"Super mais alors super intéressant! Reduplicative coordination constructions with an intensifying meaning in French and Dutch"

Van Goethem, Kristel ; Dugas, Edwige ; Amiot, Dant ; Cappelle, Bert ; Lemmens, Maarten ; Patin, Cédric ; Tayalati, Fayssal

ABSTRACT

Super mais alors super intéressant! Reduplicative coordination constructions with an emphatic meaning in (spoken) French and Dutch. French and Dutch share a construction in which an element X occurs in a reduplicative coordination pattern: [X mais alors X] (lit. 'X but then X') in French and [X maar dan ook X] (lit. 'X but then also X') in Dutch (for Dutch, see Hoeksema (2001) and Cappelle (2012)). In both languages, this pattern can be used to put emphasis on X: (1) je ne comprends pas les Wallons mais alors pas-du-tout (Valibel) 'I do not understand the Walloons but then really not' (2) wij hebben alles maar dan ook alles gedaan om die mensen goed te begeleiden (...) (CGN, shortened) 'We have done everything but then also everything to guide these people appropriately' Since these patterns combine a fixed sequence (mais alors / maar dan ook) with a variable element X (a (universal) quantifier, a degree adverb, an adjective, etc.) and since their emphatic meaning is not ...

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Super mais alors super intéressant !
Reduplicative coordination constructions with an intensifying meaning in French and Dutch

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Continuation of the project in two thematic subgroups:

- 1. Eng. *let alone* / Du. *laat staan* / Fr. *encore moins*
- 2. Fr. *X mais alors X'* / Du. *X maar dan ook X'*
1. Introduction
2. Dutch *X maar dan ook X'* (MDO)
3. French *X mais alors X'* (MA)
4. Comparison MDO/MA
5. Conclusions
1. Introduction
1.1. Some examples

- Reduplication pattern with an intensifying function in (informal/spoken) Fr and Du:
  - Fr. \( X \) mais alors \( X' \) (MA) (lit. \( X \) but then \( X' \))
    
    (1) Je ne comprends \textit{pas} les Wallons mais alors \textit{pas du tout} (Valibel) 'lit. I don't understand the Walloons but then not at all'
  - Du. \( X \) maar dan ook \( X' \) (MDO) (lit. \( X \) but then also \( X' \))
    
    (2) Wij hebben \textit{alles} maar dan ook \textit{alles} gedaan om die mensen goed te begeleiden (CGN) 'lit. We have done everything but then also everything to guide these people appropriately'
1.2. Theoretical background

- constructions are "conventionalized pairings of form and meaning" (Goldberg 2006:3)
- Dutch X MDO X' is considered a construction by Hoeksema (2001)

⇒ Research questions:
- Can we find additional evidence for this constructional analysis of X MDO X'?
- Does this constructional analysis also hold for French X MA X'?
Preliminaries:

- X MA X'and X MDO X' seem to act as semi-schematic constructions
  - Form: fixed sequence MA/MDO + variable parts X and X'
  - Meaning: not (entirely) predictable intensifying value

⇒ intensifying MA/MDO CXs should be distinguished from their compositional equivalents ("opposition" + "temporal"/"consequence"):

(3) Pour éviter de souffrir, on ne doit pas aimer, mais alors on souffre de ne pas aimer (web) 'To avoid suffering, one should not love, but then one suffers from the lack of love'

(4) Je kunt dan verbinden tegen lagere kosten maar dan ook lagere bandbreedte natuurlijk (COW) 'Then you can connect at lower costs, but then also (with) lower band width of course'
1.3. Methodology

- Formal and functional analysis of X MDO/MA X'
- Comparative and corpus-based approach
  - **Fr:**
    - 100 occ. of (non-compositional) MA found with Google
    - 50 occ. of (non-compositional) MA in Frantext
    - non-systematic analysis of Valibel occ. (spoken Belgian French)
    - prosodic experiment
  - **Du:**
    - 130 occ. of (non-compositional) MDO in COW
    - non-systematic analysis of CGN occ. (spoken Dutch)
2. Dutch MDO
2.1. State of the art

- **Hoeksema (2001):** "emphatic reduplicative coordination"
  - "emphasis" equated with (qualitative / quantitative) intensifying value
  - reduplication often associated with intensifying value:
    1. **Fr.** *Il est très très (très) malin* ‘lit. He is very very cunning’
    2. **Du.** *Het regende en regende* 'lit. It rained and rained'
    3. **Eng.** *For years and years this has been a problem*
    4. **Yoruba (West-Africa)** *múra kiá kiá* 'to get prepared very quickly'
Main characteristics MDO (Hoeksema 2001):

✓ MDO is non-compositional
✓ MDO coordinates two similar (if not identical) items

(9) *Ik wil alles maar dan ook alles zien* 'lit. I want to see everything but then also everything'

✓ X in X MDO X' is usually inherently emphatic
(universal quantifier, degree adverbial)

(10) *We vonden 't heel maar dan ook heel spannend* 'lit. We found it very but then also very exciting'

✓ X is mostly a single lexical item
✓ X' is often preceded by a degree adverb (Y)

(11) *Hij kan niets maar dan ook echt niets* 'lit. he can't do anything but then also really anything'
Additional observations (Cappelle 2012):

✓ degree adverbial Y may precede X

(12) **helemaal nichts maar dan ook nichts** 'lit. completely anything but then also anything'

✓ MDO may be compositional

• metalinguistic interpretation: 'I say X, **but if I say X then I also mean X**'

• cf. first occurrences observed by Hoeksema (1917, 1918) contain *letterlijk* 'literally' before X'

✓ parts of words may be reduplicated

• compound members / prefixoids:

(13) **ape- maar dan ook apetrots** 'lit. monkey- but then also monkey-proud'

• non-morphemic sequences:

(14) **iede- maar dan ook iedereen** 'lit. eve- but then also everybody'
2.2. Syntactic nature of X and X'

- **X = universal pronominal quantifier** (72,31%)
  - mostly negative value (57,69%)
    (15) *Er zat niets, maar dan ook niets menselijks bij.* 'lit. There was nothing, but then also nothing human about it.'
  - positive value (14,62%)
    (16) *Overal, maar dan ook letterlijk overal, staan meisjes te dansen op de bar.* 'lit. Everywhere, but then also literally everywhere girls were dancing on the bar top'

- **X = degree adverb** (13,85%)
  (17) **verschrikkelijk, maar dan ook verschrikkelijk aanbevolen!** 'lit. terribly, but then also terribly recommended'

- **Other categories of X (<4,00%), not observed by Hoeksema (2001): Adj, NP, VP, PP, word part**
2.3. X and X' are +/- identical

- Reduplication (93.85%)
  - exact reduplication (41.33%): (18) *j vergist j heel flink in de lego markt, maar dan ook heel flink.* ‘lit. you’re very badly mistaken in the lego market, but then also very badly.’
  
- with addition of a degree adverb Y (27.69%) (19) *De stylisten van alle, maar dan ook echt alle Oost-Europese deelnemers pakten groots uit qua stofgebruik.* ‘lit. The stylists of all, but then also really all Eastern European participants pushed the boat out in their use of fabrics.’

- with "delayed" addition (24.82%): (20) *Dan moet je toch helemaal knetter maar dan ook knettergek zijn.* ‘lit. Then you have to be completely raving but then also raving mad’
2.4. X and X' are different

- **Reformulation (3,85%)**

  (21) *Ik heb gisteren 3 postings geplaatst [sic] met dezelfde opmerkingen, maar dan ook letterlijk hun woorden gekopieerd en geplakt* 'lit. Yesterday I have posted 3 postings with the same observations, but then also litterally their words copied and pasted'

- **Incomplete reduplication/ellipsis (2,31%)**

  (22) *Maar dat hysterische subcultuurtje heeft echt niks, maar dan ook niks te maken met de klassieke musicals uit Hollywood.* 'But that hysterical subculture has really nothing, but then also nothing to do with the classical musicals from Hollywood'

→ cf. Cappelle (2012)
2.5. Constructional preferences

- **X = non gradable (~ 90%)**:
  - universal (pronominal) quantifiers (*niets* 'nothing', *nooit* 'never', *alles* 'everything', *geen enkele* 'none', etc.)
  - (high/absolute) degree adverbials (*veel* 'a lot', *volledig* 'completely', etc.)
  - superlative expressions (*het enige* 'the only')

⇒ **Constructional specialization**:  
  - MDO used to put emphasis on elements that already indicate a high/absolute degree
  - even more pronounced tendency compared to Hoeksema's diachronic study
    - X = universal quantifier: 57.57% in Hoeksema → 75.38% in COW (p < 0.001)
3. French MA
3.1. Syntactic nature of X and X'

More categorial variation; most important categories:

- **Adj/AdjP (26,25%)**
  
  (23) *La route est longue... mais alors très longue* 'lit. The road is long...but then very long'

- **V/VP (22,00%)**
  
  (24) *J’ai décidé de ne plus dormir, mais alors plus dormir une seconde* 'lit. I have decided not to sleep anymore, but then not to sleep a single second anymore'

- **Adv/AdvP (16,87%)**
  
  (25) *Miss Pérou est loin mais alors très loin d’être moche* 'Miss Peru is far but then very far from being ugly'

- **NP (16,25%)**
  
  (26) *Ils aimaient mieux débiter des conneries, mais alors, des conneries!* 'lit. They liked more to talk bullshit, but then, bullshit!'
3.2. X and X' are +/- identical

- **Reduplication**
  
  a. **exact reduplication (6.25%)**
  
  (27) *Je suis déçu mais alors déçu* 'lit. I am disappointed but then disappointed'

  b. **with "delayed" addition (31.25%)**
  
  (28) *J'ai vu un très mais alors très gros camion* 'I have seen a very but then very big truck'

  c. **with addition of a degree adverb Y (52.50%)**
  
  (29) *Un cadeau à petit budget (mais alors tout petit !!!)* 'lit. A present at low budget price (but then very low!!!)'

  d. **double reduplication (4.40%)**
  
  (30) *Blocage complet, mais alors complet complet complet* 'lit. complete blockade, but then complete complete'
3.3. X and X' are different

- Incomplete reduplication/ellipsis (44.40%)

  (31) **GROS GROS mais alors gros problème** 'lit. BIG BIG but then big problem'

  (32) *Je vous avais prévenus: deux cons ! mais alors ø heureux… heureux…* 'lit. (...) two fools! but then happy… happy…'

- Reformulation (6.90%)

  (33) *j’en avais vraiment rien à foutre des cheveux blancs de Marie-Antoinette… Mais alors … rien à taper* 'lit. I couldn’t care less about the white hair of Marie-Antoinette… But then couldn’t give a fig.'
3.4. The role of prosody

Pilot study:
recorded in Lille (U. Lille 3) with an Edirol R1
- 5 speakers of French
  - 4 females, 1 male
  - 4 French (North), 1 Belgian
  - graduate students, admin. staff
  - 21>45 (mean: ~28)

Procedure:
- The subjects were asked to read sentences in dialogues (cf. (blue) text in 21) – the context was read by the experimenter
- 87 sentences ("mais alors" = 18; 69 distractors), semi-random order, 1 iteration | ~20 min; only intensifying (non-compositional) MA
- "mais alors" parameters: number of syllables of the following word, position, category, addition of "vraiment", etc.
- Speakers were asked to speak a colloquial French; repetitions were allowed/requested, in case of mistakes, sputtering

21
Vous parlez à votre ami Laurent de Marie, une amie que vous avez perdue de vue :
"Ah, si tu l'avais connue, la fameuse Marie... Elle était géniale, mais alors GENIALE, hein ! Tu n’en serais pas revenu."

You’re speaking to your friend Laurent about Mary, a former friend:
"Ah! If only you knew her, the famous Mary... She was awesome, but then AWESOME, huh! You would not have believed her."
Preliminary results:
(1) The ‘mais alors’ part is not consistent

- A: The ‘mais alors’ sequence is produced by some speakers with a low and flat F0, and usually with an increased tempo and a small intensity (> the expected realization)
- B: The syllable [lɔʁ] is prominent – high and intense – in other speakers
- Cf. Elle était géniale, mais alors GENIALE (hein ?) 'she was awesome, but then AWESOME' by S2 (A) – illustrating the former strategy - and S1 (B) – illustrating the latter
(2) The ‘X’ part is consistent

- For all speakers, there is a sharp decrease of the F0, starting from a (super-) high on the first syllable (usually acute and intense) to a low on the last (HL on a monosyllabic)
- The initial consonant is usually lengthened
- Cf. Elle était merveilleuse, mais alors MERVEILLEUSE (hein ?) 'she was wonderful, but then WONDERFUL (huh?)' by S1 (A)
- Cf. Elle était mégalo, mais alors MEGALO (hein ?) 'she was megalomaniac, but then MEGALOMANIAC (huh?)' by S3 (B)
3.5. Constructional preferences

- Preference for gradable lexemes (60.65%)
  
  (34) Quelques *grandes* (*mais alors vraiment grandes*) *copines*… 'lit. Some close (but then really close) friends'

- Non gradable elements : two cases
  
  1. X = (mostly negative) universal quantifier / degree Adv / non-gradable Adj
    
    (35) *Ne jamais, mais alors jamais leur donner à manger après minuit* 'lit. Never, but then never (...)'

    (36) *Mon Mac Os X délire COMPLETEMENT, mais alors completement* 'lit. (...) completely, but then completely'

    (37) *Défragmentation impossible, mais alors complètement impossible* 'lit. defragmentation impossible, but then completely impossible'
2. $X = \text{(non-gradable) NP}$

(38) *peut-être des espèces de rateaux, mais alors très longs* 'lit. possibly a kind of rakes, but then not very long (ones)'

(39) *un plâtrier, mais alors un qui ne fait que le plâtre* 'lit. a plasterer, but then one who only does plasterwork'

$\rightarrow X'$ adds a precision about X (often ellipsed)

$\rightarrow$ not an intensifying, but a specifying interpretation
3.6. Analysis of X MA X’

- Two subconstructions in French:
  
  (1) Intensifying MA construction
  ✔ X is gradable or non-gradable
  ✔ intensification markers: degree adverbs, double reduplication, exclamative modality, etc.

  (40) *Il n’a rien vu venir mais alors rien du tout* ‘lit. He didn’t see anything coming, but then anything at all’

  (41) *Loin, mais alors très loin d’un 5 étoiles* ‘lit. Far, but then very far from a five star (hotel)’

  (42) *marre mais alors marre!!* ‘lit. enough but then enough!!’
(2) Specifying MA construction

✓ X = non gradable (generally N/NP)
✓ X' specifies the meaning of X
✓ different prosody?

(43) Y a peut-être des armes par-ci par-là, mais alors des pas déclarées. 'lit. Maybe there are some weapons here and there, but then not declared (ones)'

Remark: Dutch would use here 'X maar dan wel X'' (lit. X but then well X') instead of 'X maar dan ook X''

(44) Er zijn misschien hier en daar wapens, maar dan wel niet-aangegeven wapens.
Both subconstructions have a focalizing function:

- what is expressed after MA is the rhematic part of the expression (the most informative part)

Confirmed by:

- possible ellipsis of the thematic part:

  (45) Je vous avais prévenus: deux cons ! mais alors ø heureux… heureux… 'lit. (...) two fools! but then happy… happy…'

- possible delayed addition of the rhematic part (endfocus):

  (46) Il est complètement mais alors complètement HS 'lit. he is completely but then completely disabled'
4. Comparison MDO/MA
Comparison categories of X

DUTCH

X MDO X'

FRENCH

X MA X'

- Pron/ Det
- Quant
- Adv
- Adj
- NP
- Prefixoid
- Pron
- Quant
- Adv(P)
- Adj(P)
- NP
- V(P)
### Comparison MDO/MA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>DUTCH MDO</strong></th>
<th><strong>FRENCH MA</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Restricted categorial variability of X</td>
<td>• More categorical variation of X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Outspoken preference for non-gradable X (about 90%)</td>
<td>• X can be gradable or non-gradable</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Mostly (exact) reduplication (&gt;93%)</td>
<td>• Less cases of (exact) reduplication (49%); more ellipsis</td>
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<td>• (More) uniformal form-meaning mapping (MDO ~ intensifying function)</td>
<td>• Two subconstructions (intensifying / specifying)</td>
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⇒ MDO: high degree of constructionalization
⇒ MA: less advanced degree of constructionalization?
5. Conclusions
French and Dutch share an intensifying reduplication construction: MA/MDO

- non-compositional
- X often inherently intensifying
- intensity often reinforced by a degree adverb

French: second focalizing MA construction with a specifying function (∼ Dutch MDW)

⇒ French: one form (MA) covers two subconstructions (intensifying / specifying)
⇒ in Dutch: two independent forms (MDO/MDW) corresponding to two different constructions
6. References
References