

Equative elements in comparative constructions and in relative clauses in the history of German and English*

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Equative Constructions
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1 Introduction

degree equatives in English:

- (1) a. Ralph is **as** tall **as** Mary (is).
b. Ralph has **as** many cats **as** Mary (has).
c. Ralph has **as** fast a cat **as** Mary (has).

two equative elements:

- matrix equative element *as* – takes a lexical AP or *many*, entire degree expression may be a predicate or a modifier of the NP
- equative complementiser *as* of the subclause

no surface identity requirement on the two – German:

- (2) Ralf ist **so** groß **wie** Maria.
Ralph is so tall as Mary
'Ralph is as tall as Mary.'

degree equatives express degree equation and similarity

but: equative elements attested in relative clauses as well – earlier stages and certain dialects of English (Kortmann & Wagner 2007)

- (3) And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all **such as** handle the harp and organ.
(*King James Bible*, Genesis 4:21)

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similar constructions attested in the history of German

question: how the availability of equative elements in relative clauses can be accounted for

proposal:

- equative elements differ in terms of encoding
- lexical meaning of similarity associated with the equative element in the subclause, not the one in the matrix clause
- matrix equative element expresses equation, not specifically degree equation
- degree interpretation arises if the matrix degree element has a gradable predicate in its specifier, which is also mapped onto the degree operator in the subclause
- lack of gradable predicate produces an identificational interpretation – special case of (restrictive) relative clauses: “equative relative clauses”
- cross-linguistic differences depend on whether the equative head has to take a gradable argument

2 The syntax of comparatives

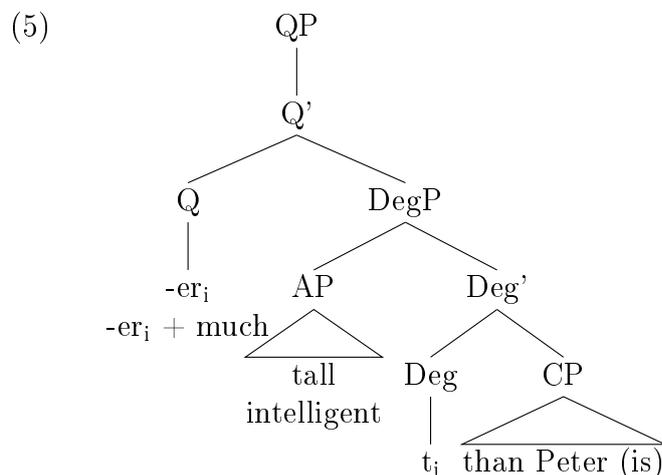
predicative comparatives:

- (4) a. Ralph is taller **than** Peter (is).
 b. Ralph is more intelligent **than** Peter (is).

assumptions (Bacskai-Atkari 2014b: 45–53):

- element *-er* is a degree head
- the AP is in the specifier of the Deg head – Lechner (2004)
- the *than*-CP is the complement of the Deg head – Lechner (2004)
- a QP is generated above the DegP, the Deg moves to Q – cf. Bresnan (1973) and Corver (1997) on Q elements; see also Lechner (1999)

structure:



Deg head imposes selectional restrictions on the complement

restrictions on the AP in the specifier, too – must be gradable (or a gradable interpretation must be licensed contextually)

(6) #Mary is more pregnant than Anne.

degree in the subclause: operator movement to the CP-periphery (comparative operator a relative operator – Chomsky 1977) – visible if the operator itself is visible (cf. the Overttness Requirement of Bacskai-Atkari 2014b)

(7) %Ralph is taller than **how tall** Peter is.

semantics:

(8) $\exists d \exists d' [\text{TALL}(r, d) \ \& \ \text{TALL}(p, d') \ \& \ (d \neq d') \ \& \ (d > d')]$

encoding of semantic properties (Bacskai-Atkari 2016b):

- degree d : matrix Deg head (*-er*)
- degree d' : operator in the subclause (*how*)
- degree inequality: comparative complementiser (*than*)
- superiority/inferiority: matrix Deg head

properties of comparatives:

- the degree element *-er* is often a bound morpheme, and it cannot stand alone as a proform – (9a)
- the *than*-CP is licensed only if the matrix degree element is present – (9b)

(9) a. Peter is indeed tall, but Ralph is more *(so).
b. *Ralph is tall than Peter.

→ comparatives seem to be tied to a degree interpretation, the DegP is an integer part of the construction

some APs may be lexically specified as comparative (cf. Bacskai-Atkari 2014b: 53)

(10) a. %University life is **different** than I expected.
b. I don't want to be anything **other** than what I've been trying to be lately.
c. Marzahn-Hellersdorf ist **anders** als man denkt.
Marzahn-Hellersdorf is other than one thinks
'Marzahn-Hellersdorf is different from what one thinks it it.'

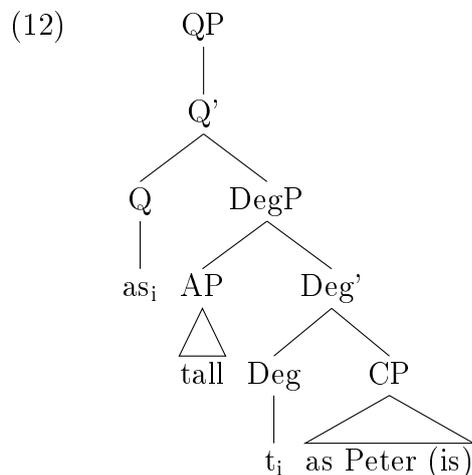
but: (10) attested with only a small set of adjectives, not across the board with all gradable adjectives

3 The syntax of equatives

question: whether equatives have the same structure as comparatives

(11) Ralph is as tall **as** Peter (is).

possible structure:



semantics:

(13) $\exists d \exists d' [\text{TALL}(r,d) \ \& \ \text{TALL}(p,d') \ \& \ (d=d')]$

but: differences from comparatives

- equatives periphrastic – matrix element not a suffix
- matrix equative element may function as a proform – (14b), (14c)
- *as*-CP available without the matrix equative element, too, possible across the board with all gradable adjectives (cf. Jäger 2010, Thurmair 2001: 165–182) – (14d), (15b)

German:

- (14)
- Sie ist **so** nett, **wie** ihre Mutter.
she is so kind as her.F mother
'She is as kind as her mother.'
 - Sie ist **so wie** ihre Mutter.
she is so as her.F mother
'She is like her mother.'
 - Sie ist halt **so**.
she is PRT so
'She is like that.'
 - Sie ist nett, **wie** (auch) ihre Mutter.
she is kind as too her.F mother
'She is kind, as is her mother.'

English similar but proform element is *so*, not *as*:

- (15) a. Peter is nice and Mary is **so**, too.
b. Peter is nice, **as** is Mary.

lack of degree interpretation: lack of matrix equative element or of matrix gradable AP

→ degree interpretation is not contingent upon the equative head of the subclause (in line with the assumption that *d'* is encoded by the operator)

→ degree interpretation is contingent upon the presence of the matrix equative element (in line with the assumption that *d* is encoded by the matrix Deg)

→ but: the presence of the matrix equative element is not sufficient, a gradable argument in the specifier has to be present for the degree interpretation to arise

4 Similarity

equative elements in various similative constructions – historical connections

degree equatives:

- (16) a. Ralph is as tall **as** Peter.
b. Ralf ist so groß **wie** Peter.
Ralph is so tall as Peter
'Ralph is as tall as Peter.'

non-degree equatives:

- (17) a. Ralph is tall, **as** is Peter.
b. Ralf ist groß, **wie** (auch) Peter.
Ralph is tall as too Peter
'Ralph is tall, as is Peter.'

various parenthetical constructions (cf. Bacskai-Atkari 2014a):

- (18) a. Peter, tall **as** he is, will hit his head.
b. Peter, groß **wie** er ist, wird sich den Kopf anschlagen.
Peter tall as he is will.3SG himself the.M.ACC head on.hit.INF
'Peter, tall as he is, will hit his head.'

hypothetical comparatives:

- (19) a. My daughter is shouting, **as** if she were at the dentist's.
b. Meine Tochter schreit, **wie** wenn sie beim Zahnarzt wäre.
my.F daughter shouts as if she at.the.DAT.M dentist would.be
'My daughter is shouting, as if she were at the dentist's.'

→ equative complementisers are licensed in a number of constructions, independently of a matrix equative element

→ the equative/degree interpretation of the subclause arises in the scope of the matrix equative element – in itself, the subclause conveys a meaning of similarity

note: matrix equative element licensed without an equative subclause, too – exclamatives, *so...that* constructions

- (20) a. She is **so** diligent!
b. Sie ist **so** fleißig!
she is so diligent
'She is so diligent!'
c. She is **so** tall that she will hit her head.
d. Sie ist **so** groß, dass sie sich den Kopf anschlagen wird.
she is so tall that she herself the.M.ACC head on.hit.INF will.3SG
'She is so tall that she will hit her head.'

standard value expressed by a THAT-clause or reference to a norm

complementiser in clauses expressing similarity shared with degree equatives – but not necessarily so

English *like* (cf. the data in Pulgram 1983: 124, Pfeffer 1985):

- (21) a. *Ralph is as tall **like** Peter.
b. Ralph is tall, **like** Peter.
c. %My daughter is shouting **like** she were at the dentist's.

German *als* in hypothetical comparatives (cf. Jäger 2010, Eggs 2006):

- (22) a. Sie schreit, **als** wäre sie beim Zahnarzt.
she shouts than be.SBJV.3SG she at.the.M.DAT dentist
'She is shouting as if she were at the dentist's.'
- b. Sie schreit, **als** ob sie beim Zahnarzt wäre.
she shouts than if she at.the.M.DAT dentist be.SBJV.3SG
'She is shouting as if she were at the dentist's.'
- c. Sie schreit, **als** wenn sie beim Zahnarzt wäre.
she shouts than if she at.the.M.DAT dentist be.SBJV.3SG
'She is shouting as if she were at the dentist's.'

reason: *als* (*(al)so*) the original equative complementiser – present in Old High German equatives already, replaced by *wie* during Early New High German (from the second half of the 16th century onwards), see Jäger (2010); the patterns in (22) show the grammaticalisation of an earlier form (Bacskai-Atkari 2016a)

regular West-Germanic pattern: cognates of *as* as equative/similative markers – German *wie* innovative, as is English *like* and Dutch *gelijk* (Haspelmath & Buchholz 1998)

→ complementiser in equatives more grammaticalised than in similatives (innovative patterns start in non-degree equatives, cf. Jäger 2010)

→ hypothetical comparatives represent an independent path – complementiser taken from similatives

→ similative clauses have a lexical meaning without there being a matrix equative element; the lexical meaning may be weakened in equatives (grammaticalisation), which do not straightforwardly allow any similative complementiser

→ the complementiser of the subclause in itself does not encode degree equality, degree is present if the degree operator is present, too; equation encoded by the matrix equative element, which selects for a particular C head (e.g. *as*) and does not allow all similative complementisers (e.g. *like*)

5 Historical developments affecting equative elements

regular West-Germanic pattern:

- *as* in degree equative and ordinary similitive subclauses
- matrix equative element *so*

present-day patterns:

- (23)
- Ralph is **as** tall **as** Peter.
 - Sophie is **zo** groot **als** Lieke.
Sophie is so tall as Lieke
'Sophie is as tall as Lieke.'
 - Ralf ist **so** groß **wie** Peter.
Ralph is so tall as Peter.
'Ralph is as tall as Peter.'

German: *wie* an innovation – (23c)

English: matrix *as* seems to be different – (23a)

former periods of German (before Early New High German): *as*-clause introduced by *als*
(examples from the beginning of the 12th century)

- (24)
- wart aber ie **sô** werder man geborn [...] **sô** von Norwege Gâwân
was.3SG but ever so noble.M man born as from Norway Gawain
'But was there ever born a man as noble as Gawain from Norway?'
(*Parzival* 651, 8ff; Eggs 2006: 22–23, ex. 14)
 - [...] waer er **sô** milt **als** lanc, er hete tugende
be.COND.3SG he so generous as tall he have.COND.3SG virtues
vil besezzzen
many possess.INF
'If he were as generous as he is tall, he would have had many virtues.'
(Walther von der Vogelweide, *Werke* Bd. 1, 118f; Eggs 2006: 22, ex. 12)
 - dochn was dâ nieman **alsô** vrô **alsô** mîn her Gawein
but was.3SG there noone so glad as my lord Gawain
'but noone was as glad there as my Lord Gawain'
(*Iwein* 2618f; Eggs 2006: 22, ex. 13)

→ the variation *so/as* is common in West Germanic historically (both matrix equative element and complementiser)

etymology:

- English: *as* derives from *eallswa* (*all* + *so*), forms *swelce* (*swilce*, *such*) and *so* (*swa*) also possible historically in *as*-constructions (see Kortmann 1997: 315–317; see also López-Couso & Méndez-Naya 2014: 312–314 and references there)
- German: *als* derives from Old High German *also* (*all* + *so*), various forms of *so* possible historically in *as*-constructions (see Jäger 2010)
- Dutch: *als* derived from *also* (*al* + *so*)

→ elements *so* and *as* are essentially the same (either as matrix elements or as complementisers), later differentiation/changes naturally possible (e.g. English *as... as* vs. *so... that*, German *so... wie* vs. *so... dass*)

6 Equative relative clauses

equative elements in relative clauses attested in earlier periods in English and German

- (25) And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all **such as** handle the harp and organ.
(*King James Bible*, Genesis 4:21)

partly attested in present-day English dialects (traditional/conservative feature, Kortmann & Wagner 2007) – matrix element *all* (Herrmann 2005)

- (26) [...] **so all as** he had to do were go round in a circle all the time [...]
(*Freiburg English Dialect Corpus* Som_001; Herrmann 2005: 64, ex. 26d)

element *all* evidently not a degree marker but may convey the meaning of equation

Old High German:

- (27) a. **sulike** gesidoe **so** he im selbo gecos
 such companions so he him self chose
 ‘such companions that he chose for himself’
 (*Heliland* 1280; Brandner & Bräuning 2013: 138, ex. 20)
- b. **So** ware **so** ich cherte minen zoum ...
 so where so I guided my rein
 ‘Wherever I guided my rein ...’
 (*Bairischer Psalm* 138; Brandner & Bräuning 2013: 143, ex. 30, quoting Lühr 1998)

pattern in (27b): headless relative – attested in modal free relatives as well:

- (28) er bi unsih tod thulti, **so** wio **so** er selbo wolti
 he by us death suffered as how as he self wanted
 ‘he suffered death by us, as he himself wished’
 (*Otfrid* V, 1, 7; Jäger 2010: 488, ex. 46, quoting Schrodts 2004)

→ parallelism with equative constructions

note: *so*-relatives grammaticalised and *so* was a general relative marker in Early New High German (similarly to present-day *wo* in southern dialects, see Brandner & Bräuning 2013, and to *that* in English) → no matrix *so* needed

- (29) hier das Geld **so** ich neulich nicht habe mitschicken können
here the.M money so I recently not have with.send.INF can
'Here the money that I recently could not send.'
(Schiller to Goethe 127; Brandner & Bräuning 2013: 132, ex. 4, quoting Paul 1920)

availability of equative elements in relative clauses: relative clauses also express equation (Brandner & Bräuning 2013: 147–150)

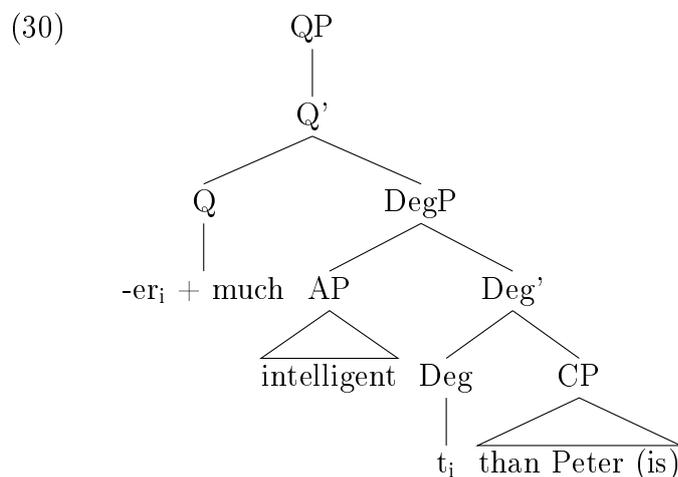
claim here: not all relative clauses are equative – but equative elements in relative clauses do render an equative reading, which is not tied to degree

7 The proposed structure

question: how the structure of equative relative clauses compares to degree equatives

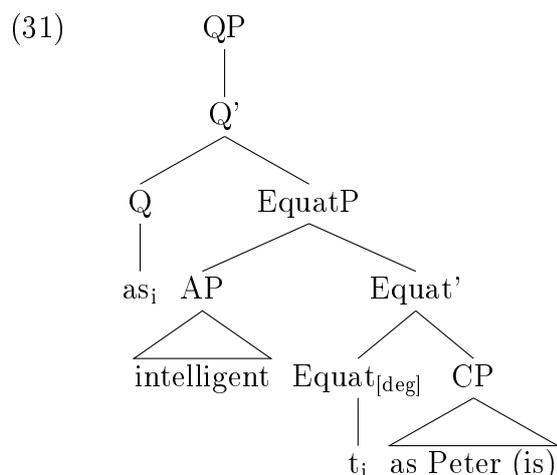
drawing upon the idea of Brandner (2016): Equative Phrase (EquatP) – here: EquatP analogous to DegP, unlike the structure of Brandner (2016)

structure for (degree) comparatives:



comparatives regularly have a DegP layer, which encodes the comparative degree and thereby difference

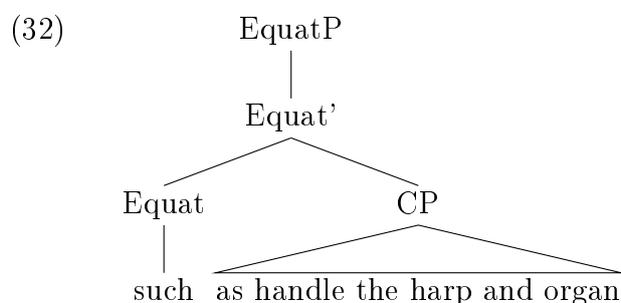
structure for degree equatives:



properties:

- no DegP layer – absolute adjective combined with an equative marker
- degree present as a feature [deg] – not all equative elements can be associated with a degree (e.g. *all* in English dialects), these do not bind a degree variable in the subclause
- structure similar to comparatives; shared property: QP layer → comparatives and degree equatives demonstrate similar syntactic behaviour

structure for equative relative clauses:



properties:

- no DegP, no [deg] present
- EquatP similar to the one in degree equatives, but no lexical AP and no [deg]
- no QP generated
- structure applies to equative relative clauses, not to all relative clauses

structure of equative relatives is essentially similar to that of degree equatives, which are in turn minimally different from comparatives

availability of degree equatives does not imply the availability of equative relatives: not all Equat heads allow the absence of a gradable argument

8 Conclusion

equative elements in relative clauses – attested in various periods of English and German

- degree equatives involve an EquatP and not a DegP, as opposed to comparatives – yet an AP in the specifier and a CP complement in both cases attested
- equative relatives involve an EquatP, just like degree equatives
- equative relatives do not have a gradable argument in the specifier of the Equat head → no gradable interpretation

equative relatives and their cross-linguistic differences can be accounted for in a principled way, involving minimal syntactic/semantic differences

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