

Clause-initial subject doubling in Dutch dialects (Or: Liliane was right after all)

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Abstract

This paper revisits the debate between van Craenenbroeck & van Koppen (2002, 2007) on the one hand and Haegeman (1990, 1992, 2004) on the other regarding the status of clause-initial subject doubling in Dutch dialects. Contrary to our earlier work, we conclude that Haegeman (2004) is right in drawing a principled distinction when it comes to this type of doubling between the dialect of Lapscheure and that of Wambeek. Stronger still, we argue that Haegeman (1990, 1992)'s original position, whereby the first subject element in clause-initial subject doubling is a clitic (rather than a weak pronoun) is indeed the correct analysis. After presenting some arguments—both old and new—in favor of this position, we conclude by considering the broader theoretical implications of this analysis.

1 Introduction: the bone of contention

This paper revolves around a particular configuration of pronominal subject doubling which is attested in various Dutch dialects.¹ It is exemplified in (1) and (2).

- | | | |
|-----|---|------------------|
| (1) | Ze gui zaai.
she.DEFICIENT goes she.STRONG
'She's going.' | Wambeek Dutch |
| (2) | Ze goa zie.
she.DEFICIENT goes she.STRONG
'She's going.' | Lapscheure Dutch |

In both these examples the subject pronoun is expressed twice, but interpreted only once. As such, they represent cases of pronominal subject doubling. Two further characteristics will play a central role in the remainder of this paper. First, one instantiation of the subject is a strong pronoun (*zaai* and *zie*), while the other is deficient (*ze*). Second, these examples display what one could call clause-initial subject doubling, in that the first subject pronoun is also the first element of the clause. Subject doubling is by no means restricted to this sentence type, though: both in the dialect of Wambeek and in that of Lapscheure, subject

¹It gives us great pleasure to be able to dedicate this paper to Liliane. Her contributions both to the field at large and to dialect syntax more specifically simply cannot be overstated. Without Liliane's inspiring work our own linguistic careers probably would have taken a different turn as well.

doubling also occurs in embedded clauses (the a-examples in (3) and (4)) and inverted main clauses (the b-examples in (3) and (4)).

- (3) a. da se zaai guit.
that she.DEFICIENT she.STRONG goes
'that she's going.'
- b. Gui se zaai?
goes she.DEFICIENT she.STRONG
'Is she going?' Wambeek Dutch
- (4) a. da se zie goat.
that she.DEFICIENT she.STRONG goes
'that she's going.'
- b. Goa se zie?
goes she.DEFICIENT she.STRONG
'Is she going?' Lapscheure Dutch

One of the main bones of contention between Haegeman (2004) (henceforth H) and van Craenenbroeck & van Koppen (2007) (henceforth VC&VK) concerns the question of whether (1)–(2) and (3)–(4) represent a unified phenomenon or not. VC&VK claim that they don't: while (3)–(4) are representative of a phenomenon they call clitic doubling, the doubling in (1)–(2) is of a fundamentally different nature, which they call topic doubling. H, on the other hand, contends that for the Lapscheure data, this split is uncalled for and hence that (2) and (4) represent the same type of doubling, in particular clitic doubling. Closely related to this analytical difference is the question of the pronominal status of the first subject element in (1)–(2). VC&VK argue that while clitic doubling (the examples in (3)–(4)) always involves the combination of a clitic and a strong pronoun (in the sense of Cardinaletti & Starke (1999)), topic doubling never contains a clitic. This means that the deficient pronoun at the beginning of the clause in (1)–(2) is a weak pronoun. Haegeman (1990, 1992), on the other hand, claims that the deficient pronoun in all the examples in (2) and (4) are subject clitics. The only difference is that while in (4) the clitic cliticizes onto C in narrow syntax, in (2) it does so at PF.² A central argument in this debate comes from examples like (5) (van Craenenbroeck & van Koppen 2007:157).

- (5) a. { We / * Me } komme waaile mergen.
we.WEAK we.CLITIC come we.STRONG tomorrow
'We are coming tomorrow.'
- b. da { * we / me } waaile mergen kommen.
that we.WEAK we.CLITIC we.STRONG tomorrow come
'that we are coming tomorrow.'

²The reason for this difference is the Verb Second requirement, which regulates that specCP should be filled in a declarative main clause in Dutch (dialects), so the clitic can only move to C at PF, after it has satisfied V2 at Spell-Out. Haegeman (2004:132–133) reinterprets this difference as a difference in pronominal status: *ze* is a clitic in (4), but a weak pronoun in (2). As van Craenenbroeck & van Koppen (2007:157) point out, however, this claim risks undermining the unified account of clitic doubling in (2) and (4). Moreover, given that we will argue that *ze* is in fact a clitic in both (2) and (4), we will stick with Haegeman (1990, 1992)'s original analysis in the remainder of the paper and not follow Haegeman (2004)'s reinterpretation.

- c. Mergen komme { * we / me } waaille.
 tomorrow come we.WEAK we.CLITIC we.STRONG
 'Tomorrow we are coming.' Wambeek Dutch

In the first person plural the dialect of Wambeek makes a morphological distinction between its clitic and its weak pronoun, and as the examples in (5) make clear, it is the clitic pronoun that shows up in embedded clauses and inverted main clauses (clitic doubling contexts according to VC&VK), whereas the weak pronoun appears in subject-initial main clauses (topic doubling). According to VC&VK, exactly the same distribution underlies the examples in (1)–(4), save for the fact that the deficient form *ze* is homophonous between a clitic and a weak pronoun. In a sense, then, those examples are less informative than the ones in (5). H, on the other hand, contends that within Lapscheure (where no minimal pairs like the ones in (5) can be constructed) there is no evidence in favor of a different status of *ze* and so the conclusion drawn on the Wambeek data does not carry over to Lapscheure.

In this paper we revisit this debate, and conclude, contrary to our earlier work, that Haegeman (1990, 1992, 2004) is right, and that the type of doubling illustrated in (2) is of a fundamentally different nature than the one in (1): while the latter is a case of topic doubling, the former represents clitic doubling, exactly like the examples in (3)–(4).³ In support of this position, we present four arguments, which we lay out in detail in the next section.

2 Arguments for a clitic doubling analysis

2.1 Introduction

In this section we present four arguments in favor of the hypothesis outlined in the previous section. Some of these arguments are known from the literature (though not always explicitly acknowledged as such), others are new.

2.2 Coordination

As pointed out by (Cardinaletti & Starke 1999:169), weak pronouns differ from clitics in that the former can but the latter cannot be a shared subject of a predicate coordination. If the two dialects under consideration here differ in the pronominal status of clause-initial deficient pronouns, we expect that difference to be manifested there as well. As the examples in (6) (van Craenenbroeck & van Koppen 2000:12) and (7) show, this expectation is borne out.

- (6) *'k Spelen op de piano en zingen altijd geweldig.
 I.DEFICIENT play on the piano and sing always great
 INTENDED: 'I play the piano and always sing wonderfully.' Lapscheure Dutch

³Fortunately, we have not always been wrong-headed: in van Craenenbroeck & van Koppen (2000:40) we conclude, partly based on data from the Lapscheure dialect, "that West Flemish does not have [topic] doubling". We should have stuck to that initial position.

(7) 'k Guin nuir ojs en zeg em wa da 'k er va paus.
I.DEFICIENT go to home and tell him what that I there.of think
'I'm going home and will tell him what I think.'
Wambeek Dutch

While in Lapscheure Dutch the deficient pronoun 'k cannot occur as the shared subject of a predicate coordination, its identically sounding counterpart in the Wambeek dialect can. This suggests that there is a difference in pronominal status between these two elements: 'k is a clitic in (6), but a weak pronoun in (7). This is consistent with a clitic doubling analysis of (2) and a topic doubling analysis of (1).

2.3 Geographical distribution

A second way to distinguish clitic doubling from topic doubling concerns their geographical distribution. As discussed in detail by de Vogelaer & Devos (2008), clitic doubling and topic doubling are typically found in different geographical areas. First consider the map they provide of clitic doubling:

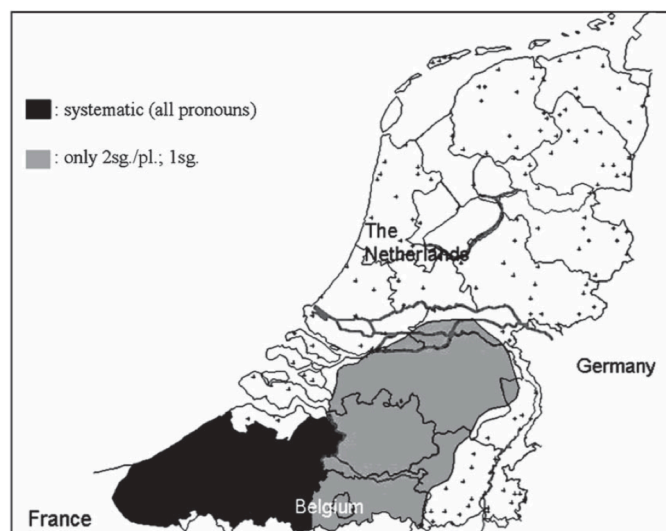


Figure 1: Geographical distribution of clitic doubling (de Vogelaer & Devos 2008:256)

There is a core clitic doubling area, which consists of the provinces of French Flanders, West Flanders, and East Flanders. In addition, there appear to be remnants of a clitic doubling system, where we find what looks like first and second person doubled pronouns. Following Pauwels (1958), Nuyts (1995), de Schutter (1994) and de Vogelaer (2005), we assume that these are not actual cases of (clitic) doubling, but that they involve reanalysis of originally clitic doubled forms as non-doubled, positionally restricted strong pronouns. As such, we will not discuss these forms any further in the rest of the paper.

The distribution of topic doubling can be represented as follows:

Topic doubling is concentrated in the provinces of Flemish Brabant and Antwerp, with extensions into the northeast of East Flanders. When comparing Figure 1 with Figure 2,

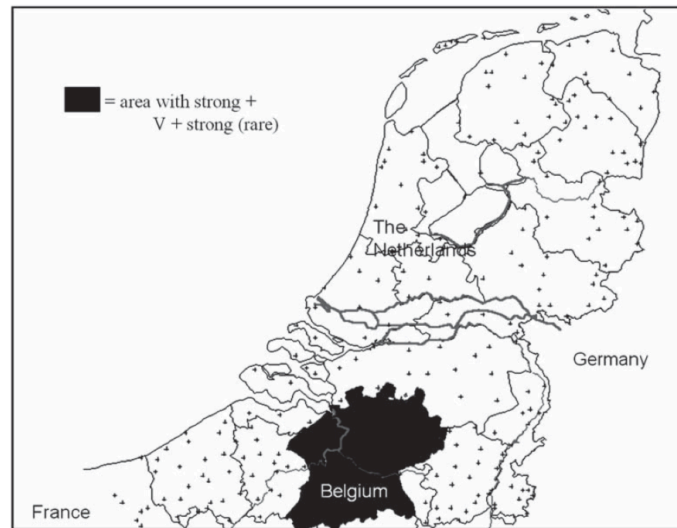


Figure 2: Geographical distribution of topic doubling (de Vogelaer & Devos 2008:257)

it becomes clear that the geographical distribution of clitic doubling and topic doubling is quite distinct—nearly complementary even. This means that we can use the distribution of the phenomena to shed light on the status of the examples in (1)–(2): if they pattern as in Figure 1, we are led to an analysis in terms of clitic doubling, while if they show the distribution in Figure 2, we are dealing with topic doubling. Interestingly, de Vogelaer & Devos (2008) do precisely this. Their findings, as well as their interpretation of these findings, can be found in Figure 3.

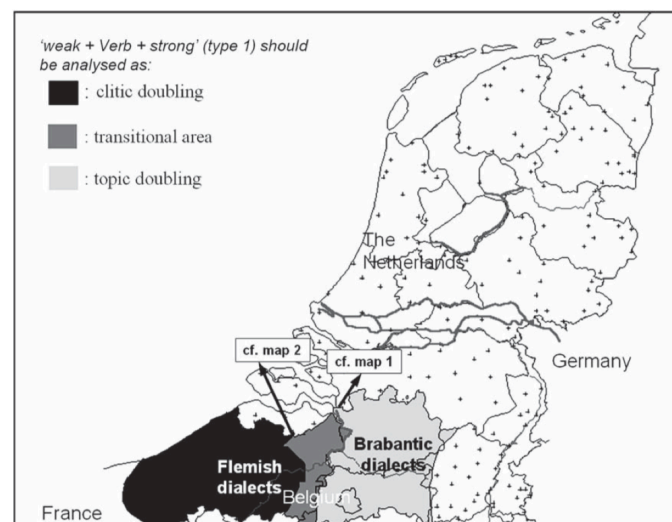


Figure 3: Geographical distribution of the pattern 'deficient+verb+strong' (de Vogelaer & Devos 2008:262)

2.4 Tripling

(8) *Ze goa ze zie.
she.DEFICIENT goes she.CLITIC she.STRONG
INTENDED: 'She's going.' Lapscheure

(9) Ze gui ze zaai.
she.DEFICIENT goes she.CLITIC she.STRONG
'She's going.' Wambeek

The group of dialects uninspiredly referred to as “A-dialects” in Figure 4 are like Lapscheure Dutch in that they disallow pronominal tripling, while the so-called “B-dialects” are like that of Wambeek in allowing the subject to be doubled twice within one sentence. Like the map in Figure 3, then, these facts suggest that the contrast between Lapscheure and Wambeek under investigation in this paper is part of a larger generalization, whereby (roughly) the provinces of French Flanders, West Flanders, and East Flanders behave like Lapscheure Dutch in disallowing topic doubling, while Flemish Brabant and Antwerp are like Wambeek Dutch in having this construction.

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Figure 4: Two dialect groups according to van Craenenbroeck & van Koppen (2006)

2.5 Meaning differences

Van Craenenbroeck & van Koppen (2002) coined the term ‘topic doubling’ for the example in (1) (and—wrongly—also for the one in (2)) to highlight the fact that the first subject element occupies a position in the CP-domain, a region typically associated with information-structural effects. One of the examples they present in support of this position is the minimal pair in (10) (van Craenenbroeck & van Koppen 2002:295).

- (10) a. Een vrou komt a kaffee binn.
 a woman comes a bar in
 ‘A woman enters a bar.’
 b. Een vrou komt zaai a kaffee binn.
 a woman comes she.STRONG a bar in
 ‘Women usually enter a bar.’
 #‘A woman enters a bar.’

Wambeek Dutch

In (10a) the indefinite subject is not doubled and a non-specific indefinite reading is possible, while in (10b) this reading is absent and only a generic interpretation is available. This shows that topic doubled subjects behave like topicalized constituents: both are incompatible with a non-specific indefinite reading.

If the Lapscheure example in (2) represents a case of clitic doubling, not topic doubling, we expect this type of doubling not to be sensitive to information-structural considerations. As far as we know, this has not been looked into in any detail for the Lapscheure dialect (though see Haegeman (1990:335n2) and (Haegeman 2004:127) for occasional remarks about the meaning of this type of doubling), but Uittenhove (2015) examines pre-

cisely this issue for the closely related dialect of Bredene.⁵ Through an extensive questionnaire, he examines whether information-structure has an effect on the use of subject doubling in the dialect of Bredene. He distinguishes between four contexts—new information focus, givenness topic, contrastive focus, and contrastive topic—and examines to what extent these contexts favor subject doubling. The main finding of his research is quite unequivocal: “De zwak-sterkverdubbeling (..) wordt in alle contexten aanvaard. Zowel als focus als als topic krijgt de zwak-sterkverdubbeling van het subject hoge scores”⁶ (Uittenhove 2015:68). This is exactly what we would expect in the context of this paper: if West Flemish lacks topic doubling altogether, then there should be no interaction between subject doubling—i.e. clitic doubling—and the information-structural properties of the subject.

2.6 Conclusion

We have just reviewed four pieces of evidence that all point to the same conclusion: the data in (1) and (2) should not be given a unified account. More specifically, while in Wambeek Dutch topic doubling as in (1) contrasts with the clitic doubling examples in (3), the Lapscheure data in (2) and (4) seem to uniformly point towards a clitic doubling analysis. In addition, we have also shown that there are reasons to think that this interdialectal difference is symptomatic of a larger split, which (roughly) contrasts the Flemish dialects with the Brabantic ones.

3 Conclusion and broader implications

The one-sentence summary of this paper is clear and easy: we were wrong and Liliane was right in the analysis of the Lapscheure data in (2). More generally, it looks like topic doubling, while a real phenomenon, does not extend all the way into the Flemish dialects, but is stopped in its tracks at the Flemish-Brabantic border. The broader implications of this regional divide are, we believe, well worth exploring (see van Craenenbroeck & van Koppen (2016) for relevant discussion).

Another consequence of the proposal developed here relates to Haegeman (1990)’s original analysis of subject doubling in Lapscheure Dutch. Recall from footnote 2 above that the analysis of an example like (2) differed from those in (4) in that the clitic only cliticized to C at PF. The reason for this difference was the V2-requirement of Lapscheure Dutch: the preverbal position has to be filled by an XP at the point of spell-out. However, if we are right that the preverbal subject element in (2) is a true clitic, then the preverbal position is occupied by a head, not an XP in this example. The key to understanding this conclusion, we believe, lies in Joutiteau (2010)’s reclassification of V2-, SVO- and VSO-languages into one single category of X(P)-VSO. The V2-constraint—however implemented and probably more aptly called the X(P)-VSO-constraint—prohibits the finite verb

⁵Both the Lapscheure dialect and the Bredene one are part of so-called coastal West Flemish, see Tældeman (2013).

⁶“Deficient-strong subject doubling is accepted in all contexts. Both as focus and as topic this type of doubling receives high acceptability ratings.”

from being leftmost in the clausal phase (Jouitteau 2011:10), and one of the ways in which this constraint can be respected is by merging a head to the left of the finite verb. Lapscheure Dutch can do this in a context like (2), but Wambeek Dutch cannot. While this distinction might seem far-fetched or arbitrary at first, van Craenenbroeck (2011) argues that there is another context in which the clause-initial position is occupied by a head in Lapscheure Dutch, namely in expletive constructions (see Haegeman (1986), Grange & Haegeman (1989) for extensive discussion):

- (11) T zyn gisteren drie studenten gekomen.
 EXPL are yesterday three students come
 'Three students came yesterday.' Lapscheure Dutch

Van Craenenbroeck (2011) argues that the expletive element *t* should not be analyzed as a reduced form of the third person neuter personal pronoun *het* 'it', but rather as a West Flemish analogue to Welsh or Breton clause-initial particles, with which they share many morphosyntactic properties (Jouitteau 2008, 2010, 2011, Borsley et al. 2007, Willis 1998, 2007). Viewed from this perspective, both the expletive example in (11) and the clitic doubling example in (2) are representative of the X-VSO-nature of Lapscheure Dutch. Working out this connection in more detail is a topic for further research, though.

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