

Ambiguity and the Internal Structure of Comparative Complements in Greek

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Introduction

ambiguous comparative constructions in English (cf. Bresnan 1973):

- (1) I saw a taller woman **than my mother**.
- (A) 'I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.'
- (B) 'I saw a taller woman than my mother is.'

question: what causes ambiguity (English and cross-linguistically)

- purely clausal analysis (see Bresnan 1973, Lechner 2004)
- purely phrasal analysis (cf. Hankamer 1973 for the phrasal analysis of *than*)

Greek

three types of comparatives

- *ap'oti* 'than' - clausal
- *apo* 'from' + accusative DP - phrasal (?)
- genitive - phrasal

proposal: ambiguity in cases like (1) with various underlying structures
(not necessarily clauses)

Clausal comparatives

reading (A): a lexical, tensed verb is reconstructed (predicate: verb)

(2) I saw a taller woman than my mother ~~saw an x-tall woman~~.

degree expression (x-tall woman) would be eliminated in English anyway

(Bresnan 1973, Kennedy 2002, Bacskai-Atkari 2014c)

reading (B): a predicative relation is reconstructed, not tensed
(predicate: adjective)

- (3) a. I saw a taller woman than my mother
~~BE an x-tall woman~~.
- b. I can't imagine a braver woman than Queen Boudicca
~~BE an x-brave woman~~.

German

- (4) a. Ich habe eine größere Frau **als** **meine** **Mutter** gesehen.
I have a taller woman than my.F.NOM/ACC mother seen
'I saw a taller woman than my mother.'
- b. Ich habe einen größeren Mann **als** **mein** **Vater** gesehen.
I have a taller man than my.M.NOM father seen
'I saw a taller man than my father saw.'
- c. Ich habe einen größeren Mann **als** **meinen** **Vater** gesehen.
I have a taller man than my.M.ACC father seen
'I saw a taller man than my father is.'

Analysis

no default accusative (Schütze 2001), accusative available for small clause subjects

analysis:

- nominative remnants: clausal ellipsis, nominative case assigned by finite inflection
- accusative remnants: remnants of small clauses, case assigned by matrix verb

→ elements like *than* or *als* ‘than’ may take both TP and PredP (small clause) complements

(on small clauses as PredPs, cf. Matushansky 2012, following Bowers 1993)

Greek clausal comparatives

- (5) a. Eida mia gynaiika psiloteri **ap'oti i** **mitera mou.**
saw.1SG a woman taller than the.NOM mother my
'I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.'
- b. *Eida mia gynaiika psiloteri **ap'oti ti** **mitera mou.**
saw.1SG a woman taller than the.ACC mother my
'I saw a taller woman than my mother.'

Subject/object remnants

- (6) a. S'agapo perissotero **ap'oti i** **Maria**.
I.love.you more than the.NOM Mary
'I love you more than Mary loves you.'
- b. S'agapo perissotero **ap'oti ti** **Maria**.
I.love.you more than the.ACC Mary
'I love you more than I love Mary.'

Greek clausal comparative pattern

- no accusative case remnant available - complement of *ap'oti* cannot be a PredP in the German way
- nominative remnant not ambiguous - reconstruction of a predicative relation with an adjectival predicate should involve a tenseless clause (tenseless-tenseless match), but *ap'oti* always takes a TP complement

Phrasal comparatives

Germanic: comparatives introduced by an element corresponding to *than* - C-element

single PPs attested in other languages - including KPs (lexical case)

Italian (*di* 'of'), Polish (genitive), Russian (genitive), Hungarian (adessive)

lexical cases: instances of PP (see e.g. Asbury 2005; 2008)

KP the lowest PP layer, immediately above the DP; KP tops off the nominal projection, projections of higher P constitute a different extended projection (Den Dikken 2010, cf. also Dékány & Hegedűs 2014 on Hungarian)

Greek phrasal comparatives

- (7) Eida mia gynaike psiloteri **tis** **miteras** **mou**.
saw.1SG a woman taller the.GEN mother.GEN my
'I saw a taller woman than my mother is.'

Tensed clauses

- (8) *S'agapo perissotero **tis** **Marias**.
I.love.you more the.GEN Mary.GEN
'I love you more than Mary.'

Greek phrasal comparative pattern

- genitive PP (KP): K head takes a single DP complement - no tense specification possible - no ambiguity
- tenseless - tenseless match satisfied - reconstruction of a predicative relation with adjectival predicate always possible

A special hybrid comparative in Greek

- (9) Eida mia gynaiika psiloteri **apo ti mitera mou.**
saw.1SG a woman taller from the.ACC mother my
'I saw a taller woman than my mother.'
(preference: 'than my mother is' > 'than my mother saw')

Subject/object ambiguity

- (10) S'agapo perissotero **apo ti** **mitera mou.**
I.love.you more from the.ACC mother my
'I love you more than my mother.'

Towards the analysis

adopting the analysis of Merchant (2009): P head *apo* takes a CP complement

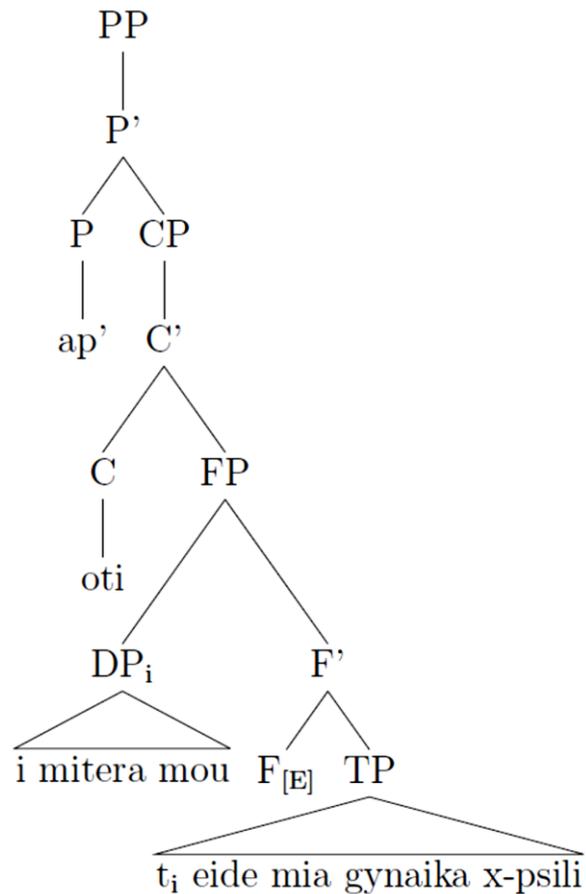
- *ap'oti* is a complex form involving a preposition *ap'*, a shortened form of *apo*, and the relativiser *oti*, which otherwise occurs in free relatives
- *ap'* takes a CP, which hosts *oti* in its specifier; remnant (if there is ellipsis) moves to an FP below the CP, no further movement to CP/PP
- *apo* also takes a CP, which contains no visible element, and the remnant DP moves up to the specifier of the PP; *apo* moves up to a higher p head position

Status of the relativiser

different assumption regarding the status of *oti* : a C head, not an operator (\leftrightarrow Merchant 2009) - *oti* licensed even in cases where it cannot be the degree operator itself, and there is only one comparative/relative operator (cf. Bacskai-Atkari 2014a, 2014c for a similar argumentation for German *wie* 'as/how') - subcomparatives (Giannakidou & Yoon 2011)

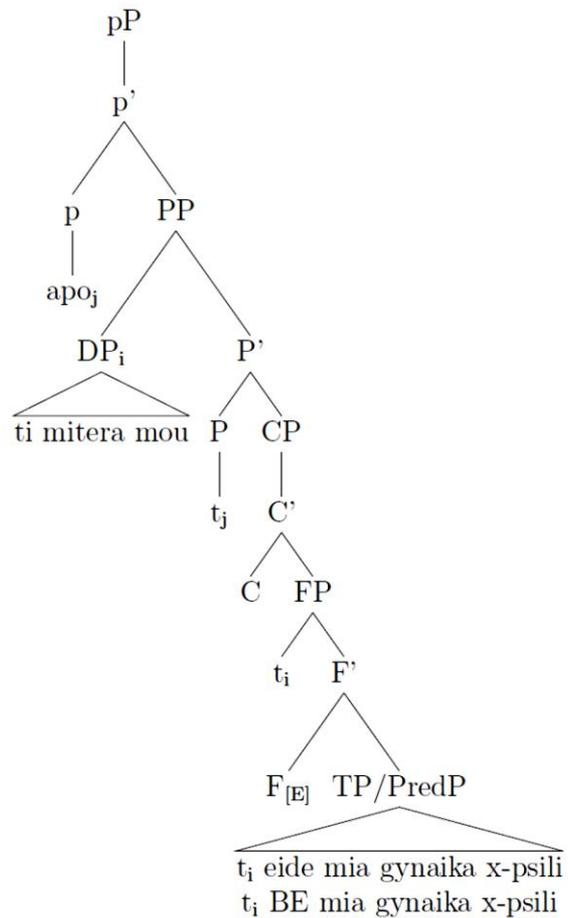
Structure with *ap'*

(11)



Structure with *apo*

(12)



Question 1

why *apo* but not *ap'* moves up to p

- *apo* moves from P to p anyway: more general property (cf. Lechner & Anagnostopoulou 2005)
- *ap'* is a clitic that cliticises onto the C head
- *apo* moves to p in order to assign case to its complement DP, which is located in [Spec,PP]

Question 2

why the DP moves up to PP with *apo* but not with *ap'*

- both P heads are [+comparative], which is a feature passed on to the C head of the complement, on which it is interpretable - CP selected because of the [+comparative] nature
- P heads otherwise select a nominal complement
- *ap'* selects a CP containing *oti*, which makes the CP [+nominal], as a headless relative clause
- *apo* selects a CP without *oti*, which is not a free relative clause (no such requirement on comparative subclauses in general) - the nominal argument of the P head can be realised only by upward movement of the DP to the [Spec,PP] position, and the P head *apo* moves up to p, hence the DP argument is within its complement

Question 3

why a PredP is licensed under *apo* but not under *ap'*

- no nominative case assigned within PredP
- external case assignment available only with *apo* because it attracts the DP to the PP; with *ap'*, the DP would remain in the CP and caseless

Question 4

so why are *ap'oti*-comparatives not ambiguous and *apo*-comparatives ambiguous in constructions like (1)

- no PredP licensed under *ap'oti* due to case-assignment requirements; TP for predicative relation in (1) not available either because no tense antecedent in the matrix clause, and only recoverable material can be elided (cf. Merchant 2001)
- with *apo*, both a TP and a PredP possible since the DP moves up to the PP anyway; PredP-reconstruction is more faithful to the surface pattern, no case reassignment involved (hence some preference probably)

Conclusion

potentially ambiguous comparative constructions in Greek - three types of comparatives

- true clausal comparatives with *ap'oti* 'than': not ambiguous - tensed clause licensed to be reconstructed only with an underlying lexical verb, no external case assignment
- true phrasal comparatives with the genitive - not ambiguous, only tenseless relation recoverable (limited)
- mixed phrasal comparatives with *apo* 'from' - ambiguous, obligatorily elliptical clause either tensed or tenseless, remnant moves up to PP and is assigned accusative case

Thank you!
Danke!

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