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Variation in the use of the *wo*-relativizer in Swabian German

This paper presents the findings from a variationist analysis of the polysemic *wo*-relative pronoun ('where', 'who', 'that'), which varies with standard German relatives (*der, die, das*, etc.) in many southern dialects. It has generally been assumed that *wo*-relatives in German are used to signal some abstract notion of place and that their usage has spread to other contexts. To investigate this phenomenon, 1458 relative clauses were extracted from a panel study of 20 speakers of Swabian, a dialect spoken in southwestern Germany, who were recorded in 1982 and again in 2017. Results from the multivariate analysis show that, over a 35-year timespan, use of *wo*-relatives has decreased in nominative cases with animate antecedents and increased in oblique cases. External factors, most notably community (urban/rural), education, occupation and notions of 'Swabian Identity', also influence speakers' choice between standard *dxx*-pronouns and *wo*-relatives.