

## Postpositions or particles? The constituency of some motion event descriptions in Dutch

Dutch has several types of adpositions, as can be seen from examples (1)-(3) from the ‘38 million words corpus’ of the Institute for Dutch Lexicology ([www.inl.nl](http://www.inl.nl)):

- (1) *Een jongen [... fietste] op de Rijksparallelweg* (mcnov93ove)  
a boy cycled on the national-parallel-road  
‘A boy was cycling on the National Parallel Road’
- (2) *Iedereen dronk zijn drankje op* (mcmar95ove)  
everyone drank his drink up  
‘Everyone finished their drinks’
- (3) *Een [...] meisje fietst [...] de Dokter Larijweg op* (mcaug94ove)  
a girl cycles the Doctor Larij-road on/up  
‘A girl is cycling onto the Doctor Larij Road’

The adposition *op* ‘on’ in (1) is a preposition: it forms a prepositional phrase with the nominal that follows it. *Op* in (2) is a particle: together with the verb *dronk* ‘drank’ it forms a separable complex verb (see e.g. Blom 2005) that takes the nominal preceding *op* as its direct object. What has been unclear so far, however, is what the status is of the adposition in a construction such as (3). Some studies conclude that it is a postposition, forming a postpositional phrase with the nominal that precedes it. Other studies argue that it is a particle, part of a separable complex verb *opfietsen* that takes a direct object. Yet other studies analyze sentences such as (3) as syntactically ambiguous: *op* is essentially a postposition, but it can be reanalyzed as a particle.

That these earlier studies reach such different conclusions is not due to a difference in methodology: they are all based on constituency tests such as, for example, passivization or topicalization. Instead, they come to different conclusions because (i) they do not all use the same set of tests, (ii) some tests are believed to yield conflicting results, and (iii) there is disagreement about the grammaticality of some of the examples and also about the validity of some of the tests.

The present paper offers a new perspective on this old problem by means of a different methodology. Unlike previous studies, it is based on authentic language data. In addition, it takes the cognitive-grammar view that “symbolic considerations are critical to the determination of grammatical constituency” (Langacker 1987: 366). It therefore provides a semantic analysis of constructions such as (3), pointing out that such constructions are in some crucial respects more similar to constructions such as (2) than to constructions such as (1). Both the particle in (2) and the adposition in (3), for example, designate the result of the event. A further similarity between (2) and (3) is that the event ‘progresses through’ (Tenny 1994: 15) the referent of the nominal preceding the adposition. It will be argued that observations such as these warrant the conclusion that the adposition in (3) is a particle, part of a separable complex verb that takes a type of direct object.