# ON THE LEFT PERIPHERY OF CLAUSAL COMPARATIVE COMPLEMENTS

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Abstract: The aim of the research that this article is based on is to investigate the structural representation of comparative constructions within the framework of generative syntax; in this article I propose that clausal comparative complements, e.g., constituents responsible for the standard value and introduced by than in English, are clauses full-fledged in terms of the cartographic approach. Consequently, there are two complementizer positions: Force and Finiteness in the left periphery, and the former can be filled by than in English. The other positions in the C-system can also be filled, as expected: I prove that both TOP and FOC elements can appear in the designated positions. It is explained how comparative operator movement works in the above layout, and I also tackle deviant but grammatical comparative constructions (i.e., those lacking comparative operators).

**Keywords**: generative syntax, comparatives, cartographic approach, left periphery, operator movement.

Resumen: El objetivo de este artículo es investigar la representación estructural de las construcciones comparativas en el marco de la sintaxis generativa; en este artículo propongo que los complementos comparativos oracionales (por ejemplo, las frases responsables del valor estándar e introducidas por than en inglés) son oraciones completas subordinadas desde el punto de vista del análisis cartográfico. Por lo tanto, hay dos posiciones para los complementizadores en la periferia izquierda: la de Fuerza y la del aspecto Finito, y la de Fuerza se puede llenar con than en inglés. Las otras posiciones en el sistema de C se pueden llenar también, según lo esperado: demuestro que los elementos TOP y FOC pueden aparecer en las posiciones correspondientes. Se explica cómo los movimientos del operador en las construcciones comparativas funcionan en la disposición ya explicada, y también examino algunas construcciones comparativas extráñas (es decir, ésas que carecen de los operadores comparativos).

**Palabras clave**: sintaxis generativa, construcciones comparativas, análisis cartográfico, periferia izquierda, movimiento del operador.

#### 1. Introduction

The target of this paper is to present an adequate generative syntactic analysis of the left periphery of clausal comparative constructions, such as the one below in brackets:

(1) The door is higher [than the desk is wide].

As for the structural representation of the left periphery of subordinate clauses, I am going to follow the findings of the cartographic approach (e.g., L. RIZZI 1997, 2002), as it is considered to be an up-to-date and prominent analytical background in the matter.

Therefore, several questions seek to be answered in the argumentation. First of all, it must be investigated what clausal comparative complements are and where they are generated, as they provide the basis of the research. Secondly, it is also of utmost importance to state what the cartographic approach is and which of its aspects and findings are to be used throughout the paper. Thirdly, one of the two questions that might open new fields of research for the academic

community is what the structural representation of the left periphery of clausal comparative complements would possibly look like, and how this representation could be justified.

And finally, on the one hand, it is the nature of structural positions, on the other hand, it is the appearance of links connecting the elements in these positions (for instance, movement chains or binding chains) which may constitute the essence of generative syntactic analyses. Comparative operator movement as such falls in the scope of the latter. Therefore, it should also be defined what comparative operator movement is, and where the landing site of this movement is within the left periphery of clausal comparative constructions.

As a consequence, I will provide an analysis of the left periphery of clausal comparative constructions in the light of the cartographic approach. Accordingly, this paper will explain why not only one complementizer can introduce such subordinate sentences.

# 2. Clausal comparative complements

Although it has been shown in (1) which segment of the comparative construction is considered the comparative complement, it is yet to be described why it is a complement, and what it is the complement of. To start with, it must be mentioned that in present-day generative literature the Adjectival Phrase is treated as a functionally extended expression, which was initiated by N.F.M. Corver (1990: 34, based on S.P. Abney 1987, followed by J. Grimshaw 1991 and C. Kennedy 1997); that is, originally an AP was thought to be embedded under a functional Degree Phrase (DegP) as its complement, as can be seen in the example below:

$$[DegP [Deg', [\mathbf{Deg}^0]][AP \dots]]]$$

However, the benefit of the analysis with a functional layer can be captured in that positioning the *than*-clause might become easier. Even though N.F.M. CORVER (1997), C. KENNEDY (1997) and C. KENNEDY & J. MERCHANT (1997) maintain the view that the AP would be the complement of Deg<sup>0</sup> and the *than*-clause could be freely adjoined under a recursively generated Deg' node, this solution cannot be accepted due to semantic reasons. The example below shows the schematic information structure of comparative constructions:

(3) 
$$\alpha$$
 is  $\varphi$ -Deg<sup>0</sup><sub>[+COMP]</sub> than  $\beta$  is  $\varphi$ -Deg<sup>0</sup><sub>[-COMP]</sub>;  $\alpha$  is  $\mathbf{d}_{ref}$ - $\varphi$ ;  $\beta$  is  $\mathbf{d}_{sta}$ - $\varphi$ 

Consequently, there are three elements necessary for a comparative construction to be interpretable: one of them is an element  $\alpha$ , which is compared to  $\beta$ , on the grounds of the adjectival dimension represented by the adjective or adverb  $\varphi$  both in the matrix clause and in the comparative complement. In a comparative construction, both elements  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  represent different values on the scale determined by the adjective  $\varphi$ 's dimensional parameter, according to the scalar analysis of comparatives (cf. C. Kennedy 1997: 50ff.);  $\alpha$  represents the reference value  $(\mathbf{d}_{ref})$ , which indicates the degree to which  $\alpha$  is  $\phi$ , whereas the standard value  $(\mathbf{d}_{sta})$  is represented by the comparative complement (than-XP) with  $\beta$  inside, as «the complement of than denotes the set of degrees that satisfy the restriction derived by abstracting over the degree variable in the comparative clause» (A. VON STECHOW 1984, as adopted in C. KENNEDY 1997: 56). It must also be stipulated that it is the Degree head equipped with a [+COMP] feature that takes a than-XP comparative complement, as in W. LECHNER (1999). As a result, the Degree head embedded in the subordinate clause is [-COMP]<sup>1</sup>. It is also straightforward that there is a DegP generated in the subordinate clause, as the AP within the DegP is overtly filled even in English, when it is not identical to that in the matrix clause, as could be seen in (1) above. In order to show the above mechanisms in practice, I suggest that the following examples be glanced at:

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> I will return to the issue of the complement of the [-COMP] Degree head later.

#### (4) Butch is taller than Fluffy is.

In the above example, the height of *Butch* (reference value) is compared to that of *Fluffy* (standard value) on the dimensional scale of *tall*. The degree relation in (4) can be characterised as  $d_{ref} > d_{sta}$ .

In lines with the above argumentation, it was assumed in R. IZVORSKI (1995a), W. LECHNER (1999) and G. KÁNTOR (2001) that three elements are semantically related to the Degree head: the element denoting the reference value ( $\alpha$ ), the constituent representing the standard value (the *than-*clause) and the adjective providing the dimensional parameter ( $\varphi$ ). Therefore, no matter what kind of comparative construction is to be analysed, it is always a must that the comparison be equipped with an appropriate standard value; thus the *than-*constituent cannot be optionally adjoined to either the Degree head or the Adjective, but it must be generated as a complement.

Furthermore, it was put forth by E.L. KEENAN (1987) that, as only two of the above mentioned three elements are generated in the vicinity of the Degree head, Deg<sup>0</sup> itself should be treated as a complex two-place predicate. In order to accommodate these two elements, it can be stipulated that the AP is generated in the specifier position of DegP, whereas the *than*-clause is generated as the complement of Deg<sup>0</sup>, as can be seen below:

(5) 
$$[_{\text{DegP}} [_{\text{AP}} \dots ] [_{\text{Deg}}, [\mathbf{Deg}^{0}] [than-XP]]$$

Nevertheless, one might wonder how the formation of comparative adjectives is executed. It must be stated here that the Degree head is an abstract functional head, and it has no phonological content. Also, the AP is merged into the specifier of DegP to check its [+COMP] feature (as analysed in W. LECHNER 1999) with the comparative Deg head. On the other hand, the exact formation of the comparative inflected adjective or adverb (*green-er, more beautiful, less loudly* etc.) falls out of the scope of any syntactic research, as it is the task of the morphological module, which happens to be post-Spell-Out, according to, for example, the framework called Distributed Morphology (cf. M. HALLE & A. MARANTZ 1993). As a result, this paper does not provide further analyses of the morphological processes throughout the derivation<sup>2</sup>.

In order to make one last assumption in this section, it should be taken into consideration that according to many scholars comparative complements can be classified either as phrasal comparatives or as clausal ones<sup>3</sup> (cf. I. HEIM 1985, C. KENNEDY 1997). The distinction lies in the fact that in the case of the former, only a nominal expression follows *than*, whereas in the case of the latter, a whole, or at least an almost full remnant of a clause, as can be seen in the examples below:

- (6) The desk is longer than the rug.
- (7) The desk is longer than the rug is wide.

(i) 
$$[QP [Q' [Q more+A^0_i]]_{DegP} [AP t_i]_{Deg'} [Deg^0] [than-XP]]]]$$
(ii) 
$$[QP [Q' [Q A^0_i-er]]_{DegP} [AP t_i]_{Deg'} [Deg^0] [than-XP]]]]$$

 $<sup>^2</sup>$  It is a universal property for the comparative  $Deg^0$  to manifest comparative constructions. It can also be a universal expectation that the inflectional morphology of languages makes it visible on the adjective that it actually participates in a comparative construction, thus creating comparative forms. As the morphological module uses the structure built by the syntax, it is necessary to stipulate that there is room for head-to-head movement of the adjective to be merged with, for instance, *more* in English, or to be fused with -er in a separate functional position, as can be seen below in (i-ii). For empirical evidence on the existence of this functional layer (which is a Quantifier Phrase on DegP), see N.F.M. CORVER (1997).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> It also deserves attention that it is a debated issue whether such a distinction can be made. For instance, W. LECHNER aims at proving that all phrasal comparatives are underlyingly clausal (1999: 100).

The construction in (6) is taken to be phrasal, as opposed to the one in (7), which is assumed to be clausal in nature.

To sum up, it can be seen that in the case of clausal constructions comparative complements are the *than-XPs* in which *than* is followed by a constituent larger than a bare nominal expression. Also, the *than-XP* is generated as the complement of the Degree head.

# 3. The cartographic approach

In order to capture the essence of the cartographic approach, it can be said that it is based on «a refined enough typology of positions» (L. RIZZI 2002: 1), as there have been «recent attempts to draw very detailed maps of structural representations» (*ibidem*). This research trend can also be noticed in, for example, R. BHATT & J. YOON (1992), G. CINQUE (1999), L. RIZZI (1997, 2002), and A. ROUSSOU (2000).

To start with, it can be said that the structural representation of a clause may be supposed to consist of three structural layers, as described by L. RIZZI (1997: 1); these three layers are the lexical layer (headed by the verb, associated with theta-role assignment), the inflectional layer (headed by functional heads corresponding to morphological specifications on the verb), and the complementizer layer (also called the left periphery) (*ibidem*). As this paper tackles the left periphery of clausal comparative complements, the third layer above deserves special attention. In mainstream cartographic approach, the map of the complementizer layer with the two other embedded layers is as follows:

(8) 
$$[_{CP} \dots Force \dots Top^* \dots Foc \dots Top^* \dots Fin [_{IP} \dots [_{VP} \dots]]]$$
 (on the basis of L. RIZZI 2002:13)

As a consequence, the left periphery is acclaimed to have two complementizer positions. It starts with Force, which is responsible for «distinguishing various clause types: declarative, interrogative, exclamative, relative, comparative (...) etc.» (L. RIZZI 2001: 1), and it closes with Finiteness, which determines whether the subordinate clause is finite or non-finite. However, the topic positions, either to the left or the right of the focus position, are both iterable. As a consequence, the topic and focus positions are generated between the two complementizers. Although many languages allow only one of these complementizer positions to be overtly filled at a time, there are instances when both have phonetic realization:

(9) Dywedais i [mai 'r dynion fel arfer a [werthith y ci]] (Welsh) said I C<sup>0</sup> the men as usual C<sup>0</sup> will-sell the dog
'I said that the men would sell the dog as usual.'
(L. RIZZI 2002: 14, as adopted from I. ROBERTS 2001)

# 4. The left periphery of clausal comparative complements

In this section I would like to make the claim that the left periphery of clausal comparative complements is not different from that of other subordinate clauses; that is, it is considered to be full-fledged in terms of L. RIZZI (1997, 2002). I am going to provide Hungarian examples to show that the above mentioned claim is valid, as this language allows both complementizer positions to be filled at the same time, and it also allows overt comparative wh-operators in comparatives. To start with, I suggest that the example below be looked at:

(10) Klára jobban kiszolgálta Annát, [mint Anna amennyire Klárát ha kiszolgálta volna]. Klára better served Anna-ACC than Anna what Klára-ACC if served would 'Klára served Anna better than Anna would have served Klára.'

Analysing the bracketed part of the sentence, I propose that *mint* (*than*) expresses the comparative illocutionary force of the subordinate clause (L. RIZZI 2001: 1). *Anna* and *Klára* are both topics, and they are arguments originating in the VP layer as agent and patient respectively. Moreover, their order is interchangeable, and – the topic positions being iterable – they could also both precede or follow the wh-operator.

As for *amennyire* (*what*), it must be mentioned that it is a wh-operator in the focus position of the C-system. This position is reserved for non-contrastive focus in Hungarian (L. RIZZI 1997: 285, K. É. KISS 1987, J. HORVATH 1985, M. BRODY 1990, G. PUSKÁS 1992), just like in Albanian (G. TURANO 1995) or Greek (I.M. TSIMPLI 1995), as the position of contrastive focus immediately precedes the verb in Hungarian, and is the first one within the predicate (K. É. KISS 1998a, 1998b). Still, there are three reasons why the operator is to be in focus position and not in, say, topic position. First of all, it moves into the C-system obligatorily, as can be seen in the example below, as opposed to topics, which move into the left periphery due to optional topicalization.

(11) \*... mint Anna Klárát ha kiszolgálta volna amennyire (jól)<sup>4</sup>. than Anna Klára-ACC if served would what (well).

Secondly, it can be preceded and/or followed by topicalized elements, thus it cannot be in specFin either. And finally, as this position is not iterable, no other (non-contrastive) focussed element could appear in the left periphery, as can be noticed in the example below:

(12) \*... mint Anna amennyire CSELÉDDEL Klárát ha kiszolgálta volna. than Anna what servants-with Klára-ACC if served would '... than Anna would have served Klára WITH SERVANTS.'

The complementizer domain is finished by the Fin node, here filled by the finite complementizer ha (if), and the topics with the non-contrastive focus are sandwiched between the two complementizers, Force and Fin. In fact, there has been a heated debate on the category of than in recent literature: for example, C. KENNEDY (1997) considered it a preposition, W. LECHNER (1999) did not assign it a categorial label, and R. IZVORSKI (1995a) took the standpoint that it can undoubtedly be considered preposition in cases when it is followed by a bare nominal; nevertheless, it can be deduced from the above argumentation that than – introducing the comparative illocutionary force of the embedded sentence – should be considered a complementizer. If this is so, it cannot be preceded by any element originating in the comparative complement, which seems to be a viable constraint, as can be seen in the examples below:

- (13) *John is taller*[(\*what<sub>i</sub>) than (#what<sub>i</sub>) Mary is  $[D_{egP} tall_{CD} t_i]^5$ .
- (14) John loves Mary more [than John, Mary loves].
- (15) \*John loves Mary more [John than Mary loves].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The Adjective or Adverb – if it is identical to that in the matrix clause – can optionally be elided by Comparative Ellipsis in the embedded clause in Hungarian. As Comparative Ellipsis is a PF-operation, it falls out of the scope of this research. For further analysis, consult J. BRESNAN (1973, 1975) or A. BUTLER (1998).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> In English, the Adjective or Adverb – if it is identical to that in the matrix clause – must be deleted by Comparative Deletion in the embedded clause. As Comparative Deletion is a PF-operation (just like Comparative Ellipsis), it also falls out of the scope of this research. For further analysis, consult J. PINKHAM (1982: 99ff.) or W. LECHNER (1999: 99ff.).

In (13), the wh-operator may appear overtly in its landing site in certain dialects of English (see N. CHOMSKY 1977 for further analysis), but is ruled out when it precedes *than*. Also, the object in the embedded clause, *John* is topicalized in (14) and lands in the left periphery. However, topicalization must not move the element over the Force head, in this case filled by *than*, as can be seen in (15).

# 5. Comparative operator movement

On the basis of N. CHOMSKY (1977), R. IZVORSKI (1995b), H. RULLMANN (1995) and W. LECHNER (1999) among others, it is stipulated that a wh-operator moves from deep inside the comparative complement into an A-bar position in its left periphery. Although this functional element tends to be a null operator in most of the cases, there are two reasons why to believe in its existence. First of all, they are sensitive to extraction islands (mentioned already in N. CHOMSKY 1977: 88ff.), as can be seen below:

- (16) \*Butch ate more bones than he had discussed a plan to eat. (Complex NP)
- (17) Butch ate more bones than he had planned to eat.
- (18) \*Butch has more fleas than [that he has apples] is likely. (Sentential subjects)
- (19) Butch has more fleas than it is likely he has apples.
- (20) \*Butch ate more bones than Fluffy wondered whether to lick. (wh-islands)
- (21) Butch ate more bones than Fluffy wanted to lick.
- \*Butch is older than Fluffy is not old.

- (Negative islands)
- (23) Butch is older than Fluffy is chronologically challenged.
- (24) \*Butch ate more bones than he was walking with puppies. (Adjunct islands)
- (25) Butch ate more bones than he was given butterflies.

(Examples 16-25 are based on Bresnan 1975 and Izvorski 1995b: 206.)

Secondly, it is quite clear that many languages (for example, Afrikaans, Hindi and Bulgarian, cf. R. IZVORSKI 1995b; even some dialects of English, see N. CHOMSKY 1977, and Hungarian) allow overt wh-operators in the comparative complement, as could be noticed in, for instance, the Hungarian example in (10).

To continue, it may be asked what the function of the comparative operator is, where it is generated and why it is supposed to move into clause-initial focus position. It has been stated that the DegP in the subordinate clause is [-COMP] (i.e., it is absolute); therefore, the complement of the Degree head is not a *than-*clause. I accept W. LECHNER'S (1999) structural representation, in which the comparative operator is base-generated in the complement position of the lower Deg<sup>0</sup> and moved to the clause-initial focus position. This implicates that the *than-*clause and the operator, as complements of Deg<sup>0</sup>, are in complementary distribution. The reason for this is that the function of the comparative operator, on the basis of the scalar analysis of comparatives (cf. C. Kennedy 1997: 50ff.), is to specify the degree, the standard value of comparison. In other words, on the scale determined by the dimensional parameter given by the adjective(s), the standard value is manifested by the comparative operator.

Also, the reason why the comparative operator moves into non-contrastive focus position might be that in order for the comparative construction to converge and be fully grammatical, the standard value should be represented in a privileged position, as it determines the degree to which the reference value, and therefore the basis of the comparison, is related. Nevertheless, the claim that the comparative operator is a wh-operator in fact, and as such it needs to move to the left periphery due to semantic reasons, should dissolve all doubts. As it has been mentioned, the movement of the comparative operator to the left periphery is obligatory (see 11), unlike that of topicalized elements; this can be due to obligatory strong feature checking. Furthermore, the overt comparative operator and other candidates for non-contrastive focus are in complementary distribution (see 12).

To refer to one interesting and slightly deviant syntactic phenomenon in connection with clausal comparative complements, and to provide one more argument in favour of the

comparative operator's being base-generated as the complement of the lower Degree head, I suggest that the following example be investigated:

(26) (?) She wanted more [than for me to become an Olympic champion].

The comparative construction consists of the reference value (referring to what or how much she wanted), the standard value incorporated in the than-clause, and the adjective much's dimensional parameter. What is striking is that in none of the languages may the comparative operator appear overtly in the comparative complement in sentences like (26). This is exemplified in the following Hungarian sentence as well:

(27) Többet akart, mint (\*amennyire) hogy olimpiai bajnok legyek.
more-ACC wanted than what that Olympic champion be-1<sup>st</sup>-SING-SUBJUNCTIVE
'(S)he wanted more than for more to become an Olympic champion.'

On the other hand, the sentence in (26) supports the analysis of the left periphery provided by the cartographic approach: both complementizer positions (Force and Finiteness) seem to be filled. This may be so, even though it might also be hypothesized that there is an elided medial clause between the matrix clause and the IP taken by the non-finite complementizer *for*. As for this medial clause, I doubt that its hypothetical presence could serve as an explanation for the acceptability of (26). Generally speaking, CPs headed by *for* appear in comparative complements when they are generated in spec;IP as sentential subjects, as can be seen below:

(28) It was easier for her to ride a pony [than [for him to water the garden] was easy<sub>CD</sub>].

However, in the case of (26) this is surely not so, as no verb – not even be – could follow the clause in brackets:

(29) \* She wanted more [than for me to become an Olympic champion] was.

Furthermore, it might also be supposed that it is the verb *want* that is missing in the subordinate clause due to elision. Still, this is not a viable solution either, as *want* does not take CP-complements headed by *for*, as can be seen below:

- (30) She wanted (\*for) me to become an Olympic champion.
- (31) \* She wanted more than she wanted for me to become an Olympic champion.

Moreover, there are further problems with the sentence in (30). If the standard value is to be manifested by the *than*-clause, the comparative complement should – as a whole – refer to the standard value. The element(s) providing the reference value (*what* or *how much she wanted*, *her «wanting»*) and the comparative complement (*she wanted me to become an Olympic champion*, practically also *her «wanting»*) are logically incomparable, as *want* appears on both sides. This is even more straightforward if we consider the following example:

(32) *She wanted more than a cup of coffee.* 

If (32) is contrasted with (31), it is clear that the standard value and the reference value are comparable on a scale in (32), but not in (31). As a consequence, the idea that there is an elided medial clause between the matrix clause and the comparative complement in (26) is hereby dismissed.

The only question still seeking to be answered is why the sentence in (26) is question-marked. In my opinion, it is quite natural that the standard value should clearly be determined. However, as there is no DegP and no adjective or adverb generated in the

comparative complement, there is no position for the comparative complement to be generated in either. This is the reason why the comparative operator cannot appear even in Hungarian in such constructions, as could be noticed in (27). As a result, there is no comparative operator determining the standard value, which in this case could be anywhere on the scale of *much*, with the only restriction that the reference value must be higher than that. Hence the lack of the comparative operator and that the reference and standard values are marked on the scale exclusively with regards to each other may end up with lower status of acceptability.

#### 6. Conclusion

In fact, this paper has been arguing for the acknowledgement of clausal comparative complements as full-fledged subordinate clauses in terms of the cartographic approach. In the present article, it was proven that *than-XPs* are actually complements, as they are necessary for clausal comparative constructions to converge at LF. It was stipulated that Degree heads are phonologically null functional elements, and their feature [±COMP] decides on whether the functionally extended adjectival or adverbial expression can serve as comparative or absolute.

The topic and focus positions in the left periphery of the comparative complement are sandwiched between the two complementizer positions: Force and Fin, in the former of which the complementizer *than* represents the comparative illocutionary force of the subordinate clause. The comparative wh-operator is base-generated as the complement of the absolute Degree head in the lower clause, and moved into the focus position hosted by the complementizer layer of the comparative complement. Nevertheless, there exist slightly deviant comparative constructions as well, whose existence has also been helpful when investigating the nature of comparative operator movement.

Future prospects of the research include, for example, the generative analysis of phrasal comparative complements, which may all be hypothesized to be derived from their clausal counterparts, on the basis of the clausal hypothesis (cf. W. LECHNER 1999: 100).

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