

~~Cuttington College~~
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APPENDIX 16
Comparison in Kpelle
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0. Comparative expressions are based on absolute predications concerning qualities or aspects. The relevant underlying constructions are exemplified by the following:

bérei ní kátèi. This house is big.
pérs kéte. A big house.

1. Comparison may be implicit. If more than one item is under consideration, the relative size (weight, length, etc.) of one may be expressed in one of the following ways:

bérei ní kátèi. This house is bigger - biggest.
nyívi káa à bérs kátèi. This is the big(ger - gest) house.
bérei ní káa à gétèi. This house is the big one.
gáa à núu-péleí. He is the old(er - est) person.

2. Explicit comparison is most commonly expressed by constructions with the verb /tee/ 'pass by, surpass, excel'. The derived adjectival, in predicative usage, may be used without reference to a particular quality. Or the quality may be expressed by the appropriate adjectival, followed by the consecutive construction /é tée/. In both cases, the second item in the comparison is followed by /-ná/ 'top, surface'. The word expressing the higher value on the scale is predominantly used (i.e., big, good, heavy; not small, bad, light).

bérei ní téi nyíti ná. This house excels that one.
molon ní téi nyíti ná. This rice exceeds that. (in quantity or possibly quality)
bérei ní kátèi é tée nyíti ná. This house is larger than that one.

3. Comparable comparisons starting from the word expressing the lower value on the scale are "grammatical" (i.e., understandable and acceptable when constructed in order to make the situation explicit), but informants will almost invariably transform them to the usual construction described above. The following is possible:

bérsi ní kurotêi NYÍXI é tée nyíti mà. This house is smaller than that one.

4. Inferiority may also be expressed in another way, but in this case the particular quality cannot be specified.

bérsi ní toóòí nyíti mù. This house is smaller than (inferior to, in worse shape than) that one.

("Literally", this means 'This house is fallen under that one.')

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