

Possessive Object Constructions in Heerlens

1. *Introduction**

In this paper I will discuss some characteristics of the possessive object construction in spoken regional Dutch in Heerlen (henceforth: 'Heerlens'). Heerlen is a town in Limburg, a province in the Southeast of the Netherlands.

Contrary to Standard Dutch (henceforth: ABN), in Heerlens double objects can appear in a wide range of constructions. Some of them will be illustrated in section 2. The construction that will be the main topic of this paper is the possessive object construction, in which the indirect object is construed as the possessor of the other object. This construction will be briefly compared with the benefactive construction. In section 3, it will be shown that both construction types in Heerlens are in various respects similar to the possessive object and benefactive constructions in French and German. In section 4, however, I will discuss an unexpected difference concerning the possessive object construction between Heerlens and French/German. It will be shown that this difference can be better understood by taking a regional construction type into consideration.

2. *Variety of indirect object constructions in Heerlens*

One of the characteristics of Heerlens is that it does not only make a productive but also an extensive use of indirect objects in a wide variety of constructions that are unacceptable in ABN. Compare the following examples.

- | | | | | | |
|-------|--------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------|----------------------------|
| (1)H | Ik was | je | de | wagen | |
| H/ABN | Ik was | | de | wagen | voor je |
| | I wash | you (i.o) | the | car | |
| | I wash | | the | car | for you |
| | 'I will wash the car for you' | | | | |
| (2)H | Ik hoef | het | je | niet | te geloven |
| H/ABN | Ik hoef | het | | niet | van je te geloven |
| | I need | it | you (i.o) | not | to believe |
| | I need | it | | not | of you to believe |
| | 'I do not need to believe it of you' | | | | |
| (3)H | Ik breek | hem | het | been | (ABN: zijn been) |
| | I break | him(i.o) | the | leg | his leg |
| | 'I am breaking his leg' | | | | |
| (4)H | De poes | springt | je | op | schoot (ABN: op je schoot) |
| | the cat | jumps | you (i.o) | onto | lap onto your lap |
| | 'The cat jumps onto your lap' | | | | |

In (1) the indirect object is a benefactive and in (2) it is some kind of 'source'. In (3), the indirect object functions as a 'possessive' object. The same is true for the object in (4), but we will see in the next section that it is not *a priori* clear whether it is a direct or an indirect object. Leaving idiomatic expressions beside, the indirect objects in (1-4) are not possible in ABN. In (1-2), the indirect object NP must be substituted for by a PP. This option is possible in Heerlens as well. In (3), only a

genitive specifier can be used. This option is also possible in Heerlens, but gives rise to a marginal result if the possessed object refers to a body-part. In as far as the construction in (4) is possible in ABN, the prepositional object requires a genitive specifier of its own in addition to the possessive object.

This paper mainly deals with the possessive object constructions in (3) and (4), although some attention will be paid to the benefactive construction in (1), since this will enable us to highlight some remarkable features of the possessive object construction.

3.1. *Benefactives and possessive objects in Heerlens*

Consider the following examples of the benefactive construction in Heerlens:

- (5)H Ik sla *je* een vlieg dood
I beat you (i.o) a fly dead
(6)H Ik ruim *hem* de kamer op
I clean him (i.o) the room PART
(7)H Ik smeer *haar* de boterhammen
I butter her (i.o) the sandwiches

In all the above examples the indirect object can be replaced by a *voor*-PP (cf. (1)). The double object construction however seems to imply some 'involvement' of the person referred to by the indirect object in the event described (Van Bree 1981:168). Note that in Heerlens the benefactive is not restricted to contexts in which a transfer of possession is implied as is the case in English (cf. Pijnenburg 1991 and references cited there).

The benefactive and possessive object constructions differ with respect to the restrictions placed on the direct or the prepositional object. In the benefactive construction the object can be either an indefinite or a definite NP, whereas an indefinite NP leads to unacceptability in the possessive object construction. This can be seen in (8) and (9a): (9a) is only acceptable if it is construed as a benefactive construction, i.e. as 'the rabbit is eating a carpet for him' (cf. Guéron 1988 for a possible account of this restriction in the possessive object construction).

- (8)H Ik smeer *haar* een boterham (cf. (7))
I butter her (i.o) a sandwich
(9)a.H *Het konijn eet *hem* een tapijt op
the rabbit eats him (i.o) a carpet up
'The rabbit is eating his carpet'

Sometimes the use of a definite object leads to ambiguity between a benefactive and possessive interpretation, e.g. (9b) can be either construed as 'the rabbit is eating the carpet for him' or as 'the rabbit is eating his carpet'. The interpretation of (9b) is dependent on the given context.

- (9)b.H Het konijn eet *hem* het tapijt op
the rabbit eats him (i.o) the carpet up

However, if the direct object refers to a body-part (or something that is intimately related to the indirect object), this ambiguity does no longer show up (cf. (10)). As we will see, Heerlens is similar in this respect to French and German.

- (10)H Ik breek *hem* het been (cf. (4))
I break him(i.o) the leg
'I am breaking his leg'

Before we will go and look at French and German, I want to note that in Heerlens, there are two passive constructions that correspond to the prepositional inalienable possession construction. In (11b) we find the normal (personal) passive counterpart of (11a), whereas we find an impersonal passive construction in (11c).

- (11)a.H Ik tik *hem* op de vingers
 I hit him on the fingers
 'I hit him on the fingers' or 'I give him a reprimand'
 b.H *Hij* wordt op de vingers getikt
 he is on the fingers hit
 c.H *Hem* wordt op de vingers getikt
 him is on the fingers hit

Since the possessive object in (11a) can appear in the passive voice either as a nominative NP (11b) or as an objective NP (11c), we may conclude that the possessive object *hem* in (11a) can be either a direct or an indirect object. That the possessive object can be an indirect object can also be seen from the fact that (11a) allows the so-called pseudo- or *krijgen*-passive as in (12); in the *krijgen*-passive the indirect object is promoted to subject.

- (12)H *Hij* kreeg op de vingers getikt
 he got on the fingers hit

The sentences in (11b) and (11c) differ in meaning; whereas (11b) is preferably construed as 'he has been hit on the fingers', (11c) can only be metaphorically construed as 'he has been given a reprimand'. As expected, the example in (12) can only have the latter meaning as well. As we will see, Heerlens is similar to French and German in this respect.

3.2. Benefactives and possessive objects in French and German

The French and German benefactive and possessive object constructions are similar to the constructions in Heerlens. First, I will give a short characterization of the French constructions. As in Heerlens, there are no semantic restrictions on the benefactive construction in French. Consider (13):

- (13)F *Pierre lui* a lavé la voiture
 Pierre him (i.o) has washed the car

But since French has the possessive object construction as well, (13) can like Heerlens be construed either as a benefactive construction, i.e. as 'Pierre washed the car for him' or as a possessive construction, i.e. as 'Pierre washed his car'. If the direct object refers to a body-part, only the inalienable possession reading is available.⁴ Note that as in Heerlens the possessed NP must be definite.

- (14)F *Je lui* ai lavé les mains
 I him(i.o) has washed the hands
 'I washed his hands'

In the prepositional construction the possessive object can appear either as a dative or as an accusative NP (cf. (15)).

- (15)a.F *Je lui* ai frappé sur le nez
 I him (dat.) have hit on the nose
 'I patted him on the nose (friendly)'
 b.F *Je l'* ai frappé sur le nez
 I him (acc.) have hit on the nose
 'I knocked him on the nose'

As in Heerlens, the difference correlates with a difference in meaning. As can be seen from the glosses, (15a) has a more metaphorical meaning, whereas the (15b) can only have a literal meaning (cf. Pijnenburg 1991:58).

As in French and Heerlens, there is no semantic restriction on the German benefactive double object construction.

- (16)G Er trägt ihm den Koffer zum Bahnhof
he carries him(i.o) the suitcase to the station

The possessive object construction expands to all (abstract) objects having an intimate relationship with the indirect object. As in Heerlens and French, the possessed object must be definite.

- (17)G Man ist uns ins Haus eingebrochen
they have us into-the house broken
(18)G Er verdirbt ihm die Laune
he spoils him(i.o) the temper

In the prepositional inalienable possession construction, the possessive NP may have either the dative (19a) or the accusative (19b). As in French and Heerlens, the a-sentence has a metaphorical meaning, whereas the b-sentence has a literal meaning.

- (19)a.G Der Rauch biß mir in die Augen
the smoke bites me (dat.) in the eyes
'The smoke is irritating my eyes'
b.G Der Hund hat mich in das Bein gebissen
the dog has me (acc.) in the leg bitten

3.3. Conclusion

In the first part of this paper I have presented an overview of several constructions in Heerlens that are only marginal possible or do not occur in ABN (section 2).

In section 3, I have shown that the distribution and the behaviour of the benefactive and the possessive object in Heerlens is the same as in French and German. A possessive object is only grammatical if the possessed object is definite. In the double object construction, a possessive interpretation is favoured if there is some kind of intimate relation between the possessor and the possessed object (especially if the latter refers to a body part). In the prepositional construction, the possessor may be either a direct or an indirect object. If the possessor is a direct object, the construction has a literal meaning, whereas only a metaphorical meaning is possible if the possessor is an indirect object.

4. *The reflexive inalienable possession construction*

We have seen that Heerlens is similar to French and German in various respects. In this section, however, I will discuss a difference between Heerlens and French/German with respect to the reflexive possessive object construction, i.e. the construction in which the possessive object is a reflexive. It will be shown that this difference can be understood by taking the so-called *band lek*-construction into consideration.

4.1 *An unexpected difference between French/German and Heerlens*

In French and German, there is an alternation of a reflexive possessive object and a genitive specifier. In (20/21a), for instance, *se/sich* can be replaced by the genitive specifier *son/sein* as can be seen in (20/21b).

- (20)a.F Il *se* coupe le doigt
 he refl. cuts the finger
 b.F Il coupe *son* doigt
 he cuts his finger
(21)a.G Er bricht *sich* das Bein
 he breaks refl. the leg
 b.G Er bricht *sein* Bein
 he breaks his leg

The a-sentences with a reflexive clitic or NP are common constructions in French and German. In both languages the reflexive construction expresses a coincidental event; it is by accident that someone cuts his own finger (20a) or breaks his own leg (21a). The b-sentences with a genitive specifier however are rare and change coincidence into action; the event is deliberately performed. Besides, the possessed object is preferably construed as alienable, i.e. if in these examples the genitive specifier is construed as coreferential with the subject, the object refers to a prothesis or something of the sort.

As can be seen in (22), in Heerlens similar reflexive possessive constructions can be found as in French and German.

- (22)H Hij breekt *zich* het been
 he breaks refl. the leg

It is very remarkable, though, that the interpretation of (22) differs from the a-examples in (20) and (21). Whereas the French and German examples refer to a coincidental event, (22) can only refer to a deliberate action. A coincidental event can only be expressed in Heerlens if the reflexive object has been dropped. Contrary to French and German, the inalienable possession reading will be maintained, i.e. the subject of (23) is construed as the possessor of the object. In accordance with this, the possessed object will appear with a definite article. This can be seen in (23).

- (23)H Hij breekt *het* been
 he breaks the leg
 'He breaks his own leg'

In Heerlens, the construction with a genitive specifier is marginally possible. Probably, this construction must be viewed as a borrowing from ABN. For reasons of space, I will not discuss this matter here.

The difference between French and German on the one hand and Heerlens on the other can be summarized as follows. In French and German the reflexive inalienable possession construction refers to a coincidental event, whereas in Heerlens this construction can only be construed as a deliberate action.

If the reflexive object is not present, the situation is reversed. Further, in French and German the replacement of the possessive object by a genitive specifier results in the loss of the inalienable possession reading. In Heerlens on the other hand the inalienable possession reading is still available after dropping the possessive object, since the subject may act as a possessor.

4.2 The band lek-construction in Heerlens

How can the dissimilarities discussed in 4.1 be better understood? I will argue that the different semantic features of the construction in Heerlens is connected with the so-called *band lek*-construction (cf. Van Bree 1981). Consider the following examples:

- (24)H Hij heeft de band lek
 he has the tyre punctured
 'He has a flat tyre'
 (25)H Hij heeft de ogen rood
 he has the eyes red
 'He has red eyes'

In these examples the subject is interpreted as the possessor of the object which must be definite as in the possessive object construction (cf. Van Bree 1981:128). In (24-25) a state is described (24), for example, refers to a state of 'a tyre being flat'. In ABN this state cannot be expressed by the same means, but has to be described with the help of a copular construction as in (26) or with the help of an attributive adjective as in (27).

- (26)ABN Zijn band is lek
 his tyre is flat
 (27)ABN Ik heb een lekke band
 I have a flat tyre

Given the ungrammaticality of (28), we may conclude that as in ABN the *band lek*-construction is not possible in Standard German (although according to Van Bree 1981, it may be present in some western dialects). In French, however, the *band lek*-construction is known as well (cf. Van Bree 1981). This can be seen in (29).

- (28)G *Er hat die Haare schön
 he has the hair beautiful
 'His hair is beautiful'
 (29)F Il a le pantelon blanc
 he has the trousers white
 'His trousers are white'

I will come back to this later and return to Heerlens now. As can be seen in (30), the *band lek*-construction can be formed with the verb *krijgen* as well. Since in the *krijgen*-passive the indirect object is promoted to subject (cf. section 3.1), it is tempting to assume that the S-structure subject of the *band lek*-construction is an underlying indirect object as well.

- (30)H Hij kreeg de band lek
 he got the tyre punctured
 'His tyre is flat'

The assumption that the subject in (24-25) is an underlying indirect object seems to be confirmed by the fact that the copular construction in Heerlens may appear with an overt possessive object. This can be seen in (31).

- (31)H Hem is de band lek
 him is the tyre punctured
 'His tyre is punctured'

Further, it explains that the subject behaves as a possessive subject in (24-25) and that a possessive object cannot be added to this construction (cf. (32)).

- (32).H *Hij heeft zich de band lek

In (24-25) a predicative adjective has been used. If we use a participle as in (33), we would expect an ambiguity to appear, since the participle can be construed either as an adjective or as a past participle. Consequently, it should be possible to construe the examples either as an action or as a state. This expectation is not confirmed; the examples can only be construed as states.

- (33)H Jan heeft de jas gescheurd
 Jan has the coat torn

We may conclude from this that for some strange reason the participle can only be construed as an adjective in (33), i.e. we are dealing here with the *band lek*-construction. This is confirmed by the fact that the subject can only be interpreted as the possessor of the object.

The assumption that the participle can be an adjective can be tested, since in embedded clauses a past participle can either follow or precede the finite verb, whereas an adjective can only precede the final verb. Now compare the following examples:

- (34)a.H dat Jan het been heeft *gebroken*
 that Jan the leg has broken
 b.H dat Jan het been *gebroken* heeft
 that Jan the leg broken has

Only (34b) is construed as a *band lek*-construction. Note, however, that in Heerlens the order of the verbal sequence in (34a) is only marginally possible.

Summarizing, we may conclude the participle can only be interpreted as a past participle if the subject of the sentence does not behave as a possessor. If, on the other hand, the subject is a possessor, the participle has to be interpreted as an adjective, i.e. the construction is construed as a *band lek*-construction. This may be accounted for if we assume that in Heerlens a possessor has to be an underlying indirect object.

4.3 Reflexive possessive object construction reconsidered

Let us now consider the examples in (22) and (23), repeated here for convenience as (35) and (36).

- (35)H Hij breekt *zich* het been
 he breaks refl. the leg
 (36)H Hij breekt *het* been
 he breaks the leg

As we have seen in section 4.1, (35) expresses an active, deliberate action, whereas (36) in its inalienable possessive interpretation expresses a coincidental event. Further, we have seen that the situation is reversed in French and German; the reflexive construction in these languages expresses a coincidental event, whereas the construction with a genitive specifier refers to a deliberate action. How can this deviant behaviour of Heerlens be understood?

Both (35) and (36) are verbal sequences. The fact that (35) can only refer to a deliberately performed action is only due to the presence of the reflexive object. I think we can understand this interpretation of (35) better if we take the perfect tense counterparts of (35) and (36) into consideration. These are given in (37) and (38).

(37)H Hij heeft *zich* *het* been gebroken
 he has refl. the leg broken

(38)H Hij heeft *het* been gebroken
 he has the leg broken

Let us first consider (38). This example has all the features of the *band lek*-construction discussed in the previous subsection: (i) the object is a definite NP, and (ii) the subject is interpreted as the possessor of the object. Since (38) can only be understood as referring to a state, we must conclude that (38) is construed as a *band lek*-construction.

Example (37) shows that in addition to the manipulation of the order of the verbal sequence (cf. (34)), participle constructions can be disambiguated by insertion of the reflexive object *zich*. If we add this reflexive, as in (37), the example can only be construed as a verbal construction. This is not surprising, since we have seen that a reflexive possessive object cannot appear in the adjectival *band lek*-construction (cf. (32)).

Note that in Heerlens the reflexive *zich* is more than just a *possessive* object, since it does not only make the sequence verbal, but also prevents the subject from acting as a possessor, i.e. if the reflexive is present, the subject must be an agent. This explains why (35) can only be construed as an action.

Since (37) has an active reading, the same must be true for (35). Consequently, *zich* must be construed as an argument in the same way as *hem* in (39).

(39)H Ik breek *hem* het been
 I break him the leg

Because (37) is treated on a par with (39), this example must also refer to a deliberate action. The argument-status of the reflexive object explains why (37) cannot be interpreted as a coincidental event as the reflexive possessive construction in French and German can.

Summarizing, we may conclude that, despite appearance, the constructions I have discussed in this subsection are not similar to French and German examples in (20) and (21).

5. Conclusion

In this paper I have discussed the possessive object construction in Heerlens. In section 3, it has been shown that the distribution of this construction is quite similar to the one in French and German. In section 4, we encountered an unexpected semantic difference between Heerlens on the one hand and French and German on the other with respect to the reflexive possessive object construction: if the possessive object is a reflexive, the sentence seems to refer to a coincidental event in German and French but not in Heerlens. If the reflexive possessive object is absent, the situation is reversed. I have shown that the similarities of these constructions are only apparent. The constructions in Heerlens differ in two respects.

First, in Heerlens the subject may act as the possessor of an object that refers to a body-part if there is no possessive object present (cf. (36)). In French and German this is not an available option; the possessor can only appear as a (reflexive) object. Further, the use of a genitive specifier will result in a loss of the inalienable possession interpretation.

Second, in Heerlens the so-called *band lek*-construction is fully productive. The reflexive *zich* can be used to distinguish between the *band lek*-construction and the verbal perfect tense construction. By inserting the reflexive object, the subject of the sentence can no longer act as a possessor. As a result, an active reading arises. Since German does not have the *band lek*-construction (cf. the ungrammaticality of the German example in (28)), and, consequently, the problems that occur in Heerlens do not occur in German. As we have seen, however, French has the *band lek*-construction. The crucial point for French, however, is that the past participle will always appear in front of the direct object (cf. (40)), whereas the adjective will always follow it (cf. (41)).

(40)F Il a cassé sa jambe
he has broken his leg
'He has broken his leg'

(41)F Il a sa jambe cassée
he has his leg broken
'He has his leg broken'

Consequently, a participle can never be understood as an adjective.

Notes

* I would like to thank Hans Broekhuis for the fruitful discussions that have led to this article. Further, I like to thank Ton Duinhoven, Aafke Hulk, Pieter Muysken, Jan Stroop and an anonymous LIN-reviewer for their comments on an earlier version of this article.

1. The data are taken from Van Bree 1981 (Eastern Dutch), Duden 1984 (German), Guéron 1988 (French) and Pijnenburg 1991 (French and German). The data from Heerlens are collected by myself. Note that I make a distinction between Standard Dutch (ABN), regional Standard Dutch (Heerlens) and the local dialect. Regional Standard Dutch is the variety that is regarded as ABN by the local population. Heerlens, however, has adopted various syntactic constructions from the local dialect that cannot be found in ABN; some of these will be discussed in this paper.

2. There are some ABN examples of the prepositional possessive object construction that do not contain a genitive specifier. Although the situation is not perfectly clear, these examples seem to have a metaphorical meaning. If the prepositional object has a genitive specifier of its own, the literal meaning of the sentence seems to be favoured.
- (i)a.ABN Ik tik hem op *de* vingers
 I hit him on the fingers
 'I hit him on the fingers' or 'I give him a reprimand'
- b.ABN Ik tik hem op *zijn* vingers
 I hit him on his fingers
 'I hit him on the fingers'
3. Note that most speakers of Standard Dutch reject both the impersonal passive in (11c) and the *krijgen*-passive in (12).
4. Of course, this is only the case if the direct object does not have a genitive specifier as in (i).
- (i)F Je lui ai lavé le visage de son bébé
 I him have washed the face of his baby
 'I have washed the face of his baby for him'
- As will be clear from the gloss, the clitic in (i) can only be construed as a benefactive.

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