

Attraction through formal resemblance.

Five case studies on constructional contamination

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WHAT IS CONSTRUCTIONAL CONTAMINATION?

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

WHAT IS CONSTRUCTIONAL CONTAMINATION?

A usage-based mechanism that creates lexical biases in
morphosyntactic variation

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

You're interested in language variation and want to score a quick publication

You're interested in language processing and its effects on the language system

CO-AUTHORS



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THANKS TO



Gert De Sutter



Tom Ruette

1. How does constructional contamination work?
2. Case studies
3. Recap: how to apply it to your case study?

How does constructional contamination work?

1. An alternation: partitive genitive with \emptyset vs. -s

\emptyset

vs.

-s

iets leuk

'something fun'

iets leuks

'something fun-s'

iets verkeerd

'something wrong'

iets verkeerds

'something wrong-s'

How does constructional contamination work?

1. An alternation: partitive genitive with -Ø vs. -s
2. Another construction that often looks like one of the variants

Partitive genitive:

ik heb iets verkeerd gegeten.

'I have eaten **something wrong**.'

Construction with adverb:

ik heb iets verkeerd verstaan.

'I have **misunderstood** something.'

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How does constructional contamination work?

1. An alternation: partitive genitive with -∅ vs. -s
2. Another construction that often looks like one of the variants, viz. -∅
3. That other construction is particularly frequent among some lexical items

Highly frequent among *verkeerd*:

ik heb iets verkeerd verstaan.

‘I have misunderstood something’.

Less frequent among *leuk*:

Je hebt iets leuk ingepakt.

‘You have wrapped something up in a fun way.’

How does constructional contamination work?

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2. Another construction that often looks like one of the variants, viz. -∅
3. That other construction is particularly frequent among some lexical items:
language users very often hear the string *iets verkeerd* 'something wrong(ly)', without -s, and less often *iets leuk* 'something fun/in a fun way', without -s

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4. Language users store unanalyzed chunks as ready mades (Dąbrowska 2014)
 - ⇒ Even among unambiguous partitive genitives, language users will be more inclined to drop the -s for *iets verkeerd(s)* 'something wrong'

How does constructional contamination work?

1. An alternation, e.g. variant X and variant Y
 2. Another (unrelated) construction that often looks like one of the variants, e.g. variant X
 3. That other construction is highly frequent for word A
 4. Language users store unanalyzed chunks as ready mades (Dąbrowska 2014)
- ⇒ Even among strictly unambiguous instances of the alternating construction,
word A will be biased towards variant X

CASE STUDIES

Dutch

Case study 1: the partitive genitive

Case study 2: verbal clusters

Case study 3: past tense formation

Case study 4: long and bare infinitives

Case study 5: comparative placement

English

Case study 6: Adverb placement

(Hilpert 2019: 65-68,
Hilpert & Flach forthc.)

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Case study 1: **the partitive genitive**

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Case study 1: the partitive genitive

1. An alternation: partitive genitive with \emptyset vs. -s

\emptyset

vs.

-s

iets leuk

'something fun'

iets leuks

'something fun-s'

iets verkeerd

'something wrong'

iets verkeerds

'something wrong-s'

Case study 1: the partitive genitive

2 & 3. Strings that superficially resemble partitive genitives on -Ø are particularly frequent with assessment adjectives *verkeerd* 'wrong', *beter* 'better',... and color adjectives

iets verkeerd

Something wrong

niets verkeerd

nothing better

iets beter

something better

wat geel

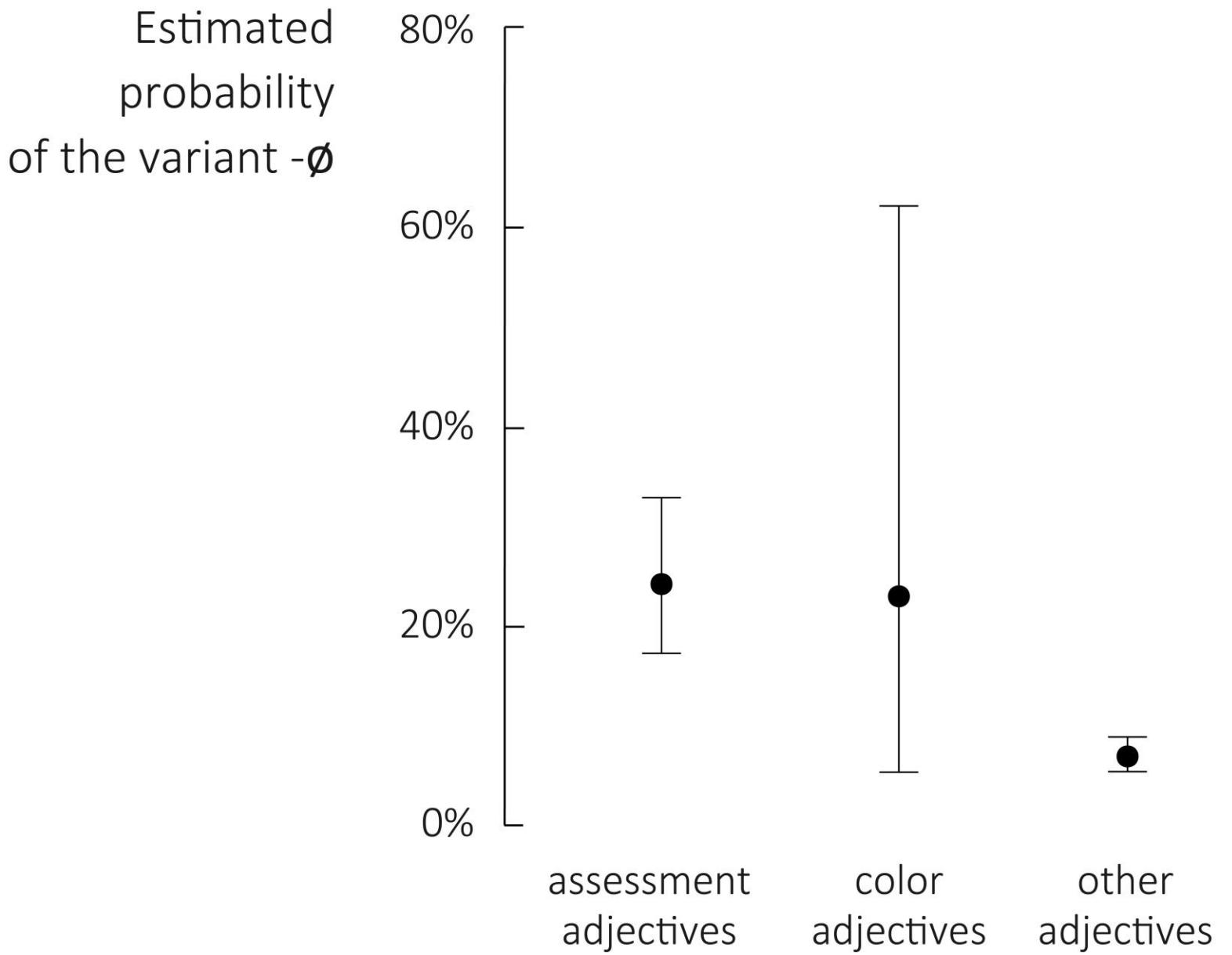
Something yellow

veel blauw

a lot of blue

⇒ Prediction: Even among unambiguous partitive genitives, language users will be more inclined to drop the -s for phrases containing these adjectives

- Only strictly unambiguous partitive genitives
- Mixed regression model, controlling for other known factors and random lexical preferences



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Verbal clusters

1. An alternation: VERBAL PARTICIPLE + AUXILIARY VS. AUXILIARY + VERBAL PARTICIPLE

dat de deur net door John gesloten is vs. *dat de deur net door John is gesloten*

2. Another construction that superficially looks like one of the variants: ADJECTIVE + COPULA

dat de deur al geruime tijd gesloten is

That the door already some time **closed** is

⇒ Prediction 1: the more often a participle is used as an adjective, the more often it will appear in the order VERBAL PARTICIPLE + AUXILIARY in unambiguously verbal instances with the auxiliaries *zijn* 'be' or *worden* 'become'

Verbal clusters

Prediction 1: The more often a participle is used as an adjective, the more often it will appear in the PARTICIPLE + AUXILIARY order in unambiguously verbal instances, with the auxiliaries *zijn* 'to be' or *worden* 'become'

e.g. *gesloten* 'closed' would prefer the PARTICIPLE + AUXILIARY order compared to
geopend 'opened'

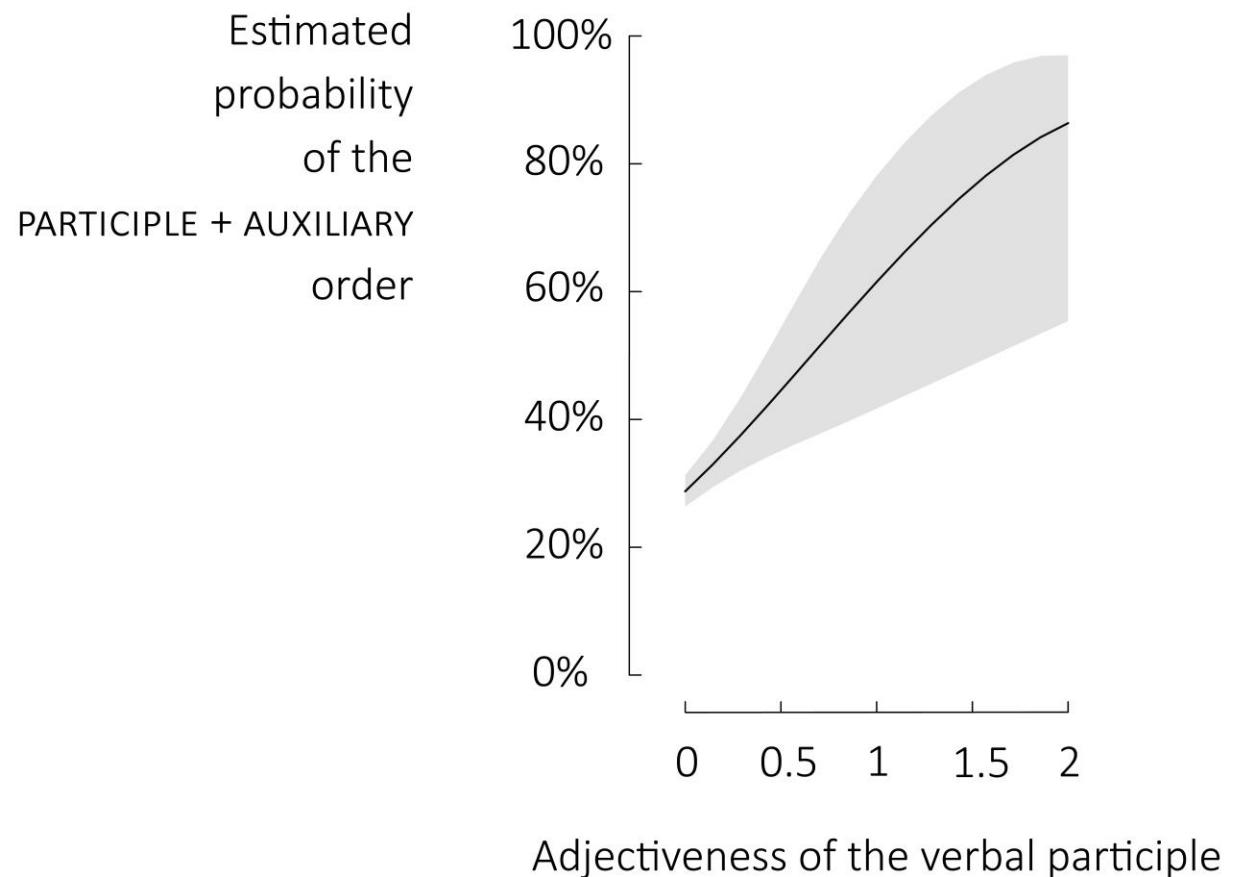
Prediction 2: The same lexical bias might also appear among verbal clusters with other auxiliaries, but it should be weaker.

Verbal clusters

- Dataset from Gert De Sutter, with auxiliaries *zijn* 'be', *worden* 'become' and *hebben* 'have'
- De Sutter distinguished between ambiguous & unambiguous verbal clusters
- We only looked at unambiguous verbal clusters
- For each participle:

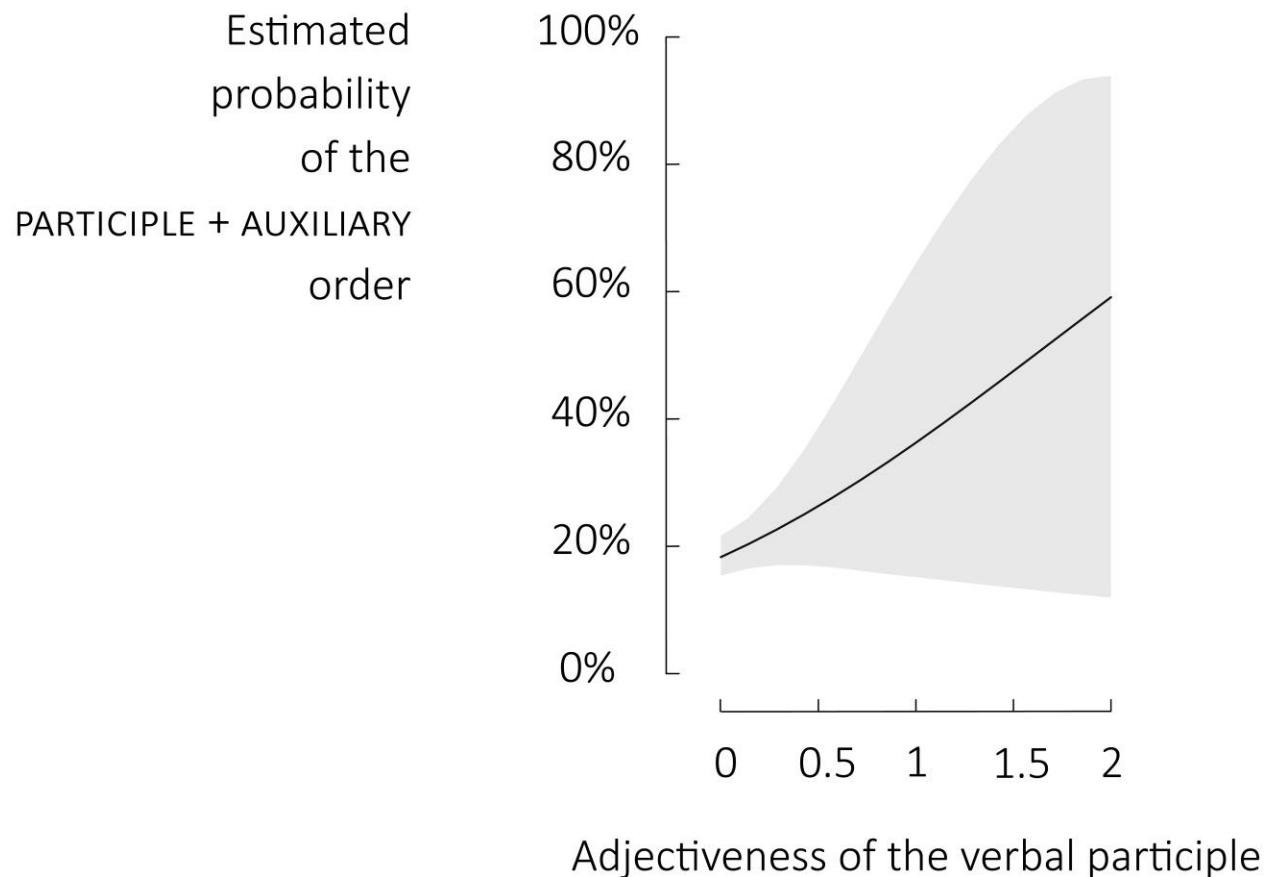
$$\text{Adjectiveness} = \arcsin \sqrt{\frac{\text{occurrences as an adjective in the Corpus of Spoken Dutch}}{\text{Total number of occurrences in the Corpus of Spoken Dutch}}}$$

Auxiliaries *zijn* 'be' and *worden* 'become'



Odds Ratio = 3.96
p-value = 0.001

Auxiliary *hebben* 'have'



Odds Ratio = 2.54
p-value = 0.132

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Other case studies

3. Paste tense formation (Vosters 2012, De Smet 2021)

<i>Gisteren graafde ik een put</i>	vs.	<i>Gisteren groef ik een put</i>
Yesterday digged I a hole		Yesterday dug I a hole

4. Long and bare infinitives among the posture verbs (Pijpops, De Smet & Van de Velde 2018)

<i>Terwijl we zaten te wachten,...</i>	vs.	<i>Terwijl we zaten wachten,...</i>
While we sat to wait		while we sat wait

5. Comparative placement (Van de Velde & Pijpops 2018)

<i>Een lager dan verwachte opkomst</i>	vs.	<i>een lagere opkomst dan verwacht</i>
A lower than expected attendance	vs.	a lower attendance than expected

6. Adverb placement (Hilpert 2019: 65-68, Hilpert & Flach forthc.)

<i>The driver was instantly killed</i>	vs.	<i>the driver was killed instantly</i>
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Recap

1. An alternation, e.g. variant X and variant Y
2. Another (unrelated) construction that often looks like one of the variants, e.g. variant X
3. That other construction is more frequent for word A than word B
4. Language users store unanalyzed chunks as ready mades (Dąbrowska 2014)

⇒ Test for constructional contamination:

Even among strictly unambiguous instances of the alternating construction,
word A will be biased towards variant X

Want to know more?

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Don't like Dutch?

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