

# On the Morpho-Syntax of Existential Sentences in Romance based Creoles

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## *Abstract:*

In this paper we provide a comprehensive comparative overview of existential sentences in Romance Creoles. Based on our empirical investigation, we also provide a theoretical analysis of existential constructions which mimic 'transitive' possession. Specifically, we assume that the pervasiveness of a predicative possession strategy for existentials in Creoles has reflexes in their syntax, for which a *possession configuration*, building on recent work of Manzini and Franco (2016), Franco and Manzini (2017, to appear), Franco and Lorusso (2018) will be drawn. In essence, we argue that the 'contextual domain' of existentials (see Francez 2007; 2009) can be encoded as the *possessor* of a (transitive) HAVE predicate including the pivot as its internal argument (cf. Manzini and Savoia 2005), with the coda which is (optionally) introduced as an adjunct encoding a further possessor ('locative' *includer*) of the predicate (cf. McNally 1992).

*Keywords:* Creole, existential, locative predicative possession, Romance

## *1. Introduction*

In this paper, we deal with existential sentences in Romance based Creole languages with the aim to provide a comprehensive picture of their shape. Our research is based on the data collected in the Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures (APiCS: Michaelis *et al.* 2013) on-line database (especially, Features 64, 77 and 78). Existential sentences have been featured, in the domain of creolistics, in many works devoted to uncover the structural properties shared among creoles, but not with their substrates and superstrates.

Bickerton (1981), for instance, has enumerated a number of morpho-syntactic features that are present in many creoles, which can be related to

an innate language bio-program, deep-rooted in the human brain. Bickerton specifically assumes that all Creoles “have separate copulas for existential sentences (e.g. ‘here get mountain’), which is the same as for the possessive (e.g. ‘she get car’)” (p. 43; cf. also McWhorter 2005, 2011). Markey (1982) claims that all Creole languages “have one copula for existence and possession, but another one for location” (p. 171). Holm and Patrick (2007) show that the 94.44% of their sample – which includes a big number of Creole languages – adopts a ‘have’ = ‘there is’ strategy for existentials, namely existential sentence and predicate possession are encoded by means of the same verbal item. Consider for instance the examples in (1) and (2) from Krio, an English based Creole spoken in Sierra Leone.

- (1) *dɛn*        **gɛt**        *bɔku*        *pipul*        *dɛm*        *de*    *Existential*  
 3pl        have        a.lot.of        people        pl        there  
 ‘There were a lot of people there’, lit. ‘They have a lot of people there’  
*Krio* (Finney 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- (2) *wi*        **gɛt**        *fo*        *pikin*        *Predicative Possession*  
 1pl        have        four        child  
 ‘We have four children’  
*Krio* (Finney 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)

In Krio, both predicative possession (2) and existential sentences (1) are expressed with the verb ‘get’ meaning HAVE. We find an expletive in (1) in the form of a 3rd person plural pronoun. This pattern clearly differs from English there-sentence with *be* (or *exist*) as a main verb (see Moro 2017).

McNally (2011: 1830) defines existential constructions as copular structures with specialized / non-canonical morpho-syntax which describe (non-) existence or (un)presence in a given contextual domain. As shown in Bentley (2017: 347), the parts of an existential sentence are usually referred to with the terminology in (3).

- (3) (PP = coda +) (expletive +) (proform +) copula + NP = pivot (+ PP = coda)

All the items in brackets in (3) are optional. Only the copula and the post-copular noun phrase (the pivot) obligatorily appear in an existential sentence. The pivot is, for instance, the NP *bɔku pipul* (‘a lot of people’) in the sentence in (1). An expletive is, for instance, the adverbial item *there* in English or the personal pronoun *dɛn* (‘they’) in Krio in (1). According to Moro (2017: 2) existential sentences including only the pivot are rare. More commonly, existential sentences involve the so-called “coda,” that is, normally, it is present a prepositional (PP) phrase (or another XP) “specifying the domain of existence of the individual or set of individuals whose existence is predicated” (Moro 2017: 2), as for instance the PP *in the street* in (4).

- (4) There are many dogs in the street

The existential proform is a (possibly locative, cf. Bentley et al. 2015) clitic hosted by the copula, as illustrated in (5) for Italian, where the proform is lexicalized by the item *ci*, which shows up in many Romance varieties (Catalan *hi*, French *y*, Ligurian *i*, etc.).

- (5) **Ci** sono molti cani in strada  
 ‘There are many dogs in the street’  
*Italian*

As shown in Bentley (2017: 348) there are Romance varieties that lexicalize all the components illustrated in (3), as shown with an example from Rocchetta Cairo (Ligurian) in (6).

- (6) In sa früt chì<sub>[coda]</sub> u<sub>[expletive]</sub> i<sub>[proform]</sub> è<sub>[copula]</sub> tante smenze<sub>[pivot]</sub>  
 in this fruit here expl pf be.3sg many seeds  
 ‘In this fruit there are many seeds’  
*Rocchetta Cairo* (Ligurian)

In this paper we will provide a comprehensive overview of existentials sentences in Romance Creoles. Based on our empirical investigation we will provide a theoretical analysis of existential construction. Clearly, we assume that the pervasiveness of a predicative possession strategy for existentials in Creoles has reflexes in their syntax, for which a ‘possession configuration’ – building on recent work of Manzini and Franco (2016), Franco and Manzini (2017, to appear), Franco and Lorusso (2018) – will be draw.

Specifically, the rest of the paper is structured as follows. In section 2 we provide the relevant data from the French, Spanish and Portuguese Creoles featured in the APiCS on-line database. Section 3 highlights the similarities and differences of existential sentences in Romance Creoles *vs.* their lexifiers. Section 4 contains the theoretical core of the discussion, where we propose that the ‘contextual domain’ of existentials can be encoded as the possessor of a (transitive) HAVE predicate including the pivot as its internal argument (cf. Manzini and Savoia 2005), with the coda which is (optionally) introduced as an adjunct encoding a further possessor (i.e. a ‘locative’ *includor*) of the predicate. The conclusion follows.

## 2. Existentials in Romance based Creoles: the data

Confirming the fact that the preferred strategy for encoding existential structure in Creoles is to use a HAVE predicate, as sketched in (1)-(2) for Krio, the vast majority of Romance based varieties follow this pattern. Let’s start

from French Creoles. French does not license phonologically null subjects and require an expletive subject for existentials ('il'), using an existential proform ('y') cliticized to a HAVE verb ('a', cf. *Jean a un chien* 'Jean has a dog'), as illustrated in (7).

- (7) il y a des chiens dans le jardin  
 'there are dogs in the garden'  
*French*

In the vast majority of French based Creoles no expletive or proform is ever lexicalized. As illustrated by the following examples, the existential HAVE predicate appears in first position, followed by the pivot ((a) examples). In these languages, predicative possession is 'canonically' expressed via SVO transitive sentences ((b) examples). Note that no relevant influence of the substrates can be assumed here, given that the same behaviour is found in Atlantic and Indo-Pacific Creoles. The verbal items recruited from the lexicon to encode existential and predicative possession are highlighted in bold in the examples.

- (8) a. **Gen**            manje        sou            tab            la.  
 have            food        on            table        def  
 'There is food on the table'  
*Haitian Creole* (DeGraff 2007: 103)
- b. Mari            **gen**            kouraj  
 Mary            have            courage  
 'Mary has courage'  
*Haitian Creole* (DeGraff 2007: 115)
- (9) a. **Ni**            manjè        anlè            tab-la  
 have            food        on            table-def  
 'There is food on the table'  
*Guadeloupean Creole* (Colot and Ludwig 2013a: APiCS Structure dataset<sup>1</sup>)
- b. Mari            **ni**            on            kabrit.  
 Mary            have        one            goat  
 'Mary has a goat'  
*Guadeloupean Creole* (Colot and Ludwig 2013a: APiCS Structure dataset)
- (10) a. **gen**            manjé        asou            tab-a  
 gen            food        on            table-art  
 'There is (some) food on the table'  
*Guyanais* (Pfänder 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)

<sup>1</sup> We have not inserted Martinican Creole among our examples, given that the data provided in the APiCS are practically the same as Guadeloupean Creole (cf. Colot and Ludwig 2013b).

- b. yé                    **gen**                    roun                    liv/ liv-ya  
 3pl                    have                    a                    book/book-pl.def  
 ‘They have a book/the books’  
*Guyanais* (Pfänder 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- (11) a. **nana**                    enn                    armoir                    dan                    la                    kuizinn  
 have                    indf                    cupboard                    in                    def                    kitchen  
 ‘There is a cupboard in the kitchen’  
*Reunion Creole* (Barat *et al.* 1977: 81)
- b. son                    papa                    **nana**                    in                    gran                    moustas  
 poss.3sg                    father                    have.prs                    indf                    big                    moustache  
 ‘His father has a big moustache’  
*Reunion Creole* (Barat *et al.* 1977: 22)
- (12) a. **ena**<sup>2</sup>                    mañze                    lor                    latab  
 Have                    food                    on                    table  
 ‘There is food on the table’  
*Mauritian Creole* (Baker and Kriegel 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- b. mo                    **ena**                    sañ                    rupi  
 1sg                    have                    hundred                    rupee  
 ‘I have 100 rupees’  
*Mauritian Creole* (Baker and Kriegel 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)

The only French based Creole that diverges from this pattern is Tayo, which is spoken by around 3000 speakers in Southern New Caledonia. Tayo does not have a verb dedicated to (transitively) encode predicative possession. Tayo uses a ‘locational predication’ (see Creissels 2014) to encode both existentials and possession, as illustrated in (13)-(14). Thus, it is true that we do not have a dedicated lexical item which is the counterpart of HAVE in this

<sup>2</sup> Note that Mauritian Creole has two different verbs for expressing possession: *ena* is a stative verb; *ganye* is non-stative. Baker and Kriegel (2013) highlight this difference (cf. also Sycé 2013; 2017). Consider the existential sentences in (i)-(ii):

- (i) **ena**                    buku                    leksi                    lor                    pye-la  
 have                    many                    litchis                    on                    tree-the  
 ‘There are lots of litchis on the tree’
- (ii) **gany**                    buku                    leksi                    parti                    Ti-Rivyer  
 have                    many                    litchis                    in                    Ti-Rivyer  
 ‘There are lots of litchis in the Ti-Rivyer area’

What (ii) means is that Ti-Rivyer is a suitable place to go if one wants to get litchis. This, actually, seems to confirm the strict link between existentials and possession. Indeed, the same stative/non-stative distinction is at work in the possession domain, as illustrated in (iii)-(iv).

- (i) mo **ena** 100 rupi  
 ‘I have 100 rupees (in my pocket)’
- (ii) mo **gany** 100 rupi  
 ‘I earn/get Rs 100 (for doing a particular task)’

language; still the expression of possession and existential meaning are not differentiated, like the other French Creoles illustrated so far.

- (13) **na** ndipa ndesi latam *Existential*  
 na bread loc table  
 ‘There is some bread on the table’  
*Tayo* (Ehrhart and Revis 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- (14) **na** a ŋgra lafamij pu lja *Possession*  
 na indf.art big family prep 3sg  
 ‘He has a big family’  
*Tayo* (Ehrhart 1993: 173)

Turning to Spanish based Creoles, we observe again that the verb which encodes predicative possession is almost often the one which is recruited to convey an existential meaning. Spanish on the contrary uses two distinct lexical items for this purpose, respectively *haber* and *tener*, as illustrated in (15) and (16).<sup>3</sup>

- (15) **hay** gatos en la calle *Existential*  
 ‘There are cats in the street’  
*Spanish*
- (16) José **tiene** un gato *Predicative Possession*  
 ‘José has a cat’  
*Spanish*

Spanish based Creoles behave just like the French Creoles illustrated in (8)-(12). Again, no relevant influence of the substrates can be assumed in such cases, provided that the same kind of encoding for existentials and predicative possession is found in both Pacific and Atlantic Creoles.

- (17) a. **Tyéne** komída na mesa  
 have food loc table  
 ‘There is food on the table’  
*Zamboanga Chabacano*<sup>4</sup> (Steinkrüger 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- b. le **tyéne** tres ermáno  
 s/he have three brother  
 S/he has three brothers.  
*Zamboanga Chabacano* (Steinkrüger 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)

<sup>3</sup> Spanish employs a unique form of the predicate *haber* ‘have’ in the present indicative tense, namely *hay*, which stems the fusion of the third-person singular present tense of *haber* and the locative pronoun *y* (cf. Suner 1982; MacNally 2011).

<sup>4</sup> According to the data available in the APiCS, this pattern including a ‘tener’ verb, is attested also in Cavite and Ternate Chabacano, that are cognate languages spoken in the Philippines.

- (18) a. **tin** un gai Portuges aden  
 have indf guy Portuguese inside  
 ‘There’s a Portuguese guy inside’  
*Papiamentu* (Kouwenberg 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- b. awor mi **tin** un lista basta largo  
 Now Isg have indf list sufficiently long  
 ‘Now I have quite a long list’  
*Papiamentu* (Kouwenberg 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- (19) a. **aten** mucho hende aí plasa  
 Have much people there plaza  
 ‘There are lots of people in/at the plaza’  
*Palenquero* (Schwegler 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- b. Gutabo **aten** ese kusa aí memo  
 Gustavo have that thing right there  
 ‘Gustavo has this thing right (over) there’  
*Palenquero* (Schwegler 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)

The sole exception among Spanish based Creoles is represented by Media Lengua, which is a mixed language spoken in Ecuador. Media Lengua uses two different predicates, respectively ‘sit’ for existentials (20) and ‘hold/have’ for predicative possession (21). The pivot in the existential sentence in (20), *manchani plata* ‘a lot of money’ seems to be here the subject of the predication. It is unmarked for case (contra the internal argument of the possessive verb, which is marked accusative, as in (21)) and triggers agreement on the verb.

- (20) Isti olla-bi manchani plata **sinta-xu-n** *Existential*  
 this pot-loc a.lot.of silver sit-prog-3sg  
 ‘There is a lot of money in this pot’  
*Media Lengua* (Muysken 1981a: 55)
- (21) tres gato-s-ta kaza-bi **tini-ni**  
 three cat-pl-acc house-loc have-1sg  
 ‘I have three cats in the house’  
*Media Lengua* (Muysken 1981: 63)

Finally, also many Portuguese based Creoles follow a HAVE pattern for existentials.<sup>5</sup> Once again, this strategy is at work in Atlantic and in Pacific

<sup>5</sup> No proforms or expletives are found in European and Brazilian Portuguese. Consider the examples in (i)-(ii), adapted from Bentley (2017: 349-350).

- (i) Nesta fruta **há** moitas sementes  
 in.this fruit have.3SG many seeds  
 ‘In this fruit there are many seeds’  
*European Portuguese*

creole, providing support for the idea of an innate language creation mechanism at work in such contexts, along the lines of Bickerton (1981; 1984). Consider the examples below, where, as before, the (a) examples show an existential construction and the (b) examples show a sentence expressing transitive possession.

- (22) a. **Ten** un radin na menza  
 Have det radio.little on table  
 ‘There is a little radio on the table’
- b. N **ten** un radin  
 Isg have det radio.little  
 ‘I have a little radio’  
*Cape Verdean Creole of São Vicente*<sup>6</sup> (Swolkien 2012)
- (23) a. (I) **teŋ** poŋ na mesa  
 3sg.sbj have bread on table  
 ‘There is bread on the table’  
*Casamancese Creole* (Biagui and Quint 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- b. Joŋ **teŋ** kabalu  
 John have horse  
 ‘John has a horse’  
*Casamancese Creole* (Biagui and Quint 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- (24) a. (Ê) **tê** tôvada  
 Expl have storm  
 ‘There is a storm’  
*Principense* (Maurer 2009: 58)
- b. N **tê** dôsu kaxi  
 Isg have two house  
 ‘I have two houses’  
*Principense* (Maurer 2009: 104)
- (25) a. Mete patio **té** wan bityil ku wan aza kabadu  
 Inside yard have art bird with art wing broken  
 ‘There is a bird in the yard with a broken wing’  
*Fa d’Ambô* (Post 1999: 63)

- (ii) **tem** muitos caroços nessa fruta.  
 have.3SG many seeds in.this fruit  
 ‘In this fruit there are many seeds’  
*Brazilian Portuguese*

<sup>6</sup> An identity between existential and possession predicates is attested also in the Cape Verdean Creole of Brava and the Cape Verdean Creole of Santiago, as documented in APiCS feature 78.



- b. Eli                    **té**                    wan                    lapizi  
 3sg                    have                    art                    pencil  
 ‘He has a pencil’  
*Fa d’Ambô* (Post 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- (26) a. **tiŋ**                    ũ                    makak                    i                    ũ                    crocodile  
 have-pst                    one                    monkey                    and                    one                    crocodile  
 [Once upon a time], there was a monkey and a crocodile  
*Diu Indo-Portuguese* (Cardoso 2009: 167)
- b. Nə                    Go                    yo                    **te**                    bastāt                    cousin                    i                    auntie  
 Loc                    Goa                    1sg                    have.npst                    many                    cousin                    and                    auntie  
 ‘I have many cousins and aunties in Goa’  
*Diu Indo-Portuguese* (Cardoso 2009: 167)
- (27) a. **Teng**                    kumeria                    na                    mesa  
 have                    food                    loc                    table  
 ‘There is food on the table’  
*Papia Kristang* (Baxter 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- b. Maria                    **teng**                    ŋgua                    baisikal  
 Maria                    have                    one                    bicycle  
 ‘Maria has a bicycle’  
*Papia Kristang* (Baxter 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- (28) a. Nu                    meo                    di                    matu                    **teng**                    ung                    pos                    grandi  
 In                    middle                    of                    forest                    have                    a                    well                    big  
 ‘In the middle of the forest there was a big well.’  
*Batavia Creole* (Maurer 2011: 67)
- b. Ile                    **teng**                    ung                    kabalu  
 He                    have                    a                    horse  
 ‘He had a horse’  
*Batavia Creole* (Maurer 2011: 66)

There are also some exceptions among Portuguese based Creoles. For instance, in Korlai, which is a Creole language spoken by ca. 1,000 speakers in an isolated area around the Indian village of Korlai, possessives and existentials are construed with the copula, not with a transitive possession verb, which doesn’t exist in that language, as shown in (29)-(30). Korlai displays a ‘locational predication’ pattern for possession and existentials similar to the one represented for the French based Creole Tayo, illustrated above in (13)-(14).

- (29) Mi                    pɛrt                    doy                    sajkəl                    **tɛ**  
 1sg.poss                    near                    two                    bicycle                    cop.prs  
 ‘I have two bicycles’  
*Korlai* (Clemens 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- (30) ũ                    ɔm                    **ti**  
 A                    man                    cop.pst  
 ‘There was a man’  
*Korlai* (Clemens 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)

In some other Portuguese based Creoles the expression of possession and existential meaning actually overlap. For instance, in Santome there are various ways to morpho-syntactically encode existential meaning. Consider the following examples.

- (31) Meza                    **tê**                    kume  
 Table                    have                    food  
 ‘There is food on the table’  
*Santome* (Hagemeijer 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- (32) Meza                    **sa**                    **ku**                    kume  
 Table                    be                    with                    food  
 ‘There is food on the table’  
*Santome* (Hagemeijer 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- (33) Ngandu, (è)    **tê**    ngê    ku    na    ka    kum’=ê    fa  
 Shark    3sg    have    person rel    neg    ipfv    eat=it    neg  
 ‘Shark, there are people that don’t eat it’  
*Santome* (Hagemeijer 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- (34) Ngê    **sen**    ni    Putuga    ku    ka    dumu    uva    ku    ope  
 person exist in Portugal rel ipfv pound grape with foot  
 ‘There are people in Portugal that smash grapes with their feet’  
*Santome* (Hagemeijer 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)
- (35) Vêndê                    **tê**                    sapê                    ãa                    data  
 Store                    have                    hat                    a                    lot  
 ‘The store has a lot of hats’  
*Santome* (Hagemeijer 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)

In the sentences in (31) and (32) we find that the coda is the subject of the predication. The examples in (31) expresses existential meaning with a HAVE verb, which is also responsible for encoding transitive possession in Santome (cf. the example in (35)), while the example in (32) expresses the existential meaning with a ‘be with’ strategy, which is not uncommon cross-linguistically, as an alternative to transitive HAVE in encoding (abstract, temporary, etc.) possession (cf. Stolz 2001; Stassen 2009; Levinson 2011; Myler 2014, among others). The example in (33) shows an optional expletive personal pronoun as the subject of the HAVE predicate followed by the pivot *ngê* ‘person’. In (34) the pivot appears to be the subject of the predicate *sen* (‘be, exist’).

Angolar displays an analogous variability in the encoding of existentials. This language has three constructions, which express both transitive possession and existential contexts, respectively *tê* ‘have’, *tha ki* ‘be with’ and *tha ku ê* ‘be with it’ as illustrated in (36)-(38). In all these (‘possessive’) examples, the pivot follows the verbal item.

(36) Tepu nakulu kwanda tia ta **tê** ũa ome  
 time old high land pst have one man  
 ‘In the olden days, in the highlands, there was a man’  
*Angolar* (Maurer 1995: 103)

(37) Hô letu kanua e tambe **tha** **ki** tano baburu  
 then inside canoe dem also be with five baburu  
 ‘So in the canoe there were also five baburu’  
*Angolar* (Maurer 1995: 103)

(38) Aie **tha** **ku** (ê) kikiê  
 Now be with it kikiê  
 ‘Now there is fish’  
*Angolar* (Maurer 1995: 67)

In Angolar, there is also a verb solely used for conveying an existential meaning,<sup>7</sup> the item *the* (possibly derived from the copula *tha*, cf. (37)-(38)). In such case, the pivot precedes the verb, matching the behaviour of the example from Santome in (34), where an EXIST/BE and not a HAVE verb is used.

(39) Aie kikiê **the**  
 Now fish there.is  
 ‘Now there is fish’  
*Angolar* (Maurer 1995: 67)

Finally, according to the data reported in the APiCS on line (feature 77), Guinea-Bissau Kriyol has two different verbs for expressing existentials and transitive possession, respectively *ten* (‘exist’), and *tene* (‘have’), as shown in (40)-(41). Actually, the two verbs appear to be lexically related. Thus, we assume that at most, the existential verb *ten* can be considered as a specialized allomorph for existential contexts of the HAVE predicate. Note that an optional expletive personal pronoun can show up as the subject of *ten*.

(40) (I) **ten** un minjer ki **tene** um fiju-femea  
 3sg exist one woman who have one child-female  
 ‘There’s a woman who has a daughter’  
*Guinea-Bissau Kriyol* (Intumbo *et al.*: APiCS Structure dataset)

(41) Djon **tene** un bisikleta  
 John have one bike  
 ‘John has a bike’  
*Guinea-Bissau Kriyol* (Peck 1988: 36)

<sup>7</sup> In his typological survey, Creissels (2014) shows that the use of a predicate solely recruited for the expression of existential meaning is quite a common strategy among natural languages.

### 3. Differences and similarities between Romance based Creoles and their lexifiers

In this section, we highlight the similarities and differences between the morphosyntax of existentials in the Romance based Creole languages illustrated so far and their lexifiers.

First, we must note that Romance based Creoles never use a proform to encode existentials. This could be due to the fact that the process of pidginization/creolization leads to a loss of inflectional morphology.<sup>8</sup> Actually, it is notable that no French based Creoles retain a (locative) proform in their grammar. In Ibero-Romance, the proform is either missing, as in Portuguese, or lexicalized as part of present tense forms of the paradigm of the HABERE verb, as in European Spanish (see Bentley 2017; cf. fn. 3). Interestingly, Spanish based Creoles invariably use an existential verb shaped on the basis of Spanish *tener*, which solely encodes transitive possession.<sup>9</sup>

Second, as for expletive subjects, the Romance languages that do not allow phonologically null subjects usually employ an obligatory expletive pronoun in existentials, as for instance *il* in French (cf. example (7)). Some French based Creoles display an optional expletive subject (usually a 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun), as illustrated in (42)-(44). Thus, the correlation between the licensing of phonologically null subject and the obligatory presence of an expletive pronoun for existentials is not borne out in Romance Based Creoles.

(42) (i)    ni            onlo            moun  
           3sg    have            much            people  
           ‘There are a lot of people’  
           *Guadeloupean Creole* (Colot and Ludwig 2013a: APiCS Structure dataset)

(43) (i)    ni            anlo            moun  
           3sg    have            much            people  
           ‘There are a lot of people’  
           *Martinican Creole* (Ludwig 1996: 338)

(44) (ye)    gen            de            kalite            demi  
           3pl    have            two            kind            berry  
           ‘There are two kinds of berries’  
           *Louisiana Creole, Pointe Coupee* (Klinger 2003: 309)

<sup>8</sup> Actually it must be noted that inflections are not at all uncommon in pidgins. Bakker (2003) shows that pidgins can have richer inflection than creoles, though much of this could be due to the fact that many creoles are lexified by ‘inflectionally rich’ Romance languages (cf. e.g. Roberts and Bresnan 2008). DeGraff (2001: 232; 2003) assumes that the presence of inflectional morphology in Haitian Creole can be seen as evidence against the idea that creole genesis involves that sort of “break in transmission” commonly ascribed to pidginization.

<sup>9</sup> In Romance languages *tenere* is attested as an existential predicate only in Brazilian Portuguese (cf. Bentley 2017: 352). All the Portuguese based Creoles illustrated in Section 2 use a *tenere* strategy for existential purposes, departing from their lexifier, which is – with good evidence – European Portuguese which uses an HABERE predicate (cf. fn. 5).

Spanish based Creoles never use an expletive pronoun, while many Portuguese based Creoles spoken in Africa, like the French ones illustrated above, allow the optional presence of an expletive, as documented in the examples in (45)-(47) (cf. APiCS online: Feature 64).

- (45) (i)       teŋ        arus        ciw        na        Sindonj  
           3sg.sbj have     rice        a.lot     in        Sindonj  
           ‘There is plenty of rice in Sindone’  
           *Casamancese* (Quint 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)

- (46) (Ê)    tê        ningê    nhon    di        pasa    lala    fa  
           3sg    have    person no     of        pass    there neg  
           ‘There is nobody who passes by over there’  
           *Principense* (Maurer 2009: 58)

- (47) (Ê)    tê        dja        ku    n     na    ka    kume    fa  
           3sg have    day     rel   1sg neg   ipfv eat    neg  
           ‘There are days on which I don’t eat’  
           *Santomé* (Hagemeyer 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)

Furthermore the pivot in Romance languages is invariantly post-verbal (cf. the example in (3)). On the contrary, in Creoles, with predicates specifically expressing existence (and non possession), the pivot precedes the verbal item, in a position that is arguably its subject position. Consider, for instance, the examples in (34) from Santomé and in (39) from Angolar.

As for the definiteness effect, it is well known since Milsark (1974) that Romance languages do not exhibit the same evidence for it as English, given that definite NPs are allowed quite freely in existential sentences.<sup>10</sup> APiCS does not provide decisive comparative evidence with respect to this issue. Note however that it does not report any example with the pivot introduced by a definite determiner among Romance Creoles. Furthermore, Sycia (2013) explicitly assumes that a definiteness effect is at work in the syntax of Mauritian Creole, as illustrated in (48).

<sup>10</sup> As reported in Bentley (2017: 357-358) however, in-depth analysis brings to light two kinds of evidence for the Definiteness Effect in Romance: (i) a definite post-verbal NP cannot be followed by the coda within the same prosodic unit (Leonetti’s 2008 *Coda Constraint*); (ii) many Romance varieties distinguish between definite and indefinite post-verbal NPs in existential by means of verb selection and/or agreement pattern (see La Fauci and Loporcaro 1993; Manzini and Savoia 2005; Bentley 2013, among others). Actually, Romance existentials with definite post-verbal NPs have been argued to be inverse locatives (Moro 1997; Zamparelli 2000, among others).

- (48) \*Ena loto la kot labutik  
 have car def near shop  
 ‘There is the car near the shop’  
*Mauritian Creole* (Syea 2013: 66)

For what concerns the similarities, we have seen that all the Romance languages involved in the present survey (French, Spanish and Portuguese), like the Creole based on them use HAVE-like predicates to encode existentials.<sup>11</sup> However, it is not clear if the pivot in Romance languages is the syntactic subject or the object of the existential construction. Bentley (2017) shows that in Spoken Brazilian Portuguese the invariant copula *tem* co-occurs with nominative pronominal pivots, as in (49). On the contrary, Manzini and Savoia (2005), Cruschina (2015) show that many southern Italo-Romance dialects with existential HAVE verbs select Differentially Object Marked (DOM) pivots, as illustrated in (50) pointing to a clear object status for them.

- (49) Tem eu.  
 hold.3sg 1sg.nom  
 ‘There’s me’  
*Spoken Brazilian Portuguese* (Bentley 2017: 353)

- (50) Ave a mie  
 have.3sg DOM I  
 ‘There’s me’  
*Salentino Apulian* (Bentley 2017: 353)

In Creole languages, we cannot detect object *vs.* subject status of the pivot of HAVE predicates on the basis of agreement/case patterns, given that the verbal predicate is normally uninflected, and the pivot is unmarked for case. However, there are at least two clear hints pointing to their object status. First, as illustrated above, we find the presence of an optional subject pronoun in various Creoles. Second, whenever a different predicate is involved in an existential construction the pivot - as already pointed out - is switched to a pre-verbal position. Considering that Creole languages are consistently SVO (cf. APiCS feature n. 1), this pattern is highly indicative of their status as (logical) subjects.

#### 4. *The analysis*

The present section contains the theoretical core of the discussion. We will propose that the ‘possessive’ encoding of existential sentences in Creole

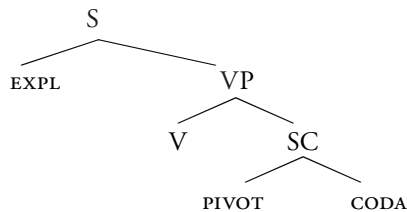
<sup>11</sup> Note, however, that HAVE predicates for existentials are also widely attested for English and Dutch based creoles. Consider for instance the examples from *Krio* in (1)-(2).

languages can be easily accounted for if we assume that the ‘contextual domain’ of existentials is encoded as the (covert, implicit) possessor of a (transitive) HAVE predicate including the pivot as its direct object (cf. Rigau 1997; Manzini and Savoia 2005), with the coda which is (optionally) introduced as an adjunct, encoding a further possessor (a ‘locative’ *inclusor*) of the predicate, following Franco and Manzini (2017, to appear), Franco and Lorusso (2018). Before introducing our analysis in Section 4.2, we provide a sketch of the theoretical background in section 4.1.

#### 4.1 Theoretical background on existentials

Existential sentences have been a prominent research topic in generative linguistics, at least since Milsark (1974). Two main proposals have been put forward for what concerns the syntax of existentials. The most well-received and widespread proposal is based on the assumption that a small clause structure in which the pivot is the subject and the coda is the predicate is involved (see e.g. Stowell 1978; Chomsky 1981; Safir 1985; Freeze 1992; Moro 1997, among others).<sup>12</sup> The second proposal takes existential sentences to be structures in which the pivot is hosted as the complement of the verbal predicate and the coda is an adjunct (see McNally 1992; Francez 2007; 2009; Villalba 2013, among others).<sup>13</sup> The two competing proposals are roughly illustrated, respectively, in (51) and (52).

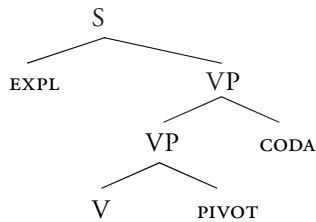
(51)



<sup>12</sup> Note that Williams (1983, 1984) (cf. also Higginbotham 1987) developed a theory in which syntactic predication is defined independently of the presence of a clausal constituent. Williams argues that, syntactically, a predication is a relation holding between a maximal projection and some phrase external to that projection. Given that external arguments are by definition ‘external’ to the maximal unit of which they are subjects, according to Williams there can be no small clause constituent encoding a subject–predicate relation.

<sup>13</sup> Another possibility would be to consider the coda as a further complement of the existential verb in a triadic structure, as suggested, for example by Keenan (1987).

(52)



Here we follow the view advocated in (52), in order to account for the syntax of HAVE existentials in Romance based Creole languages. Specifically, we follow Francez (2007; 2009) in assuming that the *contextual domain* has a direct role in shaping existentials and in assuming that codas are VP adjuncts. Francez assumes that existentials have an implicit argument that can be thought of as a contextual variable. For instance, a sentence like ‘John left’ is understood as pertaining to a contextual interval – it is true with respect to a given interval if this interval contains an event of ‘John leaving’. Francez (2007: 54) precisely argues that: “the implicit argument [...] is a contextual domain, defined as a set (of individuals, times, locations, worlds, or possibly other types of entities) determined by context or by contextual modifiers. Intuitively, the function of existentials [...] is to convey information about such contextual domains, and particularly to say what a domain or a set of domains *contains* or does not *contain*.”

We argue that the contextual domain can be syntacticized in subject position, namely it can be rendered in the form of a (possibly covert) expletive item, which is the subject of a transitive HAVE predicate. In other words, the contextual domain is encoded as a ‘possessor’. Thus, in our view, expletives are meaningful items.<sup>14</sup>

Note that the sensitivity to the ‘contextual domain’ of existential sentences has been often suggested in the semantic literature. For instance, Borschev and Partee (2001: 22) argue that: “It is important that existence is always understood with respect to some LOCation. An implicit LOCation must be given by the context. This is usually ‘here’ or ‘there’, ‘now’ or ‘then’”. An answer to the existential question must explicate what it means to be “understood with respect to some LOCation.”

Francez (2007) provides a comparison of existentials with other syntactic domains involving implicit arguments, which reveals much about their interaction with context. For instance, implicit arguments (of the kind relevant here) include “missing/covert” objects of transitive verbs. Fillmore (1986)

<sup>14</sup> Perhaps, in the generative literature, the most interesting attempt to defend the view that expletives are meaningful items is the one advanced in Moro (1997). According to Moro, English *there* or the Italian proform *ci* are meaningful, being ‘predicates predicated of the pivot’, occurring in subject position due to a mechanism of predicate raising.



identifies two types of readings for these kinds of objects: an existential quantification reading (53a) and a definite reading (53b) (cf. Francez 2007: 58).

- (53) a. I ate (= I ate something)  
 b. I noticed (= I noticed that)

Francez (2007, 2009) claims that contextual domains are actually analogous to the context sets usual in the semantic literature on contextual domain restriction (see Barwise and Cooper 1981; Von Stechow 1994; Roberts 1995, among other). Consider the example in (54) (adapted from Francez 2007).

- (54) E. Coli endotoxin caused death in all animals within 16 to 29 hours

The quantified expression *all animals* in (54) is interpreted as if some hidden constituents such as for instance *in the experiment, in the study* were involved in contextually restricting the NP *animals*. For what specifically concerns existentials, we can assume – following Francez (2007: 53) – that the context set is constructed as a set of entities related to this discourse referent by some contextually salient relation. “Generally, one can speak of the contextual domain of an entity, the context set determined through a salient discourse referent and relation.”

#### 4.2 Our proposal for Romance based Creoles: the contextual domains (and codas) as ‘possessors’

We argue that the *contextual domain*, as defined above can be encoded in the form of the possessor of an existential event. This is the most widespread strategy in the case of Romance based Creoles, as we have illustrated in Section 2. Consider this basic intuition. The Italian sentences in (55) and (56) basically express the same existential meaning. The example in (56) mimics the behaviour of the vast majority of Romance Creoles, namely it uses a HAVE predicate to convey an existential meaning. This pattern is quite widespread in Spoken Italian, at least according to our native judgements.

- (55) C'è la nebbia a Milano  
 ‘There is fog in Milan’  
*Italian*

- (56) C'hanno la nebbia a Milano  
 ‘There is fog in Milan’  
*Italian*

Crucially, in (56) the HAVE predicate is inflected for 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural, suggesting the presence of a covert expletive pronoun that we argue to be

devoted to encode the contextual domain. Substantially, we claim that the event described by the VP predicate has the property of being ‘witnessed’, namely included in (concomitant to) a relevant discourse universe, representing – in a sense – the set of individuals which can attend the described event. These individuals can be precisely rendered as the ‘contextual domain’ of the event. Actually, they are *present* to a given event and this is coherent with what Creissels (2014: 2) says, namely that: “What distinguishes existential clauses from plain locational clauses is a different perspectivization of figure-ground relationships whose most obvious manifestation is that, contrary to plain locational clauses, existential clauses are not adequate answers to questions about the location of an entity, but can be used to identify an entity *present* at a certain location.” Evidence that we are on the right track, in assuming that expletives are meaningful and encode the contextual domain, comes from examples like the following.<sup>15</sup>

- (57) A Ostia c’**hai** il sole mentre a Milano c’**hanno** la nebbia  
 ‘In Ostia, there is the sun, while in Milan there is the fog’  
*Italian*

In the existential sentences in (57) the contextual domain that is perceived as more ‘proximal’ is encoded via a second person singular inflection on the HAVE verb (namely encoding a covert ‘participant’ pronoun), while the contextual domain that is perceived as more ‘distal’ is rendered through a third person plural inflection. Curiously, the central role of the contextual domain is confirmed by the proforms found in Italian: the proform *ci* is syncretic with the 1<sup>st</sup> plural person clitic. So, the reference of 1st person plural clitics can be extended to the set of individual present/concomitant to the discourse (speaker/hearer). Note at this regard, that 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural clitic *vi* can lexicalize proforms in Italian as well (58).

- (58) vi                    ha                    scienze            filosofiche    particolari  
 cl.2pl                has                   sciences           philosophic    particular  
 ‘There are particular philosophic sciences’  
*Italian* (Croce, *Estetica* III, from Serianni 1988: 216; cf. Manzini and Savoia 2005)

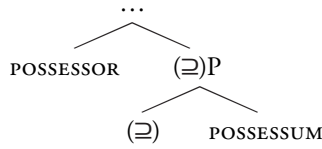
Interestingly, patterns of this kinds are not uncommon within Creole languages. As reported in Haspelmath (2013, APiCS: Features 64), for instance in Jamaican, existential sentences are formed with *gat* (< English got) or *hav* (< English have) preceded by an indefinite pronoun, usually *yu* ‘you’ or *dem* ‘they’. In some cases, even the 1st person plural *wi* ‘we’ can be used for existentials.

<sup>15</sup> Note that we leave a full analysis of Romance proforms to an independent work (cf. Franco *et al.* 2016).

According to what reported in the APiCS, which pronoun is selected depends on the speaker's attitude towards the entity which the context is about. Clearly this fact militates against the view the expletive pronouns are meaningless.

Following Svenonius (2007), Bassaganyas-Bars (2015), Manzini *et al.* (to appear) we assume that HAVE predicates encode a basic relation (of 'inclusion'), that we notate as  $(\supseteq)$  (cf. Franco and Manzini 2017 on an analogous proposal concerning the adposition *with*). Consider the representation in (59). This structure basically says that the *possessum* is the complement of  $(\supseteq)P$  and the *possessor* is its sister.

(59)



For what concern those languages using a possession schema for existentials, as for instance the Romance based Creoles illustrated in this work, we argue that the *possessum* is the pivot and the *possessor* is its contextual domain. Clearly, we assume that it is not coincidental the use of the same predicate to encode transitive possession and existential meaning. The contextual domain is precisely rendered, in such cases, with an expletive pronoun, representing the set of individuals which can possess/attend/witness/be present at the described event.

As for what concerns the codas, at least whenever they are introduced by a (locative) PP, we assume that they are, in turn, additional possessors of the pivot, introduced in the syntactic skeleton by means of an adjunction operation. Consider again the sentence in (56). This sentence clearly presupposes that 'the coda includes the pivot', namely that 'Milan **has** fog'. Evidence that we are on the right track with this kind of characterization comes from the fact that an existential meaning can be rendered in Creoles languages as in (60)-(61), repeating (31)-(32) for ease of reference. Here the coda (or better the argumental material embedded within the coda) is precisely introduced as the possessor of the pivot. In such cases, the contextual domain could be assumed, as for the example in (54), to be introduced as a covert PP/adverbial adjunct restricting the discourse universe.

(60) Meza                    **tê**                    kume                    =(31)  
 Table                    have                    food  
 'There is food on the table'  
*Santome* (Hagemeijer 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)

(61) Meza                    **sa**                    **ku**                    kume                    =(32)  
 Table                    be                    with                    food  
 'There is food on the table'  
*Santome* (Hagemeijer 2013: APiCS Structure dataset)

In this work, we follow Franco and Manzini (2017, to appear), Franco and Lorusso (2018) in assuming that locatives are interpreted as such only in so far as they denote locatively constrained ‘inclusion’. Specifically, locative is a specialization of an ‘inclusion’ relation, which arises for instance from the locative nature of the nominal element embedded under an adposition/oblique case. Indeed, in recent work Manzini and Savoia (2011a, 2011b), Manzini and Franco (2016), Franco and Manzini (2017) lay out an analysis of the syntax and interpretation of genitive *of*, dative *to*, and instrumental *with* based on the assumption that these elements are endowed with an elementary interpretive content interacting with the internal organization of the predicate/event. As for dative *to*, for instance, the line of analysis of ditransitive verbs initiated by Kayne (1984) is characterized by the assumption that verbs like *give* take as their complement a predication whose content is a possession headed by *to*. Following Kayne (1984), Pesetsky (1995), Harley (2002), Beck and Johnson (2004), we may say that in (61) a possession relation holds between the dative (Peter) and the theme of the ditransitive verb (the book). We characterize the content of *to* in terms of the notion of “(zonal) inclusion”, as proposed by Belvin and den Dikken (1997) precisely for the verb *have*. We assimilate this content to an elementary part/whole predication and notate it as  $\sqsubseteq$ , so that (62a) is roughly structured as in (62b). In (62b) the result of the causative event is that the book is included by (or part of) Peter.

- (62) a. I give the book to Peter  
 b.  $[_{VP} \text{ give } [_{PreDP} \text{ the book } [[\sqsubseteq \text{ to} ] \text{ Peter}]]]]$

Locative *in*, *to*, etc. are nothing else than a specialization of the  $\sqsubseteq$  relation, which is notably the ‘inverse’ of the relation expressed by the verb for *HAVE* (or by the adposition *with*), namely  $\supseteq$ , as illustrated above.<sup>16</sup> Thus, we argue that in the Romance based Creoles that we have reviewed the coda (actually, the nominal constituent expressed via the coda) is a second possessor of the event including the pivot and whose external argument (‘first’ possessor) is the contextual domain. A possible representation is given in (63) for the Casamancese example in (23a).

<sup>16</sup> We acknowledge that one may legitimately wonder what may be excluded from the denotation of such a wide-ranging relator as  $\sqsubseteq$ . We observe that precisely because of its very general denotation, the part/whole or inclusion predicate (whether it corresponds to a case inflection or to an adpositional head) does not have sufficient lexical content to characterize, say, specific (sub)types of possession, location, etc. Thus, in a language like Latin (the same) oblique case attaches to locations, possessors, goals e.g. *Romae* (Rome-obl) ‘in Rome, of Rome, to Rome (dative)’. However, there are no languages where the oblique case may denote, say, ‘after’ as opposed to ‘before’, ‘on’ as opposed to ‘under’, etc. To encode those meanings, natural languages usually resort to more specialized relational nouns/Axial Parts (Svenonius 2006; Fábregas 2007; Franco 2016).



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