

## Chapter 3



### Relative Pronouns and Their Deletion

#### 3.1 Similarities and Differences between Relative Pronouns in English and in Thai

The investigation shows that Thai students often make a wrong choice of relative pronouns in English. Thus a comparison between relative pronouns in English and in Thai will be made in order to detect similarities and differences which may account for the mistakes found.

In English, there are more than seven forms of relative pronouns, i.e. who, whom, whose, which, that, when, where,<sup>1</sup> in Thai there are three, i.e. thîi, sŷn, ?an.

According to Jacobs and Rosenbaum, the form of the relative pronoun used depends upon the features of the deleted noun in the noun phrase<sup>2</sup> as can be seen in the following chart:

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<sup>1</sup>Only these seven relative pronouns dealt with by Jacobs and Rosenbaum (Jacobs and Rosenbaum, op. cit., pp. 202-9) will be compared with relative pronouns in Thai.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 202.

English Relative Pronoun	Features and Function of the Deleted Noun	Examples
who	<+human> subject	(27) the child who is ill
	<+human> object	(28) the child who Carol spanked
whom	<+human> object	(29) the child whom Carol spanked
whose	<+human> genitive	(30) the child whose father is ill
which	<-human> subject	(31) the book which is there
	<-human> object	(32) the book which I like
that	<+human> subject	(33) the child that is ill
	<+human> object	(34) the child that Carol spanked
	<-human> subject	(35) the book that is there
	<-human> object	(36) the book that I like

The words "when" and "where", in their function as a relative pronoun, are always at the front of a clause modifying a noun which has the features <+ time> and <+ place> respectively,<sup>3</sup> for example

(37) the day when John came (day has the feature <+ time> )

(38) the house where I live (house has the feature <+ place> )

It seems that the application of the relative pronouns in Thai does not depend on the features of the deleted noun but rather on contexts.<sup>4</sup> Thus the choice of thîi, sŷn, ?an in Thai is usually determined by the context in which they appear. On this basis, it is obvious that when Thai students learn to use relative pronouns in English, they will be greatly confused by their forms and especially by their application. It is likely that Thai students often use the relative pronouns in English wrongly because they fail to observe the features of the deleted noun and its function in the relative clause which determine the choice of the relative pronoun in English. However, it also seems that they usually choose the relative pronoun having the same features and function as the antecedent:

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>4</sup>The author has observed that thîi is most widely used in all contexts both in spoken and written language. However, sŷn and ?an are usually used in formal or semi-formal contexts.

- (39) \*Emily decided to sell her car to George Smith which was a well-known artist. (Who should be used as the deleted noun 'George Smith' has the feature <+human> and functions as the subject of the relative clause.)
- (40) \*My friends and I are going on an excursion to Chiang-mai which three of my friends live. (Where should be used because 'Chiangmai,' the noun modified, has the feature <+place> .)
- (41) \*I will go to my uncle's house where is at Chantaburi. (It seems that the student is misled by the antecedent 'house' and also 'Chantaburi' which have the feature <+ place> and fails to note that the relative pronoun to use must function as the subject of the relative clause.)

Mistakes concerning the use of inappropriate relative pronouns may be classified as follows:

1. incorrect relative pronouns instead of who

1.1 whom

(43) \*My mother had a friend whom was a dentist.

1.2 whose

(44) \*My brother whose climbed after me grasped my hand.

1.3 which

(39) \*Emily decided to sell her car to George Smith which was a well-known artist.

2. which instead of whom

(45) \*The person which I admire most, is Lincoln.

### 3. incorrect relative pronouns instead of whose

#### 3.1 whose + possessive adjective

- (46) \*John Brown whose his office is on the fortieth floor of a skyscraper went to see a book publisher.

#### 3.2 who + possessive adjective

- (47) \*John Brown who his office is on the fortieth floor of a skyscraper went to see a book publisher.

#### 3.3 whom

- (48) \*John Brown whom office is on the fortieth floor of a skyscraper went to see a book publisher.

#### 3.4 whom + possessive adjective

- (49) \*John Brown whom his office is on the fortieth floor of a skyscraper went to see a book publisher.

#### 3.5 that + possessive adjective

- (50) \*John Brown that his office is on the fortieth floor of a skyscraper went to see a book publisher.

#### 3.6 which

- (51) \*John Brown which office is on the fortieth floor of a skyscraper went to see a book publisher.

#### 3.7 which + possessive adjective

- (52) \*John Brown which his office is on the fortieth floor of a skyscraper went to see a book publisher.

#### 3.8 where

- (53) \*John Brown where office is on the fortieth floor of a skyscraper went to see a book publisher.



3.9 where + possessive adjective

- (54) \*John Brown where his office is on the fortieth floor of a skyscraper went to see a book publisher.

4. incorrect relative pronouns instead of which.4.1 whose

- (55) \*She felt in her handbag for the piece of paper whose father had written down all the details of the journey on.

4.2 whose + possessive adjective

- (56) \*She felt in her handbag for the piece of paper whose her father had written down all the details of the journey.

4.3 what

- (57) \*We do not see the program what we want.

4.4 where

- (58) \*My friends and I are going on excursion to Padburi where is one of my friends hometown.

4.5 when

- (42) \*It gives us the news when happens recently.

5. incorrect relative pronouns instead of where5.1 which

- (59) \*The place which people like to go to live is klong.

5.2 that

- (60) \*The evidence happened near a bank of a river that my house situated.

### 3.2 Relative Pronoun Deletion in English

According to Jacobs and Rosenbaum, relative pronouns in English may be deleted through the relative pronoun deletion transformation, which is optional, only when the relative pronoun functions as the object of the relative clause as in the following statements:

(61) a. the fire which he describes is frightening.

b. the fire he describes is frightening

(62) a. the girl whom you helped is lovely

b. the girl you helped is lovely

After the relative pronoun is deleted, the relative clause still remains a sentence embedded in the noun phrase as in (61 b) and (62 b).

However, the relative pronoun cannot be deleted under two circumstances:

1. when there is a preposition preceding the relative clause:

(63) a. the radio about which Jones boasts is superb.

b.\*the radio about Jones boasts is superb.

2. when the relative pronoun functions as the subject of the relative clause:

(64) a. the situation which bothers John depresses me.

b.\*the situation bothers John depresses me.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Jacobs and Rosenbaum, op. cit., p. 204.

### 3.3 Relative Pronoun Deletion in Thai

Chaiyaratana, whose analysis of Thai is based on transformational grammar, seems to believe that the relative pronoun in Thai may be deleted when it functions as the subject or the object of the relative clause<sup>6</sup> as the following examples show:

(65) a. kháw sýy naŋsýy thîi kháw chǎɔb

he buy book r.pron. he like

He bought the book that he liked.

b. kháw sýy naŋsýy kháw chǎɔb

he buy book he like

He bought the book he liked.

(66) a. dèg thîi khun chûaj mýa-waan pen khraj

child r.pron.you help yesterday be who

Who is the child whom you helped yesterday ?

b. dèg khun chûaj mýa-waan pen khraj

child you help yesterday be who.

Who is the child you helped yesterday ?

(67) a. jàa róbkuān khon thîi kamlāŋ làb sabaaj

don't disturb person r.pron. Aux. sleep comfortable

Don't disturb the person who is sleeping comfortably.

b. jàa róbkuān khon kamlāŋ làb sabaaj

don't disturb person Aux. sleep comfortable

Don't disturb the comfortably sleeping person.

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<sup>6</sup>Chaiyaratana, op. cit., p. 207.



(68) a. phóllamáaj thîi sýy maa càag talàad mâj sòd  
 fruit r.pron.buy Aux. from market not fresh

The fruits which are bought at the market are not fresh.

b. phóllamáaj sýy maa càag talàad mâj sòd  
 fruit buy Aux. from market not fresh

The fruits bought at the market are not fresh.

It should be noted that after the relative pronoun, object of the relative clause in (65 a) and (66 a) is deleted, the relative clauses in (65 b) and (66 b) are still recognized as a sentence embedded in the noun phrase. But in (67 b) and (68 b), after the relative pronoun, subject of the relative clause is deleted, the relative clauses are reduced to phrases which function as noun modifiers. When the noun phrases in (67 b) and (68 b), i.e. khon kamlan làb sabaaj 'the comfortably sleeping person' and phóllamáaj sýy maa càag talàad 'the fruits bought at the market', are particularly examined, superficially without looking at the context, they look the same as sentences in Thai. This is due to the fact that verbs in Thai are never inflected to show their grammatical functions like those in English. For this reason, even native speakers of Thai would find it difficult to distinguish between verb phrases which function as the predicate and those functioning as noun modifiers in Thai.

These examples may lead one to conclude that generally the relative pronoun in Thai which functions as the subject or the

object of the relative clause may be deleted. However, the author has noted that sometimes the relative pronoun, subject of the relative clause cannot be deleted:

- (69) a. chán chǎb dèg thii maa hǎa khun mya-waan  
 I like child r.pron.come meet you yesterday  
 I like the child who came to see you yesterday.
- b. \*chán chǎb dèg maa hǎa khun mya-waan  
 I like child come meet you yesterday.

#### 3.4 Similarities and Differences between Relative Pronoun Deletion in English and in Thai

In English, the relative pronoun deletion may apply only when the relative pronoun functions as the object of the relative clause. If it functions as the subject of the relative clause or if it is preceded by a preposition, this transformation cannot apply. In Thai, generally the application of the relative pronoun deletion is not restricted at all: it may apply when the relative pronoun functions as the subject or object of the relative clause. As a result, Thai students will apply the relative pronoun deletion transformation freely when they study English without being aware of its particular restrictions. If they apply this T-rule to the relative pronoun which functions as the object of the relative clause, they will produce sentences that are acceptable. However, if the relative pronoun they delete happens to be the subject of the relative clause, the resulting string will be ungrammatical:

(70) \*I came across a little boy, \_\_\_\_\_ looked rather thin and dirty. (who)

(71) \*We will see the main chedi \_\_\_\_\_ contains a relic of the Buddha. (which)

The investigation reveals mistakes concerning the omission of prepositions preceding the relative clause:

(72) \*It is the mass media \_\_\_\_\_ which we can get information and fun. (from)

(73) \*She felt in her handbag for the piece of paper \_\_\_\_\_ which her father had written down all the details of the journey. (on)

The author believes that the students fail to put prepositions in front of the relative clause in English because in Thai the preposition + relative clause never occur.

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