

RELATIVIZATION IN KANA

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Abstract

Relativization is a universal linguistic feature observed across languages, though its forms vary. While extensive research has focused on languages like English, studies on lesser-known languages like Kana remain limited. This study examined relativization in Kana, analysing the structure of relative clauses, their markers, and syntactic roles. Data from six native speakers were analysed using a qualitative approach within the framework of Government and Binding Theory. Findings revealed that the particle *e* introduces relative clauses in Kana, which can modify head nouns in any syntactic position. Contrary to Ikoro (1996), this study identified *e* as the relative clause marker, while *a* is reanalysed as a clause-final enclitic for emphasis. These findings enhance understanding of Kana syntax and contribute to the typology of relative clauses.

Keywords: Relativization, Kana, relative clause marker

Introduction

Relativization is a syntactic process by which a clause is embedded within another clause to modify a noun or a pronoun, often providing additional information about it. This construction, known as a relative clause, is a fundamental aspect of complex sentence formation across languages. Relative clauses can serve various functions, such as specifying, elaborating, or restricting the referent of the noun. Typically introduced by relative pronouns like "who," "which," or "that" in English, they are essential in both written and spoken discourse for creating more informative and precise descriptions (Comrie, 1989; Keenan & Comrie, 1977). Languages exhibit a wide range of strategies for forming relative clauses. In some, relative clauses are head-initial, where the relative pronoun or complementizer precedes the clause, as in English ("the book that I read"). Others are head-final, with the relative clause following the noun it modifies as seen in languages like Japanese and Turkish. Additionally, languages vary in how they handle the relative pronoun's antecedent within the clause, a feature categorized under the Accessibility Hierarchy proposed by Keenan and Comrie (1977). This hierarchy predicts the relative ease with which different syntactic

positions (subject, object, etc.) can be relativized across languages, influencing language acquisition and processing.

Typologically, some languages use non-finite forms, participles, or nominalizations to create relative clauses, while others might employ more complex strategies involving resumptive pronouns or gaps. The diversity in relativization mechanisms reflects the linguistic creativity and adaptability in addressing the syntactic and communicative needs of speakers (Downing, 1978; Lehmann, 1984).

The linguistic phenomenon of relativisation has been extensively studied and its occurrence is a widespread feature of human languages worldwide. Research has consistently shown that relative clauses are a universal feature of natural languages, appearing in various forms across different language families (Tallerman, 1998; Wiredu, 2009). While significant work has been done on the typological study and analysis of relative clauses in languages like English, there is need to examine the concept in understudied languages. One of such lesser-documented languages is Kana. The Kana language belongs to the Ogonoid group of languages spoken in the South East part of Rivers State. Other languages of the group include Baan, Eleme, Tai and Gokana. They are the speech forms of the people of Khana, Eleme, Gokana, and Tai Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria. Kana (the language is called Kana, while the people or local government area is known as Khana) is mainly spoken in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Some scholars of the Ogonoid languages, to some extent, have examined Kana relative clause (Ikoro, 1996; Issac, 2020). Ikoro (1996) highlights relative clause formations in Kana and claims that the relative clause marker in Kana is an enclitic that occurs at the end of the relative clause. This claim has called for a re-examination of the Kana relative clause. Thus, this study aimed to re-examine the relative marker in Kana and provides a comprehensive analysis of the formation and structure of relativization in Kana. Specifically, the study was guided by the following objectives:

1. to re-examine previous analysis of relative clause marker in Kana as described in Ikoro (1996)
2. to analyze the Structural Patterns of Relative Clauses in Kana
3. to investigate the Syntactic Roles of Relative Clauses in Kana

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Government and Binding Theory. In the Government and Binding (GB) framework proposed by Noam Chomsky in the early 1980s, relativisation was analysed through a detailed system of syntactic rules and principles governing the structure of sentences. GB theory introduces several modules, including X-bar theory, theta theory, case theory, and binding theory, which together account for the relationships between different parts of a sentence.

Schaefer (2023) describes GB theory as a framework that bridges transformational grammar with contemporary syntactic analysis. It is portrayed as a

robust system where the Projection Principle ensures that lexical information (e.g., theta roles) is systematically represented in syntax. Schaefer emphasizes the enduring relevance of GB, especially its role in shaping subsequent minimalist approaches by simplifying transformational rules. Central to GB theory was the concept of *movement*, which explained how elements such as relative pronouns or operators are displaced from their original positions to a new position at the beginning of the relative clause. This displacement was necessary in forming relative clauses and are regulated by specific syntactic constraints. One key constraint in GB theory was *subjacency*, which restricts the distance over which a constituent can be moved. According to the subjacency principle, movement cannot cross more than one bounding node, such as an NP (noun phrase) or a CP (complementizer phrase), without causing ungrammaticality. This helps to explain why certain long-distance dependencies, which would require crossing multiple bounding nodes, are not permissible in natural languages (Chomsky, 1981).

Another important concept was *coindexation*, which requires that the moved relative pronoun or operator be linked, or coindexed, with its antecedent in the main clause. This ensures that the relative clause accurately refers back to the noun it modifies. For instance, in the sentence "The book that John read was fascinating," the relative pronoun "that" is coindexed with "the book," establishing a syntactic dependency between them. GB theory also introduces the notion of *empty categories*, such as traces (t), which mark the original position of moved constituents. In the example above, after movement, a trace remains in the position originally occupied by "that." This trace remained crucial for maintaining the syntactic integrity of the sentence, ensuring that each element has an appropriate place in the syntactic structure.

Furthermore, GB theory includes the *binding theory*, which deals with the relationships between pronouns and their antecedents within a sentence. The binding principles (A, B, and C) govern how different types of noun phrases, such as reflexive pronouns and regular pronouns, can or cannot be coindexed with other noun phrases in the sentence. These principles help maintain proper referential relationships within and across clauses. Government and Binding (GB) Theory, proposed by Noam Chomsky, is relevant to the study of relativization as it provides a framework for understanding how syntactic structures are generated and interpreted in the human mind, specifically addressing the movement and binding mechanisms involved in forming relative clauses. This theory helps explain the underlying principles governing the placement and interpretation of relative pronouns and clauses in different languages.

The Concept of Relativization

Relativisation is a linguistic process that involves the formation of relative clauses, which provide additional information about a noun (antecedent) within a sentence. This process is fundamental to the syntactic and semantic structuring of many

languages, allowing for the embedding of clauses to modify or qualify nouns. Peter Siemund (2023) defines relativization as the grammatical process of forming relative clauses that modify noun phrases, adding further information. His analysis highlights three strategies for relative clause formation in English: relative pronouns (e.g., *who*, *which*), subordinators like *that*, and zero-relativization, where no explicit marker is used. Nordquist (2024) states that relativization involves embedding a clause to describe or qualify a noun. He emphasizes its syntactic flexibility, showing that relative clauses can modify subjects, objects, obliques, and possessives in various languages.

Early theories of relativisation, significantly influenced by Noam Chomsky's transformational-generative grammar, proposed a process where relative clauses formed through the movement of a relative pronoun or empty operator to the beginning of the clause (Chomsky, 1977). This movement, often accompanied by *wh*-movement, serves to create questions and relative clauses within the sentence structure (Chomsky, 1977). In the Government and Binding framework, the analysis of relativisation involves examining syntactic dependencies and constraints, including the coindexing of relative pronouns or operators with their antecedents while adhering to syntactic limitations like subadjacency to ensure structural integrity (Chomsky, 1981). Relative clauses are broadly categorized into restrictive and non-restrictive types, with the former providing essential information for noun phrase identification while the latter offers supplementary, non-crucial details about the noun (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). For instance, in the sentence "The book that she borrowed was interesting," the restrictive relative clause "that she borrowed" specifies the particular book under discussion (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Conversely, non-restrictive relative clauses, as demonstrated in "My brother, who lives in New York, is visiting us," furnish additional information about the noun without impacting on its identification (Quirk et al., 1985). The construction of relative clauses varies across languages, with some utilizing relative pronouns while others employing alternative techniques like particle marking or relativiser words. English typically employs relative pronouns such as "*who*," "*whom*," "*whose*," "*which*," and "*that*," chosen based on the antecedent's syntactic role and animacy (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). In contrast, Japanese positions the relative clause before the modified noun without a relative pronoun, as exemplified in "*watashi ga kaita hon*" (the book that I wrote) (Kuno, 1973). Hebrew introduced relative clauses with the relative pronoun "*she-*," akin to English "*that*," as seen in "*ha-isha she-ra'iti*" (the woman that I saw) (Berman, 1979). The study of relativisation offers valuable insights into the syntactic structures and cognitive processes involved in language. The ongoing exploration of this topic continued to reveal the intricate and diverse mechanisms underlying human linguistic capability.

Methodology

The researcher collected data from six (6) competent native speakers of Kana with the help of native field assistants. The researcher also relied on his intuition as a native

speaker of the language but where any given set of data contradicts his intuition, direct oral interview was used to elicit comparative data from other native speakers of the language. Some available texts on the subject matter were also reanalysed. The study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach.

Relativisation in Kana

The basic function of a relative clause is to modify or specify the head noun. In Kana the particle 'e' is the relative clause marker that introduces relative clauses. Depending on its semantics, this particle could be used to mean whom, whose, who/that and what. In what follows, using data from Boue dialect of Kana, the formation of relative clause in Kana are analysed.

The Structure of Relative Clause in Kana

As mentioned earlier, the relative clause marker in Kana is the particle 'e'. The Kana relative clause is postnominal as the relativised NP (relativised head noun) precedes the relative clause. The relative clause can co-occur with any head noun irrespective of the syntactic position such a noun occupies in a sentence. This means that a head noun in the subject or object of the matrix clause could undergo relativisation in Kana. In the following subsections, we examined relativisation of head nouns in subject and object positions in Kana.

Relativisation of Subject NP

Head nouns in subject position in Kana could be relativised, as the examples in (1a-d) demonstrate.

- 1a. Lō ué [é bà wēē yìì á]
Det farm RCM they PST cultivate PRO
'The farm that they cultivated'
- b. Lō tō [é bà wēē tóp ā]
Det house RCM they PST build PRO
'The house that they built'
- c. Mēnē [é ī wēē wū á]
King RCM we PST enthroned PRO
'The king that we enthroned'
- d. Kpá [é Waaka wēē ēm á]
Book RCM Waaka PST write PRO
'The book that Waaka wrote'

The examples in (1a-d) above showed the relativisation of head nouns functioning as the subject of the relative clauses. As the data showed, the relativised head nouns precede the relative clause in agreement with the structure of Kana relative clause, which was postnominal.

Relativisation of Object NP

In Kana, the object NP of a matrix clause could also undergo relativisation. Consider the examples in (2a-c) below.

- 2a. Bà wēē dē zìǎ [é Wāākā wēē bùì á]
 They PST eat food RCM Waaka PST cooked PRO
 'They ate the food that Waaka cooked'
- b. M̄ wēē yē nè lō bēlóló [é ō bēē gbá á]
 I PST him give Det shirt RCM you PST sow PRO
 'I gave him the shirt that you sewed'
- c. Mámá wēē yàà bēlóló [é m bēē yēē á]
 Mama PST wear shirt RCM I PST buy PRO
 'Mama wore the shirt that I bought'

Examples (2a-c) above are complex sentences that contained relativised head nouns in object positions of the matrix clause. The relative object NPs all precede the relative clauses that modified them. The relative clauses are marked off from the independent clauses with a bracket.

Available data from Kana further revealed that the relative clause could occur with a head noun that is the complement of a preposition. Consider the examples in (3a-d).

- 3a. Bu t̄ [é m̄ beē tōp á]
 In house RCM I PST build PRO
 'In the house that I built'
- b. Nòò t̄ [é bà wēē lè á]
 On tree RCM they PST were PRO
 'On the tree that they were'
- c. Lō gbàrà lè nòò làrà [e āā kwē á]
 Det man is on zinc RCM PROG lick PRO
 'The man is on top of the zinc that is licking'

The structures in brackets in (3a-c) above are relative clauses, which modify the head nouns that are the objects of the prepositions of their respective matrix clauses. The prepositional phrases (3a-c) act as the subjects of the matrix clause where they occur.

Kana Relative Clause Marker

In Kana, the particle 'e' is the relative clause marker that introduces relative clauses. This clause introducing element has an inherent high tone. Depending on the relativised head noun that precedes it in a sentence, the relative clause marker could be used to mean who, what, whom, whose, and that. See the examples in (4a-d) below.

- 4a. Lō gbàrà [é bà wēē kpó á] lē dáá
 Det man RCM (whom) they PST pursue PRO is sleeping
 'The man whom they pursued is sleeping'

- b. Lō nwíí [é yē tè wēè lū á] lē keam á
 Det child RCM (whose) his father PST come PRO is here
 'The man whose father came is here'
- c. Lō tō [é ì wēē tōp á]
 Det house RCM (which) we PST build PRO
 'The house which we built'

Analysing data from Gokana, a sister language of Kana, Issac (2020) observes that the relative clause marker in Gokana manifests two different realizations. It may be null or overtly realized in surface syntax. This is also the case in Kana. The Kana relative clause marker may be absent or overtly expressed at the level of surface structure. Whether the relative clause marker is covert or overtly realized in a relativized structure, it does not affect the relativisation of the sentence, and the position of the relative clause marker cannot be occupied by another element without resulting in ungrammaticality. The choice of an overt or a null relative clause marker is determined by the speaker, stylistics and economy of speech as both manifestations occur in free variations without any grammatical consequences (Isaac, 2020). Consider the examples in (5a-d) below.

- 5a. Lō gbàrà [— bà wēē fē á]
 Det man RCM they PST kill PRO
 'The man that they killed'
- b. Kpá [— n̄ wēē ēm á]
 book RCM I PST write PRO
 'The book that I wrote'
- c. Gbó [— bà wēē fé á]
 Dog RCM they PST kill PRO
 'The dog that they killed'
- d. Tō [— n̄ wēē tōp á] è fé á
 House RCM I PST build PRO has fallen PRO
 'The house that I built has fallen'

The relative clause introducer in the examples in (5a-d) above is not overtly expressed. The position of the relative clause marker was marked — to show its absence. Observe that even though the relative clause marker was covert, the sentences are acceptable expressions since the clause under laid its presence at the deep structure level.

The Resumptive Pronoun in Kana

The relative clause construction in some languages seeks to retain a pronominal within the relative clause (Odura & Donkor, 2020). This pronominal is known as the resumptive pronoun (Odura & Donkor, 2020; Isaac, 2020). It occupies the syntactic position of the referent in the relativised construction. In Kana, the resumptive

pronoun is a phenomenon in the formation of relative clauses. Odura and Donkor (2020) argue that the resumptive pronoun usually precedes the verb in the relative clause construction. However, the resumptive pronoun follows the verb or noun within the relative clause in Kana. The examples in (6a-c) demonstrate this:

- 6a. Tō [é Wāākā wēē tōp á]
House RCM Waaka PST build PRO
'The house that Waaka built'
- b. Kpá [é ì wēē ēm á]
Book RCM we PST write PRO
'The book that we wrote'
- c. Lō nēē [é ì wēē mùè á] è lū á
Det person RCM we PST see PRO has come PRO
'The person that we saw has come'
- d. Kpá [é Wīwā wēē ēm āā tōkpōgōrō á]
Book RCM Wīwā PST write from prison PRO
'The book that Wīwā wrote from prison'

The examples in (6a-d) above showed the resumptive pronoun 'á' which occurred at the end of the clause. In (6a-c) the resumptive pronoun was attached to the verb, while in (6d) it occurred with a noun. The resumptive pronoun is an obligatory element in the formation of Kana relative clause as its absence results in ungrammaticality. It functions to mark emphasis. Ikoro (1996), analysed data from Babbe dialect of Kana, claimed that in Kana the relative clause marker was an enclitic, which occurred at the end of the relative clause and may attach to a noun or verb. According to him, this relative clause enclitic may be - ā or -ā depending on the presence of nasality in the preceding segment. Ikoro supports his claim with the following data drawn from Kana. See the data in (7a-d).

- 7a. Kpá Wīwā wēē ēm ā
Book PST write -REL
- b. Kpá Wīwā wēē ēm āā tōkpugoro -ā
Book PST write from prison -REL
- c. Kpá ā- wēē ēm āā tōkpugoro -ā
Book he PST write from prison -REL
- d. Kpá bà wēē ēm -ā ndá
Book they PST write -REL mine

Explaining the data above, Ikoro claimed that the relative clause enclitic 'ā' was attached to a verb if the verb was not followed by an object NP, otherwise it was attached to the object NP. Contrary to the position of Ikoro above, this paper argues that the clausal final particle 'a' was an enclitic that attached to the noun or verb and served to add emphasis.

Conclusion

Basically, this study undertook a re-analysis of relativization in Kana. The relative clause marker in Kana was the particle 'e', which inherently had a high tone. This particle can mean "which," "whom," "whose," "who/that," or "what," depending on its semantics. The relative clause in Kana was postnominal, meaning the relativized noun phrase (NP) preceded the relative clause. The relative clause could co-occur with any head noun, regardless of the NP's syntactic position in the sentence, allowing NPs to undergo relativization in either subject or object positions in the matrix clause. Additionally, the relative clause marker 'e' can be either null or overtly realized in surface syntax. Contrary to Ikoro (1996), this paper identified 'e' as the relative clause marker in Kana, whereas the particle 'a', which Ikoro claimed to be the relative clause marker, was actually a clause-final enclitic that attaches to a noun or verb for emphasis. In conclusion, this study has provided a comprehensive understanding of the structural and functional aspects of relative clauses in Kana. These insights contributed to a deeper understanding of Kana syntax and the broader typological study of relative clauses.

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