

REGULAR ARTICLE

The Malagasy phrasal comparative

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Abstract

There is no consensus in the literature on the analysis of phrasal comparatives. Both reduced clause analyses, in which the standard phrase contains elided clausal structure, and direct analyses, in which the standard of comparison is a direct complement to the standard marker, have been proposed. This paper argues for a direct analysis of the phrasal comparative in Malagasy, an Austronesian language spoken on the island of Madagascar. Evidence for the direct analysis comes from the lack of overt clausal comparatives, Binding Theory, scope, and Malagasy-specific characteristics of the standard. The conclusion contributes to the rapidly expanding picture of cross-linguistic variation in comparative syntax.

KEYWORDS

comparative, direct analysis, Malagasy, reduction analysis

1 | INTRODUCTION

The cross-linguistic picture of the syntax and semantics of comparatives has expanded rapidly in the last two decades (Beck et al., 2004, 2009; Bhatt & Takahashi, 2011; Bobaljik, 2012; Kennedy, 2009; Pancheva, 2006; others), revealing a complex range of variation and analytical options. In this paper, I contribute to this research with an analysis of the syntax of the comparative construction in Malagasy, a VOS (verb–object–subject) Austronesian language spoken on the island of Madagascar. Although the Malagasy construction in (1) looks superficially like its English counterpart, I argue that the Malagasy comparative should not have the same analysis that is typically offered for English.

- (1) Maditra (kokoa) [noho [ilay zaza]] Rabe
 stubborn more than that child Rabe
 ‘Rabe is more stubborn than that child.’

Some terminology is useful before continuing. In the comparatives in (1) and (2), *ilay zaza* “that child” is the standard of comparison and *Rabe* is the target of comparison, also called the associate or the correlate. *Kokoa* “more” is the comparative morpheme, *maditra* “stubborn” is the gradable predicate, and *noho* “than” is the standard marker. The standard marker and the standard of comparison together form the standard phrase.

- (2)
- | | | | | |
|------------|-------------|-----------|----------|-------------|
| Rabe | is more | stubborn | than | that child. |
| TARGET | COMPARATIVE | GRADABLE | STANDARD | STANDARD |
| OF | MORPHEME | PREDICATE | MARKER | OF |
| COMPARISON | | | | COMPARISON |

To first approximation, two types of comparatives predominate cross-linguistically. A clausal comparative is a comparative in which the standard, italicized in (3) and (4), shows clausal syntax:

- (3)
- a. Mary is taller than *John is*.

b. Sue bought more candy than *she could eat*.
- (4)
- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------|
| Marija je viša nego što je Petar | Serbo-Croatian |
| Maria is taller than what is Peter | |
| ‘Maria is taller than Peter is.’ | |
| (Pancheva 2006: 10, (23a)) | |

A widely accepted analysis of clausal comparatives (Bresnan, 1973; Heim, 2000) is that the complement to the standard marker is a complementizer phrase (CP) with a degree operator (Op) in spec,CP binding a degree variable (*d*) in the predicate. Some portion of the clause is then deleted under identity with antecedent material, as shown in (5). Deleted material is contained in angled brackets here and below.

- (5)
- a. Mary is taller [than [CP Op_i [John is *d_i*-tall]]]

b. Mary is taller [than [CP Op_i [John is <*d_i*-tall>]]]

In contrast, a phrasal comparative is one in which the surface standard is a phrase:

- (6)
- a. Mary is taller than *John*.

b. Sue talked more to Bill than *to Tom*.
- (7)
- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| Anna je viša nego Tanja | Serbo-Croatian |
| Anna is taller than Tanja | |
| ‘Anna is taller than Tanja.’ | |
| (Pancheva 2006: 10, (21a)) | |

Unlike with clausal comparatives, there is no consensus on the analysis of phrasal comparatives (Lechner, 2021, others), and it may be the case that Universal Grammar makes available more than one analysis. This paper will consider two families of analysis for phrasal comparatives: reduction analysis (RA) and direct analysis (DA).

Under an RA (Bresnan, 1973; Chomsky, 1965; Hazout, 1995; Lechner, 2004; Lees, 1961; Merchant, 2009; Pancheva, 2006; others), phrasal comparatives have a covert clausal structure, much as in clausal comparatives. The clausal is greatly reduced by ellipsis (8).

- (8)
- Mary is taller [than [CP Op_i [John <is *d_i*-tall>]]]

Under a DA (Bhatt & Takahashi, 2011; Brame, 1983; Hankamer, 1973; Hoeksema, 1983; Kennedy, 1999; Napoli, 1983; others), the standard is a simple phrase, that is, a determiner phrase (DP), and no ellipsis is involved:

- (9) Mary is taller [than [_{DP} John]]

Within this analytical context, this paper addresses the analysis of the Malagasy phrasal comparative. The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents relevant aspects of Malagasy morphosyntax and the comparative construction. Section 2.2 develops concrete instantiations of DA and RA for Malagasy. Section 3 provides argumentation in favor of a DA. Section 4 considers additional data that are apparently problematic for the DA proposal and suggests that they ultimately are not. Section 5 summarizes.

2 | MALAGASY MORPHOSYNTAX AND COMPARATIVES

Malagasy is an Austronesian language spoken by over 18 million people on the island of Madagascar. It is most closely related to Ma'anyan spoken in Kalimantan, Indonesia. This section provides the necessary background on Malagasy morphosyntax and the Malagasy comparative construction. I discuss clause structure in Section 2.1. Sections 2.2 and 2.3 present two well-known and relevant properties of Malagasy clauses: morphosyntactic requirements on the clause-final nominal and extraction restrictions. The final two subsections turn to the comparative construction. Section 2.4 describes the morphosyntax of ordinary comparatives in which the standard of comparison is an individual. Section 2.5 briefly introduces comparatives in which the standard names a degree.

2.1 | Clause structure

Malagasy is traditionally described as a VOS language, as seen in (10a). More accurately, Malagasy is a predicate-initial language as nonverbal clauses also show this word order (10b–d).¹

- (10) a. [Niantso mpiasa]_{VP} i Mery
 PAST.call worker Mary
 ‘Mary called the worker.’
 b. [Vorona ratsy feo]_{NP} ny goaika
 bird bad voice DET crow
 ‘The crow is a bird with an ugly voice.’
 c. [Faly amin’ ny zanany]_{AP} Rasoa
 happy PREP DET child.3SG.GEN Rasoa
 ‘Rasoa is proud of her children.’
 d. [Any an-tsena]_{PP} Rakoto
 LOC PREP-market Rakoto
 ‘Rakoto is at the market.’

¹I follow Leipzig glossing abbreviations, with the following additions: AT—actor topic voice, TT—theme topic voice, CT—circumstantial topic voice. Examples come from my own field work unless otherwise indicated.

The verbal picture and the use of the term “subject” are complicated by Malagasy’s Philippine-style voicing system. Within a verbal predicate, the default constituent order is verb, followed by the subject, object, obliques, and adjuncts. From within this predicate, one element, often called the trigger (Law, 2006; Pearson, 2000; Schachter, 1993), externalizes to a clause-final position. Voice morphology on the verb registers the grammatical role of the trigger, underlined in some of the examples below.

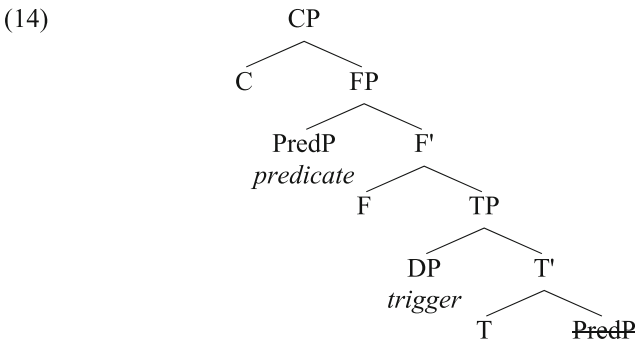
Malagasy has three voices. In the actor topic voice (AT), the trigger is the subject (11). In the theme topic voice (TT), the trigger is the object (12). In the circumstantial topic voice (CT), the trigger is an oblique or adjunct (13). CT can be used to externalize a wide range of elements, including place, time, goal, cause, means, manner, instrument, price, benefactive, and locative phrases (Paul, 2000; Rajemisa-Raolison, 1966). In nonactor topic clauses (12) and (13), the subject appears immediately after the verb inside the predicate. It is phonologically “bonded” to the verb, indicated in the orthography by an apostrophe or hyphen.

- (11) N-i-antso mpiasa i Mery
 PAST-AT-call worker Mary
 ‘Mary called the worker.’
- (12) N-antso-in’ i Mery ny mpiasa
 PAST-call-TT Mary the worker
 ‘Mary called the worker.’
- (13) a. N-i-antso-an’ i Mery mpiasa ny kiririoka
 PAST-CT-call-CT Mery worker the whistle
 ‘Mary called the worker with the whistle.’
 b. N-an-droso-an- dRaso vary ny vahiny
 PAST-CT-serve-CT Raso rice the guests
 ‘Raso served rice to the guests.’
 c. I-toer-an’ ny lehilahy ity trano ity
 CT-live-CT the man DEM house DEM
 ‘The man lives in this house.’

In the traditional view (Dahl, 1996; Guilfoyle et al., 1992; Keenan, 1976, 1995; Paul, 2000; Randriamasimanana, 1986; others), the trigger is the subject of the clause and the nonactor topic voices are parallel to familiar passives that advance nonsubjects to the canonical subject position. This yields a description of (10a) as VOS. In contrast, more recent approaches to Malagasy voice (notably Pearson, 2001, 2005, 2018) take the trigger to be a topic-like element, with the postverbal noun phrase being the true subject. Under this view, Malagasy is a VSO language, with basic word order distorted by obligatory topicalization. I will not decide between these two views but will continue to call the immediately postverbal agent the subject and the clause-final element the trigger.

Recent analyses have argued or assumed that predicate-initial word order is derived by an operation of predicate fronting (Massam & Smallwood, 1997; Pearson, 2001, 2005, 2018; Rackowski & Travis, 2000; others; see Chung, 2017, for critical discussion). I follow this line of analysis and posit a clause structure as in (14). The predicate fronts to the specifier of a high functional projection, FP. The trigger occupies spec,TP below the fronted predicate. The debate about the status of the trigger as the subject or a topic largely reduces what the label of what I am calling TP is and whether its specifier is an A or A’ position. The answers to these questions are not crucial for

what follows.² The actual immediately postverbal subject is inside the fronted PredP constituent, a claim for which there is much empirical evidence (Keenan, 1995).



2.2 | Trigger restrictions

The trigger is subject to certain restrictions, which will be relevant in the discussion of comparatives. In particular, the trigger must be nominal, appears in the nominative case, and must occur with an overt determiner:

- (15) *Trigger restrictions*
- must be nominal
 - bear nominative case
 - must have an overt determiner

As with English subjects, Malagasy triggers are typically nominal. Even though circumstantial topic morphology can be used to advance a wide range of elements to the trigger position, these elements must be nominal. Prepositional phrases (PPs) (16a), adverb phrases (16b), and clausal adverbials (16c) are impossible triggers.

- (16) a. *Nividiana-ko vary [tamin' ny zoma]_{PP}
 bought.CT-1SG.GEN rice PREP DET Friday
 ('I bought rice on Friday.')
- (Paul 2000: 92, (4d))
- b. *Itenenan' i Bozy [mafy]_{AdvP}
 speak.CT Bozy hard
 ('Bozy speaks loudly.')
- c. *Itsanganan- dRabe [mihinana akoho]_{VP}
 stand.CT Rabe eat.AT chicken
 ('Rabe stands while eating chicken.')

The Malagasy pronominal system recognizes three cases: accusative, genitive, and nominative (see Keenan, 1976; Pearson, 2018; Zribi-Hertz & Mbolatianavalona, 1999). Accusative case is

²Pearson (2005, 2018), for example, calls TP Top(ic)P. This requires that the fronted phrase in spec,FP be a larger constituent, TP in those works. The labeling of these projections impacts the naming of the morphological cases in Malagasy. See Pearson (2018) for further discussion. I believe that these variations are largely a matter of terminology, not impacting the analysis of comparatives.

used with objects. Genitive case is used for possessors and subjects. Objects of prepositions are idiosyncratically accusative or genitive (but see below). Nominative case is reserved for triggers as well as predicates, modified pronouns, and noninitial conjuncts in conjoined noun phrases (Pearson, 2001, 2018). Pearson (2005) proposes that nominative is a default case used when a noun phrase does not have a Case feature. Case is generally unmarked on nonpronominals.³

Finally, there is an unusual requirement that triggers have an overt prenominal determiner (Keenan, 1976, 2008; Law, 2006; Paul, 2000, 2009; Pearson, 2001; and others). A range of elements counts as determiners. Names may have the determiner *i* or the incorporated determiner *Ra-*, as in *i Soa/Rasoa*. Pronouns count as determiners. There are also demonstrative determiners such as *ilay* ‘that.’ Lastly, there is the default determiner *ny*, which is often translated as ‘the’ but does not necessarily encode definiteness (Paul, 2009). Triggers with an appropriate determiner are in (17). If such triggers are missing a determiner, the sentences are ungrammatical (18).

- (17) Nihomehy {Ra-soa, izy, ilay zaza, ny zanan-dRasoa}
 laughed.AT DET-NAME 3SG.NOM DEM child DET child-Rasoa
 ‘Rasoa/She/That child/Rasoa’s child laughed.’
- (18) *Nihomehy {zaza, zanan-dRasoa}
 laughed.AT child child-Rasoa
 (‘A child/Rasoa’s child laughed.’)

Law (2006) discusses that this restriction is not clearly related to definiteness or specificity, citing examples as in (19). The underlined trigger must have a determiner but is not interpreted as definite. In object position, the italicized, semantically equivalent indefinite nominal, ‘a place where children can play,’ can lack a determiner.

- (19) Ilainay ny kianja filalaovana, satria tsy manana *toerana afahan’*
 need.TT.1PL.GEN DET playground because NEG have place can.CT
ny ankizy milalao izahay
 DET children play 1PL.EXCL.NOM
 ‘We need a playground, because we don’t have any place where children can play.’
 (Law 2006: 162, (26d))

The source of this requirement is as yet unclear (see Keenan, 2008; Law, 2006; Paul, 2009) and I will not attempt to characterize it further.

2.3 | Extraction restrictions

Malagasy is well known for its restriction on extraction that only triggers can undergo A’ movement (Keenan, 1976; MacLaughlin, 1995; Paul, 2000, 2001; Sabel, 2002; and others):

- (20) *Malagasy extraction restriction*
 Only triggers can undergo A’ movement

³The accusative marker *an’* is used before proper nouns, certain kinship terms, and, optionally, before noun phrases beginning with a demonstrative determiner (Rajemisa-Raolison, 1966, 35).

(20) holds for all known overt A' movement constructions, including wh-questions and relative clauses.⁴ The relative clause data below from Keenan (2008) illustrates the robust generalization that only triggers can relativize. From the actor topic voice clause in (21a), only the agent trigger can be relativized (21b). To relativize the theme, the verb must be in the theme topic voice (22). To relativize the oblique, the verb must be in the circumstantial topic voice (23). Other verbal voice forms would be ungrammatical.

- (21) a. Manasa lamba amin' io savony io ny tovolahy
 wash.AT clothes with DEM soap DEM DET young.man
 'The young man is washing the clothes with that soap.'
 b. ny tovolahy (izay) manasa lamba amin' io savony io
 DET young.man REL wash.AT clothes with DEM soap DEM
 'the young man who is washing the clothes with that soap'
- (22) ny lamba (izay) sasan' ny tovolahy amin' io savony io
 DET clothes REL wash.TT DET young.man with DEM soap DEM
 'the clothes that are being washed by the young man with that soap'
- (23) ny savony (izay) anasan' ny tovolahy lamba
 DET clothes REL wash.CT DET young.man clothes
 'the soap that the young man is washing clothes with'

I will assume that this generalization also holds of novel overt A' movement operations.

2.4 | Ordinary comparatives

The Malagasy comparative looks superficially similar to its English phrasal counterpart, modulo predicate-initial word order⁵:

- (24) a. Lava (kokoa) noho Rasoa Rabe
 tall more than Rasoa Rabe
 'Rabe is taller than Rasoa.'
 b. Sarotra (kokoa) [noho [ny teny anglisy]]_{PP} ny teny gasy
 difficult more than DET language English DET language Malagasy
 'Malagasy is more difficult than English.'
 c. Nividy boky betsaka (kokoa) noho Rasoa Rabe
 bought book many more than Rasoa Rabe
 'Rabe bought more books than Rasoa.'
 d. Nividy laoranjy betsaka (kokoa) noho ny akondro Rabe
 bought orange many more than DET banana Rabe
 'Rabe bought more oranges than bananas.'

⁴Some adjuncts can be wh-questioned without first becoming triggers (Keenan, 1976; Paul, 2000, 2001; Pearson, 2001; others). This will not be relevant for what follows.

⁵Henceforth, unmarked verbs are in the actor topic voice (AT) form.

The comparative morpheme *kokoa* is roughly equivalent to “more” and the standard marker is *noho* “than.” *Kokoa* is generally optional when the standard phrase is present, although frequently preferred; otherwise, it is required. An adjective on its own cannot be interpreted as comparative:

- (25) a. Lava Rabe
tall Rabe
'Rabe is tall.', *'Rabe is taller.'
b. Lava kokoa Rabe
tall more Rabe
'Rabe is taller.'

I will assume that *noho* is a preposition and that *noho* and the standard form a PP, as explicitly bracketed in (24b). The standard, when it is pronominal, must be in the nominative case (26). This is unusual in that most prepositions in Malagasy are followed by a genitive or accusative nominal.⁶ I return to this fact below.

- (26) Lava noho izy/*azy/*-ny aho
tall than 3SG.NOM/3SG.ACC/3SG.GEN 1SG.NOM
'I am taller than him.'

The standard phrase typically occurs in one of two positions: it appears either at the right edge of the predicate, as in the examples above, or at the end of the clause. Both options are shown in (27). I assume that the predicate-internal position is the canonical position, and that the clause-final position is derived via extraposition, which Potsdam (2021) argues is an operation at Phonological Form (PF) with no syntactic consequences. I will not be concerned with the analysis of extraposition here, although a number of examples below show the standard phrase in the clause-final position.

- (27) Lava kokoa (noho Raso'a) Rabe (noho Raso'a)
tall more than Raso'a Rabe than Raso'a
'Rabe is taller than Raso'a.'

Given simple examples like (27) and the clause structure developed above, this predicate-final position is underdetermined and corresponds to two possible positions. The standard phrase could be inside a degree phrase forming a constituent with the gradable predicate and the comparative morpheme (if it is present), and/or it could be right adjoined to the fronted predicate, not forming a constituent with the gradable predicate. The placement of the standard phrase in ditransitives reveals that only the former option is available.

Word order in ditransitive predicates is fixed as V DP PP:

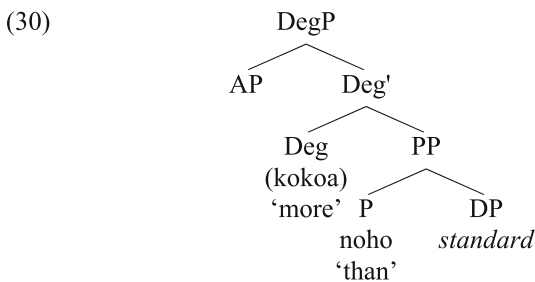
- (28) a. Nanisy sira tao amin' ny lasopy Raso'a
put salt LOC PREP DET soup Raso'a
'Raso'a put salt in the soup.'
b. *Nanisy tao amin' ny lasopy (ny) sira Raso'a
put LOC PREP DET soup DET salt Raso'a

⁶Two other preposition-like elements take nominative complements: *afa-tsy* “except” and *toy* “like” (Rajemisa-Raolison, 1966, 145).

In comparatives involving ditransitives in which the direct object is the target of comparison, this basic word order must be maintained, and the standard phrase must appear adjacent to the target, (29a), where I assume that it forms a constituent with the gradable predicate inside the nominal object, as bracketed. The standard phrase cannot be separated from the gradable predicate and follow the PP (29b), nor can the two arguments be reversed (29c).⁷

- (29) a. Nanisy [sira betsaka kokoa noho ny sakay]
 put salt much more than DET chili.pepper
 tao amin' ny lasopy Raso
 LOC PREP DET soup Raso
 'Raso put more salt than chili pepper in the soup.'
 b. *Nanisy sira betsaka kokoa tao amin' ny lasopy
 put salt much more LOC PREP DET soup
 noho ny sakay Raso
 than DET chili.pepper Raso
 c. *Nanisy tao amin' ny lasopy
 put LOC PREP DET soup
 (ny) sira betsaka kokoa noho ny saka Raso
 DET salt much more than DET chili.pepper Raso

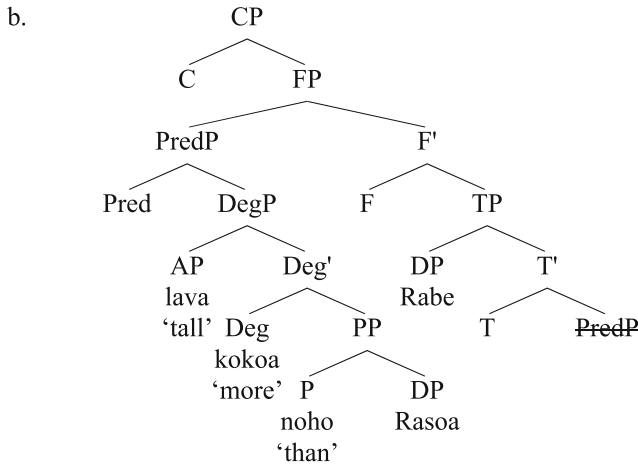
The traditional assumption is that the standard phrase forms a constituent with the comparative morpheme and the gradable predicate as part of a larger phrase, typically a degree phrase (DegP), at some point in the derivation (see Abney, 1987; Bhatt & Pancheva, 2004; Bresnan, 1973; Heim, 2000; Kennedy, 1999; Lechner, 2021, among others). Lechner and Corver (2017) and Lechner (2021) discuss the three dominant proposals in the literature for structurally combining the comparative morpheme (Deg head), the gradable predicate, and the standard phrase. I assume the structure in (30) defended in Lechner's (2001, 2004, 2021) work.



It straightforwardly captures the correct word order in Malagasy. I illustrate the structures of the predicate comparative in (31).

⁷These data have been idealized. Two speakers have infrequently and inconsistently accepted both kinds of examples in (29b, c); however, they are always degraded in comparison to examples that both maintain basic word order and have the standard phrase adjacent to the gradable predicate. A third speaker never accepts such examples. Malagasy does have a mechanism that moves predicate-internal elements rightward within the predicate (Pearson, 2000), although its properties have not been investigated. It is likely that it can apply to heavy constituents and the standard phrase under some conditions.

- (31) a. Lava kokoa noho Raso'a Rabe
 tall more than Raso'a Rabe
 'Rabe is taller than Raso'a.'



2.5 | Degree standard comparatives

In addition to standards that denote an individual, as in the above examples, the standard of comparison may also be a measure phrase. In (32a), the measure phrase is “one meter”; in (32b), it is “the world record.”

- (32) a. Lava kokoa noho [ny iray metatra] Rabe
 tall more than DET one meter Rabe
 'Rabe is taller than one meter.'
- b. Tsy mihazakazaka haingana noho [ny hazakazaka tsara indrindra
 NEG run quickly than DET running good most
 eran-tany] Rabe
 around-earth Rabe
 'Rabe didn't run faster than the world record.'

Such cases are clear phrasal comparatives and do not have a reduced clause analysis (Bhatt & Takahashi, 2011; Pancheva, 2006). I assume that the standard marker *noho* “than” combines directly with a nominal expressing a definite degree of semantic type *d*. This use of *noho* will appear in a number of places below, when an ordinary phrasal comparative is unavailable, and I will refer to it as a degree standard comparative.

Further, more complex examples are given in (33), as ways to express the English clausal comparative *Rabe bought more books than Raso'a bought*. As will be demonstrated below, the standard in Malagasy cannot be a clause as it is in the English translation; however, the comparison can be expressed by making the standard a nominal degree expression. In the examples below, the bracketed standards are expressed as a headless relative clause with an amount/measure interpretation, as paraphrased in the English translations, either “the ones that Raso'a bought” or “what Raso'a bought”. Malagasy has a rich system of headless relative clauses (Ntelitheos, 2006).

- (33) a. Betsaka ny boky novidin- dRabe [noho [ny novidin- dRasoa]]
 many DET book bought.TT Rabe than DET bought.TT Rasoa
 lit. ‘The books Rabe bought are more than the (number/amount of) books that Rasoa bought.’
 ‘Rabe bought more books than Rasoa bought.’
- b. Nividy boky betsaka kokoa Rabe [noho [ny novidin- dRasoa]]
 bought book many more Rabe than DET bought.TT Rasoa
 ‘Rabe bought more books than what Rasoa bought.’

I assume that the syntax of degree standard comparatives does not involve an RA. Because of space considerations then, I do not consider their analysis in any detail, although they will make occasional appearances in the paper as a means to express comparatives that do not have a grammatical expression with an ordinary comparative.

3 | TWO ANALYSES OF PHRASAL COMPARATIVES

This section introduces two syntactic approaches to phrasal comparatives, RA and DA, and develops instantiations appropriate for Malagasy.

3.1 | Reduction analysis

Since the earliest syntactic treatments of comparatives, it has been recognized that some comparatives are reduced clause constructions in which the standard of comparison is introduced inside a degree clause (34) (Bresnan, 1973, 1975; Chomsky, 1965; Hankamer, 1973; Lees, 1961; others). Such clausal comparatives may overtly show evidence of clausal syntax, such as clausal case-marking patterns, inflectional morphosyntax, and predicate-related material.

- (34) Mary is taller than [John is]_{clause}

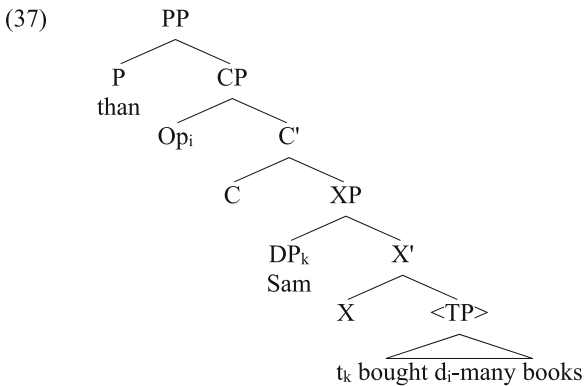
As developed in Bresnan (1973, 1975), Chomsky (1977), and others (see Lechner & Corver, 2017, for an overview), the standard analysis illustrated in (35) has been that there is a gap in the degree clause corresponding to a null degree operator which moves from within the gradable predicate and leaves behind a degree variable *d*. The degree predicate itself is elided through an operation dubbed comparative deletion (Bresnan, 1973, 1975; Lechner & Corver, 2017).

- (35) a. Mary is taller [than [Op_i John is <d_i-tall>]]
 b. Mary has more Beanie Babies [than [Op_i John has <d_i-many> comic books]]

This analysis has been extended to phrasal comparatives. Under such an RA (Bresnan, 1973; Chomsky, 1965; Lechner, 2001; Lechner, 2004; Lees, 1961; and others), phrasal comparatives are also reduced clause constructions, which differ only in the amount of material that is elided. An RA of phrasal comparatives has been defended for English (Lechner, 2001, 2021) and German (Lechner, 2001, 2004). To illustrate, the phrasal comparative in (36) would have the derivation in (37). There is movement of the degree operator Op to spec,CP from the position of the gradable predicate, as well as movement of the standard to a clause-peripheral position, spec,XP (Bhatt & Takahashi, 2011; Merchant, 2009). This permits it to escape deletion. The gradable property is

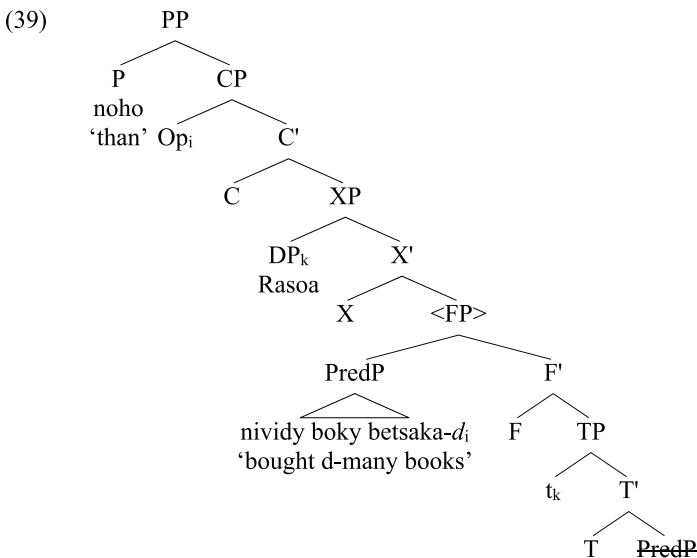
deleted via CD and any additional material is eliminated via a further process called comparative ellipsis (CE; Pinkham, 1985).

(36) Mary bought more books than Sam.



An RA can easily extend to Malagasy, with CP replaced by the Malagasy clause structure in (14), which includes predicate fronting. The example in (38) would receive the analysis in (39).⁸

(38) Nividy boky betsaka (kokoa) noho Rasoa Rabe
 bought book many more than Rasoa Rabe
 'Rabe bought more books than Rasoa.'



RA receives apparent support in Malagasy from two places: (i) the observation that the standard of comparison obeys the trigger restrictions, and (ii) noncomparative uses of *noho* where it

⁸The null operator movement in (39) violates the extraction restriction in (20). I ignore this complication as I will ultimately reject RA.

means “because” and can be followed by a clause. I present these considerations next, although I will ultimately argue that RA is not the correct analysis.

One of the most salient characteristics of the Malagasy comparative that would seem to argue for RA is that the standard is subject to the trigger restrictions from Section 2.2. First, standards must be nominal. The examples in (40) illustrate that the standard cannot be a PP (40a), CP (40b), or AdvP (40c).

- (40) a. *Nandihy kokoa tamin' ny lehilahy noho [tamin' ny vehivavy]_{PP} Rasoa
 danced more PREP the men than PREP DET woman Rasoa
 ('Rasoa danced more with men than with women.')
- b. *Mahagaga kokoa fa nitety an' i Frantsa ny mpanjaka
 surprising more that visit ACC' DET France DET king
 noho [fa nitety an' i Amerika izy]_{CP}
 than that visited ACC' DET America 3SG.NOM
 ('That the king visited France is more surprising than that he visited America.')
- c. *Niasa kokoa omaly noho [androany]_{AdvP} ny mpanampy
 worked more yesterday than today DET servant
 ('The servant worked more yesterday than today.')

Second, it was previously shown that pronominal standards bear nominative case (26). Finally, like triggers, the standard must have an overt determiner. The standards in (41) have an appropriate determiner. Those in (42), in contrast, are unacceptable because they lack an overt determiner. Even when the standard is not interpreted as definite (42b, c), a determiner is still necessary.

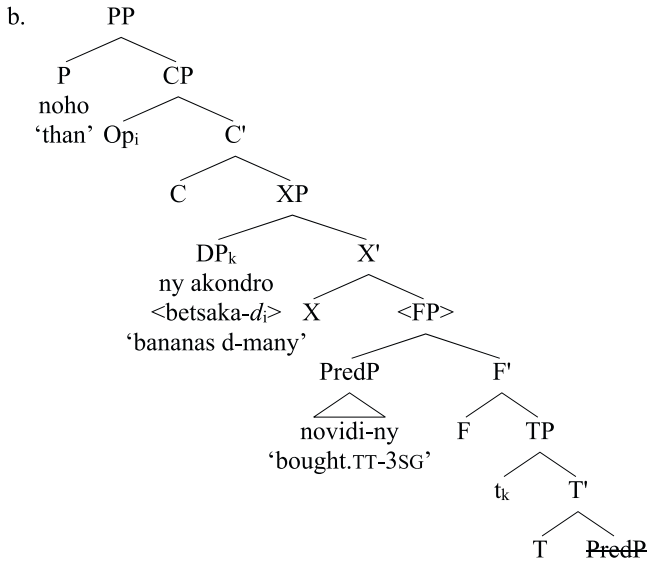
- (41) Lava noho {Ra-soa / izy / ilay zaza / ny zanan-dRasoa} Rabe
 tall than DET-NAME 3SG.NOM DEM child DET child-Rasoa Rabe
 'Rabe is taller than Rasoa/her/that child/Rasoa's child.'
- (42) a. *Lava noho {zaza / zanan-dRasoa} Rabe
 tall than child child-Rasoa Rabe
 ('Rabe is taller than a child/Rasoa's child.')
- b. Lava noho ny zaza Rabe
 tall than DET child Rabe
 'Rabe is taller than a/the child.'
- c. Nividy laoranjy betsaka noho *(ny) akondro Rasoa
 bought orange many than DET banana Rasoa
 'Rasoa bought more oranges than bananas.'

The morphosyntactic parallels between triggers and standards strongly suggest that the standard is itself a trigger and, if so, there must be a clause following the standard marker. This is captured in the RA derivation in (39). The standard originates in spec,TP, where the trigger restrictions are enforced. Further, given the proposed derivation and the extraction restriction in (20), the standard must be a trigger, as only a trigger could undergo A' movement to spec,XP. RA thus provides a principled explanation for why the standard obeys the trigger restrictions.

Even though the standard must be a trigger in RA, the target does not also have to be a trigger, because of the Malagasy voice system. To illustrate, in (43) the target is a direct object. The derivation of the comparative clause proceeds as shown, with the hypothesized elided material in brackets. The standard is the trigger of a theme topic voice clause. It moves to spec,XP followed

by deletion. CE succeeds because Malagasy clausal ellipsis is able to ignore voice morphology mismatches (Potsdam, 2007; Ranero, 2021).

- (43) a. Nividy laoranjy betsaka noho ny akondro_k <novidin-ny t_k> Rabe
 bought.AT orange many than DET banana bought.TT-3SG.GEN Rabe
 ‘Rabe bought more oranges than bananas.’



A second observation that seemingly supports RA comes from a distinct use of *noho*, where it means “because.” In this meaning, *noho* may be followed by a DP (44) or a clause (45). When followed by a DP, the DP obeys the trigger restrictions. It must be nominative (44b) and requires a determiner (44c).⁹

- (44) a. Nandositra izy [noho [Rasoa]_{DP}]
 fled 3SG.NOM because Rasoa
 ‘He fled because of Rasoa.’
 b. Nandositra izy noho ianao/*anao/*-nao
 fled 3SG.NOM because 2SG.NOM/2SG.ACC/2SG.GEN
 ‘He fled because of you.’
 c. Nandositra izy noho *(ny) alika/kotroka¹⁰
 fled 3SG.NOM because DET dog/thunder
 ‘He fled because of dogs/thunder.’

When *noho* “because” is followed by a clause, the embedded clause can show up with the expected trigger-final word order (45a), or the trigger can exceptionally come before the predicate (45b).¹⁰

⁹Ny is not required with these nouns in nontrigger contexts:

- (i) Matahotra (ny) alika/kotroka izy
 fear DET dog/thunder 3SG.NOM
 ‘He fears dogs/thunder.’

¹⁰Malagasy allows SVO in a number of contexts: adverbial clauses introduced by selected subordinators, newspaper headlines, complements to perception verbs, and clauses with contrastive subjects (Paul et al., 2016). I make no claim

- (45) a. Nandositra izy [noho [clause nanenjika azy Rasoa]]
 fled 3SG.NOM because chased 3SG.ACC Rasoa
 b. Nandositra izy [noho [clause Rasoa nanenjika azy]]
 fled 3SG.NOM because Rasoa chased 3SG.ACC
 ‘He fled because Rasoa chased him.’

The observation that *noho* “because” can take a clausal complement makes the RA of *noho* “than” even more plausible in the larger context. Despite the initial attractiveness of RA, however, Section 4 will argue that DA, to be introduced next, is superior.

3.2 | Direct analysis

In the alternative, DA, phrasal comparatives are base generated as one sees them, with the standard marker directly selecting the standard. There are no movement or reduction operations inside the standard. Bhatt and Takahashi (2011) argue that Hindi and Japanese employ a DA. That work in particular has led to the conclusion that the cross-linguistic syntax and semantics of comparatives is not monolithic and that both kinds of analyses are available, sometimes in a single language. Such a dual analysis was defended early on for English, in Hankamer (1973), McConnell-Ginet (1973), Brame (1983), Napoli (1983), and Hoeksema (1983), among others.

A DA for Malagasy has *noho* “than” taking a simple DP complement, with no hidden clausal structure and no deletion:

- (46) Nividy boky betsaka (kokoa) noho Rasoa Rabe
 bought book many more than Rasoa Rabe
 ‘Rabe bought more books than Rasoa.’

- (47)
-
- ```

graph TD
 PP --> P
 PP --> DP
 P --> noho
 P --> than["'than'"]
 DP --> Rasoa

```

Bhatt and Takahashi (2011) develop a DA for Hindi-Urdu. I apply their proposal to Malagasy, additionally importing semantic assumptions from Alrenga et al. (2012), which simplify the picture. In Bhatt and Takahashi’s analysis, the comparative morpheme *-er/more* is a three-place predicate which combines with two individual arguments—the standard and the target—and a predicate of individuals and degrees. Movement is required in order to create this predicate and satisfy the lexical entry of the comparative morpheme (Bhatt & Takahashi, 2011; see also Merchant, 2009; Reinhart, 1991). In Hindi-Urdu, the movements take place overtly. The movements will take place at Logical Form (LF) in Malagasy.

I depart from Bhatt and Takahashi’s analysis in following Alrenga et al. (2012), which assigns comparative semantics, not solely to the comparative morpheme but to both the

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that all SVO clauses in these contexts have the same analysis. Nevertheless, given that SVO is possible after *noho* “because,” it is reasonable to assess whether SVO is possible after *noho* “than.” It will be shown that it is not.

comparative morpheme and the standard marker. In traditional analyses, including Bhatt and Takahashi (2011), all of the semantics of the comparative is introduced in the comparative morpheme. The standard marker is semantically empty, serving only to flag the standard of comparison. Alrenga et al. (2012) propose that both elements provide comparative semantics, with the following division of labor: The comparative morpheme combines with a gradable predicate to produce a corresponding comparative predicate. The standard marker introduces the comparison relation. For phrasal comparatives, the standard marker combines with the standard and the target and a predicate of individuals and degrees, as in Bhatt and Takahashi's analysis. Alrenga et al. (2012) semantics for phrasal "than" is given in (48), where *sup* is the supremum function or least upper bound, which "maps (the characteristic function of) a subset *D'* of some set *D* to the minimal *d* in *D* that is greater than or equal to every *d'* in *D'*" (Alrenga et al., 2012, 3).<sup>11</sup>

$$(48) \quad \llbracket \text{THAN}_{\text{phrasal}} \rrbracket = \lambda s_e \lambda g_{\langle d, et \rangle} \lambda x_e . \text{sup}(\lambda d. g(d)(x)) > \text{sup}(\lambda d. g(d)(s))$$

This proposal for the packaging of comparative semantics has the advantage of accounting for two cross-linguistically common morphosyntactic patterns in comparatives (Alrenga et al., 2012; Bobaljik, 2012). First, it allows for languages such as Japanese which show no evidence of a comparative morpheme equivalent to *more/–er*, either overt or null. Second, it accommodates languages like Malagasy, whose comparative morpheme, *kokoa* "more," is optional but which also shows no evidence of a null comparative morpheme when *kokoa* "more" is absent. It was seen in (25a) that an adjectival predicate could not be interpreted comparatively if it had neither the comparative morpheme nor a standard phrase. In both languages, there need not be a comparative morpheme because the standard marker provides the necessary semantics.

With this lexical entry, the Malagasy clause structure from (14), and Lechner's DegP structure in (30), I proceed to show how the basic cases are analyzed under DA (see Vaikšnoraitė, 2021, for similar derivations in Lithuanian). Consider first the predicate comparative in (49) repeated from (24a). The LF structure is (50). I show PredP and the trigger having reconstructed from their surface spec,FP and spec,TP positions, respectively, to their base positions, following Massam (2000), Potsdam (2007), Cole and Hermon (2008), and Pearson (2018). The trigger is PredP-internal, and PredP itself is the complement of *T*<sup>°</sup>. The gradable predicate adjective phrase *lava* "tall" is given standard semantics as a function of individuals and degrees,  $\llbracket \text{tall} \rrbracket = \lambda d \lambda x. \text{tall}(x) \geq d$  and is of type  $\langle d, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$  (e.g., Cresswell, 1974; Heim, 2000; von Stechow, 1984; others).<sup>12</sup>

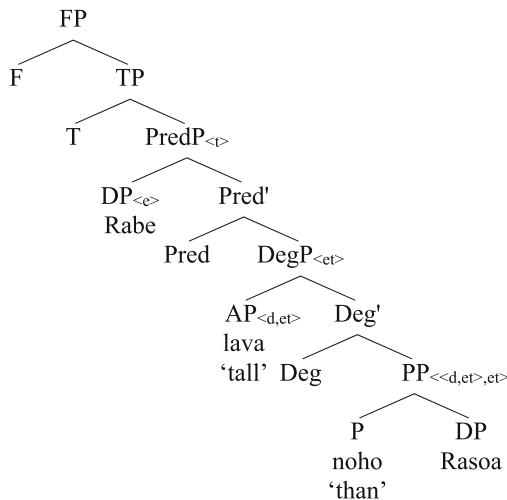
- (49)    Lava    (kokoa)    noho    Rasoa    Rabe  
          tall    more    than    Rasoa    Rabe  
          'Rabe is taller than Rasoa.'

<sup>11</sup>This lexical entry cannot be used for the degree standard comparatives introduced in Section 2.5. A second lexical entry will be required. See Bhatt and Takahashi (2011) and Alrenga et al. (2012) for proposals regarding the semantics of 'than' in degree standard comparatives. Both works agree that it is a two-place relation, not a three-place relation as in (48).

<sup>12</sup>I leave *kokoa* "more" out of the representations. If it were present, it would combine with the gradable predicate and create a function of the same type (Alrenga et al., 2012).



(50)

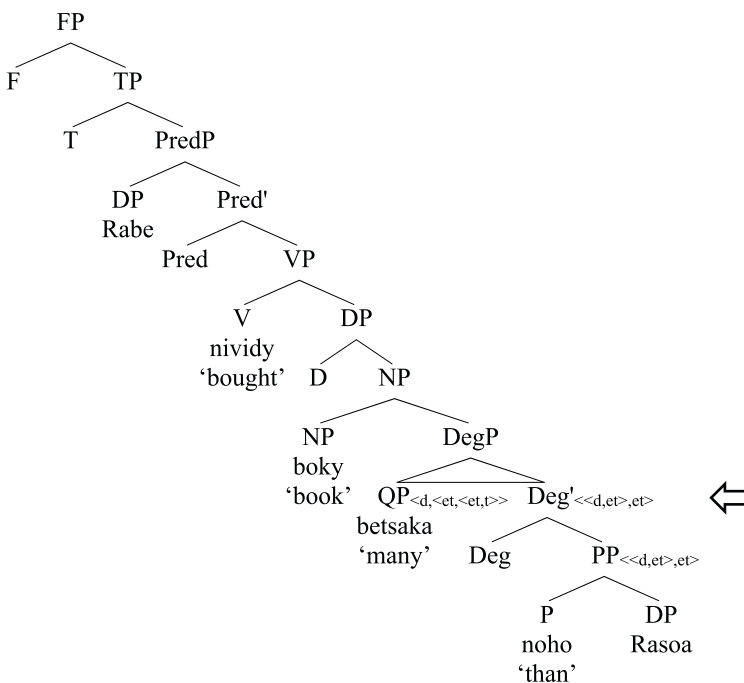


The derivation in this case converges, without the need for LF movement.

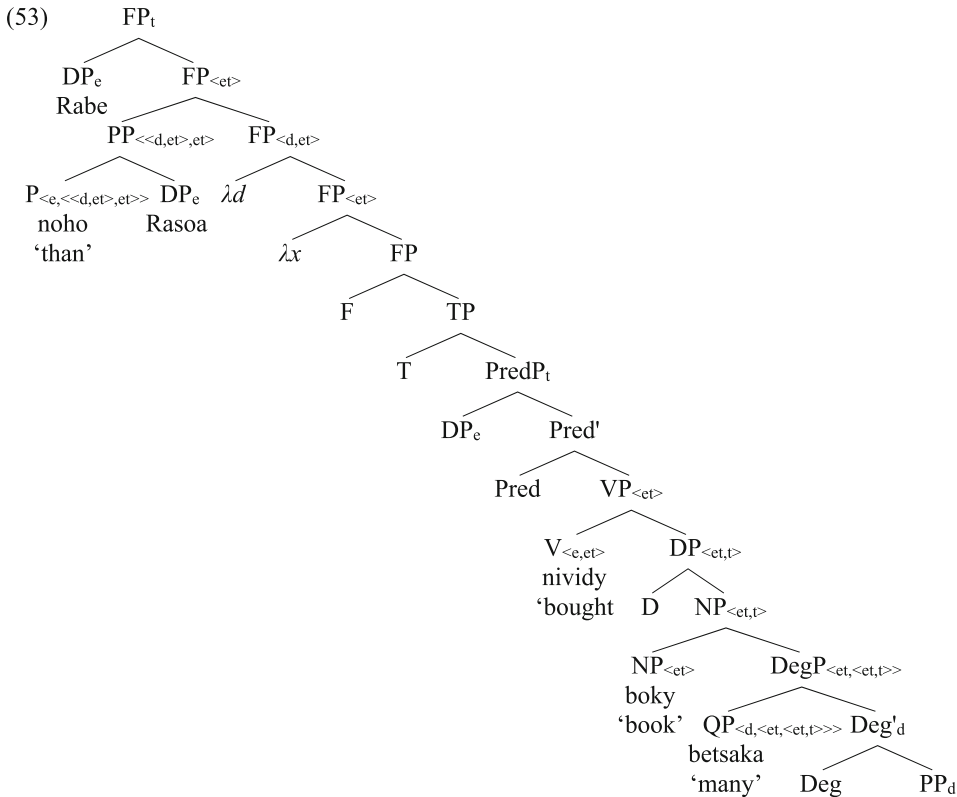
Consider next the nominal comparative in (51), repeated from (24c). An initial attempt at an LF is shown in (52). In this structure, however, the standard phrase cannot semantically combine with the QP *betsaka* “many,” which is a generalized quantifier of type  $\langle d, \langle et, \langle et, t \rangle \rangle$  (Hackl, 2000). See the arrow in (52).

- (51) Nividy boky betsaka (kokoa) noho Rasoa Rabe  
 bought book many more than Rasoa Rabe  
 ‘Rabe bought more books than Rasoa.’

(52)



Following Bhatt and Takahashi (2011), LF movement is necessary. First, the target of comparison, *Rabe*, undergoes LF movement, creating a predicate of individuals. Then the standard phrase moves, tucking in below the target, creating a predicate of individuals and degrees. Bhatt and Takahashi (2011) note that this is a case of parasitic scope (Barker, 2007; Lechner, 2017; Sauerland, 1998; others) where movement of the standard phrase targets a position created by prior movement of a scope taking element, the target. The structure after LF movement is shown in (53).<sup>13</sup> The semantic derivation now converges.



In the next section, I provide evidence showing that DA is superior to RA. In Section 5, I return to the trigger restrictions. DA does not automatically account for the trigger restrictions on the standard, but Section 5 argues that this is not a mark against it. It is independently necessary that there be a mechanism to attach these characteristics to a nominal without making it a trigger. This mechanism can thus be combined with DA without cost.

## 4 | EVIDENCE FOR A DIRECT ANALYSIS

This section provides arguments in favor of DA and against RA for Malagasy. The evidence is of four kinds. First, there is indirect evidence in Section 4.1 from the observation that the standard

<sup>13</sup>Bhatt and Takahashi (2011) argue that these movements are overt in Hindi-Urdu. Unlike in that work, late merger of the standard is unnecessary here, as the comparative semantics are encoded in the standard marker, not the comparative morpheme.

never shows overt clausal structure beyond the trigger. If RA is correct, the reduction operations will have to be maximal and obligatory. Second, Section 4.2 presents locality diagnostics from Binding Principle B and scope, which indicate that the standard in Malagasy is in the matrix clause and not in a separate dependent clause. Under DA, the construction is monoclausal and the standard is in the matrix clause. Under RA, in contrast, the standard is in an embedded clause and comparatives should behave as though they are biclausal, which Malagasy comparatives do not. Third, Section 4.3 discusses island sensitivity of Malagasy comparatives, showing that the target cannot be located inside an island and supporting a DA. Finally, Section 4.4 presents evidence against the specific instantiation of RA developed above in which the standard is always a trigger. This claim turns out to be incorrect in that there are possible standards that are not possible triggers, and vice versa. In total, the evidence strongly suggests that RA is not appropriate for Malagasy.

#### 4.1 | Lack of overt clausal structure

An expectation of RA is that one will see unreduced clauses in comparatives. DA, in contrast, precludes clausal comparatives because the standard is never a clause. English allows a wide range of clausal comparatives, which have been used as motivation for an RA of phrasal comparatives because the reduction operations are optional. We will see that none of the English clausal comparatives is grammatical in Malagasy.

Not surprisingly, fully unreduced clausal comparatives are not possible. They are also ungrammatical in English, indicating that some amount of ellipsis is obligatory:

- (54) a. \*Lava kokoa [noho lava (kokoa) Rasoa] Rabe  
           tall more than tall more Rasoa Rabe  
           (\*‘Rabe is taller than Rasoa is tall.’)  
       b. \*Nividy boky betsaka [noho nividy boky (betsaka kokoa) Rasoa] Rabe  
           bought book many than bought book many more Rasoa Rabe  
           (\*‘Rabe bought more books than Rasoa bought books.’)

Applying CD to the nominal containing the gradable element still results in ungrammaticality in Malagasy, although not in English, as seen in the examples below. The material targeted by CD is shown in angled brackets. The presence of a verb indicates clausal structure, but the result is ungrammatical, regardless of the order of the subject and predicate inside the standard phrase or the voice of the verb.

- (55) a. \*Nividy boky betsaka [noho [nividy <boky betsaka> Rasoa] Rabe  
           bought book many than bought book many Rasoa Rabe  
           (\*‘Rabe bought more books than Rasoa bought.’)  
       b. \*Nividy boky betsaka [noho [Rasoa nividy <boky betsaka>]] Rabe  
           bought book many than Rasoa bought book many Rabe  
           (\*‘Rabe bought more books than Rasoa bought.’)  
       c. \*Nividy boky betsaka [noho [novidin- dRasoa <ny boky betsaka>]] Rabe  
           bought book many than bought.TT Rasoa DET book many Rabe  
           (\*‘Rabe bought more books than were bought by Rasoa.’)

It is not the case that such comparatives cannot be expressed; rather, they are formulated as degree standard comparatives introduced in Section 2.5. The clausal comparative attempted in (55) can be expressed as in (56).

- (56) a. Betsaka ny boky novidin- dRabe [noho [ny novidin- dRaso]]  
 many DET book bought.TT Rabe than DET bought.TT Rasoa  
 lit. ‘The books Rabe bought are more than the ones that Rasoa bought.’  
 ‘Rabe bought more books than Rasoa bought.’  
 b. Nividy boky betsaka kokoa Rabe [noho [ny novidin- dRaso]]  
 bought book many more Rabe than DET bought.TT Rasoa  
 ‘Rabe bought more books than what Rasoa bought.’

Subcomparatives, in which only the degree variable is unpronounced, are also impossible:

- (57) a. \*Lava kokoa ny latabatra [noho [lehibe <betsaka> ny varavarana]]  
 long more DET table than big much the door  
 b. \*Lava kokoa ny latabatra [noho [ny varavarana lehibe <betsaka>]]  
 long more DET table than the door big much  
 (‘The table is longer than the door is wide.’)

As above, such subcomparatives can be expressed using a degree standard comparative:

- (58) Be kokoa ny halavan’ ny latabatra noho ny sakan’ ny varavarana  
 big more DET length DET table than DET width DET door  
 lit. ‘The table’s length is bigger than the door’s width.’  
 ‘The table is longer than the door is wide.’

The absence of clausal comparatives does not conclusively show that phrasal comparatives are not derived by RA. Rather, they indicate that, if the source is clausal, CE is maximal in obligatorily deleting everything but the trigger. This is an unusual state of affairs, as ellipsis operations are typically optional. DA, on the other hand, would straightforwardly not allow any of the ungrammatical examples on the assumption that the standard must be a nominal.

## 4.2 | Locality diagnostics

A structural difference between RA and DA is the number of clauses in a comparative. Under RA, the construction is biclausal; the standard is the trigger of an embedded clause. In DA, the construction is monoclausal; the standard is in a PP that is part of the matrix clause. Coreference options with respect to Binding Principle B in Sections 4.2.1 and scope ambiguities in Section 4.2.2 support the monoclausal picture. Both Principle B and scope ambiguities suggest that the standard is in the same clause as the target in Malagasy. In Section 4.2.3, I address a potential counterargument to these considerations given that the English and Malagasy facts are identical but English is argued to use an RA (Lechner, 2004).

### 4.2.1 | Principle B

Principle B of the binding theory in (59) requires that a pronoun be free in its minimal clause and imposes a clausemate anti-locality requirement on bound pronouns.

(59) *Binding Principles* (Chomsky 1981)

- A. An anaphor must be bound in its binding domain
- B. A pronoun must be free in its binding domain
- C. An R-expression must be free

I assume that the binding principles apply at LF (Chomsky, 1995, Hornstein et al., 1995, others) after PredP reconstruction (see references above) and that Malagasy obeys Principle B (Paul & Rabaoivololona, 1998; Pearson, 2018). In the examples in (60), the pronouns must be free from the coindexed trigger at LF because of Principle B.

- (60) a. Nahita azy<sub>k,\*R</sub> Rakoto<sub>R</sub>  
 PAST.see 3.ACC Rakoto  
 ‘Rakoto<sub>R</sub> saw him<sub>k,\*R</sub>.’  
 b. Faly ami-ny<sub>k,\*R</sub> Rabe<sub>R</sub>  
 happy PREP-3SG.GEN Rabe  
 ‘Rabe<sub>R</sub> is proud of him<sub>k,\*R</sub>.’

If DA is correct, a pronominal standard should require disjoint reference with a matrix argument such as the trigger, as the standard and trigger are in the same clause and coreference would violate Principle B, just as in (60). Indeed, speakers reject coreference (61). Instead, the complex reflexive *ny tenany* ‘DET self.3SG.GEN’ must be used.

- (61) Tsapan- dRabe<sub>R</sub> fa  
 feel.TT Rabe that  
 matanjaka noho \*izy<sub>R</sub>/ny tena-ny<sub>R</sub> izy<sub>R</sub>  
 be.strong than 3SG.NOM/DET self-3SG.GEN 3SG.NOM  
 ‘Rabe<sub>R</sub> felt that he<sub>R</sub> was stronger than \*him<sub>R</sub>/himself<sub>R</sub>.’

Under RA, the standard *izy* ‘3SG.NOM’ in (61) would be in a separate clause and would not be excluded by Principle B, as shown in the RA representation in (62). Principle B thus suggests that the standard is in the matrix clause, as in DA.<sup>14</sup>

- (62) Tsapan- dRabe<sub>R</sub> fa  
 feel.TT Rabe that  
 matanjaka [noho [CP [XP izy<sub>R</sub> [FP <matanjaka-*d* > izy]]]] izy<sub>R</sub>  
 be.strong than 3SG.NOM be.strong 3SG.NOM  
 ‘Rabe<sub>R</sub> felt that he<sub>R</sub> was stronger than \*him<sub>R</sub>/himself<sub>R</sub>.’

#### 4.2.2 | Scope

It is widely recognized that the scope of many quantifiers, particularly the universal quantifier *every*, is clausebound (Chomsky, 1977, May, 1977, Hornstein et al., 1995, others). I illustrate this

<sup>14</sup>While the reflexive might be taken to further support DA, the Malagasy reflexive *ny tenany* ‘himself’ is not a strict Principle A reflexive because *ny tenany* can find an antecedent across a clause boundary (Paul, 2004). Consequently, its grammaticality does not argue against a biclausal analysis.

observation for English and Malagasy. In (63a), the universal quantifier in trigger position takes wide scope over the indefinite object. In (63b), the universal quantifier in object position takes inverse scope over the indefinite in trigger position. In both cases, the wide scope interpretation of the universal is facilitated by the distributive marker *samihafa* “different” on the indefinite.

- (63) a. Nihira ny hira samihafa ny mpianatra rehetra  
 sang DET song different DET student all  
 ‘Every student sang a different song.’ EVERY > A (SURFACE SCOPE)
- b. Namotsotra ny mpifatotra rehetra ny mpiambina samihafa  
 freed DET prisoner all DET guard different  
 ‘A different guard freed every prisoner.’ EVERY > A (INVERSE SCOPE)

Hanitrimalala and Paul (2012) note that scope ambiguities are difficult to investigate in Malagasy; speakers tend to find examples unambiguous. For that reason, I have given two unambiguous examples above, which nevertheless show the availability of surface and inverse scope readings in the monoclausal case.

The situation is different when the universal quantifier is in an embedded clause. In this case, it cannot take scope out of the embedded clause over an indefinite in the matrix clause, (64), even when the inverse reading is facilitated by *samihafa* “different,” and would yield a more pragmatically reasonable meaning than the surface scope.

- (64) Lazaiko ny olona (#samihafa)  
 tell.TT.1SG DET person different  
 [<sub>CP</sub> fa manambady ny lehilahy rehetra Rasoa]  
 that be.married DET man all Rasoa  
 ‘I told someone that Rasoa is married to every man.’
- a. \*Every man is such that I told a different person that Rasoa is married to him.  
 \*EVERY > A (INVERSE, NON-CLAUSEBOUND SCOPE OF EVERY)
- b. I told someone that Rasoa is married to every man.  
 A > EVERY (SURFACE SCOPE)

This observation can be used to determine whether the comparative construction is monoclausal or biclausal. If a quantificational standard can scopally interact with matrix material, then they are in the same clause, the construction is monoclausal, and a DA is supported. Conversely, if they do not scopally interact, one explanation is that they are in separate clauses, as in RA, and the clauseboundedness of QR prevents the interaction. An RA is thus supported.

The Malagasy data in (65) conform to the DA prediction. The universally quantified standard *ny rehetra* “everyone” interacts with matrix negation to yield a scope ambiguity. In particular, the standard can scope over negation, the reading in (65b). The fact that it can do so indicates that the standard is not inside a finite clause and can be taken as evidence in favor of the monoclausal DA analysis.

- (65) Tsy matanjaka noho [ny rehetra] Rabe  
 NEG be.strong than DET all Rabe  
 ‘Rabe isn’t stronger than everyone.’
- a. ‘Rabe is stronger than not everyone.’ NEG > ALL
- b. ‘Rabe isn’t stronger than anyone.’ ALL > NEG

Under RA, the example would have the structure in (66), in which the universal quantifier *ny rehetra* “DET all” is the trigger in the clausal standard. It should not be able to scope out of the embedded clause, over negation in the main clause, contrary to fact.

- (66) Tsy matanjaka [noho [CP [XP ny rehetra [FP <matanjaka-*d* > ~~ny rehetra~~]]]] Rabe  
 NEG be.strong than DET all be.strong Rabe  
 ‘Rabe isn’t stronger than everyone.’

Summarizing, scope and Principle B suggest that the standard of comparison is in the same clause as matrix material, a conclusion that is straightforwardly compatible with DA.

#### 4.2.3 | An alternative

The reader will have noticed that the English facts regarding Principle B and scope are the same as in Malagasy. Nevertheless, some researchers have resisted concluding that a DA is needed for English (Lechner, 2004; Pancheva, 2006). Instead, they argue for an alternative instantiation of the RA in which the missing clause is not a full finite clause but, rather, a small clause lacking a CP layer and finiteness. This section develops such an analysis for Malagasy, using the small clause complement to Malagasy perception verbs (Pearson, 2018) as a guide to the expected syntactic behavior of Malagasy small clauses. I show that comparative standards behave differently from the triggers of such small clauses and conclude that a small clause approach to the Malagasy comparative data is not appropriate.

The only well-documented case of small clauses in Malagasy is the complement to perception verbs (Pearson, 2018), as in (67).

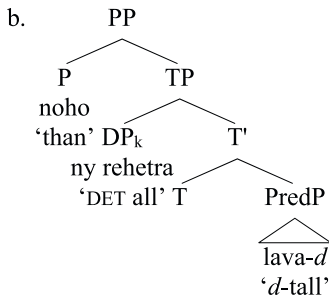
- (67) Nahita [ilay vehivavy niditra tao an-trano] aho  
 saw DEM woman enter LOC PREP-house 1SG.NOM  
 ‘I saw the woman enter the house.’

A salient characteristic of these small clauses is that they show trigger-predicate order.<sup>15</sup> Pearson (2018) therefore concludes that they lack predicate fronting. In the clause structure adopted here, (14), that means that FP, the position for the fronted predicate, is missing. Nevertheless, Pearson (2018) also shows that the initial noun phrase in the small clause is still a trigger. This requires that Malagasy small clauses be as large as TP. In the extension of the small clause analysis (SCA) to Malagasy comparatives, this is desirable in order to continue to capture the trigger characteristics of the standard.

An SCA for Malagasy comparatives would resemble RA developed above: the standard is a small clause trigger that composes directly with a (non-)verbal predicate. I instantiate an SCA for Malagasy as in (68b) for the scope example repeated in (68a). The clausal complement of the standard marker is TP, as opposed to CP. It is large enough to contain spec,TP, the position for the trigger, but not large enough to allow predicate fronting or other markers of finiteness.

<sup>15</sup>The embedded verb is also marked for tense, as Malagasy has no nonfinite verb forms. Nonetheless, the tense is not interpretable but must match the tense of the perception verb (Pearson, 2018, 795–796). I conclude that these are not syntactically finite clauses.

- (68) a. Tsy lava noho [ny rehetra <lava-*d*>] Rabe  
 NEG tall than DET all tall Rabe  
 ‘Rabe isn’t taller than everyone.’



Unfortunately, this variant of the RA does not work for the Malagasy Principle B and scope data. I demonstrate this below while also explaining how the SCA succeeds in English.<sup>16</sup>

Looking first at the Principle B data, a pronominal standard requires disjoint reference with respect to the subject (69). A local reflexive is used to indicate coreference.

- (69) John can't be better than \*him/himself.

This is accounted for by an SCA because the subjects of small clauses show the same behavior, (70). They are necessarily disjoint in reference from the matrix subject, and coreference requires a reflexive. The subject of a small clause acts as though it is in the matrix clause for purposes of Principle B.

- (70) Looking in the mirror, John saw [\*him/himself trembling].

Pearson (2018, 821) documents that Malagasy small clause complements to perception verbs behave differently. The equivalent of (70) allows coreference between the matrix subject and the small clause trigger (71); the small clause constitutes a separate binding domain for the pronoun.

- (71) Nahita [azy<sub>i</sub> nangovitra] Rakoto<sub>i</sub>  
 saw 3SG.ACC tremble Rakoto  
 ‘Rakoto saw himself trembling.’  
 (Pearson 2018: 821, (86b))

Given the differing behavior of English and Malagasy small clauses, the comparatives should also behave differently under an SCA; however, they do not (61).

The same challenge arises with the scope data. Larson (1988) observed that phrasal comparatives in English in which the standard of comparison is a universal quantifier are ambiguous (72), unlike in the clausal comparative (73).

- (72) Someone is smarter than everyone.  
 (Larson 1988: 4, (12a))
- |                                                   |              |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| a. There is someone who is smarter than everyone. | SOME > EVERY |
| b. Somebody or other is smarter than everyone.    | EVERY > SOME |

<sup>16</sup>A reviewer expresses concern that small clause complements to perception verbs in Malagasy behave differently from similar small clause complements in English. Malagasy seems to not have small clauses that parallel the English class, making perception verb complements the most suitable and, currently, only indicator of expected behavior.



- (73) Someone is smarter than everyone is.  
(Larson 1988: 4, (12b))
- |    |                                                |               |
|----|------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| a. | There is someone who is smarter than everyone. | SOME > EVERY  |
| b. | *Somebody or other is smarter than everyone.   | *EVERY > SOME |

SCA again achieves the right result here because English small clause subjects can take scope out of the small clause, as shown by the ambiguity of (74).

- (74) Someone saw [every student cheat].
- |    |                                                       |              |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| a. | There is someone who saw every student cheat.         | SOME > EVERY |
| b. | Every student was seen cheating by somebody or other. | EVERY > SOME |

Malagasy small clauses again behave differently. The trigger of a small clause cannot take scope over matrix elements. In (75), the small clause trigger cannot scope over matrix negation. The ambiguity of the comparative in (65) is thus unexpected if an SCA were correct for Malagasy comparatives.

- (75) Tsy nahita [ny olona rehetra niditra tao an-trano] aho  
NEG saw DET person all enter LOC PREP-house 1SG.NOM  
'I didn't see everyone enter the house.'
- |    |                                                  |              |
|----|--------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| a. | I saw not all (but some) people enter the house. | NEG > EVERY  |
| b. | *I didn't see anyone enter the house.            | *EVERY > NEG |

In summary, Malagasy small clauses are not as small as English small clauses and behave differently with respect to locality diagnostics. Malagasy small clauses constitute a separate clausal domain for scope and binding. Thus, even positing a small clause standard in comparatives will not explain the Malagasy facts in Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2. I conclude that an SCA for Malagasy comparatives is not adequate, despite being able to handle English facts that are potentially problematic for a full RA.

### 4.3 | Island sensitivity

A third argument in favor of DA and against RA comes from islands. A well-known diagnostic for hidden clausal structure is the possibility of interpreting unelided material inside a syntactic island. Ross (1969), and later Merchant (2001), shows that sluicing, or TP ellipsis, ameliorates islands. A *wh*-phrase extracted from an island is grammatical just in case the island is deleted. This phenomenon has been dubbed Island Repair by Ellipsis (IRE; Chomsky, 1972; Lasnik, 2001; Merchant, 2001, 2004, 2008; Ross, 1969; others). Island sensitivity can thus be used a diagnostic for hidden clausal structure.

In the domain of comparatives, Merchant (2009) shows that reduced clausal comparatives introduced by the standard marker *ap'oti* "than.CLAUSAL" in Greek do not show island effects (76a), an instance of repair by ellipsis. Phrasal comparatives introduced by *apo* "than.PHRASAL," in contrast, are island sensitive (76b). (76) illustrates a standard corresponding to the bold-faced target inside the bracketed relative clause island.

- (76) Perisoteri anθropi menun sto kratos [pu kivrnai o Putin] ...  
 more people live in.the state that governs the Putin  
 a. ap'oti o Bush  
 than.CLAUSAL the Bush.NOM  
 b. \*apo ton Bush  
 than.PHRASAL the Bush.ACC  
 'More people live in the country that Putin governs than (live in the country that) Bush (governs).'  
 (Merchant 2009: 142, (31))

Malagasy comparatives show island sensitivity.<sup>17</sup> The target cannot be inside a clausal adjunct (77) or a relative clause (78).

- (77) *clausal adjunct island*  
 \*Miara-miasa tsara kokoa (noho Rabe) izahay  
 be.together-work well more than Rabe 1EXCL.NOM  
 [rehefa mihira **Raso**a] (noho Rabe)  
 when sing Raso than Rabe  
 ('We work together better when Raso sings than (we work together when) Rabe (sings).')
- (78) *complex noun phrase (relative clause) island*  
 \*Namaky boky betsaka (noho i Tolstoy) [nosoratan' **i Balzac**] aho  
 read book more than Tolstoy wrote.TT' Balzac 1SG.NOM  
 (noho i Tolstoy)  
 than Tolstoy  
 ('I read more books that Balzac wrote than (I read books that) Tolstoy (wrote).')

Island sensitivity is expected given DA from Section 3.2. Because the target undergoes movement at LF, it cannot be located inside an island. For example, the LF for the example in (78) requires that the bold-faced target *i Balzac* move from inside the relative clause to the position where it takes scope, as in the derivation in (53). This violates the Complex Noun Phrase Constraint (CNPC; Ross, 1967).

In contrast, RA leads to the incorrect expectation that comparatives will be island insensitive, with the explanation falling under the umbrella of IRE. For concreteness, we can follow Merchant's (2004, 2009) account of this phenomenon, which is that intermediate traces of an element once it has moved out of an island are marked as illicit at PF. Ellipsis eliminates these traces. If ellipsis does not take place, or the elided constituent is too small, illicit traces remain and the derivation crashes at PF.

Under RA, the derivation of the CNPC island example in (78) proceeds as in (79). Within the standard phrase on the second line, the standard *i Tolstoy* moves from within the bold-faced relative clause to the edge of the clausal standard, stopping at the edges of the DP and PredP phases. In doing so, it crosses an island, and intermediate traces are marked illicit, indicated by a \*. Ellipsis applies at PF, however, deleting the material inside angled brackets, which includes the offending traces. The derivation should thus converge as an instance of IRE.

<sup>17</sup>For island insensitivity of reduced clausal comparatives and island sensitivity of phrasal comparatives in other languages, see Merchant, 2009 (Greek), Lindenbergh, 2016 (Dutch), An, 2020 (Korean), and Vaikšnoraitė, 2021 (Lithuanian).

- (79) Namaky boky betsaka [nosoratan' i Balzac] aho  
 read book many wrote.TT Balzac 1SG.NOM  
 noho [i Tolstoy; <[PredP \*t<sub>i</sub> namaky [DP \*t<sub>i</sub> boky betsaka-d [nosoratan' t<sub>i</sub>]]] aho>]  
 than Tolstoy read book many wrote.TT 1SG

Malagasy does allow IRE, as shown by the example in (80), in which sluicing appears to repair islands.

- (80) a. *clausal adjunct island*  
 Malahelo Rabe satria lasa nody ny zanany lahy  
 sad Rabe because left DET child-3SG male  
 fa tsy fantatr-o hoe iza  
 but NEG know.TT-1SG COMP who  
 'Rabe is sad because his son left but I don't know which (son) (\*Rabe is sad [because \_\_ left]).'  
 b. *complex noun phrase (relative clause) island*  
 Mitady olona miteny fiteny afrikanina ilay komity  
 look.for person speak language African DEM committee  
 fa tsy fantatro hoe teny inona  
 but NEG know.1SG COMP language what  
 (\*no mitady [olona [miteny \_\_] ilay komity)  
 FOC look.for person speak DEM committee  
 'The committee is looking for someone who speaks an African language but I don't know which language (\*it is looking for [someone [who speaks \_\_]]).'

RA thus incorrectly predicts (79) to be grammatical. Under DA, there is no ellipsis to repair an island violation. The island sensitivity of Malagasy comparatives consequently supports DA.<sup>18,19</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Apparent island-violating comparatives are occasionally and inconsistently accepted by speakers. A representative example is in (i).

- (i) Betsaka kokoa [ny olona [miteny **teny anglisy**]] noho ny teny gasy  
 many more DET person speaks English than Malagasy  
 lit. 'The people who speak English are more than Malagasy'  
 'More people speak English than Malagasy.'

Such exceptions uniformly have the following form: The island involved is a relative clause which is attached to the clause-final trigger. The target of comparison, bold-faced, is clause-final inside the relative clause. The italicized standard immediately follows the relative clause and is right-adjacent to the target. If any of these conditions are not met, the example becomes ungrammatical. For example, displacing the relative clause away from the standard phrase results in consistent ungrammaticality (iia), as does placing the standard before the relative clause (iib). I do not have an explanation and further investigation is required.

- (ii) a. \*[Ny olona [miteny **teny anglisy**]] dia betsaka kokoa noho ny teny gasy  
 DET person speaks English TOPIC many more than Malagasy  
 b. \*Betsaka kokoa noho ny teny gasy [ny olona [miteny **teny anglisy**]]  
 many more than Malagasy DET person speaks English  
 ('More people speak English than Malagasy.')

<sup>19</sup>A reviewer suggests that island sensitivity could be accounted for under RA if it too assumed some island-violating LF movement. Two points argue against this: First, reduced clausal comparatives in other languages are island insensitive (see Merchant, 2009, on Greek, Lindenbergh, 2016, on Dutch, and An, 2020, on Korean), suggesting that we do not want

## 4.4 | Nontrigger behavior of standards

The final piece of evidence for DA comes from under- and over-generation by RA. In RA, the standard moves from the trigger position, and nontrigger material is deleted. It thus correlates standards and triggers, accounting for the trigger restrictions, but also predicting that a phrase can be a standard if and only if it can be a trigger. DA does not correlate standards and triggers. In this context, I discuss wh-phrases and targets inside PPs that argue in favor of DA. Wh-phrases can be standards but not triggers; objects of PPs can become triggers but they cannot be standards.

### 4.4.1 | Wh-phrases

Malagasy is a wh-in-situ language (Paul & Potsdam, 2012); however, there is a restriction on where in-situ phrases can appear. Specifically, wh-triggers cannot appear in-situ (Sabel, 2002, 2003, but see Law, 2006, for refinements): the ungrammatical (81a) versus (81b) and (81c).

- (81) a. \*Nividy ny vary **iza**?  
           bought DET rice who  
           ('Who bought the rice?')  
           (Sabel 2003: 234, (12a))  
       b. Nividy **inona** Rabe?  
           bought what Rabe  
           ('What did Rabe buy?')  
           (Sabel 2003: 234, (11c))  
       c. Nividy ny vary **taiza** Rabe?  
           bought DET rice where Rabe  
           ('Where did Rabe buy the rice?')  
           (Sabel 2003: 234, (13a))

Instead, triggers must be questioned using an alternative cleft strategy in which the wh-phrase is the clause-initial predicate (Dahl, 1986; Law, 2007; Paul, 2001; Potsdam, 2006):

- (82) a. Iza no nividy ny vary?  
           who FOC bought DET rice  
           ('Who bought rice?')  
       b. [ iza ]<sub>predicate</sub> [ no nividy ny vary ]

Given that *iza* "who" cannot be a trigger, RA predicts that it also cannot be the standard of comparison, since standards are simply triggers in a clause that has been reduced by ellipsis. This prediction is incorrect. A standard may be an in situ wh-phrase (83).<sup>20</sup>

a RA to predict island sensitivity—this would have to be a Malagasy-specific fix. Second, there is no motivation for LF movement of the target or the standard in a RA, the structure is interpretable without it.

<sup>20</sup>The standard under RA is not actually in spec,TP after ellipsis. It is in the specifier of a projection, XP, above TP, having moved there from spec,TP. See the structure in (39). If the restriction on wh-in-situ holds only of wh-phrases in spec,TP at Spell Out, the argument would not go through. It only succeeds on the assumption that wh-in-situ is ruled out because the wh-phrase was in spec,TP at some point in the derivation. I do not know of an appropriate construction that would allow me to determine the precise formulation of the wh-in-situ restriction.

- (83) Lava kokoa noho **iza** Rabe?  
tall more than who Rabe  
'Who is Rabe taller than?'

Under DA, the grammaticality of this example is expected and is on par with *wh*-in-situ with prepositional objects:

- (84) a. Mandihy miaraka amin' **iza** ianao?  
dance together PREP who 2SG  
'Who do you dance with?'  
(Law 2006: 179, (72c))  
b. Nijaly noho **iza** i Paoly?  
suffered because who Paul  
'Who did Paul suffer because of?'

#### 4.4.2 | Targets inside PPs

A second case of standard-trigger mismatch comes from targets that are the object of a preposition. Such examples are ungrammatical if the standard corresponds to the prepositional object:

- (85) a. \*Nividy voninkazo betsaka kokoa ho an' i Mery *noho* i Noro Rabe  
bought flowers many more for ACC Mary than Noro Rabe  
(‘Rabe bought more flowers for Mary than Noro.’)  
b. \*Nandihy kokoa tamin' ny lehilahy *noho* ny vehivavy Rasoa  
danced more PREP DET men than DET women Rasoa  
(‘Rasoa danced more with men than women.’)

RA overgenerates in predicting that such examples should be grammatical. The circumstantial topic voice can be used to make these prepositional objects into triggers (86).

- (86) a. Nividianan- dRabe voninkazo i Noro  
bought.CT Rabe flowers Noro  
'Noro was bought flowers by Rabe.'  
b. Nandihizan- dRasoa ny vehivavy  
danced.CT Rasoa DET women  
'Rasoa danced with the women.'

If such nominals can be triggers, these clauses should be able to serve as the clausal standards for the comparatives in (85), prior to reduction. For example, (85a) should permit the pre-ellipsis structure in (87), which includes the well-formed clause in (86a) as the clausal standard. Nevertheless, after CD of the bracketed material, the ungrammatical (85a) results.<sup>21,22</sup>

- (87) \*Nividy voninkazo betsaka kokoa ho an' i Mery  
bought.AT flowers many more for ACC Mary  
noho [i Noro <nividianan- dRabe voninkazo betsaka-*d i Noro*>] Rabe  
than Noro bought.CT Rabe flowers many Rabe

<sup>21</sup>The voice mismatch between the matrix clause and the standard clause is not the cause of the ungrammaticality, as voice mismatches under clausal ellipsis are allowed in Malagasy (Potsdam, 2007; Ranero, 2021).

<sup>22</sup>In order to express such standards, a degree standard comparative is used. The licit version of (85a) is in (i).

DA, in contrast, can account for these data. Malagasy does not allow P-stranding (Potsdam, 2003) and I assume that this ban on P-stranding also holds of LF movement. If the object of a preposition is to take scope, the whole PP moves at LF (see Bayer, 1996; Bayer & Bader, 2007; von Stechow, 2002, for QR of PP). In the comparative case at hand, the target must move at LF. The DP object of *noho* “than” cannot move because that would result in P-stranding. The whole PP can move, but then there would be mismatch between the target, a PP, and the standard, a DP. A PP target will not successfully semantically combine in its adjoined position (see (53)).

#### 4.5 | Intermediate conclusion

I take the above evidence to show that phrasal comparatives in Malagasy are best analyzed with a DA. Although independently motivated by being able to account for the trigger restrictions, RA makes incorrect predictions elsewhere and I conclude it is not correct for Malagasy.

### 5 | TRIGGER RESTRICTIONS UNDER DA

The observation from Section 2.2 that comparative standards obey the trigger restrictions (15) has no automatic explanation under DA, as the standard is not a trigger. This section demonstrates that the trigger restrictions cannot be solely tied to the trigger position and the grammar must independently provide a way to place these restrictions on nontriggers. Given that such a mechanism must be available, it can be incorporated into DA with no penalty. I develop such an analysis here, proposing that the trigger restrictions can follow from complement selection.

Two pieces of evidence support the claim that there must be a way to enforce the trigger restrictions on a nominal without making it a trigger in an RA. The first is the use of *noho* where it means “because,” introduced in Section 3.1. (44b, c) showed that, when followed by a DP, the DP obeys the trigger restrictions. An RA strikes me as unlikely here, as there is no obvious antecedent for a missing clause. For example, (44a), repeated as (88), does not mean “He fled because Rasoa fled.”

- (88) Nandositra izy noho Rasoa  
fled 3SG.NOM because Rasoa  
‘He fled because of Rasoa.’

The second comes from nominal objects following the preposition *toy* “like,” which also obey the trigger restrictions (Rajemisa-Raolison, 1966, 45, 145). They are in the nominative case, (89a), and must be overtly marked with a determiner (89b).

- (i) Nividy voninkazo betsaka kokoa ho an' i Mery  
bought flowers many more for ACC Mary  
*noho ny ho an' i Noro Rabe*  
than DET for ACC Noro Rabe  
lit. “Rabe bought more flowers for Mary than what (he bought) for Noro”  
‘Rabe bought more flowers for Mary than for Noro.’

As discussed in Section 2.5, I take the standard in such examples to be a headless amount relative, roughly corresponding to “what (Rabe bought) for Noro” or “what was for Noro.”

- (89) a. Kinga saina toy ianao/\*anao/\*-nao aho  
 skilled mind like 2SG.NOM/2SG.ACC/2SG.GEN 1SG.NOM  
 ‘I am smart like you.’  
 b. Mena toy \*(ny) vainafo ny takolany  
 red like DET coals DET cheek.3SG.GEN  
 ‘His cheeks are red like coals.’

Toy “like” has a variety of uses; however, as with *noho* “because,” an ellipsis analysis is not always appropriate. While (89b) has a plausible elliptical analysis as “His cheeks are red like coals (are red),” the examples in (90) do not have elliptical interpretations. For example, (90a) does not mean “We talk like that talks too.” Thus, we must be able to directly attach the trigger restrictions to a nominal without making it a trigger.<sup>23</sup>

- (90) a. Afaka miteny toy izany koa isika  
 can talk like DEM also 1PL.INCL.NOM  
 ‘We can talk like that too.’  
 b. Toy ny aloka tsy miala ami-nao ny eritreritrao  
 like DET shadow NEG leave PREP-2SG.GEN DET thought.2SG.GEN  
 ‘Your thoughts are like shadows that never leave you.’  
 c. Misy zavatra maromaro, toy ny fary sy ny akondro,  
 exist thing several like DET sugar.cane and DET banana  
 mampiseho ny fanambinana  
 show DET prosperity  
 ‘There are several things, like sugar cane and bananas, that show prosperity.’

I propose that the trigger restrictions can be imposed on an element via complement selection. In comparatives, *noho* “than” is a preposition that selects a DP complement against which it checks nominative Case (91a). The DP category of the complement will ensure that there is an overt D°, provided that we do not allow null determiners in Malagasy (91b).<sup>24</sup> DA can thus account for the trigger restrictions, but they are not a result of the standard of comparison being a trigger.

- (91) a. *noho*, P°[Case: NOM], ‘than’, [ \_\_ DP]  
 b. no null determiners in Malagasy

I conclude that the trigger restrictions are not strictly tied to a particular syntactic position, and the grammar must provide a way to place these requirements on nontriggers. While selection may not be the most explanatory way to achieve this, some mechanism must be available. Ultimately, the trigger restrictions fail to support RA and are equally compatible with DA.

<sup>23</sup>DPs following *afa-tsy* “except” must also be nominative, but the trigger restrictions are not otherwise respected. The complement of *afa-tsy* need not be a DP, and DPs do not require a determiner (Potsdam, 2018). Potsdam (2018) argues for an ellipsis analysis akin to RA for *afa-tsy* “except.”

<sup>24</sup>Paul (2009) proposes that Malagasy has a null determiner with a restricted distribution, being allowed in DPs that are direct objects, accusative objects of prepositions, or predicates, but not DPs in other positions, such as trigger position. One could adopt Paul’s proposal if there were a principled way to rule out the null D° in positions where it does not appear. For example, suppose that Pearson (2005) is correct that nominative case is a default used when no Case is checked. An obligatorily overt determiner could be taken as an alternative licensing mechanism when Case is not available. I leave the analysis of the overt determiner restriction for future work.



6 | CONCLUSION

This paper has argued for a DA of Malagasy phrasal comparatives. DA is more successful than RA in accounting for the phenomena in (92).

| (92)                                                         | RA | DA |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|
| a. lack of clausal comparatives                              | X  | ✓  |
| b. Principle B effects with respect to the standard          | X  | ✓  |
| c. scope interactions between the standard and matrix clause | X  | ✓  |
| d. island sensitivity of the standard                        | X  | ✓  |
| e. wh-phrase standards                                       | X  | ✓  |
| f. targets that are the object of a preposition              | X  | ✓  |

The superficial reasons to suspect an RA of Malagasy comparatives introduced in Section 3.1—the trigger restrictions on the standard and uses of *noho* with the meaning “because”—turn out to be unsupportive upon further investigation. Regarding the trigger restrictions, DA is at least as successful as RA in explaining them. Comparatives give insight into the proper analysis of these restrictions and suggest that they are not actually exclusively properties of triggers. I have proposed how they can be directly encoded in the Malagasy grammar without reference to trigger-hood.

Regarding *noho*, there are simply two homophonous lexical items. *Noho* “because” selects either a DP or a clause. The standard marker *noho* “than” selects only a DP. This nominal may be an ordinary nominal typically of type *e* (93a), or a nominal of type *d* (93b). The latter yields what I have called a degree standard comparative, the precise analysis of which remains to be explored.

- (93) a. Lava    kokoa    noho    [Rasoa]    Rabe  
         tall    more    than    Rasoa    Rabe  
         ‘Rabe is taller than Rasoa.’  
      b. Lava    kokoa    noho    [ny iray metatra]    Rabe  
         tall    more    than    DET one meter    Rabe  
         ‘Rabe is taller than one meter.’

Malagasy is not the only language for which a DA has been argued to be superior. Other languages include Mandarin Chinese (Lin, 2009; Xiang, 2003), Korean (Kim & Sells, 2010), Japanese and Hindi-Urdu (Bhatt & Takahashi, 2011), Greek (Merchant, 2012), Russian (Philippova, 2018), and Lithuanian (Vaikšnoraite, 2021). Languages with phrasal comparatives where an RA has been argued to be superior include Slavic (Pancheva, 2006), Greek (Merchant, 2009), Dari and Tajik (O’Connor, 2013), Dutch (Lindenbergh, 2016), and Russian (Philippova, 2018). It is thus apparent that different languages employ different syntactic mechanisms to arrive at superficially similar forms. The phrasal comparative is not a unified syntactic phenomenon. At minimum, the cross-linguistic picture necessitates that the standard marker can syntactically select for a clause or a nominal, or both.

The larger question that the Malagasy picture raises is whether, given a language with a phrasal comparative, it is possible to predict whether it will employ an RA and/or a DA from other aspects of the grammar. An anonymous reviewer suggests that, in light of Lechner’s (2001, 2004, 2017, 2021) work on the fine details of the RA in English, it could be informative to look at a language’s small clause inventory. For Malagasy, the lack of English-like small clauses might



explain why the language cannot have reduced phrasal comparatives. Perhaps languages without English-like small clauses cannot avail themselves of an RA and will necessarily use a DA. This does not make the choice entirely predictable, but other grammatical factors may be relevant to further restrict the analysis workspace, or there may in fact be analytical freedom in some languages.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available on request from the authors.

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