

# CP IN MAURITIAN CREOLE

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mauritian Creole<sup>1</sup> is spoken in Mauritius, a small island in the Indian Ocean off the east coast of Madagascar. It is an SVO language which exhibits syntactic features very similar to those of other Creole languages, including a lack of subject auxiliary inversion in *wh*- questions and the presence of preverbal tense, mood and aspect markers (Bickerton 1995). While several aspects of Mauritian Creole syntax have been studied up to the present (Adone 1990, 1994, 1999, Baker 1972, Seuren 1990, 1995, Syea 1992, 1993, 1997, 2000 and others), none have concentrated on the complementizer system. This paper will discuss and analyze the structure of the Mauritian Creole CP within Luigi Rizzi's (1997) framework.

In section 1, I discuss the constituents being considered for this analysis, including their properties and their distribution with relation to one another. In section 2, I outline the theoretical background for this paper (Rizzi's 1997 'The Fine Structure of the Left Periphery'). In section 3, I test the theoretical framework against the facts of Mauritian Creole, discussing any changes or revisions that need to be made, and in section 4, I propose avenues for future research.

## 2. CONSTITUENTS OF CP

Several types of constituent can occur in CP in Mauritian Creole, including complementizers, a relativizer, question words (*wh*- and *yes/no*), topicalized constructions and focalized constructions. Combinations of up to three of these constituents can occur within the CP of one clause, with restrictions on the ordering of constituents in relation to each other. In this section, I discuss in detail each of the constituents under consideration, describing the properties and distribution of each.

### 2.1 Complementizers and a Relativizer

The complementizer *ki* 'that' is very common in Mauritian Creole. Complements introduced by *ki* are always finite, in that they include a finite verb form and a nominative subject. Complements introduced by *ki* are always declarative.

- (1) aster la **ki** li panse **ki** li'n fer en kitsoz malonet (Baker 151)  
now-DET **that** she think **that** she'ASP do DET thing dishonest  
'It was only then that she realized that she'd done something dishonest'

In terms of its distribution relative to other elements in CP, *ki* can be preceded by a bimorphemic *wh*- word (section 1.2) as in (2), or a bimorphemic *wh*- word and a focus (3).

- (2) **kimanyer ki** zot fin pas lafrontier ? (Adone &  
Vainikka 1999)  
**how that** they ASP pass border ?  
'How did they pass the border?'

- (3) **kifer zordi ki** ou pe koz so koze ar moi (Virahsawmy: Ziliet ek  
so Romeo)

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<sup>1</sup>Also called Kreol or Morisyen

**why today that** you ASP tell his talk to me

‘Why today are you telling me what he said.’

Another common complementizer is *pu* ‘for’. According to Adone (1994: 29) *pu* is only used to mark unrealized complements (ie. events or states which haven’t been carried out). In example (4), the event (putting a fish in) has been carried out, whereas in (5) the event (burning the boy’s house) is not carried out.

(4) li desid **al** met posoh lada (Realized)

(Adone 93)

she decide go put fish inside  
‘She decided to put a fish in it (and she did)’

(5) li ti pe al aswar **pu** al bril lakaz sa garsoh la me ban dayin fin atake li  
he TNS ASP go night **COMP** go burn house that boy the but PL witch ASP attack  
him

‘He was going one evening (for) to burn the boy’s house, but witches attacked him.’

(Unrealized)

(Adone 93)

In contrast with *ki*, *pu* takes non-finite complements (no tense, aspect etc...), but interestingly, the subject of this non-finite complement is in the nominative case, contrary to what Rizzi (1997: 284) claims is usual for non-finite subjects. In (6), the subject of the complement is the nominative *to*, rather than the accusative *toi*.

(6) finn ler **pou** *to*/\**toi* marye (Virahsawmy: Linkonnsing Finalay)

ASP time **for** *you*(*nom*) marry  
‘It was time for you to marry’

An overt subject pronoun is not required with *pu* (7), unless there is a reason for it to be there (8) (ie. to disambiguate or clarify a sentence). This also contrasts with *ki*, where the subject pronoun must always be present.

(7) mo ena enn koze serye **pou** \_ koz ar ou  
(Virahsawmy: LF)

I have a talk serious **for** talk with you  
‘I have something serious to talk to you about’

(8) momem mo finn dir li vinn koz-koze **pou** mo napa res tousel  
(Virahsawmy: LF)

myself I ASP tell him come chat **for** I not stay alone  
‘I myself told him to come for a chat so that I wouldn’t be alone’(for me not to stay alone)

In (8), *mo* must be present after *pu* in order to make it clear that the subject of the embedded clause is the same as the subject of the main clause (not the direct object). Without *mo*, the subordinate clause in (8) could read ‘for me not to stay alone’ or ‘for him not to stay alone’. Like *ki*, *pu* can follow a bimorphemic wh- word (9), but unlike *ki*, it can also follow a monomorphemic wh- word (section 2.2) (10).

(9) li ... pe pahse **kimanyer** **pu** li fer pu kuyoh so kamwad-la  
(Baker 151)

she ASP think **how** **for** she do for cajole her friend-the  
‘She...was thinking of how she could make amends with her friend.’

(10) kisannla kone **ki** **pou** fer ? (Virahsawmy: Prezidan Otelo)

who know **what** **for** do ?  
‘Who knows what to do?’

The last complementizer which I will discuss here is *si* ‘if’. *si* is similar to *ki* in that it requires a finite

complement with a nominative subject and that the subject pronoun of the complement cannot be dropped (11).

- (11) **si** to pa ekout moi, kit sa lakaz la ale  
 (Virahsawmy: LF)  
**if** you not listen me leave DEM house DET go  
 'If you won't listen to me, then get out of this house'

Alone among the complementizers, *si* has a negative counterpart *sipa* 'if not'. According to Baker (1972: 136), *sipa* only occurs when the negator *pa* is present in the main clause (12), but there are numerous examples in my data where *sipa* occurs independent of negation in the main clause (13).

- (12) **pa** kone aster **sipa** li pou kapav gagn li  
 (Virahsawmy: Dr. Nipat)  
**not** know now **ifnot** he ASP can get it  
 'I don't know now if he can get it.'

- (13) Dammarro, pins moi enn kou pou gete **sipa** mo pa pe reve  
 (Virahsawmy: Toufann)  
 pinch me DET moment for see **if-not** I not ASP dream  
 'Dammarro, pinch me for a moment to see whether or not I'm dreaming'

*si* can occur following *ki* (14)<sup>2</sup>, as well as preceding a topic (15):

- (14) sirtu **ki si** sa ti Radyu li ti pu kon mwa  
 (Baker 186)  
 especially **that if** DEM TNS Radyu he TNS ASP know me  
 'Especially since if that was Radyu, he would have known me.'

- (15) **si** li li don ou enn travay...  
 (Virahsawmy: LF)  
**if him** he give you DET work  
 'If he gives you work...'

*ki*, discussed above in its role as complementizer, is also used as a relativizer. A clause introduced by the relativizer *ki* modifies a preceding noun (16). *ki* as a relativizer doesn't appear to cooccur with any other overt CP elements.

- (16) sa kamwad la **ki** ti don li Maryay kumahs zalu li (Baker 156)  
 that friend the **who** TNS give her Maryay start jealous her  
 'The friend who had given her Maryay began to get jealous of her'

## 2.2 Question Words

In Mauritian Creole, wh- questions are expressed by movement of a wh- phrase to CP. There are two classes of wh- words in Mauritian Creole; monomorphemic (*ki* 'what, who', *kuma* 'how', *komie/kumie* 'how much/many', *kot/kote* 'where', *kan* 'when') and bimorphemic (*kifer* 'why', *kizafer* 'what (thing)', *kikalite* 'what kind', *kiler* 'what time', *kikote* 'where (what side)', *kimanier* 'how (what manner)', *kisana/kisanla* 'who (that one)', *puki* 'for whom'). Both classes of wh- word can occur in main clause questions ((17)&(18)) as well as in embedded questions ((19)&(20)).

- (17) **kan** nou pou rezoinn ? (Virahsawmy: Souiv larout ziska)  
**when** we ASP meet-again ?

<sup>2</sup> This example may simply show an accidental adjacency with an independent subordinate clause.

'When will we meet again?'

(18) **kifer** to pa 'le mahze?  
(Baker 152)

**why** you not want eat ?  
'Why don't you want to eat?'

(19) **personn** pa kapav dir moi [**ki** ler la] ?  
Demier vol)

(Virahsawmy:

noone not can tell me [**what** time DET]  
'Can't anyone tell me what time it is?'

(20) get enn kou bien [**kisannla ki** toultan telman okipe...]  
Madli)

(Virahsawmy: Profeser

look a moment well who that always so busy..  
'Take a good look at who is always so busy...'

Despite many similarities, these two classes of *wh*- words behave differently in some aspects of the syntax, especially with respect to other elements in CP. For example, bimorphemic *wh*- words can be followed by either one of the complementizers *ki* 'that' or *pu* 'for' ((15)&(16)), whereas monomorphemic *wh*- words can only be followed by *pu* ((17)&(18)).

(21) **kisana ki** to ti don sa liv la ?  
(Adone&Vainikka 78)

**who that** you TNS give this book the ?  
'Who did you give this book (to)?'

(22) li ... pe pahse **kimanyer pu** li fer pu kuyoh so kamwad-la  
(Baker 151)

she ASP think **how for** she do for cajole her friend-the  
'She...was thinking of how she could make amends with her friend.'

(23) **kisannla kone ki pou** fer ?  
Prezidan Otelo)

(Virahsawmy:

who know **what for** do ?  
'Who knows what to do?'

(24) \* **kan ki** to pou vini ?  
(Adone&Vainikka 79)

**when that** you ASP come ?

Bimorphemic *wh*- words are found following a topic (25), as well as preceding a focus and a complementizer (26). Monomorphemic *wh*- words are found preceding *pu* (27), as well as following a topic or a focus (28).

(25) **an mars, kikalite** letan gagne dan landroi kot fet ti pou deroule?  
larout)

(Virahsawmy: Souiv

**in march, what** weather have in area where party TNS ASP happen  
'In March, what kind of weather was there at the place where the party was held'

(26) **kifer zordi ki** to pe dir moi sa ?  
Madli)

(Virahsawmy: Profeser

why today that you ASP say me this ?  
'Why today(of all days) do you tell me this?'

(27) **kisannla kone ki pou** fer ?

(Virahsawmy:

Prezidan Otelò)

who know **what for** do ?  
'Who knows what to do?'

(28) **toi ki** to pou fer aster?  
larout)

(Virahsawmy: Souiv

you what you ASP do now?  
'What are you doing now?'

Another type of question under consideration here is the yes/no question. Yes/no questions are signaled either by intonation, or by placing the word *eski* at the beginning of the sentence. *eski* only occurs in main clause questions (29); embedded yes/no questions are marked by the complementizer *si/sipa* (30).

(29) **eski to**'nn dir li tousa ?

(Virahsawmy: Galileo Gonaz)

**Q** you'ASP say him allthat ?  
'Did you tell him all that?'

(30) mo pa kone [**sipa** mo pou kapav donn satisfaksion].  
Dr Nipat)

(Virahsawmy:

I not know **ifnot** I ASP can give satisfaction.  
'I don't know if I can give satisfaction'

*eski* can be preceded or followed by a topic ((31)&(32)).

(31) **toi eski** to dispoze mars ar moi ?

(Virahsawmy:

Zil Sezar)

you Q you willing walk with me ?  
'Are you willing to walk with me?'

(32) **eski moi'si** mo finn infekte par sindrom intelektiel ?

(Virahsawmy: Souiv

larout...)

**Q** me'too I ASP infect by syndrome intellectual ?  
'Have I too become infected by the intellectual syndrome?'

### 2.3 Topic and Focus Constructions

In addition to complementizers and question words, Mauritian Creole also allows topic and focus constructions to occur within CP. Rizzi makes several claims regarding topic and focus constructions which should be addressed at this point. First, he claims that 'a topic can involve a resumptive clitic within the comment. If the topicalized constituent is the direct object, the clitic is obligatory. On the other hand, a focalized constituent is inconsistent with a resumptive clitic' (Rizzi 1997: 289). Although the results are sometimes obscured by the fact that subjects can be dropped in Mauritian Creole, this test is useful for distinguishing between topic (33) and focus (34).

(33) **sa tifi**, li ti al lafrans

(Adone 27)

DEM girl, she TNS go France  
'That girl, she went to France (not England)'

(34) **sa karo kan la**, misie Zorz ti ule vande

(Adone 27)

DEM field sugar-cane DET, mister George TNS want sell  
'This sugar-cane field, Mister George wanted to sell (not that one)'

The fact that (33) contains the resumptive pronominal subject *li* indicates that it must be a topic construction, since focus constructions cannot contain a resumptive pronoun. In (34), ‘sa karo kan la’ is the direct object of ‘vande’. Since a resumptive clitic is required in a topic construction if it is a direct object and there is no resumptive clitic in this sentence, this construction must be a focus.

Rizzi (1997: 291) also claims that ‘a wh- operator in main questions is compatible with a Topic in a fixed order (Top Wh), whereas it is incompatible with a Focus’. This assumption is not born out in Mauritian Creole, where not only can a topic follow Wh (35), but a focus can also follow Wh (36).

(35) **kifer toi** to pa fou moi lape (Virahsawmy:  
 Prezidan Otelo)  
 why you you not wreck me peace  
**WH TOPIC**  
 ‘Why don’t you leave me in peace?’

(36) **kifer zordi** ki to pe dir moi sa ? (Virahsawmy:  
 Profeser Madli)  
 why today that you ASP say me this ?  
**WH FOCUS**  
 ‘Why today(of all days) do you tell me this?’

### 3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: RIZZI’S PROPOSAL

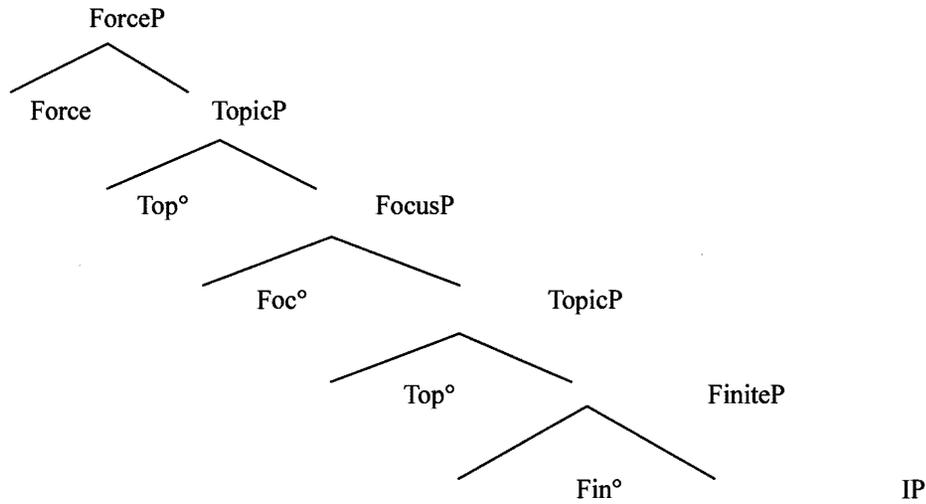
In his 1997 article ‘The Fine Structure of the Left Periphery’, Rizzi proposes that, just as IP and VP have been expanded in the last few decades, CP must be expanded to accommodate the range of constituents which can occur at the left periphery of a clause (1997: 281). In his article, which focuses mainly on Italian, English and French, Rizzi considers four types of constituents which may occur at the left periphery; relative pronouns, interrogative pronouns, topicalized elements and focalized elements (1997: 281). The theoretical framework of Rizzi’s article assumes ‘Relativized Minimality’, while in terms of motivating movement to CP, Rizzi assumes that ‘syntactic movement is “last resort” in the precise sense that it must be triggered by the satisfaction of certain quasi-morphological requirements of heads’ (Rizzi 1997: 282). In other words, any kind of movement to the left periphery of a clause is motivated by the need to satisfy the criterion that a head must be in ‘spec-head configuration with the preposed phrase’ (Rizzi 1997: 282).

Central to Rizzi’s proposal is the idea that the complementizer system is an “interface” between the subordinate clause and the matrix clause. Rizzi (1997) claims that English ‘that’ and Italian ‘che’ have a closer relationship to the matrix clause, while English ‘for’ and Italian ‘di’ have a closer relationship with the subordinate clause. ‘that’ and ‘for’ are said to have different specifications for finiteness, because ‘that’ takes a finite complement, while ‘for’ requires a nonfinite complement. For this reason, these two complementizers are claimed to occupy different positions in CP; ‘that’ occurs in the head of ForceP, the highest phrase in the representation, while ‘for’ occurs in the head of FinP, the lowest phrase in the representation.

Another important distinction which Rizzi includes in his expanded CP is between Topic and Focus constructions. These two types of construction are also claimed to inhabit different positions in the CP structure. Topic constructions occur in spec of TopP, and Focus constructions occur in spec of FocP. The heads of TopP and FocP are null in many languages (including English and Italian), but may contain topic and focus particles in other languages like Gungbe (Rizzi 1997: 287). This structure is in line with the “last resort” representation of movement, since the preposed phrase (Topic or Focus) will be in spec-head configuration with the head of TopP and FocP, whether or not they are phonetically realized. Another important aspect of the structure which Rizzi proposes is the fact that TopP and FocP are only present when required, ie. ‘when a constituent bears topic or focus features to be sanctioned by a spec-head criterion’ (Rizzi 1997: 288).

Given the assumptions made thus far, Rizzi (1997: 297) proposes the structure shown in (37).

(37)



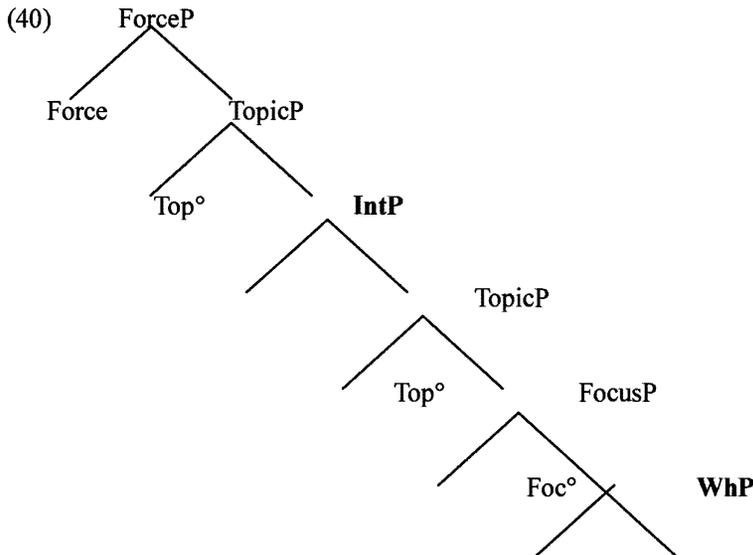
In subsequent work, Rizzi (1999) has expanded this structure further, to include Int(errogative)P and another phrase which he tentatively names Wh. His motivation for including the category IntP is that in Italian, the complementizer *se* 'if' doesn't pattern with *che* or *di*; it is located somewhere between the two. Wh is said to host embedded wh- words, and in fact Rizzi gives two separate structures: one for main clauses (38) and one for embedded clauses (39).

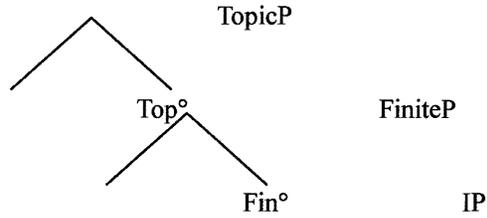
(38) FORCE (TOP\*) INT (TOP\*) FOC (TOP\*) FIN IP (Rizzi, 1999, p.3)

(39) ... Force ... INT ... FOC ... Wh ... (Rizzi, 1999, p.5)

#### 4. MAURITIAN CREOLE AND RIZZI'S PROPOSAL

With a few minor adjustments, I believe that Rizzi's proposed CP structure is able to account for the distribution of elements at the left periphery of the Mauritian Creole clause. First, if Rizzi's structure is to account for Mauritian Creole, the structures in (38) and (39) must be merged to create the tree in (40).





This tree structure is sufficient to explain all of the patterns seen in examples (1)-(30).

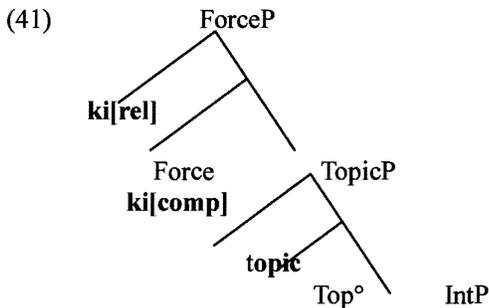
Rizzi claims that whatever is in ForceP expresses the type of clause that follows (ie. declarative, interrogative, relative etc...) (Rizzi 1997: 283). Therefore, a clause which is headed by a relative is a relative clause and a clause which is headed by the complementizer *that* is a declarative. For Mauritian Creole, I follow Rizzi's suggestion that relativizers occur in Spec of ForceP, since I have no evidence to the contrary, and I will also follow the assumption that *that* occurs in the head of ForceP. The Mauritian Creole complementizer *ki* has all the properties that Rizzi claims for *di* and *that* (finiteness, declarative force etc...), therefore I see no reason why it should not be assumed to occur in the head of ForceP (See example (1)).

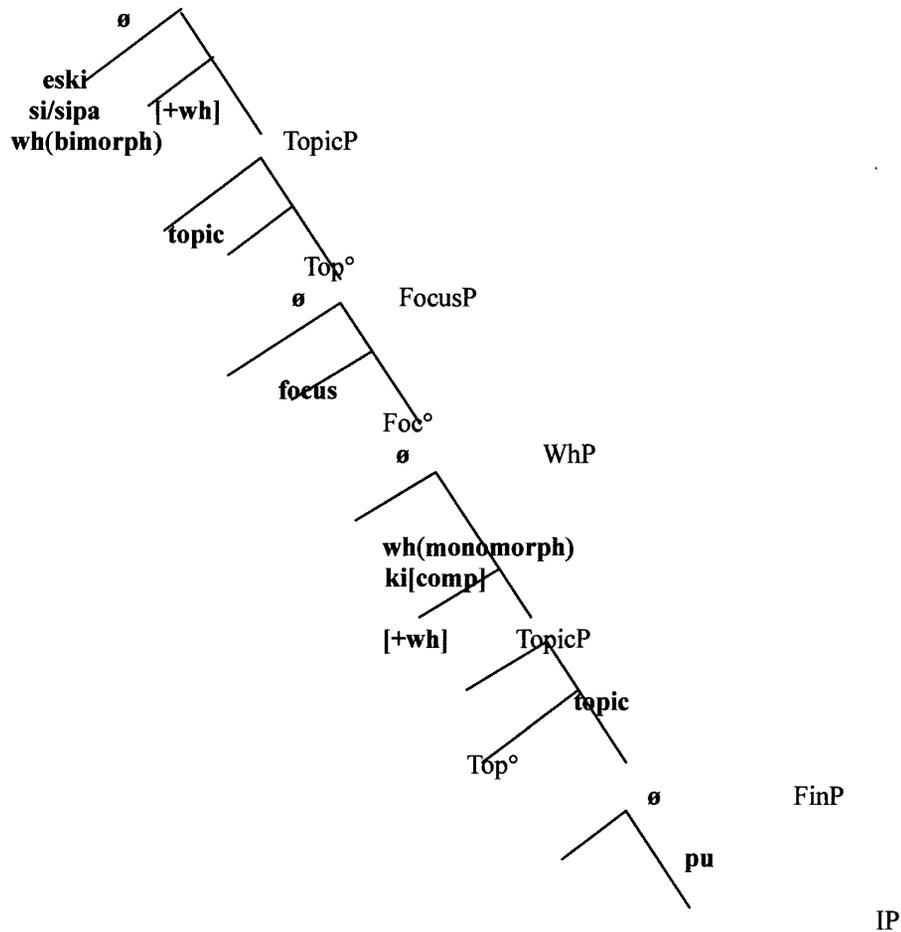
Next, Rizzi proposes that prepositional-type complementizers like *for* and *di* occur in FinP (1997: 288). These complementizers are referred to as prepositional because they usually have case agreement with the subject of the embedded clause (ie. the subject will have prepositional case instead of nominative case). Although the Mauritian Creole equivalent *pu* can be shown to occur in FinP based on the fact that nothing can intervene between it and IP, it doesn't have all of the properties that a non-finite complementizer normally has (Rizzi 1997: 284). Most significantly, even though the complement of *pu* must always be nonfinite (as is expected), the subject is in nominative case rather than in prepositional case (See example (6)).

Rizzi's (1999) addition of IntP to the structure of CP is very important for an analysis of Mauritian Creole. Although Rizzi only discusses the presence of the complementizer *se* in embedded clauses for this position, in Mauritian Creole it hosts the complementizer *si/sipa*, as well as *eski*, *si/sipa*'s counterpart in main clause yes/no questions. This is shown by the fact that both *eski* and *si/sipa* can be preceded by or followed by a topic (see (17)&(21)), as well as the fact that neither can co-occur with bimorphemic question words. Bimorphemic question words also show up in IntP, which is shown by the fact that bimorphemic *wh-* words can be preceded by a topic, which comes between ForceP and IntP, and because it can be followed by a focus and the complementizer *ki* (see (3)).

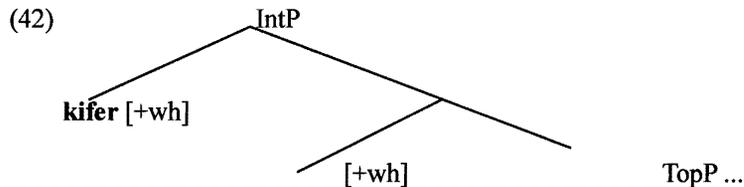
Rizzi's (1999) WhP is also very important to an analysis of Mauritian Creole. Although in his formulation, WhP only hosts embedded *wh-* phrases, I claim that in Mauritian Creole, it hosts the monomorphemic *wh-* words, and the complementizer *ki*. *ki* is found in two places in the structure; Foc° and WhP. In its position as head of ForceP, it types its clause as declarative and maintains a relationship with the matrix clause, while in its WhP position, it follows a bimorphemic *wh-* word, reinforcing the interrogative strength of the clause.

Based on the above discussion, I propose that the final version of the structure of the Mauritian Creole CP is as in (41).





An important part of this analysis is to show why movement of topic, focus and wh- elements occurs. As mentioned in section 2, Rizzi assumes that movement occurs because the heads of phrases have certain criteria which must be satisfied. In Rizzi (1997: 282), topic and focus constructions move to the spec of TopP and FocP because they need to satisfy the criterion that the heads (Top° and Foc°, containing, respectively, the features [+topic] and [+focus] ) be in spec-head configuration with a [+topic] or [+focus] constituent. A similar situation exists for movement of wh- words. The heads of IntP and WhP contain the feature [+wh], therefore they must be in spec-head configuration with [+wh] constituents. In (36), we see that *kifer* moves into spec of IntP because of the agreement of its [+wh] features with those of the head.



### 5. FUTURE RESEARCH

Due to limited space, I have not been able to cover every aspect of the Mauritian Creole CP, but in this final section I will suggest some areas of my analysis that could be expanded in future work. First, I did not go into detail about the differences between the occurrence of the constituents in CP in main clauses as opposed to their occurrence in embedded clauses. It is possible that some of the distributional properties of the constituents are directly related to whether they are occurring in a main clause or in a subordinate clause. Rizzi(1999) shows the

importance of positing a separate position for wh- in embedded clauses in Italian, so it stands to reason that this distinction could be important in Mauritian Creole as well.

Another issue that needs to be worked out relates to movement of wh- elements. If both monomorphemic and bimorphemic wh- words have the feature [+wh], and both IntP and WhP have the feature [+wh], how do we show that monomorphemic wh- words are only allowed to move to WhP and that bimorphemic wh- words are only allowed to move to IntP? For the time being, I have no answer to these questions, but I hope to be able to address them in future work.

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