The regular syntax of idioms
(With new evidence from Dutch dialects)

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Overview

★ What is an idiom?

‣ Inflexibility

‣ Regularity

★ 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.

(2) *Deze Stellenbosche wijn spant de kroon.*
  - = this wine from Stellenbosch surpasses all, is the very best (idiom can also be used negatively)

What is an idiom?

- None of the lexical items that comprise the idioms in (1) and (2) correspond to their idiomatic meaning:

(1) *Ned stark bit the dust.*
  - *bite* = use your teeth to cut into something
  - *the* = definite article
  - *dust* = fine, dry powder consisting of tiny particles of earth or waste matter

(2) *Deze Stellenbosche wijn spant de kroon.*
  - *de* = definite article
  - *kroon* = crown, i.e. a circular ornamental headdress worn by a monarch as a symbol of authority, usually made of or decorated with precious metals and jewels
  - *spannen* = span, stretch, i.e. extend from side to side

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 1994; 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
  (see i.a. Gibbs & Gonzales 1985; McClone et al. 1994;
  compare Jackendoff 1997)

- 2 other possible arguments for this position…

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Lexical inflexibility

- If any of the lexical items that make up the idioms in (1) and (2) are replaced, even by synonyms, the figurative interpretation is lost (# = loss of idiomatic interpretation):

(3) a. # bite the dirt
     b. # bite some dust
     c. # chew the dust

(4) a. # de tiara spannen
     b. # zijn kroon spannen
     c. # de kroon uitrekken

Syntactic inflexibility

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

(5) *bite the dust = die*

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

(6) *shoot the breeze = chat*
    a. # The breeze was shot by them.   **passivisation*
    b. # The breeze, we shot yesterday.   **topicalisation*

Syntactic inflexibility

- **Many idioms: syntactically inflexible [Dutch]**
  (cf. i.a. Grégoire 2009)

(7) *de geest geven = die, break down (lit. 'give the ghost')*

    a. # Toen werd de geest gegeven door Jo.   **passivisation*
   b. # De geest heeft mijn auto gegeven.   **topicalisation*

(8) *de benen nemen = run off, take off (lit. 'take the legs')*
    a. # Ten slotte werden de benen genomen door de dief.
    *passivisation

    b. # De benen heeft hij snel genomen.   **topicalisation*

What is an idiom?

Lack of

- a compositional interpretation
- lexical flexibility
- syntactic transformations
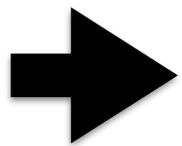
➡ follows automatically if an idiom is syntactically atomic

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

(see i.a. Gibbs & Gonzales 1985; McClone et al. 1994; compare Jackendoff 1997)

What is an idiom?

However:

in general, idiomatic VPS - such as *bite the dust* in (1) and *de geest geven* in (9) - 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)

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

(9) *Mijn camera gaf de geest.* = My camera broke down.

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★ **What is an idiom?**

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★ Methodology

★ Findings - Idioms in Dutch dialects: regular syntax

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Syntactic regularity

- idioms conform with regular phrase structure rules

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

(11) a. *Mijn camera gaf de geest.*
    b. *Mijn camera gaf de foutcode* 01.
    c. *Mijn camera zag de geest.*

Syntactic regularity

- idioms exhibit normal word order

(12) a.   *Ned Stark bit the dust.*   [SVO]
      b.   *I think that Ned Stark bit the dust.*   [SVO]

(13) a.   *Mijn camera gaf de geest.*   [SVO, V2]
      b.   *Ik denk dat mijn camera de geest gaf.* [SOV]

Syntactic regularity

- idioms behave as expected regarding their aspectual properties (telicity)

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

(9) *Mijn camera gaf de geest.*
    = My camera broke down.

Syntactic regularity

- idioms interact with productive syntax

  ‣ raising/control

  ‣ clause-type shifting

  ‣ embedding in subordinate clauses

  ‣ other syntactic operations, e.g. relativisation

(14) 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.*

Syntactic regularity

- idioms interact with productive syntax

  ‣ raising/control

  ‣ clause-type shifting

  ‣ embedding in subordinate clauses

  ‣ other syntactic operations, e.g. relativisation

(15) a. *Mijn auto <u>lijkt</u> de geest <u>te</u> geven.*
      b. *<u>Welk personage</u> heeft de geest gegeven?*
      c. *Weet iemand <u>of</u> hij de geest heeft gegeven?*
      d. *De eerste <u>die</u> de geest gaf, was de Yamaha.*

Morpho-syntactic regularity

- idioms show the normal range of inflexional affixes

  ‣ temporal, aspectual, agreement specifications vary freely

  ‣ finite and non-finite forms

(16) 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 show the normal range of inflexional affixes

  ‣ temporal, aspectual, agreement specifications vary freely

  ‣ finite and non-finite forms

(17) a. *De oude machine **gaf** gisteren de geest.*
     b. *De assistent **geeft** de geest in dit verhaal.*
     c. *Ook een nieuwe laptop <u>kan</u> de geest **geven**.*
     d. *Zijn vriendin <u>had</u> plotseling de geest **gegeven**.*

What is an idiom?

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

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

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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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; Oosterhof 2008; Van der Kooi et al. 2008)

Hogeland

Groningen

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Determiner drop

(18) 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>
  don't occur without article, cf. (18)

- <u>uncountable and plural nouns</u> do occur without article, cf. (19)

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

  ‣ they do <u>NOT</u> have a definite/specific reading, unlike the Groningen ex's in (18)

(19) (Oosterhof 2008:75)
    a.   De jongen heeft **water** gedronken.   ('The boy has drunk water.')
         the boy   has   water drunk
    b.   **Slootwater** ruikt   een beetje zuur.   ('Ditch water smells a bit sour.')
         ditch-water smells a   bit   sour
    c.   De jongen heeft **bokken** verkocht.   ('The boy has sold goats.')
         the boy   has   goats   sold
    d.   **Koeien** eten graag **gras**.   ('Cows like to eat grass.')
         cows   eat gladly grass

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

(20) (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.'

32   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; SAND; 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

- **fieldwork: 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 determiner		dropping of neuter 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 determiner dropping: obligatory or optional

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

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

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

Determiner drop - idioms

Neuter determiner dropping: impossible

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

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

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 definite 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

- 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, 2005; Deal 2011, 2013a,b; Guéron 2006; Hole 2006; Lee-Schoenfeld 2006)

Leuven

Flemish Brabant
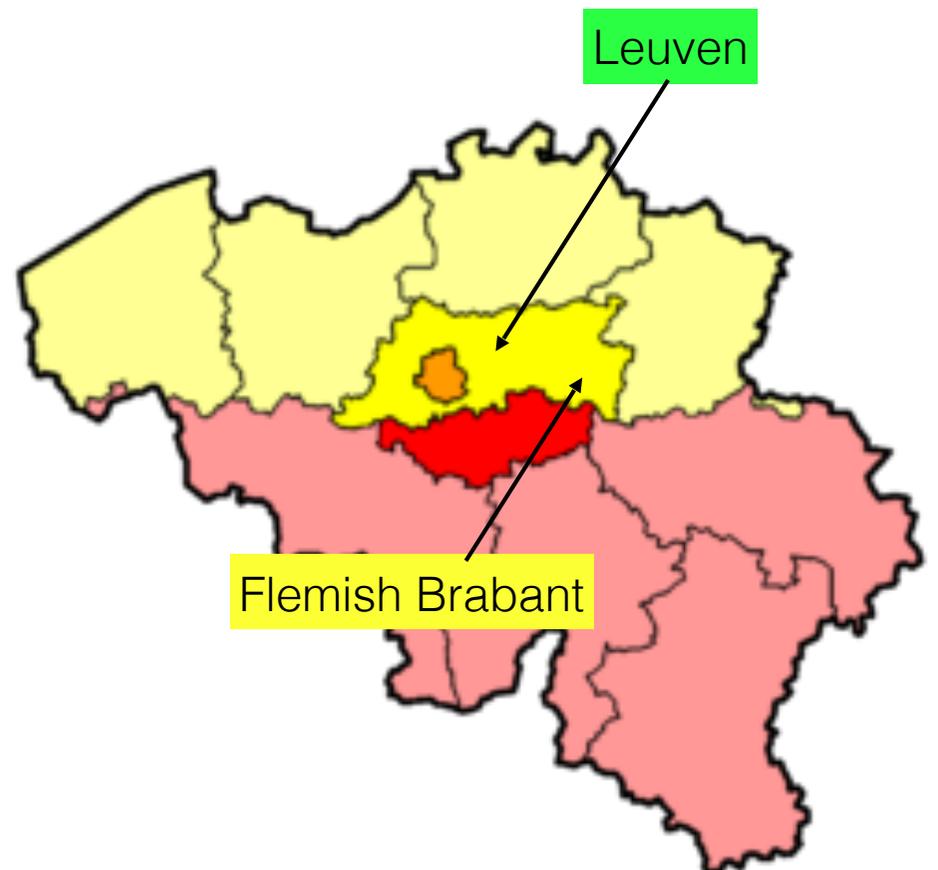
Possessive alternation

- **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

(26) 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

(27) a.   Hij   sloeg [DP <u>haar</u>] op   [DP **de**   arm].
    he   hit   her   on   the arm

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

    c.   [DP <u>Hij</u>]   sluit   [DP **de**   ogen].
    he   closes   the eyes

Possessive alternation

- **"Doubly marked" possession:**
  [TP … [DP possessor$_i$]…[DP poss.pron.$_i$ *possessum*]…
  (cf. Lee-Schoenfeld 2006)

  ‣ with both external and internal possession
     (coreferential possessors)

(28) 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
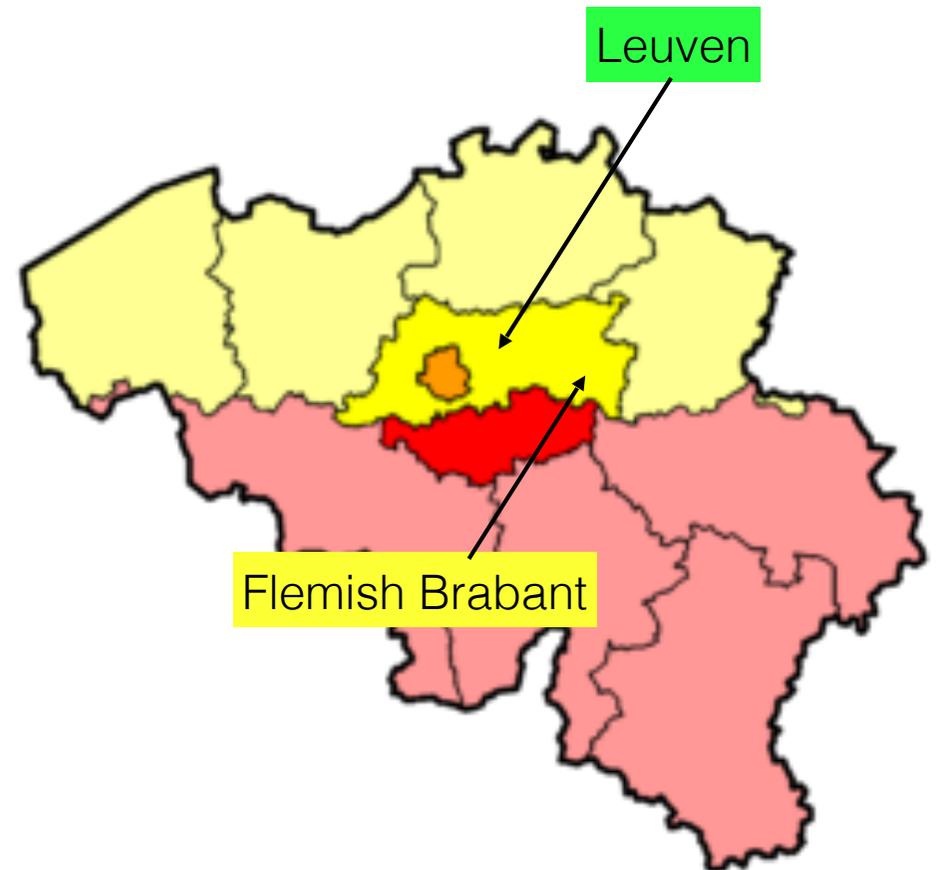
Possessive alternation - idioms

- **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

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

(30) **"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.'

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

(32) **"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

(33) **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.'

(34) **"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.'

(35) **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

(36) **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.'

(37) **"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.'

(38)   **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* Fox 1981; 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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Perfect doubling

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

Tessenderlo

Limburg

- compound tenses featuring an additional, participial *have* (or *be*)

(cf. i.a. Barbiers et al. 2009; Koeneman et al. 2011; Cornips & Broekhuis 2015)
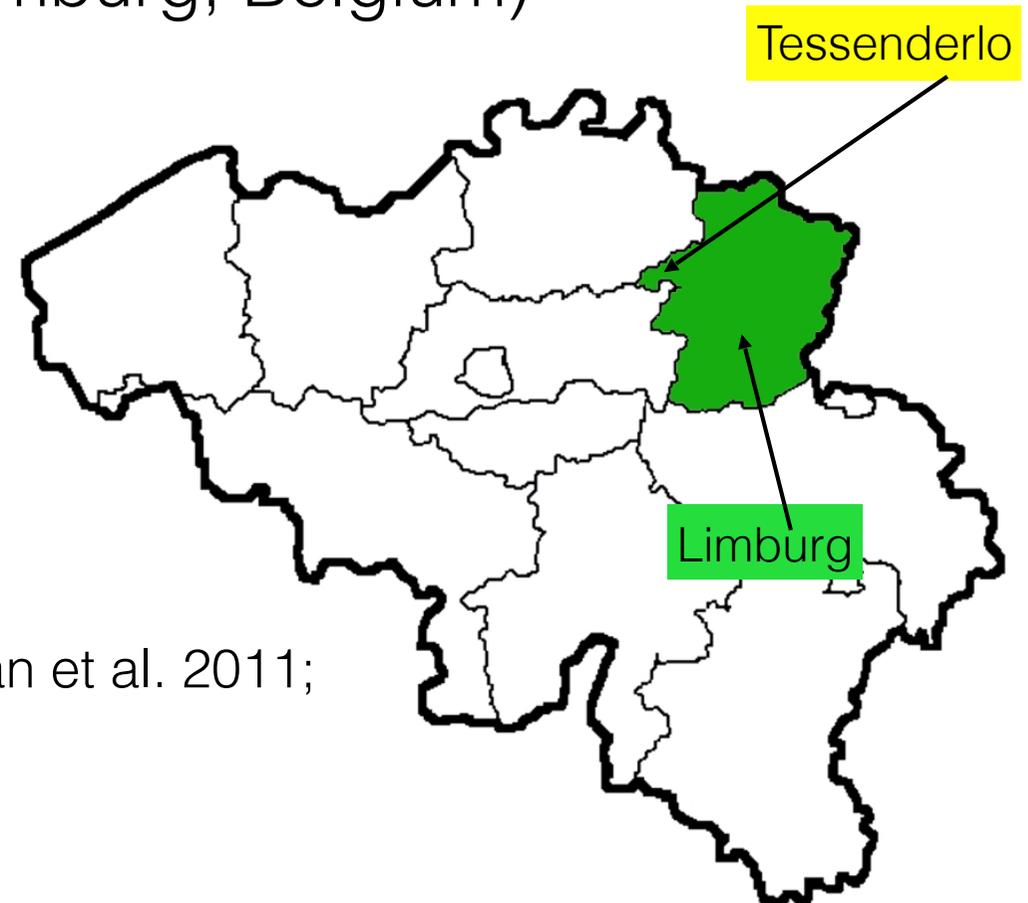
Perfect doubling

- 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*

Perfect doubling

(39) 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.'

(40) a. Ik <u>waste</u>   de   handen.
   I washed the hands   = 'I washed my hands.'
   b. Ik **heb**   de handen <u>gewassen</u>.
   I   have the hands   washed   = 'I have washed my hands.'
   c. Ik **heb**   de   handen <u>gewassen</u> **gehad.**
   I   have the hands   washed   had   = 'I have washed my hands.'

(41) 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)
  - ‣ i.e. marking an action/state which is definitely complete and unlikely to recur

- 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 it 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 not dependent on perfect aspect**

(42) a. Hij heeft zijn kap over de haag gesmeten **(gehad).**   **[Group 1]**
     Hij heeft zijn kap over de haag gesmeten **(*gehad).**   **[Group 2]**
     he has   his hood over the hedge thrown   had
     'He quit his (religious) job.'
    b. Hij smeet zijn kap   over de haag.
     he   threw his hood over the hedge = 'He quit his (religious) job.'

(43) a. Hij is niet op zijn bek   gevallen **(geweest).**   **[Group 1]**
     Hij is niet op zijn bek   gevallen **(*geweest).**   **[Group 2]**
     he is not on his beak fallen   been
     'He is very assertive.'
    b. Hij viel niet op zijn bek
     he fell not on his   beak = 'He is very assertive.'

Perfect doubling - idioms

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

(44) 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.'

(45) 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

Extra: *worden*-construction

- Loois
  (Tessenderlo, province of Limburg, Belgium)

  Tessenderlo

  Limburg
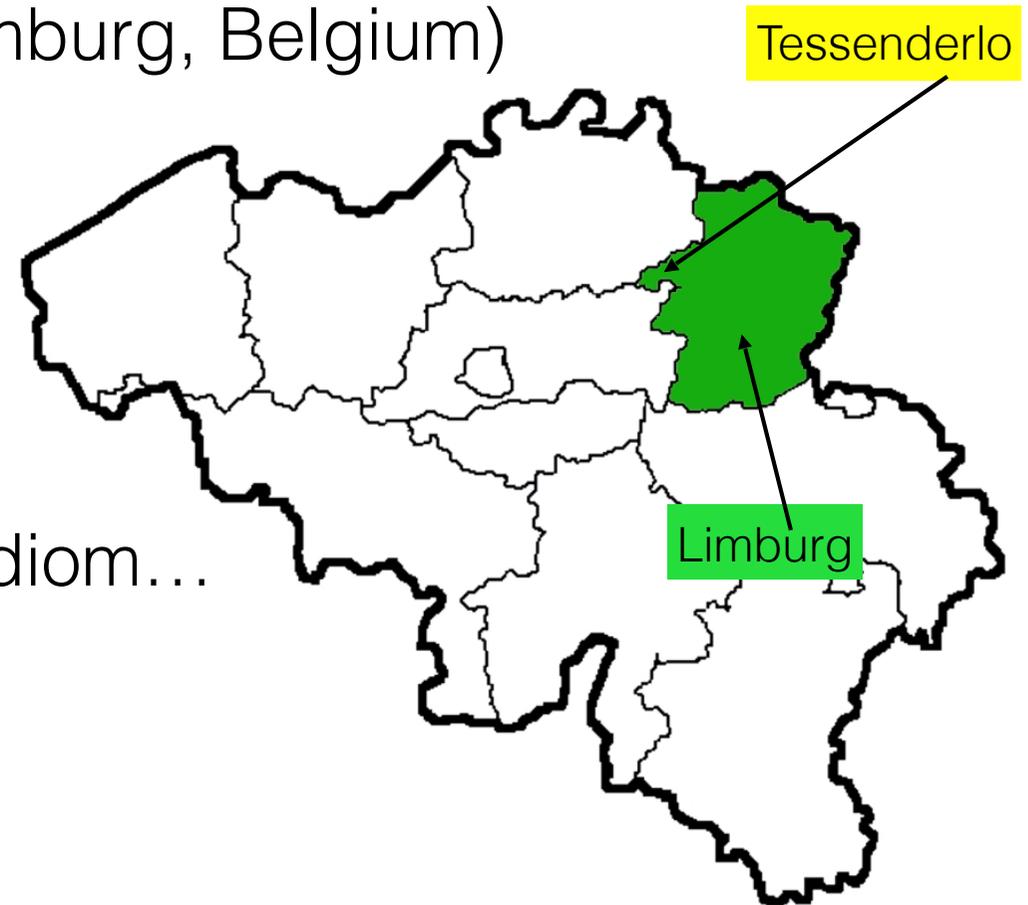
- we came across a peculiar idiom…

Extra: *worden*-construction

- **the idiom**

(46) Ze   zulle   hunne   kak   **wennen**   óphèève.   [Loois]
      ze   *zullen*   *hun*   *kak*   **worden**   *ophouden*   [Dutch glosses]
      they *will*   *their*   *poop*   *become*   *up-keep*
      'They will not proceed rashly; they will be careful (especially with money).'

Extra: *worden*-construction

- **the idiom**

(46) Ze   zulle   hunne kak   **wennen** **óphèève.INF**.
      *ze   zulle   hun   kak   **worden** **ophouden.INF***
      they will   their poop   become up-keep.INF
      'They will not proceed rashly; they will be careful (especially with money).'

- **worden + infinitive = ?**
  vs. Standard Dutch:

  ‣ *worden* (+ past participle) = passive auxiliary

    (47) Trump zal worden   afgezet.
          Trump will become.PASS deposed.PART

  ‣ *worden* (+ noun/adjective) = copula

    (48) De wereld zal   een paradijs   / beter   worden.
          the world   will   a   paradise.N / better.A become.COP

62

Extra: *worden*-construction

- **Loois: *worden* as a future auxiliary** (Van Thienen 2016a,b)
  (compare German *Es wird regnen* 'It will rain')
  (impossible in Standard Dutch)

(49) ***worden* + INF = future auxiliary**

　　　't **Went**　　　morge　　reegene.
　　　it becomes tomorrow rain.INF
　　　'It will rain tomorrow.'

(50) ***gaan/zullen* + (optional) *worden* + INF = 'double' future marking**
　　　(no difference in interpretation!)

　　　't **Gao/Zal**　morge　　**(wenne)**　reegene.
　　　it goes/will tomorrow become rain.INF
　　　'It will rain tomorrow.'

Extra: *worden*-construction

- **back to the idiom:**

(51) **gaan/zullen + (optional) worden + INF**
    Ze **gaon/zulle** hunne kak **(wennen)** **óphèève**.
    ze ***gaan/zullen*** *hun*   *kak*   ***worden*** ***ophouden***.**INF**
    they *go/will*   *their*   *poop* *become* *up-keep*.INF

(52) **worden + INF**
    Ze **wenne** hunne kak **óphèève**.
    ze *worden* *hun*   *kak* ***ophouden***
    they *become* *their*   *poop* *up-keep*.INF

Extra: *worden*-construction

- speakers who do not allow *worden* as a future auxiliary

▸ only allow the idiom without *worden*

(53) **future: *gaan/zullen - *worden***

Ze	**gaon/zulle**	hunne	kak	**(*wennen)**	óphèève.
z*e*	***gaan/zullen***	*hun*	*kak*	*worden*	*ophouden*
they	*go/will*	*their*	*poop*	*become*	*up-keep*.INF

Extra: *worden*-construction

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

	worden future		'double' future = *gaan/zullen* + (*worden*)		*gaan/zullen* future	
	in non-idiomatic contexts	in idiom	in non-idiomatic contexts	in idiom	in non-idiomatic contexts	in idiom
Group 1 (60+, ♂)	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Group 2 (others)	*	*	*	*	✔	✔

Extra: *worden*-construction

- **Observation**
  - ‣ the dialect of Tessenderlo exhibits *worden* as a future auxiliary (+ a 'double' future *gaan/zullen* + (optional) *worden*)

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

  - ‣ the pattern of future *worden* in the idiom is perfectly in line with the dialect's regular syntax
    - ➡ optional (60+ & male) vs. disallowed (others)

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

Overview

★ What is an idiom?

‣ Inflexibility

‣ Regularity

★ Findings - Idioms in Dutch dialects: regular syntax

‣ Determiner drop

‣ Possessive alternation

‣ Perfect doubling

★ **Why inflexibility?**

★ Summary

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 idioms discussed earlier**

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

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

(55) **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**

  (29)   Ik zat met de dood op het lijf.   [Leuvens]
  I sat with the dead on the body
  'I was terrified.'

  (56) **No topicalisation**
      # Amai, met de dood <op het lijf> zat ik zeker <op het lijf>.
      gosh with the death on the body sat I certainly on the body
      ≠ 'I was terrified.'

Why inflexibility?

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

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

(57)   **No passivisation**
          # Er   werd   in zijn gat gebeten.
            there became in his ass bitten
            ≠ 'He is angry.'

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

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; Everaert et al. 1995; Gibbs 1996; Stone 2016; *inter multi alia*)

- 2 types of idioms
  - **idiomatically combining expressions (ICEs):**
    individual elements of the literal expression can be mapped onto
    individual elements of the figurative meaning
    (the sub-parts of the idiom have (some degree of) semantic autonomy)
        e.g. *spill the beans*

  - **idiomatic phrases (IdPs):**
    the expression as a whole is mapped onto the figurative meaning
    (the sub-parts of the idiom exhibit no autonomy whatsoever)
        e.g. *kick the bucket*

spill   the beans   kick the bucket

  | |

divulge   the secret   die
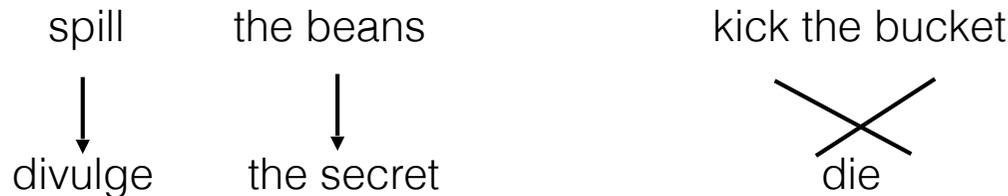
Why inflexibility?

- **ICEs = lexically flexible**, can undergo lexical substitutions to some degree
  > because an ICE is decomposable
  > its component parts are referential

  (59)   a.   *Come on, spill the details!*
           b.   *Come on, spill the news!*
           c.   *Come on, spill the gossip!*

- **IdPs = lexically inflexible**, cannot undergo lexical substitution
  > because an IdP is not decomposable
  > its component parts are not referential

  (60)   a. # *He kicked the tub.*
           b. # *He kicked the tin.*
           c. # *He struck the bucket*
           d. # *He booted the bucket.*

Why inflexibility?

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

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

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

  (62) 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 the clogs* ('die' = IdP) has a bizarre literal reading, a non-idiomatic reading is not easily available

    ‣ passivisation/topicalisation is possible

    (63) a. *… advise the coroner of the district where the clogs were popped.*
            (cf. also Fellbaum 2015)
        b. *He owned little more than the clogs he had just popped.*

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

    ‣ topicalisation/passivisation is impossible, cf. (63)

Why inflexibility?

- the data discussed today are in line with the idea that

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

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

  ➡ it seems that <u>determiner drop</u> (Oosterhof 2008), <u>possessive
    alternations</u> (Deal 2013) and <u>perfect doubling</u> (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?

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 ‣ Regularity

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 ‣ 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 (+ *worden*-construction) in Loois

- **(in)flexibility?**
  in general, morpho-syntactic manipulations in idioms are allowed, while modifications with
  information-structural impact sometimes are not

Thank You!
Questions?
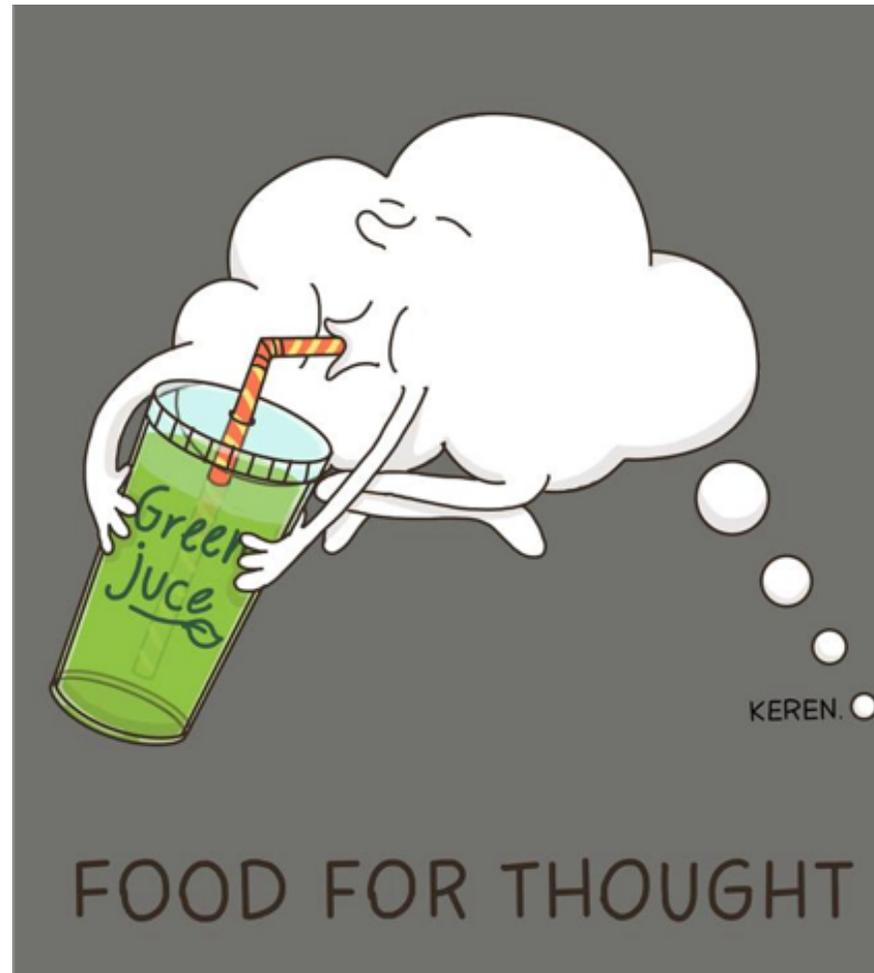
Possessive alternation in Standard Dutch

How come in Standard Dutch, there are idioms with external possession, even though Standard Dutch does not seem to have this in non-idiomatic sentences?

- *iemand de ogen uitsteken*
- *iemand op de hielen zitten, iemand op het hart trappen*
- *iemand de oren wassen, iemand de mond snoeren*

➢ so far, lack of external possession in Standard Dutch is merely an assumption, should be tested systematically (cf. Scholten fc.)
➢ external possession seems to be allowed with particle verbs or with a PP argument in Standard Dutch:

- *iemand de arm afhakken, iemand de rug insmeren, …*
- *iemand diep in de ogen kijken, iemand een krant naar het hoofd gooien, zich in de vingers snijden, iemand op het been slaan, …*

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