

Vera Hohaus

The University of Manchester & Tübingen Collaborative Research Centre 833

SPA kickoff workshop, Universität Potsdam // 28th May 2021
Superlative constructions: Towards a cross-linguistic typology

Natural languages adopt at least four distinct morpho-syntactic strategies in the expression of superlative meaning (see also Bobaljik 2012; Gorshenin 2012; Coppock 2016), including (i) a dedicated morpheme, (ii) a comparative paraphrase, (iii) the use of an intensifier, and (iv) the use of the Positive form. This talk explores the mapping between form and meaning under these different strategies, drawing mostly on data from my fieldwork on Samoan (Austronesian, Oceanic). I will argue that despite this variety in form, the same set of interpretative mechanisms underlies all of the different strategies with the exception of the comparative paraphrase: Samoan builds superlative meanings using implicit comparison by recalibrating the interpretation of the Positive with the help of context, focus alternatives, and presuppositions.

References

- Bobaljik, Jonathan D. (2012). *Universals in Comparative Morphology: Suppletion, Superlatives, and the Structure of Words*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Coppock, Elizabeth (2016). "Typological Database of Superlative Constructions." Harvard University Dataverse. URL: [doi:10.7910/DVN/71WHWY](https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/71WHWY).
- Gorshenin, Maksym (2012). "The Crosslinguistics of the Superlative." In: *Neues aus der Bremer Linguistikwerkstatt: Aktuelle Themen und Projekte*. Ed. by Cornelia Stroh. Bremen: Brockmeyer, 77–180.