

## CONTRASTIVE SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL STUDY OF NOUN CLAUSES IN ENGLISH AND BETE

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**Résumé :** Cet article présente une étude contrastive entre l'Anglais et le Bété, une langue Ivoirienne du groupe Niger-Congo-Kordofanien. Se basant sur une analyse des métafonctions idéationnelle, interpersonnelle et textuelle telles que décrites dans la Grammaire Systémique et Fonctionnelle de Halliday, il démontre la capacité épistémique de cette théorie à décrire le Bété. Le contraste notable entre les syntagmes nominaux étudiés dans les deux langues se trouve au niveau du linéaire de surface, le niveau superficiel où chaque langue exprime son identité structurale.

**Mots clés:** nom, cognition, idéationnel, interpersonnel, textuel

**Abstract :** This is a contrastive analysis of the noun clause in English and Bete, an Ivorian language classified in the Niger-Congo-Kordofanian group. It shows that Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar has an epistemic power that can be extended to describe the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions of noun clauses in Bete. The main contrast between the nouns clauses in the two languages is at the linear structure, the surface level where each language expresses its own structural identity.

**Key words :** noun, cognition, ideational, interpersonal, textual

### **Introduction**

Systemic functional Grammar (hereinafter SFG) is a linguistic theory created to study English. Today, it becomes more and more influential in the teaching of English as a second language (Z. Feng 2013, p.86). Moreover, a recent comparative study has shown better results with students taught SFG than their counterparts control group using Traditional Grammar, in writing competence of English as Second Language (Z. Feng, id., p. 93).

This article is the second of a series. It comes after the first one (T. A. Séri, 2021) that presents the nuances of the nominal systems of English and Bete. The main target is to provide an answer to the question of feasibility of a study of the Bete noun clause in SFG. The problem it addresses is twofold: do SFG principles and terminology have enough epistemic power to describe an African language such as Bete that is presented as very distant from English its natural anchorage? If they do, what are the similarities and the differences between the noun clauses in English and Bete on the point of ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions? The treatment of this issue will certainly contribute to provide Bete with a theoretical background study in SFG prior to pedagogical implementations.

The method of study is a syntactico-semantic analysis within the SFG theoretical background set by M.A.K. Halliday (1994, 2004) and developed by C. M.I.M. Matthiessen (1995, 2014), A. Downing and P. Locke (2006) and other linguists. After a brief presentation of the three basic metafunctions of language in SFG, the work will consist in a contrastive analysis of utterances that illustrate the functions of nouns clauses in English and Bete.

## **1. The metafunctions of language in Systemic Functional Grammar (S. F. G.)**

Systemic Functional grammar is a linguistic theory created by M.A.K. Halliday, which describes language based on its function. Contrary to traditional grammar that sets rules, SFG demonstrates how words or groups of words function to create meaning. This meaning-focused descriptive grammar explains the structuring of spoken and written texts. It presents language as a system, a system of meaning used in real-life contexts.

### **1.1. Ideational metafunction**

Contrary to traditional grammar, the question of how language encounters for the extralinguistic world is treated in SFG. For M.A.K. Halliday, C.M.I.M. Matthiessen:

*"There is no facet of human experience that cannot be transformed into meaning. In other words, language provides a theory of human experience, and certain of the resources of lexicogrammar of every language are dedicated to that function."* (2014, p. 30).

This quotation highlights the capacity of human language to cover human ecological and environmental realities. Language can cover human experiences in connection with the extralinguistic world and its representation. This function is called ideational or experiential and described as falling into two metafunctions: experiential and logical. This experiential metafunction is close to a more sociolinguistic one known as the interpersonal.

### **1.2. *Interpersonal metafunction***

Language also traces the nature of the relationship between participants and the circumstances of speech acts. The kind of words or language used tells a lot not only about the speaker but also about the addressee or interlocutor. Referring to that function, M.A.K. Halliday, C.M.I.M. Matthiessen say: " every message is about something and addressing someone, and these two motifs can be freely combined by and large, they do not constrain each other (ibid.)".

The interaction between speaker and addressee is constructed in a set of relations between different linguistics units or structures that are combined to create a text and a meaning.

### **1.3. *Textual metafunction***

The two metafunctions above are connected to a third one which consists in constructing the text or the discourse by means of discourse sequences. The organization of the text, the creation of meaning, and the expression of the interpersonal relationship go together with the creation of syntactic cohesion within the grammar of languages. Functionality is thus intrinsic to human language. For that reason, SFG studies language taking into account the three dimensions, the metafunctions above. Therefore, the contrastive systemic functional analysis between English and Bete will tackle the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual dimensions.

## 2. Systemic functional analysis of noun clauses in English and Bété

A clause, in the SFG framework, is "a composite entity, which is constituted not of one dimension of structure but of three (subject, Actor and theme)" (Z. Feng 2013, p. 89). Clauses are analysed in three different dimensions: as representation of world experience, as items in interpersonal exchange and finally as features in an organized message or a text.

### 2.1. Ideational metafunction

The ideational or experiential metafunction is about the way languages cover human extralinguistic and cognitive realities. The items that compose the noun clause have different functions in connection with their syntactic roles. For example, in transitive structures where clauses have a representational meaning, the elements in the clause can function as Agent, Recipient, Affected, Attribute or Circumstance.

(1) Janice will give Chris the bill tomorrow (A. Downing, P. Locke 2006, p.6).

In the example above, there is an action to perform, that is, to give something to someone. So, the person who is supposed to receive the object (the bill), is the Recipient (Chris). The object (the bill) that will be given is the Affected. The person that acts is the Agent. Here, Janice is. So, the Recipient and the Agent are the two Participants in this process.

Janice	Will give	Chris	The bill	tomorrow
Agent	Process(action)	Recipient	Affected	circumstance

Fig.1: Nouns as Agent, Recipient, Affected, Attribute and Circumstance.

By definition, an Agent is:

*" an entity having energy, volition and intention that is capable of initiating and controlling the action, usually to bring about some change of location or properties in itself or others. Agent are typically human"* (A. Downing, P. Locke 2006, p. 128).

(2a) Ted hit Bill. (*id.*, 129)

*Ted* is the Agent, *Bill* is the Affected in utterance above (2a).

(2b) Bill was hit by Ted.

Here again, *Bill* is the Affected and *Ted*, the Agent.

(3) /zoova ɲe adaa ɲe ɛɛvɛ sɔ li a lii a bɛ / (Watch Tower 2011, p.4)

Zoova give (past) adaa and ɛɛvɛ things things many

Jehovah gave Adam and Eve many good things.

There are two Participants in this utterance: *zoova* on the one hand and *adaa* and *ɛɛvɛ*, on the other hand. *Zoova* is the Agent, *adaa* , *ɛɛvɛ* are the Recipients. The third noun, *li*, is the Affected in (3).

(4) /lagɔ ɲe zaklɔ li a bɛ / (Werle et Gbalehi 1976, p. 196)

God gave zaklɔ things many

God gave zaklɔ many things

*lagɔ* (God) is the Agent and *zaklɔ*, the Recipient. As for *lia bɛ* (many things), it functions as the Affected. In some circumstances, the Agent can be a Force.

### 2.1.1. The Force

In some situations, the Participant is inanimate or not capable of ‘neither controlling nor initiating the action’ (A. Downing, P. Locke 2006, p.130). This inanimate or non-controlling entity is a Force.

(5) The volcano erupted. (*ibid.*)

*The volcano* is the Force.

(6) /ɲizako kada liɖani jli a 40 / (Watch Tower 2011, p. 14)

Rain big fall past day poss 40

A big rain has fallen for 40 days.

(7) /zɛɛ liɖɔ ɔ/ (Werle et Gbalehi 1976, p. 202)

Shame bit pres him

He was ashamed

*nizako kada* (a big rain) and *z#u* (shame) are examples of Forces in the bete clauses. In some particular circumstances, the Affected is called Beneficiary.

### 2.1.2. Beneficiary

A participant that functions as a Recipient is the one who receives 'goods', permission or information. When a favour is done to him or her, the term Beneficiary is used instead, like in:

(8) I can bake you a cake, but perhaps you don't want it. (A Downing, P. Locke 2006, p.137)

*You* is the Beneficiary in the clause above.

(4)' / *làngɔ ɲɛ zaklɔ lii a bè* / (Werle et Gbalehi 1976, p.196)

God give pres. Zaklɔ things poss. Qt

God has given Spider a lot of things

*zaklɔ* is the beneficiary and *lagɔ*, the second Participant, is the Agent. Sometimes, the Agent can be a Carrier.

### 2.1.3. Carrier

In attributive patterns, one Participant can be the Carrier and the second the Attribute.

(9) The oldest son is a musician (A. Downing, P. Locke Op. cit., p. 145)

*The oldest son* is the Carrier and *a musician* is the Attribute.

(10) / *na tɪɬ glinu avoka* / (Recorded the 22 04 2020)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This utterance and some others have been recorded from a Bete native speaker in Bouaké.

My father be lawyer (sing.)

My father is a lawyer.

*na tìbà* is the carrier and *avoka* is the Attribute.

The concepts of Carrier and Attribute do not extend to all kinds of attributive patterns. In possessions for example, other metaterms are used instead.

#### 2.1.4. *Possessed and Possessor*

In possessive structures, Participants are known as Possessor and Possessed. With verbs that express possession such as *own*, *belong*, *have got*, etc., the Carrier can be the Possessor and the Attribute the Possessed.

(11) /dàli kɛ lili / (Projet École Intégrée 2003,p.13)

Dali own pres. bean plur.

Dali owns/has some beans

(12)/gbuazu ka mobiji pɛpɛ/ (R. G. Zogbo 2005,p.203)

gbuazu own pres. car white

gbuazu possesses/owns a white car.

(13) /na dà kɛ bàna / (Projet École Intégrée *Op.Cit.*, p. 67)

My mother have got (pres) clothes

My mother has got some clothes

(14) My uncle owns a yacht.

The participants, in the examples above can be categorized as following:

language	Carrier/possessor	Verbal process	Possessed/attribute
Bete (11)	dàli	kɛ	lili
Bete (12)	gbuazu	kɛ	mobiji pɛpɛ
Bete (13)	na dà	kɛ	bàna
English (14)	My uncle	owns	A yacht

Fig.2. nouns as Carrier/ Possessor and possessed/Attribute in English and Bete

### 2.1.5. *Identified and Identifier*

In identifying patterns, an entity is identified in terms of another. So, the two Participants to take into account are the Identified and the Identifier:

(15) Fred is the doorman. (A Downing, P. Locke 2006, p. 144)

*Fred* is the Identified and *the doorman*, the Identifier.

The term Token is used to qualify an entity that represents or fills the role of the other, that is the Value. (*id.*, p. 149)

(16) / sɛɛ dɯdɯ wɯə sɪɓɓ wa wɯə / (recorded 16 06 2020)

The way mud be pres. so they be pres.

They are like mud.

*dɯdɯ* ( *mud* ) is the Token and *wa* (they) the Value.

(17) My-father-in-law is the club's secretary.

*My father-in-law* is the Token or the Identified and *the club's secretary* is the Value or Identifier. In cognitive processes the terms Experiencer and Phenomenon are used to refer to the two Participants.

### 2.1.6. *Experiencer and Phenomenon*

Some cognitive processes include two sorts of Participants. One is the Experiencer and the other, the Phenomenon, like in:

(18) Berryl thought you were ill (*id.*, p. 144).

*Berryl* is the Experiencer, *that you were ill* is the Phenomenon.

The Experiencer or Sensor is the entity that perceives, knows, likes, etc. The second Participant, the one that is 'perceived, known, liked or wanted is the Phenomenon.

(19) / ʔɪbe ɔ ʔɪbɛə / (recorded 16 04 2020 )

Pray pres he pray cont.



He prays

(20) /kle ɔ pʌ-ʌ/ (recorded 16 04 2020)

Anger he throw cont.

He gets angry

ɔ (he) is the Experiencer in (19) and (20). *kle* is the Phenomenon in (20).

### 2.1.7. *Nouns as Sayer*

In communicative verbal processes, the Participant (that communicates) is defined as the Sayer. This function is typically performed by humans. The rest of the clause that is the information provided by the Sayer is the Said. When the verb *tell* is used, the second Participant is called Recipient as in the following example:

(21) Jill told him what she knew. (A. Downing, P. Locke 2006, p. 151)

*Jill* is the Sayer, *him*, the Recipient and *what she knew*, the Said, the information provided.

(22) Our correspondent reports renewed fighting on the frontier. (*ibid*).

*Our correspondent* functions as the Sayer and *renewed fighting on the frontier*, the Said.

(23) /làngɔ lɛ naa tua/ jio-dɪ ní-ɛ nɛnɪ/ (Werle J.M. ,Gbalehi, D.J. 1976,p.204 )

God say pres. that friend false-information neg. be good

God says, my friend lies are not good.

(24) /ɔ lɛ naa àtɪ à mɛɛ ɔ/ (*id.*,p.196)

He say pres. that Dad me be pres.

He says: it's me Dad.

(25) /bàglɔ naa zɪ kʌ zɪ aa ju ʌ lie/ (Projet École Intégrée 2003, p. 61)

bàglɔ say pres. daylight come we proj. it eat

bàglɔ says tomorrow, we will eat it.

In the bete utterances above, *làgɔ* (23), *ɔ* (he)(24) and *bàglɔ* are Sayers. *àtɛ à mɛɛ ə* and *zli kɔ zi aa ju ɔ lie* are the respective Saids in (24) and (25).

### 2.1.8. Nouns as speaker or questioner

The speaker can be a Questioner when he or she puts a question or uses an interrogative sentence. In that case, the Addressee becomes automatically the Informant. In yes or no questions, the Questioner simply wants a confirmation or a denial.

( 26) A- /mánu ñ pi à ní/(R.G. Zogbo 2004,p. 118)

What you cook pres. Inter.

What have you cooked?

(27) A- /ñ ka síka jè wli nùmɛ sɔ/(ibid.)

You have rice and mutton interro.

Do you sell some rice and mutton ?

(28) B- /n n kɪ/( ibid.)

Yes I have it

Yes, I have some.

In this conversation, the speaker A is the Questioner and his addressee, B, the Informant.

## 2.2. Interpersonal Metafunction

Many structural elements are used to perform the interpersonal metafunction. They include syntactic items such as the subject, the head, the determiner, the pre-modifier and the post-modifier, etc.

### 2.2.1. Subject

In SFG, the term subject is used for the grammatical Subject only. The psychological subject is the Theme while the logical subject of traditional grammar is presented as the Actor.

(29) The duke gave my aunt this teapot. (*id.*,p.76)

(30) This teapot my aunt was given by the duke (M.A.K. Halliday, C.M.I.M. Matthiessen 2014, p. 78).

(31) /lià jε bùdu síbΛ / (Projet Ecole Intégrée 2003, p. 67)

lià aux. house build

lià has built a house

*lià* is the Subject and *bùdu*, the Affected

### 2.2.2. Nouns as Pre-head, Head and Post-head

Nouns can function as Heads in clauses and cooperates with Pre-head and Post-head. As A. Downing and P. Locke put it:

*"The nominal group has four primary elements or structural functions: the head, which is the central element, the determiner and the pre-modifier functions in the pre-head position, and the post-modifier function is post-head position"* (2006,p. 403).

(32) One Saturday morning in February 1893.

*One Saturday* is the Pre-head. *Morning* is the head. The Post-head is *in February 1893*.

From another view point, *one Saturday* functions as a pre-modifier and *in February 1893* as a Post-modifier. The role of a Determiner is to particularize the noun in different ways by establishing its reference as definite or indefinite. Articles, demonstratives or deictics, possessives, etc. can determine the noun in different aspects. A. Downing and P. Locke (*ibid.*) present Wh-words, distributives and quantifiers as members of this class. The class of determiners comprises determinatives

which include central determinatives: articles, demonstratives, possessives and quantifiers such as:

(31b)/lià jɛ bùdu sɪbə/

Lià aux. acc. house build

Lia has built a house.

( 31 c) /lià jɛ bùdua sɪbə/

Lià aux. acc house def. build

Lia has built the house

In the utterance (28c), the phrase *bùdua* has an attached operator (-a) plus a decrease of the pitch of the toneme that functions as a definite determiner.

(31d) /lià jɛ bùdu ɓlɪ sɪbə/

Lià aux. acc house qt. build

Lia has built one house.

The quantifier *ɓlɪ*, one is the determiner that indicates the quantity of the noun house.

In the three utterances in bete, the determiners  $\emptyset$  in (31b), -a in (31c) and *ɓlɪ* in (31d) are all post-posed to the noun. The example below illustrates a Pre-determinative, precisely the quantifier *wuə*(all):

(31e)/lià jɛ bùdu wuə sɪbə/

Lia aux. acc house qt. build

Lia has built all the house.

The quantifier *wuə*, all comes after the noun it quantifies. All the Determiners ( $\emptyset$  in 31b), (-a in 31c), (*ɓlɪ* in 31d), (*wuə* in 31e) used above are post-posed to the noun, the head. How about Post-determinatives?

Post-determiners can express appreciation or depreciation like in the following utterances.

(31f) /lia jε tia b̀̀du s̩b̩Λ/

Lia aux. acc house qt. build

Lia has built a good house.

The structural set of this utterance displays the appreciative adjective *tia*, *good* as post-posed to the head, *b̀̀du*, *house*. What about depreciation or minoring adjectives?

(31i)/ lia jε b̀̀du zoko s̩b̩Λ/

Lia aux. acc house bad build

Lia has built a bad house.

(31j)/ lia jε budu tikei s̩b̩Λ/

Lia aux. acc house small build

Lia has built a small house.

The pejorative adjective *zoko* (*bad*) is pre-posed to the Head *b̀̀du*, *house* contrary to the appreciative adjective in (28 f). The minoring adjective *tikei* (in 28i) holds a similar linear position. What about the positions of nouns post-modifying nouns?

(31k)/ lia jε ziki budu s̩b̩Λ/

Lia aux. acc house sheet build

Lia has built a house with sheet roof.

(31 l)/ lia jε kpako budu s̩b̩Λ/

Lia aux. acc house mud build

Lia has built a mud house.

This noun used as Post-modifiers is placed before the Head, the noun.

The concepts of Modifier, Pre-modifier and Post-modifier as defined in SFG, function in Bete. For example, the Bete Post-determinatives fulfil the two roles defined by A. Downing, P. Locke:

*“To supply information enabling the Hearer/Reader to specify and identify the person or thing referred to by the NG [...] To add supplementary information about the referent when it has already been identified” (2006, p. 447).*

The terminology of pre-modifier and post-modifier, pre-head and post-head exist in each of languages being studied. However, the concepts of Pre-head and Post-head are not iconic in the two languages given that each language has its own linear structure.

### 2.3. *Textual metafunction*

The concepts of Rheme and Theme are of main importance in the study of noun clauses. The concern of the message is the Theme:

(31b) This teapot my aunt was given by the duke.

The Theme, that is, the concern of the message is *the teapot*. What is said or predicted about the Theme is called, Rheme. In the example above (26 b) *my aunt was given by the duke* is the Rheme.

(32) / líà jɛ guʔə d̩/. (Projet École Intégrée 2003,p. 46)

líà do acc. palm seed regime sing. cut acc.

líà has cut a palm seed regime.

*líà* is the Theme and *guʔə* is the Rheme.

Above are a few occurrences of Rheme and Rheme in English and Bete that, of course cannot cover, all the categories. Sometimes, even an entire clause can function as a theme (M.A.K. Halliday, C.M.I.M. Matthiessen 2014,p.232-237). Nevertheless, the analysis will be limited to the most common ones in Bete: Absolute and Dislocated Themes.

### 2.3.1. *Absolute themes*

Bete has a secular oral tradition. Therefore, the spoken register comprises many occurrences of Absolute Theme used frequently.

(33) /ηlujwileji ò ji laa sùku mál / mós Ÿlia níklako/(R. G. Zogbo 2004,p.101)

Small girl that come past. School in she find past belly

The small girl who has come for school, is the one that got pregnant.

(34)/gwiè n pia zunie bə/ mé mobiji gla wlú/(*Ibid.*)

Dog def. I buy past today even, it car indef. Kill

The dog I bought this very morning has been killed by a car

(35) /bəə à mali pia la a je mənə /(*Ibid.*)

Bowl def. Marry buy past it aux acc. lose

The bowl Marry bought is lost.

In the utterances above, the new worthy information is provided by means of some definite noun phrases: *ηlujwileji* (33), *gwiè* (34), *bəə* (35). Moreover, these themes are constituents of the clauses that follow them. They are in syntactic relation with the second part of the utterance, that is, the support of second part of information. Consequently, they are Absolute themes. As such, they undergo no dislocation.

### 2.3.2. *Dislocated themes*

Haliday (2014, p. 232) notices two kinds of located themes: Right Location and left location.

#### 2.3.2.1. Right located themes

As the focus of the information vehicled, the theme can be in initial position in the syntactic structure.

(36) /ɔ̄ kaa li sikaa/ (recorded at Bouaké 17 06 2020)

He aux.acc. it eat rice def.

He has eaten (it), the rice.

(37) /ɔ̄ jɛ ji /na dāju/ (recorded in Bouaké 17 06 2020)

He has come your def. brother

He has come, your brother.

The two examples above expose some cases of Right Located Themes. In utterance (36), the pronoun *a* is attached to the auxiliary *ka*. It retakes the noun. A literal translation is: *he has eaten it, the rice*.

#### 2.3.2.2. Left located themes

The following examples can illustrate the structural position of Left Located Themes:

(38) /sikkaa ɔ̄ ka li/ (recorded in Bouaké 16 06 2020)

Rice def. he aux. acc. it eat

Your rice, he has eaten.

(39) /na dāju/ ɔ̄ jɛ ji/ (recorded in Bouake 16 06 2020)

Your indef. Brother he aux.acc. come

Your brother, he has come.

These utterances present some Left Located Themes in Bete. *sikkaa* and *naa daju* are examples of themes retaken with the pronoun *ɔ̄*, *he*.



## Conclusion

The study of nouns based on the ideational metafunction has shown that English and Bete nouns have a variety of similar participant roles. At the cognitive level, the noun can be the Topic, the Affected, the Recipient, and the Agent when it carries actions. It can function as a Sayer in declarative sentences or a Phenomenon, a Speaker, a Hearer in discourse. At the interpersonal level, the noun can be a Subject or an Object in a predicative relation, a Head of Pre-determiner or Post-determiner in a noun clause or in a noun phrase. At the textual level, nouns in English and Bete function as Rhemes and Themes in predicative utterances. Like its English counterpart, Bete language displays many occurrences of Absolute and Dislocated (right and left) Themes. Therefore, the theoretical framework as well as the terminological tools of SFG are appropriate for the study of Bete nouns and noun clauses. The Hallidayan theory describes the Ivorian language studied successfully. The contrast between English and Bete appears at the linear structuring of nominal units. The English linguistic units referred to with concepts such as pre-head and post-head are not completely transferable to Bete. Each language having its own syntactic behaviour, comparisons between the two languages should avoid the linear structuring of phrases.

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