

**Grammaticalising microvariation:  
What we can learn from Dutch and Afrikaans periphrastic progressives**

Cora Pots (KU Leuven)<sup>1</sup> – cora.pots@kuleuven.be

Within Germanic, there is a high amount of meso- and microvariation in the way progressive aspect is morphosyntactically realised. In Dutch, Afrikaans and Scandinavian, we find periphrastic progressive constructions in which a motion or posture verb marks progressive aspect of the lexical verb – this construction being absent in English and German. Restricted to Dutch and Afrikaans is the use of motion verb *lopen/loop* ‘walk’ as progressive marker. In Scandinavian a more general motion verb is used in this construction, e.g. a language-specific variant of GO (Wiklund 2007). Afrikaans patterns together with the Scandinavian languages when it comes to the syntactic structure of the periphrastic progressive: the construction is a case of pseudocoordination, with the motion/posture verb and lexical verb combined by the conjunction *en* ‘and’ (De Vos 2005; Løndrup 2002). Dutch is unique within the Germanic languages with respect to the syntactic structure of the periphrastic progressive. That is, the motion/posture verb takes a *te-* ‘to-’ infinitive, this *te-* infinitive being the lexical verb (Haeseryn et al. 1997). This talk focusses on morphosyntactic microvariation in the periphrastic progressive with motion/posture verbs in and between Dutch (1) and Afrikaans (2).

- (1) Ik heb ***lopen/ zitten/ staan/ liggen*** (*te*) werken.  
I have walk/ sit/ stand/ lie to work.  
‘I have been working.’ (Dutch)
- (2) Ek het (***ge-)loop/ (ge-)sit/ (ge-)stand/ (ge-)lê*** (*en*) werk.  
I have GE-walk/ GE-sit/ GE-stand/ GE-lie and work.  
‘I have been working.’ (Afrikaans)

Across the languages, we see variation in the form of the motion/posture verb when the periphrastic progressive is embedded under a temporal auxiliary (Schmid 2005). In Afrikaans, the motion/posture verb can optionally appear as past participle or in a bare form, also called IPP form (i.e. without *ge-* (2)). In Dutch, however, the motion/posture verb always has to appear in IPP form. In both languages, we see a difference between the periphrastic progressives with motion verb *lopen/loop* on the one hand and those with posture verbs on the other. That is, the ones with motion verb *lopen/loop* show *te/en*-drop—phenomena that are less frequent/ungrammatical with posture verbs (Haeseryn et al. 1997; Biberauer 2017).

I present new data from a comparative corpus study (*SoNaR+* (Oostdijk et al. 2013) for Dutch, *Korpusportaal* (VivA 2016) for Afrikaans), in which I systematically investigated morphosyntactic microvariation in Dutch and Afrikaans periphrastic progressives with motion/posture verbs embedded under temporal auxiliary *hebben/het* ‘have’. Concerning the morphological form of the motion/posture verb, we see that: (i) in Dutch the motion/posture verb indeed always occurs in IPP form, and (ii) in Afrikaans the motion verb *loop* occurs much more frequently in IPP form (around 75%) than as past participle, whereas the morphological form of the posture verbs seems truly optional (both forms occur in around 50% of the cases). With respect to the presence/absence of *te/en*, the data show that (i) *te* is always

---

<sup>1</sup>Part of this work is embedded in a project I work on together with Katherine Fraser (University of the Basque country (UPV/EHU)).

absent in Dutch periphrastic progressives with *lopen*, whereas it is sometimes present in the posture verb variants, and (ii) *en*-drop is only found in Afrikaans periphrastic progressives with motion verb *loop*.

The main point of the analysis is that the attested microvariation in Dutch and Afrikaans periphrastic progressives is an indication of the extent to which these progressives are grammaticalised. For Dutch, I propose that these periphrastic progressives are always cases of functional restructuring (Cinque 2001) in which the motion/posture verb is directly merged in the functional aspectual-progressive head of the lexical verb's functional sequence, and, being a functional head, always has to appear in bare form (IPP form). For Afrikaans, I propose that there are two structures available, and that the periphrastic progressives are on a grammaticalisation path from a syntactically less compressed structure in which the motion/posture verb can still carry inflection (i.e. appear as past participle) to a similar structure as the one I propose for Dutch (and thus only appear in IPP form). The extent to which the motion/posture verbs are grammaticalised is furthermore mirrored by their semantic bleaching, i.e. by the extent to which the motion/posture verbs still entail physical motion through space, or a seated, standing or lying position. The data show that: (i) the Dutch progressive verbs are in general more semantically bleached than the Afrikaans ones, and (ii) the motion verbs *lopen/loop* are more semantically bleached than the posture verbs. The degree of semantic bleaching of these motion/posture verbs is an indication for the lexical semantic features of these progressive verbs being gradually replaced by more functional features, e.g. a [prog]-feature, and thus gives us an indication about how functional the motion/posture verbs have become in the two languages. Other morphological quirks, like *te/en*-drop, are side-effects of the motion verbs becoming even more grammaticalised.

## References

- Biberauer (2017). Pseudo-coordination in a hybrid system: (parametric) insights from Afrikaans. Paper presented at the Workshop on Pseudo-Coordination (Venice).
- Cinque (2001). "Restructuring" and the order of aspectual and root modal heads. In Cinque & Salvi (eds.) *Current studies in Italian syntax*, 137–155. Elsevier.
- De Vos (2005). *The syntax of pseudo-coordination in English and Afrikaans*. Utrecht: Igitur/LOT.
- Haeseryn, Romijn, Geerts, De Rooij & Van den Toorn. (1997). *Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkunst*. Second edition. Groningen: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Lødrup (2002). Norwegian pseudocoordinations. *Studia Linguistica*, 56. 121–143.
- Mair (2012). Progressive and Continuous Aspect. In R.I. Binnick (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of tense and aspect*. Oxford: Oxford university press.
- Oostdijk, Reynaert, Hoste & Schuurman. (2013). The Construction of a 500-Million-Word Reference Corpus of Contemporary Written Dutch. In P. Spyns & J. Odiijk (eds.), *Essential Speech and Language Technology for Dutch. Results by the STEVIN programme*, 219–247. Springer.
- Schmid (2005). *Infinitival Syntax: Infinitivus Pro Participio as a repair strategy*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Wiklund (2007). *The Syntax of Tenselessness: Tense/Mood/Aspect agreeing Infinitivals*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- VivA. (2016). *Korpusportaal*. <http://viva-afrikaans.org>.