Between relativization and complementation

In many languages, complementizer and invariante relative particle are formally related. They are often represented by homophonous wordforms, e.g. Ru. *čto*, Ukr. *ščo*, Br. *što*, BCS *što*, Mk. *što*, En. *that*, It. *che*. The connection is also palpable in some West Slavic languages, which use different wordforms for these functions in their standard varieties, cf. Polish *co* vs. *że*, Cz. *co* vs. *že*, etc. According to the *communis opinio*, the Polish complementizer *że* is related to a relative pronoun, since it is usually traced back to Old Polish *iż*(*e*), which is, in turn, a form of the Old Polish relative pronoun **jьnże* (see e.g., Mańczak 2017). In addition, the now almost extinct Eastern dialects of Polish (dialekty kresowe) use *że* as invariant relative particle.

There is also some indication that the form *co*, which has no relative function in Modern Polish, was used in a complementizer-like function in older stages and in non-standard (dialectal) varieties (cf. Kuraškevič 1971 for an overview of possible cases, Nieminen 1939; 1950 for possible cases in the Greater Poland Oaths). A possible case from Old Polish is given in the following example:

(1)   Tako mi pomoży Bog i święty krzyż, iż to świadczę, *co* Jakub zabił Adama, to ji zabił, iż ji kradł [……] (Koscian, 1391, e-Rotha)

The commonly accepted theory on the development and relative chronology of these functions is that the complementizer developed out of a relative particle, which, in turn, is interpreted as a fossilized case form of the relative pronoun (cf. Lehmann 1995, 1208-1210, 1213-1214). This path is assumed to be generally valid, ergo also for Polish. However, if one abstracts from any theory and takes the (Old) Polish texts at face value, one comes to realize that the actual data do not necessitate this cline and allow for other interpretations of how the functions of the respective word/word forms evolved.

Focusing on the relation between complementizer and relative pronoun/particle, I will take such an theoretically agnostic stance toward the Oaths of Greater Poland (Wielkopolskie roty sądowe). I will analyze structures where *co* cannot be unequivocally assigned a relative or pronominal function or where it even has a clear complementizing function. My research shows that Old Polish *co* could or should be categorized as a general connective with an indeterminate function / meaning that becomes more specialized in later stages, possibly fueled by the process of standardization.

Further investigations will show whether this approach could also prove useful for other languages.

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