
RELATIVIZATION IN NIGERIAN PIDGIN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Relativization is a concept in syntax that deals with the relationship between an NP (or Noun) earlier mentioned and another part of that same sentence, represented by a relative pronoun. This other part of the sentence is headed by a pronoun and this gives us a reason to call it a relative clause. A relative clause is usually a subordinate clause that modifies a noun. It is formed when one clause is embedded into an NP of another clause to produce grammatical sentences. The questions are now then do we relativize in Nigerian Pidgin English and is it possible for relativization to take place in Nigerian Pidgin English given the fact that some people still look at it as a debased form of standard English in Nigeria? Nigerian Pidgin English is a pidgin, which has a geographic base in Nigeria. It is politically and sociolinguistically different from other pidgins in the world. This Nigerian Pidgin English is English based or English related because most of its vocabulary is derived from English. It also has Nigerian local languages as its underlying influence, it can be said that its vocabulary is English while its grammar is Nigerian. This paper will discuss the syntactic structure of relative clauses in Nigerian Pidgin English, a language spoken and understood by nearly all Nigerians (though with variations) in Nigeria. One thing worthy of mention here is that the process of relativization in Nigerian Pidgin English is quite different from that of English language (even when it is the parent language). The relativization structure in Nigerian Pidgin English allows the relative pronoun to come after the subject of the sentence. It can also come after the direct object in a sentence.. In some cases there are two relativizers in a sentence in which case the first relativizer is downplayed for the second to function properly. Finally, this paper will explore how the movements of relative pronouns are determined in the structure of the Nigerian Pidgin English.

INTRODUCTION

Relativization is a process in syntax. It deals with an earlier mentioned NP in a sentence and another part of that same sentence. It tries to show their relationship. This other part of the sentence is usually headed by a pronoun and thus permits us to call it a relative clause.

According to Ndimele (2008), relativization is a syntactic process of turning an otherwise full fledged sentence into a subordinate or embedded clause, so that it becomes a mere modifier of a noun phrase in the matrix clause. This process according to him gives birth to a relative clause. A relative clause according to Finegan (2004) is formed when one clause is embedded into an NP of another clause. This relative clause is a subordinate clause that takes its bearing from the main clause in the sentence. Again when a clause performs the role of giving detailed information about an NP (earlier mentioned in a sentence). Then we can call it a relative clause Ndimele (2008). Tallerman (2009) opines that a relative clause must say something about the head noun in the matrix clause by way of modification. The function of a relative clause is to restrict what a speaker wants to talk about in a given

sentence structure. The structure of relativization in English language is quite different from other languages. The Nigerian Pidgin English is our focus in this paper. It is a language that takes its bearing from English language in Nigeria. This Nigerian Pidgin English is different from other pidgins in the world. This is because most of its vocabulary is derived from English. It has Nigerian Local languages as its underlying influence. We can rightly conclude that its vocabulary is English while its grammar is Nigerian. English language has a variety of relative pronouns and these can be used depending on the situation or sentence structure. The relative clauses, are usually introduced by these relative pronouns such as who, where, whose, which, wherever, those, that etc. In Nigerian pidgin English a relative clause is usually introduced by "wey" and "im". It is worthy to note here that these two relativizers have not been established as relative pronouns. For the purpose of this research work, I shall not refer to them as relative pronouns but relativizers.

The Syntactic structure of Relativization Nigerian Pidgin English

The process of relativization in Nigerian Pidgin English is quite distinct and different. Every language has its own structure(s) and these structure(s) differ from one another. The application of linguistic theories and concepts to these individual languages opens us to the fact that every language is different in structure from one another.

A. In Nigerian Pidgin English relativization can occur after the main subject in a sentence. This means the relativizer 'wey' can be found immediately after the subject in a sentence.

For example:

1a. De maths wey the teacha teach us hard wel wel. This sentence can be divided thus.

b. De teacha teach us maths.

c. De maths hard wel wel. The relativized position is not after the verb rather it is after the subject in this sentence. Thus if we have something like this:

d. De maths de teacher teach us wey hard wel wel. Then our relativization process in this case is wrong. That relativizer 'wey' must move to the position immediately after the subject to create meaning as in the examples below:

e. De maths de teacha teach us wey hard wel wel.

This in turn will give us a sentence like this. ▼ _____

f. De maths wey de teacha teach us hard wel wel.

B. Relativization in Nigerian Pidgin English can also occur after the direct object in a sentence. The relativizer "wey" is inserted in the position immediately after this direct object in a sentence structure. This can be illustrated below:

2a. De man catch de goat wey run yesterde. This sentence can be divided thus.

b. De man catch de goat.

c. De goat run yesterde. Our relativization structure will now look like this:

d. De man catch { de goat } _____ run yesterde.

Instead of repeating the direct object in this sentence, we insert "wey" in the gap that follows the direct object in order to realize a process of relativization in Nigerian Pidgin English.

3a. de girl slap de boy wey touch am.

b. De girl slap de boy

c. De boy touch am

d. De girl slap de boy _____ touch am.

It has also been identified that if the relativizer "wey" occurs in the position immediately after the subject in such constructions as above the process of relativization in such construction is lost for example.

e. De girl "wey" slap de boy touch am _____ ↓

The relativizer must occur in the position immediately after the direct object in such sentence constructions. The process of relativization in Nigerian Pidgin English in examples (1a.) - (f) is quite distinct from that of (2a) - (d) and (3a) - (e) above.

C. Another form of relativization in Nigeria Pidgin English is the combination of the relativizer "Wey" and the pronoun "im" for example.

4a. Na de boy wey im papa get dat haus die.

b. Na de boy papa get dat haus.

c. De boy die

d. Na de boy wey im papa get dat haus die. ↑ _____

In this sentence, the relativizer "wey" has a pronoun 'im' attached to it. They combine to give us the English equivalent which is "whose". In this kind of instance "wey" cannot do without "im" such that if we try to separate them, then we will lose meaning in the sentence. For example.

e. Na de boy wey [] papa get dat house die.

Note that the pronoun 'im' must always occur in such instance(s) to give us a grammatical sentence(s). However, this combination of 'wey' plus 'im' to form a relative clause, apply only to human beings. It cannot function nor occur in animals or objects. For example we can't say

5a. Na de dog 'wey' 'im' papa tall get dat house

b. Na de chair "wey" "im" hand long get dat key.

The concept of relativization may be applied to these sentences perfectly, but language is not complete without semantics. We can rightly say that "wey" is a relative element in Nigerian Pidgin English that can stand for who, which and that. It can also combine in some cases with "im" to give us "whose". Our attention again will be drawn to "im" as a relative element. Though there is the presence of "wey" in such sentence constructions, its function is reduced (it still functions as a relativizer but the main focus here is on theme or patient and benefactive) we can rightly conclude that 'im' becomes the main relativizer in such sentence constructions because it is carrying the weight of the whole sentence. Examples 3 sentences include:

6a Na my broda wey^r bi police na im^R buy dat skirt for me.

b Na my dog wey^r bi bingo na im^R I buy dat chain for.

c Na my sister wey^r live for Onitsha na im^R buy dat shirt for me

We can see that the Nigerian Pidgin English has another distinct way of forming relative clauses given the fact that "im" can function as a relativizer in a Nigerian Pidgin English sentence, it can also downplay or reduce the function of 'wey' to a minor relativizer. The Nigerian Pidgin English in such sentences, usually has two relativizers, "wey" and 'im', separated by an NP or a VP. "Wey" in this instance is a relativizer but its function is lesser in

these and bears the major function of relativizing the clause. It bears the theta role of theme or patient as well as benefactive.

D) Relativization in Nigerian Pidgin English can be realized by way of sentence arrangement. No two languages are the same. According to Di Pietro (1971) the interpretation of the grammar of one language with the grammar of another is called transfer and the mistakes that arise from such misplacements are called interference. We cannot interpret the grammar of Nigerian Pidgin English with that of English language. This will amount to wrong Sentence constructions because the structures of the two languages are different and distinct even when English language is the parent language owing to the above fact, it has also been noticed that the Nigerian Pidgin English has another way of relativizing by way of sentence arrangement. The element “wey” is seen immediately after the first indirect object while the direct object comes at the sentence final position. In standard English, it is also the first indirect object that carries the relativization element but the direct object comes before this first indirect object. For example

Nigerian Pidgin English.

7a I give my broda wey dey go sukul my buk.
Subj direct Obj indirect obj direct object.

Standard English

b I gave my books to my brother who is a student
Subj direct Obj indirect obj direct object.

The structure for this type of relativization process in Nigerian Pidgin English is:

Subject + indirect object+ indirect object + direct object.

In Standard English we have:

R – Major Relativizer t + indirect object +indirect object 4

r – Minor Relativizer t aspect of relativization in Nigerian Pidgin English can be seen in the area or complementizers. This in English language is often called the COMP node. I will for the purpose of this paper, refer to it in Nigeria pidgin English as a COMP node too. It is called the S and pronounced as “Es Bar”. According to Ofoegbu (2008), It is a clause that have introducers like who, what, that, which, when e.t.c in English language and it is used to introduce another sentence in a sentence. in Nigerian Pidgin English, the COMP node whose introducer in only “wey” can be used to relativize NPs in Nigerian Pidgin English sentences. As noted above, English language has very many COMP Node introducers but the Nigerian Pidgin has only one, “wey” which usually occurs after the direct object in a sentence for example :

8a John marry de girl wey I show am
b John marry de girl
c I show am de girl
d John marry de girl wey I show am { }

9a Peter buy de moto wey I show am
b Peter buy de Moto
c I show am de moto
d Peter buy de moto wey I show am { }

- 10a Sunny learn de market wey we teach am
- b Sunny learn de market
- c We teach am de market
- d Sunny learn de market wey we teach am { }



In English Language in order to produce a relative clause by way of complementizers according to Finegan (2004). The relativized NP is pronominalized and moved to the front of a clause by the WH-movement operation. Ndimele (2008) points that this process of turning a noun, noun phrase or nominal element into a pronoun, is known as pronominalization. In Nigerian Pidgin English, this movement is not obtainable. The reason is that there is already a pronoun "am" before the "wey" and "wey" is used to relativise the NP in the above example. The WH-movement in English language is quite distinct from that of the Nigerian Pidgin English. This distinction is seen in the fact that in English language, when the NP is relativized, it is also pronominalized and moved to the front of its clause but in Nigerian Pidgin English, when the NP is relativized, it is not pronominalized but it is still move 5 front of its clause while a pronoun "am" is retained in the sentence final position.

Another aspect of relativization by way of complementizers in Nigerian Pidgin English is when they are found immediately after the subject in a sentence . For example

- 11a See de boy wey I dey tell you
- b See de boy _____ I dey tell you
- 12a Na de dog wey tif de meat dey run dey go
- b Na de ~~dog~~ _____ tif de meat dey run dey go.

In the above examples, if "wey" is inserted into the gaps, it will represent it's English equivalent "that" and it will serve its purpose of complementing two clauses or sentences or better still, it will be used to introduce the second clause in the sentences. Also we can always replace the "wey" with the direct object (repetition) and still make sense but our focus here is to relativise by way of complementizer. The same thing is obtainable when the COMP Node in the Nigerian Pidgin English, "wey" follows the direct object in a Nigerian Pidgin English construction for example:

- 13a James slap de boy wey call im name
- b James slap de boy _____ call im name
- 14a Joe flog im pikin wey tif im moni
- b Joe flog im pikin _____ tif im moni

3. Summary and Conclusion:

This paper has tried to draw attention to the fact that syntactic concepts can be effectively applied to the Nigerian pidgin English. It has also exposed us to the fact that the process of relativization in Nigerian Pidgin English is quite different and distinct from other languages including its parent language, English language.

There is no doubt that a lot more needs to be done to ascertain further peculiar ways that the Nigerian pidgin English relativizes. This paper can therefore be seen as an invitation to others to further one's knowledge on the identified structure.

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