# English relative clauses in a cross-Germanic perspective

Julia Bacskai-Atkari

University of Konstanz

*julia.bacskai-atkari@uni-konstanz.de*

Comparative Germanic Syntax Workshop 34
Konstanz, 14–15 June 2019

## Introduction

two major types of relative clauses in English:

(1)    a.    This is the linguist **who** has an interesting theory.
        b.    This is the linguist **that** has an interesting theory.

two strategies:

- relative pronoun strategy
- relative complementiser strategy

two possible sources of relative markers:

- demonstrative elements
- *wh*-elements

## Proposal

English quite unique among Germanic languages – number and distribution of options

other standard Germanic languages: clear preference for either strategy

- German, Dutch: relative pronouns
- Scandinavian languages: relative complementisers

proposal: development primarily related to case system and to the feature properties of the source elements behind relative markers

## Operators versus complementisers

relative pronoun versus complementiser in Standard English: apparently in complementary distribution:

(2)   *This is the linguist **who that** has an interesting theory.

proposal of Chomsky & Lasnik (1977): COMP position – in varieties like Standard English, the co-presence of the two elements violates the Doubly Filled COMP Filter
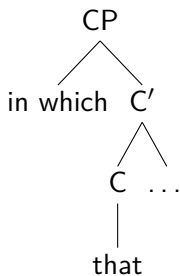
## Doubly Filled COMP

but: violation of the filter possible in non-standard varieties:

(3)   %This is the town **in which that** I live.

more recent approaches (Van Gelderen 2009, Brandner & Bräuning
2013, Bacskai-Atkari 2018a): doubling patterns involve an overt
specifier and an overt head in the CP – non-doubling patterns
realise only one of these positions overtly

Introduction
○○
Operators versus complementisers
○○●○○○○○○○○○○○
The relative cycle
○○○○○○○○○
Relative elements and case
○○○○○○○○○
Hierarchy
○○○○○
Conclusion
○

## Structure

(4)

```
          CP
         /  \
   in which  C′
            /  \
           C   …
           |
          that
```

## Doubling in interrogatives

doubling patterns like (3) similar to doubling in interrogatives
   (Chomsky & Lasnik 1977 treat them similarly):

(5)   %She asked me **in which city that** I lived.

but: doubling in interrogatives more frequent than in relative
   clauses

same observation holds for German: dialects prefer the
   complementiser strategy and may additionally use a pronoun
   (cf. Bayer 1984, Salzmann 2006, 2009)

## German

standard versus dialectal pattern (Brandner & Bräuning 2013):

(6)    a.    ... der Mann **der**    seine Schuhe verloren hat
           the man   that.M   his   shoes   lost     has
       'the man who has lost his shoes'

       b.    ... dea Mo **(dea)**   **wo** seine Schu verlora hot
           the man   that.M PRT his    shoes lost     has
       'the man who has lost his shoes'

## Interrogatives

doubling may be obligatory:

(7)  I frog-me, **fia wos  dass**-ma an zwoatn Fernseher braucht.
     I ask-REFL for what that-one a   second TV           needs
     'I wonder what one needs a second TV for.'
     (Bayer & Brandner 2008)

# Lexicalising the C position

very few doubling patterns reported by Boef (2013) for Dutch

strong preference for lexicalising the C position favours
complementisers (preference in Germanic also in main clauses,
e.g. V2, see Bacskai-Atkari 2018a,b)

## Interrogative/relative asymmetry

differences in information structure

- embedded interrogatives: the operator is focus-marked – adding the complementiser results in doubling
- relative clauses: the operator carries GIVEN information (redundant) and can be left out when a complementiser is already there (clause typing)

preference for complementisers in relative clauses: Van Gelderen (2009): *wh*-pronouns promoted by prescriptive rules but English speakers prefer *that* over a *wh*-pronoun (at least a 4:1 ratio; see also Romaine 1982, Montgomery & Bailey 1991, Van Gelderen 2004, Tagliamonte et al. 2005)

## Corpus study

two versions of the King James Bible (Bacskai-Atkari to appear):

- original version (1611/1769)
- modernised version from (1989)

distribution of relative markers – examination of parallel loci

## Original version

sample results (Genesis)

| **TOTAL** | **who** | **whom** | **which** | **that** | **as** |
|-----------|---------|----------|-----------|----------|--------|
| 374 | 14 | 25 | 123 | 210 | 2 |
| | (3.74%) | (6.68%) | (32.89%) | (56.15%) | (0.53%) |

## New version

sample results (Genesis)

| **TOTAL** | **who** | **whom** | **which** | **that** |
|-----------|---------|----------|-----------|----------|
| 374 | 106 | 41 | 118 | 109 |
| | (28.34%) | (10.96%) | (31.55%) | (29.14%) |

## Preference for complementisers

clear preference for the complementiser strategy also in present-day dialects (cf. Herrmann 2005, Kortmann & Wagner 2007, Beal 2008):

- demonstrative-based complementiser *that*
- *wh*-based complementisers *what*, *where*
- traditional patterns with *as*, *at*

## Germanic

similar preference across Germanic:

- German dialects: *wo*, *was* (see Brandner & Bräuning 2013 on Bodensee Alemannic; Salzmann 2017 on Zurich German; Fleischer 2004, 2017 on Hessian; Weiß 2013 on Bavarian; see also Kaufmann 2018 on Mennonite Low German)
- Mainland Scandinavian *som*
- Icelandic *sem*
- Flemish: *dat* mostly only in combination with a pronoun (Bennis & Haegeman 1984, Boef 2013)

## So. . .

English pattern not unique in favouring a complementiser strategy, but:

- unique in employing a demonstrative-based complementiser
- unique in the extent to which the pronoun strategy concurs

$\rightarrow$ question: what historical processes are decisive for this pattern

# The relative cycle

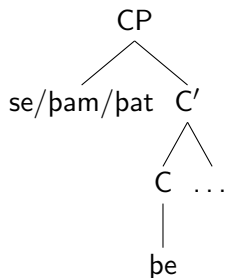relative pronouns can be reanalysed as complementisers (see Van
Gelderen 2004, 2009)

## Stage 1

*that* a relative pronoun

(8)  ac  gif we asmeagaþ þa    eadmodlican dæda **þa  þe**  he
     but if  we consider  those humble      deeds that that he
     worhte,  þonne ne  þincþ us þæt nan wundor
     wrought then   not seems us that no  wonder
     'But if we consider the humble deeds which he wrought,
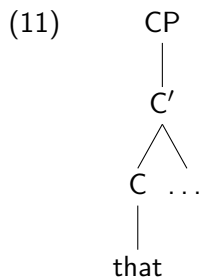     that will seem no wonder to us.' (*Blickling Homilies*)

## Structure

(9)

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\text{CP} \\
\swarrow \quad \searrow \\
\text{se/þam/þat} \quad \text{C}' \\
\quad\quad\quad \diagup \diagdown \\
\quad\quad \text{C} \quad \ldots \\
\quad\quad | \\
\quad\quad \text{þe}
\end{array}
$$

## Stage 2

*that* reanalysed as a complementiser

(10)    and suggeð feole þinges. . . **þat** næuere nes
        and say     many things    that never    not.was
        i-wurðen
        happened
        'and say many things that never happened.' (Layamon,
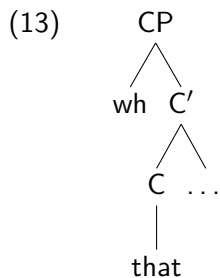        *Caligula*)

## Structure

(11)  CP
      |
      C′
     /\
    C  …
    |
    that

## Stage 3

*wh*-elements can appear in the specifier

(12)  the est orisonte, **which that** is clepid comounly the
      ascendent
      'the East horizon, which is commonly known as the
      ascendent' (Chaucer)

## Structure

(13)    CP
        /\
      wh   C′
            /\
           C  . . .
           |
          that

## Wh-pronouns

in Stage 3: new relative pronouns can move to the position left "empty" by the reanalysis of the original pronoun

appearance of *wh*-elements in relative clauses also involves a change in the feature properties of these elements: loss of quantificational features → they are no longer associated with complete propositions and can thus appear in relative clauses (Watanabe 2009)

## Relative markers

relative markers fulfil functions other than typing the clause as
relative:

- complementiser: encoding finiteness
- relative pronoun: in argument relative clauses, it carries
  phi-features

$\rightarrow$ relative pronouns have to lose features that are not available on
complementisers – case, number, gender

reanalysis step (Stage 2) motivated by economy (Van Gelderen
2004, 2009): preference of Merge over Move

$\rightarrow$ question: how strong such economy considerations operate

## Relative elements and case

loss of case features on *that*: in line with the general loss of overt
case marking in Middle English – feature loss not only motivated
for the particular element but also fostered by the system

$\rightarrow$ questions:

- how other (Germanic) languages behave in this respect
- whether the loss of overt case markings has any other
  traceable effect

## Equatives

many relative complementisers derive from equative complementisers

- mainland Scandinavian *som*, Icelandic *sem*
- English *as* (see Bacskai-Atkari to appear)
- German *so* historically, present-day German *wo* (Brandner & Bräuning 2013)

$\rightarrow$ case is irrelevant for these items as case was never part of their feature array

moreover: they are taken over from constructions in which they were complementisers already $\rightarrow$ no reanalysis in the sense of the relative cycle

# German

- no reanalysis of the pronouns *der*/*die*/*das*: evidently marked for case, number, gender

- → no reanalysis in line with there being overt case marking in the language

- → economy considerations definitely constrained by morphology

## Dutch

no reanalysis of demonstrative-based relative pronouns either

- loss of overt case marking later than in English
- gender marking not lost – difference between *die* and *dat*
- reanalysis not a necessary consequence

## Gender

gender difference maintained:

(14)   a.   het   boek **dat**   ik heb gelezen
            the.N book that.N I  have read.PTCP
            'the book I have read'

       b.   de    man **die**   daar staat
            the.M man that.M there stands
            'the man who is standing there'

→ overt gender marking also constrains reanalysis

## Inflection

$\rightarrow$ economy considerations constrained by various aspects of an inflectional paradigm

various aspects can be relevant:

- case (e.g. NOM *der*/*die*/*das* vs. ACC *den*/*die*/*das* vs. DAT *dem*/*der*/*dem*)
- gender (e.g. *die*/*dat*)
- human or non-human referent (e.g. *who(m)*/*which*)

## Paradigms

Old English: various relative pronouns, out of which *that* came to
be the "winner" – appearing more frequently in the
environments where the other potential candidates also
appeared

not possible for different members of the same inflectional
paradigm: all items show sensitivity towards the referent $\rightarrow$
insertion into the syntax from the morphological paradigm (in
the sense of Wunderlich & Fabri 1995) carries the paradigmatic
inflectional information

## Possible prediction

pronouns not appearing in contrastive paradigms become complementisers:

- true in the sense that pronouns appearing in contrastive paradigms are apparently never reanalysed
- false in the sense that pronouns not appearing in contrastive paradigms are not necessarily reanalysed – e.g. *was* in Hessian restricted to neuter antecedents (Fleischer 2017) but it has no masculine/feminine *wh*-based counterparts

$\rightarrow$ reanalysis apparently a strong tendency but not a strict economy constraint

## Inventory

|  |  | *d*-based | *wh*-based |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Pronoun-based** | Operator | *der*/*die*/*das* *die*/*dat* | *who*/*whom*/*which* *welcher*/*welche*/*welches* *was* (Hessian) |
| | C | *that* | *what* *was* (Bavarian) |
| **Equative-based** | C | *as* *so* *som* *sem* | *wo* |

# Case and the Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy

additional question: why a relative pronoun strategy is maintained/renewed even if a complementiser is available

relative pronouns identify the gap in the relative clause – processing

differences along the Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy (Keenan & Comrie 1977): subject > direct object > indirect object > oblique object (complement of preposition) > genitive (possessor phrase) > object of comparison

asymmetries also attested in the King James Bible

## Original version

sample results (Genesis):

| **Role** | **who** | **whom** | **which** | **that** | **as** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| subject | 14 | – | 41 | 169 | 2 |
| (226) | (6.19%) | – | (18.14%) | (74.78%) | (2.21%) |
| dir. object | – | 14 | 78 | 35 | – |
| (127) | – | (11.02%) | (61.42%) | (27.56%) | – |
| PP compl. | – | 11 | 4 | 6 | – |
| (21) | – | (52.38%) | (19.05%) | (28.57%) | – |

## New version

sample results (Genesis):

| Role | who | whom | which | that |
|------|-----|------|-------|------|
| subject | 106 | – | 52 | 68 |
| (226) | (46.90%) | – | (23.01%) | (30.09%) |
| dir. object | – | 30 | 62 | 35 |
| (127) | – | (23.62%) | (48.82%) | (27.56%) |
| PP compl. | – | 11 | 4 | 6 |
| (21) | – | (52.38%) | (19.05%) | (28.57%) |

## Asymmetries

complementiser strategy more likely to occur higher on the scale (Herrmann 2005)

main difference in the data: subject vs. lower functions

Fleischer (2004) for German dialects (subsuming Yiddish): subjects and direct objects pattern also together and contrast with all other functions lower in the scale

asymmetries in relative clauses:

- English: subject/oblique pattern
- German: subject/direct object/oblique pattern

## Case system

$\rightarrow$ differences pattern with differences in the case system:

- English: nominative–oblique system (with more syntactic than morphological distinctions)
- German: difference between nominative, accusative, dative (and genitive)

$\rightarrow$ differences in the case system also have an effect on the distribution of relative markers (including complementisers)

## Conclusion

relative markers in English and their distribution across Germanic

English somewhat unique – interplay of various factors:

- purely syntactic factors (operator movement versus base-generated complementiser)
- morphological factors (the availability of overt lexical elements)
- feature content of potential complementisers
- the effect of the case system

$\rightarrow$ the particular setting in English is not dependent on a single parameter but on various factors that are otherwise present in other Germanic languages as well

Thank you!

Danke!

## References I

Bacskai-Atkari, Julia. 2018a. Deutsche Dialekte und ein anti-kartografischer Ansatz zur CP-Domäne. In Augustin Speyer & Philipp Rauth (eds.), *Syntax aus Saarbrücker Sicht 2: Beiträge der SaRDiS-Tagung zur Dialektsyntax*, 9–29. Stuttgart: Steiner.

Bacskai-Atkari, Julia. 2018b. Doubly filled COMP in Czech and Slovenian interrogatives. In Denisa Lenertová et al. (eds.), *Advances in formal Slavic linguistics 2016*, 1–23. Berlin: Language Science Press.

Bacskai-Atkari, Julia. to appear. Changes affecting relative clauses in Late Modern English. In Merja Kytö & Erik Smitterberg (eds.), *Late Modern English: Novel encounters*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

## References II

Bayer, Josef. 1984. COMP in Bavarian syntax. *The Linguistic Review* 3(3). 1–38.

Bayer, Josef & Ellen Brandner. 2008. On wh-head-movement and the Doubly-Filled-Comp Filter. In Charles B. Chang & Hannah J. Haynie (eds.), *Proceedings of the 26th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics*, 87–95. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

Beal, Joan. 2008. English dialects in the North of England: Morphology and syntax. In Bernd Kortmann & Clive Upton (eds.), *Varieties of English 1: The British Isles*, 373–403. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

## References III

Bennis, Hans & Liliane Haegeman. 1984. On the status of agreement and relative clauses in West-Flemish. In Wim de Geest (ed.), *Sentential complementation: Proceedings of the International Conference Held at UFSAl, Brussels June, 1983*, 33–53. Dordrecht: Foris Publications.

Boef, Eefje. 2013. *Doubling in relative clauses: Aspects of morphosyntactic microvariation in Dutch*. Utrecht: LOT.

Brandner, Ellen & Iris Bräuning. 2013. The particle *wo* in Alemannic: Only a complementizer? *Linguistische Berichte* 234. 131–169.

Chomsky, Noam & Howard Lasnik. 1977. Filters and control. *Linguistic Inquiry* 8(3). 425–504.

## References IV

Fleischer, Jürg. 2004. A typology of relative clauses in German dialects. In Bernd Kortmann (ed.), *Trends in linguistics: Dialectology meets typology*, 211–243. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Fleischer, Jürg. 2017. Relativsatz-Einleitung. In *SyHD-atlas*. Available at http://www.syhd.info/apps/atlas/#relativsatz-einleitung (last accessed: 14 July 2017).

Gelderen, Elly van. 2004. *Grammaticalization as economy*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Gelderen, Elly van. 2009. Renewal in the left periphery: Economy and the complementiser layer. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 107(2). 131–195.

## References V

Herrmann, Tanja. 2005. Relative clauses in English dialects of the British Isles. In Bernd Kortmann (ed.), *A comparative grammar of British English dialects: Agreement, gender, relative clauses*, 21–124. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Kaufmann, Göz. 2018. Relative markers in Mennonite Low German: Their forms and functions. In Augustin Speyer & Philipp Rauth (eds.), *Syntax aus Saarbrücker Sicht 2: Beiträge der SaRDiS-Tagung zur Dialektsyntax*, 109–148. Stuttgart: Steiner.

Keenan, Edward L. & Bernard Comrie. 1977. Noun phrase accessibility and universal grammar. *Linguistic Inquiry* 8(1). 63–99.

## References VI

Kortmann, Bernd & Susanne Wagner. 2007. A fresh look at Late Modern English dialect syntax. In Javier Pérez-Guerra (ed.), *"Of varying language and opposing creed": New insights into Late Modern English*, 279–300. Bern: Peter Lang.

Montgomery, Michael & Guy Bailey. 1991. *In which*: A new form in written English. *American Speech* 66. 147–163.

Romaine, Suzanne. 1982. *Socio-historical linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Salzmann, Martin. 2006. Resumptive pronouns and matching effects in Zürich German relative clauses as distributed deletion. *Leiden papers in Linguistics* 3(1). 17–50.

# References VII

Salzmann, Martin. 2009. Different notions of variation and their reflexes in Swiss German relativization. In Andreas Dufter, Jürg Fleischer & Guido Seiler (eds.), *Describing and modeling variation in grammar*, 135–161. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Salzmann, Martin. 2017. *Reconstruction and resumption in indirect A'-dependencies: On the syntax of prolepsis and relativization in (Swiss) German and beyond*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Tagliamonte, Sali, Jennifer Smith & Helen Lawrence. 2005. No taming the vernacular! Insights from the relatives in northern Britain. *Language Variation and Change* 17. 75–112.

# References VIII

Watanabe, Akira. 2009. A parametric shift in the D-system in Early Middle English: Relativization, articles, adjectival inflection, and indeterminates. In Paola Crisma & Giuseppe Longobardi (eds.), *Historical syntax and linguistic theory*, 358–374. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Weiß, Helmut. 2013. Satztyp und Dialekt. In Jörg Meibauer et al. (eds.), *Satztypen des Deutschen*, 764–785. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Wunderlich, Dieter & Ray Fabri. 1995. Minimalist Morphology: An approach to inflection. *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft* 14(2). 236–294.