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Relative constructions with invariant relative words from a cross-linguistic perspective

The use of invariant relative words is a widespread relativisation strategy, even though these constructions are often “banned” from the written standard variety and considered to be colloquial or even substandard. They exist in virtually all Slavic languages and in many of the neighboring varieties ((colloquial) Lithuanian, colloquial/dialectal German, Italian, Greek). In most languages, the invariant relative word is homophonous with another pronominal form (Pol., Cz. *co*, Germ. *wo*, *was*) or the content subordinator (Russ. *čto*), while others, like Slovene, have a specialized form (*ki*).

In my presentation I will compare constructions with invariant relative words in Russian, Polish, Czech, Slovenian and German. In particular, I will address the following issues: formal relations, accessibility constraints, semantic characteristics (restrictive vs. non-restrictive clauses), semantic and pragmatic properties of the head noun (animate vs. non-animate, definite vs. indefinite), positional restrictions. Based on my findings, I will then discuss possible historical and areal patterns.