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# The morphology of Dutch

By Geert Booij

Reviewed by Dirk Kievit
Trinity Western University and Canada Institute of Linguistics

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Morphology is making a comeback, the author claims, and, in accordance with the aims of generative grammar, a study of the word structure of Dutch will contribute to a proper understanding of universal grammar and of the human language faculty itself.

The stated intent of this volume is to make accessible to English readers a description of the morphology of Dutch. It also seeks to contribute to the discussion on various theoretical issues. In this way it is suggested that the book may be used in advanced courses on morphology. I would add that field linguists stand to benefit from a sample description of this kind, especially in view of the continuous interaction with current theoretical developments such as Anderson's (1992) *A-Morphous Morphology* and Optimality Theory.

Not surprisingly, the bulk of the book consists of a discussion of inflection (chapter 2) and derivation (chapter 3) as well as compounding (chapter 4). The other two major chapters (chapters 5 and 6) treat the interface of morphology with phonology and syntax, respectively. An introductory chapter deals with theoretical preliminaries and a concluding chapter provides a summary. There is an extensive bibliography of material available in English on Dutch morphology, including numerous articles by the author himself.

It is usually assumed that words are formed by adding affixes to stems, which is known as syntagmatic word formation. Some processes in Dutch, however, cannot be accounted for in this way and rather require a paradigmatic accounting, which involves the substitution of one affix for another. For example, following the masculine-feminine paradigm in Dutch, *reizigster* 'female traveler' has been derived from the masculine *reiziger* 'traveler' by replacing the affix –*er* with the feminine –*ster*. However, in this case there is no verb *reizig*. This is especially clear with the word *woordvoerder* 'spokesman' which retains the epenthetic [d] (to avoid the illegal r-schwa-r sequence) in the feminine *woordvoerdster* 'spokeswoman'. In fact, paradigmatic word formation as the foundation of morphology is said to be a "hallmark of the Dutch tradition of morphological research" (p. 6). It plays a crucial role in the nonnative lexicon because many complex words have been borrowed into Dutch without their corresponding base words.

This illustrates an interesting facet of Dutch, namely the division of the lexicon into what Booij calls two strata or layers, a native (Germanic) and a nonnative (Romance) one. For example, nonnative suffixes attach only to nonnative words while native suffixes attach to both kinds of bases. As a result, we find that the nonnative adjective *stabiel* 'stable' has two nominal forms, the native *stabielheid* and the nonnative *stabieliteit*. On the other hand, the native adjective *blind* 'blind' only has the form *blindheid*. There are phonological cues whether a given affix is native or (still) nonnative.

For those of us engaged in descriptive linguistics, the danger is that we merely *describe* the data and fail to *account* for them. For example, Dutch has two plural suffixes: *-en* and *-s*. These suffixes have different historical origins but over time a "division of labor" has ensued. The rule can be stated in terms of an input condition: words ending in an unstressed syllable take *-s* while words ending in a stressed syllable take *-en*. We can take this a step further, however. In Dutch the syllables of a word are preferably parsed into "disyllabic left-headed feet." As a consequence, given a choice for plural nouns, the optimal prosodic form will be selected. This is illustrated in the following forms:

(1)  *kánon – kánons* 'canon'
(2)  *kanón – kanónnen* 'gun'

In the second case, if the form *-s* had been selected, the word would have ended in a monosyllabic foot which is less optimal. In this way, then, we have not only described the choice of allomorph but also explained the "driving force" behind it.

A prosodic analysis explains another feature that is very common in Dutch, what is known as gapping. Here, parts of compounds and certain suffixes can be optionally omitted (in fact, though Booij does not mention this, this is probably the preferred form), as illustrated in these examples:

(3)  *zicht- en tastbaar* 'visible and tangible' (from *zichtbaar en tastbaar* )
(4)  *wis- en natuurkunde* 'math and physics' (from *wiskunde en natuurkunde* )
(5)  *wis- en natuurkundige* 'mathematical and physical' (from *wiskundige en natuurkundige*)

The point to note is that it is *prosodic* words that can be omitted, not necessarily *grammatical* units. In example (5), *kundige* (which is actually a combination of three morphemes) is not a morphological constituent. However, it is a *prosodic* word because of the fact that it contains a full vowel. This explains why so-called cohering suffixes cannot be deleted in gapping. These are suffixes that do not have independent stress but form a prosodic word with the stem they are attached to. An example is the mitigating suffix *-ig* in *groenig* 'greenish' which cannot be deleted in gapping as in *\*rod- of groenig* 'reddish or greenish'.

A word of caution: when it comes to allomorphy, we should not assume that all cases of allomorphy can be explained in terms of phonological constraints. Some allomorphy, as has already been observed, is purely morphological. For instance, some Dutch noun-noun compounds have what appears to be a linking phoneme, which may be *-s* or *-e* (pronounced as schwa) as in *schaap* 'sheep' + *vlees* 'meat' *schape-vlees* 'sheep meat/mutton' and *dagje* 'day' + *mensen* 'people' *dagjes-mensen* 'day trippers'. In fact, Booij argues that they are not merely linking

phonemes but are properly considered part of the first constituent of the compound. Although they have a clearly singular meaning (for example, *dagjesmensen* are 'people who take a trip for only a single day'), the choice of allomorph roughly correlates to the choice for the plural allomorphs *-s* and *-en*. In other words, this is another example of paradigmatic word formation.

Interestingly, in Tigrinya, a Semitic language of Eritrea, I have also come across what appears to be a linking phoneme in compounds. This involves compounds whose first constituent is /bet/ 'house'. These may be compared with set expressions that involve the word bet as well. Presumably these are all from the same root, having been borrowed from Arabic /bet/ meaning 'house'. The following data shows both set expressions (6) and compounds (7).

(6) /bet təˈmərti/ 'school' (lit. 'house of education')

/bet ˈħəts'əbo/ 'drycleaner' (lit. 'house of washing')

/bet ˈfərdi/ 'court' (lit. 'house of justice')

/bet ˈmɛgbi/ 'restaurant' (lit. 'house of food')

/bet ˈʃɪnti/ 'toilet' (lit. 'house of urine')

(7) /ˈbetə ˌkrɪstiyan/ 'church' (lit. 'house of Christians')

/ˈbetə sɛb/ 'blood relatives' (lit. 'house of people')

/ˈbetə ˌzɛmɛd/ 'relatives' (lit. 'house of relatives')

In example set (6) the meaning of the morpheme /bet/ can still be easily recognized in the meaning of the expression. In all cases the expression refers to a specific place. (Some of the words in this set can take the linking phoneme but then the word has a more generic meaning.) In example set (7), however, the meaning of the first element is less clear.

There appears to be no phonological reason (such as stress or number of syllables) to explain the added linking schwa. This may instead be an indication that the expression has become a true compound in the minds of the speakers. Two factors support this hypothesis: (1) the main stress in these words falls on /bet/ and (2) these words are usually written (in the Ge'ez script) either as one word or with a hyphen. Thus, it appears that the epenthetic schwa, provides evidence for lexicalization, showing that a set expression has become part of the lexicon of the language.

While Booij's description is based on "standard" Dutch, on occasion reference will be made to regional varieties or nonstandard usages, even children's speech. This can be indicative of the direction in which the language is developing. As field linguists we do well therefore not to be exclusively focused on the standard variety of a given language but to take note of such "deviations" from the norm.

At points, I felt the English gloss to be lacking. For example, for the word *misdaadbestrijding* 'crime fight' a break between the morphemes *misdaad* 'crime' and *bestrijding* 'fight' would have been helpful. Being a native speaker of Dutch myself I was able to navigate my way through the data easily but to a nonnative speaker I suspect this will be more of a challenge. For the non-generative reader the discussion may at times become obtuse. I had to struggle through

some parts of the book, especially the section on phonology, but I found the end result very rewarding.

## References

Anderson , Stephen R. 1992. *A-morphous morphology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Beard, Robert. 1995. *Lexeme-morpheme base morphology: A general theory of inflection and word formation*. (SUNY Series in Linguistics.) Albany: State Univ of New York Press.