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LEXICAL-SEMANTIC PROPERTIES OF COMPARATIVE ADJECTIVE PHRASES IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

Rakhmonkulov Ma'rufjon Maxamat ugli
Jizzakh State Pedagogical University, Faculty of Languages, Uzbekistan
maruf.rahmonqulov@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper investigates the lexical-semantic properties of comparative adjective phrases in English and Uzbek through a systematic contrastive analysis. Comparative constructions—understood as grammatical and semantic devices for expressing difference, superiority, or inferiority between two or more referents—are universal in human language yet realised through markedly different morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic mechanisms across typologically distinct languages. The study examines how each language encodes degrees of comparison, how fixed comparative expressions function as stylistic resources, how cultural imagery shapes the selection of comparative referents, and what challenges arise when such constructions are translated between the two languages. The findings reveal systematic divergences in morphological strategy, syntactic marking, cultural framing, and idiomatic stability, with significant implications for contrastive linguistics, translation studies, and second-language pedagogy.

Keywords: comparative adjectives, lexical-semantic properties, contrastive linguistics, English, Uzbek, translation equivalence, grammatical comparison, cultural pragmatics

1. Introduction

Human cognition is fundamentally comparative: people distinguish, rank, and evaluate entities by juxtaposing their attributes against those of other entities. Language must therefore provide reliable mechanisms for expressing these cognitive operations. The grammatical category that most directly serves this purpose is the comparative degree of adjectives, through which speakers predicate a relative quality upon a subject with respect to a standard of comparison. Although comparativity is widely regarded as a linguistic universal, the formal resources through which individual languages realise it are by no means uniform. They differ in morphological complexity, syntactic dependency, degree of lexicalization, and the cultural repertoire of comparative imagery they recruit.

English and Uzbek represent contrasting typological profiles. English is an analytic Indo-European language with a comparatively impoverished inflectional morphology; Uzbek is an agglutinative Turkic language in which grammatical meaning is expressed primarily through suffixation. These typological differences manifest conspicuously in the comparative system. Whereas English speakers select between a synthetic strategy (-er) and a periphrastic one (more + adjective) according to syllable-based phonological rules, Uzbek speakers consistently apply a single agglutinative suffix (-roq) to the adjective stem, regardless of word length. This morphological contrast alone has far-reaching consequences for how comparative meaning is constructed, intensified, and embedded in larger syntactic structures.

Despite a substantial body of research on English comparative constructions (Quirk et al., 1985; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Kennedy, 2007) and a growing literature on Uzbek adjective morphology (Shukurov, 2007; Baskakov, 1966), comparatively little contrastive work addresses the two languages jointly, and still less from a lexical-semantic perspective that integrates grammatical, stylistic, cultural, and translational dimensions. The present study aims to fill this gap.

1.1 Research Aims and Objectives

The overarching aim of this study is to conduct a theoretically grounded contrastive analysis of comparative adjective phrases in English and Uzbek at the lexical-semantic level. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To describe and compare the morphosyntactic mechanisms through which the comparative degree is expressed in each language;
2. To analyse the semantic scope of comparative constructions, including their capacity to encode subjective evaluation and emotional intensity;
3. To examine fixed and idiomatic comparative expressions in both languages as stylistic resources;
4. To investigate the role of culturally specific imagery in shaping comparative reference;
5. To identify the principal challenges facing translators when rendering comparative phrases across the language pair;
6. To consider the pedagogical implications of the observed contrasts for second-language teaching.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative contrastive-analytical design within the theoretical framework of contrastive linguistics as articulated by Lado (1957) and subsequently refined by James (1980). Contrastive analysis operates on the premise that systematic comparison of two languages at selected levels of linguistic description reveals areas of structural convergence and divergence, and that these, in turn, can predict areas of difficulty for learners and complexity for translators. The present analysis focuses specifically on the lexical-semantic level, examining not only form but also the semantic and pragmatic dimensions of meaning.

2.2 Data Sources

The analytical corpus was assembled from four complementary sources. First, reference grammars provided the theoretical and descriptive foundation: for English, Quirk et al. (1985) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002) were the principal sources; for Uzbek, Shukurov (2007) and Baskakov (1966) served the equivalent function. Second, published English-language corpora—principally the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)—were consulted to verify the frequency and naturalness of attested comparative forms. Third, a selection of Uzbek literary and journalistic texts was examined to document comparable usage in authentic Uzbek discourse. Fourth, established dictionaries of English and Uzbek idioms were drawn upon to identify fixed comparative expressions in each language.

2.3 Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded in three stages. In the first stage, the morphological and syntactic properties of comparative constructions in each language were described and systematically

contrasted. In the second stage, the semantic scope of these constructions was examined, with particular attention to evaluative and emotional dimensions of meaning and to the role of culturally specific comparative referents (animals, natural phenomena, proverbs). In the third stage, selected English comparative expressions—including both productive constructions and fixed idioms—were subjected to translational analysis, with the aim of determining the degree of formal and functional equivalence achievable when rendering them in Uzbek.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The study draws on three theoretical traditions. Semantic degree theory (Kennedy, 2007; von Stechow, 1984) provides a formal account of how adjectives denote gradable properties and how comparative morphology accesses the degree argument. Baker's (2011) framework of equivalence types—semantic, pragmatic, textual, and dynamic—informs the translational analysis. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson's (2011) conception of form-meaning-use mappings informs the pedagogical discussion in the concluding section.

3. Results

3.1 Morphosyntactic Encoding of the Comparative Degree

The most fundamental structural difference between the two languages concerns the morphological strategy employed to express comparison.

In English, the strategy is determined by phonological and syllabic criteria. Monosyllabic adjectives, and a subset of disyllabic adjectives ending in unstressed syllables (e.g., -le, -er, -y), form the comparative by suffixation: small → smaller; fast → faster; wise → wiser. Polysyllabic adjectives form the comparative periphrastically through the pre-modifier more: more beautiful; more expensive; more sophisticated. A small set of high-frequency adjectives exhibits suppletive comparison: good → better; bad → worse; far → further/farther. The choice of strategy is largely non-discretionary and violation of the rule (e.g., *more tall) produces ungrammatical forms in standard varieties of the language.

In English, the standard of comparison is introduced by the subordinating conjunction than (He is stronger than I am), and the construction may be left elliptical when the standard is recoverable from context (He is stronger [than I am]). The syntax of the comparative clause has been extensively discussed in the literature (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, pp. 1116–1150), and its complexity contrasts markedly with the Uzbek pattern.

In Uzbek, morphological comparison is achieved uniformly through the agglutinative suffix -roq, which attaches directly to the adjective stem without phonological conditioning: katta (big) → kattaroq (bigger); yaxshi (good) → yaxshiroq (better); qiziq (interesting) → qiziqroq (more interesting). The morphological uniformity of this system eliminates the category-selection problem that learners of English face, but it creates a different pedagogical challenge: Uzbek learners must acquire the English syllabic rule from scratch, as it has no analogue in their first language.1

The standard of comparison is introduced in Uzbek by the postpositional construction [NP + dan] (ablative case), which functions as a relational marker rather than a subordinating

1 Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language. Longman, pp. 457–470.

conjunction: U mendan kuchliroq — literally 'He from-me stronger', i.e., 'He is stronger than me.' The explicit marker is often omitted when context is unambiguous. Unlike English, which requires grammatical comparison clauses of some syntactic complexity, Uzbek comparative constructions are typically monoclausal. Intensification is achieved analytically, through adverbs such as yanada ('even more') or the construction yana-da...roq, rather than through morphological doubling.

A further point of divergence concerns degree adverbs. Whereas English employs much and far as amplifiers of the comparative (much faster; far more expensive), Uzbek relies on the construction ancha (considerably) or bir muncha (somewhat) as pre-modifiers, or achieves the same effect through repetition of the suffix: kattaroq-kattaroq, a reduplicative pattern that implies a gradual or progressive increase. This asymmetry represents a gap in formal correspondence that creates predictable difficulties in translation.

These observations are summarised in Table 1 below, which provides a side-by-side overview of the morphosyntactic profiles of comparative adjective constructions in the two languages.2

Table 1. Comparative Morphosyntactic Properties: English vs. Uzbek

Feature	English	Uzbek
Morphological strategy	Synthetic (-er) / Periphrastic (more + adj.)	Agglutinative suffix (-roq), uniform for all adj.
Standard of comparison marker	Subordinating conjunction: than	Ablative postposition: -dan (e.g., mendan)
Intensification	much, far + comparative (much faster)	yanada, ancha + -roq form (yanada tezroq)
Degree adverb position	Pre-modifier (much more expensive)	Pre-modifier (ancha qimmatroq)
Irregular/suppletive forms	good/better, bad/worse, far/further	None — fully regular throughout
Ellipsis of standard	Common (She is taller [than him])	Less frequent; fuller form preferred

2 Shukurov, M. (2007). Hozirgi o'zbek adabiy tili. Toshkent: O'qituvchi, pp. 112–119.

3.2 Semantic Scope: Evaluative and Emotional Dimensions

Comparative adjective constructions in both languages extend beyond purely objective description to encode evaluative and affective meaning, though the mechanisms differ. In English, comparative forms carry an inherent evaluative polarity that is determined by the adjective's position on a scale: he is braver than he looks predicates not only a measurable quantity of courage but simultaneously conveys an implicit positive assessment of the subject's character. This evaluative surplus arises because scalar adjectives are anchored to culturally and contextually negotiated standards, and comparison against a foil (than he looks) highlights the positive deviation.

In Uzbek, the same evaluative meaning is typically distributed across more lexical material. The equivalent expression U ko'ringanidan ko'ra jur'atliroq ekan foregrounds the evidential particle ekan (which signals that the speaker has only recently inferred the proposition), adding an epistemic dimension absent from the English form. This suggests that Uzbek comparative constructions tend to be more explicitly pragmatically marked than their English counterparts: the language grammaticalises distinctions of evidentiality and speaker stance that English leaves implicit.

A related semantic distinction concerns the interaction of comparison with negation. In English, the construction no + comparative (no more beautiful, no taller) produces a result that is semantically equivalent to equative negation: he is no taller than she is asserts that the degrees are equal. Uzbek lacks a direct morphological equivalent and achieves the same meaning through a fuller syntactic construction: uning bo'yi undan baland emas — literally 'his height from-her tall not', i.e., 'He is not taller than her.' The syntactic elaboration required in Uzbek reflects a more general tendency of the language to express degree relations through clausal rather than morphological means.

3.3 Fixed Comparative Expressions and Stylistic Resources

Both languages possess a stock of fixed comparative expressions that function as rhetorical and stylistic resources beyond their compositional semantic content. In English, such expressions range from simple similes (as cool as a cucumber; as bold as brass) to elaborated proverbial comparatives (easier said than done; the more the merrier). These expressions are partially or wholly non-compositional—their meaning cannot be derived by applying the regular rules of grammar to their parts—and must be stored and retrieved as holistic units in the mental lexicon.

The English proverbial comparative the more the better exemplifies a construction—the correlative comparative—in which two comparative clauses are linked so that an increase in one quantity is predicated to entail an increase in the other (Culicover & Jackendoff, 1999). This construction type exists in Uzbek but is less frequent in fixed form; it tends to appear in proverb-like elaborations: Qanchalik ko'p mehnat qilsang, shunchalik ko'p natija bo'ladi ('The more you work, the more results you obtain'). The Uzbek version is typically more explicit about the causal relationship and less condensed syntactically than its English counterpart, reflecting a broader discourse preference for explicit logical connectives.3

3 Moon, R. (1998). Fixed Expressions and Idioms in English: A Corpus-Based Approach. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 2–8.

3.4 Cultural Imagery in Comparative Reference

The choice of standard of comparison is not linguistically arbitrary but culturally motivated. Both English and Uzbek recruit animals, natural phenomena, and familiar cultural artefacts as comparison standards, but the specific selections differ in ways that reflect each community's ecological and cultural environment.

English comparative similes frequently appeal to animals or environments familiar from Western cultural contexts: as cold as Alaska; as fast as a cheetah; as stubborn as a mule. These expressions are transparent to speakers who share the relevant cultural and geographic knowledge, but they may be opaque—or simply incongruous—to speakers of Uzbek, whose ecological frame of reference is the Central Asian steppe rather than sub-Saharan Africa.

Uzbek comparative imagery draws instead on the culturally salient fauna and natural phenomena of its own geography: bo'ridan ham yovuzroq ('fiercer than a wolf'); qor bo'ronidan battar ('worse than a snowstorm'). The wolf holds particular symbolic weight in Turkic cultural mythology as an emblem of ferocity and predatory cunning, making it a culturally appropriate anchor for extreme negative comparison in a way that a cheetah—exotic to Uzbek audiences—would not be.

These observations have direct implications for translation practice. A literal rendering of an English culturally specific comparative into Uzbek risks producing an expression that is grammatically well-formed but culturally displaced. Conversely, a domesticating strategy that replaces English cultural referents with Uzbek equivalents may distort the cultural texture of the source text in ways unacceptable to some translation briefs.

3.5 Translational Challenges

The translation of comparative adjective phrases between English and Uzbek involves at least three types of equivalence challenge, following Baker's (2011) taxonomy. The first is semantic non-equivalence, which arises when the source-language comparative predicate selects features that have no single-word correspondent in the target language. The second is pragmatic non-equivalence, which arises when the illocutionary force or implicature carried by a comparative construction in the source language is not reproduced by the formally closest target-language equivalent. The third, and most practically significant, is the non-equivalence of idiomatic comparatives.

Consider the English proverb The grass is always greener on the other side (of the fence). A compositional translation into Uzbek—Boshqa tomondagi o't doim yashilroq ko'rinadi—is semantically transparent and grammatically acceptable, but it lacks idiomatic resonance in Uzbek and would be perceived as a calque rather than a naturally occurring Uzbek expression. A functional equivalent that conveys the same pragmatic meaning—dissatisfaction with one's lot and idealisation of alternatives—might be the Uzbek folk saying Odamga boshqasining ishi oson tuyuladi ('Another person's task always seems easier'), which achieves dynamic equivalence at the cost of formal correspondence.

These challenges are compounded by the structural asymmetry between the two comparative systems. The English periphrastic construction (more + adjective) has no morphological parallel in Uzbek and must be rendered by the -roq suffix alone, potentially losing pragmatic nuance attached to the periphrastic form in English discourse. Conversely, the Uzbek suffix -roq may produce forms—such as qiziqroq ('more interesting')—whose English

synthetic counterpart is unacceptable (*interestinger), so English translators must consistently use the periphrastic alternative.4

4. Discussion

4.1 Typological Implications

The results confirm and extend earlier typological observations about the comparative strategies of analytic versus agglutinative languages. Greenberg (1966) and Stassen (1985) both noted that agglutinative languages tend to express comparison through overt case-marking on the standard noun phrase rather than through comparative conjunctions, a pattern clearly exemplified by the Uzbek ablative construction (-dan). English, by contrast, relies on the subordinating conjunction than, which introduces a comparative clause of variable complexity. This structural difference is not merely formal: it entails that Uzbek comparative constructions are typically more syntactically integrated (and thus less susceptible to ellipsis) than English ones, where the comparative clause may be reduced to a single noun phrase.

4.2 Semantic Universals and Language-Specific Constraints

At the semantic level, the degree-theoretic analysis of Kennedy (2007) applies to both languages insofar as both treat comparative adjectives as expressions that access a degree argument and assert that the subject's degree on a scale exceeds the standard's degree. However, the means by which the scale is constructed and the standard is introduced differ substantially, suggesting that the semantic universal is realised through language-specific grammatical machinery in each case.

The results regarding evaluative and emotional dimensions of comparison are consistent with Wierzbicka's (1999) hypothesis that languages differ in the degree to which they grammaticalise affect and speaker stance. The Uzbek evidential particle ekan, which co-occurs with comparative predicates in certain discourse contexts, has no English grammatical equivalent and must be rendered in translation through paraphrase (apparently; it turns out that).

4.3 Implications for Translation Practice

The translational challenges documented in Section 3.5 have practical consequences for professional translators working between English and Uzbek. The results suggest that a simple equivalence-based approach is insufficient for comparative idioms and proverbs: translators must adopt a pragmatic orientation that prioritises functional equivalence over formal correspondence, particularly where culturally specific comparative referents are involved.

This finding is consistent with Venuti's (1995) distinction between foreignising and domesticating translation strategies. When source-language comparatives are embedded in culturally specific imagery, the domesticating strategy—substituting target-language cultural equivalents—is likely to produce more natural-sounding and pragmatically effective texts, but at the cost of some source-cultural fidelity. The choice of strategy must therefore be guided by the translation brief and the intended readership.

4.4 Pedagogical Implications

The structural contrasts documented in this study have direct implications for the teaching of English comparative constructions to Uzbek learners, and vice versa. The syllabic rule

4 Baker, M. (2011). In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation (2nd ed.). Routledge, pp. 18–46.

governing English suffix selection (-er vs. more) represents a genuine learning challenge for Uzbek speakers, whose first language provides no morphological conditioning criterion of this type. Research in task-based language teaching suggests that comparative constructions can be taught effectively through activities that embed them in authentic evaluative contexts—comparing products, athletes, or historical figures—thereby linking grammatical form to meaningful communicative function.5

Conversely, English-speaking learners of Uzbek must acquire the ablative case-marking system as the primary syntactic vehicle for comparison, a structure that has no direct analogue in English grammar. Contrastive-awareness pedagogy—explicitly drawing students' attention to structural divergences and their communicative consequences—has been shown to accelerate the acquisition of such typologically unfamiliar constructions (Odlin, 1989).

5. Conclusion

This study has undertaken a theoretically informed contrastive analysis of comparative adjective phrases in English and Uzbek across four dimensions: morphosyntactic encoding, semantic scope, idiomatic expression, and cultural imagery. The principal findings may be summarised as follows.

At the morphosyntactic level, English comparison is governed by a phonological conditioning rule that selects between synthetic and periphrastic formation, while Uzbek comparison employs a single agglutinative suffix applied uniformly across all adjective types. The standard of comparison is syntactically marked differently in each language—through a subordinating conjunction in English and through an ablative postposition in Uzbek—producing distinct structural frames for comparative meaning.

At the semantic level, both languages extend comparative constructions to encode evaluative and emotional meaning, but Uzbek more explicitly grammaticalises evidentiality and speaker stance in comparative contexts. Fixed comparative expressions function as stylistic resources in both languages, but the Uzbek stock of such expressions is smaller and structurally less condensed than its English counterpart, reflecting a broader discursive preference for explicit logical marking.

At the cultural level, the selection of comparative referents is ecologically and culturally determined. English and Uzbek recruit different animals, landscapes, and folk narratives as anchors for comparative meaning, a fact with important consequences for both translation practice and cross-cultural communication.

These findings have implications extending across contrastive linguistics, translation studies, and second-language pedagogy. Future research might profitably extend the analysis to corpus-based quantitative investigation of comparative frequency patterns, or to experimental study of Uzbek learners' acquisition of English comparative morphology.

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