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## On the Dutch expletive and related syntactic problems

Kornelis J. Boot

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ON THE DUTCH EXPLETIVE  
AND RELATED  
SYNTACTIC PROBLEMS

by

Kornelis J. Boot

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This thesis submitted by Kornelis Johannes Boot in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota is hereby approved by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done.

---

D. G. Frantz, Chairman

---

John P. Daly

---

Bruno F. O. Hildebrandt

---

Dean of the Graduate School

Permission

Title ON THE DUTCH EXPLETIVE AND RELATED SYNTACTIC PROBLEMS

Department Linguistics

Degree Master of Arts

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Date July 27, 1976

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## ABSTRACT

In his Über das niederländische Adverbialpronomen 'er' Bech argues that the subject expletive of Dutch is inserted when the NP subject has an indefinite article. Bech also claims that the subjective expletive is a local subject and not a logical subject.

This thesis proposes that the use of the subject expletive cannot be based upon a traditional structuralist concept. The author rejects some of Bech's claims and argues for a semantic distinction between definiteness and non-definiteness as a basis for expletive insertion. An attempt is also made to apply the same distinction in accounting for the use of het with object complements.

Working within the framework called Relational Grammar, the author shows that each of the expletives has true grammatical relations of subject, direct object, or location to a verb.

Finally, constraints on combinations of er's in one sentence are shown to be controlled by a hierarchical principle.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### I.1 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the use of the Dutch expletive er and explore some related syntactic problems within the theory of Relational Grammar. When learning the Dutch language as a foreign language, students are especially frustrated when they have to memorize sentences with the word er. This is, in part, why I have chosen this topic.

In many grammar texts there are various lists to illustrate the proper use of the word er, but I am not aware of any conclusive statements concerning this syntactic topic. Bech and Paardekooper are, as far as I know, the only grammarians who have made an in-depth study of the expletive and other er-words. Bech's contribution to er has been lauded by many linguists. Paardekooper offers many examples of grammatical and ungrammatical sentences with the word er. However, it will be pointed out that Bech and Paardekooper have not sufficiently explained why the expletive er or het behaves as it does.

If we want to make any advances at all in Dutch



grammar, or in any specific grammar, then we must become aware of the underlying universal principles of the lingual phenomena. I believe that Relatioanl Grammar (Postal and Perlmutter; in preparation) can help us in this respect. Relational Grammar provides us with a set of laws by which we will be able to explain why we find certain phenomena such as the Dutch expletive in a particular language or languages. While my exposure to Relational Grammar has been miniscule, it has already proved beneficial to me. It is my wish that this thesis, in a very small way, may also contribute to the science of linguistics.

## I.2 Some Characteristics of the Dutch Language

### I.2.1 Word Order of Dutch Sentences

We first consider some characteristics of word order. Dutch has a split predicate. This means that any compound predicate occupies separate positions in the sentence or clause. These positions are usually called P1 and P2, or the first part of the predicate and the second part of the predicate. The inflected finite part of the verb is in the P1 position, and the non-finite part of the verb is in the P2 position. The "sentence field" or the "mid field" may be filled by the subject or by some other element. Only imperatives and yes-no interrogative sentences will not have an

element in the front field. The sentence will start then with the finite verb (Kruisinga, 1949: 133, 134). In any case, there may be only one syntactic element in the front field. To the right of P2 we have the "back field", which also contains one syntactic element.

1. Eergisteren zijn we al vertrokken, niet gisteren.

	P1	P2
front field	mid field	back field
The day before yesterday we had departed, not yesterday.		

When the Dutch speakers want to topicalize an element in a declarative sentence, the topicalized element will occupy the front field:

2a. Nu vertrekt de trein.

Now the train departs.

The same holds for subjects with definite determiners:

2b. De trein vertrekt.

The train departs.

Or the speaker may want to topicalize an entire clause, in which case this clause will occupy the front field:

2c. Toen de klok negen sloeg, vertrok de trein.

When the clock struck nine, the train departed.

## CHAPTER II

### THE NON-DEFINITE SUBJECT EXPLETIVE

#### II.1 Bech's Contribution

We shall analyze the Dutch expletive syntactically, but first we should summarize what Bech has contributed to this study. He pointed out that er-sentences are sentences with intransitive verbs:

3. Er zwom een vis in de vijver.

A fish swam in the pond.

or sentences that are in the passive:

4. Er werd een brug gebouwd.

A bridge was built.

As Bech observes, it is also possible to have the following er-sentence:

5. Er wacht u een verrassing.

A surprise is awaiting you.

Bech suggests that through the introduction of er the logical subject is moved to the place where the object would appear in transitive sentences. He calls this object das topische Object 'the local object', and the expletive er he calls das topische Subject 'the local subject', because it has taken the place which is the slot for the logical subject (1952: 16).

Bech compares the intransitive sentence 3 with the transitive sentence 6:

6. Ik zag een vis in de vijver.

I saw a fish in the pond.

He also compares sentence 5 with:

7. Hij bereidt u een verrassing.

He prepares a surprise for you.

Bech has a rule by which he compares these sets of sentences, which he calls the "isomorphy rule." This rule states that every expletive sentence, in addition to the local subject er, also contains a logical or grammatical subject, and that these expletive sentences can be changed to transitive sentences which have the same word order as the expletive sentences when er is replaced by a subject pronoun (or men 'one') and the intransitive (or passive) verb is replaced by an active, transitive verb (1952: 17). This means that een vis 'a fish' which is the local object of 3 is isomorphic to the logical object of 6, and een verrassing 'a surprise' which is the local object of 5 is isomorphic to the logical object of 7, because they stand in the same position as the logical objects. The isomorphy rule is thus a test for word order at the surface level; it tells us which slot the elements occupy. With the passive sentence 4 it is not necessary to apply the isomorphy rule. Simply changing 4 to the active results in this construction:

8. Men bouwde een brug.

One built a bridge.

This example shows that the local object of 4 is in the same position as the logical or grammatical object of 8. It is also noteworthy that the indirect object u 'you' of sentence 5 is not affected by the isomorphy rule. In sentence 7 u 'you' has the same function as in 5 (1952: 20, 21).

Bech takes issue here with Jespersen, who asserts that the subject is a relatively familiar element, to which the predicate adds new information. Jespersen states that in every sentence there are primary words and secondary words. The primary words are more fixed and less fluid than the secondary words. The subject is always a primary word, which means that the subject is comparatively definite and special. In this connection Jespersen points out a disinclination to take a word with an indefinite article as subject of the sentence (Jespersen, 1963: 145 - 154).

Bech observes that Dutch also has a disinclination to take a word with an indefinite article or any indefinite word as subject of the sentence. He maintains that Dutch speakers would rather say

9. Er liep iemand achter hem.

Someone walks behind him.

than

10. Iemand liep achter hem.

Someone walks behind him.

because the subject iemand 'someone' is indefinite. Bech suggests that er, rather than the indefinite NP, is the local subject, and that this er includes the definiteness which is necessary for a logical subject (1952: 14, 15). Thus Bech disagrees with Jespersen (1963: 155), who argues that expletives have an "indefinite signification."

Bech also points out that verb agreement is with the logical subject and not with the local subject. His contribution can be summarized as follows:

1. The Dutch expletive er is the local subject of the er-sentence.
2. The Dutch expletive er is more than just a syntactic slot filler. Its presence is associated with the indefiniteness of the logical subject.

Although we do not have to be in full agreement with Bech, we can appreciate that Bech senses that there is more to the function and meaning of the expletive than merely assuming a position in a string of words.

#### II.1.1 Critique of Bech's View

Bech stated that any indefinite word used as a subject requires er-insertion. Under indefinite words he lists: nouns with indefinite article, all plural nouns without

article, quantifiers without article, and indefinite pronouns. This would require that generic statements, whose subjects have an indefinite article before the noun or a plural noun without article, also need er-insertion. But this is not true. The following grammatical sentences are generic statements:

11a. Een vis zwemt in het water.

A fish swims in the water.

11b. Vissen zwemmen in het water.

Fish swim in the water.

If an er is inserted in such examples, the sentence is no longer generic:

12a. Er zwemt een vis in het water.

A fish swims in the water.

12b. Er zwemmen vissen in het water.

Fish swim in the water.

We have no argument with Bech when he states that er-insertion may not be applied when een vis 'a fish' is changed to de vis 'the fish' and vissen 'fish pl.' to de vissen 'the fish pl.'.

13a. \*Er zwemt de vis in het water.

The fish swims in the water.

13b. \*Er zwemmen de vissen in het water.

The fish swim in the water.

Both of these may not have er-insertion. The following two

sentences are the grammatical counterparts of 13 a and b:

14a. De vis zwemt in het water.

The fish swims in the water.

14b. De vissen zwemmen in het water.

The fish swim in the water.

Our criticism is that the use of er cannot be based upon a traditional structuralist concept, in this case upon the distinction between definite and indefinite articles. Rather, the use of er should be based upon a semantic concept. In this paper, we will distinguish between definite and non-definite NP's. Among definite NP's we include those whose reference is assumed by the speaker to be established in the mind of the addressee (14a and b). Note that this includes generic NP's, which refer to a particular set assumed to be established. Non-definite utterances introduce new information in the discourse, as is exemplified by the following:

15. Er zwemt een vis in het water.

{ A fish is swimming in the water.  
 { There is a fish swimming in the water.

16. Is het een forel?

Is it a trout?

17. Ik weet het niet, maar er zwemt een grote vis daar.

I don't know, but { a big fish is swimming there.  
 { there is a big fish swimming  
 /there.



In sentence 17 more new information is added in the discourse, which necessitates er-insertion. When the speaker feels that reference is sufficiently established, the discourse will continue with definite utterances:

18. Weet je wat? Ik ga de vis vangen!

You know something? I'm going to catch the fish!

19. Nee, ik! Ik heb de vis eerst gezien.

No, I! I have seen the fish first.

## II.2 Relational Grammar

Relational Grammar (Postal and Perlmutter, in preparation) claims that grammatical relations are of primary importance at all levels of syntax. The following are called "pure" grammatical relations: subject-of (1), direct-object-of (2), and indirect-object-of (3). Other grammatical relations, such as instrumental (instr), benefactive (ben), goal (g1), and locative (loc) are "impure" grammatical relations. The first are called "terms" and the latter "non-terms." These non-terms have independent semantic content. The following illustration shows some of the relationships as indicated by placement of numerals. We will also use P1 and P2 to indicate the predicate as was shown in section I.2.1.

20a. Men vond een brief op tafel.

1 P1 2 loc

One found a letter on the table.

In 20a we see that men 'one' and een brief 'a letter' respectively have a subject-of (1) and a direct-object-of (2) relation to the predicate vond 'found', whereas op tafel 'on the table' has an impure grammatical relation of location. Applying a passive transformation to 20a results in this structure:

20b.	werd	gevonden	door men	een brief	op tafel	
	P1	P2	lch	l	loc	
	was found		by one	a letter	on the table	

In 20b we see that the subject-of relation of 20a has been usurped by the direct-object-of relation of 20a; i.e. the NP in the direct-object-of relation of 20a is promoted to the subject-of relation of 20b. But the same relation-changing rule indirectly causes the old subject to be put "en chômage," a special grammatical relation for NP's which have had their former termhood usurped by another NP. Johnson (to appear: 1 - 7) calls this the Relational Annihilation Principle. Thus, (1) of 20a becomes (lch) of 20b.

Dutch has a rule which states that the agent of passive sentences becomes zero with indefinite pronouns. More accurately, men 'one' is a filler for an unspecified subject, and this filler cannot appear as non-subject. Therefore, 20b will appear at the surface as:

20c. Een brief werd op tafel gevonden.

A letter was found on the table.

When een brief 'a letter' is introduced for the first

time in a discourse context er-insertion is required:

20d. werd gevonden er een brief op tafel

P1      P2      l      lch      loc

In this example, een brief 'a letter' is chômeured. Within a given clause we may have only one subject-of, one direct-object-of, and one indirect-object-of relation, although it is possible to have more than one chômeured relation of a kind within a clause. Within Relational Grammar the relation-changing rules either promote or chômeur the terms. Applying surface structure rules to 20d results in this form:

20e. Er werd een brief op tafel gevonden.

A letter was found on the table.

Bech was correct in stating that the expletive becomes the local subject and that there is verb agreement with the logical subject. Relational Grammar would have no basic disagreement with these observations. Relational Grammar makes a much stronger claim than Bech did, however. Relational Grammar has a relation changing rule, called "dummy insertion," by which the subject-of relation of the underlying subject is usurped by the "dummy," in this case, the expletive er. This er has a subject-of relation to the predicate, explaining why er is in the front field, which can be filled by a subject. Within the framework of Relational Grammar, the relation to the predicate is paramount, and from this relation we can draw consequences for word order. According to Bech, the use

of er is explained from the vantage point of word order.

Let us consider the following sentences:

21. Er ligt een krant op tafel.

A newspaper lies on the table.

22. Er liggen kranten op tafel.

Newspapers lie on the table.

In this connection, Bech notes that verb agreement is with the grammatical subject. Relational Grammar describes this by saying that we have "brother-in-law" agreement in such cases, where the brother-in-law of a dummy is defined as the  $\hat{\text{ch\^o}}\text{meur}$  created by the insertion of that dummy. In 21 the  $\hat{\text{ch\^o}}\text{meured}$  een krant 'a newspaper' is brother-in-law to er. This accounts for the singular verb form ligt 'lies' agreeing with the singular een krant 'a newspaper', and for the plural verb form liggen 'lie' agreeing with the plural kranten 'newspapers'.

### II.3 Evidence for Subject Status of 'er'

#### II.3.1 Subject-verb inversion

First of all, Dutch is a language that must have a surface subject in its grammatical sentences.<sup>2</sup> This is based upon the notion that expletives behave in the same manner as NP's do with regard to subject-verb inversion:

23a. De boeken liggen op tafel.

l            Pl            loc

The books are lying on the table.

23b. *Liggen de boeken op tafel?*

Pl            1            loc

Are the books lying on the table?

Let us compare the sentences of 23 with those of 24:

24a. *Er liggen boeken op tafel.*

1        Pl        lch        loc

There are books lying on the table.

24b. *Liggen er boeken op tafel?*

Pl    1    lch        loc

Are there books lying on the table?

These sentences show that both NP subjects and the expletive undergo subject-verb inversion.

A similar argument can be constructed for the expletive het (het is discussed in chapter III). In this case we will compare an NP-subject with an er-subject and a het-subject:

25a. *De wind waait.*

1        Pl

The wind blows.

25b. *Waait de wind?*

Pl        1

Does the wind blow?

26a. *Er waait een harde wind.*

1    Pl            lch

A hard wind blows.

26b. Waait er een harde wind?

Pl l lch

Does a hard wind blow?

27a. Het waait.

l Pl

It blows.

27b. Waait het?

Pl l

Does it blow?

From these examples we may conclude that the subject expletive er and het behave in the same manner as NP-subjects with regard to subject-verb inversion.

### II.3.2 Subject-to-subject Raising

Dutch has a rule of subject-to-subject raising, as illustrated in the following examples:

28a. schijnt /dat de kinderen in de tuin spelen/<sup>3</sup>

Pl l

When we apply subject-to-subject raising to the underlying structure above, the derived structure will have de kinderen 'the children' as subject. According to the Relational Succession Law (Johnson, to appear: 8), an NP which ascends assumes the grammatical relation of the host out of which it ascends. The embedded verb, left with no subject, is necessarily infinitivized in Dutch, as in most other Indo-European languages:

28b. De kinderen schijnen in de tuin te spelen.

The children seem to be playing in the garden.

To use this process as a test for subjecthood of er, we consider whether the complement subject expletive of 29a can ascend to become subject of the matrix verb.

29a. schijnt /dat er kinderen in de tuin spelen/

Pl

l

If so, this would produce 29b, which we find to be well-formed:

29b. Er schijnen kinderen in de tuin te spelen.

There seem to be children playing in the garden.

However, this is not the only possible explanation for 29b. The same sentence could arise by er-insertion in place of kinderen 'children' in 29c.

29c. Kinderen schijnen in de tuin te spelen.

Children seem to be playing in the garden.

The two derivations make different predictions about the derived structure, however. If 29b is derived from 29a, kinderen 'children' is still a constituent of the complement, while deriving from 29c makes kinderen a constituent of the matrix. Against the latter is the acceptability of 29d, in which the locative phrase occurs between the matrix verb and kinderen. Normally, nothing can felicitously intervene between Pl and the chômeur created by er-insertion:

29d. Er schijnen in de tuin kinderen te spelen.

There seem to be children playing in the garden.

Though 29e is not completely unacceptable, it is much less natural than sentence 29d:

29e. ?Er spelen in de tuin kinderen.

There are children playing in the garden.

Therefore, we accept subject-to-subject raising as a slight support for er-raising analysis.<sup>4</sup>

### II.3.3 Subject-to-object Raising

Let us now consider subject-to-object raising:

30a. Jan ziet /dat zij Piet wast/

1 Pl 2

John sees that she washes Peter.

When we raise the subject zij 'she' of the embedded clause to the matrix, then, according to the Relational Succession Law, zij 'she' will assume the direct-object-of relation of the host clause out of which it ascends. Accordingly the pronoun appears in the accusative form haar 'her':

30b. Jan ziet haar /Piet wassen/ 5

1 Pl 2 2ch

John sees her wash Peter.

The following sentence has er as a subject expletive in the complement:

31a. Jan ziet /dat er iemand Piet wast/

1 Pl 2

John sees that there is someone washing Peter.

Parallel with the previous example, the subject of the embedded clause ascends to the object of the matrix:



31b. Jan ziet er /iemand Piet wassen/

1 Pl 2 2ch

John sees someone wash Peter.

By the Relational Annihilation Principle the embedded clause ceases to bear the direct-object-of relation to the predicate, but is chômeured (Johnson, to appear:6).

From the behavior of er with respect to subject-to-object raising, we may conclude that er has subject status.

Our findings in this section concur with what we established in the previous two sections. This should be ample evidence that the expletive er has a subject-of relation to the predicate.

#### II.4 An Additional Constraint on 'er'

The reader may have wondered why all of the examples we have used so far are intransitive sentences. In the Dutch language there is evidently a constraint against the subject expletive er in transitive sentences. Transitive sentences are sentences which have a subject-of and a direct-object -of relation at the surface structure.

The following represents the variety of transitive declarative sentences:

32. 1 Pl (NT)<sub>n</sub> 2 P2

The formula represents transitive sentences which have direct objects with a nondefinite reference. These objects are

placed at the end of the mid field, immediately preceding P2. Definite NP-objects occur earlier in the mid field.  $(NT)_n$  represents the non-terms. The non-terms are adverbs or oblique NP's. These oblique NP's are always marked by a preposition. The P2 position is filled by the infinitive or past participle when P1 contains auxiliaries. The following are examples which fit formula 32:

33a. Iemand kocht gisteren een geweer.

1      P1      NT      2

Someone bought a gun yesterday.

33b. Iemand heeft gisteren een geweer gekocht.

1      P1      NT      2      P2

Someone has bought a gun yesterday.

For interrogative sentences or declarative sentences with a topicalized NT we have the following formula:

34.     $(NT)$     P1    1     $(NT)_n$     2    P2

A sample sentence for an interrogative sentence would be:

35a. Heeft iemand gisteren een geweer gekocht?

P1      1              NT      2              P2

Has someone bought a gun yesterday?

When we topicalize an NT, this NT would fill the front field:

35b. Gisteren heeft iemand een geweer gekocht.

NT      P1      1              2              P2

Yesterday someone has bought a gun.

From these sentences we can infer that in grammatical

transitive sentences, the subject is always either immediately before P1 or immediately after P1. The next unmarked NP will be the direct object.

Given these facts, it is not unlikely that speakers of Dutch, when processing a declarative sentence, make use of a perceptual strategy which can be verbally stated something like: the first unmarked NP after the subject is the direct object. (It must be understood that perceptual strategies are not foolproof, but exist in something like a hierarchy of guesses about structure. When one 'guess' turns out to be wrong, a new strategy is tried.)

If we apply the er-insertion rule to transitive sentences, the underlying NP-subject is  $\hat{c}h\hat{o}meured$  and er becomes subject. This gives us the following unacceptable formula:

36. \* 1 P1 lch (NT)<sub>n</sub> 2 (P2)

or when the  $\hat{c}h\hat{o}meured$  subject is topicalized:

37. \* lch P1 1 (NT)<sub>n</sub> 2 (P2)

Parallel with formula 34 we have:

38. \* (NT) P1 1 lch (NT)<sub>n</sub> 2 (P2)

Since the  $\hat{c}h\hat{o}meured$  NP's are not marked in Dutch, the perceptual strategy mentioned above would consistently mislead a hearer of sentences of the pattern 36 into initially hypothesizing that the NP (the lch) following a transitive verb is a direct object. So it may well be avoidance of such

"false starts" in sentence interpretation that is the motivation for the constraint against er-insertion as subject of transitive clauses. This hypothesis predicts that if direct objects were marked distinctively in Dutch, er-insertion would be possible in transitive clauses as well

### II.5 Summary

In section II.1 we elaborated on and criticized Bech's view concerning er. Bech's main contribution dealt with the word order of the expletive. He also suggested that the use of er is associated with the indefinite article. Our critique on the latter was that the use of er is based upon a semantic distinction of definiteness and non-definiteness.

In section II.2 we explained how Relational Grammar treats the use of er. Of real importance is that er has a subject-of relation to the predicate.

Evidence for the subject status of er is given in section II.3. Subject-verb inversion and subject-to-object raising provide strong evidence that er is subject. Subject-to-subject raising provides a weaker evidence for our hypothesis.

The last section discussed the constraint against er in transitive sentences. We suggested that there may be a functional explanation for this constraint.

CHAPTER III  
SENTENTIAL COMPLEMENT EXPLETIVES

III.1. Subject Complements

A few verbs, as waar zijn 'to be true', vreemd zijn 'to be strange', and schijnen 'to seem' will take subject complements. The following sentence will serve as an example:

40a. vreemd zijn /dat hij komt/  
Pl                    I  
to be strange /that he comes/  
Dat hij komt is vreemd.  
That he comes is strange.

The verb vreemd zijn 'to be strange' has optional extraposition. Insertion of the dummy het accompanies extraposition:

40b. vreemd zijn    het    /dat hij komt/  
Pl                    I                    Ich  
to be strange    it    /that he comes/  
Het is vreemd dat hij komt.  
It is strange that he comes.

As indicated, we claim that het has been inserted as subject, and the complement has consequently become a chômeur. Now let us use the verb schijnen 'to seem' as an example:

41a. schijnen /dat er een harde wind waait/  
 Pl 1  
 seem /that a hard wind is blowing/

The verb schijnen 'to seem' requires obligatory extraposition:

41b. schijnen het /dat er een harde wind waait/  
 Pl 1 lch  
 seem it /that a hard wind is blowing/

Het schijnt dat er een harde wind waait.

It seems that there is a hard wind blowing.

In sentence 41b, het is the subject expletive. If this is true, then subject-verb inversion should give us a grammatical sentence:

41c. Schijnt het dat er een harde wind waait?

Does it seem that there is a hard wind blowing?

We also have a grammatical sentence when we enter a non-term in the front field:

41d. Toch schijnt het dat er een harde wind waait.

Still, it seems, that there is a hard wind blowing.

Passivized forms, such as 42, which are derived from sentential object complements, will be dealt with in section III.2.1.

42. Het wordt vergeten dat hij arm is.

It is forgotten that he is poor.

Another group of passivized forms which are derived from object complements are those with verbs that require prepositions. These will be discussed in section III.2.2.

### III.2 Object Complements

#### III.2.1 Distribution of 'het'

The Dutch linguist Th. van den Hoek says that there is a parallelism between the conditions for the use of the definite article and factive verbs. He claims that embedded sentences with factive verbs in the matrix behave as NP's with definite articles. And embedded sentences with non-factive verbs in the matrix behave as nouns with indefinite articles (Verkuyl, 1974: 184). While these claims have led us to consider factivity, as we shall see, they are not quite correct.

Let us investigate some of these sentences. Among the non-factive verbs are the following:

beweren	'to assert'
geloven	'to believe'
hopen	'to hope'
ontkennen	'to deny'
vermoeden	'to presume'
veronderstellen	'to suppose'
vertellen	'to tell'
verwachten	'to expect'
wensen	'to wish'

These non-factive verbs do not presuppose that their object complements are true. For example, in 43a, dat hij

drinkt 'that he drinks' is not presupposed to be true:

43a. Men beweert dat hij drinkt.

One asserts that he drinks.

With such non-factive verbs it is impossible to insert het following the matrix verb:

43b. \*Men beweert het, dat hij drinkt.

One asserts that he drinks.

Let us also consider factive verbs. A few are:

betreuren	'to regret'
bewijzen	'to prove'
erkennen	'to acknowledge'
lijken	'to like'
toegeven	'to admit'
vergeten	'to forget'
weten	'to know'

A factive verb presupposes that its complement is true. E.g. in 44a, dat hij drinkt 'that he drinks' is presupposed to be true:

44a. Men betreurt dat hij drinkt.

One regrets that he drinks.

The factive verb betreuren 'to regret' also allows het before its complement (the "optionality" of this het will be the topic of the following section):

44b. Men betreurt het, dat hij drinkt.

One regrets it, that he drinks.

Such sentences with and without het can be paired with



passive sentences. To 44a corresponds the following passive sentence:

44c. Er wordt betreurd dat hij drinkt.

It is regretted that he drinks.

And to sentence 44b corresponds the following:

44d. Het wordt betreurd dat hij drinkt.

It is regretted that he drinks.

### III.2.2 Provenience of 'het'

As we have said, factive verbs presuppose that their complement is true. In addition to indicating factiveness, we claim that the speaker may also indicate an assumption that the addressee is familiar with the content of the complement, by marking this complement with the definite article het. Let us illustrate this with a discussion about the character of a person named Jan. When the speaker refers to Jan's character for the first time, the following sentence could be a part of the discourse:

45a. Ik betreur dat Jan drinkt.

I regret that John drinks.

However, if Jan's drinking has been referred to before, then the following would be the appropriate expression:

45b. Ik betreur het, dat Jan drinkt.

I regret it, that John drinks.

The object complement of 45a is non-definite, whereas the

object complement of 45b is definite. Sentence 45b can be paraphrased as 45c. This does not hold for 45a, because nominalization of factive object complements assumes definiteness.

45c. Ik betreur zijn drinken.

I regret his drinking.

Non-factive verbs cannot be combined with definite object complements. The following sentences are ungrammatical:

46a. \*Zij beweert het, dat hij drinkt.

She asserts that he drinks.

46b. \*Zij beweert het drinken.

She asserts the drinking.

46c. \*Zij beweert zijn drinken.

She asserts his drinking.

Definiteness assumes factivity, which explains the ungrammaticality of the above sentences.

Let us now see how definite and non-definite factive object complements might be analysed within the framework of Relational Grammar. We hypothesize that a definite factive object complement has the definite article het in its underlying form. (Such complements are paraphrases of the definite nominalized phrases such as het drinken 'the drinking' or zijn drinken 'his drinking'.)

47a. Zij betreurt /het dat hij drinkt/

1 P1 2

She regrets /the that he drinks/

Under this analysis, het ascends to the matrix, assuming the direct-object-of relation (by the Relational Succession Law) and the object complement becomes a chômeur (Relational Annihilation Law).<sup>6</sup>

47b. Zij betreurt het /dat hij drinkt/

1 P1 2 2ch

She regrets it /that he drinks/

Zij betreurt het dat hij drinkt.

She regrets it that he drinks.

This het, now being a direct object, may be advanced to subject, to give the passive counterpart 47c:

47c. wordt betreurd door haar het /dat hij drinkt/

P1 P2 agent 1 2ch

Het wordt door haar betreurd dat hij drinkt.

It is regretted by her that he drinks.

Now, let us consider a factive object complement without the definite article het in its underlying structure:

48a. Zij betreurt /dat hij drinkt/

1 P1 2

She regrets /that he drinks/

Since there is no het to ascend, the complement remains a direct object, and as such may be advanced to give 48b:

48b. wordt betreurd door haar /dat hij drinkt/  
 P1 P2 agent l  
 is regretted by her /that he drinks/

Since this factive object complement is non-definite, obligatory er-insertion applies just as for other non-definite NP subjects (see chapter II):

48c. Er wordt door haar betreurd dat hij drinkt.  
 It is regretted by her that he drinks.

### III.2.3 Object Complements with Prepositions

There is a category of verbs connected with prepositions that can be completed with a dependent clause or an infinitive phrase:

bang zijn voor	'to be afraid of'
bidden om	'to pray for'
denken over	'to consider'
hopen op	'to hope for'
klagen over	'to complain about'
streven naar	'to strive for'
twijfelen aan	'to doubt'
vlassen op	'to look forward to'
zich verbazen over	'to be amazed about'

Let us consider the following underlying structure:

49a. denken over ik /dat ik morgen vertrek/  
 Pl (prep) 1 2  
 consider I /that I depart tomorrow/

These verbs with prepositions demand an expletive in the matrix. Here the expletive er would be compounded with the appropriate preposition over. We claim that in these cases, the expletive er has obligatorily been inserted as object, causing the complement clause to become chômeur:

49b. denken over er ik /dat ik morgen vertrek/  
 Pl (prep) 2 1 2ch  
 Ik denk erover dat ik morgen vertrek.

I am considering that I depart tomorrow.

The object expletive has cliticized to the front of the preposition. After optional equi NP deletion and infinitivization, this sentence is realized as the following:

49c. denken over er ik /morgen te vertrekken/  
 Pl (prep) 2 1 2ch  
 Ik denk erover morgen te vertrekken.

I am considering to depart tomorrow.

If, as we claim, er in such sentences has been inserted as object, it should be capable of advancing to subject and we find that 49c has passive form 49d:

49d. wordt gedacht over er ik /morgen te vertrekken/  
 Pl P2 (prep) 1 lch 2ch

Er wordt door mij over gedacht morgen te vertrekken.

It is being considered by me to depart tomorrow.

Perhaps we should indicate why we do not say that the er of sentences such as 49d have been inserted by subject expletive, as we did for sentences such as 48c. Such an analysis would advance the complement of 49a to subject, then extrapose it by inserting non-definite subject expletive er. But such an analysis would predict that 49e would be ungrammatical, since the nominalized complement is definite:

49e. Er wordt door mij over het vertrekken gedacht.

The departing is being considered by me.

### III.3 Summary

Object complements of factive verbs allow marking of their complements as definite with the definite article het. This article ascends to become direct object, and as such may subsequently be advanced to subject; this accounts for passive sentences with het as subject. But when complements without het, including complements of non-factive verbs, are passivized, the non-definite complement as subject is obligatorily replaced by the expletive er.

Object complements of matrix verbs with prepositions have obligatory object expletive er-insertion. In this case er is cliticized with the preposition of the matrix verb.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRO-LOCATIVE ER AND LOCATIVE EXPLETIVE ER

There is a rule in Dutch by which pronouns preceded by prepositions are obligatorily changed to prepositions preceded by the pro-locative er. In this case the pro-locative er is cliticized to the front of the preposition. (Koster, 1975: 121).

\*op het 'on it' becomes erop 'thereon'

\*naar het 'to it' becomes ernaar 'thereto'

We should draw attention to the fact that in this case er pronominalizes NP's, whether they have a definite or non-definite reference.

op een bank 'on a bench' become erop 'thereon'

op de bank 'on the bench' becomes erop 'thereon'

This shows that the nature of the pro-locative er differs from the nature of the expletives. Let us demonstrate this with the following sentences where the pro-locative er is not an expletive:

50a. De bever zit op zijn huis.

1        Pl        loc

The beaver sits on his house.

50b. De bever zit erop.

1        Pl    loc

In sentence 50b we are simply dealing with pronominalization;

er is anaphoric for zijn huis 'his house'. The grammatical relations of the terms and the non-terms are not affected in this process.

But now let us compare the following sentences. Purposely, we have chosen transitive sentences, in order to block expletive er-insertion.

51a. Een bever bouwt er een huis in het water.

A beaver builds a house in the water.

In sentence 51a it is clear that er cannot be the pro-locative discussed above, because the referent in het water 'in the water' is present.

Dutch speakers will also reject er to be in the front field, because er cannot be the subject expletive:

51b. \*Er bouwt een bever een huis in het water.

A beaver builds a house in the water.

The examples show that this er is not a pro-locative or a subject expletive. The position of this er is restricted to the first position in the mid field, no matter how many non-terms are present. This suggests a grammatical relation with the verb. From other examples we have seen that expletives have tendencies to cliticize. Therefore we would like to propose that er is an expletive which has been inserted as a locative. The subsequent grammatical relations can be indicated as follows:



51c. Een beaver bouwt er een huis in het water.

1            Pl   loc            2            loc(ch?)

A beaver builds a house in the water.

(It may be necessary to expand the concept of chômeur in the theory of Relational Grammar, to include former impure terms which have been "chômeured" by insertion of expletives, as was in het water 'in the water' in 51c.)

## CHAPTER V

### PRO-PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE ER

Dutch has quantifiers which modify nouns, e.g. een hoop stropdassen 'a pile of ties'. After pronominalizing stropdassen 'ties', the following phrase may be derived: er een hoop 'a pile of them'. Among the quantifiers are these:

een hoop	'a heap, pile'
een massa	'a heap'
geen	'none'
geen één	'not one'
een paar	'a few'
enkele	'a few'
meer	'more'
veel	'many'
één, twee, drie, ...	'one, two, three, ...'

The following groups of sentences illustrate how this er is used:

52a. Drie jongens gaven de lerares bloemen.

Three boys gave the teacher flowers.

52b. Drie gaven er de lerares bloemen.

Three of them gave the teacher flowers.

52c. \*Er gaven drie de lerares bloemen.

Three of them gave the teacher flowers.

53a. De jongen gaf een bloem aan drie meisjes.

The boy gave a flower to three girls.

53b. De jongen gaf er aan drie een bloem.

The boy gave three of them a flower.

53c. \*Er gaf de jongen aan drie een bloem.

The boy gave three of them a flower.

54a. De jongen gaf het meisje drie bloemen.

The boy gave the girl three flowers.

54b. De jongen gaf het meisje er drie.

The boy gave the girl three of them.

54c. \*Er gaf de jongen het meisje drie.

The boy gave the girl three of them.

The quantifier without the noun is accompanied by er, evidently a pronoun used with quantifiers. We will call this pronoun a "pro-Prepositional Phrase" (abbreviated as pro-PP from now on). We have seen in the examples above that this pro-PP is used in NP's in all the term relations: subject (52), indirect object (53), and direct object (54). Sentence 52c, 53c, and 54c are all ungrammatical, because the pro-PP er may not appear in the front field (Paardekooper, 1971: 56). This indicates that this er is not a subject. Still, the pro-PP er has a certain degree of flexibility, but this is confined to the mid field.

55a. De jongen gaf er elke dag drie een bloem.

The boy gave three of them a flower every day.

55b. De jongen gaf het meisje er elke dag drie.

The boy gave the girl three of them every day.

Another proof that the pro-PP is not a subject expletive is the absence of indefinite articles in sentence 55a and 55b. Neither de jongen 'the boy' nor het meisje 'the girl' can trigger a subject expletive at all; therefore, er forms a phrase with drie 'three'.

David M. Perlmutter and Janez Orešnik (1973: 445, 446) assert that in French we have similar phenomena. They illustrate this by the following French examples:

56a. Jean-Pierre a deux chevaux noirs et Maurice  
en a un blanc.

Jean-Pierre has two black horses and Maurice  
has a white one.

56b. Jean-Pierre a deux chevaux noirs et Maurice  
en a un.

Jean-Pierre has two black horses and Maurice  
has one.

They suggest that en is a pro-PP of the form de + NP; thus, underlying un cheval 'a horse' is un de chevaux 'one of horses'. Parallel reasoning for Dutch renders the following: er is a pro-PP of the form van + NP. This means that the phrase twee van paarden 'two of horses' is changed to er twee 'two of them', where er is the pro-PP of van paarden 'of horses'.

Now let us apply the above within the framework of

Relational Grammar. The following sentence is an underlying form:

57a. geven drie van jongens bloemen aan de lerares  
 Pl            1                            2                            3  
 give three of boys flowers to the teacher

By pronominalization the pro-PP replaces van jongens 'of boys'.

This should not affect the term relations:

57b. geven er drie bloemen aan de lerares  
 Pl            1                            2                            3  
 give pro-PP three flowers to the teacher

At the surface this sentence would be as follows:

57c. Drie gaven er bloemen aan de lerares.

Three of them gave flowers to the teacher.

When we add a topicalized time element in the front field er will be in the mid field:

57d. Toen gaven er drie bloemen aan de lerares.

Then three of them gave flowers to the teacher.

The phrase er drie is not synonymous with drie van hun 'three of them', because the underlying forms differ in definiteness:

58a. geven drie van de jongens bloemen aan de lerares  
 Pl                            1                            2                            3  
 give three of the boys flowers to the teacher

When we pronominalize van de jongens 'of the boys' we have:

58b. geven drie van hun bloemen aan de lerares  
 Pl 1 2 3  
 give three of them flowers to the teacher

This renders the following surface structure:

58c. Drie van hun gaven bloemen aan de lerares.  
 Three of them gave flowers to the teacher.

When we compare the sentences of 57 and 58 we can see why er is used in 57 and not in 58. In sentence 58 we are dealing with a definite NP which, therefore, cannot combine with er.

Let us now consider how the pro-PP behaves with a direct-object relation:

59a. geven de jongens drie van bloemen aan de lerares  
 Pl 1 2 3  
 give the boys three of flowers to the teacher

Let us pronominalize van bloemen 'of flowers':

59b. geven de jongens er drie aan de lerares  
 Pl 1 2 3  
 give the boys pro-PP three to the teacher

At the surface this sentence looks as follows:

59c. De jongens gaven er drie aan de lerares.

The boys gave three of them to the teacher.

We also recognize that there is a parallel between the subject expletive er and the pro-PP er; both are applied in the presence of words which have a non-definite reference.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONSTRAINTS ON COMBINATIONS OF ER'S

We have already shown how one er word may constrain the occurrence of another er-word. We shall now look more closely at the structure that results when two or more er's occur in a simple sentence. Bech asserts that

Das quantitative er kann aber im Gegensatz zum präpositionalen und lokalen er mit einem repletiv fungierenden er zusammen vorkommen, d.h. man kann in ein und demselben Satz sowohl ein quantitatives er als ein repletives, repletiv-präpositionales oder repletiv-lokales er haben, wenn die beiden er nicht nebeneinanderstehen (1952: 28).

There seem to be certain constraints when there are more than one er. It will be beneficial to follow Paardekooper's argument when he talks about the verhinderend 'preventing or constraining' of er's (1971: 57). Generally, we will use the same sentences that Paardekooper used, but we will apply arguments from Relational Grammar.

60a. zitten twee mensen op die bank

Pl                    1                    loc

sit                    two people                    on that bench

Since twee mensen 'two people' is a non-definite subject NP, we must insert the subject expletive er as follows:

60b. zitten er twee mensen op die bank

Pl    1                    lch                    loc

Er zitten twee mensen op die bank.

Two people are sitting on that bench.

Now the pro-locative er is compounded with the preposition op 'on' when die bank 'that bench' is pronominalized. In this construction, however, the expletive er prevents the use of the pro-locative er:

60c. \*Er zitten twee mensen erop.

Two people are sitting on it.

Its grammatical counterpart is rendered by the following:

60d. Er zitten twee mensen op.

Two people are sitting on it.

The subject expletive er prevents the use of the pro-locative er regardless of where the pro-locative appears in the surface sentence. This is not the case with the pro-PP er. To show this we first look at 61a:

61a. zitten twee mensen

Pl            l

sit            two people

The first derivation gives us the following sentence:

61b. zitten er twee mensen

Pl        l            lch

Er zitten twee mensen.

Two people are sitting.

In chapter V, we saw how the pro-PP's are derived.



Let us change the quantifier phrase twee mensen 'two people' to the pro-PP er twee 'two of them'. This renders the following:

62a. zitten er er twee

Pl l lch

Er zitten er twee.

There are two of them sitting.

The er in the front field is the subject expletive, and in the mid field is the chômeured pro-PP.

The usual rule for formation of an interrogative sentence would place the subject expletive er in the mid field:

62b. \*Zitten er (nu) er twee?

Are there two of them sitting (now)?

When the subject expletive er precedes the pro-PP in the mid field, the pro-PP must be deleted. Our example shows that it does not make any difference whether we have a non-term between the two er's, or not. The next sentence represents its grammatical counterpart:

62c. Zitten er (nu) twee?

Are there two of them sitting (now)?

Within Relational Grammar, we have reason to expect that in a choice between a term and a chômeur, the term will win out, and hence that in 62c it is the chômeured pro-PP er which has been deleted and not the subject expletive er.

Now we shall test the constraint on a sentence with

three potential er's. First we consider 63a:

63a. zitten er twee op die bank

Pl            1            loc

sit two of them on that bench

As we did with 60b, we insert the subject expletive er:

63b. zitten er er twee op die bank

pl        1        lch            loc

This would give us the following grammatical sentence:

63c. Er zitten er twee op die bank.

There are two of them sitting on that bench.

Changing this sentence to the interrogative results in this form:

63d. \*Zitten er er twee op die bank?

Are there two of them sitting on that bench?

Subject-verb inversion results in obligatory deletion of the pro-PP:

63e. Zitten er twee op die bank?

Are there two of them sitting on that bench?

When we pronominalize the locative of 63e, the result is again an ungrammatical sentence:

63f. \*Er zitten er twee erop.

There are two of them sitting on it.

Deletion of the pro-locative produces a proper Dutch sentence:

63g. Er zitten er twee op.

There are two of them sitting on it.

From the examples above we may conclude that the constraints on combinations of er's seem to be of a hierarchical nature. When there is a choice between a term and a chômeur, the term will win out. And when there is a choice between a chômeur and a non-term, the chômeur will win out.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

The Dutch expletive has a very unique clarifying function. We have seen that the following two Dutch sentences are most literally translated into one English sentence. But in Dutch these two cannot be interchanged:

64. Het wordt betreurd dat hij drinkt.

It is regretted that he drinks.

65. Er wordt betreurd dat hij drinkt.

It is regretted that he drinks.

We have indicated that sentence 64 clarifies that the embedded clause is definite. This is not true for sentence 65, where er can be combined with non-definite clauses.

The claim with Relational Grammar that the expletive er has a subject relationship to the predicate will enable us to explain other aspects of the Dutch language as well, e.g. how the expletive er is used with transposed word order, which will be illustrated by the following examples:

66a. Ik zei: "De ballonnen gaan morgen vroeg op."

I said: "The balloons will go up early tomorrow."

When the Dutch speaker changes direct discourse to indirect discourse, the finite part of the verb is transposed:

66b. Ik zei dat de ballonnen morgen vroeg opgaan.  
 I said that early tomorrow the balloons will  
 go up.

Let us compare this now with an er-sentence:

67a. Ik zei: "Er gaan morgen vroeg ballonnen op."  
 I said: "Balloons will go up early tomorrow."

When we transpose the finite verb we will have the following:

67b. Ik zei dat er morgen vroeg ballonnen opgaan.

I said that balloons will go up early tomorrow.

The transposed sentences show that the subjects, in this case, de ballonnen 'the balloons' and er are the first element after the conjunction dat 'that'. In sentence 67a and 67b ballonnen 'balloons' comes at the end of the mid field because it has non-definite reference. Here again, the claim that the er has been inserted as subject, which was forced upon us by Relational Grammar, makes a correct prediction with respect to transposed word order.

This thesis has dealt only with a narrow aspect of the Dutch language. We selected an area which had been neglected by many grammarians. It was shown that Relational Grammar helped us to suggest solutions to some of the problems in this thesis. It is our wish that some may benefit from these findings, but also that these suggested solutions may contribute to the knowledge of universal principles of language.

## FOOTNOTES

## FOOTNOTES

1. Throughout this paper , ch will be used as the abbreviation for chômeured. We are also using unordered notation, that is, we are indicating the term and the non-term relations to the predicate. Certain details of the surface form of sentences, including word order, will be a consequence of the surface grammatical relations.
2. Perlmutter (1971: 166) suggests in his Deep and Surface Structure Constraints that Dutch is a "B language," which means that Dutch does not necessarily need to have a surface subject in its grammatical sentences. If this had been true, then we would not be able to state that expletives are subjects. In a personal telephone conversation, Perlmutter informed me that what he said in this regard about Dutch has been proven wrong.
3. The embedded clause is indicated between two slanted bars. Note that sentence 28a is not pronounceable as is, for if subject raising does not apply, extraposition (see section III.1) must apply to give: Het schijnt dat de kinderen in de tuin spelen, 'It seems that the children are playing in the garden'.
4. It should be noted that for English there is no question as

to the derivation of such sentences. Sentence b can be derived from a by raising there.

a. seems /there are boys in the garden/

b. There seem to be boys in the garden.

Sentence d can be derived from c by raising boys.

c. seems /boys are in the garden/

d. Boys seem to be in the garden.

But sentence d does not permit there insertion.

e. \*There seem boys to be in the garden.

So the only derivation that will give sentence b is the same as such one we have chosen for Dutch.

5. The lack of te with the infinitive may indicate that after subject raising a "clause union" has been formed in which Piet and wassen have become dependents of the "live" verb ziet.
6. Such an analysis may also be feasible for the English translations of Dutch examples 47a and 47b, i.e., that the pronoun it in 47b is an ascended definite article the of 47a. Cf. Postal's (1966: 177 - 206) claim that pronouns are definite articles.



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