The Semantic Typology of Comparative Standards, Revisited

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I present original fieldwork data from Malay (Austronesian, Western Malayo-Polynesian; Malaysia) which provides further evidence of a two-way typology of strategies used to compose comparative meaning: compositional and pragmatic. Whilst the pragmatic strategy is dependent on context to build meaning, the compositional strategy requires specific syntactic dependencies. Importantly, the distinction is specific to the standard marker used in the construction, it is not language-dependent.

Compositional Strategy ⟦*-er*⟧(*standard constituent*)	**Pragmatic Strategy** ⟦*-er*⟧(*contextual standard*) + manipulation
English *than* (Heim 1985, Kennedy 2023)	English *compared to* (e.g. Kennedy 2007, Hohaus 2015)
German *als* (Beck et al. 2012)	German *im Vergleich zu* (Hohaus 2015)
	Japanese *yori* (Beck et al. 2004, Beck et al. 2012)
	Washo *lelew/ʔiwiʔ/dulel/-a* (Bochnak 2013)
	Samoan *i lō* (Hohaus 2015)
	+ Malay *daripada*

Table 1: Typology of Comparative Strategies

I put forward three diagnostics for the pragmatic strategy and show that the comparative proper in Malay passes these diagnostics. They are: (1) wide distribution of the standard marker (i.e. outside the comparative proper), (2) wide readings of comparatives with syntactic islands, (3) clause boundary effects. I show a basic comparative, (1a) and illustrate the first diagnostic, (1b).

(1) a. *Mee Mee lebih tinggi daripada Eve.*
NAME more tall from NAME
'Mee Mee is taller than Eve.'

b. *Saya men-[t]erima poskad daripada Eve.*
1SG ACT-receive postcard from NAME
'I received a postcard from Eve.'

Overall, these observations lead to interesting questions which I consider throughout this talk. For example, a commonality between the constructions that are composed via the pragmatic strategy in Table 1 is that they are all locative comparatives, to use Stassen's (1985) terminology, whereas those in the compositional column are particle comparatives. Does this mean that locative comparatives are more likely to be composed via the pragmatic strategy crosslinguistically? We also need to consider the role of the locative adposition itself and the syntactic/semantic implications of such a standard marker for the analysis. As discussed above, in the case of pragmatic-strategy constructions, the standard marker can be used both in and outside of the comparative, does this mean that a uniform analysis of the adposition is possible or desirable? I sketch a potential analysis of the Malay comparative, with particular consideration to the denotation of *daripada*.