



## A Contrastive Study of Superlative Comparison Schemas in Persian and English: A Cognitive-Typological Account

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Comparison is a fundamental aspect of human cognition that is expressed in various ways across languages. However, it cannot be solely described by individual words or morphemes; rather, its existence depends on underlying schematic structures. Heine (1997) notes that the domain of comparison encompasses different conceptual and linguistic forms, with the "superior comparative" serving as a prototypical example in languages worldwide. It is worth noting that both "superior comparative" and "superlative" constructions share common underlying structures. This study hypothesizes that Persian exhibits a greater variety of language-specific superlative constructions compared to English, attributed to typological features such as the "Ezafé construction," "free word order," as well as other morpho-syntactic elements including constructional idioms, specific lexical items, and phrasal/complex predicates unique to Persian.

This study aims to address the following questions: 1) What schemas and morpho-syntactic mechanisms do Persian and English employ to express the superlative comparison notion? 2) Do all constructive components of superlative comparison in Persian and English require obligatory or optional formal expression? 3) To what extent can Stassen's typological classification (1985) and Heine's cognitive approach (1997) explain the superlative comparative constructions in these two languages? 4) How similar or different are the dedicated grammaticalized constructions employed by Persian and English to express the superlative comparison notion?

### 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research adopts a corpus-based and descriptive-analytic approach. The data consists of 316 sentences (164 in Persian and 152 in English) obtained through a comprehensive search of the Colloquial Persian Dictionary, the Oxford Advanced English Dictionary, and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The collected data were subsequently analyzed using Stassen's typological classification (1985) and Heine's cognitive approach as the theoretical framework.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This contrastive study was conducted to do a cognitive analysis of the superlative

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comparison notion in the Persian and English languages, based on Heine (1997)'s cognitive approach and the following results were obtained:

In response to the first question, the findings showed that the Persian language compared with the English Language, used more various morpho-syntactic mechanisms, such as reduplication, Ezafe construction, reduplication, complex predicates and some lexical items meaning 'better/superior', constructional idioms, and idiomatic/proverbial expressions.

As with the second question, it was revealed that in Persian the components "parameter marker" and "standard marker" had no formal expression in most of the constructions and their presence was optional (out of all, 70% were three-component or two-component constructions). Also, the "standard" had no formal expression in some constructions (20% of all data). Additionally, it was found that only in few constructions, the "comparee" can be removed (10% of all data); while in English, the formal expression of "comparee" and "parameter" was obligatory and the "parameter marker" and "standard marker" often had a formal expression and mostly been marked by "-er", "-est", "more", "most". "than", the preposition "of", or other prepositional phrases, such as "-of phrases" and "-in phrases". More precisely, 70% of all data in English were four-component constructions or five-component constructions and only 30% of the data were three-component constructions.

In response to the third question, the results indicated that Persian used some language-specific strategies or schemas which had not been observed in other languages of the world. Therefore, it was found that Stassen's classification and Heine's model were not adequate enough to explain the Persian data and they need to be modified, but they can fully capture the English Language data.

Finally, the results showed that the Persian language benefited from the dedicated grammaticalized construction [Z on one side, X on the other Side] which formed based on the concept of place (directional opposition) through grammaticalization. Similarly, in English, the "-than construction", the simultaneous use of "definiteness marker" and the "present perfect tense" or "-of phrase" can be considered as the cases of dedicated grammaticalized constructions in this language.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Persian language employs a wider range of strategies to express the superlative comparison notion compared to English. Specifically, the formal expression of "parameter marker," "standard marker," and "standard" is not obligatory in Persian, whereas in English, the formal expression of "comparee" and "parameter" is required. Furthermore, while Persian predominantly utilizes locational constructions for superlative comparison, it also employs additional schemas and strategies that have been overlooked in previous studies of languages worldwide. Thus, while Stassen's typological classification and Heine's approach are insufficient to explain the Persian data, they adequately account for the English language data.

**Keywords:** Comparison, English, Heine's Cognitive Approach, Persian, Stassen's Typological Classification, Superlative Comparative Construction