Dative Alternation – a feature of new Dutch ethnolects?

1 Introduction

This analysis is part of the Roots of Ethnolect project which focuses on the possible emergence of two young ethnolects of Dutch, spoken by second generation immigrants of Turkish and Moroccan origin. In this paper I will discuss dative alternation as a possible distinctive feature of those ethnolects, considering characteristics of ethnolects in general (section 2.1) and the dative alternation in Standard Dutch (section 2.2). The result of the analysis of parts of the Roots of Ethnolect corpus are presented (section 3), concluding with the claim of dative alternation being a feature of dialectal rather than ethnolectal variation.

2 Background

2.1 Ethnolects

Ethnolects are a rather new area of bilingualism and language contact studies, which is highly relevant in nowadays diverse, multiethnic societies. According to Clyne (2000:87) an ethnolect is a "variet[y] of a language that mark[s] speakers as members of ethnic groups who originally used another language or distinctive variety". The ethnolect serves as means of communication with speakers of the dominant majority language, with members of other ethnic groups, as well as for in-group communication in some cases and the speakers can but do not necessarily have to be aware of its use (Muysken to appear:3). Distinctive features characterizing the ethnolect as variety can be found on almost every level of language, ranging from phonology over morphology and syntax to semantics and pragmatics (see e.g. Dittmar and Steckbauer 2007:78–81, and Keim 2007:95–96 for ethnolects of German). Furthermore ethnolects usually show two sorts of language acquisition traits: L1 influence and general 2nd language learning features (e.g. simplification, overgeneralization) (Muysken to appear:11).

In many countries, predominantly in urban areas with a high concentration of immigrant workers, the emergence of such an ethnolectal variety, especially among young people, has been observed. This phenomenon has been described among others for Sweden (Kotsinas 1988), Denmark (Quist 2008), Germany (Androutsopoulos 2001) and the US (Bills 1977). The Netherlands have a long history of ethnolects, due to their colonial past (see Muysken to

appear:1–3). However, nowadays it is the Turkish and Moroccan immigrants who form the biggest ethnic communities.

The Roots of Ethnolect project focuses on the possible emergence of those two young ethnolects of Dutch, as spoken by second generation migrants (i.e. born in the Netherlands) of Turkish and Moroccan origin. Fieldwork data consisting of recorded conversations (ethnic in- and out-group conversations) of young male speakers from two age groups (12 and 20) from two cities (Nijmegen and Amsterdam) and from three different ethnic backgrounds (Turkish, Moroccan and Dutch) serves as basis for the analysis. Some of the main research questions which are of importance for this paper are (1) which aspects of language use (components of the grammar) characterize the ethnolects in question as distinct varieties? (2) To what extent are ethnolects based on interference from the original language (L1) of the ethnic group in question? and (3) to what extent can we reduce features of ethnolects to properties resulting from processes of L2 acquisition (Muysken to appear:11).

This paper reports the analysis investigating dative alternation as possible distinct grammatical feature of the ethnic varieties of Dutch. The following section provides an overview on the dative alternation in Standard Dutch, necessary for a comparison with the field data.

2.2 Dative alternation

In Dutch two dative constructions (double object vs. prepositional construction with aan) co-exist (see ANS 1997:1160–1165). While traditional Dutch grammar treats both forms as equal and interchangeable, there have been quite a lot of researchers claiming that this is not the case (see Colleman 2006:103–188 for an extensive overview). Linguists have argued that the two constructions are not identical because there are lexical exceptions, thus verbs that can only appear with one of the two constructions. Further arguments are that the prepositional construction requires physical transfer (Schutter and Hauwermeiren 1983:123), that it is not possible with an abstract direct object (Toorn 1973:30) or an in-animate indirect object (Calcar 1974:153). Additionally there are discourse as well as syntactic situations which favor one construction: If the indirect object is the focus of the sentence, the prepositional form becomes more likely, as well as if the indirect object is a heavy constituent (De Schutter and van Hauwermeiren 1983:123). In cases where both constructions are possible, subtle semantic

differences are assumed (Klooster 2001:132), however, what exactly these differences are remains unclear. Some argue that the double object construction gives a higher “affectedness” to the recipient while others see the possessive relation between the objects in the focus Colleman (2006:142). However, most of these theories and explanations are based on introspection and carefully created example sentences, thus suffering from the inherent problems of this methodology. In recent years researchers tried to overcome these problems by using corpora with natural occurring language data for their analysis.

(Colleman 2006:532–553) investigated those semantic differences between the double object and the prepositional construction by studying a corpus compiled of Dutch newspaper texts (CONDIV corpus), thus focusing on the standard written variety of Dutch. He identified the exact semantics of the two constructions and their differences using 225 verbs that can occur with an indirect object. Colleman identified a range of words that can occur with both constructions, among which for example geven, vertellen, overhandigen and verlenen, as well as verbs that can only occur with one of the two constructions and verbs that can have both constructions, with one being clearly marked. According to Colleman (2006:533) the different constructions have different, broad semantic fields which overlap only marginally and he classified the 225 verbs according to those fields. For the following analysis the verbs in the first group, the ones that occur frequently with both constructions, are the most relevant. Colleman argues that cases where both constructions are possible, discourse pragmatic as well as semantic factors determine the distribution. In an earlier study (Colleman 2002:103) on the distribution of constructions with the verb geven he showed that discourse givenness is a relevant factor. When both, recipient and patiens, are either given or new, both constructions are still equally likely. In cases where the recipient is given and the patiens is new, the double object construction is strongly favored, in the opposite case it is the prepositional construction that is primarily used. However, those are only tendencies and there are still sentences where those tendencies do not bear out.

Colleman's (2006:552) corpus analysis lead to the conclusion that it is primarily the verb semantic that determines the construction and that there are discourse factors that can either support or contradict the choice of construction. The stronger the semantic influence for one construction the stronger the discourse influence has to be in order to let the speaker use the

other construction.

Van der Beek (2005:90-101) did not consider the semantic difference between the two construction but focused on discourse and syntactic factors. She showed in her syntactic analysis of the Alpino and CGN (Corpus Gesproken Nederlands) and the TwNC corpus that the distribution of the two dative constructions is primarily based on the lexical preference and pronominality. While there is generally a higher frequency of the double object construction than the prepositional construction, most verbs show preference for one of the realizations while some vary freely. The factor of pronominality effects the distribution in the way that pronoun recipients strongly favor the double object construction, while non-pronouns more often occur in the prepositional construction. Van der Beek's (2005) results are in line with the ones from Colleman's (2006) study in so far that the verb (or its semantics) strongly influence the choice of construction. Van der Beek's pronominality factor is furthermore related to the observed givenness factor by Colleman as discourse given objects are more likely to be realized as pronouns. For English Bresnan et al. (2004:29) identified animacy as another relevant factor in predicting the dative realization. This has not yet been empirically tested for Dutch but van Calcar's (1974:153) introspective conclusion is an indication for its possible influence which should be empirically analyzed in a future corpus study.

3 Present study

The two recent corpus studies reviewed here provide an empirically based explanation for dative alternation in actual language use. The verb and pronominality of the recipient seem to be the main factors influencing the choice of dative construction in Standard Dutch. But this might not be the case for the young ethnolects of Dutch investigated in the Roots of Ethnolect project. As stated above, ethnolects are characterized by language contact phenomena and show traits of second language acquisition such as L1 influence and simplification or over-generalizations. The dative with its two constructions is a feature that might be prone to both kinds of influences, as dative alternation is not a language universal and most languages are only indued with one construction to express the indirect object. Both L1 influences as well as simplification or over-generalization processes might therefore lead to a different distribution of constructions or even the lack of one of the two possibilities in the language use of ethnolect

speakers and might therefore be considered as distinctive feature of the ethnolects.

In order to investigate dative alternation as feature of the ethnolects the factors "verb lexeme" and "pronominality" will be tested for their predictive value in this specific context. In addition to these two linguistic factors the possible role of "background" and "social group" as predicting factor for dative realization will be investigated.

If background and/or social group turn out to be a valid predictor, then dative realization needs to be considered a grammatical feature of that ethnolect differentiating this variety from other varieties of Dutch (distribution differing between standard Dutch and the here analyzed non-standard varieties)(**research question 1**).

Furthermore, if background of the speaker is determining factor, a cross-linguistic description of dative constructions (Turkish and Berber) will reveal further insights on L1 influence (**research question 2**), if we however detect differences from Standard Dutch that can be identified as simplifications or over-generalizations (and which are common across the different backgrounds) a general L2 learning process should be considered to be of influence (**research question 3**).

3.1 General analysis: Nijmegen

3.1.1 Material:

In a first step the recorded conversations from the speakers of older age group in Nijmegen were analyzed, extracting all occurrences of indirect objects (according to the ANS 1997:1160-1165) from the transcribed parts of the Roots of Ethnolect corpus with verbs that theoretically allow for both, the double object construction and the prepositional construction with aan. Other prepositional constructions such as voor, van and tegen were excluded.

3.1.2 Results

This procedure lead to a dataset with 49 cases, 33 (67,3%) of which double object constructions and 16 (32,7%) prepositional constructions. These general frequencies are in accordance with the the distribution observed by van der Beek (2006:94) for Standard Dutch. Sentences with indirect objects were used by all ethnic groups and in in- and out-group conversations. In total there were twelve different verbs, with rather different frequencies: *geven* (20 cases (40,8%))

vertellen (6 cases (12,2%)), *betalen* (5 cases (10,2%)), *leren* (4 cases (8,2%)), *vragen* (4 cases (8,2%)), *doorgeven* (2 cases (4,1%)), *sturen* (2 cases (4,1%)), *verkopen* (2 cases (4,1%)), *laten zien* (1 case (2%)), *toetreden* (1 case (2%)), *trouw zijn* (1 case (2%)), *uitleggen* (1 case (2%)).

There are some other general observations preceding a detailed statistical analysis. It should be mentioned that there was less conversation data to be analyzed for the Turkish in-group conversations as those conversations were characterized by frequent code-switching and major parts of the the conversation being held in Turkish. This is different from the Moroccan in-group conversations and might be related to the acculturation difference between Moroccan and Turkish immigrant groups in the Netherlands (Extra and Yagmur 2009:5–7).

In order to identify the variables which function as predictors for the dative construction a logistic regression analysis would be useful. Unfortunately the data-set is rather small and contains some cells with the value 0. This makes a regression analysis impossible because it leads to an inflation of the standard error and a conflation of possible effects. In order to test a model with “verb lexeme”, “pronominality”, “background of the speaker” and “in-group/out-group” as possible factors in the distribution of dative constructions and to determine the relative strength of each predictor, more data is needed.

However, cross-tabulations with the present data could already reveal which factors might play a role, even though it is far too early to make a general statement.

Factors: Linguistic factors

Verb lexeme: In this analysis we had 49 dative constructions distributed over 12 verbs. It was striking that only the verb *geven* occurred with both constructions (7 prepositional constructions (35%) and 13 double object constructions (65%)). *Geven* is, together with *verkopen*, *sturen* and *uitleggen*, in Colleman's (2005:533) category of verbs which occur frequently with both realizations. Those and the other verbs in this analysis however behaved differently. The verbs *doorgeven*, *trouw zijn*, *verkopen* and *vragen* occurred only with the prepositional construction, the verbs *betalen*, *laten zien*, *leren*, *sturen*, *toetreden*, *uitleggen* and *vertellen* only with the double object construction. Because of the small size of the data-set and the low frequency of the verbs, it is not possible to determine a lexical preference for one construction for the verbs. The distribution observed here can be purely based on chance, I

would however expect to find a clear lexical preference in a bigger data-set.

Pronominality: In accordance with what van der Beek (2006:92-93) showed for Standard Dutch, pronominality is significantly related to the choice of dative construction in this data-set too. As shown by her, pronoun recipients occur more often in double object position while non-pronoun recipients prefer the prepositional construction.

noun or pronoun * realization of dative object Crosstabulation

Count

		realization of dative object		Total
		prepositional construction	double object construction	
noun or pronoun	non-pronoun	7	2	9
	pronoun	9	31	40
Total		16	33	49

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10,209[a]	1	,001		
Continuity Correction	7,850	1	,005		
Likelihood Ratio	9,718	1	,002		
Fisher's Exact Test				,003	,003
Linear-by-Linear Association	10,000	1	,002		
N of Valid Cases	49				

a. 1 cells (25,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2,94.

The linguistic variables identified by van der Beek (2005) and Colleman (2006) for Standard Dutch seem to be valid for this non-Standard variety data as well. Unfortunately it was impossible to find evidence for the importance of the factor “verb” in this data, but this is assumed to be purely related to the limited size of the data-set. What remains to be investigated is if background factors have an influence on the distribution of dative constructions as well. If the distribution of dative realization in the here analyzed non-Standard variety is different from the distribution in the Standard variety, we expect the following factors to be significant.

Background of the speaker: This factor turned out not to be significant. The speaker's background did not show a significant relation to the distribution of dative constructions. All ethnic groups used both constructions. Turkish, Moroccan and Dutch adolescents did not use the two dative constructions in a significantly different distribution. According to this finding, there does not seem to be an influence of the speakers other language (background). This contrasts with the assumption of L1 transfer influencing dative alternation in modern Dutch ethnolects.

background of the speaker * realization of dative object Crosstabulation

Count

		realization of dative object		Total
		prepositional construction	double object construction	
background of the speaker	Dutch	3	9	12
	Turkish	7	7	14
	Moroccan	6	17	23
Total		16	33	49

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2,686[a]	2	,261
Likelihood Ratio	2,600	2	,273
Linear-by-Linear Association	,048	1	,827
N of Valid Cases	49		

a. 2 cells (33,3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3,92.

in-group/out-group: The last factor investigated here was whether the distribution of dative constructions is different in in-group versus out-group conversations. According to the definition, ethnolects are used for both in- and out-group conversations, we therefore do not expect a significant difference between the two types of conversations. However, there turned out to be a significant difference between the distribution of dative constructions in in-group and out-group conversations. While the double object construction occured with about the

same frequency in both in- and out-group conversations, the prepositional construction was found very infrequently in the in-group conversations compared to the out-group conversations.

ingroup outgroup conversation * realization of dative object Crosstabulation

Count

		realization of dative object		Total
		prepositional construction	double object construction	
ingroup outgroup conversation	ingroup	2	17	19
	outgroup	14	16	30
Total		16	33	49

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6,909[a]	1	,009		
Continuity Correction[b]	5,363	1	,021		
Likelihood Ratio	7,664	1	,006		
Fisher's Exact Test				,012	,008
Linear-by-Linear Association	6,768	1	,009		
N of Valid Cases	49				

a. 0 cells (,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6,20.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

A closer look revealed that this skewed distribution was due to the fact that the verb “geven” was used in both constructions in the out-group conversation while it was only used in the double object construction in the in-group conversations. This result was furthermore influenced by the factor pronominality. There were no non-pronoun recipients with the verb geven in the in-group conversations, which would have favored a prepositional construction. It however remains unclear why there did not occur any non-pronominal recipients in the in-group conversation . It might again simply be related to the small size of the data-set.

3.1.3 Discussion

The data analyzed here suggests that dative alternation is not a grammatical feature distinguishing possible ethnolectal varieties. The distribution of dative object constructions in the data did not differ from the one reported for Standard Dutch. The factors influencing the construction wer pronominality and lexical preference. Neither of the two background factors influenced the choice of dative construction. This also means that there were neither L1 transfer from Turkish or Berber nor general second language learning processes involved. With respect to the grammatical feature of dative alternation, it is impossible to distinguish separate varieties. In order to make valid generalizations about that conclusion, more data has to be studied, but the results from this analysis clearly point towards dative alternation not being a feature of ethnolectal variation.

3.2 Analysis of local differences

The first analysis indicated that dative alternation is not a feature of the ethnolectal variation investigated by the Roots of Ethnolect project. The data for that analysis came from the conversation recorded from the speakers in Nijmegen. In a second step, the results from the Nijmegen data will be compared to the data from Amsterdam to reveal possible local differences in the use of the two dative constructions.

3.2.1 Material

Because it was only the verb “geven” which occurred with both constructions in the Nijmegen data , the further analysis will concentrate on this verb. All dative object constructions with the verb geven from the 20 year old age-group in Nijmegen and Amsterdam were analyzed in both, a combined analysis as well as separate analyses for the two cities. Possible factors influencing the choice of dative construction would be the same as in the first analysis of the Nijmegen data, with the additional factor “region” (Nijmegen/Amsterdam) in the combined analysis, but without the factor “lexical preference” as only one verb was analyzed here.

3.2.2 Combined analysis

In the combined analysis the focus is on the variable “region”. If region turns out to be a significant factor, we can conclude that the distribution of dative alternation is significantly different in the varieties spoken in Nijmegen and in Amsterdam. This would open up the possibility for the dative alternation to be a factor of regional variation (dialects) rather than ethnolectal variation (as assumed and falsified in the first analysis on the Nijmegen data, see above).

However, cross-tabulations with region and realization of dative object turned out to be not significant. From this result we would have to conclude that dative alternation is not a feature of regional variation either. Speaker background and ingroup/outgroup were also checked for and turned out not to be significant. This is what was expected from the results achieved in the first analysis showing that dative alternation is not a feature of ethnolectal variation. So far, the results are intuitive. However, a problem occurred when the factor pronominality was checked for. Pronominality has been shown to be one of the most important predictors of dative construction in Standard Dutch and was also found to be highly significant in the general Nijmegen analysis. The expected significance of pronominality however was not found in this combined analysis.

Nijmegen

In order to understand this results a closer look at the two separate data sets was neccessary. The Nijmegen data-set contained 20 cases, 13 of which were double object constructions, 7 prepositional constructions. Testing the same factors as in the general and the combined analysis yielded the following results: Background of the speaker and in/outgroup were not significant; pronominality was significant. There are no double object constructions with non-pronoun recipients, which shows the preference of non-pronouns for the prepositional construction. Those results are in line with the first analysis of the Nijmegen data and van der Beek's (2006) results for Standard Dutch.

wordclass * realization Crosstabulation

Count

		realization		Total
		prepositional construction	double object construction	
wordclass	non-pronoun	3	0	3
	pronoun	4	13	17
Total		7	13	20

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6,555[a]	1	,010		
Continuity Correction[b]	3,624	1	,057		
Likelihood Ratio	7,348	1	,007		
Fisher's Exact Test				,031	,031
N of Valid Cases	20				

a. 2 cells (50,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1,05.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Amsterdam

In contrast to this the Amsterdam data presented itself differently. The most striking observation was that among the overall 14 occurrences there was only one prepositional construction. In this prepositional construction the recipient was, as expected, non-pronominal and it occured in a Dutch in-group conversation. As such, however, pronominality did not have a significant influence on the choice of dative construction in this data-set. The double object construction occured in six cases with a non-pronominal recipient and in seven cases with a pronominal recipient. The occurrence of only one prepositional construction also lead to the fact that the other possible factors (speaker background and in/outgroup) were again not significant.

3.2.3 Discussion

Even though the combined analysis' result lead to the conclusion that region (Nijmegen/Amsterdam) was not significantly related to the choice of dative construction, a closer look at the separate regional data revealed possible differences between the two regions.

While in the Nijmegen data both constructions occurred and a clear influence of pronominality was observed, the speakers in the Amsterdam data seemed to favor the double object construction even more than what was found by van der Beek (2006) for Standard Dutch and for the Nijmegen analysis above. By favoring the double object construction in most of the cases, pronominality lost its significance for the choice of construction. This might eventually lead to the loss of the prepositional construction in the regional variety in Amsterdam. Unfortunately the data-sets analyzed here were again too small to really make valid conclusions. The data however points to the idea that dative alternation is rather a feature on the regional than on the ethnolectal level.

4 Conclusion

As already mentioned in the several sub-sections, it is unfortunately not possible to draw valid conclusions from the analyzed data. The corpus does not contain enough dative constructions in order to create a sufficiently big data-set. This is related to the fact that constructions like the ones investigated for this study are not highly frequent in actual language use. But the result of the analyses reported here are coherent and consistent, indicating that dative alternation is not a feature of ethnolectal variation but that differences in the use and distribution are rather located on the regional, or dialectal, level of language variation. It would be interesting to see if those indications can be confirmed by future analyses.

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