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The source of English headed *wh*-relative clauses

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LAGB, 16/9/15

Introduction

- English has had two different series of forms in [Spec,CP] of headed relatives over the course of its history: Old English inflected demonstratives and Middle/Modern English *wh*-phrases.

- This is despite the fact that filled [Spec,CP]s are crosslinguistically quite rare in headed relatives.

- We present an account of emergence of headed *wh*-relatives in English over c.1000–1500AD.

- This account differs from earlier work in tracking the diachronies of individual lexical items rather than the realization of relativization strategies.

- We show that our approach has significant advantages over accounts based on grammatical function, and relate this to conceptions of syntactic change within lexicalist theories of syntax.
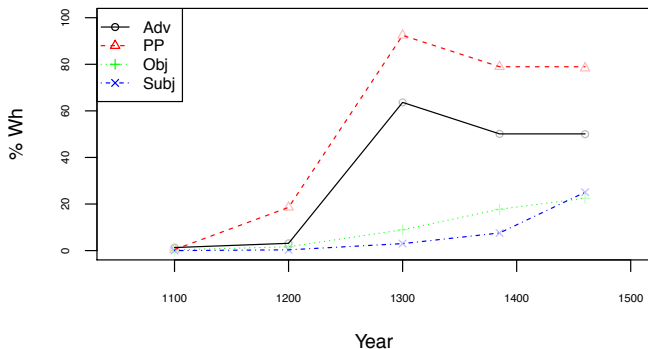
Section 1

Preliminaries

Accessibility Hierarchy

SU > DO > IO > OBL > GEN > OCOMP

(Keenan & Comrie 1977:66)

- ▶ Romaine (1982, 1984): English headed *wh*-relatives were initially attested low on the AH, and spread gradually upwards.
- ▶ Headed *wh*-relatives with adverbial and PP gaps also predated examples with argument gaps.

Early English headed *wh*-relatives

(1) & þurh   ungewædera [for whan eorþwestmas wurdon
     and through bad.weather for which crops   were
     swiþe amyrde]
     badly damaged
     "and because of bad weather, as a result of which crops
     were badly damaged"
               (Peterborough Chronicle, 1104, Dekeyser 1986: 101)

(2) min helpe ys ryȝtful of our Lord, þe which makeþ sauf þe
     my help is rightful of our lord the which makes safe the
     ryȝtful of heret.
     rightful of heart
     "My salvation is rightfully from our Lord, who makes safe
     the rightful of heart."
       (Earliest English Prose Psalter, c.1350, CMEARLPS,7.241)

Old English relativization strategies

- OE could relativize PPs and adverbials (as well as arguments) using demonstrative phrases (3a).
- OE also had a relative complementizer *þe*, for relativizing argument NPs (3b).
- The loss of inflected demonstratives in late OE/early ME left English without a strategy for relativizing low-accessibility positions.

(3)   a.   he is ure lif [on þam we lybbað &   styriað __]
               he is our life in   DEM we live   and move
               "He is our life, in whom we live and move"
        b.   ic [ðe __ to eow sprece]
               I that   to you speak
               "I, that speaks to you"   (both Ælfric homilies, c.990)

Renouvellement formel

- This suggests that headed *wh*-relatives emerged as a replacement for demonstrative relatives.

- As if English has a set of functional roles, and if the formal means to express those roles disappears, a new form must be found.

> "distinct [relativization] strategies in [a complementary] relationship are no more different than complementarily distributed allophones. And just as different allophones of a particular phoneme are phonetically similar to each other, different [relativization] strategies in a given language must be syntactically similar."
>   (Maxwell 1982:142–3; see also Romaine 1984)

Problems

- ▶ Data like the above make such notions attractive, but they are troubling for modern syntactic theory, which does not reason in terms of a stable set of "strategies".
- ▶ Most theories today work with a large set of lexical items and a few schemas for combining them. There is no easy way to guarantee the existence of e.g. "Relative Clauses with PP gaps" within such a conception of grammar, and no obvious reason to worry if a given grammar does not generate such structures.
- ▶ Two empirical problems ground this conceptual worry.
  1. The chronology of the emergence of types of *wh*-relative does not match the chronology of the disappearance of types of demonstrative relative.
  2. English is typologically in a minority in having such relativization strategies at all. Among languages with equivalents of headed *wh*-relatives, not all had an antecedent stage with demonstrative relatives.

Section 2

Data

Functional overlap

- Probably the last type of demonstrative relative to disappear was with *there*.

  (4)   every place [there as inquesyscyon ($=$ inquisition) was made]   (cmgregor,201.1651)

- Nevertheless, functionally equivalent headed *wh*-relatives with *where* emerged 250 years earlier.

  (5)   þe þyestre stedes [huer hi   zelleþ hare cloþ __]
        the dark   places where they sell   their cloth
        "the dark places where they sell their cloth"
                                 (cmayenbi,45.751)

Functional overlap
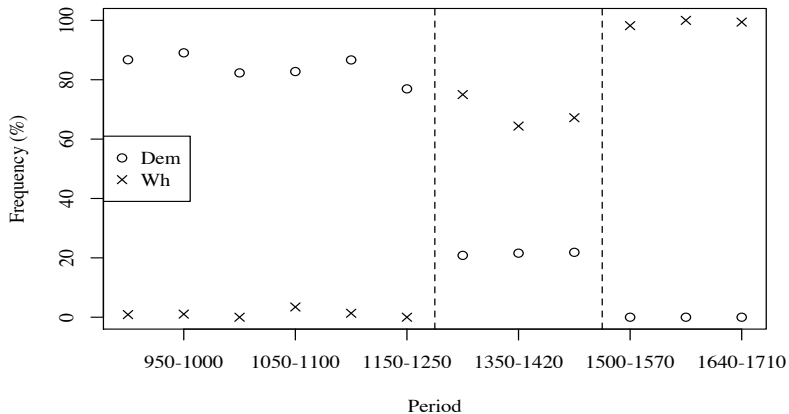
Figure 1: Demonstrative and *wh*-relatives with locative gaps over time

Discontinuities

- Demonstrative relatives with argument NP gaps disappeared during the transition to ME.

  (6)   he is iblesced [þe þe __ her cumet on drihtenes
           he is blessed that that   here comes in lord's
           nome].
           name
           "he that comes here in the lord's name is blessed"
           (cmlambx1,5.30)

- But headed *wh*-relatives with argument NP gaps didn't emerge until c.200 years later.

  (7)   a very liȝt, [which __ liȝtneth ech man that cometh in
           to this world]

                                        (cmntest,I,1.19)

Discontinuities

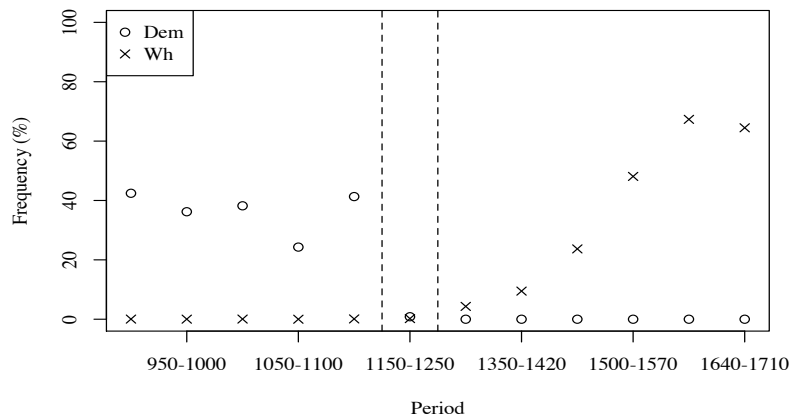Figure 2: Demonstrative and *wh*-relatives with argument gaps over time

Discussion

- ▶ Neither of these patterns conform to the replacement of one item with another in a given function.
- ▶ Given the stable presence of headed relatives with *be/that* throughout the written history of English, even the pattern in Fig. 2 is an example of functional overlap: English had a well-established strategy for forming relatives with argument gaps, but still innovated another way to do the same thing.
- ▶ Many varieties of headed *wh*-relative evolved even though English already had a way to lexicalize that function.
- ▶ In fact, there is no common pattern of association of grammatical functions with forms among languages which develop headed *wh*-relatives, either contemporaneously or at an antecedent stage.

Recurring crosslinguistic patterns

- The English data belong within a larger typological context.
- Headed relatives with interrogative relativizers are crosslinguistically vanishingly rare, but are common among Indo-European languages.

	IE	Other
Wh-RC	19 (47.5%)	3 (2.3%)
Other	21 (52.5%)	129 (97.7%)

Table 1: Headed *wh*-relatives in 172 languages (based on De Vries 2002)

- These are not inherited from Proto-Indo-European, which only had adjoined relatives (Clackson 2007), so they have emerged repeatedly in IE.
- Most instances of this diachronic progression show no evidence of an antecedent demonstrative relative phrase, so we cannot hold the demise of demonstrative relatives responsible for the rise of *wh*-relatives in the general case.

Diachrony of *wh*-forms
Early Indo-European

- *Wh*-forms derive from PIE interrogative forms $*k^w i$-/$k^w o$-.
- Reconstructed as occurring in relatives (particularly left-adjoined) as well as interrogatives.

  (8) paprizzi   huiš 3 GÍN KÙ.BABBAR pāi
       is impure WH 3 shekels of silver   he gives
       "The one who is impure, he gives three shekels of silver"
                     (Hittite, 2nd millennium BC, Garrett 2008)

- Rough (hypothetical) narrative:

  Correlative $\rightarrow$ Left-adjoined free relative $\rightarrow$ Right-adjoined free relative $\rightarrow$ adjoined relative $\rightarrow$ embedded relative.

Diachrony of *wh*-forms

- ▶ OE free relatives almost always occur in peripheral positions.
- ▶ Clause-initial FRs almost always occur with *swa. . . swa* ($\approx$ -*ever*) and generalizing interpretation.
- ▶ Definite interpretation (without *swa. . . swa*) is found in c.1/3 of clause-final FRs.

(9) Soðlice [swa hwar swa Israhela bearn wæron], þar wæs leoht.
     Truly so where so Israel's children were, there was light
     'all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.'
     (cootest,Exod:10.23.2788)

(10) Gemyne, [hwæt Sanctus Paulus cwæð]
      Remember what Saint Paul said
      'Remember what Saint Paul said.'
      (cogregdC,GDPref_and_3_[C]:15.207.28.2739)

- ▶ These positional and interpretive factors make clause-final definite FRs amenable to reanalysis as anaphoric relatives.

Diachrony of *wh*-forms
Where vs. *who*

- *Where* is robustly attested in both positions (c.50% clause-final).
- *Who* is vastly more likely to occur in left-adjoined position (c.90% of the time).
- *Where* in headed relatives emerged significantly before *who* in headed relatives.
- This is despite apparent functional overlap between *where* and *there*.
- The diachronies are prefigured in the antecedent states.

Diachrony of *wh*-forms
Where in headed relatives

(11)　Þa　　cwæð ic to him, æteowe me [þa byrigeles [hwar ic
　　　Then said　I　to him show　me the tomb　　where I
　　　þe　leigde]].
　　　you laid
　　　"Then I said to him, 'Show me the tomb where I laid you'."

　　　Se　Hælend me þa　　beo þære rihthand　genam and me
　　　The Saviour me then by　the　right hand took　　and me
　　　ut　lædde [hwar ic hine byrede]
　　　out led　　where I him buried
　　　"The Saviour then took me by the right hand and led me
　　　out to where I buried him"
　　　(*Gospel of Nicodemus*, mid.12th c., conicodC,Nic_[C]:149.161)

Section 3

Prospects and conclusions *pro tem*

Latent ambiguities and reanalysis

- ▶ Certain strings, even if unambiguous within an individual grammar, invite alternative analyses.
- ▶ Reanalysis runs over such latent ambiguities.
- ▶ The diachrony linking English headed *wh*-relatives to PIE $k^w i$-/$k^w o$- consists of a chain of such latent ambiguities.
- ▶ To that extent, the genesis of headed *wh*-relatives can be understood in isolation from system-wide functional concerns (e.g. Maxwell 1982).
- ▶ This is crucial, because aspects of the diachrony are shared by many other IE languages with otherwise quite different grammars (e.g. Latin).

Generalization across forms

- At the same time, the diachronies of other *wh*-forms are not so clear.
    - *Hwæt* is well-attested in clause-final definite FRs, and is used with a preposition (e.g. *for what*) in headed relatives c.1200, but disappears from many grammars.
    - *Which* emerges as a headed relativizer c.1350, c.100 years before *who*, in several short-lived configurations (*the which*, *which that*, etc.).
- Future research will look at the contexts for these histories from the same perspective as above.
- Central question: is there any sense in which the emergence of headed *wh*-relatives must be construed as a process of diffusion through a paradigm of *wh*-forms, or can low-level developments like these be understood purely in terms of the individual forms?

Links to acquisition: Prospects

- From this perspective, grammar change dissolves into change in the specification of lexical items.
- It therefore should relate directly to the study of lexical acquisition.
- Factors conditioning acquisition should affect patterns of change:
  - Mutual exclusivity should exert a defeasible pressure in favour of 1–1 mapping between forms and functions.
  - Effects of relative frequency should also condition change.
  - Any biases which promote similar featural specification of formally similar lexical items will also promote analogical extension.
- All of these factors govern relations between items, so they can give the impression of a system (or paradigm) without giving the system a status in the grammar.

Conclusions

- ▶ We have covered several reasons not to conceive of the emergence of headed *wh*-relatives in terms of the Accessibility Hierarchy:
  - ▶ Use of interrogative forms in dependent relatives is an IE phenomenon; the AH doesn't address this.
  - ▶ Spread from form to form gives a better fit for the diachrony than spread from function to function.
  - ▶ Diachronies of individual forms are often implied by latent ambiguities concerning those forms in antecedent stages.
- ▶ There is no stable set of functions which have been relativizable throughout the history of English. This means that the replacement of demonstrative relatives by *wh*-relatives cannot be reduced to *renouvellement formel*.
- ▶ By paying close attention to individual forms in this way, we should be able to account for complex, apparently systemic, long-term changes within a fundamentally disorganized conception of grammar which consists of a set of lexical items combined according to a small set of principles.

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