The Rise and Fall of the Relative with the Leftward Island

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What We’re Looking At

(1) a. This seemed to be done in distrust of the privy council, as if they might stifle his evidence; [which to prevent __], he put it in safe hands (Gilbert Burnet, *History of my own time*, 1683–1713)

b. Mr Hoby, my Mother, and my selfe, went to visitt some freindes [who, __ beinge not at home], we retourned [Lady Margaret Hoby, *Diary*, 1599–1601]

c. receive then this Draught [with which when thou art refresh’d __], thou mayst more strongly proceed to other Matters which yet remain (Richard Preston (tr.), *Consolation of Philosophy*, 1695)

Call them *Relatives with a Leftward Island*, or RLIs.
First Pass Characterization

- A relative clause, consisting of:
  - A relative pronoun, at the left edge of:
    - An adjoined constituent (typically a clause), which contains:
    - The gap associated with the relative pronoun, all on the left of:
  - The “host” clause.
Mr Hoby, my Mother, and my selfe, went to visitt some freindes

\[ \text{Antecedent clause} \]

\[ \text{who, } \_ \text{ beinge not at home, } \text{we returned} \]

\[ \text{Adjoined clause} \]

\[ \text{Host clause} \]

\[ \text{Relative with a Leftward Island} \]
How to Interpret an RLI

- Nonrestrictive relatives (*continuative*, in Jespersen’s sense);
- Typically *advance the narrative* w.r.t. the antecedent clause;
- Pronoun is interpreted like a *definite, anaphoric pronoun* (with an antecedent before the RLI), but fronted;
  - ... to prevent *this*, he put it in safe hands
- The adjoined clause is sometimes *semantically dependent on the following host clause*, never on the antecedent.

(2) ye abstaine from meates offered to idoles, and from blood, & from things strangled, and from fornication: [from which *if* ye keepe your selues __], yee shall doe well]. (New Testament, Authorized Version, 1611)
Basic Facts I


- Examples to be discussed here come from Penn Parsed Corpora - 401 tokens in Early Modern English corpus (> 1.7m words), 1 per c.4,300 words.

- Peak frequency (1570–1640) more like 1 per 3,400 words.

- Almost unattested (3 examples) before the 16th century.

- Robustly attested as soon as they came into existence.
Many long texts contain no examples, which may suggest not acquired by everyone.

Concentrated in philosophical or religious works, sometimes claimed (e.g. by van der Wurff) to be a borrowing from Latin (Moessner 1992, Rissanen 1999: borrowing from French), but found in texts from all registers to some extent.

Regardless of accuracy of initial claims about borrowing, clear cases of language-internal change after any initial borrowing (14th–15th century).
Basic Facts III

- Died out gradually.
- Already declining in frequency by second half of 17th century.
- Last example in Visser is from 1883.
- More detailed work on the death of RLIs to be carried out, once I get hold of a copy of the new Penn corpus...
Basic Facts IV

- Not unique to EModE: similar examples exist in at least Latin (Madvig 1870), Medieval Italian (Bianchi 1999), Early Modern Dutch (Ackema & Neeleman 2007), Bavarian German (Felix 1985), and Hindi (Rajesh Bhatt, p.c.).

(3) *das ist der Wein [[den wenn ich ___ trink], krieg ich Kopfweh]* (Felix 1985:177).

“This is the wine which if I drink get I headache.”

- This example is restrictive, though (also found in Latin and Hindi) — not clear if exactly the same construction.
Why Care?

- In summary, RLIs are complex, appear suddenly, are never hugely common, and disappear gradually.
- This combination of properties invites questions about the mechanisms behind the acquisition of RLIs.
- What changed to suddenly make RLIs possible, what is behind their gradual disappearance?
Because RLIs are so complex (and clearly unnecessary), we want to tell our story, without saying anything specific to RLIs themselves.

Instead, we might suspect that subtle changes in the general syntax of relativization (in particular, the nature of the elements at the head and the foot of the chain) drive more surprising changes like the emergence of RLIs.

Broader hope: If you pay attention to detail in the diachronic development of the English relative system, you get a story about RLIs (and other unusual constructions) for free.
Half-hearted reanalysis

- The analysis in brief: around 1450, a particular reanalysis became possible, and maybe even natural, but certainly not obligatory, within the English relative system. This reanalysis is reflected in the grammars of some speakers, but not all.

- RLIs are pretty much the only visible effect of this reanalysis. So some people have grammars which generate RLIs, while other people have (fairly different) grammars which produce pretty much identical results, without RLIs.

- RLIs disappear as a result of another small change in the syntax of relative pronouns. This change has clear effects beyond RLIs. Presumably it was slow to spread through the population, but has now done so.
The plan

1 Start with synchronic analyses of a couple of English relative constructions (including RLIs);

2 Relate the appearance of RLIs to patterns of resumption in relative clauses (just an overview here — more details in Truswell 2011);

3 Relate the dwindling of RLIs to the dwindling of relatives with remote antecedents.
The constructions in question

- A resumptive pronoun:

  (4) a cherl hath no temporeel thyng [that it ne is his lordes], as they seyn (Chaucer, *The Parson’s Tale*, c.1390)

- A remote antecedent:

  (5) They went ouer ye water to the churche of the sayde Seyntis, [whiche is an arme of the see] (Anonymous chaplain, *Journal*, 1506)
Hopes for the future

- Of course, explanations like these can seem like turtles all the way down.
- Bringing in factors like patterns of resumption and remote antecedents means we want to know why those constructions came and went.
- Eventually, we’d like to widen the search, and try to find a unified explanation of all the weird and wonderful Middle English relative constructions (which N, the which, zero relatives with subject gaps, animate which, ...).
- But not today (or this year).
Things We Don’t Find

(6)  a. √A married Gentleman coming through Canterbury, his Horse threw him, [[which a young Gentlewoman seeing __], fell a laughing] (Anonymous, Penny Merriments, 1685–7)

b. **No gaps in right-joined clauses**
   * . . . [which a young Gentlewoman fell a laughing [seeing __]]

c. **No unbounded dependencies**
   * . . . [which I think [that [a young Gentlewoman seeing __], fell a laughing]]
Basic analysis

- Conclusion: the relative pronoun remains within the adjoined clause, *contra* Felix, Van der Wurff (a good thing, if such clauses are islands).
- So we’re looking at a structure roughly like this:

```
CP1
  / \  /  \
XP2 CP1
  / \   /
Which __ ...
```
We never see any obvious gap where the adjoined clause could have moved from.

(7) *John, [[who [__ and Bill]] we saw __ last night]

More specifically, the left-adjointed constituent in an RLI can always be a left-adjointed constituent in non-RLI structures too.
Left-Adjunction in RLIs and Non-RLIs I

Finite adverbial clauses:

(8)  

a. **RLI:** but not so easie work found Ethelfrid against another part of Britans that stood in arms, [[whom though at last he overthrew ___], yet with slaughter nigh as great to his own souldiers]. (John Milton, *The history of Britain, that part especially now call’d England*, 1670)

b. **Non-RLI:** And [[though the upper part of Wededale be not very fertile of corne]; *yet ys there very fine gresse in the dale self wher the ryver passith]. (John Leland, *Itinerary*, 1535–43)
Left-Adjunction in RLIs and Non-RLIs II

Comparative correlatives (rare):

(9) a. **RLI:** For to try Doctrines is to enquire into the grounds and reasons of them; [[which the better any man understands ___], the more firmly he will be established in the Truth]. (John Tillotson, Sermon, 1679)

b. **Non-RLI:** [[The sooner a child is put to School], the better it is] (Charles Hoole, *A New Discovery of the Old Art of Teaching Schoole*, 1660)
Leftward purpose clauses:

(10) a. **RLI:** if it [your butter] be ouer cold it will not come at all . . ., [[which faults to helpe __ ] if you churne your butter in the heate of Sommer it shall not be amisse, if . . .] (Gervase Markham, *Countrey Contentments*, 1615)

b. **Non-RLI:** [[To make children to take a delight in spelling], let them spell many syllables together, which differ but only in one letter, as hand, band, land, sand, &c.] (John Brinsley, *Ludus Literarius or The Grammar Schoole*, 1627)
Left-Adjunction in RLIs and Non-RLIs IV

Present participial absolutes:

(11) a. **RLI:** wee espied three saile being small boats, sleightly wrought together, called Paugaias which we made after and tooke, [[which they on shore espying ___], they sent out an Aduisor] (Robert Coverte, *A Trve and Almost Incredible Report of an Englishman*, 1612)

b. **Non-RLI:** three or four Male-Carps will follow a Female; and . . . then [[she putting on a seeming coyness], they force her through weeds and flags] (Izaak Walton, *The Compleat Angler*, 1676)
Past participial absolutes:

(12) a. **RLI:** having opened the Letter, he gave it to me to read for him, [[which __ ended], he said he would answer it] (John Drummond, 1st Earl Melfort, Letter to King James the Second from Rome, 1690)

b. **Non-RLI:** [[she gone], comes my wife and to walk in the garden] (Samuel Pepys, Diary, 1667)
Against piedpiping analyses

- Every left-adjoined constituent in an RLI can be a left-adjoined constituent in non-RLI structures too.
- So movement of the relative pronoun is not responsible for the left-adjoined constituent appearing where it does.
- In other words, we do not want a piedpiping analysis of RLIs (contra Danckaert 2011): the A’-dependency really is entirely contained within the left-adjoined constituent.
- This is not to say that the left-adjoined constituent is base-generated in that position (Bhatt 2003 argued that movement is involved in the derivation of broadly similar correlative constructions), but just that any movements involved in the derivation of the left-adjunction structure would happen anyway.
The piedpiping alternative

```
CP1
  / \    / \  
CP2  C'1  
  |   |   |
Which ... t_{which} ... ... t_{CP2} ...
```
Consequences

- The basic tension within RLIs is that CP1 is the relative clause, but the relative pronoun is within CP2.

- A related tension: CP2 is syntactically (and semantically) dependent on CP1, but the relative pronoun within CP2 takes an antecedent prior to CP1.

- The attraction of the piedpiping analysis is that it allows us to believe that the relative dependency is really in CP1.

- If the piedpiping analysis fails, we have to confront this tension instead.
Further Properties II

- Relevant examples are overwhelmingly in sentence-final appositive relatives (398/401 examples).

  (13) a. *I wonder [[which married Gentleman a young Gentlewoman seeing ___] fell a laughing].
   b. *The thing [that a young Gentlewoman seeing ___] fell a laughing] was actually heartbreaking.

- RLIs tend to be separated from what goes before by heavy punctuation (5x more likely than other relatives).

  (14) they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knewe __, they brought him downe to Cesarea, and sent him foorth to Tarsus. (New Testament, Authorized version, 1611)
This suggests that there is no syntactic link between the RLI and the antecedent clause; the only link is the semantic dependency of the relative pronoun on its antecedent (a variant of the “discourse grammar” analysis of nonrestrictive relatives — Cinque 2008 and references therein).
Remote antecedents

- The fact that there is no syntactic relation between the relative pronoun and its antecedent is independently verified.

(15)  

a. *We haue cause also in England to beware of vnkindnesse, [who haue had, in so fewe yeares, the Candel of Goddes worde, so oft lightned, so oft put out, and...]*

b. *Learning is, both hindred and iniured too by the ill choice of them, that send yong scholers to the vniuersities. [Of whom must nedes cum all oure Diuines, Lawyers, and Physicians.]* (both Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster*, 1563–8)
The nonargument against base-generation

One argument against base-generation: left- and right-adjunction exist, but there are no Relatives with Rightward Islands.


(16)  
   a. Fred can well imagine Joe getting fatter, the more he eats.  
   b. *I can well imagine the more he eats (him eating), the fatter him getting. (Culicover & Jackendoff 2005:506–7)
The restriction to apposition

- This structural remoteness immediately restricts RLIs to nonrestrictive relatives.
- The standard compositional story about restrictive relatives relies on forming a predicate by $A'$-movement, and attaching this to its nominal sister by predicate modification. With RLIs, we never have this structural configuration, so a restrictive interpretation is impossible.

```
NP
  N'(λx.P(x)&Q(x))
    N'(λx.P(x))  RC(λy.Q(y))
```
The ingredients of RLIs

- On this approach, RLIs are possible if we stipulate three properties within an English-like system:
  1. Relative pronouns are permitted at the left edge of left-adjoined clauses.
  2. The foot of the relative dependency is a gap (rather than an overt resumptive pronoun).
  3. The relative pronoun is an E-type pronoun (requires a linguistic antecedent but not in a particular configuration).

- This is progress: properties of the construction are devolved to properties of lexical items (relative pronouns, leftPeripheral material in the adjunct).

- Our diachronic story will concern changes in the properties of those lexical items.
Two types of resumption

- To understand where RLIs came from, we need to look at patterns of resumption in Middle English (particularly 14th–15th centuries).
- One type of resumptive pronoun is used to avoid ECP violations in regular (non-RLI) relatives, and isn’t very interesting for our purposes.
- The other type is found at the foot of chains in left-adjunction structures.
(17)  a. Here deied Asa, kyng of Juda, ğat in his age had sore feet, [whiche passioun oure bokys sey [it was podegra]] (John Capgrave, Chronicle, before 1464)

    b. alle ğing [ġat ġou ğinkest apon ĭt] is abouen ğee for ğe tyme, and bitwix ğee and ği God. (Anonymous, The Cloud of Unknowing, before 1425)

These examples are not relevant to the analysis of RLIs — similar things still happen in PDE. I mention them to set them aside.
Resumption in left-adjunction structures

(18) a. I beseche þe, chef soueraygne Lord, graunte me þi signet, [where-of [when þat she haþ knalage þer-of], þat she may applie hur will to þi godly purpose]. (Sermon, c.1425)

b. For schrewes . . . doon ofte time things [the whiche thingis, [whan thei han doon hem], they demen that tho thinges ne scholden nat han ben doon]. (Geoffrey Chaucer, Boethius, c.1380)

- The resumptive pronouns here are in complement position:
  this is as far from ECP-related as possible.
- From 1150–1500, almost all relativization within left-adjunction structures is resumptive (3 counterexamples).
Two types of $A'$-dependency

I take the two distinct resumption patterns to reflect two types of $A'$-dependency.

1. The standard case involves movement to [Spec,C], and leaves a trace. Resumption is only used to avoid ECP violations.
2. The strange case involves base-generation of a relative pronoun adjoined to a left-adjoined constituent, and binding of a resumptive pronoun.

Rob Truswell

Rise and Fall of the RLI
Details of the second structure

- The adjunct attaches above C: we find subject-aux inversion and complementizers after the adjunct.

(19)  

a. Whan thow sittist at thy mete, than shuldest thou chewe vpon chastite and clennes (Aelred of Rievaulx, *De Institutione Inclusarum*, before 1450)

b. I beseche þe, chef soueraygne Lord, graunte me þi signet, [where-of when þat she haþ knalage þer-of], þat she may applie hur will to þi godly purpose.
The relative pronoun attaches above prepositions like *after*, which themselves attach above C.

(20) [*the whiche manere [[whan that men looken it in thilke pure clennesse of the devyne intelligence], it is ycleped purveaunce]; but [[whanne thilke manere is referred by men to thinges that it moeveth and disponyth], [than of olde men it was clepyd destyne]]]. [*The whiche thinges [yif that any wyght loketh wel in his thought the strengthe of that oon and of that oothir], he schal lyghtly mowen seen that thise two thinges ben dyvers*. (Chaucer, *Boethius*, c.1380)
So something like this

```
CP
   /   \\
/     \  
PP     CP
   /   /   \\
/     /     \  
which PP (that) TP
   /   /   \\
/     /     \  
after CP (that) TP
   /   /   \\
/     /     \  
   ... RP ...
```
To get from a resumptive RLI to a real RLI, the only change is that the resumptive pronoun becomes inaudible.

The obvious question is why should that suddenly happen around 1500.

I’ve written about this (Truswell 2011), but I’m going to gloss over it here. The gist is that a grammar of English with null resumptive pronouns at the foot of relative dependencies becomes plausible around 1450, but whether such a reanalysis actually occurs depends on what a learner makes of various other low-frequency constructions.
What happened to RLIs?

- PDE has base-generated left-adjunction configurations.
- PDE has E-type relative pronouns.
- PDE doesn’t have (many) remote antecedents or attachment within left-adjoined clauses.
- So a good bet is that PDE relative pronouns are syntactically dependent on their antecedents, while EModE relative pronouns weren’t.
- As relative pronouns became syntactically dependent on their antecedents, RLIs become impossible.
Testing the Hypothesis: Texts I

- 12 texts from PPCEME:
  - 3 each from 1500–1570; 1570–1640; 1640–1710.
  - 2 in each period with high RLI use, 2 with low RLI use.
- Degree of RLI use is quantified as follows:
  1. Total *Wh* relatives in the corpus = 14,343;
  2. Total number of RLIs in the corpus = 401;
  3. *Wh* relatives per RLI \(\approx 36\);
  4. Calculate expected RLIs by text;
  5. Take texts with unexpectedly high or low observed amounts of RLIs.
## Testing the Hypothesis: Texts II

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Period</th>
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<th>Obs(RLIs)</th>
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Testing the Hypothesis: Data I

Four variables, each as log frequency per 1,000 *wh*-relatives:

1. *Wh-N* relatives (independent, counted automatically);
2. *The Wh* relatives (independent, counted automatically);
3. *Wh* relatives with *remote antecedents* (independent, counted manually);
4. RLIs (dependent, counted automatically).

We expect a correlation between (3) and (4). (1) and (2) are there, as salient other changes in the EModE *Wh*-relative system, to address the question of whether the correlation between (3) and (4) is special, or indicative of general change in the *wh* relative system. We have no reason to expect a correlation between (1) or (2) and (4).
Testing the Hypothesis: Data II

(21) **Wh-N relatives**: All things therefore desire Good; which Good you may describe to be that which is desired of all. (Richard Preston (tr.), *Of the consolation of philosophy*, 1695)

(22) **The Wh relatives**: I will not overthower this citie, for the which thou hast spoken. (Old Testament, Authorized Version, 1611)

(23) **Remote antecedents**: [He] enquired of his Friend where it was he lodg’d, who gave him an account of every matter requisite for Sir Humphry’s purpose (Anonymous, *Penny Merriments*, 1684–1687)
### Testing the Hypothesis: Results 1

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All frequencies are reported as log counts per 1,000 wh-relatives.
Testing the Hypothesis: Results II

- RLIs vs. remote antecedent: $r^2 = 0.85$
- RLIs vs. Wh–N relatives: $r^2 = 0.28$
- RLIs vs. The–Wh relatives: $r^2 = 0.05$
Testing the Hypothesis: Results III

Coefficients:

|                | Estimate | Std. Error | t value | Pr(>|t|)   |
|----------------|----------|------------|---------|------------|
| (Intercept)    | -15.14042| 2.65372    | -5.705  | 0.000452   | ***        |
| Remote         | 3.32649  | 0.57131    | 5.823   | 0.000395   | ***        |
| Wh-N           | 0.18024  | 0.25678    | 0.702   | 0.502621   |            |
| The Wh         | 0.05135  | 0.15845    | 0.324   | 0.754195   |            |

Residual standard error: 0.8798 on 8 degrees of freedom
Multiple R-squared: 0.8631, Adjusted R-squared: 0.8118
F-statistic: 16.81 on 3 and 8 DF, p-value: 0.0008155
### Testing the Hypothesis: Results IV

Coefficients:

|         | Estimate | Std. Error | t value | Pr(>|t|) |
|---------|----------|------------|---------|----------|
| (Intercept) | -15.5086 | 2.4800     | -6.253  | 9.46e-05 *** |
| Remote   | 3.5571   | 0.4801     | 7.408   | 2.29e-05 *** |

Residual standard error: 0.8349 on 10 degrees of freedom
Multiple R-squared: 0.8459, Adjusted R-squared: 0.8305
F-statistic: 54.88 on 1 and 10 DF, p-value: 2.293e-05
There is a strong positive correlation between the frequency of remote antecedents and of RLIs in *wh*-relatives.

This correlation is specific to these two properties: despite other concurrent changes in the English relative system, only these two are correlated.

This correlation emerges despite noisy data: not all types of remote antecedent have disappeared today (extraposition, etc.), and such remote antecedents appear to be differentially present in texts with few or no RLIs.
Nonrestrictive relative typology

- Cinque (2008) claimed that there are two different types of nonrestrictive relative, both available in Italian. Among other things:
  - *Che/cui*-relatives must be adjacent to the antecedent (extraposition aside); *il quale*-relatives needn’t be.

(24) Da quando i russi se ne sono andati, i quali/*che non si erano mai veramente integrati con la popolazione, la pace è finita.
Since the Russians left, who had never really mixed with the population, there is no more peace.
Nonrestrictive relative typology

- Cinque (2008) claimed that there are two different types of nonrestrictive relative, both available in Italian. Among other things:
  - Che/cui-relatives only take nominal antecedents; il quale-relatives are less fussy.

  \[(25)\quad \text{Carlo lavora troppo poco. La qual cosa/*che verrà certamente notata.}\]
  Carlo works too little. Which will certainly be noticed.

- And another half-dozen properties. Basic analysis: che-relatives are standard adnominal modifiers, while il quale-relatives have only a discourse relation to their antecedent.
Cinque’s further claim: English has only the equivalent of *il quale*-relatives (non-adjacent to antecedent, category-neutral, etc.).

The category-neutral part seems clearly right, but the non-adjacency claim is contradicted by the above analysis of RLIs.

If the above analysis is correct, it is precisely the development of an adjacency requirement which is responsible for the disappearance of RLIs.

So English used to have something like *il quale*-relatives, but now they’re more mixed.
Cinque’s examples of English nonadjacency

- Cinque’s claim that English tolerates nonadjacent antecedents in nonrestrictive relatives is based on the two classes of examples.
  - First, internal arguments as antecedents (plausibly extraposition).
    - (26) a. John is coming to stay, who we haven’t seen for ages.
    - b. Only the flower is used, which is not poisonous and is attached to the plant with a very fine stem.
    - c. I was talking to Howard the other day, who tells me that you want to resign.
Cinque’s examples of English nonadjacency

- Second, sentence-initial *which* (where the antecedent, typically the previous sentence, typically is adjacent).

  (27) She borrowed a history book. Which suggests that her teacher was having some influence on her.

- Also relevant: absence of split antecedents (*pace* Cinque, Arnold), impossibility of stacking nonrestrictive relatives, . . .

  (28) *John, who went to MIT, who likes maths* (attributed to Chomsky).
Cinque’s differentiation between the two types of relatives is too coarse: PDE *which*-relatives are like *che/cui*-relatives in some respects (including impossibility of RLIs), and like *il quale*-relatives in others.

This is probably a good thing: Cinque’s list of distinctions between the two types of relatives groups together several logically independent properties (e.g. position of relative and category of antecedent). It isn’t immediately obvious why all of these properties should cluster together, so our life is easier if they actually don’t.
Conclusions I

- A synchronic analysis of RLIs highlights two characteristics:
  1. The left-adjunction structure, with the relative pronoun base-generated within the adjunct, and a gap at the foot of the relative dependency;
  2. The absence of a syntactic dependency between the relative clause and the antecedent (E-type relative pronoun).

- This suggests an analysis of the diachrony of RLIs: they appear once both components are in place, and disappear once they are no longer both in place.
  - They appear once the possibility of the left-adjunction structure can be combined with a gap (null pronoun) at the foot of the chain.
  - They disappear as a syntactic dependency between relative clause and antecedent becomes obligatory.
Conclusions II

- There is a difference between the reason that RLIs emerged and the reason they disappeared.
- They disappeared because remote antecedents disappeared in general.
- They emerged because an analysis of relative clauses involving base-generation and binding of a null pronoun became possible, but not necessary.
- This may well reflect that many people apparently never acquired RLIs in the first place.
- All of this pertains only to properties of relative and/or bound pronouns, and is not specific to RLIs. We should hope that the same is possible for other exceptional relative constructions in the history of English.
References


