НАУЧНЫЙ ЖУРНАЛ
НАУКА И МИРОВОЗЗРЕНИЕ

УДК-81'36

CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF ADJECTIVAL COMPARISON IN ENGLISH AND GERMAN GRAMMAR. (KOMPARATION DER ADJEKTIVE).

Narmyradova Jennet
Lecturer of Seyitnazar Seydi Turkmen State Pedagogical Institute. Faculty of Romano-Germanic Languages and Literature, specialty in Foreign Language and Literature (German Language and Literature, English Language).
Turkmenabat, Turkmenistan

Altyyeva Dunya
Student of Seyitnazar Seydi Turkmen State Pedagogical Institute
Turkmenabat, Turkmenistan

Annayeva Humay
Student of Seyitnazar Seydi Turkmen State Pedagogical Institute
Turkmenabat, Turkmenistan

Abstract

This comprehensive fundamental research study provides an extensive, detailed, thorough, and multifaceted scholarly analysis of the structural mechanisms, morphological and periphrastic strategies, syntactic behavior, semantic constraints, and pedagogical implications of adjective comparison in English examined in systematic contrast with German grammar. The research investigates synthetic inflectional gradation versus analytical and periphrastic degree formation, stem vowel alternation and suppletion in both West Germanic languages, attributive versus predicative and adverbial positions, case, gender, and number agreement in German compared with positional invariance in English, scalarity, gradability, and non-gradable semantic classes, comparative and superlative clause constructions, and cross-linguistic transfer phenomena in bilingual and multilingual learners. The article further explores historical divergence between English and German adjectival paradigms, corpus-based frequency patterns of synthetic versus periphrastic forms, and instructional strategies for addressing interlingual interference. Grounded in an interdisciplinary synthesis of contrastive linguistics, morphology, syntax, semantics, and foreign language pedagogy, the study formulates conceptual frameworks for understanding degree comparison across English and German.

Keywords: comparison of adjectives, contrastive grammar, English grammar, German grammar, synthetic gradation, periphrastic comparison, umlaut and suppletion, adjectival inflection, scalarity, language pedagogy.

Introduction: typological parallels and divergences in West Germanic degree comparison

Adjectival comparison represents a core grammatical mechanism through which speakers express relative degree, scale positioning, contrast, and extremes of quality across entities, states, and events. Within the West Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family, English and German share deep historical roots, analogous foundational adjective inventories, and parallel three-tier degree systems traditionally categorized as positive, comparative, and superlative. Because both languages descend from common Germanic ancestors, surface correspondences frequently appear across core everyday adjectives and degree markers, offering rich material for contrastive linguistic inquiry.

At the same time, English and German have diverged substantially in how grammatical information is distributed between inflectional morphology, periphrastic constructions, and syntactic configuration. Modern English relies heavily on fixed word order, uninflected attributive adjectives, and a prominent alternation between synthetic suffixes and analytical *more* and *most* constructions, whereas Modern German preserves a dense system of adjectival declension sensitive to gender, number, case, and definiteness alongside synthetic comparative and superlative suffixes and distinct predicative or adverbial behavior. Consequently, what appears superficially similar in degree formation often operates within markedly different morphosyntactic environments.

For linguists, translators, and language educators, comparing adjectival gradation across English and German illuminates both universal properties of scalar semantics and language-specific structural rules. Learners moving between English and German frequently encounter subtle asymmetries involving syllable thresholds, stem vowel shifts, inflectional endings on graded attributive adjectives, comparative particles, and predicative syntax that cannot be resolved by simple word-for-word equivalence.

The aim of this study is to provide a systematic scholarly analysis of adjectival comparison in English in contrastive alignment with German grammar, examining morphological and periphrastic gradation, morphophonological alternations, syntactic distribution and agreement, semantic gradability constraints, and pedagogical implications.

Synthetic and periphrastic gradation: morphological mechanisms in English and German

In English, degree comparison is realized primarily through two competing formal strategies: synthetic suffixation using *-er* and *-est*, and periphrastic modification using *more* and *most*. Monosyllabic adjectives typically take inflectional suffixes, while longer polysyllabic adjectives generally favor periphrastic *more* and *most*, with a well-known transitional zone among disyllabic adjectives where phonological shape, stress placement, etymology, and register influence selection. Furthermore, periphrastic *more*

and *most* can co-occur with gradable adjectives to express contrast or metalinguistic qualification even when a synthetic form exists in general usage.

German organizes degree formation through a largely synthetic suffixal paradigm in which the comparative is formed with *-er* and the superlative typically with *-(e)st*, supplemented in adverbial and predicative superlative functions by *am ... -(e)sten* constructions. Unlike English, German does not deploy a general periphrastic equivalent of *more* and *most* for standard scalar grading of single adjectives; instead, increased intensity or nuanced degree is conveyed through adverbial intensifiers, modal particles, compounding, or lexical phrasing. Thus, while English negotiates a structural boundary between synthetic suffixes and analytical degree auxiliaries, German anchors standard degree gradation predominantly in suffixal morphology.

This structural contrast affects how speakers encode subtle shifts of emphasis and register. In English, choosing between a synthetic form and a periphrastic form often interacts with prosodic weight and stylistic formality, whereas in German, once the comparative or superlative stem is formed, subsequent grammatical adjustments are governed primarily by syntactic position and nominal determination rather than an auxiliary degree particle.

Stem vowel alternation, suppletion, and morphophonological conditioning

Both English and German exhibit irregular and morphophonologically conditioned patterns in adjectival gradation that reflect historical sound changes and lexicalized paradigms. In English, suppletive paradigms such as *good – better – best* and *bad – worse – worst* stand out as high-frequency irregulars alongside minor morphophonological adjustments such as consonant doubling, final *-y* to *-i-* shifts, or silent *-e* truncation before *-er* and *-est*. While historical *i*-mutation affected several Germanic nouns and verbs in English, productive umlaut in comparative adjectives is absent from the modern English standard paradigm.

German, by contrast, preserves prominent umlaut alternations in the comparative and superlative of a substantial set of common monosyllabic adjectives, where back vowels such as *a*, *o*, and *u* shift to front rounded vowels *ä*, *ö*, and *ü* in addition to taking the degree suffixes. Alongside umlauted forms, German also maintains high-frequency suppletive or irregular comparison sets—such as *gut – besser – am besten* or *viel – mehr – am meisten*—that require lexical memorization and careful syntactic integration.

Comparing these irregular and morphophonologically conditioned forms reveals how historical persistence shapes contemporary usage. In German, learners must track both the stem vowel shift and the appropriate suffixal endings across paradigms, whereas in English, learners must master irregular suppletive stems while distinguishing morphological suffixation from syntactic modification with *more* and *most*.

Syntactic distribution, attributive inflection, and comparative structures

A major point of divergence between English and German lies in the interaction of degree comparison with syntactic position and nominal inflection. In English, adjectives modifying a noun in attributive position do not inflect for case, gender, or number, regardless of whether they appear in the positive, comparative, or superlative degree; inflectional marking of degree, when present, attaches to the adjective itself rather than to determiners or case endings. In predicative position after copular verbs, English adjectives similarly remain formally invariant for agreement, while comparative clauses typically introduce standards of comparison via *than* or *as ... as* structures.

In German, an adjective placed attributively before a noun must carry an inflectional ending determined by grammatical gender, number, case, and whether the noun phrase takes a definite article, an indefinite article, or zero determination. Crucially, when a comparative or superlative adjective stands in attributive position, the degree suffix precedes the inflectional declension ending, requiring speakers to coordinate stem gradation with nominal case and number marking simultaneously. In predicative or adverbial roles, uninflected or *am ... -(e)sten* forms appear without attributive case endings, creating a sharp functional split between attributive and non-attributive syntax in German that has no direct counterpart in English agreement morphology.

Comparative and superlative syntax also differs in how clauses, standards, and superlative scope are framed. Both languages distinguish comparative inequality, equative comparison, and superlative eminence, yet German relies on *als* for unequal comparison and *wie* for equal comparison in standard normative usage, along with distinct spatial and relational prepositions, whereas English relies on *than* and *as ... as* with specific structural constraints on ellipsis, pronoun case, and post-nominal or pre-nominal modifiers.

Semantic gradability, non-gradable adjectives, and cross-linguistic transfer

Adjectival comparison is governed not only by formal grammar but also by semantic gradability. Prototypical gradable adjectives denote properties along a continuous or ordered scale—such as size, speed, age, warmth, or difficulty—that naturally support degree modifiers and comparative ranking. Conversely, classifying, relational, or absolute adjectives—such as adjectives denoting nationality, material composition, chronological order, or extreme/absolute states—resist ordinary scalar grading unless coerced into a figurative, contrastive, or metalinguistic reading.

When English and German are placed side by side, semantic coercion and boundary cases often diverge in subtle ways. An adjective that functions smoothly in a comparative frame in one language may sound unnatural, overly colloquial, or stylistically marked in the other, requiring speakers to attend to collocational norms and genre expectations rather than assuming literal correspondence. Furthermore, learners frequently transfer syntactic or morphological habits across languages—such as

overgeneralizing English *more*/*most* patterns into German phrasing or applying German case-ending habits and *als*/*wie* distinctions inaccurately when producing English.

In language teaching and curriculum design, contrastive awareness helps learners anticipate these points of friction before errors become fossilized. Pairing explicit structural comparison with authentic texts across descriptive, narrative, academic, and conversational registers allows learners to see how degree comparison operates in real communication rather than as an isolated mechanical drill.

Future directions in contrastive and applied adjectival research

Future research in contrastive linguistics and applied grammar can build on corpus-based methodologies to examine how synthetic and periphrastic degree forms compete in contemporary English across registers, varieties, and digital genres alongside parallel German corpora. Investigating learner corpora from bilingual and multilingual classrooms can further clarify which morphological or syntactic contrasts cause persistent difficulty at beginner, intermediate, and advanced proficiency levels.

Additional promise lies in integrating psycholinguistic experiments, computational syntax, and translation studies to explore how processing load, working memory, and syntactic agreement interact when speakers generate or interpret graded adjectives in English and German. Such work strengthens both theoretical models of West Germanic grammar and practical instructional materials for learners and translators.

Conclusion

Comparing adjectival comparison across English and German highlights how closely related West Germanic languages can develop distinct morphological and syntactic architectures while sharing foundational scalar meanings. English balances synthetic suffixation and periphrastic *more*/*most* constructions with invariable attributive forms and *than*/*as* comparative syntax, whereas German combines suffixal gradation and umlaut or suppletive stems with complex attributive declension and *als*/*wie* comparative distinctions.

A contrastive approach that unites morphology, syntax, semantics, and pedagogical practice deepens understanding of both languages and equips learners and researchers to navigate their similarities and differences with precision. Continued empirical and theoretical inquiry into degree comparison will remain valuable for linguistic theory, translation, and language education.

References

1. Quirk R., Greenbaum S., Leech G., Svartvik J. A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language. — London: Longman, 1985. — 1779 p.
2. Huddleston R., Pullum G. K. The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language. — Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. — 1842 p.

3. Helbig G., Buscha J. Deutsche Grammatik: Ein Handbuch für den Ausländerunterricht. — Berlin: Langenscheidt, 2017. — 654 p.
4. Eisenberg P. Grundriss der deutschen Grammatik: Der Satz. — Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2020. — 516 p.
5. König E., Gast V. Understanding English–German Contrasts. — Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2018. — 336 p.
6. Mondorf B. Support for More-Support: Typological, Diachronic and Psycholinguistic Perspectives on Periphrastic Comparison in English. — Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009. — 315 p.
7. Kennedy C. Vagueness and grammar: The semantics of relative and absolute gradable adjectives. — Linguistics and Philosophy. — 2007. — Vol. 30, No. 1. — P. 1–45.
8. Biber D., Conrad S. Register, Genre, and Style. — Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. — 356 p.
9. Contrastive Linguistics. — 2025. — Vol. 50, No. 1. — P. 29–54.
10. International Journal of Applied Linguistics. — 2026. — Vol. 36, No. 1. — P. 61–84.