SEMANTICS OF RELATIVE PRONOUNS IN THE STRUCTURE OF AN ENGLISH SENTENCE

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Abstract: In this article, there are fully information about relative articles, in addition, there are some information which based on facts about semantic role of relative pronouns. Specifically, it shows how the account of restrictive relative clause constructions presented in Sag (1997) can be extended to provide an account of the syntax and semantics of NRCs and of the main differences between NRCs and restrictive relatives. The analysis reconciles the semantic intuition that NRCs behave like independent clauses with their subordinate syntax. A significant point is that, in contrast with many other approaches, it employs only existing, independently motivated theoretical apparatus, and requires absolutely no new structures, features, or types.

Key words: NRC, who, which, where, that, what, RRCs, Sag (1997), Poesio and Zucchi (1992).

Introduction

In modern English languages there are lots of interesting topics. All topics are connected with each other. For instance gerund and infinitive topics are very interesting, while the topic article has some difficulties. Pronouns are very easy topic. There are several types of pronouns. One of them is relative pronouns.

A relative pronoun is a pronoun that introduces a relative clause. It is called a "relative" pronoun because it "relates" to the word that its relative clause modifies.

The main results and findings

The person who phoned me last night is my teacher.
There are five basic relative pronouns: **who, whom, whose, which, that***

**Who** (subject) and **whom** (object) are generally only for people. **Whose** is for possession. **Which** is for things. **That** can be used for things and people only in *defining* relative clauses (clauses that are essential to the sentence and do not simply add extra information).

We use **who** in relative clauses to refer to people, and sometimes to pet animals. We use it to introduce defining and non-defining relative clauses:

*I think there’d be a lot of children who’d love to have a climbing wall in school.* (defining)

*That’s the dog who doesn’t like me.* (defining; referring to a pet animal)

*There’s this guy at work, who’s one of my friends, well he’s never been on a train.* (non-defining)

**Subjects and objects**

**Who** can act as the subject or the object of the relative clause:

*She’s going out with a bloke who’s in the army.* (who refers to a bloke and is the subject of *is* in the relative clause; bloke is an informal word for a man)

*The woman who I saw yesterday was Sheila.* (who refers to the woman and is the object of *saw* in the relative clause)

**Who** + prepositions

We can use **who** as the complement of a preposition:

*It was Cath who Ian gave the keys to. It wasn’t me.* (who refers to Cath and is the complement of the preposition *to*)

We put the preposition at the end of the relative clause, and not immediately before **who**:
Of all my friends, she’s the one who I know I can rely on.

Not: … the one on who I know I can rely.

Who with collective groups of people

We often use who with collective human nouns (e.g. committee, government, group, panel, police, team):

Nicola phoned the fire brigade, who then alerted the police and social workers.

We do not use who for things:

There are some very good art books which you can get ideas from.

Not: There are some very good art books who you can get ideas from.

Relative pronouns: whom

Whom + prepositions

The most common use of whom is with a preposition. We can use whom as the complement of a preposition:

The first book was a terrible historical novel for children which was turned down by every publisher to whom it was sent. (whom refers to every publisher and is the complement of the preposition to)

Drama in schools is particularly good for pupils for whom English is a second language.

We put the preposition before whom.

Relative pronoun: whose

We usually use whose as a relative pronoun to indicate possession by people and animals. In more formal styles we can also use it for things.
We use *whose* before nouns instead of a possessive expression (*my, your, his, her, its, our, their, x’s*) in defining and non-defining clauses:

*He’s marrying a girl whose family don’t seem to like him.* (The family of the girl he’s marrying don’t seem to like him.)

*There was me and there was Kate, whose party it was, and then there were two other people.* (It was Kate’s party.)

*It is a rambling Tudor house, whose sitting room looks out over a wonderful walled garden.* (The sitting room of the house looks out over …)

**Whose** + prepositions

We can use *whose* + noun as the complement of a preposition:

*Kate, whose sister I used to share a house with, has gone to work in Australia.* (whose sister refers to Kate and is the complement of *with*)

We can put the preposition immediately before the relative pronoun (more formal written styles) or at the end of the relative clause (more informal).

**Relative pronouns: which**

We use *which* in relative clauses to refer to animals and to things. We use it to introduce defining and non-defining relative clauses. We always use *which* to introduce relative clauses when they refer to a whole sentence or clause:

*You need to tick the box which says yes.* (defining)

*He won’t have much time to prepare for the meeting, which is this afternoon.* (non-defining)

*She had to get up and walk all the way to the other side of the room, which isn’t easy with a bad back.* (which refers to the whole sentence before it)

We use *which* or *that*, not *what*:
Another activity which/that I have chosen is photography.

Not: Another activity what I have chosen is photography.

Subjects and objects

Which can act as the subject or the object of the relative clause:

*The new sports complex, which will be built on the site of the old power station, will provide facilities for cricket, soccer, bowls and badminton.* (which refers to *the new sports complex* and is the subject of *will be built* in the relative clause)

*It was the same picture which I saw at the National Gallery.* (which refers to *the same picture* and is the object of *saw* in the relative clause)

*Which + prepositions*

We can use which as the complement of a preposition:

*Early in the Autumn Term there is a reception at which you can meet current staff and students.* (which refers to *a reception* and is the complement of *at*)

*Close by, in the churchyard, is the famous Rudston stone, from which the village takes its name.* (which refers to *the famous Rudston stone* and is the complement of *from*)

We can put the preposition immediately before the relative pronoun (more formal) or at the end of the relative clause (more informal).

**Relative pronouns: that**

We use *that* instead of *who, whom* or *which* in relative clauses to refer to people, animals and things. We use it to introduce defining clauses only. *That* is more informal than *who, whom* or *which*:

*We met somebody last night that did the speech therapy course two years after you.* (refers to a person)
The 8.30 is the train that you need to get. (refers to a thing)

She blamed herself for everything that had happened.

Subjects and objects

That can act as the subject or the object of the relative clause:

He finally remembers one lesson that his mum had taught him early – Don’t take money that doesn’t belong to you. (that refers to money and is the subject of belong in the relative clause)

It’s the same cooker that my mother has. (that refers to the same cooker and is the object of has in the relative clause)

That after superlatives

We often use that after superlatives:

The Wimbledon men’s final was the best game of tennis that I’ve ever seen.

That + prepositions

That can refer to the complement of a preposition:

We’ve got some tennis balls that you can play with. (that refers to some tennis balls and is the complement of the preposition with)

No relative pronoun

In informal styles, we often leave out the relative pronoun. We only do this in defining relative clauses, and when the relative pronoun is the object of the verb. We don’t leave out the relative pronoun when it is the subject of the verb nor in non-defining relative clauses:

German is a language which I’ve found hard to learn. (or German is a language I’ve found hard to learn.) (defining relative clause: which is the object)
She’s the singer who I heard on the radio. (or She’s the singer I heard on the radio.) (defining relative clause: who is the object)

There’s a hill which begins three miles after the start of the race. (defining relative clause: which is the subject)

Not: There’s a hill begins three miles after the start of the race.

Sir James, whose birthday is on February 26, plans to lay on a big party. (non-defining relative clause)

No relative pronoun + preposition

In defining relative clauses, we can also leave out the relative pronoun when it is the complement of a preposition. When we do this, we always put the preposition at the end of the relative clause:

She was at the garden party which I was telling you about. (or She was at the garden party about which I was telling you. or She was at the garden party I was telling you about.) (defining relative clause: which is the complement of about)

Relative pronouns: when, where and why

In informal language, we often use where, when or why to introduce defining relative clauses instead of at which, on which or for which.

Though superficially similar, English non-restrictive (‘appositive’) relative clauses (NRCs), as in (1a), differ phonologically, structurally, and semantically from restrictive relatives (RRCs), as in .¹

Kim has three pets, which a neighbour looks after. [NRC]

A very widespread and appealing view of the semantics of NRCs is that nonrestrictive relative pronouns are like normal anaphoric pronouns, and NRCs are interpreted like independent clauses, outside the scope of sentential operators (i.e. with ‘wide scope’).
There, it will exploit an insight due to Sells (1985, 1986) to provide a semantics for NRCs which is consistent with this ‘discourse anaphora’ view, and with some apparently contradictory data which suggest that NRCs have, paradoxically, both wide and narrow scope simultaneously.

The underlying intuition here can be seen by comparison of examples involving NRCs, like (1a), and an example like. These have very similar interpretations. Notice, for example, that both normal pronouns and non-restrictive relative pronouns show the ‘totality’ interpretation:

Kim has three pets. A neighbour looks after them. The others fend for themselves.

Likewise, compatibility with a wide range of antecedents is reminiscent of normal pronouns.

Kim won the race. It was a relief/I didn’t think she could do it.

NRCs cannot contain ‘externally licensed’ negative polarity items (NPIs). The ungrammaticality of suggests that the NRC is outside the scope of the negative quantifier; suggest the NRC is outside the scope of the interrogative operator. Notice that NPIs in the corresponding RRCs are unproblematic.

No one, who had anything to drink, suffered ill effects.

So far, the picture is rather consistent. It has often been claimed that this extends to the interaction of NRCs and quantification: specifically, that NRCs take wide scope with respect to quantified NPs, and so cannot attach to, or contain pronouns bound by, external quantifiers. Data like the following seem to support this claim (Ross, 1967):

Every/No plane, which has an engine in its tail, is a failure.

NRCs are typically interpreted outside the scope of propositional attitude verbs. The most natural reading of (14a) attributes to Kim a belief about linguists in general, and is consistent with her having no beliefs at all about the IPA. By contrast, the most natural reading of requires that Kim has beliefs about the IPA and linguists who use it. In fact, the NRC in is interpreted as an assertion of the speaker’s. It is as if the content of the NRC is not part of the clause that contains it.
Kim believes that linguists, who use the IPA, are clever. [NRC]

Kim believes that linguists who use the IPA are clever. [RRC]

Similarly, NRCs are naturally interpreted outside the scope of sentence negation. In above, the main clause is a denial, but the NRC it contains is interpreted as an assertion. Likewise, while it is possible to focus negation on part of an RRC, this is not possible with an NRC (Jackendoff, 1977):

We didn’t talk to the man, who married SUSAN. [NRC]
We didn’t talk to the man who married SUSAN. [RRC]

There seems to be a genuine paradox here. However, while the actual treatment proposed in Sells (1985) cannot deal with it, Sells’ central insight about what is going on seems to be correct, and provides the basis for a solution. What Sells observed is that this apparently inconsistent behaviour of having wide scope and taking quantified NP antecedents is not unique to NRCs. The same thing occurs with normal anaphoric pronouns in independent clauses.

Every chess set comes with a spare pawn, which you will find taped to the top of the box.

Every chess set comes with a spare pawn. You will find it taped to the top of the box.

Moreover, the conditions under which this is possible are similar. Broadly speaking, they are conditions where there is some signal of discourse continuity which triggers the kind of accommodation process known as ‘telescoping’ or ‘modal subordination’ (e.g. (Roberts, 1989, 1996), Poesio and Zucchi (1992)).

Conclusion

This article has provided an account of English NRCs which deals with their main syntactic and semantic properties, and captures the similarities and differences between NRCs and RRCs. The essence of the analysis is that NRCs are syntactically subordinate but behave semantically like independent clauses. The key ingredients of the analysis are, from the syntactic side, Sag (1997)’s treatment of restrictive relatives, and, from the semantic side (i) the idea of NRCs as having wide-scope, hence being introduced (like proper names and indexicals) into the
‘top box’ of the discourse structure, and (ii) the idea that pronouns in NRCs work like normal pronouns, triggering accommodation processes under appropriate conditions. The analysis exploits a variety of devices in a novel way, but (modification of REL values apart) it has employed only existing, independently motivated, structures, features, and types. This seems a significant result considering the radical innovations that have sometimes been thought necessary.

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1 UFRL at the University of Paris 7 and the LAGB, as well as at HPSG04. I am grateful to participants at these events, and anonymous referees from the HPSG04 programme committee, for criticism and comments. Special thanks are due to Olivier Bonami, Bob Borsley, Annabel Cormack, Anette Frank, Danièle Godard, Ruth Kempson, Bob Levine, Kathleen O'Connor, Peter Sells and Henriette de Swart. \