

Background: Beck et al. (2009) propose a crosslinguistic typology of comparison that classifies languages according to three parameters: **1.** Degree Semantics Parameter (DSP): A language {does/does not} have lexical items that introduce degree arguments. **2.** Degree Abstraction Parameter (DAP): A language {does/does not} have degree abstraction. **3.** Degree Phrase Parameter (DegPP): The degree argument position of a gradable predicate {may/may not} be overtly filled. A language with a positive setting for all three parameters and clausal standards should allow subcomparatives (among other constructions discussed below). Against expectations, Vietnamese has a positive setting for all three parameters and allows clausal standards, but many subcomparatives are ungrammatical.

Vietnamese degree constructions: Vietnamese forms comparatives with *hơn*, a verb meaning ‘surpass’ or ‘exceed’. Standards can be overtly phrasal (1a) or clausal (1f, 2a), with clausal standards optionally including the C-head *là* (Tran 2009). Vietnamese mostly fits the predictions for a +DSP/+DAP/+DegPP language, allowing difference comparatives (1a) and comparisons with degrees (+DSP), showing negative island effects (1b) and scope ambiguities (+DAP), and allowing degree questions and measure phrases (1c) (+DegPP), but subcomparatives are typically ungrammatical (1d). Notably, subcomparatives with more subjective predicates are often grammatical (1e-f), with some only acceptable to some speakers (marked by %). (1d) must be expressed by nominalizing the gradable predicate in the standard (1g). Examples come from consultants Nguyễn Bích Thoa, Bùi Quý Lân, and Nguyễn Trần Phương Dung.

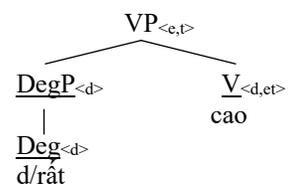
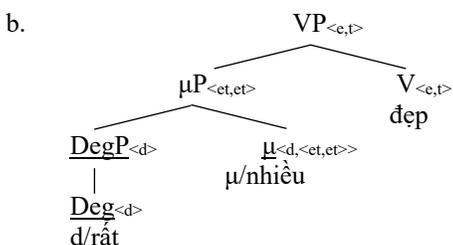
- (1) a. Tucker *cao hơn* (Tyler) (mười phân). b. * Tyler đã mua một quyển sách đắt hơn không ai mua.
 Tucker tall exceed (Tyler) (ten centimeter) Tyler PST buy one CLF book expensive exceed NEG who buy
 ‘Tucker is (10 cm) taller (than Tyler).’ * ‘Tyler bought a more expensive book than nobody did.’
 c. Philip *cao một thước chín mươi*. d. * Cái bàn dài hơn cái ghế cao. e. % John xấu hơn Mary đẹp.
 Philip tall one meter ninety CLF table long exceed CLF chair tall John ugly exceed Mary beautiful
 ‘Philip is 1.90 meters tall.’ ‘The table is longer than the chair is tall.’ ‘John is uglier than Mary is beautiful.’
 f. Phoebe thích hoá học hơn là Tyler thích toán. g. Chiều dài của cái bàn hơn chiều cao của cái ghế.
 Phoebe like chemistry exceed C Tyler like math length of CLF table exceed height of CLF chair
 ‘Phoebe likes chemistry more than Tyler likes math.’ ‘The length of the table exceeds the height of the chair.’

Analysis: The distribution of *nhều* ‘much, many’ offers clues for an analysis the subcomparative dilemma. *nhều* is used in quantity comparatives, and like gradable predicates like ‘cao’, it cannot be present in the standard (2a). Additionally, though all the predicates can be intensified with a preceding *rất* ‘very’, only those that accept a following *rất nhiều* (2b-d) are acceptable in subcomparatives.

- (2) a. Thoa mua *nhều* cái nhà hơn Vũ mua (**nhều*) cái xe hơi. b. {Tôi *rất* cao. / * Tôi cao *rất* *nhều*.}
 Thoa buy much CLF house exceed Vũ buy (*much) CLF car {1SG very tall / 1SG tall very much}
 ‘Thoa bought more houses than Vũ bought cars.’ ‘I’m very tall.’ (unacceptable subcomparative)
 c. {Mary *rất* đẹp. / % Mary đẹp *rất* *nhều*.} d. {Tôi *rất* thích Phoebe. / Tôi thích Phoebe *rất* *nhều*.}
 {Mary very beautiful / Mary beautiful very much} {1SG very like Phoebe / 1SG like Phoebe very much}
 ‘Mary is very beautiful.’ (variable subcomparative) ‘I really like Phoebe.’ (acceptable subcomparative)

I propose that one can explain these data via differences in how predicates incorporate degree arguments and the nature of degree abstraction in Vietnamese. Some gradable predicates like *cao* ‘tall’ are inherently gradable (they introduce degree arguments) (3a), while others like *đẹp* ‘beautiful’ (3b) and *thích* ‘like’ (3c) must combine with additional structure (*nhều* or its silent counterpart μ) to take degree arguments (an idea inspired by Grano & Kennedy 2012). This interacts with a crucial difference between Vietnamese and languages like English in terms of what must elide when degree abstraction occurs. In both languages degree abstraction in the standard involves degree operator movement to produce a $\langle d, t \rangle$ CP, leaving a degree trace. In English, the degree trace is not pronounced, but the gradable predicate can be (as in subcomparatives). In Vietnamese, DegP and everything within its c-command domain (underlined in 4a-b) must elide. Inherently gradable predicates like *cao* and quantifiers like *nhều* must elide, but predicates that combine with μ like *đẹp* and *thích* can remain. Sample trees and denotations broadly following Heim (2000) are given below.

- (3) a. $\llbracket \text{cao} \rrbracket = \lambda d_d. \lambda x_e. x$ is d-tall b. $\llbracket \text{đẹp} \rrbracket = \lambda x_e. x$ is beautiful c. $\llbracket \text{thích} \rrbracket = \lambda x_e. \lambda y_e. y$ likes x
 d. $\llbracket \text{hơn} \rrbracket = \lambda P_{\langle d, t \rangle}. \lambda Q_{\langle d, t \rangle}. \max(Q) > \max(P)$ e. $\llbracket \mu \rrbracket / \llbracket \text{nhều} \rrbracket = \lambda d_d. \lambda g_{\langle e, t \rangle}. \lambda x_e. x$ is g to degree d
 f. $\llbracket \text{rất} \rrbracket = \text{high degree}$ g. (4a): $\llbracket \text{VP} \rrbracket = \lambda x_e. x$ is d-tall h. (4b): $\llbracket \text{VP} \rrbracket = \lambda x_e. x$ is d-beautiful

- (4) a.  b. 

References: Beck, Sigrid, Sveta Krasikova, Daniel Fleischer, Remus Gergel, Stefan Hofstetter, Christiane Savelsberg, John Vanderelst & Elisabeth Villalta. 2009. Crosslinguistic variation in comparison constructions. *Linguistic Variation Yearbook* 9. 1-66. Grano, Thomas & Chris Kennedy. 2012. Mandarin transitive comparatives and the grammar of measurement. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 21. 219-266. Heim, Irene. 2000. Degree operators and scope. In Brendan Jackson & Tanya Matthews (eds.), *SALT X*. 40-64. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University. Tran, Thuan. 2009. Wh-quantification in Vietnamese. Dissertation: University of Delaware.