1. Comparison in Tswefap

- Tswefap ( Bamileke Narrow Grassfields, Cameroon) utilizes an “exceed” type comparative in Stassen’s (1985) typology.
- The gradable predicates used in comparatives are verbs.
- Comparatives are formed via one of many strategies involving a serial verb construction with the verb tchége ‘pass’.

(1) Nkwehnw o a seh n-tchege Chimi k. FACT be tall N-pass C
‘Kuamo is taller than Chimi.’

2. The Degree Abstraction Parameter

- Beck et al. (2009) argue that languages differ in whether they make use of degrees (Degree Semantics Parameter), with some languages lacking gradable <i>cl<sub>1</sub><rel>t<sub>1</sub>> predicates.
- One observation about degrees is that they are semantically much like individuals (objects of type e).
  - There are expressions that refer to degrees (4 feet) just like there are expressions that refer to individuals (大火).
  - There are generalized quantifiers over degrees (<i>cl<sub>1</sub><rel>d<sub>1</sub>>>) just like there are generalized quantifiers over individuals (<i>cl<sub>1</sub><rel>e<sub>1</sub>>).)
  - Generalized degree quantifiers can QO to create abstractions over variables of type d, just like generalized quantifiers over individuals can QO to abstract over type e variables.
- Beck et al. (2009) propose that languages can also differ in whether they allow abstraction over degrees (Degree Abstraction Parameter).
- From these two parameters alone, we can expect to find three types of languages:
  - No degrees (±DAP, ±DSP), Meta (Austronesian, Popa New Guinea) entirely lacks expressions that reference degrees.
  - Degrees, but no abstraction (±DAP, ±DSP), Moiré (Gur, Burkina Faso) has expressions that refer to degrees but does not allow constructions that require binding of degree variables.
  - Degrees and degree abstraction (+DAP, +DSP), English has expressions that refer to degrees and constructions that involve degree variable-binding.
- Beck et al. (2009) discuss 2 constructions that only languages with degrees may have, and they identify an additional 5 constructions that only languages that allow abstraction over degrees may have.
- On the basis of these diagnostics I argue that Tswefap has a positive setting for both parameters.

3. Evidence for Degrees and Degree Abstraction in Tswefap

- Tswefap allows all the constructions that Beck et al. (2009) take to be evidence for degrees and degree abstraction.

DIFERENCES COMPARATIVE

- Differential measure phrases can appear in comparatives.
- Type <i>d</i> expressions can be the standard of comparison.

(2) Chimi a seh pu ta’ tswé n-tchege C. FACT be tall with one head N-pass Nkwehnw o h k
‘Chimi is one head taller than Kuamo.’

COMPARISONS WITH A DEGREE

- Direct measure phrases can appear with gradable predicates without a PP.

(4) Chimi a tye v kilo ghap C. FACT be heavy kilo 10
‘Chimi weighs 10 kilos.
(Lit. ‘Chimi is 10 kilos heavy.’)

DEGREE QUESTIONS

- Questions involving a bound degree variable are possible.

(5) Chimi a seh n-tchege pu’lu, ‘How tall is Chimi?’

SUBCOMPARATIVES

- Subcomparatives, where the standard of comparison involves a second gradable predicate, are possible.

(6) Chimi a seh n-tchege pa’ n-ikie Nkwehnw o h k ne seh a
‘Chimi is taller than Kuamo’s rope is long.’

NEGATIVE ISLAND EFFECTS

- Negation in the standard of comparison is unacceptable.

(7) * Chimi a yu n-tchege pu’lu me yeh teuk C. FACT buy one book ME be expensive n-tchege yeh yi sup mi nthu yu a N-pass DEM REL no person NEG buy REL
Intended: ‘Chimi bought a more expensive book than the one no one bought.’

4. Scope Ambiguities in Tswefap and Yoruba

- In Tswefap we find evidence that degree phrases behave like quantifiers in showing scope ambiguities.

(8) yi me nthokh ngé pa’ yoh lok kwa’ it is required that building DEM take exactly seh n-tchege pu’lu yi centimeter C. yeh two be tall N-exceed like 38G ne nbi indeh le
INF be now LE
‘It is required that the building be exactly 2cm taller than it is now.
You are in a context where you have to build a model building. Your building is 2.98m tall.

Context 1: ∀<i>y</i> > max
The rules state the building must be 3m tall, no more, no less.

Context 2: max > ∀<i>y</i>
The rules state the building must be at least 3m tall, but can be more.

- Beck et al. (2009) demonstrate that Yoruba uses degrees and abstracts over degrees.

5. Conclusion

- Tswefap shows clear evidence for degree abstraction based on all of the criteria proposed by Beck et al. (2009).
- Some variation among exceed-type languages is due to the fact that they can exhibit either setting for the DAP.
- The presence of scope ambiguities in Tswefap supports Howell’s (2013) claim that a lack of modified numeral measure phrases in Yoruba leads to a lack of ambiguity.
- Some variation among exceed-comparative languages is due to differences in lexical items rather than grammatical parameter settings.

6. References


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