

- (5) tsy lava noho [ny rehetra] Rabe
 NEG tall than the all Rabe
 ‘Rabe isn’t taller than everyone.’
 a. ‘Rabe is taller than not everyone.’ NEG > ALL
 b. ‘Rabe isn’t taller than anyone.’ ALL > NEG

Evidence against an implicit comparison analysis. The paper will also reject an alternative, IMPLICIT COMPARISON (IC) ANALYSIS (Kennedy 2009) in which the comparative is phrasal but the comparative interpretation arises indirectly, through context, as in *Compared to John, Mary is tall*. Such an analysis has been defended for other Austronesian languages (Hohaus 2010, Pearson 2011). Evidence against the IC analysis is based on i) extraction patterns, ii) incorrect semantic predictions, and iii) the behavior of minimal standard adjectives. For example, Pearson 2011 argues that the IC example in (6a) has a different meaning than the explicit comparison counterpart in (6b). The former means that Rabe’s height is surprising given his weight; whereas, the latter means that the degree to which Rabe’s height is surprising exceeds the degree to which his weight is surprising. The Malagasy comparative in (6c) has only the explicit comparison interpretation.

- (6) a. Rabe’s height is surprising compared to his weight. IMPLICIT COMPARISON
 b. Rabe’s height is more surprising than his weight. EXPLICIT COMPARISON
 c. mahagaga ny hahavon-dRabe noho ny havesara-ny
 surprising the height-Rabe than the weight-3SG
 ‘Rabe’s height is more surprising than his weight.’
 *‘Compared to Rabe’s weight, his height is surprising.’

Conclusions. If the conclusions are correct, Malagasy can be added to the small but growing list of languages that have only direct phrasal comparatives and no (reduced) clausal comparatives. This requires a semantics that can directly interpret such structures, without intervening clause-level elements (Bhatt & Takahashi 2007). It also indicates that syntax need not be “abstract”, even when that would simplify semantic interpretation.

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