Ambiguity and the Internal Structure of Comparative Complements in Greek

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Introduction

ambiguous comparative constructions in English (cf. Bresnan 1973):

(1) I saw a taller woman than my mother.
   (A) ‘I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.’
   (B) ‘I saw a taller woman than my mother is.’

question: what causes ambiguity (English and cross-linguistically)

- purely clausal analysis (see Bresnan 1973, Lechner 2004)
- purely phrasal analysis (cf. Hankamer 1973 for the phrasal analysis of than)
Greek

three types of comparatives

- *ap'oti* ‘than’ - clausal
- *apo* ‘from’ + accusative DP - phrasal (?)
- genitive - phrasal

proposal: ambiguity in cases like (1) with various underlying structures (not necessarily clauses)
Clausal comparatives

reading (A): a lexical, tensed verb is reconstructed (predicate: verb)

(2) I saw a taller woman than my mother saw an x-tall woman.

degree expression (x-tall woman) would be eliminated in English anyway (Bresnan 1973, Kennedy 2002, Bacskaï-Atkari 2014c)

reading (B): a predicative relation is reconstructed, not tensed (predicate: adjective)

(3) a. I saw a taller woman than my mother BE an x-tall woman.

b. I can't imagine a braver woman than Queen Boudicca BE an x-brave woman.
German

(4) a. Ich habe eine größere Frau als meine Mutter gesehen.
    I have a taller woman than my.f.nom/acc mother seen
    ‘I saw a taller woman than my mother.’

b. Ich habe einen größeren Mann als mein Vater gesehen.
    I have a taller man than my.m.nom father seen
    ‘I saw a taller man than my father saw.’

c. Ich habe einen größeren Mann als meinen Vater gesehen.
    I have a taller man than my.m.acc father seen
    ‘I saw a taller man than my father is.’
Analysis

no default accusative (Schütze 2001), accusative available for small clause subjects

analysis:
◦ nominative remnants: clausal ellipsis, nominative case assigned by finite inflection
◦ accusative remnants: remnants of small clauses, case assigned by matrix verb

→ elements like than or als ‘than’ may take both TP and PredP (small clause) complements

(on small clauses as PredPs, cf. Matushansky 2012, following Bowers 1993)
Greek clausal comparatives

(5) a. Eida mia gynaika psiloteri ap’oti i mitera mou.
saw.1sg a woman taller than the.nom mother my
‘I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.’

b. *Eida mia gynaika psiloteri ap’oti ti mitera mou.
saw.1sg a woman taller than the.acc mother my
# ‘I saw a taller woman than my mother.’
Subject/object remnants

(6) a. S’agapo perissotero ap’oti i Maria.
    I.love.you more than the.NOM Mary
    ‘I love you more than Mary loves you.’

b. S’agapo perissotero ap’oti ti Maria.
    I.love.you more than the.ACC Mary
    ‘I love you more than I love Mary.’
Greek clausal comparative pattern

- no accusative case remnant available - complement of *ap’oti* cannot be a PredP in the German way
- nominative remnant not ambiguous - reconstruction of a predicative relation with an adjectival predicate should involve a tenseless clause (tenseless-tenseless match), but *ap’oti* always takes a TP complement
Phrasal comparatives

Germanic: comparatives introduced by an element corresponding to *than* - C-element

single PPs attested in other languages - including KPs (lexical case)

Italian (*di* ‘of’), Polish (genitive), Russian (genitive), Hungarian (adessive)

lexical cases: instances of PP (see e.g. Asbury 2005; 2008)

KP the lowest PP layer, immediately above the DP; KP tops o the nominal projection, projections of higher P constitute a different extended projection (Den Dikken 2010, cf. also Dékány & Hegedűs 2014 on Hungarian)
Greek phrasal comparatives

(7) Eida mia gynaika psiloteri tis miteras mou.
    saw.1sg a woman taller the.gen mother.gen my
    ‘I saw a taller woman than my mother is.’
Tensed clauses

(8)  *S’agapo perissotero tis Marias.
     I.love.you more the.GEN Mary.GEN
     ‘I love you more than Mary.’
Greek phrasal comparative pattern

- genitive PP (KP): K head takes a single DP complement - no tense specification possible - no ambiguity
- tenseless - tenseless match satisfied - reconstruction of a predicative relation with adjectival predicate always possible
A special hybrid comparative in Greek

(9) Eida mia gynaika psiloteri apo ti mitera mou. saw.1sg a woman taller from the.acc mother my
‘I saw a taller woman than my mother.’
(preference: ‘than my mother is’ > ‘than my mother saw’)

Subject/object ambiguity

(10) S’agapo perissotero apo ti mitera mou.
I love you more from the ACC mother my
‘I love you more than my mother.’
Towards the analysis

adopting the analysis of Merchant (2009): P head *apo* takes a CP complement

- *ap’otali* is a complex form involving a preposition *ap’*, a shortened form of *apo*, and the relativiser *oti*, which otherwise occurs in free relatives
- *ap’* takes a CP, which hosts *oti* in its specifier; remnant (if there is ellipsis) moves to an FP below the CP, no further movement to CP/PP
- *apo* also takes a CP, which contains no visible element, and the remnant DP moves up to the specifier of the PP; *apo* moves up to a higher p head position
Status of the relativiser

different assumption regarding the status of *oti* : a C head, not an operator (↔ Merchant 2009) - *oti* licensed even in cases where it cannot be the degree operator itself, and there is only one comparative/relative operator (cf. Bacskaí-Atkari 2014a, 2014c for a similar argumentation for German *wie* ‘as/how’) - subcomparatives (Giannakidou & Yoon 2011)
Structure with \( ap' \)
Structure with *apo*

(12) pP
    p'  PP
    p   P
    apo_j  DP_1
      ti mitera mou  P
    p'  CP
    P  C'
    C'  FP
    C'  F'  
    t_i  
    t_i  F_[E]
    TP/PredP
    ti eide mia gynaika x-psili
    t_i BE mia gynaika x-psili
Question 1

why \textit{apo} but not \textit{ap’} moves up to \textit{p}

- \textit{apo} moves from P to p anyway: more general property (cf. Lechner & Anagnostopoulou 2005)
- \textit{ap’} is a clitic that cliticises onto the C head
- \textit{apo} moves to p in order to assign case to its complement DP, which is located in [Spec,PP]
Question 2

why the DP moves up to PP with \textit{apo} but not with \textit{ap’}

\begin{itemize}
  \item both P heads are [+comparative], which is a feature passed on to the C head of the complement, on which it is interpretable - CP selected because of the [+comparative] nature
  \item P heads otherwise select a nominal complement
  \item \textit{ap’} selects a CP containing \textit{oti}, which makes the CP [+nominal], as a headless relative clause
  \item \textit{apo} selects a CP without \textit{oti}, which is not a free relative clause (no such requirement on comparative subclauses in general) - the nominal argument of the P head can be realised only by upward movement of the DP to the [Spec,PP] position, and the P head \textit{apo} moves up to p, hence the DP argument is within its complement
\end{itemize}
Question 3

why a PredP is licensed under *apo* but not under *ap’*

- no nominative case assigned within PredP
- external case assignment available only with *apo* because it attracts the DP to the PP; with *ap’,* the DP would remain in the CP and caseless
Question 4

so why are *ap’oti*-comparatives not ambiguous and *apo*-comparatives ambiguous in constructions like (1)

- no PredP licensed under *ap’oti* due to case-assignment requirements; TP for predicative relation in (1) not available either because no tense antecedent in the matrix clause, and only recoverable material can be elided (cf. Merchant 2001)
- with *apo*, both a TP and a PredP possible since the DP moves up to the PP anyway; PredP-reconstruction is more faithful to the surface pattern, no case reassignment involved (hence some preference probably)
Conclusion

potentially ambiguous comparative constructions in Greek - three types of comparatives

- true clausal comparatives with *ap’oti* ‘than’: not ambiguous - tensed clause licensed to be reconstructed only with an underlying lexical verb, no external case assignment
- true phrasal comparatives with the genitive - not ambiguous, only tenseless relation recoverable (limited)
- mixed phrasal comparatives with *apo* ‘from’ - ambiguous, obligatorily elliptical clause either tensed or tenseless, remnant moves up to PP and is assigned accusative case
Thank you!
Danke!
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References


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