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Paths and degrees of constructionalization

A corpus-based study of the 'far from X' construction in Dutch and French

Introduction

- Topic: [*loin de X*], [*ver/verre van X*] ‘far from X’
 - De Smet (2012): reanalysis and actualization of [*far from X*]
 - Semantics: spatial (1), metaphorical (2), downtoner (3)
 - Category change: from complex preposition (1-2) to adverbial downtoner (3): $[[far\ from]_{Adv} [X]_{XPj}] \leftrightarrow \text{‘not X at all’}$
- (1) The kyng ... withdrew his hoost bak **far from** the flode side [...]

(c. 1487, OED) (De Smet 2012: 611)

‘The king drew his army back far from the river side [...].’
 - (2) They were so **far from** what this Gentleman would insinuate [...]

(1690, EEBOCorp)
 - (3) our merchant service ... contained a **far from** insignificant proportion of foreigners (1899–1902, CLMETEV) (De Smet 2012: 611)

Outline

1. French [*loin de X*]
 - 1.1. Synchronic analysis
 - 1.2. Diachronic analysis
 - 1.3. A case of constructionalization?
2. Dutch [*ver/verre van X*]
 - 2.1. Synchronic analysis
 - 2.2. Diachronic analysis
 - 2.3. A case of constructionalization?

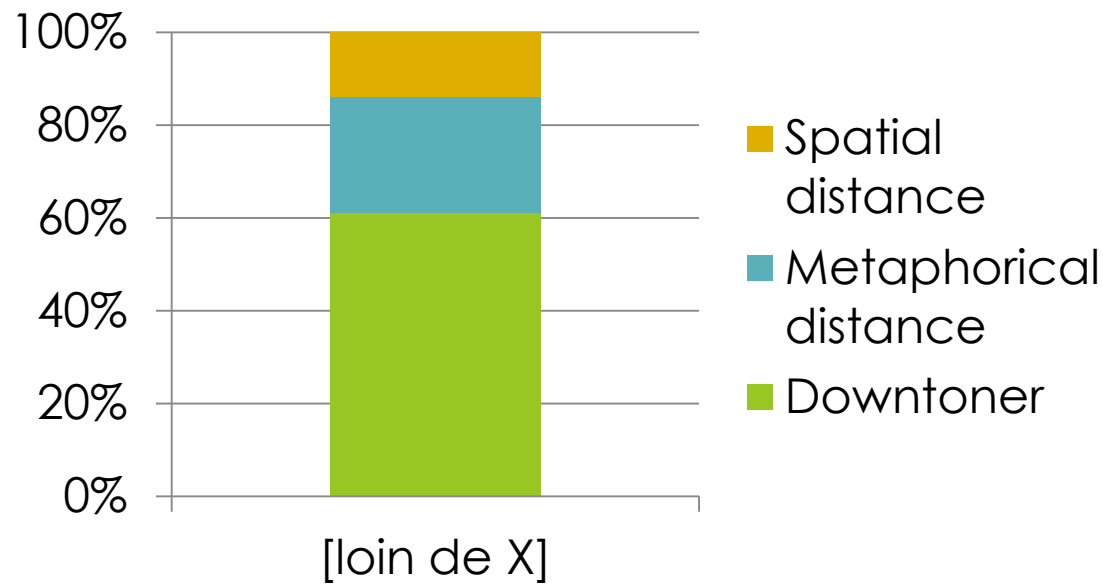
Method

- Synchronic analysis
 - FR/DU:
 - COW corpus (Schäfer & Bildhauer 2012): FRCOW2011XS + 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
 - 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. Synchronic analysis (1)

- [*loin de X*]: semantics



1.1. Synchronic analysis (2)

- Spatial distance:

(4) On était **loin de** la ville. (FRCOW2011)

'We were far from the city.'

- Metaphorical distance:

(5) Nous voilà **loin de** la mondialisation heureuse! (FRCOW2011)

'Here we are far from happy globalization!'

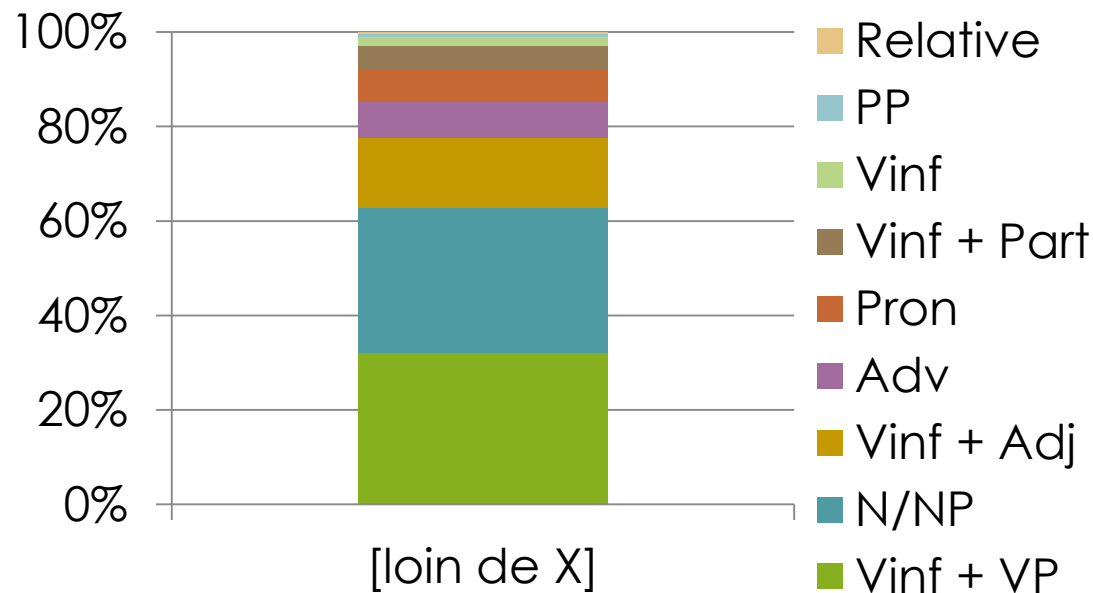
- Downtoner:

(6) Or, c'est **loin d'**être le cas. (FRCOW2011)

'But this is far from being the case.'

1.1. Synchronic analysis (3)

- [*loin de* X]: POS of X



1.1. Synchronic analysis (4)

- Complex preposition mainly followed by :

- Vinf (+ VP/Adj/Part): 53,67%

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

'The list is far from being exhaustive.'

***loin d'exhaustive**

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

'Insecurity, far from decreasing, increases.'

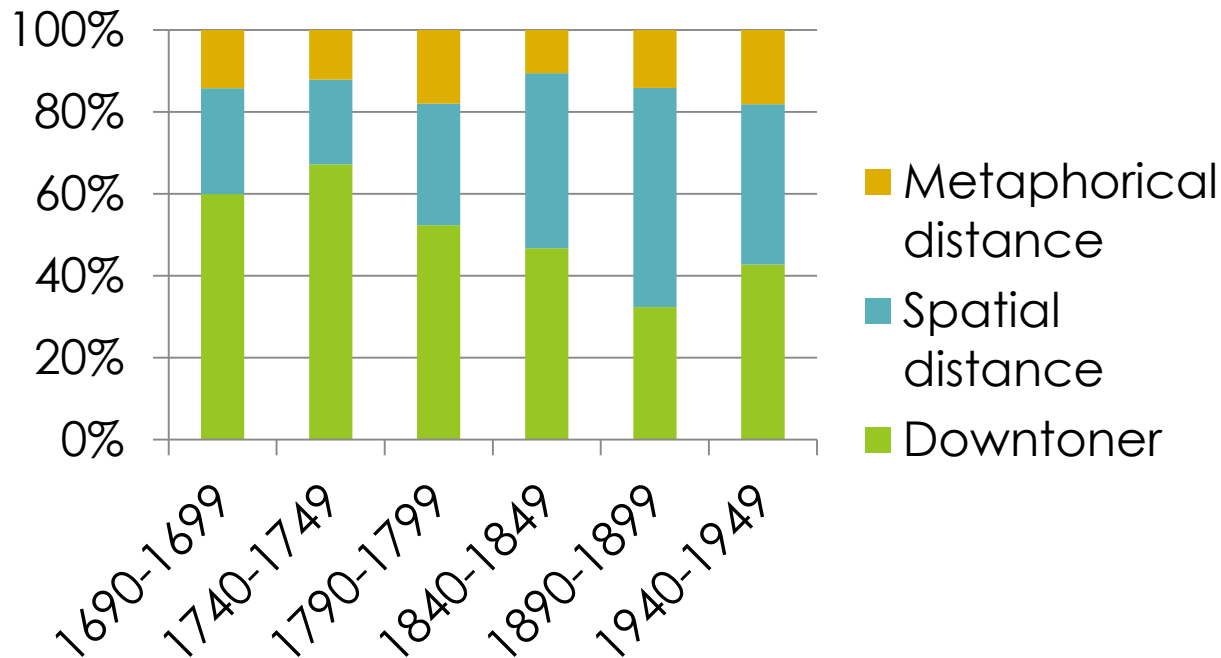
- N/NP: 30,67%

(9) Syndicalisme, **loin de sa base**. (FRCOW2011)

'Syndicalism, far from its basis.'

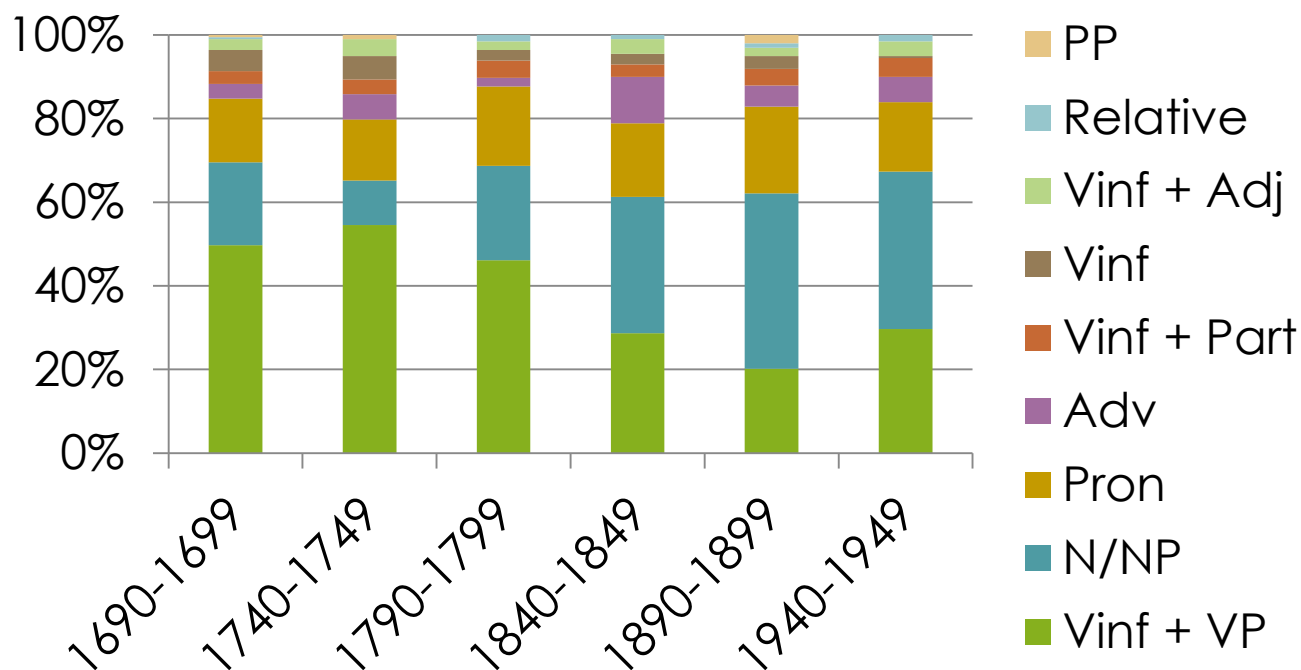
1.2. Diachronic analysis (1)

- [*loin de* X]: semantics



1.2. Diachronic analysis (2)

- [*join de X*]: POS of X

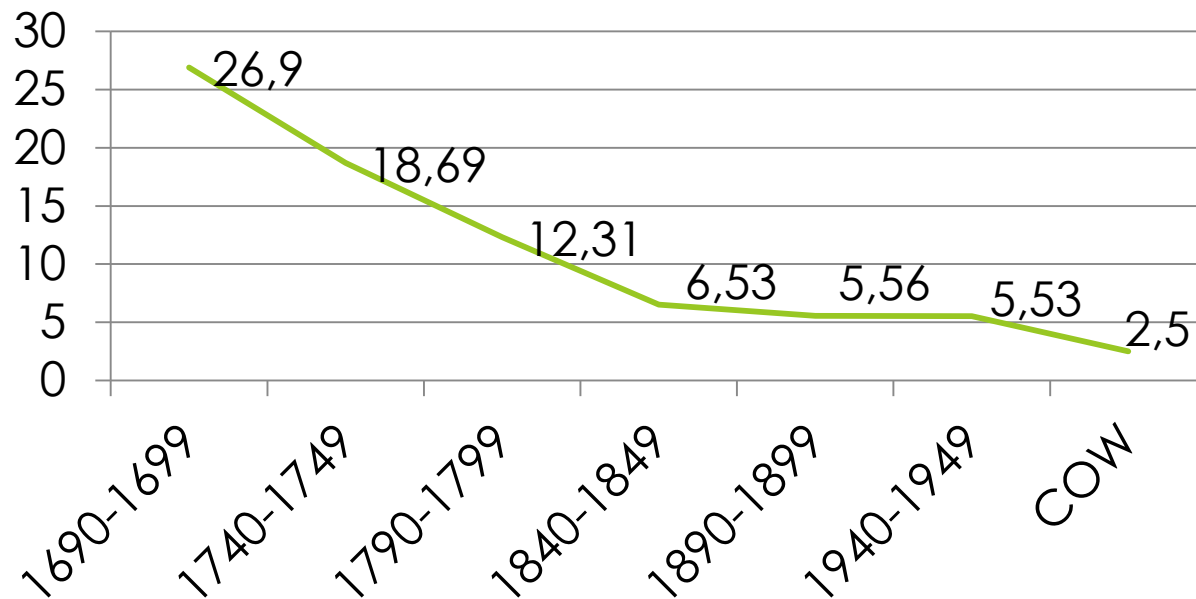


1.2. Diachronic analysis (3)

- No major semantic and formal changes
 - Most frequent POS: Vinf, N/NP, Pron
 - No extension of POS
 - Complex preposition, even with downtoner meaning
 - X is necessary: **loin de*.
- Mismatch between form and meaning

1.2. Diachronic analysis (4)

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



1.2. Diachronic analysis (5)

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

→ Distributional change

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

(Frantext 1747)

‘You are far from resembling those people.’

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

(Frantext 1791)

‘My father is far from supporting this retreat.’

1.2. Diachronic analysis (6)

- [*être (bien) loin de X*]: metaphorical distance as well as downtoner properties

→ Bridging context

(12) J'étais **loin de** savoir ce que je vois clairement aujourd'hui. (Frantext 1943)

'I was far from knowing what I clearly see today.'

(13) Tout ce qu'on dit est **loin de** ce qu'on pense! (Frantext 1697)

'Everything we say is far from what we think.'

(14) On est bien **loin de** vous oublier ici. (Frantext 1696)

'We are far from forgetting you here.'

(15) Aussi je suis bien **loin de** croire qu'ils n'aient pas l'esprit conséquent. (Frantext 1747)

'I'm also very far from believing that they don't think consequently.'

1.3. A case of constructionalization?

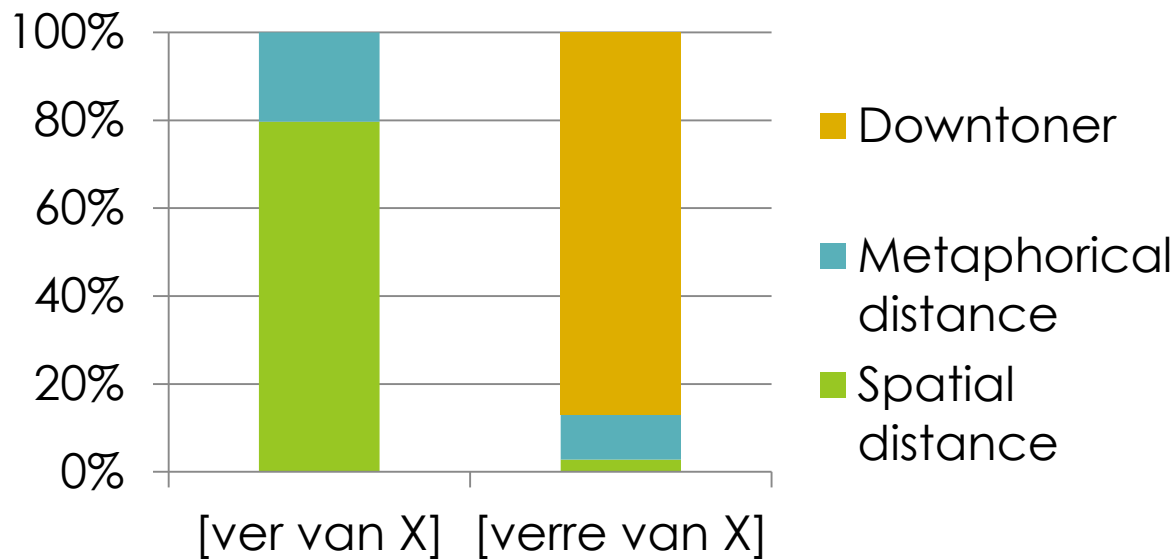
- Mismatch between form and meaning: complex preposition, even when downtoner function
 - Small distributional changes: [(*bien*) loin de X]
 - Bridging context: [*être (bien) loin de X*] combining metaphorical distance and downtoner properties
- **Minor pre-constructionalization constructional changes, but no further process of constructionalization**

(cf. Traugott – Trousdale 2013: 27)

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

2.1. Synchronic analysis (1)

- [ver/verre van X]: semantics



2.1. Synchronic analysis (2)

- [ver van X]

- Spatial distance:

(16) De appel valt nooit **ver van** de boom. (NLCOW2012)

‘The apple never falls far from the tree.’

- Metaphorical distance:

(17) De gedachte om kritiek op je te leveren staat

ver van me. (NLCOW2012)

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

- [verre van X]

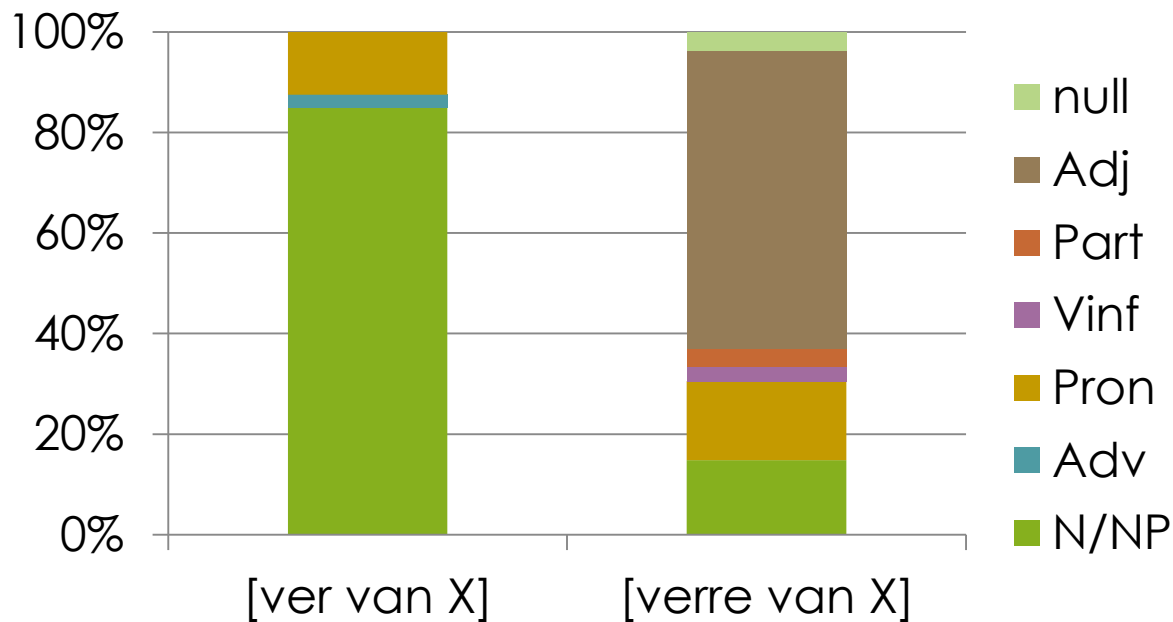
- Downtoner:

(18) Maar David was **verre van** perfect. (NLCOW2012)

‘But David was far from perfect.’

2.1. Synchronic analysis (3)

- [ver/verre van X]: POS of X



2.1. Synchronic analysis (4)

- o [ver van X]: complex preposition with nominal complements

(19) 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.’

(20) 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.’

2.1. Synchronic analysis (5)

- o [verre van X]: degree adverb

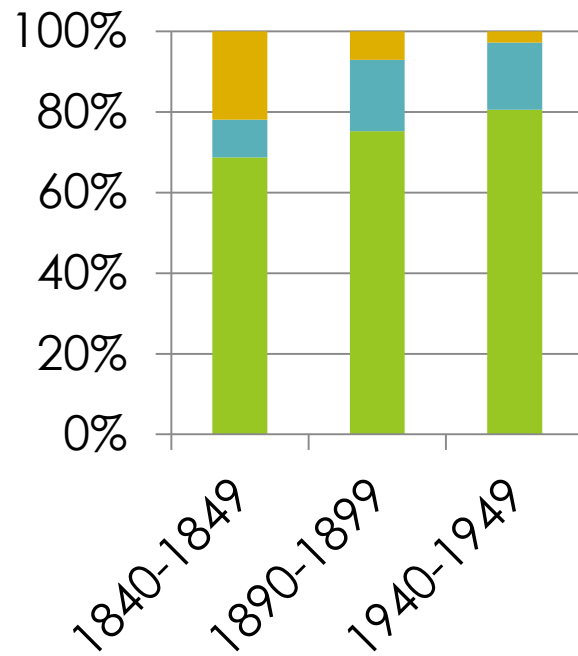
- (21) Er staan een hoop gedichten in die **verre van** onvergetelijk zijn, maar gewoon slapjes. (NLCOW2012)
'There are a lot of poems that are far from memorable, but just weak.'
- (22) Dit was een **verre van** marginiaal verschijnsel. (NLCOW2012)
'This was a far from marginal phenomenon.'
- (23) Ik zeg niet dat hier alles beter is, **verre van**, zou ik haast zeggen. (NLCOW2012)
'I'm not saying everything is better here, far from it, I'd almost say.'

2.2. Diachronic analysis (1)

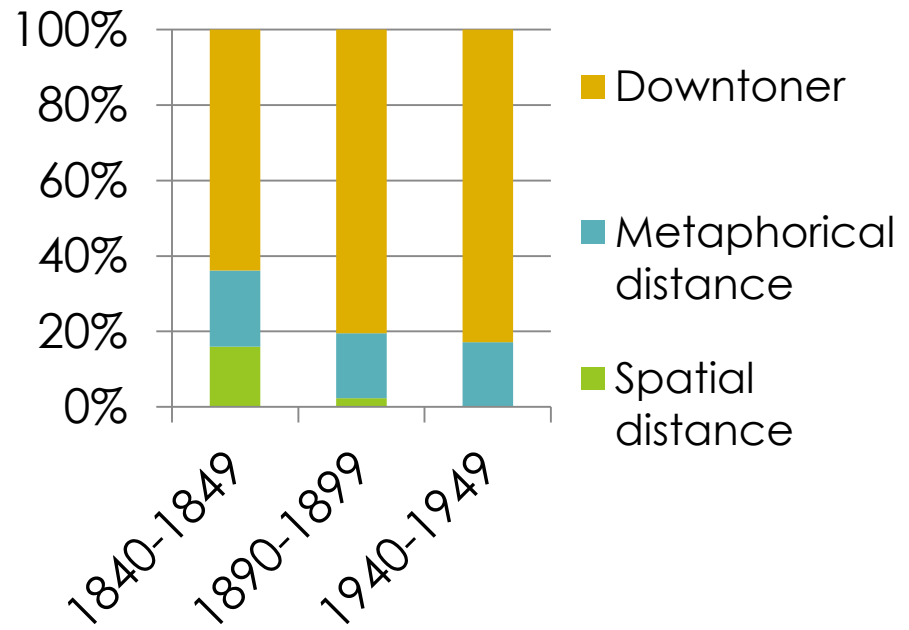
- *WNT* (s.v. *Ver^{II}*):
 - Originally an Adv of spatial distance, now also Adj
 - *Verre*:
 - inflected, regular form in Middle Dutch
 - now only used in collocations (*verre van* 'far from', *van heinde en verre* 'from far and near')
 - *Ver*:
 - uninflected form, in use since 15th century
 - now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

2.2. Diachronic analysis (2)

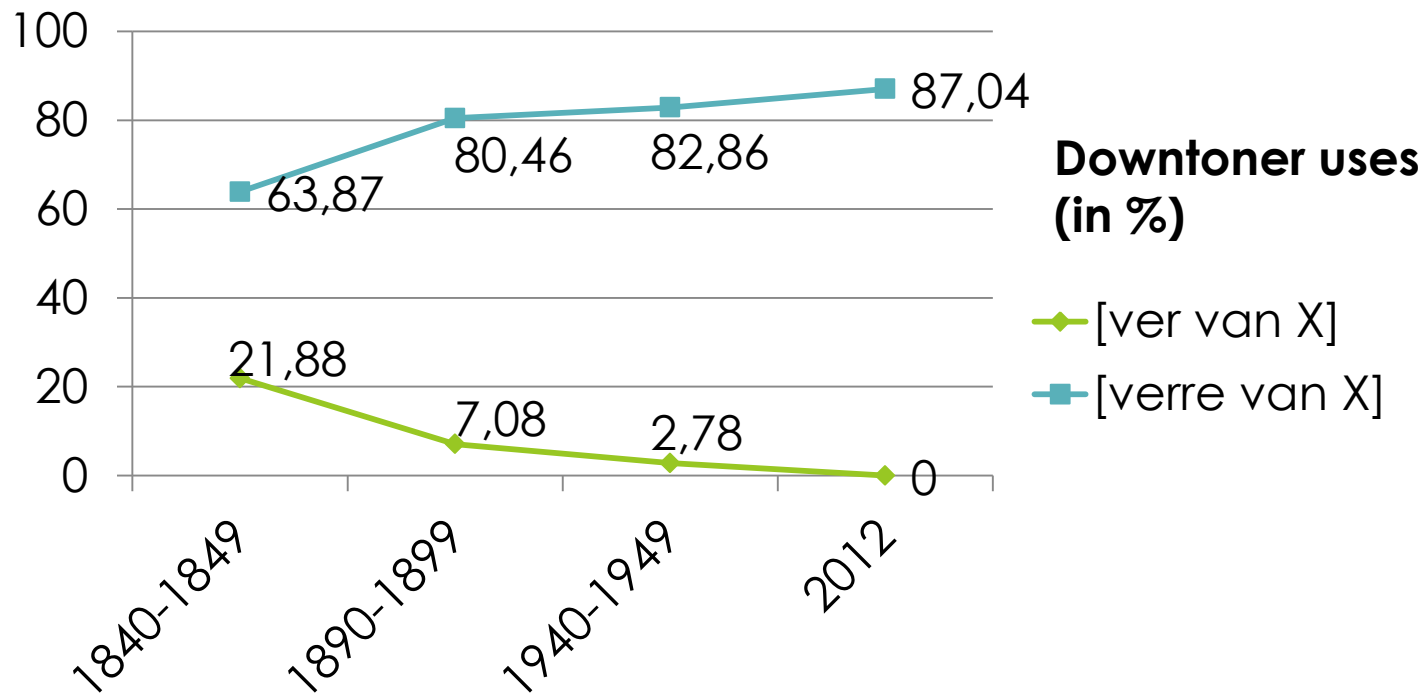
[*ver van X*]



[*verre van X*]

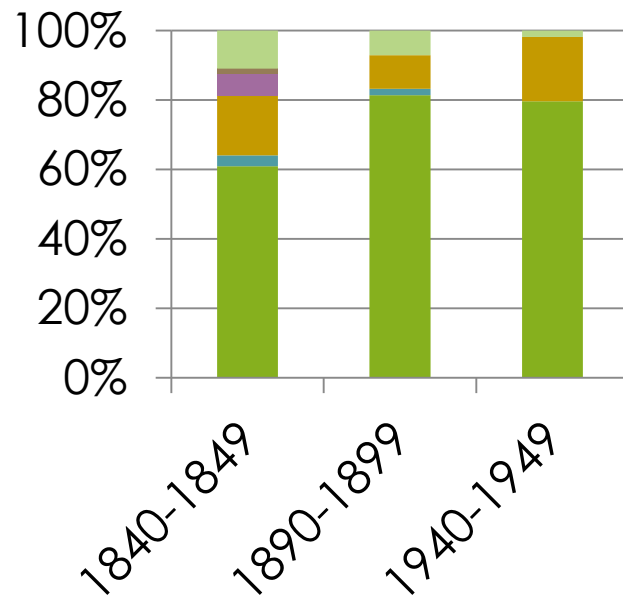


2.2. Diachronic analysis (3)

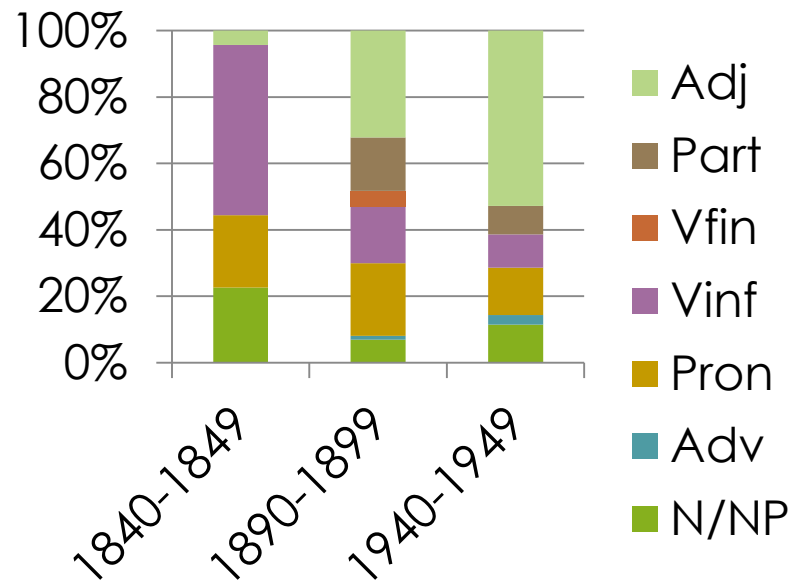


2.2. Diachronic analysis (4)

[*ver van X*]



[*verre van X*]



2.2. Diachronic analysis (5)

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

(24) 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):

(25) [...] 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.'

2.2. Diachronic analysis (6)

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

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

(NLCOW2012)

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

2.3. A case of constructionalization?

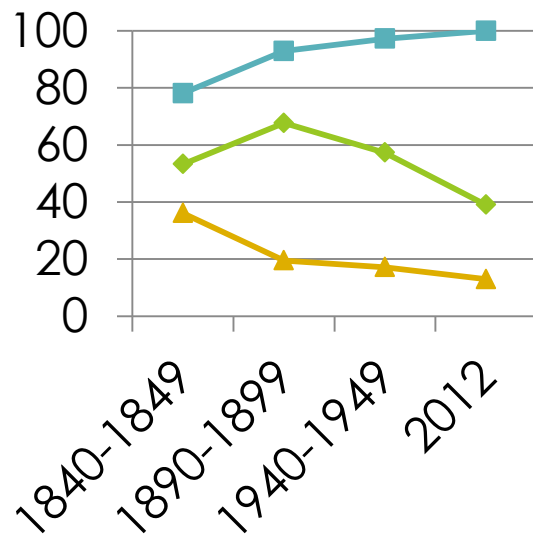
- [ver van X]:
 - Only semantic change: loss of downtoner function
 - No formal change: still complex preposition
 - **Constructional change**
- [verre van X]:
 - Semantic change: specialization as a downtoner
 - Formal change: category change from preposition to adverb; host-class expansion (Part, Adj_{Pred}, Adj_{Attr}, Ø)
 - **Constructionalization process**

(cf. Traugott & Trousdale 2013)

Conclusions (1)

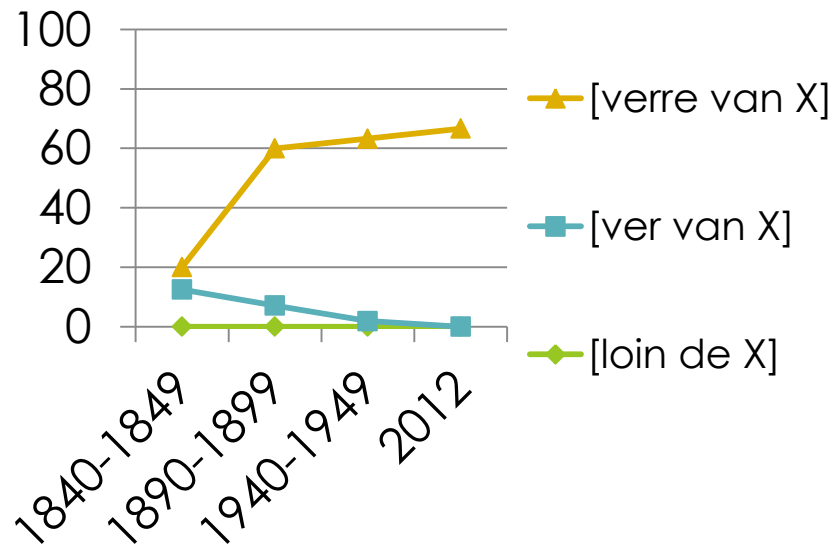
Preposition

+ spatial/metaphorical
distance (in %)



Adverb

+ downtoner
(in %)



Conclusions (2)

- Different degrees of constructionalization!
 - [*verre van X*] has undergone true constructionalization, while [*ver van X*] and [*loin de X*] have only been affected by minor constructional changes
- Further research:
 - To account for the divergent developments in the different languages
 - To study the paths of constructionalization in more detail (in terms of bridging contexts, neoanalysis, actualization)

References

- De Smet, H. (2012). The course of actualization. *Language* 88. 601-633.
- Quirk, R., S. Greenbaum, G. Leech & J. Svartik (1985). *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. London: Longman.
- 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

- COW = Corpora from the Web: <http://hpsg.fu-berlin.de/cow/colibri/>
- Frantext: <http://www.frantext.fr/>
- KB: <http://kranten.kb.nl/>
- WNT: <http://gtb.inl.nl/>