

**SIGNAL-FIRST VERSUS NUMBER-FIRST: A TYPOLOGICAL
ASYMMETRY IN OPEN-QUANTITY CONSTRUCTIONS IN UZBEK AND
ENGLISH ONLINE NEWS DISCOURSE**

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Abstract. This paper examines open-quantity constructions — expressions that report a figure while leaving its upper bound unspecified — in a genre- and topic-balanced corpus of Uzbek and English online news articles. Drawing on 50 editorial texts (26,210 words) published between September 2025 and August 2026, it shows that the two languages differ not only in how often such constructions occur but, more consistently, in how their components are ordered. In English the openness signal invariably precedes the numeral; in Uzbek the numeral invariably precedes the postposition. No counter-example was attested. The asymmetry follows from the typological profiles of the two languages and reverses the sequence in which readers encounter framing information.

Keywords: open-quantity construction, vague quantification, word order, contrastive pragmatics, online news discourse, agglutinative typology.

1. Introduction

Vague or open quantification is a standard resource of news writing. Expressions such as English “more than 700” or Uzbek “5 850 dan ortiq” allow a writer to report a figure while declining to commit to its upper bound. The device is pragmatically useful: it protects the writer against later correction, yet it presents the claim with the surface appearance of precision. For this reason such expressions occupy an ambiguous position between legitimate hedging and what Cook [3] and Maillat and Oswald [8] describe as the construction of quasi-evidential effects.

Existing contrastive scholarship has approached these constructions primarily as a lexical phenomenon, comparing the frequency of individual items across languages. Hyland [6] describes the broader English hedging system in which they participate; Martin and White [9] locate them within the graduation subsystem of appraisal. What this literature has not addressed is the internal ordering of the construction — whether the openness signal precedes or follows the numeral — and whether that ordering differs systematically between typologically distant languages.

The present paper addresses that gap. Its aim is twofold: to establish whether the ordering of open-quantity constructions is systematic within each of the two languages under examination, and to determine whether any observed regularity follows from independent typological properties rather than from stylistic preference.

2. Material and method

The study draws on a purpose-built corpus of editorial articles from four online news outlets: Kun.uz and Spot.uz for Uzbek, The Guardian and Reuters for English. The corpus covers the twelve months from 1 September 2025 to 31 August 2026 and is synchronic in design: the objective is to compare two language systems at a single point in time rather than to trace change.

Only editorial material was admitted. Texts carrying a commercial label, columnists' opinion pieces, live blogs, readers' letters and personal profiles were excluded, each exclusion being recorded with its ground. Social-media material was excluded on three grounds: posts may be edited or deleted, which defeats replicability; platform composition differs between the two language communities, which defeats comparability; and speaker status in anonymous posts cannot be established.

Table 1. Composition of the comparative corpus

Parameter	Uzbek	English
Texts in comparative core	25	25
Total words	9,470	16,740
Mean text length	379	670

Topic: economics / health	10 / 15	13 / 12
Genre: hard news / analytical	20 / 5	17 / 8
Period: first half / second half	10 / 15	10 / 15

Comparison proceeds from the language-universal pragmatic function rather than from grammatical form, in line with the tertium comparationis principle as formulated by Krzeszowski [7] and James [5]. Open quantification was operationalised as the co-occurrence of a numeral with a marker leaving its upper bound unspecified. Each text was coded binarily for the presence of this function; the ordering of components was then recorded for every attested instance.

3. Results

Open-quantity constructions were attested in 52% of English and 20% of Uzbek texts. The frequency difference is itself of interest, but the structural finding is stronger: within each language the ordering of components proved invariant across the entire corpus.

Table 2. Attested orderings, by language

Uzbek: numeral → postposition	English: preposition → numeral
200 yildan ortiq	more than 700 items
8 soatdan ortiq uyqu	more than £2,800 a child
6 milliard yevrodan ortiq	More than 1.7bn people
5 850 dan ortiq baza stansiyasi	more than a half-dozen people
mingdan ortiq turdagi dori vositasi	over \$20 billion
ikki baravardan ko‘proq	as many as 7 million people
10 000 dan ortiq mijoz	up to 200,000 asylum seekers
yuz minglab odamlarning ma’lumotlari	more than 12% of total capacity

In English the openness signal — more than, over, as many as, up to — invariably precedes the numeral. In Uzbek the postpositional element — dan ortiq, dan ko‘proq — invariably follows it. Across fifty texts no instance departed from this pattern in either direction.

The regularity is not a stylistic preference but a consequence of independent typological properties. Uzbek is an agglutinative language in which relational meaning is carried by postpositions and suffixes appended to the noun phrase; English is an analytic language in which the corresponding meaning is carried by prepositional phrases preceding it. Bo‘ronov [2] and Yusupov [11] describe this contrast in general terms; the present data show one of its discourse-level consequences.

A related observation concerns the Uzbek marker “-gacha”, which sets an upper bound rather than leaving it open: “50 foizgacha arzonlashdi” (“prices fell by up to 50 per cent”). In one corpus text this element occurred four times in a single paragraph. Functionally it corresponds to English “up to”, and it likewise follows the quantified element, confirming that the ordering regularity extends beyond the core construction.

4. Discussion

The two orderings deliver the same propositional content, but they deliver it in reversed sequence. An English reader encounters the framing signal before the figure: by the time the numeral arrives, it has already been marked as a lower bound. An Uzbek reader encounters the exact figure first, and its openness is disclosed only afterwards.

Whether this reversal has measurable consequences for interpretation is a question that text analysis alone cannot settle. Work on anchoring effects in the processing of numerical information — summarised by Kahneman [4] — suggests that elements presented first may condition the interpretation of what follows, but extending that observation to the present case would require controlled experimentation. The claim advanced here is therefore restricted to the linguistic fact; its perceptual consequences are proposed as a hypothesis for subsequent testing.

Three limitations should be noted. First, the corpus is modest in size, and the results are accordingly presented as a robust tendency rather than a statistically established regularity. Second, mean text length differs between the two subcorpora (379 versus 670 words), which affects the frequency comparison though not the structural finding. Third, the Uzbek subcorpus contains a high proportion of texts

reworked from official documents or international agency reports; a corpus weighted towards independently authored material would provide a stronger test.

5. Conclusion

Open-quantity constructions in Uzbek and English online news discourse differ systematically in the ordering of their components, and the difference follows directly from the typological profiles of the two languages rather than from any discourse preference. The finding suggests that contrastive studies of quantification in media discourse should treat constituent order as a variable in its own right, alongside frequency. For translation practice it implies that rendering such constructions word for word will reverse the order in which framing information reaches the reader — a consequence that merits attention in the training of media translators.

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