



COMPARATIVES, ETC.

PLIN0020 ADVANCED
SEMANTIC THEORY

COMPARATIVES

COMPARATIVES IN ENGLISH

- (1) a. *The bed is longer than it is wide*
b. *The bed is more expensive than I thought*

- ▶ Comparative marker: *-er, more*
- ▶ In (1) *than* seems to embed a tensed clause.

Suppletion: the comparative of *many/much* is *more*.

- (2) *John has more CDs than I have books.*

THAN-CLAUSE AND MOVEMENT

Bresnan (1973): island sensitivity \Rightarrow something is moving inside the *than*-clause

(3) *The bed is longer than it is wide*

(4) *The bed is longer than [she thinks (it is wide)]*

(5) a. **The bed is longer than it is [wooden and wide].*

b. **The bed is longer than there is a [customer who thinks that it is wide]*

c. **The bed is longer than it won't fit in my room [because it is wide]*

In some languages you see a *wh*-like item here, e.g. Italian, Russian.

THAN-CLAUSE AND ELLIPSIS

Various types of ellipsis are observed in *than*-clauses.

- (6) *I am taller than [John is ~~tall~~]* (Comparative Deletion)
- (7) *Paul ate more cookies than [Sophie ~~ate~~ candies]* (Gapping)
- (8) *Paul has more money than [it is necessary]*

PHRASAL COMPARATIVES

- (9) a. *Paul is taller than [John is tall]*
b. *Paul is taller than John*

Debate: Is (9b) derived from (9a) by deleting *is*.

Many cases that cannot be derived from clausal comparatives.

- (10) a. *Paul is taller than me*
b. *Paul never plays basketball with people who are taller than himself*
c. *Paul is taller than 6 feet*
d. *Paul is taller than none of them*

MORE ON COMPARATIVES

Other ways of expressing comparison:

- (11) a. *Compared to John, Paul is tall*
b. *Paul is tall. John isn't*

Only the comparative construction allows for differential phrases:

- (12) a. *Paul is 5 cm taller than John (is)*
b. *That building is three times taller than this one (is)*

GREEK

Greek morphologically distinguishes *clausal comparatives* and *phrasal comparatives*.

- (13) *I Maria pezi kithara kalitera apo [ton Gianni]*
the.nom Maria plays guitar better than [the.acc Giannis]
'Maria plays guitar better than Giannis'
- (14) *I Maria pezi kithara kalitera ap'oti [pezi kithara*
the.nom Maria plays guitar better than [plays guitar
o Giannis]
the.nom Giannis]
'Maria plays guitar better than Giannis does'

GREEK ELLIPSIS

Greek allows ellipsis in clausal comparatives:

(15) *I Maria pezi kithara kalitera apo [ton Gianni]*
the.nom Maria plays guitar better than [the.acc Giannis]
'Maria plays guitar better than Giannis'

(16) *I Maria pezi kithara kalitera ap'oti [o*
the.nom Maria plays guitar better than [the.nom
Giannis]
Giannis]
'Maria plays guitar better than Giannis does'

So languages like Greek have both phrasal and clausal comparatives.

Maybe English phrasal comparatives are ambiguous.

RUSSIAN

Russian is like Greek, except that the phrasal comparative has no *than*.

- (17) *Ja ljublju Ivana bol'she [Maši]*
I love Ivan more [Masha.gen]
'I love Ivan more than Masha'
- (18) *Ja ljublju Ivana bol'she čem [jego ljubit Maša]*
I love Ivan more what.instr [him loves Masha.nom]
'I love Ivan more than Masha does'

JAPANESE

Japanese lacks a word for *more/-er*.

- (19) *Paul-wa John-yori kasikoi*
Paul-top John-than smart
'Paul is smarter than John'

No simple clausal comparatives.

- (20) **Paul-wa [John-ga (kasikoi)]-yori kasikoi*
Paul-top [John-nom (smart)]-than smart
(intended) 'Paul is smarter than John is'

- (21) **tsukue-wa [hondana-ga habahiroi]-yori nagai*
desk-top [bookshelf-nom wide]-than long
(intended) 'The desk is longer than the bookshelf is wide'

JAPANESE (CONT.)

Some clausal comparatives are good.

- (22) *Paul-wa [John-ga omotteiru]-yori kasikoi*
Paul-top [John-nom think]-than smart
'Paul is smarter than John thinks'

Debate:

- ▶ Japanese only has phrasal comparatives, and what looks like clausal comparatives are underlyingly phrasal (Beck, Oda & Sugisaki 2004, Sudo 2015).
- ▶ Japanese has clausal comparatives but their distributions are different from English (Bhatt & Takahashi 2011, Shimoyama 2012).

Possible topic: Other similar languages?

HINDI-URDU

Hindi-Urdu is similar to Japanese (data from Bhatt & Takahashi 2011).

- (23) *John Bill-se zyaadaa lambaa hai*
John Bill-than more tall is
'John is taller than Bill'

Hindi never allows a clause as a complement of *-se* (meaning 'from'), which is a postpositional suffix for a nominal.

A clausal complement is bad even with ellipsis:

- (24) **Tina-ne aaj [Pim kal]-se zyaadaa kitaabẽ piṛhĩ:*
Tina-erg today [Pim yesterday]-than more books read
(intended) 'Tina read more books today than Pim yesterday'

HINDI-URDU CORRELATIVES

Hindi expresses clausal comparatives with *correlatives*.

- (25) [*Pim-ne kal jitnii kitaabẽ paṛhĩ:*]
[Pim-erg yesterday how.many books read]
Tina-ne aaj us-se zyadaa kitaabẽ paṛhĩ:
Tina-erg today that-than more books read
'Tina read more books today than Pim did
yesterday'

Possible topic: the syntax and semantics of correlatives.

MANDARIN CHINESE

Mandarin Chinese is relatively well discussed.

(26) *Yuēhàn bi Mǎlì gāo*

John BI Mary tall

'John is taller than Mary'

(Erlewine 2018)

Clausal constructions are generally ungrammatical.

(27) **Zhe ge zhuozi bi nage men kuan de gao*

the cl table BI the door wide DE high

'The table is higher than the door is wide.'

(Beck et al. 2009)

There are some competing analyses of (26) (see Erlewine 2018 and references there).

MOTU

Motu is a language that uses simple conjunction to express comparatives.

(28) *Mary na lata, to Frank na kwadoḡi*

Mary is tall, but Frank is short

'Mary is taller than Frank'

(Beck et al. 2009)

But this entails that Frank is short.

And apparently there are no (related) ways to express:

(29) a. *Mary is taller than 170 cm*

b. *Mary is 5 cm taller than Frank is*

YORUBA

Yoruba uses *exceed* (data from Beck et al. 2009).

(30) *Ade ga jo Isaac lo*
Ade tall exceed Isaac go
'Ade is taller than Isaac'

(31) *Owó osù rè ju ti ẹ lọ*
money month her exceed that your go
'Her income exceeds your income'

OTHER DEGREE CONSTRUCTIONS

MEASURE PHRASE CONSTRUCTIONS

Only some unmarked gradable adjectives can take measure phrases (cf. comparatives).

- (32) a. *John is 6 feet tall.*
b. *The lake is 30 m deep.*
c. *John is 10 min late.*
d. *Paul is 5 months old.*
- (33) a. **John is 70 kg heavy.*
b. **The car is 50 km/h fast.*
c. **John is one million dollars rich.*
d. **The water is 30 degrees warm/hot.*
e. **The book is \$10 expensive.*

In German and Dutch these are grammatical (see e.g. Schwarzschild 2005). Possible topic: Investigate other languages!

SUPERLATIVES

Superlatives in English is analyzed very well (Heim 1999, Sharvit & Stateva 2002, etc.)

(34) Superlative

- a. *Paul is the tallest rugby player.*
- b. *Paul bought the most expensive guitar.*
- c. *This is the longest title yet.*

See Aihara (2009) for Japanese.

Vera Hohaus has been working on superlatives in Samoan, which seem to have different syntactic and semantic properties.

OTHER DEGREE CONSTRUCTIONS

(35) Equatives

- a. *John is as tall as Paul (is).*
- b. *This building is twice as tall as that one (is).*

(36) Excessives

- a. *John is too tall to sleep in this bed.*
- b. *John is too tall for this bed.*

(37) Enough

- a. *John is short enough to sleep in this bed.*
- b. *John is short enough for this bed.*

JAPANESE EXCESSIVES

Japanese expresses excessives with the verb *sugiru* 'exceed'.

- (38) *John-wa kasiko-sugiru*
John-top smart-exceed
'John is too smart.'

See Nakanishi (2004) for an analysis.

REFERENCES

Morzycki (2015) *Modification* (Cambridge UP) is an excellent introduction to degree constructions and other related phenomena.

Hohaus & Bochank (2020; "The Grammar of Degree: Gradability across Languages"; *Annual Reviews of Linguistics*, 6) is a good source for crosslinguistic facts and references.

- ▶ Beck, Krasikova, Fleischer, Gergel, Hofstetter, Savelsberg, Vanderelst & Villalta (2009) Crosslinguistic variation in comparative constructions. *Linguistic Variation Yearbook* 9.
- ▶ Beck, Oda & Sugisaki (2004) Parametric variation in the semantics of comparison: Japanese vs. English. *JEAL*, 13.
- ▶ Bhatt & Takahashi (2011) Reduced and unreduced phrasal comparatives. *NLLT*, 29.
- ▶ Erlewine (2018) Clausal comparison without degree abstraction in Mandarin Chinese. *NLLT*, 36.
- ▶ Schwarzschild (2005) Measure phrases as modifiers of adjectives. *Recherches linguistiques de Vicennes*, 34.
- ▶ Sudo (2015) Hidden nominal structures in Japanese clausal comparatives. *JEAL*, 24.