How Comparatives Invert: A New Syntax with Some History

1. Synopsis: The focus of this paper is on so-called comparative inversion (**CI**), s. (1). Using (Haeberli 2002), we propose a non-standard, historically consistent solution; cf. (2). The paper analyzes structural developments of comparative clauses (**CC**) in qualitative & quantitative terms. The corpus study is based on the CC tokens from YCOE, PPCME2, PPCEME. Throughout the CI-history of English, instead of both T and subject moving, none is displaced. The solution is supported by a series of diachronic developments, notably the syntax of pronouns in early English. In the analysis, we eliminate 2 alternative mechanisms in the decrease (but crucially not decease) of CI (V-to-I and V2) and 2 scenarios how inversion might have developed.

2. CI has been the subject of current discussions: e.g., Merchant (2003) interestingly analyzes its syntax (with ellipsis) as ECP-based. What previous accounts take for granted: movement of the subject to Spec, TP/IP ("EPP") plus auxiliary displacement to C. What they miss, however, is a fuller consideration of the history of CI. We first illustrate that a series of CC properties are attested early; to take but one here: the scope issue (Heim 2006). In (3), the QP can be shown (from the context) to scope out.

3. We argue: CC in OE (ME) had productive CI with full DPs (only). Two immediate diachronic scenarios are given in (5), (6). We quantitatively argue against (5), (6), based on significant oscillations of CI-frequencies (e.g. nearly doubling after OE.).

4. While some of the oscillations may be due to focus, and other properties, we narrow down on structural properties here and argue: CI is syntactically best accounted for by the history of a non-moving subject (Haeberli 2002). This is in line with the diachronic developments and the distinct syntax of pronouns in OE/eME.

5. Traditionally, CI is T-to-C. However, while inversion in better-studied contexts (topicalization, questions, etc.) disappears or becomes obligatory (optionality only during change; cf. Kroch 1989 a.o.), CI remains optional. For OE/ME, the received CI view translates as V-to-T or V-to-C (Pintzuk 1991). However, the possibility of the *in situ* subject can account for CI simply and does away with head movement to C. Data such as (1) though, discussed in the previous CC literature, could not establish the simpler alternative for comparatives. We also present some stronger ModE evidence; from verbal clusters (Huddleston& Pullum 2002) and so far neglected subjectless CC.

6. Assuming that grammars change in explainable (if often poorly understood) ways (i.e. we make what we may call the transmission assumption), some key CC issues can be tested through diachronic reasoning. Here is how: 1st, there is a dramatic fall in the frequencies of CI between the last period of ME (M4) and eModE. This may seem up the alley of a scenario tied to the loss of verb-movement (cf. Roberts 1993). But crucially, many comparatives are (naturally) attested with the copula. And since the copula has not stopped "moving" in the modern varieties (Emonds 1976), we cannot blame the quantitative steep post-M4 decline -as the paper discusses with the copula data - on loss of V-to-T. 2nd, one runs into serious timing issues (under any major account on the loss of V-to-T) if one tries to relate CI to the loss of V-to-T. Further, CI in OE was entirely consistent with the non-moved-subject hypothesis in that (unlike the so-c. operator inversion of questions, *þa*, neg., etc) it never applied to pronouns. This also rules V-to-C out. 4th, CI frequencies increase between OE/M1. However, this increase cannot be ascribed to the increase in pronoun-inversion starting in later ME. Even in later, pronoun-inverting-friendly ME, comparatives do not show it productively. **Summary:** The syntax of inversion does not always stop at good tradition (cf.- a.m.o.- Culicover & Levine 2001 on a different type). For CI, we argue diachronically (i) for non-moved subjects (ii) against tying CI to T-to-C, V-to-I.

The phenomenon ("CI"):

    (1) Julia's early-morning class is more talkative than **is <u>her late-evening class</u>**.

What the paper argues for in comparatives ("Low-subject scenario for CI")

    (2) *Comparative*: [$_{CP}$ Comp Op… [$_{TP}$Subj$_1$/Ø **T**[=fin.verb/Aux/etc] .. [$_{vP}$ **Subj$_2$** t_v …]]]

OE shows a series of interesting degree-based properties; e.g., QP-scope and CI:

    (3) Næfre ic maran geseah eorla ofer eorþan ðonne **is <u>eower sum</u>** (*Beowulf,* III.247)
         never I greater seen of warriors on earth than   is of-you one

Not-found configurations for OE:

    (4) *? [THAN COPULA PRONOUN]

Two scenarios that the paper argues against:

    (5) CI shows a steady decline towards ModE due to receding verb-movement.
    (6) CI is a development "on the rise", which requires an independent explanation.

Main Abbreviations not spelled out in the text:

eModE= early Modern English

ME=Middle English

OE= Old English

PPCME2= *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English* (Kroch & Taylor 2000)

PPCEME= *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English* (Kroch et al 2004)

YCOE= *York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* (Taylor et al 2003)

Selected References:

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