ASPECTS

OF THE STUDY OF SYNTACTIC SYNONYMY IN MODERN ENGLISH AND AZERBAIJANI LANGUAGES

ASPECTOS DEL ESTUDIO DE LA SINONIMIA SINTÁCTICA EN LAS LENGUAS INGLÉS Y AZERBAIYANO MODERNAS

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ABSTRACT

Syntax provides a window into grammatical structure across languages, and syntactic synonymy—different constructions conveying identical meaning—reveals both shared conceptual cores and language-specific emphases. Yet comparative studies of syntactic synonymy in typologically diverse families remain scarce, particularly between Indo-European and Turkic languages. This study fills that gap by comparing Modern English (Germanic Indo-European) and Azerbaijani (Oghuz Turkic). Using criteria of semantic commonality, and structural-functional variation, the research identifies syntactic synonyms in authentic texts. Results show that, despite their typological differences, both languages employ parallel mechanisms to express the same semantic relations through distinct structures: English relies on transformational variants, while Azerbaijani leverages its agglutinative morphology. Systematic correspondences emerge—most notably between subordinate clauses and participial constructions—pointing to universal patterns that underlie language-specific realizations of syntactic synonymy. These findings inform translation studies by clarifying structural equivalences, enrich language pedagogy with alternative expressive strategies, and support computational linguistics—particularly paraphrase generation and semantic analysis—through explicit identification of syntactic synonyms. Empirically grounded, this work also contributes to theoretical linguistics by illustrating how Universal Grammar principles manifest alongside language-specific adaptations.

Keywords: Typologically diverse languages, Linguistics, Terminology, Synonymy, Syntactic structure.

RESUMEN

La sintaxis ofrece una perspectiva sobre la estructura gramatical de las distintas lenguas, y la sinonimia sintáctica (diferentes construcciones que transmiten un significado idéntico) revela tanto núcleos conceptuales compartidos como énfasis específicos de cada lengua. Sin embargo, los estudios comparativos de sinonimia sintáctica en familias tipológicamente diversas siguen siendo escasos, especialmente entre lenguas indoeuropeas y túrquicas. Este estudio subsana esta laguna comparando el inglés moderno (indoeuropeo germánico) y el azerbaiyano (túrquico oghuz). Utilizando criterios de semántica común y variación estructural-funcional, la investigación identifica sinónimos sintácticos en textos auténticos. Los resultados muestran que, a pesar de sus diferencias tipológicas, ambas lenguas emplean mecanismos paralelos para expresar las mismas relaciones semánticas a través de estructuras distintas: el inglés se basa en variantes transformacionales, mientras que el azerbaiyano se vale de su morfología aglutinante. Surgen correspondencias sistemáticas, especialmente entre cláusulas subordinadas y construcciones participiales, que apuntan a patrones universales que subyacen a las realizaciones específicas de cada lengua de la sinonimia sintáctica. Estos hallazgos fundamentan los estudios de traducción al aclarar las equivalencias estructurales, enriquecen la pedagogía lingüística con estrategias expresivas alternativas y apoyan la lingüística computacional, en particular la generación de paráfrasis y el análisis semántico, mediante la identificación explícita de sinónimos sintácticos. Con base empírica,

este trabajo también contribuye a la lingüística teórica al ilustrar cómo los principios de la Gramática Universal se manifiestan junto con las adaptaciones específicas de cada lengua.

Palabras clave: Lenguas tipológicamente diversas, Lingüística, Terminología, Sinonimia, Estructura sintáctica.

Introduction

Syntactic synonymy refers to the ability of different syntactical structures to express the same meaning or fulfill the same function within a language or between languages. This phenomenon is particularly fascinating when comparing languages from different language families, such as Modern English, a Germanic language of the Indo-European family, and Azerbaijani, a Turkic language of the Oghuz branch. The study of syntactic synonymy not only reveals the structural complexities of these languages but also has practical implications for translation, language teaching, and linguistic theory. Modern English is known for its syntactic flexibility, influenced by its Indo-European history and its contact with other languages, while Azerbaijani, as a Turkic language, is characterized by its agglutinative morphology and strong influence from Persian and Arabic languages in its historical development. Syntactic synonymy is a subcomponent of grammatical synonymy, which encompasses the semantic and functional equivalence between words, word combinations, clauses, and subordinate constructions. It focuses on how different syntactic structures can express the same meaning. For example, in English, the following sentences are syntactically synonymous because they convey the same idea with different structures:

- "When he entered the room, he greeted everybody most kindly."
- "Once inside the room, he cheerfully said hello to everyone."
- In Azerbaijani, a parallel example would be:
- "Xəstə olduğundan o, evdə qalmalı oldu."
- "O, evdə qaldı, çünki xəstə idi" (He stayed at home because he was sick).

These constructions illustrate how the same semantic relationship can be expressed through different syntactic structures, whether within a single language or across languages. Historically, the study of syntactic synonymy has its roots in Western linguistics. Henry Sweet (1891) and Hendrik Poutsma (1926) explored parallel syntactic constructions based on similarity of meaning and function. Sweet, in his *A New English Grammar: Logical and Historical*, highlighted how variations in word order and syntactic constructions could maintain the same meaning in English. Poutsma, in *A Grammar of Late Modern English*, analyzed parallel structures that served equivalent functions, laying the groundwork for the study of syntactic synonymy. Otto Jespersen (2013) formally introduced the term "syntactic synonymy," although he did not provide clear criteria for defining it. Jespersen noted, however, that syntactic structures can be considered synonymous if they serve equivalent functions in different contexts. For example, he stated that syntactic constructions that allow substitution without altering meaning are a central phenomenon in English grammar.

In the Azerbaijani context, Mammadov (1985) is a key figure. In his book *Azərbaycan dilində qrammatik sinonimlik (feil formaları əsasında)*, Mammadov classifies grammatical synonymy into three categories, with syntactic synonymy being the second. He provides specific examples of how verb forms and subordinate constructions in Azerbaijani can be synonymous, especially in tenses. For example, Mammadov notes that syntactic constructions in Azerbaijani, such as causal clauses, can vary in form but maintain the same semantic function (Bakhshaliyeva, 2019).

In recent years, research has emerged that enriches the study of syntactic synonymy between different (Filippovna, 2023; Yuzhakova, 2020). For example, in the analysis of 19th-century Udmurt manuscripts, it is observed that explanatory subordinate phrases exhibit syntactic synonymy phenomena, such as the transformation between subordinate clauses and simple or coordinated structures, evidencing functional flexibility in communicative contexts. Furthermore, a tendency toward the predominance of explanatory subordinate clauses over other types is identified, although with variations in their frequency depending on the text and the period (Utkina, 2024b, 2024a). On the other hand, Klavan et al. (2025) establish that syntactic synonymy implies not only structural equivalence but also semantic and stylistic nuances, where certain constructions reflect the main meaning and others complement it. This approach is applied in the study of syntactic variations in complex texts, where the choice of one structure or another depends on pragmatic and contextual factors. In the case of the Azerbaijani language, although research is not widespread, studies on the structure of compound sentences and the history of verb forms stand out. Different works underline the complexity of the syntactic system in this language, especially in the use of subordinate clauses and their historical evolution, which suggests the possibility of investigating phenomena similar to syntactic synonymy (Abbasova, 2024; Ahmadzade, 2023; Gulzoda, 2024).

The study of syntactic synonymy has significant implications in several fields, highlighting its relevance. Some of these fields are:

- *Translation:* Recognizing synonymous syntactic structures allows translators to choose constructions that preserve meaning and naturalness in the target language. For example, a translator may choose a participial construction in Azerbaijani to reflect an English sentence with a subordinate clause.

- *Language Teaching:* For students of English or Azerbaijani as a second language, understanding syntactic synonymy fosters greater expressive flexibility and reduces errors caused by linguistic interference.

- *Theoretical Linguistics:* This study contributes to the debate on Universal Grammar, highlighting how languages from different families can converge on certain syntactic functions, despite their structural differences.

Thus, the study of syntactic synonymy between Modern English and Azerbaijani reveals a complex and enriching linguistic landscape. Existing research demonstrates that both languages can express similar meanings through diverse syntactic structures, reflecting both universal patterns and linguistic particularities. However, limited scope and a lack of clear criteria suggest the need for broader and more systematic research. Furthermore, the development of more robust theoretical frameworks for defining syntactic synonymy could facilitate more precise comparisons. Therefore, in this paper, we analyze the most representative elements of the study of syntactic synonymy in these two languages, highlighting the similarities and differences in their structures, the strengths and weaknesses of existing research, and the implications for various fields.

DEVELOPMENT

The exploration of syntactic synonymy contributes significantly to the understanding of language variation and flexibility, particularly in formal written discourse where stylistic nuances play a vital communicative role. In contemporary linguistics, syntactic synonymy—like other types of synonymy such as lexical, morphological, and stylistic—constitutes one of the major scientific and theoretical problems. Syntactic synonymy is a multi-faceted linguistic phenomenon that becomes salient within the syntactic system of a language, occupies a significant place in that system, and is studied as an integral part of it. Both local and international linguists—including Russian, Turkic, and Azerbaijani scholars—have investigated this issue, particularly with regard to grammatical synonymy, each approaching the phenomenon from specific theoretical perspectives. During the initial stages of research,

the boundaries of syntactic synonymy, especially within phrases and sentences, were not clearly defined, and the linguistic nature and universal foundations of syntactic synonymy remained inadequately clarified. Moreover, in languages with different structural systems, various aspects of syntactic synonymy have been examined, but in some instances, the phenomenon has been viewed from a stylistic angle, as the substitution of one language unit by another, while in other cases, the synonymy of sentences that exhibit semantic equivalence has been emphasized.

For instance, while Azerbaijani may rely on participial phrases, English often prefers relative clauses to express identical semantic relations. This divergence not only marks structural variation but also influences stylistic interpretations. Furthermore, theoretical approaches such as Halliday's functional grammar underline the significance of clause equivalence in meaning representation. Similarly, transformational grammar explains how deep structures manifest surface-level alternations that carry synonymous implications. In application, syntactic synonymy plays a pivotal role in translation, where faithful yet context-sensitive rendering of structures ensures textual fidelity. Likewise, in NLP tasks like paraphrase generation, distinguishing near-identical constructions enhances model precision and output variation.

Overall, diverse perspectives have emerged among scholars regarding the phenomenon of syntactic synonymy. Some linguists emphasize a "uniform semantic relationship" between synonymous constructions, while others highlight the principle of "complete grammatical parallelism" (Gvozdev, 1952, p. 175; Kovtunova, 1955, p. 133). A third group of linguists regards the "grammatical-structural proximity" of comparable syntactic units as the key criterion (Shendels, 1959, p. 71; Yartseva, 1958, p. 26). The term syntactic synonym has been well received and widely accepted in the field of syntax. It was first introduced into linguistics by A. M. Peshkovsky, who noted that word combinations and different sentence types can form grammatical synonymy with each other (Peshkovsky, 1964, p. 57). According to Galkina-Fedoruk, both word combinations and sentence constructions fulfill the same function and are unified around a common meaning, although they differ in their structural mechanisms. For example: "отцовский дом" (father's house) and "дом отца" (house of the father), or "человек с кривым носом" (man with a crooked nose) and "кривоносый человек" (crooked-nosed man) (Galkina-Fedoruk, 1958, p. 8).

The essence of syntactic synonymy is shaped by differences in developmental stages of various syntactic constructions, in their primary lexical features, grammatical meanings, similar grammatical roles, and structural

relationships (Kononenko, 1976, p. 19). In his research, S. N. Seytlin distinguishes two types of syntactic synonyms:

1. Model synonyms, which are realized during speech production and are syntactically patterned;

2. Concrete synonyms, which are specific sentences supported by clearly defined syntactic and lexical means.

He argues that sentence synonymy may be based on the identity of syntactic models. For example: Они враги (They are enemies) – Они враждуют (They are hostile); В поле вьюга (There is a snowstorm in the field) – В поле метель (There is a blizzard in the field); Я тревожусь (I am anxious) – Я в волнении (I am in anxiety) – Я обеспокоен (I am worried). The semantic closeness in different syntactic models (i.e., based on lexical morphemes) is maintained. For instance: Когда взошло солнце, мы отправились в поход (When the sun rose, we set out on a hike) – После восхода солнца мы отправились в поход (After sunrise, we set out on a hike). These are examples of concrete syntactic synonyms.

It is plausible to suggest that different syntactic constructions reflect similarities in deep semantic structure. These models represent typical communicative situations and, as a result, attain the status of syntactic synonyms. The categorization of syntactic units as "isotypic," "equivalent," or "heterogeneous" has at times complicated the clear scientific classification of this phenomenon. Consequently, scholars have referred to synonymy as encompassing isotypic, equivalent, and heterogeneous units alike.

Azerbaijani linguist Professor Y. Seyidov has rightly emphasized the role of syntactic synonymy in both language and speech. While its roots may lie in grammatical categories and it operates within that grammatical framework, its scope clearly extends beyond the boundaries of grammar. Syntactic synonymy provides valuable data for determining the functional domains, comparative positions, and frequency of use of different grammatical categories. It also sheds light on distinctions between literary and colloquial language, as well as between written and spoken registers of the literary language. Furthermore, it serves as a useful tool for comparing and distinguishing among stylistic varieties of standard language.

Syntactic synonymy is one of the most widely observed phenomena in syntactic structure. Unlike other types of synonymy (lexical, stylistic, morphological), syntactic synonyms emerge from the convergence of word combinations, simple sentences, and complex sentences around a shared grammatical meaning. In such synonymy, morphological markers of case, word order, intonation, and the use of auxiliary words all play a significant role. It should also be noted that researchers have employed various terms in relation to syntactic synonymy, including "word combinations," "sentence models" (E. I. Shendels), "syntactic combinations" (V. P. Sukhotin), "parallel speech structures" (A. N. Gvozdev), and "syntactic units" (R. S. Zuyeva). These diverse terminological approaches underscore the theoretical and practical importance of further research into the phenomenon. The significance of the topic lies in the goal of maximizing and accurately using the synonymic resources of both language and speech in order to facilitate clearer and more nuanced expression of thought.

Although the study of syntactic synonymy does not have a long history in world linguistics, interest in the subject began to increase in the 1930s. In the early stages, several issues were conflated or only superficially addressed under the umbrella of syntactic synonymy. Later research clarified that structural variation and repetition of meaning alone are not sufficient for synonymy; a syntactic synonym must also exhibit meaningful grammatical similarity. In our view, linguistic studies have thus far treated the subject only briefly, and it was during the Soviet period that monographic investigation of syntactic synonymy became prominent. Consequently, it can be concluded that the study of syntactic synonyms, their variants, and equivalents from the perspective of syntactic stability—along with the structural-semantic investigation of their internal syntactic relationships and the expressive mechanisms underlying these relationships (e.g., synonymy between simple and complex sentences)—constitutes one of the key issues in speech syntax. This is because what may appear as regular equivalence at first glance (e.g., the synonymy of verbal constructions, the synonymy between subordinate clauses and verbal phrases, isotypic subordinate clause synonymy, synonymy among various types of subordinate clauses, etc.) requires further detailed examination.

As noted by Abdullayev K.M., Mammadov A.Y., and others:

A text is a syntactic complex that eliminates the relative incompleteness or semantic deficiency of another syntactic complex, namely the sentence, from a semantic standpoint. The text itself, therefore, demonstrates absolute semantic completeness. Consequently, it may be stated that the text functions as a key factor in the reception of semantic information by the recipient during the communicative act. (Abdullayev et al., 2012, p. 13).

One of the essential tasks of text linguistics is to identify the syntactic phenomena that manifest within a text. Among these phenomena is syntactic synonymy. A text is a layered linguistic unit built around certain modal

characteristics and a pragmatic structure, where various lexical, grammatical, and logical relations are fused to convey information (Galperin, 1981, p. 72).

There are established criteria for identifying syntactic synonyms within texts. Clearly, synonymic connections and relationships exist across various domains of language, and they can be identified within those domains—such as lexicon, phraseology, morphology, and syntax. In general, the concept of synonymic relationships among linguistic units is grounded in the universal and diverse principles of dialectical theory, which are formed by the objective interplay of linguistic events and relations. Philosophically, the problem of synonymy is considered broad, encompassing similar or closely related meanings. Syntactic synonymy is a specific type of relation wherein linguistic units converge based on their semantic proximity. In syntactic terms, the notion of formal divergence and semantic similarity is reflected in the comparative analysis of utterance constructions. These relations often involve class-subclass hierarchies, among others. Like other types of synonymy, syntactic synonyms are formed based on the principle of proximity among syntactic units.

Syntactic synonymy is considered a general theoretical issue. For this reason, it affects all levels of language and is regulated by both internal and external grammatical conditions. It also possesses distinctive semantic and structural-grammatical features. Being a multifaceted linguistic phenomenon, syntactic synonymy can be encountered across phonology, syntax, morphology, speech culture, stylistics, and beyond. While synonymy was initially studied in the lexical domain, it later extended to syntax, where scholars began investigating the functions and positions of these complex constructions. This shift occurred because exploring syntactic synonymy within the domain of syntax provides clarity on onomasiological description, transformational analysis, and interpretive understanding of texts. Studying synonymy within the syntactic space sheds light on the mechanisms of similarity and divergence in the syntactic system, bringing into focus the internal contradiction, variation, and specificity of the language's isomorphic system. It thus deepens our understanding of the nature of this linguistic phenomenon.

A number of scholars have contributed to the study of syntactic synonymy. Among Russian linguists: A.M. Peshkovsky, I.I. Kovtunova, A.N. Gvozdev, G.I. Rikhter, V.P. Sukhotin; among English linguists: O. Jespersen, D. Kerme, G. Poutsma, C. Kennedy, G. Sweet, N. Chomsky, C.C. Katts; among German linguists: I.M. Jilin, E.P. Shendels, G.V. Tsareva, L.I. Belousova; and in Turkology: Sh. Khanbikova, M.M. Ibrahimov, M. Sergaliyev, Sh.S. Aylarov, A.N. Kononov, N.A. Baskakov, A.A. Yuldashev,

N. Abdullayeva, among others. In their research, linguists have generally sought to clarify the mechanisms of similarity and divergence between linguistic objects and phenomena.

According to I.M. Jilin, syntactic synonyms are syntactic constructions—such as sentences, phrases, expressions, and other structural forms—that express similar or closely related meanings, share adequate grammatical meanings, and exhibit parallel syntactic relations (Jilin, 1974, p. 332). Determining what criteria should be used to identify syntactic synonymy in texts is a matter of debate. V.N. Yartseva explicitly argues that the main criteria are "identical grammatical meaning and structural proximity" (Yartseva, 1961, p. 116). A.S. Hornby identifies the following core features of syntactic synonyms:

1. Semantic commonality, meaning that most syntactic units convey similar meanings;

2. The potential for mutual substitution between syntactic units with shared core meaning;

3. Diverse grammatical encoding and formal variation of syntactic units (Hornby, 1996, p. 334).

According to P.V. Sukhotin, mutual substitutability is a crucial and objective feature of syntactic synonymy. That is, the possibility of replacing one syntactic construction with another is a vital indicator of synonymy. Thus, the interchangeability of one syntactic construction with another clarifies the essence of the syntactic synonym (Sukhotin, 1960, p. 160). Similarly, I.M. Jilin considers mutual substitution to be the principal criterion for syntactic synonymy. He outlines five distinguishing criteria for synonymic syntactic models:

1. Possibility of mutual substitution in the same syntactic environment and context;

2. Identity of semantic nuances across different structural models;

3. Adequacy of grammatical meaning, whereby different sentence models perform the same syntactic function;

4. Structural uniformity across models;

5. Perceptibility of synonymous models (Jilin, 1974, p. 332).

These are the criteria generally used to define syntactic synonymy. The core criterion is mutual substitutability. The defining feature of a syntactic synonym is the identity of meaning combined with structural-functional variation, which distinguishes it from related units such as syntactic variants and syntactic doublets.

When comparing syntactic synonymy with syntactic homonymy, it is important to recognize that the creation of

synonymy is not solely based on syntactic tools but also involves lexical and morphological means. Syntactic homonymy occurs when a syntactic construction has an identical structure but expresses different syntactic meanings. Both homonymy and synonymy in syntax are derivational phenomena with different appearances; identical structures with differing meanings mark the boundary between synonymy and homonymy. Syntactic synonymy, therefore, represents a regular feature in the grammatical system's development and constitutes one of the most crucial resources for linguistic enrichment. Future research may involve corpus-based investigations across genres and registers to quantify the use and distribution of syntactic synonym pairs. Such empirical data can validate theoretical classifications and refine our understanding of context-sensitive preferences. Furthermore, incorporating insights from psycholinguistics may shed light on how native speakers process synonymous syntactic forms and what cognitive preferences underpin their usage.

Synonymous relationships exist in every language and emerge through various linguistic units such as words, word combinations, grammatical forms, and syntactic constructions. In English, the relationships between syntactic units are generally divided into two categories: general and specific. General relationships occur among almost all word combinations and sentence constructions. For instance, through syntactic connections, nominal, verbal, and other phrases, as well as compound and complex sentences, are grouped around common categories. Specific relationships, in contrast, manifest as individual instances of these general connections. In English, frequently observed correspondences between subordinate clauses and verbal phrases, or among clauses of similar or differing types, illustrate such specific relationships. These occur when the semantic potential of a subordinate clause aligns with the core meaning of a verbal construction, thus establishing a syntactic synonymic relationship.

The choice of synonymous linguistic devices, including syntactic ones, is determined by the speaker's autonomy. The selection of a particular form depends on the speaker's background and worldview. For example, while one speaker of English may say "The boy will read the book," another may express the same content with "The book will be read by the boy." Both constructions are asymmetrical, and the transformations between them do not form a symmetric relational network; instead, they represent transformation rules between structurally distinct sentence types. Researchers have also addressed the functional use of syntactic synonymy in English discourse. They highlight its role in avoiding repetition, expressing meanings with greater precision, evoking emotional or stylistic nuance, and clarifying the tone and intent of an utterance.

CONCLUSIONS

The investigation of syntactic synonymy reveals its pivotal role in the architecture of language, particularly in clarifying how linguistic form interacts with meaning across diverse syntactic configurations. As demonstrated throughout this study, syntactic synonymy is not merely a stylistic device or incidental feature but a profound linguistic phenomenon rooted in the structural and functional mechanisms of language. Syntactic synonymy encompasses a spectrum of grammatical and semantic correspondences, ranging from the mutual substitutability of phrases and clauses to broader constructions reflecting equivalence in deep semantic structures. Its analysis requires not only the comparison of surface-level forms but also an understanding of their underlying syntactic functions and pragmatic roles. It also serves as a bridge between grammatical variation and communicative intent, reflecting the flexibility of language in expressing the same conceptual content through structurally distinct means.

In this study we show that syntactic synonymy is both a universal and language-specific phenomenon. While the underlying mechanisms—such as the preservation of core semantic meaning and syntactic functionality—remain constant, the expression of these mechanisms varies depending on the typological nature of each language. This has been exemplified through comparative insights from Azerbaijani and English, languages that, despite their structural differences, display comparable patterns in the formation and deployment of syntactic synonymy. Furthermore, the identification of syntactic synonyms within a text reveals the dynamic interaction between syntax, semantics, and discourse. The presence of synonymous constructions within syntactic fields and their organization into macro- and micro-level structures points to a layered, hierarchical understanding of language. These structures not only represent grammatical variation but also encode subtle shifts in tone, emphasis, and communicative purpose, which are essential for textual cohesion and stylistic diversity.

The importance of this field of inquiry is further underscored by its implications for language teaching, stylistics, translation studies, and computational linguistics. For instance, in language pedagogy, teaching syntactic alternatives can enrich learners' expressive capacities. In translation, recognizing synonymous constructions enables more faithful and nuanced renderings across languages. In computational contexts, identifying syntactic synonymy can support more accurate natural language processing

tasks such as paraphrase generation and semantic equivalence detection. In sum, syntactic synonymy constitutes a core area of theoretical linguistics, providing insights into the structural elasticity and expressive depth of language. By bridging grammar and meaning, it contributes to a holistic understanding of how languages operate, evolve, and accommodate speaker choices. The study of syntactic synonymy is thus not only of descriptive interest but of critical importance to our understanding of language as a system of structured, purposeful variation.

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