

Relativization in Bàsàa: from Syntax to Prosody¹

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1 Introduction

Bàsàa is a Bantu language (A 43) spoken in Cameroon, in Central Africa. The language is spoken by approximately 230 000 people in the Centre and littoral administrative regions.

Unlike the vast majority of Cameroonian languages, this language can claim to be well described. There exist works on phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and discourse. The aim of this investigation is, therefore, to sketch the different strategies the language uses to mark relativization. In this language, the relative construction is encoded by many non-exclusive linguistic strategies, that is morphological, syntactic and prosodic. The Bàsàa language displays certain phenomena concerning grammatical relations that are less common in the Bantu languages, with the following basic word order is (Hyman 2003):

Subject - Aux - Verb - Object – Adjunct

My argument in this work is that this language doesn't comprise a category of relative constituents. Thus, the morphosyntactic strategies for marking relatives adapt to the locative and/or the demonstrative categories. In addition, there is a quasi-symmetry between subject and object relatives. Let's consider the following example 1:

The organization of this paper is as follows: Section 2 describes the morphosyntactic features of relativization in Bàsàa. Section 3 investigates the relationship to tones in the relativizing process. Section 4 is devoted to the way prosody acts in relative marking. The concluding remarks will be presented in section 5.

2 Morphosyntactic features of Bàsàa Relativization

2.1 Locative/Demonstrative strategies

Bàsàa adopts two strategies at the morphosyntactic level to mark subject and object relatives : the Locative strategy and the Demonstrative strategy. There is a relative symmetry between

¹ I'm highly indebted to Laura Downing who provided me with a questionnaire on relatives and to the SynPhon working group (Annie, Lisa, Cedric, Martial, Fatima, Chang) for constructive comments.

subject and object relatives, because the concord marker after the relative clause which follows agreement with the head noun for subject relative and does not for object relative.

The Locative strategy

Bàsàa language holds a class of prepositions marking location. But this grammatical category is not devoted only to spatial location like Spatial semantics puts it, in terms of an element playing a communicative role, that helps determine the location or the translocation of a given referent in discourse. My argument here is that the locative category encompasses spatial reference as well as time reference. The hypothesis that derives from this assumption is that there is a viewpoint from which the speaker fixes the addressee's reference point, be it in time, place, trajectory, etc.

The preposition in the language marking the locative category is [í]. Let's consider the following examples:

(1)

í	βòm	<i>at the market</i>
í	ndʒèl	<i>on the way/road</i>
í	ηǵü	<i>over</i>
í	kòsì	<i>at twelve o'clock</i>

Since phonologically this marker has a floating Low tone, when followed by a high tone, the second tone undergoes downstep.

(2)

í	⁺ ndáp	<i>at home</i>
í	⁺ páŋ	<i>near</i>
í	⁺ sí	<i>under</i>
í	⁺ ηǵéŋ	inâ <i>at four o'clock</i>

Then in the absence of a grammatical category of relatives, the languages adapts the locative marker to express relativization. To avoid confusion, the locative marker in this position will be called Relativizer (Rel). Let's consider the following example:

(3)

í	gwǒm	mè	mè-βéγèl	βí	ń-jèr
Rel	things	1sg-subj	p1- carry	3pl -subj	pr-be heavy
<i>the things which i took are heavy</i>					

í	mùr	á	ǵ- ⁺ gwés	máðk	à	ǵ- ⁺ óŋ	βé	ndáp
Rel	man	ccd	pr- like	drinks	ccd	pr-build	neg	house
<i>the man who loves drinking cannot build a house</i>								

mè *í* -¹*gwés* *í* *βòm* *βá* *ń-tìp* *óŋ*
 1sg-subj pr- like Rel market 3pl-subj pr- finish build
I like the market that has just been built

í *ndzèl* *ù* *ń-tép* *ì* *á-kèná wé* *hàà*
 Rel road 2sg-subj p1- choose ccd f2-bring 2sg-obj far
the road you chose will take you far away

It follows from this that the language can combine or not the locative class with the demonstrative class. The later can represent another strategy for expressing relatives.

The Demonstrative strategy

Three spatial references are pointed out in Bàsàa concerning demonstratives: near the speaker, near the hearer and far from both the speaker and the hearer. The second category (near the hearer) may be used as a general referential, because it expresses the idea of *the one in question* (Hyman, 2003) and as we'll see further, the headless relatives. Thus, this category is the one used for relativization purpose.

Demonstratives may either precede or follow the noun that they modify and in all cases, there is a class agreement with the head-noun. The general scheme of demonstratives is as follows:

Dem + head-noun
 or
[í] + head-noun + Dem

(4)

a.

<i>núnú</i>	<i>nú</i>	<i>núú</i>	<i>mùràá</i>	<i>(This – that - that woman)</i>
<i>ìní</i>	<i>ì</i>	<i>ǐ</i>	<i>ndáp</i>	<i>(this – that – that house)</i>
<i>híní</i>	<i>hí</i>	<i>hǐ</i>	<i>hìlóyá</i>	<i>(this – that – that boy)</i>

b.

<i>í</i>	<i>mùràá</i>	<i>núnú</i>	<i>nú</i>	<i>(This – that - that woman)</i>
<i>í</i>	¹ <i>ndáp</i>	<i>ìní</i>	<i>ì</i>	<i>(this – that – that house)</i>
<i>hí</i>	¹ <i>lóyá</i>	<i>híní</i>	<i>hí</i>	<i>(this – that – that boy)</i>

Note that for the case of ***hí¹lóyá hǐ that boy***, two phonological processes have been implemented: first the particle *í-* has fused with the noun prefix, then causing downstep on the second syllable. This statement agrees partially on analysis from Dimmendaal (1988:58), supported by Hyman (2003) for whom the noun class prefix acquires a H tone when the demonstrative is postponed, and that there is an underlying /i-/ which surfaces on nouns which are prefixless.

My argument in connection with this comes from the southern part of the Bàsàa land where people are said to be much more conservative of the language, because they are still sitting at

In Bàsàa, there is no specific difference about subject and object relatives. The only element that changes is the concord marker which establishes agreement with the head-noun throughout the sentence, like In (6) bellow.

(6)

í ßòǎ ßá ñ-téhê wê ßá ñ-kè í ñhóyá
 Rel women ccd p1-see 2sg-obj 3pl pr-go loc swimming
The woman who saw you are going to swim

í ßòǎ ù ñ-téhê ßá ñ-kè í ñhóyá
 Rel women 2sg p1-see 3pl pr-go loc swimming
The woman who you saw are going to swim

2.3 Other relatives

Like other Bantu languages, Bàsàa can have possessor, and locative head-nouns relativized. This is done by the introduction of a resumptive pronoun .

(7)a Possessor relativization

í mùr ñgònd jèé ì ñ-kòn à ñ-kèná jó í dòktà
 Rel man daughter poss 3sg pr- be sick 3sg pr-bring 3sg loc hospital
The man whose daughter is sick is taking her to the hospital

(7)b Locative relativization

paul à m-ßú kààr í ñgü têßlè
 Paul ccd p1-lay book loc over table
Paul laid the book on the table

í têßlè paul à m-ßú kààr í ñgü jé'é í m-pùm
 Rel table ccd p1-lay book loc over poss ccd pr-be dirty
The table on which Paul laid the book is dirty

3 Semantics of relatives

In this section, I attempt to explain the way Bàsàa conceives relativization. In trying to restrict the reference on a noun, the Bàsàa speaker rather fixes this reference in space, using the eyes or orienting the imagination of the hearer. One way to classify relativization in this language is through definiteness/specification. That is, the degree of definiteness is important to determine relativization.

The head-noun is definite

We have an organization like the following:

[í - Head-noun – distal demonstrative (near the hearer)]

(8)

í βòηγέ βά †βά ḡ-†jì hók βά ḡ-tùk í páη lép
 Rel children Dem ccd pr-know swim ccd pr-play loc side river
The children who can swim are playing by the river

mè ḡ-άη í kààr ḡ ḡ βèrí háá
 1sg p1 – read Rel book Dem 3sg state -lie Dem
I read the book that is lying there

í ndzèl ḡ ḡ ḡ-sèndî ḡ ḡ-àp ηγándàk
 Rel path Dem 3sg pr-slip 3sg pr-get longer a lot
The road that is slippery gets longer and longer

The head-noun is indefinite

Indefinite : [Head-noun – distal demonstrative (near the hearer)]

(9)

βòηγέ βά †βά ḡ-†jì hók βά ḡ- là tùk í páη lép
 children Dem ccd pr-know swim ccd pr- can play loc side river
Children who can swim can play by the river

mè ḡ-άη káàr ḡ βák ḡ βèrí háá
 1sg p1 – read book ccd p1-be ccd state -lie Dem
I read a book lying there

ndzèl ḡ ḡ ḡ-sèndî ḡ ḡ-àp ηγándàk
 path Dem ccd pr-slip ccd pr-get longer a lot
A road that is slippery gets longer and longer

One can see from the above that the Demonstrative marker is optional, whether for the definite or the indefinite head-noun. Thus, the forms in (10)a are equivalent to those in (10)b.

(10)a

í mùrǎ nú à βí-†sóm̄b wóm̄ à ḡ-sàη lé à á-βèl mbâs
 Rel woman dem ccd p1-buy farm 3sg pr-plan Compl. 3sg f2-plant maize
The woman who has bought the farm is planning to cultivate maize

í mùrǎ nú βά βí-†sóm̄b wóm̄ wée à ḡ-sàη lé à á-βèl mbâs
 Rel woman dem 3pl p1-buy farm 3sg pr-plan Compl. 3sg f2-plant maize

The woman whose farm was bought is planning to cultivate maize

(10)b

í mùrǎ à ßí-[†]sómb wóm à n-sàŋ lé à á-βèl mbâs
Rel woman ccd p1-buy farm 3sg pr-plan Compl. 3sg f2-plant maize
The woman who has bought the farm is planning to cultivate maize

í mùrǎ βá ßí-[†]sómb wóm wée à n-sàŋ lé à á-βèl mbâs
Rel woman 3pl p1-buy farm 3sg pr-plan Compl. 3sg f2-plant maize
The woman whose farm was bought is planning to cultivate maize

However, in an embedded relative, the Demonstrative marker may be sometimes obligatory between 2 relative clauses.

(11)

í mùrǎ mè pórlák nú à ßí-[†]sómb wóm à n-sàŋ lé à á-βèl mbâs
Rel woman 1sg ppr-talk dem ccd p1-buy farm 3sg pr-plan Compl. 3sg f2-plant maize
The woman I was talking about who has bought the farm is planning to cultivate maize

**í mùrǎ mè pórlák à ßí-[†]sómb wóm à n-sàŋ lé à á-βèl mbâs*
Rel woman 1sg ppr-talk ccd p1-buy farm 3sg pr-plan Compl. 3sg f2-plant maize
The woman who has bought the farm is planning to cultivate maize

4 Prosodic phrasing on relatives

One of the main characteristics of relatives in Bàsàa is their prosodic organization. Two arguments help clarify this assumption: tones at the clause edgemost and prosodic boundaries between clauses.

Tones implementation can justify a continuative mode at the edgemost of the clause, like *wé* in (12)a. In contrary, we have a conclusive mode, *wê* in (12)b . The Lexical low tone of that item surfaces.

(12)a

mè pórlák wé mùrǎ
1sg ppr-talk 2sg obj woman
I was talking to you about a woman

(12)b

í mùrǎ mè pórlák wê à ßí-[†]sómb wóm
Rel woman 1sg ppr-talk 2sg obj ccd p1-buy farm
The woman I was talking about to you has bought the farm

As for prosodic boundaries, I follow Frota &al. (2007) for whom phrasing boundaries show one or more of the following boundary cues:

(i) the preboundary stretch is realized as a rise from/on the last stressed syllable into the boundary syllable, that is, a ‘continuation rise’; (ii) the preboundary stretch is realized as a rise on the last stressed syllable followed by a high plateau up to the boundary, that is, ‘sustained pitch’; (iii) the boundary is signalled by a High tone; (iv) the boundary is signalled by a Low tone; (v) there is ‘pitch reset’ after the boundary, at the beginning of the second phrase; (vi) the F0 drops to the speaker’s base level at the boundary;(vii) there is preboundary lengthening; and (viii) a pause (defined as a stretch of silence) is present at the phrasing boundary. (2007:134).

Some of these cues will be met in Bàsàa relatives, like we can see it in the bellow figures. We have three cues :

- a- The F0 drop at the speaker’s base level at the boundary
- b- Pitch resetting after the boundary
- c- Major pause

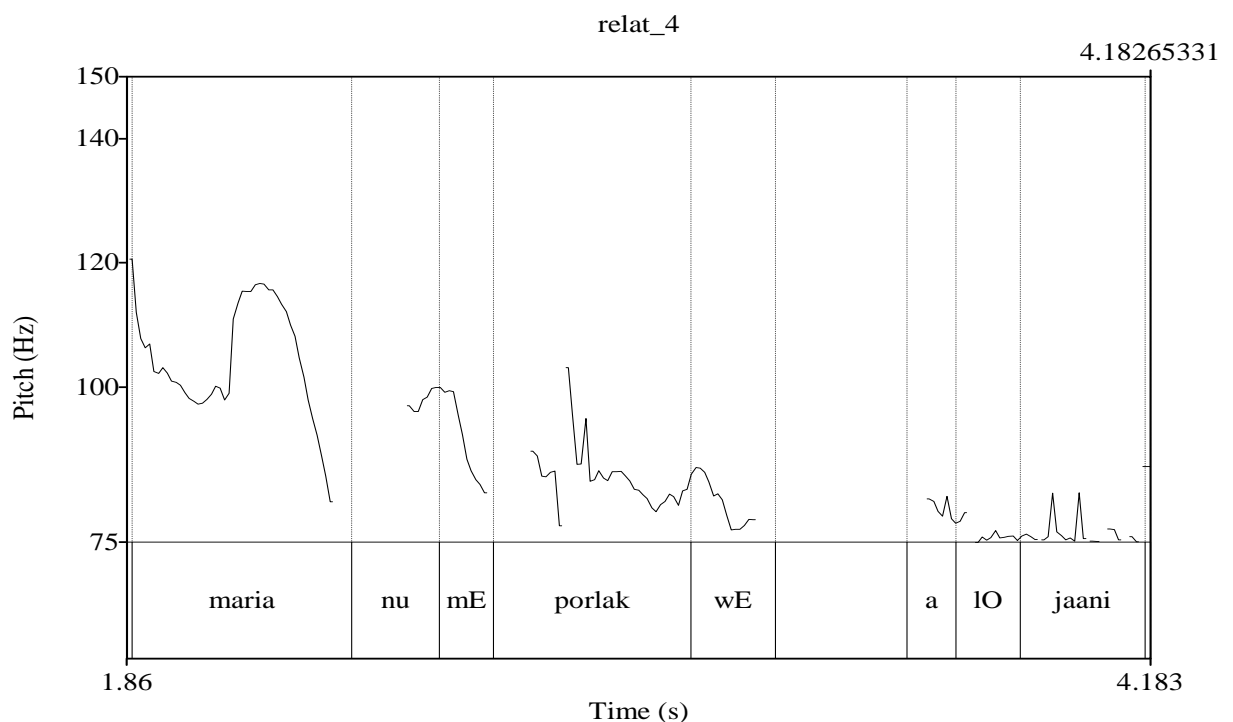
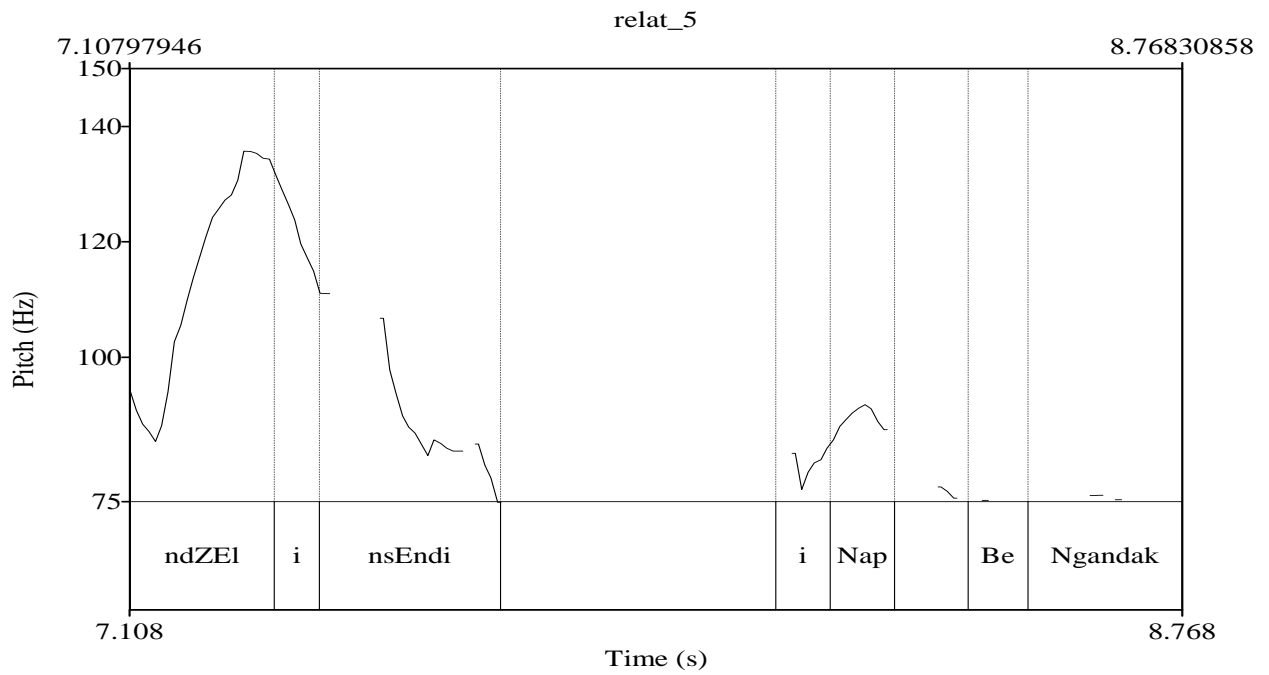


Fig 1. Pitch curve of

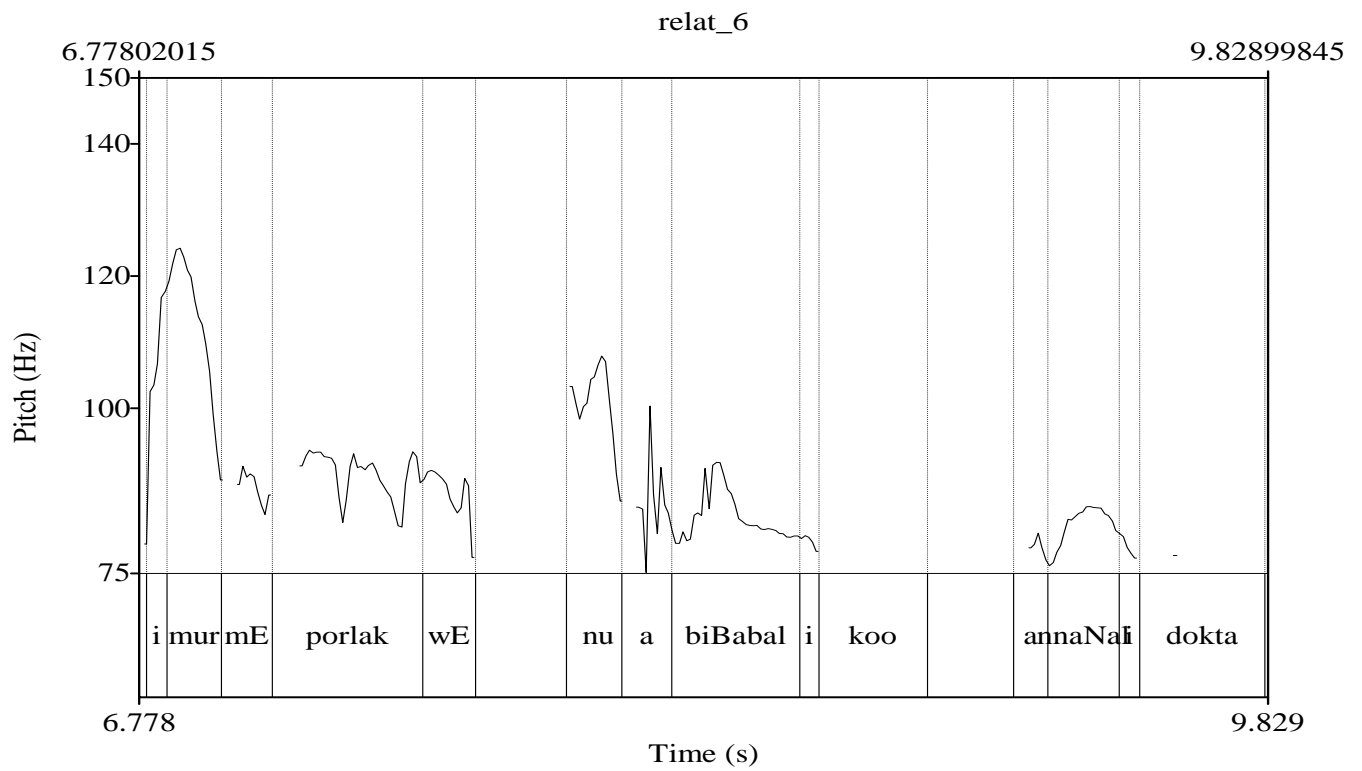
maria nú mè pórlák wê à à-lò jáání

Mary dem 1sg ppr-talk 2sg obj ccd f3-come tomorrow

Mary, of whom I was talking to you, will come tomorrow



ndzèl ì ñ-sèndì ì ò-àp bé ògándàk
 path ccd pr-slip 3sg pr-get longer neg a lot
A road that is slippery is never long



î mūrǎ mē pórlák wê nú à βí-¹βáβál î kòò à ñ-náyál î dōktà
 Rel woman 1sg ppr- speak 2sgobj Dem ccd p1-get hurt loc foot ccd p1- sleep loc hospital
The woman about whom I talked to you, who was hurt on her foot has slept in the hospital

Conclusion

In this paper, the question was to determine the way Bāsàa language encodes relativization, given there is no specific item in the language devoted to express it. The analysis taken here let identify two ways to mark relatives: syntactic strategies with the locative or the demonstrative or both, and prosodic phrasing. Unlike other languages, Bāsàa displays a quasi-symmetry between subject and object relatives.

This study still in progress needs to be completed with a more accurate analysis of phonological phrasing, in relation to syntax.

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