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Comparison and gradation

1. Preliminary notions

All the languages of the world have at their disposal different means to express **comparison** and **gradation**, but not every language expresses them through morphology. In recent years some relevant works on the typology of comparison were published (Stassen 1985; Xerberman 1999; but see already Jensen 1934), and the semantics of comparative constructions is being investigated by semanticists. A reliable survey on comparison and gradation, however, still needs detailed research in several theoretical domains, including morphology (see, for instance, the short entries by Andersen 1992 and Crookston 1994).

In the present article, then, comparison and gradation will be treated to the extent that morphology is involved, and a classification of the means employed for its expression will be sketched.

Viewed conceptually, both comparison and gradation presuppose an entity that some property, state or, more rarely, a more or less dynamic state of affairs applies to. They also presuppose that this state of affairs varies on some scale on which it may, in principle, be measured; i.e. it is a **parameter**. **Gradation** (German *Abstufung*) then is the stepwise modification of the extent to which the parameter applies to the entity, while **comparison** (German *Vergleich*) assesses this extent with respect to some standard. Taken as a grammatical category, comparison (German *Steigerung*) is the formal modification of some predicative word – most often an adjective – representing a parameter of gradation or comparison, according to the extent to which it applies to its argument, relative to some standard. Similarly, gradation may be manifested in a structural category, in particular of adjectives and verbs.

In a **comparative construction** four elements are identifiable:

(a) the element which is compared, the **comparee**, or **topic of comparison**;
(b) the element that serves as **standard of comparison**;
(c) the element, called the **pivot**, or **marker of comparison**, that introduces the standard of comparison;
(d) the predicate that represents the parameter of comparison.

(1) *John*   *is smart-er*   *than Sam*
     comparee   predicate-CMPR   pivot standard

Elements (b) and (c) can be absent for different reasons:

- the pivot, as some languages possess no element for that function (see 2.1). The construction of (1) is in fact very rare among the languages of the world, and the standard is more frequently marked by other morphological means, for instance case markers;

- the standard of comparison can be omitted for semantic and pragmatic reasons. In fact, although grading involves comparison (Sapir 1951; Lyons 1977:271), the element or the entity serving as the standard can be either presupposed logically (see, for instance, Panagl 1973 and Bertocchi & Orlandini 1997 for Latin) or by conversational implicature (see Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet 1990:283-285). Sentences like *I thought he lived in a cleaner house* or *Sheila is less lucky* are rather common in discourse. Comparatives occurring without standard, traditionally labelled **absolute comparatives** seem much more frequent than those occurring with the standard, but statistics on this point are scarce.

The adjective is the lexical category that typically undergoes comparison. Three degrees are traditionally recognised: positive, comparative, and superlative.

The **positive** degree (from Lat. *positivus* 'imposing (the standard)'), coincides with the basic form of the adjective itself, e.g. Engl. *a small box*, *an interesting book*.

The **comparative** degree of some predicate – typically an adjective – marks this predicate as applying to its argument (the comparee) to a higher extent than the standard; e.g. *smaller*. In gradable predicates, esp. in polar (or relative) adjectives, the form that is unmarked for gradation or comparison – for adjectives: the positive degree – semantically involves implicit comparison with a norm. For instance, *an old dog* is a dog that is older than some standard for dogs. It is the function of the comparative degree to allow for the substitution of the implicit default standard of comparison by a particular explicit standard of comparison.

From a cognitive point of view, it is more salient to describe entities that are larger, smaller, than those that are less large, less small and so forth. In grammars the former type is referred to as **comparison of majority**, the latter as **comparison of minority**: *That box is smaller than this* vs. *Your book is less interesting than hers*. Whereas the comparison of majority is expressed by morphological processes in several languages, apparently the comparison of minority is expressed only lexically. This implies that there is no affix meaning 'less' parallel to that of majority 'more' (but see 2.4).

A **comparison of equality** is one that ascribes to the comparee the same value of the parameter of comparison as to the standard. If it is marked formally on the predicate representing the parameter – typically, an adjective – this is called the **equative form** (see 4).

In order to describe this construction, five elements have been identified (Haspelmath & Buchholz 1998:279):

(2) *My sister* *is* *as* *pretty* *as* *you*
     1   2   3   4   5

where 1 is the **comparee**, 2 is the **parameter marker**, 3 is the **parameter**, 4 is the **standard marker**, 5 is the **standard**.

Very close to the equative is the **similative**, "a construction expressing sameness of manner" (Haspelmath & Buchholz 1998:278): *Robert is as tall as Maria* is equative, whereas *She sings like a nightingale* is similative. Similative constructions will not be treated here.

By the **superlative** (Lat. *superlativus* 'raised to the top'), the quality expressed by the adjective is described as being at a very high, possibly the highest degree. However, it must be observed that "the superlative form is often used to denote a high grade, but not necessarily an apical grade, of the graded quality" (Sapir 1951:146).

In some languages (Classical Arabic, for example), the adjective shows one single form that exerts the function both of the comparative and superlative, without any morphological distinction; this special form is frequently referred to as **elative** (Latin *elativus* 'standing out'): *akbar*, from *kabi:r*, for instance, means 'greater, greatest, very great' according to the syntactic environment or the context.

The superlative degree in comparison (e.g. *Zembo is the laziest of all the chimps at the zoo*) is to be distinguished from the highest degree in gradation (e.g. *a very old tree*, *the easiest way to clean*). Languages like English use different forms. The former is expressed by the superlative form of the adjective (the positive form either preceded by *most* or followed by *-est*), generally preceded by the definite article: *the most beautiful*, *the luckiest*. The latter is marked by an intensifier preceding the positive adjective: *very lucky*. Forms like **the very lucky of all men* are ill-formed. Languages like Latin use the superlative in both cases: a superlative like *felicissimus*, for example, occurs both in gradation (*vir felicissimus* 'man very lucky') and in comparison (*vir omnium felicissimus* 'the luckiest man of all'). The two uses of the superlative form are then called **absolute** and **relative superlative**, respectively.

The following points concern formal properties of the structural categories of comparison and gradation. First, the status of comparison between derivation and inflection is controversial and may differ according to the language. Second, suppletive expression (see Art. 52) is not rare: Latin *bonus* 'good', *melior* 'better', *optimus* 'best'; Hung. *sok* 'good', *több* 'better'. While analytic expression of gradation (e.g. *very tired*) belongs in the realm of syntax, it may also be expressed by compounding (Dutch *dood-moe* (dead-tired) 'very tired') and affixing (Latin *per-bonus* 'very good', *per-terrere* 'frighten very much').

Third, while comparison of adjectives and (derived) adverbs is well-known, it does occur on nouns, too. Cf. Sanskrit *vira-tará* 'more hero', Ancient Greek *kún-teros* '(more) shameless', lit. 'more dog'; Hungarian *róka* 'fox', comparative *rókább* 'slyer' (Bhat 1994:25f.). In Basque the suffix *-(a)go* can be added to any lexical category: *gizon* 'man': *gizonago* 'more man'; but also *gugana* 'towards us': *guganago* 'more towards us'. In Italian the superlative suffix *-issim-* is added to nominal stems to express the highest degree of a quality: *governissimo* 'a stable and powerful government', from *governo* 'government'; *canzonissima* 'the best song (among those in competition for an award)', from *canzone* 'song'.

Fourth, languages may have semantic, morphological or phonological constraints on the application of comparison to members of a word class or on its expression. The alternation between synthetic and analytic comparison in English is due to a formal constraint. Most of the semantic constraints result from the defining criterion of comparison which essentially involves a gradable parameter. Consequently, adjectives with complementary (contradictory) meaning such as *odd/even* are not used in comparison and gradation, at least not in their literal sense, and therefore often lack the morphological category of comparison. Also, certain adjectives that designate the highest grade tend to avoid comparison and gradation. This is true both for explicitly derived forms such as Dutch *doodmoe, *doodmoeër/*doodmoest* (Booij 1996:5) and for lexical terms for the highest degree such as *excellent*, **very excellent*.

2. Comparative

According to the absence or the presence, either optional or obligatory, of a marker of comparison on the lexical category involved, typically adjectives and adverbs (one of the criteria advocated by Xerberman 1999; but see already Jensen 1934), we can subdivide the strategies into four main groups.

2.1. No marker

The graded form has no marker. One of the most widespread types of comparative structures is the **juxtaposition** of two positive adjectives, with no marker of comparison and with antonymic value: *X (is) long, Y (is) short = X is longer than Y*. This is very common in isolating languages and can be found also among languages with agglutinative or fusional morphology. As Benveniste (1948) had already suggested, this strategy seems to be basic and independent of the morphological type of language in which it occurs:

"La comparaison est implicite dans l'énoncé antithétique. Toutes les langues peuvent recourir à ce moyen, même quand elles disposent d'une expression morphologique." (Benveniste 1948:126)

This type is illustrated by Samoan in (3) and occurs very frequently among Amazonian and Austronesian languages.

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

A subtype is one in which a positive adjective is juxtaposed with the negated form of the same adjective: i.e. *X (is) long, Y (is) not long = X is longer than Y*, like in Apalai (Koehn & Koehn 1986:52):

(4)   *Mopo zumo pyra kyn-exi-ne   akono   zumo.*
      Mopo big   NEG   3-be-DP   3.brother.in.law   big
      'His brother-in-law is bigger than Mopo.'

This strategy has been reconstructed for Proto-Indo-European (Puhvel 1973) and is also attested in Vedic and the Baltic languages (Pinault 1985; 1989), possibly in Latin (Baldi & Cuzzolin 2001:220). The two subtypes mentioned often cooccur in the same language, like, for instance, in Wari' (Everett & Kern 1997:193f).

2.2. Optional lexical morpheme

The form is graded by means of an often optional lexical morpheme, mainly unbound. In this type, too, which is very frequent among the languages of the world, the adjective has no marker of comparison and the standard occurs with a case marker, generally coinciding with some case (genitive, ablative, dative are the most frequent). As far as known, no language is attested in which the standard of comparison is marked by a special case, although in some languages (for instance Limbu (van Driem 1987:52) or Tsaxur (Sosenskaja 1999:561)) the standard is formed by a combination of two, mainly semantic cases that form a "special ending".

This type is rather widespread particularly among the agglutinative languages: in Turkish either the positive adjective alone or with the adverb *daha* is currently employed (Lewis 1988:54):

(5)   *kursun-dan   (daha) agır*
       lead-ABL   (more) heavy
       'heavier than lead'

In Udihe, a Manchu-Tunguz language, "the adjective itself does not take any special comparative morpheme" (Nikolayeva & Tolstaya 2001:180) and the standard is in the ablative case:

(6)   *Ussuri Biki-digi   suηta.*
       Ussuri Bikin-ABL   deep
       'The Ussuri is deeper than the Bikin.'

In Japanese the adjective is normally expressed without any adverb: *Tiroo wa Taroo yori kasikoi desu* 'Chiroo TOP Taroo from smart is (Chiroo is smarter than Taroo)' but the emphatic form *no hoo ga* 'very' can be added after *yori*, without any basic change in the meaning of the sentence (Hinds 1986:127f.).

The adverb meaning 'more' and the pivotal element corresponding to *than* may be agglutinated into one phonological word: Tümpisa Shoshone (Uto-Aztecan):

(7)   *Üü   yuhupi nü   wakakwa.*
       you   fat   me   more:than
       'You are fatter than me.' (Dayley 1989:288f.)

2.3. Affix

The form is graded by means of an affix. As has been repeatedly noticed, this type, which is quite common in the Indo-European family, is extremely rare among the world's languages.

English employs two morphological processes to form the comparative: in *smaller* there are the lexical morph *small-* and the suffix *-er*, which conveys the meaning 'more', whereas in *more interesting* the notion of comparison is expressed lexically by the adverb *more*. In the former case the comparative is expressed synthetically, in the latter analytically. This is in keeping with the general tendency observable among different linguistic families to replace synthetic by analytic expression. In English the use of the suffix *-er* is limited by phonological constraints (Quirk et al. 1994:461f.); it is no longer productive and tends to be replaced by the adverb *more: smaller/more small.*

Other declension categories may interact with the comparative in various ways. The simplest subtype is represented by a language like Old Irish, in which "all the forms of comparison are uninflected, and show no difference of number or gender" (Thurneysen 1980:232). For instance, the adjective *dían* 'swift' has the comparative *déniu* 'swifter' for all the numbers and genders. In Latin, oblique case forms of comparative adjectives contain an agglutinative sequence of the comparative suffix plus a case/number suffix which neutralizes gender: beat-*ior-i* 'happy-CMPR-DAT.SG', whereas in the so called direct cases (nominative, accusative, and vocative) there is a difference between *beat-ior-em* 'happy-CMPR-SG.M/F.ACC' and *beat-ius* 'happy-SG.N.ACC': in the latter the marker of comparison also conveys the grammatical information of number, gender and case, with cumulative exponence (cf. Art. 64).

There are two other very rare morphological processes to express gradation. Among the Semitic languages degree forms exhibit a stem with structure /aCCaC/, derived from the normal positive form of the adjective, usually /CaCCi:C/; e.g., Arabic *hami:d* 'praiseworthy', elative *ahmad* 'more praiseworthy'.

Among the Kartvelian languages the comparative can be formed by **circumfixes**: in Georgian, the comparative is characterised by the circumfix *u-...-es* with possible vocalic variation in the adjectival stem: *lamezi* 'beautiful', comparative *u-lamez-es-i* 'more beautiful'; *magari* 'strong', *u-magr-es-i* 'stronger' (Hewitt 1995:48). This type is no longer productive in Modern Georgian. In Svan, too, the comparative is formed by the circumfix *xo-...-a* and the adjective can also show vocalic variation: *c'rni* 'red', *xo-c'ran-a* 'redder' (Tuite 1997:18).

Finally, an interesting case is represented by Modern Irish:

"There is only one degree of morphologically expressed comparison... It is formed from the base adjective usually by palatalisation of the final consonant and the addition of *-e*..." (O'Dochartaigh 1992:74).

This form, however, is preceded by the particle *níos*: *bán* 'white', *níos báine (ná)* 'whiter (than)'. In Modern Irish, therefore, the comparative form is marked twice, lexically and morphologically.

2.4. Verb

The adjectival category, which clearly exhibits the morphological features typical for nouns in the Indo-European languages, is more verb-like in numerous other languages (a useful analysis in Bhat 1994:187-209). This phenomenon is particularly frequent among isolating languages, or those showing a low degree of synthesis, and among the native languages of America (but see Bhat 1994:211-243). We refer to this type as the "verbal type of comparison". Within this type, two subtypes are identifiable. The first involves verbs meaning 'to surpass, to overtake'. Needless to say, the expression of comparison here involves syntax rather than morphology. In the second subtype, the parameter of comparison itself is a verb.

In Saek, a language of the Austro-Thai family spoken between Laos and Thailand, comparison is expressed by the verb *lyyn⁵* 'surpass, overtake' (Morev 1988:43; numbers in exponence refer to tones):

(8) lum^4 myy^3nii^5 $reeng^4 lyyn^5$ myy^3luan^4
     wind   today   strong surpass   yesterday
     'today's wind is stronger than yesterday's'

This type is also attested in other South-East Asian languages, genetically related like Zhuang (Moskalev 1971:198) or unrelated, like Vietnamese (Nguyên 1997:122; see also Stassen 1985), but it is not limited to isolating languages: it also occurs in agglutinative or fusional languages with verbs meaning 'to overtake, to exceed'. It is widespread among the Bantu languages and also occurs among the Chadic languages: Hausa (cf. Sceglov 1970:239, 273; Miya, cf. Schuh 1998:314). In Rwanda, for instance, "to express comparison between two qualities or attributes the verbs *kurusha* and *kuruta* 'exceed, surpass' are used, which agree in person, number and class with the nouns denoting a person or thing that surpasses another person or thing participating in comparison" (Dubnova 1984:45).

In Amharic (Afro-Asiatic), the verbs *läqqa* 'surpass' or *bällätä* 'exceed' can reinforce the comparative form of the adjective (Hudson 1997:466):

(9) *Haylu k-antä*   *y∂bält*
     Haylu from-2.SG.M   exceed
     bätam qäcc∂n   *nä-w.*
     very   thin   is-he
     'Haylu is much thinner than you.'

This type of comparative, which according to Stassen (1985:159; on the relationship between comparison and word order see also Andersen 1983 and Romero-Figueroa 1986) tends to be related to SVO languages and supposedly developed in Late Proto-Indo-European (Puhvel 1973), also occurs in languages where the commonest type is the juxtaposed type as in Wari' (Everett & Kern 1997: 194f.).

In some languages a similar structure is used to express the comparative of minority, employing a lexical item meaning 'behind', cf. (9) from Miskito (Misulmapan) (Suárez 1983:135).

(10) *witin jang   ninara tukta*
      he   I   behind child
      'he is younger than I'

A more appropriate translation of (10) would be 'he is less old than I'. A parallel construction is found in Amazonian languages like Sanuma (Borgman 1990:54).

The comparative construction necessarily has a verbal head in those languages in which property concepts are verbs, such as West Greenlandic (Greenlandic Eskimo): "Comparative degree is expressed derivationally with a comparative/superlative affix on the (verbal) base expressing the parameter of comparison and, optionally, a case-marked nominal expressing the standard or limit of comparison (this may also be a possessive inflection on the comparative morpheme when it is in nominal form)." (Fortescue 1984:167f.):

(11) *kujataa-nit*   *issin-niru-vuq*
      south-ABL   be.cold-more-3.SG.IND
      'it is colder than the south'

"In the older language *niru* could be left out in fact" (Fortescue 1984:168).

2.5. Diachronic tendencies

Some tendencies are observable in the diachrony of comparative constructions. First of all, some old synthetic superlatives become **opaque** forms and tend to be felt as positive adjectives, for which new comparative and superlative forms are created. In Italian for instance, *intimo* has nowadays almost completely lost its original superlative function of 'innermost' and only means 'intimate', with a comparative (*più intimo*) and a rather rare *intimissimo*, used in commercials. But even in Latin, especially Late Latin, we find that those superlative forms which were residual and built by means of non-productive rules, tended to

be reanalyzed as positive: a form like *extremius* (recorded since 2nd c. A.D.) is a comparative formed from the superlative *extremum* 'very far, extreme'.

This phenomenon should not be confused with the tendency to **reinforce** and strengthen comparative forms, a feature which is rather common among the Indo-European languages. For instance, the co-occurrence of two markers of comparison was rather frequent in Late Latin: forms like *magis fortior = fortior*/*magis fortis* 'stronger', *magis beatior = beatior*/*magis beatus* 'happier' are well attested (Hofmann & Szantyr 1965:166f.). This phenomenon also occurs in spoken varieties of fusional languages which still retain the synthetic form of the comparative beside the analytic one: see Modern Greek *pio mikróteros* 'more smaller' (Holton et al. 1997:87).

Secondly, a well-known phenomenon in the history of numerous languages is the replacement of synthetic forms by **analytical** ones. This is largely attested in the history of the Romance languages, where the synthetic forms in *-iore(m)* were gradually but nearly completely replaced by the analytical forms deriving from *plus* (Italian *più* and its dialects, French *plus*; Modern Greek *pio*, as in *pio kaló* 'more beautiful', ultimately derives from *plus* via Venetian) or from *magis* (Spanish *mas*: *mas hermosa* 'more beautiful', Portuguese *mais*: *mais famoso* 'more famous', Rumanian *mai*: *mai înalt* 'higher'), and in several spoken varieties around the Mediterranean.

In Tunisian Arabic the form of the elative (template /aCCaC/: *hasan* 'good', *ahsan* 'better, very good') is usually replaced by the form *aktar* (elative form of *kati:r* 'much') plus the positive: *akt∂r has∂n* 'better'.

3. Superlative

The remarks in 2 concerning comparatives hold also for the superlative. It is worth noting that, although superlatives are often formed by the same morphological process as comparatives, they also show some typical formations. There are two basic, non-exclusive morphological processes used by the languages of the world. They are, however, mainly employed to form the highest grade (or absolute superlative), whereas the relative superlative is basically formed by syntactic devices.

3.1. Analytic formation

The form is graded by means of a lexeme. This is probably the commonest means of expressing the highest grade among the world's languages: almost every language has a word meaning roughly *very* which, preposed or postposed, combines with the adjective (see Klein 1998 on the semantics of adverbs of degree): *very friendly*, Xhosa *inencasa gqitha* 'delicious very (too delicious)'. In several languages this is the only possible means creating the superlative.

For stylistic, expressive reasons particular adverbs are employed in discourse: e.g. English *terribly*, German *furchtbar* 'terribly', Italian *straordinariamente* 'extraordinarily' (Austerlitz 1991:3). In English *terribly good* simply means 'very good'. Adverbs like those mentioned are often the etymological source of the adverb 'very': *very* itself originally meant 'really'); German *sehr*, which is the normal adverb for 'very' in present-day German, is the grammaticalised Middle High German adverb *sere* which in origin meant 'painful, violent'.

3.2. Synthetic formation

The adjective is graded by means of some morphological process. In this case the inventory of the morphological processes displayed among the languages of the world is also quite rich.

One of the processes by which the superlative is formed is **reduplication** (cf. Art. 57; extremely rarely used in the formation of comparative, as in Upriver Halkomelem; see Galloway 1984:56). In some cases there is total reduplication of the adjective, as in Samoan: *tele* 'big', *teletele* 'very big' or Sumerian: *bar* 'external', *barbar* 'very external = foreigner, barbarian'. In colloquial Italian one can reduplicate the adjective with superlative function in predicative position: *È rimasto lí tranquillo tranquillo* 'He remained there very quiet', but with an evaluative nuance.

Other cases involve partial reduplication like, for instance, of the first syllable (with some change) in some Mongol languages. In Modern Mongolian, for example, the first segment /(C)VC/ of the adjective is reduplicated but the last phoneme is replaced by /v/, so that /(C)VC/ becomes /(C)Vv/ (**inexact reduplication**: Art. 57): *ulaan* 'red', *uv ulaan* 'very red', as in Kalmuk: *xav xar* 'very black', whereas in Burjat, related to Mongolian, the phoneme is /b/ instead of /v/: *jab jagaan* 'very pink' (Sanzeev & Todaeva 1993:139). However, formation of the superlative by reduplication appears to be limited to certain adjectival classes.

Among the Indo-European languages the superlative is formed with two types of **affixes**: prefixes and suffixes. The most frequent were various **prefixes** derived from the root **per-*: *per-/prae-* in Latin (André 1951): *praeclarus* 'very famous', *percallidus* 'very smart'; *pre-*, already documented in Old Russian as *pre-/pri-* (Vjalkina 1995:321), still occurs with some adjectives in Modern Russian: *mudryj* 'wise', *premudryj* 'very wise', *krasnyj* 'red', *prekrasnyj* 'very red'; *perí-* in Ancient Greek: *perikallé:s* 'very beautiful'. In this case, the prefix is not simply added to the positive form of adjective, but rather to the adjectival stem.

In Celtic another etymologically unclear prefix *an-* is attested, which already occurs in Gallic (*ande-caros* 'very red'; Vendryes 1981:71), and is used in the same function: Irish *an-mhaith* 'very good' (from *maith*), Welsh *an-fawr* 'very big' (from *mawr*; in both cases the adjectives undergo lenition).

In some modern European languages other types of intensifying prefixed elements occur: although their productivity is rather limited, they frequently occur in colloquial varieties: Dutch *doodmoe* 'very tired', lit. 'dead-tired' (cf. Italian *stanco morto*), German *saublöde* '(sow-silly) very silly', Italian *straricco* 'very rich' (*stra-* from Latin *extra* 'outside'; cf. already Latin *extraordinarius* 'extraordinary, beyond the limits of normality'), *arcicontento* 'very happy' (*arci-* from Ancient Greek *archi-* 'chief, prominent' via Latin).

The most widespread **suffixes** among the Indo-European languages were, however, **-isto-* and **-tato-* (which bear a morphological similarity with the formatives of ordinals; Benveniste 1948), traces of which still remain in some Indo-European branches. Their morphosyntactic behaviour is almost identical with their comparative counterparts **-jos-* and **-tero-*.

In some languages a special prefix is added to the comparative form of the adjective or adverb: in Hungarian, for instance, the prefix *leg-* is added to the comparative form: *gyors-abb* 'more rapid' becomes *leg-gyors-abb* 'very rapid, the most rapid', the adverb *gyors-an* 'rapidly' *leg-gyors-abb-an* 'very rapidly'.

In Modern Irish, the superlative is formed by the synthetic comparative form of the adjective preceded by the particle *is*: *deacair* 'difficult', superlative *is deaicre* 'most difficult', *deaicre* being the comparative (see 2.3).

4. Equative

Among the graded forms, **equativity** is the one which exhibits the least variety. There are basically two types, in fact: analytic and synthetic formation.

4.1. Analytic formation

In this case the parameter marker (see 1) is expressed analytically by a particle or an adverb (German):

(12) *Zürich ist so groß wie Wien.*
      'Zurich is as big as Vienna.'

The second is restricted to certain linguistic families and is morphological. The parameter marker is expressed synthetically on the parameter by a special morpheme (Estonian):

(13) *Minu   õde   on   minu   pikk-une.*
      I:GEN   sister is   I:GEN   tall-EQT
      'My sister is as tall as me.'

      The standard doesn't usually occur in the case in which it occurs after the comparative, and in some languages there is a special case marker (Ancash Quechua):

(14) *Pani-i-mi   qam-naw   shumaq.*
      sister-1.SG-DIRECT.EVIDENCE   you-EQT   pretty
      'My sister is as pretty as you.'

      In some languages the parameter marker can be omitted. This is the case in Italian, for instance, where the presence of the parameter marker is stylistically highly marked:

(15) *Il mio libro è (così) bello come il tuo.*
      'My book is as nice as yours.'

      In a few cases analytic parameter markers "are semantically more or less transparent and mean something like 'equally, to the same degree'" (Haspelmath & Buchholz 1998:284):

(16) (a)   Chinese
             Ta   gen   ni   yíyàng   gao.
             she   with   you   *one.manner* tall
             'She is as tall as you.'
      (b)   Seychelles Creole
             I   ris   mem   degree ki   nu.
             he   rich   same   extent as   we
             'He is as rich as us.'

4.2. Synthetic formation

Synthetic formations are far less frequent than the analytic, i.e. syntactic ones. Among the languages of Europe, for instance, they occur only in three linguistic groups: Celtic, Finno-Ugric, and Kartvelian, but non-European languages also show them: Tagalog, Indonesian (in these two languages it is a prefix; cf. (17) from Indonesian), Greenlandic Eskimo (Haspelmath & Buchholz 1998:283f.):

(17)   *Ayah   saya   se-tinggi   paman saya*
       father 1.SG   EQT-tall   uncle   1.SG
       'My father is as tall as my uncle.'

        In Old Irish the equative suffix was *-ithir/-idir* (of unclear origin; Thurneysen 1980:237f.): the choice between the two was motivated by phonology (vgl. (18a-b)): "the former as a rule after monosyllables, the latter after polysyllables" (Thurneysen 1980:233):

(18)   (a)   *léir* 'eager'
               lérithir 'as eager'
       (b)   *erlam* 'ready'
               erlamidir 'as ready'

In Modern Irish the equative form is no more productive and has been replaced by the construction [*comh* + the positive form of the adjective + *le*]: *comh cliste le* 'as clever as'. In Modern Welsh, instead, the parameter marker precedes the synthetic equative form in *-ed* (Middle Welsh *-hed*), and not the simple positive form: *oer* 'cold', *cyn oered a* 'as cold as' (not *cyn oer a), even though this happens with some adjectives that do not have the *-ed* form.

5.   References

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