Comparative Deletion in Germanic

0. Introduction

Comparative Deletion:

(1) a. Ralph is taller than Michael is tall.

    b. The table is longer than the office is wide.

traditional approach: obligatory elimination of a given quantified constituent


but: phenomenon not universal

Hungarian: overt operator + overt lexical AP:

(2) a. Mari magasabb volt, mint amilyen magas Zsuzsa volt.
    Mary taller was.3SG than how tall Susan was.3SG
    ‘Mary was taller than Susan.’

    b. Az asztal hosszabb volt, mint amilyen széles az iroda volt.
    the table longer was.3SG than how wide the office was.3SG
    ‘The table was longer than the office was wide.’

→ question: Comparative Deletion and variation in Germanic?

languages: English, German, Dutch

→ proposal: Comparative Deletion is an overtness requirement on left-peripheral elements

variation ← overt/covert, extractable/non-extractable operators
1. Operator movement in comparatives


(3)

\[
\text{CP} \quad \text{C'} \quad \text{CP} \quad \text{C} \quad \text{than} \quad \text{Op.} \quad \text{C'} \quad \text{C} \quad \text{Ø} \\
\]


comparative operator: relative operator

comparatives obey islands – irrespectively of whether NP is contrastive (cf. Kennedy 2002)

- wh-island:

(4)  a. *Jason killed more dragons than \( \text{OP}_x \) Susan wondered [whether to kiss \( t_x \)].

b. *Jason killed more dragons than \( \text{OP}_x \) Susan wondered [whether to kiss \( t_x \) unicorns].

- complex NP islands:

(5)  a. *Jason killed more dragons than \( \text{OP}_x \) he had outlined [a plan to kill \( t_x \)].

b. *Jason killed more dragons than \( \text{OP}_x \) he had outlined [a plan to kill \( t_x \) unicorns].

syntactic motivation: regular movement of a [+rel] operator

\[ \rightarrow \] not specific to comparatives

overt operators – e.g. Hungarian, cf. (2)

overt operator + lexical AP: possible irrespectively of whether the AP is contrastive or not
operator has to move because of its [+rel] feature

AP: moves because of independent reasons (non-extractability)

2. The structure of degree expressions

two overt operators in Hungarian:

• operator amilyen ‘how’: not separable from the lexical AP

(6) a. Mari magasabb, mint amilyen magas Péter volt.  
     Mary taller than how tall Peter was  
     ‘Mary is taller than Peter was.’

     Mary taller than how Peter was tall  
     ‘Mary is taller than Peter was.’

• operator amennyire ‘how much’: separable from the lexical AP

(7) a. Mari magasabb, mint amennyire magas Péter volt.  
     Mary taller than how.much tall Peter was  
     ‘Mary is taller than Peter was.’

     b. Mari magasabb, mint amennyire Péter volt magas.  
     Mary taller than how.much Peter was tall  
     ‘Mary is taller than Peter was.’

similar difference in interrogative operators:

• operator milyen ‘how’: not separable from the lexical AP

(8) a. Milyen magas volt Péter?  
     how tall was Peter  
     ‘How tall was Peter?’

     b. *Milyen volt Péter magas?  
     how was Peter tall  
     ‘How tall was Peter?’
• operator *mennyire* ‘how much’: separable from the lexical AP

(9) a. **Mennyire magas** volt Péter?
   how.much tall was Peter
   ‘How tall was Peter?’

   b. **Mennyire** volt Péter **magas**?
   how.much was Peter tall
   ‘How tall was Peter?’

separable operators: not VP-modifiers

   AP may move together with them (one single constituent)

   they do not require the presence of an overt copula in Hungarian (cf. 3Sg. present tense)

degree expressions: DegP – degree head

• takes two arguments (cf. Lechner 2004)

lexical AP

   Grade argument – standard value

• projects a QP layer

   Deg moves up to \( Q \)

   specifier of QP may host other QP modifiers

degree expressions in the subclause (e.g. *amilyen/amennyire magas* ‘how/how much tall’):

(10)  

```
   QP
   /\  Q'
   |  \\
   amennyire  \\
     Q  \\
     /  \\
    AP  DegP
      /\  \\
     amilyen  Deg'
      |  \\
      magas  G
```
economy → amilyen and amennyire cannot be co-present (~ Doubly Filled Comp Filter)

structural difference → amennyire may be extracted on its own (↔ amilyen)

operator has to undergo movement

stranding of the AP depends on the structural position of the operator within the QP

→ information structure not directly related to movement and stranding

Comparative Deletion ≠ obligatory deletion of a GIVEN or non-contrastive AP

3. English

• Standard English: zero operator

(11)  a. Ralph is taller than Michael is tall.
     b. The table is longer than the office is wide.

movement → two copies

  higher copy in [Spec,CP] and lower copy in base position

movement before spellout in both cases

 ↔ Kennedy (2002): only in (11a)

  but: movement cannot be sensitive to the information structural properties of the AP

  driven by the [+rel] feature of the operator

(12)  a. Ralph is taller than [x-tall] Michael is [x-tall].
     b. The table is longer than [x-wide] the office is [x-wide].

overtness requirement: a lexical AP (or NP) is licensed in an operator position such as [Spec,CP] if the operator itself is overt

→ higher copy of the degree expression in (12) deleted

lower copy: regularly eliminated, unless it is contrastive (cf. Bacskaï-Atkari 2012):
(13)  a. Ralph is taller than \[x{-}\text{tall}\] Michael is \[x{-}\text{tall}\].
    
    b. The table is longer than \[x{-}\text{wide}\] the office is \[x{-}\text{wide}\].

contrastiveness: AP can still be given: (Kennedy 2002, quoting Chomsky 1977)

(14)  A: This desk is \textbf{higher} than that one is \textbf{wide}.
    B: What is more, this desk is \textbf{higher} than that one is \textbf{HIGH}.

zero operator: a deg head – AP cannot be stranded

Overt operators in certain varieties of English: what (cf. Chomsky 1977), how

no violation of the overtness requirement → higher copy remains overt

• what: proform deg head – takes no lexical AP

(15)  % Ralph is taller than \([what]\) Michael is \([what]\).

• how: deg head

(16)  a. % Ralph is taller than \([how\ \text{tall}]\) Michael is \([how\ \text{tall}]\).
    b. % The table is longer than \([how\ \text{wide}]\) the office is \([how\ \text{wide}]\).

no stranding:

(17)  a. *Ralph is taller than \textbf{how} Michael is \textbf{tall}.
    b. *The table is longer than \textbf{how} the office is \textbf{wide}.

• compare interrogative how: also a deg head:

(18)  a. \textbf{How tall} is Ralph?
    b. *\textbf{How} is Ralph \textbf{tall}?

→ English shows comparative deletion when there is a zero operator

→ role of information structure: contrastive lower copies realised overtly
4. Dutch

● interrogatives: *hoe* ‘how’: a Deg head

(19) a. **Hoe groot** is Jan?
    how tall is John
    ‘How tall is John?’

    b. *Hoe* is Jan **groot**?
    how is John tall
    ‘How tall is John?’

● comparative operator *hoe* ‘how’: a Deg head

(20) a. ??/?? Maria is groter dan **hoe groot** Jan is.
    Mary is taller than **how tall** John is
    ‘Mary is taller than John.’

    b. ??/?? De tafel is langer dan **hoe breed** het kantoor is.
    the table is longer than **how wide** the NEUT office is
    ‘The table is longer than the office is wide.’

● zero comparative operator: rather a QP modifier – stranding even if AP not contrastive

(21) a. ??/?? Maria is groter dan Jan **groot** is.
    Mary is taller than John **tall** is
    ‘Mary is taller than John.’

    b. De tafel is langer dan het kantoor **breed** is
    the table is longer than the NEUT office **wide** is
    ‘The table is longer than the office is wide.’

↔ English zero: non-contrastive lower copies severely degraded

considerable variation among Dutch speakers

(online) study with 70 speakers (September/August 2013):¹

acceptability marked from 5 (best) to 1 (worst)

*hoe* + AP: (20a) fully acceptable for 16%, (20b) for 27%

zero – (21a) fully acceptable for 10%, (21b) for 81%

¹ Many thanks go to Laura Bos and Marlies Kluck for helping me in collecting the data.
results (average ratings):

results (variation):

→ Dutch: Comparative Deletion only partially attested

only if the AP moves together with the zero operator
role of information structure: contrastive AP has to be preserved

with *hoe*: difference less significant than with the zero

deletion of the AP possible only if it moves up together with the zero

*hoe* + non-contrastive AP not preferred

5. German

- interrogative operator *wie* ‘how’: a Deg head:

  (22) a. Wie *groß* ist Ralf?
      how tall is Ralph
      ‘How tall is Ralph?’

      b. *Wie* ist Ralf *groß*?
      how is Ralph tall
      ‘How tall is Ralph?’

- *wie* in comparative subclauses:

  with a non-contrastive AP:

      Ralph is taller than how tall Michael is
      ‘Ralph is taller than Michael.’

      b. ??/*Ralf ist größer als wie* Michael *groß* ist.
      Ralph is taller than how Michael tall is
      ‘Ralph is taller than Michael.’

  with a contrastive AP:

  (24) a. *Der Tisch ist länger als wie* breit das Büro ist.
      the.MASC desk is longer than how wide the.NEUT office is
      ‘The desk is longer than the office is wide.’

      b. ??/*Der Tisch ist länger als wie* das Büro *breit* ist.
      the.MASC desk is longer than how the.NEUT office wide is
      ‘The desk is longer than the office is wide.’
→ *wie* in comparatives cannot be an operator

Deg head – (23a) and (24a) should be acceptable, (23b) and (24b) ungrammatical

QP modifier – (23a) and (24a) should still be possible

but: *wie* still possible (dialectal variation):

(25) ??? Ralf ist größer als *wie* Michael.
Ralph is taller than how Michael
‘Ralph is taller than Michael.’

→ *wie* in comparatives: not an operator but a grammaticalised C head (cf. Jäger 2012)

~ in comparatives expressing equality (*wie* ‘as’)

standard grammaticalisation process from operators into C heads

relative cycle – cf. Bacskai-Atkari (2013) for Hungarian comparatives

(26) CP
    C’
    C als
    CP Op. C’
    C wie

→ lexical AP cannot co-occur with *wie* in the CP domain

● zero operator: rather a QP modifier

(27) a. ? Ralf ist größer als Michael *groß* ist.
Ralph is taller than Michael tall is
‘Ralph is taller than John.’

b. Der *Tisch* ist länger als das *Büro* *breit* ist.
the.MASC table is longer than the.NEUT office wide is
‘The table is longer than the office is wide.’
German: Comparative Deletion not attested as in English

role of information structure: contrastive AP stranded or lower copy preserved

non-contrastive APs preferably more together with the operator and are hence deleted

6. Comparative operators in Germanic

two factors: extractability (Deg head or QP modifier) and overtness

interaction:

(28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>covert</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deg head</td>
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<td>zero (English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>what</em> (English)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>hoe</em> (Dutch)</td>
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<tr>
<td>QP modifier</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>zero (Dutch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>zero (German)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Comparative Deletion attested with zero operators when the lexical AP also moves up

obligatory if the operator is a Deg head

optional if the operator is a QP modifier
Conclusion

variety in terms of Comparative Deletion in Germanic languages

linked to the overtness of the operators

three factors:

● overtness of the operator – Comparative Deletion

● position of the operator in the degree expression – AP separable

● information structure – preferred position of the AP

References