

# A Survey on the Instruction of Relative Clauses in the Revised High School Textbooks

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**Abstract:** This paper reports the results of a survey on the teaching approaches in the revised MEXT-censored English textbooks for junior and senior high schools focusing on whether there are any hints that can contribute to coping with the difficult relative clause types. The results suggest that the types of relative clauses that are difficult for learners will remain difficult unless each instructor (1) keeps a balance among the sentences to present to the learners, and (2) gives them some additional exercises to help them understand the relative clause as a module in the main sentence which can be used both in the subject and object positions.

**Keywords:** Teaching approaches, MEXT-censored textbooks, Relative pronoun, Relative adverb

## 1. Introduction

Preceding studies have clarified that some relative clause structures are more difficult for ESL learners to acquire than others, although they superficially look similar to each other. There have been some studies about the order of difficulty in the category of the relative pronoun clauses only. Nagai (2012), the present researcher, summarized those studies as follows.

Kawauchi (1988) and Itoh (2001) examined the order of difficulty among the four types of relative pronoun clause structures; types called “SS,” “SO,” “OS,” and “OO” (explained later). They reported almost the same order: OS is the easiest and SS and SO are more difficult than the others.

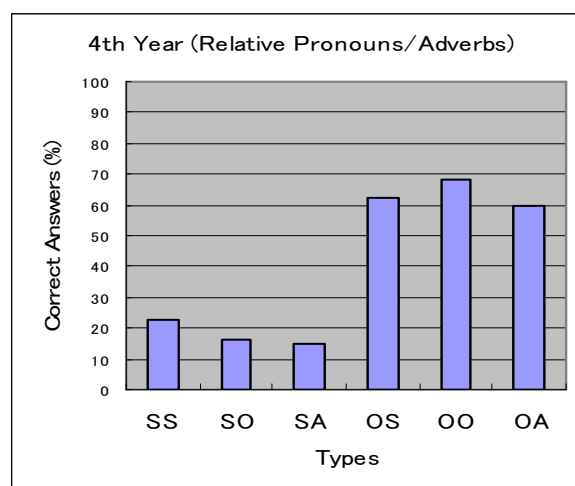
In order to clarify the acquisition of relative clauses in general, Nagai (2010) then added two relative adverb clause structures called “SA” and “OA” (explained later), and studied the order of difficulty among the six types of relative clauses. The results of the study suggest that it is more significant to divide those types into two groups containing three easy types and three difficult ones, rather than determining the order. It was because there was a clear gap between the two groups, and also each group had something in common.

As Nagai (2010) pointed out, the common feature of the types in the difficult group was relative clauses that function as the subjects of the main structures, whereas the easier group had relative clauses in the object position. **Figure 1** from NAGAI (2010) shows the learners’ achievement in uncontrolled word order arrangement tests. It is clear that there is a clear gap between the two groups: the easy and

the difficult types.

This paper reports the results of the survey on the teaching approaches in the revised MEXT-censored English textbooks for junior and senior high schools focusing on whether there are any hints that can contribute to coping with the difficult relative clause types.

**Figure 1**



(NAGAI, 2010)

## 2. The Target Structures of the Present Study

The target structures discussed in the present study are as follows: the same six types as in NAGAI (2010).

Types of Relative Clause Structures:

**SS:** The subject of the sentence is an NP relativized by a subjective relative pronoun.

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e.g. The man who speaks English doesn't speak Japanese.

**OS:** The object of the sentence is an NP relativized by a subjective relative pronoun.

e.g. I know the man who speaks English.

**SO:** The subject of the sentence is an NP relativized by an objective relative pronoun.

e.g. The letter that John wrote was long.

**OO:** The object of the sentence is an NP relativized by an objective relative pronoun.

e.g. I read the letter that John wrote.

**SA:** The subject of the sentence is an NP relativized by a relative adverb.

e.g. The office where my father works is near here.

**OA:** The object of the sentence is an NP relativized by a relative adverb.

e.g. I visited the office where my father works.

(NAGAI, 2010)

### 3. The Method

The four relative pronoun structures were examined in the six "English III" textbooks for junior high schools revised in 2011, and the two relative adverb structures were examined in the seventeen "English Expressions I" textbooks for senior high schools revised in 2012.

For both relative pronouns and adverbs, the check points were the same: (1) types of example sentences when they are first introduced to the learners, (2) types of exercises when the learners are asked to produce sentences including relative pronouns or adverbs. The seven types of exercises in point (2) are as follows.

#### Types of Exercises for Productive Skills

##### **JET** (Japanese to English Translation)

e.g. "Translate the Japanese sentences into English."

##### **UWO** (Uncontrolled Word Order Arrangement)

e.g. "Arrange the word order so that the sentence means the same as the Japanese sentence."

##### **CWO** (Controlled Word Order Arrangement)

e.g. "Arrange the word order of the underlined part so that the sentence means the same as the Japanese sentence."

##### **USC** (Uncontrolled Sentence Connection)

e.g. "Connect the two sentences using the relative pronoun/adverb."

##### **CSC** (Controlled Sentence Connection)

e.g. "Complete the latter half of the sentence using the

relative pronoun/adverb."

##### **RPAC** (Relative Pronoun/Adverb Choice)

e.g. "Choose the relative pronoun/adverb that fits the blank."

##### **MC** (Module-conscious)

e.g.(1) "Make up a relative clause first, then put it in the appropriate position in the main sentence."

e.g.(2) "Use the same relative clause as in the example sentence in a different position in the new sentence."

The last type, module-conscious, is the one the present writer expects to be effective in coping with the learners' difficulty.

## 4. The Results of the Survey

### 4.1 Types of Example Sentences

**Figure 2** shows the number of the different types of example sentences for relative pronouns, and **Figure 3** for relative adverbs.

**Figure 2**

Types of Example Sentences for Relative Pronouns

	SS	SO	OS	OO
N	10	6	13	7

**Figure 3**

Types of Example Sentences for Relative Adverbs

	SA	OA
N	3	47

As **Figure 2** shows, example sentences for the relative pronouns in the junior high school textbooks are balanced well enough. However, there is an extreme difference between the numbers of the two types in the senior high school textbooks as **Figure 3** shows.

### 4.2 Types of Exercises

**Figure 4** shows the number of the different types of exercises for productive skills for relative pronouns, and **Figure 5** for relative adverbs.

As **Figure 4** shows, there are very many exercises in only one type, which is, controlled word order arrangement exercises in the sentences where the object of the main sentence includes a relative pronoun in the subjective case.

**Figure 5** shows that there are many more exercises for relative clauses in the object position than in the subject

position, and that the types of exercises can be divided clearly into two groups in terms of the number; the four types in the upper half and the three types in the lower half.

**Figure 4**

Types of Exercises for Relative Pronouns

	SS	SO	OS	OO	sum ↓	Effect
JET	2	0	2	1	5	Positive
UNO	0	0	0	0	0	
USC	0	0	0	0	0	
MC	0	0	0	0	0	
CNO	0	1	30	2	33	Null
RPAC	0	0	3	3	6	
CSC	0	0	2	1	3	
sum→	2	1	37	7	47	

**Figure 5**

Types of Exercises for Relative Adverbs

	SA	OA	sum ↓	Effect
JET	1	2	3	Positive
UNO	0	0	0	
USC	1	0	1	
MC	0	0	0	
CNO	2	42	44	Null
RPAC	2	29	31	
CSC	0	14	14	
sum→	6	87	93	

## 5. Conclusion

The types of relative clauses that are difficult for learners will remain difficult unless each instructor (1) keeps a balance among the sentences to be presented to the learners, and (2) gives them some additional exercises to help them understand the relative clause as a module in the main sentence which can be used both in the subject and object positions. There are two reasons as follows.

First, there are a lot fewer exercises for the three difficult types of relative clauses shown in **Figure 1** (SS, SO, SA) in the revised textbooks.

Second, there are a lot fewer exercises in the types in the upper half of the figure. The four types in the upper half of **Figures 4** and **5** are expected to have a positive effect in coping with the learners' difficulty because they require the understanding of the basic structure of the main sentence;

the learners have to understand the scope and the position of the subject part, which is not required in the three types in the lower half of the figures.

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