

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 overttness 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 overttness 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

overttness 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 overttness 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

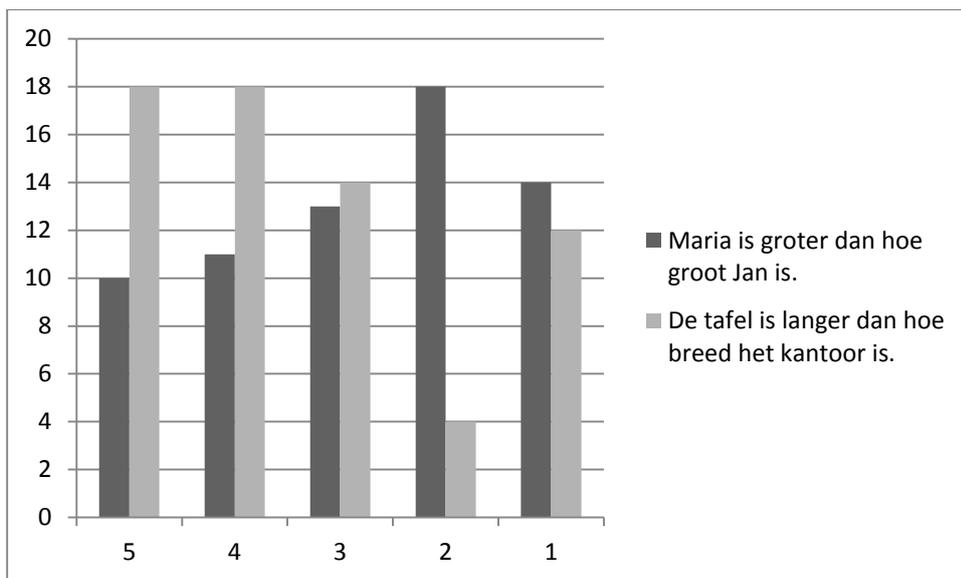
- (4) a. Maria is groter dan **hoe groot** Jan is.
 Mary is taller than how tall John is
 ‘Mary is taller than John.’
 b. De tafel is langer dan **hoe breed** het kantoor is.
 the table is longer than how wide the.NEUT office is
 ‘The table is longer than the office is wide.’

(online) study with 66 speakers:¹

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

¹ 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

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