# On the Parametric Variation of Deletion in Comparatives

**Julia Bacskai-Atkari**

## The Problem

Two main categories of deletion phenomena in comparative constructions: Comparative Deletion (CD) and Comparative Ellipsis (CE)

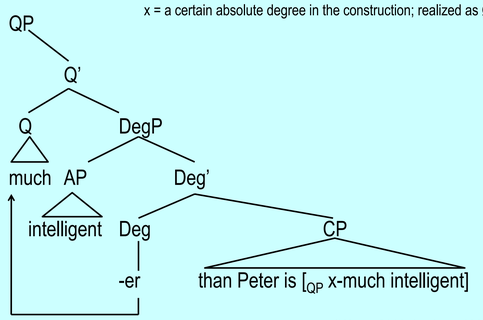
**Traditional analyses** (Principles and Parameters framework): CD is universally principled (↔CE), and is defined on the basis of its being obligatory.
**But**: cross-linguistic data show that CD is subject to parametric variation
→ **Proposal**: a functional definition based on the target site of CD, which may be better applied when accounting for the parametric variation in the comparative subclause.

## The Structure of Comparatives

(1) Mary is more intelligent [than Peter is ~~x-much intelligent~~].
reference value — standard value

x = a certain absolute degree in the construction; realized as Ø

(2)




(Kántor 2008, Lechner 1999, 2004)

## The Standard Analysis

**Comparative Deletion:**
(3a) Mary is taller than Peter is $____{CD}$. ($____{CD}$ = x-tall)
(3b) The tiger ran faster than Liz drove $____{CD}$. ($____{CD}$ = x-fast)
(3c) Susan has more cats than Peter has $____{CD}$. ($____{CD}$ = x-many cats)

→ Target: adjectival, adverbial or nominal constituent (after movement to [Spec; CP]

(Kennedy–Merchant 2000)

**Comparative Ellipsis:**
(4a) Mary is taller than Peter $____{CE}$ $____{CD}$.
($____{CE}$ = is; $____{CD}$ = x-tall)
(4b) The tiger ran faster than Liz $____{CE}$ $____{CD}$.
($____{CE}$ = ran; $____{CD}$ = x-fast)
(4c) Susan has more cats than Peter $____{CE}$ $____{CD}$.
($____{CE}$ = has; $____{CD}$ = x-many cats)

→ Target: any other recoverable constituent

CD universally obligatory – the parameter is [+CD], + referring to obligatoriness
CE universally optional – the parameter is [–CE] , – referring to optionality

(Kennedy 2002, Lechner 1999, 2004, Bresnan 1973, 1975)

## Comparative Deletion Reconsidered

English is [+CD]:
(5a) *I fed cats more often than Peter bathed pigs often. ↔ (5b) I fed cats more often than Peter bathed pigs $____{CD}$.

But the English pattern is not universal:
(6) Többször etettem macskát kaviárral, mint **ahányszor** Péter fürdetett malacot szivaccsal. (*Hungarian*)
more.often fed-I cat-Acc. caviar.with than **x-often** Peter bathed pig-Acc. sponge.with
'I fed cats more often with caviar than Peter bathed pigs with a sponge.'

*x-often* (*ahányszor*): comparative operator

→ CD is not universally principled but there is a [±CD] parameter – Hungarian is [–CD] and English is [+CD]

→ defining CD on the basis of its being obligatory is fundamentally flawed: a functional definition is needed

## Comparative Ellipsis Reconsidered

English and Hungarian are [–CE], as shown by (5b) and (6) – but there are languages where ellipsis other than CD is obligatory:
(7a) *Luisa ama più Pietro $____{CD}$ che ami Giorgio. (*Italian*)
Luise loves more Peter that loves-Subj. George
'Luise loves Peter more than she loves George.'
(7b) Luisa ama più Pietro $____{CD}$ che $____{CE}$ Giorgio. (*Italian*)
Luise loves more Peter that George
'Luise loves Peter more than she loves George.'

↔ (7c) Luisa ama Pietro più di quanto ami Giorgio.
Luise loves Peter more of x-much loves-Subj. George
'Luise loves Peter more than she loves George.'

Italian *che*-comparatives tolerate only one overt constituent (which can be a PP, an AP or a non-finite VP as well, see Napoli–Nespor 1986) in the subclause, though a full subclause is possible if there is no CD, as in (7c)

→ besides a [±CD] parameter, there is also a [±CE] parameter – Italian is [+CE], as opposed to Hungarian and English

## The Interaction of Deletion Phenomena – Comparative Verb Gapping

The application of CD may require ellipsis for the structure to converge:

(8a) Többször etettem macskát kaviárral, mint **ahányszor** Péter fürdetett malacot szivaccsal. (*Hungarian*)
more.often fed-I cat-Acc. caviar.with than **x-often** Peter bathed pig-Acc. sponge.with
'I fed cats more often with caviar than Peter bathed pigs with a sponge.'

CD applied:
(8b) *Többször etettem macskát kaviárral, mint $_____{CD}$ Péter fürdetett malacot szivaccsal. (*Hungarian*)
more.often fed-I cat-Acc. caviar.with than Peter bathed pig-Acc. sponge.with
'I fed cats more often with caviar than Peter bathed pigs with a sponge.'

CE: the deletion of the finite verb (CVG) saves the construction (though the meaning changes due to recoverability):
(8c) Többször etettem macskát kaviárral, mint $_____{CD}$ Péter $_____{CE}$ malacot szivaccsal. (*Hungarian*)
more.often fed-I cat-Acc. caviar.with than Peter pig-Acc. sponge.with
'I fed cats more often with caviar than Peter fed pigs with a sponge.'

The absence of an overt comparative operator (*x-often*, Hungarian *ahányszor*) requires the ellipsis of the finite verb in Hungarian, where this operator is otherwise available ↔ in English, there is no overt operator and the deletion of the finite verb is not requires, as shown by (5b).

Note that the ellipsis of the verb does not require the deletion of the operator:
(8d) Többször etettem macskát kaviárral, mint **ahányszor** Péter $_____{CE}$ malacot szivaccsal. (*Hungarian*)
more.often fed-I cat-Acc. caviar.with than x-often Peter pig-Acc. sponge.with
'I fed cats more often with caviar than Peter fed pigs with a sponge.'

## The Proposed Analysis

**New definition of CD:**
an operation eliminating the functionally extended AP (the QP) from the comparative subclause, if that AP is identical with the one in the matrix clause.

(for the structure of the functionally extended AP, see Corver 1990, 1997)

**Advantages:**
• Based on the target site → it is universally applicable since it allows for the [±CD] parametric variation

• It pertains to all types of comparatives the distinction between adjectival/adverbial and nominal constituents becomes superfluous

• Subcomparatives do not have to be treated as exceptional:

← If the AP in the subclause is different from the one in the matrix clause, CD by definition does not apply to it:

(9) The table is longer than the office is wide.

← If the difference is only in a nominal constituent, CD again naturally does not apply as it targets only QPs:

(10) Susan has more cats than Peter has ~~x-many~~ dogs.

**CE:**
– an operation eliminating everything recoverable from the subclause and leaving only one overt constituent in the final structure
– its presence is dependent on the deletion of the operator

**Languages with [–CE] parametric setting:**
– there are optional operations not necessarily specific to comparatives, which eliminate recoverable constituents
– however, there are ellipsis phenomena, such as CVG, that are strongly related to the presence/absence of the operator

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