

On the Syntax of Relative Pronouns

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Within Generative Grammar of the Chomskyan variant roughly three analyses of the syntax of noun-modifying relative clauses (RCs) have become prominent in the last four decades: The Head External Analysis (Chomsky 1977), the Matching Analysis (Chomsky 1965, Sauerland 1998) and the Raising Analysis (Vergnaud 1974, Bianchi 1999). Since some analyses share features of the other, we can conceive of them as types in a continuum between two poles, the one placing the base of the “head” (the noun the RC modifies) strictly RC-externally, the other strictly RC-internally. The basic schema of the former is (1-a)/(1-b), the one of the latter is (2-a)/(2-b):

- (1) a. the book_i [_{CP} Op_i (that) [Mary has read t_i]]
b. the book_i [_{CP} which_i C⁰ [Mary has read t_i]]
- (2) a. [_{DP} the [_{CP} [book]_k (that) [Mary has read t_k]]]
b. [_{DP} the [_{CP} [book_i which t_i]_k C⁰ [Mary has read t_k]]]

A lot of the phenomena having to do with RCs have not been analytically reconciled yet. Nevertheless researchers on all camps claim to provide unified accounts of RCs, grounding their reasoning on more or less reliable diagnostics¹. Given that diverging opinions about the right treatment of RCs arose practically at the onset of Generative Grammar² and persist until today³, prospects of a unified analysis look meager. It might reflect that it is either not possible to give a unified account since we are really dealing with fundamentally disparate phenomena. Or it might mean that the assumptions that researchers based their arguments on were questionable – the latter a kind of best-case scenario.

I believe that one key to an enhanced understanding of RCs is a detailed investigation into the morphosyntactic properties of relative pronouns, since they have a linking function between the head and the sentence-internal gap, a crucial feature of RCs. More specifically, I would like to identify and characterize the nature of different types of relative pronouns. A close to certain result is that most, if not all of them are derived from some other form, say, a demonstrative or a *Wh*-word: “what is used as a relative pronoun (in a given language) can also be used differently. In other words, we expect a many-to-many correspondence between the form and use of lexical items” (Wiltschko 1998, 145). To give an example of relativizers which are rarely taken into consideration (both examples rather archaic and bookish with good cause):

- (3) such stuff as dreams are made on (Shakespeare, *The Tempest*)
- (4) ... das Buch, so er ihm gegeben ...
the book RelPr he him given
the book which he has given him (Johann G. T. Grässe, *Der Teufel zu Greifenberg*)

¹Say, on Binding/Scope/Variable Binding upon Reconstruction, cf. Salzmann (2006), Sauerland (1998).

²cf. Chomsky (1965), Schachter (1973).

³The discussion that commenced with the influential monograph by Kayne (1994) is telling in this regard. It basically re-aroused a general interest in RCs. Among the ones that defended and developed the analysis is Bianchi (1999), Bianchi (2000), Bianchi (2002), De Vries (2002), Kayne (2008) and Zwart (2000). Borsley (1997), Heck (2005) and others critically reviewed it.

In German and in English *as* and *so* can function as a comparative marker (*as cheap as*) or as a degree word (*so hoch*). I consider it desirable to analyze the comparative marker and the degree word as really the same syntactic object as the corresponding relative pronoun in the above examples, save the differences in meaning and distribution both of which need to be explained.

A comparative survey and classification of relative pronouns will constitute the first part of my dissertation. The guiding paradigm of this survey will be what seems to me the most promising current direction of morphosyntactic research, sometimes called the *microparametric* approach (cf. Kayne 2005). The broader aim of the dissertation is, first, to shed light on the relationship between relative pronouns and the head of RCs. This way I hope to make a contribution to the debate on the syntactic structure of RCs in general. As an extension, I would subsequently like to take a look at the relationship between relative complementizers – whatever they will turn out to be – and “true” sentential complementizers on the one side, and between relative pronouns and *Wh*-elements on the other side. While it is commonly taken for granted that relative complementizers constitute a subset of complementizers (hence the term), recent research has it that the relationship might be just the other way around (cf. explicitly in Kayne 2008, rather implicitly in Arsenijević 2009, and Julien 2005, 95 for speculative remarks).

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