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A grammar of Nchane: A Bantoid (Beboid) language of Cameroon

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Chapter 12

Relative clauses

This chapter describes Nchane relative clauses. I begin in §12.1 with a presentation of various details related to clause structure and the formal elements of relative clauses. Section 12.2 looks at how relative clauses differ from main clauses and §12.3 addresses the topic of which clause constituents are available for relativization and which clausal roles may be filled by noun phrases modified by relative clauses. Note that in the examples, the head nominal and resumptive pronouns (when present) are bolded and relative clauses appear in brackets. Gaps are represented by a minus sign.

12.1 Relative clause structure and formal properties

Nchane relative clauses follow the head nominal and are introduced by a relativizer which agrees with the head nominal. This is illustrated in example (12.1), which has a relativized class 2 noun, and example (12.2), which has a relativized class 9 noun.

(12.1) **bā-mī** [bá - gè tó-ó] bā yēs-è mè
c2-person c2REL person P3 come-PROG c2 greet 1SG.PRO

lē lē Ø-lā w-àŋ lé wù fyé
APPL COMP c5-compound c1-1SG.POSS COP c1 burn

‘The people who were coming, were sympathizing (lit. greeting) with me that my compound had burned.’ Fire.44

- (12.2) Ø-sɔ̃ŋɔ̃ ɲá-á
 c5-oil.palm give-PROG

fɪ: [yē mw-ē: mūɲ-chí kòŋē -]
 c9.air c9REL c18a-thing c18a-all want air

'The palm tree provides air that all things need.' King of Trees.1.8

The relativizers, which are summarized in Table 12.1, are segmentally identical to the personal pronouns. However, they present a different tone pattern. While main clause preverbal pronouns are marked with either a L or a M tone, relativizers introducing clauses with a relativized preverbal constituent are marked with a H tone. Likewise, main clause postverbal pronouns are marked with a H tone, but relativizers introducing clauses with a relativized postverbal constituent are marked with either a L or a M tone.⁸⁴

The parentheses enclosing certain relativizers in the table indicate that they are rare. The alternative form for class 2 enclosed in parentheses is a particularly interesting case, illustrating a possible split in the relativizer system. The prevalent form is **ba**, which is a conservative reflex of the class 2 nominal prefix. This form is observed as the relativizer for human and nonhuman relativized constituents. The alternative form **bɔ** is seen only with human relativized constituents, often appearing to be interchangeable with **ba** in this context. It is likely to be used with postverbal as well as preverbal relativized constituents, although it is only observed in the text data with those that are preverbal. No difference has been established in meaning between the two relativizers as they are used with human relativized constituents.

⁸⁴ The term “relativizer” is utilized here rather than “relative pronoun”, in spite of the fact that the Nchane relativizer is represented by different forms depending on the grammatical role (or clausal position) of the relativized constituent. This fact hints at an extraction strategy, which would be supportive of a relative pronoun analysis. Future research may in fact reveal that these relative linkers are best described as such. But for now, the more broadly defined term is chosen in order to align with the current trend in typological studies of relative clauses (e.g., Atindogbé & Grollemund 2017).

Class	Relativizers with preverbal relativized constituents	Relativizers with postverbal relativized constituents
1	wū, wú	wù
2	bá, (bó)	bà
3	wú	wū
4	yí	yī
5	chí	chī
6	á	ā
7	kí	kī
8	bí	bī
9	yì	yì, yī
10	yí	yī, yí
14	bvú	bvū
6a ⁸⁵	má	mà, mā
19	fí	fī
18a	mú	mū
13	yí	chī
16	(fó)	(fē)
18	(wó)	(ā)

Table 12.1 Nchane relativizers.

The position of the relative clause within the noun phrase is not clearly substantiated due to insufficient data. However, noun phrases containing a relative clause and a demonstrative are common in the data, which show that the relative clause can either precede or follow the demonstrative, as examples (12.3) and (12.4) respectively illustrate.

(12.3) Ø-kwēsé [wú - káŋ-è màŋ-kàlà] wē-ē
 c1-woman c1REL woman fry-PROG c6a-cassava.puff c1-ANA1

wù ɲù fó bé ñsā y-è
 3SG COP(N) there with c9.friend c9-3SG.POSS

'...that woman who was frying cassava puff was there (in the neighborhood) with her friend.' What-goes-around.2.1

⁸⁵ The class 6a pronouns are pronounced by some speakers as **mə** or **məŋ**.

- (12.4) wù jǒ mǎŋ-kàlà mā-ā [mǎ wù bé
 3SG take c6a-cassava.puff c6a-ANA1 c6aREL 3SG ^PCOP
 yéfè - wū gē:], wù ná wù lē
 rub cassava.puff 3SG put 3SG give 3SG APPL

'She took that cassava puff, which she had rubbed [with poison] and set aside, and gave [it] to him.'
 What-goes-around.4.8

The motivation for the alternative ordering is not completely clear but is believed to be related to information load. Relative clauses that are relatively long tend to follow the demonstrative, while shorter ones precede them. The information load presented by longer relative clauses is possibly too heavy to accommodate the binding of the demonstrative to the head nominal when separated by such a great distance. Examples (12.5) and (12.6) provide further evidence for this hypothesis, where the long relative clause in (12.5) follows the demonstrative and the short relative clause in (12.6) precedes the demonstrative.

- (12.5) bǒ kwě̀ bǒ gē: bǒ fésè fē-bǒ-kfún, nū
 3PL be.home 3PL go 3PL arrive c16-3PL-home COP(N)
 bǒ: bá Ø-kwě̀ wē-è [wū - bé
 c2.child c2AM c1-woman c1-ANA1 c1REL woman P1
 nā kǐ-nfè: kē-è mǎŋ-kàlà mā-ā
 give c7-blindman c7-ANA1 c6a-cassava.puff c6a-ANA1

'They went and arrived at their home, being the children of that woman who gave that blindman that cassava puff.'

What-goes-around.8.2

- (12.6) ŋ-kēpè yē [yí - fyé] ché-é
 1SG-repair c10.house c10REL house burn c10-ANA1

'...I repaired those houses that burned...'

Fire.52

It is further observed that head nominals with modifiers appearing in RC-DEM word order often appear to have a stronger incorporation of the relative clause and head nominal, such that the modified noun phrase is used as a discriminating designation for the referent. For example, the modified noun phrase in (12.3) “that woman who was frying cassava puff” appears three times in the text, with the additional information provided by the relative clause seemingly unnecessary in one of those occurrences, since there is no other “woman” present in the story with whom

she could be confused. The modified noun phrase apparently takes on the role of a formulaic label for the woman.

No examples of headless relative clauses are observed in the text data. However, (12.7) shows that relative clauses may be formed without an overt head. In this case, the relativized constituent is an inferable object that, as a result, has been omitted from the main clause. The relativizers in these constructions are not invariant as one would expect in a headless relative clause, but in contrast agree with the omitted object.⁸⁶

- (12.7) $\text{j̀j̀i} \quad \text{gē} \quad \text{fí}, \quad [\text{mā} \quad \text{tádà} \quad \text{gē} \quad \text{chĩ̀ŋsè} \quad -]$
 N. P3 receive c6aREL T. P3 send wine

'Nji received [the wine] that Tada sent.'

Example (12.8) represents a rare case of an apparent relative clause without a relativizer. These kinds of relative clauses have not been intentionally studied and, therefore, nothing more can be said of them except that they seem to be an acceptable variation.

- (12.8) $\text{wō} \quad \text{lé} \quad \text{bé} \quad \text{fy-ē:} \quad [\text{wó} \quad \text{ɲá} \quad \text{bè} \quad \text{yũ:}]$
 2SG COP with c19-thing 2SG.HORT give 1PL on.it.QP

“...do you have something [that] you should give us?”

What-goes-around.7.5

A single head noun may be modified by multiple relative clauses, which may be juxtaposed to each other as in (12.9) or joined by a conjunction as in (12.10). While the relative clauses share a single head, each has its own relativizer.

- (12.9) $\uparrow(\text{yē} \quad [\text{yì} \quad \text{mē} \quad \text{gè} \quad \text{ɲ-ché-é} \quad \text{yì} \quad \text{lē}]),$
 c9.house c9REL 1SG.PRO P3 1SG-stay-PROG c9 APPL

$[\text{yì} \quad - \quad \text{ɲù} \quad \text{y-āŋ}], \quad [\text{yì} \quad \text{mē} \quad \text{gè}]$
 c9REL house COP(N) c9-1SG.POSS c9REL 1SG.PRO P3

$\text{ɲ-ché-é} \quad \text{yì} \quad \text{lé} \quad \text{kībè}, \quad \text{yī} \quad \text{gē} \quad \text{fyé} \quad \text{yì-chī}$
 1SG-stay-PROG c9 APPL actually c9 P3 burn c9-all

'The house in which I was staying, which was mine and in which I was currently staying, it completely burned.'

Fire.5.2

⁸⁶ The class 19 relativizer **fi** is the likeliest candidate for a headless relative clause, if they are possible, since this is the relativizer observed in relative clauses involving the question word **lá** as an apparent relativized constituent.

- (12.10) Ø-gvúnē [chì bā fwèd-é -] gē
 c5-palm.nut.chaff c5REL they burn-PROG chaff or

[chì bā fèl-é bī-tēgē yú]
 c5REL c2 make-PROG c8-pillow on.it

‘...palm nut chaff, that they use as kindling (lit. burn) or that they are making pillows with...’
 King of Trees.1.3

Typologically, the relationship between the relative clause and the matrix noun phrase is important to establish (Andrews 2007: 207). Most Nchane relative clauses are adjacent to the head nominal, which suggests that the relative clause is externally embedded. “Embedded” refers to the relative clause occurring within the matrix noun phrase. “Externally” refers to the head nominal occurring outside of the relative clause.

A relatively small number of examples in the text data show a different orientation of the head nominal and relative clause. For example, (12.11) and (12.12) show the head nominal and the relative clause separated by elements not belonging to the noun phrase. In the case of (12.11), a verb intervenes between the head nominal and the modifying relative clause. In (12.12), the head nominal and relative clause are separated by a locative adverb and a prepositional phrase.

- (12.11) bā-mī gè ké-é lē nò Ø-lá chī-nē
 c2-person P3 know-PROG COMP like.that c5-compound c5-PROX

fyé nē, bī-gē fyé, mw-ē: mū lēmè fyé
 burn like.this c8-tooth burn c18a-thing c18aAM work burn

[mù ñ-jòd-é - ñ-lēm-è
 c18aREL 1SG-take-PROG things 1SG-work-PROG

bī-gē by-ē: yú]
 c8-tooth c8-ANA1 on.it

‘People knew that as my compound burned, money burned, and the tools (lit. things of work) burned that I was using to earn that money with...’
 Fire.26

- (12.12) mē lé bē **màŋ-kàlà** yānē à kī-kē: lē,
 1SG.PRO COP with c6a-cassava.puff here in c7-bag APPL
- [mà n-lēg-é - à Ø-kwēsé wū-mù lē]
 c6aREL 1SG-beg-PROG cassava.puff in c1-woman c1-some APPL
- 'I have some cassava puff here in [my] bag, that I was begging from a certain woman.'*
 What-goes-around.7.6

The relationship between the head nominal and relative clause in these examples is said to be “adjoined” (Andrews 2007: 214), where the relative clause is located outside of the noun phrase of which the head nominal is head. It is possible that all Nchane relative clauses are of the adjoined type, even though they are usually adjacent to the head nominal. But the main point to be made here is that Nchane relative clauses are sometimes not so tightly bound to the noun phrase of the head nominal that they cannot appear outside of it.⁸⁷

Another important aspect of the relative clause to consider is what happens to a nominal when it is relativized. Unmarked constituents (Subjects and Objects), as well as Applied Objects, leave a gap in the relative clause in the position where that constituent would appear in its non-relative clause counterpart. Conversely, a resumptive pronoun occurs in place of relativized constituents introduced by a preposition (Comitative Obliques and Locative Obliques). Examples of both strategies are illustrated in §12.3 below.

12.2 Asymmetries between main and relative clauses

There appear to be no limitations on tense and aspect marking in relative clauses which would differentiate them from main clauses. However, two elements of the grammar set relative clauses apart from main clauses.

The first distinguishing grammatical feature is subject agreement. As described in §9.1.1, subject agreement is usually present in main clauses, preceding the second verbal element of the verb complex. However, subject agreement is usually not observed in relative clauses following P1 and P2 tense auxiliaries, as seen in (12.13) and (12.14).

⁸⁷ The separation of the relative clause from the head nominal as in these examples might be limited to constructions involving nonrestrictive relative clauses. Thus, perhaps the separation reflects a type of afterthought, where additional information is added at the end. More research would be needed to confirm this proposition.

- (12.13) wù jǒ **màŋ-kàlà** **mā-ā** [mà wù bé
 3SG take c6a-cassava.puff c6a-ANA1 c6aREL 3SG P1
 yéfè - wū gē:], wù ná wù lē
 rub cassava.puff 3SG put 3SG give 3SG APPL
*'She took that cassava puff, which she rubbed [with poison] and set
 aside, and gave [it] to him.'* What-goes-around.4.8

- (12.14) bvū-nē lé **bvū-k5** [bvū tādà chí yèŋ -]
 c14-PROX COP c14-ladder c14REL T. P2 see ladder
'This is the ladder that Tada saw.'

Otherwise, there is no difference in subject agreement patterning in relative clauses versus main clauses for auxiliary verbs. Additionally, main and relative clauses with first-person singular subjects show no distinction in subject agreement patterning, regardless of which auxiliary verbs are present.

A second difference between relative clauses and main clauses involves the focus marker **l̩**. As observed in §16.3.5, this marker is required to follow progressive verbs that are [-FUT, -NEG] and which have no other complement. Examples (12.15) and (12.16) show that this marker does not occur in relative clauses in this verbal context.

- (12.15) Ø-kwēsé wē-è shíshē **ŋkà**
 c1-woman c1-ANA1 put.down c9.basket
 [yì wù bé tūd-é -]
 c9REL 3SG P1 carry-PROG basket
'...that woman put down the basket that she was carrying.'
 Jealous Husband.7
- (12.16) **bā-mī** [bá - gè tó-ó],
 c2-person c2REL person P3 come-PROG
'The people who were coming, ...' Fire.44

Focus strategies in general are unattested in the relative clauses of the text corpus. Asymmetry between main and relative clauses in focus marking has been observed as a tendency among Sub-Saharan languages (Creissels 2017: 262–3) and is not surprising, since relative clauses typically express background information in which focus is usually not encoded. However, Mungbam and Mundabli both report

no such asymmetry, with focus strategies available to relative as well as main clauses (Lovegren 2013: 401; and Voll 2017: 292 respectively). Therefore, this observation for Nchane should be considered as preliminary, as further research might prove otherwise.

12.3 Accessibility of constituents to relativization

Any clausal constituent may be relativized, including Subjects, Objects, Applied Objects, Comitative Obliques, Locative Obliques and Time Adverbials.⁸⁸ Examples (12.17)-(12.19) illustrate a relativized Subject, Object and Applied Object respectively. In each of these cases, the relativized constituent leaves a gap in the relative clause, indicated by a minus sign. Note that the Applicative postposition is also absent in the case of a relativized Applied Object. (The syntactic structure of the relative clauses in the examples of this section is provided for the reader's convenience.)

- (12.17)
- | | | | | | | |
|--------------|-------|--------|----------|------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| | | | S | V | OBL_{LOC} | |
| bā-mī | [bá | - | t̩ | kwè] | dú | |
| c2-person | c2REL | person | come | c9.death ⁸⁹ | say | |
- 'The people who came to the death said...'* Disobedient Child.1.14

- (12.18)
- | | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| mē | kōŋ-é | | | | | |
| 1SG.PRO | want-PROG | | | | | |
-
- | | | | | | | |
|----------------|--------|----------|----------|---------|-----------|----------|
| | | S | V | | | O |
| bvū-lē: | [bvū | Ø-kwē: | lé | wú | kēn-è | -] |
| c14-fufu | c14REL | c1-wife | COP | 3SG.FUT | cook-PROG | fufu |
- 'I want the fufu that (my) wife will be cooking.'*

⁸⁸ It is perhaps technically more correct to say that prepositional phrases (i.e., Comitative Obliques and Locative Obliques) themselves are not the target of relativization, but rather the nominals appearing in the prepositional phrases. See the discussion regarding this distinction, appearing with the relevant examples in this section.

⁸⁹ In its nominal form, **kwè** 'death' is often used, as it is here, in reference to the celebration of a death, also referred to as a "cry-die" in Cameroon Pidgin English.

- (12.19)
- | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|---------|-----------|-----|-------|-------------------|-------------------|--|
| | | | S | V | O _{APPL} | O _{APPL} | |
| mw-ē: | [mú | bā-mí | yéŋ | - | kì-ŋché | k-àŋ | |
| c18a-thing | c18aREL | c2-person | see | thing | c7-stay | c7-1SG.POSS | |
-
- | | | | | | | | |
|------|-----|----------|-------------|-------|-----|--------|------|
| lē] | lé | Ø-dē | yī-bō | yí | lé | yí | sé: |
| APPL | COP | c4-mouth | c4-3PL.POSS | c4REL | COP | c4.FUT | tell |
- 'The things people saw in my life, only their mouths will say.'* (lit. *it is their MOUTHS that will tell*)
- Fire.62

Prepositional phrases are technically not themselves relativized, but rather the nominals of the prepositional phrases, with a resumptive pronoun occurring in the place of the prepositional phrase. This distinction is important, since as stated in §7.2, these locative pronouns encode coreference to the nominal of the prepositional phrase as well as the spatial deictic semantics of the preposition. Therefore, the locational reference of the prepositional phrase remains *in situ*, while the nominal element is *ex situ*, but overtly accessible as the nominal head of the relative clause.

A relativized nominal of a Comitative Oblique is illustrated in example (12.20), while that of a Locative Oblique appears in example (12.21). A resumptive pronoun is utilized in both cases.

- (12.20)
- | | | | | | |
|---------|-----|-----|---------|----------|--|
| mē | mō | gē: | mē | ŋ-jò | |
| 1SG.PRO | RES | go | 1SG.PRO | 1SG-take | |
-
- | | | | | | |
|-------------|-------|------|-----------------|----------|--------------------|
| | | S | V | O | OBL _{com} |
| ŋchē | [yī | bā | yú:-yí | bī-kfūnè | yū , |
| c9.medicine | c9REL | they | kill-DISTR.PROG | c8-rat | on.it |
-
- | | | | | | |
|---------|---------|----|------------------|----------|------|
| mē | ŋ-gē: | à | māŋ-kālā | mà-à | lē |
| 1SG.PRO | 1SG-put | in | c6a-cassava.puff | c6a-ANA1 | APPL |
- '...I went and took poison that they are killing rats with and I put it in that cassava puff.'*
- What-goes-around.9.14

- (12.21)
- | | | | | |
|--------------------|--------|-----|---------|--------------------|
| | | S | V | OBL _{Loc} |
| ↑(bvū-jú) | [bvù | bè | gè gwē | fó], |
| c14-place | c14REL | 1PL | P3 fall | there |
- 'At the places where we landed...'*
- Training.1.18

Relativized time adverbials are fairly common in the text data. Section 11.3 points out that time adverbials may appear in either clause-initial or clause-final positions. The tone on the relativizer in example (12.22) suggests that the language

treats this time adverbial as occurring postverbally, which is reflected in the example by the placement of the gap after the Object.

- (12.22)
- | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|-----|--------|------------|-------|---------------------|------|---------|--|
| | | | | | S | | | |
| lē | dó | jù | kī-fē | [kī | bō: | bā | Ø-ŋwà | |
| SET | SIT | COP(N) | c7-time | c7REL | c2.child | c2AM | c1-book | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| V | | | O | | ADV _{TIME} | | | |
| tʰ | bō | jí | mw-ē: | -] | | | | |
| HAB | 3PL | eat | c18a-thing | time | | | | |
- 'When it was time that school children usually eat...'*
 What-goes-around.7.1

The tone of the relativizer for **kīfē** 'time' is generally consistent throughout the text corpus, while that for other time adverbials is realized as high. This suggests that the various time adverbials could be categorized as either clause-initial or clause-final. But this analysis is currently untested.

While not common, it is also possible for a constituent of a relative clause itself to be relativized. In other words, relativization is recursive, which can be seen in (12.23). The nested relative clause appears in parentheses with its head nominal underlined, while the higher-level relative clause appears in brackets.

- (12.23)
- | | | | | | | | |
|------------|-------|--------------------|-------|--------|---------------|---------|-------|
| dī ū | bákù | núwá | gē | gà | kì-jwī | kī-nē | bé |
| D.O. | B. | N. | P3 | divide | c7-boundary | c7-PROX | with |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | S | V | O | | |
| Ø-màshê | [wú | - | gē | chùñē | <u>bvū-jū</u> | (bvú | |
| c1-machine | c1REL | machine | P3 | mark | c14-place | c14REL | |
| | | | | | | | |
| S | v | obl _{loc} | | | | | |
| - | lé | à-ntēñē | à | ñkāmbe | bé | à | wūm)] |
| place | COP | c18-middle | c18AM | N. | with | c18AM | W. |
- 'DO (Divisional Officer) *Bako Noah made this boundary with a machine (telescope) which indicated a point midway between Nkambe and Wum.'* *Pseudonym
 Land Dispute.3.2

