

The Morphosyntax of Dutch *ont-* verbs

1. Data There is a group of verbs in Dutch which consist of the morphological components in (1): a prefix *ont-* ('un-'), a nominal (1a), adjectival (1b) or verbal (1c) root, and an inflectional suffix *-en*. Despite the formal resemblance, these '*ont*-verbs' have various and seemingly unrelated meanings.

2. Figure/Ground However, the verbs in (1) do have a common semantic core, i.e. directionality, when they are redefined in terms of motion events that a Figure (F) undergoes, relative to a Ground/State (G) (cf. Talmy 2000, Pantcheva 2011). Thus the examples in (1) can be rephrased as REMOVE F FROM G (1a), REMOVE F FROM G (1b) and DEPRIVE G FROM F (1c). These types of removal are called *ablative*, *reversative* and *privative* (Gilbert-Sotelo 2017). Some verbs do not seem directional at first sight: inchoative verbs like *ontvlammen* ('ignite') intensive verbs, like *ontruïmen* ('evacuate') and idiosyncratic verbs, like *ontmoeten* ('meet'). However, for these verbs there is diachronic evidence which supports a spatial reading.

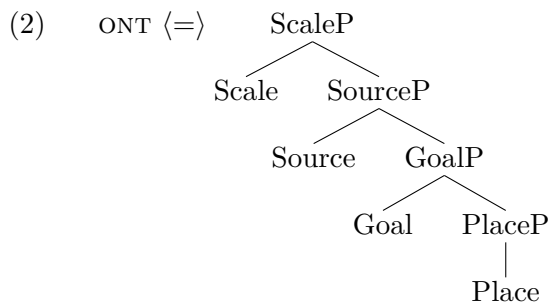
3. Main claim I argue that the mismatch which *ont*-verbs show, i.e. one form corresponds to multiple meanings, can be explained if the nanosyntactic view is adopted that the lexicon contains lexical items with internal structure (Starke 2014b). More concretely, the facts can be accounted for if one assumes that (i) the prefix *ont-* is structurally layered; and (ii) that the verbal roots come in different sizes (Caha et al. 2019). Therefore, my proposal basically consists of a fine-grained decomposition of the prefix *ont-*, which in interaction with differences in structural size of the verbal roots, explains the different, but related meanings of *ont*-verbs.

4. The analysis in a nutshell The prefix *ont-* provides the route along which the Figure travels. This route describes the removal ('from, out of') from section 2 (cf. Source Path in Pantcheva 2011)). Thus I propose the lexical entry for *ont-* as in (2). Adopting Nanosyntax, the prefix need not spell out this whole structure. Depending on the root it attaches to, it can spell out more or less structure. This way I make a distinction between ablative (3a) /privative (3b) verbs and reversative verbs (3c). (3a-b) describe a transitional path (Pantcheva 2011: 13-14), as the Figure (*king, forest*), moves from being *in* the Ground (*throne, Amazone*) to not being there. If the prefix attaches to these roots, the prefix does not spell out the ScaleP feature in (2). (3c) however, describes a scalar path (Pantcheva 2011: 16-19), as the Figure (*thread*) gradually moves towards a final state. Hence, when *ont-* attaches to this root, it *does* spell out the ScaleP feature in (2) to express scalarity. This lexicalisation pattern is also exemplified in Table 1.

The roots of the verbs also fall into two groups: privative (3b) / reversative (3c), and ablative (3a) on the other. Similarly to the prefix, the roots can also be differentiated according to size. With privative and reversative verbs, the Figure describes an inalienable part or a characteristic of the Ground. For instance, in *onthoofden* ('behead') the head (Figure) is an inherent part of the person (Ground), or in *ontreinigen* ('unclean' a person (Figure) possesses the trait of being morally clean (Ground/State). Such a pars pro toto relationship is absent in ablative verbs. In order to capture this, I propose the addition of a Figure and Ground feature to the internal structure of verbal roots, and I propose that ablative verbs are structurally smaller than privative and reversative verbs. A simplified visualisation of the implementation in Ramchand's (2008) event structure is given in Table 2. The hashtags indicate lexicalisation by other morphemes/elements.

5. Conclusion By differentiating the sizes of the roots and the prefix, I arrive at a situation whereby each verb type is different from the other: the reason why they can express different meanings is because they also differ in terms of their syntactic structure.

- (1) a. ont-tron-en b. ont-reinig-en c. ont-nem-en
 PFX-N root-INF PFX-A root-INF PFX-V root-INF
 ‘to dethrone’ ‘to un-clean’ ‘to take away from’



- (3) Examples of paths
- a. Het volk ont-troon-de de koning.
 The people away-throne-PST.3SG the king.
 ‘The people dethroned the king’
- b. Het bedrijf ont-bos-te het Amazonewoud.
 The company away-forest-PST.3SG the Amazone.
 ‘The company deforested the Amazone’
- c. Hij ont-war-de de draad urenlang, en het is nog altijd niet
 He away-ravel-PST.3SG the thread hour.long and it is still always not
 volledig ont-ward.
 completely away-ravell-ed.
 ‘He unravelled the thread for hours and it is still not completely unravelled.’

Table 1: The decomposition of *ont-*

	PLACE	GOAL	SOURCE	SCALE
abl		ont-		
priv/rev			ont-	

Table 2: Lexicalisation of *ont-*verbs

	GROUND	PLACE	FIGURE	PROC	INIT
abl		troon	#1		#2
priv/rev		hoofd/reinig			#2

References

- Caha, Pavel, Karen De Clercq & Guido Vanden Wyngaerd. 2019. The fine structure of the comparative. *Studia Linguistica* 73(3), 470-521.
- Gilbert-Sotelo, Elisabeth. 2017. Source and negative prefixes: On the syntax-semantics interface and the encoding of spatial relations. PhD dissertation. University of Girona.
- Pantcheva, Marina B. 2011. Decomposing Path: The Nanosyntax of Directional Expressions. PhD Dissertation. University of Tromsø.
- Starke, Michal. 2014b. Towards elegant parameters: Language variation reduces to the size of lexically-stored trees. In Maria d.C. Picallo (ed.), *Linguistic variation in the minimalist framework*, 140 - 152. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Talmy, Leonard. 2000. *Toward a Cognitive Semantics: Concept Structuring Systems*, vol.1. Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press.