

Comparative Constructions in Old English Text

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Comparison is one of the factors of the process of reality reflection in the mind of a person and its reproducing in language activity. It is one of the means of world perception. While cognizing a new object, we compare it with objects already known to us, trying to find similarities or dissimilarities between them in order to perceive the essence of the given object. In language, the category of comparison is rendered with the help of a comparative construction, which includes the subject of comparison, the object of comparison, the basis of comparison, and the index of comparative relations, which can be both explicit and implicit. It should be mentioned that the scholars mainly studied Modern English comparative constructions (Mezenin 1969, Cheremisina et al. 1974, Razmakhnina 1974, Baysara 1975, Yarova 2003); however, a comparative construction was not virtually studied from the diachronic perspective. Accordingly, the objective of our article is to study an Old English comparative construction, namely the syntactic connection of its components.

The object of our study is tetramerous complete and incomplete comparative constructions of Old English with explicit and implicit indexes of comparative relations. The material of our study is the entire selection of comparative constructions of poetic and sacral texts written in Old English, which are “Beowulf”, “Exodus”, “Daniel”, “Christ and Satan”, and “Psalms”. The total number of the selected comparative constructions is 589.

In order to determine the explicitness and implicitness of the indexes of comparative relations in Old English, we carried out text analysis, which showed that *swa, swa swa, swa ... swa (swa ... swa swa / swa swa ... swa), swylce, gelic/gelice, anlic/anlice (onlic), eac swa ylce (swa ylce)* are explicit indexes of comparison, and the implicitness of comparative construction is expressed with the help of the degrees of comparison, comparative dative, and the verb *genealæcan* (cf. Ikalyuk 2006).

Then we made a quantitative analysis of comparative construction, which is shown in Table 1 to determine the difference between the use of explicit and implicit indexes of comparative relations:

Table 1. Proportion of explicit and implicit indexes of comparison in Old English texts

Index of Comparison	Number of Examples	Percentage Ratio
Explicit	327	56%
Implicit	262	44%

As we can see from the table, in Old English comparative constructions are more often introduced by explicit indexes of comparative relations than by implicit ones. It should also be mentioned that language means of rendering explicitness and implicitness of indexes of comparison in Old English differ in number, which is presented by Table 2:

Table 2. Proportion of language expression of explicitness and implicitness of indexes of comparison in Old English texts

Text		Psalms	Beowulf	Daniel	Christ and Satan	Exodus	Total
EXPLICIT	swa (swa swa)	135	30	13	10	-	188
	gelic(e) (onlic, anlic, ungelic)	52	4	4	3	-	63
	swa ... swa (swa ... swa swa)	17	5	-	-	-	22
	swylc(e)	15	4	1	-	-	20
	eac swa ylce	3	-	-	-	-	3

	(eac swa ilce)						
	swa swa ... swylce	1	-	-	-	-	1
	swa... swa... (swa swa ... swa...)	15	-	1	-	-	16
	swa ylce swa	1	-	-	-	-	1
	swa... swylce...	1	-	-	-	-	1
	anlice swa	9	-	-	-	-	9
	swylc... swylc...	1	1	1	-	-	3
Total	11	250	44	20	13	0	327
IMPLICIT	degrees of comparison	54	120	25	18	41	258
	genealæcan	3	-	-	-	-	3
	comparative dative	-	-	-	1	-	1
Total	3	57	120	25	19	41	262
Total amount	16	307	164	45	32	41	589

Table 2. shows that the number of language means used to render explicitness of indexes of comparative relations in Old English exceeds the number of language means used to render the implicitness of indexes of comparison by a ration of 11 to 3, and we did not take into account different variants of indexes separately, but counted them as one index, e.g. Old English *swa* and its variant *swa swa*.

In this article we will study the syntactic connection of the components of comparative construction with explicit indexes, among which the most productive is index *swa* (*swa swa*), in accordance with Table 2. It should be mentioned that comparative constructions with index *swa* (*swa swa*) in Old English texts are complete, which means that they contain the subject of comparison as well as the object of comparison. The subject of comparison is expressed by noun (N), verb (V), pronoun (Prn), noun phrase (NP), adverb (Adv), and main clause (MC). In its turn, the object of comparison is expressed by noun, adverb, noun phrase, and comparative clause (CC):

N / V / Prn / NP / Adv / MC + *swa* (*swa swa*) + N / Adv / NP / CC, for example:

*Ɔa Ɔe wilniað fretan min folc swa ænne hlaf, Ɔa ne clypiað to Gode mid godum
That the desire eat my folk as one loaf that not cry to God with good
weorcum.
action (Psalm 13: 4).*

As a rule, the object of comparison in the comparative construction of this type is in postposition; however, there are cases when the object of comparison goes before the subject of comparison, for example:

*Efne swa bið gebletsad beorna æghwylc
Just as if is blessed man each
mann on moldan Ɔe him metodes ege
man on land that him of God awe
on his dædum drihten forhtað.
on his dead Lord is afraid (Psalm 127)*

The variant of index of comparison *swa* is *eac swa ylce/ilce*, which is used in a complete comparative construction according to the following pattern:

eac swa ylce/ilce + CC + MC, for example:

And eac swa ylce ælc rihtwis man þe hine singð, he hine singð be
And likewise any righteous man that to him sings he him sings about
him sylfum, and be þam þe hine unscyldigne dreccað.
himself and as him unprotection oppresses (Psalm 25)

besides, the comparative construction with index *eac swa ylce/ilce* can be incomplete, as well:

eac swa ilce + NP, for example:

Mine eagan wæron gedrefede and afærde for þinum yrre, and eac swa ilce
My eyes were troubled and frightened for your anger and likewise
min mod and min maga
my spirit and my maw (Psalm 30: 10)

The variant of index *swa swa* is *swa ylce swa*, which is used in a complete comparative construction to introduce a comparative clause as the object of comparison:

MC + swa ylce swa + CC, for example:

Hu ne eart þu min cyning and min Drihten, swa ylce swa þu hiora wære, þu
How not are you my king and my Lord like you their were you
þe bebude hælo cuman to Iacobes cynne?
that stayed salvation to come to Iacobe's kingdom (Psalm 43: 5)

One of the constituents of complete comparative constructions is also the marker of comparison *swylc(e)*. The subject of comparison in such comparative constructions is expressed by noun, pronoun, noun phrase, and main clause; the object of comparison is expressed by noun, pronoun, noun phrase, and comparative clause. The connection of the components in the construction of this type may be shown as follows:

N / Prn / NP / MC + swylc(e) + N / Prn / NP / CC, for example:

Ridend swefað,
The rider sleeps
hæleð in hoðman; nis þær hearpan sweg,
hero in darkness not is there of harp sound
gomen in gearðum, swylce ðær iu wæron.
no men in the yard as there earlier were (Beowulf, 2457)

Another complete comparative construction is a construction with *gelic(e)* and its variants – *onlic*, *anlic*, and *ungelic*. In contrast to *like* in Modern English, Old English *gelic* is an adjective, and *gelice* is an adverb; besides, in the comparative construction, it is used in the positive degree as well as in the comparative and superlative degrees of comparison – *gelicra* and *gelicost / gelicast*, respectively, for example:

- positive degree

Næs he bearwe gelic,
Not was it wood like
ac he hlifode to heofontunglum
but it rose to heaven's stars (Daniel, 499)

- comparative degree

*Ac þa unrihtwisan ne beoð na swylce, ne him eac swa ne limpð, ac hi beoð
 But the unrighteous not is not so not it also so not happens but they are
 duste **gelicran þonne** hit wind toblæwð.
 dust more like than it wind blew (Psalm 1: 4)*

- superlative degree

*Rape æfter þon
 Quickly after that
 on fagne flor feond treddode,
 on brilliant floor the fiend trod
 eode yrremod; him of eagum stod
 went of angry mood him from eyes stood
 ligge **gelicost** leoht unfæger.
 fires most alike light deformed (Beowulf, 725)*

As we have already mentioned, the comparative constructions of this type are complete because they contain all the components of the construction, namely the subject of comparison is expressed by noun, pronoun, noun phrase, and main clause; the object of comparison is expressed by noun, pronoun, noun phrase, and comparative clause; the basis of comparison is rendered with the help of a verb or is reconstructed from the context. These comparative constructions may have the following pattern:

N / Prn / NP / MC + *gelic(e)* / *onlic* / *anlic* / *ungelic* + N / Prn / NP / CC, for example:

*Him þær on ofne owiht ne derede,
 Them there in furnace at all not hurt
 ac wæs þær inne ealles **gelicost**
 but was there in all most alike
 efne þonne on sumera sunne scineð,
 equal as when in summer the sun shines
 and deaw dryge on dæge weorðeð,
 and the dew dry in day becomes
 winde geondsawen.
 by wind scattered (Daniel, 273)*

The special feature of the marker of comparison in these comparative constructions is its location in postposition in relation to the object of comparison, for example:

*Soðfæste men, sunnan **gelice**,
 Truthful men sun alike
 fægre gefrætewod in heora fæder rice
 beautifully crowned in their Father's kingdom
 scinað in sceldbyrig.
 shine in city of refuge (Christ and Satan, 306)*

In the Old English texts, there are also comparative constructions, in which index *anlic* is used with index *swa*; adjective *anlic* is used in the positive as well as superlative degrees. When it is in the positive and superlative degrees of comparison, *anlic* can be intensified by *samod/samed*. So, in the comparative construction of this type, the index of comparative relations can be double: *samod/samed anlic/anlicast(est) swa* and *anlicost(ast) swa*. In the first case, the subject of comparison is expressed by noun phrase, pronoun, and main clause, and the object of comparison is expressed by noun phrase and comparative clause:

NP / Prn / MC + *samed anlic/anlicast(est) swa* + NP / CC, for example:

Synd þine bearn swylce samed anlicast,
 Are your children likewise like
swa elebeamas æþele weaxen,
 olive-trees excellent grown fruitful
ymb þinne beod utan blæda standen.
 around your table without leaves stand (Psalm 127)

In the second case, the subject of comparison is expressed with the help of noun and main clause, and the object of comparison is expressed with the help of comparative clause:

NP / MC + anlicost(ast) swa + CC

For þinum eagum, ece drihten,
 For your eyes eternal Lord
þusend wintra bið þon anlicast,
 thousand years are now like
swa geostran dæg gegan wære
 yesterday passed (Psalm 89)

While comparing things according to the same features, the construction with *swa ... swa* (*swa ... swa swa*) is used. The special feature of the construction with *swa ... swa* (*swa ... swa swa*) is a fixed order of words and explicit expression of all the four constituents of a comparative construction. It means that the comparative construction of this type is complete; it always contains four constituents. In Old English comparative construction of this type, the subject of comparison is expressed by noun, verb, noun phrase, and main clause. The object of comparison is expressed by noun, noun phrase, and comparative clause.

Thus, while comparing things according to the same features, the basis of comparison, which is the nucleus of paired conjunction *swa ... swa* (*swa ... swa swa*), is expressed by adjective, adjective phrase (AP). While comparing actions according to the same features, the basis of comparison can be expressed by adverb and adverbial phrase (AdvP), which can be seen from the patterns showing the correlation of the components of the comparative construction:

N / NP / MC + swa + A / AP + swa / swa swa + N / NP / CC, for example:

Heora mod and heora wilnuncg ys swa deop swa grundleas pytt, and heora tungan
 Their spirit and their desire is as deep as bottomless pit and their tongue
sprecað symle facn.
 say always evil (Psalm 5: 11)

V / MC + swa + Adv / AdvP + swa / swa swa + N / CC, for example:

ond æt feohgyftum Folcwaldan sunu
 and at bounty-giving Folcwald's son
dogra gehwylce Dene weorþode,
 day every Danes should honor
Hengestes heap hringum wenede
 Hengest's folk with rings favor
efne swa swiðe sincgestreonum
 even as truly with treasures
fættan goldes, swa he Fresena cyn
 fretted gold as he Frissian kin
on beorsele byldan wolde.
 in beer-hall encourage would (Beowulf, 1089)

In the Old English texts, there are comparative constructions, the subject and object of which are expressed by clauses introduced by the following conjunctions: *swylc... swylc...*, *swa... swa...*, *swa...swylce...* та *swa swa...swa....*. The object of comparison is in postposition as well as in preposition in relation to the subject of comparison:

- postposition

Swylc scolde eorl wesan,
Such should earl be
æþeling ærgod, swylc æschere wæs!
nobleman fair as Aeschere was (Beowulf, 1328)

- preposition

Swa se beam geweax,
As the tree grew up
heah to heofonum, swa þu hæledum eart
high to heaven so you to men are
ana eallum eorðbuendum
over all earth dwellers
weard and wisa.
lord and leader (Daniel, 562)

In conclusion, the subject of comparison in Old English comparative constructions can be expressed by noun, verb, pronoun, adjective, adverb, noun phrase, and main clause; the object of comparison can be expressed by noun, verb, pronoun, adjective, adverb, noun phrase, and comparative clause, respectively.

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