Distinctness and the structure and size of (some) English relative clauses

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Argument fronting

* **Argument fronting** is permitted in some English relative clauses (RCs) but not others (Bianchi 1999; *pace* Haegeman 2012).

(1) a.　　a man [to whom, **liberty** we would never grant]　　　　Finite *wh*-RC

　　　b.　　a prize [that, **to John** we would never grant]　　　　Finite *that*-RC

　　　c.　* a prize [**to John** we would never grant]　　　　　　Finite Ø-RC

　　　d.　* a man [to whom, **liberty** to grant]　　　　　　　Infinitival *wh*-RC

　　　e.　* a man [**liberty** to grant to]　　　　　　　　　Infinitival Ø-RC

Argument fronting

* Argument fronting in English RCs is subject to (categorial) *distinctness* (Richards 2010).
* The relative pronoun/operator phrase must be categorially distinct from the fronted argument.

    (2)   a.   a man [**to whom, liberty** we would never grant]   (PP DP)
                 b. * a man [**who(m), liberty** we would never grant to]   (*DP DP)

    (3)   a.   a prize [**which/that, to John** we would never grant]   (DP PP)
                 b. * a prize [**which/that, John** we would never grant to]   (*DP DP)

* Subject RCs *do* allow argument fronting (*pace* Rizzi 1997: 307, Haegeman 2012: 58) but the fronted argument must be a PP due to distinctness.

    (4)   a.   * a man [**who, liberty** would never grant to us]   (*DP DP)
                 b.   a man [**who, to us** would never grant liberty]   (DP PP)

Argument fronting

* Infinitival *wh*-RCs do not permit argument fronting (though they do permit adverbial fronting (see Douglas, in prep)).

(5)   * a man [to whom, **liberty** to grant]

* I propose that relativisation in infinitival *wh*-RCs targets the position that argument fronting would target.

* Infinitival *wh*-RCs obligatorily pied-pipe a preposition. This is assumed to be a distinctness effect between the external determiner and relative pronoun (see Richards 2010).

(6)   a.   **a man** [**to whom** to grant liberty]
        b.   * **a man** [**whom** to grant liberty to]

* I hypothesise that this distinctness effect is directly analogous to the distinctness effect seen in finite *wh*- and finite *that*-RCs.

Analysis

* I propose the following configurations:

   (7)   SpecXP   SpecYP   SpecZP

SpecXP	SpecYP	SpecZP	
RC head	Rel. pron.	Fronted arg.	Finite *wh-/that*-RCs
	RC head	Rel. pron.	Infinitival *wh*-RCs

* Finite *wh-* and finite *that*-RCs are larger than infinitival *wh*-RCs, i.e. YP vs. ZP.
* There is a categorial distinctness effect between the phrases in SpecYP and SpecZP.

Topic or Focus?

I claim that the fronted argument is a focus rather than a topic (cf. Bianchi 1999).

1. Only one argument can be fronted in an RC. In non-RC contexts, topic and focus can co-occur (always in that order in English).

    (8)   ?* Do you remember the year in which that book, to JOHN Mary gave?
    (9)   That book, to JOHN Mary gave in 1979.

* I conclude that RCs are large enough to contain a focus, but not a focus *and* a topic.

Topic or Focus?

2. Foci exhibit weak crossover effects; topics do not (Rizzi 1997).

(10) a. $^{?}$* a school to which JOHN SMITH$_i$ his$_i$ mother is planning to send

    b. a school to which JOHN SMITH Mary is planning to send

(11) a. $^{(?)?}$ a person to whom THIS BOOK$_i$ its$_i$ author is happy to give for free

    b. a person to whom THIS BOOK Mary is happy to give for free

* The fronted argument seems to exhibit WCO effects, therefore patterning with foci.

Topic or Focus?

3. Topics can often be resumed by resumptive pronouns; foci cannot (Rizzi 1997).

   (12) a. ?* a man to whom LIBERTY we would never grant it
        b. ? a man to whom LIBERTY we would never grant to him

   (13) a. ?* a book which TO JOHN Mary would happily give to him
        b. ? a book which TO JOHN Mary would happily give it

* If a resumptive is possible at all, it resumes the RC head/relative pronoun rather than the fronted argument.

* The fronted argument thus patterns like a focus (and the relative pronoun patterns like a topic).

Topic or Focus?

* In traditional cartographic terms, we could equate ZP with FocP.

(14)
SpecXP	SpecYP	SpecZP/SpecFocP	
RC head	Rel. pron.	Fronted arg.	Finite *wh-*/*that*-RCs
	RC head	Rel. pron.	Infinitival *wh*-RCs

* In non-RC contexts, there is a categorial distinctness effect between topic and focus.

(15) a. **This present, to MARY** I would give.   (DP PP)
      b. * **This present, MARY** I would give to.   (*DP DP)

(16) a. **To Mary, THIS present** I would give.   (PP DP)
      b. * **Mary, THIS present** I would give to.   (*DP DP)

* We could thus equate YP with TopP.

Discussion

* We have identified three instances of categorial distinctness in English:

1. Infinitival *wh*-RCs (external determiner and relative pronoun)
2. Finite *wh*-/*that*-RCs (relative pronoun and fronted argument)
3. Non-RC contexts (topic and focus)

* I claim that infinitival *wh*-RCs are FocPs whilst finite *wh*- and finite *that*-RCs are TopPs.
* This captures the differences in availability of argument fronting as well as the distinctness effects we have identified.

Discussion

* Italian does not exhibit these distinctness effects (see Rizzi 2016, i.e. yesterday's talk).

* Richards (2010) proposes that distinctness may be sensitive to specific features (see Neeleman & van de Koot 2006 on syntactic OCP effects involving phi-features).

* Italian may compute distinctness according to specific A'-features, whilst English computes it according to categorial features.

* We could interpret this as distinctness/syntactic OCP effects taking effect at different levels of granularity (see Biberauer & Roberts 2015).

References

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