

## On the claim that noun complement clauses are relative clauses

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**1. Introduction.** A number of recent papers (Kayne 2008, 2010, Arsenijević 2009, Haegeman 2012, among others) have argued that so-called noun complement clauses (NCCs) as in (1) should be analyzed as relative clauses (RCs), as in (2).

- (1) a. the fact that they're here  
b. the claim that John kissed Mary
- (2) a. the man that I saw \_\_\_\_  
b. the claim that John made \_\_\_\_

Though the works cited above differ greatly in the details, they share the intuition that NCCs are RC variants. For example, Kayne (2008) posits that (1a) is derived from (3) with a silent *in* and its object *fact* relativized, as in (4).

- (3) They're here, in fact.  
(4) The fact<sub>*i*</sub> that they're here ~~is~~ *t<sub>i</sub>*.

Similarly, for Arsenijević (2009) the contents of ForceP are relativized and for Haegeman (2012) relativization involves operator movement from a TP position. The main goal of this paper is to present evidence against a general analysis of NCCs as RCs. In section 2, I present the main empirical evidence provided in favor of the RC analysis. In sections 3, 4 and 5, I provide cross-linguistic data that show NCCs displaying non-RC-like behavior, weakening the force of the evidence in section 2 and calling into question any strong claims that NCCs and RCs share the same type of structures across all languages. Section 6 concludes the discussion.

**2. Empirical evidence presented for the RC view.** The main empirical evidence presented in favor of the NCC as RC view is provided in (5) through (8), which show that in many languages, the same morphological item is used for both RCs and NCCs. In all of these cases, the relative marker used in the RC (a) examples is also used in the NCC (b) examples (and (8c)).

- (5) a. een gezin **dat** drie kinderen heft (Brabant Dutch)  
a family **C** three kids has  
“a family that has three kids”  
b. het problematische puntje **dat** hij drie kinderen heft  
the problematic point **C** he three kids has  
“the problematic point that he has three kids” (Arsenijević 2009:46)
- (6) a. to **što** me plaši (Serbo-Croatian)  
that **wh** me.ACC frightens  
“the thing that frightens me”

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- b. to **što** me (on) plaši  
that **wh** me.ACC he.NOM frightens  
“(the fact) that he frightens me” (Arsenijević 2009:46)
- (7) a. John-I sakwa-lul kkak-**un** khal (Korean)  
John.NOM apple.ACC peel-**Adnom.** knife  
“the knife with which John peeled an apple”  
b. John-I sakwa-lul mek-**un** sasil  
John.NOM apple.ACC eat-**Adnom.** fact  
“the fact that John ate an apple” (Arsenijević 2009:46, citing Cha 1999)
- (8) a. Hou thou thaw **té** we<sup>h</sup>thà hin. (Burmese)  
that rancid go **REL** pork curry  
“that pork curry which has turned rancid” (Haegeman 2012:273, citing Nichols 2003)  
b. [[ thu chàn tha te ] hsou **té** ] ‘əthi  
he rich REALIS EVAL **REL.REALIS** NOM.know  
“the knowledge of the fact that he is rich” (Haegeman 2012:273, citing Nichols 2003)  
c. [[ thu nei mə kàun hpù ] hsou **té** ] kauláhalá  
he stay NEG good NEG EVAL **REL.REALIS** rumor  
“the rumor that he is/was ill” (Haegeman 2012 & Nichols 2003, citing Soe 1999:56)

Arsenijević (2009:46) argues that the fact that the same lexical item is used in both NCC and RC constructions in a number of languages and the fact that these can be different classes of lexical items (complementizer in (5), *wh*-word in (6), adnominal marker in (7)) points to a deep parallel in the syntactic structure and semantics of NCCs and RCCs. However, I show in section 3 that a number of languages do not share the same parallels between these structures.

**3. Evidence against the RC view.** In contrast to the data in section 2, a number of languages with morphologically distinct declarative complementizers (C) and relative complementizers (RelC) choose the declarative complementizers for NCCs, as in (9-11).

- (9) det factum **att/\*som** Johan var här (Swedish)  
the fact **C/\*RelC** Johan was here  
“the fact that Johan was here”
- (10) huhu, **että/\*joka** Johannes oli täällä (Finnish)  
rumour **C/RelC** Johannes was here  
“the rumor that Johannes was here”
- (11) Jainkoa badela/**\*nko** froga bat (Basque)  
God part-is-**C/\*RelC-Adnom.** proof one  
“proof that God exists” (adapted from de Rijk 2008:462)

The same holds for Bulgarian, as shown in (12). Interestingly, Bulgarian is cited for optionally allowing the relative complementizer *deto* instead of the declarative complementizer *che* in some factive sentential complements, as in (13) (see Haegeman 2012, Krapova 2010).

- (12) Faktat **che/\*deto** Ivan beshe tuk (Bulgarian)  
fact.DEF **C/\*RelC** Ivan was here  
“the fact that Ivan was here”

- (13) Petar sazhajava **che/deto** Ivan vidja Maria. (Bulgarian)  
 Petar regrets **C/RelC** Ivan saw.3.SG Maria  
 “Petar regrets that Ivan saw Maria.” (Simeonova 2013:2)

In fact, Krapova (2010) analyzes these sentential complements with *deto* as hidden RC constructions. However, if the NCC in (12) were indeed a RC, we might expect it to choose *deto*, not *che*, especially if Krapova’s analysis is correct and *deto* signals a RC in Bulgarian.

Finally, In Durban Zulu (DZ), a relative marker appears in relative clauses (14a) and a declarative complementizer appears in sentential complements (14b).<sup>1</sup> In (14c) we see that in NCCs, the declarative complementizer appears, not the relative marker.

- (14) a. a- ngi- bon- e abantu abagqoka izigqoko ezibomvu (D. Zulu)  
 NEG 1SG- see NEG AUG.2people **AUG.REL.2**.wear AUG.8hat AUG.REL.8.red  
 “I don’t see the people wearing red hats.” (Halpert 2012:239)
- b. a- ngi- cabang- i [ **ukuthi** uSipho u- bon- e muntu/lutho]  
 NEG 1SG- think- NEG **that** AUG.1Sipho 1S- see- PFV 1person/13thing  
 “I don’t think Sipho saw anyone/anything.” (Halpert 2012:90)
- c. [**indaba** y-**okuthi** w- a- thatha umhlala phansi] {**y-/kw-**} a- ngi- mangaza  
**AUG.9news** 9-**that** 1- PST- take AUG.1sit down {**9s-/17s-**} PST- 1sg.o surprise  
 “The news that he retired surprised me.” (Halpert 2012:246)

Note also in (14c) that DZ NCCs show optional subject agreement in the matrix clause (class 9 *y-* agrees, class 17 *kw-* doesn’t). If these NCCs were RCs, we might expect the agreement pattern to be the same. However, the agreement is mandatory in DZ RCs, not optional, as shown in (15).

- (15) [**indaba** e- wu- yi- bhal- e phansi izolo ekuseni (D. Zulu)  
**AUG.9news** **REL-** 2ndSG- 9O- write- PST down AUG.5yesterday LOC.15morning  
 esikoleni] {**y-/\*kw-**} a- ngi- mangaza  
 LOC.7school {**9s-/\*17s-**} PST- 1sg.o surprise  
 “The news that you wrote down yesterday morning at school surprised me.”  
 (Halpert 2012:248)

Once again, we find that the behavior of NCCs does not pattern with RCs, this time neither in complementizer choice nor subject agreement patterns.

In sum, in addition to the empirical evidence in favor of the NCC as RC analysis presented in section 2, there seems to be just as much cross-linguistic data regarding complementizer choice (and subject agreement) that points in the opposite direction.

**4. Operators and the Swedish relative complementizer *som*.** In addition to appearing in RCs, the Swedish RelC *som* appears in clefts (16a) and embedded questions (16b).

- (16) a. Det var min idé **som/\*att** vann priset. (Swedish)  
 It was my idea **RelC/\*C** won prize-the  
 “It was my idea that won the prize.”
- b. Johan undrade vem **som/\*att** hade öppnat dörren,  
 Johan wondered who **RelC/\*C** had opened door-the  
 “Johan wondered who had opened the door.”

<sup>1</sup> Note that the difference in the form of the complementizer (*ukuthi* vs. *okuthi*) has to do with the presence or absence of *yo-* (which Halpert (2012) analyzes as an associative marker) on the complementizer.

Depending on one's analysis of RCs, clefts and embedded questions, it is plausible to conclude that the RelC *som* appears when some sort of operator resides or moves into the specifier of CP. The clefted phrase *min idé* in (16a) and the *wh*-phrase *vem* in (16b) both appear to the left of *som*. On the other hand, the C *att* appears in declarative sentences where no element appears in the specifier of CP. Even if this characterization of the Swedish *som* facts is off the mark, the fact that NCCs pattern with the declarative complements in complementizer choice and not with RCs casts doubt on the claim that NCCs and RCs have the same structure, at least in some languages.

**5. More counterevidence: complementizer-drop.** In English RCs, the complementizer is obligatory in subject relative clauses (17a), but optional in non-subject relative clauses (17b-c).

- (17) a. I saw the man \*(that) \_\_\_ ate the pizza.  
 b. I saw the pizza (that) the man ate \_\_\_.  
 c. I like the way (that) they solved the problem \_\_\_.

As illustrated in (3) and (4) above, for Kayne (2008) *fact* is a relativized complement to a silent *in*. Wherever *in fact* originates, it is clear that it is not subject position since the subject is occupied by *they* in (3) and (4). For Arsenijević (2009) Force contents relativize and for Haegeman (2012) operator movement is from a TP position. Since these are not subject relatives either, under all of their analyses we might expect C-drop to be licit, counter to fact, as in (18).<sup>2</sup>

- (18) a. The fact \*(that) John is here infuriates Mary  
 b. I resent the fact \*(that) Mary left

**6. Conclusions.** In this paper I have presented some cross-linguistic examples where NCCs do not behave like RCs in regards to complementizer choice, subject agreement and the availability of complementizer-drop. While these data in no way rule out the possibility that some languages might employ a RC strategy for NCCs, they do present a significant challenge for any analysis that claims that the RC strategy is universal for NCCs.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that Arsenijević 2009 does provide an analysis of the *that*-deletion facts. Due to space constraints, I leave discussion of this to future work.