

small but BIG: Augmentative schwa in the morphosyntactic build of Dutch

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Emphasis is a property of human language. Information that the speaker considers to be important can be marked by various formal linguistic means of enhancement, such as phonological stress, realization of positions that "normally" remain silent (Eng: *John DID eat an apple*; It.: *LUI ha telefonato*), or duplication of "identical" material (French: *mon livre à moi*). In this talk I will discuss the morphosyntactic behavior of a (phonologically) small but big (in the sense of emphatic / intensifying / expressive) element in the structure of Dutch: augmentative schwa. This element (often optionally) shows up on a variety of lexical items, such as (i) degree words modifying attributive adjectives (*een erg(-e) dure fiets*, lit.: a very-e expensive bike), (ii) superlative adjectives (*Jan reed 't hardst(-e)*, lit.: Jan drove the fastest-e), (iii) evaluative adjectives in vocative noun phrases (*Ach lief/lieve schatje!*; lit.: Oh dear/dear-e darling-DIM), (iv) possessive pronouns in honorific noun phrases (*Zijne Koninklijke Hoogheid*; lit.: His-e Royal Highness), (v) personal/interrogative/demonstrative pronouns (*ik(-e)*, 'I'; *wat(-e)*, 'what?'; *dat(-e)*, 'that'), etc. The question obviously arises where this element comes from. Is it simply some morpheme stored in the lexicon that can be attached to various elements? Or does this augmentative schwa find its origin in the syntactic structure of Dutch. I will adopt the latter approach. Specifically, I will argue that augmentative schwa is an affixal realization of a functional category (e.g., D, Deg). Interestingly, schwa as a sound realizing a functional category is a phenomenon observed in Dutch child language (e.g., Van Kampen & Wijnen 2000). It seems that this minimal spell out of functional material is also available in adult Dutch, but only in "special" (emphatic/intensifying/expressive) contexts. Besides examining the nature of this small element, I will also look at its distributional behavior. An interesting property of augmentative schwa is its "spreading behavior". Sometimes more than one element can be augmented with schwa, as in *een hele erge dure fiets*; lit.: a real-e very-e expensive bike); compare with *een heel erg dure fiets*. Although, at the surface, this spreading phenomenon appears to be a linear phenomenon, it will be shown that syntactic structure (hierarchy) is crucially involved.