

The subjective mode of comparison: Metalinguistic comparatives in Greek and Korean

Anastasia Giannakidou · Suwon Yoon

Received: 25 November 2008 / Accepted: 10 May 2010 / Published online: 12 July 2011
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2011

Abstract In this paper, we present a striking parallel between Greek and Korean in the formation and interpretation of metalinguistic comparatives. The initial observation is that both languages show an empirical contrast between ordinary and metalinguistic comparatives realized in two places: (a) in the form of a designated metalinguistic comparative MORE, and (b) in the form of THAN employed. We propose (building on earlier ideas in Giannakidou and Stavrou 2009; Giannakidou and Yoon 2009) that the metalinguistic comparative is subjective and attitudinal, i.e. it introduces the point of view of an individual towards a sentence—and argue that the individual expresses invariably an attitude of preference: she prefers one sentence (the sentence itself, or the proposition it expresses) in a given context over another. The preference may come out as completely negative in certain cases, and this is manifested as yet another MORE lexicalization in Korean (*charari*), which selects *nuni*-THAN, which itself carries a negative expressive index (in the sense of Potts 2007b), we will claim. Expressive negativity is not equivalent to negation in syntax, as *nuni* alone cannot license NPIs that need negation.

If our analysis is correct, it has one important implication that goes beyond just the metalinguistic comparatives in the individual languages we are considering. It allows the generalization that metalinguistic functions in language are indeed part of the grammar. In particular, they are reflexes of grammaticalization of perspective and subjective mode, on a par with predicates of personal taste discussed by Lasnik (2005, 2008, 2009), mood choice, and similar phenomena. In comparatives, subjective mode is manifested as an attitude of preference, with possible addition of expressive meaning.

A. Giannakidou (✉) · S. Yoon
Department of Linguistics, University of Chicago, 1010 E 59th Street, Chicago, IL 60637, USA
e-mail: giannaki@uchicago.edu

S. Yoon
e-mail: suwon@uchicago.edu

Keywords Metalinguistic comparative MORE · Metalinguistic THAN · Preference attitude · Subjective mode · Anchor of comparison · Quotation · Expressive meaning · Vulgar minimizers · Rescuing of NPIs · Greek · Korean

1 Metalinguistic comparatives in English and Greek

Metalinguistic comparatives (MCs) are a topic that remained largely unexplored in the literature on comparatives for quite a while. With the exception of very brief discussions (McCawley 1968; Bresnan 1973; Embick 2007), until recently very few works addressed the question of how MCs differ, if at all, from “regular” comparisons of degrees. MCs were easy to think of as just non-canonical uses of regular comparatives, and just like with metalinguistic negation (Horn 1989), it was unclear if they belong to the realm of grammar proper to begin with.

In a number of recent works, however, we find a renewed interest in the topic (Giannakidou and Stavrou 2009; Giannakidou and Yoon 2009; Lechner 2009; Morzycki 2009). Giannakidou and Stavrou argue that MCs in Greek are indeed grammatical creatures, with a syntax and semantics distinct from that of ordinary comparatives. In Greek, MCs are introduced with the preposition *para*, which is lexically distinct from the regular clausal comparative *apoti*:

- (1) ta provlimata sou ine perissotero oikonomika {**para/apoti**} nomika.
the problems yours are-3PL more financial than legal
'Your problems are more financial than legal.' (from McCawley 1968)
'Your problems are financial **rather** than legal.'
- (2) o Pavlos ine perissotero philologhos {**para/apoti**} glossologhos.
the Paul is-3SG more philologist than linguist
'Paul is more of a philologist than he is a linguist.'
'Paul is a philologist **rather** than a linguist.'

Para comparatives are metalinguistic comparisons (Giannakidou and Stavrou 2009). In the English version of example (1) the metalinguistic meaning becomes prominent with the order reversal between *financial* and *more*, and the use of *rather*, as indicated in our paraphrase of the sentence. According to McCawley, the English sentence in (1) does not have the flavor of direct comparison between degrees of problems being financial and degrees of problems being legal. It is instead intended to convey the speaker's opinion, i.e. that the speaker judges or thinks that it is 'more appropriate' to say that the addressee's problems are financial, than to say that they are legal. Likewise, (2) conveys that the speaker assesses the sentence 'Paul is philologist' to be more appropriate in the context than the sentence 'Paul is a linguist'. Greek comparatives with *para* and English ones (with *rather*) in the metalinguistic reading have exactly this *subjective* flavor in them, while the *apoti* versions are mere statements of regular comparative assessment. *Apoti* comparatives can also be used to convey metalinguistic use, just like ordinary negation can be used metalinguistically (Horn 1989); *para* comparatives, however, only have this subjective metalinguistic use.