

Dutch comparative constructions

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1 Introduction of data

1.1 Intransitive comparatives

We see an asymmetry in case-marking options of the personal pronoun following the comparative marker *dan* between comparatives where *dan* is followed by a single DP (1)-(2) or by a clause (3)-(4):

- (1) Ik ben beter dan **jjj**. *dan+DP*
I.NOM am better than you.NOM
'I am better than you.'
- (2) Ik ben beter dan **jou**. *dan+DP*
I.NOM am better than you.ACC
'I am better than you.'
- (3) Ik ben beter dan (dat) **jjj** bent. *dan+clause*
I.NOM am better than that you.NOM are
'I am better than you are.'
- (4) *Ik ben beter dan (dat) **jou** bent. *dan+clause*
I.NOM am better than that you.ACC are
'(I am better than you are.)'

1.2 Transitive comparatives

People who use and accept (2) have two interpretations for a transitive comparative with an accusative pronoun following *dan*, see (5):

- (5) Jan slaat Suzan vaker dan jou. *dan+DP*
 Jan hits Suzan more.often than you.ACC
Interpretation 1: ‘Jan hits Suzan more often than he hits you.’
Interpretation 2: ‘Jan hits Suzan more often than you hit Suzan.’

The counterpart of (5) with a nominative marked pronoun is never ambiguous (6), just as the full clausal counterparts (7)-(8):

- (6) Jan slaat Suzan vaker dan jij. *dan+DP*
 Jan hits Suzan more.often than you.NOM
Interpretation: ‘Jan hits Suzan more often than you hit her.’
- (7) Jan slaat Suzan vaker dan hij jou slaat. *dan+clause*
 Jan hits Suzan more.often than he.NOM you.ACC hits
 ‘Jan hits Suzan more often than he hits you.’
- (8) Jan slaat Suzan vaker dan jij haar slaat. *dan+clause*
 Jan hits Suzan more.often than you.NOM her.ACC hit
 ‘Jan hits Suzan more often than you hit her.’

2 Problems

General problems in research on comparatives, discussed by among others Hankamer (1973), Hoeksema (1984), Hendriks (1995), Pancheva (2006, 2010), Broekhuis (2013):

- What is the status of the comparative particle (*dan* in this case)?
 - preposition
 - coordinator
 - subordinator
- What is the status of the complement of the comparative particle?
 - a single DP
 - a full clause + ellipsis

Specific problems with the Dutch data:

- Variation in case marking is unexplained in the literature
 - Ellipsis account explains only nominative case on complement of *dan*
 - Prepositional account explains only accusative case on complement of *dan*
- The ambiguity of the accusative pronoun in the transitive comparative construction is unexpected.

2.1 A possible solution

Based on a number of similarities between Greek and Dutch comparatives, I propose to use Merchant’s (2009) analysis for Greek for the Dutch cases, which gives us an interesting division between the two different *dan+DP* options in Dutch, cf. (1) and (2).

3 Greek comparatives

Examples from Merchant (2009: 135-138) illustrate the different Greek comparative constructions:

(9) *Full clausal comparative*

I Maria pezi kiθara kalitera **ap’oti** pezi kiθara o
 the.NOM Maria.NOM plays guitar better than.CLAUSAL plays guitar the.NOM
 Giannis.
 Giannis.NOM.

‘Maria plays the guitar better than Giannis plays the guitar.’

(10) *Reduced clausal comparative*

I Maria pezi kiθara kalitera **ap’oti** o Giannis.
 the.NOM Maria.NOM plays guitar better than.CLAUSAL the.NOM Giannis.NOM

‘Maria plays the guitar better than Giannis’

(11) *Phrasal comparative*

I Maria pezi kiθara kalitera **apo** ton Giannis.
 the.NOM Maria.NOM plays guitar better than.PHRASAL the.ACC Giannis.ACC

‘Maria plays the guitar better than Giannis.’

Because of the two different comparative markers (*apo* vs *ap’oti*) the different comparative constructions in Greek can be easily identified, and Merchant demonstrates that there are a number of differences between the comparatives which he summarizes as follows (Merchant 2009: 140):

	apo	ap’oti
allows only one pivot?	yes	no
allows only DP pivot?	yes	no
always marks a pivot with accusative?	yes	no
allows pied-piping?	yes	no
allows reflexive binding from matrix clause?	yes	no
licenses negative concord from matrix clause?	yes	no

Table 1: Properties of *apo* vs. *ap’oti* comparatives

3.1 Island effects in Greek comparatives

Based on the examples in (13) and (14), Merchant (2009: 142) makes the following observation about Greek comparatives:

(12) *Phrasal* comparatives in Greek show island sensitivity.

Clausal comparatives do not.

(13) *Phrasal comparative*

*Perisoteri anθropi menun sto kratos pu kivernai o Putin apo
more people live in.the state that governs the.NOM Putin.NOM than.PHRASAL
ton Bush.
the.ACC Bush.ACC

(lit.) 'More people live in the country that Putin governs than (live in the country that) Bush (governs)' (Merchant 2009: 151)

(14) *Reduced clausal comparative*

Perisoteri anθropi menun sto kratos pu kivernai o Putin ap'oti
more people live in.the state that governs the.NOM Putin.NOM than.CLAUSAL
o Bush.
the.NOM Bush.NOM

(lit.) 'More people live in the country that Putin governs than (live in the country that) Bush (governs)' (Merchant 2009: 150)

Conclusion:

- Phrasal comparatives cannot consist of a simple PP with the comparative marker selecting a base-generated DP.
- Clausal comparatives need an analysis that explains why island hood can be violated.

4 Merchant's analysis for Greek

The analysis Merchant (2009) proposes for the Greek phrasal and clausal comparatives is based on his analysis of island effects in ellipsis constructions.

4.1 Island effects in ellipsis

The difference in island effects found with these comparative constructions reminds us of the difference in island effects between sluicing and VP ellipsis (examples from Merchant (2008: 136,138)):

(15) *Sluicing*

- a. They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't remember which.
- b. *They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't remember which Balkan language they want to hire someone who speaks __.

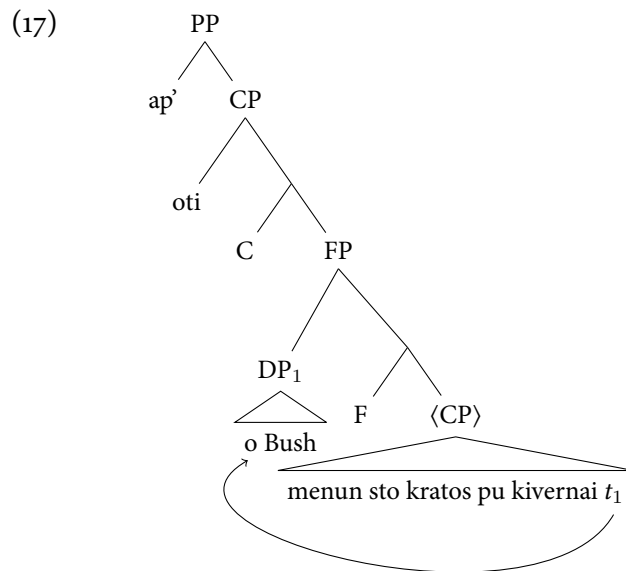
(16) *VP-ellipsis*

- a. *They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language but I don't remember which they do.

Based on these facts Merchant (2008) claims that movement out of an island is not a problem in itself (otherwise (15a) would be impossible). Unacceptability arises when a trace of movement out of an island survives at PF. The difference between sluicing and VP ellipsis is that in sluicing the ellipsis operation deletes a structure that includes all illicit traces of movement, while this is not the case in VP ellipsis.

4.2 Greek reduced clausal comparatives

To be able to explain that movement out of an island can take place in the reduced clausal comparative in (14), repeated below, Merchant (2009: 150) proposes the structure in (17):^{1,2}



1. F is a functional head carrying the ellipsis feature (*E* feature), that ensures deletion of its sister at PF.

2. Elided structure is indicated between '<>'

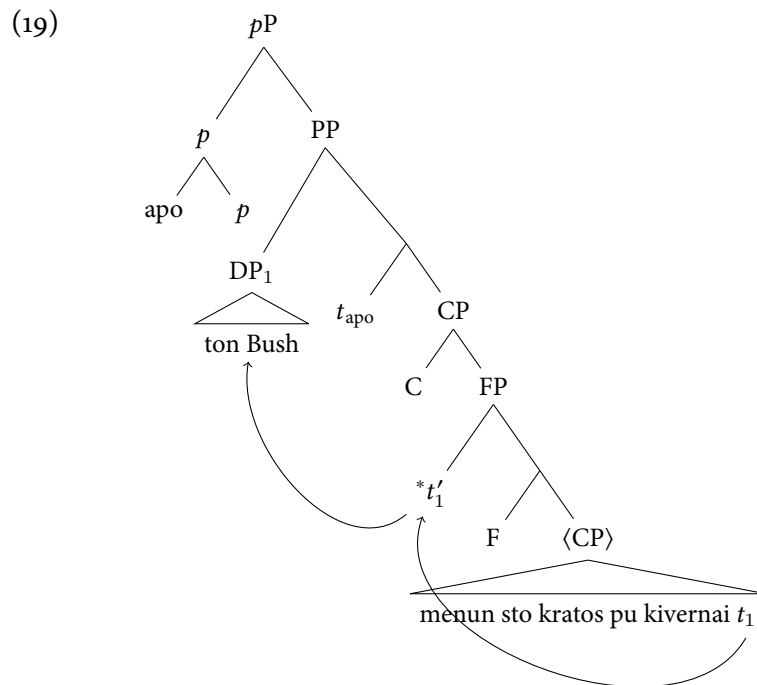
- (18) Perisoteri anθropi menun sto kratos pu kivernai o Putin apoti
 more people live in.the state that governs the.NOM Putin.NOM than.CLAUSAL
 o Bush.
 the.NOM Bush.NOM
 (lit.) ‘More people live in the country that Putin governs than (live in the country that) Bush
 (governs).’

Characteristics:

- *apoti* is split in a preposition *apo* selecting a CP with *oti*
- No illicit movement traces survive after ellipsis (just as in Merchant’s (2008) analysis for sluicing)

4.3 Greek phrasal comparatives

For the phrasal comparative we need a different structure, reflecting the fact that movement out of an island results in an unacceptable sentence. Based on this, Merchant (2009) proposes the structure in (19) for the phrasal comparative construction in (20):



(20) *Perisoteri anθropi menun sto kratos pu kivernai o Putin apo
 more people live in.the state that governs the.NOM Putin.NOM than.PHRASAL
 ton Bush.
 the.ACC Bush.ACC

‘More people live in the country that Putin governs than live in the country that Bush governs.’
 (Merchant 2009: 151)

Characteristics:

- a *pP* shell is used to create the extra movement step necessary to create a surviving trace
- Illicit trace ($*t'_1$) survives ellipsis

Benefits of Merchant’s (2009) analysis:

- Case-marking facts
- Island effects
- Interpretation
- p-like behavior of *apo*

5 Similarities between Dutch and Greek

- Case marking
 - Either a single DP with accusative case, or
 - a single DP or full clause with a comparative marker that is case transparent.
- The form of the comparative marker
 - *dan dat* resembles the structure of *ap’oti*
- The difference in island effects

Island effects found in Greek are replicated in Dutch, where the *dan+DP* comparative followed by an accusative pronoun (21) behaves differently than the *dan+DP* comparative followed by a nominative pronoun (22):

(21) *Ik lees meer boeken wanneer Jan ze aanraadt dan **jou**.
 I.NOM read more books which Jan them suggests than you.ACC

(Intended meaning: ‘I read more books when they are suggested by Jan than when they are suggested by you’)

(22) Ik lees meer boeken wanneer Jan ze aanraadt dan **zij**.
 I.NOM read more books when Jan them suggests than you.NOM

Intended meaning: ‘I read more books when they are suggested by Jan than when they are suggested by you’

5.1 Classifying Dutch comparatives as Greek comparatives

Based on these similarities between Dutch and Greek, I propose the following division of the Dutch comparative constructions:

- (23) Ik ben beter dan **jou**. *phrasal*
I.NOM am better than you.ACC
'I am better than you.'
- (24) Ik ben beter dan **jij**. *reduced clausal*
I.NOM am better than you.NOM
'I am better than you.'
- (25) Ik ben beter dan (dat) **jij** bent. *full clausal*
I.NOM am better than that you.NOM are
'I am better than you are.'

With this classification the full clausal comparative with *..dan jou bent*, (25), is not expected because (23) is not derived from the same underlying source as (24). This then explains the asymmetry in the data that we started out with.

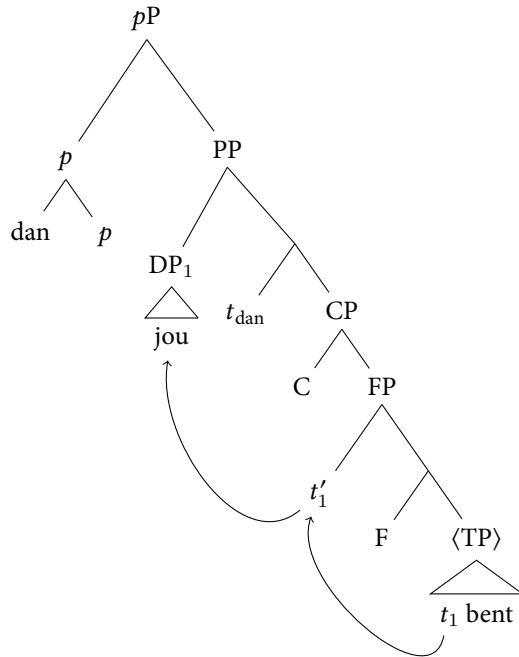
6 Merchant's analysis applied to Dutch

6.1 Dutch phrasal comparatives

I propose that the Dutch *dan+DP* comparative with the accusative pronoun following the comparative marker, (23), repeated below, can be analyzed in the same way as the Greek phrasal comparatives from Merchant's (2009) as shown in (27):

- (26) Ik ben beter dan **jou**.
I.NOM am better than you.ACC
'I am better than you.'

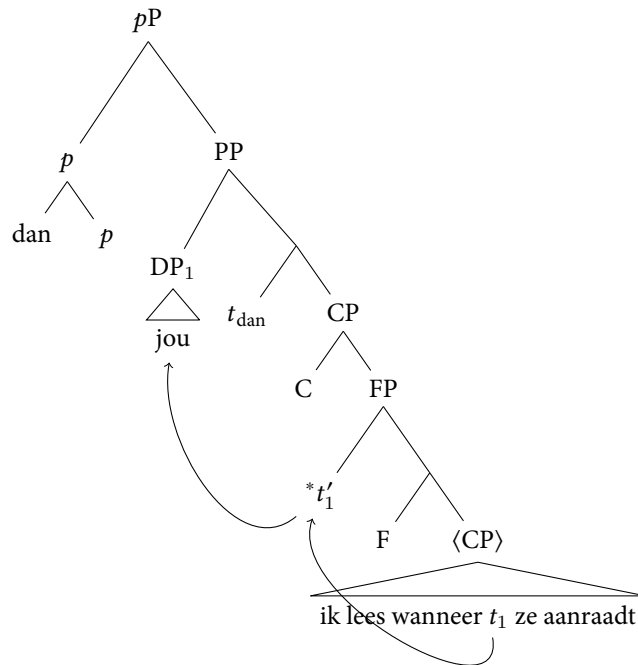
(27)



Crucial in this analysis is that even though this is a phrasal comparative, there is an underlying clausal structure. This is necessitated by the island effects discussed above. The example containing an island is repeated below and its structure is given in (29)

- (28) *Ik lees meer boeken wanneer Jan ze aanraadt dan jou.
I.NOM read more books which Jan them suggests than you.ACC
(Intended meaning: 'I read more books when they are suggested by Jan than when they are suggested by you')

(29)

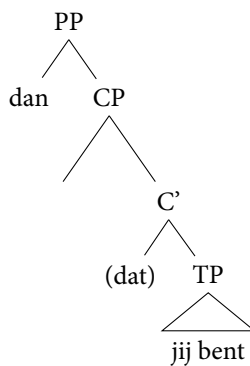


6.2 Dutch (reduced) clausal comparatives

If we apply Merchant's (2009) analysis of clausal comparatives to the Dutch full clausal comparative in (30) we get the structure in (31):

(30) Ik ben beter dan (dat) jij bent.
I.NOM am better than that you.NOM are
'I am better than you are.'

(31)



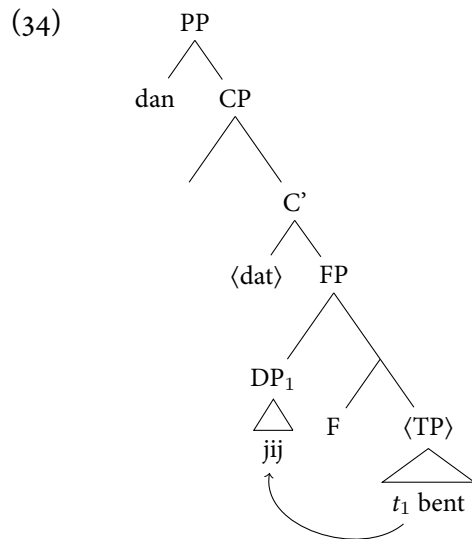
An important difference with Greek is that *dat* is always optional in Dutch full clausal comparatives.

However, a more crucial difference between Greek *ap'oti* and Dutch *dan dat* is found in the reduced clausal comparatives:

- (32) *Ik ben beter **dan dat** jij.
 I.NOM am better than that you.NOM
 ('I am better than you.')

- (33) I Maria pezi kiθara kalitera **ap'oti** o Giannis.
 the.NOM Maria.NOM plays guitar better than.CLAUSAL the.NOM Giannis.NOM
 'Maria plays the guitar better than Giannis' (Merchant 2009: 138)

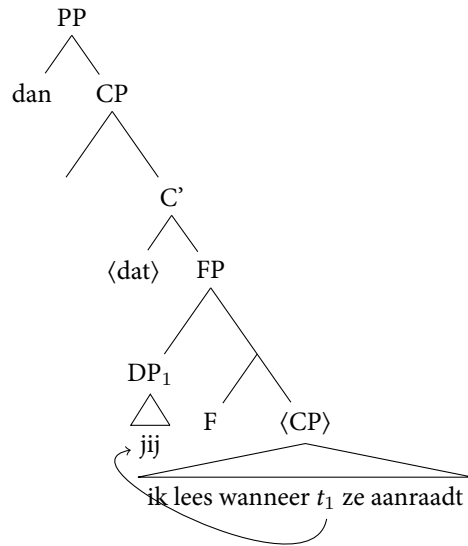
To get the correct structure for the reduced clausal comparative in Dutch we need to make sure *dat* is deleted when there is ellipsis of the lower clause:



If we now look at the reduced clausal comparative with an island in the lower clause (35), we get the structure in (36):

- (35) Ik lees meer boeken wanneer Jan ze aanraadt dan jij.
 I.NOM read more books when Jan them suggests than you.NOM
 Intended meaning: 'I read more books when they are suggested by Jan than when they are suggested by you'

(36)



6.3 Dutch ambiguous transitive comparatives

Besides the intransitive comparatives, I introduced data on the interpretation of transitive comparatives when *dan* is followed by a single DP. The data are repeated below:

(37) Jan slaat Suzan vaker dan **jou**.

Jan hits Suzan more.often than you.ACC

Interpretation 1: 'Jan hits Suzan more often than he hits you.'

Interpretation 2: 'Jan hits Suzan more often than you hit her.'

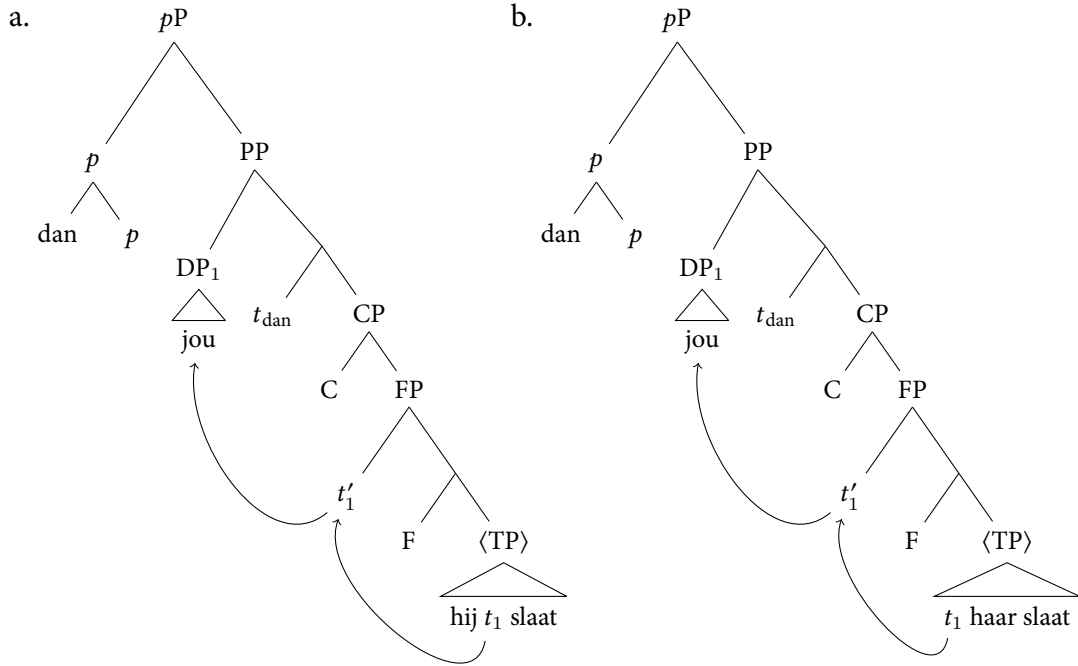
(38) Jan slaat Suzan vaker dan **jij**.

Jan hits Suzan more.often than you.NOM

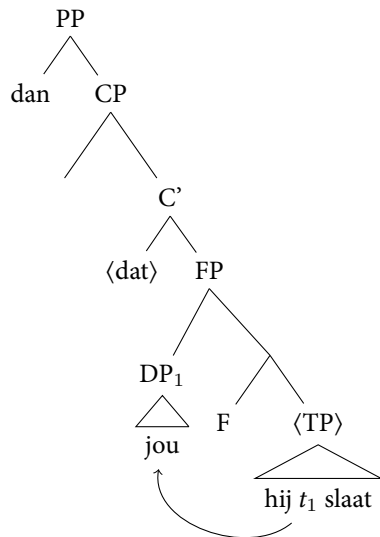
Interpretation: 'Jan hits Suzan more often than you hit her.'

With the analysis for phrasal and reduced clausal comparatives illustrated above, the ambiguity of (37) follows naturally, because the accusative case on the personal pronoun can have different origins:

(39) *Phrasal comparative*



(40) *Reduced clausal comparative*



7 Related puzzles

A benefit of the analysis proposed here is that some Dutch prepositional constructions resembling the comparative constructions discussed above can now be analyzed in the same way, reflecting their structurally similar behavior.

7.1 *Na/voor* ('after/before')

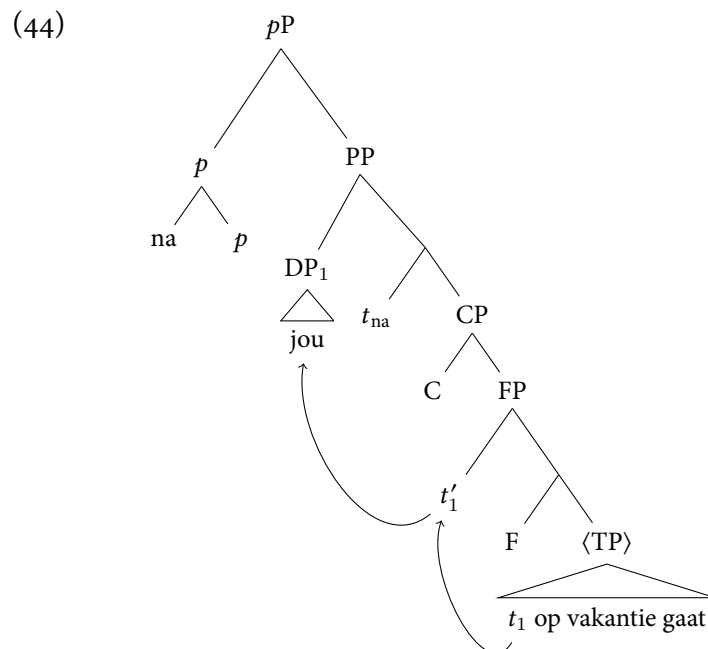
7.1.1 Data

The preposition *na* ('after') can be followed by a single DP or by a clause:³

- (41) Ik ga op vakantie na jou. *na+DP*
 I.NOM go on holiday after you.ACC
 'I go on holiday after you.'
- (42) *Ik ga op vakantie na jij. *na+DP*
 I.NOM go on holiday after you.NOM
 ('I go on holiday after you.')
- (43) Ik ga op vakantie nadat jij (op vakantie) gaat. *na+clause*
 I.NOM go on holiday after.that you.NOM on holiday goes
 'I go on holiday after you go.'

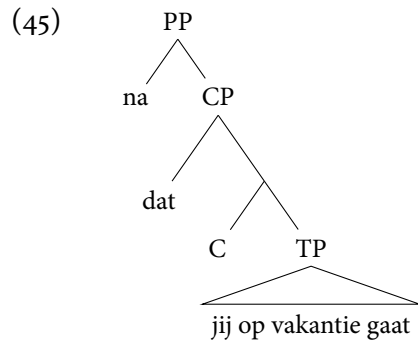
7.1.2 Analysis

The *na+DP* examples resemble the phrasal comparative constructions and can be analyzed in the same way:



3. In the following examples and discussion I only use *na* but *voor* ('before') behaves in the same way. However, examples with *na* are more transparent, because *voor* can sometimes also have a beneficiary reading in stead of a temporal one, which would lead to differences in case marking due to a different structural analysis.

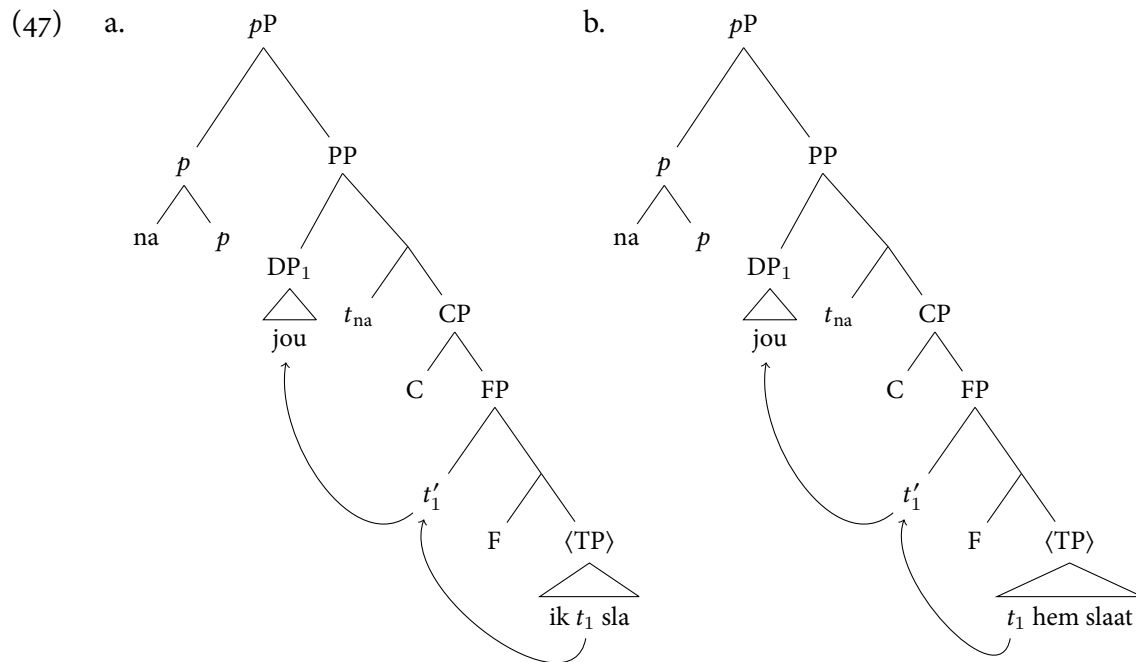
The *na*-clause example in (43) resembles the Dutch and Greek full clausal comparatives:



Interestingly, the ambiguous interpretation with transitive predicates is replicated, for all speakers:

- (46) Ik sla Peter na jou.
 I.NOM hit Peter after you.ACC
Interpretation 1: 'I hit Peter after I hit you.'
Interpretation 2: 'I hit peter after you hit him.'

The ambiguous interpretation can be accounted for in the same way as with the ambiguous comparative construction:⁴



4. Note that there is one less possible option because of the fact that the reduced clausal structure is not available with *na*.

There are some differences with the Dutch comparative construction:

- The reduced clausal construction is not possible with *na*, cf. (42).
- *dat* is not optional in the clausal construction (resembling the use of *ap'oti*).

7.2 *In plaats van* ('in stead of')

7.2.1 Data

(48) Ik ga naar school in plaats van hem. *in plaats van+DP*
I go to school in stead of him.ACC
'I go to school in stead of him.'

(49) *Ik ga naar school in plaats van (dat) hij. *in plaats van+DP*
I.NOM go to school in stead of that him.NOM
'(I go to school in stead of him.)'

(50) Ik ga naar school in plaats van dat hij gaat. *in plaats van+clause*
I.NOM go to school in stead of that he.NOM goes
'I go to school in stead of him.'

These data show that, just as with *na/voor*, *in plaats van* is only possible as a phrasal or full clausal construction. The same analysis given to *na* is applicable to *in plaats van*.

7.2.2 Diachronic change?

Klein (1985) discusses *in plaats van* and gives the following example from the Dutch novel *De Aanslag* by Harry Mulisch which was first published in 1982:

(51) en in plaats van **zij** waren zijn vader en zijn moeder en Peter gestorven.
and in stead of they.NOM were his father and his mother and Peter died
'And in stead of them his father, his mother, and Peter had died.' (Klein 1985: 367)

In this examples *in plaats van* is used with a nominative pronoun suggesting that at some point a reduced clausal structure with *in plaats van* was possible. Klein himself already notes that (51) is only marginally acceptable and as indicated by the judgment for (49) I believe it is no longer acceptable.

8 Conclusion

- Dutch has both phrasal and reduced clausal comparatives with different underlying structures
- Resemblance with the prepositions *na/voor* and *in plaats van* could point to a more general change where reduced clausal structures are reanalyzed as phrasal (prepositional) structures.

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