

Metalinguistic comparatives in Greek and Korean: attitude semantics, expressive meaning, and NPI licensing

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1. Proposal. Metalinguistic functions of natural language expressions are thought of as merely pragmatic devices with certain peculiarities (see Horn 1989 especially on metalinguistic negation), that fall outside the realm of the ‘canonical’. Recently, however, Giannakidou and Stavrou (2008; GS), identify metalinguistic comparatives (MC) in Greek as a distinct species from the degree comparative, signaled by the morpheme *para* ‘MC than’. Formalizing an earlier intuition by McCawley (1968), GS propose that MC involves an individual’s (typically the speaker’s) attitude towards the *para*-proposition: this proposition is deemed less appropriate or preferable. In the present paper, we offer further evidence that MCs are parts of the grammar, by presenting novel data from Korean showing a three way distinction between degree comparatives (*pota*), metalinguistic (*kipota*), and ‘negative’ metalinguistic (*nuni*) comparatives. The distinctions are all realized on the complementizer, like in Greek. We also show that the use of these morphemes, in all variants, brings about an individual’s emotional state, and propose that the morphemes contain expressive indices in the sense of Potts 2007. Indices allow a range from neutral to very negative stance, they thus capture the fact that expressive comparative morphemes are not all equally negative, without positing negation in syntax for the negative one (*nuni*). This is consistent with the fact that MCs do not license NPIs that need negation.

Our analysis has two important implications. First, it allows the generalization that metalinguistic functions in language are part of grammar, and indeed a manifestation of expressivity. This supports Potts’s view of the necessity of the expressive component, and in particular of expressive indices. Second, our analysis shows that the complementizer in the comparative is not semantically vacuous (as is generally believed) but quite meaningful: it is the locus of the interaction between descriptive and expressive meaning in the comparative.

2. Two and three *thans* in Greek and Korean. GS posit a species of MC in Greek, introduced by *para* ‘than’, which is lexically distinct from the regular comparative ‘than’ *apoti*:

- (1) O Pavlos ine perissotero filologhos {para/apoti} glossologhos.
the Paul is-3s more philologist than linguist
'Paul is more of a philologist than he is a linguist.'
Para sounds very much like: ‘Paul is a philologist *rather* than a linguist.’
- (2) I Kiki ine psiloteri **apoti** i Ariadne
'Kiki is taller than Ariadne.'

The use of *para* is optional; but when *para* is used, (1) is not simply a variant of the regular *apoti* degree comparative ((2)). GS argue that there is no degree abstraction syntactically in the *para* clause, and offer syntactic arguments to argue that *para* comparatives are coordinate structures, and that the *para*-clause is a proposition (rather than an individual or a degree). By using *para* in (1), the speaker expresses a disbelief towards the *para*-proposition *Paul is a linguist*: she believes the proposition expressed by the main clause (*Paul is a philologist*) to be more appropriate or preferable. This is captured in the following meaning for metalinguistic MORE_{ML}:

- (3) $[[\text{MORE}_{\text{ML}}]] = \lambda p \lambda q \exists d [R(\alpha)(p)(d) \wedge d > \max(\lambda d' [R(\alpha)(q)(d')]]$ (GS: (40))
where R is a gradable propositional attitude supplied by the context: either an epistemic attitude meaning approximately ‘appropriate to say,’ or an attitude expressing preference (desiderative or volitional); α is the individual anchor (Farkas 1992; Giannakidou 1998, 1999) of the attitude: typically, the speaker in an unembedded sentence.

This semantics captures the perspective dependence of MC, by putting all the action in the comparative morpheme (no attitude is argued to be syntactically present), and no special role is assigned to *para* apart from being selected by MORE_{ML}. In this paper, we focus on a property of *para* clauses that went unnoticed in the GS account: apart from asserting that *q* is less believed or

preferred, *para* conveys also an emotional stance towards *q* (which is not present in *apoti*): the choice to use *para* in (1) signals a “negativity”, or disapproval on the part of the speaker that Paul is not a linguist really (as indicated with *rather* that we used in the English translation). The following example expresses an even stronger “negativity”:

- (4) Kalitera na methano {**para/*apoti**} na ton panderfto!
I would rather die than marry him!

(In this case, as we see, the use of *apoti* is excluded.) Hence, *para* seems to add to MORE_{ML} the speaker’s emotional perspective.

Korean exhibits a striking parallel with Greek in lexicalizing MC, and employs not one, but two different MC *thans*. What regulates the choice seems to be emotional stance: *kipota* is used for more “mildly” negative MC, but *nuni* is used in cases like (4) with strongly negative stance:

- (5) Ku-wa kyelhonha-**nuni** nay-ka cwukkeys-ta.
him-Dat marry-rather than I-Nom die-Dec
I would rather die than marry him’.
- (6) Ney mwuncey-nun pepceki-**kipota** caycengcek-ita
your problem-Top legal-saying.than financial-Decl
‘Your problems are financial more than legal.’

For degree comparatives, Korean uses yet another complementizer: *pota*. (*Kim-i Lee-pota te khu-ta* “Kim is taller than Lee). What we see, then, is a pattern in two typologically unrelated languages that shows that the choice of *than* affects the way the comparative is going to be interpreted. This fact in itself is important, because most theories assign no particular role to *than*.

3. The expressive dimension of MC. We take the use of the complementizers *para*, *kipota*, and *nuni* to reveal a ‘heightened emotional state’—a property typical of expressives such as *damn*, studied in Potts (2005, 2007). We show that the Greek and Korean MC complementizers meet the criteria (Potts 2007) associated with expressives: (a) they are independent but interacting with the descriptive content of MORE_{ML}; (b) they are non-displaceable, i.e they predicate something of the utterance situation; (c) they are perspective dependent, evaluated usually from the speaker’s perspective; (d) speakers are never fully satisfied when they try to paraphrase the MC clause with the regular *apoti* and *pota* clauses.

We noted that the emotional state is not constant, but ranges from mildly negative to very negative. This is naturally captured if we suppose that *para*, *kipota*, and *nuni* contain expressive indexes. These indexes encode the degree of expressivity as well as the orientation of the expressive, and in Potts 2007 they are defined via numerical intervals $\mathbf{I} \subseteq [-1, 1]$. An expressive index is a triple $\langle a \mathbf{I} b \rangle$ conveying that an individual *a* is at expressive level *I* for an individual *b* (Potts 2007: (23)). If $\mathbf{I} = [-1, 1]$, then *a* has no feelings for *b*. As we narrow to proper subintervals of $[-1, 1]$ emotive feelings emerge: the more positive the number, the more positive the feelings; the more negative the numbers, the more negative the feelings. This models gives us precisely the variable “negativity” we need for our MC items; these, we claim, contain expressive relations between an individual and a *proposition*, and this is our innovation on Potts:

- (7) Expressive indices of metalinguistic comparative complementizers

Nuni, *kipota* and *para* contain expressive indexes $\langle a \mathbf{I} p \rangle$, where *a* is the individual anchor, *p* the proposition they embed, and $\mathbf{I} \subseteq [-1, 1]$.

Para and *kipota*’s index, we argue, can range through the whole *I*; but with *nuni*, *I* ranges through $[-1, .5]$, the very negative part of the interval. By embedding MC morphemes into the realm of expressives, our analysis achieves, then, a natural coverage of at least this kind of metalinguistic interaction, and allows the hypothesis that perhaps *all* metalinguistic functions in language are manifestations of expressivity.

Selected references. Giannakidou, A. and M. Stavrou. 2008. Metalinguistic comparatives and negation in Greek. MITWPL. Potts, C. 2007. The expressive dimension. *Theoretical Linguistics*.