

Some Remarks on the Typology of Comparatives

Chris Kennedy, Northwestern University

Lectures on the Syntax and Semantics of Gradability and Comparison
Kyushu University, August 2000

1 A Template for Comparative Constructions

In terms of their meaning at least, comparative constructions fit into the following semantic template.

(1)	TARGET OF COMPARISON	ORDERING EXPRESSION	STANDARD MARKER	STANDARD OF COMPARISON
	Kim	is taller	than	Lee.

Getting from from the syntax to this sort of semantic structure is sometimes complicated....

2 Stassen's (1985) Typology of Comparatives

Stassen, Leon: 1985, *Comparison and Universal Grammar*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

2.1 The Separative Comparative

The standard marker is a morpheme with a meaning roughly equivalent to 'from'.

- (2) MUNDARI
Sadom-ete hati mananga-i
horse-from elephant big-pres-3sg
'The elephant is bigger than the horse.'
- (3) JAPANESE
Nihon-go-wa doits-go yori muzukashi
Japanese-top German from difficult
'Japanese is more difficult than German.'
- (4) CARIB
Kuiliali a-kulliali kopo apoto-me mang
canoe your-canoe from big-one is
'My canoe is bigger than your canoe.'

Languages in this group include: Amharic, Classical Arabic, Guarani, Biblical Hebrew, Hindi, Korean, Manchu, Quechua, Tibetan, and Turkish.

2.2 The Allative Comparative

The standard marker is a morpheme that typically introduces goal phrases (like 'to' or 'for').

- (5) MAASAI
Sapuk ol-kondi to l-kiibutlekeny
is-big the-deer to the-waterbuck
'The deer is bigger than the waterbuck.'

- (6) BRETON
Jazo bras-ox wid-on
he big-prt for-me
'He is bigger than me.'

Language sample: Jacaltec, Kanuri, Nuer, Tarascan.

2.3 The Locative Comparative

The standard marker is a morpheme with a meaning along the lines of 'on'.

- (7) CHUCKCHEE
Gangga-dla'ul-ik getvu-ci-um
all-men-on strong-more-1sg
'I am stronger than all men.'
- (8) SALINAN
Ragas-mo in luwa ti-hek
surely-you more man on-me
'You are more of a man than me.'

Language sample: Cebuano, Mandinka, Miwok, Navajo, Tamil.

2.4 The Exceed Comparative

The standard of comparison is the direct object of a special transitive verb, which typically has a meaning along the lines of 'exceed' or 'surpass'.

- (9) YORUBA
O tobi ju u
he big exceed him
'He is bigger than him.'
- (10) VIETNAMESE
Yang qui hon bac
gold valuable exceed silver
'Gold is more valuable than silver.'
- (11) HAUSA
Doki ya-fi rago girma
horse it-exceed goat bigness
'A horse is bigger than a goat.'
- (12) SWANHI
Mfi huu ni mreŋu ku-shinda ule
tree this is big inf-exceed that
'This tree is taller than that tree.'

Language sample: Cambodian, Fulani, Igbo, Mandarin Chinese, Thai, Wolof.

2.5 The Conjoined Comparative

Comparison is effected by means of an adversative coordination of two clauses that contrast the target and standard of comparison along some dimension.

2.5.1 *Anonymous Predicates*

- (13) SAMOAN
 Ua loa lenei va'a, ua puupuu lena
 is long this boat, is short that
 'This boat is longer than that boat.'

- (14) DAKOTA
 Mastingcala king waste, tka singthela king sice
 rabbit the good, but rattlesnake the bad
 'The rabbit is better than the rattlesnake.'

Language sample: Maori, Sika, Cayapo, Mangarayi.

2.5.2 *Negation*

- (15) HIKKARYANA
 kaw-ohra naha Waraka, kaw naha Kaywerye
 tall-not he-is W., tall he-is K.
 'Kaywerye is taller than Waraka.'

- (16) MENOMINI
 apegsek tata ikkesew, nenah teh kan
 more he-is-strong, I and not
 'He is stronger than me.'

Language sample: Mixtec, Shipibo, Yavapai, Motu.

2.6 *Particle Comparatives*

The standard of comparison is marked by a construction-specific morpheme (the 'comparative particle'), an example of which is English 'than'.

- (17) HUNGARIAN
 Istvan magasa-bh mint Peter
 I. tall-prt than Peter
 'Istvan is taller than Peter.'

- (18) JAVANESE
 Enak daging karo iwak
 is-good meat than fish
 'Meat is better than fish'

- (19) MALAGASY
 Lehibe noho ny zana-ny Rabe
 tall than the son-his R.
 'Rabe is taller than his son.'

Language sample: Albanian, Basque, Finnish, Ilocano, Sranan, Toba Batak, most European languages.

2.7 *Fixed-case vs. Derived-case Systems*

A distinction that cross-cuts the categories listed above concerns the case morphology on the standard NP: is it the same in every context, or does it vary, depending on the target of comparison? Latin has both options:

- (20) LATIN: *derived case*

- a. Brutum ego non minus amo quam tu
 B-acc I-nom not less love-1sg than you-nom
 'I love Brutus no less than you (love Brutus).'

- b. Brutum ego non minus amo quam te
 B-acc I-nom not less love-1sg than you-acc
 'I love Brutus no less than (I love) you.'

- (21) LATIN: *fixed case*

- Brutum ego non minus te amo
 B-acc I-nom not less you-abl love-1sg
 (Ambiguous between (20a) and (20b).)

Questions

1. Why do comparatives show such a large degree of variation?
2. What com comparatives tell us the syntax/semantics of grading expressions in natural language?