Referring and quantifying without nominals: Headless relative clauses across languages

Reference to and quantification over individuals were identified early on as semantic properties of nominals—broadly understood as varieties of DPs/NPs with or without different kinds of D(eterminer) heads. More than fifty years ago, Montague showed us an elegant, unified treatment of referential and quantificational DPs/NPs by means of generalized quantifiers. A few years later, the referential and quantification properties of bare nominals—nominals without a D—started being investigated, in seminal work by Carlson, and then Chierchia and Dayal, who added a crucial crosslinguistic dimension. Besides nominals, there is at least one other family of constructions—largely understudied—that are capable of referring to and quantifying over individuals, albeit having no morphosyntactic resemblance to nominals: Headless Relative Clauses. They are embedded full clauses with a missing constituent but no nominal head, unlike headed relative clauses. In this talk, I define varieties of Headless Relative Clauses across languages and sketch a syntactic/semantic analysis for each variety, building on Jacobson's and Dayal's work on free relative clauses and Dayal's and von Fintel's work on free choice free relatives. In doing so, I highlight similarities and differences with the semantic behavior and the syntax/semantics interface of nominals, exploring what core semantic rules the two families of constructions share. Last, I hope to provide what is needed for those who want to study Headless Relative Clauses in whatever language they choose from whichever linguistic corner they prefer, starting with this very sentence, which contains 4 examples total of 3 different kinds of Headless Relative Clauses.