

Diachronic regularisation of Dutch quantifier inflection

In the handbooks on Dutch grammar, the inflectional behaviour of Dutch quantifiers is under-described. At first sight, they seem to go along with the adjectives, as they have alternating forms with and without schwa (*veel/vele* ‘many’, *weinig/weinige* ‘few’). It is not clear, however, what exactly drives the presence or absence of this inflectional schwa. For some quantifiers (e.g. *enig* ‘any’) one could argue that they are subject to the same syntactic constraints as the attributive adjectives, which only have the zero form in [+sg +neuter -def] contexts (some minor exceptions notwithstanding, see Haeseryn et al. 1997: 400-401, 405-412), but for other quantifiers (e.g. *veel* ‘many’), this grammatical rule does not apply, and as can be seen in (1)-(2), they are subject to what appears to be either free variation or some very subtle semantic differences (see Van der Horst 1992; Haeseryn et al. 1997: 433). Still other quantifiers occur invariably in the inflected form (e.g. *voldoende* ‘sufficient’, see (3)), or occur invariably in the uninflected form (e.g. *genoeg* ‘enough’, *zat* ‘plenty’, see (4)).

- (1) *Hij heeft veel-e boeken geschreven*
he has many-INFL books written
‘He wrote many books’
- (2) *Hij heeft veel-∅ boeken geschreven*
he has many-UNINFL books written
‘He wrote many books’
- (3) *Hij heeft voldoende/*voldoend water gedronken*
he has sufficient water drunk
‘He drank enough water’
- (4) *Hij heeft genoeg/*genoege/zat/*zatte ruimte*
he has plenty space
‘He has plenty of space’

This paper has a twofold aim. First, it is argued that the system is not as messy as it looks (see e.g. Van de Velde 2009: 42 on *veel*), especially if we apply a construction morphology approach (Booij 2010), and second - more importantly - it is shown that language users are seen to bestow new order on this messy system. This involves looking at ongoing diachronic morphological changes, most of which have gone unnoticed in the literature so far. There is a tendency to reduce variable inflection on quantifiers, so as to maximally distinguish them from adjectives, by either using the inflected or the uninflected form invariably. This leads to ‘ungrammatical’ patterns like (5) and (6), where the inflectional schwa is missing:

- (5) *Overal waar we optreden, word ik ontelbaar-∅ keren gevraagd een workshop te geven*
everywhere where we perform am I countless-UNINFL times asked a workshop to give
‘Everywhere we perform, I am asked millions of times to give a workshop’
- (6) *Daarom belt zij hem ieder-∅ dag op*
therefore calls she him every-UNINFL day PTC
‘That’s why she calls him every day’

By concentrating on variation and micro-changes in large scale corpora such as the *Twente News Corpus*, corpora with unmonitored written discourse (*CONDIV* chat (Grondelaers et al. 2000) and immigrant Dutch corpora (*Moroccorp*, under construction) it can be shown that these patterns are

not just scribal errors, but may reveal what the inflectional system in the prefield of the NP will evolve into in the near future.

References

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