RELATIVE WORDS VS RELATIVE CLAUSES

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Abstract: Starting from the idea that there are some basic relative words (pronouns, adjectives, adverbs) in English , this paper aims at highlighting the complexity of these words, viewed from different perspectives. A study upon the English relative words and the English relative clauses would be a real challenge, but it could also prove that these two aspects are special and they are worth studying in order to see whether there are always connections between them or not. The structures and the clauses with relative words offer a good and rich material to work with and to study, enabling us to draw clear, logical and useful conclusions.

Keywords: complexity, function, meaning, relative words, clauses

The notion *relative* is differently defined in dictionaries, due to its various meanings and situations of usage. For instance, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* refers to the following definitions:

1. a word referring grammatically to an antecedent
2. a thing having a relation to or connection with or necessary dependence on another thing
3. a person connected with another by blood or affinity*b* : an animal or plant related to another by common descent
4. a relative term, ie a term that makes two or more distinct references to objects, which is typically expressed in ordinary language by means of a phrase with explicit or implicit blanks, eg ... *is the same object as* ...; The word ***is*** is a relative term when it expresses identity: "This book is the English Book.

In other dictionaries the term *relative*, used as an adjective (relative word), is considered to denote or belong to a class of words that function as subordinating conjunctions in introducing relative clauses. It is also stated that in English, relative pronouns and determiners include *who*, *which*, and *that*. (*Collins English Dictionary*, 2003)

English Oxford Dictionary states that in grammar, the word *relative* denotes a pronoun, a determiner, or an adverb that refers to an expressed or implied antecedent and attaches a subordinate clause to it, e.g. which, who. In other words, these words are called *relative* because in a sentence, they ***relate*** to a noun that has been mentioned in another (superordinate) clause.

Taking this definition as a starting point, this paper focuses on the hypothesis that there is a close interdependence between relative words, or relativisers, and relative or adjective clauses, trying to demonstrate whether this statement is true or not.

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As shown in the definition, the grammatical category of relative words comprises: relative pronouns (*what, whatever, who, whoever, whom, that*) , relative adjectives /determiners (*whose, what, whatever, which, whichever*) and relative adverbs (*how, however, why*). Some relative words such as: *when, whence, whenever, where, whereby, wherein, whereupon, wherever,while* may belong to the category of relative adverbs, or may be interpreted as relative prepositions.

A relative word relates to the noun or noun substitute that its relative clause modifies. It can be found in a sentence at the beginning of a relative or adjective clause, which just like an adjective, determines or modifies nouns and noun substitutes. Relative words resemble subordinating conjunctions in that they both are connecting devices and link clauses in a sentence. Therefore, neither the relative words nor the subordinating conjunctions occur in simple sentences, whilst coordinating conjunctions and prepositions do. One of the major differences between conjunctions and relative words consists in that the first ones never have a syntactic function, whereas the latter, besides being connecting words, are also parts of the subordinate-relative clause and may be syntactically identified as subjects, objects (relative pronouns), determiners/modifiers (relative adjectives) or adverbials (relative adverbs).

Eg.*I know* ***that*** *you are right.* (*that* is a conjunction, no syntactic function)

The book ***which/that*** *is on the shelf is not John's.* (*which/that* are relative pronouns functioning as subjects)

I recognized the doctor ***whom*** *I had met last summer.* (*whom* is a relative pronoun functioning as a direct object)

The nice lady ***whose*** *bag is brown ia john's grandmother.* (*whose* is a relative adjective functioning as a noun modifier)

The house ***where*** *I spent my childhood is elsewhere.*(*where* is a relative adverb functioning as an adverbial-of place)

Relative pronouns may refer either to persons or to things regardless of their number or gender and can be common for persons and things or specific to persons or things..

Relative pronouns referring to persons may take a Nominative or an Accusative form when they introduce a relative clause.

Eg. *The little girl* ***who*** *is talking to you is my sister.* (N)
The little girl ***that*** *is talking to you is my sister*.(less formal).
The little girl ***who(m)*** *you are talking to is my sister*.(Acc)
My sister is the little girl ***to whom*** *you are talking.* .(Acc)
This is the idea ***from which*** *we started the debate.* .(Acc)
The little girl ***that*** *you are talking to is my sister.* .(Acc)

Relative pronouns referring to things may also take a Nominative or an Accusative form when they introduce a relative clause.

Eg.: *The bunch of flowers* ***which*** *is on the table is beautiful*.(N)
The bunch of flowers ***that*** *is on the table is beautiful*.(less formal).
The bunch of flowers ***which*** *you offered me is beautiful*.(Acc)
The bunch of flowers ***that*** *you offered me is beautiful.* .(Acc)

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Sometimes the relative clause is introduced by a relative pronoun which is not present, but understood: *The little girl you are talking to is my sister.*
The bunch of flowers you offered me is beautiful.

In some contexts the relative pronoun cannot be omitted, unless it is dropped together with the auxiliary verb:

Eg: *The little girl* ***who*** *is talking to you is my sister*.
*The little girl (****~~who is~~****) talking to you is my sister*.

The relative pronoun *which* may also refer to persons if the idea of choice is present, but in this case it does not introduce a relative clause, but generally a Direct Object clause:

Eg.: *I don't know* ***which*** *(one) of them is your sister.*

The only relative adjective or determiner that introduces a relative clause is *whose*, which has a Possessive form and cannot be reduceded:

Eg. *The little girl* ***whose*** *shoes are blue is my sister*.

Other relative adjectives are *what* and *which*, accompanying a Nominative or an Accusative form, but they introduce mainly a Direct Object clause, and not necessarily a relative one.

Eg. *I know* ***what*** *song is this*. (+N)
I know ***what*** *song he sings*.(+Acc)
I know ***which*** *plane took off first.* (+N)
I know ***which*** *plane you were talking about*.(+Acc)

A relative clause like: *The thought* ***what*** *song he sings bothers me*. seems far-fetched.

Sometimes relative clauses are introduced by a relative pronoun or adjective preceded by a preposition.

Eg: *The old lady* ***to whom*** *John is speaking is his mother.*
The box ***into which*** *you threw the paper is full of books.*

In these cases the relative word can be omitted and the preposition moves to the end of the clause:

Eg: *The old lady John is speaking* ***to*** *is his mother.*
The box you threw the paper ***into*** *is full of books.*

But in an example like: *This was an English class* ***during which*** *we could learn many things.* the reduction of the relative pronoun and the movement of the preposition to the end of the clause are unlikely to happen.

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Relative adverbs modify a verb and also connect two clauses in a sentence. They basically have an adverbial form, but the meaning is that of a relative pronoun preceded by a preposition. Relative adverbs do not occur in subject or object position, an thus, replacing an adverb, they act as adverbials in the relative clause.

Eg.: *This is the day* ***when*** *I got married.* (*when* is an adverbial of time)
This is the day ***on which*** *I got married.*
The school ***where*** *I studied is a good one.* (*where* is an adverbial of place)
The school ***in which*** *I studied is a good one.*
The reason ***why*** *he supported me is obvious.* (*why* is an adverbial of reason)
The reason ***for which*** *he supported me is obvious.*

Most the examples above try to substantiate that relative words initiate a relative or adjective clause. Since there are situations in which a relative word introduces other subordinate clauses than relative, our first hypothesis seems to vacillate.

Eg.: ***After what*** *John did this morning, he deserves to be punished.* (*after what* introduces an Adverbial clause of time)
What *I saw was boring.*(*what* introduces a Nominal Subject clause)
His problem is ***what*** *to say.*(*what* introduces a Nominal Subject Complement clause)
Whoever *comes first gets the prize.* (*whoever* introduces a Nominal Subject clause, but the meaning is that of a relative clause: *The person* ***who*** *comes first gets the prize*)
Whatever *you offer I'm not interested*.(*whatever* introduces an Adverbial clause of concession)
I'll bring her ***whichever*** *she likes*. (*whichever* introduces a Nominal Direct Object clause)
John always takes the umbrella with him ***wherever*** *he goes.* (*whenever* introduces an Adverbial clause of Place)
John knows ***how*** *to solve the problem.* (*how* introduces a Nominal Direct Object clause)
But in: *John knows the way* ***in which*** *to solve the problem.* (*in which* introduces a Relative clause)
A strange and unusual occurrance in a relative clause is that of the so-called resumptive pronoun, which is, in fact, a personal pronoun which refers to an antecedent, not immediately after it, but after an insertion of another subordinate clause.
Eg. *These are some of the books which, although being old,* ***they*** *are very useful*.

The relative sentence *which are very useful* is interrupted by the non-finite adverbial clause of concession *although being old* and the personal pronoun *they* is used to refer to *which*-the antecedent and to emphasize it.
According to Sharvit (1999) resumptive pronouns are meant to impede violations of some syntactic constraints. On the other hand, Beltrama (2013) considers that a resumptive pronoun is required and needed for a better interpretation of some syntactic contexts. Other opinions state that this kind of pronouns appears when a sentence changes while it is uttered in such a way that it is difficult to be finished grammatically. (Prince,1991)
The examples given in this paper so far have demonstrated that relative words, although mostly used to introduce a relative clause, may be employed to initiate other types of subordinate clauses as well. On the other hand, it is relevant to see whether relative clauses are always introduced only by relative words or not.

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Relative clauses are generally defined as subordinate, dependent clauses that provide a description and determine or modify nouns or noun substitutes. They are also known as adjective clauses, because they behave like adjectives, adding information to a noun. These clauses are like sentences inside other sentences and are meant to give explicitness and completeness to the utterance. Relative clausses are placed immediately after the noun they determine or modify:

Eg. *The* **girl*who is reading a book*** *has a black cat. (*and not: *The* **girl** *has a black cat* ***who is reading a book****.)*

According to the relationship established with the noun they modify, relative clauses may be of three types: restrictive or defining or identifying relative clauses, non-restrictive or non-defining or non-identifying relative clauses and sentential relative clauses.

Eg: 1. *The old lady* ***whom you helped yesterday*** *is John's grandmother.*
This is the reason ***why I accepted his invitation****.*
I missed the train ***which/that leaves at 7 a.m*** *because of the traffic jam.*
The smart gentleman ***who enters the room*** *is the judge.*
Any student ***whose answers are excellent*** *will be praised.*
2. I have met her son John, ***who is a doctor****.*
Those boys, ***who(m) you are playing with in the garden****, seem very happy.*
I wiil buy those apples, ***which are on the shelf.***
*That car****, for which I paid a lot of money,*** *has broken.*
3. My neighbour's child is continually crying, ***which annoys me****.*
John is always calling his mother in the middle of the night, ***which drives her crazy****.*

In the first set of examples, the relative clause is a restrictive one, being characterized by the fact that it defines/identifies the noun in the main clause, giving detailed information, which cannot be put in commas. In some of these clauses the relative pronoun may be reduced, and sentences containing a relative clause without a relative pronoun expressed are known as Contact clauses.

Eg: *The old lady* ***you helped yesterday*** *is John's grandmother.*
This is the reason ***I accepted his invitation****.*
but *I missed the train* ***leaving at 7 a.m,*** *because of the traffic jam.*
The smart gentleman ***entering the room*** *is the judge.*

In the second set of examples the relative clause is not needed to define or identify the noun (phrase), but gives additional information, which is put in commas. This is a non-restrictive relative clause. It can be used with or without relative pronoun omission:

I have met her son John, ***who is a doctor****.*(*who* cannot be reduced)
That nice person, ***whom you have just met****, is his friend*.(*whom* can be reduced: *That nice person,* ***you have just met****, is his friend.)*

In the third set of examples the relative clause does not determine or modify a noun, does not refer to a noun antecedent, but qualifies an entire previous clause, being thus considered a sentential relative clause. Besides referring to an entire clause/structure, sentential relative clause is charaterized by the fact that it can be re-phrased, the result being a restrictive relative clause:

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My neighbour's child is always crying, ***which annoys me****.* (means: ***The fact*** *that my neighbour's child is always crying,* ***annoys me****.)*

and is always introduced by the relative pronoun *which* that cannot be omitted.

Sometimes relative clauses, especially those introduced by *who, which, that* in subject position, can be reduced to a participle, the result being a non-finite relative clause.

Eg. *The young man* ***who crosses the street*** *is John.*

The young man ***crossing the street*** *is John*

All these examples show that relative clauses are mostly used with relative words introducing them, but there are cases in which a relative clause is initiated by other types of subordinators.

Eg: *The thought* ***that you are wrong*** *bothers me. (*here the relative clause is introduced by the conjunction *that*)

The doubt ***whether (if) you come tomorrow*** *presses me.*

The idea ***to go there*** *wasn't mine.*

In conclusion, in most of the cases there is a very close interdependence between relative words (including adverbs) and relative clauses, each depending on the other, but when a relative word introduces other types of subordinate clauses or when the relative clauses are introduced by other subordinators than relative words, the interdependence loses its power. Therefore, the initial hypothesis of this paper could not be confirmed completelly.

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