(Semi-)autonomous subordination in Dutch: Structures and semantic–pragmatic values

An Van linden [*], Freek Van de Velde

Department of Linguistics, University of Leuven & Research Foundation Flanders – FWO,
Blijde-Inkomststraat 21, Postbus 3308, B-3000 Leuven, Belgium

Abstract

This article presents an analysis of autonomous and semi-autonomous subordination patterns in Dutch, some of which have so far gone unnoticed. It proposes a four-way classification of such constructions with the general subordinator *dat* ('that'), drawing on Internet Relay Chat corpus data of Flemish varieties. Generalizing over the four types and their various subtypes distinguished here, we find that they all share the semantic property of expressing interpersonal meaning, and most of them also have exclamative illocutionary force. We propose a diachronic explanation for this shared semantic–pragmatic value in terms of the concept of hypoanalysis, and assess to what extent our proposal meshes with extant ellipsis accounts of the patterns studied.
© 2013 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Subordination; Insubordination; Interpersonal meaning; Exclamative force; Hypoanalysis; Dutch

1. Introduction

Traditionally, subordination is taken to imply a hierarchical organization of clauses: subordinate clauses, as the term suggests, 'depend' on main clauses, that is, they function as a constituent of their main clause. Their 'secondary' status vis-à-vis the main clause is typically reflected by the absence of their own illocution (Lehmann, 1988; Verstraete, 2005). While this is all uncontroversially true for typical uses of subordinate clauses, there seem to be some patterns that defy this traditional analysis. Subordinate clauses can occasionally be found to function (semi-)autonomously. In some of these cases, the main clause has shrunk to a single word, in other cases, the main clause has disappeared, and in yet other cases, the main clause is not even recoverable. In this article, we will focus on a range of autonomous and semi-autonomous subordination patterns in Dutch introduced by the general subordinator *dat* ('that'), some of which have largely escaped the attention of linguistic scholars. We put forward a typology of four basic types (each with their respective subtypes), and we hypothesize a shared origin in terms of Croft's (2000) concept of 'hypoanalysis'.

A first type is formed by constructions that feature (fully) autonomous subordinate *dat*-clauses, as illustrated in (1a) (cf. Verstraete et al., 2012). Constructions like (1a) lack any explicit matrix element, and have been labelled 'insubordinated' constructions in Evans (2007, see also 1993). In particular, insubordinated constructions use markers normally associated with subordination, but function as independent clauses (Evans, 2007:367). A comparison of (1b), which illustrates a full-fledged complex construction, with (1c), with main clause construal, shows that complementizer *dat* and verb-final word order, also present in (1a), are markers of subordination in Dutch.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +32 16324780; fax: +32 16324767.
  E-mail addresses: An.Vanlinden@arts.kuleuven.be (A. Van linden), Freek.Vandevelde@arts.kuleuven.be (F. Van de Velde).

(1) (a) Dat hij dat nog mocht meemaken!
         CONJ he that PRT could experience
         'I never thought he would live to experience this!' (IC)[1]

     (b) Het is prachtig dat hij dat nog mocht meemaken!
         it   is great   CONJ he that PRT could experience
         'It is great that he was able to experience this!' (C)

     (c) Hij heeft dat nog mogen   meemaken.
         he   has   that PRT may.PRS experience
         'He was able to experience this' (C)

A second type concerns constructions in which a single matrix constituent is followed by a *dat*-clause which functions as its propositional complement. In the literature, examples have been noted with the matrix constituent being a (semantically specific type of) adjective or adverb, cf. (2) (see e.g. Bos, 1963; Aelbrecht, 2006).

(2) Misschien/ Goed da   Kris komt!
     perhaps/   good CONJ Kris comes
     'It is a good thing that/maybe Kris is coming!' (Aelbrecht, 2006:1, our translation)

Within this second type, which we will refer to as 'semi-insubordination', we believe that in addition to the adjectival and adverbial subtypes, a third subtype can be distinguished, which has so far gone unnoticed. This subtype has a nominal element preceding the *dat*-clause, and is illustrated in (3).

(3) Een opluchting dat   ik weer wedstrijden kan spelen
     a   relief   CONJ I   again games   can play
     'It is a relief that I can play games again' (IC)

A third type of (semi-)autonomous subordination patterns involves what we propose to label 'cleft-like' constructions. Like the semi-insubordination patterns (cf. (2)–(3)), they have one element preceding the *dat*-clause, but this element bears a very different relation to the following *dat*-clause than the ones in (2)–(3).

(4) Vuil dat   het er   was!
     dirty CONJ it   there was
     'That place was terribly dirty!' (Haeseryn et al., 1997:1435, our translation)

(5) Lummel dat   je   bent!
     lout   CONJ you   are
     'You are such a lout!' (De Rooij, 1967:108, our translation)

The functional equivalents of these constructions in (4′) and (5′) suggest that the element preceding the *dat*-clause conceptually belongs to the propositional content of the *dat*-clause, but has been put in sentence-initial position to enhance the exclamative force of the utterance, just like the cleft constituent in a cleft construction receives extra emphasis or prominence (Davidse, 2000). Note that what is topicalized in (4) and (5) is only the head of the constituent in (4′) and (5′); the elements functioning as degree modifiers of these heads are left out, as the cleft-like construction intrinsically expresses degree modification. It has been noted that the topicalized element is not restricted to the category of adjectives or nouns (cf. (4)–(5)), but belongs to a wide range of parts of speech (cf. Bos, 1963) or constituents. The generalization here is that the cleft-like construction can front any element that can be topicalized in Dutch clauses; another topicalization strategy, for instance, yields constructions like *Vuil was het er*. 'That place was DIRTY.', involving the topicalized element in clause-initial position and V2-word order.

(4′) Het was er   ontzettend vuil
     it   was there awfully   dirty
     'That place was awfully dirty! (Bos, 1963:191)

---

[1] The sources of our examples are marked with the abbreviations IC (own corpus of internet material), C (constructed examples), and CONDIV (CONDIV Corpus). The abbreviations used in the glosses include: CONJ:conjunction, DIM:diminutive, GEN: genitive, INTERJ:interjection, NEG:negation, PRS:present, PRT:particle, REL:relativizer.