



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).

English Summary

This dissertation investigates the grammaticalization of posture verbs in Dutch and German. Posture verbs are verbs that typically refer to a standing, sitting, or lying posture of a human being. Cross-linguistically, such verbs are typically polysemous, and regularly function as tense/aspect/modality markers. This latter property also applies, to some extent, to Dutch and German. Dutch posture verbs have been used as progressive markers from Middle Dutch up until the present. In the modern language, they take a complement verb introduced by the infinitive marker *te* (e.g. *hij staat te wachten* ‘he is (standing and) waiting’). In Middle Dutch, however, the verbs are linked with another verb by the coordinating conjunction *ende* (or its reduced form *en*). The resulting structure is comparable to verbal coordination, but, as noted in the literature, it also forms a progressive construction which behaves as a monoclausal structure in some respects. This Middle Dutch progressive construction has a parallel in Modern German, namely a pseudo-coordinate construction with posture verbs. The Modern German construction is thought to be in the early stages of grammaticalization, in the sense that it occasionally hints at temporal aspect.

This dissertation investigates the properties of these three constructions in Dutch and German. The research on both Dutch and Modern German is based on corpus data and is quantitative, including analysis of frequencies using statistical methods. For Dutch, the development of the posture-verb progressive construction(s) is examined from its assumed emergence in Middle Dutch till the 18th century, which is the period when the construction seems to have attained its modern form. Based on the literature, a stepwise grammaticalization path is hypothesized; this proposed path is then evaluated and updated based on the analysis of corpus data. While the Dutch posture-verb construction is investigated diachronically, the German posture-verb construction is described from a present-day, synchronic perspective. This description makes it possible to evaluate the extent to which the construction is grammaticalized, particularly in comparison with the corresponding Dutch construction.

Chapter 1 introduces the topic of this dissertation, namely the posture-verb constructions in Dutch and German, and provides an overview of the relevant literature. The Modern Dutch construction takes an infinitival clause and is considered unambiguously monoclausal in terms of its structure; meanwhile, the construction in Middle and Early Modern Dutch can be considered pseudo-coordinate, in the sense that it is formally

biclausal while showing some monoclausal behavior. The older posture-verb construction in Dutch is thus comparable with the Modern German posture-verb construction, since both are pseudo-coordinate. This chapter also formulates the research objectives of this study and provides a brief overview of each chapter.

Chapter 2 presents the methodology used to study the Dutch posture-verb construction and outlines the characteristics of the three corpora used: the *Corpus Gysseling*, the *Corpus Middelnederlands*, and the *Corpus literair Nieuwnederlands*. The first two corpora mostly cover the Middle Dutch period (13th–16th century) and the third covers the beginning of the Modern Dutch period (17th and 18th centuries). The way in which the relevant data were extracted from each corpus is explained, as well as the statistical methods used. Although the posture-verb construction as a progressive construction is a well-known linguistic phenomenon in the history of Dutch, it has only recently become possible to conduct such a large-scale quantitative investigation of the Middle and Early Modern Dutch period, thanks to recent developments in the field of corpus linguistics. This dissertation benefits from these innovations.

Chapter 3 summarizes the likely stages of historical development of the Dutch posture-verb progressive construction, and derives a set of hypotheses to be evaluated on the basis of corpus data. Following a review of the major changes proposed in the literature, a provisional description of the development of the posture-verb construction over time is given. Furthermore, some typological observations on pseudo-coordination with posture verbs are presented, which may be relevant to the historical development of the Dutch construction. The relevant expected changes are summarized as a hypothetical five-stage grammaticalization path. Grammaticalization is known to proceed in a step-by-step manner, and the proposed grammaticalization path puts the expected changes in a historical order, outlining what took place at which stage. In order to be able to evaluate this proposed path on the basis of corpus data, fourteen hypotheses are formulated regarding diachronic changes in the frequency of certain features of the construction.

Chapter 4 reports the analyses of the corpus data. Overall, the results indicate that the older pseudo-coordinate construction and the new infinitival construction are independent of each other; that is, the former construction did not evolve into the new construction in a process of (further) grammaticalization. It appears that the older construction was widespread in Middle Dutch and began to be replaced by the monoclausal construction with an infinitival clause in the 17th century. The corpus data

clearly show that the old construction was still more frequent than the new one in the 17th century, but the latter supplanted the former in the course of the 18th century. Despite this replacement, both constructions seem to have remained largely stable during the period under study (13th–18th century). If the constructions were grammaticalizing during this period, one would expect to see an increase in the backgrounding of postural/locative semantics and foregrounding of temporal aspect; however, such a development is not attested for either construction. Rather, the constructions seem to have had stable semantics over time. In view of these results, it is proposed that the posture verbs were already available as progressive markers from the beginning of the Middle Dutch period (i.e. the 13th century) in the pseudo-coordinate construction, which was later replaced by the monoclausal construction in the Early Modern Dutch period. Based on the analyses in this chapter, the grammaticalization path proposed in Chapter 3 is modified in order to reflect the actual changes observed in the data.

Chapter 5 concerns the posture-verb construction in Modern German. The current characteristics of the construction are described on the basis of the data extracted from the *DWDS-Kernkorpus*, to evaluate the degree of grammaticalization and the potential of the construction to grammaticalize further. Based on the analyses, the posture-verb construction in Modern German does not seem to display the semantic and syntactic properties that should be observed for pseudo-coordination according to the typological literature. Nonetheless, as pointed out in the literature, some instances with backgrounded postural/locative semantics and foregrounded temporal meaning are attested, which may indicate the potential for German posture verbs to develop further into aspectual markers (as in Dutch). In particular, posture verbs with the particle *da-* could facilitate grammaticalization of the construction, since their emphasized atelicity aligns well with a progressive aspectual meaning. Since the German data seem to correspond to the initial coordinate stage of the posture-verb progressive grammaticalization path, they can be regarded as complementing the Dutch data, which do not appear to cover this stage of development.

Chapter 6 summarizes the findings reported in Chapters 4 and 5. The replacement of the older construction in Dutch can be characterized as a competitive process, resulting in the survival of the functionally superior *te* construction at the cost of the older *en(de)* construction. The status of German pseudo-coordination as a construction is questionable from a constructionalist perspective, since there seems to be no fixed pairing of form and meaning. The comparison of the Dutch pseudo-coordinate construction with the German coordinate construction provides insight into

the continuum between coordination and pseudo-coordination. The contrastive perspective also sheds light on the (im)possibility of forming pseudo-coordinate structures in the Germanic languages, and the ease with which posture verbs may grammaticalize into aspectual markers.