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Relative Clauses in Tigre

Relative clauses in Tigre¹ are definable in terms of the occurrence of the particle *la*, and by their syntactic function—that of a modifier (attribute) within a noun phrase. Also to be subsumed under the title, however, are some clauses that are not noun-modifiers and others which, while functioning as noun-modifiers, do not contain the particle.

The particle *la* has two main, though not entirely unrelated functions, first that of the definite article where it is the initial element of a simple noun phrase, and secondly that of a relative particle where, with certain stated exceptions, it precedes the verb of the clause. Examples of the two functions are:

- (1) *la šällim bə'ray* 'the black ox'
- (2) *bə'əd saga la šəwər käləb* 'another dog carrying meat,' *Lit.* other meat which he carries dog²

1. PHONOLOGY. For ease of identification the particle is represented throughout by the transcription *la*, but its phonetic characteristics vary according to its environment.

1.1. The vowel has a fully open front quality in slow speech, if the particle is quoted in isolation, or if it is stressed. One position in which particles are always stressed is immediately before the 'copula' *tu*, *ta*, *tom* and *tän* (masc. sing., fem. sing., masc. plur., and fem. plur. respectively). An example is *la tu* 'which is'; for the stress we may compare 'ämanka *tu* 'you are right' (the stress, with falling intonation, being on *la* and *-ka*).

¹ The material used for this paper was entirely provided from the speech of Mr. Lijam Ishaq of Geleb (Mensa dialect), Eritrea, during research in the field, most of it from stories first written down and subsequently recorded on tape. The transcription is that used by Wolf Leslau, *Short Grammar of Tigre* (American Oriental Society Offprint No. 18), except that it distinguishes *ä* and *a* in *all* environments, for which see F. R. Palmer, 'Comparative Statement and Ethiopian Semitic,' *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 1958, 131-2.

² The 'literal' translations are essentially *word* translations, each Tigre word being translated separately, though the translation in each case is partly determined by the context. Tigre gender is not shown in the translation, the choice of 'he,' 'she,' 'it,' etc. being dependent on the English. *la* is, however, consistently translated 'which.'

1.2. In rapid speech and where the particle lacks stress, its vowel may have a quality closer to that usually associated with Tigre *ä* (half open central and shorter in duration than *a*), but the variations in quality are such that it is not reasonable, in any given case, to make a decision between *ä* and *a*.

1.3. Before a laryngeal consonant (*h*, *ħ*, ' and ') followed by another vowel, the vowel of the particle has a quality approximating to that of the following vowel (this is true of all vowels that may morphologically be identified as *a*, and of *ä* and *ə* as well).

1.4. The sequence *mən la* (*mən* 'from') has phonetically a long medial dental nasal, and no lateral consonant; it could be written **mənna*, but for consistency *mən la* is preferred.

2. STRUCTURE OF THE RELATIVE CLAUSE. The elements in the relative clause follow the normal order of the simple sentence in Tigre, the verb being preceded by the nouns or noun phrases that function as subject and object. The position of *la* is subject to some variation.

2.1. Most commonly *la* immediately precedes the verb, e.g.,

(3) 'äb *la wädäya ħäram* 'the sin a father did,' *Lit.* father which he-did-it sin.

Also Nos. 2, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 25, 29.³

2.2 The particle sometimes occurs initially in the clause and separated from the verb; commonly, but not exclusively, the element between *la* and the verb is a pronoun subject, e.g.,

(4) *la ħətu ħäsbäyu* 'what he thought,' *Lit.* which he he-thought-it

(5) *la kitab la 'ənta qär'ākahu*⁴ 'the book you read,' *Lit.* the book which you you-read-it

(6) *la dəbä' la 'ətbakom 'äla* 'the forest around them,' *Lit.* the forest which around-them it-was

Also No. 16.

This pattern appears to be restricted to clauses which either follow the noun (§3.2.) or occur with no noun (§3.3.).

³ The numbers refer to the examples, which are indicated in the text by numerals in parentheses, not to the sections. Only examples from sections §§1 to 4 are included in these lists.

⁴ The initial *la* here, in No. 6 and in other examples is to be regarded as the definite article with the noun that follows and not the relative particle of the clause.

2.3. If the verb is complex (a full verb plus an auxiliary), the particle precedes the auxiliary, which comes after the full verb. e.g.,

- (7) *näbbär la 'äla . . . bə'äs* 'the war that was,' *Lit.* it-being which it-was war
 (8) *la šäfättit wäddəwo la 'äläw 'ämäs* 'the crimes the shifta were committing,' *Lit.* the shifta they-doing-it which they-were crime

2.4. *la* is often followed by the particles 'əl-, 'ətt- and 'əbb- plus the nominal suffixes associated with nouns and prepositions. These particles, thus, come between *la* and the verb, e.g.,

- (9) *la 'əlu təbe* 'what you said,' *Lit.* which (object)-it you-said
 (10) *la 'ətta həza* 'where he wanted,' *Lit.* which to-it he-wanted

2.5. In a long clause *la* often occurs twice, both at the beginning of the clause and immediately before the verb, e.g.,

- (11) *la mən bə'əd 'äddotat 'əb šäqät la tämäššə'o 'ägərbät wü'əkəl* 'imported materials and food,' *Lit.* which from other countries for trade which she-brings-it (= them) things and-corn
 (12) *la 'äkan la 'ətta 'əgəl təbšäh təhässəb la 'älät* 'The place she intended to reach,' *Lit.* the place which to-it to she-reach she-thinking which she-was

Also No. 24.

3. POSITION OF THE RELATIVE CLAUSE. The relative clause functions as a modifier of a noun, and occupies those positions that modifiers occupy.

3.1. Most commonly the clause precedes the noun it modifies but follows determinatives such as the demonstratives ('əlli, 'əlla, 'əllom and 'əllän) and the numerals. Many examples have already been quoted—Nos. 2, 3, 7, 8, and 11, and others are Nos. 13, 14, and 20–30. An example of a different type of modifier preceding a noun—an adjective—is found in No. 1.

A striking point about clauses preceding the noun is that, at least in the case of the preposition 'ət 'at,' a preposition that governs the whole noun phrase immediately precedes the particle *la* even when this particle is not initial, e.g.,

- (13) *hätte šewabet 'ət la näbbär diba qišot* 'at a village in which a family lives,' *Lit.* one family at which it-lives in-it village
 (14) *may bəzuḥ 'ət la bə'əttu müsakəbu* 'at his home which had plenty of water,' *Lit.* water much at which it-has his-home

In these two examples 'ət is associated with the whole noun phrase—'at a village . . .', 'at his home . . .' and not with the relative clause alone (not

'at which . . .'); yet it occurs in the middle of the relative clause, immediately before *la* and not before the whole noun phrase.

3.2. Less commonly the clause follows the modified noun, e.g.,

(15) *kal ġanas 'ala la mässäl 'etcetera,' Lit. every kind to-it which it-resembles*

Also Nos. 5, 6, and 12.

An example of an adjective following its noun is '*ädəg šəluḥ* 'a thin donkey.' One example was noted in which the clause not only comes after the noun, but is separated from it by a verbal element:

(16) *mänsä' 'ākan 'äläbu la təmbak tətḥərrəs dibu* 'Mensa has no place in which tobacco is grown,' *Lit. Mensa place it-has-not which tobacco it-is-cultivated in-it*

3.3. A relative clause often occurs with no modified noun. It may be preceded by a determinative; an example (with *worot* as the determinative) is:

(17) *worot 'älīšek la lətbəhal* 'a man called Alishek,' *Lit. one Alishek which he-is-called*

Quite commonly there is no determinative, e.g.,

(18) *bəzuḥ la ḥəzze* 'he who wants a lot,' *Lit. much which he-wants*

(19) '*ət 'äb'ərät la šüqqu* 'those who work with oxen,' *Lit. at oxen which they-work*

Also Nos. 4, 9, and 10.

This is equally a common function of all elements that act as modifiers of the noun. The adjective '*əwur* 'blind,' for example, may occur with a noun, *la 'əwur 'ənas*, or with no noun, *la 'əwur* (both to be translated 'the blind man.')

4. CONCORD RELATIONS. *la* is referred to throughout this paper as a relative *particle*, not as a relative *pronoun*. The choice of terminology results from the fact that *la* indicates only that the clause is a relative clause, but does not itself mark the kind of distinction that is shown by the relative pronouns 'who,' 'whom,' 'whose,' etc. Distinctions of this kind I shall label 'referential relations,' since in traditional terminology relative pronouns 'refer back to the antecedent.' These referential relations are marked in Tigre by the concord between the noun and certain elements within the relative clause.

4.1. The element in concord with the noun may be the verb of the relative clause; the referential relation is that indicated by a relative pronoun as the subject of the verb, e.g.,

- (20) 'ət 'äfuhu la 'älät kətfät 'the piece that was in his mouth,' *Lit.* in his-mouth which it-was piece ('älät is in concord [fem. sing.] with kətfät.)

Also Nos. 2, 6, 7, and 15.

4.2. The element in concord with the noun may be the pronominal (object) suffix of the verb; the referential relation is that indicated by a relative pronoun as the object of the verb, e.g.,

- (21) 'əlli zübän la 'ämşayu mäkäyən 'modern machines,' *Lit.* this century which it-brought-it (=them) machines (The pronominal suffix -u of 'ämşayu is in concord [masc. sing.] with mäkäyən, which though morphologically plural has masc. sing. concord.)

Also Nos. 3, 5, 8, and 11.

4.3. The element in concord with the noun may be the suffix of one of the particles 'əl-, 'ətt- or 'əbb-; the referential relations are, respectively, that indicated by a relative pronoun as the object of the verb (as in §4.2), that indicated by 'in,' 'at' or 'to' plus a relative pronoun and that indicated by 'for' or 'by' plus a relative pronoun, e.g.,

- (22) la 'əla rə'a şəlalot 'the image he saw,' *Lit.* which (object)-it he-saw image (The suffix -a of 'əla is in concord [fem. sing.] with şəlalot.)
 (23) la 'ətta mäsa dibom 'äkan 'the place they were in when night fell,' *Lit.* which in-it it-became-night on-them place (The suffix -a of 'ətta is in concord [fem. sing.] with 'äkan.)
 (24) la 'əbbu tətrə'äw la hällekek säbäb 'the reason you are seen,' *Lit.* which for-it you-being-seen which you-are reason (The suffix -u of 'əbbu is in concord [masc. sing.] with säbäb.)

Also No. 12.

This type of concord relation is always to be found where *la* is followed by 'əl-, 'ətt- or 'əbb-, but not where it is preceded by them (as in No. 15).

4.4. The element in concord with the noun may be the pronominal suffix of a preposition, especially, but not exclusively, of *dib* 'in,' occurring in all cases after the verb; the referential relation is that indicated by a preposition plus a relative pronoun, e.g.,

- (25) 'ägərbät la læzzäbbe dibän . . . 'äbyat ma 'äswaqat 'shops or houses in which things are sold,' *Lit.* things which it (=they)-is-sold in-them . . . houses or shops (The pronominal suffix -än of dibän is in concord [fem. plur.] with 'äbyat and 'äswaqat.)
 (26) qärçay la wəraq babur la lætgässe diba betätit 'ticket-inspector's box,' *Lit.* cutter (of) the paper (of) train which he-sits in-it little-house. (The suffix -a of diba is in concord [fem. sing.] with betätit.)

- (27) *la zet fäggər mænna 'əkäl* 'the crop from which oil comes,' *Lit.* which oil it-comes from-it crop (The suffix *-a* of *mænna* is in concord [fem. sing.] with *'əkäl*.)

Also Nos. 13 and 16.

4.5. The element in concord with the noun may be the pronominal (possessive) suffix of a noun within the clause; the referential relation is that indicated by a possessive relative pronoun, e.g.,

- (28) *ħällənahu la i motät worot 'əwur 'ənas* 'a blind man whose spirit had not died,' *Lit.* his-spirit which not it-died one blind man (The suffix *-u* of *ħällənahu* is in concord [masc. sing.] with *'ənas*.)

4.6. The element in concord with the noun is the suffix of the form *'äläb-* or *bə'ətt-*. These suffixes are those that are found with nouns and prepositions, but these forms have the syntactic function of verbs; the referential relations are those indicated by a relative pronoun as the subject of the verb 'have' (negated in the case of *'äläb-*), e.g.,

- (29) *'ədäd la 'äläbu dəħäb* 'limitless gold,' *Lit.* limit which it-has-not gold. (The suffix *-u* of *'äläbu* is in concord [masc. sing.] with *dəħäb*.)
 (30) *mäkasəbüt la bə'əttu garotat* 'things with profit in them,' *Lit.* profit which it (=they)-has things. (The suffix *-u* of *bə'əttu* is in concord with *garotat* which like all morphological plurals of 'inanimate nouns' has singular concord.)

Also No. 14.

4.6. Where a relative clause occurs without a noun, there can, of course, be no concordial relations, but the same kinds of referential relation hold between the entire clause in its function as a noun phrase and elements within the clause. Examples of the relation indicated by a relative pronoun as subject are Nos. 17, 18, and 19, and as object No. 4; Nos. 9 and 10 are examples of the relations marked by the particles that follow *la*.

5. RELATIVE CLAUSES WITH NO INFLECTED VERB. Two examples of a relative clause containing no inflected verbal form were noted:

- (31) *woro ħänəbbəš la šə'un 'ädəg* 'a donkey loaded with loaves,' *Lit.* one loaves which loaded donkey
 (32) *la 'äbyatom la 'əbba ħoša kədum mən lə'al* 'their houses which have earth put on top of them,' *Lit.* the their-houses which on-it earth worked from above

In both examples the clause follows the noun and both contain an uninflected verbal form—the passive participle. It is quite clear that this function of *la* is very close to that of the definite article, and in fact the second example was immediately preceded by a noun phrase followed by *la* plus an adjective:

(33) *la 'änḥusu la 'äbaya* 'its huts, the big ones,' *Lit.* the its-huts the big (plur.)

While these examples show the similarity of the two functions of *la*, they do not imply that no distinction must be made between them. In these examples the distinction depends not on the presence of an inflected verbal form, but on the fact that in No. 31 the context does not permit a definite article, the noun phrase beginning with *woro* 'one' or 'a,' while in No. 32. *la* is immediately followed by 'əbb-, a common characteristic of the relative clause, and not found where *la* is unambiguously to be treated as the definite article.

6. RELATIVE CLAUSES WITHOUT *la*. A number of clauses were noted which appear to have the function of relative clauses but do not contain *la*.

6.1. The particle is absent in sentences in which the place of the main verb is occupied by 'äläbu, e.g.,

(34) *mənye färrah 'äläbu* 'no-one is afraid of me,' *Lit.* from-me he-fears there-is-not

(35) *lali wä'am'al lar'akka 'äläbu* 'no-one will see you night or day,' *Lit.* night and-day he-sees-you there-is-not

The most obvious interpretation of these is that the initial elements form a relative clause with no modified noun, of the pattern dealt with in §3.3. Alternatively 'äläbu might be regarded as an auxiliary verb, forming a single verbal phrase with the other verbal form, the sentence thus being a simple sentence with no relative clause. If a relative clause is postulated here, the construction appears to be possible only where the referential relation is that of the relative pronoun as the subject of the verb (in this respect Nos. 34 and 35 being of the same pattern as those of §4.1, but without *la*). With other referential relations *la* always occurs, e.g.,

(36) *la 'atta tgäyäs 'äläbka* 'you have nowhere to go,' *Lit.* which to-it you-go you-have-not

6.2. The particle is often absent where the relative clause follows the modified noun, e.g.,

(37) *la 'əcäy ləḥḥän karbon labulo* 'they call the wood that is burnt coal,' *Lit.* the wood it-is-burnt coal they-call-it

(38) *'äd gašša lətkäbbät tu 'əlli* 'this is a country that welcomes guests,' *Lit.* country guest it-welcomes it-is this

That the position of the relative clause is relevant is shown by the following example, where there are two clauses, the first without *la* and following the noun, the second with *la* and preceding it:

- (39) *la säb 'italya säb šəqəl fätte wäman šəqəl la i 'araf gäbil tu* 'the people of Italy are a people that loves work and a nation that does not rest from work,' *Lit.* the people (of) Italy people work it-loves and-from work which not it-rests nation it-is

It is obvious that here too the second *la* is not to be identified with the definite article, since its absence or presence is not related to 'definiteness' or 'indefiniteness' required by the context. Examples of relative clauses containing *la* where the context would not require a definite article are Nos. 2, 13, 16, 17, 28, 29 and 30.

Two other examples may be noted; in the first the relative clause is separated from its noun (cf. No. 16), while in the second there are three clauses and the last has no modified noun:

- (40) *wäd 'anas ratä' män gə'a šəqəl 'äläbu* 'as there was a rich man's son with no work,' *Lit.* son man rich when he-became work he-has-not
 (41) *kära 'älli mässəl, kära ḥesas mässəl nəzabe, . . . wäqərab mässəl nəzabe* 'we buy things like that, things like butter . . . and we buy things like leather,' *Lit.* such-things this it-resembles, such-things butter it-resembles we-buy . . . and-leather it-resembles we buy

7. PROBLEMATIC FUNCTIONS OF *tu*, *ta*, *tom* AND *tän*. The forms *tu*, *ta*, *tom* and *tän* usually, as has already been illustrated in some of the examples, function as verbs, in that they occupy the place of the verb in the clause in the sentence, though they have morphological characteristics similar to those of the nouns. There are, however, two types of sentence in which they have rather different functions, though it is still possible to assign them verbal function if a relative clause (without *la*) is also postulated.

7.1. In the following examples *tu* appears to have merely the function of an emphatic particle; certainly its absence would leave a grammatical sentence:

- (42) *qäwekahu tu?* 'don't you know?' *Lit.* you-did-not-know-it it-is
 (43) *mi twäddu tu?* 'what do you do?' *Lit.* what you-do it-is
 (44) *'älli 'əgəl mi tu tämässəl?* 'why do you think that?' *Lit.* this for what it-is you-think

Of these No. 42 alone could be treated as containing a relative clause of any type we have yet considered, with *qäwekahu* forming the relative clause (i.e. 'what-you-don't-know'). This interpretation is not possible with the last two in that the referential relation is that of the pronoun as an object and a pronominal (object) suffix of the verb would be expected (**la twäddəwo* and **la tämässəllo*—'which you-do-it' and 'which you-think-it'). It is, however, obviously possible to emend the statement, by noting the absence of a pronominal object suffix in examples of this type. But there is

little to be gained by attempting to force these sentences into the pattern of those containing relative clauses, especially when such complex sentences as the following are to be found:

- (45) *'əlli 'əlu tər'u hälleikum tu* 'as you see,' *Lit.* this (object)-it you-seeing you-are it-is

In this example we certainly have one relative clause without *la*; if *tu* is not treated as an emphatic particle, there are two such clauses, which may be illustrated by the translation 'that which it is which you are seeing.'

There are other sentences in which it is more reasonable, though not essential, to recognise relative clauses with *tu* functioning as the main verb of the sentence, e.g.,

- (46) *süb gärrum gäddəm tu* 'good people work,' *Lit.* people good he-works it-is
 (47) *mašela wäbaltəg wäkära 'əlli mässəl tu dib 'ädna ləzzärrä* 'sorghum and millet and such-like are sown in our country,' *Lit.* sorghum and-millet and-such-things this resembles it-is in our-country it-is-sown

7.2. The forms *tu* etc. also appear to have the function of second pronominal objects of verbs that have pronominal (object) suffixes, e.g.,

- (48) *huye häbänne tu* 'my brother gave me it'
 (49) *huye häbäränne tom* 'my brother showed me them'

In these two examples the verb has the pronominal suffix *-ne* 'me' and *tu* and *tom* appear to have the function of second pronominal objects. It is again possible to argue that *tu* and *tom* are the main verbs and that the remaining parts of each sentence are relative clauses. But the objection once again is that the referential relation is that which would require to be marked by the object suffix of the verb (**häbäyyo, häbäräyyom*, 'he gave-it' and 'he-showed them'). It is clearly simplest to treat the form *tu* etc. as pronominal here, especially since it often appears in this function within relative clauses (and otherwise we have a relative clause within a relative clause), e.g.,

- (50) *la 'äkan la 'ətta häbärkänne tom* 'the place in which you showed them to me,'
Lit. the place which in-it you-showed-me them
 (51) *nəgəsti la təblänne tu* 'what the queen told me,' *Lit.* queen which she-told-me it
 (52) *la 'əbba näthäddəggom tu gäbäy* 'a way to take him from them,' *Lit.* which-by-it we-deprive-them him way

The treatment of these forms as pronominal implies yet a further type of concordial and referential relation within the relative clause—where the element in concord with the modified noun is this second pronominal object, and the referential relation is that indicated by a relative pronoun as the object of a verb which already has an object. An example is:

- (53) *la kitab la 'anta häbkänne tu* 'the book you gave me,' *Lit.* the book which you you-gave-me it (*tu* is in concord [masc. sing.] with *kitab*.)

A further example in which there is a relative clause without *la*, containing *tu* as a pronominal object in concord with the noun is:

- (54) *'alli 'anta 'äs'älkänne tu käbär* 'the news you told me,' *Lit.* this you you-told-me it news (*tu* is in concord [masc. sing.] with *käbär*.)

8. *la* FOR EMPHASIS. In Tigre, as in other Ethiopian languages, a common function of the relative particle is, in association with the copula, that of making one part of the sentence emphatic. The usual pattern is that the emphatic element or elements occur initially in the sentence, followed by the copula, the relative particle and the remainder of the sentence. Examples are:

- (55) *'əglu tu la zärrə* 'it is for that that he sows,' *Lit.* for-it it-is which he-sows
 (56) *ka 'əb säbbät 'alli tu la 'ädhākoka* 'and it is for that reason that I called you,' *Lit.*
 and for reason this it-is which I-called-you

Sentences of this type are not conveniently treated under the general statement about relative clauses. For if we treat the piece introduced by *la* as a relative clause of the common type that has no modified noun, it follows that the main verb is *tu* with the relative clause as its complement and the initial elements as its subjects. But in all the examples noted these initial (emphatic) elements were adverbial—structures that do not normally function as verb-subjects. There is, again, therefore, nothing to be gained by attempting to force these sentences into the regular pattern of the relative clauses, but to treat *tu* plus *la* as elements which establish the emphatic nature of the material they follow.

The emphasized elements may consist of an entire adverbial clause, e.g.,

- (57) *'alli wäre 'alli män säm'äka gäbbə* 'tu . . . *färur la hälleka* 'perhaps it is because you have heard this news that you have escaped,' *Lit.* this news this when you-heard it-happens it-is . . . having-escaped which you-are

A highly complex sentence of this type, but in which the emphatic initial piece consists of a negated clause with *'ikon* as the negative copula, followed by a clause and the positive *tu* is the following:

- (58) *'əgälye mäbrähät 'əb səlmät 'ət 'əgäyəs* for-me lamp in darkness as I-go for-
mätän gäbäy 'əgäl 'ər'e 'əgäl täbräh the-purpose-that road in-order-that I-
'älye 'ände 'əbe 'ikon, see in-order-that it-shines for-me while
 I-said it-is-not,
männata 'älka la müslo 'äwayər läb but to-you which resemble blind-men
'ənze wäken 'ət läḥäläləfo 'ändäy heart to and-fro as they-keep-passing
lä'üne 'əgäl i lädarkune wü'ände without they-see-me in-order-that not

'aškätäw 'əgəl i läwdəqune wa'ətroye they-bump-into-me and-while they-shouldered in-order-that not they-make-me-fall and-my-jug in-order-that not they-break from-me while I-said it-is,

la kəl lali mäbrəhät 'ənde şäbätko 'ət which every night lamp while I-carried as I-keep-passing which I-am
hälaləf la hälleko

'it is not because I want the lamp to shine for me so that I may see the way as I go in the dark, but it is in order that people like you, blind in their hearts, shall not bump into me without seeing me as they pass to and fro, and shall not, shouldering me aside, push me down and break my jug, that I carry the lamp every night as I pass.'

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