

On the Differentiation of Subject and Object in Relativization:
Evidence from Lushai

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Proceedings of the 3rd Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society (1977), pp. 335-346

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The Annual Proceedings of the Berkeley Linguistics Society is published online via [eLanguage](#), the Linguistic Society of America's digital publishing platform.

On the differentiation of subject and object
in relativization: Evidence from Lushai

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1.0. INTRODUCTION.

In this paper I will attempt to establish two related points about relativization in Lushai, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken by some 300,000 people in Southern Assam, India. The first point is certainly not to be considered surprising in light of recent work in relational grammar and of such hypotheses as the Accessibility Hierarchy. To wit, relativization, being a reference oriented strategy, is influenced by referential (or textual) considerations such as the syntactic status of an NP, Subject, Object, etc., rather than by semantic notions such as Actor, Patient, etc. In Lushai subjects relativize differently than objects and oblique noun phrases relativize differently than both of these.

The second point involves how to characterize the constructions that result from relativizing these various types of noun phrases, more specifically, how to characterize the constructions differentiating subject relativizations from object relativizations. I will show that subjects relativize obligatorily with participles and objects relativize (most commonly) with more sentential constructions, i.e., relative clauses. These two types of constructions, participles and relative clauses, are examples of two different strengths of syntactic bonding. Lushai has the word order, SOV. I will show that this fact entails important cognitive constraints which serve to explain the syntactic ranking of relativizations on subjects versus objects.

1.1. Remarks on Lushai grammar.

It is important for the interpretation of the data included in this paper that I introduce some basic aspects of the grammar of Lushai. As I have said, Lushai is SOV in basic word order. It is also postpositional and places attributive constructions after their heads. There are four tones in the language, High Level [V̄], High Falling [V̂], Low Rising [V̇], and Low Level/Dropping [V̄]. These tones do not function exclusively in the lexicon, having morphological uses as well. It is an ergative language at least at a morphological level as can be seen in the following contrast²:

ka_ far_nuu_ a_ hriaa' He knows my sister. (1)
1S_ sister 3S_ know_I

ka_ far_nuu_in_ a_ hriaa' My sister knows. (2)
1S_ sister Erg 3S_ know_I

Subject transitive.

hmei_chiaa`in_ ui' a`vuaa_ (7)
 woman Erg dog 3S beat_I
 The woman beat the dog.

Object.

nu_laa`in_ ui' a_lei' (8)
 girl Erg dgo 3S buy_I
 The girl bought the dog.

Benefactive.

nu_laa` puaan' i`lei_ sak_ (9)
 girl blanket 2S buy_{II} Benef
 You bought the blanket for the girl.

Indirect object.

an`hneen`a?_ sum`doong`tuu`in_ le?_kha_buu` a_hral?_ (10)
 3P to merchant Erg book 3S sold_I
 The merchant sold the book to them.

Instrumental.

tuk_ver?_cuu` ni`hliap` cuaan` ka`vo_ke?_ (11)
 window Top umbrella D-Instr 1S break_I
 I broke the window with the umbrella.

Locative.

dam_doy_in`a?_ cuaan` nu_laa` a` om_ (12)
 hospital Loc D-Instr girl 3S be at_I
 The girl is at the hospital.

1.2. Topicalization.

It is apparent from, e.g., sentences (11 and 22) that something resembling Topicalization occurs in Lushai by means of the Determiners cuu` and hii` and fronting. While it is clearly beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this problem in detail, a few tentative remarks may be appropriate.

Topicalization is clearly oriented to a larger discourse unit than the clause. This paper assumes a theory in which different types of grammatical analysis may apply to clauses than to sentences. At the level of the clause two components are operative, a semantic component which arranges (cognitively) participants according to role notions more or less approximating Fillmore's (1968) deep cases, and a referential component which packages this semantic material according to relevant linguistic and extra-linguistic considerations. The output of this latter component (to use this

mechanistic analogy loosely) can be regarded as NPs which function as referential peaks in the information of the clause or, more traditionally, as the textual notions subject, object, indirect object, and so forth. Topicalization therefore appears to serve to highlight NPs which are not necessarily either subjects or objects, the two most pragmatically salient NPs in a Lushai transitive sentence, but which are of an equal salience with subjects or objects in a (perhaps non-syntactic) referential frame larger than the clause.

2.0. RELATIVIZATION PROCESSES.

Most relativized constructions in this paper are based on definite NPs and thus are framed by various Demonstrative morphemes, khaa, cuu, soo, etc., or by morphological words involving contractions of these morphemes with either the Ergative or the Instrumental morphemes (see 1.1 for details of these contractions). Therefore, if the head noun of the relative construction is an Agent (Ergative case) of a transitive verb, the surface shape of these contractions will involve a falling tone (Examples 14, 15, 16, 20); if the head noun is an Instrumental, the surface shape of these contractions will involve a high level tone (Example 22).

What I am putatively labelling as relativization are several distinct constructions which result in Lushai when one attempts to modify a noun with a sentential component in which, at least underlyingly, is contained a noun coreferent with the head noun. In the Lushai data depicted below the results of this attempt vary widely, albeit in three general categories, according to the grammatical status of the head noun. One type of construction, a participial or partial relativization, is the obligatory result of relativization for subject head nouns and optionally for direct object heads. A second type, full relativization, occurs for the most part with direct objects and benefactives; while, the third result of relativization, that on indirect objects and oblique noun phrases, might best be characterized as an independent sentence nominalized by na, the Space/Time nominalizing morpheme in Lushai. This construction might be said to be in apposition to the head noun.

More specifically, participles involve the coreferent noun, followed by a participial form of the verb that is either homophonous with or a phonologically reduced form of a Stem 1 verb. This structure is framed by an optional wh-element, a, followed by the Demonstrative (for definite NPs). If the verb in this construction is transitive, the coreferent noun will be followed by the direct object and the verb will be suffixed by the morpheme tuu, equivalent to the "-er" of English agentive noun derivatives, "ticket seller," etc. It is important to note that subjects of transitive verbs are not ergatively marked in these constructions but receive either no case marking or a genitive case marking (by the method described in 1.1, above; see sentences 13-14).

The full relativizations which occur with direct object and benefactive noun heads have the same internal order with the following exceptions. The coreferent noun will receive ergative

case marking, the verb will be a Stem 2 form and will be prefixed to agree with its subject. Finally, there appears to be a greater likelihood that the head noun will be retained with direct object relativization than with subject relativization. The important characteristics of these two types of relativization then are: (i) case marking on subjects of transitives, (ii) choice of verb stem, and (iii) presence of pronominal prefixing on the verb of the relative construction. These characteristics are summarized in Table C. Sentences 15-18 and 26-27 exemplify this description. At this point we will pass to the data on Lushai sentences containing relativizations, reserving further comments on the structure of relativized constructions for Section 3.0.

2.1. Relativization data.

2.12. Subject of intransitive relativized with a participle.

S [hmei_chiaa` thii`] S a_ cuu` ka_ far`nuu_ a` nii_ (13)
 woman die_I wh- D 1S sister 3S be_I
 The woman who died was my sister.

2.13. Subject of transitive, participle.

S [hmei_chiaa` ui` vo_tuu`] S a_ cuaan` ka_ far`nuu_ a_ hriaa` (14)
 woman dog beat_I -er wh- D-Erg 1S sister 3S know_I
 The woman who died knows my sister.

2.14. Object, participle.

S [nu_la` ui` lei_ khaan` min` se?] (15)
 girl- dog buy_II D-Erg 1Obj bite_I
 Genit
 The dog the girl bought (girl's-boughten-dog) bit me.

2.15. Object, relative clause.

S [ui` hmei_chiaa` in_ a`vuak`] S a_ cuaan` ka_ far`nuu_ a_ hriaa` (16)
 dog woman Erg 3S beat_II wh- D-Erg 1S sister 3S know_I
 The dog whom the woman beat knows my sister.

2.16. Benefactive, participle.

S [nu_la` i_puaan` lei_ sak_] S a_ khaa` ka_ hriaa` (17)
 girl- 2S blanket buy_II Benef wh- D 1S know_I
 Genit
 I know the girl you bought the blanket for (the your-bought-blanket-girl).

2.17. Benefactive, relative clause.

S [nu_laa` puaan` i` lei_] S a_ khaa` ka` thiaan_ a` nii_ (18)
 girl blanket 2S buy_II wh- D 1S friend 3S be_I
 The girl you bought a/someone's (else's) blanket for is my friend.

2.18. Indirect object, relative clause.

S[sal`hou` pooi_saa_ i`peek`]S a_ tee` cuu` ka`hmuu_ (19)
 slave-pl money 2S give_{II} wh- pl D 1S see_I
 I saw the slaves to whom you gave the money.

S[nu_laa` ui` ka`peek`]S a_ cuaan` min` ngaai`zoong` (20)
 girl dog 1S give_{II} wh- D-Erg 1Obj to love_I
 The girl I gave a dog to loves me.

2.19. Indirect object, nominalization.

S[zir`tiir`tuu` (tee`) sum`doong`tuu`in_ (an`hneen`a?_) (21)
 teacher (pl) merchant Erg 3P to

a` le?_kha_buu` hral?_]S na` (tee`) khaa` ka` hmuu_
 3S book sell_{II} Nom1 (pl) D 1S see_I
 I saw the teacher(s) to whom the merchant sold the book.

((Note: I cannot explain the presence of the "stranded" '3P-to' element in the subordinated sentence.))

2.20. Instrumental, relative clause.

tuk_ver?_ cuu` S[ni`hliap` hmei_chiaa`in_ a` ken_]S a_ cuaan` (22)
 window Topic umbrella woman Erg 3S hold_{II} wh-D-Instr

ka` vo_ke?
 1S break_I
 I broke the window with the umbrella the woman was holding.

2.21. Instrumental, nominalization.

S[tiaang` hmei_chiaa`in_ ui` a`vuak`]S na` cuu` a` tliak` (23)
 stick_i woman Erg dog 3S beat_{II} Nom1 D 3S_i break_I
 The stick the woman beat the dog with broke.

2.22. Locative, nominalization.

S[zir`tiir`tuu`in_ le?_kha_buu` a` lei_]S na` khuaa` cuu` (24)
 teacher Erg book 3S buy_{II} Nom1 village D

ka_ hriaa`
 1S know_I
 I know (of) the village in which the teacher bought the book.

S[dam`doi`in` nu_laa` check` ka`peek`om_]S na` cuu` a` liaan` (25)
 hospital_i girl check 1S give_{II} be at_{II} Nom1 D 3S_i big_I
 The hospital in which the girl I gave my check to stayed is large.

3.0 THE STRUCTURE OF RELATIVIZATION.

It is not my purpose here to draw firm conclusions about the underlying structure of Lushai relative clauses. However, as I have indicated in Figure 1, I am inclined to view Lushai as a language which deletes head nouns from a position to the right of the modifying structure. The coreferent NP in a relative clause is a highly topicalized notion in that it repeats as well as augments the information represented by the head noun. I have noted that Lushai has a mechanism for topicalizing information by means of fronting (left-preposing) and morphemic marking (by cuu or hi). It may be that the extremely fronted position of the coreferent NP in a relativized sentence pragmatically precludes the repetition of this NP after the clause. Support for this analysis of RRC-Head Noun order can be derived from sentences 24, 26 and 27.

In all of the relativizations except those on indirect objects, the presence of a wh- element agreeing with the head noun is optional. I would therefore infer that this morpheme need not occur unless its absence would result in ambiguity regarding the head noun of the relativization. Of course, this circumstance would only arise in the situation where a third participant, designated indirect object, exists within the clausal frame. Note however that in indefinite relativizations, such as (28), the presence of the wh- element appears to be obligatory. Finally, at least as I have here treated RRC-Head order, the wh- element in a definite relativization occurs in the matrix clause rather than the subordinated clause.

It should be clear throughout the sentences that the basic categorical distinction of Participle versus Relative Clause consistently delineates relativizations of subject from those of objects. Since Lushai is an ergative language, it is important to stress the thoroughgoing nature of this formal distinction between the textual notions of subject and object. Above all it should be clear that this distinction pays no heed whatsoever to semantic notions underlying a clause frame, be they expressed as Actor - Patient/Goal (Fillmore, 1968) or 'causer' - 'affected' (Halliday, 1970).

In Table C. I have attempted to make explicit the criteria on which I have relied to distinguish among the types of relativized constructions in this paper. Table D then presents these constructions summarized along a continuum (or squish) according to these criteria.

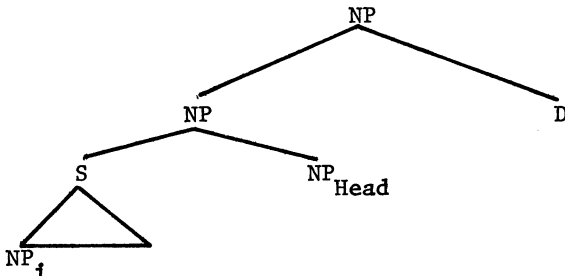


Figure 1. Underlying Structure of Lushai relative clauses.

The following sentences illustrate Figure 1 and the discussion in 3.0.

S[a₁ thii⁻ nii_{om} aa⁻ i⁻ hriat⁻] S tlang_{vaal} khaa⁻ ni⁻ zaan_{a?} (26)
 3S_i die_I probably 2S know_{II} youth_i D last night

a₁ low⁻ leeng⁻
 3S_i visit_I

The youth whom you know to have probably died visited (me) last night.

Compare (26) with Head retained to the following (27) with Head deleted:

S[thii⁻ aa⁻ i⁻ hriat⁻] S a₁ khaa⁻ a₁ thii⁻ lou₁ (27)
 dead-as 2S know_{II} wh- D 3S dead_I Neg_I

The one whom you know as dead is not dead.

While (27) represents an object relativization, the same structure varied for a subject relativization reflects how minimal the modifying construction can be, as in (28):

S[thii⁻] S a₁ i₁ hriaa⁻ em⁻ (28)
 die_I wh- 2S know Q

Did you know the one who died?

Table C.

Criteria for Distinguishing Constructions Used in Relativization.

<u>Participle</u>	<u>Relative Clause</u>	<u>Nominalized Sentence</u>
1. Subjects of V _{tr} unmarked for Erg; subject in oblique case, i.e., Genit.	1. Erg case marking on subjects of V _{tr} .	1. Erg case marking on subjects of V _{tr} .
2. Lack of ppf on V.	2. ppf on V.	2. ppf on V.
3. Reduction in syntactic status of V (S1), evident in, e.g., (a) incorporation of V into agent nominalization by -tuu ⁻ for V _{tr} and (b) potential for phonological reduction where permitted by syllable structure.	3. Use of V (S2) (Note: Syllable structure of all S2 precludes phonological reduction.	3. Use of V (S2).
		4. Noml na ⁻ present immediately to right of V (perhaps in lieu of wh- element?).

Table D.
The Relativization Squish.

<u>Textual function of Head Noun</u>	<u>Status of Construction</u>	<u>Construction type</u>
Subject, V-tr Subject, V-intr	Obligatory	Participle
Direct Object, Benefactive	Optional	Part./RC
Indirect Object Instrumental	Optional	RC/Nominalization
Time/Space Locative	Obligatory	Nominalization

4.0. SYNTACTIC BONDEDNESS AND THE BONDEDNESS HIERARCHY.

According to Foley (1976), NP level grammar can be analyzed into two basic types of relations: Noun plus Noun and Noun plus Adjunct. Noun plus Adjunct can be further analyzed as including the following seven types of relations (or categories in Foley's usage):

Noun plus	Article
Noun	" Deictic
Noun	" Quantifier
Noun	" Interrogative
Noun	" Adjective
Noun	" Participle
Noun	" Relative Clause

The claim is that this list represents a hierarchy of syntactic bondedness such that categories at the top of the list are bound more strongly to their heads than categories at the bottom of the list. The greater the syntactic bond the less apt a Noun plus Adjunct construction is to allow intervening adjuncts. Foley provides conclusive proof for the existence of such a hierarchy on the basis of an extensive treatment of Austronesian language data. It is to be noted that Participles are higher on the hierarchy than Relative Clauses and thus more strongly bound to their heads.

Now in SOV and VSO languages, where participles tend to be used to relativize subjects (compare Turkish) the considerable discrepancy between the types of constructions used to relativize subjects versus those used to relativize objects has important cognitive implications. That is, it becomes essential in such a language to know which of the two juxtaposed NPs is being modified by a particular relativized construction, realizing that clause like structures such as participles and relative clauses

stand nearly as independent clauses in a language where the structural requirement for full sentence-hood is so minimal. The relativized constructions applicable to these two NPs thus vary widely in their structures and in the grammatical impression conveyed by the way they package their clausal information.

5.0. CONCLUSION.

I wish to comment on the inclusion of nominalizations in a discussion of relativization. Considering these as Noun plus Noun relations and thus locating them within Foley's NP level grammatical analysis will, I hope, provide a means of justifying this inclusiveness. If one were to apply a universal template such as the Accessibility Hierarchy, then probably what I have here included as relativizations (21, 23, 24, 25) of obliques involving nominalized sentences would not pass through the filter. In this case my intentions have varied from those who might solely be concerned with the fit of such a template. Rather, I have tried to stick to a process of letting the data develop as it would and to then explain the whole as much as possible in unified terms. I think that Foley's view of NP level grammar contributes to this structural unification. It can be expressed as follows: As one relativizes NPs of less and less pragmatic salience to the clause frame, the types of construction that result range from closely bound participles to more loosely bound relative clauses, finally becoming fully sentential albeit nominalized sentences which stand in apposite relation to a head noun. Thus, Foley's two major NP level relations can be seen as merging (the process being roughly schematized in Table D) through the reference oriented process of relativization.

FOOTNOTES.

1. To Jim Matisoff for his generosity and patience, to Kris Lehman for his constant attention to my work on this language, and to A. Siamkima Khawlhiring and Lalliana Mualchin, teachers and friends.
2. The following abbreviations are used in this paper:
1, 2, 3 = First, second, third person, respectively; S=Singular, P(1)=Plural; ppf=pronominal prefix; D=Demonstrative; Erg=Ergative, Instr=Instrumental, Benef=Benefactive; I=Stem 1, II=Stem 2; i=(index); Noml=Nominalization/Nominalizer; Q=Question morpheme; V=Verb, tr=Transitive, intr=Intransitive; Genit=Genitive; Part=Participle, (R)RC=(Restrictive) Relative Clause; prt=Particle.
3. See Hillard (1975).
4. This analysis of clause level grammar roughly paraphrases Foley (1976 and personal communication).
5. Although, for the sake of convenience in this type of systematic presentation, I have not culled texts in an effort to get supporting examples for the claims of this paper, I have always taken care to provide situational contexts for each example I wished to elicit and tried to provoke voluntary utterances rather than mere translation responses. I am reasonably certain that these sentences are all natural and appropriate Lushai utterances.

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