A Note on the Identity and Structure of the Relative Clause in English

Yaw Sekyi-Baidoo, Dep't of English Education, Univ. of Education, Winneba

ABSTRACT

This paper is basically a rethinking into the English relative clause. It intends to shed light on the syntactic and interpretive identity of the relative clause vis-à-vis other subordinate clauses of similar structure as well as other adjectival forms.

It examines the internal structure of the RC, dwelling particularly on the issues of agency, and looks at the relationship between the RC and the agency, the problem of determining attachment in wide and local attachments and the placement and deletability of the relative element.

Again, it considers the various placements of the relative clause as in ordinary complex noun phrases, and in direct attachment and postponement, and identifies centring and right-branching relative clauses. It also establishes the headless relative as a form of diminutive relatives and as a derivation from the finite noun clause structure.

The paper also looks at the RC in cleft sentences, and identifies a possibly complex relative modification comprising obligatory as well as optional relative clauses. Associated with this is a discussion of the complexities in relative clause embedding and coordination.

One of the universals of language is NP modification – that in every language there is a strategy for modifying the noun phrase, just in the same way as verbs are also complemented. Another universal, which is an aspect of noun modification, is the relative clause. Dzameshie (1995: 99) acknowledges thus

> Relativisation seems to be a universal syntactic phenomenon, but its structural manifestation is not universal since there are typological differences among the languages of the world.

Such differences in the structural realisations of relative clauses include the position of the relative clause in relation to the NP. Some languages, for example, Japanese, have pre-modifying RCs, whilst others have post-modifying RCs. Such a classification also has implications for our analysis of the NP that is being modified i.e whether it is a postcedent or antecedent NP. Another aspect of the peculiarities of relativisation strategies is the way in which the RC is connected to the NP and also to the matrix clause whose NP it modifies. Additionally, linguists consider whether the relativising elements or particles reflect the

gender, number, case of the relativised NP, the internal structure of the relative clauses as well as the syntactic and semantic functions of the relative clause. It is important to realise, however, that in many ways the semantic implications of the RCs are closely related to the structural peculiarities of the RC and the RC-NP relationship.

Before we set out to discuss the use and structure of the English relative clause, it would be important to remind oneself that the RC is not the only strategy by which the English language, and indeed other languages, post-modifies NPs. Other structures include the appositive phrases and clauses, prepositional phrases, and verbless, non-finite clauses and reduced clauses, which are sometimes classifies as 'non-wh- relatives'. We would, however, use our applications of the term 'relative clause' to exclude some of the items which are sometimes classified as 'non-wh- relatives'. In furtherance of this, I wish to say that items which occur in post-modification may also be divided into the 'adjunct' and the 'relative'. In this classification, we would admit that though the infinitival clause post-modifies the NP, it is seen as an *adjunct* adjectival clause and not a *relative* clause.

We describe some of the post-head modifiers as 'adjunct' because there is, structurally, no link between them and the matrix clause. These elements are not selected according to any morphological properties that link them with the matrix clause. For instance, the infinitival clause - *pushing the car* - can be adjoined to the following NPs, and because it is structurally frozen, it would be correct in all these circumstances in spite of the changes in number and gender:

The boy *pushing the car*

The men *pushing the car*

The animal *pushing the car*

There, exists, on the other hand, a lexical relationship between the relative clause and the matrix clause. This link is evident, first, in the co-referentiality and the grammatical agreement between an NP of the RC, and the NP in the superordinate clause for whose modification the RC is employed, which in our case is the antecedent. For instance, in the sentence below:

The man *who was pushing the car* slipped and fell.

'who' (which is the subject of the RC) and 'the man' (subject of the MC) are related semantically and grammatically. Semantically, they refer to the same entity. Grammatically, 'who' agrees with 'man', and 'who' is therefore chosen against other relative elements such as 'whose', 'which' 'when' 'why' and 'whom', because these others are componentially deficient in at least one of the following attributes, which are all part of the meaning and lexical properties of 'who': **+ noun, + human, + subject, - object, - determiner**. 'Whose', for instance, cannot be selected because it is **–subject/+determiner**. Another way in which this relativity can occur is in the agreement between the NP of the relative clause and the verb of the matrix clause if the antecedent is the subject of the matrix clause. For example in

The man *who pushes the car* slips.

there is agreement between the 'who' and 'slips'. 'Who' here is singular because 'the man', which is its antecedent, is singular. It therefore agrees with 'slips' which is the verb of the matrix clause.

The distinction between the 'relative' and the 'adjunct' adjectival clauses is, however, more complex than we have seen above. There is a greater semantic-

grammatical consideration which bothers on tense and definiteness of description and attachment. Let us compare the following sentences:

(1) The dog *by the car* is hungry.   -   prepositional phrase

(2) The dog *lying by the car* is hungry   -   infinitival clause

(3) The dog which/*that is lying by the car* is hungry.   -   relative clause.

It would be understood that the three modifiers above vary in terms of their definiteness of sense, and this definiteness increases down the list. (1) would be considered the least definite, for it tell only about the position or location of the 'dog' and its position in relation to 'the car'. The construction, like (2) is not marked for tense. Further, there is no information about the posture of the 'dog'. Whereas this second indefiniteness seems to be addressed in (2) in 'lying', the modification in (2) as indicated above has no tense, except that the idea of tense could be inferred from the adjacent, matrix clause – *The dog is hungry*. If the qualities of tense, sense of the verb, and subject-verb agreement are useful elements of a clause's finiteness and definiteness, then we can say that it is the relative clause which – unlike the other post-modifiers - has grammatical as well as interpretive independence.

Unlike the above (1) and (2) above, the appositive clause (AC) as in (4) below exhibits the independence we would associate with the relative clause - it has tense, subject as well as an overt subject-verb agreement:

(4)   The order *that the juniors would serve the seniors* is a visit to the past.

However, unlike the RC, the appositive clause (AC) only explains, expands or re-states the idea contained in the NP (the order). Again, between the AC and the NP is a kind of coreferentiality, so that the two elements are basically interchangeable, notwithstanding

the changes in semantic focus in such transformation. It generally defines the sense or 'whatness' of the NP rather than say something new to describe it. On the other hand, the RC adds more information, and again, being adjectival (and therefore of a different class from the NP) it, unlike the appositive clause, can neither replace nor interchange positions with the NP. In effect, the AC can be said to be 'intensive' and not 'extensive', because it does not (unlike the RC) introduce any new world into the matrix clause. Relativisation, on the other hand, is synta-semantic process by which a matrix clause annexes another clause by associating it semantically, syntactically and lexically to an NP in its structure. Such a clause has an independent sense capable of being interpreted as a sentence (unlike (1) and (2), and which is informative and intensive because it introduces a new idea, thought or occurrence.

The RC differs from other post-modifiers - especially (1) and (2) from the point of view of their attachment. The remarkable grammatical and semantic dependency of the prepositional phrase (1) and the infinitival clause (2) are also a pointer to their inseparability from the NP which they modify. They are, thus, considered 'defining' or 'restrictive', very crucial for the identity of the NP and very dependent on the RC on its own meaning. In (1) and (2), it is believed that there may be other dogs. What sets this one which we talk of as being hungry apart is that 'it is by' or that 'it is lying by' the tree.

The issue of attachment becomes more complex when we consider the fact that even when we choose the restrictive form of the RC as in

The dog *that is lying by the tree*

it is known that it is intrinsically less attached and less strong even in its restriction than

The dog *by* the tree

or

The dog *lying by the tree*

The comparative disattachment of the RC can be attributed to its comparative semantic and structural fullness and independence, and the general question of *optionality* associated with it.

Again, the English RC is both **+case** and **–case**. By case consideration, we are concerned with whether in the RC strategy the nature of the relative element chosen reflects the case or function of the relativised NP. In English, the choice between 'who' and 'whom' was originally a case consideration – 'who' for the nominative (subject) and 'whom' for the accusative or object roles.

The Placement of the English Relative Clause

The English relative clause occurs in post-modification position. Payne (1987 326) identifies this positioning of the RC as a universal linguistic tendency:

> …there is a tendency for relative clauses to be postnominal. This tendency is probably due to a universal pragmatic principle that shifts 'heavy', i.e. long, phonologically complex, information to late in the clause.

This tendency might also explain the sequence of postnominal modifiers described below. It is evident that the relative clause is, generally, the most grammatically or syntactically complex of the listed postnominal modifiers, but there is more to it in terms of its attachment to the relativised NP as in wide and close attachment, postponement and extraposition, relationship with other post-modifiers, and the nature of the superordinate structure of the sentence in which it is found.

The relative clause, as seen above, is generally the most independent form of post-modification of the NP. It has its own subject, verb and complementation, as the case

may be. Generally then, the RC is the last of a group of items in the post-modification of an NP. It, in this position, has the tendency of annexing other forms of modification to itself if they follow it in the post-modification, and it, thus, causes them to be interpreted as a post-modification of its arguments or NPs, or as adverbs modifying its verb. Let's consider the following ideas about a soldier:

(5) was in mufti
(6) wore a powerful gun
(7) was thinking about being promoted for his bravery
(8) was caught up in crossfire.

In a complex construction, we would keep the idea in (8) as the main clause, (7) as a non-finite –*ing* clause, (6) as a relative clause and (5) as a prepositional phrase post-modifier. Now let's see the corresponding possible complex sentences below:

(9) The soldier *who was wearing a powerful gun* in mufti thinking about being promoted was caught up in crossfire.

(10) The soldier in mufti, thinking about being promoted, *who wore a powerful gun,* was caught up in a   crossfire.

It is evident that whereas it is clear in (10) that 'in mufti' and 'thinking about being promoted' are both describing the soldier directly, it appears in (9) that they are associated with the wearing of the gun, perhaps as adjuncts of circumstance. In fact, we could even say that 'in mufti' in (9) is describing the powerful gun, except that it might defy normal sensibilities.

We might, thus, even expand our rule to say that the items in the post-modification of the NP generally have an ordering, and that when this ordering as described below is flouted, the bigger, or more complex item annexes all those elements

which should come before it but have been placed after it in any given sentence. The ordering is as follows

    I. apposition
    II. adjective
    III. prepositional phrase/adjunct phrase
    IV. non-finite clause
    V. relative clause (or reduced relative)

Attachment

    One very important thing to consider about the English relative clause is the issue of attachment, and by this we are referring to the relationship of accessibility between the RC and its relativised NP. According to Quirk et al (1985) the most important feature for determining the attachment of the relative clause is the *agency*, which we will discuss in closer detail below. 'Agency' refers to the element in the RC by which the NP is accessed. For instance, a distinction is made between relative elements as to what 'who' or 'which' could refer to. Again, relative adverbs are restricted in their agency: 'where' (place and situation), 'when' (time), 'why' (reason).

    The issue of attachment becomes very critical in multiple-site contexts when the relative clause is preceded by a number of noun phrases, one of which it is expected to be modifying, as in the sentence below (the pre-RC NPs are bracketed):

(11)   *[The man] by [the car] of [the minister] which was brought only yesterday is the chief director.*

Here, there are a number of such pre-RC NPs among which 'the man' and 'the minister' have prosodic and proximity advantage respectively. Nevertheless, it is still evident that of the three (3) NPs, only 'the car' can be attached to 'which' as a relative clause agency,

because the others - 'the man' and 'the minister' - do not share the attribute of **–human**, which is very crucial in the meaning of 'which', the agency.

The nature of the attachment between the agency and the relativised NP could be described as *wide* or *local. A* Local attachment involves a direct relationship and a simple NP structure where the RC follows the NP directly without any intervention by another NP. In wide attachments, on the other hand, we have a complex NP in whose modification there is another or other NPs before the RC. In such a situation, the attachment between the RC and the NP is blocked by the intervening NPs. Again, since the intervening NPs are part of the modification of the relativised NP and precede the RC, they are seen as part of the total idea of the NP which is being modified by the RC. The sentences below would be illustrative:

(12)　　[The food] was for [the dog] *that barked longest in the night.*　　-　　**local**

(13)　　The food was for [the dog] in [the manger] in [the porch]　　-　　**wide**
　　　　　that barked longest in the night.

In the sentences above, 'the dog' (12) has a local attachment whilst 'the dog in the manger in the porch' (13) for its complexity (**NP** + Prep + NP + Prep + NP) has a wide attachment. This is because there in (12), there is no NP intervening between the relativised NP 'the dog' and the RC. In (13), on the other hand, 'the manger' and 'the porch' interpose between the relativised NP, 'the dog' and the RC, hence the description 'wide attachment'.

The issue of wide attachment has been very important to grammarians, pragmatists and psycholinguists as it draws attention to the direction of modification and the interpretation of the RC and the entire complex sentence. It is this which has prompted scholars to go into the dis-embedding of relative clauses among other aspects

of text simplification which aims to 'rewrite sentences, reducing their grammatical and lexical complexity while preserving their meaning and information content' for people low abilities at analysing complex structures, and parsers, (Siddharthan, 2002) Other proponents and practitioners of text simplification include Chandrasekar et al. (1996), Carrol et al. (1998) and Briscoe and Caroll (1993, 1995).

Scholars have also attempted to explain the nature of attachment in complex NPs of wide attachment and also to show principles and tendencies for realising the relativised NP among a group of other relativisable NPs. Gibson et al (1996) have proposed that RC attachment in three-site contexts depends on the two structural principles of *Recency Preference* and *Predicate Proximity*. The recency preference principle states that the RC in such contexts is generally attached to the most recent NP or the NP that is closest to it. To the predicate proximity principle, on the other hand, the RC is generally attached also to the NP which is closest to the main predicate. Thus in the three-site context such as

(14)   The officer in the office near the near the MD of the company *who received an award for efficiency* has been given a political appointment.

'the company' would be seen as the relativised or attached NP since it is the most recent NP. It is evident, however, that this rule may not always be applicable, as in the sentence above. Perhaps the next nearest NP 'MD' would be selected because of the principle of agency as put forward by Quirk et al. (1985). In such a situation, there may be the need to combine the proximity and agency principles in determining the attachment in a multi-sited context. Again, in the sentence:

(15)   'Nothing works here,' remarked the [old consultant] from [the Koomsons} of [Cape Coast] *who had retired as registrar of a university.*

'old consultant' would be the attached NP because it is nearest to 'remarked' which is the main predicate of the sentence. In this sentence then, the predicate proximity principle has applied.

In addition to the agency and the proximity-preference approaches, some scholars have also established that prosodic features are also important in establishing the attached NP in a multi-sited context since in speech, generally, the NP to which an RC will be attached will already have been focused by prosodic means. Thus, lexical-syntactic focusing is preceded by prosodic accentuation by which the NP is selected among other NPs as the thematised one and for which further modification in the form of the RC will be accorded, (Schafer et al 1996). The study proposes and confirms that it is generally difficult to use prosody to communicate that the NP2 in a three-site context is the one attached to the RC. It posits, thus, that though prosody can be used to determine attachment in a complex nominal structure, it is usually for *NP1* and *NP3*. It is in furtherance of the claims of the prosodic approach that others have also proposed that the accessibility of any of the three NPs could be enhanced by blocking out the accessibility to the other NPs, as in the Blocking Hypothesis, (Pynte and Prieur 1996).

The Placement of the English Relative Clause

We can also look at the English relative by considering its placement. It is already established that the RC in English has a fixed position as a post-modifier. There are, however, still different positions in the post-modifier slot in which the RC could be placed. Two major positions of the RC are considered on the basis of the nature of accessibility or closeness between the NP and the RC. Here, we have two situations which can be referred to as *direct attachment* and *postponement*.

In direct attachment, there is no interposition between the NP and the RC. Any element found here would be part of the initial, pre-RC post-modification of the NP as seen in the multi-sited context above and in the sentences below:

(16)   We saw the boy dancing *who was caned yesterday.*

or

(17)   Nobody noticed the house in the forest *where the chief was murdered.*

In these sentences, 'dancing' and 'in the forest' are pre-RC post-modifiers. It is, however, necessary to observe the syntactic ambiguity which such constructions can pose. 'Dancing' itself could be seen either as a participial post-modifier of 'boy' and therefore as a reduced form of the relative clause ('who was dancing'); or as a complement in the SVOC basic structure where it expresses the situation of the by at the time the 'seeing' took place. On the other hand, 'who was caned yesterday' can be considered as a postponed RC, in which case it would be a kind of parenthetical description after the circumstances in which he was seen – 'dancing' – have been expressed, with the interpretation: *We saw the boy who is/was dancing, and he is/was the one who was caned yesterday.* On the other hand, 'dancing' could be seen as a pre-RC post-modifier which, with the RC, constitutes the totality of the post-modifier description of the 'boy', with the interpretation: *We saw the boy who was dancing, and who was the one caned yesterda*y.

Direct RCs are considered according to the function of the NP to which they are attached and their position on the linear structure of the sentence. For instance, we have subject-attached, object-attached and complement-attached RCs. Adjunct-attached RCs are introduced by the relative adverbs 'where', 'when', 'why' and 'how'. Additionally, RCs could be *centre-embedded* or r*ight branching*, (Gouvea, 2004). Subject centre-embedded

RCs follow after the subject and are followed by the VP. It is for their placement between the NP head and the VP that makes them centre-embedded:

> **(18)** The girl *who helps the beggar* is washing his clothes.

On the other hand,

> **(19)** The beggar is watching the girl *who washes his clothes.*

is right-branching. It is also subject-focussed in the sense that the NP it modifies is the subject of the RC. Thus, whereas centre-embedded subject RCs modify the subjects of the matrix clause, the right-centred ones modify the subjects of the relative clauses. RCs modifying objects are also centre-embedded or right-branching. The centre-embedded ones will modify a subject which is itself the object of the verb in the RC. In this sense, the NP has the dual role as subject of the matrix clause and the traced object of the verb of the relative clause. The following is an example:

> **(20)** The beggar *whom he girl helps* gives freely to the poorer beggars.

In the analysis, 'the beggar' is the subject of the matrix clause – 'beggar…gives freely to the poorer beggars', but 'the girl helps the beggar', and 'the beggar', and the beggar is, thus, the object of the transitive verb 'helps'.

In right-branching subject RCs, the relativised NP is the object of the main clause but is the subject of the RC. The object right-branching RC is peculiar in the sense that though the relativised NP is the object of the matrix clause (as with the subject right-centred RC), it is the object of the verb of the RC. The two are illustrations:

> **(21)** The girl helps the beggar *who gives freely to poorer beggars.* (Subject right-branching)

> **(22)** The girl helps the beggar *whom the thieves wounded.* (Object Right-Branching).

Agency and Attachment

The relationship between the relative item and the rest of the RC can be described in terms of agency, and the choice of the relative item is seen to depend on the nature of the relativised noun as well as its grammatical functions in the sentence and in the construction of the proposition contained in the RC.

The agency is considered first on the basis of its *personhood*, i.e. whether it is considered **person** or **non-person.** Person agencies take 'who'/'whom', whilst the **non-**person takes 'which'. There is also the **person-frozen** form 'that'. There is, however, no consideration of number - whether singular or plural. Relative elements can, thus, be used for plural as well as singular nouns. Some languages, for example Akan, make number distinction in their relative agencies. It is important to recognise that the person category is not strictly given to only humans, but also human organisations, and generally these organisations are used as metonymies for their membership or leadership:

(23) Any government *who* does not uphold the principle of rule of law is anti-human.

Additionally, non-human things, especially animals and spirits may be given *person* agencies for literary as well as thematic considerations. Similarly, 'which', which is basically *non-person,* is used for gods and spirits. Whereas the use of non-human agency for persons is considered abusive, the use of the non-person 'which' for spirits and deities could be interpreted as an attempt to enhance their difference from man. For instance, some versions of the Bible have in the Lord's Prayer 'Our father *which* art in Heaven'. 'That', however, is neutral and is used for *person* as well as *non-person* agencies.

The agency may also on the basis of the function, whether as subject, object, determiner or adverb. This is associated with the role performed by the relativised NP in

the RC. Keenan (1985) calls this 'case recoverability', and suggests that as a universal principle, there is generally a way by which the function of the referent in the RC could be identified. All the agencies seen above - 'who', 'which and 'that' - are used as subject as well was objects. 'Who', however, has a formal variant 'whom' which is used when the relativised NP functions only as object of the verb of the RC. On the other hand, 'when', 'where', 'why' 'how' are neither used as subjects nor subjects. Being relative adverbs, they tell more about the adverb of time, place, reason and manner. Relative agencies could also be selected on the basis of their possession or association with a noun which is the syntactic subject of the RC. 'Whose' is the frozen relative possessive determiner for all nouns, be they person or non-person. This is evident in the sentences below:

(24) The animal ***whose*** *ears were slashed off* died later under the iroko tree.

(25) Busia ***whose*** *PP Government was overthrown in 1972* died in Oxford in 1978.

It is worthwhile to observe that the ideas of place, time, reason and manner have their respective agencies - 'where', 'when', 'why', 'how' - and this is only when the RC tells more about the idea of place, time, reason, or manner, thus, reinforcing the idea involved in the relativised adverb. On the other hand, we would observe that the adverb category as expressed in the relativised items here is not intrinsic. Intrinsically, they are nouns. Therefore when they are seen to be performing nominal function (object), they are relativised with 'which' or 'that'. In the examples below:

(26) We arrived finally at the place ***which*** *frightened us during childhood.*

(27) We arrived exactly at the time ***which*** *Daddy had predicted.*

(28)   For his failure, he assigned a reason ***which*** *everybody knew.*

It is worth noting from the above that the choice of agency is influenced also by the function of the relativised noun or adjunct, and that this function is determined by the verb of the relative clause rather than that of the matrix clause. Thus, the same noun occurring in the same matrix clause may take different agencies if the verbs in the different relative clauses modifying them demand different forms of complementation. This isbecause the complement in such circumstances will specify the function of the relativised item as far as its relationship with the relative clause is concerned, and the corresponding choice of agency. In the sentences below:

(29) We went to the kitchen *where* the meat **was**.

(30) We went to the kitchen *which* we **built**.

we have the same matrix clause – 'We went to the kitchen'. However, each of the two uses of 'the kitchen' has a different agency. This difference, as explained above, depends on the function of 'the kitchen' vis-à-vis the verb in the relative clause – 'was' or built'. 'Was' is a copulative verb which can sometimes take an adjunctive complement (of place). By this, 'the kitchen' performs an adverbial of place function, and therefore uses the relativised adverb agency, 'where'. Simply, it can be seen as answering the question: '*Where* was the meet? which draws attention to the use of 'where'. Evidently, it would be ungrammatical to have

(31) ?We went to the kitchen *which* the meet was.

On the other hand, 'built' is a transitive verb which requires for its complementation an NP. If 'the kitchen' is what was 'built', then it is an NP and therefore requires 'which' (is a nominal-relativising relativiser) as its agency. Certainly, the meaning would be different, and perhaps absurd, if the sentence were

(32) ?We went to the kitchen *where* we built.

and the interpretation would be that 'we didn't build the kitchen', rather, 'we built another structure in the kitchen'. Thus, where there is conflict of choice of agency, English resolves this by recourse to the function of the relativised noun as determined by the verb in the RC.

Sentential Relatives

We can categorise relative clauses here into the *sentential relatives* and the *NP relatives.* Whereas other relatives (NP relatives) post-modify NP antecedents, the sentential relatives have main clauses as their antecedents, so that the relativising item, ('which') is attached to the situation expressed in the matrix clause, which includes the subject, verb as well as elements which constitute the complementation of the verb. The sentential relative, again, does not 'describe' or 'define' as the NP relatives do. They are organised as comments or impressions about the situation described in the matrix clause, or as depicting events which are related to the situation in the matrix clause in terms of temporality or causality:

(33) Amadu does not eat fufu, *which is surprising.*

(34) Terry drove too fast and attempted a reckless overtaking, *which caused his unfortunate death.*

(35) She goes after boys younger to be his children, *which is stupid and disgraceful.*

That the link is between the relative clause and the whole of the matrix clause rather than any particular noun is evident in the reframed sentences below. Here the relativised sentence is composed as a *that* clause, rather than as a noun phrase, signifying that the relativised form is not an NP but a clause (the matrix clause) which is the subject clause of the reframed sentences:

(36) *That Amadu does not eat fufu* is surprising.

(37) *That Terry drove too fast and attempted a reckless overtaking* caused his unfortunate   death.

(38) *That she goes after boys younger to be his children* is stupid and disgraceful.

The Structure of the Relative Clause

The English relative clause has a basic structure

Rel + (NP) + verb + (Complementation)

The relative element or agency is, thus, generally the first element of the RC except in situations of transformation in which the preposition or particle of a prepositional verb or phrasal verb is permuted before the relative item. For example,

(39)   The pastor *whom* all the money was given **to**.

can be transformed as

(40)   The pastor **to** *whom* all the money was given.

In its initial position, the relative item functions basically as the link between the matrix clause and the idea in the relative clause of it is part. It may, in addition to this basic role, perform as the subject, object or determiner of the RC. When it performs only the role of linking the two clauses, it is seen as a *relative **conjunction*** (not pronoun or determiner) and would be, thus, deletable.

As intimated above, the relative item functions in addition to its relativising function as subject of the RC, in which case it is an essential part of the RC structure and cannot be deleted, as shown in the sentence below:

(41)   Daniel punished all the students ***who*** *arrived late*.

Deleting the relative item would give this anomalous structure:

(42)   ?Daniel punished all the students *arrived late*.

The relative item could also function as object of the RC verb. In such circumstances, because the subject is the first element of the actual elements of the relativised clause, the object- relative element functions basically as a relative conjunction, and may be deleted, as in

(43)   The dog (~~which~~) *we bought yesterday* has been poisoned.

The structure of the RC above is thus:

$$(Rel)+ \ NP +VP$$

This deletion, however, would not be permitted when it involves fronted prepositional object in phrasal verbs and prepositional verbs, and also when the RC is a passive clause. For instance, we have

(44)   Diana worshipped the God from whom all her blessings flowed. (**Prep. fronted**)

not

(45) ?Diana worshipped the God from all her blessings flowed (**prep fronted, rel. item deleted**)

but

(46) Diana worshipped the God (whom) all blessings flowed from.

(**prep. not fronted, rel. item deleted**).

Again, the relative item cannot be deleted in situations where the relativised NP is the notional object of a passive RC construction. This is because in such situations, the relative element (which is the permuted object) would be the syntactic subject of the RC, and would be a crucial indispensable part of the clause. The following is an example:

(47) Terry *who was killed in a lorry accident* was a promising pop musician.

In this example, 'who', the relative item, is also the subject of the RC. Notionally, however, it is the object of the verb 'killed'. In this position and function, 'who' cannot be deleted.

The relative item can, however, be deleted in the relative adverbial clauses involving 'how', 'where', 'when', 'why', when the antecedent is a generic or and indefinite noun phrase. For instance, 'where' in

(48)   He visited the place ~~where~~ he was born.

can be deleted, giving, *He visited the place he was born.* This is because 'the place', the relativised NP, or non-specific in itself. On the other hand, if 'the place' is replaced with a specific noun such as 'Accra', the relative item, 'where', cannot be deleted. Certainly, the structure below, with the relative item deleted is not acceptable in English

(49)   ?He visited Accra he was born.

It is clear from this, that in relative adverb clauses, the deletability of the relative element is tied to the specificity of the antecedent, with non-specific ones accepting and the specific ones rejecting the deletion of the relative item. In (**48**), though the definite article has been used, 'place' can still not be seen as specific or even definite in itself. It only achieves definiteness and specificity with the relative clause, 'where he was born'. This is different from (**49**) where 'Accra' even before the idea in the relative clause, 'Accra' is definite and specific since it refers to a definite place. Sentences with other indefinite and non-specific RC antecedents ('the time', 'the year', 'the reason') as against others with specific and definite RC antecedents will further illustrate this position. It is evident again that there seems to be some relationship between the defoiniteness and specificity of an antecedent and the nature of the restrictiveness of its relative clause, especially when we consider the fact that relative adverbial clauses are generally seen as

restrictive. The above leads us to postulate that restriction may be construed as a degree, with some relative clauses being more restrictive than others, (Sekyi-Baidoo, 2005).

It would be understood that even where it is deletable, the relative element cannot be seen as an optional element of the RC structure. This is because it is structurally indispensable for relating or linking the relativised clause to the matrix clause. It links the RC to the matrix clause through an NP in the matrix clause which is its antecedent (or postcedent where applicable). The relative item is, thus, only optional in the surface structure of the RC. Being part of a stage in the deep structure, it is factored into the interpretation of the RC and the complex sentence as a whole.

One very important aspect of the structure of the English RC is the strategy of **gapping.** By this strategy, English leaves a conscious 'gap' in the position where the relativised NP would be where it is invisible in the RC itself. By this strategy, it becomes easy for speakers to recover the noun to which the relativising item refers. In the two sentences below:

(50) The TV [which was in the room] was mine.

(51) The radio [which I bought] is in the room.

the relativised NPs ('the TV' and 'the radio') are not present in the relative clauses themselves but in the adjacent matrix clause. It is understood in the RCs that the NPs are there in the deep structure of the RCs, which are, thus, interpreted respectively as

which **[the TV]** was in the room]   -   subject

which I bought [**the radio**] is in room   -   object.

The NPs have been recovered in the interpretations because English keeps a generally fixed word order such that it would be understood that even where the NPs are not there explicitly, it is understood because of the fixed SVA or SVO structure there is a subject or

object respectively which would then be recovered from the adjacent clause. It is this strategy of leaving an explicit place for the NP to enable recoverability which is called *gapping,* and this occurs when an NP in the fixed order of the relative clause is deleted in the surface structure. Though the NPs are removed from the surface structure, they maintain their place in the deep structure, and like the deleted relative element, they are factored into the interpretation of the relative clause.

Closely related to the strategy of gapping is *pronoun retention,* by this process, instead of leaving a recoverability gap in the RC, a pronoun which refers to the relativised NP is retained in the RC. In the example below:

(52) ?We have a god who I can predict his ways.

(53) Sandy was sent boxes which he did not know what was in **them**.

'his' and 'them' are retained pronouns of ' a god' and 'boxes' respectively. This strategy, however, occurs generally in spoken English and is not easily permitted in formal language. In formal and written English, the RC structure would be inverted to as to bring the relative item and the pronoun together as one:

We have a god **whose** ways I can predict.

Sandy was sent boxes that which was in them he did not know.

It is believed, as intimated above, that the non-retention strategy involves an inversion which brings the object or object-related pronoun close to the relative element giving:

We have a god *who its* ways I can predict.

Sandy was sent boxes that that *which* was in he did not know.

Since they cannot both be retained in the structure, they are coalesced into one, or one is deleted. In the examples above 'who' and the possessive 'his' are joined giving *whose.* On the other hand, since 'that' and 'which' are all in reference to *'what* is in the boxes', one of

them 'that' is deleted, reducing 'that that which' to 'that which'. Where the pronoun is retained after all this inversion and deletion or coalescence, it is said to have wrongfully reoccurred, and is referred to as a *recursive pronoun* as in

We have a god **whose** ways I can predict (them).

Sandy was sent boxes that which was in (them) he did not know.

The Headless Relative Clause

The nominal relative clause and other *wh-* nominal clauses can be seen as headless, or unantecedented RCs in the surface structure. The relativised NP in the deep structure is believed to be a generic NP phrase which is modified by a restrictive RC which carries the information for the realisation of the reference of the NP.   Payne (1997: 328) describes them this way:

> Headless relative clauses are those clauses which themselves refer to the nouns that they modify….English, and many other languages, can use headless relatives when the noun is non-specific.

The NP being generic and non-specific, the RC also provides information for categorising the NP but not for identifying any particular person or object. The following are generic NPs and their relativising agencies:

The one/he/They	-	who
The place	-	where
The time	-	when
The reason	-	why
The thing	-	what.

The following are, thus, regarded as full, deep structure forms of the nominal clauses. As evident, they are headed by non-specific or generic NPs which are post-modified by relative clauses:

(54)   ~~The one~~ *who steals my purse* steals thrash.

(55)   Boadu arrived ~~at the place~~ *where he was directed.*

(56)   ~~The time~~ *when he would come* is not clear.

With the deletion of the non-definitive antecedent or heads of these RCs, the RCs replace them as NP heads of the surface structure. Since the structures they replace are nouns, they become noun clauses, so that we realise the following sentences:

(57)   -*Who steals my purse* steals thrash.

(58)   -*Boadu arrived where* he was directed.

(59)   -*When he will come* is not clear.

That these nominal clauses have RC origins can be seen in the existence of such forms as below:

(60)   -I know (the one) who broke my chair.

(61)   -Boadu arrived at the place (where) he was directed.

where the deep structure NP ('the one', 'the place') as well as the surface structure noun clause ('who broke the chair'/'Where he was directed') are both realised. In such structures, with the NP heads realised, the noun clause then reverts to its original function as relative clause, which post-modifies the non-specific NP head.

In

Boadu arrived at *the place (where) he was directed.*

we see the full complex structure with its RC and matrix clause. In this structure, the relative element, which is only a conjunction, can be deleted at the surface structure giving another popular form

Boadu arrived at *the place he was directed.*

If the relativised NP rather were deleted the sentence would read

> Boadu arrived *where he was directed.*

where the RC would replace the NP head and would then be a nominal clause

The issue of head-deletion and replacement is evident in other structures in English such as

(62) *When I asked him if he could dance, he replied he could.*

where 'dance' is deleted and 'could' assumes the function as main verb, and *Blessed are the poor*, in which 'people' or 'ones' is deleted, and 'the' introduced since the adjective 'poor' must have an article to make it nominal.

The Relative Clause in the Cleft Construction

The relative clause is an indispensable part of the true cleft structure of English. The English cleft construction has the structure

$$It + BE + \underline{NP} + RC$$
$$\underline{Adj.P}$$
$$\underline{Adv.P}$$

where the highlighted element is a noun, adverb or adjective phrase, which is headed by a noun, adjective or adverb respectively. Where it is a prepositional phrase, the structure is realised as follows:

$$It + BE + PP + RC$$

or

$$It + BE + Prep. + NP + RC$$

Huddleston (1984: 53) explains that 'the cleft construction picks out one element from the unmarked version and brings it into special focus.' The cleft construction expresses a situation taken as known but introduces or topicalises an NP or adjunct associated with

this activity, which NP or adjunct may be seen as the new information, at least as far as the main proposition of the cleft construction is concerned. The function of the relative clause in this construction is to present the background or the context against which an element has been selected for thematisation. In

(63) It was to his cat *that he bequeathed all his wealth*

and

(64) It is Christ *who is the rock of our salvation.*

'that he bequeathed all his property' and 'that someone is the rock of our salvation' are expressed as known information or the background against which 'the cat' and 'Christ' have been thematised. The non-thematised, non-cleft or unmarked versions are

He bequeathed all his wealth to his cat.

Christ is the rock of our salvation.

Two forms of relative clauses occur in the cleft construction. These are

- The obligatory relative clause
- The optional relative clause.

The *obligatory* relative clause is what is expressed in the structures presented above. It is obligatory because it is an indispensable element in any cleft construction except in diminutive cleft sentences where it is taken as clearly known and redundant, and is therefore ellipted in the surface structure. It is, however, factored into the interpretation of the sentence as in *It was to the cat.* or *It is Christ.*, especially in answer to the questions *To whom did he bequeath all his wealth?* and *Who is it who is the rock of our salvation?* As intimated above, the obligatory RC is not really to be seen as post modifying an NP, and that is partly why it can follow not only NPs but also adjectives, adverbs, and even prepositions. It is generally contextual and interpretive, and points to the background

against which 'the cat' or 'Christ' has been thematised – that they are responding to the issue of 'bequeathing of wealth' and 'being the rock of our salvation' respectively.

The optional RC, on the other hand, is not obligatory as is already implied. Its function is to post-modify any of the NPs involved in the thematisation of the focussed NP, or involved in the presentation of the background. Such a relativised NP could be subject, object or adjunct. The optional RC is classified among other aspects of the pre- and post-modification of the noun phrase(s) in the cleft. The existence of an optional RC creates a complex cleft structure. For example

   (65) It was the boy (**that stole the book)** *who was sacked.*

or

   (66)
 It was the painter (**who works in the company)** ((which was recently established)) *who won the award.*
                               1   **2**   **3**

In   **(66)**, we have a more complex cleft structure with two optional relative clauses, (1) and ((2)). Whereas (1) post modifies the highlighted item 'painter', ((2)) post modifies 'company' which is itself an NP (Object) of the verb in RC(1) and is therefore further embedded, giving an overall structure

$$It + BE + NP + (RC) + (RC) + RC$$

 It is understood that the obligatory RC is the unbracketted one, 'who won the award', and the main structure of the cleft construction is *It was the painter who won the award.*

The relative clause as seen above can be seen a complex situation where an RC is embedded in another RC which may itself be embedded in another RC as in

The director of the company (which was recently established in the town) ((where the government (((which promises development to the people))) ((((who voted for it))) has established the refinery)) has been cited for wilfully causing financial loss to the state.

The relative clauses are as follows:

1. (The company) which was recently established in the town
2. (the town) where the government has established the refinery
3. (the government) which promises development to the people
4. (the people) who voted for it

and the matrix clause is *The director has been cited for wilfully causing financial loss to the state.* It would be observed that relative clauses (((3))) and ((((4)))) are inserted between two parts of ((2)). In the structure, there is RC (1) to which is further subordinated RC ((2)) which itself has an embedded RC (((3))), which also has RC ((((4)))) further subordinated to it making four (4) degrees of dependency. Evidently, the identification of discontinuous elements and the respective heads of the various RC is very crucial for the interpretation of the RCs and also the entire complex structure.

Coordination of the Relative Clause

In addition to being subordinated to other RCs, English RCs may also be coordinated. In such a situation the conjoined RCs have the same antecedent. A very important aspect of this syntactic process is the ellipsis of redundant elements in the surface structure:

Our God, **(1)** which created the world, **(2)** (who) waters our crops, **(3)** (who) rescues us from our foes, **(4)** (who) establishes the work of our hands and **(5)** (who) gives us the peace that passes understanding deserves our praise.

It will be worthwhile to realise that like all linguistic forms, the structure of the relative clause is closely related to its interpretation. An analysis of its form cannot, thus, be made without reference to the meanings.

Conclusion

The discussions above point to the fact that the relative clause in English has an identity which is different from other such structures of similar constitution and use. However, its identity is made complete by looking at the conditions within which selections are made within its own general identity as it performs the various syntactic functions it has. Again, it would be worthwhile to investigate the semantic and pragmatic aspects of the interpretation of English relative clauses and their functions in discourse.

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