Case-assignment in Elliptical Comparatives

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Introduction

elliptical comparatives:

(1)a. I am taller than *Mary*.
   b. I am taller than Mary is.
   c. I am taller than \([x\text{-tall}]\) Mary is \([x\text{-tall}]\).

Type I constructions

(2) I love you more than my brother.

SUBJECT READING:
‘I love you more than my brother loves you.’

OBJECT READING:
‘I love you more than I love my brother.’
Type II constructions

(3) I saw a taller woman than my mother.

LEXICAL READING:
‘I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.’

PREDICATIVE READING:
‘I saw a taller woman than my mother is.’
Proposal

Reduced clausal comparatives are NOT phrasal comparatives

- Case distinction matters even in English
- Similar patterns in German (phrasal analysis untenable)
- Analysis supported by a cross-Germanic study
- Languages with true phrasal comparatives behave differently from English
Case distinction in subject/object ambiguities

Type I ambiguities:

(4) I love you more than my brother.

SUBJECT READING: ‘I love you more than my brother loves you.’
OBJECT READING: ‘I love you more than I love my brother.’
(5) a. Ich liebe dich mehr als mein Bruder.
   I love-1SG you.ACC more than my.M.NOM brother
   ‘I love you more than my brother loves you.’

b. Ich liebe dich mehr als meinen Bruder.
   I love-1SG you.ACC more than my.M-ACC brother
   ‘I love you more than I love my brother.’

c. Ich liebe dich mehr als meine Schwester.
   I love-1SG you.ACC more than my.F.NOM/ACC sister
   ‘I love you more than my sister.’
German pronominal pattern

(6) a. Ich liebe dich mehr als er.
   I love-1SG you.ACC more than he.NOM
   ‘I love you more than he loves you.’

   b. Ich liebe dich mehr als ihn.
      I love-1SG you.ACC more than he.ACC
      ‘I love you more than I love him.’

   c. Ich liebe dich mehr als sie.
      I love-1SG you.ACC more than she.NOM/ACC
      ‘I love you more than she loves you/than I love her.’
(7) a. *I love you more than he.*
   ‘I love you more than he loves you.’

b. I love you more than him.
   ‘I love you more than he loves you/than I love him.’

accusative case ambiguous - (7b)
accusative is the default case (cf. Schütze 2001)
Case distinction with two predicates

Type II ambiguities:

(8) I saw a taller woman than my mother.

LEXICAL READING:
‘I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.’

PREDICATIVE READING:
‘I saw a taller woman than my mother is.’
German feminine paradigm

(9) 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 eine größere Frau als sie gesehen.
   I have a taller woman than she.NOM/ACC seen
   ‘I saw a taller woman than she saw/than she is.’
German masculine paradigm

(10) Ich habe einen größeren Mann... gesehen.
    I have a taller man seen
    ‘I saw a taller man...’

a. als mein Vater
    than my-M.NOM father
    ‘than my father saw.’

c. als er
    than he.NOM
    ‘than he saw.’

b. als meinen Vater
    than my-M.ACC father
    ‘than my father is.’

d. als ihn
    than he.ACC
    ‘than he is.’
English pronominal pattern

(11) a. *I saw a taller woman than she.
    ‘I saw a taller woman than she saw.’

b. I saw a taller woman than her.
    ‘I saw a taller woman than she is.’
English gender mismatch patterns

(12) a. I saw a taller woman than my father.
   ‘I saw a taller woman than my father saw.’

b. ?I saw a taller woman than he.
   ‘I saw a taller woman than he saw.’

c. ??I saw a taller woman than him.
   ‘I saw a taller woman than he saw.’
German gender mismatch patterns

(13) Ich habe eine größere Frau... gesehen.
I have a taller woman seen
‘I saw a taller woman...’

a. als mein Vater
   than my-M.NOM father
   ‘than my father saw.’

b. *als meinen Vater
   than my-M.ACC father
   #‘than my father is.’

c. als er
   than he.NOM
   ‘than he saw.’

d. *als ihn
   than he.ACC
   #‘than he is.’
The proposed analysis

various factors: semantics, syntax, syntax-prosody interface (cf. Bacskaï-Atkari 2014b)
Type I constructions

degree element a verbal modifier $\rightarrow$ only one lexical predicate (love)

(14) a. $\text{LOVE}(x,y)$
    b. $\exists d \exists d'[\text{LOVE}(x,y) \& \text{LOVE}(x,d) \& \text{LOVE}(w,z) \& \text{LOVE}(w,d') \& (d > d')]$

elliptical comparatives:

(15) a. $\exists d \exists d'[\text{LOVE}(x,y) \& \text{LOVE}(x,d) \& \text{LOVE}(w,y) \& \text{LOVE}(w,d') \& (d > d')]$
    b. $\exists d \exists d'[\text{LOVE}(x,y) \& \text{LOVE}(x,d) \& \text{LOVE}(x,z) \& \text{LOVE}(x,d') \& (d > d')]$
Type II constructions

degree element an attribute within a nominal expression
→ two predicates

(16) a. SEE (x,y)
    b. \( \exists x [\text{WOMAN} (x) \& \exists d (\text{TALL} (x, d))] \)

lexical readings vs. predicative readings:

(17) a. \( \exists x \exists y \exists w \exists z [\text{SEE} (x, y) \& \text{WOMAN} (x) \& \exists d (\text{TALL} (x, d)) \& \text{SEE} (w, z) \& \text{WOMAN} (w) \& \exists d' (\text{TALL} (w, d')) \& (d > d')] \)
    b. \( \exists x \exists y \exists w [\text{SEE} (x, y) \& \text{WOMAN} (x) \& \exists d (\text{TALL} (x, d)) \& \text{WOMAN} (w) \& \exists d' (\text{TALL} (w, d')) \& (d > d')] \)
Ellipsis

(18) I love you more than he loves you [x-much].

ellipsis carried out by [E] feature - inserted already in the syntax, see Merchant (2001)

(19) I love you more than him [E] loves you [x-much].
Predicative comparatives

(20) a. ?Mary is taller than he.
    b. Mary is taller than him.

↔ (21): accusative case-assigner present:

(21) I saw a taller woman than her.
than-clause phonologically defective if copula not realised overtly

• phrased together with the matrix clause
• main stress normally falling on right edge of the IntP (English, German)
• non-elliptical subclause would constitute an IntP
• elliptical structures: right edge elided

(22) \{I saw a taller woman than her\} COP [an x-tall woman].
Type II in German

(23) a. Ich habe einen größeren Mann als meinen Vater gesehen.
    I have a taller man than my father seen
    ‘I saw a taller man than my father is.’

b. Ich habe einen größeren Mann als ihn gesehen.
    I have a taller man than he seen
    ‘I saw a taller man than he is.’


Predictive comparatives

(24) a. Maria ist größer als er.
Mary is taller than he. NOM
‘Mary is taller than he is.’

b. *Maria ist größer als ihn.
Mary is taller than he. ACC
‘Mary is taller than he is.’
Case reassignment

accusative in (23b):

(25) {Ich habe einen größeren Mann als ihn
I have a taller man than he.ACC
[ein großer Mann] COP gesehen.}
[a tall man COP seen
‘I saw a taller man than he is.’}
Imperfect paradigm

(26) *Ich sah einen größeren Mann...*

I saw.1SG a-M.ACC taller-M.ACC man

a. als mein Vater.
   than my-M.NOM father
   ‘than my father saw.’

b. als meinen Vater.
   than my-M.ACC father
   ‘than my father is.’

c. als er.
   than he.NOM
   ‘than he saw.’

d. als ihn.
   than he.ACC
   ‘than he is.’
Case reassignment

(27) \{Ich sah einen größeren Mann als ihn\}

I saw a taller man than he.ACC

[ein großer Mann] COP.

a tall man COP

‘I saw a taller man than he is.’
Extraposition

(28) Ich habe einen größeren Mann gesehen
I have-1SG a-M.ACC taller-M.ACC man seen

a. als mein Vater.
    than my-M.NOM father
    ‘than my father saw.’

c. als er.
    than he.NOM
    ‘than he saw.’

b. *als meinen Vater.
    than my-M.ACC father
    #‘than my father is.’

d. *als ihn.
    than he.ACC
    #‘than he is.’
Reduced clausal comparatives in Germanic

case distinction vs. case syncretism varies across Germanic

case distinction mostly in pronoun system

variation, changes
Icelandic

nominative and accusative case
(cf. e.g. Hróarsdóttir 2001: 115-116)

case distinction and syncretism both in pronouns and full DPs (also proper names)
Predicative comparatives

(29) Egill er hærri en þú.
Egill is taller than you. NOM
‘Egill is taller than you.’
Type I constructions

(30) a. Ég elska þig meira en hann.
   I love.1SG you.ACC more than he.NOM/ACC
   ‘I love you more than he loves you/than I love him.’

b. Ég elska þig meira en hún.
   I love.1SG you.ACC more than she.NOM
   ‘I love you more than she loves you.’

c. Ég elska þig meira en hana.
   I love.1SG you.ACC more than she.ACC
   ‘I love you more than I love her.’
(31)  a. Ég sá hærri konu en móðir mín.
    ‘I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.’

    b. Ég sá hærri konu en móður mína.
    ‘I saw a taller woman than my mother is.’
Dutch

nominative and accusative case

case distinction in pronoun system - also: variation
Predicative comparatives

(32) a. Ik ben langer dan hij.
    I am taller than he.NOM
    ‘I am taller than him.’

b. % Ik ben langer dan hem.
    I am taller than he.ACC
    ‘I am taller than him.’
(33) a. Ik vind jou leuker dan Mark.
   I find.1SG you.ACC better than Mark.NOM/ACC
   ‘I like you more than Mark.’

b. Ik vind jou leuker dan hij.
   I find.1SG you.ACC better than he.NOM
   ‘I like you more than he likes you.’

c. Ik vind jou leuker dan hem.
   I find.1SG you.ACC better than he.ACC
   ‘I like you more than I like him/%/???? than he likes you.’
Type II constructions

(34) a. Ik zag een langere vrouw dan mijn moeder.
I saw a taller woman than my mother.
‘I saw a taller woman than my mother saw/? than my mother is.’

b. Ik zag een langere vrouw dan jij.
I saw a taller woman than you.
‘I saw a taller woman than you saw/???? than you are.’

c. %/?%Ik zag een langere vrouw dan jou.
I saw a taller woman than you.
‘I saw a taller woman than you are.’
Extraposition

(35) Ik heb nog nooit een langere vrouw gezien
I have yet not a taller woman seen
‘I have never seen a taller woman…’

a. dan mijn moeder.
than my mother. NOM/ACC
‘than my mother saw/ than my mother is.’

b. dan jij.
than you. NOM
‘than you saw.’

c. *dan jou.
than you. ACC
‘than you are.’
Afrikaans

case distinction in pronominal system
Type I constructions

(36) a. Ek ken jou beter as my broer.
    I know you better than my brother. NOM/ACC
    ‘I know you better than my brother.’

b. Ek ken jou beter as hy.
    I know you better than he. NOM
    ‘I know you better than he knows you.’

c. Ek ken jou beter as hom.
    I know you better than he. ACC
    ‘I know you better than I know him.’
Type II constructions

(37) a. Ek het ’n langer vrou as sy gesien.
   I have.1sg a taller woman than she.NOM seen
   ‘I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.’

b. Ek het ’n vrou langer as sy gesien.
   I have.1sg a woman taller than she.NOM seen
   ‘I saw a taller woman than my mother is.’

c. Ek het ’n langer vrou gesien as sy.
   I have.1sg a taller woman seen than she.NOM
   ‘I saw a taller woman than my mother saw.’
Postmodifiers

compare English:

(38) I saw a woman taller than my mother.

postmodifier QPs generally predicative
(reduced relative clauses, cf. Larson 1998)
Norwegian

nominative and oblique case

• Oslo dialect

• nominative: in the presence of a finite inflection

• nominative/oblique distinction overtly in the pronoun system (also syncretism)
(39) a. *Jeg er høyere enn du.
   I am taller than you.\_NOM
   ‘I am taller than you.’

   b. Jeg er høyere enn deg.
   I am taller than you.\_OBL
   ‘I am taller than you.’
Type I constructions

(40) a. Jeg elsker deg mer enn min bror.
   I love you more than my brother.
   ‘I love you more than my brother.’

b. Jeg elsker ham mer enn du.
   I love he more than you.
   ‘I love him more than you love him.’

c. Jeg elsker ham mer enn deg.
   I love he more than you.
   ‘I love him more than you love him/than I love you.’
Type II constructions

(41)  a. Jeg så en høyere kvinne enn min mor.
     I saw a taller woman than my mother. NOM/OBL
     ‘I saw a taller woman than my mother.’

     b. Jeg så en høyere kvinne enn du.
     I saw a taller woman than you. NOM
     ‘I saw a taller woman than you saw.’

     c. Jeg så en høyere kvinne enn deg.
     I saw a taller woman than you. OBL
     ‘I saw a taller woman than you.’
Postmodifiers

(42) Jeg har aldri sett en kvinne höyere...
I have.1sg never seen a woman taller
‘I have never seen a woman taller…’

a. enn min mor.
than my mother.NOM/OBL
‘than my mother.’

b. *enn du.
than you.NOM
‘than you.’

c. enn deg.
than you.OBL
‘than you.’
Swedish

nominative and oblique case

- nominative: in the presence of a finite inflection (not necessarily overt)

- nominative/oblique distinction overtly in the pronoun system (also syncretism)
Predicative comparatives

(43) a. Jag är längre än du.
   I am taller than you.NOM
   ‘I am taller than you.’

b. Jag är längre än dig.
   I am taller than you.OBL
   ‘I am taller than you.’
Type I constructions

(44) a. Jag älskar dig mer än min bror.
    I love.1SG you.OBL more than my brother.NOM/OBL
    ‘I love you more than my brother.’

b. Du älskar henne mer än jag.
    you love.2SG she.OBL more than I.NOM
    ‘You love her more than I love her.’

c. Du älskar henne mer än mig.
    you love.2SG she.OBL more than I.OBL
    ‘You love her more than you love me.’
Type II constructions

(45) a. Jag såg en längre kvinna än min mor.
   I saw a taller woman than my mother.
   ‘I saw a taller woman than my mother saw/than my mother is.’

b. Jag såg en längre kvinna än du.
   I saw a taller woman than you.
   ‘I saw a taller woman than you saw/than you are.’

c. Jag såg en längre kvinna än dig.
   I saw a taller woman than you.
   ‘I saw a taller woman than you saw/than you are.’
Germanic patterns

• case reassignment: German, English, Icelandic

• no case reassignment: Norwegian, Swedish, Afrikaans

• Dutch

• no idea: Danish, Faroese, Yiddish
Further questions

- other Germanic languages
- dialects (e.g. Alemannic)
- diachrony (e.g. oblique case and lack of case reassignment)
Phrasal comparatives

initial question: English ambiguous patterns
reduced clauses or phrasal comparatives

• Germanic ambiguous patterns: reduced clauses (invariably)

  generally: in Type II constructions, lexical readings seem
to be more prominent

• languages with true phrasal comparatives (PPs instead of CPs)

  Italian, Hungarian: both phrasal and clausal comparatives
Italian

phrasal comparatives introduced by *di* ‘of’
Ti amo più di mio fratello.

‘I love you more than my brother.’
(47) Ho visto una donna più alta di mia madre.

‘I saw a taller woman than my mother is.’
Hungarian

clausal comparatives introduced by mint ‘than’, phrasal comparatives contain the P head -nál/-nél ‘at’ (inherent adessive case, analysed as PPs, see Asbury 2008)
Type I constructions

more love.you.1sg than Mark.nom
‘I love you more than Mark loves you.

b. Jobban szeretlek, mint Márkot.
more love.you.1sg than Mark-acc
‘I love you more than I love Mark.

c. Jobban szeretlek, Márknál.
more love.you.1sg Mark-ade
‘I love you more than Mark.
Type II constructions

(49) a. Láttam egy magasabb nőt, mint az anyám.
saw a taller woman-ACC than the mother.NOM
‘I saw a taller woman than my mother.’

b. Láttam egy magasabb nőt az anyámnál.
saw a taller woman-ACC the mother-ADE
‘I saw a taller woman than my mother is.’
Conclusion

• English reduced clausal comparatives compatible with a clausal analysis

• case reassignment can be observed in other Germanic languages too (e.g. German)

• ambiguity in Germanic contingent upon several factors
  case syncretism
  default case
  case reassignment
  requirements on oblique case

• true phrasal comparatives behave in a markedly different way
Thank you!
Danke!
😊
References


• Bacskai-Atkari, Julia (2014b) Structural Case and Ambiguity in Reduced Comparative Subclauses in English and German. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 61.4. 363-378.


References


