

Optional Ellipsis in Comparatives*

0. Introduction

- (Standard) English: the higher copy of the quantified AP or DP is deleted

phenomenon of Comparative Deletion

only contrastive lower copies remain overt

- (1) a. Mary is taller than [x-tall] Peter is [x-tall].
b. The desk is longer than [x-wide] the office is [x-wide].

reason: lexical XP is licensed to appear in an operator position only if the operator is visible

overtness requirement on left-peripheral elements

- compare Hungarian:

- (2) a. Mari magasabb volt, mint [amilyen magas] Peti volt.
Mary taller was.3SG than how tall Peter was.3SG
'Mary was taller than Peter.'
- b. Az asztal hosszabb volt, mint [amilyen széles] az iroda volt.
the desk longer was.3SG than how wide the office was.3SG
'The desk was longer than the office was wide.'

- but: comparative subclauses tend to be derived via additional ellipsis processes

- (3) a. Mary bought more cats than Peter bought cats.
b. Mary bought more cats than Peter did buy cats.
c. Mary bought more cats than Peter bought dogs.
d. Mary bought more cats than Peter did buy dogs.

processes not specific to comparatives (VP-ellipsis, gapping, pseudogapping)

→ question: can the processes be reduced to a uniform mechanism?

- if not: the kind of ellipsis is dependent on information structural properties

e.g. (3b) is VP-ellipsis but (3d) is pseudo-gapping

- if yes: the ellipsis mechanism must allow for contrastive XPs to remain overt

→ another question: whether Hungarian allows ellipsis in the same way or not

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1. Ellipsis in English

- predicative comparatives:

- (4) a. The table is longer than the office is wide.
 b. Ralph is more enthusiastic than Jason is.
 c. Ralph is more enthusiastic than Jason.

- nominal comparatives:

- (5) a. Ralph bought more houses than Michael bought flats.
 b. Ralph bought more houses than Michael did flats.
 c. Ralph bought more houses than Michael did.
 d. Ralph bought more houses than Michael.

- attributive comparatives:

- (6) a. Ralph bought a bigger house than Michael did a flat.
 b. Ralph bought a bigger house than Michael did.
 c. Ralph bought a bigger house than Michael.

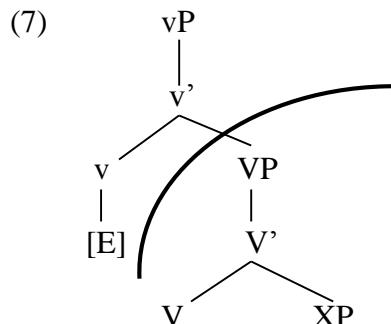
no special mechanism “Comparative Ellipsis” (cf. also Kennedy 2002; Lechner 2004)

proposal: VP-ellipsis in all cases

- ellipsis carried out by an [E] feature on a functional v or C head (Merchant 2001)
- ellipsis domain: complement of the head equipped with the [E] feature
- ellipsis cannot affect F-marked material – F-marked XP: endpoint of ellipsis

English prosody: gapping effects prosodically licensed as F-marked constituent also aligned to the right edge of an Intonational Phrase (cf. Szendrői 2001; based on Selkirk 1984, 1986; Nespor and Vogel 1986; Chen 1987; Inkelas 1989; McCarthy and Prince 1993; Neeleman and Weerman 1999; Truckenbrodt 1999 among others)

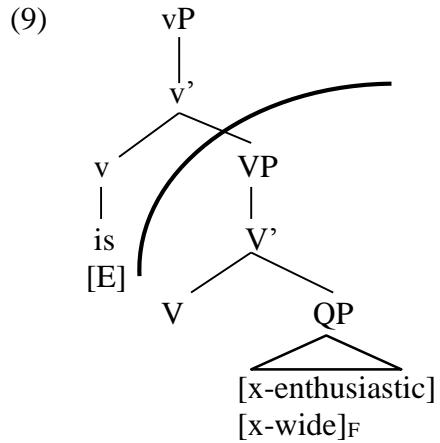
ellipsis domain:



VP-ellipsis:

- (8) a. $v_{[E]} \{ vP \overline{V [XP]} \}$
 b. $v_{[E]} \{ vP \overline{V [XP]_F} \}$

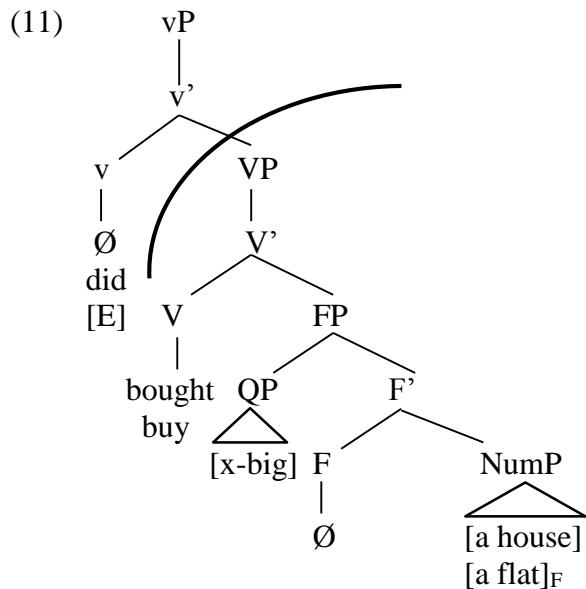
predicative comparatives – (4)



the [E] feature cannot be located lower than the C and higher than the v hosting the copula:

- (10) *The table is longer than the office ~~is~~ wide.

attributive comparatives – (6)



inversion within the nominal domain – cf. Kennedy and Merchant (2000)

linear ellipsis possible – Bacskai-Atkari (2012)

nominal comparatives – (5): DP instead of FP, no QP modifier

2. Different domains of ellipsis and syntactic ambiguity

remaining DP not always the subject:

- (12) More girls ate sandwiches than hamburgers.

derivation:

- (13) [CP than [CP {~~DP x many girls~~} {IP {~~DP x many girls~~} [VP ate [DP hamburgers]_F] }]]]

question" [E] feature on C or on v – economy: should be on C

preferable to elide the maximal GIVEN constituent (cf. Merchant 2008)

- (14) Mary drank ale more often than sherry.

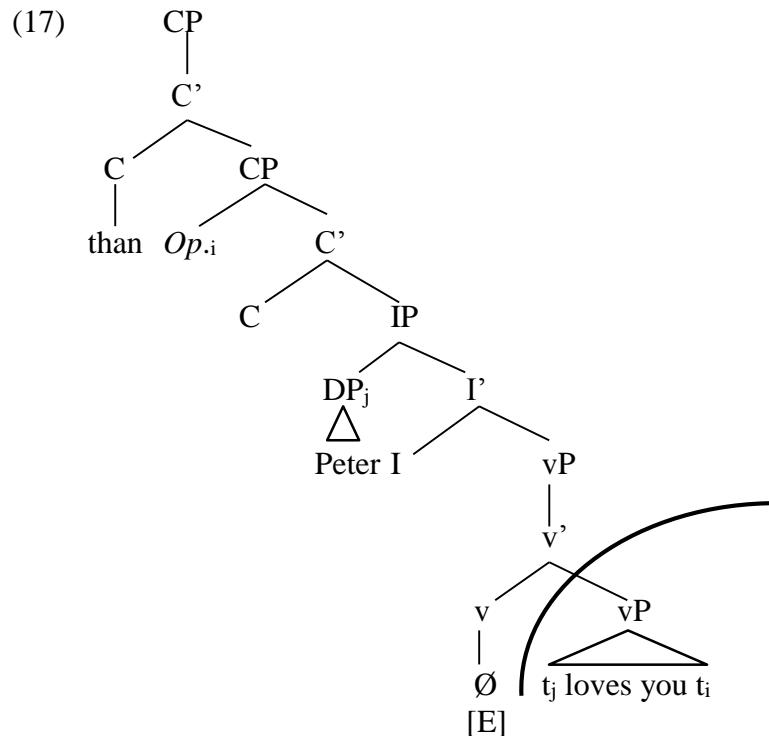
derivation:

- (15) [CP than [CP {QP x often} {IP {DP Mary} [VP drank [DP sherry]_F] {QP x often}}]]]

ambiguous structures:

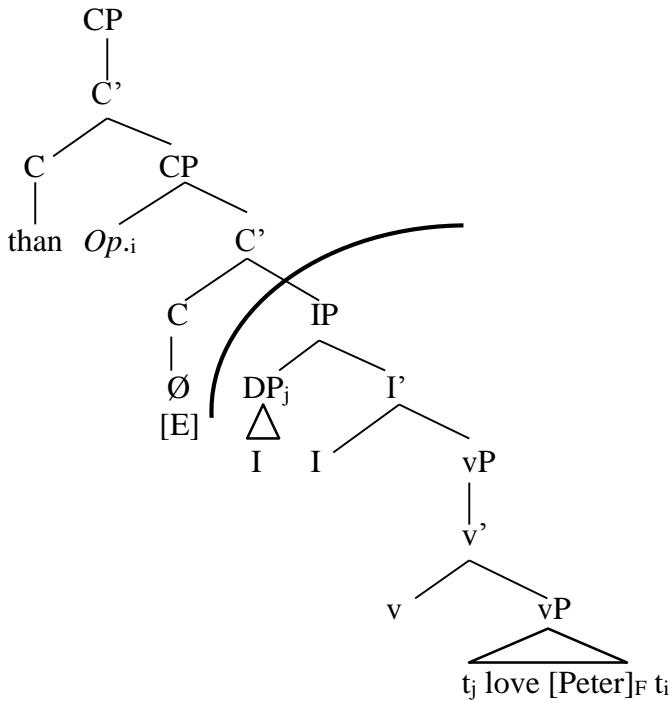
- (16) a. I love you more than Peter.
 b. I'm a linguist. I like ambiguity more than most people.

[E] feature on v:



[E] feature on C:

(18)



[E] feature not located on v head in (18):

(19) *I love you more than I Peter.

more ambiguity:

(20) More people die each year from falling coconuts than sharks.

three readings:

- (21) a. More people die each year from falling coconuts than sharks do.
- b. More people die each year from falling coconuts than from sharks.
- c. More people die each year from falling coconuts than from falling sharks.

reading in (21a):

(22) [CP than [IP [DP Op. sharks]_F {_VP {_VP die [_{PP} from falling coconuts]}]}]]]

reading in (21b):

(23) [CP than {_{IP} {_{DP} Op. people} } {_VP {_VP die [_{PP} from [_{DP} sharks]_F]}]}]]

reading in (21c):

(24) [CP than {_{IP} {_{DP} Op. people} } {_VP {_VP die [_{PP} from [_{DP} {_{AP} falling} [_{NP} sharks]_F]}]}]]]

PP may withstand deletion:

- (25) [CP than {IP {DP *Op. people*} {VP {VP die [PP from [DP sharks]]F}}}]

→ F-markedness projecting up to the PP level

3. Ellipsis in Hungarian

no obligatory deletion of the quantified AP or DP in [Spec,CP]

but: ellipsis patterns similar to English

predicative comparatives:

- (26) a. Mari magasabb volt, mint **amilyen magas** Péter **volt.**
 Mary taller was.3SG than how tall Peter was.3SG
 ‘Mary was taller than Peter.’
- b. Mari magasabb volt, mint Péter.
 Mary taller was.3SG than Peter
 ‘Mary was taller than Peter.’

nominal comparatives (attributive comparatives similar):

- (27) a. Mari több macskát vett, mint **ahány macskát** Péter **vett.**
 Mary more cat-ACC bought.3SG than how many cat-ACC Peter bought.3SG
 ‘Mary bought more cats than Peter did.’
- b. Mari több macskát vett, mint Péter.
 Mary more cat-ACC bought.3SG than Peter
 ‘Mary bought more cats than Peter did.’

question: deletion of the quantified expression and of the verb related or not

verb must be deleted if the quantified expression is deleted (Bacskaia-Atkari and Kántor 2012):

- (28) a. *Mari magasabb volt, mint Péter **volt.**
 Mary taller was.3SG than Peter was.3SG
 ‘Mary was taller than Peter.’
- b. *Mari több macskát vett, mint Péter **vett.**
 Mary more cat-ACC bought.3SG than Peter bought.3SG
 ‘Mary bought more cats than Peter did.’
- c. *Mari nagyobb macskát vett, mint Péter **vett.**
 Mary bigger cat-ACC bought.3SG than Peter bought.3SG
 ‘Mary bought a bigger cat than Peter did.’

reason (Bacskaia-Atkari and Kántor 2012): quantified expression fails to move up to [Spec,CP]

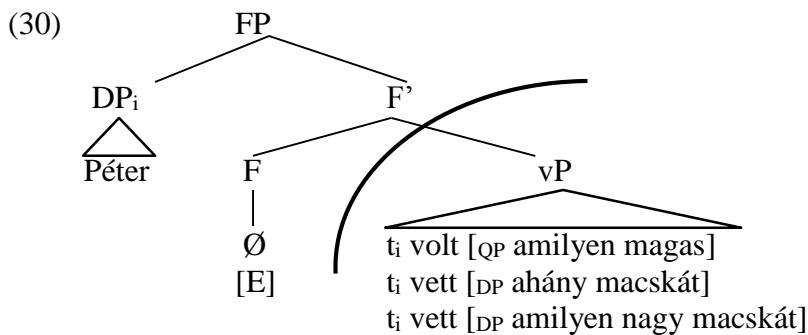
- overt [+rel] items prohibited in their base position in Hungarian
- general ellipsis has to apply

similar phenomenon in relative clauses (Bacskaiai-Atkari and Kántor 2012: 59, ex. 32):

- (29) a. Ugyanazt a könyvet olvasom, mint **amit** Péter **olvas**.
 that.same-ACC the book-ACC read-1SG as what-ACC Peter reads
 'I am reading the same book that Peter is reading.'
 b. *Ugyanazt a könyvet olvasom, mint Péter **olvas**.
 that.same-ACC the book-ACC read-1SG as Peter reads
 'I am reading the same book that Peter is reading.'
 c. Ugyanazt a könyvet olvasom, mint Péter.
 that.same-ACC the book-ACC read-1SG as Peter
 'I am reading the same book that Peter is reading.'

ellipsis: sluicing – Bacskaiai-Atkari and Kántor (2012); on sluicing in Hungarian, see van Craenenbroeck and Lipták (2006)

ellipsis site:



4. Contrastive verbs

- predicative comparatives (cf. Bacskaiai-Atkari and Kántor 2012):

- (31) Mari magasabb, mint Péter **volt**.
 Mary taller than Peter was.3SG
 'Mary is taller than Peter was.'

[E] feature located lower – copula carries new information

main stress still falls on the DP *Péter*

- copula function word phonologically dependent on another element (cf. É. Kiss 2002)

Lexical Category Condition (Truckenbrodt 1999)

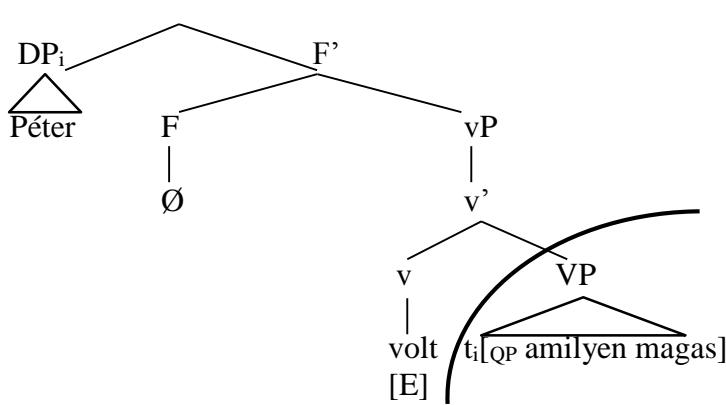
Principle of Categorial Invisibility of Function Words (Selkirk 1984)

- main stress falls on the leftmost constituent in the verbal domain (Szendrői 2001)

copula: located in a functional v head – [E] feature can be on this head

ellipsis domain:

(32)



- nominal and attributive comparatives:

- (33) a. ? Mari több macskát vett, mint Péter **látott**.
 Mary more cat-ACC bought.3SG than Peter saw.3SG
 ‘Mary bought more cats than Peter saw.’
- b. ? Mari nagyobb macskát vett, mint Péter **látott**.
 Mary bigger cat-ACC bought.3SG than Peter saw.3SG
 ‘Mary bought a bigger cat than Peter saw.’

lexical verb in (34): heads a thematic vP (layered Hungarian VP, É. Kiss 2008, 2009)

extra movement operation (→ markedness): lexical verb to the functional v head

contrast between two propositions – main stress falls on the verb

DP *Péter* cannot be focus – as a topic it escapes both main stress (Szendrői 2001) and ellipsis

contrastive verbs: neutral word order (verbal particle + verb):

- (34) Mari több macskát vett, mint **ahány** macskát Péter **meglátott**.
 Mary more cat-ACC bought.3SG than how many cat-ACC Peter PRT-saw.3SG
 ‘Mary bought more cats than Peter noticed.’

structure: [Spec,FP] filled by the verbal particle (*meg*), DP *Péter* is a topic (above FP)

non-contrastive verbs: inverted word order (verb + verbal particle):

- (35) Mari több macskát látott, mint **ahány** macskát Péter **látott meg**.
 Mary more cat-ACC saw.3SG than how many cat-ACC Peter saw.3SG PRT
 ‘Mary saw more cats than Peter noticed.’

structure: [Spec,FP] filled by the DP *Péter*, verbal particle remains within the vP

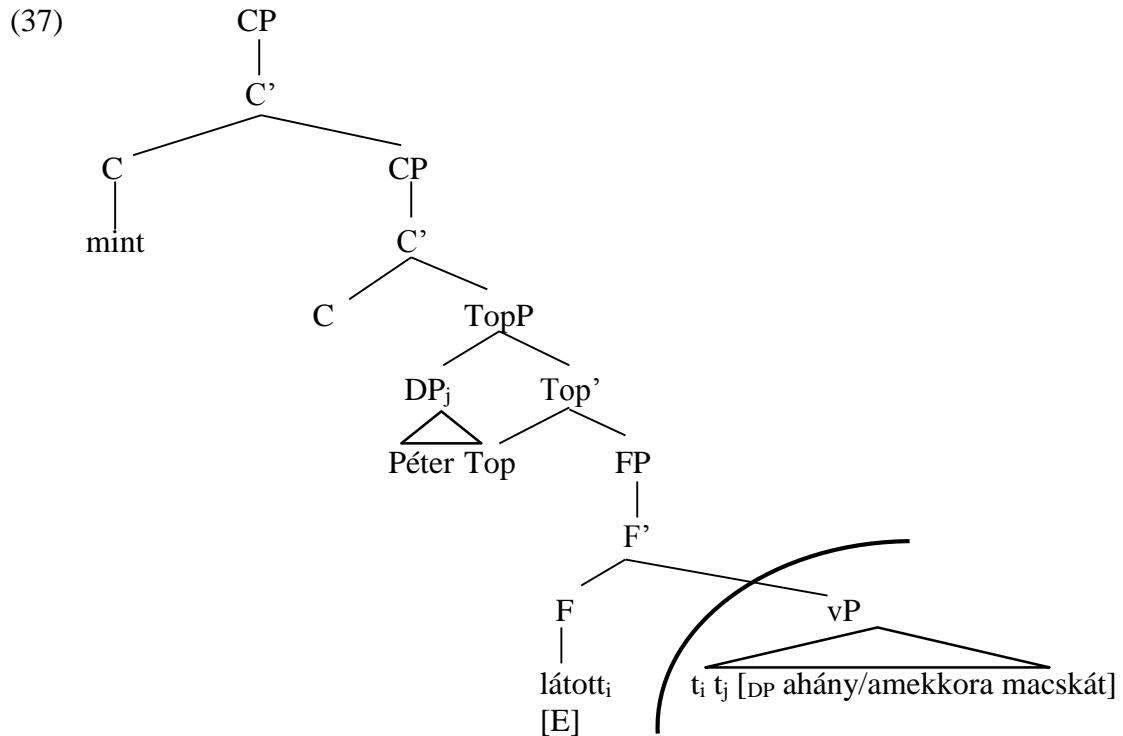
full subclauses without particles:

- (36) a. Mari több macskát vett, mint **ahány** **macskát** Péter látott.
 Mary more cat-ACC bought.3SG than how.many cat-ACC Peter saw.3SG
 ‘Mary bought more cats than Peter saw.’
- b. Mari több macskát látott, mint **ahány** **macskát** Péter látott.
 Mary more cat-ACC saw.3SG than how.many cat-ACC Peter saw.3SG
 ‘Mary saw more cats than Peter did.’

structure of (37a): DP *Péter* is a topic, no FP projection (see É. Kiss 2008)

structure of (37b): DP *Péter* in [Spec,FP], no topic projection

structure of the subclauses in (34):



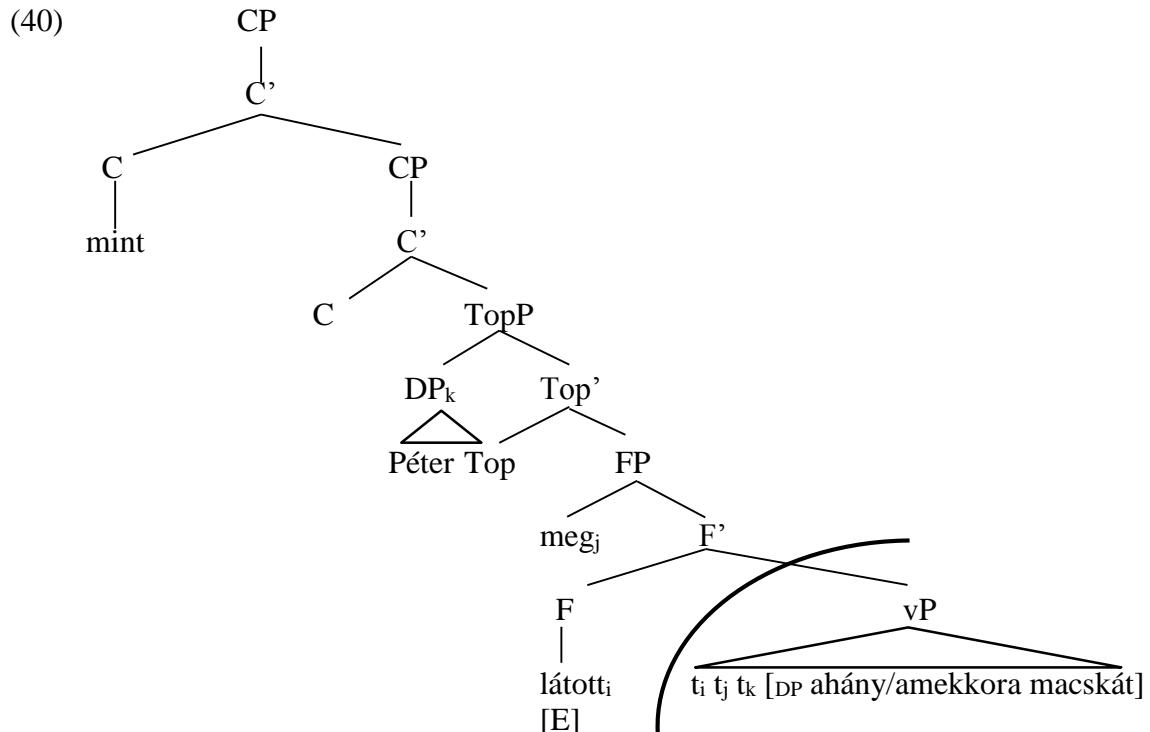
the DP *Péter* cannot be in [Spec,FP]:

- (38) a. *Mari több macskát vett, mint Péter látott **meg.**
 Mary more cat-ACC bought.3SG than Peter saw.3SG PRT
 ‘Mary bought more cats than Peter noticed.’
- b. *Mari nagyobb macskát vett, mint Péter látott **meg.**
 Mary bigger cat-ACC bought.3SG than Peter saw.3SG PRT
 ‘Mary bought a bigger cat than Peter noticed.’

acceptable (marked) variants with verbal particle:

- (39) a. ? Mari több macskát vett, mint Péter **meglátott**.
 Mary more cat-ACC bought.3SG than Peter PRT-saw.3SG
 ‘Mary bought more cats than Peter noticed.’
- b. ? Mari nagyobb macskát vett, mint Péter **meglátott**.
 Mary bigger cat-ACC bought.3SG than Peter PRT-saw.3SG
 ‘Mary bought a bigger cat than Peter noticed.’

structure:



5. More on cross-linguistic differences

- ellipsis carried out by an [E] feature on a functional head (v, C)

- gapping effects in English

← contrastive elements located at the right edge of the IntP

- no gapping effects in Hungarian – rather “proper” sluicing

← contrastive elements located at the left edge of the IntP

ellipsis in English:

$$(41) [XP (YP) X_{[E]} \{_{ZP} \text{XXXXXX} [WP XXXX]_F\}]$$

ellipsis in Hungarian:

$$(42) [XP YP_F X_{[E]} \{_{ZP} \text{XXXXXX}\}]$$

- directionality of ellipsis: from left to right

→ works if the complement (= ellipsis domain) is to the right of the functional head

→ possible for head-initial but not for head-final phrases

- (43) a. [XP X_E \{YP \text{XXXX}\}]
- b. [XP [YP XXXX] X_E]

German:

head-initial CP → sluicing attested as in English (cf. Merchant 2004, 2013)

head-final vP/VP (cf. Haider 1993) → no VP-ellipsis as in English (cf. Winkler 2005)

Merchant (2013): lexical differences

English: both E_C and E_v feature ↔ German: only E_C feature

↔ here: difference due to a more general property (directionality of heads)

Conclusion

- optional ellipsis in comparatives: not construction-specific
 - ellipsis carried out by an [E] feature on a functional (v, C) head
 - endpoint of ellipsis: F-marked constituent
- cross-linguistic differences follow from more general settings:
- different prosody (nuclear stress assigned to right or left of IntP) – English vs. Hungarian
 - difference in head-initial and head-final projections – English vs. German

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