

More on Ellipsis in English Comparatives (and Elsewhere)

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Comparative Deletion in English

- deletes the higher copy of the degree expression in a [Spec,CP] position (cf. Bacskaï-Atkari 2012)
→ only contrastive lower copies remain overt

- (1) a. Mary is taller than [~~tall~~] Peter is [~~tall~~].
b. The desk is longer than [~~wide~~] the office is [~~wide~~].

reason: lexical AP is licensed to appear in an operator position only if the operator is visible

Hungarian

- (2) a. Mari magasabb volt, mint [amilyen magas]
Mary taller was than how tall
Peti volt.
Peter was
'Mary was taller than Peter.'
- b. Az asztal hosszabb volt, mint [amilyen széles]
the desk longer was than how wide
az iroda volt.
the office was
'The desk was longer than the office was wide.'

Additional ellipsis processes

- (3) a. Mary bought more cats than Peter ~~bought cats~~.
b. Mary bought more cats than Peter did ~~buy cats~~.
c. Mary bought more cats than Peter bought dogs.
d. Mary bought more cats than Peter did ~~buy~~ dogs.

processes not specific to comparatives
(VP-ellipsis, gapping, pseudogapping)

Question

can the processes be reduced to a
uniform mechanism?

Possible answers...

- **if not:** the kind of ellipsis is dependent on information structural properties
e.g. (3b) is VP-ellipsis but (3d) is pseudo-gapping
- **if yes:** the ellipsis mechanism must allow for contrastive XPs to remain overt

Proposal

ellipsis carried out by an [E] feature on a
functional v or C head

(cf. Merchant 2001)

Proposal

- appearance on the highest possible head, otherwise unrestricted
- applies in a strict left-to-right fashion but contrastive XPs may stop it
- linked to prosody: contrastive XPs in different positions in the ellipsis domain
 - ← main stress assigned to the right or the left of the IntP
- linked to head-initial vs. head-final distinction

Gapping as VP-ellipsis

ellipsis of an entire VP versus ellipsis of a V head

- gapping is an instance of VP-ellipsis

Full structures (coordination)

- (4) a. George likes cats and Mike [_{VP} likes [_{DP} dogs]_F].
- b. George likes cats and Mike [_{VP} likes [_{DP} cats]]].

Ellipsis of the VP (stripping)

only if the DP is recoverable:

- (5) a. *George likes cats and Mike $\{\underset{\text{VP}}{\text{likes}} \underset{\text{DP}}{\text{dogs}}\}_{\text{F}}$ (too).
- b. George likes cats and Mike $\{\underset{\text{VP}}{\text{likes}} \underset{\text{DP}}{\text{cats}}\}$ too.

← deletion at PF cannot affect F-marked material

Gapping

only if the DP is F-marked:

- (6) a. George likes cats and Mike $\{\underset{\text{VP}}{\text{likes}} [{}_{\text{DP}} \text{dogs}]\}_F$.
- b. *George likes cats and Mike $\{\underset{\text{VP}}{\text{likes}} [{}_{\text{DP}} \text{cats}]\}$.

→ if gapping were a separate process targeting the V head, then (6b) should be grammatical

Proposal

linear ellipsis process proceeds from left to right, stops at an F-marked phrase

cf. Bacskai-Atkari (2012) and also Reich (2007)

on the left-to-right application cf. Bošković and Nunes (2007)

(6a): the F-marked DP *dogs* is a boundary \leftrightarrow (5b): entire VP elided

→ gapping not a separate mechanism

F-marked elements

F-marked element is the endpoint of ellipsis

- prosodically licensed: the constituent is also aligned to the right edge of an IntP

cf. Szendrői (2001), based on e.g. Selkirk (1984, 1986),
Nespor and Vogel (1986)

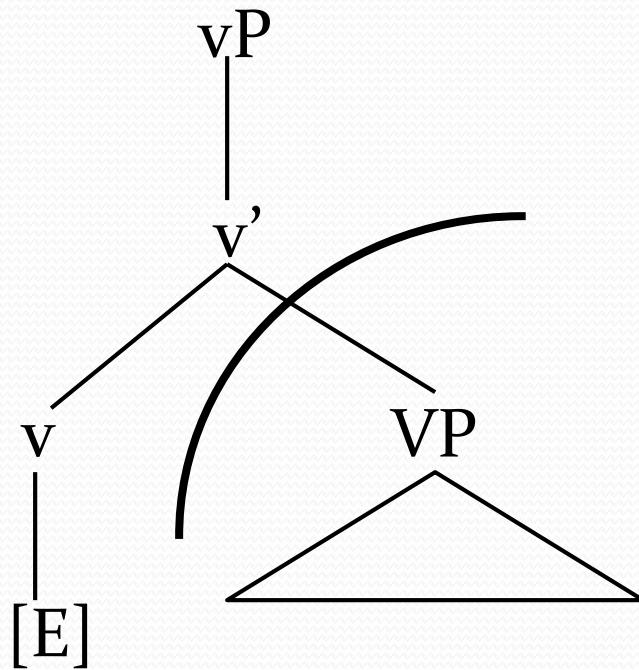
Feature-driven ellipsis and functional heads

ellipsis carried out by an [E] feature present on a functional head (Merchant 2001)

- ellipsis domain: complement of this functional head (in line with Merchant 2001)
- any element in the functional head escapes ellipsis (in line with Merchant 2001)
- F-marked constituents may withstand deletion (\leftrightarrow Merchant 2001)

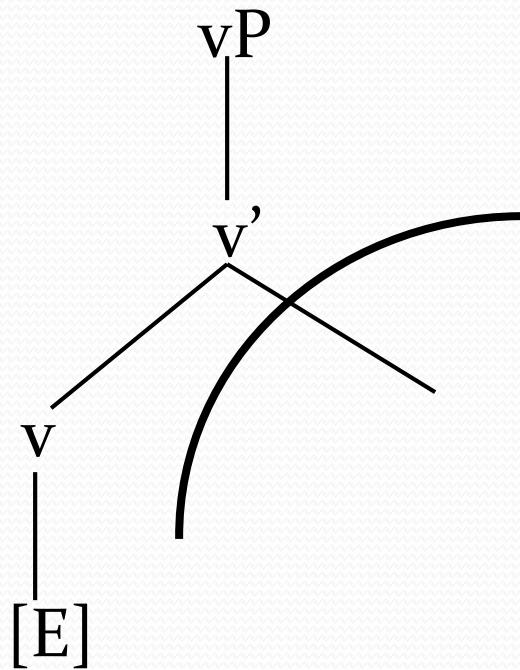
VP-ellipsis

(7)



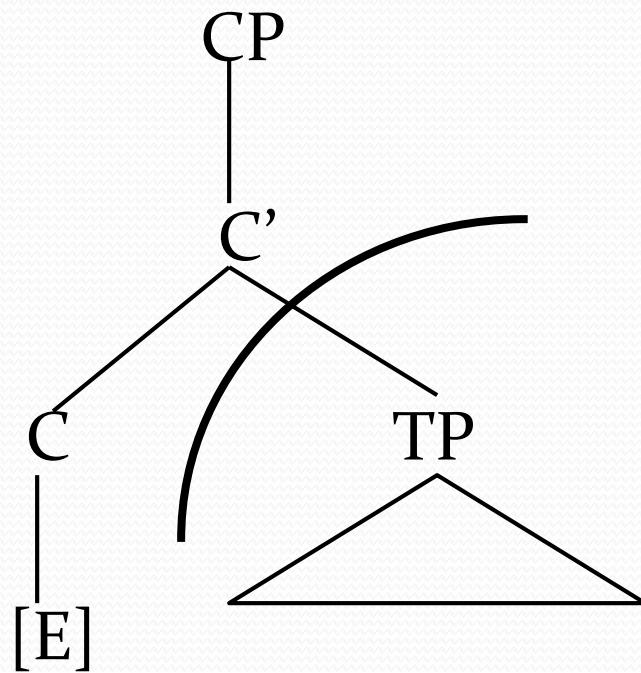
VP-ellipsis

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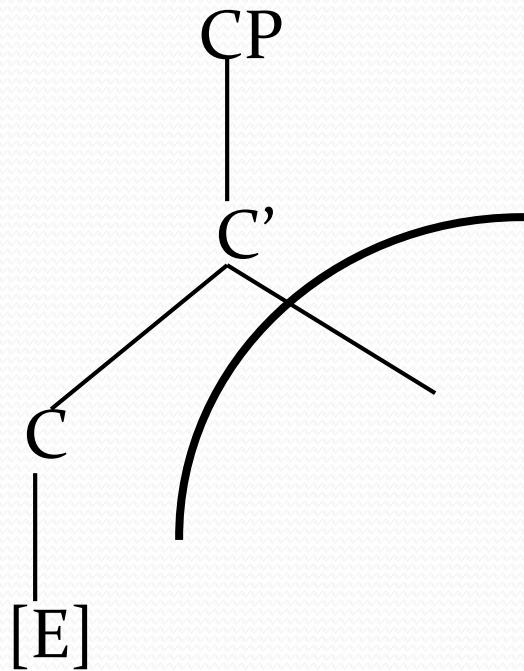
Sluicing

(8)



Sluicing

(8)



Ellipsis and information structure

- (9) a. $v_{[E]} \{_{VP} V [XP] \}$
b. $v_{[E]} \{_{VP} V [XP]_F \}$

→ information structure does not impose restrictions on
the appearance of the [E] feature

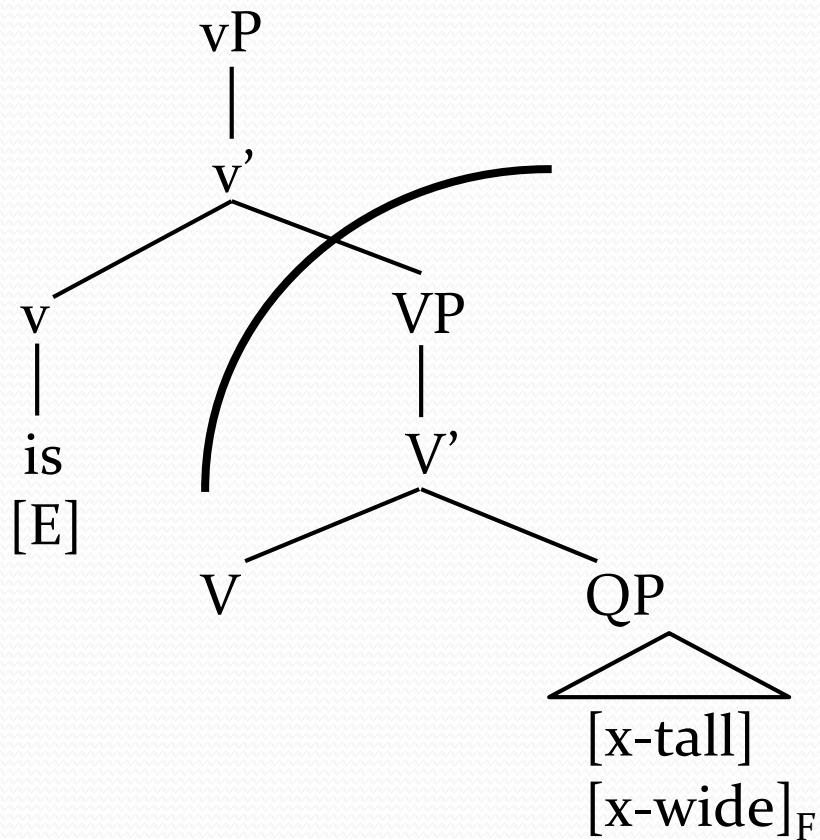
Ellipsis in English comparatives

- predicative structures:

- (10) a. Mary is taller than [~~tall~~] Peter is [~~tall~~].
- b. The desk is longer than [~~wide~~] the office is [~~wide~~].

Ellipsis domain

(11)



Position of the [E] feature

only the v head

no possible functional head between C and v
otherwise (12) would be acceptable:

- (12) *The table is longer than the office wide.

underlyingly:

- (13) *The table is longer than the office $X_{[E]}$ is [wide]_F.

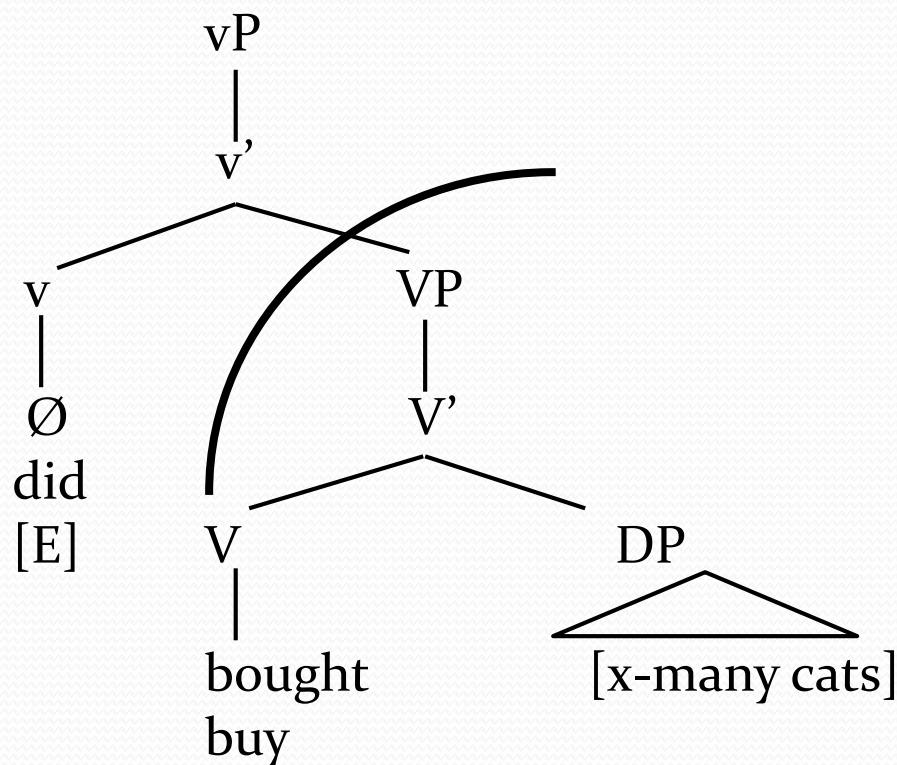
→ the [E] feature is licensed only on functional heads (v, C)

Nominal structures

- (14) a. George bought more cats
than ~~{x-many cats}~~ Mary bought ~~{x-many cats}~~.
- b. George bought more cats
than ~~{x-many cats}~~ Mary did buy ~~{x-many cats}~~.

Ellipsis domain

(15)



dummy auxiliary located outside the ellipsis domain

Different domains of ellipsis and syntactic ambiguity

Merchant (2008): preferable to elide the maximal largest unit

→ ellipsis domain can be the complement of C and v

- (16) Mary drank ale more often than sherry.

underlyingly:

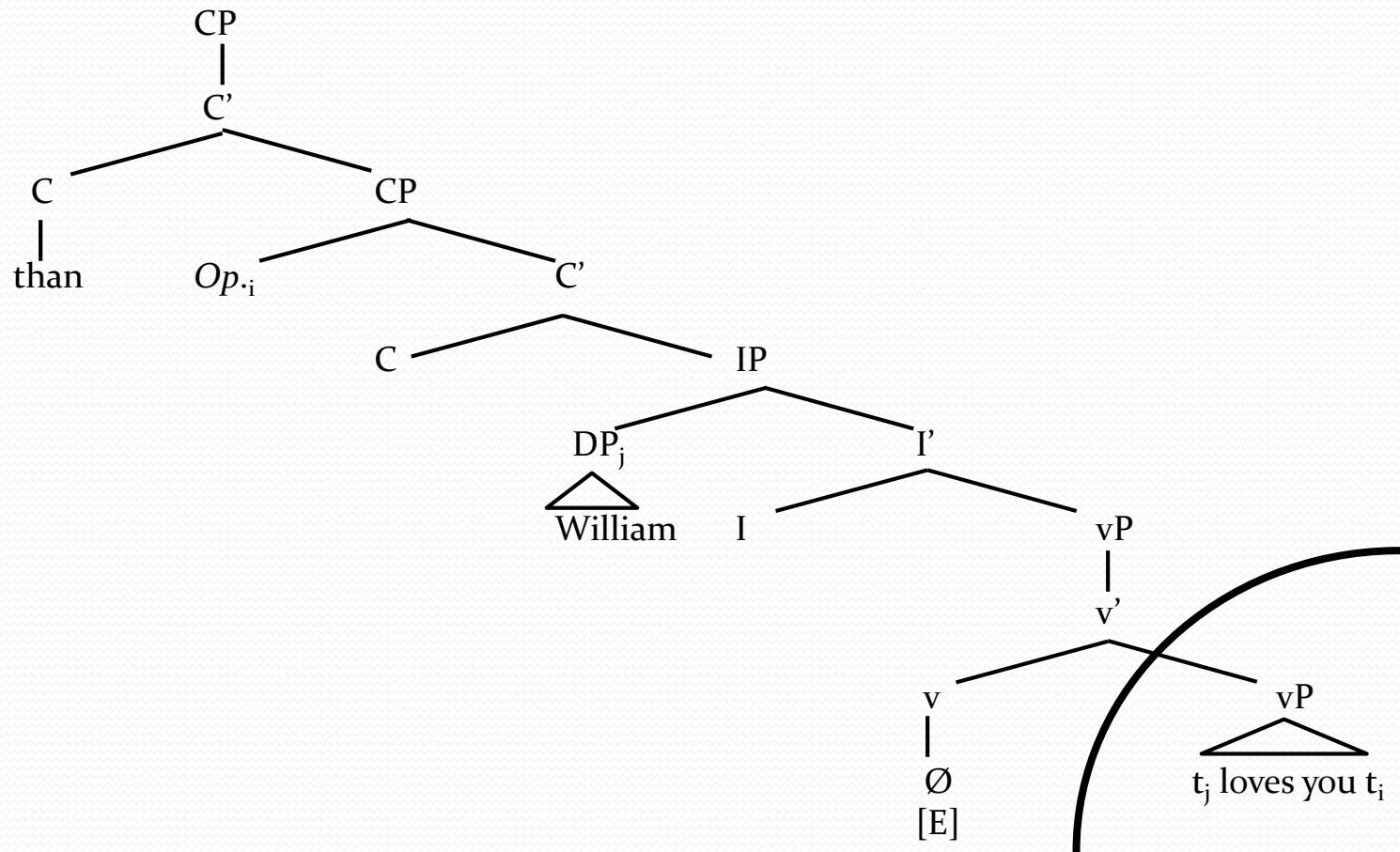
- (17) [_{CP} than [_{CP} {_{DP} ~~Op.~~ often} {_{IP} {_{DP} she}} {_{VP} drank [_{DP} sherry]_F}]])]

Ambiguity

- (18) a. I love you more than William.
 - b. I'm a linguist. I like ambiguity more than most people.
- different domains of ellipsis
- the DP *William* in (18a) can be a subject or an object

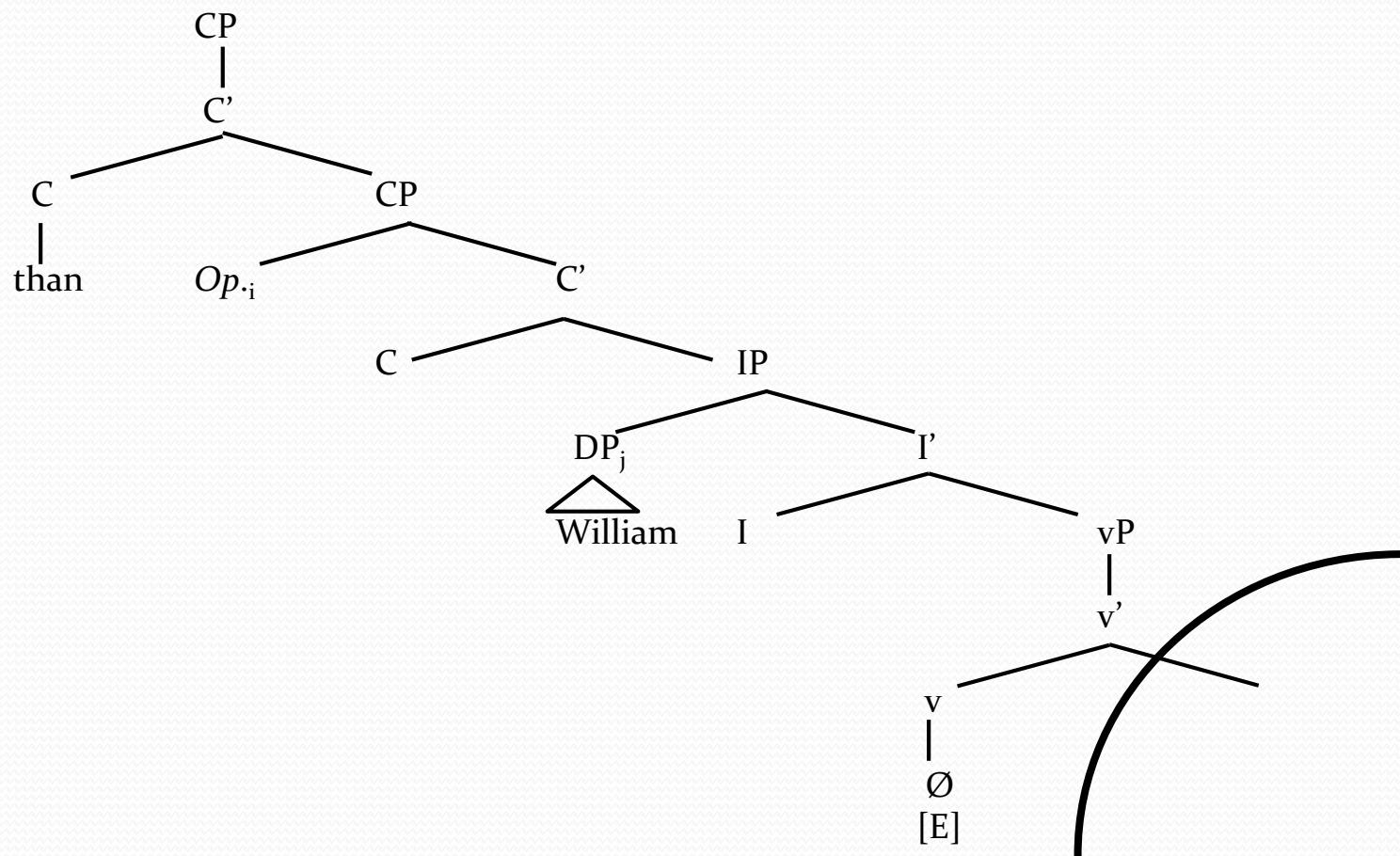
Subject

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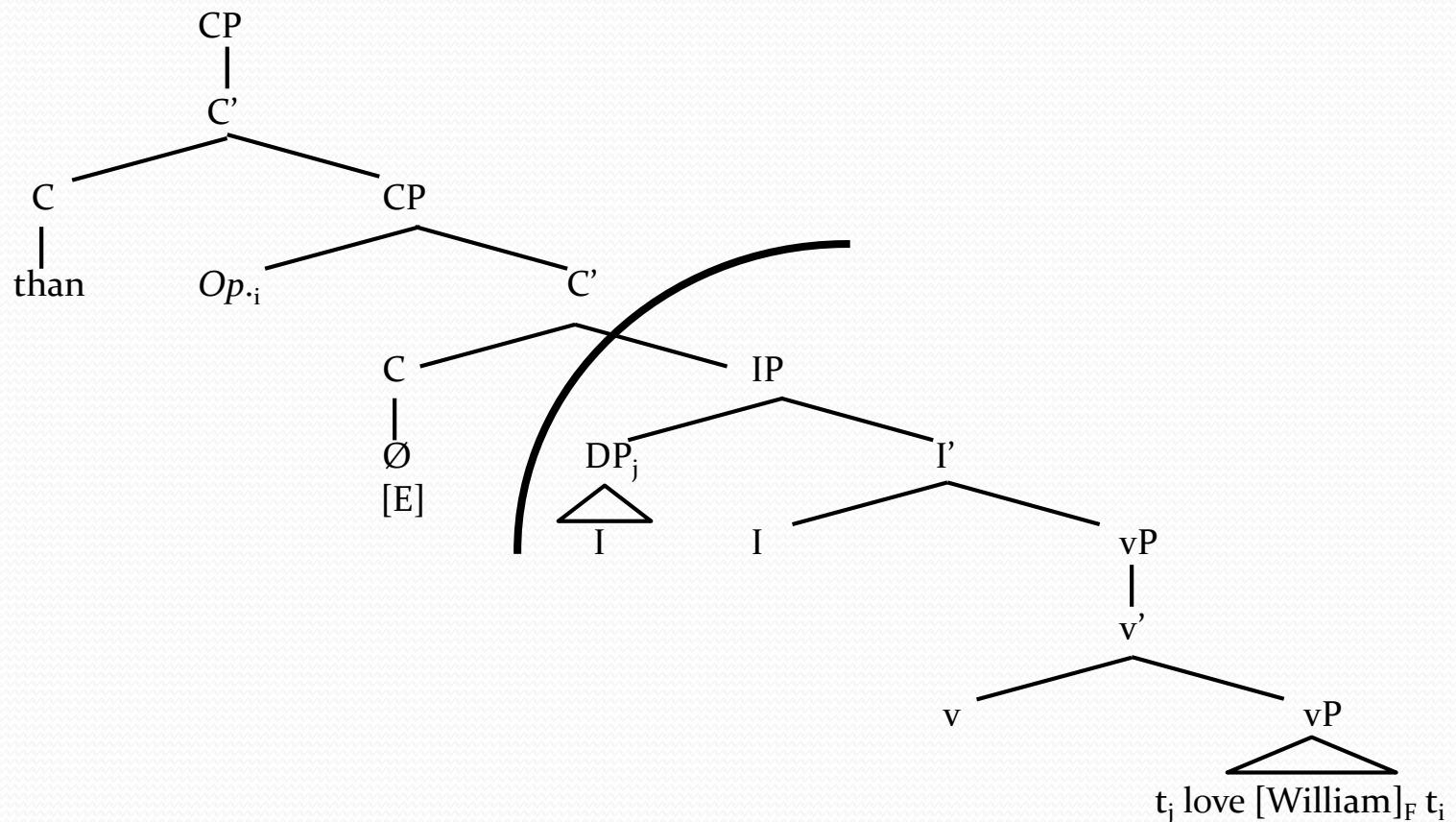
Subject

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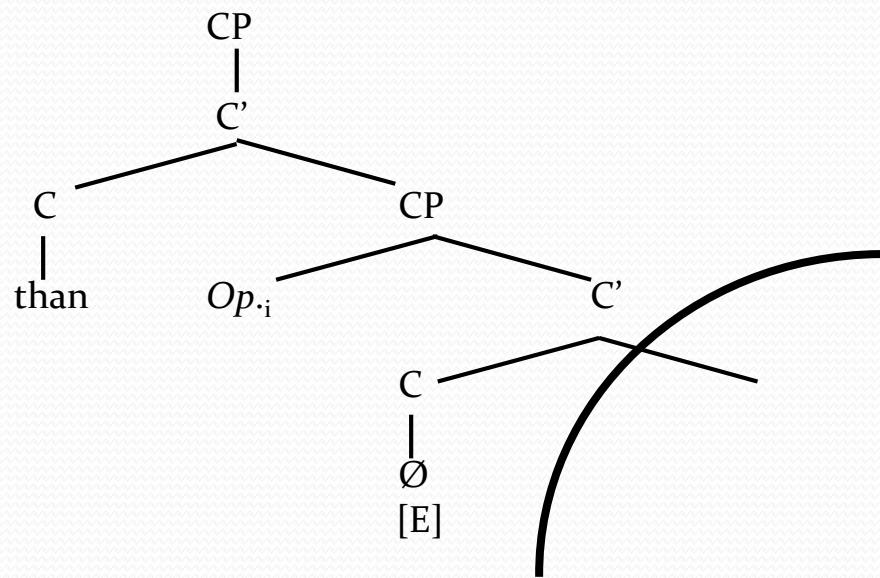
Object

(20)



Object

(20)



[William]_F

Economy

→ [E] feature located as high as possible:

(21) *I love you more than I William.

More ambiguity

(22) More people die each year from falling coconuts than sharks.

three readings:

- (23)
- a. More people die each year from falling coconuts than sharks do.
 - b. More people die each year from falling coconuts than from sharks.
 - c. More people die each year from falling coconuts than from falling sharks.

[E] located on v

VP-ellipsis – reading in (23a):

- (24) [CP than [IP [DP *Op. sharks*]F ~~{_{vP} {_{vP} die {_{PP} from falling coconuts}}}}~~]]]

[E] located on C

PP either contains an AP or not – readings in (23b) and (23c):

- (25) a. [_{CP} than {_{IP} {_{DP} *Op. people*}}
{_{VP} {_{VP} ~~die~~ {_{PP} ~~from~~ {_{DP}-[_{NP} *sharks*]_F}}}}]]]]]
- b. [_{CP} than {_{IP} {_{DP} *Op. people*}}
{_{VP} {_{VP} ~~die~~ {_{PP} ~~from~~ {_{DP}-[_{AP} *falling*] [_{NP} *sharks*]_F}}}}]]]]]

Projection

F-markedness may project up to PP from DP:

(26) [_{CP} than [_{IP} [_{DP} *Op. people*] [_{vP} [_{VP} *die* [_{PP} from [_{DP} *sharks*]]_F]]]]]

→ [E] on either v or C + mechanism of linear ellipsis may account for ambiguities

Ellipsis in Hungarian

recall: operators overt in Hungarian
→ degree expression overt in [Spec,CP]:

- (27) a. Mari magasabb volt, mint **amilyen magas** Péter volt.
Mary taller was than how tall Peter was
'Mary was taller than Peter.'
- b. Mari több macskát vett,
Mary more cat-ACC bought.3SG
mint **ahány macskát** Péter vett.
than how.many cat-ACC Peter bought.3SG
'Mary bought more cats than Peter did.'

But...

ellipsis also possible:

- (28) a. Mari magasabb volt, mint Péter.
Mary taller was.3SG than Peter
'Mary was taller than Peter.'
- b. Mari több macskát vett, mint Péter.
Mary more cat-ACC bought.3SG than Peter
'Mary bought more cats than Peter did.'

→ question: what deletes the degree expression and the finite verb?

Comparative Verb Gapping

not independent processes

phenomenon of “Comparative Verb Gapping”

(Bacskaï-Atkari and Kántor 2012)

- (29) a. *Mari magasabb volt, mint Péter volt.
Mary taller was.3SG than Peter was.3SG
‘Mary was taller than Peter.’

- b. *Mari több macskát vett, mint Péter vett.
Mary more cat-ACC bought than Peter bought
‘Mary bought more cats than Peter did.’

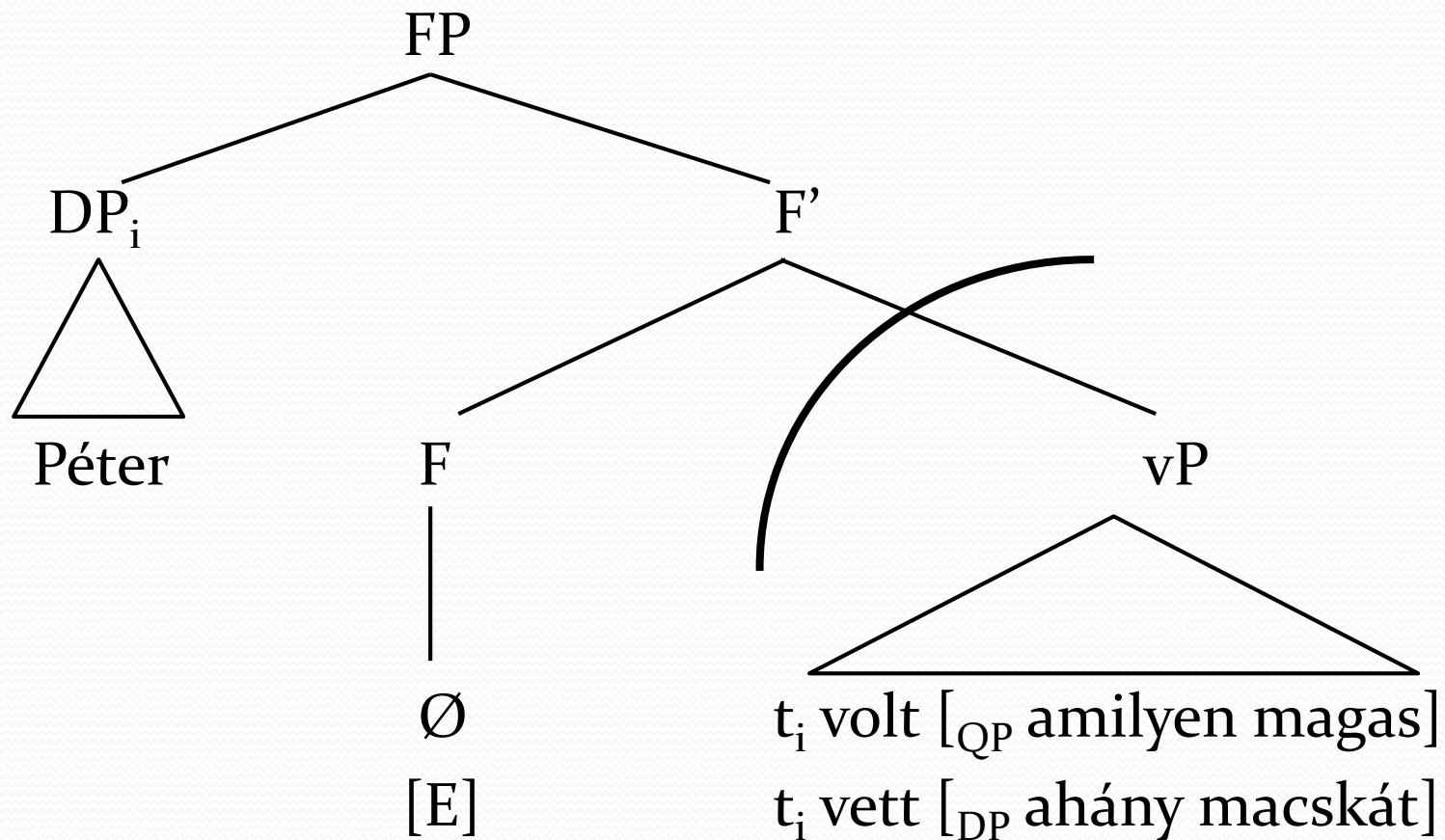
Reason

degree expression fails to move up to [Spec,CP]

- has to be eliminated but no separate process for that
- general ellipsis applies
sluicing (cf. van Craenenbroeck and Lipták 2006)

Ellipsis site

(30)



Ellipsis

- [E] feature on F head
 - (functional head – highest functional projection in the VP-domain)
 - deletion necessarily affects the verb
 - main contrast expressed by the DP in [Spec,FP]
 - nuclear stress assigned here
- cf. Szendrői (2001), É. Kiss (2008, 2009)

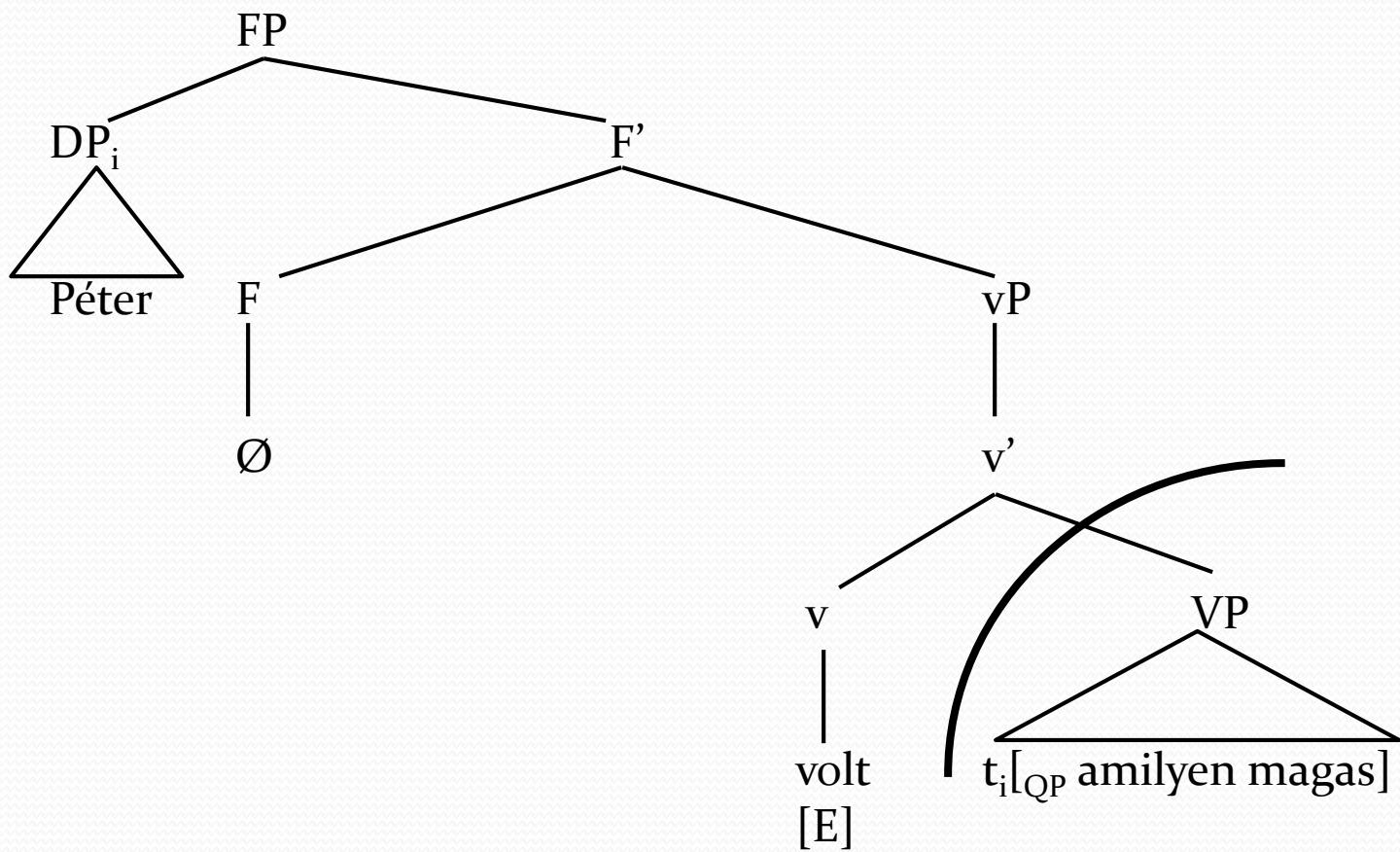
Contrastive copula

- (33) Mari magasabb, mint Péter volt.
Mary taller than Peter was.3SG
'Mary is taller than Peter was.'

- [E] feature located on the functional v head containing the copula (*volt*)
maximal constituent that can be elided:
complement of v, not of F

Ellipsis site

(34)



More on cross-linguistic differences

ellipsis carried out by an [E] feature on a functional head (v, C)

- gapping effects in English
← contrastive elements located at the right edge of the IntP
- no gapping effects in Hungarian – rather “proper” sluicing
← contrastive elements located at the left edge of the IntP

English vs. Hungarian

- ellipsis in English:

(33) $[_{XP} (YP) X_{[E]} \{_{ZP} \underline{\text{xxxxxxxx}} [_{WP} \text{xxxx}]_F \}]$

- ellipsis in Hungarian:

(34) $[_{XP} YP_F X_{[E]} \{_{ZP} \underline{\text{xxxxxxxx}}]$

Directionality

- directionality of ellipsis: from left to right
 - works if the complement (= ellipsis domain) is to the right of the functional head
 - possible for head-initial but not for head-final phrases

- (35) a. $[_{XP} X_E [_{YP} \underline{xxxx}]]$
- b. $[_{XP} [_{YP} xxxx] X_E]$

German

- head-initial CP
 - sluicing attested as in English (cf. Merchant 2004, 2013)
- head-final vP/VP (cf. Haider 1993)
 - no VP-ellipsis as in English (cf. Winkler 2005)
- Merchant (2013): lexical differences
 - English: both E_C and E_v feature \leftrightarrow German: only E_C feature
 - \leftrightarrow here: difference due to a more general property
(directionality of heads)

Conclusion

- optional ellipsis in English comparatives: not construction-specific
 - ellipsis carried out by an [E] feature on a functional (v, C) head
 - endpoint of ellipsis: F-marked constituent
- cross-linguistic differences follow from more general settings:
- different prosody (nuclear stress assigned to right or left of IntP)
English vs. Hungarian
 - difference in head-initial and head-final projections
English vs. German



Thank you!
Danke!



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