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The Functions of Relative Clauses
in Nomaándé

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0. Introduction

Relative clauses¹ in Nɔmaándé, a Narrow Bantu language spoken in the Centre Province of Cameroon (classified as A-46 by Guthrie, 1970), are always located to the right of the domain noun; that is to the right of the noun being modified by the relative clause. Using Keenan's terminology (1985: 143), Nɔmaándé makes use of **restrictive postnominal external relatives**.

The relative clause in Nɔmaándé consists of an obligatory relative pronoun² which replaces its corresponding constituent (the domain noun) in the relative clause. The domain noun is actually optional in the case of temporal clauses, as is discussed below (section 1.4). No trace of the domain noun is retained in the remainder of the relative clause. Following the relative pronoun, if it

¹ Beavon recognizes two strategies for relativization in Kɔnzime (classified by Guthrie as Narrow Bantu A-84): a "finite relative clause strategy" and a "nominalized relative clause strategy" (1985: 32). The present paper concerns only the finite relative clause strategy.

² Beavon claims (p. 37), "There is no need to employ the term <relative pronoun> in speaking of Kɔnzime RCs, since there is no difference between the pronouns used to replace nominals in main clauses and those used in RCs." This is not the case in Nomaande; the à- prefix is only used in relative pronouns, whereas the demonstrative pronoun begins with a lengthened concord prefix (e.g. ee-).

denotes the subject, comes the verb plus optional objects plus optional oblique constituents. If the relative pronoun denotes the object, it is followed by the subject, the verb and, optionally, other constituents.

Relative pronouns in Nomaándé consist of the relativizer *a* plus the noun class marker which agrees with the noun class of the domain noun. This noun class marker within the relative pronoun always carries a high tone while the relativizer *a* carries a low tone. Nomaándé makes use of 14 different noun classes.

1. Constituents that can be relativized

In order to discuss which elements can be relativized in Nomaándé narrative discourse, we begin by defining two terms which will be used extensively in the remainder of this paper. The relative clause is modifying a constituent within the matrix sentence; that is, within the sentence containing the domain noun of the relative clause. The matrix sentence can be defined as “the superordinate SENTENCE within which another sentence is EMBEDDED, e.g. 'The man who shouted came' where 'The man came' is the matrix sentence, and 'The man shouted' is the embedded sentence.” (Crystal, 1985:190)

One of the constituents of the matrix sentence which can be relativized in Nomaándé is referred to as oblique. This refers to all peripheral, or non-nuclear, constituents (that is, everything other than subject, verb, and object). These obliques are discussed below (sections 1.3 and 1.4).

1.1 Subject

The subject is relativized 18 times within the 10 texts which contain subject and/or object relative clauses (the remaining 5 texts have neither type of relative clause). Subjects are the most common constituent to be relativized in Nomaándé. For example:³

- (1) ɔcɔ awó nápa waá bɛnámákɛna bɔsókó baacɔ.
 person REL PR-HAB 3s RE-hide others people
 “The person who hides himself from other people.”

³ This paper makes use of the following abbreviations in the gloss of the example sentences:

1p, 2p, 3p - personal pronouns (plural)	HAB - habitual marker
1s, 2s, 3s - personal pronouns (singular)	INST - instrumental suffix
ADJ - adjective suffix	LOC - locative
c5, c14 - noun class markers	P1, P2, P3 - past tense markers
DEM - demonstrative pronoun	PR - present tense marker
DIR - directional marker	Q - question marker
DUR - durative suffix	RE - reflexive prefix
EXCL - exclamation	REL - relative pronoun
F1, F2 - future tense markers	SPK - speech marker

1.2 Object

The object is relativized 11 times within the 10 texts mentioned in section 1.1. A straight-forward example follows:

- (2) Nyisúéte eényi a bəoté əwáamba abó bó ŋə lónə anyía bulunde.
c5-leave DEM LOC tree look for REL 3p PR call that (name of tree)
“We then went to look for the tree that is called 'bulunde'.”

In the text “What happened in the forest”, the following sentence appears:

- (3) Sósókó a wumoté u ŋaá bá ne híyí hisiŋítí ahé u ŋaá bá u ŋə lónəna
other of one 3s P3 be with his strategy REL 3s P3 be 3s P3 call-INST
betana.
monkeys

“The other one had his strategy that he used for calling monkeys.”

In this example, 'his strategy' appears to be the instrument rather than the object of the relative clause. However, note the instrumental suffix *-en-* on the main verb 'to call'. The tense/aspect markers for the phrase show that this is an habitual past, literally 'his strategy that he habitually called monkeys (with).' According to Foley and Van Valin (1985: 347-9), 'his strategy' would qualify as a raised object due to the presence of the instrumental suffix *-en-* on the main verb (rather than using a preposition). This phenomenon is referred to as dative shift, which involves “the promotion of a normally peripheral constituent to core (= nucleus) and assigning it undergoer (= object) status” (loc. cit.).

Another example of a relativized object which raises certain questions follows:

- (4) Bəko abó tó báka tuə ɔ́ndókə etéési tús cəba ə ɔ́lókóma.
thing REL 1p be-HAB 1p buy taxes 1p go LOC to hear

“We are going to hear about the fact that we pay taxes.”

This matrix sentence serves to state the theme of the text right at the beginning of the discourse. The whole relative clause, including the domain noun that has been fronted to the beginning of the matrix sentence, seems to act as the object of the main clause “We are going to hear about (the fact that we pay taxes).”

Another concern is that 'thing' (= fact) as the domain noun is not clearly the object of ɔ́ndókə, 'buy, pay' since the relative clause already contains an object, taxes. Mr. BABOUAKEN Cosmas, a competent native speaker of Nomaándé, says that 'thing' in this context refers to 'the law' about paying taxes.

1.3 Locative

Locatives are relativized only 3 times within the 15 texts that have been studied. Two examples follow:

(5) **Ciínú ñé súète e ekumbé ayé oónju okenyi ñáá bá óñanénánó.**
turtle P1 went LOC room REL woman stranger P3 be lying down-ADJ
“Turtle went to the room where the bride/new wife was lying down.”

(6) **...tu ña só bá tó ɔwaambaka haála ahá anyía ekelá túásɔ cíá,**
1p P3 1p be 1p to hide-DUR place REL so that when 1p-1p light fire
mbá tu ká sɔ bénámbaka.
then 1p F2 1p RE-hide-DUR
“...we would look for a place where we would hide ourselves when we set fire (to the savannah)” (lit. where, so that when we set fire, we will then hide ourselves).

The first of these two examples is fairly straight-forward, while the second example is complicated by an extra subordinate phrase “so that when we set fire”. Both locatives and temporals fall into the category of oblique constituents as they are peripheral/non-nuclear to the relative clause.

1.4 Temporal

Only two of the 15 texts studied did not have relativized temporals. The vast majority of the examples of relativized temporals occur in headless relative clauses (30 examples out of 38). For example:

(7) **Ayé tó ña só bétúáhákéna bulunde, tu ñé súète.**
REL(=when) 1p P3 1p carry-DUR type of tree 1p P1 leave
“When we had carried the tree (bark), we left.”

The form of the relative pronoun which marks the temporal varies between **ayé**, **ahé**, and **ahá**. These latter two agree with the noun class of 'place' (**haála**) rather than of 'time' (**ekúlú**), but they still carry the meaning of 'when' and are interchangeable with the relative pronoun **ayé** (see (8)).

Examples of a temporal phrase which contain a domain noun follow:

(8) **Eeye ekúlú ahé bá ña léca aána...**
DEM time REL 3p P3 see thus
“When they saw (like that)...”

(9) **Huó, feeké ayé ɔ ñó hatókóna ehenyíé, ɔ́ báka hí aha o**
EXCL long ago REL 2s P3 left-DUR over there 2s be-HAB only here LOC
ohónyi e?
road Q
“My! (It was) ages ago that you left from over there, and you are still here on the road?”

1.5 Possessor

The only example of a relativized possessor occurs in a text given by a 40 year old man who speaks French well (the sentence includes a relativized locative, as well):

(10) Ɔɔcɔ awó ɔhɔsɔ ɲáá békátá a núáyé nukolí ɲé bisíemunyiki haála
person REL monkey P3 RE-cut LOC his cord P1 fix eyes-DUR place
ahá bé ɲe bú súétíne.

REL 3p P3 3p went to

“The person whose monkey cut himself in his trap looked closely at the place to which they went.”

1.6 The influence of French on the use of relative clauses in Nɔmaándé

The majority of the texts used in this study came from middle-aged to elderly men (and one woman), with one coming from a high school student. Relativized temporals of both varieties described in section 1.4 occur across age boundaries in these texts. However, it is interesting to note that in the texts of the oldest storytellers (8 of the 15 texts), where the use of relativized temporals is very current, very few other relativized constituents occur (the subject is relativized once in each of 4 texts, the object once in one of these same texts, and a locative is relativized once each in two other texts). There is a good case for claiming a trend towards accepting more relativized constituents in Nɔmaándé discourse by the native speakers as the use of French becomes more widespread through being taught in the public schools. This is particularly evident in the text from which example (10) is taken (a 16th text); the text contains 5 relativized subjects, 2 relativized objects, 2 relativized locatives and 1 relativized possessor!

Although only one example of a relativized possessor has been found in the Nɔmaándé texts studied thus far, this finding is consistent with Beavon's conclusion for Kɔnzime “that all relations are accessible to relativization except the Object of Comparison” (1985: 43).

2. Functions

It is important to look not only at which constituents can be relativized in the discourse, but in addition the functions relative clauses fill and where they can occur within the discourse. In this section we divide our description of these factors into two: relative clauses that occur within the straight narrative and relative clauses that occur within quoted material (citations).⁴ The functions of the relative clauses will overlap between these two groupings.

⁴ Beavon fails to make this distinction, in his section on “pragmatic constraints on the modification of nominals by RCs” (pp. 48-52), which prejudices his conclusions about the use of relative clauses for “the marking of Peak” (p. 50).

2.1 In Narrative

Nɔmaándé narrative is characterized by specialized uses of various tense and aspect markers in order to denote what is and is not on the time-line. In brief, the recent past tense (P1) marks events that occur on the time-line of the story in question. Two other constructions also mark time-line events, these being types of nominalization of the verb: using either a noun class 5 marker plus a demonstrative marker that agrees in noun class with the nominalized verb, or using a noun class 14 marker on the verb.

Descriptions and background material are marked in Nɔmaándé with the remote past tense (P3) or the present tense (PR). This distinction between time-line and non-time-line events is important when we discuss where relative clauses can occur in the narrative.

2.1.1 In the introduction

All the relative clauses found to date in natural texts (i.e. untranslated) in Nɔmaándé function in the restrictive sense, being used to give prominence to what is being talked about.⁵ Within the introduction to a narrative discourse, a relative clause can appear which contains new information that is relevant to the theme of the text. There are five examples of this type of relative clause in the texts that have been studied, all of which contain new information. For example:

- (11) ... **ananyía u ɲaá bámena weé beébe afákena bitoli ebí ó ɲaá**
because 3s P3 be-HAB 3s them feed-INST plums REL 3s P3
bámena u ke yeébéke.
be-HAB 3s DIR steal

“...because he was in the habit of feeding them plums that he was stealing.” Notice that this sentence is subordinated and it uses the P3 tense; it is therefore not on the time-line. Interestingly, all five of the examples of relative clauses within the introduction of the narrative are not only off the time-line but in addition all make use of the habitual.

2.1.2 In the conclusion

Within the conclusion of the narrative, relative clauses can occur, containing only old information that reiterates the theme of the text. There are only two examples of a relative clause appearing within the conclusion. For example:

⁵ Beavon reaches a similar conclusion for Koonzime: “one of the means employed by storytellers to raise a participant or prop to prominence is the RC” (p. 48). He continues (loc. cit.), “This is clearest in the case of those RCs which have an appositive relation to the shared nominal”, i.e., which are nonrestrictive. However, as Levinsohn (forthcoming) notes, in some of the examples cited by Beavon, “it is the noun phrase in which the relative clause modifies the head noun... that is in apposition”. It must be conceded, though, that some of the relative clauses cited by Beavon on pp. 49-52 do appear to be appositive.

(12) **Eehé yaáña anyía bitéési abé tɔ báka túasó ɔ́ndóko...**
 that is why 3s-be that taxes REL 1p be-DUR 1p-1p buy-DUR
 “That is why it is that the taxes that we are always paying...”

This phrase almost repeats exactly the relative clause used at the beginning of the text for introducing the theme (in the introduction this was new information). At the end of the story, this relative clause is used to simply reiterate the theme. Note that this phrase is also not on the time-line.

2.1.3 In the body of the narrative

Relative clauses are used in the body of the narrative with several functions.

2.1.3.1 To reintroduce a significant participant

Relative clauses are used to reintroduce a significant participant into the story and give prominence to this participant. The following example occurs in a text that introduces several participants but, when the main storyline is reached, it begins with the following sentence which establishes the hunter as the participant through whom the story will develop:

(13) **Aámbáya sósókó ooci awó ɲáá bámókónena mubúmébúme...**
 now other DEM REL P3 be-DUR-HAB hunter

“Now the one who was a hunter...”

2.1.3.2 In a point of departure⁶ for information related to the story theme

Relative clauses within the body of the text are also used in a point of departure for information related to the theme of the story. Eight examples have been found within the 15 texts studied. In all but one case, these relative clauses contain old, assumed, or redundant information. For example, the information given in (14) is significant for the theme of the story because it is this same law that the hunter gave that he will himself violate:

(14) **Yeeyé okotí eeye ayé ú ɲe iinjie e uúyé obúme...**
 his law DEM REL 3s P3 give LOC his hunt

“His law that he gave at his hunt was...”

2.1.3.3 To introduce information that is significant for what follows

Relative clauses within the body of the text are used also to introduce new information that is significant for what follows in the story. For instance, in example (15), the house is the place where the climactic events of the story occur:

(15) **Bá ɲga háma o ooki awó u ɲáá bá na ɔ́bóla wu oónju.**
 3p P1 arrive LOC house REL 3s P3 be with young of woman

“They arrived at the house where there was a young woman.”

Another example of a relative clause being used to introduce information significant for what follows is given below:

⁶ “A point of departure is a fronted constituent placed at the beginning of a clause or sentence both to set a domain for what follows... and to provide the primary basis for relating what follows to the context” (Levinsohn 1992: 18).

- (16) **Onóme buhiite yaandá yé engíásena eeci a ciánánáñanána acé bó ño**
 husband c14-take large of scissors DEM of huge REL 3p PR
lóno a notána báye sékátér.
 call LOC language 3p-SPK secateurs

“The husband took this really large pair of scissors that are called secateurs.”
 This sentence occurs just prior to the climax of the story. The effect of using the relative clause and various adjectives is to slow down the action and thus to build up tension for the climax.

These last two examples also demonstrate cases of a relative clause being used within a matrix sentence that is on the time-line. In example (16), the verb has the special nominalized form with the noun class 14 marker. It is actually the only example of this type. All other relative clauses that appear within a matrix sentence that is on the time-line are modifying a peripheral constituent. For example:

- (17) **Cé ñga háma eé buúse bú muúti obúme awó ñaá tánáka uúyé obúme.**

it P1 arrive LOC face of owner hunt REL P3 arrange his hunt
 “It arrived in front of the owner of the hunt who had organized the hunt.”⁷
 In examples (15) and (17), the relative clause is modifying a locative phrase within the matrix sentence.

2.2 In embedded quotes

Relative clauses also can occur within embedded quotes in narrative texts. Nine examples occur within the 15 texts studied to date. These function in similar ways to those that occur in the narrative itself. In the course of the study of relative clauses that occur in quoted material, it was found that only known information was given rather than new information. For the purposes of this study, direct and indirect quotes are not distinguished.

2.2.1 To establish the theme

In the case of embedded quotes, when a relative clause is used to establish the theme, we are talking about the theme of the quote rather than the theme of the whole text. In the following example, the chief in the story sends out the news that he wants to find the man who tried to visit his wife the night before:

- (18) **bé wuúci aámbákéna ɔɔɔ okime awó áña na henɔ́nɔ hesómbánó.**

3p him look for-DUR person all REL is with finger cut-ADJ
 “They should look out (for him) for anyone who has a cut-off finger.”

Similarly:

- (19) **Báye áá ocinyié ɔɔɔ awó náña kaá basó núusiki aha.**

3p-SPK EXCL over there man REL PR-HAB DIR us bother here
 “They said, ‘Oh, over there is the person who is always coming to bother us here.’”

⁷ Beavon would view this relative clause as nonrestrictive. However, no additional information about the owner of the hunt is supplied by the relative clause, so it is interpreted in the present paper as a redundant use of a restrictive relative clause to build up tension before the climax.

In this example, the mice are speaking about their problem, their enemy the cat, and how to handle him. The cat is thus the theme of the quote, and the use of the relative clause gives prominence to him.

2.2.2 In a point of departure for a climactic assertion

One example has been found in the texts studied of a relative clause that is used in a point of departure for a climactic assertion within the quoted material. It is as follows:

- (20) **Aányambáya nuómó eénu anó nú áña sembégésémbeje,**
now river DEM REL it is so immense (ideophone)
nuó hákena a ambala eeye.
2s place LOC bag DEM

“Now that river that is so immense, you are putting in this bag!”

This relative clause which describes the hugeness of the river is used in a point of departure for the matrix sentence which contains the climactic assertion.

2.2.3 To introduce information that is significant for what follows

A more common function of relative clauses within an embedded quote is that of giving information that is significant for what follows in the quoted material. For example:

- (21) **...tuá kaa kónákéna asana eéye yé uusú óónó, na basó abá tuasóña**
1p DIR study-DUR matter DEM of our son with we REL 1p-be
biáyá bikendinyi.
his friends

“...let's go and study this matter of our son, we who are his friends.”

This quote is made by the Hare who has come to consult with Lion about the matter of Lion's disobedient son. The fact that Hare and Lion are the son's friends is significant in the decision they will reach at the end of the story.

3. Alternative means of modifying a noun phrase in Nɔmaándé

From this study of the functions of relative clauses in Nɔmaándé narrative discourse, it is clear that relative clauses are not used as extensively or in the same ways as they can be used in Indo-European languages. One major difference is the total absence of non-restrictive relative clauses in Nɔmaándé.

One of the goals of this study is to be able to use relative clauses correctly when translating material from French or English into Nɔmaándé. Therefore, a study was also made into the alternative means of modifying a noun phrase in Nɔmaándé in contexts where a relative clause is prohibited. These means are listed briefly below, with examples from original Nɔmaándé texts:

1 -- use of an associative noun construction (Noun + Noun):

(22) **᠑᠑᠙᠑ ᠑ ᠨ᠙᠑᠋᠋᠋᠋**
man of pit
“the man who dug the pit”

(23) **ᠪᠠᠶᠠᠶᠡ ᠪᠠᠭ᠙ ᠪᠦ ᠣᠠᠵᠢ**
his people of house
“his people who were at home”

2 -- use of a Noun + Adjective:

(24) **ᠬᠡᠨ᠙ᠣᠨ᠑ ᠬᠡᠰᠣᠮᠪᠠᠨᠠᠨᠠᠳᠵᠢ**
finger cut-ADJ
“finger which is cut off”

3 -- use of a Locative + Infinitive:

(25) **ᠤ ᠨᠠ ᠯᠡᠴᠠ ᠶᠬᠤᠰᠣ ᠶ᠋ᠢᠨᠡᠳᠢ ᠣ ᠣᠪᠡᠨᠡᠳᠡ ᠶᠢᠪᠢᠯᠡ.**
3s P1 see monkeys two LOC to press palm nuts
“He saw two monkeys (who were) pressing palm nuts.”

4 -- use of a speech marker:

(26) **ᠪᠤᠨᠨᠠᠭᠤ ᠠ ᠪᠦᠮᠣᠲᠡ ᠪᠠᠶᠡ ᠨᠶᠢᠠᠮᠪᠠᠶᠡ**
village of one 3p-SPK (name of village)
“a certain village (that) they call Nyiambaye.”

5 -- use of a Noun + Verb phrase

(27) **ᠲᠤ ᠨᠡ ᠰᠦ ᠰᠦᠡᠲᠡᠬᠡ ᠣ ᠨᠶᠢᠠᠨᠶᠢ ᠣᠬᠠᠨᠳᠠ ᠬᠠᠶᠠᠴᠠ**
1p F1 1p go LOC market to travel far
“We will go to a market that is far away.”

(28) **ᠪᠡ ᠨᠡ ᠲᠡᠨᠶᠢ ᠶᠢ ᠪᠣᠨᠶᠢ ᠶᠠᠴᠤ ᠠᠨᠳᠠᠬᠡᠨᠠ**
3p P3 quick 3p get man of him take care of
“They quickly got someone to take care of him (or:who took care of him)”.

And finally:

6 -- use of a new and independent clause.

4. Conclusion

We can conclude from this study on the functions of relative clauses in Nomaándé that they are limited to being used in a restrictive manner.

We can summarize the distribution of their functions in narrative discourse in the following way:

- relative clauses introduce information relevant to the theme of the text or quote (or they reiterate such information in the case of the conclusion);
- relative clauses introduce information that is significant for what follows;

- relative clauses are used in a point of departure that is related to the theme or to highlight climactic assertions; and finally,
- relative clauses can reintroduce a significant participant.

In the few examples found of relative clauses appearing in matrix sentences that are on the time-line, all but one of these clauses modify a peripheral constituent in the matrix sentence. For every occurrence of a relative clause, it is being used to give prominence to what is being talked about.

Finally, it is possible to make a stronger claim than Beavon makes concerning the function of relative clauses; that is, that relative clauses are always used for prominence: to give prominence to a participant or theme that is introduced or reintroduced with a relative clause, to give prominence to information that is significant for what follows (e.g. the location of climactic events, the prop involved in climactic events), and to give prominence to information that follows a point of departure in which a relative clause appears, including climactic assertions.

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