
Metonymical object changes in Dutch: Lexicographical choices and verb meaning¹

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The Dutch term objectsverwisseling (literally: ‘object change’) is a lexicographical label used to describe specific combinations of a verb with two qualitatively different direct objects. Illustrative examples are de borden / de tafel afruimen (‘to clear the plates / the table’), hout / een vuur / de haard aansteken (‘to light wood / a fire / the fireplace’), riet / manden vlechten (‘to weave reed / baskets’), gaten / sokken stoppen (‘to darn holes / stockings’), sinaasappels / sap persen (‘to press oranges / juice’), eieren / kuikens uitbroeden (‘to hatch eggs / chicks’), etc.

These examples are often analysed as specific instances of metonymy (cf. Adeling 1811; VanDale 2005; Koch 2001; Waltereit 1998). Both possible direct objects are interchangeable because they are conceptually connected by their existence as a conceptual unity in the real world (such as a set table, a wood fire, reed baskets, etc.). There are, however, some discrepancies between linguistics studies of metonymical object changes (MOCs) and lexicographical choices in dictionaries. These basically concern the question of whether an object change affects the meaning of the verb.

On the basis of theoretical considerations as well as lexicographical descriptions I will try to clarify to what extent MOCs influence the meaning of a verb. To this purpose, I will evaluate the incorporation of MOCs in two standard Dutch dictionaries, i.e. Van Dale Groot Woordenboek van de Nederlandse Taal (2005) and Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal. Theoretically, it will turn out to be necessary to distinguish between grammatical-relational information and lexical meaning (cf. Brdar 2007: 181). I will argue that MOCs actually provide evidence for the fact that the verb has one lexical meaning. In this way, the present paper gives more insight into the object changes, into the underlying metonymy and also into verb meaning in general. These insights may subsequently be useful in the improvement of dictionary entries.

1. Metonymical object changes

1.1. The lexicographical label *objectsverwisseling*

The Dutch term *objectsverwisseling* (German: *Objektsvertauschung*, ‘object change’) is a lexicographical label used to describe specific combinations of a verb with two qualitatively different direct objects. Illustrative examples are given in 1-9.

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| 1. de borden / de tafel
the plates / the table
‘to clear the plates / the table’ | afruimen
<i>off-/away-clear</i> |
| 2. zand / het huis
sand / the house
‘to sweep out sand / the house’ | uitvegen
<i>out-sweep</i> |
| 3. een tekst / een blad
a text / a page
‘to print a text / a page’ | afdrukken
<i>off-press</i> |
| 4. hout / een vuur / de haard
wood / a fire / the fireplace
‘to light wood / a fire / the fireplace’ | aansteken
<i>on-light</i> |
| 5. sinaasappels / sap
oranges / juice
‘to press oranges / juice’ | persen
press |

¹ I would like to thank Fons Moerdijk, Wim Honselaar and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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| 6. | eieren / kuikens
eggs / chicks
'to hatch eggs / chicks' | uitbroeden
<i>out</i> -breed |
| 7. | riet / manden
reed / baskets
'to weave reed / baskets' | vlechten
braid |
| 8. | gaten / sokken
holes / socks
'to darn stockings / holes' | stoppen
darn |
| 9. | de presentatie / de spreker
the presentation / the speaker
'to interrupt a presentation / the speaker' | onderbreken
<i>under</i> -break |

Object change is defined in the dictionary itself as a specific instance of metonymy: Both possible direct objects are interchangeable because they are conceptually connected on the basis of a relationship in the real world (cf. VanDale 2005 *objectsverwisseling*). Instead of using the label *objectsverwisseling*, as for instance in examples 1-9, Dutch dictionaries even tag some metonymical object changes (MOCs) directly as *metonymisch* ('metonymical'). Examples 10-13 give such combinations of verbs and possible direct objects that are described as 'metonymical' in Dutch dictionaries. Examples 10 and 11 are taken from *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (WNT) and 12 and 13 come from *Van Dale Groot Woordenboek van de Nederlandse Taal* (VanDale 2005).

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|-----|---|--|
| 10. | een rivier / een dijk
a river / a dike
'to dam up a river / close a dike' | toedammen
<i>to</i> -dam |
| 11. | een ei / een eierschaal
a egg / a eggshell
'to blow an egg / an eggshell' | uitblazen
<i>out</i> -blow |
| 12. | vlees / een been
meat / a bone
'to gnaw off meat / gnaw on a bone' | afvreten
<i>off</i> -/ <i>away</i> -eat |
| 13. | de touwen / een schip
the ropes / a ship
'to cast off the ropes / a ship' | losgooien
<i>loose</i> -throw |

The connection between object change and metonymy is also reflected in Adelung's dictionary of German, dating from the end of the eighteenth century. All one hundred and one verb entries in the fourth edition of Adelung's dictionary in which the label *metonymisch* ('metonymical') occurs provide examples of MOCs.

1.2. Object changes as instances of metonymy

An explanation of the metonymy involved in MOCs is complicated. In prototypical instances of metonymy an expressed concept (the source) gives mental access to another, additionally interpreted one (the vehicle or target). Illustrative examples are *I am reading Shakespeare* or *the orange shirts won the match* in which the expressed author is interpreted as work(s) by the author or the shirts are used to denote the players with these shirts. MOCs differ from prototypical instances of metonymy in that the shifted objects never refer to anything but their literal denotation, even though the non-expressed object is also implicitly interpreted. In the

combination *clear the table*, for example, *the table* does not suddenly refer to ‘the things on the table’, nor can *juice*, in the combination *to squeeze juice*, refer to some ‘fruit’. What is metonymical in MOCs is the relationship between both possible direct objects and the ensuing possibility to change them. Metonymy, as an underlying conceptual mechanism, induces the possibility of the shifted verb-object combination (cf. Sweep 2009).

Because scholars have traditionally examined how a metonymically used expression shift its interpretation, metonymy has only been analysed from a semasiological viewpoint (cf. Koch 2001: 203). For MOCs, however, it is not sufficient simply to take into account the meaning of a given ‘verb-direct object’ combination. Since the underlying metonymy does not directly shift the interpretation of the direct object but rather makes the object change possible, one should compare the shifted combination with the non-shifted expression. In other words, because it needs to be analysed how a certain state of affairs can be expressed by a verb in combination with qualitatively different direct objects, one should also take into account the onomasiological side (i.e. from meaning to possible forms).²

Although the notion of metonymy has not always been related to these types of object shifts or verbal alternation patterns (cf. Levin 1993; Levin/Rappaport Hovav 1992; Levin/Sells 2007; Oya 2009), recent linguistic studies have analysed the role of metonymy of the same phenomenon in French (Waltereit 1998; cf. also Koch 2001; Koch 2004; Waltereit 1999). There are, however, some discrepancies between these theoretical explanations of MOCs and lexicographical choices in dictionaries, which basically concern the question of whether an object change affects the meaning of the verb or, to put it differently, whether object change causes polysemy of the verb.

In this paper I will therefore discuss to what extent verb meaning is affected by a metonymical change of object. Since some Dutch dictionaries make use of the label *objectsverwisseling* and give information on verb meaning, I will first evaluate how the meaning of the relevant Dutch verbs is lexicographically analysed and described. To this purpose I will compare two standard Dutch dictionaries, i.e. *Van Dale Groot Woordenboek van de Nederlandse Taal* (VanDale 2005) and *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (WNT). Next, I will discuss the metonymical effect of MOCs and the role of verb meaning from a theoretical point of view. I will try to clarify the discussion to what extent MOCs influence the meaning of a verb on the basis of theoretical considerations, as well as lexicographical choices. My conclusions may subsequently be useful in the improvement of dictionary entries.

2. Verb meaning and *objectsverwisseling* in VanDale 2005 and in the WNT

2.1. Verb meaning in dictionaries and *objectsverwisseling*

On the one hand, one should be careful in assuming a one-to-one-correspondence between the number of meanings in the dictionary and verbal polysemy, because dictionaries are intended for practical use. On the other hand, dictionary entries clearly give information on different

² This often neglected onomasiological side is in fact necessary for a full understanding of metonymy in general: Among other things it explains why speakers use metonymical expressions, it clarifies how hearers can understand metonymies that they have never heard before, and it makes it possible to distinguish between different types of metonymy, such as occasional metonymies, metonymical polysemy (where there only is one form to deal with), or MOCs. In my forthcoming dissertation I will present these arguments and therefore the necessity for a semasiological as well as an onomasiological analysis of metonymy at length.

senses of the verb. In this section, I will therefore look at how explicitly labelled MOCs are incorporated in VanDale 2005 and in the WNT.

There are roughly three possible ways in which an example of a direct object that is explicitly labelled as MOC can be represented in a dictionary entry. In the first place, it can just be given as an example (labelled as MOC) under the heading of a general meaning description among other examples without an object change. Secondly, the MOC can be added as a sub-meaning (marked by a Latin or Greek letter) related to a more basic meaning without object shift. A third way of incorporating the MOC in dictionary entries is by putting it into a separate verb meaning with a new numeral and an autonomous meaning description.

2.2. Incorporation of *objectsverwisseling* in VanDale 2005 and in the WNT

Some interesting differences can be noted when comparing the representation of explicitly labelled MOCs in VanDale and the WNT. Among the 137 instances labelled as *objectsverwisseling* in VanDale only eighteen cases of MOC are represented as an autonomous meaning of the verb, fourteen examples are described as a sub-meaning and 105 instances (over 75%) are given (as an example) within one general meaning including non-shifted objects. Clearly, there is a very strong tendency in VanDale to analyse the meaning of the verb as non-polysemous, independently of the shifted or non-shifted direct object it is combined with.

At first sight, the WNT shows a different picture, since only 123 instances of the 279 MOC-labels (44%) are treated under one general meaning. However, the number of MOCs treated under an autonomous meaning, marked with an Arabic numeral, is even lower at sixty-four (22%). In the remaining ninety-two instances, the MOC is considered to be a sub-meaning, marked by a letter (Greek or Latin) as subordinate to a higher general meaning.

This is not the whole story though, since in fifty-eight of these sub-meanings the WNT follows a very interesting strategy: The MOC belongs to a sub-meaning of one general meaning description that covers examples with unchanged objects, as well as with MOCs. So, in each of these cases the combination of the verb with an unchanged meaning is considered to be one sub-meaning, and the MOC another, both belonging to one general meaning description. An example of this is *uitpakken* ('to unpack'), which has the general meaning described in 1 as 'uit een [...] verpakking nemen resp. [...] die van goederen ontdoen' ('to take out of packaging or to free the packaging from goods'). The use of the verb without MOC, e.g. 'unpack goods', can be found in 1.b and the MOC itself, e.g. 'unpack a suitcase' (literally: to pack a suitcase out), is incorporated in 1.c.³ Therefore, the verb is analysed as having one general meaning in these fifty-eight cases, leading to several syntagmatic combinations.

It can be concluded that both VanDale and WNT treat the vast majority of MOCs as if they fall under one general meaning description, which also includes examples with unchanged objects. In the next section, I will discuss theoretical considerations supporting this strategy.

³ 1.a. describes a less relevant and more specific meaning, i.e. the use of *uitpakken* in combination with herring packers and ships.

3. The metonymical effect of object changes

3.1. Metonymy and perspective

Several cognitive linguistic studies have shown that metonymy can be defined as a conceptual device that creates a link between concepts of things that are related in the real world (cf. e.g. Kövecses/Radden 1998). Metonymy is often associated with a change in perspective, since metonymy is characterised as highlighting certain semantic aspects of a conceptual structure (cf. Croft 1993: 348; Moerdijk 1989), linked to a change in focus (Lakoff/Johnson 1980: 36-37; Waltereit 1998: 25) or described as a new or different perspectivisation on the same cognitive material (Taylor 1989: 125-126; Koch 2001: 214, 215). In particular, metonymically motivated changes in valency patterns of the verb, such as MOCs, are analysed as alternative perspectivisations within one conceptual structure (cf. Koch 2004: 47; Waltereit 1998: 56).

Perspective is of course meaningful in and of itself. It is therefore not surprising that previous analyses claim that MOCs directly affect the meaning of the verb and lead to verbal polysemy (Koch 2001: 215; Waltereit 1998: 56). A second reason for treating MOC-verbs as polysemous lies in the fact that the MOC leads to a different expressed relation between the direct object and the verb. However, in section 3.2 I will explain that the alleged polysemy depends to a large extent on mistaken or imprecise assumptions about what the meaning of a verb actually is.

3.2. MOCs and verb meaning

It is not an easy task to define the meanings of words exactly, but it is especially difficult to define the meaning of a verb. All verbs that allow MOCs denote actions. Actions cannot, however, be conceptualised without their participants. A verb that denotes a specific action therefore also expresses a certain relation between objects, which are the participants of the action, and which correspond to the arguments of the verb. The alleged verbal polysemy by MOC is clearly connected with the relation between a verb and its participants, since the semantic roles of a verb are considered to be a ‘part of the verb’s lexical content’ (Waltereit 1999: 235). The verbal meaning is therefore considered to be changed by MOC (cf. ‘Verbale Polysemien, die sich auf Aktantenrollen beziehen’, Waltereit 1998: 56). In this respect Brdar-Szabó and Brdar make the more subtle distinction between lexical polysemy and grammatical-relational polysemy. The latter is defined as ‘the occurrence of several different argument-structures linked with a single predicative expression and presenting basically the same state of affairs from different points of view’ (Brdar-Szabó/Brdar 2004: 324; Brdar 2007: 181). The term ‘polysemy’ is somewhat confusing in this respect, since it does not directly apply to several meanings but only to different grammatical-relational structures.

Metonymical processes often induce changes in the grammatical-relational structures, which ‘may’, but do not have to, ‘correlate with lexical polysemy proper’ (Brdar 2007: 183; Brdar-Szabó/Brdar 2004: 330). In the rest of this section, I will demonstrate that it is problematic for several reasons to claim that in cases of MOCs the lexical meaning of the verb changes.

First of all, the most fundamental meaning component, which is the action expressed by the verb, does not change in most cases of MOC. The factual action performed by an agent and expressed by verbs such as *afruimen* (‘to clear’), *uitvegen* (‘to sweep out’), *afdrukken* (‘to print’), *aansteken* (‘to light’), *persen* (‘to press’), *uitbroeden* (‘to hatch’), *vlechten* (‘to braid’), *stoppen* (‘to darn’), *onderbreken* (‘to interrupt’) and so on is independent of the kind of object it is combined with (cf. examples 1-9). Seen from this perspective, the verb clearly has only

one lexical meaning. This verb meaning combined with the conceptually close connection between both relevant objects makes the MOC possible. The metonymical relationship, or the link based on reality, between for instance ‘plates’ and a ‘table’, ‘wood’ and ‘a fire’ or ‘reed’ and ‘baskets’ is endorsed by actions expressed by *afruimen* (cf. example 1), *aansteken* (cf. 4) or *vlechten* (cf. 7) respectively. Both possible direct objects are clearly related in reality, because of the fact that they are both crucial participants in the verbal action and because they form a conceptual unity or Gestalt (such as a set table, a wood fire or reed baskets).

Secondly, one could even ask whether the thematic roles of the verb are actually changed by MOC, as claimed by Waltereit.⁴ After all, both possible direct objects (both thematic roles) are necessary for the action. The only difference between the MOC and the non-shifted direct object-verb combination is the expression of these roles. This could be compared with passive constructions, where the patient is expressed as a subject and the agent can be expressed in a by-phrase. In spite of the different syntactical forms the underlying thematic roles of the verb have not been changed. Another parallel are transitive verbs that are used intransitively, such as in *he is reading*. Although no object has been expressed in this example, it is conceptually implied and neither the ‘reading action’ nor the necessary participants have been changed from a conceptual point of view. The same goes for MOCs.⁵ Since both possible direct objects are necessarily involved in the verbal action, it is questionable whether the thematic roles are actually changed. Only the actual expression of the specific roles seems to be modified.

It is indeed true that when a speaker shifts the direct object, the perspective on the event as a whole changes. However, this raises the question of whether this affects the meaning of the verb or only the meaning of the combination of verb and direct object, as in each case the agent performs the same action in which both possible direct objects play a crucial role.

In fact, the MOC and the new perspectivisation can actually be seen as evidence of the fact that the verb has only one general lexical meaning. The verb meaning provides the necessary context or, in other words, the verb evokes the frame in which the MOC is possible. Interestingly, the analyses of Waltereit and Koch also seem to be perfectly compatible with this idea. Koch gives the French example *chasser* as having two different ways of highlighting, i.e. two senses (‘chase’ or ‘chase away’), within one frame (Koch 2001: 203-204, cf. also Taylor 1989: 126-127). These interrelated senses must therefore belong to one general meaning (cf. Janssen 2003: 96). Waltereit defines some of the above examples of MOCs explicitly as a frame-based alternation within ‘the frame embodied by the respective verb’ (Waltereit 1999: 238-239). This shows that if metonymy can be treated as a perspectivisation of the same cognitive material or as a perspectivisation within a frame, the verb seems to evoke this particular frame. This frame therefore represents the lexical meaning of the verb.

4. MOCs, verb meaning and lexicographical solutions

Because dictionaries are designed for practical use, lexicographers often have to make decisions on practical rather than on theoretical grounds. Nonetheless, lexicographers as far back as the eighteenth century have understood that, from a theoretical point of view, object

⁴ I would like to thank Wim Honselaar for exhaustively discussing this idea and possible parallel examples with me.

⁵ Interestingly, the same parallel has been observed by Levin and Sells for object changes with particle verbs (Levin/Sells 2007: 4).

changes could be metonymy-driven, a theory which is in line with some modern studies. Although Dutch dictionaries such as VanDale 2005 and the WNT do agree with the conclusions of modern studies that metonymy is involved in object changes, they do not seem to agree that MOC necessarily leads to polysemy of the verb.

In most cases, VanDale 2005 directly incorporates MOC under an already given meaning description, which implies that the verb that allows MOC is seen as monosemous. In the WNT less than 50% of the MOCs are directly incorporated under a given meaning description, but in another 20% of cases both the MOC and the un-shifted verb-direct object combinations are presented as separately numbered combinations belonging to one general meaning.

This latter solution is a very elegant one. From a theoretical point of view, the dictionary correctly treats the verb as monosemous. The general meaning description reflects the fact that the verb denotes one action or frame which includes both objects as necessary conceptual participants. From a practical point of view, the verb entry provides dictionary users with all necessary grammatical-relational information, which is that both participants can be given the status of the direct object. In this way, the dictionary entry incorporates the general lexical meaning of the verb, as well as the relevant syntagmatic combinations which correspond to different perspectives on the event denoted by the combination of verb and direct object.

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