

## ***Towards Notions of Comparative Continuity in English and French***

*Remus Gergel*

Universität Tübingen

### **1 Introduction**

The present chapter investigates comparative clauses in English and French with a special focus on subject-verb inversion. Initial cases of comparative inversion (CI) are illustrated in (1) below.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) a. *[T]he Scots have spent less on their system  
[than **has** the prison service of England and Wales].*  
([http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/magazine/3932653.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/3932653.stm))
- b. *And they were no more persuaded by democracy*

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#### **Major corpora and primary textual sources used in this study**

- Beowulf: A student edition.* Jack, George (ed.). 1994. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
BR: *Le voyage de Saint Brendan.* Short, Ian & Merrilees, Brian (eds.). 2006. Paris: Ed. Honoré Champion.  
CdR: *Chanson de Roland.* Steinsieck, Wolfgang (ed.). 1999. *Das altfranzösische Rolandslied.* Stuttgart: Reclam.  
CLM: *Corpus de la littérature médiévale.* Éditions Champion Électronique. Available online at: <http://www.champion-electronique.net/bases>.  
FM: G. de Maupassant, *Fort comme la mort*, Éditions du Boucher, 1923.  
FRANTEXT: Base textuelle Frantext. Nancy: Centre national de la recherche scientifique. Available online at: <http://www.frantext.fr>.  
LsR: *La somme le roi.* Édith Brayer and Anne-Françoise Labie-Leurquin (eds.). 2008. Paris - Abbeville, Société des anciens textes français - Paillart.  
PPCEME: Kroch, A., Santorini, B. & Delfs, L. 2004. *The Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English.*  
PPCME2: Kroch, A. and Taylor, A. 2000. *The Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English.*  
YCOE Taylor, A., Warner, A., Pintzuk, S. and Beths, F. 2003. *The York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose.*

*[than was the Pharaoh].*

(<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/11/opinion/11Cohen.html>)

- c. *Optogenetic stimulation can potentially target problem cells much more precisely [than **can** the electrodes used in DBS].*

(*Scientific American* 08/2008, p. 59)

We will argue that the key continuous element in the diachronic trajectory is a low subject. Standardly, the initial line-up of the subject is within the VP (and below the auxiliary position). But the subject is then usually assumed to move to the edge of the clause. A low subject on the derivation proposed here means in particular that the subject is not moved to the edge of the clause (technically, the inflectional domain), as would be required on standard generative approaches. Two observations worth making from the start are: (i) from a diachronic point of view, this type of syntactic behavior is well-known independently of comparatives from early Old French/English (OF/OE) onwards; (cf. Adams 1987; Haeberli 2002; Kroch 2008); (ii) several syntactic properties which could potentially affect comparatives have changed in both languages, though without always impacting on the derivation of CI (we will restrict attention to the most direct interferers). We will argue that the now relic possibility of a lack of subject not moved to the Spec,TP position is the factor that remained constant in comparatives in

both languages and which derives the core similarities.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 2 gives some details on how the syntax of comparatives in English shows various signs of an archaism, which consists in the possibility of not filling the Spec,TP position overtly. This seems to go against the grain of the requirement that every finite clause have an overt subject in that very position (the so-called EPP feature). But we show that such structures have been possible in comparatives at all major stages of the language (via null expletives; see Haeberli 2002; Hulk & van Kemenade 1995; Williams 2000, among others). Section 3 discusses a similar phenomenon in French, for which we present evidence that it has also been persistent from early Old to Modern French and for which we develop a similar analysis. In section 4, additional aspects relating to (lack of) change in comparatives as well as potential interferences with the simplest continuity hypothesis are discussed. We thus investigate the potential contact of English with French and other features that have been claimed in the literature to have an influence on V2 (e.g. Northern features). Section 5 concludes the article and formulates certain open questions including the (non)interaction with verb movement and the possibility of also having semantic continuity in comparatives.

## 2 Comparative inversion in English

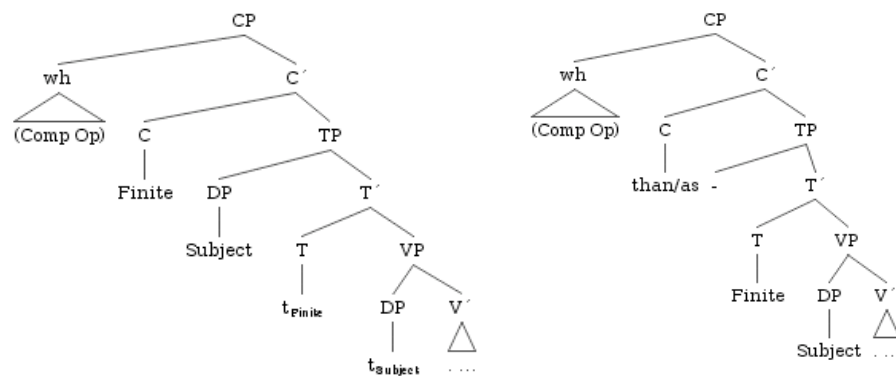
In this section, we propose that CI is simpler than on the standard generative view and that the analysis proposed is historically consistent. It represents an archaic possibility of the language. Earlier English could produce apparent V2 (and with subject pronouns clearly V3) structures by moving the finite element to T (and not exclusively higher up to C); see Fischer et al. (2000); Haerberli (2002); Pintzuk (1991); Speyer (2008), among others. It is crucial that the subject is not displaced to the edge of TP in such structures. (Or if it were, there would be no inversion). We will argue that CI patterns with this type of simple inversion and show how its derivation fits the current grammars first (section 2.1), before addressing its diachronic evolution (in section 2.2).

### 2.1 *English CI involves no movement to C*

At first sight, inversion in clausal comparatives, as in (1) above, seems amenable to a raising of the finite element to C. This corresponds to the analysis of matrix questions in English or run-of-the mill V2 structures in Germanic. (See Merchant 2003; Gergel, Gengel & Winkler 2007, among others.) But there is an alternative and diachronically more cogent analysis

of CI. To illustrate the difference: on a standard analysis, the subject is moved to the edge of the clause (Spec,TP) and the finite element is moved to C; (2a). Under the alternative to be defended, however, the subject is in a sub-T position (Spec,VP here) and the finite element is in T; (2b).<sup>2</sup>

- (2) a. Structure for the C-based analysis    b. Structure for the T-based analysis



Thus, following Culicover & Winkler (2008) and Gergel (2008), we argue that neither T nor the subject undergoes movement to C and Spec,TP, respectively.

An argument for the alternative that does without the two movement steps is that, in sequences of auxiliaries, the subject is not forced to follow the first auxiliary, (3); see Huddleston & Pullum (2002), Potts (2002), among others. This contrasts with questions, which do not allow auxiliaries to invert together around the subject, as shown in (4).<sup>3</sup>

- (3) *The notes [...] are therefore more helpful  
[than **could be** the opinions of many other critics, including myself].*  
(<http://www.amazon.com/review/RSKNPKI3HDRUB>, 06/2007)
- (4) a. ***Could** that grumpy man **be** the next prime minister?*  
b. *\***Could be** that grumpy man the next minister?*

Another possible argument for the proposal obtains under the assumption that the introducer of clausal comparatives *than* is inserted under C (Hankamer 1973; cf. (2b)). C-based V2 is, then, implausible since such movements targeting C do not take place in conjunction with overt complementizers (e.g. den Besten 1983). This derives the simple analysis of CI. But there is a valid objection, as pointed out by a reviewer.<sup>4</sup> Current English grammar has the (restricted) capacity to generate certain inversion structures under a complementizer such as *that* with the follow-up possibility of CP-recursion (cf. Davison 1979; Green 1976; Iatridou & Kroch 1992, among others). The variety of such inversion structures would certainly deserve more space by itself. We discuss two types that are often invoked and then their immediate relationship to CI: negative preposing and locative inversion. While traditionally called main clause phenomena, such structures can surface within embedded contexts. We illustrate this in (5),

for locative inversion, and (6), for negative inversion (cf. Green 1976: 384, 385).

(5) *I realized that in would come the milkman, with me there, and my hair in curlers.*

(6) *I knew that never before had prices been so high.*

The structures contain a complementizer. Hence, the possibility of recursion. (Simply put: to accommodate *that* in one CP, and the preposed constituent in the specifier position of the recursively subordinated one). However, a first incongruity obtains between locative inversion and *than* (see Aissen 1975: 8; Hartmann 2005: 95):

(7) *\*On the ground lie more apples **than** on the tree grow.*

The recursion possibilities in comparative contexts with negative preposing can also be shown (empirically) to be more restricted than they appear with the standard complementizer *that*. Thus, even though negative preposing can surface under *that*, as we saw in (6), it is ungrammatical under the comparative complementizer *than* in (8).<sup>5</sup>

(8) \*Prices got higher **than** never before had wages been.

Finally, from a general point of view, the literature on CP-recursion contains a fair amount of diverging suggestions as to the exact restrictions responsible for its licensing. However, one common feature is that the complementizers in question are explicitly selected by verbs (cf. Iatridou & Kroch 1992). This criterion is not fulfilled in the case of *than* either (selected by *-er/more*). We hence preliminarily conclude that recursion is unavailable in comparatives. Next, we turn to the diachronic aspects of CI.

## 2.2 *Diachronic continuity in the syntax of CI*

In order to show that CI was T-based at earlier stages, we can draw on independent facts about the syntax of OE. First, OE had the canonical V2 order of Germanic (produced through movement to C, e.g. in matrix questions). Second, however, it had a mechanism that only displaced the finite verb to T (e.g. with topicalization; cf. Fischer et al. 2000; Kroch, Taylor & Ringe 2000; Pintzuk 1991).<sup>6</sup> Importantly, the latter strategy would produce V3 orders, namely with subject pronouns between topicalized phrases and verbs. The asymmetry is sketched in (9) vs. (10) with a wh-question and topicalization, respectively (cf. Fischer et al. 2000;

Kroch et al. 2000; the OE material in (9) and (10) is taken here from Fischer et al. 2000: 118).

(9) *For hwam **noldest** þu ðe sylfe me gecyðan þæt...*

for what not.wanted you you self me make.known that

‘Wherefore would you not want to make known to me yourself that...’

(10) *Forðon **we sceolan** mid eally mod & mægene to Gode gecyrran*

therefore we must with all mind and power to God turn

‘Therefore we must turn to God with all our mind and power.’

The test gives the possibility of a clear prediction for OE, which could use both mechanisms in general, depending on the context (e.g., questions vs. topicalization as above). The main diagnostic to test the two types of apparent V2 effects are pronouns, which are taken to reside in the specifier of the highest functional head in the Infl-domain, here for concreteness: Spec,TP. If the finite verb surfaces to the left of pronouns, then it will be under C. (In which case the canonical type Germanic V2 analysis would be confirmed). If the finite element is invariably on the right of the subject pronoun in OE, it must be under T. Applying the test to comparatives in OE shows that they show no inversion with pronouns, but appear only as

shown in (11).

(11) *for.ðan.þe se Fæder is mare [þonne ic sy].*

because the father is greater than I am

‘For the Father is greater than I.’

(YCOE, coaelhom, ÆHom 10:19.1417)

This means that the finite verb in OE comparatives does not go beyond the TP (or the Infl-domain, more generally).<sup>7</sup>

Another diachronically rooted argument is that if a representation that does not require an overt subject in Spec, TP is on the right track, then we expect null expletives in comparative clauses. An (EModE) example of this sort is given in (12).

(12) *[H]e left soch a companie of fellowes and scholers in S. Iohnes*

*Colledge,*

*[as \_ can scarce be found now in some whole vniuersitie].*

(PPCEME-ASCH-E1-H,55R.164)

There are some contexts in current English that naturally have null (and, as Chris Lucas, p.c., points out, in standard British English only null) subjects

in comparatives; see the passives in (13a,b) and the impersonal in (13c).

(13) a. *[T]he tropics play a more active role [than \_ was thought] in controlling the Earth's climate.*

([www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2005/10/051012084249.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2005/10/051012084249.htm))

b. *Davis Cup exit poses more questions [than \_ could be answered in a year].*

([www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/sport/tennis/article4800983.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/sport/tennis/article4800983.ece))

c. *[P]ast experiences need to be reviewed in a rather more circumspect manner [than \_ has been the tendency to date].*

([www.bilaterals.org/article.php3?id\\_article=11194](http://www.bilaterals.org/article.php3?id_article=11194))

The motivation for this move lies in the historical links between null expletives and V2. For correlations between the loss of the English type of V2 and null expletives, we draw on Haeberli (2002) and transfer the basic logic to comparative clauses. (See also van Kemenade 1997 and especially Hulk & van Kemenade 1995: 246 with partly equivalent implementations, formulated in terms of expletive *pro*-drop.) We can thus suggest the following. The overt subject in CI can stay low because, structurally speaking, the higher subject position does not need to be overtly filled (or equivalently: it is filled by a null-expletive; this technicality avoids conflicts

with the EPP, i.e. the principle that the clause must have a subject in Spec,TP)

A further argument can be culled from the continuous presence of CI in the records. While CI has never seemed to be a high-frequency phenomenon, it has been attested throughout the history of English; (14) comes from the early OE text of *Beowulf*.

(14) *Næfre ic maran geseah eorla ofer eorþan ðonne is eower sum...*

never I greater seen of warriors on earth than is of.you one

‘I have never seen a greater warrior on earth than is one of you.’

(*Beowulf*, III.247)

To summarize, we have so far argued that CI involves a non-standard derivation with low subjects and that the phenomenon has been historically persistent in the history of English. In the next section, we will explore a similar phenomenon in French in which comparatives are the locus of conservatism. We will thus extend both the observation about continuity and the analysis proposed.

### 3 On the syntax of comparative inversion in French

In this section, we first clarify that French has inversion in comparatives too. We subsequently argue that French CI also involves low subjects and show that the phenomenon is also historically persistent from some of the earliest records onwards.

#### 3.1 *CI in Modern French*

Modern French allows subject-auxiliary inversion in comparative clauses:

(15) a. *Pierre est plus grand que n'était son père.*

Pierre is more tall than EN-was his father

‘Pierre is taller than his father was.’

b. *[L]es délibérations [...] sont ouvertes au public dans un degré*

the deliberations are open to.the public to a degree

*plus large que ne le sont les activités d'autres institutions...*

more large than EN it are the activities of other institutions.

‘The deliberations are more open to the public than the activities of other institutions.’

([http://www.infocom.gc.ca/reports/section\\_display-](http://www.infocom.gc.ca/reports/section_display-)

*f.asp?intSectionId=301)*

The French examples additionally feature an expletive negative (EN) element, the larger consensus on which is that it does not have negative meaning (cf. Price 1990; von Stechow 1984). EN is not a characteristic of inversion but of comparatives; more specifically, of clausal comparatives (of inequality). Non-inverted clauses display it too and equatives need not contain the EN, whether inverted or not; see (16) and (17).<sup>8</sup>

(16) *[L]a télévision est plus différente du cinéma*

the television is more different from.the cinema

*que le cinéma ne l'est de la photographie.*

than the cinema EN it.is from the photography

‘The difference between television and cinema is greater than the difference between cinema and photography.’

(<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001437/143768fb.pdf>)

(17) a. *Marie est aussi grande que l'était sa mère.*

M. is as tall as it-was her mother

‘Marie is as tall as her mother (is).’

b. *... que sa mère l'était.*

c. *... que sa mère ne l'était.*

d. ... *que ne l'était sa mère.*

By testing sequences of verbal heads in French, we can observe that the subject also follows the entire sequence rather than just the structurally highest finite member of the sequence. Crucially, then, this option is possible (and virtually obligatory) in inverted comparatives in French; see (18).<sup>9</sup>

(18) a. *Elle est plus jolie [que n'a été sa mère].*

she is more beautiful than EN-has been her mother

'She's more beautiful than her mother was.' (FM, p. 191)

b. *Ceux-ci ne seront pas touchés par la nouvelle carte militaire, pas*

those not will.be not touched by the new law military, not

*plus [que ne devrait l'être la base aéronavale de Lann-Bihoué].*

more than EN should it.be the base aero-naval of Lann-Bihoué

'They will not be more affected by the new military law, not

more than the aero-naval base Lann-Bihoué should be.'

([www.ouest-france.fr/actu/actu\\_BN\\_-Carte-militaire-le-couperet-tombe-aujourd-hui\\_8619-674581\\_actu.Htm](http://www.ouest-france.fr/actu/actu_BN_-Carte-militaire-le-couperet-tombe-aujourd-hui_8619-674581_actu.Htm))

c. *[U]ne langue qui change plus vite que ne sont rédigés les*

a language that changes more fast than EN are redirected the

*articles du future dictionnaire.*

articles of the future dictionary

‘A language that changes faster than the articles of the future dictionary are updated.’

([www.chass.utoronto.ca/~wulfric/siehl/da/actesmen/ilt1\\_2.htm](http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~wulfric/siehl/da/actesmen/ilt1_2.htm))

d. *[U]ne famille est pauvre si l'essentiel, comme la nourriture,*

a family is poor if the essential like the nourishment

*le logement et l'habillement, absorbe un pourcentage*

the lodging and the clothing absorbs a percentage

*plus élevé de son revenu*

more high of the its income

*[que ne **devrait dépenser** la famille canadienne moyenne].*

than EN should spend the family Canadian average

‘A family is poor if the essentials such as food, lodging and

clothing absorb a higher percentage of its income than the average

Canadian family should spend.’

([www.unicef.org/french/sowc06/pdfs/repcard6f.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/french/sowc06/pdfs/repcard6f.pdf))

The existence of CI is then reminiscent to some degree of the situation in English. But the question arises whether more appropriate tests for the syntax of French can be applied. Let me therefore next introduce

some background to the additional intricacies of subject-verb inversion in French. I capitalize here on ideas pertaining to inversion that have been suggested in Lahousse (2006) and Rowlett (2007), independently of comparatives, who consider a range of inversion possibilities in the language and classify them syntactically. We will test French CI on the basis of such tests and argue that it offers evidence that the subject is in a structurally low position. More specifically, French CI parallels to a large extent one particular type of stylistic inversion of French.<sup>10</sup>

A first distinction needs to be drawn between the so-called □pronominal□ inversion of the standard variety – as well as the related □complex□ inversion – which are illustrated in the two examples in (19), on the one hand, and so-called □stylistic□ inversion on the other (stylistic inversion will be further subdivided momentarily).

- |         |                               |    |                                      |
|---------|-------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------|
| (19) a. | <i>Quand est-elle partie?</i> | b. | <i>Quand Claire est-elle partie?</i> |
|         | when is-she left              |    | When Claire is-she left              |
|         | ‘When did she leave?’         |    | ‘When did Claire leave?’             |

By definition, pronominal inversion, such as the type witnessed in (19a), involves a pronoun subject, as does in fact the type of complex inversion seen in (19b) in addition to the full-DP subject it displays. Stylistic

inversion, which will be of interest for current purposes, does not share the restriction to subject pronoun clitics of complex inversions in general (whether with or without accompanying full DPs) and shows distinct properties throughout.<sup>11</sup> Since both types in (19) are clearly distinct from (the various types of) inversion that include CI, we next focus on stylistic inversion. (See e.g. Kayne & Pollock 2008, Rizzi & Roberts 1989, Rowlett 2007 for discussions of complex inversion.) More specifically, we will next inspect a two-fold subdivision within the syntactic mechanisms in the class of stylistic inversion.

According to Rowlett (2007: 217-223) (cf. also especially Lahousse 2006), there are two major types of stylistic inversion in French. The terms used in my two main sources are not fully identical (much less in the rest of the literature), but importantly the mechanisms are, and they can be summarized as follows. Crucially, one type of inversion is, simply put, a low-subject type of inversion. (The other type of inversion finds a remnant-movement-type implementation in Rowlett's analysis. Since CI will turn out to be closely related to the first type, I leave the more technical details in the implementation of the type based on remnant evacuation aside.)

A first characteristic of the low-subject inversion observed is that adverbs can be found intercalated between the finite verb and the subject:

(20) *Ici se cachent souvent des lapins.*

here self hide often some rabbits

‘Rabbits often hide here.’

Second, verbal dependants can follow a low subject (cf. (21)). But, third, the subject must be final, if the mechanism that brings about inversion is remnant movement (the latter case is illustrated with a stage topic in (22) below; cf. Rowlett 2007).

(21) *Quand passeront Jean et Pierre sous la fenêtre?*

when will.walk J. and P. under the window

‘When will Jean and Pierre walk under the window?’

(22) a. *Seuls passeront sous la fenêtre Jean et Pierre.*

alone will.walk under the window J. and P.

‘Jean and Pierre alone will walk under the window.’

b. *\*Seuls passeront Jean et Pierre sous la fenêtre.*

Fourth, quantifier float is impossible in stylistic inversion, as the contrast below (following Rowlett) between low-subject and remnant-movement inversion shows:

(23) \**Quand ont tous fini les enfants?*

when have all finished the children

‘When did all the children finish?’

(24) *Ont tous réussi ceux qui ont assez travaillé.*

have all succeeded those who have enough worked

‘Those who did enough work were all successful.’

The reason invoked by Lahousse (2006) for effects such as (23)-(24) is that the floating quantifier needs to be in a binding relationship with the trace of a raised subject. (This argument in turn is based on Doetjes’ 1992 analysis of quantifier float.)

The immediate question is whether, within the class of stylistic inversions, CI patterns with low-subject inversion or with remnant-movement inversion in the grammar of French. We will argue that the former analysis is more appropriate for CI.

First, we find that adverbs such as *souvent*, ‘often’, *can* be intercalated between the finite verb and the subject, as in (25).

(25) *La vraie vie est plus théâtrale [que ne l'est **souvent** le théâtre].*

the true life is more theatrical than EN it-is often the theater

‘Real life is more theatrical than theatre often is.’

The standard logic of the argument is as follows: Since the adverb delimits the edge of the VP (assume simply via adjunction), the subject can be observed to be within the VP. This offers, then, some indication for the low subject position.<sup>12</sup>

Second, various dependants can be found in linearly post-subject positions on the surface of CI structures. This confirms in particular the second test discussed above for stylistic inversion more generally. (In simplified terms: a remnant movement analysis, as opposed to the low-subject inversion, would require subjects to be final.)

- (26) a. *Je me défonce plus pour mon chef que ne le fait Martine*  
 I self hit more for my boss than EN it does Martine  
*pour le sien.* (John Vanderelst, p.c.)  
 for the hers  
 ‘I get more involved for my boss than does Martine for hers.’
- b. *[O]n fait plus que ne légitime la déduction jusqu'ici.*  
 one does more than EN justifies the deduction up.to.here  
 ‘One does more than deduction justifies up to here.’  
 (D. Lories in *Kant's Ästhetik/L'esthétique de Kant*, Berlin: de

Gruyter 1997, p. 575)

Third, quantifier float of the type discussed becomes entirely incomprehensible in CI (as expected if CI patterns with low-subject inversion):

(27) \**Pierre a fait ses devoirs plus vite [que tous ont fini les enfants].*

Pierre has done his homework more fast than all have finished the children

Intended: 'P. did his homework faster than all the children have finished theirs.'

Fourth, we can note that subject-less impersonals are in some cases (we assume restrictedly) possible (i.e., e.g., without the pronoun *il*):

(28) *un système qui a progressé vers un état d'équilibre*  
a system which has progressed toward a state of balance  
*durant une période de temps beaucoup plus longue*  
during a period of time much more long  
*que ne serait possible en système synthétique.*

than EN would be possible in system synthetic

‘a system that equilibrated for a much longer period of time than would be possible in synthetic systems.’

(<http://pubs.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/mineral/tcm-88939-3.html>)

(29) *Il sera plus difficile d'accroître ce pourcentage*

it will be more difficult to increase this percentage

*que n'est le cas pour Genève...*

than EN is the case for Geneva

‘It will be more difficult to increase this percentage than is the case for G.’

([http://www.litra.ch/Trains\\_trams\\_et\\_bus\\_offrent-ils\\_une\\_capacite\\_suffisante.html](http://www.litra.ch/Trains_trams_et_bus_offrent-ils_une_capacite_suffisante.html))

Overall then, these tests show that CI patterns with what Rowlett calls genuine stylistic inversion, that is, the type specifically based on low subjects. In the next section, we will focus on the main characteristics of CI in earlier French.

### 3.2 *CI in earlier French*

From a diachronic vantage point, we can make two crucial supporting

observations for the current analysis of CI right away. First, earlier stages of French had the possibility of a subject appearing in a low position (see especially Vance 1997 and Kroch 2008 for recent discussions and the references cited there). Second, we can empirically add that OF French had CI as well. This is shown in (30), with a *more* comparative, and in (31) with a comparative introduced by the adverb *isnels*, ‘nimblely, agilely’.

(30) *Plus curt a piet que ne fait un cheval.*

more runs by foot than EN does a horse

‘He runs more than a horse does.’ (*CdR*, 71.890)

(31) *Plus est isnels que nen est uns falcuns.*

more is agile than EN is a falcon

‘He is more agile than a falcon is.’ (*CdR*, 118, 1572)

Third, examples from Middle and Classical French support the idea of a continuous phenomenon; compare the inversions in the comparatives in (32) and (33), respectively.

(32) *... plus rouge que n'est feu gregois.*

more red than EN-is fire Greek

‘redder than is Greek fire.’

(CLM corpus; *Mystère de la Passion* (ca. 1450),)

(33) *J'ay plus failly que ne peut un mortel.*

I-have more erred than EN can a mortal

'I erred more than a mortal can.'

(Frantext: Q757 / VIAU Th. de / *OEuvres poétiques: I* / 1621, p. 113)

A fourth supporting argument is that subjectless impersonals are a time-honored presence in the language, including some comparatives, as the OF (34) illustrates.

(34) *Il le dublat plus que ne solt.*

he it doubled more than EN uses

'He doubled it more than is usual.' (BR, l. 765)

Fifth, verb sequences containing more than just the finite verb can occasionally be observed in the records of earlier French as well. We note that they can display the same basic surface word order as do the modern examples. I assume that the subject is in the specifier position of the lowest (and theta-assigning) predicate phrase.

(35) *Guillaumes fu joianz et liez,[...]*

Guillaumes was happy and content

*Plus que ne puet dire nus hom.*

more than EN can tell us man

‘Guillaumes was happier and more content than anyone could tell.’

*(CLM corpus; De Guillaume au faucon)*

Finally, the test based on verbal dependents after the subject (cf. 3.1 above) can also be applied to some extent to the diachronic record, see (36). The result of the test suggests once more continuity, namely in the availability of the low-subject position.

(36) *Li palefrois sor quoi ele est montee*

the palfrey on which she is climbed

*Estoit plus blans que n'est nois sor gelee;*

is more white than EN-is snow on ice

‘The palfrey on which she climbed is whiter than snow on ice.’

*(CLM corpus; 8145, Enfances Ogier - Œuvres d'Adenet le Roi)*

Overall there are reasonable grounds for a low-subject derivation of CI. While I have no quantitative results on the developments in French, it is possible that with the advent of annotated corpora such as the upcoming

*Les voies du français* (see Kroch 2008 for discussion), more will be learnt about the trajectory of the construction including numerical developments and what they may reveal about grammar.

#### **4 Continuity in the syntax of CI**

We have so far illustrated the continuous presence of CI in the historical record. This section is concerned with a selection of facts which potentially complicate the picture. We concentrate on English, due to the data situation at present (in particular the wider availability of parsed historical corpora), but also raise certain questions in connection with French.

On the basis of the Penn-Helsinki-York corpora of historical English, estimates as in (37) can be given for the ratio of inverted tokens within structures that qualified as clausal comparatives from the corpus annotation (cf. Gergel 2008).

(37) OE: 223/5114 = 4.36% ; ME: 135/1639 = 8.23% ; EModE: 31/2497 =  
1.24%

The estimates almost double in ME (compared to OE) and then drop

dramatically towards EModE. The fall in EModE is straightforwardly explained by the erosion of the low subject position (which remains an archaic possibility in comparatives, as we have seen). However, the surge in ME needs an explanation. There is more than one potential source why the incidence of CI might have increased in ME regarding potential intervening factors. The main possibilities to be discussed are listed in (38).

- (38) a. contact with Northern syntactic features in ME  
b. the influence of French  
c. independent factors relating to change/continuity in the diachrony of CI

We first investigate whether the incidence of CI in the records was influenced by factors that have been claimed to have a major influence on the loss of V2 in English. One such factor is given by Northern features possibly stemming from contact with Germanic languages that had a more regular C-based V2 than OE (see Fischer et al. 2000; van Kemenade 1997; Kroch et al. 2000; Roberts 2007, among others for discussions). But importantly, for our immediate purposes, there are several points on which the development of CI does not go together with that of the progress of such

Northern dialectal features, and – as we will argue – cannot be explained on the basis of this type of contact. To begin, subject pronouns do start to invert during ME in contexts in which they did not invert in OE. But this increase cannot be plausibly explained by a putative increase in inverting pronouns; that is, neither in terms of its timing nor the quantity of change. For one, other major changes in the patterns of inversion between finite verb and subject become visible in the estimates from the period M2 onwards. But the current increase is from M1, the first Helsinki subdivision of ME. In addition, even if we abstract away from timing, the number of actual inverting pronouns in ME still remains particularly limited and cannot explain the surge in the CI estimates.

Furthermore, we have another related negative result from an independent diagnostic, namely from a consideration of the incidence of CI in texts of Northern provenience in the PPCME2 corpus in particular. Out of the 6 Northern texts in the corpus just one contains CI. The thoroughly Northern-based *Rule of St. Benet*, for example, does not contain inversions in comparatives. The Northern version of the *Mirror of St. Edmund* is the sole text from this sample to contain (two) tokens of CI. The Northern-based ratio of texts thus stands in a stark contrast with the overall ratio of texts containing CI constructions in ME in general and in particular with the texts that are not classified as being from the North. For example, the average

within the remaining 50 texts in the PPCME2 is as follows: 35 texts have CI, that is, as much as 70% (compared to the 16.6% above). Moreover, the overall total rate of CI per relevant tokens in the Northern texts is, at 1.35%, far below the overall average of 8.23 % for ME. The situation, then, does not yield support for a rise of CI due to Northern features. (If anything, a slowing down factor might be given). Clearly, this does not mean that interesting comparisons cannot be drawn between features of, say, Old Norse (which arguably influenced the Northern V2) and of ME including comparatives<sup>13</sup> (or much less that more intricate scenarios than the ones presented are not possible). It only means that the Northern features cannot be blamed directly for the increase in CI that we witness in ME. We next turn to the influence of French.

Parallels between the syntactic histories of English and French can be, and certainly have been, drawn (Adams 1987; Hulk & van Kemenade 1995; Kroch 2008; Roberts 1993, among others). An additional possibility arises, however, when we consider the potential of an indirect grammatical influence on the grammar reflected in the ME texts. Considering such texts in respect to CI, there is an observable contrast to the influence of Northern texts that we addressed above. The influence of French cannot be refuted the way that of Scandinavian has been. First, we have already said that this language had a productive process of CI at all times. Second, and perhaps

more importantly, the corpus texts that are translations from French show the construction as well. We next focus on the texts of the PPCME2 that are translations from French to check their incidence of CI. The summary in (39) below indicates the ratios of CI per relevant clausal comparative tokens for the six texts that were French translations (using the standard corpus tags for the texts):

(39) AELR4 2/19; AYENBI 10/85; MELI 2/64; PARS 6/67; MANDEV 7/71;  
VICES 1/16.

The average frequency of CI in the six texts thus lies at 28/322 or 8.69%.

This is notably more than six times the average in the Northern texts.

A third asymmetry between the French-based and the Northern-based texts is that each individual text that is a French translation has occurrences of CI structures. (Compare the only 16.6%, or one in six of the texts, in the group of Northern texts).

But, alas, all of this does not show that there *was* a French influence on the development of CI in English. All it does is show that it is not possible to dismiss (indirect) influence on the language. There are in fact some arguments that make a positive argument *for* a French import implausible. First, the construction was already available in the OE of

Beowulf (cf. (14)), thus preceding French influence. Second, even though the frequency of CI in the French-based texts is much higher compared to the Northern texts, it is still around the ME average calculated over all texts given above. That means that a possible reinforcement through French might have taken place at most. Third, as was the case with the potential Northern influence, the surge in the estimates occurs too early, namely right from the very first period of ME. Fourth, even in a text such as the *Ayenbite of Inwyrt* dated from 1340, which is a fairly literal translation from the French *La somme le roi*, we do not get a one-to-one mapping import of French in the translation. To illustrate this point, (40) preserves the structure from the French original, as expected, but (41) does not. In (41), the English (close) translation has inversion without inversion in the French original.

(40) a. Middle French:

*Il i a son droit et sa soustenance, et tout comme il en*

he there has his right and his sustainment and all as he it of.it

*veut avoir, plus soufisementment [que n'a li rois].*

wants have more sufficiently than EN.has the king

‘He has his right and support and everything as he wants it, in

more abundance than the king does.’ (*LsR*, p. 189, Ch. 47, §123)

b. Middle English:

*Þer is his wone and his sustinonce and al þet he wyle habbe  
more ynogh*

there is his habit and his sustainment and all that he wants have  
more sufficiently

*[þanne habbe þe kyng]. (CMAYENBI,85.1650)*

than has the king

(41) a. Middle French:

*Vertu fet l'omme plus a.droit seigneur du monde*

virtue makes the man more rightfully lord of the world

*[que li rois n'est de son roiaume].*

than the king EN-is of his kingdom

‘Virtue makes man more legitimately lord of the world than the  
king is of his kingdom.’ (*LsR*, p. 189, Ch. 47-§120)

b. Middle English:

*Virtue makeþ þane man more aright lhord of þe wordle:*

virtue makes the man more rightly lord of the world

*þanne by þe kyng of his regne. (CMAYENBI, 85.1648)*

than is the king of his kingdom

The fact that even in a literal translation we can detect home-grown

instances of English inversion makes French, even as a source of re-import, then, unlikely. A more likely possibility (consistent with our proposal) is that the construction was due to a structural possibility given in the grammar of both languages, and which found propitious ground in the ME period due to a variety of factors in the output. But the question, then, of course remains what might have chiefly caused the surge in ME.

An issue that has had a direct impact on the appearance of CI on the surface strings of the texts is an independent syntactic development, namely the headedness of TP. Since a head-final TP obscures CI under the low-subject proposal defended here, the doubling of the estimates in ME as compared to OE can be explained as follows. First, notice that at the descriptive level OE had both T-final and T-initial word orders. (Cf. Fischer et al. 2000; van Kemenade 1997; Kroch et al. 2000, among others. For an interesting theoretical account of the transition in headedness, see Biberauer, Newton & Sheehan this volume). Second, we use the independent assumption that roughly half of the relevant clauses of OE are head-final (cf. Pintzuk 1991 for comprehensive discussion of such findings). Next, we can note that for a T-based inversion to be noticeable in the first place, the TP must have been T-initial. (In a head-final TP, the finite element may move to T, but still stays to the right of the subject. Hence no inversion is detectable.) That means that half of the structures that had the mechanics for

CI in place in OE were obscured in the output. But by early ME T-final structures are already dead or only archaic (Kroch et al. 2000). This, then, yields a possible explanation for the doubling of the estimates in the CI output seen in the corpora.

To summarize, we have observed that a major point of change was the directionality of the TP by the end of OE *pace*, for example, possible textual influence from French. A syntactic suggestion has been made as to why this change may have affected, as a key factor, the ratio of CI in the output. Notably for the case in point, the low subject became more prominent at the stage at which English had only head-initial TPs. This strengthens the main proposal that the main effect is best explained by continuity in the sense that the low subject position was heavily used in conjunction with T, both before and after the change in directionality of headedness.

## **5 Open issues and conclusions**

We next discuss remaining questions, grouped around two main issues, before concluding. First, we address V-to-T. We then re-address continuity in comparatives.

As noted by a reviewer, a non-trivial factor in the evolution of any

process that makes reference to the inflectional domain is the trajectory of V-to-T. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to elucidate the notorious controversies surrounding this issue in its general aspects (Kroch 1989; Pollock 1989; Roberts 1993; Warner 1997, among others), we offer a note from the perspective of comparative structures. In this connection, it is crucial to distinguish between two layers of potential interference. First, notice that whether French or English has V-to-T does not affect the underlying skeleton of the proposal. But putting the classical parametric difference (both between English and French and between the developmental stages of English; cf. Kroch 1989; Pollock 1989; Roberts 1993, among others) together with the current proposal makes a valid prediction. Namely (just) that CI involves a finite element under T. Relating to it, however, the proposal itself, as stated, does not (need to) make any reference as to which elements are under T. The important second point is that the parametric difference entirely takes care of this aspect. The parametric difference, then, does not change the phrase-structure of CI as such but it interacts with it in the output produced. There is a clear generative difference dependent upon whether CI interacts with a grammar with or without V-to-T. The predicted output difference is that, all things being equal, the former grammar will have the means to feed lexical verbs to be (re-)merged under the node T. (Simply put: lexical verbs will be able to participate in CI in conjunction with the low

subject). The latter grammar, however, will in general lack the means to do so. This seems to be the case for Present Day English (PDE), which is forced to apply *do*-support with lexical verbs. CI in PDE thus only occurs with specialized T-elements (modals/*do*) and *have/be*, as a reviewer observes. French, expectedly, also allows lexical verbs in CI.<sup>14</sup>

We now turn to our second open question, namely why a construction such as CI might have remained in place so persistently while (almost) everything else around it changed. We tentatively suggest two types of reasons as main necessary conditions. The first major reason we suggest (and hope to have convinced the reader of through the evidence presented) is that CI has been naturally riding on a syntactic option (namely low subjects) that was historically widely available in both English and French. Today, this earlier phrase-structural option remains available in areas of the grammar in the two languages which are typically stylistically marked. While the specific syntactic reasons why such representations should be plausible have been explained in some detail, there is a second type of motivation with the potential to affect comparative clauses: the interface with the component of meaning. We just mention three points in this connection.

First, one additional heuristic reason for stability may be the parallelism relationship given through the very nature of comparative constructions generally (cf. Gergel et al. 2007). A second, perhaps more

crucial reason is that the core semantic representation of comparatives may not have changed significantly in either English or French. Following tests discussed in synchronic terms in Beck et al. (to appear) for a series of largely unrelated languages, it becomes possible to test for parameters at the syntax-semantics interface in the history of English, too. In this connection, OE and PDE seem to have the same semantics of the comparative in place.<sup>15</sup> The final point that becomes conspicuous in the same connection of semantic variation in French is the need to study the role of expletive negation even more closely than a rich tradition has already done. While the negation morpheme *ne* does not have negative meaning in current French comparatives (cf. Price 1990; von Stechow 1984), it is a relic from a time when *ne* alone *could* potentially be the negative marker by itself. One major task for future research, then, remains to explain how the negative form came to essentially mark the clausal status of comparatives. (Phrasal comparatives lack *ne*). This fact may perhaps be interpreted as one option that effectively helps keep the semantic settings constant. As is well-known, it is not a universal for a language to have clausal comparatives.

To conclude, the chapter has raised several questions and purports to have provided a few answers relating to comparative clauses. It has primarily illustrated a case of simple, but thus far not systematically addressed, continuity in English and French by discussing comparative

inversion. We have drawn on the history of English and largely extended the analysis to French, a language that in its diachronic evolution is independently also well-known for having low subjects. By using knowledge from diachronic research on English and French, current syntactic diagnostics, and by having partly investigated additional factors such as language contact, we have reasoned that there is a case for a simple (and as described, identical) phrase-structural continuity based on low subjects. This may have been co-supported, though from the current evidence not caused, by language contact. Several questions have been left open here, in particular so with regard to the interface with the component of meaning.

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<sup>1</sup> CI is register-based and optional. This paper focuses on the continuity of the inverted clauses. Potentially interesting aspects in the relationship between inverted and non-inverted derivations from the point of view of grammatical theory are thus not within present scope (cf. Culicover & Winkler 2008; Gergel 2008; Gergel, Gengel & Winkler 2007; Merchant 2003; Winkler 2005, among others, for some suggestions). At the same time, nothing special is assumed for non-inverted comparatives here.

<sup>2</sup> This proposal in and of itself is independent of how a finite element can (or cannot) get to T. Unlike modals/*do* and *have/be* (cf. (1)), lexical verbs cannot appear in T in current English, as a reviewer notes. Clearly, French and earlier English have the additional possibility of V-to-T; see section 5.

<sup>3</sup> The formulation “do not allow” for questions becomes crucial to capture the appropriate contrast. Comparatives do allow auxiliary clusters to appear inverted around the subject, as in (3). They do not force the sequences across all contexts, however, cf. (i). The interaction of the conditions in CI may thus be even more complex than has been thought (e.g. in Culicover & Winkler 2008; Gergel 2008; Huddleston & Pullum 2002). An important

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independent factor is that in limited cases under the scope of negation, English allows intercalated subjects in one type of CI after all, as in (i).

- (i) a. *Abouten it is gras spryngyng,/For moiste so thikke and wel liking/ That it ne may in wynter dye/ No more than **may** the see **be** drye. (Romaunt of the Rose, Frag.A:1563)*
- b. *Of what he spoke I could tell you no more than **could** the children of Hamelin **have** told the tune the Pied Piper played. (J. Jerome, Paul Kever, p. 34. London: Hutchinson)*

Given the well-known inversion triggering potential of negation in English over various environments including different types of degree constructions (cf. Borroff 2006; Green 1976, among many others) this is not entirely surprising. What is crucial for immediate purposes is that in particular in base examples such as (3) subject intervention is impossible, while in interrogatives as in (4) it is obligatory.

<sup>4</sup> As the reviewer also points out, a further issue are colloquial English “than what” constructions. An illustration is (i), on a variation of (1a) in section 1.

- (i) *The Scots have spent less on their system than what the prison service of England has.*

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Such constructions have been invoked in particular since Chomsky (1977) as an argument for wh-movement. However, in a series of more thorough studies the observation has been refuted in its quality as an argument for genuine clausal comparatives (cf. especially den Besten 1978). What den Besten shows is that such structures are best treated as free relatives. That is, as an equivalent to Hankamer's non-clausal "than XP". Notice at the same time that if Chomsky's remark hadn't turned out to need refinement, the impossibility of inversion could be explained on the account we argue against. For instance, as follows, capitalizing on the reviewer in question's remarks: Assume a featural difference between C in comparatives and interrogatives, from which the inviolability of the Doubly-filled Comp filter in comparatives follows. Finally, there is one more caveat to the issue (independently of the analysis of CI one favors). The impossibility of inversion in "than what" structures does perhaps not have to be enforced within narrow syntax (Lasnik & Sobin 2000; Merchant 2003). Instead, the colloquialism of such structures and the high-register status of CI place them in disjoint grammars.

<sup>5</sup> It is possible to rule out such structures by using the semantics of comparison (von Stechow 1984). Playing devil's advocate it could be counter-argued that recursion is still possible, then, but that it is ruled out for independent reasons. But a grammar in which such limited options of recursion are additionally restricted by important factors including semantic

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ones only has vanishingly small possibilities of keeping the hypothetical option as viable in comparatives. Chris Lucas (p.c.) notes that a non-inverted version of (8) is less ungrammatical, but it is extremely hard to parse or to assign meaning to. This observation is important since it is consistent both with the semantic background and the simple present argument. Modern negative inversion gains ground in the seventeenth century (Nevalainen 2006) and it is unlikely a factor of historical continuity.

<sup>6</sup> Both the VP and the TP in OE could be head-final (as well as head-initial; cf. Pintzuk 1991). We discuss the significance of TP headedness in some detail from the perspective of CI in section 4 below.

<sup>7</sup> A point of change is that the diagnostic does not have the same force in Middle English (ME), where pronoun subjects start inverting (even though even here examples in comparatives are rare; cf. also the ModE situation, where contrast is needed for the speakers who accept CI with pronouns.)

<sup>8</sup> The negative expletive intruding into the equative is a later development of modern French. OF had the negative morpheme in comparatives of inequality but not in equatives (cf. also section 5 below).

<sup>9</sup> The participial and the perfect auxiliary appear separated on the surface in the single (verse-based) example I was able to find in (i). John Vanderlest (p.c.) points out that any examples of this sort (i.e. separated) are marked at the very least in current French and I have no quantitative figures for early French. Thus while such examples merit further investigation, notice, again,

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that it is the existence of the clusters that argues against a standard raising to C. (Conversely, it is technically possible to have the subject still lower than the specifier of the highest inflectional projection in such examples.)

(i) Et plus vermeille que n'est **rose** arousee.

and more red than EN.is rose made.rosy

‘And (she was) redder than a rose.’

(CLM corpus: Adenet le Roi, 8153, *Enfances Ogier- Œuvres d'Adenet le Roi*, (1269-1285))

<sup>10</sup> The terms Rowlett uses are ‘genuine SI’ for the low-subject inversion and ‘focus SI’ for the remnant-movement inversion, where focus is taken as wide-focus. I avoid these terms, as CI, though syntactically more on a par with genuine SI may not be independent of information-structure (cf., e.g., Culicover & Winkler 2008; Gergel et al. 2007; Winkler 2005).

<sup>11</sup> The CI of French is unacceptable with pronouns in current French and I could not find appropriate examples from earlier stages. The restriction cannot be blamed entirely on the clitic status of the subject pronouns as the tonic versions of the pronoun paradigm are degraded, too.

<sup>12</sup> I use the adverb test as one standard heuristic (Pollock 1989). Rowlett goes further for the inversion types he analyses and assumes that the EPP feature of T is *never* satisfied. I disagree with this for CI. CI derivations

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have non-inverted counterparts. A second note is also in order regarding adverbs. Other adverbs are also quite possible, as illustrated in (i) below. But, at least on certain syntactic accounts in the wake of Cinque (1999), they may be situated higher up and thus do not necessarily delimit the low boundary. Such adverbs would, then, be less clear as evidence for low subjects. Finally, their precise syntax is at the same time anything but clear (the invoked high position may, e.g., be a matter of LF).

- (i) *[L]e même Jacques Peyrat avait fait 2% de plus*  
 the same Jacques Peyrat had made 2% of more  
*[que ne fait aujourd'hui Christian Estrosi].*  
 than EN makes today Christian Estrosi  
 ‘The same Jacques Peyrat has made 2% more than C.E. makes today.’  
 (<http://boymottard.wordpress.com/page/19/>)

<sup>13</sup> The example (i) from the Laxdœla Saga illustrates a structure resembling CI with a dual pronoun in Old Norse (from Faarlund 2004: 267; (54c)):

- (i) *allt er mér slíkt it sama nú í hug,*  
 all.NEU.N is me.D such.NEU.N the same.DEF.NEU.N now in mind.D  
*sem þá ræddum vit*  
 as then talked.1P we.DU

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‘My thoughts are still the same regarding everything as we talked about then.’ [(Laxd 203.21)]

<sup>14</sup> As pointed out by the reviewer, there are several other (important) syntactic changes in both languages. But they did not seem to affect comparatives. One reason why the changes in the status of pronoun subjects in French might have not affected the output is that pronouns are particularly hard to find even with non-clitic forms (both in the records and with the new full forms in current French. E.g., \**Pierre est plus grand que n’était lui* (on a pronominalized (15a)) is not acceptable. A possible connection is that information structure interacts with syntax (cf., e.g., van Kemenade 2008 for OE).

<sup>15</sup> The question of whether the same semantic parameters are operative over time is certainly not trivial. Since motivating a theoretical framework for this falls beyond present scope, I refer the interested reader to Beck et al. (to appear) for the background on possible syntactic *and* semantic options. Empirically, parametric (in)variation can then be tested through various degree constructions. To mention but one, let us take measure phrases. OE had measure phrases (e.g. Gergel 2008), largely like PDE. The case of French is more intricate and deserves special attention in future research. But we can illustrate the essentials. While the ancestor language Latin had measure phrases (*ducentos pedes altus*, ‘two-hundred feet high’) such

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constructions were lost after the Old French period. However, what French seems to have exploited is a rescue strategy. Measure phrases are thus still available, introduced by the functional word *de* as in *haut de 2m*, '2m tall'.