

THE ZERO RELATIVE PRONOUN: ITS FORM AND FUNCTION

1. - DEFINITION

Jespersen in 1976 pointed out that relative clauses that could occur without an overt relative word at its beginning -such as *this is the boy we spoke of* - were characterized by the close contact in sound and sense between the antecedent and the relative clause itself. It is customary in these cases to term the clauses in which the deletion of the wh-word produces an asyndetic relative clause 'ellipted' or 'contact-clauses'.

Contact-clauses are very old in the language and have for centuries been extremely frequent in speech as well as in all kinds of Literature, except in translations which tended to reproduce foreign words (Jespersen, 1976: 360). These constructions are often explained on the so-called *apo-koinou principle*, according to which something is expressed only once instead of twice, but in such a way that the hearer connects it both with what precedes and with what follows. But this justification is not sufficient, for the construction is extended to cases in which there is no element that can strictly be said to belong to both parts of the sentence. It would be more appropriate to claim that this phenomenon is an after effect of old-speech habits from the time where not required to the same extent as in later times -OE *waes* meant very often *he (or she, or it) was*, exactly as Latin *erat*. Two sentences that were at first independent units were pronounced rapidly after each other, and thereby came to be felt as a grammatical unit, i. e. one single sentence.

In Old English there are very few examples of contact-clauses, and most of them are of a type not preserved in Present English. Contact-clauses have probably been very common in everyday speech for at least six or seven hundred years. It may be sought in the character of these texts, which is far from being colloquial. In Modern English contact-clauses continue even gaining ground.

2. - GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES

2. 1. - THE VERB IN THE MAIN CLAUSE

It is possible for a relative clause to be concatenated with another clause. The simplest case is after verbs like say, hear, know, etc. : "A defect many of his friends knew he had."

2. 1. 1. - THE VERB IN THE DEPENDENT CLAUSE

But there is a constraint for contact-clauses: when the verb in the relative clause is BE, the complement pronoun cannot be wh- (no matter the status (personal or non-personal of the antecedent.): "*John is not the man who he was."

2. 2. - ADJECTIVE PREDICATIVE

The construction with an adjective predicative is not very frequent in English, but is an idiom in Standard-Irish English: "It is surprised you will be." (Jespersen, 1976: 142)

2. 3. - ADVERBIALS

The position of a sentence adverb is a factor of ambiguity. If placed after the subject of the subordinate clause, no relative marker is needed: "The oranges he generally ate were navels."

But if it is placed before the subject, it might lead to ambiguity, and 'that' is required: "The oranges that generally he ate were navels." Jespersen also indicates that 'anywhere' and 'everywhere' with contact-clauses are similar in meaning and can be replaced by 'wherever'.

2. 4. - ALL

After 'all', a contact-clause is also frequent in Standard English: "All he could do was to tell his mother." (Jespersen, 1976: 137)

2. 5-HERE IS

After 'here is' the construction is not very frequent in Standard English: "Here is Mr. Maldon begs the favour of a word." (Jespersen, 1976: 146)

2. 6- LIKE

Contact-clauses are particularly frequent after 'like', as in: "Like the irresolute man he was." (Jespersen, 1976: 142)

2. 7- THAT

After the demonstrative 'that', namely after 'what is': "What was that you said?" (Jespersen, 1976: 141).

Also after that +BE: "That was Cantercot just went in, wasn't it?" (Jespersen, 1976: 145)

2. 8. - THOSE

Cases like: "They have lost those they formerly had are also frequent."

2. 9. - WHERE IS

Some examples can be recorded from the classic English Literature, for instance, from Malory: "Where is the lady shold mete vs here?"

3. - SYNTACTIC CONSTRUCTIONS.

3. 1. - CLEFT- SENTENCES

Contact-clauses can occur in cleft-sentences, as in: "It was John did it." (Huddleston, 1971: 247). The deletion is said to predominate in less formal registers. Jespersen (1976) suggests that the restrictive nature of 'it is' accounts for the choice of 'that' or a contact-clause.

3. 2. - EXISTENTIAL CLAUSES

In existential clauses introduced by 'there is / are', 'there was / were', contact-clauses can also take place: "There is a table stands in the corner." (Quirk, 1985: 865)

3. 3. - TEMPORAL RELATIVE CLAUSES

Michiels in his article "Relative pronouns in time, place and manner adjuncts (1975) dealing with restrictive relative clauses in which the relative pronoun is dependent on a preposition, proposes two patterns for zero:

1. -zero relative + end-preposition.
2. - zero relative +no preposition.

The pattern which exhibits backshift of the preposition is very common in place relative clauses: "He will show you the room he keeps his clockwork orange in." But unfrequent in time relatives: "The day he wrote this poem on is to be thought of as a red-letter day." (Michiels, 1977: 27). Conversely, the latter (zero + no prep) is very common in time relative clauses: "In his autobiography he tends to dwell on the year he was awarded his first scholarship." (Michiels, 1975: 506).

It is only marginally possible in place relatives, though it can sometimes be found with the antecedent 'place' in the plural: "(??) He will show you the place he keeps his clockwork orange." (Michiels, 1975: 507).

3. 4. - PLACE RELATIVE CLAUSES

As we have mentioned above, 'zero+no prep' is only marginally possible in place relative clauses, though it can sometimes be found with the antecedent 'place' in the plural: "Efforts were made to find places transformational devices could -as opposed to should- be used." (Michiels, 1975: 507).

The style of such a sentence is pretty formal though this pattern (zero +no prep) has a colloquial flavour in place relative clauses. As the relative clause is fairly long and has a break in the middle, then it makes the connection between 'used' and 'places' difficult to perceive. Quirk regards a sentence such as 'I remember the place I met him' acceptable because zero stands for the place indication -i. e where- required by the verb: ('where') I met him.

3. 5. - INFINITIVAL CONSTRUCTIONS

If the relativized nominal phrase is the object of a preposition, the relative pronoun can be left out: "May, 1965, provides a good vantage point for us to survey past and future from." (Huddleston, 1971: 256).

The same deletion is also available when the infinitival is dependent upon a pre-head adjectival modifier, as in: "A fresh solution of quinine sulphate cuts out the undesirable 4.047 line, while slightly diminishing the intensity of the 4.358 line, a convenient monochromatic radiation to work with." (Huddleston, 1971: 256).

3. 6. - NOMINAL THAT-CLAUSES

Nominal that-clauses allow the omission of "that" in certain contexts, as in: "I suppose I can use your telephone." (Quirk: 1985: 1007).

Some comment-clauses have no overt mark of subordination but, as with the zero relative clauses mentioned above, they generally lack any obligatory verb complementation, for instance in: "It could be worse, you know, You know, it could be worse." But different to: "You know (that) it could be worse."

3. 7. - COMPARATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

Deletion of the relative pronoun in comparative constructions is predictable and required: "The harder they worked, the hungrier they became." (Quirk: 1985: 1001). One seldom hears: "(?) The harder that they worked, the hungrier that they became."

3. 8. - SUPERLATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

With the superlative, zero as object (and "that" as subject) is normally the relative pronoun: "He eats the finest food he can buy." (Quirk, 1985: 869). Though normally such post-modification would make intensive relative clauses verbless: "The finest food available."

3. 9. - TERTIARY CONSTRUCTIONS

Also in those cases in which the relative pronoun, had it been expressed, would have been a tertiary, contact-clauses can occur: "By the time I had told my mother they had all left." (Jespersen, 1976: 361).

3. 10. - RESTRICTIVE VERSUS NON-RESTRICTIVE REL. CLAUSES

Wh-pronouns can be deleted from certain relative clauses. Deletion of wh-items from restrictive relative clauses produces the following post. nominal modifiers:

- PP: He married a girl (who is) from Texas.
- Sentence: I know a man (whom) George knows.
- Adj+Comp: He climbed a mountain (that is) higher than Everest.
- Adj+Intermediate form: I heard something (that was) odd.

But not all relative clauses accept deletion. It does not apply when a restrictive relative clause has the form: "wh is NP" or "wh VB x": "*I know a man a chemist."

The deletion rule correctly allows that more than one relative clause may directly follow a noun. A RRcl. may be embedded to a NP already having a RRcl; in this case, the former relative item and the verbal form can be dropped out: "John met a man (who was) in New York who had never been to the top of the Empire State Building." (C. Smith, 1964: 42). The relativized element can also function as COMPL within the subordinate clause: "The evil spirits a primitive man fears may harm his pregnant wife are a projection of his own buried negative or hostile feelings." (Huddleston, 1971: 224).

With respect to non-restrictive or Appositional constructions, Huddleston (1971: 252) speaks of *characterizing apposition* in examples such as: "The whale, a completely naked mammal, is adapted to living in polar waters." because the relationship between "the whale" and "a completely naked mammal" matches that holding between them in an intensive BE construction: the whale is a completely naked mammal. He regarded this kind of apposition as deriving from an underlying relative.

Both Huddleston (1971: 252) and Mathews (1981: 177) indicate that, on the contrary, premodifiers cannot be expanded into relative clauses: "*The (who are) available man."

4. -SYNTACTIC FUNCTIONS

According to the role that zero, if expressed, would have filled in the clause, we can account for the possible syntactic functions of zero within the relative clause: Subject, Object, Complement of a preposition ... At this stage, we can posit that two separate elements are amalgamated in a single word that fulfils both a marking and a determining function.

Following Mathews (1981), zero can fulfil not one but two different functions: on the one hand, the syntactic function assigned, and on the other hand that of being a marker for the clause as a whole.

4. 1. - SUBJECT

Most generative treatises claim that relative "that" cannot be left out if it is the Subject of the relative clause. This assertion is not entirely true, for sentences such as *Any man believes that must be a fool.* (Stahlke, 1976: 597) though unacceptable in Standard English, would be correct in non-Standard speech. Examples like the last one are possible because indefinite relatives include their antecedents: and so, "whoever" has to be understood as "any person who", where the relative item is overtly expressed.

Contact-clauses in which the relative item is in the nominative were formerly frequent in combinations considered nowadays out of use: "My father had a daughter lov'd a man." (Jespersen, 1976: 143).

Today, the omission of the relative pronoun in subject function is probably characteristic of informal registers or an archaism in poets. It has been also observed the greater frequency with which "that" is dropped when the Subject of the clause is a pronoun: They are girls you don't like to date, because of the avoidance of confusion.

4. 2. - DIRECT OBJECT

Most contact-clauses occur by far where the relative item would have been the object: "All the gold they could get was there." (Jespersen, 1976: 137).

Notice out that a special case is found when the relative would have been the object of a verb in -ing at the end of the clause: "It was a means self-defense only sanctioned his trying."

4. 3. - SUBJECT-PART OF A NEXUS-OBJECT

Parallel to the direct object is what Jespersen calls 'subject-part of a nexus-object' function. And so, contact-clauses like *One of the women he had made laugh* are quite frequent in Standard speech.

4. 4. - INDIRECT OBJECT

The question whether it is possible to leave out the relative pronoun that would be an indirect object seems to have escaped the notice of grammarians. Although there is a certain reluctance to use a contact-clause in this pattern, there is no fault with sentences such as *This is the man we gave all those apples*, nor with *It was Gary they had promised the job*.

Colloquially speaking, many people would have added "to" at the end (whom we gave all those apples) -or "to whom ...". The disinclination felt in many cases of this kind is connected with the fact that the indirect object is generally shown merely by its position between the verb and the direct object -or at any rate by its position after the verb. Any other position is therefore avoided.

4. 5. - PREDICATIVE OF A SUBJECT COMPLEMENT

A further possibility for zero is to function as predicative of a subject complement: "You were never the girl I thought you." (Jespersen, 1976: 142).

4. 6. - COMPLEMENT

In adjective clauses, a rule allows the omission of the relative "that" if it is a complement in its clause: "The place (that) I live."

Normally, the relative pronoun is not omitted if the result would be confusing. It is hard to say whether a sentence like *What books they bought were novels* is a question or a statement. With a clue such as "ever", the ambiguity can be cleared up.

4. 7. - OBJECT OF A PREPOSITION

In those cases where the relativized NP is object of a preposition, there is the possibility for contact-clauses to occur. The relativized NP is shifted to initial position, the preposition being the only overt constituent of the prepositional phrase. In general, it is certainly true that this pattern is predominantly used in formal English and is usually avoided in informal contexts: "I have never seen any signs of crawling or swimming among the specimens I have looked at." (Huddleston, 1971: 223).

Following Jespersen (1976: 361), when the preposition is placed at the end of the relative clause, deletion of the *wh*-item is acceptable because it is felt to be less intimately connected with the relative pronoun than with some verb or other words in the clause: very often the two words form together a set: "A thing he takes care of." (Jespersen, 1976: 135). On the other hand, deletion seems less likely the further removed the relative clause is from the head-noun of the antecedent NP.

5. - HEADLINES

One of the most common rules for headlines writers states that the headlines should be easily understood. Therefore, we expect the structure of the headline to be simple, or in other words, that long statements tend to be avoided and simplicity is preferred.

Brisau in his paper "Complex Sentence Structure in headlines" draws attention to those headlines consisting of more than one clause. He analysed in how far complexity, present in headlines, and what means can be used to assure that the meaning of these complex headlines is readily grasped by the reader. In his paper he established two types of complex sentence structure for headlines: the former structure being two free clauses (Ma, Mb), linked or not linked, and the latter (Ma Sb or Sa Mb) in which one clause stands in a dependence relation, one clause being bound to the other (FB or BF). Nearly half of the structures studied by Brisau were not linked, so that the sentence structure could be represented as FF. (two free clauses without linking). Out of the 3,000 headlines from *The Observer* that formed his corpus, only 264 contained two or more clauses; of all these examples, only 17 were of this type: "14 die as ship crash in fog." These are instances in which the dependent clauses are of the conditioning and reported class respectively.

Headlines in which one clause is rankshifted can also occur. In one of the three types of relative clauses that he found, the rankshifted clause is modifying an adjectival head in a nominal group (12 examples out of 82). In this case, the clause is always infinitival: "Labour unlikely to scrap bomb."

In examples of this type, both the relative item and the main verb are left out. A second type of rankshifted clause is that in which the dependent clause is expanded by a finite clause. (26 examples): "Seven months that changed the party."

To these possible structures -no matter the status (F, B)- Brisau adds those cases in which three clauses occur -what Jespersen would call 'tertiary clauses'- Thus, we come across instances of contact-clauses in: "Eichmann: the lessons no one drew." Once more, the close connection between 'that' and zero is shown as one of great relevance.

In like manner that literary or scientific treatises, the linguistic form of the headline is determined to a very large extent by the space available; Brisau considers that the linguistic make-up of the headline can be largely different from one newspaper to another. He admits that *The New York Times*, for instance, approaches discursive English far more than *The Observer*. dependent clauses are exceptional in this American newspaper, whilst headlines with three or more clauses occur regularly: "French say he told lawyer Moroccans gave sum in Ben Barka kidnapping. (the second clause being bound to the first, the third to the second." (F B'' C'').

In spite of these more discursive headlines, readers are often surprised at the difficulty to understand them. This apparent contradiction is an open invitation to make an analytic-comparative survey of the linguistic forms of headlines in a series of newspapers of various kinds, taking into account the extralinguistic factors that may influence the artistic creation.

CONCLUSION

Most linguists claim that the linguistic environment influences the speaker's selection of the relative form. This selection is a matter of priorities, sometimes personal sometimes scientific; it is generally accepted that the use of 'that' and zero makes for an easy and fluent style - a characteristic of informal registers. Following Jespersen (1976: 135), contact-clauses are found in most of those writers whose style is natural and easy (Shakespeare, Goldsmith, Dickens ...) while according to Huddleston (1971) and Quirk (1957) in formal registers wh-forms are preferred. This very same correspondence is posed by Taglicht (1973: 336) in his corpus, for the books on English Literature favoured the occurrence of zero relatives, while those on philosophy showed a preference for wh-forms - which are felt to give greater clarity. Sometimes, the choice of zero is due to extrinsic conditions to the nature of the relative item itself. Therefore, it can be argued that the deletion of the relative pronoun has nothing to do with its grammatical function, but with the fact that without it, the constituents are too hard to identify. Deletion of relative 'that' may be blocked by one of two reasons: first, when introducing a complement structure, it cannot be deleted if the verb is factive or strongly assertive,

*It developed I couldn't.

*It occurred the captain had lost his orders. (Stalhke, 1976: 598)

and second, if the deletion would confuse grammatical relationship or lead to ambiguity, it cannot be deleted:

*What you needed was in the box? (Bolinger, 72: 13)

To this respect, Jacobsson (1970) and Quirk (1985: 870) point out that there is a common tendency among Standard-English speakers to avoid the choice between 'who' and 'whom' - largely restricted to formal use - zero being used instead; likewise, relative 'that' is also preferred instead of 'who' or 'which'. This close connection between 'that' and zero led Huddleston and Jacobsson to state that wherever we have zero, 'that' can be inserted - and viceversa. The simplest way to deal with the variation between these pronouns could be, according to Huddleston, to consider on the one hand the wh-forms as 'basic' relatives (with practically no constraints on the occurrence of the appropriate wh-form), and on the other hand to consider 'that' and zero as 'non-basic' relatives (because of their limitations under certain conditions). Dialectally, a 'that' in a very short clause may be omitted: "The man did it was a friend of mine." But probably not *The man left the car for me was a friend of mine. Evidently, duration is a factor in the retention of 'that'. But probably not *The man left the car for me was a friend of mine. Evidently, duration is a factor in the retention of 'that'.

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