

Comparative Deletion in Germanic

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Comparative Deletion

- (1) a. Ralph is taller than Michael is ~~tall~~.
b. The table is longer than the office is **wide**.

traditional approach: obligatory elimination of a given
quantified constituent

cf. Bresnan (1973); Kennedy and Merchant (2000);
Kennedy (2002)

but: phenomenon not universal

Hungarian

overt operator + overt lexical AP:

- (2) a. Mari magasabb volt,
Mary taller was.3SG
mint **amilyen** magas Zsuzsa volt.
than how tall Susan was.3SG
'Mary was taller than Susan.'
- b. Az asztal hosszabb volt,
the table longer was.3SG
mint **amilyen széles** az iroda volt.
than how wide the office was.3SG
'The table was longer than the office was wide.'

Question

Comparative Deletion and variation in Germanic?

languages: English, German, Dutch

Proposal

Comparative Deletion is an overtness requirement on left-peripheral elements

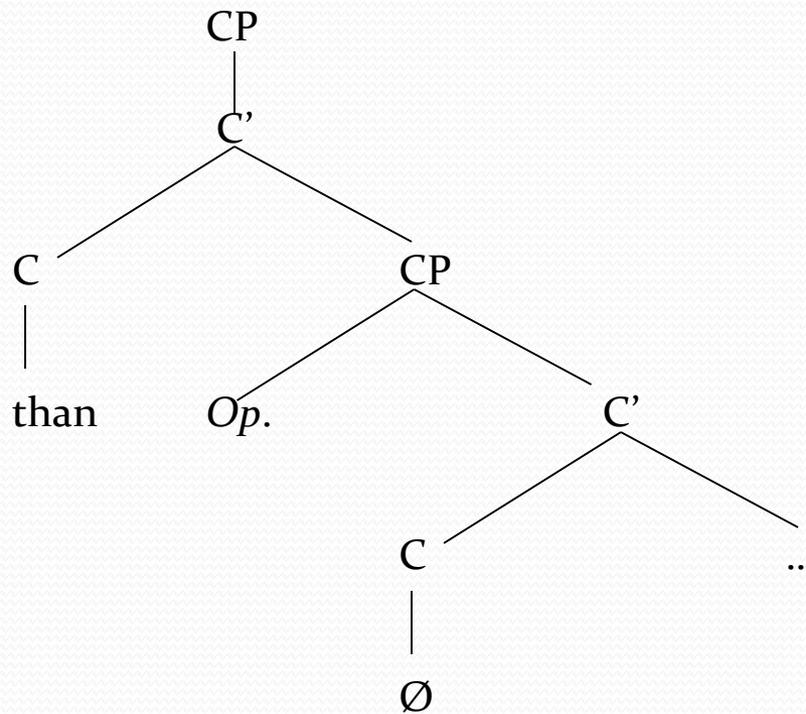
variation

← overt/covert, extractable/non-extractable operators

Operator movement in comparatives

left periphery (on multiple CPs, cf. Rizzi 1997, 1999, 2004):

(3)



Operator movement

operator movement

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

comparative operator: relative operator

- comparatives obey islands – irrespectively of whether NP is contrastive (cf. Kennedy 2002)

Wh-islands

- (4) a. *Jason killed more dragons than OP_x Susan wondered [whether to kiss t_x].
- b. *Jason killed more dragons than OP_x Susan wondered [whether to kiss t_x unicorns].

Complex NP islands

- (5) a. *Jason killed more dragons than OP_x he had outlined [a plan to kill t_x].
- b. *Jason killed more dragons than OP_x he had outlined [a plan to kill t_x unicorns].

Syntactic motivation

regular movement of a [+rel] operator

→ not specific to comparatives

Overt operators

e.g. Hungarian, cf. (2)

overt operator + lexical AP: possible irrespectively of whether the AP is contrastive or not

note: operator has to move because of its [+rel] feature

AP: moves because of independent reasons
(non-extractability)

The structure of degree expressions

two overt operators in Hungarian

Operator *amilyen* ‘how’

not separable from the lexical AP

- (6) a. Mari magasabb, mint **amilyen** magas Péter volt.
Mary taller than how tall Peter was
‘Mary is taller than Peter was.’
- b. *Mari magasabb, mint **amilyen** Péter volt **magas**.
Mary taller than how Peter was tall
‘Mary is taller than Peter was.’

Operator *amennyire* ‘how much’

separable from the lexical AP

- (7) a. Mari magasabb, mint **amennyire magas** Péter volt.
Mary taller than how.much tall Peter was
‘Mary is taller than Peter was.’
- b. Mari magasabb, mint **amennyire** Péter volt **magas**.
Mary taller than how.much Peter was tall
‘Mary is taller than Peter was.’

Interrogatives

similar difference in interrogative operators

Operator *milyen* 'how'

not separable from the lexical AP

(8) a. **Milyen magas** volt Péter?

how tall was Peter

'How tall was Peter?'

b. ***Milyen** volt Péter **magas**?

how was Peter tall

'How tall was Peter?'

Operator *mennyire* ‘how much’

separable from the lexical AP

- (9) a. **Mennyire magas** volt Péter?
how.much tall was Peter
‘How tall was Peter?’
- b. **Mennyire** volt Péter **magas**?
how.much was Peter tall
‘How tall was Peter?’

Separable operators

not VP-modifiers

- AP may move together with them
(one single constituent)
- they do not require the presence of an overt copula in Hungarian (cf. 3Sg. present tense)

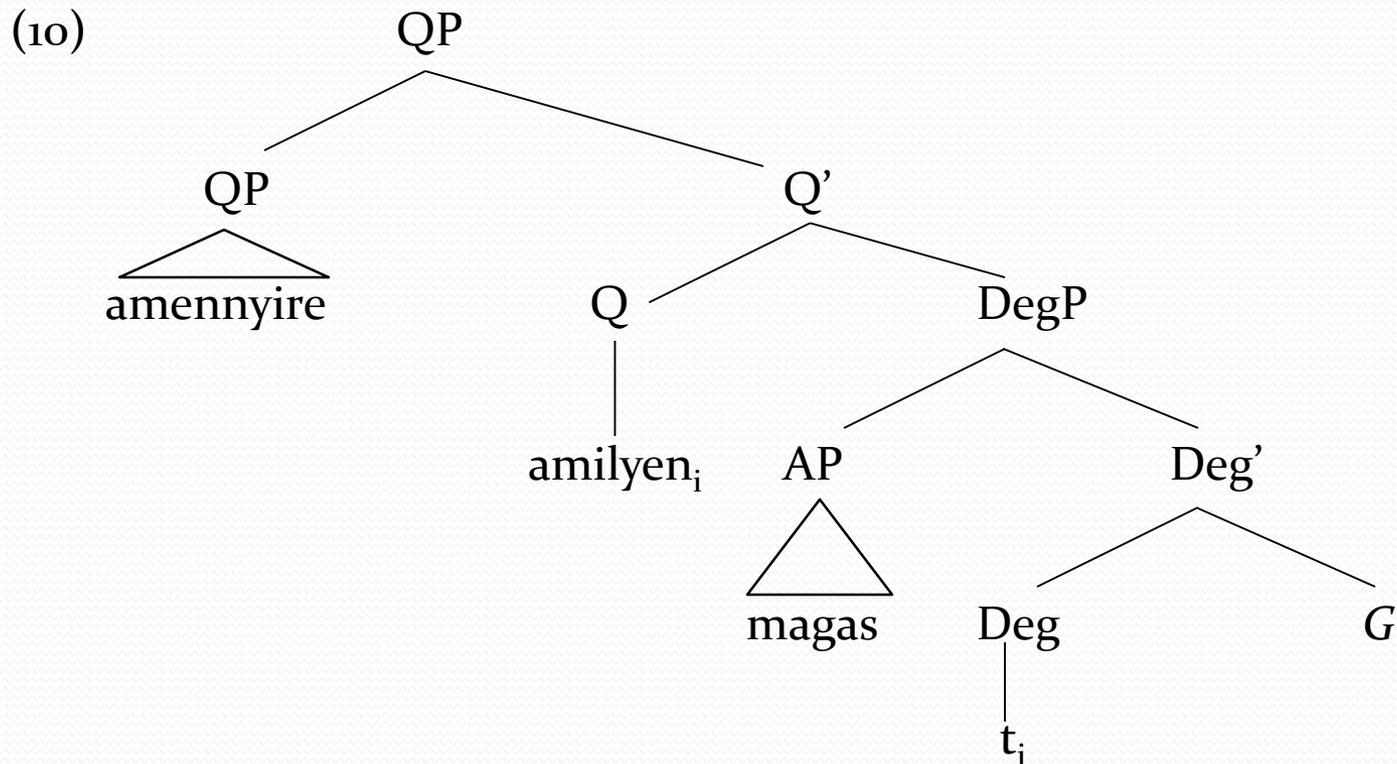
Degree expressions

DegP – degree head

- takes two arguments (cf. Lechner 2004)
 - lexical AP
 - Grade argument – standard value
- projects a QP layer
 - Deg moves up to Q
 - specifier of QP may host other QP modifiers

Degree expressions in the subclause

e.g. *amilyen/amennyire magas* 'how/how much tall'



Structural difference

- economy
 - *amilyen* and *amennyire* cannot be co-present
(~ Doubly Filled Comp Filter)
- structural difference
 - *amennyire* may be extracted on its own (\leftrightarrow *amilyen*)
- operator has to undergo movement
 - stranding of the AP depends on the structural position
of the operator within the QP

Information structure

not directly related to movement and stranding

Comparative Deletion \neq obligatory deletion of a GIVEN or
non-contrastive AP

English

- Standard English: zero operator

(11) a. Ralph is taller than Michael is **tall**.

b. The table is longer than the office is **wide**.

Movement

two copies

higher copy in [Spec,CP] and lower copy in base position

movement before spellout in both cases

↔ Kennedy (2002): only in (11a)

but: movement cannot be sensitive to the information structural properties of the AP

driven by the [+rel] feature of the operator

Copies

- (12) a. Ralph is taller than [**x-tall**] Michael is [**x-tall**].
- b. The table is longer than [**x-wide**] the office is [**x-wide**].

Overttness requirement

a lexical AP (or NP) is licensed in an operator position such as [Spec,CP] if the operator itself is overt

→ higher copy of the degree expression in (12) deleted

lower copy: regularly eliminated, unless it is contrastive (cf. Bacskai-Atkari 2012)

Derivation

- (13) a. Ralph is taller than [~~x-tall~~] Michael is [~~x-tall~~].
- b. The table is longer than [~~x-wide~~] the office is [~~x-wide~~].

Contrastiveness

AP can still be GIVEN

(Kennedy 2002, quoting Chomsky 1977)

(14) A: This desk is **higher** than that one is **wide**.

B: What is more, this desk is **higher** than that one is **HIGH**.

Operators in English

- zero operator: a Deg head – AP cannot be stranded
- overt operators in certain varieties of English:
what (cf. Chomsky 1977), *how*

no violation of the overttness requirement
→ higher copy remains overt

Operator *what*

proform Deg head – takes no lexical AP

(15) % Ralph is taller than [**what**] Michael is [~~what~~].

Operator *how*

Deg head

- (16) a. % Ralph is taller than [**how tall**] Michael is [~~how tall~~].
b. % The table is longer than [**how wide**] the office is [~~how wide~~].

no stranding:

- (17) a. *Ralph is taller than **how** Michael is **tall**.
b. *The table is longer than **how** the office is **wide**.

Interrogative *how*

also a Deg head:

- (18) a. **How tall** is Ralph?
b. ***How** is Ralph **tall**?

Summary for English

- English shows Comparative Deletion when there is a zero operator
- role of information structure: contrastive lower copies realised overtly

Dutch

- interrogatives: *hoe* 'how': a Deg head

(19) a. **Hoe groot** is Jan?

how tall is John

'How tall is John?'

b. ***Hoe** is Jan **groot**?

how is John tall

'How tall is John?'

Comparative operator *hoe* ‘how’

a Deg head

(20) 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
the table is longer
dan **hoe breed** het kantoor is.
than how wide the.NEUT office is
‘The table is longer than the office is wide.’

Zero comparative operator

rather a QP modifier – stranding even if AP not contrastive

(21) a. ?/?? Maria is groter dan Jan **groot** is.

Mary is taller than John tall is
'Mary is taller than John.'

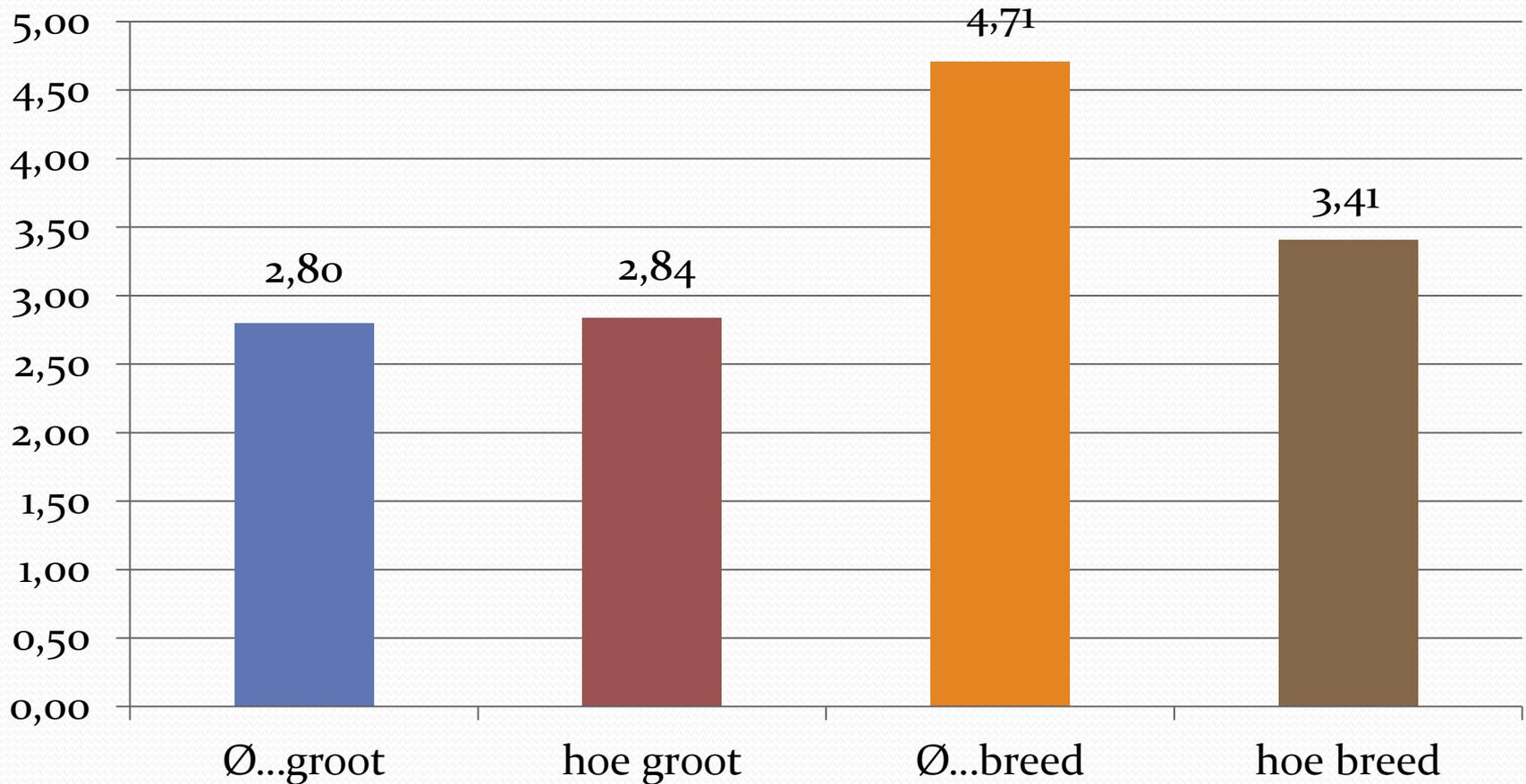
b. De tafel is langer dan het kantoor **breed** is
the table is longer than the.NEUToffice wide is
'The table is longer than the office is wide.'

↔ English zero: non-contrastive lower copies severely degraded

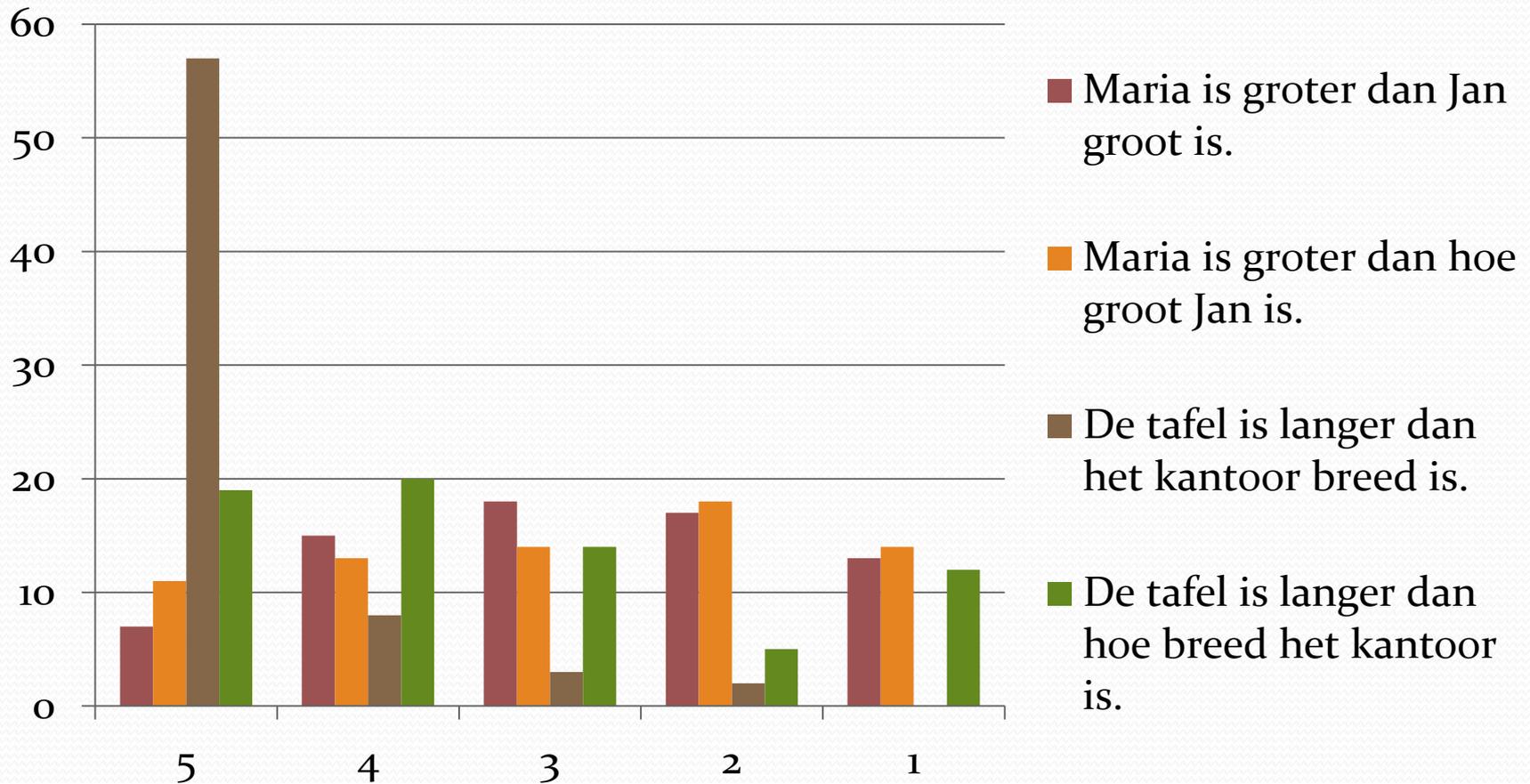
Online study

- considerable variation among Dutch speakers
- (online) study with 70 speakers (September/August 2013):
acceptability marked from 5 (best) to 1 (worst)
- *hoe* + AP: (20a) fully acceptable for 16%, (20b) for 27%
- zero – (21a) fully acceptable for 10%, (21b) for 81%

Results (average ratings)



Results (variation)



Summary for Dutch

- Comparative Deletion only partially attested
only if the AP moves together with the zero operator
- role of information structure: contrastive AP has to be preserved

with *hoe*: difference less significant than with the zero

deletion of the AP possible only if it moves up together with the zero

hoe + non-contrastive AP not preferred

German

- interrogative operator *wie* ‘how’: a Deg head:

(22) a. **Wie groß** ist Ralf?
how tall is Ralph
‘How tall is Ralph?’

b. ***Wie** ist Ralf **groß**?
how is Ralph tall
‘How tall is Ralph?’

Operator *wie* ‘how’ in comparative subclauses

- with a non-contrastive AP:

(23) a. *Ralf ist größer als **wie groß** Michael ist.
Ralph is taller than how tall Michael is
‘Ralph is taller than Michael.’

b. ??/* Ralf ist größer als **wie** Michael **groß** ist.
Ralph is taller than how Michael tall is
‘Ralph is taller than Michael.’

Operator *wie* 'how' in comparative subclauses

- with a contrastive AP:

- (24) a. *Der Tisch ist länger
the.MASC desk is longer
als **wie breit** das Büro ist.
than how wide the.NEUT office is
'The desk is longer than the office is wide.'
- b. ?/?? Der Tisch ist länger
the.MASC desk is longer
als **wie** das Büro **breit** ist.
than how the.NEUT office wide is
'The desk is longer than the office is wide.'

So...

wie in comparatives cannot be an operator

- Deg head – (23a) and (24a) should be acceptable, (23b) and (24b) ungrammatical
- QP modifier – (23a) and (24a) should still be possible

But...

wie still possible (dialectal variation):

(25) ?/?? Ralf ist größer als **wie** Michael.
Ralph is taller than how Michael
'Ralph is taller than Michael.'

The status of *wie* in comparatives

not an operator but a grammaticalised C head

cf. Jäger (2012)

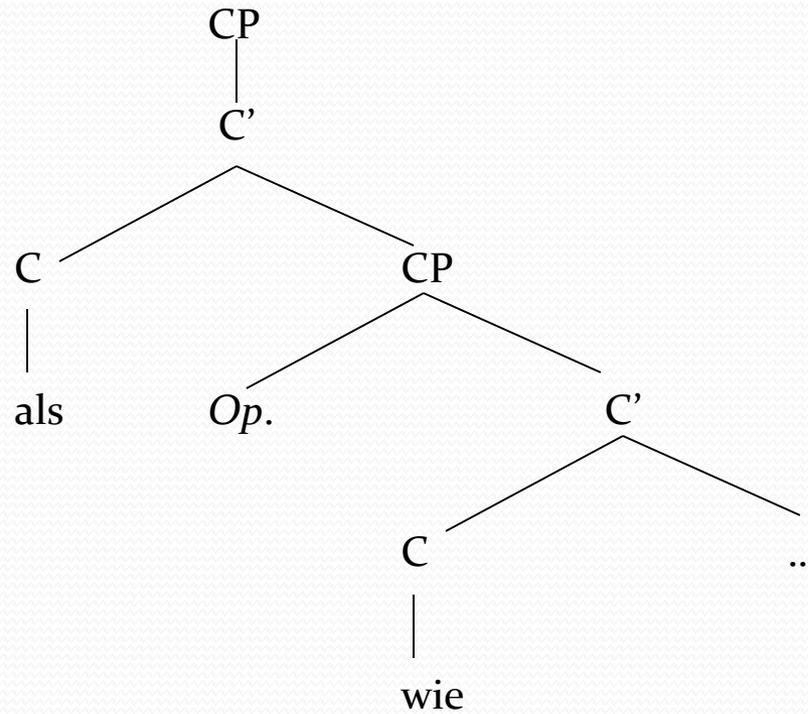
~ in comparatives expressing equality (*wie* ‘as’)

standard grammaticalisation process from operators into C heads

relative cycle – cf. Bacskai-Atkari (2013) for Hungarian comparatives

Structure

(26)



→ lexical AP cannot co-occur with *wie* in the CP domain

Zero operator

rather a QP modifier

(27) a. ? Ralf ist größer als Michael **groß** ist.

Ralph is taller than Michael tall is
'Ralph is taller than John.'

b. Der Tisch ist länger als das Büro **breit** ist.

the.MASC table is longer than the.NEUT office wide is
'The table is longer than the office is wide.'

Summary for German

- Comparative Deletion not attested as in English
- role of information structure: contrastive AP stranded or lower copy preserved

non-contrastive APs preferably more together with the operator and are hence deleted

Comparative operators in Germanic

**two factors:
extractability (Deg head or QP modifier)
and overttness**

Interaction

(28)

	overt	covert
Deg head	<i>how</i> (English) <i>what</i> (English) <i>hoe</i> (Dutch)	zero (English)
QP modifier	-	zero (Dutch) zero (German)

Interaction

Comparative Deletion attested with zero operators when the lexical AP also moves up

- obligatory if the operator is a Deg head
- optional if the operator is a QP modifier

Conclusion

variety in terms of Comparative Deletion in Germanic languages

linked to the overtness of the operators

three factors:

- overtness of the operator
Comparative Deletion
- position of the operator in the degree expression
AP separable
- information structure
preferred position of the AP

Thank you!

Danke!



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