

## More than a small clause: Russian adverbial comparatives

**Background:** There are two groups of syntactic analyses commonly given to adjectival comparatives. Direct analysis assumes that *than*-prepositions subcategorise a nominal, thus it is often applicable to phrasal comparatives (Bhatt & Takahashi 2007, Vaikšnoraitė 2021). Under reduced clause analysis, the preposition's complement is a clause (full or small) that is partially deleted by ellipsis (Merchant 2009, Pancheva 2006). In Russian, comparatives can be intuitively divided into two types: one phrasal with a genitive-marked nominal (1) and one clausal with a *wh*-expression (2).

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|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| (1) Phrasal               | (2) Clausal                  |
| <i>Ja vyše Antona.</i>    | <i>Ja vyše, čem Anton.</i>   |
| I taller Anton.GEN        | I taller <i>wh</i> Anton.NOM |
| 'I am taller than Anton.' | 'I am taller than Anton.'    |

Pancheva (2006) proposes a non-uniform analysis of Slavic comparatives: the clausal ones contain a full clause, part of which is elided, whereas the phrasal ones only feature a small clause and a degree variable. This proposal accounts for the genitive case on the standard of comparison via ascribing ECM properties to the *than*-preposition and avoids postulating two different comparative heads for nominal and clausal complements – the pitfall of the uniform direct analysis. However, this proposal is not easily extended to adverbial comparatives.

**Adverbial comparatives** mirror the adjectival ones in that there are two comparative constructions: phrasal and clausal. Phrasal comparatives with transitive matrix predicates produce an ambiguity (3).

- (3) *Ja ljublju tebjja bol'se Nikity.*  
 I love you.ACC more Nikita.GEN  
 'I love you more than Nikita loves you.'  
 'I love you more than I love Nikita.'

The ambiguity in (3) cannot be accounted for without the phrasal comparative having a clausal source. A similar phenomenon has been observed in English temporal adverbial constructions: *Alice met Sasha before Rasmus* has two readings as well. Overfelt (2021) argues that each reading results from moving one of the elided *vP*'s arguments to a focus position. This analysis, however, is not a great fit for Russian, because the standard in Russian phrasal comparatives always bears genitive case, while focus movement does not affect case marking elsewhere.

Pancheva (2006) noted the aforementioned ambiguity in Russian as well. She suggests that a part of the matrix clause is LF-copied to the embedded small clause in order to derive the necessary reading (4).

- (4) *Ja ljublju Ivana bol'se Borisa.* 'I love Ivan more than Boris'
- a. [IP I [VP love Ivan  $d_1$ -much]] -er<sub>1</sub> [Boris [VP love Ivan  $d_1$ -much]]
- b. [IP Ivan<sub>2</sub> [IP I love  $t_2$   $d_1$ -much]] -er<sub>1</sub> [Boris [IP I love  $t_2$   $d_1$ -much]] (adapted from Pancheva 2006)

In (4b), *Ivan* undergoes topicalisation, so that the IP *I love  $t_2$   $d_1$ -much* could be copied to the embedded clause and Boris could "saturate the internal argument of *love*". The problem with this analysis is that it fails to capture restrictions on the standard's position in the elided clause. Note that the more acceptable interpretation available for (5) is obtained when *menja* 'me-GEN' is construed as a subject of the elided clause rather than a dative-marked recipient. In fact, the only positions available for the standard seem to be subject and direct object.

- (5) *Roditeli dajut Maše den'gi čašče menja.*  
 parents give Masha.DAT money more often I.GEN  
 '(Our) parents give Masha money...'  
 a. <sup>OK</sup>...more often than I give Masha money.'  
 b. <sup>#</sup>more often than our parents give me to Masha.'  
 c. <sup>??</sup>more often that our parents give me money.'

Locative or instrumental-marked nominals, which are available for topicalisation, cannot be associates or standards in Russian phrasal comparatives. Therefore, restrictions imposed by A-bar movement are too weak.

**Analysis:** I propose that phrasal adverbial comparatives feature an elided relative clause. The null *than*-preposition assigns genitive case to the standard, which is interpreted inside the relative clause (6). Case is assigned directly to the nominal, so one does not have to postulate an ECM-preposition that assigns case to the small clause subject, as Pancheva (2006) does. In accordance with Dependent Case theory (Marantz 2000, Bobaljik 2008), nominals that have received non-structural case elsewhere do not receive genitive case from the comparative's null preposition.

- (6) a. I love you more [PP P [NP Nikita.GEN<sub>i</sub> {čto I love *t<sub>i</sub>*} ]]  
 b. I love you more [PP P [NP Nikita.GEN<sub>i</sub> {čto *t<sub>i</sub>* love you} ]]

I assume that the relative clause is structurally analogous to *čto*-relatives, which have been argued by Szczegielniak (2005) to be derived by head noun movement rather than operator movement, which produces *kotoryj*-relatives. Russian *čto*-relativisation can only target subjects and objects, which coincides with the possible positions of the associate/standard in phrasal comparatives. Also, the elided relative clause can be pronounced, albeit with a tint of semantic infelicity (7).

- (7) <sup>#</sup>*Ja risuju pejzaži lučše Ani, čto risuet pejzaži.*  
 I paint landscapes better Anya.GEN čto paints landscapes  
 'I paint landscapes better than Anya, who paints landscapes.'

Another piece of evidence is the improved acceptability of the universal quantifier *vse* 'all/everyone' in phrasal comparatives as opposed to the clausal ones: <sup>OK</sup>*bol'se vse{x} {čto ...}* 'more than everyone.GEN' vs. <sup>?</sup>*bol'se, čem vse* 'more than everyone.NOM'. This might be due to the presence of a restrictor – the relative clause.

**Implications:** I have proposed an alternative syntactic analysis for Russian phrasal comparatives that appear to have a clausal source. Case marking facts and restrictions on the structural position of the comparative's associate suggest that the derivation of phrasal comparatives proceeds via relativisation rather than topicalisation, contra Pancheva (2006) and Overfelt (2021). This type of analysis may be applied to other languages, further extending the range of possible comparative structures.

### Selected references

- ❖ Bhatt, Rajesh & Shoichi Takahashi. 2007. Direct comparisons: Resurrecting the direct analysis of phrasal comparatives. In *Semantics and linguistic theory*, vol. 17, 19–36. ❖ Merchant, Jason. 2009. Phrasal and clausal comparatives in Greek and the abstractness of syntax. *Journal of Greek linguistics* 9(1). 134–164. ❖ Overfelt, Jason. 2021. Stripping and VP Ellipsis in Reduced Temporal Adverbs. *Syntax* 24(4). 462–509. ❖ Pancheva, Roumyana. 2006. Phrasal and clausal comparatives in Slavic. In *Formal approaches to Slavic linguistics*, vol. 14, 236–257. ❖ Szczegielniak, Adam. 2005. Relativization that you did. In *Mit Occasional Papers in Linguistics*, vol. 24. Cambridge, MA: MIT Working Papers in Linguistics. ❖ Vaikšnoraitė, Elena. 2021. A direct analysis of Lithuanian phrasal comparatives. *Glossa* 6(1). 1–18.