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

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Chiusi
* 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]  
   b. a prize [that, to John we would never grant]  
   c. * a prize [to John we would never grant]  
   d. * a man [to whom, liberty to grant]  
   e. * a man [liberty to grant to]  

   Finite wh-RC  
   Finite that-RC  
   Finite Ø-RC  
   Infinitival wh-RC  
   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]  
b.  * a man [who(m), liberty we would never grant to]  

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

* 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]  
b.  a man [who, to us would never grant liberty]
* 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.
* I propose the following configurations:

(7) 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.
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?

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