

Variation in Dutch COMP

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This paper discusses the presence, absence, doubling, and tripling of conjunctions in early 20th century Dutch as recorded in private letters. Josef Bayer repeatedly drew attention to the huge variation found in different languages and dialects concerning the elements that can fill the Spec-C and C⁰ positions in embedded clauses (e.g. Bayer, 1984; Bayer & Brandner, 2008; Bayer, 2014). In earlier stages of West-Germanic languages, *wh*-elements were often immediately followed by a complementizer. The famous opening line of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* starts with such a sequence (1), and in the Middle Dutch Manuscript Marshall 29 similar constructions are attested (2).

- (1) *Whan that* April with his shoures soote...
when that April with its showers sweet
- (2) a. Hoe ende *aen wien dat*men raet sueken sal
how and to whom that-one advice seek shall
'How and from whom one should seek advice'
b. Hoe mellibeus sine vriende ontboet Ende *wat rade dat* si hem gauen
how Mellibeus his friends summoned and what advice that they him gave
'How Mellibeus sent for his friends and which advice they gave him'

In Modern Dutch, single *wh*-elements like *wie* 'who' and *of* 'whether' can introduce an embedded clause, but we also find complex structures like *wie of* 'who', *of dat* 'whether' and *wie of dat* 'who', where *wh*-operators and features of disjunction and subordination are spelled out differently. Bayer (2004: 9) suggests: "If speakers vary in their own dialect, this would mean that they can use homophonous morphemes with different feature structure." We will see below that this is not the case for 'true' dialect speakers, whereas variation starts to occur in dialect-contact situations, e.g. in a speaker after extensive exposure to another dialect ('dialect mixing').

On the occasion of Josef Bayer's 65th birthday, the present paper provides examples of conjunctions in embedded declarative and interrogative sentences in 65 private letters written by two women and one man in the years 1932 to 1934:

A = female, born and raised in a small fishing-village in the province of Noord Brabant.

M = female, mother of B, born and raised in Amsterdam (province of Noord-Holland) and living in Rotterdam (province of Zuid-Holland) in the years 1932-1934.

B = male, born in Amsterdam, raised in Rotterdam and living in the middle of the province of Noord Brabant in the years 1932-1934.

In their letters, we find nearly 400 finite complements which are introduced with zero, one, or more complementizers. The most common conjunction that introduces a subordinate clause in Dutch is *dat* ‘that’ (3a) (N=117). After verbs that express uncertainty about the outcome of the action, we usually find *of* ‘whether’ (3b). One of the peculiarities of many varieties of Dutch is the fact that an embedded clause can be introduced by one (3), two (4), or three conjunctions (5):¹

- (3) a. Ik verwacht natuurlijk *dat* je me op de hoogte houdt. (B)
 I expect naturally that you me up posted keeps
 ‘Of course I expect you to keep me informed’
- b. Vraag jij nu eens aan hem *of* hij mijn mantel opstuurt. (B)
 ask you now once to him whether he my coat up sends
 ‘Please ask him to send me my coat’
- c. Ze is nieuwsgierig *hoe* het met je gaat. (B)
 she is curious how it with you goes
 ‘She wants to find out how you are’
- (4) a. Ik ben benieuwd *hoe of* het eruit ziet. (B)
 I am curious how whether it out sees
 ‘I wonder what it looks like’
- b. Ik weet ook niet *waarvoor dat* dat alles goed is. (B)
 I know also not wherefore that.COMP that.DEM all good is
 ‘I don’t know either why that happens’
- (5) Ik zit nu eigenlijk nog wel in spanning *hoe of dat* het af zal lopen. (A)
 I sit now actually still a bit in tension how if that it end will go
 ‘I am very anxious at the moment (to find out) how it will end’

Moreover, a complementizer can be absent in an embedded clause. In example (6), the complementizer *dat* ‘that’ introduces the first embedded clause *dat je hun een kaartje met hun trouwen had gestuurd* ‘that you had sent them a card for their marriage’. It occurs only once and is not repeated—or empty—before the second embedded clause (*dat*) *zij dat leuk vonden* ‘(that) they liked it’:

- (6) Die hadden het er nog over *dat* je hun een kaartje met hun trouwen had
 they had it there also about that you them a card with their wedding had
 gestuurd en ___ zij *dat* leuk vonden. (M)
 sent and they it nice found
 ‘They talked about it that you had sent them a card for their wedding and (that) they
 liked that’

1 The conjunctions in examples (3)-(5) are *dat* ‘that’, *of* ‘whether’, *hoe* ‘how’, *hoe of* ‘how’, *waarvoor dat* ‘why’ and *hoe of dat* ‘how’, respectively.

In the 65 letters, we find the coordinating conjunctions *dus* ‘so, therefore’, *en* ‘and’, *maar* ‘but’, *of* ‘or’ and *want* ‘because’ before a V2-clause:²

- (7) Dutch coordinating conjunctions before a main finite clause³
- a. *dus* ‘therefore’ #5
[Ze roepen]_{CP}, *dus* [ik moet ophouden]_{CP} (B)
 - b. *maar* ‘but’ #40
[X kwam ook al om hem te halen]_{CP} *maar* [hij was net weg]_{CP} (M)
 - c. *want* ‘because’ #72
[Ik eindig]_{CP}, *want* [ik moet die briefjes nog hebben]_{CP} (B)

The conjunctions *dus*, *en* and *maar* can also be followed directly by a finite verb. The sequences *dus ik moet ophouden* and *dus moet ik ophouden* ‘so I have to stop’—where the finite verb *moet* ‘must’ and the subject *ik* ‘I’ change places—are both grammatical in Dutch (cf. (7a) versus (8a)). The occurrences of *en* followed by a main V2 clause by far outnumber phrases where *en* is followed directly by a finite verb and subject (8b).

- (8) Dutch coordinating conjunctions introducing a main finite clause
- a. *dus* ‘therefore’ #5
Zij vroeg het me, [*dus* [doe_i [ik het ook t_i]_{VP} t_i]_{IP}]_{CP} (B)
 - b. *en* ‘and’ #8
Het klokje van gehoorzaamheid tikt weer *en* moet ik ophouden. (B)

We find the following Dutch conjunctions in embedded declarative sentences:⁴

- (9) Dutch conjunctions with SOV-fin order (Verb-final embedded clauses)
- a. conjunctions of time
 - (i) *eer* ‘before’ #1
Het duurt een poosje eer we daar doorheen zijn. (A)
 - (ii) *nadat* ‘after’ #1
Nadat je brief, die ik vanochtend ontvangen heb, van zoveel narigheid sprak, ben ik besloten om elke avond maar een praatje met je te houden. (B)
 - (iii) *terwijl* ‘while’ #1
Ik kletterde tegen de straatkeien, terwijl mijn fiets aan de overkant van de straat terecht kwam. (B)

2 The general assumption is that VP and IP are head final, whereas CP is head initial in Dutch. In V2 languages, V⁰ first moves to I⁰. When C⁰ is not filled by a complementizer, the finite verb moves from I⁰ to C⁰ and the specifier position of CP may then be filled by for instance the subject (as in (7)) or an adverb.

3 In the last column of examples (7) to (11), the numbers refer to the total occurrences of the conjunctions in question in the 65 letters.

4 Note that many conjunctions seem to comprise features of location and features of subordination. The structures *nadat*, *totdat*, *voordat*, and *omdat* are historically derived from a preposition (with the respective meanings ‘after’, ‘until’, ‘before’, and ‘surrounding’) followed by the morpheme of subordination *dat* ‘that’.

- (iv) *totdat/tot dat* 'until' #8
Ik zal wachten met jou schrijven totdat je op dezen brief terug geschreven hebt. (B)
- (v) *voor* 'before' #3
Je schreef dat je al helemaal klaar bent voor de kleine er is. (M)
- (vi) *voordat* 'before' #14
Het heeft nu zeker wel lang geduurd, voordat je weer een brief kreeg. (B)
- b. conjunction of reason, cause and effect
- (i) *aan-gezien* 'as, since' #2
Aangezien hij een goede kennis was zit hij er nu mee in de war. (B)
- (ii) *daar* 'because' #5
Ik kan je nu geen geld opsturen, daar mijn uitgaven deze maand nogal groot waren. (B)
- (iii) *omdat* 'because' #26
De laatste dagen heb ik het nogal druk omdat ik een massa tijpewerk heb. (B)
- (iv) *zoodat* 'so that' #3
We zullen toch genoeg krijgen, zoodat wij beter voor het groote kunnen zorgen. (B)
- c. conditional conjunction
- (i) *als* 'if, when, in case' #67
Dan vind ik het wel zo aardig als ik het met St. Nicolaas geef. (B)
- d. disjunctive conjunction⁵
- (i) *of* 'whether' #13
Ik weet niet of ik Zondag kan komen. (B)
- e. other conjunctions
- (i) *als dat* 'as' #1
Ik schrijf dan iets mooiers als dat ik nu naar jou doe. (B)
- (ii) *alsof* 'as if' #2
Ik zal dan maar net doen alsof ik vlak bij je zit en een praatje met je houd. (B)
- (iii) *hoewel* 'even though' #9
Ik had een speentje gehaald hoewel ik er niet voor ben. (A)
- (iv) *toen* 'when' #2
Toen dat ding terug kwam, kwam hij met een kat in zijn bek aandragen. (B)
- (v) *wanneer* 'when' #10
Wanneer ik met verlof kom weet ik niet precies. (B)
- (vi) *zoals/zooals* 'as' #17
Zoals ik je al schreef, had de hond van de Opper een bunzing gevangen. (B)

5 There are two distinct meanings of the word *of* in Dutch. In some cases, the coordinating conjunction *of* 'or' introduces a main clause (A: 3×, B: 13×). In other cases, the subordinating conjunction *of* 'if, whether' is used (M: 3×, B: 10×).

Embedded clauses can also be introduced by relative *d-/wh*-elements. The relative pronoun *die* is used when the antecedent is a masculine or feminine noun referring to an object or a person (10a), whereas *dat* is used for neuter nouns (10b). The relative pronouns *wie* and *wat* are the corresponding forms that include a relative pronoun and its personal or non-personal antecedent at the same time (10c)-(10d). The pronoun *wat* has two functions: it may either be a relative that includes a relative pronoun and its antecedent, or it is an independent relative that refers to a whole clause (10e).

(10) Dutch relative pronouns with SOV-fin order (Verb-final relative clauses)

- a. *die* 'who, which, that' #11
...de brief *die* ik van je ontvangen heb. (B)
- b. *dat* 'which, that' #6
Ik heb schrijfwerk *dat* voor 2 uur afmoet. (B)
- c. *wie* 'who' #3
Verder vroeg je ook *wie* hier kwam. (B)
- d. *wat* 'what' #18
B schreef over D en *wat* *die* wilde *wat* jullie moesten doen. (M)
'B wrote about D_i and the things that he_i wanted you to do'
- e. *wat* 'which' #2
Ik probeerde de paal nog weg te duwen *wat* niet gelukte. (B)

When the relative pronoun is used with a preposition, we find the form *waar*. In some cases, the pronoun and the preposition stay together and in other cases the preposition is stranded. There seems to be free variation as all three letter-writers use structures with and without preposition stranding:

(11) Dutch relative pronouns with SOV-fin order (Verb-final relative clauses)

- a. *waaraan* 'of which' #1
Een hoop drukte en poeha *waar* je niets aan *t_i* hebt. (B)
- b. *waarbij* 'with whom' #1
De vrouw *waar_i* oom B bij *t_i* woonde in Keulen. (M)
- c. *waarin* 'in which'
Ik kreeg een brief *waarin_i* hij mij zijn besluit *t_i* vertelde. (M) #1
Is het huisje duur *waar_i* je *in t_i* woont? (M) #1
- d. *waarmee* 'with which' #1
Ik heb me witte jurk aan *waar_i* ik mee *t_i* of de foto sta. (A)
- e. *waarnaar* 'to which' #1
Ik zal de brief *waar naar_i* ik *t_i* zocht hierbij insluiten. (B)
- f. *waarop* 'on which'
Ik wou dat ik maar een betrekking had *waarop_i* we *t_i* konden trouwen. (B) #1
Dat was het minste *waar_i* ik *op t_i* gerekend had. (B) #2
- g. *waarvan* 'of whom' #1
Menschen *waarvan_i* ik *t_i* verwachtte dat ze me zouden helpen. (B)

- h. *waarvoor* ‘what for, wherefore’
 Je zult vragen *waarvoor_i* is dat *t_i*. (B) #1
 Ik begrijp niet *waar_i* dat goed voor *t_i* is. (B) #1

Note that in examples (9) to (11) a single conjunction introduces the embedded clause. The last example in (11) is interesting because we find a similar example where the *wh*-element *waarvoor* is followed by the complementizer *dat*: see (4b) above. Let us now consider in more detail which combinations of *wh*-elements and the neutral complementizer *dat* are attested in the letters.

With respect to the complementizer *of*, it is striking that A exclusively uses the complex structure *of dat* (N=9; e.g. (12a)), whereas B (N=10) and M (N=3) exclusively use *of* without *dat*. For B and M, the morpheme *of* contains the features of disjunction and subordination. For A, on the other hand, *of* is a morpheme of disjunction and *dat* is a pure subordinator. A also uses the question complementizers *hoeveel* ‘how much’ and *waarom* ‘why’ with *dat*:

- (12) a. Schrijf *of dat* ik komen kan. (A)
 write whether that I come can
 ‘Write whether I can come’
 b. Ik weet toch niet *hoeveel dat* ik hebben moet. (A)
 I know PART not how much that I have must
 ‘I don’t know anyway how much I will need’
 c. *Waarom dat* dat is zal ik je zeggen. (A)
 why that that is shall I you say
 ‘I will tell you why that should be the case’

It is striking that Bayer & Brandner (2008) explicitly refer to the equivalent German *wh*-words *wieviel* and *warum* which have a higher acceptance rate in Alemannic when they co-occur with the complementizer *dass* compared to other *wh*-words.

In contrast to A, M never uses question complementizers together with *dat*, i.e. for her all *wh*-elements are complexes of features including subordination. The only *wh*-element that co-occurs with *dat* in one of B’s later letters is *waarvoor* ‘for what, wherefore’ (see (4b)). We can only speculate why B seems to vary his use of complementizers: perhaps the move from Holland where he had contact with speakers of standard Dutch to an area in Brabant with speakers who use *wh*-elements with *dat* may account for this variation.

The last case we have to look at is the variation between *hoe*, *hoe of*, and *hoe of dat*. All of them can be used to express the meaning of ‘how’. The first form is never used by A, whereas it is the only form to express the meaning ‘how’ in embedded interrogative phrases for M.⁶ B uses this form in the vast majority of cases and he uses *hoe of* only once in a later letter (see (4a) above). Neither M nor B ever use *hoe of dat*. A uses *hoe of* only once in the context where it is followed by the personal pronoun *dat* (presumably to avoid adjacent occurrences of *dat*); otherwise she uses *hoe of dat* (N=8).

6 Note that A does use *hoe* to introduce main interrogative clauses, e.g. *Hoe komt dat?* ‘how comes that?’, i.e. ‘Why is that the case?’.

A look at the other letters that still have to be analysed shows us that M never uses complementizer clusters, i.e. for her *wh*-complementizers may contain features of disjunction and subordination. B sporadically uses *wh*-elements in COMP together with *dat* in later letters and A consistently uses the *wh*-elements *hoeveel* and *waarom* with *dat*. Moreover, she frequently employs the structures *hoe of* and *hoe of dat*, i.e. for her *hoe* ‘how’ does not comprise a feature of disjunction, and disjunctive *of* does not comprise a feature of subordination.

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