

Fronting similar manners in different ways

Accounting for a topicalization asymmetry in similative and simulative clauses

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The talk in a nutshell

- I address a topicalization asymmetry between similative (*zoals-*)clauses and simulative (*alsof-*)clauses in Dutch
- By drawing a parallel with topicalization of non-clausal constituents (i.e. DPs), I show that **referentiality** is a crucial information structure property to derive topicalization of clausal constituents as well

The talk in a nutshell

Similative (*zoals-*)clauses:

- are definite expressions which **always refer to a specific/uniquely identifiable manner** and hence can be topicalized (just like 'regular' definite DPs)

The talk in a nutshell

Simulative (*alsof*-)clauses:

- do not refer to a specific/uniquely identifiable manner, but rather to a general kind of manner whose reference cannot be easily picked up (in a way similar to weak definites)
- behave like non-referential DPs such as (non-specific) indefinites and bare quantifiers in that they resist topicalization but only allow focus-fronting

Outline

1. Topicalization asymmetry between *zoals-* and *alsof-* clauses in Dutch
2. Topicalization asymmetries in the DP-domain
3. Similarity constructions and referentiality: comparing similatives and simulatives
4. Conclusion

The problem

While it is always possible to topicalize similative clauses (1), similative clauses (2) resist topicalization in Dutch.

(1) [*Zoals zijn vader altijd danste,*] heeft Jan vandaag gedanst.

so.as his father always danced has J. today danced
"As his father always danced, John danced today."

(2) [**Alsof hij dronken was,*] heeft Jan vandaag gedanst.

as.if he drunk was has J. today danced
"*As if he were drunk, John danced today."

The problem

The contrast in (1)-(2) is surprising for several reasons:

- Both similative and simulative clauses in (1)-(2) are syntactically integrated within the matrix clause (cf. Haegeman 2003 et seq.) and attached at the same height in the extended clausal structure (possibly at the VP-level, see Alexiadou 1997: 7ff, Cinque 1999: 28ff, and Ernst 2002: 269ff)

The problem

The contrast in (1)-(2) is surprising for several reasons:

- Both similative and simulative clauses share similar syntactic functions, namely that of manner adjunct clauses (as in (1)-(2)), or that of (manner) complement clauses of verbs like, e.g., *zich gedragen* 'behave'

The problem

The contrast in (1)-(2) is surprising for several reasons:

- Both similative and simulative clauses (arguably) share a similar inner syntactic composition (cf. Massaia 2025, to appear)

The problem

As such, we would expect both clause types to pattern alike with respect to topicalization. Specifically, we would expect topicalization to be (im)possible in both cases.

... but this is not the case. Why?

The parallel (with the DP-domain)

When it comes to topicalization of DPs, it is generally acknowledged that **definites and specific indefinites**, whose reference is known and/or 'salient' (in Ward & Prince's 1991 terms), **can be topicalized more easily than** elements that do not have a clear reference, or that do not refer to anything in particular, such as **non-specific indefinites and bare quantifiers**.

The parallel (with the DP-domain)

(3) A: Aan wie heb je [_{DP} **dit boek**] gegeven? (definite)
to whom have you this book given
“To whom did you give this book?”

B: [_{DP} **Dit boek**] heb ik aan JAN gegeven
this book have I to J. given
“This book, I gave to John.”

The parallel (with the DP-domain)

(Talking about gifting Melville's *Moby Dick*)

(4) A: Aan wie heb je [_{DP} **het boek**] gegeven? (definite)
to whom have you the book given
"To whom did you give the book?"

B: [_{DP} **Het boek**] heb ik aan JAN gegeven
the book have I to J. given
"The book, I gave to John."

The parallel (with the DP-domain)

(Talking about gifting books in general)

(5) A: Aan wie heb je [_{DP} **een boek**] gegeven? (indefinite)
to whom have you a book given
"To whom did you give a book?"

B: [_{DP} ***Een boek**] heb ik aan JAN gegeven
a book have I to J. given
"*A book, I gave to John."

The parallel (with the DP-domain)

(Talking about gifting things in general)

(6) A: Aan wie heb je [_{QP} iets] gegeven? (bare quantifier)
to whom have you something given
"To whom did you give something?"

B: [_{QP} *iets] heb ik aan JAN gegeven.
something have I to J. given
"*Something, I gave to John."

The parallel (with the DP-domain)

Topicalized elements are interpreted as topics, which normally constitute given/old information in the discourse, they “most commonly denote familiar or inferable entities” (Tomioka 2021: 10) and as such “necessarily involve well-established discourse antecedents” (Alexiadou 2006: 687, but see also Reinhart 1982, Krifka 2008 a.m.o.).

- > Definite/specific expressions refer to specific/uniquely identifiable entities = topicalization OK
- > Non-specific indefinites and bare quantifiers do not refer to any entity in particular = topicalization OUT

The parallel (with the DP-domain)

Note that the DPs in (3)-(6):

- Are syntactically integrated within the matrix clause and attach at the same height (i.e., SpecCP);
- Share similar syntactic functions (i.e. that of DP-objects);
- (Arguably) share the same inner syntactic composition (i.e., they are all DPs, cf. Longobardi 1994 and Stowell 1989b)

... just like the manner adverbial clauses in (1)-(2)!

The proposal

The ability to refer to a particular entity (i.e. **referentiality**), which is crucial to account for topicalization asymmetries in the DP-domain, is also crucial to account for topicalization asymmetries in the clausal domain.

- Similative clauses can be topicalized in that they always refer to a specific/uniquely identifiable manner (and hence pattern with definite/specific expressions)

The proposal

The ability to refer to a particular entity (i.e. referentiality), which is crucial to account for topicalization asymmetries in the DP-domain, is also crucial to account for topicalization asymmetries in the clausal domain.

- Simulative clauses resist topicalization in that they do not refer to a uniquely identifiable manner, but rather to a general kind of manner whose reference cannot be easily picked up (similarly to non-specific indefinites and bare quantifiers)

Similarity constructions and referentiality

When it comes to the ability to refer to a particular entity/manner:

- Simulative clauses always refer to a uniquely identifiable manner (just like definite/referential expressions)
- Simulative clauses are akin to weak definites (cf. Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts 2010) in that they have a 'weak' reading and do not refer to any manner in particular.

Evidence (I): sloppy reading in elliptical contexts

(7) *Jan danste zoals Marie danste, en Jaap ook.*

J. danced so.as M. danced and J. too

“John danced like Mary danced, and Jack did too.”

Reading: Jan, Marie, and Jaap all danced in the exact same way (i.e. like Marie) – although the manner of dancing is underspecified (Marie could have danced *beautifully*, *awfully*,...)

Evidence (I): sloppy reading in elliptical contexts

(8) *Jan danste alsof hij dronken was, en Jaap ook.*

J. danced as if he drunk was and J. too

“John danced as if he were drunk, and Jack did too.”

Reading 1: both Jan and Jaap danced in the same way

Reading 2: Jan and Jaap danced in two different (drunken-like) ways (e.g., one stripteasing in the middle of the room, the other bumping into every person at the party)

Evidence (II): distributive reading with quantified subjects

(9) *Elke persoon in de ruimte heeft gedanst zoals Marie danste.*
every person in the room has danced so.as M. danced
“Every person in the room danced like Mary danced.”

No distributive reading (= every person danced in one way, i.e. like Mary)

Evidence (II): distributive reading with quantified subjects

(10) *Elke persoon in de ruimte heeft gedanst alsof hij/zij dronken was.*

every person in the room has danced as if he/she drunk was

“Every person in the room danced as if he/she/they were drunk.”

Distributive reading (= every person in the room danced in a different, drunken-like way)

Evidence (III): modification by 'exactly'

Similative clauses can be modified by *precies* 'exactly', whereas simulative clauses cannot.

(11) *Jan danst (precies) zoals zijn vader altijd danste.*

J. dances exactly so.as his father always danced
"John danced (exactly) like his father danced.

(12) *Jan danst (*precies) alsof hij dronken was.*

J. dances exactly as.if he drunk was
"John dances (*exactly) as if he were drunk."

Evidence (IV): (in)definiteness requirements

Both similative and simulative clauses can occasionally modify an overt NP *manier* 'way' embedded under a PP.

Whereas **simulative clauses** can occasionally modify a NP embedded under **an indefinite DP** (14), the DP embedded under the PP modified by similative clauses is necessarily always definite (13).

Evidence (IV): (in)definiteness requirements

- (13) *Jan danste op {dezelfde / *een} manier als zijn vader altijd danste.*
J. danced in the.same a way as his father always danced
“John danced in {the same / *a} way as his father always danced.”
- (14) *Jan danste op {*dezelfde / een} manier alsof hij dronken was.*
J. danced in the.same a way as.if he drunk was
“John danced in {*the same / a} way as if he were drunk.”

Evidence (IV): (in)definiteness requirements

Note also that simulative clauses – differently from similative (*zoals-*)clauses – do not typically ‘tolerate’ a manner demonstrative *zo* ‘so’ in (Standard) Dutch.

(15) *Jan danste (*zo) alsof hij dronken was.*

J. danced so as.if he drunk was
“John danced as if he were drunk.”

Evidence (V): Scrambling in the middle field

In Dutch, definite/referential expressions are scrambled more easily than non-referential elements like non-specific indefinites and quantificational elements like 'something' (Bennis et al. 2012: 1063ff).

(16) ... [_{CP} *dat Jan* [_{DP} ***het boek***]_i *waarschijnlijk* [_{DP} *_*]_i *heeft gelezen*].
that J. the book probably has read
“... that John has probably read the book.”

Evidence (V): Scrambling in the middle field

In Dutch, definite/referential expressions are scrambled more easily than non-referential elements like non-specific indefinites and quantificational elements like 'something' (Bennis et al. 2012: 1063ff).

(17) ... [_{CP} dat Jan [_{DP} **een boek*]_i waarschijnlijk [_{DP} _]_i heeft gelezen].
 that J. a book probably has read
 "... that John has probably read a book."

Evidence (V): Scrambling in the middle field

In Dutch, definite/referential expressions are scrambled more easily than non-referential elements like non-specific indefinites and quantificational elements like 'something' (Bennis et al. 2012: 1063ff).

- (18) ... [_{CP} dat Jan [_{QP} *iets]_i waarschijnlijk [_{QP} _]_i heeft gelezen].
that J. something probably has read
“... that John has probably read something.”

Evidence (V): Scrambling in the middle field

(19) *Ik geloof* [_{CP} *dat Jan* [_{CP} *zoals zijn vader danste*]_i *noog nooit* [_{CP} *_*]_i *gedanst heeft*].
I believe that J. so.as his father danced still never danced has
“I believe that John has never danced like his father danced.”

(20) *Ik geloof* [_{CP} *dat Jan* [_{CP} **alsof hij dronken was*]_i *noog nooit* [_{CP} *_*]_i *gedanst heeft*].
I believe that J. as.if he drunk was still never danced has
“I believe that John has never danced as if he were drunk.”

Evidence (VI): focus fronting

Whereas non-specific indefinites and bare quantifiers resist topicalization, they can be fronted by means of focus fronting.

(21) A: Wat heb je op de tafel gelegd?

“What did you put on the table?”

B: *[EEN GLOEILAMP] heb ik op de tafel gelegd.*

a lightbulb have I on the table put

“A LIGHTBULB, I put on the table.”

Evidence (VI): focus fronting

Whereas non-specific indefinites and bare quantifiers resist topicalization, they can be fronted by means of focus fronting.

(22) *[IETS]* *heb ik op de tafel gelegd – wist ik maar wat!*
something have I on the table put knew I but what
“SOMETHING, I put on the table – If only I knew what.”

Evidence (VI): focus fronting

Simulative clauses, similarly to non-specific indefinites and bare quantifiers, resist topicalization but allow focus fronting (see also Bücking 2015: 281 for German).

(23) A: Hoe heeft Jan vandaag gedanst?

“How did John dance today?”

B: *ALSOF HIJ DRONKEN WAS* heeft Jan vandaag gedanst.

as.if he drunk was has J. today danced

“AS IF HE WERE DRUNK, John danced today.”

Conclusion

- Simulative clauses refer to a specific/uniquely identifiable manner and as such can be topicalized (just like definite/referential expressions);
- Simulative clauses do not refer to any manner in particular (just like weak definites, non-specific indefinites, and bare quantifiers do not refer to any entity in particular) and as such resist topicalization – but allow focus fronting.

Another parallel: *if*-clauses

Schlenker (2004) shows that **conditional (*if*-)clauses** are referential expressions and as such they can be easily topicalized.

(24) a. *[If I can,] I will help.*

b. *[If his friend has put those books on the train,] you should relax.*

(Emonds 1985: 287)

Another parallel: *if*-clauses

Interrogative (*if*-)clauses are superficially (and presumably also underlyingly, cf. Kayne 1991: 665) similar to conditional (*if*-)clauses. Yet, it is impossible to topicalize them (as already shown in Emonds 1985: 287).

(25) [**If his friend has put those books on the train,*] you should inquire.

Another parallel: *if*-clauses

A by no means trivial difference between conditional (*if*-)clauses and embedded interrogative (*if*-)clauses is that the former are always adjuncts, whereas the latter are typically selected as clausal complements of the verb in the matrix clause.

In general, it is easier to front adjunct clauses than complement clauses, therefore one could assume that asymmetries in topicalization follow from this.

Another parallel: *if*-clauses

Note, however, that fronting of complement clauses is not always ruled out in English (original examples due to Postal 1997, reported in Safir 1999. For more examples, see Kusliy 2024).

(26) *[That Ed was under surveillance] he never realized.*

(27) *[That John had seen the movie] he never admitted.*

> Something other than adjuncthood/complementhood is at play here (referentiality?)

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Thank you!



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