

# Identity and Comparative Deletion

## 0. Introduction

Comparative Deletion (CD) in English:

- (1) Mary is taller than Peter is ~~tall~~.

explanations based on syntactic isomorphism (e.g. Bresnan 1973, Lechner 2004)

elided degree expression (*x-tall*) in the same syntactic position as its antecedent (*taller*)

problematic for several reasons

↔ proposal here: CD primarily linked to an overt requirement on left peripheral elements

→ recoverability of an elided degree expression is contingent upon the position of that degree expression only as far as its semantic scope is concerned

## 1. Comparative Deletion and the overt requirement

comparative subclauses: *wh*-movement of a degree expression to a [Spec, CP] position

cf. Chomsky (1977), Kennedy and Merchant (2000)

degree expression: a QP (a quantified AP) or a DP modified by a QP

comparative operator: a relative operator – [+rel] and [+compr]

either visible or invisible

overt requirement: overt lexical XPs in [Spec,CP] licensed only if the operator is overt

→ Comparative Deletion attested in languages that have a covert operator

copies: one in [Spec,CP] and one in its base position

- higher copy deleted because of the overt requirement
  - lower copy realised overtly only if it is contrastive (cf. Bacskai-Atkari 2012)
- Standard English:
- (2) a. Mary is taller than [~~x-tall~~] Peter is [~~x-tall~~].  
b. The table is longer than [~~x-wide~~] the office is [~~x-wide~~].

- in some dialects of English: *what* (cf. Chomsky 1977) and *how*

- (3) a. Mary is taller than [**what**] Peter is [~~what~~].  
 b. Mary is taller than [**how tall**] Peter is [~~how tall~~].  
 c. The table is longer than [**how wide**] the office is [~~how wide~~].

- Dutch: *hoe* ‘how’ acceptable for some speakers

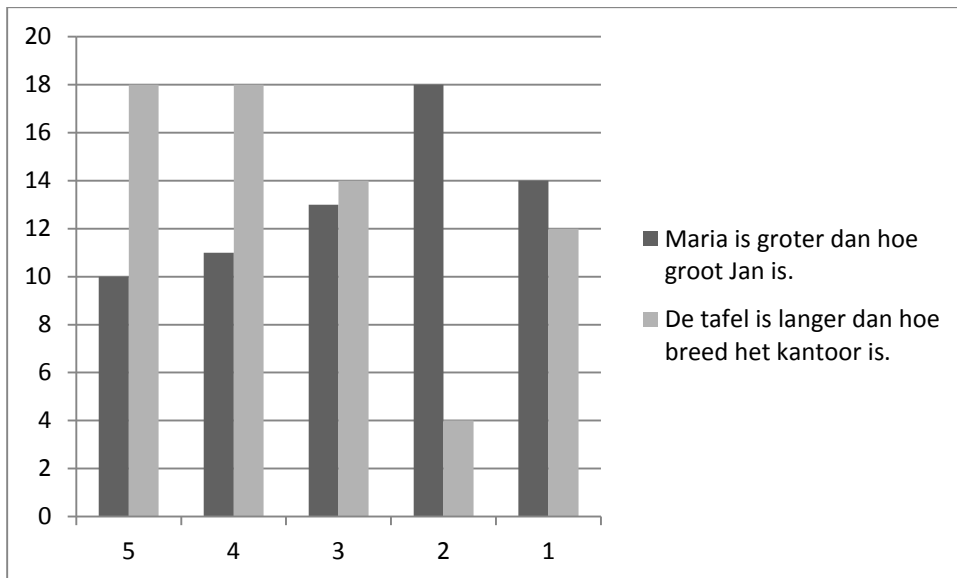
- (4) a. Maria is groter dan **hoe groot** Jan is.  
 Mary is taller than how tall John is  
 ‘Mary is taller than John.’  
 b. De tafel is langer dan **hoe breed** het kantoor is.  
 the table is longer than how wide the.NEUT office is  
 ‘The table is longer than the office is wide.’

(online) study with 66 speakers:<sup>1</sup>

acceptability marked from 5 (best) to 1 (worst)

*hoe* + AP: (4a) accepted by 15%, (4b) accepted by 27%

→ results:



- Hungarian: *amilyen* ‘how’

- (5) a. Mari magasabb, mint **amilyen magas** Péter.  
 Mary taller than how tall Peter  
 ‘Mary is taller than Peter.’  
 b. Az asztal hosszabb, mint **amilyen széles** az iroda.  
 the table longer than how wide the office  
 ‘The table is longer than the office is wide.’

Comparative Deletion ← overttness requirement

<sup>1</sup> Many thanks go to Laura Bos and Marlies Kluck for helping me in collecting the data.

## 2. *Isomorphism and ellipsis*

comparative subclauses tend to exhibit other ellipsis processes as well:

(6) Mary is taller than [~~x-tall~~] Peter is [~~x-tall~~].

analyses built on syntactic isomorphism (e.g. Lechner 2004):

- any elided constituent is logically identical to its matrix clausal antecedent
- the syntactic structure of the matrix clause is exactly the same as that of the subclause
- problem: *wh*-movement → asymmetric structure

degree expression in the matrix clause does not undergo *wh*-movement

degree expression in the subclause moves before spell-out

cf. Kennedy (2002) for structures like (6) but not for subcomparatives like (2b)

extraction islands (e.g. complex NP islands), cf. Kennedy (2002):

- (7) a. \*Liz has more cats than Martha is [a linguist who has].  
 b. \*Liz has more cats than Martha is [a linguist who has dogs].

→ movement irrespectively of whether the lower copy is contrastive or not

*wh*-movement:

- cannot be sensitive to the information structural properties of the lexical AP/NP

↔ Kennedy (2002)

- if it can take place covertly, then non-contrastive lower copies should be licensed:

- (8) a. \*Mary is taller than Peter is tall.  
 b. The table is longer than the office is wide.

→ movement prior to spellout irrespectively of whether the AP/NP is contrastive or not

→ deletion of the degree expression in [Spec,CP] cannot be conditioned by isomorphism

- problem: different word order – German:

- (9) a. Die Katze **war** **dicker** als ~~x-groß~~ die Katzenklappe **x-groß**  
 the.FEM cat was.3SG fatter than x-big the.FEM cat flap x-big  
**ist.**  
 is  
 ‘The cat was fatter than the cat flap is wide.’
- b. Die Katze ist dicker als ~~x-dick~~ der Hund ~~x-dick~~ ist.  
 the.FEM cat is fatter than x-fat the.MASC dog x-fat is  
 ‘The cat is fatter than the dog.’

ellipsis possible but no syntactic isomorphism (↔ Lechner 2004)

### 3. Ambiguity and ellipsis

ellipsis may result in ambiguity:

- (10) I love you more than Mark.

analysis based on syntactic identity (e.g. Lechner 2004): two possible structures

- (11) a. I love you more than Mark ~~loves you x-much~~.  
 b. I love you more than I ~~love~~ Mark ~~x-much~~.

problems: *wh*-movement, deleting discontinuous constituents

but: other types of syntactic ambiguities:

- (12) I saw a taller woman than my mother.

two readings:

- (13) a. I saw a taller woman than [~~an x-tall woman~~] my mother saw [~~an x-tall woman~~].  
 b. I saw a taller woman than [~~an x-tall woman~~] my mother is [~~an x-tall woman~~].

→ reconstruction of a non-identical string in (13b)

→ recoverability condition: semantic and not syntactic

entailment:

- *I saw a tall woman* entails that *I saw x* and that *x was a tall woman*
- elided string may be semantically parallel to the entire proposition or only to part of it
- only overt element (the DP *my mother*) may be semantically parallel with either *I* or *x*

- (14) a. Mary hit Susan and Mark hit Bill too.  
 b. Mary hit Susan and Mark hurt Bill too.  
 c. # Mary hurt Susan and Mark hit Bill too.

entailment in (14):

- (hit(m,s)) ENTAILS  $\exists x \exists y (\text{hit}(x,y))$   
 (hit(m,s)) ENTAILS  $\exists x \exists y (\text{hurt}(x,y))$   
 (hit(m,s)) IS NOT ENTAILED BY  $\exists x \exists y (\text{hurt}(x,y))$

ellipsis:

- (15) a. Mary hit Susan and Mark ~~hit~~ Bill.  
 b. # Mary hit Susan and Mark ~~hurt~~ Bill.  
 c. # Mary hurt Susan and Mark ~~hit~~ Bill.

Merchant (2001): GIVENness in ellipsis domains (e-GIVENness)

mutual entailment between elided string and its antecedent

entailment in (12):

- (16) saw (I, woman) ENTAILS  $\exists x \exists y (\text{saw}(x,y))$   
 woman (tall, d) ENTAILS  $\exists y [\text{WOMAN}(y) \& \exists d [\text{TALL}(y,d)]]$

→ elided string in the subclause in (13): mutual entailment with either proposition

DP *my mother* semantically parallel with *x* or *y*

#### ***4. Unambiguous structures, ellipsis, and semantic incongruence***

- lack of ambiguity:

- (17) I saw a taller woman than my father.

DP *my father* may be semantically parallel only with *x* in (16)

otherwise: gender mismatch

syntactically both structures derivable, just as in (13):

- (18) a. I saw a taller woman than ~~[an x tall woman]~~ my father saw ~~[an x tall woman]~~.  
 b. # I saw a taller woman than ~~[an x tall woman]~~ my father is ~~[an x tall woman]~~.

(18b) infelicitous ← gender mismatch (not a syntactic constraint)

problem (cf. Bresnan 1973):

- (19) # I've never seen a taller woman than my father.

reason: DP *my father* cannot be semantically parallel to *x* in (16) ← negation in (19)

→ the only possible derivation is semantically incongruent (gender mismatch)

• by contrast (cf. Bresnan 1973):

- (20) I've never seen a woman taller than my father.

Bresnan (1973): difference between (19) and (20) due to different syntactic structure

parallelism between matrix clause and subclause

↔ no syntactic identity required, difference due to semantics

in (19): (prenominal) attributive adjective (*taller*)

in (20): postnominal adjective (*taller*) essentially a reduced relative clause (cf. Larson 1998)

→ a predicate

difference between predicative and attributive adjectives:

- (21) a. Mary is tall.  
 b. Mary is a tall woman.

semantics:

(22) a.  $\exists d[\text{TALL}(\text{Mary},d)]$

b.  $\exists x[\text{WOMAN}(x)\&\exists d[\text{TALL}(x,d)]]$

→ in (19): attributive semantics in (22b) → *my father* necessarily a woman

→ in (20): predicative semantics in (22a) → no gender restriction

### 5. Degree semantics and the overtiness of operators

matrix clausal degree element (*d*) binds a degree operator (*d'*) in the subordinate clause

operator moves to the [Spec, CP]

- zero operator: associated with the same semantic type as its counterpart in the matrix clause

→ in constructions like (19) the elided degree expression cannot be predicative:

(23) # I've never seen a taller woman than my father.

- overt operator: mismatch allowed

Hungarian:

(24) Mari tegnap látott egy magasabb férfit, mint amilyen magas az  
 Mary yesterday saw a taller man-ACC than how tall the  
 apám.  
 father-POSS.1SG

‘Yesterday Mary saw a man taller than my father.’

no gender mismatch:

(25) Mari tegnap látott egy magasabb nőt, mint amilyen magas az  
 Mary yesterday saw a taller woman-ACC than how tall the  
 apám.  
 father-POSS.1SG

‘Yesterday Mary saw a man taller than my father.’

→ semantically not incongruent to have degrees of two different types

## ***Conclusion***

- Comparative Deletion: overttness requirement on operators

attested in languages having a zero operator

- other ellipsis processes optional

identity requirement:

- no syntactic identity required

either for the elimination of the degree expression or for other ellipsis

- semantic identity required

semantic parallelism for the degree expression (predicative/attributive adjective)

partial parallelism for other ellipsis processes

## ***References***

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