Adverbial morphology revisited: the case of Dutch

Janneke Diepeveen
(Berlin)

In overviews of Dutch word formation (e.g. Booij 2002) we find a section on ‘adverbial morphology’ or an inventory of adverbial suffixes, presupposing that Dutch has a category of adverbs which may be extended through word-formation patterns. This inventory usually comprises -(e)lijk, -(e)lings, -gewijs, -erwijs, -halve, -iter, -tjes, -waarts and -weg. In Diepeveen (2012), I provide the first detailed synchronic and diachronic descriptions of these Dutch adverbial suffixes and of the additional morphemes -matig and -technisch. The descriptions are based on qualitative investigation of attested language data taken from corpora and dictionaries. The empirical investigations of Dutch suffixes are supported by data available on English and German suffix equivalents.

A basic problem concerning Dutch adverbial morphology is the classification of output derivatives as either adverbs or adjectives. This classificational problem has its roots in the way adverbs and adjectives as parts of speech are defined in the Dutch grammatical tradition. Throughout time, Dutch, like German, displays an increasing degree of overlap between adverbs and adjectives. This contrasts with English, where adverbial marking by -ly was regularised and resulted in a formal demarcation of a category of adverbially used words (see Pounder 2001 and Diepeveen & van de Velde 2010).

To deal with the classificational problem from a contrastive perspective, I rely on notions of prototype theory and concepts of a functional approach to language. I propose an integrated approach to complex adverbs and adjectives as ‘modifying words’. On semantic-functional grounds we may assume one continuum of ‘modifying words’, which constitutes a cross-linguistically valid category. On morphosyntactic grounds, then, we may assume a scalar distinction between adverbial and adjectival lexemes which is language-specific. In Dutch the defining criteria pertain to the morphosyntactic valency of lexemes, i.e. their use in syntactic structure (adverbial, predicative, attributive) and their morphological ability to inflect with the obligatory ending -e in prenominal position. Thus, Dutch prototypical adverbs cannot be used as prenominal attributes and do not allow the inflectional ending -e.

I shall argue that the notion ‘adverbial morphology’ needs a different definition than the one it has previously received in the literature. Adverbial and adjectival morphology are no discrete categories but they are best viewed as scalar notions. The distinction is motivated by the morphosyntactic properties of the output words of the patterns. In Dutch, these range from invariable lexemes restricted to non-attributive positions (prototypical adverbs) to lexemes which are fully flexible (prototypical adjectives). Empirical investigations of the above-mentioned Dutch suffixes then reveal that the inventory of ‘adverbial suffixes’ is much smaller than it has previously been claimed to be.


