

1 Terminological preliminaries

This chapter deals with what are traditionally called **relative clauses**. We use the more general term **relative constructions** because although it is reasonable enough to call the underlined construction in [1i] a relative clause, the term is misleading for the type of construction seen in [1ii]:

- [1] i I agree with most of the things that your father was saying. [clause]
 ii I agree with most of what your father was saying. [NP]

These two sentences are equivalent. But the phrase *what your father was saying* in [1ii] is an NP: it corresponds not to the relative clause *that your father was saying* in [1i], but to the larger NP containing it, *the things that your father was saying*. And we will see that there are syntactic as well as semantic reasons for treating *what your father was saying* in [1ii] as an NP.

We therefore use the term ‘relative constructions’ to cover both the underlined sequences in [1], with ‘relative clause’ available as a more specific term applying to cases like [1i]. Often, however, we will talk simply of ‘relatives’, leaving ‘construction’ or ‘clause’ understood.

2 Types of relative construction

This section presents an overview of the different types of relative construction that will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections. The two major dimensions of contrast yield what we will call **formal types** and **relational types**.

The formal types are distinguished according to whether they contain one of the special relative words *who*, *which*, etc., or the subordinator *that*, or simply a ‘gap’, a missing constituent.

The relational types are distinguished on the basis of their external syntax, their relation to the larger construction containing them. The traditional distinction between restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses fits in here, but we shall use different terms and contrast them with two further categories, cleft and fused relatives.

In addition to these major contrasts, we need to invoke the more general distinction of finiteness: while most relative constructions are finite, infinitivals (and certain minor types) are also possible under certain conditions.