

Portuguese comparative constructions: some of them are more equal than others *

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The comparative constructions under analysis compare two elements with respect to a certain dimension (quantity or degree) (Henriks 1995, Marques 2003, a.o.). That comparison may be of: (i) equality; (ii) inequality (inferiority or superiority).

In Portuguese, the Degree Head exhibits selectional properties regarding the connective that introduces the Degree Clause. We observe this in sentences such as those in (1) and (2): *mais/menos* select *que/do que*; *tão* selects *como*.

(1) O João é mais alto que / do que / *como a Maria. [inequality]

the João is more tall que / do que / *como the Maria

‘João is taller than Maria.’

(2) O João é tão tímido como / *que / *do que o pai. [equality]

the João is as shy como / *que / *do que the father

‘João is as shy as his father.’

Crucially, the comparatives of inequality present an interesting puzzle: in (1), either *do que* or *que* may be the syntactic heads of the Degree Clause. In the literature, these connectives have been basically treated as two optional alternates for the same structure (Marques 2003, Matos & Brito 2002, 2008, a.o.), with the form *que* being more associated with informal speech. This is, however, a quite incomplete description of the facts, since the form *que* cannot occur in every context that is available for *do que*.

(3) A Maria é mais simpática do que / que bonita. [adjective]

the Maria is more nice do que / que beautiful

‘Maria is nicer than she is beautiful.’

(4) Vale mais fugir do que / que ficar. [infinitive verb]

worth more run.away do que / que stay

(5) O João gosta mais de férias do que / que de trabalhar. [prepositional infinitive]

the João likes more of vacations do que / que of work

‘João likes vacation more than he likes work.’

(6) O Pedro comprou mais livros do que / que o João. [subject DP]

the Pedro bought more books do que / que the João

‘Pedro bought more books than João.’

(7) O Pedro comprou mais livros do que / que revistas. [direct object DP]

the Pedro bought more books do que / que magazines

‘Pedro bought more books than magazines.’

(8) a. O Pedro comprou mais livros do que / * que recebeu. [finite verb]

the Pedro bought more books do que / * que received

‘Pedro bought more books than he received.’

b. O Pedro comprou mais livros do que / * que recebeu revistas. [finite verb]

the Pedro bought more books do que / * que received magazines

‘Pedro bought more books than he received magazines.’

The contrast between the examples in (3)-(7), on the one hand, and (8), on the other hand, demonstrates that *do que* is allowed in all contexts, whereas *que* is barred whenever the Degree Clause includes a finite verb phonologically realized. This contrast is briefly described in Mateus et al (1989) and in Price (1990). Remarkably, however, no syntactic analysis has been proposed so far in order to account for these facts.

The present paper tackles this problem, and our proposal is as follows.

A. We assume the late merger of the Degree Clause as in Bhatt & Pancheva (2004), with the underlying interpretation of (1) being the one roughly represented in (9):

(9) [mais do.que a Maria é alta] O João é alto

[more than the Maria is tall] the João is tall

Given the selectional properties of the Degree Head regarding the connective that introduces the Degree Clause in English comparatives, Bhatt & Pancheva (2004) argue that the latter is an argument of the former. Therefore, the structure of comparatives is explained in the following way: the Degree Phrase undergoes covert Quantifier Raising, right-adjoining in a scope position; the Degree Clause is merged late as its complement, in a countercyclic operation (cf. Lebeaux 1990, for relative clauses). The Degree Head is pronounced in its base position and the Degree Clause is extraposed, thus resulting in the typical word order of comparatives. Bhatt & Pancheva (2004) assume the idea that extraposition involves countercyclic merger, as proposed in Fox & Nissenbaum (1999) for relative clauses.

B. Furthermore, we claim that all canonical comparative constructions in Portuguese include two full clauses. Whenever some constituents of the Degree Clause are phonologically null, what we have is a case of ellipsis, rather than a comparison between phrases (Bresnan 1973). Consider the case of the verb *gostar* ‘like’, which, as many others, selects a prepositional phrase as its complement: when it occurs in a comparative construction, the complement in the Degree Clause is necessarily a prepositional phrase, even when the verb is not pronounced (cf.(10)-(11)).

(10) O João gosta mais da Maria *do que / que* da Ana. [complement PP]
the João likes more of.the Maria do que / que of.the Ana.
‘John likes more Mary than he likes Ana.’

(11) O João gosta mais da Maria *do que / que* # a Ana. [not the intended reading]
the João likes more of.the Maria do que / que # the Ana.

This follows straightforwardly from the hypothesis that the features exhibited by the material left behind in ellipsis sites reveal the underlying structure of a full clause (Ross (1967)).

C. We claim that stripping is the type of ellipsis involved. Following a proposal in O’Neill (2011) for French, we argue that the remnant phrases, because they contain new information, raise to a Focus position above TP. Thus, when stripping occurs, only the finite verb is elided.

D. For the connective *do que*, we first assume the proposal in Matos & Brito (2008): there is no evidence to consider that it is composed by the preposition *de* ‘of’ plus the expression *o que* that occurs in Portuguese *wh*-phrases. In addition, we assert that the distinction between *do que* and *que* is due to the fact that *que* is defective. This defectiveness imposes for *que* both the mentioned Focus position and stripping. This is different from what happens with *do que*, which is not defective: both the Focus position and stripping are optional; when this Focus position is not projected and, thus, stripping does not apply, we argue that there is Focus *in situ*, a strategy widely attested in Portuguese.

In our paper we discuss an extensive range of data from various sources, also considering dialectal variation. If our proposal is on the right track, it will allow for a comparison with other Romance languages, in particular Galician, where there are three different connectives available for comparatives of inequality: *ca*, *que* and *do que*. Although they show some subtle differences with respect to Portuguese, these Galician connectives also exhibit distinct distributional properties related to the presence of finite verbs.

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