



Syntactic Analysis of Relative Clause in Ghòtùò

OLAITAN Deborah Omolara

**Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages,
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye.**

llori.deborah@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng; ilodebby1@yahoo.com
08065015277

Abstract

*Relativisation is the process of inserting a relative clause in front of the Noun Phrase which precedes it. The structure of the Relative clause remains controversial, as current attempts to replace adjunction theories are fraught with conceptual difficulties. This work examines the relative clause as a syntactic process in Ghòtùò. Chomsky's Minimalist Program was adopted as a framework. Ethnographic design was used. Twenty-four resident native speakers between the ages of fifty and seventy-nine, two from each of the twelve quarters of Ghòtùò, Owan North Local Government Area of Edo State, were purposely selected. Primary data were elicited through oral interviews using the Ibadan Syntactic Paradigms and the Ibadan 400 Wordlist, while secondary data were sourced from primers and recorded audio clips. Data were subjected to inter-linear glossing, syntactic and qualitative analysis. Our study reveals that the language does not allow an adjective as one of the constituents of NP but rather the N will be relativised. A sentence also cannot be relativised. Also, **nhi** the operator head in the language has some contrastive features which often trigger movement into the Spec, which is contrary to some of the already propounded theories. Relativisation is a projection of the head NP, and movement is by copy and Paste, which is in accordance with the language acquisition process. Ghòtùò, being a minority language that the native speakers are gradually deserting by shifting to neighbouring languages, may be lost forever if not documented.*

Keywords: Relativisation, Ghòtùò, operator, movement, adjunction.

1.0 Introduction

Relativisation is a common phenomenon in natural languages in which sentences are transformed from the basic kernel sentences to the left periphery of the complex ones. A clause is then relativized when an NP within it is identical with the antecedent NP of the matrix clause and thereby changes to an appropriate relative pronoun simply because such a relative pronoun,



as well as the NP that comes before it is co-referential. According to Jacobs and Rosebaum (1970:211), to generate a relative clause, a sentence is embedded in a noun phrase that contains another noun phrase. Both this noun phrase and the embedded sentence are dominated by the same higher noun phrase; such constructions are called a relative clause, a term referring to the function played by the embedded sentence.

Relativisation is one of the syntactic processes that have been vigorously debated on in line with the generative traditional grammar. Moreover, various studies have been conducted on the nature of RelP and its contribution to understanding syntactic structures. Ghòtùò, being a minority language, has not received much research work, especially in the area of syntax. A study of this nature would help in documenting the language should in case the language would not go into extinction as it is one of the highly endangered languages in Nigeria.

Relativisation is a process where a sentence is embedded in noun phrase. It involves putting a sentence in an NP; the sentence is adjectivised to qualify the head noun. Focusing and Relativisation are said to be similar in meaning and derivation. So, this work is set to justify the validity of this claim through both the theoretical and empirical evidence from the language. Also, there are many functional operators in the language, the interaction of relative operator and other operators like negator and focus marker will be examined so as to determine the head in RelP as well as the status of this head.

The CP is assumed as the layer encoding the pragmatic information of utterances housing discourse information like relativisation, interrogation, focusing and topic among other things prior to Rizzi's decomposition of the C- domain. Clauses are typed based on the information encoded by the functional heads. On this basis, we investigate the following questions;

- Is relativisation base-generated or movement operation?
- What is the status of relative marker in Ghòtùò?
- What is the head in RelP; Rel or DP?
- Does Rel head co-occur with other operators? If yes what is the syntax of this interaction, if not, why?

However, our major thrust is to examine the derivation process in line with Minimalist program (MP) as proposed in Chomsky (1991, 1995) among others. Our study shall be divided into the following sections for the sake of convenience; Introduction, theoretical framework, the



derivation processes, relativisation and some theoretical issues, the interaction between focusing and relativisation as well as negation and conclusion.

The Speakers of Ghòtùò

Ghòtùò is an Edoid language spoken in Ghòtùò community in Edo state of Nigeria. Ghòtùò has been differently referred to as Otwa, Otuò and the like in the literature. This is as a result of the white especially the missionaries who first worked on the language. The language is spoken by about 100,000 natives (1963 Mid-Western Nigeria Census) in Ghòtùò town in Owan Local Government Area of Edo State (Crozier and Blench, 1992). But as of now, according to Felix (2017:2) the language is spoken by 16,303 speakers based on 1991 National Population Census. There are many factors responsible for this great decline in number of speakers; many of the speakers are now elites and raising as well encouraged their children to speak Yoruba, education, migration to urban areas for greener pasture and the love they claimed to have for Yoruba language and the people. So, the youth speak Yoruba more. Ghòtùò speakers are mostly farmers cultivating cocoa, palm oil, palm kernel and fruits like orange. Ghòtùò is often referred to as the 'food basket of Edo State'. However, with the enlightenment coming on the wings of civilization, many of them are now professionals on various fields including the academic, civil service and major players in corporate Nigeria, Adeniyi (2009).

Ghòtùò is surrounded by Emai- Luleha- Ora cluster (South and South-West), Uoka and Oloma (South) Igwe, Sasaru and Ihevbe (East and South East), Adeniyi (2015). The culture and oral tradition reveal that the people possibly migrated from different parts of Yorùbá and Bini. Lewis (2013) too notes this and this explains the significant Yoruba influence on the sound system and grammar construction of their language. The Yoruba influence still persists today reflecting in many Ghòtùò speakers being bilingual in Yoruba as well as bearing Yoruba names.

Theoretical views on Relativisation

Chomsky (1965) proposes **Matching theory** and views relativisation as involving embedding of a simple sentence in an NP functioning within the matrix sentence such that the matrix sentence NP is exactly matched by another NP within the accompanying embedded sentence. Consider for instance the example below;

- 1a. Ovbàghì nhi ọmọhí ọ dẹ odzẹmi b. Òìlha nhi mhi fùè



House Rel man the buy good

Yam Rel I cook

'The house which the man bought is good'

'The yam that I cook'

From the above examples it can be seen that the NPs in the embedded sentence are matched with the NPs in the matrix sentence. This theory requires that the two NPs must be identical but this theory may not be adequate enough to properly account for the derivation process of relativisation in Ghòtùò language as we will show it later in the following section.

Another theory is **Promotion Theory** by Schacher (1973), which assumes that relativisation consists of a null NP head in which a simple embedded sentence is the qualifier. An NP from the embedded sentence is then promoted to fill the head. For instance

2. [...[mhi fùè òìlhà]]
 I cook yam

Òìlhà the object of the verb fùè 'cook' in the embedded clause is then promoted to the null subject position of the matrix clause to derive (3) below.

- 3a. [Mhēmhe; [nhi [mhi fùè òìlhà]]]
 I –emph Rel I cook yam
 'I am the one who cooked yam'

- b. [Òìlhà; [nhi [mhi fùè t;]]]
 yam Rel I cook
 'It is yam that I cooked'

But the two above mentioned theories have their shortcomings in that there is selectional compatibility. Consider this example

4. [Ovbàghì [nhi [ọmọhí ọ dé]] ọdžémi]
 House Rel man the buy good
 'The house which the man bought is good'



The above example can have the following simple declarative sentences which are not identical or exactly matched.

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----|--------------------------|-----|-----|---------|----|---------------------|--------|
| 5a. | Ọmọhí | ọ | dẹ | ovbàghì | b. | Ovbàghì | ọdžémi |
| | Man | the | buy | house | | House | good |
| | 'The man bought a house' | | | | | 'The house is good' | |

Beside this, predicate relativisation which often does not require promotion of any kind but movement has no place in these theories above. Consider this example;

6. Lẹ́ [nhi [Ọmùà lẹ́ ọdžémi]]
 Go Rel Ọmua go good
 'The fact that Ọmùà went is good'

Awobuluyi's insertion theory of (1976) is another that assumes that relative clauses are stored in the lexicon just like lexical items with definable features. We observed that, this hypothesis runs counter intuitive because what are called lexical items must be redefined as it seems. More so, language is not acquired in this way, because, the hypothesis requires that one knows the features of a complete complementizer to know what qualifies NPs.

Bamgbose (1975) is a proponent of promotion theory. He identified some constructions like predicate relative clause as ambiguous in respect to factive and non-factive meaning. He identifies restrictive and non-restrictive relativisation as the two major classes of relativisation especially in Yoruba.

As can be seen, the literature review on this syntactic process have been motivated both descriptively and theoretically on headedness, relativisation is viewed as a projection of the 'head NP' which 'nhi mhi fùè' is attached to as seen below;

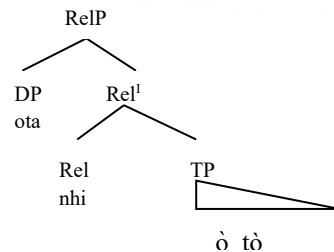
- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-------|-----|---------|--------------------------|
| Simple sentences are; | Mhi | fùè | òìlhà | "I cooked yam" |
| | Ota | tó | | "The tree burns" |
| | Ọmọhì | dẹ | ovbàghì | "The man bought a house" |

- | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|-------------------------|-----|-----|------|----|----------------------------|-----|----|------|----|---------------------------------|-----|-------|----|-----|
| 7a. | Òìlhà | nhi | mhi | fùè | b. | Ota | nhi | ọ | tò | c. | Ovbàghì | nhi | ọmọhí | ọ | dẹ |
| | Yam | Rel | I | cook | | Tree | Rel | it | burn | | House | Rel | man | he | buy |
| | 'The yam that I cooked' | | | | | 'The tree that is burning' | | | | | 'The house that the man bought' | | | | |



However, constructions like above show that relative marker actually clause typed the expression as seen below:

8.



Sentence relativisation is however not possible in the language under investigation like in focusing where sentence can be focused just like that of the constituents.

Within the context of MP, 'nhi' is the operator head and operator heads have some features which often trigger movement into Spec. This informed why an insertion theory is bound to fail.

Radford (2009) views movement as copying and deletion. This poses a serious threat to MP as it is. Collins (2011) and Ilori (2010) view movement as copy and paste processes. To assume Ilori's opinion simply explain language acquisition process. A child only makes copy of lexical items in series of merge operations. Trace copies are not focalized in the LF. Unfocalized copies are marked with the bracket '< >'.

Relativisation in Ghòtùò

Relativisation is the syntactic process of forming a relative clause construction. A relative clause is a subordinate clause in a complex IP projection that contains a constituent which has a kind of anaphoric link with another constituent serving as its antecedent in the main clause, such that the meaning of the complex clause involves two occurrences of a variable. For instance, in the Ghòtùò relative clause expression in (16&17) below;

9a. Mhi mhe ovbaghi ó
 I know house the
 'I know the house'

c. Mhi mhe ovbaghi nhi omohi ó zé
 I know house Rel man the build
 'I know the house which the man built'

b. 'Omohi ó zé ovbaghi
 Man the build house
 'The man built a house'



- 10a Òìlhà [nhi [mhi fùè [òìlhà]]] b. Ọmọhíọ nhi vare ọwẹni
 Yam rel 1sg cook man the Rel come yesterday
 ‘The yam which I cooked.’ ‘The man who came yesterday.’

The semantic interpretation of (10a) could be given as: **mhi fùè** *x* ‘I cook *x*’; where *x* is òìlhà ‘yam’. However, following the Uniform Theta Hypothesis (UTAH) of Baker (1988) somehow predictable from the co-indexing of òìlhà and its trace, we shall assume that *x* is base generated in the embedded clause before being raised overtly to the relative clause initial position.

Ghòtùò has an invariant relative clause marker/introducer **nhi**. This item is merged to a convergent IP derivation, which serves as the nucleus/embedded clause, to form a **nhi clause** projection. The **nhi-clause** functions as a kind of clausal modifier which immediately follows the relativized item, mostly nominal expressions in the complex IP. We posit that Ghòtùò relativized items originated within the **nhi-clause** before being raised or adjoined to the pre-**nhi-clause** position. For instance, in (10a), the relative nucleus clause is **Mhi fùè òìlhà**. It becomes **nhi mhi fùè òìlhà** after the relative head was merged to it. Then the direct object of the V **fùè** i.e. òìlhà being the item relativized is moved to pre-**nhi clause** position (spec-RelP) with its trace still visible within the **nhi-clause**. The structural implication of this is that Ghòtùò relative clause marker **nhi** projects RelP with strong head and specifier features that must be checked for RelP to be convergent, and one of its Spec features is [+Nominal] which happens to be the head uninterpretable feature of òìlhà. Other items that occupy Spec-RelP in Ghòtùò are relativized nominal copies of verbs and emphatic pronouns, as in (11) below;

- 11a fùè_i [nhi [mhi fùè_i òìlhà]] b. Lẹ́_i [nhi [Ọmùà lẹ́_i]]
 cook Rel 1sg cook yam go Rel Ọmua go
 ‘Cooking is what I actually did to the yam.’ ‘The fact that Ọmùà went’
- c Mhi nhẹhẹ u ibiá d [Vbavba ibiá]_i [nhi [mhi nhẹhẹ t_i]] e. Mhẹmhẹ nhi Igó
 I know you children 2pl-emph children Rel I know I that Igó
 ‘I know you children’ ‘You the children whom I know’ ‘I who is called Igó’



Looking at example (11a & b), verbal relativisation, it is observed that the verb moved to the Spec position so as to be relativised without being nominalised but leave behind its exact copy at the extraction site.

Other Operators in Ghòtùò

Negators

A negator is a functional element used to deny a proposition. According to Dahl (1979:80), Neg(ator) is used

... for converting a sentence S1, into another sentence S2,
 such that S2 is true whenever S1 is false, and vice-versa.

Generally, negators in most languages are Infl items which linearly precede the predicate that they are used to deny. However, there are other languages where Neg is not solely realized in Infl¹. In Ghòtùò, tone plays a very important role, the neg element is a low tone realized at Infl as a kind of prosodic modification on the subject noun phrase. The prosodic neg particle is a low-tone that targets and phonemically supercedes the tone of the final vowel of the subject noun phrase by changing it to an obligatory low-tone irrespective of the original tone of such a vowel. With this, it prepares the ground for the over-all negation of the clause by switching off the affirmative notion of the declarative proposition to a negative proposition. For instance, if the subject of an affirmative clause is a noun or noun phrase whose final vowel carries the mid- or low-tone, the tone obligatorily changes to low for negation. This syntactic tonal modification is evident in the following examples.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 12a. Òmùà dẹ ghobè
Òmùà buy book
‘Òmùà buys/bought a book’ | b. Òmùà dẹ ghobè
‘He has bought a book’ | c. Òmùà dẹ ghobè
‘Òmùà didn’t buy a book’ |
| 13a. Igò dẹ ghobè
‘Igò is buying a book’ | b. Igò dẹ ghobè
‘Igò should buy a book’ | c. Igò dẹ ghobè na mhẹ
Igò buy book for me
‘He didn’t buy a book for me’ |

Similarly, where short pronouns are used as subjects, the mid- or high-tone on their single syllables changes to low for negation as in examples below;

¹ For instance, English is not now assumed to be a VP adjunct that is a,djuncted to vP (Chomsky 1995:327-330; Radford & Atkinson et al. 2001:342-344). See Östen Dahl (1979) for other types of negators and negation structures.

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Yesterday FM Ọmùà eat yam

“Ọmùà ate yam YESTERDAY”

- e. É (ónhì) Ọmùà é oilha òwèni
 Eating FM Ọmùà eat yam yesterday
 “Ọmùà ATE yam yesterday”

From the examples above, we can see that focus marker is optional (that is why the marker bracketted), also, in focusing verb or verb phrase, we see that the focused verb moves to the Spec of FP and leave the exact copy of itself at its original position without being topicalized

Interaction of Relativisation with other operators

Awobuluyi (1975, 1976) claim that both focusing and relativisation are derived in the same way, that is, they are similar in meaning and structure. He is of the opinion that predicate focus involves nominalization just like in relativisation in Yoruba. But this is not so in the language under investigation, for both processes, the predicate will just move to the Spec Position leaving the exact copy of itself at the extraction site and both the moved constituent and the trace will be co-indexed as seen below.

- 20a fùè_i [nhi [mhi fùè_i òìlhà]] b. Lé_i [nhi [Ọmùà lé_i]]
 cook Rel 1sg cook yam go Rel Ọmua go’.
 “I who cooked yam” ‘Ọmùà who went’ (Relativisation)
- c. É_i [(ónhì) [Ọmùà é_i oilha òwèni]]
 Eating FM Ọmùà eat yam yesterday
 “Ọmùà ATE yam yesterday” (Focusing)

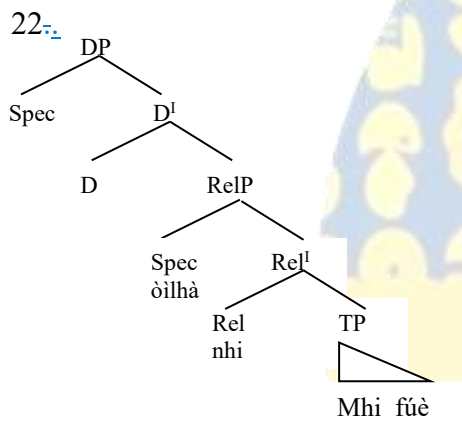
Focus constructions are said to narrow the range of references to the specific one concerned. Thus, òìlhà ‘yam’ in (20c) is narrowed down to the òìlhà specified in ‘ónhì Ọmùà é’ just like (20a) in ‘nhi mhi fùè’. (20a&b) are said to be composed of nhi the marker and the relativised clause. We want to submit here that both projections are CPs. But focus construction entails information structure which can be interpreted semantically not only with syntax but also



within the context. As claimed before, the so-called semantic similarity is informed by what is considered as heads.

- 21a Oilha_i [(ónhi) Ọmùà é [t_i [òwèni]]] b. Òìlhà_i [nhi [mhi fùè [t_i]]]
 Yam FM Ọmùà eat yesterday yam rel 1sg cook
 “Ọmùà ate YAM yesterday” ‘The yam which I cooked.’

As for finiteness of semantic information, focus heads select TP complement. The kind of information expressed in relativisation requires the TP complement for the adjectivised reading. Similarly, the whole of the RelP still functions as complement of D-head as shown below in (22)



Also, the so-called semantic narrowing is informed by the induced emphasis from checking relationship between foc head which is ọnhi and the Spec item.

It is observed from the language that sentences cannot be relativised as it is in focusing, for relative clause always qualifies the N/NP but ọnhi-phrase can never be a qualifier. We can then say that focusing clearly show that FocP is a CP projection rather than NP/DP.

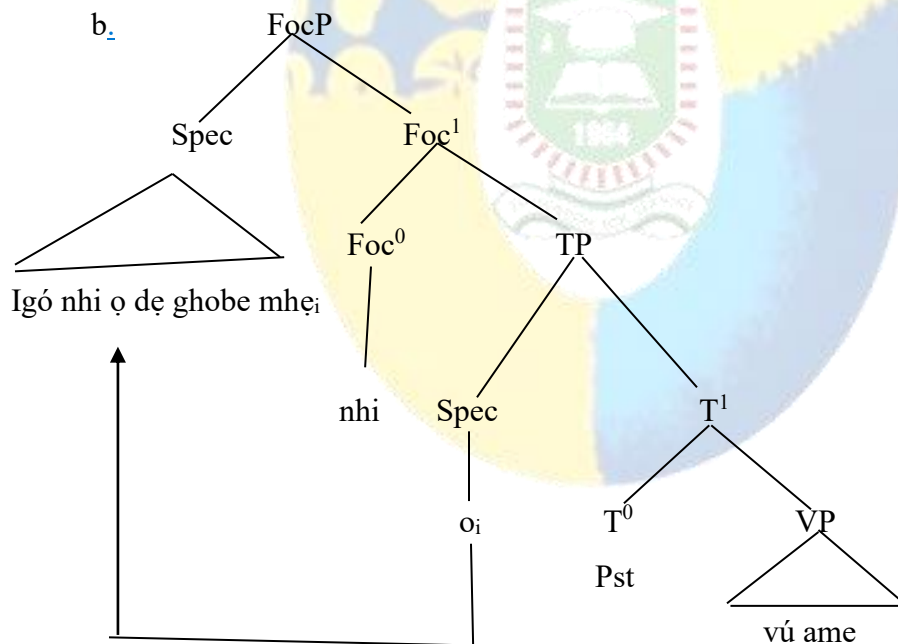
Whenever the two markers i.e. Rel marker and Foc marker occur in a sentence where both processes are at play, then the focus marker ọnhi will not be in it full form but as nhi or nhọ. Consider these examples;



- 23a. Igó nhi ọ dẹ ghobe mhe nhe vú amẹ
 Igó Rel she buy book my Foc fetch water
 “Igó who bought that my book fetched water”
- b. Igó nhi ọ dẹ ghobe mhe nhi vú amẹ
 Igó Rel she buy book my Foc fetch water
 ‘That Igó who bought that my book fetched water’

From the above examples, we discover that ọnhi the focus marker has stronger feature than relative marker in the language, for the marker can focus two constituents at the same time as seen in (23b) where both the matrix and the embedded clause are focused at the same time taken the shape ‘nhi’. But whenever it takes the form nhe, it focuses one single constituent as seen in (23a) where only the embedded clause is focused. Consider the derivation below;

24a. [FocP Igó nhi ọ dẹ ghobe mhe [Foc⁰ ọnhi [TP Igó nhi ọ dẹ ghobe mhe ọ vú amẹ]]



From the above example, it is observed that the basic clause is **Igó vú amẹ**, then Igó is relativised to derive **Igó nhi ọ dẹ ghobe mhe vú amẹ**. Now, for the emphasis on both clauses **nhi** the variant of ọnhi the Foc marker is merged in order to check its head feature which now give **nhi Igó nhi ọ dẹ ghobe mhe vú amẹ**. The relativised clause has to be fronted leaving a



trace in form of a resumptive pronoun which is co-index with it for its feature checking as shown in (24) above.

It is also observed that tone plays an important role in the language under investigation, for negation is marked with low tone. Consider these examples;

- 25a. Ọ ẹ́ ghobè
 He buy book
 'He buys/bought a book'
- b. Ọ̀ ẹ́ ghobè
 'He has bought a book'
- c. Ọ ẹ́ ghobè
 'He is buying a book'
- d. Ọ ẹ́ ghobe
 'He should buy a book'
- e. Ọ̀ ẹ́ ghobè na m̀hẹ́
 He buy book for me
 'He didn't buy a book for me'
- f. M̀hà gbé ini
 'we didn't kill an elephant'
- g. Ọ̀ ẹ́ ọ̀mọ̀ka
 'he didn't buy an orange'

The language permits the interaction of the three operators to co-occur in a single sentence without altering the meaning or bring about ill-formedness of such sentence. Consider the example below;

26. Igó n̄hì ọ ẹ́ ghobe m̀hẹ́ n̄hì ọ̀ ẹ́ rẹ́
 Igó Rel she buy book my Foc she(neg) come
 'That Igó who bought that my book didn't come'.

Of the three operators, focus marker is the only one that has the feature to focus two constituents at the same time. The relativisation only applied on Igó and nothing else, while negation applied on the fact of 'Igó not coming' and not on 'Igó not buy the book'. We then observed that when the three operators co-occur, Rel marker enters the derivation first to relativise the DP, then negator to negate the clause before the Foc marker finally comes in so as to place emphasis on the entire structure. So, the basic derivation of sentence (27) is shown below;

- 27a Igó varé
 'Igó came'
- c. Igó n̄hì ọ ẹ́ ghobe m̀hẹ́ ọ̀ ẹ́ rẹ́
 'Igó who bought my book didn't come'
- b. Igó n̄hì ọ ẹ́ ghobe m̀hẹ́ varé
 'Igo who bought my book came'
- d. Igó n̄hì ọ ẹ́ ghobe m̀hẹ́ n̄hì ọ̀ ẹ́ rẹ́
 'That Igó who bought that my book didn't come'



Conclusion

The focus of this paper has been to examine relativisation as a syntactic process in Ghòtùò. We have been able to reveal that the head in relative clause is not an NP/DP but the relative marker itself and Relativisation is a projection of CP not of IP. This goes along with the definition of merge as a projection of the head. The language does not take adjective as modifier of N/NP, The N/Np has to be relativised. It is also established that ‘ònhi’ the focus marker has stronger feature than the ‘nhi’ the relative marker for whenever they co-occur in a sentence ònhi has the power to focus both the matrix and the embedded clause at the same time.

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