
Relative Clause Construction in Dobbi

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Abstract

This article delineates the construction of relative clauses in Dobbi, a member of the Gurage language family, predominantly spoken in the western highlands of Butajira town, 135 kilometers southwest of Addis Ababa. Dobbi, being one of the less studied and documented languages within the Gurage language family, necessitates further study. In this investigation, no explicit theoretical framework is employed; rather, data analysis is guided solely by a descriptive standpoint. The data utilized for the examination was acquired through the process of elicitation from individuals who are native speakers of the language. Within the language, both headed and headless relative clauses find application. The introduction of the pronominal relativizer element, recognized as *jə-*, occurs in the relative clauses construction. By its positioning before the noun that is to be modified, the headed relative clause is classified as prenominal. In relation to both headed and headless relative clause constructions, it is observed that subjects, direct and indirect objects, obliques, and possessors are eligible for relativization. Dobbi employs *jə-* morpheme in the process of relativizing perfective structures. However, when it comes to the relativization of imperfective verbs, it does not rely on any overt morpheme, resulting in zero marking. Moreover, in negative relative verbs, the language does not utilize any overt relativizer.

Keywords: [relativization, head noun, pre-nominal relative clause, headed relative clause, headless relative clause].

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1. Introduction

The Gurage languages are classified within the Ethio-Semitic subgroup and are predominantly spoken by the Gurage ethnic group residing in the Gurage zone of central Ethiopia. This region is characterized by its vast expanse and diverse array of multi-ethnic groups and peoples (Hetzron, 1977:54). The Gurage languages themselves exhibit a significant degree of linguistic diversity, owing to the presence of various language types among the diverse Gurage populations. These distinct language types possess unique characteristics that set them apart, while still maintaining a shared understanding among them.

The Gurage people have garnered renown for their entrepreneurial spirit and active involvement in numerous commercial ventures. Many individuals from this ethnic group have established enterprises within their local communities as well as in larger urban centers, thereby contributing to the overall growth of Ethiopia's economy. Historically, the Gurage people have primarily focused on agricultural pursuits, cultivating staple crops such as Enste, the traditional food, as well as maize, barley, and other grains. Their reliance on agriculture is of paramount importance for both their economic well-being and their very survival (Fekede, 2014:22).

Among the vast array and multitude of various classifications of the Gurage languages, it is widely acknowledged and esteemed that the work of Hetzron in 1972 stands as the epitome of comprehensiveness and thoroughness. While considering this specific study, the researcher exhibits a clear inclination and predilection toward favoring the classification that Hetzron proposed in the year 1977.

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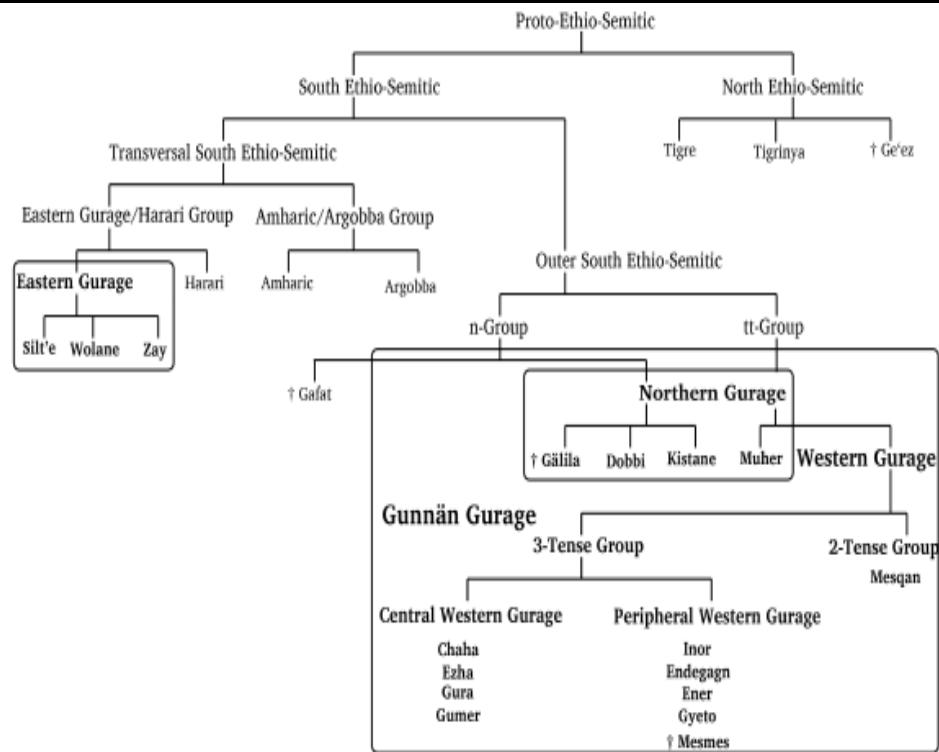


Figure 1: Genetic Classification of Ethio-Semitic Languages (Hetzron 1972:119; Meyer 2011:1222)

As previously stated, Dobbi constitutes the northern Gurage population and is neighbored with Kistane speakers towards the southeast, Muher speakers towards the southwest, and Masqan speakers towards the southwest. Consequently, certain individuals who speak Dobbi are also proficient in one of these neighboring languages. The Dobbi community inhabits the vicinity of Butajira town. The speakers of this language are predominantly segregated into three regions: DgaGoggot (the highland region), Dobbi (the temperate or subtropical region), and Wəlenjə Andəjənə and Wəlenjə Hulətəjənə (the lowland or tropical region). However, there exist numerous other individuals from the Dobbi community residing in Butajira and various regions of the nation, particularly in Addis Abeba (Teshome, 2016:45). It is widely recognized that the Dobbi ethnolinguistic group possesses alternative designations such as Goggot, Səbat Goggot Dobbi, Dobbi, and Gurage.

Similarly, their language is referred to by alternative appellations such as Goggot, Dobbi, Dobbijna, and Guraginja. Goggot has been the prevailing nomenclature in previous scholarly works when referring to the people and their language. Nevertheless, presently, the majority of individuals identify themselves and their language as Dobbi (Teshome, 2016:47).

The Dobbi people participate in the production of a crucial means of subsistence known as Enset, which is commonly referred to as the 'false banana'. The majority of the Gurage population is composed of rural-based farmers who primarily cultivate Enset, pulses, and various vegetables. Despite Enset serving as their primary agricultural crop, they also cultivate additional profitable crops such as coffee and various green plants. Furthermore, they engage in activities related to animal husbandry, specifically breeding livestock such as cows, horses, mules, sheep, and goats (Fekede, 2014:24).

This article presents a comprehensive overview of relative clause construction in Dobbi language. The data for this study was gathered over a one-month field expedition. The data was collected specifically in 'Ganza woreda', which is identified as a sub-city located five kilometers away from Butajira. The data was directly obtained from native speakers of Dobbi through field research. The study is designed as a descriptive investigation utilizing a qualitative approach. The linguistic questionnaire, which was prepared in Amharic, the contact language, served as the primary instrument for data collection. To fulfill the objectives of the study, a descriptive research method was employed. Consequently, in order to establish a comprehensive database for this study, a data collection method such as elicitation was incorporated. The collected data were presented in an interlinear morpheme format with three lines: the first line represents the actual pronunciation of the informant, the second line represents the underlying hypothetical morpheme, and the third line corresponds to a literal English translation.

2. Relative Clause

According to (Comrie, 1998:67; Andrews, 2007:205; Downing, 1978:359; Payne, 1997:54; and Nordquist, 2018:3), a relative clause is categorized as a form of dependent clause that comprises both a subject and a verb. It is commonly denoted as an “adjective clause” due to its analogous functioning to an adjective, thereby furnishing supplementary information regarding a head noun. In instances when sentences are joined together, a “relative pronoun” takes the place of a noun, noun phrase, or pronoun within the relative clause.

A relative clause is a type of subordinate clause that has a dependent relationship with an antecedent, which provides the interpretation of an element within the clause. This dependency establishes an anaphoric relationship between the relativized element in the relative clause and the antecedent. According to (Huddleston and Pullum, 2005:312), a subordinate clause typically acts as a dependent component within a larger construction. Andrews (2007:206) defines a relative clause as a clause that modifies a noun phrase (NP) by specifying the role of the referent of that NP in the situation described by the RC³.

Payne (1997:76) describes the fundamental components of relative clause construction. These include the head (the noun phrase that is modified by the clause), the restricting clause (the relative clause itself), and the relativizer or relative pronoun (the morpheme or particle that marks the restricting clause as a relative clause). Relative clauses can be classified based on various characteristics. The primary typological distinction among relative clauses lies in their position relative to the head. Consequently, relative clauses can be prenominal (occurring before the head), postnominal (occurring after the head), or internally headed (occurring within the relative clause) (Downing, 1978:363).

³ See appendix for a list of all abbreviations used in this paper.

The functional aspect of a relative clause pertains to its role as a modifier of a noun. This feature distinguishes a restrictive relative clause from a non-restrictive relative clause (Payne, 1997:78). Restrictive relative clauses provide descriptive information that is necessary to fully identify the head noun. On the other hand, a non-restrictive relative clause (NRRC) does not emphasize the head noun. The purpose of an NRRC in a language is to provide additional information about a head noun that has already been established. Consequently, it can be argued that an NRRC limits the referential qualities of the head noun while adding extra information to an already identifiable item (Comrie, 1981:69).

The other classification is based on the presence or absence of HN. Keenan (1985:89) classifies relative clauses into two categories: headed and headless relatives. Headless relative clauses can be formed without a head, signifying that the head noun is not explicitly specified. In a headed relative clause, the nominal head is overtly present in the provided construction (Payne, 1997:79 and Comrie, 1981:69).

3.1 Description of Relative Clause Construction in Dobbi

The SOV word order is manifested in declarative constructions in the Gurage languages, as can be seen in Ezha (Endalew, 2014), Wolane (Meyer, 2006), Mesqan (Miseret, 2012), and even in Dobbi. To provide additional evidence of this syntactic phenomenon, let us see the following construction in Dobbi.

(1) a. *s[NP[mift-i fəjŋə] VP[sirə-ti]]*
women-DEF goat buy.PFV-3FS.Sbj
'The women bought a goat.'

b. *s[NP[tikə-ji indʒra] VP[bən-o]]*
boy-DEF injera eat.PFV-3MS.Sbj
'The boy ate injera.'

In (1a), the subject *mift* 'women' suffixed the definiteness marker *-i*, and in (1b), the word *tikə* 'boy' are situated at the onset of the sentence with the suffixed definiteness marker *-ji*. The object *fəjŋə* 'goat' in (1a) and *indʒra*

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‘*injera*’ in (1b) are positioned between the subject and the verb. The verbs *sirə* ‘buy’ and *bən-* ‘eat’ are positioned at the end of the sentence, suffixed with the agreement marker *-ti* and *-o* in (1 and b) respectively. Consequently, the language showcases a SOV word order.

The functional attribute of a relative clause pertains to its function as a modifier of a noun. This characteristic distinguishes a restrictive relative clause from a non-restrictive relative clause. Restrictive relative clauses, also known as adjectival or defining relative clauses, limit the potential referents of the head noun to those for whom the statement in the relative clause is factually or logically true (Dzameshie, 1995:27). On the other hand, nonrestrictive relative clauses also referred to as nondefining, parenthetical, or appositive relative clauses, provide additional information about the referent, assuming that it is already recognizable.

In the relative construction in Dobbi the relativizer *jə-* remains consistent regardless of the inherent characteristics and syntactical role of the head noun within the sentence. In subject relative clauses or instances where the head noun takes the nominative case persons, animals, and objects, are employed to introduce the same relativizer marker. This particular element becomes affixed to the verbal constituents of both restrictive and non-restrictive relative clause types.

3.2 Types of Relative Clause

Relative clauses can be analyzed from at least two perspectives: (i) restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses, and (ii) headed and headless relative clauses. In the ensuing sections, we will examine each of these perspectives individually.

3.3 Restrictive Relative Clause

The primary purpose of the restrictive clause is to alter the HN and elaborate on the NP it modifies. It is capable of providing crucial and specific information about any entity that is necessary for us to comprehend the identity of the individual being referred to, as stated by (Downing, 1978:359). This signifies that the presence of the constraining RRC serves to clarify any

inquiries that the listener may have regarding the head noun in communication.

Let us consider the following examples in Dabbi.

(2) a. *s[RC[ambəssaji bəwessa jəʔət'jə-ni-ji]*
 lion-DEF INST-axe REL-kill.PFV-3MS.Sbj-DEF
HN[gəbərə] VP[aba- jŋa ni]]
 farmer father-POSS.1SG COP.PRES.3M
 ‘The farmer who killed the lion with an axe is my father.’

b. *s[RC [sənəf təmari-wotf-i jək'ət'a-ni-ji]*
 lazy student-PL-DEF REL-punish.PFV-3MS.Sbj-DEF
HN[astəmari] [əhi-nit]]
 teacher know-1SG.3MS
 ‘I know the teacher who punishes the lazy students.’

The structure (2a) *ambəssaji bəwessa jəʔət'jə-ni-ji* ‘who killed the lion with an axe’ represents a restrictive clause that is located at the beginning of the structure. Within this clause, the verb is relativized and is prefixed with the element *jə-*, which refers to the HN *gəbərə* ‘farmer’. Additionally, there is an agreement marker *-ni* that is suffixed and refers to ‘3MS-Sbj’, followed by definiteness marker *-ji*. This RRC serves to provide important information about the head HN and the action associated with it. Consequently, if the RRC is omitted from the sentence, the structure loses its specified meaning.

In (2b), the restrictive relative clause, *sənəf təmariwotf-i jək'ət'a-ni-ji* ‘who punishes lazy students’, provides comprehensive information regarding the HN, ‘teacher’. This particular structure poses restrictions and limitations on the noun, and removing the relative clause would result in a change in sentence meaning, leaving the head noun unspecified. The relative noun phrases are marked by the plural marker *-wotf-i* on the object noun of the structure *təmari* ‘student’. The relativized verb is prefixed with the relativizer marker particle *jə-* refers to the HN. The presence of a defining relative clause

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is crucial for determining the meaning of a sentence, as it imparts significant details about the modified noun.

3.4 Non-restrictive Relative Clause

Non-restrictive relative clauses in Dobbi, do not possess the defining function commonly linked to restrictive relative clauses. Instead, their purpose resides within the domain of supplying supplementary information about the HN. These non-restrictive relative clauses, characterized by their distinct syntactic form and placement, serve to enhance the comprehension and contextual knowledge of the recipient, affording a deeper degree of understanding and elaboration concerning the subject matter at hand.

Let us consider the following examples:

(3) a. *s[_{NP}[_{RC}[**bahrdar** **jə-anə-ji**] _{HN} [*tana hajk*]*
bahirdar REL-found- DEF lake tana
*vp[*fəjja* *məddəri* *ni*]]*
good place COP.PRES.3MS

‘Lake Tana which is found in Bahir Dar is a good place.’

b. *s[_{NP}[**addisaba** **jə- anə-ji**] _{HN}[*andinet park*]*
addis ababa REL-found-DEF andinet park
vp [əhi-nit]]
know.PFV-1SG
‘I know Andinet Park which is found in Addis Ababa.’

The bolded section in the previous example illustrates a NRRC, which provides supplementary information about the HN without being essential to the core meaning of the sentence.

In (3a) the clause ***bahrdar jəaləji*** ‘which is found in ‘Bahir Dar’ gives additional details about *tana hajk* ‘lake tana’. When we remove the NRRC would still leave a grammatically and semantically complete sentence. The relative clause is introduced by the relativizer *jə-* attached to the verb *alə* ‘found’ and functions to add descriptive information about the head noun.

In (3b), the NRRC *addisaba jəʔaləji* ‘which is found in Addis Ababa’ offers additional information about the HN *andinet park* ‘Andinet Park’. This clause serves to provide supplementary context about the park mentioned in the sentence but is not essential for identifying or understanding the core meaning of the sentence. In this construction, the role of the NRRC is to give additional information about the HN. If the NRRC is omitted, the sentence would still be meaningful.

Note that in Dobbi RRC and NRRC, the disparity between the two is contingent upon their referential relationship to the head noun. It is worth mentioning that a NRRC typically follows a RRC and is positioned to the right of it. Therefore, based on the aforementioned structure, we can also deduce that the NRRC is located to the right of the RRC, wherein the nearest clause is to the head noun.

Consequently, they are set apart by their allusion to the authentic designation. In both the restrictive clause and the non-restrictive clause, it is important to note that the perfective verb being relativized is always preceded by the relativizer marker ‘*jə-*’ and followed by the agreement marker.

3.5 Lexically Headed

According to (Keenan, 1985:89), relative clauses can be categorized into two distinct groups: those that have heads and those that do not. In this research, we shall label these as the lexically headed and the empty-headed relatives. The lexically headed relative clauses also referred to as the former, are embellished with phonetically manifested heads. To demonstrate this concept concretely, let us examine the following construction in Dobbi.

(4) a. *s[RC[bunna jə-sirə-ti-ji] HN[miʃt] VP[bəssa-ti]]*
coffee REL-buy.PFV-3FS.Sbj-DEF woman come.PFV-3FS
‘The woman who bought coffee has come.’

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b. $s[RC[ifuwat \ jə-səččə-ni-ji] \ HN[miss-i]]$
milk REL-drink.PFV-3MS.Sbj-DEF man-DEF
 $VP[innam \ sir-o]]$
cow buy.PFV-3MS.Sbj
'The man who drank milk bought a cow'

Dobbi's headed relative clauses possess an intriguing quality as the noun that governs them lies on the right-hand side of the dependent clause. In the example provided as (4a), the relative clause *bunna jəsirətiji* 'who bought coffee' assumes its position at the beginning of the sentence, while the head noun *miss 'women'* finds itself outside the confines of the restrictive clause. The act of relativizing the verb involves the addition of the relativizer marker *jə-* which diligently points out the HN within the restricting clause. Additionally, the agreement marker *-ti* is suffixed to indicate, '3FS.Sbj'.

In (4b), the relative clause *ifuwat jəsəččəni* 'who drank milk' preceded the main clause. The head noun *miss 'man'* occurred on the right side of the restrictive clause and was phonetically realized. The relativized verb prefixed the relativizer *jə-* which indicates the head noun, and suffixed the agreement marker *-ni* which refers to the '3MS.Sbj'. As we have seen in Dobbi, in both constructions we examine, the HN is phonetically realized.

3.6 Empty-Headed Relative Clause

There exist, within Dobbi, constructions of relative clauses that are devoid of substantial content. This implies that a relative clause can be constructed without a head noun. These relative clauses are deficient in head nouns due to the precise specification of their locations by a vacant constituent $[\emptyset]$, resulting in the creation of empty-headed relatives.

Let's look at the following examples.

(5) a. $s[RC[jə-sirə-ni-ji] \ HN[\emptyset] \ VP[\əhi-wi]]$
REL-buy.PFV-3MS.Sbj-DEF know.PFV-1SG
'I know what he bought'

b. *s*[_{RC}[*jə*-/*ʃək*-*kuni*] *HN*[*Ø*] *VP*[*feja ni*]]
REL-do.PFV-1SG good COP.3MS.PRES
'What I do is good'

In Dobbi headless relative clause constructions, the head noun is not phonetically expressed; its position is marked instead by [*Ø*]. In both (5a-b), there exists no phonetically manifested head noun. Nevertheless, the intended referent of the restricted relative is discernible. For instance, in (5a), the HN can be inferred based on the presence of the object verb *sirə* 'buy' which serves as the relativized NP. Consequently, the absent HN pertains to any sort of material that was acquired. This is demonstrated by [*Ø*], where the location of the relativized NP remains vacant. Moving on to (5b), the category of the vacant position of the NP REL could potentially be ascertained by considering the agreement feature of the relative verb *ʃək* 'do'. The agreement marker *lSG* that is attached to the relative verb *ʃək*- 'do' refers to the phonetically unrealized i.e. the position of NP REL, which is indicated by [*Ø*].

Note that in Dobbi the empty-headed relative clause, which is often designated as a free relative clause, functions as a NP while simultaneously lacking a specified antecedent. Instead, the clause itself acts as the referent. The language, such clauses typically initiate with the relativizer *jə*- . The head noun is consequently occupied by an empty element [*Ø*] introduced within a clause-medial position. This vacant element is devoid of a direct lexical reference to the head noun.

According to (Keenan, 1985:89, Lehman, 1986, Payen, 1997:326 and Comrie, 1989) with regards to the relative clause's position or location, the HN is situated either outside the restricting clause or within it. The former category is recognized as the external-headed RC, while the latter is denoted as the internal-headed RC. Dobbi exclusively utilizes externally headed relative clauses.

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The following examples are illustrative in detail.

(6) a. *s[RC[innam-i bə-init'ar jə-wək'ə-ni-ti]*
cow-DEF INS-stick REL-hit.PFV-3MS.Sbj-3FS.Sbj
HN[miss-i] VP[gʷəbbe-jyṇa ni]]
an-DEF brother-POSS.1SG COP.PRES.3MS
'The man who hit the cow with the stick is my brother.'

b. *s[RC[dəgg-hita jə-t'əffa- bʷaj]*
calf-POSS.3FS REL-disappear.PFV-MAL.3FS
HN[innam] VP[tak'ə-ti]]
cow sick.PFV-3FS.Sbj
'The cow whose calf has disappeared is sick.'

In the case of Dobbi, when the head noun is positioned outside a relative clause, it is designated as an external-headed relative clause. In example (6a), the noun *miss* 'man' is observed to occur outside the relative clause, while in example (6b), *innam* 'cow' is situated on the left side and positioned outside of the relative clause.

Based on the spatial arrangement of the HN concerning the relative clause within the structure, the formation of relative clauses can be classified into three primary categories: prenominal, internal, and post-nominal relative clauses. Consequently, the language Dobbi, similar to other Semitic languages such as Amharic (Hailu, 1972:33), Ezha (Endalew, 2014), Silte (Rawda, 2003), and Wolene (Meyer, 2006), solely utilizes the prenominal relative clause construction. Let us see the following construction.

(7) a. *s[RC[bora jə-sirə-ni-ji] HN[miss-i]*
ox REL-buy.PFV-3MS-DEF man-DEF
VP[bəss-o]]
come.PFV-3MS.Sbj
'The man who bought an ox has come.'

b. *s[RC[arəg jə-ʔət'jə-ni-ji] HN[tikə] VP[wəjjn-o]]*
snake REL-kill.PFV-3MS.Sbj-DEF boy cry.PFV-3MS.Sbj
'The boy who killed the snake has cried.'

In (7a), the restrictive clause, *bora jəsirəniji* ‘who bought an ox’, is positioned on the left side of the structure, indicating its placement at the outset of the sentence. The verb found within the relative clause is marked by a prefix *jə-* which correspondingly refers to the HN within the restrictive clause and is suffixed with the agreement marker. Moreover, the head noun *miss-i* ‘the man’ is situated on the right side of the construction.

Structure (7b) serves as an illustration of the occurrence of the relative clause, which is *arəg jəʔət jəniji* ‘who killed the snake’, appearing at the initial position of the sentence. This clause is situated on the left side of the structure, with the relativizer marker, *jə-*, preceding the verb *k'at'əj* ‘kill’. As previously exemplified, the relative clause in Dobbi buildup consistently precedes the main clause, thereby making use of the pronominal relative clause construction. In both constructions, the relative clause is positioned before the HN, indicating the use of a pronominal relative clause structure in the language.

3.7 The Hierarchy of Relative Clause Formation in Dobbi

According to Keenan and Comrie (1979:653) posit the existence of a universal constraint about the selection of syntactic roles for predicates that have the potential to be relativized. The process of relativization involves the use of six distinct categories of NPs, which are arranged hierarchically. This hierarchy, known as the **accessibility hierarchy (AH)**, serves to indicate that certain nouns are more easily accessible or simpler to relativize in comparison to others. The AH follows a specific order, namely subject > direct object > indirect object > oblique object > possessor > and object of comparison. Within this hierarchy, the symbol "*>*" signifies a higher level of accessibility for relativization.

Based on this underlying principle, Dobbi can establish a relative relationship between the subject, direct object, indirect object, and possessor. The **AH** indicates that certain nouns are more easily accessible or simpler to relativize compared to others. Now, let us consider the ensuing hierarchy of accessibility.

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3.7.1 Subject Relativization

According to Keenan and Comrie (1979:652), it is possible to relativize the subject position in any language. The primary purpose of a NP in a sentence is to provide a clear definition of the subject within the framework of a relative clause. In the case of Dobbi, a NP that serves as the subject of a sentence can undergo modification through the use of a relative clause, thereby allowing for subject relativization.

Let us consider the following examples in Dobbi:

(8) a. *s[RC[li?i ambəssa jə-?ət'jə-ni-ji] HN[miss-i]*
big lion REL-kill.PFV-3MS.Sbj-DEF man-DEF
vp[dʒəgina ni]]
hero COP.PRES.3MS
‘The man who killed a big lion is hero.’

b. *s[RC[dənigənnə-ji missi jə-?gəba-ti-ji]*
rich-DEF man-DEF REL-married.PFV3-3FS.Sbj-DEF
[gərəd] vp[məlikamma na]]
girl beautiful COP.PRES.3FS
‘The girl who married the rich man is beautiful.’

In Dobbi a noun phrase serving as the subject of a sentence may be enhanced by a relative clause, thus leading to the concept of subject relativization. In (8a), the relative clause *li?i ambəssa jə-?ət'jə-ni-ji* ‘who killed the big lion’ restricts the potential reference of the HN *missi* ‘man’ to a very specific one, namely the individual who killed the lion. It can be observed that the relativizer used in this case is *jə-*, as indicated by the fact that the relative verbs are in their perfective forms. Furthermore, the noun is referred to by the 3MS *-ni-* which is attached to the relative verb *?ət't* ‘kill’. Similarly, in a sentence (8b), the relative clause *dənigənnə-ji missi jə-?gəba-ti-ji* ‘who married the rich man’ restricts the referential scope of the subject HN *gərəd* ‘girl’. The noun is represented by the subject agreement marker *-ti* in the third-person feminine singular form, which is affixed to the verb *?gəba* ‘married’. The relativized NP operates as the subject within the clause. It is significant to highlight that the Dobbi language lacks a relative pronoun explicitly intended for the indication of a relativized noun phrase.

4 Object Relativization

Direct and indirect object noun phrases, similar to subject NPs, have been observed to be relativized in Dobbi. In such instances, the languages in question necessitate that the relative verbs bear object agreement suffixes (in addition to subject markers) that align with the relativized objects.

Let us consider the following structure:

(9) a. *s*[RC[*miss-i* *jə-sirə-ni-ji*] _{HN}[*fəŋŋə*]
man-DEF REL-buy.PFV-3MS.Sbj-3SM.Obj goat
VP [*tʃ'oma*] *v*[*nɪ*]
fat COP.PRES.3MS
'The goat that the man bought is fat.'

b. *s*[RC[*miss-i* *jə-wək'ə-ni-ti*] _{HN} [*imar*]
man-DEF REL-hit.PFV-3MS.Sbj-3MS.Obj donkey
VP [*mot-ti*]
die.PFV-3FS.Sbj
'The donkey which the man hit has died.'

The positions that have been relativized in (9a -b) are currently occupied by the NP that serve as the direct objects. These direct NP remain unexpressed within their respective relative clauses; however, they can be deduced by considering the object agreement suffixes attached to the relative verbs. In (9a), the suffix *-ji* of the relative verb agrees with the relativized direct object NP *fəŋŋə* 'goat'. The relative verbs, whose object constituents are being relativized, are required to bear object agreement suffixes. In the absence of these suffixes, the constructions become ungrammatical.

In (9b) the respective relative clauses, the direct NP are not explicitly stated but can be deduced by considering the object agreement suffixes that are attached to the relative verbs. The suffix *-ti* of the relative verb shows agreement with the relativized direct object noun phrase *imar* 'donkey'. It is worth emphasizing that the relative verbs, which have object constituents that are being relativized, must necessarily carry object agreement suffixes.

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Should they fail to do so, the resulting constructions will be considered ungrammatical.

Indirect object can also relativize in Dobbi. The indirect object NPs are not obvious inside the relative clauses; they can be recovered by accounting for the object agreement suffixes appended to the relative verbs. The following examples are illustrative.

(10) a. *s[RC[astəmari-ji məsəhaf jə-sirə-ni-aj]*
teacher-DEF book REL-buy.PFV-3FS.Sbj-BEN.Obj
HN [*gərəd-i*] VP [*gobiz na*]]
girl-DEF brave COP.3FS.PRES
‘The girl to whom the teacher bought a book is brave.’

b. *s[RC[anat'i -ji bet jə-arəʃə-ni-oj]*
carpenter-DEF house REL-buil.PFV-3MS.Sbj-BEN.Obj
HN [*miss-i*] VP [*dənigənnə ni*]]
man-DEF rich COP.3FS.PRES
‘The man to whom the carpenter built a house is poor.’

In the Dobbi, NP that are relativized function as indirect objects. These indirect object noun phrases are embedded within relative clauses; their identification can be achieved by analyzing the object agreement suffixes that are associated with the relative verbs. In example (10a), there is concordance between the relative verb and the relativized indirect object noun phrase *gərəd* ‘girl’. The suffix *-aj* on the relative verb agrees with the relativized indirect object noun phrase *gərəd* ‘girl’. Similarly, in (10b), the suffix *-oj* agrees with the relativized indirect object *miss* ‘man’. The NP that serve as indirect objects are not subject to any marking, despite the fact that the verbs to which they are connected exhibit suffixes that denote agreement with the indirect object when utilized within relative clauses.

4.1 Oblique Relativization

An oblique constituent does not encode a core grammatical relation to the verb, i.e. it is not an argument of a clause. Oblique constituents can occupy the relativized positions of relative clauses. The oblique relativization relates

to the relativization of adpositional phrases that render different adverbial functions.

(11) a. *s[RC[miss-i jə-fe-wəj] HN [awutobis]*
 man-DEF REL-go.PFV-3MS.INST bus
VP[tə-səbər-o]
 PAS- break-PFV.3MS
 ‘The bus by which the man went is broken.’

b. *s[RC[ab-ŋna jə-bəssa-wəj] HN [fərəz]*
 father-POSS.1SG REL-come.PFV-3MS.INST horse
VP[nətʃ tʃ'ə ni]
 white COP.PRES.3MS
 ‘The horse by which my father has come is white.’

The Dobbi relative verbs in (11a-b) have the instrumental marker-*wəj*, alluding to relativized adpositional phrases whose underlying forms are arguably *bəawutobis* ‘by bus’ and *bəfərəz* ‘by horse’ in their respective order. The structures of the relativized adpositional phrases are lacking inside the corresponding relative clauses; they can only be found by following the instrumental morphemes *wəj-* that indicate the heads of the relative clauses are oblique components. Dobbi's relativized elements are oblique relations that produce adverbial interpretations in (11a-b). The heads of the relative clauses are connected to instrumental phrases because they are presupposed elements by the respective motion verbs engaged in the modifying relative clauses; they specify the locations where the relative verbs express movement *jəfewəj* ‘which the man went’ in (11a) and *jə-bəssəwəj* ‘which my father come’ in (11b).

4.2 Possessor Noun Relativization

In Dobbi, it is possible to relativize genitive constructs. In the case of the example provided, the possessor noun within the genitive noun phrase has the potential to serve as the head of a relative construction. The genitive markers are not overtly displayed in the relativized genitive structures of the language. Instead, the genitive interpretation is maintained through the inclusion of possessive suffixes that are attached to the possessed nouns, as indicated by the illustrative examples provided.

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(12) a. $s[RC[g^w\dot{a}bbe-huta \quad j\ddot{e}-mot\ddot{a}-b^wji]$
 brother-POSS.3MS REL-die.PFV-MAL.3MS
 HN[g\ddot{a}b\ddot{a}re] *VP[a\ddot{z}\ddot{a}n-o]*
 farmer sad.PFV-3MS.Obj
 ‘The farmer whose brother was died has sad.’

b) $s[RC[fok'-huta \quad j\ddot{e}-n\ddot{a}d\ddot{a}d-b^wji]$
 building -POSS.3MS REL-burnet.PFV-MAL.3MS
 HN[miss-i] *VP [a\ddot{z}\ddot{a}n-o]*
 man-DEF sad.PFV-3MS.Obj
 ‘The man whose building is burned is sad.’

In these forms, the possessor nouns *gəbəre* ‘farmer’ in (12a) and *miss* ‘man’ in (12b) are relativized and become the heads of the corresponding relative clauses the possessed nouns *gʷəbəbe* ‘brother’ in (12a) and *fok* ‘building’ in (12b) carry the 3MS possessive suffixes *-huta* in both formulations. These possessive suffixes are supposed to complement the genitive prefixes that are not present in the structures, which would ostensibly surface if the head nouns were not modified by relative clauses as in the structure (12a) *jə gəbəreji gʷəbəbe moto* ‘The farmer’s brother died’ and in (12b) *jə missi fok’i nədəd* ‘the man building’s is burned’ where the initial prefix *jə-* in both cases marks genitive. The existence of the possessive suffixes secures the relative constructions that establish a possessor-possessed relationship between the two nouns engaged in the genitive configurations (*gəbəre* ‘farmer’ and *gobbe* ‘brother’ and *fok* ‘building’).

In Dobbi, it is observed that the relativizer is never present in conjunction with negative verbs. This means that even the relativizer that is overtly expressed in affirmative perfective conjugations disappears when the relative verb is transformed into a negative form. Consequently, the negation marker in (13a and b), precedes to the verb in embedded clause thus the negation marker is absent in the following construction.

(13) a. *s[RC[k^was e-ččawt] HN[tikə] VP[?k'en-a]]*
 ball NEG-play.PFV boy sick.PFV-3MS
 ‘The boy who did not play football is sick.’

b. *s[RC[wat e-weddi] HN[tikə] VP [əhi-nit]*
work NEG-like.PFV boy know.PFV-3MS
'I know the boy who did not like work.'

Dobbi employs the use of the *jə-* morpheme in the process of relativizing perfective structures, wherein the perfective verb form is modified to indicate a relative clause. On the other hand, when it comes to relativizing imperfective verbs, Dobbi does not utilize any overt morpheme and instead relies on zero marking, whereby no additional marker is added to the verb form to indicate the relative clause.

(14) a. *s[RC[nəgə ji-?gəba] HN [miss-i] HN[dənigənnə ni]]*
tomorrow 3MS-married.IPFV man-DEF rich COP.PRES.3MS
'The man who will marry tomorrow is rich.'
b. *s[RC[əkuwa ti-?gəbja HN [gəred] VP[guadəjna-jna na]]*
today 3FS-married.IPFV girl friend-POSS.1SG COP.PRES.3FS
'The girl who married today is my friend.'

As can be observed in the above construction 14(a-b), it is evident that the relativizer marker is absent within the verb that has been subjected to relativization. It is worth noting that the verb bear in the embedded clause has prefixed the agreement marker.

5 Conclusion

This article investigates the syntactic structures of relative clauses as they are constructed in Dobbi. The Data is collected in Gurage Zone, specifically within the 'Ganza woreda', which lies outside the immediate vicinity of Butajira city. Data were gathered from native speakers of the community utilizing elicitation techniques. The language encompasses two foundational varieties of relative clauses: restrictive and nonrestrictive relative clauses, as well as headed and headless relative clauses. Headed and headless relative clauses serve essential roles in language, contributing to sentence complexity and information structure. Headed relative clauses explicitly modify the head and provide additional descriptive or identifying information. They are

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syntactically transparent and help clarify or restrict the reference of the noun phrase. In contrast, headless relative clauses also called free relatives lack an explicit head noun and function as noun phrases themselves, often standing alone to fulfill grammatical roles. These constructions offer greater syntactic and functional flexibility by encapsulating complex information without needing an antecedent. The language that is being examined in this study effectively utilizes the *jə-* morpheme as a means of relativizing perfective structures, demonstrating its functionality in the grammatical framework. The relativizer *jə-* signals the start of a relative clause. On the other hand, when it comes to the relativization of imperfective verbs, Dobbi does not employ any overt morpheme which means that lack of overt markers of relativizers, relative clauses are often integrated using contextual, syntactic, or semantic cues rather than explicit grammatical markers. The verbs are commonly referred to as zero marking, which is a distinctive characteristic of Dobbi. The relative clause appears before the head noun it modifies, which means that prenominal relative clause construction. The head nouns to be modified (explicitly designated in headed relative clauses and implicitly suggested by agreement markers in headless relative clauses) can pertain to the subject, object, oblique, or possessor noun elements of the corresponding relative clauses. In summary, the linguistic system employs notably convergent methodologies for the articulation of relativization, encompassing both the absence of relative pronouns and the employment of formally identical bound relative markers in the perfective verb form.

List of abbreviations

1	First Person
2	Second Person
3	Third Person
∅	Empty
AH	Accessibility hierarchy
BEN	Benefactive
COP	Copula
DEF	Definite
F	Feminine
HN	Head noun
INST	Instrument
IPFV	Imperfective
LOC	Locative
M	Masculine
MAL	Malefactive
NEG	Negative
NP	Noun phrase
NRRC	Nonrestrictive relative clause
Obj	Object
PAS	Passive
PFV	Perfective
PL	Plural
POSS	Possession
RC	Relative clause
REL	Relativizer
RRC	Restrictive relative clause
S	Singular
Sbj	Subject
SOV	Subject, verb, object

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