3

Perspectives on Dutch syntax

The Dutch grammatical tradition has been deeply influenced by the German nineteenth-century 'logical analysis' (Becker 1827), itself a descendant of the seventeenth-century French *grammaire raisonnée* (Arnauld et Lancelot 1667), which was felt to provide a more suitable framework for language teaching than the classical grammatical tradition handed down from the Middle Ages. In the logical analysis, the object of inquiry is the proposition as an expression of thought; syntax is the study of the way parts of speech combine to form a proposition.

In the Netherlands, the logical analysis was introduced in Roorda (1852), and its application to school grammar found a culmination point in Den Hertog (1892–1896). Den Hertog ([1892] 1972, vol. 1: 8–11) presents his work as eclectic, including elements from what he calls the 'morphological' approach as well, and emphasizes the need to consider form and meaning in tandem. This has since been a recurrent theme in Dutch twentieth-century approaches to syntax, with proper attention to both form and meaning constituting a kind of shibboleth of the right linguistic persuasion (especially in European-structuralist and functionalist circles).

Den Hertog ([1892] 1972, vol. 1: 15–16) observes that mere juxtaposition of words does not make a proposition (*zin*) and identifies the finite verb (*persoonsvorm*) as the crucial ingredient of the proposition (following F. Kern 1888). The term *persoonsvorm* is motivated by the fact that the morphology of the finite verb reflects the person features of the subject, suggesting that the finite verb by itself is a concentrated expression of the proposition as a whole.

Persoonsvorm is one of a range of vernacular technical terms, mostly of seventeenth-century origin, replacing the Latin-based forms found in other European grammatical traditions. Others are *onderwerp* 'subject,' *gezegde* 'predicate,' *voorwerp* 'object,' *naamwoord* 'noun,' *werkwoord* 'verb,' *lidwoord* 'determiner,' *voegwoord* 'complementizer/conjunction,' *voorzetsel* 'preposition,' *bijwoord* 'adverb,' *hulpwerkwoord* 'auxiliary,' *bepaling* 'adjunct,' etc. Of these, *gezegde* is a term that might cause confusion, as Den Hertog restricts it to the set of verbal elements, excluding the complements of the verb. In Dutch school

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grammar, then, the clause is typically analyzed as a tripartite entity, consisting of a subject, a verbal piece ('gezegde'), and an object.

The idea that the finite verb occupies a key position in the Dutch clause remains prominent in later structuralist approaches. Thus, the prominent structuralist Van der Lubbe states that "the *persoonsvorm* is like a 'pivot' on which all other parts of speech hinge" ([1958] 1978: 272). Van der Lubbe refers in this passage to the theory of topological fields, dividing the clause in an initial field (German *Vorfeld*), a middle field (*Mittelfeld*), and a final field (*Nachfeld*), proposed by Drach (1937), and introduced in Dutch linguistics by Paardekooper (1955).

In Drach's system, the middle field is occupied by the finite verb alone (Drach 1937: 17), with material in the initial field linking to the context and material in the final field containing the main statement (see Scaglione 1981: 134; this is also the way the topological field theory has been applied to Danish, see Diderichsen 1946: 151). But Paardekooper defines the initial field and the final field in terms of obligatory adjacency: in the initial field, we find obligatory adjacency of the finite verb (*persoonsvorm*) and whichever element appears to the left of it (the subject or some other initial constituent), as well as between the finite verb and weak pronouns following it; in the final field, we find adjacency between the clause-final verb position and particles and secondary predicates to its left. (Extraposed material appears not in the final field but in a kind of appendage, called *uitloop*.)

As observed by Merckens (1961), this analysis allows one to conclude that the *position* of the finite verb (in the initial field in independent clauses, in the final field in dependent clauses) is a linguistic sign in itself, indicating the presence or absence of subordination. In later versions of the topological fields analysis, the two verb positions have been interpreted as flagpoles separating the three fields, leading to the current standard topology in (3.1):

(3.1) *Topological fields*

Initial field	Left bracket	Middle field	Right bracket	Final field
subject/fronted elements	*Vfin*	*clitics/objects/ adverbs/particles/ predicates*	*Vfin/Vinfin*	*extraposed material*

The analysis in (3.1) ties the topological fields analysis together with the much older concept of the sentence bracket (German *Satzklammer*), a concept which Scaglione (1981: 33) traces back to the sixteenth century.

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The prominent position of the finite verb is also characteristic of the early generative analyses of Dutch (and German) clause structure, for example in Bach's (1962) idea that main clause word order is the result of a single transformation positioning the finite verb. Also in Den Besten's (1977) ground-breaking analysis of the verb-second pattern, we find that the key operation positions the finite verb in its designated position, followed by another fronting operation (into the initial field) to ensure that the verb ends up in second position.

The analysis of the clause in (3.1), with the verb occupying two distinct positions, naturally leads to the question which of the two might be considered the more basic position. Since the object is placed before or after the verb, depending on whether the verb occupies the right or left bracket position, this question also relates to the question of basic word-order typology (SOV or SVO) or phrase structure typology (head-final or head-initial).

These questions may be addressed in various ways. From a diachronic perspective, one might speculate that one of the verb positions could be a syntactic innovation. Thus, Vennemann (1973:30) argues that the clause-final verb position is historically more basic, in line with the presumed head-final structure of the Proto-Indo-European clause. However, the basic pattern in (3.1) was already in place in the earliest attested stages of the Germanic languages (Wackernagel 1892: 426, Axel 2007), making the argument less compelling. From a typological perspective, it is tempting to consider the left bracket position of the verb as the more basic one, as Dutch shows tell-tale signs of head-initial structure in the position of the determiner, the adposition, and the complementizer in the DP, PP, and CP (see Zwart 1997a, also Kooij 1973). However, it should be noted that this argument presupposes a view of phrase structure in which these (or in fact all) phrases are endocentric (i.e. headed) and have D, P, and C as their heads. This view only became commonplace in the Principles-and-Parameters stage of generative grammar (from 1981 on), and in the pre-generative structuralist tradition it was not common to think of PPs and CPs (i.e. embedded clauses marked by the presence of a complementizer) as endocentric (see Bloomfield 1933: 194, Van der Lubbe [1958] 1978: 74; an early endocentric head-initial analysis is De Groot 1949, but he lacked the modern notion of 'head,' speaking of a *core* rather than a head, and taking the subject to be the clausal core). In the generative tradition, then, the question of the basic position of the verb was decided in terms of a syntactic derivation, where it was concluded that the simplest derivation moves the finite verb from the clause-final position to the second position in designated contexts (Koster 1975, Den Besten 1977). This settled the debate: the right-bracket position of the verb has since been accepted as the more basic one, and Dutch must be regarded as an SOV language.

We return to the issue of the basic position of the verb and the typological characterization of Dutch in terms of headedness in part III, chapter 9.

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I conclude this section with a brief survey of treatments of Dutch syntax after Den Hertog. Van Wijk (1909) is conceived in the tradition of Den Hertog, but has many acute observations on Dutch syntax, and is less confused about the notion of 'gezegde' (predicate), defining it simply as the clause minus its subject (1909: 27). W. de Vries (1910–1911) and (1914) are important but relatively inaccessible studies on Dutch syntax and syntactic analysis more generally. De Vries (1910–1911) is essentially a study of linguistic phenomena the presence of which is not dictated by logic. Much more than Den Hertog, De Vries emphasizes the 'illogical' nature of grammatical expression, and his ambition is to identify precisely those 'illogical' elements of natural language and to explain their role in the system of grammar. De Vries (1914) is concerned with the definition of subject and predicate. Both works take the spoken language as the object of study, and show a remarkable sensitivity to dialect features and elements of discourse and information structure. Possibly influenced by De Vries was his cousin G. S. Overdiep, who also focused on the spoken language, and wrote a systematic syntax of Dutch from the perspective of register ('stylistic grammar'; Overdiep [1937] 1949). His work was carried on by G. A. van Es, who wrote a brief college-level treatment of Dutch syntax (Van Es 1966) and later undertook a long-term descriptive project on the syntax of modern Dutch, together with his associate P. P. J. van Caspel (Van Es and Van Caspel 1971–1975).

The foremost representative of the European structuralist tradition in the Netherlands was A. W. de Groot, whose *Structurele syntaxis* (1949) was the first systematic treatment of Dutch syntax outside the tradition of school grammar. Its influential discussion of the phrase structure and clausal organization of Dutch was further developed by Van der Lubbe ([1958] 1978) and Paardekooper (1955, 1963). Paardekooper, a student of Van Wijk, contributed much in the way of terminology and methodology, and steadily expanded his 'concise' syntax of Dutch until it measured close to a thousand densely printed pages (Paardekooper 1986). Other structuralist monographs on Dutch syntax are De Witte and Wijngaards (1961) and De Schutter (1974a). Many important articles from the structuralist period have been collected in Hoogteijling (1967).

The first book-length treatment of Dutch syntax from a generative perspective was Kraak and Klooster (1968). The authors stress the importance of traditional grammar, mentioning in particular Den Hertog and Overdiep, and the work is a pleasant mix of insights from traditional and contemporary grammatical analysis. Later textbooks (Van den Toorn [1973] 1984, Vandeweghe 2000) display a similar eclecticism (though Klooster 2001 is wholly traditional). This tradition of description and analysis also underlies two recent attempts at a synthesis, the more traditional *Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkunst* (Geerts *et al.* 1984, Haeseryn *et al.* 1997) and the more generative oriented *Modern Grammar of Dutch* (Broekhuis

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1994, 1999, 2002, Broekhuis, Keizer, and Den Dikken 2003; cf. Broekhuis and Van Riemsdijk 1998).

Finally, recent years have seen the publication of two lengthy original monographs on Dutch syntax: J. de Vries (2001), focusing on spoken Dutch, and Ebeling (2006), a systematic analysis of form–meaning correspondence in the syntax of Dutch.

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