What is the best way to represent Polish comparisons with *jak*?

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This paper discusses how Polish comparisons involving the word *jak* 'like' should be represented in syntax. On the basis of attested examples, this paper argues against existing analyses of *jak* as a preposition or as a conjunction and it presents arguments supporting a clausal, gapping-like analysis of comparisons where *jak* serves as the complementiser.

Kallas 1986 claims that *jak* used in the comparison in (1) is a preposition taking nominative complement *siostra*, while in (2) it is a conjunction joining accusative nominals *naukę* and *zabawę*:

(1) Kochała   Jurka   jak siostra.
    loved.3.SG.F Jurek.ACC like sister.NOM.SG.F

    'She loved Jurek like his sister.'   (Kallas 1986, ex. (1))[1]

(2) Dzieci   często traktowały   naukę   jak zabawę.
    child.PL.N.NOM often   treated.3.PL.N learning.ACC like fun.ACC

    'Children often treated learning like having fun.'   (Kallas 1986, ex. (32))

Let us now consider (3), a slightly modified version of (1), where *jak* is followed by *siedem*, an accusative non-agreeing numeral (requiring a genitive nominal, *sióstr*):

(3) Kochała   Jurka   jak jego siedem   sióstr.
    loved.3.SG.F Jurek.ACC like his seven.ACC.PL.F sister.GEN.PL.F

    'She loved Jurek like his seven sisters.'

(3) shows that what follows *jak* may be not only nominative, but also accusative. However, this cannot be any accusative nominal – it must be an accusative non-agreeing numeral. These two case constraints happen to be identical to the subject case marking restrictions in Polish, which precisely allow nominative subjects and accusative non-agreeing numeral subjects (Franks 1995, Przepiórkowski 1999). Therefore, the claim that *jak* in (1) is a preposition requiring nominative case is a missed generalisation. This generalisation can be captured by analysing the comparison involving *jak* as a clause where the predicate is missing. This approach accounts for the fact that the implicit subject in (3) is marked for nominative case, while the subject of the comparison is accusative – this is because case is assigned independently in each clause.

Let us proceed to the discussion of (2) – Kallas 1986 claims that *jak* is a conjunction to ensure that what follows *jak* is identical (in terms of category and case marking) to what precedes it. Though very intuitive, such an analysis turns out to be wrong upon closer scrutiny, as shown in (4), where the object of OBWIESZAĆ 'dress' is genitive (structural case triggered by negation), while the nominal following *jak* is accusative (structural case expected in the absence of negation):

(4) nie   trzeba jej   obwieszać jak choinkę
    NEG need she.GEN.SG dress.INF like christmas tree.ACC.SG.F

    'There is no need to dress her like a christmas tree.'   (Google)

While sentences such as (4) cannot be handled by the conjunction analysis of *jak*, they are captured by the clausal analysis involving ellipsis. Like in gapping, where negation from the clause without gap does not have to be transferred to the gapped clause (Repp 2009), in (4) negation only applies to the main clause – this is why *choinkę* is accusative rather than genitive (like the object of the main verb). However, negation may be transferred from the main clause, which accounts for instances of case agreement across clauses observed by Kallas 1986.

Furthermore, there are arguments showing that the conjunction analysis of *jak* does not satisfy coordination criteria. First, while the conjunction and the second conjunct must not be fronted without the first conjunct (Haspelmath 2007), the phrase with *jak* can be fronted alone:

(5) Jak ognia   unikają   aparatu.
    like fire.GEN avoid.3.PL camera.GEN

    'They avoid the camera like fire.'   (The National Corpus of Polish, NKJP; http://nkjp.pl)

Secondly, while none of the conjuncts may be omitted,[2] if one tried to analyse *jak* in (1) as a

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[1]Glosses and free translations were added to examples taken from Kallas 1986.

[2]Though sentences may start with a conjunction, they are typically preceded by the sentence which would normally be the first conjunct. However, this is not the case in the issue discussed here.

conjunction, the first conjunct would be missing – the subject is implicit in (1).

By contrast, these issues can be accounted for under the clausal, gapping-like analysis of comparisons involving *jak*. The implicit subject in (1) and (3) does not pose any problem – since constraints are resolved independently in each clause, the main clause may take an implicit subject while the comparison has an overt subject. As for the fronted comparison in (5), though in Polish the clause containing the predicate tends to precede the gapped clause, the opposite ordering (backward gapping) is also attested – this would be the case in (5).

(6) and (7) show another phenomenon which is covered by the clausal, gapping-like analysis of *jak*. In (6) the verb is active, its object is accusative and the nominal following *jak* is also accusative. By contrast, in (7) the verb is passive, the implicit subject is nominative and the nominal following *jak* is also nominative. This shows that the comparison undergoes passivisation in the same way as the main clause – as it would be expected under gapping.

(6) Gdy już   nas   wydoją   jak krowę.
    When already us.ACC milk.3.PL like cow.ACC.F
    'When they have already milked us like a cow.' = they have milked us dry   (NKJP)

(7) Zostaniesz   wydojony   jak krowa.
    become.2.SG.M milk.PASS.NOM.SG like cow.NOM.F
    'You will be milked like a cow.' = you will be milked dry   (Google)

Finally, let us consider (8) which is different from examples discussed so far – there is more than one phrase following *jak*: *kwiatek*, a nominative nominal mirroring the subject of the main verb, and *do kożucha*, a prepositional phrase analogous to the complement of the main verb.

(8) Halloween   pasuje do naszej kultury   jak kwiatek   do kożucha.
    Halloween.NOM fit.3.SG to our   culture.GEN like flower.NOM to fur coat.GEN
    'Halloween fits our culture like a flower (fits) a fur coat.' = it is out of place   (NKJP)

Such examples can be handled by the clausal, gapping-like analysis, whereby the comparison is assumed to contain an elided instance of the predicate from the main clause. This is why it must satisfy the same constraints as corresponding dependents of the main clause, though these constraints are resolved independently in both clauses, as explained earlier (see (3) and (4)). At the same time, such examples pose another serious problem to the conjunction analysis of *jak* – though there is the phenomenon of non-constituent coordination (Maxwell and Manning 1996), it does not expect the discontinuity of putative conjuncts such as in (8), where *Halloween* and *do naszej kultury*, which should constitute the first conjunct, are separated by the verb.

To conclude, based on the presented evidence, it seems well-motivated to assume that comparisons involving *jak* such as the ones discussed in this paper should be analysed as clauses – subordinate clauses with an elided predicate. This way, the requirement of parallelism between the main clause and the comparison follows naturally. However, while full parallelism is possible, this analysis also captures cases where corresponding phrases are not entirely identical – due to the fact that case is assigned independently in both clauses. Moreover, like under gapping, it is also expected that agreement requirements may be different in both clauses – the subject of the main clause may require a different verb form than the one that would be expected in the gapped clause. This would be the case in (7), where the implicit subject of the main clause is second person singular masculine, while *krowa*, the subject of the comparative clause, is third person singular feminine.

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