

Comparison in Turkish: a Rediscovery of the Phrasal Comparative

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Based on new findings from a large-scale empirical study on comparison constructions in Turkish, this abstract verifies the need for a genuinely phrasal syntactic and semantic analysis of comparison in this language, develops such an analysis and also investigates the scopal effects it predicts.

At least for languages like English and German, there has been a strong tendency in recent linguistic literature to analyse apparently phrasal comparatives featuring nothing but a single NP (or DP) in the comparee term such as

(1) a Mary ran faster than Peter.

by deriving them from an underlying clausal source (cf. e.g. Lechner (2004) and references therein), where the element containing the gradable property is either copied and subsequently deleted in the *than*-clause, or moved directly to the matrix clause (cf. (1b)):

(1) b Mary ran fast-er/fast_i-er than Peter ran ~~*d-fast*~~/t_i.

Such approaches do away with the need for a special phrasal analysis for examples like (1a) and allow us to treat phrasal and clausal comparatives alike. A question that naturally comes to mind, then, is whether this uniform way of analysing all comparatives is only valid for a particular group of languages including e.g. English and German, or whether it even holds cross-linguistically.

On the basis of our own research, we are in a position to clearly state that the method of analysing all comparatives in a uniform, underlyingly clausal fashion, is certainly not appropriate for all languages: Having e.g. investigated the variety of possibilities to express a comparison in Turkish 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, it turned out that this language never allows for a clausal comparative. The only possible Turkish counterpart for (1) is for instance the phrasal construction given in (2a), whereas the corresponding clausal variant in (2b) is totally ungrammatical:

(2) a Maria Peter'den hızlı koştu.
Maria Peter.Abl fast run.Past.3Sg

'Maria ran faster than Hans.'

b *Maria Peter'den *d-hızlı*/t_i koştu hızlı/hızlı_i koştu.
Maria Peter.Abl *d-fast*/t_i run.Past.3Sg fast/fast_i run.Past.3Sg

What is more, we even found that Turkish is characterised by a total lack of finite subordinate clauses generally, as shown e.g. by (3) and (4), which feature nominalisations where a language like English typically makes use of a finite subordinate clause:

(3) Yağmur yağdığına eminim.
rain rain.Partcp.Pres.3Sg.Postp. think.Pres.1Sg

'I think that it is raining.'

(4) Maria'nın aldığı kitap enteresan.
Maria.Gen buy.Partcp.Pres.3Sg book interesting

'Maria bought a book which is interesting.'

Data like the above clearly indicate that it is virtually impossible to derive Turkish comparatives from any potential clausal source whatsoever and that instead, such a language requires a specific phrasal account of comparatives, which is what we shall address next.

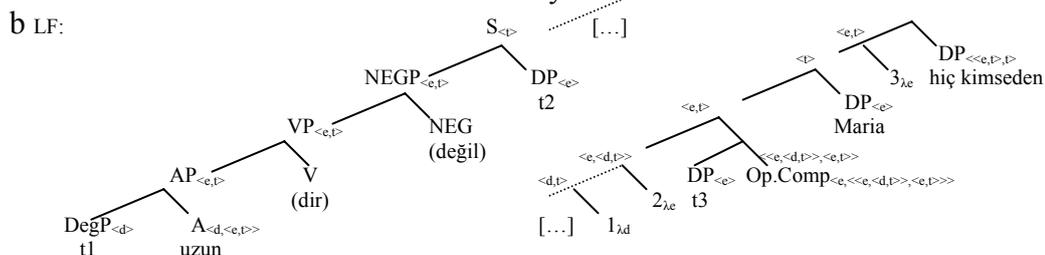
Parting from the phrasal analysis suggested in Heim (1985), which we adapted to the special needs of Turkish syntax and also modified semantically in order to take later developments in the analysis of comparatives into account, we came up with a phrasal approach to Turkish comparatives that contrasts sharply with the standard (clausal) analysis proposed for English-like languages: For whereas the standard analysis assumes that the matrix clause and the subordinate clause both provide us with a set of degrees and that a comparative operator forms their maxima to compare these (cf. the lexical entry in (5)), our phrasal account suggests the following: In

languages with purely phrasal comparatives like Turkish, the comparee term furnishes an individual that corresponds to another individual in the main clause, and the comparative operator forms and compares the maximal degrees to which these two individuals possess a quality, perform an action, etc., as specified in the matrix clause (cf. the lexical entry in (6)). We furthermore follow general practice in assuming that adjectives denote relations between individuals and degrees, as shown in the model entry for *tall* given in (7):

- (5) $[[\text{Op.Comp}_{\text{Engl}}]] = \lambda D1 \in D_{\langle d,t \rangle} . \lambda D2 \in D_{\langle d,t \rangle} . \max(D2) > \max(D1)$
 (6) $[[\text{Op.Comp}_{\text{Türk}}]] = \lambda x \in D_e . \lambda A \in D_{\langle d, \langle e,t \rangle \rangle} . \lambda y \in D_e . \max(\lambda d . A(d)(y)) > \max(\lambda d . A(d)(x))$
 (7) $[[\text{tall}]] = \lambda d \in D_d . \lambda x \in D_e . x \text{ is } d\text{-tall}$

In a next step, this phrasal analysis can then easily be transferred to other comparison constructions like equatives, superlatives, differential comparatives, etc., which we cannot demonstrate here for reasons of spatial limitations. Interestingly enough, however, this approach not only allows us to calculate the proper truth conditions for comparison in Turkish-like languages, but also makes the correct predictions with respect to the scopal behaviour of the comparative operator and quantificational DPs. To see this, take a look at the Turkish counterpart of English “**Mary is taller than nobody.*”, (8a), which is fully acceptable in that language and the LF of which is given in (8b), where we take the expressions “*dir*”, which is perfectly optional, and “*değil*” to be semantically vacuous and have to QR the element “*hiç kimseden*” to avoid a type mismatch, which thereby gets wide scope over the comparison operator:

- (8) a Maria hiç kimseden uzun değil (dir).
 Maria nobody.Abl tall (not) (be.Pres.3Sg)
 intended as: ‘Maria is taller than nobody.’



Sentence (8a) thus comes out true iff ‘there is no person *x* such that $\max(\lambda d . \text{Maria is } d\text{-tall}) > \max(\lambda d . x \text{ is } d\text{-tall})$ ’, that is, iff Maria is (the) shortest, which is exactly what the Turkish sentence means according to all our informants. Likewise, we can include a universal or an existential quantifier in the comparee term, as in (9) and (10), and our analysis which makes the quantificational DPs outscope the comparison operator correctly predicts that (9) can only mean that Maria is taller than all of the boys and (10) that Maria is taller than at least one other person. The corresponding readings with the reverse scopal order, that is, where Maria is only taller than the shortest boy and is even taller than the tallest person, respectively (cf. Heim (2001)), that our approach does not even generate, are indeed absent in Turkish.

- (9) Maria her oğlandan uzun.
 Maria every boy.Abl tall
 ‘Maria is taller than every boy.’
 (10) Maria herhangi birinden uzun.
 Maria anybody.Abl tall
 ‘Maria is taller than some other person.’

Similar observations could ultimately be added about quantificational expressions in the matrix clause, so that in sum, our phrasal analysis succeeds in correctly predicting the scopal relations attested in Turkish comparatives.

References:

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