Comparative Deletion and the Overtness Requirement

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My talk presents a novel analysis of Comparative Deletion by reducing it to an overtness constraint holding on operators. In this way, Comparative Deletion can be reduced to morphological differences and hence cross-linguistic variation is not conditioned by way of postulating an arbitrary parameter that defines whether a certain language has Comparative Deletion or not. I will show that Comparative Deletion takes place at the left periphery in the subclause in a [Spec,CP] position due to an overtness requirement that requires the presence of an overt operator if there is lexical material (an AP or an NP) located in an operator position. Since Standard English has no overt operators, the deletion of the higher copy always takes place in [Spec,CP]. I will also show that the lower copy may then be realised overtly, but this happens only if it is contrastive.

However, visible operators can appear in this position, which is possible for certain languages and language varieties that allow the degree element to be combined with a lexical AP/NP to appear overtly in the [Spec,CP] position, as is the case in Hungarian: these languages allow the overt presence of the degree elements because the overtness requirement is satisfied. Since the overtness requirement is not specifically related to comparatives, the parametric variation attested across languages can also be linked to more general properties instead of treating Comparative Deletion as a parameter.

My analysis of Comparative Deletion takes into account that languages differ with respect to the presence/absence of the operator in a more intricate way than one that could be formulated on a +/− basis and the factors responsible for cross-linguistic variation are related to the internal structure of degree expressions, the overtness of degree operators and also to information structural properties. However, Comparative Deletion is not a direct reflex of the information structural status of lexical projections associated with the degree elements but it is a factor that plays a role as far as the realisation of lower copies in a movement chain in concerned and may also be linked to the preferred position of a lexical AP in the comparative subclause in case the AP may be stranded.

In addition, my talk will also provide an adequate explanation for the phenomenon of Attributive Comparative Deletion, as attested in English, by way of relating it to the regular mechanism of Comparative Deletion. The reason behind Attributive Comparative Deletion is that the degree expression in the subclause is not licensed to appear in a particular position within the extended nominal expression. I argue that the quantified AP has to be eliminated because of the overtness requirement: the quantified AP moves to an operator position (the specifier of an FP projection on the top of the nominal domain) and, just as in the [Spec,CP] position, lexical material is licensed to appear here only if the operator is overt. Since this condition is not met in the case of the comparative operator in English, the AP has to be deleted; however, there is no separate mechanism that could carry it out and so a more general process has to apply, which is VP-ellipsis. Given that VP-ellipsis inevitably affects the lexical verb, it is explained why the verb has to be deleted.

In this way, the reason behind the ungrammaticality of the quantified AP in the [Spec,FP] position of the extended nominal expression is due to the same overtness requirement that was claimed to be responsible for the obligatory elimination of the higher copy in the [Spec,CP] position.