

A Closer Look at the Akan Relativiser¹

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Abstract

This paper provides an alternative viewpoint on the length and tone of the relativiser in Akan. The relativiser has been analysed as a long vowel with either a high-low tone (HL) (Saah, 2010) or a mid-low tone (McCracken, 2013). However, in this paper, we posit an underlying short vowel with a low tone (L) for the relativiser. We further show that it receives a high tone (H) from an adjacent H; making it a syllable with a contour tone at the phonetic level (i.e. \hat{a}). The contour tone then affects the length of the relativiser at the phonetic level, making it slightly longer than its original length.

Keywords: relative clause, relativiser, tone bearing unit, contour tone, vowel length

Akan relative clauses (RCs) have received considerable attention from both native and non-native speakers of the language². Notable among them are Christaller (1875), Balmer & Grant (1929), Welmers (1946), Schachter (1973), Saah (1994;

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² Akan is a Kwa language of the Niger-Congo family with about eleven (11) dialects including Asante, Akuapem and Fante; three of the eleven dialects that have achieved literary status (Dolphyne, 1988, p. xi). Of these three, Akuapem and Asante are jointly referred to as Twi.

2010), Osam (1997), Boadi (2005), Fiedler & Schwarz (2005) and McCracken (2013). Though RCs have been studied extensively in the language, some issues still remain unresolved. Some of these issues include the form of the relativiser, the co-referential pronouns, the final clause determiner, etc. In this paper, we pay particular attention to the form of the relativiser in Akan with supporting data from the three major dialects that have achieved literary status, namely, Asante, Akuapem and Fante. The Autosegmental Phonology is the framework adopted for the analysis of the data, and Praat is used for the measurement of the duration of the relativiser.

Relative Clause Defined

Relative clauses are said to be ‘embedded/subordinate clauses that typically serve as noun modifiers within an NP structure’ (Saah, 2010, p. 91). For Downing (1978), semantically, a relative clause may be characterised as a clause that ‘incorporates, as one of its terms, a nominal which is co-referential with a nominal outside of the clause’ (Downing, 1978, p. 378, cited in Saah, 2010, p. 91). This implies that it is the modifying clause that constitutes the relative clause but not the whole NP. Saah (2010, p. 91) argues:

whether viewed syntactically or semantically, the typical relative clause usually consists of an initial NP (the antecedent or head) followed by the modifying clause. And together, they make up one complex NP, which can perform any of the grammatical functions in a sentence such as subject and object.

This assertion may not be wholly true since the antecedent is not considered to be part of the relative clause. Additionally, Saah maintains that the RC is an embedded clause that serves as a noun modifier; thus the head noun cannot be said to be part of the RC.

Though RCs could be found in almost every language, they come in different forms in different languages. For instance,

in English, relative clauses are formed by means of relative pronouns like **who, which, that** usually introducing the clause. Some of these relative pronouns may function as the subject or object of the clause; and sometimes too they are ignored completely. However, in Akan, a relativiser introduces a prototypical relative clause; and this relativiser is not optional like the English relative pronouns except the headless RCs (Boadi, 2005). The relativiser is immediately followed by the clause and enclosed by a determiner (Osam, 1994; Boadi, 2005; Saah, 2009, 2010; Aboh, 2010).

The example below throws more light on this assertion:

1. *àbòfrá₁ (nó) [â ò₁- bú- ù kòfí nú] a- da.*
 child DEF REL 3SG.SUBJ-beat-PST K. DET PERF sleep
 ‘The child who beat Kofi is asleep.’

In line with the above definition, we can see from example (1) that the head of the NP (*Àbòfrá*) could be followed by a definite article [*nó*], then the relative clause beginning with the relativiser [*â*] which introduces the relative clause. According to Saah (2010, p. 91), the relativiser marks the beginning of the relative clause, and it selects a sentence or clause as its complement. The relativiser is then followed by the clause, with a spelt out subject [*ò*] which is co-referential with the head or antecedent. What follows next is the verb [*búò*] with its object [*ko fi*], then the determiner [*nó*] which marks the end of the relative clause. In other words, the relativiser and the final determiner set the boundary for the Akan RCs. The rest of the paper focuses on the form of the relativiser.

Methodology

The data for this study came from the three Akan dialects that have achieved literary status, namely Akuapem (Ak), Asante (As) and Fante (Fa). To identify the length and tone of the Akan relativiser, an Akan corpus was formed (by introspection) purposely for this study. The sentences were generated by introspection since the researcher is a competent native speaker of

the Asante dialect. The corpus comprised fifty (50) relativised Noun Phrases (NPs). The few NP heads that end with a low tone in the data include papa [pàpà] ‘fan’, koobi [kòóbi] ‘salted tilapia’, asau [àsàù] ‘fishing net’, Adam [ádám] ‘the name of a person’, Ado [àdò] ‘the name of a person’, kòfè [kófì], ‘coffee’ amane [àmàni] ‘suffereing’ and bankye [bàĩkyè] ‘cassava’.

It was evident that the tone of the relativiser after these nouns was different from that of those that end with a high tone. Therefore, in order to get a clearer picture, these words were used to form fourteen (14) sentences; seven (7) of them without a determiner, and their other counterparts with the determiner *no*. Six (6) native speakers (two (2) for each dialect) were then consulted and asked how they would say these sentences in a natural occurring environment. Four (4) of these native speakers are lecturers from the Department of Ghanaian Languages and Linguistics, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, while the other two are former students from the same department. Their utterances were recorded, transcribed and analysed with the help of Praat.

The Form of the Relativiser

Concerning the form of the relativiser, McCracken (2013, p. 3) remarks that ‘there are generally two approaches to describing the phonemic form of the invariant relativiser.’ According to her, while some scholars, such as Christaller (1875), Balmer and Grant (1929), Saah (1994), Osam (1997) as well as Fretheim and Amfo (2008), use the form [a] to represent the relativiser, scholars like Welmers (1946), Schacter (1973), Boadi (2005), Saah (2009) use [a] and Fiedler & Schwarz (2005) use â (McCracken, 2013, p. 3). McCracken (2013), however, remarks that the discrepancy in the representation of the relativiser has brought about the disagreement of the length and tone of the relativiser.

With regard to the length of the Akan relativiser, though most of these scholars (including McCracken) consider it to be a long vowel, after embarking on an acoustic study on the relativiser, McCracken noted that it occurs in an ‘extremely

reduced form' (McCracken, 2013, p. 3). Our data, however, showed that the Akan relativiser is a short vowel at the underlying level of representation though it is usually lengthened at the phonetic level as is evident from the measurements below:

The Relativiser	ASANTE	AKUAPEM	FANTE
/a/ without an adjacent H	75 ms	75 ms	111 ms
/a/ with an adjacent H	135 ms	135 ms	165 ms

As can be seen from the table above, in all the three dialects, the duration of the relativiser is shorter in an environment where there is no adjacent H than where there is an adjacent H. For instance, in the Twi dialects, the duration of the relativiser in the absence of an adjacent H is an average of 75 ms while that of the Fante dialect is 111 ms. In the presence of an adjacent H, however, the Twi dialects have an average duration of 125 while the Fante dialect has an average duration of 165 ms. The reason for the differences between the Twi and the Fante dialects could be attributed to the fact that the relativiser seems to assimilate the preceding vowel more in the Fante dialect. This makes the preceding vowels extremely reduced. For instance, though a short vowel for the Fante dialect, per our data, has an average duration of 72 ms the vowels that precede the relativiser have an average duration of 52 ms. And in the presence of the determiner [nó], the relativiser seems almost to assimilate the vowel [o] completely. That may account for why there is a vast difference between the values for the Twi dialects and that of the Fante dialect.

There may be some kind of assimilation in the Twi dialects, as well. For instance, the short vowel in the Twi dialects, per our data, has an average duration of 70 ms, but that of the relativiser is 75 ms. And when it follows the determiner [nó], the average duration increases to 135 ms. In consequence of this, it is difficult to determine whether the increase in the duration of the relativiser is as a result of the tone spreading or vowel

assimilation. Though McCracken (2013, p.6) considered the relativiser to be a long vowel, she was quick to add that ‘raw vowel duration measurements alone were thus not adequate to determine whether the realization of the relativiser as a long vowel was due to phonemic length or due to the vowel quality assimilation of the in no’.

With respect to the tone of the relativiser, though almost all the scholars including Osam (1994), Boadi (2005) and Saah (2009, 2010) submit that it has a High-Low tone (HL), McCracken (2013) asserts that it has a phonemic Mid-Low tone (ML) represented as [a a], though it could have a High-Mid tone (HM) after the determiner ‘no’. This is how she puts it:

Comparing these measurements to the ones from the elicited minimal clause set, I found that the pitch of the relativizer after **no** in natural discourse was most similar to the results from the minimal clause set; namely, after **no** the tone of the relativizer is realized as HM. However, when the relativizer occurred in the corpus after other words, its average tone was realized as ML. This indicates that the occurrence of pitch values of more than 200 Hz in the relativizer is most likely assimilation from the preceding high-toned **no** and is not phonemic. I therefore conclude that the phonemic form of the relativizer is most likely ML, or $\bar{a}\bar{a}$. My measurements of the relativizer in both an elicitation task and a corpus of natural discourse indicate that its phonemic form is $\bar{a}\bar{a}$, a long vowel with falling (ML) tone, and that it is not homophonous with the subjunctive morpheme. Though the relativizer is realized as HM in the environment after no, this is the phonetic influence of high-tone **no** rather than an underlying phonemic property. (p. 7)

What McCracken (and the earlier scholars) failed to recognise is the fact that sometimes the relativiser does not exhibit HL, HM or ML at all; it rather exhibits L. This happens when there is no presence of H as the examples from our data portray.

2. i) pàpàì [ǎ mì- tó- iè ø₁ nú] ní. (As)
 fan REL 1SG.SUBJ-buy-PST (3SG.OBJ) DET be.here
 'Here is the fan (that) I bought.'
- ii) kòóbìì [ǎ é₁- dá ñk^wáí nú mú nú] sù pàpá.
 salted.tilapia REL 3SG.SUBJ-lie soup DEF inside DET be.big very
 'The salted tilapia in the soup is very big.'
- iii) àsèùì [ǎ è₁- gù hó nú] yè mí diá.
 net REL 3SG.SUBJ-lie there DET be 1SG POSS own
 'The net over there is mine.'
- iv) àdùì [ǎ ò₁- bá- à há nú] yàrí.
 A. REL 3SG.SUBJ-come-PST here DET be.sick
 '(That) Ado who came here is sick.'
- v) kófíì [ǎ mí- í- !núm ø₁ nú] j₁-jè dè.
 coffee REL 1SG.SUBJ-PROG-drink (3SG.OBJ) DET NEG-be sweet
 'The coffee (that) I'm drinking is not sweet.'
- vi) ádámì [ǎ ò₁- dí- i káí nú] yé-è bòní.
 A. REL 3SG.SUBJ-take-PST lead DET do-PST sin
 'The first Adam sinned.'
3. i) pàpàì [ǎ mí- tó-ì ø₁ nú] ní. (Ak)
 fan REL 1SG.SUBJ-buy-PST (3SG.OBJ) DET be.here
 'Here is the fan (that) I bought.'
- ii) kòóbìì [ǎ é₁- dá ñk^wáj nú mú nú] sù pàpá.
 salted.tilapia REL 3SG.SUBJ-lie soup DEF inside DET be.big very
 'The salted tilapia in the soup is very big.'
- iii) àsèùì [ǎ é₁- gù hó nú] yè mí dí.
 net REL 3SG.SUBJ-lie there DET be 1SG POSS own
 'The net over there is mine.'
- iv) àdùì [ǎ ó₁- bá- à há nú] yàrí.
 A. REL 3SG.SUBJ-come-PST here DET be.sick
 '(That) Ado who came here is sick'
- v) kófíì [ǎ mí- rí- !núm ø₁ nú] j₁-jè dè.
 coffee REL 1SG.SUBJ-PROG-drink (3SG.OBJ) DET NEG-be sweet
 'The coffee (that) I'm drinking is not sweet.'
- vi) ádámì [ǎ ó₁- dí- i káj nú] yé-è bòní.
 A. REL 3SG.SUBJ-take-PST lead DET do-PST sin
 'The first Adam sinned.'

4. i) pàpàá_i [â mû- tó-ì ø_i nú] ní. (Fa)
 fan REL 1SG.SUBJ-buy-PST (3SG.OBJ) DET be.here
 'Here is the fan (that) I bought.'
- ii) kòóbì_i [â ó_i- dá ñk^wáń nú mú nú] sù pápá
 salted.tilapia REL 3SG.SUBJ-lie soup DEF inside DET be.big very
 'The salted tilapia in the soup is very big.'
- iii) ásàwù_i [â ó_i- gú hó nú] yè mí !dzí
 net REL 3SG.SUBJ-lie there DET be 1SG POSS own
 'The net over there is mine.'
- iv) àdù_i [â ó_i- bá- à há nú] yàf.
 A. REL 3SG.SUBJ-come-PST here DET be.sick
 '(That) Ado who came here is sick.'
- v) kófí_i [â mú- rú- nòm ø_i nú] jì- jè dèw.
 coffee REL 1SG.SUBJ-PROG-drink (3SG.OBJ) DET NEG-be sweet
 'The coffee (that) I'm drinking is not sweet.'
- vi) ádám_i [â ó_i- dzí- í kán nú] yé-è bòn
 A. REL 3SG.SUBJ-take-PST lead DET do-PST sin
 'The first Adam sinned.'

As compared to the following:

5. i) pàpà nú_i [â mì- tó-ìè ø_i nú] níé. (As)
 fan DEF REL 1SG.SUBJ- buy-PST (3SG.OBJ) DET be.here
 'Here is the fan (that) I bought.'
- ii) kòóbì nú_i [â è_i- dá ñk^wáń nú mú nú] sù pápá.
 salted.tilapia DEF REL 3SG.SUBJ-lie soup DEF inside DEF be.big very
 'The salted tilapia in the soup is very big.'
- iii) àsèù nú_i [â é_i- gú hó nú] yè mí dí. (Ak)
 net DEF REL 3SG.SUBJ-lie there DET be 1SG POSS own
 'The net over there is mine.'
- iv) àdù nú_i [â ó_i- bá- à há nú] yàf.
 A. DEF REL 3SG.SUBJ-come-PST here DET be.sick
 '(That) Ado who came here is sick.'
- v) kófí nú_i [â mú- rú- Ìnóm ø_i nú] jì- jè dèw. (Fa)
 coffee DEF REL 1SG.SUBJ- PROG-drink (3SG.OBJ) DET NEG-be sweet
 'The coffee (that) I'm drinking is not sweet.'
- vi) ádám nú_i [â ó_i- dzí- í kán nú] yé-è bòn
 A. DEF REL 3SG.SUBJ-take-PST lead DET do-PST sin
 'The first Adam sinned.'

We can see from the above sentences that though there are no determiners in the examples in (2), (3) and (4), semantically, there are no differences in meaning between these sentences and their counterparts in (5). Interestingly, we can also see that though there are some differences in tone among the dialects, the relativiser has the same tone in all the three dialects. Again, we can see that, in the absence of the definite article, the relativiser has a low tone in all the examples, except (4. i). But as soon as the definite article is introduced, as seen in (5), it changes from a low tone to a contour (high-low) tone. This change in tone could only be attributed to the presence of the adjacent H. In other words, where there is no adjacent H to the relativiser, it has L; but when it follows a H Tone Bearing Unit (TBU) as the examples in (5) depict, it becomes HL. This accounts for why in example (4. i) the relativiser is realised as HL. This is because the Fante word for ‘fan’ ends with a high tone, unlike in the other dialects. Therefore, concerning the tone of the relativiser, we posit an underlying L, which acquires its H from an adjacent H TBU at the phonetic level of representation. In other words, at the underlying level, the relativiser has a phonemic L instead of HL, HM or ML as claimed by the earlier researchers. This is because where there is no adjacent H, we do not hear any other tonal melody than L³.

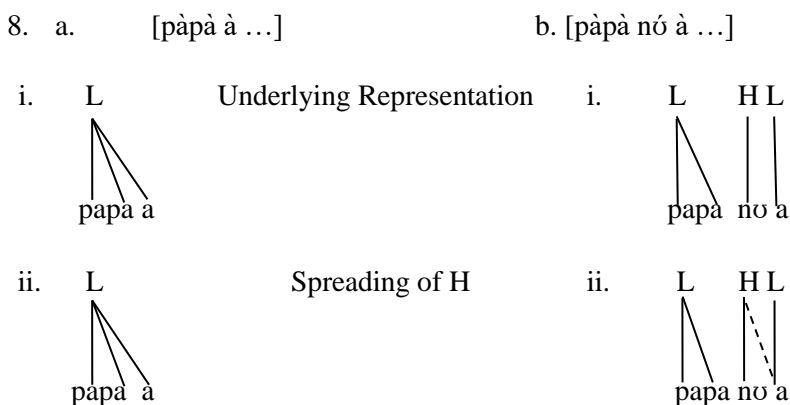
The question that can be asked is: does the relativiser only get its H from the preceding definite article (as claimed by McCracken (2013)? We have already seen from the Fante example in (4. i) that the H does not come from the definite article alone but from any adjacent H. The examples from Asante and Akuapem below also reinforce this assertion.

6. àsém̩ á m̩- ká-ìè ø̩ nú ... (As)
 message REL 1SG.SUBJ-say (3SG.OBJ) DET
 What I said ...

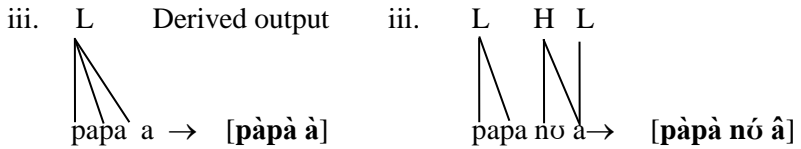
³ It should also be noted that, even in an emphatic situation, in natural discourse, none of our informers paused after the head noun and put stress on the relativiser alone.

7. bá_i á ò- rí- bá_i há nú ... (Ak)
 come REL 1SG.SUBJ-PROG-come here DET
 '(The fact that) s/he is coming here ...'

It can be seen from the above examples that the relativiser can receive its H from both nouns and verbs (or nominalised/converted verbs) as evident in examples (6) and (7) respectively. However, McCracken's claim is that the pitch of the relativiser in examples (6) and (7) is not as high as the one in example (5) due to the presence of the definite article [nú]; hence, her option for ML for the relativiser. It should be noted, however, that Akan does not have a phonemic mid tone. As a result, when a high tone is lower in pitch than a preceding one, it is considered to be a downstepped high tone (see Dolphyne, 1988; Abaka, 2000 for a detailed analysis on the downstepped H in Akan). Therefore, our decision to adopt Fiedler and Schwarz's (2005) representation [â] at the phonetic level when it receives its H from an adjacent H TBU⁴ is appropriate. Let us now look at the graphical representation (Autosegmental representation) of the derivation of the Akan relativiser with the examples in (2.i) and (5.i) repeated here as (8.a) and (8.b) respectively.



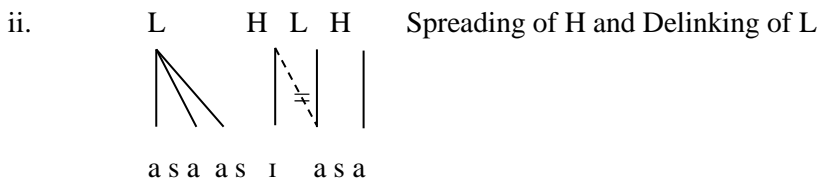
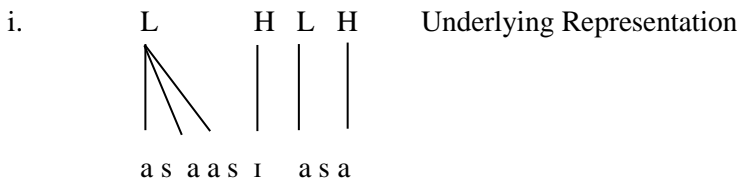
⁴ It should also be noted that tone is not marked in the Akan orthography, so there would not be any problem so far as the form and tone of the relativiser is concerned in the orthography.

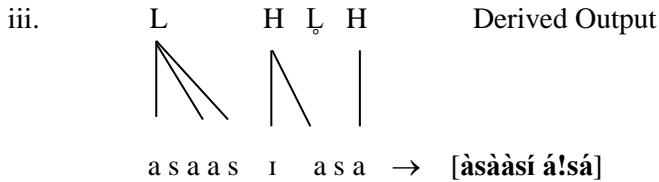


From the derivations above, (i) is the underlying representation for the NP ‘fan / the fan’ and the relativiser. We can see that where there is no adjacent H TBU (as in 8a), there is no H-spreading as evident in (8a. ii). However, due to the presence of an adjacent H TBU (i.e. the definite article), the H-spread rule applies in (8b. ii). This process then results in a falling tone (F) for the derived relativiser for (8b) while (8a) remains L. It should, however, be noted that this process is not common in Akan. That is, a process where a tone bearing unit maintains its lexical or original tone together with a spread tone is uncommon in Akan. Usually, when a H spreads to a L TBU in the language, it delinks the L from its TBU for it to become a floating L as exemplified below:

9. a. àsààsí + à-sá → àsààsí á-!sá
 land PERF-finish
 ‘Land has finished.’

b. [àsààsí] + [àsá]





We can see from the above derivation that when the H-spread rule is applied, it dislodges the L from its TBU as seen in example (9b. ii). The L therefore becomes a floating tone as evident in (9b. iii). We can, however, see its effect on the last syllable (i.e. it causes the last H to be lower in pitch than the preceding H). This shows that what happens in the case of the relativiser is unusual. Nonetheless, it shall be seen later in the paper that this is not the first time a contour tone has been reported to occur on a single TBU in Akan.

If our assertion is true, what then could be the possible reason for the earlier researchers to consider the relativiser to be a long vowel with HL or ML? The next paragraph addresses this question.

Why the Relativiser was earlier considered to be a Long Vowel with a HL

Apart from the fact that the central determiners in Akan, (i.e. *nó* [nó], *yí* and *bí*) have high tones, most Akan nouns and also end with a high tone. Most of these nouns have the tonal melody LH (including LH!H) as in *àbóá* [àbóá] ‘an animal’, *àbán* [àbáí] ‘government’, *ònípá* ‘human’, *àsúó* [àsúó] ‘river’ and *òbó!fóó* [òbó!fóó] ‘an angel / a messenger’. Some of them also have the melody H!H as in *Á!má* ‘a name for a Saturday female born’, *kó!dóó* [kó!dóó] ‘a canoe’ and *kwá!éé* [k^wá!ié] ‘forest’. And a few of the nouns have the melody L as in *pàpà* ‘fan’, *àmàné* [àmàni] ‘troubles’ and *Àfàrì* [áfàrì] ‘proper noun’. In Abaka’s (2004, 2005, 2006) classification of Akan nouns into six classes according to their tonal melody, only one of them has a tonal melody that ends with L as shown below:

- Class I nouns have underlying LH melody e.g. *sìká* ‘money’
- Class II nouns have underlying HL_̣H/H!H melody e.g. *ká!sá* ‘speech’
- Class III nouns have underlying L melody e.g. *sàkàsàkà* ‘centipede’
- Class IV nouns have underlying H melody e.g. *pápá* ‘good’
- Class V nouns have underlying H-HL_̣H/H-H!H melody e.g. *á-dáá!dzí* ‘the adaadze plant’
- Class VI nouns have underlying HLH melody e.g. *húntùmá* ‘dust’

(Abakah, 2010, p. 63)

We can notice from the above classification that apart from Class III nouns with the melody L, none of the noun classes ends with a low tone. However, in addition to the above tonal melodies, the following melodies also exist in the language though they are quite rare: HLH as in *ámàné* [ámàní]/*ébàń* [íbàń] ‘herrings’, HL as in *Ádàm* ‘the name of the first man on earth’ and LHL as in *Kwǎmè* [k^wáámì] ‘a name of Saturday male born’.

The relative rarity of nouns that end with L might have accounted for why the earlier scholars did not realise the fact that the relativiser is a short vowel with an underlying low tone. In fact, almost all the instances of the data relative to Akan RCs in the literature co-occur with a determiner (usually *nó*) or with a bare noun that ends with a high tone. And as shown already, adjacent high tones tend to influence the tone of the relativiser.

Additionally, though words from other word classes can head or anchor the relative clause in Akan, most of them end with high tones as well. The nominalised or converted verbs, the adjectives and the adverbs that can anchor the RCs also end with high tones; and therefore influence the relativiser as evident in the examples below:

10. a) kòfì nántí òtém.

K. walk fast
'Kofi walks fast'

b) nántí, à kòfì nántí, òtém nú òtí nà ò- eṣí àsí nú.
walk REL K. walk fast DET EMP FOC 3SG.SUBJ-fall down DET
'The fact that Kofi walks fast is the reason he falls down.'

c) òtém, à kòfì nántí, òtí nú òtí nà ò- eṣí àsí nú.
fast REL K. walk (t) DET EMP FOC 3SG.SUBJ-fall down DET
'Is because Kofi walks fast that is why he falls down.'

11. a) àbòffá nú á- yè títín.

child DEF PERF-be tall
'The child has become tall'

b) títín à àbòffá nú á- !yé nú bɛ-lbúá nú dáátéí.
tall REL child DEF PERF-be DET FUT-help 3SG.OBJ future
'The child's height (tallness) will help him/her in the future'

'The child's height (tallness) will help him/her in the future'
We can observe from the above examples that all the words before the relativiser end with a high tone including the proper noun (as seen in (10a)), the verb or converted verb (10b), adverb (10c), the determiner (11a) and the adjective (11b). It is therefore not surprising that the relativiser was previously regarded as a long vowel with a HL melody (underlyingly).

If Akan is said to be a Register Tone Language where the two contrastive tones are said on relatively level pitches (Dolphyne, 1988; Abaka, 2000, etc.), the question then arises: are contour tones on a single TBU allowed in the language? The next section addresses this question.

Contour Tones in Akan

Akan is indeed a Register Tone Language. This implies that each syllable or TBU is said on just one level pitch. In this respect, Akan is said to have a low tone, a high tone and an allotone which is popularly referred to as a downstepped high tone (!H) or downstep for short. However, as Abaka (2010, p. 58) remarks, in addition to the H, L and !H, Akan has two contour tones, the rising tone (R) and the falling tone (F). But these rising

and falling tones are produced when two contrastive tones occur contiguously (Dolphyne, 1988; Abaka, 2010). Nevertheless, Abaka (2010, p. 58) asserts that Dolphyne (1988) was the first to report about the presence of a falling tone on a single TBU in Fante. Abaka (2010), however, goes further to give examples of both R and F in Asante. In fact, Abaka (2010) is the first to report on contour tones on a single TBU in Asante.

Evidence from Some Earlier Studies

We can get proof from some earlier works in support of our current claim that the relativiser in Akan was, and is underlyingly a short vowel with a L. For instance, commenting on headless ('free') RCs like example (14) below, Boadi (2005, pp. 155-156) asserts that 'the head (of such constructions) may be viewed as being fused with the complementiser (or relative clause marker) *áà* in surface form as 'nea' (that, which, what)'. He adds that through some morphological and phonological rules, the third person pronoun (*ɔ*)*nó* and the relativiser *áà* are fused together to form the particle *nèà* [*nìà*] (i.e. *nó* + *áà* = *nìà*) as seen below.

12. *nea* *ɔ* *guáne- è* *ε* *no a- sán*
 that-who he escape-Past SCP Det Perf-return
 'that one who escaped has returned.' (Boadi, 2005, p. 155)

This corroborates the fact that Boadi (2005) also considers the relativiser to be a long vowel with a falling tone. Nonetheless, Boadi's (2005) proposal of some morphophonological rules that fuse *nó*⁵ and *áà* together suddenly changed the relativiser from a long vowel with F to a short vowel with L. If we follow this derivation, it confirms that indeed the relativiser is underlyingly, a short vowel with L because the [a] sound in the particle [*nìà*] is a short vowel with a low tone, rather than a long vowel with a falling tone. Surprisingly, Boadi (2005) did not account for the change of tone from falling to low in the particle *nèà*.

⁵ The high vowel [*ɔ*] also changes to [*ɪ*] through a morphophonological rule according to Boadi (2005).

A similar analysis in support of our assertion could be taken from Ofori (2011). Ofori's work is about the derived and basic focus marker in Akan. Ofori (2011) views né [ní] as the basic focus verb/copula in Akan, and [nà] as its derived variant. According to him, [nà] is derived from the focus copular 'ne' and the relativiser [a]. Thus, for Ofori (2011), example (13b) below is derived from (13a), where the particles [nɪ] and [a] are fused together to produce [na].

13. a. ònó né ònípá â ò- bá- à há.
 3SG.EMPH be person REL 3SG.SUBJ-come-PST here
 'S/he is the person who came here.'

b. ònó nà ò- bá- à há.
 3SG.EMPH FOC 3SG.SUBJ-come-PST here
 'S/he is the one who came here.'

However, if this assertion by Ofori (2011) about the derivation of the focus marker is true, then it reinforces the current claim that the relativiser is a short vowel with a low tone since the vowel in the focus marker [nà] is a short vowel with a low tone.

Finally, it could be argued that the perceived long vowel with F for the relativiser is a recent phenomenon. This is because an example cited by Kropp Dakubu (1992, p. 14) suggests that as far back as 1875, Christaller represented the Akan relativiser as a short vowel with L as evident in example (16) below:

14. obí à ókò asú ni.
 person PART he-goes-to water there-is
 'There is one that goes for water'
 (Christaller, 1875 cited in Kropp Dakubu, 1992, p. 14)

It is interesting to note that though the TBU preceding the relativiser has H, Christaller still represented the relativiser as a vowel with L. This could possibly mean that during Christaller's era the relativiser was perceived as a short vowel with a low tone.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to look at the length and tone of the relativiser in Akan. Contrary to the earlier claims that the relativiser is phonemically a long vowel with a falling pitch (i.e. [áà]), with empirical evidence from the three major dialects of Akan, we have been able to prove beyond every reasonable doubt that it is phonemically a short vowel with a low tone; and that it only receives its high tone from an adjacent preceding high tone-bearing unit. And with empirical evidence, we have also shown that in the absence of a preceding H, the relativiser does not have a falling pitch; rather, it has a normal level pitch, even at the phonetic level (i.e. [à]). This implies that there seems to be a correlation between contour tones and the length of the tone-bearing units. Or could it be that the perceived long vowel results from vowel assimilation? It is therefore not surprising that McCracken (2013) also reported that the length of the relativiser is not as long as a prototypical long vowel in Akan. Thus, in phonological terms, we consider /à/ as the phoneme and [â] as the (predictable) variant for the relativiser. Further, with support from earlier works, we have shown that the perceived contour tone of the relativiser might be a recent development. This is because we have seen that as far back as 1875, Christaller did not perceive the tone of the relativiser as a contour tone, even in the context of a preceding high tone. This also implies that contour tones in Akan are a new development, and that, with time, we might see more contour tones on single TBUs in the language.

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