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# Adpositional phrases of direction in the history of Dutch: The case of *in*

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*This study investigates directional adpositional phrases (DirPs), specifically headed by the adposition in, in the history of Hollandish Dutch. From the relatively free word order of Middle Dutch where arguments could occur either inside or to the right of the sentence brace, DirPs get restricted to a sentence brace internal position in the Modern Dutch period. In addition to this change, there is also a shift in the position of the adposition itself within the DirP—from a strictly phrase-initial position to an optional phrase-final position. As expected, the position of DirPs within a clause can be used to distinguish the Middle Dutch from the Modern Dutch period, though the shift appears to be very drastic. Surprisingly, the only instance of a phrase-final in occurs quite late, in the 19th century, contradicting hypotheses suggesting that the shift in the internal syntax of DirPs is due to the loss of case, which begins four centuries earlier.*

## 1 Introduction

In this article, I examine two aspects of directional adpositional phrases (DirPs) headed by the adposition *in* in the history of Dutch<sup>1</sup>: their external syntax (position within a clause) and their internal syntax (position of the adposition within the DirP itself). A look at the state of affairs in Middle Dutch (from the 12th to the early 16th century) and Modern Dutch (from the mid-16th century to the present), both considered by many scholars to be SOV languages, shows that they contrast with each other quite strikingly on these points. Middle Dutch DirPs frequently occur to the right of the sentence brace<sup>2</sup>—even more frequently

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<sup>1</sup> This study is part of a larger project that includes other sentential elements as well as a study of six centuries of the history of English. As the focus of this larger project is a comparison of the development of word order in English and Dutch, the investigation of other adpositions and dialect areas had to be excluded in order to keep the project feasible.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Sentence brace’ refers to the boundaries of a clause since most clausal elements are contained within this brace. These are the finite and non-finite verb in main clauses (see a) and the subordinating conjunction and the verb in subordinate clauses (see b).

than inside in some earlier texts. In contrast, the external syntax of Modern Dutch DirPs is very restricted: unlike most other PPs, they cannot appear to the right of the sentence brace except in very specific circumstances. This will be a particularly fruitful point to pursue further as many accounts of extraposition phenomena cannot easily account for this development in the history of Dutch. Moreover, there has been a shift in the internal syntax of DirPs; while the adposition of Middle Dutch DirPs only occurs before the noun phrase, it often occurs after the noun phrase in Modern Dutch DirPs.

The purpose of this study is to trace the development of DirPs headed by the adposition *in* in the Hollandish dialects of Dutch and to pinpoint when the changes in the internal and external syntax occur. In so doing, I will be able to relate both of these developments to the decline of case in the history of Dutch—if either of these changes takes place around the time that Dutch loses case, we would have strong evidence correlating these adpositional phrase phenomena to case. First, I provide an overview and a comparison of the two properties of DirPs in Modern Dutch and Middle Dutch, namely their external syntax (2.1) and their internal syntax (2.2), before stating the main goals of this study. This is followed with a description of the corpus used and the results of the corpus study (3), and I conclude with a discussion of the results and questions for further research (4).

## 2 DirPs in a Nutshell

### 2.1 External Syntax

In Middle Dutch, the position of DirPs within a clause is flexible; they appear both within and to the right of the sentence brace. The DirP *in dit cloester* ‘into

- 
- a. Jan *is* **de sloot in** *gesprongen*.  
 Jan is the ditch in jumped  
 ‘Jan has jumped into the ditch’
- b. ... *dat* Jan **de sloot in** *springt*.  
 that Jan the ditch in jumps  
 ‘...that Jan jumps into the ditch’

In the examples throughout the text, the boundaries of the clauses are given in italics and the DirPs are in bold. Main clauses with only one finite verb without a separable prefix are excluded because the rightmost boundary of the sentence brace is not visible. The terms ‘leakage’ and ‘extraposition’ and all their derivatives are used interchangeably throughout this text to refer to the location of a sentential element to the right of the sentence brace, i.e., in the Nachfeld or postfield. By using these terms, I do not mean to imply a movement from an initial position inside the sentence brace to a position to the right. I am merely using these terms to describe the location of a given element.

this cloister' in (1) below appears between the finite verb *moet* 'must' and the main verb *gaen* 'to go'; this is the order we still find in Modern Dutch.<sup>3</sup>

- (1) Ick *moet* hier **in dit cloester** *gaen*.  
 I must here in this cloister go  
 'I must go here into this cloister.' (*Exempel van een soudaensdochter*, 16th)

(2) exemplifies an instance of a DirP to the right of the sentence brace in Middle Dutch.

- (2) ...*als* hi *was ghegaen* **in een huus**.  
 as he was gone in a house  
 '...as he was going into a house.' (*Amsterdams Lectionarium*, 14th)

Unlike what we find in Modern Dutch, the DirP *in een huus* 'into a house' appears to the right of both the finite verb *was* 'was' and the nonfinite verb *ghegaen* 'gone.'

Modern Dutch DirPs, however, are among the most restricted set of PPs with respect to their position within a clause; whether prepositional or postpositional, they generally cannot occur to the right of the sentence brace.

- (3) a. ...*dat* Jan **in de sloot** *springt*.  
 that Jan in the ditch jumps  
 '...that Jan is jumping in the ditch.'  
 '...that Jan is jumping into the ditch.'
- b. ...*dat* Jan *springt* **in de sloot**.  
 '...that Jan is jumping in the ditch.'  
 \*'...that Jan is jumping into the ditch.'
- c. ...*dat* Jan **de sloot in** *springt*.  
 \*'...that Jan is jumping in the ditch.'  
 '...that Jan is jumping into the ditch.'
- d. \*...*dat* Jan *springt* **de sloot in**.  
 '...that Jan is jumping into the ditch.'

Note that the clause in (3b) is not itself ungrammatical as adpositional phrases of location (LocPs) can occur to the right of the sentence brace; only the directional

<sup>3</sup> In all translations (but not in the glosses), I use the word *into* for instances of DirPs. Unless otherwise noted, the word *in* is reserved for contexts where it has a locational reading.

reading is blocked. Under certain circumstances, however, DirPs can leak. These include instances of ‘contentful’ motion verbs as seen in (4).

- (4) *Ze zijn teruggestuurd de wei in.*  
 they are back.sent the pasture in  
 ‘They were sent back into the pasture.’

Contentful motion verbs are verbs that express more than just motion and/or manner of motion. These include motion verbs with particles like *teruglopen* ‘to walk back’ as well as borrowed verbs such as *immigreren* ‘to immigrate.’ The fact that the result of the activity is included in the lexical content of the verb itself suggests that the restriction on DirPs may be related to aspect. This matter, however, will not be taken up here.

## 2.2 Internal Syntax

The location of the adposition in Middle Dutch DirPs is fixed: the adposition always occurs before the noun phrase. Hogenhout-Mulder (1983: 74) even states that postpositions are unknown in Middle Dutch. The distinction between DirPs and LocPs is usually expressed by case: DirPs with accusative (5a) and LocPs with dative (5b).<sup>4</sup>

- (5) a. ...*als hi was ghegaen in een huus.*  
 as hewas gone in a.acc house.acc  
 ‘...as he was going into a house’ (*Amsterdams Lectionarium*, 14th)
- b. *Dinedierneen hebbe niet in min-en hus-e.*  
 yourmaid not have not in my-dat house-dat  
 ‘I do not have your maid in my house’ (*Amsterdams Lectionarium*, 14th)

Both (5a) and (5b) contain the neuter noun *huus* ‘house’ in the singular. Neither the indefinite article nor the noun receive inflection in (5a), blocking dative as an option. As *huus* is a neuter noun, neither the nominative nor the accusative have overt inflection. I assume, however, that the noun in (5a) is in the accusative.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Example (5b) does not have a visible sentence brace, but as its point is to illustrate the case distinction, the sentence brace is not relevant.

<sup>5</sup> I base this assumption on the basis of masculine nouns, which do distinguish nominative from accusative.

- a. *Hi hier neder is ghecomen uut den scoet sijn vaders inden lichaem marine.*  
 he here down is come out the lap his father in.the-ACC body Mary  
 ‘he has come down here out of the lap of his father into the body of Mary.’  
 ((*Pseudo*)*Bonaventura-Ludolphiaanse leven van Jezus*, 15th)

Combined with the verb *gaen* ‘to go’, we have a clear example of a DirP. In (5b), we see that both the possessive adjective and the noun have inflection for dative case, *-en* and *-e* respectively. This is a clear example of a LocP. As noted by Van Kerckvoorde (1993: 51) and Van der Horst (1994: 21) and others, however, this distinction is not consistently made as (6) shows.

- (6) ...want heden *moet* ic *bliven* **in diin** huus.  
 because today must I stay in your.ACC house.ACC  
 ‘...because I must stay in your house today.’ (*Amsterdams Lectionarium*,  
 14th)

We have a clear instance of a locative in (6) as the main verb, *bliven* ‘to stay,’ does not denote any sort of movement. However, neither the possessive adjective nor the noun are inflected, ruling out dative case. As presumed in (5), no inflection is a sign of the accusative case. Over the course of the Middle Dutch period, the case system reduces to the point that it is lost by the 15th century.

DirPs in Modern Dutch, where there is no longer a case system, are often distinguished from LocPs by the placement of the adposition: it occurs before the NP in LocPs (see 7a) while those in DirPs generally but not always occur after (see 7b).<sup>6</sup>

- (7) a. ...*dat* Jan **in het bos** loopt.  
 that Jan in the forest walks  
 ‘...that Jan is walking in the forest.’  
 \*‘...that Jan is walking into the forest.’
- b. ...*dat* Jan **het bos** **in** loopt.  
 thatJan the forest in walks  
 \*‘...that Jan is walking in the forest.’  
 ‘...that Jan is walking into the forest.’

Some nouns, such as *het bos* ‘the forest,’ always distinguish locational and directional readings through the position of the adposition: *in het bos* can only mean ‘in the forest’ and never ‘into the forest’ while *het bos in* can only mean ‘into the forest’ and never ‘in the forest.’

In some instances, however, an adposition placed before the NP can be ambiguous as seen in (8a). When the adposition appears before these nouns, it is

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In (a), the combination of the definite article *den* ‘the’ and the lack of inflection on the masculine noun *lichaem* ‘body’ is a sign of the accusative.

<sup>6</sup> There are also a few directional adpositions, such as *naar* ‘to’, that cannot occur postnominally. However, the external syntax of these is the same as the ones discussed in this section.

possible to get a directional reading in addition to the expected locational reading. This ambiguity seems to depend on the noun in question since changing the verb gives the same interpretations. Even with these nouns, however, the directional reading can always resort to a postnominal position (see 8b).

- (8) a. ...*dat* Jan **in de sloot** *springt*.  
           that Jan in the ditch jumps  
           ‘...that Jan is jumping in the ditch.’  
           ‘...that Jan is jumping into the ditch.’
- b. ...*dat* Jan **de sloot in** *springt*.  
           thatJan the ditch in jumps  
           \*‘...that Jan is jumping in the ditch.’  
           ‘...that Jan is jumping into the ditch.’

As mentioned above, even when a prepositional phrase is ambiguous between a directional and a locational reading, it loses this ambiguity when it occurs to the right of the sentence brace where only the locational reading is possible.

So far, I have been treating these constructions as instances of motion verb with a postpositional phrase. Another possible analysis, however, is that these ‘postpositions’ are not adpositions at all but adverbials or verbal particles. The fact that they share properties with ‘true’ adpositions and ‘true’ verbal particles further blurs the picture. Examples such as (4) (repeated here as 9 for convenience) where the postpositional phrase occurs with a particle verb and the postpositional phrase appears to the right of the nonfinite verb give strong support for the postposition analysis.

- (9) *Ze zijn teruggestuurd de wei in.*  
       they are back.sent the pasture in  
       ‘They were sent back into the pasture.’

For this study, however, the actual analysis of these adpositions is not relevant—whether these are true postpositions or verbal particles, the Modern Dutch system is different from that of Middle Dutch.

### 2.3 Research Questions

Table (1) summarizes the details of the external and internal syntax of Middle and Modern Dutch DirPs. These facts raise a number of questions.

Table 1: Summary of the Syntax of DirPs

Syntax	External	Internal
<i>Middle Dutch</i>	flexible (inside/outside)	case
<i>Modern Dutch</i>	restricted (inside)	placement of adposition

The overarching question is of course “What happened?” More specifically, I would like to answer the following questions:

1. Around what period do DirPs “lose” their ability to leak?
2. When do the postpositional variants come into the dialect of Holland?
3. Is there a correlation between the changes in the internal and external syntax of DirPs? Or between either of these and the loss of case?

An initial hypothesis for the change in the internal syntax of DirPs might be that the rise of the postpositional variant is in some way related to the loss of the case in the history of Dutch. The shift in the distinction between DirPs and LocPs from case to syntax seems at first glance quite straight forward. If there is in fact a relationship, we would expect that the postpositional variants come into the language around the time case is lost, sometime in the late 15th century or shortly thereafter.

One potential reason for rejecting this view, however, is the fact that some Modern Dutch nouns still allow a directional reading even when they occur in *prepositional* phrases. This could suggest that the change in the internal syntax is in fact not related to the loss of case but to other factors; we would then expect no correlation between this change and case loss. We would also potentially expect that the nouns in one of the two resulting sets, i.e., those allowing or those disallowing a directional reading in prepositional phrases, are in some way related: by their semantics, their frequency of occurrence or some other unknown factor. These facts do not totally rule out the initial hypothesis since it could be the case that the shift has just not completed itself, i.e., that there is layering. Some nouns vestigially retain the old order as well as the new order, but the new order will eventually win out.

### 3 Corpus Study

#### 3.1 Corpus

For this study, I focus on the adposition *in*, which was chosen because of its high frequency. I selected various electronically available, non-translated, non-literary prose texts from the late 13th to the 19th century taken from the *CD-rom*



*Middelnederlands* and the *Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren* (www.dbnl.nl). All data are written in the Hollandish dialect of Dutch, spoken in the west of the present-day Netherlands (the provinces of North and South Holland), because they provide the base for the modern standard language. A result of this choice, however, is that there are very few prose texts in this dialect from the Middle Dutch periods; therefore, I could not control for genre. From the (late) 13th century, I gathered a number of official texts, mostly contracts. Religious texts make up the bulk of the data from the 14th and 15th centuries. In the later periods (from the 16th century onward), I made use of non-official, non-religious texts such as letters, nonfiction, a journal, etc.

### 3.2 Methodology

In the texts, I looked for instances of the adposition *in* and then filtered out the cases where it had a directional reading. Most of the examples occurred with some form of the verb *gaan* ‘to go’ or *komen* ‘to come’ so there was no doubt that the adpositional phrase was directional. For other verbs, I looked at the context to determine whether it was a DirP or a LocP. If I could not determine the status by the context, I looked at the morphological case of the noun if available; otherwise, I did not include the example. For my analysis, I looked at three types of clauses: any clause containing both a finite and a non-finite verb as in (10a), subordinate clauses with a single finite verb as in (10b) and non-finite clauses as in (10c).

- (10) a.    *soe soude wij comen jn ene herberghe.*  
           so should we come in an inn  
           ‘In this way, we would come into an inn.’ (Official text from Dordrecht, 13th)
- b.    *...als sy nv in die sael quam.*  
           if she now in the room came  
           ‘...if she came into the room now.’ (*Offer des Heeren*, 16th)
- c.    *...omme vande sluyse int water te springen.*  
           in.order from.the sluise in.the water to jump  
           ‘...in order to jump from the sluice into the water.’ (*Beschrijvinge der stad Leyden*, 17th)

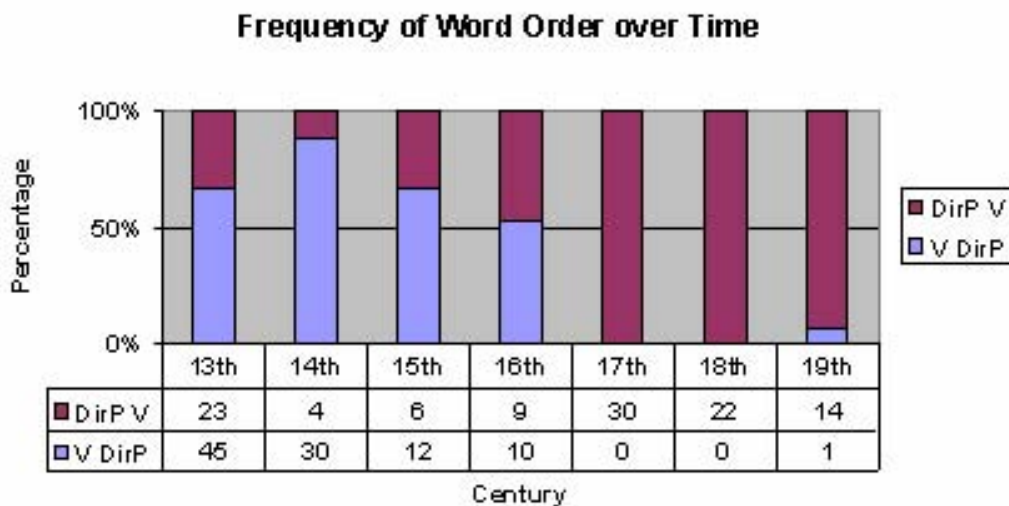
The clauses were grouped according to the order of the elements Aux, DirP, and V and the type of clause in which they occurred: main, subordinate or conjunct. There were too few examples of the various word order possibilities across the clause types to draw any conclusions, so these distinctions are not discussed further.

### 3.3 Results

#### 3.3.1 External Syntax

Figure (1) shows the distribution of the external syntax of DirPs over time, i.e., the frequency of the order V DirP versus DirP V.<sup>7</sup> There is a drastic shift in the external syntax between the 16th and the 17th century; this change itself is not surprising because this period also marks the end of the Middle Dutch period and the beginning of the Modern Dutch period as well as the loss of case in Dutch. Whereas DirPs actually occur more frequently outside of the sentence brace than inside during the Middle Dutch period, they are restricted to a clause-internal position in Modern Dutch. What is surprising, however, is that the change is so drastic, from just more than half of the examples occurring to the right of the sentence brace in the 16th century to no occurrences of this configuration in the 17th century. Even the occurrence of nominal arguments to the right of the sentence brace does not change so suddenly; in the Hollandish dialects of the late 17th century, there was still around 12% extraposition in dependent clauses and 40% in main clauses (Burrige 1993: 80-81). This seemingly sudden change may in some way be related to the texts used for this study. Analysis of additionally texts and perhaps other dialect areas could shed some light on this. In any case, the external syntax of DirPs can be used to distinguish Middle Dutch from Modern Dutch.

Figure 1: Frequency of Word Order over Time



<sup>7</sup> V refers to finite verbs in subordinate clauses with a single finite verb in addition to non-finite verbs in other clauses. The numbers below the graph are the number of examples per order per century.

### 3.3.2 Internal Syntax

Examining the development of the internal syntax of DirPs (the placement of the adposition within the adpositional phrase) shows that the prepositional variant dominates throughout the history of Dutch. The one instance of a postposed adposition in the corpus occurred quite late, in the 19th century, and is given in (11).

- (11) ...dan **Zwitserland in te gaan.**  
       then Switzerland in to go  
       ‘...then to go into Switzerland.’ (*Brieven en dagboek*, 19th)

In this example, the postpositional phrase occurs inside the sentence brace. As there is only one example of a postpositional phrase found quite late in the history of Dutch, there is not much that can be said about their development. These phrases could indeed be a late development, but the dirth of examples could also be a result of the texts used and/or the method of collecting the data. Another search through the texts as well as the investigation of other adpositions are needed to clarify this development.

## 4 Conclusions

I discovered that the dramatic change in the external syntax has taken place between the 16th and 17th centuries. This development is not so surprising as it marks the period between Middle and Modern Dutch, the loss of case, and the mixing of various Dutch dialects as the center of the Dutch-speaking area shifts North to Amsterdam. What is surprising, however, is that the internal syntax does not show much of a shift in these data; the only example of *in* after a noun phrase in my corpus occurs in the 19th century. These data do not give evidence of a possible correlation between the developments in the internal and external syntax of *in*. Nor is there a correlation between the internal syntax of *in* and the loss of case. There is, however, a correlation between the loss of case and the change in the external syntax; whether this is just a superficial, unrelated correlation or actually related in some way needs to be further investigated.

This research could be augmented by investigating the development of these syntactic phenomena in other adpositions. Given the findings of this study, I expect that the external syntax of most directional adpositions will pattern with *in*, i.e., they will not occur outside of the sentence brace after the 16th century. I suspect that a further analysis of the internal syntax of other adpositions, however, will show variation - this shift may have arisen in one or a few adpositions and then gradually spread to others.

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