

Jurica Polančec (University of Zagreb)

The invariant relativizer in contemporary non-standard Croatian

In this talk, we will present the invariant relativizer in contemporary Croatian with an emphasis on non-standard language. We will briefly introduce the Croatian invariant relativizer and its four forms (*što*, *šta*, *kaj*, *ča*). These four relativizers originate in separate Croatian dialects (*što* and *šta* in Štokavian, *kaj* in Kajkavian, and *ča* in Čakavian). Regardless of the dialect, the forms are functionally equivalent and have the same source in their respective dialects (the nom/acc case of the *what* pronoun).

In contemporary language, they differ in their sociolinguistic status: only *što* is standard; *što*, *šta* and *kaj* are used in everyday informal Croatian, which is close to the standard, but features some non-codified elements and is often influenced by dialects (Langston & Peti-Stantić 2014: 30, cf. van Marle 1997: 13–17). The form *kaj* is geographically confined to Northern Croatia including the capital Zagreb. We will discuss in some detail the rise of the form *kaj* from the dialectal status.

We will also show that the form *što*, when used in the standard, is typical of more formal and elaborate registers, in particular the language of literature. As for the other registers of standard Croatian, such as journalistic or scientific, the invariant relativizer often figures as a mere substitute for the relative pronoun (Kordić 1995: 164). Cases in which the invariant relativizer is at the same time a feature of everyday informal language as well as of the rather formal written registers of standard language are quite unusual. We found no parallel situation in other European languages, as analyzed in Murelli (2011).

In the main part of this talk, we will discuss the use of the invariant relativizer in everyday informal (non-standard) Croatian. The discussion is based on two recent studies. In Polančec & Gnjatović (2014), the rules governing the use of the invariant relativizer in everyday informal Croatian were examined and compared to the rules operating in standard language (as summarized by Pranjković 1986 or Kordić 1995). The examples were mostly found on the Internet via *Google* search engine. In Polančec & Mihaljević (2016), two exclusively non-standard forms of the invariant relativizer (*šta* and *kaj*) were examined on a sample retrieved from the Croatian web corpus *hrWac*. Two syntactic features were examined: the omission of the resumptive pronoun with relativized direct objects when the head is inanimate (**Example 1** below with omission) and the frequency of positions relativized. In the talk, we will also discuss a newly examined semantic feature observed in the same sample: the co-occurrence of definite demonstrative determiners (equivalent to *this*, *that* etc.; note that Croatian has no definite article) with the heads of relative clauses introduced by the invariant relativizer (**Example 2** below). The frequency of the co-occurrence points straightforwardly to the conclusion that the often invoked preference of the Croatian invariant relativizer for definite/specific (or given) heads holds (e.g. Browne 1986: 81).

In connection to the second study cited here, we will discuss methodological problems related to the use of Internet corpora in this type of research; we will also highlight the usefulness of such tools for investigations of non-standard language, especially if the language has no spoken corpus available yet (as is the case with Croatian). Finally, we will outline the design of a new study which should allow comparison of the frequencies of the invariant relativizer with the frequencies of the predominant relativization strategy (the one using the relative pronoun *koji*) using data from the web corpus *hrWac*.

Examples

- (1) Direct object (inanimate) relativized with omission of the resumptive pronoun

Ne znam ni dal tko čita
NEG know.PRS.1SG nor Q anyone read.PRS.3SG

ove gluposti [šta pišem]
this.ACC.PL.F nonsense.ACC.PL InvRel write.PRS.1SG

‘I don’t even know if anyone reads this nonsense that I write’

Note on (1): in this example, the accusative plural form *ih*, which refers to the head noun *gluposti* ‘nonsense’, is omitted.

- (2) RC with a noun (*zgrada*) premodified by the determiner *ona*

meni se najviše u Savici dopada
me.DAT REFL most in Savica.LOC.SG like.PRS.3SG

ona zgrada u Rogozovoj
that.NOM.SG.F building.NOM.SG in Rogozova.Street.LOC.SG

[kaj gleda na park]
InvRel has a view on park.ACC.SG

‘My favourite building in Savica is the one in Rogozova Street [that has a view on the park’]

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