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edited by

Annamaria Bartolotta

**The Emergence
of Syntactic Categories
in the History
of Linguistics:
From Medieval to Modern Age**



Hermes

Collana di Scienze del Linguaggio

THE EMERGENCE OF SYNTACTIC
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Annamaria Bartolotta (Ed.)



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Relative pronouns and relative clauses in Latin grammatical thought: implications for syntactic analyses

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Abstract

This paper deals with relatives and relative clauses (RCs) in Latin. After an introduction devoted to relativization strategies in world languages (Comrie and Kuteva 2013), the analysis of Latin RCs is carried out according to models from contemporary linguistics (Pompei 2011a and 2011b, Lavency 1981). The second part of the article focuses on ancient metalinguistic contributions, first in the transition from the Greek to the Latin tradition, then in the Medieval tradition, when grammar and logic are again intertwined. Findings include the fact that the Latin *qui* does not constitute a separate word class, and that – although syntactic uses are described – recognition and isolation of dependent clauses is still lacking throughout the Middle Ages.

Keywords: Typology of relative clauses, Latin relative clauses, Greek and Latin relative pronouns, *relatio simplex*, *relatio personalis*.

1. Theoretical background

1.1 Definitions

Relative pronouns are a subclass of pronouns “which may be used to introduce a post-modifying clause within a noun phrase” (Crystal

2008, s.v. *relative*).¹ A relative clause is a dependent clause introduced by a relative pronoun: therefore, the correct understanding of relative pronouns and clauses depends on the reference to, or the relation with, a specific portion of text uttered before. Within several classifications of relative clauses (hence RCs), a primary one is that between *adnominal*, (see example in (1) and *sentential* (2). Adnominal RCs modifies a previously mentioned noun phrase (or determiner phrase, also depending on the theoretical framework used in the description), whereas sentential RCs refers to a whole sentence, as shown in the following examples in English.

- | | | | |
|----------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| (1) I wrote to | the student | (that) | we met yesterday. |
| | NP/DP | REL.OBJ | |
| (2) I heard | that | John will be there, | which makes me |
| | COMPL | | REL.SUBJ V OBJ |

very happy.

In example (2), the pronoun “which” does not only refer to “John” but to the fact that “John will be there”, as expressed in the previous sentence. Moreover, one might also ask whether the relative pronoun refers only to the fact that John will be present at a given place or even to the fact of having heard that John will be present there. In the first case, reference is made only to the *that*-clause expressing the object of the main clause (*that John will be there*), in the second to the whole complex sentence (*I heard that John will be there*) also focusing on the meaning of the main clause.

Another relevant distinction is that between *restrictive* (or *defining*) and *non-restrictive* (or *non-defining*) RCs. The latter is a complementary apposition, functioning as an adjective (on the basis of this subtype, RCs are sometimes called *adjective clauses*, see example in (3),

¹ This paper is part of the PRIN SiRe 2017 “Le parti del discorso incontrano la retorica: alla ricerca della sintassi, nella continuità tra Medioevo ed Età moderna”, P.I. Paola Cotticelli-Kurras. I thank the participants to the PRIN project and workshops for the discussion. I thank the anonymous reviewer for valuable suggestions and insights. I am solely responsible for any errors or omissions that may remain.

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whereas the former defines a portion of the meaning expressed by the defined NP (in fact a DP in this case) to which the pronoun refers (4).

(3) They are the people who want to buy our house. (restrictive RC)

SUBJ REL.SUBJ V

(4) Clare and John, who I work with, are planning a party.

SUBJ REL.OBL V

(non-restrictive RC)

In (4) the RC is optional from a syntactic point of view: it certainly adds a more or less relevant information, but it does not change the meaning expressed by the phrase it depends on. In English such a prepositional RC may be expressed by an oblique object, as in the quoted example (4), and also alternatively formulated as “with whom I work”.

According to the analysis provided by Cotticelli-Kurras (2007, s.vv. *frase dependente, subordinate/dependent clause* and *frase relativa*), RCs can be defined using the following criteria or properties: a) a functional property: a RC is a linking clause either functioning as an attribute of a phrasal constituent of the main clause or referred to the whole main clause (see respectively examples in 1 and 2 above); b) a formal property: a RC is a finite construction, introduced by a relative pronoun, preceded or not by a preposition, or a relative adverb (e.g. in Engl. *where, when, why*); c) a semantic-pragmatic property: a RC can be defining or non-defining, being only the first obligatory to express.

Applying the notion of valency (Tesnière 1959, see Graffi 1994) to the complex sentence, i.e. a sentence formed by a main clause and at least a dependent clause, RCs are one of the three subgroups of dependent clauses: 1) argument clauses (e.g. *I know that John will be there*, the *that-clause* expressing the object); 2) circumstantial clauses (e.g. *We play to win*, the dependent being a final clause expressed by an infinitive); and finally, 3) RCs. According to Graffi (1994: 117–121), RCs can be further divided into free RCs and adjectival RCs: a free RC (cfr. Crystal 2008, s.v. *relative*) does not behave as a modifier, but rather as an argument clause, e.g. the *wh-* object clause in *He told him what he was going to do*. However, some scholars have assumed that even

these so-called free RCs actually modify an empty head, not phonetically realized. In this sense, all RCs would function as modifiers and never as arguments (see Graffi 1994: 118, fn. 36 with refs.).

1.2 Typology of RCs in the languages of the world

If RCs are essentially modifiers, this function is shared with alternative strategies, namely adjectives and genitives, as in the following English examples (quoted from Gil 2013 in WALS), each of them expressing a peculiar semantic function: the possessor **(5a)**, the quality **(5b)** and the result of an activity **(5c)**.

(5a) <i>John's</i> apple	(genitive)
(5b) <i>red</i> apple	(adjective)
(5c) apple <i>that John bought</i>	(RC)

Typological research has revealed that these three semantic functions can be formally highly differentiated – almost all Indo-European (IE) languages show this pattern, together with non-IE languages of Europe; moderately differentiated, in which two functions are encoded in a single morpho-syntactic expression (e.g. Tagalog, Thai, Västerbotten Swedish); and weakly differentiated (e.g. Mandarin, Cantonese). As noted by Gil (2001), the fact that many linguists are speakers of IE languages may constitute a bias in the description of those languages showing moderated and weak differentiation between RCs, adjectives and genitives. Such a metalinguistic issue (comparable, for example, to that concerning Parts of Speech) has indeed important theoretical implications for the typological description of the languages of the world.

Keenan and Comrie (1977) developed the Accessibility Hierarchy of Relativization, which can be schematized as follows: *subject* > *direct object* > *indirect object* > *possessor*. According to such a typological hierarchy, it is easier to relativize on subjects than on any of the other positions, then easier to relativize on direct objects than indirect objects, and in turn on possessors. Reading the hierarchy from the lower stages, if a language has the possibility to relativize on indirect objects, then it can relativize on direct objects and finally on subjects.

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Relativization strategies² can be grouped into four types, as shown by the following examples quoted from Comrie and Kuteva (2013) in WALS, with refs: I) relative pronoun (see example (6)); II) non-reduction (7); III) pronoun retention (8); IV) gap (9). This taxonomy, slightly modified over the years, was first introduced by Comrie (1981).

(6) German (relative pronoun)

Der Mann, der mich begrüßt hat, war ein Deutscher.

DP REL.SUBJ DAT V

‘The man who greeted me was a German’

According to this strategy, the RC is introduced by a relative pronoun (or adjective) which is case-marked according to the function required by the clause which is inserted in. Sometimes (as happens in Ancient Greek³ but also Modern Standard Arabic), some phenomena of “case attraction” occurs, so that the relative pronoun agrees in case with the NP/DP to which it depends regardless of the function it has in the RC. This is the most common strategy in IE languages, also ancient ones.

(7) Maricopa (Gordon 1986: 255)

aany=lyvii=m ‘iipaa ny-kw-tshqam-sh shmaa-m

ADV NP(man) 1-rel-V(beat). REL.SUBJ V(sleep)-real

‘The man who beat me yesterday is asleep’

Comrie and Kuteva 2013 identify at least three different subtypes of non-reduction strategy: the common feature is that the NP is absorbed within the main clause together with a relative marker, as shown by the example in Maricopa, a Yuman language spoken in Arizona. This phenomenon is traditionally described as a “prolep-

² Note that the perspective has moved from the single RC to the concept of “relative construction” (Lehmann 1986), formed by a head and a subordinate clause, the RC, depending on the head in different ways, thus according to different relativization strategies. Thus, the concept of relative construction seems to provide a better description of a semantic-pragmatic dependency expressed in various morpho-syntactic ways.

³ For an in-depth analysis of Ancient Greek RCs in earliest phases (attested by Mycenaean, archaic inscriptions, prose, poetry and lyric until 550 BCE) see Probert (2015). See also De Decker (2019).

sis of the relative pronoun” in ancient IE languages, as Greek and Latin which can combine or not with other phenomena such as the ellipsis or omission of the demonstrative in the main clause – which the relative points to – and either direct or indirect case attraction, the former indicating when the relative changes its case in agreement with the demonstrative and the latter indicating the reverse phenomenon.

(8) Babungo (Schaub 1985: 34)

mə̀	yè	wə́	ntiə	fáŋ	ŋwə́	sí
I	V(see)	NP(person)	that	who	he	pst2
sàŋ	ghô					
V(beat)	you					

‘I have seen the man who has beaten you’

In this example from Babungo, a Bantoid language spoken in Cameroon, the pronoun retention strategy combines a relative marker with a resumptive/anaphoric pronoun, intensifying in fact the relativization construction, being both expression of a morpho-syntactic linking function.

(9) Turkish

kitab- <i>t</i>	<i>al-an</i>	<i>öğrenci</i>
OBJ	V.PTCP	NP.SUBJ

‘The student who bought the book’.

Finally, the gap is actually the absence of any morphological coding of the relative. Nevertheless, converbs (Cotticelli-Kurras et al. (eds) 2024–2025) or indefinite constructions (participle, gerund) are at work, conveying a relative meaning at the semantic-pragmatic level.

2. Modern perspectives on Latin RCs

The above-mentioned general typological taxonomy has been applied to the Latin language in order to deepen the study of RCs in Latin, particularly by Pompei (2011a; 2011b).

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Pompei (2011a) analyses the corpus of Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* (BG, 58–50 BCE) in order to shape a typological classification of RCs in classical Latin. In the corpus selected for the analysis, only two of the four strategies typologically summarized by Comrie and Kuteva (2013) occur, namely the use of a relative pronoun, meant as a case-marked morpheme belonging to a specific PoS (type I, see example 10 and the non-reduction strategy (type II, see 11a, 11b), which involves the embedded RCs in which the nominal is expressed within the RC.

(10) *Flumen est Arar, quod per finem Haeduorum ... influit* (BG, I 12.1)
'There is a river Arar [the Saône], which flows through the territories of the Aedui'.⁴

(11a) *Caesar ... ad cohortandos milites, quam in partem fors obtulit, decucurrit* (BG, II 21.1)
'Caesar ... hastened to and fro into **the quarter that** fortune carried him, to animate the troops'.⁵

(11b) *... quae pars civitatis Helvetiae insignem calamitatem populo Romano intulerat, ea princeps poenas persolvit* (BG, I 12.6)
'...**that part** of the Helvetian state **which** had brought a signal calamity upon the Roman people was the first to pay the penalty'.

Pompei (2011a: 65ff.) observed that (11a) shows the internal head and (11b) is a correlative structure; in both cases, a relative form is expressed, a pronoun in (11a) and an adjective in (11b). Particularly, the use of the relative adjective (*quae* + NP) allows the embedding of the lexical head (*pars*) within the RC. The correlative structure, moreover, is constructed by means of an anaphoric pronoun which correlates

⁴ Translation by McDevitte and Bohn (1869) slightly modified. Where not otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

⁵ Differently, McDevitte and Bohn (1869) interpreted the simple relative *quam* as an indefinite correlative, rendering the Latin expression as "into **whatever quarter** fortune carried him", as it were *quamcumque*, the corresponding form of *quicumque*, which, in fact, fits the sentence semantically. Cfr. the translation by H. J. Edwards (1917) in which the relative clause disappears, being replaced by a nominal expression: 'Caesar ... ran down in **a chance direction** to harangue the troops'.

with the relative form that precedes it in this example, this being a pre-posed RC, also known as prolepsis of the RC in the traditional grammatical description of Latin.

Pompei (2011b), extending the field of investigation from Early to Late Latin, without leaving out the epigraphic language of the inscriptions, points out that Latin does indeed exhibit all four strategies identified by the linguistic typology: the pronoun-resumption strategy (type III) and the gap strategy (type IV) are respectively represented in the examples in (12) and (13), (Pompei 2011b: 484ff.).

(12a)

... *cuius non sum dignus solvere corrigiam calceamentorum eius* (Luke 3,16)

‘the straps of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose’.⁶

(12b)

hominem..., quem ego beneficium ei feci (Formulae Andecavenses 48)
litt. ‘the man that I did benefit to him’

(13)

... *infra castrum Vabrensim, quae villae Ursionis propinquus erat, cum rebus omnibus se muniunt* (Greg. Tur. Hist. Franc. 9,9)

... under the castle of Vabres, which was near the city of Ursinus, and with every means fortified themselves.

As Pompei (2011b: 489, 527ff.) highlights, the gap strategy never occurs in Classical Latin, but only in this kind of very Late Latin instances, when the morphological distinction proper to the relative had been lost (*quae* is used instead of *quod*).

Among the numerous studies on Latin RCs,⁷ we would like to draw particular attention to the work of Lavency (1981) on Classical Latin, since it proposes a taxonomy that can be usefully compared both with the typological classification proposed by Pompei and de-

⁶ TMB (Third Millennium Bible) English version.

⁷ For a detailed description of Latin RCs and a critical review of the existing literature on the topic, see also Pinkster (2021: 471–582).

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scribed above, and with the terminological and metalinguistic choices that will be examined in the following sections.

First of all, Lavency (1981) aims to separate the true RCs from the uses of the connective relative.⁸

Then, among the proper RCs, a distinction is made between restrictive (*déterminatives*) and non-restrictive (*qualificatives*) clauses, and for each of the two groups a classification in epithet (*épithète*, **14a**, **15a**), attribute (*attribut*, **14b**, **15b**), and apposition (*apposé*, **14c**, **15c**) is identified, as shown in the examples below, which summarized the results (see Lavency 1981: 468).

In Lavency's analysis, the following sentences contain a restrictive RC:

(14a)

Macedones vero milites ea tum erant fama quā nunc Romani feruntur.
(Nep. Eum. 3)

'In those days the Macedonian soldiers had **the reputation that the Romans now enjoy**'⁹

(14b)

Ista quidem sententia, inquit, ea est quae neque amicos parat neque inimicos tollit. (Tit. Liv. IX 3)

'...he replied: **That is just the policy which** neither procures friends nor rids us of enemies'.¹⁰

⁸ "The term *relative connexion* refers to the use of relative expressions (pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, or relative phrases) to connect independent sentences. [...] Grammars often describe the relationship between a connective relative sentence and the preceding sentence as additive (*qui = et is*), adversative (*qui = sed is*), causal (*qui = is enim*), etc. However, sentences with *qui* differ from those with *is* (and those with *hic* and *ille*, and without a pronominal subject) in a number of ways" (Pinkster 2021: 555 with references). E.g. *Agonis quaedam est Lilybitana, liberta Veneris Erycinae, quae mulier ante hunc quaestorem copiosa plane et locuples fuit.* "There is a certain woman from Lilybaeum, named Agonis, formerly a slave of Venus of Eryx. **This woman**, in the days before Caecilius was quaestor, had very considerable wealth and property." (Cic. Div. Caec. 55, quoted from Pinkster 2021: 525).

⁹ Translated by J. C. Rolfe (1929).

¹⁰ Translated by C. Roberts (1912).

(14c)

Haec duo Graeci illi, quorum copiosior est lingua quam nostra, uno nomine appellant. (Cic. Tusc. II 35).

‘Both these feelings [i.e. Lat. *labor* and *dolor*], the Greeks, whose language is more copious than ours, express by the common name [of Πόνοϛ]’.¹¹

It is interesting to note that restrictive RCs are usually preceded by a pronoun in the main clause, displaying a sort of reinforcement of the anaphoric link between the two clauses and forcing a restrictive reading in semantic terms. In **(14c)** the demonstrative *illi* is used anaphorically, more precisely in linear terms it is the cataphora to the relative pronoun which follows and is attached to it. Moreover, this also could trigger an even more restrictive reading of the sentence, which could otherwise be translated as ‘those Greek whose language...’; thus, not all the Greeks, but only a part of them. In any case, according to the typology seen above, in these cases they are RCs of Type I, with an explicit relative pronoun and also an anticipatory element in the main clause.

On the other side, the following RC must be interpreted as non-restrictive:

(15a) *Servate modo quos ignominia irritaveritis!* (Tit. Liv. IX 3)

‘Once let men whom you have exasperated by ignominious treatment live [and you will find out your mistake]’¹²

(15b) *Ea est Romana gens quae victa quiescere nesciat.* (Tit. Liv. IX 3)

‘The Romans are a nation who know not how to remain quiet under defeat’.

(15c) *O fortunate adulescens qui tuae virtutis Homerum praeconem inveneris.* (Cic. Pro Arch. 24)

¹¹ Translated by C.D. Yonge (1867).

¹² This passage immediately follows that in (14b), being in turn followed by text reported in 15b. Square brackets indicates a translator’s adding.

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‘Fortunate youth, to have found in Homer a herald of your valour!’¹³

This second group shows a different use of the relative, which adds information but behaves syntactically more freely with regards to the main clause. In (15a), as well as in (15c), the phenomenon of the ellipsis of the demonstrative can be observed: the form *quos* stands for *eos quos*, while the form *qui* is linked to an underlying *tu* ‘you’ expressed by the vocative case. Moreover, the example in (15c) may perhaps be added to the group of restrictive RCs, as it corresponds to them in terms of syntactic structure.

3. Ancient perspectives on Latin RCs

3.1 Metalinguistic developments and intertwining

Metalinguistic issues are of primary importance in the definition of any *relative* expression: first of all, it is crucial to keep in mind that the Latin term *relativum* corresponds to at least three Greek terms whose meaning are involved each time depending on the context. The Greek terms are: ὑποτακτικός, ‘post-positive’, but also ‘subordinative’, ἀναφορικός ‘anaphoric’, ‘relative’, and πρὸς τι, litt. ‘towards sth.’, that is ‘relative’ again. A Latin term, in particular, serves as an alternative terminology for these concepts: it is *subiunctivum*, which is a structural calque of ὑποτακτικός and is also used in the sense of post-positive (or post-poned).¹⁴

It is worth briefly mentioning one point in the classification of the PoS (Parts of Speech) that is particularly relevant to the definition of ‘rel-

¹³ Translated by N.H. Watts (1928), slightly modified. More literally: ‘Fortunate young man who has found in Homer a herald of your valor’.

¹⁴ This terminology sprung from both the philosophical and the grammatical tradition: in particular, the concept of πρὸς τι derives from Aristotle, whereas ὑποτακτικός and ἀναφορικός are found in Apollonius Dyscolus, as well as other grammarians. For a discussion on the origin of these terms and the different traditions, see Merlin Defanti (2020a); for the Latin correspondences, see Merlin Defanti (2020b).

ative': in Priscian, in contrast to the tradition of grammarians inspired by Donatus' model, the classification of *qu-* forms (*qui* and *quis*) follows the one proposed for the Greek language by Apollonius Dyscolus, who was Priscian's theoretical model (*Ars Grammatica* 2010: 9–57). According to Apollonius, the Greek language displays two types of articles (ἄρθρα): the prepositional article ὁ, ἡ, τό, 'the', which corresponds to the modern definite or determinative article, and the postpositive (or subjunctive) article ὃς, ἣ, ὅ, 'who, which, that', which is the relative pronoun. Indefinites, on the other hand, such as τις, 'someone, something', the orthotonic interrogative form τίς 'who? what?' but also the relative-indefinite ὅστις, ἣτις, ὅτι 'whoever, whatever', being devoid of the main feature of pronouns and articles, namely the feature of definiteness, do not belong to either of these classes, but are instead nouns.

Priscian, describing Latin, a language without articles, is therefore confronted with the need to re-modulate an existing terminology created for a structurally different language, namely Greek: he takes important terminological steps, abandoning the term 'article', except in the exercise of associating the demonstrative *hic, haec, hoc*, 'this', with nouns to make their gender explicit. Both formal and semantic properties are considered in the analysis: for example, in *Inst.* XII, 582, it is claimed that Latin demonstratives *hic, haec, hoc* are similar to the Greek post-positive article ὃς, ἣ, ὅ, because of the initial vowel and the aspiration. However, Priscian continues, the Latin demonstratives *hic, haec, hoc* correspond to the Greek demonstratives ὅτος, αὐτή, τούτο 'this', and not to articles, since this category is missing in the Latin language. Yet, as Priscian testifies, there was a custom in school teaching to use them as articles in declension exercises.

As discussed in Merlin Defanti (2020b), Priscian finds the comparison of Latin and Greek a demanding and difficult task as far as *qu-* forms, such as *quis* and *qui*, are concerned. He recognizes the correspondence of *qui* with ὃς only by going through the intermediate comparison with ὅστις on the basis of a morphological confrontation with τις, which is entirely correct from the point of view of IE etymology (being both derived from a mixture of the indefinite and interrogative stem $k^w i-$ with the interrogative – which also served as relative – stem $*k^w o$). The functional use of the Latin relative *qui* as the Greek

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relative ὅς comes then through the observation that ὅς in Greek can be used in place of ὅστις.

This is summarized by the following passage.

Priscian, XVII, 125

qui uero, quod interpretatur ὅστις (quod est subiunctiuus articulus cum nomine infinito apud illos, apud nos uero una pars et simplex, quae relatiua est τοῦ quis infiniti uel interrogatiui), potest subiunctiui loco articuli accipi, quomodo et Graeci τὸ ὅστις frequentissime ponunt loco ὅς articuli subiunctiui, nisi in diuidendis: in illis enim nec nos qui nec illi ὅστις ferunt.

In fact *qui*, with the meaning of ὅστις (which is a post-positive article combined with an indefinite noun in Greek, but in Latin is a single inseparable word, anaphoric with *quis* indefinite or interrogative), can be used instead of a post-positive article, in the same way the Greeks very frequently use ὅστις instead of the post-positive article ὅς, except in the correlative structures: in these cases, actually, neither we use *qui* nor they ὅστις.¹⁵

The study of pronouns is especially addressed by Priscian in Books XII and XVII, where the grammarian takes up the theory of the distinction between demonstrative and relative pronouns: first- and second-person personal pronouns are always demonstrative because they are the participants in the communication, that is, they are present and related to the *hic et nunc* verbal interaction. Third-person pronouns can be demonstrative or relative depending on the context: for example, *ille* is demonstrative in sentences like *Viden tu illum, Thais?* ('Don't you see him, Thais?'), but it is relative in *Sic Iuppiter ille monebat* ('So *that* Iuppiter was admonishing', with *ille* having here a reinforcing function, similar to *iste*, which may be interpreted as 'Iuppiter in person').¹⁶

¹⁵ The correlative structures are, e.g., *alius...alius*, οἱ μὲν... οἱ δέ.

¹⁶ Both examples, from Terentius and Vergil, respectively, are quoted by Priscian, *Inst.* XII, 578.

A fundamental syntactic observation comes from another passage, in which Priscian emphasizes a peculiarity of *qui*, namely the fact that it requires a second verb for the sentence to be complete.

Priscian, XVII, 127

hoc idem, id est qui, quotiens subiungitur nomini, quomodo ὅς apud Graecos, necesse est non solum ad nomen praepositum, sed etiam ad id subiunctum alterum uerbum proferri, ut uirum cano, qui uenit. si nominatiuo nominatiuus adiungitur, ad eandem personam uerba referuntur: homo uenit, qui scripsit; sin duo obliqui sunt, ad aliam personam transitio fit uerborum uel in se recipitur, ut hominem, quem uitupero, accuso et memet, quem uitupero, accuso [...]

This same word, i.e. *qui*, whenever is related to a noun, likewise ὅς in Greek, requires to be linked not only to the selected noun, but also to the second verb dependent to this noun, as in the sentence ‘I celebrate the man who came’. If a nominative is added to a nominative, verbs refer to the same person: ‘a man came, who wrote’; if there are two oblique cases, a transition of verb occurs or a reciprocal voice, as in the man (ACC), whom I blame, I accuse’, and ‘myself (ACC), whom I blame, I accuse’; [...].

In the immediately preceding passage, Priscian had discussed the fact that *quis* and *qui* belong to the same class of relatives, along with *qualis* and *quantus*, for a morphological reason, as detailed in Book XII, too. All of these forms share the property of anaphora (*relatio*), i.e. textual reference to something already mentioned in speech. The passage, then, continues with a series of examples in which the relative pronoun is found in the case required by its function in the sentence.¹⁷

To sum up, Latin grammars of Late antiquity and early Middle Ages do not identify relative pronouns – as we understand them today – as a separate PoS or word class. In Priscian’s classification, directly connected to Apollonius’s Greek model, but also in the writings depending to the *Artes* of Donatus, the forms of *qui* are described together with other forms, such as the indefinite and interrogative *quis*,

¹⁷ Here the grammarian argues about *transitio uerborum* and, modernly speaking, argument alternation. On this point, see in particular Meneghel 2020.

the correlatives *qualis, quantus*, etc. All these forms share some morphological similarities and especially a syntactic and semantic-pragmatic property, namely anaphora. From a metalinguistic perspective, *relatio* and its adjective *relativus* are the loan translation (or calques) of the Greek term ἀναφορά, which is part of a complex theory involving the notions of intra-linguistic and extra-linguistic reference and finds its roots in Greek grammar (Merlin Defanti 2020a).

3.2 Evidence from Medieval texts

Medieval authors, both of grammatical texts (e.g., *Excerptiones super Priscianum* by Alcuin of York, 8th c. CE) and of other genres, use the expression *pronomem relativum* in the way they inherit it from the earlier grammatical tradition.

For the present research, a first survey has been conducted in the *Cross Database Searchtool* (Brepolis)¹⁸, which finds 41 occurrences of *pronom* relativ** in Medieval authors¹⁹, including the names, among others, of Alcuin of York, Sedulius Scottus, Peter Abelard, Peter Helias, Thomas Aquinas, William of Ockham, and Jean Buridan. Another search was conducted for the collocation *alterum verbum* which is found in Priscian (see Section 3.1) with reference to the syntax of relative pronouns: such a collocation is attested 17 times, some in the form of comments to the above-mentioned Priscian's passage, some others dealing with lexical choices (e.g. *facio* and *fio* as the active and passive voices respectively of the verb for 'to make'), or, more interestingly from a syntactic perspective, with conjunctions (e.g. the conjunction *et*, 'and', needs a second verb). A reflection on the fact that both relative pronouns and conjunctions as *et* require a second verb is surely an insight into awareness of the complex sentence: in modern terms, the former would be a dependent, the latter a coordinate clause. It cannot be said that the ancient grammarians expressed this distinction in such clear and peremptory terms. However, at the descriptive level, the idea of complex sentence is not lacking in the

¹⁸ Last accessed on March, 30th, 2025. The access to the database was provided from the University of Verona institutional account.

¹⁹ The period selected for the search is *Medii aevi scriptores* (736–1500).

ancient description, but it is not theorized as a linguistic problem in its own right.²⁰

The question of relatives is also addressed from a philosophical perspective, both by scholars of medieval Scholasticism and by philosophers of language interested in semiotic aspects related to reference in the history of linguistic thought.

Kneepkens (1976), discussing on the opposing concepts of *relatio simplex* and *relatio personalis*, states that “The distinction between the both kinds of *relatio*, *secundum identitatem personae* and *secundum identitatem naturae*, is neither a grammatical nor a theological one. It was derived from the results of the reflexions made in the discussions on the *universalia*: so it is a philosophical one [...]” (Kneepkens 1976: 9, see also Kneepkens 1977). The starting point of the discussion is the expression *Mulier, quae damnavit, salvavit*, lit. ‘the woman who condemns also saves’, the sense being ‘woman saves and at the same time condemns’, in which the relative *quae* refers to *mulier* not expressing the singularity of a person (the word *mulier* refers in fact to two different women as extra-linguistic referents, namely Eve and Mary of the Holy Scripture), but instead showing a connection with a general meaning of the word *mulier* itself, which should be interpreted as a kind of abstract concept, namely the muliebrity or womanhood.

Rosier (1985: 4) summarized the differences between relatives of substance (*qui, ille, alius*) and relatives of accident (*talis, qualis, tantus*). For each of the two classes, one further distinguishes identity from diversity (or non-identity) forms: relative nouns (as *qui, quod*), relative pronouns (as *ille, idem*), and reciprocals (as *sui, sibi, se*) are expression of the identity, whereas correlative structures such as *alius... alius* display the diversity of the referents. This kind of distinctions, of primary importance for logicians, is in fact much less explored by grammarians, who are on the contrary more interested in linguistic structures, somehow detached from truth values of propositions. This difference between the logical-philosophical and the linguistic-grammatical approaches runs through Western linguistic thought from its origins, with some exponents having a greater emphasis on one of

²⁰ For this distinction between naïve and theoretical syntax I refer to G. Graffi’s research (Graffi 1994 onwards) and to a series of personal communications with A. Rizza whom I gratefully acknowledge.

the two (for example, in Greek antiquity, the Stoics had a logical approach, while Apollonius had a linguistic one). During the Middle Ages, the legacy of both approaches became increasingly dense and complex, and for the modern scholar it is a matter of unravelling the knots of transmission that we may encounter in the thought of authors who were at once logicians, grammarians and theologians.

4. Open questions and final remarks

In general, with or without an explicit reference to Tesnière (1959), RCs are nowadays considered as a specific subclass of dependent clauses, whose peculiarity is to be dependent on a nominal expression, either a NP or a sentence (S) considered in its entirety. In a semantic and pragmatic perspective, restrictive RCs are usually separated from non-restrictive RCs. Languages of the world display different relativization strategies, identifiable in the taxonomy proposed by Comrie and Kuteva (2013), involving I) relative pronoun, II) non-reduction, III) pronoun retention, and, finally, IV) gap (See Section 1.2.). Latin RCs can be analyzed according to all the four types – apart from the fact that the gap strategy is rarely attested and only in late period: in any case, Latin RCs are normally introduced by a relative pronoun such as *qui, quae, quod*, ‘who, which’, also admitting some syntactic peculiarities traditionally known as ellipsis of the demonstrative, case attraction, and prolepsis of the relative.

Despite the so special status of relative pronouns in today’s taxonomies and grammatical descriptions, ancient and medieval grammarians do not separate those forms from other *relativa*, which instead belong to the modern class of correlative, anaphoric, and demonstrative – both pronouns and adjectives. In other terms, relative pronouns have remained associated for a long time with all the other forms of anaphoric resumption especially represented e.g. by *idem*, ‘the same’, *ille*, ‘that’, and of correlation, e.g. *alii...alii*, ‘some...others’, *talis...qualis*, ‘such...as’ etc. In this sense the class of relatives is a broad class, including pronouns and nouns unified by the property of *relatio* (which inherits the concept and the terminology of the Greek ἀναφορά), namely linking and connection.

The Latin *qui* has been recognized - albeit together with other forms - as a relative since the work of Priscian, who classified it as a noun rather than a pronoun because it lacked the property of definiteness, describing both its morphological form and its syntactic uses, focusing in particular on the fact that such a relative needs a second verb (section 3.1). However, this essential observation did not pave the way for an in-depth analysis of complex sentences throughout the medieval tradition, partly because a general theory of dependency had not been developed yet. This confirms that the investigation of complex sentences, and in particular the description of dependency, was still a long way off and would take on its full theoretical form only in a later period, i.e. from Port-Royal onwards.

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