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Comparison constructions in the history of German

In colloquial and regional varieties of Modern German, one can observe a shift of the comparative particle standardly used only in comparisons of equality (equatives) *wie* into comparisons of inequality (comparatives), replacing *als*. Diachronic corpus research reveals that this development is part of a long-term cyclical change in German that may aptly be referred to as the comparative cycle. The talk traces this development on the basis of Old, Middle and Early New High German corpus data and discusses the related syntactic changes against the background of typological research as well as current syntactic and semantic analyses of comparison constructions, working out recurrent paths of grammaticalization and syntactic change.