

**“Maybe that the main clause is missing”  
Clausal ellipsis in Belgian Dutch**

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**OUTLINE OF THE TALK**

- 1 Introduction: X + *that*-clause
- 2 The basic data: what is X?
- 3 The analysis: clausal ellipsis
- 4 Other cases of clausal ellipsis
- 5 Remaining problem: the disappearance of *zo*
- 6 Conclusion

**1 INTRODUCTION: X + THAT-CLAUSE**

Belgian Dutch allows for sentences of the type in (1):

(1) {Misschien/ Goed} da Kris komt.  
perhaps/ good that Kris comes  
“It is {perhaps the case/good} that Kris is coming.”

(2) **Het is** {misschien **zo**/goed} da Kris komt.  
**It is** perhaps **so**/good that Kris comes  
“It is {perhaps the case/good} that Kris is coming.”

→ Main claim of this talk: (1) is derived from (2) via clausal ellipsis

**2 THE BASIC DATA: WHAT IS X?**

Overview:

- 2.1 Determining the category of X
- 2.2 Adverbs
- 2.3 Adjectives
- 2.4 Adjective-adverbs
- 2.5 Modification
- 2.6 Summary

*2.1 Determining the category of X*

X + *that*-clause: X = adjective or sentential adverb

! Dutch: no morphological distinction between adverbs and adjectives

→ categorization based on the distribution:

(3) **Adjective:** a. een vreemde zaak (attributive use)  
a strange case  
b. Dat hij niet komt, is jammer. (predicative use)  
that he not comes is unfortunate  
“That he doesn’t come, is unfortunate.”

(4) (Sentential) **Adverb:** Kaat slaapt misschien.  
Kaat sleeps perhaps  
“Perhaps Kaat is sleeping.”

(5) Ambiguous: a. de waarschijnlijke winnaar  
the probable winner  
b. Kaat slaapt waarschijnlijk.  
Kaat sleeps probably  
“Kaat probably sleeps.”

→ **Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkunst (ANS):** when adjectives are used adverbially, they are considered a subclass of the adverbs

→ label: **adjective-adverb**

◆ When we look at co-occurrence possibilities with *zo* in *het is X (zo) dat...* ('it is X {so/the case} + *that*-clause), the same three groups are formed:

(6) **Het is ADV \*(zo) da(t)...**

- a. Het is misschien \*(zo) da Kris komt.  
it is perhaps so that Kris comes  
"It is perhaps the case that Kris is coming."

**Het is ADJ (\*zo) da(t)...**

- b. Het is goed (\*zo) da Kris komt.  
it is good so that Kris comes  
"It is good that Kris is coming."

**Het is ADJ-ADV (zo) da(t)...**

- c. Het is waarschijnlijk (zo) da Kris komt.  
it is probabl{e/y} so that Kris comes  
"It is {probably the case/probable} that Kris is coming."

→ *het is X (zo) + that-clause* is semantically equivalent to *X + that-clause*

## 2.2 Adverbs

- (7) a. Misschien da Kris komt.  
perhaps that Kris comes  
"It is perhaps the case that Kris is coming."  
b. \* Altijd da Kris komt.  
always that Kris comes

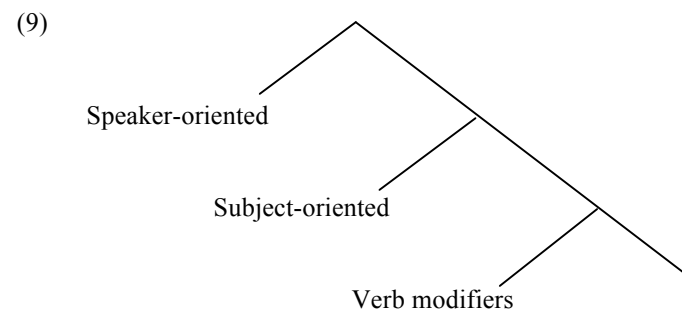
◆ Adverb order shows cross-linguistic restrictions:

- (8) a. Hij praat waarschijnlijk opzettelijk te snel.  
he talks probably intentionally too fast  
"Probably he intentionally talks too fast."

- b. \*Hij praat opzettelijk waarschijnlijk te snel.  
\* he talks intentionally probably too fast

→ Cinque (1999): ordering of adverbs:

- highest adverbs: speaker-oriented, e.g. *probably* (expresses modality)  
lower adverbs: subject-oriented, e.g. *intentionally*  
verb modifiers, e.g. *fast* (manner adverb)



→ The adverbs occurring in *X + that-clause* are restricted to the modality adverbs, a subclass of the speaker-oriented adverbs.

- (10) *wellicht* 'perchance', *allicht* 'most likely', *blijkbaar* 'apparently', *misschien* 'perhaps', *uiteraard* 'indeed', *(na)tuurlijk* 'naturally', *zeker en vast* 'definitely', *alleszins* 'absolutely' and *ongetwijfeld* 'undoubtedly'

## 2.3 Adjectives

- (11) Logisch/Vreemd da Kris komt.  
logical strange that Kris comes  
"It is logical/strange that Kris is coming."

◆ Cinque (1994) and Laenzlinger (2000) propose a similar hierarchy for adjectives: first speaker-oriented adjectives, then subject-oriented adjectives and finally the manner/thematic adjectives (cf. (9)).

➔ The adjectives occurring in X + that-clause are evaluative and speaker-oriented: they all express the speaker's opinion about the proposition in the *that*-clause.

(12) *logisch* 'logical', *evident* 'evident', *nogal wiertes* 'goes without saying', *normaal* 'normal', *ondenkbaar* 'unthinkable', *spijtig* 'regrettable', *vreemd* 'strange', *jammer* 'unfortunate', *grappig* 'funny', *dom* 'stupid', *gek* 'crazy', *goed* 'good', *lief* 'sweet' and *opvallend* 'striking'

#### 2.4. Adjective-adverbs

(13) Waarschijnlijk da Kris komt.  
probably that Kris comes  
"It is {probably the case/probable} that Kris comes."

Like the 'real' adverbs the adjective-adverbs in X + *that*-clause express modality.

(14) *waarschijnlijk* 'probably', *klaarblijkelijk* 'obviously', *zeker* 'certainly' and *mogelijk* 'possibly'

#### 2.5. Modification

◆ As we have seen in (7)b, lower (not speaker oriented) adverbs and degree words cannot occur on their own in X + *that*-clause, but they can show up in combination with either modality or evaluation, or both.

(15)a. Altijd beter dat er iemand ouder bij is.  
always better that there someone older with is  
"It is always better to have someone older there too."  
b. Misschien vaak nie slecht da hij erbij is.  
perhaps often not bad that he there.with is

"It is perhaps often not bad to have him there too."

c. Heel misschien da hij komt.  
very perhaps that he comes  
"There is a slight chance that he might be coming."

#### 2.6. Summary

◆ Three groups of words occur in X + *that*-clause: **adverbs, adjectives and adjective-adverbs**. Co-occurrence with *zo* in *het is X (zo) dat...* 'it is X (so/the case) that...' is one of the distribution tests:

- With adverbs *zo* is **obligatory**:  
Het is ADV \*(zo) dat...
- With adjectives *zo* is **prohibited**:  
Het is ADJ (\*zo) dat...
- With adjective-adverbs *zo* is **optional**:  
Het is ADJ-ADV (zo) dat...

◆ adverbs and adjective-adverbs: speaker-oriented **modality**  
adjectives: speaker-oriented **evaluation**

### 3 THE ANALYSIS: CLAUSAL ELLIPSIS

Main claim: X+ that-clause is derived through ellipsis (cf. (16), (17))

(16) ~~Het~~ ~~is~~ misschien ~~zo~~ da Kris komt.  
it is perhaps so that Kris comes  
“It is perhaps the case that Kris is coming.”

(17) ~~Het~~ ~~is~~ goed da Kris komt.  
It is good that Kris comes  
“It is good that Kris is coming.”

Overview:

- 3.1 Conditions on ellipsis
- 3.2 A closer look at the syntactic structure
- 3.3 Ellipsis of *het is X (zo) da(t)...*

#### 3.1 Conditions on ellipsis

❶ **Recoverability:** Only recoverable elements may be elided.

- ↳ 1) semantically empty elements (cf. (16), (17))
- 2) contextually given elements (cf. (18))

(18) Jella likes cats, but Sofie does not ~~like~~ ~~eats~~.

❷ **Structural restrictions:** Only elements forming a constituent can be elided

(19) [Het [is [aan.het.regenen [nu]]]].  
it is raining now  
“It is raining now.”

(20)\* Aan.het.regenen nu.  
raining now

→ the elided elements do not form a constituent here



in (16) and (17) they do form a constituent: long story

→ taking a closer look at more complex cases of the construction

#### 3.2 A closer look at the syntactic structure

- (21) a. Het is **misschien wel niet slecht** da Jessica het haar verteld heeft.  
it is perhaps PRT not bad that Jessica it her told has  
“It is perhaps not bad that Jessica told her.”
- b. **Misschien wel niet slecht** da Jessica het haar verteld heeft.  
perhaps PRT not bad that Jessica it her told has  
“It is perhaps not bad that Jessica told her.”

◆ Most simple hypothesis when X is a sequence: *misschien wel niet slecht* forms one constituent.

! **not true** (Dutch being a verb second language): the sequence cannot occur to the left of the finite verb (cf. (22))

(22) \* Misschien wel niet slecht is het da Jessica het haar verteld heeft.  
perhaps PRT not bad is it that Jessica it her told has

→ not one constituent

◆ Possible sequences

→ first the non-elliptical sentence before going into the ellipsis cases

- (23) a. Het is misschien wel niet slecht da Jessica het haar verteld heeft.  
It is perhaps PRT not bad that Jessica it her told has  
“It is perhaps not bad that Jessica told her.”
- b. Het is \* wel niet slecht da Jessica het haar verteld heeft.  
it is PRT not bad that Jessica it her told has  
“It is not bad that Jessica told her.”
- c. Het is \* \* niet slecht da Jessica het haar verteld heeft.  
it is not bad that Jessica it her told has  
“It is not bad that Jessica told her.”
- d. Het is \* \* \* slecht da Jessica het haar verteld heeft.  
it is bad that Jessica it her told has  
“It is bad that Jessica told her.”
- e. \*Het is misschien wel niet \* da Jessica het haar verteld heeft.  
it is perhaps PRT not that Jessica it her told has
- f. \*Het is misschien \* \* \* da Jessica het haar verteld heeft.  
it is perhaps that Jessica it her told has

Het	is	ADV	PRT	NEG	ADJ	da	Jessica	het	haar	verteld	heeft
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→ The ADJ position is obligatorily filled, the others are optional. When no adjectival predicate is available, the semantically weak *zo* ‘the-case’ is inserted:

- (24) a. \*Het is misschien da Jessica het haar verteld heeft.  
it is perhaps that Jessica it her told has
- b. Het is misschien *zo* da Jessica het haar verteld heeft.  
it is perhaps so that Jessica it her told has  
“It is perhaps the case that Jessica told her.”

→ *zo* is a dummy predicate, in complementary distribution with adjectival predicates.

- (25) \*Het is jammer zo da Jessica het haar verteld heeft.  
it is unfortunate so that Jessica it her told has

### 3.3 Ellipsis of ~~het is~~ X (~~zo~~) da(t)...

◆ What is elided? What survives?

① X + *that*-clause with an adjectival predicate

- (26) ~~Het is~~ misschien wel nie slecht da Kris komt.  
it is perhaps PRT not bad that Kris comes  
“It is perhaps not bad that Kris is coming.”

→ What is deleted?

*het is* ‘it is’

→ What survives?

adverb, particle *wel*, *niet* ‘not’, adjective and the *that*-clause

② X + *that*-clause with *zo* as its predicate

- (27) a. \*~~Het is~~ misschien wel nie **zo** da Kris komt.  
it is perhaps PRT not so that Kris comes
- b. ~~Het is~~ misschien wel nie ~~zo~~ da Kris komt.  
it is perhaps PRT not so that Kris comes  
“It is perhaps not the case that Kris is coming.”

→ What is deleted?

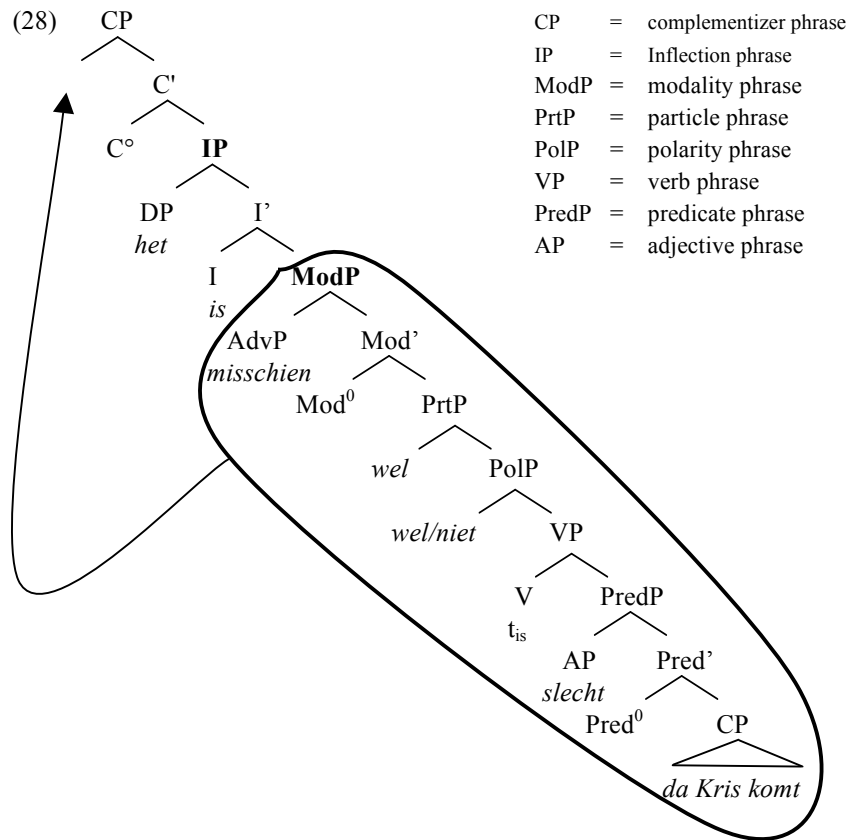
*het is*, and **zo is deleted**, as well

→ What survives?

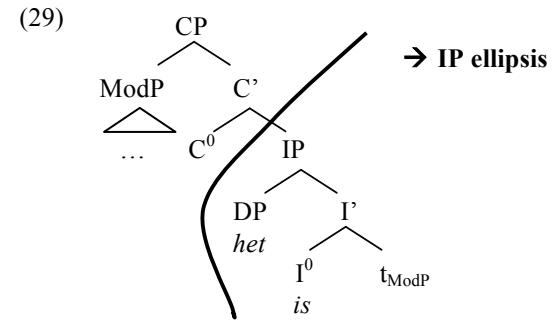
ADV, *wel*, *niet*, *that*-clause

◆ Ellipsis: 2 steps

❶ Movement of *misschien wel niet slecht da Kris komt* (modality phrase in the tree)



❷ Ellipsis of IP (Inflection Phrase)



(30) [CP [ModP Misschien wel nie slecht da Kris komt] [IP het [is t<sub>ModP</sub> ]]]

4 OTHER CASES OF CLAUSAL ELLIPSIS

Overview:

- 4.1 Sluicing
- 4.2 Fragment answers
- 4.3 Spading

→ Other constructions analyzed as movement followed by IP ellipsis

4.1 Sluicing

◆ traditional analysis of sluicing: ellipsis of IP (Merchant 2001)

(31) Someone has stolen my bike, but I don't know who [IP-~~t<sub>who</sub> has stolen my bike~~]

## 4.2 Fragment answers

- ◆ Merchant (2004): fragment moves to a position higher than IP, and IP is elided

(32) A: Who has eaten the whole chocolate cake?  
 B: Thomas [<sub>IP</sub> ~~t<sub>Thomas</sub> has eaten the whole chocolate cake~~]

(33) A: What did he give to the cat?  
 B: Food [<sub>IP</sub> ~~he gave t<sub>food</sub> to the cat~~]

## 4.3 Spading

- ◆ Belgian Dutch dialects: SPADING ‘Sluicing Plus A Demonstrative In Non-insular Germanic’ (Van Craenenbroeck 2004, 2005)

(34) A: Monika heeft iemand gezien.  
 Monika has someone seen  
 B: Wie da?  
 who that  
 “Monika has seen someone.” – “Who?”

Van Craenenbroeck (2004, 2005): the underlying sentence of the spaded clause is a cleft and *da* is a demonstrative pronoun which moved out of the cleft-clause:

(35) da is wie dat Monika gezien heeft  
 that<sub>dem</sub> is who that<sub>compl</sub> Monika seen has = **underlying cleft**

(36) Wie is da t<sub>is</sub> t<sub>wie</sub> dat Monika gezien heeft?  
 who is that that Monika seen has  
 “Who is it that Monika has seen?” = **cleft question**

(37) [Wie [ da [<sub>IP</sub> t<sub>da</sub> is t<sub>wie</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> ~~dat~~ ~~Monika gezien heeft?~~]]]]  
 who that<sub>dem</sub> is that<sub>compl</sub> Monika seen has  
 “Who?” = **spading**

## 5 REMAINING PROBLEM: THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ZO

- ◆ Dummy predicate *zo* (or a similar existential predicate such as *het geval* ‘the case’) is needed in the non-elliptical sentence when there is no adjective:

(38) a. Het is misschien {zo/het geval} da Marsha ook gaat.  
 it is perhaps so/the case that Marsha also goes  
 “It is perhaps the case that Marsha is also going.”  
 b. \*Het is misschien da Marsha ook gaat.  
 it is perhaps that Marsha also goes

- ◆ *zo* is excluded from X + *that*-clause (as is *het geval*):

(39) a. Misschien da Marsha ook gaat.  
 perhaps that Marsha also goes  
 “It is perhaps the case that Marsha is also going.”  
 b. \*Misschien {zo/het geval} da Marsha ook gaat.  
 perhaps so/the case that Marsha also goes

→ Problem: *zo* is inside ModP, just like an adjective, so it should be a survivor of the ellipsis!

- ◆ *Zo* behaves differently in constructions without ellipsis as well:

there seems to be a restriction disallowing fronting of ‘existential’ predicates such as *zo* and *het geval* (cf.0).

(40) a. Het is misschien wel {zo/het geval} da Marsha ook gaat.  
 it is perhaps PRT so/the case that Marsha also goes  
 “It is perhaps the case that Marsha also goes.”  
 b. \*{Zo/Het geval} is het misschien wel da Marsha ook gaat.  
 so/the case is it perhaps PRT that Marsha also goes

This restriction does not apply to the (evaluative) adjectives (cf. (41)).

- (41) a. Het is misschien wel leuk da Marsha ook gaat.  
 it is perhaps PRT nice that Marsha also goes  
 “It is perhaps nice that Marsha also goes.”  
 b. Leuk is het misschien wel da Marsha ook gaat.  
 nice is it perhaps PRT that Marsha also goes  
 “It is perhaps nice that Marsha also goes.”

**Possible solution:** because of this restriction, *zo* cannot be fronted together with *misschien wel* → *zo* is moved to a position higher than the adverb, but inside IP. When IP is elided, so is *zo*, since it is still in IP.

! This rather ad hoc solution is not completely satisfactory: remaining questions  
 Where exactly does *zo* move to and why?  
 Why does *zo* HAVE to move when *misschien wel (niet)* moves, and only in that case?

→ further research

## 6 CONCLUSION

- ◆ **Main claim: X + *that*-clause involves clausal ellipsis**  
 Underlying structure: *Het is X dat...* ‘it is X + *that*-clause’
- ◆ X can contain an adverb, the particle *wel*, negation or affirmation and an (adjectival) predicate.
- ◆ The adverbs in X + *that*-clause express modality and the adjectives express the speaker’s evaluation of the proposition in the *that*-clause.
- ◆ X + *that*-clause is derived in two steps: first the elements in X and the *that*-clause move to the left, out of the IP, and then the IP is deleted.

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