TYPOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF COMPARATIVES OF INEQUALITY WITH AN EMPHASIS ON OLD ENGLISH *MORE THAN* EXPRESSIONS

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Resumen

El trabajo siguiente ofrece una descripción tipológica de los comparativos de desigualdad del tipo *more than*. La lengua de enfoque es el inglés antiguo y con este fin, se han revisado y resumido rigurosamente investigaciones previas sobre el tema. Con el fin de situar los comparativos de desigualdad del inglés antiguo (Mitchell 1985) dentro de un marco lingüístico más amplio, se empieza con la descripción de una variedad representativa de las lenguas del mundo (Stassen 1984), posteriormente de las indoeuropeas, y finalmente de las germánicas (Helfenstein 1870). Asimismo, se incluye una breve discusión de los resultados de un estudio preliminar sobre todos los comparativos de desigualdad que aparecen en el poema épico «Beowulf», a modo de ejemplificar la tipología expuesta anteriormente. Para concluir, se propone que el proceso de gramaticalización pueda servir como posible explicación a la evolución de la partícula comparativa desde una forma léxica a una gramatical.

Palabras clave: Comparaciones de desigualdad, *more than*, «Beowulf», gramaticalización.

Abstract

This paper provides a typological description of comparatives of inequality of the type *more than*. The emphasis is on this kind of comparatives in Old English, and to this end previous work on comparatives has been critically reviewed and synthesized: an account of comparatives is illustrated cross-linguistically (Stassen 1984), considering representative languages around the world, then Indo-European languages, and finally Germanic languages (Helfenstein 1870) in order to set the comparatives of inequality in Old English (Mitchell 1985) within a broader linguistic context. The results of a preliminary study on all comparatives of inequality in «Beowulf», an Old English epic poem, are briefly discussed as they exemplify the typology of comparatives previously examined. To conclude, *grammaticalization* is proposed as the plausible explanation for evolution of the comparative particle from a lexical to a grammatical form.

Keywords: Comparatives of inequality, *more than*, «Beowulf», grammaticalization.

1. Introduction

The focus of the present paper is a particular type of comparative construction, namely the comparative of inequality. Furthermore, I am interested in exploring this type of construction in Old English (OE), and the different ways in which it was used, within its cross-linguistic contextualization, that is, in relation to its sister Germanic (Gmc) languages on the one hand and other Indo-European (IE) language families on the other. With this in mind, I have reviewed some of the literature on comparatives, and in general, the information provided tends to focus on one or another aspect of the comparative construction, and thus the approach is never comprehensive. My goal then is to describe the comparative of inequality construction in OE in the context of other Gmc languages and briefly to look at the origin and development of the constituent parts of this construction. Finally, I will advance some preliminary comments based on an analysis of the expression under investigation in a selected OE text, *Beowulf*, following the typology of comparatives of inequality previously suggested[1].

The outline of the present study is as follows: first, in section 2, I will define comparatives of inequality in contrast with other types of comparatives, and will describe their constituent parts; I will then provide a brief typological overview of comparatives across languages in section 3[2]; section 4 is devoted to the IE languages, but with an emphasis on the Gmc languages so as to put the OE comparative of inequality in a wider linguistic context; section 5 provides then an account of the literature dealing with the comparative inequality in the OE period, exploring issues, such as the possible origin and development of the different types of comparatives of inequality and their constituent parts; next, I present the results of my preliminary analysis of all comparatives of inequality in Beowulf; I conclude with some final remarks and a note on grammaticalization, as this may be related to the evolution of comparatives of inequality.

2. Comparartives: Three Degrees

Adjectives and adverbs can express three different degrees of quality, namely the positive, as in 'red'; the comparative, as in 'redder'; and the superlative, as in 'reddest' (Smith 1999). Comparatives can in turn be divided

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[1] Due to space limitations, I can only share some general conclusions drawn from my preliminary analysis on all instances of comparatives of inequality in «Beowulf», those which I consider relevant to the present paper.

[2] Small (1923) already pointed out in his seminal work the importance of placing the comparative of inequality in the wider context of the IE family in order to understand this construction better.

into comparatives of equality, comparatives of inequality, and those constructions expressing negative of comparison. The first type of comparative refers to those constructions in which either two elements share the same degree of a particular quality or the same object of comparison refers to a second condition in the same degree. Comparatives of inequality express a contrast between the two elements compared or a difference in degree between different states of the same quality. Finally, the negative of comparison[3] negates a comparative of equality, and in doing so the construction acquires the sense carried by comparatives of inequality (Small 1929). The different types of comparatives can be exemplified as follows:

Table 1. Types of comparatives

Comparative of equality:	
Two elements, same quality:	*John is as smart as Mary.*
One element, two conditions:	*John is as smart today as he was yesterday.*
Comparative of inequality:	
Two elements, same quality:	*John is smarter than Mary.*
One element, two conditions:	*John is smarter today than he was yesterday.*
Negative of comparison:	
John is not as smart as Mary. = Mary is smarter than John.	

(Small 1929)

3. *Comparatives of inequality cross-linguistically*

Stassen (1984, 1985) proposed that the different types of comparatives correspond to certain syntactic patterns within each language. His criterion for coming up with a typology of comparatives of inequality is based not on form, but on meaning and function. In order to represent this cognitive criterion graphically, he devised a spatial configuration (following the tradition of Joly (1967), Seuren (1978) and others), in which the «relative degrees of intensity with respect to a certain quality are represented in terms of relative distances on an axis».
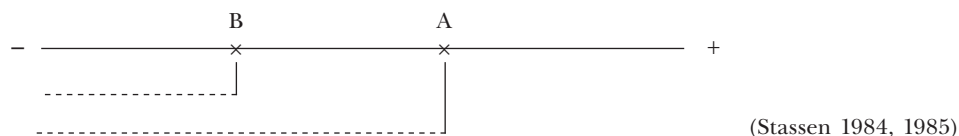
(Stassen 1984, 1985)

Figure 1. Spatial representation of degrees of intensity in comparatives of inequality.

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[3] Small (1929) noted that the negative of equality «is in effect a comparison of inequality, but fundamentally, and certainly syntactically, it belongs to the comparison of equality».

Thus, Fig. 1 represents a comparative construction of the type «A is bigger than B» and where the degree of intensity of the 'being big' quality is represented by the axis, and the two objects are juxtaposed in such a way that A, the one with the higher degree of the quality, not only is closer to the positive end but also envelops B, which is closer to the negative end (with the lower degree of the quality being compared).

Stassen thus produced an initial typology of representative languages around the world based on a parameter that would determine the semantic relation between the elements at play in the comparative construction. He used a basic terminology in which the *primus comparationis*[4] is the *comparee NP* (or nominal phrase), and the *secundus comparationis* is the *standard NP*, both referring to the noun whose quality is being compared and the noun against which the quality is being compared respectively; finally, the comparative predicate or *predicate* is the term that carries the qualitative meaning, which is usually the predicative adjective.

Stassen devised an initial typology of comparatives based on whether the Standard NP is coded by means of a *fixed* or a *derived* case in relation to the case of the comparee NP. He took this typology, which I will briefly describe right below, a step further in order to provide the motivations behind the resulting types of comparatives. To this end, he used a second typological parameter, namely the temporal sequencing of the elements participating in the comparison (for further discussion, see Stassen 1984, 1985). Due to the limited space and to the focus of the present study, I will only focus here on Stassen's initial typology of comparatives, which may prove more relevant to the typological study of the comparatives of inequality in OE.

The initial typology consists then of two major groups: in the first one the case of the standard NP is fixed, meaning that an oblique case will mark the comparison, and this case will always be the same one regardless of the case of the comparee NP. For example, in the following Latin comparative construction (1), the ablative marks comparison independently of the nominative case of the subject.

(1) *Cato*   *Cicero-ne*   *eloquentior*   *est*
    Cato   Cicero-ABL   more-eloquent   is
    comparee-NP   standard-NP
    'Cato is more eloquent than Cicero'

(Stassen 1984, p. 148)

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[4] The *primus comparationis* refers to the subject whose quality is being compared, and the *secundus comparationis* refers to the subject, which serves as a reference against which to compare the first subject.

Within this first group, two subgroups can be distinguished: the *direct-object comparatives*, where the standard NP is encoded as a direct object and is accompanied by a transitive verb meaning «to surpass» or «to exceed», and the *adverbial comparatives*, where the standard NP is encoded as an adverbial component, indicating separation from, movement to, or location on. The first one of these three adverbial comparatives is of particular interest to the present study in that, according to Stassen (1984), OE employed this type of comparative as a second option.

The second major typological group consists of comparison where the standard NP carries a derived case, namely a nominative or an accusative, which is determined by the case of the comparee NP. Thus the accusative case of the standard NP in (2) is determined by the accusative of the comparee-NP.

(2) *Brutum*   *ego*   *non*   *minus*   *amo*   *quam*   *te*
    B-ACC   I-NOM   not   less   love-*1Sg* than   you-ACC
    comparee-NP   standard-NP
    'I love Brutus no less than *you* (love Brutus)'

                                                        (Stassen 1984, p. 150)

Two subgroups can be identified within this second group: one where the NPs are in structurally independent clauses, the *conjoined comparatives*, and another one where the semantic relationship is marked through the use of a comparative particle. This last subgroup is, once more, of great significance to our analysis, since English belongs to it. Stassen (1984) noticed that this subgroup is not a «homogenous class», in that there is an array of particles across languages with a different origin and categorial status: it can be a connective, a subordinating conjunction, a temporal adverb (for example Dutch *dan*), a relative or interrogative pronoun (like Latin quam), or a negative element (as in English *than*, as has been claimed by Small, Seuren and others). Breivik (1994) points out that in the early stages of their development, the Gmc languages had a fixed-case comparative type by means of a dative as a way to express comparison of inequality. Later on, the case construction disappeared from all Gmc languages, except for Icelandic. In English, it came out of use in the second half of the 10th c. (Small 1929).

Stassen (1984) labels all subgroups, both the fixed-case comparatives and the derived-case comparatives, under a single typology of comparatives of six classes. He then tries to establish a correspondence between types and word order. Although the fixed-case types seem to follow a certain tendency toward one or another word order, including the one he alluded to as being a second option for comparison in OE (the adverbial comparatives within the fixed type), the derived-case comparatives do not seem to follow any

particular word order. I have summarized and graphically represented Stassen's typology of comparatives in table 2.

Table 2. Stassen's Typology of comparatives according to the semantic relationship between constituents

Type	Name	Case	Marking	Word Order
I	Separative	Fixed	Adv: from	sov
II	Allative	Fixed	Adv: to	vso
III	Locative	Fixed	Adv: on, at	sov, vso
IV	Exceed	Fixed	Direct Object	svo
V	Conjoined	Derived	Adversative Coordination	?
VI	Particle	Derived	Comparative Particle	?

(data from Stassen 1984)

Stassen (1984) observed that most of the languages that express comparison by means of a comparative particle also have an adverbial comparative as a second option, and that this is older than the other one. He explains this issue of chronology through the process of grammaticalization or syntactization, and provides an example from present-day English, where the comparative particle *than* is in the process of being grammaticalized from a conjunction into a preposition. Thus, he adds, one perceives «…than I» as an obsolete construction and «…than me» as more acceptable[5]. He also alluded to the underlying negative element of this comparative particle, as well as its relation to the demonstrative or relative pronominals. I will only provide a brief discussion of the possible origins of this particle further below, although they are not the focus of this study.

The comparative of inequality can then be expressed in a variety of ways around the languages of the world. An interesting fact pointed out by Stassen (1984) and, a decade later, by Breivik (1994) is that most languages do not have a separate construction, but employ existing ones to convey difference in gradability. Seuren (1984) in fact distinguished several types within this group, depending on how the relationship of gradability between the *primus comparationis* and the *secundus comparationis* is assigned. He provided examples, translated in English, for each of the representative languages he selected, as a way to demonstrate the relationship between the elements more clearly. In table 3 we can see his examples, but I have devised a formula for each of the types, so as to provide semantic syncretism.

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[5] This shifts seems to me to be more predominant in British English rather than, for example, in Standard American English, where the first expression is more common.

Table 3. Major types of comparatives of inequality around the world (excluding constructions with a comparative particle)

Language	Formula	English Equivalent
Malay	A and B, A is a	Jim and Joe, Jim is tall
Nahuatl	A is a, B is not a	Jim is tall, Joe is not tall
Samoan	A is a, B is b	Jim is tall, Joe is short
Hausa	A > B in a-ness	Jim exceeds Joe in tallness
Yoruba, Cambodian	A a > B	Jim tall exceeds Joe
Breton, Masai	A is a to B	Jim is tall to Joe
Japanese, Korean, Hindi	A is a from B	Jim is tall from Joe
Georgian	A is a on B	Jim is tall on Joe

Seuren (1984) drew attention to the semantic transparency of these types, as contrasted with those other constructions, which make use of a comparative particle.

In sum, Stassen's typology of comparatives is established under two criteria: the first criterion is based on the semantic relationship between the two nominal phrases being compared, and the second one is based on whether the comparison is marked on the standard NP by means of a fixed or a derived case. OE forms comparative constructions in two ways, with a dative as a comparative marker or with a comparative particle (*ðonne* or *þonne*).

4. Comparatives of inequality in the IE and Gmc languages

4.1. Comparatives of inequality in the IE languages

In the older periods of the IE languages, two types of comparatives of inequality can be observed: by means of a clause, or through the use of case. Small (1923) found reason to believe that the latter is an older construction: the case construction has a more limited application, since it can only be used when the two objects compared are in the nominative or accusative case, and when they refer to the same verb. Also, in support of this view, one should add that all modern Gmc languages have rid themselves of the case construction, with the exception of Old Norse (ON), leaving the clause construction as the only way of expressing the comparative of inequality.

Breivik (1994) provides a list of some of the comparative particles used in some of the IE languages, which I present here as a way to demonstrate the variety of particles in terms of origin and spelling as previously stated.

Table 4. Comparative particles in some IE languages

Sanskrit	*na*		
Lat	*quam*	OFrench	*com*
OSlavonic	*neželi*		
East Gmc		Goth	*þáu*
West Gmc	*þanne*	Mid. Dutch	*dan*
		OE	*Þonne, Þanne, Þænne*
		OHS	*than, danne, denne*
		OS	*than*
North Gmc	*þan, [þ]an, en*	ON	*an, en, þen*

(data from Breivik 1994)

4.2. COMPARATIVES OF INEQUALITY IN THE GMC LANGUAGES

Helfenstein (1870) provided a comprehensive description of comparative suffixes in the Old Germanic (OGmc) languages. He noticed two main comparative suffixes from the earliest stages of the IE family of languages: there is an early -*yans*, which in turn may have developed from -*yant*[6], from which the Teutonic languages get their main comparative suffixes; but there is also a second suffix, -*tara*[7] or -*ra*, used especially in Sanskrit and Greek.

The first of these suffixes, -*yans*, developed into the following suffixes of comparison:

Table 5. Suffixes of comparison developed from -yans

Sanskrit	*-yās or īyās*	as in	*nava > nav-yās*	'newer'
Greek	*-(i)an*	as in	*kak-ó > kák-iov-*	'worse'
Latin	*-yons, -ions, iōs > ior*	as in	*mag-no > mā-jor* [masc.]	'greater'
	> ius	as in	*> mā-jus* [neut.]	

(data from Helfenstein 1870)

For the most part, the OGmc languages made use of -*yans* as the archetypical suffix of comparison. From this suffix two different suffixes developed; in Gothic, they became -*yas* > -*is* and -*as* > -*ōs*, to which -*an* would be added if a masculine adjective or -*jan* if feminine, with a resulting -*izan* and -*izjan/-izein*

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[6] Other related IE suffixes that also replaced their final -t for an -s: -*ant*, -*mant*, and -*vant* (Helfenstein 1870).

[7] -*tara* may be a combination of the suffix -*ta* and the already comparative in meaning -*ra* (Helfenstein 1870).

for the first choice and *-ōzan* and *ōzjian/ōzjian* for the second. The selection between *-is* and *-ōs* seems to be based on euphonic motivations. Thus the positive adjective *manega* produced a comparative masculine *managiza(n)*, and a comparative feminine *managizei(n)* (Helfenstein 1870; Montes & Rodríguez 1995). Table 6 shows the paradigm of comparative suffixes in Gothic.

Table 6. Paradigm of comparative suffixes in Gothic

-yans	*-yas > -is +*	*-an* (masc.) = *-izan* (masc.)
		-jan (fem.) = *-izjan/-izein* (fem.)
	a-yas > -ōs +	*-an* (masc.) = *ōzan* (masc.)
		-jan (fem.) = *ōzjan/ōzein* (fem.)

(data from Helfenstein 1870)

The two comparative suffixes suffered rhotacism in all other OGmc languages (Helfenstein 1870; Montes & Rodríguez 1995). Thus *-is* and *-ōs* developed into *-ir* and *-ōr* respectively in Old High German, Old Saxon and Old Frisian[8]. OE seems to have had these two originally, but through lenition, they both merged into *-r* (Helfenstein 1870; Moore & Knott 1942). It should be noted that most scholars (Traugott 1992; Mitchell & Robinson 1992; Lass 1994; Smith 1999; and others) indicate though that the comparative suffix that was used in OE was primarily *-ra*, such in *gearu > gearora* 'ready, finished' (Quirk & Wrenn 1994). In addition, Quirk & Wrenn (1994) point out that when the adjective in the positive ended in *-e*, this would typically be dropped, as in *bliðe > bliðra* 'joyous'; *cene > cenra* 'bold, fierce'; *rice > ricra* 'strong, powerful.'[9] ON had the same outcome for *-ir*, whereas *-ōr* turned into *-ar*. To these suffixes were added the inflections corresponding to the weak declension of the adjective (Helfenstein 1870; Moore & Knott 1942) whether or not preceded by a determiner (Smith 1999). Robinson (1992) admits that, although both the weak and the strong declensions are possible, the weak declension is preferred in the Gmc languages.

4.2.1. *Anomalous Suffixes of Comparison in the OGmc Languages*

As mentioned before *-tara* or *-ra* represented the second type of suffix of comparison occasionally used by some of the old IE languages. There are

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[8] Lass (1994) is more specific about the kind of comparative suffix that was used in the OGmc languages. He claims that the first pair of suffixes is «more common in Gothic, the second one in [north Gmc] and OE, and OHG shows a mixture».

[9] Note, as one reviewer indicated, that the syncopation occurred in these words may be unrelated to the fact that they are comparatives.

a few instances of this anomalous suffix in the OGmc languages: Gothic *an-thara,* OHG *an-dar,* and OE *oðer,* all meaning 'other' and Gothic *hva-thar* and OE *hwæðer* meaning 'whether' (Helfenstein 1870). Sometimes, this suffix would lose its meaning over time and the more frequent comparative suffix *-ir/-ōr* would be added to this one creating a double comparative, as in OE *wyrsa* 'worse' (literally 'worser'), where *-ra > -sa* was added to the already comparative *wyr.*

4.2.2. Defective[10] Suffixes of Comparison in the OGmc Languages

Some adjectives are defective in that either the form in its positive degree lacks a comparative form or a comparative form lacks its correspondent positive form. In the latter case, the most common scenario is that the positive form became obsolete and was replaced by another form (Helfenstein 1870). Some of the adjectives that tend to be in this category are the equivalent to 'good,' 'bad,' 'small,' and 'big' (Burrow & Turville-Petre 1996; Moore & Knott 1942).

Table 7. Irregular comparatives in OGmc languages

	'good'		'bad'		'small'		'big'	
	pos.	*comp.*	*pos.*	*comp.*	*pos.*	*comp.*	*pos.*	*comp.*
Gothic	gōd-s	bat-iza	ubil-s	vair-s-iza	leitil-s	minn-iza	mikil-s	maiza
OHG	guot	peʒiro	ubil	wirsiro	luzil	minniro	mihhil	mēro
OS	gōd	betiro	ubil	wirso	luttil	…	mikil	mēro
OE	gōd	bet(e)ra	yfel	wyrsa	lytel	læssa	mycel	māro
OFris	gōd	betera	evel	wirra	litik	lessa (minnira)	… (grāt)	māra
ON	gōd	betri	illr	verri	litill	minni	mikill	meiri

(data from Helfenstein 1870)

4.2.3. Comparatives of Adverbs in the OGmc Languages

Only some adverbs, the *adverbia qualitatis,* could be used in comparative constructions[11] (Helfenstein 1870). These were not formed from the positive degree of the adverb, but they were modifications from the corresponding

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[10]   I use here and thereafter the term *defective* to refer to those adjectives that resort to suppletion in their comparatives, following the tradition of many grammars (that of Helfenstein's 1870, in this case).

[11]   Traugott (1992) claims that constructions with adverbs of comparison of inequality were more frequent than those formed with adjectives. An example of a typical construction with an adverb would have the form *þon, þy, þe* + comparative + *þe,* as in *þe ma þe hi dydon* 'any more than they did'.

comparative adjectives. These adverbs could form their comparatives in two ways: 1) the accusative neuter of the adjective serves as the positive degree of the adverb from which the comparative adverb would derive, and 2) a distinct form altogether. To the first class belong Gothic *managizō* 'many' and *minnizō* 'few' and OHG *mēra* 'many' and *minnira* 'few.' In the second group there are adverbs that form their comparatives by adding either *-ir* or *-ōr*, like the adjectives. Thus, we have Gothic *máis* (< *máiza*), OHG *mēr*, OS *mēr(r)*, OE *mā*, OFris *mā(r)*, and ON *meir* for adverbs of the *-is* type, and for example OE *smalor* 'mild' and *sparor* 'little' for the *-or* type. Other *adverbia qualitatis* in OE include *ær > ærra*; *east > easterra*; *inne > innerra*. Finally, comparative adverbs also include anomalous and defective forms, which coincide with those of the adjectives. Moore & Knott (1942) include in this group comparatives based on prepositions.

4.2.4. Comparatives in the Middle and New Gmc Languages

Once the Gmc languages reach their middle period[12], the comparative suffixes *-ir* and *-or* were not only used indiscriminately, but they also ended up merging into a single suffix *-(e)r*. The only criterion that can then be used to determine whether the original suffix was one or the other is the umlaut produced by the frontal quality of the suffix *-ir*. For example the effect of this suffix can be noticed in the comparative forms of the following Middle English (ca. 16th c.) adjectives: *long > lenger, strong > strenger,* and *old > elder*; although *longer, stronger,* and *older* were also used alongside the umlaut comparatives (Helfenstein 1870; Moore & Knott 1942; Barber 1997; Mitchell & Robinson 1992; Quirk & Wrenn 1994). To this day, the only adjective that has retained the umlaut is *old > elder*, although it competes with its alternative *older*, each being used in slightly different contexts. Also, the comparative suffix *-or* completely disappeared during the Middle English period, allowing for the *-er* suffix to become more settled, so that, by the modern period, it would become the only comparative suffix possible (Helfenstein 1870).

4.2.5. Comparatives with the particle more in the Modern Gmc Languages

All modern Gmc languages allow a second means of constructing a comparative of inequality, namely through the use of the comparative particle *more*, and its equivalents. Present-Day English (PDE) tends to use this construction with non-monosyllabic adjectives, although a lot could be said about how the frequency of use of either one or the other is shifting. By early Modern English, the dual comparative was in free variation, and there

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[12] What I mean by middle period covers a stretch of time that includes Middle English, Middle High German, and so forth.

may have been a stylistic difference between the analytic and the synthetic construction[13]. The synthetic form with -*er* may have been felt more colloquial than the analytic form with the comparative particle *more*, which was perceived as more formal. Also during the early Modern period, double comparisons were generally accepted (Quirk & Wrenn 1994), as Shakespeare proved with his «more nearer» from Hamlet. But the double comparative was not only common in drama, but in verse and prose as well (Barber 1997). At different times during the Middle Ages, English comparative particles *more* and *less* could also carry the lexical meaning of 'larger' and 'smaller,' as in: «a more requital» meaning 'a larger recompense' (King John) and as in: «less noses» meaning 'smaller noses' (Ben Jonson). German on the other hand uses this particle only when two qualities are compared: «mehr… als» (Helfenstein 1870).

To conclude this section, below is table 8, which presents lists of suffixes, cases, and particles, along with an example of an adjective in the comparative, in the different Gmc language families.

Table 8. Suffixes, cases, and particles in OGmc language families

Germanic Branch	Sub-branch	Language	Suffix	Case	Particles	Reflexes of the adjective 'old' in the comparative degree
East		Gothic	-*iz*-, -*ōz*-	Dative	*þáu*	*alþiza*
North		Old Norse	-*(a)ri*-	Dative	*en*	*ellre*
West	Southern	Old High German	-*ir*-, -*or*-	Dative	*daz, thanne, danne, denne*	*altiro*
		Old Saxon	-*er*-, -*or*-, -*ir*-, -*ar*-	Dative	*than*	*aldiro*
	Anglo-Frisian	Old English	-*ra*-	Dative	*þonne, þanne, þænne*	*ieldra*

5. Comparatives in OE

The majority of the literature consulted indicate that -*ra* was the suffix added to the stem of the adjective in order to form an inflectional comparative, although it was mentioned above that -*or* and -*(e)r* were also

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[13] Barber (1997) affirms that there is evidence that -*er*/-*est* was colloquial and *more/most* was formal. As for the free selection of methods, he mentions Ben Jonson's use of both *fitter* and *more fit*, or Shakespeare's *sweeter* and *more sweet*.

used. Comparatives must agree with the noun in case, number and gender (Mitchell 1985; Mitchell & Robinson 1992), and they «always decline in the weak paradigm whether or not preceded by a determiner» (Smith 1999).

González-Díaz (2008) recognizes two types of comparatives of inequality depending on whether the comparison is expressed by means of a suffix, corresponding to *-er* in PDE, or by pre-posing to the adjective an adverbial modifier, *more* in the case of PDE. The distinction is drawn then between the synthetic or inflectional form *versus* the analytic or periphrastic form, respectively. Her main concern is with the chronology of the adverbial intensifier, which in OE corresponds to *swiðor, bet,* and *ma*, but also with the question whether this periphrastic construction came about as a result of contact with another language or originated internally.

As far as the first of her concerns, some *corpus*-based studies show that the first comparatives of inequality in the form of periphrastic constructions appeared in the 13th c., and the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) seems to agree with this estimate. The use of periphrastic comparatives indeed spread during this time, at a time when French influence was noticeable. Nonetheless, the data analyzed by González-Díaz, which include a comprehensive collection of texts from different corpora, indicate that this construction was already in use in the second half of the 9th c.

Traugott (1992) noted that when the verb in both clauses of the comparative refers to a similar event, this can be repeated or be substituted by the expletive *don* 'to do' or it can be omitted altogether. She claims that the *secundus comparationis* in comparisons of inequality tends to be in the subjunctive when the main clause is positive, whereas this tends to be in the indicative if the main clause is negative. In addition, she believes that the element *þon, þy,* or *þe* 'any' of the *primus comparationis* derives from an instrumental of comparison meaning 'before that' or 'than before', not an instrumental of cause or measure as claimed by Small (1923, 1929) and Mitchell & Robinson (1992).

Mitchell (1985) is to date the most comprehensive treatment of comparatives of inequality. He noticed that also participles can function as adjectives, and that predicates, whether adjectives or past participles, can be used as nouns. As far as attributive adjectives, when used in comparative constructions, they can be or not accompanied by demonstratives or possessives, but if one of these elements is absent, the adjective tends to follow the strong declension. Comparatives can be both used attributively or predicatively, with or without a noun. They can be used with a dative or an instrumental case, or with a conjunction or preposition, such as *Þonne*; *Þon ma* (*Þe*); *ac*; *be*; *butan*; *nefne*.

I will only mention in passing that the *comparative absolute* is typically considered a Latinism absent in OE, and that this does not appear until the Elizabethan writers. Against this view, Mitchell & Robinson (1992) consider lines 2651 and 1703 in *Beowulf* as possible cases of *comparative absolutes*. Other scholars (Klaeber 2008) disagree and claim that these are not real comparisons altogether.

As far as the periphrastic construction, the comparative makes use of modifiers, such as *swiðor, bet, ma*, which can be found both in present and past participles, but also occasionally with adjectives (Mitchell & Robinson 1992). The main modifiers employed are *swiðe* or *swiðlice*. There is also a sporadic use of double comparatives, such as *ma wyrse* 'more worse' (see González-Díaz 2008 for an analysis of double comparatives in English).

Mitchell & Robinson (1992) deny that the genitive case was employed as the case of comparison, and that the dative of comparison was used after adjectives meaning '(un)like' and '(in)comparable with.' In addition, they point out that negative comparisons of equality have the same value as comparatives of inequality, and they quote Small (1929) to show that this construction carries a dative, and thus it may have served as the semantic bridge between the genuine IE dative of comparison and the Gmc dative, which was but one of the different cases originally employed, along with the ablative, the instrumental and the locative. The use of the dative in comparisons of inequality was limited though to those constructions where the two elements compared are in the same case, whether nominative or accusative, and they refer to the same verb. The clause construction thus is more general in use than the case construction (also in 1923, 1929). Therefore, they conclude that the case construction was never the only comparative construction. They also claim that the dative comparison of inequality was mainly used in poetry, and that it gradually became obsolete, first in prose, then in poetry. I have been able to find only one instance of this type of comparative in *Beowulf*:

> (3)   *Huru ne gemunde mago Ecglafes,/eafoþes cræftig, þæt he ær gespræc/wine druncen, þa he þæs wæpnes onlah/selran sweordfrecan.* [1465]
> Indeed not bore-in-mind son of-Ecglaf of-strength mighty, what he before spoke wine-drunk, when he the weapon lent to-better swordsman;
> 'For he bore not in mind, the bairn of Ecglaf sturdy and strong, that speech he had made, drunk with wine, now this weapon he lent to a stouter swordsman'.
>
> (Porter 2003 [1991])

Thus far, I have provided an account of the comparatives of inequality in some of the IE families, then in the Gmc languages, and finally in OE. The

following was pointed out: the comparative particles used in the different IE languages have various origins, not only in form but also in function; the two main comparative suffixes in early IE are: -*yans*, which in the Gmc languages it evolves into the main Gmc comparative suffixes, and -*tara/-ra*, from which there are only remnants in the Gmc languages; comparatives in all the Gmc languages contain not only regular forms, but also anomalous and defective suffixes; the comparative forms of adverbs are not formed directly from their positive adjectival counterpart, but from modifications of their corresponding comparative adjectives or from a different form altogether; the later stages of the Gmc languages merge both comparative suffixes (-*ir* and -*or*); constructions with a comparative particle (*more* in PDE) are in competition with synthetic constructions (-*er* in PDE). The main aspects of the comparatives of inequality in OE were described at the end.

6. *Preliminary analysis of the comparatives of inequality in* Beowulf

Two types of comparatives of inequality are present in *Beowulf*, which, following Stassen's (1984) typology of comparatives, correspond to Type I or Separative and Type VI or Particle. The first type of comparative is scarce in *Beowulf*, with only one instance; the second type is the predominant one. Type I can be said to be the older one, since its more frequent use has been noticed in texts older than *Beowulf*, and it is not used anymore in later texts. *Beowulf* shows then that its use was already in its way out.

The primary and secondary IE suffix of comparison -*tara* or -*ra* can only be found in fossilized forms, such as *oðer* 'other', *hwæðer* 'whether', and *wyrsa* 'worse'. Only the primary IE suffix of comparison -*yans* became the productive suffix -*or*, -*ra*, or -*re* of OE, as it appears in *Beowulf*.

Defective adjectives of comparison add up to little less than half of all comparisons found in *Beowulf*. It would be interesting to compare this rate with texts written in English of other periods. Different comparative particles can be found in *Beowulf*: *swiðor, bet,* or *ma*; in addition, the majority of the comparisons have a synthetic construction.

Only two spellings for the comparative particle, equivalent to PDE 'than' have been found in *Beowulf*, that is *þonne* and *ðonne*, although *þonne* was the preferred form. This coincides with the overall preference for the 'thorn' *þ* over the 'eth' *ð* in *Beowulf*.

In conclusion, the data analyzed in *Beowulf* corroborate claims, such as that the fixed-case type of comparative was on its way out at the time of *Beowulf*, and thus that the derived type by means of a comparative particle would become the only comparative; but most importantly, they yield a typology of comparatives of inequality specific to *Beowulf*, and with due cau-

tion[14], this typology may in turn be representative of the current situation of comparatives of inequality of around the 8th c.[15] One can then surmise what the frequency of use of synthetic *versus* periphrastic comparative constructions is, or that of constructions with defective *versus* regularly derived adjectives, or how often the comparative particle may have been used.

7. *Final remarks: a note on grammaticalization*

It is agreed by most (Breivik 1987, 1989, 1994 among others) that the starting point of the comparative of inequality is a semantically more transparent construction, where the meaning is conveyed paratactically. Thus, Small (1923) proposes that the starting point of this type of comparison could be a sentence like 'This mountain is higher; then that hill is (high)'. From this, the comparative particle could have carried over a «blending of temporal succession with the abstract notion of contrast». In fact, it has been claimed (Small 1923; Stassen 1985) that comparatives of inequality not only go back to paratactic structures, but they also have an underlying negative or adversative element. The temporal quality of the comparative particle could help explain why this and the temporal adverb 'then' have shared orthography for centuries, as do many other languages.

The motivation for the change from semantically transparent, paratactic constructions to non-transparent, syntactic ones has been explained through the process of syntactization (Breivik 1994). Through this process, also called grammaticalization, lexical material is reanalyzed as grammatical, thus losing its lexical meaning, but adopting a new grammatical function. In the case of English, not only has the temporal adverb 'then' become a comparative particle 'than' over time, but we can also see how this very comparative particle is changing from a conjunction to a preposition, as exemplified above. Stassen (1985) referred to this process of grammatical shift as «downgrading process».

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[14] As is well known, written language usually represents a somewhat earlier stage of the language than that of the spoken language, since the former tends to be more conservative.

[15] As one reviewer pointed out, the debate continues with regard to the date of the poem; with this in mind, the typology proposed here represents the distribution of comparatives of inequality for this particular poem alone. Any additional assertion to place these forms historically would require the substantiation of further evidence.

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