

# An Analysis of Comparatives and Related Constructions in Turkish, a Rediscovery of the Phrasal Comparative and its Significance in English, too

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Based on new findings from a large-scale empirical study on comparison constructions in Turkish as well as particular instantiations of comparatives in English, this abstract verifies the need for a genuinely phrasal syntactic and semantic analysis of all comparative constructions in the former and some comparatives in the latter language.

It has often been suggested (cf. e.g. Pinkham [1982], McCawley [1988], Bierwisch [1989] and especially Lechner [2004], among others) that phrasal comparatives like

(1) a. *Mary ran faster than Peter.*

can best be accounted for by deriving them from an underlying clausal source, where the element containing the gradable property has either been copied and subsequently deleted in the *than*-clause as in (1b) or moved directly to the matrix clause (1c):

(1) b. *Mary ran faster than Peter ran ~~fast~~.*  
c. *Mary ran fast<sub>i</sub>-er than Peter ran t<sub>i</sub>.*

But while this proposal offers the at first glance very welcome possibility of treating phrasal and clausal comparatives in a uniform fashion and thus does away with the need for a special phrasal analysis, there is yet a considerable number of theoretical as well as empirical difficulties such an approach runs into: The former include for instance the frequent unpredicted distribution of case or unusually long instantiations of movement completely incompatible with standard assumptions about movement operations as in the case of Lechner (2004); the latter, however, are much worse: First of all, there is a substantial number of cases where a phrasal comparative lacks a corresponding clausal source altogether, as the following examples featuring pronominal constructions (2), direct measure phrases (3), non-agentive subjects in the *than*-clause (4) and case mismatches (5) illustrate:

- (2) a. *John couldn't possibly be taller than himself.*  
 b. \**John couldn't possibly be taller than himself is.*
- (3) a. *Mary ran faster than 20 mph.*  
 b. \**Mary ran faster than 20 mph ran.*
- (4) a. *Mary ran faster than the world record.*  
 b. \**Mary ran faster than the world record ran.*
- (5) a. *John is older than me.*  
 b. \**John is older than me am/is.*

Additionally, there are also cases where the inverse situation obtains, that is where a clausal comparative lacks a phrasal counterpart, as can be seen from the following expletive construction:

- (6) a. *There couldn't have been more people on that bus than there were.*  
 b. \**There couldn't have been more people on that bus than there.*

Furthermore, pairs of phrasal and clausal comparatives often differ significantly in meaning, as shown in

- (7) a. *He loved him more than a brother.*  
 b. *He loved him more than he loved a brother.*

where the phrasal version in (7a) has a generic meaning that is lost altogether in its clausal variant (7b). Finally, a subcomparative like

- (8) *The knife is longer than the drawer is deep.*

should not be attested at all according to Lechner (2004)'s analysis, given that his movement approach makes it virtually impossible to generate two different gradable adjectives, in the matrix clause on the one hand and in the *than*-clause on the other. All in all, the apparent one-to-one matching of phrasal comparatives and their clausal counterparts suggested by examples like (1) and defended by proponents of an overall clausal approach to comparative constructions seems thus more than doubtful to me.

Moreover, looking at this phenomenon from a cross-linguistic perspective sheds further doubt on such an overall clausal account of comparatives, because it can only be applied to a rather restricted number of other languages such as German (cf. 9), but certainly doesn't hold generally, as the following example from Turkish shows:

- (9) a. *Maria rannte schneller als Peter.*  
 b. *Maria rannte schneller als Peter ~~er~~ schnell rannte./Maria rannte schnell<sub>i</sub> er als Peter t<sub>i</sub> rannte.*

- (10) a. *Maria Peter'den daha hızlı koştu.*  
 MARIA PETER-AbI MORE FAST RUN-Past-3Sg  
 `Maria ran faster than Hans.'

b. \**Maria Peter'den ~~er~~ hızlı koştu daha hızlı koştu./*

MARIA PETER-Abl D-FAST RUN-Past-3Sg MORE FAST RUN-  
 3Sg Past-

*\*Maria Peter'den t<sub>i</sub> koştu daha hızlı koştu.*  
 MARIA PETER-Abl RUN-Past-3Sg MORE FAST RUN-Past-3Sg  
 `Maria ran faster than Hans ran.'

In fact, the output of the extensive empirical research I have recently done in the field of Turkish comparative constructions – an area which to the best of my knowledge has never been investigated before and has yet turned out to be particularly revealing due to the absence of measure phrase constructions (11), subcomparatives (12) or even negative island effects (13) to name but a few of its characteristic deviations from the 'standard' English/German language group – suggests that there simply are no clausal comparatives in Turkish and that after all, this language does not allow for finite subordinate clauses generally, as the need for non-finite constructions in (14) and (15) below indicates:

- (11) *\*Maria bir metre yetmiş uzun.*  
 MARIA ONE METRE SEVENTY TALL  
 `Maria is 1.70 m tall.'
- (12) *\*Bıçak çekmecedен derin daha uzun.*  
 KNIFE DRAWER-Abl DEEP MORE LONG  
 `The knife is longer than the drawer is deep.'
- (13) *Maria (hiç) kimseden uzun değil.*  
 MARIA NOBODY TALL NOT  
 `Maria is the tallest.' (literally `Maria is taller than nobody.')
- (14) *Maria'nın aldığı kitap enteresan.*  
 MARIA-Gen BUY-Participle-Past-3Sg BOOK-Sg INTERESTING  
 `The book that Mary bought is interesting.'
- (15) *Yağmur yağdığına eminim.*  
 RAIN RAIN-Participle-Pres-3Sg-Prep BELIEVE-1Sg  
 `I think it is raining.'

As a matter of fact, it is thus completely impossible to derive Turkish phrasal comparatives from any clausal source whatsoever and at the same time, it seems absolutely indispensable to offer a particular phrasal approach to comparatives in the Turkish language.

Having investigated the vast variety of possibilities to express a comparison in this language by interviewing a substantial number of native speakers on more than 150 sentences each to obtain a thorough amount of positive and negative evidence alike, I am now in a position to show how comparatives operate in this language on a purely phrasal level and, modifying the approach suggested in Heim (1985), to present a specific phrasal analysis for comparatives and related constructions in Turkish that is in line with the general frameworks of generative syntax as well as of compositional semantics. As a next step, I shall then be able to apply this

specific phrasal analysis to phrasal comparatives in other languages such as English as well, thereby solving hopefully all, but at least most of the difficulties for an overall clausal analysis sketched above.

## References

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