

The Dutch Expressive Binominal Construction in syntax and morphology

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The Dutch *een-schat van-een-kind*-construction (lit. 'a treasure of a child'; 'a cute child') has captured the attention of various linguists for decades (e.g., Paardekooper 1956, Everaert 1992, Foolen 2004, Verhagen 2005). Although *een schat van een kind* is a common expression in Dutch, recent examples such as *dat monster van een virus* 'lit. that monster of a virus' show the existence of a semi-schematic pattern [Det N1 *van (een)* N2], which is subject to considerable variation.

The central aims of this study are the following:

- i. to re-examine this Expressive Binominal Construction (EBC) by means of an in-depth corpus study, with a focus on four positively-connotated N1s (*schat* 'treasure', *droom* 'dream', *pracht* 'beauty' and *wonder* 'wonder');
- ii. to compare the EBC with a potential morphological counterpart in the form of a [N1 N2]_{N2} attributive compound.

The examples (1-3) indeed show that the EBC often has a morphological counterpart in Dutch, although this correspondence is not systematic (4).

(1) *een droom van een huis* (lit. 'a dream of a house') vs *een droomhuis* (lit. 'a dream house')

(2) *een pracht van een dochter* (lit. 'a beauty of a daughter') vs *een prachtdochter* (lit. 'a beauty daughter')

(3) *een wonder van een vrouw* (lit. 'a wonder of a woman') vs *een wondervrouw* (lit. 'a wonder woman')

(4) *een schat van een kind* (lit. 'a treasure of a child') vs **een schatkind* (lit. 'a treasure child')

The differences and similarities between the various patterns will be determined by a corpus analysis of their semantic and formal properties, as well as their productivity. The corpus study will be based on 2000 occurrences of each pattern randomly extracted from the nlTenTen20 web corpus on the SketchEngine (Kilgariff et al. 2014).

Preliminary results of a pilot corpus study based on a sample of 100 occurrences of both the syntactic and the morphological pattern surprisingly reveal that both patterns differ significantly in their use and productivity.

First, in this exploratory corpus study, the syntactic pattern occurs mainly with *schat* (39%) and *pracht* (35%), and less frequently with *droom* (18%) and *wonder* (8%). In contrast, the morphological pattern occurs mostly with *droom* (53%) and *pracht* (34%), and less frequently with *wonder* (13%).

Second, the syntactic construction is mostly accompanied by nouns referring to living beings - i.e. persons (33%) and animals (19%) (e.g., *een pracht van een vrouw* 'lit. a beauty of a woman'), while the morphological pattern occurs more frequently with nouns referring to places (38%) and concepts (34%) (e.g., *een droombestemming* 'a dream destination').

Third, the syntactic pattern allows the insertion of an entire NP (e.g., *een wonder van Rotterdamse durf en techniek* 'lit. a wonder of Rotterdam daring and engineering'). The latter option is obviously excluded for the compound pattern, which might explain its overall lower productivity.

On the theoretical level, the case study will allow us to discuss the competition between multiword constructions and compounds, and to test the validity of an inverse correlation between type frequency and semantic coherence of these constructions, as claimed by Barðdal (2008).

References

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