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MIcrocomparative MOrphosyntactic REsearch (MIMORE): Mapping partial grammars of Flemish, Brabantish and Dutch☆

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Abstract

In this paper we discuss and analyze a set of correlations that we discovered using two of the large-scale Dutch dialect syntax databases available in the online tool MIMORE (the abbreviation of the MIcrocomparative MOrphosyntactic REsearch tool) (www.meertens.knaw.nl/mimore), i.e. DiDDD and DynaSAND. These correlations lead to the identification of several larger dialect groupings, basically to a typology of dialects. In particular, we investigate the following four empirical phenomena: subject doubling, demonstrative doubling, complementizer agreement and D-pronoun fronting in imperatives. We furthermore provide an analysis of these phenomena and for the typology, showing that the syntactic base structures are identical in the dialect groups and the derivations are highly similar. Parametrization arises at two points: lexical properties with respect to the spell out of ϕ and the trigger of subject doubling.

Keywords: Microvariation; Microparameters; (Morpho-)syntax; Subject doubling; Demonstrative doubling; Dutch (dialects)

1. Introduction

In recent years, the macro- and microcomparative syntax research community increasingly has been building and using online databases and tools. Some examples of microcomparative syntax research infrastructure can be found at www.dialectsyntax.org. Some examples of macrocomparative research infrastructure can be found at http://languagelink.let.uu.nl/tds/index.html.

One of the central research questions motivating the building of these infrastructures is: *Do we find clusters of correlating syntactic properties and if so, is it possible to reduce such clusters to abstract underlying building principles that explain the clusterings?* The hypothesis behind this question is that the syntax of a language or dialect is not an accidental collection of syntactic constructions but a system of interdependent interacting principles and/or constraints,

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as has been the common assumption in structuralist linguistics (cf. Weinreich, 1954) and in generative grammar throughout.

Before the advent of linguistic databases and tools it was only possible to investigate this question by looking at small sets of language varieties for which it was hard to determine whether the attested correlations were accidental or systematic. The online linguistic research infrastructure with data on large sets of language varieties has changed this now. It is to be expected that its availability will enhance the empirical basis of theoretical linguistic research considerably.

In this paper we discuss and analyze a set of correlations that we discovered using two of the large-scale Dutch dialect syntax databases available in the online tool MIMORE (the abbreviation of the MIcrocomparative MOrphosyntactic REsearch tool) (www.meertens.knaw.nl/mimore), i.e. DiDDD and DynaSAND.[1] These correlations lead to the identification of several larger dialect groupings, basically to a typology of dialects. In particular, we will investigate the following four empirical phenomena: subject doubling, demonstrative doubling, complementizer agreement and D-pronoun fronting in imperatives. We have provided an example from each of these phenomena in (1).

(1) a. Demonstrative doubling (from Brabantish)
Ik zag ***de*** **dieje**.
I saw the that
'I saw that one.'

b. Subject doubling (from Brabantish)
He-*de* **gij** da gezien?
have-you.w you.s that seen
'Have you seen that?'

c. Complementizer agreement (from Flemish)
A-*n* ze vur under werk leven, . . .
if-agr they for their work live, . . .
'If they live for their job, . . .'

d. D-pronoun fronting (from Brabantish)
Da lees maar!
That read part
'Read that!'

The paper is organized as follows. We start with a brief description of MIMORE, showing that such data collections and tools are indispensible if we want to discover and investigate correlations such as the ones at hand. Then a description is provided of the correlating morphosyntactic phenomena and their geographic distribution which is illustrated with maps. Finally, a syntactic analysis is provided that explains the typology that follows from these correlations. In turns out that the different surface varieties do not differ with respect to their underlying structures and the corresponding derivations. The differences are due to lexical properties, i.e. the possibility to spell out a head, a full projection or neither, and the specification of C as a generalized φ-Probe. On the basis of this analysis, South-Brabantish (i.e. the dialects spoken in the Belgian provinces of Antwerp and Belgian Brabant) can be characterized as a transitional zone between the dialects of Flemish and those of North-Brabant. In turn, the whole Brabantish area can be characterized as a transition zone between Flemish and northern Dutch.

2. MIMORE

2.1. MIMORE

MIMORE was developed to enable the researcher to search three Dutch dialect databases, GTRP, DiDDD, DynaSAND, at once and in a uniform way. In this way phonological and morphological properties (GTRP database), (morpho-)syntactic properties at the level of the nominal group (DiDDD database) and (morpho-)syntactic properties at the clausal level (DynaSAND database) can be related to each other. We will first describe the general functionality of MIMORE and then each of the individual databases.[2]

[1] DiDDD is an abbreviation of Diversity in Dutch DP Design, see Corver et al. (2007, 2013) for more information. DynaSAND is short for Dynamic Syntactic Atlas of the Dutch Dialects, see www.meertens.knaw.nl/sand.

[2] The MIMORE Educational Module (Pots et al., 2014; http://www.meertens.knaw.nl/mimore/educational_module/ gives an extensive description of the background and functionality of MIMORE, instructions and a number of exercises.