

SOME ASPECTS OF MODIFICATION IN ENGLISH AND POLISH PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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The remarks presented in this paper follow the author's research on the distinction between restrictive (R) and nonrestrictive (NR) modification in English and Polish. The results were partially discussed elsewhere (Muskat-Tabakowska, 1976), but the analysis of the data made it seem justified to discuss certain aspects of the problem separately, in view of their pedagogical implications.

The arguments presented further in this paper result from the following observations. R and NR modification (of both types, i.e. S-modification and NP-modification), nearly absent from written compositions produced by learners on the intermediate level (i.e. students of junior years of English Philology), become relatively frequent in the work of more advanced students (years IV and V). The latter refers mainly to NR modification with free modifiers in the sentence final position, which confirms the opinion expressed by F. Christensen, who considers this particular structure as one of the characteristics of 'mature style' (Christensen 1968:575).

In spite of the level of proficiency in English which enables the students to produce sentences of considerable length and syntactic complexity, errors attested in their work prove that they are often unaware of the existence of conventional, formal and semantic criteria that distinguish between the two kinds of modification. Consequently, the students do not realize that faulty punctuation -- in absence of the other criteria -- can result in blurring the distinction and lead to distortion of meaning. The nature of these errors changes in a characteristic way during the course of learning, and is strictly related to syntactic preferences: students of junior years use restrictive modifying clauses more frequently than the non-restrictive ones, the most common error being the use of the 'surplus' comma in front of the relative pronoun

(for discussion, see Muskat-Tabakowska, 1976). In senior years, however, the preference for NR modification becomes evident, the absence of comma preceding the relative pronoun being a frequent error. It is the systematic character of both types of error that accounts for my conviction that they reflect some sort of transitional competence on the part of the learners.

As 'superfluous' punctuation seems to disappear at the later stages of learning,¹ it is mainly 'inadequate' punctuation that I intend to consider in this place. It is the purpose of this paper to provide some suggestions concerning possible remedial procedures, as the limitation of the scope of this investigation has also been promoted by the disquieting discovery that not only does the error persevere, but it becomes more frequent in the work produced by students whose formal education in the field of the English language has practically been completed.

The starting point for the present discussion was an analysis of all instances of modification, encountered in 43 essays written by the fifth year students as a part of requirements for the examination in Methods of Teaching in the Institute of English of the Jagellonian University.

The results of the analysis are given below:

Types of modification	RESTRICTIVE		NONRESTRICTIVE		
	Correct punctuation	'Surplus' comma	Correct punctuation	No comma, no ambiguity	No comma, potential ambiguity
	14	5	16	15	17
Totals	19		16	32	
			48		
	67				

In spite of their limited scope, the data confirm my earlier hypothesis: the rule which requires insertion of a comma in front of the pronoun in *any* relative clause (which is most probably due to the interference of the learners' native tongue) is eradicated during the process of formal teaching. The new rule ('no comma introducing *any* relative clauses') occurs as the result of overgeneralization, which accounts for inadequate punctuation in cases of NR modification. This was also confirmed by some data taken from English texts written by Poles who are highly proficient in English but who had learned the language by the natural method and had never received any formal education. Cf.

1. *The investigation, which was carried out, made possible preliminary determination of SO₂ distribution in space and time.*

(R, written by a person who learned English in Britain, where he spent several years).

¹ For a detailed discussion of this problem, see Muskat-Tabakowska 1976.

Such instances most probably result from interference, reinforced by observation of linguistic data (i.e. cases of NR modification) which cannot be properly classified because the principle of classification is unknown. Cf., however:

2. *The Department of Analyses and Forecasting of Atmospheric and Water Pollution, where the proposed investigation would be conducted, employs 28 workers.*

(NR, from the same text as ex. 1)

As the data seem to show, both presence and absence of formal normative tuition can result in overgeneralization: the former leads to inadequate, the latter — to superfluous punctuation. This in turn suggests that although the taxonomy of modifying relative clauses must be taught, some new techniques should be introduced in order to make the process of teaching more effective. It was the search for such techniques that provided an incentive for the following investigation.

In Polish, punctuation of both R and NR clauses is regulated by a 'categorically demanding rule' ('przepis bezwzględnie nakazujący', cf. Przyłubscy 1973:22) which requires that the clause is set off by two commas — the 'opening' and the 'closing' one. The nature of the rule is purely conventional, which accounts for systematic ambiguity (in respect of R vs. NR modification) of all modifying clauses that are not disambiguated by some other factors.

In English, the comma is 'the most flexible of all punctuation marks in the range of its use and it has eluded grammarians' attempts to categorize its uses satisfactorily' (Quirk et al. 1972:1058). In spite of the fact that investigating the system of punctuation means 'dealing with tendencies which, while clear enough, are by no means rules' (Quirk et al. 1972:1061), a fairly general rule has been formulated which states that 'a comma occurs before a relative pronoun in a non-restrictive clause, matching the commencement of a new tone unit' (Quirk et al. 1972:1064).

In Polish, this part of the rule that demands the use of the 'closing' comma is gradually becoming a purely normative prescription, as its omission is the common practice among the native speakers of Polish (cf. Przyłubscy 1973:46). Ample evidence can be found in written and printed texts of all sorts. The 'opening' comma, however, is a proverbial 'must' with the educated Poles.

In English, the corresponding rule — despite its differentiating function — also seems mostly prescriptive with many native speakers. The data collected for the purposes of this investigation prove that the comma — written equivalent of the 'comma intonation' — is used mainly in those cases in which the lack of punctuation would make reading difficult, result in significant ambiguity, or lead to misunderstanding.

The examples which were used to check this hypothesis come from an informal letter, written by an English girl (with a university diploma in humanities). The letter included eight instances of NR relative clauses, only four of

which were preceded by a comma. The remaining four were presented to five native speakers of English, who were given the text in its entirety. It was accompanied by a note explaining that it was selected for the purpose of testing a group of students in comprehension, and that they were kindly asked to correct all mistakes that they might find in it. Four of my informants were British, the fifth was an American; all of them were educated (university diplomas), two were professional teachers of English. The sentences, as well as the results, are given below.

3. *Rita left our flat to go to Milan where she is now teaching English.*

(An obvious case of NR modification. Comma supplied by one informant, a professional teacher of English).

4. *With the three-day week, we went home early on Thursdays and Fridays which was a bright light in the gloom!*

(NR S-modification. None of the informants supplied the comma).

5. *The Warsaw Book Fair is from 19th to 24th May this year, two days shorter than before which will be a good thing as the last two days did drag...*

(NR S-modification. Comma supplied by one informant — the same as in case of 3. — probably in order to set off the inserted adverbial phrase.)

6. *We have also been to various plays which we have enjoyed.*

(NR NP-modification: *we had first seen the plays and only afterwards enjoyed them*, which rules out the possibility of R modification. None of the informants supplied the comma).

The necessity of using a comma in the remaining four NR clauses was confirmed by all informants, who acknowledged the disambiguating or clarifying function of punctuation in these cases:

7. *Many thanks for the lovely postcard from the mountains, which arrived this morning.*

(There was only one postcard, and it arrived this morning.) cf.

7a. *Many thanks for the lovely postcard from the mountains $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{which} \\ \text{that} \end{array} \right\}$ arrived this morning.*

(There were more postcards, and one of them arrived this morning).

8. *It has been very mild, but we had one surprise morning of snow, which had all melted by the afternoon.*

(Snow came as a surprise, but it melted soon.)

cf.

8a. **It has been very mild, but we had one surprise morning of snow $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{which} \\ \text{that} \end{array} \right\}$ had all melted by the afternoon.*

(Semantically unacceptable).

9. *She is hoping to go into social work, which she was doing here before.*

(She is hoping to begin doing the same kind of work.)

cf.

9a. *She is hoping to go into social work $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{which} \\ \text{that} \end{array} \right\}$ she was doing here before.*

(She is hoping to come back to the same job.)

10. *Please thank Tadek for his letter, which I have sent to be framed.*

(There was only one letter, and it will be framed.)

cf.

10a. *Please thank Tadek for his letter $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{which} \\ \text{that} \end{array} \right\}$ I have sent to be framed.*

(There were more letters, and one of them will be framed.)

These examples seem to imply that the native speaker's linguistic intuition accounts for less correspondence between intonation in speech and punctuation in writing than it is usually given credit for: punctuation is not used consistently as a means of 'recording intonation'. Once the discrepancy between the norm and usage is stated, however, there does not seem to be much point in teaching the former, which the traditional approach tends to do. Consequently, one must begin by looking for criteria of differentiation between the two types of modification other than the unreliable, mainly conventional and normative, criterion of presence or absence of a comma.

The deep structure of relative clauses, both R and NR, is apparently the same for the two languages under consideration. Out of the existing interpretations, I feel inclined to accept the one presented by Sandra A. Thompson, i.e. the assumption that an 'appropriate underlying representation for a relative clause sentence is a conjunction' (Thompson 1971:80). At least in case of NR modification such an interpretation seems widely accepted, and it is generally assumed that all NRs must be derived from sequences of sentences. In respect of Polish, traditional taxonomies based on semantic criteria consider relative clause sentences as having "za podstawę to, że oba mówią o tym samym przedmiocie":² cf.: "a relative clause sentence is equivalent to two independent predicators on the same argument" (Thompson 1971:80). NP and S-modifying NR clauses had not been isolated till relatively recently (both R and NR relative clauses were classified as 'przydawkowe' — attributive, cf. discussion in Tabakowska 1966). However, one of the earliest definitions emphasises the aspect of tense in such clauses,³ as well as semantic import of the relative pronoun itself: "... a zaimki *który, co* oznaczają to samo, co: *a on, a ten, i on, on zaś*".⁴ This function of the relative pronoun was also noticed by Thomp-

² ... based upon the fact that they both refer to the same object' (Klemensiewicz (1937:255 - 256), quoted in Tabakowska (1966:133)).

³ A factor seemingly more significant in Polish than in English. Detailed discussion of this aspect of the problem, however promising, exceeds the scope of this paper.

⁴ ... and the pronouns *which, what* (= *which* in English, EMT) mean the same as: *and he, and this one, but he*' (Krasnowolski (1898:120), quoted in Tabakowska (1966:134)).

son, who uses it as one of formal criteria of identification of such clauses.⁵

Klemensiewicz (1963: 86), who acknowledges the existence of the distinction between R ('zdania przydawkowe') and NR ('zdania rozwijające') relative clauses, enumerates the following formal criteria which he considers characteristic of the former (but not the latter) category:

1. Criterion of clause reduction:

a. the V of the VP in the relative clause can be replaced with a participle ('imiesłów przymiotnikowy czynny lub bierny'), e. g.

11. *Zły to ptak, co własne gniazdo kala.*

11a. *Zły to ptak, kalający własne gniazdo.*

cf.

11b. *It's an ill bird that fouls its own nest.*

11c. *It's an ill bird fouling its own nest.*

b. the V of the VP in some (sic) of such relative clauses can be placed with a gerund, eg.

12. *Starożytny był zwyczaj, iż dziedzice nowi na pierwszej uczcie sami służyli ludowi.*

12a. *Starożytny był zwyczaj służenia samych dziedziców ludowi na pierwszej uczcie.*

12b. *There was an old custom such that the new squires themselves served the people at the first feast.*

12c. *There was an old custom of serving the people by the new squires themselves at the first feast.*

2. Criterion of attribute conjunction: a non-reduced relative clause can be joined to the attribute by means of a conjunction, eg.

13. *... ową piosenkę, sławną dziś na całym świecie, a którą po raz pierwszy ... wygrały Włochom polskie trąby legijonów.*

cf.

13a. *?... that song, now famous all over the world, and which was played to the Italians for the first time by the Polish legions' trumpets.*

⁵ Thompson acknowledges the existence of certain restriction on this test: and cannot be used to combine the main clause and the NP-modifying NR clause if one of the constituents is either a question or an imperative; cf. her example:

Tell your father, who is outside, that supper is ready.

but:

* *Tell your father that supper is ready, and he is outside.*

The test applied to the Polish equivalent of the sentence gives:

Powiedz ojcu, który jest na dworze, że kolacja gotowa.

**Powiedz ojcu, że kolacja gotowa, i on jest na dworze.*

?*Powiedz ojcu, że kolacja gotowa, a on jest na dworze.*

It seems likely that possible acceptability of the last of the above sentences results from the distinction between semantic import of the conjunction *i* as compared with *a*. Detailed discussion exceeds the scope of the present analysis.

3. Criterion of 'augury': in the main clause deictic pronouns *ten* (this), *ów* (that), *taki* (such) are used, which introduce the contents of the relative clause, eg.

14. *Odrodzenie nastąpi przez tych, którzy idą.*

cf.

14a. *Renaissance will be brought about by those who keep going.*⁶

As shown in Tabakowska (1966), none of these criteria can be considered reliable; either because they only apply in some cases (eg. there are verbs in Polish which do not form attributive participles) or else because they apply to evidently NR clauses as well, cf. eg.

15. *Pierwszą książkę Wojciechowskiego, napisaną w 1966 r., pożyczyła mi Maria.* (Criterion 1a)

cf.

15a. *Wojciechowski's first book, written in 1966, was lent to me by Maria.*

16. *Wspominała lata wojny, lata szamotania się ze złym losem.*

(Criterion 1b)

cf.

16a. *She remembered the years of war, the years of fighting against the cruel fate.*

17. *Aktorka Maja Komorowska, bardzo już sławna, a której ja jeszcze nie oglądałem, nieczęsto występuje w telewizji.*

(Criterion 2)

cf.

17a. *? Actress Maja Komorowska, already very famous and whom I have not yet seen, seldom appears in TV.*

18. *Tę książkę, która jest już powszechnie znana, pożyczyła mi Maria.* (Criterion 3)

cf.

18a. *This book, which is already very well-known, was lent to me by Maria.*

Klemensiewicz himself uses the criteria with considerable lack of consistency, and the distinction between the two types of modification often becomes blurred. This can be easily seen in the sentence 13. above, which is apparently an instance of NR modification (the 'augury', i.e. the pronoun *ową*, clearly refers back to some restriction imposed by the earlier context, which has not been quoted). Similarly, sentences qualified as 'rozwijające' (examples given in Klemensiewicz (1963:101) fulfil criterion 1b and, as was rightly observed by Tabakowska (1966:137), are intuitively felt to be 'attributive' (i.e. restrictive).

As is seen from the English versions of 11. - 18., all the above remarks apply to English in the same measure as they apply to Polish. The failure of Kle-

⁶ Examples 11. - 14. from Klemensiewicz 1963:86. The headings — EMT.

mensiewicz's formal criteria, as well as evidence given by Thompson, seem to imply that the distinction between R and NR modifying clauses has no syntactic foundations, either in English or in Polish. To quote Thompson (1971:87) again, "the differences between restrictive and non-restrictive relative clause sentences are not of the sort that ought to be represented structurally; instead, they are differences representing a speaker's decision about how to present to the hearer information present in the modifying representation".

It is precisely this decision that in Polish often becomes overtly manifested in the surface structure of NR relative clause sentences. Namely, the NR modifying clauses can include one of the limited set of semantically cognate adverbs (or adverbial phrases).⁷ The list includes such items as *zresztą* (after all), *nawiasem mówiąc* (by the way, incidentally), *nota bene*, *w dodatku* (in addition), etc. The semantic import of all these lexical items emphasises the supplementary ('rozwijający') character of information conveyed by the relative clause, and they cannot occur with R modification. Cf. eg.

11d. *Zły to ptak, który* $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{zresztą} \\ \text{nawiasem mówiąc} \\ \text{nota bene} \\ \text{w dodatku} \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \end{array} \right\}$ *własne gniazdo kala.*

11d. can be interpreted only as a case of NR modification: *This one is an ill bird, and — on top of everything else — it fouls its own nest.* Thus, the meaning of 11d. is equivalent to

11e. *It is an ill bird, which fouls its own nest.*

Cf. also

11f. *Zły to ptak, i kala własne gniazdo.,*
which is equivalent to

11g. *It is an ill bird, and it fouls its own nest.*

The conjunctions *jednak* (however), *przecież* (and yet), *wszakże* (all the same), *байдз co байдз* (nevertheless), etc. are also used in NR relative clauses, in such cases in which the relative clause conveys some information whose semantic import contrasts with the contents of the main clause or comes as something unexpected by the sender of the message⁸, cf.

⁷ These are called 'wskaźniki zespolenia wypowiedzi współrzędnych' and discussed in Twardzikowa (1969:137), who considers them as one of the formal criteria of differentiating between 'rozwijające' (developing) and 'uzupełniające' (complementing) relative clauses in Polish.

⁸ In Polish taxonomies, these conjunctions are classified as 'przeciwstawne' (contrasting), cf. eg. Szober (1963:105).

Sb. *Ostatnio pogoda była bardzo łagodna, ale jednego rana niespodziewanie spadł śnieg, który jednak całkiem stopniał już po południu.*⁹

To sum up, it can be stated that — apart from semantic considerations — the following criteria of differentiation between R and NR relative clauses can be established:

- I. English: 1. NR clauses are never introduced by the pronoun *that*.
2. NR clauses are cut off by commas in cases of potential ambiguity or misunderstanding.
3. NR clauses can be represented as: $S_1 + \text{and} + S_2$ (cf., however, footnote no. 5 above)
- II. Polish: 4. NR clauses often include certain lexical items that cannot occur with R modification.¹⁰
5. NR clauses can be represented as: $S_1 + \left\{ \begin{array}{l} i \\ a \end{array} \right\} + S_2$ (cf. footnote 5 above)

The criterion shared by English and Polish is, of course, the clearcut discrimination between R and NR modification in the spoken medium, ie. by means of intonation. Its possible use in teaching was discussed elsewhere (Muskat-Tabakowska 1976). Apart from this distinction, to the best of my knowledge none of the criteria formulated above has been consistently employed in teaching. Allen (1959:235) offers an exercise based on criterion 3 above, discussing it under the heading of 'Connective Relative'. In the same textbook, we find an exercise which requires that NR relative clause sentences are split into separate constituents in order to yield 'an acceptable spoken form of narrative' (Allen 1959:233). Otherwise, most of the exercises involve recognition ('In which of the following sentences are commas required?', Pink 1954:29). Production is usually limited to exercises that require combination of ready-to-be-used clauses ('Combine the following pairs of sentences by means of non-defining relative pronouns' (Allen 1959:231)). The obvious disadvantage of such exercises seems to be that they consist of separate items, devoid of both linguistic and extralinguistic context. In order to elicit expected response, the items must be either fairly obvious eg.

19. *Julius Caesar came to Britain in 55 B. C. He was a powerful Roman general.*
(Allen 1959:231),

or else the entire amount of information needed for making proper classification must be crammed into a single sentence, which renders it artificial and overloaded, eg.

⁹ Translation of 8. offered by one of my fourth year students.

¹⁰ The possibility of occurrence of analogous items in the surface structure of English NR relative clauses cannot of course be excluded. However, they are less frequent — possibly because of the discriminating function of the comma.

20. *Louis XIV of France who reigned for seventy-one years and Francis Joseph who became Emperor of Austria in 1848 and survived with little to make life worth living up to 1916 are the only two crowned heads to eclipse the historic staying power of Victoria* (Pink 1954:32).

The result usually is that the exercise is done quite automatically, which does not ensure correctness of subsequent original production. And the ultimate purpose is, after all, to make prospective writers aware of the need to check whether a given sentence, placed in a given context, does indeed convey the meaning that it was intended to convey.

In view of the discussion presented earlier in this paper, conscious and systematic comparison between English and Polish seems a promising device, which in turn suggests the principles of cognitive code learning as the optimum approach. Such an assumption, utilizing the criteria of differentiation between English and Polish R and NR relative clause modification that were formulated above, entails the use of certain selected techniques. Out of those, the technique of translation seems to me most advisable. I would use it (as I actually do with my own students) 'primarily as an incentive for the student to approach the English (and Polish, as I suggest using translation both from and into the target language — EMT) text with a maximum of concentration' (Aarts 1968:226). The function of the entire text would consist mainly in providing semantic clues concerning interpretation of modifiers in respect of R vs. NR differentiation. Translation from Polish into English would entail conscious choice of the proper pronoun (*that* or *no that*) and emphasis on disambiguating factors, of which the comma is the most important one. On the other hand, translating from English into Polish would incorporate translating 'the meaning' of the non-restrictive comma, i.e. inserting into the Polish version lexical signals that in Polish perform the function of disambiguation of relative clauses in terms of their R or NR character. Both types of exercises would in fact involve what is called 'retranslation', i.e. provision of carefully selected and presented stimuli in the native tongue that are meant to elicit desired (and well defined) responses in the foreign language.

Apart from translation, paraphrase seems to be another useful technique. Exercises would be based on criteria 3 and 5, which — in view of their considerable similarity for the two languages under consideration — do not require the use of contrastive techniques.

Last but not least, in view of the fact that the R vs. NR ambiguity is finally resolved only on the basis of extralinguistic signals, i.e. assumptions of the writer (possibly defined in terms of focus and presupposition, cf. Jackendoff (1972; ch. 6)), broad contextualization of teaching materials would also be postulated, eg. in the form of commentaries, sets of questions drawing the students' attention to certain points, etc.

I hope that the above remarks would prove helpful if taken into consideration when preparing teaching materials. However, it is only actual implementation that can prove (or disprove, as the case may be) their practical value.

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