Relative complementisers in Serbo-Croatian comparatives

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1 Introduction

comparatives expressing inequality:

(1) Ralph is more creative than Paul (is).

clausal comparatives introduced by a complementiser like than – comparative subclause
often elliptical (Bacskaï-Atkari 2018)

appearance of što ‘what’ in Serbo-Croatian comparatives expressing inequality:

(2) a. Pavo je viši nego što je visok Petar.
    Paul is taller than what is tall Peter
    ‘Paul is taller than Peter.’

b. Pavo je viši nego Petar.
    Paul is taller than Peter
    ‘Paul is taller than Peter.’

što a lower complementiser in a double CP structure (Bacskaï-Atkari 2016) – distribution:
- available in non-elliptical subclauses like (2a) – obligatory for most speakers (see
Ridjanovic 1984)
- prohibited in elliptical subclauses like (2b)

→ question: why the appearance of što is conditioned this way

proposal: the distribution of što in comparatives is contingent on two factors:
- its availability as a relative complementiser in ordinary relative clauses
- its carrying an [u-rel] feature

→ the distribution of što in comparatives can be drawn back to its specific behaviour in
ordinary relative clauses

1I owe many thanks to Boban Arsenijević for his indispensable help with the Serbo-Croatian data.
2 Relative clauses

Serbo-Croatian *što*: ordinary *wh*-operator in interrogatives – similar to English *what*

(3) što je Marija videla?
    what AUX Mary seen
    ‘What did Mary see?’ (Halpern 1995: 77)

*što* does not take an overt lexical NP ↔ *koji* ‘which’:

(4) koji čovek je voleo Mariju?
    which.NOM man AUX seen Mary
    ‘Which man saw Mary?’ (Halpern 1995: 78)

same contrast between English *what* and *which*:

(5) a. **What** did Mary see?
    b. **Which** man did Mary see?

both *što* and *koji* possible in relative clauses:

(6) a. čovek *što* puši
    man that smokes
    ‘a/the man that smokes/is smoking’ (Gračanin-Yuksek 2013: 27)
    
    b. čovek *koji* puši
    man which.NOM smokes
    ‘a/the man that smokes/is smoking’ (Gračanin-Yuksek 2013: 26)

syntactic difference:

- *što* a relative complementiser
- *koji* a relative pronoun

properties of *što* in relative clauses (Gračanin-Yuksek 2013):

- not sensitive to the head noun (e.g. it can occur with a human referent, unlike in interrogatives)
- not inflected for case (↔ *koji*, see also Arsenijević & Gračanin-Yuksek 2016)
- in non-subject relative clauses it can co-occur with a resumptive pronoun

behaviour of English *what* similar in relative clauses (non-standard dialects) – not restricted to human referents (↔ interrogatives)

(7) %See he was the man *what* brought in decasualization during the war.  
    (BNC H5H; Kortmann & Wagner 2007: 291)

→ *što* and *what* available as relative complementisers anyway
3 Comparative clauses

Comparatives have a double CP structure (Bacskaï-Atkari 2018):

- higher CP hosting the canonical comparative complementiser – English than, Serbo-Croatian nego/no
- lower CP hosting the comparative operator (overt or covert) in its specifier
doubling in English:

(8) %Paul is taller than what Mary is.
doubling in Serbo-Croatian:

(9) Pavao je viši nego što je visok Petar.
Paul is taller than what is tall Peter
‘Paul is taller than Peter.’

structure:

(10) \[ \begin{array}{c}
       CP \\
       \downarrow \\
       C' \\
       \downarrow \\
       C \\
       \downarrow \\
       CP \\
       \downarrow \\
       \text{than/nego} \\
       \downarrow \\
       \text{Op.} \\
       \downarrow \\
       C' \\
       \downarrow \\
       TP \\
       \downarrow \\
       (\text{what/što}) \\
     \end{array} \]

comparative operator moves to the left – Chomsky (1977), Kennedy (2002)
operator a relative operator – cannot remain in situ; it can be overt or covert (Bacskaï-Atkari 2018)

non-standard English:

(11) a. %Ralph is more creative than how creative Paul is.
b. %The desk is longer than how wide the office is.
comparative operators always allow (and often obligatorily require) the co-presence of a lexical AP in the [Spec,CP] position (see Bacskai-Atkari 2018 cross-linguistically).

lexical AP always in the base position with what (↔ how), see Izvorski (1995) and Bacskai-Atkari (2018):

\[(13)\]
\[
\begin{align*}
&a. \text{ *The desk is longer than what wide the office is.} \\
&b. \text{ %The table is longer than what the office is wide.}
\end{align*}
\]

→ what in comparatives is a relative complementiser – the lower C carries [rel] anyway and what is available as a relative complementiser anyway

same with Serbo-Croatian što:

\[(14)\]
\[
\begin{align*}
&a. \text{ Paul je viši nego što je visok Petar.} \\
&P\text{aul is taller than what is tall Peter} \\
&\text{‘Paul is taller than Peter.’} \\
&b. \text{ Sto je duži nego što je visok ured.} \\
&T\text{able is longer than what is wide oce} \\
&\text{‘The table is longer than the office is wide.’}
\end{align*}
\]

→ što in comparatives is a relative complementiser – the lower C carries [rel] anyway and što is available as a relative complementiser anyway

→ reason for the appearance of što in comparatives partly explained by its more general behaviour

additional question: why it does not appear in elliptical clauses

\[(15)\]
\[
\begin{align*}
&P\text{aual je viši nego Petar.} \\
&P\text{aul is taller than Peter} \\
&\text{‘Paul is taller than Peter.’}
\end{align*}
\]
same in English:

(16) a. Ralph is more creative than Paul (is).
    b. %Ralph is more creative than what Paul *(is).

elliptical structures generally lack the lower CP (Bacskaia-Atkari 2016) → lack of operator
movement,ellipsis involves the deletion of the verb and the non-moved operator at PF

4 More on cross-linguistic differences

possible expectation: if the lower C is specified as [rel], then relative complementsers are
generally available

doubling patterns either with a relative operator or with a relative complementiser at-
tested in various languages (Bacskaia-Atkari 2016)

but: not all relative complementisers available in comparatives

English that: canonical relative complementiser

(17) This is the cake that I baked.

not available in comparatives:

(18) *Ralph is more creative than that Paul is.

asymmetry in English (between that and what) indicates that the difference holds not
only between different languages

→ reason should have to do with the formal properties of the relative markers in question

two major strategies:

• relative pronoun strategy
• relative complementiser strategy

two sources of relative markers:

• demonstrative elements
• wh-elements

→ four major patterns (single marker):

• demonstrative-based relative pronoun (d-pronoun)
• wh-based relative pronoun (wh-pronoun)
• demonstrative-based relative complementiser (d-complementiser)
• wh-based relative complementiser (wh-complementiser)
fifth possibility: a combination of a pronoun and a complementiser – such doubling well-attested in Germanic languages

in theory: four possibilities – but: not all of them exist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>d-complementiser</th>
<th>wh-complementiser</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d-pronoun</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wh-pronoun</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
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\(d\)-pronoun + \(d\)-complementiser: most probably not genuine doubling (complementiser a mere finiteness marker)

\(d\)-pronoun + \(wh\)-complementiser: e.g. South German dialects (Brandner & Bräuning 2013, Weiß 2013, Fleischer 2017)

the.N money that.N REL I earn.1SG that.N belongs I.DAT
‘The money that I earn belongs to me.’
(Hessian; Fleischer 2017)

\(wh\)-pronoun + \(d\)-complementiser: e.g. English (see Van Gelderen 2009), marginally Swedish\(^2\)

(20) a. It’s down to the community in which that the people live.
(Van Gelderen 2013: 59, ex. 8)

b. Detta är studenten vilken som bjöd in Mary.
this is the student which that invited Mary
‘This is the student who invited Mary.’ (Bacskai-Atkari & Baudisch 2018)

proposal: asymmetric doubling patterns \((d+wh \text{ and } wh+d)\) involve canonical feature checking: \([i\text{-rel}]\) and \([u\text{-rel}]\)

• \(d\)-elements are \([i\text{-rel}]\)

• \(wh\)-elements are \([u\text{-rel}]\)

English \textit{what} and Serbo-Croatian \textit{što} are \(wh\)-elements → they are specified as \([u\text{-rel}]\) and
trigger the movement of the comparative (relative) operator to the CP

also: they do not type the clause as relative proper → additional comparative layer
possible

\(^2\)This option was indicated as possible by the informant from the Färgelanda municipality but not by
the one from Göteborg.
5 Conclusion

Serbo-Croatian comparatives regularly involve što below nego (or no)

- što is the regular relative complementiser
- što is wh-based and specified as [u-rel]
- comparative clauses involve a lower CP specified as [rel], unless the clause is elliptical
- comparative clauses allow an overt [u-rel] complementiser that does not type the clause as relative proper – additional comparative CP possible

→ properties of Serbo-Croatian comparatives involving što can be derived from the general properties of this element and of comparative clauses

→ not a construction-specific phenomenon

References


