

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2023.61.01.34>

How to Cite:

Leleka, T., Prykhodko, V., Plakhotniuk, N., Stakhmych, Y., Chukhno, T. (2023). Peculiarities of translation of comparative constructions in English-language popular science discourse. *Amazonia Investiga*, 12(61), 342-347. <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2023.61.01.34>

Peculiarities of translation of comparative constructions in English-language popular science discourse

Peculiaridades de la traducción de construcciones comparativas en el discurso de divulgación científica en lengua inglesa

Received: January 20, 2023

Accepted: February 24, 2023

Written by:

Tetiana Leleka¹⁴⁶<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6134-4435>**Viktoriiia Prykhodko**¹⁴⁷<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8171-9823>**Natalia Plakhotniuk**¹⁴⁸<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7018-5299>**Yuliia Stakhmych**¹⁴⁹<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4661-8220>**Tetiana Chukhno**¹⁵⁰<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4112-7388>

Abstract

The paper examines the grammatical phenomenon of comparative constructions in English on the examples of popular science discourse. The linguistic phenomenon of comparative constructions is analyzed in terms of correlation with the word order and sentence combination features and in a comparative way in the context of English/French. The chosen methodology made the following scientific hypotheses: comparative constructions are endowed with correlations with causal word order; the main types highlighted are: locative construction with subtypes, admission construction, and conjunction construction; such constructions are widely repeated in different languages belonging to different groups. This study goes beyond classical theoretical grammar robotics in a number of important aspects. A more detailed classification is presented: we distinguish between two types of constructions a primary comparative construction and a

Abstract

El trabajo examina el fenómeno gramatical de las construcciones comparativas en el idioma inglés utilizando ejemplos del discurso científico popular. Se analiza el fenómeno lingüístico de las construcciones comparativas desde el punto de vista de la correlación con el orden de las palabras y características de la combinación de oraciones y de forma comparativa en el apartado de la lengua inglesa/francesa. La metodología elegida permitió las siguientes hipótesis científicas: las construcciones comparativas están dotadas de conexiones con el orden causal de las palabras; los principales tipos seleccionados: construcción de ubicación con sus subtipos, construcción de llegada y construcción de conexión; tales construcciones se repiten ampliamente en diferentes idiomas pertenecientes a diferentes grupos. Esta investigación va más allá de los trabajos clásicos sobre gramática teórica en una serie de aspectos importantes. Distinguimos entre dos tipos de construcciones: la construcción

¹⁴⁶ Ph.D. in Philology, Associate Professor of the Department of Translation, Applied and General Linguistics, the Faculty of the Ukrainian Philology, Foreign Languages and Social Communications Volodymyr Vynnychenko Central Ukrainian State University, Kropyvnytskyi, Ukraine.

¹⁴⁷ Ph.D. (Philology), Associate Professor, Associate Professor Foreign and Ukrainian Philology Department, Faculty of Digital, Educational and Social Technologies, Lutsk National Technical University, Ukraine.

¹⁴⁸ PhD in Pedagogics, Associate Professor of the Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics State University "Zhytomyr Politechnic" Ukraine.

¹⁴⁹ PhD in Philology, Associate Professor, Ivano-Frankivsk National Technical University of Oil and Gas, Institute of Humanities and Public Administration, Department of Philology, Interpreting and Translation Studies, Ukraine.

¹⁵⁰ PhD in Philology, Associate Professor of Foreign Philology, Translation and Professional Language Training Department, Faculty of Economics, Business and International Relations, University of Customs and Finance, Ukraine.



secondary one, where the comparison parameter is conveyed by both the expressed predicate and the locative type. The study reveals a number of new universals: no language lacks a degree marker and a standard comparison marker, and almost no language lacks a standard marker, even if an asymmetric comparison degree marker is present. It is also found that there is a whole variety of comparative constructions than is represented in typological theoretical grammar and that quite a few languages do not fit into any of the types described.

Keywords: comparative construction marker, predicate type, locational type, causal word order.

Introduction

Studies concerning comparative constructions abound, whether they deal with different dimensions of comparison or focus exclusively on certain aspects. This is true, for instance, of works on so-called comparative equations and similarities. Among the studies elaborated, some take an areal orientation or a more or less extended typological perspective, while others focus on a particular language. Sometimes they are grouped into grammatical currents, whose peculiarity may be to present languages not hitherto described, with or without an oral tradition, or, in any case, languages for which the field of comparison has hitherto been little or no explored. All these contributions prove to be valuable sources of information, improving our knowledge of the syntax and semantics of the processes involved in the expression of comparison. In scholarly works dealing with the question of comparative constructions in English, scholars have touched on the coordination and subordination of sentence parts. It is often difficult to distinguish coordination from subordination (Suhrob & Vasila, 2022). Sometimes scholars suggest parsing a construction as syntactically coordinated and semantically subordinated or vice versa. Croft (2022) gives an analysis of comparative correlatives (CC) in English. In this respect, the work aimed to conduct a comparative analysis in the English/French context, because they belong to different groups and the results seem to be novel. In French, comparative constructions as syntactic coordination are even more inconsistent than in English, because, unlike in English, the use of conjunctions is possible here. The aim of the paper draws out the objectives: to analyze the arguments showing that semantic subordination

comparativa primaria y la construcción secundaria, donde el parámetro de comparación se expresa tanto por un predicado expresado como por un tipo de ubicación. El estudio reveló una serie de universales nuevos: ningún idioma carece de un marcador de grado y un marcador estándar de comparación, y casi ningún idioma carece de un marcador estándar incluso cuando hay un marcador de grado presente. También se encuentra que existe toda una variedad de construcciones comparativas de las que se representan en la gramática teórica tipológica, y que bastantes lenguas no encajan en ninguno de los tipos descritos.

Palabras clave: marcador de construcción comparativa, tipo predicativo, tipo locativo, orden causal de las palabras.

does exist, which in turn indicates that syntax is not the same in the two languages; to examine the internal structure of each sentence, finding the initial phrase, and then move on to the construction itself. Given this argument, it can be shown that in English there is also syntactic subordination. In French, according to Ivorra Ordines (2020), there are two possible types of sentence parsing with comparative constructions: one asymmetrical, similar to English, the other more like a coordinated construction. Even more interesting is the HPSG analysis based on the notion of comparative construction (which allows the grouping idiosyncratic or not strictly non-compositional properties) (Balatchi, 2020). This approach allows, on the one hand, to take into account the properties that these constructions inherit from other languages and their specificities; on the other hand, to indicate what is common between two languages and specific to each language in particular (Prescod & Jeannot-Fourcaud, 2020).

Theoretical Framework or Literature Review

The characterization of the types of comparative constructions involved in the linguistic expression of comparison is a polemical issue. In this work, we pay special attention to studies describing the morphological, syntactic, and semantic influences on the languages involved in their genesis and pointing out the identities or differences of different language groups. In general, to compare is to mentally perform a certain operation on broadcast objects. For philosophers, the comparison is the operation by which two or more objects are brought together in a single act of thought in order to reveal

similarities or differences (Jackiewicz & Pengam, 2020). For psychologists, it is a perceptual or logical activity indicating the identification of differences and similarities (Marcuse, 2020). For linguists, it is the intellectual act of combining two or more animates, concrete or abstract inanimate of the same nature to highlight their similarities and differences (Spaëth, 2020). Among these very similar definitions, let us solidarize with the idea that comparison is a cognitive operation, which consists in comprehending together with the mind several (usually two) objects, comparing them to see what their similarities and differences are. Comparison requires a common ground, which conditions the very possibility of mentally approaching the objects we wish to compare. This is called *tertium comparationis* (Hohaus & Bochnak, 2020). The need for such a common ground is illustrated by a correlative pattern constructed using two types of correlated grammatical markers (Beck, 2019). On the one hand, a parameter marker indicating an unequal degree or equality between two corresponding magnitudes of a value. On the other hand, a comparison marker, introducing a contracted sentence, usually elliptical and reduced to a comparison (Bowler, 2020). Comparison can operate at any level of categorization if the comparators share the property (Mueller, Nicolai, Petrou-Zeniou, Talmina & Linzen, 2020). Sometimes the structure of a comparative sentence is incomplete and requires reconstruction from context. Thus, comparisons can be a single entity duplicated under a variable point of view (temporal or otherwise): the entity is compared to itself, viewed in a certain way in two different mental spaces (Bochnak, Bowler, Hanink & Koontz-Garboden, 2020).

Beck (2019) analyzes comparative constructions as conditional, where the first sentence functions as a condition and the second as a consequence. In contrast to prior analyses, the author proposes to consider not the comparison between the first and second clauses, but the consequence between the two comparisons. More precisely, he analyzes each initial comparison as a quantifier, which may refer to individuals, degrees, times, or possible worlds, but always in pairs. In such an analysis, however, there is a comparison in every sentence, but with an implicit term. This explains why it is not possible to introduce an explicit comparison term or a complement of dimensions (Rett, 2020). In this aspect, Hoffmann (2019) suggests that syntax reflects this impossibility by assuming that the place of the comparison term is exactly what the initial elements occupy, such as in English or German. For example, *the*

warmer would have the same syntactic structure as *three degrees warmer*. 3 moments where the first sentence is interpreted as conditional, the second sentence is the semantic head of the whole, and we understand that this is what determines its polarity. In French, such a contrast can be constructed by means of repetition due to negative polarity: *A plus vite le médecin travaillera, plus vite il n'aura plus personne à voir, et sa secrétaire non plus*.

Chircu (2020) looks at the internal structure of comparative constructions in Romance languages in terms of their syntactic relations. If the interpretation of comparative constructions resembles that of conditional sentences, one should ask whether from a syntactic point of view the first sentence resembles a hypothetical contractual sentence. For English, in both cases it would express the impossibility of the future, but not for French. In both languages, the hypothetical contractor is movable, and the order of contracting is fixed in the construction (Haruta, Mineshima & Bekki, 2020). Hoffmann (2020) argues that in a hypothetical system, the main may be ordered or interrogative sentences. Goldberg & Approach, C. A. C. G. M. (2020), in a perspective where syntactic structure necessarily reflects the interpretation, propose to analyze the first part of a comparative construction as a relative (without background), as an assistant to the second part (which has the status of a semantic load carrier). It is worth noting Romero (2019) who considers comparative constructions as movable, hypothetical contractual sentences that do not prevent the main sentence from having its own modalities. In English, there are possible cases of dependency at a distance with semantic blocking because of these limitations (Zhan & Traugott, 2020).

Methodology

The methods chosen for the work were observation, complex comparative analysis of syntactic structures of units on the examples of English and French, the method of typological analysis, the method of thematic classification, and quantitative processing of scientific literature related to the topic of work. The study presents a comparison of identity and difference (symmetry/asymmetry) between comparative constructions of two languages belonging to different language groups. In its canonical action, the symmetry/asymmetry scheme is a correlative scheme between a predicate parameter and a comparative construction. We understand the following types of comparison in the key to the

extended paradigm, which corresponds to the ontological category of homogeneous elements. We analyze the schema of comparative constructions that can abolish the possibility of relative quantification by establishing heterogeneity between comparisons. We distinguish two types of comparative constructions: primary and secondary (denying the existence of a real comparator and resorting to the comparator “paragon”). Both have the effect of comparative construction on the syntactic parameter.

Results and Discussion

This study focuses on comparative constructions in English, in particular on the syntactic and semantic aspects related to the means that are

used to explain the cognitive operation that is comparison. A comparison is a thinking act that can be considered universal, since it can be observed in any speaker, regardless of their language. This act comes from the need to combine and distinguish entities or actions in order to better conceptualize them by being aware of their similarities and differences (Beck, 2019). However, the linguistic operations used to express similarities and differences are not universal, as the existing literature on the subject shows. In English, syntactic asymmetry is clearly evident. In context, the primary and secondary comparison is possible. The context imposes a contractual relationship and allows different syntactic variants of comparative constructions (Table 1):

Table 1.

Comparative constructions with possible subtypes widely repeated in different languages belonging to different groups

Example	Explanation
1. It is important that the more Ann eats, the more she weights.	An auxiliary clause is not possible in the sentence Possible in the second sentence.
2. I ask that the more Ann eats, the more she weights.	Inversion is usually forbidden in contractual sentences, but it is possible.
3. I ask that the more Ann eats, the more she weight.	
4. If I learn more, then I realise more.	Here the argument against syntactic subordination is the fact that the order of the two sentences is fixed (for this interpretation). The corresponding stiffness is possible in conditional structures.
5. Then I realise more if I learn more.	
6. This is the type of question which the sooner you solve (it), the more easily you'll satisfy the colleagues up at corporate main office.	It is possible to extract the construction from each sentence separately.
7. The colleagues up at corporate main offices are the sort of folks who the sooner you solve this question, the more easily you'll satisfy.	With this extraction, the design seems artificial and incomprehensible.

Source : Authors' own development

We propose to analyze the first sentence as a syntactic contractual (special type) in English. This analysis allows us to explain that sentences with the same initial comparative syntagmatic can act as contractual or ordinary, outside of comparative constructions. The second example of a comparative construction is a case where syntactic and semantic subordination go hand in hand. The third construction allows for the non-compositional aspects of comparative constructions, particularly the fact that the whole can appear independently while each sentence does not. The fourth example shows that

correlative constructions are binary structures of finite mode (i.e., indicative or contractive). The fifth construction is a subtype of correlative constructions. The sixth example shows that correlated phrases are analyzed as uncorrelated with immediate constituents (branches) denoted by a sign if they begin with a union. The seventh example shows that comparative constructions can include any number of constituents but containing the use of a union is less likely. A conjunctive sentence always allows it to appear in the same environments as phrases without conjunction (Figure 1).

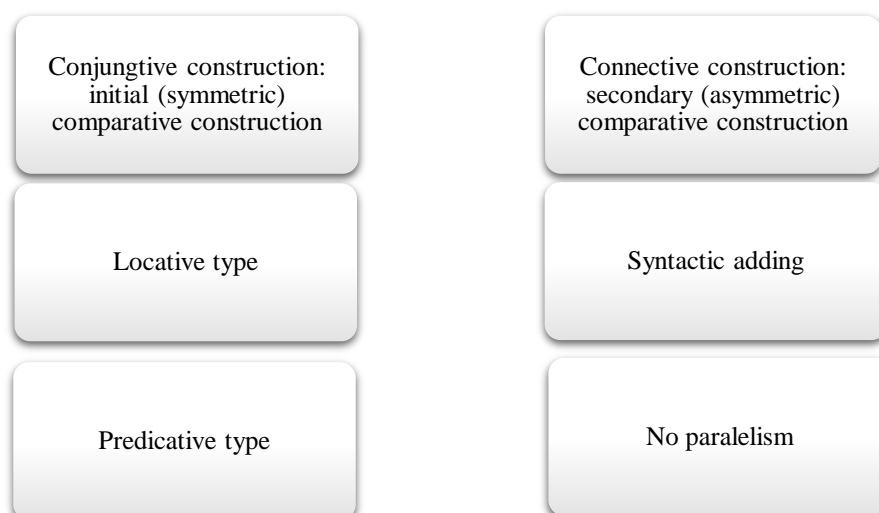


Figure 1. *Symmetric and asymmetric comparative constructions.*

Source : Authors' own development

Consequently, the constraints in comparative combusive constructions are provided by the joint use of features between the constituents. For native speakers, comparative constructions endowed with a syntagma are normal to perceive, while a native speaker of another language, e.g., French, subconsciously requires an additional restriction of syntactic parallelism, in particular concerning its withdrawal function because this language is inherent in the existence of complete syntactic parallelism, connected or not with lexical parallelism, between matrix and subject.

Very often the adventive elements present in the matrix and/or the contracting sentence question this absolute parallelism, however, this construction allows its semantic understanding, for the tendency to gradually disappear when the anaphoric elements are replaced, in the contracting sentence, by lexical components or when the contracting sentence contains an additional component to which no component in the matrix corresponds is logical for Romance languages.

Conclusions

The contrastive analysis of comparative constructions in the English/French section showed that they are closer than one might assume at first sight, since both languages (being representatives of different groups) are based on asymmetric construction from a semantic point of view. They are also similar in that they involve a comparative phrase at the beginning of each sentence. But syntactically in English, they should be parsed as asymmetrical, with the first sentence as a contracting sentence (i.e., with the

function of syntactic addition), whereas in French there are two systems: some speakers analyze them as syntactically consistent with all the limitations of parallelism; while others analyze them as syntactically asymmetrical, with the first as a complement and a possible difference of mode. Therefore, one cannot claim that comparative constructions have the same syntax in all languages. A detailed analysis of the data provides a distinction of (at least) two possible types of syntax. The model of asymmetric comparative constructions can show both what is specific about these constructions, and what they have in common, with less peripheral constructions in English or with the same constructions in other languages. Prospects for further analyses are to find out whether the interpretation of comparative constructions is exactly the same when they belong to different syntactic types.

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