

## Comparative Constructions in Amis and Kavalan

### Austronesian syntax

Li-May Sung and Cheng-chuen Kuo

National Taiwan University

This paper aims to study the comparative constructions in Amis and Kavalan, two Formosan (Austronesian) languages spoken in Taiwan. Two research questions will be addressed: 1) With respect to the essential components in a comparison, namely the comparative predicate, the comparee NP and the standard NP, how do they interact with each other in Amis and Kavalan in terms of predication, case assignment and word order? 2) From the perspective of typological analysis (cf. Greenberg 1966; Lehmann 1972; Andersen 1983; Stassen 1985), how do these two languages differ from each other in comparative constructions?

In this paper, we will show that while Kavalan mainly employs a strategy of additivity of a standard NP without resorting to any comparative affix or particle, Amis marks the comparison by means of an “exceed”-verb.

In Kavalan, the comparative construction as exemplified in (1) does not differ from a non-comparative counterpart (2) except for one added new argument NP.

(1) comparative construction in Kavalan

aiku          nengi          tu          kaput-ku  
1Sg.NOM    good    OBL    friend-1Sg.GEN  
'I'm better than my friend.'

(2) non-comparative construction in Kavalan

nengi    kaput-ku  
good    friend-1Sg.GEN  
'My friend is good.'

As shown above, the comparative predicate does not undergo some morphological processes as in English, where a comparative predicate either needs a suffix *-er* (e.g., *Susan is smarter than his father*), or must be modified by an adverb such as *more* or *less* (e.g., *Peter is more ambitious than anyone I have ever met*).

Amis, unlike Kavalan, has two comparative constructions: ‘ki’ comparatives and ‘ikaka/isafa’ comparatives. The first type employs a special verbal affix ‘-ki-’ by which the whole verbal expression turns into a transitive event, no matter it is in Agent Focus/Voice (AF) or in Patient Focus/Voice. The second type is involved with a pair of lexical items ‘ikaka/isafa’ which serves as the main predicate of the construction. The examples are shown below.

(3) 'ki' comparatives in Amis

- a. mi-ki-lalok            ci                            Aki    ci-Mayaw-an  
AF-exceed-diligent NCM.SG.NOM    Aki    OBL-Mayaw-OBL  
'Aki is more diligent than Mayaw.'
- b. ma-ki-lalok            ni                            Aki            ci                            Mayaw  
PF-exceed-diligent NCM.SG.GEN Aki            NCM.SG.NOM Mayaw  
'Aki is more diligent than Mayaw.'

(4) 'ikaka/isafa' comparatives in Amis

- ikaka/isafa            ku    fana'    ni                            mama aku            tisuwanan  
exceed/inferior.to    NOM know NCM.SG.GEN father 1SG.GEN 2SG.OBL  
'My father knows more/less than you do.'

In this paper we will also classify these comparative constructions following Stassen's comparative typology by which its applicability will be re-examined. In addition, we will explore relevant issues regarding the syntactic theory of comparatives such as event-comparison, ellipsis, and ambiguity. Finally, a discussion from a semantic-pragmatic perspective will be addressed in order to discover the underlying principles responsible for the comparatives in use. By a close investigation of the interaction of form and function, it is suggested that the selection of a comparative construction is cognitively motivated rather than random.

References:

- Andersen, P. K. 1983. *Word Order Typology and Comparative Constructions*.  
Benjamins. Amsterdam.
- Greenberg, Joseph H. 1966. *Language Universals*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Lehmann, Winfred P. 1972. Comparative constructions in Germanic of the OV type.  
Evelyn Scherabon Firchow et al. (eds.). *Studies for Einar Haugen*. Janua linguarum,  
series major 59. The Hague: Mouton. 323-330
- Stassen, L. 1985. *Comparison and Universal Grammar*. Blackwell. Oxford.