## The Syntax of Malagasy Phrasal Comparatives

**Introduction**. Few question the existence of clausal comparatives—comparatives in which the standard (the constituent following *than*) shows clausal syntax, which may have been reduced by ellipsis (Bresnan 1973 and others): *Mary is taller than John is tall.* What remains unresolved is whether all comparatives must be analyzed in this way. In particular, at stake is the analysis of phrasal comparatives, such as *John is taller than Mary* or its Malagasy equivalent in (1), in which the standard is a phrase.

(1)	lava long		standard	ilay that	zaza]] child	Rabe Rabe
	'Rabe i					

Two types of analyses have been proposed for such phrasal comparatives. Under a REDUCED CLAUSE ANALYSIS (Heim 1985 and others), the standard is a clause and (1) is also derived by applying ellipsis to the clausal structure, as in (2). Under a DIRECT ANALYSIS (Hankamer 1973, Hoeksema 1983, and others), the standard is a simple nominal, as in (3).

(2)	Reduced clause analysis	(3)	Direct analysis
	Rabe is taller [than [clause that child is tall]]		Rabe is taller [than [nominal that child]]

This paper investigates the syntax of comparatives in the Austronesian language Malagasy and argues for a direct analysis of Malagasy comparatives. Although direct analyses have been proposed for other languages, such as English (Hankamer 1973, Brame 1983, Hoeksema 1983), Chinese (Xiang 2003), and Japanese (Kennedy 2009), they have been questioned in most cases, i.e. Lechner 2004 for English, Erlewine 2007 for Chinese, and Pearson 2010 for Japanese. Thus the number of clear cases evidencing a direct analysis is still quite small (i.e. Hindi (Bhatt & Takahashi 2007)). The paper argues that Malagasy provides a good case of a direct analysis language. This result has implications for the syntax-semantics interface and cross-framework questions about the abstractness of syntax.

**Evidence against a reduced clause analysis**. Evidence against a reduced clause analysis comes from three sources: i) the standard never shows clausal characteristics, ii) the standard behaves as though it is in the matrix clause not in an embedded clause, and iii) the standard does not behave as though it has been removed from a larger, clausal structure.

The data in (4) represent i). Various comparatives in Malagasy in which the standard shows overt clausal syntax are completely impossible, in contrast to the grammatical English translations:

(4)	a.	*nividy	boky	betsaka	[noho	nividy	Rasoa]	Rabe	
		buy	book	many	than	buy	Rasoa	Rabe	
		'Rabe bought more books than Rasoa bought.'							
	b.	*nividy	laoranjy	y betsaka	nohc	o nividy	akondro	izy]	Rabe
		buy	orange	many	than	buy	banana	3sg	Rabe
		'Rabe bought more oranges than he bought bananas.'							

Second, the standard behaves as though it is in the matrix clause, as is expected under the direct analysis. For example, the standard can take scope over matrix negation, (5). This would be unexpected under the reduced clause analysis given the clause-boundedness of quantifier scope in general (May 1977, Farkas 1981, and others) and in clausal comparatives in particular (Larson 1988). Further locality arguments against a reduced clause analysis will be presented based on NPI licensing and Binding Theory.

(5)		tsy	lava	noho	[ny	rehetra]	Rabe		
		NEG	tall	than	the	all	Rabe		
		'Rabe isn't taller than everyone.'							
	a.	'Rabe	is taller	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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