

Comparative constructions in old Romanian

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Abstract

In this paper, we analyse degree adjectival constructions in old Romanian texts. We focus on the comparative of superiority, taking into account in the first place the grammaticalization stage of the degree markers. The structures from the old texts contain polyfunctional units in competition; some of them enter a complex process of specialisation (*mai* ‘more’), while others disappear (*camai*). Afterwards, we focus on the realizations of the comparative complement in the corpus analysed: prepositional phrases headed by the prepositions *ca*, *decît*, *de* ‘than’. We want to see if we can establish any constraints in the use of these prepositions. We pay attention to the word order disharmonies encountered in the old texts. The configurations with pre-adjectival complements are related to the existence of certain relics of the non-configurational syntax in old Romanian.

1. Introduction

The comparison system is prototypically represented by a set of expressions containing a degree operator and denoting a relation between a reference point (a standard value or a comparison class) and the value of a referee (the degree to which an entity has a certain property). Certain configurations are generally accepted; they correspond to a well-known scale: comparative of superiority (*mai ... decît / ca* ‘more... than’), comparative of inferiority (*mai puţin ... decît / ca* ‘less... than’), comparative of equality (*la fel de / tot atît de / tot așa de ... ca* ‘as... as’), relative superlative (*cel mai ... din / dintre* ‘the most... of / among’). Traditionally, these values are considered to belong to an unique class, although they express different aspects of the intensity of a quality ((in)equality, parallelism, analogy, identity, proportion or measure variation).

Of the analyses available for comparative constructions, we adopt the one put forward by Kennedy (1999) with respect to gradable adjectives, defined as expressions of certain points on a semantic scale (relational expressions), because they link objects to the degrees of a specific scale. A scale is an abstract representation of a measure act, thus a dimensional parameter (a type of property) in which the order is regulated through degrees. Adopting a syntactic analysis, Kennedy (1999, p. 83) shows that the gradable adjectives project an extended functional structure headed by a degree morpheme.

In this paper, we aim to analyse comparative of superiority constructions in old texts (original texts and translations) from the 16th and 17th centuries¹. In the diachronic studies on degree marking (Frâncu, 2009; Stan, 2013; Brăescu, 2015) it is shown that there are numerous items undergoing delexicalization, grammaticalization or re-analysis in order to become prototypical or emphatic means of expressing the category of comparison. In what follows, we take into account comparative configurations including adjectives, focusing on the status of the degree operator, the realizations of the comparative complement and the word order of the sequences involved in these constructions².

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¹The examples are taken from the corpus used for *The Syntax of Old Romanian* (Pană Dindelegan, 2016).

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2. The comparative of superiority

In a full-fledged construction, the comparative of superiority links two items: the adjective (with the comparative morpheme) and the comparative complement. The degree operators attested in the old texts are: *mai* ‘more’ (< lat. MAGIS)³, the main marker used in the Latin analytic comparatives (1a–f), and *camai* ‘more’ (1g–j):

- (1) a. Că **mai bună** e domniia ta decât<t>
that more good is reign your than
viița mea (PH.1500–1510, 51^v)
life my
‘that your reign is better than my life’
- b. **Mai iubite**-s decât<t> aurulu și piatra cea curată multă și
more loved=are than gold and stone that clean a.lot and
mai dulce e de miierea și fagurul (PH.1500–1510, 15^f)
more sweet is than honey.DEF and honeycomb.DEF
‘They are more loved than gold and the clean large stone and it is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb’
- c. atunce când zua era **mai caldă** (PO.1582, 56)
then when day.DEF was more hot.F
‘when the day was hotter’
- d. lumina **mai mică** să slujască nopții (PO.1582, 13)
light.DEF more dim SĂ_{SUBJ} serve night.DEF.DAT
‘the dimmer light should serve the night’
- e. **mai multe** și **mai greale** sînt păcatele noastre (CC².1581, 42)
more a.lot and more burdensome are sins.DEF our
‘our sins are more numerous and more burdensome’
- f. Și vor hi cea ce vor rămînea **mai scumpi** decât aurul cel curat și omul va
and AUX.FUT.3PL be.INF those who AUX.FUT.3PL remain.INF more
expensive than gold.DEF CEL clean and man.DEF AUX.FUT.3SG
fi **mai scump** decât piatra zamfirul (DPar.1683, 31^v)
be.INF more expensive than stone sapphire
‘And those who will remain will be more valuable than the clean gold, and man will be more valuable than the sapphire stone’
- g. **camai sărăcești** și mai mici să sînt
more poor and more small if are
darurile noastre (CC².1581, 124)
gifts.DEF our
‘if our gifts are poorer and smaller’
- h. cu atîta **camai bun** fiind decât îngerii **cît camai**
with so.much more good being than angels.DEF how.much more
osăbit decât dinșii au ocinat nume (DPar.1683, IV/30^v)
different than them AUX.PERF.3PL acquire.PPLE name

³Certain Romance languages also use the descendants of MAGIS to express the comparative: Sp. *más*, Port. *mais*, Cat. *mes*, whereas others, like French and Italian, prefer *plus* (Fr. *plus*, It. *più*). Moreover, there are varieties (such as Provençal) in which both forms, *mais* and *plus* are used (Lüder, 1996, p. 30). Similarly to old Romanian, old Romance is characterized by a high degree of variation. In old Spanish structures with *plus* are attested (since the 10th century): *plus áspero* ‘rougher’. Similar data related to the usage of *plus* were attested in old Catalan (*pus*).

- ‘being so much better than the angels that he acquired a better name than theirs’
- i. Să-m faci acoperemîntul
 SĂ_{SUBJ}=CL.DAT.1SG make.SUBJ.2SG roof.DEF
camai frumos (DVS.1682–6, 49^r)
 more beautiful
 ‘you shall make my roof more beautiful’
- j. Și făcea **camai vîrtoase** și mai trudite
 and make.IMPERF more strong and more hard
 rugile cu dînșii (DVS.1682–6, 209^r)
 prayers.DEF with them
 ‘and he made stronger and harder prayers with them’

The co-occurrence of certain forms having the same function, in similar structures and without precise combinatorial rules characterizes all the degree operators for the entire degree scale and it is, actually, a normal feature for an emerging system. The word *mai* changes from a lexical unit (an adverb) to a grammatical from (a comparative marker); however, this change does not affect the item *camai* (which disappears at a later stage).

The word *mai* is not grammaticalized as a marker for the comparative of superiority in old Romanian, a fact proved by its pre-nominal position (2a) and by interpolation (2b–d). In fact, the entire adjectival phrase is pre-nominal, a pattern which has been gradually decreasing in frequency up to the present-day. The fact that *mai* (or *camai*) are not yet grammaticalized as degree markers is not only supported by word order freedom but also by their combination with amplified adverbs (3a,b) or adjectives associated with downtoners (*mai + destui* ‘enough’) (3c).

- (2) a. Că **mai mare sfînt** de Ioan Botezătorul
 that more big saint than John Baptist
 n-au fost nimea (CC¹.1567, 17^r)
 not=AUX.PERF.3SG be.PPLE nobody
 ‘that nobody was a greater saint than John the Baptist’
- b. Aceia sînt orbi în suflet: **mai în mare perire** sînt (CC¹.1567, 76^v)
 those are blind in soul more in big sin are
 ‘Those are blind in their souls: they are in a bigger sin’
- c. Acest păgîn **mai om bun** au fost
 this Pagan more man good AUX.PERF.3SG be.PPLE
 decît acești creștini (CC¹.1567, 64^r)
 than these Christians
 ‘This Pagan was a better man than these Christians’
- d. după aceaia și împărăția ceriului dă noao,
 after that also kingdom.DEF heaven.DEF.GEN give.IMP.2SG us.DAT
 ca un iubitoriu și **mai cu multă cinste** despuitoriu (CC².1581, 545)
 as a loving and more with more glory master
 ‘after that, give us the kingdom of heaven as a loving and glorious master’
- (3) a. Și să făcură glasurile trîmbiții
 and CL.REFL.3PL make.PS.3PL sounds.DEF trumpet.DEF.GEN
 mergînd înainte **mai tare foarte** (BB.1688, XIX)
 go.GER forward more strong very
 ‘and as we went ahead the sounds of trumpet became very intense’
- b. glasurile trîmbitei întrecînd **camai**
 sounds.DEF trumpet.DEF.GEN surpass.GEN more

- tare foarte** (DPar.1683, III/38^v)
 strong very
 ‘surpassing very strongly the sounds of the trumpet’
- c. **Destui mai credincioși** sînt (cc².1581, 381)
 enough more faithful are
 ‘There are enough who are more faithful’

This unsystematic behaviour of comparative structures in the old language represents the reason for which certain linguists (Ciompec, 1985, p. 156) put forth the following periodization: in the first texts, the comparative construction “had a pre-morphological character” and it is only after the 17th century that the first genuine lexicalized comparative constructions, with the present-day structure, were attested.

When combining with verbs, both *mai* and *camai* function as manner adverbs (‘more’) expressing the comparative by themselves (Ciompec, 1985, p. 155) in structures which disappeared from the modern language (4a–f). These structures illustrate an interesting phenomenon from a typological point of view. In Romanian, two parallel phenomena are at play: on the one hand, the texts show the ongoing specialization of the degree operator *mai*; on the other hand, the manner adverb *mai* progressively disappears until the modern language, being replaced by the verbal quantifier *mai mult* ‘much more’. In other Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish) the same item (Fr. *plus*, It. *più*, Sp. *más*) is used not only in verbal contexts, but also in the adjectival phrase, cumulating (accomplishing simultaneously) the verbal quantifier and the degree marker function (Zafiu, 2006, p. 217). The data in (4a–f) from old Romanian show that the difference between old Romanian and old Romance, related to the function and status of the degree marker, was not obvious (in contrast to the present-day language, see Zafiu, 2006, p. 218).

- (4) a. **Mai** decît om bătrîru înțeș,
 more than man old understand.PS.1SG
 că porîncitele tale cerșuiu (PH.1500–1510, 106^v)
 that orders.DEF your ask.PS.1SG
 ‘I have understood more than an old man, because I asked for your orders’
- b. **mai** decît neaoa înrâlbi-me-voiu (PH.1500–1510, 43^r)
 more than snow.DEF whiten.INF=CL.REFL.ACC.1SG=AUX.FUT.1SG
 ‘I will turn whiter than snow’
- c. ei **mai** iubesc pre Dumnezeu decît
 they more love.PRES.3SG DOM God than
 pre avuția lor (cc¹.1567, 155^r)
 DOM fortune their
 ‘they love God more than their fortune’
- d. derept aceaia, **mai** gîndesc de bogăția ceștii lumi
 for that more think.PRES.3PL of richness this.GEN world.GEN
 decît de bogăția lu Dumnezeu (cc¹.1567, 145^v)
 than of richness.DEF LUI.GEN God
 ‘Thus they care more about the richness of this world than about God’s richness’
- e. ocară ca aceasta **mai** iubiși-o decît
 insult like this more love.PS.2SG=CL.ACC.F.3SG than
 cea slavă prea împodobită (svi~1670, 4^v)
 that glory too adorned
 ‘you loved more this insult than the highest glory’
- f. Nu e nice un rău **mai** de veninul
 not is no a harm more than poison.DEF

șarpelui (FD.1592–604, 471^v)
 snake.DEF.GEN
 ‘There is no stronger harm than the serpent’s poison’

Mai and *camai* are attested as semi-adverbs/adverbial clitics with an additive temporal value (‘again, one more time, already, still’) since the first attested texts (5, 6). But while the first one is still very productive in the modern language, the last one gradually disappeared:

- (5) a. pohta lui nu și-o mai
 desire.DEF his not CL.DAT.3SG=CL.ACC.F.3SG more
 poate domoli (CC².1581, 505)
 can.PRES.3SG appease.INF
 ‘he can no longer appease his desire’
- b. E când amu aceastea toate fi-vor,
 and when now these all be.INF=AUX.FUT.3PL
 cine va mai putea sta? (CC².1581, 692)
 who AUX.FUT.3SG still can.INF stay.INF
 ‘And when all these happen, who would be still able to resist?’
- (6) a. De-acmu n-oi camai purta
 of=now not=AUX.FUT.1SG more bear
 păcatele voastre! (DPar.1683, II/2^r)
 sins.DEF your
 ‘From now on, I will no longer bear your sins’
- b. numele lui să nu să camai
 name.DEF his SĂ_{SUBJ} not CL.REFL.3SG more
 pomenească! (DPar.1683, III/37^v)
 mention.SUBJ.3SG
 ‘let his name never be mentioned again’

In non-verbal contexts, *mai* functions as a weak non-clitic adverb, with a stronger degree of deficiency⁴ than other weak adverbs. In adverbial contexts, *mai* functions as an adverbial clitic. The delimitation of clitic adverbs from weak non-clitic ones is based on syntactic features, among which word order is the most important.

3. The clausal realizations of the comparative complement

The comparative complement represents the standard of comparison in a comparative structure. Given that it is obligatorily expressed and it is licensed in a binary syntactic configuration, it has been interpreted in recent work (GALR, II; GBLR) as a complement to the degree marker (not as a manner adjunct, as in the traditional literature). Generally, the comparative complement has an elliptical structure, originating in a reduced clause, from which one or more chunks are preserved (GALR, II, p. 473–485). Moreover, many typological studies underline the complexity of comparative structures (which are based on ellipsis and reorganization) and the multiple interpretations of these constructions (Pană Dindelegan, 2003; Zafiu, 2006).

The comparative complement is licensed by the degree operator (Cornilescu, 2008) and it is prototypically realized as a PP headed by the prepositions *ca*, *decît* ‘than’, *de* ‘among’. There is no locality constraint,

⁴The difference related to (phonological, morphological, semantic or syntactic) deficiency between clitics and weak adverbs was thrown into light by Reinheimer Ripeanu (2004), in the analysis of *mai* ‘more’, *cam* ‘still’, *prea* ‘too’, *tot* ‘continuously’, *și* ‘also’. For the analysis of the different types of *mai* in the old language, see also Donazzan & Mardale (2010); Mirzea Vasile (2012, p. 129–151); Brăescu (2017, p. 79–96).

the adjective or other items being able to intervene between the degree operator and the comparative complement.

The structures with comparative of inequality complements showed a high degree of variation since Latin with respect to the marking of the comparative complement (ILR, p. 266; Stoica, 2015). It was realized by analytical means, with *quam* (7a) or by synthetic ones, i.e. the ablative case (7b). These structures were not in free variation but rather in complementary distribution: the ablative was preferred in idioms, in negative structures and in rhetorical questions (Ledgeway, 2012, p. 23). The synthetic comparative complement was replaced in Late Latin by new analytical structures with the preposition *ab*, and especially with *de* + accusative / ablative (7c):

- (7) a. *clarior quam sol*
brighter than sun.ACC
b. *sole clarior*
sun.ABL brighter
'brighter than the sun'
c. *melior de aliquo*
better than others

In the analytic pattern preserved in the Romance languages, the prepositional phrase has different realizations. The construction with *quam* (> *ca*) is preserved in old Portuguese, in old Italian varieties and in Romanian (Salvi, 2011, p. 338) but was replaced with the *que / che, de / di* structure of with new analytical forms: Rom. *decît*, It. *di quanto*, Sp. *de lo que*, Port. *do que*.

In the earliest attested Romanian texts, we found comparative complements realized ad prepositional phrases headed by *decît* (8) and *de* (9). The comparative of inequality markers are frequently in free competition (10) and it is impossible to identify the syntactic constraints governing their usage⁵ (Ciompec, 1985, p. 156; Ciobanu, 2007; Stan, 2013).

- (8) a. *Că mai mare vătămătură decît trufa și măriia nu iaste,*
that more big damage than arrogance and pride not is
nice mai iute decît măriia și trufa (cc².1581, 3)
nor more violent than pride and arrogance
'There is no bigger and more violent damage than arrogance and pride'
b. *dărui lui ce era decît toate*
give.PS.3SG him.DAT what was than all.F.PL
mai frumos (cc¹.1567, 9^r)
more beautiful
'He gave to him the most beautiful things'
c. *să ținem pre toți mai buni decît noi (cc¹.1567, 63^v)*
SĂ_{SUBJ} keep.SUBJ.1PL DOM all more good than us
'Let's keep all those who are better than us'
d. *nu avem noi alt nimic mai strălucitor și mai*
not have.PRES.1PL we other nothing more shiny and more
luminat decît soarele sau mai alb decît zăpada (AD.1722-5, 9^r)
bright than sun.DEF or more white than snow.DEF
'We do not have anything else shinier and brighter than the sun and whiter than snow'
e. *se va lumina Fiiul tău în ceriu vîrtosu,*
CL.REFL.3SG AUX.FUT.3SG light.INF son.DEF your in heaven strongly

⁵It was noticed (Ciobanu, 2007, p. 170) that the old texts from the 16th century (CV.1563-8, CT.1560-1, PO.1582), as well as later texts (such as NT.1648, A.1620) prefer the construction with *de*. In other texts (such as CC².1581) the construction with *decît* is preferred. In letters and original documents, the construction with *de* is rare and the one with *decît* is not attested.

- mai luminos** de șapte ori **decît** soarele (CS_{IV}.1590–602, 18^v)
 more bright of seven times than sun.DEF
 ‘Your Son will strongly light up in Heaven, brighter than the sun’
- f. cu **mai multă** trudă înjugată iaste, **decît**
 with more much effort yoke.F.SG is than
cu veselie (CC².1581, 27)
 with joy
 ‘She is yoked with more effort than joy’
- (9) a. Aduceți-vă aminte de cuvînt ce eu am
 bring=CL.REFL.DAT.2PL in.mind of word that I AUX.PERF.1SG
 zis voao: că nu iaste robul **mai mare**
 say.PPLE you.PL.DAT that not is slave.DEF more great
de domnu-său (CC².1581, 256)
 than master=his
 ‘Remember what I have said to you, that the slave is not greater than his master’
- b. oaminiî ficiorilor lu Izdrail **mai mulți-s**
 people.DEF sons.DEF.GEN LUI.GEN Israel more many=are
și mai tari de noi (PO.1582, 180)
 and more strong of us
 ‘The people of Israel’s sons are more numerous and stronger than us’
- c. du-te de la mine, că **de mine cu mult**
 go.IMP.2SG=CL.REFL.ACC.2SG from me that than me with a.lot
mai puternic te-ai făcut (PO.1582, 86)
 more strong CL.REFL.ACC.2SG=AUX.PERF.2SG become.PPLE
 ‘You shall leave me, because you became much stronger’
- d. că **mai frumoasă** fată **de aceasta**
 that more beautiful girl than this
 n-am vădzut (CS_{XI}.1583–619, 91^v)
 not=AUX.PERF.1SG see.PPLE
 ‘that I have never seen a more beautiful girl than this one’
- e. nu vă teamereți amu, **de multe pasări**
 not CL.REFL.ACC.2PL be.afraid.IMP now than many birds
mai buni seți voi (CC¹.1567, 129^v)
 more good are you.PL
 ‘You should not be afraid, you are better than many other birds’
- f. Dup-aceea le va da cununi în capul loru,
 after=that CL.ACC.3PL AUX.FUT.3SG give.INF crowns in head.DEF their
mai luminate de soarele (CS_V.1590–602, 47^v)
 more bright.F.PL than sun.DEF
 ‘Afterwards, he will give them crowns on their heads, brighter than the sun’
- (10) a. în ceastă lume să nu aibi nemică de să-ți
 in this world SĂ_{SUBJ} not have nothing which SĂ_{SUBJ}=CL.DAT.2SG
 fie **mai drag și mai scump decît** Dumnezeu, de
 be more dear and more valuable than God that
 să nu iubești **mai vîrtos de** Dumnezeu
 SĂ_{SUBJ} not love.PRES.2SG more strong than God
 nece tată-tău, nece mumă-ta (CC¹.1567, 132^v)
 neither father=your nor mother=your

‘In this world you should have nothing more dear and more valuable than God, you should not love your father and your mother more than you love God’

- b. **mai închinată și mai fericită** ca o împărăteasă
 more glorified.F and more happy.F than an empress
 a lumii, **de** toți credincioșii pământului și
 of world.DEF.GEN than all believers.DEF earth.DEF.GEN and
 sub bezne **mai strașnică și mai înfricoșată**
 under darkness.PL more strong.F and more frightening.F
 asupra dracilor **decît** toți sfinții (AD.1722–5, 16^r)
 against devil.PL.GEN than all saints.DEF
 ‘More glorified and happier than an empress of the world, stronger in darkness than all the believers on earth and more frightening for devils than all the saints’

In numerous comparative structures (including adverbs), the two parts of *decît* (the preposition *de* and the adverb *cît*) are not merged (11). Moreover, the merger is only a written convention, without other consequences:

- (11) a. feace ciudă mai mare și mai minunată
 makes astonishment more big and more wonderful
de cît toate ciudesele (CC².1581, 109)
 than all miracles.DEF
 ‘he produces more astonishment than all the miracles’
- b. Că era și mai prost mai vîrtos **de cît** alalți (CC².1581, 297)
 that was and more ignorant more strong than others
 ‘That he was more ignorant than the others’
- c. spăla-mă-vei și mai vîrtos **de cît** zăpada
 wash.INF=CL.ACC.1SG=AUX.FUT.2SG and more strong than snow.DEF
 mă voi albi (DDL.1679, 208)
 CL.REFL.ACC.1SG AUX.FUT.1SG whiten.INF
 ‘You will wash me and I will turn whiter than snow’

The prepositional value of *decît* is interpreted (Cornilescu, 2008) as form of variation or as an oscillating form in the terms of the re-analysis framework (through the change in the grammatical function). The author adopts Haspelmath’s (1998) definition of re-analysis: the different interpretation associated to the same chain from the point of view of the constituency or of the syntactic categories of the constituents, a process which takes place in the passage from one generation to another.

The comparative construction with *de* is preserved from Late Latin (Densusianu, 1938, p. 380–381; Rosetti, 1986, p. 512; Ciompec, 1985, p. 156). A syntactic feature of the preposition *de* in comparative structures is that it selects a noun with a definite article (12a,b), without other constituents subordinated to the noun (Stan, 2013). In contradistinction, the preposition *decît* selects a noun without article (12c,d):

- (12) a. [Hristos] aceastea toate făcea-le
 Christ these all make.IMPERF.3SG=CL.ACC.F.3PL
 mai vîrtos **de omul** (CC².1581, 272)
 more strong than people.DEF
 ‘Christ made all these things more than people did’
- b. Iară Domnul arată că și **de vulpile** și
 and God shows that and than foxes.DEF and
de pasărilor mai sărac iaste (CC².1581, 277)
 than birds.DEF more poor is
 ‘And God shows that he is poorer than foxes and birds’

- c. trupul mai slab iaste **decît suflet** (cc².1581, 424)
 body.DEF more weak is than soul
 ‘the body is weaker than the soul’
- d. Mai bunu-i ospățul cu verdeață de prieteșug și
 more good=is meal.DEF with greens of friendship and
 de har **decît vițel** de iasle cu vrajbă (DPar.1683, III/7^v)
 of grace than veal of manger with brawl
 ‘The meal of greens with friendship and grace is better than eating veal with brawl’

In the present-day system of comparison, *de* limited its values and specialized for expressing measure phrases (Niculescu, 1999, p. 186), while *decît* extended its usage and took over the comparative complement (Stan, 2013, p. 310; GR, p. 506).

In later texts from the 17th century *ca* is also attested (Frâncu, 2009, p. 198; Ciobanu, 2007); in the 16th century, it was used only sporadically (13a,b), a fact which suggest that it was in an incipient stage of grammaticalization (see also Niculescu, 1999, p. 187–188; Stan, 2013, p. 311). The structure with the preposition *ca* was considered non-standard at the beginning, “a completely misguided Wallachian provincialism” (Tiktin, 1945, p. 68). The preference for the construction with *decît* is supported by latter work: “very often, *decît* is replaced by *ca* in the spoken language and even in the literary language. Educated speakers and good writers avoid this construction” (Jordan *et al.*, 1967, p. 115).

- (13) a. la noi nice un lucru nu-i **mai bun și mai cu folos ca**
 at us no a thing not=is more good and more useful than
 ceaea cînd murim pentru credința cea bună (Dvs.1682–6, 15^v)
 that when die.PRES.2PL for faith.DEF that good.F
 ‘For us, no other thing is better and more useful than when we die for the good faith’
- b. Și nu iaste alta **mai de folos și mai înfrîmșețată,**
 and not is other more useful and more beautiful
ca dragostea ceaia nefățarnica (cc².1581, 140)
 than love.DEF that sincere
 ‘And there is nothing else more useful and more sincere than sincere love’

Another comparative of inequality structure involves an incomplete pattern, in which the comparative complement is absent (14a). In these contexts, the comparative complement is contextually recovered. In the old language, another elliptical pattern is attested: *mai* is missing but the comparative complement is overtly realized. The attestation of this pattern, which disappeared from the present-day language, proves that the co-occurrence of the comparative complement and the degree operator was not obligatory in the old language (Ciompec, 1985, p. 162) (14b,c):

- (14) a. atunce el în **mai mare** grije iaste (cc².1581, 79)
 then he in more big concern is
 ‘then he is more concerned’
- b. **Bunru** e mie leagea rrostului tău **decît**
 good is me.DAT law.DEF mouth.DEF.GEN your than
 o mie de aur și de argint (PH.1500–1510, 105^r)
 one thousand of gold and of silver
 ‘For me, your law from your mouth is more important than one thousand pieces of gold and silver’
- c. ca o **sfîntă** ce iaste **decît** toții sfinții (AD.1722–5, 120^r)
 like a sacred.F which is than all saints.DEF
 ‘like a saint which is more sacred than all the saints’

In many structures from the old texts (15) a sort of *generalized comparison* (Ciompec, 1985, p. 164) is realized; this structure resembles the superlative one and included a prepositional complement headed by *dentre / dentru* ‘among’ (15a), *preste* ‘over’ (15b), *pre* ‘on’ (15c):

- (15) a. Că adică și **dentru** **îngeri**, carele era mai mare,
 that that.is and from angels which was more great
 trufa-l lepădă den ceriu (cc².1581, 3)
 pride.DEF=CL.ACC.M.3SG throw.PS.3SG from Heaven
 ‘That is, even of the angels, that who was greater was expelled from Heaven’
- b. fu mai mare **preste** **toți** în casa ei (DVS.1682–6, 62^v)
 be.PS.3SG more great above all in house.DEF her
 ‘she was greater above all in her house’
- c. mai mare e și mai înraltu e **pre** **toți**
 more great is and more high is over all
oamenii (PH.1500–1510, 81^v)
 people.DEF
 ‘he is the greater and higher than all the people’

4. Word order in comparative structures

Besides the canonical word order of the present-day language [operator + adjective + comparative complement (16a)], in the old language there are also numerous structures with pre-adjectival complements (16b–e) (Brăescu *et al.*, 2015). These constructions, with pre-adjectival comparative complements, still attested in poetry and folkloric texts from the 19th century, have been preserved in the present-day language (16f) only in the religious, obsolete register (Zafiu, 2006, p. 217):

- (16) a. Că altă moarte nu era **mai spurcată și mai fără**
 that other death not was more mean and more without
de cinste decît răstignitura (cc².1581, 68)
 of honesty than crucifixion.DEF
 ‘That there was no other death meaner and more unfair than crucifixion’
- b. **decît un iepure mai slabă și mai pemintiană**
 than a rabbit more weak and more earthly
 a fi (CII~1705, 32)
 A_{INF} be.INF
 ‘being weaker and more earthly than a rabbit’
- c. **decît stîrvul împutit tot mai dulce** iaste (CII~1705, 38)
 than carrion.DEF putrid still more sweat is
 ‘he is still sweeter than the putrid carrion’
- d. **Decît credința și nădejdia** iaste **mai mare**
 than faith.DEF and hope.DEF is more big
 dragostea (AD.1722–5, 22^r)
 love.DEF
 ‘Love is bigger than faith and hope’
- e. și dintr-atîta lumină ce avea s-au
 and from=so.much light which had CL.REFL.3SG=AUX.PERF.3SG
 făcut **decît toate negreșele și decît toate întunearicile**
 make.PPLE than all gloom.DEF and than all darkness.DEF

- mai negru și mai întunecat** (AD.1722–5, 44^v)
 more black and more dark
 ‘and, from so much light, he became blacker and darker than all the glooms and darkness’
- f. roagă-te pentru mine, netrebnicul și decît toți
 pray.IMP.2SG=CL.REFL.2SG for me worthless.DEF and than all
mai păcătosul (religious language)
 more sinful.DEF
 ‘pray for me, the most worthless and most sinful of all’

The structures with pre-adjectival complements are also attested in other old Romance languages, for example in old Italian (Giusti, 2010, p. 596–598; Poletto, 2014, p. 76). These configurations have been associated (Ledgeway, 2012; Brăescu *et al.*, 2015; Brăescu & Dragomirescu, 2017) with the discontinuous structures and related to the existence of certain relics of the non-configurational syntax in old Romanian, preserved from Latin. The disappearance of the structures under (16b–e) should be explained by an on-going change in the setting of the head directionality parameter, from partial *head-final* to consistently *head-initial* and by establishment of a fully-fledged configurational syntax, in which the relations between constituents are encoded by word order.

To explain the ordering of heads and complements (the variation between *head-initial* and *head-final* structures), Ledgeway (2012) employs *roll-up* movement: the so-called free word order of Latin is to be explained by the *roll-up* movement, whereas the more rigid word order of the Romance languages is determined by the elimination of this type of movement.

In this light, the changes taking place in the passage from Latin to the Romance languages no longer appear to be so radical (Brăescu *et al.*, 2015): Latin was a language in which the innovative *head-initial* syntax and the archaic *head-final* one were in competition (Ledgeway, 2012), a situation which carried over to old Romance (at least to old Romanian and to old Italian); the complete change from a *head-final* syntax to *head-initial* syntax was brought to a close in modern Romance. Expectedly, the old Romance languages (old Romanian included) were more similar to Latin in the domain of word order.

5. Conclusions

In diachrony, the comparative of superiority constructions, defined as complex structures expressing a relation between a property and a standard of comparison, are attested in different syntactic configurations. In this paper, we have analysed old Romanian texts with respect looking at three aspects: the grammaticalization path of the operator *mai*, the clausal realizations of the comparative complement, and word order in comparative structures.

The specialization of the operator *mai* to express the comparative of superiority was favoured by many processes characterizing the 16th and the 17th centuries: the disappearance of the competing form *camai* and the loss of the manner adverb *mai*. The competition between forms with the same function used in similar contexts and without any clear constraint represents a feature specific to all the degree operators and, actually, it is a state of all emerging systems.

The comparative complement in comparative of superiority structures was realized analytically in the old language, by means of several prepositional constructions. We have analyzed the distribution of the constructions with *de* ‘of’, *decît* and *ca* ‘than’. The emergence of the analytical expressions (Ledgeway, 2012) illustrates a general tendency of all the weakened synthetic structures, which were to be progressively replaced by other competing structures and to undergo grammaticalization.

As far as the word order of the comparative complements is concerned, we have paid special attention to the “deviant” pattern, different from the one of the present-day language, the pattern with a pre-adjectival comparative complement. We have accounted for these structures using Ledgeway’s (2012) insights, according to which the passage from Latin to Romance is characterized by an on-going passage

from a *head-final* syntax to a *head-initial* one, concomitant with the establishment of a fully configurational syntax. In the older stages of Romanian, in which numerous structures were in competition, word order was freer than in the present-day language.

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