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PAPERS OF THE
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Edited by
Monica Macaulay and J. Randolph Valentine

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Meskwaki Comparatives: A First Look

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The syntax of comparative constructions is a topic which has not so far received much attention in Algonquianist linguistics.¹ The present paper is thus a first look at how comparatives work in Meskwaki, and how the Meskwaki construction fits into crosslinguistic typological studies of comparatives. Particular attention will be paid to the morphosyntax of the Algonquian phenomenon of RELATIVE ROOTS and how the relative roots function in comparatives. It will be seen that the relative root strategy permits expression of the standard of comparison in a typologically unusual way.

TYPOLOGY OF COMPARATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

Before turning to Meskwaki we must establish some terminology for referring to pieces of a comparative construction. Following Kennedy et al. (2011), I will use DIMENSION for the gradable predicate of the comparative, TARGET for the subject of the gradable predicate (*John* in (1)), and STANDARD for the other individual to which the target is being compared:

- (1) John is taller than Bill.
target dimension standard (Kennedy et al. 2011)

Stassen (1985) investigates comparative constructions in a number of languages, finding a range of structural possibilities for expressing comparison. A few of his types are listed under (2): note that the three

1. Thanks to the audiences in Ann Arbor and the SSILA meetings in Portland, Oregon, for their comments, especially Ives Goddard, Lucy Thomason, Richard Rhodes, Brendan Fairbanks, Chris Kennedy, Emmon Bach. Further thanks go to the anonymous reviewers of this paper. Responsibility for all errors and interpretations is my own.

Before turning to further examples I must point out that in many instances the standard of comparison is not made explicit at all. Rather, it is simply clear from the context who the target is being compared to. This phenomenon is of course not peculiar to Meskwaki: it is frequently seen in English as well. Kennedy (2007), following Sapir (1944), uses the term “implicit comparative” for this type of comparative.

(6) is a Meskwaki example of an implicit comparative where the context makes it clear who the standard is:

- (6) e'hasipimeko-neškinawa-wa'či ihkwe-waki
 e'h-asipi=meke -neškinaw-a-wa'či ihkwe-w-aki
 AOR-all.together=EMPH -hate-3P>3/AOR woman-PL

a'wasimeko e'hpiahpi'hči-we-wenesičiki.
 a'wasi=meke IC-ahpih-ahpi'hči-we-wenesičiki.
 more=EMPH IC-REDUP-to.such.extent-be.pretty-3P/PART/3P
 'but she (obv.) was hated by all of the women (prox.)
 who were prettier [than she was].' (mehk.30GH)

The plural proximate NP ‘the women’ is modified by a relative clause ‘who were prettier’—that is, prettier than the other woman who is the object of their dislike.

Let us now look more closely at the morphology and syntax of the Meskwaki comparatives. (7) lists three verb forms: first, just a plain verb asserting that someone is pretty. This is called the positive form of a predicate in typological studies, and does not involve comparison.

- (7) a. [_v we-wenesi-wa] ‘she is pretty’ POSITIVE FORM
 b. a'wasi . . . [_v ahpi'hči-we-wenesi-wa] ‘she is prettier’ COMPARATIVE
 more to.such.extent-
 OBLIQUE
 c. [_v ma'wači-we-wenesi-wa] ‘she is the prettiest’ SUPERLATIVE
 of.all-

The second form in (7) is the one we are particularly interested in, the comparative. There is a particle *a'wasi* ‘more’ preceding the verb, and the verb (typically) contains an extra morpheme, such as the preverb *ahpi'hči-*

‘to such an extent.’ As we will see below, *ahpi'hči-* belongs to the set of morphemes known as relative roots, associated with oblique arguments. In the template in (7), therefore, I have annotated *a'wasi* ‘more’ as being an oblique argument of the verb.⁵

For the sake of completeness, I have also listed the superlative form of the predicate ‘be pretty’ in the templates given in (7). Notice that the superlative form has a different preverb, *ma'wači-* ‘of all,’ and no particle outside the verb complex. The syntax of the superlative is consequently quite different from that of the comparative, lacking both a relative root morpheme and an external oblique argument. An example of the superlative form is given in (8). This is taken from the same text as (6), describing the son of the woman who was hated.

- (8) e'hma'wačimeko-we-wenesiči i'na e'tašiwā'či apeno'hahi.
 e'h-ma'wači=meke -we-wenesi-či i'na
 AOR-of.all=EMPH -be.pretty-3/AOR that.ANIM

IC-taši-wa'či apeno'h-ahi.
 IC-be.so.many-3P/PART/OBL child-OBV.PL
 ‘and that [little boy] was the prettiest of all the children.’ (mehk.31K)

RELATIVE ROOTS

At this point some general background on the Algonquian phenomenon of relative roots may be useful, since certain relative roots are associated with comparative constructions. Relative roots are morphemes which appear either at the beginning of a simple verb stem or (usually) as a preverb to the left of a verb stem. Relative roots license oblique arguments in the syntax, with each relative root being associated with a particular semantic role. The typical position for obliques in Meskwaki is immediately to the left of the verbal complex.

(9) lists a few of the most common relative roots and their semantic roles. For example, the initial form *tan-* or preverb *taši-* is used to license

5. It should be noted that Algonquian languages do not exhibit a syntactic category of adjective, so there is nothing directly comparable to the English strategy of adding the suffix *-er* to an adjective stem.

obliques expressing stationary location. *in-* or preverb *iši-* is used to express the goal of motion; there is also a homophonous relative root *in-* or *iši-* that licenses manner obliques. The initial *ot-* or preverb *oči-* licenses source arguments with motion verbs, and is also metaphorically extended to express the cause or reason for an event taking place.

(9)	Stem-initial form	Preverb	Semantic type of oblique argument
a.	tan-	taši-	stationary location
b.	in-	iši-	goal of motion
c.	in-	iši-	manner
d.	ot-	oči-	source (of motion); cause or reason

(10) and (11) illustrate the function of relative roots, using the source relative root *ot-/oči-*.

- (10) *meneseki e'hočiwenekoči*,
menes-eki e'h-očiwen-ekoči,
 island-LOC AOR-carry.O.from.(there)-3'>3/AOR
 OBLIQUE
 'It (an eagle) carried him from the island.' (M15B)

In (10) the relative root appears in stem-initial position, combining with a bound verb-final morpheme *-iwen-* meaning 'carry.' The resulting verb stem is a three-place verb, requiring a subject, object, and oblique expressing source. The requirement for an oblique is satisfied by the noun *meneseki* 'island,' inflected for locative case, which appears immediately to the left of the verb.

The syntax of (11) is similar to that of (10), but in (11) the relative root combines with a full verb stem, rather than with a morpheme smaller than a full stem. The relative root in (11) therefore is realized as a preverb *oči-*, a separate phonological word, compounded with the verb stem. The entire compound is inflected with the prefix-suffix combination expressing the subject of the verb, and the oblique argument expressing the source of motion appears outside the verbal complex, immediately to the left.

- (11) *i-tepi netoči-nowi-pena*
i-tepi ne-oči-nowi-pena
 there 1-from-go.out-(1)P/IND
 OBLIQUE
 'we (exclusive) went out from there'

RELATIVE ROOTS IN COMPARATIVES

With the above background on relative roots, let us now return to comparatives and ask which relative roots are employed to express comparison. The most frequently used relative root is initial *ahpi·hč-*, preverb *ahpi·hč-* 'to such an extent,' already seen in (5) and (6) above. (12) is another example with *ahpi·hč-*, here added to the verb for 'rain.'

- (12) *e·škamimeko e'hanemi-ahpi·hč-ke-miya-niki*,
e·škami=meko e'h-anemi-ahpi·hč-ke-miya-niki
 increasingly=EMPH AOR-go.on-to.such.extent-rain-0/AOR
 'It began to rain harder and harder.' (mehk.8L)

The oblique associated with *ahpi·hč-* in (12) is *e·škami* 'increasingly,' producing the gloss 'it rained harder and harder.' (12) is another instance of an implicit comparative, comparing the current intensity of rain to a previous light rain. Additional examples with the relative root *ahpi·hč-* may be found below in (17) and (22)–(24).

Another relative root found in comparatives is initial *tasw-/particle taswi* 'so much, so many.' *Taswi* has an unusual distribution for a relative root: if it is not possible for it to appear as a stem-initial morpheme it surfaces as a separate word outside the verbal complex. It does not have the option of appearing as a preverb. *Taswi* is used for comparisons of the amount of something, such as in (13) where 'turkey' is the subject of the verb 'lie in the bowl' and the sentence asserts that the amount of turkey is greater than was previously there.

- (13) *na'hkači a'wasi-me'hmekeo taswi e'hkekina·kane·šiniči-pene-wani*.
na'hkači a'wasi-me·hi=meko taswi e'h-kekina·kane·šin-niči-pene-w-ani.
 also more.DIM=EMPH so.much AOR-lie.in.bowl-3/AOR turkey-OBV
 'and there was more turkey in the bowl [than before].' (W231K)

Although *taswi* does not appear in preverb position, the syntactic effect of combining *taswi* with the verb is the same as in other relative root constructions: the valence of the verb is increased by adding a requirement for an oblique argument of a particular type; the particle *a'wasi-me·hi* 'more' is the syntactic oblique associated with *taswi*.

Alongside the very specialized relative roots for expressing extent or amount, the more general relative root *in-/iši-* associated with obliques of manner also often appears in comparatives. For example, it is used in

(14) with the verb 'be a manitou, have spirit power,' and in (15) with 'be bad.'

(14) we'nahwi'na a'wasi'me'hi iši-maneto'wi-wa wi'sahke'ha,
we'nahi=wi'na a'wasi'me'hi iši-maneto'wi-wa wi'sahke'h-a,
so.that's.it=but more.DIM thus-be.spirit-3/IND W-SG
'Oh, Wisahkeha has more spirit-power [than I].' (W196)

(15) o'ni aškači'me'hi a'wasi'me'hmeke e'hanemišimya'šawiči wi'čawiwaka.
o'ni aškači'me'hi a'wasi'me'hi=meko e'h-anemi-iši-mya'šawi-či
and,then later.DIM more.DIM=EMPH AOR-go.on-thus-be.bad-3/AOR

IC-wi'čawiw-aka.

IC-be.with-1>3/PART/3

'And then a little later on my husband got even worse [than before].' (Auto125D)

In (16) the male speaker is lamenting the inadequacies of himself and his fellow men, saying first 'we are like old women,' and then going further to say 'we are even worse' (because old women can cook, and they cannot). The comparison in the second clause employs *iši-*:

(16) še'škimeko mehto'čimeko metemo'he'haki netešawipena,
še'ški=meko mehto'či=meko metemo'he'h-aki ne-ešawi-pena,
only=EMPH like=EMPH old.woman.DIM-PL 1-be.thus-1P/IND

a'wasimo'hčimeko neteši-nešiwana'tesipena.

a'wasi=mo'hči=meko ne-eši-nešiwana'tesi-pena.

more=even=EMPH 1-thus-be.destroyed-1P/IND

'We are only like old women, in fact we are even worse.' (W181)

Now, since *iši-* 'thus' can be used in comparatives, just like *ahpi'hči-* 'to such an extent,' one might wonder if there is some way of predicting where each form appears. (17) and (18) are a near-minimal pair showing that each of these relative roots can be used with the verb *kehke'net-* 'know.'

(17) a'wasi'me'hmeke ahpi'hčime'kwe'he-kehke'netamo'hiwaki
a'wasi'me'hi=meko ahpi'hči=me'kwe'he -kehke'netamo'hi-waki
more.DIM=EMPH to.such.extent—I.believe -know.DIM-3P>0/IND

no'šiseme'haki ke'ko'hi

ne-o'šiseme'h-aki ke'ko'hi

1-grandchild.DIM-PL something

'I believe my grandchildren know something more [than they did before].' (W237)

(18) ni'name'kwe'hmekowi'na a'wasi'me'hi neteši-kehke'neta
ni'na=me'kwe'he=meko=wi'na a'wasi'me'hi ne-eši-kehke'net-a
I=I.believe=EMPH=but more.DIM 1-thus-know-1>0/IND
'I believe I know more about it [than you do].' (W228)

(17) contains *ahpi'hči-* and asserts that the speaker's grandchildren know more than they did before. In (18), using *iši-*, the speaker asserts that he knows more than the addressee. Given the similarity between (17) and (18) we may perhaps conjecture that the two relative roots are interchangeable in comparative contexts.

The relationship between comparatives and relative roots becomes more complicated, however, when we look at the next set of examples. In these, the particle *a'wasi* 'more' is in construction with verbs bearing no relative root at all.

(19) "ki'naye'hapa, ni'hka'ne, a'wasi kewe'we'ne'neta ke'ko'hi."
ki'na=ye'hapa, ni'hka'ne, a'wasi ke-we'we'ne'net-a ke'ko'hi,
you=it.turns.out friend.VOC more 2-control-2>0/IND something
'My friend, it turns out that you have more control over things.' (W512)

(20) šewe'na'ni a'wasimekoyo'we mi'škawa'sa.
šewe'na=i'ni a'wasi=meko=iyo'we mi'škawa'sa.
but=that more=EMPH=PAST be.strong-0/POT
'that [other way] would have been much more powerful.' (1880.16M)

(21) a'wasimekoyo'we mi'ša'mi nenenehke'neta.
a'wasi=meko=iyo'we mi'ša'm-i ne-nenehke'net-a.
more=EMPH=PAST sacred.pack-SG 1-think.about-1>0/IND
'I really thought more about the sacred pack.' (1880.17H)

At this point I do not have any generalization to suggest regarding the contexts in which it is possible to omit the relative root in comparative constructions.

'AS MUCH AS' COMPARATIVES

So far we have seen how Meskwaki uses the relative root construction to license the degree expression as an oblique argument of the verb. We have also seen that Meskwaki comparatives are most similar to Stassen's conjoined type, and that the standard of comparison is frequently left unexpressed in textual examples. There is, however, a subtype of comparatives in which the standard of comparison is much less likely to be left implicit: the equative comparative, in which the target and standard are asserted to be at the same point on the scale of the dimensional predicate. In English, equative comparatives are expressed with 'as much as' or 'John is as tall as Bill,' etc. (22) is a Meskwaki example of an 'as much as' comparative:

- (22) "manikohi ki-šekwi e·hpi·hčiwanakahki,
 "mani=kohi ki-šekw-i IC-**ahpi·hči**wanakat-ki,
 this=certainly sky-SG IC-weigh.so.much-0/PART/OBL

i-ni e·hpi·hčiwanakahki nepa-kwahikani.
 i-ni IC-**ahpi·hči**wanakat-ki ne-pa-kwahikan-i.
 that IC-weigh.so.much-0/PART/OBL 1-drumstick-SG
 'As much as this sky weighs, that is how much my drumstick weighs.' (W501)

(22) is taken from a long text about the culture hero Wisahkeha: the context for (22) is that the Great Spirit has attempted to pick up Wisahkeha's drumstick, but failed to even budge it. The structure of (22) is an equation, with zero copula, between two headless relative clauses. (Participle forms of verbs are used in relative clauses, with the final suffix of the participle providing information about the head of the relative clause.) Each of the two headless relative clauses in (22) has the oblique argument associated with the relative root *a·hpi·ht-* 'to such an extent' as the head of the relative clause. That is, the resulting relative clauses are glossed 'the extent to which this sky weighs' and 'the extent to which my drumstick weighs.' The two weights are asserted to be equal, in the utterance of (22).

EXPLICIT STANDARD EMBEDDED IN THE OBLIQUE ARGUMENT

(23) is another 'as much as' example, but one with slightly different syntax. It is taken from the autobiography of a Meskwaki woman (Goddard 2006);

the context is that the author's baby had died and they are preparing to perform the adoption ceremony. She is choosing a child who will be ritually adopted by the family in place of the deceased baby:

- (23) maname·kwe·he e·hpi·hči-tepa·nakehe netapeno·hema
 mana=me·kwe·he [IC-**ahpi·hči**-tepa·n-akehe ne-apeno·hem-a]
 this.ANIM=I.believe IC-to.such.degree-love-1>3/PAST.PART/OBL 1-child-SG

e·hpi·hči-tepa·na·sota
 IC-**ahpi·hči**-tepa·na·so-ta
 IC-to.such.degree-be.loved-3/PART/3
 'I believe this is one who's loved as much as I loved my baby.' (Auto125B)

(23), like (22) above, contains two participle verbs functioning as relative clauses, but (23) is not an equational structure with a zero copula. To understand the syntax of (23), look first at the final verb in the sentence, which is a headless relative clause referring to the child she has chosen: *e·hpi·hči-tepa·na·sota* 'the one who is loved to such an extent.' That verb includes the preverb *ahpi·hči-* licensing an oblique argument. The oblique argument associated with *ahpi·hči-* is the headless relative clause to the verb's left, indicated by brackets: *e·hpi·hči-tepa·nakehe netapeno·hema* 'the extent to which I loved (in the past) my baby.' What is interesting in (23) from the point of view of the typology of comparatives is that the standard of comparison is expressed inside the clausal oblique argument of the matrix verb, rather than being relegated to a second, conjoined clause or simply left implicit.

Moreover, the strategy of expressing the standard of comparison in an embedded clause is not limited to the 'as much as' comparatives, but can be found with the ordinary comparatives as well, as seen in (24):

- (24) a·wasimeko e·hpi·hčawiči ketahpi·hčawipetoke
 a·wasi=meko IC-**ahpi·hčawi**-či ke-**ahpi·hčawi**-petoke
 more=EMPH IC-be.to.such.extent-3/PART/OBL 2-be.to.such.extent-2/DUB
 'you are probably greater than he is' (W342)

In (24) the main verb appears at the end of the sentence, inflected for a second-person singular subject; the verb stem contains the relative root *ahpi·hč-* as an initial. The same verb stem appears to the left of the main

verb, here made into a participle form with the oblique of extent as its head, inflected for a third-person singular subject. It is the third-person subject of the participle verb which functions as the standard of comparison, while the second-person subject of the main verb expresses the target. The particle *a-wasi* 'more' is combined with the participle *e-hpi-hčawiči* to jointly constitute the oblique argument of the matrix clause, meaning literally 'more (than) how great he is.'

CONCLUSIONS

We have seen that Meskwaki comparatives are most similar to the conjoined type of comparative construction in terms of the typology developed by Stassen (1985). However, the prototypical conjoined type permits expression of the standard of comparison only in the second conjunct of the two clauses, while Meskwaki does have the ability to express the standard of comparison in an embedded complement clause. This structural possibility is a consequence of the way in which Meskwaki verbs encode the dimensional predicate in comparatives: relative root morphology appears with the verbal predicate to license the degree expression as an oblique argument of the verb. Since it is possible for oblique arguments to be instantiated as headless relative clauses glossed 'the extent to which [X . . .]' it is thus structurally feasible for the standard of comparison to be expressed as an argument of the clausal oblique. This is quite different from Stassen's prototypical conjoined pattern, and suggests that the crosslinguistic typology ought to be expanded to accommodate languages like Meskwaki.

Much more investigation is needed, of course, to understand the workings of the Meskwaki comparative construction, including a closer look at the different types of relative roots participating in comparatives, and the conditions under which no overt relative root appears on the scalar predicate. Given the Nishnaabemwin example cited in (4) of a particle comparative, it would also be extremely interesting to find out more about comparatives across the Algonquian family. The present paper is a small step in that direction.

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