

CLAUSE COMBINATIONS IN GOKANA: A FOCUS ON RELATIVE CLAUSES

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Abstract

*This paper descriptively investigated relative clauses as a type of complex constructions in Gokana, an Ogonoid language spoken by over 400,000 people in the Delta-Cross of the Cross River branch of Benue-Congo in the Niger-Congo phylum. This work sought to know the structural configuration of relative clauses in Gokana, ascertain the types of relative clauses in Gokana with respect to established parameters and examine how the relativized NP is expressed. To achieve these objectives, oral interview and participant observation methods were used in the study with predetermined interview questions drawn up to account for the relative clause expressions in Gokana. Data was analyzed descriptively using the interlinear method of morpheme-to morpheme glossing. The study found out that Gokana has postnominal, internally headed and headless relative clauses when the position of the relative clauses with respect to the head noun is taken into account. Structurally, a relative clause occurs after the noun it modifies and is introduced by the relativizer *e* which is always optional. In terms of the mode of expression of the relativized NP, the study found out that Gokana employs a relative pronoun into the relative clause which then assumes the function of the relativizer (when it is deleted in surface structure) and also functions as the internal pronoun referent of the relativized subject NP.*

Keywords: relative clauses, complex constructions, dependent clause, independent clause, Gokana,

Introduction

In every language, there exists different ways of combining basic lexical items, such as verbs, to form more complex expressions and there are several construction types that involve such combinations. Complex expressions are usually multi-verb constructions involving one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. Payne (2007:306) asserts that ‘an independent clause is one that is fully inflected and capable of being integrated into discourse on its own’. A dependent clause on its own is a clause that depends on some other clause for at least its inflectional information among other things. For example, in the following example, clause (b) is dependent on clause (a) because the subject and tense of clause (b) are only understood via the subject and tense of clause (a):

1. (a) He came in, (b) locking the door behind him.

Clause (b) by itself does not qualify as a fully inflected clause, able to be integrated into discourse on its own. Fully inflected verbs are sometimes called finite verbs, whereas dependent verbs are referred to as non-finite. Payne (2007) asserts that it is possible for some verbs to be dependent in some respect but independent in some other. This implies that we can talk about one verb being *more* finite or *less* finite than another. In the light of the above, it is safe to treat the finite non-finite distinction as a continuum.

There are different types of complex constructions (multiple verb constructions). Payne (2007) identified six general types. These are serial verbs, complement clauses, adverbial clauses, relative clauses, clause chains and coordination. This paper focuses only on relative clauses as a type of clause combination in Gokana.

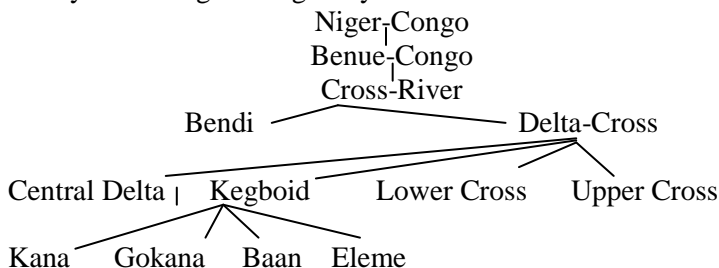
Gokana (Gòkánà) is an Ogoni language spoken in Rivers state, Nigeria. Gokana Kingdom of Ogoni is found in East Ogoni

and located between Latitude 4°36' N and longitude 7°21' E on the equator (Tanen 2005). It is made up of seventeen major communities which are Barako, Baranyonwa-Dere, Bera, Biara, Bodo, Bomu, Deeyor, Deken, Gbe, Giokoo, (the traditional headquarters of Gokana people), Kegbara-Dere, Kpor, Lewe, Mogho, Nwebiara, Nweol and Yeghe (Tanen 2005).

Gokana is the language of the people of Gokana kingdom and it is spoken by approximately 330, 500 people according to the result of March 2006 census released by the National Population Commission and given a 12 year statistical projection.

The major dialects of Gokana are Bodo, Bomu, Dere and Kibangha, although these varieties account for very slight differences in the language. The Kibangha dialect is the variety spoken by majority of the villages and it is considered the central variety. This work is however, based on the Bodo dialect.

The Ogoni group of languages or kegboid (Ikoro 1996) is made up of the four languages which are Baan, Eleme, Gokana and Khana. Faraclas (1989) places the Ogoni group in Delta-Cross, which is within the Cross River branch of Benue-Congo. Williamson and Blench (2000) say Benue-Congo is a family of the Niger-Congo Phylum.



Ikoro : 1996:7

Aims and Objectives of the study

The overall aim of this work is to investigate relative clauses in Gokana. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- a. Examine the structural configuration of relative clauses in Gokana
- b. Ascertain the types of relative clauses in Gokana with respect to established parameters
- c. Examine how the relativized NP is expressed

Methodology

Oral interview and participant observation were used in this study. Predetermined interview questions were drawn up to account for expressions of clause combinations, specifically relative clauses. Spontaneous follow up questions were also asked where necessary. These responses were audio-recorded, using a mobile phone device and later transcribed orthographically and analyzed accordingly. Participant observation was also employed in consonance with the researcher's intuition as a native speaker of the language. The interactive elicitation method was employed where the researcher provided recurrent linguistic stimuli in English and Gokana. Conversations were then initiated by the researcher and judiciously guided and as much as possible directed towards the type of expressions being sought. These too were recorded and transcribed.

Relative Clauses: Conceptual and empirical perspectives

A relative clause is one that functions as a nominal modifier (Keenan 1985), for example:

2. The car that [0 flew over the Niger bridge]

The pertinent parts of a relative clause are the following according to Payne (1997:25-26):

- a. The **head** of the noun phrase that is modified by the clause. In (2), the head is *the car*.
- b. The **restricting clause** is the relative clause itself. In (2), the restricting clause is indicated in brackets.
- c. The **relativized noun phrase(NP_{rel})** is the element within the restricting clause that is coreferential with the head noun. In (2), the NP_{rel} is represented as 0 (a gap).
- d. The **relativizer** is the morpheme or particle that sets off the restricting clause as a relative clause. In (2), the relativizer is *that*. If the relativizer reflects some properties of the NP_{rel} within the restricting clause (e.g., humanness, grammatical relation in the restricting clause, etc.), then it can be called a **relative pronoun**.

There are several typological parameters by which relative clauses can be grouped. According to Payne (1997), these parameters include but are not restricted to the following: (1) the position of the clause with respect to the head noun, (2) the mode of expression of the relativized NP, and (3) which grammatical relations can be relativized.

The first typological parameter by which relative clauses can vary is the position of the clause with respect to the head. Payne (1997:326) asserts that 'relative clauses can be **prenominal** (the clause occurs before the head), **postnominal** (the clause occurs after the head), **internally headed**(the head occurs within the relative clause), or they may be **headless**'. Since relative clauses basically modify nouns, one may be tempted to think that they would occur in the same position as other noun modifiers like descriptive adjectives, numerals, etc. Though it is true that the position of the relative clause with respect to the head noun often is the same as the position of descriptive modifiers, it is possible for relative clauses to be postnominal, even in languages for

which descriptive modifiers are prenominal. Payne (1997:326) explains that this tendency (possibility) is ‘probably due to a universal pragmatic principle that shifts “heavy,” i.e. long, phonologically complex, information to late in the clause’. This is thought to be the same principle that motivates postposing of subject complements in English. It is possible in English to place subject complements after the verb and then replace the subject by the neuter pronoun *it*. Example:

3. It baffles the driver [that the car flew over the Niger Bridge].

Postnominal relative clauses are the most common type as languages which are dominantly VO in the main-clause constituent order always have postnominal relative clauses. English is such a language. Payne (1997) identified some examples in Luganda, a Bantu language of Zaire:

4. (a) omukaziya – kubaomusajja

woman she – hit man

‘The woman hit the man’.

(b) omusajja [omukazigwe-ya-kuba]

man woman REL-she-hit

‘The man that the woman hit’.

Ikoro (1996:266) accounted for postnominal relative clauses in Kana. He asserts that a relative clause in Kana is introduced by a relevant subject marker, which may be either a noun, an emphatic pronoun or a pronominal subject clitic. Thus, there is a relative clause enclitic, which may be either –*ā*or –*ā̃* depending on the presence of nasality in the preceding segment.

5. (a) ŋwíwā wēè ém kpá

PN PAST write book

‘Nwiiwa wrote a book’

- (b) kpá ηwíiwā wēè ém-ã
 book PN PAST write-REL
 ‘The book that Nwiiwa wrote’.

- (c) kpá ηwíiwā wēè émàã tǔ̀̀-kpógóró-ã
 book PN PAST write leave house:AM-chain-REL
 ‘The book that Nwiiwa wrote from prison’.

- (a) kpá ã-wēèém àã tǔ̀̀-kpógóró-ã
 book he-PAST write leave house:AM-chain REL
 ‘The book that he wrote from prison’

- (b) kpá bà-wēè ém-ã ndā
 book they-PAST write-REL my
 ‘The book that they wrote belongs to me’

As the examples in (5) show, the relative clause enclitic may be attached to either a noun or a verb. Also, these examples further show that the relative clause enclitic is attached to a verb if the verb is not followed by an object NP otherwise it is attached to the object NP. Thus, it can be clearly stated that postnominal relative clauses are also accounted for in Kana. Internally headed relative clauses are those for which the head is within the relative clause. Payne (1997:328) suggests that many OV languages, including Bambara, a Niger-Congo language of West Africa, have internally headed relative clauses:

6. (a) ne ye so ye
 1SG PAST horse see
 ‘I saw a horse’
 (b) ce ye [ne ye so min] ye san
 man PAST 1SG PAST horse REL see buy
 ‘the man bought the horse that I saw’

Payne further explains that the relativizer *min* is the only thing that marks the clause in the brackets as a relative clause in (5b). The head noun remains *in situ* within the relative clause and is not repeated external to the relative clause. Internally headed relative clauses can be thought of as another means of avoiding having a phonologically large and semantically complex modifier precede the head noun. It precludes the hearer having to ‘wait’ until the relative clause has been uttered to learn what the noun clause modifies.

Headless relative clauses are those clauses which themselves refer to the noun that they modify. Generally, when nominal modifiers are themselves noun then we are more likely to have headless relative clauses. English, and some other languages employ headless relative clauses when the head noun is non-specific:

6. (a) [whenever I’m afraid], I call her.
(cf. ‘Any time that I am afraid ...’)
- (b) [whoever goes to the store] should get some water balloons.
(cf. ‘Any person who goes to the store...’)
- (Adapted from Payne 1997:328)

The second major parameter according to Payne (1997) by which relative clauses can vary is how the NP_{rel} is expressed. Keenan (1985) posits that this parameter is sometimes termed ‘case recoverability’ problem. That is in any relative clause there must be a way of identifying the role of the referent of the head noun within the relative clause. The head noun is said to function in the main clause: however, it always has a co-referent within the relative clause (the NP_{rel}). The role of that NP can be different from the role of the head noun within the main clause. For example, in (7a) the head noun is the subject of the main

clause verb *ate*. It is also the subject of the relative-clause verb *saw*. In (7b), however, the alligator is still the subject of *ate*, but is now the object of the relative-clause verb:

7. (a) The alligator [that saw me] ate Alice.

(b) The alligator [that I saw] ate Alice.

These clauses can be considered to be reductions of the following two abstract structures:

8. (a) The alligator that [the alligator saw me] ate Alice.

HEAD NOUN NP_{rel}

(b) The alligator that [I saw the alligator] ate Alice.

HEAD NOUN NP_{rel}

Since the NP_{rel} is left out in the surface structure of (8 a, b), a problem arises as to how the hearer is to identify the grammatical relation of this invisible noun phrase within the bracketed clause. Payne (1997) says that English solves this problem by simply leaving a conspicuous ‘gap’ in the position where the NP_{rel} would be if it were overtly expressed. This is called gap strategy. The strategy works for languages that have a fairly fixed constituent order i.e., those for which grammatical relations are expressed via the position of the core nominal in a clause. In such languages a missing argument is very obvious. On the other hand, if the language allows many constituent orders, and/ or if grammatical relations are specified via some device other than the constituent order, the gap strategy may cause the relative clause to be ambiguous. It thus, follows that ‘the gap strategy is only effective in recovering the grammatical relation of the NP_{rel} in verbal-medial languages’ (Payne 1997:330).

Relative clauses in Gokana

Structurally, a relative clause in Gokana occurs after the noun it modifies. It is introduced by a relative clause marker realized as **e**. Isaac (2003:223) also asserts that any noun regardless of its syntactic position i.e. either as subject or object, may co-occur with the relative clause.

Payne (1997) identified three typological parameters among others by which relative clauses can be grouped. He said these parameters include but are not limited to:

- d. the position of the clause with respect to the head noun
- e. the mode of expression of the relativized NP, and
- f. which grammatical relations can be relativized.

Relative clauses in Gokana can be grouped based on the first typological parameter stated above which is – *the position of the clause with respect to the head noun*. In this light, three types of relative clauses can be structurally identified in Gokana. These are:

1. postnominal relative clauses
2. internally headed relative clauses
3. headless relative clauses

Postnominal relative clauses in Gokana

This kind of relative clause in Gokana precedes the nominal element (the head noun) it modifies. Examples:

9. (a) *kpeɛ̃ tìb ból a*
Lion kill goat the
'The lion killed the goat'
- (b) *ból á (e) kpeɛ̃ a beè tìb*
goat the RCM lion the PAST kill
'The goat that the lion killed.'

- (c) ból á (e) kpeè a beè tib gbeá ól
 goat the RCM lion the PAST kill at farm
 ‘The goat that the lion killed in the farm.’

10. (a) Barinaa ni a beè dèm gbò dèm á
 PN be he PAST mould PLU mould DET
 ‘Barinaa moulded the blocks.’

- (b) gbo dèm á (e) Barinaa beè dèm
 PLU block the RCM PN PAST mould
 ‘The blocks that Barinaa moulded.’

Examples (9a & 10a) illustrate a plain transitive clause; (9b & 9b) illustrates the same clause functioning as a relative clause to modify the NPs **bólá** ‘the goat’ in (9b) and **gbo dèm á** ‘the blocks’ in (10b).

The underscored clauses in examples (9 b & c and 10 b) are instances of postnominal relative clauses in Gokana. The clauses modify the head nouns they occur after and perform the same function as other modifiers like descriptive adjectives and numerals. The difference is the position of the relative clause with respect to the head noun. The data above shows that in Gokana, it is possible for relative clauses to occur postnominally even though other descriptive modifiers like possessives, adjectives, intensifiers, quantifiers, numerals etc. are prenominal.

Internally headed relative clauses in Gokana

Internally headed relative clauses according to Payne (1997) are those for which the head is within the relative clause.

11. (a) M beè óví faà a
 1SG PAST drive car the
 ‘I drove the car.’

(b) Íbgbàlà a zálí faà á (e) ńdà beè óví
Man that buy car the RCM me PAST drive
'That man bought the car that I drove'

12. (a) Ì beè ẹẹlẹ gbo kọláló á
1SG PAST wash PLU cloth the
'I washed the clothes.'

(b) Nvín á zib gbo kọláló á (e) ńdà beè ẹẹlẹ
Child the steal PLU cloth the RCM me PAST wash
'The child stole the clothes that I washed.'

The underlined expressions in (11b & 12b) are internally headed relative clauses because they contain the nominal expression which constitutes the semantic core of the complex sentences (in this case the first person singular pronoun **ń** or **ńdà**). The nominal element occupies that syntactic position inside the relative clause which it would occupy in an independent clause and which would be the relativized position in the external-head variety.

Observe that in examples (11a & 12a) the head of the clauses is **ń** which is a dependent first person singular pronoun in Gokana. In (11b & 12b), the relativizer **e** is the only thing that marks the underscored expressions as relative clauses. The head pronouns remain in situ within the relative clause and is not repeated external to the relative clause but only change their forms to **ńdà** which is an independent first person singular pronoun in Gokana. Isaac (2003:113) confirms the existence of independent and dependent pronouns in Gokana and states that the difference between the independent and dependent forms of the personal pronouns in Gokana is that 'whereas the independent pronoun are emphatic and meaningful in isolation

(i.e. without being used in a structure), the dependent pronouns are non-emphatic and meaningless in isolation.'

Headless relative clauses in Gokana

Headless relative clauses are those clauses which themselves refer to the noun that they modify. Payne (2007) says that when nominal modifiers are themselves noun then we are more likely to have headless relative clauses. Examples (13-15) exemplify this concept in Gokana:

13. [kɔlɔ́áá-ṣ̣ṣ̣ (e) kpálo-m zɔ] m̐ deè gbèlètòò gyáá
Any-time RCM body-me pain ISG eat plenty food
'Whenever I am sick I eat more.'
14. [kɔlɔ́áá - nén (e) á sí ól gbaà-i] á kaanà ṣ̣əp
Any - person RCM s/he go farm among-us s/he pluck vegetable leaves
'Whoever that goes to the farm should pluck vegetable leaves.'
15. [kɔlɔ́áá - ḳiě (e) m̐ síi] gbo nén ólo magà m
Any - place RCM ISG reach PLU people start laugh me
'Anywhere I go people laugh at me.'

Examples (13-15) show that Gokana employ headless relative clauses for non-specific subject referents. The relative clauses function as nominals (subjects of the complex clauses) as such they are not headed by any other nominal element.

It is thus pertinent to examine how the relativized NP(NP_{rel}) is expressed in Gokana. According to Keenan (1985), this parameter is sometimes stated as case recoverability problem. The essence of this parameter is that of identifying the role of the referent of the head noun *within the relative clause*. The following sentences in Gokana will be used to discuss this phenomenon:

16. (a) Gbógó á (e) a beè dò m̀ bànà-múu á dómí Dùmbo
Dog the RCM it PST fall in hole-water the bite PN
'The dog that fell into the pond bit Dumbo'.

(b). Gbógó á a beè dò m̀ bànà-múu á dómí Dùmbo
Dog the it PST fall in hole-water the bite PN
'The dog that fell into the pond bit Dumbo'.

17. (a) ríngbálà á (e) a beè fẹ́ ból á zálí na faà
Man the RCM he PST kill goat the buy my car
'The man that killed the goat bought my car'.

(b) ríngbálà á a beè fẹ́ ból á zálí na faà
Man the he PST kill goat the buy my car
'The man that killed the goat bought my car'

Examples (16 & 17) above and generally all relative clauses in Gokana show that the relative clause marker in Gokana *e* is optional. Its deletion does not affect the grammaticality of the construction. Also from all the instances of relative clauses in Gokana discussed in this paper, it is clear that within the relative clause the head nouns function in another clause (the main clause) as in (17 c) below:

(c) ríngbálà á zálí na faà
Man the buy my car
'The man bought my car'.

The relative clause marker in Gokana *e* does not constitute a reference to the NP_{rel} and thus cannot itself help recover the role of the NP_{rel} in the relative clause. Instead what happens in Gokana is the introduction of a relative pronoun into the relative

clause so that even when the relativizer is deleted, its function is recoverable from the relative pronoun.

The deletion of the relative clause marker mentioned in the preceding paragraph does not imply the presence of a gap in NP_{rel} position. Thus, the NP_{rel} is overtly expressed with a relative pronoun strategy as can be seen in examples (16 & 17). Relative pronouns are typically similar to other pronouns in the language. Relative pronouns can be thought of as combining the functions of a plain relativizer and a clause internal pronoun that refers to the relativized NP.

Examples (16b & 17b) show that the relative pronoun **a** assumed the function of the deleted relative clause marker (relativizer) **e** and also functions as an internal pronoun referring to the relativized subject NP.

Summary and Conclusion

The study examined relative clauses in Gokana as one of the six types of complex constructions identified by Payne (1997). Among the several parameters by which relative clauses can be grouped, the study analyzed relative clauses in Gokana taking into cognizance the position of the clause with respect to the head noun and also the mode of expression of the relativized NP. Using the first typological perspective, relative clauses in Gokana were grouped into postnominal, internally headed and headless.

The study found out that a relative clause in Gokana is introduced by an optional relative clause marker **e** and that structurally, a relative clause occurs after the noun it modifies.

Also among the findings of this study is that the relative clause marker in Gokana which is **e** is not a referent to the relativized NP and thus cannot help in recovering the role of the relativized NP. Rather, Gokana employs a relative pronoun into

the relative clause which assumes the function of the relativizer when it is deleted and also functions as an internal pronoun referent of the relativized subject NP

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