

# Identity and Comparative Deletion

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# Introduction

Comparative Deletion (CD) in English:

(1) Mary is taller than Peter is **tall**.

explanations based on syntactic isomorphism  
(e.g. Bresnan 1973, Lechner 2004)

- elided degree expression (*x-tall*) in the same syntactic position as its antecedent (*taller*)
- problematic for several reasons

# Proposal

CD primarily linked to an overttness requirement on left peripheral elements

→ recoverability of an elided degree expression is contingent upon the position of that degree expression only as far as its semantic scope is concerned

# Comparative Deletion and the overttness requirement

- comparative subclauses: *wh*-movement of a degree expression to a [Spec, CP] position

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

degree expression:

a QP or a DP modified by a QP

- comparative operator: a relative operator [+rel] and [+compr]  
either visible or invisible

# Overttness requirement

overt lexical XPs in [Spec,CP] licensed only if the operator is overt

→ Comparative Deletion attested in languages that have a covert operator

# Copies

one in [Spec,CP] and one in its base position

- higher copy deleted because of the overttness requirement
- lower copy realised overtly only if it is contrastive (cf. Bacsikai-Atkari 2012)

# Standard English

- (2) a. Mary is taller than ~~[x-tall]~~ Peter is ~~[x-tall]~~.
- b. The table is longer than ~~[x-wide]~~ the office is [x-**wide**].

# In some dialects of English...

*what* (cf. Chomsky 1977) and *how*

- (3) a. Mary is taller  
than **[what]** Peter is [~~what~~].
- b. Mary is taller  
than **[how tall]** Peter is [~~how tall~~].
- c. The table is longer  
than **[how wide]** the office is [~~how wide~~].



# Dutch

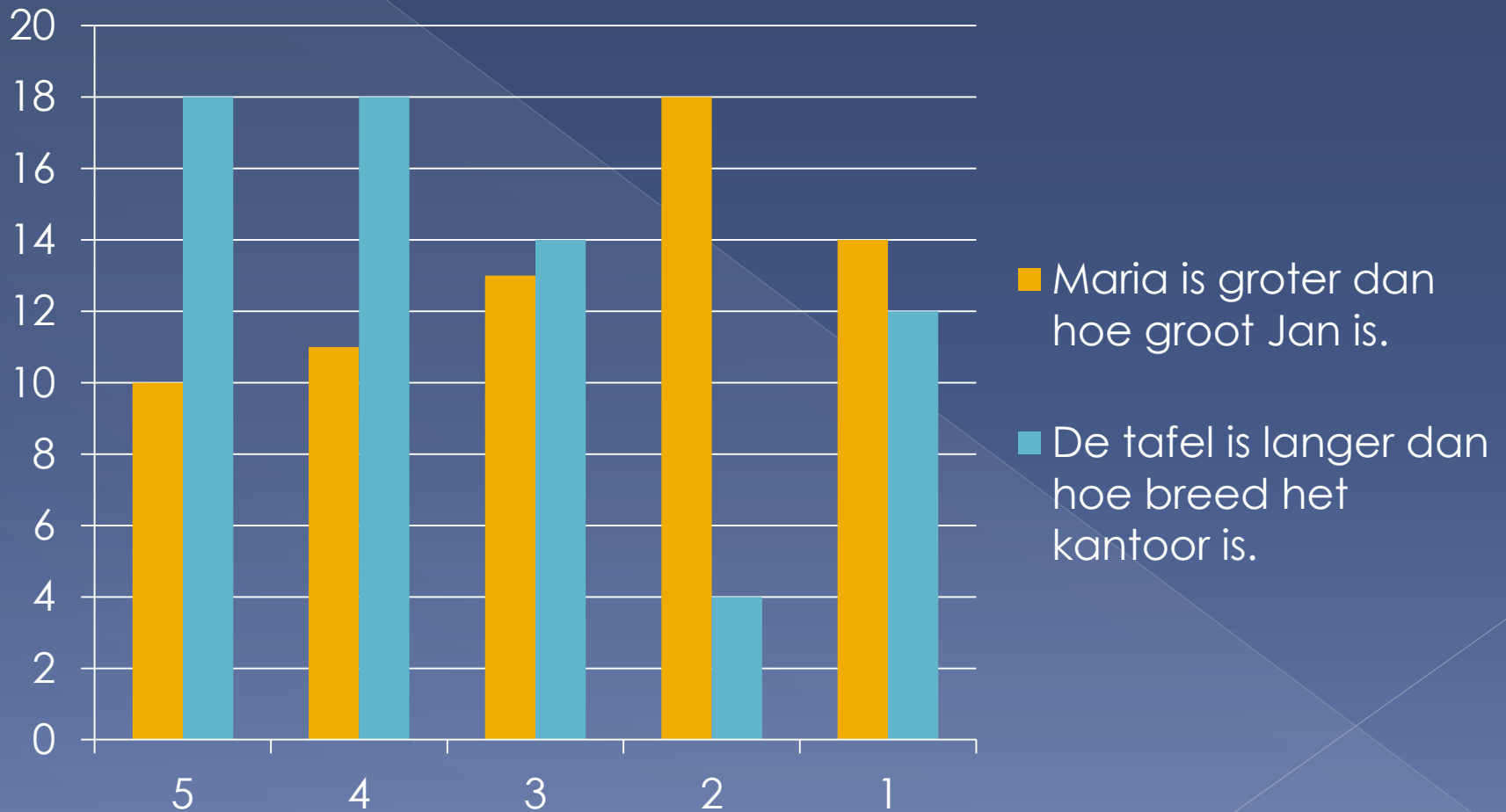
hoe 'how' acceptable for some speakers

- (4) a. Maria is groter  
Mary is taller  
dan **hoe groot** Jan is.  
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.'

# Study (online)

- 66 speakers
- acceptability marked from 5 to 1
- *hoe* + AP:
  - (4a) accepted by 15%
  - (4b) accepted by 27%

# Results



# Hungarian

*amilyen* 'how':

(5) a. Mari magasabb, mint **amilyen magas**  
Mary taller than how tall  
Péter.  
Peter  
'Mary is taller than Peter.'

b. Az asztal hosszabb, mint **amilyen széles** az  
the table longer than how wide the  
iroda.  
office  
'The table is longer than the office is wide.'

# Comparative Deletion

overttness requirement

# Isomorphism and ellipsis

comparative subclauses tend to exhibit other ellipsis processes as well:

(6) Mary is taller than ~~[x-tall]~~ Peter is ~~[x-tall]~~.

# Syntactic isomorphism

analyses built on syntactic isomorphism  
(e.g. Lechner 2004):

- any elided constituent is logically identical to its matrix clausal antecedent
- the syntactic structure of the matrix clause is exactly the same as that of the subclause

# Problem

*wh*-movement → asymmetric structure

- ◉ degree expression in the matrix clause does not undergo *wh*-movement
- ◉ degree expression in the subclause moves before spell-out
  - cf. Kennedy (2002) for structures like (5)  
but not for subcomparatives like (2b)



# Extraction islands

e.g. complex NP islands, cf. Kennedy (2002)

(7) a. \*Liz has more cats  
than Martha is [a linguist who has].

b. \*Liz has more cats  
than Martha is [a linguist who has dogs].

→ movement irrespectively of whether the lower copy is contrastive or not

# Wh-movement

- cannot be sensitive to the information structural properties of the lexical AP/NP  
↔ Kennedy (2002)

- if it can take place covertly, then non-contrastive lower copies should be licensed:

- (8) a. \*Mary is taller than Peter is tall.  
b. The table is longer than the office is wide.

So...

- movement prior to spellout irrespectively of whether the AP/NP is contrastive or not
- deletion of the degree expression in [Spec,CP] cannot be conditioned by isomorphism

# Problem

different word order – German:

- (9) a. Die Katze **war** **dicker** als ~~x-groß~~ die  
the.FEM cat was.3SG fatter than x-big the.FEM  
Katzenklappe **x-groß** **ist**.  
cat flap x-big is  
'The cat was fatter than the cat flap is wide.'
- b. Die Katze **ist** **dicker** als ~~x-dick~~ der  
the.FEM cat is fatter than x-fat the.MASC  
Hund ~~x-dick~~ ~~ist~~.  
dog x-fat is  
'The cat is fatter than the dog.'

# German

ellipsis possible but no syntactic  
isomorphism

↔ Lechner (2004)

# Ambiguity and ellipsis

ellipsis may result in ambiguity:

(10) I love you more than Mark.

# Syntactic identity

analyses based on syntactic identity

(e.g. Lechner 2004)

two possible structures

(11) a. I love you more than Mark ~~loves you x-much~~.

b. I love you more than ~~I love~~ Mark ~~x-much~~.

# Problems...

- ⦿ *wh*-movement
- ⦿ deleting discontinuous constituents



But...

other types of syntactic ambiguities:

(12) I saw a taller woman than my mother.

# Two readings

- (13) a. I saw a taller woman  
than my mother saw ~~[an x-tall woman]~~.
- b. I saw a taller woman  
than my mother is ~~[an x-tall woman]~~.

→ reconstruction of a non-identical string in (13b)

→ recoverability condition:  
semantic and not syntactic

# Entailment

- ⦿ *I saw a tall woman* entails that *I saw x* and that *x was a tall woman*
- ⦿ elided string may be semantically parallel to the entire proposition or only to part of it
- ⦿ only overt element (the DP *my mother*) may be semantically parallel with either *I* or *x*

# Entailment

- (14) a. Mary hit Susan and Mark hit Bill too.  
b. Mary hit Susan and Mark hurt Bill too.  
c. # Mary hurt Susan and Mark hit Bill too.

$(\text{hit}(m,s)) \text{ ENTAILS } \exists x \exists y (\text{hit}(x,y))$

$(\text{hit}(m,s)) \text{ ENTAILS } \exists x \exists y (\text{hurt}(x,y))$

$(\text{hit}(m,s)) \text{ IS NOT ENTAILED BY } \exists x \exists y (\text{hurt}(x,y))$

# Ellipsis

- (15) a. Mary hit Susan and Mark ~~hit~~ Bill.  
b. # Mary hit Susan and Mark ~~hurt~~ Bill.  
c. # Mary hurt Susan and Mark ~~hit~~ Bill.

Merchant (2001): GIVENness in ellipsis  
domains (e-GIVENness)

mutual entailment between elided  
string and its antecedent

So...

entailment in (12):

(16) saw (I, woman) ENTAILS  $\exists x \exists y (\text{saw}(x, y))$

woman (tall, d) ENTAILS  $\exists y [\text{WOMAN}(y) \& \exists d [\text{TALL}(y, d)]]$

→ elided string in the subclause in (13): mutual entailment with either proposition

DP *my mother* semantically parallel with x or y

# Unambiguous structures, ellipsis, and semantic incongruence

lack of ambiguity:

(17) I saw a taller woman than my father.

DP *my father* may be semantically parallel only with x in (16)

otherwise: gender mismatch

# Syntax

syntactically both structures derivable, just as in (13):

(18) a. I saw a taller woman  
than my father ~~saw [an x-tall woman]~~.

b. # I saw a taller woman  
than my father ~~is [an x-tall woman]~~.

(18b) infelicitous ← gender mismatch (not a syntactic constraint)



# Problem

cf. Bresnan (1973)

(19) # I've never seen a taller woman than my father.

reason: DP *my father* cannot be semantically parallel to x in (16) ← negation in (19)

→ the only possible derivation is semantically incongruent (gender mismatch)

# By contrast...

cf. Bresnan (1973)

(20) I've never seen a woman taller than my father.

Bresnan (1973): difference between (19) and (20) due to different syntactic structure

parallelism between matrix clause and subclause

↔ no syntactic identity required, difference due to semantics

# Difference

in (19): (prenominal) attributive adjective  
(*taller*)

in (20): postnominal adjective (*taller*)  
essentially a reduced relative  
clause (cf. Larson 1998)

→ a predicate

# Predicative vs. attributive adjectives

- (21) a. Mary is tall.  
b. Mary is a tall woman.

semantics:

- (22) a.  $\exists d[\text{TALL}(\text{Mary}, d)]$   
b.  $\exists x[\text{WOMAN}(x) \& \exists d[\text{TALL}(x, d)]]$

So...

- in (19): attributive semantics in (22b)
  - *my father* necessarily a woman
- in (20): predicative semantics in (22a)
  - no gender restriction

# Degree semantics and the overttness of operators

matrix clausal degree element ( $d$ ) binds a degree  
operator ( $d'$ ) in the subordinate clause

operator moves to the [Spec, CP]

# Zero operator

associated with the same semantic type as its counterpart in the matrix clause

→ in constructions like (19) the elided degree expression cannot be predicative:

(23) # I've never seen a taller woman than my father.

# Overt operator

mismatch allowed

Hungarian:

- (24) Mari tegnap látott **egy magasabb férfit**,  
Mary yesterday saw a taller man-ACC  
mint **amilyen magas** az apám.  
than how tall the father-POSS.1SG  
'Yesterday Mary saw a man taller than my father.'



# Overt operator

no gender mismatch

- (25) Mari tegnap látott **egy magasabb nőt**,  
Mary yesterday saw a taller woman-ACC  
mint **amilyen magas** az apám.  
than how tall the father-POSS.1SG  
'Yesterday Mary saw a woman taller than my father.'

So...

semantically not incongruent to have  
degrees of two different types

# Conclusion

- Comparative Deletion: overttness requirement on operators  
attested in languages having a zero operator
- other ellipsis processes optional

# Conclusion

identity requirement:

- no syntactic identity required

either for the elimination of the degree expression  
or for other ellipsis

- semantic identity required

semantic parallelism for the degree expression  
(predicative/attributive adjective)

partial parallelism for other ellipsis processes

Thank you!



# References

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