

DUTCH *LAAT STAAN* AND FRENCH *ENCORE MOINS* CONSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTS

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 - Revised description of *let alone*
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Project Description

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□ Background

25 years after seminal paper by Fillmore, Kay and O'Connor (FKO, 1988) on *let alone*

(1) *The baby can't even crawl yet, let alone walk.* (Longman)

□ syntax

coord. conjunction; negative polarity item; sentence fragment; paired foci

□ semantics

presupposed scale allowing an inference

□ pragmatics

given the context, the 1st clause gives more information than requested, while the 2nd (reconstructed) clause is most relevant to the discussion

(cf. Grice: satisfying Maxim of Quantity and Maxim of Relation)

“The lexical entry *let alone* thus implies an entire grammatical **construction** in which syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic information are interrelated” (FKO 1988: 530)

Project Description

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- Objectives: 3 questions
 - can we still fully support FKO's analysis?
 - does FKO's (revised) analysis extend to the most commonly used counterparts in some other languages?
 - Dutch *laat staan* (studied before)
 - French *encore moins* (or *encore plus*) (not yet studied before)
 - shouldn't we integrate phonological information in our description?

Project Description

□ Results

- *let alone* requires a rather more refined analysis than hitherto provided to cover all natural occurrences
 - *let alone* isn't always used as a negative polarity item
 - second proposition isn't always inferable
 - 1st proposition may be most relevant, 2nd most informative
- its Dutch and French counterparts also display a rich array of usage possibilities, but without perfect overlap
- prosodically, there are arguments to assume we're dealing with a construction

Methodology

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- Literature study (*let alone* and *laat staan*)
- Preliminary exploration of corpus and web-attested data
 - Building a new taxonomy of usage types (or ‘interpretations’)
 - Constructing a list of coding parameters and values
- Systematic corpus analysis
 - ▣ Looking up common translations for *let alone* in Dutch and French
 - ▣ Coding corpus examples for some 10 parameters
- Experiment on prosodic contours
 - ▣ So far for French *encore moins*

Methodology

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□ Guiding hypotheses

- There are several subtypes, each with their own properties
- The availability/frequency of these subtypes is language-specific
- Prosody (often neglected) is part of the construction

Key Findings 1:

FKO (1988) not fully accurate

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□ Syntax: always negative polarity item?

- FKO: *let alone* can occur after negative “affective trigger”:

doubt, hardly, too+ADJ, be surprised, ...

- Sometimes, it’s just the context that functions as an “affective trigger”:

(2) *A: He was pleased.*

*B: He was delighted, **let alone** pleased. (FKO 1988: 519, fn. 13)*

(3) *Is it likely? It is not. You would have to have almost perfect precision to get the ball to the top, **let alone** to have it stop dead-balanced.*

(www)

- BUT there are also cases where there is no negative affect at all:

(4) *First of all, the Internet is a truly wonderful thing, **let alone** the fact that you can look at naked women while sending an e-mail to your boss while sitting on the toilet. That in itself is worthy of a gold star. What I’m referring to, though, is the ability to do all your grocery shopping without ever leaving the house. (www)*

Key Findings 1:

FKO (1988) not fully accurate

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□ Semantics: always inference?

- FKO: scalar ordering giving rise to an inference from first to second part

- This inference may be based on a logical entailment:

(5) ... we cannot guarantee we will still be together in a week, **let alone** a year's time.
(BNC; a year is by definition longer than a week)

- Ordering may be based on shared (common ground) knowledge:

(6) George doesn't understand maths, **let alone** rocket science. (Evans & Green 2006: 648; rocket science is viewed as the summum of science)

BUT

- *Let alone* may **add** a scale to the common ground to allow an inference:

(7) "At my age I'm lucky to be able to get my pants up **let alone** drop them!" (George Clooney in an interview)

- And sometimes there IS no inference (cf. also (3) on previous slide):

(8) Cleveland... was a constantly-whining ... annoying load, who was kind of hard to love, **let alone** just even like. (www)

Key Findings 1:

FKO (1988) not fully accurate

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- Pragmatics: always similar information-relevance trade-off?

- FKO: 1st proposition is more informative but less relevant than 2nd:

(9) *I wouldn't (even) pay five dollars for it, **let alone** ten dollars.*

('informative' = allowing an inference to be made)

BUT

- Sometimes, the 1st proposition is more immediately relevant to the 'question under discussion':

(10) *Some say Gould was the first ever to reach the western bend of the Murray River.*

But we can't be certain he even got as far as the river itself. ...

*Although he had a magnificent view from the top of the Mount Lofty range on the Murray River, there is no mention of his ever having reached its banks, **let alone** the remote western bend 100 miles away. (simplified quote from Toosarvandani 2008)*

- 1st p occasionally seems more relevant but less informative than 2nd:

(11) *I had no idea that a physician could do something like that, especially to his own child, **let alone** to anyone else's child. (COCA)*

Key Findings 1:

FKO (1988) not fully accurate

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- Our revised typology: 2 very different usage types
 - 1st proposition allows one to infer the 2nd proposition
- (12) *The baby can't even crawl yet, **let alone** walk.* (= (1)) (typical)
- (13) *You've got enough material there for a whole semester, **let alone** a week.* (FKO 1988) (1st clause is positive; from high to low; much less frequent)
 - 1st proposition does **not** allow one to infer the 2nd proposition
 - 2nd proposition functions as an 'as a matter of fact' afterthought
- (14) *Choosing ten favorite films is akin to choosing my ten favorite children (okay, so I don't have ten children, **let alone** one, but you get the point of the pathetic analogy).* (www) (atypical, at best)
 - 1st proposition has a gradable predicate; 2nd 'proposition' functions as an 'and I could even mention...' aside; syntactic asymmetry
- (15) *information from this process will be crucial in fundraising applications, **let alone** its value in helping the group plan and learn* (www)
(let alone Y can even (marginally) be fronted here; cf. never mind Y)

Key Findings 1:

FKO (1988) not fully accurate

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Our hypothesis:

- *p let alone q* has a common semantics (involving ‘let’s not even talk about q’)
- Information and Relevance (typically) assume opposite values:

	p	q
Information	High	Low
Relevance	Low	High

e.g. (1), (2), (5), (6)

	p	q
Information	Low	High
Relevance	High	Low

e.g. (4), (8), (11), (14), (15: p also low in Relevance and q low in Information)

Key Findings 2:

Dutch corpus study

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- In Dutch Parallel Corpus, *let alone* corresponds with *laat staan* (lit. ‘let stand’) in *7 out of 10* cases
- COW corpus, 121 examples of *laat staan*
- Syntax
 - Flexible position, just like *let alone*:
 - (16) *Het ontdekken, laat staan verhelpen, van dit probleem was niet meer aan hem besteed.* (COW)
‘(The) discovering, let alone solving, (of) this problem was nothing for him anymore.’
 - In main clauses, *laat staan* can’t conjoin 2 finite predicates:
 - (17) **ze reageren niet eens, laat staan doen er wat mee.*
‘they don’t even react, **let alone do** something with it.’
 - (18) *ze reageren niet eens, laat staan dat ze er wat mee doen.* (COW)
‘^{??}they don’t even react, **let alone that** they do something with it.’
compare *let alone*, even without *do*-support:
 - (19) *He hardly ever calls me, **let alone visits** me.*

Key Findings 2:

Dutch corpus study

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□ Syntax (cntd.)

- Usually a negative-polarity item, like *let alone*

But consider these web-attested examples:

- (20)
- a. *Ik hou van kleurtjes, laat staan op m'n nagels.* (www)
'I love colours, let alone on my nails.' (= ... especially on my nails)
 - b. *Ik ben gek op actiefoto's, laat staan in de sneeuw, erg mooi.* (www)
'I'm crazy about action shots, let alone in the snow, very beautiful.'

Key Findings 2:

Dutch corpus study

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□ Semantics / Pragmatics:

- 2nd proposition may occasionally not be inferable (rare)

- At least one example in our corpus:

(21) *Ik bedoel per week werden er in het hele keizerrijk ongeveer 300 mensen per dag gekruisigd ofzo **laat staan** de vroege christenen die voor de leeuwen gingen.*
(COW)

‘I mean every week, in the entire empire, some 300 people were crucified a day or so **let alone** the early christians who were thrown to the lions’

- Other attested ‘illogical’ examples (cf. Cappelle 2013):

(22) a. *Zij is geen potentieel topmodel, **laat staan** een gewoon model.* (www)

‘She’s not a potential top model, **let alone** a mere model.’

b. *De hoofdband laat je toe veel gekkere dingen te doen met je hoofd zonder dat de koptelefoon afvalt, **laat staan** nog maar beweegt op je hoofd.* (www)

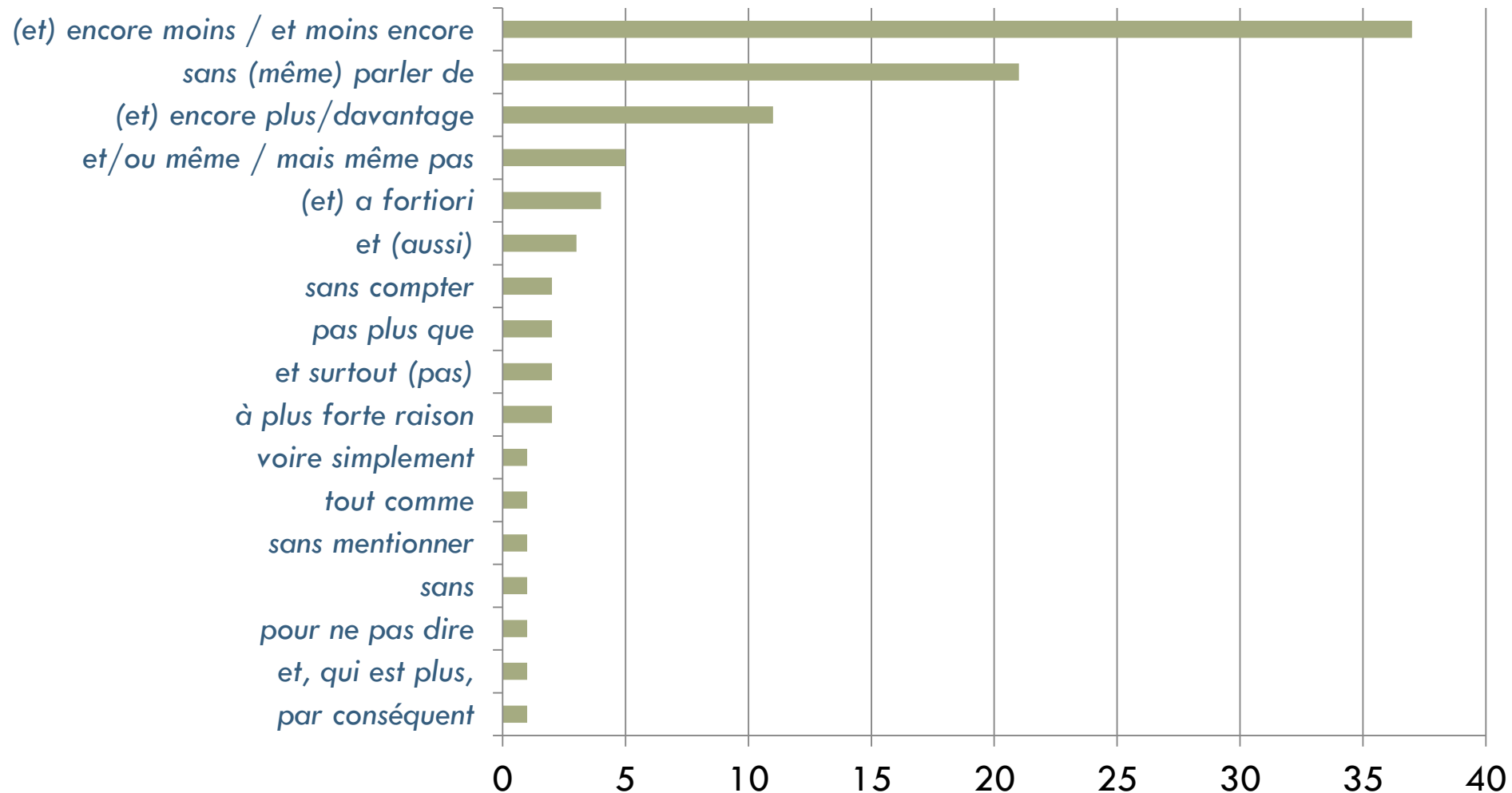
‘The head strap allows you to do much crazier things with your head without the headphones falling off, **let alone** even just moving on your head.’

Key Findings 2:

French corpus study

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Data drawn from Linguee (en-fr): 99 examples with *let alone*



Key Findings 2:

French corpus study

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- 100 examples of *encore moins* from Google and Frantext
- 100 examples of *encore plus* from Google and Frantext
(in Google searched for *et encore plus*)

□ Syntax

- Final position is possible, but rare

(23) *Je suis très fatigué et Méli^{ss}a encore plus.* (Frantext)

‘I’m very tired, {^{??}let alone Méli^{ss}a / and Méli^{ss}a even more}.’

- Sometimes final position is (practically) the only possibility (not possible in English or Dutch)

(24) *ça ne me surprend pas et {[?]encore moins (ne)} me révolte {encore moins}* (www)

‘that doesn’t surprise me let alone disgust me’

Key Findings 2:

French corpus study

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□ Syntax (cntd):

Strong tendency: *encore moins* after morpho-syntactic negation, *encore plus* after lexical negation

(24) *Incapables de se concentrer sur une phrase, **encore moins** une page.*

'[They're] incapable of concentrating on a page, let alone a page.'

(25) *Difficile aussi pour eux d'être embauchés, et **encore plus** de mettre de l'argent de côté.* (Frantext)

'It's also hard for them to find a job, let alone to put some money aside.'

■ No examples found of *encore moins* after lexical negation in corpus, but there are web-attested examples:

(26) *c'est bien trop difficile à admettre et **encore moins** à comprendre.* (www)

'It's really too hard to admit let alone understand'

■ performance errors or signs of constructionalization of *encore moins*?

Key Findings 2:

French corpus study

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□ Semantics/Pragmatics

- ▣ Typical use of *encore plus*: expressing temporal conditionality

(27) *Un sourire, c'est précieux et encore plus quand il est sincère.* (Frantext)

(after gradable, typically meliorative or already intensified, predicate)

'A smile is worth a lot, {%o let alone / still more} when it's a sincere one.'

- ▣ No examples of *encore moins* used without inference in corpus, but web-attested cases:

(28) *Je ne supporte pas ma mère et encore moins ma sœur* (www)

'I can't stand my mother and even less my sister'

(29) *Motorola a vendu peu de smartphones et encore moins de tablettes.* (www)

'Motorola has sold few smartphones and even fewer tablets.' (cp. *let alone*: different interpretation, involving a presupposed scale!)

(after gradable, typically pejorative, predicate)

Key Findings 3:

Prosodic experiment (fr)

- Pilot study with 5 speakers of French
 - 4 females, 1 male
 - 4 Frenchs (North), 1 Belgian
 - grad. students, admin. staff
 - 21 > 45 (mean: ~28)
- Recorded in Lille (U. Lille 3) with an Edirol R1
- Procedure:
 - Subjects were required to read sentences in dialogues – the context was read by the experimenter
 - 87 sentences (18 *et encore moins*; 69 distractors), semi-random order, 1 iteration | ~20 min
 - Speakers were required to speak colloquial French; repetitions were allowed/requested, in case of mistakes, sputtering

Key Findings 3:

Prosodic experiment (fr)

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Votre ami Charles vous parle d'un plat qu'il compte préparer pour Laurent, ce soir, à base d'endives. Vous intervenez :

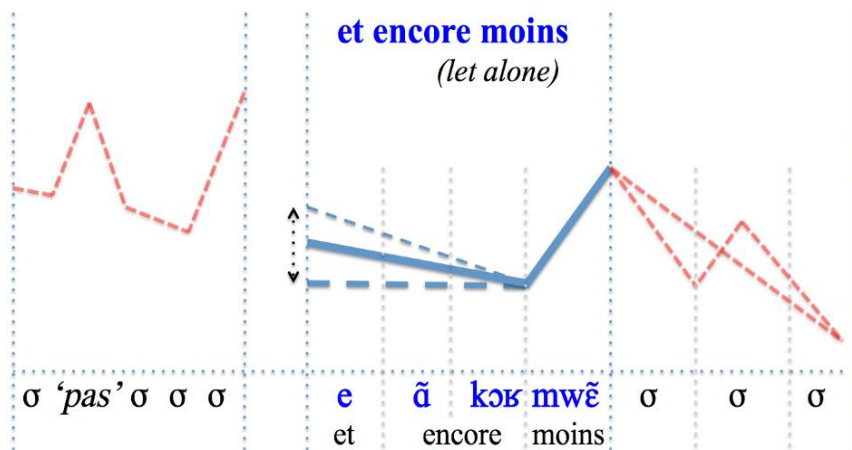
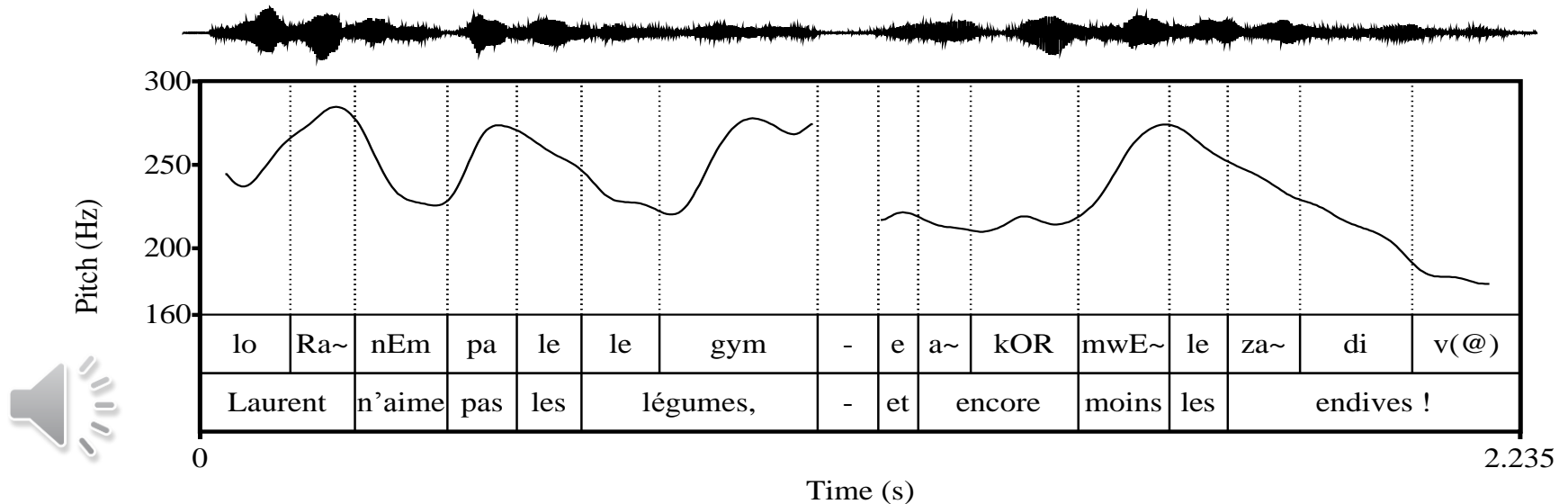
[Your friend Charles is speaking to you about a dish he intends to prepare for Laurent, this evening, containing Belgian endive. You respond:]

"Il n'en voudra pas ! Il a toujours mangé n'importe comment. Laurent n'aime pas les légumes, et encore moins les endives ! C'est sans espoir. »

[He won't eat that! He never pays attention to what he eats. Laurent does not like vegetables, especially not endive! It's hopeless!]

- Varying *et encore moins* parameters, e.g.
 - number of syllables of the following word
 - position
 - syntactic category of the following phrase/word

Key Findings 3: Prosodic experiment (fr)



- What is constant:
 - syllable [mwɛ̃] 'moins' is associated with a high/rising pitch (L)H*
 - preceding syllables are L (or small declination – L2, L3, L5; *L1, *L4)

Conclusions and Outlook

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- Refinement of FKO's (1988) classic analysis
- Arguments for a constructional approach
 - *let alone* often does not draw on a pre-existing scale but **creates** a scale (coercion)
 - language-specific facts (e.g. *laat staan dat*; 'temporal' *encore plus*)
 - prosody supports the constructional status of *encore moins*
- Observed differences between *let alone*, *laat staan*, *encore moins/plus* may not all be arbitrary
 - *laat staan* \approx '(I) don't touch on' \approx *let alone*
 - *encore moins/plus* = 'still less/more' (already inherently scalar)
- We still need to validate our corpus results statistically
- We will extend the prosodic experiment to Dutch

Main references

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Questions and Discussion

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- Thank you.