

THE ELEMENT OF NEGATION IN ENGLISH AND POLISH COMPARATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

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In 1917, Jespersen, relying on his acute feeling for grammatical analysis, intuited the presence of a negation element in comparatives. There has been a number of attempts to analyze comparative structures since then. Of transformational approaches, some seem to be quite inadequate, like that of Lees (1961), Smith (1961), Chomsky (1965) and Doherty and Schwartz (1967). These cannot be treated as adequate for the simple reason that the above mentioned authors take *John is tall* and *Mary is tall* as sentences underlying *John is taller than Mary*. They seem to disregard the fact that the comparative sentence (*John is taller than Mary*) does not imply that John is in fact tall, nor does it imply that Mary is tall. There are treatments where this fact is taken into consideration of comparative sentences in which he tries to account for the fact that comparatives do not imply the existence of the feature compared. Thus, taller in his view expresses the mere relation of features in the cases of John and Mary. Such an interpretation does not state that the feature tall is present in the underlying sentences. Since there is no way to judge from the examples quoted above whether John is in fact tall or Mary is in fact tall, Seuren proposes that the underlying sentences should contain some information that there is an unspecified degree of the feature tall. He, in fact, uses the term "extent" to account for this unspecified degree. Consequently, the sentences underlying *John is taller than Mary* will be *John is tall to the extent e and Mary is not tall to the extent e* or *John is tall to an extent to which Mary is not*. Although this interpretation has been severely criticized by Bartsch and Vennemann (1972, 1973) we consider it to be quite satisfactory for our purposes.

Bartsch and Vennemann seem to misinterpret Seuren's definition "to the extent e" by claiming that he has to account for two comparatives in the quoted sentence rather than one. They paraphrase his treatment of "extent" and try to convince us that what he is saying is *John is taller than some e and Mary is*

shorter than that *e*, which, we feel, is not what Seuren meant at all. Instead, Bartsch and Vennemann suggest that it would be more adequate to express the "unspecified degree of tallness" by means of a measure function as applied to the dimension Height (Tallness) — f_T^M . Thus, in their interpretation, the sentence will be represented by

$$f_T^M(x, \text{John}) > f_T^M(y, \text{Mary})$$

with, as they call it, "direct" verbalization:

The height of John is greater than the height of Mary and "better" verbalization:

John is taller than Mary.

Such treatment, in our view, in no way differs from that of Seuren's for what Bartsch and Vennemann express in symbols Seuren expresses in words. One could, for instance, choose a solution combining the two and represent the sentence by means of:

John is *x* tall and Mary is *y* tall
 where $x > y$ and $x \text{ tall} \neq \text{tall}$, $y \text{ tall} \neq \text{tall}$

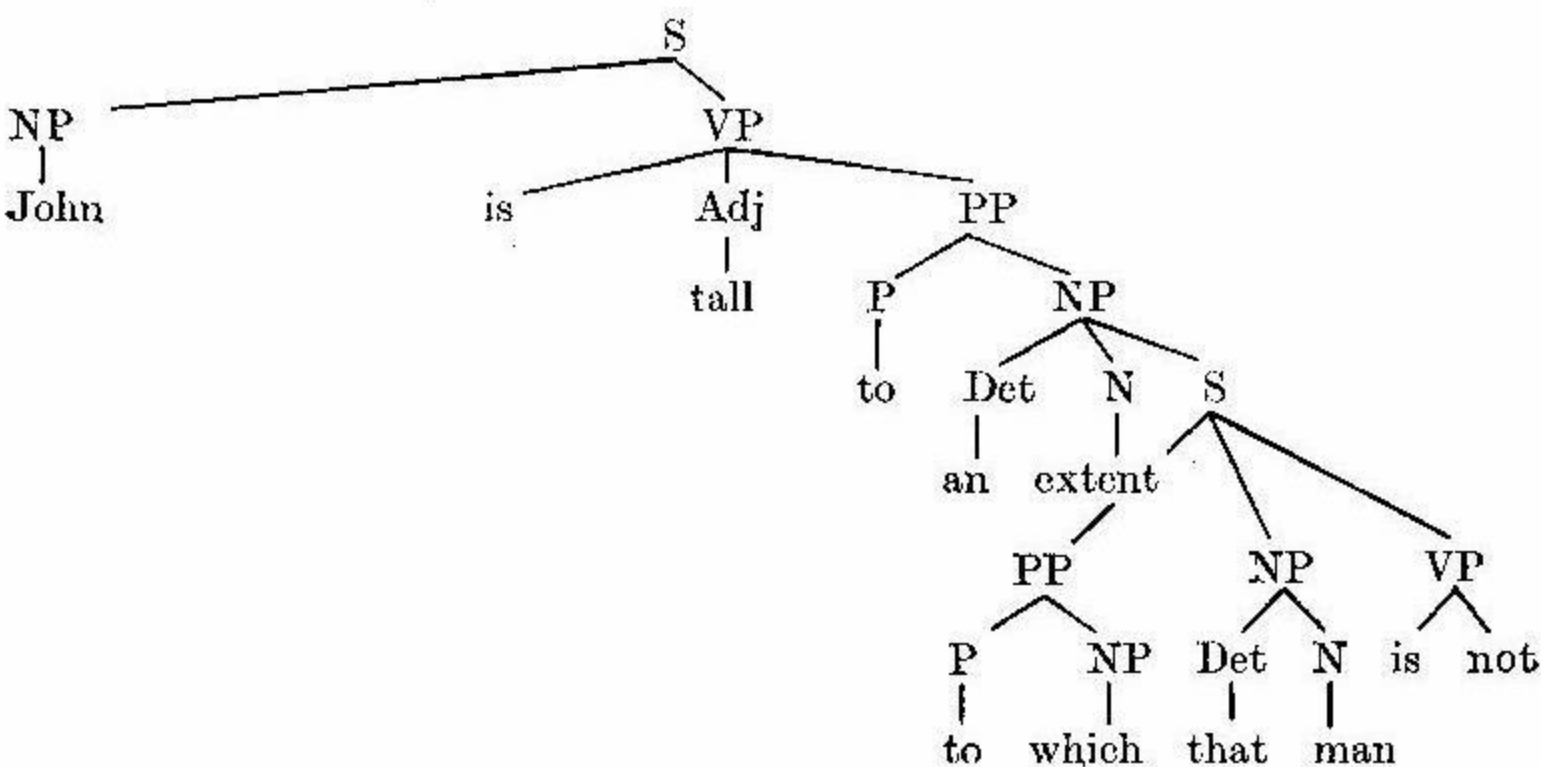
Finally, we feel that Seuren's proposal seems to be better for the simple reason that Bartsch and Vennemann try to explain comparative by means of comparative in the "direct" verbalization of the semantic interpretation of the sentence in question.

Consequently, we will base our investigations on Seuren's interpretation of the comparative sentence.

Accordingly, the sentence

John is taller than that man (is)

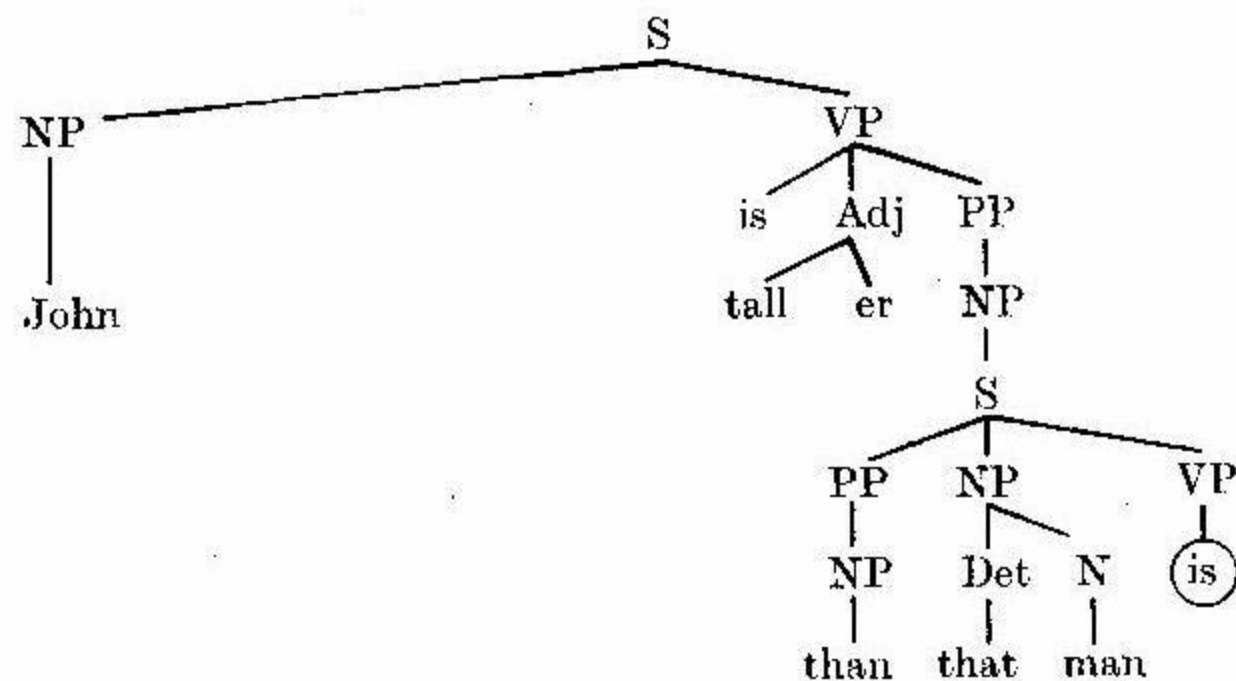
will have the following deep structure:



and the following rule is proposed for COMPARATIVE INTRODUCTION:

X	—	Adv	—	to an extent	to	—	which	—	Y	—	not	—	Z
1		2		3		4		5		6		7	=(optional)
1		2+er		0		than		5		0		7	

This rule would turn the previous deep structure into:

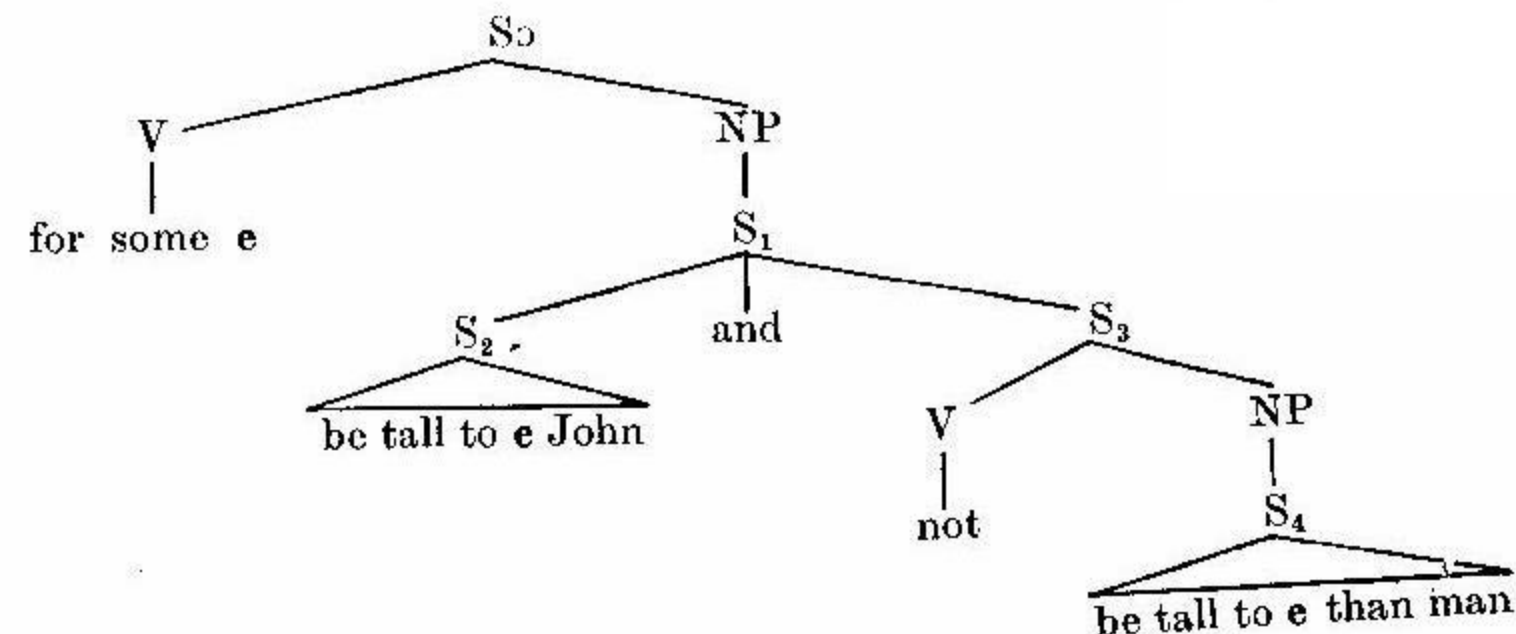


is (and consequently the vacuous VP above it) may be deleted optionally (Ross (1968)).

As Ross' treatment needs amendment, Seuren proposes his own representation of the deep structure of the sentence, eliminating the relative approach to "extent". The following is the representation of what he calls "simple comparative". Sentences like

- He is taller than anybody
- He is a taller man than Mary is a woman

(will have more complex semantic representations of. Seuren (1970:542)):



It is worth mentioning again that the element *be tall to e* does not carry the lexical feature *tall* but the whole phrase functions as a way to express "some unspecified degree of vertical dimension". Ross (1968) also draws our attention to the fact that words like *any* and *ever* which usually occur in *if*-clauses and negative and interrogative sentences but not in affirmative sentences may be also found in THAN-clauses:

He solves problems faster than any of my friends ever could.

* Any of my friends could ever solve those problems.

Could any of my friends ever solve those problems?

At no time could any of my friends ever solve those problems.

If any of my friends ever solve those problems, I'll buy you a drink.

The negative elements cannot occur in THAN-clauses:

* He is taller than nobody here.

* Bill ran faster than I couldn't.

These facts would suggest that there is a negative element present in the structures underlying the THAN-clauses.

Following Seuren's interpretation of the relation of comparison based on the "extent-phrase" we shall see that the Polish sentence

Janek jest wyższy niż Marysia.

will have a similar deep structure to that of the English sentence:

Janek jest wysoki do *e* i Marysia nie jest wysoka do *e*

Since there seems to be no essential difference between the underlying structures of English and Polish comparative sentences of inequality

* John is taller than Mary.

Janek jest wyższy niż Marysia.

we might say that the semantic interpretation of such a comparative sentence both in English and in Polish will be:

Adj — to some *e* — X and — not — Adj — to *e* — Y

and the following set of rules will operate to transform this semantic structure into its surface representation:

And — Deletion

SV — Inversion

Operator Incorporation

more-than — Rule

Thus,

be tall to *e* John and not be tall to *e* Mary ⇒

be tall to *e* John not be tall to *e* Mary ⇒

John be tall to *e* not Mary be tall to *e* ⇒

John be tall to *e* more than Mary be tall to *e* ⇒

John be more tall to *e* than Mary be tall to *e* ⇒

John be more tall than Mary be tall ⇒

John be taller than Mary be tall ⇒

John be taller than Mary be ⇒ (optional)

John be taller than Mary ⇒

John is taller than Mary

Tense has been disregarded here as much as possible to avoid unnecessary complication. Only in the last operation it is taken into consideration to give the final form of the comparative sentence.

Accordingly, the same rules will operate for Polish:

być wysoki do *e* Janek i nie być wysoki do *e* Marysia

to obtain finally:

Janek jest wyższy niż Marysia.

There is no need to mention that in the case of the Polish sentence additional rules will operate in order to obtain the agreement between the adjective *wysoki*, *-a*, *-e* and the noun (masc. sg. in the case of Janek and fem. sg. in the case of Marysia).

Certain grammatical features may occur with negation, other preclude negation. Those features that show positive polarity do not occur in the THAN-clauses. The negative polarity features occur in THAN-clauses even when no overt negation element is present. Let us consider some English examples showing the occurrence of those features, and their Polish EQUIVALENTS:

You have already got less support than he has.

* He has got more support than you already have.

Już masz mniej zwolenników niż on.

* On ma więcej zwolenników niż ty już masz.

I would rather carry less than he does.

* He carries more than I would rather do.

Wolałabym raczej nieść mniej niż on.

* On niesie więcej niż ja wolałabym.

I could just as well eat a bit more than you do.

* You eat a bit less than I could just as well do.

Mogłabym właściwie jeść trochę mniej niż ty.

* Jesz trochę mniej niż ja właściwie mogłabym.

I would pretty much like to run faster than he does.

* He runs slower than I would pretty much like to.

Bardzo bym chciała biec szybciej niż on.

* On biegnie wolniej niż ja bym bardzo chciała.

He would be far better off with less money than he has.

* He has more money than he would be far better off with.

Byłoby mu znacznie lepiej z mniejszą ilością pieniędzy niż obecnie posiada.

* Posiada obecnie więcej pieniędzy niż ilość, z którą byłoby mu znacznie lepiej.

John still wants to buy more books than he can afford.

*John can afford fewer books than he still wants to buy.

On ciągle chce kupować więcej książek niż go na to stać.

*Stać go na mniej książek niż ciągle chce kupować.

Some of the Polish equivalents sound peculiar but, on the whole, they fall into the same pattern as the English sentences. Items like: *already, rather, just as well, pretty* (as a degree adverb), *far* (with comparison), *still* do not allow for sentence negation.

On the other hand, in English negative polarity items like *much, be all that, bother, lift a finger, care to, far + need, infinitive, can possibly, the slightest, budge, can help* and *can stand/bear*, or *at all* occur in THAN-clauses.

-The emperor was more inclined to amuse himself than to do much for his country.

That amount of spaghetti was more than I was at all keen to eat.

That is more than he will bother thinking of.

John's laziness was stronger than his willingness to lift a finger.

The fifth glass was more than I cared to drink.

I've solved lots of more difficult problems than he has got very far even in understanding.

John runs faster than he need run.

He was a greater bore than I could possibly put up with.

He went further than I had the slightest intention of going.

Given their characters it is much easier for Bill to give in than for John to even budge.

My urge to steal was stronger than I could help.

The sound of her voice was more than I could stand.

This is more serious than I would have believed at all possible.

Not all of the above examples can be rendered in Polish without drastic changes in their structures. Those that can, however, back up the assumption that the negative polarity element may occur in the Than-clauses.

Any and ever mentioned above in Ross' examples may also appear in Polish equivalent structures:

Załatwiał interesantów grzeczniej niż ktokolwiek kiedykolwiek przedtem.

There is also independent evidence (Joly (1967) and König (1970)) supporting the assumption that there is a negative element in the underlying structure of comparatives. In many dialects of English *nor* is used instead of *than*,

I know better *nor* that. (Worcestershire)

Bill can read faster *nor* a dog can trot. (London)

He's richer *nor* you'll be. (Louisiana, U.S.A.)

Nor looks backward and links the second clause of a comparative sentence to the first (coordinating function). It looks forward and it signifies that the second clause is involved in the negative movement (negating function). *Than* operates exactly in the same way (Joly (1967 : 29)).

Than has *ponne* (by which not) as its etymology and in Old English corresponds directly to a derivational stage as in

John is tall to an extent to which that man is not.

Moreover, the assumption provides explanation for the negation element in the comparative structures of other languages such as French, Spanish, Italian, Welsh, Latin and New High German, and for the existent of a negation copying transformation in dialect of English such as Cockney.

He has never been no good to no woman not never.

As for Polish dialects, we have not been able to find suitable examples with negation actually present in the surface structure but in Brückner (1957 : 354), the words *niżby, niż(e)* receive the following comments:

"...przy porównaniach, które Słowianin stale w przeczenie ubiera, np. większy niż ty" (used in comparison where a Slav always uses negation).

There are, however, comparative sentences in Polish that do not contain *niż* in their surface structures:

Janek jest wyższy od Marysi.

But such sentences are fully synonymous to those using *niż* and therefore their underlying structure will have the element of negation.

In conclusion, we may say that the Polish language provides evidence in favour of the assumption that the element of negation is present in the comparative sentences expressing inequality of features, and that element of negation, though not always present in the surface structure, occurs in the than-clauses. As may be seen from the examples quoted in this paper, it is clear that not all English comparative sentences have their Polish equivalents, at least in their surface representations, but the examination of their deep structures proves the assumption that some element of negation is present in the comparison of inequality.

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