

Comparative Constructions at the Interface between Syntax and Semantics: Lessons  
from Malay  
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The syntactic realisation of the standard of a comparative is either phrasal or clausal. In the case of English, it is typically assumed that both are possible, see the contrast between (1a) vs (1b/c).

1. a. Jon is taller than [Laura].
- b. Jon is taller than [Laura is].
- c. Jon owns more video games than [Laura owns videogames].

However, the availability of both comparative standards is in fact a point of variation crosslinguistically. Where Russian and Greek display the same pattern as English (Pancheva 2006; Merchant 2009), there are many languages which lack clausal standards altogether, e.g. Hindi, Turkish and Samoan (Bhatt & Takahashi 2011; Hofstetter 2009; Hohaus 2015).

In order to determine the syntactic status of the standard phrase, we can use various diagnostics. For example, the availability of constructions subcomparatives (e.g. ‘the desk is longer than the door is wide’) indicates clausal standards, whilst the availability of a reflexive remnant in the standard (e.g. ‘no star shines brighter than itself’) indicates phrasal ones. In this talk, I present original fieldwork data regarding the application of these diagnostics to the Austronesian language, Malay, the results of which have significant implications for the semantic analysis.