The standard marker in Malayalam encodes comparative semantics

Mythili Menon

Abstract 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 as a semantic argument of the comparative morpheme. I depart from this analysis and provide evidence that both the comparative morpheme and standard marker contribute to the semantics of comparison (similar in spirit to Kennedy 2007, Alrenga et al 2012, Schwarzschild 2014); evidence for my proposal comes from Malayalam.

Keywords Adjectives, Gradability, Comparatives

1. Introduction

Under the standard analysis, gradable adjectives denote relations between individuals and degrees (Seuren 1973, Cresswell 1979 a.o). A gradable predicate, such as tall, incorporates the measure function height, which when applied to an individual, yields the degree $d$ of height of that individual.

(1) $\lbrack \text{tall} \rbrack = \lambda d \lambda x. \text{height}(x) \geq d$

In the degree analysis of adjectives, functional morphology such as, measure phrases (‘two feet’), positive morphemes (POS), or the comparative morpheme more saturate the degree argument. In comparatives, such as (2) the semantics of comparison is encoded in the comparative morpheme (3) and the standard marker than is taken to be semantically vacuous.

(2) a. John is taller than Bill (is).
   b. John is $\lbrack \text{AP} \lbrack \text{DegP} -\text{er than Bill} \rbrack \text{tall} \rbrack$
   c. $\lbrack \text{DegP} -\text{er than Bill} \rbrack_1$ John is $\lbrack \text{AP} t_1 \text{tall} \rbrack$

(3) $\lbrack -\text{er/more} \rbrack = \lambda D. \lambda D'. \max D' > \max D$ (Heim 2000)

In this paper, I will argue for an alternative analysis where both the standard marker than and the comparative marker more encode comparative semantics. Evidence comes from Malayalam comparatives. Malayalam lacks an adjectival category and uses complex property concept expressions to encode adjectival meaning (Menon 2013, Menon and Pancheva forthcoming). In the absence of adjectives, nominal and verbal comparatives are formed using two different kinds of comparatives. The comparative marker is an adnominal degree modifier along the lines of ‘in addition to’, ‘in excess of’. Thus, in Malayalam, the role of the comparative marker is not to saturate the degree argument of the adjective. The comparative semantics is encoded in the

---

1 Various parts of this paper were presented at CUSP 8 at Stanford University, AFest at EFLU, Hyderabad, FASAL 6 at UMass, Amherst, and Syntax + at USC. I thank the audiences at these events. I also thank K.A Jayaseelan, P.Madhavan, Roumyana Pancheva, and Roger Schwarzschild for valuable comments. Also a special thanks to R. Amritavalli, who initiated me into syntax, without whom this paper would not have come into existence. Any errors are my own.
semantically non-vacuous than which functions as a quantifier domain adverbial (similar in spirit to Schwarzschild 2014) whereby it restricts the domain of the degree quantifier more. The paper is structured as follows. In the following section 2.0, I will introduce the two types of comparatives in Malayalam. In section 3.0, I will analyze the distribution of the comparative marker more and in section 4.0, I will look closely at the distribution of the standard marker than, followed by the analysis in section 5.0.

2. Malayalam comparatives: The basic data

There are two types of comparatives in Malayalam, depending on the standard marker: kaal-um and il-um (4). They both show clausal comparison and phrasal comparison (see Menon 2012). The kaal-um is similar to a particle comparative (like English) and is unique to Malayalam among other Dravidian languages. kaal is a dedicated than morpheme found only in comparatives. The comparative marker kuuʈuttal is optional with kaal-um comparatives.

(4)  

a. the kaal-um comparative: phrasal

Anil-inə [Komalan-e kaal-um] (kuuʈuttal) pokkam əŋə
Anil-DAT Komalan-ACC than-UM more tallness POSS V
‘Anil is taller than Komalan.’ (Lit. ‘To Anil there is (more) tallness than Komalan.’)

b. the kaal-um comparative: clausal

Anil-inə [Komalanə pokkam u[ə-t-ine] kaal-um (kuuʈuttal) 
Anil-DAT Komalan-DAT tallnessEX.COP_nonfinite-REL-NOML-ACC than-UM more 
pokkam əŋə 
tallness POSS V
‘Anil is taller than Komalan.’ (Lit. ‘To Anil there is (more) tallness than Komalan has tallness.’)

The second type of comparison, called the il-um comparative is the common strategy employed by all other Dravidian languages. It uses a locative postposition il, which is attached directly to the standard. Thus, there is a case marking difference between the two comparatives. The standard in the kaal-um comparative is accusative case marked while the standard in the il-um comparative is locative case marked.

(5)  

a. the il-um comparative: phrasal

Anil-inə [Komalan-il-um] *(kuuʈuttal) pokkam əŋə
Anil-DAT Komalan-LOC-UM more tallness POSS V
‘Anil is taller than Komalan.’ (Lit. ‘To Anil from Komalan there is tallness.’)

b. the il-um comparative: clausal

Anil-inə [Komalanə pokkam u[ə-t-il-um] *(kuuʈuttal) 
Anil-DAT Komalan-DAT tallnessEX.COP_nonfinite-REL-NOML-LOC-UM more 
pokkam əŋə 
tallness POSS V

2 In the literature, the PossV əŋə (5a) is called existential copula and the PredV aaŋə (5b) is called the equative copula.
‘Anil is taller than Komalan.’ (Lit. ‘To Anil from Komalan there is tallness.’)

There are two generalizations from the above data. The comparative marker behaves differently in kaa-um and il-um comparatives. In the case of il-um comparatives, the comparative marker kuuṭutta is obligatory. In the following section, I will look closely at the distribution of the comparative marker.

3. Distribution of the comparative marker more

The comparative marker in Malayalam kuuṭutta has a peculiar distribution. In this section I note an asymmetry in the distribution by looking at different expressions it can combine with.

3.1 NP comparatives are conditioned by possession

The comparative marker is obligatory when the NP is encoded in a non-possessive construction (6). When the NP is encoded in a possessive construction (the existential copula), the comparative marker is optional (cf. (5)).

(6) NP comparative: obligatory more outside of possession

a. Anil [Komalan-e kaa-um] *(kuuṭutta) pazham kazhicc-u
   Anil Komalan-ACC than-UM more bananas eat-PAST
   ‘Anil ate more bananas than Komalan.’

b. *(kuuṭutta) veḷḷam kuṭiccu ‘drank more water’

c. *(kuuṭutta) kaatu vizhingi ‘ate more air’

(7) NP comparative: optional more with possession

a. Anilinə [Komalan-e kaa-um] (kuuṭutta) veḷḷam unṭə
   Anil-DAT Komalan-ACC than-UM more water POSS V
   ‘Anil has more water than Komalan.’

b. (kuuṭutta) paṇṭam unṭə ‘has more money’

Crucially, possession plays a role in determining the presence of the comparative marker. In the case of il-um comparative, as I noted in the previous section, the comparative marker is always obligatory.

3.2 Verbal comparatives: obligatory more

In the case of verbal comparatives (8), the comparative marker seems to be obligatorily required.

(8) a. Anil [Komalan-e kaa-um] *(kuuṭutta) ooṭi
   Anil Komalan-ACC than-UM more ran
‘Anil ran more than Komalan.’

b. *(kuuʈuttal) nadannu ‘walked more’
c. *(kuuʈuttal) mala keri ‘climbed more hills’

The same obligatory requirement holds of verbal comparatives formed using the il-um comparative.

3.3 Class 1 property concept expressions prohibit the comparative marker

In previous work, I have analyzed Malayalam has having two classes of property concept (PC) expressions (for more details, see Menon 2013, Menon and Pancheva 2014, Menon and Pancheva forthcoming). There are no semantic differences between the two types of roots. The distinction is morpho-syntactic (based on etymology), and the morpho-syntactic class determines the type of structures the roots can appear in.

(9) a. [[\nall ]] = the property of goodness (Class 1)
      b. [[\santosh ]] = the property of happiness (Class 2)

A covert possessive v categorizes Class 1 roots. Class 2 roots are categorized with a non possessive v, and they enter further PC predication as complements of possessive predicates. Correspondingly, all PC predication is possession-based.

(10) Class 1 PC root (-a ending, relativized root)

      a. [[[\nall + \vposs \ POS] \ -a]rel
         Lit. ‘having an instance of goodness measuring to a degree that exceeds the standard’
      b. \vposs \ = \(\lambda \Pi \lambda d \lambda x \ \exists y [y \ is \ an \ instance \ of \ \Pi \ & \ x \ has \ y \ & \ \mu(y) \geq d]\)
      c. [ POS ] = \(\lambda g_{d,e,t}\lambda x. \ \exists d \ [g(d)(x) \ & \ d > d]\)
      d. [nalla] = \(\lambda x. \ \exists y [y \ is \ an \ instance \ of \ goodness \ & \ x \ has \ y \ & \ \mu(y) \geq d \ & \ d > d]\)
          \(\approx \lambda x. \ \exists d [x’s \ goodness \geq d \ & \ d > d]\)

Thus, Class 1 PC expressions encode covert possession and they are gradable. These Class 1 PC expressions such as big, good, new never appear with the comparative marker.

(11) Class 1 PC comparatives: more is prohibited

      a. Anil [Komalan-e kaal-um] (*kuuʈuttal) nalla-van aanə
         Anil Komalan-ACC than-UM more good-M.SG PRED V
         ‘Anil is good than Komalan.’ (Lit. ‘Anil is one having goodness than Komalan’)

*
b. (*kuṭuttal) pazhayat ‘more old’  
c. (*kuṭuttal) valippam ‘more big’

Class 1 PC expressions only appear with kaal-um comparative due to the prohibition against the comparative marker.

3.4 Class 2 property concept expressions optionally allow the comparative marker

Class 2 PC roots are non-gradable and they are categorized using a non possessive verbal head.

(12) Class 2 property concept root (-am ending, nominalized root)

a. $[[\sqrt{pokk} + \emptyset_v] + -am]_n$
   Lit. ‘being an instance of height’

b. $[\emptyset_v] = \lambda II \lambda x \ [x \text{ is an instance of } II]$

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

The possessive relation is expressed at the level of the word, through a covert possessive verbal morpheme, with Class 1 roots, and at the phrasal level, through an overt possessive verb, with Class 2 roots. Gradability is directly related to property possession. Only Class 1 roots are gradable.

Class 2 PC expressions such as happiness, tallness, smartness optionally appears with the comparative marker.

(13) Class 2 PC comparatives: more is optional

a. Anil-inə $[Komalan-e \ kaa[-um] \ (kuṭuttal) \ pokkam \ unṭə]$
   Anil-DAT Komalan-ACC than-UM more tallness POSS V
   ‘Anil is taller than Komalan.’ (Lit. ‘Anil has more tallness than Komalan.’)

b. (kuṭuttal) santosham ‘more happiness’

c. (kuṭuttal) dukkam ‘more sadness’

A question regarding the comparative marker emerges at this point. Why is more obligatory with NP comparatives outside of possession, optional with possessive predicates including those appearing with Class 2 expressions, and disallowed with Class 1 expressions? We will proceed to answer this question in section 5. The table below summarizes the behavior of the comparative marker in the presence of the two different kinds of comparatives and with the different property concept expressions as well as NP and VP comparatives.
Summary of the behavior of the comparative marker kuṭuttal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>kaal-um comparative</th>
<th>il-um comparative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. NP comparative (outside possession)</td>
<td>obligatory more</td>
<td>obligatory more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. NP comparative (with possession)</td>
<td>optional more</td>
<td>obligatory more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Verbal comparative</td>
<td>obligatory more</td>
<td>obligatory more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Class 1</td>
<td>prohibited more</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Class 2</td>
<td>optional more</td>
<td>obligatory more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this section we have seen that the behavior of *more* is quite distinct from the English – *er/more*. It has a varied distribution depending on the standard marker and the kind of expression it combines with. In the next section, we will look at the distribution of the standard marker *than*.

4 Distribution of *than*

English can optionally omit the standard phrase in a comparative construction. These type of constructions are called as implicit comparatives.

(14) {Come out onto the porch.} It’s cooler here. (Sheldon 1945)

(15) a. John has 3 pens. I have *more*.
    b. John is 6 ft tall. I am taller.

4.1. *Than* is always obligatory in Malayalam

Another point of difference between English comparatives and Malayalam comparatives is that these comparatives are disallowed in Malayalam.

    ʻAnil has three pens. I have more than that.

    b. Anil-inə aarə ați pokkam үңə. enikka [atin-e kaar[u]n] kuṭuttal үңə Anil-DAT three feet tallness EX COP I-DAT that-ACC than more POSS V
    ʻAnil is 6 feet tall. I have more than that.

Thus, another generalization that comes forth from this data is regarding the nature of the comparative marker *more* in Malayalam, it behaves differently from English *more*. 
4.2. Hebrew bare comparatives

Hebrew bare comparatives have been analyzed in Schwarzschild 2014 as having a semantically meaningful than.

(17) Miri xazaka mi-Yoni (Schwarzschild 2014: 17)
Miri strong[3sg.fem] SM-Yoni
‘Miri is stronger than Yoni.’

The standard marker mi appears in (13) without the comparative marker yoter. Hebrew bare comparatives do not have a null more since differentials cannot combine with bare comparatives.

(18) *harbe xazak mi-Yoni (Schwarzschild 2014: 24)
a lot strong SM-Yoni
‘a lot stronger than Yoni.’

Hebrew allows differentials to be expressed as a prepositional phrase following the comparative adjective.

(19) hu (yoter) xazak mi-Yoni bə-harbe (Schwarzschild 2014: 24)
he CM strong SM-Yoni P – a lot
‘he’s stronger than Yoni by alot’

4.3. Malayalam differentials

Measure phrases can combine with comparatives without the presence of the comparative marker (similar to English), though speakers prefer the presence of the comparative marker.

(20) HoAnilin-ə [Komalan-e kaal-um] ranṭu inch (kuṭṭuttal) pokkam uŋə Anil-DAT Komalan-ACC than-UM two inch more tallness POSS V
‘Anil is two inches taller than Komalan.’

(21) Anil [Komalan-e kaal-um] orupaatə pazham (kuṭṭuttal) kazhiccu Anil Komalan-ACC than-UM a lot bananas more eat
‘Anil ate a lot of bananas than Komalan.’

However, in the il-um comparatives the more is obligatory. This is similar to the Hebrew differential comparatives in (xx).

(22) a. Anilin-ə Komalan-il-um ranṭu inch *(kuṭṭuttal) pokkam uŋə Anil-DAT Komalan-LOC-UM two inch more tallness POSS V
‘Anil is two inches taller than Komalan.’

(23) b. Anil Komalan-il-um orupaatə *(kuṭṭuttal) pazham kazhiccu Anil Komalan-LOC-UM a lot more bananas eat
‘Anil ate a lot more bananas than Komalan.’

Below is a summary of the distribution of the comparative marker and the standard marker given the data from English, Hebrew, and Malayalam. As seen, all languages have ways of forming comparative and allowing differentials in comparative but they do so differently. Malayalam differs from English and Hebrew in forming comparatives from property concept expressions. Hebrew and Malayalam allow bare comparatives, formed only using the standard phrase headed by than. English and Hebrew, to the exclusion of Malayalam, allow an incomplete comparative where the standard phrase is omitted. Thus, the Malayalam than is special and the behavior of than and more in Malayalam is different from that of English or Hebrew.

- Summary of the distribution of more and than in English, Hebrew, Malayalam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Malayalam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comparative</strong></td>
<td>John is taller than Bill</td>
<td>John is taller than Bill</td>
<td>John is taller than Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bare comparative</strong></td>
<td>*John is tall than Bill</td>
<td>John is tall than Bill</td>
<td>John is tall than Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incomplete comparative</strong></td>
<td>It is cooler over here</td>
<td>It is cooler over here</td>
<td>*It is cooler over here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Differential</strong></td>
<td>John is 2 inches taller than Bill</td>
<td>John is taller than Bill by 2 inches</td>
<td>John is 2 inches taller than Bill/ John is taller than Bill by 2 inches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Toward an analysis

There are three viable options for accounting for the variable behavior of the comparative marker. I will show that only one of these options is tenable for the data presented from the Malayalam comparatives. The first option is to assume the standard semantics for the comparative marker as in the standard literature. In this case, the comparative marker more encodes the comparative semantics. However, this analysis will provide no explanation for the varied distribution of the comparative marker. Why is it that the more is disallowed with Class 1 property concept expressions, optional with Class 2 property concept expressions, and obligatory with NP and VP comparatives, if indeed the comparative marker encodes comparative semantics uniformly?

The second option is to assume a silent degree head as is seen postulated for Hindi (Bhatt and Takahashi 2011). However, if indeed there was a silent head mediating the semantics, we expect to see systematic distinctions between the degree head –er and the comparative marker, yet we don’t.
The final option is to assume that the standard phrase is not semantically vacuous and in addition to the comparative marker encodes the comparative marker. This is the analysis I will be pursuing in the following sections.

5.1 Is the more actually more?

Before laying out the analysis, looking at the nature of the comparative marker, one could ask whether it is indeed a comparative marker. I will offer a morphological decomposition account suggesting that the comparative marker is a dedicated morpheme seen only in comparative uses.

√kur is the root for quantity predicates. The same root can be seen in comparatives of superiority (more) as well as comparatives of inferiority (less). Moreover, kuuṭuttal ‘more’ is only used in comparatives.

(24) a. √kur + -ee = kuree ‘a lot, many, much’
   b. √kur + -avo= kuravə ‘less’
   c. √kur + -uka = kuuṭuka ‘to increase’
   d. √kur + uṭ + -al = kuuṭuttal ‘many/much + er’ ~ ‘more’

Following the traditional analysis in Bresnan (1973), Hackl (2000), more is analyzed as in (25).

(25) –er + many/much = more

5.2 A semantics for than

The standard marker determines the semantics of comparison (selecting for a phrasal vs. clausal standard of comparison) cross-linguistically (Kennedy 2007, Alrenga et al 2012). Comparative marker is not always necessary in comparative constructions (Schwarszschild 2014 for Hebrew) Comparative markers are cross-linguistically far more rare than standard markers (Stassen 1985).

5.2.1 Schwarzschild’s proposal

The than phrase can bind the degree argument in the matrix clause in bare comparatives (i.e. syntactically saturate the degree argument of the gradable predicate) or can act as a quantifier domain adverbial in the presence of more (i.e., syntactically act as an adjunct to the degree phrase).

(26) a. than: [[kaaf-um ]] = λD. λD’. ∃d [ d ∈ D ∧ d ∈ D’]
   b. more: [[kuuṭuttal ]] = λD. λD’. ∀d [ d ∈ D → d ∈ D’]

However, both in Class 1 and Class 2 property concept expressions there is no degree argument that than can bind. In the standard analysis, gradable adjectives are type <d, et>. In my analysis of Class 1 expressions, they are predicates of individuals. (see appendix). Alrenga et al’s

3 Schwarzschild uses thresholds in his analysis and not degrees.
analysis also assumes the standard semantics for gradable predicates and will not work for the Malayalam data. We adopt the spirit of Schwarzschild’s proposal, essentially than encodes the comparative semantics and behaves as a quantifier domain adverbial in the presence of more.

5.3 Than is not semantically vacuous and encodes comparison

My main proposal is regarding the semantic content of the standard marker than. The standard marker is not semantically vacuous and acts as a context setter. The phrase headed by than can function as a quantifier-domain adverbial whereby it restricts the domain of the degree quantifier more. The semantics for the standard marker is given in (27). It takes a degree predicate and gives a degree, which is greater than the maximal degree denoted by the degree predicate.

(27) than: \[[kaa]-um \] = \( \lambda D \langle d, t \rangle . \exists d [ d > \text{max}(D)] \)

(28) John is taller than Bill (is)

The standard phrase [than Bill is] denotes a degree- a degree of tallness one would have to exceed in order to be taller than John. This degree is Bill’s height, the maximal degree to which Bill is tall. Max is standardly defined as follows. It denotes the largest degree that satisfies D.

\[
\text{def}
\]

(29) \( \text{max}(D) = 1 d \left[ \forall d' \left[ D(d') \rightarrow d' \leq d \right] \right] \)

Given this semantics, in the next sections I develop how comparatives are formed in the different classes of property concept expressions in Malayalam.

5.4 Than alone encodes comparison- Class 1

Class 1 property concept expressions are –a ending relativized property concept expressions and they never allow an overt comparative marker more. The internal composition of these Class 1 expressions encode covert possession, through merge in the Spec of a functional head \( \emptyset_{v\_poss} \). The positive morpheme (POS) can saturate the degree argument and the –a, which is the relative clause marker in Proto-Dravidian attaches next. The role of this marker is only syntactic and it does not change the semantic type of the property concept expression.

(30) \( [[[\sqrt{nall} + \emptyset_{v\_poss}] + \text{POS}] + \text{POS}] + \text{POS} + \text{POS} \)

Lit. ‘having an instance of goodness measuring to a degree that exceeds the standard’

(31) a. 

RC

\( \lambda x. \exists d [x’s \ goodness \geq d \ and \ d > d_s ] \)

\( \sqrt{P} \quad -a \)
The role of the standard marker, *than*, which is a PP adjunct that can adjoin to the vP, is to combine with a Class 1 expression and restrict the POS, essentially set the context. This structure is then turned into a resumptive one by the addition of resumptive pronouns that turn the relative clause into a free relative.

(31) b. A resumptive pronoun makes the RC in (5a) into a free relative.

\[ \lambda x. \exists d \ [x's \ goodness \geq d \ and \ d > d_s] \]

The PP adjunct is then right adjoined to the VP.

(32)

\[ \lambda d \lambda x \exists y \ [y \ is \ an \ instance \ of \ II \ & \ x \ has \ y \ & \ \mu(y) \geq d] \]
The PP adjunct then extraposes for λ-abstraction to a position before the VP. Comparative semantics is entirely encoded in than. Syntactically as well as semantically the comparative marker has no role.

(33) \[ \text{than wh}_{1} \text{ Komalan is } t_{2} \text{ good] ( } [vP] ) = \lambda D. \exists d > \text{max (the degree to which Komalan is good )] } \]

Thus in some sense, this is similar to an implicit comparison in English, although the \textit{kaalum} comparative is an explicit comparative (see Menon 2012 for a detailed analysis of this).

(34) Compared to John, Bill is tall.

This analysis also accounts for how the distribution of \textit{kaalum} is less restricted than that of than phrases. The comparative marker cannot appear on its own since semantically the comparative marker alone can do the comparison.

   b. Anil-ine \textit{kaalum} enikkə Paris iʃʈ am aŋə
      Anil-DAT than I-DAT Paris love PRED V

5.5. \textit{Than alone encodes comparison- Class 2}

Class 2 property concept expressions are different from Class 1 property concept expressions in that they are nominalized with the –am marker. They merge in the Spec of a non possessive \(\emptyset\). Thus in these cases, the possession is encoded overtly by combining with the possessive verb \(uŋə\). The dative case marker on the subject and the possessive verb together contributes a degree for comparison (cf. (11)).

(36) \[ [\sqrt{\text{pokk} + \emptyset} \text{v} + \text{-am}]_n \]
   Lit. ‘being an instance of height’

(37) \[ \lambda II \lambda x [x \text { is an instance of } II] \]
The nominal formed in (37) merges with a PossP hosting the Poss V. Thus possession makes the predicate gradable. The standard marker than saturates the degree argument of the have predicate + dative construction.

\[ \sqrt{\text{pokk}} \quad v \]

The cases in which the standard marker than and the comparative marker more can encode comparison are in Class 2 as well as NP/VP comparatives. This happens optionally with Class 2 property concept expressions and obligatorily with NP/VP comparative. In these cases, more is an adnominal degree modifier, meaning along the lines of “in addition of”, “in excess of”. The semantics is given in (40).
The role of the comparative marker, when it appears with than is to saturate the max (D).

(41) John is taller than Bill (is).

(42) than ([kaulutil]) = the degree to which John is tall in excess of the degree to which Bill is tall.

Thus, when more occurs with than, it specifies the degree exceeding the specified standard.

Thus, NP and VP comparatives need to be made gradable overtly by the addition of the degree morphology, the comparative adnominal marker more which gives the excess degree. Below are the derivations for the NP and VP comparatives.

(43) NP comparatives
more

(44) VP comparatives

$$S$$

$$\text{DP}$$

$$\text{VP}$$

$$\text{Anil}$$

$$\text{NP}$$

$$\text{ran}$$

$$\lambda d \lambda x . [\mu (x) > d]$$

more

$$\text{DP}$$

$$\text{P}$$

$$\lambda D \exists \text{d} . [d > \text{max} (D)]$$

$$\exists \text{d} . [d > \text{max} (\text{Komalan’s height})]$$

$$\exists \text{d} . [d > \text{max} (\text{D})]$$

$$[\text{wh}_1 \text{ Komalan is \_tall}]$$

than

6 Conclusion

We have shown a maximally transparent mapping from surface syntax to meaning by showing that both the comparative morpheme (more) and the standard morpheme (than) contribute to the semantics of comparison. The than can never be omitted from comparative constructions. The than phrase can bind the degree argument in the matrix clause in bare comparatives or can act as a quantifier domain adverbial in the presence of more. This division of labor can be seen in other instances of grammar, time and tense adverbials, modality and negation, numerals and plurals.

References


