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Degrees of adverbialization

A cross-linguistic
corpus-study of 'far
from X' constructions

Introduction (1)

- **Topic:** [*far from X*] construction:
 - Fr. [*loin de X*]
 - Eng. [*far from X*]
 - Du. [*ver / verre van X*]
 - Sw. [*långtifrån / långt ifrån 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.'
- (4) Och om du inte kan hålla dig, stå **långt ifrån** mig. (SVCOW2014)
'And if you cannot control yourself, stand far from me'

Introduction (3)

○ Metaphorical distance:

- (5) Nous voilà **loin de** la mondialisation heureuse!
(FRCOW2011)
'Here we are far from happy globalization!'
- (6) Her centralized , authoritarian populism is quite **far from** the ideology which i'd imagine both of us seek . (UKCOW2011)
- (7) De gedachte om kritiek op je te leveren staat **ver van** me. (NLCOW2012)
'The thought of criticizing you is far from me.'
- (8) Nu var det så **långt ifrån** bröstmjök man kan komma.
(SVCOW2014)
'Now, this was as far from breast milk as it gets.'

Introduction (4)

● Degree modifier (downtoner):

- (9) Or, c'est **loin d'**être le cas. (FRCOW2011)
'But this is far from being the case.'
- (10) 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)
- (11) Maar David was **verre van** perfect. (NLCOW2012)
'But David was far from perfect.'
- (12) Och inne i varuhuset var det **långt ifrån** fullt! (SVCOW2014)
'And inside the department store it was far from crowded!'

Introduction (5)

◉ Different outcomes?

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

Outline

1. Method
2. Comparison semantics
3. Comparison construction types
(complementation patterns)
4. Discussion structural differences
5. Conclusions

Method

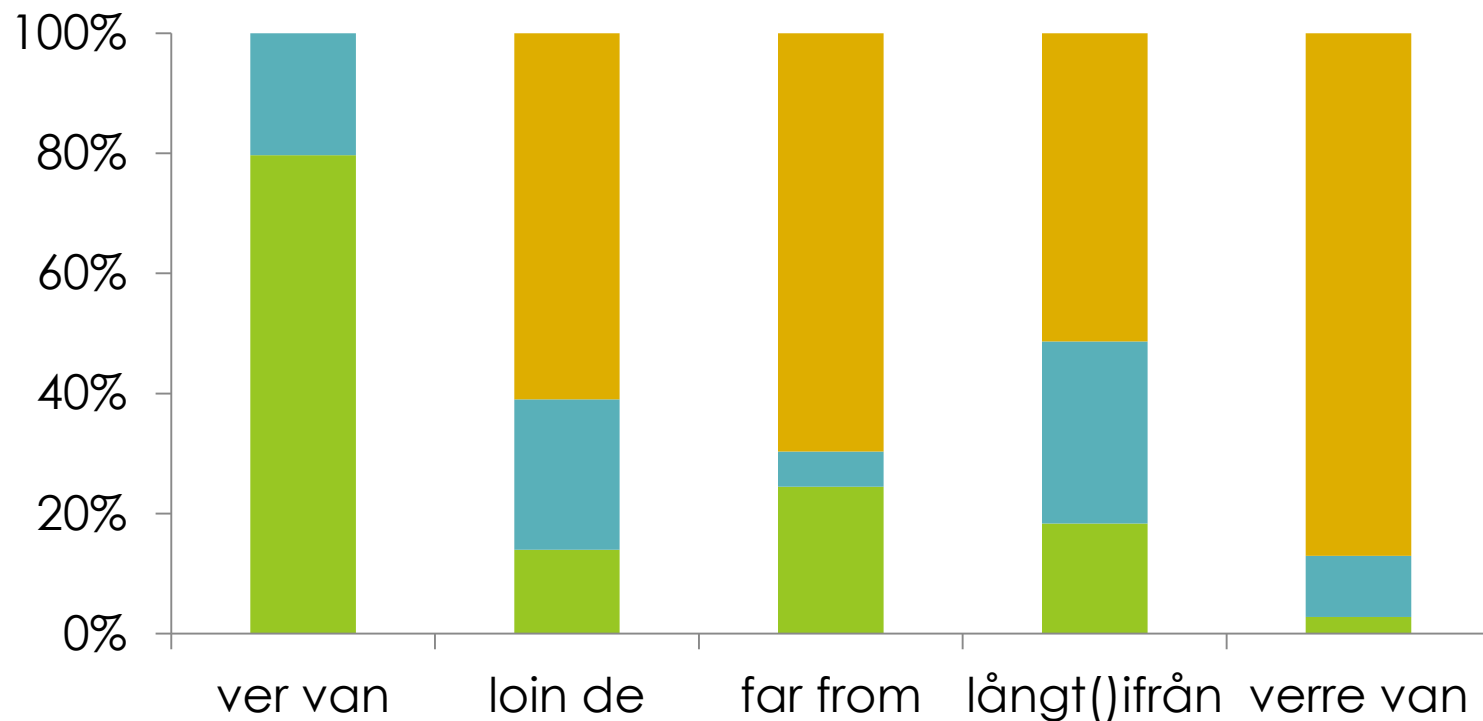
- **A synchronic cross-linguistic corpus study**
 - COW corpus (COrpora from the Web, cf. Schäfer & Bildhauer 2012):
 - FRCOW2011XS / UKCOW2011XS / NLCOW2012-00X / SVCOW14AX
 - 300 random tokens per language

[Diachronic analysis: cf. De Smet et al. 2014, Van Goethem et al., subm.]

1. Comparison semantics

Comparison semantics

■ Spatial distance ■ Metaphorical distance ■ Downtoner

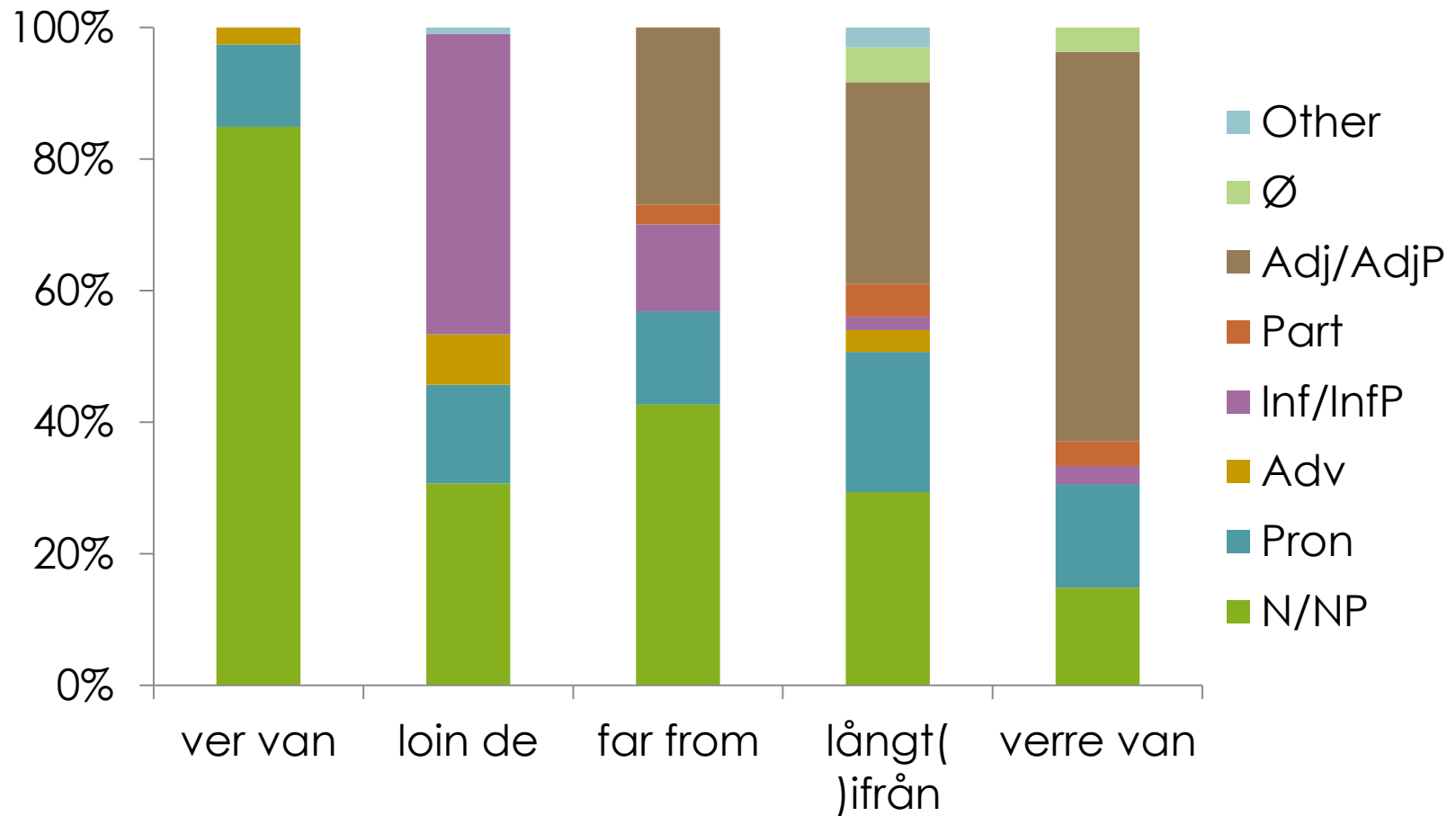


Comparison semantics

- Dutch *ver van* is almost never used with downtoner meaning
- Dutch *verre van* is almost never used with spatial meaning
- French, English and Swedish ['far from X']-constructions display the full range of meanings, in somewhat varying proportions

2. Comparison construction types

Complementation: POS of X



Complementation: POS of X

- Dutch *verre van* and Swedish *långtifrån* show the widest array of complement types, including verbs, adjectives as well as absolute uses
- Dutch *ver van* takes (almost) exclusively pronominal and nominal complements
- French and English take inbetween positions
- Nominalized clauses are most prevalent with French *loin de* and English *far from*

3. Discussion: structural differences

French [*loin de X*]

• Form/function mismatch

- [*loin de X*]: downtoner meaning, but no adverbial properties
(13) La liste est **loin d'être exhaustive**. (FRCOW2011)
'The list is far from being exhaustive.'
***loin d'êxhaustive**
- No absolute use (**loin de*)

◉ Possible causes ?

- Strong cohesion of [*de* + complement]
 - clitic form *d'* (*loin d'être...*, *loin des musées*)
 - *de* as infinitival complementizer (*Il est important de rouler prudemment*)
 - Separation *loin* / *de* (*loin des théâtres et des musées ; l'hôtel est situé loin, pense-t-il, des théâtres*)
- *de* has a high degree of semantic bleaching (“prépositions vides”)
 - no preposition stranding (**là je suis encore loin de*)

[cf. Melis 2003]

English [*far from* X]

- Partial adverbialization
 - *Far from* is acceptable with adjectives
 - But it resists use with verbs
 - (14) This brief review **far from** exhausts the ways electronic computers can help in forest mensuration. (Google Books)
- And *far from* has no absolute use
 - (15) Not that he had tried. **Far from** it. (Google Books)
 - (16) *Not that he had tried. Far from.

English [*far from X*]

◉ Possible causes?

- ◉ *Far* could adverbialize due to ambiguity between
 - ◉ *far from* + gerund (= nominalized clause)
 - ◉ *far from* + progressive tense (= verb phrase)
- ◉ Compare
 - (17) you are **far from** endeavouring to destroy them
(say you) (1659, EEBOCorp)
 - (18) [...] the discourse and words which here we are
endeavouring to explicate (1659, EEBOCorp)

English [*far from X*]

- o Possible causes?

- o BUT: *Far* retains adjectivelike-behaviour even when *far from* functions as downtoner

(19) Since the characters were far from perfect, the look of the show would be just as **far from perfect** as well. (Google Books)

(20) The **further from** perfect your parents were [...], the more unfinished business you can have as an adult. (Google Books)

--> Conservative pull of adjectival *far*?

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

o Functional split:

- [*ver van X*]:
 - Spatial/metaphorical meaning
 - Nominal complements
- [*verre van X*]
 - Mostly downtoner meaning
 - Degree adverb (+ Adj, Ø)

(21) Dit was een **verre van** marginaal verschijnsel. (NLCOW2012)

'This was a far from marginal phenomenon.'

(22) Ik zeg niet dat hier alles beter is, **verre van**, zou ik haast zeggen.
(NLCOW2012)

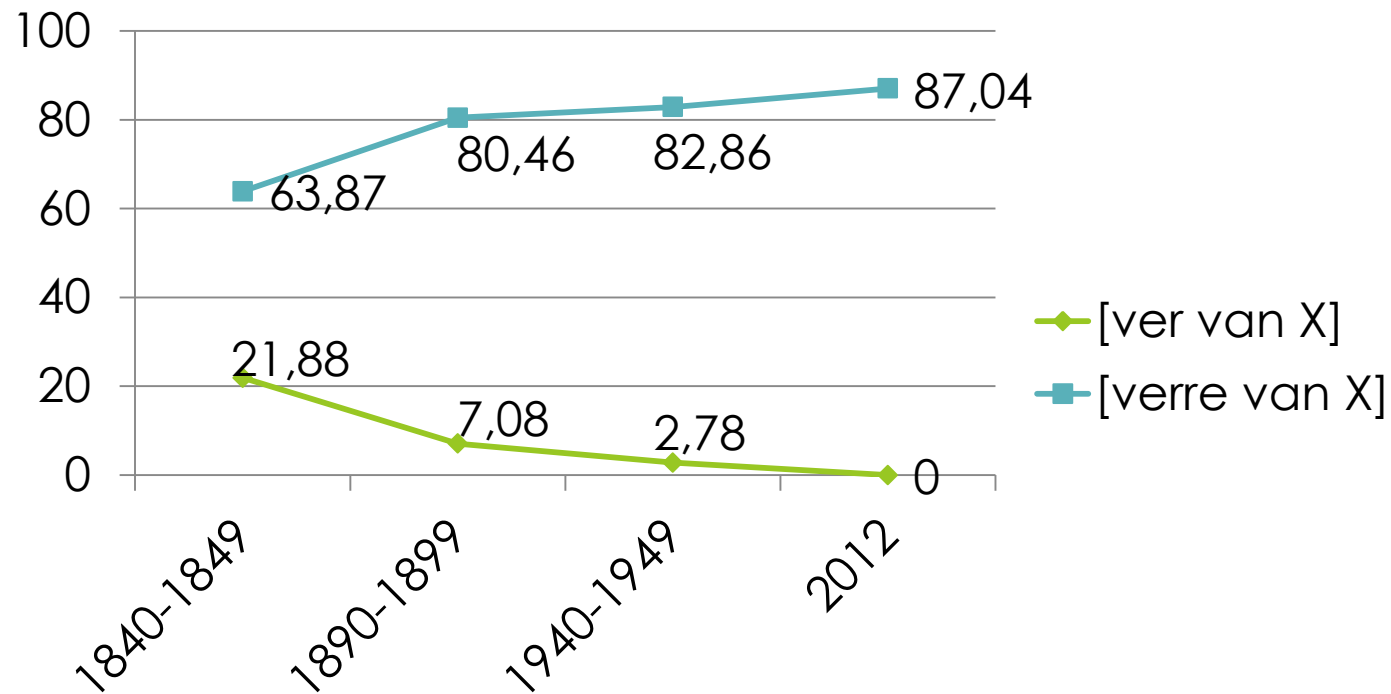
'I'm not saying here everything is better, far from it, I'd almost say.'

○ Possible causes:

- **Form-function asymmetry** → 'exaptation' of the obsolete form *verre van* to express the new downtoner meaning
- **Subsequent host-class expansion** (cf. Van Goethem et al., subm.):
 - + Part, Adj_{Pred}
 - < Word order: [*verre van* + Part/Adj] available chunk in nominalized clauses:
 - *Deze vraag is nog verre van beantwoord (te zijn)*
 - *Hij schijnt verre van sympathiek (te zijn)*
 - + Adj_{Attr}
 - < Dutch attributive slot allows complex sequences
 - cf. 'een vanavond nog nader bekend te maken bedrag'
 - + Absolute use
 - < Possibility of preposition stranding
 - cf. *Daar hou ik niet van; Daar hou ik me verre van*

Evolution downtoner uses

(cf. Van Goethem et al., submitted)



Swedish [*långtifrån* / *långt ifrån* X]

- Adverbial properties
 - collocates with verbs:

(23) Svenska folket har **långt ifrån** slutat att konsumera dem (SVCOW14AX)
 'The Swedish people have far from stopped to consume them'
 - occurs in syntactic slot for sentence adverbs in subordinate clauses, i.e. before the tensed verb:

(24) Jag tror att vi **långt ifrån** är färdiga med varandra (SVCOW14AX)
 'I think that we far from are finished with each other'
 - absolute use:

(25) Inte ett av mina bästa år, **långt ifrån**. (SVCOW14AX)
 'Not one of my best years, far from (it)'

○ Possibly related phenomena?

- Unlike in French, Swedish adpositions may select a wide variety of complements
- Like in English, *långt ifrån* may however still be modified by an adverb when used as a downtoner:

(26) Jag är **väldigt långt ifrån** glad
 'I am very far from happy'

- Like in Dutch, a split occurs between *långt ifrån* (spatial and metaphorical distance) and unverbated *långtifrån* (5,3% in sample)
 - These differences in spelling are prescribed by the Grammar of the Swedish Academy.
 - But they are often violated (general tendency in Swedish to write compound words separately)

4. Conclusions

○ Cline of adverbialization:

- ver van > loin de > far from > verre van / långt()ifrån

	<i>ver van</i>	<i>loin de</i>	<i>far from</i>	<i>verre van</i>	<i>långt()ifrån</i>
+ NP	+	+	+	+	+
+ Part	-	-	+	+	+
+ Adj_{Pred}	-	-	+	+	+
+ Adj_{Attr}	-	-	+	+	+
Absolute use	-	-	-	+	+

Conclusions

- **A north-south cline**

- **Commonalities:**

- ['far from X] constructions in all four languages develop downtoner-like meanings
- In all four languages these occur with (i) noun phrases and (ii) nominalized clauses

- **Differences:**

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

Conclusions

- ◉ **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
- ◉ Swedish adpositions are generally less restrictive on the types of complement they select for

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