

On the Dutch Verb *Laten*

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0. Introduction

This paper will be concerned with sentences of the type in (1).¹

- (1) a Ik laat Jan een liedje zingen
I let Jan a song sing
'I let Jan sing a song'
b Ik laat een liedje zingen
I let a song sing
'I let someone sing a song'

I intend to show that bare infinitival complements to *laten* (=let, make, have) without an overt subject, as in (1b), are not necessarily so-called 'passive infinitives' (cf. Vanden Wyngaerd 1990), but can also be active infinitives involving an empty subject. In what follows I will show that the embedded internal argument can remain in object position even when the external argument is not lexically expressed. As a consequence, the subject position must be filled by an empty subject. For reasons given in section 2, I will assume that this empty NP is a *pro* rather than a PRO subject. This *pro* subject will be licensed in an ECM configuration.

I will also argue that *laten* is a transitive verb that may select a Small Clause (SC) complement involving not only a direct object NP, but also an indirect object in the shape of an *aan*-PP. This construction is carried over to the cases of *laten* that involve bare infinitival complements. I will show that the *aan*-PP may serve to identify the embedded *pro* subject. The constructions without an overt embedded subject will be shown to also allow *door*-PPs with most embedded verbs, which may serve to identify the embedded external argument as well. It is not always clear, however, whether this *door*-PP is an argument to the matrix clause, or an agentive PP belonging to an embedded passive infinitive. If neither an *aan*-PP, nor a *door*-PP is present, the external argument will receive arbitrary interpretation.

¹ This paper is a revised version of my presentation on the TIN-dag 1994. I would like to thank the TIN-dag audience and the anonymous reviewer for useful comments. Furthermore, I wish to give special thanks to Ans van Kemenade, Marcel den Dikken and Aafke Hulk for commenting in detail on earlier versions of this paper and for fruitful discussions concerning the topic.

Finally, it will be argued that the impossibility of empty subjects in embedded ergatives and intransitives supports a *pro* subject analysis of such infinitives.

1. Against Infinitival Passives

On the basis of examples as in (2), it has been proposed that in languages that have overt marking of their infinitival morphology (IM), this IM may absorb the external θ -role of the embedded verb (cf. Vanden Wyngaerd 1990: 97).

- (2) a Hij liet [het huis vernielen] (door de soldaten)
 b *He let the house destroy (by the soldiers)

Absorption of the external θ -role would work in the same way as with passive morphology (cf. Baker, Johnson and Roberts 1989). The passive infinitive approach assumes that IM always bears the external θ -role, but that an overt manifestation of IM, for instance Dutch *-en*, behaves as a pronoun in that it need not have an overt NP as antecedent, while a covert IM, such as in English, behaves like an anaphor and must have an overt NP as antecedent. This way *-en* is able to absorb the external θ -role in sentences like (2a), but the empty IM in (2b) cannot absorb this role.

If this is the case for sentences like (2a), we would expect that all the embedded infinitives without an overt subject would allow a passive *door*-PP, identifying the implicit external argument. However, the examples in (3) and (4) show that this is not the case. In fact, these sentences argue in favour of an *active* analysis of these kind of embedded infinitives.

- (3) a Ik liet [de dief zien] *aan* de agent/**door* de agent
 I let the thief see to the officer/*by the officer
 'I showed the thief to the officer'
 b De dief werd gezien *door* de agent
 The thief was seen by the officer

As we can see in (3a), verbs of perception do not allow a passive *door*-PP to appear in embedded infinitives. This is not to be expected if the embedded clause is a passive infinitive, since these verbs do allow passive *door*-PPs in matrix configurations, as (3b) shows. Moreover, a bare infinitive like *weten* (=to know) can be embedded under the matrix verb *laten*, but it can never be passivized (4).

- (4) a Ik liet [het, weten] *aan* Jan [dat ik ziek was],
 I let it know to Jan that I ill was
 'I let Jan know that I was ill'
 b *Het werd (*door* Jan) geweten dat ik ziek was
 It was (by Jan) known that I ill was

The examples in (3) and (4) clearly suggest that these embedded infinitives are not to be analysed as passives, but rather as actives. An example like (5) illustrates the fact that *laten* can be ditransitive and that the *aan*-PP must be an argument of that verb. The complement of ditransitive *laten* can be analysed as a Small Clause (cf. Kayne 1984).²

- (5) a Ik liet de eer *aan* jou
 I let the honour to you
 'I give you the credit you deserve'
 b Ik liet de zorg voor de kinderen (over) *aan* Jan
 I let the care for the children prt to Jan
 'I left Jan the care for the children'

As we will see in section 3, *aan*-PPs as in (3) and (4) and *door*-PPs as in (2) can both function to identify the subject of the embedded clause. In the next section we will concentrate on the status of the embedded internal argument.

2. On the object status of the embedded internal argument

If the embedded infinitives without an overt subject are always passive infinitives, the internal argument is expected to move into the embedded subject position. There are various criteria (cf. Postal 1974; Radford 1988; Lasnik and Saito 1991; Lasnik 1993) by which it can be tested whether an NP has the status of a subject or an object. One of these is the behaviour of floating emphatic reflexive *zelf* (cf. Everaert 1986; Broekhuis 1992). If its NP has moved away, this floating reflexive can only modify a subject, not an object, as is shown in (6c) below.

- (6) a Ik liet [de president_i vanmorgen zelf_i in de auto klimmen]
 I let the president this morning self in the car climb
 'I let the president climb in the car by himself this morning'

² See Den Dikken (1992) for an account of the structural licensing of the two arguments in a Small Clause complement via a(n empty) particle. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this theory in detail.

- b Ik liet [de lijfwachten_i de president_j zelf_{i/j} in de auto duwen]
 I let the bodyguards the president himself/themselves in the car push
 'I let the bodyguards (themselves) push the president (himself) in the car this morning'
- c Ik liet [de lijfwachten_i de president_j vanmorgen zelf_{i/j} in de auto duwen]
 I let the bodyguards the president this morning themselves in the car push
 'I let the bodyguards themselves push the president in the car this morning'
- d Ik_i liet [de president_j vanmorgen zelf_{i/j} in de auto duwen]
 I let the president this morning myself in the car push
 'I myself had some people push the president in the car this morning'
- e De president_i werd vanmorgen zelf_i in de auto geduwd
 The president was this morning himself in the car pushed
 'The president himself was pushed into the car this morning'

The (b) sentence shows that if the reflexive is not floated away from an NP, it can modify both a subject and an object. However, the (d) sentence shows that even if the Agent of the embedded clause has been left implicit, the reflexive cannot be taken to refer to the internal argument, which suggests that this has not moved into embedded subject position.³ Moreover, the (e) example shows that a matrix internal argument can be the antecedent for *zelf* under passivization. This contrast between (d) and (e) strongly suggests that the internal argument is still in object position.

Another argument is provided by Quantifier Floating (QF) (cf. Sportiche 1988), which is possible with subjects, but not with objects.⁴ The examples in (7) show, that even if the embedded external argument of the verb *weten* (=to know) remains implicit, the internal argument does not move to subject position.

- (7) a Ik liet elke student zijn cijfer weten
 I let every student his grade know
 'I let every student know his grade'

³ As I propose a syntactic analysis of the *laten* constructions in this paper, I assume that the external argument of the embedded clause in (6d) is not suppressed in the lexicon, but rather represented by a *pro* subject. It has been pointed out to me (A. Hulk, p.c.) that this analysis leads to an opacity problem, since we would expect a *pro* subject to be able to serve as the antecedent for the reflexive *zelf*. The fact that this is not the case may have to do with a raising to matrix object position operation (cf. Lasnik 1993), but I will leave this as a topic for further research.

⁴ The *not*-initial and *alone*-final arguments for subjecthood mentioned by Postal (1974) do not apply to Dutch, since both subjects and objects display these properties.

- b Ik liet de studenten_i elk_i hun cijfer weten
 I let the students each their grades know
- c Ik liet elk cijfer weten (aan/*door de studenten)
 I let every grade know (to/*by the students)
- d *Ik liet de cijfers_i elk_i weten
 I let the grades each know

The embedded verb *weten* cannot be passivized, as we saw in (4) above, so that the internal argument *elk cijfer* has not moved to the embedded subject position in (7c,d), but remains in object position. As soon as the object NP floats away from its quantifier, the sentence becomes ungrammatical, as in (7d). This is contrasted by the example in (7c), which is grammatical with the external argument either interpreted generically, or identified by the *aan*-PP. The FQ-construction in (7b) is grammatical, because the quantifier belongs to the embedded subject. The FQ-construction in (7d), however, is not grammatical, supporting the claim that the internal argument in this and the (c) sentence is still in object position.

The examples in (3) and (4) have shown that not all embedded infinitives without an overt subject are to be analysed as passives, and the examples in (6) and (7) have argued that the internal argument of the embedded clause remains in object position even when the subject is not overt. If we want to adhere to the Projection Principle (cf. Chomsky 1981), we will have to assume an empty subject in these cases.

Empty subjects bearing a θ -role can either be PRO or *pro*. I will assume with Chomsky and Lasnik (1991) that PRO needs to be assigned a structural Null Case by the functional head of TP. As there is no direct evidence for a TP-projection for a bare infinitive, I will assume that there is no way for the empty subject to receive this Null Case.⁵ If, on the other hand, we assume the embedded subject to be a *pro*, it can be compared to empty subjects of Small Clauses (SCs), as in (8).

⁵ Cf. Pijnenburg (1991: 105/6) for criteria for French infinitival complements to *faire*. The same criteria can be applied to Dutch. As shown in (i) below, there is no evidence for a TP projection in Dutch bare infinitival complements to *laten*, since they do not allow a past tense infinitive like *hebben* (=to have) or separate temporal adverbials (b), while other infinitival complements do (a).

- (i) a Ik beloofde *gisteren* [PRO het boek vóór morgenavond te *hebben* gelezen]
 I promised yesterday the book before tomorrow evening to have read
 'Yesterday I promised to have read the book before tomorrow night'
- b *Ik liet *gisteren* [het boek vóór morgenavond gelezen *hebben*]
 I let yesterday the book before tomorrow night read have

Thus the infinitival complement to *laten* does not involve a TP projection. I will assume that it does have an AgrOP projection in which it can license the objects of an embedded transitive infinitive, and check the *-en* morphology of the infinitive.

- (8) Geld maakt [*pro* niet gelukkig]
 Money makes not happy
 'Money doesn't make people happy'

In these cases, the *pro* subject must be formally licensed by structural accusative Case (cf. Rizzi 1986: 546). For subjects of SCs and bare infinitives this is achieved via Exceptional Case Marking (ECM).

According to Rizzi (1986) structural Case is assigned under government by V, P or Infl. If we recast this into a minimalist framework (cf. Chomsky 1992), however, licensing happens via a Specifier-Head relation in a functional projection, which is AgrOP for structural accusative Case. According to Lasnik and Saito (1991) and Lasnik (1993), following Postal (1974), it is not only the direct object, but also the ECM subject that is licensed in the matrix SpecAgrOP. For reasons of space, we will leave out the details about this claim and just adopt the idea that Dutch ECM subjects are assigned their structural Case in the SpecAgrOP of the matrix clause. As long as the content of *pro* cannot be recovered from the immediate linguistic context, the *pro* subject of a bare infinitival complement to *laten* will be assigned arbitrary reference. However, the next section will show that *pro* can be identified by matrix *aan*- and *door*-PPs.

3. Prepositional objects recovering the content of *pro*

The empty subjects of bare infinitives can be made explicit by certain prepositional objects, as exemplified in (9).⁶

- (9) a Ik liet [*pro* de auto wassen] *door Jan/*aan Jan*
 I let the car wash by Jan
 b Ik liet [*pro* de brief lezen] *door Jan/aan Jan*
 I let the letter read by Jan/to Jan
 c Ik liet [*pro* de soep proeven] *door Jan/aan Jan*
 I let the soup taste by Jan/to Jan
 d Ik liet [*pro* de jurk zien] *aan Jan/*door Jan*
 I let the dress see to Jan
 e Ik liet [*pro* het_i weten] *aan Jan/*door Jan* [dat ik ziek was]_i
 I let it know to Jan that I ill was

⁶ The *laten* constructions are often analysed as two different verbs according to their permissive or causative meaning. In this paper I generalise over both types, as in Dutch the difference is less clear than, for instance, in French or English, where two different verbs correspond to either meaning, i.e. *laisser/faire* and *let/have*. The distinction seems to be related to 'an orientation away from or toward the embedded subject' as discussed in this section.

As we can see in (9), some of the verbs only allow *door*, others only allow *aan* and still others allow both the *aan* and *door* prepositions. Cannings and Moody (1978) argue that these PPs are not part of the embedded clause, but rather of the matrix clause. They show this for comparable constructions in French, as exemplified in (10).

- (10) a J'ai fait écrire la dissertation *par un copain*
 'I had a friend write the composition'
 b J'ai fait écrire une dissertation *à mes étudiants*
 'I had my students write a composition'

According to C and M, the prepositions *par* and *à* in these constructions do not simply introduce agentive NPs in an adjunct to passive constructions.⁷ Rather they are deictic prepositions that mark the 'Intermediary' role of the NPs they introduce. This idea is motivated by the fact that in other constructions the preposition *par* has 'deictic property of orientation away from its object' (C and M 1978: 335), while the preposition *à* expresses orientation towards its object, as is shown in the examples in (11) and (12).

- (11) a Je l'ai su *par Marie*
 'I found it out from/through Marie'
 b Je l'ai appris *par Pierre*
 'I learned it from/through Pierre'
 c Il est allé de Paris *à Nice* en passant *par Marseille*
 'He went from Paris to Nice by way of Marseilles'
- (12) a Je suis allé *à Paris*
 'I went to Paris'
 b J'ai donné une pomme *à Marie*
 'I gave an apple to Marie'
 c J'ai dit *à Pierre* qu'elle avait faim
 'I told Pierre that she was hungry'

None of the above examples involve a passivization operation. The NPs in (11) are all a kind of intermediary person/place in the event described, that are not necessarily affected themselves. The NPs in (12), on the other hand, are the ultimate Goal (target, addressee) of the event and they are all necessarily affected by the event described. The same goes for the examples in (10). In (10b), the *à*

⁷ Compare Kayne (1975: 239), who takes *par* to indicate an indirect relation between the matrix subject and the embedded event, while *à* would indicate a more direct relation between the matrix subject and the event. In what follows I will present a different approach.

preposition necessarily implies that the students learned something by writing their compositions, while in (10a) the preposition *par* there is no such implication for the friend writing the composition.

Similarly, as we saw in (5), Dutch *laten* allows *aan*-PPs in simple constructions. In both the (a) and (b) sentences, the *aan*-PP is the Goal argument of *laten*. These Goal-PPs express orientation towards their object, just as the French *à*-examples above. I have not been able to find similar examples of *laten* in combination with a *door*-PP, but this does not exclude the possibility of Intermediary *door*-PPs with caustive *laten* in combination with bare infinitival complements.

When we consider the example sentences in (9), it turns out that the embedded infinitival complements to *laten* are to be divided into three groups. One involves Agentive verbs, as in (9a), that allow an implicit subject in combination with a *door*-PP. A second group involves verbs of Perception, that allow empty embedded subjects combined with an *aan*-PP, as illustrated in (9d,e). And the final group shows an alternation between these two, as exemplified in (9b,c). As with the examples in (10)-(12) for French, there seems to be a correlation between the deictic orientation of the preposition and the degree of 'affectedness' of the prepositional object involved. The preposition *door* involves an orientation away from its object, and as a consequence this object is not necessarily affected by the embedded event. For instance, washing a car or reading a letter out loud need not affect the Agent. The preposition *aan*, on the other hand, involves an orientation towards its object, and consequently the prepositional object is necessarily affected by the embedded event. The Agent of *zien*, for example, is necessarily affected as (s)he is also the Goal of the event. If the Agent and the Goal of *lezen* are one and the same person this will be expressed by using the *aan*-PP, so that the prepositional object is necessarily affected. Apparently, this notion of 'affectedness' is only applicable to Goal arguments, since if the subject of *wassen* has him- or herself as Theme argument, the preposition *door* is the only correct preposition and *aan* is still ungrammatical, even though the subject must be affected under identity with the object.⁸

Apparently, the *aan*-PPs must be analysed as arguments of the compositional complex formed in the syntax by the higher verb, *laten*, and the embedded infinitive. Syntactically, the PP will be attached to the matrix verb. They have a semantic role of Intermediary/Goal. An argument in favour of this idea, apart from the sentences in (5), is that both Dutch and English have a simple verb that is the exact synonym of the verbal complex *laten zien* (= *to let see*), namely

⁸ This explanation is supported by the fact that certain embedded infinitives, like *détruire* and *décorer* (cf. Pijnenburg 1991: 101) in the complement of the French causative *faire*, do not allow *à*-PP, but only *par*-PPs or lexical datives (clitics) that identify the embedded subject. The class of verbs that disallow an *à*- or *aan*-PP, however, does not exactly correspond in the two languages. I will leave this issue for further research.

tonen (=to show). These verbs take a Goal argument, which may be introduced by the preposition *aan* (= to), as is illustrated in (13a), or occur as an NP, as in (13b).⁹

- (13) a Jan toonde de jurk *aan* Marie
 Jan showed the dress to Marie
 b Jan toonde Marie de jurk
 Jan showed Marie the dress

For the *door*-PPs it is not so clear that they are arguments to *laten*, they may be Agents in an adjunct PP to an embedded passive infinitive, as well as Intermediaries for the event caused by the matrix subject. Both the *aan* and *door*-PPs serve to identify the content of the empty or passivized subject of the embedded infinitive.

4. Additional Evidence

The above approach is supported by embedded ergatives as in (14).

- (14) a Ik liet [de bal vallen]
 I let the ball fall
 'I dropped the ball'
 b *Ik liet [*pro* vallen]

As we saw at the end of section 2, *laten* always has an object slot, SpecAgrOP, in which a *pro* can be licensed. And in section 3 we saw that it is the syntactic complex of *laten* plus the embedded infinitive that creates the possibility for an additional *aan*-PP or a *door*-PP argument, or for both. Thus, apart from a formal Case licensing requirement for *pro*, there is also the requirement that the embedded *pro* subject must be identifiable by another matrix argument, even if this is not lexically expressed.

Now, since *laten* always has an AgrOP, why is (14b) ungrammatical?¹⁰ I would like to suggest that this is not because embedded infinitives without an overt subject are passives and that ergatives like *vallen* cannot be passivized. Rather I would like to claim that the embedded ergative does not contain a

⁹ These examples actually suggest that their *laten* + bare infinitive equivalents may also appear in two variants, a dative construction, with the PP, and a double object construction with an accusative NP. For reasons of space, I will leave this question open for further research.

¹⁰ These ergative constructions were brought to my attention by Teun Hoekstra (p.c.) as a possible problem for an active analysis of bare infinitives.

position for an external argument that can be represented by a *pro*. As ergatives do not have an AgrO projection of their own, motivated by the fact that they cannot assign accusative Case, the internal argument will have to be licensed in the matrix SpecAgrO. There is no embedded external argument that needs to be interpreted via a Goal/Intermediary argument. Such an argument is not made available by the *laten* plus ergative complex, which at most allows a locational adjunct. The same can be said for the non-complex English equivalent, as we can see in the glosses and translation in (15).

- (15) Ik liet [de bal vallen] *door Jan/*aan Jan/ op Jans hoofd
 I let the ball fall *by Jan/* to Jan/ on Jan's head
 'I dropped the ball (on Jan's head)'

As a consequence, *pro* is not structurally licensed, because the embedded internal argument occupies the matrix SpecAgrOP. Moreover, its contents are not even recoverable through the argument structure of the complex verb, since there is no extra argument available (e.g. an *aan-* or *door-*PP).

Similarly, the impossibility of a *pro* subject in intransitive embedded infinitives as in (16) cannot be accounted for by a passive analysis of embedded infinitives.

- (16) a Ik liet de jongens (hard) werken
 I let the boys hard work
 b ?Ik liet [(hard) werken] door de jongens
 I let hard work by the boys
 c ??Ik liet [*pro* (hard) werken]
 I let hard work

First, it is possible to form impersonal passives with an intransitive verb like *werken* and *vertrekken*, as is illustrated in (17).¹¹

- (17) a Er wordt hier hard gewerkt
 It is here hard worked
 'People work hard here'
 b Er wordt ook nooit op tijd vertrokken
 It is prt never on time left
 'They never leave on time!'

As these impersonal passives are possible for matrix intransitives, a passive analysis of the embedded infinitive in (16c) is not adequate. The causative

¹¹ The argument was brought to my attention by Marcel den Dikken (p.c.).

constructions improve considerably if subject and tense are generic, as in (18a); and the construction is perfect with an obligatorily present adjunct like *graag*, as in (18b).¹²

- (18) a ?Slavendrijvers laten *altijd* hard werken
 Slave drivers let always hard work
 'Slave drivers always make people work hard'
 b Ik laat *graag* voor me werken
 I let happily for me work
 'I like having people work for me'

If anything, the generic reading of the sentences in (18) supports an active analysis of the embedded infinitive involving a *pro* subject. According to Rizzi (1986), an arbitrary *pro* that cannot recover its content is licensed only in generic contexts.

5. Conclusions

In this paper I have discussed the Dutch causative verb *laten* and its bare infinitival complements. We have seen that this bare infinitive can leave its subject unexpressed. I have argued that this infinitive may be analysed as an active construction involving an empty external argument in most cases. I have assumed the empty subject to be a *pro*, formally licensed in the matrix SpecAgrOP. The contents of this *pro* may, but need not, be recovered by an Intermediary/Goal argument to the verbal complex of *laten* and the embedded verb. This argument can either be an *aan*- or *door*-PP. If the argument is overt, it serves to identify *pro*, if it is implicit, *pro* is assigned arbitrary reference.

I will leave open the possibility that the *door*-PP is a realisation of the external argument to an embedded passive. These passives exist in certain dialects of Dutch and in Italian, as is illustrated by the examples in (19).

- (19) a Het huis_i is [door Jan laten stofzuigen t_i] (cf. Coopmans 1985)
 The house has-been by Jan let Hoover
 'Jan had the house hoovered by someone'
 b La macchina fu fatta riparare a Giovanni
 The car was made fix to Giovanni
 'The car was made to be fixed by Giovanni' (cf. Baker 1988:201)

I will leave this as a problem for further research.

¹² This example was brought to my attention by Ans van Kemenade.

If the embedded infinitive is ergative, it does not have an external argument that can be represented by a *pro*. Moreover, a verbal complex of *laten* plus an ergative does not make available an Intermediary/Goal argument, so that a potential *pro* would not be identified and, hence, its content would not be recovered, so that *pro* is not licensed, even though there is a matrix SpecAgrOP position.

Unergative intransitive infinitives embedded under *laten* do not form real counterexamples to an active analysis of *laten* constructions without an overt subject, either, rather they lend support to the idea that a *pro* subject is licensed in generic environments.

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