

# Clause size in German elliptical comparatives

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## 1 Introduction

comparative subclauses regularly elliptical (Bacskai-Atkari 2018):

- (1) a. Mary is taller than Peter (is).
- b. The table is longer than the office is wide.

ellipsis can lead to ambiguity (Bacskai-Atkari 2018: 168–173):

- (2) I love you more than **Peter**.  
Subject reading: ‘I love you more than Peter loves you.’  
Object reading: ‘I love you more than I love Peter.’

subclause is apparently isomorphic with the matrix clause – different underlying functions of the remnant (case ambiguity)

special case of potentially ambiguous structures: attributive comparatives – DP-external and DP internal readings (Lerner & Pinkal 1995)

- (3) 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.’

subject remnants in both cases – but: underlying clause with a lexical verb or a predicative clause

→ isomorphism apparently not adhered to

question: whether this affects clause size

German attributive comparatives: the remnant in constructions like (3) shows morphological case distinctions (for masculine remnants) between the two readings

proposal: case assignment in German attributive comparatives provides evidence that elliptical predicative clauses are smaller than TP

## 2 Ellipsis

prototypical case of ellipsis: sluicing

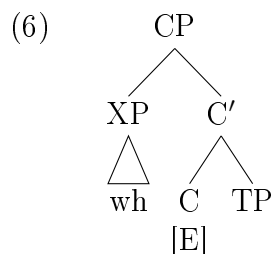
- (4) Someone did the laundry but I don't remember **WHO** ~~did the laundry~~.

elided elements should be e-GIVEN (ellipsis-GIVEN) in the discourse (Merchant 2001: 26):

- (5) e-GIVENness  
 An expression E counts as e-GIVEN iff E has a salient antecedent A and, modulo  $\exists$ -type shifting,  
 (i) A entails F-clo(E), and  
 (ii) E entails F-clo(A).

e-GIVENness more restrictive than GIVENness (Merchant 2001: 25–36)

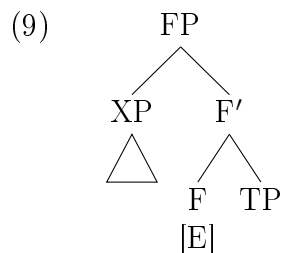
sluicing: remnant *wh*-element in [Spec,CP] – [E] feature for ellipsis in C, complement of C (the TP) elided (Merchant 2001)



clausal ellipsis also beyond sluicing – fragment answers:

- (7) A: Who phoned grandma?  
 B: **Liz** ~~phoned grandma~~.
- (8) A: Who did Liz phone?  
 B: ~~Liz phoned~~ **grandma**.

analysis of Merchant (2001: 675): fragments involve an FP (functional projection), which hosts the [E] feature in its head



→ also fragment answers like in (8) conform to the general template

word order in the elliptical clause not attested in a non-elliptical counterpart:

- (10) a. \*Grandma<sub>i</sub> Liz phoned t<sub>i</sub>.  
 b. Grandma<sub>i</sub> ~~Liz phoned~~ t<sub>i</sub>.

but: ellipsis not “saving” the structure – movement motivated by the [E] feature

### 3 Ellipsis and isomorphism

island violations:

- (11) a. [<sub>DP</sub> How diligent a worker]<sub>i</sub> did they hire t<sub>i</sub>?  
b. \*[How diligent]<sub>i</sub> did they hire [<sub>DP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> a worker]?

*wh*-based degree expression cannot be extracted out of the DP-island (see Kennedy & Merchant 2000 and Bacskai-Atkari 2018: 132–139 on inversion within the DP)

apparent repair effect (based on Vicente 2018: 484, ex. 11):

- (12) a. \*They hired a diligent worker, but I don't know [how diligent]<sub>i</sub> they hired [<sub>DP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> a worker].  
b. They hired a diligent worker, but I don't know how diligent [ ].

repair approach (see Merchant 2001): the underlying structure of (12b) is the same as in (12a)

↔ alternative approach by Barros et al. (2014) and Vicente (2018): *how diligent* originates as the predicate of the clause

- (13) They hired a diligent worker, but I don't know [how diligent]<sub>i</sub> [<sub>IP</sub> that worker is t<sub>i</sub>].  
(Vicente 2018: 485)

→ no repair needed as there is no island violation

alleged repair effect does not arise with non-intersective adjectives:

- (14) \*They hired a hard worker, but I don't know how hard [ ].  
(Vicente 2018: 485)

underlying structure in the repair analysis: non-intersective adjective an attribute

- (15) \*They hired a hard worker, but I don't know [how hard]<sub>i</sub> they hired [<sub>DP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> a worker].

intersective versus non-intersective adjectives as predicates (Vicente 2018: 485):

- (16) a. The worker is diligent.  
b. \*The worker is hard.

→ (14) ruled out: either underlying island violation or *how hard* is a predicate

→ the elliptical clause is not isomorphic to the antecedent clause

question regarding clause size still: the complement of the F head still a TP in Vicente (2018) and Merchant (2001)

## 4 Attributive comparatives in German

subject-object ambiguities in German comparatives with case-ambiguous remnants (e.g. feminine):

- (17) Ich liebe dich mehr als **meine** Schwester.  
I love.1SG you.ACC more as my.F.NOM/ACC sister  
'I love you more than my sister.'

no ambiguity with masculine remnants:

- (18) a. Ich liebe dich mehr als **mein** Bruder.  
I love.1SG you.ACC more as my.M.NOM brother  
'I love you more than my brother loves you.'
- b. Ich liebe dich mehr als **meinen** Bruder.  
I love.1SG you.ACC more as my.M.ACC brother  
'I love you more than I love my brother.'

→ morphological case apparently a reliable indicator of underlying function

predicative comparatives: only nominative remnant possible – this is also the default case (Schütze 2001)

- (19) a. Ich bin schneller als **du**.  
I am faster as you.NOM  
'I am faster than you.'
- b. \*Ich bin schneller als **dich**.  
I am faster as you.ACC  
'I am faster than you.'

attributive comparatives show case distinction – based on the experimental data presented in Bacskai-Atkari (2023: 258–282):

- nominative remnant for the DP-external reading
- accusative remnant for the DP-internal reading

→ ambiguity only with case syncretism (e.g. feminine remnants)

DP-external reading:

- (20) Kontext: Ich habe mit [meiner Schwester / meinem Bruder] beschlossen, unseren Eltern dieses Jahr selbstgemalte Bilder zu schenken.  
'Context: I have decided with [my sister / my brother] to give self-painted pictures to our parents this year.'

- a. Ich male ein schöneres Bild als **meine** Schwester.  
I paint.1SG a.N nicer.N picture as my.F.NOM/ACC sister  
'I am painting a nicer picture than my sister.'
- b. Ich male ein schöneres Bild als **mein** Bruder.  
I paint.1SG a.N nicer.N picture as my.M.NOM brother  
'I am painting a nicer picture than my brother.'
- c. \*Ich male ein schöneres Bild als **meinen** Bruder.  
I paint.1SG a.N nicer.N picture as my.M.ACC brother  
'I am painting a nicer picture than my brother.'

DP-internal reading:

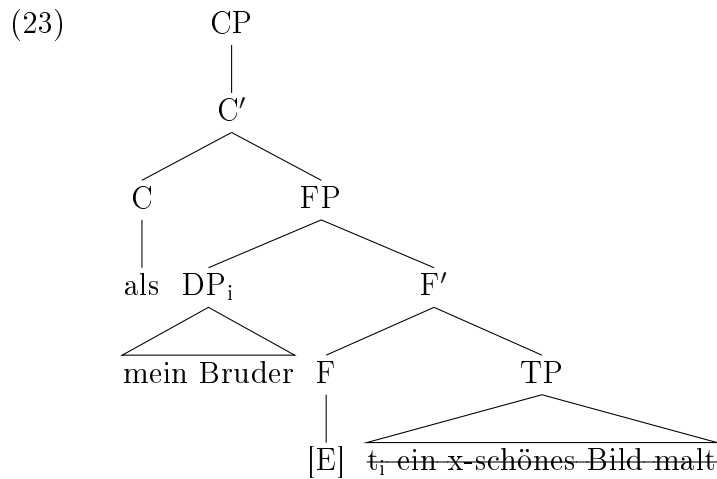
- (21) Kontext: [Deine Schwester / Dein Bruder] ist ganz schön groß, jedoch nicht [die größte Frau / der größte Mann] der Welt.  
'Context: [Your sister / Your brother] is fairly tall but not [the tallest woman / the tallest man] in the world.'

- a. Ich kenne eine größere Frau als **deine** Schwester.  
I know.1SG a.F taller.F woman as your.F.NOM/ACC sister  
'I know a taller woman than your sister.'
- b. \*Ich kenne einen größeren Mann als **dein** Bruder.  
I know.1SG a.M taller.M man as your.M.NOM brother  
'I know a taller man than your brother.'
- c. Ich kenne einen größeren Mann als **deinen** Bruder.  
I know.1SG a.M taller.M man as your.M.ACC brother  
'I know a taller man than your brother.'

derivation of the DP-external reading unproblematic (see Bacskai-Atkari 2018; 2023):

- (22) Ich male ein schöneres Bild [CP als [FP **mein** Bruder [TP ein  
I paint.1SG a.N nicer.N picture as my.M.NOM brother a  
x-schönes Bild malt]].  
x-nice picture paints  
'I am painting a nicer picture than my brother.'

structure:



nominative case regularly assigned in [Spec,TP] to the subject remnant

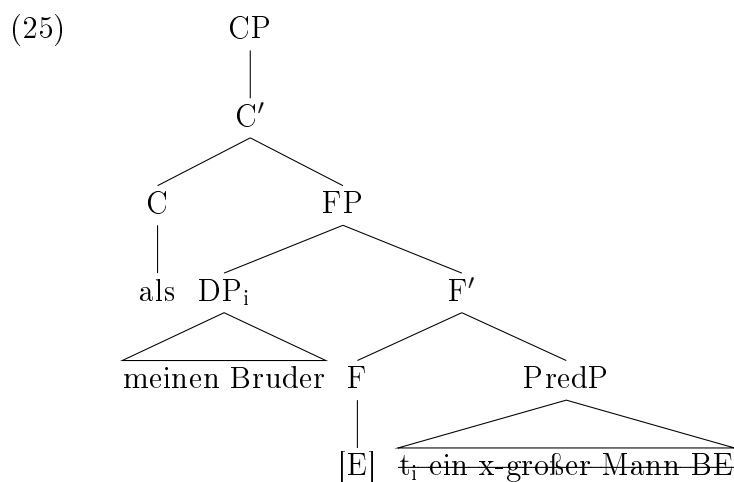
derivation of the DP-internal reading: accusative subject remnant only possible if it is not on [Spec,TP] before

→ no TP in the underlying predicative clause – instead: PredP (in the sense of Bowers 1993; 2010 and den Dikken 2006, in that predication is not tied to tense)

- (24) Ich kenne einen größeren Mann [<sub>CP</sub> als [<sub>FP</sub> **deinen Bruder** [<sub>PredP</sub> ein I know.1SG a.M taller.M man as your.M.ACC brother a x-großer Mann BE]]].  
 x-tall man BE  
 'I know a taller man than your brother is.'

“BE”: the phonologically empty Pred head

structure:



no nominative case assigned from T as there is no TP

source of the accusative case:

- not a default case in German (Schütze 2001)
- cannot come from *als* (C) – accusative on subject remnants only allowed in attributive comparatives
- only possible source: matrix verb – accusative assigned to the entire object DP in the matrix clause (also adjacency effect, see Bacskai-Atkari 2023)

evidence from predicative comparatives: default nominative case

- (26) Ich bin schneller als **du**.  
 I am faster as you.NOM  
 ‘I am faster than you.’

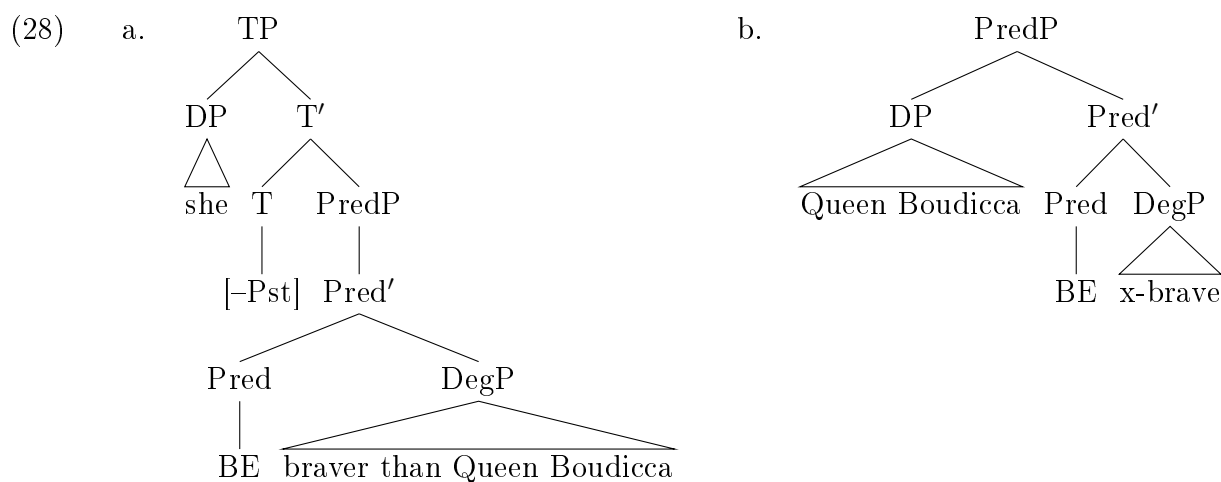
further evidence from the lack of tense: tense interpretation not always matching the matrix clause

- (27) She is braver than Queen Boudicca.

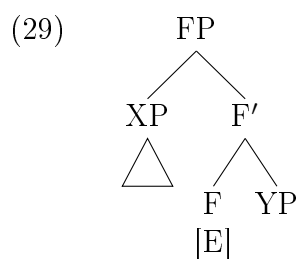
only recoverable information can be deleted (see Merchant 2001) – past tense not recoverable from the matrix clause in (27)

→ lack of TP in the subclause: interpretation governed by pragmatic factors

structure of the two clauses in (27):



→ template of Merchant (2001: 675) in (9) to be revised: complement of F not always a TP (see Bacskai-Atkari 2023)



→ ellipsis can affect clause size

## 5 Conclusion

clause size and clause structure in elliptical comparatives

- isomorphism problematic in several elliptical constructions – predicative clauses recoverable
- attributive comparatives: DP-external and DP-internal readings – predicative reading non-isomorphic
- German attributive comparatives: accusative case on subject remnants with the DP-internal reading: only if TP is missing

→ ellipsis can not only lead to non-isomorphic underlying clauses but also to a smaller clause size

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