

THROWING MORE LIGHT: THE COMPONENTS OF THE RELATIVE CLAUSE IN
OKERE

The relative clause structure in Okere presents an essential feature to the typology of relative clauses in Kwa languages by employing what I analyze as the focus marker in its structure because it has the same form as the focus marker in the language (cf. Animah 2015). In this paper, I discuss the relative clause structure in Okere, a Guan (affiliated to the Kwa language family) language spoken in the eastern part of Ghana. It has about 80,000 speakers who also speak Akuapim-Twi as a second language. Downing (1978) observed that post-nominal relative clauses have some added marking, usually found in other subordinate clauses like the relative clause, and this is true for the Okere. The data below presents the features of the relative clauses in Okere.

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|----|----|------------------------------|--------|--------|-----------|---------|----|
| 1. | a. | è-nyé | [à-sě̀ | mo | n-wú | à] | |
| | | SG-man | SG-REL | 3SG | PST-die | CD | |
| | | ‘The man who died’ | | | | | |
| | b. | n-nyé | [è-sě̀ | èmó | n-wú | à] | |
| | | PL-man | PL-REL | 3PL | PST-die | CD | |
| | | ‘The men who died’ | | | | | |
| 2. | a. | è-yí | [è-tè | è-nyé | né | n-hú | à] |
| | | SG-tree | SG-REL | SG-man | FM | PST-see | CD |
| | | ‘The tree that the man saw’ | | | | | |
| | b. | n-yí | [è-tè | è-nyé | né | n-hú | à] |
| | | PL-tree | PL-REL | SG-man | FM | PST-see | CD |
| | | ‘The trees that the man saw’ | | | | | |

The relative clause in Akan (Saah 2010) and Ewe (Dzameshie 1995) have similar features, but Okere presents other additional features not attested in other languages. First, the relativizer in Okere agrees with the relativized head in number and animacy (human and non-human only) and, therefore, Okere has four relativizer forms. Second, the focus marker in the relative clause in Okere is so far not found in other closely related languages. The distribution of *né* in the relative clause is also restricted. It always occurs after the subject and before the verb of the relative clause, and it is optional usually when the subject of the relative clause is a pronoun (as exemplified in (1a & b)). The *né* is also glossed as the focus marker and not the relativizer because relativizers are the initial elements of the relative clause in Kwa languages (cf. Saah 2010; Dzameshie 1995; Ameka 1991). The question then is: what is the focus marker doing in the relative clause in Okere? Schacter (1973) argues a formal similarity between focus constructions and relativization since they involve movement from an embedded clause to a matrix clause. The hypothesis here is that relativization triggers focus marking before the verb phrase.

Summary: The relative clause structure in Okere presents an interesting feature to the typology of relative clause structure in Kwa languages and relative clauses in general.

References

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