Targeted concept: Equative constructions: “As...as” and “not as...as”

Form, meaning, and use dimensions

**Form**

1. As ...as and not as...as can be used with all parts of speech (adjective, adverbs, non-count nouns, count nouns, and verbs)
2. In sentences, the second as can be followed by clauses, reduced clauses, noun phrases, and subject pronouns
3. In sentences where the verb is repeated after the second as, a form of do/does/did can be used instead.
4. The same verb does not need to be repeated a second time.

**Meaning**

To show a degree of similarity or identity, or a degree of difference among people or things

**Use**

1. To indicate varying degrees of similarity and difference, with modifying adverbs (exactly, almost, not quite, nearly, practically, just about, nowhere near, not nearly, or not anywhere near)

   Ex. David is nearly as tall as Michael. (Michael is only a little taller than David.)

   David isn't nearly as tall as Michael. (Michael is much taller than David.)

2. To make tactful comparison (more polite and less direct): there is semantic nonequivalence between positive comparatives and negative equatives with negative polarity adjectives. It is considered more tactful to use negative equatives rather than comparatives.
Ex. Susie is dumber than Sonia. Vs. Susie is not as intelligent as Sonia.

3. To convey a sense of “same or more” in discourse

Ex. Mary is as tall as her father. (Mary and her farther are identical in height.)

Mary is as tall as her father. In fact, she’s taller than him.

Teaching and activities

A teaching context for this particular grammar lesson will be a follow-up lesson after students are introduced to expressing differences through comparatives and superlatives for intermediate level leaners. It also can be exclusively used as part of an enrichment program for advanced students who have already retained a good degree of grammatical knowledge, yet have not made great use of it due to lack of cognition and sensitivity to the interconnectedness of form, meaning, and use. Thus, this lesson will primarily place an emphasis on pragmatic knowledge, investing a great deal of class time understanding/practicing subtle semantic nuisances that might have been treated in students’ previous learning as identical, interchangeable meanings.

Depending on student’s command on forming this grammatical structure, the class might need to spend some time reviewing the form and the unmarked meaning of this grammatical structure, yet in a more extended, creative perspective. That is, rather than revisiting the domain of prototypical examples (i.e. “as adjective as”), students will be motivated to look at other non-prototypical cases utilizing other parts of speech. Students will be encouraged to “play” with the form on their own more creatively and actively, to explore the freedom they can have to deviate from their almost-fixed-form-creation. I firmly believe this will help students liberate themselves with the prescriptive mindset with grammar and start sensing an ownership of their literacy practice.
After students become more competent with the form, the class will zero in on connecting meaning and use. First, without explicit instruction, the class will be exposed to many spoken and written discourse data that reveals how artfully and strategically (whether it is wittingly or unwittingly) people use this particular form in both their everyday language and institutional language. The date will also demonstrate how unsuccessful, poor command of comparison structure may affect the interpersonal relationship or cause some communicative problems. Below are some concrete examples that will be provided to the students for in-depth investigation and discussion for use of equative construction and comparison: Advertising discourse, evaluative discourse (music criticism, movie criticism), or some comedic scenes from TV (i.e. Sheldon Cooper in The Big Bang Theory who does not think of others and thus makes many overtly impolite remarks). Looking closely at the use in many different contexts, the class will be guided to elicit meaningful usage patterns of the concept more explicitly.

Once the concept is internalized, the class will have a chance to practice this concept in a realistic context. Students are given a variety of data concerning three siblings (two of them are fraternal twins). The data contains height, weight, age, GPA, income, and I.Q. which naturally elicit a variety of comparative and equative structures. Students are noted that some topics can be very sensitive thus they should consider the notion of politeness/indirectness and level of specificity by employing tactful use of language and varying degrees of adverbials. To make this activity more authentic, students will be paired to create an informal conversation. The decision for which form is used will be determined by the reaction from the partner at hand, the relationship between the interlocutors and the siblings, and the mood of the conversation in action. Each team will have a chance to talk about what factors affect their online decision-making and the rest of the class will comment on the validity of the pairs’ language use.