

Comparatives in Cheyenne

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This talk examines the encoding of comparison in Cheyenne (Algonquian: Montana and Oklahoma), based on existing language materials (Leman 2011; Fisher et al. 2006; Cheyenne Bible Translation Committee 2007) and one author's fieldwork.

Comparatives crosslinguistically. Comparative structures are ones which express a comparison in degree, quantity, or quality between two things. Comparison is expressed by different structures cross-linguistically, with three major classes emerging in the literature. *Conjoined comparatives* express a comparison by means of two contrasting simple statements, akin to 'Mary is tall and John is not', sometimes involving negation or intensification to flag the contrast; this strategy is used in languages like Mian, Itelmen, and Mauwake, about one of every four/five languages (Bobaljik 2012). *Exceed comparatives* use a verb which means 'exceed'/'surpass', akin to 'Mary exceeds John in height'; this structure is used in languages like Amele, Mandarin, and Tamashek, and is about as common as the conjoined comparative (Stassen 2008; Bobaljik 2012). The remainder of the world's languages use a *standard comparative*¹ which involve a standard of comparison (marked by case or a particle), and sometimes marking on the predicate as well, as in *John is taller than Mary*; this strategy is used by languages like English, Hebrew, and Japanese, and has been the primary focus of cross-linguistic analyses of comparatives.

Cheyenne Comparatives. There are two Cheyenne forms that are good candidates for comparatives, both of which are preverbs. *Hóno'xe-*, which Fisher et al. 2006 translates as 'most, more', is used in at least some comparisons, like (1).

- (1) *Néhóno'xého'tsenótse menótse.*
Né-hóno'xe-ho'tsén-ótse mene-ótse
2-HONO'XE-have-PL.INAN berry-PL.INAN
'You have more berries (than I).'
- (Fisher et al. 2006, *hóno'xe-*)

We discuss the distribution of this preverb, and discuss whether it is better considered a comparative or a quantifier (as in 'more of the berries').

Another good candidate is *hehpe-* (initial variant *hehp-*), which Fisher et al. 2006 and Leman 2011 both translate as 'beyond'. *Hehp(e)-* occurs in both intransitive forms (with contextually-provided standards of comparison) as in (2) and transitive forms as in (3).

- (2) *Éhehpe'éstáhe.*
É-hehpe-'éstáhe.
3-HEHPE-tall
'He's taller.'
- (Fisher et al. 2006, *-'éstáhe*)
- (3) *Náhehpó'éstáhemá.*
Ná-hehp-ó'éstáhe-m-a.
3-HEHPE-tall-FTA-3:1
'He's taller than me.'
- (Fisher et al. 2006, *-hehpó'éstáhem*)

We discuss the distribution of this preverb and whether it is best classified as a comparative or an excessive (like English *too*). Ultimately, Cheyenne is classified as making use of a *standard comparative*, as these preverbs attach to the predicate and reference a standard (be it explicit or contextual). We also compare these strategies to those found in other Algonquian languages, e.g., Meskwaki (Dahlstrom 2015).

¹So called because of their contents, not their prevalence.

References

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