Dialect variation in Dutch manner adverbs

Stilletjeser or *stillertjes* as comparative?

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Some Dutch manner adverbs are marked with diminutive morphology and 'adverbial *-s*'; cf. *still-etje-s* (quiet-DIM-S) 'quietly'. This morphological material interacts with comparative/superlative formation: in Standard Dutch (SD), comparatives/superlatives of diminutive manner adverbs (DMAs) are ill-formed. Dialect reference grammars and novel questionnaire data reveal variation that is unaccounted for; some dialects allow comparative/superlative DMAs.

I propose a unified analysis of SD and dialectal DMA patterns. Based on a discussion of morphosyntactic and semantic properties of the Dutch diminutive and prior analysis of *-s*, I propose that DMAs decompose into a phrasal category featuring a manner noun marked by diminutive morphology and a small clause headed by *-s*. This analysis of DMAs is comparable to that of Dutch *blootshoofds* 'bare-headed'. Identified loci of variable affix ordering and variation between SD and dialects are PF/linearization and variation in the functional domain, respectively.

Keywords: morphosyntax, manner adverbs, Dutch, microvariation, predicate inversion

1. Introduction

In Standard Dutch (henceforth SD), some manner adverbs can be marked with diminutive morphology (1–2) (I gloss the *-s* following the diminutive in adverbs as -S throughout). The semantic contribution of the diminutive morpheme is subtle; the examples translate into English similarly. In Section 2.2, I discuss the semantics of the diminutive in more detail.

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(1) *Marie beweegt stil.*
Marie moves quiet

(2) *Marie beweegt still-etje-s.*
Marie moves quiet-DIM-S
Both: 'Marie moves quietly.'

SD diminutive manner adverbs (henceforth DMAs) like in (2) exhibit morphosyntactic properties that have received only limited attention in the literature so far. Firstly, (3) illustrates that in SD the presence of 'adverbial *-s*' is obligatory in DMAs, but impossible with non-diminutive manner adverbs.[1]

(3) a. **Marie beweegt still-etje.*
Marie moves quiet-DIM
b. **Marie beweegt stil-s.*
Marie moves quiet-S

Furthermore (4) shows that *-s* is not part of the SD diminutive suffix itself: controlling for the phonology of the rhyme of the base word, we find that a diminutive nominal like *brilletje* is ill-formed with *-s*.

(4) *De kleuter draagt een brill-etje(*-s)*
the toddler wears a glasses-DIM-S
'The toddler wears glasses.'

Secondly, we observe that the added morphological material in DMAs blocks comparative/superlative formation in SD. Non-diminutive manner adverbs allow regular formation of comparative and superlative manner adverbs, illustrated in (5).

(5) a. *Marie beweegt still-er dan Jan.*
Marie moves quiet-COMP than Jan
'Marie moves more quietly than Jan.'
b. *Marie beweegt het stil-ste van iedereen.*
Marie moves the soft-SUP of everyone
'Marie moves the most quietly of everyone.'

These degrees of comparison cannot be combined with diminutive morphology. (6ab) demonstrate that the diminutive suffix and *-s* are ill-formed in combination with comparative morphology, regardless of the order of morphemes. (7ab) demonstrate that superlative DMAs are ill-formed too.

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1. I refer to 'adverbial *-s*' (see also Royen (1947–1956)) as *-s* throughout, because I argue there is nothing inherently adverbial about it; although it is a building block of Dutch adverbials, I analyze it as the head of a word-internal small clause.

(6) a. *Marie beweegt still-etje-s-er dan Jan.*
Marie moves quiet-DIM-S-COMP than Jan
b. *Marie beweegt still-er-tje-s dan Jan.*
Marie moves quiet-COMP-DIM-S than Jan
Both intended: 'Marie moves more quietly than Jan.'

(7) a. *Marie beweegt het still-etje-s-te van iedereen.*
Marie moves the quiet-DIM-S-SUP of everyone
b. *Marie beweegt het stil-st-je-s van iedereen.*
Marie moves the soft-SUP-DIM-S of everyone
Both intended: 'Marie moves the most quietly of everyone.'

However, in some Dutch dialects comparative/superlative formation based on DMAs is possible; it is attested in dialect reference grammars and in our questionnaire data. Examples (8–10) are all explicitly categorized as diminutive (manner) adverbs by the authors (my glosses and hyphenations).

(8) a. *still-eke-z-er* (Kempenland Dutch, De Bont 1958: 453)
quiet-DIM-S-COMP
b. *nät-je-z-er*
neat-DIM-S-COMP
c. *zach-je-z-er*
soft-DIM-S-COMP
d. *loi-ke-z-er*
slow-DIM-S-COMP

(9) a. *zach-ie-z-der* (Kampen Dutch, Gunnink 1908: 93)
soft-DIM-S-COMP
b. *zach-ie-s-te*
soft-DIM-S-SUP

(10) a. *zuit-je-z-er* (Veenkoloniën Dutch, Schuringa 1923: 103)
sweet-DIM-S-COMP
b. *net-je-z-er*
neat-DIM-S-COMP

The data in (11–13) are written translations of SD sentences featuring comparative (11–12) and superlative (13) DMAs given by our online questionnaire informants. These data were gathered between January and March 2023 among dialect speakers from across the European Dutch language area in the *Meertens Panel*.[2] Of 584 contacted dialect speakers, 165 responded by filling in the entire question-

2. For more information on the *Meertens Panel* see https://meertenspanel.meertens.knaw.nl.

naire.[3] We see both the DIM-S-COMP order (11a/12a) and the COMP-DIM-S order (11b/12b) are attested. Also, we see these orders are attested with different allophones of the diminutive morpheme (*-etje* in (11), *-eke* in (12)). In (13), we see only the DIM-S-SUP order is attested. The examples in (11–13) are not the only comparative/superlative DMAs found in our questionnaires, but serve as representatives of their kind. We find no clear regional effect on the attestations of comparative/superlative DMAs.

(11) a. *Jan sluupt still-etje-s-er naor binnen dan Marie.* (North Brabant Dutch)
Jan sneaks quiet-DIM-S-COMP to inside than Marie.

b. *Jan slûpt still-er-tje-s nor binnen dan Marie.* (Urk Dutch)
Jan sneaks quiet-COMP-DIM-S to inside than Marie
Both: 'Jan is sneaking inside more quietly than Marie.'

(12) a. *Jan sloipt still-eke-z-er naor binne as Marie.* (Limburgish NL)
Jan sneaks quiet-DIM-S-COMP to inside as Marie

b. *Jan sjlup sjtill-er-ke-s noa binne as Marie.* (Low-Saxon Dutch)
Jan sneaks quiet-COMP-DIM-S to inside as Marie
Both: 'Jan is sneaking inside more quietly than Marie.'

(13) *Marie schrieft ut net-je-s-te van de heale klasse.* (Overflakkee Dutch)
Marie writes the neat-DIM-SUP of the whole class
'Marie writes the neatest of the entire grade/has the neatest handwriting in her grade.'

The only detailed analysis of DMAs available intends to rule out comparative/superlative DMAs; cf. the discussion of Corver (2021) in Section 3.1. While patterns like (8–13) are correctly ruled out for SD, this leaves the dialect data unaccounted for. I propose a unified analysis of DMAs in SD and Dutch dialects. Regarding the more complex (comparative/superlative) DMAs, I focus here on the comparatives, leaving aside the superlatives for now. I suspect that the analysis given below could be extended to capture them too.

Based on the above, I formulate the following questions:

1. Where is the diminutive morphology in the structure of Dutch DMAs?
2. What is *-s* in the structure of Dutch DMAs?

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3. The questionnaire results are compiled in an online database (https://mima.hum.uu.nl/home) as part of the NWO-funded *Mind your Manner Adverbials!*-project at Utrecht University. At the time of writing, the database is still under construction. It will be expanded to include user instructions and more detailed questionnaire results.

3. How do Dutch dialects vary from SD, to the effect of permitting complex (comparative) DMAs?

Here, I follow (but also deviate from) Corver (2021) in decomposing DMAs into an articulated inner structure. I propose the following answers to these questions:

1. The diminutive is a Size^0 head that categorizes a manner root as a nominal.
2. *-s* is a Den Dikken-style (2006) linker that facilitates word-internal predicate displacement, not a realization of n^0 as in Corver (2021).
3. As a functional head, the featural make-up of *-s* is the locus of variation between SD and dialects, per the Borer-Chomsky conjecture (Borer 1983; Chomsky 1995).

Under the copy theory of movement (Chomsky 1993), this analysis is able to capture the variable comparative affix ordering (DIM-S-COMP and COMP-DIM-S, witness (11)) as an effect of Spell-Out at PF. As I show, it captures both SD and dialectal Dutch DMA patterns, keeping its narrow syntactic component constant across patterns and linguistic varieties.

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 discusses the formal and semantic properties of Dutch diminutive morphology, noting its close ties to the nominal domain. Section 3 discusses literature on Dutch *-s*. I present counter-arguments against Corver's (2021) account of *-s* in SD DMAs, and instead take inspiration from Corver's (2007) model of *-s* in absolute genitival constructions. Section 4 presents my analysis of DMAs in both SD and dialects, and identifies relevant loci of variation. Section 5 concludes.

2. Dutch diminutive morphology and DMAs

In this section, I give an overview of the literature on Dutch diminutive morphology, focusing on the work of De Belder (2011), laying the foundation for my analysis of Dutch DMAs below, and establishing a link between the diminutive and the nominal domain. The semantics of the diminutive in DMAs is compared with Russian adjectival morphology (Kagan & Alexeyenko 2010).

2.1 The morphosyntax of the Dutch diminutive

Based on data from German, Russian, and Halkomelem, Wiltschko and Steriopolo (2007) argue that the morphosyntax of diminutive affixes varies cross-linguistically in two dimensions: their status as a head (projecting their own features) or a modifier to another head (not projecting their features further), and

their base position above/below the word-level (i.e., above/below the functional head categorizing the root in a Distributed Morphology model of grammar (Halle & Marantz 1993). That Dutch diminutive morphology projects its own features can be concluded from the following minimal pair (14):

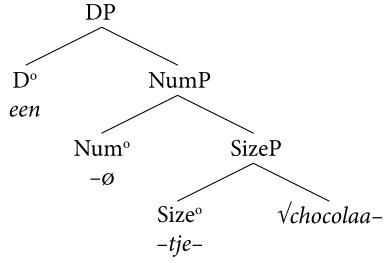
(14) a. *Ik proefde een chocolade.*
I tasted a chocolate
'I tasted a certain kind of chocolate.'
*'I tasted a piece of chocolate.'

b. *Ik proefde een chocolaa-tje.*
I tasted a chocolate-DIM
*'I tasted a certain kind of chocolate.'
'I tasted a piece of chocolate.'

In (14b) (from De Belder 2011: 84–85), we see that the addition of the diminutive suffix derives a noun with a unit reading from the mass noun *chocolade*. This reinforces the idea that the Dutch diminutive affix is a head projecting its features, rather than a modifier that does not.

Concretely, De Belder's (2011) analysis of *een chocolaatje* is as in (15):

(15)



In (15), the root *chocolaa-* is embedded under the SizeP headed by the diminutive head *-tje*, and further embedded under an extended nominal projection. Together, these functional projections categorize the root as a nominal.[4] The diminutive exponent is labelled Size° in (15); this reflects the primacy that De Belder (2011) attributes to the semantic contribution of functional material like diminutive morphology: as she explains in detail, in nouns like *chocolaatje*, diminutive morphology semantically attributes a size (roughly 'small') to a root by

4. Concerning the question of where the Dutch diminutive suffix is merged relative to the root, De Belder (2011) adopts Borer's Exo-Skeletal Model of categorization, which holds that pure root categorization is redundant, provided functional material in the extended projection of a root projects identifiable categorial features. In (15), the root is categorized as a nominal, then, by virtue of being embedded under a diminutive head.

projecting a [Size] feature — which forces the unit reading available in (15). Below, I too take the diminutive morpheme in DMAs to be a Size° head.[5]

In Section 2.2, I reflect on the semantic contribution of the diminutive in DMAs, and relate it to its status as a Size° head.

2.2 The semantics of Dutch DMAs

The status of the diminutive as a Size° head may lead to the expectation that it denotes a specific scale of physical size in Dutch DMAs — as it does in nouns like *appel-tje* 'little apple'. However, there is no interpretative difference in terms of physical size in DMAs; *stilletjes* is not 'smaller' than *stil*. However, comparing Dutch DMAs with Russian adjectives marked with *-ovat*, as in (16) (from Kagan & Alexeyenko 2010: 1), may teach us about its size-related meaning.

(16) *Po utram on pjot proxladnyj sladk-ovat-yj čaj s limonom.*
at mornings he drinks cool sweet-ovat-MASC.ACC tea with lemon
'In the mornings, he drinks cool sweetish tea with lemon.'

As Kagan and Alexeyenko (2010) explain, *-ovat* modifies the meaning of an adjective A to mean that the property A denotes holds of its argument to an intuitively low degree; in (16), the tea is merely sweetish, not (too) sweet. Concretely, that the complex property denoted by A-*ovat* holds of an argument, does not entail that the property denoted by A holds of it. Likewise, an event modified by a Dutch DMA (17a) does not entail an event modified by the same adverbial lacking the diminutive (17b).

(17) a. *Jan giechelt still-etje-s.*
Jan giggles quiet-DIM-S
'Jan giggles quietly.'
b. ?**Jan giechelt stil.*[6]
Jan giggles quiet
Intended: 'Jan giggles quietly.'

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5. Finding nominal substructure in (manner) adverb(ial)s is unsurprising given research which holds they decompose into a nominal core embedded in an adpositional superstructure (e.g., Alexeyenko 2015; Corver 2021; Déchaine & Tremblay 1996; Emonds 1987; Kiss & Hegedüs 2021; Manninen 2003). Potential counterarguments to analyzing Dutch DMAs as PPs exist, which deserve addressing. I leave this for future research.

6. To me, *stil* is a semantically illicit modifier in (14b) because of the auditive dimension of giggling — being quiet precludes making noise. The low-degree-of-being-quiet meaning of *stilletjes* is what saves it in (17a). An anonymous NB reviewer asks if we would not expect (17b) to improve if we changed to manner expression to *vrij stil* 'quite quiet' or *erg stil* 'very quiet', presumably because it highlights the gradability of the adverb. To them, this does not improve

Kagan and Alexeyenko's (2010) account of the degree-modifying properties of *-ovat* is couched in a theory of the structure of lexical scales. For my purposes here, based on the semantic similarity between the Dutch diminutive and Russian *-ovat*, I want to raise the possibility that, in the spirit of cross-categorial parallelism, what degree is to the adjectival domain, size is to the nominal domain.[7] I propose the diminutive morpheme in DMAs, hosted in Size°, contributes to the composite meaning of the DMA by diminutivizing the abstract size of the manner of the event, yielding such interpretative differences as observed between (17a) and (14b).

As an anonymous reviewer points out, diminutive morphology can also be used to express emotive or expressive aspects of meaning (cf. Ritter & Wiltschko 2023). Indeed, the diminutive nominal *brilletje* in (4) can (but need not) be used to relay a positive attitude towards the toddler's glasses (e.g., if the speaker finds the glasses cute on the toddler), or a negative one (e.g., if the speaker condescendingly refers to the toddler's expensive designer glasses, because they think such luxury items are unsuitable for a toddler). This contribution of the diminutive falls within the expressive dimension of meaning in that it is independent of what Potts (2007) calls descriptive, propositional meaning. Possibly, the diminutive morphology found in Dutch DMAs also contributes such expressive meaning; De Belder (2022: fn. 1) notes that, content-wise, *Ze zong zacht-je-s* (she sang soft-DIM-S) 'She sang softly' is synonymous with *Ze zong zacht*, without the diminutive. This raises the question why two synonymous forms exist in the language. Possibly, native speakers may choose the DMA over the non-diminutive-marked adverb to convey an expressive layer of meaning that is more difficult to paraphrase than propositional meaning. I think some of the difference in meaning between non-diminutive manner adverbs and DMAs is attributable this expres-

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(17b). I do not share this intuition; to me, (i) is (somewhat) better than (17b) (capitalization indicating stress). I have similar intuitions about use of *vrij stil*.

(i) *Jan giechelt ERG stil!*
Jan giggles very quiet
'Jan giggles very quietly!'

7. The parallel between Russian *-ovat* and Dutch diminutive morphology in DMAs extends to their distributional properties as well; Kagan and Alexeyenko note that *-ovat* is compatible with some, but not all adjectives, depending on what kind of scale the adjectives lexicalize. The Dutch diminutive too combines with some, but not all manner adverbs (witness the contrast between *zacht-je-s* and **hard-je-s* (hard-DIM-S, intended 'loudly')), patterning as *-ovat* as a function of the scales lexicalized by the manner adverbs. Diminutive marking on Czech adjectives displays similar sensitivity to the polarity or properties of the scale that the adjective is associated with (De Clercq et al. 2023: 8). I thank an anonymous NB reviewer for referring me to De Clercq et al. (2023).

sive domain. Still, minimal pairs such as (17ab) exist, which suggests the diminutive morpheme does contribute propositional meaning to (at least some) DMAs. Nothing excludes the possibility that both things are correct, as far as I know.

In the next section, I turn to previous accounts of Dutch *-s* in different types of adverbials.

3. Dutch DMAs and *-s*

In this section, I discuss previous work on Dutch *-s*, argue that the only extant account of SD DMAs faces problems, and highlight an analysis of Dutch absolute genitival constructions to take inspiration from in modelling Dutch DMAs in Section 4.

3.1 Corver (2021) on Standard Dutch DMAs

The SD *-s* found in adverbials has previously been observed and studied, but the only detailed analysis of *-s* in the context of DMAs is found in Corver (2021). His derivation of *zachtjes* (soft-DIM-S, 'softly') is given in (18). It features the silent root √WAY, which encodes manner semantics.

(18) a. $[_{FP}$ *zacht* $[_{F'}$ F $[_{QP}$ *-je* $[_{nP}$ n^o [√WAY]]]]]

b. $[_{FP}$ *zacht* $[_{F'}$ F $[_{QP}$ *-je* $[_{nP}$ $[_{n^o}$ √WAY+n^o (= *-s*)] [~~√WAY~~]]]]]

In (18), the adverb decomposes into a nominal part (the root √WAY categorized by n^o), and an attributive adjective (i.e., *zacht* 'soft') in [Spec,FP], modifying the nominal. We find the diminutive morpheme *-je* in Q^o, the head of Q(uantity)P, and the functional head F^o mediating the relation between the adjectival predicate and the noun in the noun's extended projection. The structure given in (15b) is derived from the one in (18a) through movement of the root to the categorizing head n^o (typical of DM-style word-building), yielding the complex head $[_{n^o}$ √WAY+n^o]. For Corver, the n^o-part of this complex head spells out as *-s* since the merger of n^o and the root √WAY cannot otherwise be tracked at PF, both n^o and the root being silent.

Although Corver notes that comparative forms of some DMAs, such as *net-je-s-er* (neat-DIM-S-COMP) 'more neatly' are sporadically attested, he builds on his analysis of Dutch DMAs (18b) to explain the ill-formedness of comparative forms of DMAs in Dutch more generally, as follows: he considers two possible word-internal positions of the comparative morpheme *-er* (preceding the diminutive and *-s*, as in *zacht-er-tje-s*, and following them, as in *zacht-je-s-er*), which he rules

out on different grounds. First, he tentatively proposes that forms like *zacht-er-tje-s* are ruled out because of an interaction between the formation of the synthetic comparative adjective *zacht-er* and the complex suffix *-tje-s* (19) (adapted from Corver 2021): movement of the adjective leaves a deleted copy between the comparative adjective and the suffix. In a way reminiscent of the effect of intervening copies on English *wanna*-contraction, he suggests this intervening copy blocks attachment of the suffix. Dutch comparative DMAs in which the comparative morphology precedes *-tje-s* can thus not be derived and are ill-formed.[8]

(19) *[FP [QP *zacht-er* [AP ~~*zacht*~~]] [F' F° [QP *-tje* [*n*P [√WAY+*n*° (= *-s*)] ~~√WAY~~]]]]

Secondly, Dutch comparative DMAs in which *-er* follows *-tje-s* are ruled out because of the requirement of the comparative morpheme that *-er* attach to an adjectival element, not a nominal one. In (20) (also adapted from Corver 2021), *-er* is analyzed as a suffix attached to the *-tje-s* complex which is nominal in nature, meaning this comparative DMA also cannot be derived.[9]

(20) [FP *zacht* [F' F [QP *-je* [*n*P [[$_n$ √WAY+*n*° (= *-s*)]] (*-**er**)] [~~√WAY~~]]]]]

Thus, Corver's analysis runs afoul of attestations of patterns in dialectal Dutch like (11); these feature the combination of diminutive and comparative morphology his model does not capture.

Moreover, the analysis of DMAs presented in Corver (2021) actually predicts *-s* to precede, instead of follow, the diminutive morpheme (M. De Belder p.c.); according to standard word-formation processes of the Distributed Morphology framework, lower affixes are found closer to the root than structurally higher ones, in a Mirror Principle-fashion (cf. Baker (1985), and Muysken (1979, 1981), cited there). The structure in (20), given as a tree diagram in (21), depicts an intermediate stage in the derivation of *zachtjes*. After √WAY forms a complex head with *n*°, this complex head forms another complex with Q°, as in (22). This order of operations ultimately yields the incorrect affix order *zacht-s-je*, contrary to fact.

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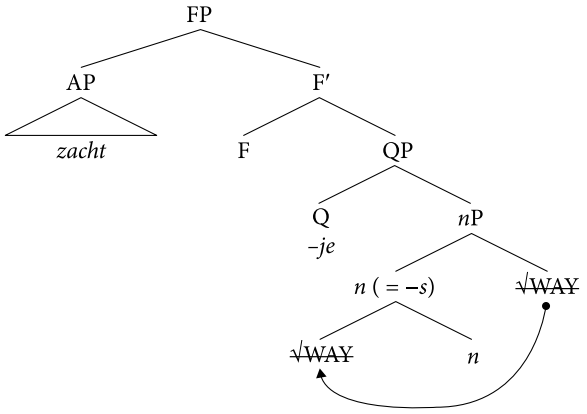
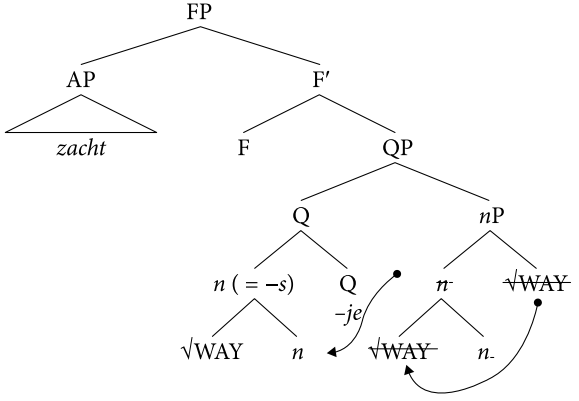
8. An anonymous NB reviewer asks why Corver's analysis in (18b) could not be minimally adapted to have a comparative form of *zacht* (as a CmprP) in [Spec,FP], similarly to (19). Even disregarding Corver's way of ruling out (19), this approach does not tell us how and why SD and some dialects should vary in (dis)allowing a comparative form in [Spec,FP].

9. A possible alternative would be to have *-er* merge with FP and suffix onto the entire constituent. This would run into the same problem however, since Corver (2021: fn. 22>) specifically refers to the whole FP in (20) as nominal — this alternative analysis would still see *-er* merged with a nominal constituent, leading to ill-formedness by Corver's reasoning.

(21)



(22)



Concluding, Dutch DMAs require a new analysis which can generate comparative/superlative forms in dialects and rule them out in SD. In Section 4, I propose one, inspired by Corver's (2007) analysis of Dutch absolute genitival constructions, which I discuss in Section 3.2.

3.2 Corver (2007) on *blootshoofds*

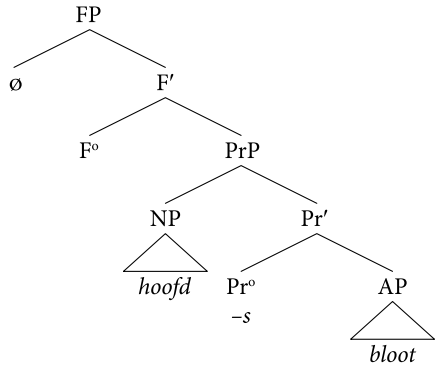
In (23) we find a Dutch absolute genitival construction. Notably, these constructions feature prolepsis, in which one grammatical element *-s*, appears multiple times — one 'in anticipation' of another.

(23) *bloot-s-hoofd-s*
bare-s-head-s
'bare-headed; with the head bare'

Corver (2007) proposes an analysis of this adverbial pattern; it features (i) a nominal small-clause structure with an adjectival predicate, (ii) word-internal predicate inversion, (iii) a Den Dikken-style (2006) linker *-s*, and (iv) Chomsky's (1993) copy-theory of movement as 'ingredients' for his analysis. In Section 4, I adapt this analysis to Dutch DMAs.

(24–25) together give Corver's (2007) analysis of *blootshoofds*. Let us unpack these structures in terms of the ingredients listed in the previous paragraph, starting with (24):

(24)

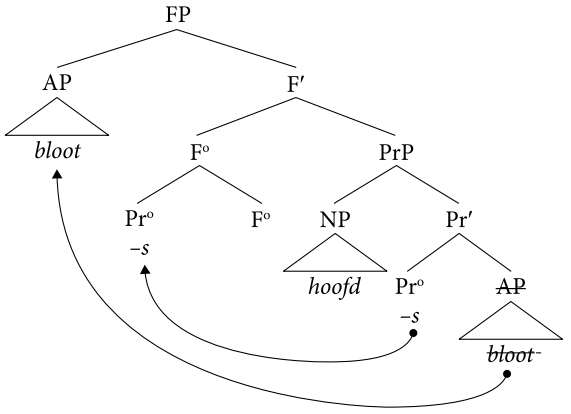


In (24), we find a small clause headed by Pr°, embedded in the structure.[10] The small clause consists of three parts: a nominal (*hoofd*) in [Spec,PrP], an adjectival predicate (*bloot*) as a complement to Pr°, and the head Pr° (*-s*). Pr° is taken to be functional and nominal in nature (see Corver (2007) for arguments bearing on the nature of *-s*). Note that in this way, the structural conditions for predication over a subject (in [Spec,PrP]) by a predicate (the complement of Pr°) are met; the predication is mediated by Pr°, a functional relator (Den Dikken 2006). In this light, *-s* is an affixal nominal copula.

Now let us turn to (25):

10. Note that Corver labels the head that spells out as *-s* as simply X°. To clearly identify the small clause and its head, I label them Pr°/PrP respectively, using Bowers's (1993) notation. Nothing hinges on this terminological choice; what is important is *-s* functions as a linker/relator (Den Dikken 2006).

(25)



In (25), to account for the observed order of subject and predicate, predicate inversion moves the AP *bloot* to a functional specifier position in the extended projection of the small clause. For reasons of locality, movement of Pr° to F° takes place. This extends the locality domain of the complement of Pr° to include [Spec,FP] as a valid landing site for movement of *bloot*. The analysis of *bloot-shoofds* is now almost complete; to account for the double occurrence of *-s*, Corver appeals to Chomsky's (1993) copy theory of movement; copies left in original positions of displaced elements crucially include information on their phonetic realization. At PF, only the highest copy in a movement chain is usually overtly realized, with other links/copies getting deleted. The absolute genitival construction is exceptional in that it features Spell-Out of a higher and lower copy of *-s*, yielding the pattern of prolepsis.

It is specifically the atypical Spell-Out of copies and the extra syntactic space afforded by the small clause analysis that interests me here. For now, the former needs some more discussion before we move on to an account of (variation in) Dutch DMAs. As mentioned above, Corver's account of proleptic *-s* in *bloot-shoofds* is exceptional in that it takes as premise that Spell-Out of multiple related copies is possible, whereas single Spell-Out (of the higher copy) appears to be the rule. To remediate this apparent issue, Corver borrows from Nunes (1995, 2004, cited in Corver 2007) the idea that copies that form part of a complex word may be exempt from the exigencies of a linearization algorithm such as Kayne's (1994) LCA and thus escape deletion. Specifically, Corver proposes the high copy of *-s* may form a complex word *bloot-s*, together with *bloot*. Since this copy of *-s* is invisible to the linearization algorithm inside this complex word, the algorithm 'accidentally' spells out *-s* twice: once as part of *bloot-s*, once as the only visible, lower link of its movement chain.

In support of this multiple-Spell-Out-of-copies analysis of prolepsis in these constructions, Corver presents evidence of variation in the *blootshoofds* pattern

concerning the occurrence of *-s*. Specifically, different speakers accept and produce different variants of *blootshoofds*, in which only the first or second instance of *-s* is pronounced, as in (26): key to Corver's analysis of the variation is that under the copy theory of movement, variable Spell-Out of different copies of displaced elements is quite easily explained, if not expected — whether the higher or lower *-s* is pronounced is a question of variable deletion of one of the two connected copies.

(26) a. *bloot-s-hoofd*
bare-s-head
b. *bloot-hoofd-s*
bare-head-s

The variation in (26) supports the analysis because variable Spell-Out of higher/lower copies is exactly what we find. Note that, while Spell-Out of the higher copy seems to be the rule, Spell-Out of lower copies has been proposed by a variety of authors (Pesetsky 1997; Bošković 2001; Bobaljik 2002; Bošković & Nunes 2007, all cited in Corver 2007). Accounting for the variation, Corver suggests that the formation of a complex word including one of the copies of *-s* (which, recall, ultimately yields the pattern of prolepsis) may apply optionally, meaning not all derivations of the absolute genitival construction permit double Spell-Out of *-s*. In these cases, the order of Pr° and F° may vary as in (27) (adapted from Corver 2007).[11] The idea is that this has consequences for the cliticization of the higher copy of *-s* onto *bloot*; Corver raises the possibility that PF requirements force strict adjacency between *bloot* and *-s*, and that F° cannot intervene. If F° does not intervene (27a), cliticization of *-s* onto *bloot* is possible, the higher copy of *-s* survives at PF and thus is linearized/pronounced while the lower one is deleted. If F° does intervene (27b), cliticization of *-s* onto *bloot* is impossible, the higher copy of *-s* does not survive at PF, and the only way to salvage the derivation is to delete it, in which case the lower copy is ultimately spelled out.

(27) a. $[_{FP}$ *bloot* $[_{F'}$ $[_{F°}$ *-s* $[F°]]$ $[_{PrP}$ *hoofd* $[_{Pr'}$ *-s* ~~*bloot*~~$]]]]$
b. $[_{FP}$ *bloot* $[_{F'}$ $[_{F°}$ $[F°]$ *-s*$]$ $[_{PrP}$ *hoofd* $[_{Pr'}$ *-s* ~~*bloot*~~$]]]]$

11. An anonymous reviewer doubts if the structures in (27) can be told apart at Spell-Out/linearization; there is no hierarchical asymmetry between F° and Pr°, and since syntax 'sees' only hierarchical organization — not linear order — (27a) and (27b) are identical. However, this is a question of the particular implementation of head movement one adopts. Under the head-adjunction analysis — which Corver (2007) appears to implicitly adopt in distinguishing between the two structures in (27) — both orders are not only valid, but distinct (see Dékány 2018: 5). Under this analysis, then, (27a) and (27b) may be told apart and such PF-requirements concerning the adjacency of *-s* and its left-adjacent host may be formulated.

With this analysis of proleptic *-s* in Dutch *blootshoofds* in mind, Section 4 presents my analysis of the DMA data at issue. These patterns fall into place neatly if we take inspiration from the account of proleptic *-s* described above; the copy-theory-of-movement analysis provides the tools to deal with variable affix orders. Additionally, the small clause analysis allows us to house more morphological material, like a comparative *than*-phrase.

4. Accounting for DMAs, variable affix ordering, and variation

The main data driving this investigation of Dutch DMAs concern variation of the kind found in (11), repeated here as (28); the combination of diminutive morphology/*-s* with comparative morphology on manner adverbs is ill-formed in SD (witness (6), repeated here as (29)), but well-formed in some Dutch dialects.

(28) a. *Jan sluupt still-etje-s-er naor binnen dan Marie.*
Jan sneaks quiet-DIM-S-COMP to inside than Marie
(North Brabant Dutch)

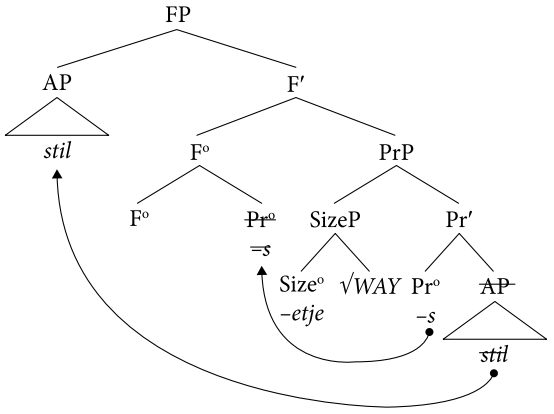
b. *Jan slûpt still-er-tje-s nor binnen dan Marie.* (Urk Dutch)
Jan sneaks quiet-COMP-DIM-S to inside than Marie
Both: 'Jan is sneaking inside more quietly than Marie.'

(29) a. **Marie beweegt still-etje-s-er dan Jan.*
Marie moves quiet-DIM-S-COMP than Jan
**Marie beweegt still-er-tje-s dan Jan.*
Marie moves quiet-COMP-DIM-S than Jan
Both: 'Marie moves more quietly than Jan.'

In Section 3.1, we have seen how Dutch DMAs have been analyzed by Corver (2021), and the empirical and theoretical challenges the extant account faces. Section 3.2 discussed theorizing in the domain of Dutch absolute genitival constructions (which feature *-s*, like DMAs). Here I synthesize the above into an analysis of Dutch DMAs that captures the problematic DMAs featuring comparative morphology, the observed variable affix orders, and points to the locus of variation.

I propose a new analysis of 'simplex' DMAs like *stilletjes* in (30), on which I later build to model comparative DMAs.

(30)



In (30) we find morphology familiar from the previous account of Dutch DMAs (an adjectival predicate (*stil*), the diminutive morpheme as Size° heading the nominal layer dominating the root √WAY), now cast in a structure inspired by that proposed for Dutch *blootshoofds* (featuring *-s* as Pr° heading a small clause).[12] Whereas Corver's (2021) model of *zachtjes* saw the adjective predicate over the manner nominal as an attributive modifier in [Spec,FP], in (30) this predication relation is established in a small clause that takes the manner nominal as its

12. An anonymous NB reviewer questions whether this syntactic analysis predicts a compositional semantics that is consistent with the contrast illustrated in (17), where the diminutive appears to adjust the meaning of the adverbial scale that *stil* is associated with. To them, (30) instead predicts a meaning paraphrased as *(op) een stil maniertje* '(in) a quiet little way/manner', rather than something that translates roughly as *in a quiet-ish way/manner*. This could suggest, for instance, that *-etje* is an exponent of a degree projection related to the adjectival predicate, rather than to the extended (nominal) projection of the manner root. This point is well taken, and I will merely offer another perspective on (30) that may make the position of the diminutive more plausible.; another way of looking at (30) is to take it to be the structural configuration in which the diminutive expresses emotive meaning (see Section 2.2 for discussion), like we have seen in the nominal *brilletje* in (4). To me, an endearing function/reading of the diminutive in *stilletjes* is not excluded (cf. De Clercq et al. (2023: 8) about the endearing function of diminutives in Czech adjectives). Nor is the endearing reading mutually exclusive with what I dub the size-related reading: (17b) can be used to express both at once, it seems to me — in fact, I take the alternative with the degree head *vrij (stil)* as a possible strategy to keep the size-/degree-related meaning, while eliminating the endearing component of meaning from the adverbial. Under this view, the diminutive exponent seems to be either polyfunctional or non-compositional in realizing its two commonly associated meanings simultaneously, in a single position. Although this is merely tentative, see De Belder et al. (2014) for non-compositional use diminutive morphology from a cross-linguistic perspective. Note finally, that the reviewer's objection also extends to Corver's (2021) analysis of simplex DMAs, as far as I can tell. For an analysis of the diminutive as a realization of a degree head in Dutch DMAs see De Belder (2022).

subject in [Spec,PrP]. Like in Corver (2021), the diminutive morpheme is found dominating the manner root. Contra Corver, it is not merged in the extended projection of an (already categorized) nominal, but directly with the root. This preempts the need for a (silent) categorizing head n^o to be merged with the root which, I remind the reader, is one part of the complex head [$_{n^o}$ √WAY+n] which Corver takes to Spell-Out as *-s*. The observed word-internal order is derived through predicate inversion of *stil* across the small clause subject to [Spec,FP]. Lieke Hendriks (p.c.) raises the question what motivates this predicate inversion. Borrowing from Corver (2021), I propose the diminutive morpheme must have a left-adjacent host to suffix onto, lest the derivation crash at PF. Predicate inversion provides such a host in *stil*. This inversion is enabled by domain-extending head movement of *-s*/Pr^o to F^o. Linearization deletes the higher copy of *-s* (because it cannot cliticize onto *stil* due to intervention of F^o), and the lower copy of *stil*, yielding *stil-etje-s*.[13]

Second, to account for DMAs like *stilletjeser*/*stillertjes (dan Jan)*, I take the idea that related meaning reflects related underlying structure as a null hypothesis, and propose they share the underlying structure of *stilletjes*. For this reason, they are analyzed very similarly to *stilletjes*, in (31–32) respectively.[14]

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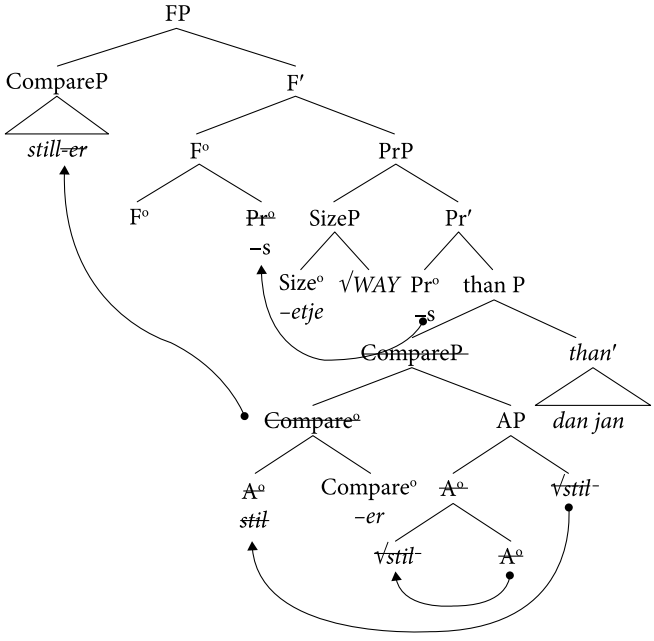
13. Again, the reviewer's comment about the ordering of F^o relative to Pr^o in the complex head [$_{F^o}$ [F^o Pr^o]] applies. Adopting Corver's (2007) implicit implementation of head movement as adjunction, I contend that [$_{F^o}$ [F^o Pr^o]] can be told apart from [$_{F^o}$ [Pr^o F^o]], and that linearization of the two orderings thus may be sensitive to the difference between left- and right-adjunction of the Pr^o to F^o. In (30) (and (31–32) based on (30)) right-adjunction of Pr^o takes places and derives the low Spell-Out of *-s* we observe. This implies that a pattern in which we find a high occurrence of *-s*, resulting from left-adjunction of Pr^o, is also possible, in parallel with *bloot-s-hoofd(-s)*. A DMA pattern like *net-s-je-s* (neat-S-DIM-S) can indeed be found using a quick Google Search, and is even attested in the Corpus of Contemporary Dutch (*Corpus Hedendaags Nederlands*), as in (i):

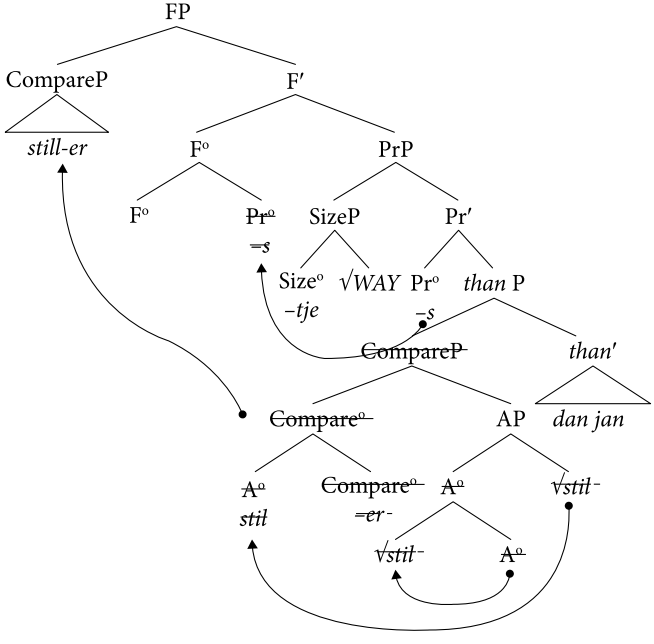
(i) *…die er wagens net-s-je-s uit de rij kwam pikken en afvoeren.*
…that there wagons neat-S-DIM-S out the queue came pick and tow.away
'…that came to neatly pick up and tow away cars there.'
I refer the reader to Dékány (2018) for a critical overview and assessment of the arguments for and against head movement as adjunction.

14. *-etje*/*-tje* are allomorphs of the Dutch diminutive. The analysis suggests PF/Spell-Out of the morpheme is sensitive to linearization of the complex word.

(31) *still-etje-s-er* *dan Jan*
quiet-DIM-S-COMP than Jan
'more quietly than Jan'



(32) *still-er-tje-s* *dan Jan*
quiet-COMP-DIM-S than Jan
'more quietly than Jan'



In my discussion of the analyses presented in (31–32), I restrict myself to the parts that differ from the analysis of *stilletjes* presented in (30). The main difference between (31–32) and (30) concerns the comparative morphology. In (31–32), comparative morphology is merged on top of the adjectival root *√stil*, in accordance with accounts of comparative morphosyntax (Alrenga et al. 2012; Bobaljik 2012). The comparative consists of the suffix *-er*, and the *than*-phrase *dan Jan*, introducing the standard of comparison. Differently from what happens in (30), in (31–32) it is not the base predicate *stil*, but the comparative-marked predicate *still-er* that inverts around the small clause subject to [Spec,FP], creating a copy and stranding the *than*-phrase. Note in the resultant configuration two copies of comparative *-er* 'straddle' both the diminutive morpheme/*-s*. To account for the variable order of the comparative suffix relative to the diminutive/*-s*, I appeal to the idea of partial Spell-Out/deletion of higher/lower copies of the same displaced element *still-er*. In (31) it is the lower copy of *-er* that spells out while the higher is deleted, yielding its word-final position in *still-etje-s-er*, and vice versa in (32), yielding *still-er-tje-s*.[15] This raises the question of what regulates the Spell-Out and deletion of the higher/lower copy of *-er*. The implementation of discontinuous Spell-Out in (31), with concomitant partial deletion of a high and low copy of a displaced element, is reminiscent of Fanselow and Ćavar's (2002) idea of distributed deletion, applied word-internally. To them, a displaced constituent undergoes distributed deletion if its subconstituents bear different semantico-pragmatic features attracted to/checked by distinct functional heads in distinct (high/low) positions; in such cases, different parts of the constituent are differentially deleted/spelled out in different (derived v. *in situ*) positions. If no features of the subconstituents 'pull' the Spell-Out of the displaced element to different positions, regular movement obtains, in which the higher copy is fully spelled out, and the lower one fully deleted at PF. The former case could be what ultimately yields the *still-etje-s-er*-pattern, whereas the latter yields the *still-er-tje-s*-pattern. This raises the question what semantico-pragmatic effect drives distributed deletion in the *still-etje-s-er* case. I want to tentatively propose that this is due to focus. Fanselow and Ćavar observe that, in the Croatian and German split-XP constructions they account for, the right part of the split constituent (i.e., the part of the split XP Spelled-Out in the lower copy) is put in primary focus relative to the left part

15. The idea of discontinuous Spell-Out of a word/partial Spell-Out of copies has a precedent in the literature on Dutch comparatives: Corver (2005) deals with double comparatives in Dutch (such as *lang-er-der*, long-COMP-COMP) by appealing to partial Spell-Out of copies of displaced *lang-er* as well; the second *-(d)er* is a partial Spell-Out of a copy in (i) (adapted from Corver 2005):

(i) $[_{\text{ComparP}}$ Spec $[_{\text{Compar}'}$ ~~*lang-er*~~ $[_{\text{AP}}$ *lang-er*$]]]$ (> *langer-(d)er*)

(i.e., the part of the split XP Spelled-Out in the higher copy). If the same holds for the distributed deletion posited above, this suggests the difference between *still-er-tje-s* and *still-etje-s-er* is that the latter (derived through distributed deletion) construction puts into focus the comparative meaning of the complex DMAs (the right, focal part of the split constituent being the comparative *-er* morpheme). As possible evidence of this, consider the following: many (though not all) speakers of (Standard or dialectal) Dutch turn out to prefer one of the forms of comparative DMAs over the other.[16] One such SD speaker, who generally prefers the *still-er-tje-s* pattern if presented as a comparative without an explicit *than*-phrase, states their preference changes when an explicit *than*-phrase is present, claiming it is exactly because of the added focus on the comparison that the *than*-phrase provides. That is: their preference changes as in (33).

(33) *stillertjes* > *stilletjeser* → *stilletjeser dan Jan* > *stillertjes dan Jan*

Furthermore, Likert-scale data from people judging comparative DMAs are consistent with this. Table 1 presents preliminary data from our second *Meertens Panel* questionnaire (run June 2023 — August 2023, $N=174$). The table presents the absolute numbers of ratings of different comparative forms of *zachtjes* and *stilletjes*. Informants rated 'fill-in-the-blank' sentences from 1 (labelled 'ungrammatical, no one speaking my dialect would ever say this') to 5 (labelled 'grammatical, I or a fellow speaker of my dialect say this) with the adverbs in question on the blanks. The test sentences for the forms of *zachtjes*/*stilletjes* are given in (34–35) respectively. As the table shows, all comparative DMAs are rated 5 by a minority of speakers. Note that (34–35) contain *than*-phrases. Also, for both DMAs the comparatives ending in *-er* appear to be rated more highly by more people.[17] Although this deserves a more thorough (statistical) examination than I can provide here, I suggest one explanation is that the *than*-phrase provided in the test sentences puts more focus on the comparison, favoring the *-er*-final forms, as expected on the distributed deletion account.

(34) *Jan praat … dan Marie.*
Jan talks … than Marie
"Jan talks more softly than Marie."

(35) *Marie sluipt … dan Jan de trap op.*
Marie sneaks … than Jan the stairs up
"Marie is sneaking up the stairs more quietly than Jan."

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16. Informants have such preferences even if they do not fully accept either form. This is a puzzling fact that deserves closer investigation. I leave this for future research.

17. Although not by all informants. This too I leave for future research.

Table 1. Likert-scale judgments of different forms of DMAs

DMA	1	2	3	4	5
zachtjeser	113	15	16	12	18
zachtertjes	157	11	2	3	1
stilletjeser	134	11	13	11	5
stillertjes	151	14	6	2	1

To complete this account of variable affix ordering as the result of distributed deletion, I briefly touch upon the question of syntactic implementation. As an anonymous reviewer commented on a previous draft of this paper, under standard assumptions PF/linearization is insensitive to semantico-pragmatic information. Fanselow and Ćavar (2002) implement their idea of distributed deletion through checking/attraction of syntactic features in Spec-head configurations. In this way, linearization/PF is made sensitive to semantics-pragmatics indirectly through mediation of an abstract syntactic feature. A semantico-pragmatic effect such as focus can be thought of as a feature [Foc] on the focused (sub)constituent. To Fanselow and Ćavar, it is the strength of such a feature that determines if/in what position (sub)constituents are spelled out (either through normal means, or in a distributed deletion-fashion). A way of implementing the above then, is to posit an optional [Foc] feature on the Compar^{o} *-er* which percolates up to ComparP. Since it is the presence of an overt *than*P that appears to affect the rate of acceptance of the different affix orderings, I propose the [Foc] feature of Compar^{o} is checked in [Spec,*than*P], against a similar feature on *than*^{o}. Given an overt *than*P appears to put focus on the comparison, [Foc] is strong on overt *than*^{o}, deriving the effect of distributed deletion/discontinuous Spell-Out of the DMA.

Finally, the analysis of DMAs in SD and Dutch dialects presented here points to a clearly identifiable locus of variation between SD and dialects; the featural composition of Pr^{o}. The difference between the (narrow) syntax of simplex and comparative DMAs boils down to the size of the small clause complement: SD only allows an AP-sized, but not *than*P-sized complement, some dialects allow both. This difference is straightforward to capture: it is uncontroversial that syntactic heads impose restrictions on their complements. Furthermore, the Borer-Chomsky Conjecture (Borer 1983; Chomsky 1995) holds that syntactic variation between languages be restricted to the featural make-up of functional heads. Given *-s* is functional, we can model the difference between SD and dialects in terms of c-selectional features of *-s* as follows (36):

(36) c-selectional features of *-s* in SD and Dutch dialects:
-s [+__ AP]
[+/− __ *than*P]

Summarizing, the analyses of simplex and comparative DMAs in SD and dialects described above have the following benefits:

i. The basic syntactic structure of DMAs is uniform between SD and dialects.
ii. Variation in variable affix ordering in dialects is captured at PF/in terms of linearization, not narrow syntax.
iii. The locus of variation between SD and dialects (in terms of the (un)well-formedness of comparative DMAs) is compliant with the Borer-Chomsky Conjecture.

5. Conclusion

I have presented new, empirical and theoretical, arguments that suggest that the extant analysis of the structure of DMAs in SD and dialects is inadequate. A novel analysis answers questions of the nature of their constituent parts (the diminutive morpheme and *-s*), captures both simplex and comparative DMAs, and accounts for remarkable variable affix ordering in the latter, all while upholding general principles of a uniform and simple narrow syntactic component.

Some questions remain, such as the structure of superlative DMAs, and the nature of FP (the highest node dominating DMAs in my analysis), which I leave for future research.

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