

Attributive possession in 19th century Mauritian Creole

Andrei Avram (Bucharest)

Abstract

The paper examines the attributive possessive structures attested in 19th century Mauritian Creole. It is first shown that these include a construction with the preposition *pou* ‘for’, which has not been mentioned in the literature. The situation in Mauritian Creole is then compared to that in Seychelles Creole, a closely related variety. Also discussed are some of the more general implications of the findings.

1 Introduction

As is well known, possession is formally encoded in two main types of constructions: predicative possession¹ and attributive possession² (cf. Heine 1997a: 86; Herslund/Baron 2001: 3; Stassen 2009: 26). These types differ in several respects. In predicative possession structures the relation of possession is expressed by a verb, being therefore explicitly asserted; their typical interpretation is that of ownership or temporary possession, although they may also be polysemous; they have clausal syntax (cf. Heine 1997a: 86; Herslund/Baron 2001: 3; Stassen 2009: 26–27). As for attributive possession structures, the relation of possession is expressed by a nominal and it is presupposed; they are polysemous to a far greater extent;³ they have phrasal syntax (Seiler 1983: 199, Heine 1997a: 86, Herslund/Baron 2001: 1 and 12, Seiler 2001: 33, Stassen 2009 26–27, Nichols/Bickel 2011). Given that both their formal encoding and their semantics differ considerably, Stassen (2009: 28) rightly concludes that “predicative and attributive possession are probably to be considered as belonging to two different (or at least partially different) typologies”.

Following Heine (cf. 1997a, 1997b, 2001) it is useful to distinguish two subtypes of predicative possession structures: the *have*-construction and the *belong*-construction. The *have*-construction is defined as “that construction which is used canonically to express ‘I have a car’ or ‘we have no money’”; the possessee is typically indefinite; there is “emphasis on the possessor” (Heine 1997a: 86–87). The *belong*-construction is typically exemplified by a sentence such as ‘The car belongs to me’; the possessee is the clausal subject and/or topic and it is typically definite; the possessor is the complement or an oblique constituent (cf. Heine 1997a: 86–87).

¹ Also referred to as “verbal possession” (see e. g. Heine 1997a: 86).

² Alternative terms include “nominal possession” (see e. g. Heine 1997a: 86), “adnominal possession” (see e. g. Heine 1997a: 86, Stassen 2009: 26) or “adnominal possessives” (see e. g. Allesaib 2012: 179).

³ According to Seiler (1983: 199–198, 2001: 33), for instance, attributive possession structures are characterized by their “openness to an almost infinite number of possible interpretations”.

In sum, according to Heine (1997a: 87, 1997b: 26), “all languages [...] have conventionalized means of expressing” the distinction between predicative possession (including that between *have*-constructions and *belong* constructions) and attributive possession, as set out below (examples from Heine 1997a: 87):

(1) Predicative possession

- a. *have*-construction
Ron has a dog.
- b. *belong*-construction
The dog is Ron’s.

(2) Attributive possession

Ron’s dog

Following Heine (1997a, 1997b, 2001), the theoretical framework adopted in the present paper, the various means of expressing the rather abstract relation of possession are derived from concrete domains. Their “stereotypical descriptions” are called “event schemas” (Heine 1997a: 91, 1997b: 142). The eight basic event schemas identified (see Heine 1997a: 91–97, 1997b: 142–148) are believed to account for the various possessive structures attested cross-linguistically, i. e. they develop into various possessive constructions. Each of the event schemas is associated with a particular set of morphosyntactic correlates. In what follows the presentation of the event schemas is limited to those relevant for the aims of the present paper:⁴ the Goal Schema and the Topic Schema.

In the Goal Schema the possessor is conceptualized as goal, encoded as an adjunct introduced by means of the allative/directional or of the benefactive/dative case marker, while the possessed NP is the subject. This schema develops into both *belong*-constructions and attributive possession structures. The morphosyntactic correlates of the Topic Schema are as follows: the possessor NP is the topic and the possessed NP the subject. According to Heine (1997a: 96) the Topic Schema “as a source for attributive possession provides one of the most common templates”.

Several studies have examined the syntactic structures employed for expressing attributive possession in pidgins and creoles. Heine and Kuteva (2001), for instance, analyze the attributive possession structures found in over 40 pidgin and creole languages, with various lexifiers. Vintilă-Rădulescu (2003) discusses attributive possession constructions as well as the lexicalization of the meaning of ‘to have’ in French-lexifier creoles. Attributive possession patterns are also illustrated in the volume edited by Holm and Patrick (2007) on the comparative syntax of 18 creoles.

The present paper is concerned with the attributive possession structures in 19th century Mauritian Creole, although reference will occasionally be made to other types of possessive constructions as well. Following Holm (cf. 1988: 199, 2000: 220), a distinction is made throughout the paper between possessive structures consisting of two nominals (full NPs) or of a nominal (full NP) and a possessive determiner (possessive adjective), on the one hand, and

⁴ For discussion and analysis of all the event schemas and of their implementation in various possessive constructions the reader is referred to the book-length treatment in Heine (1997b).

pronominal possession, i. e. involving possessive pronouns, on the other. The textual evidence examined is illustrative of an already stable variety. The pidginized form of French which had emerged after the French took possession of Mauritius in 1721 had already been creolized: on the basis of demographic and linguistic evidence, Baker and Corne (1986: 169) conclude that “it seems entirely clear that a stable Creole language [...] existed in Mauritius by not later than the 1770s”.⁵

The paper is organized as follows. In 2 I present the types of attributive possessive structure in 19th century Mauritian Creole identified by Syea (1994, 1995, 2007, 2013) and Guillemin (2007, 2009, 2011a). Also discussed are a number of issues related to previous work on attributive possession in Mauritian Creole. In section 3 I show that there is a fourth type of attributive possessive structure in Mauritian Creole, attested in 19th century texts. Section 4 is concerned with a comparison of the attributive possessive constructions in Mauritian Creole and those recorded in the closely related Seychelles Creole. The findings and some of their implications are discussed in section 6.

The corpus of 19th century Mauritian Creole samples includes travel accounts (Milbert 1812, de Freycinet 1827), literary works (de la Butte 1850, Lolliot 1855, Descroizilles 1867), folklore (Baissac 1888), monographs (Baissac 1880, Adam 1883), religious texts such as the translation of the Gospel according to Mathew (Anderson 1885) and the Catechism (Lambert 1888), the texts published by Chaudenson (1981), and the collection of old Mauritian Creole texts (Textes créoles anciens n. d.).

The examples appear in the orthography or system of transcription used in the sources mentioned, and include glosses⁶ and translations; early Mauritian Creole examples also include the year of the attestation if different from the date of publication. The length of quotations has been kept to a reasonable minimum.

2 Previous work

Syea (1994: 85, 1995: 177, 2007: 18, 2013: 3) states that three types of attributive possessive structure, which he calls “genitive constructions”, are found in early Mauritian Creole. All of these are attested in 19th century texts.

The first type of attributive possessive structure identified by Syea (1994, 2007) is the “analytic possessive construction”.⁷ This type is called “‘postposed’ construction by Guillemin (2009: 310, 2011a: 269), “direct construction” by Allesaib (2012: 179) or “N-Possessor type” by Syea (2013: 1). In this type attributive possession is expressed via the juxtaposition of the possessed NP and the possessor NP. This construction “is ‘bare’ in the sense that there is no overt morpheme to express the possessive relation”, in other words “the possessive relation is expressed by the structure alone” (Allesaib 2012: 179). This type will also be referred to as

⁵ Note also that this variety was first referred to as “langue créole” in 1773 (cf. Baker/Corne 1986: 168).

⁶ The following abbreviations are used: 1 = first person; 2 = second person; 3 = third person; COMPL = completive aspect marker; DEF = definite article; DEM = demonstrative; INDEF = indefinite article; NEG = negator; NP = noun phrase; PAST = past tense marker; PL = plural; POSS = possessive determiner; QP = question particle; QW = question word; REL = relativizer; SG = singular.

⁷ Called “periphrastic” in Syea (1995: 181).

the “[possessed + possessor]” structure (see Holm/Patrick 2009: x). Consider the examples below, provided by Syea (1994, 1995, 2007, 2013):

- (3) a. Mò saclave la guerre. [1805] (Pitot 1885: 372)
 1.SG slave war
 ‘I am a slave of war.’
- b. ein camarad’ ça blancs-la (Chrestien 1831: 41)
 INDEF friend DEM white DEF
 ‘a friend of those whites’

The second type is called “synthetic genitive” by Syea (1995: 181, 2007: 15), “preposed construction” by Guillemain (2009: 310, 2011a: 269), “indirect construction” by Allesaib (2012: 179), and “Saxon-type genitive” or “Possessor-N type” by Syea (2013: 2). This corresponds to the “[possessor + *his* + possessed]” (see Holm/Patrick 2009: x) structure, illustrated in the following examples:

- (4) a. ça dilizence la so portrait (Lolliot 1855: 14)
 DEM coach DEF POSS.3.SG portrait
 ‘the picture of this coach’
- b. grand Missié son cause (Decroizilles 1867: 22)
 big mister POSS.3.SG words
 ‘the plantation owner’s words’
- c. Zean so manzé (Baissac 1888: 79)
 Zean POSS.3.SG food
 ‘Zean’s food’

In this attributive possessive structure an overt marker of possession links the two constituents (cf. Allesaib 2012: 179): the possessor is indexed on the head noun via the adnominal possessive determiner *so*.

The last type of attributive possessive structure is called “mixed” by Syea (1994: 86), “poss-initial” in Syea (1995: 181) or “possessive pronoun-N-Possessor type” in Syea (2013: 2). In work on the comparative syntax of creole languages this type is known as “[*his* + possessed + possessor]” (see Holm/Patrick 2009: 349). Listed below are Syea’s (1994, 1995, 2007) examples:

- (5) a. dans son lamain Gouvernement (Decroizilles 1867: 2)
 in POSS.3.SG hand government
 ‘in the government’s hands’
- b. so pitit ppâ Azor (Baissac 1880: 14)
 POSS.3.SG child father Azor
 ‘Papa Azor’s child’
- c. Paulin ti son frère Pauline (Baissac 1888: 291)
 Paulin PAST POSS.3.SG brother Pauline
 ‘Paulin was Pauline’s brother.’

This is a possessor climbing construction, in which the possessive determiner *so/son* is not adjacent to the possessor NP, but to the possessed NP.

Syea (1995: 182) writes that texts pre-dating 1855 (Lolliot 1855) contain no examples of the [possessor + *his* + possessed] and [*his* + possessed + possessor] structures. According to Syea (1995: 182), the [possessed + possessor] pattern is “the first and only means of expressing [attributive] possession for well over a century”. The [possessor + *his* + possessed] construction is first recorded in 1855. As for the [*his* + possessed + possessor] structure, it is attested for the first time in a text dating from 1867. However, according to Syea (1995: 187, 2007), this type might have emerged before the [possessor + *his* + possessed] structure. As acknowledged by Syea (1995: 187), this “sequence of developments [...] appears at first sight to run counter to the textual evidence”. Nonetheless, according to Syea (1995: 187) several arguments can be adduced in defence of this scenario, as follows. The time gap between the first attestations of the two constructions is of only 12 years. The [possessor + *his* + possessed] structure is found in 1855 in a single example (Lolliot 1855: 14). It also occurs once in 1867, in the example below:⁸

- (6) grand Misié son cause (Descroizilles 1867: 22)
 big mister POSS.3.SG talk
 ‘the master’s words’

The [*his* + possessed + possessor] pattern is first attested in 1867, but in four examples (Descroizilles 1867: 2, 4, 7, 11). Finally, the examples of [*his* + possessed + possessor] outnumber the instances of [possessor + *his* + possessed] in the texts collected by Baissac (1888).

As shown by Syea (1995: 182), the text by Descroizilles (1867) is “the first in which all three types of genitives are attested”. Syea (1995: 182) further states that late 19th century texts (e. g. Baissac 1888) also contain all the three attributive possessive structures, in the following decreasing order of frequency: [possessed + possessor], [*his* + possessed + possessor] and [possessor + *his* + possessed]. With respect to the latter, Syea (1995: 182) specifies that they occur “with the least frequency, very few examples being known”.

Summing up, previous work has identified three types of attributive possessive structures, employed in 19th century Mauritian Creole:

⁸ Also quoted by Guillemin (2007: 390, f. n. 9, 2009: 133).

Period	Type	Order of constituents
up to 1855	analytic	[possessed + possessor]
1855–1867	analytic	[possessed + possessor]
	synthetic	[possessor + <i>his</i> + possessed]
1855–1888	analytic	[possessed + possessor]
	synthetic	[possessor + <i>his</i> + possessed]
	POSS-initial	[<i>his</i> + possessed + possessor]
after 1888	analytic	[possessed + possessor]
	synthetic	[possessor + <i>his</i> + possessed]

Table 1: Attributive possessive structures in 19th century Mauritian Creole identified in previous work

According to Syea (1994: 85–86, 1995: 181, 2007: 18, 2013: 29) and to Guillemin (2007: 289, 2011a: 112–114) these are the only attributive possessive constructions ever attested in the history of Mauritian Creole. Consider in this respect the most recent statement by Syea (2013: 38): “it is reasonable to assume that sometime around the middle of the nineteenth century, possession was expressed in three different ways in MC [= Mauritian Creole]”.

Of these three patterns, the [*his* + possessed + possessor] construction seems to have gone out of use, at the latest, in the first decades of the 20th century.⁹ The other two attributive possessive structures, [possessed + possessor] and [possessor + *his* + possessed], are still used in Mauritian Creole,¹⁰ as shown in (7a) and (7b) respectively:

- (7) a. lakaz lapay mo tohtoh (Baker 1972: 83)
house straw POSS.1.SG uncle
‘my uncle’s straw house’
- b. mo frer so madam (ibd.)
POSS.1.SG brother POSS.3.SG wife
‘my brother’s wife’

Corne (1999: 171) notes that the [possessor + *his* + possessed] pattern “has a useful disambiguating role”. As shown in (8), the [possessed + possessor] allows two readings:

- (8) a. lakaz tonton Zorz (Corne 1999: 171)
house uncle Zorz
‘Zorz’s uncle’s house’
- b. lakaz tonton Zorz (ibd.)
house uncle Zorz
‘uncle Zorz’s house’

⁹ The pattern is found in *Ça qui tini poëlon qui cone so prix la gresse* (Decotter 1920, proverb 399) [lit. ‘He who has a frying pan knows the price of grease’], for which Hearn (1885: 12) suggests the equivalent: ‘It’s the one who hold the skillet that knows the cost of lard’. However, the proverb also appears in Baissac (1880: 156), from which it may have been taken. The last known occurrences known to me are *so trous savates* ‘the holes in his sandals’ and *so trou maye* ‘the holes in his undershirt’ (Soulsobontemps 1925).

¹⁰ See Corne (1970: 12), Valdman (1978: 196–197), Stein (1984: 62), Corne (1999: 171), Heine/Kuteva (2001), Guillemin (2009: 132–134), Allesaib (2012: 179).

In (8a) the NP *lakaz tonton* is part of a recursive possessive structure, whereas in (8b) *lakaz tonton* is an appositive NP. However, the [possessor + *his* + possessed] pattern can distinguish these two meanings, as illustrated by (9a) and (9b) respectively:

- (9) a. Zorz so tonton so lakaz (Corne 1999: 171)
 Zorz POSS.3.SG uncle POSS.3.SG House
 ‘Zorz’s uncle’s house’
- b. tonton Zorz so lakaz (ibd.)
 uncle Zorz POSS.3.SG house
 ‘uncle Zorz’ house’

Which of the two attributive possession constructions is more frequent in modern Mauritian Creole is a matter of some dispute in the literature. According to Chaudenson (1990: 82) or Corne (1991: 171), the [possessed + possessor] structure is the most frequently used one. Corne (1999: 171), for instance, writes that “this is the usual pattern”. On the contrary, according to Guillemin (2009: 134), a native speaker of the language, “the *so* genitive” – i. e. the [possessor + *his* + possessed] construction – “is now the most commonly used form in all registers of modern MC [= Mauritian Creole]”. More recently, Syea (2013: 38) simply mentions its “somewhat common occurrence in MC [= Mauritian Creole]”.

The descriptions of the attributive possession patterns in 19th century Mauritian by Syea (1994, 1995, 2007, 2013) and Guillemin (2007, 2011a) call for a number of remarks. Consider first the [possessed + possessor] pattern. The meaning of (3a) – from Syea (1995: 181, 2013: 25) – is not that of literal possession. For ease of exposition, example (3a) is repeated below as (10):

- (10) Mô saclave la guerre. [1805] (Pitot 1885: 372)
 1.SG slave war
 ‘I am a slave of war.’

This is also the case of all other similar examples in this 1805 text, such as the one below:

- (11) Mô noir bitation. [1805] (ibd.: 373)
 1.SG black plantation
 ‘I am a plantation black’

In all these examples – the earliest on currently available evidence – the second NP is not a possessor, but rather it qualifies the first one, by specifying its kind. In other words, the second NP is a modifier. Similar cases occur abundantly in modern Mauritian Creole as well. As shown by Corne (1999: 171), in addition to “that of possession (the genitive)”, structures consisting of a head noun and an NP complement “cover a wide variety of relations between the head noun and the NP complement”, such as:

- (12) a. Quality
 boku dimun mon laz (Corne 1999: 171)
 many people POSS.1.SG Age
 ‘many people of my age’
- b. Provenience
 zans lamontany (ibd.)
 people mountain
 ‘hill-folk’
- c. Goal
 kanot pwaso (ibd.)
 boat fish
 ‘fishing boat’

Similarly, Allesaib (2012: 181) writes in her synchronic analysis of the noun phrase in modern Mauritian Creole that in addition to structures expressing literal possession “other constructions also consist in two juxtaposed nominals”:

- (13) a. Modifier
 Lakaz tol (Allesaib 2012: 181)
 house tin
 ‘a tin (roof) house’
- b. Appositive noun phrase
 Larivyer Latanye (ibd.: 182)
 river Lataniers
 ‘Lataniers river’
- c. Compounds
 Bor lamer (ibd.: 182)
 edge sea
 ‘the seaside’

As can be seen, the constructions (10) and (11) parallel the structure in (13a), and semantically they express quality or provenience, to use Corne’s (1999: 171) terms. They are therefore examples of possession understood *lato sensu*, i. e. as typically extending to various kinds of attributive modification of one nominal by another. This is in line with the use of the term “possession” by e. g. Nichols and Bickel’s (2011) “to refer to all kinds of adnominal constructions regardless of whether the semantics is literal possession”. Examples illustrative of literal possession are first attested in 1818:

- (14) a. noir madam Lissir [1818] (de Freycinet 1827: 411)
 black lady Lissir
 ‘lady Lissir black’
- b. la voix li-cien [1818] (ibd.)
 voice dog
 ‘dog’s voice’
- c. dans milié la savanne [1818] (ibd.)
 in middle savannah
 ‘in the middle of the savannah’

Example (3b) does not date from 1831, it is actually from 1822. The example at issue is already found in Chrestien (1822),¹¹ whereas Syea (1994, 1995, 2007) quotes from the second edition in 1831.

With reference to the [possessor + *his* + possessed] pattern, Guillemain (2007: 290, f. n. 1) writes that “I have come across only one example of [such] genitives in the early texts (19th century)”, and quotes the example in (6). This claim is disconfirmed by the earlier attestation in 1855, see example (4a).

Some of Syea’s (1995, 2007 and 2013: pages) claims regarding the [possessor + *his* + possessor] and the [*his* + possessed + possessor] structures also need to be amended. The [possessor + *his* + possessed] pattern does not occur only once in Descroizilles (1867), as stated by Syea (1995: 187), but twice. Here is the second example:

- (15) vous trouvé « Batisse » son ton-ton (Descroizilles 1867: 9)
 2.SG see Batisse POSS.3.SG uncle
 ‘the master’s words’

More importantly, the [possessor + *his* + possessed] construction does not occur at all in any of Baissac’s (1880, 1888) texts. Reproduced below is the only such alleged example, as glossed and translated by Syea (1995: 181, 2013: 24):

- (16) Zean so manze (Baissac 1888: 79)
 John POSS food
 ‘John’s food’

However, this is taken out of context. The string *Zean so manze* is found twice in Baissac (1888). Consider the identical sentences in which it occurs:

- (17) a. Zeanne vini pour amène Zean so manze (Baissac 1888: 79)
 Zeanne come for bring Zean POSS.3.SG food
 ‘Zeanne came to bring Zean his food’
- b. Zeanne vini pour amène Zean so manze (ibd.: 81)
 Zeanne come for bring Zean POSS.3.SG food
 ‘Zeanne came to bring Zean his food’

¹¹ See Textes créoles anciens (n. d.). For example (3b) see the text in Chaudenson (1981: 94).

As can be seen, *Zean so manze* is not an instance of [possessor + *his* + possessed], but of a double object construction. Baissac's translation constitutes further support for this analysis: example (17a) is translated 'Jeanne qui porte à Jean son déjeuner' (Baissac 1888: 78), while the French version of (17b) is 'Jeanne arrive pour apporter à Jean son déjeuner' (Baissac 1888: 80).

The [*his* + possessed + possessor] pattern is found, even if only once, in an 1850 text:

- (18) son malice, sa satte la (de la Butte 1850: 2)
 POSS.3.SG wickedness DEM cat DEF
 'the wickedness of that cat'

In spite of the comma separating *son malice* 'the wickedness' from *sa satte la* 'that cat'.¹² This is the first occurrence in Mauritian Creole of the [*his* + possessed + possessor] construction. This example precedes by some 17 years the one in (3a), dating from 1867, considered by Syea (1995: 187, 2007: 17) and Guillemain (2009: 133, 316, 2011a: 273) to be the earliest attestation in Mauritian Creole of this attributive possessive structure. Note, however, that the occurrence of this pattern in 1850 confirms Syea's (1995: 187) hypothesis that it chronologically preceded the [possessor + *his* + possessed] construction, first attested in an 1855 text (see example (4a) in section 2).¹³ Further support is provided by the fact that this pattern is better attested in Descroizilles (1867). According to Syea (1995: 187), "the 1867 text – has four examples" illustrative of the [*his* + possessor + structure], but actually there are 11 such cases in Descroizilles (1867).

3 The [possessed + *for* + possessor] structure

19th century Mauritian Creole evinces yet another attributive possession pattern, which appears to have gone unnoticed in the literature,¹⁴ which employs *pou*, the Mauritian Creole reflex of the French preposition *pour* 'for': [possessed + *for* + possessor].

There are several examples attesting to the use of this structure. Seven such instances are found in three of the texts also published in Chaudenson (1981): *Annexe et note de renvoi* (Chaudenson 1981: 80–82), *Le catéchisme de 1828* (Chaudenson 1981: 107–114), and *Proclamation pour noirs esclaves dans Maurice* (Chaudenson 1981: 118–120). One more example is recorded in Chrestien (1831: 46). One last example comes from Anderson (1885: chapter V). The examples are listed below in chronological order.

The first attestation of the [possessed + *for* + possessor] pattern is in 1805:

- (19) môt n'a pas conné bon Dié pour blanc. [1805] (Pitot 1885: 373)
 1.SG NEG know good God for white
 'I don't know the white man's God'¹⁵

This is followed by five examples recorded 23 years later:

¹² Cf. the variant of the same folktale in Baissac (1880: 125) *so malice ça çatte là*, without a comma.

¹³ See example (4a) in section 2.

¹⁴ Including in the recent collection of papers edited by Baker/Fong (2007).

¹⁵ This is also Baker's translation in Baker/Corne 1982: 222)

- (20) a. Jésus-Christ li pitit Bon Dieû [1828] (Chaudenson 1981: 110)
 Jesus Christ 3.SG for good God
 ‘Jesus Christ is the son of God’¹⁶
- b. Jésus-Christ, qui pitit pour Bon Dieû [1828] (ibd.: 111)
 Jesus Christ REL child for good God
 ‘Jesus Christ, who is the son of God’
- c. Bon Dieû li Père pour note
 good God 3.SG father for POSS.1.PL
 Seigneur, Jésus-Christ [1828] (ibd.: 112)
 Lord, Jesus Christ
 ‘God is the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ’
- d. Bon Dieû li Père ou papa pou tou (ibid. 112)
 good God 3.SG father or father for all
 ‘God is the Father of all people’
- e. zaute été anges pour Bon Dieû. [1828] (ibd.: 113)
 they PAST angel for good God
 ‘they were God’s angels’

A further attestation dates from 1831:

- (21) Ça la-caz’ pour l’amitié (Chrestien 1831: 46)
 DEM house for friendship
 ‘This is the house of friendship’

The pattern is also attested four years later:

- (22) Protectèrs pour zautres maîtres [1835] (Chaudenson 1981: 119)
 protector for POSS.2.PL master
 ‘the protectors of your masters’¹⁷

The last occurrence of the [possessed + *for* + possessor] structure is in 1885:

- (23) Vou sel pou la ter (Anderson 1885, chapter V)
 2.PL salt for earth
 ‘You are the salt of the earth’

In addition to nominals (full NPs), *pou* is also found in attributive possession structures with pronominals:

¹⁶ Guillemin (2011b: 6) glosses *pour* ‘of’ and gives the same translation ‘Jesus Christ is the son of God’.

¹⁷ Cf. the French version of the text: *les protecteurs des maîtres* (Chaudenson 1981: 117).

- (24) a. M. Sirandale [...] qui zize pour nous (*Le Cernéen* 1839: 4)
 Mr Sirandale REL judge for 1.PL
 ‘Mister Sirandale himself, who is our judge’
- b. BON PRINCE pour nous (*Descroizilles* 1867: iii)
 Bon Prince for 1.PL
 ‘our Bon Prince’
- c. zistoire pour (ibd.: 22)
 story for 1.SG
 ‘my story’
- d. lizié pour toa (*Anderson* 1885, chapter VII)
 eye for 2.SG
 ‘your eyes’

The existence of this type of attributive possessive construction instantiates what Heine (1997a: 95, 2001: 316) calls “Goal Schema”. As shown by Heine and Kuteva (2001, 2002), the languages in which this schema develops into attributive possession structures include creoles and pidgins. For instance, a number of English-lexifier creoles¹⁸ use reflexes of the English benefactive preposition *for*. In French-lexifier creoles constructions with a reflex of *pour* ‘for’ are far less frequent. However, there are French-lexifier creoles which use it in structures expressing attributive possession. One such variety is Tayo, spoken in New Caledonia. Consider the following examples from the only book-length description of this creole (Ehrhart 1993):

- (25) a. meso pou per (*Ehrhart* 1993: 149)
 house for priest
 ‘the priest’s house’
- b. petit pu chef (ibd.: 231)
 child for chief
 ‘the Chief’s daughter’
- c. lafime pu dife (ibd.: 231)
 smoke for fire
 ‘the smoke of the fire’
- d. dife pu fam -la (ibd.: 232)
 fire for woman DEF
 ‘the woman’s fire’

Similar examples can be found in Corne (1995 and 1999), including with pronominals:

¹⁸ Such as Australian Kriol, Grenada Creole English, Krio, Ndyuka, Sranan, Vincentian.

- (26) a. tet pu purp (Corne 1995: 127)
 head for octopus
 ‘the head of the octopus’
- b. mwaniche pu tule peti -la (ibid.: 45, f. n. 9)¹⁹
 food for PL child DEF
 ‘the children’s food’
- c. tule meson¹ pu lesot (ibid.: 30)
 PL house for POSS.3.PL
 ‘their houses’
- d. latribi pu nu (Corne 1999: 30)
 tribe for 1.PL
 ‘our tribe’

Another French-lexifier creole which employs this construction, although only marginally,²⁰ is Louisiana Creole:

- (27) Piti pu mo neve (Neumann 1985: 160)
 child for 1.SG nephew
 ‘My nephew’s child’

In 19th century Mauritian Creole *pou* also occurs in other possessive constructions. As mentioned by Chaudenson (1981: 228), “*pou* is especially used in early Mauritian to mark possession”, in the *belong*-construction:

- (28) a. c’ella qui première [...] li pour moi (Chrestien 1822: 16)
 DEM REL first 3.SG for 1.SG
 ‘the first one is mine’
- b. Zotre tou répondé: pour Moucié Caraba ça! (de la Butte 1850: 3)
 3.PL all answer for Mister Caraba
 ‘They all answered: this is Mr Caraba’s!’
- c. Ça robe là pour Zanne. (Baissac 1880: 73)
 DEM dress DEF for Zanne
 ‘This dress is Zanne’s.’

The preposition *pou* is also used in conjunction with the question word ‘who’, to form *wh*-possessors:

- (29) pour qui sa maille là? [1850] (Chaudenson 1981: 123)
 for QW DEM corn DEF
 ‘whose corn is it?’

In addition, *pou* is the mark of pronominal possession. As already noted by Baissac (1880: 19), “the Creole develops *le mien*, *le tien*, into *ça qui pour moi*, *ça qui pour toi*, or, shorter, *pour moi*, *pour toi*”. Consider the examples below:

¹⁹ Corne (1999: 45, f. n. 9) explicitly refers to “**pu** as the Tayo possessive connector”.

²⁰ Ingrid Neumann-Holzschuh (personal communication, October 2014).

- (30) a. Zouli couman pour vou [1850] (Chaudenson 1981: 123)
 nice as for 2.SG
 ‘as nice as yours’
- b. Mo lacase vaut mié qui ça qui pour vous.
 POSS.1.S house be worth better than DEM REL for 2.PL
 G
 ‘My house is worth more than yours.’ (Baissac 1880: 19)
- c. Pour moi plis vaut mié qui pour toi (ibid.: 76)
 for 1.SG more be worth better than for 2.SG
 ‘Mine is worth more than yours.’

According to Chaudenson (1981: 228), the uses illustrated in (28) and (29) are “the origin of the formation of possessive pronouns in Mauritian”. Indeed, the “long” variants, e. g. *ça qui pour vous* ‘yours’ in (30b), are actually belong-constructions.

According to Chaudenson (1981: 228), the use of *pou* in such structures is due to the fact that the French preposition *à* is not preserved in Mauritian Creole.²¹ As is well known, the uses of the preposition *à* in French include various possessive constructions. These include attributive possession structures with nominals (full NPs) (31a) and with pronominals (31b), possessor doubling constructions with nominals (full NPs) (31c) and with pronominals (31d), *belong*-constructions (31e), and *wh*-possessors (31f):

²¹ As in other French Creoles, see Goodman (1964: 54).

- (31) a. la voiture à Jean
 DEF car to Jean
 ‘John’s car’
- b. cette voiture à moi
 DEM car to me
 ‘this house of mine’
- c. son ami à Jean
 POSS.3.SG friend to Jean
 ‘Jean’s friend’
- d. ton ami à toi
 POSS.2.SG friend to 2.SG
 ‘my friend’
- e. Ceci est à moi.
 DEM is to 1.SG
 ‘This is mine.’
- f. À qui sont ces gants?
 to QW are DEM-PL gloves
 ‘Whose gloves are these?’

Baissac (1880: 75) writes that *à* only exists in a few what he calls “compositions adverbiales”, such as “*àcote*, where; *àçthère*, now”. Similarly, Guillemin (2009: 129–130) states that in early Mauritian Creole “the preposition *à* is found only in fixed expressions, e. g. *jusqu’ à* ‘until’, *à bord* ‘on board’” and that such expressions “become one morpheme” – *ziska* and *abor* respectively – in the modern variety. In fact, there is at least one occurrence of the preposition *à* in an early 19th century source. Significantly, *à* is recorded in an attributive possession construction:

- (32) moi venir voir femme à moi [1802] (Milbert 1812: 271)
 1.SG come see woman to 1.SG
 ‘I have come to see my wife’

Since the French-derived preposition *à* is not preserved in Mauritian Creole, *pou* takes over the uses in French of the preposition *à* in possessive constructions. Circumstantial evidence is provided by the fact that in some French-lexifier creoles a reflex of this preposition functions as a marker of attributive possession, both with nominals (full NPs) and with pronominals. One such variety is Guadeloupe Creole:

- (33) a. timun -a- Pyè (Corne 1999: 131)
 child to Pyè
 ‘Pyè’s child’
- b. timun -a- mwen (ibd.)
 child to 1.SG
 ‘my child’

Consider next the situation in modern Mauritian Creole. According to Guillemin (2009: 130), *a* is found in “relatively modern MC [= Mauritian Creole] texts”, particularly in written Creole, which is presumably an effect of decreolization.²² Crucially, even in such texts the preposition *à* “is never used in possessive constructions” (Guillemin 2009: 130). Consequently, unlike in French, the following possessive structure, for instance, is ungrammatical:

- (34) *Loto a Pol (Guillemin 2009: 130)
 car to Pol
 ‘Pol’s car’

In the modern variety of Mauritian Creole, *pou* occurs only in possessive constructions other than attributive possessive ones, such as in the forms of possessive pronouns:²³

- (35) (sa ki) pu twa (Stein 1984: 64)
 DEM REL for 2.SG
 ‘yours’

Note, here again, that the “long” variant *sa ki pu twa*, literally “that which is yours”, is actually a *belong*-construction, which, as mentioned above, is believed to be the source from which possessive pronouns were formed in Mauritian Creole.

Summing up, 19th century Mauritian Creole employs *pou* in five possessive constructions. The chronology, based on textual evidence, of the possessive constructions with *pou* attested in 19th century Mauritian Creole is set out in Table 2:

Possessive construction	First attestation
attributive possession with nominals (full NPs)	1805
attributive possession with pronominals	1839
<i>belong</i> -construction	1850
<i>wh</i> -possessor	1850
possessive pronoun	1850

Table 2: Possessive constructions with *pou* in 19th century Mauritian Creole

Note that *pou* is first attested in the attributive possession construction with nominals (full NPs). The use of the preposition *pou* in 19th century Mauritian Creole in attributive possession structures is not surprising. As already mentioned, such constructions are widespread in many languages. Furthermore, reflexes of the French preposition *pour* are found in attributive possession structures in other French-lexifier creoles. The various uses of *pu* in 19th century Mauritian Creole possessive structures confirm Heine’s (1997a: 95) claim that the Goal Schema is a common source for both attributive possession and *belong*-constructions.

The data discussed so far show that 19th century Mauritian Creole exhibits four types of attributive possession constructions:

²² See Mahadeo (1981: 87–88) on decreolization reflected in the use of prepositions borrowed from French.

²³ See Goodman (1964: 55), Goodman et al. (1971: 44–46, 50), Vintilă-Rădulescu (2003: 200, 202).

Type	Constituents and order of constituents
analytic	[possessed + possessor]
synthetic	[possessor + <i>his</i> + possessed]
poss-initial	[<i>his</i> + possessed + possessor]
with <i>for</i>	[possessed + <i>for</i> + possessor]

Table 3: Types of attributive possession constructions

What is striking is the fact that the now extinct type with *for* is more frequently attested in 19th century Mauritian Creole than the synthetic one. As shown in this section, there are nine occurrences of the [possessed + *for* + possessor] pattern with nominals (full NPs), and four more with pronominals; these are recorded in seven sources. On the other hand, as seen in the preceding section, there are only three attestations of the [possessor + *his* + possessed] construction, in just two sources.

The distribution in specific historical periods of the attributive possessive structures of Mauritian Creole, strictly on the basis of their attestations,²⁴ is set out below:

Period				
	analytic	synthetic	poss-initial	with <i>for</i>
1805–1850	+	–	–	+
1850–1855	+	–	+	+
1855–1885	+	+	+	+
1885–1925	+	+	+	–
after 1925	+	+	–	–

Table 4: Distribution of attributive possessive structures in Mauritian Creole

The analytic type is first attested relatively early. This is to be expected since, as put by Guillemain (2009: 131), these “genitive constructions without a preposition have always been grammatical in MC [= Mauritian Creole]”.²⁵ Rather surprisingly, perhaps, the hitherto unnoticed attributive possession construction with *for* is first attested equally early. Until about the half of the 19th century these two structures appear to have been the only means available in Mauritian Creole for expressing attributive possession. Two patterns, the poss-initial and the one with *for*, are no longer in use: while the former survived into the early decades of the 20th century the latter fell out of use towards the end of the 19th century. Finally, the synthetic type – although the last one to emerge – not only still survives, but, on some accounts, appears to

²⁴ Keeping in mind Baker’s (1997: 93) caveat that “old text are not an accurate guide to when features first appeared in the spoken language” because, obviously, “features must generally have become established in the spoken language before their first appearance in a text”.

²⁵ The earliest record dates from 1734, an “example of what appears to be pidginized French” (Baker/Corne 1986: 69). No attributive possession constructions are attested in any of the eight 18th century texts (see Chaudenson 1981: 77–78, *Textes créoles anciens* n. d.).

be the most widespread attributive possession structure in the modern variety of Mauritian Creole.

4 Mauritian Creole and Seychelles Creole

Consider next the situation in Seychelles Creole (cf. Bollée 1977, Corne 1977, Chapuis 2007: 349, Michaelis/Rosalie 2013). This is a variety closely related to Mauritian Creole, of which it is an offshoot, having evolved independently starting with the year 1770.

The most frequently attested type of attributive possessive construction is the analytic one, i. e. [possessed + possessor], “with the possessor showing no marking” (Michaelis/Rosalie 2013):

- (36) a. zistwar Sesel (Bollée 1977: 46)
 history Seychelles
 ‘the history of the Seychelles’
- b. vât Sûgula (Corne 1977: 27)
 belly Sounougoula
 ‘Sounougoula’s belly’

Two other patterns are found. They both use the possessive determiner *so/sõ*, with respect to which Bollée (1977: 42) writes that “the usage of the possessive in the Creole deviates in several respects from French usage”. One is the synthetic type,²⁶ i. e. [possessor + *his* + possessed], in which “the possessor indexed on the head noun via the adnominal possessive determiner” (Michaelis/Rosalie 2013):

- (37) a. mo papa so lakaz (Corne 1977: 27)
 POSS.1SG father POSS.3.SG house
 ‘my father’s house’
- b. Sûgula sõ vât (Bollée 1977: 42)
 Sounougoula POSS.3.SG belly
 ‘Sounougoula’s belly’
- c. sa lisjê tu sõ ledã (ibid.: 164)
 DEM dog all POSS.3.SG tooth
 ‘all the dog’s teeth’

According to e. g. Corne (1986: 167) and Sycia (1995: 185, 2013: 38) this type is rare in Seychelles Creole.

The poss-initial type, i. e. [*his* + possessed + possessor] also occurs, in which “the possessive determiner is not adjacent to the relevant noun, but “climbs” up the first noun in the nominal phrase” (Michaelis/Rosalie 2013):

²⁶ For the differences between the synthetic type in Mauritian Creole and Seychelles Creole, which are beyond the scope of the present paper, see Corne (1986: 167) and Sycia (1995: 185, 2013: 27).

- (38) a. sô pos palto (Corne 1977: 27)
 POSS.3.SG pocket coat
 ‘the pocket of his coat’
- b. sô met lakur (Bollée 1977: 42)
 POSS.3.SG master house
 ‘the master of the house’
- c. sô nō sa solda (ibd.)
 POSS.3.SG name DEM soldier
 ‘this soldier’s name’

Unlike Mauritian Creole, the type with *for*, i. e. [possessed + *for* + possessor], is not attested in Seychelles Creole. It cannot occur with two nominals (full NPs). As for structures consisting of a nominal (full NP) and a possessive determiner, the preposition *pur* can be used “for emphasis” (Corne 1997: 49), i. e. “to emphasize possession” (Chapuis 2007: 350). In such cases, the possessed NP is preceded by a possessive determiner and followed by *pur* and a pronominal. Consider the example below:

- (39) eski u n uar u ser pur u? (Corne 1977: 49)
 QP 2.SG COMPL see POSS.2.SG sister for 2.SG
 lit. ‘did you see your sister of yours?’ [= ‘did you see your sister?’]

This usage is a reflex of the French possessor doubling construction, illustrated in (31d). Note that unless the possessive determiner and the possessive pronoun co-occur, the sentence below, as an alternative to (39), is ungrammatical:

- (40) *eski u n uar ser pur u?
 QP 2.SG COMPL see sister for POSS 2.SG
 ‘did you see your sister?’

As in Mauritian Creole, the preposition *pur* ‘for’ is found in several other possessive constructions. For instance, “pronominal possession is marked by *pur* + NP” (Corne 1977: 49). Bollée (1977: 53) writes that “(sa ki) pu mwa, pu u, etc.” correspond to French ‘le mien, le tien, etc.’ In other words, *pur* occurs in the forms of possessive pronouns (see also Chapuis 2007: 350), optionally preceded, as in Mauritian Creole, by *sa ki*:

- (41) a. tu pur mua (Corne 1977: 49)
 all for 1.SG
 ‘all mine’
- b. lev pur u! (ibd.)
 lift for 2.SG
 ‘all mine’
- c. mō napa dā sa ki pu mwa (Bollée 1977: 53)
 1.SG not-have in DEM REL for 1.SG
 ‘I don’t have [them] in mine’
- d. pli ěportā ki pu sō kamarad (ibd.)
 more important than for POSS.3.SG friend
 ‘more important than that of the others’

The preposition *pur* also occurs together with the question word *ki* ‘who’ to form the *wh*-possessor *pur ki* ‘whose’:

- (42) u lisiē pur ki, u? (Corne 1977: 188)
 2.SG dog for QW 2.SG
 lit. ‘you are whose dog’ [= ‘who the hell do you think you are?’]

The existence both in Mauritian Creole and in Seychelles Creole of the analytic type is not surprising. It represents a case of what Heine and Kuteva (2001: 15) call “retention”. As put by Guillemin (2009: 310) about Mauritian Creole, this type “is derived from French, minus the preposition *de*”. The French preposition *de* has not survived in the two creoles at issue,²⁷ which do, however, preserve the order in which the possessed NP and the possessor NP occur in the lexifier language.

The fact that the synthetic type is also found both in Mauritian Creole and in Seychelles Creole is not surprising either. This attributive possession structure instantiates what Heine (1997a: 96, Heine 2001: 317) and Heine and Kuteva (2001: 16–17) call “Topic Schema”. This accords with similar views expressed in the literature on Mauritian Creole and respectively Seychelles Creole. Guillemin (2009: 134), for instance, writes that “the modern MC [= Mauritian Creole] genitive with a possessive adjective is a Topic-Possessive structure”. As for Seychelles Creole, Corne (1986: 167) considers this structure a form of topicalization. Heine and Kuteva (2001) show that this schema is implemented in a number of creoles, with various lexifier languages and spoken in various geographical areas.²⁸ It is therefore conceivable that the synthetic type of attributive possession structure may have emerged independently in Mauritian Creole and in Seychelles Creole. Also, both creoles have French as their lexifier, which makes frequent use of topic structures in colloquial speech (see e. g. Chaudenson 1990, 2003):

²⁷ As in other French-lexifier creoles, see (Goodman 1964: 54).

²⁸ See also Holm (2000: 219).

- (43) Jean, son papa, il est malade (Chaudenson 2003: 140)
 Jean POSS.3.SG father 3.SG is ill
 ‘Jean’s father is ill.’

As shown by Chaudenson (1990, 2003), spoken French exhibits even recursive topic structures. Consider the example below:

- (44) Ma sœur, son copain, son
 POSS.1.SG sister POSS.3.SG friend POSS.3.SG
 anniversaire, c’est en mai. (Chaudenson 1990: 82)
 anniversary it is in May
 ‘My sister’s friend’s anniversary is in May.’

Similarly, such topic structures are recursive in Mauritian Creole and in Seychelles Creole. Consider the following example from Mauritian Creole:

- (45) Kolo so madam so nom
 Kolo POSS.3.SG wife POSS.3.SG name
 enn nom angle (Guillemin 2009: 318)
 INDEF name English
 ‘Kolo’s wife’s name is an English name.’

On the other hand, as already mentioned, the synthetic type is quite common, possibly the most frequent, in Mauritian Creole, whereas it is rare in Seychelles Creole. This significant difference in the frequency of occurrence of the synthetic type can only be explained with reference to an important difference between Mauritius and the Seychelles in terms of the socio-linguistic situation. Beginning with 1835, large numbers of indentured labourers and their families arrived in Mauritius (Holm 1989: 398, Syea 1995: 183), whereas in Seychelles there was no importation of indentured workers from India (Holm 1989: 402, Syea 1995: 1985). As a consequence, while at present Mauritians of Indian descent make up “two thirds of the island’s population” (Holm 1989: 398), in the Seychelles “the population includes few Indians” (Holm 1989: 402). The languages spoken by the Indian immigrants in Mauritius included both Indo-European (Indic) languages – Bhojpuri, Gujarati, Hindi and Marathi – and Dravidian languages – Tamil and Telugu.²⁹ Regardless of their genetic affiliation, all these languages are typologically head-final languages and have attributive possession structures in which the possessor precedes the possessed (a typical syntactic correlate of the OV word order). These attributive possession constructions are superficially similar to the synthetic type attested in Mauritian, from which, however, they also differ in several respects (Syea 1995: 183–184, 2013: 23). For instance, in Hindi the possessive morpheme shows number and gender agreement:

²⁹ According to Holm (1989: 398), Mauritians of Indian descent “have retained a number of their ancestral languages for use within their community”.

- (46) a. Raam kii larki (Syea 2013: 23)
 Raam POSS daughter
 ‘Ram’s daughter’
- b. Vikram kā son
 Vikram POSS 2.SG
 ‘Vikram’s son’
- c. Vikram ke larke (Syea 1995: 184)
 Vikram POSS son-PL
 ‘Vikram’s sons’

Moreover, the Hindi possessive marker agrees with the possessed NP, i. e. with the NP to its right, whereas in Mauritian *so(n)* agrees with the possessor NP, i. e. with the NP to its left. On the other hand, unlike Mauritian Creole, the possessive marker in Bhojpuri exhibits no agreement:

- (47) a. baraa beeta ke ghar (Syea 2013: 23)
 elder son POSS house
 ‘the elder son’s house’
- b. tor burhia ke hāl (Corne 1986: 162)
 POSS.2.SG wife POSS condition
 ‘your wife’s health’

Syea (2013: 38) suggests that in spite of differences such as the ones illustrated above, the synthetic type “may have been preferred [...] by the Indian immigrants, given its superficial similarities to the genitives in their native languages”. These similarities have led Corne (1986: 162) to the conclusion that the synthetic type of Mauritian Creole has its origins in the languages of the Indian immigrants, in particular Bhojpuri and Hindi. However, several facts speak against such a scenario. The Topic Schema, as already mentioned, develops into attributive possession constructions in other creoles, which cannot be traced back to any substrate or adstrate influences. Also, as shown by Syea (1995: 184), given that the synthetic type is first attested in Mauritian Creole in 1855, it is rather implausible to assume that some 20 years only after the beginning of their immigration to Mauritius speakers of Indian languages would have already impacted on this particular aspect of the syntax of Mauritian Creole. Moreover, this would not explain why, on currently available textual evidence, there are only a total of three occurrences of this type of attributive possession construction in 19th century Mauritian Creole. On the contrary, it seems more reasonable to assume that a possible influence of the adstrate languages spoken by the Indian immigrants may have made itself felt only later, long after the emergence of the synthetic type. This tallies with the significant increase, beginning with the 20th century, in its frequency of occurrence, to the point of possibly being the most widespread type of attributive possession construction in modern Mauritian Creole. To sum up, the subsequent influence of the adstrate languages spoken by Indian immigrants in Mauritius provides a plausible explanation for the difference in the frequency of occurrence of

the synthetic type in modern Mauritian Creole as opposed to modern Seychelles Creole, for which no similar adstrate influence can be invoked.³⁰

Consider next the rather different situation in the case of the poss-initial type. This is an instantiation of what Heine (1997b: 148) and Heine and Kuteva (2001: 18–19) call “anti-Topic Schema”. This conceptual schema is only rarely a source for attributive possessive structures. More recently, Sycia (2013: 37) derives the poss-initial type in 19th century Mauritian Creole from “such [French] possessor doubling possessive constructions as *son père à lui* (lit. his father to him)”. Whatever the right account may turn out to be, the fact remains that of the pidgin and creole languages examined by Heine and Kuteva (2001), the poss-initial is attested in only two: Mauritian Creole and Seychelles Creole. Since this type is rare, it is unlikely that its occurrence is the outcome of independent developments in the two creoles. Rather, it is more plausible to assume that it must have existed in Mauritian Creole prior to 1770, the date after which this variety and Seychelles Creole evolve separately. This could account for the attestation of this type of attributive possessive structure in both creoles. While Mauritian Creole has lost the poss-initial attributive possessive construction, this continues to be used, although infrequently, in the modern variety of Seychelles Creole.

Finally, the attributive possessive construction with *pou* ‘for’ appears to be an independent evolution in 19th century Mauritian Creole.

5 Conclusions

19th century Mauritian Creole has been shown to have four types of attributive possession structures. As shown by Heine and Kuteva (2001: 24), “that a given language should have more than one type [of] attributive possession does not seem exceptional, however, in creoles this [...] is the rule”. On their view, to the attributive possession construction preserved from the lexifier language others are added in the process of creolization, by exploiting the various conceptual schemas which may lead to the grammaticalization of attributive possession. 19th century Mauritian Creole is illustrative of this scenario. To the analytic type, retained from French, three other are added: the synthetic, the poss-initial and the one with *for* respectively.

Variation in different historical periods in the frequency of the patterns expressing attributive possession in Mauritian Creole also reflects the contribution of the languages in the adstratal input. Even if the equivalent attributive possession structures in the adstrate languages of the Indian immigrants are not identical to the synthetic type of Mauritian Creole, the former appear to have contributed to reinforcing its use in the latter.³¹

The existence of several attributive possession structures is a further confirmation of the claim that creoles “germinate several options” (Aitchison 1996: 147), even in the same historical period, some of which are preserved, whereas others end up being lost. A similar point is made by Sycia (2013: 38), who writes that “old and new structures compete against each other until one gives way”. As put, again, by Sycia (2013: 38), “this kind of competition between old and new structures is of course not exclusive to the development of creole languages”. In

³⁰ See also Sycia (2013: 38), who attributes the significantly higher frequency in Mauritian Creole of the synthetic type to “some kind of convergence with the genitives of the Indian immigrants”.

³¹ For a discussion of language contact and variation in possessive constructions see McConvell (2005).

the case of Mauritian Creole, the only type of attributive possession structure attested throughout its history is the analytic one, which retains the order of the possessed NP and of the possessor NP in French, its lexifier language. On the other hand, two of the types of attributive possessive construction recorded in the 19th century are no longer in use today: the poss-initial and the one with *pou* respectively. One question which might be asked is: why did these two particular types lose out to their competitors, i. e. the analytic and the synthetic type respectively?. As in other cases of language change leading to the loss of previously attested structures, it is difficult to answer such a question. An admittedly speculative account might run as follows. In three of the types of attributive possession construction, i. e. the analytic, with *for* and the poss-initial one, the order is identical, with the possessed NP preceding the possessor NP: [possessed + possessor], [possessed + *for* + possessor] and [*his* + possessed + possessor]. In other words, there was a competition between three types with the same ordering of the possessed and of the possessor NPs. Of these types only the analytic one has survived, presumably because, unlike the other two, it is retained from French “minus the preposition *de*”, to use Guillemin’s (2009: 132) formulation, being therefore the longest established type, and also the most frequent one, hence unmarked.³² The type with *for* is not an instance of retention, it replaces with *pou* the preposition *à* in the original French construction, which is less common than its counterpart with *de*. The poss-initial type is possibly modelled on a less frequent French possessor doubling construction with *à*. According to Syea (2013: 37), possessor doubling structures “would have constituted an ideal way of expressing possession in a contact situation”, given the fact that “their use has a functional motivation – they provide emphasis through doubling the possessor”. In principle, then, the poss-initial type modelled on such constructions would have also been ideal in a contact situation. However, if or once there is no more need to “provide emphasis”, such constructions would have used up their utility. Also, given the fate of the preposition *à* in Mauritian Creole, the possessor has never been overtly marked twice in the poss-initial type. Consider, finally, the synthetic type, which has survived and which is reported to be quite frequent. Possibly also influenced by similar topic structures in colloquial French, this is the only one with the reverse order, i. e. the possessor NP precedes the possessed NP. In this respect it has not faced competition from any of the other three types of attributive possession construction. It has also had the additional advantage of being reinforced by the similar attributive possession structure attested in the adstrate languages spoken by Mauritians of Indian descent.

The findings also confirm the importance of the historical study of pidgin and creole languages. This “provides [...] evidence which attests to the existence, previously not suspected, of certain features in the older stages of pidgins and creoles” (Avram 2005: 245). A case in point is the occurrence of the attributive possessive construction with *pou* in Mauritian Creole, between 1805 and 1885.

Also, the claim put forth by, among others, Mufwene (1991: 29), that “creole structures have barely changed since their formation” is disconfirmed. On the contrary, as stated by Baker (1995: 6), “wherever early Creole texts exist, they show that the languages in question subsequently changed a great deal”. The loss of both the poss-initial type and of the one with *pou*

³² Cf. the similar explanation suggested by Syea (2013: 22) for the rarity of the synthetic type in Seychelles Creole, which “had to compete with the long-established unmarked” analytic type.

confirms the fact that creole languages can undergo significant changes in their evolution. Crucially, such changes are not necessarily the result of decreolization.

Last but not least, this analysis of the attributive possession structures in 19th century Mauritian Creole can be taken as being an argument in support of the so-called “gradualist” views of creolization. Although there are several versions,³³ known under various names, such as the “Gradualist Model” of creolization (Carden/Stewart 1988, Arends 1993) or the “Gradual Creolization Hypothesis” (McWhorter 1992), they all share the basic claim that the process of creolization is gradual and it extends over a number of generations of speakers. Baker (1997) has already shown, on the basis of the first attestations of 42 features of Mauritian Creole, that this language has developed slowly, for about 150 years: some of these features are only recorded after 1888. The development of attributive possession structures in Mauritian Creole appears to have been equally slow. Indeed, currently available data suggest that it is also only after 1888 that the two types found in the modern variety of Mauritian Creole have become definitively entrenched.

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³³ See e.g. Arends/Bruyn (1995) for an overview.

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