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MORE ON HAD BETTER, 'D BETTER AND BETTER

A pilot study by van der Auwera and de Wit (in print) on the 'comparative modals' of English presents a few hypotheses on the differences between *had better*, *'d better* and *better* in Present-day English (based on the LOB, FLOB, BROWN and FROWN corpora). These hypotheses concern (i) differences between UK and US English, (ii) semantic differences between advice and wish constructions (as in (1) vs. (2)), and (iii) the presence vs. absence of the subject in *better* constructions (see (3) vs. (4)).

- (1) "Madame Noel, I think you *had better* go" said Mrs Cupply.
- (2) By that time I was chilled to the bone, exhausted from the relentless battering of the traffic, sullen and depressed. This *had better* be good, I thought grimly as I crossed the road and walked up the cul-de-sac to the Parsonage.
- (3) "What? The hell you ain't. *You better get back* up here now, if you know what's good for you."
- (4) Drewitt hesitated. "I would like to go on." "I wouldn't like you to. So that's it! *Better get* your uniform on and report to the duty sergeant."

The talk reports on work that checks these hypothesis on bigger corpora, corpora on older English, and puts the English findings in a wider West Germanic perspective.

van der Auwera, J. & A. De Wit (in print) "The English comparative modals - a pilot study", *Distinctions in English Grammar, Offered to Renaat Declerck*. ed. Cappelle, B. & N. Wada., Tokyo: Kaitakusha.

Johan van der Auwera was born in 1953 and is of Belgian nationality. He is professor of General and English Linguistics at the University of Antwerp. He holds undergraduate degrees in Germanic Philology and in Philosophy (1975). His PhD was on the philosophy of language (1980) and his 'habilitation' on the structure of the noun phrase (1990). His student days were spent in Antwerp, Berkeley, and Stockholm, and longer research visitorships took him to Hannover, Nijmegen, Paris, and Princeton. Current research, within Antwerp's Center for Grammar, Cognition, and Typology, focuses on grammatical semantics, both from a language-specific and a cross-linguistic point of view, with special reference to mood, modality, negation, and indefiniteness. He is the editor-in-chief of *Linguistics*. In 2005 he was elected as president of the *Societas Linguistica Europaea*. (<http://webh01.ua.ac.be/vdauwera/>)

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