

**ELLIPTICAL COMPARATIVES IN FINNISH, ESTONIAN AND  
HUNGARIAN**

The present paper aims at presenting how elliptical constructions in comparative subclauses can be analysed in Finnish, Estonian and Hungarian, concentrating on what underlying parametric differences can be found. First we will outline the structure of comparative subclauses and the parameters responsible for ellipsis phenomena, as found in Indo-European languages, followed by a brief summary in section 3 on the universal constraints on deletion. Sections 4, 5 and 6 will deal with the deletion phenomena in Hungarian, Finnish and Estonian, respectively, with the aim of showing the parametric setting in each language.

**1. The structure of comparatives**

Comparatives consist of two major parts, as illustrated by (1): in the matrix clause (Mary is more intelligent), the reference value of comparison is expressed in the form of a degree expression, within which the comparative subclause itself (than Peter is) expresses the standard value:

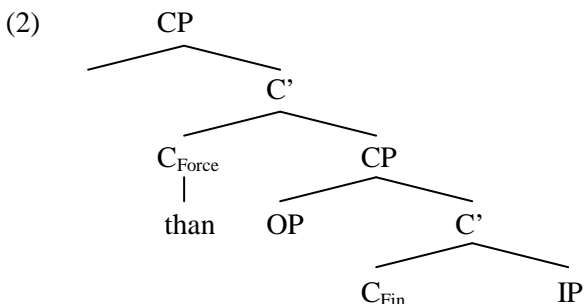
- (1) Mary is more intelligent than Peter is [than Peter is *x-much* intelligent].

The subclause contains a QP, within which the comparative operator (here: *x-much*) is found.<sup>61</sup> The comparative subclause is a CP introduced by the complementiser *than* (cf. Kenesei 1992) representing comparative Force (see Rizzi 1999). This subcategorises for another CP, to the specifier of which the comparative operator moves via operator movement (Chomsky 1977; Kennedy and Merchant 2000). The structure<sup>62</sup> is schematically represented below:

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<sup>61</sup>The term ‘comparative operator’ refers to a subset of operators behaving quite similarly to ordinary relative operators but are found in comparative subclauses and may exhibit certain characteristics that are not shared by all operators, as shown in section 5. This operator is generally taken to be null in English, see Kennedy and Merchant (1997: 5); we will indicate it as *x-much* (or *x-many*) throughout the paper, using the conventions of the relevant literature; still, it has to be stressed that since this is a null operator, *x-much* does not refer to any phonological content to be deleted.

<sup>62</sup>Our representation follows Rizzi’s analysis of the Left Periphery, who claims that there are two CP projections, the upper one being responsible for Force and the lower for Finiteness, and in between the two optional Topic and Focus phrases can be found, if any (Rizzi 1997: 297): [CP [TopP\* [FocP [TopP\* [CP]]]]]



There are two basic types: predicative comparatives, as in (3), where the QP is in a predicate position, and attribute comparatives, as in (4), where the QP is a modifier within a DP:

- (3) The tiger is faster than the cat.                      predicative  
 (4) I have bigger tigers than Peter has.                  Attributive

## 2. Parametric variation in the comparative subclause (IE languages)

There are three deletion operations that can be associated with comparative subclauses: Comparative Deletion (CD), Comparative Ellipsis (CE), and Comparative Verb Gapping (CVG). The applications of these processes define the parametric setting, according to which languages can be [ $\pm$ CD], [ $\pm$ CE], and [ $\pm$ CVG], [ $\pm$ ] meaning that the operation is obligatory in the given language. These terms are descriptive parameters only (in this respect similar to SVO, SOV etc.): they describe only what can be seen in the surface structure but not the syntactic causes thereof.

CD deletes the AP in predicative comparatives and the DP in attributive comparatives, if it is identical to its antecedent in the matrix clause (cf. Kennedy–Merchant 2000). English has a [+CD] parameter: if CD does not apply, the result is ungrammatical:

- (5) Mary is taller than Peter is (\*tall).  
 (6) Susan has bigger cats than Peter has (\*big cats).

By contrast, Bulgarian is a [–CD] language: the elements *колкото висок* ‘x-much tall’ and *колкото голяма котка* ‘x-much big cat’ can remain overtly and the sentences are still grammatical:

- (7) Мери по-висока беше от колкото висок Питър беше.  
 Mary taller was than x-much tall Peter was  
 ‘Mary was taller than Peter.’
- (8) Жужа по-голяма котка видя, от колкото голяма котка  
 Susan bigger cat saw than x-much big cat  
 Питър къпеше.  
 Peter bathed  
 ‘Susan has a saw a bigger cat than Peter bathed.’

Let us now turn to CE. This deletes everything except for one focalised constituent. English is clearly [-CE], as shown in (5) and (6). Southern Italian dialects have a [+CE] parameter:

- (9) \*Eva      incontra Pietro più     volte a casa     che (\*lei) (\*lo) (\*incontri)  
 Eve        meets     Peter more times at home that she him meets  
 a           scuola.  
 at         school  
 ‘Eve meets Peter more times at home than she meets him at school.’

Last but not least, let us discuss a peculiar phenomenon here referred to as Comparative Verb Gapping (CVG). It means that if the operator is deleted, the finite verb must also be deleted. English has a [-CVG] setting, as demonstrated by (5) and (6). Bulgarian is a [+CVG] language as shown by the following predicative comparative examples (attributive ones demonstrate the same):

- (10) Мери по-висока беше от колкото висок Питър беше.  
 Mary taller was than x-much tall Peter was  
 (11) \*Мери по-висока беше от Питър (\*беше).  
 Mary taller was than Peter was  
 ‘Mary was taller than Peter was.’

In (10), the comparative subclause contains the operator колкото висок ‘x-much tall’ and the finite verb беше ‘was’; the sentence is, as expected, grammatical. However, as shown in (11), if the operator is deleted but everything else remains, the result is ungrammatical – if the finite verb is also elided, the sentence is again grammatical.

It can be concluded that all the three phenomena are present in languages on a +/- basis.

### 3. Deletion, new, given

Any operation involving ellipsis must somehow be constrained, so that once a constituent or a sequence of constituents is deleted in a clause that otherwise fully conforms to the requirements of grammar, that constituent or sequence of constituents must be recoverable from somewhere, so that the information structure remains intact, regardless of the apparent deletion. This means that elided elements are expected to be given in the context, which might be paraphrased as not new.

Schwarzschild (1999) came up with the idea that a constituent or a sequence of constituents may be regarded to carry given information in the clause if and only if that is entailed by prior discourse: “[a]n utterance U counts as given iff it has a salient antecedent A and, modulo  $\exists$ -type shifting, A entails the  $\exists$ -F-closure of U [+GIVEN]” (GIVENNESS; Schwarzschild 1999, example 25).

In the light of Merchant (2001), it can be said that there should also be mutual satisfaction of the givenness requirement between the antecedent and the utterance. Therefore, the definition of givenness can be seen below:

(12) GIVENness in ellipsis domains (e-GIVEN): An utterance U counts as e-GIVEN iff it has a salient antecedent A and, modulo  $\exists$ -type shifting, A entails the  $\exists$ -F-closure of U, and U entails the  $\exists$ -F-closure of A (on the basis of Merchant 2001).

In the present paper we will rely on Merchant's condition on ellipsis, which can be summarised as follows: a constituent  $\alpha$  can be deleted iff  $\alpha$  is e-GIVEN (Merchant 2001: 38).

#### 4. Hungarian

In this section we will show that Hungarian is a language with a [-CD], [-CE] and [-CVG] setting.

The possibility of an overt operator and a full subclause shows that Hungarian must be a language with [-CD] and [-CE] setting:

- (13) Péter sokkal kövérebb, mint amilyen kövér Jancsi valaha is lesz.  
 Peter much fatter than OP fat Johnny ever will.be  
 Peter is much fatter than Johnny will ever be.'
- (14) Péter sokkal gyorsabb autót vett, mint amilyen gyors autót  
 Peter much faster car-ACC bought than OP fast car-ACC  
 Jancsi vásárolt.  
 Johnny purchased  
 'Peter bought a much faster car than the one that Johnny purchased.'

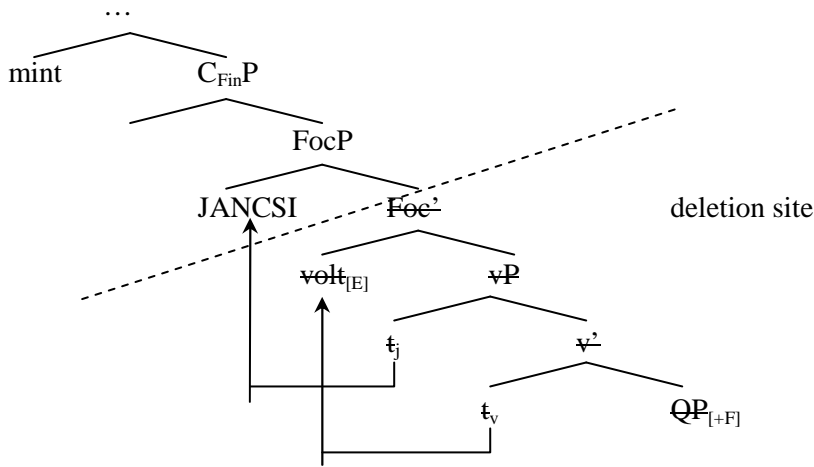
When it comes to Comparative Verb Gapping (CVG), the following pattern can be observed in predicative comparatives (the same applies to attributive ones):

- (15) Péter sokkal kövérebb volt, mint amilyen kövér Jancsi volt.  
 Péter much fatter was than OP fat Johnny was  
 'Peter was much fatter than Johnny was.'
- (16) Péter sokkal kövérebb volt, mint Jancsi (\*volt).  
 Péter much fatter was than Johnny was  
 'Peter was much fatter than Johnny was.'

The full subclause is shown in (15), which is perfectly grammatical, containing both the operator and the finite verb. However, if the operator is deleted but the verb is not, the result is ungrammatical: the construction can be saved by deleting the verb too. It is true that comparative operators are optionally present in the subclause: however, if they are absent, the deletion of the verb is obligatory; on the other hand, a constituent can be deleted iff it is GIVEN.

What happens is that the operator has to move up to the [Spec; CP] position to have its [+wh] feature checked. However, if it for some reason fails to move up, feature checking cannot happen, which causes PF-uninterpretability as the comparative operator's feature is PF-uninterpretable. The way for PF to solve this is via deletion, which can effectively eliminate the otherwise fatal strong [+wh] feature inside the VP (Kennedy and Merchant 2000: 131). This is illustrated in (17):

(17) Péter sokkal kövérebb volt, [mint [QP amilyen kövér] Jancsi volt].



This is sluicing per definitionem (cf. Craenenbroeck and Lipták 2006). The uninterpretable feature is in the vP; sluicing always targets the Foc' in Hungarian (ibid.) and so everything will be deleted under that node, including the finite verb. Hence, if the finite verb is visible, it signifies that sluicing has not taken place and the uninterpretable feature has not been elided. The target of CVG is thus not the verb as such but its disappearance is the result of sluicing.

## 5. Finnish

Finnish is basically [+CD], [-CE] and [-CVG].

As for Comparative Deletion (CD), consider the following data:

(18) Joni on pidempi kuin Mari (\*on)/ (\*on pitkä).  
 John is taller than Mary is. is tall  
 'John is taller than Mary.'

(19) Joni on pidempi kuin (?mitä/\*mitä pitkä) Mari (\*on).  
 John is taller than OP OP tall Mary is.  
 'John is taller than Mary.'

The examples above show that in Finnish it is ungrammatical to have an AP in the subclause that is identical with the one in the matrix clause; it is marginally acceptable to have a single operator *mitä* 'what' after *kuin* 'that' but the adjective cannot be repeated. The picture is even more complex when it comes to attributive comparatives:

(20) ??Ostin nopeamman auton kuin miten nopean auton Petri osti.  
 I.bought faster car than OP fast car Peter bought.  
 'The car I bought is faster than the one that Peter bought.'

(21) Ostin nopeamman auton kuin Petrin ostama auto.  
 I.bought faster car than Peter-PART buy-PART car  
 'I bought a car faster than the one that Peter bought.'

- (22) ??Ostin nopeamman auton kuin miten nopea Petrin  
 I.bought faster car than OP fast Peter-PART  
 ostama auto oli.  
 buy-PART car was  
 ‘I bought a car faster than the one that Peter bought.’

If the subclause contains a DP that is logically identical with the one in the matrix clause, as in the sentence is only marginally acceptable. The only truly grammatical possibility is the one in (21), where the subclause contains the relevant pieces of information within a kind of possessive construction. Nonetheless, even this is only marginally acceptable if it contains the repeated adjective, as shown by (22). This means that the comparative subclause tends to be fundamentally predicative in Finnish, and the subject thereof bears the contrast necessary for comparison.

It seems that Finnish is [+CD], like English; but unlike English, where CD targets the AP in predicative comparatives and the DP in attributive ones, in Finnish it targets the maximal projection containing the finite verb (I'/vP) in predicative comparatives and the DP in attributive ones.

The following examples are indicative of [–CE]:

- (23) Huoneeni on suorakaiteen muotoinen, hieman pidempi kuin mitä  
 my.room is rectangular shaped slightly longer than OP  
 se on leveä.  
 it is wide  
 ‘My room is rectangular, it is slightly longer than it is wide.’
- (24) Ostin nopeamman auton tänään kuin Petri osti eilen.  
 I.bought faster car today than Peter bought yesterday  
 ‘I bought a faster car today than Peter bought yesterday.’

On the other hand, there are no CVG effects, as can be seen in (23) and (24). Hence it can be concluded that Finnish is a language with a [+CD], [–CE] and [–CVG] setting.

## 6. Estonian

Estonian is basically like Finnish in having a [+CD], [–CE] and [–CVG] pattern.

In Estonian, there exists the comparative operator *kuivõrd*. For some speakers, *kuivõrd* is ungrammatical in any construction. Grammaticality judgments are indicated for both *kuivõrd*-sensitive and *kuivõrd*-resistant speakers in this order when they differ.

Let us then begin with CD. Consider the following examples:

- (25) \*Jaan on pikem kui Mari on pikk.  
 John is taller than Mary is tall
- (26) ??/?Jaan on pikem kui *kuivõrd* pikk Mari on.  
 John is taller than OP tall Mary is  
 ‘John is taller than Mary.’

As can be seen in (26), the repetition of the adjective in the subclause is not grammatical in itself, and marginal acceptability can be achieved by adding *kuivõrd*. It seems that in Estonian predicative comparatives there is some way CD involved. This is so in attributive comparatives too:

- (27) \*/?Ostsin kiirema auto kui kuivõrdkiire auto Peeter ostis.  
 I.bought faster car than OP fast car Peter bought
- (28) Ostsin kiirema auto kui Peeter ostis.  
 I.bought faster car than Peter bought  
 'I bought a faster car than Peter bought.'

Especially for *kuivõrd*-sensitive speakers, the presence of the DP containing the operator is not acceptable. See also:

- (29) Ma sõin rohkem õunu kui Jaan (sõi).  
 I ate more apples than John ate
- (30) \*Ma sõin rohkem õunu kui mitu õuna Jaan (sõi).  
 I ate more apples than OP apples John ate

Thus it seems that Estonian is [+CD] for *kuivõrd*-sensitive speakers, and it is little less so for *kuivõrd*-resistant ones. CD targets the I' in predicative comparatives, and the DP in attributive comparatives in Estonian, just like in Finnish.

The presence of two contrastive constituents is indicative of [-CE]:

- (31) Ostsin kiirema auto täna kui Peeter eile.  
 I.bought faster car today than Peter yesterday  
 'I bought a faster car today than Peter did yesterday.'
- (32) B-kategooria filmide kino Hamburgis oli palju mõjukam,  
 B category films-GEN cinema Hamburg-INE was more influential  
 kui ta on seda nüüd.  
 than it is that now  
 'The cinema of B category movies in Hamburg used to be more influential than it is now.'

On the other hand, there is no CVG to be observed either, as shown by (28).

In sum, we can say that Estonian has fundamentally [+CD], [-CE] and [-CVG] setting.

## 7. Conclusion

In this article, we wanted to provide an insight into what elliptical comparatives look like in Finnish, Hungarian and Estonian. The main aim was to show what kind of parametric settings can be found in these languages. As far as the parametric settings of the three languages are concerned, we can conclude that (i) Hungarian is [-CD], [-CE] and [+CVG], (ii) Finnish is [+CD], [-CE] and [-CVG], and (iii) Estonian is also [+CD], [-CE] and [-CVG].

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