

Comparative Standards and the Feasibility of Conceptual ExpansionPaper in journals : this is the first page of a paper published in *Cognitive Linguistics*.[*Cognitive Linguistics*] 20-2, 395-423 (2009)**Comparative standards and the feasibility of conceptual expansion**

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Abstract

*Parallelism between targets in a comparative structure is not always respected in some comparative standards in Japanese that allow the conceptual expansion of their referents, e.g., Nihon-no jinkoo-wa kankoku-yori ooi (The population of Japan is larger than Korea). We would like to investigate the conditions under which conceptual expansion is permitted. In contrast to Japanese, the standard of comparison in English adheres to the constraint of parallelism, (e.g., The population of Japan is larger than *(that of) Korea.) and other European languages follow suit. There seems to be a typological difference between Japanese and English, and the key to understanding this lies in the positioning of the mandatory morpheme designating the concept of comparison. After discussing conceptual expansion in comparative contexts, I then move on to more general situations, and consider the availability of conceptual expansion with reference to the central/peripheral distinction of participants involved in an event. We shall see that the breaking of the parallelism constraint in Japanese comparative sentences is the result of conceptual expansion meeting general constraints on its occurrence.*

Keywords: conceptual expansion; comparative construction; typological difference; salience, conventionality.

* I would like to thank the following people for giving instructions on the behavior of comparative constructions in different languages: Donna Tatsuki, David Farrah, Sachiko Shimoji, Montserrat Sanz, Toshikazu Inoue, Chung Sung Yeo, Jorg Nowakowitsch, Agnès Disson, Yasumin Sultana, Keiko Takemura, Albina Chuwa, Mari Okamoto, Kumiko Okamoto, Shigeo Mori, Eijiro Doyama, Yuu Kuribayashi, and Irene Franko. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Yukio Hirose and the anonymous reviewers of this journal for their intriguing suggestions. All the remaining inadequacies are of course mine. Correspondence address: Graduate School of Letters, Osaka University, (1-5 Machikaneyama, Toyonaka, Osaka 560-8532, Japan). Author's e-mail: <okadas@let.osaka-u.ac.jp>.

This is part of the research supported by Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research No.19520420, Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

Cognitive Linguistics 20-2 (2009), 395-423
DOI 10.1515/COGL.2009.019

0936-5907/09/0020-0395
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The following is a comment on the published paper shown on the preceding page.

Comparative Standards and the Feasibility of Conceptual Expansion***OKADA Sadayuki***

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The problem

It is often pointed out that the targets of comparison in a comparative construction should conform to some form of parallel structure requirement. Accordingly, we find the following examples in which the pronoun “that” cannot be omitted:

(1) a. The freezing point of alcohol is much lower than*(that of) water.

b. The heart of a bird is more powerful than*(that of) a mammal of similar size.

However, in Japanese, the discrepancy in (1) is allowed. In other words, the second target of comparison (comparative standard) is allowed to expand its reference in Japanese to fit itself to the parallel element in the subject position.

(2) a. *Arukooru-no hyooten-wa mizu (-no hyooten) yori hikui.*

[Alcohol-GEN freezing-point-TOP water (-GEN freezing-point) than low]

b. *Tori-no shinzo-wa onaji ookisa-no honyuurui (no shinzo) yori tsuyoi.*

[Bird-GEN heart-TOP similar size-GEN mammal (-GEN heart) than powerful]

English does not allow the conceptual expansion of the comparative standard, while Japanese is tolerant of this type of expansion. We would like to delve into the reason for this difference, with the aim of presenting general licensing conditions for conceptual expansions subsuming this particular type as a subcase.

Mandatory morphemes of comparison

In examining the comparative formation, we need to pay attention to the alignment of the morpheme which is indispensable to the construction of comparison. In the case of Japanese, the crucial morpheme of comparison “yori” is directly attached to the comparative standard as in (2). Without the phrase headed by this morpheme, the sentence is not interpreted as a comparative, since no morphological marking is assigned to the comparative predicate (*hikui* and *tsuyoi*). Thus, the semantic importance of the standard expression is relatively high with respect to the formation of a comparative construction.

In contrast, the mandatory morpheme of comparison “-er” (or “more”) is directly attached to the comparative predicate in English, as in (1). The comparative conjunction “than” and the comparative standard are optional, such that even without their presence, the sentence is understood as a comparative. Moreover, the comparative inflectional morpheme can never be omitted from the predicate in expressing the concept of comparison.

In English, the comparative standard is simply adjunctive, and its semantic importance is estimated to be relatively small.

As the semantic importance of the comparative standard is different between these two languages, it is not surprising that conceptual expansion is only admitted in Japanese. This is because the processing effort devoted to the proper interpretation of a noun phrase with a lot of semantic importance sounds more reasonable than the effort allotted to the same task for a noun phrase with little importance. The participant worthy of much attention deserves the processing effort of singling out the designation most suitable for the particular context in which it is employed. On the other hand, the distribution of effort to a participant in a peripheral status is not deemed effective. The conceptual expansion of comparative standards in Japanese is more motivated than the same conceptual operation allotted to the comparative standards in English. This is a realization of the general distinction between items profiled in conveying the intended message and those in the shadow. Of course, attention falls on the former items rather than the latter, and the processing effort should be distributed accordingly.

English-type and Japanese-type languages

Not only in English, but also in other languages (German, French, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Hungarian, Arabic and Esperanto) where the indispensable comparative morpheme is attached to the comparative predicate just as in English, the conceptual expansion of the standard expression is generally not attested.

French (Romance)

(3) a. *La population du Japon est plus grande que celle de la Corée.*

b. **La population du Japon est plus grande que la Corée.*

In contrast to the English-type, there are some languages similar to Japanese in that the mandatory morpheme of comparison is realized as a concomitant of the comparative standard (Korean, Chinese, Hindi, Swahili, and Turkish). In addition, they seem to be more tolerant of the conceptual expansion of the standard expressions.

Hindi (Indo-Aryan) comparative standard + se

(4) a. *Japan ki jãnsãnkhya koriya ki jãnsãnkhya se zyada hai.*

[Japan-GEN population Korea-GEN population from/than large is]

b. *Japan ki jãnsãnkhya koriya se zyada hai.*

[Japan-GEN population Korea from/than large is]