

Case-assignment in Elliptical Comparatives

Julia Bacskai-Atkari
University of Potsdam (SFB-632)

julia.bacskai-atkari@uni-potsdam.de

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Introduction

elliptical comparatives:

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

cf. Bresnan (1973), Kennedy (2002), Bacskai-Atkari (2014a)

Type I constructions

(2) 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

(3) 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.'

Proposal

reduced clausal comparatives are NOT phrasal comparatives

- case distinction matters even in English
- similar patterns in German (phrasal analysis untenable)
- analysis supported by a cross-Germanic study
- languages with true phrasal comparatives behave differently from English

Case distinction in subject/object ambiguities

Type I ambiguities:

(4) 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.'

German nominal pattern

- (5) a. Ich liebe dich mehr als **mein** **Bruder**.
I 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 love-1SG you.ACC more than my.M-ACC brother
'I love you more than I love my brother.'
- c. Ich liebe dich mehr als **meine** **Schwester**.
I love-1SG you.ACC more than my.F.NOM/ACC sister
'I love you more than my sister.'

German pronominal pattern

- (6) a. Ich liebe dich mehr als **er**.
I love-1SG you.ACC more than he.NOM
'I love you more than he loves you.'
- b. Ich liebe dich mehr als **ihn**.
I love-1SG you.ACC more than he.ACC
'I love you more than I love him.'
- c. Ich liebe dich mehr als **sie**.
I love-1SG you.ACC more than she.NOM/ACC
'I love you more than she loves you/than I love her.'

English pronominal pattern

(7) 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/than I love him.'

accusative case ambiguous - (7b)

accusative is the default case (cf. Schütze 2001)

Case distinction with two predicates

Type II ambiguities:

(8) 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.'

German feminine paradigm

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

b. Ich habe eine größere Frau als **sie**
I have a taller woman than she.NOM/ACC
gesehen.
seen
'I saw a taller woman than she saw/than she is.'

German masculine paradigm

(10) Ich habe einen größeren Mann... gesehen.
I have a taller man seen
'I saw a taller man...'

a. als **mein** **Vater**
than my-M.NOM father
'than my father saw.'

c. als **er**
than he.NOM
'than he saw.'

b. als **meinen** **Vater**
than my-M.ACC father
'than my father is.'

d. als **ihn**
than he.ACC
'than he is.'

English pronominal pattern

- (11) 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.'

English gender mismatch patterns

- (12) a. I saw a taller woman than **my father**.
'I saw a taller woman than my father saw.'
- b. ?I saw a taller woman than **he**.
'I saw a taller woman than he saw.'
- c. ??I saw a taller woman than **him**.
'I saw a taller woman than he saw.'

German gender mismatch patterns

(13) Ich habe eine größere Frau... gesehen.
I have a taller woman seen
'I saw a taller woman...'

a. als **mein** **Vater**
than my-M.NOM father
'than my father saw.'

c. als **er**
than he.NOM
'than he saw.'

b. *als **meinen** **Vater**
than my-M.ACC father
'than my father is.'

d. *als **ihn**
than he.ACC
'than he is.'

The proposed analysis

various factors: semantics, syntax, syntax-prosody interface (cf. Bacskai-Atkari 2014b)

Type I constructions

degree element a verbal modifier → only one lexical predicate (*love*)

(14) a. LOVE (x,y)

b. $\exists d \exists d' [\text{LOVE (x,y) \& LOVE (x,d) \& LOVE (w,z) \& LOVE (w,d') \& (d > d')}]$

elliptical comparatives:

(15) a. $\exists d \exists d' [\text{LOVE (x,y) \& LOVE (x,d) \& LOVE (w,y) \& LOVE (w,d') \& (d > d')}]$

b. $\exists d \exists d' [\text{LOVE (x,y) \& LOVE (x,d) \& LOVE (x,z) \& LOVE (x,d') \& (d > d')}]$

Type II constructions

degree element an attribute within a nominal expression
→ two predicates

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

lexical readings vs. predicative readings:

- (17) a. $\exists x \exists y \exists w \exists z [\text{SEE}(x,y) \ \& \ \text{WOMAN}(x) \ \& \ \exists d(\text{TALL}(x,d)) \ \& \ \text{SEE}(w,z) \ \& \ \text{WOMAN}(w) \ \& \ \exists d'(\text{TALL}(w,d')) \ \& \ (d > d')]$
b. $\exists x \exists y \exists w [\text{SEE}(x,y) \ \& \ \text{WOMAN}(x) \ \& \ \exists d(\text{TALL}(x,d)) \ \& \ \text{WOMAN}(w) \ \& \ \exists d'(\text{TALL}(w,d')) \ \& \ (d > d')]$

Ellipsis

(18) I love you more than **he** ~~loves you~~ [x-much].

ellipsis carried out by [E] feature - inserted already in the syntax, see Merchant (2001)

(19) I love you more than **him** [E] ~~loves you~~ [x-much].

Predicative comparatives

- (20) a. ?Mary is taller than **he**.
b. Mary is taller than **him**.

↔ (21): accusative case-assigner present:

- (21) I saw a taller woman than **her**.

Syntax—prosody interface

than-clause phonologically defective if copula not realised overtly

- phrased together with the matrix clause
- main stress normally falling on right edge of the IntP (English, German)
Selkirk (1984, 1986), Nespor and Vogel (1986), Truckenbrodt (1999)
- non-elliptical subclause would constitute an IntP
- elliptical structures: right edge elided

(22) {I saw a taller woman than **her**} COP [an x-tall woman].

Type II in German

(23) a. Ich habe einen größeren Mann als **meinen Vater**
I have a taller man than my-M.ACC father

gesehen.

seen

'I saw a taller man than my father is.'

b. Ich habe einen größeren Mann als **ihn** gesehen.
I have a taller man than he.ACC seen

'I saw a taller man than he is.'

Predicative comparatives

(24) a. Maria ist größer als **er**.
Mary is taller than he.NOM
'Mary is taller than he is.'

b. *Maria ist größer als **ihn**.
Mary is taller than he.ACC
'Mary is taller than he is.'

Case reassignment

accusative in (23b):

- (25) {Ich habe einen größeren Mann als **ihn**
I have a taller man than he.ACC
[ein großer Mann] COP gesehen.}
a tall man COP seen
'I saw a taller man than he is.'

Imperfect paradigm

(26) ?Ich sah einen größeren Mann...
I saw.1SG a-M.ACC taller-M.ACC man

a. als **mein** **Vater**.
than my-M.NOM father
'than my father saw.'

c. als **er**.
than he.NOM
'than he saw.'

b. als **meinen** **Vater**.
than my-M.ACC father
'than my father is.'

d. als **ihn**.
than he.ACC
'than he is.'

Case reassignment

- (27) {Ich sah einen größeren Mann als ihn}
I saw a taller man than he.ACC
[ein großer Mann] COP.
a tall man COP
'I saw a taller man than he is.'

Extraposition

(28) Ich habe einen größeren Mann gesehen
I have-1sg a-M.ACC taller-M.ACC man seen

a. als **mein** **Vater**.
than my-M.NOM father
'than my father saw.'

c. als **er**.
than he.NOM
'than he saw.'

b. *als **meinen** **Vater**.
than my-M.ACC father
'than my father is.'

d. *als **ihn**.
than he.ACC
'than he is.'

Reduced clausal comparatives in Germanic

case distinction vs. case syncretism varies across Germanic

case distinction mostly in pronoun system

variation, changes

Icelandic

nominative and accusative case
(cf. e.g. Hróarsdóttir 2001: 115-116)

case distinction and syncretism both in pronouns
and full DPs (also proper names)

Predicative comparatives

(29) Egill er hærri en þú.

Egill is taller than you.NOM

'Egill is taller than you.'

Type I constructions

(30) a. Ég elska þig meira en hann.
I love.1SG you.ACC more than he.NOM/ACC
'I love you more than he loves you/than I love him.'

b. Ég elska þig meira en hún.
I love.1SG you.ACC more than she.NOM
'I love you more than she loves you.'

c. Ég elska þig meira en hana.
I love.1SG you.ACC more than she.ACC
'I love you more than I love her.'

Type II constructions

(31) a. Ég sá hærru konu en móðir mín.
I saw.1SG taller woman than mother.NOM my.NOM
'I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.'

b. Ég sá hærru konu en móður mína.
I saw.1SG taller woman than mother.ACC my.ACC
'I saw a taller woman than my mother is.'

Dutch

nominative and accusative case

case distinction in pronoun system - also: variation

Predicative comparatives

(32) a. Ik ben langer dan **hij**.
I am taller than he.NOM
'I am taller than him.'

b. % Ik ben langer dan **hem**.
I am taller than he.ACC
'I am taller than him.'

Type I constructions

- (33) a. Ik vind jou leuker dan **Mark**.
I find.1SG you.ACC better than Mark.NOM/ACC
'I like you more than Mark.'
- b. Ik vind jou leuker dan **hij**.
I find.1SG you.ACC better than he.NOM
'I like you more than he likes you.'
- c. Ik vind jou leuker dan **hem**.
I find.1SG you.ACC better than he.ACC
'I like you more than I like him/%/???? than he likes you.'

Type II constructions

- (34) a. Ik zag een langere vrouw dan **mijn moeder**.
I saw a taller woman than my mother.NOM/ACC
'I saw a taller woman than my mother saw/? than my mother is.'
- b. Ik zag een langere vrouw dan **jij**.
I saw a taller woman than you.NOM
'I saw a taller woman than you saw/???? than you are.'
- c. %/??? Ik zag een langere vrouw dan **jou**.
I saw a taller woman than you.ACC
'I saw a taller woman than you are.'

Extraposition

(35) Ik heb nog nooit een langere vrouw gezien
I have yet not a taller woman seen
'I have never seen a taller woman...'

a. dan **mijn moeder**.
than my mother.NOM/ACC
'than my mother saw/than my mother is.'

b. dan **jij**.
than you.NOM
'than you saw.'

c. *dan **jou**.
than you.ACC
'than you are.'

Afrikaans

case distinction in pronominal system

Type I constructions

- (36) a. Ek ken jou beter as **my broer**.
I know you better than my brother.NOM/ACC
'I know you better than my brother.'
- b. Ek ken jou beter as **hy**.
I know you better than he.NOM
'I know you better than he knows you.'
- c. Ek ken jou beter as **hom**.
I know you better than he.ACC
'I know you better than I know him.'

Type II constructions

(37) a. Ek het 'n langer vrou as sy gesien.
I have.1SG a taller woman than she.NOM seen
'I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.'

b. Ek het 'n vrou langer as sy gesien.
I have.1SG a woman taller than she.NOM seen
'I saw a taller woman than my mother is.'

c. Ek het 'n langer vrou gesien as sy.
I have.1SG a taller woman seen than she.NOM
'I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.'

Postmodifiers

compare English:

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

postmodifier QPs generally predicative

(reduced relative clauses, cf. Larson 1998)

Norwegian

nominative and oblique case

- Oslo dialect
- nominative: in the presence of a finite inflection
- nominative/oblique distinction overtly in the pronoun system (also syncretism)

Predicative comparatives

- (39) a. *Jeg er høyere enn **du**.
I am taller than you.NOM
'I am taller than you.'
- b. Jeg er høyere enn **deg**.
I am taller than you.OBL
'I am taller than you.'

Type I constructions

(40) a. Jeg elsker deg mer enn **min** **bror**.
I love you.OBL more than my brother.NOM/OBL
'I love you more than my brother.'

b. Jeg elsker ham mer enn **du**.
I love he.OBL more than you.NOM
'I love him more than you love him.'

c. Jeg elsker ham mer enn **deg**.
I love he.OBL more than you.OBL
'I love him more than you love him/than I love you.'

Type II constructions

- (41) a. Jeg så en høyere kvinne enn **min mor**.
I saw a taller woman than my mother.NOM/OBL
'I saw a taller woman than my mother.'
- b. Jeg så en høyere kvinne enn **du**.
I saw a taller woman than you.NOM
'I saw a taller woman than you saw.'
- c. Jeg så en høyere kvinne enn **deg**.
I saw a taller woman than you.OBL
'I saw a taller woman than you.'

Postmodifiers

(42) Jeg har aldri sett en kvinne høyere...
I have.1SG never seen a woman taller
'I have never seen a woman taller...'

a. enn **min mor**.
than my mother.NOM/OBL
'than my mother.'

b. *enn **du**.
than you.NOM
'than you.'

c. enn **deg**.
than you.OBL
'than you.'

Swedish

nominative and oblique case

- nominative: in the presence of a finite inflection (not necessarily overt)
- nominative/oblique distinction overtly in the pronoun system (also syncretism)

Predicative comparatives

(43) a. Jag är längre än **du**.
I am taller than you.NOM
'I am taller than you.'

b. Jag är längre än **dig**.
I am taller than you.OBL
'I am taller than you.'

Type I constructions

- (44) a. Jag älskar dig mer än **min** bror.
I love.1SG you.OBL more than my brother.NOM/OBL
'I love you more than my brother.'
- b. Du älskar henne mer än **jag**.
you love.2SG she.OBL more than I.NOM
'You love her more than I love her.'
- c. Du älskar henne mer än **mig**.
you love.2SG she.OBL more than I.OBL
'You love her more than you love me.'

Type II constructions

- (45) a. Jag såg en längre kvinna än **min mor**.
I saw a taller woman than my mother.NOM/OBL
'I saw a taller woman than my mother saw/than my mother is.'
- b. Jag såg en längre kvinna än **du**.
I saw a taller woman than you.NOM
'I saw a taller woman than you saw/than you are.'
- c. Jag såg en längre kvinna än **dig**.
I saw a taller woman than you.OBL
'I saw a taller woman than you saw/than you are.'

Germanic patterns

- case reassignment: German, English, Icelandic
- no case reassignment: Norwegian, Swedish, Afrikaans
- Dutch
- no idea: Danish, Faroese, Yiddish

Further questions

- other Germanic languages
- dialects (e.g. Alemannic)
- diachrony (e.g. oblique case and lack of case reassignment)

Phrasal comparatives

initial question: English ambiguous patterns
reduced clauses or phrasal comparatives

- Germanic ambiguous patterns: reduced clauses (invariably)

generally: in Type II constructions, lexical readings seem
to be more prominent

- languages with true phrasal comparatives (PPs instead of CPs)

Italian, Hungarian: both phrasal and clausal comparatives

Italian

phrasal comparatives introduced by *di* 'of'

Type I constructions

(46) Ti amo più di mio fratello.
you.ACC love.1SG more of my.M brother
'I love you more than my brother.'

Type II constructions

- (47) Ho visto una donna più alta di mia madre.
have.1SG seen a.F woman more tall.F of my.F mother
'I saw a taller woman than my mother is.'

Hungarian

clausal comparatives introduced by *mint* 'than', phrasal comparatives contain the P head *-nál/-nél* 'at' (inherent adessive case, analysed as PPs, see Asbury 2008)

Type I constructions

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

Type II constructions

- (49) a. Láttam egy magasabb nőt, mint **az anyám**.
saw a taller woman-ACC than the mother.NOM
'I saw a taller woman than my mother.'
- b. Láttam egy magasabb nőt **az anyámnál**.
saw a taller woman-ACC the mother-ADE
'I saw a taller woman than my mother is.'

Conclusion

- English reduced clausal comparatives compatible with a clausal analysis
- case reassignment can be observed in other Germanic languages too (e.g. German)
- ambiguity in Germanic contingent upon several factors
 - case syncretism
 - default case
 - case reassignment
 - requirements on oblique case
- true phrasal comparatives behave in a markedly different way

Thank you!
Danke!



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