The syntactic category of comparative complements cross-linguistically

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Introduction

comparative constructions: *than*-XP expressing the standard value of comparison:

(1) Ralph is taller than Mary.

question: category of the element THAN
PP and CP complements

THAN can be a C or a P head:

(2) a. Ralph is taller than she is.

b. Raulo è più alto di te.
Ralph is more tall of you.

(2a): than a C head

(2b): di a P head
status of surface-ambiguous cases like (1):

- reduced full (tensed) CP – Bresnan (1973); Lechner (2004)
- PP, *than* having two separate lexical entries as C and P – Hankamer (1973)
- CP without tense specification, no proper ellipsis – following Bacskaï-Atkari (2014b)
Proposal

cross-linguistically also intermediate types between prototypical C and P, types can be put on a cline, grammaticalisation possible

- C heads always taking full (tensed) clauses – e.g. Afrikaans
- C heads taking either a full (tensed) clause or a small (tenseless) clause, small clause option restricted to constructions where an external case assigner is available – e.g. German
- C heads taking either a full (tensed) clause or a small (tenseless) clause, small clause option available across the board – e.g. English
- P heads – e.g. Italian *di*
Phrasal comparatives

Italian *di* takes a DP complement:

(3) Raulo è più alto *di* te.
    Ralph is more tall.M of you.ACC
    ‘Ralph is taller than you.’

structure cannot be expanded:

    Ralph is more tall.M of you.NOM be.2SG
    ‘Ralph is taller than you.’

b. *Maria ama Giorgio più *di* Anna Pietro.
    Mary loves George more of Anna Peter
    ‘Mary loves George more than Anna loves Peter.’
Italian


(5)  a. Maria ama Giorgio più *che* Anna Pietro.
    Mary loves George more that Anna Peter
    ‘Mary loves George more than Anna loves Peter.’

    b. Maria è più intelligente *che* divertente.
    Mary is more intelligent that entertaining
    ‘Mary is more intelligent than entertaining.’

    hence: *di* is a P element taking a regular DP complement
Polish

"od ‘from’ + DP in the genitive

(Borsley & Jaworska 1981, 80, ex. 8; cf. also Stolz 2013):

(6) Jan jest wyższy od Piotra.
    John is taller from Peter.

‘John is taller than Peter.’
Types of PPs

P element may be the head of a lexical Kase projection (KP) cross-linguistically. Lexical cases: instances of PP (see Asbury 2005, 2008). KP the lowest PP layer, immediately above the DP; KP tops off the nominal projection, projections of higher P constitute a different extended projection (Den Dikken 2010, cf. also Dékány & Hegedűs 2014 on Hungarian).
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Russian

genitive case (cf. the discussion in Bacskai-Atkari 2014c):

(7) Ona vyše svoi odnoklassnikov.  
    she taller her.PL.GEN classmates.GEN  
    ‘She is taller than her classmates.’
Greek

genitive case (dated; see Bacskai-Atkari 2015a):

(8) Eida mia gynaika psiloteri tis miteras mou.
    saw.1SG a woman taller the.GEN mother.GEN my
    'I saw a taller woman than my mother is.'
Hungarian


(9) Mari magasabb Péternél.
    Mary taller       Peter.ADE
    ‘Mary is taller than Peter.’
Distribution of phrasal comparatives

importantly: PP-comparatives available across the board – not linked to a specific position in the clause
Clausal comparatives – tensed clauses

two indicators:

- full clause recoverable with a tensed verb
- remnant DP bears underlying structural case – nominative subjects
German

(10) a. Der Tisch ist länger als das Büro breit ist.
    the table is longer than the office wide is
    ‘The table is longer than the office is wide.’

    b. Ralf ist größer als ich/*mich.
       Ralph is taller than I.NOM/I.ACC
       ‘Ralph is taller than I am.’

structure of elliptical clauses like (10b): FP (functional projection) generated above TP, remnant moves to [Spec,FP], F head carries the ellipsis feature [E], complement of F elided, see Merchant (2001)
Structure

(11) CP
   C'
   C als x-groẞi C'
   CP
   C FP
   DPj F' ich F <TP>
   [E] tjt bin
Properties

case assignment: regularly in TP (Bacskai-Atkari 2014b)

lower CP: hosts the operator (cf. Chomsky 1977; Kennedy 2002 on relative operator movement in comparatives); no overt material in [Spec,CP] if the operator itself is zero (marked here as “x”; see the “Overtness Requirement” of Bacskai-Atkari 2014c)
Icelandic

nominative/accusative system (see Hróarsdóttir 2001)
leftrightarrow Mainland Scandinavian nominative/oblique system:

(12) Egill er hærri en þú.
Egill is taller than you.NOM
‘Egill is taller than you.’
Afrikaans

(13) Sy is langer as ek.
    she is taller then I.NOM
‘She is taller than I am.’
Giannakidou & Yoon (2011, 627, ex. 10):

(14) I Kiki ine psiloteri apoti i Ariadhni.  
the.NOM Kiki is taller than the.NOM Ariadne  
‘Kiki is taller than Ariadne.’
Hungarian

(15) Mari magasabb, mint Péter.
Mary taller than Peter.
‘Mary is taller than Peter.’
(16) Marie jest vyšší než já.
Mary is taller than I.NOM
‘Mary is taller than I am.’
So... elliptical structures like (10b) can be derived from full clauses, pattern attested cross-linguistically.
Dutch

(17) Ik ben langer dan hij/\%hem.
I am taller than he.NOM/he.ACC
‘I am taller than he is.’
English

(18) Ralph is taller than ?I/me.
So...

a general ellipsis mechanism is not sufficient for the analysis of all reduced comparatives
Clausal comparatives – tenseless clauses

so far: two types of clausal comparatives:

- languages with regular clausal patterns (German, Afrikaans)
- languages that show deviation (English, colloquial Dutch)
case of remnant DP always matches underlying case (Bacskai-Atkari 2014a):

(19) Ek het ’n vrou langer as sy gesien.
I have.1SG a woman taller than she.NOM seen
‘I saw a taller woman than my mother is.’
German

unexpected pattern (Bacskai-Atkari 2014b):

(20) Ich habe einen größeren Mann als meinen Vater gesehen.
    I have.1SG a.M.ACC taller.M.ACC man than my.M.ACC father seen
    ‘I saw a taller man than my father is.’

nominative remnant associated with a different meaning:

(21) Ich habe einen größeren Mann als mein Vater gesehen.
    I have.1SG a.M.ACC taller.M.ACC man than my.M.NOM father seen
    ‘I saw a taller man than my father saw.’
Icelandic

(22)  a. Ég sá hærri konu **en** móður mína.
I saw.1SG taller woman than mother.ACC my.ACC
‘I saw a taller woman than my mother is.’

b. Ég sá hærri konu **en** móðir mín.
I saw.1SG taller woman than mother.NOM my.NOM
‘I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.’
Core idea

cf. Bacskaia-Atkari (2014b): no full tensed clause in (20)

- PredP generated below FP instead of TP – phenomenon restricted to predicative clauses in German
- no nominative case assignment in base-generation position of the subject
- case assignment from matrix transitive verb – phenomenon restricted to cases where there is a potential case assigner, unlike simple predicative clauses like (10b)
Adjacency

reduced, tenseless THAN-XP has to be adjacent to the matrix object (constituency):

(23) *Ich habe einen größeren Mann gesehen als meinen Vater.
    I have.1SG a.M.ACC taller.M.ACC man seen than my.M.ACC father
    ‘I saw a taller man than my father is.’
Structure

(24)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{CP} \\
\text{C'} \\
\text{C} \quad \text{FP} \\
\text{als} \quad \text{DP}_i \quad \text{F'} \\
\text{meinen Vater} \quad \text{F} \quad <\text{PredP}> \\
\text{[E]} \quad \text{t}_i \times_{-\text{groß}} \\
\end{array}
\]
lower CP absent – no operator movement $\rightarrow$ ellipsis takes place to eliminate an ungrammatical relative operator in its base position (no relative in situ, see Bacskai-Atkari 2014c; see also the analysis of Bacskai-Atkari & Kántor 2012 for similar phenomena in Finno-Ugric) $\rightarrow$ FP layer generated regularly, tenseless clauses always contain only a single remnant but no adjectival predicate, unlike tensed clauses
Greek

only nominative available but no predicative reading
(Bacskai-Atkari 2015a):

(25) Eida mia gynaika psiloteri ap’oti i/*ti
saw.1SG a woman taller than the.NOM/the.ACC
mitera mou.
mother my
‘I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.’
Hungarian

only nominative, ambiguous (Bacskai-Atkari 2015b):

(26) Láttam egy magasabb nőt, mint Liza/*Lizát.
saw.1SG a taller woman.ACC than Liz.NOM/Liz.ACC
‘I saw a taller woman than Liz.’
(27) a. I saw a taller woman than her.
   ‘I saw a taller woman than she saw. / I saw a taller woman than she is.’

b. Ralph is taller than me.
So... 

English accusative case not restricted to cases where the matrix verb can assign accusative

a general ellipsis mechanism and small clauses dependent on the matrix transitive verb are not sufficient for the analysis of all reduced comparatives
Clausal comparatives – grammaticalised small clauses

so far: three types of clausal comparatives:

- languages with regular clausal patterns involving tensed clauses (Afrikaans, Greek)
- languages with predictable clausal patterns involving tensed and tenseless clauses (German, Icelandic)
- languages that show deviation (English, Dutch)
Question

 THAN-XP in the third type always a CP, or CP/PP variation (two lexical elements of different categories for THAN)

potential sources of accusative case:

- default case accusative in English, appears in the absence of an overt case assigner (see Schütze 2001)
- assigned by THAN as a preposition (Hankamer 1973)
Wh-extraction

argument of Hankamer (1973) for P status: asymmetry in *wh*-extraction

(28) a. Who$_i$ are you taller than $t_i$?
b. *Who$_i$ are you taller than $t_i$ is?
Prepositions in English

both stranding and pied-piping:

(29) a. \textbf{What} did you open the bottle [with t_i]?
   b. \textbf{[With what]} did you open the bottle t_i?

no pied-piping with \textit{than}:

(30) *\textbf{[Than who(m)]} are you taller t_i?
Accusative in English

default case (Schütze 2001) – generally available for DP remnants – no PredP necessary

(31) Ralph has more cats than me.
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Grammaticalisation

(33)  a. 

CP

C'

C

CP

than

Opj

C'

C

FP

XPi

F'

F

TP

[E]

...ti tj ...

b. 

CP

C'

C

FP

than

XPi

F'

F

PredP

[E]

...ti Op. ...

c. 

CP

C'

C

FP

than

XP

F'

F

DP/QP

[E]

Op. ...
Reanalysis involving the loss of PredP: grammaticalisation into a more functional projection (no predication proper, general predicative relation more similar to the Relator Phrase of Den Dikken 2006)

no reanalysis of FP into PP – would be less structure (DP complement of P head) but would be degrammaticalisation;
also: structures in (33a) and (33b) have not disappeared, full, non-elliptical clauses exist, hence ample input for the learner for *than* as a proper C head

→ status of English *than*: still a C head, complement types vary
Conclusion

various types of comparatives cross-linguistically:

- phrasal comparatives
- clausal comparatives with typical clausal surface pattern
- clausal comparatives with mixed surface pattern
## Overview

| phrasal comparatives (PPs) | Italian *di*  
| | Polish *od*  
| | Hungarian *-nál/-nél* |
| clausal comparatives (CPs) | both tensed and tenseless complements |
| | tenseless complement available across the board | English *than*  
| | | Dutch *dan/als* (substandard) |
| | tenseless complement only if licensed by a matrix transitive verb | German *als*  
| | | Icelandic *en* |
| | only tensed complements | Afrikaans *as*  
| | | Greek *apoti*  
| | | Hungarian *mint* |
So...

→ no universal phrasal (PP) analysis for structures with a single DP following \textsc{than} – clausal reduction attested in several languages

→ no universal TP-deletion analysis (ellipsis of full clauses) – even CPs can be minimal
Thank you!

Danke!
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References


References II


References V


References VI


