



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

The historical development of the Dutch posture-verb progressive construction: including a comparison with German

Okabe, A.

Citation

Okabe, A. (2023, February 22). *The historical development of the Dutch posture-verb progressive construction: including a comparison with German*. LOT dissertation series. LOT, Amsterdam. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3564457>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3564457>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Chapter 6 Summary and conclusion

6.1. Summary and discussion

6.1.1. Summary of the results

In Chapter 4, the development of the Dutch posture-verb progressive construction was analyzed in detail based on the corpus data. The results were summarized in Table 22 in Chapter 4, repeated here as Table 1.

Table 1. Development of the Dutch posture-verb progressive construction

Stage	Form/meaning
Stage 1 [pre-1200]	Biclausal/bipredicative or monopredicative S PV _{fin} Adv _{loc} <i>en(de)</i> (S) V ² _{fin}
Stage 2 [1200–1600]	Biclausal/monopredicative S PV _{fin} Adv _{loc} <i>en(de)</i> V ² _{fin}
Stage 3 [1600–1700]	Biclausal/monopredicative S PV _{fin} Adv _{loc} <i>en(de)</i> V ² _{fin}
	Monoclausal/monopredicative S PV _{fin} Adv _{loc} <i>te</i> V ² _{inf}
Stage 4 [1800–now]	Monoclausal/monopredicative S PV _{fin} Adv _{loc} <i>te</i> V ² _{inf}

As discussed in 4.5.2., the data are interpreted as indicating that one construction replaced another. These two constructions do not seem to be historically related. The older construction with *en(de)* as a connector was mostly attested in Middle Dutch (13th–16th century, cf. Stage 2 in Table 1). This construction was gradually superseded by the newer construction with *te* as a connector, which increased in frequency mostly in the 17th century (Stage 3 in Table 1). From around the 18th century, the *te* construction became the only posture-verb construction with a progressive meaning in the language (Stage 4 in Table 1). This situation seems to have remained stable to the present day: the proportions of locative and temporal modification and the most frequent types of second verb are comparable between the 18th century and Modern Dutch.

Despite the lack of historical continuity between the pseudo-coordinate *en(de)* construction and the unambiguously monoclausal *te* construction, the

two constructions share some commonalities. For example, both are strongly associated with a locative meaning, as reflected by the regular occurrence of locative modifiers. The stability of the two constructions in terms of their locative meaning can also be seen in the semantics of the second verb, such as the fact that the second verb must describe an activity compatible with the particular posture; that is, it appears that the stable and salient locative semantics of the posture verbs has prevented the second verb from becoming semantically more diverse. This semantic profile seems to be found with both the *en(de)* and the *te* construction, and it may have been precisely this overlap in semantic profile that made the two constructions competitors, with one of them eventually 'taking over'.

For German, Chapter 5 reports the current status of the posture-verb construction in the present-day language. According to the analyses (cf. section 5.3.), the construction seems to be mostly coordinate, although the data may also indicate an incipient stage of grammaticalization. The unrealized subject of the second verb and the strong semantic compatibility between the second verb and the posture verb could be regarded as indicators of beginning grammaticalization, although these features can also be explained as general characteristics of coordination with a one-event interpretation. Moreover, judging from the placement of the noun and the adverbial, the two-verb sequence is not strongly bound together in a structural sense. Furthermore, backgrounding of the postural/locative meaning cannot be confirmed, since, on average, 96% of instances are modified for location, in contrast to 53.8% in Dutch. The Modern German construction, therefore, cannot be characterized as a grammaticalized progressive construction; however, it may yet grammaticalize, like its Dutch equivalent, particularly with *dastehen*, *dasitzen*, and *daliegen*. This prediction is mainly based on the nature of the particle *da-*, which serves to de-emphasize the locative nature of the posture verb and emphasize the aimlessness and atelicity of the activity described by the second verb.

Since the data for Dutch seem to primarily reflect Stage 2 onward and the data for German seem to reflect Stage 1 (cf. Table 1), it could be argued that the German data supplement the Dutch, by indicating what the Dutch *en(de)* construction would have looked like at Stage 1. Under this view, the Dutch posture-verb construction at Stage 1 would be characterized by the absence of preposed objects or adverbials of the second verb, as well as a high proportion of instances modified for location. Elision of the subject of the second verb and strong semantic compatibility between the second verb and posture verb is observed not only at Stage 1 with German, but also at later stages with Dutch, which suggests that these characteristics are

inherited from coordination. At the same time, however, it should be noted that the Dutch and German data are not entirely comparable due to the presence of the *da*-verbs in German (i.e. *dastehen*, *dasitzen*, and *daliegen*; see also 5.2.1.). Since there are no comparable verbs in Dutch, some language-specific factors need to be taken into account.

In summary, the development of the posture-verb construction in Dutch includes the replacement of the pseudo-coordinate *en(de)* construction by the monoclausal *te* construction. The development from the former to the latter is not understood as a process of grammaticalization, but as replacement of one construction by another. In addition, the German data seem to complement those for Dutch, in the sense that the latter illustrate the development from Stage 2 onward and the former the situation at Stage 1. This also means that some of the differences between the Dutch and the German data could therefore be attributed to the changes from Stage 1 to 2. These include the possibility of preposing the elements belonging to the second verb, which could be linked to pseudo-coordination, and a decrease in locative modification, which may suggest backgrounding of the spatial semantics of posture verbs.

6.1.2. Discussion

The data for the Dutch posture-verb construction do not indicate that the older pseudo-coordinate construction with *en(de)* gradually developed into the newer monoclausal construction with *te*; rather, it appears that the latter supplanted the former. The basis for distinguishing the two constructions as separate is the observation that the *en(de)* construction does not appear to have developed from pseudo-coordinate to monoclausal. As described in 4.5.2., the *en(de)* construction rarely occurred with an infinitival second verb and a preposed object of the second verb, indicating that its structure should be treated as biclausal. Furthermore, the construction remained diachronically stable in many important respects. It is true that some instances exist that seem to indicate an underlying monoclausal structure, but as a whole, the evidence does not point to a clear development towards monoclausality during the period investigated.

As the *te* construction is not considered to have developed from the *en(de)* construction, the two constructions are therefore viewed as independent of one another. This observation aligns with the proposal of Van den Toorn (1975) and Van der Horst (2008). As presented in 1.3.3., these

authors have suggested that [PV *te* V²], originally used with a purpose meaning, was reinterpreted and grew semantically closer to the pseudo-coordinate posture-verb construction with progressive meaning, which eventually resulted in the replacement of the *en(de)* construction by the *te* construction. My results are in line with this proposal.

The observation that the old construction is replaced by a new, synonymous one is a good illustration of the *competitive exclusion principle* or *isomorphism principle* in language change (Gause 1934, Landsbergen 2009: 47f.). This principle states that ‘different forms with the same meaning (synonyms) or different meanings with the same form (homonyms) can be said to “compete” with each other for the same resource’ (Landsbergen 2009: 47). Competition leads either to one eventually taking over the resource completely, or to some sort of differentiation or specialization (cf. De Smet et al. 2018: 198-201). In the case of the Dutch posture-verb construction, it appears that the two synonymous constructions with different connectors competed, resulting in the survival of the *te* construction at the cost of the *en(de)* construction.

The current data do not provide clear, let alone conclusive evidence for the cause of the disappearance of the old pseudo-coordinate posture-verb construction in Dutch. At the same time, it is possible to speculate as to why this might have occurred. When the expression of purpose was taken over by the [*om te* V_{inf}] construction (Van den Toorn 1975: 261ff., Van Pottelberge 2002: 163; cf. section 1.2.3.), the *te* construction became unambiguously progressive (cf. section 4.5.2.). The *en(de)* construction, on the other hand, was ambiguous between a progressive construction and a coordinate sentence without progressive meaning (cf. section 4.5.2.). In other words, the *te* construction was functionally superior to the *en(de)* construction, since it is a specialized and thus more effective progressive construction. This characteristic of the *te* construction could have given it an advantage over the *en(de)* construction, eventually resulting in it usurping the role of posture-verb progressive construction. The general lack of a pseudo-coordinate structure in Modern Dutch, as pointed out by Zwart (2011: 121), could also indicate that pseudo-coordination is more characteristic of Middle Dutch than of Modern Dutch.

Another point for discussion is the development from coordination to pseudo-coordination. As the German posture-verb construction does not show any monoclausal-like behaviors, the only criteria that allow us to judge whether the construction qualifies as pseudo-coordinate are semantic in nature. Semantic cohesion between the posture verb and the second verb is one such criterion; it is certainly a sufficient condition for pseudo-

coordination, but it is not distinctive since it is present in both Dutch (Stage 2 onward) and German (Stage 1) regardless of the degree of grammaticalization. This raises the question of how pseudo-coordination and coordination can be meaningfully distinguished, when monoclausality cannot be determined on the basis of structural features.

In the case of the Dutch and German posture-verb constructions, backgrounding of the postural/locative meaning of posture verbs could play an important role in this respect. The level of backgrounding is reflected in the extent to which instances of these constructions are modified for location. Under this view, the Dutch posture-verb construction is more pseudo-coordinate than the German one, since the former are less frequently modified for location. On the other hand, foregrounding of atelic aspect, which is thought to proceed hand-in-hand with backgrounding of the spatial semantics of posture verbs, is not observable in the data. The occurrence of durative temporal adverbials, for example, seems to be optional and redundant, which makes it a poor diagnostic for evaluating the temporal profile of the posture-verb construction. Moreover, the fact that posture verbs as lexical verbs already have the power to impose a temporally unbounded timeframe on the composite event (cf. section 3.2.1.) could also explain why the construction does not show any obvious development in this respect. In other words, atelicity is present all the time, regardless of the extent to which posture verbs are auxiliaryized. This characterization of posture verbs certainly contributes to the consistent semantic profile of the Dutch posture-verb construction across the centuries.

On the other hand, the German [PV *und* V²] phrase is almost always modified for location, and all the other features of this phrase—such as the omission of the subject of the second verb and a one-event interpretation of the coordinated clauses—can be observed with ordinary coordination. This raises the question of whether the German [PV *und* V²] structure can indeed be considered a pseudo-coordinate ‘construction’. From the perspective of Construction Grammar, ‘constructions are defined as form-meaning pairings—symbolic units that pair linguistic form with conceptual meaning’ (Hilpert 2021: 6). However, based on the observations discussed in the present study, there seems to be no fixed form-meaning pair in German, but rather a bundle of characteristics that may or may not reflect pseudo-coordination. Therefore, under the constructionalist view, the German [PV *und* V²] phrase cannot be labeled as a ‘construction’. Instead, it should be viewed as a composite ‘pattern’ consisting of a combination of elements, which is not directly licensed as a whole.

Various proposals have been made about how a pattern can be defined and how it differs from a construction (Möhlig-Falke & Busse 2019, Petré 2019: 159-164, Traugott 2019: 125ff.). In the context of diachronic construction grammar, Traugott (2019: 127) has proposed the definition that 'a pattern is a replicated sequence that is associated with a recurring (but underspecified) meaning and that has combinatoric potential' (cf. Fried 2009: 276). This means that when one-off sequences are frequently replicated, some of them develop into patterns and become chunked as single units. When these chunked units are further entrenched in the language community, constructionalization (i.e. the emergence of a new form-meaning pairing, as defined in Traugott & Trousdale (2013: 22)) can be said to have occurred (*ibid.*: 149). Petré (2019) specifically focuses on the pre-construction stage of constructionalization, i.e. the process of how a pattern develops into a construction. Based on an analysis of the English *be going to* construction between the 15th and the 17th century, he argues that certain patterns that background certain lexical aspects of the sequence (e.g. intentionality and directed motion) have paved the way for constructionalization (*ibid.*: 159, cf. Hilpert & Koops 2008). According to his analysis, these patterns first underwent a frequency change and a semantic change, leading up to a new global cognitive schema. After the entrenchment of this schema had reached a certain threshold, a formal change took place, which resulted in the emergence of a new form-meaning pairing, i.e., the *be going to* construction (*ibid.*: 187). Returning to German pseudo-coordination, it seems that some patterns that appear to background the postural/locative meaning of posture verbs are observed (cf. (32) in 5.4.), which could, according to Petré's theory, lead to further development. At the same time, these patterns do not seem to be entrenched to the degree that they constitute a single construction. In sum, the German pseudo-coordination can be characterized as a pattern, a recurrently observed sequence, and is not as entrenched as the Dutch posture-verb construction.

In short, despite being so closely related, Dutch and German apparently do not align with each other in how far the posture verbs are grammaticalized and whether a construction can be formed with posture verbs. This observation certainly aligns with how Hopper & Traugott (2003: 39) characterize the grammaticalization process: '[p]articulate changes do not have to occur, nor do they have to go through to completion' (cf. Traugott 2010: 275). It is even possible that a construction stays in a stable state for centuries, as observed for the Dutch *en(de)* construction during the Middle Dutch period.

Why certain changes never happen or stall after initiation is a question ‘that has not yet satisfyingly been answered’ (Bouzouita et al. 2019: 1). Hintz (2011: 201-207), for example, proposes that there are not only *propelling forces* and *attracting forces* that drive or motivate linguistic items to grammaticalize (further), but also *obstructing forces*, i.e., functional pressures that impede this development. An obstructing force could consist, for example, in ‘the absence of a paradigm into which a potential new grammatical marker could fit’ (Nicolle 2012: 389). Another possible obstructing force is a high functional load on a given linguistic item. A linguistic item with a high functional load could be deeply integrated into the language and become resistant to grammaticalization. Apart from functional reasons, Bouzouita et al. (2019: 8) argue that ‘the determinants of diachronic stability are first and foremost to be sought in the mechanisms of language acquisition’. In general, although some proposals have been made, the nature and interaction of causal factors involved in diachronic (in)stability largely remain an open question. This thesis does not explore such questions further, but the analyses provided may be informative for research into the role of such hypothesized obstructing forces, providing both an opportunity to explain the observed stability, and a testing ground for the theoretical proposals.

Under the contrastive view, Dutch and German also provide empirical evidence relevant to Kuteva’s proposal (1999, 2001) that the use of posture verbs as canonical spatial verbs is a prerequisite for the verbs to develop into TAM markers (cf. section 1.3.2.). Posture verbs in Dutch, which are frequently used as locative verbs (Van Staden et al. 2007, Lemmens 2002), are indeed a good instantiation of Kuteva’s theory, since the verbs function as progressive markers. As for German on the other hand, *stehen* and *liegen* belong to the set of basic locative verbs, but *sitzen* does not (Kutscher & Schultze-Berndt 2007). At the same time, in terms of forming potentially pseudo-coordinate patterns, *sitzen* behaves like *stehen* and *liegen*. Therefore, although German posture verbs cannot be regarded as aspectual markers at present, the existence of potential pseudo-coordinate structures involving *sitzen* as well as *stehen* and *liegen* indicates that basic locative use may not be a necessary prerequisite for aspectual use.

In summary, the development of the Dutch posture-verb construction could be characterized as a competition between two types of progressive construction. The *te* construction, which is unambiguously progressive, wins the competition as the functionally superior variant, leading to the loss of the pseudo-coordinate posture-verb construction. In this respect, Modern Dutch and Modern German are comparable, in the sense that neither language has an established pseudo-coordinate construction with posture

verbs, in contrast to other Germanic languages (cf. Höder 2011: 176f.; see also section 1.2.3.). Diachronic studies, such as the present research on Dutch, can provide a more nuanced view on this synchronic comparability. From a contrastive viewpoint, the present research substantiates the observation that even closely related languages may differ in how far a certain linguistic element is grammaticalized.

6.2. General conclusion

This dissertation has described the development of the Dutch posture-verb progressive construction from the 13th to 18th century, and the current status of the Modern German [PV *und* V²] phrase, based on data extracted from corpora. The development of the Dutch constructions is summarized as a replacement of the pseudo-coordinate construction with the connector *en(de)* by a monoclausal construction with the infinitive verb introducer *te*. At the same time, the constructions did not develop significantly in terms of their semantics, as can be observed from the consistent degree of lexical and semantic variety in the second verb and the stable rate of locative modification during the whole period under investigation. The German [PV *und* V²] structure is characterized as a coordination of clauses, with occasional instances showing pseudo-coordinate-like, temporally unbounded semantics. The *da*-verbs could facilitate further grammaticalization by means of the particle *da*- emphasizing the atelic, aimless aspect of the activity described by the second verb.

The comparison of the Dutch and the German constructions sheds light on how the continuum between coordination and pseudo-coordination could be characterized. For example, semantic cohesion between the posture verb and the second verb is a feature shared by both coordination and pseudo-coordination. On the other hand, backgrounding of the spatial semantics of posture verbs seems to be characteristic of pseudo-coordination. Structural features, such as preposing of objects and adverbials belonging to the second verb, could also be associated with pseudo-coordination. From a more global perspective, the present contrastive research also sheds light on the (im)possibility of forming pseudo-coordinate structures in Germanic languages, and the degree to which the posture verbs are grammaticalized as aspectual markers.

With this study, I hope to have demonstrated the importance of exploring corpus data in depth and detail before drawing conclusions about

the historical development of a given construction. Looking at the Middle Dutch pseudo-coordinate construction and the Modern Dutch monoclausal progressive, it may be tempting to think that a single progressive construction has grammaticalized from biclausal to monoclausal. Close inspection of the data, however, has revealed that what we see is probably a replacement of one construction by another. Both constructions remain stable for centuries without significant grammaticalization. This research has also shown that not all the features attributed to the pseudo-coordinate construction in Dutch are frequently attested; some may even be considered marginal. Although the pseudo-coordinate construction with posture verbs is a well-known phenomenon in Middle Dutch, mentioned in various grammar books, its actual characteristics seem to deviate from the common conception of the construction. Therefore, a thorough investigation of the historical data is crucial for gaining an accurate understanding of the language, and an objective inspection of the corpus data enables this.

For future research, it could be useful to understand the posture-verb construction in a broader context, for example, in relation to other constructions. The relationship of the posture-verb construction with the [*om te* V_{inf}] construction and other progressive constructions in Dutch could shed some light on why the *en(de)* construction was replaced by the *te* construction.

