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How Various Frame Setters Restrict Interpretations of Contextual Comparisons

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How Various Frame Setters Restrict Interpretations of Contextual Comparisons

Abstract
This study focuses on contextual comparisons that have received much less attention than standard more-than-comparisons. The purpose of this study is to expand the scope of Hohaus’ (2015) framework and enrich it by adding various types of frame phrases that bring different types of degree relations in presuppositions. It is demonstrated that the relations between frame phrases and their main clauses are rule-governed as predicted by Hohaus’ (2015) framework; an asserted degree relation holds only when it satisfies the degree relation in the presupposition brought by its frame phrase(s). Relevant data will be provided in English and Japanese.
How Various Frame Setters Restrict Interpretations of Contextual Comparisons

Toshiko Oda*

1. Introduction

More-than-comparisons exemplified in (1) have received significant attention in the literature. On the other hand, contextual comparisons exemplified in (2) have received far less attention.

(1) Taro is taller than Jiro. (more-than-comparison)
(2) Compared to Jiro, Taro is taller.¹ (contextual comparison²)

To the best of the author’s knowledge, Hohaus (2015) provides the most explicit analysis of contextual comparison. She argues that Compared to Jiro in (2) is a frame phrase, which contributes presupposition. The comparison in the main clause Taro is taller (than someone) holds when the presupposition is met. This unique analysis provides a solid base for the formal analysis of the less studied comparisons.

Despite the potential of her framework, Hohaus has discussed only one type of frame phrases in detail, namely compared-to-phrases and their cross-linguistic equivalents. Thus, her analysis has yet to be tested with more empirical data. The current study demonstrates how various types of frame phrases restrict interpretations of contextual comparisons. Relevant data are provided in English and Japanese.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Hohaus (2015) and Sawada (2009) are reviewed in Section 2. In doing so, the scope of Hohaus’ framework is expanded to include “implicit comparisons” discussed in Sawada (2009). Japanese data are presented in Section 3. Yorimo-phrases and conditional phrases are analyzed as frame phrases in Japanese. Two additional types of data are presented in Section 4. One shows that contextual comparisons are degraded when relevant presuppositions are not completely met. The other demonstrates cases of how multiple frame phrases contribute presuppositions for an assertion. Those behaviors are potentially captured by Hohaus’ framework. Finally, concluding remarks are provided in Section 5.

2. Background


Contextual comparisons have been studied far less than more-than-comparisons. This is somewhat surprising given the fact that they are widely observed in utterances. The characteristics of what are referred to as contextual comparisons herein are that they lack a than-clause/phrase that provides an overt standard of comparison. A than-clause/phrase is normally considered an argument of the comparative operator -er. When an overt than-clause/phrase is missing, the argument position is occupied by an invisible free degree variable.

Let us first consider a very simple case in (3), where the standard of comparison is implied in its utterance context. The LF structure is given in (4). The comparative operator -er takes a free degree variable d with an index 5, whose value is given by the assignment function g in the given

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¹The examples in (1) and (2) have practically the same meaning, but some differences remain. Sawada (2009) highlights that some native speakers find (2) somewhat unnatural. Informants in the current study also prefer (1) to (2) unless there is a good pragmatic reason.

²Note that Hohaus (2015) describes examples like (2) as “comparatives with indirect strategies.” See 7.3 of Hohaus (2015) for details. In this paper, for the purpose of discussion, they are simply referred to as “contextual comparison.”.
context. Assuming the lexical entry of tall and -er as in (5) and (6), respectively, the truth conditions of (3) will be as in (7).

(3) Taro is taller. (contextual comparison)

(4) $\text{Taro is } t_1\text{-tall in } s_3$

(5) $[[\text{tall}]] = \lambda s_3. \lambda d_3. \lambda x_3. x$ is $d$-tall in $s$

(6) $[[-er]] = \lambda d_3. \lambda D_3. \lambda \mu s_3. \lambda x_3. \mu(s_3)(x) \geq \mu(s_3)(y)$

(7) $\lambda s_3. \text{MAX}(\lambda d_3. \text{Taro is } d\text{-tall in } s_3) > g(5)$

Let us now turn to the case of contextual comparison given in (2). The uniqueness of Hohaus’ (2015) analysis lies in how she treats the compared-to-phrase, which she proposes adds a presupposition for the contextual comparison of the matrix clause. The LF of (2) is given in (8). The semantics of compared to is given in (9), which roughly means that it takes an individual and denotes that its degree property measured by $\mu$ is in comparison with that of another individual. The compared-to-phrase is combined with a syntactic head Frame and constitutes a frame phrase. The lexical entry of Frame is given in (10). The minimality operator MIN in Frame plays a crucial role. It defines a minimal situation in which the meaning of the compared-to-phrase holds. When the situation becomes an argument for the assertion of a matrix clause, the possible interpretation of the assertion is restricted. In other words, a matrix clause comparison holds only when it involves $y$, the argument of compared to. The truth conditions of (2) given in (12) are roughly paraphrased as follows: It is defined if a degree comparison is made with Jiro in a minimal situation. When defined, it asserts that Taro is taller than some contextually provided standard degree in the minimal situation. The value of the standard degree, $g(5)$, is restricted to Jiro’s height, because that is the only value that satisfies the presupposition. Hohaus also demonstrates that practically the same analysis applies to corresponding German examples, which is not provided here due to limitations of space.

(8) $[[\text{compared to}]] = \\
\lambda s_3. \lambda y_3. \exists x_3. \exists u_3. \exists v_3. \exists w_3. [\mu(s_3)(x) \geq \mu(s_3)(y)]$

(9) $[[\text{Frame}]] = \lambda p_3. \lambda q_3. \lambda \mu s_3. \lambda \mu q_3. \text{MIN}(p_3)(s_3). q(s)$

(10) $[[\text{min}]] = \lambda p_3. \lambda s_3. \lambda x_3. \lambda y_3. p_3(s_3) \& \neg \exists s' [s' < S \& p(s')]$

(Hohaus 2015:68)

---

3. Following an established analysis, this study assumes that gradable adjectives denote relations between degrees and individuals (Cresswell 1977; von Stechow 1984; Heim 1985; Kennedy and McNally 2005, among others).

4. This paper adopts the framework of Heim and Kratzer (1998) for compositional calculation.
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\[ \left[ (8) \right] \Rightarrow 1 \iff \\
\lambda s : s \in \text{MIN}(\lambda s^* . \exists x_{<e} . \mu_{s^* , c, e, d} [\mu(s^*)(x) \geq \mu(s^*)(\text{Jiro})]) \]

\[ \text{MAX}(\lambda d . \text{Taro is } d\text{-tall in } s) > g(5) \]

2.2. Implicit Comparisons

There is another construction in English that was not discussed in Hohaus (2015) but can be accounted for by her framework. The example in (13) is very similar to (2), but the adjective in the main clause is in its positive form tall. Following Sawada (2009), such examples are referred to as “implicit comparisons” herein.

(13) Compared to Jiro, Taro is tall. (implicit comparison)

Despite their similarities, contextual and implicit comparisons, exemplified in (2) and (13), respectively, have very different interpretations. Sawada highlights that implicit comparisons like (13) come with the implications described in (14). He explains how the implications arise by a notion of economy. In short, he argues that if Taro were a tall person, the speaker would simply say Taro is tall and would not add Compared to Jiro because it is uneconomical. The extra phrase Compared to Jiro indicates that the standard of tallness needs to be changed and it is pushed down to the height of a short person, namely Jiro. As for Taro, he is not tall. This is because the default standard of tallness would have applied if he were a tall person.

(14) Implications for (13) Compared to Jiro, Taro is tall
a. Jiro is short.
    b. Taro is not definitely tall. (possibly borderline)

Sawada (2009) does not provide the compositional semantics of implicit comparison. The current study posits that Hohaus’ framework applies to implicit comparisons. The LF structure of (13) is given in (15). The comparison in the main clause is made by the POS operator. The FrameP is located on top of the main clause. The semantics of the sentence is given in (17), which may be roughly paraphrased as follows: It presupposes that a degree comparison involves Jiro in a minimal situation. When defined, it asserts that in the minimal situation Taro is taller than some contextually provided standard degree c. Given the presupposition, the standard of tallness c contains Jiro’s height.

(15)
\[
\text{FrameP}_{<s,t>} \quad 3_{<s,t}> \quad \text{TP}_{<s,t>}
\]

\[
\text{FrameP}_{<s,t>} \quad 3_{<s,t>} \quad \text{TP}_{<s,t>}
\]

\[
\text{Frame} \quad 6 \quad \text{Taro is } \text{POS tall } s_3 \quad \text{Compared to Jiro}
\]

(16)
\[ \left[ (16) \right] \Rightarrow 1 \iff \lambda s : s \in \text{MIN}(\lambda s^* . \exists x_{<e} . \exists d_{c_\text{contextually given standard degree}} [\mu(s^*)(x) \geq \mu(s^*)(\text{Jiro})]) \]

(17)
\[ \left[ (17) \right] \Rightarrow 1 \iff \lambda s : s \in \text{MIN}(\lambda s^* . \exists x_{<e} . \exists d_{c_{\text{standard of tallness}}} [\mu(s^*)(x) \geq \mu(s^*)(\text{Jiro})]) \]

In this section, we have seen two cases to which Hohaus’ (2015) analysis applies, namely contextual and implicit comparisons with a frame phrase. Their comparisons are made by two types of degree operators in main clauses, namely -er or POS. In both cases, the value of a standard of comparison is context dependent. The role of FrameP is to restrict the possible interpretations of the standard of comparison.

\[ ^5 \text{This study adopts the simple lexical entry for POS for the purpose of discussion. The contextually given standard degree } c \text{ is a vague degree, possibly constitutes a neutral interval as discussed in von Stechow (2006, 2009). Then an individual that has the adjectival property has a degree that is greater than the upper bound of the interval.} \]
3. Variations of Contextual Comparisons in Japanese

3.1. Phrasal Yorimo-Comparatives as Contextual Comparison

To enrich Hohaus’ (2015) framework, this section outlines variations of frame phrases. Relevant data are provided in Japanese. Yorimo-comparatives are normally considered equivalents of more-than-comparatives. However, Oda (2021) argues that at least some phrasal yorimo-comparatives such as (18) should be analyzed as contextual comparisons. In (18), yorimo takes John. Nevertheless, the intuitive meaning of (18) is that the test score of John is compared.

(18) [rc Mary-ga to-tta tensuu]-wa [FrameP John yorimo] takai. 7
The test score that Mary obtained is higher than (that of) John.

(18) cannot be analyzed as an equivalent of more-than-comparison because its literal translation is nonsense, as shown in (19). A better translation of (18) is (20), where the yorimo-phrase acts as a frame setter like a compared-to-phrase. The implicit comparison in (21) is not a good translation because (18) does not come with implications of a lowered standard of degree discussed in Sawada (2009).

(19) more-than-comparison
‘The test score that Mary obtained is higher than John.’

(20) contextual comparison
‘Compared to John, the test score that Mary obtained is higher.’

(21) implicit comparison
‘Compared to John, the test score that Mary obtained is high.’

This study proposes the LF and the semantics of (18) as in (22) and (23), where John yorimo serves as a frame phrase. The truth conditions are given in (23).

(22)

(23)

Notice that there is something very small but important in the presupposition. This study

6The idea of yorimo as an equivalent of compared to in English was originally proposed by Beck et al. (2004). Kennedy (2007) and many others argue against it and treat yorimo as an equivalent of than in English.

7Abbreviations for functional morphemes in Japanese are as follows: ACC(accusative), COPULA/copula), COND(conditional), GEN(genitive), NEGI(negation), NOM(nominaive), PAST(past tense), TOP(topical), YORIMO(yorimo).

8Whether or not the Japanese language has degree movement is still a matter of debate. This study tentatively assumes degree movement in (22) for the purpose of discussion. See Beck et al. (2004), Beck et al. (2009), and others for an assumption that some languages including Japanese have the negative setting a parameter that governs the availability of degree movement, namely degree abstraction parameter (DPA).
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adopted > (greater than-relation) rather than ≥ (greater than or equal to) relation for the contribution of yorimo. The equality needs to be excluded because yorimo-phrases are incompatible with equatives such as onaji gurai ‘roughly the same’.  

(24) #Mary-ga to-tta tensuu-wa [FrameP John yorimo] onaji gurai da.  
    Mary-NOM obtain-PAST test.score-TOP John YORIMO same roughly COPULA  
    Intended: ‘Compared with John, the test score that Mary obtained is roughly the same.’

In contrast, (25) with John to kuraberu to ‘if compared with John’ is well-formed. This shows that different frame phrases bring different presuppositions.

(25) Mary-ga to-tta tensuu-wa [FrameP John to kuraberu-to ]  
    Mary-NOM obtain-PAST test.score-TOP John with compare-COND onaji gurai da.  
    same roughly COPULA  
    ‘If compared with John, the test score that Mary obtained is roughly the same.’

What presuppositions are brought by phrases like John to kuraberu to ‘if compared with John’? The semantics of such conditional-phrases in Japanese will be discussed in the next subsection.

3.2. Conditional Phrases

Sawada (2009) argues that examples with conditional phrases like (26) are an instance of implicit comparison in Japanese. In fact, (26) comes with implications described in (27) that are associated with implicit comparisons. First, the sentence implies that Jiro is a short person. Second, Taro is certainly not a tall person. This means that (26) is an equivalent of (13), and takai in this case means ‘tall’ rather than ‘taller.’

(26) [FrameP Jiro to kurabe-reba ] Taro-wa se-ga takai.  
    Jiro with compare-COND Taro-TOP height-NOM tall  
    ‘If compared with Jiro, Taro is tall.’ (implicit comparison)

(27) Implications for (26)
    a. Jiro is short.
    b. Taro is not definitely tall. (possibly borderline)

This study assumes that conditional phrases in Japanese are FrameP. Importantly, it is assumed that conditional phrases involve R, a relation in general. Consider the semantics of (26) given in (28). It is defined if Jiro is involved in a degree relation with another individual in a minimal situation. When defined, it asserts Taro’s height is greater than a contextually given standard of tallness in the minimal situation. This vague standard of tallness must include Jiro’s height because the presupposition would not be met otherwise.

(28) λs: s∈MIN(λs.∃x<e,∃µ<e,d> [R(µ(s*)(x))(µ(s*)(Jiro))]).
    MAX(λd. Taro is d-tall in s)> c standard of tallness

The reason this study assumes R, a relation in general, for conditional phrases in Japanese is as follows. The presupposition with R captures its compatibility of onaji gurai ‘roughly the same’ given in (25). The meaning of onaji gurai ‘roughly the same’ is very vague. As its translation shows, it does not require an exact equality between two degrees. For instance, two lengths, 20cm and 21cm, will be described as onaji gurai if the speaker considers them roughly the same. The

---

9Japanese does not have a straightforward equivalent to as in English. Equatives can be made with -hodo, but it is a negative polarity item as discussed in Hayashishita (2007). The current study adopts onaji gurai ‘roughly the same’ for degree equatives. The literal translation of gurai is ‘degree’. Nevertheless, onaji gurai does not mean ‘the same degree’. It rather refers multiple degrees that are similar to each other.

10Japanese has several verb ending conditional morphemes (COND) such as -reba, -ra, and -to. They all bring the meaning of ‘if’. In (26) -reba is chosen as it brings the implications in (27) most strongly.
degree relation of onaji gurai will be best represented by \(\approx\). If the matrix degree relation of (25) is \(\approx\) ‘roughly the same’, the degree relation presupposed by the conditional phrase needs to be even more vague than \(\approx\) so that it is satisfied by \(\approx\) in the assertion. Neither \(>\) (greater than) nor \(\geq\) (greater than or equal to) will suffice. Thus, \(R\), a relation in general, is a good candidate for the degree relation brought by the conditional phrase in (25).

In conclusion, the truth conditions of (25) are given in (29). It presupposes that there is a degree relation in general between John and another individual \(x\) in a minimal situation. It asserts that Mary’s test score is roughly the same as a contextually given degree \(g(5)\) in the minimal situation. Given the presupposition, the value of \(g(5)\) is restricted to the test score of John.

\[
\lambda s: s \in \text{MIN}(\lambda s^*. \exists x <e>, \exists \mu <s, <e, d>>, [R(\mu(s^*)(x))(\mu(s^*)(\text{John}))]).
\]
\[
\text{MAX}(\lambda d. \text{the test score that Mary obtained is } d\text{-high in } s) \approx g(5)
\]

### 3.3. Conditional Phrases and More-Than-Comparisons

If conditional phrases bring \(R\), a relation in general, it is predicted that conditional phrases are compatible with more-than-comparisons in assertion, because \(R\) is easily satisfied by \(>\). This prediction is borne out. In (30), takai ‘high’ does not come with any visible comparative morpheme, but 20 en ‘20 yen’, a differential degree, guarantees that takai means ‘higher’.\(^{11}\) In fact, (30) does not have any implications of lowered standard degree. The truth conditions of the sentence are given in (31). The value of \(g(5)\) is understood as the bus fee last year, because that is the only available degree in the minimally restricted situation.

\[
\text{(30)} \quad \text{[FrameP Mae to kuraberu-to ] basu-no unchin-ga 20 en takai.}\quad \text{12}
\]
\[
\text{past with compare-COND bus-GEN fee-NOM 20 yen high ‘If compared with the past, the bus fee is higher by 20 yen.’}
\]
\[
\lambda s: s \in \text{MIN}(\lambda s^*. \exists x <e>, \exists \mu <s, <e, d>>, [R(\mu(s^*)(x))(\mu(s^*)(\text{the.bus.fee}))]).
\]
\[
\text{MAX}(\lambda d. \text{the bus fee is } d\text{-yen in } s) = g(5)+ 20 \text{ yen}
\]

Thus far, this section has discussed cases where presuppositions brought by FrameP are successfully met as well as those where they are not. This is because the presupposed degree relations are sometimes as loose as \(R\), a relation in general, or as strict as \(>\), the more-than-relation. The data are summarized below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presupposed degree relation in FrameP</th>
<th>Asserted degree relation</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt; by yorimo</td>
<td>&gt;</td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; by yorimo</td>
<td>POS</td>
<td>not available</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; by yorimo</td>
<td>(\approx)</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>(24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R) (relation in general) by a conditional phrase</td>
<td>(\approx)</td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>(25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R) (relation in general) by a conditional phrase</td>
<td>POS</td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>(26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R) (relation in general) by a conditional phrase</td>
<td>&gt;</td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>(30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Summary of the data in Japanese.

\(^{11}\)Note that ‘20 yen’ in (30) does not behave as a direct degree. Thus, the main clause does not have an interpretation of ‘the bus fee is 20 yen.’

\(^{12}\)Note that not every conditional-phrase is compatible with contextual comparison. The choice of conditional morpheme affects the grammaticality of the sentence. (30) has to ‘COND’, and the sentence is well-formed. Similar examples to (30) in Sawada (2009) have -tara and -ruto for conditional morphemes are judged ‘??.’ Thus, each conditional morpheme seems to bring a different interpretation even though they all serve to express ‘if’.
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Importantly, the summarized results are natural consequences predicted by Hohaus’ (2015) framework. Thus, they provide cross-linguistic support for her framework.

4. Further Data

4.1. When Minimality Matters

This section presents two types of novel data in Japanese that are likely to be captured by Hohaus’ (2015) framework. One is a case where the minimality operator $\text{MIN}$ in Frame plays an important role. Sentences are degraded when the assertion does not mention all individuals mentioned in a frame phrase. This is because the individuals are defined as minimally required elements in the assertion. The other is a case where a sentence has layered frame phrases. Interestingly, the order of frame phrases matters in relevant cases.

Let us consider the first case. The conditional phrase of (32) introduces three people, namely Taro, Jiro, and Saburo. However, the matrix clause mentions only Taro. The judgment of the sentence is degraded. Intuitively speaking, the sentence is syntactically well-formed but it is somewhat incomplete because Jiro and Saburo are not mentioned in the matrix clause.

(32) \[\text{[FrameP} \ Taro \ \text{to Jiro to Saburo-o kuraberu-to} \ ], \]
\[\text{Taro and Jiro and Saburo-ACC compare-COND} \]
\[\text{Taro-TOP height-NOM tall} \]
\[\text{‘If Taro, Jiro and Saburo are compared, Taro is tall.’} \]

This intuition is captured by the notion of minimality built into the semantics of $\text{MIN}$ given in (11). The FrameP of (32) brings a presupposition that there is a degree relation among Taro, Jiro, and Saburo. $\text{MIN}$ in the presupposition restricts the situation for the assertion into one that involves Taro, Jiro, and Saburo. When the assertion mentions only Taro, the presupposition is not met.

In fact, the sentence improves when the continuing sentence mentions Jiro and Saburo as shown in (33). The well-formed status of (33) indicates that the FrameP modifies the conjoined two clauses so that both are asserted in the same minimal situation, namely $s_3$ in the LF structure in (34).

(33) \[\text{[FrameP} \ Taro \ \text{to Jiro to Saburo-o kuraberu-to} \ ], \]
\[\text{Taro-wa se-ga takai} \]
\[\text{Taro-TOP height-NOM tall} \]
\[\text{but Jiro and Saburo-TOP height-NEG tall-NEG} \]
\[\text{‘If Taro, Jiro and Saburo are compared, Taro is tall but Jiro and Saburo are not.’} \]

This degraded judgment for (32) and the improved one for (33) may appear to be common sense. Nevertheless, there does not seem to be any theoretical explanation for such phenomena in the literature so far.

There is a question that needs to be answered before concluding this subsection. Why is (32) degraded whereas the very similar example in (26) is well-formed? In (26), Jiro’s height is automatically considered a part of the contextually determined standard of comparison for $\text{POS}$ without being mentioned in the main clause. Why does this not happen to Jiro’s and Saburo’s heights in...
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(32)? The extra person in (32) seems to play a role in this. In the case of (26), where only Jiro is mentioned in the frame phrase, Jiro’s height must be part of the standard of tallness, because that is the only option for the presupposition to be met. On the other hand, (32) involves two persons other than Taro, namely, Jiro and Saburo. The standard of tallness for POS can be defined by the height of only one of them. The height of the other person could also be part of the standard of tallness, but it does not have to be. Therefore, they need to be disambiguated as in (33). In fact, the sentence given in (35) shows another option to disambiguate the possibilities. In (35), *Jiro* is short and *Saburo* is neither tall nor short.\(^{13}\)

(35) [\text{FrameP} Taro to Jiro to Saburo-o kuraberu-to ], Taro-wa se-ga Taro and Jiro and Saburo-ACC compare-COND Taro-TOP height-NOM takai ga, Jiro-wa se-ga hikuku-te Saburo-wa dotirademo nai. tall but Jiro-TOP height-NOM short-and Saburo-TOP either NEG ‘If Taro, Jiro and Saburo are compared, Taro is tall, but Jiro is short and Saburo is neither (tall or short.)’

4.2. When the Order Among Frame Phrases Matters

This subsection discusses cases where there are multiple Frame Phrases that modify a main clause. Nothing in Hohaus’ (2015) analysis prevents multiple frame phrases from appearing in a sentence. For instance, it is possible to have both a conditional phrase and a *yorimo*-phrase in one sentence as shown in (36). The exact syntactic relation among the two frame phrases is not yet clear, but this study tentatively assumes that FrameP\(_1\) is located higher than FrameP\(_2\) in the LF structure.

(36) [\text{FrameP}1 Mary to John-no tensuu-o kurabru-to ], Mary and John-GEN test.score-ACC compare-COND [RC Mary-ga to-tta tensuu]-wa [\text{FrameP}2 John yorimo] takai. Mary-NOM obtain-PAST test.score-TOP John YORIMO high ‘If the test scores of Mary and John are compared, the one obtained by Mary is higher than (that of) John.’

(37)

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{FrameP}_1 & 3 \\
\text{FrameP}_2 & 3 \\
\text{DegP} & 3 \\
\text{TP} & 6 \\
\end{array}
\]

A reason to assume the above structure is as follows. Intuitively speaking, the relevant situation for comparison is gradually narrowed down by each frame phrase. In other words, the following process seems to be occurring: FrameP\(_1\) ‘if the test scores of Mary and John are compared’ first provides a presupposition that there is a general degree relation among Mary’s test score and that of John in a minimal situation. Then FrameP\(_2\) ‘John YORIMO’ further narrows the situation down to one where there is a > (larger-than-relation) between John and another individual.

Another example that showcases potentially layered frame phrases is given in (38), which has three *yorimo*-phrases. Importantly, there is an order among the three *yorimo*-phrases.

\(^{13}\)There are two other possible sources of the difference between (26) and (32). One is the type of conditional morphemes. *-reba* is adopted in (26), whereas *-to* is adopted in (32). Another possible source is the fact that the matrix subject *Taro* is overtly mentioned in the frame phrase in (32), whereas it is not in (26). These issues will be left for further research.
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The sentence is well-formed only in a situation where the test scores of the three boys mentioned in the yorimo-phrase are ordered as in (39), namely Chris’ test score is the best, Bill’s is the second best, and John’s is the worst. The sentence sounds as if three comparisons are made step by step. First, Mary’s test score is better than John’s. Then, it is even better than Bill’s. Finally, it is further better than Chris’. This intuition can be captured by assuming that the second and the third frame phrase narrow down a minimal situation given by the first frame phrase. This section presented two cases of contextual comparisons in Japanese that are likely to be captured by Hohaus’ (2015) framework. Nevertheless, the discussions remain intuitive descriptions at this moment; a formal analysis is yet to be provided.

(38) [RC Mary-ga to-tta tensuu]-wa [FrameP1 John yorimo] Mary-NOM obtain-PAST test.score-TOP John YORIMO
[FrameP2 Bill yorimo] [FrameP3 Chris yorimo] takai. Bill YORIMO Chris YORIMO high
‘The test score that Mary obtained is higher than (that of) John, Bill, or Chris.’
(39) Chris’ test score > Bill’s test score > John’s test score

5. Conclusion

This study discussed contextual comparison in English and Japanese with various frame phrases. Degree relations presupposed by frame phrases were found to have rich variations. The relations between frame phrases and their main clauses are rule-governed as predicted by Hohaus’ (2015) framework; an asserted degree relation holds only when it satisfies the presupposition by its frame phrase(s).

The contribution of this study is that it has expanded the scope of Hohaus’ (2015) framework to so-called implicit comparisons and enriched the framework by adding various types of frame phrases that bring different types of degree relations.

Varieties of contextual comparisons have been largely neglected in the literature. Therefore, there is great room left for further investigation. The data in Section 5 are just the tip of the iceberg. Further investigation of contextual comparisons will provide another dimension to the semantic research of comparatives.

References


