

Adverbial diminutives and contrastive reduplication in a post-colonial setting: A pilot study into the morphology of Curaçaoan Dutch

1. Introduction This paper presents results of a pilot study into the morphology of Dutch spoken on Curaçao, an ex-colony of the Netherlands, which currently has the status of independent country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. With the exception of an exploratory study into some grammatical features in the spontaneous Dutch spoken on Curaçao (Depuydt 2010), we are not aware of any investigations into the morphology of this variety, neither from a formal nor a sociolinguistic perspective. The aim of this paper is to fill this gap, by discussing the results of a pilot study into two morphological phenomena, namely (i) adverbial diminutives (henceforth AD) and contrastive reduplication (henceforth CR). While both phenomena are typically spoken features of Netherlandic Dutch, the former – crucially – is a relatively old phenomenon (Diepeveen 2012), whereas the latter is an emergent innovation (Cavirani-Pots & Dirix 2024). An example of AD is given in (1). An example of nominal CR is given in (2), adjectival CR in (3), and verbal CR in (4).

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| <p>(1) Je moet dat straks-je-s doen.
 you must that later-DIM-S do
 ‘You should do that later (preferably).’</p> | <p>(3) Ik hou van MOOI -E mooi -e schilderijen.
 I hold of beautiful-INFL beautiful-INFL paintings
 ‘I love really/prototypically beautiful paintings.’</p> |
| <p>(2) Ze is op zoek naar een MAN man.
 she is on look at a man man
 ‘She’s looking for a real man.’</p> | <p>(4) Je moet dat boek LEZ-EN lez-en.
 you must that book read-INFL read-INFL
 ‘You should really read the book (not just skim it).’</p> |

In AD, the diminutive suffix *-je* plus an additional *-s* (see a.o. Corver 2019, Cloin-Tavenier 2024) appears on an independently existing adverb, the presence of *-jes* often triggering an attenuative/evaluative interpretation (Diepeveen 2012). In CR, contrastive focus (indicated by caps in the examples) is placed on the reduplicant, triggering a semantic interpretation of ‘typical/real’.

In view of the fact that adverbial diminution is a relatively old phenomenon in the morphology of Netherlandic Dutch, our hypothesis is that it is likely that it is accepted by Curaçaoan Dutch speakers. With respect to CR, two competing hypotheses arise. Given the recent rise of this phenomenon in Netherlandic Dutch, it might be the case that CR does not exist in Curaçaoan Dutch yet – or is only accepted by speakers who have lived in the Netherlands (many people temporarily move to the Netherlands to study). In contrast, reduplication is a very productive morphological strategy in Papiamentu, the vital Portuguese-based creole increasingly spoken by all layers of Curaçaoan society (Kauwenberg & LaCharité 2015). This productivity of CR in Papiamentu could also impact its acceptability in Curaçaoan Dutch.

2. Methodology We conducted an acceptability judgement experiment (elicited on a 7-point scale) which probed language-internal constraints but also external predictors (gender, age, proficiency in local languages, length of stay in The Netherlands) and a number of language-ideological triggers pertaining to the respondents’ attitude towards different varieties of Dutch.

2.1 Participants 32 Curaçaoan Dutch speakers took part in this study (Mean age=62, range 19-85, *SD* 16.4), of which 12 identified themselves as male and 20 as female. All participants were born on Curaçao and have their current residence there. Almost all of them were highly educated.

2.2 Questionnaire design The experimenter conducted the interviews on an individual basis by means of a survey, which consisted of two practice items, and 22 test items on three different morphological phenomena, two of which are discussed in this paper: AD and CR. Two test items in three variants targeted AD. Two different adverbs were used, namely *iets* ‘somewhat’ and *straks*, which were tested in three variants: with diminutive (*iets-jes/straks-jes*), with diminutive but without the final *-s* of the core adverb (*iet-jes/strak-jes*) and the control variant without diminutive (*iets/straks*). Four items in two variants targeted CR. We used the verb *lezen* ‘to read’, the noun *man* ‘man’, the noun *jongen* ‘boy’, and the adjective *mooi* ‘beautiful’ to test the hypothesis that adjectival and nominal CR is more acceptable compared to verbal CR, building on the results of a recent corpus investigation, which reported such categorical preferences in Dutch CR (Cavirani-Pots & Dirix 2024). We made use of spoken stimuli in order to include accent strength as an index of the relative ‘weight’ of the competing languages; all test items were recorded by speakers who were born on Curaçao and currently live in the Netherlands (*n*=6, 3 male, 3 female, Mean Age=49, range 27-68). Informants were asked to rate the test items for

acceptability, using a 7-point Likert Scale. The acceptability judgements task was followed by a language background questionnaire.

3. Results We fitted two separate linear mixed effects regression models on the acceptability judgements for AD and CR. For AD the fixed effects were Variant (*ietsjes* (=S) vs *ietjes* (=no-S) vs *iets* (=control)) and Lemma (*iets* vs *straks*). For CR the fixed effects were Variant (CR vs control), and Lemma (*Lezen* vs *Man* vs *Jongen* vs *Mooi*). For both linear mixed effects regressions, the co-variables were: (i) respondent gender (female vs. male), (ii) age group (Young (19-42) vs. Adult (45-69) vs. Senior (70+)), (iii) self-reported proficiency in Dutch (7-point scale), (iv) attitude towards the respective status of the languages spoken in Curaçaoan society (Pro-both vs. Pro-Papiamentu vs. Pro-Dutch), (v) the number of years spent in the Netherlands (None vs. 3 to 9 vs 10+), (vi) the speaker whose recording was used in the stimulus (6 speakers), and (vii) the perceived accent strength of those speakers.

Main findings AD For AD, we found a significant interaction between Variant and Lemma to the extent that the variant with *-s* (*straksjes*) is dispreferred. We hypothesize that this is a phonological effect: given that the core adverb already starts with an *-s* and the diminutive-variant also ends in an *-s*, it might be that the intermediate *-s* is dispreferred due to too many sibilants being present within two syllables. In addition, we found a near-significant interaction between Variant and amount of time spent in the Netherlands which signals that the *s*-variant is dispreferred by respondents who spent more than 10 years in the Netherlands. The latter fact is not surprising: speakers who only learned Dutch on Curaçao or spent less time in the Netherlands are clearly aware of the AD phenomenon in general, but have not been exposed enough to the subvariants of this phenomenon that exist only in spoken Netherlandic (and Belgian) Dutch. Overall, the results confirm that AD as a morphological phenomenon is present in the grammar of Curaçaoan Dutch, in line with our hypothesis.

Main findings CR We found a significant main effect of Attitude: respondents with a pro-Dutch attitude rate all the stimuli higher in terms of grammatical acceptability – there even is a weak interaction between Attitude and Variant to the extent that it is especially the reduplications which are valued higher on account of pro-Dutch sympathies (this interaction does not reach full significance though, $p = .096$). This may indicate that a positive attitude to Dutch has a positive effect on the acceptability judgements: respondents who are interested in Dutch, and therefore probably use it in a more natural way than those who prefer to use Dutch only when strictly necessary, are arguably more open to accepting emerging morphological phenomena. We also found a significant interaction between Variant and Lemma: CR is accepted most easily for *jongen* ‘boy’ and *mooi* ‘beautiful’. This relates to the lexical possibilities of the CR phenomenon: nominal (and in particular *jongen* ‘boy’) and adjectival CR is preferred over verbal CR. This finding thus supports our hypothesis that CR targets particularly nouns and adjectives, with verbal CR being less acceptable. The observation that nominal CR with *man* is not favoured can be explained by the comment made by several respondents that *man man* sounded as a ‘Papiamentism’; apparently the Papiamentu reduplication of *homber* ‘man’ is very frequent, so respondents were more cautious to allow this in Dutch. Finally, we found a significant interaction between Variant and Age: compared to the younger speakers, CR is disfavoured especially by the Adult respondents, but less so by the Senior ones. The latter is not very surprising: given the recent emergence of this phenomenon, it is logical that younger speakers accept it more than adult speakers. With regard to the even higher Senior sympathies, we hypothesize that this might actually be caused by *interference* of the Papiamentu reduplication: overall, these speakers have arguably been more exposed to Papiamentu, and might therefore show more interference from this language into Dutch. The combination of the last two findings may suggest that the two competing hypotheses about the acceptability of CR in Curaçaoan Dutch both are correct: even though not necessarily the amount of time spent in the Netherlands but a pro-Dutch might favour acceptability of CR (generally, for all age groups), seniors approving CR more than adults might be due to language interference/contact.

Provisional though they are, the presented results highlight the importance of fusing a morphosyntactic focus with sociolinguistic (demographic and ideological) depth when studying formal innovation in a post-colonial situation in which the acquisition of Dutch need not be complete and interference from other languages in speakers’ portfolios is bound to impact one’s proficiency.

Selected references •Depuydt, C. 2010. *An emerging variety of Dutch in the Antilles: Determining Papiamentu influence*. MA thesis. Freiburg: Albert-Ludwigs-Universität. •Cavirani-Pots, C. & Dirix, P. 2024. On contrastive reduplication: Adding Dutch to the West Germanic typology. *Leuvense Bijdragen* 104, 38-61 •Corver, N. 2019. Adverbial *-s* as Last Resort: n and a get their support. *NLLT*, 40, 1023-1073 •Diepeveen, A. 2012. *Modifying words. Dutch adverbial morphology in contrast*. PhD dissertation. Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 971-991