

whichthat notes

7/9/07

0. relative clauses

in English:

adjectival clause

follows head

gap – missing phrase – in the adjectival clause

various types:

WH relative: WH-containing phrase in front; this phrase fills the gap; the WH-word is anaphoric to the head (*an idea which I got ___ from Pullum*) [allows for “pied-piped” relatives: *a church to which I gave much money ___*; *a friend whose time I wasted ___*; *a friend from whose ideas I have borrowed ___*]

that relative: complementizer *that* in front; the gap is a zero anaphor to the head (*an idea that I got ___ from a friend*)

zero relative: no marker in front; the gap is a zero anaphor to the head (*an idea I got ___ from a friend*)

infinitival relative:

[*for* Subj] [*to* VP], with gap in VP; the gap is a zero anaphor to the head (*the person for you to see ___*)

[*to* VP], with subject gap; the gap is a zero anaphor to the head (*the person ___ to do this job*)

[*to* VP], with gap in VP; the missing subject is interpreted as generic, and the gap is a zero anaphor to the head (*the person to see ___*)

restrictive relatives can be of all types; non-restrictives are WH relatives

in a “free relative” a WH-word represents a fusion of a definite pronominal head with a WH relativizer (*What he had in his hand sparked* ‘That which he had in his hand sparked’)

subject/direct object/etc. relatives: the gap is a subject/direct object/etc. in the relative clause

subject zero relatives are non-standard, though well attested (*There was a farmer had a dog*), but subject *that* relatives are fine (*There was a farmer that had a dog*)

1. history in a nutshell:

a. *that* (from the demonstrative) was the original relativizer (cf. complementizer *that* in nominal clauses)

b. *which* from 14th c., *who/whom* 15th (extended from interrogative uses)

c. MWDEU (894): “By the early 17th century, *which* and *that* were being used pretty much interchangeably.”

d. *that* went into eclipse in late 17th c., reappeared in early 18th (when it was viewed by many as an unpleasant innovation) and slowly spread in restrictives

e. some 19th c. writers favoring *that* as restrictive – mostly looking for a return to the good old ways?

2. British vs. American usage

Strunk & White (2000:59): “... it would be a convenience to all if these two pronouns were used with precision. Careful writers, watchful for small conveniences, go *which*-hunting, remove the defining *whiches*, and by so doing improve their work.”

?American journalists and editors as the disseminators of Fowler’s Rule

Garner’s MAU (782): “British writers have utterly bollixed the distinction between restrictive and nonrestrictive relative clauses.”

blanket condemnations in many other recent (American) sources, esp. those intended for the young or for novice writers; but not Trask (2005: *Say What You Mean!*)

GP #1464: restrictives in occurrences per million: *which* 800 Am, 2600 Br (ratio .3); *that* 3400 Am, 2200 Br (ratio 1.5)

AZ #2291 on Leech studies over 1961 to 1991-92, data from writing: “colloquialization” in both varieties, but hugely greater (roughly, factor of 5) changes in Am than Br

Christian Mair (Freiburg) 6/20/07, on recent corpus linguistics conf. paper by Geisler & Johansson, data from speech:

	AmEng	BrEng
<i>that</i>	90 – 97%	49 – 59 %
<i>which</i>	3 – 6%	41 – 51%

?usage in other parts of the English-speaking world (Canada, Australia, South Africa,...)

3. ML #1467 on meaning diffs.: *which* non-personal gender vs. *that* unconstrained?

4. *that which*; *that that* attested

5. possessive *that*’s moderately frequent, suggesting that *that* is being reinterpreted by some as a relative pronoun

6. more work to be done on details of *which/that* choice (despite GP’s suspicions that there’s nothing there)

in particular, phenomena in 4.2-4.7, in most of which the antecedent isn’t fully referential; many of them “set-up + pay-off” constructions; diff. between *which* and *that* following from diff. between anaphoric pronoun and marker of subordination?