

The Nonrestrictive Relative *That*

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Abstract Today, normally the relative *that* is not used in nonrestrictive relative clauses. But, even today there are times when one comes across the relative *that* used nonrestrictively. In fact, one sees it surprisingly often, especially in BrE. Historically, in nonrestrictive clauses, not only *which* but also *that* has been used for hundreds of years, but early in the 20th century, using *that* nonrestrictively ceased to be popular, although writers like D. H. Lawrence continued using it.

The objective of my article is to point out that, despite its limited instances, the nonrestrictive *that* has been used in much the same way as *which*. To be specific, *which* has been used in nonrestrictive clauses when its antecedents are definite, indefinite, and when the antecedents have general reference, and all of this seems to have been the case with *that* too. The antecedents of the nonrestrictive *which* are noun phrases, adjective phrases, verb phrases, part of the previous clause, or a whole clause, and *that* seems to take the same kinds of antecedents as *which*. My study is based upon more than sixty examples of the nonrestrictive relative *that* ranging from the beginning of the 20th century to the present.

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1. Introduction

Today, the relative *that* used in a nonrestrictive clause like (1a) is ungrammatical. In cases like this, *which* is used like (1b).

- (1) a. *He lives in Paris, *that* I visited three years ago.
 b. He lives in Paris, *which* I visited three years ago.

In writing, in nonrestrictive relative clauses, the relatives and their antecedents are separated by such markers as commas, dashes or parentheses. The existence of these markers makes the relation between the relatives and their antecedents less close, and it makes the information to be conveyed by the nonrestrictive relative clauses additional and supplementary. Since these clauses are additional and supplementary, they can be excised without changing the meanings of the antecedents. This is the case whether the antecedents are humans or things. And when the antecedents are things, today *which* is used in nonrestrictive relative clauses in almost all cases. However, although far fewer in number, there are certainly cases in which *that* is used in nonrestrictive clauses.

The objective of this article is to argue that, in nonrestrictive relative clauses, when the antecedents are things, *that* has been used so far in ways that corre-

spond to *which*. In this paper, I will first give an overview of the nonrestrictive *that* and then touch upon the extent to which the relative *that* has been used until now. Next, I will show that the nonrestrictive relative *that* has been used in much the same way as *which* at least over the last hundred years.

2. Overview

Formerly, in nonrestrictive relative clauses, *that* and *which* were equally used. The *OED 2* offers 15 instances of the nonrestrictive *that*, the earliest instance of which is from King Alfred's *Orosius* (9th century) and the latest one is from Robert Bridges's poem (19th century). One can see the examples of *that* in nonrestrictive clauses in Oliver Goldsmith (1730?-74) and Thackeray (1811-63)¹.

- (2) a. Age, *that* lessens the enjoyment of life, increases our desire of living.

(Oliver Goldsmith)

- b. And with my own little stock of money besides, *that* Mrs. Hoggarty's card-parties had lessened by a good five-and-twenty shillings, I calculated.... (Thackeray)

In the 20th century *that* began to be used less and less in nonrestrictive relative clauses, and soon it was replaced by *which* almost in all cases. But even in the

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20th century, it is well-known that writers like D. H. Lawrence made frequent use of the relative *that* in nonrestrictive clauses²:

- (3) a. Do you know the little red ovary flowers,
that produce the nuts? (*Women in Love*)
b. ... she must always work small things, *that*
one can put between one's hands, birds and
tiny animals. (*Women in Love*)

Even today, despite the fact that it is no longer popular to use *that* in nonrestrictive clauses, one comes across its instances surprisingly often. Huddleston and Pullum (2002:1052) give four instances of the nonrestrictive relative *that*, and Biber et al. (1999:615) give three instances. And even a cursory glance at the BNC and the Wordbanks will reveal more than a dozen instances of it. The instances of this relative can also be seen in *The Economist*, the British economic magazine, or in a newspaper:

- (4) a. Their creation was a reaction to the McCain-Feingold campaign-finance law of 2002, which ... prohibited parties from raising "soft" money to support issue campaigns (*that* just so happen³ to nail your opponent).
(*The Economist*, May 22nd 2004, p.32)
b. One of our boundaries, *that* have always been immutable, is the boundary that separates the fans from the court. (AP)
(*The Daily Yomiuri*, Nov. 23, 2004)

Or one can see it in a magazine article:

- (5) "But we've never had one (= an outbreak of influenza) like this, *that* covered nine countries with more than 150 million birds dead or culled."
(*Reader's Digest*, Oct. 2005, p. 22)

Or one can find it in academic articles:

- (6) a. This civil-rights ethos in language planning was also behind the 1975 amendment to the Voting Rights Act, *that* provided bilingual ballots and bilingual voting materials...
(*English Today*, July 2004, p.17)
b. Individual factors associated with these changes, *that* may lead to malnutrition, are: ...
(*Nursing Studies*, March 2004, p.227)
c. Based on the limited evidence provided within the present work, *that* previously reported and from experience in the U.S.A., these concerns appear to be unfounded.
(*Physiotherapy*, June 2004, p.70)

All of the instances in (6) are confined to BrE. But there is also an instance in AmE :

- (7) A great deal of the limited energy available to

the ego is thus consumed in ceaseless adjudication between one party, *that* would empty life of pleasure, and the other, *that* would rob it of safety. (*Atlantic Monthly*, July 1961, p.69)

Overall, in addition to the *OED* 2, Huddleston and Pullum (2002:1052) (four instances of the nonrestrictive relative *that*), and Biber et al. (1999:615) (three instances), I have 58 instances of the nonrestrictive relative *that*, which range from 1910 to 2005. Their breakdown is as follows: 14 instances from the *Blackwood's Magazine* (Jan. 1910, Jan. 1930, July 1931, Jan. 1950, July-Dec. 1971), 15 instances from *The English Review* (Jan. 1910, Jan. 1930, July 1931), four instances from *The Economist* (July 3rd 2004, June 12th 2004, May 22nd 2004, July 3rd 2004), two instances from the *Atlantic Monthly* (July 1931), three instances from academic articles (2004), one instance from *The Daily Yomiuri* (2004), one instance from the *Reader's Digest* (2005), 13 instances from the BNC, one instance from the Wordbanks and four instances from the COBUILD ON CD-ROM. My own observations in the following are mainly predicated on these instances from 1910 to 2005.

3. The Relative *That* in Nonrestrictive Clauses

There are three cases in which the nonrestrictive relative *that* is used. That is, it is used when its antecedents are definite, when its antecedents are indefinite, and when its antecedents have generic reference.

3.1 Definiteness, indefiniteness and generic reference of the antecedents

3.1.1 Definite antecedents

Which can be used in nonrestrictive clauses when its antecedents are definite noun phrases like *the car*, *my book* and *the Hilton Hotel*. These noun phrases have already been identified, they are given information, and therefore their meanings do not have to be redefined by the restrictive relative clauses that follow.

- (8) a. I bought *the car*, *which* cost me a lot of money.
b. He borrowed *my book*, *which* he hasn't returned to me yet.
c. He's staying at *the Hilton Hotel*, *which* lies near the station.

That also takes such antecedents:

- (9) a. Then he, too, ascended *the stairs*, *that* creaked and groaned under his weight.
(*The English Review*, Jan. 1910, p.273)
b. Microsoft is also pushing *its own next-generation*

DVD technology, that competes with rival technologies from Japan's Matsushita, NEC, Toshiba and others.

(*The Economist*, June 3rd-9th 2004, p. 55)

- c. *His heart, that* had lifted at the sight of Joanna, had become suddenly heavy at the sight of Ramdez thumping after her.

(Huddleston and Pullum 2002:1052)

- d. It was only later I discovered that *my swallow and house-martin, that* had fed on flies near my cows, had been drastically reduced in number.

(*Blackwood's Magazine*, July-Dec. 1971, p. 77)

- e. Birchwood brought along the twin-engine version of their TS340 to Poole but there is *another layout option, that* might appeal to a couple, of swapping the guest cabin for a dinette that converts to a double berth.

(COBUILD ON CD-ROM)

- f. One announces that ... *two sorts of beer (that* are popularly supposed to be rivals but which the "City" knows to be "interlocking") are respectively and indisputably "the Best."

(*The English Review*, Jan. 1930, p.93)

3.1.2 Indefinite antecedents

With regard to noun phrases like *a car* or *some nurses* or *friends*, *a car* is indefinite of course because an indefinite article is used, and *some nurses* or *friends* are indefinite because they do not pinpoint the exact numbers and are not clearly defined. Swan (1995:495) says that non-identifying clauses can be used after indefinite noun phrases like *a car* or *some nurses* or *friends*, as well as after definite noun phrases like *the car*, *this house*, *my father* or *Mrs Lewis*. Swan says further that after such indefinite noun phrases like *a new car* and *some nurses*, both the restrictive and nonrestrictive relatives can be used. He gives the following instances:

- (10) a. He's got *a new car that* goes like a bomb.
b. He's got *a new car, which* goes like a bomb.

- (11) a. We became friendly with *some nurses that* John had met in Paris.
b. We became friendly with *some nurses, whom* John had met in Paris.

Regarding the choice between a restrictive clause and a nonrestrictive one, Swan says that when the information a relative clause provides is felt to be most important in conveying the message, a restrictive clause is chosen, and that when this is not the case, a nonrestrictive one is chosen.

The following are my instances in which the antecedents of the nonrestrictive relative *that* are indefinite:

- (12) a. The Macintosh PowerBook Duo 230 4/80 is *a slimline portable notebook, that* transforms itself onto a powerful desktop computer.... (COBUILD ON CD-ROM)

- b. *An extremely realistic and detailed game system, that* contains everything you'll ever want from a game, plus much, much more!!! (COBUILD ON CD-ROM)

- c. In local TV markets the firm now uses *a combination of electric meters, that* record which channels sets are tuned to, and paper diaries....

(*The Economist*, June 12th-18th 2004, p.60)

- d. He gazed at the yellow, stained wall with all the spots which *dead bugs, that* had once crawled, had left. (Biber et al. 1999:615)

- e. She was there, standing free in *terrible empty spaces, that* had been cleared for the passage of the coffin.

(*The English Review*, Jan. 1910, p. 316)

3.1.3 Generic reference of the antecedents

Quirk et al. (1985:1239) say that an antecedent that has generic reference is followed by a nonrestrictive relative, and they give the following example. Here, the *which*-clause is a general statement of the giant panda:

- (13) *The giant panda, which* is to be found in the remote parts of China, lives exclusively on bamboo shoots.

The antecedents that have generic reference have already been identified and do not have to be restricted in their meanings by the restrictive relative clauses, which may be why the nonrestrictive relatives are chosen in these cases. The following are examples of the nonrestrictive *that* the antecedents of which have generic reference, and in these examples, each *that*-clause states the general characteristics of the antecedents:

- (14) a. *The pantan monkey, that* spends almost all of its time in open grassland, adopts just such tactics.

(Huddleston and Pullum 2002:1052)

- b. *February, that* in other years held intimations of spring, this year prolonged the bitter weather.

(Huddleston and Pullum 2002:1052)

- c. *Geology, that* was always of the earth, earthy, has lost even its old attraction of

blasphemy....

(*The English Review*, Jan. 1931, p. 183)

- d. *Birds like the robin or linnet or chaffinch or thrush or sparrow, that perch as a rule upon small branches, have no need of great contrasting colours....*

(*The English Review*, Jan. 1910, p.225)

- e. It is possible that *daws and starlings, that doubtless gained immunity from attack through accompanying rooks, have become dark through sympathy as it were....*

(*The English Review*, Jan. 1910, p. 234)

3.2 The referents of the nonrestrictive relative *that*

The antecedents of the nonrestrictive relative *which* are noun phrases, adjective phrases, verb phrases, part of the clause, or a whole clause. In (15a) the antecedent of *which* is a noun phrase, in (15b) it is a verb phrase, and in (15c), it is a whole sentence:

- (15) a. *The next bus, which is to arrive at nine, did not come.*
 b. He was determined *to pass the exam, which he eventually did.*
 c. *He missed the plane, which made him unhappy.*

This is also the case with *that*. For instance, the antecedents in (2a,b), (4a,b), (5), (6a-c), (7), (9a-f), (12a-e), (13) and (14a-e) are examples in which the antecedents are noun phrases. In (16), the antecedent of *that* is also a noun phrase, but in this case the antecedent comprises two noun phrases: "the quiet pride in their calling and steely determination to achieve."

- (16) Full of the quiet humour that characterises the firm's directors, the various essays are also imbued with *the quiet pride in their calling and steely determination to achieve, that the best amongst the world's dealers all share.*
 (COBUILD ON CD-ROM)

In (17) and (18), the antecedents are other than noun phrases. In (17), the antecedent of *that* is the state of being "wore out" (= worn out), and in (18a-e), the antecedents are the whole clauses that precede *that*:

- (17) I'm *wore out, that's* what I am, with trying to keep a rag
 (*The English Review*, Jan. 1910, p. 323)
- (18) a. *I'm always going myself away, that* was how he thought of it. (BNC)
 b. *Added to the sweeteners they'd have to pay back, that* would mean a deficit of nearly 130 m. (BNC)
 c. *Just sit there and look out, that's* what you

look onto. (BNC)

- d. ... over to the general election and *they vote Democratic, that* could help Clinton.

(Wordbanks)

- e. *There's no defence, that* I can see.

(*The English Review*, Jan. 1910, p.300)

3.3 The cases of the nonrestrictive relative *that*

The nonrestrictive relative *which* is used as subject, object, or as complement, of which it is as subject that *which* is used most often.

- (19) a. He lives in New York, *which* is a big city.
 (subject)
 b. He taught me how to drive a car, *which* I could not do before. (object)
 c. She said she was kind, *which* I don't think she was. (complement)

This applies to *that* on the whole. For instance, of the examples in this article, (2a), (3a), (4a,b), (5), (6a-c), (7), (9a-f), (12a-e), (14a-e), (17) and (18a-d) are all examples in which *that* is subject, whereas (2b), (3b), (16) and (18e) are all examples in which *that* is object.⁴

4. Conclusion

I have argued that, when the antecedents are things, the nonrestrictive relative *that* has been used in much the same way as the nonrestrictive relative *which* over the last hundred years. This way of using the relative *that* might be a remnant of those days when *that* and *which* were equally used in nonrestrictive relative clauses. And this remnant seems to be surviving more conspicuously in BrE than in AmE, although it can never be said with certainty because I have not investigated each and every instance of the nonrestrictive relative *that* in BrE and AmE that appears over the past hundred years. But should this observation be to the point, it would show the conservatism of BrE.

Notes

1. Quoted in the *Webster's Dictionary of English Usage*, p.894.
2. D. H. Lawrence used both *that* and *which* in nonrestrictive relative clauses.
3. The fact that here the -s is not added to the verb "happen" in *that just so happen* may indicate that here *that* is a nonrestrictive relative whose antecedent is "issue campaigns," and that it is not a printing error in this magazine.
4. Unfortunately an instance in which *that* is used as complement was not found this time.

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