

Attributive comparatives in Javanese

The main goal of this research is to provide a semantic analysis of attributive comparatives in Javanese, a Western Malayo-Polynesian language of the Austronesian family. A secondary aim is to show that contrary to Kennedy's (2008) claim, Javanese does have a comparative morpheme. Focusing on the main goal, I argue that the obligatory post-nominal modification in Javanese attributive comparatives is syntactically analyzed as a reduced relative clause. Assuming that relative clauses are islands (Chomsky 1977), the restrictive nature of the *than*-clause complement in Javanese is then due to the consequent low scope of the comparative morpheme.

This restrictive nature is illustrated in (2) - (3). Javanese attributive comparatives show that the complement of the *than*-clause must overtly express the information about the compared object, as in (2). If no more than a proper name is present, the interpretation can only result in the amusing reading shown in (3); no other information can be recovered, as is possible in English.

This constraint in Javanese suggests that VP ellipsis is not an available strategy, implying that the comparative morpheme *luwih* cannot scope high enough to delete constituents under identity. In other words, movement to a position above the matrix CP (as in English) is impossible. The reason for this restriction is due to the mandatory post-nominal modification in Javanese, which I argue naturally blocks syntactic movement as a relative clause island. Only a low landing site of the comparative morpheme in Javanese is available because the reduced relative clause structure of post-nominal modification renders the syntax opaque to higher movement. This analysis is sketched out below (Diagram 1).

Assuming null operator movement in the relative clause (Chomsky 1977) occurs first, the degree morpheme *luwih* then moves to the highest possible maximal projection of the relative clause (here, below λx), leaving a trace of type *d*. The *than*-clause then Late Merges as the complement of the comparative morpheme *luwih* (Bhatt & Pancheva 2004). The comparative morpheme, defined below, takes two arguments which are predicates of degrees, in which the comparative clause set is a proper subset of the set of degrees that the matrix clause denotes.

$$(1) \quad \llbracket \text{luwih} \rrbracket = \lambda f_{(d,t)}. \lambda g_{(d,t)}. f \subset g$$

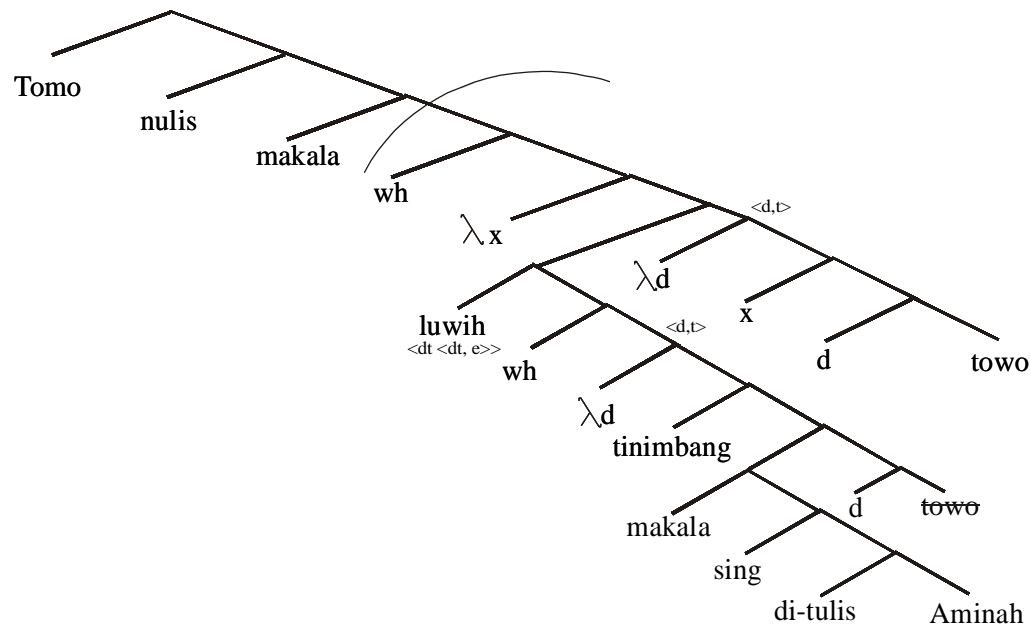
It is important to underline that since the degree morpheme is not expected to be able to scope outside of the relative clause, whatever information is given in the *than*-clause complement is what is available for interpretation.

Turning to the second aim, Kennedy (2008) notes that while all languages have designated comparative constructions, not all languages have specialized overt comparative morphemes; Javanese is one language argued not to have such a morpheme, as in (4). As this Austronesian language has many different dialects, a construction lacking comparative morphology may be limited to only certain dialects. Nevertheless, there does exist comparative morphology in Javanese as shown in (5) for comparisons of superiority, and also noted in grammars and dictionaries (Horne 1961; Robson et al 2002) for comparisons of superiority, inferiority and equality.

Thus, the goal of this paper is twofold: (i) to show that Javanese does have a comparative morpheme; (ii) to provide a semantic analysis of the restrictive nature of the *than*-clause complement in Javanese attributive comparatives. Finally, this paper aids in the development of establishing a tradition of work in the syntax-semantics interface in Austronesian languages.

- (2) Tomo nulis makala [CP luwih towo [CP tinimbang [DP (makala) [CP sing di-tulis Aminah]]]]
 Tomo write paper more long than paper that PASS-write Aminah
 ‘Tomo wrote a longer paper than Aminah.’
 (Lit: ‘Tomo wrote a longer paper than the paper that was written by Aminah.’)
- (3) Tomo nulis makala [CP luwih towo [CP tinimbang [DP Aminah]]]
 Tomo write paper more long than Aminah
 ‘Tomo wrote a paper longer than Aminah’s body.’ (12.11.2008)
- (4) Enak daging karo iwak
 is-good meat than fish
 ‘Meat is better than fish.’ (Kennedy 2008:2)
- (5) daging **luwih enak** tinimbang iwak
 meat more good than fish
 ‘Meat is more delicious than fish.’ (21.11.2008)

DIAGRAM 1: Semantically interpreted structure for (2)



References

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