On the Categorical Status of English Relative *That*

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1. Problem

Generally speaking, English relatives consist of two types: *wh*-relatives and *that*. However, whether relative *that* (henceforth, R-*that*[1]) is categorized into relative pronoun or not has been discussed over 100 years among linguists. Auwera (1985) assembles these arguments concerning the categorical status of R-*that*. Thus, among them we see the most typical and important arguments, which can be divided into three types. The first type of the arguments to be considered is that R-*that* is not pronominal: R-*that* is not a relative pronoun. The second type argues that R-*that* is pronominal. The third type proposed by Auwera (1985) claims that R-*that* is at the in-between stage.

First of all, we observe the contradictory arguments concerning the categorical status of R-*that*. Look at the following examples.

(1) (a) I remember the day **when** he came.

    (b) I remember the day **on which** he came.

    (c) *I remember the day **which** he came.

    (d) I remember the day **that** he came.

<div align="right">(Auwera (1985: 157))</div>

In (1a), the relative clause starts with relative adverb *when*. Generally, adverbials can be expressed by prepositional phrases. So, in (1b), the *wh*-relative pronoun appears with the preposition in the clause-initial position. This means that *wh*-relatives are classified into two types: pronominal and adverbial. Thus, as illustrated in (1c), the *wh*-relative pronoun is unacceptable, if it is used adverbially. In (1d), however, R-*that* is accepted without a preposition. This might suggest that R-*that* is not pronominal.

We can find another argument that might deny the pronominal status of R-*that*. Let us look at the following examples.

(2) (a) This is the candidate **whom** I have spoken **about**.

    (b) This is the candidate **about whom** I have spoken.

(3) (a) This is the candidate **that** I have spoken **about**.

    (b) *This is the candidate **about that** I have spoken.

<div align="right">(Auwera (1985: 151))</div>

In (2a) and (3a), the prepositional objects are relativized as *wh*-relative and R-*that*, and appear in the

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clause-initial position with the preposition *in situ*.[2] In (2b), the *wh*-relative pronoun is relativized and moved to the clause-initial position with the preposition.[3] This implies that the preposition can take a relative pronoun as its complement, because they constitute a prepositional phrase. However, as we can see in (3b), R-*that* does not allow pied-piping. Prepositional complements are nominal. So, if R-*that* is pronominal, it should be a constituent member of the prepositional phrase. Therefore, R-*that* might not be a relative pronoun.

   According to the above arguments, R-*that* might not be pronominal. On the contrary, there exists an argument for the pronominality of R-*that*. Let us consider the following examples.[4]

(4) (a) I like the man **that** you've seen.

   (b) I like the man **φ that** you've seen.

   (c) I like the man **that φ** you've seen.

(5) (a) I like the man you've seen.

   (b) I like the man **φ** you've seen.

(6) (a) *I like the man has seen you.

   (b) *I like the man **φ** has seen you.

(7) (a) I like the man **that** has seen you.

   (b) I like the man **φ that** has seen you.

   (c) I like the man **that φ** has seen you.

(Auwera (1985: 170))

Let us suppose that, in (4a), R-*that* is not pronominal. It follows that, in (4a), there should be no overt relative pronoun and then a covert relative pronoun has to exist theoretically since a relative clause requires some relativizer that connects the relative clause to its antecedent. For convenience of discussion, we will mark the covert relative pronoun as φ, phonologically and morphologically null element. Then, (4a) can be represented either as (4b) or as (4c).

   In (5a), the object is relativized but realized as a covert relative pronoun. This type of sentence should be represented as (5b), which does not contain R-*that* but the zero relative pronoun. In (6a), on the other hand, the subject is relativized but not realized as an overt relative pronoun. In contrast to object relativization, subject relativization is not allowed in English, as illustrated in (6). Generally, in English finite clauses, the subject must appear overtly in a subject position. This hypothesis is called the EPP (Extended Projection Principle).[5]

   Now let us examine the example in (7a), which is also concerned with subject relativization and

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[2] This phenomenon is called preposition stranding (P-stranding).
[3] This phenomenon is called pied-piping.
[4] For convenience of discussion, some of these examples are adjusted partially.
[5] For details, see Chomsky (1982: 10; 1986a: 46; 1995: 55).

contains only R-*that* in the relative clause. If we keep to the supposition that R-*that* is not a relative pronoun, the relative clause in (7a) should contain a zero relative pronoun, and be analyzed as in (7b) or (7c). According to the EPP, the example in (7a) should be unacceptable, since its relative clause includes no overt subject in its subject position, as indicated in (7b) or (7c). But the example is in fact acceptable. This implies that R-*that* functions as subject. Therefore, the examples in (4) to (7) can be the argument for the pronominality of R-*that*.

As we have seen, some linguistic facts suggest that R-*that* is not a relative pronoun, while other phenomena indicate that R-*that* is a relative pronoun. So, the aim of this study is to clarify the categorical status of R-*that*. The construction of the discussion is as follows. In section 2, we will examine the proposal in Auwera (1985), which reconciles the contradictory arguments concerning the categorical status of R-*that*. He reviews diverse assertions based on various types of theoretical backgrounds such as traditional and descriptive grammar, Functional Grammar, Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar, Realistic Syntax, Generative Grammar: especially, Jespersen (1924, 1927, 1969), Junger (1981), Gazdar (1981), Brame (1980). In section 3, we will verify the claim by Generative linguists that R-*that* is a complementizer. Although Auwera (1985) mentions this hypothesis, the idea has been explored to a large extent and the Generative approach is currently influential. We will point out flaws in the hypothesis, and make a suggestion for an alternative proposal. In section 4, we will present our proposals, concluding the whole discussion.

2. Previous Analysis: Auwera (1985)

The issue to be considered here has been discussed from various perspectives, but has not been solved clearly because of the conflicting data. We will first examine the assertion made by Auwera (1985) that R-*that* is a highly pronominal relativizer. According to the discussion in (4-7) above, he admits the pronominal characteristics of R-*that* to some extent, but also recognizes that the pronominality is not sufficient. More precisely, R-*that* is not fully pronominal. Some scholars indicate the fact that although *wh*-pronouns show (pro)nominal declensions to some extent, R-*that* is invariant in its form, and therefore the latter should be set apart from the former. Auwera (1985: 171) states that *which* is also invariant because it was originally the genitive form of *what*, and that *who-whom* contrast is also breaking down. Accordingly, *wh*-pronouns indeed lost their declensions. Thus, leveling, i.e. losing declensions, cannot be counter-arguments for pronominality, he asserts.

However, the morphological evidence is inadequate, because it does not explain the essential characteristics of R-*that* and its distribution. As Auwera (1985: 173) admits, the above evidence is not direct one. Then, he shows three pieces of "direct" evidence for R-*that* being at the in-between stage: R-*that* belonged to one category at one time, and is on its way to a different one at another point of time.

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The first evidence is related to gender. Present-day R-*that* is felt to be neuter to some extent. Gender is a typically (pro)nominal characteristic. If the ancestor of R-*that* was conjunctional and developed its pronominality historically, there should be a stage where its gender-sensitivity was weaker than that of Present-day English. As expected, in Middle English and Early Modern English R-*that* had no preference for either human or non-human antecedents. That is, the "dehumanization" process of R-*that* started in the seventeenth century. However, the example for the argument of gender is as follows:

(8) The man/book **that** I like...

<div align="right">(Auwera (1985: 153))</div>

The factor involved here is whether the antecedent is human or non-human, but is not directly related to gender. Furthermore, at least this formal evidence cannot explain the contradictory arguments stated above.

His second evidence is from the minor phenomenon, resumptive pronouns.[6] Such a marginal phenomenon is inappropriate for drawing a general conclusion.

The third evidence is concerned with the co-occurrence of *wh*-relative and R-*that*. In Present-day English relative constructions, the appearance of either *wh*-pronoun or R-*that* or covert object relativization are allowed as in (9a-c), the co-occurrence of *wh*-relative and R-*that* is not illegitimate as in (9d).[7]

(9) (a)   the car [**which** you bought *e* last week]

   (b)   the car [**that** you bought *e* last week]

   (c)   the car [you bought *e* last week]

   (d) *the car [**which that** you bought *e* last week]

<div align="right">(Quirk et al. (1985: 366))</div>

However, through Old English to Early Modern English, the construction corresponding to (9d) is acceptable.[8] Auwera (1985: 174) attributes the unacceptability of this co-occurrence to the pronominal status of R-*that*. This might be the evidence for the pronominality of R-*that*, but is not necessarily sufficient for its being at the in-between stage.

In general, the historical development of the English language is not gradual. The change from one stage to the next stage is rapid: from Old English to Middle English or from Middle English to Modern English. The most unstable period in Modern English (including Prensent-day English) is that of Early Modern English. Present-day English seems to be at a rather stable stage. If it is changing rapidly, a wide variety of changes should be found in different linguistic phenomena. Furthermore, his

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[6] For details, see Auwera (1985: 155-156).

[7] The element *e* is an empty trace which suggests the original position of relativized pronouns.

[8] To be more precise, the categories of these elements in question are not the same.

claim does not explain the above contradictory phenomena concerning relative constructions.

3. Generative Analysis of R-*That* as Complementizer

In this section, we will look at the assertion that R-*that* is a complementizer. Although Auwera (1985) mentions complementizer, the idea was not mature. Investigation in functional categories (in contrast to lexical categories) developed since Chomsky (1986a), and the category of complementizer has been established. Thus, we will verify the influential ideas.

First of all, we confirm the category complementizer. Let us see the following examples.

(10) (a) I hope [**that** Thelma will dance after lunch].

　　(b) I hope [**for** Thelma to dance after lunch].

　　(c) I wonder [**whether** Thelma will dance after lunch].

　　(d) I wonder [**whether** *ec* to dance after lunch].

　　(e) I wonder [**if** Thelma will dance after lunch].

(Haegeman and Guéron (1999: 99))

All the examples in (10) have embedded complement clauses, which start with complementizers. In (10a), whose complementizer is *that*, the complement clause is declarative. In (10b) with complementizer *for*, the complement clause is non-finite, that is, infinitival clause. In (10c) and (10d), both of which contain complementizer *whether*, the complement clauses are interrogative (though the former is finite and the latter non-finite). In (10e) with complementizer *if*, the complement clause is finite interrogative. Thus, the choice of complementizer seems to be dependent on the complement clause type. In other words, complementizers signal their complement clause type.

The predicate *hope* in (10a-b) requires declarative propositional content, whether it is finite or non-finite. The predicate *wonder* in (10c-e) requires interrogative complement. Notice that *if* is chosen only in the case of finite interrogative and that *whether* can be used in either finite or non-finite interrogatives. According to Haegeman and Guéron (1999: 99), the choice of complementizer has two dimensions: (i) finiteness and (ii) illocutionary force or mood.

The point of discussion is that complementizers are grammatical elements and that they do not contain any lexical content. That is, complementizers belong to functional category but not to lexical category. Consequently, if R-*that* is a complementizer, it cannot be a relative pronoun, since the relative pronoun is a constituent of the relative clause.
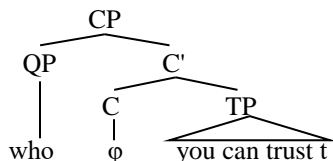
Next, we will further examine the discussion concerning relative clauses, following Radford (2004: 223-234). See the following examples.

(11) (a) It's hard to find people [**who** you can trust].

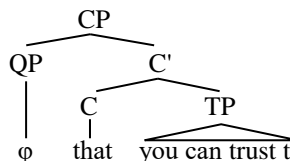　　(b) It's hard to find people [**that** you can trust].

(Radford (2004: 224, 228))

In (11a), *wh*-relative *who* is used. In (11b), on the other hand, R-*that* appears within the relative clause. These sentences are analyzed as in the following tree diagrams.

(12) (a)   (b)

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          CP                                        CP
        /    \                                    /    \
      QP      C'                                QP      C'
      |      /  \                               |      /  \
     who   C     TP                            who   C     TP
           |    / \                                  |    / \
           φ   you can trust t                       φ   that you can trust t
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The tree diagrams in (12a) and (12b) show how the relative clauses in (11a) and (11b) is constructed. In (12a), covert complementizer φ appears in the head of CP and overt relative pronoun *who* is raised from its original position into QP[9]: the spec-position of CP. On the other hand, in (12b), overt complementizer *that* is base-generated in the head of CP and covert relative pronoun φ is moved into the spec-position of CP. Complementizer serves some grammatical function within the C (= Complementizer) position without any relevance to the meanings of the relative clause. In contrast, *wh*-relative pronouns are related to the propositional content under TP node.

    Then, let us see the following examples.

(13) (a) Lord Lancelot Humpalot is someone [**whose** ego is even bigger than libido].

    (b) *Lord Lancelot Humpalot is someone [**that's** ego is even bigger than libido].

(Radford (2004: 229))

In (13a), the *wh*-relative *whose* precedes the noun *ego*. In (13b), R-*that* with "genitive" *that's* is accompanied by the noun *ego* and the sentence is ungrammatical. This contrast of grammaticality can be explained by representing each relative construction, as in (14).

(14) (a) Lord Lancelot Humpalot is someone [**whose** ego φ [t is even bigger than libido]].

    (b) *Lord Lancelot Humpalot is someone [φ **that's** ego [t is even bigger than libido]].

In (14a), the *wh*-phrase *whose ego* is raised from its original position, labeled *t*, and null complementizer φ appears in the C position. The lexical *wh*-phrase has meaningful content, and thus can consist of more than one constituent. As the structure of the sentence does not have any flaws, it is acceptable. In (14b), *that's* in genitive form is accompanied by the lexical noun *ego*, and the covert *wh*-pronominal φ is supposed to be in the CP spec-position. If R-*that* is a complementizer and serves some grammatical function without having any meaningful content, it should appear alone in C position. It cannot be combined with lexical elements. Furthermore, if the *wh*-pronoun is covert, the movement is invisible, so the interpretation of the relative clause should be impossible. As the construction in (14b) has these defects, the ungrammaticality can be explained.

    Moreover, the generative accounts allow the explanation of another linguistic phenomenon. Let

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[9] Within the framework of Minimalism, the movement is not concerned, but for convenience the *Barriers* framework is adopted here.

us see the following examples.

(15) (a) There are still diseases [**for which** there is no cure].

   (b) *There are still diseases [**for that** there is no cure]

<div align="right">(Radford (2004: 229))</div>

In (15a), the *wh*-relative *which* follows the preposition *for*. In (15b), R-*that* also appears to follow the preposition *for*, but in this case the sentence is unacceptable. Once again, the grammatical contrast can be explained by representing the detailed structures, as in (16).

(16) (a) There are still diseases [**for which** φ [there is no cure t]].

   (b) *There are still diseases [**for** φ **that** [there is no cure t]]

In (16a), covert complementizer φ is generated in the head of CP and the prepositional phrase *for which* is moved into the spec-position of CP from the adjunct position. There is no problem in this structure, and therefore the sentence is quite acceptable. On the other hand, in (15b), the overt complementizer *that* should be base-generated in the head of CP and therefore the prepositional phrase *for φ* should be moved into the spec-position of CP from the original *t* position. In this case, the reason why this sentence is unacceptable is that prepositional complement is not realized overtly.

As we have seen, the generative analysis of R-*that* appears to explain the above linguistic facts. However, it cannot explain the argument for R-*that* being pronominal, which is discussed in (4-7) above.

4. Conclusion: R-*That* is a Relativizer

From the above discussion, at first glance the previous analyses might explain some complicated phenomena, but other problems still remain unsolved. If we cannot deny the pronominal status of R-*that* presented in (4-7), for which any theories fail in its explanation, we have to find another approach to R-*that*. The points to be considered are differences in essential characteristics between *wh*-relatives and R-*that*. In order to elucidate the exact natures of these elements, we will check their original elements, from which they should have developed their characteristics.

First, let us check the *wh*-interrogative pronoun, from which *wh*-pronoun has developed. Look at the following examples.

(17) (a) George saw William.

   (b) **Who** did George see?

   (c) **Which** policeman did George see?

<div align="right">(Haegeman (1994: 494))</div>

In (17a), the predicate *see* requires two arguments (*George* and *William*) to achieve the goal of making a propositional content. As the two arguments refer to specific entities in the world, they are called constants: elements which have some specific semantic value. In (17b), one of the arguments is

realized as *wh*-pronoun, which does not have a specific semantic value. Thus, it is called variable. In (17c), the same type of argument is variable, but has some limitation to its interpretation. The semantic representations of (17b) and (17c) can be illustrated respectively, as follows.

(18) (a) For which x, x is human, is it the case that George saw x?

(b) For which x, x is a policeman, is it the case that George saw x?

<div align="right">(Haegeman (1994: 494))</div>

The *wh*-pronoun *who* in (17b) corresponds to "for which x, x is human" and the *wh*-phrase *which policeman* to "for which x, x is a policeman." The subject auxiliary inversion (SAI) is represented as "is it the case." Syntactically, the raising of *wh*-phrases and SAI are brought about. Semantically, in each case the *wh*-constituent does not select one referent in the world and thus is an operator which binds a variable.

Then, let us turn to demonstrative *that*, which is the ancestor of R-*that*. Langacker (2009: 120) states that the demonstrative can stand alone as a full nominal, and single out a physical referent in the immediate discourse situation. Thus, its use can be accompanied by a pointing gesture. Therefore, we can assert that R-*that*, which has developed from the demonstrative, should have the following characteristics: the immediate connection with the antecedent and the restrictive function. Consider the following examples.

(19) (a) Peggy was the *first*/*only* student **that**/(**who**) took the exam.

(b) This is the *worst* article **that**/??**which** has ever been published in this journal.

<div align="right">(Declerck (1991: 541, 542))</div>

As indicated in (19), if the antecedent is restricted by some modifiers, R-*that* is strongly preferred. The reason is that the restricted nature is shared by the antecedent and R-*that*, while *wh*-relatives are operators and take variables which do not have any specific value. In other words, R-*that* has a restrictive feature, while *wh*-relatives have a non-restrictive or variable feature. These features conflict with each other. Thus, we propose the following feature [+/- restrictive] for relatives. This feature also explains the contrast between *wh*-relatives and R-*that* in non-restrictive relatives.

(20) (a) They are pulling down the building opposite the church, **which** was built only fifteen years ago.

(b) *They are pulling down the building opposite the church, **that** was built only fifteen years ago.

<div align="right">(Declerck (1991: 539))</div>

In restrictive uses, the relative clause functions as a modifier of its antecedent. Thus, the antecedent does not serve as a full nominal, and so the relative clause cannot be separated from the antecedent.

The other feature we propose is [+/- immediate], which can explain the following phenomena.

(21) (a) This is the candidate **whom** I have spoken **about**.

(b) This is the candidate **about whom** I have spoken.

(22) (a) This is the candidate **that** I have spoken **about**.

(b) *This is the candidate **about that** I have spoken.

<div align="right">(Auwera (1985: 151))</div>

In (21a) and (22a), involved in preposition stranding, both the *wh*-relative and R-*that* are allowed. On the other hand, in (21b) and (22b), pied-piping is possible only in *wh*-relatives. R-*that* with [+ immediate] must be connected with its antecedent directly, but in (22b) it is embedded within the prepositional phrase, which impedes the direct relationship between them. The same explanation also applies to the following cases.

(23) (a) I picked up the apples, some of **which** were badly bruised.

(b) * I picked up the apples, some of **that** were badly bruised.

<div align="right">(Thomson and Martinet (1986: 87))</div>

Finally, we will point out the important necessary characteristics of R-*that*, which are related to its categorical status. Let us consider the following examples shown in the beginning.

(24) (a) I remember the day **when** he came.

(b) I remember the day **on which** he came.

(c) *I remember the day **which** he came.

(d) I remember the day **that** he came.

<div align="right">(Auwera (1985: 157))</div>

As can be seen in (24a-c), *wh*-relatives can be clearly divided into *wh*-relative pronouns and *wh*-relative adverbs. However, as suggested in (24d), R-*that* can be adverbial. It has developed from demonstrative *that*, as already mentioned. Demonstratives function as pronominal, adjectival and adverbial, and furthermore are sensitive to plurality, but R-*that* has lost these characteristics. In consequence, R-*that* seems to have been grammaticalized. Thus, contrary to Auwera (1985), R-*that* may have lost its pronominality to some degree. As a result, in Present-day English we can find various usages, as in (25).

(25) (a) I know **that** he is lying.

(b) It is clear **that** he is too old to do it.

(c) It was last Thursday **that** he left hospital.

(d) He is *so* old **that** he cannot walk without a stick.

(e) The wine (**that**) you have brought with you is really excellent.

<div align="right">(Declerck (1991: 47, 32, 266, 314, 534))</div>

In conclusion, R-*that* is a relativizer, which functions either as pronominal or as adverbial. Since R-*that* has developed from the demonstrative, it inherits some functional and semantic characteristics. On the other hand, *wh*-relatives show the contrasting features from their ancestors. This is reflected in

various types of differences between them. Using demonstratives as relativizers is characteristic of Germanic languages, whereas the use of interrogative pronouns as a relativizer is characteristic of Romance languages. English was originally Germanic, but since the Norman Conquest it has been strongly influenced by French, because over two hundred years the official language had been French in England. Accordingly, the two types of relatives came to coexist and the division of semantic and functional roles occurred.

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