

# Structural Ambiguity and Case Assignment in Hungarian Clausal and Phrasal Comparatives

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# Introduction

elliptical comparatives:

- (1) a. I am taller than **Mary**.  
b. I am taller than [~~x-tall~~] Mary is [~~x-tall~~].

# Hungarian

both clausal and phrasal comparatives

- (2) a. Magasabb vagyok, **mint** (amilyen magas) Mari (volt).  
taller am than how tall Mary was  
'I am taller than Mary (was).'
- b. Magasabb vagyok **Marinál**.  
taller am Mary.ADE  
'I am taller than Mary.'

# Type I constructions

(3) I love you more than **my brother**.

SUBJECT READING: 'I love you more than my brother loves you.'

OBJECT READING: 'I love you more than I love my brother.'

# Type II constructions

(4) I saw a taller woman than **my mother**.

LEXICAL READING: 'I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.'

PREDICATIVE READING: 'I saw a taller woman than my mother is.'



# Theory

two major ways of accounting for ambiguities:

- clausal analysis - case-syncretic remnants ambiguous  
see Bresnan (1973), Lechner (2004)
- phrasal analysis - no underlying structural differences  
see Hankamer (1973)

# Ambiguity and case assignment with single predicates

English:

(5) I love you more than **my brother**.

SUBJECT READING: 'I love you more than my brother loves you.'

OBJECT READING: 'I love you more than I love my brother.'

# English pronominal pattern

(6) a. ?I love you more than **he**.

‘I love you more than he loves you.’

b. I love you more than **him**.

‘I love you more than he loves you.’

‘I love you more than I love him.’



# German

ambiguity:

- (7) Ich liebe dich mehr als **meine** **Schwester**.  
I.NOM love.1SG you.ACC more than my.F.NOM/ACC sister  
'I love you more than my sister.'

# German

case distinction:

(8) a. Ich liebe dich mehr als **mein** **Bruder**.  
I.NOM love.1SG you.ACC more than my.M.NOM brother  
'I love you more than my brother loves you.'

b. Ich liebe dich mehr als **meinen** **Bruder**.  
I.NOM love.1SG you.ACC more than my.M.ACC brother  
'I love you more than I love my brother.'

# Hungarian clausal comparatives

case distinction:

- (9) a. Jobban szeretlek, mint **Márk**.  
better love.1SG than Mark.NOM  
'I love you more than Mark loves you.'
- b. Jobban szeretlek, mint **Márkot**.  
better love.1SG than Mark.ACC  
'I love you more than I love Mark.'

# Case ambiguity in Hungarian

only with possessives:

(10) a. Látom Mari-**t**/\*Mari-**Ø**.

see.1SG Mary-ACC

‘I can see Mary.’

b. Látom az anyám-**at**/anyám-**Ø**.

see.1SG the mother.POSS.1SG-ACC

‘I can see my mother.’



# Elliptical comparatives

no ambiguity:

- (11) a. Jobban szeretlek, mint **a bátyám**.  
better love.1SG than the brother.POSS.1SG.NOM  
'I love you more than Mark loves you.'
- b. \*Jobban szeretlek, mint **a bátyám-Ø**.  
better love.1SG than the brother.POSS.1SG-ACC  
# 'I love you more than Mark loves you.'
- c. Jobban szeretlek, mint **a bátyám-at**.  
better love.1SG than the brother.POSS.1SG-ACC  
'I love you more than I love Mark.'



# Hungarian phrasal comparatives

ambiguity:

(12) Jobban szeretlek **Márknál**.

better love.1SG Mark.1SG.ADE

‘I love you more than Mark.’

# PP as a focus

(13) **Márknál** szeretlek jobban.

Mark.1SG.ADE love.1SG better

‘I love you more than MARK.’

# PP as a contrastive topic

(14) **Márknál** jobban szeretlek.

Mark.1SG.ADE better love.1SG

‘As for Mark, I love you more than he loves you / than I love him.’

# PP as a distributive phrase

(15) **Márknál** is jobban szeretlek.

Mark.1SG.ADE too better love.1SG

‘I love you even more than Mark.’

# Summary for Type I

- Germanic: pattern predictable from general case-assignment properties
  - both ambiguity and disambiguation
- Hungarian clausal comparatives: strict case distinction (stricter than generally)
- Hungarian phrasal comparatives: ambiguity



# Ambiguity and case assignment with two predicates

English:

(16) I saw a taller woman than **my mother**.

LEXICAL READING: 'I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.'

PREDICATIVE READING: 'I saw a taller woman than my mother is.'

# English pronominal pattern

- (17) a. ?I saw a taller woman than **she**.  
‘I saw a taller woman than she saw.’
- b. I saw a taller woman than **her**.  
‘I saw a taller woman than she is.’

# German

ambiguity:

(18) Ich habe eine größere Frau als **meine**  
I have a.F.ACC taller.F.ACC woman than my.F.NOM/ACC  
**Mutter** gesehen.  
mother seen

‘I saw a taller woman than my mother.’

# German

case distinction:

- (19) a. Ich habe einen größeren Mann als **mein**  
I have a.M.ACC taller.M.ACC man than my.M.NOM  
**Vater** gesehen.  
father seen  
'I saw a taller man than my father saw.'
- b. Ich habe einen größeren Mann als **meinen**  
I have a.M.ACC taller.M.ACC man than my.M.ACC  
**Vater** gesehen.  
father seen  
'I saw a taller man than my father is.'

# German predicative comparatives

- (20) a. Ralf ist größer als **er**.  
Ralph is taller than he.NOM  
'Ralph is taller than he is.'
- b. \*Ralf ist größer als **ihn**.  
Ralph is taller than he.ACC  
'Ralph is taller than he is.'



# Hungarian clausal comparatives

ambiguity:

- (21) a. Láttam egy magasabb nőt, mint **az anyám.**  
saw.1SG a taller woman than the mother.POSS.NOM  
'I saw a taller woman than my mother.'
- b. Láttam egy magasabb nőt, mint **Liza.**  
saw.1SG a taller woman than Liz.NOM  
'I saw a taller woman than Liz.'

# Hungarian clausal comparatives

no accusative available:

- (22) a. \*Láttam egy magasabb nőt, mint **az anyámat**.  
saw.1SG a taller woman than the mother.POSS.ACC  
'I saw a taller woman than my mother.'
- b. \*Láttam egy magasabb nőt, mint **Lizát**.  
saw.1SG a taller woman than Liz.ACC  
'I saw a taller woman than Liz.'

# Hungarian phrasal comparatives

unambiguously predicative reading:

- (23) Láttam egy magasabb nőt **az anyámnál.**  
saw.1SG a taller woman.ACC the mother.POSS.1SG.ADE  
'I saw a taller woman than my mother is.'

# Preposed DP

- (24) Egy magasabb nőt láttam **az anyámnál**.  
a taller woman.ACC saw.1SG the mother.POSS.1SG.ADE  
'I saw a taller woman than my mother is.'

# PP as a focus

- (25) <sup>??/\*</sup> **Az anyámnál** láttam egy magasabb nőt.  
the mother.POSS.1SG.ADE saw.1SG a taller woman.ACC  
# 'I saw a taller woman than my mother is.'



# PP as a contrastive topic

- (26) ?**Az anyámnál** láttam magasabb nőt.  
the mother.POSS.1SG.ADE saw.1SG taller woman.ACC  
'I saw a taller woman than my mother is.'

# Degree semantics and tense

comparative semantics: degree in the matrix clause ( $d$ )  
binds another degree ( $d'$ )

e.g. *taller than x-tall*:  $d > d'$  (where *-er* carries  $d$ ,  $x$  carries  $d'$ )

# Semantics of Type I

(27) Alex loves Sam more than **Jay**.

LOVE(a,s)

(i) LOVE(**j**,s)

(ii) LOVE(a,**j**)

# Semantics of Type II

(28) Alex saw a taller woman than **Mary**.

SEE(a, woman) & TALL(woman, d) (i) SEE(**m**, woman) & TALL(woman, d')

(ii) TALL(**m**, d')

# Tense distinction in Type II

verbal predication is tensed, adjectival predication is tenseless

→ PP complement in phrasal comparatives is also tenseless

→ accusative in reduced clauses ← clause is defective  
(Bacskai-Atkari 2014b)

small clause: lacks a tense layer - hence also tenseless

→ there is a match in Type II constructions (tensed vs. tenseless)



# Ellipsis in Hungarian comparatives

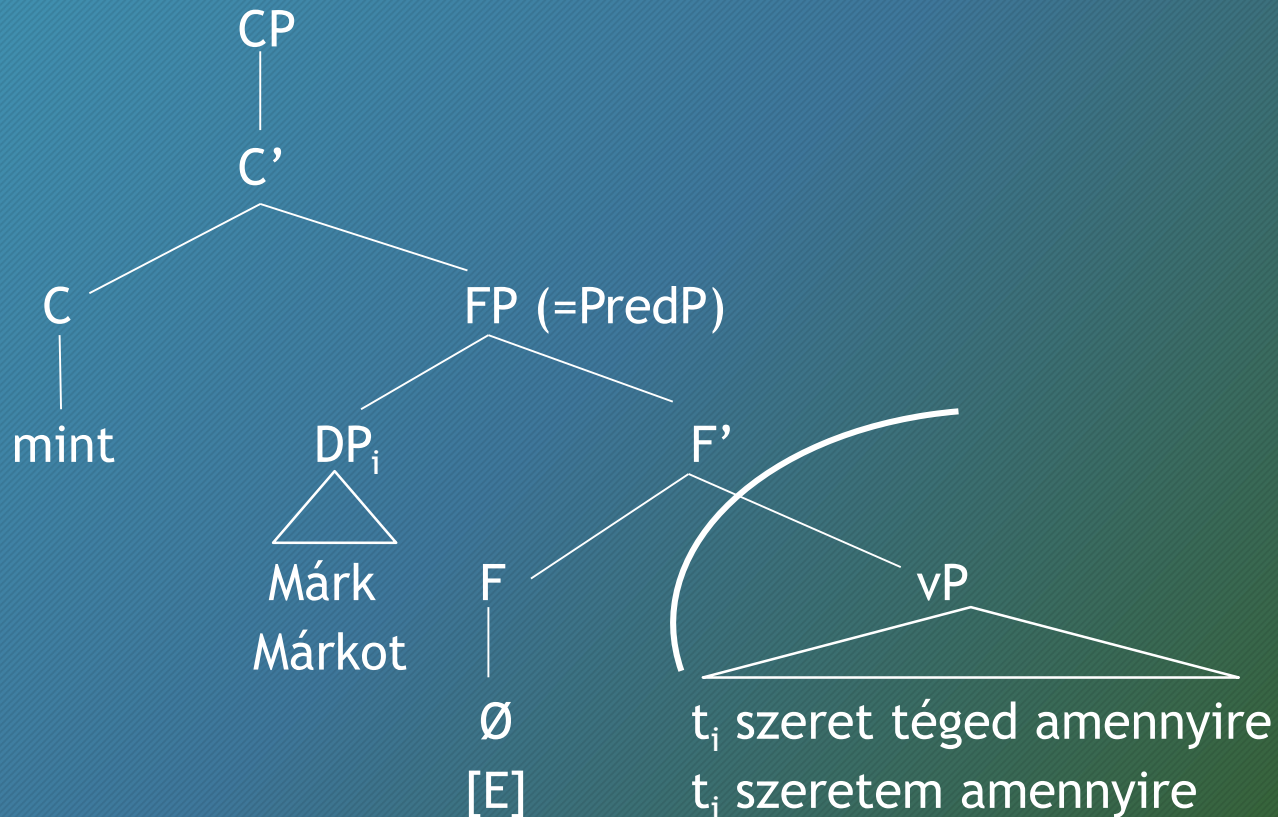
Type I: regular ellipsis mechanisms (cf. Bacskai-Atkari 2014a)

(29) a. Jobban szeretlek, mint **Márk** szeret ~~téged~~ amennyire.  
better love.1SG than Mark.NOM loves you.ACC how.much  
'I love you more than Mark loves you.'

b. Jobban szeretlek, mint **Márkot** szeretem amennyire.  
better love.1SG than Mark.ACC love.1SG how.much  
'I love you more than I love Mark.'

# Ellipsis in Type I

(30)



# Type II ambiguities in Germanic

- lexical reading: regular ellipsis with subject remnant in a tensed clause, subject DP in [Spec,TP]
  - predicative reading: no TP, only PredP, subject in [Spec,PredP] - no ellipsis, as the degree predicate is deleted anyway (Comparative Deletion)
- C may select TP or PredP (FP) in Germanic

# Ellipsis in Hungarian

Hungarian: C selects PredP (FP) anyway

if a (tensed) copula is present, it is located lower than the F (in a v)

- (31) a. \*Mari magasabb **volt**, mint Márk **volt**.  
Mary taller was.3SG than Mark was.3SG  
'Mary was taller than Mark was.'
- b. Mari magasabb, mint Márk **volt**.  
Mary taller than Mark was.3SG  
'Mary is taller than Mark was.'

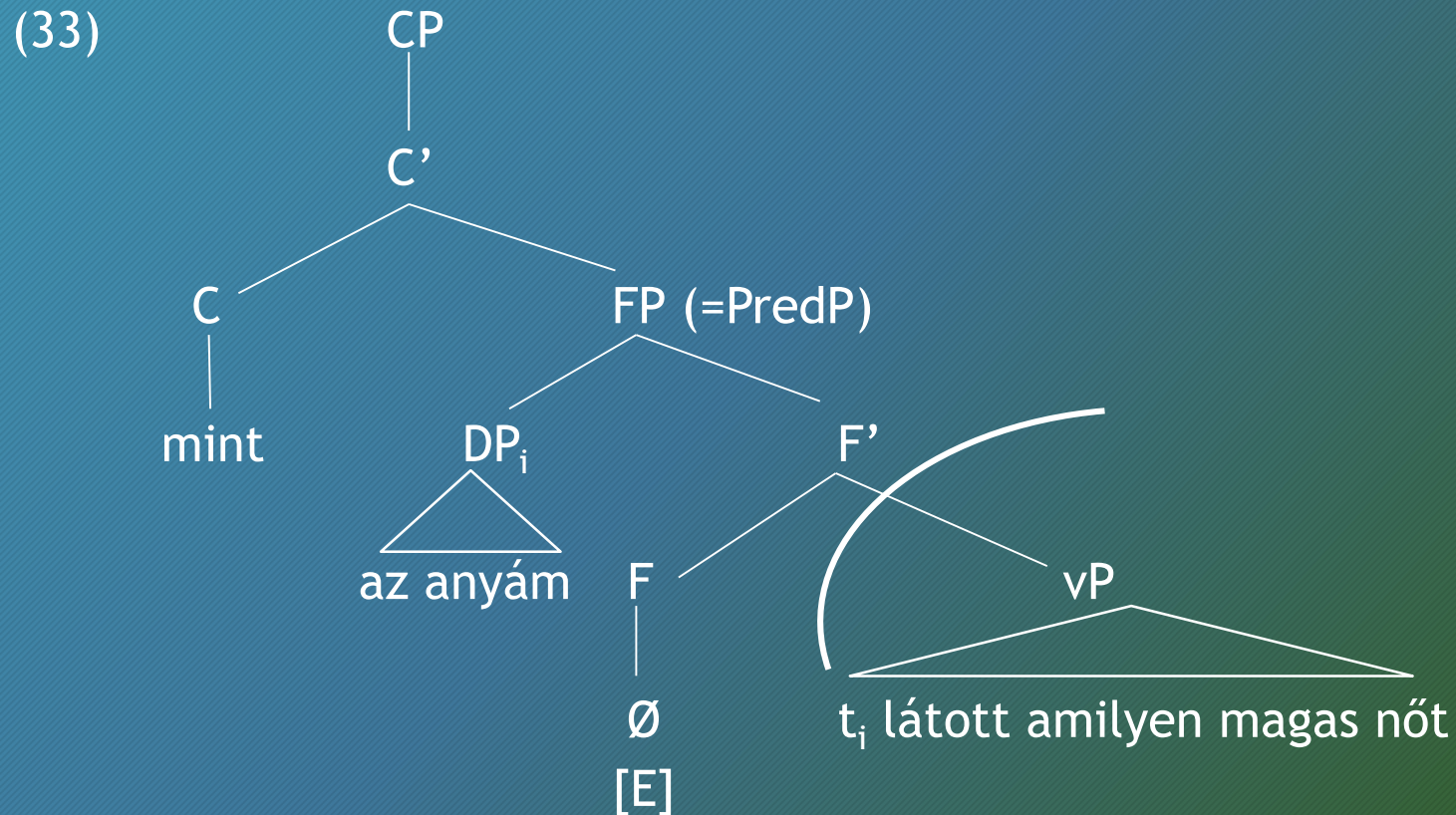


# Type II in Hungarian

- (32) a. Láttam egy magasabb nőt, mint **az anyám**  
saw.1SG a taller woman.ACC than the mother.POSS.1SG.NOM  
~~látott—amilyen—magas—nőt.~~  
saw.3SG how tall woman.ACC  
'I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.'
- b. Láttam egy magasabb nőt, mint **az anyám**  
saw.1SG a taller woman.ACC than the mother.POSS.1SG.NOM  
~~amilyen—magas.~~  
how tall  
'I saw a taller woman than my mother is.'

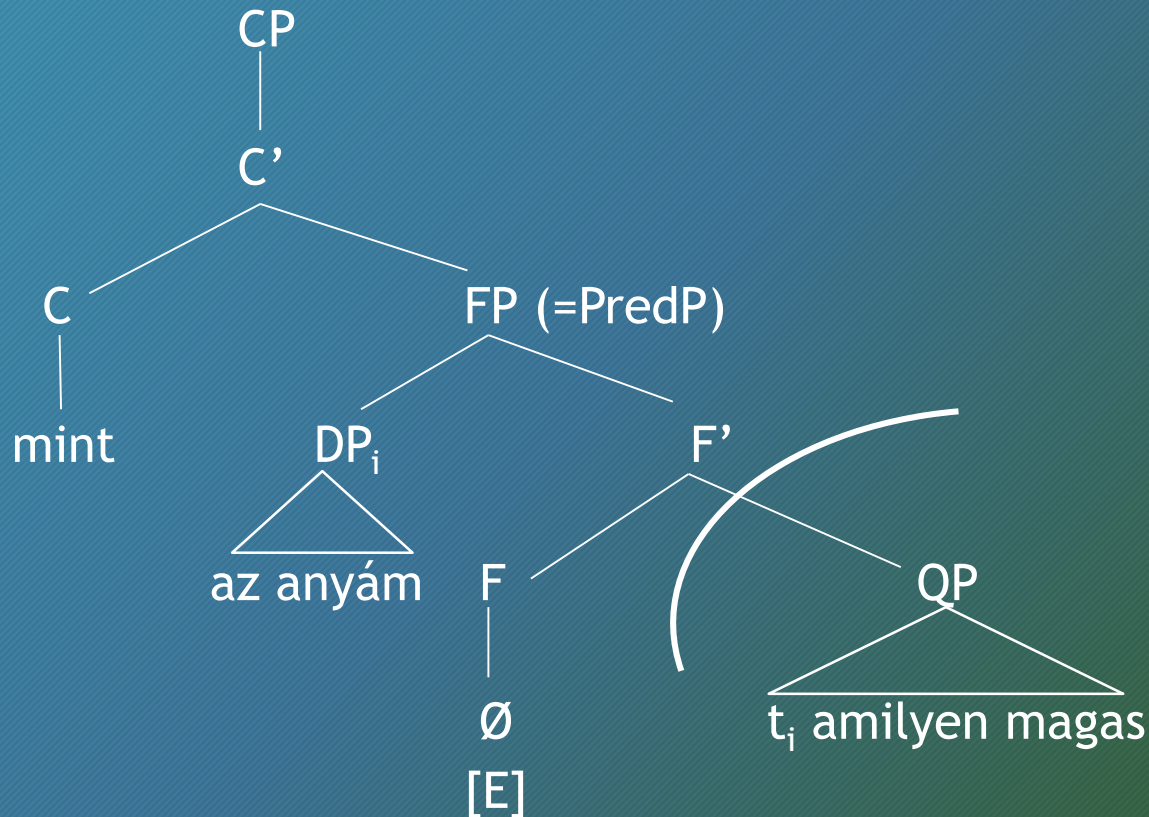


# Ellipsis with lexical readings



# Ellipsis with predicative readings

(34)



# So...

no selectional differences for the C, and no accusative in Hungarian clausal comparatives

→ ambiguity

↔ phrasal comparatives are PPs, hence tenseless

→ no difference in subject/object ambiguities, but clear choice of tenseless reading over tensed one

# Conclusion

structural ambiguities in clausal and phrasal comparatives

- subject/object readings: in line with case assignment properties
- lexical/predicative readings: dependent on tensed/tenseless distinction

# Summary

	Germanic (English, German, Icelandic)	Hungarian	
	CP	CP	PP
<b>subject/object ambiguities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ ambiguity</li> <li>✓ disambiguation</li> </ul>	✓ disambiguation	✓ ambiguity
subject reading	remnant DP nominative OR accusative if default accusative case	remnant DP nominative	inherent lexical case
object reading	remnant DP accusative	remnant DP accusative	inherent lexical case
<b>lexical/predicative ambiguities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ ambiguity</li> <li>✓ disambiguation</li> </ul>	✓ ambiguity	✓ disambiguation
lexical reading	remnant DP nominative	remnant DP nominative	inherent lexical case
predicative reading	remnant DP accusative	remnant DP nominative	inherent lexical case



# Factors determining ambiguities

- type of the degree complement (CP or PP)
- general case-assignment properties of the language (distinction vs. syncretism)
- general rules of tensed vs. small clause formation

Thank you!  
Bedankt!



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