Attachment in syntax and discourse: Towards an explanation of the variable scope of non-restrictive relatives

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This paper develops a theory of scope of non-restrictive reative clauses (NRCs) that explains Schlenker's (2013) puzzling observations, which suggest that although NRCs generally project, i.e. are interpreted globally, local readings, under certain circumstances, are available:

(1) a. If Max called the dean, who (then) called the chair, I would be in trouble.
    b. #If Max called the dean, who hated me, I would be in trouble.

Against trapping: It has been suggested e.g. by Martin (2016) that the contrast between (1-a) and (1-b) is due to the need to bind the anaphoric *then* in (1-a), which only finds an appropriate antecedent (the event of Max calling the dean) in the scope of the conditional—a solution parallel to van der Sandt's (1992) trapping for presuppositions. In Zeevat's (2016) view, the NRC would still be trapped in (1-a) even without an explicit *then* because of a weak causal relation between the events: the dean would not call the chair if Max didn't call the dean. However, (2) shows that the NRC can receive an embedded interpretation in the conditional antecedent even in the absence of an explicit anaphor or a causal link. Conversely, the anaphoric pronoun *him* in (3), which can only be bound in the local context, does not seem to be able to license trapping and the sentence receives no coherent interpretation, although the corresponding conjoined conditional does.

(2) If Mary stands in front of Peter, who (first/then/also) moves a little closer to Max, everyone will fit into the picture.

(3) If someone$_a$ wears this jacket, *and it* / #*which* is too big for him$_a$, he will look silly.

(Not only) continuative NRCs have local readings: The conditions under which NRCs have local readings have been poorly understood so far. Poschmann's forthcoming experimental study supports the generalization that one such condition is that the NRC is *continuative* in the broad sense of Holler (2008), that is, the coherence relation (CR) between the NRC and its host clause is *coordinating* (Asher and Vieu, 2005). That includes not only *Narration* (temporal sequence) or *Result* (causal) as in (1-a), but also *Parallel* (similar situations, temporal relation unspecified) as in (2), and *Contrast* (contradictory situations, denial of expectation). However, (4), where the NRC is an *Elaboration* on the content of the email, shows that a local reading is also possible with a subordinating CR.

(4) If you get an email from Bill, who writes that he got a new job, don't trust it.

Syntactic structure, discourse structure, and the speaker: We argue that there exists, in fact, a complex indirect relationship between the use of CR markers like *then* in (1), discourse-structural coordination vs. subordination, and the scope of NRCs. Our **first claim** is that NRCs are interpreted locally only if they are attached to a clause in the scope of an entailment-cancelling operator *both syntactically and discourse-structurally*, no matter if by a coordinating or a subordinating CR. However, a broad class of CRs — *speaker-oriented* ≈ pragmatic relations in the sense of Sanders et al. (1992) — imply that the speaker has an attitude to one or mostly both of the propositions they connect.

For instance, non-speaker-oriented *Explanation* can be paraphrased as *A because B*. Its speaker-oriented (epistemic) counterpart is *I believe A because I believe B*, and is normally used when the speaker tries to convince the hearer of *A*. In the latter case the relation can only hold in the global context and never in the scope of an entailment-cancelling operator.

We share the widely accepted view that NRCs are interpreted globally because they encode propositions to which the speaker (or a salient attitude holder) has a direct attitude (e.g. Potts, 2005). However, our **second claim** is that NRCs are not speaker-oriented by definition or due to some general conventional rule, but only if (a) the speaker's attitude towards the proposition expressed by the NRC is marked explicitly, e.g. by an adverbial like *frankly*; or if (b) they are connected to the context by a speaker-oriented CR.

Arguably, (b) is the case in (5), a variant of (1-b). The information that the dean hates the speaker is supposed to make it more plausible to the hearer that the speaker would be in trouble if Max called the dean. That is, the NRC is connected by speaker-oriented *Explanation* to the sentence as a whole—outside the scope of the conditional. In contrast, local interpretation of the proposition under *if* results in a less coherent discourse, cf. (6-a): it is not clear without further context why the dean's attitude to the speaker is relevant.

(5) If Max called the dean, who hates me, I would be in trouble.

(6) a. Max would call the dean. ?She hates / would hate me.   locally incoherent
    b. Max would call the dean. She would then call the chair.   *Narration*

Our **third** point, which is still rather a hypothesis than a **claim**, is that in the absence of clear indications to the contrary, NRCs normally attach to their context by a speaker-oriented subordinating CR, very often *Explanation*. First, NRCs are syntactically subordinate clauses, which tend to express subordinating CRs (Matthiesen and Thompson, 1988). Indeed only a small minority of NRCs are continuative (about 4.5% according to Loock, 2007). Second, NRCs differ from adverbial and coordinate clauses, and resemble independent sentences, in that their CR to the context is *not encoded* in the syntactic structure. Connectives like *because* and *and* project their semantic arguments in the syntax, and therefore always connect the clauses *both syntactically and discourse-structurally*. But NRCs only encode a syntactic link, whereas the discourse-structural one must be inferred from cues like *then* in (1-a), or general pragmatic principles. As argued by Jasinskaja and Karagjosova (2015), the latter lead to a strong preference for speaker-oriented *Explanation* between juxtaposed sentences, and NRCs seem to follow the same pattern:

(7) a. Mary fired Bill. He drank too much.   *Explanation:* drinking causes firing
    b. Mary fired Bill, who drank too much.   *Explanation:* drinking causes firing
    c. Mary fired Bill and he drank too much.   *Result*: firing causes drinking

In sum, the way NRCs are connected to the rest of the sentence—syntactic subordination, on the one hand, and absence of syntactic encoding of the CR, on the other—results in a strong but non-absolute preference for speaker-oriented CRs, global attachment in the discourse structure and therefore global interpretation of NRCs. The underlying assumption that the unit in the scope of an operator must constitute not only a syntactic, but also a discourse-structural unit, raises new questions about the relationship between structure and semantics.

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