Reducing Attributive Comparative Deletion

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The Problem

Various kinds of deletion structures in comparatives – different phenomena?

Comparative Deletion:

(1) Mary is taller than Peter is tall.
(2) Mary saw bigger cats than Peter saw big cats.

Comparative Subdeletion:

(3) The dog is bigger than the doghouse is wide.
(4) Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter did big dogs.

Constraints:

(5) Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter bought (wide) doghouses.

Proposal: all of these are reducible to the simple process Comparative Subdeletion – differences due to more general settings

Comparative Deletion

Comparative Deletion (CD) deletes the NP in the subclause if it is logically identical to its antecedent in the matrix clause (Bacskai-Atkari 2010)

(7) CPr

C

P

than


C

IP

Predicatives: AP contained within a NP headed by a zero operator x → operator movement: the NP moves up to the lower [Spec, CP], where CD deletes it (Bacskai-Atkari 2010)

(8a) "Mary is taller than Op. Peter is tall.
(8b) "How is Mary tall?" = (8c) "How tall is Mary?"

• copy theory of movement: the lower copy of the NP is deleted regularly by PF, the NP is e-given

(9) Mary is taller [than [OP Peter] is tall].

Attributives: AP adjacent within a DP → operator movement: the entire DP containing the AP moves up to the lower [Spec, CP], where CD deletes it (Bacskai-Atkari 2010)

• the AP cannot be extracted from the DP (→ DP-islands):

[10b] "How big did Mary see cats?" = (10c) "How big did cats Mary see?"

• again, the lower copy of the NP is deleted regularly by PF, the DP is again e-given

(11) Mary saw bigger cats [than [OP Peter saw big cats]].

• the deletion of the entire DP in attributive comparatives is a result of other constraints

• deletion is permitted under logical identity with the quantified element in the matrix clause

The Syntax of Attributive Modification

In the case of attributive modification involving an operator, the NP moves up to the specifier of a functional projection (FP), a functional extension of the DP (cf. Kennedy and Merchant 2000)

[19a] "How big cat did you see?" = (19b) "How big a cat did you see?"

(20)

Similarity:

[21a] Mary saw [too big a cat].
[21b] Peter didn’t see [as big a cat] as Mary did.
[21c] Mary saw [too big a cat] that she couldn’t believe it.

The F head can sometimes be filled:

[22] [How big of a cat] did Mary see?

Structural ambiguities:

[23] Mary saw a big cat but Peter saw a dog.

"Mary saw a big cat but Peter saw a big dog."

Comparative Subdeletion

Subcomparatives: the relative quantities of different properties or entities are compared (Kennedy 2000):

(12a) The dog is bigger than the doghouse is wide.
(12b) Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter did big dogs.

• but recall the definition of CD: deletion takes place in the lower [Spec, CP] position and is licensed under identity with the quantified element in the matrix clause

→ the QPs and big and wide in (12a) and the DPs and doghouses in (12b) are not logically identical

→ the QPs and the DP doghouses are not in the lower [Spec, CP] position of the comparative subclause Cd takes place in the lower [Spec, CP] regularly – Bacskai-Atkari (2010)

lower copy: cannot be deleted because it is F-marked

Bolikovic and Nunes (2007, 48): lower copies may be phonologically realised if the pronunciation of the highest copy causes the deletion to crash at PF

Derivation:

(13) The dog is bigger [than [OP Peter] is big].

→ subcomparatives are not exceptional in terms of CD → it is enough to have CD in the grammar, no need for a separate subcomparative deletion process (the operator is phonologically null anyway)

Attributive Comparative Deletion

Not the entire lower copy remains (→ predicative comparatives):

(14a) Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter did big dogs.
(14b) Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter did big big dogs.

possible reason: the QP (x-big) is e-given, so it should be subject to deletion → the NP dogs is F-marked

But rather a positional problem:

(15a) % The dog is bigger than the doghouse is wide.
(15b) The dog is bigger than the doghouse is wide.

(15c) Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter did big dogs.
(15d) "Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter did big doghouses."

• in (15a), big has to be un stressing – it violates the constraint that the lower copy should be deleted

• however, (15c) and (15d) are not unattactable at all → positional problem

→ (15d) is unattactable in English: either illicit configuration or deletion of an F-marked constituent

(16) "Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter didn’t see [as big a dog] doghouses."

possibility: Attributional CA is a special process? – QP only part of a lower copy, not the lower copy itself

Attributive CD involves deletion of the lexical verb:

(17a) Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter bought big dogs.
(17b) Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter bought big bigger dogs.
(17c) Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter bought big big dogs.
(17d) Mary bought bigger dogs than Peter didn’t see [as big a cat] doghouses.

→ is Attributive CD carried out by some verb deletion process?

But deletion seems to target discontinuous constituents:

(18a) "Mary saw a bigger cat than Peter didn’t see a dog.
(18b) Mary saw a bigger cat than Peter did saw a big dog.

The QP modifier of the DP in the subclause moves up in attributive comparatives → string in (18) explained:

(24) Mary saw a bigger cat than Peter
did [saw a __ _ _ ] .

Kennedy and Merchant (2000): the QP moving to [Spec, PF] equips the F head with a [\emph{w]} feature, which is PF-uninterpretable on the F head (→ D heads like which): this can be checked only if the entire FP moves to [Spec, CP]

higher copy: remains in (19) but e-abled by CD in comparatives like (24)

lower copy: can be deleted in (19) but not in (24) as the DP within it is F-marked, but the F head bears the PF-uninterpretable [\emph{w}] feature on it and should be deleted (Bolikovic and Nunes 2007)

→ how is it possible that the lexical verb has to be deleted alongside with the QP but the DP can remain?

Conclusions

The process of deletion:

Reich (2007): when deletion applies at PF, it does not (and cannot) affect F-marked material

Verb Gapping:

(25a) Mary likes cats and Peter [likes [\emph{[dp] dogs]].
(25b) Mary likes cats and Peter [likes [\emph{[dp] dogs]].
(25c) "Mary likes cats and Peter [likes [\emph{[dp] cats]].

→ Verb Gapping is an instance of VP-deletion; deletion targets the e-given VP, within which there is an F-marked DP – linear PF application stops

if no F-marked DP, there is nothing to prevent deletion of the DP:

(26a) Mary likes cats and Peter [likes [\emph{[dp] cats]].
(26b) Mary likes cats and Peter [likes [\emph{[dp] cats]].
(26c) Mary likes cats and Peter [likes [\emph{[dp] cats]].

→ target of gapping not the V head but the VP

VP-deletion in attributive comparatives: the F-marked constituent is the DP, not the FP

(27a) "Mary saw a bigger cat than Peter [saw [big a __ _ _]].
(27b) "Mary saw a bigger cat than Peter [saw [big a __ _ _]].
(27c) "Mary saw a bigger cat than Peter [saw [big __ _ _]].

→ Mary saw a bigger cat than Peter [saw [big __ _ _]].

VP-deletion: optional process that may save the construction from being ill-formed (cf. sluicing)

→ Attributional Comparative Deletion is reducible to Comparative Deletion and VP-deletion

References