



New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences



Issue 1 (2017) 357-363

ISSN 2421-8030

www.prosoc.eu

Selected paper of 8th World Conference on Educational Sciences (WCES-2016), 4-8, February 2016, University of Alcalá, Madrid, Spain

Means of expressing approximating quantities in English and Armenian

Yelena Mkhitarian*, Department of Teaching Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, Kh.Abovian Armenian State Pedagogical University, Tigran Mets 17, Yerevan 0010, Armenia.

Zhanna Ayvazyan^b, Department of Teaching Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, Kh.Abovian Armenian State Pedagogical University, Tigran Mets 17, Yerevan 0010, Armenia.

Suggested Citation:

Mkhitarian, Y. & Ayvazyan, Y. (2017). Means of expressing approximating quantities in English and Armenian. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*. [Online]. 01, pp 357-363. Available from: www.prosoc.eu

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Jesus Garcia Laborda, University of Alcalá, Spain

©2017 SciencePark Research, Organization & Counseling. All rights reserved.

Abstract

The paper gives a cross-linguistic analysis of approximations in English and Armenian, particularly in the sphere of numerical quantities. The study is carried out on two levels: semantic and structural. The comparative study shows that the three types of approximators: non-specified, specified with the two subtypes as well as quasi-specified approximators singled out in the paper as a third semantic type are widely represented both in English and Armenian. Semantically they are in most cases identical. The differences concern English approximators under, odd, the suffix-*ish* which have no counterparts in Armenian. Likewise, Armenian approximator *haziv* is not functionally analogous with the English semantic counterparts (*hardly*, *barely*) which are normally not used to express approximating quantities in English. Some synonymous approximators both in English and Armenian exhibit stylistic differences in their usage. The structural analysis shows that out of ten basic patterns that approximators are constituents of four are identical in the related languages, the rest six patterns equally divided between the compared languages exhibit specificity that is intrinsic to each of them.

Keywords: Approximation, approximating quantity, specified approximator, non-specified, quasi-specified, exact information, imprecision, comparative study, differences, similarities.

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Yelena Mkhitarian**, Kh. Abovian Armenian State Pedagogical University, Tigran Mets 17, Yerevan 0010, Armenia.

E-mail address: helenmkhitarian@yahoo.com / Tel.: +374-77-20-71-06

1. Introduction

The world surrounding us is too versatile, too complicated and complex to be thoroughly and completely perceived by our brain and senses. It is natural that our language is unable to reflect the objective reality with all its diversity in full scope and size. As Stubbs says, “When we speak or write, we are rarely clear, precise or explicit about what we mean - and perhaps could not be” (Stubbs, 1987, p.738). “This inevitably”, writes Channell, “leads to vagueness which is in some ways regrettable, but it is the price we have to pay for having a means of social communication flexible enough to cope with the infinite variety of our experiences” (Channell, 1994, p. 6). One of manifestations of vagueness is approximation, a linguistic category applied by language users when they fail or tend to avoid giving an exact and precise description of things, phenomena and properties. Linguistic means that actualize this category are called approximators. Lakoff relates approximators to the sphere of ‘fuzzy semantics’ (Lakoff, 1973). Quirk and Greenbaum refer this class of lexemes to *downtoners* alongside with *comprisers* which serve to express an approximation (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1978).

These linguistic units make up a specific semantic group “which enable speakers to give approximations rather than being absolutely precise and perhaps being heard as pedantic” (Carter and McCarthy, 2006. p.203). The category of linguistic approximation is a universal category existing in almost all languages and on all levels.

The aim of this paper is to present a comparative analysis of approximators in English and Armenian, which belong to languages of different morphological and syntactic structure. We must mention that this kind of cross-linguistic study is complicated by the fact that this class of Armenian lexemes has not been a special object of study in Armenian linguistics. Armenian linguists give only general characteristics of these lexical units, referring them to the class of quantity adverbs (Abeghyan, 1963; Asatryan, 1983; Papoyan and Badikyan, 2003). Our task to include the Armenian approximators in the present research may be regarded as a sort of pioneering work we are greatly encouraged to carry out. The analysis is made on two levels: semantic and structural.

Semantic analysis

Approximation is a relative category which implies estimating a number or amount with some element of imprecision predetermined by various extralinguistic factors. There are different types of semantic classifications of these lexemes suggested by different linguists. We will adhere to the classification of approximating quantities proposed by J. Channell (1994) according to which they may be classified into two basic types:

- 1) Approximations based on numerical expression (about five books)
- 2) Approximations based on non-numerical expression (heaps of books)

We will concentrate on the first type and find out how the approximating quantities of this type are expressed linguistically in both languages.

Linguists distinguish a set of lexical units which specify upper and lower limits for quantities on the number continuum. They are so-called partial specifiers which include *at least*, *at most*, *under*, *over*, etc. (Wachtel, 1981). Alluding to this taxonomy we propose somewhat a different classification of approximators which will include both specified and non-specified approximators as well as a new type that we suggest: quasi-specified. The classification includes both English and Armenian approximators.

- 1) Non-specified (App):** They show tendency towards both lower and higher limit.

English: about, around, round, approximately, roughly, and so

Armenian: mot (about), shurj (around), motavorapes (approximately), mi (some)

2) Specified (App): They show tendency towards either higher (increasing) or lower (decreasing) limit.

- a) **increasing** (App+): English - more than, at least, over, odd
Armenian - aveli kan (more than), amenakichy (at least), ants(past)
- b) **decreasing**(App-): English - under, less than, at most
Armenian - amenashaty (at most),shat-shat (atmost), haziv (hardly)

3) Quasi-specified (App ►): This type includes approximators approaching a definite quantity limit but not reaching it: English: nearly, almost; Armenian: grete (nearly), hamarya (almost),

The semantic analysis shows that the class of English non-specified approximators *about, around, round* are practically equivalent to Armenian *mot, shurj, motavorapes*.

There is a similarity between English pair *about* and *around* and that of Armenian *mot* and *shurj*: the members of the first pair stand in the same relation with each other as those of the second one: they have the same lexical meaning, with some difference concerning the stylistics of their usage: the first member of the pair (*about, mot*) occurs more often in oral speech, while the second (*around, shurj*) is more common in writing.

As far as *approximately* and its Armenian counterpart *motavorapes* are concerned, they are used in more formal speech. In Armenian, however, this regularity may be violated and the English *about* may be rendered in Armenian by *motavorapes*.

There is one more point identical in the two languages. It is the use of the English indefinite pronoun *some* and the Armenian numeral *mi*, which is the stylistic variant of the numeral *mek* (one) meaning *approximately*.

- **Some sixty people** attended the conference.

Na gutse kkhmi **mi erku gram**. (He may drink one two hundred grams) (Petrosyan,1983)

Speaking of differences we must mention in the first place English approximator (App-) *under* which has no counterpart in Armenian (in the sense of approximating quantity). On the contrary, its antonym *over* is identical to Armenian *anc*.

- He is **under 40** meaning He is not yet 40.

He is **over 40** = Na **40 anc** e meaning He is more than 40.

The meaning of English *under* may be rendered in Armenian descriptively: The young man is **under twenty** = **Eritasardy der ksan tarekan chka** (**The young man is not yet twenty years old**).

There is another difference concerning Armenian approximator *haziv*, which is semantically close in meaning to English *hardly/barely* but functioning somewhat differently: the English lexemes are not usually used with numbers to express approximation.

There is also similarity in the use of specified approximators, both increasing (App+) and decreasing (App-): *at most, at least, over, more than, under*, etc. and their Armenian counterparts: *amenashaty, amenakichy, aveli kan, antc*, etc.

English *nearly* and *almost* correspond to two Armenian approximators respectively: *grete* and *hamarya* with no visible semantic difference.

Of special interest are such expressions as *like* and *a sort of*, which are usually not included in the list of English lexemes expressing numerical approximation. The following example is taken from *Cambridge Grammar of English* by R. Carter and M. McCarthy, 2006).

- Between then and **like nineteen eighty four** I just spent the whole time, I mean for that whole **sort of twelve year period or whatever...**

The meanings of *like* and *a sort of* are rendered in Armenian by means of *mot* (about).

Structural analysis

This section examines approximators on the structural level. It shows in which sequence the approximators (*app*), numbers (*num*) and nouns (*n*) follow each other. Various configurations that are formed this way will serve as basis for introducing the following basic structural patterns characteristic both of the English and Armenian languages. The analysis points out similarities and differences that both languages display in this regard. Special attention is focused on those patterns which manifest some kind of specificity not observed in the other language and an attempt is made to show how these cases can be rendered in the respective languages.

Pattern 1

app + num + n

English and Armenian exhibit a close similarity in regard to this pattern. Here belong English *about, around, round, approximately, some, at most, at least, less/more than, nearly, almost*; Armenian *amenashaty, amenakichy, mot, motavorapes, mi, shurj, grete, hamarya*.

Pattern 2

English *num1 or num 2 + n*

Armenian a) *num1 kan num2 + n*

b) *num1 + te + num2 + n*

This pattern contains the English disjunctive conjunction *or*, which corresponds to two Armenian synonymous disjunctive conjunctions *qam* and *te*.

- Six **or** seven men were sitting easily round a table. (Christie)
- Bob Straudy hachakh er linum Geayi tany: Shabaty chors **qam** hing angam. (Zeytuntsyan) (Bob Straud often goes to Gaya's house: four **or** five times a week)
- Two **or** three weeks passed. (Maugham) (Erqu **te** ereq shabat ancav.)

Pattern 3

num1-num2 +n

The pattern is used exclusively in Armenian. Two numbers are joined together asyndetically: by a hyphen or a comma.

- Mtav nra graseghani daraqy, vortegh erevi **erqu-ereq** tught shrjkentronic stacats, **meq-erqu** dimum. (Petrosyan) (He opened the desk drawer and drew out **two-three** papers and **one-two** applications.)

Pattern 4

num + n + or so/something/whatever

The pattern with its structural synonyms is in common use in English; Armenian has no direct analogue.

- He may stay for **a week or something?** (Ahern)
- I mean the whole **sort of twelve year period or whatever...** (R. Carter and McCarthy)

The pattern may occur without the conjunction. It was **the forty something** you had to look out for. (COCA)

Close to the English pattern is the Armenian structure with *qoghmery*. Armenian approximator *qoghmery* may be considered identical to the English expression *in the region of*, but unlike the latter is normally found in the colloquial register, while the English counterpart is strongly limited to formal style.

- Na qga zhamy **uti qoghmery**. (He will come in the region of 8 o'clock)
- He earns somewhere **in the region of \$20000**. (OALD)

Pattern 5

English: *more/less than + num + n*

Armenian: *aveli kan + num + n*

The pattern is in common use both in English and Armenian. The Armenian pattern functions with a certain constraint: the structure with *less* is not widely spread in Armenian.

Pattern 6

num + app (odd) + n

This pattern is represented by the approximator *odd* and is characteristic of only English. It is used to show that the figure is slightly higher than the actual number. Semantically *odd* is close to *more than*. The pattern can be rendered in Armenian with the help of *aveli kan*, which is close in meaning to the synonymous version of the English pattern, i.e. *more than*.

Pattern 7

num(abl) +n + app

This pattern is in wide use in Armenian and corresponds to English Pattern 1.

- Na **tasnerqu hazar dolaric aveli** pogh uner. (Fitzgerald) (He had over twelve thousand dollars) (Fitzgerald)

The specificity of Patterns 7 is conditioned by the morphological factor: being a synthetic language, Armenian requires the noun (dolar) in the ablative case before the approximator.

Pattern 8

n +num(gen) + app

Like Pattern7, this one has no counterpart in English either. It is represented in most cases by the noun *qoghmery* and the numeral in the genitive case, which is predetermined by the synthetic nature of the Armenian language.

- **Zhamy ereki qoghmere** na eqav.(Fitzgerald) (He came **at about eight o'clock**) (Fitzgerald)

Pattern 9

num+ ish

The suffix –ish meaning ‘approximately’ finds no morphological analogue in Armenian. Its meaning is rendered in Armenian by the approximator *mot* (about).

- The woman was **thirtyish**. (Qiny **mot eresun** tareqan er).

Pattern 10

Double approximation

Double approximation which is inherent in both languages implies a combination of at least two patterns: We suggest the following patterns:1) Pattern 1+ Pattern 5{ He was offering him **nearly three thousand more than** he was currently earning at Harvard (Segal)};2) Pattern 1 +Pattern 3{Hastat hamozvats er, vor **qgan shat-shat vec-yot hogi. (Petrosyan)}**};3) Pattern 1 +Pattern 1{Giovanni stayed **at large nearly a week** (Baldwin)}.

As double approximation we can also view a combination of approximators and hedges, notably those expressing uncertainty (perhaps, maybe /Էրևի, գուցե):{That **perhaps** may be **about 1%** of the truth but coupled with the fact that I wanted to be a part of Theo and Bethany's life (Ahern)};{Ttkacoghy gramekenan er, vori arjev nstats mardy kliner **erevi eresunerek-eresunchors tareqan. (Petrosyan)}**. The man working at the typewriter could perhaps be thirty-forty years old.

Conclusion

The comparative study shows that the three types of approximators: non-specified, specified with the two subtypes as well as quasi-specified are widely represented both in English and Armenian. Semantically they are in most cases identical. The differences concern English approximators *under, odd, the suffix-**ish***, which have no counterparts in Armenian. Likewise, Armenian approximators *ants* (past) and *qoghmer* (within a certain time period) have no direct equivalents in English. Armenian *haziv* is not functionally analogous with the English semantic counterpart (*hardly*) which is normally not used to express approximating quantities in English. Some synonymous approximators both in English and Armenian exhibit stylistic differences in their usage. The structural study also shows that out of the ten basic patterns outlined in the research Patterns 1, 2, 5 and 10 are almost identical in both languages; the rest show non-equivalence: Patterns 4, 6, 9 are in common use in English, whereas Patterns 3, 7, 8 are found only in Armenian.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully thank Gohar Melikyan and Anna Kesoyan for their contribution and support.

References

- Abeghyan, M. (1963). *Hayots lezvi tesutyun*. Yerevan: Mitq.
Ahern, Cecella. (2005). *Love, Rosie*. New York: Hyperion.
Asatryan, M. E. (1983). *Zhamanaqaqits hayots lezu. Dzevabanutyun*. Yerevan: EPH-i hrat, 811-322.
Baldwin, James. (1956). *Giovanni's Room*. London: Penguin.
Carter, R., & McCarthy, M. (2006). *Cambridge grammar of English*. Cambridge University Press.
Channell, J. (1994). *Vague language*. Oxford University Press.

Fiction

- Fitzgerald, Scott F. (2014). *Mecn Getsbi.*(S. Seferyan, Trans.). Yerevan: Zangak publishing house. (Original work published 1973).
Fitzgerald, Scott F. (1973). *Great Gatsby*. Kiev: Dnipro Publisher.
Lakoff, G. (1970). A note on vagueness and ambiguity. *Linguistic Inquiry* 1, 357-359.
Lakoff, G. (1973). Questionable answers and answerable questions. In Braj B. Kachru, R. B. Lees, Y. Malkiel, A. Pietrangeli, S. Soporta (Eds.). *Issues in Linguistics: Papers in honor of Henry and Renee Kahane* (pp.453-467). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
Maugham, Somerset. (1972). *The Moon and Sixpence*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
Papoyan, A. N., & Badikyan, Kh. (2003). *Zhamanaqaqits hayots lezvi sharahyusutyun*. Yerevan: EPH-i hrat.
Petrosyan, Vardges. 1983. *Vipakner. hator erkrord*. Yerevan: Sovetakan grogh.

Mkhitaryan, y. & Ayzazyan, Y. (2017). Means of expressing approximating quantities in English and Armenian. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*. [Online]. 01, pp 357-363. Available from: www.prosoc.eu

Quirk, R., & S. Greenbaum (1978). *A university grammar of English*. London: Longman.

Segal, Erich. 1985. *The Class*. United States: Bantam Books.

Stubbs, M. (1987). An educational theory of (written) language. In T.Bloor & J. Norrish (Eds.). *Written language (British studies in applied linguistics)*. (pp. 737-775). London: Centre for Information on Language Teaching.

Wachtel, T. (1981). Distinguishing between approximations. *Journal of Pragmatics* 5, 311-322.

Zeytuntsyan, Perch. (1987). *Yntir Erker*. Yerevan: Sovetakan grogh.