

English Corner 14: grammatical equivalents

Only equivalent grammatical structures (adjectives, adverbs, phrases, clauses, nouns, pronouns etc.) are compared by some grammatical devices. The most commonly encountered devices are **conjunctions**, either **coordinating** conjunctions, which can be **non-adversative** (linking *similar* grammatical terms: **and, then, or, not**) or **adversative** (linking *contrasting* grammatical terms: **but, yet**), and **discontinuous** correlative conjunctions, which either link *related* grammatical equivalents (**as far as ..., as well as ..., both ... and ..., if ... then ..., not only ... but also**) or *alternative* grammatical equivalents (**either ... or ..., neither ... nor ..., on the one hand ... on the other ..., whether ... or ...**). Some **adjectives** also require only similar grammatical forms to be compared. Examples are given below of their proper and improper use.

Correct comparisons

- **Adjectives** may be conjoined by **and** [the spermatozoa swim **fast and straight**], **not** [it was **hot not cold**], **but** [The method is **time-consuming but cheap**] and **yet** [My supervisor was **firm yet kind**], as can **adverbs** [The spermatozoa swam **rapidly then slowly**].
- **Nouns** and **gerunds** (verbal nouns) can be linked by **and** [**Eating and drinking** are allowed in the social room], **or** [**Eating or drinking** is not allowed in the laboratory] and **either ... or** [He should open **either the window or the door**]. When comparisons are made **pronouns** may be used to prevent repetition of **nouns**, whether linked by the adjective **unlike** [**Unlike spermatozoa** from other species, **those** [*i.e.* spermatozoa] from man are characterised by incomplete replacement of histones], **than** [**Lymphocytes** from treated patients were larger **than those** [*i.e.* lymphocytes] from untreated patients] or **similar to** [**Growth** in the treated group was **similar to that** [*i.e.* growth] in controls]. With **like** used as an adjective [**Like her husband, Dr Yeung** studied for a PhD at Reading], the linked **noun** may be elided when the **genitive** is used [**Like her husband's** [*i.e.* PhD], **Dr Yeung's PhD** was conferred at Reading]. With **discontinuous conjunctions** **nouns** may not be strictly comparable if they are of different **number** [**Neither the professor** [*i.e.* singular] **nor the students** [*i.e.* plural] were to blame].
- **Phrases** may be linked by **either ... or** [He was **either at home or at the office**], **not only ... but also** [The birth rate varies **not only between cities but also between areas within the city**], **both ... and** [You should inform **both the Chief Editor and the Institute Director**] and **as well as** [Their job is to design the primers **as well as to validate them**].
- **Verbs** and **clauses** may be linked by **and** [Dr Jones is **clever and seems professional**], **but** [The cleaners **sweep the floors but scientists sterilise the bench tops**], **whether or not** [She asked **whether or not** I had read Cooper's monograph on the epididymis], **as far as ... it is** [**As far as next season goes, it is** too early to make forecasts], **both ... and** [You should **both inform the Chief Editor and telephone the Institute Director**], **either ... or** [He should **either open the window or open the door**], **if ... then** [**If you administer too much anti-androgen then** mating performance will be reduced], **neither ... nor** [He could **neither admit that he was right nor consider that he was wrong**], **not only ... but also** [The birth rate **not only varies between cities but also differs between areas within the city**], **on one hand ... on the other** [**On one**

hand, the results could reflect the maturity of the spermatozoa, *on the other*, they may merely reflect their age].

Common errors in making comparisons between non-equivalent grammatical structures

- In [Like her **husband**, Dr Yeung's **PhD** was made at Reading] a **person** (husband) and an **inanimate object** (PhD) are being compared. The sentence can be made grammatical by emphasising that the two PhDs are compared by making husband genitive [Like her **husband's**, Dr Yeung's **PhD** was made at Reading. Like her **husband's PhD**, Dr **Yeung's** was made at Reading].
- In [Unlike other **species**, **human spermatozoa** are characterised by incomplete replacement of histones] a **nomenclature** (species) is compared with **cells** (spermatozoa). For a comparison of spermatozoa between species, grammar demands that only the cells be compared [Unlike **spermatozoa** from other species, **human spermatozoa** are characterised by incomplete replacement of histones]; the use of a **pronoun** would eliminate repetition [Unlike **spermatozoa** from other species, **those** (*i.e.* spermatozoa) from man are characterised by incomplete replacement of histones].
- In [Lymphocytes from treated patients were larger **than** untreated **patients**] and [Growth in the treated group was **similar to controls**] a particular **group of people** (patients, controls) is compared with a particular **cell type** (lymphocytes) or a **physical attribute** (growth). For similar objects to be compared, the introduction of a **pronoun** suffices to provide good grammar [Lymphocytes from treated patients were larger **than those** [*i.e.* lymphocytes] from untreated patients. Growth in the treated group was **similar to that** [*i.e.* growth] in controls].
- In (He should **either open the window or the door**), a **clause** (open the window) is compared with **noun** (door). A **verb** can be added to the noun to make a clause that can be compared (He should **either open the window or open the door**). Alternatively, the **verb** can be removed from the clause (moved before **either ... or**) to compare nouns (He should **open either the window or the door**).
- In [He could admit **neither that he was right nor wrong**], a **clause** (admit that he was right) is compared with an **adjective** (wrong). As above, a **verb** can be added to the adjective to make a compared clause [He could admit **neither that he was right nor that he was wrong**], but this introduces repetition of **that he was**, which can be avoided by moving the words outside **neither ... nor**, for a comparison of adjectives [He could admit **that he was neither right nor wrong**]. In this situation, it is more usual to use a **negative** verb with **either ... or** [He could **not admit** that he was **either right or wrong**].
- In [You should **both inform the Chief Editor and the Institute Director**] and [The birth rate **not only varies between cities but also between areas within the city**] **clauses** (inform the Chief Editor/varies between cities) are compared with **phrases** (the Institute Director/between areas within the city). As above, moving the clausal **verbs** outside the linking structure generates valid, comparable phrases [You should **inform both the Chief Editor and the Institute Director**. The birth rate **varies not only between cities but also among areas within the city**]. Alternatively, **verbs** can be added to the phrases to generate compared clauses [You should **both inform the Chief Editor and write to the Institute Director**. The birth rate **not only varies between cities but also changes between areas within the city**].