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Old English simile of inequality: structure overview

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with an Old English simile whose ground is disproportionately more inherent in the tenor, the latter surpassing a prototypical maximum of a salient feature. It sheds some light on the structural typology of the simile of inequality. Depending on the type of connection, three major kinds of the simile of inequality are singled out, which are further categorised into subtypes regarding the grammatical category of their elements as well as their positioning within the structure. A relatively low productivity of Old English the simile of inequality is justified in terms of its semantic idiosyncrasy, which makes the tenor more prominent than the vehicle, as well as the semantics of its comparison markers, which contribute to the construction's expressing difference implying similarity. The article touches upon the quantitative and chronological characteristics of the Old English simile of inequality. It also outlines the specificity of the contexts in which such constructions are used.

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1. Introduction

Simile is a multidimensional phenomenon at different levels, be they linguistic forms, conceptual structures, cognitive representations, or communicative functions. It is able to activate the connections of cognitive and discursive paradigms demonstrating the results of cognition as well as revealing hidden meanings of texts.

Typically, on considering the notion of a simile, one thinks of a structure containing a comparison marker as well as expressing similarity between the tenor and the vehicle,¹ the latter being a prototypical bearer of the common salient feature. Thus, in a tenor—vehicle dyad, the ground is expected to be disproportionately more inherent in the vehicle. The idea is absolutely correct and does not cause any concerns, though this is true only for similes of equality leaving out a whole class of similes, which gets undeservingly insufficient attention in the specialized literature. The structure in question is the simile of inequality, the mere existence of which is mentioned in few works only. Contrary to the simile of equality, in the simile of inequality the ground is disproportionately more inherent in the tenor, which surpasses the prototype—a universally accepted maximum.

Let us consider the following example:

1. *Lies spread like the sea.*

The ability to cover a vast space spreading out is an inherent property of the sea and characterizes all seas without any exceptions, which makes it a perfect prototype for the simile vehicle since it is a typical representative of the liquid phenomena famous for their ability to spread. However, by changing the “place” of the highest concentration of the salient feature, we will get the simile of inequality..

2. *Lies spread wider than the sea.*

In (2) it is evident that the disproportionality of the salient feature is in favour of the tenor, whose ability to cover a vast space is even more hyperbolized than in the simile of equality (1). In the simile of inequality, the tenor appears to be a unique, exclusive phenomenon capable of exceeding a typical standard of a certain characteristic. It is possible due to the understanding that the sea, no matter how big it is, still has its limits, so lies can theoretically “spread beyond” those limits, which becomes possible in the context by creating a mental picture of the spreading of a certain substance that goes beyond the known seas. Simile, being it of equality or inequality, sooner complies with the logic of imagination rather than with a formal logic.

In order to give an empirically adequate account of Old English similes of inequality, I scrutinized the DOE Web Corpus (DOEC, [n.d.](#)) – a representative corpus of Old English texts which provides the tools for automatic selection and contains at least one copy of every surviving Old English manuscript. The continuous sampling method made it possible to account for 128 similes of inequality and is exhaustive.

2. Methodology

Considering that this article addresses similes, which always have a separately marked comparison indicator (comparative conjunction and/or the ending of the comparative degree of an adjective or an adverb), I conducted empirical material sampling from a semasiological perspective. Consequently, I used markers of Old English similes of inequality as a formal indicator, employing the University of Toronto corpus, which contains at least one copy of each preserved Old English manuscript.

Some additional manual work was still required, so the subsequent step in the sampling process involved analysing all extracted sentences from the corpus to ascertain the function of the comparative indicator as a marker of simile *per se*, rather than any other formation. This is crucial as Old English comparative markers could serve multiple functions beyond indicating simile, such as non-figurative comparisons or time markers. Hence, the defining parameter was the semantics that unify diverse comparative formations based on the principle of figurative similarity of conceptually distant notions. The final stage of material sampling involved implementing the following algorithm: Firstly, I engaged in reading the sentence suggested by the search system to comprehend the overall meaning of the expression. Secondly, upon identifying comparative semantics, I proceeded to identify the compared concepts. This task often required delving into a broader context, particularly since sentences could be too brief or contain pronouns. Thirdly, I determined the contextual meaning of the identified compared elements, establishing whether they belonged to the same or different conceptual domains. Lastly, when faced with compared concepts from different conceptual classes, I assessed the possibility of one of them serving as the typical carrier of the salient feature.

Satisfying all criteria allowed the inclusion of the sentence proposed by the machine into the corpus of analysed empirical material. For example, the search system suggested the following sentences with a comparative marker *þonne*: a) *Hē wæs mære þonne his brōðor* ‘He was greater than his brother’ b) *Hē wæs strangra þonne se wind* ‘He was stronger than the wind’. Having established the general meaning of the expressions, it becomes clear that sentence (a) communicates a comparison of two representatives of the same conceptual class (both of them are people, let alone related), while sentence (b) compares the subjective vision of the two notions belonging to different conceptual classes (one of them is a person, while the other belongs to meteorological phenomenon). Thus, at this stage, sentence (a) is excluded from the corpus proposed by the machine, and sentence (b) undergoes further analysis.

During the structural analysis stage, the comparative marker served as the starting point for a thorough examination. This process involved scrutinising both the left and right colligation of the marker to gain a comprehensive understanding. After determining the grammatical categories of the tenor, vehicle, and ground, I recorded their composition. Finally, I described the identified regularities in structural modelling and conducted quantitative calculations, interpreting the results to generalise qualitative characteristics.

As the Anglo-Saxon era spans six centuries, I also analysed all structural types of similes from the perspective of possible diachronic changes, despite the fact that the Old English is considered a single

synchronic period in the history of the English language. Given the ongoing debate surrounding the chronological attribution of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, uncertainty persists regarding certain aspects related to the usage of the structures analysed in this work. Unfortunately, the largest corpus of Old English literature, from which material was selected, does not provide precise century dating for manuscripts. The Dictionary of Old English Corpus (DOEC) divides the five centuries of Old English into only two periods (early and late). Meanwhile, the York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English (YCOE) is more precise in this matter, but it only includes texts created between 950 and 1050.

Dividing the Anglo-Saxon era into only two periods (following DOEC) or excluding manuscripts created before 950 and after 1050 (following YCOE) would be too generalised of an approach for a comprehensive study. This ambiguous situation necessitates resorting to a single solution: seeking information about the creation date of manuscripts from various informative sources. Therefore, as attributing a particular manuscript to a specific century is not always definitively established, there is a need for logical organisation of the analysis process of disputed texts. Thus, during the study, I compared data from all available informative sources, such as historical records and linguistic analyses, to establish the most accurate century of creation for the disputed manuscript. In case of a lack of convincing arguments in favour of one date and a wide range of years of manuscript creation covering more than one century, I considered the latest of the disputed dates as provisional, representing the time when the analysed text undoubtedly existed.

3. Theoretical background and objectives

Simile is a phenomenon whose various dimensions reveal themselves at different levels: being a cognitive representation of a certain concept, it materializes in a particular linguistic form, performing a definite communicative function. Similes activate the common ground of cognitive and discursive paradigms, showcasing the outcome of cognition and unveiling hidden implications, similarly to metaphors (Gibbs & Steen, 1999; Grady, 1997, 1999; Kapranov, 2014, 2016, 2018; Lakoff, 1987, 1993; Мізін, Коцур, Летюча, Caik, 2024). Thus, like metaphors, Old English similes reflect the mental and emotional reflections of Anglo-Saxons in contemporary literature (Low, 2000; Wilton, 2016; Zwikstra, 2009), serving as poetic representatives of their experience (Cavell, 2016).

Having the general categorial meaning of similarity and comparison, which *a priori* implies both sameness and difference with all the intervening points (Конюшкевич, 2002), simile semantics allows for sub-categorization into two groups: the simile of equality and the simile of inequality (Addison, 1993; Bredin, 1998; Nevanlinna, 1993; Seh, 2016; Гулыга & Шендельс, 1969; Лебедько, 1971; Назарян, 1992; Николаева, 2002; Щепка, 2008). A scientific recognition of the two kinds of simile, however scarce it is, hardly ever results in the research of their operation during earlier stages of the English language development. Were it not for the study of Middle English simile structure by Nevanlinna (1993), it would be hard to identify any synchronic or diachronic research focused on simile. There have been, however, several cases of simile analysis as a part of investigation of Old English comparative clauses or in functioning studies of the dative case (Baker, 2012; Fisher, 1992; Gergel, 2008; McLaughlin, 1983; Merritt, 2013; Mitchel, 1985). As a stylistic device simile has sporadically attracted the attention of Margolis (1957), who focused on discriminating features of simile in comparison to related devices; as well as Beardsley (1981), Dawes (1998), Tyler (2006); Amodio (2014), Stodnick and Trilling (2012) also shed some light upon similes when carrying out an analysis of Old English translations or adaptations of Latin texts.

Since the scholarly attention to the simile of inequality has been limited, particularly in the context of earlier stages of English language development, the current study seeks to address this gap by investigating the operation of these Old English similes with a specific focus on their structure. Drawing on insights from previous studies on comparative clauses as well as analyses of Old English translations of Latin texts, my research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Old English simile of inequality, answering key research questions, such as: How do Old English similes of inequality vary in terms of their elements' grammatical categories and structural positioning? How do Old English similes of inequality contribute to the overall stylistic and rhetorical strategies employed in Old English literature? What are the quantitative characteristics of Old English similes of inequality, and how do they compare to similes of equality in terms of frequency and distribution?

Answering these questions will enable conducting a diachronic analysis of English similes of inequality regarding their structure which will contribute to a better understanding of English language evolution in terms of its figurative speech which reflects cultural dynamics. It will also enable carrying out contrastive investigations dedicated to similes of inequality in different languages that chronologically coincide with the Old English period.

4. Structural features of Old English simile of inequality

All Old English similes of inequality are closed, that is they have their ground explicitly stated. Structurally, they can be divided into three types: (1) the simile of inequality with a conjunctive connection (4.1); (2) the simile of inequality with a prepositional connection (4.2); (3) the simile of inequality with an asyndetic connection (4.3).

4.1. Simile of inequality with a conjunctive connection

In this section, I explore similes of inequality employing conjunctive connections, utilizing either a lexeme or a noun phrase (4.1.1) or a clause (4.1.2) as a vehicle.

4.1.1. Simile of inequality with a conjunctive connection whose vehicle is expressed by a lexeme or a noun phrase

In such similes a vehicle is introduced by the conjunction *þonne*. Old English conjunction *þonne* 'than' was a homophone and a homograph to the adverb *þonne* 'then', and among other functions, it could introduce the second element of the two compared ones. According to Online Etymology Dictionary (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.), such etymology can be indicative of the development of its semantics which derived from a demonstrative meaning 'after that'.

Typical of the Old English period, the conjunction *þonne* was characterised by orthographic variability and co-existed in such forms as *þon* and *þone*. For the sake of presentation, outside of the examples, the form *þonne* will be used hereafter as the most frequent form within the research material, outnumbering either of the other two variants by 16 times (114 uses of *þonne* against 7 uses of *þone* and the same number of *þon*).

The simile of inequality with a conjunctive connection whose vehicle is expressed by a word or a noun phrase can be grouped into four subtypes depending on the two criteria: (a) the positionality of its components; (b) the grammatical category of its ground. Thus, the whole scope of similes of inequality with a conjunctive connection whose vehicle is expressed by a word or a noun phrase can fall into four subtypes: with an interpositional ground expressed by an adjective (4.1.1.1); with a prepositional ground expressed by an adjective (4.1.1.2); with a ground, expressed by an adjective and further specified by a clause (4.1.1.3); with a ground expressed by a verb (4.1.1.4).

4.1.1.1 The basic structure for most Old English similes of inequality is a combination of nouns or noun phrases with an adjective in the comparative degree, which corresponds to the model $N/P + Adj_{comparative} + \textit{þonne} + N_{nom}P$, for example:

(3) *He is modigra middangearde, staðole strengra ðonne ealra stana gripe* 'It [God's word] is prouder than the earth, stronger in its rooting than the compression of all stones'.

In the 9th century *Solomon and Saturn* God's word is compared to a prototype of courage/pride—the Earth, and a prototype of strength—a stone. However, because of the adjectives in the comparative degree the salient features are not disproportionately presented in favour of the vehicles – the earth and a stone, but in favour of the tenor—the word of God. In this way, the supernatural intensity of the salient feature manifestation is revealed (*modigra* 'more daring/prouder' and *strengra* 'stronger'). Thus, the concept of the word of God stands out even more in the story due to its superpowers, and thanks to the simile of inequality its importance is emphasised.

4.1.1.2 Sometimes the adjective in the comparative degree could be in a preposition to the whole construction, not necessarily being in a contact position with the lexeme governing it, which corresponds to the following structural pattern: **Adj_{comparative}** + N/P + *ponne* + N_{nom}P, for example:

(4) ... hefigere ic eom micle bōn se hara stan oppe unlytel leades clympre '...much heavier I am than a grey stone or a large piece of lead.'

In the given example, taken from the 10th century Riddle 40, the pronoun *ic* 'I' stands for an enigmatic phenomenon (most likely God); combined with the verb and the intensifying adverb, they split the ground and the vehicle...*hefigere...bōn se hara stan* ... '... harder... than a grey stone...'

4.1.1.3 Sometimes similes of inequality are followed by a clause that specifies, explains or justifies the use of the simile forming the model N/P + **Adj_{comparative}** + *ponne* + N_{nom}P + **clause**, for example:

(5) Maria is wlitigre ðonne se mōna, forðan ðe heo scinð buton æteorunge hire beorhthysse. 'Mary is more beautiful than the moon because she shines without diminishing her brightness.'

In Aelfric's 10th century *Homilies*, not only is the extraordinary beauty of the Virgin Mary described, but also the disproportion of the salient feature in favour of the Mother of God is explained by adding a clause, which, in fact, clarifies and justifies the reason for the radiance exceeding the brightness of the moon.

4.1.1.4 When a comparative element is a part of a verbal phrase, the simile of inequality corresponds to the following model: **VP** (Adv_{comparative} + V) + NP + *ponne* + NP, for example:

(6) Ic gelyfe þæt se heah-engel mid þam geswutelode þæt he micle swiðor sohte and lufode þære heortan clænnysse þonne ðæra stāna frætwunge. 'I believe that in this way the archangel showed that he seeks and loves the purity of the heart more than the precious stones of decoration.'

In the given example taken from Aelfric's 10th century *Homilies* the simile ground is the possibility of being sought after and loved, which, in this case, is unequally displayed in favour of a pure heart, rather than jewels which are considered a typical prototype of admiration. In such a construction the tenor and the vehicle are expressed by the combination of two nouns in the genitive and accusative cases.

4.1.2. Simile of inequality with a conjunctive connection whose vehicle is expressed by a clause

Sometimes the vehicle can be expressed by a whole situation denoting a certain object/phenomenon in its specific manifestation and relation to other objects at a particular point on a time and space continuum. This calls for a more complex syntactic formation than a word combination, so in such cases the vehicle is verbalised by a clause, for example:

(7) ... and æghwylc mona sie sinderlice xii ðusendum siða beorhtra ðonne he ieo wæs ær Abeles slege. ...and each individual moon is twelve thousand times brighter than it was before Abel's murder.'

In this case (*Solomon and Saturn*, IX century), the vehicle is not just the moon, but the moon in its particular state at a specific moment in time, which is expressed by the clause. The entire simile corresponds to the following structural model: N/P + **Adj_{comparative}** + *ponne* + clause.

4.2. Simile of inequality with a prepositional connection

This section delves into similes of inequality employing a prepositional connection, particularly the preposition *ofer* (ancestor of modern *over*), which developed from the Proto-Germanic lexeme **uberī* meaning 'over, beyond, above' in Old English.

The Old English similes of inequality with the preposition *ofer* were an alternative to the above-mentioned similes of inequality with the conjunction *ponne*, recorded, however, only in the manuscripts that are superscript glosses of the Latin texts. Therefore, there is a strong possibility that the use of the preposition *ofer* in the simile of inequality is due to the literal translation of the Latin *super*.

Nevertheless, the construction was in use and demonstrated the regularities of current structuring. Depending on the positionality of its elements, it existed in several variations: with an interpositional ground expressed by an adjective (4.2.1); with a prepositional ground expressed by an adjective (4.2.2); with a prepositional ground expressed by a verb (4.2.3); with a postpositional ground expressed by a verb (4.2.4).

4.2.1 The basic structure of similes of inequality with a prepositional connection is $N/P + \text{Adj}_{\text{comparative}} + \text{ofer} + N_{\text{nom}}P$, for example:

(8) *þa ≤ winsuman ≥ ofer gold & stan deorwurbne swypne & swettran ofer hunig & beobreade.* 'They [the words of God] are more pleasant than gold and precious stones, sweeter than honey and honeycomb.'

This example is taken from the 11th century *Vitellius Psalter*, the structural model of which coincides absolutely with the corresponding model of similes with the conjunction *þonne*.

4.2.2 The ground expressed by an adjective could also occupy the initial position within the construction, which makes it analogical to one of the types of similes of inequality with the conjunction *þonne*, though in the case of similes with the preposition *ofer* the adjective could be used in the positive degree. This proves that the meaning of the preposition in certain colligations was specific enough to convey the sense of superiority of one object over another as well as the disproportion of a salient feature between them, which made the necessity of the comparative degree of the adjective optional, for example:

(9) *Hu swete gomum minum gesprecu ðine ofer hunig & beobread muðe minum.* 'How sweet your words are to my palate, they are over [sweeter than] honey and honeycomb to my mouth.'

In the above example, the simile corresponds to the model $\text{Adj}_{\text{positive}} + NP + \text{ofer} + N_{\text{nom}}/NP$. The use of the adjective in the positive degree in this case is due to its colligation with the adverb *Hu* 'how' meaning "so much", which denotes a high degree, a significant intensity of the inherent characteristic. In addition, the meaning of the preposition *ofer* had been highly stable since the times of the Proto-Indo-European language, so the sense of "high intensity that goes beyond certain limits" did not require an additional superiority expressed by the comparative degree of an adjective.

4.2.3 The majority of similes of inequality with a prepositional connection was taken from the 11th century *Vitellius Psalter*. They are, in fact, grammatical and syntactic variants of few juxtapositions, the most frequent of which are the comparison of God's commandments to honey, gold and precious stones, as well as the comparison of a purified soul to snow. One of those options is the combination of a verbal ground and noun phrases corresponding to the model $V + NP + \text{ofer} + N_{\text{nom}}P$, for example:

(10) *Forðon ic lufude bebodu þina ofer gold & þone basowan stan.* 'That is why I love your commandments more than gold and topaz.'

4.2.4 A structure in which the preposition occupies the initial position can be considered a derivative of the previous model. It adds pathos to the statement corresponding to the following structural model: $\text{ofer} + N + N/P + V$. The example was taken from the same psalter:

(11) *þu stredest me mid ysopon & ic beo geclænsod þu ahwyhst me & ofersnaw ic beo ablicen.* 'Cleanse me with hyssop, and you will accept me pure, above snow I will shine.'

4.3. Simile of inequality with an asyndetic connection

Due to the developed inflectional system in Old English, the simile of inequality could be built without any conjunction or preposition. In the 10th century riddle, for example, there is a simile with a noun in the genitive case and an adjective in the comparative degree placed in a final position, which corresponds to the model $N/P + N_{\text{gen}}P + \text{Adj}_{\text{comparative}}$:

(12) *lc eorþan eom æghwær brædre □ widgiela þōn þes wong grena...* 'I of-the-earth is everywhere wider and extend further than this green meadow...'

The clue to this riddle is most likely God and, therefore, the simile of inequality where the salient feature is disproportionate in favour of the tenor exceeding a well-known maximum, is a perfect means to express the idea of an unreal large scale.

Quantitative data of the singled out structural types of Old English simile of inequality are presented in Table 1.

As the table shows, the most typical constructions for the Old English the simile of inequality were structures with a conjunction, especially the basic colligation $N/P + \text{Adj}_{\text{comparative}} + \text{þonne} + N_{\text{nom}}P$, which outnumbers all the others by almost 2.4 times. The prepositional connection in Anglo-Saxon simile of inequality occurs much less often and is recorded in models that are structurally related to similar models with a conjunctive connection, except for the structure where the preposition is in the initial position. The least productive are the structures with an asyndetic connection, the use of which, among other things, could have been caused by the prosodic requirements of the riddle from which they were taken.

The entire simile of inequality corpus is represented by closed similes. Although structurally they are the same as similes of equality in many respects, the difference, however, is that in the similes of inequality there is always an element indicating the disproportionality of a salient feature, which makes them closed since the verbalisation of the disproportionality of the feature without specifying the feature *per se* is impossible. Such elements, as a rule, are the comparative degree of an adjective (much less often—an adverb indicating high intensity) in combination with a conjunction or a preposition, the semantics of which involves the comparison of different concepts. The latter are, in fact, another allomorphic feature between the Old English similes of equality and those of inequality. While the comparison markers used in the simile of equality always presuppose similarity,² the connectors used in the simile of inequality (*þonne*, *ofer*) presuppose difference between compared objects. In other words, all comparison markers used in Old English similes involve matching objects/concepts etc., however, those used in similes of equality indicate similarity implying difference, while those used in similes of inequality indicate difference, implying similarity within a certain parameter. This very fact may be the reason why the comparison markers of similes of inequality are not typically used in figurative contexts based on similarity (Table 2).

As the table shows, almost every 200th use of *þonne* and every 370th use of *ofer* in Old English texts is found in similes of inequality, which is dozens of times less than in the case of comparison markers of similes of equality, whose meaning expresses similarity implying difference and not vice versa.³

Table 1. Structural types of Old English simile of inequality.

Structural type	Number
4.1. Simile of inequality with a conjunctive connection	104
4.1.1. Simile of inequality with a conjunctive connection whose vehicle is expressed by a word or a noun phrase	
4.1.1.1. $N/P + \text{Adj}_{\text{comparative}} + \text{þonne} + N_{\text{nom}}P$	90
4.1.1.2. $\text{Adj}_{\text{comparative}} + N/P + \text{þonne} + N_{\text{nom}}P$	6
4.1.1.3. $N/P + \text{Adj}_{\text{comparative}} + \text{þonne} + N_{\text{nom}}P + \text{clause}$	4
4.1.1.4. $\text{VP} (\text{Adv}_{\text{comparative}} + V) + NP + \text{þonne} + NP$	2
4.1.2. Simile of inequality with a conjunctive connection whose vehicle is expressed by a clause: $N/P + \text{Adj}_{\text{comparative}} + \text{þonne} + \text{clause}$	2
4.2. Simile of inequality with a prepositional connection	18
4.2.1. $N/P + \text{Adj}_{\text{comparative}} + \text{ofer} + N_{\text{nom}}P$	5
4.2.1.1. $\text{Adj}_{\text{positive}} + NP + \text{ofer} + N_{\text{nom}}/NP$	2
4.2.1.2. $V + NP + \text{ofer} + N_{\text{nom}}P$	4
4.2.1.3. $\text{ofer} + NP + N/P + V$	7
3. Simile of inequality with an asyndetic connection: $N/P + N_{\text{gen}}P + \text{Adj}_{\text{comparative}}$	6
Total	128

Table 2. Quantitative characteristics of Old English similes of inequality in terms of the general productivity of the comparison markers used in them.

Type of simile	Number	Ratio
With the <i>þonne</i> component	104 out of 21,312	1:204,9
With the <i>ofer</i> component	18 out of 6676	1:370,9
Total	122 out of 27,988	1:229,4

As for the age of the analysed structures, they are consistently present since the earliest records. The basic structure N/P + **Adj**_{comparative} + *bonne* + N_{nom}P is found in manuscripts throughout the whole Anglo-Saxon era (Table 3).

Reading the table horizontally we can see the productivity of the singled out structural models, while interpreting it vertically—the fruitfulness of the centuries in which the simile of inequality was used. Regarding the age of the structure we can make an assumption, the explanation of which goes beyond the scope of this work intersecting with the planes of anthropology and psychology, and clearly requires separate thorough interdisciplinary studies. The point is that similes of inequality rather imply similarity (but not specify it explicitly), indicating the disproportion of a salient feature in two objects/concepts. They emphasize the difference between two similar concepts rather than the similarity between two different concepts. In other words, the difference that is inherently present in any simile is manifested to a greater extent in the simile of inequality than in the simile of equality. It is the perception of difference (contrast) which is genetically embedded in the simile of inequality that may be the primary cause of the “oldness” of the construction, since human recognition of differences allowed them to survive in the process of evolution at the instinctive level (the instinct of self-preservation), which means that this ability to recognise the difference is rooted in the most distant depths of evolution and is a companion for a person during the entire period of their existence.

To further explain the table, it is necessary to point out the peculiarities of the textual sources of the selected sampling. The point is that many similes of inequality compare a very limited range of concepts in certain texts only, the plot of which require their use, and those few texts are the sources of a large number of the sampled examples. Such manuscripts include the Riddle 40 and the Riddle 66 (which is probably an abridged version of the Riddle 40) as well as the *Solomon and Saturn* text. In other words, there are fragments of Old English texts that are consciously and purposefully based merely on similes of inequality comparing the same tenor with many vehicles in order to achieve a certain communicative effect. For example, in the two aforementioned riddles the tenor is God, who is compared to more than 30 vehicles. This proves once again the uniqueness and exclusivity of the tenor, justifying the small number of concepts/phenomena that have the potential to be the tenors of similes of inequality since uniqueness is *a priori* a rare phenomenon.

Thus, the productivity of similes of inequality is more a result of the socio-political climate of medieval England than a characteristic of the Old English language in general, this is why all conclusions must be drawn bearing this fact in mind. The most striking manuscript in terms of the structural diversity of the simile of inequality is undoubtedly the Riddle 40, in which almost all structural patterns with conjunctive and asyndetic connection were recorded. This fact contributes to the conjecture that the author of the riddle had a great flair for verbal skills, which is consistent with the assumptions of Weber (2012, p. 98) and Williamson (1977, p. 12).

Table 3. Chronological appearance of Old English similes of inequality.

Century Structural type	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
4.1. Simile of inequality with a conjunctive connection							104
4.1.1. Simile of inequality with a conjunctive connection whose vehicle is expressed by a word or a noun phrase							
4.1.1.1. N/P + Adj _{compar} + <i>bonne</i> + N _{nom} P	1	1	23	57	6	2	90
4.1.1.2. Adj _{compar} + N/P + <i>bonne</i> + N _{nom} P			1	5			6
4.1.1.3. N/P + Adj _{compar} + <i>bonne</i> + N _{nom} P + clause			2	2			4
4.1.1.4. VP (Adv _{compar} + V) + NP + <i>bonne</i> + NP				2			2
4.1.2. Simile of inequality with a conjunctive connection whose vehicle is expressed by a clause: N/P + Adj _{compar} + <i>bonne</i> + clause			2				2
4.2. Simile of inequality with a prepositional connection							18
4.2.1. N/P + Adj _{compar} + <i>ofer</i> + N _{nom} P					5		5
4.2.2. Adj _{positive} + NP + <i>ofer</i> + N _{nom} /NP					2		2
4.2.3. V + NP + <i>ofer</i> + N _{nom} P					4		4
4.2.4. <i>ofer</i> + NP + N/P + V				1	6		7
4.3. Simile of inequality with an asyndetic connection: N/P + N _{gen} P + Adj _{compar}				6			6
Total	1	1	28	73	23	2	128

The persistence of similes of inequality throughout the Old English period indicates their importance as rhetorical devices in literary expression. Their use allowed Anglo-Saxon authors to vividly illustrate differences between concepts, underscoring theological ideas. Since the tenor often referred to God, these similes further emphasized the distinction between the divine and the earthly. Their structural diversity showcases the sophistication of poetic and rhetorical techniques employed by Old English writers, who carefully crafted similes to evoke specific imagery and convey complex ideas to laymen.

5. Conclusion

Similes of inequality are characterised by the disproportionality of the salient feature in favour of the tenor. In Old English they are formed in an analytical or synthetic way. In the case of analytical constructions, the comparative degree of an adjective is most often used in combination with the conjunction *þonne*; the use of the preposition *ofer* is limited to only two sources and may be due to a literal translation of the Latin *super*. In the case of the synthetic method, the Anglo-Saxon simile of inequality is formed by combining a noun in the genitive case with the comparative degree of an adjective. The comparison markers *þonne* and *ofer* do not express the semantics of similarity, instead, they inevitably involve the comparison of phenomena with the explication of difference implicating similarity based on a common feature. The structural characteristics of similes of inequality are similar to the structural models of similes of equality in most cases, except for the much less frequent performance, which, among other things, is explained by the use of the simile of inequality only in those contexts that require the indication of uniqueness and exclusivity of the tenor.

The structural patterns observed in the studied Old English similes of inequality reflect cultural and linguistic trends in Old English literature, offering valuable insights into the poetic and rhetorical techniques employed by Anglo-Saxons. This study will facilitate the examination of English similes of inequality from a diachronic perspective. This will contribute to our understanding of the evolution of the English language regarding its figurative expression, which mirrors cultural shifts. Additionally, it will allow for comparative studies focused on similes of inequality in other languages contemporaneous with the Old English era.

Notes

1. When addressing the matter of the constituents of a simile, I will follow the terminology of I. A. Richards (1936), who introduced technical terms to describe metaphor: the tenor (primum comparandum) and the vehicle (secundum comparatum), which later were expanded into the tenor, the vehicle and the ground (tertium comparationis). Thus, in the simile *Her lips are red like roses*, the tenor is *lips*, the vehicle is *roses* while the ground is *red*. This simile is closed (a term used by Beardsley, 1981; Dawes, 1998; Margolis, 1957) because the ground is explicitly expressed.
2. According to Online Etymology Dictionary *gelic* meant “similar, resembling”, *swa* meant “in this way”, *swylc* – “just as, as, in like manner”.
3. Every 11th use of *gelice*, every 3^d use of *gelicra* or *gelicost*; every 4th use of *gelicnysse*; every 10th use of *swylce*; every 58th use of *swa* is found in Old English similes.

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