

Microvariation in the Dutch complementizer system: new data from Flemish

1. Introduction

In this talk I present as yet unobserved data concerning the Flemish prepositional complementizer *van* 'of'. *Van* is standardly seen as a dialectal counterpart of the Standard Dutch complementizer *om* (Haest 1986). I show that in certain (mostly Brabantine) dialects of Flemish the interpretation of the clause introduced by *van* differs from that introduced by *om*. This difference can be derived configurationally if we adopt a Kaynian (1999) analysis.

2. The data

The main difference between *van* and *om* can be captured by the following statement:

GENERALIZATION: The use of *van* indicates that the proposition expressed in the complement clause is **dissociated** from the event described in the matrix clause.

This generalization can be illustrated by the data in (1) and (2):

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| (1) | a. Freddy probeert de auto te repareren.
Freddy tries the car to fix | b. Freddy probeert om de auto te repareren.
Freddy tries OM the car to fix |
| (2) | a. Freddy probeert de auto te repareren.
Freddy tries the car to fix | b. Freddy probeert van de auto te repareren.
Freddy tries VAN the car to fix |

While there is no meaning difference between (1a) and (1b) in Standard Dutch, there is such a difference with respect to *van* in Flemish (2). In (2b) the speaker doubts whether Freddy will be able to fix the car. Through the use of *van* he is implying that Freddy's efforts will be in vain. By contrast, in (2a) the speaker suggests that Freddy will be successful in fixing the car. This difference is related to the temporal relation between the matrix and the embedded event. In (2a) the events of trying and fixing coincide, while in (2b) the fixing of the car is dissociated from Freddy's trying. The actual fixing of the car is projected into the future and therefore its truth becomes uncertain. As a result, the matrix event (the trying) gets emphasized. However, this is not the only dissociated reading *van* can induce. Consider the data in (3).

- | | |
|----|--|
| a. | ??Het is moeilijk van deze Mercedes nu te repareren.
it is difficult VAN this Mercedes now to fix |
| b. | Het is moeilijk van Mercedesen te repareren.
it is difficult VAN Mercedeses to fix |

Van induces a generic reading on the complement clause of an adjective. As this genericity is incompatible with the punctual reading and the specific direct object of (3a), the diminished grammaticality of this sentence follows. Once again, the complement clause is dissociated from the main clause. The sentence in (3b) does not mean that it is difficult at this moment to fix Mercedeses, but at all/most times.

3. The analysis

These data can be accounted for if we adopt an analysis along the lines of Kayne (1999) in which prepositional complementizers are seen as attractors (cf. also Den Dikken 1996, Hoekstra 1995). The main idea of this analysis is that *van* does not form a single constituent with the infinitival clause. Instead, it is merged later in the derivation and attracts the infinitival clause to its Spec-position. Subsequent movement leads to the surface word order. The derivation of a sentence with *van* goes through the following steps.

STEP 1: the infinitival clause is the subject of a Small Clause (SC); the predicate is the matrix predicate (be it an adjective, (the root of) a control verb or a raising verb)

STEP 2: the matrix predicate incorporates into the head of the SC (Agr^o) (cf. Hale & Keyser 1993)

STEP 3: *van* is merged with the SC and it attracts the infinitival clause to its Spec-position (i.e. Spec,CP); the resulting configuration is one in which *van* dissociates the infinitival clause from the SC (which as a result of step 2 is coindexed with the matrix predicate)(cf. Barbiers 1995)

STEP 4: a Focus-phrase (FocP) is merged with this CP; the matrix predicate needs to be focused, so the remainder of the SC (containing only the matrix predicate) raises to Spec,FocP; *van* has to move along to Foc^o for reasons of equidistance

STEP 5: the resulting configuration in FocP is one in which the matrix predicate is focused with

respect to the complement clause.

The structures in (5) and (6) show how this analysis can be technically implemented for the sentence in (4).

(4) Freddy probeert van de auto te repareren.

Freddy tries VAN the car to fix

(5) a. $[_{AgrP} [de\ auto\ te\ repareren]\ Agr^\circ [probeer]]$ _ movement of the verbal root to Agr°

b. $[_{AgrP} [de\ auto\ te\ repareren]\ Agr^\circ + [probeer]_i\ t_i]$ _ merger of *van*

b. *van* $[_{AgrP} [de\ auto\ te\ repareren]\ Agr^\circ + [probeer]_i\ t_i]$ → attraction of the infinitival clause to

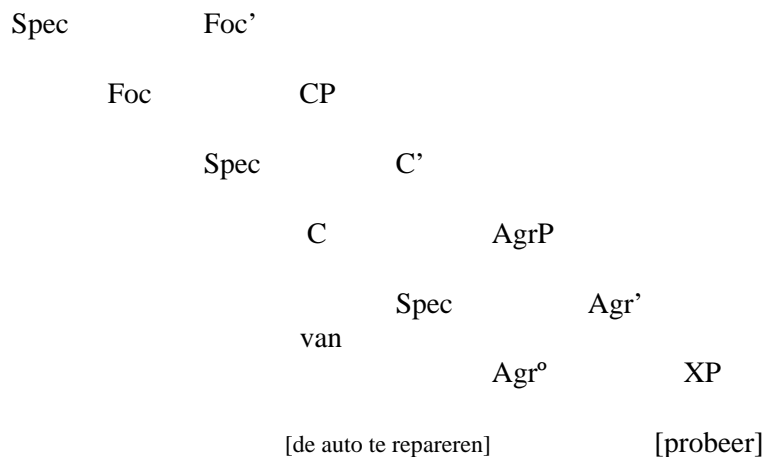
Spec,*van*

c. $[[de\ auto\ te\ repareren]_i\ van\ [_{AgrP}\ t_i\ Agr^\circ + [probeer]_i\ t_i]]$

→ merger of FocP, movement of AgrP to Spec,FocP and of *van* to Foc

d. $[_{FocP}\ [_{AgrP}\ t_i\ Agr^\circ + [probeer]_i\ t_i]_j\ Foc + van_k\ [[de\ auto\ te\ repareren]_i\ t_k\ t_j]$

(6) FocP



4. Implications of the analysis

As indicated above, this analysis gives a syntactic account of the semantic data discussed in section 2. I have shown that *van*'s original semantic feature of locative dissociation is retained in the domain of complementation. Furthermore, the analysis allows us to generalize over a large number of *van/de/di/of*-constructions such as those illustrated in (7).

(7) a. die schat van een kind b. cet idiot de Jean c. that idiot of a
doctor

that treasure of a child

that idiot of John

The examples discussed by Kayne (1999) (cf. (8)) can also be captured under the present approach.

(8) a. Jean a essayé de chanter. b. Gianni ha tentato di cantare

John has tried DE sing-inf

John has tried DI sing-inf

However, they are different in two respects: there is no dissociated reading of the complement clause and no focus on the matrix predicate. I will argue that this difference derives independently from the interaction between the lexical properties of C° and the FocP-CP-layer.

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