On the syntactic regularity of idioms

New evidence from Dutch dialects

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Overview

★ What is an idiom?

  ‣ Inflexibility

  ‣ Regularity

★ The project

★ Findings - Idioms in Dutch dialects: regular syntax

  ‣ Determiner drop

  ‣ Possessive alternation

  ‣ Perfect doubling

★ Why inflexibility?

★ Summary

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What is an idiom?

- An idiom = an expression with a non-compositional interpretation

  — its meaning as a whole is not simply predictable/derivable from (the combination of) the literal meanings of its parts

(1) *Ned Stark bit the dust.* = Ned Stark died.

What is an idiom?

- None of the lexical items that comprise the idiom in (1) correspond to its idiomatic meaning:

    - *bite* = use your teeth to cut into something

    - *the* = definite article

    - *dust* = fine, dry powder consisting of tiny particles of earth or waste matter

Non-compositionality

- The Fregean principle of compositionality:
  the meaning of a complex expression is determined by the meanings of its parts and the rules used to combine them

- Given their non-compositionality, idioms appear to directly violate this principle
  (cf. i.a. Katz & Postal 1963; Fraser 1970; Katz 1973; Chomsky 1980; Machonis 1985; Schenk 1995; Grégoire 2009)

- Question:
  How can idioms be reconciled with this principle?

Non-compositionality

- One possible answer:
  idioms are stored in our mental lexicon
  as single, atomic items
  (cf. i.a. Jackendoff 1997; Everaert 2010)

- 2 other possible arguments
  (> inflexibility)

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Lexical inflexibility

- If any of the lexical items that make up the idiom in (1) are replaced, even by synonyms, the figurative interpretation is lost (# = loss of idiomatic interpretation):

(2) a.   Ned Stark bit the dust.
    b. # Ned Stark bit the **dirt**.
    c. # Ned Stark bit **some** dust.
    d. # Ned Stark **chewed** the dust.

Syntactic inflexibility

- **Some idioms: syntactically inflexible [English]**
  (cf. i.a. Newmeyer 1974; Nunberg et al. 1994)

(3) *bite the dust = die*

    a. # The dust was bitten by Ned.   **passivisation*
    b. # The dust, Ned has bitten.   **topicalisation*

(4) *shoot the breeze = chat*

    a.   We shot the breeze for hours.
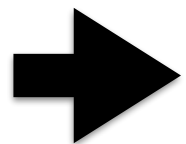   b. # The breeze was shot by us.   **passivisation*
    c. # The breeze, we shot yesterday.   **topicalisation*

What is an idiom?

Lack of

* a compositional interpretation
* lexical flexibility
* syntactic transformations

➡️ follows automatically if an idiom is syntactically atomic?
i.e. if an idiom = a multiword expression that …
… functions as a single word in syntax
… is stored wholesale as a unit in the lexicon
(cf. i.a. Gibbs & Gonzales 1985; McGlone et al. 1994)

What is an idiom?

- However:

  in general, idiomatic VPs - such as *bite the dust* in (1) - are formed in a manner which obeys the **regular syntactic rules of the language**, like any other **fully regular VP**

  (cf. i.a. Fellbaum 1993; Nunberg et al. 1994; Ifill 2002; McGinnis 2002; Svenonius 2005; Everaert 2010; Stone 2013)

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Syntactic regularity

- idioms conform with the regular phrase structure rules of the language

(5) a. *Ned Stark bit the dust.*
     b. *Ned Stark bit the bread.*
     c. *Ned Stark swept the dust.*

Syntactic regularity

- idioms behave as expected re. their aspectual properties (telicity)

(6)   *Ned Stark bit the dust.*
    =   Ned Stark died.

(7)   *Robert Baratheon kicked the bucket.*
    =   Robert Baratheon died.

Syntactic regularity

- idioms interact with productive syntax

  ‣ raising/control

  ‣ clause-type shifting

  ‣ embedding in subordinate clauses

  ‣ other syntactic operations, e.g. relativisation

(8) a. *Another promising company <u>seems to</u> bite the dust.*
   b. *<u>Who</u> will bite the dust?*
   c. *They want you to think <u>that</u> a big character bit the dust.*
   d. *He is the first major character <u>who</u> bites the dust in this episode.*

Morpho-syntactic regularity

- idioms show the normal range of inflexional affixes

    ‣ temporal, aspectual, agreement specifications vary freely

    ‣ finite and non-finite forms

(9)   a.   *My iMac **bit** the dust today.*
        b.   *Another one **bites** the dust.*
        c.   *Littlefinger <u>will</u> surely **bite** the dust.*
        d.   *So many Starks <u>have</u> **bitten** the dust over the course of six seasons.*

Morpho-syntactic regularity

- idioms seem to be built up by the same normal, **regular (morpho-)syntactic structure-building mechanisms** that create non-idiomatic structures

- these data suggest that the idioms are not stored as single, atomic units
  (cf. i.a. Stone 2013, 2015)

Ongoing debate

- **inflexibility ~ lexicon**

  ‣ idiom = stored wholesale as a single unit in the mental lexicon

  ‣ idiom = syntactically atomic, a multiword expression functioning as a single word in syntax

- **regularity ~ syntax**

  ‣ idiom = has structure, has a regular (morpho-)syntax, is built up by the normal (morpho-)syntactic structure-building mechanisms of the language

  ‣ idiom = not stored as a single, atomic unit

Inflexibility vs. regularity?
Lexicon vs. syntax?

- **this talk: contribution to this debate**

  further demonstration that idioms are built up by the same regular structure-building mechanisms that create non-idiomatic syntactic structures

- **empirical basis:**

  new data from idioms in non-standard varieties of Dutch

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The project

- ❖ idiomatic expressions in 13 non-standard varieties of Dutch
(in both The Netherlands and Flanders)

- ❖ analysing idioms from available dialect dictionaries

- ❖ acquiring native speaker judgments on syntactic manipulations of idioms
(formal interviews, with judgment tasks)

The project

- **Electronic database of non-standard Dutch idioms**
  http://languagelink.let.uu.nl/idioms
  (under construction! available to the public January 2017)
  .

  ❖ two (sub)parts:

  ‣ idioms collected from dialect dictionaries + glosses, translations, POS-tagging, syntactic properties

  ‣ selected idioms in each variety + judgments on syntactic manipulations (min. 6 speakers per dialect)

  ❖ allows for the presentation of gathered data and facilitates searches

  ❖ serves as a search tool for systematic investigation into the syntax of idioms

The project

The Netherlands

Deventer   Drenthe

Groesbeek   Utrecht

Hogeland

Belgium

Aalst   Wambeek

Brugge   Tessenderlo

Lede   Bree

Dendermonde   Leuven

The project

The Netherlands

Hogeland

Drenthe

Deventer

Utrecht

Belgium

Dendermonde

Groesbeek

Tessenderlo

Lede

Brugge

Bree

Aalst

Leuven

Wambeek

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Findings

If the syntax of idioms is completely regular…

- **Prediction:**

    ‣ **if:** a language (variety) exhibits a syntactic phenomenon that is 'peculiar'/uncommon (i.e. that seems to be a cross-linguistic or cross-dialectal 'rarity')

    ‣ **then:** this same syntactic phenomenon will also be found in the idioms of that language (variety)

- This is exactly what we found in our research on Dutch dialects.

    ➡ we discuss 3 cases in 3 different Dutch dialects

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Determiner drop

- many dialects spoken in the Dutch province of Groningen, e.g. Hogelandsters

- **definite/specific nouns** occur without an overt article in contexts where other varieties of Dutch require a definite determiner
  (cf. i.a. Schuringa 1923; Ter Laan 1929, 1953; Apotheker 1980; Reker 2005; Bloemhoff et al. 2008; Oosterhof 2008)

Hogeland

Groningen

Determiner drop

(10) dropping of non-neuter definite determiners (Ter Laan 1953:35)

	Groningen	Standard Dutch & other dialects
a.	**Man** het geliek. *man has right* 'The man is right.'	**De** **man** heeft gelijk. *the man has right* 'The man is right.'
b.	**Jong** het **bok** verkòft. *boy has goat sold* 'The boy has sold the goat.'	**De** **jongen** heeft **de** **bok** verkocht. *the boy has the goat sold* 'The boy has sold the goat.'
c.	**Kou** staat in **sloot**. *cow stands in ditch* 'The cow is standing in the ditch.'	**De** **koe** staat in **de** **sloot**. *the cow stands in the ditch* 'The cow is standing in the ditch.'
d.	Dou **deur** dicht. *do door closed* 'Close the door.'	Dou **de** **deur** dicht. *do the door closed* 'Close the door.'

Determiner drop

Careful: in Standard Dutch (and dialects in other regions than Groningen)

- <u>singular countable nouns in argument position</u>: always an overt article, e.g. (10)

- <u>uncountable and plural nouns</u> do occur without article, cf. (11)

(11) (Oosterhof 2008:75)
- a. De jongen heeft **water** gedronken.   ('The boy has drunk water.')
       the boy   has   water drunk
- b. De jongen heeft **bokken** verkocht.   ('The boy has sold goats.')
       the boy   has   goats   sold
- c. **Koeien** eten graag **gras**.   ('Cows like to eat grass.')
       cows   eat   gladly grass

   ‣ but: these constituents have an **indefinite/generic reading**

   ‣ they do <u>NOT</u> have a definite/specific reading,
      unlike the Groningen examples in (10)

Determiner drop

Some more details:

the **definite/specific non-neuter** determiner (*de* = 'the.NON-NEUT') is dropped

- obligatorily in certain Groningen dialects (+)

- optionally in others (●)

- never in others (—)

map *Reeks Nederlandse Dialectatlassen* for dropping of 'de'

Determiner drop

what about the **definite/specific neuter determiner**
(*het* or *'t* ='the.NEUT')?

➡ <u>standard assumption</u>: it is never dropped

(12) (Ter Laan 1953:35)

*(**'t**)   Peerd löpt in *(**'t**)   laand.
the.NEUT *horse runs in the*.NEUT *land*
*(**'t**)   Vool is bie hom.
the.NEUT *foal is with him*
'The horse is running on the meadow.
The foal is with him.'

map *Reeks Nederlandse Dialectatlassen* for dropping of 'het'

Determiner drop

what about the **definite/specific neuter determiner**
(*het* or *'t* = 'the.NEUT')?

➡ <u>more recent observation:</u>
(Apotheker 1980; Barbiers et al. 2005-2008;
Oosterhof 2008)

it is dropped
- obligatorily in certain Groningen dialects (+)

- optionally in others (●)

- never in others (—)

map *Syntactische Atlas Nederlandse Dialecten* for dropping of 'het'

Determiner drop - idioms

Hogeland

Groningen

- **data from our fieldwork discussed here:**
  idioms in the Hogelandsters dialects
  (dialects spoken in Hogeland)

Determiner drop - idioms

- **places of birth
  of our informants**

  1. Uithuizermeeden

  2. Uithuizen

  3. Stedum

  4. Oosterwijdwert

  5. Zuidbroek

Determiner drop - idioms

- **our observations:**

	dropping of non-neuter definite determiner		dropping of neuter definite determiner	
	in non-idiomatic contexts	**in idioms**	**in non-idiomatic contexts**	**in idioms**
Uithuizermeeden, Uithuizen	obligatory	obligatory	never	never
Stedum, Zuidbroek, Oosterwijdwert	optional	optional	never	never

Determiner drop - idioms

Non-neuter definite determiner dropping: obligatory or optional

(13) Hai veegde mie **(*de) / (de)** **mantel** oet.
    he swept me the the coat out
    'He punished me severely.'

(14) Hai het et an **(*de) / (de)** **loop**.
    he has it on the the run
    'It's going smoothly for him.'

(15) Hai draaide mie **(*de) / (de)** **rogge** toe.
    he turned me the the back to
    'He turned his back on me.'

Determiner drop - idioms

Neuter definite determiner dropping: disallowed

(16) Hai ken ***(t)**   **gras**   heuren wassen.
      he   can   the.NEUT *grass   hear   grow*
      'He's very conceited, cocky.'

(17) Hai bindt ***(t)**   **vour**   an.
      he   binds the.NEUT *forage on*
      'He's launching something.'

Determiner drop

- **Observation**
  - ‣ dialects in the province of Groningen (more specifically, in Hogeland) exhibit determiner drop

  - ‣ this same syntactic phenomenon is also found in the idioms of these dialects

  - ‣ the patterns of determiner drop in idioms are perfectly in line with the dialects' regular syntax
    - ➡ non-neuter definite determiner drop (vs. no neuter determiner drop)
    - ➡ obligatory vs. optional determiner dropping

- **Conclusion**
  - ‣ the idioms are built up by the regular structure-building mechanisms of the dialects under scrutiny

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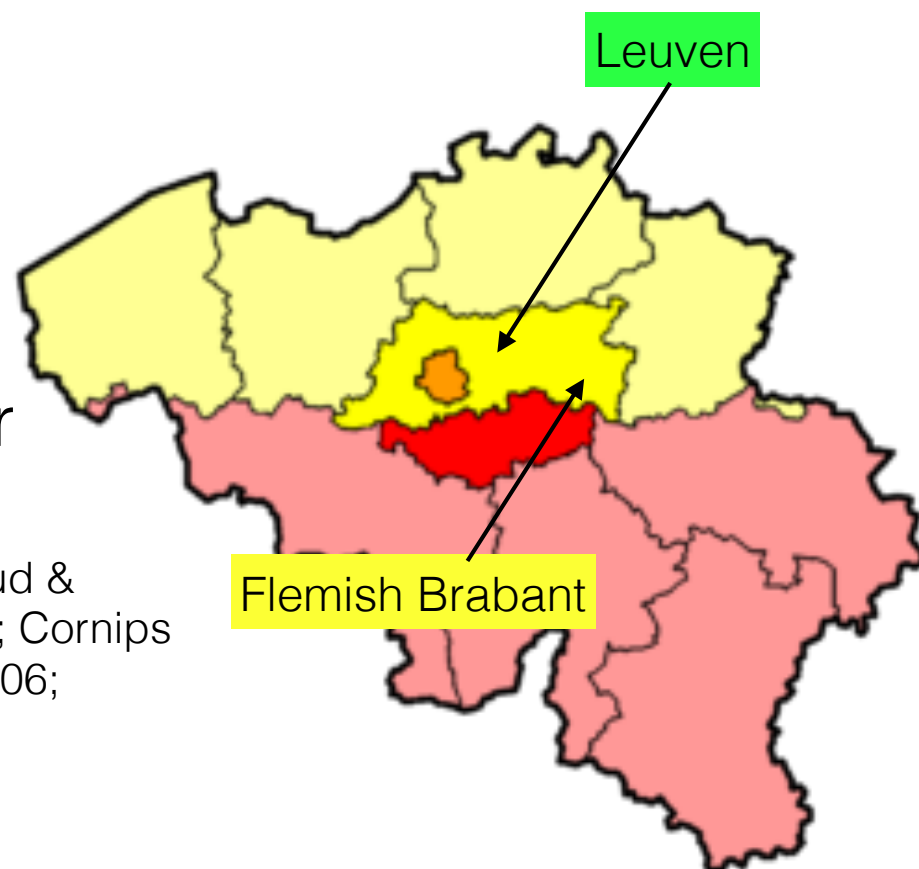
- ‣ **Possessive alternation**

- ‣ Perfect doubling

★ Why inflexibility?

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Possessive alternation

- many Dutch dialects, e.g. Leuvens (province of Flemish Brabant, Belgium)

- inalienable possession can be marked with different syntactic alternations

    ‣ the possessor can also appear outside of the possessum DP

    (cf. i.a. Vandeweghe 1987; Burridge 1990; Vergnaud & Zubizarreta 1992; Broekhuis & Cornips 1994, 2015; Cornips 1998; Guéron 2006; Hole 2006; Lee-Schoenfeld 2006; Deal 2013a,b; Haegeman & Danckaert 2013)

Leuven

Flemish Brabant

Possessive alternation

- **Internal possession: [TP … [DP possessor *possessum*] …]**

  ‣ possession is expressed internally in the possessive DP, e.g. with a possessive pronoun or a genitive nominal

  ‣ the possessor nominals are encoded syntactically as dependents of the possessum nouns

(18) a. Hij sloeg op   [DP **Marie's / haar** arm].
        he   hit   on   Mary's   her   arm
     b. Ik gooi een krant   naar [DP **Jefs / zijn** hoofd].
        I   throw a   newspaper to   Jeff's his   head

Possessive alternation

- **External possession: [TP …[DP possessor]…[DP Ddef *possessum*]…]**

  a nominal is

  ‣ syntactically encoded as a verbal dependent

  ‣ but semantically understood as the possessor of an inalienable noun (preceded by a definite article) in one of its co-arguments

(19) a. Hij sloeg [DP haar] op [DP **de** arm].
       he hit her on the arm

   b. Ik gooi [DP Jef] een krant naar [DP **het** hoofd].
       I throw Jeff a newspaper to the head

   c. [DP Hij] sluit [DP **de** ogen].
       he closes the eyes

Possessive alternation

- **"Doubly marked" possession:**
  [TP … [DP possessor$_i$]…[DP poss.pron.$_i$ *possessum*]…
  (Lee-Schoenfeld's 2006 terminology)
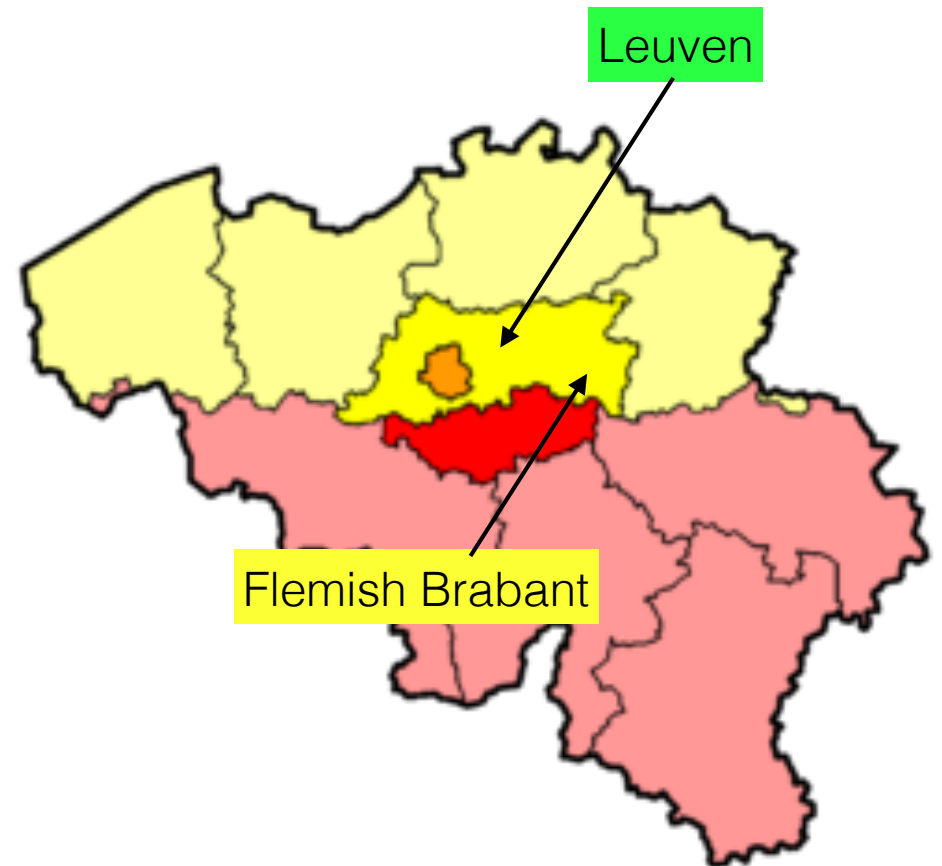
  ‣ with both external and internal possession
    (coreferential possessors)

(20) a.   Hij   sloeg [DP <u>Marie$_i$</u>] op   [DP **haar**$_i$ arm].
         he   hit   Mary   on   her   arm
     b.   Ik gooi [DP <u>hem$_i$</u>] een   krant   naar [DP **zijn**$_i$ hoofd].
         I   throw   him   a   newspaper   to   his   head
     c.   [DP <u>Jon$_i$</u>] sluit   [DP **zijn**$_i$ ogen].
         Jon   closes   his   eyes

Possessive alternation - idioms

- **data from our fieldwork discussed here:**
  idioms in the Leuvens dialect
  (dialect spoken in Leuven)

Leuven

Flemish Brabant

Possessive alternation - idioms

- **the possessive alternation with inalienable nouns
our observations in the Leuvens dialect:**

internal possession		external possession		'doubly-marked' possession	
in non-idiomatic contexts	in idioms	in non-idiomatic contexts	in idioms	in non-idiomatic contexts	in idioms
✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔

Possessive alternation - idioms

(21) External possession (subject)
   Ik zat met   de   dood op   **het**   lijf.
   I sat with   the dead   on   the   body = 'I was terrified.'

(22) "Doubly-marked" possession (subject)
   Ik$_i$ zat met de dood   op   **mijn$_i$** lijf.
   I sat with the dead on   my   body = 'I was terrified.'

(23) External possession (subject)
   Ik keer hem **de** rug toe.
   I turn him the back to   = 'I don't want anything to do with him.'

(24) "Doubly-marked" possession (subject)
   Ik$_i$ keer hem **mijn$_i$** rug   toe.
   I turn him my   back to = 'I don't want anything to do with him.'

Possessive alternation - idioms

(25) External possession (indirect object)
Ik ga **hem** zand in **de** ogen strooien.
I   go him sand in the eyes strew   = 'I am going to fool him.'

(26) "Doubly-marked" possession (indirect object)
Ik ga **hem**$_i$ zand in **zijn**$_i$ ogen strooien.
I   go him   sand in his   eyes strew = 'I am going to fool him.'

(27) Internal possession
Ik ga zand in **zijn** ogen strooien.
I   go sand in his eyes strew   = 'I am going to fool him.'

Possessive alternation - idioms

(28) **External possession (indirect object)**
    Ik ga **hem** de prang op **de** keel   zetten.
    I   go him the clip   on the throat put   = 'I am going to pressure him.'

(29) **"Doubly-marked" possession (indirect object)**
    Ik ga **hem$_i$** de prang op **zijn$_i$** keel   zetten.
    I   go him   the clip   on his   throat put = 'I am going to pressure him.'

(30) **Internal possession**
    Ik ga de prang op **zijn** keel   zetten.
    I   go the clip   on his throat put   = 'I am going to pressure him.'

Possessive alternation

- **Observation**
  - ‣ in the dialect of Leuven, inalienable possession can be marked with different syntactic alternations

  - ‣ this same syntactic phenomenon is also found in the idioms of the dialect

  - ‣ the pattern of the possessive alternation in idioms is perfectly in line with the dialect's regular syntax
    (*pace* Fellbaum 1993; Sailer 2015 on English and German!)
    - ➡ internal possession
    - ➡ external possession
    - ➡ "doubly-marked" possession

- **Conclusion**
  - ‣ the idioms are built up by the regular structure-building mechanisms of the dialect under scrutiny

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  ‣ Possessive alternation

  ‣ **Perfect doubling**
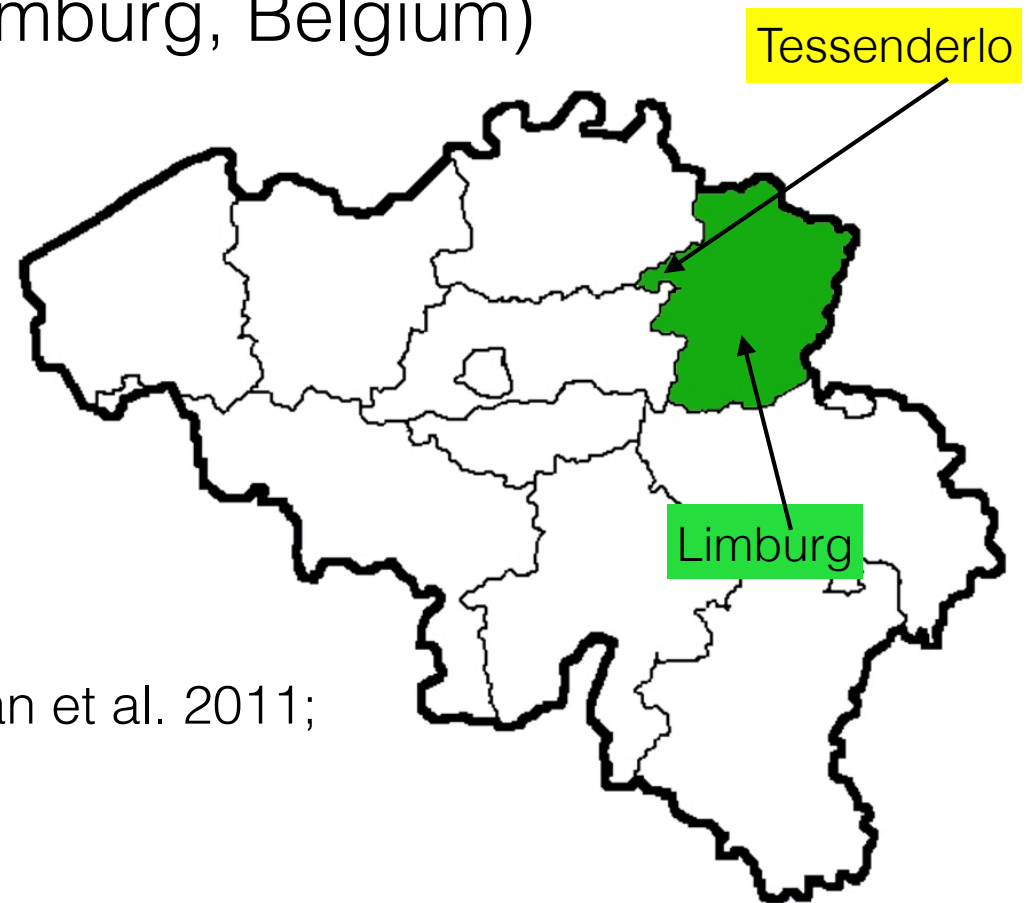
★ Why inflexibility?

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Perfect doubling

- South-eastern dialects of Dutch, e.g. Loois (Tessenderlo, province of Limburg, Belgium)

- compound tenses featuring an additional, participial *have* (or *be*)
  (cf. i.a. Barbiers et al. 2009; Koeneman et al. 2011; Cornips & Broekhuis 2015)

Tessenderlo

Limburg

Perfect doubling

- South-eastern dialects
  ‣ (a) simple past

  ‣ (b) simple (present/past) perfect
    ➡ *have/be*
      + past participle

  ‣ (c) perfect doubling
    ➡ *have/be*
      + past participle
      + past participle of *have/be*

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Perfect doubling

(31) a. Ik <u>beet</u> in de boterham.
     I bit   in the sandwich   = 'I bit the sandwich.'
    b. Ik **heb**   in de boterham <u>gebeten</u>.
     I have in the sandwich bitten   = 'I have bitten the sandwich.'
    c. Ik **heb** in de boterham <u>gebeten</u> **gehad**.
     I have in the sandwich bitten   had   = 'I have bitten the sandwich.'

(32) a. Ik <u>viel</u> twee keer.
     I   fell two   time   = 'I fell twice.'
   b. Ik **ben** twee keer <u>gevallen</u>.
     I am two   time fallen   = 'I have fallen twice.'
   c. Ik **ben** twee keer <u>gevallen</u> **geweest**.
     I am two   time fallen   been   = 'I have fallen twice.'

Perfect doubling

- the double perfect appears <u>in similar contexts</u> as its non-doubling counterpart

- the double perfect is <u>not sensitive</u> to the <u>semantic</u> properties of the main verb

- the double perfect has the so-called '<u>superperfect use</u>' (Carruthers 1994)

- the double perfect can involve a <u>'reversal' interpretation</u>
    - ‣ e.g. in *Ik **heb** de fiets <u>gestolen</u> **gehad*** ('I have the bike stolen had'), the implication can be that the bike is no longer missing

    (Barbiers et al. 2009; Koeneman et al. 2011 (and confirmed in our fieldwork))

Perfect doubling - idioms

- **our observations in the Loois dialect:**

	regular perfect		perfect doubling	
	in non-idiomatic contexts	**in idioms**	**in non-idiomatic contexts**	**in idioms**
Group 1 (age +60)	✔	✔	✔	✔
Group 2 (age -60)	✔	✔	*	*

Perfect doubling - idioms

- **idioms dependent on perfect aspect**
  (cf. Harwood & Temmerman 2015; Harwood et al. 2016)

(33) a. Ze   hebben in zijn gat gebeten **(gehad).   [Group 1]**
          Ze   hebben in zijn gat gebeten **(*gehad). [Group 2]**
          they have   in his ass bitten   had
          'He is angry.'
      b. # Ze   beten in zijn gat.
          they bit   in his   ass ≠ 'He is angry.'

(34) a. Het is van het camion gevallen **(geweest).   [Group 1]**
          Het is van het camion gevallen **(*geweest). [Group 2]**
          it   is from the truck   fallen   been
          'It was stolen.'
      b. # Het viel van   het camion.
            it   fell from the truck   ≠ 'It was stolen.'

Perfect doubling

- **Observation**
  - ‣ the dialect of Tessenderlo exhibits perfect doubling
    - ➡ optional for speakers aged 60+
    - ➡ disallowed for speakers aged 60-

  - ‣ this same syntactic phenomenon is also found in the idioms of the dialect

  - ‣ the pattern of perfect doubling in idioms is perfectly in line with the dialect's regular syntax
    - ➡ optional (60+) vs. disallowed (60-)

- **Conclusion**
  - ‣ the idioms are built up by the regular structure-building mechanisms of the dialect under scrutiny

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★ **Why inflexibility?**

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Why inflexibility?

- **discussed in this talk:** several cases of idioms (in dialects of Dutch) built up by the regular structure-building mechanisms of the dialect

- **this suggests:** these idioms are
  — completely regular in their morpho-syntax
  — not stored wholesale in the lexicon as single, atomic units

- **remaining puzzle**: if idioms are not syntactic atoms, why do "stock and standard" syntactic manipulations (topicalisation, passivisation) sometimes destroy idioms?

Why inflexibility?

- **also the case for some of the dialectal idioms discussed earlier**

(16)   Hai ken *(t)   **gras**   heuren wassen.   [Hogelandsters]
       he   can   the.NEUT *grass   hear   grow*
       'He's very conceited, cocky.'

(35)   **No passivisation**
       # 't   Gras   ken (deur hom) wassen heurd worden.
         the grass can   by   him   grow   heard   become
         ≠ 'He's very conceited, cocky.'

(36)   **No topicalisation**
       # Ja, 't   Gras   kon   hai wis   heuren wassen!
         yes the grass could he certainly hear   grow
         ≠ 'He's very conceited, cocky.'

Why inflexibility?

- **also the case for some of the idioms discussed earlier**

(33) Ze   hebben in zijn gat gebeten (gehad).   [Loois]
      they have   in his ass bitten   had
      'He is angry.'

(37) **No passivisation**
      # Er   is in zijn gat gebeten (geweest/geworden).
        there is in his   ass bitten   been   become
        ≠ 'He is angry.'

(38) **No topicalisation**
      # Amai, in zijn gat hebben ze   zeker   gebeten (gehad)!
        gosh in his ass have   they certainly bitten   had
      ≠ 'He is angry.'

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Why inflexibility?

- the most well-known account: **Semantic Mapping**
  (Newmeyer 1974; Nunberg 1978; Wasow et al. 1984; Gazdar et al. 1985; Fillmore et al. 1988; Nunberg et al. 1994; *inter multi alia*, cf. Harwood et al. 2016 for a syntactic implementation in terms of phases)

- <u>2 types of idioms</u>

  ‣ **idiomatically combining expressions (ICEs):**
  individual elements of the literal expression can be mapped onto individual elements of the figurative meaning
  e.g. *spill the beans*

  ‣ **idiomatic phrases (IdPs):**
  the expression as a whole is mapped onto the figurative meaning
  e.g. *kick the bucket*

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Why inflexibility?

- **ICEs = flexible**, can undergo topicalisation and passivisation
  > an ICE is decomposable
  > its component parts are referential

  (39) a. *The beans, Bob has most certainly spilled.*
        b. *The beans were spilled (by Bob).*

- **IdPs = inflexible**, cannot undergo topicalisation and passivisation
  > an IdP is not decomposable
  > its component parts are not referential

  (40) a. # *The bucket, Bob has gone and kicked.*
        b. # *The bucket was kicked (by Bob).*

Why inflexibility?

- an interesting extra hypothesis (Trotzke 2015)

  ★ morpho-syntactic manipulations are licit

  ★ information-structural modifications sometimes aren't

➡ constraints on word order variation (topicalisation, passivisation)

  ‣ are not only due to the ICE-IdP divide

  ‣ are also due to syntax-external factors at the level of pragmatics

Why inflexibility?

- **Trotzke (2015:225) observes the following tendency ('accessibility' vs. 'bizarreness'):**

‣ "when the literal reading is not accessible/plausible to the hearer (when it is 'bizarre'), the hearer infers, due to a relevance implicature, that the idiomatic reading should be chosen"

‣ these syntax-external pragmatic factors may overwrite ordering constraints, and hence play a role in idiom flexibility

‣ according to Trotzke, this is why IdPs with a bizarre literal reading can still show up in e.g. topicalisation constructions, while IdPs with a plausible literal reading cannot

Why inflexibility?

- an idiom such as *pop one's clogs* ('die' = IdP) has a bizarre literal reading, a non-idiomatic reading is not easily available

  ‣ topicalisation/passivisation is possible

    (41) a. *Amy Winehouse sang that song before her clogs were popped.*
          b. *Her clogs, Amy most certainly popped.*

- an idiom such as *kick the bucket* ('die' = IdP) has an accessible plausible literal, non-idiomatic meaning

  ‣ topicalisation/passivisation is impossible, cf. (40)

Why inflexibility?

- the data discussed today are in line with (and support for?) the idea that

  ‣ **morpho-syntactic** manipulations in idioms are **allowed**
    (cf. interaction with productive syntax (e.g. V2, embedding), cf. free variation
    of temporal-aspectual-agreement specifications)

  ‣ modifications that have **information-structural** impact
    (topicalisation, passivisation) are sometimes **not allowed**

  ➡ it seems that determiner drop (Oosterhof 2008), possessive
    alternations (Deal 2013a) and perfect doubling (Koeneman et al.
    2011) do not have an information-structural impact (at least, in the
    dialects under scrutiny), and can be classified as run-of-the-mill
    morpho-syntactic manipulations

Overview

★ What is an idiom?

  ‣ Inflexibility

  ‣ Regularity

★ The project

★ Findings - Idioms in Dutch dialects: regular syntax

  ‣ Determiner drop

  ‣ Possessive alternation

  ‣ Perfect doubling

★ Why inflexibility?

★ **Summary**

Summary

- **ongoing debate: inflexibility vs. regularity ~ lexicon vs. syntax**

  ‣ are idioms stored wholesale as single, atomic units in the mental lexicon?
      cf. idiom inflexibility

  ‣ are idioms built up by the regular structure-building mechanisms of the language?
      cf. idioms with regular (morpho-)syntax

- **this talk:** idioms are built up by the same normal (morpho-)syntactic structure-building mechanisms that create non-idiomatic structures

- **evidence:** new data from idioms in dialectal Dutch

  ‣ determiner drop in Hogelandsters

  ‣ possessive alternation in Leuvens

  ‣ perfect doubling in Loois

Thank You

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Thank You

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The elephants in the room

✦ **don't you ever find idioms with a syntactic structure that doesn't fit in with the general grammar of the system?**

➡ **external possession** with an IO-possessor and a DP-possessum in idioms, but not in non-idiomatic sentences in Standard Dutch?
(Haeseryn et al. 1997; König & Haspelmath 1997; Haspelmath 1999; Broekhuis 2013)

e.g. *iemand **de** ogen uitsteken* (stab someone the eyes out = 'make someone jealous'), *iemand op **de** hielen zitten* (sit someone on the heels = 'follow someone closely'), *iemand op **het** hart trappen* (step someone on the heart = 'hurt someone'), *iemand **de** oren wassen* (wash someone the ears = 'tell someone what they did wrong'), *iemand **de** mond snoeren* (lace someone the mouth = 'silence someone')

‣ **careful**: discussion in the literature whether or not it is indeed the case that Standard Dutch lacks external possession with an IO-possessor (e.g. Fox 1981; Vandeweghe 1987, recent work by J. Scholten (Utrecht)) + unclarity about the judgments (Boef et al. 2015) — needs to be tested systematically!

The elephants in the room

✦ **don't you ever see syntactic irregularities in idioms?**

➡ **irregular syntax** (Harwood et al. 2016)

    e.g. English *be that as it may*
          Dutch *schoon schip maken* (clean ship make = 'leave the past behind, start anew')

➡ **proverbs, full sentential idioms: do not interact with productive syntax**
(Horvath & Siloni 2015, 2016; Harwood et al. 2016)

- *The early bird catches the worm.*
- *People who live in glass houses should not throw stones.*
- *You can't teach an old dog new tricks.*
- *Do bears shit in the woods?*
- *What's cooking?*
- *Where's the beef?*
- *Cry me a river!*
- *Eat my shorts!*

The elephants
in the room

- Horvath & Siloni (2015, 2016):
  we need to distinguish between two types of idioms

  - **phrasal idioms** (regular syntax)

  - **clausal idioms** (no interaction with productive syntax)

    - the latter are stored wholesale in the lexicon as independent entries on their own, as single units, as "big units" (i.e. syntactically atomic, multiword expressions functioning as a single "word" in syntax)

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