

Reducing Attributive Comparative Deletion

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The Problem

Various kinds of deletion structures in comparatives – different phenomena?

Comparative Deletion:

- (1) Mary is taller than Peter is tall. (*predicative*)
(2) Mary saw bigger cats than Peter saw big cats. (*attributive*)

Comparative Subdeletion:

- (3) The dog is bigger than the doghouse is wide.
(4) Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter did buy big doghouses.

Constraints:

- (5) *Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter bought (wide) doghouses.

Proposal: all of these are reducible to the single process Comparative Deletion – differences due to more general settings

Constraints on Deletion

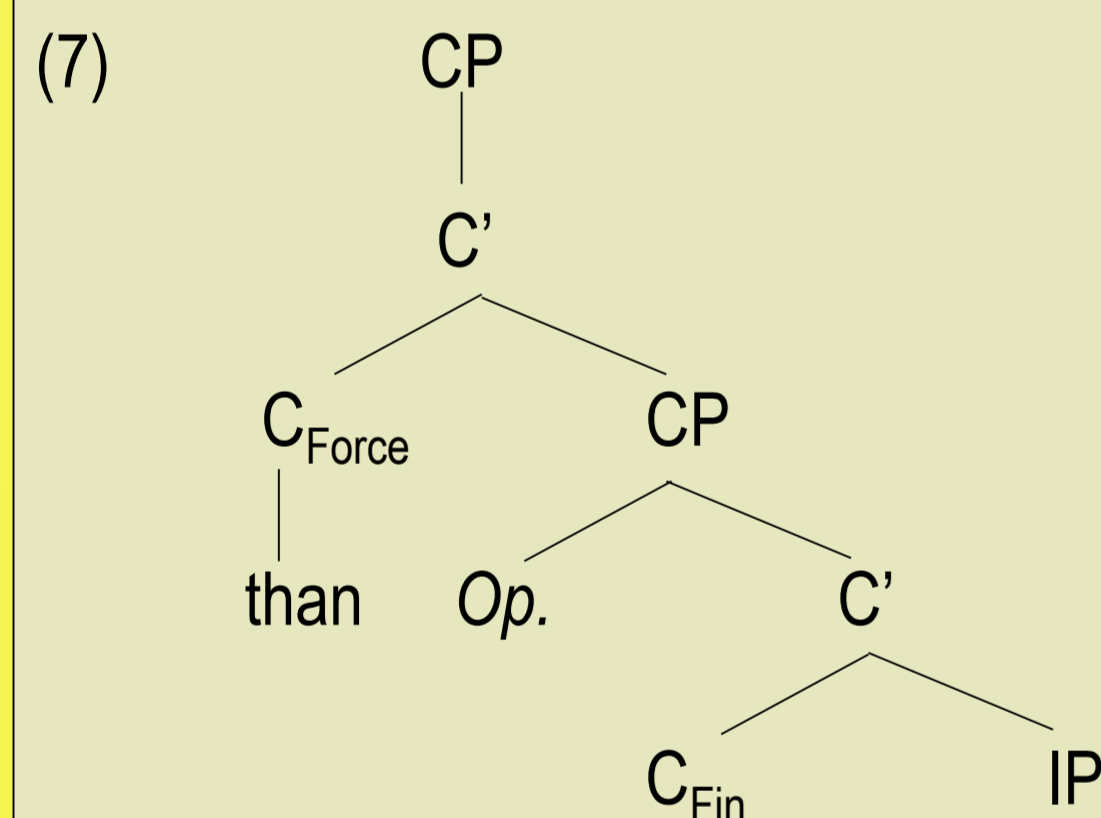
GIVENNESS: elements are either GIVEN or F-marked

- (6) Louise was reading a novel and Peter was reading / *writing an epic.

Recoverability: a constituent α can be deleted iff α is e-GIVEN (Merchant 2001: 38) → α must have a salient antecedent in the discourse

Comparative Deletion

Comparative Deletion (CD) deletes the QP in the subclause if it is logically identical to its antecedent in the matrix clause (Bacskai-Atkari 2010)



Predicatives: AP contained within a QP headed by a zero operator x → operator movement: the QP moves up to the lower [Spec; CP], where CD deletes it (Bacskai-Atkari 2010)

- the AP has to move together with the Q head:

- (8a) *Mary is taller than Op. Peter is tall.
(8b) *How is Mary tall? ↔ (8c) How tall is Mary?

- copy theory of movement: the lower copy of the QP is deleted regularly by PF; the QP is e-GIVEN

- (9) Mary is taller [CP than [CP [QP x tall]] Peter is [QP x tall]].

Attributives: QP adjunct within a DP → operator movement: the entire DP containing the QP moves up to the lower [Spec; CP], where CD deletes it (Bacskai-Atkari 2010)

- the QP cannot be extracted from the DP (← DP-islands):

- (10a) *Mary saw bigger cats than Op. Peter saw cats.

- (10b) *How big did Mary see cats?
↔ (10c) How big cats did Mary see?

- again, the lower copy of the DP is deleted regularly by PF; the DP is again e-GIVEN:

- (11) Mary saw bigger cats [CP than [CP [DP x big cats]] Peter saw [DP x big cats]].

- the deletion of the entire DP in attributive comparatives is a result of other constraints
- deletion is permitted under logical identity with the quantified element in the matrix clause

Comparative Subdeletion

Subcomparatives: the relative quantities of different properties or entities are compared (Kennedy 2000):

- (12a) The dog is bigger than the doghouse is wide.
(12b) Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter did buy big doghouses.

the QP and the DP remain → are the sentences in (12) exceptions?

but recall the definition of CD: deletion takes place in the lower [Spec; CP] position and is licensed under identity with the quantified element in the matrix clause

- the QPs *big* and *wide* in (12a) and the DPs *dogs* and *doghouses* in (12b) are not logically identical
- the QP *wide* and the DP *doghouses* are not in the lower [Spec; CP] position of the comparative subclause

CD takes place in the lower [Spec; CP] regularly – Bacskai-Atkari (2010)

lower copy: cannot be deleted because it is F-marked

Bošković and Nunes (2007: 48): lower copies may be phonologically realised if the pronunciation of the highest copy causes the derivation to crash at PF

Derivation:

- (13) The dog is bigger [CP than [CP [QP x wide]_F the doghouse is [QP x wide]_F].

→ subcomparatives are not exceptional in terms of CD → it is enough to have CD in the grammar, no need for a separate subcomparative deletion process (the operator is phonologically null anyway)

Attributive Comparative Deletion

Not the entire lower copy remains (↔ predicative comparatives):

- (14a) Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter did buy big doghouses.
(14b) *Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter did buy big doghouses.

possible reason: the QP (*x-big*) is e-GIVEN, so it should be subject to deletion ↔ the NP *dogs* is F-marked

But rather a positional problem:

- (15a) % The dog is bigger than the doghouse is big.
(15b) The dog is bigger than the doghouse is WIDE.
(15c) *Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter did big DOGHOUSES.
(15d) *Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter did WIDE DOGHOUSES.

- in (15a), *big* has to be unstressed – it violates the constraint that the lower copy should be deleted
- however, (15c) and (15d) are not unacceptable at all → positional problem

→ (15d) is underivable in English: either illicit configuration or deletion of an F-marked constituent:

- (16) *Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter did buy [DP [QP wide]_F doghouses]].

→ is Attributive CD a special process? – QP only part of a lower copy, not the lower copy itself

Attributive CD involves deletion of the lexical verb:

- (17a) Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter bought x-big dogs.
(17b) *Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter bought x-big doghouses.
(17c) Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter bought x-big doghouses.
(17d) Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter did buy x-big doghouses.

→ is Attributive CD carried out by some verb deletion process?

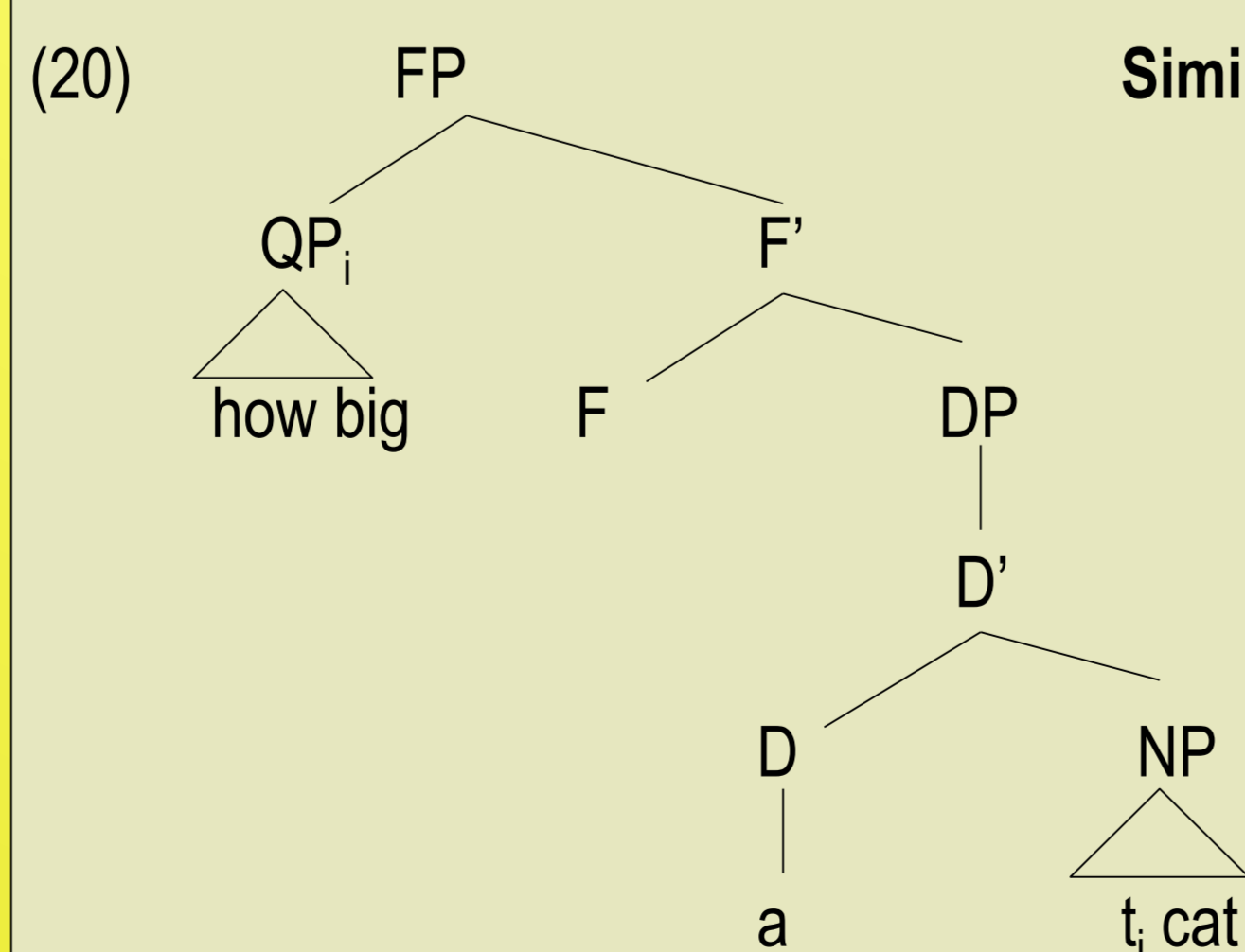
But deletion seems to target discontinuous constituents:

- (18a) *Mary saw a bigger cat than Peter did see a x-big dog.
(18b) Mary saw a bigger cat than Peter did see a x-big dog.

The Syntax of Attributive Modification

In the case of attributive modification involving an operator, the QP moves up to the specifier of a functional projection (FP), a functional extension of the DP (cf. Kennedy and Merchant 2000).

- (19a) *A how big cat did you see? ↔ (19b) [How big a cat] did you see?



Similarly:

- (21a) Mary saw [too big a cat].
(21b) Peter didn't see [as big a cat] as Mary did.
(21c) Mary saw [so big a cat] that she couldn't believe it.

The F head can sometimes be filled:

- (22) [How big of a cat] did Mary see?

Structural ambiguities:

- (23) Mary saw a big cat but Peter did see a dog.
'Mary saw a big cat but Peter saw a dog.' / 'Mary saw a big cat but Peter saw big a dog.'

Conclusions

The QP modifier of the DP in the subclause moves up in attributive comparatives
→ string in (18) explained:

- (24) Mary saw a bigger cat than Peter did see [FP [QP x big]_i a ____i dog].

Kennedy and Merchant (2000): the QP moving to [Spec; FP] equips the F head with a [+wh] feature, which is PF-uninterpretable on the F head (↔ D heads like *which*): this can be checked off only if the entire FP moves to [Spec; CP]

higher copy: remains in (19) but elided by CD in comparatives like (24)

lower copy: can be deleted in (19) but not in (24) as the DP within it is F-marked; but the F head bears the PF-uninterpretable [+rel] feature on it and should be deleted (Bošković and Nunes 2007)

→ how is it possible that the lexical verb has to be deleted alongside with the QP but the DP can remain?

The process of deletion:

Reich (2007): when deletion applies at PF, it does not (and cannot) affect F-marked material

Verb Gapping:

- (25a) Mary likes cats and Peter [VP likes [DP dogs]_F].
(25b) Mary likes cats and Peter [VP likes [DP dogs]_F].
(25c) *Mary likes cats and Peter [VP likes [DP dogs]_F] too.

→ Verb Gapping is an instance of VP-deletion; deletion targets the e-GIVEN VP, within which there is an F-marked DP – linear PF application stops

if no F-marked DP, there is nothing to prevent deletion of the DP:

- (26a) Mary likes cats and Peter [VP likes [DP cats]_F].
(26b) *Mary likes cats and Peter [VP likes [DP cats]_F].
(26c) Mary likes cats and Peter [VP likes [DP cats]_F] too.

→ target of gapping not the V head but the VP

VP-deletion in attributive comparatives:

the F-marked constituent is the DP, not the FP

- (27a) *Mary saw a bigger cat than Peter [VP saw [FP x-big [DP a dog]_F]].

- (27b) *Mary saw a bigger cat than Peter [VP saw [FP x-big [DP a dog]_F]].

- (27c) Mary saw a bigger cat than Peter [VP saw [FP x-big [DP a dog]_F]].

- (27d) *Mary saw a bigger cat than Peter [VP saw [FP x-big [DP a dog]_F]].

VP-deletion: optional process that may save the construction from being ill-formed (cf. sluicing)

→ Attributive Comparative Deletion is reducible to Comparative Deletion and VP-deletion

References

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