Givon Chapter 9: Relative Clauses

Syntax and Morphology
Relative Clauses

* Subordinate clauses – embedded, as noun modifier, inside a noun phrase.

E.g. I bought [NP the book which was assigned by my teacher].
Restrictive relative clauses (RRCs)

* The prototype REL-clauses
  - restrict the nouns from one set to a subset
  i.e. narrow the domain of the reference

E.g. The man who married my sister is a crook.
Restrictive relative clauses (RRCs)

* Referential coherence
  - RRCs are used in grounding the referent noun to the knowledge-base that is already represented in the mind of the hearer.

E.g. I bought the book which was assigned by my teacher.
Restrictive relative clauses (RRCs)

- **accessible** – but not easily accessible – to the hearer

  When a referent is maximally accessible, a pronoun or zero anaphora is used; When it is less accessible, a full noun is used.

- Modifying a full noun with a RRC is one of several strategies used when a referent is less accessible.
Anaphoric grounding device

- **Semantic:**
  “A relative clause codes a state/event one of whose participants is co-referential with the head noun modified by the relative clause”.

- **Pragmatic:**
  “The speaker assumes that the state/event coded by a RRC is familiar, known, or accessible to the hearer, or otherwise is unlikely to be challenged as new information”.
Anaphoric grounding device

a. That guy [standing next to the bar] is packing a gun.

b. The gal [I told you about] is not here yet.

* In sum, the definiteness of the head noun, signaling its accessibility, obviously contributed to our suggestion that the relative clause is involved in tracking the referent in the anaphoric mental representation of text.
Referring-indefinite heads and cataphoric grounding

\* (7)
  a. A man who had no shoes on came into the office. (referring-indefinite)
  b. The man who had no shoes on came into the office. (referring-definite)

\* Is anaphoric grounding one property of RRCs’?
Referring-indefinite heads and cataphoric grounding

* The common function of RRCs thus remains that of establishing referential grounding or referential coherence.

E.g.

The man who had no shoes on came into the office.
Referring-indefinite heads and cataphoric grounding

* A definite referent is grounded *anaphorically* by its modifying RRC, i.e. grounded into existing mental structure.

* In contrast, an indefinite referent is grounded *cataphorically* by its modifying RRC, i.e. grounded into mental structure that is in the process of being organized, structure that is a building.
RRCs with non-referring heads

* The RRC modifying such non-referring heads always fall under some non-fact modality, either irrealis or the habitual.

* e.g.

  (19) a. Anybody who marries my sister is asking for trouble.

  c. I know no man who would do this.
RRCs with semi-referring heads

* Headless relative clauses

* Under the scope of fact modality:
  a. Whoever stole my wallet dumped it in the trash.
     (>Somebody stole my wallet)
     - referring but not fully specified, implicit head

* Under the scope of non-fact modality:
  a. Whoever finishes first gets a bonus.
     (>I have no idea who that would be)
     - non-referring implicit head
9.2.2 Non-restrictive relative clauses

What are the functional distinctions between restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses?
The logic of restriction

RRC:

Women who love too much are often disappointed.
Americans who are sports-crazy all love the game.

RRC serves to single out
A restricted sub-set of the
Domain ‘women’.
It narrows the domain of
Reference.

Some women love too much
The logic of restriction

NRRC:

Women, who love too much, are often disappointed. Americans, who are sports-crazy, all love the game.

NRRCs do not single out a restricted sub-set of the domain ‘women’.
It does not narrow the domain of reference.

NRRC are separated from their head noun by an intonation break or pause, marked by a comma. They are parenthetical clauses that share some of the functional characteristics of RRC.
Presupposition, assertion and challenge

Semantic:

**RRC** → RRC codes a state/event one of whose participants is *co-referential* with the head noun modified by the RRC.

**NRRC** → (identical with RRC)

*modify*

e.g. The man [ ] is a crook.

[ ]=RC=[who married my sister]

**The man** married my sister.

Subject of RC
Presupposition, assertion and challenge

Pragmatic:

RRC → The speaker assumes that the state/event
coded by a RRC is familiar, known, accessible to
the hearer, or otherwise is unlikely to be challenged
as new information.
e.g. That girl I told you about is not here yet.
I assume that I told you earlier.

NRRC → The state/event is typically not supposed,
even when the head is referring and definite. The
speaker does not assume that the information
about the state/event is accessible to the hearer.
NRRC is asserted as new information.
Presupposition, assertion and challenge

...so after that trouble
the man who went to call the police comes back and...

Q: So now you are finally telling me someone did call them!

Ans:
RRC: I thought I’d told you that earlier!!

NRRC: Well, yeah, I suppose I should have mentioned that earlier.
Coherence and grounding

RRC:
The information in the RRC serves to ground the referent to some mental-text. However, the information structure into which definite and REF-indefinite referents are grounded is crucially different.
Coherence and grounding

RRC:
Definite (Anaphoric grounding)
The woman you met last year just called.
⇒ The speaker assume that the referent is still accessible in the hearer’s pre-existing mental structure.
你去年遇到的那個女生打電話給你。

REF-indefinite: (Cataphoric grounding)
A women you met last year just called.
⇒ The speaker judges the RRC-coded event sufficiently remote, unimportant, and thus the hearer does not have ready access to the referent in readily-available mental storage.
你去年有遇到一個女生吧(你還記得嗎)!?她打電話給你。
Coherence and grounding

NRRC:
The information in NRRC tend to be parenthetical and somewhat backgrounded. The speaker may judge the information to be useful or relevant at that point. They may deem the information less central for the main thematic line of the discourse.

i.e. 你爸爸，上次我還跟他一起去釣魚，昨天來學校找你耶!
Coherence and grounding

NRRC:
Definite (Anaphoric grounding)
The woman, who was standing next to the door, pulled a gun....
  ➔ The speaker supplies the hearer with more information concerning a noun ‘the woman’ that has been mentioned previously.

REF-indefinite (Cataphoric grounding)
A good friend of mine, whom I hope you’ll meet some day, just called.....
  ➔ The referent ‘a good friend of mine’ is being introduced for the first time.

Topic generic (Generic grounding)
Academics, who tend to be somewhat abstract, have a peculiar sense of...
  ➔ The information in the NRRC grounds ‘academic’ to the hearer’s generic knowledge.
Restriction and reference

RRC:

RRC can modify the strictly non-referring nouns.

i.e. (19)

a. Anybody who marries my sister is asking for trouble.

b. Any man whom my sister marries better think twice.

c. I know no man who would do this.
Restriction and reference

RRC:

- The RRC modifying such heads always fall under some non-fact modality.

  i.e.

  She said that anybody who marries her sister will be lucky.
  She said that anybody who married her sister would be lucky.

- The RRC code hypothetical states/events, within which the co-referent argument also is non-referring.
Restriction and reference

NRRC:

NRRC can *not* modify the strictly non-referring nouns.

a. *Anybody, who marries my sister, is asking for trouble.*

b. *Any man, whom my sister marries, better think twice.*

c. *I know no man, who would do this.*
Restriction and reference

NRRC:

\[\text{The man \underline{who would say this} is a cad. (RRC)}\]

\[\text{*The man, \underline{who would say this}, is a cad. (NRRC)}\]

\[\text{\underline{The man, who would visit every summer}, was well known on the island.}\]

(a referring sense is imparted to the head noun.)
Generic head nouns and topicality

RRC:
Generic subjects, while semantically referring, are pragmatically topical.

Women who love too much are often disappointed.
Generic head nouns and topicality

RRC:

Generic objects

We study elephants who live in the tropics.
NRRC:
Generic subjects

Women, who love too much, are often disappointed.
Generic head nouns and topicality

NRRC:
Generic objects

We study elephants, who live in the tropics.

Hence, all REL-clause, either RRC or NRRC, may be considered **topicalizing constructions**.
Restriction an unique reference

RRC:
RRC can not modify unique head nouns, such as proper names or pronouns.

i.e.
*John who is my friend is a poet.
*I who you all know will speak now.

⇒ Restrictive modification is superfluous with referentially unique NPs, because these NPs are uniquely identifiable to the hearer.
Restriction an unique reference

NRRC:
NRRC can modify unique head nouns, such as proper names or pronouns.

i.e.
John, who is my friend, is a poet.
I, who you all know, will speak now.
Several John’s

If there are several John’s we know, then RRC can be used:

The John [who lives in Taipei] will come soon.
Where

I went to the park.
We ran into each other at the park.
I went to the park at which we ran into each other.

→ I went to the park where we ran into each other.
that

His research supports the finding that apples are good to our health.

I bought the book which/that the teacher assigned.

I bought the book, which/*that the teacher assigned.
that

He is the only one that went to the party.
He is the only one who went to the party.

He is the first person that got a gold medal.
He is the first person who got a gold medal.
The End