

Relative complementisers in Serbo-Croatian comparatives

Julia Bacskai-Atkari
University of Konstanz
julia.bacskai-atkari@uni-konstanz.de

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

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 (Bacskai-Atkari 2018)

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.’

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

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. 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 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 (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

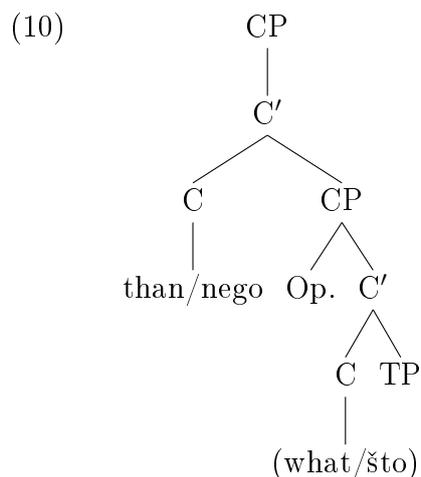
doubling in English:

(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:



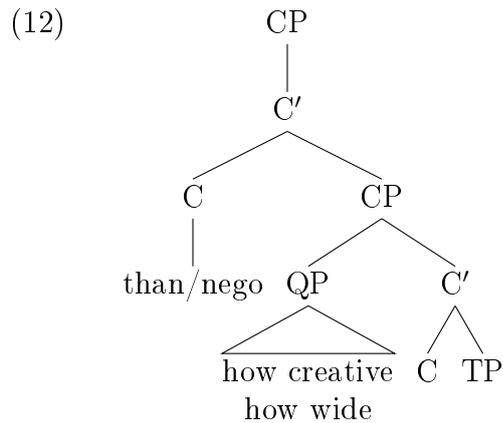
comparative operator moves to the left – Chomsky (1977), Kennedy (2002)

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.

structure:



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* (\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

same with Serbo-Croatian *što*:

- (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-moved operator at PF

4 More on cross-linguistic differences

possible expectation: if the lower C is specified as [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

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

	<i>d</i> -complementiser	<i>wh</i> -complementiser
<i>d</i> -pronoun	(+)	+
<i>wh</i> -pronoun	+	–

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)

- (19) Des Geld, **des wo** ich verdiene, des geheert mir.
 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 Swedish²

- (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)

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

- *d*-elements are [i-rel]
- *wh*-elements are [u-rel]

English *what* and Serbo-Croatian *što* are *wh*-elements → they are specified as [u-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

²This 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

- Arsenijević, Boban & Martina Gračanin-Yuksek. 2016. Agreement and the structure of relative clauses. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 1(1). 1–16.
- Bacsikai-Atkari, Julia. 2016. Towards a cross-linguistic typology of marking polarity in embedded degree clauses. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 63(4). 389–409.
- Bacsikai-Atkari, Julia. 2018. *Deletion phenomena in comparative constructions: English comparatives in a cross-linguistic perspective*. Berlin: Language Science Press.
- Bacsikai-Atkari, Julia & Lisa Baudisch. 2018. Clause typing in Germanic: A questionnaire and its results. Potsdam: University of Potsdam. URL: <https://publishup.uni-potsdam.de/frontdoor/index/index/docId/40681>, last accessed: 07.04.2018.
- Brandner, Ellen & Iris Bräuning. 2013. The particle *wo* in Alemannic: Only a complementizer? *Linguistische Berichte* 234. 131–169.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1977. On *wh*-movement. In Peter W. Culicover, Thomas Wasow & Adrian Akmajian (eds.), *Formal syntax*, 71–132. New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Fleischer, Jürg. 2017. Relativsatz-Einleitung. In *SyHD-atlas*. Available at <http://www.syhd.info/apps/atlas/#relativsatz-einleitung> (last accessed: 14 July 2017).
- Gelderen, Elly van. 2009. Renewal in the left periphery: Economy and the complementiser layer. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 107(2). 131–195.
- Gelderen, Elly van. 2013. *Clause structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gračanin-Yuksek, Martina. 2013. The syntax of relative clauses in Croatian. *The Linguistic Review* 30(1).
- Halpern, Aaron. 1995. *On the placement and morphology of clitics*. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.
- Izvorski, Roumyana. 1995. A solution to the subcomparative paradox. In Jose Camacho, Lina Choueiri & Maki Watanabe (eds.), *WCCFL 14: The proceedings of the 14th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics*, 203–219. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Kennedy, Christopher. 2002. Comparative Deletion and optimality in syntax. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 20(3). 553–621. doi:10.1023/A:1015889823361.

- Kortmann, Bernd & Susanne Wagner. 2007. A fresh look at Late Modern English dialect syntax. In Javier Pérez-Guerra (ed.), *“Of varying language and opposing creed”: New insights into Late Modern English*, 279–300. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Ridjanovic, Midhat. 1984. Serbo-Croatian *nego* (*što*) v. *od* in comparative sentences and *nego* v. *ali* in coordinate structures. *The Slavic and East European Journal* 33(4).
- Weiß, Helmut. 2013. Satztyp und Dialekt. In Jörg Meibauer et al. (eds.), *Satztypen des Deutschen*, 764–785. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.