RELATIVE CLAUSES AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH, FRENCH, AND GREEK THROUGH *THE LITTLE PRINCE*

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ABSTRACT

The present paper takes a contrastive approach to the usage of relative clauses in English, French, and Greek, focusing on their educational relevance in foreign language instruction. Although relative clauses constitute a common grammatical construct, their structure and purpose vary between tongues, posing difficulties for students. This contrastive investigation uses textual proof from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's The Little Prince to demonstrate the way actual materials may be included into instruction in languages to improve morphological competency. The paper compares the fundamental elements of relative sentences in every language to show their parallels, differences, and the challenges they offer to Greek-speaking learners of English and French. Research results indicate that works of literature offer good possibilities for imparting complicated morphological patterns in relevant situations, promoting both language correctness and cross-cultural comprehension.

Introduction

Relative clauses represent an important aspect of complicated syntactic structure in natural tongues. They enhance phrases by including describing, restricting, or explaining data, improving transmission accuracy. Understanding contextual phrases provides a substantial barrier for foreign speaking individuals since their structure, as well as placement, differ greatly among linguistic frameworks (Radford, 2004; Riegel, Pellat, & Rioul, 2009). Relative clauses are an essential component of sophisticated syntactic organization in natural languages. They improve utterances by including descriptive, restricted, or explanatory information, resulting in greater accuracy and communication efficacy. According to several scholars, mastering such structures is a difficult task for second-language learners because relative clauses often display particular language limitations that communicate with wider syntactic principles, processing mechanisms, and discourse functions (Radford, 2004; Riegel, Pellat, & Rioul, 2009; Keenan & Comrie, 1977). Understanding how relative clauses work is thus critical for advanced linguistic competence, especially in situations when students must traverse structural differences between their native language and the target language.

In English and French, relative clauses maintain rather tight grammar conventions, necessitating the inclusion of relative pronouns or concordance characteristics. However, in Greek, there is considerable freedom, notably via the multipurpose usage of the word που. Significant cross-linguistic disparities frequently result in adverse effects in the generation of contextual clauses among native speakers of Greek learning English and French (Tsimpli 2003). In English and French, relative clauses adhere to rather strict grammatical standards. Both languages rely largely on a pre-existing inventory of relative pronouns to encode qualities like as gender, number, animal nature, and syntactic function, which requires learners to change agreement patterns while maintaining structural coherence across the phrase. In contrast, Greek allows for considerable freedom, particularly through the multipurpose usage of the

particle 'που', which operates as a generic relativizer independent of case-identifying and agreement requirements (Tsimpli, 2003; Kotzoglou, 2006). These typological discrepancies frequently provide significant challenges for Greek learners of English and French, resulting in transfer effects, excessive generalization, and avoidance techniques in the formation of intended-language relative clauses. Numerous research on second language learning demonstrate that intercultural impact is important in molding learners' syntactic visualizations, particularly when the L1 provides more straightforward or cost-effective alternatives than the L2 (Odlin, 1989; Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008).

This research used an analytical contrastive technique to investigate the operational and structural components of relative clauses in every one of the languages, with examples from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*. The incorporation of actual works of literature into language study is particularly significant because it helps students to view syntax in place and interact with interesting, visually appealing illustrations (Duff & Maley, 1990; Mansfield, 1997).

This study takes a contrastive analytical approach to investigate the functional and structural aspects of relative sentences in Greek, English, and French, using similar instances from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*. The use of literary texts in linguistic study and instruction is especially beneficial because literature provides realistic, stylistically rich, and contextually diverse contexts for monitoring grammar in use. Literary discourse exposes students to forms, registers, and narrative functions that are not typically found in textbooks, enhancing both language intuition and interpretative abilities (Duff and Maley, 1990; Lazar, 1993; Mansfield, 1997).

Furthermore, the multifaceted aspect of literature—combining creativity, emotional involvement, and cultural depth—has been found to increase learners' motivation and facilitate deeper comprehension of complicated structures of grammar, including relative clauses (Carter & Long, 1991; Paran, 2008). This study attempts to illustrate structural distinctions between the three languages while also demonstrating how literary content can

be used as a valuable teaching tool for developing intermediate syntactic consciousness.

Theoretical Framework

The structural analysis of clauses that are relative has attracted a great deal of attention throughout contemporary semantics. Chomsky's (2002) computational grammar highlights the function they play in recurrent buildings, which enable unlimited phrase expansion. Radford (2004) describes them in terms of clauses with subordination created by dependent pronouns which alter the noun expression. The structural study of relative clauses has received a lot of attention in modern syntactic and semantic theory, owing to the important role these structures play in the design of human language. Chomsky's (2002) computational grammar emphasizes their role in recursive syntactic structures, which enable limitless phrase extension and contribute to language's generative ability. In a similar vein, Radford (2004) defines relative clauses as subordinate constructs introduced by dependent pronouns that change the noun phrase and thereby increase its descriptive or referential specificity. Their research has thus become critical for understanding how languages contain relationship information between statements.

In the English language, the pronouns with relative meanings include who, which, that, whose, and whom, all of which have syntactic or contextual limits. French utilizes qui, que, dont, lequel, and conjugated variations that need gender as well as the number consistency with predecessors (Riegel et al., 2009). Greek uses the inert component που, as well as the increasingly official ο οποίος/η οποία/το οποίο, that coincide with the preceding in gender, quantity, and position (Holton, Mackridge & Philippaki-Warburton, 2012). In English, the system of relativizers—who, which, that, whose, and whom— imposes syntactic and contextual limitations, particularly on animacy, grammatical function, and formality. For example, who and whom often relate to human antecedents, but *which* is employed for non-human referents; that acts as a more neutral complementizer-like relativizer and is commonly chosen in spoken forms (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Furthermore, English distinguishes between restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses, a

distinction that influences both meaning and punctuation, emphasizing the significance of syntactic accuracy in advanced language usage (Biber et al., 1999).

According to an instructional point of view, contextual phrases have been vital for students with advanced abilities due to how they enable the construction of intricate phrases, which is required for written instruction and skilled verbal interaction (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). French, on the other hand, has a more morphologically confined system, using qui, que, dont, and lequel, as well as inflected forms (laquelle, lesquels, etc.), which need gender and number agreement with their antecedents (Riegel et al., 2009). The distinction between these forms is not only morphological, but also syntactic, since qui normally denotes the subject of the relative phrase, whereas que indicates the object. Furthermore, dont expresses possession or complements of verbs and adjectives that need the preposition de, resulting in structural features that learners must internalize to attain grammatical precision (Grevisse & Goosse, 2016).

Greek has a hybrid system with both the invariant relativizer που and the more formal series ο οποίος/η οποία/το οποίο, which inflect for gender, number, and case to fit the antecedent (Holton, Mackridge & Philippaki-Warburton, 2012). The confluence of these forms reflects a larger diglossic legacy in Greek, in which informal and formal types affect relativizer selection. Furthermore, που lacks clear case marking, leading to syntactic uncertainty, whereas ο οποίος offers full morphological transparency, making it particularly popular in academic, legal, and administrative speech (Joseph & Philippaki-Warburton, 1987).

From an educational standpoint, relative clauses play an important role in the development of advanced skill in both first and second languages. Their understanding of syntax enables students to produce syntactically complicated sentences, which are required for both professional and academic writing (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). According to applied linguistics research, L1 typology, cognitive load, and input frequency all have an impact on relative clause acquisition. For example, Gass and Selinker (2008) note that learners whose native language has a similar relative clause construction system

generally learn the target tongue relativization more quickly. Furthermore, computational research shows that explicit teaching, exposure to real texts, and practice with restrictive and non-restrictive structures all improve learners' syntactic variety (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011).

In multilingual environments, relative clauses also shed light on cross-linguistic effect. Learners of English or French with Greek as their first language may acquire syntactic tendencies from Greek, such as the extensive usage of invariant που, which results in excessive generalization or avoidance of semantically complicated relativizers (Tsimpli, 2006). These events highlight the necessity of contrastive analysis and tailored instructional approaches. As a result, a thorough grasp of relative clause patterns not only helps to fundamental linguistics, but also to empirical language teaching approaches targeted at developing advanced linguistic competency.

Contrastive Analysis of Relative Clauses

English

English differentiates within restricted and non-restrictive contextual phrases. Limited sentences provide the important data: The child that posed the inquiry seemed inquisitive. Non-restrictive phrases provide additional details which are separated by commas: The sage fox revealed the secrets of existence. Students frequently mistake both of them, especially when it comes to commas and the potential usage of the word rather than whom/which.

French

In French, relative clauses can be restrictive (*propositions relatives déterminatives*) or non-restrictive (*propositions relatives explicatives).* Nevertheless, French has tougher morphosyntactic restrictions. The child who asked the inquiry was curious (restrictive), but the wise *renard* revealed the hidden mysteries of life (non-restrictive). Furthermore, the usage of *dont* to communicate ownership or supplements (Le livre dont j'ai besoin) poses extra

challenges for Greek pupils, since they might exaggerate regarding the Greek που formulation.

Greek

Greek has a great level of versatility. The element που is commonly employed throughout both restrictive as well as non-restrictive situations. Το παιδί που έκανε την ερώτηση ήταν περίεργο. Although straightforward, the method may result in transfer errors if Greek students produce a text in English or French, frequently neglecting required pronoun differences (the boy's father is a pilot rather than whose father is a pilot). Less officially authorized databases use ο οποίος, which needs complete agreement: Το παιδί, ο οποίος ήταν περίεργος, έκανε την ερώτηση.

Literary Evidence from *The Little Prince*

The book *The Little Prince* by the French poet Antoine de Saint-Exupéry is an excellent resource for studying relative clauses between tongues. Let examine some of the instances below:

English: *The little prince, who came from another planet, asked many questions.*

French: *Le petit prince, qui venait d'une autre planète, posait beaucoup de questions.*

Greek: *Ο μικρός πρίγκιπας, που ερχόταν από έναν άλλο πλανήτη, έκανε πολλές ερωτήσεις.*

The corresponding section demonstrates fundamental parallels in restrictive as well as non-restrictive versions. Still, Greek students may ignore the relative pronouns *whose* in English or *dont* in French, as Greek indicates ownership in distinct ways:

English: *The man whose rose was unique felt responsible for her.*

French: *L'homme dont la rose était unique se sentait responsable d'elle.*

Greek: *Ο άνθρωπος που το τριαντάφυλλό του ήταν μοναδικό ένιωθε υπεύθυνος για αυτό.*

The Greek phrase utilizes the possessive form of του in connection with που, while English and French require modified comparative formulations.

Another noteworthy case involves relative closes introduced by relative pronouns.

English: *The star that he saw was bright.*

French: *L'étoile qu'il voyait brillait.*

Greek: Το *αστέρι που έβλεπε έλαμπε.*

The relative pronoun can be omitted in English sentences (e.g., *The star he noticed is brilliant*), which is not possible in French. However, it seems acceptable in conversational Greek. These comparisons demonstrate how people can overestimate or neglect necessary components.

Kostadinova has identified similar cases while investigating the production of English texts by Bulgarian native speakers whose first foreign language is French and second foreign language is English (Kostadinova 2012).

Pedagogical Applications

The application of *The Little Prince* when teaching relative cluases gives various benefits:

- Validity. Learners experience contextual sentences in important storytelling situations.

- Cross-cultural comparability. Simultaneous interpretations provide direct comparative evaluation, which increases learners' knowledge of underlying distinctions.

- Error eradication / correction. Instructors might provide exercises based on frequent errors, which might include inappropriate use of *whom* in the English language or *dont* in the French language.

- Rewrite in an creative manner. Students may translate relative clauses into simplified statements and reverse the process, which reinforces morphological knowledge.

For example, teachers might offer the statement "*Le renard, qui était sage, expliqua un secret*" then invite learners to reqrite it using both English and Greek, noting the way relative pronouns are interpreted properly.

Conclusion

Relative phrases, while ubiquitous, differ significantly between English, French, and Greek, posing difficulties for native speakers of the Greek language. The divergent examination of linguistic sections in *The Little Prince* exposes reoccurring difficulties, including the usage of *whose*, as well as *dont*, the difference across restrictive and non-restrictive words, as well as consistency specifications in French and formal Greek. While relative phrases are widespread, they differ greatly across English, French, and Greek, making it difficult for native Greek speakers to learn advanced structures in other languages. A comparative analysis of linguistic segments from The Little Prince reveals recurring sources of difficulty, most notably the use of whose and dont, the distinction between restrictive and non-restrictive clauses, and the gender, number, and case agreement requirements in French and formal Greek. These cross-linguistic disparities highlight the cognitive burden put on learners, as they must traverse not just new syntactic structures, but also conceptual distinctions that do not always translate easily onto their native grammatical system.

Incorporating cultural materials improves syntactic instruction by connecting with basic morphological notions. Novel analogies inspire students, promote multicultural understanding, and permit syntax to be perceived as an evolving framework compared to an artificial constraint structure. Integrating culturally rich resources into training has been

demonstrated to promote syntactic development by placing abstract grammatical ideas in relevant situations. Literature such as The Little Prince gives students actual instances of relativistic thinking in action, allowing them to perceive language as a living system immersed in narrative meaning, cultural symbolism, and artistic complexity rather than an isolated set of prescriptive rules. Innovative analogies and cross-cultural comparisons promote student engagement, higher-order thinking, and an understanding of how linguistic patterns change across languages and historical situations. Syntax, using such techniques, becomes an adaptable framework that replicates human communication and cultural expression rather than an artificial limitation.

Further investigations might broaden this paradigm through incorporating actual educational information, investigating learners' production of contextual phrases, and evaluating the efficacy of academic interventions. Future study might broaden this theoretical and pedagogical paradigm by including actual educational data, with a particular emphasis on the ways that learners generate relative clauses in guided and autonomous assignments. Such empirical data would allow us to identify distinct developmental processes, mistake patterns, and transfer effects associated with Greek as a first language. Furthermore, assessing the effectiveness of targeted educational strategies—such as explicit comparative teaching, corpus-driven materials, and culturally incorporated activities—could shed light on which methods best support the formation of complex syntactic structures. Longitudinal research would also help educators understand how knowledge of relative clauses grows over time, providing practical assistance for building programs that combine the field of linguistics and applied teaching.

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