

A semantics for the comparative in Fijian.

Kennedy (to appear) identifies two possible loci of cross-linguistic variation in the semantics of the comparative: these concern (i) whether the language has individual or degree comparison and (ii) whether it has implicit or explicit comparison (IC/EC); he argues that no language is known to have only IC. Our study of the comparative in Fijian - the first that we know of - concludes that (I) Fijian has individual but not degree comparison; (II) degree comparison is ruled out by the inability of *mai vei* (= ‘than’) to combine with a CP; Fijian allows only phrasal comparatives, which cannot be analyzed as reduced clauses; (III) implicit comparison is the norm in the language; (IV) the semantics of IC, originally intended to account solely for the comparative of superiority, can be amended to give a unified treatment that includes the superlative, comparative of inferiority, and equative (exemplified in (1-4)).

Evidence for (I) and (II) includes (i) *mai vei*’s inability to take a partially elided clausal complement (5); (ii) lack of comparative subdeletion (6); (iii) unambiguity of Fijian counterparts (7a) of English sentences (7b,c) where the ability of ellipsis to target different constituents creates ambiguity. Hence a Reduction Analysis is unavailable for the language; *than* selects for a DP, interpreted as an individual of type *e*.

Turning to (III) and (IV), Kennedy defines IC as the establishment of orderings between individuals by manipulating the context such that the gradable property P is true of the comparee A and false of the standard B, indirectly conveying that A is more P than B. Unlike with EC, degree morphology is redundant in this construction and typically absent (8). On the basis of Kennedy’s diagnostics, we conclude that Fijian is an IC language. For instance, given a situation with two bent pipes, IC cannot be used to say ‘Pipe A is more bent than Pipe B’ (9a). The same holds in Fijian (9b).

Fijian constructions expressing that ‘A is more P than B’ can also mean ‘A is P for a B’ or ‘A is the most P of the B’ (10). This is a problem for the view that in IC, the predicate is true of the comparee and false of the standard: in (10(i-ii)), A is a subset of B. We therefore amend the semantics of IC as follows. Suppose a gradable predicate P is a function that takes a comparison class X in a context c and returns the subset of X whose elements are P in c (Klein (1991)). The crucial ingredients of the proposal are (we henceforth suppress context parameters):

- a. For a sentence $S = \text{‘A is } P_x \text{ mai vei B’}$, the comparison class X for P = $\{\|A\|, \|B\|\}$
- b. $\|A \text{ is } P_x \text{ mai vei B}\| \equiv \|P\|(X)(\|A\|) \equiv \|P\|(\{\|A\|, \|B\|\})(\|A\|) \equiv \|A\| \in \{x \in \{\|A\|, \|B\|\} : P(x)\}$
- c. For any arbitrary comparison class X for a gradable property P, $\exists x \in X : \neg P(x)$.
- d. If $X = \{\|A\|, \|B\|\}$ and it is presupposed that $\|A\| \subseteq \|B\|$, then $X = \{\|B\|\}$. In this case, (b) entails only that A is one of the elements of X that is P; the other elements of X ($=\|B\|$) may or may not be P. This yields the interpretation ‘A is P for a B’ (10(i)).
- e. If in addition to (d) it is presupposed that there is only one x s.t. P(x), (b) is interpreted as ‘A is the only B that is P’ = ‘A is the most P of the Bs’. (*superlative* (2), (10(ii)))
- f. If $\|A\|$ and $\|B\|$ are presupposed to be disjoint then by (c), (b) entails that B is not P, and hence that ‘A is more P than B’. (*comparative of superiority* (1), (10(iii))).
- g. $\|sega \text{ soti } P\|(X) = \{x \in X : \forall y \in X. y \neq x [\neg sega \text{ soti } P(y) \rightarrow x \text{ is less old than } y]\}$.
So $\|A \text{ is } sega \text{ soti } P_x \text{ mai vei B}\| \equiv A \text{ is less old than every other } y \in X \text{ s.t. } \neg sega \text{ soti } P(y)$. By (c), this entails that A is less old than B. (*comparative of inferiority* (3)).
- h. A sentence $S = \text{‘A is } P_X \text{ vakaa B’}$ relative to a comparison class $X \supseteq \{A, B\}$ presupposes that $\|B\| \in \|P\|(X)$ and asserts that $\|A\| \in \|P\|(X)$ (cf. ‘Like B, A is P’). Since $\|P\|(X)$ is an absolute and not a gradable property, any x and y that are both in $\|P\|(X)$ cannot have that property to different degrees. Hence S entails that A is as P as B is (*equative* (4)).

- (1) e qase mai vei Meri o Pita
3-sg old DIR PRP Mary TOP Peter
'Peter is older than Mary'.
- (2) Pita e qase mai vei ira (na tiko e
Peter 3-sg old DIR PRP group ART people PRP
na lomanivale)
ART inside-the-house
'Peter is the oldest (in the room)'.
- (3) E sega soti qase mai vei Meri o Pita
3-sg NEG as much old DIR PRP Mary TOP Peter
'Peter is less old than Mary'.
- (4) Na vilivola e bibi vakaa na volavola
ART reading 3-sg important like ART writing
'Reading is as important as writing'.
- (5) *E rui goneyalawa totoka sara o Meri mai vei [au
3-sg very girl beautiful very TOP Mary DIR PRP I
a nanuma]
PAST think
Intended: Mary is more beautiful than [CP wh_i [TP I thought ~~Mary was t_i beautiful]]]~~
- (6) *e balavu na teveli mai vei [na dabedabe e
3-sg long ART table DIR PRP ART chair 3-sg
cecere].
tall
Intended: The table is longer than [CP wh_i [TP the chair is t_i tall]]]
- (7a) E talei-taki Pita vakalevu o Jone mai vei Meri
3-sg likes Peter greatly TOP John DIR PRP Mary
'John likes Peter more than John likes Mary'.
- (7b) John likes Peter more than [CP wh_i [TP ~~John likes~~ Mary t_i]]
- (7c) John likes Peter more than [CP wh_i [TP Mary ~~likes John~~ t_i]]
- (8) Compared to Peter, Mary is old.
- (9a) Compared to Pipe B, Pipe A is bent. (Infelicitous when both pipes are bent).
- (9b) E takelo na vaivo oqo mai na vaivo oya.
3-sing curved ART pipe this DIR ART pipe that
'This pipe is more bent than that pipe.' (Infelicitous when both pipes are bent)
- (10) e balavu o Meri mai vei ira na kai Sikoti
3-sg tall TOP Mary DIR PRP group ART people Scots
(i) *'Mary is tall for a Scottish person'*; (ii) *'Mary is the tallest Scottish person'*.
(iii) *'Mary is taller than the Scottish people'*;