

Compounds split by silence: Compound pruning in Dutch synthetic adjectival compounds

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Abstract

We describe a novel ellipsis phenomenon attested in Dutch synthetic adjectival compounds, whereby the right part of the compound undergoes ellipsis and the left part gets realised. Such partial realisation of the compound is standardly accompanied by clausal ellipsis of some sort (fragment formation, sluicing or gapping). After inventorising the morphosyntactic properties of the phenomenon, we argue that the ellipsis targeting the right part of the compound is not coordination reduction (Booij 1985), but standard ellipsis. We settle for an account for the facts that is based on the observation that synthetic adjectival compounds in Dutch are not word-level units but syntactic phrases, within which the stranded first part is a syntactic phrase itself. Its phrasehood allows it to undergo A-bar movement out of the compound to form a remnant of clausal ellipsis, while clausal ellipsis needs to be present to allow the affixal second part to be non-realised.

1. Introduction

Compounds are words, and as such they fall under the *Lexical Integrity Hypothesis*, which holds that syntactic processes do not have access to word parts. Standard ellipsis (such as clausal ellipsis, VP ellipsis or N/N' ellipsis) is a syntactic operation and therefore cannot target part of a word: it is impossible to elide part of a derived word (cf. (1)) or part of a compound, be that a synthetic compound like *meat eater* (2a) or a primary compound like *schoolbag* (2b) (see Bosque 2019 among others).

- (1) *John liked the play, and Mary dis-__ it. (*disliked*) (Bresnan and Mchombo 1995)
- (2) a. Meat consumption should be discouraged. *__ eaters should pay more. (*meat eaters*)
b. *Travel bags are more expensive than school __. (*schoolbags*)

There is a systematic – and to our knowledge hitherto unnoticed – exception to the generalisation that parts of compounds cannot be targeted by ellipsis, which is found in the realm synthetic adjectival compounds in Dutch, as shown in (3) and (4). In these examples, a compound such as *achtpotig* ‘eight-legged’, *driebaans* lit. ‘three-laned’, *groenogig* ‘green-eyed’ is only half present: the first part is pronounced, the second part is missing, indicated by the __ sign. In addition, the utterance also contains an elided subject and the verb, in a manner that resembles fragment answers in (3) and gapping in (4). The absence of the subject and verb is indicated by the Δ sign.

- (3) a. A: Spinnen zijn zespotig.
spiders are six.leg.ADJ
‘Spiders have six legs.’
B: Nee, acht__ Δ.
no eight
‘No, they have eight legs.’
b. A: De N36 is driebaans.
the N36 is three.lane.ADJ
‘Road N36 has three lanes.’
B: Nee, vier__ Δ.
no four
‘No, it has four lanes.’

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- c. A: Kevin is blauwogig.
Kevin is blue.eye.ADJ
 ‘Kevin has blue eyes.’
 B: Nee, groen__ Δ.
no green
 ‘No, he has green eyes.’
- d. A: Deze hoed is doosvormig.
this hat is box.shape.ADJ
 ‘This hat has the shape of a box.’
 B: Nee, piramide__ Δ.
no pyramid
 ‘No, it has the shape of a pyramid.’
- (4) a. Insecten zijn zespotig en spinnen acht__ Δ.
insects are six.leg.ADJ and spiders eight
 ‘Insects have six legs and spiders eight.’
 b. De N36 is tweebaans en de N40 vier__ Δ.
the N36 is two.lane.ADJ and the N40 four
 ‘Road N36 has two lanes and road N40 four.’
 c. Kevin is blauwogig en Lucas groen__ Δ.
Kevin is blue.eye.ADJ and Lucas green
 ‘Kevin is blue-eyed and Lucas green-eyed.’
 d. Deze hoed is doosvormig en die piramide__ Δ.
this hat is box.shape.ADJ and that pyramid
 ‘This hat has the shape of a box and that one the shape of a pyramid.’

We will refer to the ellipsis phenomenon in (3)–(4), which silences the second part of a synthetic adjectival compound, as *compound pruning*. Compound pruning removes the right part of synthetic adjectival compounds and leaves behind only the left part, which is interpreted contrastively with respect to a correlate in an antecedent clause.

Sentences like those in (3) and (4) are characteristic of informal language use, they would not be used in formal writing. In formal language, these examples involving corrective fragments or gapping would be realised with the compounds pronounced in full, as *achtpotig*, *vierbaans*, *groenogig* and *piramidevormig*.

- (5) a. A: Spinnen zijn zespotig.
spiders are six.leg.ADJ
 ‘Spiders have six legs.’
 B: Nee, achtpotig Δ.
no eight.leg.ADJ
 ‘No, they have eight legs.’
- b. A: De N36 is driebaans.
the N36 is three.lane.ADJ
 ‘Road N36 has three lanes.’
 B: Nee, vierbaans Δ.
no four.lane.ADJ
 ‘No, it has four lanes.’

	ADJECTIVIZER	Example	Gloss	English translation
Num–N–ADJ	-s	<i>drie-baan-s</i>	three-lane-ADJ	‘three-lane’ (e.g. road)
	-ig	<i>zes-del-ig</i>	six-part-ADJ	‘six-part’ (e.g. composition)
Q–N–ADJ	-s	<i>meer-persoon-s</i>	more-person-ADJ	‘multi-person’ (e.g. household)
	-ig	<i>veel-zijd-ig</i>	many-side-ADJ	‘multifaceted’ (e.g. summary)
N–N–ADJ	-ig	<i>doos-vorm-ig</i>	box-form-ADJ	‘box-shaped’ (e.g. shape)
A–N–ADJ	-ig	<i>groen-og-ig</i>	green-eye-ADJ	‘green-eyed’ (e.g. boy)

Table 1: Synthetic adjectival compounds in Dutch.

- (6) a. Insecten zijn zespotig en spinnen achtpotig Δ .
insects are six.leg.ADJ and spiders eight.leg.ADJ
 lit. ‘Insects are six-legged and spiders eight-legged.’
- b. Kevin is blauwogig en Lucas groenogig Δ .
Kevin is blue.eye.ADJ and Lucas green.eye.ADJ
 ‘Kevin is blue-eyed and Lucas green-eyed.’

As mentioned above, compound pruning can be found with synthetic adjectival compounds in Dutch. Synthetic adjectival compounds are a type of compound in which a derivational affix is added to the combination of two roots, the first of which is variably a numeral or quantifier, a noun or an adjective, and the second of which is always a noun. The derivational affix in our examples is always the adjectiviser *-ig* or *-s* (often comparable in function to the English *-ed* suffix), see table 1 for an overview. We address the internal structure of these compounds in section 4.1.

Compound pruning in Dutch is subject to considerable individual variation. We established the existence of three groups of Dutch speakers in informal consultation sessions: for some speakers (including the second author of this article) all examples in (3) and (4) are fully grammatical; for a second group of speakers (including a reviewer) all examples are fully ungrammatical; and for a third group some examples are acceptable and others are not. For this third group, the (ab) examples with a stranded numeral tend to fare better than the (cd) examples, which strand an adjective or a noun, and the fragment examples in (3) fare better than the gapping ones in (4).

To confirm this, we also conducted a small online questionnaire study in March 2026 with 34 Dutch natives on a voluntary basis (no compensation offered), who were first year students of the BA *Linguistics* programme in Leiden.¹ Participants were asked to rate 27 sentences on a scale from 1 to 5, where the end points were labelled under each example, as *helemaal goed* ‘completely right’ for 5 and the *helemaal fout* ‘completely wrong’ for 1. The 27 sentences contained examples (3a–d), (4a–d) as well as example (42) (see section 4.1. below) as well as fillers, which were among others the non-pruned versions of each example as well as a fully grammatical and ungrammatical control.

The results of the questionnaire back up the results of our informal data collection. We provide the percentage of the participants who gave a rating of 4 or 5 to the tested examples, which correspond to (3a–d) and (4a–d) above, in table 2.

As the reader can see, the fragment examples are on the whole rated better than the gapping examples, and the compounds with a numeral first part were rated better than compounds with a non-numeral remnant, except for the case of (4d), whose rating was surprisingly high compared to (3d). Since numeral remnants are the best type of remnants (3ab, 4ab), in section 4 of the paper we will center our account on examples with numeral remnants. We return to the difference between the (ab) and (cd) examples in (3) and (4) in section 4.1.

¹ The students at this point had little training in formal syntax and morphology. In addition, they were not informed about the linguistic nature of the data or the theoretical implications of the study.

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			% of speakers with a rating of 4–5
fragment	(3a)	Spinnen zijn zespotig. – Nee, acht.	61
	(3b)	De N36 is driebaans. – Nee, vier.	55
	(3c)	Kevin is blauwogig. – Nee, groen.	52
	(3d)	Deze hoed is doosvormig. – Nee, piramide.	29
gapping	(4a)	Insecten zijn zespotig en spinnen acht.	38
	(4b)	De N36 is tweebaans en de N40 vier.	26
	(4c)	Kevin is blauwogig en Lucas groen.	23
	(4d)	Deze hoed is doosvormig en die piramide.	44

Table 2: Rating of compound pruning in fragments and gapping.

It is important to stress that compound pruning is only available with synthetic adjectival compounds, and cannot take place with other types of compounds. It is much more difficult to construct grammatical examples in ways similar to compound pruning either with primary compounds (cf. (7ab)) or synthetic verbal compounds (cf. (7c)):

- (7) a. A: Mijn medaille is olijfgroen.
my medal is olive.green
 ‘My medal is olive green.’
 B: *Nee, gif__ Δ.
no poison
 ‘No, poison green.’ (*gifgroen* ‘poison green’)
- b. *Ik heb keelontsteking en jij oor__ Δ.
I have throat.infection and you ear
 ‘I have a throat infection and you an ear infection.’ (*ooronsteking* ‘ear infection’)
- c. ?*Wij zijn bierdrinkers en jullie wijn__ Δ.
we are beer.drinker.PL and you.PL wine
 ‘We are beer drinkers and you wine drinkers.’ (*wijn drinker* ‘wine drinker’)

The purpose of our paper is twofold: we describe the properties of compound pruning and we attempt to explain why it affects synthetic adjectival compounds and how it comes about. In section 2, we begin by defining the specific syntactic properties of compound pruning sentences. We show on the basis of these properties that compound pruning is not an instance of conjunction reduction, but involves standard ellipsis. In section 3 and 4 we introduce two accounts of how ellipsis comes about in these sentences, one in terms of Extra deletion and one in terms of a *move-and-delete* derivation of ellipsis. We show that Extra deletion cannot explain all properties of compound pruning, while the *move-and-delete* analysis comes a long way in doing so. Section 5 summarizes the findings. Our approach to the data is minimalist in nature (Chomsky 1995; 2000), and uses the late-insertion model of vocabulary items (as in Distributed Morphology).

2. Morphosyntactic properties and the elliptical nature of compound pruning

2.1. Morphosyntactic properties of compound pruning

Sentences in which compound pruning occurs have three key characteristic properties.

The first is that compound pruning can only apply to an adjectival compound that is in predicative position, i.e. when it is complement to a copula verb. All our examples above were such cases. Compound pruning is impossible if the adjective is an attributive modifier of a noun inside a noun phrase. As the following examples show, ungrammaticality obtains regardless of whether the modified noun is overt or itself elided, as in (8a) and (8b) respectively. We return to (8b) in section 3, where it will have particular relevance, and in section 4, where we derive this pattern and similar ones.

- (8) a. *Lucas is [DP een groenogig jongetje], en Tim [DP een blauw__ jongetje] Δ.
Lucas is a green.eye.ADJ boy and Tim an blue boy
- b. *Lucas is [DP een groenogig jongetje], en Tim [DP een blauw__ [N' N]] Δ.
Lucas is a green.eye.ADJ boy and Tim an blue
 'Lucas is a green-eyed boy and Tim is a blue-eyed boy.'

The second characteristic property concerns the coordinative configuration in which compound pruning is found: the elided compound must be a predicate in a clause that is directly coordinated to a clause with a similar compound (as is usual in gapping), or it should be a predicate in an elliptical clause that is formed across utterances, as for example in question/answer pairs (9a) or as fragmentary responses to declaratives (9b). This is not surprising as in some accounts (Reich 2007, Boone 2014), ellipsis in gapping and fragments are formed in similar ways under parallel discourse relations between antecedent and ellipsis clause.

- (9) a. A: Is de A4 driebaans?
is the A4 three.lane.ADJ
 'Does the highway A4 have three lanes?'
 B: Nee, vier__ Δ. compound pruning as fragment answer
no four
 'No, it has four lanes.'
- b. A: De A4 is driebaans.
the A4 is three.lane.ADJ
 'The highway A4 has three lanes.'
 B: Nee, vier__ Δ. compound pruning as fragmentary correction
no four
 'No, it has four lanes.'

The need for parallel discourse relations and clausal coordination also means that compound pruning cannot be found in contexts where the adjectival compounds are directly coordinated to each other, as in (10), or where the adjectival compounds are not occupying parallel syntactic positions in coordinated clauses, as in (11).

- (10) *Deze liften moeten respectievelijk [&P vijfpersoons en zeven__] zijn.
these lifts must respectively five.person.ADJ and seven be
 'These lifts must be for five and seven persons respectively.'
- (11) *Dit zijn liften die vijfpersoons zijn en die liften daar zijn zeven__.
this are lifts that five.persons.ADJ are and those lifts there are seven
 'These are lifts which are for five persons and those lifts are for seven persons.'

The third property of compound pruning is that in addition to omission of the second part of the compound, it also standardly involves ellipsis of a large constituent, which involves minimally the verb phrase but can also be a whole TP. The first type was illustrated by the gapping examples in (4),² the second by the

² That gapping in Dutch can involve ellipsis of only a verb phrase and not the TP, is evidenced by the grammaticality of examples in which a negated modal auxiliary takes scope over both conjunctions, which some of our informants accept. As Potter et al (2017) argue, these examples necessitate a treatment in terms of small conjunct coordination and ellipsis of a vP constituent.

- (i) Jan kan niet naar Hawaii op vakantie en zijn zoon naar Noordwijk.
 Jan can not to Hawaii on vacation and his son to Noordwijk
 'It cannot be the case that Jan is going to Hawaii on vacation and his son to Noordwijk.'

The same can also be observed with compound pruning:

- (ii) *Context:* Two robotics engineers are debating how many legs their robots should have. One says to the other:
 Jouw robot kan niet vierpotig zijn en de mijne drie. Dat is niet eerlijk!

fragmentary responses in (3). In section 4, we will also provide further examples of clausal ellipsis, namely sluicing. In all cases of ellipsis, the first part of the compound forms an ellipsis remnant that carries contrastive focus, and the missing second part of the compound is given.

The presence of clausal ellipsis is not absolute: in some restricted contexts it is possible to find a configuration that resembles gapping but with the verb also present, see (12) as illustration. Sentences of this sort are in general degraded compared to their gapped equivalent. For some speakers (12) fares worse than compound pruning in (4), but is still acceptable. For others it is ungrammatical. We indicate this with the % sign before the verb in the second conjunct.

- (12) De weg is eerst tweebaans, maar (%wordt) later vier.
the road is first two-laned but becomes later four
 ‘The road has first two lanes, later four.’

We will return to these three characteristic properties of compound pruning in section 4, when we suggest an analysis for the phenomenon. In the next section (section 2.2) we use these three characteristics and some others to point out that compound pruning is not an instance of conjunction reduction, a known type of ellipsis that can target parts of compounds. In section 2.3 we provide evidence that compound pruning does involve ellipsis.

2.2. Compound pruning is not an instance of conjunction reduction

Compound pruning cannot be classified as the elliptical process that can target any type of coordinated compound (or larger coordinated phrase or sentence), namely conjunction reduction (Booij 1985 and Bosque 2012 among others). When it operates on coordinated compounds, conjunction reduction eliminates either the first part of a compound in a second coordinand or the second part of a compound in a first coordinand, two patterns that are illustrated in (13) on a two-part compound with parts X and Y (see actual examples in (14)).³

- (13) Patterns of conjunction reduction
 a. X<Y> & XY
 b. XY & <X>Y

As Booij (1985) cogently argues based on data from Dutch, conjunction reduction does not violate the Lexical Integrity Hypothesis when it operates on compounds because it is not a syntactic process, but prosodic in nature (a ‘late PF-ellipsis’ in the terminology of Lipták and Güneş 2022).⁴ Its signature property is that it elides a domain that corresponds minimally to prosodic words. If compound pruning is a case of conjunction reduction, we understand why it allows for deletion.

When we compare compound pruning, however, to conjunction reduction affecting compounds, we find that the two have starkly different properties.

your robot can not four.leg.ADJ be and the mine three that is not fair
 ‘It cannot be the case that your robot has four legs and mine only three. That’s not fair.’

We thank an anonymous reviewer for calling our attention to these data.

³ Conjunction reduction can also operate on coordinated phrases as well as clauses, such as the case of backward conjunction reduction, usually referred to as RNR in (i) and (ii). See Broekhuis and Corver (2019) for discussion.

- (i) Jan heeft een boek en Piet heeft een tijdschrift gelezen.
 Jan has a book and Piet has a newspaper read
 ‘Jan has read a book and Piet a newspaper.’
 (ii) Jan heeft een dik en Piet heeft een dun boek gelezen.
 Jan has a thick and Piet has a thin book read
 ‘Jan has read a thick book and Piet a thin one.’

⁴ See also Kenesei (2008) for arguments for the prosodic nature of conjunction reduction in Hungarian.

To start, the domain of application in the case of compound pruning is much smaller than that of conjunction reduction in compounds. Compound pruning only operates on synthetic adjectival compounds, and no other compound type, while conjunction reduction can affect compounds and complex words of many types, without categorial and size restrictions. Most crucially for us, conjunction reduction can happily target compounds that cannot show up with compound pruning (compare with the examples in (7) above):

- (14) a. Mijn medaille is olijf__ of gifgroen.
my medal is olive and poison.green
 ‘My medal is olive or poison green.’
- b. Ik heb keel__ of oorontsteking.
I have throat or ear.infection
 ‘I have a throat or ear infection.’
- c. Wij zijn bierdrinkers en verkopers.
we are beer.drinker.PL and seller.PL
 ‘We are beer drinkers and sellers.’

In addition, conjunction reduction can elide any kind of category, such as adjectives (cf. (14b)), a verb (as in *in__ en uitrijden* in and out.drive ‘drive in and out’) or prepositions (*voor__ of achterin (de boot)* before or behind.in (the boat) ‘in the front or back (of the boat)’), see Broekhuis and Corver (2019). Compound pruning on the other hand can only eliminate a noun and the adjectiviser in a synthetic adjectival compound.

Concerning the syntactic position of the gap inside the compound and other morphosyntactic properties, compound pruning and conjunct reduction are totally different. Firstly, conjunction reduction can operate on coordinated words (as in the previous examples) in addition to operating on larger constituents (phrases or sentences), while compound pruning is ill-formed when two compounds are directly coordinated, recall the ungrammaticality of (10) above. Secondly, conjunction reduction results in a gap that is in adjacent position to an (overt or covert) coordinator (recall (13)), while in compound pruning, the coordinator and the gap are never adjacent: they are separated minimally by the stranded first part, and possibly another constituent like a subject, cf. (4a) repeated here:

- (15) Insecten zijn zespotig en spinnen acht__ Δ. (=4a)
insects are six.leg.ADJ and spiders eight
 ‘Insects have six legs and spiders eight.’

In addition, conjunction reduction can target adjectival compounds with predicative function, but also adjectives with attributive function inside NPs, as in (16), while compound pruning cannot target attributive adjectives, as we have shown in example (8) above:

- (16) Dit zijn hand-gemaakte en geschilderde artikelen.
this are hand-made and painted products
 ‘These are hand-made and painted products.’

Last but not least, conjunction reduction can leave non-existing words behind, such as *schei*, the root of the verb *scheiden* ‘separate’, which is not an independent word of the language. Such words cannot be found in compound pruning type sentence structures, as (17) shows.⁵

⁵ This example has a structure that resembles compound pruning, but does not involve a synthetic adjectival compound. We are not aware of synthetic adjectival compounds whose first part is a non-existing word.

	conjunction reduction	compound pruning
compound type	any type	synthetic adjectival
elided category	any lexical category (N, A, V, P)	N-ADJ
type of coordination	any level	clausal
targetable adjective	predicative or attributive	predicative
stranded word	existing / non-existing	existing
position of missing part in compound	adjacent to coordinator	non-adjacent to coordinator

Table 3: Properties of compound pruning and conjunction reduction.

- (17) a. schei__ en natuurkunde (scheikunde ‘chemistry’)
and nature.study
 ‘chemistry and physics’
- b. *Zijn analyse is natuurkundig en mijne schei__.
his analysis is physics.ADJ and my chemistry.ADJ
 ‘His analysis is within physics and my analysis is within chemistry.’

The above comparison shows that compound pruning does not track the properties of conjunction reduction, as summarised at a glance in table 3. Unlike conjunction reduction, compound pruning operates exclusively on synthetic adjectival compounds and eliminates the noun and an adjectiviser; it can only take place in clauses that are coordinated or form discourse turns; it can only target predicative adjectives; it always leaves existing words behind and the position of the missing compound part is not adjacent to the coordinator. We conclude that conjunction reduction and compound pruning involve distinct ellipsis processes.

2.3. Compound pruning involves ellipsis

Before turning to the question of how compound pruning comes about, in this section we entertain the question of whether sentences with compound pruning involve an ellipsis operation that applies specifically to a compound to begin with. While we have assumed this so far, it is important to demonstrate this point and to establish beyond doubt that our sentences contain compounds split into half by ellipsis.

The output of compound pruning in a clause can a priori be assumed to correspond to two syntactic structures. In one, the clause contains a predicative compound that is split by ellipsis as shown in (18a–c), where the stranded first part of the compound forms the remnant of clausal ellipsis. Clausal ellipsis is indicated by [TP Δ] to the right of the remnant, following the move-and-delete analysis of Dutch fragments and gapping (Temmerman 2011, Aelbrecht 2007, Boone 2014). Alternatively, it can be the case that this clause does not contain a compound, rather it contains a numeral/adjectival/nominal constituent that functions as a clausal predicate in its own right and is the remnant of clausal ellipsis (marked again as [TP Δ]). The difference between the two types of structures concerns the syntactic category of the bolded constituent: in (18a–c) we have a split compound, which is an adjective; in (19a–c), the bolded unit is a numeral, an adjective or a noun.

- (18) *first clause* *second clause*
- a. [CP1...[Adj NUM-N-ADJ]...] & [CP2 ... [AP NUM **N-ADJ**] [TP Δ]]
- b. [CP1...[Adj A-N-ADJ]...] & [CP2 ... [AP A **N-ADJ**] [TP Δ]]
- c. [CP1...[Adj N-N-ADJ]...] & [CP2 ... [NP N **N-ADJ**] [TP Δ]]
- (19) a. [CP1... [Adj NUM-N-ADJ]...] & [CP2 ... [NumP NUM] [TP Δ]]
- b. [CP1... [Adj A-N-ADJ]...] & [CP2 ... [AP A] [TP Δ]]
- c. [CP1... [Adj N-N-ADJ]...] & [CP2 ... [NP N] [TP Δ]]

There are several arguments to be made for the case that underlyingly, we are dealing with structure (18) and not (19), that is to say what we call compound pruning contains a compound word underlyingly.

The first argument comes from meaning considerations. Our examples are interpreted with the meaning of a predicative compound in it. To illustrate, a sentence like (4c), repeated here as (20), is predominantly interpreted to mean that Lucas is a person who is green-eyed and not someone who happens to be green e.g. because he got green paint all over his clothes. This is due to the strict syntactic parallelism between the two elements *groenogig* and *groen*, which is the remnant of gapping.

- (20) Kevin is blauwogig en Lucas groen__Δ. (=4c)
Kevin is blue.eye.ADJ and Lucas green
 (i) ‘Kevin is blue-eyed and Lucas is green-eyed.’ (corresponds to structure (18b))
 (ii) #‘Kevin is blue-eyed and Lucas is green.’ (corresponds to structure (19b))

The second argument comes from the observation that (19a) and (19b) cannot be correct structures as numerals and bare singulars (with the exception of names of professions) in Dutch cannot be predicates in a clause (complement to a copula verb). (21a) shows that a numeral cannot be a predicate, unless in the context of arithmetic or when used to specify one’s age, as (21b).

- (21) a. *Deze apples zijn zeven. b. De derdemachtswortel uit 64 is 4.
these apples are seven the cube.root out 64 is 4
 lit. ‘These apples are seven.’ ‘The cube root of 64 is 4.’

A similar argument can be construed observing the type of negation used in compound pruning sentences. When used to express arithmetic relations, predicative numerals are compatible with either sentential negation (*niet* ‘not’) or constituent negation (*geen* ‘no’) in utterances like (22a). The choice does not affect the meaning of the sentence in any way. Adjectival predicates are only compatible with sentential negation (*niet* ‘not’) and not constituent negation (*geen* ‘no’), as shown by (22b).

- (22) a. 2x2 is {niet/ geen} vijf.
2x2 is not no vijf
 ‘2x2 is not five.’
 b. Spinnen zijn {niet / *geen} zespotig.
spiders are not no six.leg.ADJ
 ‘Spiders are not six-legged.’

In sentences with compound pruning, the numeral is not compatible with constituent negation (*geen* ‘no’), either, which follows if the numeral is underlyingly part of an elliptical adjectival compound. The choice of negation does not follow if the numeral is a predicative numeric expression in the clause.

- (23) Dit beestje is zespotig, {niet / *geen} acht__Δ.
this creature is six.leg.ADJ not no eight
 ‘This creature is six-legged, not eight-legged.’

The fourth argument supporting the structures in (18) concerns the syntactic category of the remnants. The category of the remnant is clearly adjectival according to the evidence of later pronominal reference: to refer back to the predicate Dutch uses the pronominal anaphor *dat*, which can refer back to adjectives (among others), cf. (24). Pronominal *zoveel* ‘so.many’, which can refer to numeral predicates, cannot be used in compound pruning:

- (24) a. Dit beestje is zespotig. Dat beestje is *dat* ook.
this creature is six.leg.ADJ that creature is that too
 lit. ‘This creature is six-legged. That creature is that, too.’
 b. Dit beestje is zespotig. Deze spin acht__Δ. En die spin is *dat* ook.
this creature is six.leg.ADJ this spider eight and that spider is that too
 lit. ‘This creature is six-legged. This spider is eight-legged. And that spider is that, too.’

- (25) a. 4x4 is zestien. En zoveel is 8+8 ook.
4x4 is sixteen. and so.many is 8+8 too
 ‘4x4 is sixteen. And 8+8 is also so many.’
- b. Dit beestje is zespotig. Deze spin acht Δ. *En die spin is ook zoveel.
this creature is six.leg.ADJ this spider eight and that spider is too so.many
 lit. ‘This creature is six-legged. This spider is eight-legged. And that spider is so many, too.’

In this section we provided four pieces of evidence for the claim that compound pruning contains a compound that is missing its second part in an elliptical process of some sort: interpretational parallelism, the absence of predicative function with numerals and bare nouns, the specific form of negation applying to the remnant and category restrictions on pronominal reference to this item. The results dovetail and indicate that compound pruning contains a compound that is only partially pronounced.

This conclusion is also in line with the observation that compound pruning observes the recoverability condition that is characteristic of standard ellipsis (surface anaphora), namely that the elided material – the content of the missing TP and more importantly also the missing compound part – should be e-GIVEN (Merchant 2001) and be syntactically isomorphic to an antecedent (Chung 2006). This requires that compound pruning should be preceded by a linguistic antecedent in which the compound is present in full. This was the case in all our examples as the reader can ascertain. All examples contained a correlate to the elliptical compound with the same noun and adjectiviser (N+ADJ) sequence.

When there is no such antecedent available, compound pruning fails. To see this, consider first the sentence in (26) and its structural representations in (26i) and (26ii). The antecedent contains the noun *pot* ‘leg’ in the plural, but not the form *-potig* ‘leg-ADJ’. Due to this, *Deze spin acht* ‘this spider eight’ is derived from the underlying structure that is isomorphic to the antecedent clause *Deze spin heeft acht poten* ‘This spider has eight legs’, with gapping and N-ellipsis of the noun *poten* (26i). The sequence does not correspond to the clause *Deze is spin is achtpotig* ‘This spider is eight-legged’, as shown in (26ii).

- (26) Dit beestje heeft zes poten. Deze spin acht.
this creature has six leg.PL this spider eight
 ‘This creature has six legs. This spider eight.’
- i. Dit beestje heeft zes poten. Deze spin [NP acht [N' ~~poten~~]] [TP heeft]
this creature has six leg.PL this spider eight leg.PL has
- ii. Dit beestje heeft zes poten. Deze spin [AP achtpotig] [TP is]
this creature has six leg.PL this spider eight.leg.ADJ is

Evidence for the unavailability of the predicative underlying structure in (26b) comes from the category of pronominal reference to the elliptical *acht*: it can be followed by a pronominal form that is of the numeral category, but not one that is an adjective.

- (27) Dit beestje heeft zes poten. Deze spin acht Δ.
this creature has six leg.PL this spider eight
 ✓ En die spin heeft er ook zoveel.
and that spider has ER also so.many
 #En die spin is dat ook.
and that spider is that too
 lit. ‘This creature has six legs. This spider eight. And that spider has so many, too.’

This in turn shows that (26ii) is the wrong representation. We conclude that a compound pruning clause must be anteceded by an isomorphic structure, in line with its elliptical nature.

Having stated the existence of compound pruning and having listed its properties, in the next two sections we investigate how partial pronunciation of the compound comes about. Our analysis needs to account for the three properties of compound pruning listed in section 2.1: the predicative nature of the adjectival compound, the presence of clausal coordination/turn-taking across sentences and the standard

presence of clausal ellipsis in these sentences. In addition, the analysis must explain why compound pruning applies only to synthetical adjectival compounds, and not to any other compound.

In section 3, we sketch an account that is capable of explaining a subset of these properties but not all, namely Extra deletion. We find it important to consider Extra deletion because our data resemble to a considerable degree data in other languages that received an analysis in terms of this type of ellipsis process. In section 4 we propose an alternative account that we believe is capable of accounting for all key properties of compound pruning, and which is built on two claims that we substantiate independently: the fact that synthetic adjectival compounds are not word level units but phrases, and the fact that clausal ellipsis can repair ungrammatical sentences by eliminating (i.e. blocking the insertion of) forms that cause the ungrammaticality.

3. Compound pruning as Extra deletion

3.1. Extra deletion

Extra deletion is an elliptical phenomenon identified relatively recently by Duk-ho An (see An 2016; 2019; 2025). Extra deletion is the optional non-constituent deletion of material inside the remnant of a clausal ellipsis operation such as fragments or gapping. When clausal ellipsis creates a gap and leaves behind the remnant, schematically illustrated in (28), the string of deleted elements can optionally be extended beyond what is initially marked for deletion, namely the TP. When it is extended into parts of the remnant, it can delete non-constituents. Shading marks elision.

(28) [... [X Y] [Δ] TP]
 remnant clausal ellipsis

For illustration, consider the following example from Korean, which illustrates the various forms of fragmentary answers that can be given to a constituent question:

(29) Q: John-i nwukwu-uy tongsayng-ul manna-ss-ni? (An 2019, ex. (43))
 John-NOM who-GEN brother-ACC meet-PAST-Q
 ‘Whose brother did John meet?’
 A1: Mary-uy tongsayng-ul [TP Δ]
 A2: Mary-uy tongsayng-ul [TP Δ]
 A3: Mary-uy tongsayng-ul [TP Δ]
 A4: Mary-uy tongsayng-ul [TP Δ]
 Mary-GEN brother-ACC
 ‘(John met) Mary’s brother.’

Korean is an agglutinative language with case markers. The constituent that answers the *wh*-phrase is the remnant in the fragment and contains an accusative suffix on the remnant noun phrase and a genitive suffix on the possessor noun phrase inside that. In the context of clausal ellipsis, this remnant is optionally pronounced either fully (29A1); without the final accusative affix (29A2); without the possessed noun (29A3) or only spelling out the possessor without a case marker (29A4). The optional Extra deletion steps are illustrated by gray shading. Shaded material is always e-GIVEN.

Clearly, these shaded parts of the remnant do not form a syntactic constituent, while they invariably form a single continuous linear string. As An (2016; 2019; 2025) argues, this pattern cannot be captured in syntactic terms, and should be captured in terms of linear order: the non-pronunciation of the case markers and the possessed noun is due to PF-deletion that takes place right at or shortly after linearization before vocabulary insertion (An 2025). Sensitivity to linear order is evident as it is always an unbroken, contiguous string of morphemes that elides. In other words, deletion of the leftmost word or affix is dependent on deletion of the ones that follow it, consider (30).

- (30) Q: nwu-ka nwukwu-lul manna-ss-ni? (An 2016, ex. (71); 2019, ex. (3))
 who-NOM who-ACC meet-PST-Q
 ‘Who met whom?’
- A1: Cho-ka Yang-ul [TP Δ]
- A2: Cho-ka Yang-ul [TP Δ]
- A3: *Cho-ka Yang-ul [TP Δ]
 Cho-NOM Yang-ACC
 ‘Cho (met) Yang.’

Erschler (2022) provides data from Turkish, Ossetic, and Eastern Armenian in another syntactic domain, namely gapping, and puts forward the claim that gapping contexts in these languages can also feature the late PF-process of Extra deletion, which he refers to as *slending*. The example in (31) (Erschler 2022: (11d), with our bracketing) is a case of Turkish gapping, in which clausal ellipsis is extended into the remnant *küçük kızın evine* small daughter-3SG-GEN house-3SG-DAT and eliminates two possessed nouns and their case markers. These units do not form a syntactic constituent.

- (31) Can büyük kız-in-in ev-in-e gelmiş,
 Can big daughter-3SG-GEN house-3SG-DAT arrived
 Ayşe ise [[küçük kız-in-in] ev-in-e] [TP gelmiş]
 Ayshe CTR small daughter-3SG-GEN house-3SG-DAT arrived
 ‘Can arrived at his eldest daughter’s house, and Ayshe, at her youngest one’s.’

3.2. Compound pruning as the result of Extra deletion

Section 2.3 argued that compound pruning sentences contain an elliptical clause in which in addition to clausal ellipsis, we also find partial pronunciation of a compound, as in (32), repeated from (18) above.

- (32) *first clause* *second clause* (=18)
- a. [CP1...[Adj NUM-N-ADJ]...] & [CP2... [AP NUM ~~N-ADJ~~] [TP Δ]]
- b. [CP1...[Adj A-N-ADJ]...] & [CP2... [AP A ~~N-ADJ~~] [TP Δ]]
- c. [CP1...[Adj N-N-ADJ]...] & [CP2... [NP N ~~N-ADJ~~] [TP Δ]]

The structural representation of the elliptical clause as given greatly resembles the configuration in which Extra deletion is possible in languages like Korean and Turkish, illustrated in the previous section. For this reason, we need to ask whether compound pruning is a case of Extra deletion, whereby clausal ellipsis is extended into a predicative compound and eliminates the right part of the compound, eliding not a syntactic unit, but a morphological one, namely part of a word, as shown in (33).

- (33) a. Insecten zijn zespotig en spinnen achtpotig [TP Δ]
 insects are six.leg.ADJ and spiders eight.leg.ADJ
 lit. ‘Insects are six-legged and spiders eight-legged.’
- b. Deze weg is tweebaans. Die weg vierbaans [TP Δ]
 this road is two.lane.ADJ that road four.lane.ADJ
 ‘This road has two lanes. That one four.’

With this analysis in place, we would gain in understanding why compound pruning is standardly accompanied by clausal ellipsis: this would follow from the parasitic nature of Extra deletion on the presence of an independently created clausal deletion site. The need for clausal ellipsis in turn explains why compound pruning only operates under clausal coordination/turn-taking: coordination must be at the level of the clause to create room for clausal ellipsis to take place in the elliptical clause.

Despite its initial plausibility, we believe that there is reason to think that Extra deletion is not what gives rise to compound pruning in Dutch. To begin with, we are not aware of other syntactic contexts in which Extra deletion can be attested in this language. Consider for example a syntactic context similar to

the Korean (29A4). In fragment formation clausal ellipsis cannot be extended into a possessive noun phrase and eliminate the possessed noun and the possessive marker -s:

- (34) Q: Wiens fiets heeft Piet geleend?
 whose bike has Piet borrowed
 ‘Whose bike did Piet borrow?’
- A: *Mijn vaders fiets [TP Δ].
 my father.POSS bike
 ‘My father.’

Putting the problem of non-attestation aside for a moment, and assuming that Extra deletion can take place in Dutch for the sake of the argument, we still run into other problems. One is that this analysis would predict that compound pruning can target compounds in attributive position as well, provided that the noun that this adjective modifies is elided, as was also the case in (31) above. Since the noun and the right part of the compound form an unbroken, contiguous string, clausal ellipsis should be extendable to this string, if the only condition on Extra deletion is adjacency to a clausal ellipsis site. This prediction is wrong, as we showed in example (8b) above, repeated here as (35). Compound pruning cannot target a compound inside a noun phrase, under any condition.

- (35) *Lucas is [DP een groenogig jongetje], en Tim [DP een blauwogig jongetje] [TP Δ]
 Lucas is a green.eye.ADJ boy and Tim a blue.eye.ADJ boy
 ‘Lucas is a green-eyed boy and Tim is a blue-eyed boy.’ (=8b)

Another problem concerns the position of the remnant. For Extra deletion to take place, the compound must be the final element in the clause. While standardly this is the case (see our examples so far), non-initial remnants can be constructed with some effort and while degraded, they are not fully ungrammatical, as they should be if ellipsis applying to the compound is Extra deletion. The same applies to example (42), which will be discussed in the next section.

- (36) ??Vijfpersoons moet deze lift worden, en zeven__ die [TP Δ].
 five.people.ADJ must this lift become.INF and seven that
 ‘This lift must be able to carry five people, and that lift must be able to carry seven people.’

In a similar manner, as we mentioned in section 2, we can also find examples like (12), repeated in (37) where clausal ellipsis does not take place and which are degraded, but for some speakers acceptable.

- (37) %De weg is eerst tweebaans, maar wordt later vier__.
 the road is first two-laned but becomes later four
 ‘The road has first two lanes, later four.’ (=12)

For speakers who accept an example like (37), non-pronunciation of the right part of the compound is not parasitic on clausal ellipsis taking place in the same clause. These speakers allow for the verb to be overt.

The last important point we raise against an analysis in terms of Extra deletion is the selectivity of compound pruning when it comes to the ellipsis target. As we pointed out in section 1, compound pruning can only apply to compounds that are adjectival and synthetic in nature, such as those in table 1. Other compounds, primary and synthetic ones, do not yield well-formed cases of ellipsis. This is unexplained if part of the compound is missing due to Extra deletion, the only condition on which is adjacency to a clausal ellipsis site.

- (38) a. *Mijn medaille is olijfgroen, en de jouwe gifgroen [TP Δ].
 my medal is olive.green and the yours poison.green
 ‘My medal is olive green and yours poison green.’ (*gifgroen* ‘poison green’)
- b. ?*Wij zijn bierdrinkers en jullie wijndrinkers [TP Δ].
 we are beer.drinker.PL and you.PL wine.drinker.PL
 ‘We are beer drinkers and you wine drinkers.’ (*wijndrinker* ‘wine drinker’)

One could argue that the application of Extra deletion to word-part elements is constrained in some ways, so that the difference between (33) and (38) would follow. To rule out (38), we would need to say that Extra deletion cannot delete an adjective (*groen*) or a noun (*drinkers*) when these are subwords but can delete a morpheme such as *-potig*, *-baans* or *-ogig*, which are bound morphemes. The status of such a restriction on Extra deletion is presently unclear.

Having considered Extra deletion, we conclude that it cannot provide a full explanation for the phenomenon: it leaves important generalisations unexplained, among which that these compounds are syntactically predicates and not attributive modifiers.

4. The ‘move-and-delete’ analysis

In this section an analysis is presented that is capable of answering the question why compound pruning can only target synthetic adjectival compounds and what the role of clausal ellipsis is. We provide an account in which compound pruning is the result of *move-and-delete* type of remnant formation, in which the remnant of ellipsis undergoes movement as a phrasal syntactic constituent. To support this analysis, in section 4.1 we argue that synthetic adjectival compounds can have the structure of phrases. In section 4.2, we show how the derivation proceeds and we explain the need for independent ellipsis with reference to the need to eliminate an otherwise ill-formed affix.

4.1. The structure of synthetic adjectival compounds

We contend that the reason why compound pruning shows up with synthetic adjectival compounds is that this type of compound formation allows a phrasal derivation in the syntax. The phrasal nature of the compound formation is most clear for compounds where the first part is a numeral (examples 3a-b, 4a-b). In this section we present our evidence and some background information on the structure of synthetic adjectival compounds as discussed in the existing literature.

Synthetic compounds, where a single derivational affix is added to a combination of multiple units, are notoriously difficult to analyse. The structural relation between the constituent parts is not evident, in addition it is often the case that the syntactic constituency and the semantic constituency are not isomorphic, i.e. such compounds may present bracketing paradoxes.

Van Santen and Booij (1998) specifically offers four distinct ways to analyse synthetic adjectival compounds such as the adjectives *blauwogig* (blue.eyes.ADJ) ‘blue-eyed’ or *tweebaans* (two.lane.ADJ) ‘having two lanes’ in Dutch. These expressions can be the product of derivation, with the adjectiviser attaching to a syntactic phrase (39a) or with it attaching to a compound (39b). The expression can also be the product of compounding (39c) or the product of a combination of derivation and compounding in an unusual ternary structure (39d). Van Santen and Booij (1998) argue that some analyses suit some synthetic compounds better than others and that some synthetic compounds may allow more than one structure.

- (39) a. *derivation: ADJ affix attaches to a phrase (NP)* (van Santen and Booij 1998)
 [A [NP blauw oog]-ig]
 [A [NP twee baan]-s]
- b. *derivation: ADJ affix attaches to a compound*
 [A [A-N blauw-oog]-ig]
 [A [Num-N twee-baan]-s]
- c. *compounding: ADJ affix attaches to N, A forms a compound with another head*
 [A [A blauw] [A [N oog] [-ig]]]
 [A [Num twee] [A [N baan] [-s]]]
- d. *compounding+derivation: ADJ affix attaches to A and N at the same time*
 [A [A blauw] [N oog] [-ig]]
 [A [Num twee] [N baan] [-s]]

While (39a), based on a phrasal derivation is a prominent approach to synthetic compound formation in Germanic languages (Botha 1984, Neef 2015), Booij (2019) discards this option for Dutch with reference

to the fact that no morphological evidence can be found for the phrasal combination of the first two parts: adjectival inflection is present in syntactic phrases, cf. *de lange-e arm* (the long-AGR arm ‘the long arm’) but is never found in compounds, cf. *lang(*-e)armig* long.arm.ADJ ‘long-armed’. Instead, Booij (2009) argues for the correctness of the compound structure in (39c), where the adjective or numeral modifies the base of the complex adjectival head formed by the noun and the adjectiviser (N+ADJ). The noun+adjectiviser can, but need not, be an existing word of the language.

For the kind of synthetic adjectives we attest in compound pruning, namely those types listed in table 1, we accept Booij’s conclusion that (39c) is the best representation, but we do this with a twist: while we agree with Booij that the first and the second element do *not* form a syntactic phrase, we contend that the initial element on its own *can* form a phrase. When it does form a phrase, the entire construct is also an adjectival phrase syntactically, since a phrase cannot be contained in a head. This proposal is shown in (40) (see Kenesei 1995/96 for a similar proposal for Hungarian).

(40) Synthetic adjectival phrases in our account

- a. [AP [NumP twee] [A baan-s]]
- b. [AP [AP blauw] [A og-ig]]
- c. [AP [NP piramide] [A vorm-ig]]

Inside the AP, the adjectiviser *-s*, *-ig* form a head-type unit together with a noun yielding *-baans*, *-ogig* or *-vormig*. We treat these as affixes, because many of such forms do not exist as free morphemes in Dutch, or not with the meaning they have in the compound. We also take the view that wordhood is a phonological phenomenon, and we allow for phrasal structures like (40) to become word-sized units once PF spells them out as a single prosodic word.⁶ Finally, with respect to lack of adjectival inflection in synthetic compounds (cf. *lang(*-e)armig* long.arm.ADJ ‘long-armed’), we believe this due to the fact that adjectival inflection is only present when the adjective is part of a determiner phrase (Belk 2019), which is not the case in synthetic adjectives as they do not contain a determiner layer.

Having sketched our structural proposal, we now list three reasons for treating the first part of the compound as a syntactic phrase in our examples. Two of these reasons concern adjectival compounds with a numeral (40a) and one concerns adjectival compounds with a noun (40c).

The first argument for the phrasal status of the initial element is that this element can be an information-seeking *wh*-phrase (a type of quantificational element). This is possible in compounds with an initial numeral or quantifier when these are used as clausal predicates, as shown in (41) (the example comes from the internet). The *wh*-question involving *hoeveelbaans* clearly has the import of a regular question, i.e. the *wh*-phrase *hoeveel* inside it denotes a variable and is answered in (41B) either by the full adjectival compound or its elliptical, compound pruning version.

- (41) A: Hoeveelbaans wordt de A4?
how.many.lane.ADJ become.3SG the A4
 lit. ‘How many-laned will the highway A4 be?’
- B: Vier(baans) Δ.
four.lane.ADJ
 ‘Four.’

Since *wh*-replacement is allowed in the initial position of the compound, it comes as no surprise that we can construct a compound pruning example with sluicing as well. The sluiced remnant is the *wh*-phrase, which corresponds to a correlate in which the initial element is a quantificational indefinite, as in (42). 22 of our 34 informants (64%) accepted this sentence.

⁶ That natural language can convert syntactic phrases into word-size units has been demonstrated by Compton and Pitman (2015) among others.

- (42) Dit beestje is veelpotig, maar ik weet niet hoeveel_ precies Δ.
this creature is many.leg.ADJ but I know not how.many exactly
 lit. ‘This creature is many-legged, but I don’t know how many exactly.’

Clearly, there is no other way to analyse expressions as *hoeveelpotig* and its ilk than as syntactic phrases. Compounds, regardless of type (synthetic or primary) cannot contain *wh*-phrases, which attests to the conclusion that they are not phrasal syntactic units. Consider the ungrammatical forms in (43). In these examples (43ab) show that a NN and NA compound cannot have a nominal *wh*-phrase in it. (43c) shows that the first part of a primary compound cannot be given as answer to a phrasal question, either.

- (43) a. *Watdrinkers zijn jullie? (intended answer: *wijndrinkers* wine.drink.ER.PL)
what.drink.ER.PL be.3PL you.PL
 lit. ‘What drinkers are you?, i.e. What kind of alcoholic drink do you drink?’
- b. *Watgroen is je medaille? (intended answer: *olijfgroen* olive.green)
what.green be.3SG your medal
 lit. ‘What kind of green is your medal?’
- c. A: Wat soort groen is je medaille?
what kind green be.3SG your medal
 lit. ‘What kind of green is your medal?’
- B: *Olijf. (intended answer: *olijfgroen* olive.green)
Olive
 ‘Olive green.’

It is also telling that a *wh*-containing word can hardly take part in further compound formation, for example by the addition of a noun: while *tweebaansweg* ‘two.lane.road’ is a well-formed compound in Dutch, *hoeveelbaansweg* is not, cf. (44).⁷

- (44) ??Een hoeveelbaansweg wordt de A4?
an how.many.lane.ADJ.road become.3SG the A4
 lit. ‘A how many-laned road will the highway A4 be?’

The second reason for assuming the syntactic phrasehood for the compound is that the initial element can itself be a complex syntactic constituent. This again concerns numeric items. Consider the bracketed constituents *drie à vijf* ‘three to five’ or *meer dan twee* ‘more than two’. These units are clearly phrases because they are multi-word units, and they contain functional material, such a preposition (*à* in 45a) and a complementiser (*dan* in 45b).

- (45) a. Deze weg is [drie à vijf]baans.
this road is three to five.lane.ADJ
 ‘This road has three to five lanes.’
- b. De doorgaande wegen zijn vaak [meer dan twee]baans.
the main road.PL are often more than two.lane.ADJ
 ‘The main roads often have more than two lanes.’

Again, it can be shown that such complex units are not allowed in other types of compounds such as compounds consisting of a numeral and a noun:

- (46) vierhoek zeshoek *vier-à-zes-hoek *meer-dan-vier-hoek
four.angle six.angle four-to-six-angle more-than-four-angle
 ‘square’ ‘hexagon’ ‘a shape with 4 to 6 sides’ ‘a shape with more than 4 sides’

⁷ We gloss *tweebaansweg* and similar forms here and below as containing the adjective *tweebaans* in it. This is not the only choice: the *-s* affix can also be treated as a linking morpheme that is characteristic of compounds (De Haas and Trommelen 1993). The gloss in this case would be *tweebaansweg* two.lane.LNK.weg.

The last argument for synthetic adjectival phrases comes from data in which the initial element is a fully referential proper name. In our adjectives, we can find referential proper names in initial position, as (47ab) show ((47a) was a headline in *NRC* on September 1, 2023). That the proper name is used as a referential expression is shown by the fact that pronominal reference is possible to this form in (47b): *hij* ‘he’ can refer back to (former Dutch prime minister) Mark Rutte.

- (47) a. Wie vult het Mark Rutte-vormige gat in de politiek?
who fill.3SG the Mark Rutte-shaped.AGR hole in the politics
 ‘Who will fill the Mark Rutte-shaped hole in politics?’
- b. Er is een Mark Rutte_i-vormig gat ontstaan in de politiek, maar hij_i
there is a Mark Rutte-shape.ADJ hole appeared in the politics but he
ontkent het.
deny.3SG it
 ‘There appeared a Mark Rutte_i-shaped hole in politics, but he_i denies it.’

The availability of a proper name in adjectival compounds is in line with our claim that such compounds can have a phrasal structure, as it is standardly assumed that the non-head of a compound cannot be a referential expression or contain a D-layer that would be responsible for the referential reading (Hoeksema 1988, Harley 2009). At the same time, the presence of a proper name is the weakest of our arguments, as recently De Belder (2022) brought to light that Dutch compounding can feature a referential non-head, in so-called referential compounding. This is illustrated by *zonshoogte* sun.s.height ‘the height of the sun’, where *zon* has unique and specific reference, and pronominal reference is possible to it.

- (48) ?De zon,shoogte is opvallend deze ochtend, ook al is hij_i nog maar net op.
the sun.s.height is striking this morning even if is he only PRT just up
 ‘The height of the sun is striking this morning, even if it (i.e., the sun) has only just gone up.’

Taking stock, what transpires from our discussion is that some synthetic adjectival compounds can have the structure of phrases. We have supplied two strong arguments for the claim that the initial constituent can have phrasal properties for adjectival compounds that start with a numeral or a quantifier (40a). For such forms, the availability of a *wh*-phrase or a complex syntactic constituent in initial position is indubitable evidence that the initial element can be a phrase and that the entire form therefore can have the structure of a phrase, with the N+ADJ attaching to it as an affix. For adjectival compounds that start with a noun (40c), we observed that proper names can be initial elements, which is expected under a phrasal analysis as well. For adjectival compounds that start with an adjective (40b), we cannot demonstrate that the initial item is undoubtably a phrase, but we believe this option is present to the speaker via analogical extension.

We can now return to the elliptical pattern we call compound pruning and link the behaviour of adjectival compounds to the available data patterns. As we mentioned in section 1, compounds with a numeric initial element give rise to the best examples of compound pruning. In this section we have seen that this type of compound exhibits strong evidence for syntactic derivation as a phrase. We interpret this by stating that the availability of a phrasal derivation for the compound correlates with the availability of compound pruning, and it does so because it is a condition on it. Compound pruning is best for all our speakers with numeric remnants (examples (3ab), (4ab)), because such remnants can be easily formed as syntactic phrases. We hypothesise that speakers who accept compounds with an adjectival or nominal initial elements in compound pruning (examples (3cd), (4cd)), also construct these compounds as phrases, upon analogy.

4.2. *A-bar movement and ellipsis ‘repair’ via non-insertion*

We argued in the previous section that the application of compound pruning is restricted to phrasal adjectival compounds because these are compounds that are syntactic phrases underlyingly. This explains why compound pruning applies only to synthetic adjectival compounds, and not to any other type. In this section, we argue that their phrasal nature also means that they do not present a violation of the *Lexical*

Integrity Hypothesis: the compounds in question are not words syntactically but phrases, and as such, syntactic processes such as ellipsis and movement can target their parts.

Let us now turn to the question what the derivation of the elliptical clause looks like. The analysis we provide should explain why compound pruning has the three key properties we identified in section 2.1: (i) the compound is a predicate, not an attributive modifier; (ii) compound pruning is found in clausal coordination/turn-taking and (iii) compound pruning standardly shows the presence of clausal ellipsis with a few exceptions.

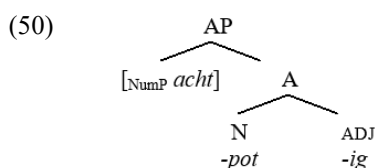
We believe most of these properties fall out and are in fact predicted by a *move-and-delete* analysis of remnant formation in ellipsis. If the initial, phrasal constituent in the remnant undergoes movement to a peripheral position in the clause, followed by ellipsis of a clausal constituent, we come a long way in understanding the characteristic properties of compound pruning.

To show how, we start by laying out the derivation of the elliptical clause in (3a), repeated as (49).

(49) A: Spinnen zijn zespotig. (=3a)
spiders are six.leg.ADJ
 ‘Spiders have six legs.’

B: Nee, acht__ Δ.
no eight
 ‘No, they have eight legs.’

In (49), the adjectival compound forms the clausal predicate, and is complement to a *v* head which we take to contain the copular verb. The clausal predicate is predicated of the subject *spinnen* ‘spiders’. We generate the subject in Sp,vP. The adjectival compound has the structure in (50) as we argued above: it contains in the highest specifier position the numeric phrase. This numeral, being a phrase, can undergo phrasal movement out of the AP when it is contrastively focused.



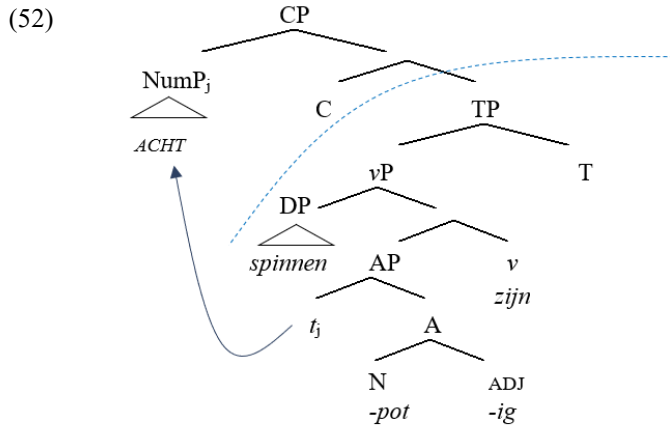
Movement of the numeral out of the AP cannot proceed in non-elliptical clauses, as the next example shows. Despite the fact that the numeral can undergo A-bar movement into a left peripheral position, the rest of the adjectival compound cannot be formed because movement leaves behind an ill-formed second part, the affixal *-potig*, which cannot attach to a host. This morphological problem results in ungrammaticality.

(51) *Acht zijn spinnen -potig.
eight are spider.PL leg.ADJ
 lit. ‘It is eight that spiders are legged.’

With reference to the ill-formed status of the stranded affixal N+ADJ unit, we can now understand why omission of the second part of the compound in compound pruning is standardly accompanied by ellipsis of another constituent in the clause. In other words, omission of the compound part is ‘parasitic’ on an independent ellipsis operation such as clausal ellipsis or gapping, using the terminology of Fritzgibbons (2014) and Scheider (2025). This independent ellipsis is needed in our view because it blocks vocabulary insertion, as argued in Wilder (1997), Abels (2018a), Mendes and Nevins (2023) among many others. If the affixal *-potig* falls under ellipsis, its morphological defectiveness as an unbound morpheme is removed by ellipsis: since this form does not get inserted into the structure, its affixal nature is immaterial for the well-formedness of the sentence.

With these ingredients in place, we illustrate our proposal through the derivation of the fragment-type elliptical clause in (52), which contains the numeral remnant *acht* in contrastive focus. We follow Temmerman (2013) in analysing Dutch fragments as involving A-bar movement of the remnant constituent

into Sp,CP, followed by TP ellipsis. This means that we generate the synthetic adjective phrase in predicative position, as complement to the copula. The numeral first part of the adjective, which we argued is a phrase as well, undergoes movement to Sp,CP to check a [Foc] feature on C. The movement leaves behind the affixal *-potig* inside the adjectival predicate. This does not result in ungrammaticality as ellipsis affects the TP and *-potig* is not inserted as a vocabulary item. The structure of (49B) is shown in (52):



The derivation of an example involving sluicing (see (42) above) would be identical to this, involving movement of the *wh*-phrase to Sp,CP. The derivation of gapping would similarly involve A-bar movement of the remnants to a clause peripheral position and TP-ellipsis as well, if one adopts the proposal of Aelbrecht (2010). We refrain from providing this structure for reasons of space.

With this derivation in place, we can now return to the question of why compound pruning has its characteristic properties. The need for clausal ellipsis can be understood with reference to the derivation as sketched here: clausal ellipsis is necessary as the adjectival compound cannot be realised with the host of the affix moved away from it. Note that clausal ellipsis is an available ellipsis operation in Dutch and it is moreover one that is known for its capacity to ‘repair’ otherwise ungrammatical derivations, see Merchant (2008:152–153) for a brief overview of such repair effects in English, van Craenenbroeck (2010) on such repair effects in Dutch dialects and even more closely Schneider (2025) on a repair effect that is surprisingly similar to ours. Smaller ellipsis, targeting only the AP predicate is unavailable: Dutch does not allow for AP ellipsis, it uses a deep anaphor instead in this position:

- (53) Vliegen zijn klein, en bijen zijn *(dat) ook.
fly.PL are small and bee.PL are that too
 ‘Flies are small and bees are, too.’

Possibly, for some speakers, AP ellipsis is possible under some conditions and can give rise to cases of compound pruning where the verb does not get deleted. We leave the fine structure of such sentences, repeated from (12) here for future work.

- (54) %De weg is eerst tweebaans, maar wordt later vier. (=12)
the road is first two-laned but becomes later four
 ‘The road has first two lanes, later four.’

Returning to the key properties of compound pruning, if our accounts holds water, we understand why compound pruning is allowed in clausal coordination (or turn-taking) only: clausal ellipsis is needed to salvage the stranded affix in compound pruning and clausal coordination is needed to create room for clausal ellipsis to apply. When smaller constituents are coordinated, there is no available standard ellipsis operation that can remove the stranded affix and this affix would result in ungrammaticality.

The last property we need to account for is the predicative nature of the compound. The compound in compound pruning is always a clausal predicate, not an attributive modifier, see examples (8ab) above, repeated in (55):

- (55) a. *Lucas is [DP een groenogig jongetje], en Tim [DP een blauw jongetje].
Lucas is a green.eye.ADJ boy and Tim a blue boy
- b. *Lucas is [DP een groenogig jongetje], en Tim [DP een blauw [N' Δ]].
Lucas is a green.eye.ADJ boy and Tim an blue
 'Lucas is a green-eyed boy and Tim is a blue-eyed boy.' (=8)

The ungrammaticality of (55a) is easy to understand: to derive this sentence we would need to extract the numerical constituent out of an attributive adjective to a focal position in the DP. Assuming that focal adjectives may move to higher positions in the DP (Corver and van Koppen 2009), such movement of the first part of the compound would leave behind a stranded affix, as shown in (57). As Dutch does not have AP ellipsis, the stranded affix violation cannot be removed by eliding the AP and (55a) cannot be derived.

- (56) [... [DP een [_{FocP} BLAUW_i [NP [N' [AP *t_i* -ogig] jongetje]]]]]

The ungrammaticality of (55b) is much more difficult to explain. This example differs from the previous one in that here the noun is elided as well. As omission of constituents of the size of N' is possible in Dutch and can target a noun and any number of its attributive modifiers (Kester 1996), this type of ellipsis should in principle be able to elide a constituent that involves the adjectival modifier and the modified noun together, and block insertion of the stranded affix.

- (57) [... [DP een [_{FocP} BLAUW_i [NP [N' [AP *t_i* -ogig] jongetje]]]]]

The ill-formedness of this sentence therefore must be due something to else. We believe that (57) is ill-formed because the premise that Dutch has nominal ellipsis is in fact wrong. What appear to be instances of nominal ellipsis are actually instances of pronominalization, as Corver and van Koppen (2011) argue in detail. If this is correct, the ungrammaticality of (57) follows from further ado: since the nominal gap contains a pronoun, there is no elided constituent – thus no structure – inside the NP, the synthetic adjective cannot be base-generated inside this elided structure and its first part cannot move out of it, either.

Having outlined the above, we are now in position to go one step further and ask whether it is possible to do compound pruning in contexts where the correlate of the adjective is an attributive modifier but the remnant is realised as what looks like the remnant of clausal ellipsis, not contained inside a noun phrase. This is possible in the case of fragments, as (58) shows. While this seems to contradict our claim that there is a ban on attributive compounds, the derivation of B's answer is identical to that sketched in (52). The remnant does not extract out of a DP (in the manner of an Left Branch Extraction), but starts out as a clausal predicate (*blauwogig*) followed by A-bar movement of *blauw* to Sp,CP and TP ellipsis, as shown in (58b).

- (58) A: Lucas is [DP een groenogige jongen].
Lucas is a green.eye.ADJ.AGR boy
 'Lucas is a green-eyed boy.'
- B: Nee, blauw_i [TP Lucas [_{VP} *t_i* -ogig] is].
no blue
 'No, he is blue-eyed.'

Evidence for the predicative structure underlying the derivation comes from the observation that fragments of this sort can also be constructed with ordinary adjectives. An adjective with an attributive correlate can form a contrastive fragment on its own, and when it does so, it never shows the agreement it would do should it originate inside a DP as attributive modifier. Instead it is necessarily uninflected.

- (59) A: Lucas is [_{DP} een lange jongen].
Lucas is a short.AGR boy
 ‘Lucas is a tall boy.’
- B: Nee, kort / *korte.
no short short.AGR
 ‘No, he is short.’

As predicative adjectives do not show agreement in Dutch, the fact that the fragment in (59) is necessarily uninflected indicates that it is a predicative adjective, not an attributive one. This in turn means that the grammaticality of (59B) is not due to ellipsis repairing an LBE violation, rather the elliptical clause ‘evades’ a potential island violation through using a predicative structure that is sufficiently close in meaning to the original one (see Barros 2014, Barros et al 2014, and Abels 2018b).

Turning to gapping, we can notice that an example comparable to (58) is ungrammatical, cf. (60). This is completely parallel to the behaviour of regular adjectives in the position of the second remnant as well (cf. (61)): irrespective of whether the adjective shows up with attributive agreement or without agreement as predicative adjective do, the sentence is ill-formed. The ungrammaticality of (61) is due to the fact that clausal ellipsis never repairs an LBE violation (which we established with reference to (59) already) and gapping disallows an ‘evasion’ strategy involving a predicative structure, which we put down to more stringent requirements of structural parallelism applying in gapping than in sluicing/fragments.

- (60) *Lucas is [_{DP} een groenogig jongetje], en Tim blauw.
Lucas is a green.eye.ADJ boy and Tim blue
 ‘Lucas is a green-eyed boy and Tim is a blue-eyed boy.’
- (61) *Lucas is [_{DP} een lange jongen], en Tim kort / korte.
Lucas is a tall.AGR boy and Tim short / short.AGR
 ‘Lucas is a tall boy and Tim a short one.’

Taking stock, in this section we sketched the *move-and-delete* analysis of remnant formation as applied to our compound pruning data. The initial motivation for adopting a move-and-delete analysis was the observation that the left part of the compound in compound pruning must be a phrase – a restriction that is straightforwardly explained by adopting the move-and-delete analysis, as only phrases can undergo A'-movement. In addition, we showed that a move-and-delete account also provides an explanation for the need for clausal ellipsis and clausal coordination in these examples as well (providing a second motivation for a movement-based account), as it requires clausal ellipsis to remove the stranded affix that is left behind by the movement of the phrasal part of the compound. We also put in place some suggestions about how to explain the ban on attributive compounds in compound pruning.

5. Summary

In this paper we described an elliptical phenomenon that applies to synthetic adjectival compounds in Dutch and splits such compounds in half. The data are puzzling not only because compounds do not allow for syntactic ellipsis normally (a violation of the Lexical Integrity Hypothesis), but also because the data come with a set of curious properties: this elliptical phenomenon needs clausal ellipsis and clausal coordination to be well-formed and can only target clausal predicates.

We provided an analysis for these properties in terms of standard ellipsis, in the last section arguing for the movement of the first part of the compound and clausal ellipsis eliminating the second part of the compound among other things. The role of clausal ellipsis in this second respect is crucial as without it, the second part of the compound would be a stranded affix, a violation that ellipsis can remove. If our analysis is on the right track, it supports proposals that recognise the evidently syntactic nature of some word-formation processes (Kenesei 1996/95, Bauer 1998) and the existence of a *move-and-delete* type of remnant formation in clausal ellipsis.

We leave important questions for further research, such as the investigation of variation in the acceptability of compound pruning, both when it comes to (a) differences in grammaticality between

fragments and sluicing on the one hand and gapping on the other; (b) differences in grammaticality between different categories as remnant (numeral, adjective or noun) and (c) the causes of speaker variation to begin with. We have not touched upon the cross-linguistic landscape of compound pruning and what its existence would entail about the analysis of compounds in languages other than Dutch either. We only note here that we are aware of similar examples in Hungarian, Russian and Icelandic, and even in English for that matter, as the following example is acceptable to an anonymous reviewer of this paper and some (but not all) native speakers we consulted.

- (62) [Two robotics engineers are debating how many legs their robots should have. One says to the other:]
Yours can't be four-legged and mine only three! That's not fair!

On this basis, we suspect that compound pruning is not specific to Dutch only. With this paper we hope to have laid the foundations of more research into its intricacies.

Author contribution statement

The two authors contributed equally to all sections, except for section 4.2, which is the contribution and the responsibility of the first author only.

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