



SONDERDRUCK

Institut für
SPRACHWISSENSCHAFT
DER UNIVERSITÄT WIEN

A NOTE ON CASE ABSORPTION

One of my theses was formulated as follows:*

Case-absorption, as in the case of passive participles, should not be considered a property of morphological classes of some kind, but rather a property of a broader range of constructions.

My reasons for postulating this thesis have to do mainly with the analysis of the differential properties of certain infinitivals in Dutch. I will briefly outline this analysis below.

Consider the following sentences:

- (1) a. Dit bier is niet te drinken
This beer is not to drink
This beer is undrinkable
- b. Deze blikjes zijn om weg te gooien
These cans are for away to throw
This cans are for throwing (them) away
- (2) a. Dit is een niet te drinken bier
This is a not to drink beer
This is an undrinkable (kind of) beer
- b. Dit zijn blikjes om weg te gooien
This are cans for away to throw
These are throw-away cans

In the a-sentences the infinitive is bare, being introduced just by the infinitive marker te, while the b-sentences contain infinitives that are headed by the complementizer om. I will refer to these as the te-infinitives (TIs) and om-te-infinitives (OTIs) respectively. Both TIs and OTIs occur predicatively as in (1) and adnominally as in (2). Despite superficial similarities, however, there are a number of quite fundamental distinctions to be drawn among them. Let us first list a number of properties in which they differ.

Facts

(1) Position

Both OTIs and TIs can occur preverbally:¹

- (3) a. Ik geloof niet dat deze blikjes om weg te gooien
zijn
I believe not that these cans for away to throw
are
- b. *Ik geloof niet dat deze blikjes zullen zijn
om weg te gooien
I believe not that these cans will be
for away to throw
- (4) a. Hij denkt dat dit bier niet te drinken zal zijn
He thinks that this beer not to drink will be
- b. *Hij denkt dat dit bier niet zal zijn te drinken

Adnominally, there is also a clear positional difference:

- (5) a. Dit is een niet te drinken bier (=2a)
b. *Dit is een bier niet te drinken
- (6) a. *Dit zijn om weg te gooien blikjes
b. Dit zijn blikjes om weg te gooien (=2b)

In other words, TIs occur only prenominally, while OTIs are limited to the postnominal position.

(ii) Adjectival heads

Many of these 'modal' infinitival constructions appear to be similar in meaning as well as in structure to the English tough-movement construction. We may ask, therefore, whether TIs and OTIs can be headed by an adjective of the appropriate sort. At first sight, it appears that both can:

- (7) a. Deze stoel is gemakkelijk te verplaatsen
This chair is easy to move
- b. Deze stoel is gemakkelijk om te verplaatsen
This chair is easy for to move

However, note that adverbs in Dutch have the same form as the corresponding adjective. As a consequence, gemakkelijk in (7a) could just as well be an adverb and part of the infinitival itself. This analysis is not available for (7b), of course, because here the adjective precedes the complementizer om, a position where adverbs cannot appear. Thus, the infinitival of (7b) can itself be modified further by an adverb:

- (8) Deze stoel is gemakkelijk om vlug te verplaatsen
This chair is easy for quickly to move

There is one major reason to consider gemakkelijk in (7a) an adverb, and not an adjective heading the infinitival. This is the fact that the same combination occurs prenominally:

- (9) Dit is een gemakkelijk te verplaatsen stoel
This is an easy to move chair

If gemakkelijk were the adjectival head here, it would mean that adjectives can have right-branching complements pre-

nominally, which is never the case in Dutch. Consider:

- (10) a *De trots op zijn vader jongen
The proud of his father boy
b *Drie bereid om te sterven terroristen
Three ready for to die terrorists
c *Een gemakkelijk om te verplaatsen stoel
An easy for to move chair

Hence, to preserve this generalization the analysis of (7) must be:

(7a): NP cop [_{TI} Adv te V]

(7b): NP cop [_{AP} A [_{OTI} om te V]]

(iii) Aspectual auxiliaries

OTIs may contain aspectual or temporal auxiliaries² but this option is always ruled out for TIs:

- (11) a Dat is typisch iets om te hebben gedaan
That is typically something for to have done
b Frans is handig om te hebben geleerd
French is handy for to have learned
(12) a *Deze formulieren zijn te zijn/te hebben ingevuld
vóór 6 uur
These forms are to be/to have filled out
before 6 o'clock
b *Dit boek is niet te hebben/te zijn begrepen op
jonge leeftijd
This book is not to have/to be understood at
young age

(iv) Agent phrase

TIs may contain an agent phrase of the type door NP ('by NP')
OTIs may not.

- (13) a Dit zijn de door de kandidaat te tekenen papieren
These are thy by tha candidate to sign papers
These are the papers to be signed by the candidate
b Deze tekens zijn door de meeste mensen gemakkelijk
te herkennen
These signs are by the most people easy
to recognize
These signs are easy to recognize for most people

- (14) a *Deze blikjes zijn om door de gebruikers weg te
gooien
These cans are for by the user away to
throw
b *Dit is een stoel om door de invalide te verplaatsen
This is a chair for by the invalid to move

(v) Reflexives

Reflexive pronouns cannot occur in TIs, but they can in OTIs³.

- (15) a *Jan vindt dit een zich niet voor te stellen
concept
John finds this a himself not to imagine concept
b *Voor hem zijn deze uitgaven zich niet te veroor-
loven
For him are these expenses himself not to afford
(16) a Jan vindt dit koncept moeilijk om zich voor te
stellen
John finds this concept difficult for himself
to imagine
b Voor heren is deze zeep niet geschikt om zich
mee te wassen
For gentlemen is this soap not adequate for them-
selves with to wash

(vi) Nature of the gap

The gap in a TI must be in the direct object position. In OTIs, however, the gap is not so restricted: most non-subject NP positions can serve as the gap. In particular, prepositions can be stranded in OTIs, but not in TIs (cf. Van Riemsdijk (1978b) for a general discussion of the properties of preposition stranding in Dutch).

- (17) a. Deze stoel is te verplaatsen
This chair is to move
This chair can/must be moved
- b. Deze stoel is om te verplaatsen
This chair is for to move
This chair is for moving
- (18) a. *Deze stoel is op te zitten
This chair is on to sit
(*This chair can/must be sat on
- b. Deze stoel is om op te zitten
This chair is for on to sit
(*This chair is for sitting on

Analysis

It is the last contrast which is the most revealing. It suggests that the gap in TIs is due to NP-movement while the gap in OTIs is the result of wh-movement, because prepositions can only be stranded by wh-movement in Dutch but never by NP-movement.⁴

This assumption will directly account for (iv) and (v): reflexives are always excluded in passives and we would expect agent phrases to be possible in an NP-movement (passive) environment.

The main question that arises is: how can we make sure that NP-movement occurs in TIs? The answer appears to be that TIs are an environment in which case absorption is obligatory. If this assumption is made, everything follows. The direct object position from which case is withheld could be lexical or PRO. If the NP is lexical, it must move because of the Case filter, and if it is PRO it must move because PRO may not be governed, according to the principles of the government-binding theory of Chomsky (1981). But if it is lexical and moves, it will move to the subject position of the infinitival construction, where it will not receive case either. Hence it must be PRO, which will then end up in a position where it is neither case-marked nor governed.

The next question is, how can we prevent wh-movement from creating a gap in TIs? The answer can be found in the proposals of Van Riemsdijk (1981). There it is argued that adjectives and TIs are both of the category $[+V]^{max}$. This category is parallel in terms of \bar{X} -theory, to S. Hence it may be assumed to have a subject position, but not a COMP. I will assume, without further argument, not only that the arguments given in my other paper for German are correct, but also that they carry over to Dutch.

The analysis of TIs as $[+V]^{max}$ can account for properties (i) and (ii) directly. The $[+V]^{max}$ analysis is specifically designed to capture a number of similarities between TIs and true APs. Predicative APs can only occur preverbally in Dutch never postverbally. Similarly, adnominal APs must always be prenominal and can never be postnominal.⁵ This takes care of property (i). Property (ii) follows straightforwardly as well: adjectives (and other categories) of the tough-type are expected to take \bar{S} -complements, but not AP-complements.

Property (iii) will follow from the same analysis if we make a slight additional conjecture. It is reasonable to assume that aspectual auxiliaries, regardless of how main-verb-like they are, are restricted to environments, which have an INFL-constituent (cf. Chomsky (1981)). There is every reason not to assume that $[+V]^{max}$ has an INFL-node, hence property (iii) is accounted for.

We see that two simple assumptions go a long way in explaining the main properties of the constructions under consideration:

A TIs are analyzed as $[+V]^{max}$.

OTIs are analyzed as \bar{S} .

B TIs have a gap by virtue of NP-movement.

OTIs have a gap by virtue of wh-movement.⁶

Assumption A is independently motivated. Assumption B, on the other hand, is the one that, at this stage of the game, has to be stipulated. To be more precise, the stipulation amounts to B':⁷

B' $[+V]^{max}$ is an obligatory domain for case absorption

Another, and perhaps a somewhat more revealing, way of stating this principle is to say that any environment where a verb, regardless of its morphological properties, is inserted into an adjectival environment is an obligatory case absorption environment. This way the similarity between TIs and ordinary passives, for which case absorption was originally designed, is directly brought out.

A last step in this account would be to derive B' in some way from A. While I believe there are ways in which this

could be done, my ideas remain quite speculative. In the context of the round-table meeting it appears more appropriate to let this problem stand as one of the 'Kaynian' questions. At any rate, the above remarks should suffice to substantiate the thesis cited at the beginning.

August 1981

Tilburg University
Department of Language and
Literature

Footnotes

* This paper was written as a result of the round-table meeting held at the Linguistics Department of Vienna University in June 1981. Participants were requested to submit theses to be discussed during the meeting. The present note attempts to substantiate one of the theses I had submitted. I would like to thank the participants for stimulating and helpful discussion, and the organizer, Hubert Haider, for providing the opportunity.

1) The impossibility of extraposition in the case of TIs should not be confused with the possibility of a limited form of verb raising.

(a) Hij denkt dat dit bier niet is te drinken
He thinks that this beer not is to drink

A first relevant observation is that this is not the result of true verb raising, which can affect large clusters of verbs. E.g.

(b) *Hij zei dat dit bier niet schijnt te zijn te drinken
He said that this beer not seems to be to drink

Example (4b) in the text is another instance of this fact. A second relevant fact is that the presence of a complement constituent in the infinitive discriminates directly between the extraposition- and verb raising variants:

(c) Hij denkt dat dit bier niet met een rietje is te drinken
He thinks that this beer not with a straw is to drink

(d) *Hij denkt dat dit bier niet is met een rietje te drinken

The impossibility of extraposition in the case of OTIs (cf. (3b)) is somewhat unexpected given our later analysis of OTIs as \bar{S} , see below. However, it is still the case that OTIs are interpreted as predicates, and there is a general prohibition in Dutch against postverbal predicative constituents.

- 2) The possibilities are somewhat limited, however, by the fact that OTIs often have a slightly purposive meaning which is not easily compatible with past or perfect auxiliaries.
- 3) The verbs used here take a direct object plus an inherent reflexive, unlike English.
- 4) This conclusion is largely the same that I arrived at in Van Riemsdijk (1978a), although, as De Haan (1981) rightly points out, my previous analysis suffers from a number of weaknesses. One of these, the fact that OTIs do not exhibit the unbounded antecedent-gap relation that one would expect under a *wh*-movement analysis, remains unaccounted for in the present analysis. Nevertheless, the arguments given here appear to strengthen the *wh*-movement analysis and to refute the radically different proposal by De Haan, which space prevents me from discussing in detail.

5) This is not completely correct, as pointed out to me by Jan Koster. Similarly, the statement that TIs cannot occur postnominally is slightly too strong. Both APs and TIs can occur postnominally when heavy and under highly stylistically marked conditions:

(f) Alleen kaarten geldig voor de voorstelling van 17 oktober
 Only tickets valid for the performance of 17 oktober
 kunnen worden ingeruild
 can be changed

(g) Alleen op kaarten te verkrijgen aan de avondkassa
 Only on tickets to acquire at the evening ticket box
 behoeft geen toeslag te worden betaald
 needs no surcharge to be paid

This parallelism confirms the analysis proposed here.

6) To be more precise, they may have a gap but need not necessarily have one. De Haan (1981) points out that this is a property that distinguishes TIs from OTIs, since TIs must have a gap. The latter fact is correctly predicted by principle B' below. The optionality of the gap in OTIs, as in (d), remains puzzling, however:

(d) De voorstelling was om te huilen
 The performance was for to cry
 The performance was deplorable
 (example from De Haan (1981))

De Haan points out, however, that when there is an object, this object must be a gap, a fact which further complicates the matter. But this generalization cannot be completely correct either, witness (e).

(e) Dit is weer om een erfenis te verdelen
 This is weather for an inheritance to divide
 This is dreary weather

7) Readers who are familiar with my paper on adjectives (Van Riemsdijk (1981)) will notice that B' is not consistent with the conclusions arrived at there. In fact, I claimed virtually the opposite, viz. that adjectives which are inserted into a [+V]^{max} (i.e. verbal) environment acquire the possibility of assigning case. However, I was only able to hedge about the reason why this case assignment is limited to oblique cases. This fact now follows from B'. The remaining problem is why 'intransitive adjectives' are permitted in a [+V]^{max} environment, while intransitive verbs are not (cf. footnote 5).

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Zusammenfassung (des Redakteurs)

Dieser Beitrag geht der Frage nach, ob Kasusabsorption als Eigenschaft einer morphologischen Kategorie (cf. participia perfecti passivi) zu verstehen ist, oder eher in einem weiteren syntaktischen Kontext zu analysieren wäre.

Als Evidenz dient die Analyse von zwei modalen Infinitivkonstruktionen im Niederländischen.

Die eine stellt sich als Fall einer NP-Verschiebung heraus, während die andere als wh-Verschiebungsphänomen zu analysieren ist. Bezüglich Kasusabsorption gilt, daß jeder Kontext, in dem ein Verb - ungeachtet seiner morphologischen Eigenschaften - in eine Adjektivphrase eingefügt wird, ein Absorptionskontext ist.