

THE COMPLEMENTIZER IN  
MIDDLE ENGLISH  
APPOSITIVES\*

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1. Appositive relative clauses in modern English do not have the full range of complementizers that restrictive relatives do. Compare the restrictive relative in (1) with the nonrestrictive appositive in (2):

- (1) We found just the person  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{who} \\ \text{that} \\ \phi \end{array} \right\}$  we need to edit the journal.
- (2) Bill,  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{who} \\ * \text{that} \\ * \phi \end{array} \right\}$  we really ought to invite to the party, seems very depressed these days.

An explanation for the nonoccurrence of *that* in appositive relatives has been suggested by Chomsky and Lasnik (hence-

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forth C&L) (1977, fn. 46), based on three assumptions:

- (i) a *Wh* Movement analysis of both kinds of relatives;
- (ii) a recoverability condition blocking deletion of *wh*-words with semantic content;
- (iii) a surface filter that rules out the combination of *wh*-phrase plus *that* in COMP position.

This surface filter is given in (3):

- (3) \*<sub>[COMP wh-phrase  $\varphi$ ]</sub>,  $\varphi \neq e$  (= C&L (53))

Surface filter (3) is, as C&L point out (p. 446), "a language-specific filter; in fact, it did not hold in Middle English." Restrictive relatives commonly began with *which that* in Middle English (ME), but not in the Elizabethan period. For a historical discussion of this filter, see Keyser (1975).

C&L argue that an appropriate form of the recoverability condition will prevent deletion of *wh*-words in questions (direct or indirect), where the quantifier-like *wh*-word has intrinsic semantic content, but will allow deletion of the *wh*-word in relatives, where it is simply a clause marker without semantic content. They suggest (p. 447, fn. 46) that any "residual semantic content in relative pronouns is redundant, since it is expressed in the head of the construction"; they further suggest that this redundancy would automatically follow from a raising analysis of relatives along the lines suggested in Vergnaud (1974). They then go on to say that "these remarks apply only to restrictive relatives. In appositives, a raising analysis is inappropriate and a full NP with lexical content remains in the *wh*-phrase. This explains the fact that deletion of the *wh*-phrase is impossible in appositives. Note that it then follows, given filter (53), that the complementizer *that* will never appear with appositives."

2. This analysis of appositives makes certain predictions about the possible range of complementizers in ME appositives. First, since filter (53) did not hold in ME, it then follows that the combination of *wh*-word plus *that* should have appeared in appositives as well as in restrictive relatives. (As in modern English, *that* could optionally delete.) Second, according to assumption (ii), deletion of the *wh*-phrase is impossible in appositives; hence, the analysis predicts that *that* could not by itself have introduced ME appositives, but could only have occurred in combination with a *wh*-word.

These predictions are only partially borne out by the data. The first prediction is correct: appositives were commonly introduced by *which that* in ME. (Note that *who* was not yet used as a relative pronoun; *which* was used for human as well as nonhuman NPs.) The following examples from Chaucer il-

lustrate this possibility:

- (4) His brother, *which that* seven yeer was of age,...  
*Clerk's Tale* 780
- (5) Aurelius, *which that* yet despeired is...  
*Franklin's Tale* 1297
- (6) I, *which that* am the sorwfulleste man,...  
*Complaynt d'Amours* 1

The second prediction, however, is incorrect: ME appositives could be introduced by *that* alone,<sup>1</sup> as illustrated by the following examples from Chaucer:

- (7) But Troilus, *that* thoughte his herte bledde for wo,...  
*Troilus and Criseyde* 2, 950
- (8) Aaron, *that* hadde the temple in governaunce,...  
*Summoner's Tale* 1894
- (9) The hye God, *that* al this world hath wrought, seith..  
*Summoner's Tale* 1972
- (10) bigat upon his wyf, *that* called was Prudence,  
 a doghter which that called was Sophie.  
*Tale of Melibee*, B. 2157
- (11) This Absolon, *that* jolif was and gay, gooth with a  
 sencer on the holiday.  
*Miller's Tale*, 3339-40
- (12) But certainly no word ne writeth he  
 Of thilke wikke ensample of Canacee,  
*that* loved hir owene brother synfully.  
*Man of Law's Tale*, 77-9

There is no reason to assume that the semantics of restrictive versus nonrestrictive relative clauses was different in ME than today. Hence, if C&L are correct in claiming that the semantic content of *wh*-words is different in appositives than in restrictives, the data from Chaucerian ME show that deletability of *wh*-words is not a function of semantic content, and therefore, the nonoccurrence of *that* in modern appositives cannot be attributed to the impossibility of *Wh* Deletion in this construction. This small point of syntax raises the important theoretical question of whether the recoverability principle has a filtering function in grammar. Its failure to make the right predictions in this case (as well as others) suggests that it may in general

<sup>1</sup> Note that in OE as well, the invariant relative marker *þe* could be used in nonrestrictive relatives:

- (i) ... Herodes, *þe* we nu embe reccað  
 Herod, that we now about tell  
 AElfric's Homilies II 384,4
- (ii) seo burh Hierusalem, *þe* Crist on ðrowode..  
 the city Jerusalem, that Christ in suffered, ...  
 AElf.Hom. II 190, 15

be incorrect to use the recoverability condition on deletion (e.g. *Wh* Deletion) to filter the application of particular rules (e.g. *Wh* Movement) in order to avoid stating conditions on the rules themselves. Whatever the correct analysis of appositives, there is no necessary difference in complementizers between the two kinds of relatives. In the modern Scandinavian languages, just as in ME and OE, we find that appositive clauses have the same range of complementizers that restrictive relatives do; in both cases the preference is for the invariant *som*, a relative marker that functions like English *that*, as shown in the following Norwegian example:

- (13) Niels Bohr, *som* var en berømt fysiker *som*  
 Niels Bohr, that was a famous physicist that  
 bidro til kvantumteorien, ble tildelt  
 contributed to quantum theory, was given  
 Nobelprisen i 1922.  
 the Nobel prize in 1922.

Yet the Scandinavian languages clearly distinguish between restrictive and nonrestrictive relative clauses; except for the choice of complementizer,<sup>2</sup> the same characteristic differences are found as in English. Restrictive relatives can stack, while nonrestrictives cannot, as illustrated by the contrast between the Norwegian examples in (14a) and (14b).

- (14) a. Mannen som jeg møtte i går som  
 The man that I met yesterday that  
 jeg fortalte deg om er en berømt fysiker.  
 I told you about is a famous physicist.
- b. \*Niels, som jeg møtte i går som jeg fortalte deg  
 om, er en berømt fysiker.

(Of course, the nonrestrictive relatives in (14b) can be conjoined by *og* 'and'). Furthermore, nonrestrictives can modify proper nouns, are outside the scope of negation and quantifiers,<sup>3</sup> require an intonation break, and always follow any restrictive relatives. Thus, the sameness of complementizer can-

<sup>2</sup> There is, however, a different difference in complementizer choice in Danish. When the subject is relativized, restrictive relatives allow either *som* or *der* 'there' (and in some dialects, the combination *som der*). Appositives, on the other hand, allow only the invariant *som* (cf. Erteschik-Shir (1973, 34)). *Der* is also restricted to the first of a series of conjoined relatives. I agree with Erteschik-Shir that *der* in this use is best analyzed as a dummy subject.

<sup>3</sup> That is, negation outside the appositive cannot condition negative polarity items within the appositive, even though these items can appear in restrictive clauses in parallel positions. While there is no *some/any* alternation in the Scandinavian languages, this difference between appositives and restrictives can be illustrated by other negative

not plausibly be explained by claiming that the Scandinavian languages, unlike English, have only one type of relative clause.

3. There remains, of course, the interesting question of how the modern restriction on the use of *that* developed in English. It seems to be a much later development than the constraint against consecutive *which that*. Jespersen cites numerous examples of *that* in appositives after the ME period, from Shakespeare even into the nineteenth century:

- (15) Flenas, his sonne, *that* keeps him companie  
Shakespeare, *Macbeth* III 1, 135
- (16) my only child, my poor Sophy, *that* was the joy of  
my heart  
Fielding, *Tom Jones* 2.50
- (17) he looks as auld as me, *that* might be his mother  
Scott, *The Antiquary* 1.247
- (18) Is it kind to have made me a grave so rough?  
Me, *that* was never a quiet sleeper?  
Tennyson, *Maud* 306

More examples of appositives introduced by *that* alone are cited in Jespersen, *MEG* III, 4.3<sub>1</sub>, 4.4<sub>2</sub>, 5.1<sub>1</sub>, 5.2<sub>1</sub>, 8.1<sub>2</sub>.

Jespersen describes the development of this restriction against *that* as follows: "In early Modern English, *that* is the favorite relative and is found in non-restrictive as well as in restrictive clauses, but there is in literature a growing tendency to extend the sphere of the *wh*-words, which more and more oust *that* from non-restrictive clauses," probably because "*wh*-words seemed more refined or dignified than *that*" (4.3<sub>1</sub>). Traugott (1972) notes that this restriction on *that* was not one of the suggestions put forth by the prescriptive grammarians of the eighteenth century; rather "that change seems to have occurred spontaneously" (pp. 182-183). Jespersen suggests that the difference is a function of the "looser" connection of appositives to the head noun. He notes that "restrictive clauses are generally placed immediately after the antecedent, while non-restrictive clauses may stand at some distance...[*wh*-words] gain greater carrying power than *that* and hence are often preferred in the second of two coordinated relative clauses, even when

polarity items such as (Swedish) *långre* 'any more' and *det minsta* 'at all':

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|     | No one   |   |  |   |  |  |        |  |        |  |         |  |      |  |                              |  |       |  |  |
|     | *Någon   |   |  |   |  |  |        |  |        |  |         |  |      |  |                              |  |       |  |  |
|     | someone  |   |  |   |  |  |        |  |        |  |         |  |      |  |                              |  |       |  |  |
|     | *Per   |   | who studied at all can fail.                   |   |  |  |        |  |        |  |         |  |      |  |                              |  |       |  |  |
|     | Peter  |   |  |   |  |  |        |  |        |  |         |  |      |  |                              |  |       |  |  |

they are restrictive and the first has *that* or no pronoun" (5.3<sub>1</sub>):

- (19) ingenious sentences, *that* I suddenly or accidentally recollected; *and which* without my utmost vigilance, had been irrevocably lost for ever.  
Swift, *Polite Conversation* 48
- (20) things *that* neither the Spaniards, or the English men had tasted for many years; *and which*, it may be supposed, they were glad of.  
Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* 2.134
- (21) that ideal *that* we were pleased to call aristocracy *and which* soon became the common property of our set.  
H. G. Wells, *The New Macchiavelli* 99
- (22) a sort of thing *that* used to cut me to the heart, *and which* she kept up till the very day I left her.  
Shaw, *Cashel Byron's Profession* 163
- (23) she possessed gifts *that* were not only higher than a ready tongue, *but which* paid better in the long run.  
Eden Phillpotts, *The Mother* 38

Jespersen observes that "the inverse order (*who* or *which*...*and that*) is rare" (5.3<sub>2</sub>). It is probable that similar considerations explain why the zero-complementizer has always been used exclusively in restrictive relatives (4.3<sub>4</sub>).

Another contributing factor in the loss of *that* from appositive relatives may lie in the feeling that *that* should be limited to inanimate antecedents. An anonymous referee points out that if eighteenth century grammarians did not legislate against nonrestrictive *that* per se, they did object to the use of *that* with animate (or at least human) heads. For example, John Dryden says the following<sup>4</sup> in a letter to William Walsh, criticizing an essay that Walsh had sent him:

I find likewise that you make not a due distinction betwixt that and who; a man *that* is not proper; the relative *who* is proper. *That*, ought always to signify a thing; *who* a person.

Although prescriptive grammarians were not completely successful in establishing this usage, the stricture may well have contributed to preventing *that* from appearing in relatives with proper noun heads, the nonrestrictive relative par excellence.

#### References

- Chomsky, N. and H. Lasnik (1977) "Filters and Control," *Linguistic Inquiry* 8, 425-504.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Ward (1942), Letter No. 17, p. 34. The letter was probably written early in 1691.

## SQUIBS AND DISCUSSION

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