

Relative clauses in South Slavic and the predictability of morphosyntactic features

Julia Bacskai-Atkari
(University of Konstanz)

My talk investigates the morphosyntactic properties of relative markers introducing relative clauses in South Slavic languages, arguing that the restrictions on the combinations of these elements are predictable based on their morphological properties, especially the fact whether the given element is demonstrative-based or *wh*-based.

In Slavic languages, just like in many other European languages, relative clauses can be introduced by two kinds of relative markers: (i) relative complementisers, which are invariant in their form, and (ii) relative pronouns, which are inflected (for case, number and gender, depending on the language). In principle, relative markers may either stem from demonstrative pronouns or from *wh*-pronouns (Roberts & Roussou 2003, van Gelderen 2009); while Germanic languages regularly use *d*-elements (e.g. English *that*) and may or may not have developed the *wh*-strategy. Slavic languages regularly use *wh*-based complementisers and/or pronouns.

In Germanic, an interesting generalisation arises: while asymmetrical patterns (*d*-pronoun + *wh*-complementiser, or *wh*-pronoun + *d*-complementiser) are widely attested, the symmetrical *d*-pattern (*d*-pronoun + *d*-complementiser) is limited to cases where the complementiser is most probably a declarative one underspecified for [rel], and the symmetrical *wh*-pattern (*wh*-pronoun + *wh*-complementiser) is not attested at all. This has led to the hypothesis (Bacskai-Atkari 2020) that the impossibility of two *wh*-based relative markers is due to both elements bearing an uninterpretable relative feature, [u-rel], which should be checked against an interpretable element – either invisible or a *d*-based relative marker, which is always specified as [i-rel]. While the proposal appears to be adequate for the Germanic facts, two potential problems arise. First, the lack of *wh*-doubling in Germanic relative clauses may stem from the fact that this pattern never arises due to the strong presence of the *d*-patterns. If so, the missing pattern would constitute an accidental gap rather than one ruled out on principled grounds. Second, if the hypothesis turns out to be correct, this has strong implications on the inheritance of features like [u-rel], which appear to be retained even after reanalysis as a complementiser.

Slavic languages provide an ideal testing ground as both relative complementisers and relative pronouns are regularly *wh*-based (see Kljajevic 2012: 36 on relative complementisers). I will concentrate on South Slavic. The basic patterns are given in (1) for Serbian/Croatian: *što* is a complementiser and *koji* is a pronoun.

- (1) a. *čovjek što puši*
man that smokes
'a/the man that smokes/is smoking' (Gračanin-Yuksek 2013)
- b. *čovjek koji puši*
man which.NOM smokes
'a/the man who smokes/is smoking' (Gračanin-Yuksek 2013)

Both elements are phonologically identical to their *wh*-operator counterparts:

- (2) a. *Što je Marija videla?*
what AUX Mary seen
'What did Mary see?' (Halpern 1995: 77)
- b. *Koji čovek je voleo Mariju?*
which.NOM man AUX seen Mary.ACC
'Which man saw Mary?' (Halpern 1995: 78)

The variation between the two strategies in (1) can be observed across South Slavic (Macedonian and Bulgarian have the complementiser *što*, Slovene has the complementiser *ki*)

and also West Slavic, at least when non-standard varieties are also considered (Czech and Polish have the relative complementiser *co*, Slovak has the relative complementiser *čo*).

While in Serbian/Croatian both options in (1) are possible, the combination of the elements in question (**koi što*), which would constitute a so-called Doubly Filled COMP pattern, is not (Goodluck & Stojanović 1996: 292). The same pattern is reported for Slovene (Hladnik 2010: 12–13). The ban on the co-occurrence of a *wh*-based relative operator and a *wh*-based relative complementiser is in line with the hypothesis formulated above.

Macedonian seems to contradict this hypothesis as doubling patterns such as (3) are possible. This pattern is possible with all relative pronouns, except when the pronoun also has the form *što* (Rudin 2014: 320), but this is most probably a phonological constraint (similar constraints apply in multiple *wh*-fronting, see Bošković 2002).

- (3) čovekot **koj-što** zboruva
the.man who-that talks
'the man who is talking' (Rudin 2014: 316)

However, it appears that Macedonian *što* is also available as a declarative complementiser 'that' (Rudin 2014):

- (4) Se raduvam, **što** ve gledam.
REFL rejoice.1SG that you.PL.ACC see.1SG
'I am happy that I see you' (Tomic 2006: 419)

I suggest that the Macedonian pattern is indicative of two properties. First, the generalisation formulated above holds: *što* in cases like (3) is underspecified for [rel], just as it is in (4). The extension to declarative clauses is a triggering environment for this feature: Arsenijević (2020) argues that Serbian/Croatian declaratives have referential properties, suggesting that such declarative clauses are formally relative and have not undergone the loss of [u-rel], which explains the lack of doubling patterns in Serbian/Croatian. In other words, patterns like (4) are a prerequisite for patterns like (3) with *wh*-based complementisers, but the availability of (4) does not automatically mean that (3) should be available as well.

Second, the fact that the feature [u-rel] can be lost on a *wh*-based relative complementiser (whereby an overt or a covert operator has to be equipped with [i-rel]) indicates that while the morphological properties are decisive for most patterns, they do not prohibit further grammaticalisation even in languages where the original *wh*-element is still available.

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