

English Complex Verbs as Loan Words in Dutch

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1. Introduction

This paper will provide an investigation into some ungrammatical ad hoc constructions in spoken Dutch. More specifically, inflected forms of complex verbs (both prefixed verbs and particle verbs) that are borrowed from English, will be discussed. These include past participle constructions such as *down-ge-load* ‘downloaded’, *up-ge-screwed* ‘screwed up’, and *out-ge-sourced* ‘outsourced’, but infinitival forms such as *up-back-en* ‘to back up’ and *pull-en* ‘to pull off’ are included as well. Of course, it is quite difficult to study this phenomenon in everyday language. So, to avoid the basis of this paper to rest on sheer assumptions, practical use is made of Google as a super-corpus. This methodology aims to show that the reflections in this paper are not mere grammatical fantasy. Thanks to the boom of personal homepages on the web, we can see that these constructions are truly present in native idiolects. Admittedly, these kinds of constructions are mostly “just” sporadic performance errors by native Dutch speakers. Nevertheless, these mistakes might tell us something about underlying principles and/or constraints that are present in Dutch and/or English grammar. So, the term *ungrammatical* used above should be put into perspective. These constructions also catch the eye because they appear to violate the principle of Lexical Integrity. This will be discussed in a little more detail further on. First of all, chapter 2 will provide an explanation to account for the fact that more grammatical parts of language, such as particle verbs, appear as loan words in Dutch at all. Further on, in chapter 3, the results of a google research will be provided. This research will be related to a theoretical background by Geert Booij and Corrien Blom, in order to account for its results. At the end, the main points of this paper will be summed up in the conclusion.

2. The Influence of English

A first question that came to mind was why these English complex verbs appeared in Dutch at all. Booij (2001) has already commented on the dominant position of English as a foreign language in Europe. However, he concluded that “the very intensive form of language contact between English and Dutch does not erode the grammatical system of Dutch.” Now, I do not wish to contradict this claim from a synchronic point of view, but I find it reasonable at least to take note of a steady increase in more grammatical content. Verbs like *upgraden* ‘to upgrade’ and *back-uppen* ‘to back up’ are a nice illustration of this.¹ In the next paragraph I will try to explain the processes behind these borrowings in Dutch.

The first thing one has to bear in mind is that words are linked to ideas. They are a surface form for an underlying meaning. Especially for abstract words (*art, love, science, respect, etc.*) this notion can become quite important. Following this reasoning, one might conceive the existence of a “semanticon” (in contrast to lexicon) as a collection of all the ideas in one language. Moreover, there is no inviolable one-to-one relationship between word and meaning. A single meaning or an idea may be expressed by multiple words or a phrase, just like a single word may have several meanings. So, sometimes a single meaning is expressed by a syntactically more complex structure. This is where the English particle verbs come in. Although they are syntactically complex, they are still semantic units, and as such, they qualify to be borrowed by another language. This dynamic reflects the influence of a dominant culture via its language. The whole process either enriches the amount of ideas in the other language, or simply provides it with a more economical way to express an idea with a word or a phrase. Sometimes this new word will be a whole new concept (e.g. *downloaden* ‘to download’), sometimes only a (slightly) different connotation from already available words in the language will suffice to trigger a loan coinage (e.g. *fuck-uppen* ‘to fuck up’). The connotational surplus of these constructions is often related to – or can sometimes maybe even equated with – identification with the foreign culture (consider the example *make-ouden* ‘to make out’).

Now, a final issue that needs to be addressed here before going a bit further into the matter, is the Lexical Integrity Hypothesis:

¹ One can find a written record of the verb “back-uppen” in a title on page 60 of the June issue 2008 of EOS, a popular scientific magazine.

(1) *Principle of Lexical Integrity*

“The syntax neither manipulates nor has access to the internal structure of words” (Anderson 1992: 84)

The idea here is that words are supposed to be the essential building blocks for syntax to create grammatical sentences. Hence, they should not be split up or “interrupted”.

However, with particle verbs in both English and Dutch, the particle can be *separated* from the verb. Therefore, Booij (ms) claims “they must have phrasal status in the relevant syntactic contexts”. So, because the principle, as it is stated in (1), forbids syntactic rules to move around parts of words, Booij (to appear) suggests a reformulation of the Lexical Integrity Principle. Blom (2005) addresses the same problem:

A word analysis of SCVs, then, requires an explanation of their separability. The various morphological analyses of SCVs show two ways of getting by this principle (i.e. the Lexical Integrity Principle): either it is completely abandoned, or it is adapted so that SCVs do not fall under its scope. (Blom 2005: 41-42)

Because of this problem, Cappelle (to appear) suggests constructionist approaches to grammar are more ideally suited when dealing with particle verbs, because they allow the existence of phrasal lexical units. Now, in the previous paragraph, I already referred to particle verbs as syntactically complex constructions (i.e. phrases). So, considering the data under investigation in this paper, such a constructionist framework seems to be the most appropriate here.

3. The Analysis

This is the largest section of the paper. It will provide an investigation into the grammatical uses of a small set of English verbs that appear in Dutch. These are: *to backtrack*, *to back up*, *to download*, *to downscale*, *to downsize*, *to fuck up*, *to inbreed*, *to make out*, *to outsource*, *to pull off*, *to screw up*, *to update*, *to upgrade*, and *to upload*. A very important distinction that needs to be made here is the distinction between prefixed verbs and particle verbs. They’re easily recognized, for the prefixed verbs are all spelled as one word starting with the prefix, and the particle verbs

are spelled as two separate words starting with the verb-part. In total, 14 verbs are analyzed: 9 prefixed verbs and 5 particle verbs. Since we're only interested in the ungrammatical and dubious inflections of these verbs in Dutch, acknowledged inflectional forms of these verbs will be left out. Of course, it's important to know what these exactly are, so one has a frame of reference. Now, for the 9 prefixed verbs this is quite easy. Lexical integrity is maintained. The present tense singular simply adopts the verb stem, present tense plural adds the plural suffix *-en*, the infinitival form adds the infinitival suffix *-en*, and the past participle is formed by adding both the prefix *ge-* and the suffix *-d or -t* (unless the verb stem already ends in *d* or *t*)². For the particle verbs, on the other hand, there is no real consensus as to their complete inflection. Mostly, their use is therefore avoided, unless there is no other alternative. This uncertainty of native Dutch speakers comes to show that this is highly unexplored territory yet, almost completely devoid of rules. Only the infinitival form is quite straightforward, usually adding the normal infinitival *-en* suffix to the particle. So, now it's time to go see how native Dutch speakers sometimes creatively use alternative or new inflections for these verbs.

3.1. The Data

Table 1 gives an overview of several hypothetical inflected forms for the prefixed verbs. *Table 2* does this for the particle verbs. These hypothetical inflections are partly based on real encounters in spoken Dutch, and partly based on introspective analogy. The systematicity of the researched inflected forms is quite obvious. For each of the inflections, the google search queries are mentioned in the first column, and the number of hits for Dutch websites is mentioned in the second column.

Table 1: A quantification of alternative inflections for prefixed verbs

1.a. backgetracked	0
1.b. "back te tracken"	0
2.a. downgeload	3130
2.b. "down te loaden"	15400

² The combination of a prefix and a suffix to form the past participle are also referred to as a circumfix.

2.c. “load * down”	147
3.a. downgescaled	6
3.b. “down te scalen”	8
4.a. downgesized	1
4.b. “down te sizen”	3
5.a. ingebreed	0
5.b. “in te breedten”	2
6.a. outgesourced	122
6.b. “out te sourcen”	103
7.a. upgedate	15800
7.b. “up te daten”	20100
8.a. upgegrade	2750
8.b. “up te graden”	16300
9.a. upgeloop	50200
9.b. “up te loaden”	21700
9.c. “load * up”	4240

The a-queries represent alternative forms for the past participle, and the b-queries have the Dutch infinitival marker *te* in them. Only the verbs *download* and *upload* have received an additional c-query, because they resulted in some interesting linguistic behavior: a total abandonment of the principle of lexical integrity, as stated in (1). Some examples are: *load het down* ‘load it down’, *load maar down* ‘load just down’, *load de boel down* ‘load the bunch down’, *load je gewoon down* ‘load you simply down’, *load het up* ‘load it up’, *load je uitspraak up* ‘load your speech up’, and *load uw bestanden eenvoudig up* ‘load your files easily up’. So, although *up* and *down* are foreign grammatical chunks, they appear to be slowly acquiring grammatical status in Dutch idiolects.

When looking at the figures, two conclusions present themselves. Firstly, the prefix *up* tends to be the most sensitive to these kinds of inflectional formation, whereas *back* does not seem to allow it at all. Secondly, the infinitival b-queries tend to outnumber the past participle forms of the a-queries, the only exceptions being 6 and 9. Now, if one compares these alternative inflections for the prefixed verbs with those that will be used for the particle verbs in *Table 2*, one might notice the proposed inflection for the particle verbs is much less systematic. Because these verb don’t form a true part of the Dutch lexicon and are just used every once in a while in discourse, I allowed myself a little more license here.

Table 2: A quantification of alternative inflections for particle verbs

10.a. upgebacked / upgebackt	9 / 9
10.b. upbacken	6
10.c. “up te backen”	15
11.a. upgefucked / upgefuckt	125 / 83
11.b. upfucken	354
11.c. “up te fucken”	83
12.a. outgemaket	0
12.b. “ge-make-out-ed”	1
12.c. “make-outen”	4
13.a. offgepulled	0
13.b. gepull-offt	0
13.c. gepulled	2070
13.d. “te pullen”	913
13.e. “off te pullen”	1
14.a. “gescrew-upt”	0
14.b. upgescrewed	1
14.c. upscrewen	7
14.d. screwuppen	1
14.e. “up te screwen”	2

Once again, we see that it’s mostly *up* that triggers these alternative inflections, or, in other words, native Dutch idiolects have an internalized grammar that allows English complex verbs with *up* to acquire these specific inflections in Dutch. A more detailed hypothesis to account for the existence of these inflections is put forward in section 3.3. *Table 1* and *Table 2* merely serve the purpose here to prove their existence in Dutch idiolects, how ever sporadic they may occur.

3.2. Theoretical background

In this section, the issue of the internalized Dutch grammar is addressed. What exactly in Dutch grammar makes a native speaker split these verbs up and rearrange them? Which mediating processes or constraints account for the mapping of the original verbs and their

inflections onto these newly coined formations? In an associated context to this one, Booij (2002a) mentions the following:

Particle verbs or separable complex verbs are combinations of a preverb and a verb that function as complex verbs. Preverbs in Modern Dutch and German are quite similar in their behavior (...) Preverb-verb sequences in these languages differ from prefixed verbs (...) in that the preverb is separable from the verb. (Booij 2002a: 319)

So, it's interesting here to take a look at complex predicates in Dutch and to study their properties first. Now, Booij makes a note of the separability of the preverb-verb sequences in Dutch here. This will prove to be quite an important property of Dutch grammar. In the literature it has led to a basic distinction between Separable Complex Verbs (SCVs) and Inseparable Complex Verbs (ICVs). This twofold classification for complex predicates in Dutch will be maintained for the remainder of this paper. Some nice minimal pairs to illustrate the exact distinction that is being made, one finds in Booij (2002b):

(2)	SCV	ICV
	dóorlopen 'to walk on'	doorlópen 'to pass'
	dóorbreken 'to break through'	doorbréken 'to break'
	óndergaan 'to go down'	ondergáan 'to undergo'
	óverkomen 'to come over'	overkómen 'to happen to'

One might notice here that one distinguishing property separates the SCVs from the ICVs: their stress pattern. SCVs always carry stress on the particle in Dutch, whereas the prefixes of ICVs are never stressed. Booij and Blom (2003) also draw attention to the semantic literalness of the particles in the SCVs as opposed to "the loss of independent semantic content" for the prefixes in ICVs. From a diachronic point of view, then, both Booij and Blom defend the claim that particles are an intermediate stage between words and prefixes:

(3) word > particle > prefix (Booij, Blom 2003: 70)

So, left-adjacent secondary predicates of the verb (with full semantic content) may over time grammaticalize into particles (with partial semantic content), just like particles may over time grammaticalize even further into prefixes (with semantic bleaching and loss of meaning). Booij and Blom

claim that semantic change triggers this diachronic evolution, which is certainly plausible, considering the different semantic structure of SCVs and ICVs. ICVs intuitively feel more like semantic “units”. Consider the examples *achtervólgén* ‘to chase’ and *omrínge* ‘to surround’. With SCVs, by contrast, the particle semantically modifies the verb to which it is attached.

3.3. Application on the data

In this section we will use the theoretical background of section 3.2 to account for the data in section 3.1. Now, Booij and Blom consider the diachronic evolution discussed in the previous section to be unidirectional by nature. Yet, when the borrowed English prefixed verbs are inflected in Dutch, they sometimes behave like these separable complex verbs or SCVs, despite Dutch linguistic conventions that don’t allow it. So, the semantic unity of the verb is lost again. Paradoxically, the more problematic inflection of a separated complex verb is sometimes chosen over the “easier” option. It seems like the natural evolution in (3) is reversed here. What allows this to happen?

Basically, I want to argue that this is effectuated for the English prefixed verbs by three factors: the stress pattern of the English prefix verbs, their morphological transparency and the separability of the Dutch SCVs. First of all, the initial stress of the English prefixed verbs makes them sound like the Dutch SCVs for the native Dutch speaker. Although the prefixed verbs can easily be treated as a semantic unit, the stress pattern is similar to that of separable complex verbs in Dutch. So, when these prefixed verbs are morphologically transparent to a native Dutch speaker as well, he or she will also be able to separate the relevant part (the prefix) from the verb, in order to accommodate it to Dutch syntax. So, the English prefixed verbs are bound to be falsely interpreted as SCVs by a Dutch speaker, because of their matching stress pattern. When the verb-part would carry the stress in an English prefixed verb, this would not be a problem, since the stress pattern would match the Dutch ICVs. So, when these characteristics and tendencies of Dutch syntax prevail over the power of conventional rules, one might come across inflections like *downgeload* or *upgedate*. When I talk about “the power of conventional rules”, I both refer to Dutch language education and intuitive constraints in Dutch grammar. Such a constraint might be a strong tendency to avoid a foreign

part of language to functions as a separated particle in Dutch discourse. Consider *up*.

A shorter version of the story goes as follows: there's a match between the stress patterns of these English prefixed verbs and Dutch separable complex verbs, the English prefixed verbs are considered separable by analogy, and morphological transparency allows the separation-operation to be performed correctly. Because I use *analogy* as a basis here, I would also like to refer to Tomasello (2000). Although it is within the context of first language acquisition, he claims that grammatical principles emerge as a generalization over a sufficient number of analogue lexical examples. I believe that this hypothesis can apply to natural language in general, and shouldn't just be restricted to the domain of first language acquisition. In this case the lexical examples would be the Dutch SCVs and their grammatical inflection, and the English prefixed verbs inherit their inflection by analogy.

Of course, this still leaves the alternative Dutch inflections for the English particle verbs as listed in *Table 2*. These more varied inflections require a slightly different explanation. First of all, the stress pattern is also *analogous* to that of the Dutch SCVs here, except for the fact that the particle appears at the end of the word. The morphological transparency also remains an essential requirement here. Otherwise, the particle to be moved around in Dutch inflection couldn't be identified in the first place. Yet, this is obviously not explanatory on its own for the inflections in *Table 2*. I'd propose a strong constraint in Dutch morphology on adding a suffix to a particle. However, the infinitival marker *-en* seems to be exempted from this constraint, as evidenced by *back-uppen*. So, analogy with the inflectional rules of Dutch SCVs (which are also separable) might just be explanatorily sufficient here. Nevertheless, query 13 for the particle verb "pull off" would still be an exception. Excluding the one hit for "*off te pullen*", it would seem the particle for this verb in Dutch has simply been dropped for the sake of inflectional convenience. It simply got rid of the problematic factor and acquired more of a Dutch feel because of it. What made this possible for the verb *pull off* might have to do with some phonological and/or semantic properties, and it might be worth investigating, but that goes beyond the scope of this paper.

4. Conclusion

The main purpose of this paper is to point out that complex verbs borrowed from English occasionally acquire an adapted inflection in Dutch idiolects, which splits them up morphologically as if it were built up out of native Dutch morphemes. Especially the particle/prefix *up* appears to be sensitive to this phenomenon. From the point of view of Dutch inflectional rules this can be accounted for by the English stress pattern for complex verbs and the morphological transparency of these complex verbs for the Dutch speaker, acquainted with English. These properties lead to analogy with Dutch separable complex verbs, and therefore allow violations on the lexical integrity of these borrowed complex verbs. So, certainly from a cross-linguistic point of view, this undermines the authority of the Lexical Integrity Hypothesis. Furthermore, this shows a steady increase in the influence of English on Dutch. However, as Booij states, “it does not erode the grammatical system”. After all, it’s the English words that are adapted to Dutch grammar, and not the other way around. Nevertheless, some English particles do appear to take up a grammatical function in some idiolects, somehow expanding the number of grammatical units (although restricted to specific contexts). This phenomenon might be interesting to investigate further from a different point of view. I’d propose an analysis in the psycholinguistic processing of these alternative inflections. After all, one might find these formations to arise out of uncertainty or a “lack of option”, which would lead to something one might call a “forced coinage”. Up to you now!

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