ATLANTIS
Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies
47.2 (December 2025): 1-23
e-ISSN 1989-6840
DOI: http://doi.org/10.28914/Atlantis-2025-47.2.15

On the Social Diffusion of Comparative Forms in English Historical Correspondence

Tamara García-Vidal
UNED
tgarcia@flog.uned.es

The historical trajectory of English adjective comparison has sparked an interest in historical linguistics through corpus-based research. Nevertheless, this issue has been relatively unexplored through a historical sociolinguistic approach, specifically in terms of social stratification for this variable, where epistolary documents have proved to be particularly useful in that they contain socio-demographic information about a writer's social status, gender or age. By means of a corpus-based study of private letters drawn from the *Parsed Corpus of Early English Correspondence* and the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Extension*, this study will trace the social diffusion of both comparative forms in England from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, which will allow us to observe language change in real time through several generations of informants at the community level. Thus, the aims of this paper are (i) to explore the existence of social stratification in synthetic and analytic comparative forms and its developmental path in sociolinguistic terms, (ii) to identify the social groups leading the use of one form or another and (iii) to identify whether the factors of etymological origin and syllable length of the adjective may have motivated the selection of comparative strategy among the different social ranks of informants.

Keywords: historical sociolinguistics; adjective comparison; historical correspondence; synthetic comparatives; analytic comparatives

. . .

Sobre la difusión social de formas comparativas de adjetivos en la correspondencia histórica inglesa

La trayectoria histórica de la comparación de adjetivos en inglés ha despertado interés en la lingüística histórica a través de investigación basada en corpus. Sin embargo, esta cuestión ha sido relativamente poco explorada desde un enfoque sociolingüístico histórico, concretamente en lo que se refiere a la estratificación social de esta variable, donde los documentos epistolares han resultado ser especialmente útiles, ya que contienen información sociodemográfica sobre el estatus social, el género o la edad del escritor. Mediante un estudio basado en corpus de cartas privadas extraídas del *Parsed Corpus of Early English Correspondence* y del *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Extension*, este estudio rastreará la distribución social de ambas formas comparativas en Inglaterra durante los siglos XV al XVIII, lo que nos permitirá observar el cambio lingüístico en tiempo real a través de varias generaciones de informantes a nivel comunitario. Así pues, el objetivo de este trabajo es (i) explorar la existencia de una estratificación social en la forma comparativa sintética y analítica y su trayectoria del desarrollo en términos sociolingüísticos, (ii) identificar los grupos sociales que lideran el uso de una forma u otra y (iii) determinar si los factores de origen etimológico y longitud silábica del adjetivo pueden haber motivado la selección de la estrategia comparativa entre los distintos rangos sociales de los informantes.

Palabras clave: sociolingüística histórica; adjetivos comparativos; correspondencia histórica; comparativos sintéticos; comparativos analíticos

1. Introduction

There are two different ways in which the English language can form the comparative degree of adjectives: by using a synthetic form *-er* (*higher*) or an analytic form *more* (*more expensive*). The phenomenon of comparative alternation has, since the early twentieth century, been an issue of interest in English linguistics, reflecting, as it does, a "showcase of grammatical variation" (Mondorf 2009, 201). Thus far, a wealth of research has focused on the underlying motivations for comparative alternation in Modern English (ModE), the findings suggesting that choice of comparative strategy is influenced by a variety of factors, including phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic factors/aspects, amongst others (Bauer 1994, 51-60; Leech and Culpeper 1997; Graziano-King 2003; Mondorf 2003, 2009; Boyd 2007; Hilpert 2008; D'Arcy 2012). While this body of work has contributed to disentangling the main forces governing comparative alternation in Present-Day English (PDE), the number of diachronic studies concerning the topic of adjective comparison is far lower.

Among the main diachronic accounts of the evolution of the adjective comparative system in English that do exist, some pioneering works have identified the distributional

tendencies of comparative forms from Late ModE to PDE (Kytö 1996; Kytö and Romaine 1997, 2000), while others have centred on establishing the syntactic and morphological features affecting comparative formation (Traugott 1992, 262-64; Lass 1999, 155-58; González-Díaz 2008, 80-88), as well as frequency factors (Krug 2003) and even cognitive and semantic-pragmatic determinants of comparative variation (Mondorf 2003, 2009; González-Díaz 2008, 89-107), amongst others. The genre-based distribution of comparative forms has also been found, attesting that the synthetic form of comparison prevailed in more informal texts whereas the analytic form was more commonly found in formal registers (Kytö 1996).

However, the social factors that may have contributed to the distribution of synthetic and analytic forms of comparison have often been ignored. By examining the historical sociolinguistic context within which linguistic variation is embedded, we can trace patterns of language variation and change in remote speech communities over time to identify the social meaning of linguistic variables. In this context, the historical material of private letters of correspondence is particularly relevant and suitable (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1996: 39-54; Palander-Collin, Nevala and Nurmi 2009), as they contain socio-demographic information pertaining to both authors and recipients—i.e. social rank, age, provenance, gender, etc.—, thereby facilitating the exploration of sociolinguistic features traditionally associated with linguistic production through a speech community. As such, the observation of social differences in the past may shed light on the socio-linguistic factors that could have contributed to the distribution and direction of change of any linguistic pattern. In consonance with this, the goals of this paper are to trace the historical social diffusion of synthetic and analytic comparative forms through the Late Middle English (ME) and Early Modern English (EModE) in private letters, to identify the social groups leading the use of one form or the other, and to detect whether other factors conditioning the social distribution, such as number of syllables and the etymology of the comparative adjective, could have determined the choice of the comparative strategy.

2. Literature Review

From a historical viewpoint, the existing literature has tackled the issue of English adjective comparison by examining the gradual introduction of the analytic comparative strategy and the various factors accounting for the choice between using synthetic or analytic structures to form the comparative adjective. In Old English (OE), the adjective comparative system was roughly inflectional; the comparative's ending suffix *-(o)ra* stemmed from the Germanic suffixes */*oza*/ and */*iza*/, which survived as *-er*. Previous works that traced the origin of the analytic mechanism to construct the comparative in English reflect opposing views on the topic: while some scholars claim that it emerged as a result of Latin/French influence during the thirteenth century (Pound 1901, 3; Mustanoja 1960/2016, 280; Mossé 1969; Kytö 1996; Kytö and Romaine 1997), others state that the analytic comparative strategy was a native English development (Curme 1931, 503; Mitchell 1985, 84; González-Díaz 2006, 2008, 28), existing occasionally

in OE texts as a collocation of the degree intensifiers *ma*, *swiðor*, and *bet* (*more*) with participles (González-Díaz 2006).

During the course of the ME period, a substantial rise in the use of the analytic variant is noted, leading to a lapse of linguistic competition between the two comparative forms until the end of the EModE period (Lass 1999, 156-57). Some studies have accounted for the evolution of and competition between the two comparative forms by corroborating that the analytic variant did not arise until the Late ME period—through analogy with Latin and French analytic constructions—and because from this time onwards, the synthetic comparison began "reasserting itself" (Kytö and Romaine 2000, 172). In this process of competition, the English comparative system has witnessed two patterns of change between adjective types: a tendency from synthetic to analytic comparatives but also from analytic to synthetic comparatives. Specifically, while synthetic comparative formation gained grounds in disyllabic adjectives ending in *-y* and *-ly* (*more worthy* > *worthier*), the system moved towards analytic comparative formation in disyllables ending in *-ous* and *-ful* (*joyfuller* > *more joyful*) from Late ME to PDE (Kytö and Romaine 1997, 344).

The above outline shows evidence of the historic variation and change of the linguistic comparative variants. The factors governing the choice between synthetic and analytic comparatives drawn from the literature can be divided into internal and external factors. Research on internal factors points mainly to phonological, morphological or syntactic factors as the main precursors for variation. At the start of the ModE period, both comparative constructions were employed indiscriminately but with certain limitations, since short adjectives had a higher frequency of suffixation, while longer adjectives involved periphrasis (Sweet 1891, 326). In line with this, Jespersen (1909/1956, 350-51) asserted that the preference for one type of comparison over the other was primarily determined by length, with short adjectives being more prone to taking synthetic forms and longer adjectives taking analytic forms (see also Pound 1901, 9-10; Quirk et al. 1985, 461-62; Kytö and Romaine 2000, 180; Suematsu 2004, 37). Another key factor in the selection of form of comparison, according to Poutsma (1914), is word ending, which he claims is "chiefly a matter of euphony, convenience and rhythm and partly one of meaning" (1914, 474). He further claims that the analytic construction appears to be more unnatural as it is more likely to be found with longer words in literary contexts, as opposed to the employment of synthetic forms, which are mostly preferred in "the vulgar (i.e. spoken or colloquial) language" (1914, 478). The diachronic validity of some synchronically oriented studies on syntactic and semantic-pragmatic factors as determinants of comparative alternation (see Rusiecki 1985; Leech and Culpeper 1997; Lindquist 2000; or Mondorf 2003, 2009, amongst others) has been tested by González-Díaz (2008, 75-107), who concludes that these factors did not have a significant influence on the distribution of comparative forms in EModE or Late ModE, with the exception of the syntactic position of the comparative (attributive, postpositive or predicative).

Considering external factors that could have influenced the selection between synthetic and analytic forms of comparison, some studies on ME and EModE have shown that the synthetic form occurred more frequently with native adjectives (*stronger*), whereas the analytic form was more readily chosen with Romance adjectives (*more beautiful*)[1] (Sweet 1891, 327; Pound 1901, 18; Bolinger 1968, 120; Quirk et al. 1985, 463; Kytö and Romaine 1997, 346; Terasawa 2003, 194-97; González-Díaz 2008, 51-73; García-Vidal 2019). Interestingly, Pound also noticed that "individual preference" (1901, 18) was presumably at work as a factor determining the comparative choice in EModE. In this respect, Curme (1931, 504) signals a stylistic advantage of the analytic form over the synthetic one to express the idea of degree and emphasis, stating that a separate word allows the speaker/writer to stress the comparative form, whenever they wish to emphasize the concept of degree—or the adjective—when highlighting the meaning. In line with this, Mondorf (2003, 2009) found that the use of the analytic form in the presence of complex environments of cognitive complexity—presence of complements or argument complexity—did emerge after the eighteenth century (Mondorf 2009, 161-67). In addition, she advocates for a linguistic "division of labour" (2009, 117-64) whereby the analytic form of comparison is used in contexts with high level of cognitive complexity—especially when combined with longer and less frequent adjectives—whereas the synthetic form is employed with shorter and more frequent adjectives after EModE. Additionally, previous studies have revealed that the synthetic variant prevailed in informal types of texts—matter-of-fact text types—, whereas the analytic form spread widely in formal registers during Late ME and EModE (Kytö 1996; Kytö and Romaine 2000). It was at the end of the EModE period when the two ways of comparing adjectives started to advance along "divergent tracks" (Kytö and Romaine 1997, 336), eventually reaching their present-day distribution. As many grammars were published during the eighteenth century, particularly aimed at upper and middling orders of society, the English language started to be codified, which implied "the suppression of optional variability in language" (Milroy and Milroy 2012, 6), that is, when faced with a choice between two or more forms, one will be favoured over the other. One of these forms will be considered the most appropriate, i.e., the standard, whereas the other will be viewed as less precise or incorrect (Yañez-Bouza 2018, 38). Under this condition, one may assume that the choice of the comparative strategy could have also been influenced by prescriptive tendencies after the eighteenth century (Kytö and Romaine 2000).

Even though these works provide insight into the linguistic behaviour of comparative forms in historical written registers, extralinguistic factors guided by social considerations on this topic have scarcely been mentioned in the literature. In fact, they have only been considered in the study of double comparative forms (*more stronger*) by González-Díaz (2008, 159-95), who analysed their socio-stylistic distribution and showed that they were

[1] In this study, the term "native" refers to adjectives of Germanic and Old Norse etymological origin, whereas the term "Romance" refers to adjectives of Latin/French etymological origin.

primarily used by the upper ranks of society in the first half of EModE, and then spread among lower ranks around the first half of the seventeenth century, but disappearing during the eighteenth century under the influence of prescriptivism. However, double forms are beyond the scope of the current study.

In order to shed light on the historical sociolinguistic dimension of the phenomenon, material containing socio-demographic information about writers is required. As Finegan and Biber argued (1994, 2001), variation in social status can be detected in register analysis. In this sense, private letters of correspondence for historical sociolinguistic research are considered a reliable source for sociolinguistic analysis over time since they allow us to trace socio-linguistic change through a speech community at different times. The possibility of gathering personal information about both writers and recipients has facilitated the study of sociolinguistic variables traditionally associated with linguistic production, such as social status, gender, age, education, social networks, etc. Therefore, correspondence is commonly regarded as the ideal genre to study sociolinguistic variation due to its proximity to speech, since it represents the vernacular language (e.g. Elspaß 2012; Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2017) and stands out as "the most involved and therefore oral of written genres" (Romaine 1998, 18) available for tracing linguistic changes. The present paper, therefore, analyses private letters of correspondence to trace the historical diffusion of synthetic and analytic comparative forms from a sociolinguistic angle through Late ME and EModE, identifying the social groups leading the use of one form or the other and exploring other factors that could have affected their social distribution, such as number of syllables and the etymology of the comparative adjective.

3. Methodology

The main research question that has guided this study is whether English comparative forms were associated with the writing of certain social groups or not. To trace the social distribution and the social groups leading their diffusion, it is necessary to rely on historical material which enables us to reconstruct the socio-linguistic processes from the past. In view of this, the source material for the present study comes from the *Parsed Corpus of Early English Correspondence* (PCEEC) (Nevalainen et al. 2006), covering the periods 1410-1681, and the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Extension* (CEECE), spanning the decades from 1681 to 1800 (Nevalainen et al. 2012).[2] The former is a compilation of 4,970 private letters by 666 informants from 84 collections, which amounts to 2,159,132 running words, whereas the latter comprises 4,921 private letters by 311 informants belonging to 77 letters collections and contains 2,220,345 running words. Thus, these corpora allow the researcher to easily access the language of

[2] The PCEEC was compiled by Terttu Nevalainen (leader), Jukka Keränen, Minna Nevala, Arja Nurmi, Minna Palander-Collin and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg. As for the CEECE, the main compilers are Terttu Nevalainen (leader), Helena Raumolin-Brunberg, Samuli Kaislaniemi, Mikko Laitinen, Minna Nevala, Arja Nurmi, Minna Palander-Collin, Tanja Säily, and Anni Sairio.

Late ME and EModE and provide an opportunity to compare how members of different social ranks and of different genders used certain linguistic variables. The time spans covered by both corpora are essential for tracking ongoing linguistic changes in the development of the English language—a period of transition characterized by the spread of the incipient configuration of Standard English.

Given that the language used by speakers of different social statuses has historically influenced linguistic variation, accurate models of social stratification are necessary (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2017, 32-36; 135-36). Thus, in historical sociolinguistic research, it is essential to consider the hierarchical model of social orders upon which past societies were built. For the purpose of this study, the conventional classification of historical social ranks proposed by Nevalainen (1996, 58) and Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2017, 136) has been followed. Considering that the socio-historical background in Late Medieval England and Early Modern England was different, a social hierarchical model employed for the dynamic examination of change has been selected as the basis for our approach to exploring the social embedding of linguistic diffusions across centuries.[3] More specifically, this model allows for long-term temporal comparison in the dynamic examination of the social embedding of linguistic diffusion, based on the tripartite social classification proposed by Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2017, 137): "[a]ll orders above the professions [are] lumped together as the upper ranks, the professions and merchants forming the middle ranks, and the other non-gentry the lower." In this respect, upper ranks comprise royalty, nobility, clergy and gentry; middle ranks merchants and professionals and lower ranks other non-gentry backgrounds.

The correlations between gender and social status examined in the present study are based on data from both male and female informants in the PCEEC and the CEECE. In view of the different word counts written by each gender in the different social ranks within the sub-periods under investigation (see table 1), the figures were normalized to a text of 100,000 words for comparisons.

Table 1. Word count for informants according to social rank

	1418-1500		1501-1600		1601-1700		1701-1800	
	Men	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**
Upper	174,337	79,706	661,993	46,239	923,880	314,535	926,399	462,678
Middle	159,429	434	57,626	0	261,249	3,815	442,083	136,620
Lower	113,153	6,528	101,361	10,685	265,611	39,659	71,329	22,795
Total	446,919	86,668	820,980	56,924	1,450,740	358,009	1,439,811	622,093

[3] Wrightson (1991) also claimed that hierarchy models are best suited to describing the society of the sixteenth century, while the tripartite pattern better accounts for the social orders in the seventeenth century. Moreover, English society in the eighteenth century was also considerably different from earlier periods, as is reflected, for instance, in the development of the wealth and power of the middle ranks—merchants and professionals (Kaislaniemi 2018, 50).

The data were divided into periods of ninety-nine years, the exception being the first period, which only includes eighty-two years owing to the fact that it indicates the starting point of the earliest letter including comparative adjectives in the PCEEC. For the retrieval process of instances, the software *AntConc 3.5.9* (Anthony 2011) was employed. The parsed version of the PCEEC was used to obtain the comparative instances, but for the CEECE, the tagger programme *CLAWS* (Garside 1987, 30-41) was used for grammatical tagging. As the tagging of each corpus only provides us with the tokens for synthetic comparatives, the spelling variants considered for the search of analytic forms are *mar(e)**, *mor**, *moare*, *moch*, *moore* and *more*. The resulting concordance hits for synthetic and analytic forms were saved and listed. The data were then classified according to the date of publication of the letter and correlated with the social status and gender of the writer, along with the linguistic factors of etymological origin and syllable length of the adjective mentioned below, after which they were copied to *Excel* spreadsheets. Statistical tests were used to establish whether the resulting data were significant or not: a non-parametric Pearson's Chi-square test was used to assess whether the data were statistically significant and a two-way ANOVA statistical test was performed to measure the effects of the independent variables (gender and social rank) on the dependent variable (synthetic and analytic comparative variants). The final output required manual disambiguation to exclude instances from the analysis which were: quantifier uses of *more*, as in example (1), suppletive forms, as in (2), and proportional clauses which may entail parallelism with adjectives that follow, as in (3). As both corpora are large, the excessive generation of these forms was the main challenge, and removing them proved to be a time-consuming process.

(1) [...] but I heare there be many *more great men* come thence very lately. (PCEEC, John Chamberlain, lower rank, 1613, 9,390)[4]

(2) [...] and there we fyndyng some new occasion to seek a *better* resolution of hir majesty. (PCEEC, William Cecil, upper rank, 1586, 1,395)

(3) [...] the more he knows you, he will find you *the more agreeable*. (CEECE, William Cowper, middle rank, 1784, 21,981)

For the study of the social distribution of comparative adjectives, the linguistic factors of etymological origin—native and Romance adjectives—and syllable length of the adjective were considered. In order to find out the etymology of comparative adjectives, the Oxford English Dictionary (Simpson and Weiner 1989) was employed. Correlating the etymological origin and syllable length of the adjective with the social rank of the informant allows us to ascertain whether the nature of the adjective, and

[4] The examples presented in this study contain the following information in this order: name of the corpus, author's name, author's social rank, date of the letter, and number of example within the classification of instances retrieved.

hence the type of vocabulary, could have influenced the sociolinguistic distribution of comparative forms in the letters of the different social ranks of informants.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1. Historical Distribution

This section presents the chronological distribution of both synthetic and analytic comparative adjectives in Late ME and EModE correlated with the etymological origin of the adjective. The material drawn from the corpora provides us with a total of 5,330 comparative adjectives, of which 2,910 are synthetic adjectives and 2,420 analytic. There is a positive correlation of native adjectives with synthetic forms and of Romance adjectives with analytic forms (see table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of synthetic (S) and analytic (A) comparatives between native and Romance adjectives across periods (absolute figures)

	1418-1500		1501-1600		1601-1700		1701-1800	
	S	A	S	A	S	A	S	A
Native	88	15	293	101	919	219	1,188	233
Romance	12	36	25	177	151	573	234	1,066
Total	100	51	318	278	1,070	792	1,422	1,299

Figure 1 shows the distribution of comparative adjectives across periods (normalised frequencies). As can be observed, the data here illustrate a substantial rise in the use of English comparative adjectives over time, with higher rates of the synthetic form over the analytic in all the investigated periods. This distribution is in line with previous studies on comparative adjectives in historical data (Kytö 1996; Kytö and Romaine 1997, 2000) which have revealed that the synthetic comparative variant is the most frequent comparative strategy across centuries. On closer scrutiny, the data point to the moderate use of both comparative linguistic forms during the fifteenth century, with both increasingly used through the sixteenth century such that the proportion of synthetic (36.22) and analytic forms (31.66) is quite similar. After that, the use of both forms continues to increase steadily in the seventeenth century, though frequency of use diverges in as much as synthetic forms become more common (59.15) than analytic forms (43.78). However, during the eighteenth century, the difference in frequency of usage of the two forms once again begins to converge (68.96 for synthetic forms and 63 for analytic). Overall, what seems to emerge from the data is the fact that both comparative forms were clearly in competition throughout Late ME and EModE, which was also attested in a previous study by Kytö and Romaine (1997) using the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts*, a multi-genre diachronic corpus containing different text types in prose or verse.

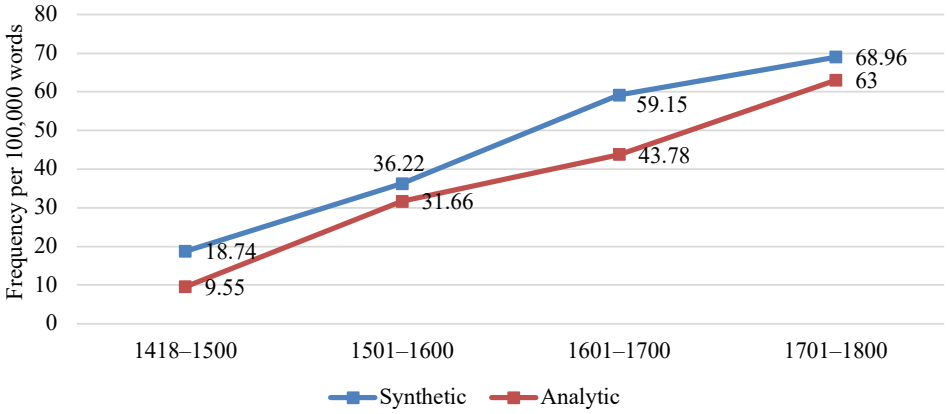

FIGURE 1. Distribution of comparative adjectives across centuries (normalised frequencies)

4.2. Historical Sociolinguistic Distribution

As it is a common assumption that social differences contribute to the spread of linguistic innovations or trends, and that "we need to take into account social factors in addition to intra-linguistic factors in order to come closer to explanations [of language variation and change]" (Milroy 1998, 41), this section attempts to capture the social distribution of synthetic and analytic comparative forms with respect to gender and social rank. Furthermore, to account for the social distribution of both types of comparative forms, the linguistic factors of syllable length and etymology of the adjective were also considered in order to shed light on the preference for one comparative form over the other depending on the type of adjective.

4.2.1. Gender and Social Variation in Comparative Forms

This section presents the results of correlating comparative forms with the gender and social status of the informants from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century.

Figure 2 demonstrates that there was a steady increase in the employment of synthetic and analytic forms across time, with noticeable differences in letters by upper, middle, and lower social groups. On closer scrutiny, the fifteenth century points to a possible gender difference within the higher echelons of society, with upper-ranked women using the analytic variant most frequently (25). In contrast, upper-ranked men exhibit a lower rate of analytic occurrences (9.1) but the highest frequencies of synthetic forms (26.3). The same holds true for middle-ranked men and lower-ranked informants, insofar as the synthetic form is more frequently found in their letters. Contrary to what is observed in the previous period, during the sixteenth century the analytic variant diffuses more substantially across middle and lower layers of society, with upper-ranked (33) and middle-ranked men (34.7) catching up on upper-ranked women (36.7). Regarding synthetic forms, women from higher social ranks increased their use considerably from 21.3 to 62.7, exhibiting

therefor wide differences between their use of the two forms. By the seventeenth century, use of analytic comparative forms is rather homogenous among the different social ranks, except for middle and lower-ranked women. However, the ranks behave differently when the observation of the difference in frequencies between both forms is examined. Unlike middle and lower orders of society, upper-ranked women (90.2) and men (60.3) show a considerable increase in use of the synthetic variant and, consequently, bigger differences between the two forms. An interesting pattern emerges with the analytic variant during the eighteenth century, since it spreads widely among middling orders, with use by middle-ranked women (78.3) slightly exceeding that of upper-ranked women (74.9). Unfortunately, the relative scarcity of data from middle-ranked women in earlier material poses a problem for the detection of gender differentiation within this social rank. Finally, the use of the analytic form by lower-ranked women and men decreases considerably during the eighteenth century, from 25.2 to 13.1 and from 38.7 to 26.6, respectively.

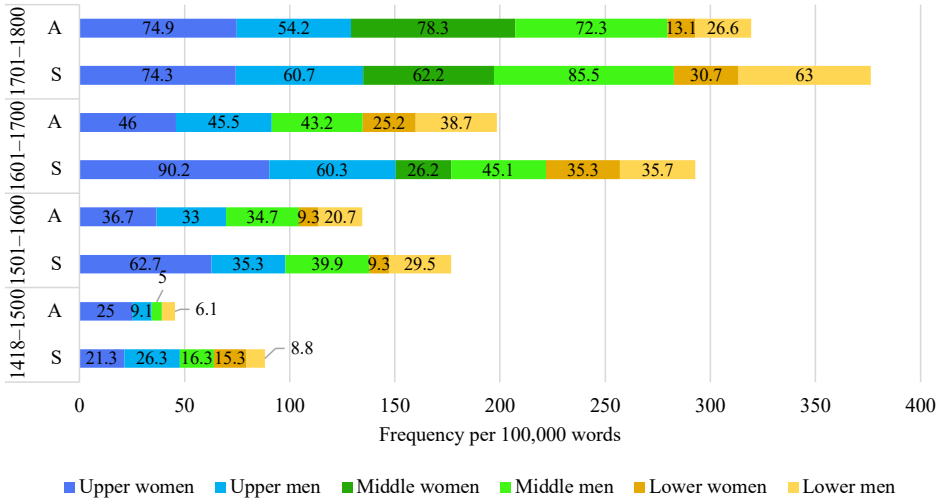

FIGURE 2. Gender and social variation in the distribution of synthetic (S) and analytic (A) comparative adjectives across centuries (normalised frequencies)

Even though this distribution may signal a possible female advantage in the use of the analytic comparative variant among members of the upper orders in the fifteenth century, the rather limited amount of data during this period casts doubt on whether this points to a case of female leadership or to skewed results. According to Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2017, 130), "gender affiliation can only be detected when a change has passed its incipient phase" and "[…] remains constant from the new and vigorous stage on until its (near) completion." In our data, gender differences in the use of the analytic comparative variant level out from the sixteenth century onwards, which may indicate that gender distinction was not an indicative factor for comparative strategy choice, at least after this

century. More data from earlier periods would be needed to firmly state that women were ahead of men in the use of the analytic comparative form. While gender affiliation seems to be elusive after the sixteenth century, social rank proves to be more pronounced and decisive for the distribution of comparative variants, showing greater differences between upper, middle, and lower ranks across centuries. Statistical results also confirm this observation: the distribution of synthetic (p <0.01) and analytic comparative forms (p <0.05) in our data is statistically significant only for the category of social rank.

More precisely, the overall trend that emerges from figure 2 seems to indicate that the analytic comparative form could have been first associated with upper ranks of society during the fifteenth century, and then eventually reached middle and lower ranks in the later periods. Data from the eighteenth century show a clear socially conditioned increase in the use of the analytic comparative variant with middle ranks leading its use, followed by upper ranks and with lower ranks lagging behind.

As has been previously attested, members from middle-ranked groups of society, such as lawyers, scholars or government officials often acquired their linguistic behaviour from those in the upper echelons through their contact with formal texts (Conde-Silvestre and Calle-Martin 2015, 78; Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2017, 154). As such, one interpretation of our findings could be that, as the analytic comparative variant shows a socially-stratified diffusion, reaching a wider range of the population with the leading middling social ranks during the eighteenth century, this sector of society might have been aware of the tendency in the repertoire of the upper ranks and could have adopted it to such an extent that the data show the highest occurrences in their letters.

Previous research showed that the use of the analytic form peaked during the Late ME period although the synthetic form reasserted itself during the EModE (Kytö and Romaine 2000, 172; González-Díaz 2008, 82). The sociolinguistic results obtained here suggest that this direction of change could have been linked to upper-ranked sociolinguistic practices since they show the highest rates of analytic forms in the fifteenth century, and of synthetic forms in the following centuries. It is, however, difficult to pin down why upper ranks show a decrease in synthetic comparative adjectives during the eighteenth century and, consequently, similar frequencies of both comparative forms. To investigate this further, the factors of etymological origin and syllable length of the adjective will be explored in the following section to determine whether the nature of the adjective could have motivated the choice of comparative strategy between the different social ranks.

4.2.2. Social Variation in Comparative Forms: Etymological Origin and Syllable Length of the Adjective

This section examines the correlation between the type of adjective—based on etymology and syllable length—and the strategy for comparative choice across different social ranks. The gender category has been disregarded in this analysis as no significant conclusions were drawn in the previous section.

In figure 3, the distribution of monosyllabic comparative adjectives correlated between native and Romance adjectives across social ranks is shown. As can be seen, native adjectives increasingly take synthetic comparative forms over time. Interestingly, however, the use of analytic forms with native monosyllabic adjectives is most prolific during the sixteenth century in letters written by the middle ranks (10.41) and it is during the seventeenth century that lower ranks exhibit their highest rates of analytic forms (7.20) with native monosyllabic adjectives, see examples (4) and (5) below, which is followed by a dip in the eighteenth century.

(4) [...] but aunswer made yt were too great a leape, and that yt were *more fit* you should be first sent on some message. (PCEEC, John Chamberlain, lower rank, 1608, 9,102)
(5) This country *fitter* for geese and ducks than people. (CEECE, George Culley, lower rank, 1784, 14,524)

What is notable with monosyllabic Romance adjectives is that there appears to be no preference for either comparative strategy until the eighteenth century, when instances of the synthetic form begin to outnumber the analytic comparative variant. An interpretation for this might be that, during the eighteenth century, as many historians of the English language have identified (see for example Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2006, 251), prescriptive tendencies wiped out variation by establishing a standard language, and hence the rejection of some grammatical patterns. In this respect, prescriptive tendencies codified the use of comparative forms whereby the synthetic variant was mainly restricted to monosyllabic adjectives. Interestingly, it is precisely during the eighteenth century that lower ranks of society show higher rates of both synthetic (8.49) and analytic forms (3.18) in terms of monosyllabic Romance adjectives when compared with previous periods, as seen in examples (6) and (7):

(6) [...] Touchinge the city, it is *more large* than any I have seene since I left London. (PCEEC, Nehemiah Wharton, lower rank, 1642, 10,254)
(7) [...] I can't tell how long they will be in executeing being *larger* than I ever made any in Lancashire. (CEECE, Carolus Charles, lower rank, 1792, 15,216)

A different picture emerges with disyllabic adjectives, as illustrated in figure 4. While Romance adjectives always favoured the use of the analytic comparative form, native adjectives exhibit an increase in its use during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, showing vacillation between both comparative forms throughout the eighteenth century. As regards social differences, the data do not present a discernible pattern until the eighteenth century, at which point the middling sections of society surpass the upper sections in their use of analytic forms with Romance disyllabic adjectives, as examples (8) and (9) illustrate:

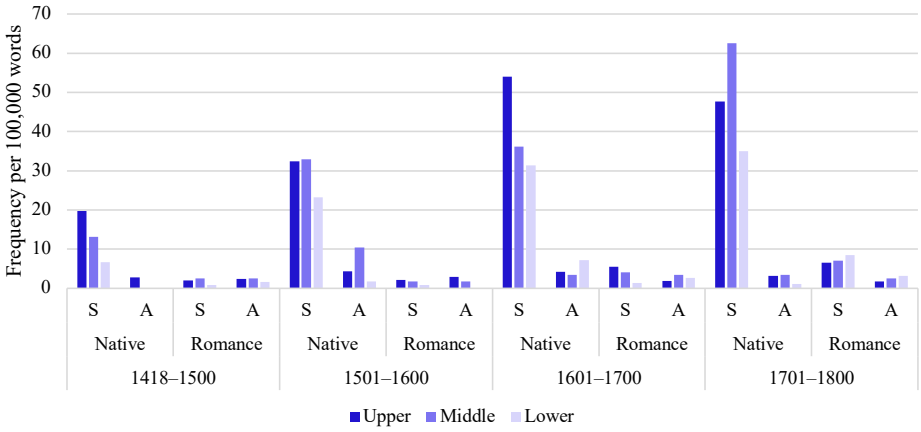

FIGURE 3. Social distribution of synthetic (S) and analytic (A) monosyllabic adjectives in terms of native and Romance adjectives (normalised frequencies)

(8) Lets always rite when we can, and have patience when we cannot. so shall we be *more hapy* when we meet whonce agen. (PCEEC, Winefrid Thimelby, upper rank, 1650, 10,891)
(9) He was much *more Civil* and attentive than I expected. (CEECE, Samuel Crisp, middle rank, 1780, 21,458)

It is interesting, though, that the use of the analytic form with Romance adjectives peaked during the sixteenth century (8.92) in letters by the lower orders, and then sharply decreased during the eighteenth century (4.24), when this social group show increased rates of using synthetic forms with native adjectives (9.56).

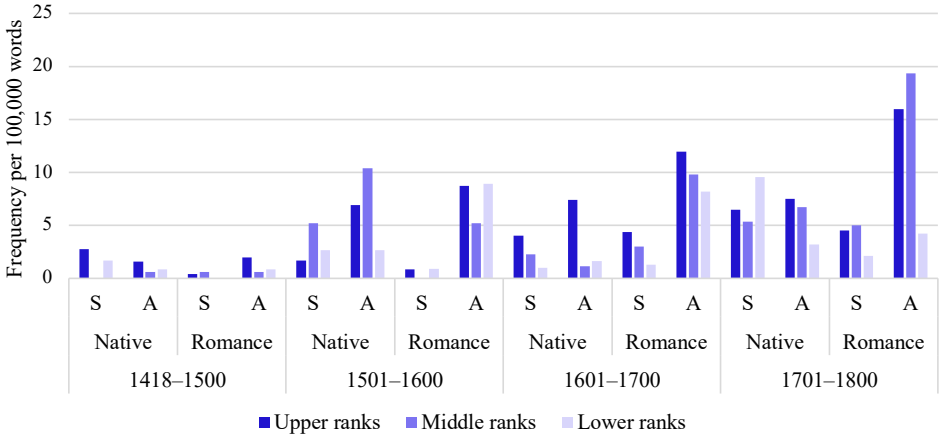

FIGURE 4. Social distribution of synthetic (S) and analytic (A) disyllabic adjectives in terms of Romance adjectives (normalised frequencies)

Finally, as illustrated in figure 5, the results of polysyllabic adjectives show a more conspicuous pattern. A clear social stratification in the use of the analytic variant can be observed: upper ranks show higher rates of the analytic form in Romance adjectives from the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries, but it diffuses to middle-ranked informants during the seventeenth century (see examples (10) and (11)), when use by this group overtakes that of the upper orders during the eighteenth century, while lower ranks lag behind in taking it up.

(10) […] no man *diligenter* nor more circumspect, which thing both the kings his masters notid in him greatly. (PCEEC, Thomas Wyatt SR, middle rank, 1537, 1,297)
(11) […] only this I must confess, the have been *more diligent* of late than heretofore, and yet not so diligent as I could wish. (CEECE, Henry Brougham JR, upper rank, 1695, 17,002)

These findings shed new light on the results obtained in the previous section. Overall, analytic forms increased substantially in the writings of each social rank across the centuries, as they were more prolific with Romance adjectives and commonly found in the letters of the upper ranks from the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries. By the seventeenth century, middle ranks had almost caught up with upper orders in terms of use of analytic forms, and then surpassed them during the eighteenth century. The tendency to use more analytic forms over time is, however, not evident in lower ranks of society during the eighteenth century, which contrasts with their noticeable increase in the use of synthetic forms.

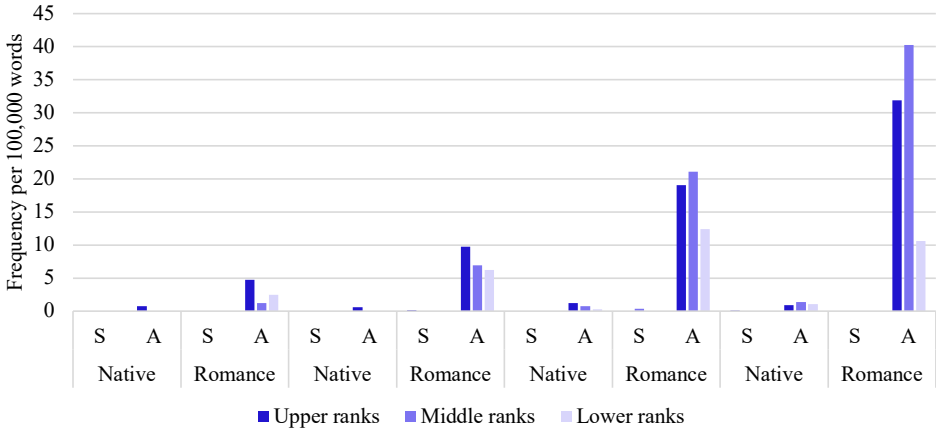

FIGURE 5. Social distribution of synthetic (S) and analytic (A) polysyllabic adjectives in terms of native and Romance adjectives (normalised frequencies)

This decline in analytic forms is observed in Romance disyllabic and polysyllabic adjectives, being most noticeable in native monosyllabic adjectives, allowing for

the hypothesis that this was associated with eighteenth-century prescriptivism. Prescriptive grammarians "base their rules as much as on the perceived practice of the educated upper classes as on 'reason', 'logic' and the rules of Latin" (Beal 2004, 123), which implies that the social status of the reader was a decisive factor when writing eighteenth-century grammars (Cresy 1980). While the grammars of the first part of the eighteenth century were mainly aimed at the more privileged ranks of society, who enjoyed the advantages of classical education (Fletcher 1995, 300-305), during the second half of the century there was a change in the intended readership of the grammars, for they also expanded to middle ranks, including professionals, and, most significantly, women (Bax 2008, 287). Consequently, this is also well illustrated in the realm of comparative adjectives since the rules for synthetic or analytic comparison changed over the course of the eighteenth century. As Bax's analysis of eighteenth-century grammars shows, during the first part of the century, prescriptive grammarians included the Latinate origin of the word as a decisive principle for choosing between synthetic or analytic comparative forms, along with the number of syllables, main stress, or the feature ending. This is reflected, for instance, in Greenwood's grammar, which states that adjectives, "such chiefly as come from the Latin, […] form or make the comparative degree by putting the word *more* before them […]" (1711, 108; italics added), something that is also contemplated in Fisher's grammar (1750, 78). Since this approach would require the user to have a good command of Latin, people who had no classical education may have been insecure about their usage (Langford 1989, 78-88). Over the course of the second half of the century, the feature of Latinate origin ceased to be considered as a factor in terms of choice of adjective comparison, an indication that the intended audience of grammars was widened with the aim of including those who had not been trained in classical education. Yet, until well into the second part of the century, grammars of the period would condemn the use of the synthetic form for some disyllabic adjectives which had appeared in previous grammars: "[…] Ben Johnson has *wretcheder* for *more wretched*; and Milton has *virtuousest* for *most virtuous*, and *famousest* for *most famous*. But these examples are not to be imitated" (Fenning 1771, 23; italics in the original).

Therefore, during the second half of the eighteenth century, the synthetic comparative variant was confined to monosyllabic and disyllabic adjectives ending in *-er*, *-y,* or syllabic consonants, whereas the analytic variant was employed with adjectives of two or more syllables, especially with disyllabic adjectives ending in *-d*, *-ed*, *-ent*, *-ful*, and *-ing*.[5] These attempts to suppress variation in language and the need to codify the English language led to linguist insecurity, which has been attested to be a clear legacy of the eighteenth century (Downes 1998, 193). The dissemination of grammatical manuals, the seeming condemnation of certain grammatical patterns, and

[5] According to Bax (2008, 286), this approach to adjective comparison was the one taken by Quirk et al. (1985) in the following century and has persisted to the present day.

the obsession with correctness in language might have led informants of lower social status to rely on well-entrenched adjectives, that is, more frequent ones, that would require the synthetic comparative variant. This seems to be corroborated by the drop in the use of the analytic form with polysyllabic and disyllabic Romance adjectives during the eighteenth century, and most notably in the decline in the use of analytic forms with native monosyllabic adjectives from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century—from 7.20 to 1.06, respectively.

In contrast, upper and middle ranks demonstrate a different perspective. The results obtained show that the use of the analytic mode increased over time in their letters, becoming more frequent in the eighteenth century, by which time the analytic variant appears to be strongly correlated with Romance polysyllabic adjectives. This shift may explain the lower rate of synthetic forms in their eighteenth-century letters, giving the impression that such adjectives were less common in earlier data. Thus, the correlation of higher use of analytic comparative forms with upper ranks may simply be the result of them using more polysyllabic Romance adjectives over the centuries, something which is most noticeable during the eighteenth century, which, in its turn, could point to a more formal writing style that employed more refined vocabulary. As previously attested (González-Díaz 2006, 731), analytic forms rose in prominence mostly by analogy with the French comparative construction, which undoubtedly involved notions of prestige. This would explain the reason why higher rates of analytic forms were frequently found in more formal registers, as evidenced in earlier research (Kytö 1996, Kytö and Romaine 2000).

The eighteenth century witnessed a surge of epistolary literacy, in other words, skills in letter-writing practices which were graded in terms of gender and social rank (Brant 2006, 33-34). This implies that the literacy rate was socially stratified in that it was higher among upper and middle ranks. Like elite members, non-elite parents—merchants in particular—would take care of instructing their children in epistolary literacy by using as models not only authentic letters but also Bibles, business records and popular literature (Whyman 2009, 45). One of the essential hallmarks of politeness is the mastery of polished language, a point the upper ranks were well aware of. In fact, there is some evidence of educated writers having amended their letters to resemble the writing style of the elite, whereas uneducated writers would employ oral features in their writings (Auer 2008). Since low-ranked members had limited educational opportunities, they could not learn the domains of language use in different registers, which suggests that their range of linguistic variation might have been limited and thus processes of linguistic simplification would have been preferred (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2017, 188). In this sense, the likelihood that higher-status writers may have employed more formal and complex adjectives, leading to a higher use of the analytic form, and that the decrease in analytic forms by lower-ranked informants may reflect the use of a less formal vocabulary during the eighteenth century seems quite plausible. Consequently, this would suggest that the use of the analytic comparative

form in earlier periods pointed to a less stable correlation with any type of adjective, rather than being associated with an elevated language use.

5. Conclusion

The present paper has investigated the social distribution of synthetic and analytic comparative forms from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century in English private letters drawn from the PCEEC and the CEECE, revealing that social differences affected the distribution of comparative adjectives. Firstly, the analysis has corroborated earlier work by illustrating that the synthetic comparison is the more commonly used strategy across centuries but also evincing the rise in use of the analytic comparison from the sixteenth century onwards,when the two comparative forms entered into strong competition. Secondly, the distribution of the two forms across social groups at different times has revealed a socially stratified diffusion of the analytic variant. More precisely, the upper social strata had led the spread of the analytic comparative variant from the Late ME and throughout the first part of the EModE period, at which point the middle ranks of society caught up with them, though the lower ranks still lagged behind. Focusing on the correlation of comparative strategy choice with the etymology and syllable length of the adjective, the socio-historical trajectory has confirmed that synthetic and analytic forms took slightly different routes in terms of comparative strategy, at least among the letters of the different social ranks of informants. While upper and middle ranks show a gradual increase in their use of the analytic comparative variant with disyllabic and polysyllabic Romance adjectives over time—the increase in terms of polysyllabic in the eighteenth century being quite steep—, a gentle increase in analytic forms in connection with disyllabic Romance adjectives and with monosyllabic native adjectives has been found in the letters of lower ranks during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, respectively. The analysis of the social patterning throughout the different stages of the diffusion has revealed that this fact might relate to issues of prescriptivism. In general, grammars from the eighteenth century restricted the use of the synthetic comparative form to short adjectives and the use of the analytic mode to longer ones, with a particular emphasis on the correlation of Romance adjectives with analytic forms and native adjectives with synthetic forms. In this sense, then, the attribution of Romance adjectives to the analytic variant seems to point to a more formal writing style which would be reflected in the letters of the upper strata. In contrast, these practices would not have reached the lower ranks, who show a less stable correlation of Romance adjectives with analytic forms and would rely largely on the use of short adjectives with synthetic forms, thereby reflecting oral features in their writings. This study has thus foregrounded the importance of social factors in the exploration of linguistic change and variation. As such, the present paper paves the way for further research in other corpora over prolonged periods of time, and considering a wider range of sociolinguistic factors at the macro- and micro-level of linguistic analyses.

Works Cited

Anthony, Laurence. 2011. AntConc (version 3.5.9) [Computer Software]. Tokyo: Waseda University.

Auer, Anita. 2008. "The Letter which that I Wrote: Self-corrections in Late Modern English Letters." In Dossena and Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2008, 213-34.

Bauer, Laurie. 1994. *Watching English Change. An Introduction to the Study of Linguistic Change in Standard Englishes in the Twentieth Century*. London: Longman.

Bax, Randy C. 2008. "*Foolish*, *Foolisher*, *Foolishest*: Eighteenth-Century English Grammars and the Comparison of Adjectives." In Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2008, 279-88.

Beal, Joan. 2004. *English in Modern Times*. London: Arnold.

Bolinger, Dwight. 1968. *Aspects of Language*. New York: Harcourt.

Boyd, Jeremy Kenyon. 2007. *Comparatively Speaking: A Psycholinguistic Study of Optionality in Grammar*. Ph.D. Dissertation. San Diego: University of California.

Brant, Clare. 2006. *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture*. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Conde-Silvestre, Juan Camilo and Javier Calle-Martín. 2015. "Zero-that Clauses in the History of English. A Historical Sociolinguistic Approach (1424-1681)." *Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics* 1 (1), 57-86.

Corfield, Penelope J., ed. 1991. *Language, History and Class*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Cressy, David. 1980. "Literacy and Society in England and Beyond." In Cressy 1980, 175-89.

—, ed. 1980. *Literacy and the Social Order. Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Curme, George O. 1931. *A Grammar of the English Language*. *Vol. III: (Syntax)*. London and New York: Heath.

D'Arcy, Alexandra. 2012. "On Being Happier but not More Happy: Comparative Alternation in Speech Data." *Working Papers of the Linguistics Circle of the University of Victoria* 22 (1), 72-87.

Dossena, Marina and Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, eds. 2008. *Studies in Late Modern English Correspondence: Methodology and Data* (Linguistic Insights Studies in Language and Communication 76). Bern: Peter Lang.

Downes, William. 1998. *Language and Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Eckert, Penelope and John R. Rickford, eds. 2001. *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Elspaß, Stephan. 2012. "The Use of Private Letters and Diaries in Sociolinguistic Investigation." In Hernández-Campoy and Conde-Silvestre 2012, 156-169.

Fenning, Daniel. 1771. *A New Grammar of the English Language*. London.

Finegan, Edward and Douglas Biber. 1994. "Register and Social Dialect Variation: An Integrated Approach." In Finegan and Biber 1994, 315-47.

—, eds. 1994. *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Register*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP.

—. 2001. "Register Variation and Social Dialect Variation: the Register Axiom." In Eckert and Rickford 2001, 235-67.

Fisher, Ann. (1968) 1750. *A New Gramm*ar. Menston: Scolar Press. Facsimile reprint of 2nd edition, Newcastle upon Tyne: I. Thompson & Co.

Fletcher, Anthony. 1995. *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800*. New Haven and London: Yale UP.

García-Vidal, Tamara. 2019. "Multilingual Influences and Comparative Periphrastic Adjectives in the Bibles of Wycliffe and King James." *Revista Electrónica de Lingüística Aplicada (RAEL)* 18: 35-55.

Garside, Roger. 1987. "The CLAWS Word-Tagging System." In Garside, Leech and Sampson 1987, 30-41.

Garside, Roger, Geoffrey Leech and Geoffrey Sampson, eds. 1987. *The Computational Analysis of English: A Corpus-Based Approach*. London: Longman.

González-Díaz, Victorina. 2006. "The Origin of English Periphrastic Comparatives." *English Studies* 87: 707-39.

—. 2008. *English Adjective Comparison. A Historical Perspective.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Graziano-King, Janine. 2003. *English Comparatives: A Preliminary Investigation*. Kingsborough Community College, CUNY.

Greenwood, James. 1711. *An Essay towards a Practical English Grammar*, *Describing the Genius and Nature of the English Tongue; Giving likewise a Rational and Plain Account of Grammar in General, with a Familiar Explanations of its Terms*. London: printed for John Clark.

Hernández-Campoy, Juan Manuel and Juan Camilo Conde-Silvestre, eds. 2012. *The Handbook of Historical Sociolinguistics*. Oxford and Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.

Hilpert, Martin. 2008. "The English Comparative-Language Structure and Language Use." *English Language and Linguistics* 12, 395-417.

Hoog, Richard M., ed. 1992. *The Cambridge History of the English Language. Vol. I (The Beginnings to 1066).* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Jespersen, Otto. (1956) 1909. *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*, VII. Copenhagen: Ejnar Munskgaard.

Kaislaniemi, Samuli. 2018. "The Corpus of Early English Correspondence Extension (CEECE)." In Nevalainen, Palander-Collin and Säily 2018, 45-59.

Kirk, John, ed. 2000. *Corpora Galore: Analysis and Techniques in Describing English.* Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Krug, Manfred. 2003. "Frequency as a Determinant in Grammatical Variation and Change." In Rohdenburg and Mondorf 2003, 7-67.

Kytö, Merja. 1996. "The Best and Most Excellentest Way: The Rivalling Forms of Adjective Comparison in Late Middle and Early Modern English." In Svartvik 1996, 124-44.

KYTÖ, Merja and Suzanne Romaine. 1997. "Competing Forms of Adjective Comparison in Modern English: What Could be *More Quicker* and *Easier* and *More Effective?*" In Nevalainen and Kahlas-Tarkka 1997, 329-52.

—. 2000. "Adjective Comparison and Standardisation Processes in American and British English from 1620 to the Present." In Wright 2000, 171-98.

LANGFORD, Paul. 1989 [1998]. *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

LASS, Roger, ed. 1999. *The Cambridge History of the English Language. Vol. III: 1476-1776*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

LEECH, Geoffrey and Jonathan Culpeper. 1997. "The Comparison of Adjectives in Recent British English." In Nevalainen and Kahlas-Tarkka 1997, 353-73.

LINDQUIST, Hans. 2000. "Livelier or More Lively? Syntactic and Contextual Factors Influencing the Comparison of Disyllabic Adjectives." In Kirk 2000, 125-132.

MILROY, James. 1998. "Explaining Linguistic Variation to Explain Language Change." *Sociolingüística* 12, 39-52.

MILROY, James and Lesley Milroy. 2012. *Authority in Language. Investigating Standard English*. London and New York: Routledge.

MITCHELL, Bruce. 1985. *Old English Syntax. Vol. I*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

MONDORF, Britta. 2003. "Support for *More*-Support." In Rohdenburg and Mondorf 2003, 251-304.

—. 2009. *More Support for More-Support. The Role of Processing Constraints on the Choice Between Synthetic and Analytic Comparative Forms*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

MOSSÉ, Fernand. 1969. *A Handbook of Middle English*. London: Johns Hopkins UP.

MUGGLESTONE, Lynda, ed. 2006. *The Oxford History of English*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

MUSTANOJA, Tauno Frans. (2016) 1960. *A Middle English Syntax: Parts of Speech*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

NEVALAINEN, Terttu. 1996. "Social Stratification." In Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1996, 57-76.

NEVALAINEN, Terttu and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg, eds. 1996. *Sociolinguistics and Language History. Studies Based on the Corpus of Early English Correspondence*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

—. 2017. *Historical Sociolinguistics. Language Change in Tudor and Stuart England*. 2nd ed. London: Longman/Pearson Education.

NEVALAINEN, Terttu and Leena Kahlas-Tarkka, ed. 1997. *To Explain the Present: Studies in the Changing English Language in Honour of Matti Rissanen*. Helsinki: Société Néophilologique.

NEVALAINEN, Terttu et al. 2006. *Parsed Corpus of Early English Correspondence.* Parsed version. Helsinki: University of Helsinki and York.

NEVALAINEN, Terttu et al. 2012. *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Extension*. Department of Modern Languages, University of Helsinki.

Nevalainen, Terttu, Minna Palander-Collin and Tanja Säily, eds. 2018. *Patterns of Change in 18th-Century English. A Sociolinguistic Approach*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Nurmi, Arja, Minna Nevala and Minna Palander-Collin, eds. 2009. *The Language of Daily Life in England (1400-1800)*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Palander-Collin, Minna, Minna Nevala and Arja Nurmi. 2009. "The Language of Daily Life in the History of English. Studying how Macro Meets Micro." In Nurmi, Nevala and Palander-Collin 2009, 1-23.

Pound, Louise. 1901. *The Comparison of Adjectives in English in the XV and the XVI Century.* Heidelberg: CarlWinter.

Poutsma, Hendrik. 1914. *A Grammar of Late Modern English*. Groningen: Noordhoff.

Quirk, Randolph et al. 1985. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman.

Rohdenburg, Günter and Britta Mondorf, eds. 2003. *Determinants of Grammatical Variation in English*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Romaine, Suzanne. 1998. "Introduction." In Romaine 1998, 1-56.

—, ed. 1998. *The Cambridge History of the English Language*. *Vol. IV: 1776-1997*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Rusiecki, Jan. 1985. *Adjectives and Comparison in English. A Semantic Study*. London and New York: Longman.

Simpson, John A., and Edmund Weiner, eds. 1989. *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. [CD- ROM]. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Suematsu, Nobuko. 2004. "The Comparison of Adjectives in 18th-Century English." *NOWELE* 45: 33-50.

Svartvik, Jan, ed. 1996. *Words. Proceedings of an International Symposium*, *Lund*, *25-26 August 1995.* Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien.

Sweet, Henry. 1891. *A New English Grammar: Logical and Historical*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Terasawa, Jun. 2003. "A Sociohistorical Study of Periphrastic Comparison in English." In Ukaji, Ike-Uchi and Nisimura 2003, 191-207.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid. 2006. "English at the Onset of the Normative Tradition." In Mugglestone 2006, 240-73.

—, ed. 2008. *Grammars, Grammarians and Grammar-Writing in Eighteenth-Century England*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Traugott, Elizabeth C. 1992. "Syntax." In Hogg 1992, 168-289.

Ukaji, Masatomo, Masayuki Ike-Uchi and Yoshiki Nisimura, eds. 2003. *Current Issues in English Linguistics* (*Special Publications of the English Linguistic Society of Japan*). Tokyo: The English Linguistic Society of Japan.

Whyman, Susan. 2009. *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Wright, Laura, ed. 2000. *The Development of Standard English 1300-1800. Theories, Descriptions, Conflicts*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

WRIGHTSON, Keith. 1991. "Estates, Degrees and Sorts: Changing Perceptions of Society in Tudor and Stuart England." In Corfield 1991, 30-52.

YÁÑEZ-BOUZA, Nuria. 2018. "Grammar Writing in the Eighteenth Century." In Nevalainen, Palander-Collin and Säily 2018, 27-43.

Received: 16 August 2023 Accepted: 28 February 2024

Tamara García-Vidal is a Lecturer in the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics at the National University of Distance Education (UNED), where she primarily teaches English language and linguistics and language variation and change in English. Her main research interests lie in the fields of historical (socio)linguistics, language variation and change and corpus linguistics. Much of her research explores how social and historical contexts shape English linguistic variation and change, with a focus on standardisation, linguistic innovation, and pragmatics. She has published articles in leading journals, including *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, *Folia Linguistica Historica*, and the *Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics*.