

Clausal Comparatives and Cross-linguistic Variation

Junko Shimoyama, McGill University

Cross-linguistic variation in comparative constructions has attracted much attention in recent years. There has been much discussion, for instance, on how the phrasal comparatives (*John is taller than Bill*) should be analyzed. While the phrasal complement of *than* is claimed to be derived from a full clause in English (Lechner 2001) and from a small clause in Slavic languages (Pancheva 2006), the phrasal complement of *than* in Hindi-Urdu and Japanese is argued convincingly by Bhatt and Takahashi 2007, 2008 to be base generated as phrases.

This paper looks at a lesser known area of potential cross-linguistic variation in comparatives. It has recently been claimed that some languages lack clausal comparatives with degree abstraction structure (Beck, Oda and Sugisaki 2004, Kennedy to appear). These studies propose parameters to which the lack of clausal comparatives is attributed: a parameter that allows or disallows abstraction over degrees in the syntax (Beck *et al.*); or a parameter that restricts some languages to have only individual comparison, but no degree comparison (Kennedy). These claims on typological variation are based on data from Japanese, and how they differ from English. According to their analyses, what appears to be the clausal complement of *yoru* 'than' in the Japanese example in (1) is in fact a free relative DP that contributes an individual, but not a degree or degrees. It is thus a case of phrasal comparatives.

This paper shows that a closer look at Japanese data reveals that genuine clausal comparatives with degree abstraction structures do exist in the language. The above cross-linguistic claims on parametric variation are thus not well supported and require evidence from other languages.

The individual-denoting DP analysis receives initial plausibility in that a noun-forming morpheme *-no* appears to optionally show up in the clausal complement of *yoru* as in (1) without change in meaning or grammaticality. We will present five environments where the plain clausal complement and the *-no* DP complement differ in meaning or grammaticality. Importantly, the difference in meaning and grammaticality would follow if we assume that the plain clausal complement involves degree abstraction structures that are familiar from analyses of its English counterpart.

First, when intensional verbs such as *want* and *require* are involved as in (2), the plain clausal complement only gives rise to the *de dicto* reading, while the *-no* DP counterpart only gives rise to the *de re* reading. The *de dicto* reading can only be achieved in the degree analysis. The second and third areas where the two analyses make different predictions involve negative islands and syntactic islands (Kikuchi 1989). In both environments, the plain clausal complement is not allowed, whereas the *-no* DP complement is fine. This pattern is expected under the assumption that the plain clausal complement involves movement of a degree operator, degree abstraction and degree comparison (von Stechow 1984, Rullmann 1995). Fourth, the plain clausal complement is not allowed in (3). This is not surprising if the complement received a clausal analysis like (3)a, but is unexpected if it received a DP analysis like (3)b. Fifth, while (4)a with *-no* DP allows the interpretation where John wrote a research paper, (4)b, with the plain clausal complement, does not allow such an interpretation (contra judgments reported in Beck *et al.*). Again, this is not surprising if the plain clausal complement received a clausal, degree analysis.

A further challenge for the individual-denoting DP analysis is that it incorrectly predicts a sentence like (5) to be ambiguous. Finally, the proposed analysis will be compared to a recent proposal that combines the DP analysis with degree semantics (Sudo 2008).

- (1) Hanako-wa [**Taro-ga katta (-no)**]-yori takai hon-o katta.
 Hanako-TOP Taro-NOM bought(-NO)-YORI expensive book-ACC bought
 ‘Hanako bought a more expensive book than what Taro bought.’
- (2) Taro-wa [[**Hanako-ga hosigatteita**]-yori] takusan-no onigiri-o katta.
 Taro-TOP Hanako-NOM wanted -YORI many-GEN rice.ball-ACC bought
 ‘Taro bought more rice balls than Hanako wanted/*what Hanako wanted.’
- a. Degree analysis:
 $\max(\lambda d. \text{Taro bought } d\text{-many rice balls}) > \max(\lambda d. \text{Hanako wanted } d\text{-many rice balls})$
- b. Individual-denoting DP analysis:
 $*\exists x. \text{Taro bought } x \ \& \ x \text{ is rice balls} \ \& \ \max(\lambda d. d\text{-many}(x)) > \max(\lambda d. d\text{-many}(\max(\lambda y. \text{Hanako wanted } y)))$
- (3) Kono hon-wa [[**Hanako-ga katta *(no)**]-yori] takai.
 this book-TOP Hanako-NOM bought NO -YORI expensive
 a. *This book is more expensive than Hanako bought.
 b. This book is more expensive than what/the one(s) Hanako bought.
- (4)a. [-no DP complement: review or research paper]
 Mary-wa [[**John-ga kaita**]-no]-yori nagai ribyuu-o kaita.
 Mary-TOP John-NOM wrote-NO -YORI long review-ACC wrote
 ‘Mary wrote a longer review than what/the one(s) John wrote.’
- b. [plain clausal complement: review only]
 Mary-wa [**John-ga kaita**]-yori nagai ribyuu-o kaita.
 Mary-TOP John-NOM wrote-YORI long review-ACC wrote
 ‘Mary wrote a longer review than John wrote.’
- (5) Taro-wa [**Hanako-ga mituketa**]-yori kasikoi hito-o mituketa.
 Taro-TOP Hanako-NOM found-YORI smart person-ACC found
 ‘Taro found a smarter person than Hanako found.’
 DP analysis: ‘Taro found a smarter person than [who Hanako found].’
 $\max(\lambda x. \text{Hanako found } x)$
- a. *Taro found a smarter person than [those who Hanako found] did.
 b. Taro found a person who is smarter than [those who Hanako found].

Selected references

- Beck, Sigrid., Toshiko Oda and Koji Sugisaki. 2004. Parametric variation in the semantics of comparison: Japanese vs. English. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 13: 289-344.
- Bhatt, Rajesh. and Shoichi Takahashi. 2007. Direct Comparisons: Resurrecting the Direct Analysis of Phrasal Comparatives. *Proceedings of SALT 17*.
- Bhatt, Rajesh. and Shoichi Takahashi 2008. Reduced and unreduced phrasal comparatives. Ms. University of Massachusetts at Amherst and University of Tokyo.
- Kennedy, Christopher. to appear. Modes of comparison. In the Proceedings of Chicago Linguistic Society 43.
- Sudo, Yasutada. 2008. On comparative deletion in Japanese. Handout for the Fifth Workshop on Altaic Formal Linguistics, SOAS, University of London.