

# Constructions, Functional Heads, and Comparative Correlatives

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Informal discussions of syntax often talk about constructions, and constructions are central to some approaches to syntax, notably recent versions of Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG). Chomsky, however, has long claimed that constructions do not exist. The main alternative is functional heads, which are typically invisible. Instead of stipulating e.g. that some construction has X as its first daughter one stipulates that some functional head has X as its specifier. The comparative correlative (CC) construction, exemplified by *The more I read, the more I understand*, provides an important testing ground for these approaches.

The CC construction has some unusual properties. It does not allow a pied piped preposition before the initial comparative phrase. Thus, *The more people I talk to, ...* is fine, but *\*To the more people I talk, ...* is not. It also allows the complementizer *that* after the initial phrase, as in *The more that I read, the more that I understand*. The construction also shares some properties with other constructions. It is similar in certain respects to the reversed CC construction, exemplified by *I understand more, the more I read*, and other S + adjunct structures, and also to the *if-then* and *as-so* constructions. The component *the*-clauses share properties with other filler-gap constructions, such as *wh*-interrogatives and relative clauses, and resemble what Huddleston and Pullum (2002) call exhaustive conditionals in allowing copula omission under certain circumstances. Thus, just as we have *The better the students (are), the better the grades (are)*, we also have *However good the students (are), ...* and *No matter how good the students (are), ...*

A satisfactory analysis must capture both the distinctive properties of the construction and its parts and the properties that they share with some or many other constructions. An unstructured set of constructions each with its properties would make no distinction between the various kinds of properties, but HPSG with its hierarchical classification of constructions can do this. It can analyse the CC, *if-then* and *as-so* constructions as subtypes of *correlative-clause* and the latter as a special subtype of *head-adjunct-phrase*. It can also analyse *the*-clauses and exhaustive conditionals as special subtypes of *head-filler-phrase*. This allows both distinctive and shared properties to be accommodated. What about a functional head-based approach? This will require three functional heads for the CC construction, one for the construction as a whole and one for each of the *the*-clauses (because they have somewhat different properties) It will require many others for the related constructions. It seems to be assumed that the lexicon includes an unstructured set of functional heads. If so, however, it will not distinguish between the various kinds of properties. This is an important weakness. On the face of it, the only way to overcome it would be to propose a hierarchical classification of functional heads. However, this would essentially be mimicking the HPSG construction-based approach, and it is not clear how it could be seen as preferable.