

Partitive Comparatives

I will argue that *than* is a partitive preposition in the domain of degrees, corresponding to *of* in the domain of individuals. Like *of*, *than* can appear in two types of partitive structures – *referential partitives* and *predicative partitives*. The complement of *of* is an individual (of type $\langle e \rangle$) in referential partitives (1a)), and a predicate of individuals (of type $\langle e, t \rangle$) in predicative partitives (1b)). Similarly, in the domain of degrees, the complement of *than* can be of two types: a degree-denoting CP (of type $\langle d \rangle$), or a smaller clause interpreted as a predicate of degrees (of type $\langle d, t \rangle$) (2)).

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| (1) | a. some <u>of</u> [_{DP} $\langle e \rangle$ the water] | (referential partitive) |
| | b. a glass <u>of</u> [_{NP} $\langle e, t \rangle$ water] | (predicative partitive) |
| (2) | a. Mary is taller <u>than</u> [_{CP} $\langle d \rangle$ wh ₁ John (is) d₁-tall] | (referential partitive) |
| | b. Mary is taller <u>than</u> [_{PredP} $\langle d, t \rangle$ John d-tall] | (predicative partitive) |

The two partitive strategies are the source of the clausal/phrasal distinction in comparatives. The referential partitive structure underlies all clausal and reduced comparatives. The predicative partitive structure underlies phrasal comparatives.

Consequences:

(i) A partitive role for *than* is incompatible with the view that the complement of *than* denotes a degree point on a scale. This is so, because a degree point does not have divisible structure, yet partitives are sensitive to the part-of relation. A change to an interval-based semantics for comparatives is thus needed (as argued on independent grounds by others).

(ii) The proposal provides a novel argument in favor of the classical analysis of the constituency in degree expressions

(iii) Phrasal comparatives are given different structure than clausal comparatives, without positing different *-ers*. (The two *thans* are independently motivated by the existence of the two *ofs*).

(iv) Some analyses of partitives treat partitive *of* is semantically vacuous. To the extent that the semantic parallelism between degree constructions and partitives obtains, and maintaining a single *-er*, partitive *of* too must be given a semantic role.