Absence of syntactic passive in creoles: Evidence from French-based Mauritian Creole

ANAND SYEA

University of Westminster
syeaa@westminster.ac.uk

Abstract

This article examines passive-type constructions in Mauritian Creole, arguing that they are topic, not passive constructions. I claim that their initial argument (the displaced object) occupies the specifier position of a Topic Phrase, not the structural subject position. This proposal is motivated by the fact that nothing at the surface identifies the displaced object as a grammatical subject, except its position relative to an auxiliary or verb. The topic analysis is supported by both semantic restrictions relating to specificity and animacy and syntactic restrictions relating to distribution (word order) and coordination. It is also supported by the fact that these same restrictions do not apply in unaccusatives, a structurally similar type of construction. The important contribution of this article is that passive-type constructions in Mauritian Creole are 'apparent' rather 'real' passives, with the wider implication being that creoles, like many languages, do not use canonical passives to express passive meaning.

Keywords: Passive, Transitive OV constructions, theme topic, topicalization, unaccusative

Résumé

Cet article examine les constructions de type passif en créole mauricien, en soutenant qu'il s'agit de constructions topicales et non passives. Je soutiens que leur argument initial (l'objet déplacé) occupe la position de spécifieur d'un syntagme du topique (TopP), et non la position de sujet structurel. Cette proposition est motivée par le fait que rien à la surface n'identifie l'objet déplacé comme étant un sujet grammatical, à l'exception de sa position relative à un auxiliaire ou à un verbe. L'analyse du sujet est soutenue par des restrictions sémantiques relatives à la spécificité et à la catégorie animé/inanimé ainsi que par des restrictions syntaxiques relatives à la distribution (ordre des mots) et à la coordination. Elle est également étayée par le fait que ces mêmes restrictions ne s'appliquent pas aux verbes inaccusatifs, un type de construction structurellement similaire. La contribution importante de cet article est que les constructions de type passif en créole mauricien sont des passives « apparentes » plutôt que des passives « réelles », impliquant que les créoles, comme beaucoup de langues, n'utilisent pas les passives canoniques pour exprimer le sens passif.

Mots-clés: Passifs, constructions OV transitives, thème, topicalisation, inaccusatifs

1. INTRODUCTION

In the absence of analogues of European passive markers in creole languages, creole O-(Aux)-V constructions, where V is transitive, can present an interesting analytic dilemma.[1] Although the O (object) is readily interpreted as the complement of the verb, its surface syntactic position is nevertheless far from obvious because theoretically, there are two structural positions that can host it. One is the structural subject position (a core argument position), the other a topic position (a clause-peripheral non-argument position). If the object occupies the former position, then, within the framework of transformational generative grammar (Chomsky 1981, for instance), it is said to have moved there as a result of passivization (an instance of A-movement), whereas if it occupies the latter position, it is said to have moved there via topicalization (an instance of A-bar movement). On the former assumption, the O-(Aux)-V structure is effectively passive, on the latter it is a topic construction. Notwithstanding this potential structural ambiguity, a number of studies (see e.g. Corne 1977, 1981; Winford 1993; LaCharité and Wellington 1999; Veenstra 2004; DeGraff 2007; and Velupillai 2015, among others) have suggested that these constructions are passive, thus challenging the traditional claim that creoles lack passive (see, for instance, Baissac 1880, Valdman 1978, Bickerton 1981, and Holm 1988, among others). This paper, however, explores an alternative to the passive analysis and argues that the displaced theme object is in topic, not subject, position. Such a proposal is of course controversial, but it cannot be dismissed *a priori*, for nothing on the surface suggests that the initial theme argument must be a grammatical subject, except its surface position relative to the auxiliary (tense, mood, aspect markers) and verb. The usual markers of subject (e.g., agreement inflection on auxiliary or verb and case inflection on subject pronoun) have not been retained in creoles, although a few rare occurrences have been noted.[2] In support of the topic analysis, I examine passive-type (henceforth transitive OV) constructions in French-based Mauritian Creole.[3] I argue that there are certain semantic restrictions

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[1]The following abbreviatons are used: ACC (accusative), AspP (Aspectual Phrase), Aux (auxiliary), DEF (definite), DEM (demonstrative), FinP (Finite Phrase), FocP (Focus Phrase), FUT (future), INDF (indefinite), INFL (inflection), IP (Inflectional Phrase), LOC (locative), NEG (negative), NOM (nominative), O (object), PASS (passive), PL (plural), POSS (possessive), PRF (perfect), PROG (progressive), PST (past), RecP (reciprocal), REL (relative), SG (singular), TOP (topic), TopP (Topic Phrase), TP (Tense Phrase), V (verb).

[2]Examples with weak/nominative form of theme subject pronoun do occur in Mauritian and Seychelles Creole but are limited to a few verbs (e.g., *invite* 'invite', *peye* 'pay' but not *apele* 'call', *apre* 'chase' and so on).

(i) mo   (ti)   invite   sa   fet   la   (ii) *to   (ti)   apele   minister
    1SG   PST   invite   DEM   festival DEF   2SG   PST   call   ministry
    'I was invited to that festival.'   'You were called to the ministry.'

[3]Corne (1981) provides an early analysis of such constructions in terms of phrase structure rules. Crucially, he takes passive verbs to be adjectives derived from verbs because they fail to drop their verb-final vowel. However, the loss of this vowel, as argued in Syea (1992), is a structural, not lexical, matter.

on the displaced object to do with specificity (definiteness) and animacy and certain syntactic restrictions to do with distribution (word order) and coordination that can be accounted for relatively straightforwardly if the displaced object is analyzed as a theme topic rather than a nominative subject.

In proposing a topic analysis of transitive OV constructions in Mauritian Creole, this paper suggests that passivization may be an option that creole languages generally tend to avoid when foregrounding the object of a transitive verb, partly because, in the absence of a detransitivizing (passive) morpheme, it often results in structures with processing difficulties, particularly if the object is animate, and partly because other strategies for expressing a passive meaning such as suppressing the subject of active sentences or using verbs of reception like English *get* may have been available in the input (see Keenan and Dryer 2007 for discussion of such strategies). Cases of true passives, including those with a *by*-phrase, are consequently thought to be rare and restricted to acrolectal varieties (i.e., those strongly influenced by their lexifiers) (Bickerton 1981) and, surprisingly, to earlier stages of creoles.[4] As a consequence, the application of A-movement in creoles may be said to be generally restricted to unaccusative and raising constructions.[5]

The rest of the article is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a brief theoretical background by outlining the analysis of passive and topic constructions in English within the framework of transformational generative grammar (Chomsky 1981, Burzio 1986, Rizzi 1997, among others). Section 3 presents examples of transitive OV constructions from a few creoles and briefly reviews the passive analysis outlined in LaCharité and Wellington (1999) before outlining an alternative topic analysis. Using data from Mauritian Creole, section 4 examines the semantic and syntactic restrictions on the initial theme argument in these constructions and demonstrates that they follow naturally on the hypothesis that this argument is in topic, not subject, position. Section 5 provides further evidence for this analysis based on syntactic restrictions relating to phenomena such as word order restrictions on the fronted object and coordination. Section 6 considers the implication of such an approach to transitive OV constructions for creole grammars, and section 7 concludes the discussion.

2. PASSIVE AND TOPIC CONSTRUCTIONS IN ENGLISH

Syntactic (canonical) passives in a language such as English or French surface in two different forms. They are either long, as illustrated by (1a) from English and (2a) from

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[4]Baissac (1880: 42) for instance has the following example:

Tout	lanouite	mo	disang	té	manzé	av	pinézes
All	night	1SG.POSS	blood	PST	eat	by	bedbugs

'I was bitten by bedbugs all night.'

[5]This traditional view is challenged by the list of creoles reported to have passive constructions by APiCS (Michaelis et al., 2013), but whether all of these are 'real' or 'apparent' passive remains an open question for now.

French, or short, as illustrated by (1b) and (2b) from English and French respectively. The difference lies in whether they use a *by*-phrase or not:

(1) a. The car was repaired by John.

   b. The car was repaired.

(2) a. La voiture a été réparée par Jean.
      'The car was repaired by John.'

   b. La voiture a été réparée.
      'The car was repaired.'

One property of passive constructions is that their surface theme subject is understood as the logical object of the verb. This is clear from the fact that the object position left empty after the object has been displaced cannot be filled by another theme NP. Examples such as (3a) and (3b) are therefore unintelligible or ungrammatical since they violate the principle of Full Interpretation (Chomsky 1986) or the Case Filter (Chomsky 1981).

(3) a. * The car was repaired the bus (by John)

   b. * La voiture a été réparée l'autobus (par Jean)
      'The car was repaired the bus (by John).'

A second property of passive constructions is that their verb is morphologically inflected with a passive participle form *-en/-ed* in English (e.g., stol-*en*, writt-*en*, repair-*ed*, and so on) and *é* in French (e.g., lav-*é* 'washed', répar-*é* 'repaired', donn-*é* 'given', and so on). A third property, related to the second one, is that they have an auxiliary, *be* in English and *être* 'to be' in French, that accompanies the passive participle suffix on the verb, thus displaying a periphrastic passive form. In many languages, however, an auxiliary is not used, and the passive form is signalled by morphology alone. In other words, they have what Keenan and Dryer (2007: 7) call "strict morphological passives". A further property is that they may have an optional agent *by*-phrase. Whenever this agent *by*-phrase is not present, as in short passives, an agent argument is assumed to be implicitly present (Baker et al. 1989), an assumption that is claimed to be supported by the fact that it can control the null subject of a rationale clause as in *The ship was sunk to collect insurance* and it can occur with a subject-oriented adverb such as *deliberately* as in *The ship was deliberately sunk.*

The analysis of passive within the framework of transformational generative grammar (e.g., Chomsky 1981, Burzio 1986, among others) argues that the displaced theme object in examples like (1) and (2) moves from its canonical object position to a base-generated empty subject position. This movement is necessitated by the fact that the passive verb cannot assign a theta role to its subject and an accusative case to its object. Movement of the object thus takes place in accordance with the Case Filter and the Theta Criterion (Chomsky 1981, Burzio 1986, Jaeggli 1986, Baker et al. 1989) as the moved object NP receives nominative case in the derived subject position but no additional theta role.

As for topic constructions in a language like English, they are also derived by movement of a clause-internal constituent but to a non-argument position on the left periphery of the clause, not the structural subject position. The moved constituent is linked to a gap (_____) in the comment clause, as illustrated in (4):

(4) a. These books, I bought ___ for my daughter

     b. Him, we see _____ everyday at school

In an example like (4a), the fronted object NP *these books* is the topic, and it names an individual (person, object, etc.) already present in the universe of discourse (Kiss 2003: 36). The clause *I bought _____ for my daughter* in that sentence is the comment, and it asserts something about the topic *these books*. The topic NP is linked to the gap (the position from which it has moved) inside the comment. In Rizzi's (1997) Cartographic framework, which we adopt here, when a constituent is topicalized, it targets the specifier of a Topic Phrase (TopP), one of several functional projections on the left periphery. Movement in this case is triggered by a feature (e.g., [+Top]) on the head of TopP and it is in this respect similar to other types of A-bar movement (e.g., *wh*-movement), which are also triggered by some feature on the head of some functional projection. Thus, when a *wh*-phrase moves to form a *wh*-question such as *What will you tell them?* it targets the specifier of Focus Phrase (FocP) on the left periphery, and movement is triggered by the [+Foc] feature on its head. The similarity between topic and *wh*-movement is also illustrated among other things by the fact that they both display similar reconstruction effects for Binding Principle C (Chomsky 1981), as shown in the following:

(5) a. * Mary$_i$ she$_i$ loves ___

     b. * Who$_i$ does she$_i$ love ___ ?

Both these sentences end up violating Binding Principle C when the fronted constituents (R-expressions) are moved back into their original base-generated object position.

With this brief overview of some of the basic properties and derivation of passive and topic constructions in English in mind, let us now turn to consider some examples of transitive OV constructions in creoles. We will, however, focus mainly on such constructions in Mauritian Creole.

3. TRANSITIVE OV CONSTRUCTIONS IN CREOLES

As illustrated below, Mauritian Creole, like other creoles, has sentences which, at the surface, resemble English or French short passives.[6] The initial argument, just like those in (1b) and (2b), is understood as the semantic object of the verb. Such sentences, as noted earlier, have been identified as passive in several studies (see

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[6]See APiCS (Michaelis et al. 2013) for a list of pidgins and creoles which are said to have what have been identified as passive constructions.

Corne 1977, 1981; Winford 1993; LaCharité and Wellington 1999; Veenstra 2004; DeGraff 2007; and Velupillai 2015).[7]

(6)   a. loto   la   finn   met   dan garaz
           car   DEF   PRF put   in   garage
           'The car has been put in the garage.'   (Mauritian Creole)

     b. to   semiz   pe   kud
           2SG.POSS shirt   PROG   sew
           'Your shirt is being sewn.'   (Mauritian Creole)

     c. loto-a   lavé
           car-DEF   wash
           'The car has been washed'   (Guyanese Creole; Damoiseau 2003: 15)

     d. lakou-la/a   balyé
           court-DEF   brush
           'The front court has been brushed.'
                   (Guadeloupe/Martinique Creole; Bernabé 1983: 395)

     e. di   fisi   kóti   kaa
           DEF   fish   cut   already
           'The fish has already been cut.'
                   (Saramaccan; McWhorter and Good 2012: 165)

     f. di   eg-dem   mash
           DEF   egg-PL   mash
           'The eggs have been mashed.'   (Jamaican Creole; Bailey 1966: 81)

     g. di   buk put pan di   tebl
           DEF   book put on   DEF   table
           'The book was put on the table.'
                 (Jamaican Creole; LaCharité and Wellington 1999: 260)

     h. di   leta   rait
           DEF   letter write
           'The letter was written.' (Jamaican Creole; LaCharité and Wellington 1999: 260)

A brief examination of such examples reveals that, unlike their English and French counterparts, they do not have an auxiliary (the equivalent of the English auxiliary *be* or French *être* 'to be') nor a passive participle suffix on the verb.[8]

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[7]The examples from Mauritian Creole in this paper come from the author, who is a native speaker of this language.

[8]Some French-based creoles display short and long verb forms (e.g., *fe/fet* 'do/make' [Haitian, Martinican, Guadeloupean], *pwan/pwi* 'take' [Martinican, Guadeloupean] and *manz/manze* 'eat' [Mauritian Creole]). DeGraff (2007) suggests that the extra segment reflects a grammatical-function change in syntax, while Syea (1992) argues that in Mauritian Creole, the alternation reflects a structural distinction, with the short form used with complements (e.g., *sant/*sante dusman* 'sing quietly') and the long form with adjuncts (e.g., *sante/*sant tulezur* 'sing everyday').

Additionally, they almost never have a *by*-phrase.[9] Constructions with a *by*-phrase, like those in (7), are ungrammatical or rare, and usually restricted to acrolectal varieties (see Bernabé 1983).[10]

(7) a. * loto   la   finn   met   dan   garaz   par   Zan
          car   DEF   PRF   put   in   garage by   John
       'The car has been/was put in the garage by John.'   (Mauritian Creole)

     b. * on   lòt   mèb   ka   fèt   pa   Pyè
          INDF   other   furniture PRF   make   by   Peter
       'Another piece of furniture was made by Peter.'

                                                  (Martinican; Bernabé 1983: 386)

     c. * di   wósu   fèifi   u   mi
          DEF   house   paint   by   1SG
       'The house was painted by me.'

                                        (Saramaccan; McWhorter and Good 2012: 165)

This being so, the only property of English or French short passives that these creole transitive OV constructions possess is a change in the position of the object NP. It precedes rather than follows the verb (and its auxiliary). This change is what lies behind the assertion that creoles have passive (see Winford 1993, LaCharité and Wellington 1999, and DeGraff 2007, among others), and it provides much of the justification for the passive analysis proposed in LaCharité and Wellington (1999) for OV constructions such as (6f–h) in Jamaican Creole. Nevertheless, in the absence of any other kind of clear indicator that the displaced object is in subject position, the possibility of an alternative topic analysis cannot be ruled out. First, we briefly review LaCharité and Wellington's (1999) analysis.

3.1 A passive analysis of transitive OV constructions

Working within Chomsky's (1981) framework, LaCharité and Wellington (1999) argue that constructions like (6f–h) in Jamaican Creole are passive. Their central assumption is that these constructions have a phonologically null, but syntactically active, argumental passive morpheme (the equivalent of English passive *-en*) under INFL. Following previous analyses of passives (see Chomsky 1981, Burzio 1986, Jaeggli 1986, and Baker et al. 1989), they argue that this abstract argument (PASSIVE) 'absorbs' the verb's accusative case and its external theta role. Consequently, the object NP moves into the structural subject position, a case-marked non-theta position, in compliance with the Case Filter (Chomsky and

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[9]Papiamentu exceptionally has periphrastic passives while Fanakalo has a passive verbal inflection (Kouwenberg and Muysken 1994).

[10]This is so in Mauritian Creole even when the *by*-phrase has an indefinite, phonologically heavy or collective agent NP:

*Loto la   ti   met dan garaz par enn madam/madam ki   ti   pe   asiz laba la/ konpagni
 Car DEF PST   put in garage by a   lady/ lady   REL PST PROG sit there DEF/company
 'The car was put in the garage by a woman/ the woman who was sitting there/the company.'

Lasnik 1977) and the Theta Criterion (Chomsky 1981, Burzio 1986). A sentence like (6g) is therefore represented as in (8):

(8) [IP [NP$_i$ di buk] [INFL PASS-en] [VP put t$_i$ pan di tebl]]

This account looks theoretically plausible and is consistent with the principle of Uniformity (Chomsky 2001: 2).[11] Creoles are after all natural languages, and the difference between them and their lexifiers concerning passive lies in the phonological form of the passive argumental morpheme, covert in creoles and overt in their lexifiers.

   Although the analysis of LaCharité and Wellington (1999) seems theoretically well grounded and extendable to similar OV constructions in other creoles, it does nevertheless face some empirical difficulties, particularly when we consider examples similar to (6f–h) in Mauritian Creole. The passive analysis seems particularly problematic when we consider semantic restrictions on the displaced theme object and syntactic restrictions on its position relative to other constituents (e.g., fronted *wh*-phrases and negative adverbial phrases) and its distribution (ability to coordinate with unaccusatives). Such difficulties, as we show, do not arise under the alternative topic analysis. Rather, the semantic properties and syntactic restrictions follow naturally.

3.2   A topic analysis of transitive OV constructions

Following the Cartographic guidelines in Rizzi (1997) and drawing on data mainly from Mauritian Creole, we propose that the displaced theme object in examples like (6 a–b) occupies the specifier of a topic phrase (TopP) and is linked to a topic-gap (trace) in the canonical object position, an instance of topicalization (Ross 1967), as illustrated by (9):

(9) [TopP   OBJ$_i$ TOP [+Top] [FocP [FinP   [pro$_{imp}$] AUX V   t$_i$]]]

The theme object is attracted to the specifier position of TopP by the [+Top] feature on its head. Under this analysis, a structure like (9) is transferred to the interfaces for semantic and phonological interpretation. Importantly, its interpretation at the semantics-discourse interface involves locating some discourse-linked antecedent. Such a search, according to Reinhart (1981), can be construed as an instruction to the hearer to access their mental representation concerning the individual/entity in question, and then add the salient information to the open clause (FinP). A pragmatic 'aboutness' relation (Reinhart 1981) then holds between the topic NP and the open clause (the comment).[12] The comment is then 'about' the topic phrase as it asserts something about it.

   A further assumption concerning the structure in (9) is that the subject position is not empty, as it would be in the case of passive in the underlying structure. Rather, it is filled with an impersonal null pronoun (represented as pro$_{imp}$) functioning as the external argument of an active transitive verb in the open/comment clause. Finite clauses

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[11]The Uniformity hypothesis essentially says that in the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary, assume languages to be uniform, with variety restricted to easily detectable properties of utterances.

[12]The topic in (9) may be identified as the 'Aboutness topic' of Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl (2007).

with an unexpressed impersonal subject and a transitive verb are common in Mauritian Creole, both as independent and complement clauses, and they have a structure similar to that of the open clause in (9) but with the object remaining in situ, as shown in (10):

(10) [FinP [pro$_{imp}$] AUX   V   OBJ]

The following examples illustrate matrix and embedded sentences with unexpressed impersonal subject:

(11) a. ti   donn   bann   zanfan   la   kado
          PST   give   PL   child   DEF   present
          'Someone/They gave the children presents.'

      b. ki   bis   ti   pran   avan   pu   al   lenor?
          what   bus   PST   take   before   for go   North
          'What bus did they/people (used to) take before to go up North?'

(12) a. li   ti   dir [(ki)   ti   donn   bann zanfan la   kado]
          3SG   PST   say   that   PST   give   PL   child   DEF   present
          'S/he said that someone/they gave the children presents.'

      b. to   kone [ki   bis   (ki)   ti   pran   avan   pu   al   lenor]
          2SG   know   which bus   that   PST   take   before   for go   North
          'Do you know which bus they/people used to take/took before to go up North?'

The unexpressed subject in such finite sentences is a non-referential/non-specific pronoun like the indefinite pronoun 'someone' or the impersonal/arbitrary indefinite third person plural pronoun 'they' in English. And, as shown by the glosses in (11b) and (12b), it can also be glossed as an arbitrary indefinite NP, namely 'people'. In this respect, the unexpressed subject in these sentences is similar in its interpretation to the unexpressed subject of impersonal constructions in other languages (e.g., Spanish (Jaeggli 1986), Italian (Cinque 1988), Irish (McCloskey 2007), Lithuanian (Šereikaite 2017), and so on). It is generally construed as some unspecified individual or collective of individuals whose identity is unknown (Siewierska 2010). Additionally, it can have an existential, or, in Cinque's (1988) term, quasi-existential force, which can be attributed to the presence of episodic tense or aspect marking, signalling a specific time reference or a quasi-generic force (Cinque 1988), as in (11b) and (12b), usually in a habitual context, which, in these sentences, is established by the presence of the temporal adverb *avan* 'before'. These are properties that the unexpressed impersonal subject in (11) and (12) shares with impersonal or arbitrary subjects in other languages such as Italian, French, German, Irish, and so on (see McCloskey 2007 and references cited there). Furthermore, since it is restricted to the subject position of finite clauses, it is identifiable with the impersonal subject pronouns in some of the Germanic languages (e.g., *men* in Dutch), which, according to Fenger (2018), are also restricted to a nominative case position, but not with the English impersonal pronoun *one*, which is not restricted in its distribution and has only an inclusive generic reading in contrast to the multiple (existential and generic) reading that the Dutch impersonal *men* has. Given this distributional and interpretational similarity to the impersonal subjects found in some of the Germanic languages (not English), the unexpressed subject in (10) may also be said to share

their structural makeup, which, according to Fenger, is deficient (i.e., lacking a functional layer unlike English *one*), thus lending itself to multiple (i.e., generic and existential) interpretations.

As an impersonal pronoun, the unexpressed subject in examples such as (11) and (12) cannot be anaphorically linked to a referential specific (definite) personal pronoun. Thus, example (13a) is ungrammatical if the unexpressed impersonal subject of the embedded clause is linked to (or bound by) the overt referential personal subject pronoun *zott* 'they' in the main clause. Example (13b) is likewise ungrammatical if the unexpressed impersonal subject in the main clause is linked to the overt referential personal subject *zott* 'they' in the embedded clause. Thus, neither a backward nor a forward anaphoric relation appears possible between an unexpressed non-referential/impersonal subject pronoun and an overt referential personal pronoun even though they share person and number features:

(13) a. zott   dir   [pu   kwi   pwason   dimen]
     3PL   say   FUT   cook   fish   tomorrow
     * 'They$_i$ say that they$_i$ will cook fish tomorrow.'

 b. ti   dir   [zott   pu   manz   diri   tanto]
     PST   say   3PL   FUT   eat   rice   tonight
     * 'They$_i$ say they$_i$ will eat rice tonight.'

This restriction follows naturally since the anaphoric relation is between an unexpressed subject pronoun that is impersonal, non-referential, and indefinite and one that is personal, referential, and definite. Such a restriction, as pointed out by McCloskey (2007: 834–5), also seems to hold between impersonal arbitrary and referential subject pronouns in other languages (e.g., Italian, Irish, and German).

Another observation on the unexpressed subject is that it is not only impersonal but also understood as human. Thus, the meaning of a sentence like (14a) is that a person, not an animal (e.g., a cat), left a (dead) mouse by the dog and the meaning of (14b) is that an implicit human agent, not some non-human or inanimate (e.g., a machine), turned the water off:[13]

(14) a. finn   met   enn   ti   lera   kot   lisyen   la
     PRF   put   a   small   rat   by   dog   DEF
     'Someone/They has/have placed a (dead) mouse near the dog.'

 b. finn   ferm   dilo
     PRF   shut   water
     'Someone/They has/have turned the water supply off.'

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[13]This is supported by the possibility of an agent (human)-oriented adverb like *par ekspre* 'deliberately':

finn ferm dilo par ekspre
PRF shut water by purpose
'Someone has turned the water supply off on purpose/deliberately.'

Interestingly, an inanimate reading of the unexpressed subject is impossible even when an appropriate context is created to facilitate it. Example (15b), for example, is not felicitous when compared to (15a) since the unexpressed subject cannot be construed as referring to cars, vans, and so on:

(15) a. ti   ena   buku   trafik   lor larut e   enn loto ti   tuy plizier dimunn
        PST have much traffic on road and a   car PST kill several people
        'There was a lot of traffic on the road and one car killed several people.'

     b. # ti   ena   buku   trafik   lor larut e   ti   tuy   plizier dimunn
          PST have much traffic on road and PST kill several people
          'There was a lot of traffic on the road and several people were killed.'

This difference highlights the fact that in such impersonal constructions like (11) and (12), a human animate reading of the unexpressed subject persists even when an inanimate causer is pragmatically available in the preceding context. The unexpressed impersonal subject of the constructions in (11) and (12) is therefore identifiable as a human agent, which is thought to be a general characteristic of impersonal constructions (Blevins 2003, Siewierska 2010, Šereikaitė 2017, Legate et al. 2020, among others) – but see McCloskey (2007) for other possibilities in the interpretation of Irish arbitrary subjects.[14]

     A further observation is that the impersonal agent subject, although unexpressed, is syntactically active, unlike the agent in passive, which is syntactically deleted but semantically present as an implicit argument. Looking back at the structure in (9) and (10), the assumption is that the subject is not syntactically missing but simply unexpressed. Using diagnostic tests for the syntactic presence of a subject in subjectless impersonal constructions (see McCloskey 2007, Legate et al. 2020, among others), we show that an unexpressed impersonal subject is indeed syntactically present in structures like (9) or (10).

     One indication of its presence is that an adjunct *by*-phrase, as observed earlier, is impossible. Thus (16a) and (16b) are ungrammatical:

(16) a. * ti   donn bann zanfan la   enn kado   par zott   mama
          PST give   PL   child   DEF a   present by   3PLPOSS mother
          'Someone/They gave the children a present by their mother.'

     b. * mo tande [ti   apel li   lopital par enn dokter], me mo pa kone kifer
          1SG hear   PST call 3SG hospital by a   doctor] but 1SG NEG know why
          'I hear someone/they called him/her to the hospital by a doctor, but I don't know why.'

This restriction follows naturally, it may be suggested, from the assumption that an impersonal unexpressed subject is already present in these examples and has been assigned the verb's external theta role. The insertion of a *by*-phrase thus results in a violation of the principle of Full Interpretation (Chomsky 1986). Additionally, examples with an agent *by*-phrase, like those in (16), also involve a conflict of

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[14]According to McCloskey (2007: 837–8), Irish arbitrary null subjects do not have to be plural, human, or animate.

features, as the unexpressed subject is non-referential while the agent in the *by*-phrase is referential. However, since *by*-phrases can also be missing in languages which have passives, its impossibility in examples like (16) can only suggest, rather than confirm, that an unexpressed subject is syntactically present.[15]

A stronger argument in support of this claim is the possibility of anaphor binding. The reciprocal *len-e-lot* 'each other' in Mauritian Creole, like reciprocals in other languages, requires a plural antecedent, as illustrated by the contrast in (17):

(17) a. garson   la   ek tifi la   kontan   len-e-lot
        boy   DEF   and girl DEF   love   RECP
        'The boy and the girl love each other.'

     b. * garson la   kontan   len-e-lot
        boy   DEF   love   RECP
        *'The boy loves each other.'

Examples like (18) show that a reciprocal is possible in impersonal sentences like (11):

(18) a. ti   dir lor radio [(ki) pu   kapav vizit len-e-lot semen prosen]
        PST   say on   radio that   FUT able   visit RECP   week next
        'They said on the radio that people will be able to visit each other as from next week.'

     b. ler   mo   mama ti   tipti [ti   invit len-e-lot manze zur lane]
        when   1SG.POSS mother PST little PST invite RECP   eat   day New.Year
        'When my mother was little, people invited each other to eat on New Year's day.'

     c. zur Zezi ti   ne   [ti   fer   fet   e   ti   donn len-e-lot kado]
        day Jesus PST born   PST make party and PST give RECP   present
        'On the day Jesus was born, people had a party and gave each other presents.'

Since reciprocals require binding (Chomsky 1981), we conclude that they are bound by an unexpressed subject pronoun inside the bracketed clause in (18).

The syntactic presence of an impersonal subject in (11) or a structure like (9) or (10) is also suggested by remnant NPs (such as 'who', 'what', and so on) following sluicing. According to Ross (1967), Merchant (2001), and others, a remnant NP or DP in examples like (19) results from sluicing, an operation whereby everything in a *wh*-interrogative, except the *wh*-phrase, is elided, as illustrated by the strike through notation:

(19) a. Someone called this morning, but I don't know who ~~called this morning~~

     b. John hit someone but no one knows who ~~John hit~~

The remnant *wh*-phrase 'who' is understood as subject in the indirect question in (19a) and object in the indirect question in (19b). In both cases, the remnant NP is linked to the indefinite, non-specific pronoun 'someone' in the first conjunct. Now, as (20) illustrates, sluicing is also possible in Mauritian Creole:

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[15]Keenan and Dryer (2007: 5–6) lists Latvian, Toba, and Kutenai as languages which have passives but no agent phrase. They also note that although Turkish has passives, its speakers only reluctantly accept agent *by*-phrases.

(20) a. kikenn   finn   bat   li,   zott   pa   kone   kisennla ~~finn bat li~~
         Someone   PRF   beat 3SG   3PL   NEG   know   who   PRF beat 3SG
         'Someone hit him, but they don't know who.'

   b. li   ti   zwenn   kikenn   me   li   pa   finn   dir   nu   kisennla
      3SG   PST   see   someone   but 3SG   NEG   PRF   tell 1PL   who
      ~~li   ti   zwenn~~
      3SG   PST   meet
      'S/he met someone, but s/he didn't tell us who.'

Applying sluicing to constructions with impersonal subject, like those in (11), provides further support for the claim that an unexpressed subject is syntactically present in their underlying structure, and not deleted or suppressed as would be the case if they were passive. The remnant *wh*-phrase *kisennla* in (21)–(23) confirms the presence of a syntactic subject.

(21) Speaker A: ti   dir   li   pintir   laport   la   ver
                   PST   tell   3SG   paint   door   DEF   green
                   'Someone/They told him to paint the door green.'

   Speaker B: **kisennla** ~~ti   dir   li   pintir   laport la   ver~~?
                 who   PST   tell 3SG paint   door   DEF green
                 'Who ~~told him to paint the door green~~?'

(22) Speaker A: kifer   Zan   ankoler?
                   why   John   angry
                   'Why is John angry?'

   Speaker B: finn   koken   so   liv;   pa   kone   **kisennla** ~~finn koken so liv~~
                 PRF   steal   3SG.POSS   book   NEG   know   who
                 'Someone/They has/have stolen his books, but don't know who ~~stole~~
~~his books~~.'

(23) ti   dir zott   pa   vinn   lekol;   pa   kone   **kisennla** ~~ti   dir   zott~~
     PST   tell 3PL   NEG   come   school   NEG   know   who   PST tell 3PL
     ~~pa   vinn   lekol~~
     NEG   come   school
     'Someone/They told them not to come to school, don't know who ~~told them not to~~.'

Interestingly, in all these examples, a remnant *by*-phrase is impossible. Thus, speaker B cannot use *par kisennla* 'by who (m)' instead of *kisennla* 'who' in (21). Likewise, replacing the remnant NP in (22) and (23) with a *by*-phrase, as shown in (24), is also impossible:

(24) a. * finn   koken   so   bisiklet;   pa   kone   par   **kisennla**
           PRF   steal   3SG.POSS   bicycle   NEG   know   by   who
         'Someone/They has/have stolen his bicycle; don't know by who.'

   b. * ti   dir zott   pa   vinn   lekol;   pa   kone   par   **kisennla**
        PST   tell 3PL   NEG   come   school   NEG   know   by   who
        'Someone/They told them not to come to school today; don't know by who.'

The contrast between (21)–(23) on the one hand and (24) on the other is due to a voice mismatch (Legate et al. 2020). The impossibility of (24 a–b) with a passive remnant

by-phrase suggests that constructions like (11) are active, not passive, and they have a syntactically projected unexpressed indefinite subject, understood as 'someone' or 'they'.

As for the displaced theme object in (9), we argue that it occupies a specifier position on the periphery of the clause and is linked to the gap (trace) in the comment clause. Under a topicalization analysis, we take it to have moved there from its canonical object position. In what follows, we discuss semantic and syntactic restrictions on the displaced theme object and argue that they can be straightforwardly accounted for under a topic analysis.

4. SEMANTIC AND SYNTACTIC RESTRICTIONS ON THE THEME OBJECT

One observation on transitive OV constructions like (6 a–b) in Mauritian Creole is that they are generally judged grammatical if the initial argument is specific (old information known to the hearer), as shown in (25), and ungrammatical if non-specific (new information unknown to the hearer), as shown in (26) and (27). Specificity is signalled by the postposed definite determiner *la* 'the', while non-specificity by the indefinite determiner *enn* 'a/an' or null (zero) determiner.[16]

(25) a. loto   la   finn   met   dan   garaz
      car   DEF PRF   put   in   garage
      'The car has been/was put in the garage.'

    b. lakaz   la   ti   pe   ankor   ranze
      house DEF PST PROG still   build
      'The house was still being built.'

(26) a. * enn loto   finn   met   dan   garaz
       a   car   PRF   put   in   garage
      'A car has been/was put in the garage.'

    b. * enn lakaz ti   pe   ankor   ranze
       a   house PST PROG still   build
      'A house was still being built.'

(27) a. * bann   loto   finn   met   dan   garaz
       PL   car   PRF   put   in   garage
      'Cars have been/ were put in the garage.'

    b. * bann   lakaz ti   pe   ankor   ranze
       PL   house PST PROG still   build
      'Houses were still being built.'

    c. * loto   finn   repare
       car   PRF   repair
      'A car/Cars has/have been repaired.'

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[16]Examples with an indefinite theme NP (e.g., *enn loto* 'a car' and *loto* 'car(s)') are acceptable if the NP gets a specific reading through context, as illustrated by the following:

Enn loto ti   repare yer.   Sofer la   finn vinn pran li?
a   car PST repair yesterday. Driver DEF PRF come take 3SG
'A car was repaired yesterday. Has the driver been to collect it?'

Such a restriction, however, does not apply to the subject of transitive or unergative sentences. It can be either specific or non-specific, as illustrated by (28):

(28) a. loto   la/ enn   loto/loto   finn   kraz   so   bisiklet
         car   DEF/a   car/ car   PRF   crush 3SG.POSS   bicycle
         'The car/A car/Cars has/have smashed his bicycle.'

     b. zanfan   la/enn   zanfan/bann   zanfan   pe   plore
         child   DEF/a   child/ PL   child   PROG   cry
         'The child/A child/Children is/are crying.'

Nor does it apply to the subject of unaccusatives, since it too can be either specific or non-specific, as illustrated by (29):

(29) a. zanfan   la/ enn   zanfan/bann   zanfan   finn   tonbe
         child   DEF/a   child/ PL   child   PRF   fall
         'The child/A child/Children has/have fallen.'

     b. ver   la/ enn   ver/ ver   finn   kase
         glass   DEF/a   glass/glass PRF   break
         'The glass/A glass/Glasses has/have broken.'

     c. bis   la/   bann   bis/ bis   pa   pe   rule   zordi
         bus   DEF   PL   bus /bus   NEG   PROG   run   today
         'The bus/Buses/Buses isn't/aren't running today.'

If the initial argument (the theme object) in examples like (25)–(27) were in subject position, as expected under a passive analysis, the contrast between (25) on the one hand and (26)–(27) on the other would be surprising, for, as (28) and (29) make clear, non-specific (indefinite) NPs, including theme ones, are not barred from subject position. By contrast, in a topic analysis, the difference between (25) and (26)–(27) is expected because, as illustrated by the difference between (30a–b) and (30c–d), non-specific (indefinite) NPs, unlike specific NPs, are generally excluded from a topic position (see Kiss 2002, 2003):[17]

(30) a. * enn   loto   mo   kamarad   pe   lave
            a   car   1SG   friend   PROG   wash
         'A car, my friend is washing.'

     b. * bann   loto   mo   kamarad   pe   lave
            PL   car   1SG   friend   PROG   wash
         'Cars, my friend is washing.'

     c. loto   la   mo   kamarad   pe   lave
         car   DEF   1SG   friend   PROG   wash
         'The car, my friend is washing.'

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[17]Kiss (2003: 37) observes that the following with an indefinite, non-specific topic and the intended meaning '(As for) a lake, (it) was formed' is impossible in Hungarian:

[TopP Egy tó   [AspP keletkezett]
       A   lake   was   formed

    d. bann   loto   la   mo   kamarad   pe   lave
       PL   car   DEF   1SG   friend   PROG   wash
       'The cars, my friend is washing.'

The fact that the displaced theme object in (26), (27) and (30a–b) cannot be non-specific (indefinite) seems to follow directly from a general discourse requirement that topic phrases be specific (in the sense of Enç 1991).[18] That is, they must be discourse-linked to some unique discourse antecedent or, in the words of Aissen (1992: 50), to 'some identifiable participant in discourse'. What follows naturally from such a requirement are two things: firstly, as pointed out by Prince (1981) and Kiss (2002, 2003), the topic constituent cannot be non-specific and secondly, it cannot be non-referential (e.g., a pleonastic element like 'there').[19]

    A second semantic restriction on the displaced theme object in transitive OV constructions like those in (6a, b) is that it cannot be animate. The following are judged ungrammatical.[20]

  (31) a. * Zan   finn   bate
         John   PRF   beat
         'Someone has beaten John.'

      b. * dokter   la   finn   morde
         doctor   DEF   PRF   bite
         'Someone bit the doctor.'

      c. * sat   la   ti   apre
         cat   DEF   PST   chase
         'Someone chased the cat.'

It is interesting to note that a similar restriction holds on displaced animate theme objects in Caribbean English Creoles transitive OV constructions (see Alleyne 1987, Winford 1993). Compare, for example, (6f–h) above with the examples in (32), also from Jamaican Creole:

  (32) a. ?? di   pikni   dem   kis   aredi
          DEF   child   PL   kiss   already
         'The children have already been kissed.'   Alleyne (1987: 78)

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[18]According to Enç (1991) an NP is [+specific] if it denotes a subset of a set of referents already present in the domain of discourse.

[19]A pleonastic (non-referential) pronoun like 'there' cannot be placed in a topic position, cf. *There, I didn't think would be a fight. (Prince 1981: 251).

[20]However, this restriction does not apply when the animate theme object is contrastively focused:

  (i) ZAN   finn   bate   (pa   Pyer)
      John   PRF   beat   NEG   Peter
      'John was beaten (not Peter)

  (ii) SAT   LA   finn   apre   (pa   lisyen   la)
       cat   DEF   PRF   chase   not   dog   DEF
       'The cat was chased (not the dog).'

b. ?? di   gyol sen   fu   di   moni
    DEF girl send for DEF money
    'The girl was sent for the money.'   Alleyne (1987: 78)

c. ?? di   daag kik   out di   haus
    DEF dog   kick out DEF house
    'The dog was kicked out of the house.'   Winford (1993: 122)

Under a passive analysis, the ungrammaticality/marginality of the transitive OV constructions in (31) and (36) is unexpected because specific animate NPs (including proper nouns) are not excluded from the structural subject position. This is clear from transitive constructions like (33), unaccusative constructions like (34), and unergatives constructions like (35):

(33) a. Zan   finn   bat   enn   garson
        John PRF   beat a   boy
        'John has beaten/hit a boy.'

     b. sat   la   ti   apre   enn   lera
        cat   DEF PST chase a   rat
        'The cat chased a rat.'

(34) a. Zan   finn   tonb dan   labu
        John PRF   fall   in   mud
        'John fell in the mud.'

     b. sat   la   finn   nwaye
        cat   DEF PRF   drown
        'The cat has drowned.'

(35) a. Zan   pu   sante
        John FUT sing
        'John will sing.'

     b. sat   la   finn   sot   lor   sez
        cat   DEF PRF   jump on   chair
        'The cat jumped on the chair.'

If the fronted theme object in (31) moves from its canonical object position to the structural subject position, as per the analysis of passive in Chomsky (1981), Burzio (1986), and others, it is predicted that, much like the unaccusatives in (34), the OV constructions in (31) should also be grammatical. This prediction is not borne out, as the ungrammaticality of (31) demonstrates.

However, examples like (31) are problematic not only for a passive analysis but also for a topic analysis that posits that the fronted object lies in the periphery of the clause (more specifically, in a topic position), given that animate proper nouns and NPs, being specific, are not barred from such a position. And, indeed, as the examples in (36) show, they are not, particularly when the topic phrase is a hanging topic linked to a resumptive pronoun inside the comment clause.

(36) a. Zan,   finn   bat   li
        John   PRF   beat 3SG
        'John, someone has beaten him.'

b. bann zanfan la,   ti   truv zott dan bazaar
   PL   child   DEF PST   see   3PL   in   market
   'The children, someone saw them in the market.'

c. lisjen la,   ti   fek   apre li
   dog   DEF PST   just   chase 3SG
   'The dog, someone just chased it away.'

d. lever la,   finn met   li   dan lerb
   worm   DEF PRF   put   3SG   in   grass
   'The worm, someone/they put it on the grass.'

What the contrast between (31) and (36) suggests then is that animate NPs, when topicalized, cannot be gap-linked, as evidenced by the ungrammaticality of (31), but must instead be reprised by a resumptive pronoun, as shown in (36).[21] Why should that be? A possible and plausible answer is that, given the strong association between animacy and agency and the availability of an unexpressed subject, animate fronted objects in OV constructions like (31) tend to be read as the agent of the verb rather than its theme. The relationship between animacy and agency is also invoked by Alleyne (1987) in connection with examples like (32) in Jamaican Creole. Only the presence of a resumptive pronoun coreferential to the fronted object, as shown in (36), or contrastive focus on the topic NP (see also footnote 20), it seems, can ensure that this 'theme as agent' misinterpretation (or processing error) is avoided.

It is interesting to note that a 'theme as agent' reading in such OV transitive constructions persists even when the context discourages it, as in the following:

(37) a. * ler   li   ti   pe   kas   nikmus,   Zan   ti   pike
       while 3SG PST PROG break wasp nest John PST sting
       * 'While he was picking a wasp nest, John stung.' (not 'John was stung')

    b. * kan   li   ti   pe   apre enn lisyen polisie   la   ti   morde
       when   3SG PST PROG chase a   dog   policeman DEF PST bite
       * 'When he was chasing a dog, the policeman bit.' (not 'the policeman was bitten')

    c. * ler   li   ti   pe   travers grandrut sat la   finn tape
       while 3SG PST PROG cross   road   cat DEF PRF   hit
       * 'While it was crossing the road, the cat hit.' (not 'the cat was hit')

What is clear from (37) is that even the availability of a non-human or inanimate causer, either through linguistic coreferencing, as in (37b), or pragmatic anaphora, as in (37a) and (37c), does not stop the topic animate object *polisie la* 'the policeman' from being incorrectly interpreted/processed as agent of the verb *morde* 'bite'. Thus,

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[21]The same pattern can be observed in Jamaican Creole, as demonstrated by the following from Durrleman (2005: 113):

(i) Da   bwai deh, mi   laik im
   DEF   boy   LOC, 1SG   like 3SG
   'As for that boy, I like him.'

(ii) ??? da   bwai deh, mi   laik
      DEF   boy   LOC   1SG   like

the reading of the OV construction inside a construction like (37b) is not 'the police-
man was bitten' or 'the policeman, someone bit (him/her)' but rather the incorrect
interpretation 'the policeman bit (someone)'. The facts relating to the impossibility
of fronted animate objects in OV constructions like (31) can therefore be captured
relatively straightforwardly under a topic analysis.

Turning now to a third restriction on the fronted theme object in transitive OV
constructions like (6a–b), it appears that these objects cannot be pronouns either,
whether they are animate or inanimate, which is puzzling since personal pronouns
are by definition definite (Roberts 2005).[22]

(38) a. * mwa   finn   kritike
           1SG.ACC   PRF   criticise
           'Me, they have criticized.'

      b. * twa   pu   met   dan   prizon
           2SG.ACC   FUT   put   in   prison
           'You, they will put in prison.'

      c. * zott   pu   lave   plitar
           3PL   FUT   wash   later
           'Them, they will wash later.'

      d. * li   finn   petire
           3SG   PRF   paint
           'It, they have painted.'

Unlike the third person (singular and plural), the first and second person singular in
Mauritian Creole display different case forms, depending on their distribution. Thus,
they have the nominative form *mo* 'I' and *to* 'you' for first and second person singular
respectively when they appear in the subject position of a finite clause, as shown in
(39a–b) and the corresponding first and second person singular accusative form *mwa*
'me' and *twa* 'you' when they appear as the object of a verb, as shown in (39a–b) or a
preposition, as shown in (39c), and as topics, as shown in (39d):

(39) a. mo   ti   truv   twa   lor   laplaz
         1SG.NOM   PST   see   2SG.ACC   on   beach
         'I saw you on the beach.'

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[22]A pronoun is possible as the first argument in OV constructions like (6a–b) but only with
a few verbs in the acrolectal variety. Example (i) is from Corne (1981: 108) and (ii) from
APiCSonline (Michaelis et al., 2013) respectively.

   (i) zott   in   fek   peye   par   zott   burzua
       3PL   PRF   just   pay   by   3PL.POSS   boss
       'They just got paid by their boss.'

  (ii) si   mo   invité   én   lanivérser …
       If   1SG   invite   a   birthday
       'If I'm invited to a birthday …'

b. to   ti   truv mwa   lor laplaz
   2SG.NOM   PST   see   1SG.ACC   on   beach
   'You saw me on the beach.'

c. li   le   al   ar   twa
   3SG   want   go   with   2SG.ACC
   'S/he wants to go with you.'

d. twa   lapolis   pe   rode   partu
   2SG.ACC   police   PROG   search   everywhere
   'You, the police are looking for you everywhere.'

With the fronted object pronouns displaying accusative (not nominative) form, the examples in (38) are clearly problematic for a passive analysis. Surprisingly, they are also problematic even when these pronouns are in the nominative, as shown in (40). A passive analysis incorrectly predicts that the examples in (40) should be grammatical:

(40) a. * mo   finn   kritike
        1SG.NOM   PRF   criticize
        'I, they have criticized.'

    b. * to   pu   met   dan   prizon
        2SG.NOM   FUT   put   in   jail
        'You, they will put in prison.'

The nominative form is expected on a pronoun when it appears in the subject position of a finite clause, as shown in (39a–b) above, an unaccusative finite clause, as shown in (41), or unergative finite clause, as shown in (42):

(41) a. to/*twa   pu   tonbe si to   pa   fer   atansion
        2SG.NOM/2SG.ACC   FUT   fall   if 2SG.NOM   NEG   make   attention
        'You'll fall if you're not careful.'

    b. mo/*mwa   pu   nwaye si mo   tonb dan   larivier
        1SG.NOM/1SG.ACC   FUT   drown if 1SG.NOM   fall   in   river
        'I will drown if I fall in the river.'

(42) a. mo/*mwa   ti   galupe   gramatin
        1SG.NOM/1SG.ACC   PST   run   morning
        'I jogged this morning.'

    b. to/*twa   ti   pe   riye   divan   laglas
        2SG.NOM/2SG.ACC   PST   PROG   laugh   in front of   mirror
        'You were laughing in front of the mirror.'

Under a topic analysis, the ungrammaticality of the examples in (40) follows directly from the fact that such structures involve conflicting cases: thus, the fronted pronoun has the nominative form (*mo* 'I', *to* 'you') in its derived (topic) position while the gap to which it is linked has the accusative form. It also follows under this analysis that a nominative pronoun, being phonologically weak/unstressed, is naturally excluded from an edge/peripheral (topic) position, which typically hosts phonologically strong/stressed constituents. The ungrammaticality of (38), on the other hand, is unexpected under a topic analysis: the fronted object pronouns have the accusative (phonologically strong) form, which, as is clear from (39d), is the case form expected

on topic pronouns. This is further illustrated by the hanging topics in (43) and the contrastive focused constituents in (44):

(43) a. mwa,   finn   kritike   mwa
          1SG.ACC   PRF   criticise   1SG.ACC
          'Me, they criticized me.'

      b. twa,   pu   met   twa   dan   prizon
          2SG.ACC   FUT   put   2SG   in   prison
          'You, they will put you in prison.'

(44) a. MWA   finn   kritike   (pa   twa)
          1SG.ACC   PRF   criticise   NEG   2SG.ACC
          'Me, they have criticized (not you).'

      b. TWA   pu   met   dan   prizon   (pa   li)
          2SG.ACC   FUT   put   in   prison   NEG   3SG
          'You, they will put in prison (not him/her).'

Why, then, are the examples in (38), with a fronted accusative object pronoun, ungrammatical?[23] It is apparent from the difference between (38) on the one hand and (43) and (44) on the other that a fronted object pronoun, unless contrastively focused, cannot be linked to a gap inside the clause. Instead, it must be linked to a resumptive pronoun, as shown in (43). Given that (38a–b) pattern with (31) in that neither allows a fronted animate object (pronoun or NP) to be gap-linked (unless it is contrastively focused), we could account for the ungrammaticality of the former in the same way that we explained the ungrammaticality of the latter: that is, in the absence of a resumptive pronoun inside the comment clause or contrastive focus, a fronted animate object is misinterpreted/misanalysed as the agent of the transitive verb, a possibility enhanced by the availability of an indefinite null subject and a universally strong association between animacy and agency. The ungrammaticality of (38c–d), with a fronted inanimate pronoun remains unexplained under the proposed 'theme as agent' misanalysis approach, as the association between animacy and agency cannot be invoked in these cases. One solution is to appeal to the phonological form of the fronted pronouns in these examples. The third person singular pronoun *li* 'he/she/it' and the third person plural *zott* 'they', as noted earlier, are phonologically weak forms and are therefore naturally excluded from peripheral positions that generally tend to host phonologically strong forms. A topic analysis, unlike a passive analysis, can thus account for the impossibility of fronted object pronouns (nominative and accusative) in transitive OV constructions in Mauritian Creole.

   It is interesting to note that such misinterpretation or incorrect processing (i.e., theme as agent), as discussed above, does not occur in the presence of an intervener (e.g., a *wh*-phrase or a clause), as shown in (45):

(45) a. dokter   la   kan   ti   apele?
          doctor   DEF   when   PST   call
          'The doctor, when did they call?'

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[23]A theme object pronoun is also known to be impossible in the subject position of OV constructions in Vincentian Creole (Prescod 2004: 127).

b. bann   lisjen   la   kifer   ti   apre?
   PL   dog   DEF why   PST   chase
   'The dog, why did they chase?'

c. zanfan   la   kisennla ti   dir ti   bate
   child   DEF   who   PST   say PST   hit
   'The child, who said, they/someone hit.'

This would suggest that the strong association between animacy and agency that encourages the 'theme as agent' misinterpretation only holds when a gap-linked non-focused animate topic constituent and the unexpressed indefinite subject in the OV construction are adjacent.

In summary, it seems that the displaced theme object in transitive OV constructions in Mauritian Creole cannot be non-specific or animate or pronominal, and this is the case unless reprised by a resumptive pronoun or contrastively focused.

5. FURTHER EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF A TOPIC ANALYSIS OF TRANSITIVE OV CONSTRUCTIONS

In what follows, we discuss some additional evidence that further supports the topic analysis of the transitive OV constructions in Mauritian Creole.

The first piece of evidence comes from the position of the displaced theme object relative to a fronted *wh*-phrase. As illustrated by (46) and (47), whenever a *wh*-phrase is fronted in a transitive OV construction, the displaced object appears to its left, as shown in (46b) and (47b), not to its right, as illustrated by the ungrammaticality of (46c) and (47c).[24]

(46) a. loto   la   finn met   dan   garaz
   car   DEF   PRF   put   in   garage
   'The car they have put in the garage.'

  b. loto   la   kot   finn   mete?
    car   DEF   where PRF   put
    'The car where have they put?'

  c. * kot   loto   la   finn   mete?
    where car   DEF   PRF   put
    'Where the car have they put?'

(47) a. loto   la   pu   repare   dimen
   car   DEF   FUT   repair   tomorrow
   'The car they will repair tomorrow.'

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[24]However, Papen (1978: 419) includes the following:

(i) kuma lapê   prepare (dâ) Moris?
   how   rabbit prepare in   Mauritius
   'How do people cook rabbit meat in Mauritius?'

If acceptable, this suggests *wh*-phrases can be placed above TopP (perhaps in an Interrogative Phrase; see Rizzi (2001)).

    b. loto   la   kan   pu   repare?
       car   DEF when FUT repair
       'The car when will they repair?'

    c. * kan   loto   la   pu   repare?
        when car   DEF FUT repair
        'When the car will they repair?'

Under a passive analysis, we do not expect (46c) and (47c) to be ungrammatical, since the fronted object occupies the subject position and the fronted *wh*-phrase, to its left, occupies the specifier of FocP, as per the template posited in Rizzi (1997). They should therefore be just as grammatical as the unaccusative in (48b), where the object has moved into the subject position:

(48) a. loto   la   ti   tonb   dan   larivier
       car   DEF PST fall   in   river
       'The car fell in the river.'

    b. kot   loto la   ti   tonbe?
       where car DEF PST fall
       'Where did the car fall?'

And yet, (46c) and (47c) are ungrammatical, unlike (48b). Under a topic analysis, however, their ungrammaticality is not unexpected. As a topic phrase, the theme object in these examples appears higher than (or to the left of) the *wh*-phrase. This is because topic constituents target the specifier of TopP, while *wh*-phrases target the specifier of FocP, following Cartographic syntax (Rizzi 1997). These sentences are therefore ungrammatical because they either violate Relativised Minimality (Rizzi 1990) or require an additional FocP, an option that violates Cartographic guidelines (Rizzi 1997) where only one FocP is allowed in the periphery of a clause.[25] Of course, no such problem arises with the unaccusative (48b) since the theme object appears in subject position and the *wh*-phrase in the specifier of FocP.

    A second syntactic restriction that also supports the topic analysis relates to the position of the theme object in relation to a negative adverb of frequency like *zamen* 'never'. As illustrated by (49) and (50), a theme object must be to the left of this type of adverb for a transitive OV construction to be well formed:

(49) a. zamen finn   lav   loto   la
       never   PRF   wash car   DEF
       'They have never washed the car.'

    b. loto   la   zamen finn   lave
       car   DEF never   PRF   wash
       'They have never washed the car.'

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[25]The ungrammatical sentences in (46c) and (47c) seem to pattern with ungrammatical topic sentences like the following in English:

  *Where did this book Mary buy?

c. ?? zamen   loto   la   finn   lave
   never   car   DEF   PRF   wash
   'They have never washed the car.'

(50) a. zamen   ti   lir   sa   bann   liv   la
    never   PST   read   DEM   PL   book   DEF
    'They never read these books.'

  b. sa   bann   liv   la   zamen   ti   lir
    DEM   PL   book   DEF   never   PST   read
    'They never read these books.'

  c. * zamen   sa   bann   liv   la   ti   lir
     never   DEM   PL   book   DEF   PST   read
     'They never read these books.'

If negative adverbs occupy the specifier of FocP (Rizzi 1997), we then expect *zamen* 'never' to precede the NP in subject position as in the transitive, unergative, and unaccusative constructions in (51) where the agent or theme is unambiguously in subject position:

(51) a. zamen   Zan   finn   manz   pwason
    never   John   PRF   eat   fish
    'John has never eaten fish.'

  b. zamen   ti-bebe   plore
    never   baby   cry
    'The baby never cries.'

  c. zamen   bonom   la   finn   tonbe
    never   old-man DEF   PRF   fall
    'The old man has never fallen down.'

This being so, a passive analysis of transitive OV constructions incorrectly leads us to expect (49c) and (50c) to be well-formed. A topic analysis, in contrast, correctly rules them out because, with the theme object in the specifier of TopP, the negative adverb has moved across it to the specifier of a higher projection, violating locality (Relativized Minimality (Rizzi 1990)) as illustrated by (49c) and (50c). Alternatively, as was the case with (46c) and (47c), a second FocP is required, which is inconsistent with Cartographic guidelines (Rizzi 1997).

  A further restriction that also supports a topic analysis of transitive OV construc-tions relates to coordination. As illustrated by (52) and (53), it is possible to coord-inate two such constructions, with and without an overt subject, as in (52), or two unaccusatives, as in (53), but not a transitive OV construction and an unaccusative, as shown in (54).

(52) a. bis   la   finn   lave   e   finn   repare
    bus   DEF   PRF   wash   and   PRF   repair
    'The bus, they have washed and repaired.'

  b. bis   la   mekanisien   la   finn   lave   e   finn   repare
    bus   DEF   mechanic   DEF   PRF   wash   and   PRF   repair
    'The bus, the mechanic has washed and repaired.'

(53) a. zanfan la   finn glise   e   finn tonbe
        child   DEF   PRF   slip   and PRF   fall
        'The child slipped and fell.'

    b. bis   la   finn kase   e   pa   pe   rule
       bus   DEF   PRF   break   and NEG   PROG   run
       'The bus is broken and is not running.'

(54) a. * bis   la   finn repare e   finn ale
          bus   DEF   PRF   repair and PRF   go
          'The bus, they have repaired, and it has gone.'

    b. * glason la   ti   met   dan enn ver   e   pe   fonn
         ice   DEF   PST   put   in   a   glass and PROG   melt
         'The ice, they put in a glass, and it is melting.'

The ungrammaticality of (54a) and (54b) follows directly from the principle that requires conjuncts to belong to the same category (e.g., PP and PP or TP and TP) (Ross 1967). Under the proposed topic analysis, these constructions involve the coordination of a TopP (the transitive OV construction in the first conjunct) and TP (the unaccusative in the second conjunct), two categorially dissimilar constituents, and are therefore correctly ruled out. Under a passive analysis, in contrast, these constructions involve coordination of two TPs and are therefore incorrectly predicted to be well formed. As expected, the topic analysis also correctly rules out the coordination of a transitive construction (a TP) and an OV construction (a TopP), as illustrated by (55):

(55) a. * kamion la   finn repare e   pe   sarye   kann
          lorry   DEF   PRF   repair and PROG   carry   cane
          'The lorry, they have repaired, and it is carrying sugar cane.'

    b. * masinn la   finn kup   gazon e   finn netwaye
         machine DEF   PRF   cut   grass and PRF   clean
         'The machine has mowed the grass and they have cleaned it.'

The ungrammaticality of constructions such as (54) and (55) therefore provides additional support for the claim that the OV transitive constructions under discussion are topic, not passive, constructions. The topic analysis of OV constructions is therefore syntactically supported not only by facts relating to word order but also by facts relating to coordination.

6. IMPLICATION OF A TOPIC ANALYSIS OF TRANSITIVE OV CONSTRUCTIONS IN MAURITIAN CREOLE

The analysis of transitive OV constructions in Mauritian Creole as topics rather than passives suggests that passivization, an instance of A-movement, is an option that has not been exploited in this language, and possibly in some other creoles too (e.g., West African Pidgin English, Tok Pisin, Bislama, among a few others), while other instances of A-movement (e.g., movement to subject position in unaccusative and raising constructions) appear to have been.[26] The proposal that Mauritian Creole

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[26]Raising is possible in Mauritian Creole from AP and NP small clauses:

has topic rather passive constructions can be taken to support the traditional intuitions of many creolists that creoles, like many non-creole languages, lack canonical passives (see Siewierska 2010, Keenan and Dryer 2007). Interestingly, native speakers of creoles generally tend to reject passive structures. McWhorter and Good (2012: 164) note for instance that their Saramaccan consultants translated English-type passives as active sentences with the generic third person plural subject *de* 'they', as shown in (56):[27]

(56) di   bálima   kai   bigà   de   tɔto   ɛ   a   bàku
      DEF   ball. player fall   because   3PL   push   3SG   LOC   back
      'The soccer player fell because they hit in the back.'

                                                      (McWhorter and Good 2012: 164)

Likewise, Veenstra (2004: 277) notes that not all speakers of Saramaccan accept sentences with a fronted object as passive unless they were contextualized (i.e., they included aspectual information focusing on the endpoint of an event denoted by the verb). There are also similar caveats from contributors to the chapter on passives in the APiCS databases (Michaelis et al. 2013). Thus, in her contribution to these databases, Escure (2013) notes in connection to Belizean passives that "since only the context provides the correct interpretation (passive or active), it is in fact doubtful that Belizean Creole has a passive construction". Altogether, it seems that there are some doubts as to whether passive (in which the object appears in subject position) is available in these languages.

Creoles, including Mauritian Creole, thus tend to resort to other well-known strategies for expressing a passive meaning. These include suppressing the logical subject, or using an impersonal subject, or using a verb similar to 'get' as in *John got arrested*. All three are used in Mauritian Creole although the last one is limited to just a few verbs like *gany bate* 'got beaten', *gany kriye* 'got shouted at' but not * *gany tuye* 'got killed' (see Winford 1993: 142 for similar structures in Caribbean English creoles).

7. CONCLUSION

This article has argued that the displaced theme object in transitive OV constructions in Mauritian Creole occupies a topic position (the specifier of TopP), not the structural subject position. The empirical evidence in support of this analysis comes from semantic and syntactic restrictions that seem to constrain its distribution in these constructions. It is shown, for instance, that it cannot be non-specific or animate. The latter restriction, it is argued, is due to the strong association between

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(i) li   paret   bet,   me   li   pa   bet
    3SG   appear   stupid, but   3SG   NEG   stupid
    'S/he appears stupid, but s/he isn't.'

(ii) li   paret   enn   bon   dimunn
     3SG   appear   a   good   person
     'S/he appears to be a nice person.'

[27]This is also the case in Martinican Creole (Anne Zribi-Hertz, personal communication, June 27th 2022, at 17:28).

animacy and agency and the availability of a null indefinite arbitrary/impersonal subject. A displaced animate object is misread as the agent or logical subject of an active verb (most commonly the agent), thus resulting in structures that are judged to be ill-formed. Further evidence that the displaced theme object is in topic, not subject, position comes from the fact that it linearly precedes a fronted *wh*-phrase or a negative adverb of frequency, constituents that typically occupy the specifier of FocP. It is also shown that the semantic and syntactic restrictions do not apply in unaccusatives, another type of OV construction, a difference that follows directly from a difference in the distribution of the theme object in these two different types of construction. Finally, the 'theme as topic' proposal has interesting implications for the analysis of structurally similar constructions as passive in other creoles. Are they 'real' or 'apparent' passives? If the latter (i.e., illusionary), then the traditional view that creoles lack passives may retain plausibility.

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