Comparative Deletion in Germanic

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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,
    Mary taller was.3SG
    mint amilyen magas Zsuzsa volt.
    than how tall Susan was.3SG
    ‘Mary was taller than Susan.’

    b. Az asztal hosszabb volt,
        the table longer was.3SG
        mint amilyen széles az iroda volt.
        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
Operator movement in comparatives


(3)
Operator movement

operator movement

comparative operator: relative operator

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

(4)  a. *Jason killed more dragons than $OP_x$ Susan wondered [whether to kiss $t_x$].

b. *Jason killed more dragons than $OP_x$ Susan wondered [whether to kiss $t_x$ unicorns].
Complex NP islands

(5)  a. *Jason killed more dragons than $OP_x$ he had outlined [a plan to kill $t_x$].

b. *Jason killed more dragons than $OP_x$ he had outlined [a plan to kill $t_x$ unicorns].
Syntactic motivation

regular movement of a [+rel] operator

→ 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

note: operator has to move because of its [+rel] feature

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

b. *Mari magasabb, mint amilyen* Péter volt *magas.*  
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.’
Interrogatives

similar difference in interrogative operators
Operator \textit{milyen} ‘how’

not separable from the lexical AP

(8) \begin{align*}
a. \text{Milyen magas} & \text{ volt Péter?} \\
n \text{how} & \text{ tall} \quad \text{was Peter} \\
\text{‘How tall was Peter?’} \\
b. \text{*Milyen} & \text{ volt Péter magas?} \\
n \text{how} & \text{ was Peter tall} \\
\text{‘How tall was Peter?’}
\end{align*}
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)
Structural difference

- economy
  \[ \rightarrow \text{amilyen and amennyire cannot be co-present} \]
  \( (~ \text{Doubly Filled Comp Filter}) \)

- structural difference
  \[ \rightarrow \text{amennyire may be extracted on its own} \leftrightarrow \text{amilyen} \]

- operator has to undergo movement
  strandig 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
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
Copies

(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)
Derivation

(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 **higher** than that one is **wide**.
    B: What is more, this desk is **higher** than that one is **HIGH**.
Operators in English

- 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
  \[\rightarrow\] higher copy remains overt
Operator *what*

proform Deg head – takes no lexical AP

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


Operator *how*

Deg head

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

no stranding:

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

also a Deg head:

(18) a. How tall is Ralph?

b. *How is Ralph tall?
Summary for English

- English shows Comparative Deletion when there is a zero operator

- role of information structure: contrastive lower copies realised overtly
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
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.’
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
Online study

- considerable variation among Dutch speakers

- (online) study with 70 speakers (September/August 2013): 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%
Results (average ratings)

- Ø...groot: 2.80
- hoe groot: 2.84
- Ø...breed: 4.71
- hoe breed: 3.41
Maria is groter dan Jan groot is.

Maria is groter dan hoe groot Jan is.

De tafel is langer dan het kantoor breed is.

De tafel is langer dan hoe breed het kantoor is.
Summary for 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
German

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

(22) a. \textbf{Wie groß} ist Ralf?
how tall is Ralph
‘How tall is Ralph?’

b. *\textbf{Wie} ist Ralf \textbf{groß}?
how is Ralph tall
‘How tall is Ralph?’
Operator *wie* ‘how’ in comparative subclauses

- with a non-contrastive AP:

(23) a. *Ralf ist größer als wie groß Michael ist.*
    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.’
Operator *wie* ‘how’ in comparative subclauses

- with a contrastive AP:

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

b. ?/?? Der Tisch ist länger
    the.MASC desk is longer
    als wie das Büro breit ist.
    than how the.NEUT office wide is
    ‘The desk is longer than the office is wide.’
So...

\textit{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.’
The status of *wie* in comparatives

not an operator but a grammaticalised C head

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

standard grammaticalisation process from operators into C heads

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

(26)

\[ \text{lexical AP cannot co-occur with } \text{wie in the CP domain} \]
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.’
Summary for 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
Comparative operators in Germanic

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

(28)

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<thead>
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<th>covert</th>
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<td><strong>Deg head</strong></td>
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<td><em>zero</em> (English)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>QP modifier</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>zero</em> (German)</td>
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</table>
Interaction

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
Thank you!
Danke!
😊
References

References