

Myrthe Coret-Bergstra, *Infinitival innovations. A case study on Frisian-Dutch language contact* (dissertation University of Utrecht), Amsterdam (2020), LOT 562, 291 pp. ISBN 978-94-6093-347-9.

A book review is not just a good occasion for finding fault or virtue in the product at hand, in this case the doctoral dissertation of Myrthe Coret-Bergstra, but, ideally, it should also draw out reflection on the field of study and how to advance it scientifically. The field of study in this review involves, as the book's subtitle states, language contact between Frisian and Dutch.

Now, the language contact situation between Frisian and Dutch is not a symmetrical one as far as sociolinguistics is concerned. Speakers of Frisian all have a Us Wurk 71 (2022), s. 176-184; <https://doi.org/10.21827/uw.71.176-184>

stable command of Dutch, due to the omnipresence of Dutch in education, society, media, and so on. Speakers' command of Frisian varies, with roughly 64% having a good command of the language, which means speaking and understanding it (Provincie Fryslân 2020: 8). As Frisian is basically a 'bilingual' language in the sense specified above, it makes sense to study the language not just in isolation from Dutch, but always in tandem with Dutch. We thus applaud the fact that Coret-Bergstra chose to study Frisian from a bilingual perspective. A pitfall of the approach could be that it tends to view the changes in Frisian as if they were all a consequence of contact with Dutch. Grammatical interaction, however, is not an easy linear process of Frisian grammar step by step becoming Dutch. Evidence for this comes from the fact that not all changes are 'Dutch', as is clear from the weird word orders found in Koeneman & Postma (2006), which are neither classical Frisian nor Dutch.

Frisian-Dutch language contact is not only unbalanced sociologically, but, as makes sense, also psycholinguistically: the mental lexicon and grammar of Frisian is affected by Dutch. In the past, this was seen as a linear effect. Nowadays, we know that the interaction between the two mental systems is extremely complex. Van Coetsem (1988) and several others pointed out that certain aspects of grammar and lexicon are more prone to survive in language contact than others. Thus another pitfall of an overly simplistic approach attributing all change to Dutch is that such an approach fails to document and account for the complexity of the interaction between the two grammars (see for examples of such complexity, Koeneman & Postma 2006, Reitsma 2021, Ytsma 1995). In our view (see below), Coret-Bergstra's approach is overly simplistic. To avoid an overly simplistic approach, it is good to consult the sizeable literature on Frisian, which is written by linguists who devote a substantial part of their time to the study of Frisian and have a lot of expert knowledge on the Frisian language and linguistics which is not written down. In addition, more co-operation could have provided more information from our Frisian specialist's treasure store, going beyond questionnaires and incidental contact.

Theoretically, we expect any serious theory, such as generative grammar in its various guises (Distributed Morphology, minimalism, and so on), to provide us with an account of grammatical intertwining and of resilience or the lack thereof in language contact. Bearing this in mind, we will now go on to discuss Coret-Bergstra's dissertation. According to the blurb, the thesis investigates how grammatical changes in a language contact situation can be modelled with the aid of shifting parameter settings. Unfortunately, the blurb features a spelling error in a Frisian example sentence, which is present throughout the relevant thesis chapter 4 (pages 103, 106, 108, 109, 110). The blurb gives the example: *oan't messeslyppe* 'at the knife-sharpen'. This should be in Standard Frisian: *oan 't messeslyppen*, with a final gerundial *-n* (and a space between the preposition and the determiner). This spelling error cannot be ignored easily, as exactly the difference between *-en* and *-e* is the topic of one of the three case studies Coret-Bergstra discusses in the thesis. It

also reminds the older co-author of this review of the Dutch examples in *Linguistic Inquiry* in the previous millennium, which almost without exception featured spelling errors in case there was no Dutch linguist among the co-authors. On a more serious note, spelling obviously is not important, but on the other hand, neither *Linguistic Inquiry*, nor any other linguistic journal, tolerates sloppy spelling, especially not if it involves a crucial grammatical ending. So it is a matter of decorum and respect towards languages of less social standing to pay attention to the spelling. This matter also underlines the fact that it is risky to study a language without making more extensive use of existing expertise, since what happens in the field of spelling may also happen in the field of theoretical analysis (for example, when the SAND part 2 completely misanalysed IPP in Frisian examples, see Hoekstra 2010). Here we should mention that Coret-Bergstra did have some incidental contact with Frisian researchers, mainly for the questionnaires.

Coret-Bergstra works within the generative framework of Distributed Morphology, as stated on p.3: “my view on syntax is based on the Distributed Morphology framework”. Differences between Standard Frisian and Dutch are accommodated by different parameter settings. Parameters can be of different sizes (p.28):

For a given value v of a parametrically variant feature F :

- Macroparameters: all functional heads of the relevant type share v
- Mesoparameters: all functional heads of a given naturally definable subclass (e.g. V) share v
- Microparameters: a small subclass of functional heads share v (e.g. modals)
- Nanoparameters: one or more individual lexical items are specified for v

While this framework with its fourfold subdivision is aesthetically pleasing, it does raise the question of which parameter to use when describing a phenomenon. It seems that we need restrictions on the setting of parameters. Parameters can also be of different types (p.25-26):

- Merge parameter
- Move parameter
- Spell-out parameter

In the ideal world, these parameters should be able to share information with each other, they should be able ‘to talk’ to each other, which is not the case in the present analysis.

It is within this framework that Coret-Bergstra deals with language data from present-day Frisian. Present-day Frisian is close to, but not necessarily identical with, the normative standard for the Frisian language. Standard Frisian is a standard for a minority without self-government, a standard which has little impact on language use in society. In some respects, Standard Frisian reflects the state of the language one or two generations ago. Coret-Bergstra makes this clear with the

aid of questionnaires filled in by speakers. She observes interesting changes which are going in the direction of Dutch, and these changes are accommodated by saying that Frisian speakers have both the old / Frisian parameter settings at their disposal and the new / Dutch ones, leading to variation / interference in their Frisian. This is her view of language contact in a nutshell, as presented in chapter 2. The dissertation bases itself on three types of constructions.

- Chapter 3 discusses the two types of infinitives which Frisian features.
- Chapter 4 deals with noun incorporation in tensed verbs and infinitives.
- Chapter 5 deals with the absentive.

Each chapter starts out with a theoretical analysis of the Standard Frisian data. Subsequently, the data from the questionnaires are analysed, and an attempt is made to fit these into the chosen analysis. In our contribution, we will focus on chapter 3, for reasons of brevity.

Nominal and verbal infinitives

Coret-Bergstra offers an elegant account of the difference between verbal and nominal infinitives. Verbal infinitives end in schwa. This is also the form used in isolation (citation infinitive). The verbal infinitive is selected by modals and by the causative verb. Nominal (or gerundial) infinitives end in *-en*, often pronounced as syllabic *-n*, and they are selected by determiners, by perception verbs, by the infinitival marker *te* ‘to’, and by *gean* ‘go’ and *bliuwe* ‘stay’. These latter two verbs can only select a gerundial infinitive if it denotes a posture verb (*sitte* ‘sit’, *stean* ‘stand’, *lizze* ‘lie’ or *hingje* ‘hang’) and marginally a verb like *wenje* ‘live’. Both verbal and nominal infinitives have the same functional structure, except that nominal verbs additionally involve a nP level:

Projection (P)	(nP)	>	AspP	>	VoiceP	>	vP
Elements within P	inflected Adj		Adverb		Acc DP		

The second row indicates which elements are found within the projection. The nP projection directly dominates inflected adjectives characteristic of DPs, the AspP level accommodates adverbs, the VoiceP level accommodates accusative DPs.

Standard Frisian differentiates the verbal and the nominal ending depending on the syntactic context in which they are used. In Interference Frisian the endings are to some degree used regardless of syntactic context. Coret-Bergstra has researched Interference Frisian with the aid of questionnaires and thus provided the field with new data on IF. In each chapter she starts out with the data from SF, and shows quite elegantly how they fit into the framework. This thesis provides a clear account of facts supporting the theory. In this view, both verbal and nominal infinitives involve verbs. The difference is that a nominal infinitive puts a nominal roof on top of a verbal infinitive, a nP with a head, *n*, in which the nominal infinitival ending is inserted. The nominal ending is attached to the verb by means of a lowering operation, just as has been proposed for English tensed verbs (which

seem to occur in VP with their ending being lowered from a higher functional projection). The problem is that such a lowering operation limits the explanatory power of the overall framework. Now the language learner and the linguist have two ways of describing structure: by upward movement and by downward movement. How to know which type of movement to apply? What are the restrictions on downward movement? Can it apply successive-cyclically? Which operations are allowed post-syntactically?

Another point is that data problematic for the analysis are trivialised or explained away. And this is a recurring experience for readers of this thesis. As long as the data tie in with the standard Distributed Morphology theory, things move along very smoothly. But as soon as there is a counterexample, Coret-Bergstra devotes very little energy to it, nor offers new empirical insights or even interesting speculations. This is a pity, because when the going gets tough, a reader's interest gets going. It is good to provide support for the standard theory, but it is a weakness not to devote a fair share of attention and creativity to problematic data. It is the problematic data that may ultimately help to further the standard theory.

An example of this easy way out approach is found on p.52, where Coret-Bergstra attempts to analyse the infinitival marker *te* 'to'. Following standard analyses (Zwart 1993), she rejects the idea that the infinitival marker occurs in T. In a footnote, Zwart's main argument is mentioned: if *te* 'to' would express a Tense relation, we would expect it to be found in all infinitives. But this argument is not very strong. Even English, for which the T analysis of the infinitival marker is well established, features clauses in which there is no infinitival marker but which are nevertheless considered to be tensed, such as imperatives and the complements of perception verbs. Now, this section would have been much more interesting if Coret-Bergstra would have dared to leave the theoretical highway and venture into the jungle of data, charting new territory. Instead, she concentrates on a specific subtype of infinitive, the absentive, which more or less behaves in line with the expectations based on previous analyses. Here she follows the idea that the infinitival marker *te* 'to' spells out a preposition. Since a preposition requires a noun, it follows that the infinitival itself will be nominal (gerundial) in Frisian. The analysis is defended by showing that absentives, like PPs, are found to the left of the main verb (*is* in the examples below). Then Coret-Bergstra notes the problem that the bulk of infinitives is found to the right of the main verb. It would have been more interesting to focus on the fact that the prepositional infinitives to the left of the main verb cannot be developed into clauses. For example, they require objects and particles to be incorporated:

- | | | | | |
|--------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------|
| (1a) | <i>Omdat hy</i> | <i>te hierknippen</i> | <i>is.</i> | Frisian |
| | because he | to hair.cutting | is | |
| (1b) * | <i>Omdat hy</i> | <i>syn hier</i> | <i>te knippen</i> | <i>is.</i> |
| | because he | his hair | to cutting | is |

The analysis of the infinitival marker is simply too crude, since it expects infinitives on the left only. The reader is left somewhat disappointed with Coret-Bergstra's reaction to the obvious fact that most infinitives do not behave as expected. Her reaction is (p.52-53): "... it is not likely that *te* is a preposition in these contexts, at least not anymore." This is all the reader gets now that the data stop fitting the theory.

More use could have been made of Jarich Hoekstra's (1997:84 and further) subdivision of infinitival clauses into three types: adjectival, prepositional and clausal. Again, the flow of the argument is quite smooth and well-written as long as the data fit Coret-Bergstra's theory, but nothing much is offered when the data do not fit the theory. The reader is left with this same general impression in the subsequent two chapters, on noun incorporation and on the absentive. Coret-Bergstra is masterful when summarising previous analyses and adding the facts to the standard theory, but not when problems for the theory arise. To wrap this point up, we will focus on a problem with the analysis of the difference between Dutch and Frisian absentives (p.159, 189 and further). The following parameters are given:

- (2) Frisian *gean* = Fmerge PP
 Dutch *gaan* = Fmerge PP, FmergeVP

These two parameters are proposed in order to account for the contrast between Frisian (3) and Dutch (4):

- | | | | | | |
|------|------------|-------------|----------------|-----------------|---------|
| (3a) | <i>Jan</i> | <i>giet</i> | <i>nei</i> | <i>skoalle.</i> | Frisian |
| | Jan | goes | to | school | |
| (3b) | <i>Jan</i> | <i>is</i> | <i>te</i> | <i>fiskjen.</i> | |
| | Jan | is | to | fishing | |
| (4a) | <i>Jan</i> | <i>gaat</i> | <i>naar</i> | <i>school.</i> | Dutch |
| | Jan | goes | to | school | |
| (4b) | <i>Jan</i> | <i>is</i> | <i>vissen.</i> | | |
| | Jan | is | fishing | | |

In Frisian, *gean* 'go' combines with prepositions (see 3a), including the preposition *te* 'to' (see 3b). In Dutch, *gaan* 'go' combines with prepositions (see 4a) and VPs (see 4b).

Coret-Bergstra claims that in Innovated Frisian (or Interference Frisian), the Frisian language user has a Dutch-like parameter setting, in which *gean* 'go' combines with PPs and VPs:

- (5) Innovated Frisian *gean* = Fmerge PP, FmergeVP

This holds for those speakers of Frisian that allow, besides (3a) and (3b), also for sentences such as:

- | | | | | |
|-----|------------|-----------|-----------------|---------|
| (6) | <i>Jan</i> | <i>is</i> | <i>fiskjen.</i> | Frisian |
| | Jan | is | fishing | |

Now the Frisian parameter is identical to the Dutch one. However, we still have the following contrast in Dutch:

(7a) *	<i>Jan</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>te vissen.</i>	Dutch
	Jan	is	to fishing	
(7b)	<i>Jan</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>vissen.</i>	
	Jan	is	fishing	

That is, although Dutch and Innovated Frisian have the same parameter settings, Innovated Frisian allows for absentives with and without *te* ‘to’, and Dutch only allows for absentives without *te* ‘to’. It seems that there is more to it than just this parameter. Is the Dutch *te* ‘to’ maybe different from the Frisian *te* ‘to’, and if so, can that account for the observed difference in the examples give above? Furthermore, the proposed parameter is also problematic in the light of the following sentences (p. 178). These show another difference, namely the place of the silent/overt GO in the sentence. Is that difference something that could explain that?

(8a) *	<i>Jan zal / wil / moet</i>	<i>te vissen</i>	<i>GAAN.</i>
	Jan shall / wants / must	to fishing	go
(8b)	<i>Jan zal / wil / moet</i>	<i>GAAN</i>	<i>vissen.</i>
	Jan shall / wants / must	go	fishing

If Dutch can merge both VP and PP, it should exhibit both options, but it doesn’t.

A valuable contribution to Frisian linguistics

We are very happy that linguists not directly affiliated with Frisian institutions participate in our field. Coret-Bergstra’s thesis provides a very valuable contribution to the field in the following respects:

- It provides a comparison of phenomena in Standard Frisian with present-day Frisian, giving us a window on ongoing linguistic changes in the language under the influence of Dutch.
- It provides an elegant analysis of certain systematic differences between Frisian and Dutch verbal constructions on the basis of the standard theory.
- It is well structured and well written.

Needless to say, we vented some criticism in our review, but this mainly involved our wish ‘to have more’, that is, more depth of discussion and analysis in the case of counterexamples and in the case of changes in Frisian in the direction of Dutch. Apart from parameter switching from the ‘Frisian’ value to the ‘Dutch’ one, the thesis does not offer us insight into resilience, into questions like:

- Why are some areas of Frisian grammar subject to Dutch influence whereas others are not?
- Is parameter change all there is to language contact from a generative perspective?

- What does a theory of grammar intertwining look like (since obviously the two grammars are not kept separate)?

After all, Frisian features interferences from Dutch already for centuries: some remain small in frequency, others are successful, and some never occur. The thesis title refers to language contact but in actual practice, it is focused more on confirming generative theory than on providing insight into the grammatical interactions in language contact. There is a subtle equilibrium between the need to uphold the theory and the need to modify the theory in the face of counterexamples. If we modify the theory too quickly, we drift off into chaos and lack of uniformity. On the other hand, if we cling to the standard theory too much, our analysis becomes uninteresting and counterexamples are trivialised. We do feel that Coret-Bergstra was a bit too concerned with fitting the data to the standard theory of Distributed Morphology: counterexamples were presented, but received little attention. In spite of this, we are very happy with this thesis for the reasons which we have indicated in this review. More contact with Frisian linguists could perhaps have helped with several of the issues that we pointed out. Our criticism also makes us look in the mirror: are we visible enough? Are we approachable enough? For any linguist out there: we are extremely happy to think along and collaborate!

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