

Clause size in German elliptical comparatives

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Attributive comparatives constitute potentially ambiguous structures, leading to DP-external and DP-internal readings (Lerner & Pinkal 1995):

- (1) I saw a taller man than my father.
External reading: 'I saw a taller man than my father saw.'
Internal reading: 'I saw a taller man than my father is.'

In German, the readings are distinguished by morphological case on the remnant: in the external reading, it is the regular nominative for subjects (*mein Vater* 'my.NOM father'), while in the internal reading it is the accusative (*meinen Vater* 'my.ACC father'); syncretism arises for feminine, neuter and plural remnants. German otherwise does not allow the accusative case on a subject remnant in comparatives (Bacskai-Atkari 2023). I argue that the split pattern arises due to different underlying clause sizes: for the external reading, a fully-fledged clause containing a TP is reconstructed, while the internal reading is associated with a predicative clause that projects only a PredP but no tense specification. In regular predicative main clauses, there is a TP (or IP) layer above the PredP (cf. Bowers 1993, 2010): if this were the case for the internal reading in German, the remnant should regularly receive nominative case from T. The accusative case is ultimately governed by the matrix verb under adjacency with the matrix object DP. The data thus provide additional support for the idea that isomorphism between the elliptical clause and the antecedent clause is not a prerequisite for ellipsis (cf. Vicente 2018): crucially, the differences also pertain to clause size.

References

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