

PRELIMINARIES TO THE STUDY OF COMPARATIVE WORDS
IN ENGLISH AND POLISH

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1. *Introduction*

We assume that the term 'comparative' should be used to describe various structures relating to the process of comparison. The majority of recent works on comparative structures is concerned with conventional comparative sentences only (cf. Bresnan 1973), a marginal treatment, if any, being given to other than the grammaticalized sentential means of expressing comparison (cf. Bartsch & Vennemann 1972, Post 1978). In this paper, we will be concerned with comparative words, i.e., such lexical items which relate to comparison. To our knowledge, English and Polish do not have complete and exhaustive descriptions of such words, although scholars do qualify certain lexical items as the exponents of comparison (cf. Huddleston 1971, Anderson 1971). Consider, for example, the following passage from Anderson (1971:17):

...many simple items (verbs, prepositions, nouns) represent the same underlying relations as 'overt' comparative structures. Consider such different types as *prefer* ('like more'), *darken* ('become darker or dark'), *exceed* ('become greater than'), *beyond* ('further than'), *after* ('later than'), *top* ('highest point'). [...] an underlying configurational representation for such items seems appropriate; [...] such representations have alternative realizations, which, in a sense, retain more of the abstract structuring.

The reason why we have included the passage from Anderson's work is that it clearly specifies certain characteristics of comparative words. According to Anderson,

(1) comparative words can be of different grammatical categories;

- (2) comparative words involve the same comparison relations as comparative sentences do;
- (3) comparative words and comparative sentences are alternative realizations of the same underlying representations;
- (4) comparative sentences retain more of this underlying representation than comparative words do.

With the linguistic material presented below, taken from English and Polish, we hope to support the observation that comparative words are of different grammatical categories. The comparative words surveyed in this paper will be adjectives, adverbs, verbs, and prepositions.

Claim (2) logically follows from the assumption that the constitutive property of a linguistic expression is its relational meaning (cf. Klemensiewicz 1958). Consequently, expressions of the same semantic type have the same relational meaning. Since comparative sentences involve various comparison relations, it is only natural to suggest that comparative words involve the same semantic relations.

The plausibility of claim (3) is evidenced by current linguistic literature, especially of the generative semantics type. There exists ample evidence that markedly different surface expressions are alternative realizations of the same semantic structure. Thus, we think that it is justified to assume that comparative words and comparative sentences are alternative realizations of the same underlying representation.

To ascertain whether comparative sentences retain more of the underlying representation than the comparative words, requires (a) prior specification of the relevant aspects of the semantic relational structure underlying comparative constructions, and (b) establishing which of these aspects are reflected in comparative sentences.

As regards (a), it is assumed after Post (1978), that

- (1) the basic comparison situation involves two terms, a property shared by these terms, and a relation of comparison;
- (2) one of the compared terms functions as the point of reference (standard of comparison) for the other term;
- (3) comparison relations can be optionally quantified, hence quantitative and qualitative comparative constructions should be distinguished;
- (4) the property with respect to which a relation of comparison is established between two terms is left unspecified in the semantic structure of qualitative comparative constructions. In such a case, it does not surface but is rather implied by the standard of comparison.

As far as (b) is concerned, a typical comparative sentence obligatorily lexicalizes the terms of comparison and the relation, 'bare' or quantified. Fillmore (1971:537) even says that one of the functions of the comparative construction is to make the comparison relation and the two terms of this

relation accessible. Additionally, the shared property is either given explicitly in the surface structure (in the quantitative constructions), or is implied by the standard of comparison, i.e., the second term (in the qualitative type).

The examination of the collected material showed that (a) comparative words reflect only some of the aspects enumerated above, and that (b) comparative words differ among themselves as to which of those aspects they reflect. This second finding served us as a basis for grouping the collected material into the following four groups:

- (1) comparative words which denote various comparison relations;
- (2) comparative words which involve a quantified relation and a property;
- (3) comparative words which involve comparison relation and the second term;
- (4) comparative words which additionally involve 'non-comparative' semantic elements.

We are in a position now to discuss the linguistic material that we have found in English and Polish grammars. The presentation will not be a systematic contrastive study, but should rather be viewed as the evidence for the existence of the same linguistic problem both in English and Polish.

2. Comparative words which denote various comparison relations

A study of comparative words of this class has to be preceded by a prior establishing of the set of comparison relations. To our knowledge, there does not exist any account of this sort in the linguistic literature of both languages involved. Besides, the number of elementary comparison relations recognized in individual works varies from author to author.¹ In view of this inadequacy, it is not surprising that the comparative words reported upon in this section denote the generally recognized comparison relations, such as superiority, identity and equality.

In English, we have been able to find two works whose authors treat certain lexical items as the exponents of the underlying comparison relationship. In Bach (1968:120-121), it is suggested that the verb *surpass* expresses the same semantic relationship as *more... than*. This suggestion is supported by the fact that *more... than* sentences can easily be replaced with expressions containing the verb *surpass* in exactly the same function as the marker *more... than*, i.e. a formal exponent of the comparison relation of superiority:

- (1) a. Bill is shorter than John.
b. John is taller than Bill.

¹ For example, Jespersen (1929) assumes that there are three basic comparison relations, Sapir (1944) suggests that as many as fifteen different comparison relations should be recognized. In a recent study on comparative constructions by Jurkowski (1976), ten distinct comparison relations have been distinguished.

- (2) a. Bill is surpassed by John in tallness (height).
 b. John surpasses Bill in tallness (height).

In Post (1978), the adjectives *same*, *identical* and *equal* have been discussed. They function as the exponents of the elementary comparison relation of identity, and consequently, the constructions containing these three lexical items should be treated as comparative constructions of identity *par excellence*.

In our interpretation, *same* lexicalizes the bare relation of identity. *Identical* is regarded as the marked counterpart of *same*, which additionally informs about the commitment of the speaker to the truth of the proposition involving the relation of identity. The adjective *equal* is assumed to stand for the derived relation of equality, i.e., quantified relation of identity.

Our discussion of these three adjectives was confined to their function as predicatives of the copulative verb *be*, as in the following:

- (3) a. John and Bill are $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{the same} \\ \text{identical} \\ \text{equal} \end{array} \right\}$

- b. John is $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{the same as} \\ \text{identical to} \\ \text{equal with} \end{array} \right\}$ Bill.

(3a) represents the case when both compared terms are topicalized. In the case represented by (3b), the comparison relation and the standard are made the comment.

Since the optimal lexicalization of the semantic representation underlying comparative constructions additionally includes the presence, in the surface structure, of the property attributable to the compared terms, we observed that this is achieved with *same*, *identical* and *equal* by adding the following complements:

- (4) a. in the way $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{that} \\ \text{which} \end{array} \right\}$ S
 b. in NP

The NP of (4b) can be a nominal defining a mode of action, as in (5a), or an abstract measurable, but not directly observable, property, as in (5b):

- (5) a. John and Bill are $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{the same} \\ \text{identical} \\ \text{*equal} \end{array} \right\}$ in gestures.
 b. John and Bill are $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{the same} \\ \text{identical} \\ \text{equal} \end{array} \right\}$ in height.

Except for *equal*, which occurs only in quantitative comparatives, the remaining two adjectives occur both in quantitative and qualitative comparative constructions. This observation is evidenced by the incompatibility of *equal* with complements denoting unspecified mode of action (see (5a) above).

In Polish grammars, we did not manage to find a description of lexical items expressing various comparison relations. We have only come across with a written suggestion in Karolak (1972) that the words, which are evidently the Polish counterparts of *surpass*, *same*, *identical*, *equal* and the like, should be interpreted along the lines described above. Karolak (1972:136) explicitly states that lexical items like *różny*/different, *inny*/other, *różnić się*/differ, *być podobny*/be similar, *taki sam*/the same, *przewyższać*/exceed are the exponents of various comparison relationships.

3. Comparative words which involve a quantified comparison relation and a property

This group of comparative words includes such adjectives as *long-short*, *tall-short*, *high-low*, *wide-narrow*, *deep-shallow*, *large-small* etc. Adjectives of this class exist in pairs of antonyms such as those quoted above. Each pair of antonyms is semantically based on the concept of scale which for each pair represents the relevant dimension. Thus the pair *long-short* is based on the concept 'length', the pair *large-small* on the concept 'size' etc.

One of the antonyms in each pair is the marked member of the opposition, the other being one unmarked. The unmarked member represents the underlying dimension as a whole. In other words, there is no presupposition such as *John is tall* attached to propositions of the form *John is x feet tall*. On the other hand, a proposition such as *John is 5 feet short* (with the marked member of the pair *tall-short*) carries with it the presupposition "John is short".

It has been claimed by many grammarians that antonymous adjectives are implicitly comparative, i.e. the form of the positive degree of these adjectives expresses the relations 'more than' and 'less than' (cf. Sapir 1944, Lyons 1968, Bartsch & Vennemann 1972). According to this approach, a sentence like (6)

- (6) John is tall.

should be interpreted as 'John is taller than the average height of man', because to say that a person is tall is to place him above the point which in the speaker's evaluation represents the average height of man.

A similar interpretation of the positive degree of antonymous adjectives can be found in Polish sources as well (see Wierzbicka 1971, Topolińska 1975, Jurkowski 1976). Wierzbicka, Topolińska and Jurkowski assume that the Polish counterparts of the English antonymous adjectives express internal

comparison too. In the syntactic structures including a positive form of such adjectives, only one term of comparison is externalized; the second, i.e., the average is present only *in potentia*.

We think that in the group of comparative words which denote comparison relations and a property, Geis's analysis of *before* and *after* time prepositions should also be included (Geis 1970). Geis has argued that *before* and *after* are alternative lexical realizations of the subtree underlying *earlier than* and *later than* respectively (Geis 1970:237). For Geis, the following two examples have the same underlying structures:

(7) a. John went home $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{before} \\ \text{after} \end{array} \right\}$ Frank did.

b. John went home *at a time which was* $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{earlier} \\ \text{later} \end{array} \right\}$

than the time at which Frank went home.

To our knowledge, there does not exist in Polish a study in which time prepositions are explicitly interpreted as expressing comparison relationships.

4. Comparative words which involve 'bare' comparison relation and the standard of comparison

4.1. Comparative adjectives in Polish

From the morphological point of view, the adjectives to be discussed in this section are derived from nouns through suffixation.² The adjectives of this type define the shared property indirectly. In uttering them, the speaker assumes that the designatum of the noun stem of the adjective suffices to specify the property unambiguously.

Smólkowa & Tekiel (1977) distinguish seven different suffixes with which denominal comparative adjectives are formed.

a. Suffix *-ski*

e.g. oko *snajperskie* — 'sniper eye'
oportunizm *lewacki* — 'leftist extremist opportunism'

b. Suffix *-owski*

e.g. zygzaki *picassowskie* — 'pseudo-picassian zigzags'
fryzura *bitlesowska* — 'The Beatles hair style'

c. Suffixes *-i||y, -czy, -niczy*

e.g. *cyklopie* spojrzenie — 'cyclopean look'
uchodźcza dola — 'refugean fate'

d. Suffix *-owaty*

e.g. *tyczkowaty* młodzieniec — 'rod-like youngster'
skrzyniowate łóżko — 'trunk-like bed'

e. Suffix *-asty*

e.g. *kleszczaste* palce — 'claws-like fingers'
konopiasta czupryna — 'towy shag'

f. Suffix *-aty*

e.g. *pyzate* dzieci — 'doughnut faced children'
gąbczata twarz — 'spongy face'

g. Suffix *-isty/ysty*

e.g. substancje *kleiste* — 'gluey substances'
jedwabiste rzęsy — 'silken eyelashes'

Gawelko (1977) additionally mentions two other adjective-from-noun forming suffixes:

h. Suffix *-ow*

e.g. *kredowa* białość — 'chalky pale'
alabastrowa cera — 'alabaster-like complexion'

i. Suffix *-an*

e.g. *lniane* włosy — 'flaxen hair'
słomiane wąsy — 'strawy moustache'

Considering the link between comparative adjectives and the nouns they modify, two distinct cases can be distinguished according to Heinz (1957). Case (1) is illustrated by the following example:

(8) *mima ułańska* — 'uhlan look'

Heinz says about expressions like (8) that the entity denoted by the surface noun (*mima/look*) is similar to the same entity (*mima ulana/uhlan look*) denoted by the designatum of the nominal stem of the adjective (*ulan/uhlan*). The second term of comparison (*mima ulana/uhlan look*) does not occur in the surface structure but is defined by the nominal stem of the adjective.

Case (2) is illustrated by (9):

(9) *dzieci pyzate* — 'doughnut faced children'

² The Polish examples given in this section are due to Smólkowa and Tekiel (1977).

According to Heinz, in expressions like (9), the entity denoted by the surface noun (*dzieci/children*) implies an object which is perceived as similar to the entity denoted by the nominal stem of the adjective (*pyzy/doughnuts*).

It seems to us that considering the link between comparative adjectives and the nouns they modify, still another case should be distinguished as well.

Consider the following:

(10) *stupowate nogi* — 'pillar-like legs'

In expressions like (10), the entity denoted by the surface noun (*nogi/legs*) is similar to the entity denoted by the nominal stem of the adjective (*stupy/pillars*).

Smólkowa&Tekiel (1977) observed that Polish has comparative adjectives which, from the morphological point of view, are compounds of the type N+Adj:

(11) *welnopodobny* — 'wool-like'
człekokształtny — 'man-like'

These compounds have the adjectives *podobny/similar* and *kształtny/like* as the second constituent of the compound. Their function is to denote the comparison relation. The function of the noun stem is to specify the second term of comparison, i.e. the standard.

4.2. Comparative adverbs in Polish

According to Grzegorzycowa (1975) and Smólkowa&Tekiel (1977), there are in Polish comparative adverbs. They fall into two morphological groups:

(1) suffixal adverbs, formed from denominal adjectives with the suffix *-o*
e.g. *moralitetowo uproszczony* — 'simplified in the morality play manner'

(2) prefixo-suffixal adverbs, formed with the prepositional prefixes *po-* and *z-*, and the suffixes *-u* and *-a*:

e.g. *zachował się po prostaku* — 'behave like a boor'
akcentować z wileńska — 'speak with the accent characteristic of Eastern provinces of the Pre-War Poland'

These comparative words inform about the similarity of the subject and the entity denoted by the nominal stem of the adverb, in respect of the action specified by the verb.

Suffixal adverbs are formed from denominal adjectives ending in *-ow-*, *-owat-*, *-sk-*, and *-ast-*:

(12) *albumowo* wydana monografia — 'album edited monograph'
kołnierzowato rozszerzony — 'collar-like extended'

aktorsko podkreślić tragizm sytuacji — 'to emphasize the seriousness of the situation theatrically'

drzewiasto rozgałęzione żyły — 'tree-like ramified veins' and directly from nouns:

(13) *szczeniacho* całować — 'teenage kissing'
wilczo szczerzyć zęby — 'wolfish grin'

Considering the morphology of the prefixo-suffixal comparative adverbs, three subgroups can be distinguished. The first group includes those adverbs which are formed from denominal adjectives ending in *-sk-*:

(14) *po aktorsku* — 'like an actor'
po dżentelmeńsku — 'like a gentleman'

Group two includes adverbs based on adjectives ending in suffixes other than *-sk-*. The adverbs of this group are formed with the prepositional prefix *po-* and the dative of the adjective:

(15) *po cywilnemu* — 'in a civilian way'
po wiosennemu — 'in a spring fashion'

Finally, group three comprises adverbs formed with the prepositional prefix *z-* and the suffix *-a*:

(16) *z niemiecka* — 'like a German'
z wileńska — 'like a resident of Eastern provinces of the Pre-War Poland'

4.3. Comparative verbs in English

Duszak (1978) observed that in English there are verbs which express a resemblance of behaviour between two entities. She has in mind such verbs as *to ape*, *to dog*, *to wolfe* etc.

(17) a. John aped his mother.
b. Reporters have dogged him for years.
c. He wolfe the entire salad.

The verbs of this class are of the same general pattern 'X acts like Y', where X stands for the agent and Y for the designatum of the verb. The verbs of this semantic class imply an object which fulfills a comparative function; it is used to show an analogy that exists between it and some other object.

In the above case, the confrontation of the two terms is performed in terms of behaviour. But such a confrontation can also be performed in terms of various physical qualities such as shape, colour, consistency etc. Duszak

distinguished two classes of verbs expressing resemblance of physical properties between two entities. The first class is of the general pattern 'X becomes like Y':

(18) The bridge arched across the river.

The second class is of the pattern 'X make Y become like Z':

(19) John arched the branch.

These two types of verbs point out to the fact that X/Y acquire some features which make it similar to the idea inherent in the designatum of the implied object.

5. Comparative words which additionally involve 'non-comparative' semantic elements

The comparative words of this class involve various comparison relations, alongside with other 'non-comparative' semantic elements. We suggest that the verb *prefer*, mentioned by Anderson, qualifies as such a word. It is irrelevant whether the analysis of *prefer* into *like* and *more* is detailed enough. We think that even a more refined semantic decomposition of this verb would reveal the presence of a semantic element representing the relation of superiority, indicated in Anderson's interpretation by *more*.

Postal's discussion of the verb *remind* (Postal 1970), is another instance of an analysis postulating a combination of a semantic element representing comparison relation with another non-comparative semantic element. Actually, Postal does not say that *remind* relates to comparison at all, however, he stipulates that *similar* be an underlying element in the semantic structure of this verb. In his analysis, *remind* involves the predicates STRIKE and SIMILAR. The entire analysis probably cannot be maintained, but the fact that the verb *remind* involves the comparison relation of similarity is indisputable.

In her work, Duszak (1978) discusses verbs like *model*, *caricature*, *pattern*, *paraphrase* etc., to which she assigns the general pattern 'X produce Z in relation to Y'.

(20) a. John caricatured his aunt.

b. She patterned her dress after her sister.

c. He paraphrased her words in his own way.

Duszak does not specify the relation in which Z stands to Y, i.e. the object produced to the original. It is plausible that the relation here is that of similarity. If so, then a more accurate pattern should be something like 'X produce Z similar to Y'. If our interpretation of the verbs *model*, *pattern*, *parody* and the like is correct, then they should also be subsumed under the class of comparative words.

6. Conclusions

The general conclusions that we want to emphasize are as follows:

- 1) English and Polish have lexical items which, in various ways, relate to the process of comparison;
 - 2) these lexical items are of different surface category;
 - 3) they reflect only certain aspects of the semantic relational structure underlying comparative constructions;
 - 4) they differ among themselves as to which of these aspects they reflect.
- We hope to have sufficiently supported (1) and thus provided justification for undertaking of a detailed crosslinguistic study of words relating to comparison.

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