

## Preface

This book is on relative clause structure in the Mesoamerican languages. The book consists of a total of nine chapters in the form of independent articles. We use the concept ‘RC structure’ as an umbrella term here to refer to relevant aspects of linguistic structure that revolve around relative clauses (RCs) and relative constructions. Seven chapters are on different language families of the Mesoamerica linguistic area, including Nahuatl, Mayan, Mixe-Zoquean, Chatino, Zapotec and Otomian, while an eighth chapter is on Pesh, a Chibchan language spoken in Honduras, outside the limits of Mesoamerica. While we do not consider Pesh a Mesoamerican language, we include it in the book to show the extent to which the relative constructions found in the other languages of this book can indeed be said to be Mesoamerican. In this connection, the first article in the book sets the typological scene, as it were, taking an areal view of the phenomenon and thus allowing us to propose what type of RC structure is typically Mesoamerican.

The study of relative constructions is a powerful descriptive enterprise. This is because RC syntax is placed at the very center of the grammar of a language. We believe that to understand the RC structure of a given language adequately, the analyst has to amass a substantial descriptive knowledge from other domains of the syntax and morphosyntax of that language. This expertise must include an understanding of nominal phrase syntax, the syntax of both simple clauses and subordination, the grammatical treatment of arguments and obliques, syntactic operations such as movement, agreement and binding, the syntax and morphology of nominalization, word order configurations, and the constructional realization of information structural categories such as focus and topic. In addition to all this knowledge, we must of course add the constructional idiosyncrasies and structural richness of RCs and relative constructions in the language under study. All this makes the study of RC structure particularly challenging, and it becomes all the more so where poorly described languages are concerned, because a good description can only be based on a good understanding of the structure being described. The challenge becomes greater still in the context of conducting a typological survey on RC structure in a specific linguistic area, because a comprehensive typology must be based on a good descriptive knowledge of the RCs of a representative sample of languages. The purpose of this book is to fill in many gaps in our understanding of RCs in Mesoamerican languages.

In the previous linguistics literature on Mesoamerican languages, the best studied family by far is the Mayan family. This also holds true for the study of the

syntax of RCs at large, but even in Mayan languages relative constructions have often been tackled indirectly as a means to achieving a different goal, which often involved the understanding of syntactic phenomena that are of interest for generative approaches to syntax such as extraction, movement, etc. Notable exceptions are the monographs on the RCs of Yucatec Maya by Gutiérrez Bravo (2015), the RCs of Kaqchikel by Guarcax González (2016), and the RCs of Chol by Martínez Cruz (2007) (with a special emphasis on the encoding of property concepts). Beyond Mayan, our knowledge of RC structure was in general poor until the recent monographs by De la Cruz Cruz (2010) on Tepostec Nahuatl and Jiménez Jiménez (2014, 2019) on San Miguel Chimalapa Zoque. Apart from these works, information about RCs in the different languages of the area is often just touched on in grammatical sketches. Even the recent edited book by Comrie and Estrada Fernández (2012) on the RCs in languages of the Americas has only one paper on a Mesoamerican language, namely Yucatec Maya by Gutiérrez Bravo (2012), whose proposal is taken up and developed in more depth in Gutiérrez Bravo (2015).

Against this background, and having in mind the aim to produce the right context to generate a new body of knowledge of RC structure in Mesoamerican languages, we embarked on the 2015–2017 CNRS-PICS research project “Mésoamérique et la syntaxe de la proposition relative” (“Mesoamerica and the syntax of the relative clause”). This large project involved a group of linguists who are experts in different Mesoamerican languages and who participated in various syntax workshops at CIESAS-Sureste, San Cristobal de las Casas. The workshops were led by linguists, including Judith Aissen, Christian Lehmann, Ivano Caponigro and Harold Torrence. This project was followed by the 2017–2018 UC-Mexus project on “Headless RCs in Mesoamerican languages” coordinated by Ivano Caponigro, Harold Torrence and Roberto Zavala Maldonado.

The workshops produced numerous high-quality research outcomes. The book by Caponigro, Torrence and Zavala Maldonado (2021) includes contributions on the relation between *wh*-words and headless RCs. In this book, the contributions have a wider focus, as they study different aspects of RCs in the various languages of study: while some just cover headed RCs (Flores Nájera, López Nicolas, and Chamoreau) others include both headed and headless RCs (Jiménez Jiménez, Mateo Toledo, Campbell, and Palancar). In addition to these, the book also includes one chapter on a whole family (Zavala Maldonado) and an overview chapter by Palancar, Zavala Maldonado and Chamoreau.

Apart from its thematic coherence, to give the volume editorial coherence we have ensured that the contributions abide by the following conventions:

1. *Natural examples*: The book only includes papers by authors who have a large natural text corpus on which to base their linguistic analysis. We

believe that modern linguistic research should be carried out primarily on natural examples, and only revert to elicitation when a construction is not attested in the natural corpus or when testing the limits of the grammaticality of a construction. Scientifically, this is the right thing to do. Accordingly, in contradistinction to most previous literature on RCs that uses elicited examples, which for the most part are not even full sentences, we have encouraged authors to use as many natural examples from texts as possible. Textual examples are indicated as {Txt}.

2. *Consistent terminology:* The articles in this book share a similar terminology. This is especially relevant regarding two areas where terminological confusion abounds in the linguistic literature. One concerns the way we talk about the elements that introduce a RC. The other concerns the way we categorize RCs according to their function in the matrix clause and the structural types that arise as a result.<sup>1</sup>

As for the former, we distinguish three elements: (i) the term '**subordinator**' is used for a conjunction that introduces RCs and other types of subordinate clauses like complement clauses; (ii) the term '**relativizer**' is used for a conjunction that is only used to introduce RCs; and (iii) the term '**complementizer**' is reserved for a conjunction that introduces complement clauses, but not RCs.

As for the function of RCs, we distinguish headed RCs from headless ones. A **headed RC** is a modifier of a domain nominal that serves as its head. The domain nominal can be a (full) noun (i.e., the canonical headed RC), a pronominal (i.e., equivalent to light-headed RCs), or a determiner (only in some languages). A **headless RC** is a RC that functions as an argument or an adjunct of the predicate of the matrix clause. There are two main types of headless RCs, those that exhibit a gap strategy and those introduced by a relative pronoun. We reserve the term '**free relative**' for a headless RC that is introduced by a relative pronoun that is also a WH-word.

3. *Consistent abbreviations:* Throughout the book, we use the same abbreviations for glosses in the examples.
4. *Consistent representation of RCs:* Throughout the book, in examples of relative constructions, the RC is always placed in between brackets and, if the RC is a headed RC, the head appears underlined.

<sup>1</sup> All RCs in Mesoamerican languages are finite. This is the reason why we do not deal with nominalization issues in this book. The notable exception is Chamoreau's contribution on Pesh, where this problem needs to be addressed.

In our chapter “A typological overview of RC structure in Mesoamerican languages”, we identify what constitutes the canonical profile of a relative construction in the Mesoamerican languages. We propose that the typical Mesoamerican RC is a morphosyntactic finite RC with a gap, but when the relativized position is that of locative, a relative pronoun is typically used (with this pattern reaching out beyond Mesoamerica). To corroborate their Mesoamerican peculiarity, we compare these features with the ones found in the relative constructions of languages spoken outside Mesoamerica, both to the north and to the south of the area. In our proposal, we have identified three structural traits that we take to be Mesoamerican: (i) RCs introduced by determiners which agree in deixis with the determiner of the DP in which the domain nominal is embedded; (ii) so-called ‘pied-piping with inversion’ introduced by Smith-Stark (1988) for interrogatives that has percolated into RC structure; and (iii) headless RCs with a gap, that is, headless RCs where there is little indication as to the role of the relativized element. To illustrate this typological overview we use data from the papers in this volume, and also from other works that were research outcomes of the RC syntax workshops at CIESAS-Sureste.

The paper by Zavala Maldonado provides a general overview of the relativization strategies in headed RCs in the two branches of the **Mixe-Zoquean family**: Mixean and Zoquean. Zavala Maldonado shows that there are three major relativization strategies: gapping, relative pronoun, and non-reduction with internal head. The first two are present in all languages of the family while internally-headed RCs are restricted to few and exhibit features that are typologically uncommon in other world’s languages that share this strategy. Both the gapping and the internally-headed strategy are basic in the languages that have them, but the accessibility of the relative pronoun strategy varies much across the different members of the family. Zavala Maldonado further shows that it is common in the Mixe-Zoquean languages to convert extrathematic relations into core arguments for relativization purposes.

In his paper, Jiménez Jiménez proposes a typology of domain nominals in the relative constructions of **San Miguel Chimalapa Zoque** (Chiapas Zoque, Mixe-Zoquean) that helps to explain how the different relative constructions in this language are used, covering both scope of relativization and the three types of relativization strategy (i.e., by a gap, by a relative pronoun and by an internal head). More specifically, Jiménez Jiménez proposes five different types of domain nominals: (i) full head; (ii) elided head; (iii) light head; (iv) determiner head; and (v) non-overt domain nominal. All these domain nominals have been identified in the typological literature, except for the determiner head, which constitutes an important intermediary type between the elided head and the light head.

Jiménez Jiménez's contribution is followed by Mateo Toledo's paper on the RCs of **Q'anjob'al** (Mayan), which also departing from a typology of heads proposes a typology of relative constructions in Q'anjob'al. Among the features of RCs discussed that are common to all Mayan languages are: they are finite, post-nominal with an external head; the use of the same interrogative expressions in questions, interrogative complements and relative clauses; and restrictions on the relativization of agent arguments. Taking into account both the form and the type of expression of the head, Mateo Toledo shows that Q'anjob'al has four types of RCs: (i) nominal-headed RCs that contain a nominal or a pronoun head; (ii) determiner-headed RCs that contain a determiner or a demonstrative as head; and (iii) headless RCs of two subtypes: free relatives, which are headless RCs exhibiting a relative pronoun based on a *wh*-word, and headless RCs with a gap. The four types of RCs differ in lexical and syntactic features, relativization strategies, and meaning.

Flores Nájera's paper explores some puzzling word-order phenomena involving discontinuity of constituents in the relative constructions of **Tlaxcala Nahuatl** (Uto-Aztecan) under the notion of non-configurational syntax. Tlaxcala Nahuatl exhibits externally-headed relative constructions in which the RC may precede, follow, or be discontinuous with respect to the DP containing the domain nominal, which Flores Nájera calls 'the domain DP'. One question which arises is how to show that discontinuous RCs are subordinate to the domain DP. In addition to externally-headed RCs, in Tlaxcala Nahuatl the domain DP can also be located within the RC with or without the co-occurrence of a relative pronoun. Flores Nájera proposes two possible analyses for this phenomenon. The first one is that Tlaxcala Nahuatl has internally-headed relative constructions with particular features that are different from those described in the literature for this type of construction. The second analysis is that there are no relative constructions with internal heads and that the position of the domain DP within the RC is due to the fact that the relative constructions of Tlaxcala Nahuatl have non-configurational features. Under the non-configurational analysis, the RC and the domain DP do not form a constituent at a syntactic level and they can be contiguous or discontinuous in any place of the complex DP with respect to the matrix sentence. In this paper, the author presents evidence in favor of this second analysis.

Following Flores Nájera's paper are three contributions from three Oto-Manguean languages: two from the Zapotecan branch and one from the Otomanguean branch.

In his contribution, Campbell shows that relative constructions in **Zenzontepec Chatino** (Zapotecan; Chatino) display a range of nuanced syntactic differences. Some are syndetic (i.e., a RC introduced by a subordinator), while

others are asyndetic (i.e., introduced by no subordinator). Some are externally headed, while others have external light heads or are headless. Some display a gap strategy, others have relative pronouns, and a pronoun retention strategy may be used for disambiguation. While some of the differences are syntactic, being based on the syntactic function of the head in the RC, Campbell claims that asyndesis and the cline of headedness are not based on syntax *per se*, but are largely driven by information structure and discourse, especially specificity and topicality. Thus the syntax of RCs is like much of the rest of the syntax of the language and cannot be easily understood without considering data from natural discourse.

López Nicolás studies headed RCs with a full nominal head in **Zoochina Zapotec** (Zapotecan; Zapotec). The study focuses on the structural and morphosyntactic properties of headed RCs. He discusses the relativization strategies used in the language, namely, the gap strategy and the relative pronoun strategy, the latter derived from interrogative pronouns and pronominal classifiers with anaphoric function. To complement his study of the different constructions, the author further introduces the different syntactic roles for which there is access to relativization.

Palancar's contribution is on the relative constructions of **Tilapa Otomi** (Oto-Pamean; Otomian). Palancar claims that this language has three types of RCs in headed relative constructions: (i) asyndetic RCs; (ii) RCs introduced by a determiner that the author argues functions as a relativizer; and (iii) RCs introduced by a relative pronoun derived from WH-words. Types (i) and (ii) reveal a gap relativization strategy, and they have a wide functional scope in the relativization hierarchy, while type (iii) only allows for WHO and WHERE in headed relative constructions. The type (iii) construction is remarkable in two ways. On the one hand, the locative relative pronoun strategy based on WHERE is the only construction that is available to relativize a locative adjunct. On the other hand, the RC based on WHO can only relativize a human subject or a human possessor, which is typologically surprising, although also found in Zenzontepec Chatino. All three types of RCs can be used as headless RCs with the addition of a fourth type involving a light head. In contrast to what happens in headed relative constructions, when type (iii) is used as a headless RC it involves a larger set of relative pronouns with a wider functional scope.

The book finishes with Chamoreau's paper on the restrictive headed relative constructions of **Pesh**, a Chibchan language from Honduras, which, not being Mesoamerican, serves as a control for the rest of the languages in the book. Chamoreau shows that Pesh follows three relativization strategies: (i) internally-headed RCs in which the head nominal of the RC, which is a core argument or a genitive, occurs inside the RC. This is the most frequent and

primary strategy in Pesh, as it is used to relativize subjects; (ii) externally-headed RCs in which the head nominal, which has a peripheral role in the RC, occurs outside the RC, being represented in the RC by a gap; and (iii) RCs introduced by a WH-word but only involving the locative WH-words *piah* ‘where’ and *pikan* ‘where, in which direction’. The distribution of the three RCs in Pesh clearly responds to accessibility restrictions of specific functions: argument and genitive with internally-headed RCs, oblique and adjunct (comitative, instrumental, locative, and object of comparison) with externally-headed RCs, and locative with WH-word RCs. This paper also explores the relation between relative strategies and degree of finiteness. Internally-headed RCs and externally-headed RCs are less finite and exhibit some features of nominalization in the scalar phenomenon of nominalization, since the marker that obligatorily occurs at the end of the relative construction in internally-headed RCs and at the end of the RC in externally-headed RCs is a case or a topic enclitic marker prototypically used at the end of noun and postpositional phrases. In contrast, RCs bearing a WH-word are most finite, and their subordinate feature is marked by a subordinator at the end of the verb.



We acknowledge the support of various institutions for the research behind this book. In France, we want to thank CNRS for their support through the 2015–2017 research project CNRS-PICS “Mésoamérique et la syntaxe de la proposition relative”, and especially the UMR-8202 *Structure et dynamique des langues* (SeDyL) and the UMFRE-16 *Centre d’études mexicaines et centraméricaines* (CEMCA). In Mexico, we acknowledge the support of CIESAS-CONACYT, especially CIESAS-Sureste at San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. We want to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions and for the precious time devoted to this book. We are also grateful for the support of two specific people who were responsible for different important aspects of the book: to Timothy Feist for proof-reading the English in the manuscript and making sure that it sounded idiomatic and for pointing out inconsistencies that needed correction; and to Hugo H. Vázquez López for ensuring that the manuscript was formatted consistently

Finally we want to thank all participants of the relative clause syntax workshops at CIESAS-Sureste between 2015 and 2018, for the intellectual richness of all our discussions, for the warmth of the time spent together, and for their individual and collective contributions to the creating of new and better knowledge on RC structure in the languages of Mesoamerica. Our special thanks go

to Judith Aissen, for her teaching, for the generosity of her time, and for her professional commitment to creating high-quality linguistics scholarship and research in Mexico.

*In the times of confinement of 2020 ...*

*Enrique L. Palancar*

*Roberto Zavala Maldonado*

*Claudine Chamoreau*

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