

## CLIPP

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# Relative clauses

A **relative construction** is a construction consisting of a (possibly empty) nominal and a subordinate clause which semantically modifies the nominal. The nominal is the **head** and the subordinate clause the **relative clause** (RC). The modifying relation between them is such that the head is involved in the situation expressed by the clause. In E1, the phrase *book (which) you are consulting* is a relative construction; *book* is its head, *(which) you are consulting* is the RC (enclosed in brackets in all the examples).

A RC is **restrictive** if it narrows down the head concept. In E1, the RC restricts the concept of *book* to one exemplar. In *you, who never buys books*, the RC does not further restrict the concept of *you*. It is called **appositive** (non-restrictive) because of its similarity to appositions. If a language has RCs, it has restrictive RCs, but not necessarily appositive RCs.

The function of restrictive RCs varies between the poles of **entity identification** and **concept formation**. The RC in E1 identifies an entity; the RC in E2 forms a concept. Fulfillment of this twofold function by a RC involves the interplay of three operations (to be described below): **subordination-nominalization** subordinates the RC and desententializes it to some degree. **Attribution/head formation** combines head and RC into one notion. **Anaphora-empty-place formation** forms an empty place in the RC which refers to the head.

## Examples

E1 The book [(which) you are consulting] is up-to-date.

E2 [Whichever book you choose] will be fine for me.

E3 a. njuntulu-|| ukutja-Ø-npa wawiri pantu-m̩ u,  
Walbiri [you-ERG SR-AUX-SBJ.2 kangaroo spear-PAST]

ɲula kapi-m̩ a pura-mi ɲatjulu-|| u.  
DEM FUT-SBJ.1 cook-PRS I-ERG

‘The kangaroo that you speared, I will cook.’

b. ɲatjulu-|| ukapi-m̩ a wawiri pura-mi,  
I-ERG FUT-SBJ.1 kangaroo cook-PRS

kutja-npa pantu-m̩ u njuntulu-|| u.  
[SR-AUX.2 spear-PAST you-ERG]

‘I will cook the kangaroo you speared.’

E4 Quae mihi antea signa misisti  
Latin [REL:ACC.PL.N I.DAT before statue:ACC.PL.N send:PERF.ACT:IND.2.SG]

ea nondum vidi.  
DEM:ACC.PL.N not:yet see.PERF.ACT:IND.1.SG

‘The statues you sent me recently I have not seen yet.’

E5 Bavul-u ver-diğ-im hamal nerede?  
Turkish [suitcase-ACC give-NR-POSS.1] porter where  
‘Where is the porter to whom I gave the suitcase?’

E6 (shí) lééch'aaí b-á hashtaak-ígíí naha'in.  
Navajo [I dog 3-for IMPF:1:sing-NR] IMPF:3:bark  
‘The dog that I am singing for is barking.’

E7    Mard-i   ke   u   va   zan-aš            diruz   āmad-and   mi-rav-ad.  
 Persian   man-IND   [SR   he   and   wife-POSS.3sg   yesterday   came-3pl]   IMPF-leave-3sg  
 (Literally:) ‘The man that he and his wife came yesterday is leaving.’

Abbreviations: ACC accusative, ACT active, AUX auxiliary, DAT dative, DEM demonstrative, ERG ergative, FUT future, IMPF imperfect, IND indicative, N neuter, NR nominalizer, PERF perfect, PL plural, POSS possessive, PRS present, REL relative, SBJ subject, SG singular, SR subordinator, 1/2/3 first/second/third person.

### Subordination-nominalization

Subordination of the RC may be signalled, inter alia, by a conjunction (E3, E7), by a relative pronoun (E1 with *which*, E2, E4), by a subordinating affix on its verb (E5, E6), or merely by its embedded position (E1 without *which*).

A major subdivision of RCs is based on the syntactic relation of the RC to the main clause. If the relative construction forms a nominal in the main clause, it is **embedded**. In the embedded examples above, the relative construction is the subject of the main clause. If the RC does not form a nominal with its head, it is **adjoined** to the main clause, as in E3. In E3.a, the RC is **preposed**; in b, it is **postposed**. The most common variant of the adjoined relative construction is the **correlative construction** (E4). Here the RC contains a relative pronoun and the main clause a correlative demonstrative pronoun. Just as E3, the correlative construction is generally invertible.

In RCs as elsewhere, subordination may involve varying degrees of **desententialization** down to full **nominalization** (→ entry **complementation**). Typically, the adjoined RC is syntactically most like an independent clause. Since embedded RCs function as adjectivals or nominals, they generally show restrictions on tense/aspect/mood, genitive case on the logical subject and, ultimately, non-finiteness of the verb (**relative participle**).

### Attribution/head formation

Attribution modifies a nominal head by a dependent expression, the **attribute**. In relative constructions, the attribute is a clause. Otherwise, it may be an adjective (*heavy book*) or a dependent nominal (*book on the table*). RCs allow greater freedom in identifying entities and forming complex concepts than other attributes.

Attribution presupposes that the head and the modifier are syntagmatically separate (E1). In E2 and E3.a, the subordinate clause is a RC, but it is not an attribute to its head. As an alternative to attribution, we here have **head formation**. Accordingly, RCs are subdivided into **external head** and **internal head** RCs. Internal head RCs predominate in languages such as Hittite, Bambara, the Indic and Yuman languages. Preposed RCs and **indifferent** (indefinite, generalized) RCs (E2) are generally of the internal head variety.

The most common way of signalling head-formation is by a relative pronoun (E2, E4). Attribution may also be signalled by a relative pronoun (E1 with *which*), by attributors such as the indefinite suffix in E7 or even by the agreement of the RC with the head. Often it is only conveyed by constituent order. There are three possibilities of sequencing an embedded RC as against its head: it may be **prenominal** (E5), **postnominal** (E7), or **circumnominal** (E6). A circumnominal RC is thus an embedded internal headed one. While circum- and postnominal RCs are generally only partially desententialized, the prenominal RC is at the end of this scale; E5 exhibits all the nominalization phenomena mentioned before.

## Anaphora/empty-place formation

The role that the head plays inside an external head RC is signalled by diverse strategies. The most common one is to leave an **empty place** in the **relativized position** (E1 without *which*, E3.b, E5). Also common is the use of an anaphoric pronoun to represent the head (E7). It presupposes at least a moderate degree of sententiality, since strongly nominalized RCs, in particular prenominal ones, are like simple attributes in not bearing a normal anaphoric relation to their head.

A **relative pronoun** is used to represent the head in several, primarily Indo-European, languages (E1 with *which*). The prototypical relative pronoun thus functions in all of the three operations constitutive of a relative construction. An example of a less prototypical relative pronoun is the Arabic one, which only signals subordination and attribution. The relative pronoun is, thus, not a defining feature of RCs, but one of a set of alternative devices for forming them.

In a non-sentential attribute, the head plays the role of subject (or absolutive) (cf. *heavy book* with *the book which is heavy*). This is also the most frequent function of the head in the RC. A complex **hierarchy of syntactic functions** codetermines which syntactic functions are relativizable. Its primary subhierarchy is as follows:

- subject / absolutive
- direct object / ergative
- indirect object and other valency-governed arguments
- adjuncts

Secondary functions such as the genitive attribute and mediated functions such as the function of the relativized position in E7 are on different subhierarchies which are at lower levels than the adverbial one. In general, if a RC forming strategy in a language can relativize a given position on this hierarchy, it can relativize all positions higher up. Basque, e.g., can relativize only down to the indirect object, Quechua can relativize only valency-governed arguments, and English includes adjuncts. Very few strategies allow constructions such as E7. The achievement of an RC forming strategy on this hierarchy generally diminishes with desententialization.

## Headless relative clauses

Concept formation and entity identification need not center around a lexical head notion; something may be conceptualized or identified as whatever is in a certain situation. A **headless relative clause** is one whose semantic head is lexically empty. (In an alternative terminology, internal head RCs are called headless.) There are two basic varieties of this construction. If a RC with a relative pronoun lacks a lexical head (for examples, omit *book* from E2 and *signa* from E4), the relative pronoun serves as a pronominal head for the complex concept to center around. If a RC without a relative pronoun lacks a lexical head (omit *hamal* from E5), it will be like a substantivized adjectival.

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