

There's something about something A polarity sensitive N-of-N-construction in dialect Dutch

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MAIN GOAL OF THIS TALK

- to provide an analysis of a previously undiscussed subtype of the N-of-N-construction

ADDITIONAL RESULT

- (a first step towards) a decompositional syntactic analysis of (one type of) polarity sensitivity

OUTLINE OF THE TALK

1. The basic data: *something of N* (SoN)
2. Dissecting the SoN
 - 2.1 Properties of *iets* 'something'
 - 2.2 Properties of N
 - 2.3. External syntax of SoN
 - 2.4 Data summary
3. Towards an analysis: SoN vs. *enig(e) N*
4. The analysis: decomposing a polarity item
5. Further research: modifiers, plurals and mass nouns, variation in licensing contexts
6. Summary and conclusions

1. The basic data: *something of N* (SoN)

- (1) Moeten we voor die cursus iets van boek lezen?
must we for that course something of book read
'Do we have to read any book for that course?'

→ in certain (southern) dialects of Dutch¹, the combination *something of N* (henceforth SoN), where N is a singular count noun, can be used to signify 'any N' or 'some N or other'

2. Dissecting the SoN

2.1 Properties of *iets* 'something'

(i) *iets* 'something' cannot be replaced by a lexical NP

- (2) * Moeten we voor die cursus een roman van boek lezen?
must we for that course a novel of book read
- (3) * Moeten we voor die cursus een boek van roman lezen?
must we for that course a book of novel read

(ii) *iets* 'something' cannot be replaced by iemand 'someone'

- (4) * Waser iemand van verkoper in de winkel?
was there someone of salesperson in the store
INTENDED: 'Was there any salesperson in the store?'

(iii) *iets* 'something' cannot be combined with zo 'so'

- (5) * Moeten we voor die cursus zoiets van boek lezen?
must we for that course so.something of book read

compare: the comparative *something of a N*-construction

- (6) Is dat ook weer zoiets van een teken des tijds?
is that also again so.something of a sign of.the time
'Is that also something like a sign of the times?'

http://www.vrijzinnighumanisme.be/5_radio-tv/513_radio050627.htm

¹ Unless indicated otherwise, all examples are from Wambeek Dutch, but with normalized spelling.

(iv) iets 'something' can fuse with clausal negation into niets 'nothing'

- (7) Moeten we voor die cursus niets van boek lezen?
 must we for that course nothing of book read
 'Don't we have to read any book for that course?'

compare: no fusion in the comparative *something of a N*-construction

- (8) Zouden we voor haar verjaardag niet iets van een boek kopen?
 should we for her birthday not something of a book buy
 'Shouldn't we buy something like a book for her birthday?'
- (9) * Zouden we voor haar verjaardag niets van een boek kopen?
 should we for her birthday nothing of a book buy

(v) iets 'something' cannot be topicalized, but it can be wh-moved

- (10) Hij kan iets van boek kopen.
 he can something of book buy
 'He can buy some book or other.'

topicalization

- (11) * Iets kan hij kopen van boek.
 something can he buy of book

wh-movement

- (12) Wat kan hij kopen van boek?
 what can he buy of book
 'What kind of book can he buy?'

2.2 Properties of N**(i) N cannot be preceded by determiners, demonstratives or possessive pronouns**

- (13) * Moeten we voor die cursus iets van de/een/mijn boek lezen?
 must we for that course something of the/a/my book read

compare: 'regular' PP-modifiers inside a DP

- (14) Heb je gisteren iets van de/een/mijn Zweedse componist gekocht?
 have you yesterday something of the/a/my Swedish composer bought
 'Did you buy something by the/a/my Swedish composer yesterday?'

(ii) N cannot be replaced by an R-pronoun

- (15) * Moeten we er voor die cursus iets van lezen?
 must we there for that course something of read
- (16) * Daar moeten we voor die cursus iets van lezen.
 there must we for that course something of read

compare: 'regular' PP-modifiers inside a DP

- (17) Heb je er gisteren iets van gekocht?
 have you there yesterday something of bought
 'Did you buy something by him yesterday?'
- (18) Daar heb ik gisteren iets van gekocht.
 there have I yesterday something of bought
 'I bought something by him yesterday.'

(iii) the PP van N 'of N' cannot be topicalized, wh-moved or extraposed

- (19) Hij kan iets van boek kopen.
 he can something of book buy
 'He can buy some book or other.'

topicalization

- (20) * Van boek kan hij iets kopen.
 of book can he something buy

wh-movement

- (21) * Waarvan kan hij iets kopen?
 where.of can he something buy

extraposition

- (22) * Hij kan iets kopen van boek.
 he can something buy of book

compare: 'regular' PP-modifiers inside a DP

- (23) Ik heb gisteren iets van Bach gekocht.
 I have yesterday something of Bach bought
 'I bought something by Bach yesterday.'
- (24) Van Bach heb ik gisteren iets gekocht.
 of Bach have I yesterday something bought
 'I bought something by Bach yesterday.'

- (25) Van wie heb je gisteren iets gekocht?
of who have you yesterday something bought
'Who did you buy something by yesterday?'
- (26) Ik heb gisteren iets gekocht van Bach.
I have yesterday something bought of Bach
'I bought something by Bach yesterday.'

(iv) N can be animate

- (27) Heb jij iets van coureur gezien?
have you something of racer seen
'Did you see any racer?'

2.3 External syntax of SoN**(i) SoN is a constituent****fronting to V2-position**

- (28) Iets van boek moeten we niet lezen.
something of book must we not read
'A BOOK we don't have to read.'

fragment answers

- (29) Q: Wat kunnen we voor Jan kopen?
what can we voor Jan buy
'What can we buy for Jan?'
- A: Iets van boek.
something of book
'Some book or other.'

pseudoclefts

- (30) Wat dat Jan niet gekocht heeft is iets van boek.
what that Jan not bought has is something of book
'What John didn't buy was any book.'

(ii) SoN is a nominal constituent**or or-coordination**

- (31) We kopen voor Jan óf een cd óf iets van boek.
we buy for John or a cd or something of book
'We'll buy either a cd or some book or other for John.'

(iii) SoN is a non-specific indefinite**there-expletives**

- (32) Er liggen twee koeien in de wei. → non-specific
there lie two cows in the meadow
'There are two cows lying in the meadow.'

- (33) Twee koeien liggen in de wei. → specific
two cows lie in the meadow
'There are two cows lying in the meadow.'

- (34) Jan had niet gezegd dat er iets van boek zou verkocht worden.
Jan had not said that there something of book should sold become
'John hadn't said that any books would be sold.'

- (35) * Jan had niet gezegd dat iets van boek zou verkocht worden.
Jan had not said that something of book sold should become

scrambling

- (36) Ik heb gisteren twee boeken gelezen. → non-specific
I have yesterday two books read
'I read two books yesterday.'

- (37) Ik heb twee boeken gisteren gelezen. → specific
I have two books yesterday read
'I read two books yesterday.'

- (38) Heb je gisteren iets van boek gelezen?
have you yesterday something of book read
'Did you read any book yesterday?'

- (39) * Heb je iets van boek gisteren gelezen?
I have something of book yesterday read

(iv) SoN has the distributional properties of N, not of iets 'something'**selection by V***iets* 'something'

- (40) Niemand vertelde iets.
nobody told something
'Nobody told anything.'

boek 'book'

- (41) * Niemand vertelde (een) boek.
nobody told a book

iets van boek 'something of book'

- (42) * Niemand vertelde iets van boek.
nobody told something of book

phrasal comparatives*iets* 'something' (cf. Hoeksema & Klein 1995:171)

- (43) * Ik krijg liever een dvd als iets.
I get rather a dvd as something

- (44) Ik krijg liever een dvd als een boek.
I get rather a dvd as a book
'I'd rather get a dvd than a book.'

- (45) Ik krijg liever een dvd als iets van boek.
I get rather a dvd as something of book
'I'd rather get a dvd than some book or other.'

(v) SoN is polarity sensitive

→ SoN is an affective polarity item (API) in the sense of Giannakidou (1998, 1999, 2001)

SoN is licensed in/by:**negative sentences**

- (46) Jan heeft nooit iets van boek gekocht.
Jan has never something of book bought
'John has never bought any book.'

before-clauses

- (47) Voordat je iets van boek koopt, komt je best bij mij.
before you something of book buy, come you best with me
'Before you buy any book, you'd better come to me.'

without-clauses

- (48) Zonder iets van boek kom je er niet.
without something of book come you there not
'Without any book you'll never get there.'

yes/no-questions

- (49) Heb je iets van boek gekocht?
have you something of book bought
'Did you buy any book?'

constituent question

- (50) Wie heeft iets van boek gekocht?
who has something of book bought
'Who bought any book?'

protasis of conditionals

- (51) Als je iets van boek ziet, roep mij dan.
if you something of book see call me then
'If you see any book, call me.'

restriction of universal quantifier

- (52) Iedereen die iets van boek koopt mag gratis binnen.
everyone REL something of book buys may freely enter
'Everyone who buys any book can enter for free.'

restriction of definite descriptions

- (53) De studenten die iets van boek kopen mogen gratis binnen.
the students REL something of book buys may freely enter
'The students who buy any book can enter for free.'

restriction of at most

- (54) Maximum vijf studenten die iets van boek kopen mogen gratis binnen.
at most five students REL something of book buys may freely enter
'At most five students who buy any book can enter for free.'

too

- (55) Jan is te zat om iets van boek te kopen.
 Jan is too drunk for something of book to buy
 'John is too drunk to buy any book.'

comparatives

- (56) Jan gaat meer naarde cinema dan dat ik iets van boek koop.
 Jan goes more to the cinema than that I something of book buy
 'John goes to the cinema more often than I buy a book.'

superlatives

- (57) Dat was de laatste keer dat ik iets van boek heb weggegeven.
 that was the last time that I something of book have away.given
 'That was the last time I gave any book away.'

future

- (58) Ik zal iets van boek kopen.
 I shall something of book buy
 'I'll buy some book or other.'

modals

- (59) Hij kan iets van boek kopen.
 he can something of book buy
 'He can buy some book or other.'

imperatives

- (60) Koop iets van boek.
 buy something of book
 'Buy some book or other.'

habituals

- (61) Als ik ga slapen lees ik meestal iets van boek.
 if I go sleep read I usually something of book
 'When I go to bed, I usually read some book or other.'

disjunctions

- (62) We kopen voor Jan een cd of iets van boek.
 we buy for John a cd or something of book
 'We'll buy either a cd or some book or other for John.'

downward entailing QPs

- (63) Niemand heeft iets van boek gekocht.
 nobody has something of book bought
 'Nobody bought any book.'

complement of negative verbs

- (64) Hij weigert iets van boek te lezen.
 he refuses something of book to read
 'He refuses to read any book.'

SoN is not licensed in/by:

episodic affirmative sentences

- (65) * Gisteren om drie uur kocht ik iets van boek.
 yesterday at three hour bought I something of book
 INTENDED: 'Yesterday at three I bought some book or other.'

generics

- (66) * Iets van vogel heeft een snavel.
 something of bird has a beak
 INTENDED: 'A bird has a beak.'

restriction of at least

- (67) * Minimum vijf studenten die iets van boek kopen mogen gratis binnen.
 at.least five students REL something of book buys may freely enter

restriction of some

- (68) * Somige studenten die iets van boek kopen mogen gratis binnen.
 some students REL something of book buys may freely enter

restriction of many

- (69) * Veel studenten die iets van boek kopen mogen gratis binnen.
 many students REL something of book buys may freely enter

2.4 Data summary

PROPERTIES OF <i>IETS VAN N</i> 'SOMETHING OF N'
Properties of <i>iets</i> 'something'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cannot be replaced by a lexical NP - cannot be replaced by <i>iemand</i> - cannot be combined with <i>zo</i> 'so' - can fuse with clausal negation - cannot be topicalized - can be <i>wh</i>-moved
Properties of N
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cannot be preceded by determiners/demonstratives/possessive pronouns - cannot be replaced by an R-pronoun - the <i>of N</i>-PP cannot be moved - can be animate
External syntax of SoN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is a nominal constituent - is a non-specific indefinite - has the distributional properties of N, not of <i>iets</i> 'something' - is an API

3. Towards an analysis: SoN vs. *enig(e) N*

→ the combination of the indefinite determiner *enig(e)* with singular count nouns bears an interesting resemblance to SoN:

(i) **both SoN and *enig(e) N* can mean 'any N' or 'some N or other'**

(70) Heeft iemand enig bezwaar?
 has anyone any objection
 'Does anyone have any objections?'

(71) Hij moet toch enige vorm van straf krijgen.
 he must PRT some.or.other form of punishment get
 'He should receive some form of punishment or other.'
 (www.hln.be/hlns/cache/det/art_547212.html)

(ii) **both SoN and *enig(e) N* are indefinite**

(72) Is er enig bezwaar tegen zijn komst?
 is there any objection against his coming
 'Is there any objection against him coming?'

(iii) ***enig(e) N* is polarity sensitive**

Hoeksema & Klein (1995), Hoeksema (2005): when followed by a singular count noun, *enig(e)* is licensed by/in:

- negative sentences
- *without*-clauses
- yes/no-questions
- *wh*-questions
- protasis of conditionals
- restriction of a universal quantifier
- *too*
- comparatives
- superlatives
- downward entailing QPs
- complements of negative predicates

and in slightly older [as well as non-standard, jvc] stages of Dutch by/in:

- modals
- imperatives
- habituals
- disjunctions

On the other hand, *enig(e)* + singular count noun is not licensed in/by:

- episodic affirmative sentences
- generics
- restriction of *many*

⇒ *enig(e)* + singular count noun = API

→ the parallelism between SoN and *enig(e) N* will form the starting point of the analysis

4. The analysis: decomposing a polarity item

4.1 The meaning components of *any*

Kadmon & Landman (1993):

(73) *any N* = the corresponding NP *a N*, with additional semantic/pragmatic characteristics contributed by *any*, in particular:

WIDENING: in an NP of the form *any N*, *any* widens the interpretation of the NP along a contextual dimension

STRENGTHENING: *any* is licensed only if the widening that it induces creates a stronger statement, i.e. only if the statement on the wide interpretation entails the statement on the narrow interpretation

example

(74) a. An owl hunts mice.
b. Any owl hunts mice.

→ in (74)a the NP *an owl* quantifies over a contextually determined set of owls (e.g. it excludes sick owls)

→ the NP *any owl* in (74)b widens that domain: it displays reduced tolerance to exceptions

(75) A: A sick owl doesn't hunt mice.
B: Right. Of course. Still, it's true that an owl hunts mice.

(76) A: A sick owl doesn't hunt mice.
B: Wrong. ANY owl hunts mice. (It's just that if an owl is very sick, he doesn't do very well on the hunt.)

(77) *Any owl hunts mice* entails *An owl hunts mice*, so the use of *any* is licensed (strengthening)
→ strengthening ensures that *any* only shows up in the appropriate licensing contexts

4.2 *Enig* = *een* + *ig*

proposal: the two central meaning components (existential quantification and widening) are morphologically expressed in *enig*:

***een* = existential quantification**

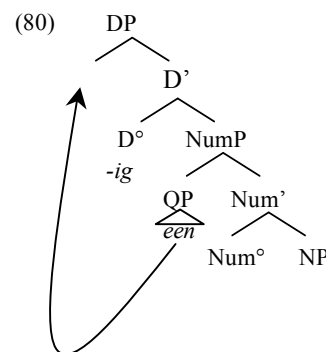
(78) Ik heb een boek gekocht. = $\exists x : \text{book}(x) \ \& \ \text{bought}(I,x)$
I have a book bought
I bought a book.'

***-ig* → widens the domain provided by N**

(79) a. Deze auto is groen. b. Deze auto is groenig
this car is green this car is green.IG
'This car is green.' 'This car is greenish.'

→ in the transition from (79)a to (79)b, the domain provided by the adjective is widened, as the set of green things is a subset of the set of greenish things

→ similarly for *bangig* 'scaryish', *bitterig* 'kind of bitter', *bollig* 'roundish', *bozig* 'kind of angry', *dikkig* 'fattish', *dommig* 'kind of stupid', *dunnig* 'thinnish', *killig* 'kind of chilly', *blauwig* 'blueish', *bruinig* 'brownish', *grijzig* 'greyish', *azijnig* 'vinegar-like', *brijig* 'goeey-like', *dauwig* 'dew-like', *glazig* 'glazy', *idiotig* 'idiot-like', *ivorig* 'ivory-like', *juwelig* 'jewel-like', *likeurig* 'liquor-like'



the analysis: - *een* is basegenerated in specNumP
- *-ig* is basegenerated in D°
(cf. Barbiers & Bennis 2004)
- *een* moves to specDP

4.3 *iets van* = *iets* + *van*

proposal: the two central meaning components (existential quantification and widening) are syntactically expressed in SoN:

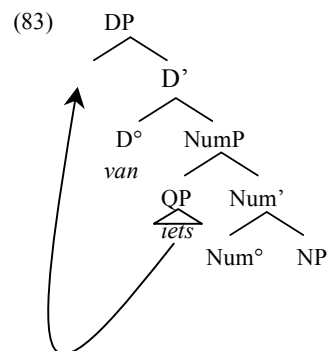
***iets* = existential quantification**

- (81) Ik heb iets gekocht. = $\exists x : \text{bought}(I,x)$
 I have something bought
 I bought something.'

***van* → widens the domain provided by N**

- (82) Q: Wat is dat voor een stof?
 what is that for a substance
 'What kind of substance is that?'
 A1: Ik geloof een zuur.
 I believe an acid
 'I think it is an acid.'
 A2: Ik geloof van een zuur. (Van Craenenbroeck 2002:60)
 I believe of an acid
 'I think it is an acid of some sort.'

→ the use of *van* in (82)A2 widens the domain provided by the N *acid*, as substances that are perhaps not acids in the strictest sense of the word are now also taken into consideration



the analysis: - *iets* is basegenerated in specNumP
 - *van* is basegenerated in D°
 - *iets* moves to specDP

4.4 The basic properties of SoN revisited

(84) Properties of *iets* 'something'

- (i) cannot be replaced by a lexical NP
- (ii) cannot be replaced by *iemand*
- (iii) cannot be combined with *zo* 'so'
- (iv) can fuse with clausal negation
- (v) cannot be topicalized
- (vi) can be *wh*-moved

(i) & (ii) → follow from the fact that *iets* is a 'pure' existential quantifier in SoN, without any further lexical meaning

(iii) → assuming *zo* 'so' to be a predicate (Bennis, Corver & Den Dikken 1997:87), its absence in SoN follows from the fact that *iets* 'something' is not a predicate

(iv) → follows from the fact that *iets* is situated in the highest position of the extended nominal projection of the N (cf. Den Dikken 2006:184 for a comparable and compatible view)

(v) → follows from the fact the SoN is necessarily non-specific; compare indefinite *wat*:

- (85) a. Ik heb gisteren wat gedaan. → non-specific
 I have yesterday what done
 'I have done something yesterday.'

- b. * Ik heb wat gisteren gedaan. → INTENDED: specific
 I have something yesterday done

- (86) * Wat heb ik gedaan.
 what have I done
 INTENDED: 'I have done something.'

(vi) → *iets* forms a constituent, so it can be *wh*-moved; given that *wh*-movement is also a type of existential quantification, the API reading is preserved

(87) Properties of N

- (i) cannot be preceded by determiners/demonstratives/possessive pronouns
- (ii) cannot be replaced by an R-pronoun
- (iii) the *of*-PP cannot be moved
- (iv) can be animate

(i) → follows from the fact that the string *iets van* ‘something of’ takes up the determiner domain

(ii) & (iii) → follows from the fact that the N is not a complement of *van*, i.e. there is no PP in the structure in (83)

(iv) → the N simply provides a contextual domain to be widened and *iets* is a pure existential operator → there is no feature mismatch between the two

(88) External syntax of SoN

- (i) is a nominal constituent
- (ii) is a non-specific indefinite
- (iii) has the distributional properties of N, not of *iets* ‘something’
- (iv) is an API

(i) → SoN = DP

(ii) → APIs are “dependent existential quantifiers” (Giannakidou 1998:70), i.e. they cannot introduce a discourse referent in the actual world ⇒ they cannot be specific

(iii) → follows from the fact that the N is the lexical head of the entire structure, i.e. *iets* ‘something’ and *van* ‘of’ are in the extended nominal domain of the N

(v) → it expresses a combination of existential quantification and domain widening

5. Further research: modifiers, plurals & mass nouns, variation in licensing context**5.1 Modifiers**

→ SoN is degraded – to varying, yet to be determined degrees – when N is modified, both prenominally and postnominally

(89) Moeten we voor die cursus iets van boek lezen?
 must we for that course something of book read
 ‘Do we have to read any book for that course?’

(90) ??Moeten we voor die cursus iets van Engelse boek lezen?
 must we for that course something of English book read
 ‘Do we have to read any English book for that course?’

(91) ??Moeten we voor die cursus iets van boek over taalkunde lezen?
 must we for that course something of book about linguistics read
 ‘Do we have to read any book for that course?’

5.2 Plurals and mass nouns

→ at first sight, SoN is also possible with plurals and mass nouns:

(92) Heb je onderweg iets van problemen gehad?
 have you on.the.way something of problems had
 ‘Did you have any problems along the way?’

(93) Heb je iets van therapie moeten volgen?
 have you something of therapy must follow
 ‘Did you have to follow any therapy?’

however, they pattern differently in a number of respects:

(i) distribution: there are dialects allowing SoN only with mass nouns and plurals, not with singular count nouns

(ii) modification by *bijna* 'almost'

(94) * Ik heb bijna niets van boek gekocht.
I have almost nothing of book bought.

(95) Ik heb bijna niets van problemen gehad.
I have almost nothing of problems had
'I hardly had any problems.'

(96) Ik heb bijna niets van therapie gevolgd.
I have almost nothing of therapy followed
'I hardly followed any therapy.'

note: *almost* normally modifies FCIs and universal quantifiers:

(97) You can pick almost any card.

(98) Almost every student participated.

(iii) modification by *ook maar* 'also only'

(99) ?*Niemand had ook maar iets van boek gekocht.
nobody had also only something of book bought

(100) Niemand had ook maar iets van problemen gehad.
nobody had also only something of problems had
'Nobody had had any problems.'

(101) Niemand had ook maar iets van therapie gevolgd.
nobody had also only something of therapy followed
'Nobody had followed any therapy.'

possible clue: *enig(e)* has a non-polarity-sensitive use when combined with plurals and mass nouns (Hoeksema & Klein 1995)

- (102) a. Enige tijd geleden was hij hier.
ENIGE time ago was he here
'Some time ago he was here.'
- b. Enige minuten geleden was hij hier.
ENIGE minutes ago was he here
'Some time ago he was here.'
- c. * Enige minuut geleden was hij hier.
ENIGE minuut ago was he here

5.3 Variation in licensing contexts

→ SoN does not have the exact same set of licensing environments as Giannakidou's (1998, 1999, 2001) APIs:

	APIs	SoN
phrasal comparatives	*	ok
DP-complement of negative verbs	*	ok
weak intensional verbs	*	ok

6. Summary and conclusions

- certain dialects of Dutch possess an as yet undiscussed instantiation of the N-of-N-construction, whereby the first N is *iets* 'something' and the second a bare count noun
- I have analyzed this construction as a DP, with *iets* moved to specDP, *van* in D°, and the NP (contained in a NumP) in complement position
- this construction has the distribution of an API
- its polarity sensitivity comes about through a combination of existential quantification (lexicalized by *iets*) and domain widening (expressed by *van*)

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