

## THE GRAMMATICAL STATUS OF *THE SAME*

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### ABSTRACT

The same, consisting of two words (or of clinic-plus-word), functions as a single grammatical item. Basically, it belongs to the determiner slot in phrase structure (together with articles, demonstratives and possessors). Like demonstratives, it may function as a substitution anaphor. But the same also shares some properties with adjectives — it can make up a complete copula complement, it may be the first element of a reduced relative clause, it may be followed by a preposition plus NP, and it has limited function as an adverb.

### 1. Introduction

Why is it that *same* must be accompanied by the definite article *the* when used as a copula complement, whereas *different* never is. Compare:

- 1) Today's message is [the same] as yesterday's message.
- 2) Today's message is [different] from yesterday's message.

When used as modifier within an NP, *same* must again be preceded by *the*:

- 3) The same message came today.

*Different* is most frequently preceded, within an NP, by indefinite article *a*:

- 4) A different message came today.

However, it is possible to use *the* with *different*. Suppose that every day for

three months the same message had appeared on your computer screen. Then one day a different message is found there. The following day, yesterday's message appears again. You can say:

5) The different message came again today.

Or you can even include both *the same* and *different*, in this order:

6) The same different message came again today.

One can get two adjectives together in an NP – for example, *the little white house*, and *a nasty wet day* – but not, as a rule, two from the same semantic type. Does the fact that *the same* and *different* may co-occur, as in (6), suggest that *the same* is not really an adjective at all, but instead some other kind of modifier within an NP?

To respond to this question, we shall first survey the set of adjectives which require two arguments, then examine the difference of meaning between *the same* and *identical*, before studying how *the same* slots into the structure of an NP and examining its grammatical properties.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Adjectives which require two arguments

Most adjectives – in English and in every other language – simply modify a noun. But there is a small set which indicate a relation between two arguments. Using X and Y for the arguments, one can say either:

7) X *be* ADJECTIVE PREPOSITION Y

or

8) X and Y *be* ADJECTIVE

For example, *different (from)* may occur in either of:

9) Today's message is different from yesterday's message.

10) Today's message and yesterday's message are different.

The constructions for *equal (to)* are illustrated by:

11) In a right-angled triangle, the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the

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<sup>1</sup> Huddleston (2002: 1137-40) provides an excellent discussion of same within "comparative constructions", a quite different matter from that investigated here.

sum of the squares on the other two sides.

- 12) In a right-angled triangle, the square on the hypotenuse and the sum of the squares on the other two sides are equal.

Adjectives relating to two arguments differ concerning which preposition(s) they require for occurrence in framework (7). The set includes:

- |                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 13) identical (to/with) | different (from/than/to) |
| similar (to)            | dissimilar (to/from)     |
| equal (to/with)         | separate (from)          |
| related (to)            | independent (of)         |
| comparable (to/with)    | consistent (with)        |
| simultaneous (with)     | concurrent (with)        |

At first glance, *the same* (*as*) appears to belong in this set of adjectives. For instance, one can say either of:

- 14) Today's message is the same as yesterday's message.  
 15) Today's message and yesterday's message are the same.

In this respect, *the same* (*as*) does pattern like adjectives *different* and *identical*. Once we look further, however, differences emerge. But before delving further into grammar, we can compare the meanings of *the same* (*as*) and *identical* (*to/with*).

### 3. Meaning contrast between *the same* and *identical*

The difference between the canonical meanings of *the same* (*as*) and *identical* (*to*) is perfectly straightforward:

- If "X and Y are *the same*", then  $X = Y$ . That is, there is only one entity involved.
- If "X and Y are *identical*", then there are two entities (that is, it is not the case that  $X = Y$ ). The two entities are very similar in certain respects so that it can be difficult to tell them apart.

A grammarian of English will say that determiners and possessors go into the same slot in NP structure. That is, determiners go into slot (c) and possessors also go into slot (c) – see §4. One cannot say that determiners and possessors go into identical slots since only one slot is involved, not two.

"Identical twins" are not one person but two people who it is difficult to tell

apart. This is why we use *identical* here rather than *the same*. In contrast, the “morning star” and the “evening star” are not two identical stars but one and the same star (the planet Venus) which is accorded different names depending on the time of day at which it is observed.

The canonical meanings of *the same* and *identical* are thus quite clear. There is – as is always the case – extension of meaning in everyday usage, such that in some circumstances *the same* and *identical* may be used interchangeably.<sup>2</sup> For example, if someone is comparing his stamp collection with that of a friend, he may exclaim (with pointing):

16) This stamp of mine is the same as that stamp of yours.

Strictly speaking, the collector should have used *is identical to* rather than *is the same as*. But since two stamps are being considered (rather than just one), the meaning is clear. Quite often *the same* is used as an abbreviation for *the same in* [some] *respect*. For instance, if one hears *The houses in that street are all the same*, it would probably be inferred that they are of the same design. The Germanic term *same* is far more frequent<sup>3</sup> than the Romance borrowing *identical* and, related to this, it has wide extensions of meaning.

However, there are many situations in which only one of *the same* and *identical* may be employed, as illustrated by the examples given a little earlier.

*Identical* is like *different* in that it may be preceded by definite article *the* or indefinite article *a*, whereas *same* may not occur with *a*.

Just as *the same* may be used with *different*, so it may be used before *identical*. For example:

17) The same (set of) identical twins came to Tom’s party as to Laura’s party.

It is clear that *identical* belongs to the set of double-argument adjectives illustrated in (13). We will see that *the same* has a different grammatical status; that is, it is not an adjective. *The same* can usefully be referred to as an “identifier”.

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<sup>2</sup> Dictionaries are typically lax in distinguishing meanings of semantically similar words. The second edition of the *OED* (Simpson – Weiner 1989), for instance, gives as definition of *identical* “the same, the very same: said of one thing (or set of things) viewed at different times or in different relations” and for *same* it says “the ordinary adjectival and pronominal designation of identity”.

The *Cobuild dictionary* aims to define less frequent words in terms of more frequent ones. For *identical* it states “things that are **identical** are exactly the same” (Sinclair 2001: 774).

<sup>3</sup> The *Cobuild Dictionary* (Sinclair 2001: xiii-xv, 774, 1373) lists *same* in frequency Band 5, while *identical* is in Band 2.





- 26) [Two messages [(which are) the same as yesterday's]<sub>RC</sub>] appeared on the screen.
- 27) [Two messages [(which are) different from yesterday's]<sub>RC</sub>] appeared on the screen.

This is a property which *the same* and *different* share with most adjectives. For instance:

- 28) [A new message [(which is) impossible to understand]<sub>RC</sub>] just arrived.

Many adjectives form an adverb by adding *-ly* (for details see Dixon 2005: 381-385). This applies to the double-argument adjectives in (13). One can say *John made his decision independently (of Mary)* and *Tom behaved similarly (to Kate)*. It is interesting that *the same* may function as an adverb (without any derivational suffix being added). Compare (examples from Huddleston 2002: 1138):

- 29) She treats them all differently.  
 30) She treats them all identically.  
 31) She treats them all the same.

Some speakers would prefer to say *He treats them all in the same way*, rather than (31). However, constructions such as (31) are fairly well attested although they may be of recent origin,<sup>5</sup> created by analogy with sentences like (29-30).

Having pointed out several respects in which *the same* behaves like adjectives, we can mention one way in which it shares a grammatical property with demonstratives. Substitution anaphora (Dixon 2003: 83-85, 111-112) may involve a demonstrative:

- 32) John has ordered coffee and I'll have that too.

*The same* may also be used as a substitution anaphor:

- 33) John has ordered coffee and I'll have the same.

*Different* and *identical* (and other double-argument adjectives) lack this property.

We can now turn to consideration of *the same* as copula complement, as illustrated at the beginning of this paper by sentence (1).

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<sup>5</sup> This is based on examination of the considerable corpus in the *OED* entry for *same*.

### 7. *The same* as copula complement

A copula complement may consist of an NP or of an adjective. A further way in which *the same* patterns with adjectives is that it may make up a copula complement on its own, as in (1) and:

- 14) Today's message is [the same] as yesterday's message.  
 15) Today's message and yesterday's message are [the same].

The interesting point is that, even when functioning as copula complement, *same* must still be accompanied by *the* (a demonstrative would not be appropriate in this context).

Instead of (14) and (15), one could say:

- 14') Today's message is [the same message] as yesterday's (message).  
 15') Today's message and yesterday's message are [the same message].

It could be suggested that (14') and (15') are the underlying structures for (14) and (15). In order not to state the word *message* three times it is omitted from the end of (15). And in (14) it is stated after *yesterday* instead of after *the same* (although it is understood to be in underlying structure after *the same*).

But, whether or not this analysis is accepted, it is a fact that this is another way in which *the same* behaves like an adjective, although in terms of position it is a determiner (slot c) within NP structure.

Once again, *same* requires a preceding *the*. This applies to *same* in all contexts in which it occurs. Examples from the *OED* show that *same* has required a preceding *the* from the earliest stages of the language. However, we could not regard *the same* as a single syntagmatic unit since *very* can intrude between definite article and *same* – *the very same message*. Maybe the association between *the* and *same* has some similarities to that between the two elements of a verb such as *bring in*. The phrasal verb *bring in* is a single lexical item but its components need not occur contiguously – alongside *The farmer brought in the cows* we get *The farmer brought the cows in*.

### 8. Summary

We have been discussing the “identifier” *the same* and *this/that/these/those same* which involve *same* preceded by the article *the* – from slot (c-i) in NP structure – or a demonstrative – from slot (c-ii). (We use *the same* as abbreviation for these five forms.)



- As regards position within an NP, *the same* belongs in slot (c). It is mutually exclusive with possessors – also in slot (c) – and may be preceded by items from slots (a-b) and followed by items from slots from (d) on.
- *The same* may function as substitution anaphor, like demonstratives which also belong to slot (c).
- *The same* shares an important property with double-argument adjectives (from slot f) – it may be followed by preposition plus NP.
- Like adjectives (in slot f) *the same* may be the first element of a reduced relative clause.
- Like many adjectives, *the same* has limited function as an adverb (and retains its form for this function, not taking derivational suffix *-ly* as adjectives do).
- Like adjectives, *the same* can make up a complete copula complement. We see that the identifier item *the same* has unique form, including definite article *the* (or, in some contexts, a demonstrative). It functions in some ways like a determiner and in other like an double-argument adjective.

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