# *RELATIONAL CLAUSES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR*

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***Abstract:*** *The aim of this paper is to present some problems that can appear in identifying the relational clauses within the framework of systemic functional grammar. According to systemic functional grammar, there are four major process types within the systemic functional framework: material, mental, verbal and relational. There are prototypical cases of all major process types. But there are some other cases which can not be identified so easily, the so-called 'intermediate' cases which make the classification of clauses difficult.*
***Keywords*****:** *relative clauses, attributive, identifying, Token, Value.*

The aim of this paper is to discuss some of the most common problems that can appear in identifying relational clauses within the framework of systemic functional grammar. The paper is structured in two parts: in the first part we make a short presentation of the structure of relational clauses, and in the second part we classify some of the difficulties encountered in analyzing these clauses within the framework of systemic functional linguistics. In this framework clauses can be interpreted from three perspectives: clause as message, clause as exchange, and clause as representation. In this paper we are concerned with the third aspect, the meaning of the clause as representation, and with the grammatical system by which this is achieved, namely transitivity. "The transitivity system construes the world of experience into a manageable set of process types" (Halliday, 1994: 119).

According to Halliday, there are three main types of processes: material, mental and relational, but there are some other linguistics, such as Christian Matthienssen, Clare Painter who consider that, beside these three types, there is another one: the verbal one.

The category of relational clauses is a generalization of the traditional notion of 'copula' constructions. Relational clauses construe *being* and do this in two different modes: attribution and identification. Thus, there are two types of relational clauses: attributive clauses with Carrier + Attribute, and identifying clauses with Token + Value. For example,

| | |
|---|---|
| The king is intelligent. | [attributive] |
| James must be the king. | [identifying] |

In attributive clauses, 'a is an attribute of b'; in identifying clauses, 'a is the identity of b'. The examples above point out a difference between the attributive and identifying modes: the identifying one is reversible. For example, we can say :"The king must be James", but we can not say *"Intelligent is the king".

If Attribute and Carrier are of the same order of abstraction, Token and Value are of two different order of abstraction. For example,

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| It | was | pretty good. | |
| Carrier | | Attribute | [attributive] |



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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| It | was | the best movie I have ever seen. | |
| Token | | Value | [identifying] |

If it is difficult to determine which participant is Token and which Value, the following rule can be applied: if the clause is Active, then the Subject is the Token, if the sentence is passive, the Subject is the Value.

The exercise doesn't involve a written response. (Token)
A written response isn't involved in this exercise (Value)

In order to apply this test in sentences where the relational verb is the verb 'to be', we replace this verb with another relational verb, such as 'to represent' and see whether the sentence is passive or not. For example,

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| This piece of work | is | our best effort. |
| Subject/Token | | Value |
| This piece of work | represents | our best effort. |
| Subject/Token | | Value |
| What amazes me | is | his manner in which he works. |
| Subject/Value | | Token |
| What amazes me | is represented | by his manner in which he works. |
| Subject/Value | | Token |

(i) It is sometimes difficult to decide whether a clause is relational or material because the space can be interpreted either as relation (in relational clauses) or as motion (in material clauses). In particular, the semantic domains of location, possession and change of state can be construed either relationally or materially.
**Location**. A number of locative verbs occur either in relational clauses, simply denoting relation in space or in material clauses, denoting movement in space (verb of motion). The following example is relational even though the verb *go* is essentially a verb of motion:

This theory goes back in ancient times.

If we take into consideration the simple unmarked present tense, it is quite easy to see that the above example is a relational clause because it is not possible to use the present continuous (progressive present) which is the unmarked choice in a material clause. We can not say:

*This theory is going back in ancient times.

This correlates with the fact that the theory is not construed as moving back in ancient times. We can verify our choice by using an agnate verb, for example, *to date*.

This theory dates from ancient times. (relational)
* This theory is dating from ancient times. (not possible)



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We can not relate the example to

The theory moves back to ancient times. (material)

nor can a circumstance of Manner be added to represent the rate of motion:

* This theory is going back quickly in ancient times.

Another example is the verb *to run.* As we can notice there is a difference between the following examples:

The road runs along the river. (relational clause).
The man is running along the river. (material clause).

**Possession.** Although the verb *to have* denotes a relational process, the meaning of possession may be construed materially where it involves some dynamic aspect as getting, giving, receiving, obtaining. For example:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The young man | has | high qualifications. |
| Carrier | Process | Attribute |
| | | |
| The young man | is obtaining | high qualifications. |
| Actor | Process | Range |

We have to note that the verb *to have* can also be used materially, as in:

The young man is having dinner.

**Change of state.** A state of being is typically represented in a Carrier + Process + Attribute structure such as in *The soup is cold.* In addition, a change of state can be represented relationally, as in *The soup became/ got cold.* However, this latter set of attributives is distinctive in selecting the continuous present as the unmarked choice for present time: for example we can say *It's getting late*. In this they reflect a greater semantic proximity to the material process type. In fact, a change of state can also be construed as a material process without attributive elements, as in *The water boiled.*

(ii) Another problem is represented by certain verbs which can be used in both attributive relational clauses and in mental clauses. The process of 'sensing' can be interpreted either as attribute (in relational clauses) or as inert processes (in mental clauses).
We can distinguish among several types of verbs:

a. One group of verbs is the class of physical perception, such as *smell, taste, feel.*

The woman is smelling the flower. (mental)
The woman smells good. (relational)

In the first case the woman is treated as a conscious being; in the second sentence the attribute 'good' is ascribed to her, so we can not consider her as a conscious being.



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We can also notice that, while the mental clause can be passive: *The flower was being smelt by the woman*, the attributive relational clauses can not: **Good was smelt by the woman*.

b. A second group is represented by verbs which can express either a mental process as a reaction or can express a relation of causality. For example,

Good education influences children. (mental)
Pressure influences rainfall. (identifying relational: causal)

Both mental and relational clauses express emotions; the emotions expressed in mental clauses are realised through a conscious process, while the emotions expressed in relational clauses can be interpreted as an Attribute.

The film depressed me. (mental)
I felt upset (attributive relational)

Because both types of clauses construe emotions it is difficult to distinguish between them. However, we should observe that mental clauses can be also passive, *I was depressed by the movie*, which is not possible for relational clauses **Upset was felt*. Another difference is that relational clauses can be intensified by the adverb *very: I felt very upset*, which is not possible for mental clauses: **The movie depressed me very.*
Nevertheless, as Halliday notices, there are clauses which can not be identified so easily. For example:

He is scared.

If we consider the sentence to be mental, then 'He' is the Senser, 'and 'is scared' represents the Process, passive form. We can check this interpretation by adding the Agent:

He is scared of dogs.

If we consider the sentence to be attributive relational, 'He' is the Carrier, 'is' represents the process, and 'scared' is the attribute. We can replace the verb 'to be' with other relational verbs, such as 'to seem', 'to become'.

He seems scared. / He becomes scared.

(iii) Another problem in identifying the relational clauses is that there are some verbs which can be used in both verbal and relational clauses. Some of the verbs are: *to suggest, to indicate, to show, to convince, to emphasize, to tell to mean, to prove*. For example,

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Her actions | confirmed | their suspicions. | (identifying relational) |
| Assigner | Value | | |
| He | confirmed | that he will not come. | (verbal) |
| Sayer | | | |



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The management emphasized/ underlined to the employees that there are no money left for their demands. (verbal)
The white walls emphasized the space in her house. (relational).

Matthienssen notices that "*He took the pen and underlined the main points in this chapter* is an example of these verbs functioning in a material clause" (Matthienssen: 126).

(iv). Relational clauses are sometimes not recognised. There are some relational types that have a different structure from a typical one which is made up of: Carrier + Process + Attribute or Token + Process + Value. In some cases they can have an Agent (Assigner, Attributor) or a Beneficiary or the Process itself embodies the Attributive role. These types are difficult to be identified in the analysis, so we are drawing attention to them giving a few examples of each:
a. causative relational clauses:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| - identifying: | They | baptized | the girl | Elisabeth. |
| | The French | elected | Mr. Sarcozy | president. |
| | I | pronounce | him | the winner. |
| | Assigner | Process: identifying | Token | Value |
| - attributive: | I | declare | the games | open. |
| | You | can consider | it | done. |
| | I | keep | my windows | shut. |
| | Attributor | Process: Attributive | Carrier | Attribute |

"Note that these sentences should not be confused with material processes which include also a 'resultative' Attribute". (Matthienssen, 1997: 125). The main difference is that, in a material clause the resultative attribute can be left out while in attributive relational clause this is not possible.

We folded the paper flat: we folded the paper (material)
We kept the paper flat, but not *We kept the paper (attributive relational).

b. Relational clauses with Beneficiary role:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| He | owes | **John** | money. |
| The car | cost | **me** | a lot of money. |
| She | makes | **him** | a good friend. |

Notice that the last example can be interpreted in several ways according to the structure:
(i). Attributor + Process + Carrier + Attribute means "she cause him to be a good friend"
(ii). Carrier + Process + Beneficiary + Attribute means " she was a good friend to him".
We can also interpret this sentence materially : Actor + Process + Beneficiary (Client) + Goal. This interpretation is not very good for this example because the verb 'make' behaves as a copula-like verb, but it works perfectly when the verb 'make' is transitive:



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*She will make him a cake.*

c. Relational clauses in which the process embodies the Attribute role. Normally, a quality is represented as an Attribute, not as a part in the process. For example,

It doesn't matter. = It is not important.
This room stinks. = It is stinky.
The reasearch methods differ from one institute to another. = The methods are different.

According to Matthienssen, there are several adjectives such as *eager, keen, willing, happy, afraid, scared, ready etc* which can occur as Attributes in attributive clauses.

John is afraid.
The girl is ready.

These adjectives can also modify the meaning in examples where the process is not relational, but mental:
John is afraid to swim in the sea.
Doctors are quick to prescribe antibiotics.
If we compare *Doctors are quick to prescribe antibiotics* with *Doctors prescribe antibiotics quickly* we notice that in both cases the process is the behavioural *prescribe*. But, in the second case, an additional feature was added in order to create a 'verbal group complex'. The additional meaning is a modal meaning, related to inclination or ability. For example,

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Jane | is eager to please | her professors. |
| Phenomenon | Process: mental | Senser |
| | | |
| Profesor Jones | is | easy [to please]. |
| Carrier | Process: attributive relational | Attribute. |

Conclusions:
In this paper we have presented only the most important problems on identifying relational clauses. These problems appear due to the common characteristic relational clauses share with material, mental and verbal clauses. Relational clauses express space as relation, while material clauses express space as motion; relational clauses construe sensing as attribute, while mental clauses as an inert process, relational clauses realize symbolization as identity while verbal clauses as communication.

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