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More on Ellipsis in English Comparatives (and Elsewhere)

0. Introduction

● Comparative Deletion in English: deletes the higher copy of the degree expression in a [Spec,CP] position (cf. Bacskai-Atkari 2012)

→ only contrastive lower copies remain overt

(1) a. Mary is taller than [tall] Peter is [tall].

b. The desk is longer than [wide] the office is **[wide]**.

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

● 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

proposal: ellipsis carried out by an [E] feature on a functional v or C head (cf. Merchant 2001)

- appearance on the highest possible head, otherwise unrestricted

- applies in a strict left-to-right fashion but contrastive XPs may stop it

- linked to prosody: contrastive XPs in different positions in the ellipsis domain

  ← main stress assigned to the right or the left of the IntP

- linked to head-initial vs. head-final distinction

1. Gapping as VP-Ellipsis

ellipsis of an entire VP versus ellipsis of a V head

  gapping is an instance of VP-ellipsis

- full structures (coordination):

(4)　　a. George likes cats and Mike [$_{VP}$ likes [$_{DP}$ dogs]$_F$].

　　　　b. George likes cats and Mike [$_{VP}$ likes [$_{DP}$ cats]].

- ellipsis of the VP (stripping) – only if the DP is recoverable:

(5)　　a. *George likes cats and Mike [$_{VP}$ likes [$_{DP}$ dogs]$_F$] (too).

　　　　b. George likes cats and Mike [$_{VP}$ likes [$_{DP}$ cats]] too.

← deletion at PF cannot affect F-marked material

● gapping – only if the DP is F-marked:

(6)　　a.　George likes cats and Mike [~~vP likes~~] [DP dogs]F].

　　　　b.　*George likes cats and Mike [~~vP likes~~] [DP cats]].

→ if gapping were a separate process targeting the V head, then (6b) should be grammatical

proposal: linear ellipsis process proceeds from left to right, stops at an F-marked phrase

　　　cf. Bacskai-Atkari (2012) and also Reich (2007)

　　　on the left-to-right application of PF cf. Bošković and Nunes (2007)

　　　(6a): the F-marked DP *dogs* is a boundary ↔ (5b): entire VP elided

→ gapping not a separate mechanism

F-marked element is the endpoint of ellipsis

　　　prosodically licensed: the constituent is also aligned to the right edge of an IntP

　　　　　cf. Szendrői (2001), based on e.g. Selkirk (1984, 1986), Nespor and Vogel (1986)

## *2. Feature-driven ellipsis and functional heads*

ellipsis carried out by an [E] feature present on a functional head (Merchant 2001)

　　　● ellipsis domain: complement of this functional head (in line with Merchant 2001)

　　　● any element in the functional head escapes ellipsis (in line with Merchant 2001)

　　　● F-marked constituents may withstand deletion (↔ Merchant 2001)

VP-ellipsis:

(7)

sluicing:

(8)

CP
 |
 C'
 /\
C   TP
|
[E]
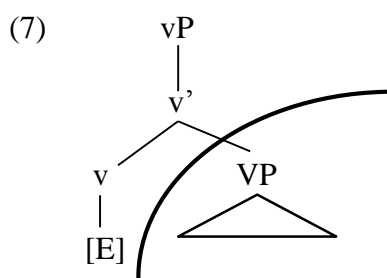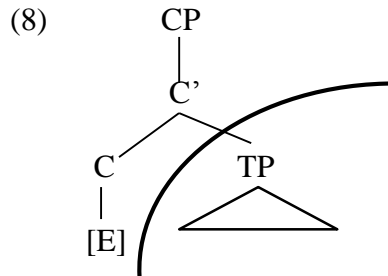
ellipsis and information structure:

(9) a. v$_{[E]}$ [$_{VP}$ V [XP]]
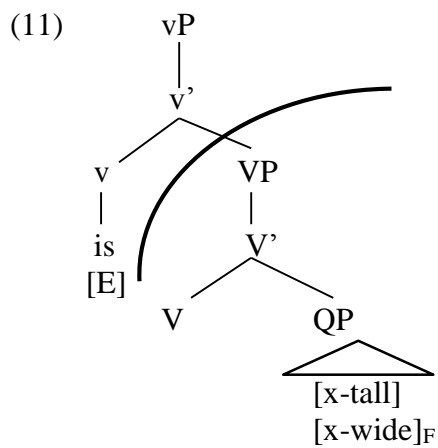
b. v$_{[E]}$ [$_{VP}$ V [XP]$_F$]

→ information structure does not impose restrictions on the appearance of the [E] feature

3. Ellipsis in English comparatives

● predicative structures:

(10) a. Mary is taller than [tall] Peter is [tall].

b. The desk is longer than [wide] the office is **[wide]**.

ellipsis domain:

(11)

vP
 |
 v'
 /\
v   VP
| |
is   V'
[E] /\
    V   QP
        /\
      [x-tall]
      [x-wide]$_F$

position of the [E] feature: only the v head

no possible functional head between C and v – otherwise (12) would be acceptable:

(12)   *The table is longer than the office wide.

underlyingly:

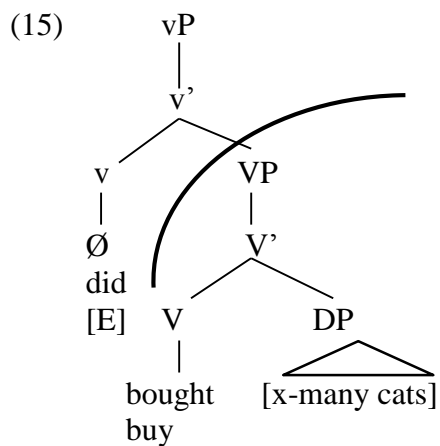(13)   *The table is longer than the office $X_{[E]}$ ~~is~~ [wide]$_F$.

→ the [E] feature is licensed only on functional heads (v, C)

● nominal structures:

(14)   a. George bought more cats than ~~[x-many cats]~~ Mary ~~bought [x-many cats]~~.

     b. George bought more cats than ~~[x-many cats]~~ Mary did ~~buy [x-many cats]~~.

ellipsis domain:

(15)

```
              vP
               |
              v'
          ╱        ╲
        v          VP
        |           |
        Ø          V'
        did      ╱     ╲
        [E]    V        DP
               |       ╱  ╲
             bought  [x-many cats]
             buy
```

dummy auxiliary located outside the ellipsis domain

4. Different domains of ellipsis and syntactic ambiguity

Merchant (2008): preferable to elide the maximal largest unit

→ ellipsis domain can be the complement of C and v

(16) Mary drank ale more often than sherry.

underlyingly:

(17) [$_{CP}$ than [$_{CP}$ ~~[$_{DP}$ x often]~~ ~~[$_{IP}$ [$_{DP}$ Mary]~~ ~~[$_{VP}$ drank~~ [$_{DP}$ sherry]$_{F}$]]]]
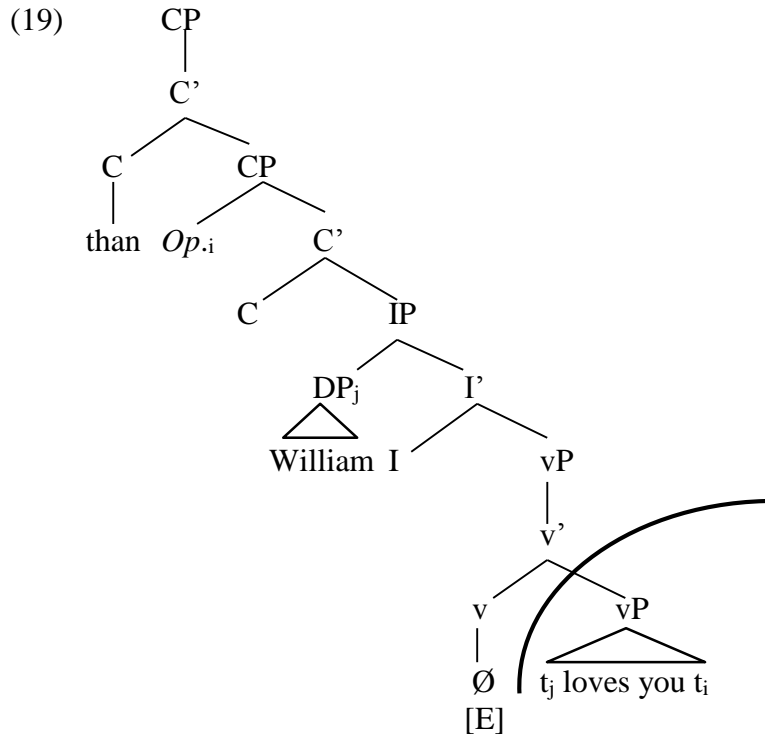
● ambiguity:

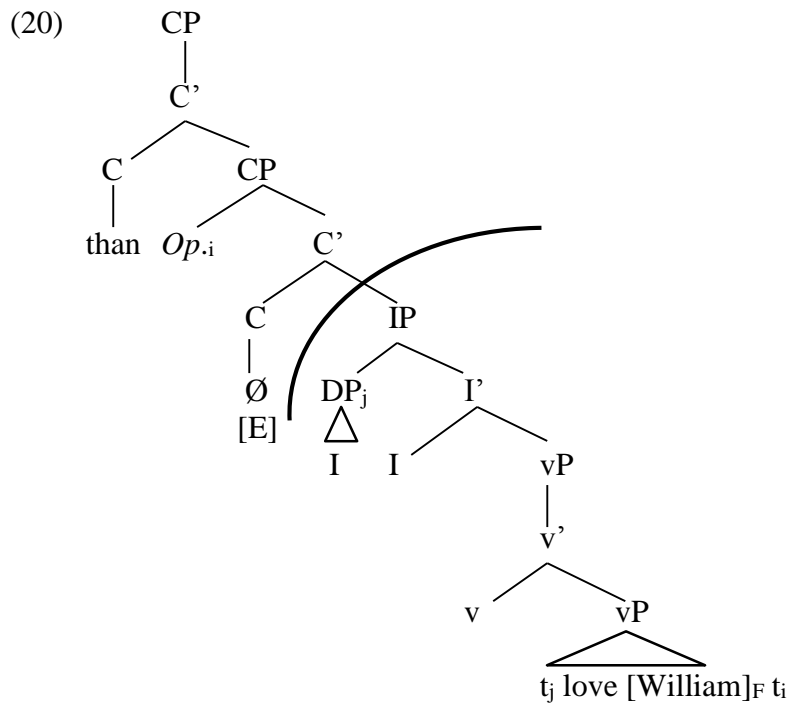(20) a. I love you more than William.

      b. I'm a linguist. I like ambiguity more than most people.

→ different domains of ellipsis → the DP *William* in (20a) can be a subject or an object

subject:

(19)

```
CP
│
C'
┌────┴────┐
C        CP
│      ┌──┴────┐
than  Op.i    C'
          ┌────┴────┐
          C        IP
               ┌────┴────┐
              DPⱼ        I'
              △      ┌───┴────┐
           William  I       vP
                             │
                             v'
                        ┌────┴────┐
                        v        vP
                        │        △
                        Ø    tⱼ loves you tᵢ
                       [E]
```

object:

(20)

```
CP
│
C'
┌────┴────┐
C        CP
│     ┌───┴────┐
than Op.i     C'
          ┌────┴────┐
          C        IP
          │    ┌────┴────┐
          Ø   DPⱼ       I'
         [E]  △    ┌────┴────┐
              I    I        vP
                            │
                            v'
                       ┌────┴────┐
                       v        vP
                                △
                        tⱼ love [William]F tᵢ
```

economy → [E] feature located as high as possible:

(21) *I love you more than I William.

● more ambiguity:[1]

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

three readings:

(23) 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.

[E] located on v – VP-ellipsis – reading in (23a):

(24) [CP than [IP [DP *Op.* sharks]F [vP [VP ~~die [PP from falling coconuts]~~]]]]

[E] located on C – PP either contains an AP or not – readings in (23b) and (23c):

(25) a. [CP than ~~[IP [DP *Op.* people] [vP [VP die [PP from [DP~~ [NP sharks]F]]]]]]

　　　b. [CP than ~~[IP [DP *Op.* people] [vP [VP die [PP from [DP [AP falling]~~ [NP sharks]F]]]]]]

F-markedness may project up to PP from DP:

(26) [CP than ~~[IP [DP *Op.* people] [vP [VP die~~ [PP from [DP sharks]]F]]]]

→ [E] on either v or C + mechanism of linear ellipsis may account for ambiguities

5. Ellipsis in Hungarian

● recall: operators overt in Hungarian → degree expression overt in [Spec,CP]:

(27) a. Mari　　magasabb volt,　　　mint **amilyen magas** Péter　**volt**.
　　　　　Mary　　taller　　　was.3SG　than　how　　　tall　　Peter　be.PST.3SG
　　　　　'Mary was taller than Peter.'

　　　b. 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.'

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[1] I am indebted to Jenneke van der Wal for calling my attention to this particular example.

● but ellipsis also possible:

(28) a. Mari   magasabb volt,   mint Péter.
         Mary   taller   was.3SG than Peter
         'Mary was taller than Peter.'

      b. Mari   több   macskát vett,   mint Péter.
         Mary   more   cat-ACC   bought.3SG than Peter
         'Mary bought more cats than Peter did.'

→ question: what deletes the degree expression and the finite verb?

not independent processes

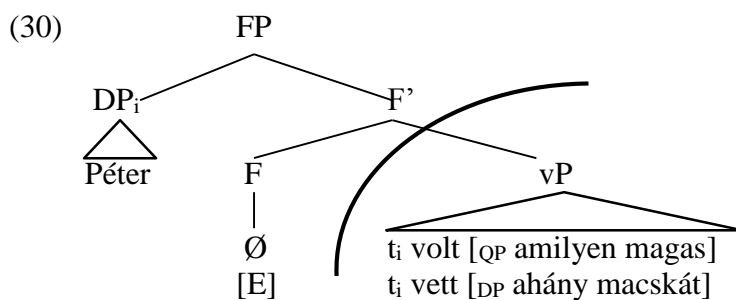   phenomenon of "Comparative Verb Gapping" (Bacskai-Atkari and Kántor 2012)

(29) 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.'

reason: degree expression fails to move up to [Spec,CP]

    → has to be eliminated but no separate process for that

    → general ellipsis applies – sluicing (cf. van Craenenbroeck and Lipták 2006)

ellipsis site:

(30)   FP
         DP$_i$ F'
         Péter   F   vP
                      Ø   t$_i$ volt [$_{QP}$ amilyen magas]
                      [E]   t$_i$ vett [$_{DP}$ ahány macskát]

[E] feature on F head (functional head – highest functional projection in the VP-domain)

→ deletion necessarily affects the verb

main contrast expressed by the DP in [Spec,FP] – nuclear stress assigned here
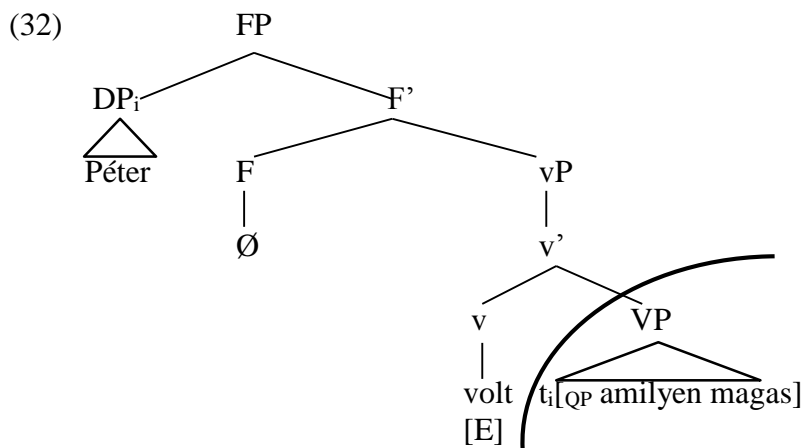
    cf. Szendrői (2001), É. Kiss (2008, 2009)

● contrastive copula:

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

[E] feature located on the functional v head containing the copula (*volt*)

    maximal constituent that can be elided: complement of v, not of F

ellipsis site for (31):

(32)

6. 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:

(33) [$_{XP}$ (YP) X$_{[E]}$ [$_{ZP}$ ~~xxxxxxx~~ [$_{WP}$ xxxx]$_F$]]

ellipsis in Hungarian:

(34) [$_{XP}$ YP$_F$ X$_{[E]}$ [$_{ZP}$ ~~xxxxxxxx~~]

● 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

(35) a. [$_{XP}$ X$_E$ [$_{YP}$ ~~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 English 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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