

**The emergence of a new adverbial downtoner: constructional change and
constructionalization of Dutch [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*] ‘far from X’***

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Schoone va' verre es dikkels verre va' schoone

‘Beautiful from afar is often far from beautiful’

(Teirlinck, *Zuid-Oostvlaandersch Idioticon*, 1922)

Abstract

The English expression *far from*, denoting spatial or metaphorical distance, has developed into an adverbial downtoner (De Smet, 2012). In this corpus-based study, our first purpose is to analyze to which degree the Dutch counterparts of the English [*far from X*] construction, that is [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*], have also developed into downtoners. We show that synchronically *ver van* mostly has a spatial or metaphorical meaning, while *verre van* is generally used as an adverbial downtoner. As a second objective, we explore the diachronic pathways taken by both constructions and argue that the category change undergone by [*verre van X*] is part of a true constructionalization process, while [*ver van X*] has been affected by minor constructional changes only.

Keywords: downtoner, degree adverb, Dutch, category change, constructional change, constructionalization

1. Introduction

In his study on actualization¹, De Smet (2012) describes as one of his corpus-based case studies the reanalysis of English *far from*, a multiword sequence that combines an adjective/adverb (*far*) with a preposition (*from*). Originally *far from* was used as a relational expression² that denoted physical or metaphorical distance and typically combined with noun phrases, as it still does in present-day English (1-2).³ However, *far from* developed into a degree adverb, more specifically a ‘downtoner’, used to lower the force of the lexical element in its scope (see Section 2). In the process, *far from* underwent ‘host-class expansion’ (Himmelmann, 2004): it no longer combines with nominal elements only (N, NP, gerunds), but also, for instance, with adjectives (3).

- (1) *Green willow is a modern, fresh house set in a wonderful garden near East Preston village, not **far from** the sea.* (UKCOW2011XS_2163572)
- (2) *Her centralized, authoritarian populism is quite **far from** the ideology which i'd imagine both of us seek.* (UKCOW2011XS_1069996)
- (3) *But it is **far from** certain that this means that the public wish to see the strongest and most explicit images available on television (...)* (UKCOW2011XS_2317887)

In the same study, De Smet makes a brief comparison with the Dutch cognate of *far from*, *verre van* (2012, pp. 620-621), which can also act as a downtoning degree adverb in present-day Dutch, as shown in (4):

(4) *Maar David was verre van perfect.* (NLCOW2012_2307046)

‘But David was far from perfect.’

De Smet (2012) argues that actualization is to a large extent language-specific and item-specific, because it is guided by similarity relations within constructional networks, which differ from item to item and from language to language. It follows that a comparative study can reveal interesting differences between both languages. Therefore the central focus of this paper is to elaborate on the Dutch case study. However, we will not only take into account *verre van* but also its formal variant *ver van* and will embed our analysis within the constructional framework, assuming that both sequences form part of two specific constructions, viz. [*verre van X*] and [*ver van X*]. We hypothesize that the co-occurrence of these two formally-related constructions may profoundly affect the course and the outcomes of the diachronic processes, since in Dutch, contrary to English, two forms are in competition to express and develop the same functions within the constructional network.

The first purpose of our corpus-based study is to establish to what extent the two Dutch constructions have also developed into adverbial downtoners, like their English counterpart, and whether they have undergone parallel developments. As a second objective, we will explore in detail the diachronic pathways taken by both constructions and examine if the observed category changes can be seen as instances of a constructionalization process, with prominent

changes at both the formal and the semantic poles of the construction (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013). These issues will raise more general questions about how competition between horizontally-related constructions in the network influences the changes they undergo, and more specifically about the relation between category change and constructionalization.

The structure of this article is as follows. In the next section, we define the notion of ‘downtoner’ and look into the possible sources of adverbial downtoners in English and Dutch. In Sections 3 and 4, we concentrate on our specific case study and describe the results of a synchronic and diachronic corpus-based analysis of the [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*] constructions. We contrast the semantic values of both constructions (spatial distance, metaphorical distance, downtoner) and their complementation patterns in present-day Dutch (Section 3), and examine their specific diachronic developments (Section 4) in order to account for the observed differences. The results are discussed in greater detail in Section 5, where we raise the more general and theoretically-oriented questions about the relation between category change, constructional change and constructionalization, and the impact of competing constructions on these changes. In Section 6, finally, we show how the specific case study on Dutch [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*] contribute to our understanding of category change dealt with from a constructional perspective.

2. Downtoners

Quirk et al. (1997, p. 445) distinguish two types of degree adverbs: amplifiers and downtoners (also called diminishers, cf. Biber et al., 1999, p. 555). They both co-occur with gradable items or units and indicate a higher or lower degree with respect to a norm set out on a specific scale.

Whereas amplifiers “scale upwards from an assumed norm” (e.g. *a very funny film*), downtoners “have a generally lowering effect, usually scaling downwards from an assumed norm”. Examples of English adverbial downtoners are provided in (5):

(5) *a bit dull, a little extravagant, almost impossible, nearly dark, pretty rare, somewhat uneasy* (Quirk et al., 1997, p. 445)

Degree adverbs, including downtoners, are mostly used to premodify gradable adjectives, as in the examples in (5), but some of them can also modify verbs and predicates (6), other adverbs (7), pronouns / predeterminers / numerals (8), and even noun phrases (9):

(6) *They don't support her **at all**.* (Quirk et al., 1997, p. 598)

(7) *I expect them **pretty soon**.* (Quirk et al., 1997, p. 448)

(8) a. ***Nearly** everybody came to our party.* (Quirk et al., 1997, p.449)

b. ***Virtually** all the students participated in the discussion.* (Quirk et al., 1997, p. 449)

c. *I paid **less than** ten pounds for it.* (Quirk et al., 1997, p. 450)

(9) a. *They will stay for **about** a week.* (Quirk et al., 1997, p. 450)

b. *It was **rather** a mess.* (Quirk et al., 1997, p. 451)

Semantically, Quirk et al. (1997, p. 590) propose four subtypes of downtoners, although they admit that clear-cut distinctions are not always possible: approximators (e.g., *almost*), compromisers (e.g., *more or less*), diminishers (e.g., *partly*), and minimizers (e.g., *hardly*). Minimizers are defined as negative maximizers, which implies that they denote the lower extreme of the scale, and mean ‘(not) to any extent’. As such, premodifying *far from* and *verre van*, as illustrated in (3) and (4), have to be regarded as minimizing downtoners: *far from* and *verre van* can be reformulated as ‘not ... at all’. Other minimizing downtoners in English are *barely*, *hardly*, *little*, *scarcely* (negative ones) and *in the least*, *in the slightest*, *at all*, *a bit* (nonassertives) (Quirk et al., 1997, p. 598). The examples show that downtoners can develop from syntactically very different sources, including adverbs in *-ly* (*hardly*), adjectives (*little*), noun phrases (*a bit*), and prepositional phrases (*in the least*, *at all*) (cf. Nevalainen & Rissanen, 2002; Traugott, 2008; Claridge & Kytö, 2013; De Smet & Fischer, 2017). *Far from* developed from an adjective or adverb (*far*) governing a fixed preposition (*from*) into an adverbial unit – a pathway that is to our knowledge relatively exceptional.

Similarly to English *far from*, Dutch *verre van* is not mentioned among the degree adverbs in the reference grammars of present-day Dutch. The ANS (*Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkunst*) (Haeseryn et al., 1997, p. 455, pp. 892-897, pp. 908-909) does not introduce subdivisions in the semantic class of degree adverbs. Amplifiers and downtoners are grouped together in a class of adverbs that express the degree of intensity with respect to the modified adjective, adverb or predicate. Examples of such degree adverbs are given in (10). The examples also show that Dutch degree modifiers have similar sources as the ones observed for English: adverbs (10a), adjectives (10b), noun phrases (10c), prepositional phrases (10d), and even pronouns (10e). The combination of an adjective / adverb with a preposition, as in the case of *verre van*, is not mentioned.

- (10) a. *nogal slechte manieren* ‘rather bad manners’
 b. *een **hoogst** significant verschil* ‘a highly significant difference’
 c. *Hij is een beetje verlegen.* ‘He is a little shy.’
 d. *een **in hoge mate** ongelukkige samenloop van omstandigheden* ‘a highly ((lit.) in high measure) unfortunate combination of circumstances’
 e. *Je zou **wat** vaker moeten komen.* ‘You should come more often ((lit.) some often-COMP).’
 (Haeseryn et al., 1997, pp. 892-897, pp. 908-909)

The use of *verre van* as a degree adverb is not mentioned in the *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse syntaxis* (van der Horst, 2008) either, even though this voluminous diachronic reference work on Dutch syntax provides extensive lists of Dutch degree adverbs that have emerged since Old Dutch.

We do find some interesting information in the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (*WNT*⁴, s.v. *Ver*^{II}) about the diachrony of *ver* (*van*) and *verre* (*van*). Both forms are originally adverbs of spatial distance, but in their predicative use (*het is verre / ver* ‘it is far’) they could easily have been reinterpreted as adjectives, giving rise to other unambiguously adjectival uses (e.g. *verre landen* ‘distant countries’). Whereas *verre* is the inflected form of the adverb, and the common form in Middle Dutch, it is nowadays only preserved in some (archaic) collocations and idiosyncratic uses (including *verre van* ‘far from’ but also for instance *van heinde en verre* ‘from far and near’ and (*de begroting*) *verre te boven gaan* ‘to exceed (the budget) by far’, cf. *Van Dale* dictionary⁵, s.v. *verre*). *Ver* is the uninflected and modern form of the adverb and adjective, but has been in attested use since the 15th century. The *WNT* provides examples from the sequence *ver(re) van* (or its obsolete form *verde* (*van*)) from the 16th century on, for instance:

(11) *Dit en schijnt soo verre vande waerheijt niet te wesen, dat ...* (Boonen, Leuven 180b [1594])

‘This does not seem to be so far from the truth, that ...’

It can be assumed that the expression of metaphorical distance, as illustrated in (11), is derived from the spatial use by semantic extension, transferring its meaning from the source domain of spatial distance to the more abstract target domain of scalarity (cf. Heine et al., 1991). This metaphorical interpretation has led to the emergence of the downtoner meaning: being far from (having) an idea or from doing something may be reinterpreted – by pragmatic strengthening (Traugott, 1988) – as completely rejecting this idea or action. In a following stage, the downtoner meaning can trigger new syntactic behavior (through actualization), with *ver(re) van* picking up the syntactic features of other degree adverbs.

We will have a closer look into the historical examples of these sequences, and their semantics and construction types in Section 4.

3. [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*] in present-day Dutch

3.1. Method

In order to provide a synchronic overview of the semantic and formal properties of the constructions [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*]⁶, we have extracted a random sample of 300

occurrences including both variants *ver van* / *verre van* from the NLCOW2012-00X webcorpus. This is a gigatoken database of tagged and lemmatized texts extracted from the web in 2012, including informal sources such as forums and blogs (Schäfer & Bildhauer, 2012; Schäfer, 2015).⁷

As indicated in Table 1, the sequence *ver van* occurs more frequently in the corpus sample than *verre van*. However, since *ver* is far more common than *verre* in present-day Dutch, the relatively high proportion of the collocation *verre van* (36%) is somewhat surprising, and suggests that it is still productive in present-day Dutch.

	<i>Tokens</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>ver van</i>	192	64.0%
<i>verre van</i>	108	36.0%
Totals	300	100.0%

Table 1: Overview number of tokens for [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*] in NLCOW2012-00X

We have analyzed these 300 synchronic occurrences according to two criteria: the semantics of the sequence (spatial distance, metaphorical distance or downtoner) and its complementation pattern (N/NP, Pron, Adv, Adj, etc.). With regard to the semantic annotation, we labelled as dntoners all occurrences in which substitution was possible by another synonymous downtoner (e.g. *helemaal niet* ‘not at all’). In the next paragraphs, we will compare the results found for both constructions.

3.2. Semantics

Table 2 and Figure 1 compare the semantics of the sequences [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*] in the corpus sample. Very different semantic pictures emerge for the two constructions, with significant differences (Pearson Chi-Square test: $\chi^2 (1) = 243.366$, $p = .000$) and an extremely large effect size (Cramer's $V = 0.901$).⁸

Semantics	[<i>ver van X</i>]		[<i>verre van X</i>]	
Spatial distance	153	79.69%	3	2.78%
Metaphorical distance	39	20.31%	11	10.19%
Downtoner	0	0	94	87.04%
Totals	192	100.00%	108	100.00%

Table 2: Semantics [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*] in NLCOW2012-00X

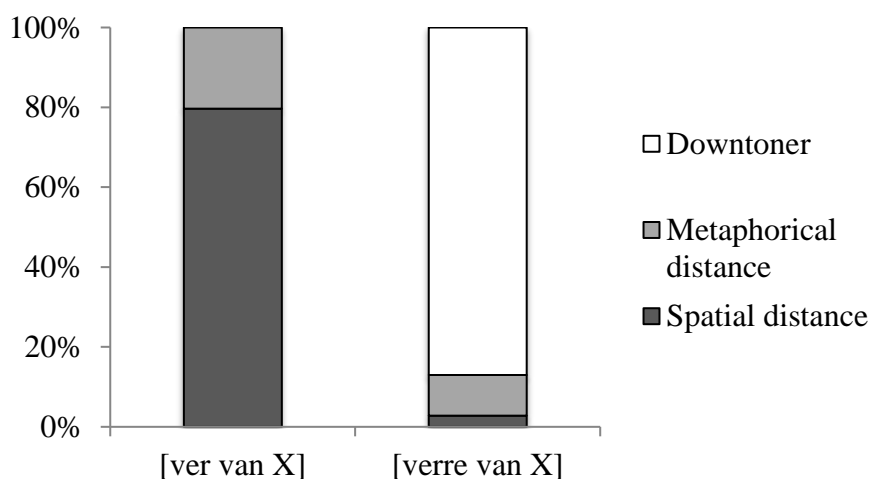


Figure 1: Semantics [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*] in NLCOW2012-00X

The construction [*ver van X*] expresses in about 80% of the data a relation of spatial distance between two entities, such as between the apple and the tree in (12); in the remaining cases it is used to express metaphorical distance, for instance between a person and a particular thought, as in (13).

(12) *De appel valt nooit **ver van** de boom.* (NLCOW2012-00X_1024072)

‘The apple never falls far from the tree.’

(13) *De gedachte om kritiek op je te leveren staat **ver van** me.* (NLCOW2012-00X_14047)

‘The thought of criticizing you is far from me.’

The construction [*verre van X*], on the contrary, is typically used with a downtoner meaning, as in (14), even if spatial and metaphorical values are also attested, for instance in collocations such as *zich verre van X houden* ‘to keep oneself far from X’ (15):

(14) *Meestal wordt de partij eenvoudig gekwalificeerd als 'rechts', maar dit begrip is in Polen **verre van** eenduidig.* (NLCOW2012-00X_1494739)

‘In most cases, the party is simply qualified as 'right-wing', but this notion is far from univocal in Poland.’

(15) *Ik houd mij **verre van** de bestaande vooroordelen die in de inleiding beschreven staan [...].* (NLCOW2012-00X_11310355)

‘I keep myself far from the existing prejudices that are described in the introduction [...].’

While degree modifier (downtoner) uses are typically associated with the construction [*verre van X*], they are not observed in the corpus sample for [*ver van X*]. However, this does not mean that they do not occur in present-day Dutch. Examples (16-17) illustrate the use of [*ver van X*] with downtoner meaning, as attested on the web (Google, 11 March 2015). At the same time, for expressing downtoner meaning [*verre van X*] is clearly the default form. The *Corpus Gesproken Nederlands (CGN)*, covering spoken Dutch, produces one unambiguous downtoner example of [*ver van X*] (*toch is de uitslag van het referendum **ver van** zeker* ‘and yet the outcome of the referendum is far from certain’), against 11 downtoner examples of [*verre van X*]. In the much larger *Twente News Corpus (TwNC)*, consisting of Dutch newspapers, the string frequency of *ver van ideaal / ideale* (‘far from ideal’, taken here as a representative collocation to gauge variation without the need for additional corpus analysis) is 1, as opposed to 240 for *verre van ideaal / ideale*.⁹

(16) *De politie heeft niet de indruk dat het verkeer in de Belgradostraat is toegenomen, maar de situatie blijft **ver van** ideaal.*

(http://www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20141014_01322324)

‘The police does not have the impression that the traffic in Belgrade Street has increased, but the situation remains far from ideal.’

(17) *Terwijl de wind in de nacht van zaterdag op zondag flink was toegenomen en de temperatuur **ver van** aangenaam werd, verzamelden zich zondagmorgen om 08.15 uur de eerste jongens en meisjes voor de jaarlijkse kermis viswedstrijd bij de Wilhelminabank.*

(<http://www.grolsekermis.nl/?cat=10>)

‘While the wind had picked up considerably in the night from Saturday to Sunday and the temperature had become far from pleasant, the first boys and girls were gathering on Sunday morning at 8:15 for the annual fair fishing competition at the Wilhelmina Bank.’

This suggests that we need to look at the corpus results from the right perspective: when taking a random sample of [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*] in present-day Dutch, it can be concluded that the latter mostly acts as a downtoner, while the former typically expresses spatial or metaphorical distance. This does not mean that when extending the corpus sample, downtoner uses of [*ver van X*] could not be found. Even so, they are likely to be vastly outnumbered by the downtoner uses of [*verre van X*].

3.3. *Complementation patterns*

Table 3 and Figure 2 show the results of the analysis of the complementation types of *ver(re) van* in the synchronic corpus sample. Again significantly different distributions can be observed (Pearson Chi-Square-test: $\chi^2(1) = 151.148$, $p = .000$), with a large effect size (Cramer's $V = 0.710$)¹⁰.

Complementation	[<i>ver van X</i>]		[<i>verre van X</i>]	
N/NP	163	84.90%	16	14.81%
Adv	5	2.60%	0	0
Pron	24	12.50%	17	15.74%
Vinf	0	0	3	2.78%
Part	0	0	4	3.70%
Adj	0	0	64	59.26%
Null (no complement)	0	0	4	3.70%

Totals	192	100.00%	108	100.00%
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Table 3: Complementation patterns of [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*] in NLCOW2012-00X

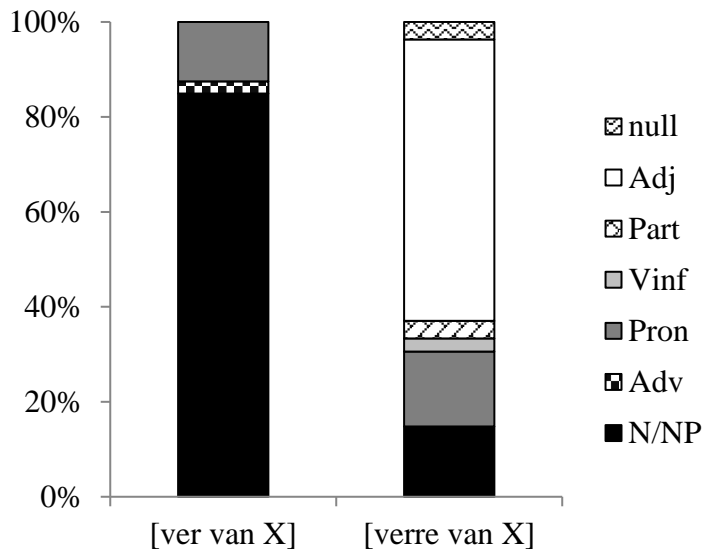


Figure 2: Complementation patterns of [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*] in NLCOW2012-00X

The corpus results show that *ver van* is typically followed by nominal complements (nouns, noun phrases, or pronouns) (18-19), which supports the status of *van* as a preposition, even if adjectival complementation is not completely excluded in present-day Dutch, as shown in Section 3.2.

- (18) *En dan te weten hoeveel van die hierheen gehaalde vluchtelingen doodongelukkig zijn hier ... ver van huis.* (NLCOW2012_7983249)

‘And then to think how many of these refugees are unhappy here ... far from home.’

(19) *Vanuit Mexico gezien liggen Parijs en Breda helemaal niet zo **ver van** elkaar.*

(NLCOW2012_12731817)

‘Seen from Mexico, Paris and Breda are not so far apart ((lit.) far from each other) at all.’

The construction [*verre van X*], on the contrary, shows a strong preference for adjectival complementation, mostly predicative adjectives, as in (20), but *verre van* can also be used to modify an attributive adjective (21).

(20) *Er staan een hoop gedichten in die **verre van** onvergetelijk zijn, maar gewoon slapjes.*

(NLCOW2012_13722928)

‘There are a lot of poems in it that are far from memorable, but just weak.’

(21) *Dit was een **verre van** marginaal verschijnsel.* (NLCOW2012_1434558)

‘This was a far from marginal phenomenon.’

Moreover, *verre van* can also be used without a complement, anaphorically referring to the preceding context, as in (22). As such, it resembles other full-fledged degree adverbs (e.g. *Ik zeg niet dat hier alles beter is, absoluut niet / allesbehalve* ‘I’m not saying everything is better here, not at all’). As shown by the English translation, this construction is not available for *far from*, which needs to be complemented, for instance by the pronoun *it*.

(22) *Ik zeg niet dat hier alles beter is, **verre van**, zou ik haast zeggen.*

(NLCOW2012_8758301)

‘I’m not saying everything is better here, far from it, I’d almost say.’

In sum, the synchronic data show two completely different pictures for the constructions [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*]. The former is typically used as a relational expression with nominal complements, expressing spatial or metaphorical distance. The latter is most frequently used as a downtoning degree adverb with scope over an adjective. When [*verre van X*] takes a nominal complement at all, this is mostly in (outdated) collocations, such as *zich verre van X houden* ‘to keep oneself far from X’.

In the next Section, we will investigate how this distinction has developed over time.

4. Diachronic developments

4.1. Method

For the diachronic study, we have consulted the Dutch historical newspaper archives of the Royal Library (CHK corpus).¹¹ This corpus allowed us to extract a random selection of 200 tokens of the sequences *ver van* / *verre van* from three different time intervals: 1840-1849, 1890-1899, and 1940-1949. Some tokens had to be removed because they did not instantiate our target constructions, such as the sequence *ver van in men ging zo ver van te zeggen dat [...]* ‘they went so far as to say that ((lit.) they went so far from saying that [...])’, or because OCR quality (Optical Character Recognition, i.e., the digital conversion of the printed text) was too bad to interpret the context. Table 4 gives an overview of the number of tokens analyzed for

each construction in the three time intervals. We did not find sufficient tokens for earlier periods, but in what follows, the quantitative analysis based on the CHK will be complemented by qualitative analysis of earlier data drawn from the *WNT* (*Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*, the reference dictionary for Dutch from about 1500 to 1900), which registers attestations from the 16th century onward.

	[<i>ver van X</i>]	[<i>verre van X</i>]	Totals
1840-1849	64 (34.97%)	119 (65.03%)	183
1890-1899	113 (56.50%)	87 (43.50%)	200
1940-1949	108 (60.67%)	70 (39.33%)	178
Totals	285	276	561

Table 4: Diachronic data from CHK corpus

A total number of 561 tokens has been analyzed according to the semantic and formal criteria described above. The relative proportions of the two constructions suggest a gain in productivity of [*ver van X*], at the expense of [*verre van X*], throughout the periods examined. In 4.2 and 4.3 we will explore the semantic and formal changes in the two constructions separately; in Section 4.4 we will compare their respective developments.

4.2. [*ver van X*]

4.2.1. *Semantic changes*

Figure 3 shows the distribution, in percentages, of the three major senses (spatial, metaphorical, downtoner) of [*ver van X*] in the three analyzed periods.

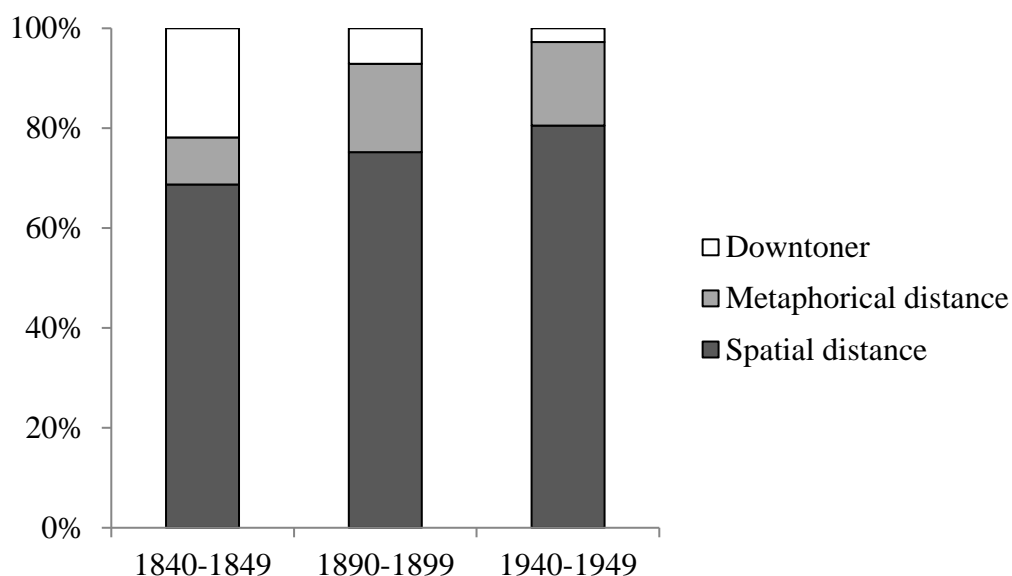


Figure 3: Semantic changes [*ver van X*] in CHK corpus

The charts show a clear development: the proportion of spatial and metaphorical meanings significantly increases between 1840 and 1949, whereas the use of [*ver van X*] with downtoner meaning, even though still well-established in the middle of the 19th century (see (23)), has virtually disappeared one century later.

(23) *Ook te Sheffield en in de nabuurschap is het nog **ver van** rustig.* (*Middelburgsche courant*, 28.01.1840)

‘In Sheffield and its surroundings, too, it is still far from quiet.’

4.2.2. Changes in the complementation types

As shown in Figure 4, the semantic changes are paralleled by considerable shifts in the complementation types of *ver van* between the middle of the 19th and the 20th century.

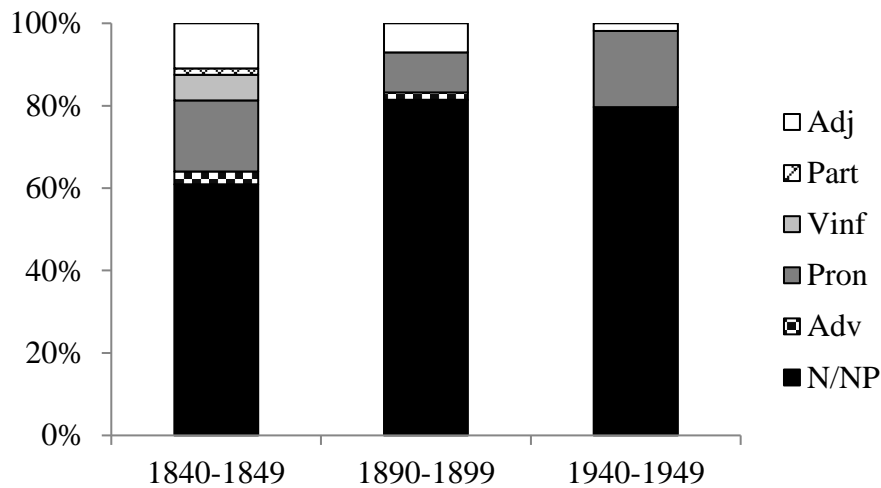


Figure 4: Changes in the complementation types of [*ver van X*] in CHK corpus

In general terms, we observe an increase in nominal complementation patterns (especially when aggregating the proportions of N/NP and pronouns) and a significant decrease of adjectival complementation (see (23)). The combination with verbal forms (infinitives and participles) was still possible in 1840-1849, as illustrated in (24), but is no longer attested in 1940-1949. The *WNT* includes some examples of the same type from the 19th century, for instance (25).

(24) *In de oogen van den Heer Polk, versterkt de Unie zich, naar mate zij zich uitbreidt, en wel **ver van** hare banden lossen te maken, vermeerdert elke aanwinst hare kracht en grootheid. (Algemeen Handelsblad, 17.01.1849)*

‘In the eyes of the Lord Polk, the Union gets stronger as it expands, and though far from loosening its ties, every acquisition increases its strength and greatness.’

(25) *Om te schijnen wat hij zeer ver is van te zijn, de huichelaar* (Kneppelh. 1, 230 [1841])

‘In order to look like what he is far from being, the hypocrite’

Such examples are both semantically and syntactically interesting. Semantically, the sequence [*ver van V*inf] is often ambiguous between the metaphorical and the downtoner meaning. In (24), for instance, *ver van* can be reformulated as ‘instead of’ which carries both the idea of a metaphorical distance (“the Union is far removed from any intention of loosening its ties”) and, by pragmatic inference, a sense of emphatic negation (“the Union will not loosen its ties at all”). Syntactically, however, the construction [*ver van V*inf] should still be analyzed as a relational expression that functions as syntactic head to an infinitival complement. Example (25) is illustrative in this respect. The degree modification by *zeer* ‘very’ is suggestive of the adjectival / adverbial status of *ver*, as first part of the relational expression *ver van*, while adverbial dtoners are usually not gradable (compare English: **very at all*). Moreover, the example shows that Dutch *van* can be separated from *ver* (through ‘exbraciation’), particularly so as to avoid weighty clause-medial constituents. This is in line with the word order alternation also attested for the purely spatial use of *ver van*, *omdat hij ver van zijn geboortedorp is* ‘(lit.) because he far from his place of birth is’ vs. *omdat hij ver is van zijn geboortedorp* ‘(lit.) because he far is from his place of birth’. The alternation is not possible for the adverbial downtoner, witness **omdat hij verre is van gelukkig* ‘(lit.) because he far is from happy’.

4.3. [*verre van X*]

4.3.1. *Semantic changes*

Compared to [*ver van X*], the construction [*verre van X*] undergoes the opposite semantic changes, as shown in Figure 5: it gradually loses its spatial meaning and increasingly specializes as a downtoner. The proportion of metaphoric meanings is more or less stable during the century examined, which supports our hypothesis that the expression of metaphorical distance is a crucial link between the spatial meaning and the downtoner use (see Section 2): the latter one cannot be derived directly from the spatial use; the metaphorical meaning is derived from the spatial meaning first by metaphorical extension, and acts as the ground for the pragmatic extension to the downtoner meaning. Conversely, it is perhaps because the metaphorical meaning maintains links to both the spatial and downtoner use that it is the one meaning consistently shared by [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*].

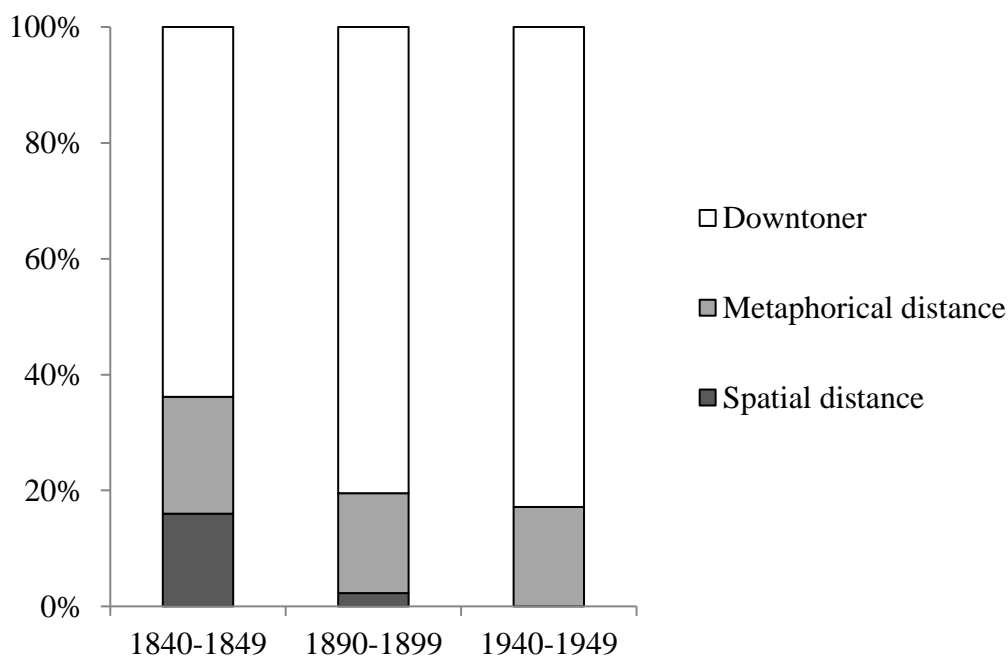


Figure 5: Semantic changes [*verre van X*] in CHK corpus

As stated by the *WNT* (s.v. *Ver^{II}*) (see Section 2), *verre* is the older form and was originally used as an adverb of spatial distance, as in (26), an example from the 16th century:

(26) *Een ... stadt Italiae in Lombaerdien, niet verre van Parma* (SERVILIUS, *Dict. Trigl.*

XX 8 r° b [1552])

‘An Italian city in Lombardy, not far from Parma’

Whereas [*verre van X*] is still commonly used to express spatial distance by the middle of the 19th century (27), this use is already marginal half a century later and disappears in the 20th century.

(27) *De Duky-Sailly, die zich niet verre van de plaats bevond, zond eene boot af, en aan deze gelukte het, er negen anderen te redden.* (*Algemeen Handelsblad*, 23.07.1846)

‘The Duky-Sailly, which was not far from the site, sent off a boat, and this one succeeded in rescuing nine others.’

4.3.2. *Changes in the complementation types*

The change from spatial expression to downtoner is reflected in considerable changes in the complementation of *verre van*, as can be seen in Figure 6.

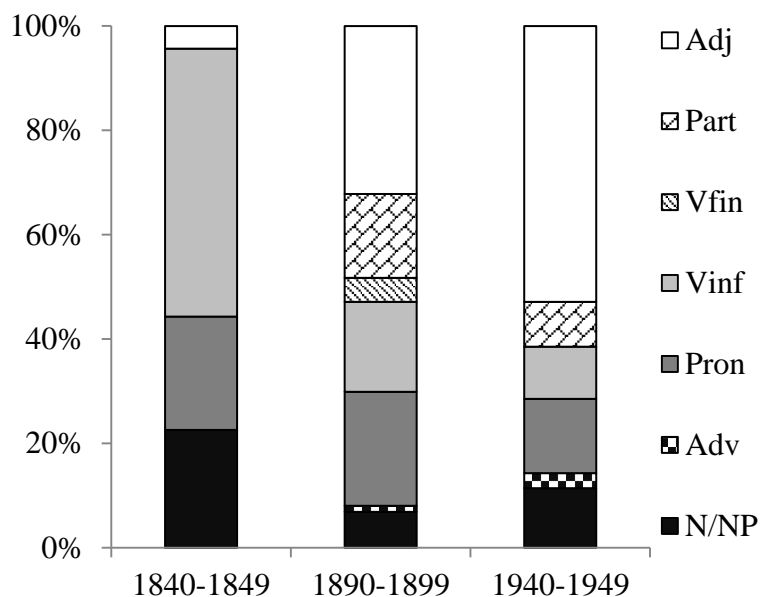


Figure 6: Changes in the complementation types of [verre van X] in CHK corpus

In 1840-1849, *verre van* is essentially followed by nominal complements: nouns / nominal phrases, pronouns, and, especially, infinitives.¹² The construction [(wel) *verre van* Vinf], mostly used with the meaning ‘instead of Vinf’, is particularly productive in this period (28-29), but comes to compete with several other constructions later on.

(28) *Het blijkt dus, dat, wel verre van aan de afschaffing der graanwet te denken, men deze wenscht te behouden* (Arnhemsche courant, 20.09.1845)

‘It thus appears that, far from considering the abolition of the corn law, people desire to keep it’

(29) *Maar het adres van den kolonialen raad van 18 September 1843, wel **verre van ongepast te zijn**, kan niet anders worden aangemerkt dan als eene krachtdadige handhaving der belangen van de kolonie [...]*. (Algemeen Handelsblad, 10.04.1845)

‘But the address of the colonial council of 18 September 1843, far from being inappropriate, cannot be regarded as anything but a vigorous enforcement of the interests of the colony [...].’

As already suggested for [*ver van Vinf*] in 4.2, this construction seems to be a crucial facilitating context for the reanalysis from a metaphorical relational expression to an adverbial downtoner. Semantically, ‘instead of’ may involve both the expression of abstract distance (‘being far from an idea / an action’) and of rejecting an idea or action (and replacing it by something else). Syntactically, the combination of *verre van* with infinitives and infinitival phrases is an extension of its original nominal complementation patterns, as in (26). In combination with copular verbs, as in (29), Dutch word order requires insertion of the adjectival or nominal predicate inbetween *verre van* and the copula (cf. *verre van ongepast te zijn* ‘(lit.) far from inappropriate to be’). It is probable that this construction lies at the basis of the expansion to adjectival complements. The copula holds no new information (its presence being predictable from the preceding adjective), yet occupies a highly prominent position in the clause that is normally reserved for new or focal information. Therefore, it is likely that speakers and writers would have been tempted to suppress it. The same holds for the complementation by infinitival phrases consisting of a past participle and an auxiliary verb: whereas in the corpus data from 1840-1849, the auxiliary (e.g., *te zijn* ‘to be’) is always expressed (30), this is no longer the case half a century later (31). It is very likely that the combination [*verre van Part*], as in (31), is another bridging context for the emergence of adjectival complements.

(30) *Deze vraag is nog verre van beantwoord te zijn.* (*Algemeen Handelsblad*, 17.08.1846)

‘This question is far from being answered.’

(31) *De zaak der gemeente-administratie te Sliedrecht schijnt nog verre van opgehelderd, steeds gaat de justitie voort met getuigen te hooren. (Middelburgsche courant, 25.03.1895)*

‘The case of the municipal administration in Sliedrecht seems still far from clarified, the judiciary still continues to hear witnesses.’

We notice indeed that adjectival complementation strongly increases from the second half of the 19th century on. It emerges first in predicative position (32) (which is consistent with the above hypothesis of copula-suppression), but already at the end of the 19th century, [*verre van* Adj] may be integrated into the noun phrase too, with *verre van* modifying an attributive adjective (33).

(32) *De toestand van het ijs in het Kattegat en de verschillende toegangen tot de Oostzee is nog verre van gunstig, terwijl ook in de meeste Duitse Oostzeehavens nog weinig verbetering valt waar te nemen. (Algemeen Handelsblad, 06.03.1895)*

‘The state of the ice in the Kattegat and the various entrances to the Baltic Sea is still far from favorable, while little improvement can be observed in most of the German Baltic ports.’

(33) *Deze voorstellen vloeien voort uit het eindigen van de huur van het bekende café Niessingh aan den oever der rivier, dat in een verre van schitterenden toestand verkeert. (Algemeen Handelsblad, 26.08.1897)*

‘These proposals are the result of ending the lease of the famous café Niessingh on the river bank, which is in a far from brilliant state.’

The absolute use of *verre van*, observed in the synchronic data (3.3), is not yet present in the data from 1940-1949, which suggests that this is a recent extension of the use of *verre van* as an adverbial downtoner.

4.4. Comparison [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*]

The diachronic analysis of the constructions [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*] has revealed two mirror developments. Whereas both constructions have been in competition with each other since Middle Dutch and still show significant functional overlap in the middle of the 19th century, their functions gradually drift apart from this period onwards.

Figure 7 traces the evolution of the proportion of downtoner uses between 1840-1849 (CHK corpus) and present-day Dutch (NLCOW2012-00X corpus) and clearly indicates the functional divergence between [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*], the former losing its downtoner meaning, and the latter getting more and more specialized as a downtoner.

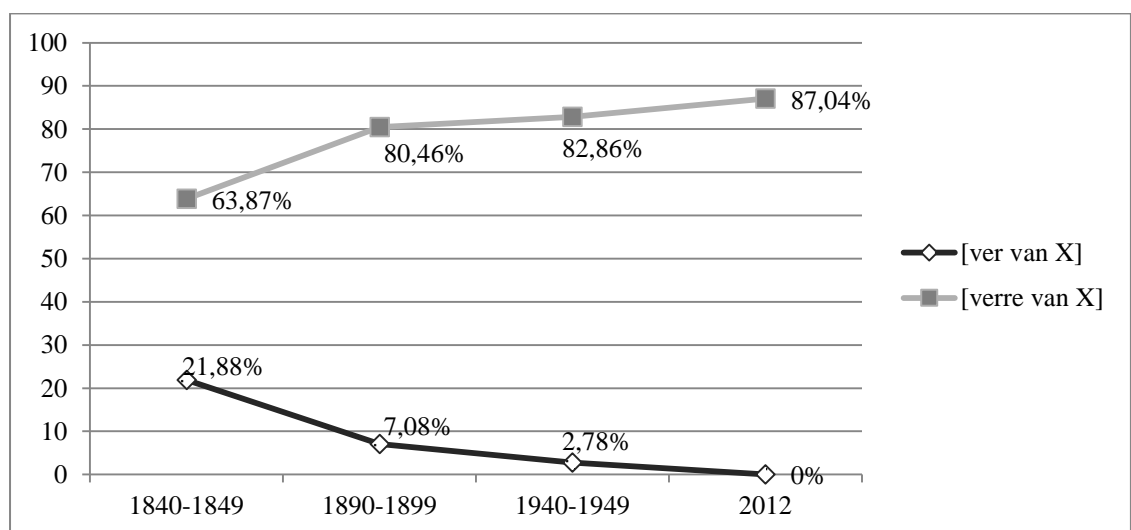


Figure 7: Evolution downtoner meanings [*verre van X*] and [*ver van X*]

This view is supported by the degree to which meaning and complement type govern the choice between [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*]. This can be measured as the respective effect sizes of meaning and complement type, using Cramer's V. The closer the value of Cramer's V is to 1, the greater the effect of the independent variables (meaning, complement type) on the dependent variable (*ver van / verre van*). The functional differentiation between *ver van* and *verre van* then shows up as growing effect sizes for the factors governing the choice. Figure 8 plots the values for Cramer's V over time, showing that both meaning and complement type become better predictors of the choice between [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*] – in other words, the formal variants drift apart. There is an increasing association of *ver van* to lexical (i.e. spatial or metaphorical) meanings and nominal complements¹³, and a growing association of *verre van* to grammatical (i.e. downtoner) meanings and non-nominal complements such as adjectives or past participles. The figure also suggests that differentiation happened first in the items' semantics, with consequences on distributional behaviour following slightly later.

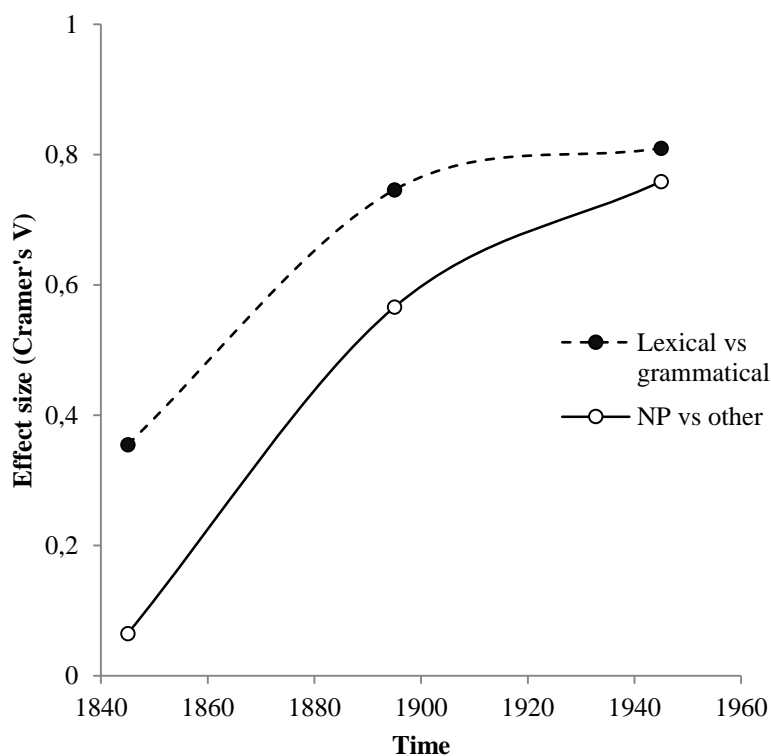


Figure 8: Semantic and syntactic differentiation in the choice between *ver van* and *verre van*, as reflected by increasing effect size of independent variables.

The corpus results are confirmed by the data provided in the *WNT* (s.v. *Ver^{II}*). In the 19th century, *ver van* and *verre van* are both attested with spatial, metaphorical and downtoner meanings. Examples (34-35) illustrate this competition in the [*ver(re) van* Vinf] construction, which has been argued to act as an important locus of semantic and syntactic change.

(34) *Ten bewijze dat hij er verre van was zich iets te willen aanmatigen boven de overige leden van zijn... geslacht* (Potgieter 4, 92 [1840])

‘To prove that he was far from wanting to presume anything above the other members of his ...generation’

(35) *Ik ben ver van dit aan den geleerden vreemdeling...euvel te duiden* (Veegens, *Hist. Stud.* 2, 3 [1880])

‘I am far from blaming the learned stranger for it’

However, this construction appears to go back much further in time; the *WNT* (s.v. *Ver^{II}*) signals an example from 1622 already, which is ambiguous between a metaphorical and downtoner meaning:

(36) *Haest vliegen sy (de eenden) weer henen: ‘t Is een lichtveerdich goet: haer doen is ver van ‘t menen* (Rijckelsma, *Eendenj.* 16 [1622])

‘In haste they (the ducks) fly away again: it’s a reckless thing: its doings are far from intentional (lit. far from meaning it)’

So we can assume that the metaphorical and possibly the downtoner meanings too had already emerged long before the 19th century. However, during it was during the 19th century that the availability of two forms to express the same three meanings led to a gradual functional specialization. During this process, [*ver van X*] essentially underwent ‘retraction’ (Haspelmath, 2004) of its most innovative functions (downtoner use), while [*verre van X*] specialized in this function.

5. Category change, constructional change and constructionalization

To sum up, we can state that both [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*] have undergone a category change to adverbial downtoners to some extent, but whereas the former again loses its innovative uses in the course of its history, the latter pursues this new course. In a first step, both forms start off as a (compositional) combination of an adjective/adverb and a preposition, governing nominal complements, and are used to express spatial, and later on metaphorical, distance. Since at this original stage, *ver* and *verre* are just two formal variants used to denote the same functions, we propose that they form part of the same construction, represented as follows:

(37) STEP 1: $[[\textit{ver(re)}]_A [\textit{van}]_{\text{Prep}} [\textit{X}]_{\text{NP}}]_{\text{AP}} \leftrightarrow \text{'distant from X'}$

However, in a second step, this construction develops a new downtoning meaning out of the metaphorical use. We have suggested that the expansion to infinitival complements, particularly productive in the case of *verre van* by the middle of the 19th century, plays an important role in the transition from metaphorical to downtoner meaning, and facilitates the extension to participial and adjectival complements later on. However, syntactically, nominal complementation, including infinitival clauses, is still to a very large extent preferred in this period. In other words, this second stage involves a mismatch between form and meaning, typical of a pre-constructionalization process (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, p. 27): syntactically [*ver(re) van X*] still acts as a relational expression, combining an adjective / adverb and a preposition, but semantically a (non-compositional) downtoning interpretation is often available, such as ‘instead of’ in the cases with infinitival complements:

(38) STEP 2: $[[\textit{ver(re)}]_A [\textit{van}]_{\text{Prep}} [\textit{X}]_{\text{VInf}}]_{\text{AP}} \leftrightarrow \text{'instead of X'}$

From the second half of the 19th century, a split takes place into two separate micro-constructions (STEP 3): proportionally, [*ver van X*] is increasingly used as a complex relational expression with nominal complements to express spatial and metaphorical distance (39a), while [*verre van X*] gradually specializes into an adverbial downtoner, and is nowadays mostly used to modify predicative adjectives (39b). [*Verre van X*] even extends this function by a subsequent host-class expansion to new complementation patterns, i.e. attributive adjectives, and finally, absolute use (without a complement).

- (39) a. STEP 3A: [[*ver*]_A [*van*]_{Prep} [*X*]_{NP}]_{AP} ↔ ‘distant from X’
 b. STEP 3B: [[*verre van*]_{Adv} [*X*]_A]_{AP} ↔ ‘not X at all’

In the case of [*ver van X*], we observe a category change in some functions developed from STEP 1 to STEP 2. It involves minor semantic and formal changes, including the emergence of a small share of downtoner uses with infinitival and adjectival complements, but from STEP 2 to STEP 3A, these innovative uses tend to disappear again. In the end, when we compare STEP 1 with STEP 3A, no new construction has been created, and although [*ver van X*] has undergone minor constructional changes along the way, the final result cannot be seen as a constructionalization in the sense of Traugott & Trousdale (2013, p. 22). No new form-function node is created in the constructional network; instead, [*ver van X*] (almost completely) loses its downtoner function and does not attract new complement types.

The picture is completely different for [*verre van X*]. From STEP 1 to STEP 3B, we observe a gradual extension of its downtoner meaning and, syntactically, a shift from complex

relational expression to degree adverb. Since a new form-meaning pair emerges by the end of the process, we can conclude that the use of *verre van* as adverbial downtoner is the result of true constructionalization. The process is accompanied by some typical changes in its degree of schematicity, productivity and compositionality (cf. Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, pp. 13-20). With regard to schematicity, we have observed that the ambiguous form-meaning mappings of STEPS 1 and 2 (i.e., two forms for the same meanings) eventually lead to a new micro-construction with univocal form-meaning mapping: in STEP 3B *verre van* is an unambiguous instantiation of the more abstract schema of adverbial dntoners. The increased productivity is manifested through the host-class expansion subsequent to the category change. Finally, from STEP 1 to STEP 3B, we notice a loss of compositionality: *verre van* is no longer a compositional sequence combining an adverb / adjective with a preposition, but acts as a non-compositional downtoning adverb. Loss of compositionality here implies, among other things, that the *van* in *verre van* can no longer be considered as the head of a prepositional phrase. This is also evident from its inability to undergo exbraciation, as shown in 4.2. Curiously, the preposition *van* is preserved as a relic of its original function to complement *verre* with nominal complements, but has completely lost this function in the present-day Dutch downtoning adverb, to the extent that it can even be used without a complement.

6. Conclusions

In this study we have shown that category change does not only concern single words, but can also affect multi-word units, such as Dutch *verre van*, forming part of the micro-construction [*verre van X*]. Similarly to its English counterpart *far from*, Dutch *verre van*, originally the combination of a spatial adverb/adjective with a preposition, has developed into a non-compositional and productive downtoning degree adverb in present-day Dutch. Its adverbialization is even more advanced than English *far from*, as shown by the fact that, contrary to the latter, *verre van* can be used absolutely in recent attestations.

The process seems to have been supported by different factors. We have shown that Dutch word order has made available chunks such as [*verre van Part + VInf*] and [*verre van Adj + VInf*] in which the infinitive may have been dropped for efficiency reasons. Moreover, we assume that the adverbialization process of *verre van* must have interacted with the developments in another form, *ver van*, which essentially has reverted to its original functions. In sum, our case study does not only support the importance of context-sensitivity in category change, one of the basic assumptions of a constructionist view on language change (Bergs & Diewald, 2008), but also demonstrates the need to focus not only on the vertical inheritance relationships in the constructional network (links with the “parents”), but also to take into account the interaction, connectivity and possible competition between different (micro-)constructions at the horizontal level (links between “peers”), as also proposed by Norde (2014) and Norde & Morris (this volume).

Whereas the evolution of [*ver van X*] involves an onset and subsequent withdrawal of minor constructional changes, the use of [*verre van X*] as a degree adverb is the result of constructionalization, including major changes at the semantic and the syntactic level: the original spatial expression has developed into a downtoning adverb and through the process it underwent an important expansion of its host-classes.

The question then arises if every category change should be accounted for as an instance of constructionalization. We believe that this must often be the case, but not always. Category change very frequently involves prominent changes at the formal level because the changing item has to conform to the morphological and syntactic properties (in the sense of complement types or inflectional properties, for instance) of the new word-class it enters, and this is logically reflected at the semantic level too. This kind of constructionalization process is gradual, as is typical of grammatical constructionalization (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, p. 22): the properties of the new category are acquired in a piecemeal way, as illustrated in this study for *verre van*. The item may even stay defective, stuck in-between two lexical categories (synchronic ‘intersective gradience’, cf. Denison, 2001; Aarts, 2007). This can be illustrated by recently attested adjectival uses of the French noun *clé* (e.g., *une position vraiment clé* ‘a really key position’) (Van Goethem, 2015) or by the examples of evaluative adjectives in Germanic derived from nouns, as provided by Battefeld, Leuschner & Rawoens (this volume) (e.g., *ein spitze Auto* ‘a great car’).

However, other types of category change are assumed to operate in a more abrupt way, such as morphological conversions, in which an item is converted into a new lexical word-class and generally adopts the morphological and syntactic properties of this new category instantaneously (e.g., Dutch *fiets_N* ‘bike’ > *fiets_V* ‘to bike’). Since a new form-function pair is created, we can still consider this type of category change the result of constructionalization, but of a different kind. We are dealing here with instantaneous lexical constructionalization: “the output of conversion is a construction, but it has not arisen gradually” (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, p.187).¹⁴

Finally, category change may also occur as the result of coercion-by-override when an item is inserted in a constructional slot intended for items belonging to another lexical category. This phenomenon is discussed in Booij & Audring (this volume) and can be illustrated by

adjectives coerced into noun-like behaviour when embedded in prepositional phrases (e.g., *van rijp tot groen* ‘from mature to green’). Contrary to the grammatical constructionalization of *verre van*, and similarly to morphological conversion (as an instance of lexical constructionalization), category change as a result of coercion-by-override is not gradual, but instantaneous. Contrary to conversion, however, it does not (necessarily) create a permanent category change accompanied by formal and semantic changes. In the example, the adjective *rijp* is only used as a noun when inserted in the specific prepositional phrase pattern, but does not develop nominal properties outside of it (e.g., **de/het rijp* ‘the mature’). Therefore constructionalization is not necessarily involved.

It follows that we need to distinguish between different types of category change, as the result of different processes (grammatical or lexical constructionalization, coercion-by-override, and probably several others), and that category change should not be confused or identified with constructionalization.

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CGN (Corpus Gesproken Nederlands) Available online at: <http://lands.let.ru.nl/cgn/>

CHK (Corpus Historische Kranten) Available online at: <http://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten>

TwNC (Twente News Corpus) Available online at: <http://hmi.ewi.utwente.nl/TwNC>

WNT (Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal) Available online at: <http://gtb.inl.nl/>

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¹ Actualization is traditionally defined as "the process following syntactic reanalysis whereby an item's new syntactic status manifests itself in new syntactic behavior" (De Smet, 2012: p. 601).

² Given its relational semantics, *far from*, as well as *ver(re) van*, can in many contexts be analysed as a complex preposition, but in the absence of positive evidence supporting this analysis, we assume here the analysis most closely reflecting their historical origins as combinations of an adjective/adverb and a preposition.

³ The examples have been taken from the UKCOW2011XS and NLCOW2012-00X webcorpora, compiled at the Freie Universität Berlin (Schäfer & Bildhauer, 2012). The more recent versions of these corpora are accessible, after registration, via the Colibri² web application (see <https://webcorpora.org/>).

⁴ We have consulted the electronic version of the *WNT* via the web platform of the *Geïntegreerde Taalbank* (<http://gtb.inl.nl/>).

⁵ Online version of *Van Dale Nederlands*, consulted via <http://bib.arts.kuleuven.be/bibliotheek/catalog.cfm>.

⁶ The search query [word="ver|verre"%c] "van" allowed us to obtain a random sample of occurrences including both forms.

⁷ Information about the COW project can be found at <http://corporafromtheweb.org/>. A more recent version of the corpora as well as the new search interface is available since 2015 at <http://webcorpora.org/>.

⁸ The statistical tests have been carried out with the statistical program SPSS (IBM SPSS Statistics 21). In the Pearson Chi-Square test, we have grouped together the spatial and metaphorical meanings and compared this semantic category of “distance” with the proportion of downtoner meanings.

⁹ The difference between the CGN and TNC may be due to chance or it may reflect regional sampling. The TNC contains no Flemish material, whereas the CGN does. The one example of downtoner [*ver van X*] in the CGN comes from a Flemish source.

¹⁰ Since the expected frequencies of several complement types were lower than 5, we had to group certain categories to be able to perform Pearson’s Chi-Square-test. We have therefore compared the complementation by nominal categories (N/NP, Pron), typical of prepositions, with the other complementation patterns (Adv, Vinf, Part, Adj, null).

¹¹ The corpus was compiled by Hendrik De Smet, drawing on public domain materials made available through the newspaper archive of the *Koninklijke Bibliotheek*. The corpus was queried with a dedicated perl script, using the regular expression `\bver(re)? van\b`.

¹² Dutch *te*-infinitives (more so than their English cognate, the *to*-infinitive) often function as noun clauses. They occur as subjects, direct objects and as complements of prepositions. It is reasonable to assume that the use of infinitives following *ver(re) van* is therefore a natural extension of the use of *ver(re) van* with noun phrases.

¹³ The nominal complements include nouns, noun phrases and pronouns; the non-nominal category contains the remaining complement types.

¹⁴ Conceivably, however, even conversions are gradual but the ‘analogical pull’ exerted by major word classes and highly productive alternations is so strong that the relevant developments unfold much more quickly and systematically.