

The syntax and semantics of comparison

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In this mini-course, we will discuss select topics in the syntax and semantics of comparison. We will pay close attention to compositional interpretation and to the details of cross-linguistic variation. The course will be relevant to students interested in quantification, the semantics of measurement, the structure of adjectives, and the syntax-semantics interface more broadly.

Day 1: Essentials of degree semantics and its morpho-syntactic correlates. The grammar of property concepts, with a close look at Malayalam, a language with no adjectives. Two types of comparative adjectives in the history of Slavic, and their analysis based on property concepts. Implications for the question of how degrees are introduced to gradable adjectives and what the relation between the positive and the comparative forms is.

Day 2: Varieties of “more” across and within languages. Phrasal, clausal and measure phrase comparatives, and links with the scope of “more”. Spanish “de” and “que” comparatives with a single “more”.

Day 3: Absolute and relative interpretations of superlatives, the role of scope, focus and definiteness, and cross-linguistic variation between English and Slavic. Proportional and relative readings of quantity superlatives.