“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.”
   b. Het is goed *(zo) da Kris komt.
      it is good so that Kris comes
      “It is good that Kris is coming.”
   c. Het is waarschijnlijk (zo) da Kris komt.
      it is probably 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:

    he talks 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)

(9)

Speaker-oriented

Subject-oriented

Verb modifiers

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


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.


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’, *zeer* ‘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**
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 the case that Kris is coming.”

(17) Het is goed da Kris komt.
    “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

1 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 cats.

2 Structural restrictions: Only elements forming a constituent can be elided

(19) [Het [is [aan.het.regen [nu]]]].
    “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 not bad that Jessica it her told has”

    “It is perhaps not bad that Jessica it her told has”

◆ 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 it that Jessica it her told has

⇒ not one constituent

◆ Possible sequences

⇒ first the non-elliptical sentence before going into the ellipsis cases
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(23) a. Het is misschien wel niet slecht da Jessica het haar verteld heeft. It is perhaps not bad that Jessica it her told has “It is perhaps not bad that Jessica told her.”
b. Het is x 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 x x 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 x x x 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 x da Jessica het haar verteld heeft. it is perhaps PRT not that Jessica it her told has
f. *Het is misschien x x x 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 |

→ 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) dat(t)…

◆ What is elided? What survives?

Ø X + that-clause with an adjectival predicate

(26) Het is misschien wel nie slecht da Kris komt. it is perhaps 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

Ø X + that-clause with zo as its predicate

(27) a. *Het is misschien wel nie zo da Kris komt. it is perhaps 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

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

Ellipsis of IP (Inflection Phrase)

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 [___ 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 [he has eaten the whole chocolate cake]

(33) A: What did he give to the cat?
   B: Food [he gave food 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\_dem is who that\_compl Monika seen has  = underlying cleft

(36) Wie is da to wie dat Monika gezien heeft?
    who is that that Monika seen has
   “Who is it that Monika has seen?” = cleft question

(37) [ Wie [ da to wie dat Monika gezien heeft?]]
    who that\_dem is who that\_compl 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 the case that Marsha also goes.”
   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 the case that Marsha also goes.”
   b. * {Zo/Het geval} is het misschien wel da Marsha ook gaat.
      so the case is it perhaps 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 nice that Marsha also goes
   “It is perhaps nice that Marsha also goes.”

b. Leuk is het misschien wel da Marsha ook gaat.
   nice it is perhaps 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.

REFERENCES


