

Some Peculiarities of Comparative Constructions in Nivacle (Mataguayo Family, Paraguayan Chaco)

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Nivacle, an under-studied Mataguayo language from the Gran Chaco, displays a bewildering variety of typological rarities, for instance in the realms of possession, verbal alignment, predicative possession and applicatives (Fabre 2004, 2009-2010, 2012, 2015, 2016). The purpose of this article is to document different types of comparative and equative constructions, some of which, like one-word “all-in-one” comparatives, have scarcely been reported before.

1. Introduction

Nivacle is one of the four languages belonging to the Mataguayo family of the South American Gran Chaco region, the other being Wichí (Argentina)/Weenhayek (Bolivia), Maká (Paraguay), as well as three varieties of Chorote (Argentina and Paraguay). Nivacle is spoken by some 14,000 people in Paraguay, as well as by about 400-500 people in Argentina, in the provinces of Formosa and Salta. I have gathered the data in fieldwork in the central Paraguayan Chaco during the months of June/July in 2007, 2009 and 2011.¹

From a typological point of view, Nivacle can be characterized as a radical head-marking language with a fairly high degree of polysynthesis and agglutination. There are no adpositions or nominal cases in Nivacle, hence no oblique phrases. Any locative or instrumental relation is conveyed with an applicative suffix on the verb. Applicatives can also be used in order to increase valency. Only temporal NPs can freely appear without being indexed on the verb with an applicative suffix. Although there is neither tense nor aspect, verbs have two moods, realis and irrealis. All verb forms are finite. Multiverbal constructions are widely used in order to convey what is expressed in other languages by aspectual categories, manner adverbs, as well as some comparative constructions, which are discussed in this paper.

All Nivacle verb forms are finite and have at least one prefix slot filled by a subject marker (S_A, S_P, or A). A basic (non-derived) verb can be intransitive or monotransitive. There are five conjugations. In basic intransitives, alignment may be accusative (conjugations I, II, and IV or active (conjugation III) (1-4).²

- (1) Ø-k³uj
3S-be.cold
'It's cold' (intransitive, conj. I)

¹I am grateful to Yvonne Treis and an anonymous reviewer for their detailed and insightful comments, which contributed substantially to the final version of this paper. I am fully responsible for any remaining shortcomings.

²A = Agent, ABOVE = Applicative 'above', ANT.VENT = Anticipated ventive; BEN = Benefactive, CAUS = Causative, COL = Collective, COMP = Comparee, CON = Conative, CONT = Container, D = Determiner, DEM = Demonstrative, DG = Degree marker, DIST = Distal, D-PRON = Determinant (3rd person) Pronoun, F = Feminine, INC = Inclusive, IND = Indefinite, INH = Inherent Quality, INST = Instrumental, INT = Intensive, IRR = Irrealis, M = Masculine, NEG = Negative, NMLZ = Nominalizer, P = Patient, PAR = Parameter, PL = Plural, PL.IND = Indefinite plural, POS = Possessive, PRON = Personal Pronoun, PROX = Proximal, REC = Reciprocal, REF = Reflexive, RL = Realis, S = Subject, SAP = Speech Act Participant, STD = Standard Marker, STD.M = Standard Marker, SUB = Subordinator, T = Theme, R = Recipient, VENT = Ventive

- (2) xaj-kum-ʔin
1S-work-INT
'I work/I'm working' (intransitive, conj. II)
- (3) ts-ułbx
1S-be.tired
'I am tired' (intransitive, conj. III)
- (4) Ø-vaf
3S-die
'S/he is dead' (intransitive, conj. IV)

Basic transitives belong to Conjugation V and two arguments appear in the prefix slot, A and O (P/T/R), and can license an object NP or pronoun (5a-b).

- (5a) xa-võm
1A(3P)-lose
'I lost it' (monotransitive, conj. V)
- (5b) xa-võm ł-xa ji-peso-xij
1A(3P)-lose F-D 1POS-money-CONT
'I lost my wallet' (monotransitive, conj. V)

In (6a-c), both arguments are SAPs, and the corresponding pronouns are only used if emphasis is needed. Third person D-pronouns are more frequent, since they are more often used in cases of ambiguity.³

- (6a) tsi-²van
(3A)1P-see
'S/he sees me' (monotransitive, conj. V)
- (6b) k²a-²van
1A(2P)-see
'I see you (sg.)' (monotransitive, conj. V)
- (6c) ła-s-²van
2A-1P-see
'You (sg.) see me' (monotransitive, conj. V)

Verbs belonging to other conjugations can be made transitive only through suffixation of an applicative, which then licenses a new argument (7, 8). I consider such verbs derived transitives.

³D-pronouns (D-PRON) differ from (canonical) personal pronouns (PRON) in two respects. First, D-pronouns are available only for the third person. Second, and more importantly, D-pronouns are derived from determiner particles, which indicate gender and visual evidentiality (see second paragraph after (11)). For this reason, they are very useful for keeping track of participants.

Basic transitives exhibit inverse/hierarchical alignment with a lexical split where either P/T (10, 11) or R (9) is chosen as the argument to compete with A for the single argument surfacing in the prefix slot.⁴ There is only one exception, where A represents second person and P/T/R first person, in which case both arguments surface (6c). There is no inverse or direct marker, and the surfacing argument cannot be analysed as a portmanteau morpheme.

- (7) Ø-kʷuj-ja-m
3S-be.cold-1-BEN
'I am cold' (lit. "It is cold for me") (intransitive, conj. I) (cf. 1)
- (8) Ø-vaf-xò-m
3S-die-1INC-BEN
'He died for us' (intransitive, conj. IV) (cf. 4)
- (9) kʷa-tis-ʔa-ʃ
1A(2R)-give.R-2-INST (2-INST = T)
'I give it to you (sg.)' (basic monotransitive, conj. V => ditransitive, same conjugation)
- (10) ʃa-n-xut-ja-m
2A(3T)-CISL-give.T-1-BEN
'You (sg.) give it to me' (lit. "You give it here for/to me")
- (11) xa-xut-eʃ-ʔa-i
1A(3T)-give.R-PL.SAP-2-DIST
'We (excl.) give it to you' (basic monotransitive, conj. V => ditransitive, same conj.)

Suffixal derivation, consisting of person markers and/or applicative suffixes, allows any verb, even intransitives like (7) and (8), to take additional arguments. The same strategy applies to monotransitives like (9), (10) and (11), yielding ditransitive constructions. Note that the semantic roles of the non-A argument of the basic transitives *-tis* and *-xut*, both translated as 'give', are different: the non-A argument of *-tis* is a recipient, whereas *-xut* can only license a T-argument. If there is a need to express the third argument, an applicative suffix must be used. For *-xut*, there are two options for the R, either benefactive (10) or distal (11), which indicates the physical distance between the agent and the recipient.⁵ With *-tis*, the T appears as an instrumental, which is, apart from its main instrumental use, the most frequent exponent of P/T for derived transitives.

There is no adjective category in Nivacle, and property concepts, as well as quantifiers (including numerals, both natives and loans from Spanish) are conjugated like verbs (§ 2).

The relationship between referentiality and predicativity is very fluid. All NPs must be preceded by a determiner particle which shows grammatical gender (masculine vs. feminine in the singular; human vs. non-human in the plural) and visual evidentiality (seen by speaker at speech time; seen by speaker before speech time; seen by speaker before speech time but no longer existing; never

⁴For the sake of clarity of exposition, the ousted argument has been retained (within parenthesis) in the glosses. For more details on alignment types in Nivacle, see Fabre (2012) and (2016).

⁵The Nivacle distal does not only mark geographical distance to or from a reference point (its canonical use). It is also used in describing physical, short-distance displacement of an object handed over to somebody, or for groping for something felt to be close in the dark, or invisible at the bottom of bag.

seen by speaker). In the absence of a determiner, the noun automatically becomes predicative (12b, 13b). Conversely, the presence of a determiner before a verbal form suffices to make it referential (12a, 13a). Both nominalizers and verbalizers exist in Nivacle, but the presence or absence of the determiner alone is enough to induce a referential or a predicative reading. This shift from noun to verb and vice versa is very common, even in cases where the corresponding noun or verb would be readily available to the speaker (13a) (Nivacle does have a pair of nouns for ‘shoes’!).⁶

(12a) ʔ-xa ji-tʃʰakfa
F-D 1POS-spouse
‘My wife’

(12b) ji-tʃʰakfa
1POS-spouse
‘She is my wife’

(13a) na-va tʰ-ɔs-tʃʰe
D-PL 3S-walk-APL.LONG
‘His/Her shoes’

(13b) tʰ-ɔs-tʃʰe
3S-walk-APL.LONG
‘(S)he is walking along’

2. Comparison in Nivacle

It is a well-known fact that people all over the world never tire of comparing phenomena, events, peoples and things. Comparison, then, is deeply grounded in cognition. Nonetheless, it is very puzzling indeed that some languages appear to lack any dedicated comparative constructions. In some of these languages, a speaker may resort to the conjoined comparative strategy. Stassen (1985: 183-188) provides a pair of examples from Abipon, an extinct language of the Guaykurú family, formerly spoken in Argentina. Within the Gran Chaco region, the languages belonging to the Enlhet-Enenlhet family (a.k.a. Maskoy/ Lengua-Maskoy) also lack dedicated comparative constructions, albeit the speakers, if really pressed, can resort to a conjoined comparative strategy (Hannes Kalisch, p.c.).

As will be seen in the next sections, Nivacle has dedicated comparative constructions, two participants, a comparee and a standard, are compared in terms of some gradable property, the parameter. Since property concepts are verbs in Nivacle (§ 1), the standard marker is a verbal suffix, and both comparee and standard can be personal affixes. Comparative constructions can be

⁶In Nivacle, the locative-applicative $-ʃʰe \sim -kʰe$ must be used whenever an event takes place along or within a well-defined trajectory. Movement is not necessary. Walking on a road, scratching one’s arm or having a sore finger triggers the presence of $-ʃʰe \sim -kʰe$ on the verb. This suffix has a few important metaphorical extensions. It can refer back to an event in the past, e.g. ‘think’ + $-ʃʰe \sim -kʰe$ must be translated by ‘remember’ (think about something gone). Because Nivacle is a tenseless language, {I think + $-ʃʰe \sim -kʰe$ } cannot automatically be translated as ‘I thought/remembered’, but rather, depending on the context, as ‘I thought/I think/I will think about a former event X’. The suffix $-ʃʰe \sim -kʰe$ is also an associated motion suffix, which indicates movement away of a non-subject entity from the deictic centre: {I see + $-ʃʰe \sim -kʰe$ } ‘I see X going away’.

mono-clausal or bi-clausal. Nivacle comparative constructions exhibit the following rarities:

(A) In its canonical use, *-k²oja* is an associated motion suffix which indicates the anticipated coming of a non-subject participant (14).

(14) x-ovał-k²oja xa kolektivo
 1A(3P)-look-ANT.VENT D.M bus
 ‘I am/was watching for the bus to come’

(15) x-ovał xa kolektivo
 1A(3P)-look D.M bus
 ‘I look at the bus (not moving)’

In comparative constructions, *-k²oja* functions as a standard marker of comparison (16) (§§ 3, 4, 6.2, and 6.3)

(16) na-t²un-²in-ji-k²oja
 2S-be.strong-INT-1-STD.M.THAN
 ‘You (sg.) are much stronger than me’

(B) In its canonical use, *-xul* is an associated motion suffix indicating the simultaneous coming into the visual field of a non-subject participant (17).

(17) xa-²van-xul
 1A(3P)-see-VENT
 ‘I see/saw him/her/it/them coming’

(18) xa-²van
 1A(3P)-see
 ‘I see/saw him/her/it/them’ (no indication of movement)

In comparison constructions, it is an equative or similitive standard marker (19-21). Unlike *-k²oja*, the equative/similitive *-xul* is suffixed to a predicatively used noun which can (21), but need not (19, 20), be followed by a possessed noun indicating which quality is being compared (§ 5).

(19) a-xunaʃ-ji-xul
 2S/POS-likeness-1-STD.M.LIKE
 ‘You are like me’

(20) t²-ɒn-aʃ-eł-vat-xul
 3S/POS-shout-PL-REC-STD.M.LIKE
 ‘They sound alike’ (about two languages or two persons having the same kind of voice)

- (21) kas-xunaʃ-e-ʃ-tʃ²e-vat-xuʃ
 1INC.POS-likeness-3-INST-APL.LONG-REC-STD.M.LIKE

na kats²-unax
 D.M 1INC.POS-strength
 ‘I am as strong as you / We (incl.) are of equal strength’

(C) Both comparee (COMP) and standard (STD) can be affixed to the verb, which means that utterances like ‘You are much stronger than me’ (16) and ‘You are like me’ (19) can be packaged into a single word. “All-in-one” comparative construction appears to be a typological rarity (§ 3). As far as I am aware, Baure, an Arawak language from eastern Bolivia, is the only language where such a constellation has been attested (Danielsen 2007: 212).⁷

(D) An unusually high number of constructions are available in Nivacle in order to express comparison of inequality and equality.

(E) Quality verbs function as parameters. The verbs *-vn* (always combined with the standard marker *-²e*) ‘more’, *-atɛʃ* ‘less’, *-aʃ(eʃ)* ‘exceed’ and the obligatorily possessed noun *-xunaʃ* ‘likeness’, function as degree markers.

Nivacle has no adjective category, property concepts (parameters, PAR) are inflected like verbs (conjugations I, II, & III; marginally, with only one verb, IV). It must be noted, however, that within these conjugations, only a subclass of the verbs (the ones in the left column of Table 1) can be used in a mono-clausal comparative construction (‘I am taller/more clever/stronger than you’ vs. ‘I speak/cook/shout more than you’). If the speaker wants to use a verb from the right columns in a comparative construction, this has to be bi-clausal (compatible at least with Type 3a).

	I		II		III	
	tall	speak	clever	cook	strong	shout
1	jaʔ-pitex	jaʔ-ts ² isei	xaj-kaxɔʃʃaj	xaj-ataj	tsi-t ² un	tsi-t ² ɔj
2	aʔ-pitex	aʔ-ts ² isei	ʃat-kaxɔʃʃaj	ʃt-ataj	na-t ² un	na-t ² ɔj
3	Ø-pitex	Ø-ts ² isei	t-kaxɔʃʃaj	t-ataj	Ø-t ² un	Ø-t ² ɔj
1inc	kas-pitex	kas-ts ² isei	ʃta-kaxɔʃʃaj	ʃt-ataj	ʃtan-t ² un	ʃtan-t ² ɔj

Table 1. Examples of verbs from conjugations I, II and III.

There are two main standard markers (STD.M.THAN), *-k²oja* in comparative and *-xuʃ* in equative constructions. It is remarkable that both are isomorphic with associated motions suffixes, and attach to the verb (parameter). The fact that two associated motion suffixes are recruited as markers of the standard of comparison appears to be cross-linguistically unique. In a few constructions, two locative applicative suffixes may be used as standard markers instead of *-k²oja*: *-²e* ‘proximal’ (§ 6.1) and *-²apɛ* ‘on /above [surface]’ (§ 6.4), both of which attach to the main verb.

⁷The cited example is: *ro=iro-še-ko-wo=ni* (3SGm=surpass-vert.size-ABS-COP=1SG) ‘He is taller than me’. The author notes that “The absolute suffix *-ko* ‘ABS’ follows the incorporated root *-š(i)e* ‘vertical size’, as it is an instance of Ground incorporation [...]. It is theoretically possible that other bound roots are also incorporated into the verb *-erok-* ‘surpass’, but unfortunately no other examples could be elicited” (Danielsen 2007: 212).

As an associated motion suffix, *-k'oja* (anticipated ventive) marks a non-subject participant expected to be coming, but not in sight at the event time. *-xul* (simultaneous ventive) also represents a non-subject participant which is seen coming by the speaker. Apart from serving as standard markers, the associated motion suffixes have various other uses.⁸

In all comparative constructions, COMP is obligatorily marked as a personal prefix on PAR. Additionally, the corresponding NP (or pronoun) can optionally appear. Depending on the construction type, the STD can be a personal suffix on PAR, or an NP (or pronoun). PAR can be a canonical verb or a predicative noun, in which case the prefix will be possessive.

In what follows, closely related constructions share the same digit but are distinguished from each other by a lower case letter (Type 1a, 1b, etc.).

3. *-k'oja* in mono-clausal comparative constructions

Note how (22) matches the morphology of the comparative construction in (23).

	Ex. (22)	Ex. (23)
Prefix	AGENT	COMP
Suffix	PATIENT	STD
<i>-k'oja</i>	ASSOCIATED MOTION	STD marker (THAN)

Table 2. Structure matching between examples (22) and (23).

(22) **j-amat-tax-ji-k'oja**
 3A-catch-CON-1P-ANT.VENT
 'He was laying in ambush/about to catch me'

(23) **na-t'un-²in-ji-k'oja**
 2S_{COMP}-be.strong-INT-1_{STD}-STD.M.THAN
 'You are much stronger than me'

There are two types of mono-clausal comparative constructions. The simplest consists of one verb alone ("all-in-one"), where both comparee and standard are affixes on the parameter, the comparee being a subject prefix, and the standard a SAP suffix (Types 1a and 2a). Although it is theoretically possible to add two NPs or pronouns coindexed with the comparee and standard affixes, speakers hardly ever resort to this option. In case the standard refers to a third person participant, the second type is used, where the parameter verb is followed by an NP or D-pronoun which represents the standard (Type 1b and 2b). Here too, the comparee may, but need not, appear as an additional NP.

TYPE 1a				
COMP Person Prefix	PAR V	STD Person Suffix	STD-marker <i>-k'oja</i>	Ex. (23)

⁸Nivacle has a third associated motion suffix, *-f'e* ~ *-k'e* 'itive' (seen going away), but it is not used in comparative constructions. For further details on the associated motion suffixes in Nivacle, see § 5.4 in Fabre (2016).

TYPE 1b				
COMP Prefix	PAR V	STD-marker <i>-k^ʔoja</i>	STD NP	Ex. (24)

(24) na a-xpɔjitʃ Ø-ux-k^ʔoja-klɛ
 D.M 2POS-house_{COMP} 3S_{COMP}-be.big_{PAR}-STD.M.THAN-RATHER

[xa ji-xpɔjitʃ]
 D.M 1POS-house_{STD}
 ‘Your house is somewhat bigger than my house’

The verb *-ǎf* (or its variant *-ǎf-e-f*) ‘exceed’ can be used as a degree marker when STD is a D-PRON as in (26).⁹ As no parameter is mentioned, this results in a generic construction, where the exact property intended to be compared must be recoverable from the context (Types 2a and 2b). Type 2a is, like Type 1a, an “all-in-one” construction, while Type 2b is much like 1b, were it not for the fact that *-ǎf* is used in place of a parameter verb. Note that in Type 2b, only the standard marker *-k^ʔoja* can license the D-pronoun representing the STD (**j-ǎf-^ʔa* is ungrammatical for ‘S/he is better than me’).

TYPE 2a				
COMP Person Prefix	DG V = <i>-ǎf</i>	STD Person Suffix	STD-marker <i>-k^ʔoja</i>	Ex. (25)

(25) j-ǎf-^ʔa-k^ʔoja
 3A_{COMP}-exceed_{DG}-2_{STD}-STD.M.THAN
 ‘S/he beats you (at anything)’

TYPE 2b				
COMP Person Prefix	DG V = <i>-ǎf-e-f</i>	STD-marker <i>-k^ʔoja</i>	STD D-PRON	Ex. (26)

⁹The instrumental is often used to license NPs or pronominal objects as well as subordinate clauses. The instrumental has two allomorphs *-f* and *-x*, which are usually preceded by a person marker (*-ji* 1, *-^ʔa* 2, *-e* 3, *-xó* 1INCL). For more details on the uses of the instrumental suffix, see Fabre (2009-2010). Occasionally, like in Type 2b, the third person marker appears as a default, frozen form with the instrumental. Concerning the Exceed-comparative, Stassen (1985: 42) states: “Its main characteristic is that the standard NP is invariably constructed as the direct object of a special transitive verb, the meaning of which can be glossed as ‘to exceed’ or ‘to surpass’.” Now, neither *-ǎf*, nor its variant *-ǎf-e-f* (*-ǎf* + 3 + INST) is a transitive verb in Nivacle since neither can be followed by an NP. In fact, the main use of *-ǎf(-e-f)*, when *-k^ʔoja* is not involved in the construction, corresponds to a manner adverb. Where other languages use manner adverbs, Nivacle regularly uses a multiverbal (if not canonically serial) construction consisting of a (manner) verb followed by the subordinative particle *ti* and the main verb (lit. “he-is-slow that he walks”). With *-ǎf(-e-f)*, the resulting meaning is ‘very; much; a lot’. Dixon’s Type B (2008:797-798) is a serial verb construction (“without any overt marker of coordination, subordination or other syntactic linkage”) where PAR (the major member of the construction) is an adjective or an intransitive verb, and the “Index” (here DG) a comparison verb (the minor member) meaning ‘exceed’, ‘surpass’, ‘pass’ or ‘defeat’. In Dixon’s typology, two other types (C and D) also involve the same comparison verb, but these are directly followed by a noun representing PAR.

- (30) $k^2\text{-}\acute{a}f\text{-}e\text{-}f$
 1_{ACOMP-exceed}DG-3-INST
 ti tsi-t²un-²in-²a-k²oja
 SUB 1_{SCOMP-be.strong}PAR-INT-2_{STD-STD.M.}THAN
 ‘I am stronger than you’

- (31) $t^2\text{-}\acute{a}f\text{-}e\text{-}f$
 2_{ACOMP-exceed}DG-3-INST
 ti na-t²un-²in-ji-k²oja
 SUB 2_{SCOMP-be.strong}PAR-INT-1_{STD-STD.M.}THAN
 ‘You are stronger than me’

5. Equative degree: *-xut* in mono-clausal constructions

Unlike mono-clausal constructions with *-k²oja*, where the parameter represents a property concept verb, *-xut* is suffixed to a predicatively employed possessive noun or to a nominalized verb, and the comparee marker is a possessive prefix. Despite its ambiguity out of context, the most frequent predicative noun used with the standard marker *-xut* is *-xunaf* ‘the like of it; how it is’ (Type 4a, ex. 32 and 33; Type 4b, ex. 34a). This noun may be analysed as a kind of equative degree marker which introduces a dummy parameter, whose exact interpretation is to be taken from the context (‘be in some sense like + STD’).¹⁰ The fact that *-xunaf* is a noun can be of some help in trying to analyse this construction (lit. “your likeness equals mine”).

TYPE 4a				
COMP Possessive Prefix	DG <i>-xunaf</i>	STD Person Suffix	STD-marker <i>-xut</i>	Ex. (32, 33)

- (32) a-xunaf-ji-xut
 2_{POS_{COMP}-likeness}DG 1_{STD-STD.M.}LIKE
 ‘You (sg.) are like me (looking like me, sharing the same ideas, behaving the same way etc.)’
- (33) ni-4-xunaf-a-xo-xut
 NEG-3_{POS_{COMP}-likeness}DG-IRR-1_{INC_{STD}-STD.M.}LIKE
 ‘S/he is not like us (incl.)’

In case the standard refers to a third person, an NP appears instead of the suffix (Type 4b, ex. 34a). Few other nouns can be used like *-xunaf* (Type 5, ex. 35 and 36). It might be tempting to analyse all types with *-xut*, with the exception of Type 7, as similatives rather than equative constructions, were it not for the striking structural similarities (Haspelmath & Buchholz 1998) between the

¹⁰Another way to put it would be to say that the DG-marker is fused with a generic parameter meaning ‘likeness’.

represents the comparee, (2) the NP representing the DG (D + *l-xunaf*), and (3) the NP representing the standard (37 & 38). Note that this construction lacks a standard marker. This is probably due to the anaphoric/cataphoric feature of the determinant. I have not been able to find any example of this type which would include the standard marker *-xul*. Moreover, Type 6, albeit strikingly overrepresented in biblical texts, appears to be practically non-existent outside elicited contexts and translated texts. It may be paraphrased as ‘Comparee has quality Q – [and in this respect] same as comparee is the standard’.

TYPE 6				
COMP Person Prefix	PAR V	DG <i>-xunaf</i>	STD NP	Ex. (37, 38)

- (37) *ji-vo²jeʃtʃ²e* [na-n *l-xunaf*]_{DG} [xa David]_{STD}
 3S_{COMP}-be.just D.M-DEM/ANAPH 3POS-likeness D.M David
 ‘S/he is as trustworthy as David’ or ‘S/he is trustworthy like David’
 (‘S/he is trustworthy – equally so [is] David’)

- (38) *a-k²atsax-e-ʃ-tʃ²e* [xa-n *l-xunaf*]_{DG}
 2S_{COMP}-be.wide-3-INST-LONG D.M-DEM 3POS-likeness

 [xa tovok]_{STD} ti tʃi-na-vɔm-xat
 D.M river SUB IND.A-2P-be.injured-CAUS
 ‘Your wound is as wide as a river’ (Discontinuous constituent: lit. ‘You are wide with something long + because someone wounded you’ = ‘your wound’)

Note that *-xunaf* is also compatible with the comparative standard marker *-k²oja* (Type 7, ex. 39). The first two words belong to the same VP, in which case ‘be.different’ (the only verb attested in this construction) would be equivalent to a negative operator like in Type 4a (33) above.¹¹ The VP is followed by a third person D-pronoun. Rather than the literal ‘be.different his/her/its/their-likeness’, I would consider *-vena l-xunaf* as a whole ‘be unlike’ (just like *ni-l-xunaf-a-xul* [NEG-3POS-likeness-IRR], which means ‘It is not like it’).¹² In some sense, Type 7 is reminiscent of Types 4a and 4b, were it not for the choice of the standard marker. In this construction, *-xunaf* always appear with a third person possessive prefix. In other contexts, any personal possessive prefix is possible.

TYPE 7				
COMP Person Prefix	DG <i>-vena + l-xunaf</i>	STD-marker <i>-k²oja</i>	STD D-PRON	Ex. (39)

¹¹According to Seelwische’s dictionary (1990), *-vena* (1st conjugation) ‘be different’ can be used in all persons. Unfortunately, the author provides no example. All the examples I know are third person. *-a* is a frozen suffix (in its canonical use, it is a locative applicative ‘punctual’, but it can also be used to licence an object) since there is a synonym (4th conjugation) *-ven-e-f*, where *-a* has been replaced by *-e-f* (3rd person default + instrumental), as well as a derived verb *-ven-chat* (causative) ‘separate, distinguish’.

¹² In other contexts, the verb *-vena* is often used in traditional tales with the meaning of transforming oneself into something else, or appearing under a different form.

- (39) [Ø-vena ɬ-xunaf-k^ʔoja] [xa-v-ɛɬ]_{STD}
 3_{COMP}-be.different 3_{POS}-likeness-STD.M.THAN D-PL-IND.PL
 ‘They are different from the others’

6. Further comparative types

6.1. Type 8: *-ɔn-^ʔe* ‘be ahead of’ + locative applicative proximate

In this construction, the parameter verb, which bears the usual comparee prefix, comes first. There is no overt subordinator before the degree marker, which consists of another verb, *-ɔn* ‘be ahead of’, obligatorily followed by the locative applicative proximate *-^ʔe*, which I consider here as a standard marker since it licenses the NP, in the same way as the applicative *-^ʔapɛ* does in Type 10, and *-k^ʔoja* or *-xut* elsewhere.

TYPE 8						
COMP _i Person Prefix	PAR V	COMP _i Prefix	DG V <i>-ɔn</i>	STD-marker <i>-^ʔe</i> (PROX)	STD NP	Ex. (40)

- (40) Ø-ptsex (ɬa-vátʃa)
 3_{COMP}-be.quick_{PAR} (3_{POS}-PRON_{COMP})

 t^ʔ-ɔn-^ʔe [xa Pedro]_{STD}
 3_{COMP}-be.ahead_{DG}-3.STD.M.THAN D.M Pedro
 ‘(S/he,) s/he is quicker than Pedro’

6.2. Type 9

Here, the construction centers around the word *atɛf* ‘is unlike’. I prefer to consider this word as a (defective) verb rather than a canonical particle, for two reasons. First, as a rule, particles cannot govern other words in Nivacle, and the omission of a particle has no consequence on grammaticality (although a certain shade of meaning may disappear in the process). Second, although there is only one form available, the presence of the third person instrumental applicative *-e-f* suggests a verbal origin. In any case, *atɛf* is a highly atypical word. The presence of an obligatory third person instrumental applicative (default instrumental in contradistinction with any person + instrumental) is often idiosyncratic.

As can be seen in (41), the function of *atɛf* is to assign to the COMP immediately at its left the opposite value of the information stated in the subordinated clause, which is otherwise identical to (31) above. Example (41) could thus be paraphrased as *it is untrue that you are stronger than me*. The second clause is headed by the irrealis subordinator, which triggers the irrealis mood on the prefixed subject.

TYPE 9			
COMP_i NP ~ PRON	V <i>ałɛʃ</i>	SUB.IRR <i>ka</i>	COMP_i Person Prefix
PAR V	STD Person Suffix	STD-marker <i>-kʰoja</i>	Ex. (41)

- (41) a-vátʃa ałɛʃ ka
 2POS-PRON_{COMP} is.unlikev SUB.IRR

na-tʰun-ʰin-ji-kʰoja
 2S.IRR_{COMP}-be.strong_{PAR}-INT-1_{STD}-STD.M.THAN
 ‘You are less strong than me’

6.3. Type 10: Comparison with the negative verb *ni-iʰ-a* ‘not.be’

This construction consists of two clauses, the first of which is always the third person of the verb ‘be’ in its negative form: *ni-iʰ-a*. This is followed by the irrealis subordinator *ka* and a Type-1a construction with the subordinated parameter verb in irrealis mood. In all other contexts, the verb *-iʰ* means ‘to be located’ and is obligatorily followed by a locative applicative.

TYPE 10			
V <i>ni-iʰ-a</i>	SUB.IRRL <i>ka</i>	COMP Person Prefix	PAR V (IRR)
STD Person Suffix	STD-marker <i>-kʰoja</i>	Ex. (43)	

- (42) ni-iʰ-a ka nas-tʰun-ʰin-ʰa-kʰoja
 NEG-be-IRR SUB.IRR 1S.IRR_{COMP}-be.strong_{PAR}-INT-2_{STD}-STD.M.THAN
 ‘I am less strong than you’

6.4. Type 11: Mono-clausal construction with locative applicative

Finally, there is a reasonably frequent mono-clausal construction where the verb *-áʃ* functions as the degree marker, like in Type 2b, but with the comparee as subject and the locative applicative *-ʰapɛ* ‘on/above’ as the standard marker instead of *-kʰoja* (43, 44). Interestingly, in one of its non-canonical (locative) uses, *-ʰapɛ* functions as an intensive marker.

TYPE 11				
COMP Person Prefix	DG V = <i>-áʃ</i>	STD-marker <i>-ʰapɛ</i> (ABOVE)	STD NP	Ex. (43, 44)

- (43) $k^{\text{?}}\text{-a}\text{ʃ}\text{-}^{\text{?}}\text{ap}\acute{\text{e}}$ [xa vatʃvatʃ]_{STD}
 1A_{COMP-exceed}_{DG-STD.M.THAN} D.M eagle
 ‘I am stronger than an eagle’
- (44) $j\text{-}\grave{\text{a}}\text{ʃ}\text{-}^{\text{?}}\text{ap}\acute{\text{e}}$ [pa-va ákxiku-j]_{STD}
 3A_{COMP-exceed}_{DG-STD.M.THAN} D-PL tree-PL
 ‘It is higher than the trees’

7. Concluding remarks

In comparative and equative constructions, Nivacle makes use of both mono-clausal and bi-clausal structures. In terms of frequency of use, when both comparee and standard are speech act participant affixes (COMP is always present as a prefix), the mono-clausal construction is preferred although the bi-clausal option is possible, too. When either COMP or STD is a SAP, both options are equally possible. In contrast, whenever COMP and STD are both third person, a bi-clausal construction is preferred.

Comparison of positive inequality is the most common in my database as well as in native published texts, followed by the equality construction. The boundary between equality and similitive constructions is not always clear-cut. The negative inequality constructions (Types 9 and 10) are the least preferred. The higher frequency of positive inequality constructions clearly correlates with the number of different types available (1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, and 7 for the mono-clausal types, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d, 8 and 10 for the bi-clausal).

There are two different constructions for negative inequality, both bi-clausal (types 9 and 10), as well as four equality constructions, all mono-clausal (types 4a, 4b, 5, and 6).

In terms of the frequency of use, eight constructions are very often used: 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, and 3c, for positive inequality, as well as 4a, for equality. Less often, but still reasonably documented, are types 3d (positive inequality) and 4b, 5, and 6 (equality), followed by types 7 and 8 (positive inequality), and 9 (negative inequality).

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