

RELATIVE CLAUSE OMISSION FOUND IN *TENET* MOVIE BY CHRISTOPHER NOLAN

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive qualitative research aimed to identify instances of relative clause omission in the movie *Tenet* by director Christopher Nolan. A theory from Hewings (2013) was applied to determine relative clauses in the data source. Observation and documentation were used as data collection methods, with the analysis conducted descriptively using words and sentences. Out of the 44 utterances that contain relative clauses, there were 20 data represented relative clause omission found in the movie's dialogues. They were categorized by subordinator: 7 utterances omitting "who", 3 utterances omitting "whom", 9 utterances omitting "that/which", 1 utterance omitting "why", and 2 utterances omitting "when". Only 10 data were selected as samples to narrow down the analysis. After thoroughly conducting the research, it was concluded that the omission of clauses, including relative clauses, often occurred in the context of informal conversations such as those found in movies. Although the omission made the utterances grammatically incomplete, it did not stop listeners from understanding them, as the meanings of the utterances remained the same.

Keywords: movie, omission, relative clause, subordinator, utterances

1. Introduction

The use of clause is very common in everyday life, whether in writing or conversation. Human interactions often involve the use of clause, whether people realize it or not. For example, when someone says, "He is the man whom I met yesterday." Here, the clause "whom I met yesterday" is a relative clause that refers to

the man being talked about. In English grammar, clause is part of syntax, making its use very important. This is because syntax helps clarify how sentences are formed and structured according to grammatical rules (Purba et al., 2023). Considering that English is widely used by people for international communication purpose, grammar certainly needs to be learned well. However, it is

difficult to remember the grammar rules due to how people's opinions and perceptions of the language are changing (Bochari et al., 2022). This also applies to syntax, where incorrect syntax usage can make language ambiguous, thus making the meaning of sentences difficult to understand (Putri et al., 2022).

It is obvious that people tend to violate the rule of constructing complete clause during conversations, as speakers omit clause to make utterances shorter and flow in a casual manner. Despite this, listeners do not face difficulties in understanding the speakers' intentions. This was experienced by Elle Fanning and Nicholas Hoult during their interview (BuzzFeed, 2021), when Elle asked Nicholas about his character's middle name in a certain old movie, and Nicholas guessed it correctly. Elle responded positively by saying, "I think **(that)** I get a check!" Here, the omission of the connector "that" between the main and subordinate clause is occurred. This casual speech pattern is common as people often do not follow exact rules for making sentences with complete clause in everyday conversations, allowing for more natural and expressive communication (Ambalegin, 2023).

The phenomena of clause omission can also be observed in movie conversations, where the characteristics of clause differs slightly from those in formal speech. The movie *Tenet*, directed by the infamous British-American director Christopher Nolan, is an example of a movie that extensively applies clause omission in the dialogue of its characters. The plot of the movie follows a CIA agent who teams up with his partner to prevent World War III. Besides offering an exciting storyline, the dialogues in the movie *Tenet* also frequently include omission of clause particularly

relative clause. In one scene, the protagonist said, "That's the reason **(why)** I'm here." This utterance occurred in minute 00:28:19 to 00:28:23. The relative pronoun "why" is omitted from the utterance. However, no grammatical errors occurred because one characteristic of relative clause is that they can be omitted from a sentence (Hewings, 2013). The utterance itself can still be understood clearly.

This study applied Hewings' (2013) theory to understand how people tend to omit relative clause in informal conversations, including those in movies. Two previous studies were chosen as comparisons. First, Sulistiani (2022) identified 109 relative clause instances in John Green's novel *Paper Towns*, with 50 restrictive and 59 non-restrictive clauses. The study found that common nouns are most frequently modified by both types of relative clause. Next, Cahyani et al. (2021) analyzed relative pronouns in John Grisham's *Rogue Lawyer* using Quirk et al. (1985) theory. They found relative pronouns like "who", "whose", "whom", "which", "that", and zero pronouns. Non-restrictive clause often used commas for separation, while restrictive clause could not be omitted without causing ambiguity.

The aforementioned researchers had their own preferences in choosing the subject and object of their research. While both were related to the topic of relative clause, they focused on the types of relative clause namely restrictive and non-restrictive as the objects of their study. However, this study itself did not discuss types but solely focused on the omission of relative clause. Additionally, the subject or data source of this study was different. This study analyzed a movie instead of novels, and the data under study were in the form of utterances instead of written text. Judging from the

published articles on the topic of clause, most researchers discussed errors in constructing clause (Ambalegin, 2023). This makes this study unique in its approach, focusing instead on clause omission rather than clause errors.

Studying the use of relative clause in movies is interesting due to the observable differences between formal writing and informal conversation. Movies often reflect real-life interactions, portraying society and human conditions (Flick, 2014). Most movie dialogues are informal, conveying a casual language style (Dewi et al., 2020). A notable feature is the omission of relative clause, which often does not alter sentence meaning. This research aimed to analyze this omission to better understand relative clause characteristics. *Tenet* by Christopher Nolan was chosen because its informal dialogue settings provide natural-sounding conversations, making it easier to gather relevant data.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Syntax

As a branch of linguistic, syntax deals with how words form phrases, clauses, and sentences (Helmie et al., 2022). Syntax studies the arrangement of subjects, verbs, objects, and modifiers to reveal how they form phrases, clauses, and sentences (Vocroix, 2021). Understanding English syntax is crucial for studying clauses, as it explains how words are structured to convey meaning. Therefore, the mastery of English syntax is essential for analyzing the structure and function of clauses within English sentences.

2.2 Clauses

A clause contains at least a subject and a predicate (Sumardi & Said, 2020). Azar & Hagen (2011) described a clause as a group of words that consists of a subject

and a verb. A clause is part of a larger sentence (Huddleston et al., 2005), and it is often called as sub-sentence (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). A sub-sentence means that a clause is a smaller unit than sentence, but has its own subject and predicate to form meanings.

2.3 Types of Clauses

In English grammar, clause consists of two types namely main clause (independent clause) and subordinate (dependent clause). Independent clause can stand alone as a complete sentence, while dependent clause needs an independent clause to have a complete meaning in a sentence (Juliarta & Wirawa, 2023). For example, in the sentence “I know that she is coming,” the main clause in this sentence is “I know” which still have meaning when stand alone as a sentence. Meanwhile, the subordinate clause, “that she is coming” lacks meaning if does not be paired with a main clause. Subordinate clause itself can be categorized into three types based on their role in constructing the sentence meaning namely noun clause, adjective or relative clause, and adverbial clause (Ambalegin, 2023).

2.3.1 Noun Clause

Noun clause is a type of clause that functions similarly as a noun in a sentence (Yulika, 2022). Oshima & Hogue (2007) added that noun clause is a dependent clause that has role as either subject or object of sentence. Common w-h words such as what, whatever, which, when, where, wherever, who, whoever, and how typically has the role of noun clause subordinator (Ambalegin, 2023). Noun clause can be functioned as subject of verb, object of verb, subject of complement, object of complement, and object of preposition of a sentence (Melantari & Fatimah, 2020). An example of clause is

when someone said, “I think **that** the study of brain is interesting,” with the subordinate clause “that the study of brain is interesting” acts as object of the verb “think” (Novarita, 2019).

2.3.2 Adverbial Clause

According to Leech (1989), adverbial clause is a type of clause that add information to the main clause. Adverbial clause can also modify verb, adverb, or adjective of a sentence, which then has the possibility to change the overall meaning of said sentence (Ambalegin, 2023). Adverbial clause can be categorized into several types according to their role. It includes the use of adverbial clause to indicate time (such as “when” and “whenever”), condition (such as “if” and “unless”), contrast (such as “although” and “while”), reason and cause (such as “because” and “since”), and place (such as “where” and “wherever”), depends on the context of the sentence (Rakhmasari, 2022). An example of adverbial clause is when someone said, “He built his own book company **because** he always wanted to do that”, with the subordinator “because” shows reason of how he built a book company (Prabawati et al., 2020).

2.3.3 Adjective Clause or Relative Clause

Adjective clause or relative clause is a type of dependent clause that functions like an adjective in a sentence, which means that adjective clause modifies a noun (Hidayah, 2021). There are mainly two types of adjective clause namely restrictive or defining and non-restrictive or non-defining clause (Hewings, 2013). Subordinator for relative clause is that of relative pronoun like “who” and “whom” to indicate a person, “why” to indicate a reason, “where” to indicate a place, “when” to indicate a time, and “that/which” to indicate a thing or sometimes a person (Ambalegin, 2023). An example of relative clause is when someone

said, “The man **who** stands there is tall”, with the relative pronoun “who” referring to the subject “the man” as person (Andriani & Bram, 2022).

2.4 Clause Omission

Azar (2003) described omission or reduction as an act of shortening sentences without changing their meaning. Omission may occur in clause. Shortening or reducing clauses can help individuals to avoid repeating words (Athallah & Oktavia, 2023). The omission of clause commonly happens in informal situation where English grammar is considered as not too strict. It includes the settings like casual conversations, text messages, and even social media posts. For example, in relative clause, the relative pronouns like “who” and “whom” sometimes can be omitted such as in the sentence, “She is the one (**whom**) I love the most.”

3. Research Method

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach, as it was suitable for presenting research phenomena in descriptive form (Merriam, 2009). According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), qualitative method described research result in pictures and words rather than numbers. A theory from Hewings (2013) was applied to identify the relative clause. The data source was the movie *Tenet* by Christopher Nolan, focusing on the omission of relative clause in characters’ conversations.

Data collection involved two steps namely observation and documentation. First, the movie was watched to identify dialogues with relative clause. Then, a note-taking method was used to record these dialogues as documentation (Siyoto & Sodik, 2015). The data were analyzed descriptively using words and sentences. Only omitted relative clause instances were analyzed as

adjusted to the topic and objectives of the research.

Flick's (2014) data analysis method, consisting of data preparation, reduction, categorization, and interpretation, was applied. The data were collected and prepared by watching the movie, reduced to select samples, categorized by their relative pronouns using table, and interpreted to present detailed findings. This approach allowed the data to be presented narratively (Sugiyono, 2013).

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Result

The study identified six categories of relative pronouns used as subordinators in relative clause instances within the movie. These pronouns helped characters efficiently add context to their speech. Specifically, "who" was used to refer to a person as the subject (17 utterances), "whom" for a person as the object (3 utterances), "that/which" for things or occasionally for people (18 utterances), "where" for place or location (3 utterances), "why" for reason (1 utterance), and "when" for time (2 utterances). The research revealed a total of 44 occurrences of relative clause in *Tenet* movie. It shows how often relative clauses appeared in the movie dialogues.

To align with the research purpose, only omitted relative clause was discussed in this research. Specifically, there were 20 utterances found related to the omitted relative clause. Out of the 20 utterances, the distribution of relative pronoun used as subordinators is as follows: 5 utterances with the subordinator "who," 3 utterances with the subordinator "whom," 9 utterances with the subordinator "that/which," 1 utterance with the subordinator "why," and 2 utterances with the subordinator "when."

It is important to note that all these subordinators were omitted in the original utterances, showing how the structure of a sentence changes when the subordinator is removed.

Table 1. Omitted relative clause findings

No	Relative pronoun categorization	Data findings
1.	Who	5 utterances
2.	Whom	3 utterances
3.	That/which	9 utterances
5.	Why	1 utterance
6.	When	2 utterances
Total number of omitted relative clause		20 utterances

4.2 Discussion

The omitted relative clause in the movie *Tenet* can be discussed in detail in the following analysis. Out of 20 total data, there were only 10 selected samples of data chosen for the analysis. It was because the analysis would be narrowed down to limit its scope. These 10 data samples consisted of 10 utterances, each explained with its grammatical structure.

Utterance 1

Original utterance: "I'm not the man they send to negotiate..." (00:21:51 – 00:21:53)

Utterance with complete clause: "I'm not the man **whom** they send to negotiate..."

The utterance above has two subjects, "I" and "they," indicating it is a clause. A subordinator like "who" should be included to complete the grammatical structure. The correct form is, "I'm not the man who they send to negotiate..." Here, the main clause is "I am the man," and the

subordinate clause is “who they send to negotiate.” The relative clause “who they send to negotiate” provides more detail about the noun (person).

Utterance 2

Original utterance: “But I am the man people talk to.” (00:21:57 – 00:21:59)

Utterance with complete clause: “But I am the man **whom** people talk to.” :

The utterance above has two subjects, “I” and “people.” Originally, a subordinator is omitted, affecting the sentence’s structure. To make it clear, “whom” is added between the main and subordinate clause, resulting in: “But I am the man whom people talk to.” Here, “I am the man” is the main clause, and “whom people talk to” provides additional detail about the noun “man,” specifying the person whom people talk to.

Utterance 3

Original utterance: “This may be the easiest trigger I’ve ever had to pull.” (00:22:05 – 00:22:07)

Utterance with complete clause: “This may be the easiest trigger **that/which** I’ve ever had to pull.”

This utterance initially omits a subordinator that connects the main clause to the relative clause. To complete it grammatically, add the connector “that” or “which” between the main clause (“This may be the easiest trigger”) and the subordinate clause (“I’ve ever had to pull”). This addition clarifies that the trigger referred to is the easiest one the speaker has ever pulled.

Utterance 4

Original utterance: “The dealer you’re looking for is Andrei Sator.” (00:22:35 – 00:22:36)

Utterance with complete clause: “The dealer **whom/that** you’re looking for is Andrei Sator.”

This utterance includes two subjects, “dealer” and “you,” indicating it is a clause. To complete it, consider adding “who” or “that” as the relative pronoun between the main and subordinate clauses. Thus, the correct sentence is: “The dealer who/that you’re looking for is Andrei Sator.” Here, “The dealer is Andrei Sator” is the main clause, and “who/that you’re looking for” acts as the subordinate relative clause, specifying which dealer is meant.

Utterance 5

Original utterance: “Except the gas he made his billions from was actually plutonium.” (00:22:48 – 00:22:50)

Utterance with complete clause: “Except the gas **that** he made his billions from was actually plutonium.”

The original utterance has two subjects, “the gas” and “he,” forming a clause with a missing relative pronoun as subordinator. Adding the subordinator “that” between “the gas” and “he made his billions from” completes the sentence: “Except the gas that he made his billions from was actually plutonium.” This clarifies that the gas is what made him a billionaire, linking the main and subordinate clauses.

Utterance 6

Original utterance: “I’m assuming I have a budget.” (00:26:34 – 00:26:35)

Utterance with complete clause: “I’m assuming **that** I have a budget.”

In the example above, the speaker omits the relative pronoun “that” before the subject “I.” Despite this omission, the utterance remains clear and understandable to listeners because the context is unchanged. However, adding subordinator “that” would grammatically complete the sentence and specify that the subject “I” have a budget for specific items.

Utterance 7

Original utterance: "That's the reason I'm here." (00:28:19 – 00:28:23)

Utterance with complete clause: "That's the reason **why** I'm here."

In the original utterance, the verb "am" is in the subordinate clause "I'm here," and the verb "is" is in the main clause "That's the reason." The subordinator indicating cause or reason is omitted in the subordinate clause. Adding subordinator "why" between the two clauses completes the sentence grammatically. "Why" acts as a relative pronoun, starting the clause "why I'm here" to specify the cause or reason referred to by "the reason."

Utterance 8

Original utterance: "The day they turn, that's his refuge." (00:52:14 – 00:52:15)

Utterance with complete clause: "The day **when** they turn, that's his refuge."

The utterance above contains two verbs: "turn" in the main clause "The day they turn," and "is" in the subordinate clause "that's his refuge." The main clause lacks a subordinator, implying a temporal relation with "the day" preceding "they." Adding "when" as a subordinator would grammatically complete the main clause. "When" serves as a relative pronoun introducing a clause specifying the time the subject "they" turn.

Utterance 9

Original utterance: "Only a fool wants to be near me." (00:55:02 – 00:55:03)

Utterance with complete clause: "Only a fool **who** wants to be near me."

The utterance above has two clauses: "Only a fool" which is a main clause, and "wants to be near me" which is a subordinate clause with an omitted "who". Despite omitting the subordinator "who," the meaning remains clear. Grammatically, adding subordinator "who" would complete

the sentence by specifying which fool the speaker refers to.

Utterance 10

Original utterance: "There may be a time and place you feel threatened." (1:56:02 – 1:56:04)

Utterance with complete clause: "There may be a time and place **when** you feel threatened."

This utterance consists of two clauses: the main clause, "There may be a time and place," and the subordinate clause introducing the new subject "you," which states, "you feel threatened." The subordinator "where" could optionally connect the clauses to specify the place where the person feels threatened, although the meaning is clear without it.

5. Conclusion

The omission of relative clause can be categorized by their relative pronouns. These relative pronouns act as subordinators that connect the main clause and subordinate clause in each utterance. They include the subordinator "who," indicating a person as the subject; the subordinator "whom," addressing a person as the object; the subordinator "that/which," referring to a thing or sometimes a person; the subordinator "where," indicating a place; the subordinator "why," showing a reason; and the subordinator "when," suggesting time. Through analysis, it was concluded that the omission of relative clause does not change the meaning of utterances, although grammatically they are still incomplete. It was also found that the omission of relative clause is common in everyday conversations as part of informal speech. Movies serve as a medium where this phenomenon can be observed, as they often depict real-life situations. This demonstrates that despite

their grammatical incompleteness, the meaning of utterances remains clear, reflecting the natural flow of informal speech in everyday life as portrayed in movies.

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