

Grammatical Interfaces in Transparent Free Relatives

Jong-Bok Kim¹, Stefan Müller²

¹ Kyung Hee University, Seoul, ² Humboldt University

jongbok@khu.ac.kr, St.Mueller@hu-berlin.de

Mittwoch,
04.03.2020
15:15–15:45
VMP5 2067/2071

The so-called ‘transparent’ free relatives (TFR, e.g., *I bought [what seemed to be a guitar]*) display quite striking properties in that its content nucleus a guitar is within the bracketed clause, as if the underlined expressions are transparent. The transparent properties can be attested from corpus data (COCA: Corpus of Contemporary American English) like [*What appears to be a **pale blue painting***] *turns/*turn into something else entirely*. The number value of SFRs (standard free relative) is singular or determined by the *wh*-phrase, but that of TFRs is dependent upon the boldfaced nucleus. There have been three main approaches to the TFRs: parenthetical placement with backward deletion (Wilder 1999), shared structures (Van Riemsdijk 2001, 2006), and configurational structures with movement operations (Grosu 2003). Authentic data obtained from our corpus search, however, show that none of these previous analyses are satisfactory enough to account for various uses of the construction. This paper suggests that the most viable way to account for such vibrant properties of the TFRs as attested by corpus search is to allow tight interactions between the lexicon and constructional constraints. The key property starts from the fact that *what* is ‘lexically’ underspecified for categorical and semantic information. In terms of constructional constraints, we assume that there is a TFR construction as a primitive grammatical element. This construction is a special type of filler-gap unbounded construction with its own constructional properties. Its constructional peculiarities have to do with the simple fact that the head of the construction is *what*, whose category value is determined by the semantic nucleus. An additional lexical property of the construction is that it is only raising verbs (e.g., *call, consider, take, assume, describe, seem, appear*) that can introduce a TFR. This means that raising verbs can change their predicative argument into any nonverbal argument (NP, PP, Adv, AP) whose categorical information (including POS and number values) is shared with that of the head *what*. These lexical specifications can immediately explain two important constraints in the TFR: *what* is the only possible element in the TFR and its possibility of referring to a human being (as in *He met what he thought is an underage girl*), and only raising verbs can introduce the TFR. There are other positive consequences of the present analysis. For example, since the predicative expression eventually determines the syntactic category of the whole clause, we can explain why the distributional possibilities of TFRs are determined by the predicative expression. It further accounts for the preposition restriction (*He speaks in/*at what linguists call a Northern dialect* COCA 2001 ACAD) as well as coordination facts. This is possible since the property of the whole TFR in question is determined by the nucleus expression whose syntactic and semantic features are identified with the expression *what* functioning as the head of the clause.

AG 6

References: Grosu, Alexander (2003). A Unified Theory of ‘Standard’ and ‘Transparent’ Free Relatives. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 21, 247–331; Van Riemsdijk, Henk (2006). Free Relatives. In M. Everaert and H. Riemsdijk (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Syntax* Vol. II. Blackwell, 338–382. Wilder, Chris (1999). Transparent Free Relatives. In K. Shahin, S. Blake & E.-S. Kim (eds.), *Proceedings of WCCFL 17*. Cambridge: CUP, 685–699.