English Comparative Correlatives: Paratactic vs. Hypotactic Features

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

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

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

While Culicover and Jackendoff (1999: 549) state that *that*-complementizers "cannot appear in C2", den Dikken (2005: 502) claims that they are indeed possible in both C1 and C2. Hoffmann (2014: 96) similarly states that an "optional *that*-complementizer [in C1] could only be found in earlier stages of English" and that "colloquial ModE apparently licenses an optional *that* in both C1 and C2." Concerning subject-auxiliary inversion, Culicover and Jackendoff (1999: 559) claim that it occurs "marginally [...] in C2 but not C1." Hoffmann (2014: 94 and 81) maintains that it is "optional" in C2 but "disfavored" in ModE (2014: 94).

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

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