

The more you look into it, the more fun it gets: Correlative comparatives in Norwegian and other languages

‘Correlative comparatives’ (alternatively ‘comparative correlative’) is not a very well known linguistic term. It refers to a construction in which two events/states are expressed as having a causal connection; each event contains a comparative element, i.e. an adjective or adverb or quantifier in the comparative degree, and a main feature of the causal connection between the two events is that the two comparatives are proportional to each other in strength. In English correlative comparison is expressed through the *the... the...* construction (1), and in Norwegian through similar constructions (2):

(1) The more we get together, the happier we'll be.

(2) Jo mer du spiser, jo feitere blir du.

? more you eats ? fatter becomes you

‘The more you eat, the fatter you get.’

I have glossed the Norwegian morpheme *jo* as ?, because its identity in terms of part of speech and in terms of syntactic function is far from clear, nor is the English morpheme *the* any clearer.

For a typologist this is an extremely hard research topic, simply because descriptive grammars hardly ever mention it, so it is very difficult to come by typological data on correlative comparison. In my talk I will thus limit myself to the language I know best – my native Norwegian – and a handful of European languages, for which it is easier to find both data and informants. I will mainly concentrate on the syntax of the Norwegian construction(s), but will use data from other languages to illuminate the Norwegian data further in depth, and present some clues in the direction of an analysis of the construction. The talk is mainly intended to show the complexity, the weirdness and the beauty of correlative comparatives.