

Adverbs in Dutch

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There appear to be three types of adverbs in Dutch, each with its own distributional properties. I will refer to these classes as

1. sentence adverbs (*gisteren* 'yesterday')
2. VP-adverbs (*snel* 'quickly')
3. modal particles (*maar* 'just')

Sentence adverbs differ from VP-adverbs in two respects. First, they can appear in extraposition. Second, they are not necessarily in focus. VP-adverbs differ from modal particles in that they are necessarily in focus (except in contrastive intonation patterns). Modal particles differ from sentence adverbs and VP-adverbs in that they cannot be in focus (they do not participate in focus phrasing).

Modal particles are considered to be a 'watershed' between old and new information (Krivonosov 1977). This generalization appears to hold up. Consider the contrast in (1):

- (1) a. Doe 't MORgen maar [do it tomorrow just]
b. Doe 't maar MORgen [do it just tomorrow]

In both (1a) and (1b), the nuclear pitch accent is on *morgen* 'tomorrow'. But the readings are slightly different. In (1a), *morgen* comes as the resolution of a posed question. The options, doing it *tomorrow* or at some other time, were known in advance. In (1b), *morgen* is presented out of the blue. No set of options was made explicit in the discourse. In that sense, *morgen* in (1a) can be said to convey old information, or, better, discourse linked (D-linked) information. In contrast, *morgen* in (1b) presents new or non-D-linked information.

This point can also be illustrated with noun phrases preceding or following the modal particle. Consider (2):

- (2) a. Lees *Oorlog en Vrede* maar [read *War and Peace* just]
b. Lees maar *Oorlog en Vrede* [read just *War and Peace*]

In (2b), mention of *Oorlog en Vrede* comes a bit as a surprise. We had not thought of that possibility. In (2a), *Oorlog en Vrede* is one of a number of books suggested for reading.

It is important to keep the notion of D-linking apart from the notion of focus. D-linked elements can be in focus. Definite objects can be the bearer of nuclear pitch accent, as in (3):

- (3) Je moet het BOEK maar pakken [you must the book just grab]

In (3), the combination of the direct object and the verb may constitute a focus phrase. This can be shown by associating *het boek (maar) pakken* with *alleen* 'only', introducing a possible alternative:

- (4) Ik zei alleen maar dat je het BOEK maar moest pakken, niet dat je de afwas moest doen

[I only told you to just grab the book, not to do the dishes]

In (4), the object-verb combination *de afwas doen* is presented as an alternative to *het boek (maar) pakken*, showing that *het boek* may be part of a larger focus phrase with the verb, even if separated from the verb by the modal particle.

Thus, modal particles are sensitive to the distinction between D-linked/non-D-linked information, not to focus phrasing.

The relation between D-linking and definiteness can be formulated as follows. Indefinite noun phrases are not D-linked, unless they are deaccented. Definite noun phrases are always D-linked. Names may or may not be D-linked (see the example in (2)).

As a result, indefinite noun phrases will only be found to the left of modal particles when deaccented (or when contrastive). In that case, the indefinite noun phrase loses its existential interpretation:

- (5) a. Ze moeten maar illegalen oppakken [they should just illegals arrest]
b. Ze moeten illegalen maar oppakken [they should illegals just arrest]
c. # Ze moeten illegalen maar oppakken [they should illegals just arrest]

In (5a), *illegalen* 'illegal aliens' gets an existential interpretation. In (5b), it gets a generic interpretation. In (5c), *illegalen* can only get a contrastive interpretation (it has 'narrow focus'), not an existential interpretation.

Similarly, definite noun phrases will generally be found to the left of modal particles. The extent to which we can find definite noun phrases to the right of modal particles is dependent on the felicity of having a non-D-linked definite noun phrase.

Examples like the ones in (6) seem to be not so bad:

- (6) a. Ga maar de krant lezen [go just the newspaper read]
b. Ga maar je proefschrift herschrijven [go just your thesis rewrite]

Here, the entire object-verb combination presents new information (a suggested action), even though it incorporates a D-linked element (the direct object noun phrase). Similarly with definite noun phrases inside PPs:

- (7) Ga maar naar de burens [go just to the neighbors]

Interestingly, the examples in (6) seem much worse when the verb is fronted:

- (8) a. * Lees maar de krant
b. Lees de krant maar
(9) a. * Herschrijf maar je proefschrift
b. Herschrijf je proefschrift maar

If these judgments hold up, the distribution of the modal particle is dependent on surface order. The generalization that seems to emerge is that modal particles are not sensitive to (focus phrase) constituency or to abstract structure (traces). On this respect, they are truly different from sentence adverbs and VP-adverbs.

The difference between sentence adverbs and VP-adverbs can be demonstrated in the

following dialogues:

- (10) Q Wat is er gebeurd? [what happened?]
a. O, ik heb gisteren het BOEK uitgelezen [oh, I have yesterday the book finished-reading]
b. O, ik heb het BOEK gisteren uitgelezen [oh, I have the book yesterday finished-reading]
- (11) Q Wat is er gebeurd? [what happened?]
a. O, ik heb snel het BOEK uitgelezen [oh, I have quickly the book finished-reading]
b. # O, ik heb het BOEK snel uitgelezen [oh, I have the book quicky finished-reading]

In (11b), the intonation on *het boek* is contrastive. Not so in (10b):

- (12) Ik zei alleen maar dat ik het BOEK gisteren uitgelezen had, niet dat ik verder niks nuttigs gedaan heb.
[I only said that I had finished the book yesterday, not that I had not done any other useful things.]
- (13) # Ik zei alleen maar dat ik het BOEK snel uitgelezen had, niet dat ik verder niks nuttigs gedaan heb.
[I only said that I had finished the book quickly, not that I had not done any other useful things.]

The fact that the pitch accent on *het boek* in (12) allows the phrase *het boek gisteren uitgelezen* to be in focus shows that *gisteren* can be incorporated in a focus phrase. Conversely, since *het boek* in (13) can only be in narrow focus, we may hypothesize that *snel* may not be incorporated in a focus phrase.

One possible explanation for the difference could be that VP-adverbs necessarily constitute an independent focus phrase. Focus phrases cannot be embedded in another focus phrase, as discussed elsewhere.

Two observations are consistent with the hypothesis that VP-adverbs constitute their own prosodic phrase. First, VP-adverbs may not appear in extraposition, unlike sentence adverbs:

- (14) a. Jan heeft het gEDAAN gisteren [John has it done yesterday]
b. * Jan heeft het gEDAAN snel [John has it done quickly]

Adverbs in extraposition receive no pitch accent whatsoever. If VP-adverbs need to constitute a prosodic phrase, the ungrammaticality of (14b) is accounted for. Second, VP-adverbs in preverbal position require a more prominent pitch accent than sentence adverbs in the same position. Compare:

- (15) a. Jan heeft GISTEREN/gisteren het BOEK gelezen
[John has yesterday the book read]
b. Jan heeft SNEL/*snel het BOEK gelezen
[John has quickly the book read]

Possibly the requirement that VP-adverbs have to constitute a prosodic phrase of their own is a function of their communicative value. VP-adverbs by their nature seem to add information, which automatically puts them in focus. The only way VP-adverbs can be noninformative is when they are already part of the preceding discourse, e.g. as part of a question *What did John read quickly?*. A question like this prompts an answer with contrastive intonation. Sentence adverbs, by their scene setting function, are much more likely to be present in existing discourse, and if so do not necessarily prompt a contrastive response.

VP-adverbs differ from modal particles in that their distribution is sensitive to prosodic structure. Sentence adverbs differ from modal particles in that they may be in or out of focus.

These generalizations have the following consequences for the distribution of definite and indefinite noun phrases. Definite and indefinite noun phrases may precede or follow sentence adverbs. However, sentence adverbs can only follow nuclear pitch accent bearing indefinite noun phrases, if they are already present in the discourse. This is because a nuclear pitch accent bearing noun phrase projects focus, incorporating material intervening between itself and the verb in the prosodic phrase. Therefore, the order noun phrase—adverb—verb will be limited to exactly those cases. Notice that in that situation, the order adverb—noun phrase—verb will convey the same information. This order will prevail as soon as the adverb is thought of as conveying information independently from the noun phrase—verb combination (as is standardly the case with VP-adverbs, if we were right above). Thus, as soon as the sentence adverb carries but a secondary pitch accent, it will have to precede the nuclear pitch accent bearing object.

If these observations are correct, an adverb may follow the nuclear pitch accent bearing noun phrase only if the information conveyed by the adverb is not given, and if the adverb does not carry any pitch accent. Such configurations can be construed, but are rarely encountered in everyday speech.

With VP-adverbs, the said configuration is never encountered, since VP-adverbs always carry pitch accent (again, ignoring contrastive situations).

References

Krivososov, Aleksej. 1977. Deutsche Modalpartikeln im System der unflektierten Wortklassen. In H. Weydt, ed., *Aspekte der Modalpartikeln*. Niemeyer, Tübingen, pp. 176-216.