

Expressive morphology in Curaçaoan Dutch

1. Introduction This paper focuses on expressive morphology in one particular variety of Dutch, namely the one spoken on the Caribbean island Curaçao. The language situation on this ex-colony of the Netherlands is multilingual (Papiamentu (Iberian Creole), Dutch, English and Spanish), with Papiamentu seeming to be the emotional language of the speakers (language of proximity and solidarity), whereas Dutch is used in domains such as education and law. The aim of this paper is to present the results of a recent study into the acceptability, morphological variation, and emotion perception of three expressive constructions in Curaçaoan Dutch, namely (i) adverbial diminutives (henceforth AD), (ii) contrastive reduplication (henceforth CR), and (iii) elative taboo compounding (henceforth ETC). These phenomena are mostly part of spoken language in Netherlandic Dutch, crucially though, the first phenomenon is a relatively old phenomenon (Diepeveen 2012), the second an emergent phenomenon (Cavirani-Pots & Dirix 2024, which seems to be a recent borrowing from English (see e.g. Gomeshi et al. 2004)), and the third is a relatively recent phenomenon (Hoeksema 2012). An example of AD is given in (1). A nominal CR example is given in (2) and an adjectival one in (3) (note that verbal CR is also possible). An example of ETC is given in (4). All three phenomena have been labeled as expressive in the literature (Corver 2016, Hoeksema 2012, Cavirani-Pots & Dirix 2024).

- (1) Je moet dat **straks-je-s** doen.
you must that later-dim-s do
'You should do that later (I would really prefer that/I try to say this politely).'
- (2) Ze is op zoek naar een **MANman**.
she is uplook at a man man
'She is looking for a real/prototypical man.'
- (3) Ik hou van **MOOI-E** **mooi-e** schilderijen.
I hold of beautiful-infl beautiful-infl paintings
'I love prototypically beautiful paintings.'
- (4) Je nieuwe auto is **poepmooi**.
your new car is poop-beautiful
'Your new car is super beautiful (personal in-volvement).'

In AD, the diminutive suffix *-je* (plus an additional *-s*, see a.o. Corver 2019; Cloin-Tavenier 2024) appears on an independently existing adverb. In CR, contrastive focus (indicated by caps in the examples) is placed on the reduplicant, triggering a semantic interpretation of 'typical/real'. In ETCs, a taboo noun is the left hand member of an elative compound. In ADs and ETCs we furthermore find variation among Netherlandic Dutch speakers; in ADs the *-s* on the core adverb can be dropped (e.g. *strak-jes* instead of *straks-jes*), and in ETCs some regiolects place a diminutive suffix on the taboo word (e.g. *poep-je-mooi*). Whether these expressive morphological patterns are part of Curaçaoan Dutch – which is mostly used in more formal settings, and not in the informal/colloquial settings in which expressive language is typically used – is the first question we want to answer with our study. The second question we want to answer is how sociolinguistic factors and degree/valence of perceived emotion impact the acceptability of the three phenomena.

2. Hypotheses With respect to AD, given that it is relatively old as a phenomenon of Netherlandic Dutch, our hypothesis was that it is likely that it is also used by Curaçaoan Dutch speakers. However, we also hypothesized that not everyone might accept it, given that the

phenomenon is mostly used in informal/colloquial speech. With respect to CR, two competing hypotheses arose. Given the recent emergence of this phenomenon in Netherlandic Dutch, it might be that CR does not exist in Curaçaoan Dutch – 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 (Kauwenberg & LaCharité 2015; Brute et al. 2019). It might therefore be the case that CR is accepted in Curaçaoan Dutch due to interference from Papiamentu. With respect to ETC, we expected it to be rejected by many speakers, given its highly informal/colloquial status. Finally, with respect to the perceived emotion in these constructions, we hypothesized that AD might trigger a different degree or valence of emotion perception compared to CR and ETCs, due to the fact that in AD it is a functional morpheme that contributes expressivity, whereas in the other two phenomena it is a lexical item that does so, which clearly have conceptual content that might influence the perceived valence.

3. Methodology

2.1 Participants 32 Curaçaoan Dutch speakers took part in the study (Mean age: 62, range 19-85), of which 12 identified themselves as male and 20 as female. All participants were born on Curaçao and have their current residence there.

2.2 Questionnaire design For the data collection, we used a carefully designed questionnaire, which consisted of two practice items, and 22 test items on the three different morphological phenomena. For AD, two different adverbs were used: *iets* ‘somewhat’ and *straks* ‘later’, both of 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*). For CR, four lexical items were used, the verb *lezen* ‘to read’, the noun *man* ‘man’, the noun *jongen* ‘boy’, and the adjective *mooi* ‘beautiful’, each paired with a control variant. For ETC, two different adjectives were tested: *mooi* ‘beautiful’ and *lelijk* ‘ugly’ in three variants: without diminutive (*poepmooi/schijtlelijk* – *poep* and *schijt* are synonyms meaning ‘shit’), with diminutive (*poepjemooi/schijtjelelijk*), both paired with a control variant. All stimuli were presented in spoken guise (3 male and 3 female Curaçaoan Dutch speakers), and were asked to be rated using a 7-point Likert scale on acceptability, after which perceived emotion was tested by means of the 2DAFS instrument (Two-Dimensional Affect and Feeling Space, Lorette 2021), which allows for the measurement of perceived valence (positive/negative) and arousal ((non-)activation). The questionnaire also contained a language background section, investigating a.o. language attitudes.

4. Results and interpretation We executed three separate linear mixed effects regression models on the acceptability of AD, CR and ETCs. The sociolinguistic 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 on Curaçao (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. In addition to that, we added the emotion perception co-variables, namely the scores on valence (perceived positive/negative emotion) and arousal (perceived activation).

3.1 Main results sociolinguistic factors influencing acceptability For AD, we found a

near-significant interaction ($p=.0974$) between Variant and Time spent in the Netherlands. That is, participants who spent more than ten years of their life in the Netherlands, accepted the variant without -s (i.e. the more colloquial variant) more than those who spent less time in the Netherlands. This is not surprising: speakers who spent time in the Netherlands are more likely to have learned this colloquial variant. For CR, we report two main findings. First, we found a near-significant interaction ($p=.096$) between Variant and Attitude. That is, participants who have a pro-Dutch attitude accept the CR variants to a higher degree, which might indicate that speakers who are interested in the Dutch language are more open towards accepting emerging morphological phenomena in their Dutch. Second, 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 unsurprising: 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. For ETC, we found a significant interaction between Variant and Attitude: both expressive variants (with and without the diminutive suffix) are accepted more by participants with a pro-Dutch attitude. This indicates that speakers with a positive attitude towards this language are more likely to accept regional variants (i.e. the Dim-Variant) – even if they never lived in the regions in which this variant is used. 3.2 Main results emotion perception For AD, we found a significant effect of Arousal. That is, participants rate the acceptability of the expressive variants higher when they perceive more arousal. For CR and ETC we find a similar effect, however, in this case it is a significant effect of Valence; higher perceived valence (in either positive or negative direction) results in a higher acceptability score for the expressive variants. This means that perceived emotion compensates for lower acceptability of expressive constructions. These findings furthermore suggest that both truth-conditional and use-conditional meaning contribute to the acceptability of expressive constructions. During the talk, we will discuss the theoretical implications of these findings, in which we will propose that the finding that an expressive functional morpheme (AD) triggers arousal perception is due to the fact that this is a functional head, and that the fact that CR and ETC trigger valence perception is due to their conceptual content/status as roots. Furthermore, we build on the proposal by Corver (2016) that expressivity is triggered by grammatically unexpected positioning of functional heads, extending this to roots in non-canonical positions for CR and ETC.

References • Cavirani-Pots, C. & Dirix, P. 2024. On contrastive reduplication: Adding Dutch to the West Germanic typology. *Leuvense Bijdragen* 104, 38-61 • Corver, N. 2016. Emotion in the build of Dutch. *Tijdschrift voor de Nederlandse Taalen Letterkunde*, 132, 232-276 • Diepeveen, A. 2012. Modifying words. Dutch adverbial morphology in contrast. PhD dissertation. Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin • Lorette, P. 2021. Investigating Emotion Perception via the Two- Dimensional Affect and Feeling Space. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 1-14