Focal aspects in the Lelemi verb system

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SFB 632 “Information Structure”; Project B1 “Focus in Gur and Kwa languages”

In our presentation we will outline the verb system of Lelemi and concentrate on certain “focal” aspects which are of primary interest to us. Lelemi has two TAMP paradigms: one constituting the so-called “simple tenses”, the other the so-called “relative tenses” (Allan 1973), although not every “simple tense” has a counterpart in the “relative tenses”. The simple paradigm is formed by subject prefixes (prefixed pronouns for 1st or 2nd person and noun class pronouns for 3rd persons) and the verb form whereas the relative paradigm is build up by the obligatory use of an external subject noun, an invariable verb prefix, and the verb form. While the simple paradigm is used in quite a lot of syntactic environments the relative paradigm only shows up in relative clauses with the subject being the head as well as in subject and sentence focus constructions including questions concerning the subject.

We will show some interesting interactions between the grammatical expression of focus and the verb system and sketch the grammaticalisation path of the morpheme nà.

We have undertaken our investigation of the Lelemi language as part of a project working on focus in Gur and Kwa languages within the SFB (collaborative research center) “Information structure: The linguistic means for structuring utterances, sentences and texts.” funded by the German Research Foundation.

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1. Lelemi and the Balemi

1.1 General information

Lelemi is a language spoken by the Balemi people in about 17 communities near the Ghana-Togo border, in the Buem area (cf. map of Buem Area in the appendix (Höftmann & Berger 1965: 141). In 2003 it was spoken by about 49,000 speakers (Gordon 2005).


Kwa

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na-Togo:
  Lelemi-Lefana, Akpafu-Lolobi, Likpe, Santrokofi
  Logba
  Basila, Adele

ka-Togo:
  Avatime, Nyangbo-Tafi
  Kposo, Ahlo, Bowiri
  Kebu, Animere

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Our data presented here was mainly elicited by ourselves with Lelemi speakers from Baglo and Borada during our field research in 2004 and a guest invitation in 2005. Only at some points we are relying to two grammatical sketches about Lelemi (Höftmann 1971, Allan 1973).

History of research:


- discussion of their genetic relationship to other language groups in the area and of their internal organisation (Westermann 1905, 1922, 1927, 1940, Westermann/Bryan 1952, Migeod 1911, Struck 1912, Johnston 1919/22, Greenberg 1954, Blench 2001…)

- for Lelemi merely:

  (phonetics, grammatical scetch, proverbs, glossar Lelemi-German)

  (some numbers, collection of 101 sentences in Lelemi)

  (with comparative wordlist)


According to the Ethnologue (Gordon 2005) (and our observations during the field research in the area, too) the language is vigorous and used in all domains of every day life, even though one can observe some incorrect use of the concord system in the speech of younger people. There is some bilingualism with Twi (Northern communities) and Ewe (Southern communities) (Gordon 2005, Höftmann 1971, Ring 1982).

Ethnologue (Gordon 2005): “Language development Literacy rate in first language: below 1%. Literacy rate in second language: 5% to 15%. NT: 1995.”

(Some material published by Rev. A.O. Dogli, 1928/9 and 1957)

1.2 **Typological traits**

- **word order:** strict SVO, possessor - possessum
- **vowel** system: 7 phonemic vowels (Allan states 9 underlying vowels) – vowel harmony, i.e. two sets of vowels differentiated by the tongue position (+/-ATR) which works on the level of the word
  - radical [-ATR] vowels a, ε, υ cause open vowels a, ε, υ (in prefixes)
  - radical [+ATR] vowels e, o cause closed vowels u, e, i (in prefixes)
- **tone** language with tones having lexical and grammatical function: number of tonemes unclear due to inexistent systematic tone analysis – there are five surface tones: H, M, L, LH, HL
- **Complex noun class system** marked by prefixes
  - noun class prefixes and allomorphs (Höftmann 1971)
  - a-, e-
  - υ-, o-
  - ba-, be-
  - ka-, ke-
  - κω-, ku-
  - le-, li-, le-
  - m-, n-
"Regarding the differentiation of number, there is no opposition between pairs of classes to be found. [...] Concerning the meaning of these prefixes it is obvious that only a classification in two main groups is possible: one “animate group” (persons and animals) and one “inanimate group”." (Höftmann 1972: 37)

Noun class system (Allan 1973), in comparison to Heine 1968

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>classes</th>
<th>class prefixes - singular</th>
<th>class prefixes - plural</th>
<th>semantics</th>
<th>Heine 1968</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(I)</td>
<td>ə-, o-, a-, e-</td>
<td>ba-, be-</td>
<td>most animate nouns</td>
<td>I o-/ba-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(II)</td>
<td>ə-, o-</td>
<td>le-, li-, le-</td>
<td>artefacts, domesticated crops</td>
<td>II o-/i-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(III)</td>
<td>le-, li-, le-</td>
<td>ba-, be-</td>
<td>tribes, birds, bats</td>
<td>III li-/a-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(IV)</td>
<td>le-, li-, le-</td>
<td>a-</td>
<td>body parts, natural events ...</td>
<td>III li-/a-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>ka-, ke-</td>
<td>ba-, be-</td>
<td>animals of the bush</td>
<td>VII ka-/a- ??</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(VI)</td>
<td>ka-, ke-</td>
<td>kə-, ku-</td>
<td>hist.: diminutives</td>
<td>VI ka-/ko-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(VII)</td>
<td>kə-, ku-</td>
<td>ba-, be-</td>
<td>few animates</td>
<td>IV ko-/ba-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(VIII)</td>
<td>kə-, ku-</td>
<td>a-</td>
<td>body parts, natural things</td>
<td>V ko-/a-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(IX)</td>
<td>ka-, ke-</td>
<td>n-, m-</td>
<td>??</td>
<td>Heine = ka-/ko-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(X)</td>
<td>o-</td>
<td>ba-, be-</td>
<td>onomatopoeic, ...</td>
<td>VIII o-/a-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>??</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IX bo-/ba-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>??</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X bo-/a-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Allan cites some more noun classes which are all characterised as mass nouns without singular/plural opposition: n-, m- (XI), a- (XII), ə-, o- (XIII), le-, li-, le- (XIV), ka-, ke- (XV), kə-, ku- (XVI), o- (XVII), bo- (XVIII))

- Höftmann (1971: 38-40) and Allan (1973: 117 ff.) identify some suffixes which are partly borrowed
- Subject concord is expressed on the verb

2. Lelemi verb system

2.1 Earlier treatments of the verb system

Höftmann 1971:
- very rough description: basic syntax of verbal predicates, remarks on probable functions of a few verbal suffixes, examples with a few auxiliaries, remarks on relevance of grammatical tone (on auxiliary, verb) (p. 33, including table)

Allan 1973:
- systematic description of the verbal aspect system on the basis of theories of the 60s and early 70s
- verb consists of: “finite verb prefix” + verb stem (p. 236)
- finite verb prefix: “verbal concord marker” or “relative marker” [of subject] + “tense marker” + “optional modality node”
i.e. it combines subject agreement and TAMP
- referents expressed by noun class concord prefixes (p. 239) on the verb
- distinguishes between:
  2. “Aspect”: negation, certainty, customary action, motion away from the speaker, motion towards the speaker = modality node
- identifies 5 verb suffixes which are no longer productive (-A: stative verbs; -I; -O, -LÀ, -LI/-MI/-NI) (p. 246f.), suffix vowel harmonizes

2.2 Our analysis

Structure of the verb and the verb phrase
- order of verb elements
  - first and obligatory: subject prefix
  - second and +/- overt: TAMP
  - third: verb (form)
  - object in nominal or pronominal form follows the verb
- aspectual system
- grammatical verb tone: can occur on all three parts of the verb phrase – subject prefix, TAMP, verb stem
- we don’t regard further specification of the verb here which can be added to the aspectual forms: certainty, customary action, motion away from the speaker, motion towards the speaker (Allan 1973: 291 ff.)

2.2.1 Simple paradigm in affirmation

(a) Perfective
- Allan’s „simple past“
- perfective of dynamic verbs with temporal past interpretation

(1) ọnànà ọ̣nvà ụ-ụ, ụ̀łọ̀kù̀bì ọ̣nvà ụ̀nùwènị́.  
  man DEM 3sg.PF-take girl DEM pen  
  ‘The man took the girl’s pen.’

(2) bè-yè èjìbì.  
  3pl.PF-buy fruits  
  ‘They bought fruits.’

(3) kàmàdù ní, lì-nù kòkùn kòdù.  
  yesterday TP, 1sg.PF-hear noise INDEF  
  ‘Yesterday, I heard some noise.’

---

1 The tonal marking in our examples is as follows: (´) high tone, (´) low tone, (·) mid tone, (·) falling tone.
(b) Stative – Perfective?

- Allan’s „simple present“ (of verbs of state)
- with stative verbs and verbs describing one’s physical position (only about three dozen of verbs)
- → possibly complementary used to form (a)

(4) ŋ-ṹ ká süë kú āgnès bé-yè tóyótá kú bëns.
1sg.STAT-know COMPL Sue CNJ Agnes 3pl.PF-buy Toyota CNJ Benz.
‘I know that Sue and Agnes bought a Toyota and a Benz.’

(5) díí ní, úlòkú 5dì 5-cà
some.time TP woman INDEF 3sg.PF-exist

nà úlòkú 3mëni ü-bò bébì ëtë.
CNJ woman DEM 3sg.STAT-have children three
‘Once there was a woman and this woman had three children.’

(c) Unclear function

- = Allan’s „past progressive“
- Allan (1097: 256): „… the affirmative Past Progressive asserts that the past action has effects continuing till some subsequent time, usually the present.“,
- it does not assert a punctual event in the past, it does not display a special form for negation but uses instead the negative form of the perfective, and it doesn’t display a relative form of its own
- → we suggest that what we are dealing with here is probably not a tense-aspect-differentiation but rather another category linked to IS, possibly to denote focus on the verb – this still needs further investigation

(6) lëtì-fò libí lémò li-tè mìnà 5tì.
1sg.?sp?-wash car DEM CL.PF-give 1sg.poss father
‘I have washed the car for my father.’

(d) Imperfective

- Allan’s „simple present progressive“
- used to express events in the present as well as habitual, momentary actions (for dynamic verbs)

(7) mòtì-fò libí lémò li-tè mìnà 5tì.
1sg.IPF-wash car DEM CL.PF-give 1sg.poss father
‘I’m washing the car for my father.’

(e) Future

- Allan’s „(simple) future“
- formed by subject prefix + lu/du? + bo (probably of verbal origin “to come”) + VN (prefix BO) > nominal periphrase
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(8) ḷ-dūhò  bɔ́dì.
3sg.FUT INF.eat
‘He will eat.’

(f) Subjunctive
- Allan’s „subjunctive“
- clearly modal defined > (possibly with imperative)

(9) mò-bèmòdì  nì-tiàyì  lèlèmì  làdì.
1sg.IPF-try 1sg.SUBJ-learn Lelemi language
‘I’m trying to learn the Lelemi language.’ (Allan 1973: 271)²

→ There are different pronominal forms for 1st person singular used in different aspects: LE, N, MO → which one of them can be seen as basis / original?

- We suggest it is the nasal due to his frequent occurrence.
- What about 1st person singular pronouns in neighbouring languages?

2.2.2 Simple paradigm in negation
- in some aspects changes of 1sg pronoun (no explanation at the moment)
- two basic negation markers (TA, (L)A)
- optional tonal distinction between negation of IPF and FUT

(a) negative perfective

(10) ní-tá-nú  ḷ.
1sg.PF-NEG-see 3sg
‘I didn’t see her.’

(b) negative stative

(11) lèè-ìì  kàbá  kàmènì.
1sg.STAT.NEG-know family DEM
‘I do not know this family.’

(12) óòowo, ḷò-òòì  ìbùdì  nà  ú-yè  èjìbì  ú-òè.
no, 3sg.STAT.NEG-be.qual child CNJ 3sg.PF-buy fruits 3sg.PF-give
‘It is not her child that she bought the fruits for.’

(c) negative imperfective

(13) nàà-kàfì  ká ...
1sg.IPF.NEG-think COMPL
‘I don’t think that …’

² In this and subsequent examples taken from Allan 1973 we have adapted the tonal marking. As far as the first verb form of this example is concerned, following the glosses of Allan, the subject prefix should have a long vowel, otherwise it has to be treated as relative form.
(14) òòòò, bèlòkúbí ínyò bà-là-ká skú.
    no, girls two 3pl.IPF-NEG-read book
    ‘No, the two girls are not reading a book.’

(d) negative future

(15) ù-là-dí.
    3sg.FUT-NEG-eat
    ‘He will not eat.’

(16) è-lé-bò kùdikùdí lènò.
    2sg.FUT-NEG-come never also
    ‘You will never come again.’

(e) negative subjunctive

(17) ù-tà-dù.
    3sg.FUT-NEG-kill/bite
    ‘He should not kill/bite.’ (Allan 1973: 314)

Synchronically, there is no hint which supports a verbal origin of the negation element (for instance, no other (new) subject agreement at the main verb, no VN as main verb).

2.2.3 Relative paradigm in affirmation
- no subject agreement
- obligatory: nominal subject or disjunct pronoun

(a) Relative Perfective

(18) ‘Who has eaten the beans?’
    ùlòkú ámò nà-dí.
    woman DEM REL.PF-eat
    ‘That woman has eaten (them).’

(19) ‘I know that Sue and Agnes bought a Toyota and a Benz. But who bought what?’
    syúè nè-yè tòyòtá nà ágnès ú-yè bèns
    Sue REL.PF-buy Toyota CNJ Agnes 3Sg.PF-buy Benz
    ‘Sue bought a Toyota and Agnes bought a Benz.’

(b) Relative Stative

(20) ‘Whose child has the ticket?’
    mìná ìkpànà ìbìdí mì-bò tìkètí ámò.
    1sg.poss friend child REL.STAT-have ticket DEM
    ‘My friend's child has the ticket.’

3 “The paradigms for Mid and Low tone verbs are identical; ambiguities are resolved by the context.” (Allan 1973: 314)
(c) Relative Imperfective

(21) \( \text{ùcúlǐ òni mò-nū bècúlǐ lèlò ìnvò nǐ ...} \)
    person CL. NI REL.IPF-look people on DEM TP
    ‘The person who is looking for the people …’ (=stewardess)

(22) \( \text{bí mò-lè mé?} \)
    what REL.IPF-happen here
    ‘What is happening here?’

(23) \( \text{èbí ányò mò-cūí nà ùlù ñtè.} \)
    car two REL.IPF-burn in road middle
    ‘Two cars are burning in the middle of the road.’

(d) Relative Future

(24) \( \text{ùpìà nùš-dù ònànà òmò.} \)
    spear REL.FUT-kill man DEM
    ‘It’s a spear that will kill that man.’ (Allan 1973: 331)

The pronoun of 1st person singular of the simple paradigm seems to be used in most cases in order to fill the gap of the syntactical necessary subject prefix. Generally (affirmative) REL is characterised by the obligatory spelling out of the external subject position and, contrary to the simple paradigm, with the absence of agreement on the subject prefix.

2.2.4 Relative paradigm in negation

- combination of subject prefix from affirmative relative and negative marker from simple negative (exception: negative relative IPF – subject prefix MO doesn’t seem to be allowed in negation)
- no data for relative “Perfective” with stative verbs in Allan (1973)

(a) Negative Relative Perfective

(25) \( \text{òpìà nà bár òní ná-tá-Phù kùyè kèmò.} \)
    3Sg.PF-eat in bar CL.NI REL.PF-NEG-be_costage price inside
    ‘She ate in a cheap restaurant.’

(b) Negative Relative Imperfective

(26) \( \text{bùbò bí nàà-sà ù-bò álàkpa ènè ìnvò́́ò.} \)
    INF.have what REL.NEG.IPF-finish 3sg.STAT-have thing four there.Q
    ‘Does he has four things?’ (lit: What does not get finished he has four things there?)

(c) Negative Relative Future

(27) \( \text{lèpìà nàà-dù ónànà òmò́.} \)
    spears REL.FUT.NEG-kill man DEM
    ‘Spears won’t kill that man.’ (Allan 1973: 332)
## 2.2.5 Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple</th>
<th>Affirmation</th>
<th>Negation</th>
<th>TAMP-</th>
<th>stem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>LÉ (1sg) Ó (3sg, cl1) (low)</td>
<td>(X)</td>
<td>N (1sg) Ó (3sg, cl1)</td>
<td>TÁ₁ (identical with lexical verb tone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfective? „Stative“</td>
<td>N (1sg) Ó (3sg, cl1) (identical to lexical verb tone)</td>
<td>(X)</td>
<td>LÉ (1sg) Ó (3sg, cl1)</td>
<td>: (low) (mid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>LÉ (1sg) Ó (3sg, cl1) (identical to tone of 1st syllable of the verb)</td>
<td>(X)</td>
<td>N (1sg) Ó (3sg, cl1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperfective</td>
<td>MÓ (1sg) Ó (3sg, cl1) (opposite to lexical verb tone)</td>
<td>(X)</td>
<td>N (1sg) Ó (3sg, cl1)</td>
<td>(L)A₁ (opposite to lexical verb tone) (identical with lexical verb tone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>Ñ (1sg) Ó (3sg, cl1) (L)Û (B)Ô +VN (with lexical verb tone)</td>
<td>(X)</td>
<td>N (1sg) Ó (3sg, cl1)</td>
<td>(L)A₂ (identical to tone of 1st syllable of the verb) (opposite to lexical verb tone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjunctive</td>
<td>LÉ (1sg) Ó (3sg, cl1) (opposite to lexical verb tone)</td>
<td>(X)</td>
<td>LÉ (1sg) Ó (3sg, cl1)</td>
<td>TÁ₂ (low)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Concerning the marking of tones in the table we follow for the moment Allan 1973, who claims that lexically there are only mid and low tones on the verb stem.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative</th>
<th>Affirmation</th>
<th>Negation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LEX&lt;sub&gt;Subj&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>LEX&lt;sub&gt;Subj&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PRO&lt;sub&gt;Subj&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>PRO&lt;sub&gt;Subj&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TAMP-</td>
<td>TAMP-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfective? „Stative“</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperfective</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjunctive</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3 Dichotomy of simple and relative paradigms - summary

major syntactic difference between “simple” vs. “relative” TAMP:

- simple paradigm is always encoded **on the verb** by a prefix (irrespective of existence of preverbal lexical subject constituents)
  → full **verb-internal** subject agreement paradigm
- relative paradigm is always encoded **before the verb** by a lexical subject constituent – an invariable verb prefix fills the gap at the verb, often constituted by a generalized 1sg pronominal form, sometimes by a clausal conjunction.
  → **verb-external** encoding

3. The relative paradigm

3.1 Distribution of the relative paradigm

- Allan concerning relative forms (p. 324ff.) mentions that
  “In addition to their use in “same-subject” relative clauses [i.e. in sentences where the subject of the relative clause is also its head – AS, IF] relative verb forms are used to express emphasis, generalizations, historical facts, or statements of habitual or customary action”.
  > he doesn’t offer any linguistic explanation
  > our data confirms only the occurrence concerning the relative clause with the subject as head and the occurrence concerning focal subjects incl. wh-interrogatives

(1) **First occurrence: “same subject relative clauses”**

Comparing restrictive relative clauses with subject respectively non-subject head:
Common component in both types of relative constructions is the determination of the relativised element by an identifier pronominal form that consists of a noun class concord for the preceding relativised noun and morpheme -nì. If the subject is relativised a “relative” TAMP form is used, i.e. the TAMP form with invariable prefix at the verb. If a non-subject constituent is relativised the simple TAMP verb form, i.e. including subject prefix, occurs.

Subject restrictive relative clause

(28) èbùò ü-nỳë.
    animal 3sg.STAT-stand
    ‘There is an animal there,
     ñùè èbùò ñní ü-nỳë vò ñ-dì ñáànjùë.
     but animal CL./N/ REL.STAT-stand there 3sg-be cattle
     but the kind of animal that is over there is a cattle.’

Non-Subject restrictive relative clause

(29) ñklàmà ñvò ñò-dò tròuzìs ñní ñààbì ñvò ñ-cà.
    dog DEM 3sg.IPF-bite trousers CL./N/ boy DEM 3sg.PF-wear
    ‘The dog bites the trousers which the boy wears.’
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(30) nà àlà ànì nà màà-nù ní ... 
    CNJ things CL. NI CNJ 1sg.IPF-see TP 
    ‘and the things that I am seeing, ...’

(2) Second occurrence: wh-questions concerning the subject (or part of it)

wh-question for subject

(31) ṣmá ná-dì àkábí ámò. 
    who REL.PF-eat beans DEM 
    ‘Who ate the beans?’

wh-question for non-subject

(32) bí nà ùlàkú ọmò ọ-dì. 
    what CNJ woman DEM 3sg.PF-eat 
    ‘What did the woman eat?’

(3) Third occurrence: reply to wh-question concerning the subject (or part of it), i.e. new information focus on subject and other focal environments

If a reply to a wh-question concerning the subject, i.e. new information focus on the subject or another focus on the subject, is to be encoded then the relative paradigm has to be used.

Focus on subject (non-canonical)  cf. verb form in simple tense:

(33) a. ọnàabì úmwì pé mà-dì kùtú. ọdì 
    boy one only REL.IPF-eat orange 
    ‘Only ONE boy is eating an orange.’

    b. ọnàabì ì-fì ùlàkùbì. ì-fì 
    boy REL.STAT-carry girl 
    ‘A BOY was carrying a girl.’

    c. lọfì lìnyì ná-sà. lè-sà 
    lorry two REL.PF-meet 
    ‘TWO LORRIES COLLIDED.’

Focus on non-subject

Non-subject focus is by default coded in the postverbal position of the focussed element in the canonical sentence (in-situ).

(34) (a) What did the woman eat? 
    (b) What did the woman do? 
    ọdì àkábì. \( \) 3sg.PF-eat beans  
    ‘She ate BEANS.’ ~ ‘She ATE BEANS.’

---

5 In Lelemi, subject and sentence focus are coded in the same way.
(35) Did he bring the table or did he send it?

\[ \text{ú-ú ú-sàlà-kù.} \]

3sg.PF-take 3sg.PF-go_with

‘He SENT it.’

(36) Did the woman buy fruits?

\[ \text{ú-ú-yè.} \]

yes, 3sg.PF-buy

‘Yes, she DID.’

*ex-situ* non-subject focus (non-canonical, optional use of clausal conjunction *nà*)

The morphological coding device for *ex-situ* non-subject focus constructions consists of optional morpheme *nà* postponed to the focussed constituent. Here, the simple paradigm is used.

(37) àkábi áwìdì (nà) ùlòkù ẹmò ò-dì.

beans raw (CNJ) woman DEM 3sg.PF-eat

‘The woman ate RAW BEANS.’

(38) S: ‘The boy is eating a banana.’

A: kùtà (nà) ènàábi ìmò ì-dì.

orange (CNJ) boy DEM 3sg.IPF-eat

‘The boy is eating an ORANGE.’

(39) ‘Did she buy the bananas?’

\[ ò-òwò, bú-yú (nà) ú-yù nyà. \]

no, INF.steal (CNJ) 3sg.PF-steal CL

‘No, she STOLE them.’

The simple paradigm seems to be used everywhere else: in main as well as in subordinated clauses, i.e. in several syntactic environments.

The relative paradigm, on the one hand, is bound to the subject but on the other hand not every subject triggers this paradigm. We conclude that the relative paradigm is not required just by the syntactic subject function but by (additional) information structural considerations.

### 3.2 Information structure and the relative paradigm

Why is the subject treated in some environments in a special way such as to require the relative paradigm?

Our hypothesis:

The special status of focused subjects is conditioned by information structure: Subjects in canonical sentence-initial position are prototypically interpreted as topics (i.e. they are anti-focal). Therefore if a subject is in focus this conflicts with its primary topical status and results in a non-canonical construction (i.e. the relative paradigm).

⇒ Canonical sentences make use of the simple paradigm, i.e. they have a topic-comment structure.
Within topic-comment structure the focus is situated within the comment (cf. object in-situ focus).

If the focus lies outside the comment and the sentence-initial subject is involved (subject focus, sentence focus) then the non-canonical sentence with relative paradigm is used.

On the other hand, if the focus is on a non-subject constituent in sentence-initial position the construction with clausal conjunction nà and the simple paradigm (cf. non-subject ex-situ focus) is used.

In sentences with a non-topical subject the predicate is encoded as relative clause, however, just as an appositional relative clause without the “identifier” pronoun X-ni.

→ use of same relative paradigm in same subject relative clauses, wh-questions for the subject, subject (and sentence) focus

3.3 Grammaticalization of clausal conjunction

An element na⁶ occurs in different environments - on first sight with different functions:

1. it occurs as clausal conjunction nà, used with sequential events (“and (then)”) (ex. 40)
2. in ex-situ NSF, nà occurs at the beginning of the non-focal part of the sentence (Allan “emphasis”) (cf. examples (32, 37-39)
3. it occurs within the relative paradigm in the perfective (affirmative and negative), here, however, with deviant high tone ná (cf. examples 31, 33)

We claim that the origin of the morpheme in all these environments is always the same, namely the clausal conjunction.

(40) ‘The youngest child went …’

nà ū-tī utes ŋēm Δmè.

CNJ 3sg.STAT-take road right DEM

‘and he took the right road.’

In ex. (40) the use of nà as conjunction is evident. In the ex-situ non-subject focus constructions (ex. (37) to (39)) the non-focal clause is formally completely identical with the narrative clause shown in (40). Accordingly morpheme nà in both functions is considered a conjunction by us.

In its third function within the relative paradigm, on the other hand, nà has already been grammaticalised into subject prefix in the perfective. The invariable subject prefix in the relative perfective is high toned ná. We analyse it as a conglomeration of the conjunction nà (with inherent Low tone) plus a high tone which is borne by the subject pronoun in the simple perfective. Such development from a conjunction denoting the accomplishment of actions to a past marker was also shown by Hopper (1979) for Malay, an Austronesian language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CNJ</th>
<th>Subject Prefix in Relative Perfective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nà</td>
<td>nà’t (← nà + ’)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

6 It is quite possible that this morpheme might be borrowed from Akan.
4. Conclusion

We have shown that Lelemi

- has a similar dichotomy in the verb system as reported for several West African languages from different language groups (Hausa, Buli, Fulbe, etc.)
- the relative paradigm is restricted to subject related constructions and concerns:
  1. relative sentences with subject as head,
  2. wh-questions asking for the subject,
  3. constructions including the subject within the focus domain (subject or sentence focus)
- the relative paradigm occurs when the subject is non-topical, i.e. in Lelemi the subject-topic correspondence has been grammaticalised to a certain extent (cf. Bantu)
- a single clausal conjunction has been grammaticalised into a subject prefix for the relative perfective

References


**Abbreviations**

- **CL**: class concord marker
- **CNJ**: conjunction
- **COMPL**: complementiser
- **DEM**: demonstrative pronoun
- **FUT**: future
- **INDEF**: indefinite pronoun
- **INF**: infinitive
- **IPF**: imperfective
- **NEG**: negation (marker)
- **PF**: perfective
- **pl**: plura
- **poss**: possessive
- **REL**: invariable verb prefix of relative paradigm
- **sg**: singular
- **STAT**: “stative”
- **SUBJ**: subjunctive
- **TP**: terminal particle

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