

Equative constructions in world-wide perspective

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Abstract: In this paper, we report on a world-wide study of equative constructions ('A is as big as B') in a convenience sample of 119 languages. From earlier work, it has been known that European languages often have equative constructions based on adverbial relative pronouns that otherwise express degree or manner ('how', 'as'), but we find that this type is rare outside Europe. We divide the constructions that we found into six primary types, four of which have closely corresponding types of comparative constructions ('A is bigger than B'). An equative construction often consists of five components: a comparee ('A'), a degree-marker ('as'), a parameter ('is big'), a standard-marker ('as'), and a standard ('B'). Most frequently, the parameter is the main predicate and the equative sense is expressed by a special standard-marker. But many languages also have a degree-marker, so that we get a construction of the English and French type. Another possibility is for the equality sense to be expressed by a transitive 'equal' (or 'reach') verb, which may be the main predicate or a secondary predicate. And finally, since the equative construction is semantically symmetrical, it is also possible to "unify" the parameter and the standard in the subject position ('A and B are equally tall', or 'A and B are equal in height'). But no language has only a degree-marker, leaving the standard unmarked. Finally, we note some word order correlations.

Keywords: equative construction, comparative construction, language typology, areal typology, word order correlation

1. Introduction: Equative constructions

This paper examines equative constructions, as illustrated in (1a-c), from a broadly cross-linguistic perspective. Equative constructions express situations in which two referents have a gradable property to the same degree.

- (1) a. Udihe (Tungusic; Nikolaeva & Tolskaya 2001: 187)
Ei mo: xaisi gugda-lan̄ki-ni tauxi mo:-digi.
 this tree also high-EQUAT.DG-3SG [that tree-ABL]
 'This tree is as high as that one.'
- b. Acehnese (Austronesian; Durie 1985: 221)
jib sa=bê caröng ngön=lôn
 3SG equal=how.big clever with=1SG
 'He is as clever as I.'
- c. Awa Pit (Barbacoan; Curnow 1997: 144)
na=watsa=yη katsa i

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1SG=like=RESTR big be
 ‘He is just as big as me.’

Equative constructions are in many ways similar to comparative constructions (like ‘This tree is higher than that one’), which also compare two referents with respect to a gradable property, but where one of the referents has the property to a higher degree.² But while comparative constructions have been studied quite extensively from a cross-linguistic perspective (e.g. Andersen 1983; Stassen 1985; 2001; 2005; Bobaljik 2012; Stolz 2013), equative constructions are considered much less frequently. The two major previous studies are Haspelmath & Buchholz (1998), which is restricted to European languages, and Henkelmann (2006), who examines 25 languages world-wide.

The term *equative* for these kinds of constructions is fairly old,³ but because few European languages have a special morphological pattern for them, it is much less widely known than comparative, and many descriptive linguists are apparently still unaware of it.

In this paper, we report on a study of equative constructions in a world-wide convenience sample of 119 languages. Equative constructions are mentioned much less frequently in descriptive grammars than comparative constructions, and they tend to be studied less thoroughly. Thus, what we are reporting on here is much more preliminary than what could be said about comparative constructions, but we hope that our cross-linguistic study will nevertheless be valuable as a general overview of world-wide diversity, and that it will help language describers come up with more accurate descriptions in the future.

Equative constructions are quite varied across languages, but we propose to distinguish six primary types. We identify five key components in an equative construction, as illustrated in (2), using an English and a French example. The six types can be characterized with reference to these five components.

(2)	1	2	3	4	5
	comparee	degree-marker	parameter	standard-marker	standard
	<i>Kim</i> <i>is</i>	[<i>as</i>	<i>tall</i>]	[<i>as</i>	<i>Pat</i>].
	<i>Kim</i> <i>est</i>	[<i>aussi</i>	<i>grand</i>]	[<i>que</i>	<i>Pat</i>].

An equative construction must allow a way to express the PARAMETER (component 3, some gradable property concept word, usually called adjective), the COMPAREE (component 1, the first referent to be compared), and the STANDARD (component 5, the other referent to which the first referent is compared).

In addition, equative constructions typically also have an EQUATIVE STANDARD-MARKER (component 4), i.e. a marker that is closely associated with the standard, and often they also include an EQUATIVE DEGREE-MARKER (component 2), a marker that is

² Equative constructions are sometimes called “comparative constructions of equality”, and comparative constructions are sometimes called “comparative constructions of inequality”.

³ The term *equative* (German *Äquativ*) was coined in the 19th century for equative degree constructions in the Celtic languages such as Old Irish *demn-ithir* ‘as reliable (as)’ (from *demin* ‘reliable’), and was also used early for the Turkic languages. Its use in a typological context hardly predates Haspelmath & Buchholz (1998). Note that the term *equative* is also used in a totally different sense, for EQUATIONAL constructions (e.g. ‘Kim is a painter’).

closely associated with the parameter and occurs only or primarily in equative constructions or other constructions expressing equality or similar notions.⁴

We begin in §2 by briefly recapitulating some of the findings of Haspelmath & Buchholz (1998), who noted a particularly close connection between equative and similative constructions in European languages. Then we introduce our primary types (§3) and compare them with the primary types of comparatives (§4), before giving examples of the primary types in §5. In addition to the primary types, languages also resort to strategies that do not readily fall into cross-linguistic types (§6), and some do not seem to have a generally applicable equative construction at all (§7). Nevertheless, in §8 we propose some cross-linguistic generalizations of equative constructions, before concluding in §9.

2. European similatives and equatives based on manner words

In quite a few European languages, equative constructions are based on a demonstrative word meaning ‘so’ (a kind of manner deictic expression, cf. König (2014) in this volume) and a relative (often also interrogative) word meaning ‘how’ (see Haspelmath & Buchholz 1998: 317). The demonstrative functions as a degree-marker, and the relative as a standard-marker. Some examples are given in (3), where the demonstrative and the relative are highlighted by boldface (the sentences are from their questionnaire data).

(3) a. Latin

Claudia tam docta est quam Julius.
 Claudia [so learned] is [how Julius]
 ‘Claudia is as learned as Julius.’

b. Modern Greek

I adhelfti mu ine toso ómorfi óso kj esi.
 the sister my is so pretty how also you
 ‘My sister is as pretty as you.’

c. Slovene

Moja sestra je tako čedna kot ti.
 my sister is so pretty how you
 ‘My sister is as pretty as you.’

d. Georgian

Čemi da isetive lamazi-a rogorc šen.
 my sister so pretty-is how you
 ‘My sister is as pretty as you.’

Such demonstrative-relative expressions are also called CORRELATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS, and they seem to be characteristic of the European linguistic area (Haspelmath 2001), in particular of Romance, Germanic, Slavic and Balkan languages. This was hypothesized by Haspelmath & Buchholz on the basis of the fact that western,

⁴ Haspelmath & Buchholz (1998) called this “parameter marker”, but *degree-marker* (cf. Ultan 1972 for this term) is more transparent and is preferred here.

eastern and southern European fringe languages (Celtic, Maltese, Caucasian) were not found to exhibit this pattern. In general, our world-wide study strongly confirms this earlier hypothesis, as we will see in §5.2 below. However, the correlative patterns are found in one area outside of Europe: in the Indo-Aryan languages, illustrated by (4) from Marathi, where the standard precedes the parameter and the comparee.

- (4) Marathi (Dhongde & Wali 2009: 226)
- Lili jītk-i sundar abi tītk-i (sundar) Mini nabi.*
 Lili [as.much-F beautiful] be.PRS [that.much-F (beautiful)] Mini NEG
 ‘Mini is not as beautiful as Lili.’

In this construction, we have an unreduced correlative relative clause, literally ‘How much Lili is beautiful, so much Mini is not (beautiful).’ The predicate may or may not be repeated – apparently the repetition is not as odd as it would be in English (*Mini is as beautiful as Lili is beautiful*).

European languages also often use a ‘how’ word to express similarity of manner, and the simulative marker (‘like something/someone’) is not uncommonly identical to the equative standard marker, as in (5-6).

- (5) German
- a. *Claudia ist so gelehrt wie Julius.*
 Claudia is so learned how Julius
 ‘Claudia is as learned as Julius.’
- b. *Claudia schwimmt wie ein Fisch.*
 Claudia swims like a fish
 ‘Claudia swims like a fish.’
- (6) Russian
- a. *Kostja takoj umnyj kak ego sestra.*
 Kostya [so smart] [as his sister]
 ‘Kostya is as smart as his sister.’
- b. *Kostja plavaet kak ryba.*
 Kostya swims [like fish]
 ‘Kostya swims like a fish.’

It is not immediately obvious how this should be explained. From a semantic point of view, one could note that similarity (as in 4b and 5b) is the same as partial identity (i.e. identity in some but not all respects), and that equative constructions express identity of degree between two referents with respect to a property. However, the standard markers in examples (3) and (5-6) are relative adverbs of manner or quantity, and do not originally express any kind of identity sense. Apparently the identity meaning derives as an implicature from the relative clause construction: ‘to such a degree as’ becomes ‘to the same degree as’.

We did not study simulative constructions systematically in non-European languages (cf. Nose 2009 for some observations), but it is our impression that equative constructions are not uncommonly expressed in a way similar to simulative

constructions. Equative standard markers are often glossed with ‘like’ by language describers, suggesting that the marker could also be used for similarity of manner. However, we did not find the correlative pattern in (3) or (4) in any non-(Indo-) European language.

3. The primary types of equative constructions

In this section, the six primary types are briefly introduced schematically, illustrating them with pseudo-English sentences. Real examples from languages around the world and further discussion is provided in §5 below.

3.1. Type 1: Only equative standard-marker

In this type, the equative construction contains an ordinary predicative property-word as parameter (‘is tall’) plus differentiated comparee (‘Kim’) and standard (‘Pat’), with an equative standard-marker (‘like’), but no equative degree-marker. We already saw an example of this type in (1c) above.

“Kim is tall [**like** Pat].”

3.2. Type 2: Equative degree-marker and standard-marker

Type 2 is an equative construction that contains an ordinary predicative property-word as parameter and plus differentiated comparee and standard, with both an equative degree-marker (‘equally’) and an equative standard-marker. This is the type found in English (*as tall as*) and most other European languages (illustrated in (3) above).

“Kim is [**equally** tall] [**as** Pat].”

3.3. Type 3: Equative degree-marker unified

This is an equative construction that contains an ordinary predicative parameter with an equative degree-marker (‘equally’), but the comparee and standard referents are UNIFIED, i.e. they are expressed as a single conjoined or plural noun phrase (‘Kim and Pat’). There can thus be no standard-marker. (This construction can also be regarded as a kind of reciprocal construction.)

“[Kim and Pat] are [**equally** tall].”

3.4. Type 4: Primary reach equative

Type 4 is an equative construction with a verb as its primary predicate that elsewhere expresses a notion of ‘reaching’ or ‘equaling’, with the comparee as subject and the standard as second argument (generally object), and with the parameter expressed as a kind of oblique constituent (‘in height’).

“Kim [**reaches/equals** Pat] in height.”

3.5. Type 5: Primary reach equative unified

This is an equative construction with a verb as its primary predicate that elsewhere expresses a notion of (reciprocal) ‘reaching’ or ‘equaling’, with a unified comparee and standard expression as its subject (‘Kim and Pat’), and with the parameter expressed as a kind of oblique constituent (‘in height’).

“[Kim and Pat] **are equal** (to each other) in height.”

3.6. Type 6: Secondary reach equative

Type 6 is an equative construction that contains an ordinary predicative parameter (‘is tall’) and differentiated comparee and standard, with a secondary verb that has the standard as its second argument and that elsewhere expresses a notion of ‘reaching’ or ‘equaling’.

“Kim is tall [**reaching/equaling** Pat].”

The six primary types that we distinguish here are very similar to types IA, IB, IIA1, IIA2, and IIB of Henkelmann (2006: 377–378). In addition, he distinguishes quite a few additional types, but since these are all quite rare, they are not so prominent in this paper (see §7 below for some examples). In terms of substance, we have no real disagreements with Henkelmann’s insightful and clearly presented classification.

It should be noted that we limit our attention to predicative uses of property predicates. In many languages, equative constructions can also be used attributively, as in Veps and English, as seen in (7) and its English translation.

(7) Veps (Finno-Ugrian; Nina Zaitseva & Riho Grünthal, p.c.)

mina en nagend minun tytren
 1SG NEG.1SG see.PST [1SG.POSS daughter.GEN]
com-uttu-st neicukast
 beautiful-EQUAT.DG-PART girl.PART
 ‘I didn’t see a girl as beautiful as my daughter.’

In English, however, the attributive adjective must be postposed, unlike ordinary, non-equative adjectives. The adjective cannot be preposed (**I didn’t see an as beautiful girl as my daughter; *I didn’t see an as beautiful as my daughter girl*). In German, postposing of the adjective is not a possible repair option, so neither (8a) nor (8b) are grammatical. The only way to render (7) is by a relative clause (8c), i.e. an attributive construction which contains a predicative adjective.

(8) German

- a. **Ich sab kein so schönes wie meine Tochter Mädchen.*
 I saw no so beautiful as my daughter girl
- b. **?Ich sab kein Mädchen so schön wie meine Tochter.*
 I saw no girl so beautiful as my daughter

- c. *Ich sah kein Mädchen, die so schön wie meine Tochter war.*
 I saw no girl whoso beautiful as my daughter was

These are interesting complications which have not been studied in any detail, and which we cannot go into here because the grammatical descriptions that our study is based on are generally silent about these matters.

4. Comparing equative and comparative constructions

Before moving on to the exemplification and discussion of the six primary types of §3, we should briefly point out the similarities between four of them (the non-unified types 1-2, 4 and 6) and four corresponding comparative construction types. There is no space here to illustrate the comparative construction types in detail (see Stassen 1985; 2001; 2005; Dixon 2008), but the schematic (Pseudo-English) representation in Table 1 should be sufficient for the main point.

Like equative constructions, comparative constructions usually have a standard-marker, or otherwise they may have a verb ('exceed') expressing the relationship between the comparee and the standard. This verb may be the primary predicate, with the parameter backgrounded ('Pat exceeds Kim in height'), or it may be a secondary predicate. If the construction has a standard-marker rather than using a verb, it may also have a degree-marker. The comparative degree-marker is very well-known in English, because it has a special affixal form (*tall/tall-er*), but such affixal comparative degree-markers are not common outside of Europe (cf. Bobaljik 2012).

Table 2 gives the six equative types and for each of them the number of constructions in our sample that represent it. On the right-hand side we give the corresponding comparative types.

Table 2. Equative and comparative construction types

equative type	equative type (schema)	number in sample	corresponding comparative type (schema) (cf. Stassen 1985; 2005)
1. Only equative standard-marker	"Kim is tall like + Pat."	57	"Pat is tall from + Kim."
2. Equative degree- and standard-marker	"Kim is equally + tall as + Pat."	33	"Pat is more + tall than + Kim."
3. Equative degree-marker unified	"[Kim and Pat] are equally + tall."	13	–
4. Primary reach equative	"Kim reaches/equals + Pat in height."	5	"Pat exceeds + Kim in height."
5. Primary reach equative unified	"[Kim and Pat] are equal in height."	4	–
6. Secondary reach equative	"Kim is tall reaching/equaling + Pat."	8	"Pat is tall exceeding + Kim."

For equative constructions there are two additional types, with comparee and standard unified (types 3 and 5), which follows from their meaning: Since the two referents are equal with respect to the degree in question, it is natural to treat them

together as a single referent set, rather than to treat one as the topic and the other one as the information focus. This unification is not possible with comparative constructions, because one would not know which of the referents has the higher degree of the property.⁵

It should be noted that the classifications of the preceding section and this section do not claim to be original or improvements over earlier classifications (Haspelmath & Buchholz 1998; Stassen 2005; Henkelmann 2006). In general, the comparative concepts with which linguists work are necessarily arbitrary to some degree (cf. Haspelmath 2010). The primary types are highlighted here because they were the most frequent in our data, and are thus the most likely types to be found by fieldworkers. Moreover, the other types are not the basis for any generalizations, and it is cross-linguistic generalizations (such as those advanced in §8) that are the most interesting outcome of world-wide grammatical comparison. In §§6-7, we will see that not all constructions and all languages fit into the primary types.

5. Examples of the primary types

We collected data from descriptive materials (mostly reference grammars) of 119 different languages, listed in the Appendix. Like most samples in language typology, this sample is biased toward the languages of Europe, but in contrast to Haspelmath & Buchholz (1998), languages from all continents are represented, and the sample is much bigger than Henkelmann's (2006) sample of 25 languages. We recognize that this is a convenience sample, and we do not make strong claims of representativeness.

For 18 of the languages, our database contains more than one construction, and overall we have 136 constructions.

5.1. Type 1: Only equative standard-marker

Of the six primary types distinguished here, the first type is by far the most common type. Here there is no equative degree-marker, only a standard-marker that is associated with the standard, and that looks like an adposition. The standard-marker may be preposed (as in 9-10) or postposed (as in 11).

(9) Babungo (Bantu; Schaub 1985: 116)

ɲwə' luu we' yaa Làmbi
 he be strong [like Lambi]
 'He is as strong as Lambi (or maybe: strong like Lambi).'

(10) Xârâcùù (Oceanic; Moyse-Faurie 1995: 139)

è mwaa kèrèrè chaa nû
 3SG long [like a coconut.tree]
 'It is tall like a coconut tree.'

⁵ In principle, one could imagine a language which distinguishes between "Kim and Pat differ in height" (= 'Kim is taller than Pat') and "Pat and Kim differ in height" (= 'Pat is taller than Kim'), but such languages do not seem to exist.

(11) Ingush (Nakh-Daghestanian; Nichols 2011: 511)

Sim sanna q'abwa jar yz.
 [bile like] bitter be.PST 3SG
 'It was as bitter as bile.'

The standard-marker is typically glossed as 'like', but this should not be taken to imply that it necessarily has other functions apart from the function of serving as a marker of an equative construction. The standard-marker may also be a suffix, and it may then be called equative case (e.g. in example (42) from K'abeena below).

5.2. Type 2: Equative degree-marker and standard-marker

The second type is also fairly common in our sample, but this is primarily because our sample is biased toward European languages. As was discussed above, this is the type of some of the best-known European languages (cf. 12).

(12) the "Standard Average European" type

Kim is as tall as Pat. (English)
Kim est aussi grand que Pat. (French)
Kim ist so groß wie Pat. (German)

This particular demonstrative-relative pattern is not attested outside of Europe, but type 2 with both a degree-marker and a standard-marker occurs in some other languages. Again, the standard-marker may precede the standard (as in 13-14) or follow the standard (as in 15).

(13) Hiligaynon (Philippinic; Wolfenden 1971: 103)

si Pedro kasing-gwapo ni Juan
 ART.HUM Pedro [EQUA.DG-handsome] [GEN.HUM Juan]
 'Pedro is as handsome as Juan.'

(14) Chiquihuitlán Mazatec (Oto-Manguean; Suárez 1983: 129)

ta⁴nkū⁴ ?nka² fɔ² ko³-na²
 [same tall] he [with-me]
 'He is as tall as I am.'

(15) East Greenlandic (Eskimo; Mennecier 1995: 460)

taanna uat-tut at-tii-vu-q
 that.one 1SG-EQUAT.ST be.tall-EQUAT.DG-IND-3SG
 'He is as tall as me.'

The degree-marker is most commonly a particle, but it may also be a prefix (as in Hiligaynon in (13), as well as in quite a few other Austronesian languages), or a suffix (as in Veps in (7) and in East Greenlandic in (15)).

When the degree-marker and the standard-marker are particles and occur next to each other, one might wonder whether we are perhaps dealing with a complex standard-marker. Consider example (16):

(16) Nzadi (Bantu; Crane et al. 2011: 174)

oŋkàán ↓ *nápe é* *ye* *okúùr* *mpîl* ‘*ɔmɔtúk* *ye* *oŋkàán* *napyáá*
 book this PROG be [old manner one] [with book that]
 ‘This book is as old as that book.’

Here the standard-marker is *ye* (glossed ‘with’), and the postposed expression *mpîl* ‘*ɔmɔtúk* (glossed ‘manner one’, i.e. ‘in the same manner’) is regarded as a degree-marker. Literally (16) is “This book is old in the same manner with that book”.

But alternatively one could say that *mpîl* ‘*ɔmɔtúk* *ye* is a single complex standard-marker (“just like”). To really resolve this issue, one would need more data, e.g. information about constructions in which the standard is implicit (e.g. ‘This book is very old, but that book is as old’). But since we do not have more data, we classified this construction as a degree- and standard-marker construction, simply because there are clearly two different elements.

A similar case is (17), where the standard-marker *-as* (Dative case) and the degree-marker *bish* occur next to each other, between the standard and the parameter, in a mirror-image pattern to (16). Again, the Dative case-suffix and the word *bish* are clearly distinct elements, so we classify this construction as having both a degree- and a standard-marker.

(17) Kashmiri (Indo-Aryan; Wali & Koul 1997: 137-38)

nəsi:mī *cha* *po:sh-as* *bish* *ə:vij*
 Nasim is [flower-DAT] [like delicate]
 ‘Nasim is as delicate as a flower.’

5.3. Type 3: Equative degree-marker unified

In this type, the comparee and the standard are a single conjoined nominal, i.e. the comparison is not presented from the perspective of a topical comparee:

(18) Canela-Krahô (Je; Popjes & Popjes 1986: 144)

capi *me* *kryt* *cati* *piɸen*
 [Capi and Kryt] [big equal]
 ‘Capi and Kryt are equally big.’

5.4. Type 4: Primary reach equative

In this type, the equality is expressed by a (generally transitive) verb meaning ‘equal, reach’, with the comparee as subject and the standard as object. The parameter is expressed in some other way, as a second object or oblique. This pattern is found especially in African languages.

(19) Malgwa (Chadic; Löhr 2002: 107)

Manye *ɕa-ɖp-ɕe* *ad-â-ne* *án* *wála*.

Manye [reach-3SG.PRF-RDP father-GEN-3SG PREP growth
 ‘Manye is as big as his father.’ (‘Manye reaches her father in growth.’)

(20) Koyra Chiini (Songhay; Heath 1998: 319)

yee too ga gaabi
 1SG.IMPF [attain 3SG] strength
 ‘I am as strong as he.’ (‘I reach him in strength.’)

(21) Tamashek of Mali (Berber; Heath 2005: 243ff.)

Ø-ogdæ` b-dər-i t-è-bædde
 3SG.M.SUBJ-be.equal-with-1SG F-SG-length
 ‘He is as tall as I (am).’ (‘He equals me in length.’)

It is not quite clear whether this pattern is ever fully productive, in the sense that it can occur with a wide range of property concepts. The following examples from Koyra Chiini indicate that the parameter may also be something that is not strictly speaking a property-word, with a gradable property interpretation derived metonymically (year standing for age, money for wealth).

(22) Koyra Chiini (Songhay; Heath 1998: 319):

- a. *yer o sawa jiri*
 1PL IPFV be.equal year
 ‘We are of the same age.’
- b. *yee sawa-nda ga njerfu*
 1SG.IPFV be.equal-APPL 3SG money
 ‘I am not as rich as he is.’

5.5. Type 5: Primary reach equative unified

This type is the unified counterpart of type 4, i.e. the comparee and the standard are a single conjoined nominal, and ‘equal/reach’ is the main predicate, understood in a mutual sense (‘equal to each other’).

(23) Zay (Ethiopic; Meyer 2005: 848)

kebbede-wā ?almāz be-gudernε qittu-nomu
 Kebedde-and Almanz in-height equal-FOC.3PL.SBJ
 ‘Kebedde and Almanz are equally tall.’ (‘...are equal in height’, ‘equal each other in height’)

(22a) above is similar.

5.6. Type 6: Secondary reach equative

In this type, the primary predicate is a property word, while a ‘reach/equal’ verb is used as a secondary predicate.

(24) Degema (Edoid; Kari 2004: 156)

Ómo náa o=vóv túl mé=ēn.
 child this 3SG=be.tall [reach me=FE]
 ‘This child is as tall as me.’

(25) East Dangla (Chadic; Shay 2005: 310)

Ísà tát nety ij Yúunùs.
 Issa big [equal.PST with Younous]
 ‘Issa is as old as Younous.’

(26) Nigerian Pidgin (English-based; Faraclas 1989: 237)

Chinwe get sens rich yu.
 Chinwe have sense reach you.
 ‘Chinwe has as much sense as you.’

Sometimes it is not fully clear whether a form is a secondary verb or a simple standard-marker. In Boumaa Fijian, the form *tautauvata* is regarded as a verb here, as it combines with the verbal auxiliary *me* ‘should’.

(27) Boumaa Fijian (Oceanic; Dixon 1988: 96)

au sega soti ni vu'u me tautauvata `ei Sepo
 1SG not lot that clever should same with Sepo
 ‘I am not as clever as Sepo.’

But (27) is different from the earlier examples in that there is also a degree expression preceding the parameter ‘clever’, so in this regard it resembles our second type (degree- and standard-marker).

A secondary reach equative construction can grammaticalize into a construction with a particle standard-marker. This is described by Álvarez (2005) for Goajiro, where *ma-shi aka* (28a) can be contracted to *maaka* (28b).

(28) Goajiro (Arawakan; Álvarez 2005: 24)

a. *Kaüsi-shi ma'in Luuka ma-shi aka Kamiirü.*
 fat-M much Lucas be.thus-M as Camilo
 ‘Lucas is as fat as Camilo.’ (Lit. “Lucas is very fat, is equal to Camilo.”)

b. *Kaüsi-shi ma'in Luuka maaka Kamiirü.*
 fat-M much Lucas be.thus.as Camilo
 ‘Lucas is as fat as Camilo.’

6. Other ways of expressing identity of degree

In a number of languages, it is not the comparee referent and the standard referent that are the primary arguments of the construction, but abstract nominalized forms of the property are compared, e.g.

(29) Matigsalug Manobo (Philippinic; Wang et al. 2006)

Ka kalayatan ni Pablu, nekeg-iling ka keddi ne kalayatan.

FOC height of Pablu PST-like FOC my LNK height
 ‘Pablo is as tall as I.’ (Lit. ‘Pablo’s height is like my height.’)

(30) Rukai (Austronesian; Zeitoun 2007: 182)

Maramao *'a-ka-taadhi'i-lini* *'elrengé la dhipolo.*
 DYN.FIN.identical NMLZ-STAT.NFIN-good-3PL.GEN Elrengé and Dhipolo
 ‘Elrengé is as good as Dhipolo.’ (Lit. ‘The goodness of Elrengé and Dhipolo is equal.’)

But there are also mixed constructions, where one of the phrases is an abstract nominalized form and the other is a referent, e.g.

(31) Koromfe (Gur; Rennison 1997: 197)

Kemde dxi tε bɔdini.
 Kemde length reach Badini
 ‘Kemde is as tall as Badini.’ (Lit. ‘Kemde’s length reaches Badini.’)

The two abstract properties need not be explicitly said to be alike, but they can also occur in a simple equational construction:

(32) Kawaiisu (Uto-Aztecan; Zigmond et al. 1991: 63)

bacon huʔu-kama-ruu juɔɔruu huʔu-kama-ruu
 bacon good-taste-NMLZ beans good-taste-NMLZ
 ‘Bacon tastes as good as beans.’ (Lit. ‘The taste of bacon is the taste of beans.’)

And in some languages, two separate predications have to be used, as in the Mauwake example in (33). There is a very similar type in comparative constructions (“conjoined comparative”, Stassen 1985; 2005).

(33) Mauwake (Madang; New Guinea; Berghäll 2015: 311)

Auwa mia maneka, muuka pun naap.
 1SG.father body big son also like.that
 ‘The father is big, (and) the son is like that too.’

Surprisingly, a fairly unique pattern is found in a big language, Persian, illustrated in (34). Here the parameter is expressed as an abstract noun, and the standard is a possessive modifier of the abstract noun:

(34) Persian (Mace 2003: 52)

in be tonǰi-ye ān ast
 this to speed-EZ that be.3SG.NPST
 ‘This is as fast as that.’ (Lit. ‘This is to the speed of that.’)

7. No general equative construction

Some languages do not seem to have an equative construction that can be used with different properties, though it has been claimed that all languages have a predicate ‘same’ (Goddard & Wierbicka 1994). In quite a few descriptions, the examples of degree identity predications do not contain a specific property expression, and it seems that the precise parameter will have to be inferred from the context:

(35) Mina (Chadic; Frajzyngier & Johnson 2005: 424)

Bìcì ngə kásəmə.

Bitsi like Kasuma

‘Bitsi is the same size as Kasuma.’ (Lit. ‘Bitsi is like Kasuma.’)

(36) Huehuetla Tepehua (Totonacan; Kung 2007: 588)

Juu xqooy x-sʼalakatʼzun-ta que miistuʔ.

ART dog PST-equal-PFV as cat

‘The dog is the same size as the cat.’ (Lit. ‘The dog is equal to the cat.’)

(37) Jamsay (Dogon; Heath 2008: 452)

ʼen dè: dò:-gó-Ø hà: ʼen dère dô:-Ø

his father reach-IPFV.NEG-3SG but his brother reach-IPFV.3SG

‘He is not as good as his father, but he’s as good as his elder brother.’ (Lit. ‘He doesn’t reach his father, but he reaches his brother.’)

In Matses (Panoan), there are a number of different standard-marking postpositions: *ten* ‘as big as’, *tion* ‘as long as’, *ted* ‘as many as’, *pad/pado* ‘same as’, *-bi*, ‘like’ (Fleck 2003). But these do not amount to a general system of equative marking.

However, it should be noted that for most of the languages mentioned §§6-7, we do not have very good evidence that the pattern is as general as we would expect it to be from the perspective of European languages. We noted in §5.4 that the primary reach equative construction may be restricted in its applicability.

8. Cross-linguistic generalizations

8.1. A missing pattern

When we look at the types 1-6 of §3, we immediately see that there is a logically possible pattern that is nevertheless virtually unattested.

Generalization 1:

No language has only a degree-marker, leaving the standard unmarked (“Kim is [equally tall] Pat”).

This is quite surprising, and we have no explanation for the generalization. But the analogous pattern is also missing in the case of comparative construction (no language has a construction like “Kim is tall-er Pat”).⁶ Such a pattern would be quite economical,

⁶ This was noted by Greenberg (1963 [1966:88]):

and it would be the mirror image of type 1, where there is only a standard-marker, with no overt marking of the degree. The standard-marker is usually a fairly robust marker, usually an adposition, and more rarely a special case suffix, as in (15) (Greenlandic). Occasionally a rather general case is used as a standard-marker (genitive in Veps, see (7), genitive in Hiligaynon, see (13), or dative in Kashmiri, see (17)).

We found only a single partial exception to our generalization in Urarina, where a number of adjectives can take an equative suffix that “transitivizes” them, so that they can combine with a preverbal standard, as in (38).

- (38) Urarina (Peru; Olawsky 2006: 210)
aberi anai-ni-a raj maleta
 stone be.heavy-EQUAT.DG-3 his suitcase
 ‘His suitcase is as heavy as stone.’

There is thus no standard-marker here. However, this pattern is quite restricted in Urarina and occurs only with a handful of adjectives.

8.2. Word order in equative constructions

As in other grammatical constructions, some of the strongest, or at least most salient, generalizations concerns the word order, specifically the order of parameter and standard (this was noted for comparative constructions by Greenberg 1963, Universal 22). Let us briefly consider two such generalizations here. For these generalizations, only the 86 constructions which include a predicative parameter and a non-predicative standard are relevant, i.e. types 1 and 2.

Generalization 2:

If the parameter follows the standard, then the language generally has dominant object-verb order.

Not surprisingly, the Chinese languages are exceptions to this generalization, as they are also exceptional with respect to other word-order generalizations:

- (39) Mandarin Chinese (Li & Thompson 1981: 565)
Tā gēn nǐ yíyàng gāo.
 she with you same tall
 ‘She is as tall as you.’

However, there are strong areal effects in the distribution of the various equative patterns, just as there are for object-verb order and other word-order patterns: The languages of Eurasia (except for Europe and Southeast Asia) tend to have OV and standard-parameter order, the languages of Africa (except for Ethiopia) tend to have VO

“in many languages, [the degree-marker] is optional or does not exist at all. On the other hand, there is always some element which expresses the comparison as such, whether word or affix, corresponding to English ‘than’...”

and parameter-standard order, and so on. Given the bias in the languages of our sample, it is therefore not certain that Generalization 2 is independent of areal effects.

There is also a connection between the position of the standard and the position of the standard-marker, which is again not surprising because the standard-marker is often an adposition-like element:

Generalization 3:

If the standard precedes the parameter, then the standard-marker generally follows the standard, and if the standard follows the parameter, then the standard-marker generally precedes the standard.

Among the 58 constructions in which the standard follows the parameter, 52 have preposed standard-markers. This is the general European type (see 12), and it was also illustrated by Babungo and Xârâcùù (in 9-10 above). There are only 6 constructions with postposed standard-markers, e.g.

(40) Teribe (Chibchan; Quesada 2000: 139)

Maria e plú Juan dik.
 Maria DEM good Juan like
 ‘Maria is as good as Juan.’

Among the 28 constructions in which the standard precedes the parameter, 23 have postposed standard-markers. This was earlier illustrated by Ingush (11) and East Greenlandic (15), and is also found in Jamsay and K’abeena:

(41) Jamsay (Dogon; Heath 2008: 449)

mí jín gùrù-Ø
 [1SG like] long-3SG
 ‘He/She is as long (=tall) as I am.’

(42) K’abeena (Ethiopic; Crass 2005: 295)

baydar mahammadi-gg k’iraa’rob
 Haydar.NOM Mohammed.GEN-EQUAT.ST big.UNM.COP.M
 ‘Haydar is as tall as Mohammed.’

Only 5 of the constructions in which the standard precedes the parameter have a preposed standard-marker, e.g. Zazaki and Cantonese (as well as Mandarin, illustrated in (39) above).

(43) Zazaki (Iranic; Selcan 1998: 563)

Lazek bonde çenek-e pil-o.
 boy.NOM [as girl-OBL.F] big-COP.M
 ‘The boy is as big as the girl.’

(44) Cantonese (Matthews & Yip 1994: 166ff)

kéuib hóu-chíb gā-jē gam leng
 3SG [just-like older-sister] [as pretty]
 ‘She is just as pretty as her (older) sister.’

Greenberg (1963), who looked at comparative constructions, was concerned with the correlation between the order of adjective, standard-marker and standard and the order of adposition and noun. He only considered two orders, “standard-marker-adjective” and “adjective-marker-standard” (cf. his Universal 22), thus implying Generalization 3.

9. Conclusion

This concludes our survey of equative constructions in the world’s languages. We found that equative constructions are rather difficult to compare in a world-wide perspective, not only because there is even more variation than with comparative constructions, but also because they tend not to be thoroughly described in grammars, and because many languages apparently do not have strongly grammaticalized ways of expressing the relevant meanings.

Overall, the kinds of constructions used to express equative meaning are rather similar to comparative constructions, except that there are also unified equative constructions in which the comparee and the standard are not different nominals. The correlations between constituent order in equative constructions and elsewhere also seem to be rather similar to the correlations found in comparative constructions.

The relations between equative and similitive constructions need to be studied further. Finding evidence for the coding of similitive constructions in grammars is even more difficult, as they are an even less well known construction type.

Special abbreviations

EQUAT.DG	equative degree marker
EQUAT.ST	equative standard marker
ABL	ablative case
RESTR	restrictive
PART	partitive case
HUM	human
LNK	linker
DYN	dynamic
FIN	finite
NFIN	nonfinite
STAT	stative
EZ	ezafe (attributive marker)
NPST	nonpast
UNM	unmarked

Appendix: The sample languages

Africa (32)	Hungarian	Rukai
Afrikaans	Ingush	Skou
Akan	Kannada	Tagalog
Akoose Manenguba	Kashmiri	To'aba'ita
Angolar	Kharia	Tok Pisin
Babungo	Khasi	Tukang Besi
Buduma	Khwarshi	Xârâcùù
Cape Verdean Creole	Korean	
Degema	Lao	North America (15)
East Dangla	Laz	Arapaho
Eton	Maithili	Ayutla Mixe
Gidar	Mandarin	Central Yup'ik
Gude	Marathi	Chiquihuitlán Mazatec
Hdi	Pacoh	Chontal Maya
Jamsay	Papiá Kristang	East Greenlandic
K'abeena	Persian	Kawaiisu
Karimojong	Puxi Qiang	Lealao Chinantec
Koromfe	Scots Gaelic	Minnesota Ojibwe
Koyra Chiini	Sri Lanka Malay	Misantla Totonac
Ma'di	Sursilvan Romansch	Rama
Malgwa	Swedish	Sochiapan Chinantec
Mani	Tsez	Teribe
Miya	Udihe	Upper Necaxa Totonac
Mooré	Urdu	Wappo
Nande	Veps	
Nigerian Arabic	Western Lawa	South America (15)
Nigerian Pidgin	Zazaki	Awa Pit
Nzadi		Baure
Pichi	Papunesia (22)	Berbice Dutch Creole
Sandawe	Acehnese	Canela-Krahô
Swahili	Boumaa Fijian	Goajiro
Tamashek of Mali	Hiligaynon	Hup
Zay	Ilocano	Kadiwéu
	Kambera	Matsés
Eurasia (35)	Kiribati	Nambikuára
Atong	Loniú	Pilagá
Breton	Makassarese	Sanuma
Cantonese	Maori	Urarina
Diu Indo-Portuguese	Marshallese	Waimiri-Atroarí
Eastern Armenian	Matigsalug Manobo	Warao
German	Mauwake	Wari
Godoberi	Mualang	
Hmong Njua	Nahavaq	
	Port Sandwich	

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