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Relative pronouns in standard and colloquial Upper Sorbian: two sharply diverging systems

In Upper Sorbian interrogative pronouns turn into relative pronouns by adding the relativising element *-ž*, for example *hdy* ‘when’ → *hdyž*, *što* ‘what’ → *štož*, *kajki* ‘which’ → *kajkiž*, *čehodla* ‘why’ → *čehoždla*, *zwotkel* ‘from where’ → *zwotkelž*, all of them introducing relative subject or object clauses. In my talk, I will concentrate, however, on attributive relative clauses introduced by the relative pronoun *kotryž* from *kotry* ‘which’, competing with the relative particle *kiž*. The third relative pronoun forming attributive relative clauses, *štóž* from *štó* ‘who’, is restricted to animate reference in the singular and will be considered only marginally.

The relative pronoun *kotryž* is fully inflected for case, number and gender, whereas *kiž* is completely indeclinable. I will focus on the different rules for their mutual replacement in the two Upper Sorbian varieties in question. Relevant factors are, among other things, the subgenera *+animate/human* and several syntactic functions like subject or direct-object position, the role of possessive pronouns and genitive objects. I will start with a presentation of the full inflectional paradigm of *kotryž* and the possibility of its reduction in standard Upper Sorbian, followed by the rules grammarians give for its usage. These prescriptive rules will be compared with the actual usage in the everyday colloquial speech, differing sharply from the standard with respect to both forms and functions. The most evident difference lies in the distribution of *kotryž* and *kiž*, with a much higher frequency of the indeclinable relative particle in the colloquial variety.

In addition to describing the types of relativisation in the modern Upper Sorbian varieties, I am planning to give a short overview of their development from the first written texts, including some points of comparison with Lower Sorbian.