.
- c. Radical null-subject languages: permit referential null arguments more broadly – not just subjects but also objects.
- d. Semi-null subject languages: permit non-referential (i.e., generic, arbitrary, or expletive) null subjects only.

It has been proposed (Huang 2000; Biberauer 2010; Barbosa 2011) that the class of semi-null subject languages can be further divided into three types, as listed in (184).

(184) *Subtypes of semi-null subject languages*

- a. Languages that permit only true expletives (i.e., non-argumental expletives, like English *there*)<sup>32</sup> to be “null”, e.g., German, Dutch (Biberauer 2010: 153).
- b. Languages that permit both true expletives and quasi-argumental expletives (like *it* with weather verbs) to be “null”, e.g., Yiddish (Barbosa 2011a: 581).
- c. Languages that allow non-argumental and quasi-argumental expletives, as well as impersonal subjects, to be “null”, e.g., Icelandic and a variety of creoles (Barbosa 2019: 488).

I noted in Chapter 2 that Mauritian Creole is most similar, in terms of subjectlessness, to semi-null subject languages. With respect to the semi-null subject subtypes listed in (184), Mauritian Creole falls most in line with the third group, listed in (184c). Because the third type of semi-null subject languages includes the “null subject” phenomena found in the other two subtypes, a general account of covert subjects in Icelandic, or in Mauritian Creole, might shed light on how the narrower set of subjectless constructions arises in the subtypes in (184a) and (184b). In this section, I consider whether semi-null subject languages as a group might be amenable to an account that does not include *pro*.

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<sup>32</sup> Consider, however, Freeze (1992) and Bjorkman & Cowper (2015), who argue that English expletive *there* does contribute some semantic content.

Recall that positing a non-argumental (aka ‘true’) expletive *pro* has been argued to be unjustified, since such a move is motivated solely by the desire to maintain a universal Extended Projection Principle (Wurmbrand 2006; Biberauer 2010). As noted in section 3.3.2, Chomsky (1981) proposed the EPP to account for the fact that English clauses require overt subjects, whether or not there is a theta role assigned to the subject. I extend the argument presented by Wurmbrand and Biberauer and claim that if there is no such thing as a purely expletive *pro*, then the language subtype listed in (184a) cannot properly be considered a null-subject language subtype at all.

Barbosa (2011b) shows that in Icelandic, an overt expletive is disallowed in SpecTP, as shown in (185b). Compare the sentence with the unmarked declarative in (185a), which contains an expletive in SpecCP, presumably to satisfy the V2 requirements of the language.

- (185) a. Það var stundum hlegið að ráðerranum.  
 it was sometimes laughed at the.minister  
 ‘The minister was sometimes laughed at.’
- b. Stundum var (\*Það) hlegið að ráðerranum.  
 sometimes was it laughed at the.minister  
 ‘The minister was sometimes laughed at.’ (Barbosa 2011b: 582)

Biberauer (2010) shows that, in Icelandic, while the overt expletive may not appear in SpecTP, other material may. For example, she follows Holmberg (2000) in assuming that in the Icelandic stylistic fronting example in (186), the participle *tekin* can be fronted to SpecTP.

- (186) a. Það hefur \_\_\_ verið **tekin** erfið ákvörðun.  
 there has been taken difficult decision  
 ‘A difficult decision has been taken.’
- b. Það hefur **tekin** verið erfið ákvörðun.  
 there has taken been difficult decision  
 ‘A difficult decision has been taken.’ (Biberauer 2010: 168)

Thus, if non-argumental expletive *pro* is theoretically implausible and Icelandic disallows overt expletives in SpecTP, then T does not have a specifier in (185b) and (186a). However, (186b) shows that SpecTP *can* project in the absence of a subject. That is, the EPP in Icelandic appears to be optional. Indeed, this is what Biberauer (2010) argues. She proposes that T in Icelandic bears an optional acategorial strength feature (\*). This feature, when it appears on T, triggers the movement of the structurally highest item in its complement (vP, for her) to SpecTP. In the absence of this feature, there is no such movement, and T does not project a specifier.

I have shown that Mauritian Creole does not take an overt subject in existential constructions. As shown in (187), repeated from Chapter 3, Mauritian Creole has existential constructions, which are translated into English with the expletive *there*.

- (187) a. Ena enn lisyen kot mwa.  
 have a dog at 1SG  
 ‘There is a dog at my place.’ (Syea 2017: 240)
- b. Ena voler dan lavil.  
 have thief in town  
 ‘There are thieves in town.’ (Syea 2017: 334)

If Wurmbrand (2006) and Biberauer (2010) are correct that there cannot be a non-argumental expletive *pro*, then the constructions in (187) and Mauritian Creole in general do not have non-argumental expletive *pro*. Further, if my account of subjectless constructions in Chapter 3 is

correct, then T does not project a specifier in those constructions, and Mauritian Creole does not have an obligatory EPP. That is, T in Mauritian Creole must have an optional EPP, perhaps represented as a strength feature, as Biberauer proposes for Icelandic. This is because while nothing moves to SpecTP in subjectless constructions in Mauritian Creole, overt external arguments do move to SpecTP in the active Voice, and internal arguments can move to SpecTP in unaccusative clauses.

Sigurðsson & Egerland (2009) show that, like Mauritian Creole, Icelandic permits impersonal null subjects. These are shown in (188).

- (188) a. Hér er verið að dansa.  
 here is been to dance  
 ‘People are dancing here.’/‘There is ongoing dancing here.’
- b. Þá var farið að dansa.  
 then was gone to dance  
 ‘People then began to dance.’
- c. Þá var reynt að opna dyrnar.  
 then was tried to open door.the  
 ‘Then, somebody tried to open the door.’

(Sigurðsson & Egerland 2009: 169)

According to Sigurðsson & Egerland (2009: 167-8), these impersonal constructions are possible only with verbs whose external arguments are volitional. They are incompatible with raising verbs, unaccusative verbs, psych verbs, and a variety of other predicates that do not take volitional external arguments.

If, as I have argued, subjectless constructions do not necessarily contain a phonologically null *pro* in subject position, it seems worth exploring the possibility that there is no arbitrary or generic *pro* in constructions like those in (188). At least in Icelandic, the fact that, just as in

Mauritian Creole, only thematic external arguments can be covert in impersonal constructions suggests that there is something more to the story than simply a null pronominal in subject position. The same holds for other languages that permit only non-referential covert subjects, like Cape Verdean Creole. An example of a Cape Verdean Creole construction with a generic covert subject is given in (189), repeated from section 2.5.

- (189) Na        veron,     ta        korda sedu.  
           in.the summer ASP wake early  
           ‘In the summer one wakes up early.’ (Barbosa 2019: 511)

If a non-*pro* account, possibly a Voice-based one, can explain how generic or arbitrary covert subjects arise in these languages, the evidence for the class of semi-null subject languages is further weakened.

#### 4.2 *Li*-expletives and their optionality

I showed in Chapter 3 that in Mauritian Creole there is an overt expletive *li*, which resembles the English expletive *it*. Examples are given in (190) and (191), repeated from Chapter 3. The sentences in (190) contain weather verbs<sup>33</sup> and those in (191) contain adjectival predicates.

- (190) a. (Li) fer so deor.  
           it make hot outside  
           ‘It’s hot outside.’ (Syea 2013:40)
- b. (Li) pu fer soley dimen.  
           it IRR make sun tomorrow  
           ‘It will be sunny tomorrow.’ (Syea 2017: 126)

<sup>33</sup> Note that in Icelandic, weather verbs do not surface with an overt expletive.

ii. í gær                    rigndi (\*það).  
       yesterday            rain     it  
       ‘Yesterday, it rained.’ (Biberauer 2010: 158)



Creole covert subjects, the issue ought to be thoroughly explored. The Voice-based approach could lead to a better understanding of phonologically null pronouns, and to a more nuanced understanding of what it means for a covert element to be syntactically active.

### 4.3 The EPP and case assignment

#### 4.3.1 EPP

Chomsky (1981) proposed the Extended Projection Principle (EPP) to account for the fact that English clauses require overt subjects. Despite its definition changing over time as the theory has developed (Chomsky 1982, 1995, 2000), the EPP has consistently been a requirement that something structurally appear (whether overtly or covertly) in the subject position of the clause. Doner (2019:5) characterizes the EPP as “the obligatory movement of some element into the inflectional domain” whether that element is the thematic subject or some other constituent.

If the analysis of Mauritian Creole subjectless constructions proposed here is correct, then the EPP in Mauritian Creole, if there is one, is very different from the EPP in English. It would be odd to propose that the EPP in Mauritian Creole optionally appears in some constructions but not in others, when the very reason the EPP was proposed was to account for necessarily overt subjects. On the other hand, if there is no EPP in Mauritian Creole, then it must be explained why overt subjects in Mauritian Creole move to SpecTP rather than remaining *in situ*; that is, it must be explained why the overt subject does not remain in a position between the TMA markers and the verb. I suggest in section 4.3.3 below that overt subjects in Mauritian Creole move to SpecTP for case assignment rather than to satisfy some version of the EPP.

### 4.3.2 Accusative case

I have assumed here that if a functional head has case to assign, that case must be assigned. This assumption was crucial to my account of the differences between transitive and unergative subjectless clauses. In particular, I stipulated in Chapter 3 that if Voice has an accusative case feature, accusative case must be assigned to something. Voice with [ACC] is therefore only compatible with verbs that take an internal argument that can receive accusative case.

In Chapter 3, I proposed that Mauritian Creole has four Voice heads: two active and two non-active. The two active Voice heads, repeated in (192), appear in clauses with overt external arguments, and are distinguished by whether they have accusative case to assign.

(192) a. *Unergative active Voice head*

Voice  
[  $\theta$ , D ]

b. *Transitive active Voice head*

Voice  
[  $\theta$ , D  
ACC ]

The two non-active Voice heads I proposed, which appear in clauses with covert external arguments, differ in one additional way. The transitive non-active Voice head introduces an external argument variable, and, like its active counterpart, has accusative case to assign. The unergative non-active Voice head introduces a lexically bound external argument variable and does not have accusative case to assign. The two proposed Voice heads are repeated in (193) and (194).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Why Mauritian Creole Voice can have GEN(x) or [ACC] but not both warrants further research. This non-active Voice is oddly similar to middles in that it describes an otherwise eventive predicate as generic, it does not assign



(193) *Transitive non-active Voice head*

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{Voice} \\ \left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{x, Human(x)} \\ \text{ACC} \end{array} \right] \end{array}$$

(194) *Unergative non-active Voice head*

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{Voice} \\ \left[ \text{GEN(x), Human(x)} \right] \end{array}$$

As I mentioned in footnote 15, one could instead think of these four different heads as a single head with different feature bundles; this would not affect the analysis.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4.3.3 Nominative case

Since Chomsky (1981), nominative case has been assumed to be assigned to a DP in SpecTP by T (originally INFL). In a sense, the EPP and nominative case worked in tandem to force the presence of a DP in the specifier of TP – the EPP can force the movement of an argument to a local position so that case assignment can occur. In theory, then, the subjects of Mauritian Creole active root clauses occupy SpecTP and are assigned nominative case there. Similarly, when the internal argument of an unaccusative clause moves to SpecTP, it is assigned nominative case by T.

In the analysis proposed in Chapter 3, T does not project a specifier in at least three types of clauses, listed in (195). An example of each is provided in (196).

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accusative case, and it requires an adverbial. The main difference between the subjectless unergative in Mauritian Creole and what are generally called middles is that the unergative in Mauritian Creole does not have a theme.

<sup>35</sup> It is crucial, however, that the presence of the ACC feature and the absence of the GEN operator go together.

(195) *Mauritian Creole constructions in which TP lacks a specifier*

- a. Clauses in the non-active Voice
- b. Existential constructions
- c. Unaccusative clauses whose internal arguments remain low

(196) a. Zwe foutborl avek enn boul an lapo.  
play football with a ball in leather  
'People play football with a leather ball.'

b. Ena voler dan lavil.  
have thief in town  
'There are thieves in town.'

c. Inn ariv enn aksidan.  
PERF happen an accident  
'An accident happened.'

If T assigns nominative case and requires that nominative case be assigned locally – to whatever occupies its specifier – and if T has no specifier in the sentences in (196), then it is unlikely that any of the constructions listed in (195) contain a T specified for nominative case. This is because nothing appears in the specifier of TP.

With the theoretical connections between the EPP and nominative case,<sup>36</sup> and given my assumption that case features must be assigned, it may be that when T is specified for nominative case in Mauritian Creole, the case has a strength feature, much like what Biberauer (2010) proposed for Icelandic; I refer to this strong case feature on T as [*\*NOM*] here. In Mauritian Creole, in active constructions, if T bears this feature, it can probe down and select an argument that requires case; the strength of the feature would require case to be assigned locally; that is, it

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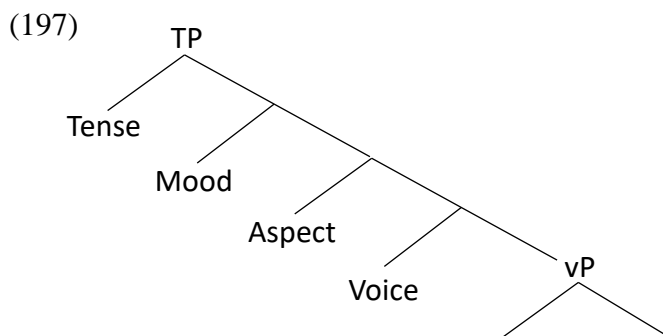
<sup>36</sup> This is generally, but may not cross-linguistically, be the case. Some languages appear to show movement to SpecTP while assigning nominative case to another argument, showing that the EPP and nominative case can be separate. The Icelandic example in (i) illustrates this.

(i) Mér likuðu hestarnir.  
me.DAT liked.3PL the.horses.NOM.MASC.PL  
'I liked the horses.'  
(Sigurðsson 1989: 240, cited in Travis 2008: 28)

would need to be assigned to an element in SpecTP. On the other hand, given that [\*NOM] is optional, if T did not bear this feature in an active construction, the overt external argument would be spelled out *in situ* and not get case, leading to a crash. In the case of non-active Voice, [\*NOM] on T would need something to move to SpecTP but would not find a caseless argument to target also leading to a crash. The derivations would thus converge with T [\*NOM] and an active Voice head, or with T and a non-active Voice head, as required. This is just a brief sketch of how the case-EPP properties of T in Mauritian Creole might interact with the Voice heads I have proposed. A full analysis would require considerably more work, in particular regarding constructions like (196c). For example, if nominative case is not assigned in constructions like (196c), then what case does the internal argument receive? Case is difficult to investigate in Mauritian Creole as there is very little overt evidence of case distinctions. I leave this matter for future research.

#### 4.4 The structure of INFL in Mauritian Creole

Throughout this thesis, I have assumed that the TMA markers in Mauritian Creole spell out independent functional heads in the inflectional domain. In chapter 1, I assumed as a starting point the fully articulated Mauritian Creole inflectional structure illustrated in (197), following Sylea (2013: 132). This was based on the rigid linear order of the overt TMA markers shown in (198), repeated from section 1.3.1.



(198) a. Dev **ti** **pu** **finn** manz so lasoup  
 Dave PST IRR1 PERF eat 3POSS soup  
 si ti ena pli disel ladan.  
 if PST have more salt inside

‘Dave would have already eaten his soup if there had been more salt in it.’

b. \*Dev **pu** **ti** **finn** manz so lasoup  
 Dave IRR1 PST PERF eat 3POSS soup  
 si ti ena pli disel ladan.  
 if PST have more salt inside

c. \*Dev **finn** **ti** **pu** manz so lasoup  
 Dave PERF PST IRR1 eat 3POSS soup  
 si ti ena pli disel ladan.  
 if PST have more salt inside

The TMA markers in Mauritian Creole are repeated in (199).

(199) **TMA markers**<sup>37</sup>

TNS	<i>ti</i>	‘past’
IRR	<i>pu</i>	‘(definite) future’
ASP	<i>(f)inn</i>	‘perfect’
	<i>(a)pe</i>	‘imperfective’

I assume that the tense and mood heads in the Mauritian Creole inflectional domain are necessarily projected in root clauses as they anchor a situation to the moment of speech and the real world. In the preceding chapters, I have shown that in the absence of past-tense marking in a root clause (unless the irrealis marker appears), the clause describes a situation that holds habitually/generically or imperfectively at the moment of speech, i.e., in the present. Further, a root clause that lacks either of the irrealis markers describes a situation that holds in the real

<sup>37</sup> I have omitted the irrealis marker *(a)va* because, as previously mentioned, it is not used by my consultants.

world. I assume that when functional information is interpreted in the absence of overt marking, functional heads that encode that information are specified. For example, MoodP is projected in realis root clauses even though there is no Mauritian Creole vocabulary item that expresses that realis meaning.

The aspect system in Mauritian Creole presents itself as an area worthy of exploration on its own. Cowper (2005) takes the projection of Asp to be an event head. As such, she proposes that Asp is only projected with events and not with states. For English, therefore, it would not be projected in (200a), but it would be specified for perfectivity in (200b) and imperfectivity in (200c).

- (200) a. Jenna loves cookies.
- b. Jenna eats cookies every afternoon.
- c. Jenna is eating cookies.

In 3.1.4, I argued that the default viewpoint aspect in Mauritian Creole is perfective, just as in English. Thus, in the absence of overt aspect marking in an eventive clause, I assume Asp to be projected, specifying eventivity. In addition to the unmarked perfective and marked imperfective (with *(a)pe*) in Mauritian Creole, there is the additional perfect aspect marker *(f)inn*. If Asp in Mauritian Creole were like Asp in English, where Asp is only projected with events, we would expect neither of the aspect markers to co-occur with stative verbs. With respect to *(a)pe*, the restriction we find in English on combining imperfective morphology with a stative verb typically holds in Mauritian Creole (Syea 2013: 115), though it is sometimes possible to combine *pe* and a stative verb in Mauritian Creole. In such cases, we get an inchoative reading of the situation, which has an eventive interpretation. This is shown in (201).

(201) a. Mo pe konn mo tab aster.  
 1SG IPFV know 1SG.POSS table now  
 ‘I’m beginning to know my tables now.’ (Syea 2017: 269)

b. Mo pe kontan bann plant.  
 1SG IPFV like PL plant  
 ‘I am starting to love plants.’

(*F*)*inn*, on the other hand, combines freely with statives. This is shown in (202).

(202) a. To finn kontan mwa avan fondasion lemond.  
 2SG PERF like 1SG.NOM before foundation the.world  
 ‘You loved me before the founding of the world.’  
 (glosbe.com/mfe/en/finn%20kontan)

b. Li finn konpran ki so frer finn aret egziste  
 3SG PERF understand that 3SG.POSS brother PERF stop exist  
 ‘She understood that her brother had ceased to exist.’  
 (https://glosbe.com/mfe/en/finn%20konpran)

If Asp distinguishes between states and events, then the sentences in (202) should not be possible. Interestingly, my consultants regularly use (*f*)*inn* in place of *ti* to indicate that something occurred in the past. What I am told is that the difference between the two markers lies in whether a situation has been completed. That is, while the marker (*f*)*inn* can be used to refer to events that began prior to the moment of speech, using *ti* necessitates that an event is done. The sentences in (203) show this.

(203) a. Ti fer labier ek patat.  
 PST make beer with potato  
 ‘Beer was made with potato (but no longer is).’

b. Finn fer labier ek patat.  
 PFV make beer with potato  
 ‘Beer was/has been made with potato (and may still be made with it).’

It is possible that *(f)inn* is taking on some tense semantics while retaining its aspectual meaning. Syntactically, at least in root clauses, we have seen that *(f)inn* and *(a)pe* are in complementary distribution, as shown again in (204). This is why I have assumed that they occupy the same position.

- (204) a. \*Zan **inn** **pe** fair lexercis pendant  
 John PERF IPFV do exercise for  
 trwa zer ek li tuzur pa fatigue.  
 three hour and 3SG still NEG tired

Intended: ‘John has been exercising for three hours and still isn’t tired.’

- b. \*Zan **pe** **inn** fair lexercis pendant  
 John IPFV PERF do exercise for  
 trwa zer ek li tuzur pa fatigue.  
 three hour and 3SG always NEG tired

Intended: ‘John has been exercising for three hours and still isn’t tired.’

However, *(f)inn* and *(a)pe* do pattern differently in some embedded clauses. For example, some verbs in Mauritian Creole disallow tense marking in their complements. These verbs also disallow *(f)inn* to appear in their complements. *(A)pe*, on the other hand, is permitted in these complement clauses. This is shown in (205) with the matrix psych verb *tann* (‘hear’).

- (205) a. \*Mo ti tann zot **ti/finn** sante.  
 1SG PST hear 3PL PST/PFV sing

Intended: ‘I heard them sing.’

(Syea 2013: 229)

- b. Mo ti tann twa **pe** sante.  
 1SG PST hear 2SG IPFV sing

‘I heard you singing.’

(Syea 2017: 360)

Ultimately, the Asp head in Mauritian Creole differs from the Asp head in English. Unlike in English, where that head, when projected, is the locus of a two-way aspectual distinction – perfective and imperfective – in Mauritian Creole, Asp is dealing with distinctions among the perfect, perfective, and imperfective. How this manifests is outside the purview of this thesis but merits investigation.

#### 4.5 *By*-phrases

In section 2.6, I showed that cross-linguistically, some non-active Voice types permit *by*-phrases containing the “suppressed” agent while others do not. I noted there that linguists have analyzed passives as containing an external argument variable in Voice; that variable can either be bound through existential closure or by an agentive *by*-phrase. In section 3.3, I showed that at least unergative subjectless constructions in Mauritian Creole disallow agentive *by*-phrases. I accounted for this in the same way as Šereikaitė (2020) does for Lithuanian active existentials: the variable introduced by the non-active Voice head is lexically bound by an operator within the Voice head itself. Subjectless transitives in Mauritian Creole also disallow *by*-phrases, as shown in (206).

(206) a. \*Toule dessam, selebre Nwel par dimoun.  
 every December, celebrate Christmas by people  
 Intended: ‘Every December, Christmas is celebrated by people.’

b. \*Semenn dernier, finn gagn konkour radio par kikenn.  
 week last, PFV win contest radio by someone  
 Intended: ‘Last week, a radio contest was won by someone.’

It is very unclear why Mauritian Creole would disallow these *by*-phrases in subjectless transitives. Under my analysis, there is nothing barring their presence; if anything, I would



expect that they are permitted. I do not provide an account for this here but will note that this is like canonical and grammatical object passives in Icelandic, as shown in (207), repeated from (101).

(207) a. *Canonical passive*

?	Pað	var	skoðaður	bíll	af	bifvélavirkjanum.
	EXPL	was	inspected	car.NOM	by	car.mechanic.DEF
	‘There was a car inspected by the car mechanic.’					

b. *Grammatical object passive*

?	Pað	var	skoðað	bílinn	af	bifvélavirkjanum.
	EXPL	was	inspected	car.ACC.DEF	by	car.mechanic.DEF
	‘The car was inspected by the car mechanic.’					(Legate 2014: 89)

Legate (2014) proposes that the Icelandic grammatical object passive contains phi-features in the specifier of Voice, semantically restricting the initiator introduced and hosted in the Voice head.

Under that view, along with the idea that agentive by-phrases can bind an initiator variable in Voice, one would expect by-phrases to be completely illicit in a grammatical object passive if its Voice head has phi-features in SpecVoiceP. Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002) show that the grammatical object passive in Icelandic is a relatively new construction. I have noted that there is variability among Mauritian Creole speakers when it comes to subjectlessness and how it is licensed. These Mauritian Creole and Icelandic data highlight that there is much more to explore when it comes to the relation between non-active Voice heads and implicit subjects.

#### 4.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I explored some of the consequences of the analysis I proposed in Chapter 3. The clearest consequence is to cast doubt on the existence of the class of “semi-null subject

languages”. The subjectless constructions in those languages may very well be amenable to non-*pro*-drop analyses.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have investigated how some root clauses in Mauritian Creole can lack overt thematic subjects. I considered two possibilities to explain how these clauses surface without overt subjects: 1) Mauritian Creole has a phonetically null pronoun that can be interpreted as either generic or arbitrary, and 2) Mauritian Creole has non-active Voice constructions that license implicit external arguments. I argued that an analysis under which Voice licenses the implicit subjects is more promising than one involving *pro* in subject position. I hope to have convinced the reader of the following:

1. The absence of overt material in what one would expect to be subject position does not mean that the language has a null subject *per se*.
2. Thematic implicit external arguments in Mauritian Creole are the product of non-active Voices in Mauritian Creole rather than instances of phonetically unrealized pronouns.
3. The class of semi-null subject languages is perhaps not a class of null-subject languages at all.

In Chapter 2, I showed that covert thematic subjects in Mauritian Creole are exclusively agents. I also showed there that the interpretation of the covert subject depends on the valency of the verb, the presence of clausal modification, and the type of TMA marking that appears in the clause. That is, unergative verbs permit only generic covert subjects, while transitive verbs permit both generic and arbitrary covert subjects. The generic reading in both cases is strictly tied to the presence of adverbial modification in the clause. Further, imperfective marking permits only an arbitrary interpretation of the implicit subject, meaning that the marker can only co-occur with a covert subject in transitive clauses.

In Chapter 3, I presented how a *pro*- versus a Voice-hypothesis could account for the subjectless Mauritian Creole data described in Chapter 2, arguing that the Voice analysis is superior. In particular, I proposed that Mauritian Creole has two non-active Voice heads: a transitive one, which must assign accusative case to an internal argument, and an unergative one, which does not assign case and therefore does not co-occur with verbs that take internal arguments. Both non-active Voice heads introduce a [+human] external argument variable. With the transitive head, the variable can be bound by a generic operator on an adverbial modifier, deriving a generic reading of the implicit agent; if there is no generic operator, it can receive an arbitrary reading through Existential Closure or existential binding by an existential quantifier that is lexically specified on the imperfective aspect head. With the unergative non-active Voice head, the external argument variable is bound within the Voice head itself by a GEN operator on the same head. The only way for unergatives to surface with an implicit subject, then, is if a generic operator on an adverbial modifier binds the clause's event variable, making the clause generic and thus compatible with the lexically generically bound external argument variable. The main prediction of such an analysis was that constructions that do not take agents cannot have implicit subjects. This prediction was borne out: unaccusatives and statives in Mauritian Creole do not permit implicit subjects.

I returned to the discussion of the null-subject typology in Chapter 4. Considering data from Mauritian Creole and Icelandic, I suggested that semi-null subject languages may not be true null-subject languages at all. First, there is no reason to believe that languages that do not have overt non-argumental expletives have expletive *pro*. In fact, there is arguably no real motivation for expletive *pro*. Second, I showed that Icelandic, like Mauritian Creole, permits

impersonal covert subjects. Importantly, though, those subjects must be human and volitional.<sup>38</sup>

If like Mauritian Creole, Icelandic impersonals can be explained without the use of *pro*, then questioning the existence of semi-null subject languages as a class is worthwhile.

The impossibility of *by*-phrases in Mauritian Creole non-active clauses and the details of how nominative case is assigned are also areas that deserve further investigation. A good starting point may be to look at what Kriegel (1996) and Henri (2010) refer to as *gagn*-passives. These constructions are like canonical passives in that the agent is implicit, the theme appears in grammatical subject position, and there may be a *by*-phrase containing the agent. Examples are provided in (208).

- (208) a. Zan ti gagn morde (ar lisyen).  
John PST get bite with dog  
'John got bitten (by a dog).'
- b. Mo pu gagn pini (ek mo profeser).  
1SG IRR1 get punished with 3SG.POSS professor  
'I will get punished (by my teacher).'
- (Henri 2010: 246)

However, these *gagn*-passives are not very productive and occur only with a small subset of verbs that involve the meaning of punishment or suffering, for example, *bate* ('beat'), *pini* ('punish'), *kraze* ('crush'/'destroy') (Baker & Kriegel 2013). There is also a construction that Henri (2010) calls the "copula passive".<sup>39</sup> Like *gagn*-passives, these are not productive. None of the speakers I consulted found these constructions to be acceptable in Mauritian Creole.

However, for those who do accept them, as provided in the literature, they contain the internal

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<sup>38</sup> Sigurðsson & Egerland (2009: 168, fn. 13) explain that a non-human reading is not possible if the verb refers to a "possibly human action". They note that a few verbs that denote animal behaviour may appear in the impersonal.

<sup>39</sup> See Henri (2010) for her explanation on why she refers to these constructions as "copular".

argument in subject position, the external argument is suppressed, and they accept *by*-phrases. Examples are given in (209).

(209) a. Zorz finn blese par enn koudkouto.  
George PERF wound by a knife-threat  
'George has been wounded by a knife-threat.' (Corne 1977)

b. Li pe fonsse vann so lakaz.  
3SG IPFV force sell 3SG.POSS house  
'S/he is being forced to sell his/her house.' (Henri 2010: 239)

Why these constructions allow *by*-phrases while subjectless constructions do not is worth looking into. These constructions may also shed light on case assignment in Mauritian Creole: if what I have proposed is correct, then transitive clauses require the internal argument of transitives to be assigned accusative case. How do the internal arguments raise to, presumably, SpecTP and for what reason then? Or perhaps the internal arguments are in the left periphery. Ideally, the work presented in this thesis can inform any work conducted on the passive-like constructions in (208) and (209).

As an understudied language with a wide range of historical and synchronic language contact, Mauritian Creole is a captivating one to learn and learn about. Its small inventory of functional morphology makes Mauritian Creole potentially mysterious, leaving very few clues as to what lies beneath its surface. I have barely scratched the surface in trying to better understand this language's grammar. As I said at the outset of this dissertation, however, I want this research to be a contribution to the existing work on Mauritian Creole but also to provoke further investigation of the language's grammar. In contrast to what speakers of Mauritian have said

numerous times to me, yes, Mauritian Creole has systematic rules,<sup>40</sup> it just isn't so overt about them.

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<sup>40</sup> While conducting fieldwork in Mauritius, I was told SEVERAL times by speakers that their language just “has no grammar”.

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