

# Same, different and other as comparative adjectives – A uniform analysis based on French



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## Abstract

The goal of this article is to provide a uniform and non-specific analysis for all constructions involving terms expressing similarity and difference (*sidi* terms) such as *same*, *different* or *other* in French. Beyond theoretical economy, the motivation for this enterprise is based on crosslinguistic evidence showing a unique term for *same* through all constructions in many unrelated languages. The proposed analysis does not resort to any specific mechanism, but relates *sidi* terms to both comparatives and relational terms: *sidi* terms are assumed to be relational adjectives that are complemented by DPs or comparative clauses; in short, they are analyzed as comparatives of individuals. The diversity of constructions does not derive from multiple lexical entries, but from the presence of silent structures: in particular, the comparative clause can be fully or partially elided, and the phrasal or clausal complement of *sidi* terms can include a silent underspecified pronoun, which can get a pronominal, reflexive, reciprocal or vaguer interpretation. The behavior of *sidi* terms in islands argues for the presence of silent structures.

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## 1. Introduction

Adjectives such as *different*, *same* or *other* express similarity and difference (they will henceforth be called *sidi* terms): they make a comparison between elements. For instance in (1), *different* compares Lucie (the compared element) with Claire (the standard).

(1) Lucie is different from Claire.

These adjectives appear in various constructions as illustrated below with French *différent*. The first group of constructions involves a linker (e.g. *de* 'from', *que* 'than, as, that') and the standard (underlined) is at least partially explicit.

(1)' Lucie est différente de Claire.  
'Lucie is different from Claire.'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the article, I will provide English translations that are as close as possible to the French sentences to make the French structure transparent. Note that I will not specify grammaticality judgments for the English translations, but only for the French sentences.

- (2) J'ai vu un film différent de ce film-là.  
'I watched a movie different from this one.'
- (3) Paul a vu un film différent de ce que proposait Marie.  
'Paul watched a different movie than what Marie proposed.'
- (4) Paul a vu un film différent de Marie.  
'Paul watched a different movie than Marie.'
- (5) J'ai regardé un film différent d'hier.  
'I watched a different movie than yesterday.'

The second set of constructions does not exhibit any linker. In this case, the standard is implicit and can be retrieved based on sentence-external elements (underlined in (6)–(7)) or sentence-internal ones (underlined in (8)–(13)).

- (6) Lucie est allée voir Frida hier. Moi, j'ai vu un film différent.  
'Lucie watched Frida yesterday. As for me, I watched a different movie.'
- (7) [*Watching a trailer*] C'est un film différent que j'avais vu.  
'It is a different movie that I had watched.'
- (8) Ces films sont différents.  
'These movies are different.'
- (9) J'ai vu des films différents pendant les vacances.  
'I watched different movies during the holidays.'
- (10) Les critiques ont vu des films différents.  
'The critics watched different movies.'
- (11) Par rapport à la semaine dernière, chaque enfant est différent aujourd'hui.  
'As compared to last week, each child is different today.'
- (12) Chaque critique a vu un film différent.  
'Each critic watched a different movie.'
- (13) Paul et Claire ont vu un film différent.  
'Paul and Claire watched a different movie.'

To the best of my knowledge, most previous analyses (e.g. Heim, 1985; Dowty, 1985; Carlson, 1987; Moltmann, 1992; Barker, 2007) concentrate on so-called internal readings such as (10), (12) and (13) and propose specific mechanisms to account for them without relating them to the other cases or to other expressions of the language. A few studies (e.g. Beck, 2000; Brasoveanu, 2011) relate some of these constructions to each other, but not all of them: they assume the existence of several lexical entries for e.g. *different*. Moreover, the previous accounts usually focus on a single *sidi* term (mostly *same* or *different*).

The goal of this paper is to present a uniform analysis for all these constructions in French, which does not appeal to specific mechanisms: I will commit myself to a single lexical entry for each *sidi* term – *différent*, *même* 'same' and *autre* 'other', and derive the diversity of constructions from mechanisms that are already necessary to account for other elements of the language, i.e. relational terms and comparatives. Beyond theoretical economy, the main motivation for this enterprise is empirical: in many languages from different language families that I have surveyed (see Appendix A), a single word is used for *same* under all its uses.

In a nutshell, the variety of constructions will be derived from the presence of silent structures. In particular, I hypothesize that *sidi* terms are relational adjectives that can be complemented by comparative clauses, and these comparative clauses can be partially or fully elided. This hypothesis will be supported by the behavior of *sidi* terms in islands.

As a preview, here is the gist of the analysis. *Différent* is a relational adjective that selects two individuals, just like other relational terms (e.g. *enemy*, *neighbor*). The first individual (the compared element) is projected as a DP and the second one (the standard) can correspond to a DP or a CP just like comparatives; a preposition (linker) occurs between the DP/CP and the *sidi* term as is standard with relational terms (e.g. *enemy of*, *far from*). Moreover, the standard can be partially or completely silent: the comparative clause can be elided, and the DP can be silent and underspecified so that it is

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