

This abstract presents (a small portion of) the results from a large-scale empirical study on comparison in Thai, in which we interviewed a substantial number of native speakers on a sample of more than 200 sentences each to obtain a thorough amount of positive and negative evidence alike on the (un)availability of different comparison constructions and the particular shape they take in this language. In this study, we not only elicited data on standard constructions like the comparative, the superlative, the positive and the equative, but we also investigated related phenomena such as differential comparatives, direct comparison with a degree, degree questions, subcomparatives, comparatives featuring antonyms, measure phrase constructions, *too/enough* constructions or the occurrence of negative island effects and scopal ambiguities, among many others, which – to the best of our knowledge – has never been done before. Two main insights we thereby gained and to which we shall confine ourselves here (for lack of space) are (i) comparison in Thai clearly differs from comparison in typical *exceed*-languages (as which Thai has traditionally been analysed) and (ii) comparison in Thai is also radically different from comparison in most other East Asian languages, exemplified by Mandarin Chinese and Japanese in what follows.

In Stassen (1985), the expression *gwah* in a canonical Thai comparative like (1) is taken to be a verbal element, whose meaning roughly corresponds to that of the verb *exceed* in English, and Stassen therefore argues that Thai should be counted among those languages that are characterised by an *exceed*-type comparative. According to him, comparatives in this language are thus to be analysed in a way paralleling English *exceed*-comparatives like e.g. (2), and this approach still seems to be state of the art today, as can be seen from the fact that Thai is listed among the languages with *exceed*-type comparatives in *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online* (Stassen (2008)). In the course of our own study, however, it turned out that none of our informants offered *exceed* as a possible translation of *gwah* and likewise, translation tasks in the opposite direction also failed systematically: There wasn't even a single informant who translated *exceed* by *gwah*, which made us become more and more doubtful about the *exceed*-account. From a syntactic point of view, it furthermore looks suspicious that Thai comparatives invariably lack a preposition corresponding to English *in* in example (2). Critical minds might object that these prepositions are not always realised overtly, but it is also problematic for the *exceed*-analysis that the respect to which the standard and the comparee term are compared appears in the form of the adjective *soong* and not as a nominal element, which is generally taken to be characteristic of *exceed*-type comparatives. Note, in this context, that Thai is not a language where nouns and adjectives cannot be distinguished formally, but that it rather patterns with English in this regard, where we also typically get a difference in form between *high* and *height*, *long* and *length*, *wide* and *width*, etc. Moreover, we found that Thai allows for a whole range of constructions that are normally absent from canonical *exceed*-languages (cf. Beck et al. (in press)) and displays for instance direct measure phrase constructions (which are possible with even more adjectives than in English itself, cf. (3)), degree questions (4) or even subcomparatives (5). Interestingly enough, none of these constructions are attested in either Japanese or Mandarin Chinese, where they directly lead to ungrammaticality (cf. Beck, Oda & Sugisaki (2004) and Beck et al. (in press) for Japanese and Krasikova (2007) and Beck et al. (in press) for Chinese data). Likewise, we discovered that Thai shows largely the same scopal ambiguities as English or German, so that the second sentence in (6) can for example be understood either with an *exactly-15-pages-in-total*-interpretation or with a minimal-requirement-reading (cf. Heim (2001)). Once again, such ambiguities are neither found with classical *exceed*-languages nor with Japanese or Mandarin Chinese (for data cf. the references in the one but last brackets).

In sum, we conclude from the specific shape of ordinary Thai comparatives, the availability of certain related constructions as well as the occurrence of scopal ambiguities that comparison in Thai behaves quite unlike comparison in a typical *exceed*-language, rather patterns with English-like languages in this respect and should therefore also be included in this language group and given an English-style analysis (cf. e.g. von Stechow (1984)) with *gwah* denoting a preposition/conjunction corresponding to English *than*, instead. On the one hand, comparison in Thai thus turns out to be much less 'exotic' than expected, but on the other, this makes comparison in Thai all the more interesting, given that this sets this language apart from most other East Asian languages.

### example sentences

- (1) *Maria soong gwah Hans.*  
Maria tall GWAH Hans  
'Maria is taller than Hans.'
- (2) *Braveheart has always exceeded Dragonheart in courage.*
- (3) *Ka-nohm-bpahng nahk 1,5 kg.*  
bread heavy 1,5 kg  
'The bread weighs 1.5 kilos.'; literally corresponds to: '\*The bread is 1.5 kilos heavy.'
- (4) *Maria soong tao ry?*  
Maria tall equal question particle  
'How tall is Maria?'
- (5) *Dto soong gwah bpra-dtoo gwahng.*  
table high GWAH door wide  
'The table is higher than the door is wide.'
- (6) *Rahng yow 10 nah gra-daht.*  
draft long 10 page paper  
'The draft is ten pages long.'  
*Boht-khwaam dtawng yow gwah rahng 5 nah paw-dee.*  
article be\_required long GWAH draft 5 page exactly  
'The article is required to be exactly five pages longer than the draft.'

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