

## RELATIVE CLAUSES IN ENGLISH (As seen by Formal and Pedagogical Grammars)

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The distinction between formal and pedagogical grammars is of prime importance to the teacher of foreign languages.

There has been a tendency in Foreign Language Teaching to take whatever it can from the fashionable linguistic trend and apply it directly to the actual teaching situation. It became particularly evident when the Structural Linguistic Approach was developed. This "scientific" way of looking at language, analysing it as if it were an animal or a plant, cutting it into pieces and reconstructing it from the smallest unit possible, has influenced language teaching to a tremendously important extent. Texts have been graded according to this strategy, which was the procedure to analyse a language, but not the one to teach it. Research techniques, applied when studying a subject (language, animal, plant) are not necessarily applicable to the teaching of these subjects, still less in the case of such a complex process as language.

A Formal Grammar, be it Structural, Transformational - Generative, Tagmemic, Scale and Category, etc., has to be filtered before using it in the classroom. This filter is what we call "Pedagogical Grammar". Then, "the role of the pedagogic grammar is that of an interpreter between a number of formal grammars and the classroom... In practical terms, the task of applied linguistics might seem to be to take a grammatical topic and go to different formal grammars to discover what statements they have to offer, and after examination with particular learners in mind, the target is the production of LT materials stressing particular aspects of the grammatical topic in hand" (Candlin, 1972).

Chomsky distinguishes between linguistic and pedagogic grammars, stating: "A grammar describes and attempts to account for the ability of the speaker to understand an arbitrary sentence of his language and to produce an appropriate sentence on a given occasion. If a pedagogic grammar it attempts to provide a student with this ability, if a linguistic grammar it aims to discover and exhibit the mechanisms that make this achievement possible." (Chomsky, 1966)

The aim of this paper is to present some of the conclusions that one can derive from descriptions which are based on Transformational Generative Grammar, some of which are not at all new, as one can trace them back to Traditional Grammar analyses. This apparent lack of originality can be explained in two ways: a) it is the manner in which they are explained by Formal Grammars what makes of a series of isolated comments, classifications or lists of examples in Traditional Grammars, something coherent and unified, sharing a common underlying explanation, and b) as Chomsky puts it, "A traditional or structuralist description can be immediately incorporated into a Generative Grammar to the extent that it is correct and does not rely on the "intelligence of the reader"

and his 'linguistic intuition'". (Chomsky, 1966)

Formal Grammars have studied Relative Clauses from various angles and/or have concentrated on some of their characteristics, establishing relationships between this type of clauses and structures which are apparently quite different or seemingly unrelated.

Some of these studies are presented and commented on in the following sections, keeping in mind a pedagogical point of view.

## SECTION 1.-

Kuroda, in "English Relativization and Certain Related Problems" (Language, Vol 44, Nº 2, 1968) describes as a "remarkable fact that the English words used as Interrogative Pronouns are also used as Relative Pronouns". This coincidence could be considered accidental, as the word 'bank', in 'bank of a river' and 'savings bank', or we might assign some semantic characteristics to these two kinds of pronouns. Current transformational analysis postulates the same WH - marker for relatives and interrogatives and Kuroda concludes that as in both relativization and interrogation the WH - word is to be preposed, one transformation has to take care of the preposing in both cases.

He deals with four entities: 'what' and 'which', both as interrogatives and relatives. He employs the examples given by Lees in "The Grammar of English Nominalization" to illustrate the two uses of 'what':

- a) what lay on the table was the issue.
- b) what lay on the table was the tissue.

Interrogative 'what' is derived: WH + something → what

The indefinite pronoun 'something' can be analysed as:

SOME PRO → something in which 'SOME' will be 'indefinite determiner' and 'PRO', a noun, and so we have:

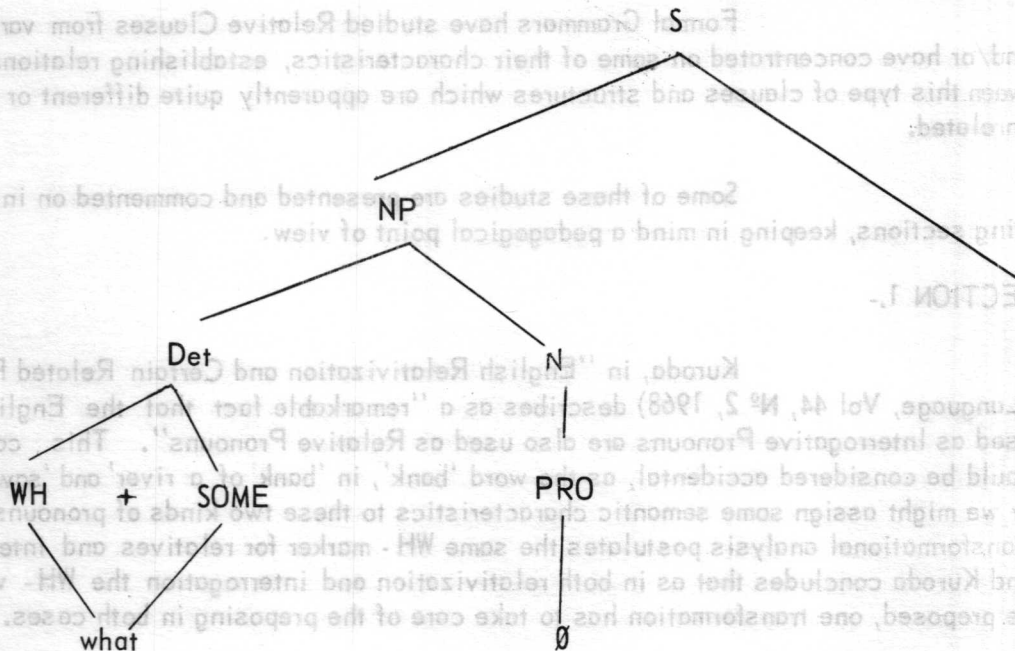
WH + SOME + PRO → WH + something → what

This form is dominated by the node NP in a sentence, 'WH + SOME' being dominated by 'Determiner'.

Introducing the following rules:

- i. WH + SOME → what
- ii. PRO → ∅ (after what)

we get:

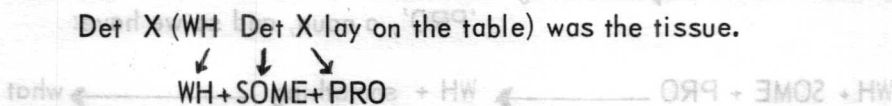


If we want to account for the relative pronoun 'what' in sentence (b) by means of rule i, we have to take the two underlying VP's:

1. was the tissue
2. lay on the table

(Assuming that their subjects are coreferential and identical (1), relativization is possible). Their subjects will be denoted by X.

We thus obtain:



Applying the same rules i. and ii. for the interrogative pronoun, we get:

- rule i. Det X (what PRO lay on the table) was the tissue.
- rule ii. Det X (what lay on the table) was the tissue.

(1) See Section 2.



In order to get rid of 'Det X' at the beginning of the sentence, we apply rule iii. Det PRO - - - Ø (before WH SOME PRO).

So we obtain sentence b., which, according to Kuroda, has been related by certain traditional grammarians and by transformationalists as well, to sentence c.

c. that which lay on the table was the tissue.

In fact, b. could be said to derive from c. by rule iv.

rule iv. THAT WHICH → what

Kuroda goes into deeper waters, but I hope that by means of these few examples one can realize that there is a relationship between relativization and interrogation.

The teacher has to notice that the examples given by Kuroda prove that relative and interrogative pronouns are formed in the same way, but this does not mean that relative clauses and interrogative sentences are formed in the same way, i.e. they are structurally equivalent.

- e. What he said was repeated by everybody.
- f. What did he say? (1)

## SECTION 2.

Another fact which has been discussed by grammarians (ancient and modern) is the identity which has to exist between the antecedent and the relative pronoun. This 'identity condition' has not meant exactly the same for everybody, or for the same person at different stages in the development of a grammar.

We can take earlier transformational work based on Chomsky (1957), which refers to LEXICAL IDENTITY, meaning that NP's were identical only if they consisted of the same lexical items.

In "Aspects" we find the expression STRICT IDENTITY, which includes both LEXICAL and REFERENTIAL identity (Chomsky 1965).

In: 'the man - (≠ wh - - the man - had been fired ≠ ) returned to work' the two NP's 'the man' have to be referentially identical if we want to apply relativization.

(1) This would be specially misleading for Spanish speaking students, as for them several types of relative and interrogative constructions are very similar, sometimes not requiring a change in word order. The examples given in English can be translated: Lo que dijo fue repetido por todos. ¿Qué dijo?



Bach refers to this problem when dealing with the relationship between a sentence having an embedded relative clause and two sentences joined with a conjunction, such as:

- a. Someone who drove downtown robbed a bank.
  - b. Someone drove downtown and robbed a bank.
- b. could be expanded:
- c. Someone drove downtown and that one robbed a bank.

The function of the 'one's' is to indicate this 'identity of reference', and could very well be replaced. We can use subscripts to distinguish 'one<sub>1</sub>' from 'one<sub>2</sub>', or simply 'x, y, z', etc.

Our sentence could be described then:

- d. Some x drove downtown and x robbed a bank.

Compare:

- e. Someone drove downtown  $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{someone else} \\ \text{some other one} \end{array} \right\}$  robbed a bank.

- f. Some x drove downtown and some y such that  $x \neq y$  robbed a bank./

The identity between relative pronouns and antecedents has to be taken into account when preparing exercises such as combining two sentences into one by means of embedding. Some texts employ the concept of lexical identity forgetting about referential identity, or simply taking a simplistic point of view, do not show the possibility of having different lexical items with referential identity. In a very common type of exercise, students are asked to make one sentence out of two:

- a. this is the dog
- b. the dog caught the ball
- c. this is the dog that caught the ball.

We could very well have:

- a. this is the dog.
- b. it caught the ball.
- c. This is the dog that caught the ball.

I think this would reproduce a more natural situation, more likely to be found in real language.



## SECTION 4.

The problem presented in the previous section, dealing with adjectives as derived from relative clauses, can be expanded and discussed from another angle. We can take NP's containing an adjective, as in:

a. I was watching the beautiful girl.

Grammarians have explained that the rule for reduction of relative clauses with predicate adjectives is formulated in terms of deleting 'WH Aux be', and so, we should be able to give the relative clause from which the NP 'the beautiful girl' comes. But we find that there are two possible sources:

b. the girl who is beautiful

c. the girl who **was** beautiful

This problem is discussed by Bach, who arrives at the conclusion that 'most commonly it appears to be the Past Tense in Non Present contexts and Present elsewhere'. I suppose that Non Present contexts refer to Past, if we look carefully at the examples he provides:

i. The Russians **will put** a man in the moon who is well trained.

ii. Stalin **made** short shrift of those who **didn't** agree with him.

iii. I **am** watching a girl who is beautiful.

Again, I think this point can be discussed with advanced students but not at elementary stages.

Spanish speaking students would not find this structure very new, as it exists in Spanish, with the additional complexity of the use of the subjunctive in some cases, sentence i., for instance. (is = sea)

## SECTION 5.

There is an innocent looking structure which is used in most English textbooks even at a very elementary stage, in spite of the fact that it has not been taught before. Formal grammars connect it with relative clauses. I am referring to prepositional phrases used as noun modifiers:

a. The man on the right is drinking beer. (the man who is ...)

b. The knife in his hand is sharp (the knife which is ...)

c. What do we call the sea between these countries and Africa?

(the sea which is ...)

These examples are taken from Hornby's 'Oxford Progressive En-



glish Alternative Course' and appear in the first ten lessons of Book A. This structure is not taught in the four books of the Course.

Carlota Smith refers to these prepositional phrases when she deals with the deletion transformation, which optionally deletes 'AUX be'. This works very well with the examples she gives, and with the ones I have given above (a<sub>1</sub>, b<sub>1</sub>, and c<sub>1</sub>). But how could we account for a sentence like:

d. What is the fifth letter from the right? (which appears in Hornby's book A)? Is it derived from something like:

e. What is the fifth letter which is from the right?

It seems to me that this derivation from a relative clause is a good explanation, but nothing more than this. The teacher does not need to worry about the complexities lying behind this structure, as students seem to acquire its use without great difficulty.

#### SECTION 6.

The negation of elements, as opposed to sentence negation, can be explained by means of embedded sentences. In this respect, Bach says: "As a matter of fact, possibilities for negation provide a good clue as to whether a sentence is composite or not".

I shall take his example, which is classical, to illustrate this point.

a. The professors signed a petition

If we start from its underlying form b, we can see that it can be negated in three different ways:

b. The ones who were professors signed something which was a petition.

i . The professors **didn't** sign a petition.

NEG the ones who were professors signed something which was a petition.

ii . The **professors** didn't sign a petition.

The ones NEG who were professors signed something which was a petition.

iii. The professors didn't sign a **petition**.

The ones who were professors signed something NEG which was a petition.

The important fact for the teacher is to realize that the three possibilities suggested by Bach, plus others that one may add (1), do exist, and he has to be aware of

(1) The professors didn't sign a petition (but they supported one)  
The professors didn't sign a petition (but the petition)

the prosodic features which show these underlying meanings. It is not the teacher's concern to investigate whether each of these different meanings has a different deep structure or whether they all share a common base and their differences belong to the morphophonemic level.

Teachers may take a sentence in the native language of his students and vary its meaning by giving prominence to different elements in it, not necessarily in the negative construction exclusively, so as to make the students realize that the language of everyday life does employ this kind of device to enrich communication. Then it will be very easy for them to get the English sentences.

## SECTION 7.

The difference between Restrictive and Non Restrictive Clauses. (Defining and Non Defining, or Restrictive and Appositive (2)) is perhaps the best known aspect of Relative Clauses which has been studied. It is described and taught in most textbooks and it is interesting to notice that the differences between them are signalled in terms of meaning rather than of structure. It is recognized in them that intonation (or punctuation) plays an important role, and there are exercises which drill this aspect.

Some formal studies, such as Carlota Smith's, point out that there are some structural characteristics which differentiate Restrictive and Appositive Relative Clauses. According to her, the determiner of the Noun Phrase is the decisive element in the acceptance of relative clauses.

Traditionally, two types of determiners have been fundamentally distinguished: the definite and the indefinite articles. But this distinction is not enough, and she suggests that there are other additional elements that can be regarded as determiners or part of the determiner:

- a) Mass nouns and proper names (they have a  $\emptyset$  determiner).
- b) 'all', 'any', etc. (they may be considered part of Det. (Pre Det.)).
- c) Pronominal genitives ('his', 'John's') (They behave as Dets.)

Speakers distinguish noun phrases in terms of definiteness not only when they carry the determiner 'the' or 'a'.

The following NP's are ordered according to definiteness:

John	my book
the man	the book
any man	a book
	any book

(2) Carlota Smith's terminology.



Smith groups determiners in three categories, called:

- Unspecified (any, all)
- Specified (a, the, Ø)
- Unique (Ø (proper names))

There is another distinction which I have to make before going into further explanations. The concepts 'contained' and 'containing sentence'. In 'the ball that he bought is blue', the containing sentence is 'the ball is blue' and the contained sentence, 'he bought the ball'.

This distinction is relevant because it is the determiner in the containing sentence the one which conditions the relative clause we can embed. Now we are in a position to show the relationship between determiners and restrictive or non restrictive clauses.

UNIQUE DETERMINERS	Ø (proper names)	Accepting only APPOSITVE CLAUSES
SPECIFIED DETERMINERS	a the Ø	accepting APPOSITVE AND RESTRICTIVE
UNSPECIFIED DETERMINERS	any all	accepting only RESTRICTIVE CLAUSES

In order to apply the Relative Transformation we need a Relative marker, which will be part of the determiner. In other words, determiners will have R and/or A relative markers when they can accept R and/or A relative clauses' (1).

These are some phrase structure rules to produce determiners with the appropriate relative markers (1):

Noun phrase	→	Determiner + Substantive Proper name + (A)
	→	Specified + (R) + (A) Unspecified + (R)
Proper name	→	Ø
Specified	→	(Predeterminer + Definite Indefinite)
Unspecified	→	a Predeterminer.
Definite	→	the (+ Intensifier <sub>1</sub> if no A and no Predeterminer)

(1) Taken from Carlota Smith's article 'Determiners and Relative Clauses in a Generative Grammar of English', Language, vol. 40, 1 (1964).



Indefinite  $\longrightarrow$  a (+ Intensifier<sub>2</sub> if no A and no Predeterminer)

Predeterminer<sub>1</sub>  $\longrightarrow$  each, every, some, all, any, etc.

Intensifier<sub>1</sub>  $\longrightarrow$  very, etc.

Intensifier<sub>2</sub>  $\longrightarrow$  mere, utter, perfect, real, etc.

The following examples illustrate the acceptability of Relative

Clauses by determiners:

A Rel 1 John, who knows the way, has offered to guide us.

R Rel 2 \*John who is from the South hates cold weather.

A Rel 3 They pointed to a dog, who was looking at him hopefully.

R Rel 4 They pointed to a dog who was looking at him hopefully.

A Rel 5 \* Any book, which is about linguistics, is interesting.

A Rel 6 The book, which is about linguistics, is interesting.

R Rel 7 Any book which is about linguistics is interesting.

R Rel 8 He lives in a skyscraper that is twenty stories high.

R Rel 9 The man who fixed the radio left this note.

She also mentions that relative clauses of the Restrictive type, do not combine with possessive genitives:

10 The man's car, which he bought last year . . . .

11 . . . the man's old car . . . .

12 \* . . . the man's car that he bought last year . . . .

Another point worth mentioning in relation to relative clauses and definiteness in the determiner, is presented by Huddleston (1). He takes the sentences:

a. The man who came to dinner stayed all night.

b. The man stayed all night.

e. The man came to dinner.

and goes on to say: . . . where does THE come from in b.? The speaker does not presuppose that the hearer can identify the man referred to independently of the information that he came to dinner. To treat the antecedent as indefinite thus seems more satisfactory from a semantic point of view, and also enables us to explain certain differences between restrictive and non-restrictive relatives. It is frequently pointed out that proper nouns can take only non-restrictive relatives: the absence of restrictive relative would follow automatically from the above suggestion that the antecedent in the restrictive construction is always in-

(1) "The Sentence in Written English", Rodney D. Huddleston, Cambridge U.P., 1971.

definite. That this constraint on the antecedent does not hold in the non-restrictive construction is due to the fact that here there is no matrix NP: in 'the man, who came to dinner, stayed all night' the definiteness is a property of 'the man', not of the expression 'the man, who came to dinner'.

My aim in the present section has been to show that there is a relationship between determiners and relative clauses. The teacher has to take it into account when he prepares his teaching materials, and thus he will be able to avoid the possibility of making his students produce wrong sentences. As I said before, the difference between Restrictive and Non Restrictive Clauses has been shown by traditional textbooks pointing out their differences in meaning but without reference to structural factors. This would be the contribution of a Formal grammar, then.

## SECTION 8.

Another point that I shall mention very briefly is the possible deletion of the relative pronoun when its antecedent is the object of the clause, as in the following examples taken from Hornby's OPEAC Book B:

- a. These are the photographs (that) we took in London.
- b. Those are the people (that, whom) you saw yesterday.
- c. That is the man (that, whom) I met at the party.

It seems to me that formal grammars take this fact for granted and mention it casually, without going into detailed descriptions.

This is particularly difficult for Spanish speakers, as in this language the relative pronoun cannot be deleted. Moreover, there is the choice between two pronouns, "que" and "quien". The former is most commonly used both for Humans and Non Humans. The latter is generally preceded by a preposition, to indicate Dative Case, usually "a" or "con", and is used with Human nouns.

An explanation concerning the difference between subject and object is required. This can be exemplified in class by taking the two underlying sentences and using the personal pronoun in the second:

- a. These are the photographs. We took **them** in London
- b. Those are the people. You saw **them** yesterday.
- c. That is the man. I met **him** at the party.

The students, already familiar with the personal pronouns, will realize that the use of 'them' and 'him' in this case shows that they perform a given function, Objective Complement in this case. Some will also notice that the two sentences can be put together if we simply delete the personal pronoun. The teacher may choose another al-

ternative, and arrive at the final sentence in this way:

- i These are the photographs. We took the photographs in London.
- iii These are the photographs. We took them in London.
- iii These are the photographs which we took in London.
- iv These are the photographs we took in London.

it will depend on the students' level and on the objectives the teacher has in mind, whether he chooses one way or the other.

There are two other cases in which the relative pronoun is deleted. The particular problems can be centred in the fact that in sentences like a and b the relative item has the function of subject:

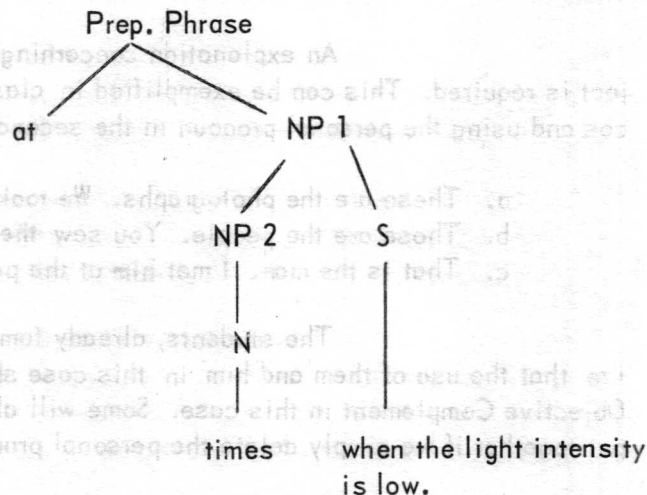
- a. It was John did it.
- b. There's a man wants to see you.

Huddleston considers them 'non basic' relatives, and he did not find examples in the corpus he analysed. We will not deal with them in this paper.

## SECTION 9

Other relatives, besides the relative pronouns already mentioned (who, which, that, etc.), which are the most common, are 'when', 'while', 'where' and 'why'. Huddleston employs the term 'pro-form' to cover both types of relatives. He mentions that 'when', 'while', 'where' and 'why' are interesting in that the antecedents are NP's, not adverbials of time, duration, place or reason. Thus the structure for the relevant part of (i), for example, is shown in the following PM:

- i) Photosynthesis takes place only at times when the light intensity is low.





The 'at' preceding 'times' is not a necessary part of the construction—compare 'the times when the light intensity is low are more frequent than might be imagined', or example (ii), where there is no 'for' preceding 'several reasons'.

ii) There are several reasons why  $V^{(r)}$  fluctuates.

This type of relative, in my experience, does not present special problems, and it is not necessary that the teacher isolates it from the other structures, i.e. the relatives employing 'who', 'which' and 'that'.

## SECTION 10.

There is still another relative that we have not mentioned.

It is the possessive 'whose'. As with the relatives mentioned in the previous section, it is not necessary to teach it separately, as it obeys to the same general principles. As in the case of 'whom', a relative clause containing the possessive can be related to underlying sentences paying special attention to the possessive pronoun in the contained sentence:

- a. i. Here's the man whose daughter Jack is going to marry.  
ii. Here's the man. Jack is going to marry his daughter.
- b. i. Dickens whose novels are still very popular, lived in the 19th c.  
ii. Dickens lived in the 19th c. His novels are still very popular.

I said in Section 8 that Spanish speaking students found it difficult to distinguish between "who" and "which", because this distinction does not exist in their language. With "whose" it is just the other way round, as in this language there are four items for the possessive relative: 'cuyo', 'cuya', 'cuyos', 'cuyas'.

**CONCLUSION.** In these 10 Sections I have described very briefly some of the aspects which formal grammarians have studied in connection with Relative Clauses and I have tried to indicate some of their possible applications to the teaching of English as a foreign language.

This paper cannot take into account all the teaching situations in which the teacher finds himself, all the differences in the objectives that he has established, the type of students he is teaching, etc, etc. I am conscious of the differences of approach that underlie the teaching of English to adults who need the language for bibliographical purposes or to university graduates who will do research in an English speaking country, just to mention two situations.

These will be the particular cases that will finally make the textbook writer and the teacher choose the application that he may have for conclusions such as the ones presented in this paper.

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