

Comment clause

Crossing the boundaries between simple and complex sentences

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The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the existence of the category 'comment clause' whose range of use by far exceeds the traditional comment-on-topic category. In addition to a topicalized noun, the comment clause may have in its scope an element in focus, an adverbial phrase, and most important, a wide variety of clauses. The distinction between the many kinds of complex sentences and the simple sentence with a comment clause boils down to what element is in the scope of the comment clause. The data for the present study come from Wandala (Central Chadic), where the comment clause is overtly marked.

The importance of this study transcends Wandala or Chadic languages, as it provides an explanation, applicable cross-linguistically, for the formal syncretism involving a variety of functions considered hitherto unrelated.

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose and scope of the study

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that there exists a type of dependent clause that can be used in a variety of environments. I shall call it a 'comment clause'.¹ In addition to a topicalized noun, the comment clause may have in its scope an element in focus, an adverbial phrase, as well as a wide variety of clauses. The importance of

1. The term 'comment clause' is used in traditional linguistics in at least two senses. One is the distinction introduced by the Prague School between the topic and comment. This distinction is fully compatible and fully subsumed under the expanded notion of comment clause as proposed here. The other sense of the term 'comment clause' is used in descriptive studies of English for parenthetical clauses within another clause (Mathews 1997: 61, Quirk et al.1985). There is no connection between that understanding of the term and the category described in this paper.

the category comment clause as defined in this study is that it can occur in simple or complex sentences. The distinction between the simple sentence and the wide range of complex sentences with a comment clause boils down to what element is in the scope of the comment clause.

The present study is based on Wandala (Mandara), a Central Chadic language, spoken in the Far North Province of Cameroon and in northeastern Nigeria.

The interest of the comment clause in Wandala is that it is used in functions that in many languages have been analyzed as belonging to different functional domains, such as clausal complementation and subordination, topicalization, temporal and conditional apodosis, clausal complements of a noun phrase, and even afterthought clauses. Here is a non-exhaustive sample of various contexts in which the comment clause is deployed in Wandala. The comment clause is marked by the particle *wá*, whose structure and derivation is described below:

Complements of verbs of saying:

- (1) *á bà páll-á-tà, wá nó kìnà òdíyà*
 3SG say one-GEN-3PL COM PRES NOW COMP
 ‘One among them says, thus’

áñkwà òdíyà òdíyà
áñkwà òdí-á-rwà òdíyà
 exist knowledge-GEN-1SG COMP
 ‘I have my knowledge, behold.’

Temporal apodosis:

- (2) *má dá-d má màñár wá*
 HYP go-go HYP NOW COM
 ‘And when he [the groom] goes,’

ólà tàr òánnà bàdèmmè á dǎ zè dàdà
 speech 3PL DEF all PRED go HL father
 ‘everything that they have to say is with the father.’

Conditional apodosis:

- (3) *hámá má cìnà-kùr-áncín jùbòonè náwá*
hámá má cìnà-kùr-án-cìn jùbà únà ná wá
 assembly HYP hear-2PL-3SG-hear matter DEF DEM COM
 ‘Listeners, if you understand this matter,’

bákà-r giná
bákà ár gí ná
 NEG.EX OVER TO DEM
 ‘there is no greater [truth/goodness] than that.’

Comment on a topicalized noun phrase:

- (4) *áyáwólwá rùbákà*
á yà-wá ólvà-á-rwà bákà
 well 1SG-COM word-GEN-1SG NEG.EX
 ‘Well, I have no words.’
- (5) *mábà kàḥà kùlà wá ájìyù kàgìyà*
má bà kàḥà kùlà wá à jì-y-ú k gè iyà
 HYP FOC count calculus COM 3SG surpass-1SG-VENT NEG TO 1SG
 ‘If it concerns counting, nobody surpasses me.’

Comment on a reason clause:

- (6) *má bàní bàdòm mírámyà mándiyámyà*
má-á bàní bàdòm ir-á-myà mà án diy-á-myà
 HYP-PRED concern all head-GEN-1INCL 1INCL ASSC knowledge-GEN-1INCL
wá šágrónà máhí gámyà
wá šágrà únà má híg-á-myà [not in the recording]
 COM well DEF 1INCL happy-GEN-1INCL
 ‘Because we have all of this knowledge, it is good.
 As far as we are concerned, we are happy.’
 [The expression *híg-á-myà* is not clear to other speakers.]

An afterthought clause:

- (7) *ólvà ṅánnà yè sè ndà-n-ée nà kwá [error] wá*
 story DEF 1SG come tell-3SG-1SG DEM COM
 ‘The story I came to tell...’
- á kàtá lvà ndzà*
á kàtá ólvà ndzà
 3SG want story past
 ‘He wants an old story.’

Unlike in many languages, the marker of the comment clause in Wandala has no epistemic or deontic function, nor does it serve to separate arguments of complex sentences (for both functions of complementizers see Frajzyngier 1996).

1.2 Typological characteristics of Wandala

In order to appreciate the role and the form of the marker *wá*, some information about the forms of morphemes is in order. All morphemes in Wandala can have three forms within the clause: the root form which for most morphemes ends in a consonant. If the syllable or consonant cluster conditions so require, an epenthetic vowel may be inserted after the consonant. The epenthetic vowel is high front in the environment of

palatal segments, high round in the environment of round segments, and high central in other environments. The epenthetic vowel is *e* before a pause:

- (8) *yò ágdzè kinnàní zùjwé bàtánmàlà tàrà màrà árg dàdà*
yò ágdzè kinnà-ní zùjwé bà t-án
 therefore child C.FOC-INTENS first of all FOC 3PL-ASSC
màlà tàr á màrà á r g dàdà
 attach 3PL PRED mother PRED ON TO father
 ‘And therefore, as for the daughter, she is more attached to her mother
 than to her father.’

Morphemes have the root form when the material that follows them is the expected follow up. The lexical or grammatical morphemes have the root form before determiners; transitive verbs have the root form before objects in perfective aspect; all verbs have the root form before adverbs; and most morphemes have the root form before prepositions; and in one type of the head-modifier construction, the head has the root form. Only some constructions are illustrated here.

Root form of the source extension *s* (with epenthetic high-central vowel) before the object:

- (9) *púm tànábàpùsè zàrvàná átè bùcé*
púm tà nábà pw-sè zàrvà-nà á tè bùcé
 ONOM 3PL then pour-s sesame-DEM PRED T mat
 ‘Pum! They poured out sesame onto a mat.’

Here is an illustration of the root form of the verb (with epenthetic high-front vowel) before the nominal object:

- (10) *tátsámdá žílé*
tá tsá md-á žílé
 3PL get-up people-GEN man
 ‘People of the groom get up,’
tásèbègyì mdámùksè
tá sè bègyì md-á mùksè
 3PL come meet people-GEN woman
 ‘they come to find the people of the bride.’

In one type of the head-modifier constructions, the head has the root form:

- (11) *yó álv wándàl ñánnà á fyàr málrùwà [error]*
yó álv wándàl ñánnà á f-y-à-r mál-rúwà
 well speech Wandala DEM 3SG put-1SG-GO-ON elder-1SG
 ‘This Wandala speech is authorized by my boss.’

All prepositions have the root form before their complements:

- (12) *nóo và tén kìnì njànjá twáfká ordinator yándál vwándàlà*
nóo và tén kìnì njà-n-í-njà á t wáf-k-á
 PRES time T-DEM C.FOC sit-1SG-EP-sit PRED T face-GEN
ordinator yá ndà lv wándàlà
 computer 1SG speak language Wandala
 ‘Today, I am sitting in front of the computer, I am speaking the Wandala language.’ (T is the preposition coding locative targets)

The root + *a* form characterizes morphemes when they are followed by the nominal subject:

- (13) *əbɔyàsəbɔyà dùksá*
əbɔy-à-s-əbɔy-à dùksá
 fall-GO-S-fall-PB thing:Q
 ‘Something fell out?’

The root + *á* is used in a variety of structures which involve connecting two elements that do not constitute an expected, natural sequence. The vowel *á* with a high tone is otherwise a goal marker and the locative predicator, required when the predicate of a locative predication is not inherently locative. One type of genitive construction where the second noun is not the natural modifier of the first:

- (14) *hóhà lvá hərədá [má added in analysis]*
hà-ú-h-à lv-á hərəđ [má
 finish:3SG-APPL-finish-PB business-GEN farm [AND
 ‘When their farming finished ...’

Intransitive verbs code the ensuing noun phrase as the object through the root + *á* ending:

- (15) *tà dè hàl-tá zàrvá tàr njánnà tà púmá d-əm bùhá*
tà dè hàl-t-á zàrv-á-tàr njánnà tà pú-m á d-əm bùhá
 3PL SEQ gather-T-GO sesame-GEN-3PL DEF 3PL pour-IN PRED go-IN bag
 ‘And then they gathered their sesame in and poured it into a bag.’
 (the verb *hàl* ‘gather’ is intransitive)

The comment clause marker *wá* always ends in the high tone vowel *á*. The form *wá* is most likely a combination of two morphemes: the form *w*, which is the consonantal component of the remote deictic, and the question word ‘what’:

- (16) a. *ábánánè kòndángù kòbúunà*
á bá nánè kò ndá-n gè wè kò bwá nà
 3SG say 3SG 2SG say-GO-3SG TO what 2PL two DEM
 ‘He says, “Why do you say the two of you?”’

- b. *á, kàndángùgdzárwà màkígyé*
á, kà ndá-n g w gdz-á-rwà mà kígyé
 ah, 3SG say-3SG TO what child-GEN-1SG 1INCL three
 “Why did you say [so] my son? “There are three of us.””

- (17) *às-t-wá làrúusà á-m xàx-á wándàlà*
 DEM-DEM-DEM marriage PRED-IN land-GEN Wandala
 ‘That is the marriage in the Wandala land.’

The high-tone vowel *á* added to the question word/demonstrative marker *w* indicates an unexpected connection with the ensuing element.

Lexical items and grammatical morphemes consistently have the root form before the marker *wá*, as they do before all other determiners.

2. Functions for which the comment clause is deployed

The comment clause is syntactically dependent, as evidenced by the fact that it is never the sole component of a sentence. Moreover, its dependency is within the sentence rather than within the discourse. This property of the complement clause is fully confirmed by all natural language examples in the data gathered, many of which are included in this study. Moreover, the element on which the clause is a comment always precedes the comment clause. Again, the evidence is provided by all natural language examples in the data gathered as well as by all examples cited in this study.

The comment clause is also pragmatically dependent, as evidenced by the fact that it cannot be interpreted on its own. It has to be interpreted in connection with the element that precedes it, not with the element that follows the comment clause. The sections below describe the various syntactic environments in which the comment clause occurs. The overall function of the clause preceded by *wá* is to serve as a comment on the preceding material, be it a clause, a noun phrase, or an adverbial phrase.

The comment clause can be a complement of a verb of saying, a temporal and conditional apodosis clause, or a complement of any fronted constituent.

2.1 Comment on a topicalized noun phrase

The comment clause marked by *wá* follows the topicalized noun phrase. When the comment clause occurs after the topicalized noun phrase (and only topicalized phrase), the noun phrase preceding the comment-clause marker *wá* ends in the vowel *a*, marking a phrasal boundary. When the comment-clause marker *wá* follows other,

non-topicalized constituents, it is preceded by the root forms of the morphemes that precede it:

- (18) *yò, únàwá dàcí mánà dàdá dàdúwá*
yò, únà ná wá dàcí má-nà dàdá dàdú wá
 well DEF DEF COM then HYP-DEM father father COM
tyápkà dàdúwà ámbárkà
tyá-p kà dàdú wá á-m mb-á-r kà
 become able-APPL NEG:PB father COM PRED-IN house-GEN-3SG NEG
 ‘Well, as for that, if that is so, [it means that] the father was not able to be a father at his home.’

In the following example, the last word of the topic phrase *kùlà* ends in the vowel *a*:

- (19) *mábà kèḡà kùlà wá ájyù kègyà*
má bà kèḡà kùlà wá à jì-y-ú k gè iyà
 HYP FOC count calculus COM 3SG surpass-1SG-VENT NEG TO 1SG
 ‘If it concerns counting, nobody surpasses me.’
- (20) *ḡánwá dùksèḡánwá séí mábàni áktyàna bàddámyà*
ḡán wá dùksè ḡánwá wá séí má bà nì
 DEF COM thing DEF COM only HYP FOC INTENS
á ktyà-nà bà ddá-myà
 3SG cool-3SG FOC father-INCL
 ‘That, that thing, only God knows how to cool it.’
 (only God knows how to fix the parents’ behavior) (*ktyà-nà* ‘cool’ + 3SG OBJ)

The comment marker may form a unit with the demonstrative *ná*, where the demonstrative retains its final vowel. It appears that the division of labor between the two markers is that the demonstrative marks the topic phrase and the form *wá* anticipates the comment clause. In the following example, the adverbial phrase is the topic:

- (21) *ánó vácí stwà nává yágánikà*
á nó vácí s-t-wà ná-wá yá gá níká
 eh PRES day DEM-DEM-DEM DEM-COM 1SG contract marriage
 ‘On such and such day I am going to get married.’
- (22) *áwáyà nává tàdá kràwà*
á wáyà ná wá tà dá kràwà
 PRED yesterday DEM COM 3PL go:GO Krawa
 ‘As for yesterday, they went to Krawa ...’
- (23) a. *yó ágdzà dāwálná à dè žàràn ùrará*
yó ágdzà dāwàl-ná à dè žàrà-n ùr-á-rà
 well young man-DEM 3 go see-[pause] friend-GEN-3SG
 ‘Well, the boy went to see his friend.’

- b. *ùrá dǎ ñàrà*
ùr-á dǎ ñàrà
 man-GEN father POSS-3SG
 ‘a friend of his father’s.’
- c. *tàbúkùrdá tər wá àpwàtr dǎzà ddánàrà gègyálè*
tà bú kùrd-á tər wá à pwà-trè dè zà
 3PL two all-GEN 3PL COM 3SG send:PL-3PL go side
ddá ñà-rà gè gyálè
 father POSS-3SG DEST girl
 ‘Both of them, he sent them to the girl’s father.’

Evidence that the comment-clause marker *wá* is not a topic marker is provided by its contrast with the demonstrative *w*, which topicalizes the first person pronoun. In topicalizer function, the form does not have the vowel *a*:

- (24) *áyáwǎlvá rùbákà*
á yá-w ǎlvà-á-rwà bákà
 well 1SG-DEM word-GEN-1SG NEG.EX
 ‘Well, I have no words.’

2.2 Comment on a contrastive focus

Wandala has the contrastive focus marker *kínnì*. The comment on the contrastive focus phrase may be preceded by the marker *wá*. The importance of this fact is that in some languages, e.g. English, complementizers share some of the functions of the comment clause marker *wá* and do occur in the comment-on-focus clause. In Polish and Russian, complementizers do not occur in the comment-on-focus clause. Here are examples from Wandala:

- (25) *áyò ǎgdzarà kínnà wá mákábà*
áyò ǎgdzar-à kínnà wá má ká
 now child-PL C.FOC COM HYP 2SG
trálvà àbètàrè àsàná zàmàné
bà-trá lvà à bà-ítaré á sá-nà zàmàné
 talk-3PL speech 3SG say-3PL 3SG come-3SG time (F)
 ‘And now, with respect to children, when you talk to them, they say it is modern times that brought it.’
- (26) *ée, bàddǎtərñánnà kìn tàxdám*
ée, à bà ddá tər ñánnà kìn tà xd á-m
 well 3SG say father 3PL DEF now 3PL bury PRED-IN

- (31) *ágdzàrámi tápúnáwá mánà názùní ámmàgnáwá*
ágdzàr-á-mì tá pú ná wá
 child:PL-GEN-1INCL 3PL pour DEM COM
má nà názù ní á mmàg ná wá
 HYP DEM what INTENS 3SG do DEM COM
únèní táwáynetèrnà táfàtrà rùksònwiré
únè ní tá wáy-nà ítèr nà tá fà-trà-r úksòɥw ìrè
 DEF INTENS 3PL want-3SG 3PL DEM 3PL put-3PL-ON idiot head
 ‘The thing that makes our girls laugh around is that the men that the girls like
 cheat on them.’ (úksòɥw ‘idiot, somebody who cannot talk’)

2.4 Comment clause as a complement of verbs of saying

The *de dicto* complements of verbs of saying can be marked by the comment-clause marker *wá*, whose function subsumes that of the *de dicto* complementizer. In this, the function of *wá* corresponds to the function of the *de dicto* complementizer ‘that’ in English, *que* in French, *что* in Russian, and *dass* in German (for the notion of *de dicto* complementizers see Frajzyngier 1991):

- (32) *èè, à binùwá ákàtà bàká kàmàgànéstàràwáyàa*
èè, à b-in-ù wá á kàtà bà-ká
 e 3SG say-3SG-EP COM 3SG want tell-2SG
 ‘He said, he wants you to say...’
- (33) *yàndànéenàwá ádàbà kwàkyétrà tám hùdàrà*
yà ndà-né-yà nà wá ádàbà kwàkyé trà
 1SG say-3SG-1SG DEM COM because much work
t-á-m hùc-á-rà
 3PL-PRED-IN belly-GEN-3SG
 ‘As I have said earlier, there is too much work in it [the world].’
- (34) *á bà páll-á-tàr wá nó kìnà dīgíyà*
 3SG say one-GEN-3PL COM PRES NOW COMP
 ‘One among them says, thus’
áɥkwà diyárù dīgíyà
áɥkwà diy-á-rwà dīgíyà
 exist knowledge-GEN-1SG COMP
 ‘I have my knowledge, behold.’

The comment-clause marker may precede any type of direct speech. While it is quite common for *de dicto* complementizers in Chadic languages to precede direct or indirect speech (Frajzyngier 1996), this is not the case in Western Indo-European languages, where a *de dicto* complementizer such as ‘that’ in English cannot precede direct speech:

- (35) *àbà pàllè kínúwá tàtánàskè fí dáyà*
à bà pàllè kíní wá tàtánà skè fíd-á-η nà
 3SG say one C.FOC COM sorry POL lie-GEN-2SG DEM
 ‘The other said, “Sorry, this is your lie.”’

- (36) *ábà ddá káḥà kùlùwá*
á bà dd-á káḥà kùlù wá
 3SG say man-GEN counting units COM
 ‘The one who can count all says:’
gyàwàngfískè kógá jàwá jìbàrà
gyà-wà-n-gí skè kwá gá jáv-á jìbà rà
 leave-IMP:PL-3SG-leave POL 2PL take doubt-GO type Q
 ‘Leave that, please, why do you doubt?’

- (37) *àbà pàllè kíní wá*
à bà pàllè kíní wá
 3SG say one C.FOC COM
 ‘Another one said:
má kyóra dùksà ḥánnà séi bà yá nánà
má kyà-ùrà dùksà ḥánnà séi bà yá ná-n-nà
 HYP where-Q thing DEF then FOC 1SG see-3SG-see
 “No matter where the object is, I will see it.”’

The marker *wá* can precede a clause in the imperative, a function shared by complementizers in IE languages:

- (38) *yò bállàhá η ḥánnà ḥàbá dàlyè ḥáccìnà*
yò bál làh-á-η ḥánnà ḥàbè á dàlyè wá ḥá ccìnà
 well sing song-GEN-2SG DEF yet PRED again COM IEXCL hear:IMPER
 ‘Sing your song again, so that we may hear it again.’

- (39) *é, àbàḥksówá pàšó pàšəvgəḥánnà*
é, à bà ḥksó wá pàšà-w-pàš əvgə ḥánnà
 eh, 3SG say Sultan COM dig-PL-dig grave DEF
 ‘And the Sultan said, “Dig up this grave.”’
 (*pàšà-w-pàš* is a reduplicated imperative form)

The marker *wá* can precede the imperative verb of the complement clause. The *de dicto* complementizers of IE language cannot be used in a similar environment:

- (40) *àbàḥksúwá dómbaré nóyàblámdè*
à bà ḥksè wá dú-wà mbàré
 3PL say Sultan COM go-PL.IMP together
nó yá blá mdè á dš zè kùr ḥánnà
 PRES 1SG send people PRED go HL 2PL DEF
 ‘The sultan said, “Go, I am sending people to your place.”’

The marker *wá* alone may be a marker of *de dicto* complementation, even if the main clause does not contain a verb of saying. This is the case with the first instantiation of the marker *wá* in the following example:

- (41) *à dǎndàvǎ ázà dǎ ñàrwǎ gyálǎ ná*
à dǎ ndàvǎ á zà dǎ ñà-r wá gyálǎ-ná
 3SG go ask PRED HL father POSS-3 COM girl-DEM
hàyèn hàyá àmá dǎ ñàrwǎ à kàtá yéinvyè
hàyé-n-hàyá àmá dǎ ñà-r wá à kàtá á
 love-3SG-love but father POSS-3SG COM 3SG want 3SG
yé-n-v-yè
 refuse-3SG-APPL-refuse

‘He went to ask her father, saying that the girl loves him.
 But her father wants to refuse him.’

- (42) *tàsǎndàvìwǎlvǎ kàḥànáa rúgyà wá*
tà sǎ ndáv-i-w ǎlvǎ kàḥàn-áa-rú g-yà
 3PL come ask-1SG-VENT matter goods-GEN-1SG TO-1SG
 ‘They came to ask me about the matter of the goods’
wá bákà ǎlvǎ kàḥànà
 COM NEG.EX matter goods
 (I said) ‘There is no matter of goods.’

The only example of the comment-clause marker *wá* occurring after a verb of perception is in an elicited sentence, hence its validity is somewhat doubtful:

- (43) *yà ná wá tà gyá dáfà*
 1SG see COM 3PL prepare food
 ‘I saw that they prepared food.’

The comment-clause marker *wá* is not an obligatory component of the complements of verbs of saying. Thus, it does not have to precede direct speech:

- (44) *à bǎ pǎllè ddá ḥimà*
à bǎ pǎllè dd-á ḥimà
 3SG say one man-GEN ear
 ‘The one who hears all said.’
šǐilyá zàrvǎ mì pǎllè mbèdá mbèdá dǎm yáwnà
šǐili-á zàrv-á myà pǎllè mbèdá-m-mbèd á dǎm yáw ná
 sand-GEN sesame-GEN 1INCL one fall-IN-fall PRED go:IN water DEM
 ‘One of our sesame seeds fell into the water.’²

2. The use of the verb *mbèdá* here is a lexical error, as this verb codes a fall from a standing position. It can be applied to people, trees, houses, etc. The verb *vḥyá* [bḥyá] ‘fall’ should have been used instead. In the subsequent description of the same event the speaker does indeed use the verb *bḥyá* ‘fall’.

Compare a structurally identical fragment with the comment-clause marker *wá*:

- (45) *ábà ddá káḥà kùlùwá*
á bà dd-á káḥà kùl wá
 3SG say man-GEN counting units COM
 ‘The one who can count all says.’
gyàwàngfiskè kógá jáwá jibàrà
gyà-wà-n-gí skè kwá gá jáw-á jibà rà
 leave-IMP:PL-3SG-leave POL 2PL take doubt-GO type Q
 ‘Leave that, please, why do you doubt?’

The comment marker *wá* does not occur if the complement clause precedes rather than follows the verb of saying, thus providing the evidence that in the contexts where it appears, the form *wá* marks the clause as a comment on the preceding material within the same sentence:

- (46) *sèyáádtàttàwà yéssánsó sábiná*
sèi yá dás tàttàwà yá s-á-n-só-sè á b-inà
 then 1SG FUT search 1SG come-GO-3SG-s-come 3SG say-3SG
 ‘‘I will search, I will get it out, and bring it back,’’ he said.’
 (47) *ánkórán dálvàmúvgàbiná*
ánk ùrà á ndá lv ám vg à b-iná
 exist person 3SG speak word in grave 3SG say-3SG
 ‘‘There is somebody talking in the grave,’’ he said.’

Most examples in which the comment-clause marker *wá* does occur have some material after the verb of the first clause and before the comment-clause marker *wá*. It is usually the subject of the clause. If the complement clause immediately follows the verb of saying, the comment-clause marker *wá* most often does not occur:

- (48) *ábánánè kòndángù kòbúunà*
á bá nàné kò nd-á-n gè wè kò bwá nà
 3SG say 3SG 2SG say-GO-3SG TO what 2PL two DEM
 ‘He says, ‘‘Why do you say the two of you?’’
é ddà nàrà mùvgèkíní àbàbà
é ddà nàrà á-mú vgè kíní à bà bà
 well father 3SG PRED-IN grave C.FOC 3SG say FOC
kái màkígíyískè gdzárwà
kái mà kígíyí skè gdz-á-rwà
 no, 1INCL three POL child-GEN-1SG
 ‘And his father in the grave says, ‘‘No, we are nevertheless three, my son.’’

The comment-clause marker *wá* does not occur if the complement clause uses the deontic complementizer *séi* ‘then, therefore’ borrowed from Hausa or Fula.

The reason the form *wá* does not occur is that its function is subsumed by the complementizer *séi*:

- (49) *máḥàrà béetàrè séetá dá šúlà*
máḥàrà á bà ítàrè séi tá d-á šúlà
 now (F) 3SG say 3PL then 3PL go-GO travel
 ‘Now they say that they have to travel.’
- (50) *àbàḥàṅ kàyà sèyìdà sánsà sábinà*
à bà ḥàṅ kàyà sèi yà dè sá-n-sà-sè á b-ìnà
 3SG say 3SG nevertheless then 1SG SEQ come-3SG-S-come 3SG say-3SG
 ‘He says, “Nevertheless, I will get it out.”’

The comment-clause marker *wá* is used if there is some other material between the verb of saying and the complement clause, e.g. the subject of the main clause. The comment-clause marker *wá* is not used if the complement clause precedes the verb of saying. If the complement clause has the deontic complementizer *séi* the comment-clause marker *wá* is not used. This points out that the role of the comment-clause marker *wá* is thus to mark the clause as being a comment on the preceding material.

2.5 Comment on a relative clause

A comment clause can have a relative clause in its scope. The *de dicto* complementizers of IE languages perform a similar function:

- (51) *kínnázù ábà dzàtèrbádzènáwá*
kín názù á bàdz-à-tèr-bádzè ná wá
 now what 3SG spoil-GO-3PL-spoil DEM COM
ógdzrè á màtán màrà
ógdzrè á màtá án màrà
 daughter 3SG attach ASSC mother
 ‘Actually, what spoils them is **that** the daughter is attached to her mother.’
- (52) *šlvá mdè mákállàm mìrwá àmàḥkpéedà*
šlv-á mdè mákállàm-ìr wá á màḥ-k péedà
 word-GEN people denigrate-head COM PRED make-NEG force
 ‘The words of denigrators are of no use.’

2.6 Comment on an adverbial phrase

A comment clause can occur after an adverbial phrase. Complement clauses with a *de dicto* complementizer cannot have adverbial phrases in their scope in IE languages:

- (53) *àstù wá ḥó-ḥà nàr-wà-ndzà ḥánnà*
 like.that COM finish:VENT-finish language-mouth-past DEF
 Lit. ‘Like that finished this story.’

The adverbial phrase may be locative:

- (54) *ám já dùnínà nònànnàwá bákà árgfàrvónè*
á-m nj-á dùní-nà nó nánà wá bákà
 PRED-IN life:GEN world-DEM PRES DEF COM NEG.EX
á-r g fà-rvónè
 PRED-ON TO put-heart
 ‘In this life here, there is nothing that surpasses patience.’

2.7 Comment clauses after volitional verbs

A comment clause can follow a volitional verb. The role of the marker *wá* is merely to mark the comment clause rather than any deontic function. The deontic function is coded by the preposition *gè* before the verb of the complement clause:

- (55) *yò cáamànkìni názù àkàtànórwá*
yò cáamàn kìnì názù à kàtà-nà ùr wá
 well first of all c.FOC what 3SG want-3SG person COM
bà gè njà-rí-njà án hèer-àn-klàpì-rè
 FOC TO stay-3PL-stay ASSC peace (Ar)-ASSC-health (K.Ar)-NOM
 ‘First of all, what one wants is for them to live in peace and good health.’

2.8 Temporal and conditional apodosis clauses

The comment-clause marker *wá* occurs in both temporal and conditional sentences, but it marks only apodoses:

- (56) *ámhèrdè nánà égdzrè bà máhàhàlálà d-ém f-á-tàrwá*
á-m hèrdè nánà égdzrè bà má hà-hàlálà d-ém f-á-tàr wá
 PRED-IN farm DEF child FOC HYP go-go go-IN field-GEN-3PL COM
 ‘While farming, when the child goes to their field,’
áblà làhàrà
á blà làh-á-rà
 3SG send song-GEN-3SG
 ‘he sings his song.’

- (57) a. *mádà dùmá màhàrwá*
má dá-d-wà má màhàr wá
 HYP go-go-VENT HYP now COM
 ‘And when he [the groom-to-be] arrives,
álvà tàr-nánà bàcèmmé á d-é zè dàdà
 speech 3PL-DEF all PRED go HL father
 ‘everything that they have to say is to the father.’

- b. *dàdà̀nək̀ìní t̀yà̀p̀t̀yè dàdà̀mbàrwá*
dàdà̀ nè k̀ìní t̀yà̀-v-tyè dàd à-m mb-á-rà wá
 father DEM C.FOC mature-APPL-mature father PRED-IN house-GEN-3SG COM
 ‘As for the father, once he is a father at his home,’
- mándà síwèè k̀ìní à̀g̀dzárwá á̀h̀ìp̀h̀yè ká̀h̀àbè*
má á ndà-sú wèè k̀ìní à̀g̀dz-á-r wá
 HYP 3SG say-s what C.FOC child-GEN-3SG COM
á h̀ì-p-h̀yè ká h̀àbè
 3SG accept-APPL-accept NEG again
 ‘whatever he says, his child should accept, shouldn’t she?’

The marker *wá* may follow the demonstrative *ná*:

- (58) *méyáblà lág̀hnàwá*
mé yá blà láh ná wá
 HYP 1SG send song DEM COM
 ‘“When I sing the song,
- à̀ǹkórán dálvàmúvgàbiná*
à̀ǹk ùrà á ndá lv ám vg à b-iná
 exist person 3SG speak word in grave 3SG say-3SG
 there is somebody talking in the grave,” he said.’
- (59) *žílè mávácátèná á dótàtàyà mùksà*
žílè má-vàcà á-tà-ná á dót tàyà mùksà
 man HYP-time PRED-T-3SG 3SG go search woman
 ‘The man, at the time when he will go to look for a woman,’
- náwá átsé áh̀álà mánùràrà*
ná wá á-tsé á-h̀álà m-án ùr-á-rà
 DEM COM 3SG-get up 3SG-go HYP-ASSC man-GEN-3SG
 ‘he gets up and goes either with his man’
- málà kàtèhàrómlè*
má t̀àkàtè h̀àrà úmlè
 or fellow 3SG another
 ‘or with one of his buddies.’

The following sentence contains two instantiations of the comment-clause marker *wá*: one when it marks a temporal apodosis, and the other when it marks a comment on the topicalized noun:

- (60) *dàdà̀nək̀ìní t̀yà̀p̀t̀yè dàdà̀mbàrwá*
dàdà̀ nè k̀ìní t̀yà̀-v-tyè dàd à-m mb-á-rà wá
 father DEM C.FOC mature-APPL-mature father PRED-IN house-GEN-3SG COM
 ‘As for the father, once he is a father at his home,’

mándà súwèè kìnì ògdzárwá áhìp-hyè káhàbè
má á ndà-sú wèè kìnì ògdz-á-r wá
 HYP 3SG say-s what C.FOC child-GEN-3SG COM
á hì-p-hyè ká hàbè
 3SG accept-APPL-accept NEG again
 ‘whatever he says, his child should accept, shouldn’t she?’

The comment clause can function as a conditional apodosis:

- (61) *àbiná màgyávgyè màgàyánrùwá*
à b-íná má gyá-v-gyè-n màgày-á-nyè wá
 3SG say-3SG HYP COOK-APPL-COOK-pause millet-GEN-1EXCL COM
 ‘He said, “If our hungry rice (*Digitaria exilis*) is cooked...’
nyàzàná bànyè àntàrànrùwá tànè
nyá zà-ná bà nyè àntàrà mù-rwá tànè
 1EXCL eat-3SG FOC 1EXCL CONJ mother-1SG only (F)
 ‘we will eat it only with my mother.’”
- (62) *à bàpállè n kìnì wá mábà ní bà jìr bhyà-s-à-bhyè*
à bà pállè nà kìnì wá má-bà ní
 3SG say one DEM C.FOC COM HYP-FOC INTENS
bà jìr bhyà-s-à-bhyè
 FOC true fall-s-fall
dá-m hùd-á hàyi wá
dá-m hùd-á hàye wá
 go-IN belly-GEN river COM
 ‘One among them said, “If really [one grain] has fallen into the river,”
sèyádátàttàyà yéssánsá sábiná
sèi yá dá tàttàyà yá s-á-n-s-à sè á b-íná
 then 1SG FUT search 1SG come-GO-3SG-s-come 3SG say-3SG
 “I will search, I will get it out, and bring it back,” he said.’
- (63) *hámá má cinà-kùr-áncín jùbóonè nàwá*
hámá má cinà-kùr-án-cin jùbà únà ná wá
 assembly HYP hear-2PL-3SG-hear matter DEF DEM COM
 ‘Listeners, if you understand this matter,’
bákà-r giná
bákà àr g-íná
 NEG.EX OVER TO-DEF
 ‘there is no greater [truth/goodness] than that.’

The *de dicto* complementizers of IE languages do not mark either temporal or conditional apodosis.

2.9 Comment clauses in counter-expectation predication

The comment clause can clarify the reason for a counter-expectation. Western Indo-European languages do not deploy the complementizer in the coding of this function.

- (64) *yò àyá šágrà*
 well EXCL good
 ‘Well, it is good.’

àmá wá yàcinànciná lvè ñánnà
àmá wá yà cin-àn-ciná lvè ñánnà
 however COM 1SG hear-3SG-hear matter DEF
 ‘However, it seems I have already heard about this thing.’

ámáwá gđárùḥàbé cíkwa ándá lè yà
ámá wá gđá-rù ḥàbé cíkwa á ndáhà lèyà
 but COM child-1SG still small 3 read lecture
 ‘But, my child [daughter] is still young, she is still in school.’

3. Synthesis

The syntactic environments listed above do not have much in common in terms of the categories that precede the form *wá*. That indicates that the presence of the comment-clause marker *wá* is not triggered by the properties of the phrases or clauses that precede it. In all cases, the marker *wá* is followed by a clause, hence the evidence that it is some type of clause marker. But not all clauses, even those in complex sentences, are preceded by the comment-clause marker *wá*. The fact that the presence of the marker *wá* cannot be predicted from the material that precedes it or that follows it, is the evidence that it is a means for independent coding, a property shared by complementizers in other languages (Frajzyngier 1996).

The form *wá* marks the ensuing clause as being a comment on what precedes it. It is also a part of the preceding clause or phrase. The marker *wá* indicates that something else follows in the utterance and that it constitutes a comment on the immediately preceding material.

4. Implications

The fundamental function of being a comment on a preceding element allows us to explain a relatively large variety of syntactic constructions in which the comment clause occurs. The comment clause is the only element that these constructions have in common. It explains rather well the complex sentence structures with the comment clause.

The widespread use of the comment clause puts into the question the fundamental notion of clause combining (Haiman & Thompson 1988), viz., does 'clause combining' represent an observation of the internal structure of some utterances or is it an observation of the speakers' motivation. Clause combining harkens to the same assumptions that led to the notion of phrase structure rules, viz. combining larger entities out of smaller entities. The use of the comment clause confirms the assumption that speakers operate with different motivations, viz. on the coding of various functional domains (Frajzyngier & Shay 2003). If the speaker wants to make a comment on a noun or an adverbial phrase, the use of the comment clause results in a simple sentence. If the speaker wants to make a comment on a proposition, the result is a complex sentence.

Abbreviations

1	First person	K	Kanuri
2	Second person	M	Masculine
3	Third person	N	Noun, nasal consonant
AFF	Affected	NEG	Negative
APPL	Applicative	NOMIN	Nominalizing
AR	Arabic	PAST	Past time marker
ASSC	Associative	PB	Phrase-final marker
C.FOC	Contrastive focus	PL	Plural
COM	Comment marker	POL	Polite
COMP	Complementizer	PNCT	Punctual
CONJ	Conjunction	PRED	Predicative marker
DAT	Dative	PREP	Preposition
DEF	Definite	PRES	Presentative
DEM	Demonstrative	Q	Question marker
EX	Existential	REFL	Reflexive
F	Fula (Fulfulde)	REM	Remote
FOC	Focus marker	RQ	Rhetorical question
GEN	Genitive	S	Source
GO	Goal	SEQ	Sequential
H	Hausa	SG	Singular
HYP	Hypothetical	T	Target
IMPER	Imperative	TOG	Together (multiple participants)
IN	Inner space	TR	Transitive
HL	Human locative	VENT	Ventive References
INCL	Inclusive		

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