

Case and identity in comparative deletion

A well-known aspect of English comparatives is that a variety of constituents can be "left out" of the surface form. The standard approach to comparatives involving missing clauses, such as (1), is that they can be explained in terms of general principles of ellipsis, like the examples in (2) (see e.g. Napoli 1983). The purpose of this talk is to show that examples like (3) instead form a natural class with comparative deletion (CD) constructions like (3).

- (1) Jones published more papers than we {thought, expected, said, predicted}.
- (2) Jones published more papers than Smith (did) (radical pamphlets).
- (3) Jones published more papers than Smith published.

Specifically, we claim that neither (1) nor (3) involve ellipsis; instead, the "missing" constituents are null pronominals (that may undergo wh-movement; this is a separate issue that we will not address here). We focus on two pieces of evidence for this analysis. First, comparatives like (1) are sensitive to structural Case, a fact that has not been previously observed in the literature. When the main predicate in the comparative clause is an adjective or passive verb, the subject position must be null—it may not be filled by an expletive:

- (4) Jones published more papers than (*it) was {necessary, thought, expected, said, predicted}.

This follows if the "missing" clause is actually a pronominal expression. Like other pronominals, this constituent must receive Case. Complements of adjectives and passive verbs do not receive Case, however; therefore, when an expletive blocks movement to subject position, the sentence is ungrammatical. This fact would be unexplained if such comparatives involved ellipsis, as the putative sources are perfectly well-formed:

- (5) Jones published more papers than it was {necessary for him to (publish), thought that he would (publish)}.

Second, this analysis solves a 25-year-old puzzle in the semantics of comparatives. As originally observed by Bach, Bresnan and Wasow (1974), CD constructions, unlike comparatives that involve ellipsis, resist "sloppy identity" readings. This is illustrated by (6a-b).

- (6) a. Jones lost more of his hair than Smith lost.
["strict" reading only: ??Smith lost Jones' hair]
- b. Jones lost more of his hair than Smith (did).
["sloppy" reading OK: Smith lost his own hair]

If the missing NP in a is a pronominal category, the absence of the sloppy reading follows from independent properties of English pronouns: sloppy-like interpretations are generally unavailable, arising only in very specific contexts (e.g., so-called "paycheck sentences"). This is illustrated by (7), which corresponds to the interpretation we assign to (6a).

- (7) Jones lost more of his hair than Smith lost of it. [strict reading only]

In contrast, we show that (6b), which involves ellipsis, is derived from the subdeletion structure in (8).

- (8) Jones lost more of his hair than Smith (did) lost of his hair. [sloppy reading OK]

Since the elided constituent in (8) contains an occurrence of the NP *his hair*, (6b) shows the same type of strict/sloppy ambiguity as other ellipsis constructions in similar contexts. A conclusion of this analysis is that CD and subdeletion constructions must be derived from different sources (Grimshaw 1987, Corver 1990), rather than from the same source, as more commonly assumed (see e.g., Bresnan 1975, Heim 1985, Izvorski 1995).

