

# ELLIPTICAL COMPARATIVES REVISITED

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## 1 Introduction

The present paper aims at presenting how elliptical constructions in comparative subclauses can be analysed in Hungarian, with particular focus on Comparative Deletion and Comparative Verb Gapping.

Section 1.1 will briefly outline the general structure of comparatives, with special attention paid to the subclause. In section 1.2, we will describe the various parameters responsible for ellipsis phenomena in comparatives, as found in Indo-European languages, followed by a brief summary in section 1.3 on the universal constraints on deletion. Part 2 will deal with the deletion phenomena in Hungarian, first introducing the general clause structure in Hungarian, then presenting the data, and finally giving an explanation of Comparative Verb Gapping.

### 1.1 The Structure of Comparative Subclauses

For the general structure of comparatives, let us consider the following example:

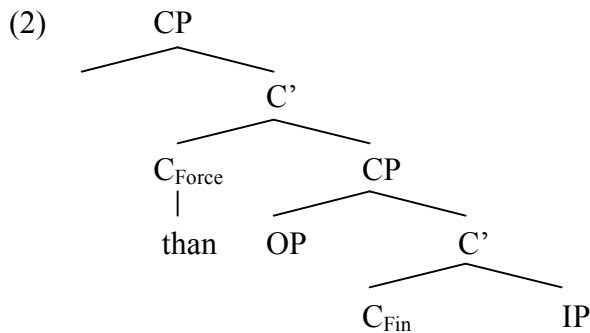
(1) Mary is more intelligent [than Peter is *x-much intelligent*].

The structure of comparatives consists of two major parts: in the matrix clause (*Mary is more intelligent*), the reference value of comparison is expressed in the form of a degree expression, within which the comparative subclause itself (*than Peter is*) expresses the standard value.

The subclause contains a QP, within which the comparative operator (here: *x-much*) is to be found. The term ‘comparative operator’ refers to a subset of operators behaving quite similarly to ordinary relative operators but are found in comparative subclauses and may exhibit certain characteristics that are not shared by all operators, as will be shown in section 2.1. This operator is generally taken to be null in English, see Kennedy–Merchant (1997: 5); we will indicate it as

*x-much* (or *x-many*) throughout the paper, using the conventions of the relevant literature; still, it has to be stressed that since this is a null operator, *x-much* does not refer to any phonological content to be deleted.

Let us now turn to the structure of the subclause. The comparative subclause is a CP, which is introduced by the complementiser *than* (cf. Kenesei 1992a) representing comparative Force (see Rizzi 1999). This subcategorises for another CP, to the specifier of which the comparative operator moves via operator movement (Chomsky 1977; Kennedy–Merchant 2000). The structure is schematically represented below:



Our representation follows Rizzi's analysis of the Left Periphery, who claims that there are two CP projections, the upper one being responsible for Force and the lower for Finiteness, and in between the two optional Topic and Focus phrases can be found, if any (Rizzi 1997: 297):

(3) [CP [TopP\* [FocP [TopP\* [CP]]]]]

In English, the comparative operator is normally covert; however, there are some dialectal differences – (4) is grammatical in New England English:

(4) John is taller than what Mary is. (Chomsky 1977: 87, ex. 51a)

This shows explicitly that there is operator movement in the subclause: the comparative operator is base-generated in [Spec; QP] in the comparative subclause (Kántor 2008c) and moves up to the [Spec; CP] position, as shown in (5). Even when there is no operator, however, there are further reasons for operator movement as comparatives obey islands. The examples below show that they obey *wh*-islands:

- (5) a. \*John killed more dragons than OP<sub>x</sub> Mary wondered **whether** to kiss [t<sub>x</sub> dragons]  
 b. John killed more dragons than OP<sub>x</sub> Mary wanted to kiss [t<sub>x</sub> dragons]

Likewise, the operator cannot be extracted out of a complex NP island:

- (6) a. \*John killed more dragons than OP<sub>x</sub> he had outlined **a plan** to kill [t<sub>x</sub> dragons]  
 b. John killed more dragons than OP<sub>x</sub> he planned to kill [t<sub>x</sub> dragons]

Having established all this, let us briefly look at the classification of comparatives, before turning to deletion phenomena. There are two basic types of comparatives: predicative

comparatives, as in (10a), where the QP is in a predicate position, and attribute comparatives, as in (10b), where the QP is a modifier within a DP:

- (7) a. The tiger is faster than the cat. *predicative comparative*  
 b. I have bigger tigers than Peter has. *attributive comparative*

Both of these types have their subcomparative counterparts, which means that in the case of predicative comparatives, the QP is different in the subclause from the one in the matrix clause, and in the case of attributive comparatives, the noun modified by the QP is different in the two clauses. This is shown below:

- (8) a. The desk is longer than the rug is wide. *predicative subcomparative*  
 b. Pico wrote a more interesting novel than he did a play. *attributive subcomparative*  
 Kennedy and Merchant (2000:131, ex. 77)

## 1.2 Parametric Variation in IE Comparative Subclauses

There are two deletion operations to be discussed here that can be associated with comparative subclauses: Comparative Deletion (CD) and Comparative Verb Gapping (CVG). The first has been well-known from the 1970s in the literature,<sup>1</sup> whereas CVG is a phenomenon that, to our knowledge, has not been described so far. It must be mentioned that there may be other, optional processes that apply on comparatives (e.g. VP-deletion) but these are not our concern here.

Tentatively, we suggest that the applications of these deletion processes define the parametric setting, according to which languages can be [ $\pm$ CD] and [ $\pm$ CVG], [+] meaning that the operation is obligatory in the given language. Note that these terms are descriptive parameters only (in this respect similar to SVO, SOV etc.): they describe only what can be seen in the surface structure but do not refer to the syntactic causes why these should be so.

Let us begin with Comparative Deletion (CD). This deletes the AP in predicative comparatives and the DP in attributive comparatives, if it is identical to its antecedent in the matrix clause (cf. Kennedy–Merchant 2000). This is illustrated below:

- (9) a. Mary is taller than Peter is \_\_\_\_<sub>CD</sub>. (\_\_\_\_<sub>CD</sub> = x-much tall)  
 b. Susan has bigger cats than Peter has \_\_\_\_<sub>CD</sub>. (\_\_\_\_<sub>CD</sub> = x-much big cats)

English has a [+CD] parameter: CD is obligatory, and if it does not apply, the result is ungrammatical:

- (10) a. \*Mary is taller than Peter is tall.  
 b. \*Susan has bigger cats than Peter has big cats.

By contrast, Bulgarian is a [–CD] language:

<sup>1</sup> See, eg., Bresnan 1973, 1975; Lechner 1999, 2004; Kennedy and Merchant 2000; Kennedy 2002; Büring 2007.

- (11) a. Мери по-висока беше от **колкото висок** Питър беше.  
 Mary taller was than **x-much tall** Peter was  
 ‘Mary was taller than Peter.’
- b. Жужа по-голяма котка видя, от **колкото голяма котка** Питър къпеше.  
 Susan bigger cat saw than **x-much big cat** Peter bathed  
 ‘Susan has a saw a bigger cat than Peter bathed.’

As can be seen, the elements *колкото висок* ‘x-much tall’ and *колкото голяма котка* ‘x-much big cat’ can remain overtly and the sentences are still grammatical, unlike in English.

Let us now discuss a peculiar phenomenon here referred to as Comparative Verb Gapping (CVG). It has to be mentioned that the term is a misnomer in that the operation is not restricted to comparatives and is not completely verb gapping either; still, descriptively it captures what is going on in such instances. CVG means that if the operator is deleted, the finite verb must also be deleted.

To illustrate our point, consider the following data from Bulgarian, which is a [+CVG] language. The examples in (12)–(14) show the phenomenon in predicative comparatives:

- (12) Мери по-висока беше от **колкото висок** Питър **беше**.  
 Mary taller was than **x-much tall** Peter **was**
- (13) \*Мери по-висока беше от Питър **беше**.  
 Mary taller was than Peter **was**  
 ‘Mary was taller than Peter was.’
- (14) Мери по-висока беше от Питър.  
 Mary taller was than Peter  
 ‘Mary was taller than Peter.’

In (12), the comparative subclause contains the operator *колкото висок* ‘x-much tall’ and the finite verb *беше* ‘was’; the sentence is, as expected, grammatical. However, if the operator is deleted but everything else remains, as in (13), the result is ungrammatical. If the finite verb is also elided, as in (14), the sentence is again grammatical.

The same phenomenon can be observed in attributive comparatives:

- (15) Жужа по-голяма котка видя, от **колкото голяма котка** Питър **къпеше**.  
 Susan bigger cat saw than **x-much big cat** Peter **bathed**
- (16) \*Жужа по-голяма котка видя, от Питър **къпеше**.  
 Susan bigger cat saw than Peter **bathed**  
 ‘Susan saw a bigger cat than Peter bathed.’
- (17) Жужа по-голяма котка видя, от Питър.  
 Susan bigger cat saw than Peter  
 ‘Susan saw a bigger cat than Peter.’

In (15), the comparative subclause contains *колкото голяма котка* ‘x-much big cat’ and the finite verb *къпеше* ‘bathed’; the sentence grammatical. If only the operator is deleted, as in (16), the result is ungrammatical. The finite verb must also be elided form a grammatical sentence, as in (17), with natural changes in the meaning, of course.

At the first sight this seems to be a comparative-specific issue but the phenomenon can actually be observed in other relative clauses as well. Consider:

- (18) Същата книга чета, като **която** Питър **чете**.  
 that.same book read as **what** Peter **reads**
- (19) \*Същата книга чета, като Питър **чете**.  
 that.same book read as Peter **reads**
- (20) Същата книга чета, като Питър.  
 that.same book read as Peter  
 ‘I read the same book that Peter read.’

It is a property of Bulgarian that it can include като ‘as’ in other relatives in addition to the relative operator, in this case която ‘what’. The interdependency between която and the verb чете ‘read’ can be observed: if която is deleted, чете has to be deleted as well.

CVG is not a universal phenomenon: English for instance clearly has a [–CVG] parameter, as demonstrated by the examples in (21), where the finite verb is present but there is no overt operator:

- (21) a. Mary is taller than Peter is.  
 b. Susan saw a bigger cat than Peter bathed.

It can be concluded that all the three phenomena are present in languages on a +/- basis. Before turning to the question of how Hungarian behaves in this respect, let us first overview the universal constraints on ellipsis.

### 1.3 Deletion, New, Given

Any operation involving ellipsis must somehow be constrained, so that once a constituent or a sequence of constituents is deleted in a clause that otherwise fully conforms to the requirements of grammar, that constituent or sequence of constituents must be recoverable from somewhere, so that the information structure remains intact, regardless of the apparent deletion. This means that elided elements are expected to be *given* in the context, which might be paraphrased as *not new*. However, separating *new information* and *not new information* must be conceptualised in the system of grammar and with the tools of syntactic-semantic theory, since a grammatical approach to the problem clearly needs a constraint such that it is understood by the different modules of grammar.

First, Halliday (1967) tried to tackle the problem of *new* versus *given* information by declaring that given information is anaphorically recoverable; on the other hand, new information must be considered textually and/or contextually non-derivable. What this means is that information that cannot be construed by analysing the information already available in the discourse cannot be considered given.

Nevertheless, there may be slightly different but equally valid statements about the dichotomy of new versus old information in the discourse. For instance, Taglicht (1982: 222) asserted that givenness (or given information) always lacks prominence, while novelty in the sentence is associated with prominence. Nevertheless, prominence and the lack of prominence –



FocP, there may be iterable Distributive Phrases, the specifier of which can host distributive quantifiers, such as universal quantifiers, quantified phrases involving *sok* ‘many’, or *is* ‘also’ phrases; topicalized constituents move to the specifiers of iterable Topic Phrases (TopP) above DistPs; the topmost maximal projection is a CP.

As for the split Left Periphery of Hungarian CPs, consider the following examples (see also Kántor 2008a, 2008b):

- (25) a. [DP [CP Elemért [CP aki látja]]], szóljon neki.  
 Elmer-ACC who sees notify-IMP-3<sup>RD</sup>/SING him-DAT  
 ‘Whoever sees Elmer, please notify him.’
- b. Jelentkezzen [DP [CP Edével [CP aki beszélt]]]  
 Come.forward-3<sup>RD</sup>/SING-IMP Ede-INS who talked  
 ‘Whoever saw Ede, please come forward.’  
 Kenesei (1992b: 588)

As can be seen, the relative operator *aki* ‘who’ in the examples can be preceded by another phrase, namely *Elemért* in (25a) and *Edével* in (25b). This is only possible if there is another layer (a TopP) generated above the CP containing the operator in its specifier position – in that case, the split CP analysis of Rizzi should be adopted (see section 2.1; for further discussion, see Kántor 2008c, 2008d).

## 2.1 Deletion in Hungarian Comparative Subclauses – The Data

Let us consider the following examples in terms of Comparative Deletion (CD) and Comparative Verb Gapping (CVG) in Hungarian. As will be shown, Hungarian is – just like Bulgarian – a language with [–CD] and [+CVG] setting. Consider:

- (26) a. Péter sokkal kövérebb, mint Jancsi.  
 Peter much fatter than Johnny  
 ‘Peter is much fatter than Johnny.’
- b. Péter sokkal kövérebb, mint (amilyen kövér) Jancsi valaha.is lesz.  
 Peter much fatter than OP fat Johnny ever will.be  
 ‘Peter is much fatter than Johnny will ever be.’
- (27) a. Péter sokkal gyorsabb autót vett, mint Jancsi.  
 Péter much faster car-ACC bought than Johnny  
 ‘Peter bought a much faster car than Johnny.’
- b. Péter sokkal gyorsabb autót vett, mint amilyen gyors autót Jancsi vásárolt.  
 Peter much faster car-ACC bought than OP fast car-ACC Johnny purchased  
 ‘Peter bought a much faster car than the one that Johnny purchased.’

The sentences in (26a) and (27a) would be the most naturally used versions for native speakers; however, as demonstrated by the possibility of (26b) and (27b), the full clauses can be

recovered both for predicative and for attributive comparatives, the structures containing also the operator (i.e. *amilyen kövér* and *amilyen gyors autót*). This shows that Hungarian must be a language with [-CD] setting.

When it comes to Comparative Verb Gapping (CVG), the following pattern can be observed in predicative comparatives:

- (28) a. Péter sokkal kövérebb volt, mint Jancsi.  
Peter much fatter was than Johnny  
'Johnny was much fatter than Johnny.'
- b. Péter sokkal kövérebb volt, mint amilyen kövér Jancsi volt.  
Péter much fatter was than OP fat Johnny was  
'Peter was much fatter than Johnny was.'
- c. \*Péter sokkal kövérebb volt, mint Jancsi volt.  
Péter much fatter was than Johnny was  
'Peter was much fatter than Johnny was.'

The full subclause is shown in (28b), which is perfectly grammatical, containing both the operator *amilyen* and the finite verb *volt*. However, if the operator is deleted but the verb is not, as in (28c), the result is ungrammatical. The construction can be saved by deleting the verb too, as shown in (28a). The same can be observed in attributive comparatives:

- (29) a. Péter sokkal gyorsabb autót vett, mint Jancsi.  
Peter much faster car-ACC bought than Johnny  
'Peter bought a much faster car than Johnny.'
- b. Péter sokkal gyorsabb autót vett, mint amilyen gyors autót Jancsi vett.  
Peter much faster car-ACC bought than OP fast car-ACC Johnny bought  
'Peter bought a much faster car than Johnny.'
- c. \*Péter sokkal gyorsabb autót vett, mint Jancsi vett.  
Peter much faster car-ACC bought than Johnny bought  
'Peter bought a much faster car than Johnny.'

Hungarian seems to behave exactly in the same way as Bulgarian, and thus it is clearly a [+CVG] language. It must be mentioned, though, that the requirement that the finite verb should be deleted if the operator has been deleted is also dependent on whether the verb contains NEW or GIVEN information. Consider:

- (30) a. Péter sokkal kövérebb, mint (amilyen/amilyen kövér) Jancsi (valaha.is) lesz.  
Peter much fatter than OP OP fat Johnny ever will.be  
'Peter is much fatter than Johnny will ever be.'



- b. Péter kövérebb, mint <sup>?</sup>(amilyen) Jancsi  **lenne**, ha élne.  
 Peter fatter than OP Johnny be-3<sup>RD</sup>/SING-COND if live-3<sup>RD</sup>/SING-COND  
 ‘Peter is fatter than Johnny would be, if he were alive.’
- c. Kövérebb vagyok, mint **voltam**.  
 fatter am than I.was  
 ‘I am fatter than I was.’
- d. <sup>?</sup>Több almát vettem, mint Péter **hámozott**.  
 More apple-ACC I.bought than Peter peeled  
 ‘The number of pears I bought is higher than that of those that Peter peeled.’
- e. Nagyobb macskát láttam, mint <sup>?</sup>(amekkora macskát) **etetett Péter**.  
 Bigger cat-ACC I.saw than OP cat-ACC fed Peter  
 ‘I saw a bigger than the one that Peter fed.’

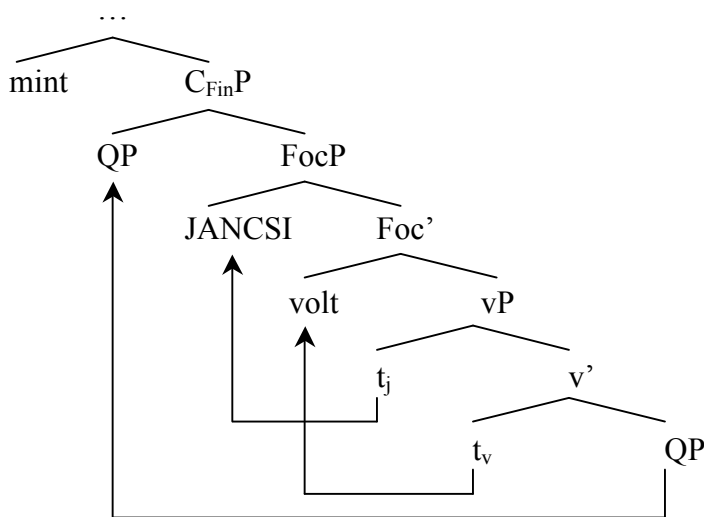
In all the above cases, the finite verb can remain in the subclause, despite the fact that there is no operator. However, the deletion of the verb in these cases would violate the requirement that only GIVEN elements can be deleted, hence the difference from the examples in (28) and (29). In sum, it still can be maintained that Hungarian has [+CVG].

## 2.2 A Solution to Comparative Verb Gapping

In fact, some problems do emerge in connection with CVG-effects. First, it is true that comparative operators are optionally present in the subclause. However, if they are absent, the deletion of the verb is obligatory; on the other hand, a constituent can be deleted iff it is GIVEN (e-GIVEN).

The following diagram shows the structure of (28b):

(31) Péter sokkal kövérebb volt, [mint [QP amilyen kövér] Jancsi volt].



The reason for *Jancsi* to be located in [Spec; FocP] is that comparatives inherently encode contrast – this is formalised below:

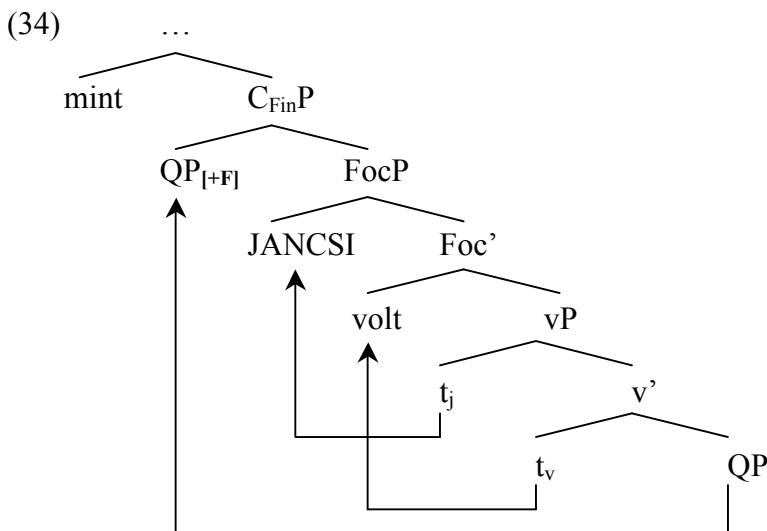
- (32) a. Max is taller than Felix is.  
 b.  $\exists d[\neg(d(\text{tall}(\text{felix}))) \& (d(\text{tall}(\text{max})))]$   
 cf. Klein (1980) and Larson (1988)

Whenever there is focussing in Hungarian, the main stress on the focussed element is followed by a reverse Verb–Verb Modifier order; this is exactly what happens in the case of comparatives:

- (33) Aztán megpillantottam egy sokkal nagyobb macskát,  
 then VM.noticed-1<sup>ST</sup>/SING a much bigger cat-ACC  
 mint amelyet PÉTER pillantott meg.  
 than OP Peter noticed VM  
 ‘Then I noticed a much bigger cat than Peter.’

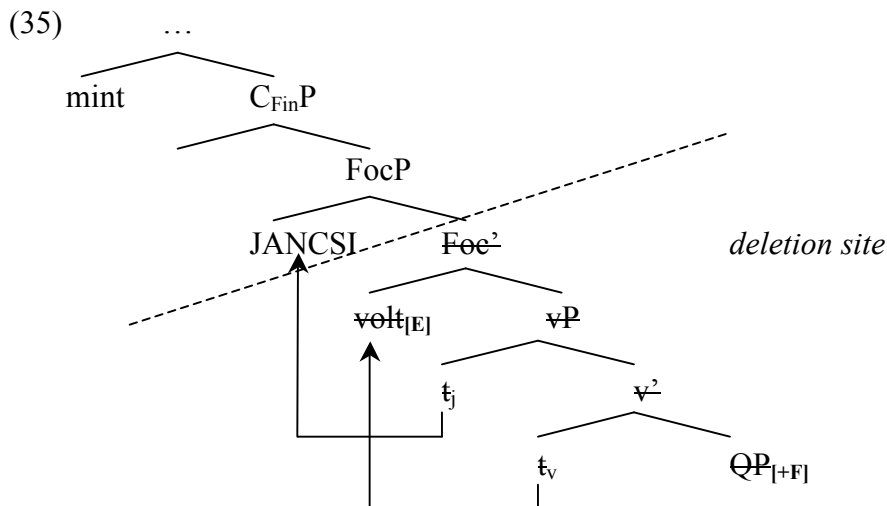
The order must be that of verb (*pillantott*) and VM (*meg*), otherwise the construction would be ungrammatical.

Returning now to the problem in connection with (31), what happens is that the operator has to move up to the [Spec; CP] position to have its strong feature checked. This is shown below:



However, if the operator for some reason fails to move up, feature checking cannot happen, which causes PF-uninterpretability, as the comparative operator’s feature is PF-uninterpretable. The solution to the CVG-puzzle can be found in the capabilities of the PF interface. Following Kennedy and Merchant (2000), if there is a PF-uninterpretable feature reaching the PF interface, after Transfer (i) the derivation either crashes, or (ii) iff the constituent including that feature is e-GIVEN, PF can eliminate it from the construction, and the feature will be checked only at LF. In

other words: the way for PF to solve this is via deletion, which is known to effectively eliminate the otherwise fatal strong [+wh] feature inside the VP (*ibid*:131).<sup>2</sup> This is illustrated in (35):



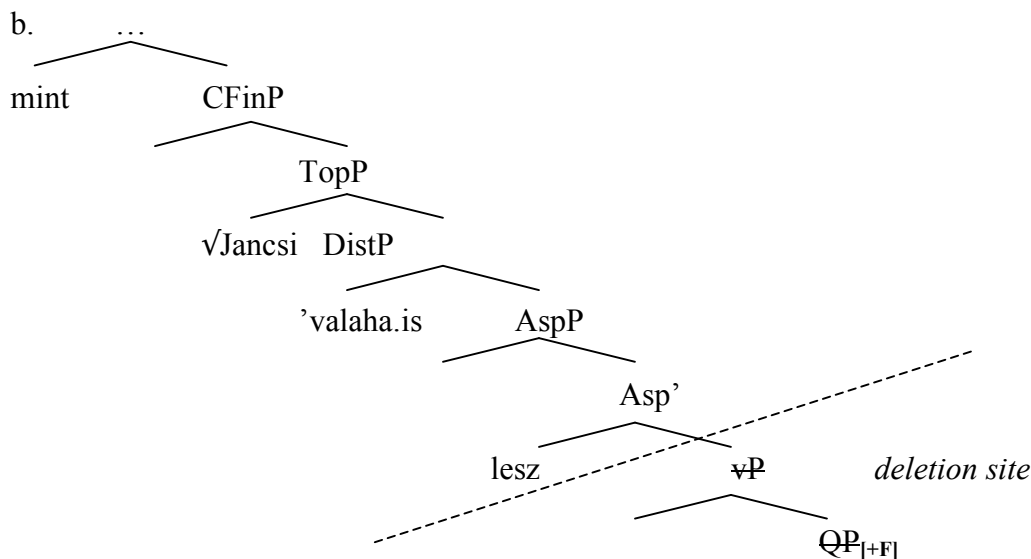
What happens is sluicing *per definitionem* (cf. Craenenbroeck and Lipták 2006). As can be seen, the uninterpretable feature is located in the vP; sluicing always targets the Foc' in Hungarian (*ibid.*) and so everything will be deleted under that node, including the finite verb *volt*. Hence, if the finite verb is visible, as in (28c) and (29c), it signifies that sluicing has not taken place and the uninterpretable feature has not been elided. The target of CVG is thus not the verb as such but the application of sluicing in these cases saves the structure from being ungrammatical.<sup>3</sup>

The last puzzle to solve is why it is it not always Foc' in Hungarian elliptical comparatives that is deleted. Let us have a look at the following diagram:

- (36) a. Péter sokkal kövérebb, [mint √Jancsi `valaha.is lesz].  
 Peter much fatter than Johnny ever will.be  
 'Peter is much fatter than Johnny will ever be.'

<sup>2</sup> See Reglero (2006) for a obligatory gapping in Spanish subcomparatives: although the phenomenon sounds similar to what we can find in Hungarian, Spanish lacks overt comparative operators, thus Reglero's analysis is more similar to Kennedy and Merchant's (2000) approach.

<sup>3</sup> We claim that C<sub>Fin</sub><sup>0</sup> is responsible for finiteness here, similarly to other non-relative clauses, and lacks the strong feature that would otherwise trigger the movement of the operator to its specifier position.



It is clear that only given information can be deleted; however, the verb in (36a) encodes new information as well, inasmuch as its tense differs from that of its matrix counterpart. That is, the maximal given constituent possible is *vP* in this example, thus *vP* is deleted, which also includes the *QP* with its [+wh] feature. Assuming that this is so, one may wonder why it is not enough to delete the *vP* in all elliptical comparatives. The answer to this question is based on the fact that sluicing always targets the maximal given constituent possible (cf. Craenenbroeck and Lipták 2006: 254; see also Merchant 2008 for further discussion); this is also exemplified by (37):

- (37) They studied a Balkan language,  
 a. but I don't know which [*e*].  
 b. \*but I don't know which they did [*e*].  
 (Craenenbroeck and Lipták 2006, ex. 17)

In sum, the phenomenon of Comparative Verb Gapping can be explained by the optional trigger of relative movement, and if comparative operator movement is not triggered, the degree expression inside the comparative complement clause is deleted by sluicing.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Anikó Csirmaz and Huba Bartos (p.c.) remarked that the following Hungarian examples may be problematic for the analysis just presented above:

- (i) Jancsi sokkal részegebb volt, mint Olivér.  
 Johnny much drunk-er was than Oliver  
 'Johnny was much more drunk than Oliver was.'  
 (ii) Jancsi sokkal részegebb volt, mint amilyen részeg Olivér.  
 Johnny much drunk-er was than OP drunk Oliver  
 'Johnny was much more drunk than Oliver is.'

The contrast between the two examples can be captured in that the comparative subclause in (i) contains past tense, while (ii) contains present tense, although there is no overt verb form detected in either of them.

We claim that this is not problematic. It is widely known that the 3<sup>rd</sup>/singular form of the copula *be* in the present tense in Hungarian (i.e., the Hungarian equivalent of *is*) can be phonologically null, and this is what we can see (or, in fact, not see, as it is null) in (ii). Since the comparative operator and the adjective are overt in the comparative subclause, on the basis of the analysis presented above, no sluicing has taken place here, which explains why only the present tense copula is available in (ii).

### 3 Conclusion

In this article, we wanted to provide an insight into what elliptical comparatives look like in Hungarian. One of the main aims was to show what kind of parametric settings can be found in this language.

The parameters in question describe the general appearance of elliptical comparative constructions. First, [ $\pm$ CD] shows whether the AP in predicative comparatives or the DP in attributive comparative must obligatorily be deleted in the comparative subclause if it is identical to its matrix counterpart. Second, in [+CVG] languages, if the comparative operator is missing from the comparative subclause, the finite verb must also be deleted, unless it carries new information, as was presented in connection with Hungarian. To our knowledge, this phenomenon has not been explained in the literature; we ventured an outline of a possible analysis in connection with the Hungarian data presented in section 2.2.

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On the other hand, as the degree expression containing the comparative operator is deleted in (i), based on the argumentation above, sluicing must have taken place, thus the verb is probably also gone. Assuming that the verb encoded only given information, it cannot be anything else but *volt* (*was*), the same form as its matrix counterpart. Nevertheless, even if the empty verb form in (i) is generated as the present tense null copula, the problem with this is that the null verb form would be followed by the gap left by sluicing, and I suppose that the parsing of such a construction would invariably treat these null sequences as one, invariably giving the verb form a given interpretation.

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