

## Relative markers and subject-object asymmetries in the Wycliffe Bible

My talk presents corpus study on the two versions of the Wycliffe Bible (earlier, EV vs. later, LV), examining the distribution of *who(m)/which* and *that* in relative clauses with a personal referent. The main question is to what extent the observed variation is due to (i) the function of the gap and (ii) the particular version. *Wh*-pronouns started to occur in headed relative clauses in Middle English; they increased in frequency in the subsequent centuries especially in the standard variety (van Gelderen 2004, 2009; Romaine 1982). The clear distinction between *who(m)* for personal and *which* for non-personal referents is a later development, as is the preference for *who(m)* over *that* for personal antecedents in norm-oriented contexts (Ball 1996).

The chi-square tests carried out on a representative sample reveal the following. (i) There is a significant ( $P < 0.05$ ) preference for *wh*-pronouns in object relatives and for *that* in subject relatives. (ii) While there are no significant differences between the two versions regarding object relatives, the preference for *that* in subject relatives is significantly higher in the LV than in the EV. Crucially, this is specific to relative clauses with personal referents: with non-personal referents, there are no significant differences regarding subject relatives, while the preference for *which* in object relatives is significantly higher in the LV. The LV is generally considered to be closer to idiomatic English (Bruce 1984). I argue that the asymmetries and differences indicate the beginning of two tendencies, namely (i) the emergence of a subject-object asymmetry (in terms of *that* vs. *wh*, respectively), and (ii) the specification of *which* for non-personal referents. The differentiation started in the more marked functions (non-subjects), as also indicated by the fact that oblique gaps are exclusively marked by *wh*-elements in both versions.

## References

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