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## THE ENGLISH 'AS...AS' EQUATIVE CONSTRUCTION\*

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### Angielska konstrukcja ekwatywna 'as...as'

#### Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest opis angielskiej konstrukcji ekwatywnej *as...as* i zaproponowanie jej formalnej klasyfikacji. Pierwsza część artykułu przedstawia ogólne definicje oraz klasyfikacje porównania zaproponowane w wybranych publikacjach językoznawczych, a także wyszczególnia komponenty semantyczne i wyrazy funkcyjne charakterystyczne dla konstrukcji ekwatywnej. Artykuł omawia następnie najważniejsze zasady determinujące elipsę w konstrukcji ekwatywnej oraz opisuje formalne wyrażenie jej poszczególnych komponentów semantycznych i wyrazów funkcyjnych. W ostatniej części artykułu zaproponowana została klasyfikacja formalna angielskiej konstrukcji ekwatywnej *as...as* na podstawie wyrażenia formalnego PARAMETRU.

**Słowa kluczowe:** porównanie, konstrukcja ekwatywna, komponent semantyczny, STANDARD, PARAMETR, PRZEDMIOT PORÓWNANIA.

#### Abstract

This paper attempts to describe the form of the English 'as...as' equative construction and to propose its formal classification. First, definitions and classifications of the equative construction as a comparison, presented in different linguistic accounts, are summarised and dis-

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cussed. Second, the paper provides an overview of the semantic components and grammatical morphemes of the 'as...as' equative construction. Moreover, this paper lays out principles underlying ellipsis in the equative construction and, subsequently, concentrates on the formal representation of each semantic component and grammatical morpheme. In the final section, the 'as...as' equative construction is classified based on the formal representation of the PARAMETER.

**Keywords:** comparison, equative construction, semantic component, STANDARD, PARAMETER, COMPAREE.

## Introduction

The 'as...as' equative construction, exemplified by the sentence *Mark is as clever as Julia*, is widely used in discourse to express an almost equal intensity of a property exhibited by two referents. English grammars and linguistic accounts present most variants of the equative construction but they seldom discuss their formal elements in detail. Therefore, based on empirical research, this paper attempts to present and describe all formal variants of the equative construction and propose its formal classification.

The article consists of three sections. Section 1 summarises the descriptions of the equative construction as a comparative construction and lays out different terminologies concerning the semantic and grammatical components. Section 2 discusses the formal aspects of the equative construction such as an ellipsis and formal representation of the semantic and grammatical components. Section 3 proposes the formal classification of the equative construction on the basis of the formal representation of the PARAMETER.

### 1. The 'as... as' equative construction as a comparative construction

Ultan (120) distinguishes and describes the following four degrees of predicative comparison:

- 1) **positive**, with respect to social norms, e.g.: *John is tall*.
- 2) **equative**, indicates the approximate equality between Entity<sub>1</sub> and Entity<sub>2</sub>, e.g.: *John is as tall as George*.
- 3) **comparative**, represents relative difference between Entity<sub>1</sub> and Entity<sub>2</sub>, e.g.: *John is taller than George*.
- 4) **superlative**, represents extreme inequality between inferior or superior Entity<sub>1</sub>, a member of a group, and Entity<sub>2</sub> which denotes all members of this group, e.g.: *John is the tallest of the boys*.

Ultan discusses for what reason the positive degree may be considered a degree of comparison. The first observation is that the adjective in positive degree is inherently comparable, namely Entity<sub>1</sub> exhibits more of property X

than the norm in a given cultural and social group. In sentence (1), for instance, *John* is taller than most people in the social group or culture the speaker has in mind. By contrast, other degrees of comparison are formally marked, e.g. the equative degree in sentence (2) is marked by the 'as...as' construction which comprises the function words  $as_1$  and  $as_2$ . Significantly, Ultan argues that the equative degree might denote complete or approximate equality between Entity<sub>1</sub>, which might be slightly superior or inferior, and Entity<sub>2</sub>.

Andersen (1983) observes that, in a comparative construction, it is the result of comparison that is significant rather than the process of comparing as such. Therefore, he distinguishes two salient results of comparison such as identity/similarity and difference. Comparison of equality pertains to the identity/similarity of Entities with respect to some property. By contrast, comparison of inequality results in the difference between two Entities. In addition, comparison may be implicit or explicit depending on one Entity or two Entities being compared, as illustrated in sentences (5) – (6) below, respectively:

- 5) John is (just) as tall. / John is taller. (Andersen 100)
- 6) John is as tall as Mary. / John is taller than Mary. (100)

While Ultan presents four degrees of comparison, Quirk et al. distinguish three kinds of comparison pertaining to gradable adjectives and adverbs. What differentiates each kind of comparison is the relation to a different degree, such as:

- a) a higher degree,
- b) the same degree, or
- c) a lower degree.

The degrees distinguished by Ultan and Quirk et al. correspond to each other: lower and higher degrees correspond to the comparative and superlative degrees, whereas the same degree corresponds to the positive and equative degrees. Quirk et al. argue that comparison with relation to each degree has a different formal representation – a higher degree is marked inflectionally by the suffixes *-er/-est* or their periphrastic equivalents *more/most*; a lower degree is marked by means of *less* and *least*; the same degree is represented by the correlatives 'as...as'. Considering the same degree, the function word  $as_1$  is classified as the 'endorsing item', i.e. the anticipatory word functioning as "endorsement of coordination", whereas the function word  $as_2$  designates the coordinator (920). In addition, the general comparative construction falls into three semantic categories such as equivalence, sufficiency, and excess, illustrated respectively with sentences (7) – (9) below:

- 7) Jane is as healthy as her sister (is). (1127)
- 8) Don is sensitive enough to understand your feelings. (1127)
- 9) Marilyn was too polite to say anything about my clothes. (1127)

Sentence (7) instantiates comparison of equivalence with a gradable adjective *healthy* to the same degree. Quirk et al. note that the comparison of equivalence consists of a matrix clause, denoting Proposition<sub>1</sub>, and a correlative subordinate clause, which denotes Proposition<sub>2</sub>. For instance, in sentence (7), the matrix clause *Jane is as healthy* denotes Proposition<sub>1</sub>, whereas the subordinate clause *as her sister* denotes Proposition<sub>2</sub>. Both propositions are compared with respect to the ‘standard of comparison’. In the matrix clause, the endorsing item *as*<sub>1</sub> and the gradable adjective *healthy* function as the comparative element *as healthy*. The standard of comparison HEALTH is implicitly represented by the gradable adjective *healthy* whose property pertains to the domain of ‘HEALTH’. In the correlative subordinate clause, the coordinator *as*<sub>2</sub> and Entity<sub>2</sub>, which designates the basis of comparison, function jointly as a comparative clause.

Haspelmath and Buchholz (278) define the equative construction as a comparison of equality “expressing the sameness of extent”. They argue that the equative construction is derived from the correlative relative clause, whose function words *as*<sub>1</sub> and *as*<sub>2</sub> – termed as a PARAMETER MARKER and STANDARD MARKER, respectively – are formally represented by a correlated (i.e. identical in a form) demonstrative pronoun and a relative pronoun. According to the more recent definition provided by Haspelmath (9), equative constructions “express situations in which two referents have a gradable property to the same degree.” I believe that the latter definition is more precise since two referents and the identical degree of a property are taken into consideration, instead of “the sameness of extent” only.

Biber et al. propose different terminology for the syntactic elements of the equative construction. In their account, the comparative element and the comparative clause are termed as a ‘comparative adjective’ and ‘degree complement’ respectively. The function word *as*<sub>1</sub> is classified as the degree adverb instead of the endorsing item. Furthermore, Biber et al. (526) note that a comparative phrase (e.g. *as ever before*), in the form of a prepositional phrase, or a comparative clause (e.g. *as you can get it*) may represent the degree complement.

Huddleston (“Comparative constructions”) proposes a more specific classification of comparison, which also subsumes the ‘as...as’ equative construction. He distinguishes comparison of equality and inequality, which might be further specified as scalar or non-scalar, as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

The dimensions of comparison proposed by Huddleston (1099)

	EQUALITY	INEQUALITY
SCALAR	<i>Kim is <u>as old as</u> Pat.</i>	<i>Kim is <u>older than</u> Pat.</i>
NON-SCALAR	<i>I took the <u>same bus as</u> last time.</i>	<i>I took a <u>different bus from</u> last time.</i>

Huddleston notes that the scalar comparison pertains to gradability and concerns the position on a cline, whereas the non-scalar comparison pertains to identity or similarity. Concluding from Table 1, the scalar comparison of equality – instantiating the 'as...as' equative construction – comprises Entity<sub>1</sub> *Kim*, Entity<sub>2</sub> *Pat*, and the gradable property *old*. By contrast, the non-scalar comparison of equality denotes identical Entity<sub>1</sub> *the bus* and Entity<sub>2</sub> *the bus last time* which are construed as identical by means of the adjective *the same*.

Interestingly, Huddleston argues that equality may pertain to slight superiority but not inferiority. Thus, Entity<sub>1</sub> and Entity<sub>2</sub> are construed as 'almost equal' rather than 'exactly equal'. For instance, in the scalar comparison of equality in Table 1, *Kim* might be slightly older than *Pat* but not younger. In this respect, Huddleston's observation partially contrasts with Ultan's, which assumes that equative degree might denote slightly superior or inferior equality.

Huddleston (1101–1102) further distinguishes the 'term comparison', denoting the comparison between the 'primary term' and 'secondary term', and the 'set comparison', which involves "comparison between the members of some set", whose one member is superior with respect to a cline. In line with Quirk et al., Huddleston argues that the comparative construction comprises a matrix clause, incorporating the primary term, and a subordinate clause, which incorporates the secondary term. The subordinate clause is termed as a comparative clause which represents the secondary term introduced by the function word *as*<sub>2</sub>. This leads to an observation that the 'as...as' equative construction is an instance of the scalar term comparison of equality, which is illustrated in sentence (10) below:

10) Sue is as good as Ed. (Huddleston 1103)

In sentence (10), the scalar term comparison of equality incorporates the primary term *Sue*, denoting Entity<sub>1</sub>, and the secondary term *Ed*, which denotes Entity<sub>2</sub>. Concluding from sentence (10), the primary term and the secondary term are principally represented by proper nouns. Huddleston argues that the primary and secondary terms might invoke variables, when a comparison denotes an unreal situation and does not indicate the factual characteristic of the primary term and/or the secondary term, or constants, which demonstrate what the primary and secondary terms are like. As Huddleston observes, the secondary term – designated by a noun phrase instead of a clause – denotes the constant. Therefore, in the scalar term comparison of equality, the primary term and the secondary term may invoke variables or constants, as illustrated in sentences (11) – (12) below:

11) **Bob** is as generous as **Liz**. [constant-constant] (Huddleston 1113)

12) **Your sister** is as intelligent as **I thought**. [constant-variable] (Haspelmath and Buchholz 305)

In sentence (11), the scalar term comparison of equality characterises the primary term *Bob* and the secondary term *Liz* concerning the gradable adjective *generous*. Therefore, the primary term and secondary term are constants. In sentence (12), the primary term *Your sister* is constant, indicating the factual situation in which *Your sister* is intelligent to X degree, whereas the secondary term *I thought* invokes the variable “I thought your sister to be intelligent to X degree”. The scalar term comparison of equality equates a constant with a variable and characterises the primary term *Your sister* as intelligent.

In addition, Huddleston proposes terminology concerning the syntactic elements of the scalar term comparison of equality, which may be illustrated in sentence (11). To begin with, the adverb *as<sub>1</sub>* is termed as a ‘comparative governor’, which corresponds to the endorsing item in Quirk et al. and the degree adverb in Biber et al. Furthermore, Huddleston distinguishes an ‘expanded comparative complement’ *as Liz*, which consists of the preposition *as<sub>2</sub>* and the complement *Liz*, designating the secondary term. The expanded comparative complement corresponds to the comparative clause in Quirk et al. and the degree complement in Biber et al. Moreover, a comparative governor, gradable adjective, and expanded comparative complement are jointly labelled as a comparative phrase (e.g. *as good as Ed*).

Huddleston’s terminology seems to define the equative construction most precisely. It specifies the scalar dimension of the equative construction and the distinction between the term comparison, incorporating the ‘as...as’ equative construction, and the set comparison. Moreover, he describes constants and variables which refer to the primary term and secondary term in the equative construction.

### 1.1. The semantic components and grammatical morphemes of the equative construction

Ultan distinguishes five main constituents of the predicative comparative construction, which may be further divided into two categories such as: (1) semantic components - ITEM, QUALITY/QUANTITY, and STANDARD OF COMPARISON; (2) grammatical morphemes - DEGREE MARKER and STANDARD MARKER whose function is to explicitly mark various comparative constructions. Sentence (13) below illustrates semantic components and grammatical morphemes constituting the prototypical equative construction:

13) John is as tall as George. (120)

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ITEM - *John*, DEGREE MARKER - *as<sub>1</sub>*, QUALITY - *tall*, STANDARD MARKER - *as<sub>2</sub>*,  
STANDARD OF COMPARISON - *George*.

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Sentence (13) shows that the ITEM *John* is compared with the STANDARD OF COMPARISON *George* with respect to some QUALITY *tall*. Furthermore, Ultan refers to the DEGREE MARKER *as*<sub>1</sub> and the STANDARD MARKER *as*<sub>2</sub> as semantically neutral equative markers, which might indicate complete or approximate equality.

In line with Ultan, Haspelmath and Buchholz distinguish the semantic components and grammatical morphemes of the equative construction. Their terminology differs distinctively from Ultan's: COMPAREE corresponds to ITEM; PARAMETER MARKER to DEGREE MARKER; PARAMETER to QUALITY/QUANTITY. However, the terminology concerning the STANDARD MARKER and STANDARD is more or less congruent in both accounts. Furthermore, Haspelmath and Buchholz (279) argue that the COMPAREE, PARAMETER, and STANDARD are designated by "lexical expressions that may be filled by an open class of elements", whereas the PARAMETER MARKER and STANDARD MARKER are fixed "functional elements".

In his recent paper, Haspelmath argues that the PARAMETER MARKER should be referred to as a DEGREE MARKER since this term is more transparent in typological research. For Haspelmath, the COMPAREE represents a referent compared to the other referent functioning as the STANDARD. Furthermore, the PARAMETER denotes a gradable property, whereas the EQUATIVE DEGREE MARKER and EQUATIVE STANDARD MARKER pertain to the PARAMETER and STANDARD, respectively.

I believe that the terminology proposed by Haspelmath and Buchholz is most transparent and precisely indicates the role of each semantic component and grammatical morpheme. Therefore, throughout this paper, their terminology is applied.

## 2. The formal aspects of the 'as...as' equative construction

This section concentrates on the formal and semantic representation of the prototypical equative construction as well as principles underlying an ellipsis and the formal representation of the semantic components and grammatical morphemes, discussed in Section 1.1. above.

### 2.1. The prototypical affirmative *as...as* equative construction

This section presents the semantic and formal representation of the prototypical equative construction. The search into the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) on March 22, 2022 shows that the equative construction with the PARAMETER represented by an adjective phrase (AdjP PARAMETER) occurs with the highest frequency, amounting to 136, 635 instances. The second most frequent equative construction occurs with the

PARAMETER represented by an adverb phrase (AdvP PARAMETER), with a frequency amounting to 73,541 instances. The sentence below instantiates the prototypical equative construction with the AdjP PARAMETER:

14) John is as tall as George. (Ulan 120)

Sentence (14) incorporates the semantic components, i.e. the COMPAREE *John*, the STANDARD *George*, the PARAMETER *tall*; and the grammatical morphemes, i.e. the PARAMETER MARKER *as*<sub>1</sub> and the STANDARD MARKER *as*<sub>2</sub>. Formally, the COMPAREE and STANDARD are designated by proper nouns, whereas the PARAMETER is designated by a gradable adjective. Concerning the general meaning, the COMPAREE exhibits degree<sub>1</sub> of the PARAMETER which is more or less equal to degree<sub>2</sub> of the PARAMETER exhibited by the STANDARD.

The Construction Grammar formalism proposed by Goldberg, who defines constructions as form-meaning pairs, enables an accurate representation of a semantic and formal structure of the equative construction and, therefore, is applied in this article. Figure 1 below presents the semantic components and formal elements of the prototypical equative construction.

Sem	STATE	< COMPAREE	PARAMETER (quality)	STANDARD >
	↓	↓	↓	↓
Syn	linking verb	< NP <sub>1</sub>	<i>as</i> <sub>1</sub> AdjP <i>as</i> <sub>2</sub>	NP <sub>2</sub> >

Fig. 1. Semantic and formal representation of the prototypical equative construction

## 2.2. Ellipsis

This section discusses an ellipsis in the equative construction based on Quirk et al. and Huddleston (“Comparative constructions”). Quirk et al. provide a general definition of an ellipsis and propose its classification. They also describe principles of an ellipsis in a general comparative construction, which apply to the equative construction as well. Huddleston also describes an ellipsis in a general comparative construction and proposes two different interpretations of the ellipsis regarding the formal representation of the STANDARD.

### 2.2.1. Quirk et al.

Quirk et al. (883) define ellipsis as ‘grammatical omission’ and argue that the salient principle underlying ellipsis is VERBATIM RECOVERABILITY, i.e. words are recoverable if their meaning is understood or implied. Furthermore, they distinguish and describe three main types of ellipses, namely recoverability type, functional type, and formal type. The recoverability type ellipsis pertains to the forms which are ‘recoverable from context’ whose



most salient dimension is textual recoverability, that is “the full form is recoverable from a neighbouring part of the text” (861). They categorise textual recoverability as anaphoric and cataphoric. In principle, anaphoric reference pertains to the aforementioned antecedent, whereas cataphoric reference to the antecedent to be mentioned in discourse. Quirk et al. (862) define antecedents as “items which follow the pro-form or ellipsis, as well as items which precede it.” By way of an illustration, let us consider sentences (15) – (16) below which instantiate the anaphoric (15) and cataphoric (16) textual recoverability concerning the use of a pronoun:

15) **The poor girl** did not complain, although **she** was badly hurt. (861)

16) Although **she** was badly hurt, **the poor girl** did not complain.

Functional type ellipsis, as a kind of the textual recoverability, relates to the cataphoric or anaphoric textual ellipsis, and furthermore, the relationship between elliptical and antecedent constructions which both constitute elements incorporated into a larger construction. Furthermore, within the functional type, Quirk et al. distinguish the general ellipsis, when the functional relation between an elliptical and antecedent construction is irrelevant, and the special ellipsis, where the relation between an elliptical and antecedent clause determines the condition for ellipsis, e.g. the comparative relation between an antecedent and elliptical clause. The general and special function type ellipsis is illustrated in sentences (17) – (18) below, respectively:

17) My own camera, like Peter's  $\Delta$ , is Japanese. (900)

18) Mary can beat Ann more easily than  $\Delta$  Phyllis. (892)

[i.e. Mary can beat Ann more easily than *Mary can beat* Phyllis.]

Concerning the formal type of ellipsis, Quirk et al. distinguish two main types, i.e. the initial formal ellipsis and the final formal ellipsis, depending on whether initial or final syntactic elements are ellipsed. Sentences (19) – (20) below illustrate formal ellipsis:

19) He will come later, if (**he comes**) at all. (893)

20) I have eaten more than you (**have eaten**).

According to Quirk et al., the initial formal ellipsis in sentence (19) concerns the noun phrase *he* and the verb *comes*, whereas the final formal ellipsis in sentence (20) concerns the predication *have eaten*. The same two kinds of formal ellipses may be found in the ‘as...as’ equative construction, as shown in sentences (21) – (22) which instantiate the final and initial formal ellipsis, respectively.

Now, let us consider the ellipsis in a general comparative construction. Quirk et al. argue that in a subordinate clause of a comparative construction, syntactic elements which constitute a matrix clause are repeated. Due to for-

mal and semantic parallelism between the matrix and subordinate clauses, ellipsis may be considered as obligatory in the comparative construction. Therefore, the non-contrastive syntactic elements of the predicate may be ellipted in a subordinate clause, with the exception of the contrasting ones, as illustrated in the sentences below provided by Quirk et al. (1137):

- 21) Isabelle has as many books as her brother (**has**).  
 22) The time passed as quickly as (**it passed**) last year.

Sentences (21) – (22) instantiate different dimensions of an ellipsis. To begin with, sentence (21) illustrates the anaphoric textual recoverability ellipsis of the verb *has*, and the functional comparative relation – termed in this paper as an equative relation – between the elliptical and antecedent clause. Moreover, the ellipsis of the predicate *has* is indicative of the final formal ellipsis. Analogically, sentence (22) instantiates the anaphoric textual recoverability of the noun phrase *it* and the verb *passed*, the functional equative relation, and the initial formal ellipsis.

In conclusion, the anaphoric textual recoverability ellipsis, the functional equative relation ellipsis, and the initial or final formal ellipsis might appear in the formal representation of STANDARD in the equative construction.

### 2.2.2. Huddleston (Comparative constructions)

In accordance with Quirk et al., Huddleston (Comparative constructions) notes that repetitive syntactic elements in a comparative phrase are understood, and therefore, should be ellipted. The main verb may be reduced to an auxiliary verb or infinitival *to* in a subordinate clause. In the equative construction, a subordinate clause is often reduced to a verbless clause due to an ellipsis of a noun phrase and/or a verb, as illustrated by sentences (23) – (24) below provided by Huddleston (1111):

- 23) Max didn't love Jill as much as [**she \_ him**].  
 24) He didn't send as many postcards to his friends as [**\_ letters to his mother**].

In sentence (23), the lexical verb *love* is ellipted in the verbless clause designating the STANDARD; whereas, in sentence (24), the noun phrase *he* and the lexical verb *sent* are already mentioned and understood, thus they might be ellipted due to anaphoric textual recoverability.

Huddleston further discusses another significant characteristic of the ellipsis in the equative construction. The function word *as*<sub>2</sub> takes mostly a single one-word complement representing the STANDARD. In some cases, this complement is only represented by a noun phrase (e.g. *Monday* in sentence (25)) which functions as an immediate complement:

- 25) I saw him as recently as **Monday**. (1114)

However, in some cases the approach to this complement is problematic since it might be interpreted as an immediate complement or a reduced clause, as illustrated with the sentence below, as provided by Huddleston (1113):

26) Bob is as generous as Liz. (reduced clause or immediate complement?)

In the case of (26), the comparative complement *Liz* might be interpreted as a reduced comparative clause or an immediate complement designated by a noun phrase. Even though Huddleston believes that the comparative complement is most often designated by a reduced clause, he does not exclude the alternative immediate complement interpretation. Without the ellipsis, sentence (26) would have two non-elliptical forms:

27) Bob is as generous as Liz is (generous). (1113)

28) Bob is as generous as Liz. (immediate complement)

In non-elliptical sentence (27), the copula *is* might be ellipsed, whereas the non-contrastive adjective *generous* would be ellipsed as a rule. By contrast, in sentence (28), the noun phrase *Liz* represents an immediate complement.

Huddleston argues that the reduced-clause interpretation of a comparative complement is preferred under certain conditions. First, the nominative pronoun is of the same nominative case as it would be together with the copula:

29) Bob is as generous as **she**. (1114)

In sentence (29), as Huddleston observes, the accusative pronoun *her* might alternatively represent the STANDARD in informal style instead of the nominative pronoun *she*. Another principle favouring a reduced clause concerns the addressee's familiarity with a referent denoted by the STANDARD:

30) In a country as rich as **Australia (is)** there should be no poverty. (1116)

31) Criticism is as old as **literary art**. (1116)

32) He looks as fit as a **fiddle**. (1116)

In sentence (30), the ellipsis of the copula is optional since the STANDARD representing the referent *Australia* may be less familiar to an addressee. In sentence (31), on the other hand, the COMPAREE *Criticism* and the STANDARD *literary art* represent familiar abstract referents; thereby, the ellipsis of the copula is preferred. Significantly, Huddleston observes that the ellipsis of the copula is obligatory in the idiomatic equative construction, for instance, *as fit as a fiddle* in sentence (32).

In line with Huddleston, I assume that the STANDARD is primarily designated by a reduced clause whose non-contrastive syntactic elements may be ellipsed due to anaphoric textual recoverability, except for the immediate complement STANDARD (e.g. *Monday* in sentence (25)). Moreover, a reduced clause instantiates the functional special ellipsis with an equative re-

lation between an elliptical and antecedent clause. Finally, there might be the initial or final formal ellipsis of non-contrasting syntactic elements in a reduced clause designating the STANDARD.

### 2.3. Formal representation of the semantic components and grammatical morphemes

This subsection discusses the formal representation of semantic components and grammatical morphemes. The semantic components, namely the COMPAREE, PARAMETER, and STANDARD, may be formally represented by lexical items belonging to different grammatical categories. The grammatical morphemes, that is the PARAMETER MARKER and STANDARD MARKER, are mainly represented by the function words *as*<sub>1</sub> and *as*<sub>2</sub>, respectively. The COCA study of the equative construction is carried out to describe and illustrate the formal representation of semantic components and grammatical morphemes with as much precision as possible.

#### 2.3.1. STANDARD

This section discusses two formal variants representing the STANDARD, namely the nominal STANDARD – formally represented by a noun phrase – and the propositional STANDARD, formally represented by a clause.

##### 2.3.1.1. Nominal STANDARD

As a semantic component, STANDARD denotes a referent with which COMPAREE is being compared. Haspelmath and Buchholz (1998) distinguish the specific STANDARD, making a specific reference to a referent, and the generic STANDARD, which makes a generic reference to a referent belonging to a general class or substance. While the specific STANDARD is primarily represented by a proper noun (e.g. *Maria* in sentence (33)), the generic STANDARD may be represented by a common noun (e.g. *an olive* in sentence (34)) or a mass noun (e.g. *gold* in sentence (37)). Moreover, they argue that the equative construction with the generic STANDARD tends to express more figurative than literal meaning. Therefore, the equative construction with a specific combination of the PARAMETER and generic STANDARD may form an idiomatic expression which is deeply entrenched in English and often functions as the simile:

33) Robert is as tall as **Maria**. (Haspelmath and Buchholz 278)

34) The tomato is as small as **an olive**. (310)

35) He is as poor as **a church mouse**. (310)

Sentences (33) – (35) show that the generic STANDARD might be literal (e.g. *an olive*) or figurative (e.g. *a church mouse*). Haspelmath and Buchholz note that the equative construction with a specific combination of PARAME-

TER and generic STANDARD may constitute an idiom which might denote an extreme degree of PARAMETER exhibited by a given generic STANDARD, which results in the hyperbolic meaning of the construction. Fillmore et al. (1988) distinguish the substantive idiom, namely a lexically-filled idiom with a specified lexical arrangement, and the formal idiom, a lexically-open formal pattern whose meaning is more abstract without the specification of lexically-open gaps. Sentences (36) – (37) below instantiate the equative constructions which constitute substantive idioms with the generic nominal STANDARD:

36) I'm **as blind as a bat** without my glasses. (Cambridge Dictionary)

37) She's been **as good as gold** all morning. (Cambridge Dictionary)

The general equative construction  $as_1 X as_2 Y$  instantiates a formal idiom with a lexically-open PARAMETER and a lexically-open STANDARD. Nevertheless, concluding from sentences (36) – (37), some equative constructions are substantive idioms with a lexically-filled PARAMETER and a lexically-filled generic STANDARD. In sentence (36), for instance, the equative construction instantiates a substantive idiom with the lexically-filled PARAMETER *blind* and the lexically-filled generic STANDARD *bat*. With a generic STANDARD represented by a lexical item other than *a bat*, this construction would not constitute a deeply entrenched English substantive idiom. Rather, it would merely constitute an equative construction with hyperbolic meaning, e.g. *as blind as a worm*.

### 2.3.1.2. Paragon STANDARD

For Lakoff (87) paragons are “individual members who represent either an ideal or its opposite”, whereas the ideal is defined as “an abstract ideal case” which influences the organisation of cultural knowledge concerning an entity, for instance, the *ideal family*. Significantly, cultural knowledge is organised according to the said ideal, resulting in prototype effects. In contrast, non-ideal cases are imperfect and without as many good qualities.

In the equative construction, the paragon often functions as a specific nominal STANDARD, termed in this paper as a paragon STANDARD. The research into the paragon STANDARD indicates that it might represent a cultural and historical figure or location, as illustrated with sentences (38) – (48) below:

#### MYTHOLOGICAL FIGURES

38) “At two years of age my granddaughter is **as beautiful as Aphrodite**.” (COCA)

39) Obviously, he's **as rich as Croesus**. (COCA)

40) I know you cheated on me! You're **as false as Cressida**! (*Farlex Dictionary of Idioms*)

## BIBLICAL FIGURES

- 41) Jones was once described by a friend as being **as proud as Lucifer**.  
(*Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus*)
- 42) She is considered **as wise as Solomon** and has become something of a matriarch within the community. (*COCA*)
- 43) If you want to teach young children, you must be **as patient as Job**.  
(*McGraw-Hill Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs*)
- 44) Of course, I am **as old as Methuselah**. Ninety-three. (*COCA*)

## HISTORICAL FIGURES

- 45) But in the short-term, why did we deal with Stalin? Because he was not **as bad/evil as Hitler** in our eyes. (*COCA*)
- 46) You have to be **as game as Ned Kelly** to go into a dangerous place like that!  
(*Farlex Dictionary of Idioms*)

## LOCATIONS

- 47) There's a plastic mass twice **as big as Texas** floating off the coast of California.  
(*COCA*)
- 48) Our customer service department always becomes **as busy as Grand Central Station** at this time of year. (*Farlex Dictionary of Idioms*)

Sentences (38) – (48) show that the paragon STANDARD exhibits PARAMETER to the ultimate degree<sub>2</sub>, which results in figurative and hyperbolic meaning. Even so, in the non-affirmative equative construction, the meaning is more literal than figurative since hyperbole seems to be cancelled, as illustrated with sentence (45). A further observation is that the equative construction with the paragon STANDARD instantiates a substantive idiom, with a lexically-filled PARAMETER (e.g. *rich* in sentence (39)) and a lexically-filled paragon STANDARD (e.g. *Croesus* in sentence (39)). Therefore, this construction may also constitute a deeply English entrenched idiom, analogous to the equative construction with the generic STANDARD.

### 2.3.1.3. Propositional STANDARD

Haspelmath and Buchholz (304) argue that STANDARD might incorporate a verb phrase in an equative clause, i.e. “comparison where the verb is part of the STANDARD”. They point out that both participants in the equative clause, functioning as a COMPAREE and STANDARD respectively, represent different referents. The ‘verb core’ of the whole equative clause is lexically different from a verb phrase of a clause functioning as a STANDARD. These principles are illustrated below in sentences (49) – (50) which instantiate equative clauses:

- 49) My brother dances as beautifully as **my sister sings**. (305)
- 50) This room is as ugly as **I feared**. (305)

However, the COCA search indicates that principles distinguished by Haspelmath and Buchholz are not always applicable. Not only might STANDARD designated by a clause represent the same participant as a COMPAREE – as in sentence (51) – but also a main lexical verb of an equative clause might be identical to a lexical verb of a clause functioning as a STANDARD, as in sentence (52) below:

51) You're not nearly as bad as **you'd like to be**. (COCA)

52) They can crush a ship as easily as **I crush this nut**. (COCA)

In this paper, the STANDARD designated by a clause is termed as a propositional STANDARD, whereas the equative clause is referred to as the equative construction with the propositional STANDARD. According to Cruse (2000: 25), the proposition “attributes some property to an entity, or a relation between two or more entities”, so each proposition combines one or more arguments representing entities and the predicate which may assign property to an entity or relate arguments in the proposition. Sentences (49) – (52) show that the propositional STANDARD includes an argument and a predicate which pertain to the PARAMETER.

Another observation is that the propositional STANDARD may represent a referent performing an activity in a real situation, as in sentences (49) and (52), or a referent in a hypothetical situation, which may be the same as a COMPAREE (51) or represent another referent expressing their subjective evaluation regarding a PARAMETER exhibited by a COMPAREE (50).

A further observation is that the propositional STANDARD may denote an unreal situation. For instance, in sentence (50), the hypothetical propositional STANDARD *I feared* implicitly represents the hypothetical degree<sub>2</sub> of the PARAMETER *ugly* which is equated with the real degree<sub>1</sub> exhibited by the COMPAREE *this room*. Interestingly, the hypothetical propositional STANDARD represents hypothetical degree<sub>2</sub> rather than another referent compared to a COMPAREE, as with the nominal STANDARD or the propositional STANDARD denoting a real situation. Therefore, the hypothetical propositional STANDARD may be considered as semantically idiosyncratic.

The equative construction with the propositional STANDARD may instantiate a formal idiom with a lexically-filled PARAMETER and a partly lexically-open propositional STANDARD, as in sentence (53), or a lexically-open PARAMETER and a lexically-filled propositional STANDARD, as in sentence (54):

53) He scuttled back into the house **as fast as his legs would carry him**. (Cambridge Dictionary)

54) He's **as mean /rich / crazy as they come**. (Cambridge Dictionary)

### 2.3.1.4. STANDARD designated by a gerund

The COCA search indicates that the propositional STANDARD, following Huddleston's (2002a) terminology, may be formally represented by a gerund-participle clause or a gerundial noun. In this paper, this formal variant of STANDARD is termed as a gerundial propositional STANDARD.

#### 2.3.1.4.1. Propositional STANDARD designated by a gerund-participle clause

First, let us concentrate on a gerund-participle clause which might designate the propositional STANDARD. Huddleston ("The verb") distinguishes the primary finite form of a verb, marking present or past tense and modality, and the secondary non-finite form which is non-tensed and does not mark modality. One of the secondary verb forms is a gerund-participle, defined by Huddleston (82) as "the inflectional form of a verb marked by the -ing suffix". The gerund-participle verb is incorporated into a gerund-participle clause, illustrated by Huddleston (1188) with the sentences below:

55) **Telling her father** was a big mistake.

56) He stopped **seeing her**.

In sentences (55) – (56), the gerund-participle clauses *Telling her father* and *seeing her* show that a gerund-participle might take a nominal complement (direct objects *her father* and *her*). The COCA search shows that the gerund-participle clause may formally represent the gerundial propositional STANDARD, as illustrated with the COCA sentences below:

57) **Finding such images** would be as difficult as **searching music only by genre**.

58) **Deploying inventory on exchanges** is not as simple as **cooking on a George Foreman Grill**.

In sentences (57) – (58), the gerund-participle clauses *searching music only by genre* and *cooking on a George Foreman Grill* represent general activities. The COCA search shows that, apart from a general activity, the gerundial propositional STANDARD might also represent a specific activity, as illustrated in sentence (59) below:

59) For these dogs, **keeping their heads above water** is about as easy as **keeping their noses away from other dog's rear ends**. (COCA)

Research into the equative construction with the gerundial propositional STANDARD shows that it may instantiate a substantive idiom with a lexically-filled PARAMETER (e.g. *exciting / easy* in sentences (60) – (61)) and a lexically-filled propositional gerund-participle STANDARD (e.g. *watching paint dry / falling of a log* in sentences (60) – (61)):



- 60) Everyone loves that period drama, but, to me, it's as **exciting as watching paint dry**. (Farlex Dictionary of Idioms)  
 61) Boy, that test was **easy as falling off a log!** (Farlex Dictionary of Idioms)

#### 2.3.1.4.2. Propositional STANDARD designated by a gerundial noun

For Huddleston (“The verb” 81–82) a gerundial noun formally resembles a gerund-participle but, on some principles, a grammatical difference between them might be determined. The following are the main grammatical differences between a gerundial noun and gerund-participle which concern grammatical features such as: (1) complementation – a gerundial noun might take the *of* prepositional phrase complement, whereas a gerund-participle incorporates a noun phrase; (2) modification – the gerundial noun might be modified by an adjective, the gerund-participle might be modified by an adverb; (3) determination – gerundial nouns might combine with the determiner *the*; (4) plurality – the gerundial noun may inflect plurality, as opposed to the gerund-participle. These grammatical differences lead to the conclusion that the propositional STANDARD in sentences (62) – (63) below is designated by a gerundial noun rather than a gerund-participle:

- 62) Because government officials disagree with PETA's viewpoint that **the killing of animals** really is pretty much as bad as **the killing of humans**, they suppress PETA's expression of that viewpoint using references to the Holocaust. (COCA)  
 63) Show me that **your shooting** is as good as **your cheating**. (COCA)

In sentence (62), the gerundial noun phrase *the killing of humans*<sup>1</sup> comprises of the gerundial noun *killing*, which combines with the determiner *the*, and the prepositional phrase *of humans* which functions as a complement. In sentence (63), the gerundial noun phrase *your cheating* combines with the possessive pronoun *your*. Notably, the gerundial noun *your cheating* represents a specific activity and might be paraphrased as *the cheating of yours*, which excludes a gerund-participle.

In the gerund-participle clauses in sentences (57) – (61) the landmarks of the relation are coded by ordinary object NPs. However, sentence (62) shows that the landmark of the relation in gerundial nouns is designated by the *of*-PP.

#### 2.3.2. COMPAREE

The equative construction may incorporate the nominal COMPAREE and the propositional COMPAREE which may not only determine a different sentence pattern instantiated by the equative construction but also the formal representation of the PARAMETER and STANDARD.

<sup>1</sup> In the generative grammar, noun phrases like *the killing of humans* / *the reading of the book* are labelled as ‘mixed nominalizations’ or ‘nominal gerunds’ (Alexiadou et al. 2007: 483).

### 2.3.2.1. Nominal COMPAREE

Haspelmath defines the COMPAREE as a referent compared to the STANDARD. Since COMPAREE denotes a referent, i.e. a real-world entity, it is formally represented by a noun phrase which may comprise a proper noun (e.g. *Zurich* in sentence (64)), a pronoun (e.g. *I* in sentence (65)), or a common noun (e.g. *Frozen veggies* in sentence (66)):

64) **Zurich** is as big as Vienna. (Haspelmath and Buchholz 278)

65) **I am** as happy as the moustache man on the pizza box. (COCA)

66) **Frozen veggies are** as good as fresh (veggies)! (COCA)

Sentences (64) – (66) show that the nominal COMPAREE may make a specific reference (e.g. *Zurich*) or a generic reference (e.g. *Frozen veggies*). Therefore, it may be further classified as the specific nominal COMPAREE and the generic nominal COMPAREE. Concerning the meaning of the whole construction, the nominal COMPAREE exhibits the PARAMETER to the more or less equal degree as the nominal STANDARD. Sentences (64) – (66) show that the nominal COMPAREE usually correlates with the AdjP PARAMETER and the nominal STANDARD.

Another observation is that the equative construction with the nominal COMPAREE instantiates the copular sentence pattern which, following Downing (2006), incorporates a subject (S), functioning here as a nominal COMPAREE, a linking verb (V), and a complement (C). What represents the complement (C) is the  $as_1$  PARAMETER  $as_2$  STANDARD part of the equative construction, termed by Huddleston (“Comparative constructions”) as a comparative phrase (see Section 1). Regarding the linking verb, Quirk et al. (200) categorise it semantically as a stative verb which may denote two kinds of situations: (1) STATE – “the less permanent situation” (e.g. *be angry*); or (2) QUALITY – “relative permanent and inalienable property of the subject referent” (e.g. *be tall*). The equative construction with the nominal COMPAREE may be followed by the QUALITY stative verb – as in sentences (64) and (66) – or the STATE stative verb, as in sentence (65).

With the AdvP PARAMETER or the propositional STANDARD, the equative construction with the nominal COMPAREE would constitute a grammatically ill-formed construction, as shown in sentences (67) – (68) below:

67) \*Zurich is as beautifully as Vienna.

68) \*Zurich is as popular as riding a bike.

### 2.3.2.1. Propositional COMPAREE

The propositional COMPAREE might denote a state or an activity, which might be abstract or performed by a referent. Accordingly, it may be formally represented by a clause comprising of a stative verb, as in sentences (69) –

(70), or a clause comprising of a dynamic verb, as in sentences (71) – (73) below:

### stative verb

- 69) **Mehmet knows Turkish** as well as he knows Dutch. (Haspelmath and Buchholz 305)  
 70) **I consider it** as insidious as crack or meth. (COCA)

### dynamic verb

- 71) **My sister runs** as fast as you. (Haspelmath and Buchholz 309)  
 72) In a handful of words, **Dee had dismantled her** as efficiently as she completed her research projects. (COCA)  
 73) **Lake Louise gives you** as much space as you want. (COCA)

The equative construction with the propositional COMPAREE might instantiate all argument structure constructions. Beside the copular pattern, Downing distinguishes the intransitive, transitive, ditransitive, and complex transitive sentence patterns. Sentences (69) – (70) present the equative constructions with a stative-verb propositional COMPAREE. The equative construction in sentence (69) instantiates the intransitive sentence pattern (S-V) which incorporates an obligatory complement (C) represented by the 'as<sub>1</sub>...as<sub>2</sub>' comparative phrase. In sentence (70), the equative construction instantiates the complex transitive sentence pattern (S-V-Od-C) which incorporates a stative-verb propositional COMPAREE (S-V), the pronoun *it* functioning as a direct object (Od), and the 'as<sub>1</sub>...as<sub>2</sub>' comparative phrase functioning as an object complement (C).

On the other hand, sentences (71) – (73) incorporate a dynamic-verb propositional COMPAREE with which the equative construction may instantiate three different sentence patterns. First, sentence (71) instantiates the intransitive sentence pattern (S-V) which takes the 'as<sub>1</sub>...as<sub>2</sub>' comparative phrase as an optional adverbial (A) rather than an obligatory complement (C), as in sentence (69). Sentence (72) instantiates the transitive sentence pattern (S-V-Od) in which the pronoun *her* and the 'as<sub>1</sub>...as<sub>2</sub>' comparative phrase function as a direct object (Od) and an adverbial (A), respectively. Sentence (73) instantiates the ditransitive sentence pattern (S-V-Oi-Od), in which the indirect object (Oi) is represented by the pronoun *you*, whereas the direct object (Od) is represented by the 'as<sub>1</sub>...as<sub>2</sub>' comparative phrase. The observation from sentences (69) – (73) is that the propositional COMPAREE correlates mostly with the AdvP PARAMETER and the propositional STANDARD.

The COCA search into the intransitive equative construction shows that it may also instantiate the middle construction, i.e. a construction which is formally in the active voice, whereas semantically an "intermediate between

ordinary actives and passives" (Huddleston, 2002b: 307-308). This construction is illustrated in sentence (74) below:

74) She doesn't frighten easily. (Huddleston, 2002: 307)

Huddleston ("The clause: complements") argues that the middle construction denotes a state rather than an event, even when headed by a dynamic verb, as in sentence (75). On a formal level, this construction comprises an obligatory adjunct of manner which is formally represented by an adverb of manner (e.g. *easily* in sentence (74)).

In the middle construction motivated by an equative construction, the propositional COMPAREE is formally represented by a clause which might be followed by a stative verb or a dynamic verb. The 'as<sub>1</sub>...as<sub>2</sub>' comparative phrase functions as an obligatory adjunct of manner. In sentence (75) below, for instance, the middle construction consists of the propositional COMPAREE (e.g. *meconium washes away*) and the adjunct of manner (e.g. *just as easily as any other breastfed baby poo*):

75) Everything I've heard indicates that **meconium washes away just as easily as any other breastfed baby poo**, but if you are concerned about it and still want to use cloth from day one, you can use flushable or fleece liners in the diapers to protect them. (COCA)

Alternatively, the gerund-participle clause (e.g. *Finding such images* in sentence (57)) or the gerundial noun (e.g. *the killing of animals* in sentence (62)) may formally represent the propositional COMPAREE which is termed in this paper as the gerundial propositional COMPAREE. Concluding from sentences (57) – (59) and (62) – (63), the equative construction with the gerundial propositional COMPAREE instantiates the copular sentence pattern in which the gerundial propositional COMPAREE correlates with the AdjP PARAMETER and the gerundial propositional STANDARD. The exceptions are the idiomatic equative constructions presented in sentences (60) and (61) which take the nominal COMPAREE, the AdjP PARAMETER, and the gerundial propositional STANDARD.

### 2.3.3. PARAMETER

The research into the equative construction shows that three different grammatical categories may formally represent the PARAMETER: an adjective phrase, an adverb phrase, and a noun phrase. The sections below describe the PARAMETER and present a semantic and formal representation of the equative construction with each formal kind of PARAMETER, based on the formalism proposed by Goldberg.

### 2.3.3.1. PARAMETER designated by an adjective phrase (AdjP PARAMETER)

The most prototypical AdjP PARAMETER is designated by an adjective phrase with a gradable adjective as its head. Biber et al. claim that the adjective may be semantically classified as a descriptor or a classifier. Descriptors are gradable adjectives characterising an entity with respect to descriptive qualities such as colour, size, and emotion. By contrast, classifiers are non-gradable, categorised as relational, affiliative, or topical. Their function is to delimit an adjective (e.g. *additional*), assign nation or religion (e.g. *Chinese*), or show a relationship with a noun (e.g. *chemical*). Since they are non-gradable, they do not usually function as an AdjP PARAMETER. Let us now consider sentence (76) below which presents the most prototypical AdjP PARAMETER which is formally represented by a gradable adjective:

76) Jill is as **clever** as Liz. (Huddleston 1101)

In addition to a gradable adjective, the AdjP PARAMETER may be formally represented by an adjective phrase which consists of an adjective followed by a non-finite *to*-clause. According to Biber et al., such an adjective phrase comprises a head adjective predicate which permits a post predicate non-finite *to*-clause, the missing noun phrase of which refers to a subject of a sentence:

77) They are as **keen to join in** as we are. (Carter and McCarthy 766)

Moreover, the AdjP PARAMETER may be represented by an adjective phrase which consists of an adverb premodifier and an adjective head:

78) I am as **severely handicapped** as you (are). (Quirk et al. 1137)

Sentences (76) – (78) show that the AdjP PARAMETER correlates with the nominal COMPAREE and the nominal STANDARD which may be designated by a noun phrase, as in sentence (76), or a reduced copulative clause, as in sentence (77). The semantic and formal representation of the equative construction with the AdjP PARAMETER is presented in Figure 2.

Sem	STATE	<	nominal COMPAREE	PARAMETER (quality)	nominal STANDARD	>
	↓		↓	↓	↓	
Syn	linking verb	<	NP <sub>1</sub>	( <i>as</i> <sub>1</sub> )	AdjP	<i>as</i> <sub>2</sub> NP <sub>2</sub> >

**Fig. 2.** Representation of the AdjP PARAMETER EC with the nominal COMPAREE

In addition, the AdjP PARAMETER may correlate with the gerundial propositional COMPAREE and the gerundial propositional STANDARD, as

shown in sentences (57) – (59) and (62) – (63). Figure 3 presents the semantic and formal representation of this construction.

Sem	STATE	< propositional COMPAREE	PARAMETER (quality)	propositional STANDARD >
	↓	↓	↓	↓
Syn	linking verb	< gerundial noun	as <sub>1</sub> AdjP	as <sub>2</sub> gerundial noun >
		gerund-participle clause		gerund-participle clause

Fig. 3. Representation of the AdjP PARAMETER EC with the gerundial propositional COMPAREE

### 2.3.3.2. PARAMETER designated by an adverb phrase (AdvP PARAMETER)

There are different syntactic roles and semantic categories of adverbs in English. Biber et al. argue that the adverb may function as a modifier or an adverbial. Modifiers are adverbs which are tied with another element of a clause, whereas adverbials constitute themselves as an element of a clause. Although Biber et al. distinguish seven semantic categories of adverbs, only the adverbs of place (e.g. *far*), manner (*quickly*), frequency (*often*), degree (*thoroughly*), and stance (*surely/honestly*) appear to function as a PARAMETER in the equative construction. The stance adverbs are further classified as epistemic (e.g. *surely*) or style (e.g. *honestly*), denoting the manner of communication. The functions of an additive adverb (e.g. *also*) and a linking adverb (e.g. *additionally*) seem to be inconsistent with the semantic function of the PARAMETER since they do not designate gradable properties of activities. Let us consider the COCA sentences below:

- 79) The timing is right and, I must confess to a certain curiosity about a man who would venture from as **far** as **Capetown** to pay us a visit.  
 80) He's out of the door almost as **quickly** as he came in.  
 81) Enjoy this beverage as **often** as you like.  
 82) But I struggle to think of another bar that celebrates whiskey in all forms as **thoroughly** as Mac McGee.  
 83) Your master will enslave you as **surely** as the rest of us.  
 84) Please fill out the questionnaire as **honestly** as possible.

Adverb phrases of an adverbial function formally represent the AdvP PARAMETER in sentences (79) – (84). They may denote degree (e.g. *far*, *thoroughly*, *surely*), manner (e.g. *quickly*, *honestly*), or frequency (e.g. *often*). Another observation is that the AdvP PARAMETER pertains to activities represented by the propositional COMPAREE and propositional STANDARD.

The AdvP PARAMETER may also be represented by the degree adverbs *much* and *little*. Quirk et al. distinguish a subjunct which functions as a subordinate adverbial. The degree adverbs *much* and *little*, as subjuncts of a nar-

row orientation subordinated to a single syntactic element, function as intensifiers which may indicate a high or low degree with respect to the intensity on a cline, as in examples (85) – (86). The intensifier may be further classified as an amplifier, intensifying and increasing a degree, or a downtoner, which decreases the degree. Therefore, the degree adverb *much* functions as an amplifier, which is further classified as a booster denoting a high degree. By contrast, the degree adverb *little* functions as a downtoner which is classified as a minimiser denoting a low degree. This variant of PARAMETER is termed in this article as the subjunct-AdvP PARAMETER with which the equative construction is partly idiomatic, with a lexically-filled subjunct-AdvP PARAMETER and a lexically-open (reduced) propositional STANDARD. Sentences (85) – (86) below illustrate the subjunct-AdvP PARAMETER, designated by the booster amplifier *much* and the minimiser downtoner *little*:

85) Finns don't shake hands as **much** as Central Europeans. (Haspelmath & Buchholz 287)

86) He slept as **little** as a nightingale. (COCA)

In addition, sentence (75) shows that the equative construction with the AdvP PARAMETER might motivate the middle construction whose AdvP PARAMETER is represented by the adverb of manner (e.g. *easily*).

Another observation is that the AdvP PARAMETER may denote a qualitative meaning, which subsumes manner, or a quantitative meaning, which may subsume degree, frequency, or quantity. Sentences (79) – (86) show that the AdvP PARAMETER correlates with the propositional COMPAREE and the propositional STANDARD. The semantic and formal representation of the equative construction with the AdvP PARAMETER is presented in Figure 4.

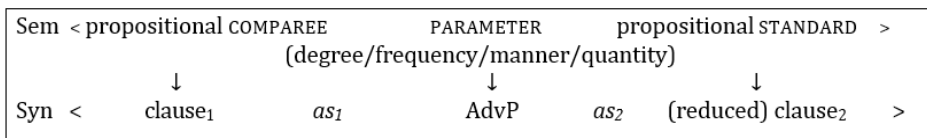


Fig. 4. Representation of the AdvP PARAMETER equative construction

### 2.3.3.3. PARAMETER designated by a noun phrase (NP PARAMETER)

The NP PARAMETER may be designated by four kinds of noun phrases: (1) Quantifier-Noun (Quantifier-N); (2) fused-head NP; (3) Adjective-Determiner-Noun (Adj-Det-N); and (4) such-Indefinite Determiner-Noun Phrase (such-InDet-NP).

#### 2.3.3.3.1. Quantifier-N PARAMETER

Haspelmath and Buchholz distinguish 'quantitative equatives' which denote a more or less equal quantity of the PARAMETER represented by a noun phrase, as illustrated in sentences (87) – (91) below:

87) Isabelle has as **many books** as her brother (has). (Quirk et al. 1137)

88) He has as **much money** as she. (Haspelmath and Buchholz 298)

89) Pat has as **little money** as Kim. (Huddleston, "The verb" 1124)

90) I've as **few shirts** as Ed. (Huddleston 1126)

91) At least I didn't spend as **much money** as Elton. (COCA)

Payne and Huddleston distinguish the degree determinatives (*many, much, few, little*) which function as quantifiers of a countable or non-countable noun phrase. Furthermore, they argue that degree determinatives might be of a positive orientation (*much/many*), denoting great quantity, or a negative orientation (*little/few*), which denotes a small quantity.

For Radden and Dirven, the degree determinatives correspond to scalar quantifiers which denote scalar quantification i.e. a quantification with respect to some implicit standard on a cline. Countable nouns take the scalar quantifiers *many/few*, whereas non-countable nouns take the quantifiers *much/little*. Concluding from sentences (87) – (91), the Quantifier-N PARAMETER is partly idiomatic, with a lexically-filled quantifier and a lexically-open head noun and, concerning the meaning, appears to represent the quantity of an entity (e.g. *many books*).

### 2.3.3.3.2. Fused-head NP PARAMETER

In addition to the Quantifier-N PARAMETER, the NP PARAMETER may also be formally represented by the "fuse-head noun phrase" (Payne and Huddleston) or "a partitive construction" (Radden and Dirven). For Payne and Huddleston (410) "fused-head NPs are those where the head is combined with a dependent function that in ordinary NPs is adjacent to the head, usually determiner or internal modifier.". They distinguish the fuse-head with a special interpretation which pertains to quantification of predicatives construed as gradable categories, as illustrated in sentence (92) below:

92) Ed isn't [**much of a husband**]. (415)

In sentence (92), the degree determiner *much* functions as a degree quantifier for a gradable property which characterises an entity denoted by a predicative head noun (e.g. *husband*). Formally, the fuse-head NP of a special type consists of the degree quantifier (*much/little*) functioning as a head determiner. The degree quantifier is followed by the preposition *of* heading a prepositional phrase (e.g. *of a husband*) whose complement is formally represented by an indefinite noun phrase (e.g. *a husband*).

For Radden and Dirven, the fuse-head noun phrase is a kind of a partitive construction. The degree determinative (*much/little*) is termed as an amount quantifier which functions as a pronoun heading a prepositional phrase comprising of the preposition *of* and the complement designated by



the indefinite noun phrase (e.g. *a husband*). Sentences (93) – (94) below provided by Quirk et al. (1139) illustrate the fused-head NP PARAMETER:

93) It was as **much of a success** as I had imagined it would be.

94) It was as **little of a success** as I had imagined it would be.

The sentences above show that the fused-head NP PARAMETER is partly idiomatic, with a lexically-filled quantifier and prepositional phrase (e.g. *much of / little of*) and a lexically-open indefinite head noun (e.g. *a success*). Moreover, the fused-head NP PARAMETER appears to represent the high or low degree of a property characterising a referent denoted by a head noun.

#### 2.3.3.3.3. Adj-Det-N PARAMETER

Pullum and Huddleston (550) argue that the noun phrase may comprise an adjective which functions as an external modifier. Such an adjective is labelled as a predeterminer adjective and followed by an indefinite article which marks an indefinite head noun. The noun phrase of this type might formally represent the NP PARAMETER which appears to denote a quality of an entity, as shown in sentence (95) below:

95) It was as **lively a discussion** as we thought it would be. (Quirk et al. 1137)

It is worth noting that the nominal COMPAREE in sentence (95) is represented by the anticipatory *it* whose function is principally formal. Quirk et al. note that the anticipatory *it* is not a proper subject of a sentence: it functions as a required initial subject to meet a structural requirement concerning argument structure. Semantically, as they suggest, the anticipatory *it* might indicate the identification of a proper subject further in a sentence. These principles are observable in sentence (95) in which the anticipatory *it* indicates that the proper subject COMPAREE is to be identified with the Adj-Det-N PARAMETER.

#### 2.3.3.3.4. Such-InDet-NP PARAMETER

Huddleston (“Comparative constructions”) presents the equative construction with the NP PARAMETER which is formally represented by an indefinite non-countable noun phrase (e.g. *a rate*). In such case, following Payne and Huddleston (435), the adjectival predeterminer *such* functions as an external modifier of an indefinite noun phrase, as illustrated below in sentences (96) – (97):

96) Few industries were growing at such **a rate** as catering. (Huddleston, “The verb” 1130)

97) His second film wasn’t such **a success** as his first. (1130)

The observation from sentences (96) – (97) is that the equative construction with the Such-InDet-NP PARAMETER may instantiate all kinds of argu-

ment structure constructions (sentence patterns): the copulative pattern with the nominal COMPAREE, as in sentence (97), and other sentence patterns with the propositional COMPAREE, e.g. the intransitive sentence pattern in sentence (96) which incorporates the propositional COMPAREE and the ‘such...as’ comparative phrase functioning as an adjunct which has an adverbial function and modifies a verb phrase. In contrast, sentence (97) takes the nominal COMPAREE and the ‘such...as’ comparative phrase functioning as an obligatory complement describing the nominal COMPAREE.

### 2.3.3.3.5. The representation of the equative construction with the NP PARAMETER

The equative construction with the NP PARAMETER instantiates two general constructions which differ in their semantic and formal representations. First, the NP PARAMETER may correlate with the nominal COMPAREE and the nominal STANDARD. With such semantic components, the NP PARAMETER might represent three different meanings such as: (1) – the more or less equal quantity of an entity possessed by a COMPAREE and STANDARD, as in sentences (87) – (90); (2) – the degree of a quality exhibited by an entity, as in sentences (93) – (94); and (3) – the quality of an entity, as in sentence (95). Figure 5 presents the semantic and formal representation of this construction.

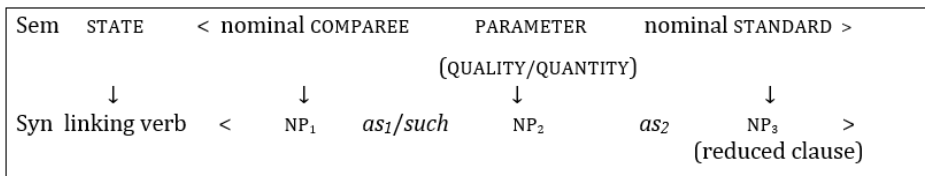
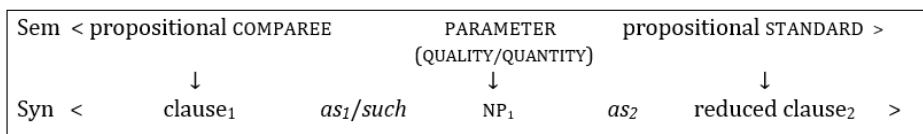


Fig. 5. Representation of the equative construction with the NP PARAMETER

In addition, the equative construction with the NP PARAMETER may correlate with the propositional COMPAREE and the propositional STANDARD and – with such semantic components – may also represent different meanings. First, the NP PARAMETER may represent the quantity of an entity engaged in an activity represented by a propositional COMPAREE and propositional STANDARD, as shown in sentence (91). Second, the NP PARAMETER may represent an indefinite entity pertaining to a propositional COMPAREE and propositional STANDARD, as in sentence (96). Therefore, the observation is that the propositional COMPAREE involves the NP PARAMETER or, alternatively, the NP PARAMETER identifies the propositional COMPAREE. Figure 6 represents the semantic and formal representation of this construction.



**Fig. 6.** Representation of the equative construction with the NP PARAMETER

### 2.3.4. PARAMETER MARKER

Quirk et al., Biber et al., and Huddleston (“Comparative constructions”) agree that the most prototypical PARAMETER MARKER is formally represented by the degree adverb *as*<sub>1</sub>. For Haspelmath and Buchholz, who believe that the equative construction is based on the correlative relative clause construction, the PARAMETER MARKER is formally represented by an adverbial demonstrative pronoun which is correlated with the adverbial relative pronoun *as*<sub>2</sub> functioning as a STANDARD MARKER. In addition, all accounts indicate that – in the negated equative construction – the degree adverb *so* may alternatively function as a PARAMETER MARKER, as in sentences (98) – (99) below:

98) Kim is **as** old as Pat. (Huddleston, “The verb” 1099)

99) It’s **not so** simple as that. (1130)

In addition to the degree adverb, the PARAMETER MARKER might be formally represented by the function word *such* which, according to Quirk et al., may function as a predeterminer modifying a noun phrase. Similarly, Payne and Huddleston (435) categorise *such* as an adjectival predeterminer which functions as an external modifier of a head noun. Huddleston (“Comparative constructions”) observes that the equative construction tends to be negated with the *such*-PARAMETER MARKER:

100) His second film **wasn’t such** a success as his first. (Huddleston, “The verb” 1130)

101) Few industries were growing at **such** a rate as catering. (1130)

Sentences (100) and (101) demonstrate that PARAMETER MARKER designated by *such* correlates with the NP PARAMETER represented by an indefinite noun phrase with a head abstract noun (Dixon). In this instance, the degree adverbs *as* and *so* may not function as PARAMETER MARKERS, since they are not modifiers of a noun phrase.

Quirk et al. (1137) argue that the *as*<sub>1</sub>-PARAMETER MARKER may have the following functions depending on the formal variant of PARAMETER: (1) determinative; (2) head of a noun phrase; (3) subjunct; (4) modifier of an adjective phrase; (5) modifier of a premodifying adjective; (6) modifier of an adverb phrase; or (7) modifier of a premodifying adverb. Quirk et al. (1137) illustrate these functions with sentences (102) – (108) below, respectively:

- 102) Isabelle has **as many** books as her brother (has).  
 103) **As many of my friends** are in New York as are here.  
 104) I agree with you **as much** as I agree with Robert.  
 105) The article was **as objective** as I expected (it would be).  
 106) It was **as lively** a discussion as we thought it would be.  
 107) The time passed **as quickly** as (it passed) last year.  
 108) I am **as severely** handicapped as you (are).

Concluding from sentences (102) – (108), the PARAMETER may motivate the following functions of the PARAMETER MARKER: (1) AdjP PARAMETER - modifier, as in sentences (105) and (108); (2) AdvP PARAMETER – modifier or subjunct, as in sentences (107) and (104) respectively; and (3) NP PARAMETER – modifier or determinative, as in sentences (102) and (106).

The observation is that the PARAMETER MARKER most often functions as a modifier – with all three formal kinds of the PARAMETER. It is observable that sentence (103) is formally different from sentences (102) and (104) – (108) since it appears to instantiate a fronted equative construction. The degree determinative follows the PARAMETER MARKER in sentence (103) so it seems to function as a determinative rather than a head of a noun phrase.

### Ellipsis of the PARAMETER MARKER

The semantic components of the equative construction are obligatory, however, the PARAMETER MARKER tends to be optional on some principles discussed by Quirk et al. and Haspelmath and Buchholz. To begin with, Quirk et al. distinguish two principles that permit the ellipsis of the PARAMETER MARKER. First, it tends to be optional in informal style when a linking verb (e.g. *were* in sentence (109)) is followed by a noun phrase (e.g. *gold*) functioning as a nominal STANDARD. The meaning of the equative construction with an ellipsed on this principle PARAMETER MARKER is less emphatic:

- 109) They **were** good **as gold** while you were away. (Quirk et al 1138)

Second, the function word *as*<sub>1</sub> tends to be optional when the linking verb is implied, especially in verbless and subjectless supplementive clauses in the literary style, as illustrated by Quirk et al. (1138) in sentence (110) below:

- 110) Lawson, implacable **as ever**, contented himself with a glare of defiance.

While Quirk et al. note that it is the linking verb or the implication of the linking verb that permits an optional PARAMETER MARKER, Haspelmath and Buchholz observe that the PARAMETER MARKER tends to be optional with the generic STANDARD. However, as they note, it is more obligatory than optional with the specific nominal STANDARD. Haspelmath and Buchholz (310) illustrate the ellipsis of the PARAMETER MARKER with sentences

(111) – (112), which instantiate the equative constructions with the specific and generic STANDARD, respectively:

111) My sister is **as** pretty as **you**.

112) The cherry is (**as**) big as **an apple**.

In sentence (111), the specific nominal STANDARD *you* motivates the obligatory PARAMETER MARKER. In contrast, the PARAMETER MARKER in sentence (112) is optional due to the generic STANDARD *an apple*. Consequently, the inference is that the principles proposed by Haspelmath and Buchholz contrast partly with those of Quirk et al. The copula is followed by the nominal STANDARD in sentence (111); but even so, the PARAMETER MARKER is obligatory due to the specific nominal STANDARD. Therefore, there are grounds to believe that the principles proposed by Haspelmath and Buchholz are more accurate.

### 2.3.5. STANDARD MARKER

In the English equative construction, the STANDARD MARKER is formally represented by the function word *as*<sub>2</sub> only. According to Haspelmath and Buchholz, the STANDARD MARKER is formally represented by a relative pronoun – when followed by a STANDARD represented by a NP – or a subordinate conjunction, when STANDARD is represented by a clause. In contrast, Huddleston argues that *as*<sub>2</sub> functions as a preposition which may introduce an expanded complement designated by a prepositional phrase (e.g. *as Pat* in sentence (113)), or a comparative clause (e.g. *as they seemed* in sentence (114)).

After Huddleston, I believe that the STANDARD MARKER is formally represented by a preposition head which takes a noun phrase complement functioning as a nominal STANDARD. However, in line with Haspelmath and Buchholz, I believe that the STANDARD MARKER is formally represented by a subordinate conjunction when followed by a clause functioning as a propositional STANDARD. Thus, the conclusion is that the STANDARD MARKER may function as a preposition with the nominal STANDARD, as in sentence (113), or as a subordinate conjunction with the propositional STANDARD, as in sentence (114):

113) Kim is as old **as Pat**. (Huddleston, "Comparative constructions" 1130)

114) They are not as good **as they seemed**. (Haspelmath and Buchholz 305)

## 3. The formal classification of the as...as equative construction

This section concentrates on the formal classification of the 'as...as' equative construction. There is an overview of the formal classification proposed

by Haspelmath & Buchholz, which is partially described in Section 2.3. Then, the formal classification based on the formal variants of the PARAMETER is presented.

### 3.1. Haspelmath and Buchholz' classification

Haspelmath and Buchholz (290–297) distinguish and discuss three formal types of the 'as...as' equative construction which have been identified in European languages:

- a) relative-based equative construction,  
e.g. *Our house is as tall as yours.*
- b) constructions primarily characterised by a PARAMETER MARKER,  
e.g. *My sister is equally pretty as you.* (literal translation from Dutch language)
- c) construction exclusively characterised by a STANDARD MARKER,  
e.g. *Todayyesterday STANDARD MARKER (quantity) cold.* (literal translation from Kalmyk language)

The authors claim that the English equative construction is relative-based which is by far the most common type in European languages. They argue that the relative based equative construction is derived from the correlative relative clause construction since the PARAMETER MARKER is designated by the demonstrative pronoun *as*<sub>1</sub>, whereas the STANDARD MARKER by the relative pronoun *as*<sub>2</sub>.

They divide the relative-based equative construction into a canonical construction and STANDARD MARKER-only construction. In a canonical construction, there is a PARAMETER MARKER and STANDARD MARKER, whereas in a STANDARD MARKER-only construction, as the name itself indicates, there is only a STANDARD MARKER. Accordingly, the *as...as* equative construction is a relative-based canonical construction with a PARAMETER MARKER, which tends to be optional with the generic STANDARD, and an obligatory STANDARD MARKER, as shown in sentences (115) – (116) below, respectively:

115) My sister is **as** pretty as **you**. (310)

116) The cherry is (**as**) big as **an apple**. (310)

Furthermore, Haspelmath and Buchholz differentiate two formal kinds of the equative construction based on the form of the PARAMETER and STANDARD, respectively:

- a) quantitative equative constructions – with the quantifier-N PARAMETER,  
e.g. *He has as **many books** as she.* (298)
- b) equative clauses – with the propositional STANDARD  
e.g. *My brother dances as beautifully as **my sister sings**.* (305)

Haspelmath and Buchholz treat the equative construction and the equative clause as two separate constructions of a similar form. What differentiates equative clauses from equative constructions is the STANDARD MARKER which is formally represented by a subordinating conjunction instead of a relative pronoun or, according to Huddleston ("Comparative constructions"), a preposition. In this paper, equative clauses are treated as equative constructions with the propositional STANDARD.

Apart from formal classification, Haspelmath & Buchholz propose the referential classification of the equative construction depending on a specific or generic reference made by the STANDARD. They distinguish the following referential kinds:

- a) generic equative construction – with the generic STANDARD, e.g. *He is as poor as a church mouse.* (310)
- b) specific equative construction – with the specific STANDARD, e.g. *Robert is as tall as Maria.* (278)

Haspelmath & Buchholz' classifications and examples incorporate most formal variants of the equative construction. They present examples showing the propositional STANDARD, the AdjP PARAMETER, the AdvP PARAMETER, and one kind of the NP PARAMETER, namely the quantifier-N PARAMETER. Nevertheless, the gerundial propositional STANDARD and three other formal variants of the NP PARAMETER described in Section 2.3 are not included.

### 3.2. The PARAMETER-based formal classification

The study of the PARAMETER in Section 2.3.3. demonstrates that its formal representation determines semantic and formal representation of semantic components and grammatical morphemes of the equative construction. Therefore, based on the formal representation of the PARAMETER, I would extend the formal classification of the equative construction. Accordingly, the equative construction (EC), as the relative-based canonical construction, might be further classified as the AdjP PARAMETER EC, the AdvP PARAMETER EC and the NP PARAMETER EC.

More specifically, the AdjP PARAMETER and AdvP PARAMETER equative construction might be further classified as the idiomatic AdjP PARAMETER and AdvP PARAMETER equative construction. The aforementioned formal subcategories of the *as...as* equative construction are related by inheritance links which, according to Goldberg (72) who defines a construction as a form-meaning pair, "are posited between constructions which are related both semantically and syntactically". Goldberg distinguishes four kinds of inheritance links: (1) polysemy link – concerning a general meaning of a construction together with extensions; (2) subpart link – a construction might be classified as an independent subpart of another construction; (3) instance

link – when one construction, termed “a special case” (79), is a more specified instance of a more abstract construction; and (4) metaphorical extension link – when constructions are semantically connected by metaphorical mappings. The general formal classification of the English equative construction is presented in Figure 7.

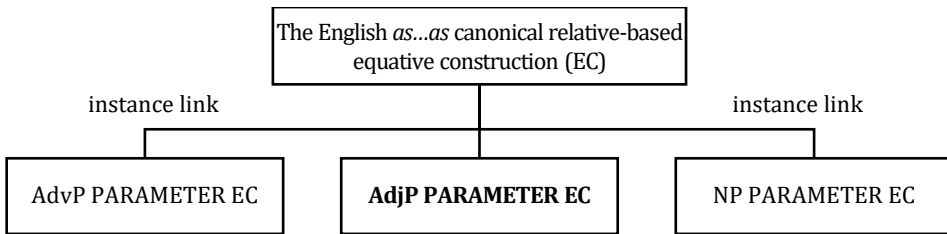


Fig. 7. The formal classification of the English *as...as* equative construction

The description of COMPAREE, STANDARD, and PARAMETER in Section 2.3. shows that different kinds of the COMPAREE and STANDARD may correlate with a particular PARAMETER: the AdjP PARAMETER usually correlates with the nominal COMPAREE and the nominal STANDARD; the AdvP PARAMETER correlates with the propositional COMPAREE and the propositional STANDARD; the NP PARAMETER may correlate with the nominal COMPAREE and the nominal STANDARD as well as and the propositional COMPAREE and the propositional STANDARD.

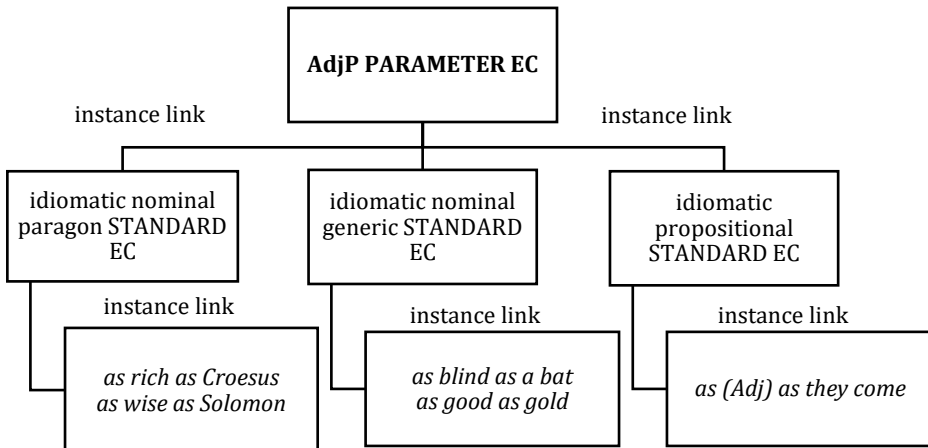
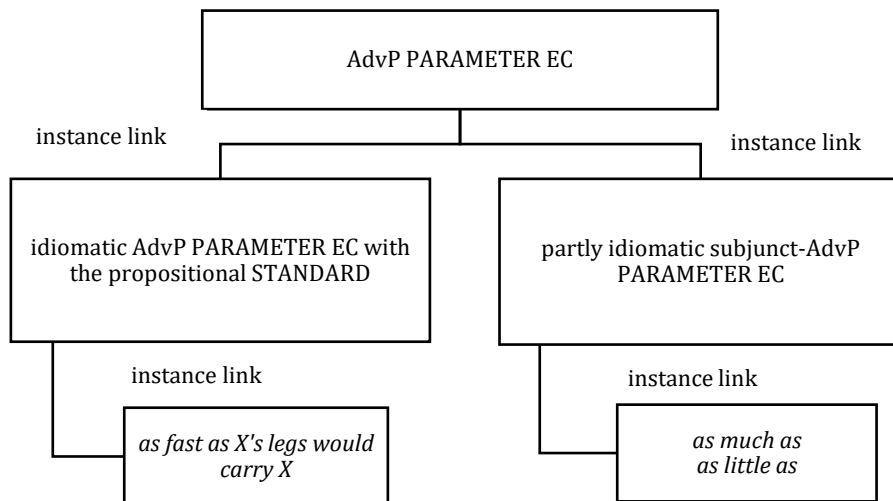


Fig. 8. The classification of the AdjP PARAMETER EC

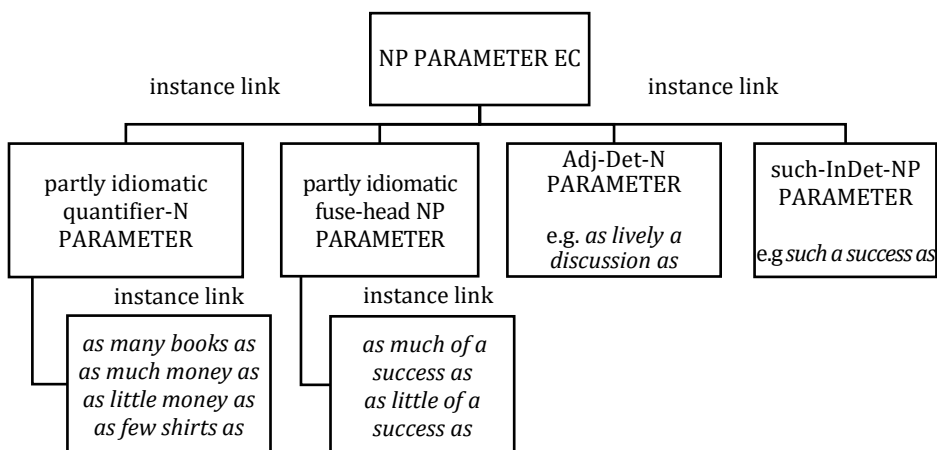
Additionally, the AdjP and AdvP PARAMETER EC may motivate an idiomatic expression which may occur with different kinds of STANDARD, namely the generic nominal STANDARD, the paragon STANDARD, or the



propositional STANDARD. Therefore, these idiomatic equative constructions may be further classified based on the STANDARD, as presented in Figure 8 and Figure 9 respectively.



**Fig. 9.** The classification of the AdvP PARAMETER EC



**Fig. 10.** The classification of the NP PARAMETER EC

Figure 8 and Figure 9 show that the AdjP PARAMETER EC may incorporate all kinds of STANDARD and, therefore, might be considered as more complex than the AdvP PARAMETER EC which tends to occur with the propositional STANDARD only. Most idiomatic ECs presented in Section 2.3. occur with the AdjP PARAMETER which suggests that they are mainly used to

denote a situation in which the COMPAREE exhibits the PARAMETER to hyperbolic more or less equal degree as the STANDARD. In contrast with the AdjP and AdvP PARAMETER EC, the NP PARAMETER EC tends to be non-idiomatic concerning meaning but more complex concerning the formal representation of the PARAMETER, as presented in Figure 10.

Figure 10 demonstrates that the NP PARAMETER may be designated by four different noun phrases which may represent the quantity of an entity (e.g. *as many books as*), the degree of an entity (e.g. *as much of a success*), the quality of an entity (e.g. *as lively a discussion*), or merely an entity (e.g. *such a success*).

#### 4. Conclusions

The 'as...as' equative construction is a scalar term comparison of equality which incorporates three obligatory semantic components: COMPAREE, PARAMETER, and STANDARD; and two grammatical morphemes: *as*<sub>1</sub> functioning as the PARAMETER MARKER and *as*<sub>2</sub> functioning as the STANDARD MARKER. The STANDARD is usually designated by a reduced clause whose non-contrasting syntactic elements are ellipted due to possible anaphoric textual recoverability. Therefore, the STANDARD may be formally represented by a reduced clause whose noun phrase, which denotes a contrasting referent, is the only non-elliptical syntactic element.

The semantic components of an equative construction may be formally represented by means of different grammatical categories, or lexical words belonging to the same grammatical category. The English EC may incorporate two kinds of STANDARD, namely nominal STANDARD and propositional STANDARD. The nominal STANDARD, which represents a referent, may be further categorised as specific, paragon, and generic. The propositional STANDARD, on the other hand, denotes a specific or general activity and may be formally represented by a tensed finite clause, gerund-participle clause, or a gerundial noun. Research into the STANDARD demonstrates that, analogous to the EC with the generic STANDARD, the EC with the nominal paragon STANDARD or propositional STANDARD may instantiate an idiomatic expression.

Likewise, the equative construction may incorporate the nominal COMPAREE or the propositional COMPAREE. The nominal COMPAREE correlates mostly with the AdjP PARAMETER and the nominal STANDARD; the propositional COMPAREE correlates mostly with the AdvP PARAMETER and the propositional STANDARD. The EC with the nominal COMPAREE tends to instantiate the copular sentence pattern, whereas the EC with the propositional COMPAREE may instantiate all other argument structure constructions (sentence patterns). Moreover, the EC with the propositional COMPAREE may

motivate the middle construction which instantiates the intransitive sentence pattern. The PARAMETER might be formally represented by an adjective phrase (which is most prototypical), an adverb phrase, or a noun phrase. In terms of the whole EC, it is often the PARAMETER that determines the form of the COMPAREE and STANDARD. The PARAMETER MARKER may be represented by the degree adverb *as<sub>1</sub>/so* or the adjective *such*. As a grammatical morpheme, it might be ellipted when followed by the generic STANDARD. Concerning the STANDARD MARKER, it is solely represented by the function word *as<sub>2</sub>* which may be formally represented by a preposition, when followed by the nominal STANDARD; or a conjunction, when followed by the propositional STANDARD.

The equative construction may be formally classified according to the formal representation of the PARAMETER, thus the AdjP PARAMETER EC, the AdvP PARAMETER EC, and the NP PARAMETER EC may be distinguished. More specifically, the AdjP PARAMETER EC and the AdvP PARAMETER EC may constitute an idiomatic expression which may be subdivided depending on STANDARD. The NP PARAMETER EC, which does not tend to be idiomatic, might be further classified based on the formal representation of PARAMETER.

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