

Revisiting object drop and extraposition in Dutch imperatives

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1 In Den Dikken (1992), an empty operator movement (EOM) analysis is proposed for the joint phenomena of object drop and object extraposition in Dutch **IMPERATIVES** of the types in (1a) and (1b). The essence of this analysis is that when the object is dropped or appears in clause-final position, a null operator is base-generated in the object position, optionally coindexed with a nominal expression in the right periphery. This paper confirms the EOM analysis for object drop (related to topic drop in non-imperative contexts; (2a)), but argues that object extraposition in finite imperatives does not involve EOM, instead being a combination of leftward scrambling and remnant VP fronting: (2b) (the skeletal structures in (2a,b) focus on the essentials; details of the syntactic derivations are filled in below). The paper also develops the licensing conditions on object drop and extraposition in imperatives, giving a central role to deontic obligation modality. Five novel clusters of empirical material are discussed to these ends, laid out in sections 2 to 6.

- (1) a. leg <die bal> (niet) neer <die bal>! (niet) neerleggen die bal!
 put that ball not down that ball not down.put.INF that ball
 b. leg (niet) neer! (niet) neerleggen!
 put not down not down.put.INF ‘(don’t) put it/that ball down!’
- (2) a. [$Op_{Obj} \dots [_{VP} \text{leg } t_{Obj} \text{ neer}]]$
 b. $[[_{VP} \text{leg } t_{Obj} \text{ neer}] [Obj \dots [_{VP}]]]$

2 Den Dikken (1992) observes that **P-stranding** under extraposition is impossible in finite imperatives (3a) but fine in infinitival ones (3b). One new observation of the present paper is that finite imperatives do sanction P-stranding under object drop: (3a’). EOM can strand prepositions in Dutch (*dit is moeilijk om over te praten* ‘this is tough to talk about’), but scrambling of the complement of P is normally successful only if that complement is a so-called ‘R-pronoun’, such as *er* ‘it_[+R]’. Thus (3a) shows that object extraposition in finite imperatives does not involve EOM.

- (3) a. *denk maar niet meer over na dat probleem!
 think but not anymore about PRT that problem
 a’. denk (er) maar niet meer over na!
 think it_[+R] but not anymore about PRT
 b. niet meer over nadenken (dat probleem)!
 not anymore about PRT.think that problem

3 Dutch has **past-tense imperatives** (Wolf 2003). Object extraposition is possible in these but object drop is not: (4a~b). This contrast can be understood if object drop in finite imperatives involves movement of a null operator, interfered with by the null temporal operator for anteriority (Op_{Ante}) in TP: (5). For overt topic scrambling *cum* overt remnant VP movement into the left periphery, Op_{Ante} does not give rise to an intervention effect because no EOM is involved in this.

- (4) a. soms had de scheids een slechte bui; legde dan maar liever meteen neer die bal!
 sometimes had the referee a bad mood put.PST then rather at.once down that ball
 b. soms had de scheids een slechte bui; *legde dan maar liever meteen neer!
 sometimes had the referee a bad mood put.PST then rather at.once down
- (5) * $[Op_{Obj} [_{TP} Op_{Ante} [_{VP} \text{legde } t_{Obj} \text{ neer}]]]$

4 Apart from finite and infinitival imperatives, Dutch also has a limited range of **past-participial imperatives** (6a), for whose syntax Rooryck & Postma (2007) have postulated a silent deontic obligation modal. They do not mention that participial imperatives can be transitive, and can feature object drop and extraposition: (6b). Rooryck & Postma (2007) take participial imperatives to involve movement of the participial phrase into SpecCP. This would illegally traverse Op_{Obj} (in SpecMoodP) in the structure in (2a). This paper argues that the participial phrase is a VP which moves to the specifier of the Mod(al)P projected by the silent deontic obligation modal.

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|-----|----|---------------------------------------|--------------|---|------------|
| (6) | a. | opgepast! | ‘watch out!’ | opgesodemieterd! | ‘sod off!’ |
| | | up.taken.care | | up.sodomised | |
| | b. | en nou neergelegd (<u>die bal</u>)! | | en nou weggegooid (<u>die rotzooi</u>)! | |
| | | and now down.put.PTCP that ball | | and nou away.thrown that rubbish | |

5 The extraposition and object-drop behaviour of finite imperatives in **conditional conjunction and disjunction** constructions further confirms that object drop and extraposition are regulated differently, and that extraposition requires the presence of deontic obligation modality. In (7), *die bal* is both extraposable and omissible; but (8a) resists extraposition, while object drop (8b) is fine. That extraposition is possible in (7a) but not in (8a) follows if the syntax of the first disjunct of conditional disjunctions contains $\text{Mod}_{[\text{deontic}:\square]}$ (‘you must put that ball down or else I’ll shoot’), licensing movement of VP around the scrambled object, whereas the first conjunct of conditional conjunctions does not (‘if you put that ball down, I’ll shoot’). That omission of the object is possible in both (7b) and (8b) shows that EOM is not dependent on $\text{Mod}_{[\text{deontic}:\square]}$: Op_{Obj} lands in the specifier of $\text{MoodP}_{[\text{Imp}]}$, not ModP . EOM to SpecMoodP is not interfered with by the conditional operator Op_{Cond} , which finds itself in the CP domain, farther up than MoodP . The hypothesis that the first disjunct of (7) is an imperative while (8)’s first conjunct has the syntax of a conditional is supported by two further facts. (i) While the infinitival versions of (7) are fine, those of (8) are altogether impossible, regardless of whether the object is pronounced or, if it is, where *die bal* is placed. Dutch has no infinitival conditionals; infinitival imperatives are licensed only in the presence of $\text{Mood}_{[\text{Imp}]}$, which is absent from (8). (ii) The distribution of object extraposition in (7)–(8) is inversely correlated with the distribution of negative polarity items (NPIs) in the conditional con/disjunction constructions in (9) and (10) (the latter taken from Keshet & Medeiros 2019, who do not mention (9)). NPIs can be licensed by Op_{Cond} but not by imperatives.

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|------|----|---|---|
| (7) | a. | leg <die bal> neer < <u>die bal</u> > of ik schiet | ‘put that ball down or I’ll shoot’ |
| | | put that ball down that ball or I shoot | ‘you must put the ball down or else I’ll shoot’ |
| | b. | leg neer of ik schiet | |
| (8) | a. | leg <die bal> neer <* <u>die bal</u> > en ik schiet | ‘put that ball down and I’ll shoot’ |
| | | put that ball down that ball and I shoot | ‘if you put that ball down, I’ll shoot’ |
| | b. | leg neer en ik schiet | |
| (9) | | *budge an inch or I’ll shoot | *‘you must budge an inch, or else I’ll shoot’ |
| (10) | | budge an inch and I’ll shoot | ‘if you budge an inch, I’ll shoot’ |

6 Dutch imperatives can have an **overt subject**. Co-occurrence of both an object and a subject in the right periphery produces a **fixed order**: (11/2b) are bad without comma intonation. The scrambling *cum* remnant VP movement analysis of object extraposition accounts for this, with the subject being spelled out in its base position (consistent with Bennis’ 2007 observation that clause-final *jullie* ‘you_{PL}’ does not ϕ -agree with the finite imperative verb), just outside VP and below the landing-site of object scrambling. The syntax of (11a)/(12a) is schematised in (13).

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|------|----|--|----|--|
| (11) | a. | leg neer <u>die bal</u> jij/jullie! | b. | *leg neer jij/jullie <u>die bal</u> ! |
| | | put.SG down that ball you _{SG/PL} | | put.SG down you _{SG/PL} that ball |
| (12) | a. | neerleggen <u>die bal</u> jij/jullie! | b. | *neerleggen jij/jullie <u>die bal</u> ! |
| (13) | | [$\text{ModP}_{[\text{VP}]} \text{leg } t_{\text{Obj}} \text{ neer} / t_{\text{Obj}} \text{ neerleggen}$] [$\text{Mod}_{[\text{deontic}:\square]} [\text{Obj}_{[\text{VP}]} \text{Subj } [t_{\text{VP}}]]$]] | | |

7 Apart from further enhancing the syntax of Dutch imperatives with object drop and extraposition, this paper clarifies the roles played in syntax by the silent deontic obligation modal, null operators (for dropped objects, temporal semantics, conditionals), and remnant VP movement.

References Bennis 2007, Featuring the subject in Dutch imperatives. <https://doi.org/10.1075/la.103.04ben> • Den Dikken 1992, Empty operator movement in Dutch imperatives. *Language & Cognition* 2, 1–64 • Keshet & Medeiros 2019, Imperatives under coordination. *NLLT* 37. DOI:10.1007/s11049-018-9427-y • Rooryck & Postma 2007, On participial imperatives. <https://doi.org/10.1075/la.103.10roo> • Wolf 2003, Imperatieven in de verleden tijd. *Taal&Tongval* 55, 168–87.