

**Hendrik De Smet**

(KU Leuven)

[hendrik.desmet@arts.kuleuven.be](mailto:hendrik.desmet@arts.kuleuven.be)

**Muriel Norde**

(Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)

[muriel.norde@hu-berlin.de](mailto:muriel.norde@hu-berlin.de)

**Kristel Van Goethem**

(F.R.S.-FNRS & Université catholique de Louvain)

[kristel.vangoethem@uclouvain.be](mailto:kristel.vangoethem@uclouvain.be)

**Gudrun Vanderbauwhede**

(Université de Mons)

[gudrun.vanderbauwhede@umons.ac.be](mailto:gudrun.vanderbauwhede@umons.ac.be)

## Degrees of adverbialization

A cross-linguistic  
corpus-study of 'far  
from X' constructions

# Introduction (1)

- **Topic:** [*far from X*] construction:
  - Fr. [*loin de X*]
  - Eng. [*far from X*]
  - Du. [*ver / verre van X*]
  - Sw. [*långtifrån / långt ifrån X*]
- **Parallel source:** [Adj/Adv<sub>spat</sub> Prep X]
- **Parallel semantics** (in synchrony):
  - (1) spatial distance
  - (2) metaphorical distance
  - (3) degree modifier (downtoner)

# Introduction (2)

- **Spatial distance:**

- (1) On était **loin de** la ville. (FRCOW2011)  
'We were far from the city.'
- (2) Green willow is a modern , fresh house set in a wonderful garden near East Preston village , not **far from** the sea . (UKCOW2011)
- (3) De appel valt nooit **ver van** de boom. (NLCOW2012)  
'The apple never falls far from the tree.'
- (4) Och om du inte kan hålla dig, stå **långt ifrån** mig. (SVCOW2014)  
'And if you cannot control yourself, stand far from me'

# Introduction (3)

## o Metaphorical distance:

- (5) Nous voilà **loin de** la mondialisation heureuse!  
(FRCOW2011)  
'Here we are far from happy globalization!'
- (6) Her centralized , authoritarian populism is quite **far from** the ideology which i'd imagine both of us seek . (UKCOW2011)
- (7) De gedachte om kritiek op je te leveren staat **ver van** me. (NLCOW2012)  
'The thought of criticizing you is far from me.'
- (8) Nu var det så **långt ifrån** bröstmjölk man kan komma.  
(SVCOW2014)  
'Now, this was as far from breast milk as it gets.'

# Introduction (4)

## ◉ Degree modifier (downtoner):

- (9) Or, c'est **loin d'**être le cas. (FRCOW2011)  
'But this is far from being the case.'
- (10) But it is **far from** certain that this means that the public wish to see the strongest and most explicit images available on television (...) (UKCOW2011)
- (11) Maar David was **verre van** perfect. (NLCOW2012)  
'But David was far from perfect.'
- (12) Och inne i varuhuset var det **långt ifrån** fullt!  
(SVCOW2014)  
'And inside the department store it was far from crowded!'

# Introduction (5)

## o Different outcomes?

### o Category change:

from [adverb/adjective + preposition] to adverbial downtoner

- $[[far]_A [from]_{Prep} [X]_{NP}]_{AP} \leftrightarrow$  'distant from X'
- $[[far\ from]_{Adv} [X]_{Adj}]_{AP} \leftrightarrow$  'not X at all'

### o Different degrees of 'adverbialization'?

# Outline

1. Method
2. Comparison semantics
3. Comparison construction types  
(complementation patterns)
4. Discussion structural differences
5. Conclusions

# Method

- **A synchronic cross-linguistic corpus study**
  - COW corpus (COrpora from the Web, cf. Schäfer & Bildhauer 2012):
    - FRCOW2011XS / UKCOW2011XS / NLCOW2012-00X / SVCOW14AX
    - 300 random tokens per language

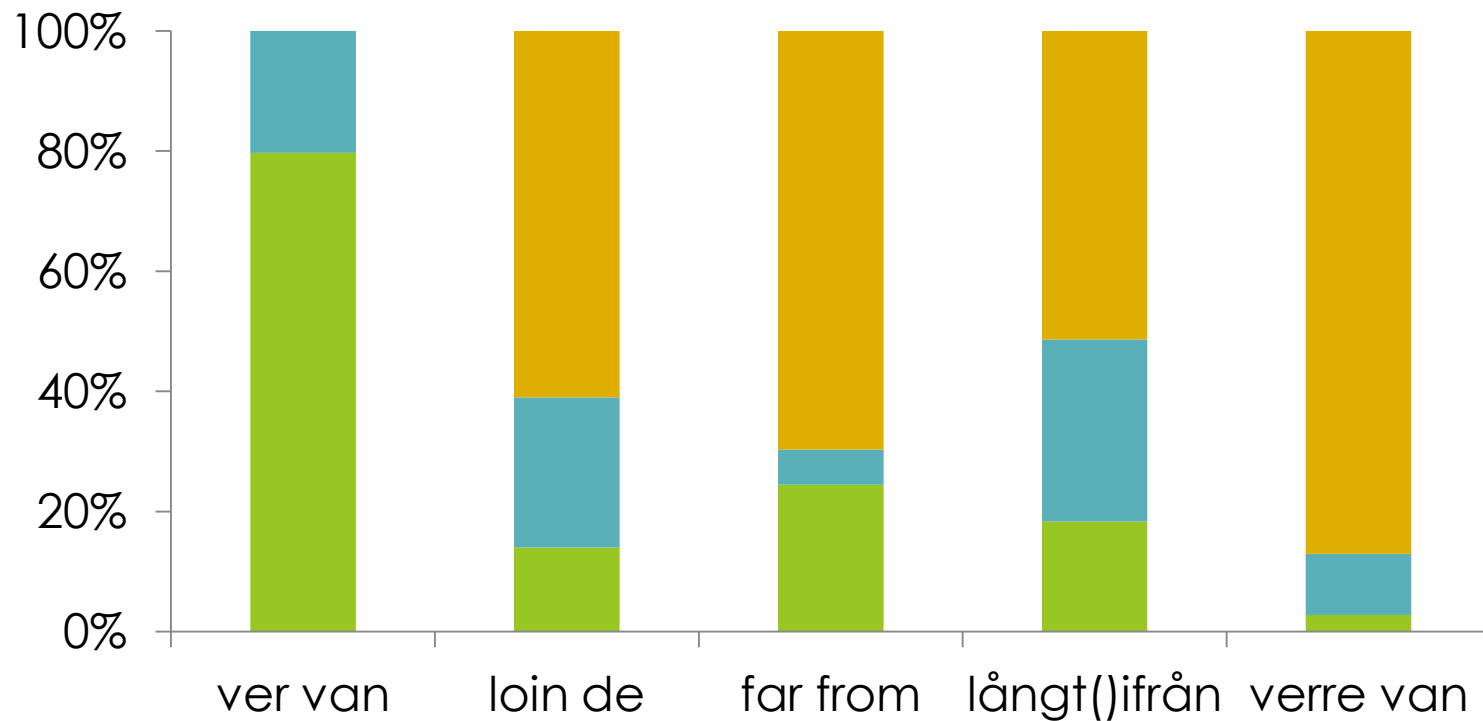
[Diachronic analysis: cf. De Smet et al. 2014, Van Goethem et al., *subm.*]



# 1. Comparison semantics

# Comparison semantics

■ Spatial distance ■ Metaphorical distance ■ Downtoner

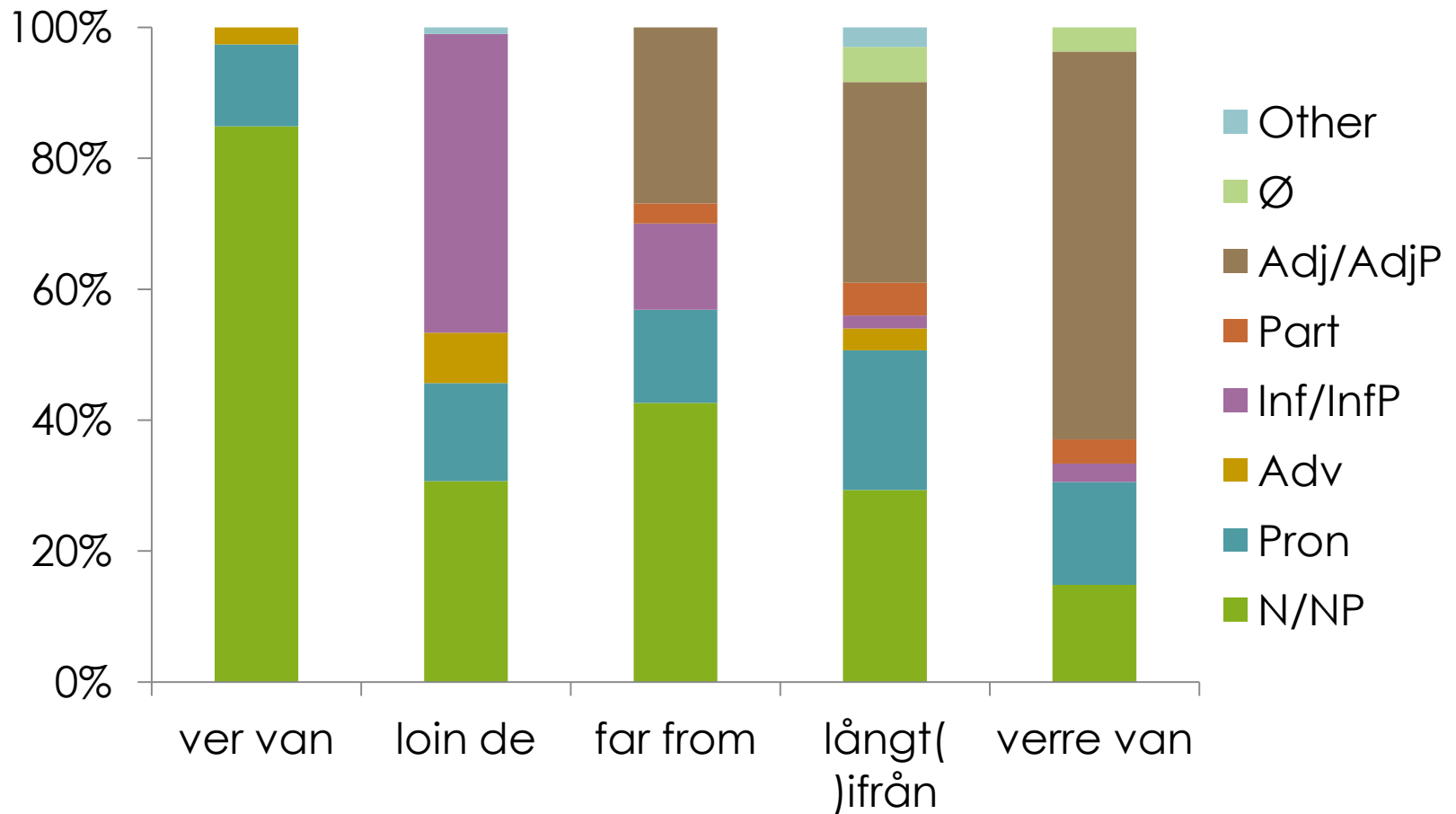


# Comparison semantics

- Dutch *ver van* is almost never used with downtoner meaning
- Dutch *verre van* is almost never used with spatial meaning
- French, English and Swedish ['far from X']-constructions display the full range of meanings, in somewhat varying proportions

## 2. Comparison construction types

# Complementation: POS of X



## Complementation: POS of X

- Dutch *verre van* and Swedish *långtifrån* show the widest array of complement types, including verbs, adjectives as well as absolute uses
- Dutch *ver van* takes (almost) exclusively pronominal and nominal complements
- French and English take inbetween positions
- Nominalized clauses are most prevalent with French *loin de* and English *far from*

### 3. Discussion: structural differences

# French [*loin de X*]

## o Form/function mismatch

- [*loin de X*]: downtoner meaning, but no adverbial properties  
(13) La liste est **loin d'ê**tre exhaustive. (FRCOW2011)  
'The list is far from being exhaustive.'  
\***loin d'**exhaustive
- No absolute use (\**loin de*)



## ○ Possible causes ?

- Strong cohesion of [*de* + complement]
  - clitic form *d'* (*loin d'être...*, *loin des musées*)
  - *de* as infinitival complementizer (*Il est important de rouler prudemment*)
  - Separation *loin / de* (*loin des théâtres et des musées ; l'hôtel est situé loin, pense-t-il, des théâtres*)
- *de* has a high degree of semantic bleaching (“prépositions vides”)
  - no preposition stranding (*\*là je suis encore loin de*)

[cf. Melis 2003]

## English [*far from X*]

- Partial adverbialization
  - *Far from* is acceptable with adjectives
  - But it resists use with verbs
    - (14) This brief review **far from** exhausts the ways electronic computers can help in forest mensuration. (Google Books)
  - And *far from* has no absolute use
    - (15) Not that he had tried. **Far from** it. (Google Books)
    - (16) \*Not that he had tried. Far from.

# English [*far from X*]

## ○ Possible causes?

- *Far* could adverbialize due to ambiguity between
  - *far from* + gerund (= nominalized clause)
  - *far from* + progressive tense (= verb phrase)
- Compare
  - (17) you are **far from** endeavouring to destroy them  
(say you) (1659, EEBOCorp)
  - (18) [...] the discourse and words which here we are  
endeavouring to explicate (1659, EEBOCorp)

# English [*far from X*]

- Possible causes?

- BUT: *Far* retains adjectivelike-behaviour even when *far from* functions as downtoner

(19) Since the characters were far from perfect, the look of the show would be just as **far from perfect** as well. (Google Books)

(20) The **further from** perfect your parents were [...], the more unfinished business you can have as an adult. (Google Books)

--> Conservative pull of adjectival *far*?

# Dutch [*ver* / *verre van X*]

## o Functional split:

- [*ver van X*]:
  - Spatial/metaphorical meaning
  - Nominal complements
  
- [*verre van X*]
  - Mostly downtoner meaning
  - Degree adverb (+ Adj,  $\emptyset$ )

(21) Dit was een **verre van** marginaal verschijnsel. (NLCOW2012)  
 'This was a far from marginal phenomenon.'

(22) Ik zeg niet dat hier alles beter is, **verre van**, zou ik haast zeggen.  
 (NLCOW2012)

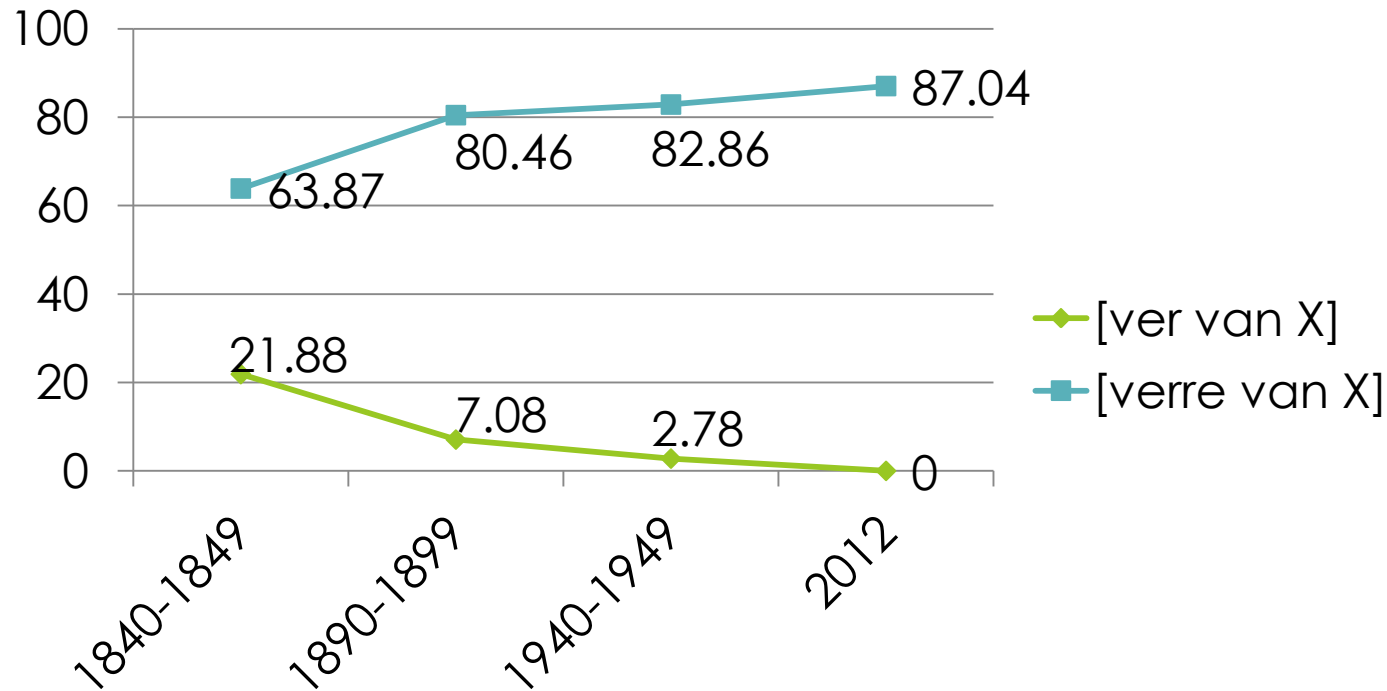
'I'm not saying here everything is better, far from it, I'd almost say.'

## o Possible causes:

- **Form-function asymmetry** → 'exaptation' of the obsolete form *verre van* to express the new downtoner meaning
- **Subsequent host-class expansion** (cf. Van Goethem et al., subm.):
  - + Part, Adj<sub>Pred</sub>
    - < Word order: [*verre van* + Part/Adj] available chunk in nominalized clauses:
      - *Deze vraag is nog verre van beantwoord (te zijn)*
      - *Hij schijnt verre van sympathiek (te zijn)*
  - + Adj<sub>Attr</sub>
    - < Dutch attributive slot allows complex sequences
      - cf. 'een vanavond nog nader bekend te maken bedrag'
  - + Absolute use
    - < Possibility of preposition stranding
      - cf. *Daar hou ik niet van; Daar hou ik me verre van*

# Evolution downtoner uses

(cf. Van Goethem et al., submitted)



# Swedish [*långtifrån* / *långt ifrån X*]

- Adverbial properties
  - collocates with verbs:
    - (23) Svenska folket har **långt ifrån** slutat att konsumera dem (SVCOW14AX)  
'The Swedish people have far from stopped to consume them'
  - occurs in syntactic slot for sentence adverbs in subordinate clauses, i.e. before the tensed verb:
    - (24) Jag tror att vi **långt ifrån** är färdiga med varandra (SVCOW14AX)  
'I think that we far from are finished with each other'
  - absolute use:
    - (25) Inte ett av mina bästa år, **långt ifrån**. (SVCOW14AX)  
'Not one of my best years, far from (it)'



## ○ Possibly related phenomena?

- Unlike in French, Swedish adpositions may select a wide variety of complements
- Like in English, *långt ifrån* may however still be modified by an adverb when used as a downtoner:

(26) Jag är **väldigt långt ifrån** glad

‘I am very far from happy’

- Like in Dutch, a split occurs between *långt ifrån* (spatial and metaphorical distance) and unverbated *långtifrån* (5,3% in sample)
  - These differences in spelling are prescribed by the Grammar of the Swedish Academy.
  - But they are often violated (general tendency in Swedish to write compound words separately)

# 4. Conclusions

## ○ Cline of adverbialization:

- ver van > loin de > far from > verre van / långt( )ifrån

	<i>ver van</i>	<i>loin de</i>	<i>far from</i>	<i>verre van</i>	<i>långt( )ifrån</i>
<b>+ NP</b>	+	+	+	+	+
<b>+ Part</b>	-	-	+	+	+
<b>+ Adj<sub>Pred</sub></b>	-	-	+	+	+
<b>+ Adj<sub>Attr</sub></b>	-	-	+	+	+
<b>Absolute use</b>	-	-	-	+	+

# Conclusions

- **A north-south cline**

- **Commonalities:**

- ['far from X] constructions in all four languages develop downtoner-like meanings
- In all four languages these occur with (i) noun phrases and (ii) nominalized clauses

- **Differences:**

- Adverbialization reflected in host-class expansion in English *far from* Dutch *verre van*, and Swedish *långt ifrån*
- Host-class expansion is more advanced in Dutch *verre van* and Swedish *långt ifrån* than in English *far from*

# Conclusions

- **Possible causes:**

- Word order: Dutch *verre van* + Adj is an available chunk in nominalized clauses, contrary to English and French:

*ze lijkt verre van sympathiek (te zijn)*

*... loin d'être sympa*

*... far from being nice*

- English nominalized clauses sometimes resemble progressive verb phrases (*...are far from questioning...*)
- Availability of two forms in Dutch supported form-function differentiation
- Swedish adpositions are generally less restrictive on the types of complement they select for

# References

- COW = Corpora from the Web: <https://webcorpora.org/>
- De Smet, H. (2012). The course of actualization. *Language* 88. 601-633.
- De Smet, H., Vanderbauwhede, G., Van Goethem, K. (2014). Parallel sources, different outcomes. A corpus-based study of the [*far from X*] construction in French, English and Dutch. Paper presented at Cogling 2014, Gent, dec. 2014,
- Melis, L. (2003). *La préposition en français*. Paris: Ophrys.
- Quirk, R., S. Greenbaum, G. Leech & J. Svartik (1985). *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. London: Longman.
- Schäfer, R. & F. Bildhauer. (2012). Building large corpora from the web using a new efficient tool chain. N. Calzolari et al. (Eds), *Proceedings of the Eight International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation*, Istanbul, 486-493.
- Traugott, E. C. & G. Trousdale (2013). *Constructionalization and Constructional Changes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Van Goethem, K., Vanderbauwhede, G., De Smet, H. (2015, subm.). Emergence of a new adverbial downtoner: constructional change and constructionalization of Dutch [*ver van X*] and [*verre van X*] 'far from X' *Category change from a constructional perspective (Constructional approaches to language)*.