

# A Relative Complementizer Parameter: Revisiting the Universals for Relative Clauses

Yexin Qu

Department of Linguistics, Cornell University

yq248@cornell.edu

The list of universals provided by De Vries (1995) includes the following:

- a) Languages with relative pronouns do not have internally headed relative clauses (IHRCs)
- b) Languages with relative pronouns do not have prenominal relative clauses

But counterexamples to (a) can be found in older Indo-European languages such as Vedic Sanskrit:

(1) tvé tát naḥ suvédam usríyam vásu  
2s.Loc Dem.Nom.sg 1p.Dat easy.to.find.Nom.sg.N reddish.Nom.sg good.Nom.sg  
[yám tvám hinóṣi mártiyam] (RV 8.4.16cd)  
Rel.Acc.sg 2s.Nom drive.Pres.2s mortal.Acc.sg

“In you is that ruddy good [=cattle] easy to find for us (and for) the mortal whom you urge on.”  
(Translation from Jamison and Brereton 2014)

Example (1) is a counterexample to (a) since *yám* is a relative pronoun and the head *mártiyam* ‘mortal’ is internal to the relative clause. The accusative case for *mártiyam* is assigned inside the relative clause and it is left in-situ, thus the relative pronoun is not R-bound, that is, the head does not bind the relative pronoun (Safir 1986, Browning 1987). Cinque (2020) suggests that the reason for (b) is that relative pronouns must be R-bound, hence example (1) also undermines (b).

The goal of this paper is to show that there are two CP projections in the left periphery of the relative clauses. By comparing IHRCs in Japanese (の *no*-IHRCs) and Korean (것 *kes*-IHRCs) with the other types of relative clauses in Japanese, Korean, and Mandarin, showing that *no* and *kes* are in higher projection relative to the other relativizers, the adnominal (Japanese ‘連体形 *rentaikēi*’ and Korean ‘-ㄴ/은 *-n/-un*’, ‘-는 *-nun*’, and ‘-ㄹ/을 *-l/-ul*’).

In Section I, I show that Japanese and Korean have both the high and low relative complementizers. First, Japanese and Korean use null complementizers as the lower ones, since the strategies used to form non IHRCs in Japanese and Korean are higher than the IP projection through comparison with other languages with prenominal relative clauses. Second, Japanese *no* (as in IHRC) and Korean *kes* are the higher complementizers. Whitman (2009), Frellesvig and Whitman (2011) discuss the usage of overt complementizers in Japanese and Korean relative clauses. I show that Japanese *no* (as in IHRC) and Korean *kes* are higher complementizers by comparing them to other complementizers like Japanese *koto*. Watanabe (2003) suggests that Japanese *no*-IHRC has *no* as a complementizer, and its specifier holds a null Operator. I show that Watanabe’s argument for the CP projection of Japanese exists in Korean *kes*-IHRCs, and in languages with relative pronouns, such as Vedic Sanskrit *ya*-clauses.

Based on this evidence, I propose a new parameter governing the distribution of IHRCs:

- Languages with high relative complementizer (like Japanese *no* and Korean *kes*) can have IHRCs
- Languages with only low relative complementizer (like Mandarin 的 *de*) do not have IHRCs

To support this parameter, in Section II, I show that the Mandarin particle *de* is a low relative complementizer. First, in Mandarin when ‘*de*’-clauses function as the internal arguments of unaccusative verbs, they only have the indefinite reading and do not have to raise to pass Case Filter, as is comparable to the pseudo-incorporation in Turkic languages. Second, Mandarin ‘*de*’ cannot host phi-features, which suggests its position in the left periphery is relatively low.

In Section III, I compare the Japanese maximalizing IHRCs with other type of IHRCs such as those found in Navajo. The former type has been discussed by many scholars, Grosu and Hoshi (2019) and Cinque (2020) together suggest that the Japanese maximalizing IHRCs involve raising, while the Navajo IHRC has an Operator in SpecCP. I compare the Japanese type with the high complementizer type as in Vedic, and the Navajo type with the low complementizer type as Mandarin.

	IHRC	EHRC
High Comp	Japanese maximalizing IHRC, Vedic	Japanese EHRC
Low Comp	Navajo	Mandarin

In Section IV, I revisit the question why certain languages with high complementizer do not allow IHRCs, such as English, with a DP/NP parameter point of view.

## References:

- Browning, M., 1987. Null Operator Constructions. PhD diss. MIT
- Cinque, G., 2020. *The syntax of relative clauses: A unified analysis*. Cambridge University Press.
- De Vries, M., 2005. The fall and rise of universals on relativization. *Journal of Universal Language*, 6(1), pp.125-157.
- Frellesvig, B. and Whitman, J., 2011. Prenominal complementizers and the derivation of complex NPs in Japanese and Korean. *Japanese and Korean Linguistics*, 18, pp.73-87.
- Grosu, A. and Hoshi, K., 2019. Japanese internally-headed and doubly-headed relative constructions, and a comparison of two approaches. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics*, 4(1).
- Jamison, S.W. and Brereton, J.P. eds., 2014. *The Rigveda: the earliest religious poetry of India*. South Asia Research
- Safir, K., 1986. Relative clauses in a theory of binding and levels. *Linguistic Inquiry* 17: 663–89.
- Watanabe, A., 2003. Wh and operator constructions in Japanese. *Lingua*, 113(4-6), pp.519-558.
- Whitman, J., 15 The syntax of overmarking and kes in child Korean. *The Handbook of East Asian Psycholinguistics*, p.221.