

Relative clauses & comparative clauses: Week 11

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1 Relative clauses as modifiers of nouns

Relative clauses are a type of subordinate clause, generally they are used to modify nouns. Because they are modifiers, they are not licensed by the noun and are not very restricted.

- (1) a. Someone backed into [the car [which was parked in my spot]].
b. [The boy [who won the golden ticket]] was named Charlie Bucket.

Important to all relative clauses is the idea of an anaphoric relationship. Relative pronouns (*which* and *who* in (1) above) need to be interpreted by their antecedents (*car* and *boy* respectively).

This distinguishes relative clauses from other types of subordinate clauses, as can be seen in (2) on pg. 184. The content clause has no anaphoric relationship with anything in the matrix clause.

1.1 Wh and non-wh relative clauses

There are two main types of relative clauses, those that have a wh relative pronoun, and those that do not. The non-wh relatives also come in two types, those that have *that* and those that do not.

- (2) a. WH relative: The film which I needed was missing.
b. Non-WH relative:
(i) THAT relative: The film that I needed _ is missing.
(ii) BARE relative: The film I needed _ is missing.

Even though there is no relative pronoun in (2-b-i) or (2-b-ii), there is still an anaphoric relation between the gap following the verb *need* and the antecedent noun *film*. Adding an object makes the clause ungrammatical, see (4).

1.2 The relativised element

The R element that is anaphorically linked to the head noun is called the relativized element and can have a variety of functions in a clause. With WH relatives, different WH words are used for different antecedents. Non-WH relatives can have the same functions, and *that* is optional in all positions except subject.

R elements can also be in a content clause embedded in a relative clause.

- (3) a. The item in question is a key [which he says [(that) she found <which>]].
b. The item in question is a key [(that) he says [(that) she found...]].

1.3 The relative phrase

In some sentences, there is additional material along with the R element at the front of the relative clause. See (4) below.

- (4) She hasn't been able to contact [the people [whose house she's renting]].

So, we need to distinguish between the **relative phrase** and the **relative element**.

Relative phrase the constituent occupying initial position in the clause

Relative element the element that is anaphorically related to the head noun, R.

Some of these relative phrases must be fronted (8i), some can be stranded or fronted (8ii-iii). The possessive *whose* always needs to front the entire NP, and keep in mind that *whose* can be used for parts of inanimate objects as well.

2 Integrated vs supplementary relatives

These are also known more commonly as restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses. Integrated relatives are the type that we have been looking at so far, they have different characteristics from supplementary relatives.

- (5) My sister who's a nurse lives in Minnesota.
I have more than one sister and I'm telling you which sister I'm referring to.
- (6) My sister, who's a nurse, lives in Minnesota.
I only have one sister and I'm giving your extra information about her.

2.0.1 What are the differences between these structures?

Intonation and punctuation Integrated relative clauses are not offset by pauses or commas, they are one single prosodic unit.

Interpretation Integrated relative clauses generally narrow down (restrict) the set of possible referents, supplementary relatives give extra information, often parenthetical material.

Some integrated relative clauses are not restrictive in a semantic sense, but they are essential for the interpretation of the sentence. These can be seen in (11-ii) and (12). There are syntactic differences between the two relative clauses as well, H & P mention four.

WH relatives vs non-WH relatives Supplementary relatives are almost WH types, bare constructions are ungrammatical and *that* relatives are marginal at best.

- (7) Dan, who won a scholarship to med school, is driving through tonight.
- (8) *Dan, 0/that won a scholarship to med school, is driving through tonight.

Antecedents allowed Supplementary relatives allow clauses and proper nouns to be antecedents, these are not allowed in integrated relatives.

Which *Which* can be a determinative as well as a pronoun in supplementary clauses. It can only be a pronoun in integrated clauses.

Function Integrated relatives are always dependents (modifiers), but supplementary clauses are not so restricted. See (15).

3 Relative words in integrated and supplementary relatives

The list in (16) are the relative elements.

3.1 Gender

Personal and non-personal pronouns are really a developed system of animacy, where humans and human-like things are considered personal, everything else is non-personal. Non-human objects need non-personal relative pronouns and human objects require personal pronouns. See (17). Again, note that *whose* is neutral in relative clauses.

3.2 Case

Similar to open interrogatives, *who* is nominative and *whom* in accusative in formal styles. But the issue of case can be avoided altogether by using the style neutral *that*.

3.3 Prescriptive note

Microsoft Word loves to make you feel guilty for using WH words with integrated relative clauses, but again this is simply a made up rule. See the famous sentences on pg. 191.

4 Fused relatives

Fused relatives are where the relative element and the head noun are the same thing. There is a list of fused relative words in (20). The compound words and *what* cannot be normal relative constructions, while *who*, *whom*, and *which* can only be in a restricted number of fused constructions.

- (9) a. [**Whoever** said that] was trying to mislead you.
b. The **person** [who said that] was trying to mislead you.
- (10) a. I've eaten [**what** you gave me].
b. I've eaten the **food** [which you gave me].

4.1 Fused relatives and interrogatives

Some fused relatives can be ambiguous with interrogative content clauses. An example is in (22-iii) where it can have the meaning "That which she wrote is unclear," or "What did she write?"