

Parallel evolution of relative clauses in Indo-European

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The Indo-European indefinite/interrogative pronouns **k^wi-/k^wo-* are the source of relative pronouns in several daughter languages, including varieties of Romance, Slavic, and Germanic among others. These pronouns did not head relative clauses in PIE, and so their presence in the relative clauses of the daughter languages is a result of processes of historical evolution which have recurred in different subfamilies. However, this recurring parallel process is by and large confined to Indo-European. Comrie (1998) claims instead that the interrogative relative pronoun strategy is a European areal phenomenon, because it is also found in neighbouring languages such as Hungarian and Georgian. However, there is ample evidence that endogenous innovation gives rise to interrogative relativizers in English and several other Indo-European languages. This suggests that such endogenous processes may be wholly or partly responsible for the emergence of interrogative relativizers across Indo-European. However, these processes are not the same across daughter languages: there appear to be several meandering paths from the same start point to similar endpoints.

In this talk, we establish a framework for describing both the parallel diachronic pathways and the dimensions of variation around those pathways. The broad outline of the parallel developments can be established by combining a typological perspective on Indo-European indefinite/interrogatives with results from Haspelmath (1997) on the relationship between interrogative and indefinite pronouns, from Belyaev & Haug (2014) on the typology of correlatives and conditionals, and from Haudry (1973) on the relationship between correlatives and headed relatives. At the same time, the behaviour of individual lexical items within this typological space is less predictable, accounting for the variation around this broad pathway.