

Verb Forms in Mauritian

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1 Introduction

This paper[†] focuses on the syntactic and pragmatic factors motivating the selection of verbal forms in Mauritian, which like many Creoles, has little inflectional morphology. The distribution of MC verbs between long and short forms, can be seen not only at the lexical level but also at the syntax-semantics/pragmatics interface. However not all Mauritian verbs display this Long Form vs Short Form variation¹. Those that do, or at least some of them, are phonologically determined². Table (1) below provides a summary of the classifications of verbs in Mauritian.

	<i>e</i> -final	<i>i</i> -final	Others	
			Copula	Base Form
(1) Short Form	al, manz, konn, avoy, touy, ferm...	sort vinn	-	bwar, krwar, pini balye, tenir, kouver...
Long Form	ale, manze, kone, avoye, touye, ferme...	sorti vini	ete	bwar, krwar, pini balye, tenir, kouver...

We consider that verbs having the base form, are used in both environments. Because of lack of space we leave aside the case of serial verbs and reduplication (Henri in prep.).

2 The data: Short and Long Forms

Mauritian verbs are not subject to inflection depending on their subject nor on preverbal TAM as seen from (2-3)³. From the data, we may take as a working hypothesis that a SF obtains if the verb has a complement: In (2), both forms are available since the PP *lor disab* can either be a truly selected dependent of the verb or an adjunct while in (3a), the verb lacking a complement, puts on the LF. The same is true for (3b) since temporal PPs, in this case *depi yer*, are clearly adjuncts.

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| <p>(2) a. Zan/li pe/ti mars/marse lor disab.
John/he PROG/PST walk PREP sand
John/He is/was walking on the sand.</p> <p>(3) a. Mo pe manze (*manz).
1SG PROG eat (*SF)
I am eating.</p> <p>(4) a. Li pe ale/al dan Paris.
3SG PROG go PREP Paris
Lit. (i) He is wandering in Paris or (ii) He is going to Paris.</p> | <p>b. Li (pou/va) manz (*manze) mang.
3SG IRR/FUT.IND eat (*LF) mango
He/She will/would eat mango.</p> <p>b. Nou/Zan (ti/pe) marse (*mars) depi yer.
2PL/John walk (*SF) since yesterday
We/John walk(s)/was/is walking since yesterday.</p> <p>b. Liv la dat (*date) depi sink an.
book DEF date (*LF) since five year
Lit. The book dates from five years.</p> |
|--|--|

Notice also that in (2) there is no semantic difference whether the PP is a complement or an adjunct. However in (4a), the selected PP has a directional interpretation: either the agent is heading toward Paris in which case the SF appears, or he is wandering in Paris or going somewhere in Paris which selects for the LF. Compare also (3) above, where the LF is expected because of intransitive *marse*, which can optionally take a complement as in (2), to (4b), where the verb *dat* needs an obligatory temporal PP hence requiring the SF. The hypothesis is further confirmed with verbs taking an obligatory nominal, adverbial or adjectival complement. In (5a) and (b), only the SF is available while in (6), both forms are possible, providing again a semantic difference.

[†]Many thanks to Danièle Godard, Jean-Marie Marandin and Alain Kihm for their comments and feedback on this paper.

¹(Baker 1972) says that about 70% of the verbal lexicon display these two distinct forms. Louisianese and Haitian, which are also French-Based Creoles also exhibits a Long vs Short Form alternation but with totally different constraints (tense and aspect in Louisianese for instance).

²They are generally *e*-final. Verbs which have a consonant cluster however, like *promne*- 'to stroll' or with a semi-consonant *balye*- 'to sweep', do not undergo final vowel deletion, the only exception being those with *rCe* like *perse*- 'to drill' which has a Short form *pers*. The phenomenon is also available with a few verbs ending in /i/.

³From now and onwards, we use SF for Short Form and LF for Long Form.

- (5) a. Zan inn zet (*zete) enn sak.
John PERF throw (*LF) a bag
John has thrown away a bag.
- b. Zan res (*reste) malad.
John stay (*LF) sick
John remains sick.
- (6) Zan koz/koze bien.
John speak well
(i) John speaks well. (Generally) or (ii) John speaks well (with me. He is not angry anymore).

In fact the SF is possible only if the verb has a canonical complement since in (7, 8) the LF surfaces because the verb's complement has been extracted.⁴

- (7) Tibaba ki mo mama ti veye (*vey) toule zour.
DP.baby COMP 1SG.POSS mother PST look-after (*SF) every day
It's little babies that my mother looked after every day.
- (8) a. Kot Zan pe marse (*mars)?
where John PROG walk (*SF)
Where is John walking?
- b. Kimanyer Zan koze (*koz)?
How John talk (*SF)
How does John talk?

Finally, with a ditransitive verb like *done-* 'to give', the LF only appears if and only if both complements are missing. Extraction of only one complement doesn't call for the LF.

- (9) a. Ki Zan inn done (*donn)?
what John PERF give (*SF)
What did John give?
- b. Kisannla Zan inn donn (*done) enn sak?
who John PERF give (*LF) a bag?
To whom did John give a bag?

That complement realization is the trigger of SF and not mere adjacency (as is the case in Hausa (Crysmann 2005)) is shown by the following:

- (10) Zan al/*ale touletan kot so tantinn pandan vakans.
John go.SF/go.LF always at 3SG.POSS aunt during holidays
John always goes at his aunts' during holidays.

2.1 Long Forms with verbal or sentential complements

Further data in (11)-(12) show that the LF is also needed if the verb is followed by a clausal or verbal complement. LF in (11a) is expected since these are adjuncts. More surprising is the case in (11b, 12) since they are sentential complements and hence should call for the SF. Moreover, as can be the case with *k*-clauses in MC, the complementizer *ki* can be optional in certain contexts (11b), making the situation even more puzzling. With a nominal complement *panse* has a SF but not with a sentential one. The same is true for a verb like *kone*.

- (11) a. Zan pa manze (*manz) parski li malad.
John NEG eat (*sf) because 3SG sick
John doesn't eat because he's sick.
- b. Zan panse (*pans) (ki) mang la pa bon.
John think (*SF) COMP mango REL DEF NEG good
John thinks that the mango is not good.
- (12) Mo pa kone (*konn) kifer li pa kontan mwa/kot Mari etc.
1SG NEG know (*SF) why 3SG NEG like 1SG.ACC/where Mary COP
I don't know why he doesn't like me/where Mary is.
- (13) Mari inn demann (*demande) Pol kisannla inn manz so roti.
Mary PERF ask (*LF) Paul who PERF eat 3SG.POSS roti
Mari has asked John who has eaten her roti.

In (14), the verb *pans* takes a VP introduced by the complementizer *pou* as complement whereas in (15) it is followed by a clause. Again, the verb is LF when followed by a clausal complement and a short form when followed by a phrasal complement. Crosslinguistically however, it is well known that sentential complements are less integrated than nominal or prepositional ones (they are extraposed in German, they are not incorporated in incorporating languages, etc.).

⁴Notice that in (8a) and (b), the interpretations in (6) and (2) above are available.

- (14) Zan pans (*panse) pou pas (*pase) so HSC.
 John think (*LF) COMP pass (*LF) 3SG.POSS HSC
 Lit. John thinks to pass his HSC.
- (15) Mo nepli kone (*konn) kouma pou koz (*koze) ar li.
 1SG no-more know (*SF) how COMP speak (*LF)
 I don't know how to speak to him anymore.

With a VP complement without *pou*, the verb is SF (16) except for a few verbs (17) (inherited from French verbs which takes a complement of type *à/de + Vinf*).

- (16) a. Zan pe konn (*kone) dans (*danse) sega. b. Zan ti vinn (*vini) manze (*manz).
 John PROG know (LF) dance (LF) sega John PST come (*LF) eat (*SF)
 Lit. John is knowing how to dance the sega. Lit. John came to eat.
- (17) a. Zan ti'nn oblize (*obliz) vann so lakaz.
 John PST'PERF oblige (*SF) sell 3POSS house
 John was being obliged to sell his house.
- b. Mari inn kontinye (?kontign) vinn lekol mem si li ti malad.
 Mary PERF continue (?SF)come school even if 3SG PST sick
 Lit. Mary has continued to come to school although she was sick.

2.2 Contextual Constraints

However there are reprise contexts where the LF is possible but where syntactically the SF is expected. In (18), although the verb has a nominal complement, the LF is available⁵.

- (18) SPEAKER A: Ki sa djaket la pe fer la? Mo ti zet tou bann vye zafer. (What is this jacket doing here? I threw away every old stuff.)
 SPEAKER B: To ti ZETE (?zet) sa djaket la?
 2SG PST throw (SF) DEM jacket DEF
 Lit. You THREW away this jacket?

In Godard and Marandin (2006)'s terminology, (18) expresses an "instance of deferment with an overtone of surprise". In Mauritian, besides illocutionary force, this type of dialogical move can also be encoded on the verb, *viz.* the LF is also available with a special intonation. In (19), the intonation contour and contextual environment provides what Guerts (1998) calls proposition denial. The context is such that Speaker A presupposes that John doesn't eat chicken curry and that s/he needs to cook something else. The LF of the verb is used to deny the assertion. The reverse is also available (20)⁶.

- (19) SPEAKER A: Mo pe al kwi kari poul parski Zan kontan manz kari poul. (I'm going to cook chicken curry because John likes to eat chicken curry.)
 SPEAKER B: Be non. Zan pa MANZE (?manz) kari poul.
 But no. John NEG eat (SF) curry chicken
 No, John doesn't EAT chicken curry.
- (20) SPEAKER A: Mo bizin al kwi enn lot zafer parski Zan pa manz kari poul. (I need to cook something else because John doesn't eat chicken curry.)
 SPEAKER B: Be non. Zan MANZE (?manz) kari poul.
 But no. John eat (SF) curry chicken
 No, John EATS chicken curry.

⁵Hertz and Li Pook Tan (1987) also note these types of constructions where the LF appears if "a contrastive tone is put on the verb", even though it has a canonical complement.

(1) To pou MANZE sa rougay la?!!! (You will EAT this rougay?!!!) (Hertz and LiPookTan 1987)

⁶Mauritian prosody is an uncharted territory. A phonological study remains to be done but LF does not seem to be triggered by phonological lengthening since the stress does not seem to necessarily fall on the verb final syllable.

Notice that these constructions are possible only with declaratives which convey assertions, questions and so on but are excluded with interrogatives, exclamatives and imperatives.

- (21) a. *Kisannla ki'nn MANZE roti? (Who ATE the roti?) c. *MANZE kari poul la! (EAT the chicken curry!)
 b. *ala li MANZE roti sa boug la! (How he EATS roti this man!)

Unlike Italian's reinforced negation (Godard and Marandin 2006), which are restricted to main clauses, these constructions can be embedded under resolutive predicates (*dir*-‘tell’) or true-false predicates (*krwar*-‘believe’), which both take propositional complements but not under mandative (*le*-‘want’), decidative predicates (*deside*-‘decide’) or factive predicates (*kone*-‘know’)⁷.

- (22) To pa ti dir mwa (ki) to pa MANZE kari poul!!!?
 2SG NEG PST tell 1SG.ACC that 2SG NEG eat curry chicken
 Didn't you tell me that you don't EAT chicken curry!?
- (23) *Mo kone ki Zan MANZE kari poul.
 1SG know 1SG.ACC if John eat curry chicken
 I know that John EATS chicken curry.
- (24) *Mo'nn deside (ki) li MANZE kari poul.
 1SG'PERF decide that 3SG eat chicken curry
 I've decided that he EATS chicken curry.

In the case of the copula *ete*, it is syntactic environment which determines its appearance (Henri and Abeillé 2007): it appears in extraction contexts, implying that the copula doesn't have a short form. If it had a null counterpart, as suggested in Seuren (1990) among others, we would expect it in reprise contexts.

- (25) SPEAKER A: Zan pa'nn vinn lekol zordi. Li malad. (John didn't come to school today. He's sick.)
 SPEAKER B: *Zan ETE malad?
 John COP sick
 John IS sick?

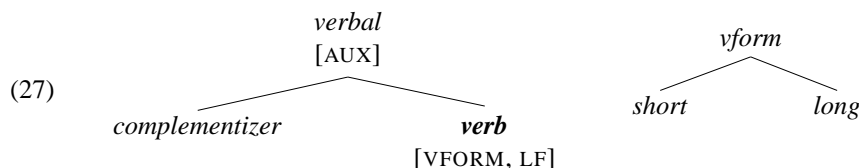
A summary of this section is given in the table below:

	V with canonical COMPS	V with adjuncts	Extracted COMPS	V with clausal COMPS	V with VP COMPS
(26) Short Form	NPs, PPs, APs	-	-	-	+
Long Form	declaratives + reprise contexts	+	+	+	some inherited verbs

3 A constraint-based account within HPSG

3.1 Verbal forms and lexical constraints

We redefine the attribute *VFORM*, which is a head value, with two values *long* and *short*. Verbs with base forms have an underspecified *VFORM* value. In addition, we add a lexical feature *LF* which is appropriate for the type *verb* and which distinguishes those verbs inherited from the lexifier language (*oblize*, *arete*, *kontinye*..). Notice also that we keep the feature *AUX* as a value of *verbal* hence allowing complementizers like *pou* to be treated as a raising verb. i.e., it takes as arguments the arguments of the verb following it and form with the following constituent a VP.



⁷Note that some of our informants allow embedding under *dimande* PR.-‘wonder’ but not under *dimande*-‘ask’ which we leave aside here.

We define a lexical constraint on the verb which says that a SF needs obligatorily to be followed by at least one phrasal complement (28). This constraint can thus account for all types of phrasal complements the verb can take (NPs, APs, VPs..).

$$(28) \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{verb} \\ \text{VFORM } \textit{short} \end{array} \right] \Rightarrow \left[\text{VAL} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{SUBJ} \langle \boxed{1} \rangle \\ \text{COMPS} \langle \boxed{2} \textit{non-clause} \rangle \oplus \textit{list} \end{array} \right] \right]$$

We define two lexical constraints on the occurrence of LF verbs.

$$(29) \text{ a. } \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{verb} \\ \text{VAL} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{SUBJ} \langle \boxed{1} \rangle \\ \text{COMPS } \textit{nelist}(\textit{clause}) \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right] \Rightarrow \left[\text{VFORM } \textit{long} \right] \quad \text{b. } \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{HEAD} \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{verb} \\ \text{LF+} \end{array} \right] \\ \text{VAL} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{SUBJ} \langle \boxed{1} \rangle \\ \text{COMPS} \langle \textit{VP} \rangle \oplus \textit{list} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right] \Rightarrow \left[\text{VFORM } \textit{long} \right]$$

3.2 Contextual constraints and Clause types

Building on previous work (Ginzburg and Sag 2000), we explain the LF with complements appearing in declarative clauses by constraining their content to be of type *proposition*. We further constrain the context to be a reprise context (*non-empty pending*) with a salient non-predicative verb. We thus define a constraint on clauses allowing them to have a LF verb:

$$(30) \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{clause} \\ \text{CAT} \left[\text{HEAD } \textit{verb} \right] \\ \text{CONT } \textit{proposition} \\ \text{CTXT} \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{reprise-context} \\ \text{SAL-UTT} \left\{ \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{verb} \\ \text{COMPS} \langle \text{[PRED-]} \rangle \end{array} \right] \right\} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right] \Rightarrow \left[\text{HEAD} \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{verb} \\ \text{VFORM } \textit{long} \end{array} \right] \right]$$

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