More on Ellipsis in English Comparatives (and Elsewhere)

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Comparative Deletion in English

- deletes the higher copy of the degree expression in a [Spec,CP] position (cf. Bacskai-Atkari 2012)
  → only contrastive lower copies remain overt

(1)  
  a. Mary is taller than [tall] Peter is [tall].
  b. The desk is longer than [wide] the office is [wide].

reason: lexical AP is licensed to appear in an operator position only if the operator is visible
(2) a. Mari magasabb volt, mint [amilyen magas]
    Mary taller was than how tall
    Peti volt.
    Peter was
    ‘Mary was taller than Peter.’

b. Az asztal hosszabb volt, mint [amilyen széles]
    the desk longer was than how wide
    az iroda volt.
    the office was
    ‘The desk was longer than the office was wide.’
Additional ellipsis processes

(3) a. Mary bought more cats than Peter bought cats.
    b. Mary bought more cats than Peter did buy cats.
    c. Mary bought more cats than Peter bought dogs.
    d. Mary bought more cats than Peter did buy dogs.

processes not specific to comparatives
    (VP-ellipsis, gapping, pseudogapping)
can the processes be reduced to a uniform mechanism?
Possible answers...

- **if not**: the kind of ellipsis is dependent on information structural properties
  e.g. (3b) is VP-ellipsis but (3d) is pseudo-gapping

- **if yes**: the ellipsis mechanism must allow for contrastive XPs to remain overt
Proposal

ellipsis carried out by an [E] feature on a functional v or C head

(cf. Merchant 2001)
Proposal

- appearance on the highest possible head, otherwise unrestricted
- applies in a strict left-to-right fashion but contrastive XPs may stop it
- linked to prosody: contrastive XPs in different positions in the ellipsis domain
  - main stress assigned to the right or the left of the IntP
- linked to head-initial vs. head-final distinction
Gapping as VP-ellipsis

ellipsis of an entire VP versus ellipsis of a V head

- gapping is an instance of VP-ellipsis
Full structures (coordination)

(4) a. George likes cats and Mike \[_{\text{VP}} \text{ likes } [_{\text{DP}} \text{ dogs}]_{\text{F}}]\].

b. George likes cats and Mike \[_{\text{VP}} \text{ likes } [_{\text{DP}} \text{ cats}]\].
Ellipsis of the VP (stripping)

only if the DP is recoverable:

(5) a. *George likes cats and Mike \( [\text{VP likes } [\text{DP dogs}]] \) (too).

       b. George likes cats and Mike \( [\text{VP likes } [\text{DP cats}]] \) too.

← deletion at PF cannot affect F-marked material
Gapping

only if the DP is F-marked:

(6) a. George likes cats and Mike \([_{VP \text{ likes}} [_{DP \text{ dogs}}]_F].\)

b. *George likes cats and Mike \([_{VP \text{ likes}} [_{DP \text{ cats}}].\)

→ if gapping were a separate process targeting the V head, then (6b) should be grammatical
Proposal

linear ellipsis process proceeds from left to right, stops at an F-marked phrase

cf. Bacskaia-Atkari (2012) and also Reich (2007)
on the left-to-right application cf. Bošković and Nunes (2007)

(6a): the F-marked DP *dogs* is a boundary ↔ (5b): entire VP elided

→ gapping not a separate mechanism
F-marked elements

F-marked element is the endpoint of ellipsis

- prosodically licensed: the constituent is also aligned to the right edge of an IntP

Feature-driven ellipsis and functional heads

ellipsis carried out by an [E] feature present on a functional head (Merchant 2001)

- ellipsis domain: complement of this functional head (in line with Merchant 2001)
- any element in the functional head escapes ellipsis (in line with Merchant 2001)
- F-marked constituents may withstand deletion (↔ Merchant 2001)
VP-ellipsis

(7)
VP-ellipsis

(7)
Sluicing

(8)
Sluicing

(8)
Ellipsis and information structure

\[(9)\]

a. \( v_{[E]} [\_\_V [XP]] \)

b. \( v_{[E]} [\_\_V [XP]_F] \)

→ information structure does not impose restrictions on the appearance of the [E] feature
Ellipsis in English comparatives

• predicative structures:

(10) a. Mary is taller than [tall] Peter is [tall].

b. The desk is longer than [wide] the office is [wide].
Ellipsis domain

(11) 

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{is} \\
\text{[E]} \\
\text{v} \\
\text{v'} \\
\text{vP} \\
\text{VP} \\
\text{V'} \\
\text{V} \\
\text{QP} \\
\text{[x-tall]} \\
\text{[x-wide]}_F \\
\end{array}
\]
Position of the \([E]\) feature

only the \(v\) head

no possible functional head between \(C\) and \(v\)

otherwise \((12)\) would be acceptable:

\[(12) \quad *\text{The table is longer than the office wide.}\]

underlyingly:

\[(13) \quad *\text{The table is longer than the office } X_{[E]} \text{ is } [\text{wide}]_F.\]

→ the \([E]\) feature is licensed only on functional heads \((v, C)\)
Nominal structures

(14) a. George bought more cats than \([x\text{-many-cats}]\) Mary bought \([x\text{-many-cats}]\).

b. George bought more cats than \([x\text{-many-cats}]\) Mary did buy \([x\text{-many-cats}]\).
Ellipsis domain

(15)

dummy auxiliary located outside the ellipsis domain
Different domains of ellipsis and syntactic ambiguity

Merchant (2008): preferable to elide the maximal largest unit

→ ellipsis domain can be the complement of C and v

(16) Mary drank ale more often than sherry.

underlyingly:

(17) \[ \text{[CP than [CP [DP Op. often] [IP [DP she] [VP drank [DP sherry]_F]]]]} \]
Ambiguity

(18) a. I love you more than William.
   b. I’m a linguist. I like ambiguity more than most people.

→ different domains of ellipsis
→ the DP *William* in (18a) can be a subject or an object
Subject

(19) William than Op_i CI' CP C' CP C' IP DP_j [E] vP v v [Ø] t_j loves you t_i
Subject

(19)

C' CP
   C CP
      C'
        C than
         Op_{i}

IP
   DP_j
      William

I vP
   v'
      v
        Ø
          [E]
Object

(20)

[Diagram of a tree structure with nodes labeled C, CP, C', OP, IP, I, vP, t_j love [William], v, v', DP_j, [E], Ø, and links indicating the relationships between the nodes.]
Object

(20)

[William]_{F}
→ [E] feature located as high as possible:

(21) *I love you more than I William.
More ambiguity

(22) More people die each year from falling coconuts than sharks.

three readings:

(23) a. More people die each year from falling coconuts than sharks do.
    b. More people die each year from falling coconuts than from sharks.
    c. More people die each year from falling coconuts than from falling sharks.
[E] located on v

VP-ellipsis – reading in (23a):

(24) \[
\text{[CP than [IP [DP Op. sharks]F [VP [VP die [PP from falling coconuts]]]]]]}
\]
[E] located on C

PP either contains an AP or not – readings in (23b) and (23c):

(25) a. \[ \text{[CP} \text{ than } \{ \text{IP} \left[ \text{DP} \text{ Op. people} \right] \}
\{ \text{VP} \left[ \text{VP} \text{ die } \left[ \text{PP} \text{ from } \{ \text{DP} \left[ \text{NP} \text{ sharks} \right]_F \right] \right] \right] \} \}}

b. \[ \text{[CP} \text{ than } \{ \text{IP} \left[ \text{DP} \text{ Op. people} \right] \}
\{ \text{VP} \left[ \text{VP} \text{ die } \left[ \text{PP} \text{ from } \{ \text{DP} \left[ \text{AP} \text{ falling} \right] \left[ \text{NP} \text{ sharks} \right]_F \right] \right] \right] \} \}}\]
Projection

F-markedness may project up to PP from DP:

\[(26) \left[ \text{CP than } \left[ \text{PP-Op. people} \right] \left[ \text{VP-die} \left[ \text{PP from } \left[ \text{DP sharks} \right] \right] \right] \right] \]

→ [E] on either v or C + mechanism of linear ellipsis may account for ambiguities
Ellipsis in Hungarian

recall: operators overt in Hungarian → degree expression overt in [Spec,CP]:

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

b. Mari több macskát vett,
Mary more cat-ACC bought.3SG
mint ahány macskát Péter vett.
than how many cat-ACC Peter bought.3SG
‘Mary bought more cats than Peter did.’
But...

ellipsis also possible:

(28) a. Mari magasabb volt, mint Péter.
   Mary taller was.3SG than Peter
   ‘Mary was taller than Peter.’

   b. Mari több macskát vett, mint Péter.
   Mary more cat-ACC bought.3SG than Peter
   ‘Mary bought more cats than Peter did.’

→ question: what deletes the degree expression and the finite verb?
Comparative Verb Gapping

not independent processes
phenomenon of “Comparative Verb Gapping”
(Bacskai-Atkari and Kántor 2012)

   Mary taller was.3SG than Peter was.3SG
   ‘Mary was taller than Peter.’

      Mary more cat-ACC bought than Peter bought
      ‘Mary bought more cats than Peter did.’
Reason

degree expression fails to move up to [Spec,CP]

→ has to be eliminated but no separate process for that

→ general ellipsis applies
  sluicing (cf. van Craenenbroeck and Lipták 2006)
Ellipsis site

(30)

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ø</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[E]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>vP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tᵢ volt [QP amilyen magas]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tᵢ vett [DP ahány macskát]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

DPᵢ

Péter
Ellipsis

- [E] feature on F head
  (functional head – highest functional projection in the VP-domain)
  → deletion necessarily affects the verb

- main contrast expressed by the DP in [Spec,FP]
  nuclear stress assigned here
Contrastive copula

(33) Mari magasabb, mint Péter volt.
Mary taller than Peter was.
‘Mary is taller than Peter was.

• [E] feature located on the functional v head containing the copula (volt)
  maximal constituent that can be elided: complement of v, not of F
Ellipsis site

(34)
More on cross-linguistic differences

ellipsis carried out by an [E] feature on a functional head (v, C)

• gapping effects in English
  ← contrastive elements located at the right edge of the IntP

• no gapping effects in Hungarian – rather “proper” sluicing
  ← contrastive elements located at the left edge of the IntP
Ellipsis in English:
\[(33) \left[ X_P (Y_P) X_{[E]} \left[ Z_P \underline{x x x x x x x x} [W_P x x x x]_F \right] \right] \]

Ellipsis in Hungarian:
\[(34) \left[ X_P Y_P F X_{[E]} \left[ Z_P \underline{x x x x x x x x x} \right] \right] \]
Directionality

- directionality of ellipsis: from left to right

→ works if the complement (= ellipsis domain) is to the right of the functional head

→ possible for head-initial but not for head-final phrases

(35) a. \([_{X_P} X_E \ [_{Y_P} \xxx]]\)

b. \([_{X_P} \ [_{Y_P} \xxx] X_E]\)
German

- head-initial CP
  → sluicing attested as in English (cf. Merchant 2004, 2013)
- head-final vP/VP (cf. Haider 1993)
  → no VP-ellipsis as in English (cf. Winkler 2005)

- Merchant (2013): lexical differences
  English: both $E_C$ and $E_v$ feature ↔ German: only $E_C$ feature

↔ here: difference due to a more general property
  (directionality of heads)
Conclusion

• optional ellipsis in English comparatives: not construction-specific
• ellipsis carried out by an [E] feature on a functional (v, C) head
• endpoint of ellipsis: F-marked constituent

→ cross-linguistic differences follow from more general settings:

• different prosody (nuclear stress assigned to right or left of IntP) English vs. Hungarian
• difference in head-initial and head-final projections English vs. German
Thank you!
Danke!
😊
References


References

References