1 Relative Clause Constructions: A Definition

According to Dixon (2010: 314) a canonical relative clause construction has the following four characteristics:

- It involves a main clause – MC – and a relative clause – RC – which form a complex sentence with a single unit of intonation;
- The underlying structure of these two clauses must share one common argument; This CA functions both as an argument in the main clause and in the relative clause and may occur in both clauses, in one of them, or in neither of them.
- The relative clause modifies the common argument of the main clause. It may either provide information which is essential for the identification of the reference of the common argument – in a restrictive relative clause – or it provides additional information about the common argument – in a non-restrictive relative clause.
- The relative clause must have the basic structure of a clause with at least a predicate and the core arguments required by this predicate. It may also have additional arguments and is sometimes not marked with respect to tense, aspect, modality, etc.

In addition to this canonical and in a way prototypical relative clause construction Dixon (2010: 315) mentions a number of non-canonical types as, for example, the ‘co-relatives’ (or ‘correlatives’), where there is no embedding, and other adjoined clauses which may have a temporal or relative clause interpretation.

2 Relative Clause Constructions across Languages

Kuteva & Comrie (2005) postulate four major types of relative clause formation which can be found cross-linguistically:

relative pronoun strategy => case marked relative pronoun that indicates both the syntactic and semantic role of the head noun within the relative clause; an element or pronoun which simply indicates that a clause is a relative clause is not sufficient to postulate that a language is applying this strategy

non-reduction => a) correlatives /b) head-internal /c) paratactic
- a) full NP within the relative clause + (at least one) pronominal form in the matrix clause
- b) full NP within the relative clause, no representation thereof in the matrix clause
- c) the ‘relative clause’ does not differ from an ordinary declarative clause; it is loosely connected to a ‘main clause’

pronoun retention => resumptive pronoun within the relative clause, whereas the term ‘resumptive pronoun’ applies only if this pronoun were ungrammatical or optional in an independent clause

gap => no overt reference to the case of the head noun
3 Relative Clause Constructions in the African Context
According to Kuteva & Comrie (2005) only three of the above presented strategies can be found in African languages. These are
- correlative (subtype of the non-reduction strategy),
- pronoun-retention and
gap.
There is also at least one language known which makes use of the paratactic strategy: Koyaga, a language of the Manding-cluster. But this seems to be a remnant, as Bambara, a closely related Mande-language, uses a similar relative marker and has already undergone a grammaticalization process towards the correlative strategy.
Other aspects of relativization strategies observable in the African context involve nominalization of verbs, as, for example, in §Ani (RV, pc) as well as the use of optional particles marking the beginning and the end of a relative clause and thus “support” a strategy which basically involves a tonal changes of the NP preceding the relative unit (Ngas).
In the following sections I will mainly concentrate on two of the above mentioned strategies, namely those involving correlatives and those with a gap. Examples for the correlative strategy will be taken from Bambara, while the gap-strategy is illustrated on the basis of Swahili. I will, however, also provide some examples of relative clauses in Ngas and briefly touch on the nominalization strategy in §Ani.

3.1 Bambara
3.1.1 Some introductory remarks on the language
- member of the Mande language family in West Africa,
- tone language (high/low),
- isolating,
- predominant word order: subject – tense/aspect marker – object – verb

3.1.2 Relative constructions in Bambara
Relative clauses in Bambara are marked by the particle mín (REL) when the referent appears in the singular and by mínw (REL + PL) when the referent appears in its plural form. The latter is often pronounced as múnu (Kastenholz 1998).
With regard to the function Bambara distinguishes between restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses which are expressed in different ways: While a restrictive relative clause precede the main clause, a non-restrictive relative clause follows the main clause. Another important difference is that the relative particle mín follows the relativized constituent in a restrictive relative clause, but replaces it in a non-restrictive context.1

1 If not indicated otherwise, examples are taken from Kastenholz (1998). The interlinearization throughout this paper is my own.

(1) dônsô yé màrifa mín sàn, òs'ôngô tun ká gëEn
   hunter PERF.AFF gun REL buy DEM.REF.SG price PAST PART expensive
   the gun the hunter bought was expensive

(2) dônsô yé màrifa sán, mín s'ôngô tun ká gëEn
   hunter PERF.AFF gun buy REL price PAST PART expensive
   the hunter bought a gun, which was expensive

---

1 If not indicated otherwise, examples are taken from Kastenholz (1998). The interlinearization throughout this paper is my own.
3.1.2.1 Restrictive Relative Constructions

Characteristics (Kastenholz 1998, among others):

- RC precedes the main clause
- relativized constituent followed by mòn / mínw which generally refers to the whole / complex NP ⇒ the antecedent or head noun is part of the RC\(^2\)
- plural marking occurs on the relative particle
- the main clause usually contains either the singular referential/distant demonstrative ó or its plural correspondent ólu; this elements occurs in that position of the clause to which the information given in the relative clause refers.
- instead of the demonstratives ó / ólu there may also appear the ‘simple’ pronouns of the third person singular or plural, à and ù, respectively

(3) ù bin-na mQO mínw kán,
3PL pull down-PERF.AFF.INTRANS person REL-PL POSTPOS

ólu bEE tún yé dúnan-w yé.
DEM.REF.PL all PAST PERF.AFF stranger-PL POSTPOS

‘The people whom they pulled down were all strangers.’

literally: ‘The people whom they pulled down – those were all strangers.’

I assume that this correlative construction is based on the following two statements:\(^3\)

mQОw bEE tún yé dúnan-w yé.
person-PL all PAST PERF.AFF stranger-PL POSTPOS

‘The people were all strangers.’

ù bin-na mQОw kán,
3PL pull down-PERF.AFF.INTRANS person-PL POSTPOS

‘They pulled the people down.’

(4) à yé jirí-bolo jálan mí́n kári.
3SG PERF.AFF tree-branch dry REL break

à yé ó ci.
3SG PERF.AFF DEM.REF.SG chop

‘She chopped the dry tree-branch which she had broken.’

literally: ‘The dry tree-branch which she had broken – she chopped that one.’

Based on:\(^4\)

à yé jirí-bolo jálan ci
3SG PERF.AFF tree-branch dry chop

‘She chopped the dry tree-branch.’

à yé jirí-bolo jálan kári.
3SG PERF.AFF tree-branch dry break

‘She had broken the dry tree-branch.’

\(^2\) Not explicitly stated in Kastenholz and The New Bambara Grammar, but very important for our analysis!

\(^3\) These examples are my own creations.

\(^4\) see footnote 3
The NP which is relativized – the so-called head noun – can be omitted, if it is clearly identifiable from the context. Examples thereof can be found in the Gospels (here: Mt.5,22 http://www.bible.is/BAMLSB/Matt/5).

(5) (mọọ ọ mọọ) Mín  b’á’(bEá)  wele  fato,
     (everyone)    REL   PRES.AFF+3SG   call  “fato”

ò  ka kan ni  jahanama  tasuma  ye.
DEM.REF.SG  deserve...  hell  fire  ...

‘(Everyone) Who calls him “fato” deserves hellfire.’

3.1.2.2 Non-restrictive Relative Constructions
Characteristics (Kastenholz 1998, among others):
- RC follows the main clause
- mín / mín-w occurs in the position of the relativized constituent ⇒ the antecedent or head noun is not part of the relative clause\(^5\)
- the main clause looks exactly like an ordinary declarative clause (no special pronouns required)

(6) mùso-w  yé  ù  dèn-w  kOQi,  
     woman-PL  PERF.AFF  3PL  child-PL  look after

mín-w  yé  í  kò  bá  lá
REL-PL  PERF.AFF  REFL  wash  river  POSTPOS

‘The women looked after their children, who washed themselves in the river.’

Based on:  
mùso-w  yé  ù  dèn-w  kOQi,  
woman-PL  PERF.AFF  3PL  child-PL  look after
‘The women looked after their children.’

dèn-w  yé  í  kò  bá  lá  
child-PL  PERF.AFF  REFL  wash  river  POSTPOS
‘The children washed themselves in the river.’

(7) à  yé  mùsu  fúru,  
3SG  PERF.AFF  woman  marry

mín  bOra  Lágine.
REL  come from-PERF.AFF.INTRANS  Guinea
‘He married a woman, who comes from Guinea.’

\(^{5}\) Again this is neither explicitly stated in Kastenholz or The New Bambara Grammar, but essential for our analysis.

\(^{6}\) Again, these examples are my own creations.
Based on:
à yé músu fúru.
3SG PERF.AFF woman marry
‘He married a woman.’

músu bOra Lágine.
woman come from-PERF.AFF.INTRANS Guinea
‘The woman came (comes) from Guinea.’

3.1.2.3 **Other possibilities to express Relative Constructions**

**Participles** (examples from *The New Bambara Grammar*):

(8) O mQO sigi-len ye ne fa ye.
DEM.DIST.SG person sit-PPP COP 1SG father COP
‘The person who is seated is my father.’

literally: ‘The seated person is my father.’

(9) O cè na-tò ye ne fa ye.
DEM.DIST.SG man come-PPA COP 1SG father COP
‘That man who is coming is my father.’

literally: ‘The coming man is my father.’

**Nomina Agentis** (examples from *The New Bambara Grammar*):

(10) Ne tè a dila-baa dòn.
1SG PRES.NEG 3SG make-AGENS know
‘I do not know who made it.’

literally: ‘I do not know the maker.’

(11) I wele-baa bè so kònò.
2SG call-AGENS PRES.AFF house POSTPOS.LOC
‘The one who has called you is in the house.’

literally: ‘Your caller is in the house.’

**Distributive forms** (example from The New Bambara Grammar)

(12) Mògò o mògò da-ra a la,
everyone /whoever believe-PERF.AFF.INTRANS 3SG POSTPOS

o na kisi
DEM.REF.SG FUT save

‘Whoever believes in him will be saved.’ /
‘Everyone who believes in him will be saved.’

3.2 **Swahili**

3.2.1 **Some introductory remarks on the language**

- East African Bantu language spoken in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and beyond
- most important Lingua Franca besides Hausa
- class language: nouns are grouped according to semantic units, all elements depending on a certain noun have to be marked with a respective concord marker that differs according

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7 see footnote 6
3.2.2 Relative Constructions in Swahili

Swahili has three primary strategies used in the formation of relative clauses. Two of these strategies are expressed within the verb, as can be seen in the morphological sequence structure illustrated above. The third one involves *amba*, which has been referred to as 'relative pronoun' by some authors but whose status is in fact not totally clear yet.

3.2.2.1 Strategy I: “tensed relatives”

The basic requirements for using this strategy are:

- subject (PRO or CL) – tense/aspect marker – relative; – verbal base – indicative

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{PRES.PROG} & \Rightarrow \text{-na-} \\
\text{FUT} & \Rightarrow \text{-taka-} \\
\text{PAST} & \Rightarrow \text{-li-} \\
\text{NEG} & \Rightarrow \text{-si-}
\end{align*}
\]

(13) “tensed” RC with antecedent /head noun of class 1 (human, singular)

Mw-alimu a-na-ye-sem-a a-na-ka-a jira-ni.

CL1-teacher 3SG-PROG-REL.CL1-speak-INDIC 3SG-PROG-live-INDIC next door-LOC

‘The teacher who is speaking is living next door.’

Mwalimu is both the subject of the main and of the relative clause!

Based on:

Mw-alimu a-na-ka-a jira-ni.

CL1-teacher 3SG-PROG-live-INDIC next door-LOC

‘The teacher is living next door.’

Mw-alimu a-na-sem-a.

CL1-teacher 3SG-PROG-speak-INDIC

‘The teacher is speaking.’

(14) “tensed RC” with antecedent /head noun of class 2 (human, plural)

W-alimu wa-na-o-sem-a wa-na-ka-a jira-ni.

CL2-teacher 2PL-PROG-REL.CL2-speak-INDIC 3PL-PROG-live-INDIC next door-LOC

‘The teachers who are speaking are living next door.’

Walimu is both the subject of the main and of the relative clause!

Based on:

W-alimu wa-na-ka-a jira-ni.

CL2-teacher 3PL-PROG-live-INDIC next door-LOC

‘The teachers are living next door.’

W-alimu wa-na-sem-a.

CL2-teacher 3PL-PROG-speak-INDIC

‘The teachers are speaking.’
“tensed RC” with antecedent /head noun of class 7 (“thing”, singular)

Ki-tabu u-li-cho-ki-nunu-a uta-ki-som-a
CL7-book 2SG-PAST-REL.CL7-OBJ.CL7-buy-INDIC 2SG-FUT-OBJ.CL7-read-INDIC
‘You will read the book that you have bought.’

Kitabu is both the object of the main and of the relative clause!

Based on:

U-ta-ki-som-a ki-tabu.
2SG-FUT-OBJ.CL7-read-INDIC CL7-book
‘You will read the book.’

U-li-ki-nunu-a ki-tabu.
2SG-PAST-OBJ.CL7-buy-INDIC CL7-book
‘You have bought the book.’

3.2.2.2 Strategy II: “tenseless relatives”

Like in strategy I, strategy II is also manifested within the verbal complex. This time, however, the relative marker does not occur in an intermediate slot but verb-finally. Furthermore, this strategy does not involve any kind of tense or aspect marking. Its form simply is:

subject (PRO or CL) – verbal base – final vowel – relative:

Due to the lack of any temporal specification this type of relative clause has also been labeled as “general relative” (Möhlig & Heine 1999:243; Ashton 1944[1971]:111, fn. 1). The main function of a verb which is relativized by means of this strategy is to qualify its antecedent or head and expresses something more general (cf. (16)) or, according to Mohammed (2001:181), adjective-like (cf. (17)):

3SG-teach-INDIC-REL.CL1 COP CL1-teacher
‘(He) who teaches is a teacher.’ / ‘Whoever teaches is a teacher.’ / ‘Everyone who teaches...’

(17) Wa-tu w-engi wa-sem-a-o ki-swahili
CL2-person CL2-much 3PL-speak-INDIC-REL.CL2 CL7-Swahili
wa-na-ka-a Kenya.
3PL-PROG-live-INDIC CL14-Kenya
‘Many people who speak Swahili are living in Kenya.’ => ‘Many people speaking Swahili are living in Kenya.’ => ‘Many Swahili speakers are living in Kenya.’

(18) M-bwa w-angu ni-m-pend-a-ye ni m-zee.
CL9-dog CL1-POSS.PRO.1SG 1SG-OBJ.3SG-love-INDIC-REL.CL1 COP CL1-old
‘My dog, which I love, is old.’ / ‘My beloved dog is old.’

Based on:

M-bwa w-angu ni m-zee.
CL9-dog CL1-POSS.PRO.1SG COP CL1-old
‘My dog is old.’

Na(<ni+a)-m-pend-a m-bwa w-angu.
1SG-PRES-OBJ.3SG-love-INDIC CL9-dog CL1-POSS.PRO.1SG
‘I love my dog.’
3.2.2.3 Strategy III: “amba relatives”
Among the three primary Swahili relativization strategies the one with amba is the least constrained with regard to tense/aspect marking, and, in a way, the closest to what speakers of languages that make use of a relative pronoun are used to.

(19) Ch-akula amba-cho u-me-ki-pik-a
CL7-meal AMBA-REL.CL7 2SG-PERF-OBJ.CL7-cook-INDIC
ki-ko j-iko(<j+ioko)-ni.
CL7-be.LOC CL5-kitchen-LOC
‘The meal which you have cooked is in the kitchen.’

Based on:
Ch-akula ki-ko j-iko(<j+ioko)-ni. (chakula=subject)
CL7-meal CL7-be.LOC CL5-kitchen-LOC
‘The meal is in the kitchen.’

u-me-ki-pik-a ch-akula. (chakula=object)
2SG-PERF-OBJ.CL7-cook-INDIC CL7-meal
‘You have cooked the meal.’

(20) M-tu a-me-wa-salimu wa-geni amba-o
CL1-person 3SG-PERF-OBJ.3PL-greet CL2-guest AMBA-REL.CL2
a-me-wa-lik-a
3SG-PERF-OBJ.3PL-invite-INDIC
‘The man has greeted the guests whom he has invited.’

Based on:
M-tu a-me-wa-lik-a wa-geni. (wageni=object)
CL1-person 3SG-PERF-OBJ.3PL-invite-INDIC CL2-guest
‘The man has invited the guests.’

M-tu a-me-wa-salimu wa-geni. (wageni=object)
CL1-person 3SG-PERF-OBJ.3PL-greet CL2-guest
‘The man has greeted the guests.’

As I have already pointed out, amba-relatives are in a way more familiar to us than the other two strategies. Besides their “relative pronoun-type” character they are identifiable more easily, which might be the reason why this strategy is preferred in certain contexts, for instance, when a sentence is longer and more complex (Ashton 1944[1971]:309f.).

3.2.2.4 Other possibilities to express Relative Constructions
Like Bambara, Swahili has other possibilities to express relative contexts. Among these secondary strategies are cleft constructions as in (21) (Mohammed 2001:186f):

(21) Wewe ni m-tu tajiri.
ABS.PRO.2SG COP CL1-person rich
‘You are a rich person.’

A-li-ye m-tu tajiri ni wewe.
3SG-be.AUX-REL.CL1 CL1-person rich COP ABS.PRO.2SG
‘It is you who is rich.’
Other instances which can be interpreted as cleft constructions involve *ndio*, which is in the lexicon simply translated as ‘these are they’ (cf. Höftmann & Herms: 1999[2005]). I assume that it is a cleft the translation of which has to be modified according to the context in which it occurs. Furthermore, it can be segmented into *ndi* + the corresponding relative marker of the NP targeted by the cleft process. The following example is taken from the Bible (Jo. 1,9) (*Biblia ndio Maandiko Matakatifu yote ya Agano la Kale nayo ya Agano Jipya katika msemo yva Kiswahili*, see References).

(21) Ndi-o mw-anga wa kweli  
    ndi-REL.CL3 CL3-light GEN.CL3 CL3-truth  
    u-na-o-mw-angaz-a kila m-tu,  
    CL3-PAST-REL.CL3-OBJ3SG-elucidate-INDIC every CL1-person  
    tena ndi-o (mwanga wa kweli) u-li-o-kuw-a  
    furthermore ndi-REL.CL3 CL3-PAST-REL.CL3-come into existence-INDIC  
    u-ki-ja u-limwengu-ni  
    CL3-SIM-come CL3-world-LOC  
    ‘It is the light of truth which elucidates every person; furthermore, it is the light which came into existence, when it came into the world.’

3.3 Others

In this section I will briefly touch onto two phenomena I mentioned earlier. These are relativization which involves tonal changes and relativization via nominalization.

3.3.1 Ngas

Ngas is an Afro-Asiatic language spoken in Plateau State, Nigeria. It has two dialects: Plain Ngas and Hill Ngas. One of its most important features is tone, both in the lexicon and in syntax. Tone also plays a crucial role in relative constructions in this language, as it is the only means which is not optional.

3.3.1.1 Relative constructions in Ngas*

In Ngas, a relative clause follows the noun it modifies. The structure is as follows:

\[
\text{Head NP (REL) S (POSTREL) (PL Head NP)}
\]

Ngas’ relative markers are *nÈ, kÈ* and *koonÈ*; its post-relative markers are *Àa* and *nyî*. These markers are invariant with respect to the number of the head noun. In addition, they are all facultative and can be omitted. The crucial thing with regard to relative constructions is the fact that the relative marker evokes a falling tone on the preceding element. This might be the head noun itself or the last element within the NP. Thus, a high tone becomes high-low-falling and a mid tone becomes mid-low-falling. (Examples from Jungraithmayr & Holubová 2010.)

(22) ²yâm nÈ [pO jì] nyî  
    child.REL REL PROG V.come POSTREL  
    ‘This child that is coming’

(23) gÔ [kÈ nÈt] Àa  
    man.REL 3SG.PF V.go POSTREL  
    ‘the man who has gone’

(24) kÈ nî nÈN [wu kàrÈn]  
    3SG.PF V.see cow.REL 2PL.GA V.slaughter  
    ‘He/She saw the cow that you slaughter.’

* All data and comments presented in this section are from Miroslava Grünwaldt (Holubová).
3.3.2 §Ani
§Ani is a Central Khoisan language of the Khoe group. These languages have a rich morphology and use particles as well as bound morphemes. Furthermore, §Ani has clicks and tones (for more details see Vossen 1997).

3.3.2.1 Relative constructions in §Ani
Relative constructions in §Ani are expressed via nominalization of the verb within the “relative clause”.

(25) §gEE.khoe-hE tsáe-ña dóo-tse-§oë-hE ...  
female.person-F.SG 2M.SG-OBJ love-2M.SG.OBJ-HAB-F.SG  
‘The/A woman who loves you...’  
literally: ‘The/A woman loving you one...’  (R.V. p.c.)

(26) n.hé-m khoe-mà §irú-biye ‘x’ùún-a-§óm-mà  
DEM-M.SG person-M.SG bush-horse kill-JUNC-PAST-M.SG  
kx’áò.khòè tóota* *(<Setswana) (Vossen & Güldemann 2000)  

male.person real  

‘This man who (recently) killed a zebra (is) a real man.’  
literally: ‘The having killed one man real.’

4 Summary
In this overview I have shown that relative constructions in African languages display a wide range of processes involved in its formation. In addition to the more “classical” structures which make use of relative particles we have seen that relative concord markers, participles, tone and nominalization also play a crucial role in this area. In addition, relative constructions in African languages do not obey the clear concept of subordination, but are sometimes in an intermediary state between parataxis and hypotaxis on a possible path of grammaticalization. Given that only four out of a huge number of languages have been presented here, it becomes clear that the formation of relative clauses still remains an interesting object of further investigation.
### 5 Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1,2,3PL</td>
<td>first, second or third person plural (SUBJ, OBJ, POSS, REFL)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1,2,3SG</td>
<td>first, second or third person singular (SUBJ, OBJ, POSS, REFL)</td>
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Bibliography


*M. New Bambara Grammar* [ca 1980] Bamako: Centre de Littérature Evangélique


Online Resources

[http://www.bible.is/BAMLSB/Matt/5](http://www.bible.is/BAMLSB/Matt/5)