

SUBCATEGORIZATION AND QUANTIFICATION PROPERTIES OF SUPERLATIVES IN SLOVENE

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The following is an example of a sentence in Slovene containing a superlative.

- (1) Najboljši študenti so, [CP kar smo jih imeli.]
best-Nom.sg.masc. students-Nom.pl.masc. BE-3rd.pl.pres. that BE-1st.pl.pres. 3rd.pl.acc.pron have-L-participle
'They are the best students that we have had (them).'

In the modest range of literature that has been written on Slovene superlatives, it has been implicitly assumed that the specific type of CP that frequently cooccurs with superlatives is simply a relative clause. In fact, it is deceptively similar to the standard Slovene relative clause, but as I show below, this similarity is superficial and these CPs are both syntactically and semantically distinct from relative clause CPs.

The most common relative clause construction in Slovene includes the indeclinable complementizer *ki* and a resumptive clitic pronoun that agrees entirely in ϕ -features with the relativized head and checks its case within the relative clause. The resumptive pronoun appears only when it represents the dative or accusative object of the embedded predicate, and under such conditions, it is obligatory, as illustrated in sentence (2).

- (1) Govorim s človekom, [ki ga poznaš.]
speak-1st.sg.pres. with man-inst.sg.masc that-REL him-3rd.sg.acc.masc.pron know-2nd.sg.pres.
'I am speaking with the man that you know.'

- (2) *Govorim s človekom, [ki poznaš.]
speak-1st.sg.pres. with man-inst.sg.masc that-REL know-2nd.sg.pres.
'I am speaking with the man that you know.'

This type of relative clause (hereafter, the *ki*-type relative) is only used when the relativized NP is introduced as the subject, object, or indirect object of the relative clause. When these conditions are not met, the relative pronoun *kateri* is used.

There is an apparent parallelism between CP that occurs alongside superlatives (hereafter, *kar*-phrases) and the relative clause CP. Both contain invariable complementizers as well as an obligatory clitic pronoun. In the case of the relative clause, the syntactic role of the clitic pronoun is fairly transparent; that is, it is a resumptive pronoun. This strategy for forming relative clauses (namely, invariable complementizer plus resumptive clitic pronoun) is by no means unique to Slovene. It occurs in colloquial Czech, infrequently in B/C/S, and is the standard way of forming relative clauses in a variety of non-Slavic languages, such as Brazilian Portuguese and Bergamesco. The *kar*-phrase, while it bears an undeniable likeness to these relative clauses, nevertheless possesses certain unique properties that distinguish them from the typical Slovene relative clause.

The most conspicuous difference between the *ki*-type relative and the *kar*-phrase is the form of the complementizer itself. The word *kar*, while indeclinable in these constructions, is borrowed from the paradigm of declinable wh-word relative pronouns that are used almost exclusively to head either free relative or correlative clauses. The second and more striking distinctive property of the *kar*-phrase is that the clitic pronoun it contains is invariably plural, regardless of the number feature on the relativized head.

- (3) Najboljši iskalec si, [kar smo jih imeli.]

best-Nom.sg.masc. seeker-Nom.sg.masc. BE-2nd.sg.pres. that BE-1st.pl.pres. 3rd.pl.acc.pron have-L-participle

‘You are the best seeker that we have had (them).’ (Rowling 1999)

(4)* Najboljši iskalec si, [kar smo ga imeli.]
 best-Nom.sg.masc. seeker-Nom.sg.masc. BE-2nd.sg.pres. that BE-1st.pl.pres. 3rd.sg.acc.pron have-L-participle

‘You are the best seeker that we have had.’

While it is tempting to posit that the clitic pronoun denotes a plural partitive genitive (this, though incorrect, proves to be a valuable insight), it must be noted that the clitic does not occur exclusively in the genitive case. It can represent a dative or accusative object of the embedded predicate, as shown in (5).

(5) Najboljši iskalec si, [kar smo jim dali] nagrado.
 best-Nom.sg.masc. seeker-Nom.sg.masc. BE-2nd.sg.pres. that BE-1st.pl.pres. 3rd.pl.dat.pron give-L-participle award-Acc.sg.fem.

‘You are the best seeker to whom we have given (them) the award.’

The issue that I will present is the apparent feature mismatch between the clitic pronoun and the head of the ‘antecedent’ NP in *kar*-phrase constructions. The object of the embedded predicates in both (3) and (5) is plural, while the matrix subject N⁰ is singular. With *ki*-type relatives, such a mismatch is inadmissible, as shown in (6).

(6) *Najboljši iskalec si, [ki smo jih imeli.]
 best-Nom.sg.masc. seeker-Nom.sg.masc. BE-2nd.sg.pres. that BE-1st.pl.pres. 3rd.pl.acc.pron have-L-participle

‘You are the best seeker that we have had (them).’

I will conclude that the *ki*-type relative and the *kar*-phrase are entirely distinct constructions. While the former is a straightforward relative clause, the *kar*-phrase is a partitive CP complement to the superlative itself. Put differently, the superlative optionally subcategorizes for the *kar*-phrase, and thus, unlike a relative clause, the *kar*-phrase is not a complement of N. The structure that I propose to account for *kar*-phrases is similar to the structure proposed by Kayne to account for relative clauses and that Alexiadou (2002) expands to account for constructions involving comparative adjectives. That is to say, the *kar*-phrase is merged as a complement to the superlative and then extraposes to the right periphery of the clause. Abstractly, (where Deg represents the degree word and S represents the clause):

[_{NP} [_{Det} Deg + S] N] ! [_{NP} [_{Det} Deg] N S] (Alexiadou 2002).

In the case of the *kar*-phrase, this would be realized as follows:

[_{CP} [_{NP} [Najboljši + [kar smo jih imeli] iskalec] je] ! [_{CP} [_{NP} [Najboljši t] iskalec] je [kar smo jih imeli]]

[_{CP} [_{NP} [Best + [that we have them had]] seeker] is] ! [_{CP} [_{NP} [Best t] seeker] is [that we have them had]]

‘(He) is the best seeker that we have had (them).’

This analysis furthermore accounts for the unique semantics of the *kar*-phrase. The complement CP is not interpreted as a relative clause, but it is interpreted as specifying the range of variables over which the superlative quantifies. And accordingly, native speakers agree that sentence (3) containing the *kar*-phrase is best paraphrased as follows:

12) Najboljši iskalec si od vseh iskalcev [_{RC} ki smo jih imeli.]
 best-Nom.sg.masc. seeker-Nom.sg.masc. BE-2nd.sg.pres. of all-gen.pl. seeker-gen.pl. that BE-1st.pl.pres. 3rd.pl.acc.pron have-L-participle

‘You are the best seeker of all the seekers that we have had.’

The clitic pronoun of a *kar*-phrase, in fact, denotes a set of variables, and for this reason, it is consistently plural.