Comparing Comparatives: An Exploratory Study of the Acceptability of Double Comparatives in Danish and English

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1. Introduction

How will constructions where two elements are seemingly competing for the same position in the syntactic structure be evaluated by native speakers? Such constructions should be ungrammatical and therefore also unacceptable. This article seeks to explore one instance of these constructions that can be found in naturally occurring sentences and utterances despite not being well-formed. Specifically, this article seeks to explore the Adjective Phrase with a particular emphasis on comparative constructions. In this regard, some attention will be given to the potential existence and acceptability of the double comparative construction in American English and Danish. This doubling of comparative elements is documented in historical variants of English as well as non-standard variants of present-day English (Wlodarczyk 2007, 196–197) and therefore it would be interesting to explore if it is still possible in present variants of different languages. Other linguists, like Corver (2005, 167), have argued that such a construction is still possible in non-standard variants of English and that an analysis is needed since there are languages where these constructions are allowed, despite them being problematic in standard English. If such a construction is possible, then how acceptable is it to native speakers of Danish and English, and how can we analyse it in a generative framework? For this purpose, an acceptability study is a good starting point for research, since it can help the early inquiries into a construction that could potentially warrant a more thorough examination in the future.

First, I will briefly account for theoretical assumptions and understandings of the adjective phrase within the context of this article. This will be done in an attempt to demonstrate the complexities of the adjective phrase and the potential functional layers the internal structure might have. Then, I will introduce the core of the acceptability study. After this, the findings will be presented before I will finish up the article by commenting on how the findings can serve as a good

Leviathan: Interdisciplinary Journal in English (ISSN: 2446-3981), No. 10, 2024.

beginning for studying this concept and discussing how the findings can be used for future research.

2. Theoretical foundations and assumptions

3.1 The adjective

In the following, I will briefly account for the understanding and analysis of standard Adjective Phrases (AdjP) that will be employed in this article. After this account, several theoretical assumptions and their influence on the analysis of comparative constructions will be taken into consideration. The following will take the form of a brief introduction to different theoretical perspectives that serves as the foundation for the understanding of AdjPs that is employed throughout. This account focuses mainly on the positive and comparative forms of the adjective with minimal attention being paid to the superlative constructions. I choose to refer to the AdjP as such instead of AP to avoid any confusion with the adverb phrase (AdvP). The study compares English and Danish evaluations of several sentences. Therefore, the theoretical foundation is based on both Danish and English syntax and grammar. Since the two languages are quite similar when it comes to the construction of AdjPs, specific comments on either language will focus on instances where there is a difference between the two languages.

Throughout this article, a simple structure for AdjP will be taken to be a projection of a lexical category consisting of the adjective (Emonds 1976, 151). This article will focus on attributive and predicative use of adjective phrases and therefore the focus will be on pre-nominal AdjPs. The post-nominal use of adjectives as shown in Haegeman and Guéron (2008, 70) will not be commented on.

The two kinds of AdjPs as they are employed in this article are provided in (1) and (2) below with the first being an attributive and the second a predicative function of the AdjP. This shows that AdjPs are 'used to describe the referents of nouns' (Aarts 2011, 30).

(1) She kissed the nice boy

(2) The bike is new

An inherent feature of adjectives is their ability to express features of gradeability and degree (Zwarts 1992, 32), by means of different inflectional forms. Zwarts (1992, 4) even argues that the concept of *degree* is the 'characteristic property' of adjectives. This is especially noticeable in the comparative and superlative forms of the adjective. To form the comparative construction in either Danish or English, there are two options. The first being the analytic comparative which is created with the free comparative morpheme *more* and an adjective; the latter being the synthetic

comparative which is created by suffixing the bound comparative morpheme *-er* onto the adjective (Corver 2005, 166; Elzinga 2005, 757). Again, this highlights the importance of degree and gradeability since these comparative constructions should indicate that the degree of the adjective in relation to the noun it modifies is greater or smaller than the degree expressed elsewhere (Corver 1997b, 132). However, this comparison can potentially be understood within the context of the sentence, thus meaning that (3) below must compare the *bike* to some other object. I will return to the importance of these *than*-phrases that signal comparison as in (4) in section 5.1.

(3) Your bike is newer

(4) Your bike is newer than my car

One difference to note between Danish and English is that it is possible to see agreement in some Danish AdjPs, something that is not possible in English. This is because agreement is weak in English and therefore not morphologically realised (Haegeman and Guéron 2008, 429). However, if the adjective is in the comparative form, like in (7) and (8), then agreement cannot be seen in Danish either.

(5) En dårlig historie

A bad story

(6) Den dårlig-e historie

The bad-DEF story

(7) Hun købte en flottere model

She bought a beautiful-er model

(8) Hun købte den flottere model

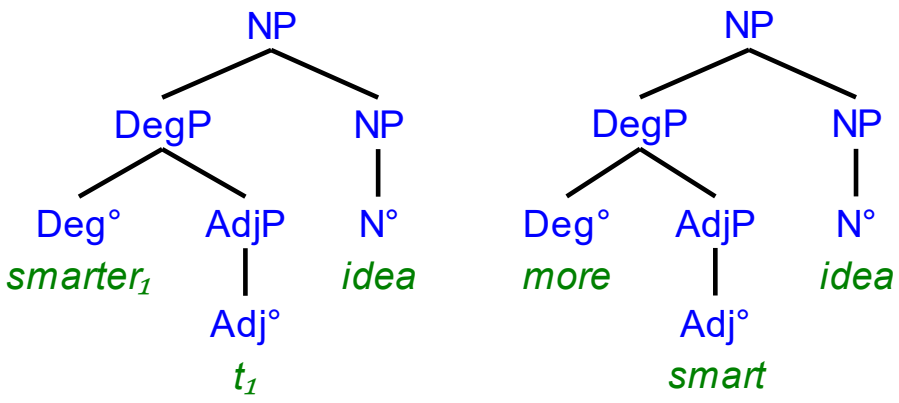
She bought the beautiful-er model

3.2 The functional layers of the AdjP

The importance of the concept of degree for AdjP cannot be overstated. Like in the DP framework where the phrase is considered to have a functional element on top of a lexical category, a similar framework can be applied to the AdjP. Here, a functional element, the degree phrase, can be said to dominate the lexical category of adjective and thus creating the 'Degree Phrase (DegP), the extended projection of the adjective' (Oxford 2017, 98). Then the DegP would be the position in the syntactic tree where both the comparative morphemes would be base generated and where the adjective would be leftward raised to to receive the bound comparative ending *-er* (Corver 1997a, 295; Corver 1997b, 124; Kayne 1994, 50). If the construction involved the free comparative morpheme, then the *more* would be base generated in the same position, but the adjective would stay within the AdjP. This would explain why constructions with both *more* and *-er* should be

ungrammatical since they are competing for the same position in the structure. Moreover, Zwarts (1992, 29) argues that it is 'reasonable to assume that the functional head for A is the Deg.' Since this gives a functional layer on top of the lexical core, then the extended AdjP, the DegP, would have cross-categorical symmetry with other similar constructions like the DP. The structure for both ways of forming the comparative can be seen in (9).

(9)



Corver (1997a, 1997b) further argues that there should be a secondary functional layer below the DegP: the Quantifier Phrase (QP). This expands on Bresnan's (1973, 277) suggestion that *more* is a QP that is a comparative form of *much* which combines with a determiner-like form of *-er* to form *more*. This suggestion immediately has two issues: First, as Bresnan (1973, 278–79) also noted, there are situations where *more* can occur, but *much* cannot, i.e., **as much intelligent* compared with *as much more intelligent*. Secondly, as a direct consequence of this, there would have to be a rule that deletes *much* but only if it modifies adjectives and adverbs, which seems too ad hoc. As Corver (1997b, 121) notes, even though such a rule can 'provide the right output string, it has no real explanatory force.'

However, Corver (1997b, 119) argues that there could be a QP between the DegP and the AdjP, and that this QP will contain different kinds of functional degree words than the DegP. One of the words that can then be considered more quantifier-like is *more* (Corver 1997b, 120).

3.3 Constructions with double comparative

All of this is challenged by the potential existence of constructions that contain double comparative elements, i.e., constructions where both the analytic and the synthetic comparatives are realised simultaneously. According to Corver (2005, 168–169) such constructions used to be possible in older variants of English with examples being found in some works of Shakespeare. When looking through Danish grammars, I have not been able to find any sources that would indicate the

historical presence of double comparatives, but that should not be counted as definitive evidence of a complete absence in a historical setting. In a more thorough examination of this construction in Danish, it would be beneficial to also focus on the historical aspects and possibilities.

Despite the assumption that the two forms of comparative are competing for the same position, it is possible to find examples of constructions that contain both comparatives simultaneously. Some linguists have interpreted these constructions as 'grammatical slips' (De Vooys 1967, referenced in Corver 2005, 168), thus ultimately reducing them to mistakes of performance instead of considering them as legitimate potential constructions.

To account for the double comparative construction, one could look to a similar doubling in the syntax: Negative concord. In this construction multiple constituents of a similar kind can express a single meaning. In the case of negative concord, this would be multiple negative elements resulting in a single negative meaning (de Swart and Sag 2002, 373). An example of negative concord is the sentence *I didn't do nothing* which despite the multiple negative elements have a single negative meaning for speakers of certain variants of English. Similarly, one could view these double comparative constructions as phrases that contain multiple comparative elements, but still only express a single comparative meaning. It has been argued that this double comparative construction could also license double comparison as exemplified below in (10)

(10) John is more taller than Bill than Peter. (Seuren 1973, 561)

Considering comparative doubling as a phenomenon that is similar to negative concord has its benefits. First, it can help account for internal agreement within the comparative construction through c-command. If the comparative doubling is understood as multiple elements expressing a single meaning, then the two elements would need agreement between them, which should explain why phrases like **more bestest* or **most better* would continue to be ungrammatical and unacceptable despite the doubled construction potentially being acceptable. Secondly, it results in different aspects of language like negative concord and comparative concord having similar explanations within this framework.

Finally, Corver (2005, 171) argues that there is a *Comparative Criterion* within the phrase which states:

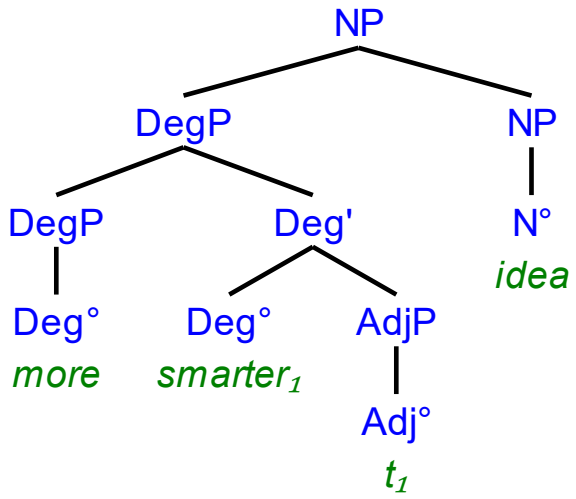
a. Each X[+comparative] must be in a Spec-Head relation with a [+comparative] phrase YP.
b. Each [+comparative] phrase YP must be in a Spec-Head relation with a X[+comparative].

Within this model, the *-er* 'just designates the interpretive property "comparative"' (Corver 2005, 172). The bound comparative morpheme is then the functional head which is in a relation with the comparative phrase *more* that is required as part of the criterion. However, what Corver (2005, 171–

172) refers to as *ComparP*, *SuperlativeP* and *PositiveP* will be considered as AdjP in the context of this article, since these phrases express aspects of degree and will therefore be understood as instances of degree phrases on top of the AdjP. I would argue that this further division does not serve any deeper purpose for the analysis within this article. However, a benefit of this model is that it can account for both the standard variants (Corver 2005, 172) as well as the constructions that have comparative doubling.

This results in (11) being the assumed simplified structure of constructions with double comparative elements.

(11)



While some complexities may be lost in a context like the one that has been accounted for here, this could highlight some of the ways we could understand and analyse adjectives in a generative framework. Within this framework there could be several functional layers within the AdjP as well as other functional layers like a DP above the DegP.

4. Methodology and case study

4.1 Background

This article is inspired by Corver's (2005, 170) suggestion that this is a construction that is a 'phenomenon of natural language syntax.' However, Corver's argument was only found as a direct result of me misunderstanding of a video where it initially seemed like the person used a double comparative.[1] After I misheard the phrase *a clearer* as *more clearer,* some research was done on corpora sites and google to examine if comparative doubling happened in both English and Danish.

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_R1UDsNOMk (Timestamp: 18:24, Accessed January 10, 2024)

The adjectives chosen for stimuli sentences in the study were words that could be found in corpora or online searches. This ensured that the words at least could be, or had previously been, used in double comparative constructions. However, the frequency of the words did vary to some degree across the two languages. Searches in Danish corpora like KorpusDK yielded no results, but it was possible to find instances in several newspapers and online fora:

(12) På Lyngby Stadion sprøjtemaler man faktisk græsset, så det bliver mere grønnere[2]

On Lyngby Stadium spraypants one actually grass-the so it becomes more greener

"At Lyngby Stadium, they spraypant their grass field to make it more greener"

(13) Kan du sige noget mere dummere end det?[3]

Can you say something more stupid-er than that?

"Could you say anything more stupid-er?"

(14) Vi vil udvikle mere smartere og effektive serviceydelser til borgerne[4]

We will develop more smart-er and effective service services for the citizens

"We are going to develop more smart-er and effective services for the citizens"

However, for most of the examples from Danish it was only possible to find a couple of examples at most. For English, the most frequent double comparative construction was *more better* which occurred 117 times in COCA, while the construction with the least occurrences was *more greener* with only two instances recorded in COCA. These online searches yielded a list of eight adjectives that had previously been used in double comparative constructions in both languages, and these words were included as part of the stimuli sentences. Examples from English can be found in (14) and (15) below:

(15) Every government in the world is telling its citizens to look into more greener ways of producing electricity (COCA)

(16) In men's tennis they are more stronger, more tougher maybe like on the court (COCA)

Throughout this selection process, it was attempted to correct for instances that were the result of machine translation, instances where *more* meant "another", and instances where *more* meant "no longer". This correction was done for both the Danish and English sentences.

This means that the study will compare similar adjectives across the two languages. This can both be a benefit because it assists with comparing the proverbial apples to apples, but it can also be a drawback because the words might be used differently or at least not with the same frequency

[2] https://ekstrabladet.dk/sport/fodbold/dansk_fodbold/superligaen/lyngby/hvad-sker-der-sproejtemaler-graesset/9638639 (Accessed January 9, 2024)
[3] https://www.superdebat.dk/debat/muhammeds-ansigt-p%C3%A5-en-toast (Accessed January 9, 2024)
[4] https://deltag.aarhus.dk/sites/default/files/documents/Borgerservice%20og%20Bibliotekspolitik%202019-2022%20%28tilg%C3%A6ngelig%20udgave%29.pdf (Accessed January 9, 2024)

across the languages. However, the words are all fairly common and should be known to most participants. Luckily, the study compares two languages that are quite close to each other with regards to syntax and cultural contexts. This means that as an example, the sentence that includes a female lawyer does not seem out of place or culturally incorrect in the context of either language. The strengths and weaknesses of the methodology will be discussed more in depth in section 5.

This acceptability study examines several sentences that are judged by native speakers. In linguistics, such a study can be used as a starting point because native speakers of a language can have some instinctual or intuitive feeling about what is acceptable and grammatical and what is unacceptable or ungrammatical (Haegeman and Guéron 2008, 14–16). This study is then trying to serve as a starting point for exploring how native speakers evaluate and judge sentences with double comparative constructions. To achieve this, eight paradigms were constructed in each language. Each paradigm is based around one of the adjectives from the online and corpora-based searches. The paradigms contained four different conditions, i.e. four different versions of the same sentence: 1) A well-formed sentence without any comparative element, 2) a sentence containing a standard comparative construction, 3) a sentence with the double comparative construction, 4) an ill-formed sentence. The first and last category were included to examine if the participants were able to identify a well-formed and an ill-formed sentence and, in this regard, they served as control categories that could enhance the comparison. Examples of the paradigms can be seen below in (17)–(20). The first two examples in (17) are from the control category; the next two in (18) are from the comparative category, (19) contain examples of double comparative and finally, the examples in (20) are part of the category with ill-formed sentences.[5]

(17) Hun er en klog elev ligesom mig
She is a smart student like me
John is a really smart man like me

(18) Hun er en klogere elev end ham
She is a smart-er student than him
John is a smarter man than me

(19) Hun er en mere klogere elev end ham
She is a more smart-er student than him
John is a more smarter man than me

(20) Ligesom er elev klog en han hende
Like is student smart a he her
Man smart really me like is a John

[5] An overview of all the paradigms can be found in the appendix.

The acceptability study is especially interested in the difference in evaluation between condition two and three. The sentences were constructed in a manner that aims for the highest degree of similarity across the four different categories. When constructing the sentences, they were constructed with a minimal amount of differences between the conditions. This means that neither the length of sentences nor the syntax should be considered as the primary reason for differences in evaluation. If there is no significant difference between the sentences from the first category and those of the second, then sentence length should not be an explanation for a potential difference between sentences from the second category and those of the third.

4.2 Setting up the study

The two studies were set up through the online survey manager Google Forms. One study was set up for Danish and another for English. The 32 sentences in each study were presented in a pseudorandom order, and for each sentence participants had the possibility of providing comments. This means that a random order of numbers was generated and then the sentences were arranged in said order. The sentences were further presented in smaller blocks which each contained eight sentences. A benefit of this approach is that participants can provide specific comments related to specific sentences they found unacceptable instead of only providing one possibility at the end of each list. However, a drawback is that every participant sees the sentences in the same order. Ideally, the sentences would have been presented in a truly randomised order with the possibility of comments still available to participants, since this could help alleviate fatigue as a potential explanation for the later sentences in the study receiving a lower score.

Before participants were shown the stimuli sentences, they were asked to share their age, gender, and variant of English they spoke. Participants were also asked to indicate if they were native speakers of English or Danish.

The study is focused mostly on American English for the following reasons: First, Wlodarczyk (2007, 196) argues that the double comparative is present in many non-standard variants of American English. Secondly, the corpora and online searches yielded more results in the American corpora than British corpora. Finally, due to the brevity of this article, the choice was made to focus on a single variant of English, if it was made possible by the participants. Therefore, an option to self-characterise the variant of English the participants spoke was included as part of the study.

Initially, it was considered to include 40 sentences in the study but to encourage participation, it was decided to limit the study to a shorter list. However, the four lists that made up the totality of each study still included eight sentences on each list and potentially also several sentences from

the same paradigm on the same list. This could potentially have a priming effect on participants where they would evaluate the double comparative construction higher after being exposed to it a few times because they recognise the pattern (Branigan 2007, 2). Another measure taken to avoid such a result was that prior to responding to the survey, participants were not informed about what the study was examining to avoid influencing their evaluation and thus attempting to lower the risk of participant selection bias.

Prior to gathering the data from the study, I hypothesised that the double comparative construction would be evaluated slightly better in English than Danish. This hypothesis was based on two things: First, as earlier mentioned, the double comparative construction used to be possible in English. Secondly, as a native Danish speaker I used my own evaluation of some of the examples from Danish and found all of them to be problematic, ill-formed or unacceptable in some way. However, it was still the working hypothesis that double comparative constructions would be evaluated rather poorly in both languages, and that they would be evaluated lower than standard comparative constructions.

5. Results

Participants were recruited by sharing a link to participate in the study on social media. No compensation was offered to participants, so everyone participated voluntarily. In total, the English part of the study had 25 participants but 3 were excluded from the results due to not being native speakers of English. Participants were between 23 and 80 years old which results in a mean age of 35.7. (15 women, 6 men and 1 non-binary.) Every one of the 22 participants all characterised their English as being 'American English.'

The Danish study had 70 participants with only a single participant being excluded due to not being a native speaker of Danish. The participants were between 22 and 74 (mean =39.6). (36 men and 33 women.) For the Danish study, a section to characterise what kind of Danish the participants spoke was not included.

Figure 1 shows the results from the English study. Here, the data indicates a significant difference between the evaluation of standard comparative constructions and the evaluation of double comparative constructions. This two-sided Welch Two Sample t-test (using the t.test function in R) showed that the differences between comparative and double comparative and the difference between double comparative and gibberish were significant (both $p < 2.2 * 10^{-16}$). The difference between control and comparative was not significant ($p > 0.6$).[6] (Thanks to Ken

[6] Correcting for multiple comparisons using the Bonferroni method means dividing the standard thresholds of significance by the number of comparisons or tests (Field, Miles, and Field 2012, section 10.5). That

Ramshøj Christensen for helping me with the statistics and the plots.) This means that despite the double comparatives receiving a relatively low mean acceptability rating, they are still evaluated as being better than sentences with completely "broken" syntax.

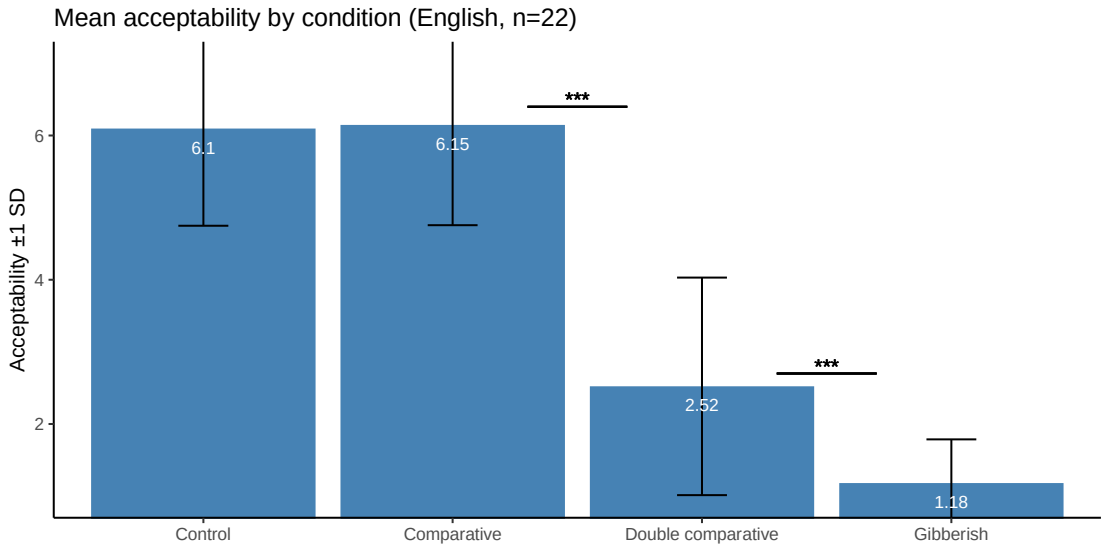


Figure 1: Plot showing mean acceptability by condition for the English study.

Figure 2 shows the results from the study of Danish sentences, where a similar trend is showing. Again, the difference between control and comparative was not significant ($p > 0.6$) while the differences between comparative, double comparative and gibberish were all significant ($p < 0.001$).

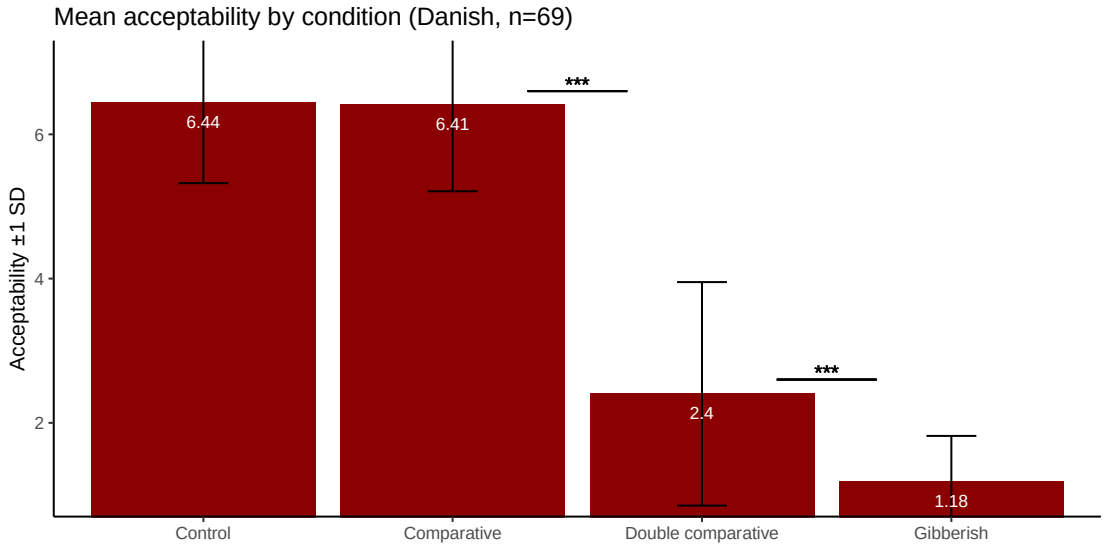


Figure 2: Plot showing mean acceptability by condition for the Danish study.

means that for a difference to be significant with $p < 0.05$, the actual p-value must be $< 0.05/3$, (i.e., < 0.0167) and for $p < 0.001$, the actual p-value must be $< 0.001/3$ (i.e., < 0.0003). The p-value for the differences between comparative and double comparative and the difference between double comparative and gibberish, i.e., $2.2 * 10^{-16}$, is clearly far below $0.001/3$.

6. Discussion

6.1 Pitfalls of the methodology

In the following, I will briefly account for some of the issues I noted in the design of the study as well as some mistakes that were made as part of the process. Initially, it is a challenge that the sentences are not exactly the same length and the same tense. Longer and more complex sentences are more likely to receive a lower score. Furthermore, the same pseudorandom string was utilised for both lists which is not ideal and can be viewed as a flaw in the research design. Since there is only one list in the study there could also be a potential priming effect where later sentences score higher because participants recognise the syntactical structure (Branigan 2007, 1). In an ideal setting, the study would have had several possible lists that participants could be exposed to. However, the software that was utilised for this study had some limitations if comments were to be available for the participants. Therefore, the pseudorandom approach was chosen. As earlier mentioned, a truly randomised order and several lists would have been preferable to combat or minimise some of these issues and gain more accurate data.

Another issue with Google Forms was only discovered after the data gathering process was over. A participant contacted me and made me aware that using the arrow keys on their keyboard while in Google Forms would change the rating that the participant had given to a previous sentence. This is an unfortunate consequence of using Google Forms that I did not know about or consider before using Google Forms as the software for the study. In the future, it would be preferential to use a different kind of software that would not have these challenges.

It is also potentially a problem that the sentences did not have a short introduction that could provide some context since comparative is dependent on context to determine the degree (Zwarts 1992, 137). This could mean that the sentences containing comparative constructions but no *than*-phrase would receive lower scores because a context was not included as part of the setup which therefore rendered them less acceptable. If the sentences without a comparison CP/PP, i.e., a *than*-phrase, received a lower score, this may be due to the lack of context provided in the sentences. Therefore, this can be viewed as a weakness in the study design that sentences without the comparative CP/PP were included or that context was not provided. Several participants made comments that indicated that they felt like a comparison was missing and they might therefore have given these sentences a lower score. Due to the brevity of this article, it was not possible to examine the analysis of the comparative *than*-phrases. These CP/PPs provide their own challenges for the syntax, since it is difficult to determine where they are base generated (Corver 2005, 175; Corver 2000, 162).

Despite screening for potential confounds with the stimuli sentences, some participants still commented that the sentences were clunky, contained wrong forms like *stupider* where the comment would have preferred *more stupid,* or had interpretations where the *more* could be understood as having another meaning than comparative. However, only a few participants in each study made comments like this, and to a certain degree it can be explained by personal preference which is something that is extremely hard to account for. It is impossible to create perfect, neutral sentences that everyone will evaluate similarly. It is likely that some participants will dislike a sentence for some reason which was almost impossible to predict. However, using wrong forms of words and creating ambiguous sentences must definitely be viewed as a weakness and something that should be avoided.

6.2 Comments from participants

As earlier mentioned, the double comparative constructions received low mean evaluations in both studies. Some of the comments the participants made mentioned that double comparative constructions seemed to be more a part of spoken language than written language and that *more* could often be left out. An example of this is one commenter who wrote: 'Leave out *more,* it is more like speech' (my translation). This can be expected since the study examined a syntactic doubling, but I still find it interesting since it could be viewed as evidence for the comparative concord that was mentioned earlier. It would seem that the double comparative construction expresses a single meaning even though it has two comparative elements.

The study does indicate that double comparative constructions are slightly better than sentences with completely broken syntax. However, as one participant comments 'the "more better" or "more smarter" kind of phrases are really obviously wrong, but I'll never say they're completely unacceptable because absolutely everyone will know what you're trying to say.' This, in combination with the data, could indicate that double comparative constructions can be understood and processed by speakers, but that these constructions are seen as inferior or incorrect when compared to standard constructions. An explanation for this is offered by Wlodarczyk (2007, 214) who argues that requirements of syntactic economy and 'arguments against tautology and pleonasm' are some of the reasons why the double comparative is no longer an acceptable part of English. However, this could just be a possible explanation and is not necessarily the reason for the scores. Moreover, while the present study may not have enough participants to make any broad generalisations it can serve as a good first indicator for how these constructions are perceived by native speakers.

In relation to the hypothesis, I expected that the double comparative constructions would be considered slightly better in the English part of the study, since it used to be a possible construction within the grammar. However, the double comparative constructions receive similar evaluations across the languages. It could indicate that double comparative are not general properties of the languages or parts of the grammar. This is also interesting because the standard comparative constructions received quite high evaluations in both languages, very close to the scores of the control sentences. This, when seen in relation to the low rating that double comparative receives, could indicate that double comparative constructions might be ungrammatical or problematic in some other way. The data seems to indicate that double comparative constructions are not broadly acceptable to native speakers of either Danish or English. However, both Corver (2005, 168) and Wlodarczyk (2007, 195) argue that double comparative constructions are features of non-standard variants of especially American English, so in a future study it would be interesting to target native speakers of these dialects to examine if the constructions would be evaluated more highly within these variants.

6.3 Future research

This article only dealt with the double comparatives that consist of a combination of the analytic and synthetic comparatives, i.e. only examples with *more* and *-er*. Corver (2005, 182) argues that it should also be possible to double the synthetic ending *-er* + *-er* to form a double comparative like *fasterer, strongerer,* or *betterer*. Moreover, it is also argued that it should be possible in the superlative form. For future research, it could be very interesting to examine how native speakers would evaluate double synthetic comparatives, double superlatives, as well as explore if these double comparative constructions also license double comparison as Seuren (1973, 561) argued. In such a study it would be possible to examine if the construction licenses double comparison or if it is a case of comparative concord or agreement.

Furthermore, it would be extremely interesting to do a larger study with spoken stimuli. As earlier mentioned, some participants commented that double comparative was an element from the realm of speech. Therefore, it could be interesting to examine if participants would rate double comparatives higher than they did in the present study, if the stimuli were presented as sound files instead of being presented as written sentences. Earlier studies have not found any effect of the modality i.e., written stimuli compared to spoken (Christensen and Wallentin 2011, 1625; Nyvad, Christensen and Rohde 2023) but since some participants commented that double comparative belonged more in the realm of speech it could be worth examining if there would be a difference in this case.

In future studies, it could also be relevant to gather information about the educational status of the participants and ask for more data on what regional dialect they spoke. This would require many more participants and a much larger study, but it could help provide some nuance to the findings. Maybe participants with a higher education are more critical of double comparatives, or maybe specific regional dialects are more accepting of such constructions. In such a study, it could also be interesting to examine if there might be a gender effect.

Finally, it could be interesting to explore the pragmatic function of double comparative. Is there a situation where people would deliberately use double comparative constructions? One such situation could be to express irony by saying that someone is *more smarter*. This ironic-use function was an aspect that I had not considered when designing the study, but it is something that could be interesting to examine. However, this might be very hard to screen for in a study.

7. Conclusion

This article has explored the acceptability of double comparative constructions in relation to standard comparatives, and two versions of control sentences. Theoretically, this article has argued that double comparative could be understood as a case of comparative concord. However, the theoretical review also showed that double comparative constructions were hard to account for since the two comparative elements theoretically compete for the same position in the syntactic structures. A central part of the article revolved around an acceptability study of sentences from Danish and English. The data shows that there is a significant difference between the categories called comparative, double comparative and the category that was referred to as gibberish. The data indicates that double comparative constructions are evaluated quite poorly by native speakers despite being constructions that are naturally occurring in sentences and utterances. Finally, several future avenues of research that could build on the present study were mentioned, because this study had limitations and challenges that future studies could remedy.

This study found that native speakers of Danish and English evaluated double comparative constructions as being significantly worse than the standard form and they evaluated double comparative as being rather unacceptable.

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