Relative complementisers in Serbo-Croatian comparatives

Julia Bacskaí-Atkari

University of Konstanz

julia.bacskaí-atkari@uni-konstanz.de

14th Annual Meeting of the Slavic Linguistics Society
Potsdam, 11–13 September 2019
comparatives expressing inequality:

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

clausal comparatives introduced by a complementiser like _than_ – comparative subclause often elliptical (Bacskai-Atkari 2018)
Serbo-Croatian

appearance of što ‘what’ in Serbo-Croatian comparatives expressing inequality:¹

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

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

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

što a lower complementiser in a double CP structure (Bacskai-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
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
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?
Differences in relative clauses

(6) a. čovjek što puši
    man    that smokes
    ‘a/the man that smokes/is smoking’
    (Gračanin-Yuksek 2013, 27)

b. čovjek 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

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 non-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
Comparative clauses

Comparatives have a double CP structure (Bacskai-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

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) CP

\[ C' \]

\[ C \quad CP \quad C' \]

\[ \text{than/nego} \quad \text{Op.} \quad \text{C'} \]

\[ C \quad TP \]

\[ (\text{what/što}) \]
Operator movement

comparative operator moves to the left – Chomsky (1977), Kennedy (2002)

operator a relative operator – cannot remain in situ; it can be overt or covert (Bacskai-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)
Structure

(12) CP
   /    \ C'
  /      \ C
 /        /\  
| than/neg| QP | C'
|         /      \ 
|     how creative | C | TP
|           |     |
| how wide  |
**English**

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

(13)  

a. *The desk is longer than what wide the office is.*  
b. %The table is longer than *what the office is wide.*

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

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

b. Sto je duži nego što je visok ured.  
table is longer than what is wide  
office ‘The table is longer than the office is wide.’

→ 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) Pavao je viši nego Petar.
Paul is taller than Peter
‘Paul is taller than Peter.’

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 (Bacskai-Atkari 2016) → lack of operator movement, ellipsis involves the deletion of the verb and the non-moving operator at PF
possible expectation: if the lower C is specified as \([\text{rel}]\), then relative complementisers are generally available

doubling patterns either with a relative operator or with a relative complementiser attested in various languages (Bacskai-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
Typology

two major strategies:

- relative pronoun strategy
- relative complementiser strategy

two sources of relative markers:

- demonstrative elements
- *wh*-elements
Four major patterns

- 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
Possibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><em>d</em>-complementiser</th>
<th><em>wh</em>-complementiser</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>d</em>-pronoun</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>wh</em>-pronoun</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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, Weiβ 2013, Fleischer 2017)


‘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 in Mary
      ‘This is the student who invited Mary.’
      (Bacskai-Atkari & Baudisch 2018)

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

Serbo-Croatian comparatives regularly involve što below nego

- 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
Thank you!

Danke!


References II


References


