The ‘as ~ as’ Construction:
Focusing on the Meaning of Equality
The 'as ~ as' Construction: Focusing on the Meaning of Equality

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to reconsider the meaning of 'equality' in the 'as ~ as' construction. The construction is used to express that two persons or things are equal and is generally called the 'comparison of equality'. We usually use the word 'equality' without really considering what it means, but the meaning is not easy to understand. I believe that considering the meaning of 'equality' would lead us to a proper understanding of the 'as ~ as' construction.

We are not concerned here with idiomatic phrases, such as 'as long as', because these phrases are only secondarily based on the basic interpretation of the 'as ~ as' construction. Also, negative sentences are not dealt with because these sentences are also secondary and I want to consider 'as ~ as' first.

First, I examine dictionaries and encyclopedias of mathematics, philosophy, and linguistics in order to understand what 'equality' is. From this, I find that the meaning of 'equality' is 'equal' or 'the same'. It is expressed by the symbol '=' in mathematics and logic: that is, when A and B have the same value, the relation between them is represented as A = B.

Next, the meaning of 'equality' in the 'as ~ as' construction is inspected. The 'as ~ as' construction is generally recognized as meaning 'the same'. Some previous studies present this interpretation and use the symbol '=' for visual understanding. The explanation seems to be based on mathematics and logic because sentences with 'as ~ as' are shown with the symbol. Although this helps us understand more easily, it might lead us to a
misunderstanding of the meaning of 'equality' in the 'as ~ as' construction because linguistic meaning should not be dealt with in the same way as mathematical or logical meaning.

Other previous studies mention that the 'as ~ as' construction means 'the same or more'. In this interpretation, there is an additional phrase or sentence after each 'as ~ as' statement. For instance, there is an example which is "Mary is as tall as her father. In fact, she is taller than him." In the example, the sentence with 'as ~ as' just means that Mary is equal to her father in height, and the second sentence works to tell detail about their height: that is, their heights are not the same and Mary is taller. In addition, the two sentences use the same adjective and show them as "as tall as" and "taller than". From the two points, 'as ~ as' construction can be meant as 'more' by supporting the second sentence and the part of "taller than". Here, then, 'as ~ as' itself does not mean 'more', so the 'more interpretation needs to be supported by an additional statement. In other words, when the speaker wants to show that something is 'more', he must add information to make the meaning of the utterance clear. Then, the 'more' meaning can be interpreted.

Next, I examine whether 'as ~ as' construction can mean 'less'. There is another example which is "Mary is as tall as her father. In fact, she is younger than him." This example is presented to compare with the example above. Comparing the two examples, both of the first sentences are the same, but the second sentences are different. The different parts are "taller than" and "younger than". The adjectives are antonym. Moreover, the two sentences in this example use antonymous adjective and show them as "as
tall as” and “younger than”. Because of the points, this example is regarded as ungrammatical. From above, this example implies that ‘as ~ as’ construction cannot mean ‘less’. However, we can use the ‘as ~ as’ construction when we do not know the difference between the two things being compared. On the other hand, when the difference is obvious, we can also use the ‘as ~ as’ construction in some cases. For example, generally people desire to be superior to other people, so they do not want to be considered inferior to anyone. This state of mind allows the speaker to say that the he is equal to someone else even if he is actually slightly inferior. Hearers who know the truth will understand the utterance in context, but if the hearers do not know the truth, they will believe that the speaker is not inferior to the other person in the comparison.

From these investigations, I find that the meaning of the ‘as ~ as’ construction should generally be understood as ‘the same’, but interpretation of the ‘as ~ as’ construction has a range: ‘slightly more’ or ‘slightly less’, depending on the context. In other words, the ‘as ~ as’ construction can acceptably be used to express a slight difference. After considering the meaning of the ‘as ~ as’ construction, I examine ‘as ~ as’ constructions in movie scripts, to see how ‘as ~ as’ constructions are used effectively.

We can learn the intentions of the speaker through interpretations of the utterances. Our interpretations are rich enough to understand many things even though the ‘as ~ as’ construction itself simply means ‘the same’. The interpretation leads us to a deeper understanding of the ‘as ~ as’ construction. When we understand the ‘as ~ as’ construction properly, we can understand not only its basic usage but also its expressive
interpretations.
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Introduction

(1) I am (in) old (in) Hiroshi.  
(2) I am (in) tall (in) my mother.  

(New Crown, 2006)  
(Sunshine, 2006)

These are sentences of the ‘as ~ as’ construction taken from junior high school English textbooks. Junior high school students are taught the construction in the second grade. How would we understand and translate the two sentences into Japanese? It is assumed that we are aware of only the literal meaning of these sentences: example (1) means ‘I am equal to Hiroshi in age’ and example (2) means ‘I am equal to my mother in height’. Then, we would translate example (1) as ‘watashi wa Hiroshi to onaji nenre ei desu (I am the same age as Hiroshi)’ and example (2) as ‘watashi wa haha to onajikurai se ga takai (I am as tall as my mother)’. Certainly this way of thinking is not mistaken, and these are the generally accepted translations.

Why does the speaker want to say that the speaker is equal to Hiroshi in age or to the speaker’s mother in height? The speaker’s psychological factors must be at work. I believe that it is impossible to understand these sentences without considering such factors. We can express our age and height not only by comparing with someone but also by using numerical value. For example, ‘I am fourteen years old’ or ‘I am one hundred and fifty centimeters tall’. Numerical value information is more specific than comparisons because we can give someone exact information about our age or height. Why, then, do we compare with someone? It is necessary to
explain the meaning of 'equality' in 'as ~ as' constructions in order to answer this question. Moreover, a proper understanding of the meaning of 'equality' would lead us to the deep interpretation which 'as ~ as' constructions can express.

Since the construction is generally taught to second year junior high school students, it seems that teachers teach students only the form 'as ~ as …' and the translation '…to onaji kurai ~', which means 'be equal to ~(in …)'. Generally, since teachers do not give students detailed knowledge of the linguistic expression, most teachers do not teach the proper meaning of 'as ~ as'. After that, students do English grammar or translation exercises. Some exercises involve reading visual information from pictures or charts in which two pieces of information seem to be the same. Moreover, in review exercises of three types of comparison (the comparative, the superlative, and the positive), students use 'as ~ as' when two persons or things seem to be the same and use '~er / more ~ than' when there seems to be a difference even if the difference is slight. It seems that teachers unconsciously give the students the viewpoint of 'A=B', that is, 'A as ~ as B' means 'A is the same as B', because both teachers and students are not aware of slight differences.

Generally when we talk about 'equality' in Japanese, the word could mean not only 'the same' but also 'a little more or a little less'. I wonder whether the word in English can have a range of meanings like this. We might have an incorrect translation of 'as ~ as' constructions into Japanese, or we might have a wrong interpretation of the meaning of 'as ~ as' itself.

In a well known English grammar reference book for high school students, Ishiguro (2000) explains that when there is no difference between
two things being compared, we use the ‘as ~ as’ construction. He also states that ‘A as ~ as B’ means “A = B” (p.203). The explanation in the reference is similar to our general understanding of the meaning of the ‘as ~ as’ construction. However, Yagi (1987) states that ‘A as ~ as B’ could be seen not as ‘A = B’ but as ‘A ≥ B’: that is, not ‘A is the same as B’ but ‘A is the same or more than B’. When I first saw the symbol ‘≥’, I was very surprised because the explanation was definitely different from Ishiguro’s (2000). I found the difference of interpretation of ‘as ~ as’ constructions quite interesting and wanted to know more about what ‘equality’ is. Since Yagi’s (1987) meaning of ‘more than’ is not generally known, I wonder whether he focuses on the ‘more’ meaning too much to explain the new interpretation to us.

The purpose of this study is to reconsider the meaning of ‘equality’ in ‘as ~ as’ constructions. I attempt to make our understanding of ‘equality’ clarified through discussion of the meaning of ‘as ~ as’ constructions. I collected some examples with ‘as ~ as’ statements from movie scripts on the Internet. The examples were found through searching the website of movie scripts, using the search term ‘as *** as’. After that, some sentences including idiomatic phrases, such as ‘as long as’, were manually taken away because these phrases are only secondarily based on the original meaning of ‘as ~ as’ and are not dealt with in this study. Negative sentences were also taken out because these sentences are also secondary and I want to consider ‘as ~ as’ first.

In chapter 1, I give an overview of the meaning of ‘equality’ as found in dictionaries and encyclopedias. The generally accepted meaning of ‘as ~ as’
constructions is also explained. In chapter 2, I discuss the meaning of 'the same or more' in ‘as ~ as’ constructions. The meaning of 'more' is focused on because it is not generally known. Further, I verify a 'less than' interpretation which is not referred to in previous studies, and consider our mental state when we compare. Finally, in chapter 3, I examine some examples of ‘as ~ as’ statements from a couple of movies to confirm the meaning of 'equality' in the ‘as ~ as’ construction. Examples from movies have visual and audio information, so they are helpful to understand the human relationships and to empathize with the speaker's emotion. In other words, the examples are useful for examining the meaning of 'equality' in ‘as ~ as’ constructions through the speaker's feeling and intention.
Chapter 1

Background on 'equality'

1.1 The meaning of 'equality'

1.1.1 Treatment in mathematics and philosophy

In this chapter, I survey the meaning of 'equality' in 'as ~ as' constructions. This attempt is to reconsider the meaning of 'equality' in 'as ~ as' constructions. The 'as ~ as' construction is generally called 'comparison of equality'. Although the word 'equality' is used in daily conversation without full consideration of the meaning, it is difficult to understand the meaning of 'equality'. I discuss how 'equality' is treated in dictionaries and encyclopedias.

In this section, I will present the meaning of 'equality' in mathematics and philosophy. First, let us check the meaning in mathematics. In Lapedes (1978), 'equality' means "the state of being equal" (p.326). Yano, Mogi, and Ishihara (1968) say: "Being equal. It is sometimes used as the meaning of equivalence" (p.323, translated by author). In the two above, the word 'equal' is used in the explanations. We know the word 'equal', but it is also difficult to understand its meaning. To make our understanding clearer, the meaning of 'equal' is examined. Lapedes (1978) says "being the same in some sense determined by context" (p.326), and Yano et al. (1968) state that "A and B are equal, and the relation between A and B is represented as A = B by using the symbol of '=' when the two symbols A and B represent the same mathematical object" (p.473, translated by author). It seems that 'equal' means 'the same' and can be shown by the symbol of '='.
when two mathematical objects are the same.

Next, let us consult encyclopedias of philosophy for the meaning of 'equality'. In Shimonaka (1971), there are two meanings of 'equality' in logic and they are the following: "consciousness that there is no difference between two things in quantity or number" (p.864, translated by author), and "it is represented by the symbol =" (p.1001, translated by author). It also says that the difference between 'equal' and 'identical' is that 'identical' means one thing, while 'equal' means two contrasting things. The encyclopedia also mentions generally that "there are no worthy differences between humans regardless of social position, wealth, sex, or age" (p.1167, translated by author). Edwards (1972) says that,

The proposition “A and B are equal” may be descriptive or normative, but in either case it is incomplete without a statement of the respects in which the objects or persons compared are deemed to be equal. In instances where this appears not to be so, either the context supplies the complement or the comparison is of pure quantities, as in pure mathematics. Two objects equal in weight, or height, or value may be unequal in other respects: apart from the abstractions of mathematics and logic, no two objects could ever be said to be equal in all respects, only in all relevant respects. (p.38–39)

In mathematics and logic, the symbol ‘=’ is often used to explain the meaning of 'equality'. The two disciplines are similar in terms of showing the logical relation in a simple way by using the symbol ‘=’. Then, what does ‘=’ represent? In Liungman (1991),
two horizontal and parallel lines together become the equals sign. The uniting and linking quality of — is, so to speak, doubled, and creates the sign for similarity in one dimension, that of quantity in mathematics, with a similar meaning in some other systems, such as geometry. (p.148)

We found that the symbol of ‘=’ itself means not ‘the same’ but rather “similarity in one dimension”.

1.1.2 Treatment in linguistics

In this section, I check the meaning of ‘equality’ in linguistics. Japanese and English dictionaries and encyclopedias are referred.

First, I consider the meaning in Japanese. Matsumura (1988) explains ‘equality’ as “①being equal in grade or degree, ②being equal in qualification or skill, ③the same as equivalence” (p.1706, translated by author). The word ‘equal’ is also used in the explanations. In Umesao, Sakakura, Hinohara, and Kindaichi (1989), ‘equal’ means that “there is no difference between multiple things in quality, quantity, or degree. They are the same” (p.1647, translated by author). According to Sato (1989), ‘equal’ is described as “being the same in comparison to shapes, quality, condition, degree, or numerical value. It is very similar” (p.380, translated by author).

Next, we will examine the meaning in English. In the Longman Dictionary of the English Language, ‘equality’ means “the quality or state of being equal” (p.495). The Oxford English Dictionary 2 (OED2) defines it as “the condition of being equal in quantity, amount, value, intensity, etc” (p.347). Moreover, the meaning of ‘equal’ in the Longman Dictionary of the
English Language is "1a. of the same quantity, amount, or number as another, b. identical in mathematical value or logical DENOTATION; EQUIVALENT" (p.495) and "3. evenly balanced or matched" (p.495). According to the OED2, its meaning is "Of magnitudes or numbers: Identical in amount; neither less nor greater than the object of comparison. Of things: Having the same measure; identical in magnitude, number, value, intensity, etc" (p.346).

So far, it seems that 'equality' is explained by the core meaning of 'equal' or 'the same'. It may be difficult to understand 'equality' if we do not understand the meaning of 'equal' or 'the same'. The words 'equal' and 'the same' are synonyms. The Longman Dictionary of the English Language explains the difference of the synonyms as follows: 'same' means "items under consideration are really one, and not two or more different but like things" (p.1314) and 'equal' means "two or more different items correspond in value, number, size, etc" (p.1314).

1.2 The meaning of the 'as ~ as' construction

In this section, I provide an overview of previous studies of the treatment of 'equality' in 'as ~ as' constructions. Before that, I consider our general understanding of the 'as ~ as' construction. Generally, we understand 'as ~ as' to mean 'the same'. The meaning I presented in the previous section, especially the definition in mathematics and logic, might influence our understanding of the meaning of the 'as ~ as' construction. Some people regard 'A as ~ as B' as 'A = B'. Some linguists also regard it in the same way. Below are examples from Ando (2005) and Matsui (2003):
(3) A. comparison of equality: A=B
   B. comparison of superiority: A>B
   C. comparison of inferiority: A<B
   (Ando, 2005)
   (translated by author)

(4) This watch is as expensive as that one. (A=B)
   This watch is more expensive than that one. (A>B)
   This watch is less expensive than that one. (A<B)  (Matsui, 2003)

Ando (2005) refers to these three types of comparative constructions and
states “the traditional grammars have recognized such types of comparative
constructions” (p.567, translated by author) as the explanation for (3). He
has not given any explanation of why he used the symbols or what the
symbols mean. Matsui (2003) states that “comparison means showing the
relative degree based on common sense and considering whether A is equal
to B or A is more than / less than B” (p.95, translated by author), and she
provides (4) as concrete examples. Although her three example sentences
correspond to Ando (2005), she also does not state the reasons why she uses
the symbols or what the symbols mean. Also, she does not explain her
reason for interpreting ‘as ~ as’ constructions as ‘the same’ through the use of
the symbol ‘~’. She might recognize that she does not have to state the
reasons because they are already well known. Moreover, she provides the
following example sentences in another article.
(5) a. John is as old as Mary.
   b. John is the same age as Mary. (Matsui, 2004)

She states that "the examples of (5) are synonymous. The examples are interpreted as meaning that they are the same age" (p.45, translated by the author). Then, she shows the relation between John and Mary with symbols:

(6) a. John=Mary
   b. John=Mary (Matsui, 2004)

From the examples of (5) and (6), I wonder if the reason she thinks that the ‘as ~ as’ construction is regarded as ‘=’ is because she seems to think that ‘the same ~ as’ and ‘as ~ as’ are synonymous. However, it is not explicitly examined. She prefaces that all example sentences have been checked by two informants, so she might omit an explanation of the differences between ‘the same ~ as’ and ‘as ~ as’. Thus, Ando (2005) and Matsui (2003, 2004) attempt to show ‘equality, superiority, and inferiority’ with symbols to make the comparisons easy to understand, but this attempt might give us a misunderstanding of the meaning of ‘equality’ in ‘as ~ as’ constructions.
Chapter 2

Interpretations of the ‘as ~ as’ construction

2.1 An alternate meaning of the ‘as ~ as’ construction

In the last chapter, I examined the meaning of ‘equality’ and found that it seemed ‘the same’. I also presented previous studies about ‘as ~ as’ constructions. Previous studies only show symbols or example sentences with ‘as ~ as’ to explain the construction, and they do not offer any suggestions for where the meaning of ‘the same’ comes from. Our general understanding matches that of these previous studies, so we accept the explanation because the idea is generally accepted.

In this chapter, I further consider interpretations of the ‘as ~ as’ construction. I consider an alternate meaning of the ‘as ~ as’ construction, ‘the same or more’, in this section. To begin with, let us review previous studies about the meaning of ‘the same or more’ in ‘as ~ as’ constructions. The studies also show example sentences where the ‘as ~ as’ construction means ‘the same’, but the example sentences are presented without the symbol ‘=’.

(7) Jane is as old as Nancy. They are both 16 years old.

(Yoshida, 1998)

The sentence “They are both 16 years old.” is added to show their age. Likewise, Ogawa (1989) shows the following example:
(8) Mary is as tall as her father. In fact, they're identical in height.

(Ogawa, 1989)

Ogawa (1989) should have described that as 'they are the same in height' instead of "they're identical in height". It is recognized that the 'as ~ as' construction means 'the same' from the examples (7) and (8). On the other hand, Ogawa (1989) also shows the following example:

(9) Mary is as tall as her father. In fact, she is taller than him.

(Ogawa, 1989)

(underlined by author)

Ogawa (1989) explains that the 'as ~ as' construction does not mean 'exactly the same' but rather 'the same or more'. This aspect seems to agree with *OED2* which says that "In this and the next sense often with latent notion of 'at least equal'" (p.346) in the explanation of 'equality'.

Although I have examined 'equality' and found that it meant 'the same', some linguists state that it actually means 'the same or more'. The meaning of 'more' seems to be a new aspect because it is not generally known. Yagi (1987) states that the meaning of the 'as ~ as' construction is 'the same or more' and represents it with the symbol '≥'. Let us consider features of the meaning of 'the same or more' in 'as ~ as' constructions.

(10) Mary is as tall as Jane, maybe taller.

(Bolinger, 1972, as cited in Araki, 1986)
The examples (10), (11), and (12) show that the ‘as ~ as’ construction does not only mean ‘the same’ but also ‘more’. In the example (10), the sentence “Mary is as tall as Jane” has additional information: “maybe taller”. Also in (11) and (12), each sentence has additional information, signaled by the phrase, “in fact”. The additional information shows what the speaker really wants to tell. According to an informant, the examples are acceptable because the ‘as ~ as’ construction means “the same or more”. Another informant says that the ‘as ~ as’ construction normally means ‘the same’ when there is no additional information. Yagi (1987) claims that the ‘as ~ as’ construction means ‘the same or more’, but the ‘more’ meaning in ‘as ~ as’ constructions is not normally interpreted by conversational implicature. This term is provided by Grice. Grice (1975) states the following cooperative principle for conversation: “Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner” (p.45). Quantity means that the speaker has to speak without exaggeration and without omission. Quality means that the speaker must not tell a lie or something that is not true. Relation means that the speaker has to talk about something that connects with the subject. Manner means that the speaker must not say anything that is ambiguous or obscure. When we follow this principle, we can communicate without problem or
misunderstanding. Yagi (1987) uses the principles and explains that if a speaker knows that John is older than Bill, the speaker will say not 'John is as old as Bill' but instead, 'John is older than Bill'. The utterance 'John is as old as Bill' is vague because hearers do not know whether John and Bill are the same age or John is older. It is certain that the meaning of 'more' in 'as ~ as' constructions is not generally understood without such additional information. In addition, it is supposed that the 'as ~ as' construction does not always mean 'more' and there is only a possibility of interpreting it as 'more'.

It is important to consider the range of the 'more' meaning when we examine 'as ~ as' constructions. Let us consider this range by proposing numbers. For example, there are two numbers, 1.1 and 10. We can say each number is more than 1. However, while there is little difference between 1.1 and 1, there is a big difference between 10 and 1. Would you think that these differences are regarded as the same from the viewpoint that both are more than 1? I wonder whether the 'as ~ as' construction defines a limit to the extent that the construction can mean 'more'.

(13) *Kim is as tall as Pat.*

(Huddleston & Pullum, 2005)

Huddleston and Pullum (2005) state that "Kim's height is AT LEAST equal to Pat’s, not that it is identical. We can say, without contradiction: *Kim is as tall as Pat, in fact slightly taller* (p.199–200). It allows not a wide range of meaning but a slight range of meaning.

Through the discussion in this section, 'more' has been found to be one
of the interpretations of 'as ~ as' constructions, but its range is slight.

2.2 The interpretation of 'less'

In this section, I consider another interpretation of 'as ~ as' constructions: 'less than'. This interpretation is hardly discussed in the previous studies.

Each example from (9) to (12) that I presented in the last section has a contrastive example, (14) to (17):

(14) Mary is as tall as her father. In fact, she is shorter than him.  
     (Ogawa, 1989)

(15) Mary is as tall as Jane, maybe shorter.  
     (Bolinger, 1972, as cited in Araki, 1986)

(16) Jane has as much money as Fred; in fact he has much less.  
     (Smith, 1974)

(17) John is as rich as Fred; in fact he is much poorer.  
     (Yoshida, 1998)

(underlined by author)

Although the examples (14) to (17) are originally marked with asterisk mark which shows that the sentence is ungrammatical, I put question mark which presents that the sentence is unacceptable. I call the examples from (9) to (12) 'type 1' and the examples from (14) to (17) 'type 2'. The differences are the underlined comparative adjectives. The adjectives are antonyms of the adjectives in the first examples (9) through (12). For example, the adjective
used in (9) is "taller" and the one used in (14) is "shorter". In the type 1 examples, the adjectives in the 'as ~ as' constructions and the comparative adjectives in the additional information are the same. On the other hand, in the type 2 examples, the adjectives are antonyms: "as tall as" and "shorter" in example (14). It might be said that type 1 is acceptable and type 2 is unacceptable because of the antonyms of adjectives. Also, it seems that the unacceptability of type 2 implies that the 'as ~ as' construction does not mean 'less than'. Watanuki and Petersen (2006) remark that the 'as ~ as' construction cannot express 'less than'. They explain the following:

There are two people, a speaker and another person. The second person is 173.3 centimeters tall and proud of the height. The speaker has a sister who is 173.1 centimeters tall, and says to the person as follow:

(18) Uchi no imouto datte kimi to onaji kurai se ga takai yo.

(19) My sister is as tall as you.

The Japanese sentence (18) can be translated as 'My sister is as tall as you'. In Japanese, the speaker can say 'onaji kurai se ga takai (as tall as)' in this situation. In the English sentence (19), the speaker cannot say 'as tall as' in this situation. They explain that the range of the meaning in English is different from in Japanese. The examples (18) and (19) do not correspond. In regard to Watanuki and Petersen's (2006) situation, an informant said that the speaker cannot say sentence (19) when the speaker knows their heights. The informant also said that if the speaker does not know their heights, it is possible to say (19), even though strictly speaking the sister is
shorter, because the difference of 2 millimeters is very small and it is impossible to see the difference of their height.

Suppose in the situation that there is an obvious difference in heights. Is it impossible to use the ‘as ~ as’ construction? The answer is ‘no’. The speaker's psychology makes it possible to use the ‘as ~ as’ construction. For instance, a person C is 163 centimeters tall and one of C’s friends is 166 centimeters tall. The difference of their height is three centimeters and can easily be seen. According to informants, in this situation, if C says ‘C is as tall as C’s friend’, it can be interpreted in two ways. One interpretation is that hearers know their heights and understand that the utterance is not true. One informant explains this by telling about his parents. The father of the informant says that he is as tall as his wife, but in fact he is a little shorter than her. The informant knows that the statement is not true but can imagine his father’s feelings. It is not comfortable for men to say that they are shorter than a woman. That is why he uses that expression, even though it is not true. Some people desire to be superior to other people. The desire makes it possible to use the ‘as ~ as’ construction even though the ‘as ~ as’ construction does not fundamentally mean ‘less’. In this situation, the hearers know the heights. What would happen if the hearers do not know the heights? In this case, there is another interpretation. Here, hearers regard the utterance as a truth: ‘C is not shorter than C’s friend’ or ‘the father is not shorter than his wife’. When hearers know the fact that C is shorter than C’s friend or the father is shorter than his wife, the listeners might have the impression that the speaker, C or the father, has uttered a falsehood about their height.
As observed above, it is possible to use ‘as ~ as’ constructions in some ‘less than’ cases: one is when we do not know the exact difference and another is when the interpretation comes from the speaker’s psychology. It might be natural that the speaker may be conscious only of ‘similarity’ rather than ‘less’. Type 2 cannot have additional information if the speaker does not want to show that the subject of the sentence is inferior to the other person in the comparison. Also, ‘as ~ as’ constructions can be regarded as an enhancement of a trait so that the two people are considered (almost) the same.

2.3 Mentality when we compare with someone

In the previous section, I referred to the speaker’s psychology and certainly psychology often affects our utterances. In this section, I examine further the psychological state of mind.

Suppose there are two children, D and E, and they are comparing their heights. Their friends are deciding who is taller. It sometimes happens that there is very little difference in their heights. As a result, the friends may judge that they are equal because the friends cannot see a difference. As a result, the children will be disappointed if they had expected themselves to be taller. One friend might then say ‘D may be taller than E’ or ‘E may be taller than D’ as a result of careful observation. The one who is judged to be taller, even if only a little taller, will be pleased at the result, but the other will be chagrined even if the one is only a little shorter. Although the friends regard the slight difference as a minor matter, D and E regard it as a significant matter.
Even such young children have strong feelings about the results when they are compared with another person. I wonder whether people typically avoid comparisons with someone when there is an obvious difference. Generally, there is a tendency for tall people to be regarded as better and most people wish to be taller. So, if people compare with heights, it just shows that one person is in a more advantageous position, with regards to height, than the person they are compared with. Therefore, it is more interesting to compare people who seem to be equal than those who have obvious differences.

Let us consider another case. There are two persons, F and G, and they are comparing their heights. F is a little shorter than G. Then, if F says ‘F is shorter than G’, even though it is true, the utterance may be regarded as statement of inferiority. We generally would not say so if we were F and think that being short is not as good as being tall. Suppose there is somebody else, H, and H decides who is taller. In that case, H's decision depends on the relationship H has with F or G. If F and H know each other and H cares for F, and H will not say anything to upset F. H may not state ‘F is the same as G’ because the judgment of ‘the same’ may make F disappointed if F wishes he were the taller.

When one person in the comparison is great and famous, the implication of the speaker is changed. For example, when someone states ‘my daughter is as pretty as Audrey Hepburn’, it is generally the case that this is not a fact in the literal sense. When the person chooses to compare the daughter with Audrey Hepburn, the person is bragging about the daughter’s beauty. People can use comparisons to boast about themselves
or their belongings in order to make the hearers recognize that they are superior. The speaker's psychology also affects the interpretation and the psychology enhances evaluation of the subject of the sentence (the daughter) from 'less' to '(almost) the same'.

In this way, the speaker's psychology has the effect of enhancement of the value (here, the daughter's beauty). When the speaker is the subject of the comparison, the utterance can be interpreted as a kind of boast or vanity on the part of the speaker. When somebody else is the speaker, the utterance can be interpreted as an enhancement of the value or a flattery of the person who is the subject of the sentence.
Chapter 3

Examination of the ‘as ~ as’ construction through movie scripts

3.1 The interpretation and the upper limit of ‘the same’

In the last chapter, the meaning of ‘as ~ as’ constructions was discussed extensively. The core meaning of ‘as ~ as’ is ‘the same’, and the meaning of ‘more’ is not always interpreted. This interpretation occurs when the speaker adds information to tell his intention accurately. Alternately, when the fact is ‘less than’ but the speaker does not want to express it, the construction can be used and it enhances the value based on the speaker’s psychology. For these reasons, the ‘as ~ as’ construction should be interpreted not only as ‘the same’ but also as a slight difference: ‘slightly more’ or ‘slightly less’.

In this chapter, I examine the interpretation of ‘as ~ as’ constructions based on example sentences from movie scripts. Example sentences from movies are easy to understand situations. We can see usages of the ‘as ~ as’ construction and consider the implications of the ‘as ~ as’ statements in context. I consider not only the literal meaning of the utterances but also the intention of the speakers. The consideration of the example sentences from movie scripts is based on the discussion in the previous chapter.

First, I will examine a situation that is interpreted as ‘the same’. However, the sentence does not show anything that is ‘exactly the same’. In this case, ‘A as ~ as B’ shows that B is the upper limit and the value of A is enhanced to B when A and B are compared. This example comes from the movie, Thelma & Louise. This movie is about the ties of friendship and
the love between Thelma and Louise through runaway from polices. Thelma is a housewife while Louise is a single woman who works at a restaurant as a waitress. Thelma and Louise are best friends and they decided to take a two-day vacation to go on a road trip. On the way, they go to a bar to rest. Thelma orders alcohol, which Louise advises her against. Below is the conversation between Thelma and Louise:

(20) Louise: Thelma!

  Thelma: Oh, what, tell me somethin'.

  Is this my vacation or isn't it?

  I mean, God, you're as bad as Darryl.

Louise: I'm sorry.

  I'm just not used to seeing you this way.

  I haven't seen you this way in a while.

  (boldface added by author)

Darryl is Thelma's husband. Thelma does not like him very much because he tries to control her. Louise knows that, and both women think of Darryl unkind. In this conversation, the utterance "you're as bad as Darryl" has the general meaning: 'Louise is unkind to Thelma now. Louise is almost equal to Darryl with regards to the degree of unkindness to Thelma'. Thelma cannot do anything freely; she has to ask for permission from her husband Darryl to do anything because he always wants to be in control of her. Now, Louise is also trying to control Thelma, when Thelma just wants to enjoy her vacation. Here, Thelma says "you're as bad as Darryl" instead
of just saying "you're bad". If Thelma says "you're bad", it might just mean that 'you are unkind'. It would not be meaningful because Thelma would just be telling her feelings to Louise. There is a reason why Thelma uses her husband's name. This reason surely includes irony, which is clear from the context and the backgrounds of the characters and the situation.

According to an informant, this utterance is like a joke. It is interpreted as a joke for the following reasons. Comparing Louise with Darryl in terms of their unkindness or in terms of their human nature, Darryl is more unkind than Louise. So, we cannot say 'Louise is as bad as Darryl' intrinsically. There is no quantitative information because the focus of comparing Louise with Darryl is the unkindness of their human nature, which cannot be measured in numbers. However, Thelma and Louise know each other and also know Darryl very well, so the two women recognize which person is more unkind. Then, it is understood between Thelma and Louise that the statement is not precisely true when the meaning is applied to the actual world. Also, Louise understands Thelma's intention. For these reasons, the informant understands the utterance, "you're as bad as Darryl", as a joke. The informant also says that there is little possibility that 'as ~ as' means 'more' because the form 'as ~ as' on its own generally means 'the same' or 'equal'. When we interpret a sentence with an 'as ~ as' expression, we cannot understand the sentence accurately if 'as ~ as' has two meanings: 'the same' and 'more'. So, 'as ~ as' basically means 'the same', while the meaning of 'more' may be interpreted in particular contexts.

The 'as ~ as' construction itself means 'the same'. However, we know that Louise is less than Darryl from the background information of the movie.
We interpret the sentence as 'the same' because it seems that Darryl is the upper limit and the unkindness of Louise is enhanced to that of Darryl based on the context and background information. So, the utterance cannot be understood as 'more' because Darryl is the upper limit and the unkindness of Louise does not exceed Darryl's.

3.2 Interpretation and Adverbs

Some adverbial phrases are concerned with the understanding of 'as ~ as' constructions. They affect the interpretation of the 'as ~ as' constructions. In the movie of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, 'almost' is used in an utterance with 'as ~ as'. The Harry Potter series is one of the most famous movie franchises in the world. This movie is the fourth story in the series. Harry Potter is a boy who is a student at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Harry is a competitor in the Triwizard Tournament, an inter-school competition. In the third and final task, the person who reaches the Triwizard Cup is the winner. Harry and Cedric Diggory, another competitor and Harry's senior at school, have helped each other in this Tournament, so they want to share the win. So, Harry and Cedric reach the cup at the same time. The Triwizard Cup is a portkey, which teleports anyone who touches it. Harry and Cedric are transported to an old graveyard, where they see a deformed Voldemort and his servant. After he is restored by his servant, Voldemort utters the following sentences to Harry:
(21) Harry! I'd almost forgotten you were here. Standing on the bones of my father. I'd introduce you but word has it you're *almost as famous as me* these days. The boy who lived. How lies have fed your legend Harry. Shall I reveal what really happened that night thirteen years ago? Shall I divulge how I truly lost my powers? It was love. You see when dear sweet Lily Potter gave her life for her only son she provided the ultimate protection. I could not touch you. It was old magic, something I should have foreseen. But no matter, no matter. Things have changed, I can touch you now!

(boldface added by author)

Voldemort's utterance, "you're almost as famous as me" cannot be understood as 'the same or more' because of the adverb 'almost'. Obviously, both Voldemort, who terrifies people as the most powerful evil wizard in living memory, and Harry, who was not killed by Voldemort's magic, are very famous and it is perceived by not only Voldemort and Harry but also other people living in the wizarding world. So, Voldemort adds the expression "word has it" to his utterance so that it is not seen as his own judgment. When Voldemort says that "word has it", he shows his pride. From his character, we can assume that he believes that he is much more famous than Harry. He might want to say this, but he realizes that Harry is well known to many people. So, Voldemort uses the function of the adverb 'almost'. Matsui (2004) uses the following examples to consider differences between three expressions which portray the same relation: John's age is less than
Mary's.

(22) a. John is almost as old as Mary.
   b. Jane is not as old as Mary.
   c. Jane is younger than Mary. (Matsui, 2004)

Matsui (2004) explains that it is a fact that all of the sentences logically mean John is younger, but they have different emphases. (22a) emphasizes the closeness of the two, (22b) emphasizes the difference, and (22c) simply shows that John is younger. In addition, in example (22c), it is possible to understand John as much younger because we do not know the degree of difference. Following this information, we can understand that the utterance “you're almost as famous as me” shows that Harry and Voldemort are close in terms of fame but that Voldemort is a little more famous than Harry. According to an informant, if it were not for the word ‘almost’, ‘as famous as’ means ‘the same’ in terms of fame. I asked the informant whether it is possible to understand ‘as famous as’ as meaning that Harry is more famous than Voldemort. The informant says that there is a slight possibility but that it is better to say ‘at least as famous as’ or ‘(even) more famous than’ if I want to show the meaning of ‘more’ clearly.

Based on the information from the informant, I find that ‘the same’ is the core meaning of ‘as ~ as’ constructions, but there is a slight possibility that it can mean ‘more’. In addition, ‘as ~ as’ constructions rely almost entirely on expressions such as ‘at least’ or the comparative of superiority if we want to show the meaning of ‘more’.
3.3 The expanded interpretation

In this section, I propose an expanded interpretation of the 'as ~ as' construction. As has been mentioned in sections 1.2 and 2.1, the relation between A and B in 'A as ~ as B' is sometimes explained by using symbols such as '=' and '≥'. In example (20) from section 3.1, it is possible to express "you're as bad as Darryl" as 'Louise = Darryl', and "you're almost as famous as me" in example (21) from section 3.2 as 'Harry < Voldemort'. However, 'as ~ as' constructions cannot always be expressed using symbols. In *Stuart Little 2*, a 'as ~ as' construction which cannot be shown using symbols is used effectively. *Stuart Little 2* is a family adventure movie about the title character, Stuart. There are five members in Stuart's family: Mr. and Mrs. Little, their son George, their baby daughter Martha, and Stuart, a talking mouse who was adopted as their second son. Stuart seems to be a real member of the family and goes to the same school as George. One day on his way home from school, Margalo, a female yellow canary, drops from the sky into the passenger seat of Stuart's car. Margalo is being pursued by another bird, Falcon, and gets injured. Stuart somehow gets Margalo away from Falcon and takes her to his home to treat the injury. Margalo is allowed to stay with the Littles until her injury is healed. Stuart and Margalo begin to feel something special while they spend time together. In this scene, Stuart and Margalo are talking while they watch a movie at home. Margalo has never migrated south and says that things never go well. Stuart and Margalo's conversation continues:
(23) STUART: Yeah.

Something’s always stopping me, too.

Everybody around here thinks I’m too small to accomplish anything.

MARGALO: Hey, the way I see it, you’re as big as you feel.

STUART: Yeah.

Boy, I’m really glad you fell into my car.

I mean, you know...

(boldface added by author)

Margalo says this encouragingly to Stuart who looks sad and laments his small size. Margalo has seen that Stuart is kind and brave, although it has only been a few days. When we understand the utterance literally as ‘Stuart and his heart are the same size’, we might not appreciate Margalo’s intention. Margalo senses Stuart’s attitude and use this phrase to express the following meaning: even if you are small, you have a kind and brave heart. The important thing is not the size of your body but the size of your heart. There is a saying: a sound mind in a sound body. This saying generally means that when your body is healthy, your mind will be healthy. Based on this saying, this utterance can be understood as meaning, when you have a big heart, you can be big. Indeed, one informant understands Margalo’s statement as, ‘even though you are small, if you are positive and have confidence, it does not matter’ or ‘your attitude is more important than your size’.

The utterance “you’re as big as you feel” is a tagline of this movie, and it
is said two more times after this. Both times it is said by Stuart himself. One day, suddenly, Margalo disappears. Stuart gets depressed and he decides to search for Margalo because he assumes that Margalo has been kidnapped by Falcon. The utterance is in a scene where George tries to prevent Stuart from leaving.

(25)GEORGE: Are you crazy?
   GEORGE: You can't go out there.
   STUART: What you mean because I'm too small?
   STUART: Well, let me tell you something, George, you're as big as you feel.
   (boldface added by author)

The utterance can be understood as meaning that Stuart is capable of searching for Margalo no matter how dangerous it is because he believes in himself and is confident.

The other time the phrase is repeated is when Margalo leaves Stuart for the migration. Margalo was under an obligation to Falcon, so Falcon made Margalo help steal valuables from houses. Thanks to Stuart, Margalo was freed from Falcon. Now, at last, Margalo can migrate south, as she has dreamt of doing. Although Margalo yearns for migrating, she is full of anxiety because it is her first time. Stuart encourages Margalo:
(26) MARGALO : Now, it's the real thing.

GEORGE : Are you scared?

MARGALO : The world's pretty big, and I'm pretty small.

STUART : Somebody once told me, "You're as big as you feel."

STUART : Just spread your wings...and soar.

(boldface added by author)

In example (23), Stuart lamented his small size. This time, Margalo laments hers. Stuart tells Margalo the same thing she told him. This key sentence gives encouragement to little Stuart and Margalo. Therefore, the utterance is fitting for the last scene. The utterance is said a couple of times as a tagline for the movie, including the final scene. The utterance must have a particular meaning. If not, then it would not work. According to an informant, the 'as ~ as' construction in this utterance does not mean 'the same or more'. Instead, it is 'poetic or idiomatic'. So, if we cannot understand this purpose of the utterance, we may not understand the story as well.
Conclusion

In this study, the meaning of 'equality' in 'as ~ as' construction has been considered through a discussion of previous studies and data from movie scripts.

In chapter 1, I consulted three kinds of dictionaries and encyclopedias: mathematics, philosophy, and linguistics. The definition of 'equality' was concluded to be 'the same' or 'equal'. This conclusion matches the meaning of the 'as ~ as' construction which is generally accepted. I examined an interpretation that describes 'A as ~ as B' as 'A = B', but the interpretation is not explicitly explained in previous studies. So, I concluded that this aspect is well-known to us and an explanation of where this interpretation comes from is not needed.

In chapter 2, I discussed the 'more' meaning of 'as ~ as' constructions. I found that it was difficult to understand the meaning of 'more' in 'as ~ as' constructions from the form of 'as ~ as' itself. In other words, the core meaning of 'as ~ as' is 'the same', and the 'more' meaning is not understood unless there is some additional information. The interpretation of 'less' in 'as ~ as' constructions was also discussed. This interpretation is not discussed enough in previous studies. Some sentences which have this aspect are only shown as unacceptable sentences. However, it can be used when the speaker does not know the difference between two persons or things. It is also used when the speaker wants to be recognized as a better person. It is an interesting point that the speaker's psychological state of mind affects the interpretation of 'less'. It enhances 'less' to '(almost) the
same'. These interpretations that mean 'more' and 'less' do not come from the form of 'as ~ as' itself; they come from context or psychology. Also, the speaker's psychology influences the intent of the utterance, so we should consider it when we interpret utterances.

In chapter 3, I examined some examples from movies. I also found that the core meaning of 'as ~ as' in movies was 'the same'. In the first example, the 'as ~ as' utterance did not actually mean 'the same'. In fact, in the form of 'A as ~ as B', B was the upper limit and value of A was enhanced to the limit. Then, the utterance could be interpreted as 'the same'. Some adverbs can influence the meaning of 'as ~ as' effectively by focusing the meaning of 'the same'. I found that the phrase 'almost as ~ as' ("almost as old as") is similar to the expression 'not as ~ as' ("not as old as") and the comparative ("younger than"), but they have a difference in meaning: the phrase 'almost as ~ as' highlights the closeness of the two persons or things. These meanings or interpretations are the basic ones. Another example, though, shows us an expanded interpretation of 'as ~ as'. In that example, it does not matter whether the meaning of 'as ~ as' is 'the same'. The expression is interpreted as 'poetic or idiomatic' in the situation. This aspect of interpretation has not been dealt with when we consider the meaning of the 'as ~ as' construction.

In summary, the meaning of 'equality' in 'as ~ as' constructions is simply 'the same', but 'as ~ as' constructions can also be used to express 'slightly more' or 'slightly less'. These two interpretations arise from the situation or intention of the speaker. So, I suggest that we should consider not only the basic meaning but also the interpretation of the 'as ~ as'
construction when we try to understand the sentences using 'as ~ as'. Our
interpretations based on context are rich enough to understand many things
even when the words themselves are not clear. This means that our
interpretations help us to understand utterances beyond the words spoken.
When we interpret sentences with 'as ~ as' properly, we can understand not
only its basic usage but also its expressive interpretations.
References


Appendix

Example sentences in junior high school English text books for the second year students

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<th>Text book</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
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| NEW HORIZON   | ●Knowledge is important for democracy.  
                 It's as important as freedom.       | p.76         |
<p>| 平成 4 年検定 (東京書籍) |                                                                         |             |
| NEW HORIZON   | ●His cooking is usually as good as my mother’s.                         | p.82         |
| 平成 8 年検定 (東京書籍) |                                                                         |             |
| NEW HORIZON   | ●One day they fly as high as a bird on Elliott’s bike and go to a forest. | p.77         |
| 平成 13 年検定 (東京書籍) | ●They fly as high as a bird.                                           |             |
| NEW HORIZON   | ●One day they fly as high as a bird on Elliott’s bike and go to a forest. | p.79         |
| 平成年 17 検定 (東京書籍) | ●They fly as high as a bird.                                           |             |
| NEW CROWN     | ●This is as popular as the V-sign.                                      | p.68         |
| 平成 8 年検定 (三省堂) | ●This gesture is as popular as the V-sign.                             |             |
|               | ●This gesture is as popular as the V-sign.                             | p.99 文法のまとめ |</p>
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<tr>
<th>NEW CROWN</th>
<th>面積の検定 (三省堂)</th>
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<tr>
<td>The surface of a regular roof is over 50 degrees. It's as hot as sand on a summer beach.</td>
<td>My bag is as big as yours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is as hot as sand on a summer beach. (それは夏の浜辺の砂と同じくらい熱いです。)</td>
<td>文法のまとめ 2つ[2人]のもの[人]を比べて「…と同じくらい～」というときには、&lt;as + 形容詞 + as ...&gt;の形を使います。</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>ONE WORLD</th>
<th>平成 4 年検定 (教育出版)</th>
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<td>And now the Rolling stones are as famous as the Beatles.</td>
<td>The Rolling Stones are as famous as the Beatles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>British English is as easy as American</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NEW CROWN

平成 17 年検定

面積の検定 (三省堂)

The surface of a regular roof is over 50 degrees. It's as hot as sand on a summer beach.

My bag is as big as yours.

It is as hot as sand on a summer beach.

文法のまとめ 2つ[2人]のもの[人]を比べて「…と同じくらい～」というときには、<as + 形容詞 + as ...>の形を使います。

ONE WORLD

平成 4 年検定 (教育出版)

And now the Rolling stones are as famous as the Beatles.

The Rolling Stones are as famous as the Beatles.

British English is as easy as American
<table>
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<th>平成 8 年検定 (教育出版)</th>
<th>English.</th>
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<td><strong>ONE WORLD</strong></td>
<td>●Yes, he is as good as a professional player.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>平成 13 年検定 (教育出版)</td>
<td>●He is as tall as his father. (彼は父親と同じくらい背が高い [身長が同じ]。)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ONE WORLD</strong></td>
<td>●This area is as famous as Broadway in New York.</td>
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<tr>
<td>平成 17 年検定 (教育出版)</td>
<td>●The work was as hard as sports training! ●Wow! That dog is very big. ●Yes, but my dog is as big as that one.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunshine 平成 4 年検定 (開隆堂)</td>
<td>●I think I'm as old as you.</td>
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<td>Sunshine 平成 13 年検定</td>
<td>●It's as tall as your house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(開隆堂)</td>
<td>Sunshine</td>
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<td>平成 17 年検定 (開隆堂)</td>
<td>●Every year we hold this contest in November. It's as exciting as Field Day.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>●How big is your dog? It's as big as yours.</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL ENGLISH</td>
<td>●I am as tall as my mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>平成 13 年検定 (学校図書)</td>
<td>●Here is a mark for recycling. Plastic bottles can become shirts, pens and so on. Such things are as good as new ones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>●Sue is as old as Ryo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>●Sue is as old as him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>●Mike is as old as Ryo.</td>
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</table>
| | ●Mike can run as fast as Hiroshi. | 「マイクと売は同じ年齢です」というように、程度が同じであること を表すときには、「as＋形容詞＋as」を使いま
| TOTAL ENGLISH | P.77
<p>|  | 2つのものを比べて「同じくらい～だ」と言う。 |
| 平成17年検定 (学校図書) |  | p.87 Check It Out 5 |
|  | 「ミヒと俊は同じ年齢です」というように、程度が同じであることを表すときには、「as+形容詞/副詞+as」を使います。 |
|  |  |  |
| COLOMBOUS | p.44 |
| 平成4年検定 (光村図書) |  |
|  |  |
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<th>COLUMBUS 21</th>
<th>●Yuka thinks Korea is as cold as Hokkaido.</th>
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<td>平成 13 年検定（光村図書）</td>
<td>●We eat a special cake as round as the full moon.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>●This cake is as round as the full moon.</td>
<td>p.59</td>
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<td></td>
<td>●Ottawa was not as cold as Moscow.</td>
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<td>●Hiro studies English as hard as Sanae.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language Focus 4</td>
<td>「〜と同じくらい…です」と比べていく言い方</td>
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<td>&lt;as＋形容詞(副詞)の原级＋as&gt;を使います。</td>
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