

The Inversion of Comparative Constructions and Information Structure in English*

In-Sik Jeong
(Seoul National University)

Jeong, In-Sik. 2003. **The Inversion of Comparative Constructions and Information Structure in English.** *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 11(3), 23-43. This paper investigates the discourse functions of inverted comparative/superlative constructions in English involving the preposing and postposing of constituents. It divides the comparison into two types: inflectional comparative constructions and implicit comparative constructions. The former type takes inflectional or periphrastic forms such as *~er*, *~est*, *more*, *less*, *as*, *most* and *least*, while the latter takes implicit comparative words such as *different* or *equal*. This study argues that non-canonical comparative/superlative constructions are not randomly used and that the felicity of their use depends on the discourse status of the information represented by the preposed and postposed comparative constituents. Particularly, it shows that preposed constituents are more familiar than, or at least as familiar as postposed constituents, and postposed ones represent focus. (Seoul National University)

Key words: comparative, superlative, information status, preposing, postposing, familiarity, focus, inversion.

1. Introduction

Many researchers have paid a lot of attention to inversion, which

* This work was supported by Korea Research Foundation Grant (KRF-2002-074-AM-1534). I owe a great deal to Chungmin Lee, including Myungja Kim, Seungkwon Yang, Sookhee Chae, Eunyoung Cho Moonjeong Choi and Taekgyu Hong, whose stimulating insight and helpful criticism led me to complete this article. I also thank two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

places the logical subject after the verb and the postverbal constituent before the verb, including a VP inversion, quotation inversion and a locative inversion. Somewhat less attention, however, has been paid to the inversion of comparative constructions.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the discourse constraints and functions of non-canonical comparative/superlative constructions in English, in that canonical word-order comparative constructions are not randomly changeable to its noncanonical counterpart, although they are truth-conditionally equivalent. This article divides the English comparative construction into two types in formal and semantic terms: inflectional comparative constructions and implicit comparative constructions. It also shows that the occurrence of these two types is alike syntactically and functionally and that inverted comparative constructions, particularly, have equal discourse constraints on their use, which are related to the information status represented by the preposed constituents and the postposed constituents. The inverted comparative constructions are felicitous only when the preposed constituents include discourse-old information or inferable information, whereas they are not felicitous where the preposed constituents represent discourse-new information.

This study is restricted chiefly to the discussion of the variants of the [S + be + Comparative Constituent] sentence type at the level of discourse. Particularly, an adjective as a head of comparative phrases should function predicatively, not restrictively.

This article is organized as follows. Section 2 addresses two types of comparative phrases canonical and noncanonical in terms of their form and meaning. Section 3 shows that noncanonical comparative constructions are subsumed under subject-verb inversion, not subject-auxiliary inversion. It discusses the information status of preposed and proposed constituents in discourse and argues that such status determines the felicity of the reversal of constituents. Particularly, the postposed constituent is argued to function as focus. Section 4 contains a short conclusion.

2. Two types of Comparative Forms

Comparison in English is realized by the change of the base form of relevant items in relation to the degree of gradable adjectives and adverbs. However, it may often be realized by inherent comparative words without the change of the base form. In either case, comparative clauses require two or more objects/elements for comparison. For explanatory convenience, I divide the comparison into two types differentiated by the form and meaning of comparative words.

2.1. Inflectional and Periphrastic Comparison

The comparison may be by means of the inflectional forms (*~er* and *~est*), as in (1-2), or by the addition of the premodifiers *more* and *most*, *as*, and *less* and *least* (periphrastic forms), as in (3-5):

- (1) Mary is cleverer than Susan.
- (2) Mary is the cleverest in the class.
- (3) Mary is more beautiful than Catherine.
- (4) Mary is as intelligent as Elizabeth.
- (5) This is the least difficult task of all.

Comparative sentences, unlike superlative sentences, normally take correlative clauses introduced by *than* and by *as*, as shown in (1), (3) and (4) above. They may, however, reduce the clauses in one of the ways of avoiding redundancy of expression when it is recoverable or inferable from a discourse, as illustrated in the following:¹⁾

- (6) a. Researchers speculate that young women are more likely to answer the multiple-choice math test questions the way they

1) Boldface in this article is mine and indicates comparative constructions or comparative words.

were taught in school. **Young men are more likely to figure out shortcuts.** (LA Times. 8/29/2001)

- b. [...] Young men are more likely to figure out shortcuts (than young women (are)).
- (7) a. I was shocked to learn that an estimated 16 million people in the United States have diabetes, and one-third of them do not know they have it. While diabetes affects people of all ages and ethnicities, **diabetes is more prevalent in minority communities especially Hispanics, African Americans and American Indians.** (Universal Press Syndicate: Dear Abby. 8/27/2001)
- b. [...] diabetes is more prevalent in minority communities Hispanics, African Americans and American Indians. (than in majority communities).

The missing part in (6) is recoverable from what is evoked in the preceding sentence, while the missing part in (7) is inferable from the sentence via contrast with *in minority communities*.

2.2. Implicit Comparison

As mentioned above, some lexical items require two or more objects/elements of comparison for its semantic realization, one being obligatory in its presence as a constituent of a sentence and the other being sometimes optional. Even though the latter does not necessarily appear in the sentence, it is recoverable or inferable from the discourse. Such items have an inherent semantic property of comparison and do not need any inflectional or periphrastic form for comparison. In this study, they are referred to as implicit comparative words in contrast with inflectional comparative ones. Among them are *equal(ly)*, *identical(ly)*, *equivalent*, etc; *different(ly)*, *other(wise)*, etc. Consider the following:

- (8) a. The problem is **equally** inexplicable.
b. The problem is **as** inexplicable (as it/them).
c. The problem is inexplicable **equally** (to it/them).
d. The problems is **equally** inexplicable (to it/them).
- (9) a. His opinion is very **different** from mine.
b. Last year our confidence was high no matter who we were playing. We just went in there and beat them. This year is **different**. (Chicago Tribune. 2001/9/1)
c. [...] This year is **different** (from last year).

One of the literal meanings of *equal* is *of the same measure, quantity, amount, or number (as another)* or *being the same (as another)*, and one of the literal meanings of *different* is *partly or totally unlike (another) in nature, form, or quality not the same (as another)*. As shown in the meanings of the words, they necessarily have an object for comparison regardless of its explicit realization in the sentence. Then the object of comparison for the subject *the problem* in (8a) may be recoverable or inferable from the preceding discourse, if it is given, as in (8b) through (8d). Likewise, the subject of the third sentence in (9b) is compared to what is previously evoked, as paraphrased in (9c). Thus, like inflectional comparative constructions, their implicit counterparts permit inferable objects of comparison, because they make comparative reference to something that has proceeded. Detailed discussions are provided in the following section.

3. Constraints and Information Status of Reversed Constituents

3.1. General Constraints

Thus far I have discussed the canonical comparative constructions of the sentence pattern [S + be + Comparative Constituent]. It would not be hard to find their variants, where the canonical subject appears in

postverbal position while the canonically postverbal comparative constituent appears in preverbal position, as exemplified in the following:

- (10) a. And we can respectfully make clear as day that we understand their worries, we feel their pain, and this is why we disagree. Ultimately, I think we're right ... these values will make other countries wealthy and powerful as well. ... **But perhaps even more important than that is how we say it.** Bush has been vulgar rap in this respect. If we put the same lyrics to the tunes of Beethoven and Gershwin then I think we could create greater harmony." (Herald Tribune. 6/9/2003)
- b. Adding to the outrage is the fact that some of this cabal who were auxiliaries in Boston are now leaders of dioceses in their own right. **Probably the most prominent of these is Thomas Daily, bishop of Brooklyn.** (Chicago Tribune. 7/27/2003)
- c. Continuing our theme, once you choose to face your symptoms, then what do you do? You will see a lot of relaxation skills in this self-help guide. These are important skills. **But equal to them is your willingness to stay anxious.**(R. Reid Wilson. *Don't Panic Revised Edition: Taking Control of Anxiety Attacks*)
- d. Alcoholism and drug addiction are the forms which the individual chooses in non-orgiastic culture. In contrast to those participating in the socially patterned solution, such individuals suffer from guilt feelings and remorse. While they try to escape from segregatedness by taking refuge in alcohol or drugs, they feel all the more separate after the orgiastic experience is over, and thus are driven to take recourse to it with increasing frequency and intensity. **Slightly different from this is the recourse to a sexual orgiastic solution.** (Erich Fromm. *The Art of Loving*. p.34)

In each of the boldface sentences, the constituents that are placed after the verb in a canonical word order are placed before the verb, while the canonically preverbal constituents appear after the verb. Such distribution of noncanonical word order is felicitous. However, the preposing of comparative constituents is not always permitted, as illustrated in the following:²⁾

- (11) a. Ramadi, one of several Sunni-majority towns along the Euphrates River west of Baghdad, was a stronghold of support for Saddam, and has been the site of frequent attacks that have killed Americans as well as Iraqis.

The attackers seem to be growing bolder. The 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, which has lost around 10 of its soldiers to postwar ambushes, is headquartered in a former presidential palace in Ramadi that sports Arabic graffiti on its entry wall: **"Saddam's return is better than Bush's freedom."** (USA Today. 7/5/2003)

- b. [...] The attackers seem to be growing bolder. The 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, which has lost around 10 of its soldiers to postwar ambushes, is headquartered in a former presidential palace in Ramadi that sports Arabic graffiti on its entry wall: **#"Better than Bush's freedom is Saddam's return."**

- (12) a. Age adds another complication. Most people, as they get older, need reading glasses or bifocals for close work. **This condition, called presbyopia, is different from farsightedness because it has nothing to do with the shape of the eye;** it happens when the lenses in the eyes lose their ability to curve sufficiently to focus on nearby objects. (*Time*. 11/1/1999)

- b. Age adds another complication. Most people, as they get older, need reading glasses or bifocals for close work. **#Different from farsightedness is this condition, called presbyopia,**

2) Sharp (#) indicates that the relevant sentence is not felicitous in the discourse, while asterisk (*) indicates that the sentence is not grammatical.

because it has nothing to do with the shape of the eye; it happens when the lenses in the eyes lose their ability to curve sufficiently to focus on nearby objects.

Here, the order of the relevant elements in (11a) and (12a) is reversed in the same context with (11b) and (12b), respectively. The infelicity of (11b) and (12b) reveals that the distribution of a noncanonical word order is not random. If randomness were possible, the sentences like those in (11b) and (12b) would be as felicitous as those in (10). The theory of preposing (Birner (1994), Prince (1984), Reinhart (1981) and Ward (1988), *inter alia*) requires that preposed constituents be anaphorically linked to the preceding discourse for felicitous preposing.³⁾ The felicity of the boldface sentences in (10) is supported by the fact that the preposed comparative constituents contain information that is explicitly evoked in the prior discourse, e.g., in such lexical forms as *that*, or *this*. On the other hand, the infelicity of the boldface sentences in (11b) and (12b) is due to the fact that the preposed comparative constituents represent information that has not been previously evoked in the discourse, or discourse-new information. Thus, the choice of felicity is not random but is made on a pragmatic constraint concerning a status of the information represented by preposed constituents.

Thus far we have addressed only comparative constructions of which the preposing occurs in the main clause. The embedded clause is also subject to the same discourse constraints, as exemplified in the following:

3) The information represented by preposed constituents is related to previously evoked information via such various relations as type/subtype, part/whole, entity/attribute and identity relations. One of them is given below:

It carefully selects a twig of the correct size and shape and then strips off the leaves. This the ape inserts into a hole in the termite nest.

In this example, the preposed *this* is coreferential with *a twig of the correct size* in the preceding sentence. Thus the former and the latter stand in an identity relationship. Such relations are defined in a poset (partially ordered set). See Hirschberg (1991) for more details.

- (13) a. Sure. In fact, I think that's more important. As you as you know, we've been using color inside the paper for quite some time now. This is the first time, starting with tomorrow's paper, that we'll be able to use it on page one, as well. **But I think more important is the improvement in the content.** We're not losing any content. On the contrary, we're adding some. (CNBC. 4/8/2002)
- b. Also fueling the comeback is the recent interest for paid search, or sponsored links, that companies such as Overture Services, Google and Yahoo have helped legitimize as an advertising medium.
"A big chunk of the money is paid search, **but I think equally important is the attitude,**" said Forrester Research analyst Jim Nail. "A year and half ago, I was hearing people say, 'Online doesn't work. Forget it. I'm not going to do it.'" (USA Today. 7/2/2003)

As seen in (13a) and (13b), each comparative constituent is placed before the verb of the embedded clause. Such ordering is felicitous. More detailed account is provided in the discussion of (19) below.

It should be noted that the inverted comparative constructions should be distinguished from the subject-auxiliary inverted constructions.⁴⁾ Although these two types of inverted constructions are sometimes confused with each other in the literature, the inverted constructions exemplified so far above are shown to be different from those in the following:

- (14) a. Nor should it be assumed that force can always be limited to air power. (Jeong (2002). p. 202; *Time*. 6/1995)

4) Subject-Auxiliary inversion and Subject-Verb inversion are sometimes classified together under the same rubric of inversion by Green (1980, 1982), McCawley (1977), etc. Particularly, Green (1980) proposes a wide range of discourse functions concerning the two types of inversion under the same class. In contrast, Birner & Ward (1993), Bresnan (1994) and Levine (1989) consider the two as distinct on a formal and functional ground.

- b. Little did I imagine that my younger son, Zhao Long, would die. (Jeong (2002). p. 199; *Time*. 6/1999)
- c. Only when we do not understand one another is there tension, resentment, or conflict. (John Gray. *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. p. 5)

Exemplified above in (14) is a subject-auxiliary inversion, which is triggered by the preposing of such negative constituents as *not*, *little*, *only*, and *under no circumstances*. In this case, only the first auxiliary verb appears before the subject as in (14a) while the periphrastic *do* appears before the subject in the absence of any other auxiliary as in (14b) and (14c). However, subject-verb inversion requires that all auxiliaries including the main verb appear together before the subject if they are present in a sentence. Consider the following:

- (15) a. The impact on human health would be more important.
 - b. More important would be the impact on human health. (CNN. 11/27/1997)
 - c. *More important would the impact on human health be.
-
- (16) a. The country's economic growth has been still more remarkable.
 - b. Still more remarkable has been the country's economic growth.
 - c. *Still more remarkable has the country's economic growth been. (Jeong (2002). p. 171)

As shown in (14) and (15-16), the two types of inverted constructions are formally distinct. Moreover, they are functionally distinct and should be treated as separated constructions.⁵⁾

5) Green (1980) proposes various discourse functions for inversion -- practical, emphatic, connective, introductory, etc. As she does not distinguish among subject-verb inversion, subject-auxiliary inversion and quotation inversion, proposed functions come from all inversion types. Thus, some functions may be excluded according to an inversion type. Subject-auxiliary inversion is out of this study.

What follows is a detailed discussion of discourse functions served by the reversed constituents in comparative constructions.

3.2. Preposed Constituents and Information Status

Birner (1994) shows that the preposed constituent in inversion represents discourse-old information. Likewise, it applies to an inversion of comparative constructions, exemplified in (17):

- (17) A: **Austin is the tallest in our school.**
B: a. No, you're mistaken. **Taller than he/him is Michael.**
b. No, you're mistaken. **Taller is Michael.**

Here, the preposed constituent *taller (than he/him)* has been explicitly evoked in the prior discourse by A, and therefore represents discourse-old information, while the postposed constituent *Michael* represents information that is new to the discourse. Such combination renders the inversion felicitous. In the case of (17Bb), particularly, the head of the preposed adjective phrase only appears with the rest omitted differently from (17Ba) but such combination is also felicitous, because the head has been previously evoked and represents discourse-old information, as well as the omitted part is recoverable from the discourse.

Interestingly, it is not the case that the head of the preposed constituent should correspond to discourse-old information. Rather, even when some portion of the preposed constituents contains discourse-old information, inverted comparative constructions is felicitous. The portion, which is often realized by the *than*-clause/phrase or prepositional phrase excluding inflectional or implicit comparative forms, is explicitly or implicitly realized. Here an implicit realization refers to ellipsis. Consider first (10a), (10b) and (10c), repeated here as (18a), (18b) and (18c), respectively:

- (18) a. And we can respectfully make clear as day that we

understand their worries, we feel their pain, and this is why we disagree. Ultimately, I think we're right ... these values will make other countries wealthy and powerful as well. ... **But perhaps even more important than that is how we say it.** Bush has been vulgar rap in this respect. If we put the same lyrics to the tunes of Beethoven and Gershwin then I think we could create greater harmony." (Herald Tribune. 6/9/2003)

- b. Adding to the outrage is the fact that some of this cabal who were auxiliaries in Boston are now leaders of dioceses in their own right. **Probably the most prominent of these is Thomas Daily, bishop of Brooklyn.** (Chicago Tribune. 7/27/2003)
- c. Continuing our theme, once you choose to face your symptoms, then what do you do? You will see a lot of relaxation skills in this self-help guide. These are important skills. **But equal to them is your willingness to stay anxious.** (R. Reid Wilson. *Don't Panic Revised Edition: Taking Control of Anxiety Attacks*)

In (18a), the preposed *important* represents information that is new to the discourse. However, *that*, the complement of the preposition *than*, refers to the preceding sentence, *these values [...] powerful as*, and therefore represents familiar information. In (18b), *prominent* is not evoked previously in the discourse. However, *these*, the complement of the preposition *of*, is evoked in the prior discourse by referring to *leaders of dioceses* and represents familiar information. In (18c), likewise, *equal* is new in the discourse. The pronoun *them*, preceded by the preposition *to*, represents old information as the replacement of *relaxation skills, these, or important skills* in the prior discourse. This is why the boldface sentences in (18) are all felicitous.

Now consider the examples in (19), where no *than* clause/phrase and prepositional phrases are realized in the boldface comparative sentences:

- (19) a. At roughly 9,000 years of age, Kennewick Man is one of the oldest remains ever found in North America. Accidentally discovered in the summer of 1996 by boat-race spectators in the shallows of Oregon's Columbia River, he presented scientists with a thrilling find: the well-preserved remains of a battle-scarred man thought to have been in his 40s, who, perhaps until an arrowhead in his hip brought him down roughly 90 centuries ago, stood about 5 feet 10 inches tall. **Even more intriguing was his surprisingly long face and large, protruding nose, facial features that do not resemble those of any known American Indian tribe.** (Washington Times. 4/27/2001)
- b. The safest bet for summer is a clean white wine. Two of my favorites are the 2001 Kenwood Sauvignon Blanc at the reduced price of \$9.95, and the 2001 Meridian Sauvignon Blanc at the reduced price of \$8.95. **Slightly different is the 2002 Cavit Pinot Grigio from Italy at the reduced price of \$9.95.** From Australia, there is the 2002 Lindemans Bin 65 Chardonnay at \$7.95 and the 2001 Rosemount Estate Chardonnay at \$10.95. (Herald Journal. 6/14/2003)

As in (18), the comparative forms *more intriguing* and *different* in (19) do not correspond to previously evoked information. Moreover, unlike the preposed constituents in (18), those in (19) do not contain any *than*-clause/phrase or prepositional phrases. The inversion, nevertheless, is felicitous with the comparative constituents preposed. It should be noted that the *than*-phrase or prepositional phrase is omitted, because it is recoverable via inference from the discourse. Thus, when it is filled, the comparative constructions in (19a) and (19b) may be paraphrased as (20a) and (20b), respectively:

- (20) a. Even more intriguing than them/these/those was his surprisingly long face and large, protruding nose, facial features that do not resemble those of any known American Indian tribe.

- b. Slightly different from *them/these/those* is the 2002 Cavit Pinot Grigio from Italy at the reduced price of \$9.95.

In (20a), assuming that *them/these/those* is a replacement of the descriptions of *Kennewick Man*, the preposed constituent contains information that is previously evoked in the discourse. Thus, the construction is felicitous with *even more intriguing* in the preposed position. In (20b), assuming that *them/these/those* refers to *the 2001 Kenwood Sauvignon Blanc* and *the 2001 Meridian Sauvignon Blanc*, the preposed constituent is taken to represent familiar information. The inverted comparative construction is felicitous. Importantly, these types of comparative constructions lack a *than*-phrase or prepositional phrase but are recoverable via inference from what is previously evoked in a discourse. Prince (1981, 1992) defines inferable information as information that can be inferred from other information evoked in the discourse. She treats it as discourse-old. Hence, inferable elements and explicitly evoked elements behave as a single class of discourse-old information.

Now let us assume that both the preposed and the postposed constituent represent information that has previously evoked in the discourse, as illustrated in the following:

- (21) a. "Changes that are taking place literally across the globe are now taking place in our own backyard," he says. "That makes it impossible for the American public and government to ignore." Longing for "asylum," he says, some smokers have decided to pack up and move to Canada. And they aren't alone: "I'm ready to immigrate," says Quade Whitmire, entertainment manager for San Francisco Gay Pride. **Canadians say it's nothing new that their country is more liberal than the USA.** Diversity is prized in Canada, where nearly half of the population classifies itself as neither Canadian, French nor British. This, some say, has bred tolerance, but it also has denied the country an identity. (USA Today. 7/8/2003)

- b. [...] # **Canadians say it's nothing new that more liberal than the USA is their country.**

When both the preposed and postposed constituents correspond to information that has been explicitly evoked in the prior discourse, the more recently evoked information is argued to be more familiar than the earlier evoked information. In the boldface sentence of (21a) both *their country* and *the USA* have been explicitly evoked in the prior discourse. However, *the USA*, which is inferred from *American public and government* in the prior discourse, has been mentioned earlier than *their country*, referring to *Canada*, and therefore is less familiar than *their country*. The relevant sentence is felicitous. However, when these constituents are reversed in the same context as (21b), the relevant sentence is infelicitous. The infelicity in (21b) is caused by the fact that the preposed constituent represents less familiar information than does the postposed constituent. Therefore, the preposed constituent in inversion should represent more familiar information in the discourse than does the postposed constituent.

3.3. Postposed Constituents and Information Status

As mentioned above, the felicity of inverted comparative constructions is determined by the relative discourse-familiarity of the preposed and postposed constituents, in that the preposed constituent represents more familiar information than does the postposed one. This relative familiarity may entail that the postposed constituent represents more or less familiar information, as shown in most of the examples above. In many cases, however, the postposed constituent may represent information that is new to the discourse, as illustrated in the following:

- (22) a. Then, around 1980, computers suddenly got small. The desktop personal computer came on to the market and gave enormous power to the individual. Tiny businesses could do what only

large ones could before. Even within big businesses, employees had much more autonomy. **Even more important for political freedom was another development of the 1980s: the fax machine.** It is no coincidence that communism collapsed in 1989 just as the fax machine was becoming widespread and fairly inexpensive. (*Reader's Digest*. 6/1997)

- b. Trying to become the first player in 20 years to defend his title, Els didn't make a birdie and opened with a 78, his worst round ever at the British Open. Four past major winners were among more than two dozen players who shot in the 80s. **The most noteworthy was David Duval, who played well except for two triple bogeys and a quadruple bogey on his way to an 83.** Colin Montgomerie got off easy. He tripped on his way to breakfast, injured his hand and withdrew after seven holes. **Equally surprising was Norman, even though he won 10 years ago when the British Open was last held at Royal St. George's.** (*USA Today*. 7/17/2003)

As discussed in (19) and (20), although in (22a) the preposed *even more important for political freedom* is not explicitly evoked in the prior discourse, the missing part is inferable from the discourse, resulting in the full constituent *even more important for political freedom than the desktop personal computer*. Consequently, the preposed constituent contains discourse-old information and therefore represents discourse-familiar information. However, the postposed *another development of the 1980s* represents information that is new to the discourse. Likewise, in the first boldface sentence of (22b), the preposed comparative constituent *the most noteworthy* is new to the discourse, but the inferable information may be added from the discourse, resulting in the full constituent *the most noteworthy of them (=the four past major winners)*. And so the preposed element constitutes more familiar information. In contrast, the postposed *David Duval* is

discourse-new. In the second boldface of (22b), the preposed *equally surprising* is discourse-new but the previously evoked information may be added to it via inference, resulting in the full constituent *equally surprising to him (=Colin Montgomerie)*. It constitutes more familiar information but the postposed *Norman* represents discourse-new information.

It should be noted that for the felicity of an inverted comparative construction the preposed constituent should represent more familiar information than the postposed constituent does but not vice versa.

Finally, this study argues that the noncanonically postposed constituent marks focus, although what is meant by this term varies from one account to another. Jackendoff (1972) defines the focus of a sentence as the information in the sentence that is assumed by the speaker not to be shared by him and the hearer. In addition, focus is realized as stress. That is, when a phrase is chosen as the focus of the sentence, the highest stress is put on a syllable of the phrase. This definition may be supported by a *Wh*-cleft sentence. Thus, in order to show that the postposed constituent marks focus, the inverted comparative construction may be paraphrased as a *Wh*-cleft sentence. Consider (22a) and (22b), repeated here in part as (23a) and (24a) due to space limit:⁶⁾

- (23) a. Even more important for political freedom was another
DEVELOPMENT of the 1980s.
b. What was even more important for political freedom was
another DEVELOPMENT of the 1980s.
- (24) a. Equally surprising was NORMAN.
b. One who was equally surprising was NORMAN.

In (23), the postposed constituent *another development of the 1980s* represents information that has not been explicitly in the prior discourse

6) Capitalization in the following examples is mine. It indicates that the relevant words in the sentence receive a pitch accent at the time of an oral utterance.

and the part of the sentence which has the greatest concentration of information as focus. That is, it is the focus of the sentence and the highest stress falls on *development*. Likewise, it is expected that in (24) the postposed *Norman* represents discourse-new information, and receives the highest stress as focus. Thus, the noncanonical comparative construction and the *Wh*-cleft sentence are interchangeable without any violation of a discourse constraint or semantic difference.

4. Concluding Remarks

We have seen that the occurrence of the inflectional and implicit comparative construction is alike syntactically and functionally and that inverted comparative constructions have equal discourse constraints and functions on their use, which are related to the information status represented by the preposed constituents and the postposed constituents. For the felicity of inverted comparative constructions, the relative familiarity of information within a discourse has crucial influence on the felicity of English noncanonical comparative construction, and particularly, the preposed constituent in a noncanonical word order should be more familiar than, or at least familiar as, its postposed counterpart. In contrast, the postposed constituent represents less familiar information, functions as focus and receives the highest stress.

This study has addressed inverted comparative constructions where the postposed constituent occurs chiefly as information that is evoked or inferable in the prior discourse, but excluded comparative constructions where the postposed constituent appears as a personal pronoun. Their comparative/contrastive analysis is left for future study.

References

- Birner, Betty J. (1994). Information Status and Word Order: An Analysis of English Inversion. *Language* 70:233-259.

- Birner, Betty J., & Ward, Gregory L. (1998). *Information Status and Noncanonical Word Order in English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Birner, Betty J., & Ward, Gregory L. (1993). *There*-Sentences and Inversions as Distinct Constructions: A Functional Account. *Berkeley Linguistics Society* 19:27-39.
- Birner, Betty J., & Ward, Gregory L. (1992). On the Interpretation of VP Inversion in American English. *Journal of Linguistics* 28: 1-12.
- Bresnan, Joan W. (1994). Locative Inversion and the Architecture of Universal Grammar. *Language* 70:72-131.
- Bresnan, Joan W. (1973). Syntax of the comparative clause construction in English. *Linguistic Inquiry* 4:275-343.
- Emonds, Joseph. (1976). *A Transformational Approach to English Syntax: Root, Structure-Preserving, and Local Transformations*. New York: Academic Press.
- Green, Georgia M. (1982). Colloquial and Literary Uses of Inversions. In *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy*, (Ed.). Deborah Tannen, 119-153. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Green, Georgia M. (1980). Some Wherefores of English Inversions. *Language* 56:582-601.
- Hirschberg, Julia. (1991). *A Theory of Scalar Implicature*. New York: Garland.
- Jackendoff, Ray. (1972). *Semantic Interpretation in Generative Grammar*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Jeong, In-Sik. (2002). *English Special Constructions*. Seoul: System Publishing Company.
- Jeong, In-Sik. (2001). Some Focus-related Items and Topic Sentences in English: A Discourse Analysis. *Discourse and Cognition* 8: 243-274.
- Katz, Bernard D. (1995). Making Comparisons. *Mind* 104:369-392.
- Kuno, Susumu. (1981). The Syntax of Comparative Clauses. *Papers from the Regional Meetings, Chicago Linguistic Society* 17: 136-155.
- Lee, Chungmin. (2002). Contrastive Topic and Proposition Structure. In

- Asymmetry in Grammar*, ed. Ann-Morie Di Sciullo. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Levine, Robert D. (1989). On Focus Inversion: Syntactic Valence and the Role of a SUBCAT List. *Linguistics* 27:1013-1055.
- McCawley, Noriko Akatsuka. (1977). What is the "Emphatic Root Transformation" Phenomenon? *Papers from the Regional Meetings, Chicago Linguistic Society* 13:384-400.
- Prince, Ellen F. (1988). The ZPG Letter: Subjects, Definiteness, and Information-Status. In *Discourse Description: Discourse Analyses of a Fund-raising Text*, ed. S. A. Thompson and W. Mann: John Benjamins.
- Prince, Ellen F. (1986). On the Syntactic Marking of Presupposed Open Proposition. In *Papers from the Parasession on Pragmatics and Grammatical Theory*, eds. Anne M. Farley, Peter T. Farley and Karl-Erik McCullough, 208-222: Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Prince, Ellen F. (1984). Topicalization and Left-Dislocation: A Functional Analysis. In *Discourses in Reading and Linguistics*, eds. Sheila White and Virginia Teller, 213-225. New York: Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences.
- Prince, Ellen F. (1981). Toward a Taxonomy of Given-New Information. In *Radical Pragmatics*, ed. Peter Cole. New York: Academic Press.
- Reinhart, Tanya. (1981). Pragmatics and Linguistics: An Analysis of Sentence Topics. *Philosophica* 27.
- Rochemont, Michael S., & Culicover, Peter W. (1990). *English focus constructions and the theory of grammar: Cambridge studies in linguistics ; 52*. Cambridge England ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sharvit, Yael, & Stateva, Penka. (2002). Superlative Expressions, Context, and Focus. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 25:453-504.
- Ward, Gregory L. (1988). *The Semantics and Pragmatics of Preposing*. New York: Garland.
- Ward, Gregory L. (1986). The Semantics and Pragmatics of Preposing.

In-Sik Jeong
Institute for Linguistic Research
Seoul National University
San 56-1, Shinrim 9dong, Gwanak-Gu
Seoul 151-742, Korea
Phone: 82-11-9025-5538
Email: isjeong@uts.cc.utexas.edu

Received: 31 June, 2003

Accepted: 10 Aug, 2003

Revised: 29 Aug, 2003