Information Structure and Clausal Comparatives in Czech and Polish

0. Introduction

Comparative Deletion: attested in English (cf. Bresnan 1973)
  descriptively: deletion of a non-contrastive AP or NP from the comparative subclause

• predicative structures:

(1)  a. Mary is taller than Charles is tall.
    b. *Mary is taller than Charles is tall.
    c. The desk is longer than the office is wide.

• Czech:

(2)  a. *Marie je vyšší, než je vysoký Karel.
      Mary is taller than is tall Charles
      ‘Mary is taller than Charles.’
    b. *Ten stůl je delší, než je ta kancelář široká.
       that desk is longer than is that office wide
       ‘The desk is longer than the office is wide.’

• Polish:

(3)  a. *Maria jest wyższa niż Karol jest wysoki.
      Mary is taller than Charles is tall
      ‘Mary is taller than Charles.’
    b. *?? Stół jest dłuższy niż biuro jest szerokie.
       desk is longer than office is wide
       ‘The desk is longer than the office is wide.’

→ question: why Czech and Polish lack predicative subcomparatives in the English way
→ proposal: constructions in (2) and (3) ruled out for slightly different reasons

• Comparative Deletion linked to an overtness requirement on the operator
• realisation of the lower copy licensed if wh-in-situ is also allowed

1. Comparative Deletion

comparative subclause: operator movement of the quantified expression
→ two copies: higher copy in a [Spec,CP] position, lower copy in the base position

operator: zero (x) in Standard English

(4)  a. Mary is taller than [x-tall] Charles is [x-tall].
    b. The desk is longer than [x-wide] the office is [x-wide].
overtness requirement: a lexical AP (or NP) is licensed in an operator position such as [Spec,CP] if the operator itself is overt

→ higher copies of the QPs in (4) deleted

lower copy of the movement chain: realised only if contrastive (Bacskai-Atkari 2012, 2013b)
possible if the higher copy cannot be pronounced (cf. Bošković and Nunes 2007)
otherwise regularly deleted (Bobaljik 2002; Chomsky 2005; Bošković and Nunes 2007)

→ final string:

(5) a. Mary is taller than [x-tall] Charles is [x-tall].
b. The desk is longer than [x-wide] the office is [x-wide].

● movement of the entire QP (including the AP): operator cannot be extracted

similarly: how in interrogatives

(6) a. How tall is Mary?
b. *How is Mary tall?

● higher copy of the QP licensed with an overt operator

how in certain dialects of English

(7) a. % Mary is taller than [how tall] Charles is [how tall].
b. % The desk is longer than [how wide] the office is [how wide].

role of information structure: only contrastive lower copies remain

deletion itself is not tied to information structural properties

2. Predicative comparatives in Czech

AP in the base position + zero operator ruled out:

(8) a. *Marie je vyšší, než je vysoký Karel.
Mary is taller than is tall Charles
‘Mary is taller than Charles.’
b. *Ten stůl je delší, než je ta kancelář široká.
that desk is longer than is that office wide
‘The desk is longer than the office is wide.’

● interrogatives: overt operator jak ‘how’ available – extractable

(9) a. Jak vysoký jest Karel?
how tall is Charles
‘How tall is Charles?’
b. Jak jest Karel vysoký?
how is Charles tall
‘How tall is Charles?’
↔ *how* in English

different positions within the functionally extended AP (Bacskai-Atkari 2013a, 2013b)

*how*: in a head position → cannot be extracted

*jak*: modifier → can be extracted as a phrase to a phrasal position

• *jak* also available in comparatives – extractable

*jak +* non-contrastive AP:

(10) a. ?? Marie je vyšší, než **jak** vysoký je Karel.  
Marie is taller than **how** tall is Karel  
‘Marie is taller than Karel.’

b. ?? Marie je vyšší, než **jak** je vysoký Karel.  
Marie is taller than **how** is tall Karel  
‘Marie is taller than Karel.’

c. #Marie je vyšší, než **jak** je Karel **vysoký**.  
Marie is taller than **how** is Karel **tall**  
‘Marie is taller than Karel.’

*jak +* contrastive AP:

(11) a. ?? Ten stůl je delší, než **jak** široká je ta kancelář.  
that desk is longer than **how** wide is that office  
‘The desk is longer than the office is wide.’

b. #Ten stůl je delší, než **jak** je široká ta kancelář.  
that desk is longer than **how** wide is **that** office  
‘The desk is longer than the office is wide.’

c. Ten stůl je delší, než **jak** je ta kancelář **široká**.  
that desk is longer than **how** wide is **that** office **wide**  
‘The desk is longer than the office is wide.’

(10c) and (11b) infelicitous

• clause-final position: sentential stress position (Šimík and Wierzba 2012)

• main contrast expressed by *Karel* in (10) ↔ in (11): by the AP *široká* ‘wide’

AP may move together with the operator to [Spec,CP] but this is not the preferred position

• not sensitive to information structural properties

role of information structure: determines the preferred position of the AP

• condition: the operator is separable

• ungrammaticality of (8)

  zero operator → higher copy has to be deleted (overtness requirement)

  but: lower copy cannot remain even if it is contrastive ↔ English

3. Predicative comparatives in Polish

AP in the base position + zero operator unacceptable for most speakers:

(12) a. *Maria jest wyższa niż Karol jest wysoki. Mary is taller than Charles is tall
   ‘Mary is taller than Charles.’
   b. *? Stół jest dłuższy niż biuro jest szerokie. desk is longer than office is wide
   ‘The desk is longer than the office is wide.’

● interrogatives: overt operator jak ‘how’ available – not extractable

(13) a. Jak wysoki jest Karol? how tall is Charles
   ‘How tall is Charles?’
   b. *? Jak jest Karol wysoki? how is Charles tall
   ‘How tall is Charles?’

● but: jak not available in comparatives (with any word order, separate/non-separate)

(14) a. *Maria jest wyższa niż jak wysoki jest Karol. Mary is taller than how tall is Charles
   ‘Mary is taller than Charles.’
   b. *Stół jest dłuższy niż jak szerokie jest biuro. desk is longer than how wide is office
   ‘The desk is longer than the office is wide.’

● ungrammaticality of (12)
   zero operator → higher copy has to be deleted (overtness requirement)
   but: lower copy cannot remain even if it is contrastive ↔ English

possible reason: no zero operator in Polish at all? (~Czech?)

but: there is no overt operator either

→ different reason – operator must be zero
   if there is an extractable zero operator, then both sentences in (12) should be fine
   ~ zero in German, Dutch (cf. Bacsáik-Atkari 2013a, 2013b)

→ the zero operator is not extractable (~English)

→ question: why a contrastive lower copy cannot be realised in Polish (and Czech?)
4. Attributive comparatives

attributive comparatives in English:

(15) a. Mary bought a bigger dog than Peter did.
    b. Mary bought a bigger dog than Peter did a cat.

syntax of attributive modification in English (cf. Kennedy and Merchant 2000)
- QP modifier cannot be extracted from within the nominal expression
- QP modifier moves to a left peripheral position within the nominal expression

interrogatives:

(16) How big a dog did Mary buy?

structure (Bacskai-Atkari 2013a, based on Kennedy and Merchant 2000):

(17)

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same inversion in comparatives like (15):

(18) Mary bought a bigger dog than [x-big a cat] Peter did buy [x-big a cat].

entire nominal expression (FP) moves up ← QP cannot be extracted

DP-island constraint (Kayne 1983; Ross 1986; Grebenyova 2004; Bošković 2005)

higher copy of the FP deleted (← overtness requirement):

(19) Mary bought a bigger dog than [x-big a cat] Peter did buy [x-big a cat].

reason: overtness requirement – operator position (Bacskai-Atkari 2013a)
QP cannot be eliminated on its own (no separate mechanism)

→ VP-ellipsis applies (Kennedy and Merchant 2000; see also Bacskai-Atkari 2013a)

(20) Mary bought a bigger dog than [x-big a cat] Peter did buy [x-big a cat].
lexical verb cannot be overt:

(21) *Mary bought a bigger dog than Peter bought a cat.

condition for the grammaticality of structures like (21): QP can move out on its own → can be used as a test for the extractability of the QP (even if the QP is not visible)

5. Attributive comparatives in Czech and Polish

QP extractable from the nominal expression – visible in interrogatives

● Czech (Kennedy and Merchant 2000: 104, ex. 30):

(22) a. Jak velké auto Václav koupil?
   how big car Václav bought
   ‘How big a car did Václav buy?’

   b. Jak velké Václav koupil auto?
   how big Václav bought car
   ‘How big a car did Václav buy?’

● Polish (Kennedy and Merchant 2000: 104, ex. 29):

(23) a. Jak długą sztukę napisał Paweł?
   how long play wrote Paweł
   ‘How long a play did Paweł write?’

   b. Jak długą napisał Paweł sztukę?
   how long wrote Paweł play
   ‘How long a play did Paweł write?’

in comparatives: lexical verb + remnant NP licensed

● Czech (Kennedy and Merchant 2000: 105, ex. 32b):

(24) Václav koupil větší auto než Tomáš ztratil loď.
   Václav bought bigger car than Tomáš lost boat.
   ‘Václav bought a bigger car than the boat that Tomáš lost.’

● Polish (Kennedy and Merchant 2000: 104, ex. 31a):

(25) Jan napisał dłuższy list, niż Paweł napisał sztukę.
   Jan wrote longer letter than Paweł wrote play
   ‘Jan wrote a longer letter than Paweł did a play.’

higher copy of the QP: deleted in [Spec,CP] – overtness requirement
remnant NP not affected – not a lower copy itself

→ there is a zero comparative operator both in Czech and in Polish
6. Predicative comparatives revisited

zero operator taking APs → unacceptability of lower copies of APs (~English):


   Mary is taller than is tall Charles

   ‘Mary is taller than Charles.’

   b. *Maria jest wyższa niż Karol jest wysoki.

   Mary is taller than Charles is tall

   ‘Mary is taller than Charles.’

but: contrastiveness does not license the realisation of lower copies either (~English):


   that desk is longer than is that office wide

   ‘The desk is longer than the office is wide.’

   b. /?/ Stół jest dłuższy niż biuro jest szerokie.

   desk is longer than office is wide

   ‘The desk is longer than the office is wide.’

→ difference in the overt realisation of copies of a movement chain

difference in *wh*-questions: English licenses *wh*-in-situ – multiple *wh*-questions

(28) **Who** saw **what**?

↔ Czech, Polish: multiple *wh*-fronting

• Czech (Rudin 1988: 498, ex. 105):

(29) a. Kdo koho viděl?

   who whom saw

   ‘Who saw whom?’

   b. *Kdo viděl koho?

   who saw whom

   ‘Who saw whom?’

• Polish (Rudin 1988: 497, ex. 104):

(30) a. Kto kiedy wyjechał?

   who when left

   ‘Who left when?’

   b. *Kto wyjechał kiedy?

   who left when

   ‘Who left when?’

→ proposal: (27) unacceptable because the realisation of lower copies is generally prohibited in the given languages (~↔ English)
**Conclusion**

comparative clause formation differs from the Standard English pattern in Czech and Polish

- overtness requirement: higher copy of the moved quantified expression overt only if the operator is overt – available in Czech but not in Polish

- extractability of the overt operator jak ‘how’ in Czech → AP may occupy a preferred position according to its information structural status

- zero operators – QP deleted in [Spec,CP] – a lexical NP may be left behind (attributives)

- overt realisation of lower copies not enforced by contrastiveness (↔ English)

more general property of movement chains in the respective languages

**References**


