



ISSN Print: 2394-7500  
 ISSN Online: 2394-5869  
 Impact Factor: 5.2  
 IJAR 2018; 4(11): 31-34  
 www.allresearchjournal.com  
 Received: 15-09-2018  
 Accepted: 20-10-2018

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## A dialectal relook at the relative clause in EWE

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### Abstract

Although it is universally implicated that Ewe introduces the Relative Clause with the demonstrative *si* and marks its end with the determiner (clause final marker) *la* (hereafter CFM), the preoccupation of this paper is to describe how relative clauses are constructed in Ewe spoken dialects in Ghana. This paper primarily explored the syntactic features of relative clauses in Ewe. It also examined the syntactic configuration of Relative Clauses in relation with the word order of the language. Fiedler & Schwarz (2005:120) claim that the Relative Clause is introduced also by *yikè* in Inland dialects of Ewe. What is most surprising about their claim is their failure to account for the coastal dialects to make the claim evidentially comparable. This paper explained the argument that the Relative Clause is introduced in southern dialects (also called coastal dialects) by the demonstrative adjectives; “*yi, ya*” and marks its end with “*ké*”. It is also demonstrated that the Relative Clause is however introduced by the inland dialects with “*kè*” and closes it variously with “*mí* and *xé*”. The paper also argue that the relativizer is obligatory in both the written language and the oral dialects but the CFM in mostly optional in speech than in the written language.

**Keywords:** relative clause, relativizer, dialect variation, written Ewe

### 1. Introduction

The first section of this paper deals with some genetic information on the Ewe language and the second section sets the structure or organization of the paper.

Ewe is the English spelling of the language. In the Ewe orthography, it is spelt EWe and pronounced əʋə. Ewe is a cluster of dialects spoken in a geographical area stretching from the lower Volta through Togo, Benin and as far as Western Nigeria to Lower Weme. Thus, from Greenwich Meridian 30<sup>0</sup>E and from the Atlantic Coast to about 8<sup>0</sup>N which has been called Gbe since 1980 (Ameka 1991:1) [2]. The language is called EWegebe and its speakers are called EWeawo (the EWees).

Its major dialects include in Ghana Aŋlo, Avenor, Torŋu (Tongu) classified as coastal dialects; Ho, Adaklu, Awudome, Peki, Kpedze, Abutia etc classified as central dialects and Anfoe, Hohoe, Ve, Kpando, Leklebi, Ve, Alavanyo etc classified as northern dialects. The northern and central dialects are then grouped as Inland dialects [EWedomegbe] (Ameka and Esegbey, 2007) [4].

The effect of geographical distance on mutual intelligibility is not as high among the dialects in Ghana as compared to those between Gbe dialects in Ghana and others in Togo and Benin. Although it is universally implicated that Ewe introduces the Relative Clause (hereafter R.C) with the demonstrative *si* and marks its end with the determiner (clause final marker) *la* (hereafter CFM), the preoccupation of this paper is to describe how relative clauses are constructed in spoken Ewe in Ghana. I take a closer look at few dialects from Ameka & Esegbey (2007) [4] classification of Ewe dialects as southern and inland dialects. Data collected for this work was based on this classification.

Section two of the paper takes a look at the syntactic concept **relative clause (RC)** in Ewe and how it manifests in sentences. Section three explores the types and functions (syntactic configuration) of relative clauses the *si ... la* clause. In section four, I test the claim by Fiedler & Schwarz (2005:120) [7] that inland dialects introduce the RC with *yikè* (the source of the debate of this paper) and share my argument on the issue. The last part of this section deals with the conclusion of the discussions.

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**2. Methodology**

The data used in this paper is solicited from two sources; apart from native speaker intuitiveness of the author, the primary data is collected from six (6) inland speakers, three (3) from Ho and three (3) from Peki. The secondary sources include songs and books. Dirges were played and listened to closely by the researcher. The dirges were from Wusuta Dzobisiwo and Botoku Minornudzor Akaye Groups for inland speakers (these audio recordings were picked from VOLTA STAR RADIO, 91.1 FM). An audio recording of Dzaba songs was also used. (Dzaba is a traditional sect practiced among some coastal dialects). The Dzaba audio recording was picked from Xavi for the coastal dialects.

**2.1 The concept relative clause (RC)**

Relative clause is a syntactic concept in linguistics. Its study has received a notable literary attention across languages. Dowling (1978) cited in Dzameshie (1995:27) [5] says that “the concept relative clause is a universal syntactic phenomenon in natural languages”. His assertion may seem reasonable and acceptable if one has not enough knowledge on the topic. The questions this paper poses to this assertion are that;

- How unique is the concept RC to the natural languages in terms of form?
- Are the relative clauses sharing the same syntactic and semantic features across natural languages?
- Are the relative clauses performing the same syntactic and semantic functions across all natural languages?

Dzameshie (1995:27-28) [5] in an attempt to answer these questions says: “it would seem reasonable, therefore, to establish a universal syntactic characterization of this notion, relative clause; but attempts in this direction have not been very successful, principally because of significant cross- linguistic variations in the relationship between the deep structure and surface structure of relative clauses. Differences occur in areas such as the ordering of elements and positioning of relative clauses in complex syntactic structures”.

Another difference this paper observes is that even within individual languages the form used in expressing the relativizer varies (at least Ewe) in terms of dialectal classifications.

Fiedler and Schwarz (2005:121) [7] explained that in Ewe, differences exist in the construction of relative clauses depending on the syntactic function of the antecedent noun phrase (ANP). They also cited Schachter (1973) who says that verbs in the relative clause in Akan change tone in relation to the link tone of the relative pronoun **â** and the clause final marker (CFM) **nó**.

One notable observation of this paper out of the various literatures on Akan relative clause is the controversy over the relativizer. While one school of thought is going for **ââ** (Boadi 2005, Sah 2009 etc), another school is accepting **â** (Fiedler & Schwarz 2005) [7]. There is the third school;

Osam (1997) and Amfo & Fretheim (2005) maintaining that the relativizer is **a** while McCracken (2013) [9] argues that the relativizer is **ââ**. Sah (2009) explains that there are other words in Twi which are represented in the Akan orthography by **a** which has their phonemic realization similar to that of the relativizer **a**. One such morpheme is **ââ** used to express conditionality and subjunctives (McCracken 2013:2-3) [9]. This paper observes that the root of the controversy may be dialectal variation which must be studied synchronically. The result of such a study may put this linguistic argument to rest.

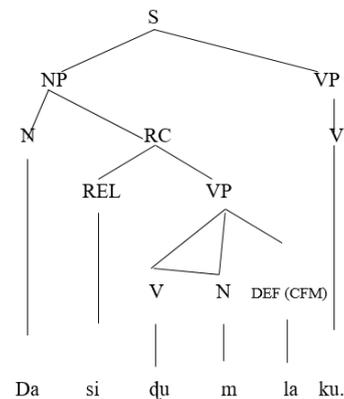
**2.2 How are relative clauses constructed in Ewe?**

Within the complex noun phrase is located the relative clause in languages including Ewe as demonstrated in 1.

1. (a) English: **The boy [who came] is sick**  
 (b) Ewe: **Da [si qu- m la] ku.**  
 Snake REL bite-1SG CFM die  
 ‘The snake which bit me is dead’  
 (c) Akan: **Àbrántiè no- [áà ð- bɔ̀ɔ̀ wó no] re- bá**  
 Boy DEF- REL 3SG- hit 2SG CFM PROG- come  
 ‘The boy who hit you is coming’

(Fiedler & Schwarz 2005: 122 in McCracken 2013:3 [9], modified here for convenience) [7].

In the three sentences the relative clauses are bolded and italicized while the noun phrases are underlined. To explain that the RC is found in the NP, study this tree diagram for 1(b) above.



The relative clause is introduced by a demonstrative across many languages; at least for English and many West African languages such as Ewe, Yoruba, Akan, Dagbani, Buli and Lelemi.

In table 1 the demonstrative element which introduces the relative clauses are listed. The clause final markers where applicable are also identified.

It must be noted here that in Ewe, the clause final marker **la** is used as a definite article and as a determiner in the syntax of the language hence its use as a CFM should be clearly defined by the structure containing it.

**Table 1:** The demonstratives which introduce the RC in some languages.

Language	Relati-Vizer	Clause final marker (CFM)	Source
ENGLISH	who, which etc.	-	Dzameshie (1995) <sup>[5]</sup>
EWE	si	la	Dzameshie (1995) <sup>[5]</sup> , Duthie (1996) <sup>[6]</sup> , Fiedler & Schwarz (2005) <sup>[7]</sup> , Amegashie (2008) <sup>[11]</sup> Ameka (2012) <sup>[3]</sup>
AKAN	a	no	Fiedle & Schwarz (2005) <sup>[7]</sup> , McCracken (2013) <sup>[9]</sup>
DAGBANI	ɲún	Máá / lá	Fiedler & Schwarz (2005) <sup>[7]</sup>
YORUBA	ti	--	Kobele (2006)
BULI	wāā	lá	Fiedler & Schwarz (2005) <sup>[7]</sup>

As can be observed from the table above, the relativizers and the clause final markers in the written languages are noted; at least Ewe.

2. ... ɲkɔ *si* dukɔ-wo nya ne (Nutsuakor, 1977:1)  
 ...name REL nation-PL know 3SG  
 '... the name which nations know for it'

However, how the native speakers express the relativizer in the various dialects remains uncovered. Some aspects of these dialectal variations which form the bases of the debate of this work are discussed in section three.

### 2.3 Types of Relative Clauses

The classification of relative clauses are discussed here on two syntactic bases,

- The syntactic configuration of the NP in which the RC occurs in the sentence structure
- The ordering of the RC in the sentence structure.

A type of RC is the Subject oriented RC; this means that the NP in which it occurs is a subject to the sentence as indicated in 4.

3. (a) Dukɔ *si* dze agɔ *la* a-kpɔ to-hehe.  
 Nation REL split fan palm CFM FUT- see ear-stretch  
 'The nation which offends shall be punished'.  
 (b) Tɔfodela *si* dze dɔ *la* ku  
 Fisherman REL split work CFM die  
 'The fisherman who is sick died'

From 4(a) and (b), the NPs '**Dukɔ si dze agɔ la**' and '**Tɔfodela si dze dɔ la**' in which the RCs *Si dze agɔ la* and *si dze dɔ la* occurs respectively are syntactically subjects to their various sentences, hence the name subject oriented relative clauses.

Dzameshie (1995)<sup>[5]</sup> and Duthie (1996)<sup>[6]</sup> explained that if the head noun of the NP is plural in form, the pluralizer is cliticized onto the relativizer as exemplified in 5.

4. (a) Agbledela *si*-wo va *la* xɔ nunana  
 Farmer REL-PL come CFM receive thing give DUP  
 'The farmers who came received award'.  
 (b) Osɔfo *si*-wo dzu- a ame *la* ma- yi dzifo o  
 Pastor REL-PL insult-HAB person CFM NEG-go  
 heaven NEG  
 'Pastors who insult people will not go to heaven'.

This further explains that if there is any pluralizer and or any intensifier in the clause, it must occur between the relativizer and the predicate of the clause. This is judged from the fact that in Ewe, adjectives, numerals, demonstratives, pluralizers, intensifiers and determiners follow the Head noun in the order exemplified in 6.

Adjectives > numerals > demonstratives> pluralizers > intensifiers > determiners.

5. Takuvi yeye eve sia- wo katã la nye tɔ-nye-wo.  
 handkerchief  
 ADJ NUM DEM-PL INT DET COPU POSS-1SG-PL  
 'All these five new handkerchiefs are mine'.  
 6. (a) Sukuvi *si*-wo katã va *la* kpɔ-m  
 Student REL-PL all come CFM see- 1SG  
 'All the students who came saw me'  
 (b) Ame tsitsi *si*-wo boɲ va *la* kpɔ dzidzɔ.  
 Person old REL- PL rather come CFM see joy  
 'The aged who came were rather happy'.

The grammatical function of this type of RC is mainly to modify or qualify the head noun of the subject NP. This type of NP is also called antecedent NP (ANP). RCs which qualify their NPs are called Restrictive RCs because they restrict the referent of the RC to the head noun (Dzameshie, 1995)<sup>[5]</sup>. Thus in 4, 5 and 7 the RCs restrict their referents to the various subject NPs.

Another type of the RCs is the object oriented RC. In this type, the head nominal functions syntactically as an object to the predicate of the sentence.

7. (a) Amuzu da tu xeve *si*-wo le ati- la dzi.  
 Amuzu throw gun bird REL-PL PREP tree- DEF on  
 'Amuzu shot the birds which were on the tree'.  
 (b) Fiafi *si* di-m mie-le *la* ku.  
 Thief REL search-PRG 1PL TOP CFM die  
 'The thief we are looking for is dead'.

In 8 (a and b), the relativized NPs **xevi** in (a) and **fiafi** in (b) are functioning as grammatical objects to their respective predicates.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

Fiedler & Schwarz (2005:120)<sup>[7]</sup> claim that the Inland dialects of Ewe introduce the relative clause with *yikɛ*. This is an argument worth testing. The following statements in 9 were captured from a story telling session in an Oral Literature class in University of Education, Winneba in 2014. The lecturer happens to be a native of Peki. 9(a) is a story telling register among the people of Peki and Hohoe.

8. (a) Ame *kɛ-xɛ* be ati-e me-dzɔ o ne-va lé-e  
 Person REL CFM say tree-DEF NEG- straight NEG  
 should-come catch-3SG  
 'The person who says the stick is not erect should come and hold it.  
 (b) ... Ame *kɛ kɛ* tu dɛdɛ wo-a-xɔ atsu le e-si  
 ... Person REL CFM first remove 3PL- FUT-collect  
 male from 3SG-hand

3SG hand (An extract from a work song among the Pekis)

‘The person who removes first loses her husband’

9. (a) Ame **yì ké** lɔ-m ne-wò-a-va  
Person REL CFM love- 1SG should-3Sg- FUT- come  
‘The person who loves me should come’.  
(Extract from Akpalu *fe agohawo*)  
(b) Òvi kè xé tsɔ- ɔ dɔ-e òu-a ...  
Child REL CFM pick-HAB work- EMPH eat- HAB ...  
‘The child who runs errand receives reward’  
(c) Ame yì òli nya la-e wò-wu-na  
Person REL ghost know DET-int 3PL- kill- HAB  
‘The person who the ghost knows is the one it kills’.  
(A proverb among the southern/coastal dialects)  
(d) Nu **yà ké** me- wɔ na Fiamogã-wo hafi ...  
Thing REL CFM 1SG do PREP Fiamogã-elder-PL PREP ...  
‘What I have done to Fiamogã elders ...’  
(An extract from Kpegi songs among the Avenors)

Analysis of the data as demonstrated in 8 and 9 above indicate that

- The phonological representation of the relativizer **yìkè** does not relate to Inland dialects of Ewe as proposed (ib id). The high tone and low tone on the two front vowels in the first and second syllables respectively are misplaced making pronunciation of the word difficult not only to inland speakers but the coastal dialects as well.
- The so called relativizer **yìkè** is closer to the southern dialects like Anlo, Avenor etc but with low tone on the high front vowel /i/ in the first syllable and high/mid tone on the front spread low vowel in the second syllable as **yì-ké**. This paper proposes that the relativizer is also introduced variously with “**yì**, and **yà**” as demonstrated in the discussion.

It is also worth noting that depending on the speech context the CFM can be omitted. The omission however has no syntactic and semantic effect of the utterance as demonstrated in 10 (a and c).

10. (a) Ame **yà ke** le ze-vi-a gbɔ ...  
Person REL CFM PREP pot-DEMU-DET POST  
‘The person who is before the little pot’  
(b) E-fle avɔ **kè mí** wò-kpɔ.  
3SG buy cloth REL 3SG see.  
‘S/he bought which cloth s/he saw’  
(c) Nu ´yi ke´ wɔ´dza´ me´hiã´ be´ wò-a-do le e´me o.  
Thing REL CFM 3PL- slash NEG-need that 3SG-SUBJ-exit at 3SG-inside NEG  
‘The thing that is slashed need not come apart.’ (Ameka & Esegbey, 2007:243) <sup>[4]</sup>.

The paper however assumes from the discussion that the coastal dialects use “**yì** and **ya**” as the relativizers and “**ké**” for the CFM. In the same spirit, the inland dialects introduce the RC with “**kè**” and close it with either “**mí** or **xé**”. The syntactic ordering of word here varies in relation with the written (standard) Ewe, in that the relativizer is followed immediately with the CFM and the main clause follows whether at the subjective or objective slot of the sentence as observed in **11** above.

#### 4. Conclusion

I have demonstrated in support with earlier literature that the RC is introduced by the demonstrative adjective **si** in written Ewe. The end of the RC is marked by a clause final marker **la** when it has an antecedent NP both in the written Ewe and also in oral speech.

It is also observed that RCs follows an NP to assume two syntactic slots in the sentence in the language; either as a subject or an object. It is worth noting the universal implication that the constituent ordering of RC in Ewe follows the noun phrase construction order in the language. Thus (head noun+adjectives> numerals > demonstratives >pluralizers> intensifiers > determiners).

The paper also argue that the relativizer is constant in the written language and in the oral dialects but the CFM in mostly optional in speech. The position of the CFM in the spoken language directly follows the relativizer. The paper is of the view also that formal educated Ewe speakers tend to use the relativizer ‘**si**’ than the uneducated speakers who use the ‘**yì, yà ké**’ in phonological language.

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