COMPARATIVE AND SUPERLATIVE DEGREES OF ADJECTIVES IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: A LEXICAL-SEMANTIC AND CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The expression of adjectival degree is an important grammatical and semantic phenomenon in English and Uzbek. Although both languages enable speakers to describe qualities in terms of comparison and relative intensity, they employ different morphological and analytical resources to express these meanings. This study aims to examine the lexical-semantic characteristics of comparative and superlative adjective forms in English and Uzbek, focusing on their morphological structure, semantic interpretation, and functional equivalence. The research employs descriptive, contrastive, and lexical-semantic analysis, drawing on established grammatical descriptions and illustrative examples from both languages. The analysis considers the English suffixes -er and -est, the analytical markers more and most, and the Uzbek comparative suffix -roq and superlative marker eng. Particular attention is paid to irregular forms, the interaction between grammatical structure and lexical meaning, and differences in the expression of comparison. The discussion demonstrates that, despite functional similarities, the two languages differ in the grammatical mechanisms used to encode degree. The study provides a theoretical framework for further empirical research in comparative linguistics and may contribute to translation studies, bilingual lexicography, and foreign-language teaching.

Keywords: comparative degree, superlative degree, adjectives, lexical semantics, contrastive linguistics, English, Uzbek.

1. Introduction

Adjectives are an important lexical category because they express properties and characteristics of people, objects, and situations. Their grammatical forms may also indicate the relative intensity of a quality. The comparative and superlative degrees are particularly significant because they enable speakers to establish relationships between entities and evaluate their characteristics relative to a comparison standard or a larger group.

In English, adjectival comparison is expressed through inflectional forms, such as tall–taller–tallest, and analytical constructions, such as interesting–more interesting–most interesting. Uzbek employs different grammatical resources, including the suffix -roq in forms such as baland–balandroq and the marker eng in expressions such as eng baland. These examples illustrate a shared communicative function accompanied by differences in morphological realization.

The grammatical analysis of comparison is addressed in The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language by Huddleston and Pullum (2002), which provides a detailed account of comparative constructions in English. Parrott (2010) also discusses the grammatical patterns and teaching implications of comparative and superlative forms. For Uzbek, Sjoberg's Uzbek Structural Grammar (1963) provides a documented grammatical description of the language.

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Despite the availability of grammatical descriptions, a contrastive investigation must distinguish between formal correspondence and semantic equivalence. For example, the English adjective better and the Uzbek adjective yaxshiroq can express comparable meanings, but their morphological structures are different. Likewise, the best and eng yaxshi perform comparable superlative functions through different grammatical mechanisms.

The research problem addressed in this paper concerns the relationship between morphological structure, lexical meaning, and the expression of degree in English and Uzbek.

The aim of the study is to identify the principal lexical-semantic characteristics of comparative and superlative adjectives in the two languages.

The objectives are to:

1. Describe the principal grammatical patterns used to express comparative and superlative degrees in English and Uzbek.
2. Examine the relationship between adjective meaning and the expression of degree.
3. Identify major structural similarities and differences between the two languages.
4. Consider the implications of these differences for translation and English language teaching.

2. Methodology

The study employs descriptive, contrastive, and lexical-semantic methods. The descriptive method is used to characterize the grammatical forms of adjectives in each language. Contrastive analysis identifies correspondences and differences between English and Uzbek constructions, while lexical-semantic analysis examines how adjective meanings interact with comparative and superlative marking.

The examples are selected to illustrate established grammatical patterns rather than to represent the results of a corpus-based investigation. The analysis is organized around three dimensions: morphological formation, semantic interpretation, and cross-linguistic correspondence.

The English examples are consistent with the grammatical descriptions presented by Huddleston and Pullum (2002) and Parrott (2010). The Uzbek examples illustrate commonly used forms and require further examination against a broader Uzbek-language dataset for an empirical study.

No quantitative corpus analysis or experimental investigation is claimed in this paper. Consequently, the discussion identifies qualitative patterns rather than statistical differences in frequency or productivity.

3. Comparative and Superlative Degrees in English

3.1. Morphological and analytical formation

English expresses adjectival degree through both inflectional and analytical constructions. The choice of form depends partly on adjective length, morphological characteristics, and established usage.

Many short adjectives form the comparative by adding -er and the superlative by adding -est. For example: small–smaller–smallest; tall–taller–tallest; fast–faster–fastest. Spelling changes occur in certain forms, as illustrated by big–bigger–biggest. Adjectives ending in -e generally take -r and -st, as in nice–nicer–nicest.

Longer adjectives commonly employ the analytical markers more and most: beautiful–more beautiful–most beautiful; important–more important–most important; interesting–more interesting–most interesting.

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These patterns are useful generalizations rather than an absolute rule based solely on syllable count. Some adjectives permit variation, and conventional usage influences the choice of form (Parrott, 2010).

English also contains irregular forms, including good–better–best and bad–worse–worst. Such forms demonstrate that the expression of degree cannot always be explained through regular suffixation.

3.2. Semantic interpretation

The comparative degree typically establishes a relationship between two entities or situations, whereas the superlative identifies an entity as occupying an extreme position on a relevant scale within a comparison set.

1. This building is taller than that one.
2. This is the tallest building in the town.
3. The second explanation is more accurate than the first.
4. This is the most accurate explanation available.

In the first and third examples, the comparative forms taller and more accurate express a relative difference in degree. In the second and fourth, the superlative forms tallest and most accurate locate an entity at the upper end of a scale within a contextually defined group.

The interpretation of these forms depends on the semantic properties of the adjective and the comparison context. For example, taller refers to a measurable physical dimension, whereas more accurate evaluates the degree to which information corresponds to relevant facts or standards.

Therefore, comparative and superlative constructions are not merely formal variations of adjectives. They also participate in the organization of scalar meaning.

4. Comparative and Superlative Degrees in Uzbek

4.1. Comparative forms

Uzbek expresses adjectival degree through grammatical and lexical means that differ from those of English. Two particularly relevant patterns are the suffix -roq for comparative meanings and the pre-adjectival marker eng for superlative meanings.

The suffix -roq is used to form comparative adjectives: katta–kattaroq (big–bigger); baland–balandroq (tall/high–taller/higher); yaxshi–yaxshiroq (good–better); tez–tezroq (fast–faster).

In a sentence such as Bu bino u binodan balandroq ("This building is taller than that building"), the suffix -roq marks the comparative meaning, while -dan identifies the reference entity.

This construction differs structurally from the English pattern taller than that building. English uses the comparative adjective followed by than, whereas Uzbek can express the comparison through the reference noun marked with -dan and an adjective bearing -roq.

The lexical meaning of the adjective determines the quality being compared. Thus, kattaroq concerns size, balandroq concerns height, and yaxshiroq expresses an evaluation of quality or suitability.

4.2. Superlative forms

The Uzbek marker eng combines with an adjective to express a superlative meaning: eng katta (the biggest); eng baland (the tallest/highest); eng yaxshi (the best); eng qiziqarli (the most interesting).

For example, Bu shahardagi eng baland bino corresponds to "the tallest building in this city." Unlike the English forms tallest and most interesting, the Uzbek constructions use a separate marker before the adjective.

English	Uzbek

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taller	balandroq
the tallest	eng baland
better	yaxshiroq
the best	eng yaxshi
more interesting	qiziqarliroq
the most interesting	eng qiziqarli

These correspondences illustrate similarities in grammatical function alongside differences in morphological and syntactic structure. The table is illustrative rather than exhaustive. The most appropriate translation may depend on the adjective, sentence structure, and communicative context.

5. Contrastive Lexical-Semantic Analysis

The comparison of English and Uzbek adjective degrees reveals several dimensions that merit attention.

First, both languages provide grammatical resources for expressing relative degree. English uses inflectional and analytical constructions, while Uzbek frequently uses -roq for comparative forms and eng for superlative expressions. This contrast reflects differences in how the two languages encode a broadly comparable semantic function.

Second, lexical meaning affects the interpretation of degree. The adjectives tall, intelligent, expensive, and accurate represent different semantic properties. Although they can participate in comparative and superlative constructions, the dimensions being compared differ: physical height, cognitive ability, monetary value, and correctness, respectively.

Third, formal similarity does not always guarantee complete semantic equivalence. The English more expensive and Uzbek qimmatroq may communicate comparable meanings, but the exact interpretation of either form depends on the context. Similarly, better and yaxshiroq may express quality, suitability, or performance, depending on the noun or situation being described.

Fourth, irregularity must be considered in lexical-semantic comparison. English forms such as better and best do not follow the regular -er/-est pattern. Their Uzbek counterparts, yaxshiroq and eng yaxshi, use different morphological resources. Such correspondences are important for contrastive grammar and translation because equivalent meanings may be encoded through different formal mechanisms.

Finally, the comparative and superlative degrees are sensitive to the comparison set. A superlative normally identifies the upper or lower extreme within a contextually defined group, while a comparative relates one entity to another. This distinction is important in both languages and should be preserved in translation.

These observations support a multidimensional approach to the analysis of adjectival degree. Rather than comparing isolated word forms alone, researchers should consider morphological structure, lexical meaning, syntactic environment, and contextual interpretation together.

6. Conclusion

The contrastive analysis of comparative and superlative adjectives in English and Uzbek demonstrates that the two languages share the communicative function of expressing relative degree while employing different grammatical mechanisms.

English uses the suffixes -er and -est, the analytical markers more and most, and irregular forms such as better and best. Uzbek commonly expresses comparative meaning through -roq and superlative meaning through eng. These patterns provide a basis for identifying grammatical correspondences and structural differences between the languages.

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The lexical-semantic interpretation of adjective degrees depends on the property being described and the context in which the comparison occurs. Consequently, contrastive analysis should extend beyond formal morphology to examine the relationship between adjective meaning, comparison standards, and contextual equivalence.

The principal contribution of this paper is a structured qualitative framework for examining these relationships. The analysis does not claim statistical findings or definitive empirical generalizations. Further research should use a systematically compiled dataset of English and Uzbek examples to investigate the distribution of comparative patterns, variation among adjective classes, and implications for translation.

The proposed framework may be useful in comparative linguistics, bilingual lexicography, translation studies, and the teaching of English to Uzbek-speaking learners.

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