

Comparative Expressions in *King Lear*

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A variety of comparative expressions are used in *King Lear* by William Shakespeare. They contribute to the play from the perspectives both of the contents and of linguistics. The aim of this thesis is to investigate the differences between Shakespearean language and Present-Day English and study the ways in which comparative expressions are used effectively according to the development of the story.

Chapter I discusses the methods of the study, the explanation of the terms and the text I used.

Chapter II consists of statistical data and text analysis on three types of comparison—comparative degree, superlative degree and comparison of equality. Among the numbers of each type, the number of comparatives is the largest and that of superlatives is the second largest. This result accords with the tendency of Present-Day English. Data on each act in the play is also included. Other data covers the presence or absence of the basis of comparison and determiners. The basis of comparison of comparative constructions is a *than*-phrase and that of superlative constructions is an *of*, *in*-phrase and a *that*-clause. In *King Lear*, most of the superlative constructions have no explicit basis of comparison. As for the comparative constructions, 37% of them have an explicit basis of comparison.

Then text analysis follows from the perspective of basis of comparison and determiners. The analysis covers the meter of the blank verse and the contents of the play. One of the results is that the explicit basis of comparative constructions plays an important part in the context of the play. Another is that most of the superlative constructions with a non-explicit basis of comparison are absolute superlatives. In absolute superlatives, there is usually no definite determiner like *the*.

Chapter III focuses on inflectional comparative formations (with *-er* or *-est* ending) and periphrastic comparative formations (with *more* or *most*). The method of comparative formation in Shakespeare's time was somewhat different from that in Present-Day English. In *King Lear*, many of the monosyllabic words have inflectional forms and many of the polysyllabic words have

periphrastic forms as in Present-Day English, but there are quite a number of examples of periphrastic comparative formation for monosyllabic words. There are also some examples of double comparison which includes *more* or *most* plus inflectional forms (type A) and inflectional forms with *-er* or *-est* ending (type B).

Text analysis is done with these examples which are characteristic of Shakespearean English. What the study shows us is the diversity of the functions of *more* and *most*. Both of them intensify the adjectives or adverbs more than normal use of comparison and at the same time complete the meter. In many cases *most* works as an intensifier, meaning *very*, as in the use of absolute superlative.

Lastly some conclusions are presented regarding how Shakespeare chose the type of formation of comparison.