Identity and Comparative Deletion

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Comparative Deletion (CD) in English:

(1) Mary is taller than Peter is tall.

explanations based on syntactic isomorphism (e.g. Bresnan 1973, Lechner 2004)

- elided degree expression (x-tall) in the same syntactic position as its antecedent (taller)
- problematic for several reasons
Proposal

CD primarily linked to an overtness requirement on left peripheral elements

→ recoverability of an elided degree expression is contingent upon the position of that degree expression only as far as its semantic scope is concerned
Comparative Deletion and the overtness requirement

- comparative subclauses: *wh*-movement of a degree expression to a [Spec, CP] position
  - degree expression: a QP or a DP modified by a QP
- comparative operator: a relative operator [+rel] and [+compr]
  - either visible or invisible
Overtness requirement

overt lexical XPs in [Spec,CP] licensed only if the operator is overt

→ Comparative Deletion attested in languages that have a covert operator
Copies

one in [Spec,CP] and one in its base position

- higher copy deleted because of the overtness requirement
- lower copy realised overtly only if it is contrastive (cf. Bacska–Atkari 2012)
Standard English

(2) a. Mary is taller than [x-tall] Peter is [x-tall].

b. The table is longer than [x-wide] the office is [x-wide].
In some dialects of English...

*what* (cf. Chomsky 1977) and *how*

(3) a. Mary is taller than [what] Peter is [what].

b. Mary is taller than [how tall] Peter is [how tall].

c. The table is longer than [how wide] the office is [how wide].
hoe ‘how’ acceptable for some speakers

(4) a. Maria is groter
    Mary is taller
    dan hoe groot Jan is.
    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.’
Study (online)

- 66 speakers
- acceptability marked from 5 to 1
- *hoe + AP:*
  - (4a) accepted by 15%
  - (4b) accepted by 27%
Maria is groter dan hoe groot Jan is.
De tafel is langer dan hoe breed het kantoor is.
amilyen ‘how’: 

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

b. Az asztal hosszabb, mint amilyen széles az
the table longer than how wide
iroda.
office
‘The table is longer than the office is wide.’
Comparative Deletion

overtness requirement
comparative subclauses tend to exhibit other ellipsis processes as well:

(6) Mary is taller than \([x\text{-tall}]\) Peter is \([x\text{-tall}]\).
analyses built on syntactic isomorphism (e.g. Lechner 2004):

- any elided constituent is logically identical to its matrix clausal antecedent

- the syntactic structure of the matrix clause is exactly the same as that of the subclause
wh-movement → asymmetric structure

- degree expression in the matrix clause does not undergo wh-movement
- degree expression in the subclause moves before spell-out

  cf. Kennedy (2002) for structures like (5) but not for subcomparatives like (2b)
Extraction islands

e.g. complex NP islands, cf. Kennedy (2002)

(7) a. *Liz has more cats than Martha is [a linguist who has].

b. *Liz has more cats than Martha is [a linguist who has dogs].

→ movement irrespectively of whether the lower copy is contrastive or not
**Wh-movement**

- cannot be sensitive to the information structural properties of the lexical AP/NP
  \[\leftrightarrow\text{Kennedy (2002)}\]

- if it can take place covertly, then non-contrastive lower copies should be licensed:

  (8)  
  a. *Mary is taller than Peter is tall.
  b. The table is longer than the office is wide.
→ movement prior to spellout irrespectively of whether the AP/NP is contrastive or not

→ deletion of the degree expression in [Spec,CP] cannot be conditioned by isomorphism
Problem

different word order – German:

(9) a. Die Katze war **dicker** als x-groß die Katzenklappe x-groß ist.
   the.FEM cat was.3sg fatter than x-big the.FEM cat flap x-big is
   ‘The cat was fatter than the cat flap is wide.’

b. Die Katze ist **dicker** als x-dick der Hund x-dick ist.
   the.FEM cat is fatter than x-fat the.MASC dog x-fat is
   ‘The cat is fatter than the dog.’
German

ellipsis possible but no syntactic isomorphism

↔ Lechner (2004)
Ambiguity and ellipsis

ellipsis may result in ambiguity:

(10) I love you more than Mark.
analyses based on syntactic identity
(e.g. Lechner 2004)
two possible structures

(11) a. I love you more than Mark loves you \(\times\) much.

b. I love you more than He love Mark \(\times\) much.
Problems...

- *wh*-movement
- deleting discontinuous constituents
But...

other types of syntactic ambiguities:

(12) I saw a taller woman than my mother.
Two readings

(13)  a. I saw a taller woman than my mother saw [an x-tall woman].

   b. I saw a taller woman than my mother is [an x-tall woman].

→ reconstruction of a non-identical string in (13b)

→ recoverability condition:
   semantic and not syntactic
Entailment

- *I saw a tall woman* entails that *I saw x* and that *x was a tall woman*

- elided string may be semantically parallel to the entire proposition or only to part of it

- only overt element (the DP *my mother*) may be semantically parallel with either *I* or *x*
Entailment

(14) a. Mary hit Susan and Mark hit Bill too.
   b. Mary hit Susan and Mark hurt Bill too.
   c. # Mary hurt Susan and Mark hit Bill too.

(hit(m,s)) \text{ ENTAILS} \exists x \exists y (hit(x,y))

(hit(m,s)) \text{ ENTAILS} \exists x \exists y (hurt(x,y))

(hit(m,s)) \text{ IS NOT ENTAILED BY} \exists x \exists y (hurt(x,y))
Ellipsis

(15) a. Mary hit Susan and Mark hit Bill.
    b. # Mary hit Susan and Mark hurt Bill.
    c. # Mary hurt Susan and Mark hit Bill.

Merchant (2001): givenness in ellipsis domains (e-givenness) mutual entailment between elided string and its antecedent
entailment in (12):

(16) saw (I, woman) \text{ entails } \exists x \exists y (\text{saw}(x,y))

woman (tall, d) \text{ entails } \exists y [\text{WOMAN}(y) \& \exists d [\text{TALL}(y,d)]]

\rightarrow \text{ elided string in the subclause in (13): mutual entailment with either proposition}

DP my mother semantically parallel with x or y
lack of ambiguity:

(17) I saw a taller woman than my father.

DP my father may be semantically parallel only with x in (16)

otherwise: gender mismatch
syntactically both structures derivable, just as in (13):

(18) a. I saw a taller woman
    than my father saw [an x-tall woman].

    b. # I saw a taller woman
    than my father is [an x-tall woman].

(18b) infelicitous ← gender mismatch (not a syntactic constraint)
Problem

cf. Bresnan (1973)

(19) # I've never seen a taller woman than my father.

reason: DP *my father* cannot be semantically parallel to *x* in (16) ← negation in (19)

→ the only possible derivation is semantically incongruent (gender mismatch)
By contrast...

cf. Bresnan (1973)

(20) I’ve never seen a woman taller than my father.

Bresnan (1973): difference between (19) and (20) due to different syntactic structure

parallelism between matrix clause and subclause

↔ no syntactic identity required, difference due to semantics
in (19): (prenominal) attributive adjective
(taller)

in (20): postnominal adjective (taller)
essentially a reduced relative clause (cf. Larson 1998)

→ a predicate
Predicative vs. attributive adjectives

(21) a. Mary is tall.
    b. Mary is a tall woman.

semantics:

(22) a. $\exists d [TALL(Mary,d)]$
    b. $\exists x [WOMAN(x) \& \exists d [TALL(x,d)]]$
So...

→ in (19): attributive semantics in (22b)
   → my father necessarily a woman

→ in (20): predicative semantics in (22a)
   → no gender restriction
Degree semantics and the overtness of operators

Matrix clausal degree element \((d)\) binds a degree operator \((d')\) in the subordinate clause.

Operator moves to the \([\text{Spec, CP}]\)
Zero operator

associated with the same semantic type as its counterpart in the matrix clause

$\rightarrow$ in constructions like (19) the elided degree expression cannot be predicative:

(23) # I’ve never seen a taller woman than my father.
Overt operator

mismatch allowed

Hungarian:

(24) Mari tegnap látott egy magasabb férfit,
Mary yesterday saw a taller man-ACC
mint amilyen magas az apám.
than how tall the father-POSS.1SG
‘Yesterday Mary saw a man taller than my father.’
Overt operator

no gender mismatch

(25) Mari tegnap látott egy magasabb nőt,
Mary yesterday saw a taller woman-ACC
mint amilyen magas az apám.
than how tall the father-POSS.1SG
‘Yesterday Mary saw a woman taller than my father.’
So...

semantically not incongruent to have degrees of two different types
Conclusion

- Comparative Deletion: overtness requirement on operators attested in languages having a zero operator
- other ellipsis processes optional
identity requirement:

- no syntactic identity required
  either for the elimination of the degree expression
  or for other ellipsis

- semantic identity required
  semantic parallelism for the degree expression
    (predicative/attribution adjective)
  partial parallelism for other ellipsis processes
Thank you!
References