

ON THE RELATIVISATION OF THE “HIGHEST SUBJECT POSITION”

Georges Rebuschi

Sorbonne Nouvelle & CNRS [UMR 7107]

1. Introduction*

A few years before the Minimalist Program was explicitly devised, a ban on vacuous movement (henceforth BVM, also known as the Vacuous Movement Hypothesis)¹ was suggested in *Barriers* (Chomsky 1986), according to which the derivational economy of (specific types of) sentences ranked over and above the overall simplicity of grammars; the idea was that the regular raising of interrogative Wh-Phrases to Spec,CP —and the correlative regular head-movement of (V+)I to C— was to be blocked if it was the highest (i.e. radical) subject position (HSP) that was being questioned: the phonetic output was exactly the same, namely [Wh-P_{SUBJ} — (V+)I ...], whether two instantiations of (consequently “vacuous”) Move- α had applied or not.² Another *signe avant-coureur* or forerunner of the by now outdated Procrastinate principle³ was that raising the Wh-P out of IP was, however, necessary for interpretation, but only took place after s-s; in the LF component.⁴

However, I do not know of any work discussing whether the BVM is also supposed to apply to *relative* Wh-Phrases and abstract (or phonetically unrealized) relative operators, henceforth AROs. In this paper, I would like to argue that, as far as (restrictive) relative clauses —(R)RCs— and AROs are concerned, the specific properties of the

* I am really happy to dedicate this paper to Professor Rudolf P. G. de Rijk, whose dissertation and papers on Basque relative clauses some 30 years ago really were pioneering work, and only hope he will forgive me both the errors and shortcomings he or others may discover herein, and the fact that, for once, I'm neither discussing Basque syntax in general, nor Basque relative clauses in particular — but there is a very strong reason for this: Basque does not exhibit so many subject/object asymmetries as many other natural languages do (see for instance Rebuschi 1989), so that it is not really surprising that it should not display any asymmetry in the relativisation of “higher” subjects and objects, which is one of the two sides of my topic today.

¹ The following abbreviations will be used: ARO, abstract relative operator; BVM, ban on vacuous movement; DO, direct object; F, feminine; HSP, higher subject position (as defined in the text); IHRC, internally headed relative clauses; P.A., Palestinian Arabic; RC, relative clause; Rel, relative; RP, resumptive pronoun; RRC, restrictive relative clause; TTE, *that*-trace effect; VISH, VP-Internal Subject Hypothesis.

² Of course, the BMV does not simplify specific *grammars*: it must be a principle of UG.

³ See Chomsky 2001 for an astonishing reversal to Pesetsky's Earliness Principle...

⁴ Given Procrastinate, the BVM simply “followed” in later versions of Chomskyan syntax.

relativisation of the HSP not only suggest that the BVM also applies, but that even LF movement of these AROs is unnecessary,⁵ and should therefore be taken as positive evidence in favour of the (meta-theoretical, and, admittedly, not currently too fashionable) stance according to which movement is costly and is thus best avoided whenever possible. In other words, if, as Chomsky (2000: 13) puts it, “the displacement property is, indeed, forced by legibility conditions: it is motivated by interpretive requirements that are externally imposed by our systems of thought, which have [...] special properties”, and if the sort of truth-conditional semantics that has developed in the past thirty years is indeed a good, if only partial, model of one of those “systems of thought” with its “special properties”, then Ockam’s razor dictates that all things being equal, it is certainly worthwhile trying to limit movement to those cases where it is “motivated by interpretive requirements” (at least when it is not morphologically driven —for example by the Wh-Criterion).

2. Basic data

Any full-fledged typology of DP-internal RRCs⁶ contains at least two dimensions. On the one hand, the functionalist, Keenan-&-Comrie-like, approach has clearly demonstrated that when a single clause is considered, there is a hierarchy of functions (and/or positions), with the subject ranking above all the others, so that relativising non-subjects may either be blocked (as in Malagasy, which has correlatively developed a variety of passive voices) or require special means or strategies (such as the use of resumptive pronouns). On the other hand, generative grammarians, working on Island phenomena, have investigated in detail what happens (or cannot happen) when an RC is embedded in a DP or another clause (which may itself be an ordinary completive clause, an indirect question, or yet another relative).

Let us then start with what looks like a paradox. Taken together, these two dimensions define one unmarked relativisation target, the subject of a non(-further) embedded RC, which has become to be known as the “Highest Subject Position” or HSP: as it is a subject, it (or rather the DP that instantiates it) ranks higher than any of its clause-mates, and, since it belongs to a non-embedded RC, no island effect whatsoever is expected.⁷ Now very often, whenever any other position is relativised, some features are systematically exhibited that *seem* to turn the universally accessible HSP into a sort of exception.

⁵ Contrary to explicit relative *wh*-pronouns, as explained in 4.1.

⁶ I’m leaving out those languages that only have “correlative” (a.k.a. “left-hanging” or “left-dislocated”) RCs, and those that only have so-called “internally-headed” RCs. As for those that have both DP-internal RRCs and either correlative RCs or IHRCs, I simply will not consider those relativisation strategies, as they do not seem relevant (as far as I can see).

⁷ In representational terms, which Chomsky (1986: p. 30 and footnote 25) did not exclude *a priori*, the HSP is “[syntactically] adjacent”, or “1-subjacent”, to the NP modified by the RC: this “adjacency” therefore does not exclude languages like French or Spanish, where AdjPs typically occur in between the lower NP and the RRC itself, given the now classical adjunction-to-NP analysis of APs and RRCs, such that the relative clause is adjoined to *some* segment of NP, and therefore lies within the scope of the D head of the DP.

2.1. For concreteness, let's first consider the *that-trace* effect (henceforth TTE), which blocks the appearance of a phonetically realised C° head when the RRC is not "head-adjacent" in the sense intended here, i.e. when the RC is governed by an intervening verb, but does not show up when it is the HSP that is relativised, as in the well-known pair of examples (1)-(2).⁸

- (1) the man [that __ loves Mary] [*relativization of the HSP*]
 (2) the man [that John says [(**that*) __ loves Mary]]
 [*relativisation of a non-higher subject position*]

I will not review here the various tentative explanations of the TTE itself, but will rather take it for granted, so as to discuss why it does not apply to the HSP, thereby creating the illusion of irregularity (see section 4.1).

2.2. The second example is provided by languages that (almost) systematically use resumptive pronouns (RPs).

2.2.1. In Palestinian Arabic, for instance, RPs are obligatory everywhere *except* in the HSP, as shown by (3)-(8), borrowed from Shlonsky (1992: 445-446).⁹

- (3) [*RP forbidden when HSP is relativised*]¹⁰
 l-bint [ʔilli (**hiy*) raayha "al beet]
 the-girl that she going to-the house
 'the girl that _ is going home'
 (4) [*RP compulsory when non-adjacent / embedded subject position is relativised*]¹¹
 l-bint [ʔilli fakkati ʔ inno (**hiy*) aayha "al beet]
 the-girl that you-F-thought that she going to-the house
 'the girl that you thought _ is going home'
 (5) [*RP compulsory when non-embedded DO position is relativised*]
 l-bint [ʔilli shufti-*(*ha*)]
 the-girl that you-F-saw-her
 'the girl that you saw _'

⁸ I will not discuss the fact that, in many varieties of (especially non-British) English, the complementiser *that* is compulsory, rather than optional, when the *subject* of a non-embedded RRC is relativised (as in (1)), but it clearly shows that the "functional" dimension alluded to above must also be taken into account: *that* is compulsory when the HSP is relativised, optional when a non-subject is relativised (whether embedded or not), and forbidden when a non-adjacent subject is:

- (i) Here is the man **(that)* __ loves Mary.
 (ii) Here is the man (that) Mary loves __.
 (ii') Here is the man (that) Bill thinks (that) Mary loves __.
 (iii) Here the man (that) Bills thinks (**that*) __ loves Mary.

⁹ I slightly modify the transcription for easier word-processing.

¹⁰ All things being equal, and in particular if the absence of an otherwise obligatory RP is strictly equivalent to a gap, this example exactly parallels (1).

¹¹ On the difference between the two complementisers, see the suggestion in 4.4.

- (6) [*RP compulsory when embedded DO position is relativised*]
 l-bint [ʔilli fakkarti ʔinno Mona habbat-*(ha)]
 the-girl that you-F-thought that Mona loved-her
 'the girl that you thought that Mona loved _'
- (7) (*RP compulsory when Oblique position is relativised*)
 l-bint [ʔilli fakkarti fi-*(ha)]
 the-girl that you-F-thought on-her
 'the girl that you thought about _'
- (8) (*RP compulsory when adnominal position is relativised*)
 l-bint [ʔilli shufti beet-*(ha)]
 the-girl that you-F-saw house-her
 'the girl whose house you saw'

Here again, then, what must be considered the unmarked case for cross-linguistic and syntactic simplicity reasons also appears to be "exceptional".

2.2.2. Although the data is less radically transparent, the same sort of situation appears in Hebrew, where the RP is simply optional in the counterparts of examples (4), (5) and (6), i.e. in embedded subject position and in direct object position, whether "adjacent" or "embedded" —but it remains compulsory in the cases illustrated by (7) and (8), and, most significantly, utterly impossible when the HSP is relativised, as in the equivalent of (3) above (see Borer 1984, Shlonsky 1992); a significant exception to the ban on RPs in HSP will be discussed in 4.3 below.

2.2.3. Intriguingly, the same sort of data as in Palestinian Arabic surface in the somewhat stilted use of relative *tel que* 'such that' in French for instance:¹²

- (9) *un/l'homme tel qu' il a construit une belle maison
 a/the-man such that-he has built a beautiful house
- (10) (j'ai vu) le garçon tel que Marie l'a embrassé¹³
 I've seen the boy such that M. him-has kissed
- (11) (je connais) un/l'homme tel que Marie lui parle en russe
 I know a/the man such that M. to-him speaks in Russian

¹² Such sentences are to be sharply distinguished from the pedantic, quasi-logical variants illustrated below, where the pronounced *x* may appear in any position:

- (i) l'homme *x* tel que *x* aime Marie.
 (ii) l'homme *x* tel que Marie aime *x*.
 (iii) l'homme *x* tel que je crois que l'enfant de *x* est malade.

¹³ This sentence is admittedly slightly degraded, but in any case much better than (9). Besides, when the indefinite *un(e)* is used, and the DO position is relativised, there is a strange restriction: whatever the grammatical number of the "head" or "antecedent" noun/NP and/or dominating NumberP/DP, the resumptive pronoun must, for some reason, be in the plural:

- (i) un homme tel que / comme Marie les aime / *l'aime
 a man such that as M. them likes him-likes

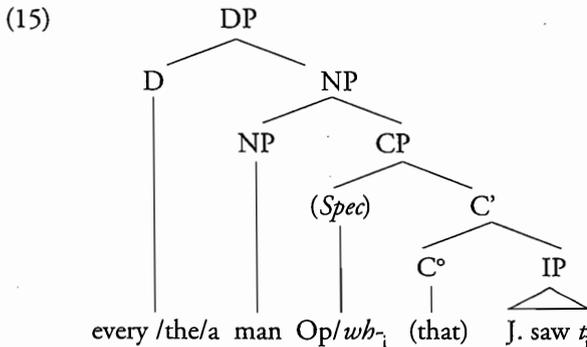
- (12) *la/une mère telle que son enfant est malade*
 the/a mother such that her child is sick
- (13) *la maison telle que je connais le maçon qui l'a construite*
 the house such that I know the brick-layer who/that it-has built

Suppose (i) that *tel* is a base-generated relative pronoun¹⁴ which, owing to Full Interpretation, must bind a variable, and (ii) that, since little *pro* is unavailable in French, only phonetically realised pronouns can be interpreted as variables bound by it (as is corroborated by the fact that all the sentences above are ungrammatical if the italicised pronoun is left out): we should then expect (9) to be in, contrary to the facts. Before we turn to a tentative solution to this specific problem, let's note that a general ban on some sort local A'-binding of French pronominals cannot account for the facts, since DP Left-dislocation precisely requires the presence of a pronoun, as shown in (14), whose variants without a pronoun after a pause (the comma) would be out:

- (14) a *Un éléphant, ça a une longue trompe.*
 an elephant it/that has a long trunk
- b *Mon chien, il aime les poires.*
 my dog he likes (the) pears

3. HSP relativisation at the syn/sem interface

3.1. From an interpretative point of view, RRCs are classically analysed as providing (the characteristic function of) a set that intersects with the set denoted by the "head" NP. Thus, provided the relative pronoun or abstract Operator in Spec,CP is translated into a λ -operator (see Partee 1975), the higher NP part of the configuration in (15) is "compositionally" interpreted as in (16).



¹⁴ Regarding *tel* as an adjective complemented by a CP [*que* IP], i.e. without any operator in its specifier, as do Heim & Kratzer 1998 with the English counterpart *such that*, certainly would not help, since the RP should now be bound by that adjective, an otherwise unmotivated extension of the Binding Theory (admittedly, Siegel 1994 does index the adjectival *pro*-from *such*, but in this specific case, it is with an AP, not an N', NP or DP!).

- (16) $[_{NP} [_{NP} \text{man}] [_{CP} (\text{who}) \text{John saw } _]]$
 a $[_{IP} \text{John saw } t_i] \Rightarrow \text{saw}'(j', x)$
 b $[_{CP} \text{Wh-}/OP_i (\text{that}) [_{IP} \text{John saw } t_i]] \Rightarrow \lambda x. \text{saw}'(j', x)$
 c $[_{NP} \text{man}] \Rightarrow \lambda x. \text{man}'(x)$
 d $[_{NP} [_{NP} \text{man}] [_{CP} \text{Wh-}/OP_i \text{that } [_{IP} \text{John saw } t_i]]] \Rightarrow \lambda x [\text{man}'(x) \wedge \text{saw}'(j', x)]$

The higher NP segment is under the scope of the Determiner, which may thus be considered to quantify over the set obtained by the intersection referred to above: more technically, the λ -expression on the right-hand side of the arrow in (16d) is a property, just as are the λ -expressions in (16b) and (c); hence, it will combine with, respectively, a universal quantifier, an *iota* operator translating a definite article or, at least under a conservative approach to indefinites, with an existential quantifier to yield a Generalised Quantifier.¹⁵ It should be clear that a tree like (15) is highly, but not totally, transparent for semantic interpretation, since there is *one* element that appears to the right-hand side of the arrow that has no counterpart in the syntactic structure: it is the connective " λ " in boldface in (16d) — since all adjunctions presumably cannot be translated into such a connective.¹⁶

3.2. The example above illustrates DO relativisation. An obvious fact about it is that if there were no relative pronoun or operator in its specifier position, the right-adjoined CP could *not* be interpreted as a property, so that the configuration could not yield the intersecting interpretation that is standardly assumed for RRCs: an embedded CP with an uninterpretable *that* head and no specifier is just a clause, translating into a proposition. (From this point of view, we can safely adhere to Chomsky's words cited in the Introduction —even if we don't adopt the specific technology he supposes underlies it, which stipulates the existence of invisible uninterpretable features whose only role is to trigger the raising of some —possibly invisible— element such as an ARO so as to erase those invisible and uninterpretable features...).

Likewise, the relativisation of an *embedded* clausal subject as in (2) and (4) above also requires the raising of a relative element to the specifier of the higher CP, standardly represented by an ARO "*Op*" here:

- (17) the man [*Op*_i that John says [(**that*) *t*_i loves Mary]] [see (2)]

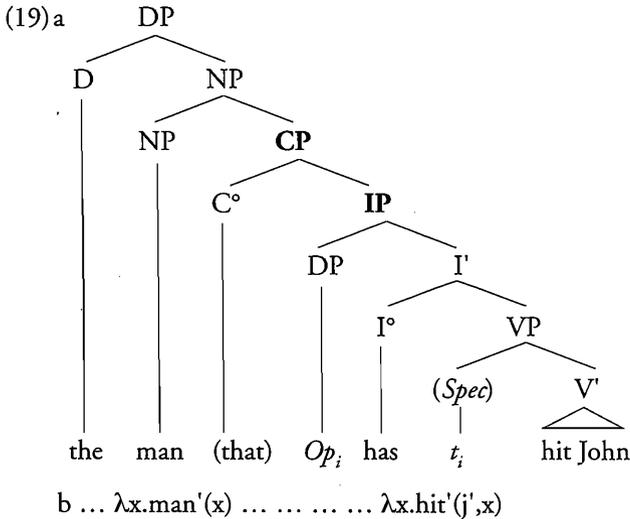
- (18) l-bint [*Op*_i ?illi fakkati ?inno *(hiy) aayha "al beet]
 the-girl that you-F-thought that she going to-the house
 'the girl that you thought $_$ is going home' [see (4)]

— otherwise, there would be no possibility of interpreting the clauses [*that John says [(**that*) loves Mary]*] and [*?illi fakkati ?inno *(hiy) aayha "al beet]*] that respectively follow $[_{NP} \text{man}]$ and $[_{NP} \text{bin}i]$ as denoting sets intersecting with the sets denoted by those very NPs.

¹⁵ There are many options concerning the proper translation of both *the* and *a*, but they are irrelevant to the present discussion, which is concerned with the part of the DP which is the structural complement of D.

¹⁶ Even if all adjoined XPs were to be translated into the connective " \wedge " followed by the translation of XP, the semantics would not be strictly compositional. See 4.4 for a tentative solution.

3.3. Consider now the particular situation of HSP. Of course, vacuous movement of a relative pronoun or abstract operator would correctly yield a λ -expression, just as in the cases discussed above. But once the VISH (the VP-Internal Subject Hypothesis), or some generalised variant of Larsonian shells or the *v*P hypothesis is adopted, the very presence of an ARO (or an explicit relative pronoun, for that matter) in the Spec,IP¹⁷ position will *ipso facto* create a chain between an element that is inherently marked as [+Rel(ative)] and occupies a non- θ -position, and its coindexed trace, i.e., at the interpretation level, a pair consisting of a λ -operator and the variable it binds. In other words, if, as is generally assumed, an unmarked non-root C° is not interpretable,¹⁸ an NP-adjoined CP like the one in (19a) will be transparent, and will allow the IP it dominates to be straightforwardly translated into a λ -expression, as shown in (19b).



Note that a more finely articulated version of clause structure, with, say, three heads (and projections thereof) like AgrS, T, and AgrO, such that AgrS would always be higher than AgrO,¹⁹ would yield the same results, to wit, that non-HSP relativisation would require Relative pronoun or ARO raising to Spec,CP —even from Spec,AgrO, since the subject DP in Spec, AgrSP would block the interpretation AgrOP as a λ -expression— first as such (containing a free variable, the VP-internal trace of the subject DP; it would be ill-formed), but also externally, as an expression denoting a set capable of intersecting with the set denoted by the “head” NP.

¹⁷ Or Spec,AgrSP, or yet Spec,TP-I take these distinctions to be irrelevant: see below.

¹⁸ Radical C°s must have a minimal interpretable specification, which will range over the various types of “enunciative” modalities: assertion, interrogation, injunction or exclamation, whereas only *some* non-root C°s will (for instance in the case of indirect questions) —whence the fact that completive clauses are generally considered to be presupposed; thus: whether *I think it's raining* or *I don't think it's raining* is uttered, the truth-value of the embedded clause cannot be directly denied.

¹⁹ The position of T is, on the other hand, both cross-linguistically variable, as shown by Ouhalla 1991, and irrelevant here.

To summarize, then, the BVM as applied to abstract relative operators can be regarded as the effect of an economy principle that says that other thing being equal, elements that need not be moved to yield an interpretable structure simply must not move, even at LF, given that the "legibility conditions" mentioned in § 1 are fulfilled.

4. Corroborations and residual problems

4.1. Why there is no *that*-trace effect in RRCs like the one in (1) (*the man [that ___ loves Mary]*) follows from the idea defended here: there is no TTE because the gap is not occupied by a trace, but by the phonetically empty relative operator.²⁰ An indirect proof of this can be found in the contrast between the English TTE and the *quel/qui* alternation in French. Note that this alternation takes place both whenever the target of relativisation is an embedded subject, as in (20a), *and* when it is the higher subject, as in (20b):²¹

- (20) a. Le garçon [que je crois [qui ___ aime Marie]]
 b. Le garçon [qui ___ aime Marie]

This clearly indicates that the French alternation can be described in purely PF terms as the replacement of *que* by its allomorph *qui* as soon as the subordinating conjunction is followed by a gap; in English, on the other hand, such purely phonetic information is not sufficient, since the grammatical properties of the gap (whether it is an abstract operator or a trace) are crucial.

The story is not complete, however, since the Doubly-Filled Comp Filter will obviously not exclude a relative clause like the one in (21):

- (21) *the boy [_{CP} that [_{IP} who likes Mary]]

The *ceteris paribus* clause at the end of 3.3 now finds its justification: explicit relative pronouns are not just [+Rel] operators with a phonetic form to them, they also are *wh*-expressions, and must consequently abide by Rizzi's *Wh*-Criterion, which will now obligatorily trigger movement — as noted in the Introduction, the extension of the BVM to relativisation I am suggesting here only concerns ARO raising, not explicit relative pronoun movement. However, let's add for those readers who do not really care for invisible uninterpretable features that a property much more visible than a [+Rel] feature on C° might well account for the obligatory raising of visible *Wh*-relatives: not only do they possess phonetic features, they also have ϕ -features (at least animacy and sometimes number, etc.) which must agree with those of the modified NP; since those features need not be interpreted within the RRC (because they are already provided by

²⁰ See footnote 8.

²¹ In fact, the condition is necessary, but not sufficient, to "salvage" structures, as witnessed by the inacceptability of both (i) variants of below (cp. (ii), well-formed but irrelevant):

- (i) Plus de gens entrent *que/*qui ne sortent (ii) Plus de gens entrent qu'il n'en sort
 more of people go-in-PL than NEG go-out-PL

(By the way, recall that there is no *than*-trace effect in English!)

the NP), there is always the possibility that they must be checked (and deleted) under (syntactic) adjacency or 1-subjacency, without further ado.

4.2. Let us now turn to Palestinian Arabic relativisation. Given the data in section 2.2 (P.A. RPs are excluded whenever, but only when, the target of relativisation is the HSP), we apparently have here the simplest possible case: if Operator movement is altogether blocked, there are two options:

- (i) if the ARO is in the HSP, it will remain there, but the relative clause will nonetheless be interpretable, as explained in 3.1, without further ado;
- (ii) if the ARO is in *any* other position, and since, by hypothesis, it cannot raise to an A'-position, the interpretation will be blocked, and the sentence ruled out, whence the use of an other strategy, namely, the *base-generation* of an ARO in Spec,CP, which, as we saw above (§ 2.2.3), will only be licit if it binds a pronoun that may be interpreted as a variable.

Note that this approach abides by the traditional view that (most) RPs turn up whenever movement is impossible, but I nonetheless depart from Shlonsky's account of HSP relativisation by suggesting that the ARO does not move from its Spec,IP position.

4.3. Of course, the BVM as derived here cannot account for the (not so free?) alternative solutions offered by Hebrew (see 2.2.2)²² or by the very existence of the option of *rel que* relativisation in French, but those phenomena lie outside the scope of the subject matter of this paper —except insofar as they provide an empirical basis for the privileged status of HSP relativisation.²³

On the other hand, as mentioned at the end of 2.2.2., at least in some varieties of Modern Hebrew, there is exactly one (apparent) exception to the ban of Vacuous Movement as applied to AROs. Thus, Shlonsky (*op.cit.*: p. 449) reports “Doron's [...] observation that a topicalised phrase that appears immediately to the right of the complementiser makes it possible —and for many speakers obligatory— to generate a pronoun resuming the clausal [highest] subject.” The contrast between (22a) and (b) —his (14a,b— illustrates this:

- (22) a ha-ʔish she-ʔal politika ʔ?(hu) lo ʔohev le-daber
 the-man that-about politics he NEG likes to-talk
 ‘the man who doesn’t like to talk about politics’
 lit. ‘the man that about politics does not like to talk’

²² Contrary to Borer's 1984 and Shlonsky's 1992 descriptions, later work has shown that the choice between an RP and a gap is not totally meaningless: see Demirdache 1997, and Sharvit 1999.

²³ It might for instance be suggested that the particular register or style that uses *rel que* relativisation is precisely one in which AROs cannot move to an A'-position— but that sounds both simplistic and *ad hoc*. As for Shlonsky's own analysis of the cases where RPs are “optional”, I must confess that, independently of the problems raised by the references cited in the preceding footnote, I'd rather find another solution because of the methodological qualms his solution triggers in my positivist self: he has to stipulate the existence of two distinct complementisers with the same phonetic form, *she*, the difference between which lies in the fact that one of them would be inflectionless, whereas the other would carry abstract (i.e. phonetically unrealised) inflection...

- b *ha-ʔish she-hu lo ʔohev le-daber "al politika
 the-man that-he NEG likes to-talk about politics
 (*ditto*)

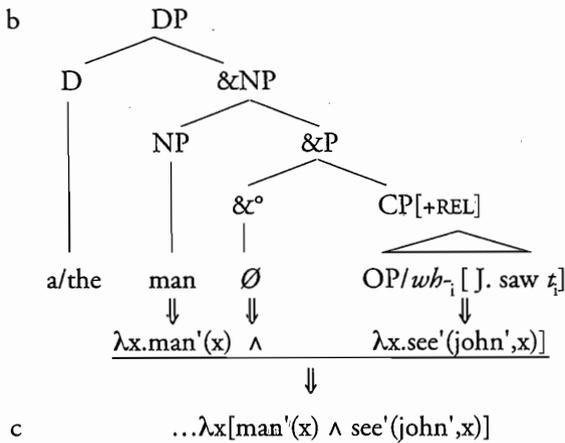
The grammar of those “many” speakers for whom the RP is obligatory in (22a) then simply corroborates the extension of the BVM to relativisation (where it is possible, i.e. for the HSP).

Shlonsky next explains that “some speakers marginally accept [(22a)] without a resumptive pronoun” because “the deviance manifested across a Topic is mild, Subjacency-like, as opposed to the more robust unacceptability that accompanies typical ECP violations.” More work on the subject might however reveal another type of solution, compatible with my version of the BVM, depending on how topics are interpreted: *a priori*, they could either be treated as scrambled elements that would reconstruct at LF (therefore allowing the absence of a RP), or as elements about which the rest of the clause constitutes a true *predication*, in which case the topicalised phrase would be in the specifier position of a Top head that would contain a λ -operator or feature, thereby blocking the (otherwise) absolutely free and costless interpretation of the clause that contains an ARO in subject position as a (set-denoting) relative clause.

4.4. Let us now turn to an objection that might be raised against my proposal. It has to do with the fact that, in many languages, the complementiser adjacent to the modified or “head” NP is sensitive to what, on a more traditional approach, would be the [+Rel] feature of the ARO in its specifier: given my theory, the ARO occupying the HSP remains in Spec,IP even at LF, hence is unable to check that feature on C° (or the lexical item that fills it). A possible solution lies in the result obtained in Rebuschi 2001, to wit, that there is in fact no such thing as right-adjunction of nominal modifiers, hence of RRCs in particular, a relative CP rather being the complement of a conjunctive head that takes the modified NP as its structural specifier. Thus, the basic structure for relative modification would not be as in (15) or (19), but as in (23) below: now, the intersection between the denotation of the “head” NP and that of the relative clause follows from the presence of the conjunction symbolised by “&”, which is in turn independently justified by general considerations concerning asymmetric coordination (cf. Johannessen 1997).²⁴

- (23) a. $[_{DP} \text{ a/the } [_{\&NP} [_{NP} \text{ man}] [_{\&'/\&NP} \&] [_{CP} \text{ WH-}/OP_i \text{ (that) [John saw } t_i]]]]]$

²⁴ Rebuschi 2001 also provides empirical evidence that the specific conjunctive head “&” is phonetically realized in certain natural languages such as Kurmanji Kurdish and Xhosa/Zulu, and Annabel Cormack (p.c.) informs me that *de* in Chinese relative constructions might also (pending further investigation) instantiate this particular conjunctive head.



The general idea would then be to derive the special form taken on by certain relative complementisers in certain contexts not from the fact that an ARO precedes them, but from the fact (typical of RC modification) that these heads are linearly adjacent, and syntactically 1-subjacent, to the conjunction, so that they might in fact incorporate into it.²⁵

5. Conclusion

I have tried to show that Chomsky's 1986 Vacuous Movement Hypothesis can be extended to one specific relativisation target —the one that is universally accessible across languages, namely the Highest Subject Position of a restrictive relative clause— at least when a phonetically *unrealised* operator is available. Moreover, I have shown that this ban on vacuous movement is not limited to “visible” syntax, since the legibility conditions tolerate, hence probably require, that an abstract relative operator in the HSP (if one is available in the language considered) stay there instead of raising to Spec,CP.

This hypothesis has hopefully three merits.

First, it provides a unified account of the absence of *that*-trace effects in English when the HSP is relativised, and of the fact that the relativisation of the very same position does not trigger the appearance of otherwise obligatory resumptive pronouns, as in Palestinian Arabic for instance.

Second, it solves the tension between two competing visions of simplicity, the one that suggests that it is better to apply Move- α (or any avatar thereof) just anywhere, i.e. even when it would result in vacuous movement, and that according to which stipulating a ban of vacuous movement could be explicitly ascribed to GU (and would therefore simplify the relevant derivations). More specifically, it is not even a “ban” that has to be

²⁵ This of course does not preclude the raising of AROs to Spec,CP (in the languages —probably a majority— that allow the ARO to move to an A'-position) and the (representationally simultaneous) merging of the two adjacent functional heads in other cases, i.e. when it is not the HSP, but some other position, that is relativised.

stipulated either in UG or in specific grammars, since it is treated as the (descriptive label for the) result of interface conditions on interpretability, associated with the idea that Move(- α) is *not* costless, and is therefore best avoided.

Finally, if my hypothesis is correct, it constitutes one more argument against the revival of the "Head Raising Analysis" as propounded by Kayne 1994,²⁶ because, as far as I can see, that analysis just cannot distinguish between higher subject relativisation on the one hand, and either embedded subject relativisation, or higher or embedded non-subject relativisation.

Obviously, it is a modest result, but if it does not solve either the accessibility hierarchy problems uncovered by functional linguistics, the island phenomena studied by generative grammarians, or a mixture of those two dimensions (as for instance in those cases of Modern Hebrew where gaps and resumptive pronouns apparently alternate freely), it is simply because those problems lie outside of the scope of the topic of this paper: I simply hope that, if I am on the right track, the really difficult tasks just mentioned will be ridden of a unnecessary burden—that of treating the relativisation of HDP on a par with any other instance of relativisation.

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²⁶ On this, see Rebuschi 2001, *passim*.