

Towards a fine-grained analysis of Dutch *de/het meeste*

Koen Roelandt | CRISSP-HUB / KU Leuven | koen.roelandt@hubrussel.be



Introduction

(1) Jan heeft de meeste bergen beklommen.
John has the_{pl.masc.} most mountains_{pl.masc.} climbed
John climbed most mountains.

Two different readings:

1. Absolute: “John climbed more than half of the mountains”
2. Relative: “John climbed more mountains than the other climbers did”

Claim 1: In Dutch, the different readings are linked to definiteness and specificity.

(2) Jan heeft het meeste bergen beklommen.
John has the_{sing.neut.} most mountains_{pl.masc.} climbed
John climbed the most mountains.

The article *het* ‘the’ does not agree with the noun *bergen* ‘mountains’.

Claim 2: In Dutch, there are two different structures underlying *de meeste* and *het meeste*. One has a D that agrees with the head noun, the other one does not.

Outline

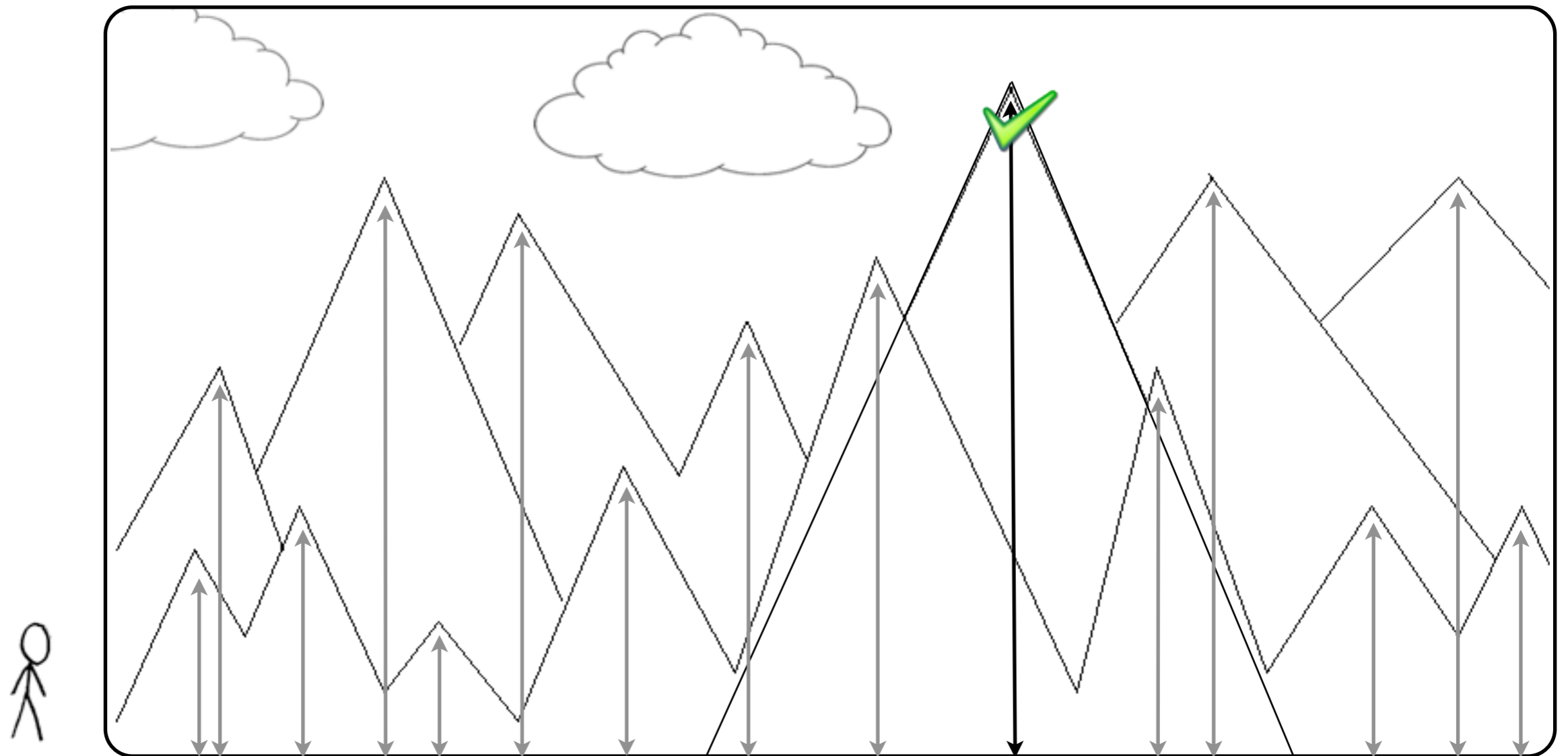
1. Analysis of English superlatives
 - a. Absolute reading
 - b. Relative reading
2. Analysis of English *most*
 - a. Absolute reading
 - b. Relative reading
3. Analysis of Dutch *de meeste* and *het meeste*
 - a. Preamble: *de* and *het*, specificity
 - b. Dutch data
 - i. First test: scrambling
 - ii. Second test: existential *there*
 - c. Claim 1: definiteness and specificity
 - d. Claim 2: two different syntactic structures
 - i. AGR
 - ii. *AGR
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English superlatives

Analysis of superlatives by Heim (1999) and Szabolcsi (1986).

- Two different readings:
 - absolute reading
 - relative reading.

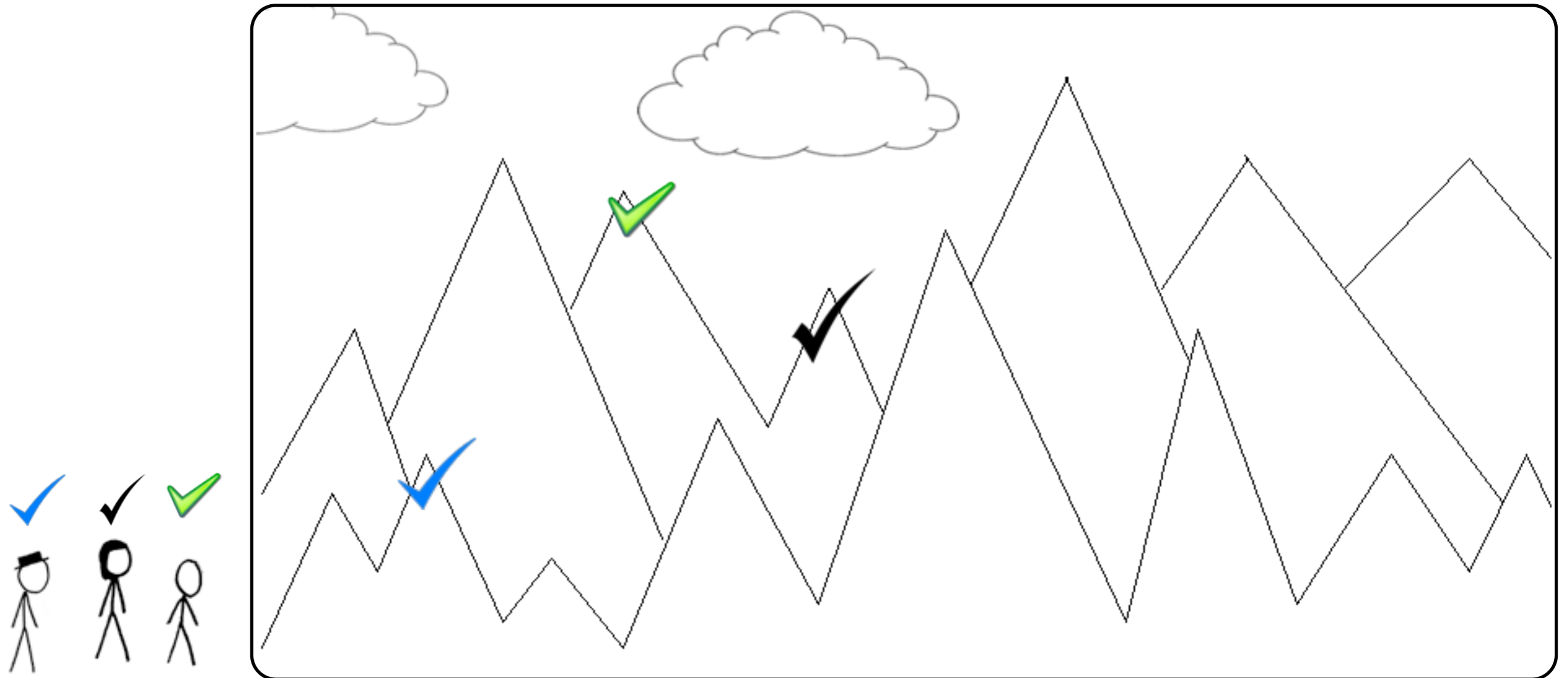
English superlatives: absolute reading



John climbed the highest mountain.

$[[[-est C]_i[d_i\text{-high mountain}]]] = \lambda x. \forall y \in C [y \neq x \rightarrow \max \{d: x \text{ is a } d_i\text{-high mountain}\} > \max \{d: y \text{ is a } d\text{-high mountain}\}]$

English superlatives: relative reading



John climbed the highest mountain.

$\llbracket [-\text{est } C]_i \llbracket \text{climbed } [d_i\text{-high mountain}] \rrbracket \rrbracket = \lambda x. \forall y \in C [y \neq x \rightarrow \max \{d: x \text{ climbed a } d\text{-high mountain}\} > \max \{d: y \text{ climbed a } d\text{-high mountain}\}]$

English *most*

Analysis of *most* by Hackl (2009).

- *Most* is the superlative of *many*.
- Two different readings:
 - absolute (or proportional) reading
 - relative reading.
- The two different readings are triggered by the presence or absence of *the*.

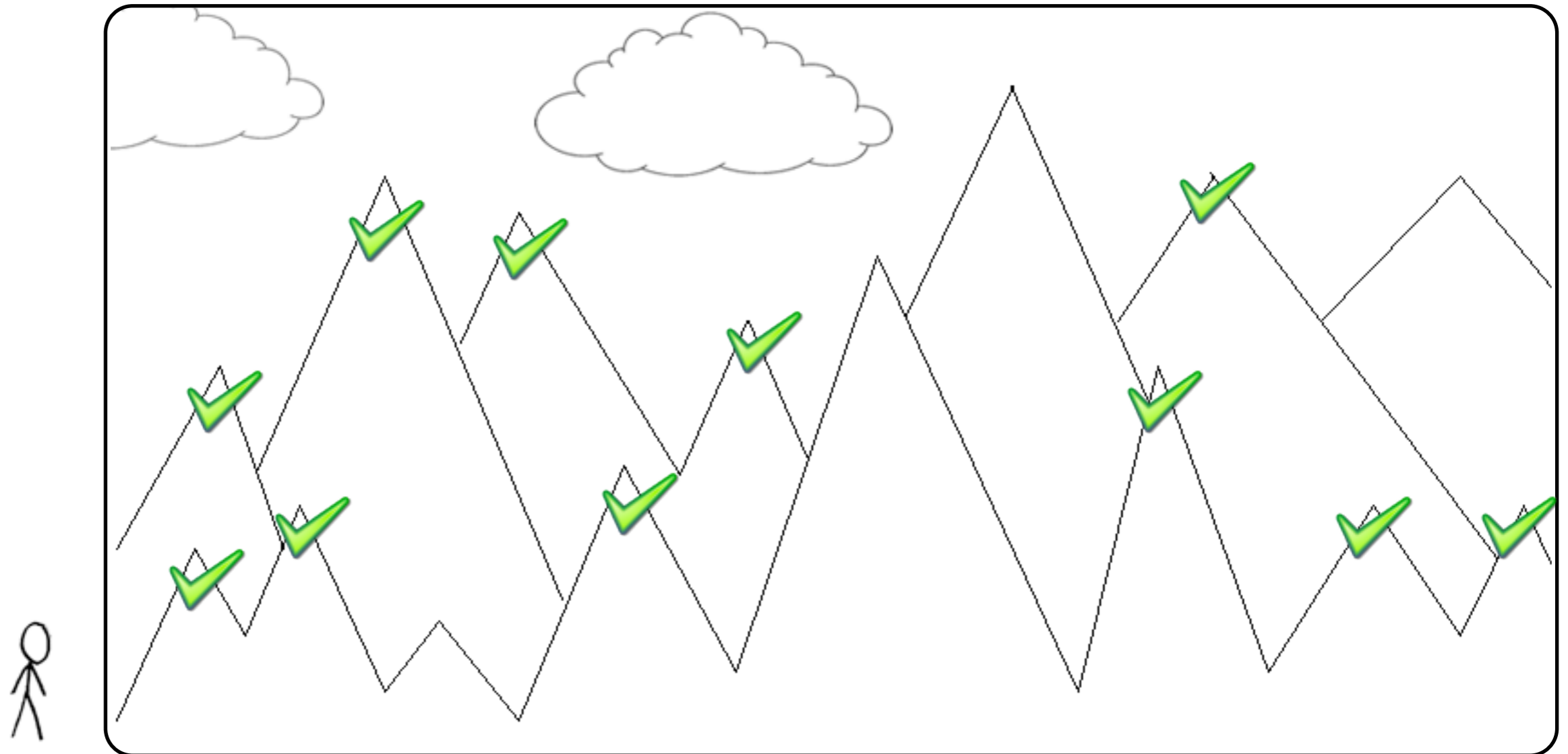
(3) (a) John climbed most mountains.

(absolute)

(b) John climbed the most mountains.

(relative)

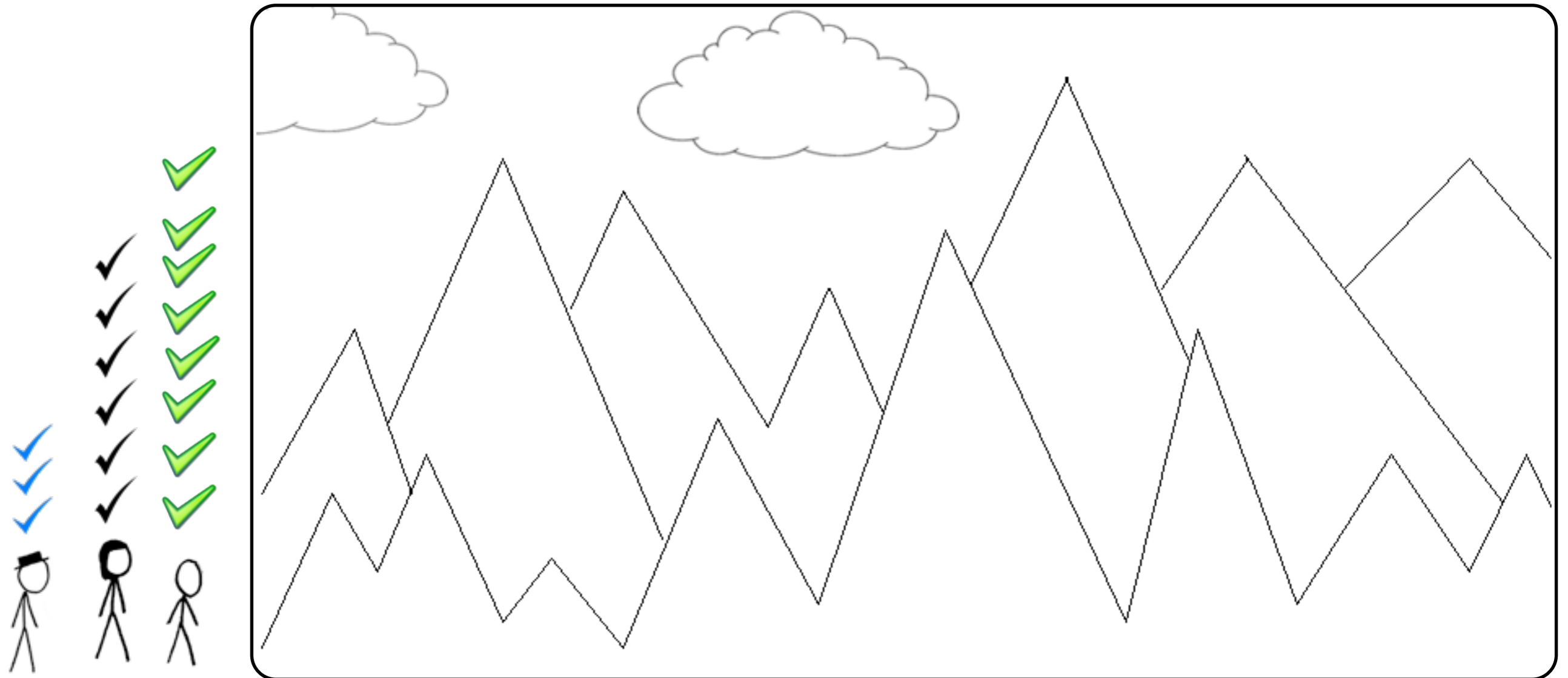
English *most*: absolute reading



John climbed most mountains

$\llbracket [-\text{est } C]_i [d_i\text{-many mountains}] \rrbracket = \lambda x. \forall y \in C [y \neq x \rightarrow \max \{d: \text{mountains}(x) \ \& \ |x| \geq d\} > \max \{d: \text{mountains}(y) \ \& \ |y| \geq d\}]$

English *most*: relative reading



John climbed the most mountains.

$\llbracket [-est\ C]_i \llbracket \text{climbed } [\emptyset\ d_i\text{-many mountains}] \rrbracket \rrbracket = \lambda x. \forall y \in C [y \neq x \rightarrow \max \{d: \exists z [\text{mountains}(z) \ \& \ |z| \geq d \ \& \ \text{climbed}(x, z)]\} > \max \{d: \exists z [\text{mountains}(z) \ \& \ |z| \geq d \ \& \ \text{climbed}(y, z)]\}]$

Dutch *de meeste* and *het meeste*

- Analyse *de/het meeste* ‘most’ as the superlative of *veel* ‘many’.

Definiteness and specificity

- DPs with *de/het meeste* and relative readings are non-specific indefinite.
- DPs with *de/het meeste* and absolute readings are definite.
- Tests:
 1. Scramble the DP
 2. Existential *there*.

Two syntactic structures

- There are two syntactic structures underlying *de meeste* and *het meeste*:
 1. with a D that agrees with the head noun
 2. with a D that does not agree with the head noun.

Preamble: *de* and *het*, specificity

De versus het

- (4) (a) *de man* - *de vrouw*
the man_{sing.masc.} - the woman_{sing.fem.}
- (b) *het huis* - *het geld*
the house_{sing.neut.} - the money_{sing.neut.}
- (c) *de mannen* - *de vrouwen* - *de huizen*
the men_{pl.masc.} - the women_{pl.fem.} - the houses_{pl.neut.}

Specificity

Specific: the speaker has a particular object in mind.

Non-specific: the speaker does not have a particular object in mind.

(Hawkins 1978)

First test: scrambling

Non-specific indefinite DPs can't be scrambled

- (5) (a) ...dat Jan gisteren wat gekregen heeft.
...that John yesterday something got has
...that John got something yesterday.
- (b) * ...dat Jan wat gisteren gekregen heeft.
...that John something yesterday got has
- (6) (a) ...dat Jan gisteren de/één/een gitaar gekregen heeft.
...that John yesterday the/one/a guitar got has
...that John got the/one/a guitar yesterday.
- (b) ...dat Jan de/één/??een gitaar gisteren gekregen heeft.
...that John the/one/??a guitar yesterday got has
...that John got the/one/a guitar yesterday.

Scrambling: *de meeste* versus *het meeste*

- (7) (a) ...dat Jan gisteren de meeste bergen beklommen heeft. (relative/absolute)
...that John yesterday the most mountains_{pl.} climbed has
...that John climbed (the) most mountains yesterday.
- (b) ...dat Jan de meeste bergen gisteren beklommen heeft. (absolute)
...that John the most mountains_{pl.} yesterday climbed has
...that John climbed most mountains yesterday.
- (8) (a) ...dat Jan gisteren het meeste bergen beklommen heeft. (relative)
...that John yesterday the most mountains_{pl.} climbed has
...that John climbed the most mountains yesterday.
- (b) * ...dat Jan het meeste bergen gisteren beklommen heeft.
...that John the most mountains_{pl.} yesterday climbed has

Scrambling: *het meeste*

- (9) (a) ...dat Jan gisteren het meeste geld verloren heeft. (relative/absolute)
...that John yesterday the most money_{sing.neut} lost has
...that John lost (the) most money yesterday.
- (b) ...dat Jan het meeste geld gisteren verloren heeft. (absolute)
...that John the most money_{sing.neut} yesterday lost has
...that John lost most money yesterday.

Second test: existential *there*

Only indefinite DPs can appear in sentences with existential *there*.

(10)(a) Er is een man in de straat.

there is a man in the street

(b) Er zijn mannen in de straat.

there are men in the street

(c)* Er is de man in de straat.

there is the man in the street

Existential *there*: *de/het meeste*

Only indefinite DPs can appear in sentences with existential *there*.

- (11)(a) Er is het meeste geld in Monaco. (relative)
there is the most money in Monaco
- (b) Er zijn het meeste bergen in Zwitserland. (relative)
there are the most mountains in Switzerland
- (c)* Er zijn de meeste bergen in Zwitserland.
there are the most mountains in Switzerland

Claim I: definiteness and specificity

Claim I

- DPs with *de/het meeste* and relative readings are non-specific indefinite.
- DPs with *de/het meeste* and absolute readings are definite.

Claim 2: two different syntactic structures

Claim 2

- There are two syntactic structures underlying *de meeste* and *het meeste*:
 1. AGR: with a D that agrees with the head noun
 2. *AGR: with a D that does not agree with the head noun.

(1) Jan heeft de meeste bergen beklommen. (relative/absolute)
John has the_{pl.masc.} most mountains_{pl.masc.} climbed
John climbed (the) most mountains.

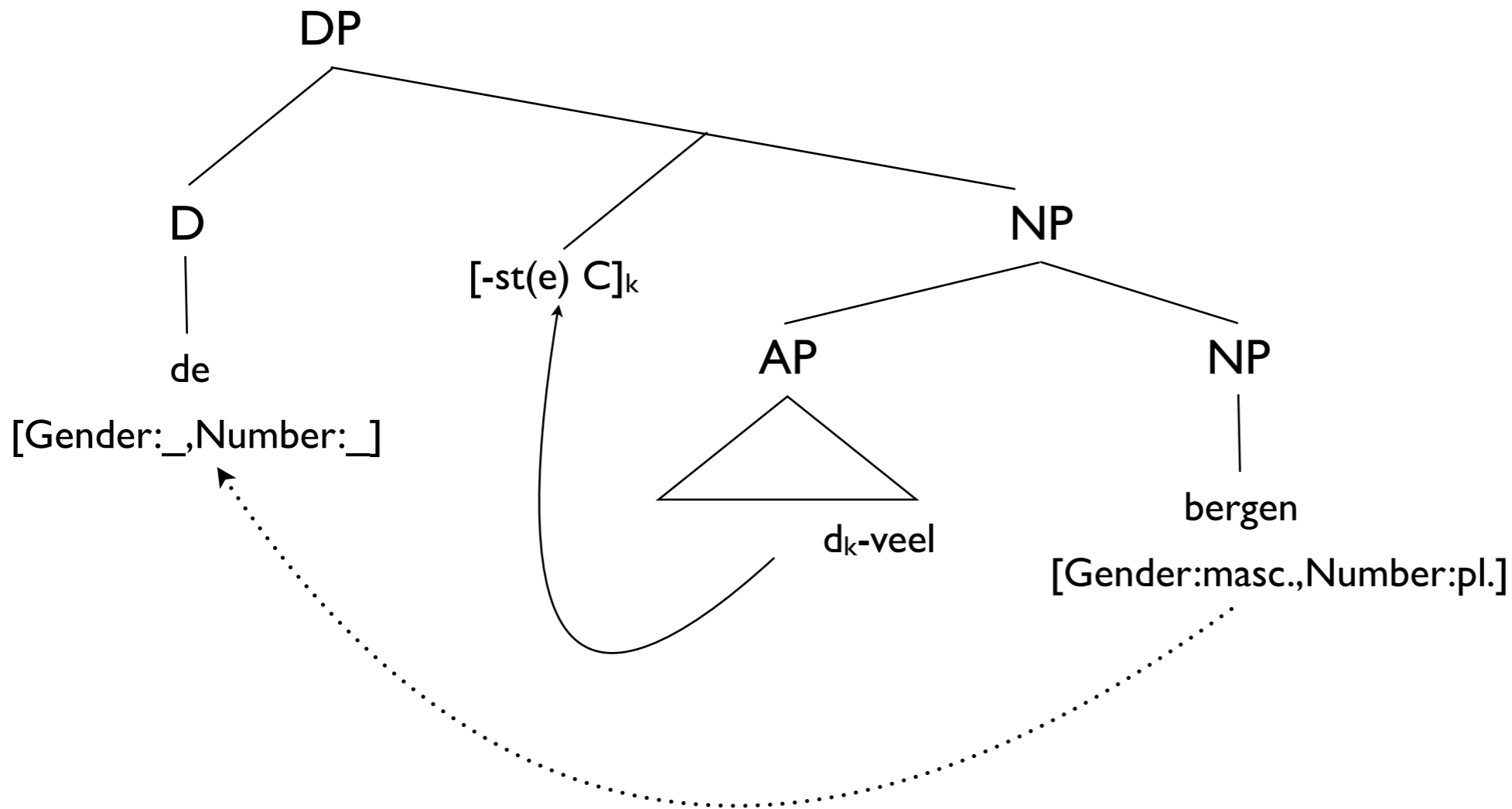
(2) Jan heeft het meeste bergen beklommen. (relative)
John has the_{sing.neut.} most mountains_{pl.masc.} climbed
John climbed the most mountains.

AGR

- The determiner agrees with the head noun:

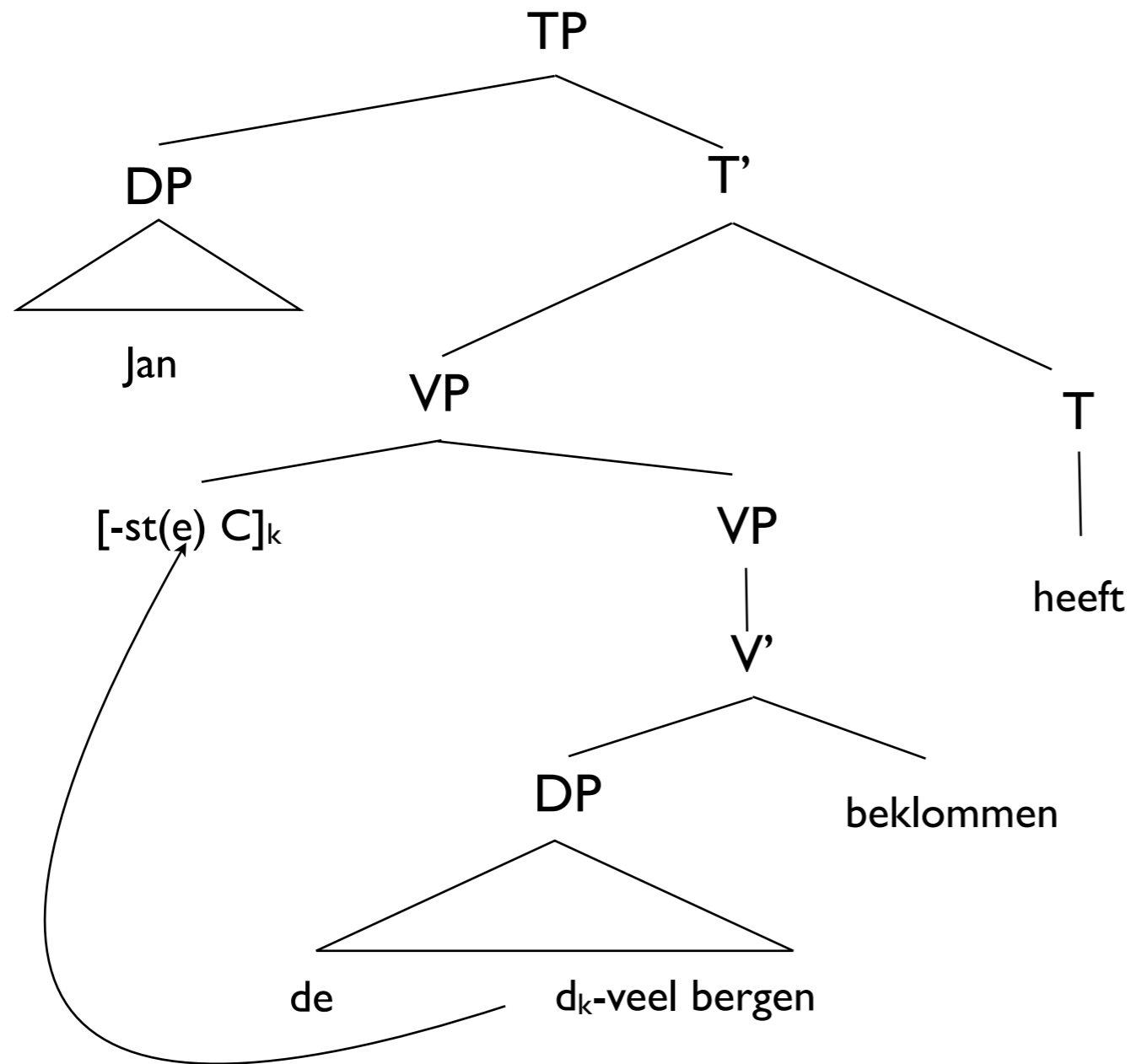
- (12) (a) de meeste mannen
 the_{pl.masc.} most men_{pl.masc.}
- (b) de meeste vrouwen
 the_{pl.fem.} most women_{pl.fem.}
- (c) de meeste huizen
 the_{pl.neut.} most houses_{pl.neut.}
- (d) het meeste geld
 the_{sing.neut.} most money_{sing.neut.}

AGR: absolute reading



- D agrees with the NP in number and gender.
- [-st(e) C]_k moves out of the AP (Heim (1999), Hackl (2009)).
- [[-st(e) C]_k [d_k-veel bergen]] is the expected absolute reading.

AGR: relative reading



- [-st(e) C]_k adjoins to VP (Szabolcsi (1986), Heim (1999), Hackl (2009)).
- [[-st(e) C]_k[[de d_k-veel bergen] beklommen]] is the relative reading.

*AGR

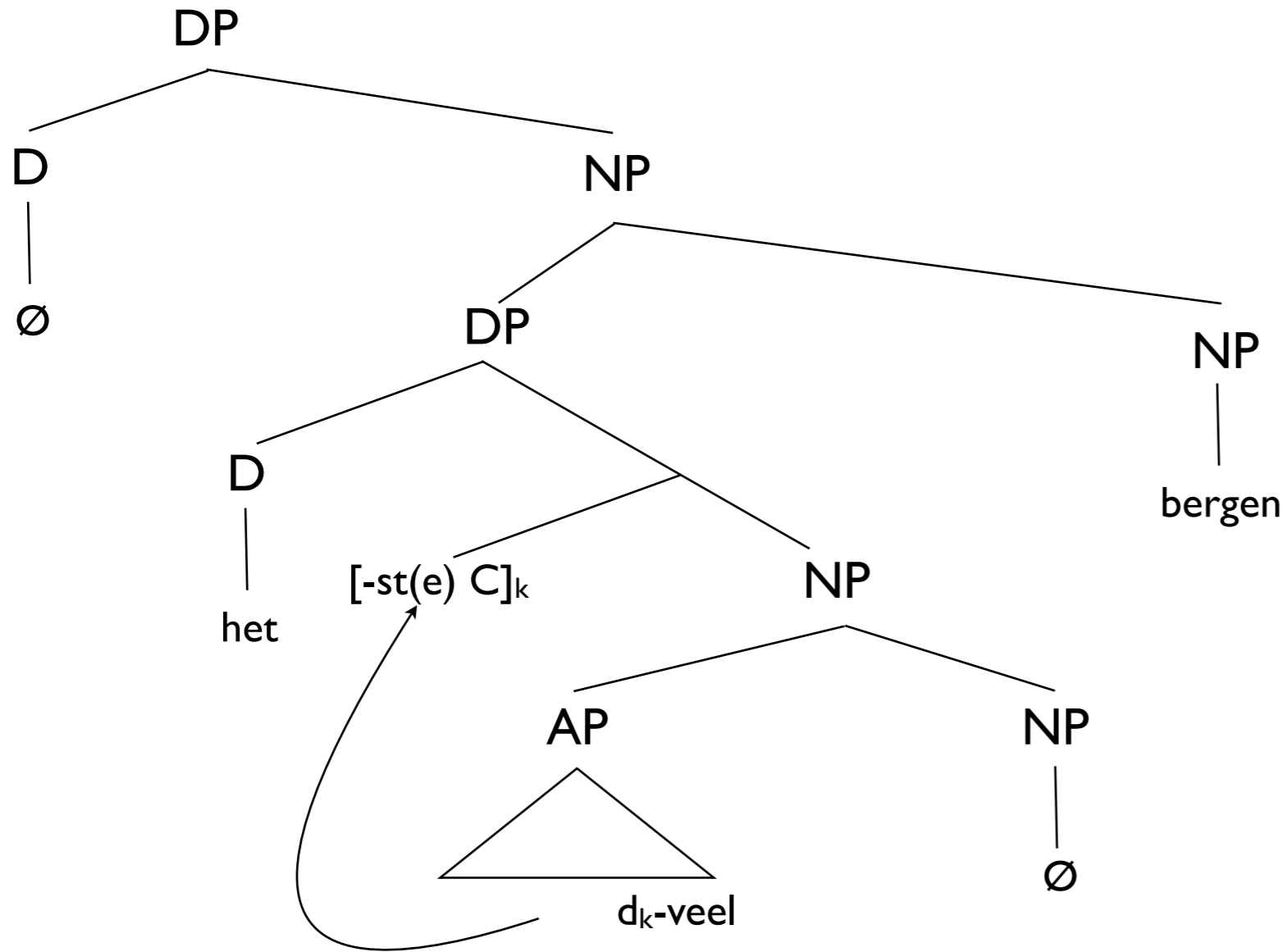
- The determiner in *AGR does not agree with the head noun:

- (13) (a) het meeste mannen
 the_{sing.neut.} most men_{pl.masc.}
- (b) het meeste vrouwen
 the_{sing.neut.} most women_{pl.fem.}
- (c) het meeste huizen
 the_{sing.neut.} most houses_{pl.neut.}

- The *AGR structure shows similarities with indefinite plurals. We assume that there is a null D in both cases:

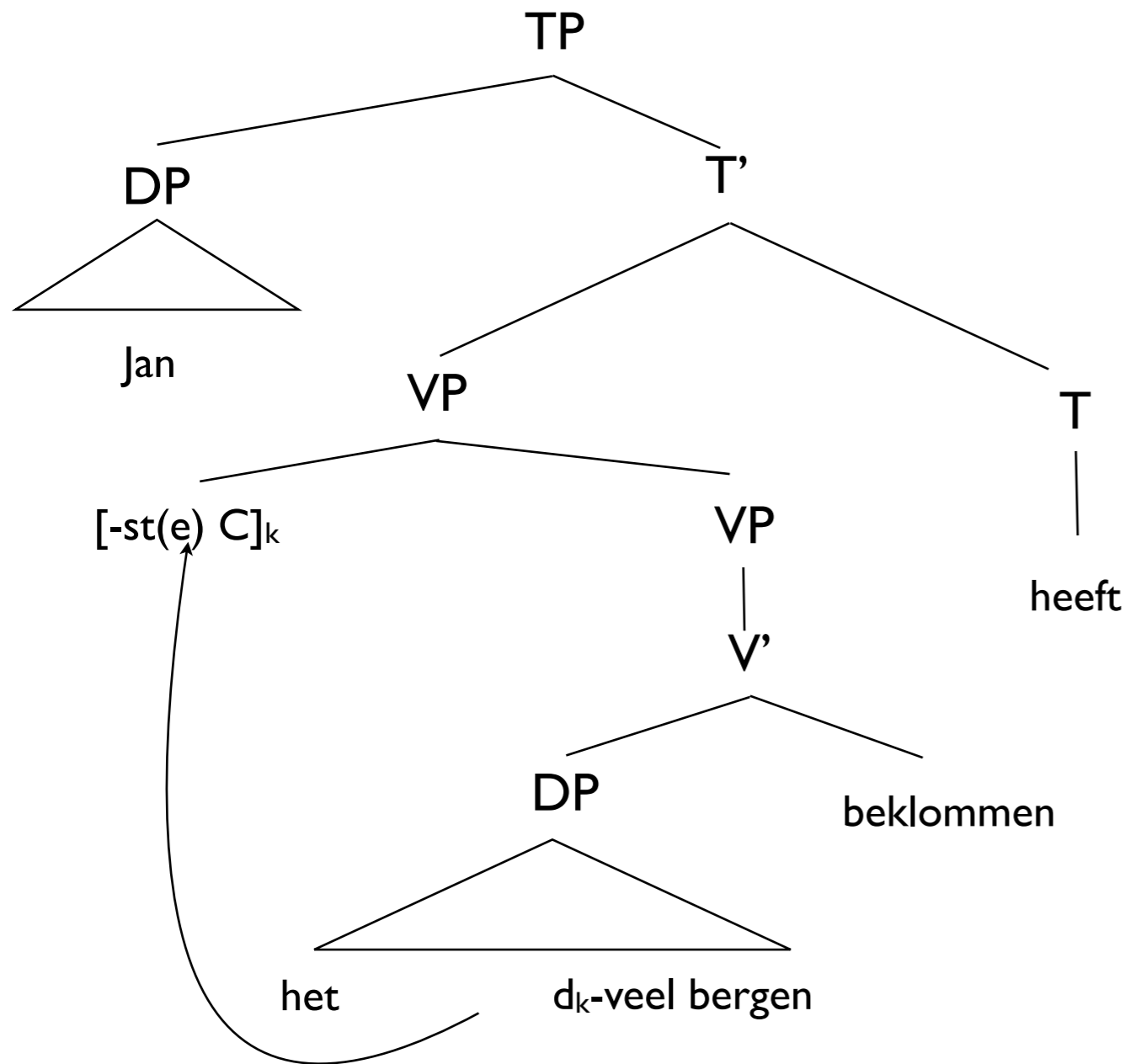
- (14) (a) Er zijn ∅ het meeste bergen in Zwitserland.
 there are ∅ the most mountains in Switzerland
- (b) Er zijn ∅ mannen in de straat.
 there are ∅ men in the street

*AGR: absolute reading



- Null D in the highest DP accounts for the combination with existential *there*.
- Anaphoric gender marking in Dutch (predicate) superlatives may be optional (Matushansky 2008).
- This explains why there is no agreement between *het* and the null NP.
- [[[[-st(e) C]_k [d_k-veel bergen]]bergen] is not a valid absolute reading.

*AGR: relative reading



- [-st(e) C]_k adjoins to VP (Szabolcsi (1986), Heim (1999), Hackl (2009)).
- [[-st(e) C]_k[[het d_k-veel bergen] beklommen]] is the relative reading.
- This is the only available reading for *AGR structures.

Conclusion

- In Dutch, *de/het meeste* has an absolute and a relative reading:
 - the different readings do not depend on the article
 - the DPs with relative readings are non-specific indefinite
 - the DPs with absolute ('proportional') readings are definite
 - there are two different syntactic structures underlying *de/het meeste*.
- Future research:
 - Research of English data (and other languages)
 - AGR and *AGR structure
 - Consequences for the semantics of *most* and *de/het meeste*
 - Similar expressions, such as *de/het minste*, *de meerderheid* etc.

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Thank you!!!

<http://www.xkcd.com>

