

Relative Clause in Vietnamese as a Nominal Dependency Relation

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes to look at the Relative Clause construction in Vietnamese with respect to its status as an adjunct (the dominant view of Chomsky (1971)) as well as a complement, a recent view put forth in Kayne (1994). In addition, we propose to provide a simpler algorithm for plugging the RC structure into the main body of the clause on the basis of the demonstration that a parallel processing of the RC can, in effect, translate an Operator-Variable relation to a nominal dependency relation, easily identifiable through a nominal feature.

A simple, restrictive Relative Clause in Vietnamese looks like the following:

- (1) *kon cho ma ban thay hom-qua bi mat*
CLA dog which you see yesterday is lost
'The dog which you saw yesterday was lost'.

That is, in most respect, it looks an English RC notwithstanding the various typological distinctive properties of Vietnamese RCs that the paper elaborates first. Investigating mostly Romance and Germanic languages, Kayne (1994) claims that in RCs a lower NP moves to the domain of the CP to realize the RC:

- (2) $[_{DP} D^0 [_{CP} NP [C^0 [_{IP} [e]]]]]$
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This paper explores the possibility of viewing RCs in Vietnamese as “selected” elements on the basis of the crucial difference with the otherwise English pattern of RCs (see 1 above) that Vietnamese displays, namely, the use of the Classifier element (CLA) within the NPs. Using the findings of Khuong (2004) with respect to the Vietnamese DP-structure and DP-internal movements as in Bhattacharya (1999), we show that the use of the relative pronoun (*ma* ‘which’ in 1 above) is crucially dependent on the availability of the Classifier element within the relativised head NP and that this dependence calls for a view of RCs in this language though not very different from the one propounded in Kayne (1994), that is a substantial improvement from the perspective of plausible implementational work. In other words, the dependency relation between a nominal head (CLA) and the operator (Relative Pronoun) is shown to actually aid in quickly recognizing RCs in this language and finding their rightful place of attachment within the main derivational space.

[355 words]