

# The syntactic category of comparative complements cross-linguistically\*

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## 1 Introduction

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

(1) Ralph is taller **than** Mary.

question: category of the element THAN cross-linguistically and in (1)

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.M of you.ACC  
'Ralph is taller than you.'

in (2a): tensed clause can be recovered, subject naturally in the nominative  
→ *than* a C head

in (2b): no clause can be recovered, only a single DP remnant in the accusative possible  
→ *di* a P head

question: 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 Bacskai-Atkari (2014b)

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proposal: cross-linguistically also intermediate types between prototypical C and P, types can be put on a cline and 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*

## 2 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:

- (4) a. \*Raulo è più alto **di** tu sei.  
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.'

compare *che* 'that' (cf. Napoli & Nespors 1986, Bacskai-Atkari 2010, Bacskai-Atkari 2014c):

- (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

similar: Polish *od* 'from' + DP in the genitive (Borsley & Jaworska 1981: 80, ex. 8; cf. also Stolz 2013: 56–57):

- (6) Jan jest wyższy **od** Piotra.  
John is taller from Peter.GEN  
'John is taller than Peter.'

P element may be the head of a lexical Kase projection (KP) cross-linguistically  
 lexical cases: instances of PP (see e.g. 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)

Russian genitive case (cf. the discussion in Bacskai-Atkari 2014c: 47–48):

- (7) Ona vyše **svoix** **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 adessive case (cf. Wunderlich 2001, Bacskai-Atkari 2014c: 47):

- (9) Mari magasabb **Péternél**.  
 Mary taller Peter.ADE  
 ‘Mary is taller than Peter.’

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

### 3 Clausal comparatives – tensed clauses

two indicators:

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

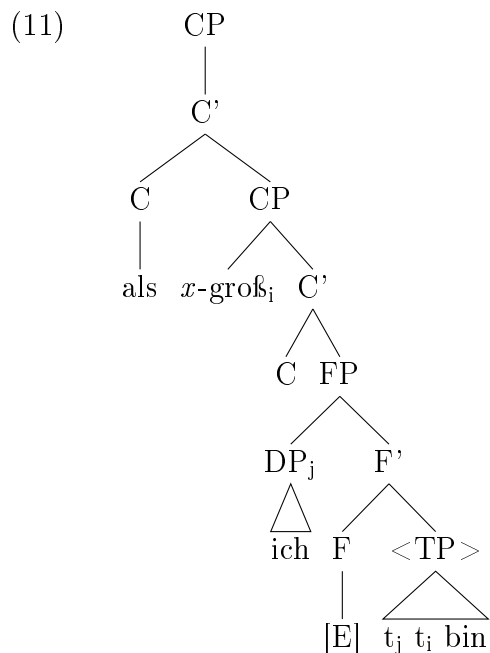
exemplified by German *als* ‘than’:

- (10) a. Der Tisch ist länger **als** das Büro breit ist.  
 the.M.NOM table is longer than the.N.NOM 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.’

similar patterns attested cross-linguistically – Germanic, Slavic, Romance, Hungarian, Greek have clausal comparatives

structure of full clauses like (10a) straightforward – complement of C an ordinary finite clause in the language

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)



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 similar (nominative/accusative system, see Hróarsdóttir 2001: 115–116  
 ↔ Mainland Scandinavian nominative/oblique system):

- (12) Egill er hærrí **en** þú.  
 Egill is taller than you.NOM  
 ‘Egill is taller than you.’

Afrikaans:

- (13) Sy is langer **as** ek.  
 she is taller than I.NOM  
 ‘She is taller than I am.’

Greek (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.NOM  
'Mary is taller than Peter.'

Czech:

- (16) Marie jest vyšší **než** já.  
Mary is taller than I.NOM  
'Mary is taller than I am.'

→ elliptical structures like (10b) can be derived from full clauses, pattern attested cross-linguistically

however: variation in colloquial 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.

→ a general ellipsis mechanism is not sufficient for the analysis of all reduced comparatives

## 4 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)

Afrikaans: 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.'

↔ unexpected pattern in German (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.'

same distribution in Icelandic:

- (22) a. Ég sá hærru 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 hærru konu en móðir mín.  
 I saw.1SG taller woman than mother.NOM my.NOM  
 'I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.'

no accusative in predicative constructions in German and Icelandic otherwise  
 (↔ English), see (10b) and (12)

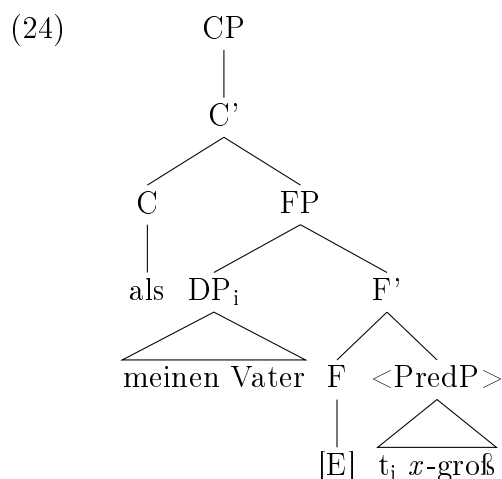
core idea (cf. Bacskai-Atkari 2014b): no full tensed clause in (20)

- 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)

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 of reduced tenseless clauses:



lower CP absent – no operator movement → 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) → FP layer generated regularly, tenseless clauses always contain only a single remnant but no adjectival predicate, unlike tensed clauses

cross-linguistically: not all languages show the availability of such structures – see Afrikaans in (19) above

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

- (25) Eida mia gynaike psiloteri **ap’oti** i/\*ti mitera mou.  
saw.1SG a woman taller than the.NOM/the.ACC 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.’

availability of accusative subjects (and hence tenseless complements) in German restricted

English:

- (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.

ambiguity in (27a): accusative available with a subject of an underlying lexical verb

availability of accusative in (27b): no external case assigner

→ 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

## 5 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)

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

- (28) a. Who<sub>i</sub> are you taller **than** t<sub>i</sub>?  
 b. \*Who<sub>i</sub> are you taller **than** t<sub>i</sub> is?

however: prepositions in English allow both stranding and pied-piping:

- (29) a. **What**<sub>i</sub> did you open the bottle [with t<sub>i</sub>]?  
 b. [**With what**]<sub>i</sub> did you open the bottle t<sub>i</sub>?

no pied-piping with *than*:

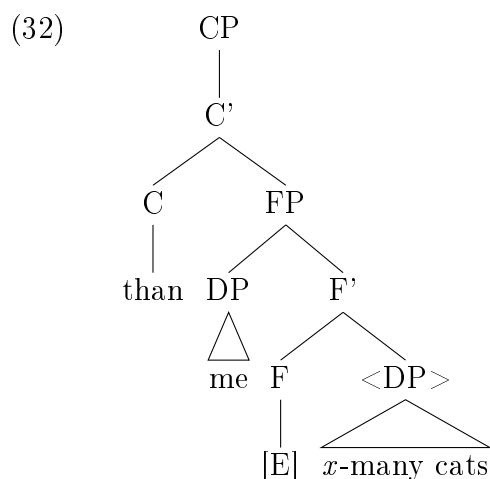
- (30) \*[**Than who(m)**]<sub>i</sub> are you taller t<sub>i</sub>?

asymmetry between (28a) and (28b) expected if the structure of tensed clauses and tenseless clauses is different underlyingly – (28a) is not derived from a construction like (28b), but there is more structure than in a PP

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

- (31) Ralph has more cats **than** me.

structure for cases like (31):

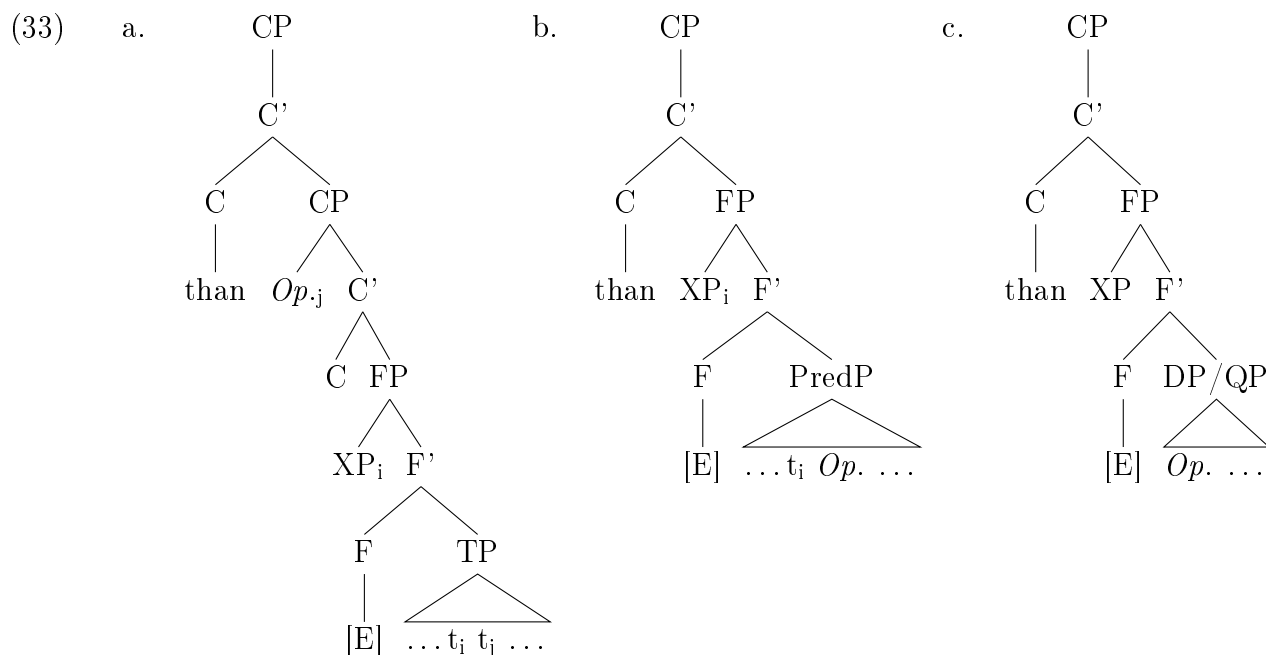


reanalysis: structure more economical and transparent, no movement step

but: predication relation more abstract (subject + degree predicate), F hosts degree argument in the complement (operator bound by matrix degree – comparative semantics), remnant XP in the specifier contrasted with a matching element of the matrix clause (if more options: ambiguity)



grammaticalisation scheme: (33a) → (33b) → (33c)



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, but complement types vary

## 6 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)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Italian <i>di</i></li> <li>• Polish <i>od</i></li> <li>• Hungarian <i>-nál/-nél</i></li> </ul>
clausal comparatives (CPs)	both tensed and tenseless complements	tenseless complement available across the board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English <i>than</i></li> <li>• Dutch <i>dan/als</i> (substandard)</li> </ul>
		tenseless complement only if licensed by a matrix transitive verb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• German <i>als</i></li> <li>• Icelandic <i>en</i></li> </ul>
	only tensed complements		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Afrikaans <i>as</i></li> <li>• Greek <i>apoti</i></li> <li>• Hungarian <i>mint</i></li> </ul>

→ no universal phrasal (PP) analysis for structures with a single DP following THAN – clausal reduction attested in several languages

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

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