Equative elements and relative clauses

Julia Bacskai-Atkari
(University of Potsdam)

In my talk, I examine the status of equative elements in relative constructions, concentrating on the interrelatedness of three constructions: ordinary degree equatives, non-degree equatives (including hypothetical comparatives), and relatives clauses (with a special focus on free relatives). The English equative complementiser *as* and its German cognate *als* (both deriving from *so*, cf. Kortmann 1977 for English and Jäger 2010 for German) are attested in all the three types diachronically and partly also synchronically, and similar phenomena can be detected in the case of Hungarian *mint* 'as'. I argue that the appearance of equative elements in relative constructions is possible because (i) equative elements may appear in non-degree constructions (such as non-degree comparisons and hypothetical comparatives), and (ii) the matrix equative element expresses equation but not necessarily degree, depending on whether it takes a gradable predicate in its specifier.

Degree equatives have two major meaning components: expressing similarity and equation. Expressing similarity involves the comparison of two entities along some lexical predicate, while equation involves identifying an entity with another one. In degree equatives, there is a gradable predicate (an AP or an NP) associated with two entities, and the two degrees are identical (e.g. *Ralph is as tall as Peter* – the gradable predicate is *tall*, Ralph and Peter are similar in their tallness, Ralph is tall to degree *d* and Peter is tall to degree *d'*, and *d=d'*). On the one hand, the expression of similarity can appear in non-degree equatives as well (e.g. *Ralph is tall, as is Peter*), and this is reflected in hypothetical comparatives as well (e.g. *Mary was pale, as if she had seen a ghost*). On the other hand, equation is not tied to the presence of a degree and can thus appear in constructions where some kind of identification (between two entities or events) is expressed, as can be observed in various kinds of relative clauses. In Old High German, free relatives of the form *so* + WH + *so* (e.g. *so wer so* 'who, whoever') are well attested (see Jäger 2010, based on Paul 1920 and Behaghel 1982), but the element *so* was licensed even in cases where there was a matrix NP (see Brandner & Bräuning 2013), and the subclause was again introduced by *als* 'as'. As shown by my corpus study on the King James Bible, similar patterns involving a matrix *such* and a relative clause introduced by *as* are well attested in Early Modern English free relatives, and do in fact survive into Present-Day English in certain dialects (Kortmann & Wagner 2007).

I argue that similarity is expressed only by the subclause but not by the matrix equative element, which is why the absence of the matrix elements still render grammatical configurations expressing (non-degree) similarity. The absence of a gradable predicate in the matrix clause is subject to cross-linguistic variation, and while the equative element selects the same kind of complement clause (introduced by *as*/*als*) as in degree equatives, the gradable predicate is absent from the subclause as well. Hence, relative clauses taken by equative elements are minimally different from degree equatives in that the gradable argument of the equative head is absent in teh case of relative clause constructions.

References

Behaghel, Otto (1982) *Deutsche Syntax: Eine geschichtliche Darstellung III*. Heidelberg: Winter.

Brandner, Ellen & Iris Bräuning (2013) The particle *wo* in Alemannic: Only a complementizer? *Linguistische Berichte* 234. 131–169.

Jäger, Agnes (2010) Der Komparativzyklus und die Position der Vergleichspartikeln. *Linguistische Berichte* 224. 467–493.

Kortmann, Bernd (1997) *Adverbial subordination: A typology and history of adverbial subordinators based on European languages*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Kortmann, Bernd and Susanne Wagner (2007) A fresh look at Late Modern English dialect syntax. In: Javier Pérez-Guerra (ed.) *"Of varying language and opposing creed": New insights into Late Modern English*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Paul, Hermann (1920) *Deutsche Grammatik III: Syntax*. Halle: Niemeyer.