STEREOTYPED COMPARISONS IN THE LANGUAGE OF GEOFFREY CHAUCER

1. INTRODUCTION

The works of Geoffrey Chaucer exhibit the frequent appearance of structures like *as stille as any ston*, *as swyft as thought* or *as white as chalk* and, on the grounds of the unexpectedly large corpus gathered from his writings (of more than four hundred examples[1]), we considered it to be of great interest to devote our attention to study them.

Kerkhof (1982: 376-89) outlines some cases of stereotyped comparisons in Chaucer and it was precisely from his suggestions that the idea for this article arose. Therefore, this paper will deal with the so-called stereotyped comparisons[2], that is, highly hyperbolic comparisons with a chiefly colloquial origin, fossilized and lexicalized in a language owing to their repeated use in a given linguistic community.

These comparative structures show an intrinsic relationship between the adjective and the noun acting as the second member of the comparison in the sense that, owing to their fossilized status, the appearance of the former requires the presence of the latter and vice versa.

The continuous occurrence of these stereotypes may demonstrate that many of them might have been already fossilized in the Middle English period. Actually, they were very appealing to the poet, who decided to include them in his poetry as well as in his prose. In fact, Chaucer realized that this

[1] The task of compiling was also eased by the recent edition of Chaucer's works on CD-ROM. *Chaucer: Life and Times*. 1995: Primary Source Media Limited.

[2] These structures can also be labelled using various terminology. Gutierrez Diez prefers to name them *fossilized similes*, González Calvo *intensive comparisons*, Beinhauer *lexicalized comparisons* and *hyperbolic expressions*. However, we agree with Mayoral's terminology namely *stereotyped comparisons*, the term which we will be using in the course of the paper.

type of comparison transmitted comic tinges to his writings, humour could be subtly included, and that provided him with a skilful and effective way to secure the constant interest and attention of his audience.

> - Thou comest hoom *as dronken as a mous*[1]. WBT, 246.

> - And Seint Jerome, whan he longe tyme hadde woned in desert, where as he hadde no compaignye but of wilde beestes, […] for which his flessh was *blak as an Ethiopeen for heete*, and ny destroyed for coold, […]. ParsT, 344.

> - Hir mouth was *sweete as bragot or the meeth,*
> *Or hoord of apples* leyd in hey or heeth. MilT, 3261-62.

Thus, in this paper[2] we intend (1) to trace the origin of stereotyped comparisons; (2) to carry out a syntactic analysis; and finally (3) to analyse those elements forming the second member of the comparison.

2. ORIGIN

With regard to their origin, stereotyped structures were not new in the Middle Ages. Chaucer came about these types of combinations through various sources, most of them adapted from Old English, Latin, French or Italian, that is, from the languages that the poet learned in his lifetime. Chaucer's biographers (Dillon 1993: 1-24) suppose that in his youth the poet attended one of the three schools surrounding the river Thames, where he had the possibility of getting acquainted with classical languages and their literature, and this fact could have helped him to come across these kind of comparative structures that he used later as *calques* or loan translations.

> - Quid *magis* est *saxo durum*?. Ovid. *Ars Amandi*, 473.

[1] *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson. 3rd edition. Oxford: OUP, 1991. All the following quotations are from the same edition of *The Riverside Chaucer*.

[2] The examples quoted constitute a brief summary of a major corpus drawn from the complete works of Geoffrey Chaucer, and this corpus has been the primary source of information for the data included.

- Som tyrant is, as ther be many oon,
That hath herte *as hard as any stoon*. Chaucer, MerT, 989-90.

- Et iacebat *immobilis* et nihil aliud *quam dormiens cadaver*. Apuley, *Asinus Aureus*, Vi, 21.

- Yet Troilus for al this no word seyde,
But longe he ley *as stylle as he ded were*. Chaucer, Tr, I, 722-23.

After this initial learning period, he was given a position of great responsibility in the court. In fact, the post of ambassador affected his literary career by getting in contact with the literary movements of the continent and, particularly, with these comparisons which offered him a wide range of possibilities to be used in his own language. Accordingly, we have carried out a research of European medieval writings to prove the influence of these languages and we have been able to verify how, even though he was a poet of unlimited genius, he was also directly influenced by the stereotypes from the continent, as can be seen in the following examples.

- *Blanche comme fleur de liz.* de Lorris, *Le Roman de la Rose* (RR), 1028.

- His nayles *whitter than the lylye flour.* Chaucer, NPT, 2863.

- Pur ço Francs si *fiers come leuns. La Chanson de Roland,* 1888.

- Whan he hym knew, and hadde his tale herd,
As fiers as leon pulled out his swerd. Chaucer, KnT, 1597-98.

- Poi, procedendo di mio sguardo il curro,
vidine un' altra *come sangue rossa*,
mostrando un' oca bianca piú che burro. Dante, *La Divina Commedia*, Inferno, 17, 61-63.

- Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes,
And for to drynken strong wyn, *reed as blood*;. Chaucer, GP, 634-35.

The parallelism and analogy amongst the stereotypes of these medieval languages is obviously non-casual and this coincidence leads us to suppose that some of them have a traditional character and have managed to filter

through into European folklore to be spread afterwards into all the languages by means of literature. If we attempt to trace their origin, we come to the conclusion that they are to be found in classical literature.

However, along with these adaptations from European folklore, many examples of our corpus show a distinctive and unique character in each language whose origin has to be found in colloquial language and which always responds to the speaker's point of view (Beinhauer 1968: 257-58). That is, apart from the task of imitating those models from the past, the internal mechanism of each language will allow its users to invent and devise its own stereotypes, projecting its own culture and, in these cases, the process of fossilization and lexicalization will be influenced by the political, economical or social situation of the moment. Thus, the first of the examples below shows a stereotype, fossilized owing to a specific geographical feature of France (the river Loire) whereas the second one can only be contextualized in an English environment.

> - La reconnait trop sombre et trop profonde et d'un courant *plus rapide que courant de Loire*. Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval*, p.58.
>
> - […] Hadde alwey bawdes *redy* to his hond,
> As any hawk to lure in Engelond. Chaucer, FrT, 1339-40.

Therefore, the process of invention in each language becomes clearer when analysing specific adjectives, like *green*.

> - […] aussi *vert comme une cive*. de Lorris, RR, 200.
> - Ful fade and caytif was she eek,
> And also *grene as ony leek.* RR, 211-12.
>
> - Myn herte and alle my limes been as *grene*
> As *laurer* thurgh the yeer is for to sene. MerT, 1465-66.

Whereas de Lorris uses the word *cive* ('spring onion'), Chaucer prefers *leek* and *laurer*. This duality may be explained by the differences found in the products of each country. The inexistence of a one-to-one relationship between the adjective and the second term can be obviously explained by the specific diversity found in the production of each country (*cf.* nowadays the Spanish stereotyped comparison *más colorado que un tomate* and its English counterpart *as red as a beetroot*). Thus, every language shows a

natural tendency to develop its own stereotyped comparison and Chaucer was clearly conscious of this fact when translating from French.

- Et si n'ot pas *n'ed Orlenoiz*. de Lorris, RR, 1217.
- *Hir nose was wrought at point of devys.* Chaucer, RR, 1215.
- Moult clere stoit aussi *froide comme puiz ou comme fontaine.* de Lorris, RR, 110.
- Cleer was the water, and *as cold*
As any welle is, soth to seyne […]. Chaucer, RR, 116-17.

In the first example above, Chaucer omits the French reference to the Orléans whereas in the other he prefers the anglosaxon word *well* to the French term *fo(u)ntain* because perhaps that stereotype with the second term *well* was already lexicalized and fossilized in his own language. Thus, the poet in his translation of de Lorris's *Le Roman de la Rose* makes all the changes necessary to avoid the possible ambiguity that the original text could cause. As Hatim (1990: 223) points out, "the translator has not only a bilingual ability but also a bi-cultural vision. Translators mediate between cultures […] seeking to overcome those incompatibilities which stand in the way of transfer of meaning"[1].

All in all, once we have mentioned the two possible origins (classical and colloquial), we should notice that Chaucer makes far greater use of the second. These stereotyped comparisons of colloquial origin are always under a process of continual movement of lexicalization and new stereotypes are constantly being fossilized in every language. Therefore, it must be clear that the catalogue available for these stereotypes should be richer than those inherited from tradition[2].

[1] Chaucer tends to adapt his translations to his English audience in order to make them more comprehensible, otherwise most of his verses would have been ambiguous for his audience. Let us mention A. Bensoussan's recent translation of R. Redoli's brilliant *Chisnetos* ("La Beata Aquejada de Picores") in which the French professor opts to translate the Spanish name 'Encarna' into French as 'Conception', conveying thus the same connotations that the Spanish term contains (*Cf.* his conference held at the University of Málaga on March 12th under the title of "La Traducción Lúdica").

[2] Notice that stereotypes nowadays may be spread even quicker than in the Middle Ages owing to the powerful influence of the mass media. Therefore, the catalogue of examples compiled from present-day English requires a constant attention and compilation to have it up-to-date (Calle and Miranda 1997).

3. SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS

3.1. PATTERNS

The syntactic analysis of these stereotyped structures reveals the different patterns that the constituents exhibit in the sentence structure. Chaucer does not always use the same syntactic structure and, depending on the verse he is writing, he uses what we are going to label regular order, on the one hand, and complex order, on the other. In a regular order the adjective[1] is sorrounded by both members of the comparison (first and second term) and, therefore, it responds to the following structure.

FIRST TERM	COMP-ELEMENT	SECOND TERM
Noun	*as ... as/so ... as/also ... as*	Noun
	-er than/more ... than	

- And Jason is *as coy as is a mayde*; […]. LGW, 1548.

- Five arowis were of other gise,
That ben ful foule to devyse,
For shaft and ende, soth for to telle,
Were *also blak as fend in helle.* RR, 971-74.

- His coomb was *redder than the fyn coral,*
And batailled as it were a castel wal. NPT, 2859-60.

- For present tyme abidith nought;
It is more *swift than any thought.* RR, 5023-24.

This regular pattern is more abundant in Chaucer's writings, but sometimes the poet alters this regularity to acommodate his poetry to the metrical, stylistical and rhyming rules of the verse, making use of structures considered to be more complex from a syntactic point of view. Thus, five main patterns can be found.

[1] Throughout this paper we will use Quirk's terminology as *comp-element* to refer to adjectives as the heads of comparisons, either in the form of equality or superiority (Quirk et al. 1972: 765-68).

a) The first term is inserted in the comp-element, that is, between the adjective and the second particle. The pattern used in this case responds to the following structure: {*so*/*as* + adjective + **first term** + *as*} + second term[1].

- Nas nevere yet seyn thyng to ben preysed derred,
Nor unde cloude blak *so bright* a sterre
As was Criseyde. Tr, I, 174-76.

b) Chaucer also collocates the verb within the comp-element, forming the pattern {*so*/*as* + adjective + **verb** + *as*} + second member.

- And she, for sorwe[2], *as doumb* stant *as a tree*. MLT, 1055.

In addition, we may also locate examples in which more than one verb can be placed in the position mentioned. The next case illustrates the adjective (*faire*) followed by two verbs (*lye* and *brenne*), both placed within the bounds of the comparison, that is, between the constituents of the comp-element.

- Yet wole the fyr *as faire* lye and brenne
As twenty thousand men myghte it biholde[3]. WBT, 1142-43.

c) This third possibility conveys the combination of the previous ones, for the poet places the first term and the verb between the adjective and the second particle which constitute the comp-element, showing the pattern {*so*/*as* + adjective + **verb + first term**} + second member. However, we should also bear in mind that Chaucer makes use of some freedom in the collocation of the verb and the first member of the comparison since sometimes the verb precedes it and in others the subject does. This variability between these two sentential elements responds to rhyming and metrical causes. The verse used by Chaucer, iambic pentameter, consists of five feet of two syllables (stressed and unstressed, respectively) and that is precisely what the poet aims to manage with this variability of positions: the maximum perfection of his pentameters.

[1] We should observe that this type of ordering is very closely related to the contemporary clauses of consequence, such as *he was so noble a man that …*, *it was so difficult a task that …, etc.*

[2] It should be taken into account that, in this case, *for sorwe* is also inserted between the first term and the comp-element.

[3] Notice that the presence of the numeral in this example adds even more hyperbolic connotations to the stereotype.

- To gróund(e) / déd she / fálleth / ás a / stón. AA, 70.

This same pattern is also observed in comparisons of superiority.

- A fáirer / sáugh I / néver(e) / nóon than / shé. ClT, 1032.

d) Sometimes a subordinated clause (of time, of place, etc.) can be positioned within the comp-element structure.

- Ther nys, ywis, no serpent *so cruel*,
Whan man tret on his tayl, en half so fel,
As womman is, whan she hath caught an ire. SmT, 2001-2.

Like the subordinated clause, other elements may appear functioning as proper adjective complements.

- And but I be to-morn *as fair* to seene
As any lady, emperice, or queene
That is bitwixe the est and eke the west. WBT, 1245-47.

e) Finally, we have observed another pattern which is considered to be more interesting from a linguistic point of view for a complete alteration in the natural sequence of constituents occurs: the second member of the comparison preceeds its comp-element (its adjective). This structure is very peculiar and characteristic of poetry and Chaucer, a master of this art, makes a profitable use of it. The rhetorical figure which occurs here is that generally known as hyperbaton (Mayoral Ramírez 1993: 655).

- Love is a thyng *as any spirit free.*
Wommen, of kynde, desiren libertee. FranT, 767-68.

Furthermore, this pattern admits the appearance of other sentential elements between the comp-element and its second term.

- As any wezele his body *gent and smal.* MilT, 3234.

Chaucer tends to use these stereotyped structures when he is describing places and characters. By placing the comp-element at the end of the line, he emphasizes the quality described by the adjective because, as such, it generally constitutes a stressed syllable in the prosodic structure of the line. Besides, the poet als o alters the regular pattern owing to rhyming necessities. It is quite significant that in the seven examples found with this pattern the adjective is made to rhyme with another word forming couplets.

- Upon his hand he bar for his deduyt
An egle tame *as any lilye whyt*. KnT, 2177-78.

3.2. POSITION OF STEREOTYPED COMPARISONS

Next, we will study those positions of the stereotyped comparisons within the scope of the verse. Thus, three positions have been observed: they may head the line, end it, or even be split on two verses. The position adopted by the stereotype, which is never arbitrary, chiefly depends on the metrical and rhyming characteristics of each line. This explains Chaucer's preference to place *as fiers as leon* at the beginning, to make a perfect consonantic rhyme between the words *herd* and *swerd*.

- Whan he hym knew, and hadde his tale herd,
As fiers as leon pulled out his swerd. KnT, 1597-98.

This situation is also observed in the two following examples in which the stereotyped comparison is placed at the end and on two lines to make the words *sloo* and *free* rhyme with *two* and *me*, respectively[1].

- Ful smale ypulled were hire browes two,
And tho were bent and *blake as any sloo*. MilT, 3245-46.

- And yeven hym my trewe herte *as free*
As he swoor he yaf his herte to me. SqT, 541-42.

Finally, it is important to mention those stereotypes which show an unusual type of combination. We are referring to those cases in which the comp-element and its second term do not constitute a comparative clause but, on the contrary, both appear together and generally the second member preceding. Although the surface structure does not show any comparative formula, we are in fact dealing with a variant of stereotyped comparisons since the deep structure reveals the presence of a term which perfectly denotes the quality of the adjective in a maximum and hyperbolic degree.

- He hadde a beres skyn, *col-blak* for old. KnT, 2142.

Thus, these structures must be considered as another form of stereotyped comparison. They constitute an advanced level of fossilization and lexicalization since formulae like *col-clak* or *snow white* are in fact equivalent to the

[1] Although rhyme is very important, we cannot forget that prosody plays its counterpart importance since another syntactic distribution would have broken the perfection of Chaucer's pentameter.

stereotypes *blak as coal* and *white as snow*, however, the former shows a more advanced level of assimilation appearing jointly[1]. These lexicalizations usually take place with hue-adjectives, such as *reed, white, blak,* and so on.

- A somonour was ther with us in that place,
That hadde a *fyr-reed* cherubynnes face, […]. GP, 623-24.

- Two corones han we,
Snow white and *rose reed*, that shynen cleere […]. SNT, 253-54.

3.3. EQUALITY VERSUS SUPERIORITY

3.3.1. *Frequency*

It is well known that the constituents required for the occurrence of a stereotyped comparison are (1) an adjective, (2) a second term or referent and (3) the correlative particles/morphemes employed to mark the degree of comparison or intensification, such as *more ... than* or *-er than* for superiority, *as ... as* for equality and *less ... than* for inferiority, which is the least commonly used and most difficult to hear. As Jespersen (1969: 224) points out, "comparisons with *less* are not very frequent; instead of *less dangerous than*, we often say *not so dangerous as*, and whenever there are two adjectives of opposing meaning, we say […] *weaker than* rather than *less strong than*". According to this fact, although the majority of the examples collected in our corpus appear in the comparison of equality[2] *as*/*so ... as* (81.73%), the superiority construction (*more/-er than*) is also found but in a lesser degree

[1] From a diachronic point of view, this type of combination has been present in all the stages of the history of English (*Cf.* Shakespeare, *Tit*, II, ii, 76). Sometimes examples may be found showing the complete assimilation of the adjective and its referent, appearing together: *Now whenas darkesome night had all displayd / Her coleblacke curtein over brightest skye,* […]. Spenser. *The Faerie Queene*, Book 1, Canto 4, 389. Notice that Espejo Muriel (1990) cites similar structures in her detailed analysis of hue adjectives in Spanish, with examples like *verdemar* or *verde-montaña.*

[2] This tendency towards the use of the degree of equality is something inherent in the English language because it has followed the same pattern in all the stages of its history. Notice, however, the opposite direction followed by Spanish with its preference for the degree of superiority since the Baroque period (Beinhauer 1973: 259).

(18.26%). The following examples illustrate how the same stereotype is used with both constructions.

- His nayles *whitter than the lylye flour,*
And lyk the burned gold was his colour. NPT, 2863-64.

- And over that his cote-armour
As whit as is a lilye flour,
In which he wol debate. Th, 866-68.

These two examples are not isolated. Chaucer's literary production is full of similar contrasts, like *fressh as May* and *fressher then the May with floures newe*; *as hard as any stoon* and *harder than is a ston*. The existence of these alternative constructions with the same stereotypes (equality versus superiority) made us think over their semantic value to check whether they were completely synonymous or not, that is, if any distinction could be taken into account to justify the use of one or the other.

3.3.2. *Semantic Value*

The state of the art can be summarized as follows: on the one hand, some specialists led by Beinhauer (1968: 249-50) defend that it is unnecessary to establish any kind of semantic difference between both types of structures since they are virtually felt to be synonyms. On the other hand, Chantraine de van Praag (1982: 815-16) thinks it is compulsory to make a semantic distinction between the comparison of equality and that of superiority, labelling the former 'qualitative' and the latter 'quantitative comparison', that is, the *more* (adjective) *than* comparison seems to be more dynamic and hyperbolic and intensifies the expression much more than that with *as ... as*.

Given such opposed points of view, we are left to adopt the most reasonable interpretation and we actually believe that the only difference is to be found just in the frequency with which they appear (*as ... as* is more frequent) considering that from a semantic point of view forms like *as hard as any stoon* and *harder than any ston* mean *very hard* and both can be offered as free variants for the same meaning (Zuluaga 1980: 149). Moreover, the lack of any kind of semantic difference may also be demonstrated analysing some examples translated by Chaucer.

- Estoit *plus noir que meure*. de Lorris, RR, 941.

- *Blak as bery or ony slo*. Chaucer, RR, 928.

The example mentioned illustrates that Chaucer is not concerned with the degree of the original French adjective (equality being more frequent than superiority) and tends to translate it using the degree of equality. Therefore, if there had been any semantic difference in the Middle Ages, Chaucer's *modus operandi* would have been somehow different. Thus, the choice of a particular structure must never be considered to be a question of semantics but the contribution of equal forces, that is, the intrinsic tendency of every language and even metrics whose powerful influence is decisive in the choice of a specific degree of the comparison, as shown in the following examples.

- His náyles / whítter / thán the / lylie flóur. NPT, 2863.

- An égle / táme *as / ány / lílye / whyt.* KnT, 2178.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE SECOND TERM

Next, the second member of the comparison will be studied from a double perspective, that is, (1) from a morphosyntactic and (2) from a semantic point of view.

First, we will analyse the second term of stereotyped comparisons from a morphological and syntactic point of view to observe the nature of its constituents.

a) It has been observed that the second member may be a noun. In fact, the presence of a noun is essential so that these comparative structures may be regarded as stereotypes, otherwise, they could never have been fossilized.

- He is *as angry as a pissemyre* [sic]
Though that he have al that he kan desire. SumT, 1825-26.

Although the head of the second term is generally a noun, however, this noun can be extensively complemented by any kind of phrase specifying the head. The purpose of this complementation is to emphasize the high gradual dimensions of the stereotype. Mayoral Ramírez (1993: 651) asserts that the

noun phrase forming the second member can be expanded, lengthened or extended by any type of complementation: adjectival phrases, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, that is, formulae used with the aim of highlighting the hyperbolic character of the stereotyped structures.

- Hir flesh was *tendre as dew of flour*
Hir chere was symple as byrde in bour. RR, 1013-14.

- Ful ofte his lady from hire wyndow doun,
As fressh as faukoun comen out of muwe. Tr, III, 1783-84.

- *Soul as the turtle that lost hath hire make.* MerT, 2080.

In these stereotypes, the referent usually expresses a high and hyperbolic degree of comparison. However, in most occasions an isolated noun is not able to transmit that high intensity and it resorts to the complementation by other gramatical categories which help to define more precisely the meaning of the stereotype. Therefore, it is not the same to say **soul as the turtle* that *soul as the turtle that lost hath hire make*; the former being completely meaningless whereas the latter emphasizes that high degree of isolation that the comparison conveys.

Sometimes the second term may function as the subject of a sentence, the verb of which is sometimes omitted depending on the metrical and stylistic necessities of each line. In fact, we are dealing with a poetic license on the part of the poet.

- And of Creseyde thou hast seyd as the lyste
That maketh men to wommen lasse triste
That be *as trewe as ever was any steel*. LGW, 332-34.

- But doutelees, *as trewe as any steel*
I have a wyf, though that she poure be. MerT, 2426-27.

There are significant differences between the examples mentioned above for the former includes a verb functioning as the main one whereas the latter makes use of the copular verb *been* on two occasions, as a main one and as the verb of the second term of the comparison. The two verbs that usually appear with the second term of the comparison are *been* and *don*.

- And eke this hous hath of entrees
As fele as of leves ben in tress
In somer, whan they grene been. HF, 1945-47.

- But nathelees, his purpos heeld he *stille*
As lordes don whan they wol han hir wille. ClT, 580-81.

- Ye ride as coy and *stille as dooth a mayde*
Were newe spoused, sittynge at the bord. ClT, 2-3.

Obviously, the presence of these verbs with the second term of the comparison, despite the fact it may be omitted, is due to the metrical circunstances of that specific line. Therefore, the presence of these sentences in the structure of the second member of the comparison helps to specify and highlight the dimensions of the stereotype.

b) Although the grammatical category that usually appears in the referent is that of a noun, we can also find examples where an adjective makes up the second term. In these cases, it is necessary to establish some differences because this is just a comparative structure which could never be interpreted as a stereotype. That is, the following example formulates a casual comparison (with an adjective as referent) which could rarely manage to fossilize or lexicalize.

- It *as long was as it was large.* RR, 1351.

Thus, stereotyped comparisons can only be regarded as such when the second term of the comparison counts on the obligatory presence of a noun, otherwise, it is just a casual form of comparison with scarce possibilities of lexicalization. Moreover, from a semantic point of view, we realize that it is not completely accurate to consider them a comparison in the fullest sense as the relationship established between the constituents does not serve as an expression of a measurable and gradual quality. On the contrary, they generally express a quality actually voiced in the highest degree and, therefore, are semantically equivalent to a proper superlative and, in some cases, the degree of the adjective is so extreme that they can be considered as hyperbolic. As the following example shows, nothing can be blinder than a stone and, as such, they are regarded as hyperbolic.

- This Januarie, *as blynd as is a stoon,*
With Mayus [sic] in his hand, and no wight mo,
Into his fresshe gardyn is ago […]. MerT, 2156-58.

Nevertheless, on some occasions it should also be observed how Chaucer uses the same adjective for comp-element and for the second term. Undoubtedly, this procedure of using the same adjective twice in the same comparative structure pretends to put even more emphasis on the relationship between the comp-element and its second member, usually an object which contains that quality in its intrinsic nature.

- His voys was *murier than the murie orgon*. NPT, 2851.

- *Whit* was this crowe *as is a snow-whit swan*. ManT, 133.

The poet is here comparing a quality (*murie* and *whit*) and the appearance of the same adjective in the second member of the comparison illustrates how these compared elements (*orgon* and *swan*) contain that quality in the highest sense. Porto Dapena (1973: 356) remarks that stereotyped comparisons, either equality or superiority, are equal to real superlatives when the second term contains the quality expressed by the adjective in the highest, and in these cases the maximum degree is highlighted by the presence of the same adjective in the referent. This type of combinations, although scarce in Chaucer's works, should be taken into account for they could have been a precursor to the present-day expression *whiter than white*[1].

Besides the componential analysis of the second term, we can also study the semantic field to which the noun constituting the second term can be related to. Accordingly, three main groups can be found[2] on the grounds that they can be related to a natural, cultural and social context.

a) The first group contains those nouns referring to nature. Thus, the natural environment provides the poet with a wide variety of elements traditionally considered stereotypes of a given quality and, in particular, those nouns used for naming animals, plants and natural phenomena become the most numerous group.

- […] Have herte *as hard as dyamaunt*
Stedefast and nought pliaunt. RR, 4383-84.

[1] *Cf. Oxford English Dictionary.* 1993. 2nd ed. on Compact Disk. OUP, Oxford.

[2] Mayoral Ramírez (1993: 650-51) establishes a similar group classification in his analysis of Spanish stereotypes, however, he prefers to omit those ones referring to the social context of the period. Thus, his grouping turns out to be somehow incomplete.

- For ay *as bisy as bees*
Been they, us sely men for to deceyve,
And from the soothe evere wol they weyve. MerT, 2422-24.

- […] he seith nat ones nay,
But was as glad therof *as fowel of day,* […]. ShT, 37-38.

- This strem you ledeth to the sorweful were
There *as the fish in prysoun is al drye.* PF, 138-39[1].

b) A second group, which is less numerous than the former, includes nouns denoting famous and mythological personages. These references can be taken from the Bible, on the one hand, and from the classical literature, on the other. Latin and Greek allusions, however, clearly domain owing to the humanistic education of the poet in London.

- […] For thou shalt, by thin owene experience,
Konne in a chayer rede of his sentence
Bet than Virgile, while he was on lyve,
Or Dante also […]. FrT, 1517-20.

- Ful ofte tyme I rede that no man truste in his owene perfeccioun,
but he be stronger than Sampson, […]. ParsT, 955.

- And but I do, God take on me vengeance
As foul as evere hadde *Genylon of France*. ShT, 193-94[2].

In fact, these cultural allusions are suitable and adequate for stereotyped comparisons for they always refer to famous and, therefore, they fulfill the lexicalization requirements: to provide hyperbolic and superlative meaning necessary to this kind of structures.

c) Third, a large group of second terms contains nouns such as *boos, noble, bacheler* which reflect the social environment of the poet, that is, instruments or even ways of thinking of Chaucer's medieval England.

- A brooch she baar upon his lowe coler

[1] *Cf.* also *RvT*, 3926; *MilT*, 3807; *RR*, 546; *HF*, 1681; *NPT*, 2859; etc.
[2] *Cf.* also *BD*, 661-62; *Tr*, I, 454-55; *BD*, 1080-82; *FranT*, 1109-10; *HF*, 1232; *PhyT*, 49; *CYT*, 1413; *NPT,* 3362-65; *etc.*

As brood as is the boos of a bokeler. MilT, 3265-66.

- Ful *brighter* was the shynyng of his hewe
Than in the Tour the noble yforged newe[1]. MilT, 3255-56.

- Yong, fressh, and strong, in armes *desirous*
As any bacheler of al his hous. *SqT*, 23-24.
- […] Hym oghte nat be tiraunt ne *crewel*
As is a fermour, to doon the harm he kan. LGW, 377-78[2].

5. CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion of our analysis, we would like to highlight those features which directly or indirectly ease the process of lexicalization of these stereotypes.

One. We have already mentioned the colloquial origin of these structures. It is the individual who is continually and unconsciously creating and banishing them owing to the speech-acts of a given linguistic community. Therefore, lexicalization and fossilization must be regarded as an active and everchanging process which always depends on the speech-act of that specific community. However, that speech-act on the part of the individual is not the only element favouring the process of lexicalization. Other intrinsic linguistic forces must be considered as affecting not only the process but also the degree of fossilization that a given stereotype can acquire in a language.

Two. The rhetorical figure of alliteration plays a significant role because in most occasions the comp-element exhibits the same alliterative sense as the second term. Examples of this type abound in all the stages of English (*cf. as stille as stoon*. *Tr*, III, 699); in

[1] Biggam's analysis of the social implications of hue adjectives conforms perfectly to the process of lexicalization of stereotyped comparisons. Biggam (1993: 50) asserts that "yellow hair indicates beauty in men as well as women, when combined with brightness". Thus, this stereotype reflects the social values of a given culture.

[2] *Cf.* also *RR*, 2694; *ClT*, 1198; *HF*, 1348; *CYT*, 617; *SumT*, 2090; *MilT*, 3261-62; *MerT*, 1673; *SumT*, 2267-68

Shakespeare we come across *as swift as swallow* (*Tit*, IV, ii, 174) and in contemporary English *as snug as a bug in a rug, as big as bull-beef, as flat as a flawn* or *stable as a stone* (Calle and Miranda 1997)[1]. Thus, the existence of such consonantism directly eases the process of fossilization: it is produced with more speediness and effectiveness because it allows the speaker of a given language the task of memorising. So, its degree of appearance in the speech-act of the community is undoubtedly potentialized.

Three. Another linguistic feature to be considered as influencing the process of lexicalization is prosody. Many stereotyped comparisons respond to a same metric pattern in which one stressed syllable is followed by an unstressed one (*sóft às sílk, thíck às glúe*). This pattern based on the alternative use of stressed and unstressed syllables speeds up the oral component of the stereotype and this fact produces a more effective and widely spread lexicalization. In fact, through the compilation of the examples in contemporary English (Calle and Miranda 1997), we have realized that the majority of the present-day stereotypes are formed by monosyllabic and bisyllabic adjectives and, as such, it demonstrates that the shorter they are, the quicker they manage to lexicalize. The only exceptions found in current English are *as different as chalk to cheese* and *as slippery as an eel*, whereas the rest of the stereotypes compiled contain one-or-two-syllable adjectives.

Four. Nowadays, we count on another extralinguistic characteristic. In fact, the decisive influence played by the mass media can make a given stereotype fossilize with extreme rapidity compared with the dim and difficult process of fossilization found in the medieval society.

All in all, the process of lexicalization operating in the would-be stereotyoped comparisons must be understood as something open and dynamic, as

[1] All these cases have been analysed in our conference held in Thessaloniki (Greece) on April 11th 1997. *Cf.* Calle Martín, J. and Miranda García, A. Stereotyped Comparisons in Contemporary English: Origin, Analysis and Classification. *11th International Symposium on Theoretical and Applied Linguistics*. Diss. Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece), 1997.

the contribution of equal and parallel forces occur. It is something changeable for the speaker tends to use these comparative metaphors and, in most occasions, he/she devises and makes them up according to the needs of the message (González Calvo 1985: 137) and, as such, the community will have the capacity of banishing and creating new ones at the same time. If Chaucer himself had ever referred to these stereotypes, we dare say he would have defined them as *chaungynge as a fane* (ClT, 996) and *as swift as thought* (*HF*, 1924) to emphasize their mutability. Right now new stereotyped comparisons might be being coined which, beyond any doubt, will be the object of future studies.

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