Appositive Relatives in Discourse

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Much recent work in syntax, especially on the development of syntax from discourse strategies, has been concerned with relative clauses. In this study I was concerned with a sub-type of relative clause in English, the Appositive Relative (AR), more usually known as the non-restrictive relative. Keenan and Comrie (1977) in their work on universals of relative clauses have defined a hierarchy of ease of relativization for the NPs within the relativized clause. Their cross-linguistic definition of RC, however, is necessarily a semantic one and excludes AR from consideration.[1] Keenan (1975) tested the accessibility hierarchy (AH) by looking at the actual frequency of relativization on Subjects, Direct Objects, Oblique NPs, etc. in written English. I was interested in whether the same distribution would be found for AR.

Loetscher (for English) and Sankoff and Brown (New Guinea Tok Pisin) have given some semantic characterization of the kinds of information appearing in appositive relatives. Sankoff and Brown's work (1976) suggests different discourse functions for RCs which might correspond to AR and RR in English. I was also interested, then, in whether ARs were used differently in the discourse than RR as evidenced by the point of embedding to the higher sentence, as well as whether they encoded discourse-new information.

Syntactic models have generally tried to capture the difference   between AR and RR by suggesting in various way looser connection between the main S and AR. Work on subordination and coordination predicts that tightly subordinated structures are more 'difficult' (in a sense to be discussed below) or more 'linguistically complex.' This would seem to predict, counter-intuitively, that AR should be the simpler or 'easier' structure.

I hope to make two points, one, that AR are 'difficult' structures, and two, that their use in discourse modifying definite but not identified NPs is evidence of the strength of the 'rule of conversation' which demands that information sufficient to identify new referents be provided immediately.

"Difficulty'

The work on syntacticization from discourse strategies gives diachronic evidence of subordinate structures developing after coordinate structures(Sankoff for Tok Pisin, Justus' work on development of restrictive form embedded relatives in Hittite). Defining and documenting the conditions under which subordination and coordination are used has been a central problem for many researchers. Psycholinguistic evidence, experimental and

developmental, indicates the relative 'difficulty' of subordinate
structures. Subordinate clauses are found to emerge late in child
speech cross-linguistically (Jacobson, Sloan, and Clancy). Slobin
and Welsh (1973) found difficulty in imitation. Kintsch (1974)
reports several experiments with adults using passages with con-
tent controlled, some containing subordination, others coordinat-
ion. The subordinated passages were less accurately recalled.
The work of E.O.Keenan and colleagues on planned and unplanned
discourse suggests that early emerging structures and strategies
may also be those called upon under conditions which allow or
demand less planning, late emerging structures being more frequent
when more planning is possible. Kroll (1977) has documented the
increase in subordination in speech modalities which allow more
processing time, for unplanned and planned written discourse.
    By difficult I mean just these findings of late emergence
historically and in acquisition, poorer recall and lesser use
under conditions which allow less planning or processing time.
Between AR and RR however we have not two surface forms for the
'same' semantic implication, but one surface form with two sem-
antic implications (at least), one rather clear and the other
very vague. In the diachronic case for subordination and co-
ordination the development from 'easy' to 'difficult' seems
natural if stated: "languages develop from 'easier' to more
'difficult' structures." Why should they? As Givon, (1977)
has put it this is a loss (from the speaker's point of view)
which must be offset by some gain -- probably in 'automatic
processing' a narrowing of function which decreases possibi-
lities for interpretation the hearer must choose from. By the
measures used in this study AR seem to line up as 'more difficult':
they were used rarely absolutely, rarely compared to RR, contained
relativizations on the 'easier' positions, were more frequent
in more planned discourse. The structure used with a less de-
finite semantic implication behaves as if 'more difficult'
suggesting that 'difficulty' is indeed a function of the formal
complexity relative to a payoff in automatic processing.

AR and RR characteristics

    Formal criteria for distinguishing AR and RR are the pre-
sence of a comma intonation or a slowing, (or indication of a break)
for AR, and the obligatory use of wh- forms rather than that.
Proper nouns such as personal names which by their nature specify
a unique definite referent rather than a class of referents, and
other definite NPs which are pragmatically known to have only one
referent can never have a restricting RC. For most NPs both types
of RC are possible modifiers but for (a) and (b) there is no corres-
ponding restrictive:

AR
  a) John,
  b) My father,
  c) My brother,   who sleeps late, is a nightowl.
  d) The man,
  e) A man,

RR
  My brother
  The man   who sleeps late is probably a nightowl.
  A man

Hawkins (1977) discusses many other formal possibilities which distinguish AR from RR such as the occurence of certain adverbs and of parentheticals. None of these occured in the corpus however.

RR defined semantically by Keenan is a clause which picks out a specific member of the rest of referents specified by the head NP. Thus -
The Danes who are well-educated are content.
identifies by 'disambiguating' which of the already mentioned set of all Danes the main proposition is claimed to be true of.

The usual definition of AR is negative: they do not restrict the scope of the head NP,they merely add information to the sentence, but what kind of information is very vaguely delimited. Loetscher (1973) found one use of AR to be for explanatory material, as in the following:
Fido, who escaped from the dean's house last night, was
caught in the linguistic department.
He found limitations on the temporal sequencing of two clauses.

John, who poured the drink, handed it to Bill.
*John, who handed the drink to Bill, poured it.

Also material in RR is said to be presupposed, but in AR more asserted.

Sankoff and Brown distinguish identifications from 'characterizations.' Identifications,they say,instruct the hearer "you have a file X, put this in that file," while characterizations instruct the hearer to "open a file on this." They do find that characterizations tend to be used later for identifications. Their data appear to indicate a more frequent use of the developing RC marker (bracketing with a locative particle ia) for identifications.

Syntactic models variously reflect the intuition that AR are more independent than RR, by deriving the one from conjoined structures, the other from embedded structures (though Thompson has proposed deriving both from conjoined structures) or by giving AR its own performative verb (Thorne).

Data and Method

The relative clauses discussed in this study came from 2 corpora of spoken English, spontaneous interviews by pairs of undergraduates in a speech class, and planned speeches introducing a classmate, given in front of the same class. Topic and content were controlled to the extent that the planned speeches necessarily incorporated the material gathered in the interviews.

Relative clauses which had both wh- forms and comma intonation or some indication of a break were taken as appositive.

Characteristics investigated were internal to RC and external. That is, internally, the NP relativized on in terms of the accessibility hierarchy defined by Keenan, the verb type whether copula or verbal. External refers to the position in the main clause of the element embedded into, that is whether it is the Subject NP, Direct Object, etc.

Results

Traugott (1972) remarks that "AR" are common in written language but they tend not to be used much in speech. Instead a coordination or two separate sentences is used. Indeed, AR are very rare in this corpus, and much more so in relatively unplanned discourse, both absolutely and compared to RR. Only 35 AR occured in total in 250 minutes of speech. The 14 AR in 221 minutes of spontaneous speech were 16% of the RC corpus, the 21 AR in 35 minutes of planned speech formed 70% of the total RCs for that corpus.
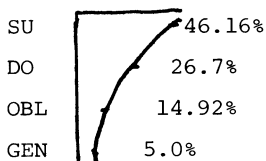
Keenan (1975) predicts an order of difficulty favoring relativization on Subject: "there may be some sense in which it is 'easier' or more 'natural' to form RCs on the Subjects (or higher) end of the CH (accessibility hierarchy)." Table Ia shows the results he found from examining a corpus of over 2200 restrictive relatives from written materials. There is a sharp and constant decrease down the AH, but with substantial numbers at the lower positions.

Keenan made the further predication that intuitive judgements of syntactic simplicity would correlate with RCs using relativization on Nps at the high end of the AH. His sources were newspapers, Orwell, Virginia Woolf, and P.F.Strawson (in increasing order of supposed complexity). The intuitively more complex writings did contain more relativizations on lower positions.
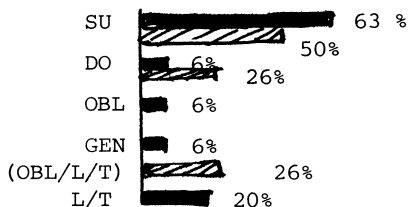
Table I

SU: subject NP, DO:direct object, OBL: indirect object and oblique, L/T: locatives and temporals

(a)   predicted (after   (b)   actual   ■ AR   ▨ RR*
      Keenan,1975)

SU	46.16%
DO	26.7%
OBL	14.92%
GEN	5.0%

SU	63 %
	50%
DO	6%
	26%
OBL	6%
GEN	6%
(OBL/L/T)	26%
L/T	20%

* RR data from Van Naarssen, 1977.

    Data from the RR in this corpus (from Van Naarssen,1977)
(Table Ib, cross-hatching) show more relativization on DO, less
on SU. (Both OBL and LOC/TEM were included in OBL here, so no
comparison can be made). AR do seem more limited to the easier
positions, although the number of AR in the sample is very small.
    Another analysis suggests that AR are formed on propositions
that are simple in the sense of-having few NP arguments and there-
fore few posiblities for relativization. Table II shows the number
of AR containing copula and verbal predicates. The verbs were only
36% of the spontaneous data but 50% of the planned.

Table II*

	Spontaneous %	Planned %	Total%
COP	64	45	52
VERB	36	50	44

* The remaining 4% were instances of HAVE, existentials,etc.

    Such an analysis is of course not independent of the AH
analysis, since propositions with only one argument would
necessarily relativize on Subject. Keenan looked in his data
for evidence that authors who use simple syntax will promote
NPs to subject position. In this corpus there was one use of
Passive verb. If there is 'promotion' it would seem to be
presyntactic.
    The second question in this study concerned where in the
sentence AR were found, that is which NP in the higher S was
modified, and whether this NP was definite or indefinite, first
mention in the discourse or second-mention.
    These AR are similar to Sankoff's 'characterizations'; the
head NP is a first-mention in the discourse, by a ratio of 5 old:
30 new. Although theoretically AR as well as RR can occur with
indefinite NPs, actually they occur on definite NPs, mostly

proper nouns. Of 29 non-sentential appositives, 7 were indefinite, 22 were definite. Table III shows the point of embedding.

Table III[2]

Constituent of main clause. Distribution of AR by element embedded under. S_O: main S node (for sentential appositives, SU: subject, COMP:Direct obj. predicate nom., indirect obj., OBL:oblique, L/T: locative and temporals.

Expected
($\emptyset$ prediction)

Actual

	Expected	Actual	
S_O	▭	▬	7
SU	▭		
COMP	▭	▬▬	15
OBL	▭	▬	8
L/T	▭	▬	4

Note that there were no occurences of AR modifying Subject NPs. All positions embedded to allow the RC to occur sentence-finally, which acquisition studies would suggest is the 'easiest' position in which to add a relative clause. In a larger stretch of speech, however, the finality of sentence-final position is not clear, and AR occur in exactly those positions in which a coordinate proposition could also be used and follow the modified NP immediately:

I have an acting coach in Hollywood, { who I go to ...... / and I go to him... }

The point about the use of AR in discourse is perhaps that they are <u>not</u> used, that the place appropriate for their use is the place for introduction of new information, which is post-verbally insofar as in the discourse the sentence is organized to go from given to new; and this place is just the one which allows the use of a coordinate structure. That AR are used at all is evidence for the strength of the demand, according to the rules of conversation, that referents being introduced into the discourse be immediately identified.

FOOTNOTES

1. Cross-linguistically the function of AR and RR need not coincide in the same structure, though they often seem to. Given a semantic characterization of AR, this will be an interesting question to investigate.

2. Examples:
   S_0 : I would clam up, which I don wonna do.
   SU : ---------------------
   COMP : I'm taking political science ya know which is totally different
   OBL : ...depends on the job market, which fer teachers' pretty steep

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