

# Introduction

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## 1. Encoding similarity

Recognition of similarity has been proposed to be fundamental to human mental object representations and categorization (Rosch, 1975; Goldstone, 1994; Cooke et al., 2007; Hahn & Ramscar, 2001; Hampton, 2015 among others). *Like, way, such and as*, grouped under the category of similarity, have been listed among semantic primes, i.e. “simple universal concepts that are embedded in the lexicons of all (or most) human languages” (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014: 11–12). One way or another, the concept of similarity is believed to be ubiquitous across languages. It has multiple facets: from physical resemblance to vague reminiscence to simulation (Fortescue, 2010), from similarity of manner to similarity of quality (Insara, 2021).

In linguistic literature, similarity has been largely examined in the context of ‘sameness’ and the discussion has focused on the question whether the two notions are considered parts of one conceptual continuum ‘same’ – ‘similar’ – ‘different’ or whether they are juxtaposed (Sovran, 1992; Arutjunova, 1990; Haspelmath & Buchholz, 1998; Fortescue, 2010; Treis & Vanhove, 2017; Insara, 2021; Umbach & Gust, 2021). In this sense, similarity has been further classified along two dimensions of contrast: scalarity vs non-scalarity and equality vs inequality (Bužarovska, 2005), covering both exactness between two objects (identical dimension or degree) as well as their partial similarity (being reminiscent of, seeming to, (vaguely) reminding of). Another fruitful avenue of research has been the study of the link between similarity on the one hand and unrealis, evidentiality and epistemic and non-epistemic modality on the other (Letuchiy, 2008; Creissels, 2017; Gipper, 2018; Wiemer, 2024). Even though various subtypes of similarity depending on the base of comparison have been taken into consideration, including but not limited to physical resemblance (similarity in shape or other visual property), functional resemblance (acting in the manner of something else or having the same status) and evaluative resemblance (similarity in

value), most of the studies have been engaged with inspection of similarity of manner (1), (consider Giomi, 2022), while similarity of quality (2) remains under-studied:

(1) He sings *like* a nightingale (Haspelmath & Buchholz, 1998: 278)

(2) There is movement towards, I think, something *in the nature of* a pluralistic system (Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's Dictionary)

In this volume, we would like to refine the distinction between different types of similarity, and to draw particular attention to markers of similarity of quality. Typically, being part of a nominal phrase, they reveal a tendency to be based either on a genitive structure (e.g. *tipo* in Romance languages < *del tipo*, Polish *typu<sub>GEN</sub>*, *pokroju<sub>GEN</sub>*), like in (3), or on a prepositional phrase, like in (4). The latter can involve various prepositions, such as *in* + (*Det*) + *N* + *of/Genitive* in languages of various groups (e.g. English *in the nature of*, German *in der Art von*, French *dans le genre de*, Polish *w rodzaju* and *w stylu* or Russian *vrode* and *v duxе*) or *na 'onto'* + *N +GEN* in Slavic languages (Russian *napodobie*, *na fason*, Ukrainian *na zrazok*, Polish *na kształt*, *na wzór*, *na obraz*, Czech *na způsob*, Serbian *na foru*) comparable to *à la (manière de)*, *à l'image de* in Romance languages:

(3) Pol. zdarzali się także ludzie *pokroju* krawca Kujawskiego (NKJP)  
 happen<sub>3PL.PAST</sub> also people<sub>NOM</sub> pokroju tailor<sub>GEN.SG.M</sub> Kujawski<sub>GEN.SG.M'</sub>  
 <\*pokrój<sub>GEN.SG</sub>  
 'there were also people like (similar to) Kujawski, the tailor'

(4) Ru. Malen'kij xvostik *napodobie* porosjačego (RNC)  
 small<sub>NOM.SG.M</sub> tail<sub>NOM.SG.M</sub> napodobie pig<sub>ADJ.GEN.SG.M</sub>  
 < na+podobie<sub>ACC.N.SG</sub>  
 'a small tail similar to a pig's tail'

Similatives originate from various semantic classes, including demonstratives and a recently well-studied class of taxonomic nouns (TNs) (see Vassiliadou & Lammert, 2022; Mihatsch et al., 2023). The evolution of TN constructions proves that while entering the role of similatives, these items can gain approximative (quantifying and hedging), exemplifying, and quotative functions (Mihatsch et al., 2023). Achieving new functions may be paired with a change in the case assignment in the nominal complements in inflected languages, as well as opening up to non-nominal complements (phrases or clauses) (Janebová et al., 2023). However, it has also been observed that not all elements of the TN class follow this pathway and some, like Czech *druh* 'kind/sort', retain their subtype meaning. This begs the question why only some elements of one semantic class develop similiative function and what enables such functional layering. We propose that

investigating other semantic classes that give rise to constructions of similar developmental pathways, such as nouns with the meaning ‘style’ or ‘spirit’, can help us understand not only how similitives come to life but also what types of similarity they communicate and whether these strategies are shared by multiple languages.

## 2. Perspectives on similitives: An overview of contributions

The contributions in this volume address a set of central research questions: How can different types of similarity be distinguished, such as similarity of quality, degree, or manner, and intensional versus extensional similarity? What are the semantic sources of similarity markers? And what mechanisms and motivations underlie the changes that result in the rise of new similarity markers? To answer these questions, the authors investigate both morphosyntactic and syntactic properties of similitives and explore their role in categorization. Most studies adopt a comparative perspective, drawing on similarities and differences within and across language families, with their findings having broader typological relevance.

The first set of papers focuses on Germanic languages. Massaia examines the syntax of similitive clauses, raising the question of whether these should be analyzed as coordinate or subordinate constructions. She argues for a uniform analysis of Germanic similitives as prepositional relative clauses whose antecedent is the so-called parameter and whose relative marker is the standard marker. Variation between Germanic languages is argued to be restricted to the lexical items that can surface in each variety. Van Olmen and Van der Auwera turn to “wellness” equatives (e.g., *as well as*, *as good as*) and especially their additive extensions. They trace the diachronic development from literal to extended uses and argue that Dutch can be considered intermediate between English and German in this process. Finally, Gaeta examines equatives in Walser German, highlighting how sociolinguistic profiles and multilingual contact with Italian, French, Piedmontese, and Lombard have shaped the range and use of standard markers.

The theme of contact-driven development is further taken up by Hemmings, who investigates the interplay of language internal and language external factors in the development of similitives in Enggano. She shows how grammaticalization of similitives in this Austronesian language on one hand is shaped by regular sound changes and semantic extensions common for similitives cross-linguistically, and on the other, is based on external templates, reflecting contact-induced change due to contact with Indonesian.

The next group of papers turns to Romance languages. This part of the volume begins with Vassiliadou, Gerhard-Krait, and Lammert’s examination of two French markers of similarity, *genre* and *style*, traditionally described as taxonomic

nouns and manner nouns, respectively. Their study focuses on the correlation between the syntactic structures and the range of interpretations these items, showing how they yield readings from clear categorization to categorical approximation, depending on the properties of the comparator and comparandum. The following two papers take a comparative approach: Benigni and Bernasconi compare style-noun constructions in Russian and Italian to explore how they convey similarity based on manner. They show how nouns originally denoting “style” have shifted from their lexical meanings, functioning now primarily to express a relation of similarity between a referent *X* and a property associated with *Y*. In a similar vein, Vladimirska and Gridina examine the lexemes *esprit* in French (‘spirit/mind’) and *dukh* in Russian (‘spirit’), analyzing which semantic features allow these nouns to be recruited for similitative functions and how these uses differ from other types of similitives.

The final two papers turn fully to Slavic. Janebová, Martinková, and Kisiel provide a comparative corpus study of Czech and Polish, asking whether Czech – despite lacking prepositional patterns based on taxonomic nouns – has developed functional equivalents of the Polish markers expressing similarity, exemplification, and quotation. Stosic and Đurić close the volume with a study of four Serbian similitative markers originally belonging to the taxonomic and manner domains. They show that in Serbian, manner nouns constitute the primary source for denominal similitives, and that these items follow grammaticalization paths broadly parallel to those found in other European languages.

### 3. Variation and contact in similitative constructions

This volume focuses primarily on European languages, but the discussion is situated in the broader typological context of similitative clauses. The main language families under investigation are Germanic, Romance and Slavic. Unlike much of the earlier literature, English is not treated as the primary object of study in the Germanic domain; rather, it serves as a point of departure for exploring cross-Germanic variation. For example, Massaia examines English and German, occasionally drawing on Dutch, Swedish, and Icelandic, to uncover shared patterns across Germanic languages. Similarly, Van Olmen and Van der Auwera compare extensions of “wellness” equatives in three West-Germanic languages, testing the hypothesis that Dutch occupies an intermediate position between English and German.

Several contributions adopt a single-language perspective while situating their analyses within a broader typological background. Stosic and Đurić investigate markers of similarity of quality in Serbian, following recent research on

Romance, Germanic, and Slavic similatives. Reviewing the paradigms of Serbian taxonomic and manner nouns – identified in the literature as two main sources of similatives in European languages – they show that manner nouns are the primary source for denominational similarity markers in Serbian. Janebová, Martinková, and Kisiel, focusing on Czech, demonstrate that unlike most Slavic languages, which make extensive use of taxonomic nouns, Czech nouns such as *druh* ‘kind’ and *typ* ‘type’ never appear in prepositional similitive constructions. This absence stimulates the discovery of alternative, non-taxonomic pathways for the development of Czech similatives. In their analysis of French, Vassiliadou, Gerhard-Krait, and Lammert investigate the uses of *genre* and *style*, testing whether taxonomic versus approximative readings can be mapped reliably onto specific syntactic configurations. They argue that the semantic relationship between the compared elements is a crucial parameter for the emergence of particular similitive uses, thereby refining the link between similarity and categorization.

Other contributions adopt a broader contrastive approach across typologically distinct languages. Benigni and Bernasconi compare style-noun constructions in Russian (*v stile* ‘in the style of’) and Italian (*(in) stile* ‘(in) style’), showing that their development relies on metonymical abstraction and is less advanced than the grammaticalization of type-noun constructions. Vladimirska and Gridina examine *esprit* ‘spirit’ in French and *dukh* ‘spirit’ in Russian, two nouns with close semantic affinities but different usage patterns, demonstrating how they give rise to divergent similitive developments.

Finally, some papers highlight the role of contact-induced change. Gaeta extends Haspelmath’s (2017) typology of equative and similitive constructions to two Walser German linguistic islands in the north-western Italian Alps, in the Aosta valley. His analysis situates Walser German within the Germanic family, with reference to Standard German and other dialects. Hemmings, by contrast, turns to Enggano, an Austronesian language spoken off the coast of Sumatra, which is currently endangered due to the dominance of Indonesian and frequent code-switching. Both contributions illustrate how patterns in a surrounding language may provide a template for the development of new similitive constructions.

#### 4. Beyond type nouns: Alternative sources of similatives

Similatives are traditionally derived from type-noun constructions, and this grammaticalization pathway has been at the center of attention in previous studies. Unsurprisingly, several contributions in this volume revisit the development of type-noun constructions in individual languages. However, this topic is treated

less as a primary object of study and more as a background against which constructions with non-taxonomic nouns are analyzed. Vassiliadou, Gerhard-Krait, and Lammert illustrate this shift by contrasting the semantic and syntactic behavior of the French non-taxonomic noun *style* with the type noun *genre*. Their analysis highlights the interplay between linguistic and pragmatic factors in organizing both taxonomic and ad hoc conceptual groupings. Janebová, Martinková, and Kisiel compare taxonomic nouns in Polish (*rodzaj*, *typ*, *gatunek*) and Czech (*druh*, *typ*), showing that despite their shared origins, the range of uses and subsequent developments of these constructions diverge significantly in the two closely related languages. Gaeta contributes further by examining similitative constructions based on *art* ‘kind’ and *schort/suart* ‘sort’ in Walser German, enriching Haspelmath’s (2017) typology of equative and similitative constructions with data from a lesser-known German variety. In Serbian, Stosic and Đurić analyze the type noun *tip* alongside *fazon* ‘manner, fashion’, *fora* ‘joke, trick’, and *stil* ‘style’, revealing dominant grammaticalization paths in this so-far understudied language.

A number of contributions extend this focus to non-taxonomic nouns, especially those related to *style*. Benigni and Bernasconi provide detailed case studies of ‘in the style of’ constructions in Russian (*X v stile Y*) and Italian (*X (Prep) stile Y*). By mapping the full range of noun types that can occur in each position of the construction, they uncover a rich variety of syntactic configurations. Similar developments are traced in Serbian (*stil, u stilu*; Stosic and Đurić) and Czech (*ve stylu*; Janebová, Martinková, and Kisiel), suggesting that *style*-based similitives represent a cross-linguistically valid alternative pathway to the traditional type-noun model.

Other papers investigate prepositional structures with nouns outside the taxonomic and ‘style’ domains, highlighting their potential for grammaticalization into similitives. Janebová, Martinková, and Kisiel analyze Czech expressions such as *po vzoru* ‘after a model’, *v duchu* ‘in spirit’, *ve znamení* ‘in sign’, *na způsob* ‘in manner’, and *ve smyslu* ‘in sense’, comparing their grammaticalization to parallel structures in other Slavic languages. Stosic and Đurić examine Serbian *fazon* ‘manner, trick’ and *fora* ‘joke, trick’, tracing similarities and differences in their development as compared to other European languages. Vladimirska and Gridina show that the construction *X dans l'esprit (de) Y/X v dukhe Y* ‘X in the spirit of Y’ also yields similitive interpretations, while Hemmings provides an overview of the development of *kidé*, *kadé*, and *dé* in Enggano, derived from the verb *doo* ‘be similar’.

Finally, several contributions examine comparative structures that allow variation in the choice of comparee, parameter, and standard marker. These include English *in the same way* and German *auf dieselbe Weise* (Massaia); equative

expressions such as English *as good as, as well as, just as well* and their Dutch and German counterparts (Van Olmen and Van der Auwera); and the standard markers *wie/wétté* and *wi/wit* in Walser German (Gaeta). Together, these studies demonstrate how similative constructions can develop not only from type nouns but also from a wide range of lexical and syntactic sources.

## 5. Conclusions

We hope that readers of this special issue will appreciate the diversity of approaches and the variety of languages included. We opted to confront novel data with well-established ones in order to support new insights on certain aspects of the topic and to advance towards a global understanding of similatives. Tying the typological with synchronic and diachronic perspectives was one of our main goals for this issue. By bringing together case studies from both major European families and lesser-studied or contact-influenced languages, this volume highlights the complexity of similative constructions. It also shows how local patterns can contribute to the refinement of cross-linguistic generalizations, thereby opening new avenues for future comparative research.

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