

Polyfunctionality of the subordinator *èké* in Adiokrou: A Cross-linguistic Perspective

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Languages are known to make varying formal distinctions between subtypes of subordinate clauses, particularly relative clauses and complement clauses. Languages like English use differential markers, e.g. *which*, *who* (*m*), *where*, *whose*, *that*, etc., to mark relative clauses, while marking complements, with verbal or nominal heads, by *that*. Languages like Japanese, in contrast, treat relative clauses and complements with nominal heads alike (both as attributive clauses), in contradistinction to complements with verbal heads (Comrie and Horie 1995). Adverbial clauses, however, tend not to pattern with relative clauses nor with complement clauses.

Adiokrou (a Kwa language of Côte d'Ivoire, a Niger-Congo language) presents an interesting case study of polyfunctionality in the marking of subordinate clauses. The subordinator *èké* marks not only relative clauses and complement clauses with nominal or verbal heads, but also various adverbial clauses, as shown in (a)-(g) (see page 2).

The Adiokrou subordinator *èké*, thus presents an instance of semantic underspecification apparently motivated by the principle of Economy (Haiman 1985). The subordinator is assigned a very general syntactic function of marking subordinate clauses, but its precise semantic interpretations are determined only contextually. To ensure a proper semantic interpretation of the *èké*-marked clause, e.g. whether to interpret a subordinate clause as conditional (f) or concessive (g), the Adiokrou language arguably resorts to massive pragmatic/contextual disambiguation, the precise mechanism of which needs further investigation.

References

- Comrie, Bernard and Kaoru Horie. 1995. "Complement Clauses versus Relative Clauses: Some Khmer Evidence." In: *Discourse Grammar and Typology*, ed. by Abraham, Werner, Talmy Givon, and Sandra A. Thompson, 65-75. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Haiman, John. 1985. *Natural Syntax*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Relative clause

- a. èg̀̀) à [èk'é èb' l'èl à]
person the SUB PPERF-buy book the
'The person *who* bought the book.'

Relative clause

- b. l'èl à [èk'é kòfì èb' à]
book the SUB Kofi PPERF-buy the
'The book *which* Kofi bought.'

Complement with verbal head

- c. l'ì- dâd- èl [èk'é m'él b-òw-ów]
he PPERF-tell them that Mel FUT-come
'I told them *that* MEL would come.'

Complement with nominal head

- d. w'èl ès'è [èk'é m'él b-òw-ów]
one say that Mel FUT-come
'The rumor that Mel would come.'

Temporal adverbial clause

- e. èk'é l- òw' ák'í à m- ìbrím -ń
SUB he PPERF-come home the I PPERF-ask him
èk'é l- ìd'z' òb
SUB he PPERF-eat food
'*When* he had arrived home I asked him if he had eaten.'

Conditional adverbial clause

- f. èk'é m- òn' òs mí- b-ów-m-éb èl
if I PPERF-have money I FUT-buy house
'*If* I have money, I will buy a house.'

Concessive adverbial clause

- g. èk'é nàm àm-ân j'éd'z'í sí- b-ów-s-éj gb'èñ
if rain PROG-rain too we FUT-go out
'*Even though* it is raining we will go out.'