Than encodes comparative semantics

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In traditional analyses, the semantics of comparison is wholly introduced by the comparative morpheme (*more*, *-er*), with the standard marker (*than*) merely marking the standard phrase for comparison. We depart from this analysis and provide evidence for the hypothesis that both the comparative morpheme and the standard marker contribute to the semantics of comparison (Schwarzchild 2010, Alrenga et al 2012) by looking at how comparison works in a language without a lexical category of adjectives, namely Malayalam.

In the absence of adjectives, Malayalam forms complex morphosyntactic expressions (1) from property concept roots, after they merge with functional heads in the syntax (Menon and Pancheva 2014, to appear). Class 1 expressions compose with a $\emptyset_{v_{-pos}}$ head and are reduced relative clauses denoting a relation between individuals and degrees. Class 2 expressions are nominals composing with a $\emptyset$, head denoting instances of properties.

1) Class 1: *nalla* ‘goodness’

\[
[[[\text{\normalfont Nalla ~} + \emptyset_{v_{-pos}}]_{v} + \text{POS}]_{v} - a]_{rel}
\]

(Lit. ‘having an instance of goodness measuring to a degree exceeding the std’)

\[
[[\emptyset_{v_{-pos}}] = \lambda \Pi \lambda x \exists y [y \text{ is an instance of } \Pi \& x \text{ has } y \vDash \mu(y) \geq d]
\]

\[
[[\text{\normalfont nalla}] = \lambda x. \exists d [x's \text{ goodness} \geq d \text{ and } d > d, ]
\]

2) Class 2: *pokkam* ‘tallness’

\[
[[\text{\normalfont pokk} + - a]_{n} (\text{Lit. ‘being an instance of height’})
\]

\[
[[\emptyset_{v_{-pos}}] = \lambda \Pi \lambda x [x \text{ is an instance of } \Pi]
\]

\[
[[\text{\normalfont pokkam}] = \lambda \Pi \lambda x. [x \text{ is an instance of height}]
\]

These expressions exhibit different behavior in comparison. Class 1 forms never allow the comparative marker and Class 2 allows the marker optionally. Nominal and verbal comparatives obligatorily require the marker.

3) a. *kaal-ulm* comparative: Class 1

Anil Komalan-e *kaal-ulm* (*kuu\text{\textsc{uttal}}) nalla-van a\text{\textsc{\textalpha}}

Anil-DAT Komalan-ACC than-UM more good-noml EQ COP

‘Anil is more good than Komalan.’ (Lit. ‘Anil is one who has goodness than Komalan’.)

b. *kaal-ulm* comparative: Class 2

Anil-in\text{\textalpha} Komalan-e *kaal-ulm* (kuu\text{\textsc{uttal}}) pokkam u\text{\textsc{\textalpha}}

Anil-DAT Komalan-ACC than-UM more tall EX COP

‘Anil is taller than Komalan.’ (Lit. ‘Anil is one who has tallness (more) than Komalan’.)

**Proposal:** The traditional analysis where the comparative marker encodes semantics runs into problem when accounting for (3). Adapting Schwarzchild’s (2010) proposal for Hebrew, instead, we claim that *than* is not semantically vacuous and behaves as a quantifier domain adverbial working in tandem with *more*. The *than* phrase can bind the degree argument in the matrix clause in the absence of *more* or can act as a quantifier domain adverbial in the presence of *more*.

4) a. *than*:

\[
[[\text{\normalfont kaal-ulm}] = \lambda D. \lambda D'. \exists d [d \in D \land d \in D']
\]

b. *more*:

\[
[[\text{\normalfont kuu\text{\textsc{uttal}}}] = \lambda D. \lambda D'. \forall d [d \in D \rightarrow d \in D']
\]

Class 1 comparatives are norm-related and only the *than* encodes comparative semantics since a *pos* morpheme binds the degree variable before the complex expressions composes with the relative clause marker *-a*. Class 2 comparatives are not norm-related and can appear with the comparative marker. Further evidence is provided by measure phrases acting as differentials. They combine with Class 1 and Class 2 without the comparative marker.