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Parallel sources, different outcomes

A corpus-based study of
the ‘far from X’
construction in French,
English and Dutch

Introduction (1)

- Topic: [*loin de X*], [*far from X*], [*ver/verre van X*]
- Parallel source: [Adj/Adv_{spat} Prep X]
- Parallel semantics (in synchrony):
 - (1) spatial distance
 - (2) metaphorical distance
 - (3) degree modifier (downtoner)

Introduction (2)

○ Spatial distance:

- (1) On était **loin de** la ville. (FRCOW2011)
'We were far from the city.'
- (2) Green willow is a modern , fresh house set in a wonderful garden near East Preston village , not **far from** the sea .
(UKCOW2011)
- (3) De appel valt nooit **ver van** de boom. (NLCOW2012)
'The apple never falls far from the tree.'

○ Metaphorical distance:

- (4) Nous voilà **loin de** la mondialisation heureuse! (FRCOW2011)
'Here we are far from happy globalization!'
- (5) Her centralized , authoritarian populism is quite **far from** the ideology which i'd imagine both of us seek . (UKCOW2011)
- (6) De gedachte om kritiek op je te leveren staat **ver van** me.
(NLCOW2012)
'The thought of criticizing you is far from me.'

Introduction (3)

- o **Degree modifier (downtoner):**

- (7) Or, c'est **loin d'**être le cas. (FRCOW2011)
'But this is far from being the case.'
- (8) But it is **far from** certain that this means that the public wish to see the strongest and most explicit images available on television (...) (UKCOW2011)
- (9) Maar David was **verre van** perfect. (NLCOW2012)
'But David was far from perfect.'

Introduction (4)

- Different outcomes?
 - Category change:
from adverb/adjective + preposition to adverbial downtoner?
 - $[[far]_A [from_{Prep} [X]_{NP}]]_{AP} \leftrightarrow \text{'far from X'}$
 - $[[far\ from]_{Adv} [X]]_{XP} \leftrightarrow \text{'not X at all'}$
- Different degrees of « adverbialization »?
- Different processes of change?

Outline

1. French [*loin de X*]
2. English [*far from X*]
3. Dutch [*ver/verre van X*]
4. Conclusions

Method

○ Synchronic analysis

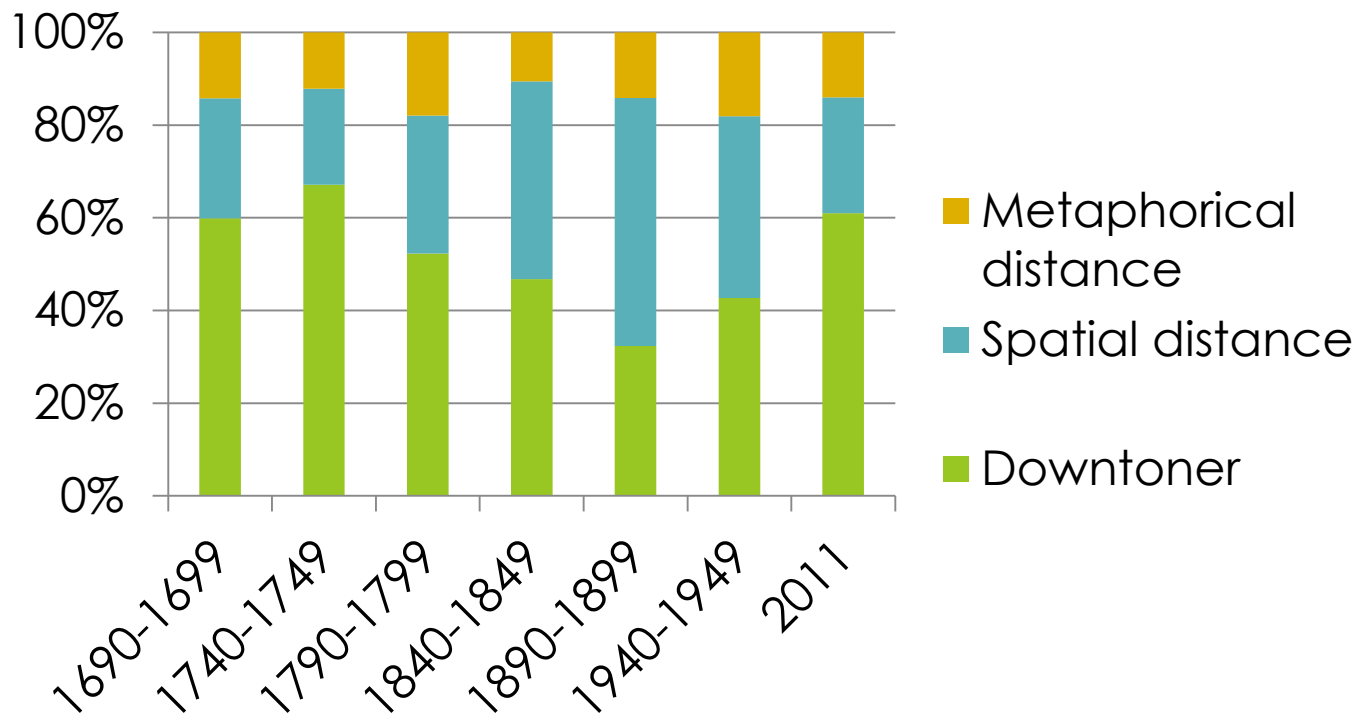
- FR/ENG/DU:
 - COW corpus (Schäfer & Bildhauer 2012): FRCOW2011XS / UKCOW2011XS / NLCOW2012-00X
 - 300 random tokens per language

○ Diachronic analysis

- FR:
 - Frantext corpus
 - 200 random tokens in 6 time intervals: 1690-1699; 1740-1749; 1790-1799; 1840-1849; 1890-1899; 1940-1949
- ENG:
 - EEBOCorp, CLMET3.0 and BNC
 - 200 random tokens in 10 time intervals: 1550-9; 1590-9; 1630-9; 1650-9; 1670-9; 1690-9; 1710-1780; 1780-1850; 1850-1920; 1987-1992
- DU:
 - KB corpus: newspaper archives of the *Koninklijke Bibliotheek*
 - 200 random tokens in 3 time intervals: 1840-1849; 1890-1899; 1940-1949

1. French [*loin de X*]

1.1. [*loin de X*]: semantics (1)



1.1. [*loin de X*]: semantics (2)

- Spatial distance:

(10) [...] si **loin de** la mer. (FRCOW2011)

‘[...] so far from the sea.’

- Metaphorical distance:

(11) Le moment où je parle est déjà **loin de** moy. (Frantext 1698)

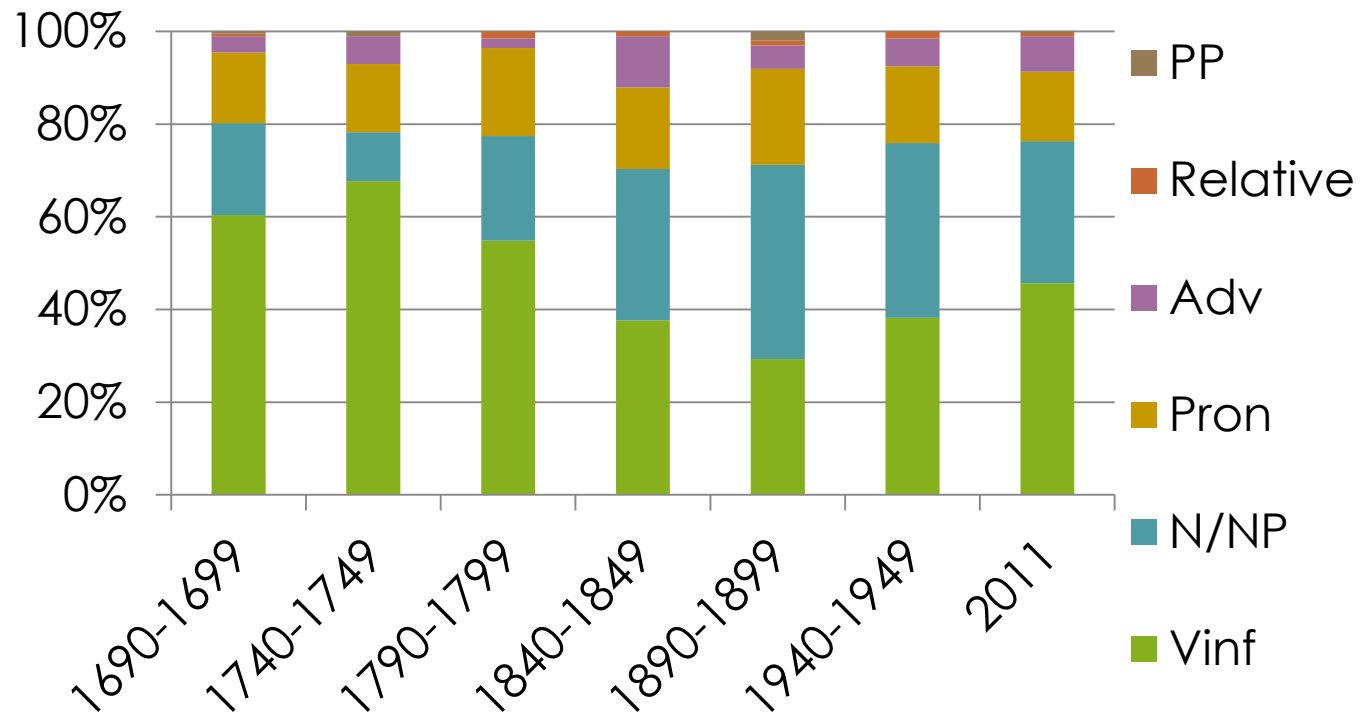
‘The moment I speak is already far from me.’

- Downtoner:

(12) Vous êtes **loin d’**avoir vaincu toutes les difficultés. (Frantext 1797)

‘You are far from having overwon all the difficulties.’

1.2. [*loin de X*]: POS of X (1)



1.2. [*loin de* X]: POS of X (2)

- [*Loin de*] mainly followed by :

- Vinf (+ VP/Adj/Part/Ø)

(13) La liste est **loin d'**être exhaustive. (FRCOW2011)

'The list is far from being exhaustive.'

***loin d'**exhaustive

(14) La précarité, **loin de** reculer, s'étend. (FRCOW2011)

'Insecurity, far from decreasing, increases.'

- N/NP

(15) Albert est si **loin de** mes préoccupations. (Frantext 1899)

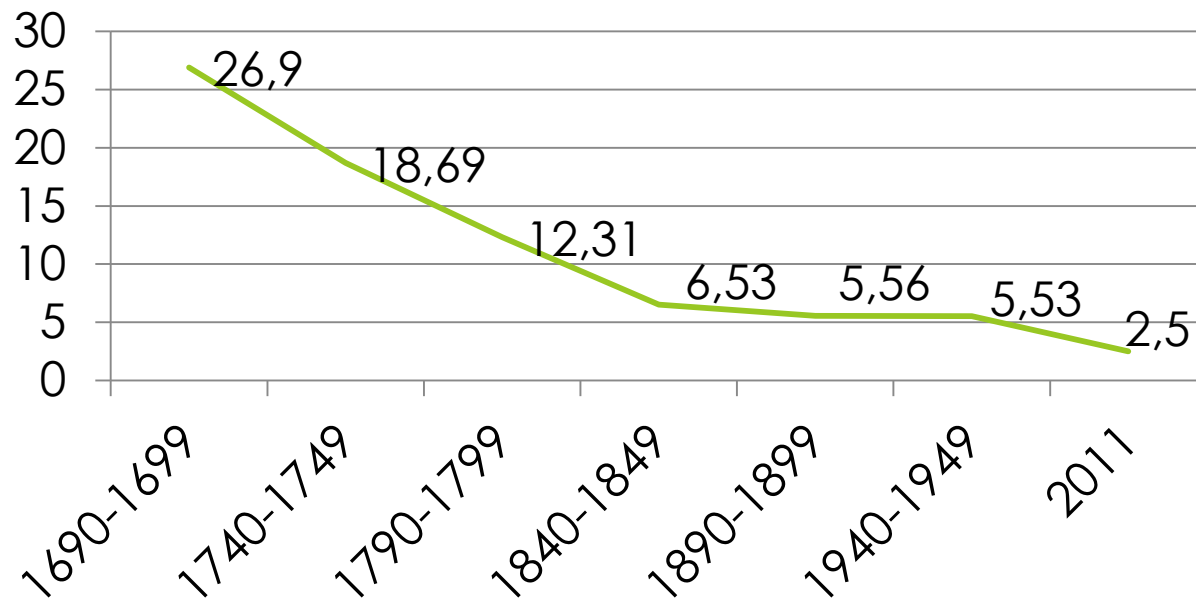
'Albert is so far from my preoccupations.'

1.3. Mismatch form / meaning

- No major semantic and formal changes
 - Most frequent POS: Vinf, N/NP, Pron
 - No extension of POS
 - No degree adverb, but downtoner meaning
 - X is necessary: **loin de*
- Mismatch between form and meaning

1.4. [*bien loin de X*] (1)

- [*bien loin de X*] as a downtoner (in %):



1.4. [*bien loin de X*] (2)

- [*bien loin de X*]: more frequent in the 17th and 18th centuries than in the 19th and 20th centuries

→ Distributional change

(16) Vous êtes **bien loin de** ressembler à ces gens-là.

(Frantext 1747)

‘You are far from resembling those people.’

(17) Mon père est **bien loin de** supporter cette retraite.

(Frantext 1791)

‘My father is far from supporting this retreat.’

1.5. A case of adverbialization?

- Mismatch between form and meaning: no degree adverb, but downtoner meaning
- Small distributional changes: [*bien loin de X*]

→ **Minor changes, but no constructionalization**

(cf. Traugott – Trousdale 2013)

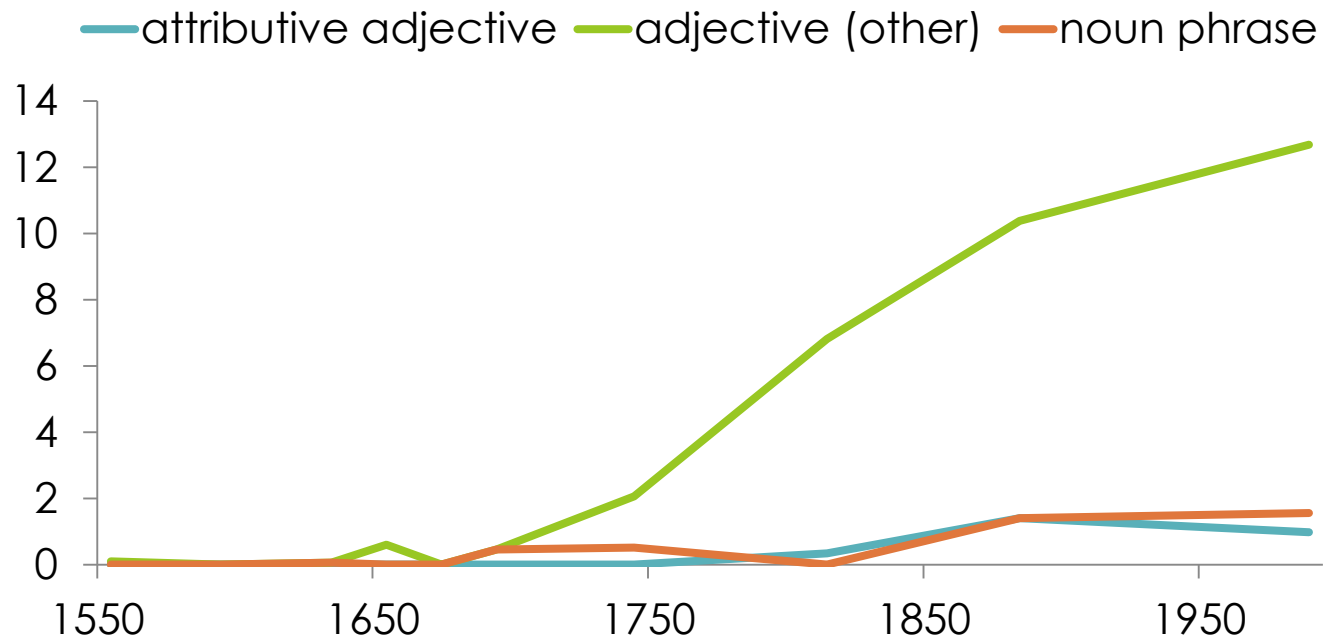
2. English [*far from X*]

2.1 The rise of downtoner *far from*

- Downtoner-uses in PDE

- (18) [noun phrase] it's **far from** the only service we offer you. (BNC)
- (19) [predicative adjective] how long he will stay there is **far from** certain. (BNC)
- (20) [attributive adjective] this is a **far from** universal feature. (BNC)
- (21) [verb phrase] football hooliganism had **far from** disappeared (BNC)

2.1 The rise of downtoner *far* from



2.2 Causes of change

- Shift in acceptability, rather than syntactic reanalysis
 - Downtoner-uses were never completely ungrammatical

(22) Till his voice was much more clere then his wit.
And yet **fer from** witles: but plaine blunte
grosenes, Showde his words: (1556, EEBO)
 - Syntactically, downtoner uses are not categorically distinct from lexical uses

(23) Cleaned up for her inspection she supposed
and even then many of them **very far from** tidy.
(BNC)

2.2 Causes of change

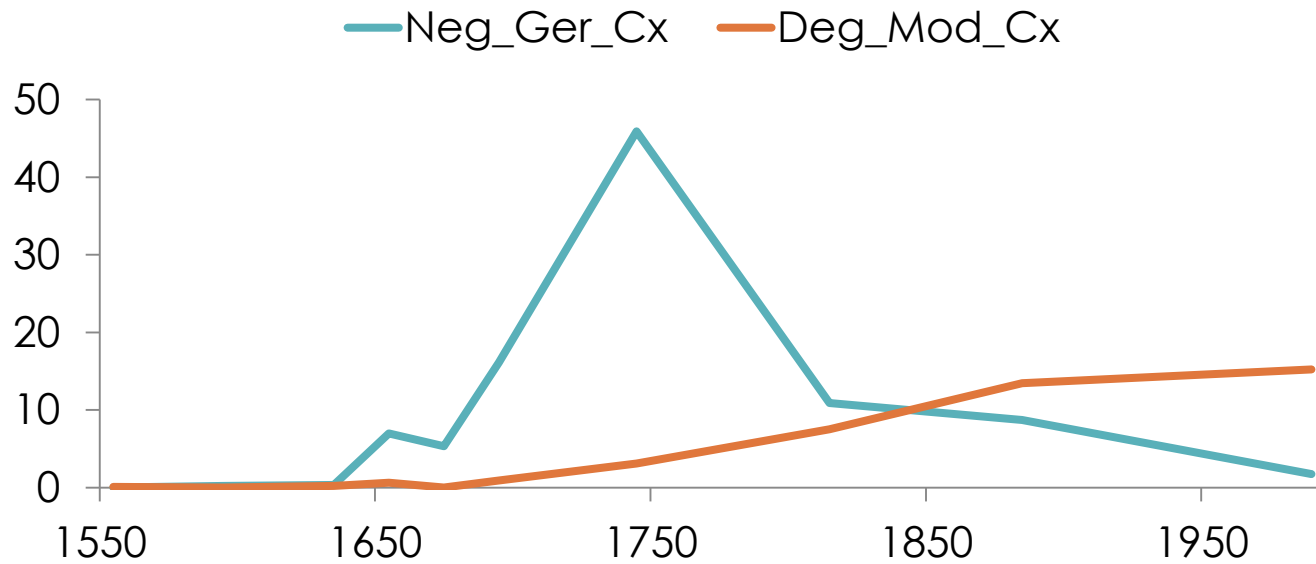
- Rise of downtoner follows earlier change
 - *Far from* + *Ving* in emphatic negative construction

(24) he was very **far from** thinking that Church was,
and ever should be a safe keeper, and an
infallible witnesse of Tradition in generall: (1638, EEBO)
 - Origins
 - meaning: from metaphorical senses of *far from*

(25) And **far from** flattery I spoke my minde (1592, EEBO)
 - form: *far from* + *Ving* instantiates *far from* + NP

2.2 Causes of change

- Emphatic negative construction appears just before downtoner use



2.2 Causes of change

- *Be far from Ving* improved the acceptability of *be far from Adj*
 - Dramatic increase of *be far from X* with scalar meaning
 - Frequent interchangeability
- (26) That Abraham begat Isaac, is a point very **far from** being Fundamentall (1638, EEBOCorp)

2.2 Causes of change

- *Be far from Ving* improved the acceptability of *be far from Adj*
 - Increased structural indeterminacy for *far from*
 - (27) yet notwithstanding those Fathers were **far from** questioning the authority or infallibility of any one of the Evangelists (1653, EEBOCorp)
 - (28) But we are **not** questioning the instrumentality of the soul now, but of faith. (1658, EEBOCorp)

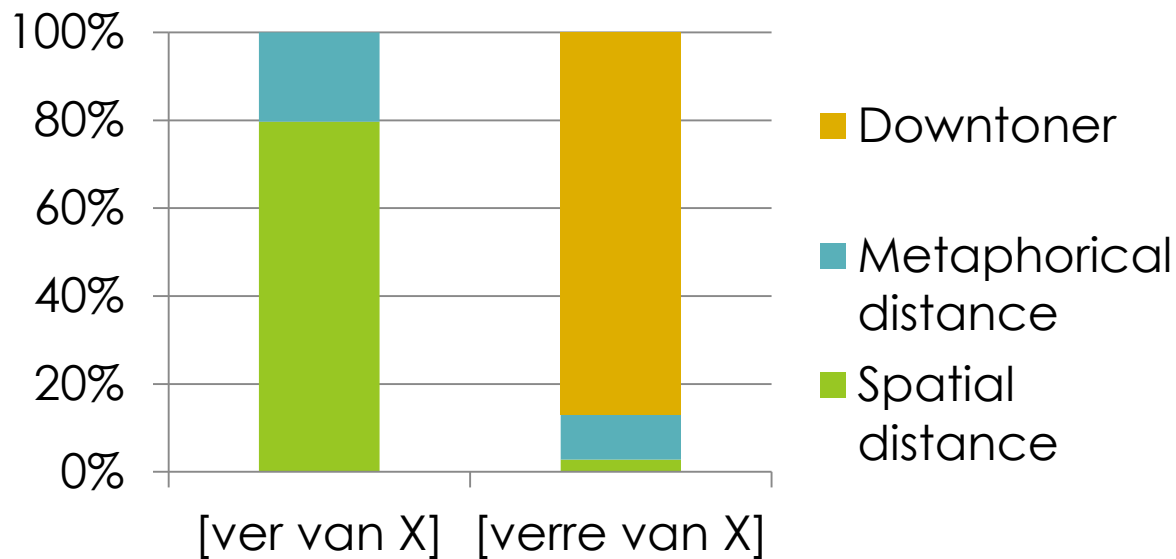
3. Dutch [*ver/verre van X*]

3.1. Two forms: *ver* vs *verre* (1)

- ◉ WNT (s.v. *Ver^l*):
 - ◉ Originally an Adv of spatial distance, now also Adj
 - ◉ *Verre*:
 - inflected, regular form in Middle Dutch
 - only preserved in collocations (*verre van* 'far from', *van heinde en verre* 'from far and near')
 - ◉ *Ver*:
 - uninflected form, in use since 15th century
 - now the generalized form for the Adv (and Adj)

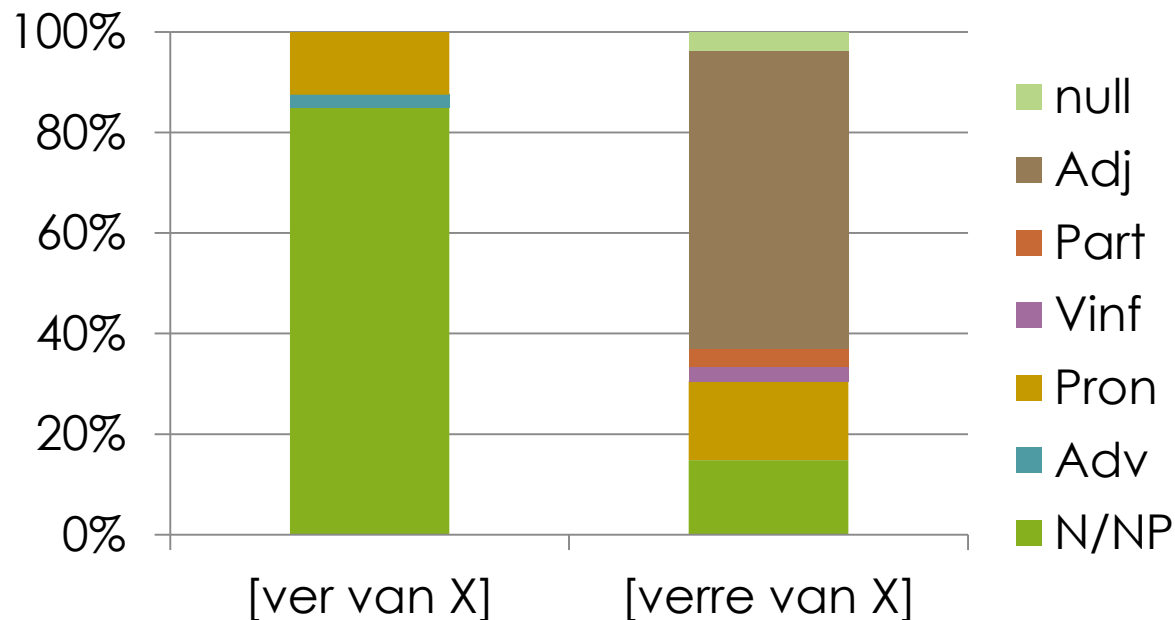
3.1. Two forms: *ver* vs *verre* (2)

- Semantics (NLCOW2012)



3.1. Two forms: *ver* vs *verre* (3)

- POS of X (NLCOW2012)



3.1. Two forms: *ver* vs *verre* (4)

- *Ver van* + nominal complements (N/NP/Pron)

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

(NLCOW2012)

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

(30) Vanuit Mexico gezien liggen Parijs en Breda helemaal niet zo **ver van** elkaar. (NLCOW2012)

‘Seen from Mexico Paris and Breda are not so far apart at all.’

3.1. Two forms: *ver* vs *verre* (5)

- [verre van X]: degree adverb (+ Adj, Ø, ...)

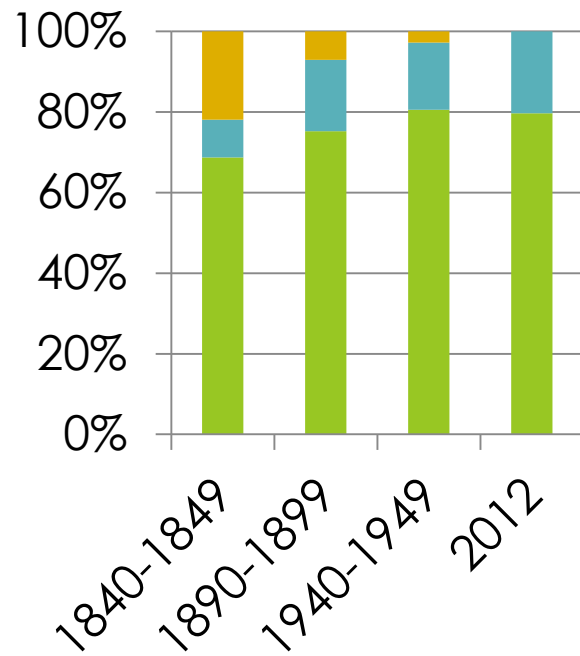
(31) Er staan een hoop gedichten in die **verre van** onvergetelijk zijn, maar gewoon slapjes. (NLCOW2012)
'There are a lot of poems that are far from memorable, but just weak.'

(32) Dit was een **verre van** marginiaal verschijnsel. (NLCOW2012)
'This was a far from marginal phenomenon.'

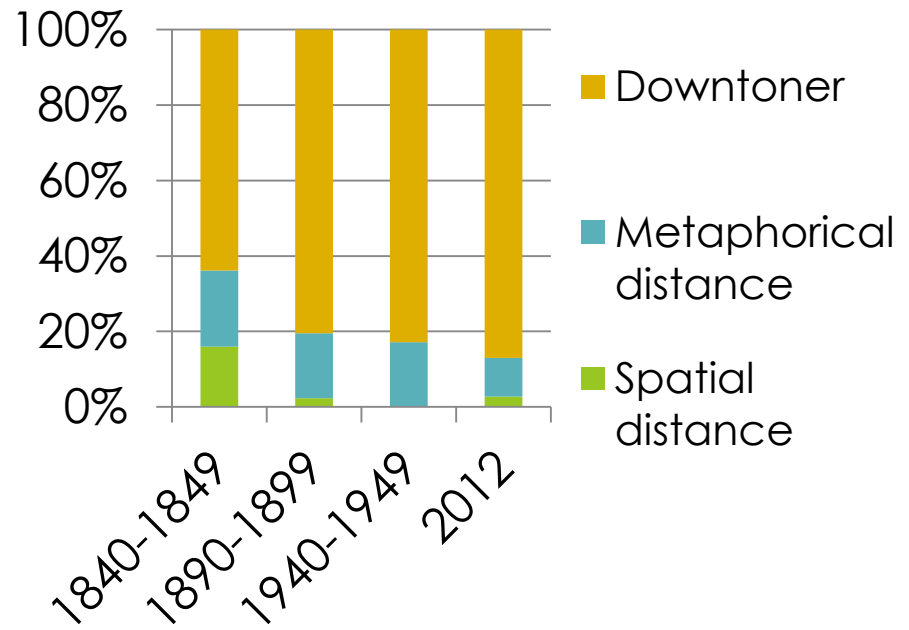
(33) Ik zeg niet dat hier alles beter is, **verre van**, zou ik haast zeggen. (NLCOW2012)
'I'm not saying here everything is better, far from it, I'd almost say.'

3.2. [ver van/verre van X]: semantics (1)

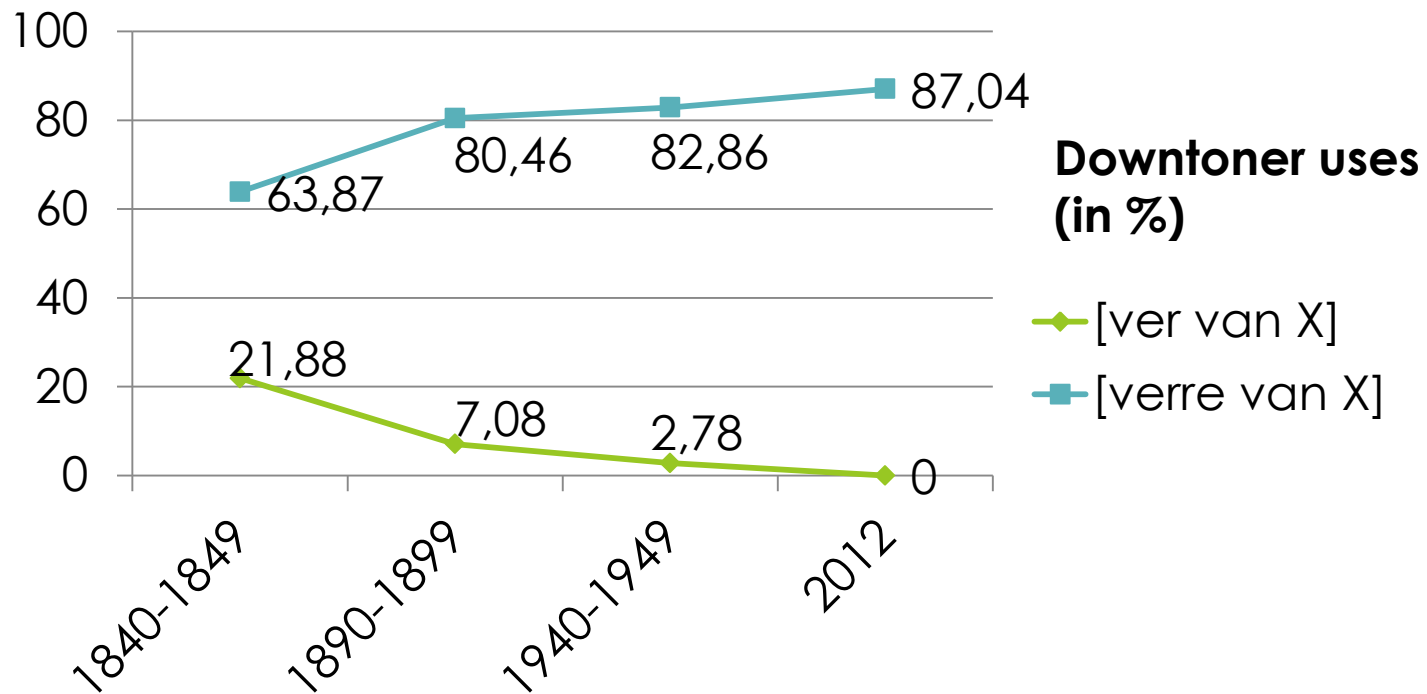
[ver van X]



[verre van X]

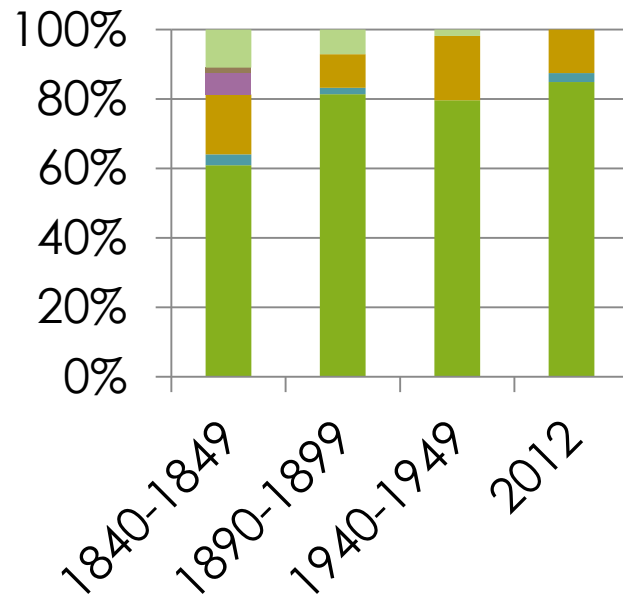


3.2. [ver/verre van X]: semantics (2)

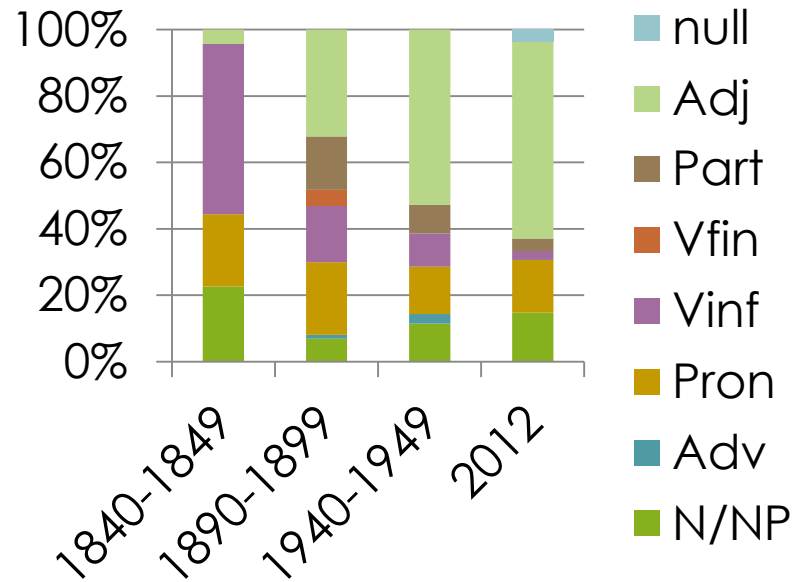


3.3. [ver/verre van X]: POS of X (1)

[ver van X]



[verre van X]



3.3. [*ver/verre van X*]: POS of X (2)

- [*verre van + te + Vinf*] ‘instead of *Vinf*’: frequent in 18th-19th centuries, disappears later on

(34) Het blijkt dus, dat, wel **verre van** aan de afschaffing der graanwet te denken, men deze wenscht te behouden (KB, 1845)

‘It thus appears that, far from thinking of the abolition of the corn law, people desire to keep it’
- Adj_{Pred} precedes Adj_{Attr} (since 1890-1899):

(35) [...] het bekende café Niess'nggh [...], dat in een **verre van** schitterenden toestand verkeert. (KB, 1897)

‘[...] the famous bar Niess'nggh [...], which is in a far from brilliant state.’

3.3. [*ver/verre van X*]: POS of X (3)

- [*verre van* $\emptyset$]: not yet in 1940-1949, only in COW 2012:

(36) Ik zeg niet dat jij het volgende zegt, **verre van** ... [...].

(NLCOW2012)

'I'm not saying you say the following things, far from it... [...].'

3.4. A case of adverbialization?

- [verre van X]:
 - Semantic change: specialization as a downtoner
 - Formal change: category change to adverb
 - Host-class expansion (Part, Adj_{Pred}, Adj_{Attr}, $\emptyset$)
- [ver van X]:
 - 'Retraction': loss of downtoner function
 - No formal change: no new complement types

Conclusions (1)

○ Commonalities:

- All three languages develop downtoner-like meanings
- In all three languages these occur with (i) noun phrases and (ii) nominalized clauses

○ Differences:

- Adverbialization reflected in host-class expansion in English *far from* and Dutch *verre van*
- Host-class expansion is more advanced in Dutch *verre van* than in English *far from*

Conclusions (2)

- ◉ **Possible causes:**

- ◉ Word order: Dutch *verre van* + Adj is an available chunk in nominalized clauses, contrary to English and French:

ze lijkt verre van sympathiek (te zijn)

... loin d'être sympa

... far from being nice

- ◉ English nominalized clauses sometimes resemble progressive verb phrases (*...are far from questioning...*)
- ◉ Availability of two forms in Dutch supported form-function differentiation

References

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- Schäfer, R. & F. Bildhauer. (2012). Building large corpora from the web using a new efficient tool chain. N. Calzolari, K. Choukri, T. Declerck et al. (Eds), *Proceedings of the Eight International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation*, Istanbul, 486-493.
- Traugott, E. C. & G. Trousdale (2013). *Constructionalization and Constructional Changes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Corpora and dictionaries

- BNC: <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>
- COW = Corpora from the Web: <http://corporafromtheweb.org/>
- EEBOCorp: <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>
- Frantext: <http://www.frantext.fr/>
- KB: <http://kranten.kb.nl/>
- WNT: <http://gtb.inl.nl/>