

ATTRIBUTIVE COMPARATIVE DELETION AS VP-ELLIPSIS

0. The problem

- Attributive Comparative Deletion in English:

(1) Liz bought a bigger cat than George did (*buy) a (*big) cat flap.

the lexical verb and the adjective both have to be deleted if the noun (*cat flap*) is overt

- German: no such constructions:

(2) *Martha hat eine größere Wohnung als Peter ein Haus.
Martha has a-Fem. bigger-Fem.flat than Peter a-Neut. house
'Martha has a bigger flat than Peter a house.'

→ questions:

- why is the deletion of the adjective possible in English, and not in German?
- how is the deletion of the adjective related to the deletion of the lexical verb?
- how is it possible to delete the lexical verb and the adjective together?

→ proposal: Attributive Comparative Deletion is VP-ellipsis

→ as German has no VP-ellipsis in the way English has, there will be no Attributive Comparative Deletion in German

1. Constraints on deletion

GIVENNESS: a constituent α can only be deleted if it is GIVEN (Merchant 2001: 38)

→ α must have an appropriate antecedent in the discourse (recoverability)

(3) Peter las einen Roman und Max ~~las~~ ein Epos.
Peter read a-Masc.Acc. novel and Max read a-Neut.Acc. epic
'Peter was reading a novel and Max an epic.'

(4) *Peter las einen Roman und Max ~~schr~~rieb ein Epos.
Peter read a-Masc.Acc. novel and Max wrote a-Neut.Acc. epic
'Peter was reading a novel and Max was writing an epic.'

F-marking (Focus-marking): novelty, prominence (cf. Selkirk 1996, 2005; Merchant 2001)

Büring (2006: 322–323): nodes that are not FOC are either GIVEN or F-MARKED

- F-MARKED constituent but not FOC: NEW in the discourse
- constituent without F-marking: GIVEN
- (FOC: either GIVEN or NEW)

F-marked constituents cannot be deleted

2. Comparative Deletion

Comparative Deletion (CD): deletes the QP or DP in the subclause, if it is logically identical with its antecedent in the matrix clause (Bacskai-Atkari 2010)

(5) Mary is taller than Peter is ~~tall~~. (*predicative*)

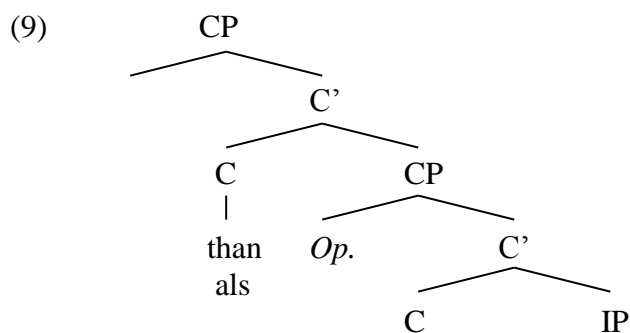
(6) Mary saw bigger cats than Peter saw ~~big cats~~. (*attributive*)

same for German:

(7) Maria ist größer als Peter ist ~~groß~~. (*predicative*)
 Mary is taller than Peter is tall
 ‘Mary is taller than Peter.’

(8) Maria mag größere Katzen als Peter mag ~~große Katzen~~. (*attributive*)
 Mary likes bigger cats than Peter likes big cats
 ‘Mary likes bigger cats than Peter does.’

deletion site for CD: [Spec; CP] –QP/ DP containing the operator moves up via *wh*-movement



- predicative structures: a zero operator heads the QP containing the AP
- attributive structures: QP adjunct within a DP (Kántor 2008; Kennedy and Merchant 2000)

→ entire DP moves up and gets deleted – QP cannot be extracted out of the DP
(DP island constraint; see Izvorski 1995; Bošković 2005; Grebenyova 2004;
Kayne 1983; Ross 1986; Kántor 2008)

copies:

- higher copy deleted by CD
- lower copy regularly deleted by PF (cf. Bošković and Nunes 2007; Chomsky 2005; Bobaljik 2002)

QP/DP is GIVEN:

(10) Mary is taller [_{CP} than [_{CP} ~~{QP x-tall}~~ Peter is ~~{QP x-tall}~~]].

(11) Mary saw bigger cats [_{CP} than [_{CP} ~~{DP x-big cats}~~ Peter saw ~~{DP x-big cats}~~]].

both cases contain CD – the deletion of the entire DP is the result of more general constraints

3. Comparative Subdeletion

subcomparatives – the QP remains:

(12) The cat is bigger than the cat flap is wide.

(13) Die Katze ist dicker als die Katzenklappe groß ist.
the-Fem. cat is fatter than the-Fem. cat flap big is
'The cat is fatter than the cat flap is big.'

lower copy: cannot be deleted because it is F-marked

Bošković and Nunes (2007: 48): lower copies may remain if the pronunciation of the higher copy would cause the derivation to crash at PF

(14) The cat is bigger [_{CP} than [_{CP} ~~{QP x-wide}~~_F the cat flap is [_{QP} x-wide]_F]].

→ Comparative Subdeletion is Comparative Deletion, not a separate operation

4. Attributive Comparative Deletion

not the entire lower copy remains (\leftrightarrow predicative structures):

(15) *Liz bought a bigger cat than George did ~~buy~~ a big cat flap.

(16) Liz bought a bigger cat than George did ~~buy~~ a **big** cat flap.

positional problem:

(17) *Liz bought a bigger cat than George did ~~buy~~ a wide cat flap.

lexical verb is also deleted alongside the QP:

(18) *Liz bought a bigger cat than George bought a **big** cat flap.

but: lexical verb and the QP do not seem to be adjacent

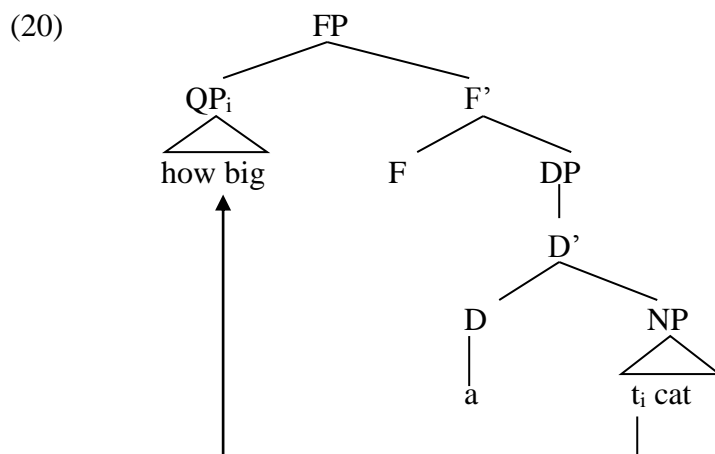
5. The syntax of attributive modification

if the attributive modifier contains an operator, the QP moves up to the specifier of an FP (English); the FP is a functional extension of the DP (see Kennedy and Merchant 2000)

(19a) *[A [QP how big] cat] did you see?

(19b) [[QP How big] a cat] did you see?

structure:



• similarly (see Kennedy and Merchant 2000: 124):

(21) Liz saw too big a cat.

(22) Liz saw so big a cat that she fainted.

- the F head can sometimes be filled (Kennedy and Merchant 2000: 125–126):

(23) How big of a cat did you see?

(24) Liz saw too big of a cat.

(25) Liz saw so big of a cat that she fainted.

- syntactic ambiguities (Kennedy and Merchant 2000: 127–130):

(26) Liz saw a big cat but George did a tiger.

structure:

‘Liz saw a big cat but George did ~~see~~ a tiger’

‘Liz saw a big cat but George did ~~see~~ big a tiger’

attributive comparatives: the QP modifier within the DP moves up too:

(27) Liz bought a bigger cat than George did ~~buy~~ _{[FP [QP ~~big~~] [DP a ___i cat flap]].}

→ the lexical verb and the adjective are adjacent at PF

Kennedy and Merchant (2000): the QP moving to [Spec; FP] equips the F head with a [+wh] feature, which is uninterpretable on the F head at PF (↔ D heads, e.g. *which*): the feature can be checked if the entire FP moves up to [Spec; CP]

higher copy of the FP:

- default: it remains – e.g. (19)
- comparatives: CD deletes it – e.g. (27)

lower copy of the FP:

- default: it is deleted – e.g. (19)
- comparatives: the DP within it is F-marked – e.g. (27)

→ problem: the F head with the uninterpretable [+wh] feature should be deleted (see Bošković and Nunes 2007) ↔ the DP should remain

6. VP-deletion in English

Reich (2007: 472–473): deletion at PF cannot affect F-marked material

“Verb Gapping”:

(28a) Liz likes cats and George [_{VP} likes [_{DP} tigers]_F].

(28b) Liz likes cats and George ~~[_{VP} likes [_{DP} tigers]_F]~~.

(28c) *Liz likes cats and George ~~[_{VP} likes [_{DP} tigers]_F]~~ too.

→ Verb Gapping is in fact VP-ellipsis: deletion targets the GIVEN VP containing an F-marked DP –linear PF-operation stops

if there is no F-marked DP, there is nothing to prevent the deletion of the DP:

(29a) Liz likes cats and George [_{VP} likes [_{DP} tigers]].

(29b) *Liz likes cats and George ~~[_{VP} likes [_{DP} tigers]]~~.

(29c) Liz likes cats and George ~~[_{VP} likes [_{DP} tigers]]~~ too.

→ target is not the V head but the VP

attributive comparatives: VP-deletion

the F-marked constituent is not the DP but the FP

(30) *Mary bought a bigger dog than Peter [_{VP} bought [_{FP} x-big [_{DP} a doghouse]_F]].

(31) *Mary bought a bigger dog than Peter ~~[_{VP} bought [_{FP} x-big [_{DP} a doghouse]_F]]~~.

(32) Mary bought a bigger dog than Peter ~~[_{VP} bought [_{FP} x-big [_{DP} a doghouse]_F]]~~.

(33) *Mary bought a bigger dog than Peter ~~[_{VP} bought [_{FP} x-big [_{DP} a doghouse]_F]]~~.

VP-ellipsis: optional process that may save the construction from ungrammaticality

(cf. sluicing)

7. German

Winkler (2005): no VP-deletion of the English type in German

instead: stripping *-es*-construction, *auch*-ellipsis

German VP: head-final – in subclauses, the verb does not move up to C

- (34) Ich esse das Brötchen schneller als er die Fenster putzt.
 I eat the-Neut. bread faster than he the-Pl. windows cleans
 ‘I eat the bread faster than he cleans the windows.’

→ if an F-marked constituent precedes the V head, the entire VP would remain

also: no movement of the QP to [Spec; FP]:

- (35) Er hat [ein [QP zu großes] Herz].
 he has a-Neut. too big-Neut. heart
 ‘He has too big a heart.’

→ the entire DP has to be eliminated – it cannot be F-marked

Conclusion

Attributive Comparative Deletion can be reduced to Comparative Deletion and VP-ellipsis

English has VP-ellipsis → there is Attributive Comparative Deletion

German has no VP-ellipsis → it lacks Attributive Comparative Deletion

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