Between headed and headless relative clauses: evidence from Hup
Category: Oral presentation

That many supposedly universal categories do not in fact apply generally across all languages, and that such categories often prove to not be discrete, has received considerable discussion in typology (e.g. Dryer 1997, Croft 2000, Haspelmath 2007). In many cases, it is the ongoing revision of traditionally accepted categories, in light of data from individual languages, that has allowed us to come to a more fine-grained typological understanding of linguistic phenomena. This paper considers relative clause constructions from this perspective. Most syntactic typologies of relative clauses recognize two distinct categories: 'headed' and 'headless' (or 'free') relatives, according to whether or not the relative clause is associated with a domain nominal (e.g. Andrews 2007); to this, Citko (2004) adds a third, intermediate category of 'light-headed' relatives. Yet, as this paper argues, such a strictly categorical approach – even one that makes room for three categories – is descriptively and typologically inadequate. In particular, for languages in which relative clauses are nominalizations (in an appositional relationship to the domain nominal), elements occurring as domain 'nominals' may be shaped by processes of grammaticalization that give them a partly lexical, partly grammatical identity, and different elements may represent different points along a lexical–grammatical continuum.

Hup, a Nadahup (Makú) language of the northwest Amazon, provides a striking illustration of such variability among domain nominals (and associated elements) across relative clauses. Hup relative clauses may be associated with a full noun phrase (i.e. headed; example 1), or without any domain nominal whatsoever (i.e. headless; example 2). But Hup relative clauses may also appear with a range of intermediate elements. These include 'bound' nouns (example 3), which differ from full noun phrases in their syntactic status – they cannot occur as independent constituents of a clause, but are obligatorily preceded by another nominal element. Even more intermediate are the classifiers or 'class terms', which are historically derived from bound nouns (see Epps 2007; cf. Ospina 2002 for Yuhup), but as domain nominals are at best syntactically marginal, and in some contexts function as grammatical elements that cannot properly be considered nouns at all (example 4). Finally, relative clauses may appear with the enclitic =*d'əh*, elsewhere a marker of plural number on Hup nouns; as such, they resemble headless relative clauses in that the plural marker is effectively a grammatical element, but they also have some features of headed relatives in that =*d'əh* is the suppletive plural form of the non-feminine animate class term, and can thus derive an agent nominalization and encode features of animacy and gender (example 5). The Hup data suggest that the ability of a relative clause to appear with a domain nominal should not be viewed as a dichotomy between headed or headless, nor even as involving a third, clearly defined category of 'light' heads, but that the property of 'headedness' in relative clauses may be best represented as a gradient phenomenon, and this approach is arguably descriptively richer and typologically more accurate than the alternative.

Examples:

(1) *[tɨh   wæd-ě-p]   parátu,   wáb-an   pɨd=mah   cak-w'ob-yɨʔ-pɨd-ɨh*
3sg   eat-PERF-DEP   plate   jirau-DIR DIST=REP   climb-set-TEL-DIST-DECL
'The plate [he had eaten from], she set (it) back up on the shelf.'

(2) *tɨh   tɔhɔ-yɨʔ-ay=mah,   [tinɨ̌h   hɨ̌   ni-ʔě-p],*
3sg   finish-TEL-INCH=REP   3sg.POSS animal   be-PERF-DEP

[húp   nɨ̌h   hɨ̌   ni-ʔě-p]
person   POSS   animal   be-PERF-DEP
'It was all gone, [that which had been his game animal], [that which had been
the person's game animal].' (i.e. it had been fully consumed)

(3) *ʔǎn   [hi-kéy-ep]=ʔãy*
1sg.OBJ   FACT-see-DEP=FEM
'the woman [who looked after me]' (as a child)

(4) *nup   bóda=tat-ʔěʔ,   [núp   d'ɔh-yǽt-æp]=tat*
this   ball=ROUND-PERF   this   rot-lie-DEP=ROUND
'This was a ball, [this rotting round thing lying here].'

(5) *[ʔíp   pǎ̃=mǽh]=d'əh   hɨd   ʔɔ̃h=yɨʔ-ɨy*
father   NEG:EX=DIM=PL   3pl   sleep-TEL-DYNM
'[The little fatherless ones], they fell asleep.'

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