

Disambiguating Dutch pseudopartitives

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The ambiguity of the predication direction between two nominals in Dutch pseudopartitives disappears under Split Topicalization (ST). This novel observation provides support for an analysis in which the two nominals are merged in a DP-internal predication structure in which one nominal always undergoes N⁰-raising to a higher functional projection.

Ambiguity in predication: Pseudopartitive constructions in Dutch as in (1) are ambiguous with respect to the direction of predication between two nominals (e.g., Corver, 1998): either the noun *fles* ‘bottle’ or the noun *wijn* ‘wine’ can be the subject nominal.

- (1) *Een fles wijn.*
A bottle wine
‘A bottle of wine’

When *fles* ‘bottle’ is the subject nominal and *wijn* ‘wine’ the predicate nominal, then *een fles wijn* ‘a bottle of wine’ has a container reading: a bottle containing wine. On the other hand, if *wijn* ‘wine’ is the subject nominal and *fles* ‘bottle’ the predicate nominal, *een fles wijn* ‘a bottle of wine’ has a cardinal reading: wine to the amount of a bottle. The ambiguity of pseudopartitives is often resolved through the verbal predicate in a sentence. In (2), the verb is ‘to drink’. Since one cannot drink a bottle but one can drink wine, it must be that *wijn* ‘wine’ is the subject nominal in (2).

- (2) *Ik heb een fles wijn gedronken.*
I have a bottle wine drunk
‘I drank a bottle of wine.’

Syntax of pseudopartitives: One way of analyzing pseudopartitives is through a Small Clause (SC) construction. Corver (1998) suggests a syntactic analysis in which the subject nominal and predicate nominal are merged in a DP-internal predication (cf. Bennis et al., 1997), demonstrated in (3). To obtain the final linear order, he suggests *fles* ‘bottle’ to undergo N⁰-raising to the head of a higher, directly dominating functional projection, i.e., Predicate Inversion.

- (3) [DP ... [XP *wijn* [X' X *fles*]]]

Conveniently, SCs are supposedly non-directional in terms of predication (see e.g., Den Dikken, 2006). This means that the structure in (3) allows both *wijn* ‘wine’ and *fles* ‘bottle’ to be the subject nominal in the predication relation that holds between the two nominals. Novel data on ST versions of pseudopartitives not only support an SC analysis of pseudopartitives (3), but provide further support for Corver’s assumption of *fles* ‘bottle’ always undergoing head movement.

Split pseudopartitives: Pseudopartitives can appear in a ST construction (see e.g., Pafel, 1996 for German): one part of the DP is topicalized, and the other part is stranded in the VP. In (4), *thee* ‘tea’ is topicalized, while *een glas* ‘a glass’ is stranded in the VP. Crucially, only the cardinal reading is available for (4). This is indicated through the impossibility of *gebroken* ‘broken’, which requires *glas* ‘glass’ to be the subject nominal. Note that ST is not a standard phenomenon in Dutch (e.g., van Hoof, 1997), meaning (4) is not available to all speakers of Dutch.

- (4) *Thee heb ik een glas gedronken/gebroken.* [cardinal/*container]
Tea have I a glass drunk/broken
‘As for tea, I drank/*broke a glass.’

The only way to obtain a container reading of the pseudopartitive in a split construction is to topicalize both nominals (5). Topicalizing only *glazen* ‘glasses’ is impossible (6).

- (5) *Glazen thee heb ik drie gedronken/gebroken.* [cardinal/container]

Glasses tea have I three drunk/broken

‘As for glasses of tea, I drank/broke three.’

(6) **Glazen heb ik (drie) thee gedronken/gebroken.*

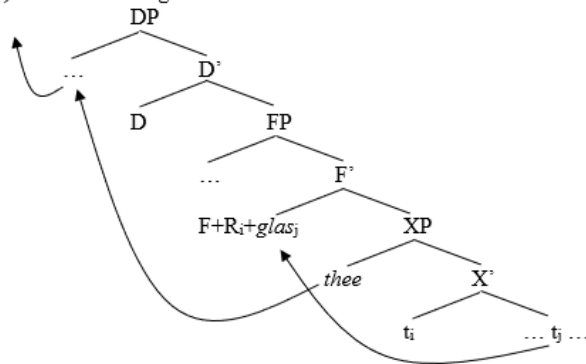
Glasses have I three tea drunk/broken

Split pseudopartitives in which the subject nominal and predicate nominal are separated are thus unambiguous, unlike their non-split counterparts.

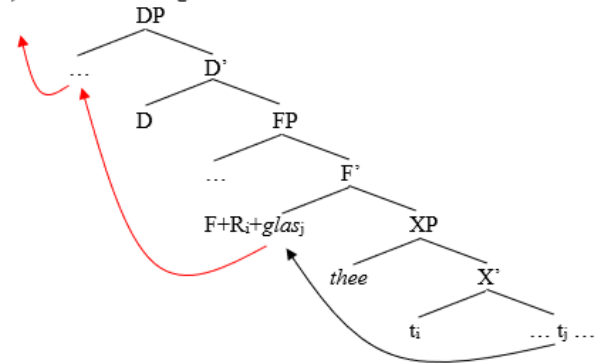
Derivation of split pseudopartitives: The availability of (4) and the unavailability of (6) show support for an analysis in which *glas* ‘glass’ cannot undergo movement out of the DP, while *wijn* ‘wine’ can. For this reason, I adopt Corver’s (1998) analysis in which *glas* ‘glass’ N⁰-raises to the head of a higher functional projection FP. This movement step blocks further A’-movement of the nominal out of the DP; an element that has undergone head movement cannot undergo subsequent A’-movement. As shown in (7), *thee* ‘tea’ is free to undergo A’-movement out of the DP, while *glas* ‘glass’ is not.

(7) Analyses of split pseudopartitives

a) Cardinal reading



b) Container reading



A main issue that I would like to discuss is what the motivation behind moving *glas* ‘glass’ is in constructions in which it is not the predicate nominal, i.e., in the container reading.

Extension to German: Preliminary data shows that the same observations hold for German. Non-split pseudopartitives are ambiguous, while split pseudopartitives are unambiguous. The only way to obtain a container reading in a ST construction is to topicalize both nominals. This nevertheless enables the cardinal reading as well, meaning ambiguity rearises.

References

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