

Comparing points over a time span

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This communication focuses on constructions whose meaning involves a comparison of degrees disposed over a time span. Which information is conveyed and what are the objects of comparison are the two leading questions.

The observation is made that two kinds of information are encoded: (i) description of a series – a set of ordered pairs of degrees and times –, as in (1), and (ii) comparison of single points, as in (2), a kind of construction that has received greater attention in the literature (see, e.g., Kennedy & Levin 2007, Hay et al.1999, Piñon 2005):

- (1) a. The temperature rose progressively.
- b. Summers are getting hotter and hotter.
- (2) The temperature rose two degrees.

Concerning (ii), it seems equivalent to consider a function from times to degrees or the reverse one: a function that returns the degree d when applied to time t is equivalent to a function that returns the time t when applied to degree d . However, the choice of one or another of these functions is not always indifferent. Two arguments sustain such position. The first one concerns different readings of sentences as (3), which can be paraphrased as (4a) or as (4b):

- (3) [In the course of a poker championship] Who earned more money so far?
- (4) a. At speech time, which player has the greater income?
- b. Which player earned more money at some point during the championship?

This diversity of readings is not observed in sentences as (5), but only in constructions with degree predicates:

- (5) Who scored more goals so far?

The second argument comes from the lexical expression of the difference between the compared points:

- (6) a. The inflation rate slowly fell to 5%.
- b. The inflation rate has dropped a lot.
- c. The temperature dropped abruptly.

Though in all these cases a comparison between pairs of degrees and times is at stake, in (6a) the temporal distance between two degrees is measured, while in (6b) what is measured is the difference between two degrees separated by some time interval. In (6c), no prominence is given to times or

degrees, instead a comparison between two pairs of times and degrees being expressed. Thus, (6c) is close to constructions as (1), which, in addition and unlikely (6c), involve quantification over pairs of times and degrees.

References:

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