Tel-Aviv University
The School of Philosophy, Linguistics and Science Studies
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THURSDAY INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLOQUIUM

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How to derive a relative pronoun from an interrogative one

In many languages relative pronouns are morphologically derived from interrogative ones. Examples include Bulgarian (koj -> kojto), Slovenian (kje -> kjer), Greek (pjos -> opjos), Spanish (qué -> el que), and in some sense also Hindi (ko -> jo) and German (was -> das). This morphological pattern hasn't received much attention in the theoretical literature, where relative operators are typically treated on a par with interrogative ones. I offer a new empirical (crosslinguistic) and theoretical perspective on the issue. I demonstrate that the use of the relative morpheme is subject to an implicational constraint: if the morpheme is used in some construction in (1), then it is also used in all the constructions on the right.

(1) interrogative > unconditional > correlative > free relative > headed relative

I demonstrate how the pattern can be modeled using the nanosyntactic toolbox. I further propose to assimilate the interrogative -> relative derivation to the much better studied interrogative -> indefinite derivation, using a Kratzer & Shimoyama-style analysis, which builds on the idea that indefinite morphemes indicate a relation to a c-commanding quantificational operator. The operators implicated in this kind of analysis are the universal, existential, or negative operator. I will argue that relative pronouns in correlatives and relatives also indicate a relation to a c-commanding operator, namely the (Kratzer-style) conditional operator in correlatives and quantificational determiners in (free) relatives.

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