English Comparative Correlatives: Paratactic vs. Hypotactic Features
Jakob Horsch (Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Germany) and Thomas Hoffmann (Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Germany)

English comparative correlative (CC) constructions typically consist of two clauses, C1 and C2 (cf. Culicover & Jackendoff 1999; den Dikken 2005):

(1) \[\text{The more we get together,}\] \_ C1 [the happier we'll be.] \_ C2

In terms of its semantics, the construction has both asymmetric and symmetric properties: The relationship between C1 and C2 is conditional (asymmetric), but there is also parallel (symmetric) change in C1 and C2 over time.

Now, recent corpus-based studies (Hoffmann 2014; Hoffmann, Brunner & Horsch 2019) have shown that in Modern English (ModE), there is an iconic tendency of formal symmetry between C1 and C2.

Interestingly, diachronically the CC construction originally clearly was a hypotactic structure (Hoffmann 2014: 81). Two phenomena in ModE CCs that are remnants of a hypotactic relationship are that-complementizers in C1 (2) and optional subject-auxiliary inversion (SAI) in C2 (3).

(2) \[\text{The more } \_ \text{THAT-complementizer he says,}\] \_ C1 [the less I wanna say.] \_ C2

(3) \[\text{The more they work,}\] \_ C1 [the more \_ I will / will I SAI pay them.] \_ C2


In any case, these are features that have yet to be analyzed in a large corpus study, which may reveal how the syntactic relationship between C1 and C2 are stored in speakers’ mental grammars.

Accordingly, the present paper presents the first large corpus-based analysis of the use of that-complementizers and SAI based on data from the British National Corpus. In the over 2,000 C1C2 tokens, only 29 cases of that-complementizers in C1 and also 2 in C2 were found, indicating that this feature is losing its hypotactic function. Consequently, we argue that this hypotactic feature is no longer a central property of ModE CCs. Similarly, no instances of SAI were found in C1, but 52 such cases in C2, indicating that this feature still does play a certain role. Yet, as we will also show, the parallel deletion/truncation of auxiliaries in C1 and C2 has assumed a much greater importance for ModE CCs.

References