NON-STANDARD COMPARATIVES

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Outline of the talk

General idea:
Comparative expressions typically take degrees as their arguments, but can also be used without degrees.
A prototypical example is the French aussi, operating on degrees in:
a. *Pierre est aussi grand que Jean* (Pierre is as tall as Jean).
But also used without any degree in:
b. *Pierre est américain aussi.* (Pierre is American too).

I will claim that this is not an accident, and that there are good arguments for introducing a more abstract view of comparison taking *a* and *b* as two kinds of comparisons.
b. exemplifies what is called non-standard comparative in the title.

My arguments for a comparative analysis of these items, more often analysed as “additive particles” or “presupposition triggers” will be based on French data.
As usual I will try to show that this analysis is supported by the data, offers a simplification of the grammar, and makes nice predictions.
Plan

First I will consider comparatives (more, less, as) in comparative constructions:

A is (neg) COMP pred than B

Ex: Rostropovitch n’est pas plus américain que Kubrick
R. is not more American than K.

Then I will consider the same expressions in reduced structures:

A is COMP PRED
Ex: Rostropovitch n’est pas plus américain
R. is not more American

My main objective is to show that if we extend a comparative analysis, we can derive the semantics of comparative constructions, and the discourse constraints on reduced structure.
Standard comparatives

Comparative expressions:

(1) Pierre est **plus (moins, aussi)** grand que Jean
   Pierre is more (less, as) tall than Jean

(2) Pierre travaille **comme** Jean
   Pierre works like Jean

Standard analyses:

Comparative expressions assert a relation between degrees w.r.t. a dimension in (1).

Pierre’s height and John’s height are in the relation >, <, =

In (2) the comparative expression asserts a relation (of identity) between some property of the activities.

Pierre’s work and John’s work are identical w.r.t. an unspecified dimension.

Cresswell (76), Klein (80), Bierwisch (89), Von Stechow (84), Kennedy (2001)
Non-standard comparatives (1)

Consider some of these items in a slightly different context:

(2) Pierre est grand aussi
    Pierre is tall-aussi

    Meaning : Pierre is tall

In this use, *aussi* is often analyzed as a discourse connective or as a presuppositon trigger.

Observation:

1. It is the same item “aussi” than in standard comparative.

2. It is not a mere lexical “accident”. A synonym of *aussi* in French is *également*, and *également* has exactly the same meaning in similar contexts:

(3) Pierre est grand également
    Pierre is tall-également
Non-standard comparatives (2)

*Comme* has also a similar use:

(4) Pierre est français comme moi.  
Pierre is French like me.  
Meaning: Pierre is French and the same is true for me.

What makes these uses “non-standard”:

- they can combine with non-gradable predicates

- their paraphrase is not as for standard comparatives:

  X has the property P to the same degree than Y  
  X accomplishes the action P is the same (manner, quantity) than Y

-the usual paraphrase of non-standard comparatives is:

  having the property P is also true of Y  
  accomplishing the action P is also true of Y
Invitation to a comparative analysis?

1. The systematic (if not exhaustive) identity of the lexical items used for both interpretations.

2. The nature of the paraphrase offered for the non-standard use, which looks like a comparison of equality relating truth values.
   
   (5) Pierre est grand. Jean aussi.
   
   (6) Pierre est grand. C’est aussi vrai de Jean
       Pierre is tall. This is also true for John

3. The apparent syntax/semantic correlation

   Non-standard are perceived as relating truth values of whole clauses. They are typically associated by syntax and intonation to wide scope, and relation from sentence to sentence.

   Non-standard for instance is the only interpretation accessible for:
   - some comparatives in final position: Jean est grand aussi
   - some comparatives in reduced sentences: Jean aussi
Utility of a comparative analysis

1. Capturing a generalization

   In a sense, to explain why the same material is used for both interpretations.

2. To simplify the grammar by deriving the complex constraints on the so-called “discourse connectives or “presupposition” triggers from their comparative nature.

   Note that they are non-standard objects in both theories.

   They would be discourse connectives without any meaning of their own.

   For integrating them in the theory of presuppositions some special stories are needed (see Zeevat)
Comparative constructions with adjectives

Let us call “comparative constructions“ structures like:

(7) Jean est plus grand que Pierre
    Jean n’est pas plus grand que Pierre

We will have to contrast this context with “reduced comparatives” like:

(8) Jean est plus grand
    Jean n’est pas plus grand.

In comparative constructions, *than* is present, and in the simplest case, is followed by an NP.

Comparative constructions are self-contained, (no anaphoric nor presuppositional context dependency).

Reduced comparatives are context dependent.
Non-standard comparatives in comparative constructions

Corblin (2005) discusses examples like (9):

(9) Rostropovich n’est pas plus américain que Kubrick
Rostropovich-is not more-American than Kubrick.

• This sentence is self-contained, there is no constraint on its context.
• This is a (negative) comparative construction.
• The modified adjective (*américain*) is not gradable.
• The sentence is perfect in any register of French.
• Its preferred reading is:

R is not American and K. is not American.

with *Americain* = having the American citizenship.
Comparing non-gradables

Combining synonymous of *plus (more)* with negation will produce the same effect:

(10) Rostropovich n’est *pas davantage* américain que Kubrick
    Rostropovich is not more American than Kubrick

A typical (emphatic) way of asserting that \( P \) is false is to assert:

\[
P \text{ pas plus que } Q
\]

“\( P \) no more than \( Q \)”

\( Q \) being something obviously false like: “I am the Pope”.

(11) Kubrick n’est pas plus américain que moi pape.
    Kubrick-is not more-American than me Pope

The inescapable observation is that comparative expressions like *plus* are licensed, under negation, with non gradable predicates like: to be an American citizen. The construction is interpreted as a commitment to the falsity of both propositions.
Comparatives and gradable predicates

It is important to check if this non-standard interpretation (the predicate is equally false of both) exists only for non-gradable predicates. If it were so, one could suspect some sort of “coercion” of an otherwise ill-formed structure.

Take a gradable predicate like *grand* in a comparative construction.

(12) Jean n’est pas grand, et Pierre ne l’est pas plus que Jean
    Jean is not tall, and Pierre is not-more-tall than Jean.

There are two interpretations for the second conjunct of (12):

A - Pierre is not taller than Jean

B - Pierre is not tall either (Nothing is implied concerning their relative size).

The ambiguity is even stronger for the reduced version:

(13) Jean n’est pas grand, et Pierre ne l’est pas davantage
    Jean is not tall, and Pierre is not-more-tall than Jean.

Conclusion: the non standard interpretation can emerge even with gradable predicates.
The contrast between positive and negative sentences

In the positive version:

(14) Pierre est plus Américain que moi.
     Pierre is more American than me

The “coercion” non-gradable $>$ gradable is obligatory.
(14) means something like: Pierre is closer to the typical, ideal, American citizen than me.
   (our citizenship is irrelevant).

In the negative version:

(15) Pierre n’est pas plus Américain que moi.
     Pierre is-not-more-American than me

The negative version of the “gradable” interpretation of (14) is not impossible, but
the preferred interpretation is: Pierre is not American and I am not.

This interpretation is about citizenship (non-gradable).
Gradables/non-gradables

Hypothesis:

Gradable predicates relates individuals and properties by way of degrees and truth values.

Non-gradable predicates relates individuals and properties by way of truth values.

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
A & tall & V/F \\
 & & degree \\
A & american & V/F
\end{array}
\]

Scan a set with tall, you will end with a subset and a partial order.

Scan a set with american, you will end up with a subset.
Comparing with and without degrees

Comparing is to state the relation holding between the values returned by the projection of two individuals onto a given property.

A comparative statement is achieved by means of the basic relations:

\[ = \quad (\text{as}), \]
\[ > \quad (\text{more}), \]
\[ < \quad (\text{less}). \]

more and less are only defined for degrees.

as can operate on degrees (same degree) and truth values (same truth value).

\[ x \text{ is as } A \text{ than } y \quad = \quad \text{A makes no difference between } x \text{ and } y. \]

Prediction:

more and less are incompatible with non-gradable properties.

as should be compatible with non-gradable properties.
Negative versions of comparatives: degrees and truth values

degrees
not more $\leq$
not less $\geq$

What meaning, if any, of combining negative versions with truth values?

A reasonable assumption is:
If admissible with the negative version the undefined meanings are ruled out:

not more $(>)$ or $(\geq) =$
not less $(<)$ or $(\leq) =$

To be no more A than to be as A as
To be no less A than to be as A as

Prediction:
no more and no less should be compatible with non-gradable predicates
with the meaning:
x is no more (less) A than y =
( x is A ) and (y is A) are both true or both false.
Comparatives : a matter of scope?

Non-gradable predicates are just used as a strong test:

\[
\begin{align*}
A \text{ is more (less) } X \text{ than } B & \quad \text{out} \quad \text{coercion} \\
A \text{ is not more (less) } X \text{ than } B & \quad \text{OK} \quad \text{Truth value identity} \\
A \text{ is as } X \text{ than } B & \quad \text{OK} \quad \text{Truth value identity}
\end{align*}
\]

But the general idea is that the difference is a matter of scope:

Both gradable and non-gradable relate individuals and Properties by means of truth values.

- If the scope of a comparative is truth-values (of clauses), then we get NS comparatives. This can happen for gradables and non-gradables.

Gradable predicates relate individual and properties by means of degrees

- If the scope of a comparative is degree (of a property), then we get S comparatives.

We expect thus a correlation between syntactic scope and the contrast S/NS:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wide scope (over the clause)} & \quad \text{NS} \\
\text{Narrow scope (over the degree)} & \quad \text{S}
\end{align*}
\]
Positive version : coercion

For a non-gradable predicate like “American”, any combination with more and less will “coerce” the non-gradable predicate (citizenship) to its gradable version, something like: the typical, ideal American.

(16) Rostropovich est plus américain que Kubrick

(17) Rostropovich est moins américain que Kubrick

(16) and (17) are about the relative position of K and R w.r.t. the typical American

But this is not true for comparatives expressing equality:

(18) Rostropovich est (tout) autant américain que Kubrick
    preferred meaning: both are American citizens.

This is expected in our approach.
Negative versions and equality

Our expectation:
• negative versions and equality should be O.K. with non-gradables.
• they should mean truth value identity.

This is true to a large extent for acceptability in comparative constructions:

(16) R. n’est pas moins (plus) américain que K.  O.K.
(17) R. est tout autant (aussi) américain que K.  O.K.

For meaning, it seems that we have more that mere truth value identity.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pas plus (no more)} & \quad = \text{X is false of both} \\
\text{Pas moins (no less)} & \quad = \text{X is true of both} \\
\text{Également = (as)} & \quad = \text{X is true of both}
\end{align*}
\]

All we expect is truth-value identity.

What we observe is more specific.
Setting the truth value to true or false

What French data show is that different kinds of comparatives come with a specific truth value: true/false.

What is observed is:

*Pas plus, pas davantage, non plus*  
= not more  
Select the value: false

*Pas moins*  
= *not less*  
= *as*  

But one must look carefully at the data for measuring the strength of this preference:

The fact that comparative of equality sets the value to “true” is not undefeasible:

(18) Il est aussi musicien que moi Pape  
He is a as a-music player-as me pope.  
Both are false

(19) Il est aussi musicien que moi professeur  
He is as musician as me professor  
Both may be true
Setting the truth value

The conjunction “comme” offers a similar behavior:

(20) Il est musicien comme moi.
   He is a music player-like-me

   (20) is a very usual way of asserting that he is not a music player, provided that it is well-known that the utterer of (20) is not.

But the very same sentence (20), even with the same intonation, can be a standard way of saying that he is a music player, provided that it is well known that the utterer is a music player.

One may think that the reading “both are false” is an ironic or anti-phrase reading and has nothing to do with semantics.

For pas plus (not more), it is true that the preferred reading is both are false, but there are marginal examples interpreted as both are true:

(21) Il n’est pas plus parisien que moi. Nous sommes tous deux nés à Paris
   He is not more parisian than me. We were both born in Paris

But the repartition pas plus = (both are false)/pas moins (both are true) seems of a different nature.
Setting the truth value: conclusion

Our “deductive” proposal can only predict truth value identity.

What we observe, in addition, is a strong (but, in some cases, defeasible) preference:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not more</th>
<th>pref.</th>
<th>Both are false</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not less</td>
<td>pref.</td>
<td>Both are true</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As</td>
<td>pref.</td>
<td>Both are true</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact that there is some specialization is not surprising considering that the system deduces the same semantics (truth value identity) for any of these lexical combinations.

The fact that we get this specialization and not another one seems intuitively sound, but I have no insight about how to tell a good story on this.
Reduced (standard) comparatives

As explained previously, it is useful to contrast:
• comparative constructions:
  (22) Jean est plus grand que Pierre
• reduced comparatives:
  (23) Jean est plus grand

What makes the difference is that in reduced comparatives, the individual with which a comparison is made is not referred to in the comparative sentence.

Examples of reduced (standard) comparatives:

• Without verbal ellipsis
  (24) Pierre mesure 1,60 m. Jean est plus grand
  (25) Pierre n’est pas grand. Jean ne l’est pas davantage

• With verbal ellipsis
  (26) Pierre mesure 1,60 m. Jean plus.
  (27) Pierre mesure 1,60 m. Jean moins
  (28) Pierre mesure 1,60 m. Jean pas plus
  (29) Pierre mesure 1,60 m. Jean autant
Reduced (non-standard) comparatives?

My proposal: analyzing lexical items often considered as *presuposition triggers/discourse connectives* as non-standard reduced comparatives.
A good test: can we derive from this comparative nature their semantics and their licensing constraints which are notoriously complex and strong?

All the following examples exemplify lexical items which does appear in standard comparatives, used as non-standard.
I include in this list *non plus* without giving the relevant arguments (see Corblin 2005).
• Without verbal ellipsis
  (30) Pierre est venu. Jean est aussi venu.
     Pierre came. Jean-as-came
  (31) Pierre n’est pas venu. Jean n’est pas davantage venu.
     Pierre did not came. Jean did not-more-came
  (32) Pierre a refusé. Jean n’a pas moins refusé.
     Pierre refused. Jean did not-less-refused.

• With verbal ellipsis
  (33) Pierre est venu. Jean aussi
     Pierre n’est pas venu. Jean pas davantage.
  (34) Pierre n’est pas venu. Jean non plus.
     Pierre n’est pas venu. Jean pas plus
An analysis as reduced comparatives.

The basis of the analysis is as follows:

A sentence like:

\[(35) \text{Pierre n’est pas davantage venu} \] (Pierre did not more come)

Is a reduced version of:

\[\text{Pierre n’est pas davantage venu que x} \] (Pierre dit not more come than x)

And we can thus use what we know about the analysis of:

\[\text{Pierre n’est pas davantage venu que Jean} \]

For deriving:

A. the semantics of (35)

B. the requirement on its discourse context.

The same strategy should work for the other items: \textit{aussi, non plus, pas plus, pas moins}.\]
Semantics of reduced comparatives.

Consider again

(35) *Pierre n’est pas davantage venu* (Pierre did not more come)

What it means is: *come (Pierre)* has the same truth value than *come (x)*

(36) *Pierre aussi est venu* (Pierre came too)

What it means is: *come (Pierre)* has the same truth value than *come (x)*

This is a mere application of the analysis as non-standard comparatives.

Note: in my analysis, the scope of the negation of (35) is the comparative, not the predicate.

This means that there is no inference from (A) to (B):

(A) *Pierre n’est pas davantage venu*          (B) *Pierre n’est pas venu*

And this is a good prediction since although there is a negation too in (37), the inference is false:

(37) *Pierre n’est pas moins venu*          (implies *Pierre came*)

Pierre did not less come
Constraints on reduced comparatives

The constraints on the context of these sentences are very strong.

• With verbal ellipsis, there is a strict polarity identity requirement.

(35) Je t’aime. #Moi non plus
     I love you. # Me-no more (A famous joke and the title of a song)

(36) Je ne t’aime pas. #Moi aussi
     I do not love you.# Me-as.

• Without verbal ellipsis

The constraints are much more difficult to state adequately, and I cannot go into the details.
Let us focus on very simple cases:

\[Pierre aussi est venu\] is felicitous if the previous sentence is:
\[x \neq Pierre\] est venu.

This constraint is familiar from the literature on too.

I will try to argue that these constraints are a consequence of these sentences being reduced comparatives.
A look at standard reduced comparatives

Reduced standard comparatives must find in their context the compared individual.

(37) **Pierre** mesure 1m,60. Jean est plus grand
Pierre is 1.60m tall. Jean is taller

Jean est plus grand = Jean est plus grand (que X)
X to be found in the context.

But to get an X is not enough :

(38) Pierre est célibataire. (?) Jean n’est pas plus grand.
Pierre is a bachelor. Jean is not taller.

And this is a property of *reduced* comparatives since (39) is fine :

(39) Pierre est célibataire. Jean n’est pas plus grand que lui
Pierre is a bachelor. Jean is not taller than him.
Good contexts for standard reduced comparatives

Among good contexts are (40) and (41):

(40) Pierre mesure 1,80. Jean n’est pas plus grand.
    Pierre is 1,80 meters tall. Jean is not taller
(41) Marie est de petite taille. Jean n’est pas plus grand.
    Marie is small. Jean is not taller.

Discourse constraint:
    in *Y is more pred*, the reduced comparative sentence relates the value for *Y*
    of the dimension underlying *pred*, to the value returned by *pred* for an *X* of the context.

    Constraint: the previous sentence must give an evaluation for that *X* of the *same dimension*.
    In (40)-(41) the relevant dimension is the size.

Motivation: comparatives can be reduced iff the discourse context has already made salient the evaluation
    of the intended individual wrt the dimension underlying the predicate.
    If the discourse does not provide this, the comparative should not be reduced and we use
    a comparative construction.
Corresponding constraint for non-standard comparatives?

Take as a starting point the constraint:
The previous sentence of a reduced comparative $Y$ is $COMP \ pred$ (than $X$) should evaluate for an individual $X$ the dimension underlying $pred$.

In my view, non-standard comparatives operate on the truth value of $pred$, and not on their degree.

A natural version of the constraint for non-standard comparatives is:
the previous sentence should state whether or not $pred$ holds of $X$.

This leaves open two alternatives for the previous sentence:

$$
X \ pred \\
X \neg pred
$$

What we observe is more specific: depending on the type of the comparative, either a sentence implying $X$-$pred$, or a sentence implying $X$-$\neg pred$ is required.

Pierre n’est pas venu. #Jean aussi est venu
Pierre est venu.# Jean n’est pas plus venu.
Choosing the right alternative

But what is observed is in fact a prediction of the analysis:

Just take the semantics of *pas plus* (not more) already used for comparative *constructions*:

(42) Pierre n’est pas plus venu que Jean

\[ \text{Come (Pierre)} \& \text{ come (Jean)} \]

have the same truth value.

Strong preference : Both are false.

What is the specificity of *reduced* comparatives like:

(43) Pierre n’est pas plus venu

If we are right, they need a previous *sentence* asserting either *come (X)*, or *not come (X).*

In other word, the truth value of *come (X)* will be decided when processing the reduce comparative.

\[ X \text{ est venu. Pierre n’est pas plus venu.} \]

\[ \text{come (X).} \quad \text{Come (Pierre)} \& \text{ come (X)} \quad \text{are both false} \quad \text{ill formed since come (X)} \]

\[ X \text{ n’est pas venu. Pierre n’est pas plus venu} \]

\[ \neg \text{come (X).} \quad \text{Come(Pierre)} \& \text{ comme (X)} \quad \text{are both false} \quad \text{O.K. since } \neg \text{come (X)} \]
Predictions

There are two kinds of comparatives in the structure X-comparative-pred

• Both True (BT)
  X-pred & Y-pred are both true. aussi, pas moins
• Both False (BF)
  X-pred & Y-pred are both false pas plus

Reduced BT are licensed if the previous sentence implies : Y-pred
Reduced BF are licensed if the previous sentence implies : Y¬-pred.

This is exactly what is observed:

Pierre n’est pas venu. #Jean aussi
Pierre est venu. Jean aussi.
Pierre est venu. #Jean pas plus
Pierre n’est pas venu. Jean pas plus.

Note that for pas moins, the prediction is non-trivial and correct:
Pierre n’est pas venu. # Jean n’est pas moins venu.
Pierre est venu. Jean n’est pas moins venu.
CONCLUSION (1)

French offers a good support for a comparative analysis of these so-called ”additive particles” or “presupposition triggers” based on the lexical identity of the morphemes and on the observed properties predictable on the basis of such an analysis.

As for data, the main problem is that there are some gaps:
Some combinations are not acceptable although our speculative proposal would predict that they should be, and predicts how they should be interpreted:
Consider:

(44) Pierre n’est pas aussi Français que moi
   Pierre is not as French as me.

Only interpretation = coercion. Pierre is not as typical as me as a French man.

Prediction : not identical w.r.t. Truth value should mean . One is false, the other is true.

But (44) cannot be so interpreted and coercion is obligatory.

It might be interesting to investigate the nature of this strong gap.
CONCLUSION (2)

Some other gaps are, are in my view less important and less conclusive.

The claim is that comparative lexical expressions used in standard comparatives are accessible for being used in non-standard comparatives. The claim is not that any of them should be.

A plausible reason for explaining that not any of them will be used is that what NS comparative can express is very poor: truth value identity.

If one looks at other languages, what should be checked is whether one can find comparative expressions doing the same job about truth values.

My guess is that French data are so systematic that it is worth testing this prediction.
Références

Corblin, F. (2005) "De pas davantage à non plus", dans La syntaxe au coeur de la grammaire, PUR.
Muller observe que l’on peut juxtaposer deux assertions en utilisant des conjonctions dont certaines sont proches des conjonctions de comparaison.

Pierre boit, tout comme Paul.
   de même que Paul
   tout autant que Paul
   ainsi que Paul

Pierre ne boit pas, pas plus que Paul
   pas plus que Paul ne se drogue.
   Muller note que *pas est impossible après ces *ne
Pierre ne boit pas, pas plus que Paul ne se drogue *pas.

Muller note que ce qu’il appelle la double assertion ne se distingue plus guère des comparatives :
   Pierre boit tout autant que Paul.
Muller note que l’énoncé segmenté favorise la double assertion

Il affirme que la double assertion négative est naturelle sans pause

Pierre ne boit pas plus que Paul

Je n’en suis pas sûr.

Muller suppose que les assertions parallèles sont des comparatives dont

Les actants sont, non plus des quantificateurs, mais les prédicats de l’assertion.

Que Pierre boit est tout autant le cas que c’est la cas que Pierre boit.

Pas plus que l’école ne saurait ignore l’écriture, elle ne saurait ignorer…

Muller note que le système s’étend à moins