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.