

***The X-er... the Y-er...* prefabs: even more peripheral, or all the more core?**

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1 A challenge to Universal Grammar

English has a somewhat special construction which evokes joined scales. Movement on the one scale is correlated with movement on the other. Examples are given in (1):

- (1) a. The older we get, the more stimulation we need.
b. The more I think about it, the less I like it.

A variety of names have been given to this construction, but the one that now appears to stand out most prominently is the ‘comparative correlative’ (Culicover and Jackendoff 1999; Den Dikken 2003, 2005, Borsley 2004a, 2004b, Taylor 2004, to appear; Resnik et al. 2005). Other names that have been proposed are the ‘correlative comparative (construction)’ (Huddleston 2002: 1135-1137; Cappelle to appear), the ‘comparative conditional (construction)’ (McCawley 1988; Michaelis 1994; Beck 1997; Culicover 1999: 83-85; Declerck and Reed 2001), the ‘double comparative construction’ (Thiersch 1982), and the ‘BCHF construction’ (Fillmore 1986: 164-166), where BCHF stands for the idiomatic and representative instance ‘the bigger they come, the harder they fall’. The present paper uses the notation *the X-er... the Y-er...*, adopting and adapting the transparent way Fillmore, Kay and O’Connor (1988: 506-508) refer to the construction.

As can be inferred from the references above, the *the X-er... the Y-er...* construction has attracted a fair deal of attention in the recent linguistic literature. It has mainly been studied from the perspective of the following question: Are its syntactic properties unique, or do they follow from basic grammatical principles and from what we know about other constructions in the language? The stakes are high: if the construction can be shown to be idiosyncratic, in other words, if it is one of a kind (*sui generis*), we must conclude that we can no longer uphold a neat and essentially Chomskyan distinction between, on the one hand, what is general, fully productive (constrained only by a universal set of principles and parameters), predictable, and what therefore poses no learnability problem (since its acquisition in a sense ‘comes for free’), and, on the other hand, what is specific, unproductive (or only semi-productive), unpredictable, and what therefore needs to be learned as such – a distinction traditionally made between syntax and lexicon, or between core and periphery. This conclusion, i.e. that such a clear-cut distinction is not tenable because at least some productive syntactic patterns have to be learned as well, *the X-er... the Y-er...* being a case in point, has been made with varying degrees of explicitness by Fillmore (1986), McCawley (1988), Fillmore, Kay and O’Connor (1988), Culicover (1999), Borsley (2004b) and especially Culicover and Jackendoff (1999). After detailed examination of the characteristics of the construction, these latter authors state that it “has proven in numerous respects to behave unlike more familiar ‘core grammar’” (p. 569). This view, however, has been vehemently criticized by Den Dikken (2005) and Taylor (to appear). Using as his forum the same journal in which Culicover and Jackendoff (1999) presented their “view from the periphery”, Den Dikken refutes their argumentation for idiosyncrasy, claiming that, on the contrary, “the construction exhibits a very high degree of crosslinguistic consistency and that its syntax is that of a well-behaved correlative, analyzable in keeping with the principles and parameters of UG” (p. 498).

What all linguists who have recently analysed the *the X-er... the Y-er...* pattern agree on, certainly Den Dikken but also the proponents of the *sui generis* stance, is that “each of its clauses displays an ordinary long-distance dependency” (Culicover and Jackendoff 1999: 543). That is, the comparative phrase (presumably minus *the* – see Borsley 2004a) in each clause is assumed to be extracted from a (possibly deeply embedded) position further in its clause:

- (2) a. [The [more counterexamples]_i] Mary says that Bill has helped Fred to discover t_i , the less I believe her.
 b. The more I talk to Joe, [the [less about linguistics]_i] I am inclined to think Sally has taught him to appreciate t_i .
 (after Culicover and Jackendoff 1999: 555)¹

This view has also recently been repeated by Abeillé and Borsley (2005), who write that “we always deal with an initial phrase that is ‘extracted’ (my translation of the French original: “on a toujours un syntagme initial « extrait »” – B.C).

In this paper I want to point out that the comparative phrase cannot always be analysed as being linked with an empty position somewhere in the clause that it precedes. Consider the underlined comparative phrases in the following examples:

- (3) a. The more you have contacts with people, ... (British National Corpus, henceforth BNC)
 b. the more they become dependent on the help of others, the more they have “special needs”. (BNC)

In (3a), (*the more*) cannot be seen as extracted from the NP headed by the noun *contacts*, since this noun and, unless the *with*-PP is stranded, the rest of the NP would have to have been extracted along with (*the more*), in keeping with the standard Left Branch Condition on extraction. Compare:

- (4) a. I wonder [how many contacts with people]_i you have t_i .
 b. *I wonder [how many]_i you have [t_i contacts with people].

Likewise, in (3b), we cannot find an extraction site for either of the two occurrences of *the more* in their respective clauses.

My claim is that in these cases, the *the more*-phrases are not extracted clause constituents but are ‘pre-installed’ parts belonging to productive subtypes of the *the X-er... the Y-er...* construction. These subtypes can be represented very schematically as follows:

- (5) a. *the X-er* [_{Clause} ...], [_{Clause} [*the* [*Y-er* (...)]_i] ... t_i ...]
 b. [_{Clause} [*the* [*X-er* (...)]_i] ... t_i ...], *the Y-er* [_{Clause} ...]
 c. *the X-er* [_{Clause} ...], *the Y-er* [_{Clause} ...]

So, we can distinguish three subtypes on the basis of whether the first, the second, or both parts contain an initial phrase that is not extracted from the clause it flanks. As a cover-term for these types with one or two comparative phrases that are not syntactically integrated in the clause, I will speak of *the X-er... the Y-er...* ‘prefabs’.

¹ As is common practice in generative linguistics, the hypothesized original or underlying location is identified by means of a t (for *trace*) that is coindexed with the extracted element. In HPSG, the extracted element is called a ‘filler’ for a coindexed ‘gap’ elsewhere in the sentence.

More justification for positing such prefabs will be postponed to section 3, where I will also offer my own views on whether or not their existence makes the comparative correlative construction in English (more) special (than it already is). First, in section 2, I will present some basic semantic properties of the *the X-er... the Y-er...* construction in general.²

2 The meaning of the pattern

2.1 General characterization

The now common name “comparative correlative” suitably reflects at once the use of comparative morphology in the two parts of the pattern and the fact that a correlative relation holds between these two parts. As Declerck and Reed (2002: 334) put it, instances of *the X-er... the Y-er...*

“imply the existence of paired scales and the idea that a change of position of the relevant value on the one scale triggers the corresponding or opposite change of position of the relevant value on the other scale”.³

I will comment on three words in Declerck and Reed’s description: *trigger*, *corresponding* and *opposite*. Let me start with *opposite*. This word is meant to capture the fact that there can be an inverse correlation. For example, in (1b) (*The more I think about it, the less I like it*), a change on the scale of my consideration is negatively correlated with a change on the scale of my appreciation. Next, it is important not to equate the word *corresponding* with *proportional*. Though *the X-er... the Y-er...* are sometimes said to consist of “clauses of proportion”, Abeillé and Borsley (2005) remind us what De Cornulier (1988) and Beck (1997) emphasised with regard to the comparative correlative construction in French (*plus X... plus Y...*) and in German (*je X-er... desto Y-er...*), respectively: the construction indicates covariation between

² I will not be concerned in this paper with syntactic issues other than the existence of non-extracted comparative phrases. For more information on the syntax of the construction, see the works mentioned at the beginning of this section, especially Culicover and Jackendoff (1999), Den Dikken (2005) and Taylor (to appear). A recurring theme of debate is the syntactic relation between the two parts: does the construction display coordination (i.e. pure juxtaposition of two clauses with identical structure) or subordination (i.e. the combination of a subclause and a head clause, in this order)? Some elements featuring in this debate are the possibility to insert the subordinating conjunction *that* after the comparative *in*, especially, the first part (e.g. *The older that we get, the more stimulation (%that) we need...*), the fact that the form of an added question tag is based on the second part (e.g. *The older we get, the more stimulation is needed, {*don’t we? / isn’t it?}*), the occasional occurrence of subject-operator inversion in the second clause (e.g. *The older (*do) we get, the more stimulation do we need*), and the possibility to have a backward bound pronoun in the first part (e.g. *The older they get, the more some people need stimulation*). These elements seem compelling arguments for subordination, but Culicover and Jackendoff (1999) maintain – not overly convincingly according to Den Dikken (2005) – that the subordination of the first part to the second is of a purely semantic and not of a syntactic nature. Another noteworthy syntactic fact is the possibility to omit *be* or to retain only the comparative phrase under certain conditions (e.g. *The more partners (you have), the greater (is) the risk of AIDS*).

³ In fact, one or both of the paired scales can constitute a *cluster* of scales, as in:

- (i) a. Whatever the products you sell, [the more you know about them, and the more you show that knowledge to potential customers], the better you will be at making sales. (BNC) (first part is a cluster of scales)
- b. But the more these greenhouse gases build up in the atmosphere, [the more heat is trapped and the more the Earth warms]. (BNC) (second part is a cluster of scales)
- c. [The more History attempts to transcend its own rootedness in historicity, and the greater the efforts it makes to attain, beyond the historical relativity of its origin and its choices, the sphere of universality], [the more clearly it bears the marks of its historical birth, and the more evidently there appears through it the history of which it is itself a part] (BNC) (both parts are clusters of scales)

two scalar values but certainly no proportional relation between them. The following examples (adapted from French and German) will make this clear:

- (6) a. The balder one is, the more intelligent. (De Cornulier 1988)
 b. The higher a natural number is, the higher is its square. (Beck 1997)
 c. In last year's games, the warmer it was, the more often Louise scored. (Beck 1997)

In (6a), what is intended by this general statement (whether uttered in earnest or not) is that bald people tend to be intelligent, not, of course, that there's a strict inverse correlation between the number of one's hairs and the number of one's neurones.⁴ In (6b), it is true that higher natural numbers always have higher squares than lower ones, but the correlation, though perfect, is not a proportional correspondence, since as you increase the magnitude of natural numbers (e.g. 1, 2, 3, ...), the magnitude of their squares increases exponentially (2, 4, 9, ...). And as regards (6c), this sentence allows for a scenario in which Louise scored different numbers of goals on days with the same temperature – as long as none of her scores on these days was higher than on warmer days or lower than on colder days. Such a scenario would be excluded on a strictly proportional analysis.⁵

More relevant to our concerns is the word *trigger* in the description at the beginning of this section. This word rightly suggests that the scale evoked by the first part specifies the independent variable and the one evoked by the second part the dependent variable, as Fillmore (1986: 166) had already remarked. This is also clear from Fillmore's paraphrase of *The more harshly I scold him, the worse he behaves*: "Changes in the degree of harshness in my scolding *yields* corresponding changes in the degree to which he behaves badly" (my emphasis – B.C.).⁶ What this means is that there is directionality between the two scales. So, although it may well be true that, as the person in question behaves worse, I scold him more harshly, what Fillmore's example sentence encodes is that an increase in the harshness of my scolding implies an increase in his bad behaviour. It does not say anything about the influence of the latter on the former. Abeillé and Borsley (2005) refer in this connection to De Cornulier (1988), who uses the following example (translated here from French):

⁴ This said, older varieties of English (cf. also Den Dikken 2005: 502) seemed to allow to express explicitly that the change along the two scales is commensurate, even in cases where such a reading makes no literal sense:

- (i) a. ... and the more he shall labour to seek, *so much* the less shall he find.
 (The Bible, Douay-Rheims, Challoner Revision, 18th century)
 b. *by how much* the better man you are yourself, *by so much* the more will you be inclined to believe me
 (Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 18th century)

⁵ Cf. also Den Dikken (2005: 515-516, fn. 23):

"As Alexander Grosu (pers. comm.) points out with respect to comparative correlatives such as (i), the parallel increase, if measured in fixed increments in one of the two clauses of the comparative correlative, need not involve such fixed increments in the other clause as well: thus, it is by no means required that the number of customers decrease by fixed percentages over time in order for (i) to be true. The only thing that seems to be required is that there be a decrease in the volume of customers *at every point along the way*."

(i) The later it got, the fewer the customers that entered the shop."

⁶ Similarly, in the words of Fillmore, Kay and O'Connor (1988: 506-507), the interpretation of a sentence like *The more carefully you work, the easier it will get*, "is paraphrasable as something like "The degree to which you do your work carefully will *determine* the degree to which your work gets easy"" (again my emphasis – B.C.). It should be noted that these paraphrases are not entirely accurate in that they suggest that a *decrease* on the one scale also yields a *decrease* on the other scale. This need not always be so: with respect to Fillmore's sentence, it may well be that as I scold him *less* harshly, he behaves just as badly. For a clearer example, the truth of the sentence *The more you eat, the more health risks you run* does not automatically imply the truth of the sentence *The less you eat, the fewer health risks you run* – as anyone knows, there's a more or less ideal amount of food intake one should observe and the higher the deviation from this norm in either direction, the higher the health risks. In other words, *the more... the more...* only implicates but does not entail *the less... the less...*

- (7) The more children you have, the less you pay in taxes.

This sentence only refers to the effect of the number of children that one has on the amount that one has to pay in taxes. As De Cornulier points out, we are not allowed to reverse the directionality of the effect. Obviously, just because I happen to pay less in taxes than you do, this does not necessarily mean that I have more children than you have.

2.2 Conditionality

It is because of the implicational directionality described in the preceding section that the *the X-er... the Y-er...* construction has often been analysed as a kind of conditional construction (see again section 1 for authors who use the term ‘comparative conditional’). Indeed, a sentence like *The older we get, the more stimulation we need* can easily be paraphrased as ‘If we get older, we need more stimulation’. Just as in *if*-conditionals, we can have a combination of a present tense form in the first part and a future tense form in the second part, in which case the pattern as a whole expresses a “contingent prediction” (Fillmore 1986: 166). Compare:

- (8) a. The faster we drive, the sooner we’ll get there.
b. If we drive faster, we’ll get there sooner.

Fillmore also notes that when both parts contain a present tense form, the whole has the flavour of a “general principle”, and if they both contain a past tense form, the sentence expresses a “past correlation” (p. 166). Again, we can find the same combinations of tense forms in *if*-conditionals. Such conditionals then no longer refer to a conditional link between the two clauses but are bleached to the point of merely expressing a pattern of regular co-occurrence of two situations. *If* can then be paraphrased as *when(ever)*:

- (9) a. In general, the earlier in the day first class letters are posted, the more certainty there is of next day delivery. (BNC)
b. In general, if/when(ever) first class letters are posted earlier in the day, there is correspondingly more certainty of next day delivery.
- (10) a. Therefore tournaments were mock-battles contested by teams of knights and, as in war, the more knights in your team the more likely you were to win. (BNC)
b. ... if/when(ever) there were more knights in your team, you were correspondingly more likely to win.

Some syntactic similarities between *the X-er... the Y-er...* and standard conditionals are provided by Taylor (2004, to appear).

2.3 Reservations about the conditional nature

Some authors have questioned the viability of considering *the X-er... the Y-er...* as a variety of conditional sentences. I will briefly present some of their counterarguments here, and evaluate them in the following section.

First, McCawley (1988: 186, n. 6), though he considers the pattern as a conditional variety notes himself that inserting *then* is not grammatical:

- (11) The louder you talk, (*then) the less people listen. (McCawley 1988)

Second, Culicover and Jackendoff (1999: 545) mention a fact brought to their attention by a reviewer, namely that the construction does not allow counterfactual instantiations, unlike, of course, standard conditionals. Compare:

- (12) a. *The faster we had driven, the sooner we would have gotten there.
b. If we had driven faster, we would have gotten there sooner.

Third, Declerck and Reed (2002: 28) argue that only *some* cases of *the X-er... the Y-er...* seem to have a conditional connotation. “A sentence like *The longer I knew him, the less I understood him*”, they write, “is not interpreted as ‘If I knew him longer, I understood him less.’ There is no conditional interpretation either in *The more I listened to him yesterday, the less I could believe him.*”

2.4 Salvaging conditionality

Some comments on the above reservations about a conditional analysis are in order.

First, it is not wholly impossible to encounter *then* before the second part of a *the X-er... the Y-er...* sentence. For example:

- (13) a. The faster something is, *then* the better it is! (BNC)
b. ‘We feel that the more we know about Michael, *then* the more we can help him.’ (BNC)
c. Generally speaking, the higher the creature is on the scale of consciousness, *then* the longer is its period of adolescence, and the more is it reliant upon its parents, because the greater is the scope for learning.⁷ (BNC)

The occurrence of such sentences has also been noted by Taylor (2004), as reported in Resnik (2005). This leads her to conclude that it is warranted after all to pursue an analysis of the *X-er... the Y-er...* as a construction that is closely related to conditionals.

Second, it is true that a free-standing *the X-er... the Y-er...* sentence does not allow counterfactual tense forms of the so-called third canonical tense pattern of conditionals (past perfect + conditional perfect). Nor, for that matter, does such a sentence allow the tense forms of the second canonical tense pattern (past tense + conditional tense), which can be used in conditionals whose protasis (i.e. P-clause) refers to a situation that is presently counterfactual and that is rather unlikely to be fulfilled in the future. Compare:

- (14) a. *The faster we drove – which we don’t and probably won’t – the sooner we would get there.
b. If we drove faster – which we don’t and probably won’t – we would get there sooner.

However, in a past-tense narrative (where present and future tense forms are ‘backshifted’), such a sentence is perfectly normal. This shows that there is no constraint against the combination of a past tense and a conditional tense as such:

- (15) We all felt uncomfortable in the car and wished the road didn’t have so many curves. But one thing was certain: the faster we drove, the sooner we would get there, and this certainty kept us from complaining.

⁷ Incidentally, the occurrence of a *because*-clause in the cluster of scales (see also footnote 3) in the second part of this sentence is also intriguing.

On the web, I found one example with pattern 3 tense forms:

- (16) Her paper, the thesis of which was something like “a good top is hard to find,” showed no patience for the swooning lover, no tolerance for the passive admirer. I knew then that the more my desire had been evident to her, the more she would have sneered at my bottom ways. I had been disdained. (www)

Here too, the tense forms in this *the X-er... the Y-er...* instance are arguably backshifted. If this is indeed the case, the reconstructed ‘present’ version would be something like ‘[I now know this:] as my desire has been increasingly evident to her – and it has! – so she will have increasingly sneered at my bottom ways’. This *will* (backshifted as *would*) may then be the verb form that can be used in English to mark a situation as predictable.⁸

In other words, the mere fact that instances of *the X-er... the Y-er...* can contain canonical pattern 2 and pattern 3 tense forms associated with standard conditionals is not sufficient ground to consider these instances as genuine counterfactual conditional sentences. At least, we have not been able to find instances in which *the X-er...* refers to a situation which can only actualize in a world that is not, or that is unlikely to become, the actual world. But this non-occurrence is in turn not a sufficient reason to reject a conditional analysis either, as I will show shortly.

Third, while it is true that we cannot paraphrase *The longer I knew him, the less I understood him* as ‘If I knew him longer, I understood him less’, this merely highlights the fact that the implicational relation between the two parts cannot be rendered in the form of a simple conditional sentence like the ones given so far. It does not mean that there is no conditionality involved.

Beck (1997) analyses German and English comparative correlatives as conditional sentences in a rather more sophisticated way. A sentence like (8a), repeated here as (17a), would be paraphrased as (17b) in her account (which is actually couched in a more technical formal semantics framework):

- (17) a. The faster we drive, the sooner we will get there.
 b. ‘For any two randomly chosen scenarios (i.e. possible worlds), s1 and s2, if it’s the case that we drive faster in s1 than in s2, then it’s also the case that we will get there sooner in s1 than in s2.’

It now becomes clear why genuine counterfactual tense forms are not acceptable: this would yield meaningless, nonsensical and/or internally contradictory paraphrases like ‘... if it’s the case – and this may well be so – that our driving had been faster in s1 than s2 – which is counter to fact – then ...’.

Interestingly, sentences that according to Declerck and Reed (2002) do not receive a conditional interpretation can nonetheless also be given such a kind of paraphrase. For example:

- (18) a. The longer I knew him, the less I understood him.
 b. ‘For any two randomly chosen moments in the past, t1 and t2, if it’s the case that I knew him longer at t2 than at t1, then it’s also the case that I understood him less at t2 than at t1.’

⁸ Cf. Declerck and Reed (to appear):

“... *will* expresses predictability:

[“Who wrote this incomprehensible nonsense?” — “I did. It may be incomprehensible, but it’s not nonsense.] I {*will* / **shall*} have used too many difficult words, as usual.”]

3 Back to *the X-er... the Y-er...* prefabs

All instances of *the X-er... the Y-er...* are partly fixed in form insofar as they have to contain twice the lexical item *the* and a comparative morpheme. My claim in this paper is that there is a subtype of this construction in which the entire comparative phrase in one or both of the two parts is lexically fixed.

As discussed in Cappelle (to appear), negation may result in ungrammaticality (cf. also McCawley 1988: 178-179; Beck 1997: 254-257):⁹

- (19) a. *The older they get, the cuter they ain't. (used for comic effect in *The Simpsons*)
 b. *The faster we don't drive, the later we will get there.

Note that 'simple' conditionals related in form to (19a-b) are perfectly grammatical, which shows again that such conditionals are not apt paraphrases:

- (20) a. If they get older, they ain't cuter.
 b. If we don't drive faster, we will get there later.

The problem with (19a) is that the comparative phrase is not only part of what is meant to be negated but also happens to have the negation within its scope. Language users have found a curious way to take the negation iconically out of the scope of the comparative phrase in order to defuse such a scope clash:¹⁰

- (21) a. And the more you spend doesn't necessarily mean the better you get. (www)
 b. Contrary to popular belief, the higher the horsepower doesn't mean the more frequent the vehicle collisions. (www)

There is also a scope clash in (19b), but this cannot be resolved this way.

Now, the following examples have negation but are not grammatically unacceptable:

- (22) a. ... the more my father pushes the more I don't want to do it. (www)
 b. The longer you don't use tobacco, the more your confidence will grow. (www)

By contrast, simple conditionals are ungrammatical here:

- (23) a. *If my father pushes more I don't want to do it more.
 b. *If you don't use tobacco longer, your confidence will grow more.

I conjecture that (22a-b) are fine because they are of the prefabbed type described in section 1. That is, they contain at least one comparative phrase that is not analysable as originating within (i.e. filling a gap in) the clause they precede. This is why they do not engender a scope conflict. Schematically, the scope hierarchies are as follows:

⁹ McCawley (1988) and Cappelle (to appear) only deal with negation in the second clause. Beck (1997) also gives an ungrammatical example with a negative element in the first clause: **The less no one works, the more tired he becomes.*

¹⁰ This strategy may occasionally lead to syntactic subordination, that is, to the abandonment of the typical *the Y-er...* structure in the second part:

(i) And the more games a console has doesn't mean that the console is better. (www)

- (24) a. ... the more (not (I want to do it))
 b. the longer (not (you use tobacco)) ...

The fact that the comparative phrase takes scope over the negator is also apparent from the paraphrases of (23a-b) in the line of Beck (1997).

- (25) a. 'For any two randomly chosen scenarios (i.e. possible worlds), s1 and s2, if it's the case that my father pushes more in s1 than in s2, then it's also the case that [my not wanting to do it] actualizes "more" in s1 than in s2' (as opposed to: '... then it's not the case that [my wanting to do it] actualizes "more" in s1 than in s2')
 b. 'For any two randomly chosen scenarios (i.e. possible worlds), s1 and s2, if it's the case that [your not using tobacco] has a longer actualization in s1 than in s2, then it's also the case that your confidence will grow more in s1 than in s2' (as opposed to: '... if it's not the case that [your using tobacco] has a longer actualization in s1 than in s2, ...')

Does the existence of such prefab subtypes of *the X-er... the Y-er...* pose a threat to current grammatical theory? I believe it does if that theory adheres to minimalist assumptions, because one would have to explain why the comparative strings in the *the X-er... the Y-er...* pattern have not always undergone frontward movement from out of their respective clauses. One could perhaps argue that the relevant comparative phrase in examples like (22a-b) *does* originate within the clause. After all, one can say:

- (26) a. I *more and more* don't want to do it.
 b. I haven't used tobacco *for a longer time*.

In that case, however, one would still have to account for the fact that English does not allow a closer match for the actual comparative phrase within the clause (cp. **I more don't want to do it*; **I haven't used tobacco longer*). I do not claim that minimalism cannot deal with sentences like (22a-b), but I think it seriously needs to consider them.

If one's theoretical assumptions are those of Construction Grammar, these sentences are not at all problematic. They simply suggest that speakers have direct mental access to stored patterns in which lexical material like *the more* or *the less* or *the longer* is already fitted in. And such patterns have been around for such a long time that they must be part of core grammar:

- (27) Thou likenest it also to wild fire;
 The more it burns, *the more it hath desire*
 To consume every thing that burnt will be.
 (Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, *The Prologue to The Wife of Bath's Tale*, 14th century)

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