

# Language Documentation & Linguistic Theory 2

## A note on the typology of head-internal relativization

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## Typology of Head-Internal Relativization

**1. Typology of Head-Internal Relativization:** Languages show various relativization strategies. Depending structural positions in which a relativized head noun appears, relative clauses are classified into prenominal, postnominal, and head-internal types. Creissels (2000) states that Head-Internal Relative Clauses (HIRCs) are generally hard to come by in the African continent. In fact, according to Kuteva and Comrie (2005), HIRCs were not found in their 54 sample African languages. Does it mean that the absence of HIRCs is a significant feature shared by all the African languages? I demonstrate that while it is true that a head-internal strategy is quite rare in African languages, it is not the case that its absence is one of the typological features of African languages. However, to the best of my knowledge, HIRCs are only observed in some Gur languages (Niger-Congo family) in the African continent. This article presents ample first-hand data on HIRCs in Gur languages based on my fieldwork and demonstrate that HIRCs do exist in “African languages”.

**2. Universals and Parameters:** The existence of HIRCs in African languages is by itself significant for the above reason. However, it also has quite significant insights for typology and linguistic universals, which are not available from other languages outside Africa. Various linguists have proposed parameters for HIRCs. Langendon (1977), Kuroda (1974-77/1992) and Cole (1987) put forth the famous word order generalization that HIRCs are restricted to SOV languages (with a null pronoun) (cf. also Kayne 1994). Watanabe (1992) argued that *Wh*-in-situ is the defining parameter. However, such proposed parameters are challenged by Gur languages. My detailed fieldwork research of HIRCs in several Gur languages has shown that they attest HIRCs even though they are SVO languages without pro-drop (see also Tellier 1989, Gil 2000 for pertinent observations). Furthermore, not all Gur languages allow HIRCs. Some of them (Bùlì, Kabiyé, Mooré, Dagbani) allow HIRC, while others (Gurenɛ, Dàgáárè, Sisaala-Pasaale, Kɔ̀nni) lack HIRC. Significantly, *Wh*-in-situ does not correlate with the availability of HIRCs either. Watanabe (2004) proposes yet another generalization that HIRCs are limited to languages with a so-called indeterminate system. However, as I show, this generalization does not apply to those Gur languages either.

**3. New Generalizations:** Not every Gur language allows HIRCs, however. Those Gur languages in my sample that allow HIRCs include Bùlì, Kabiyé, Mooré, and Dagbani. In HIRCs, the head remains in-situ, while the head can be also dislocated to the left. On the other hand, those Gur languages that do not allow HIRCs in my sample include Sisaala-Pasaale, Gurenɛ, Kɔ̀nni, and Dàgáárè. In these languages, the relativized head obligatorily moves to the left periphery. A close examination reveals interesting descriptive generalizations that those Gur languages with HIRCs (i) show a determiner element at the right edge of the relative clause, whereas those Gur languages without HIRCs (ii) show a determiner element adjacent to the head noun at the left edge.

- i [[ ... SUBJ V OBJ... ] **D** ] (Bùlì, Kabiyé, Mooré, Dagbani)
- ii
  - a. [ OBJ **D** [ ... SUBJ V **t**<sub>OBJ</sub> ... ] ] (Sisaala-Pasaale)
  - b. [ OBJ-D [ ... SUBJ V **t**<sub>OBJ</sub> ... ] ] (Kɔ̀nni)
  - c. [ **D** OBJ [ ... SUBJ V **t**<sub>OBJ</sub> ... ] ] (Dàgáárè)
  - d. [ OBJ **D** [ ... SUBJ V **t**<sub>OBJ</sub> ... ] **D** ] (Gurenɛ)
  - e. [ **D** [ ... SUBJ V OBJ ... ] ] (Unattested cross-linguistically)

**4. Towards a Universal Theory** Gur languages brings further consequences for the typology of HIRCs outside Africa. I observe that HIRCs comes in two varieties cross-linguistically: the determiner-type (e.g. Navajo, Lakhota, Georgian, etc.) and the nominalization-type (e.g. Japanese, Dogrib, Quechua, etc.). HIRCs in Gur belong to the former. The latter, on the other hand, uses nominalization instead of determiners. In fact, the word order generalization seems to hold only in the latter type of HIRCs. In other words, HIRCs of the nominalization type are only found in SOV languages, while HIRCs of the determiner-type are found both in SOV and SVO languages.

- iii [[ ... SUBJ OBJ... V ] **Nml** ] (Japanese, Dogrib, Quechua)

Thus, HIRCs in Gur not only show the existence of HIRCs in African languages but also lead us to a new typology of HIRCs and refined universals.