TEMA

14

The Expression of Quality. The Expression of Degree and Comparison

Expresión de la cualidad. Expresión de grado y comparación.

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Material de elaboración propia a partir de las fuentes oficiales que se citan al final del tema. No es un temario oficial ni sustituye a la normativa publicada.

Índice

1. INTRODUCTION

2. THE EXPRESSION OF QUALITY

- 2.1. The concept of quality
- 2.2. Semantic classes of adjectives
- 2.3. Other ways of expressing quality

3. THE EXPRESSION OF DEGREE

- 3.1. Gradability
- 3.2. Intensifiers and downtoners

4. THE EXPRESSION OF COMPARISON

- 4.1. General view
- 4.2. The comparative and superlative of adjectives: form
- 4.3. The comparative and the superlative: use
- 4.4. Comparison of equality and similarity
- 4.5. Comparison by proportion and other constructions

5. PEDAGOGICAL AND DIDACTIC IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. The English system in contrast with Spanish
- 5.2. Typical errors of the Spanish-speaking learner
- 5.3. Place in the curriculum
- 5.4. Classroom proposals

6. CONCLUSION

Fuentes

1. INTRODUCTION

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? / Thou art more lovely and more temperate." With these two lines of Sonnet 18, Shakespeare does something that every speaker of English does dozens of times a day: he attributes a quality to someone (lovely, temperate) and then places it on a scale by means of comparison (more lovely, more temperate). Language does not simply label the world; it measures it. The adjective tells us what something is like, the adverb of degree tells us how much, and the comparative construction tells us how it stands against something else.

This topic deals with exactly that triangle: quality, degree and comparison. I will first examine how quality is expressed in English, mainly through adjectives, but also through adverbs, nouns, prepositional phrases and clauses. Secondly, I will study the notion of gradability and the expression of degree through intensifiers, downtoners and other devices. Thirdly, I will analyse comparison in its three forms: inequality (the comparative and the superlative), equality and comparison of degree by proportion. Finally, I will turn to teaching: I will contrast the English system with the Spanish one, review the typical mistakes of Spanish-speaking learners and consider the place of this content in the Secondary classroom, with some practical proposals, before closing with the conclusion.

Before moving on, I would like to mention the sources consulted. For descriptive grammar I have used Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik, A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language (Longman, 1985); Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum, The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language (Cambridge University Press, 2002), whose chapter 13 deals with comparative constructions; Douglas Biber, Stig Johansson, Geoffrey Leech, Susan Conrad and Edward Finegan, Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (Longman, 1999); and Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy, Cambridge Grammar of English (Cambridge University Press, 2006). For pedagogical usage I have consulted Michael Swan, Practical English Usage (Oxford University Press, fourth edition, 2016), and the grammar reference of the British Council's LearnEnglish. As for the legal framework, I will refer to Organic Law 3/2020 (LOMLOE), Royal Decrees 217/2022 and 243/2022, and Extremadura Decrees 110/2022 and 109/2022, as modified in 2023, together with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) and its Companion Volume (2020).