VARIOUS USES OF THE RELATIVE PRONOUNS IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN

Nicoleta MINCĂ
University of Piteşti, Romania

Abstract: *This study aims at presenting the differences and similiarities between various uses of the relative pronouns in English and Romanian.The English relative pronoun refers back to another word or sentence, discharging an anaphoric function. It also introduces either restrictive or descriptive relative clauses. In Romanian, relative pronouns are defined in a context that implies the co-occurrence of two verbs and they are considered to be either a part of the class of both interrogative and relative pronouns, or grouped distinctly as relative pronouns and interrogative pronouns.*

Key words*: anaphoric function, restrictive relative clauses, descriptive relative clauses, relative pronouns, interrogative pronouns*

Pronouns have no meaning of their own. They generally stand for (*pro*+noun) or refer to a noun, an individual or individuals or to a thing or things (the pronoun's antecedent) whose identity is made clear earlier in the text. The pronoun doesn't 'name' in the strict sense of the word, it only makes reference to somebody or something already mentioned in the text or during the conversation.

The relative pronoun relates groups of words to nouns or other pronouns. It refers to some noun, pronoun, phrase or sentence already written or uttered to denote the person, thing, or idea spoken about, and called 'the antecedent' of the relative. It joins the clause it stands in to the clause that precedes it and always introduces a relative/attributive clause.

In Contemporary English, the status of relative pronouns is analysed in connection to their forms. Usually, a relative pronoun is the first word in a relative/attributive clause or phrase, excepting the *–ing* forms and prepositions. It also refers back to another word, word-group, or sentence, discharging an anaphoric function. A relative pronoun introduces either *restrictive* relative clauses that limit or define the antecedent, or *descriptive* relative clauses that yield some additional, supplementary kind of information abut the antecedent.

BDD-A24003 © 2010 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:06:25 UTC)

Relative *who* and *which* occur as relative pronouns at the head of an attributive sub-clause, qualifying a noun or pronoun (the antecedent) in the main clause. *Who* and its declension forms *–whose, to whom, whom, for whom, by whom* are used:

-in reference to nouns and pronouns denoting persons, e.g.

The woman *whom* you have just met is his sister.

-in reference to animals, when they are thought of as *he* or *she* in fables, fairy-tales, as pets, etc., e.g.

"When the poor kid, *who* was called the *ugly duckling,* heard this, he couldn't stand it any longer and went out into the world…" (H. C. Andersen, *The Ugly Duckling*)

-in reference to personifications, e.g.

Oh, you, Rome! *Whom* I really admire…

-in reference to names of countries looked upon in the political sense, e.g.

The United States, *who* was considered as a land of immigrants, has created a new national character for itself.

-in reference to collective nouns, e.g.

The Bartons, *who* met him at the concert last night, were very polite.

Relative *who* agrees with interrogative *who* in referring to beings only, in not distinguishing sex or number, and in having the declined forms *whom* and *whose.* It differs in being used as a subject only, not as a nominal predicate.

I wish I knew the man *who* wrote that book.

My grandpa, *who* will be seventy tomorrow, is still a good sportsman.

Relative *who* differs from interrogative *who* in being pronounced with weaker stress and lower pitch: *Who said so? – I asked him who had said so. – The man who said so.* This difference makes it possible to distinguish between interrogative and relative *who(m)* in sub-clauses. Thus, we interrogative *who* in a sentence like the following:

There was a longer fight about *who* should be king.

In sentences like the following, *who(m)*, as in the preceding example, introduces a noun clause and cannot, therefore, be classified as a relative pronoun, but it is clearly non-interrogative:

I have said it; and let *who* will deny it.

It is much in the king's power to summon *whom* he will, to take the advice of *whom* he will.

Relative *whom* occurs as an object and after prepositions in literary English. As an indirect object, it is accompanied by *to*: This is the woman *to* whom

BDD-A24003 © 2010 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:06:25 UTC)

I gave the letter. Unlike interrogative *whose,* relative *whose* may refer to things, at least in literary English.

The only consonants *whose* notation requires special notice are the following.

The relative pronoun *which* differs considerably from the interrogative *which.* It is used only of things and animals, having no selective meaning, e.g.

He spoke very quickly, *which* did not appeal to her.

The task *which* confronted him had to be faced alone.

Westminster Abbey, *which* is one of the oldest churches in Great Britain, contains many famous graves.

In written English relative *which* may be followed by a noun that renders time, size, idea, etc., summarizing or repeating part of the main clause.

It rained all night and all day, during *which* time the ship broke into pieces.

Which may also refer to a preceding sentence or part of a sentence. A clause of this type is sometimes interpolated in the sentence referred to by way of parenthesis.

The proposal was postponed, *which* was exactly what he wanted.

They also had, *which* was of importance to some of them, an heroic past.

As in the case of *who*, relative and interrogative *which* differ in stress and intonation. We should note that *which*, when used analogously to *whom,* retains its selective meaning. When the antecedent is a collective noun denoting persons, relative *who* (with a plural verb) is used when the individuals forming the group are thought of, *which* (with a singular verb) when the group as such is meant.

He joined the party *who* were walking before him.

He joined the party *which* was in power.

Of the two examples given of the use of relative *who* and *which*, the former in each case (I wish I knew the man *who* wrote the book; The task *which* confronted him had to be faced alone) contains a clause restricting the reference of the antecedent to one or more particular persons or things, and, therefore, called a restrictive clause. The latter (My grandpa, *who* will be seventy tomorrow, is still a good sportsman; Westminster Abbey, *which* is one of the oldest churches in Great Britain, contains many famous graves) contains a clause which doesn't restrict the reference of the antecedent, but gives further relevant information about it, and it is called continuative or amplifying clause.

Restrictive clauses are subordinate in meaning to the clause containing the antecedent, while continuative clauses are more independent and their contents

BDD-A24003 © 2010 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:06:25 UTC)

may often be expressed by an independent statement. We have to mention that a sentence with a restrictive clause contains a single statement, and one with a continuative clause contains two statements.

That may refer either to persons or things and differs from *who* and *which* in three respects: it occurs mainly in restrictive clauses; it may refer to personal as well as non-personal antecedents; it is never preceded by a preposition, though it may open a clause with a preposition at the end. As a part of speech, it is intermediate between a relative pronoun and a conjunction.

My sister *that* is at Cluj will come tomorrow.

He is the very boy *that* we have been looking for.

You are a man *that* can understand.

Like relative *who* and *which*, relative *that* is unstressed and, on the whole, *who* is more usual than *that* with reference to persons, whereas *that* is more usual than *which* with reference to things. *That* is frequently used with reference to persons in clauses that are distinctly classifying, consequently in such as define an antecedent qualified by a superlative, or by *any* or *only.*

Shakespeare was one of the greatest writers *that* ever lived.

Ask Richard, or any other boy *that* was there.

That is used, to the exclusion of *who,* in the function of a nominal predicate, reminding us of *which,* but *that* only occurs in this function when the clause is restrictive.

I let him have it – fool *that* I was – without asking for a receipt.

Having a restrictive character, the relative pronoun *that* is preferred after superlatives and, generally, after words implying a superlative idea, e.g.

They were *the first that* visited the British Museum.

He was *the only* student *that* solved the problem correctly.

What introduces dependent questions that are often divided by only a thin partition from similarly constructed clauses with no interrogative meaning.

She asked him *what* he had found.

He gave me *what* he had found.

A clearly interrogative meaning, as in the first example, will be marked by stronger stress and higher pitch. When the meaning is clearly non-interrogative, *what* may be classified as an independent relative, i.e. one without an antecedent. It may introduce a subject clause, an object clause, a predicate clause, or a clause preceded by a preposition.

What is one's man meat is another man's poison.

But that is not *what* he promised us!

After *what* you have told me I believe he is innocent.

BDD-A24003 © 2010 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:06:25 UTC)

The close affinity between interrogative and non-interrogative *what*-clauses is partly due to the fact that they have the same word-order.

Relative *what* may be used attributively, when the following noun usually denotes a thing. In some cases its meaning is more or less depreciatory, e.g.

I shall receive *what* letters I please.

Peter gave him *what* help he could.

This depreciatory meaning may be made explicit by the addition of 'little'.

I gave him *what* little help I could.

Who, which and *what*, compounded with *ever*, are used as independent relatives. These compounds, which are very indiscriminate in meaning, may introduce noun-clauses and concessive adverbial clauses.

Whoever asks about you will be informed.

The result will be satisfactory, *whichever* side wins.

Whatever happens, he shall have done his duty.

In Romanian, the relative pronouns are defined in a context that implies the co-occurrence of two verbs which are in a relation of a unilateral dependence, i.e. a construction with three terms:

Intră *cine* vrea.

Am citit cartea *pe care* mi-ai recomandat-o.

Ceea ce doreşti dumneata nu este posibil.

The relative pronoun is double-related to the verb in the main clause and to the verb in the subordinate clause. In *intră* ***cine*** *are bilet, cine* is interdependent to the two verbs, being a subject, while in *face* ***ce*** *vrea, ce* is a direct object for the two verbs.

If we agree that the relation value is defined as we have explained above, we may assert that *ceea ce* şi *cel ce* are compound relative pronouns. The interrogative pronouns – *care, ce, ce fel de, cine, cât, a câta, al câtelea* are, by no means, relative pronouns, too. The compound indefinite pronouns have, in a certain characteristic context, the same value: *oricine, orişicine, oricare, orişicare, orice, orişice, oricât, orişicât.* Yet, their affiliation to a three-term construction does not lead to a structural implication, because the third term supposes an optional expansion. Therefore, we can say: *intră* ***oricine*** sau *intră* ***oricine vrea,*** but we can't say: *intră* ***cine*** sau *intră* ***câţi***, we can say: *alege-l* ***pe oricare***, or *alege-l* ***pe oricare vrei***, but we can't say: *alege-l* ***pe care***.

The units that should be the nucleus of this class, that is they always have a relative value, are viewed as syntagms which cannot be analysed syntactically. Thus, if *ceea ce,* which is of a neutral value, is syntactically considered as an indivisible unit that can not be analysed from the point of view of determination of

BDD-A24003 © 2010 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:06:25 UTC)

the regent *ceea ce* to the subordinated *ce*, the compound *cel ce,* the forms of its paradigm – *celui ce, cei ce, celor ce,*and the form *celei ce* constitute the subject in point.

The relative *ce* joint to the demonstrative *cel* introduce attributive clauses and they are incorporated by the main clause, which becomes insufficient: "***Cei ce** rabdă jugul ş-a trăi mai vor/ Merită să-l poarte spre ruşinea lor."*

It is quite obvious that we witness insufficiently stabilized linguistic facts, especially if we take into account that *cel* is to be continued with *care*: *cel care, celui care, celor care, al celora care,* etc., all of them being syntagms where *cel, celui, celor, al celora* are regents to *care.* As regards the Nominative-Accusative form, *care* is considered to be a syntagm, especially in some cases when it is occurrent with *cine.*

De is a relative pronoun which is equivalent to *care* and it is used in constructions like: "*M-a adus tuşa Profira, **a de**-i bucătăreasa boierului ăl bătrân."*

The pronouns *care, ce, cine, cât, a câta, al câtelea, ceea ce, cel ce, de* and the phrase *ce fel de* are considered to be either a part of the same lexico-grammatical class of both interrogative and relative pronouns, or grouped distinctly as interrogative pronouns and relative pronouns. The first possibility is accounted for by the fact that, no matter their syntactic position makes them topical by giving them interrogative or relative values, they have the same paradigms, and can be considered positional variants of the same class of pronouns. Besides, one can assert that these units and the interrogative intonation are interdependent because, on the one side, interrogation may come together with other units and, on the other side, pronouns like *care, cine, ce*, etc., can appear in a context with or without such an intonation.

Bibliography

AVRAM, Mioara, *Gramatica pentru toţi,* Editura Humanitas, Ediţia a III-a, Bucureşti, 2001
BĂDESCU, Alice, *Gramatica limbii engleze,* Editura Ştiintifică şi Enciclopedică, Bucureşti, 1984
BANTAŞ, Andrei, LEVIŢCHI, Leon, *Dicţionar englez-român*, Editura Teora, Bucureşti, 1992
COTEANU, Ion, *Gramatica de bază a limbii române,* Editura Garamond, Bucureşti, 1993
CHIŢORAN, Dumitru, *Further Contrastive Studies,* Bucharest University Press, 1978
Dictionary of Contemporary English, Longman, Second Edition, 1994
GRAUR, A., *Tendinţele actuale ale limbii române,* Editura Ştiinţifică, Bucureşti
IORDAN, Iorgu, ROBU, Vladimir, *Limba română contemporană,* Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică, Bucureşti, 1971

BDD-A24003 © 2010 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:06:25 UTC)

IRIMIA, Dumitru, *Gramatica limbii române*, Editura Polirom, Iaşi, 1997
LEVIŢCHI, Leon, PREDA, Ioan, *Gramatica limbii engleze*, Editura Mondero, Bucureşti, 1992
LEVIŢCHI, Leon, *Gramatica limbii engleze*, Editura Teora, Bucureşti, 1995
POPESCU, Ştefania, *Gramatica practică a limbii române*, Editura Lider, Bucureşti, 1997
QUIRK, Randolph, GREENBAUM, Sidney, LEECH, Geoffrey, SVARTNIK, Jan, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, Longman, London and New York, 1992
THOMSON, A. J., MARTINET, A. V., *A Practical English Grammar*, Oxford University Press, 1986

BDD-A24003 © 2010 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:06:25 UTC)