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The typology of the Old English simile of equality: A structural overview

This study elucidates four fundamental structural types of Old English similes of equality and examines their chronological usage patterns. The analysis establishes correlations between comparison markers employed in these similes and the peculiarities of their formation, elucidating the basic and most frequently used structural models, including such comparison markers as *gelice*, *gelicra*, *gelicost*, *gelicnyse*, *swylce*, and *swa*, along with their orthographical variants. The paper also sheds some light on the semantic features of these similes, exploring their intensified similarity and ability not to specify a tenor, shaped by their specific structural characteristics. Furthermore, the investigation studies the timing of specific comparison marker appearances in manuscripts. The research uncovers a positive correlation between early appearances of comparison markers in similes and heightened potential for figurativeness. These findings illuminate a gradual divergence between simile and metaphor over time, unveiling an increased cognitive complexity within figures of speech. This nuanced exploration contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of figurative expressions, offering valuable insights into the historical development of linguistic devices in Old English manuscripts and enhancing our comprehension of the intricate interplay between language structure and figurative meaning.

1. Introduction

The exploration of Old English simile has been relatively limited in published works. This presents an opportunity for researchers fascinated by structures and word order from over a thousand years ago, as well as for those who recognize the importance of understanding the past to comprehend the present.

While metaphor has consistently garnered significant interest, simile, particularly medieval one, has not enjoyed a comparable level of popularity in linguistic studies. Prior to Nevanlinna's (1993) investigation into Middle English simile

structure, there can hardly be found historic research dedicated to simile. Notable exceptions include occasional simile analyses within studies on Old English comparative clauses or the functioning of the dative case (Baker 2012; Fisher 1992; Gergel 2008; McLaughlin 1983; Carlton 2013; Mitchel 1985). The examination of simile as a stylistic device in literary works has captivated scholars like Margolis (1957), who drew comparisons between simile and related devices. Additionally, Qadir (2016), Beardsley (1981), Dawes & Yorke (2003), and Tyler (2006) have contributed to this area. Amodio (2014) and Stodnick (2012) touch upon similes in their analyses of Old English translations and adaptations of Latin texts.

What has been more widely explored in scholarship is the relationship between metaphor and simile (Barnden 2016; Chiappe & Kennedy 2001; Glucksberg 2001; Glucksberg & Haught 2006; Gokcesu 2009; Johnson 1996). It has become a common assumption that metaphors are superior to similes because they are considered stronger and more powerful tools (Kennedy & Chiappe 1999). However, several linguists offer a different perspective, challenging this view (Nowotny 1965; Bredin 1998; O'Donoghue 2009; Gargani 2014; Chen–Yao Kao 2022). Metaphors are often celebrated for their ubiquity and cognitive origins; however, similes also engage shared cognitive and discursive frameworks, which vary across different languages and cultures (Presner et al. 2021; Shapoval et al. 2022; Karaban 2024). Like metaphors, similes not only reflect cognitive processes but also uncover underlying meanings that might otherwise remain hidden (Gibbs & Steen 1999; Lakoff 1993; Kapranov 2014, 2016, 2018; Mizin & Slavova 2023).

This article, however, aims to focus solely on simile in all its forms by examining the formation and usage of different types of Old English similes of equality from the 7th to the 12th centuries, highlighting their peculiarities and contrasting their features. It serves as a general overview of a series of articles devoted to the structure of the Old English simile (Oleniak 2018, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2024), presenting additional assumptions and findings regarding the comparison of all its structural types.

2. Methodology

Since similes always feature a distinct comparison marker, I approached empirical material sampling from a semasiological perspective.

I used indicators of Old English similes of equality – *gelice*, *gelicra*, *gelicost*, *gelicnysse*, *swylce*, and *swá* – as formal markers, utilizing the University of Toronto corpus, which includes at least one copy of every surviving Old English manuscript. Nevertheless, some manual work was still necessary. The next step in the sampling process involved examining all extracted sentences from the corpus to determine whether the comparison indicator functioned specifically as a marker of simile rather than serving another grammatical role. This distinction is crucial because Old English comparative markers could also indicate non-figurative comparisons

or function as markers of time or intensity. Therefore, the key criterion was the semantics that unify various comparative constructions through the figurative similarity of conceptually distant ideas.

The final phase of material sampling followed a structured process: First, I read each sentence suggested by the search system to grasp its overall meaning. Second, upon identifying comparative semantics, I analysed the concepts being compared, which often required a broader contextual review since some sentences were too short or contained pronouns. Third, I determined the contextual meaning of the identified elements to assess whether they belonged to the same or different conceptual domains. Finally, if the compared concepts came from distinct conceptual categories, I evaluated whether one of them functioned as the typical bearer of the prominent characteristic being highlighted. For example, the search system suggested the following sentences with the comparative marker *swa*:

- a) *Swá ealde swá hié ðá wáeron hié gefuhton*
- b) *...Wuton cunnian, hwænne hine god læte swa swa gymeleasne...*

After establishing the general meaning of these expressions (Step 1), we can see that sentence (a) – ‘*As old as they were at that time, they fought*’ – conveys the intensity of the characteristic of old age [despite being very old, they fought] and does not exhibit figurative and comparative semantics. In contrast, sentence (b) – ‘*... Let us wait until God abandons him like a stray...*’ – compares two specific ways of being forsaken [God abandons object X in the same way that object Y is abandoned]. Thus, at this stage, sentence (a) is excluded from the machine-suggested corpus, while sentence (b) undergoes further analysis.

Next, after identifying the compared elements (Step 2), we determine that the author describes a hypothetical situation from the speaker’s perspective, where the abandonment of a layperson by God is compared to ceasing to care for a stray animal. By establishing the contextual meaning of the pronoun *hine* (‘him’ – the tenor) and the noun *gymeleasne* (‘a stray’ – the vehicle), we can confirm the relative conceptual distance (Step 3) between a human and either an animal or another person who is treated with indifference, rejection, or irritation.

Verifying (through dictionary definitions) whether the vehicle can serve as a prototypical bearer of the characteristic (Step 4) allows us to conclude that the image of a stray is indeed associated with homelessness, lack of kin or other close relationships, and thus with being unwanted and mercilessly discarded.

In this way 1038 similes of equality were sampled, whose indicators of comparison were notional words, which were formed in the pre-English period as a result of grammaticalization. These are four lexemes (or their variants) that belong a) to the class of adjectives in all three degrees of comparison (*gelice*; *gelicra*; *gelicost*), not only showing the similarity of the compared concepts, but also the intensity of this

similarity; b) nouns (*gelicnysse*) or c) adverbs (*swylce* and reduplicated *swa* in the case of emphasis).

3. Simile of equality with the comparison marker expressed by *gelic(e)*

Structurally, the Old English simile of equality, incorporating the components *gelic(e)* / *on(ge)lic(e)* / *anlic(e)*¹, is a combination of two nouns (the tenor and the vehicle) and the abovementioned comparison marker. It primarily employs the link verb *to be* and makes use of comparison markers in positive (2.1), comparative (2.2) and superlative (2.3) degree.

3.1. Simile of equality with the comparison marker expressed by *gelic(e)* in positive degree

The dominant element among adjectival markers is *gelice*, which, unlike the other two, was consistently used in all texts throughout the entire period in the majority of possible positions within the construction. Considering positionality and grammatical class, all combinations of structural elements can be reduced to fifteen models, with the basic and most productive one being *N / Pron + (be) + N_{dat} / NP_{dat} + gelic*:

- (1) *Se gitsiendawer þe ne wyrð næfre full is helle gelic þe næfð nan*
That greedy man who not becomes never full is to-hell like that not has no
gemet ac swa heo ma forswelgeð swa heo ma gewilnað.
measure but so it more swallows so it more desires.

(ÆAdmon 1 B1.9.3)

‘*The greedy man, who is never satisfied, is like hell; it has no measure, and the more it swallows, the more it desires*’

In the vast majority of cases, the comparison marker *gelice* governs the vehicle expressed by a noun in the dative case. However, alternative constructions with the nominative case vehicle are possible, as seen in the glossed *Gospels*, and may be influenced by rhythmicity or the specifics of manuscript translation:

- (2) *Eft ongelic is ric heofna segne sende in sae of all † eghwele*
Again alike is kingdom of heaven (to) a net sent in sea out of all every
cynn fisca somnende † geadrigende (MtGl (Li) C8.1.1)
kind of-fish collects together.
‘*Again, similar is the kingdom of heaven to the net, sent into the sea, gathering of every kind of fish*’.

1 For convenience, the form *gelic* will be used as a generalized lexeme for the Old English marker of comparison expressed by an adjective in the positive degree beyond the limits of the empirical material.

Chronologically, all the similes with the *gelice* component belong to the last three centuries of the Old English period, a consequence of King Alfred's active development of translation and educational activities in the second half of the 9th century.

The adjectival nature of this comparison marker prompts discussion not only about the verbalization of the similarity of the compared concepts but also about the intensity of this similarity, actualized by the forms of the comparative and superlative degrees of comparison, which is described in the following sections.

3.2. Simile of equality with the comparison marker expressed by *gelic(e)* in comparative degree

Old English similes featuring an adjectival marker in the comparative degree, *gelicra* structurally comprise a combination of a masculine or neuter noun in the dative case with the comparative degree of the adjective *gelice*, typically positioned after a noun or pronoun. Its predominant structure corresponds to the model $N + be + N_{\text{dat}} + gelicra$:

- (3) *Ac þa styriendan netenu sint monnum gelicran, forðæm <hy> habbað*
 but the domesticated animals are (to)men similar because they have
eall þæt ða unstyriendan habbað... (Bo B9.3.2)
 all that the undomesticated have...
 'But the domesticated animals are more like humans, because they have everything that the undomesticated ones have...'

In the provided example the form of the adjective in the comparative degree does not imply the presence of two alternative vehicles with greater or lesser degrees of similarity to the tenor. Instead, it demonstrates a heightened intensity of similarity between the tenor and the vehicle.

3.3. Simile of equality with the comparison marker expressed by *gelic(e)* in superlative degree

Old English similes employing an adjectival comparison marker in the superlative degree, *gelicost*, structurally consist of a masculine or neuter noun in the dative case (representing the vehicle) and a *gelicost* component, following a noun or pronoun (representing the tenor), sometimes with a verbalized, positionally independent ground. Its basic structure corresponds to the following model: $N / \text{Pron} + (be) + N_{\text{dat}} / NP_{\text{dat}} + gelicost$:

- (4) *Saturnus cwæð: Nieht bið wedera diestrost, ned bið wyrda heardost,*
 Saturn said: Night is of-weather darkest need is of-fate hardest
sorg bið swarost byrden, slep bið deaðe gelicost. (MSolA13)
 sorrow is heaviest burden sleep is to-death like.
 'Saturn said: Night is the gloomiest of weathers, need is the hardest of fates, sorrow is the heaviest burden, sleep is most like death'.

In less frequent instances (approximately 10% of cases), when the vehicle follows *gelicost*, its nominative case is used, which can be viewed as a literal translation from Latin.

4. Simile of equality with the comparison marker expressed by *gelicnysse*

Old English similes of equality with a noun comparison marker demonstrate the use of eight different orthographic variants: *gelicnysse*, *gelicnesse*, *gelicnes*, *genicnisse*, *gelicnyss*, *gelicnys*, *onlicnessa* and *onlicnesse*. Typically, the comparison marker occupies the final position within the construction, combining with the vehicle expressed by the noun in the genitive case, although its interpositional placement is also quite frequent. Its basic and most frequent structure is N/P + N_{gen} + *gelicnysse*:

- (5) *Stanas mogon hnexian and þæt starce isen on leades gelicnysse, ærðan*
 Stones can soften and the firm iron to lead likeness before
þe se geleafamæge of Agathes breoste beon æfre adwæsced.
 that the faith may of Agatha's breast be over put out.
 (ÆLS (Agatha) 1.3.9)
 'Stones can soften, and the firm iron can be in the likeness of lead, before
 faith may ever be put out in Agatha's breast'

This way of expressing similarity has only partially preserved its original functions and form to the present day. These structures exhibit both similar and contrasting features compared to the modern simile: Isomorphic features align with the modern definition of simile in terms of the number of constituent parts, while allomorphic features manifest in the possible absence of a defined referent, indicating a lack of expression of the tenor. In such structures, the tenor and the comparison marker merge, forming a symbiotic formation. The substantive character of this formation suggests that a certain non-verbalized object or phenomenon is understood as the referent of the tenor:

- (6) *Þonne is leornod on bocum þæt on þysse worulde syn fif onlicnessa*
 Then is learned in books that in this world are five likenesses
þe hellegryre. (HomS 4 (ScraggVerc 9))
to hell-torment.
 'Then it is learned in books that in this world there are five likenesses of
 hell-torment.'

Constructions featuring an unspecified tenor are employed to convey difficult-to-describe or unclear, incomprehensible phenomena, thereby amplifying their significance. Arguably, by employing the tenorless simile as a common means of communication, the Anglo-Saxons had a broader range of linguistic tools for expressing similes compared to modern English speakers.

The ability of Old English similes with the *gelicnysse* component to express similarity without verbalizing the tenor brings them closer to metaphor. This, coupled with the chronological age of such similes, provides another argument in favour of the gradual formation of comparative figures of speech with greater cognitive complexity.

5. Simile of equality with the comparison marker expressed by *swa*

As a productive and multifunctional lexeme in Old English, *swa* was more frequently employed outside the simile. Therefore, not all instances of *swa* automatically need to be associated with it. Compositionally, the component *swa* in Old English similes takes various forms as a marker of comparison: *swa* or *swa...swa...*, as well as *(e)alswa*, which, in the Early Middle English period, evolved into two separate lexemes: the adverb *also* and the conjunction *as*. Its basic structure model is N / Pron + *swa swa* + N / NP. When the component *swa* is used as a simile comparison marker, there is a notable increase in structural types with a verb component compared to similes with noun or adjectival markers of comparison. It corresponds to the model N / Pron + V + *swa swa* + N and appears to be the most frequent:

- (7) *Donne græet se lareow swa swa kok on niht, ðonne he cwīð: Nu us*
 Then cries the teacher like a cock in night when he says now for–us
is tima ðæt we onwæcnen of slæpe. (CP B9.1.3)
 is time that we awaken from sleep.
 ‘Then the teacher yells as a cock does at night when he says: Now it is time for us to awaken from sleep’.

The Old English simile employing the *swa* component allows for a flexible rearrangement of its constituents, offering additional communicative information. The use of the simile with the *swa* component signifies the ability to modify the positionality of the tenor–vehicle dyad, depending on the nominative or communicative nature of the element. In cases where the tenor and vehicle not only serve a nominative function by naming their referents but also provide supplementary details about them, describing actions or states, the inverse order is commonly observed. In such instances, the construction takes on the character of a figurative analogy:

- (8) *Swa eac gif þu wisdom timbrian wille, ne sete þu hine on uppan þa gitsunga,*
 So also if you wisdom build want not set you it on upon the greed
forþam swa swa sigende sond þone ren swylgð, swa swylgð seo gitsung
 because just as sinking sand the rain swallows so swallows the greed
þa dreosendan welan þisses middangeardes, forþam hio hiora simle bið
 the falling riches of–this world because it of–them always is
þurstegu. (Bo B9.3.2)
 thirsty.

‘Similarly, if you wish to build wisdom, do not place it on the sands of greed, for just as a sinking sand swallows the rain, so does greed swallow the crumbling wealth of this world, as it is always thirsty for more’.

The (non)reduplication of the element *swa* is contingent on its correlation with the grammatical class of associated words. Adjectives and adverbs more frequently align with the singular *swa* than any other parts of speech. This tendency can be explained by the fact that, unlike nouns, pronouns, or verbs, adjectives and adverbs furnish additional information about the qualitative characteristics of phenomena, objects, or actions. This inherent ability to express a certain quality seems sufficient, eliminating the need for additional ‘strengthening’ elements like reduplication or the addition of the prefix *eal-* to the simile comparison marker:

- (9) *Ða wearð aweaht wealdend drihten, swa he slæpende softe reste oððe swa*
 Then was awakened ruling lord as he sleeping softly rested or as
weorð man wine druncen. (PPs A5)
a noble man with-wine drunk.
 ‘Then the Ruler, the Lord, was awoken, as he softly rested like a noble man drunk with wine’.

The following principle holds: the more precisely the quality of the object is emphasized, the less additional emphasis is required.

An analysis of the empirical material provides grounds to assert with a high degree of probability that the reduplicated *swa* and *ealswa* are directly linked to the emphasis. These reduplications consistently appear in a contact position with the vehicle, irrespective of the direct or inverse order of the simile components. Never occupying a position before the tenor, a doubled *swa* or *ealswa* may function as a formal indicator of the immediately following vehicle:

- (10) *Swa swa wæter utagoten iceom& tostrede syndealle ban mine geworden*
Just like water poured out I am and scattered are all bones mine become
is heorte min swa swa weax miltende on middele innoðes mines.
 is heart my like wax melting in middle-of-belly mine.
 (PsGIF (Kimmens) C7.10)
 ‘As water poured out, I am scattered, and all my bones are melted; my heart is like wax, melting in the midst of my bowels’.

It is also worth mentioning that, despite the fact that many Old English texts have a Latin account of events behind them, the use of this construction cannot be attributed solely to literal translation. In numerous cases, it involves a free interpretation of stories, where the original Latin text² lacks such a construction, for example, the description of Satan as cited in O’Neill (O’Neill, 2016: xiii):

2 Psalm 36: 35–36, Vidi impium superexaltatum et elevatum super cedros Libani.

- (11) *Ic geseah þone unrihtwisan swiðe up ahafenne, swa swa sum cedertreow on*
 I saw the unrighteous—one very up lifted like a cedar—tree on
Libanus munte. (Judg B8.1.7.2)
Lebanon's mountain.
 'I saw the unrighteous one towering up high like a cedar tree on the mountain of Lebanon'.

6. Simile of equality with the comparison marker expressed by *swylc(e)*

The lexeme *swylc(e)* was not characterized by orthographic constancy either and allowed spelling variability without obvious collocational or colligative differences. Alongside *swylc(e)*, the forms *swilce* and *swelce* were used. The component *swylce* consistently occupies the most stable syntactic position, almost always being placed between the tenor and the vehicle. Its basic structure is V / VP + *swylce* + clause:

- (12) *Þonne scinæð he swa sunnanleoman and glitenað swa swylce he sio eall*
 Then shines he like sunbeam and glitters as if he were all
gylden. (HomU 17.1 (Kluge E) B3.4.17.1)
golden.
 'Then he shines like sunlight and glitters as if he were all golden'.

Old English similes of equality with the *swylce* component can be a combination of two nouns or noun phrases, two verbs or verb phrases, two parts of a sentence, or a notional word with a subordinate part of a sentence. Recorded chronologically throughout the Old English period, such similes represent the sole means of figuratively comparing our concept of a certain phenomenon or action with a hypothetical, unreal situation. Additionally, akin to similes with the comparison marker expressed by a noun, similes with the *swylce* component may contain a non-verbalized tenor for describing unclear, incomprehensible, and difficult-to-identify phenomena:

- (13) *An wæs þæt mon geseah swelce an fyren hring norðan cumen mid*
 One was that man saw as if a fiery ring from—the-north came with
micle swege. (Or5 B9.2.6)
great noise.
 'Once, a man saw as if one fiery ring came from the north with a great sound'.

In contrast to similes with the components *gelic* (in any degree), *gelicnysse*, and *swa*, similes with the *swylce* component exhibit a clear tendency to combine units at the syntactic rather than the lexical level. Approximately 97.5% of the considered

constructions contain phrases or clauses in at least one of the two possible distributions of the *swylce* component.

7. Contrast and comparison of types of similes of equality

Comparing the discussed comparison markers, it should be noted that their grammatical category directly influences the structural modelling of the simile. They exhibit varying degrees of categorical semantics, impacting their ability to enter into syntactic relations and, consequently, their degree of universality. Additionally, they display differing levels of flexibility in terms of combinatorial capabilities with other structural elements, leading to compositional diversity in their usage.

The adjectival marker of comparison, *gelice*, and the noun marker *gelicnysse* are employed in similes where only our perceptions of people or objects are compared. Even if the general meaning of the construction indicates the way of performing an action, this does not alter the categorical affiliation of the tenor and the vehicle within the object sphere. The ability to indicate the way the action is performed is realized through the use of a verb element – the ground:

- (14) ...*goldfylle gelic* *glitonap* Fenix. (HomU 17.1 (Kluge E) B3.4.17.1)
 ...to-gold leaf (foil) like glitters Fenix.
 ‘... like gold leaf glitters Fenix’

The marker of comparison *swa* primarily focuses the narrative around objects, occasionally including actions and situations. In contrast, the marker of comparison, *swylce*, can compare people, objects, their characteristics, actions, and situations, making it the most versatile indicator of Old English simile:

- (15) ...*ic wat þæt his ansyn wæs swylce ligraesc and his reaf wæron swylce*
 I know that his appearance was like lightning and his robes were like
snaw swa þæt we wæron afyrhte þæt we þær lagon swylce we deade wæron.
snow so that we were afraid that we there lay as-if we dead were.
 (Nic (A) B8.5.2.1)
 ‘...I know that his countenance was like lightning, and his clothing was like snow, so that we were frightened as if we lay there as if we were dead’.

However, when considering compositional and combinatorial possibilities, we observe the opposite situation. Despite being the least universal in terms of categorical semantics, the adjectival marker of comparison, *gelice*, is the most compositionally flexible. With the ability to match only people or objects, it appears in 15 structural models, showcasing its versatility in occupying different positions within the construction. On the other hand, even though the *swylce* marker is the

most universal due to the uniformity of its positioning, it appears in a smaller number of structural models within the construction – eleven, indicating its lower compositional flexibility.

The similes in question are employed with varying frequency throughout the Old English period, as shown in Table 1. The table presents generalized quantitative data on Old English similes, irrespective of structural models or alternative orthographic equivalents of the comparison marker, in comparison with the total number of uses of the corresponding comparison indicator in the corpus of Old English manuscripts (at the time of sampling). The right-hand side of the ratio is rounded to the nearest tenth.

Type of simile	Number	Ratio
with the component <i>gelice</i>	110 out of 1261	1:11,4
<i>gelicra</i>	7 out of 20	1:2,9
<i>gelicost</i>	31 out of 82	1:2,6
with the component <i>gelicnysse</i>	41 out of 179	1:4,4
with the component <i>swa</i> (<i>swa</i>)/ <i>swa...swa...</i>	496 out of 28952	1:58,3
with the component <i>swylce</i>	353 out of 3335	1:9,4
Total	1038 out of 33829	1:32,6

Table 1. Quantitative Characteristics of Old English Similes of Equality in the Context of Comparison Marker Usage.

The table illustrates not only the distinct performance of similes with the corresponding markers but also the potential capacity of constructions with these markers to convey figurative meaning, specifically, to be employed in similes rather than structures of other semantics. Such statistics provide grounds for assuming the greater or lesser propensity of the selected comparison markers to be used in figurative contexts, indicating their varying potential for imagery. For instance, one in eleven uses of the *gelice* component in Old English texts is within the similes in question. In contrast, almost every third use is in the case of *gelicra* and *gelicost*. The *gelicnysse* component forms a simile in every fourth use case. Showing a sufficiently high potential for imagery, the *swylce* component appears in almost every tenth case. On the other hand, the *swa* marker exhibits the lowest tendency towards figurative semantics. These calculations intriguingly correlate with the chronological features described below regarding the ‘birth’ century of the analysed similes.

The chronology of the recorded beginning of the use of Old English similes with considered comparison markers does not exhibit universal trends either. Instead, it is characterized by heterogeneity (Table 2).

Century Type of simile	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th	total
with the component <i>gelicost</i>	4	4	6	9	7	1	31
with the component <i>gelicnysse</i>	4	3	4	28	2	–	41
with the component <i>swylce</i>	12	3	60	166	104	8	353
with the component <i>gelice</i>	–	–	12	48	49	1	110
with the component <i>gelicra</i>	–	–	2	3	2	–	7
with the component <i>swa</i> (<i>swa</i>)	–	–	50	210	236	–	496
Total	20	10	134	464	400	10	1038

Table 2. Recording of Similes in Question with Respect to Their Comparison Markers.

Table 2 illustrates the emergence of the comparison markers at different points in time, spanning several centuries. It is important to note, however, that the correlation between centuries and the corresponding comparison markers may be somewhat tentative due to the possibility that the mentioned simile markers could have been used in oral speech before being recorded in writing. Therefore, recognizing the limitation of the sources available and understanding that no one will ever be able to obtain additional data, we rely on the existing information, revealing a certain pattern.

The “oldest” similes are those with the markers *gelicnysse*, *gelicost*, or *swylce*. This may seem like a trivial statement of an unremarkable fact, but a closer examination of the structural and semantic potential of these constructions reveals three key points. Firstly, the chronological relationship between the emergence of similes and their corresponding markers of comparison suggests that the possibility of later origins for similes with different markers is plausible. From the outset, the Anglo-Saxons possessed a rich linguistic arsenal to articulate the entire spectrum of similarities, comparing our concepts of objects, characteristics, actions, and situations. As time progressed and translation and enlightenment developed, the linguistic means expanded, incorporating those that allowed for a more emphatic presentation of information, such as *swa*.

Secondly, among all Old English similes, only these three markers – *gelicnysse*, *gelicost*, and *swylce* – were recorded in constructions capable of expressing a higher degree of closeness to the metaphor. The component *gelicost* achieves this through the superlative degree of comparison, while *gelicnysse* and *swylce* allow the formation of tenorless similes, where the tenor is unmarked and syntactically unexpressed. Thirdly, revisiting the previously assessed potential for imagery, these three markers exhibit a high tendency to be used in figurative expressions.

Considering the points mentioned above, we can cautiously formulate a pattern regarding Old English similes: the earlier a particular comparison marker began to be used in a simile, the higher is its figurative potential and, consequently, the closer connection this type of simile demonstrates with metaphor. Conversely, the higher is the figurative potential of the comparison marker, the earlier it is employed in similes, providing evidence of a closer connection of this type of simile with metaphor. Therefore, the hypothesis that simile formation gradually shifts away from metaphor, reflecting a smooth and consistent cognitive complication of figures of speech, appears quite plausible.

Conclusion

The scope of categorical semantics associated with each comparison marker influences the level of universality and colligative flexibility within the construction. This correlation directly impacts the compositional variety of the latter. For instance, adjectival and noun markers (such as *gelice* at any degree and *gelicnysse*) primarily compare our perceptions of objects. However, when there is a verb expressing the ground, these markers can also indicate the manner in which the action is performed. The adverbial/conjunctive marker *swa*, which compares our perceptions of objects and, to a lesser extent, actions and situations, exhibits greater universality. The most universal marker is *swylce*, with categorical semantics covering the comparison of our perceptions of objects, their characteristics, actions, and situations.

The chronological patterns in the use of Old English similes and the varying inclination of comparison markers to appear in figurative contexts suggest a gradual divergence between simile and metaphor, accompanied by a rise of cognitive complexity in figures of speech. These indicators of comparison are not exclusive to similes, frequently appearing in diverse semantic contexts, albeit with varying frequencies: *gelicra* and *gelicost* occur one in three times, *gelicnysse* one in four times, *swylce* 1 in 10 times, *gelice* one in 11 times, and *swa* one in 58 times. This diversity allows us to gauge their potential for figurativeness, which correlates with the chronology of the first recorded examples and their semantic proximity to metaphor. The earlier similes featuring a specific comparison marker appear in manuscripts (with *gelicost*, *gelicnysse*, and *swylce* being among the oldest), the higher the potential for figurativeness the marker exhibits, and consequently, the closer connection to metaphor this simile demonstrates. Alternatively, a higher potential for figurativeness of a comparison marker corresponds to its earlier adoption in similes (approximately 200 years), indicating a closer association of this simile type with metaphor. *Gelicnysse* and *swylce* achieve this by allowing the tenor to remain implicit, while *gelicost* does so by expressing the intensity of similarity.

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Tipologija staroengleske poredbe jednakosti: strukturni pregled

Ovaj rad razmatra četiri temeljna strukturna tipa staroengleskih poredbi jednakosti i ispituje njihove kronološke obrasce uporabe. Analiza utvrđuje korelacije između poredbenih oznaka u poredbama i osobitosti njihove tvorbe, razjašnjavajući tako temeljne i najčešće korištene strukturne modele, uključujući poredbene oznake kao što su *gelice*, *gelicra*, *gelicost*, *gelicnyse*, *swylce* i *swa*, zajedno s njihovim ortografskim varijantama. Rad također rasvjetljava značenjska obilježja tih poredbi, istražujući njihovu povećanu sličnost i sposobnost da ne određuju pobliže pojam koji se uspoređuje, što proizlazi iz njihovih specifičnih strukturnih karakteristika. Nadalje, istraživanje proučava vrijeme pojavljivanja pojedinih poredbenih oznaka u rukopisima te otkriva pozitivnu korelaciju između ranog pojavljivanja poredbenih oznaka u poredbama i povećanog potencijala za figurativnost. Te spoznaje otkrivaju postupno odvajanje poredbe od metafore tijekom vremena te veću kognitivnu složenost unutar stilskih jezičnih figura. Time ovo podrobno istraživanje pridonosi dubljem razumijevanju evoluirajuće prirode figurativnih izraza te nudi dragocjene uvide u povijesni razvoj jezičnih sredstava u staroengleskim rukopisima, kao i bolje shvaćanje zamršenog odnosa između jezične strukture i figurativnog značenja.

Ključne riječi: poredba, metafora, stilska figura, staroengleski jezik

Key words: simile, metaphor, figure of speech, Old English