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# Comparative Alternation across African Varieties of English

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*Abstract*

Most adjectives in English have two options to express the comparative form: synthetically (e.g., *cleverer*) or analytically (e.g., *more clever*). The coexistence and availability of both comparative forms may generate confusion on which one to use, and which factors determine the choice of either form. While traditional grammars attributed length (measured in number of syllables) as the main determinant for comparative variation (Sweet 1891, Quirk et al., 1985, Biber et al., 1999, Huddleston and Pullum 2002), recent studies show that the situation is more complex and list a set of determinants that influence this alternation. Despite of this, a scarce amount of research has actually focused on the coexistence of comparative forms in varieties of English other than the standard American and British English. Hence, the present paper analyses the main factors that underlie comparative alternation through an in-depth focus on the occurrences of inflectional and periphrastic forms of a selection of adjectives in the following language varieties: South African, Nigerian, Ghanaian, Kenyan, and Tanzanian Englishes. In line with contemporary studies, results show that comparative alternation is predominantly governed by phonological factors while other frequently mentioned factors such as 'colonial lag' are not so determining.

Key words:

Adjective, synthetic, analytic, comparative alternation, language variation.

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## *1. Introduction*

Adjectives in English can express comparison resorting to two different ways: inflectionally (e.g., *cleverer*) or periphrastically (e.g., *more clever*). While the former relies on the suffixation of the adjectival base with *-er*, the latter is based on the addition of the adverb *more* before the adjectival base (Quirk et al., 1985, 458; Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 1580-1584; González-Díaz 2008, 15).

The choice between the synthetic and analytic forms of comparative adjectives in English has received significant attention, particularly in corpus-based research (e.g., Mondorf 2003; González-Díaz 2008; etc.). However, neither of them focuses on varieties of English other than British and American English. Hence, the present study aims at analysing the coexistence of both forms in African varieties represented in the GloWbE (Corpus of Global Web-Based English), namely South African (ZA), Nigerian (NG), Ghanaian (GH), Kenyan (KE), Tanzanian (TZ) Englishes. Therefore, the present paper will try to provide an answer to the following research question: why does the English language mark comparison with both synthetic and analytic forms? To do so, this paper departs from (and adapts conveniently to this study) Mondorf's set of determinants affecting comparative alternation (Mondorf 2003, 251-304) as a foundation to analyse any kind of factor that may affect the choice of either comparative form in the varieties under study.

This paper is organised as it follows. Section 1 briefly summarises the content regarding the research question explored and includes the structure of the paper. Section 2 provides a summary of the literature. Firstly, it explores notions such as English as a global language through current demographic studies and estimations on the number of speakers altogether with the exploration of interrelated notions such as globalisation and colonisation. Following that, the most important models of World Englishes are presented among which Schneider's Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes stands out for the development of this paper. Secondly, it overviews the history of grammar books concerning the history on comparative alternation from Johnson's grammar of English in 1640 until Huddleston and Pullum's grammar in 2002, along with significant contributors in the field such as Mondorf, Kyto and Romaine, or Peter. Section 3 includes methodological database, procedures, and resources. In section 4, an analysis of the different determinants that influence the choice of comparative forms will be provided. Lastly, section 5 summarises the results obtained to draw conclusions and quantify each determinants contribution on comparative alternation. Plus, it will provide a

tentative explanation for the slow progression of such morphosyntactic change and will predict whether such change is likely to take place in the near future.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Globalisation and Colonisation: World Englishes Models

For centuries has mankind dreamt about a sole, universal language that would allow communication between human beings without the need to learn other languages or, alternatively, having something translated. While all artificial attempts have failed to provide such language, recently, it seems that a natural one has emerged on its own: English. Crystal estimated that there were between four and five hundred-million English native speakers and over a billion English speakers in countries where English is an official language (Crystal 2003, 59-71). Additionally, considering nowadays importance of the English language in most educational systems around the globe, it could be agreed that the total number of speakers of the English language globally, may be over two billion (2003, 67).

Certainly, globalisation has contributed to a great extent to such dissemination; however, within this sociolinguistic context, it is not possible to make sense of the notion of globalisation without connecting it to colonisation. While the current spread of English around the world can be attributed to the influence of the United States and the development of technology and internet, it cannot be denied that English proliferation around the world is mostly owed to the imposition of the English language in numerous countries of the New World, Asia, and Africa through colonisation processes centuries ago. Such imposition not only has extended the number of English speakers and varieties of the language but also (depending on the kind of colonisation process exerted by the British Empire) it has caused linguistic death for many indigenous countries (Mufwene and Vigoroux 2008, 1-5). Admittedly, languages or dialects can only be a threat to each other whenever they contend for the same function. Then, if no imposition of the English language had occurred through colonisation processes not only there would be less varieties of English but, probably, most indigenous languages and cultures would have survived, considering the fact that most communities isolated from any kind of colonial regime had likely survived, "Overall, the populations the most isolated from the socioeconomic structure inherited from the colonial regimes are those that have held on to their languages and other cultural practices" (Mufwene and Vigoroux 2008, 8).

Assuredly, globalisation has contributed to the emergence of World Englishes, for which classification two different traditional models stand out. The first model is built upon the "distinction of ENL (English as a Native Language) countries from ESL (English as a Second Language) countries and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) countries" (Schneider 2011, 30-32). The second model is one of the most influential and representative models of the spread of the English language where the author portrays three major learning contexts (see Figure 1). Such learning contexts are represented in three concentric circles: the "Inner Circle" in which English speaking countries can be found (Great Britain, United States of America, New Zealand, etc.) where English is norm-providing; the "Outer Circle" mostly represented by former colonies where English is an official language and norm-developing (India, Africa, etc.); and the "Expanding Circle" where English is neither an official language nor a former colonial language but it is mainly used as a foreign language and it is norm dependent. Through this model, Kachru claims that the English language belongs to its users and dismisses the attribution of any special prominence, authority, or superiority to ENL countries (Schneider 2007, 14). Hence, the interest of this paper in analysing comparative alternation in African varieties of English.



*Figure 1. Kachru's "Three Circles" model (from Schneider 2011, 32)*
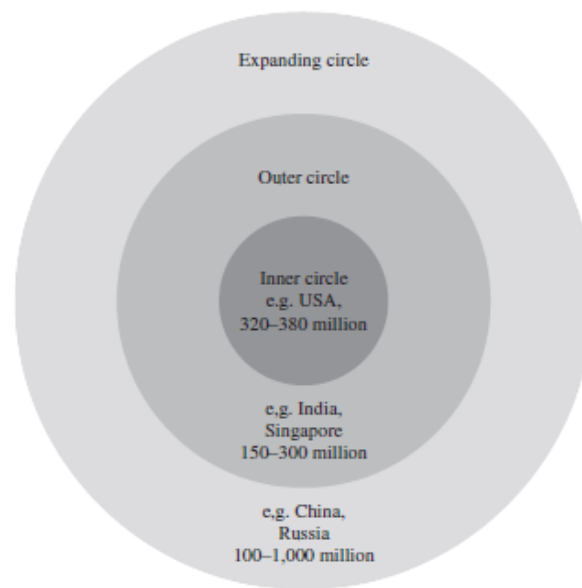
The third model was initially presented by Edgar W. Schneider in the form of an article in *Language* (Schneider 2003), which later evolved to a monograph, *Postcolonial English* (Schneider 2007). In his model, The Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes, Schneider presents the evolution of the English language in former colonies of Britain by placing a special

emphasis on those varieties which had evolved in specific language ecologies. The development of each African-English variety is represented by the progression of five different stages: *foundation*, *exonormative stabilisation*, *nativisation*, *endonormative stabilisation*, and *differentiation*. Additionally, such phases are characterised by the development of socio-political background, identity constructions, sociolinguistic conditions, and linguistic effects (Schneider 2007, 21-68). Figure 2 summarises these phases and the parameters that characterise them.

| Phase | History and politics | Identity construction | Sociolinguistics of contact/ use/attitudes | Linguistic developments/ structural effects |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1: Foundation | STL: colonial expansion: trade, military outposts, missionary activities, emigration/ settlement IDG: occupation, loss/ sharing of territory, trade | STL: part of original nation IDG: indigenous | STL: cross-dialectal contact, limited exposure to local languages IDG: minority bilingualism (acquisition of English) | STL: koinéization; toponymic borrowing; incipient pidginization (in trade colonies) |
| 2: Exonormative stabilization | stable colonial status; English established as language of administration, law, (higher) education, ... | STL: outpost of original nation, "British-plus-local" IDG: individually "local-plus-British" | STL: acceptance of original norm; expanding contact IDG: spreading (elite) bilingualism | lexical borrowing (esp. fauna and flora, cultural terms); "-isms"; pidginization/ creolization (in trade/ plantation colonies) |
| 3: Nativization | weakening ties; often political independence but remaining cultural association | STL: permanent resident of British origin IDG: permanent resident of indigenous origin | widespread and regular contacts, accommodation IDG: common bilingualism, toward language shift, L1 speakers of local English STL: sociolinguistic cleavage between innovative speak- ers (adopting IDG forms) and conservative speakers (upholding external norm; "complaint tradition") | heavy lexical borrowing; IDG: phonological innovations ("accent," possibly due to transfer); structural nativization, spreading from IDG to STL: innovations at lexis – grammar interface (verb complementation, preposi- tional usage, constructions with certain words/word classes), lexical productivity (compounds, derivation, phrases, semantic shifts); code- mixing (as identity carrier) |
| 4: Endonormative stabilization | post-independence, self-dependence (possibly after "Event X") | (member of) new nation, territory-based, increasingly pan-ethnic | acceptance of local norm (as identity carrier), positive attitude to it; (residual conservatism); literary creativity in new variety | stabilization of new variety, emphasis on homogeneity, codification: dictionary writing, grammatical description |
| 5: Differentiation | stable young nation, internal sociopolitical differentiation | group-specific (as part of overarching new national identity) | network construction (increasingly dense group- internal interactions) | dialect birth: group-specific (ethnic, regional, social) varieties emerge (as L1 or L2) |

*Figure 2. The evolutionary cycle of New Englishes: parameters of the development phases (from Schneider, 2007)*

Such model will be significant to understand any possible difference that may emerge among the varieties of English selected. Generally, the common pattern for African countries is within the phase of *nativisation* as Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Tanzania are found within this third phase (Schneider 2007, 113-238; Brato 2020, 378-380). This phase is characterised by heavy lexical borrowings and phonological, lexical, and grammatical innovations, that, in these cases may be entering through contact with other indigenous languages. However, South Africa is in a more advanced stage, endonormative stabilisation, which often occurs post-independence and is characterised by the stabilisation of the variety through the codification of dictionaries, writing, and grammatical descriptions. Additionally, there is a more recent model, *Extra- and Intra-Territorial Forces Model* (Buschfeld and Kautzsch, 2016) that complements Schneider's

Dynamic Model in that it is also applicable to varieties of English with a non-postcolonial origin (e.g., Cyprus).

### 2.2. Formation of Comparative Adjectives in English

The formation of comparative adjectives in the English language has for centuries been a topic of interest for English linguists. Most of the research carried out on the history of comparative formation focuses on the history of synthetic comparison and the ongoing implementation of the analytic comparison. Considering that English was back then a highly inflected language, the comparative system for adjectives was mostly inflectional, "In Old English, the comparative system for adjectives was almost wholly inflectional (-*(o)ra/ost* from the Germanic suffixes */iz/* and */oz/*)" (García-Vidal 2020, 36-37). It was during the Middle English period that the innovative analytical forms began to develop and receive importance. One of the first influential grammars of English that accounts for comparative alternation is Ben Johnson's (1640) which even if it does not make any special distinction among the inflectional and periphrastic forms of the adjective, recognises after the positive degree, the comparative, and the superlative. Furthermore, presents grammatically acceptable comparative forms such as *wiser*, *more wise*, but also some ungrammatical comparative forms such as *learned*, *\*learneder*, and *\*learnedest* (Johnson 1640[1972]).

Throughout the eighteenth century, there is an emergence of numerous grammars of English which include theory on the formation of comparative adjectives. Priestley (1761/1969) is one of the first authors to provide tentative explanations for choosing the analytic comparative over the synthetic form by referring to length in claiming that especially polysyllabic adjectives tend to prefix the word more to avoid the difficulty of pronunciation (Wick 2005, 2). Moreover, Priestley by referring to ''Mr. Johnson'' proposed that most disyllabic adjectives ending in -*some*, *-ful*, *-ing*, *-ous*, *-less*, *-ed*, *-fy*, *-ky*, *-my*, *-ny*, *-py*, and *-ry* would not admit the synthetic form (Wick 2005, 2).

Sweet's grammar of English published in 1891 is the first to provide an extensive and influential analysis of the formation of comparative adjectives up until that moment. He provides a brief history on the subject and claims that both comparative forms do not longer inflect indiscriminately considering that now longer and unfamiliar adjectives showed a tendency to take the periphrastic formation. However, the inflectional comparison was being restricted to shorter adjectives: mainly monosyllabic, disyllabic bearing the stress on the last syllable (unless those ending in consonant clusters), and many disyllabic adjectives marking the stress on the first syllable, unless those ending in *-ish*, *-s*, and *-st* to avoid repeating sibilant

sounds (Sweet 1891, 326-327). Furthermore, the author specifies that those disyllabic or longer adjectives plus those ending in *-ful*, *-ing*, or *-ed* took the periphrastic form (1891, 327).

Current visions on comparative alternation in English adjectives include numerous constraints. The traditional rule of length is still present in nowadays influential grammars of English and discerns between monosyllabic, disyllabic and trisyllabic or longer adjectives. While most monosyllabic adjectives take the inflectional comparative form (and can take the analytical in most cases), and trisyllabic or longer adjectives take the periphrastic, disyllabic adjectives are subject to variation (Quirk et al. 1985, 461-463). Disyllabic adjectives can take the analytical form almost always leaving variation to the ability to take inflectional marker (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 1583). Furthermore, Quirk includes final segment as a significant determinant in comparative alternation providing suffixes such as *-y*, *-ow*, *-le*, *-er*, and *-re* which trigger the inflectional form (Quirk et al. 1985, 462). Similarly, Huddleston and Pullum state that the main determinant that makes inflection possible or impossible for disyllabic adjectives relates to the ending of the lexical base (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 1583). Final segment becoming a significant determinant in comparative alternation has led to further studies on the topic. Some studies claim that most adjectives ending in *-ly* tend to take the analytical form (Lindquist, 1998). In line with such claim are Bauer's findings about the adjectives *costly*, *deadly*, *friendly*, and *kindly* which favoured the periphrastic (Bauer 1994, 57-78). Against such findings are Peters', for which such adjectives clearly did not take the periphrastic form (Peters 2000, 307). Moreover, further studies into final segment propose that adjectives ending in *-y* other than those ending in *-ly* do take the inflectional form (Kytö and Romaine 2000, 307). Also, adjectives ending in *-le*, excluding *able*, inflect for comparative formation (Kytö and Romaine 2000, 181).

Generally, linguists agree that English is undergoing a process of simplification of the language as there is a significant tendency of inflectional forms being substituted by periphrastic ones (Bauer 1994, 52). In Potter words, "This change may be seen as another manifestation of the trend from synthesis to analysis, or from complex to simple forms, which has been going on for thousands of years in the history of our language from Indo-European to modern English." (Potter 1969, 146-17).

In summary, endless research has been devoted to the determinants affecting comparative variation. It could be agreed that one of the studies that epitomises comparative alternation is Mondorf's *Support for more-support* (2003) which lays the foundations for the analysis in the present paper.

## 3. Methodology

The present section describes how data has been gathered and analysed as well as the main sources of evidence. The primary source of information was *The Corpus of Global Web-Based English* (GloWbE), a corpus released in 2013 unique in that it allows users to compare between different varieties of English as it consists of around 1.9 billion words of different types of texts (including both formal and informal texts) from twenty different countries (Davies 2013).

However, other sources have also been significant for the development of this study. *The Electronic World Atlas of Varieties of English* (eWAVE) is an interactive database on morphosyntactic variation in spontaneous spoken English that maps 235 features from a dozen domains of grammar in 51 varieties of English and 26 English-based Pidgins and Creoles in eight Anglophone world regions of all the globe (Kortman et al., 2020). *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) is a corpus that contains more than one billion words of texts from eight different genres in American English (Davies 2008). Lastly, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) the principal historical dictionary of the English language.

*The Electronic World Atlas of Varieties of English* was not only essential to choose which varieties of English were going to be analysed (South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Tanzania) but also to check how pervasive the variables studied are:

79—Regularised Comparison Strategies: extension of the synthetic marking. This feature is neither pervasive nor extremely rare in Tanzanian English. Feature exists but is extremely rare in South African English. There is an attested absence of the feature in Nigerian and Ghanaian English and there is no information on the feature available in Kenyan English.
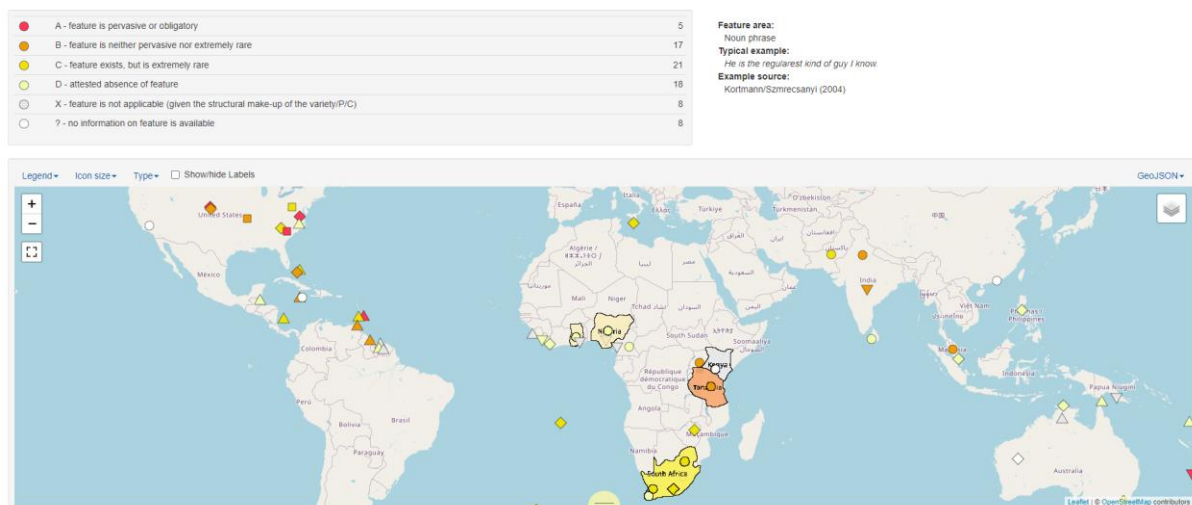


*Figure 3. Regularised comparison strategies: extension of the synthetic marking (adapted from Kortmann et al., 2020)*

80—Regularised Comparison Strategies: extension of the analytic marking. This feature is neither pervasive nor extremely rare in South African, Kenyan, and Tanzanian English. This feature exists but is extremely rare in Ghanaian English and there is an attested absence of the feature in Nigerian English.
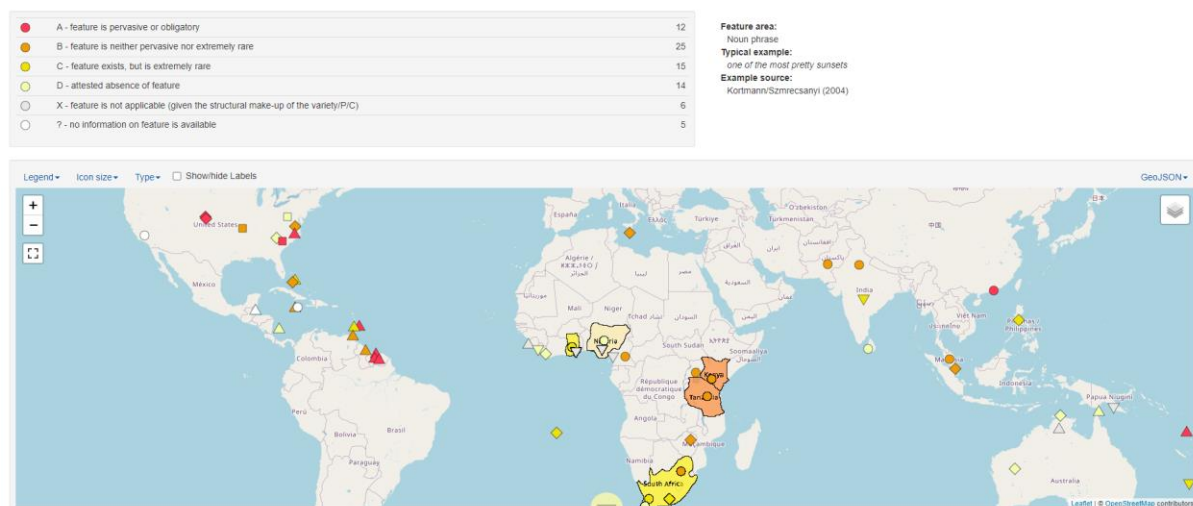


*Figure 4. Regularised Comparison Strategies: extension of the analytic marking (adapted from Kortmann et al., 2020)*

With regards to the selection of adjectives, it is important to highlight that the present paper only analyses seven adjectives in five different varieties of English due to length constraints. Moreover, some requisites were established to make this selection more significant. The first requirement concerned length measured in syllables, only disyllabic adjectives were chosen considering that these are subject to variation. Thus, two different approaches were taken for the selection of adjectives. The first of them was to choose from adjectives already analysed in Britta Mondorf's *Support for more-support* (2003) and *Synthetic and Analytic Comparatives* (2009). From that selection of adjectives, those amongst the most frequently used had to be dismissed to operate with a manageable set of data, the rest of the adjectives underwent a process of calculation to check the frequency with which each comparative form of the adjective appeared in each African-English variety under study in contemplation of significant data to analyse. Hence, the adjectives *better*, *clever*, *costly*, *noble*, and *risky* were chosen. Moreover, a second approach was used to broaden the number of adjectives for this paper. To do so, GloWbE was used to look for the thousand most frequent adjectives. These were filtered to meet the same criteria. Thus, two more adjectives were selected: *deadly* and *real*. Altogether, seven adjectives were chosen, and are classified according to their final segment: disyllabic

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adjectives ending in <-y> (*costly*, *deadly*, and *risky*); disyllabic adjectives ending in <-l>, <-le> (*noble* and *real*); and disyllabic adjectives ending in <-er> (*bitter* and *clever*).

Table 1 shows the expected grammatical form considering the variables discussed in section 4, as well as the form considered grammatically correct following *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (Quirk et al., 1985. 461-463). Additionally, figures 5, 6, and 7 portray the frequency for each comparative form of the adjectives selected. There is a significant contrast between the expected and the correct grammatical form and the actual tendency that users of the language have when using comparison. *Costly* is a clear example of such contrast, considering that tendency shows there is a major proclivity towards using the analytic form, whereas the expected and ''correct'' grammatical form is the synthetic one.

*Table 1. Expected and grammatically "correct" comparative forms of the disyllabic adjectives selected*

| Adjective | Expected grammatical form | ''Correct'' grammatical form |
|---|---|---|
| Costly | Costlier | Costlier |
| Deadly | Deadlier | Deadlier |
| Risky | Riskier | Riskier |
| Noble | More noble | Nobler |
| Real | More real | Realer |
| Bitter | More bitter | Bitterer |
| Clever | More clever | Cleverer |
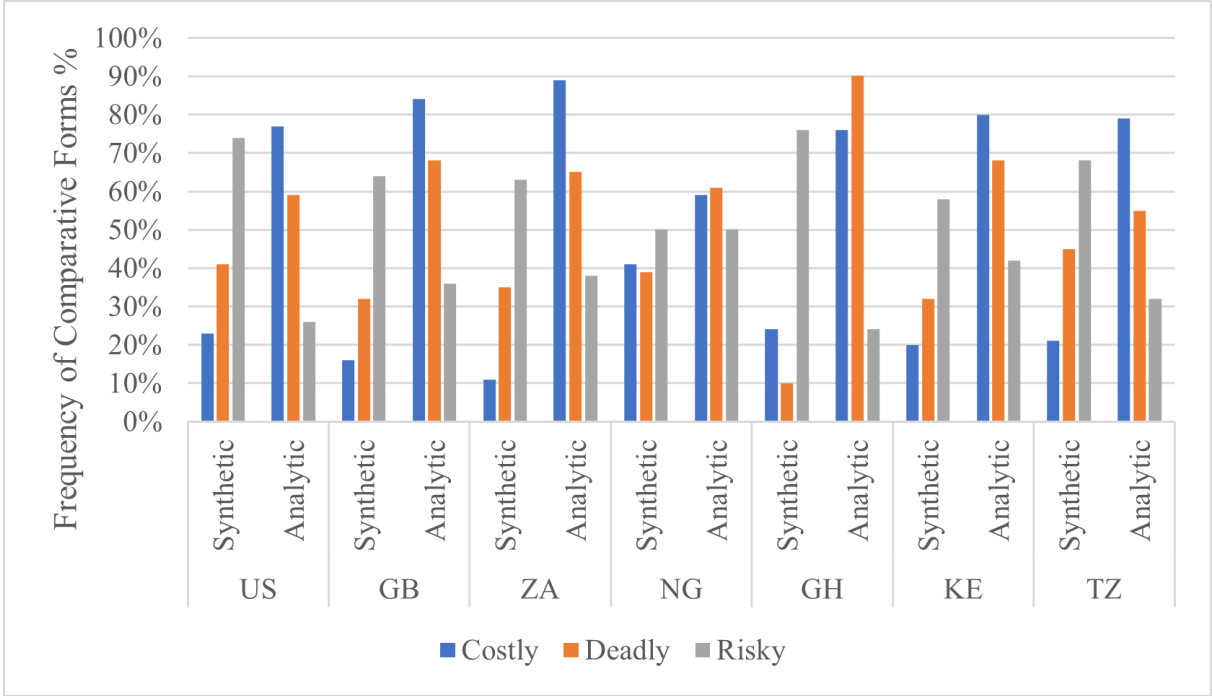


*Figure 5. Frequency of the disyllabic adjectives selected ending in <-y>*

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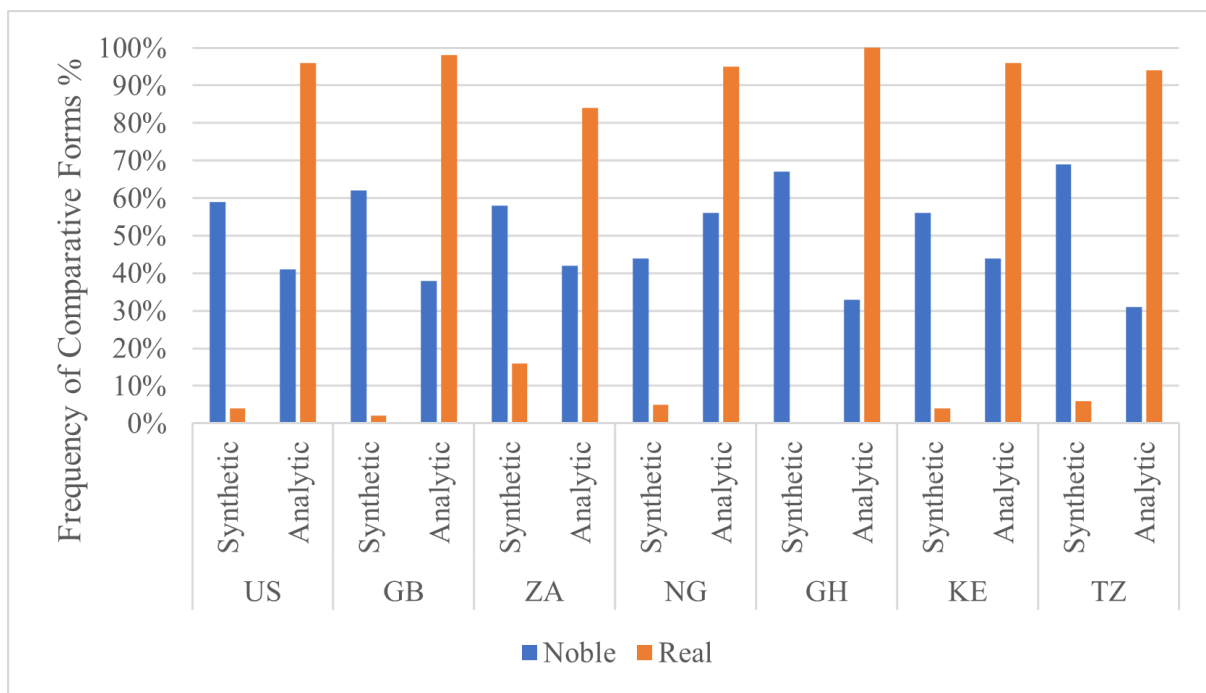
*Figure 6. Frequency of the disyllabic adjectives selected ending in <-l> or <-le>*
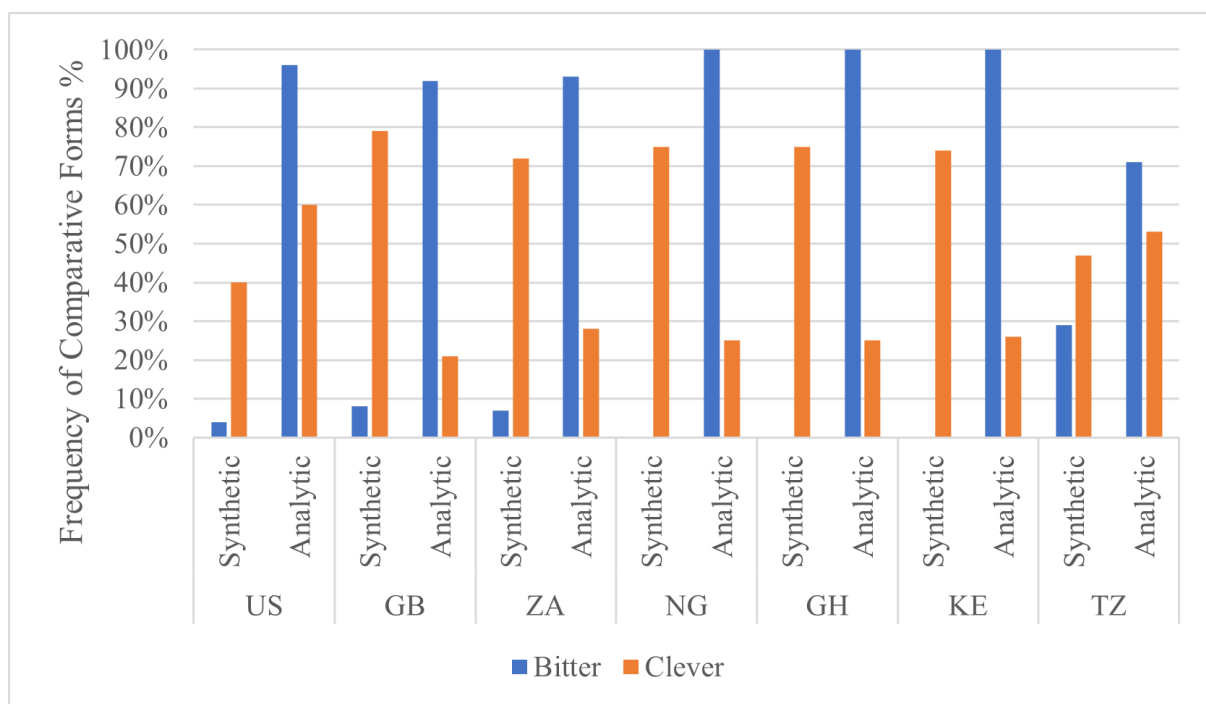


*Figure 7. Frequency of the disyllabic adjectives selected ending in <-er>*

Additionally, the token frequency of the database of adjectives used for this study equals 1,001 total adjectives, from which the retrieved adjective types amount to 358 examples of inflectional comparative formation and 643 examples of periphrastic comparative. This distribution means that, in spite of the ongoing English language trend of replacing synthetic by analytic forms,

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there is still significant variation in frequency between both forms. Periphrastic comparatives are almost twice as frequent as the inflectional comparatives. However, such results differ with popular studies such as Hilpert's distribution in *The English Comparative—Language Structure and Language Use*, as it accounts for "71,622 examples of morphological comparatives and 8,256 examples of periphrastic comparatives" (Hilpert 2008, 404). Such distribution suggests that English is still far from replacing the inflectional forms. A possible explanation for such contrast among distributions of synthetic and analytic comparatives may be the approaches with which adjectives were selected in this paper, as only disyllabic adjectives with a significant frequency in other comparative form than the expected were chosen in contemplation of significant results that were able to explain any kind of variety in comparative alternation. Hence, a random selection of disyllabic adjectives would probably result in a distribution similar to Hilpert's, far from inflectional substitution.

## 4. Analysis

The present section is an in-depth study on comparative variation in the varieties of English under study. It is mostly based on Mondorf's (2003) foundations on the set of determinants affecting comparative alternation: namely, lexicon[1], morphology, phonology, pragmatics[1], semantics, and syntax. Additionally, at the end of this section, an analysis on the influence that language contact and colonial lag may have in comparative alternation is presented.

### 4.1. Variation in Morphology

Although the area of morphology is often referred to in the literature respecting comparative alternation of adjectives, it has barely been seen as a major determinant until Mondorf's analysis in *Support for more-support* (2003), where she highlights that morphological complexity may indeed be a contributing factor in the choice of comparative form, "morphological complexity strongly affects the choice of comparative variant" (Mondorf 2003, 283).

Figure 8 provides the percentages for the occurrence of the analytic comparative forms of the adjectives selected. Unlike Mondorf's results, which show that morphological complexity correlates significantly with the choice of comparative formation (2003, 284), figure 8 shows mixed results: although some morphologically complex adjectives such as *costly* and *deadly* show significant proclivity towards the analytic form (77% and 67% respectively), some morphologically simple adjectives like *real* and *bitter* show a major proclivity towards the analytic form (92% and 93% respectively). For that reason, although morphological complexity may be influential for comparative alternation, it is not determinant.

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1. Although all the determinants have been analysed, both lexicon and pragmatics due to their influence in comparative alternation had to be dismissed.
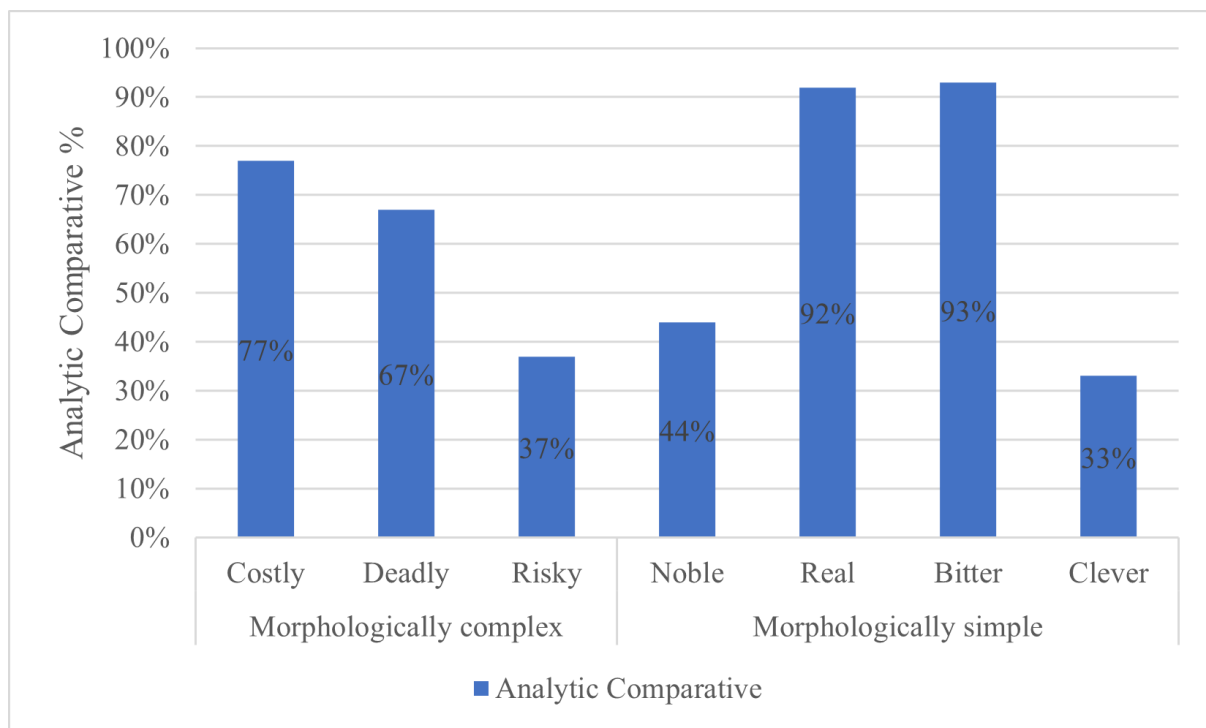
*Figure 8. Frequency of the analytic comparative form according to morphological complexity*

## 4.2.    Variation in Phonology

Phonology is one of the key determinants in comparative alternation. The present section includes different phonological factors that affect the choice of comparative variant: length, final segment, stress clash avoidance[2], haplology, and consonant clusters[3].

### 4.2.1.  Length and Prospective Length

Length of words measured in number of syllables has traditionally been one of the most significant determinants in the discrimination between the analytic and the synthetic comparative forms (Sweet 1891, Quirk et al., 1985, Biber et al., 1999, Huddleston and Pullum 2002). Generally, monosyllabic adjectives take the synthetic form whereas trisyllabic adjectives take the analytic, leaving disyllabic adjectives subject to variability (Mondorf 2003, 257). Considering that the focus of this paper is placed on disyllabic adjectives and length will not be determinant in this case, it is important to focus on the prospective length of adjectives, which is considered determinant for the choice of comparative form in most adjectives. Those adjectives for which the addition of the suffix -er does not suppose the addition of a new syllable tend to form the comparative inflectionally whereas those adjectives for which the addition of the comparative suffix entail the addition of a new syllable will most likely take the periphrastic

2. The section on ''stress clash avoidance'' could not be analysed considering that only one of the adjectives selected was oxytone but no examples were found on attributive position.
3. The section on ''consonant clusters'' could not be analysed considering that no adjective selected ended in consonant cluster.

form. Figure 9, taking the prospective length into account, displays the frequency with which the comparative form of each adjective appears. Here, adjectives are classified according to whether the inflection of the positive form entails the creation of a new syllable. The adjective that most frequently selects the inflectional variant is *noble*, the only one which does not trigger the creation of a new syllable. For the rest of the adjectives, adding the inflection *-er* entails a new syllable and most, with the exception of *risky* and *real*, clearly opt for the analytical variant. As a result, even if there is variation in both groups, it could be agreed that the prospective length of an adjective is determinant in comparative alternation.
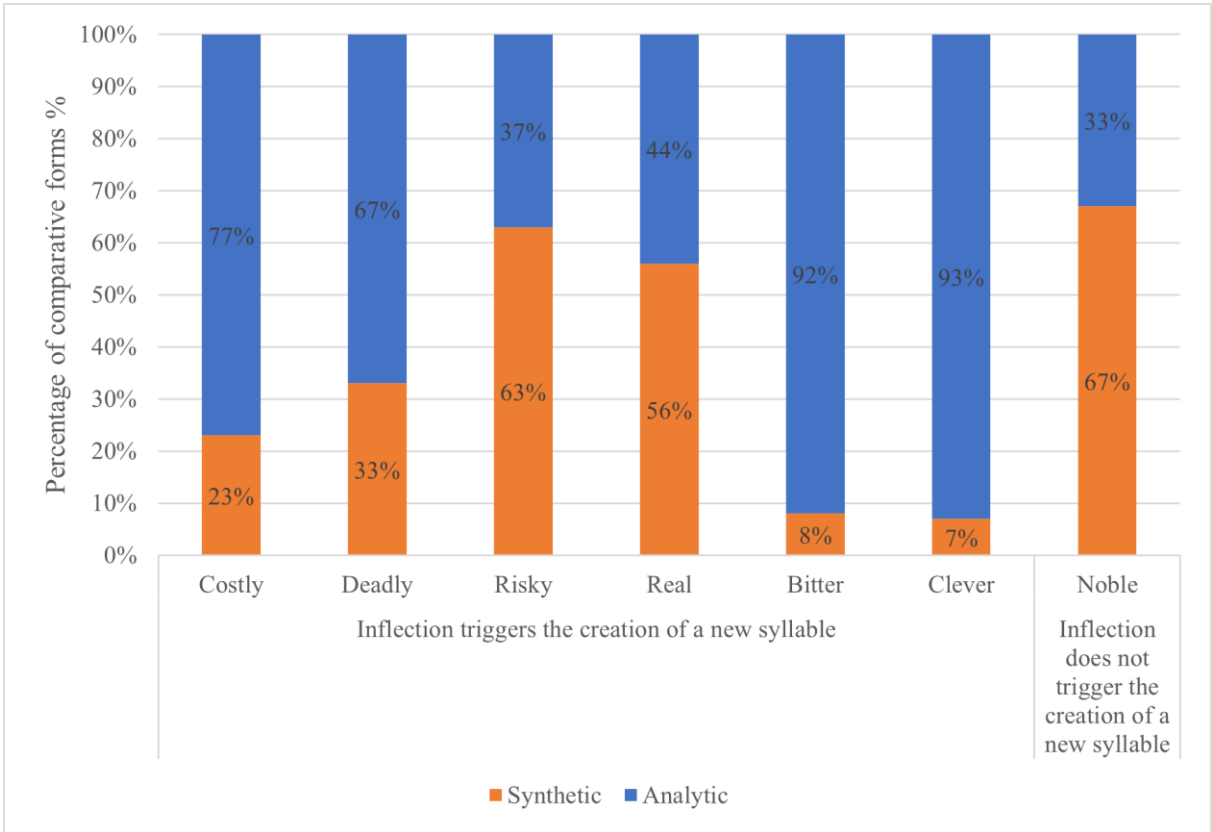


*Figure 9. Frequency of comparative forms according to prospective length*

### 4.2.2. Final Segment

Literature concerning the correlation between the final segment of adjectives and the comparative form is abundant. It is generally agreed among scholars that the presence of certain suffixes can defy or trigger the synthetic form of the adjective within a comparative context. For instance, disyllabic adjectives ending in unstressed vowel <-y>, <-l> or <-ə$^r$> most likely trigger the synthetic form (Quirk et al., 1985, 462; Kytö and Romaine 1997). However, other linguists have demonstrated that these generalisations should be qualified. Mondorf demonstrated that for adjectives ending in <-r> there is in fact, a major proclivity towards the

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analytic comparative (Mondorf 2003, 281). Figure 10 displays the frequency of each comparative form of the adjectives according to final segment. Adjectives such as *real* or *bitter* should inflect for comparison according to their final segment <-l> and <-er>, notwithstanding, results show that these adjectives take the periphrastic form more than nine out of ten of the occurrences. Such results for the adjective *bitter* are in line with Mondorf's findings; however, the adjective *clever* shows the opposite tendency, as majorly takes the synthetic form. Surprisingly, final segment <-y> shows different behaviours as the group is significantly heterogeneous with respect to comparative form. While the adjective *risky* majorly takes the synthetic form, *costly* and *deadly* show significant variation as they mostly take the analytic form. Thus, considering these heterogeneous results, it is advisable not to treat adjective's final segment as a determinant of comparative alternation.
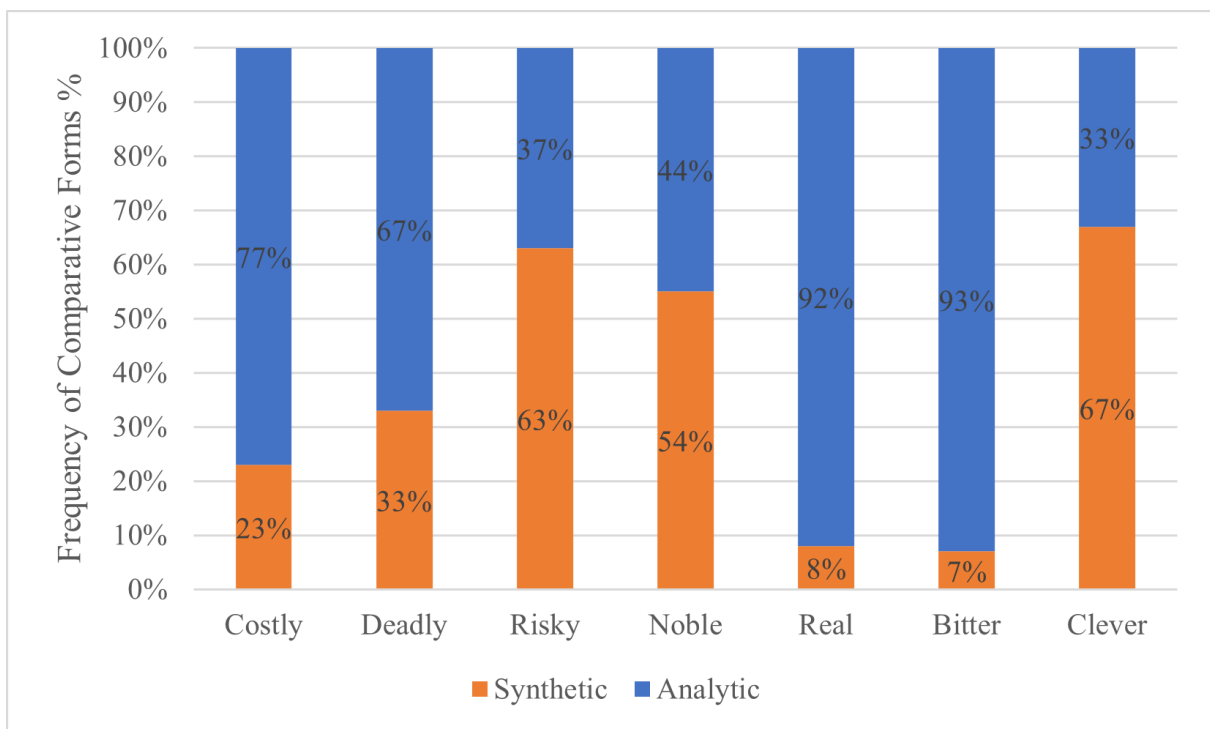


*Figure 10. Frequency of comparative forms according to final segment*

### 4.2.3. Haplology

The avoidance of adjacent similar sounds is a feature significantly rooted in the speakers of the English language. It has been described by scholars under the concept of *horror aequi* which is the "widespread (and presumably universal) tendency to avoid the use of formally (near-) identical and (near-) adjacent (non-coordinate) grammatical elements or structures" (Rhodenburg 2003, 236). This concept seems to be in line with the notion of haplology, a sound change phenomenon in which a word undergoes the elision of a syllable through dissimilation

whenever there is a combination of similar adjacent sounds. Admittedly, *horror aequi* effects are of significant relevance for comparative formation, "There is, however, a marked tendency to avoid -rer" (Jespersen 1909[1956], 349). Figure 11 displays the analysis of five of the adjectives selected that could potentially endure *horror aequi* effects if inflected. This graph shows divergent results. Starting with those adjectives that tend to avoid the repetition of similar sounds: *costly*, *real*, and *bitter* seem to be affected by *horror aequi* effects as they predominantly take the analytic comparative. Such results show that the repetition of liquid or rhotic sounds would be significant enough to avoid the use of the synthetic variant. However, these results do not correlate with adjectives *noble* and *clever* as both inflect for comparison with a higher frequency. While *noble* most likely inflects for comparison due to a major influence of the prospective length determinant, the adjective *clever* probably inflects owing to its high frequency, as both *bitterer* and *cleverer* have the same pronunciation /ər ər/.
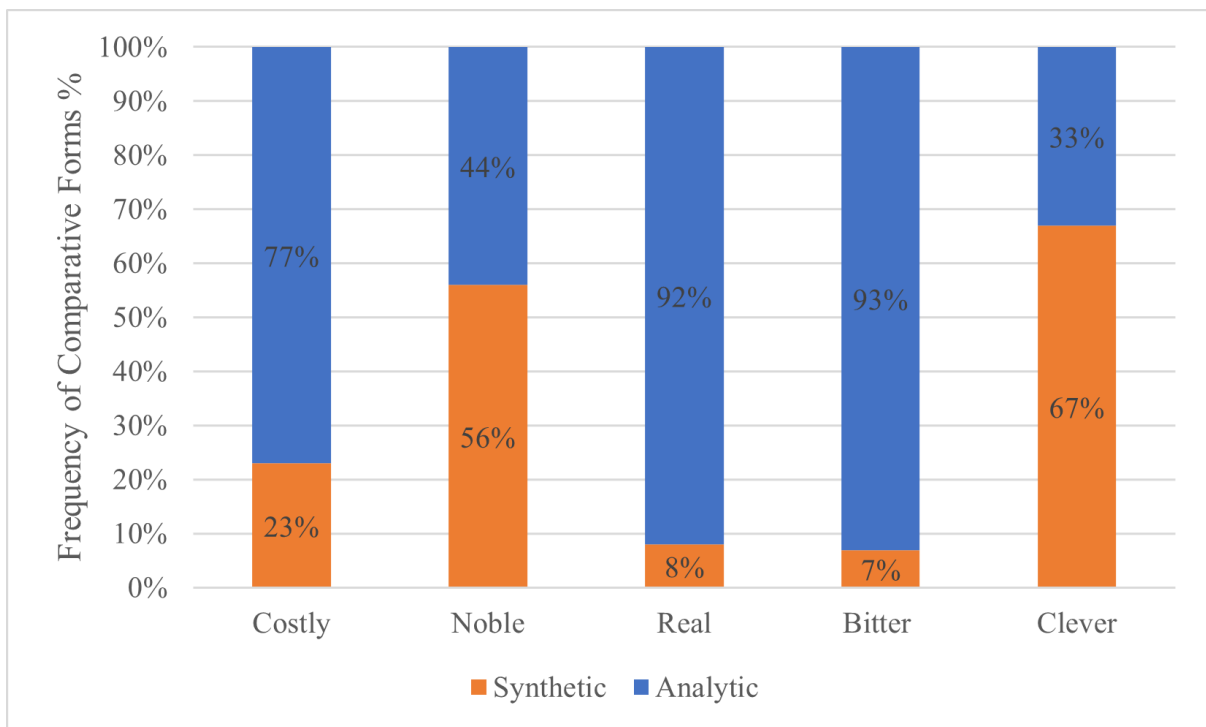


*Figure 11. Frequency of comparative forms according to horror aequi effects*

### 4.3.    *Variation in Semantics*

The influence that semantic factors have in comparative alternation has received little attention in the literature. However, such factors have been recently analysed by Mondorf who claims that can "exert a potent role in comparative alternation" (Mondorf 2003,289).

### 4.3.1.  *Semantic Complexity*

Britta Mondorf in her article refers to Braun's *Studien zu Syntax und Morphologie der Steigerungsformen im Englischen* (1982) and claims that semantical complexity or simplicity has certain correlation with comparative formation (Mondorf 2003, 289). Furthermore, in association to Braun's theory determines that the complexity of an adjective is measured by the length of the glosses provided in dictionaries and the availability of antonyms. Lastly, concludes that semantically complex adjectives prefer the analytic comparative form.

Before determining whether semantically complex adjectives prefer the periphrastic variant, it is important to check whether semantic complexity correlates with the number of glosses and antonyms. Figures 12, 13, and 14 display a representation of the number of antonyms, entries (glosses), and length of such entries measured in quantity of words for the seven adjectives selected. *The Oxford English Dictionary* was used to calculate the number and length of glosses. Furthermore, the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* was used to determine the number of antonyms each of the adjectives selected had.



| | Deadly | Costly | Risky | Noble | Real | Bitter | Clever |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of Glosses | 16 | 3 | 3 | 20 | 24 | 15 | 12 |
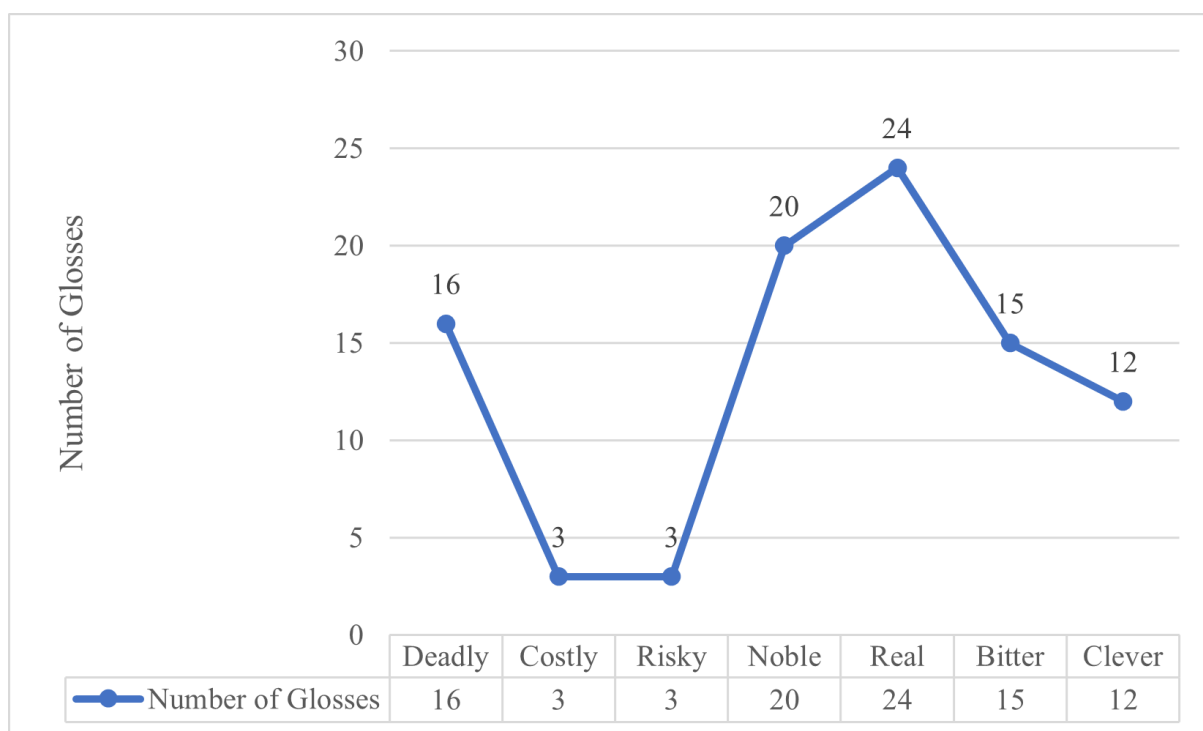
*Figure 12. Number of entries (glosses) in The Oxford English Dictionary*

| | Deadly | Costly | Risky | Noble | Real | Bitter | Clever |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Length of Glosses in Words | 144 | 49 | 23 | 337 | 383 | 198 | 137 |
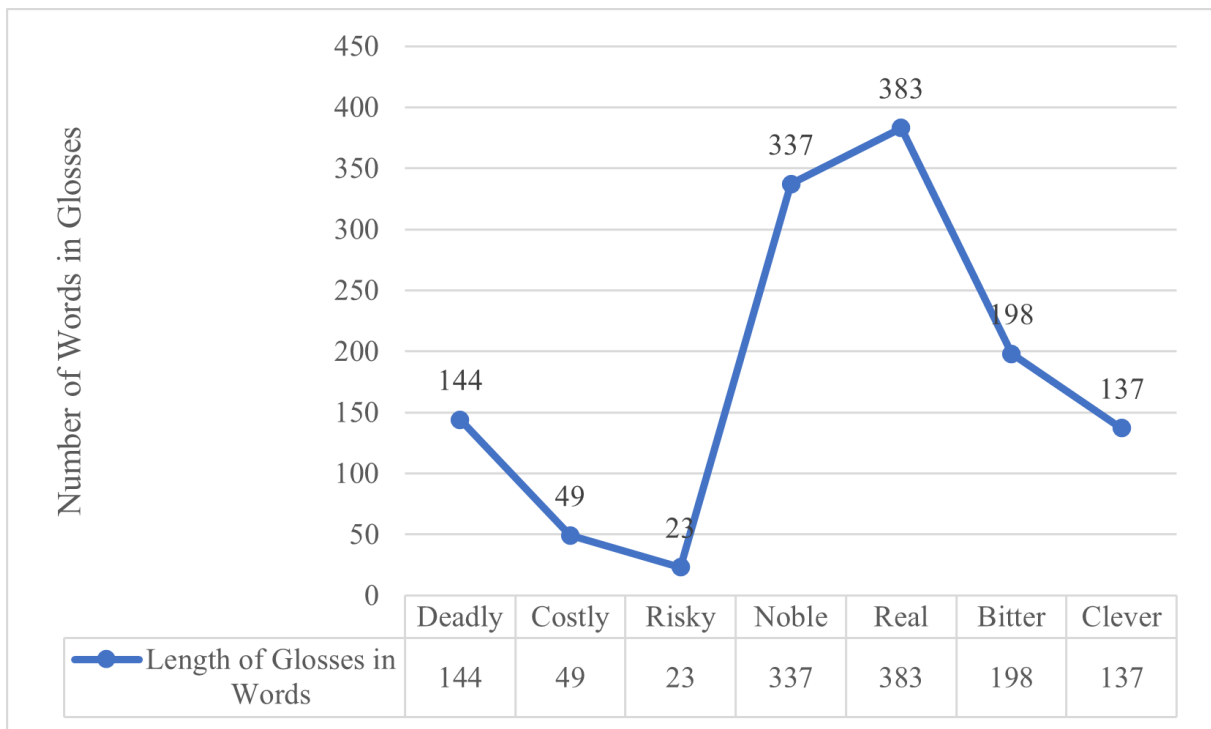
*Figure 13. Length of entries (glosses) measured in number of words in The Oxford English Dictionary*



| | Deadly | Costly | Risky | Noble | Real | Bitter | Clever |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of Antonyms | 0 | 3 | 1 | 9 | 22 | 3 | 5 |

*Figure 14. Number of antonyms in The Contemporary Corpus of American English*

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Figures 12, 13, and 14 represent different variables related to semantic complexity of the adjective. Although a significant correlation is portrayed between the number of entries and their length, figure 14 displays different results, which means that the number of antonyms and semantic complexity do not correlate equally as variables 12 and 13 do. In order to provide a more visual comparison, and following the information provided in figures 12 and 13, a ranking from more to less semantically complex adjectives is presented in *a* (see *1-a* below); the information of figure 14 is rank-ordered in *1-b*.
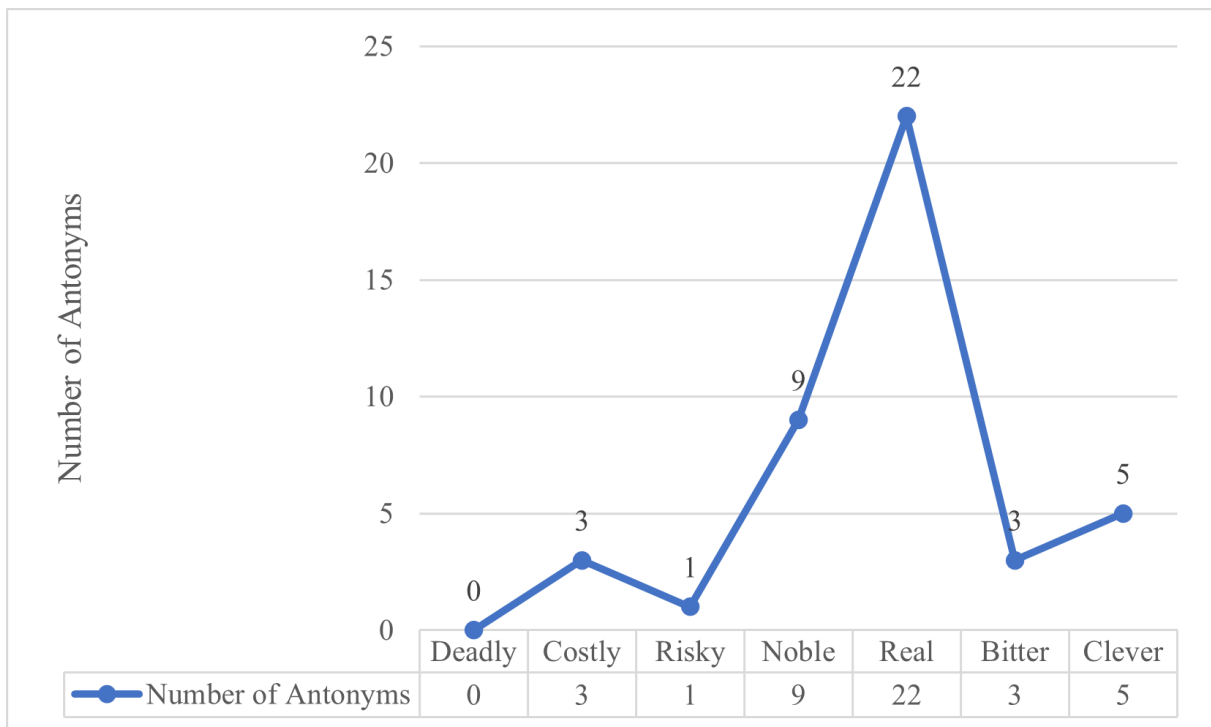
(1)

    a. *Real > noble > bitter > deadly > clever > costly > risky.*

    b. *Real > noble > clever > bitter > costly > risky > deadly.*

While the two most semantically complex adjectives coincide, the right end of the hierarchy differs. Therefore, in order to determine whether semantic complexity of adjectives coincide with the choice of the analytic variant, this paper will take both number and length of entries as the main predicators of semantic complexity

       To determine whether semantic complexity of adjectives correlates with the analytic variant of comparatives (see Braun 1982, 112), hierarchy of semantically complex to simple adjectives should somehow coincide with the one corresponding to comparative adjectives based on frequency of the analytic variant (ordered from more frequent to less frequent). These are represented respectively in *2-a* and *2-b*.

(2)

    a. *Real > noble > bitter > deadly > clever > costly > risky.*

    b. *Bitter > real > costly > deadly > noble > risky > clever.*

As shown in (2), if *a* and *b* were to be compared, there would be some differences. For instance, the most semantically complex adjective '*real*', is the second most frequent adjective using the analytic variant, whereas the second most semantically complex adjective '*noble*' is the fourth most frequent adjective using the analytic form. Hence, although these hierarchies do not coincide perfectly, semantic complexity should indeed be considered an influential factor of comparative alternation considering that most variations are provided by the importance that other determinants may have in some of the adjectives.

### 4.3.2.  Concrete versus Abstract Adjectives

Abstract versus concrete meanings have proven to play a part in comparative alternation (Mondorf 2003, 289). As she observes in her article, abstract concepts of adjectives have a major affinity with the analytic variant. This is exemplified in the following pair of sentences (see 3 below).


(3)
>    a.   What makes the Ghanaian Boko Haram ***more deadly*** is that it does most of its damage underground.                                                                    *Concrete*
>    b.   The disease sprouts and goes on full offensive, becoming even ***deadlier***.          *Abstract*


In order to ascertain Mondorf's claim that abstract concepts of adjectives tend to use the comparative analytically, 1,001 sentences (which are the occurrences for the adjectives selected in GloWbE) have been analysed in order to discern between abstract and concrete adjectives. As most of the adjectives followed this trend, a general graph has been established to represent the analysis of concrete and abstract uses of the adjectives selected for all of the varieties of English under study in figure 15. When expressing abstract meaning, the use of the periphrastic comparative is used 71% of all cases as opposed to the 29% of the inflectional comparatives, which confirms the tendency of adjectives with abstract concepts using the periphrastic comparative form. This tendency also confirms Mondorf's notion of *more*-support, as there is a greater cognitive effort involved in displaying abstract meanings which is balanced with the use of the analytic variant (Mondorf 2003, 290). Moreover, when expressing concrete meaning there is a more homogeneous usage of comparative forms.
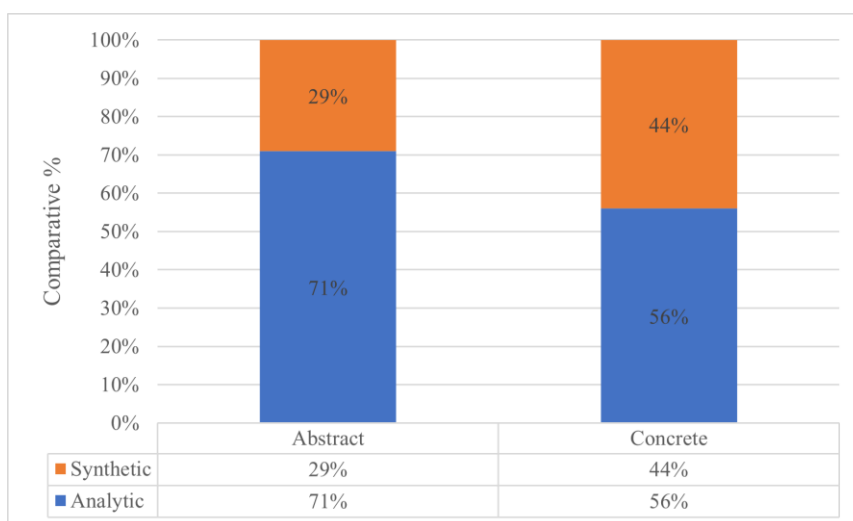


| | Abstract | Concrete |
|---|---|---|
| ■ Synthetic | 29% | 44% |
| ■ Analytic | 71% | 56% |

*Figure 15.  Synthetic vs. analytic comparatives according to meaning*

### 4.4. Variation in Syntax

Literature on the influence that syntax has in comparative alternation is extensive (Rohr 1929; Jespersen 1956; Leech and Culpeper 1997). Hence, the present section will determine if position and the presence of infinitival complements influence comparative alternation for the adjectives selected.

### 4.4.1. Position

Scholars have long been aware of the influence that position can exert in comparative alternation (Jespersen 1956, 348 and Quirk et al., 1972, 293). Indeed, confirmation of such influence is provided by Leech and Culpeper (1997, 366). Generally, it is agreed by scholars that "adjectives in predicative and postnominal position form their comparative far more often analytically than those in attributive position" (Mondorf 2003, 286). Table 2 confirm such claims for the seven adjectives selected in the five different varieties of English analysed. Results show that attribution and predication somehow display the synthetic comparative form homogeneously while the analytic form is used three times more than the synthetic form in predicative position. Hence, it can be concluded that for most adjectives position is influential, in comparative alternation.

*Table 2. Synthetic vs. analytic comparatives of the seven disyllabic adjectives selected according to syntactic position*

|             | Synthetic | | Analytic | | Total | |
|-------------|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|
|             | N   | %   | N   | %    | N    | %    |
| Attributive | 143 | 46% | 167 | 54%  | 310  | 100% |
| Predicative | 192 | 26% | 549 | 74%  | 741  | 100% |
| Postnominal | 0   | 0%  | 7   | 100% | 7    | 100% |
| Total       | 335 | 32% | 723 | 68%  | 1058 | 100% |

### 4.4.2. Presence of Infinitival Complements

The influence that the presence of infinitival complements has on comparative alternation has priorly been analysed by Mondorf (2003, 262). While Mondorf argues that to-infinitive complements correlates with the analytic variant of comparative formation she includes some variables such as obligatory infinitival complements, optional infinitival complements, and adjuncts. Figure 16 shows that, although for some of the adjective selected there was no record of infinitival complements (*deadly*, *real*, *bitter*, and *clever*) those that have (*costly*, *risky*, and

*noble*), formed the comparative analytically which indicates that the presence of infinitival complements is a great indicator of the use of the analytic form.
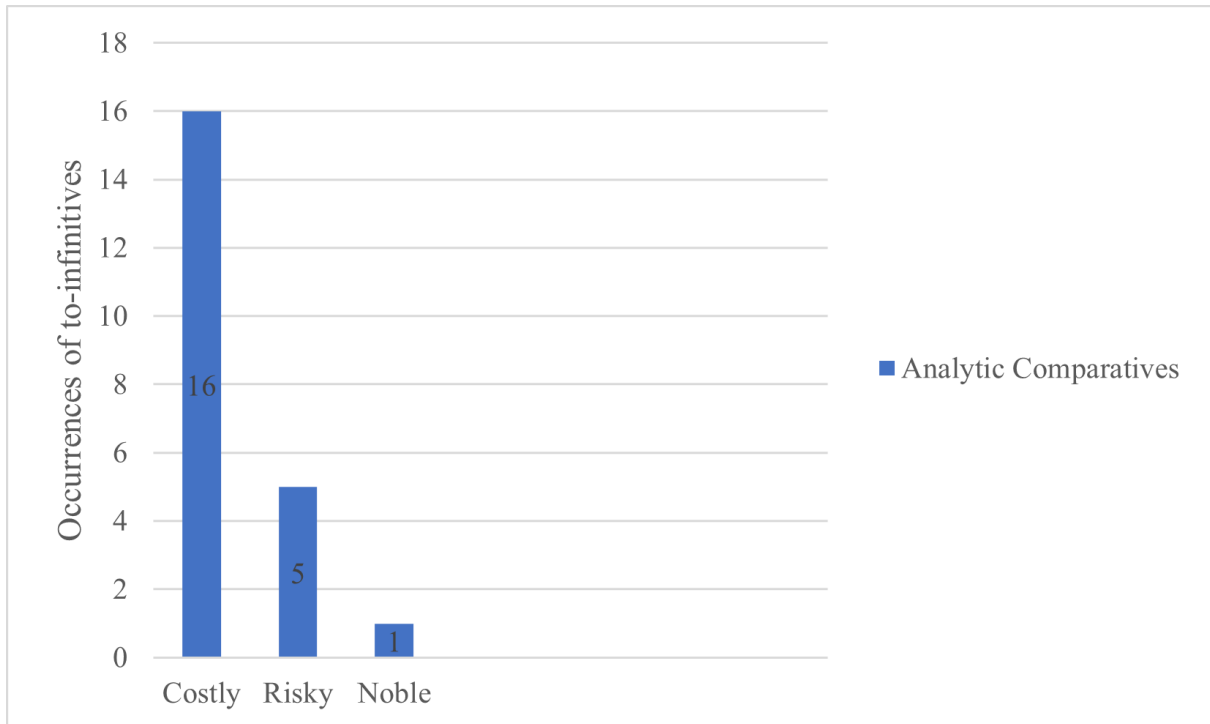


*Figure 16. Analytic comparatives of adjectives in non-attributive position with an infinitival complement*

## 4.5. *Other Determinants in Comparative Alternation*

### 4.5.1. *Language Contact*

Language is continuously changing, not only with the addition of new words, but also grammatically and phonetically. Although most of the language variation is due to the progression of time, language change and language contact are the essential causes of differences between varieties (Schneider 2007, 26). For instance, the coexistence of Norman French and English during late old English and Middle English had a significant impact in the evolution of the English language, especially, considering the addition of new morphosyntactic, phonologic, and morphologic norms. Just to put an example, English has adapted many of the French prefix and suffix morphemes, including *pre-*, *-ous*, *-ity*, *-tion*, etc.

Aforementioned figure 5 and 6 (see in section 3), which display the frequency of the inflectional and periphrastic forms for the disyllabic adjectives selected ending in <-y>, or <-l>, <-le>, show significant results for the Nigerian variety. Figure 5 shows the same frequency in both comparative forms for the adjective *risky* in Nigerian English, oppositely to the rest of varieties which clearly show a major proclivity to form comparison synthetically. Similarly,

figure 6 shows for the adjective *noble* in Nigerian English a major proclivity to form comparative periphrastically, whereas the rest of varieties form it inflectionally. Considering that only South African English is in a more advanced stage within The Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes (endonormative stabilisation), and the rest of the varieties share the same phase (nativisation), an explanation in terms of 'colonial lag'— the tendency in former British Colonies to retain older forms of English (Mondorf 2009, 89) — should be dismissed as the five varieties of English are found in a similar process of evolution. However, such variation could be attributed to language ecology as Nigerian English has been in contact with several indigenous languages, some of which might be highly isolating languages such as Yoruba or Igbo languages. (4) and (5) present how Okpameri and Yoruba (two Nigerian indigenous languages) respectively form comparative constructions:

(4) (Raifu and Happy 2021, 72)

   *a.* Khohv<u>ene</u> 'heavier'

   *b.* Fiea<u>vene</u> 'louder'.

   *c.* Tanah<u>vene</u> 'happier'.

(5) (Howell 2013, 271-288)

   *a.* *Joko yii da* <u>*ju*</u> *iyen lo.*

   Chair this be.good exceed that. One

   ''This chair is nicer than that one''.

   *b.* *\*Omatoyo yara* <u>*ju*</u> *Ade le (yara) lo*

   Omatoyo be.fast exceed. Ade can (run)

   Intended: ''Omatoyo is faster than Ade can be.''

While (4) shows comparative constructions marked inflectionally in Okpameri, (5) displays two different examples of comparative constructions in Yoruba, an isolating language. These examples portrayed in (5) demonstrate that in Yoruba the morpheme *ju* is used to express comparison. Then, most speakers of indigenous isolating languages in contact with any variety of English would express comparison in the English language using the analytic form as it would probably be a less opaque form for the individual considering the similarities with the native language.

## *5. Conclusion*

The present study has analysed different factors that may affect comparative alternation in disyllabic comparative adjectives in South African, Nigerian, Ghanaian, Kenyan, and Tanzanian Englishes. By no means the aim of this paper was to determine whether each of the available variants was right or wrong, but rather its aim has been to provide an explanation to such variation.

Section 4 has provided an analysis which turns out to be mostly in line with Mondorf's notion of *more*-support (Mondorf 2003). Whenever an adjective is subjected to a more lexically, morphologically, phonologically, pragmatically, semantically, or syntactically more complex context, the analytic variant seems to be selected. Overall, every determinant analysed had an impact on comparative alternation for the disyllabic adjectives selected in a major or minor degree. Probably, the choice of comparative form will mostly depend on every single adjective rather than grouping adjectives which share characteristics. For every adjective there will be a determinant that has a major impact in comparative alternation which will not be the same for other adjectives. Comparative choice will most likely be characterised by a combination of determinants rather than by a single one. However, it could be agreed that some of the determinants had a major impact, namely: length and prospective length, haplology, semantic complexity, position, and the presence of infinitival complements.

Nonetheless, other extralinguistic factors will also have a notable impact in comparative alternation, such as language contact, especially relevant in World-Englishes which have emerged in a situation of language coexistence with many other indigenous languages. One of the main examples mentioned throughout this paper is the case of Nigerian English, a variety which resulted from the contact with highly isolating languages such as Yoruba or Igbo. This may justify a higher frequency of the analytic comparative form in Nigerian English. Ample room for this issue remains available for future research, as it was out of the scope of this paper. However, the main question remains: why does the English language, an analytical language, still use the inflectional form, after several centuries of marking comparative formation with both synthetic and analytic forms? While distributions on both comparative forms keep favouring the synthetic one even if the tendency is to replace the synthetic by the analytic forms, for synthetic comparative forms to be substituted by the analytic ones, a long period of coexistence needs to be in the centre of such process, considering that, especially, morphosyntactic changes are extremely slow. Hence, it is probable that we are still centuries away from seeing a complete transition from synthetic to analytic forms.

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