Unintegrated co relative clauses in conversational Polish

Wojciech Guz (The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin)

This paper discusses a colloquial variety of Polish relative clauses introduced by the uninflected relative marker co, which is an alternative to the standard inflected relative pronoun który. Both variants are illustrated in (1).

(1) To jest ta sukienka którą / co kupiłam.  
   this is this dress which\[\text{ACC.SG.F}^\text{trace}_{\text{ACC}}^\text{co} \] I bought  
   ‘This is the dress that I bought’

Unlike previous accounts of co clauses (e.g. Bondaruk 1995; Mykowiecka 2001, Lavine 2003), the paper draws on corpus data. Much in the vein of Miller and Weinert (1998), the analysis concentrates on authentic spoken utterances marked by structural unintegration – a common feature of spontaneous speech. The study shows that co relative clauses can display unintegration features that go beyond the mere absence of agreement features in the network of grammatical relations between the head, the complementizer co and the trace. This is related in general to the loose syntactic relationship of the head NP to the co clause, which, for example, can be a main clause with its own object, as in (2).

(2) o tym terminie co nie przysyła jej tych alimentów  
   about this deadline co not he sends her this alimony  
   ‘about this deadline that he doesn’t send her the alimony’

The paper explores several types of this loose structural connectivity of co clauses. In a corpus-derived sample of 257 unintegrated co clauses, specific features of unintegration include (i) co clauses as main clauses with no gaps, (ii) interpretational idiosyncrasy and context-dependency, (iii) non-matching case forms between the head and the trace, and lack of required resumptive pronouns, (iv) lack of a nominal head, (v) preposition ellipsis, (vi) long-distance relationship between the head and co clause, and (vii) ambiguity in the semantic contribution and categorical status of co. The nature of these unintegration features is such that for some co clauses a relative clause reading is untenable. The word co may be better seen as a conjunction or a general discourse-linking element rather than a relativizing complementizer. In such conjunction-like uses, co may also act as a time/place conjunction similar to English when and where. There may even not be a nominal head associated with the co clause, as in (3).

(3) tutaj mieszkają co mają / co taka cysterna stoi?  
   so here they live co they have co such cistern truck stands  
   ‘So they live where they have, where the cistern truck is?’

As a result, a significant proportion of co clauses (257 out of 802 (32%)) depart from the traditional perception of what function co relative clauses perform. The advantage of using corpus data is that they offer insight into a wider range of functions of co than previously reported on the basis of introspection. It is argued that there is a cline of uses of co ranging from a straightforward complementizer, through ambiguous conjunction/relativizing uses, to time- or space-reference conjunctions. It is assumed that the uninflected co, a diachronic development of the pronominal and inflected co, has been grammaticalized to perform these other functions besides the basic relativizing function.
References