Dutch quotative *van*

Past and present

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The quotative use of the Dutch preposition *van* ‘of’ can be considered as the Dutch counterpart of English *like*, German *so* and similar items in other languages, the use of which has increased significantly in many languages of the world in the last four decades. Stylistically, quotative *van* occurs most frequently in informal spoken language, less in more formal spoken language and infrequently in written language (the written language in the new media included). In this sense, Dutch quotative *van* fits in to a worldwide trend. Yet, quotative *van* shows some characteristics that seem to differentiate it from its counterparts in other languages. Firstly, *van* not only combines with direct speech, but also occurs regularly in combination with indirect speech. Secondly, *van* is not restricted to youth language; it is widely used in all age groups and regions (also in Belgian Dutch). Thirdly, based on written informal documents and dairies, we show that the quotative use of *van* has old roots in the history of Dutch, going back to at least the 17th century.

**Keywords:** Quotative *van*, similative meaning, direct speech, indirect speech, synchrony, diachrony, sociolinguistic profile

1. Introduction

Quotative markers in the languages of the world provide at least two puzzles. Firstly, utterances with quotative marking can easily be translated from one language into the other (e.g., English *He was like* "oh no!", Dutch *Hij zei van* "o nee!", German *Und er so* "o nein!"). However, the lexical and syntactic means for constructing such utterances vary quite a lot between languages, as the examples just given illustrate: English has a copula verb + *like*, Dutch a verb of saying + *van* (a preposition), and German uses a verbless construction with the deictic modal adverb *so* ‘thus’. The question, then, is what is universal and what is language-specific?
Foolen (2008: 123) provides a typology of the kind of items that develop into quotative markers in the world’s languages: (i) verbs of speaking (see e.g. Bakker and Wessler 1999; Klamer 2000; Lord 1993), (ii) demonstrative and modal deictic markers: for example German so, Norwegian sånn (see Hasund et al., this volume), Sanskrit iti ‘thus’ (see Be_Slayed 2010), (iii) quantifying elements: for example, English all and just¹, Norwegian bare (see Hasund et al., this volume), and (iv) words with simulative meaning: for example English like, Sanskrit yatha ‘like’ (see Be_Slayed 2010). As we will show in this chapter, Dutch van belongs to this fourth category.

Some of these quotative markers (e.g. English like) have recently increased in frequency of use (see Buchstaller 2011; Fox Tree and Tomlinson 2008; Tagliamonte and D’Arcy 2007) to such an extent that native speakers are aware of it. Foolen (2008) interviewed speakers from a range of languages in which innovative quotatives have been reported, such as Puerto Rican Spanish (estar ‘to be’ or asi ‘so’), Finnish (niinku ‘as like’ and ihan et ‘quite that’) and Turkish (gibi ‘as if, like, similar’). Time and again, the informants reported that these markers belong to the innovative language of younger speakers in their language. Older speakers in particular tended to hold negative attitudes towards the use of these markers (cf. Buchstaller 2006; D’Arcy 2007; Dailey-O’Cain 2000 for attitudes regarding English like). Yet, quotative markers seem to be ‘of all times’. Verbs of saying, deictic modal adverbs and words with ‘similative meaning’ have grammaticalized into quotative markers in different languages and in different times (see, e.g., Be_Slayed 2010 for Sanskrit; Buchstaller and Van Alphen, this volume; Güldemann 2008 for African languages).

It will take time to solve these two issues (universal function versus language specific ‘solutions’, ‘new’ versus ‘of all times’), something we are not intending to do here. First and foremost, however, any attempt at solving these puzzles needs to be based on a careful and detailed description of the language-specific facts. The present chapter is meant to contribute to this aim by providing a synchronic and diachronic description of the Dutch quotative marker van ‘like’. Linguistic attention for quotative van started with a squib by Verkuyl (1976), followed by some other squibs and smaller papers by different authors (see Foolen et al. 2006 for an overview of the Dutch literature). The 5th Dutch sociolinguistic conference (2006) devoted a workshop to quotative van (see Foolen 2006; Mazeland 2006; Van Alphen 2006). Coppen (2010) focused on the synchrony and diachrony of the more specific construction zoiets hebben van (lit. ‘have such + something of’, roughly meaning ‘be like’). Here, we will focus on three issues:

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¹. Just can be paraphrased as ‘nothing but’, which comes close to ‘all’. Gaudy-Campbell (2010) shows that just occurs in I just thought followed by direct speech. That is why it is included here. Norwegian bare also means ‘just’.

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i. The structural profile of the marker, that is, the way the quotative marker fits in the structure of utterances will be discussed in Section 2.

ii. In Section 3, we discuss the sociolinguistic and stylistic profile of *van*. Who uses this quotative marker and in which speech styles does it occur? Is the marker typical for narrative colloquial style as produced by young speakers (such as English *like* and German *so*; cf. Golato 2000), or is its use more widespread?

iii. Section 4 is devoted to its diachronic development. Typically, quotative markers develop from elements that are already available in the language and fulfill other functions (cf. Güldemann 2008; Vandelanotte and Davidse 2009). Reconstructing this development for a specific quotation marker through time can help us understand how it has developed its present spectrum of uses.

The data in this chapter are taken from two existing corpora: the CGN (Corpus of Spoken Dutch: see http://lands.let.kun.nl/cgn/ehome.htm) contains about 9 million words of spoken Dutch – one third from Belgium, two thirds from The Netherlands – compiled between 1998 and 2004. Different styles are represented, from informal to formal. The second is the DBNL (Digital Library of Dutch Literature: see www.dbnl.nl), which to date contains 7845 Dutch texts from the Middle Ages through to the 21th century. The DBNL – the collection of which started in 1999 – aims at digitizing Dutch texts which are relevant to the cultural history of Dutch, both in Belgium and the Netherlands. Furthermore, we use examples which have been individually collected by the authors over the past 10 years and which contain examples from spoken and written sources. We use these data-sets as sources for examples without intending to make quantitative claims on the use and distribution of quotative *van*.

2. **The structural profile of quotative *van***

Matrix clauses introducing direct speech in Dutch can take different forms. An unmarked way of quoting is when the matrix sentence contains a verb of saying or thinking (as in *Jan zei “Ik blijf”/John said “I will stay”*). In Dutch, it is not unusual to insert *van* between verb and quote: cf. (1), a typical example of quotative use of *van*:

(1) (CGN)

Bij voorbaat werd ook al gezegd van “uh we spreken er de zorg over uit hoe het gaat lopen.”

In advance, it was said already too like “we utter our worries about how things will develop.”
It is important to note that, besides *van*, there are other ways to mark quotative material in Dutch. Sometimes the deictic modal adverb *zo* is inserted immediately before the quote, leading to the construction personal pronoun + quotative verb + *zo*. Speakers sometimes omit the matrix verb (see Hermann and Steinbach, this volume; Oshima and Sano, this volume for contextualization of quotation in German Sign Language and Japanese). These different forms are illustrated in the following fragment: ‘say’ + *zo* in line 3, verb-less *zo* in lines 4 and 5, and ‘say’ in line 6.

(2) (CGN)
L1 was de vorige keer lachen met dat broertje van Tom.
   was the previous time laugh with that brother + dim, of Tom.
L2 wij zaten zo en we hadden net lootjes getrokken (...) 
   we sat ZO and we had just lots drawn (...) 
L3 dan zeg ik zo “ik weet lekker wie iedereen heeft en jullie weten niet wie ik heb”. 
   then say I ZO “I know nice who everyone has and you know not who I have.”
L4 dus wij zo “nou Bram wie heeft wie dan?”
   so we ZO “now Bram who has who then?”
L5 Dus hij zo “ja jij hebt uh die” (...)
   So he ZO “yes you have uh that” (...)
L6 Ik zeg “oh dus dan heb jij die?”
   I say ”Oh so then have you that?”
   ‘Last time, it was funny with Tom’s brother. We were sitting there and we just had drawn lots. (...) then I say ZO I know who has whom and you don’t know whom I have. Then we ZO well Bram, who has whom? Then he ZO yes you have eh him (...) I say oh then you have that one?’

Later in this chapter, we will see that *zo* and *van* can co-occur in quotative constructions. However, our focus will be on *van*. As its primary uses are non-quotative, we will start with an overview of these.

2.1 Non-quotative use of *van*

*Van* is the most common preposition in Dutch, comparable to English *of*. It can be used with a variety of meanings, ranging from prototypical possessive, partitive and causative meanings (3–5) to source meanings (where English would use *from*): cf. (6–8).

(3) Dat boek is van mij (possessive)
   That book is Van me
   ‘That book is mine’
(4) Een van mijn tantes woont in die straat (*partitive*)
    One van my aunts lives in that street
    ‘One of my aunts lives on that street’

(5) Ze zat te bibberen van de kou (*cause*)
    She sat to shiver van the cold
    ‘She was shivering from the cold’

(6) Hij liep van zijn bureau naar het raam (*locational source*)
    He walked van his desk to the window
    ‘He walked from his desk to the window’

(7) De tentamenperiode loopt van 19 tot 31 oktober (*temporal source*)
    The exam period walks van 19 to 31 October
    ‘The exam period ranges from October 19 to October 31’

(8) Zij is een kind van rijke ouders (*relational source*)
    She is a child van rich parents
    ‘She is a child of rich parents’

Note that prepositional *van* has also become, due to semantic bleaching, a semantically devoid function word, contributing almost no meaning. As such, it is quite commonly used for noun complements, especially the complements of nominalized verbs (as can be seen in Examples (9) and (10)).

(9) Een schilderij van de ondergaande zon
    A painting van the setting sun
    ‘A painting of the sunset’

(10) Het schrijven van boeken
    The writing van books
    ‘The writing of books’

In complements like these, *van* can also mark the agent or the subject of the nominalized verb, as in (11).

(11) De kritiek van de oppositie
    The criticism van the opposition
    ‘The opposition’s criticism’

One specific use deserves special attention in the context of the present paper: namely, where *van* has similitative or approximative meaning (cf. 12–13):

(12) Hij heeft iets van zijn vader
    He has something van his father
    ‘He looks like his father’
Example (12) is a construction with *van* indicating some kind of source (such as a genetic property). Importantly, it also indicates a similarity between the subject and his father. Compare this example to (13), which contains *van*, an existential quantifier (*iets* ‘something’) and an adjective. Here, the construction *iets van blauw* does not just signify something which is blue, but rather something ‘bluish’, some color resembling blue. The same meaning can also be expressed in a construction with a genitive (cf. 14):

(14) Ik zag iets blauws in dat schilderij
I saw something blue + gen in that painting
‘I saw something blue in that painting’

Many researchers have pointed out that quotative markers are often associated with a comparative, simulative or approximative meaning (Buchstaller 2004; Güldemann 2008, this volume; Meyerhoff 2002), and the same seems to hold for Dutch *van*, which, in its pre-quotative function, has simulative meaning.

2.2 Quotative *van*

In quotative constructions, two parts can be distinguished, optionally linked by a quotative marker. They have been labeled in different ways, depending on the theoretical viewpoint regarding the syntactic relationship between the two parts. Vandelanotte and Davidse (2009: 785) make a distinction between the classical matrix + complement view and a constructional *interclausal* perspective, “which takes the reporting clause (as a whole) and the reported clause as the primary component structures of quoting constructions” (see also Vandelanotte, this volume). The advantage of the latter view is that it easily accommodates a variety of matrix clauses (the first component of the construction), transitive but also intransitive clauses, and even rather loose connections between the two components, in which the quoted part looks more like an adverbial adjunct to the sentence as a whole. Nevertheless, in most cases, it is possible to identify an element in the matrix clause – usually a verb or a noun – that is the main *trigger* for the quotative part and of which the quotative part can be seen as a thematic argument.

As we will show below, the contexts in which quotative *van* can be found vary substantially, both regarding the *trigger* component, as well as the quoted part. Crucially, it is not only verbs that function as the main trigger or anchor; in addition, nouns frequently are triggers (see Section 2.2.1). As regards the quoted material,
the most striking observation is that, contrary to *like* and other quotatives with sim-
ilative semantics, *van* can combine with indirect speech (see Section 2.2.2).

2.2.1 Van introducing direct quotes

Quotative *van* occurs in three types of structures. It can be found in a reporting
clause that also contains a trigger, which can be a verb or a noun. The reporting
clause can contain a light verb construction or, in the third type, the quotation is
linked to a preceding clause by *van*, optionally preceded by the modal adverb *zo* ‘so’,
but without a trigger verb or noun. We will now discuss these three types in turn.

In the first type, the most frequent trigger verbs are *zeggen* ‘to say’ and *denken* ‘to think’. Besides semantic variants of these two, we also find verbs of perceiving
and feeling (such as *horen* ‘to hear’ and *zich schamen* ‘to be ashamed’). Quotative
*van* is optional. Typical examples are (15–16).

(15) Papa *zei* *(van)* ‘ik ga de zolder opruimen en veel weggooien’
    Papa said *van* ‘I go the attic clean and much throw away’
    ‘Papa said like “I am going to clean the attic and throw away a lot.”’

(16) Dan *denk* je *(van)* ‘waar ben je nou mee bezig?’ *(Van Alphen 2006: 29)*
    Then think you *van* ‘where am I PART with busy’
    ‘Then you think like “what am I doing?”’

The trigger nouns we find in this type are mostly deverbal nouns like *vraag* ‘question’, *discussie* ‘discussion’, but also semantically similar nouns like *idee* ‘idea’,
*gevoel* ‘feeling’ (18) and sometimes even nouns only vaguely reminiscent of feel-
ings, such as *tendens* ‘tendency, general feeling’ (20) and *smile* ‘smile’ (19). The
syntactic function of the noun varies. It can be an object (17), a complement of a
preposition (18–19) or a subject (20). If the trigger is a noun, quotative *van* is oblig-
atory (indicated with an asterisk attached to the brackets, i.e. non-optionality).

(17) Nu kreeg ik een *mailtje* *(van)*: ‘je was een succes’
    Now received I an email *van*: ‘you were a success’
    ‘Now I received an email like “you were a success.”’

(18) Ik deed het met een *gevoel* *(van)* ‘had dit zo gemoeten?’
    I did it with a feeling *van* ‘had this so must?’
    ‘I did it with a feeling like “was this right?”’

(19) En dan zit je met ’n *smile* *(van)* ‘ik heb je geholpen’.
    And then sit you with a smile *van* ‘I have you helped’
    ‘And then you are sitting there with a smile like “I helped you.”’

2. We thank Emar Maier and Wessel Stoop for their collaboration, in particular regarding the
typology of quotative constructions as presented here.

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The trigger noun is often the complement of a light verb like *hebben* ‘have’, creating a complex verb, like *het idee hebben*, lit. ‘have the idea’, meaning ‘think’, as in Example (21).

(21) *We hadden ook nog steeds het idee van “ja ze kennen ons”*

We had also still the idea van ‘yes they know us’

‘We still thought like “Yes they know us.”’

The second type in which quotative *van* occurs does not contain a semantically rich verb or noun. Instead, quotative *van* is triggered by a light verb (*zijn* ‘be’ or *hebben* ‘have’) and is always preceded by elements like demonstrative *zo* ‘such’ and/or *iets* ‘something’, often written as one word *zoiets* (cf. Coppen 2010). The content of such quotes is, typically, a ‘feeling’, cognitive state or attitude, as can be seen in (22), which expresses an attitude, (23), which reproduces a wish, and (24), which demonstrates inner thought (see Spronck, this volume for the encoding of attitudes in quotation). More examples can be found in the extracts of adolescent talk in Lamerichs and te Molder (2009).

(22) *Dat is zoiets van: “U kunt wel meer uitgeven als u het maar zelf betaalt”*

That is such something van ‘you can spend more if you only pay it yourself’

‘That is something like “you can spend more if you only pay it yourself.”’

(23) *Toen had ik zoiets van “Ja daar wil ik ook aan meedoen”*

Then I had such something van ‘yes there want I also to participate’

‘Then I felt like “I also want to participate in that.”’

(24) *Ik heb zoiets van “Als het echt niet kan, dan horen we ’t wel.”*

I have such something van ‘if it really not can, then hear we it for sure’

‘I have a feeling like “If it really is impossible, we will hear it.”’

It is, in particular, the combination of *hebben* ‘to have’, *zoiets* ‘such a thing’ and *van* ‘like’, which is targeted by critics of modern language use, the criticism being that this usage is considered ‘vague’. In recent years, this construction has repeatedly ended up in the top five (and in some cases as the ‘winner’) in popular polls for the most irritating word or construction of the year, both in the Netherlands and in Belgium.3 It is one of the favorite pet peeves in web forums and in popular language

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magnets such as Onze Taal. Despite this negative attitude, the construction seems to have gained in considerable frequency since it was mentioned for the first time in 1986 in Onze Taal.

Whereas the two constructional types just discussed both contain some kind of trigger (a full verb or noun, or light verb construction with demonstrative), in the third type, no such trigger is present. Rather, the quotation is added to an utterance in an asyndetic way, as a kind of elaboration or illustration of the foregoing sentence (cf. Mazeland 2006). In this type of construction, the quotative marker van is also often accompanied by the demonstrative zo ‘so’ (cf. 27).

(25) Moeten jullie ook wel eens mensen teleurstellen van “ja ‘t is op?”
Must you also mod sometimes people disappoint van “yes it is up?”
‘Do you also have to disappoint people sometimes like “nothing is left?”’

(26) Toen gaf ze mij een doosje met brieven van “bewaar jij dat maar.”
Then gave she me a box-dim with letters van “take care you that mod”
‘Then she gave me a little box with letters like “you better take care of that.”’

(27) Veel studiegenoten reageerden laconiek, zo van “ja, ja, zal wel”
Many co-students reacted laconically, so van “yes, yes, will be”
‘Many co-students reacted laconically, like “yes, yes, if you say so.”’

In these examples, the quotes cannot be complements of the matrix verbs, as these already have a complement (mensen ‘people’ in 25, doosje met brieven ‘little box with letters’ in 26) or they are intransitive (reageerden ‘reacted’ in 27). Rather, the function of the quote seems to be to paraphrase or illustrate the content of the sentence in a more informal, involved way (see Golato this volume).

2.2.2 Van introducing indirect quotes

Like and a range of other new quotative markers in other languages have long been claimed to be restricted to direct quotes; indeed the focus of attention in the literature tends to be on direct quotatives. However, for English be like and go, Vandelanotte (this volume) points out that “[s]ome infrequent inroads into the indirect

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4. Onze Taal is a monthly journal, widely read by people who are interested in the Dutch language and in language use in general: see www.onzetaal.nl.

5. There must have been earlier uses of this specific construction, cf. the following passage from Louter Leugens (1951) by Simon Carmiggelt, an author who had a ‘good ear’ for informal spoken language:
‘t Is ver van me bed’, sprak de andere man. Hij had zo iets van: Piet eet toch wel, en goed ook.
‘I don’t have much to do with it’, said the other man. He felt like: Piet will eat anyhow, and good too. It thus took 35 years, until 1986, before the construction was observed explicitly in Onze Taal.
domain have (...) been reported”, although “[it] remains to be seen whether [this] type of usage (...) takes root and expands beyond relatively rare occurrences”. A remarkable syntactic property that differentiates Dutch quotative van from its English counterpart is the fact that it can be used with indirect clauses. This can be seen in Examples (28) and (29), in which the indirect clause starts with the complementizer dat ‘that’ and the wh-word wat ‘what’ respectively. Note also the fact that these constructions are verb-final, with clause final finite verbs kwam ‘come’ and doen ‘do’, a clear diagnostic of subordination.

(28) Net zoals dat ze nu al roepen van dat ’t griepvirus ook uit de ruimte kwam
Just like that they now already shout van that the influenza virus also from the space came
‘Just like they now claim like that the influenza virus came from outer space too.’

(29) Ik vroeg van wat ze ’s middags wou doen weet je wel
I asked van what she afternoon wanted do know you well
‘I asked like what she planned to do in the afternoon, you know.’

As has been stated in the literature (cf. Banfield 1973; Coulmas 1986; Jiang 2009 inter alia), the distinction between direct and indirect reported discourse is not absolute. As van is used in both contexts, it would narrow the perspective if we were to exclude cases of indirect reports from our overview.

Verkuyl (1976) observed the use of van + indirect discourse, commenting that he would never use it himself. However, a search in the Corpus of Spoken Dutch (CGN) provided about 300 examples of van preceding an indirect clause.6 Examples include cases with a verb as the trigger (as in (28) roepen ‘shout’ and (29) vragen ‘ask’), but also – parallel to the construction with direct quotation – with nouns (cf. (30) and (31)).

(30) ...deze theorie van dat de populaire cultuur eigenlijk in dit opzicht ook een soort voedingsbodem is geweest voor de vrouwenbeweging die in de jaren zeventig echt heel sterk is opgekomen.
...this theory van that the popular culture actually in this respect also a sort nurture-soil is been for the women’s-movement that in the years seventy really very strongly is arisen.
‘...this theory like that popular culture has actually been in this respect a kind of fertile soil for the women’s liberation movement which strongly developed in the seventies.’

6. This figure indicates that the construction is not uncommon, although its relative importance compared to direct reported speech has not yet been determined.
...en dat die bovendien ook aanvaardde ’t argument van dat uh dat het eigenlijk niet bewezen was dat zij het gedaan had.
...and that he moreover also accepted the argument van that eh that it actually not proven was that she it done had
‘...and that he, moreover, accepted the argument like that eh that it had not been proven actually that she had done it.’

These are not examples of direct quotation, yet the parallel with the use of van in relation to direct quotes is remarkable. Quotative van with indirect quotation also occurs in the second type of construction, with light verbs such as hebben ‘have’ or zijn ‘be’ accompanied by zo ‘so’ and/or iets ‘something’, again parallel to the direct quotation.

Bij Arthur was ’t altijd zo van als we uitgingen dan was ’t echt zo van dat hij ja een beetje ons zat te pushen.
With Arthur was it always the case that when we went out then was it really so van
that he yes a little us sat to push
‘With Arthur, it was always the case that when we went out, then it always was like that he was pushing us.’

Ik had zelf van dat hij heel veel vragen stelde.
I had self van that he very many questions put
‘I was like that he asked very many questions.’

The third type of construction we discussed above for van + direct speech can also be found with indirect quotation. Here, quotative van occurs without triggers, loosely connecting the previous sentence to an indirect quotation, which again has an elaborative, illustrative meaning. This is demonstrated in (34), taken from the CGN.

en ze heeft ’t ook wel gestimuleerd van dat zij zei van “ik had in ’t begin ook heel erg dat ik m’n stem dat dat fout ging.”
And she has it also mod evoke van that she said van “I had in the beginning also very much that I my voice that that went wrong”
‘And she also evoked it, like that she said like “I also had it very badly in the beginning that I, my voice, that that went wrong.”’

We can thus conclude that van followed by an indirect clause occurs in exactly the same syntactic types of construction as quotative van followed by direct clauses, that is, with a full noun or verb as the trigger in a reporting clause, with a light verb construction in a reporting clause, and in loosely connecting illustrative

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7. In this example, two quotative vans occur. The second one is with direct quotation as indicated by the quotation marks.
elaborations. This parallel is a strong argument for considering direct and indirect variants as belonging to the same family of (quotative) constructions.

We now turn to the second profile of Dutch quotative *van*, taking a sociolinguistic and stylistic perspective.

3. **Sociolinguistic and stylistic aspects of quotative *van***

In most languages, the use of a new quotative marker shows sociolinguistic and stylistic variation. English *like* and other quotative markers (*be all, go, this is + NP*) occur predominantly in informal speech of younger speakers, and demonstrate regional and ethnic variation (cf. Buchstaller and D’Arcy 2009; Fox this volume; Kohn and Franz 2009). For Dutch *van*, only a few sociolinguistic studies are available. Van Alphen (2006) analyzed spoken corpus data from Amsterdam speakers recorded in 1975 and 1993. The percentage of direct quotes marked by *van* increased from 39% to 58%, and at the same time, the diversity of verbs and nouns that acted as triggers in the matrix clause also increased. In addition, the factors *social class* and *sex* played a role. In 1975, the use of *van* was more frequent amongst higher educated male speakers, whereas by 1993 the higher educated women and the lower classes had caught up with the trend. Overall, *van*-quotes were spread relatively evenly across all social classes, ages, genders and ethnicities and Van Alphen (2006) concluded that sociological factors ceased to be relevant for the variability in their usage.

In the Corpus of Spoken Dutch (CGN 1998–2004), we do not find any difference between Dutch as used in the Netherlands (Netherlandic Dutch) and in Belgium (Flemish), two varieties that differ in many other syntactic, lexical and phonetic aspects. The occurrences of *van* + indirect clause in the CGN, which has a ratio of 2:1 Netherland Dutch to Flemish, corresponds exactly to the relative corpus size of the two sub-corpora. We expect the same balance to hold for *van* + direct quotes.

Gender, social class, age and ethnicity do not seem to have a significant bearing on the use of the *van* quotative in the CGN corpus examples. There are, however, *individual* differences. Indeed, the frequency of using *van* seems to be an aspect of personal style. Some speakers hardly ever use it, whereas others – even sometimes with the same social profile – use it in nearly every context, in which it can be used. It might even be the case that some speakers consciously suppress the use of *van* on the basis of their awareness of the negative attitudes against quotative

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8. The corpus consists of Amsterdam informal conversations between friends. All interviews were conducted in dyads and triads and the collection contains speakers between 20 and 40 years who come from all social classes and both genders. Token numbers of all instances of direct reported discourse were in 1975 N = 211; in 1993 N = 262 (Van Alphen 2006: 32).
van in the hebben-zoiets-van context (see Section 2.2.1) and that they generalize the avoidance of quotative van to all contexts.

As to stylistic variation, we can say the following. Firstly, the use of van belongs to the register of spoken language, primarily occurring in colloquial speech. Yet, it is not difficult to observe it in more formal discussions or in interviews on the radio and on TV, or even in discussions that take place in the Dutch Parliament; as such, there is no absolute restriction to informal styles. Jones and Schief- felin (2009) have shown that between 2003 and 2006, the use of be + like in ‘Instant Messaging’ increased. In order to compare their findings with Dutch computer mediated language use, we investigated the use of quotative van in data from ‘new media’ such as ‘chats’ and internet fora.9 We were surprised to see that quotative van was used infrequently in this type of discourse. It seems that the medium – namely, spoken versus written (in this case computer-mediated) communication – is the main variable that conditions the occurrence of van quotes. It also seems that the real time, spontaneous and thus unprepared production of speech in spoken discourse is the main factor favouring the use of van. As such, the distribution of van in spontaneous speech depends partly on the cognitive needs of speakers reporting demonstrating (see Clark and Gerrig 1990), or acting out, (see Wierzbicka 1974) a quote. In computer-mediated text, such online ‘hold on’ signals are less necessary (see Jaeger 2010 on the management of syntactic density) or can be replaced by dots. Indeed, as regards the prosodic marking of van-framed quotation, Verkuyl (1976) claimed that quotative van was often followed by a (filled) pause. While pauses, especially filled ones, have the obvious advantage of buying the speaker valuable time before producing the relevant content, van itself also provides such extra time and of course, the same holds for interjections (such as ja ‘yes’ and nou ‘now’), which often mark the beginning of the direct quotation. However, in the more recent CGN corpus, (filled) pauses after van are infrequent. Van Alphen (2009) similarly found a strong decrease in the frequency of van followed by the hesitation marker eh between 1975 and 2009: In the corpus collected in 1975, 27% of van-quotations were followed by eh, compared to 11% in 1993.10 We take these findings to mean that over time, the need to produce such elements before the quotative content has reduced. By now, the quick switch to direct discourse after van seems to have become routine in spoken language and speakers need much less time to cognitively process the quotative construction.

9. These data were collected in 2010 by Steven Westelaken, student assistant for the ‘Newspeak’ project, a corpus project that aims at putting together a corpus of language use in the new media.

10. The ratio of van-quotations per number of direct reported discourse is as follows: 1975: 82/211 (39%), 1993: 152/262 (58%), 2009 = 34/155 (22%).
The sociolinguistic and stylistic profile of quotative van seems to suggest that, despite the negative attitudes attached to its use, the form has spread across the whole linguistic community, in all regions in the Netherlands and Flemish-speaking Belgium. Although it seems clear that the use of quotative van has spread rapidly during the last quarter of the 20th century, there is ample evidence that it has been present in Dutch for a much longer time, as we will show in the next section.

4. The diachronic development of van

Recent diachronic studies on quotative markers have shown that their quotative use is typically the result of a grammaticalization process, involving an item that exists already in the language. This can be seen, for example, in English like (Vandelanotte and Davidse 2009: 795), as well as Saramaccan táa (Lefebvre and Loranger 2008) and Bislama olsem (Meyerhoff 2002). A similar process also seems to hold for Dutch van.

The exact transition from non-quotative uses to quotative uses is an issue that needs further investigation. In this section, we intend to show that the use of van as a quotative marker is much older than the perception of its recent increase in use suggests. Van den Toorn (1997: 530) similarly remarks: “Although the construction can be observed with certainty in the 19th century already, it is not an exaggeration to assert that the use of this expletive (superfluous) or performative (i.e., relating to a speech act) van is increasing”. Indeed, Coppen (2010) presents examples of quotative van in Dutch literature going back to 1894.

A construction with quotative van, notably van ja ‘Van yes’ and van nee ‘Van no’ can be found in 17th century diaries. We encountered it several times in the diaries of Willem Frederik (1613–1664), stadholder of Friesland, Groningen and Drente (from 1648, see Example 35), and other diary-like or letter-like documents from that time.

(35) Willem Frederik, Gloria parendi, diaries of Willem Frederik, stadhouder of Friesland, Groningen and Drente, 1648.

L1 Gemmenich bij mij geweest, sprack mij van de cornetzplaetz, of hij nae Wesel soude gaen;
   Gemmenich with me been, spoke me from the Cornetzplaetz, whether he to Wesel should go;
L2 ick seide van “jae, hij most sich laeten voorstellen”;
   I said van “yes, he should himself let introduce”
   ‘Gemmenich, who had come to me, spoke to me of the Cornetzplaetz, whether he should go to Wesel. I said like “yes, he should let himself be introduced”.'
Although *van ja* and *van neen* may be considered rather limited constructions, it should be noted that in (35), the following clause *hij most sich laten voorstellen* ‘he should let himself be introduced’ is in fact the object of the verb *seyde* ‘said’, and shows features of both direct and indirect speech. Like direct speech, it lacks a complementizer *dat* (which is obligatory in finite subordinate clauses in Dutch) and has a word order with verb second (which is indicative for main clauses). Like indirect speech, however, it shows tense agreement with the main clause (*most ‘had to’* is simple past, whereas in direct speech, present tense *mot* would be expected) and the pronouns are also shifted to a deictic center different from the speaker at the original time of utterance (*hij* and *sich* 3rd sg. rather than *gy* and *U* 2nd sg.: *Gy mot U laten voorstellen*). As such, the construction resembles the German Konjunktiv II (*Er sagte, er sollte sich vorstellen lassen* ‘he said he should let himself be introduced’). In any case, the answering particle *jae* and the following clause must be analyzed as the object of the verb. Together, they constitute an elaborate quotation that straddles the boundary of direct and indirect speech.

Another use of *van* still a century earlier (1568), is observed by Van der Horst (2008). This concerns the construction with *van* and an infinitival clause. This infinitival clause can be a verb complement or a noun complement, as seen in Examples (36–37).

(36) (Anonymous, possibly Coornhert 1568, Van der Horst 2008: 870)
\[
\text{dat se vresen van berispt te worden}
\]
that they fear van reprimanded to become
‘that they fear to be reprimanded’

(37) (Coornhert, *Zedekunst dat is wellevenskunste*, 1585, Van der Horst 2008: 941)
\[
\text{uyt vreezen van in ghebreck te komen}
\]
from fear van in shortage to come
‘from fear of becoming in need’

Syntactically, this construction differs from the construction types we observed in modern-day Dutch involving quotative *van*. It resembles a verb complement construction which occurs relatively frequently in Flemish (also modern-day Flemish) but which is almost absent in modern Netherlandic Dutch. This particular construction, *van* + verb or noun complement, has been analyzed extensively for modern Flemish by Van Craenenbroeck (2002), who convincingly argues that examples such as (36) and (37) cannot be analyzed as a normal quotative construction since, for instance, elements from this type of *van*-construction can be extracted, an impossibility in other constructions with quotative *van*.

Although the constructions in (36–37) may appear quite unlike other quotative constructions, they do provide evidence that in earlier stages of Dutch, the
preposition *van* could be used to link infinitival complements to verbs and nouns like *vresen* ‘to fear’ in (36) and *uyt vreezen* ‘out of fear’ in (37). Moreover, this has only been observed with deverbal nouns (apart from *fear*, Van der Horst 2008 mentions *danger, reason, need, want, trust* and *thankfulness*) and verbs that encode thoughts and feelings. What this effectively means is that the infinitival *van*-complements we observe in earlier stages of Dutch are related to the same semantic field in which modern-day quotatives occur.

The construction with *van* followed by a finite clause that acts as the complement of a verb, noun or adjective is already attested in the 16th century (see 38). From then on, it occurs throughout the centuries.

(38) (Willem Boonen, *Geschiedenis van Leuven*, 1593–1594)

in dankbaerheijt *van dat zij hunne pelgrimagie soo geluckichlijcken volbracht hadden*

in thankfulness *van* that they their pilgrimage so luckily accomplished have

‘in thankfulness of having accomplished their pilgrimage so luckily’

(39) (Baruch de Spinoza, *Nagelate schriften*. n.p., 1677)

Gy zijt zonder twijffel verwondert *van dat ik u zo lang heb doen wachten*

Thou art without doubt wondered *van* that I you so long have done wait

‘Thou hast wondered without doubt, that I have kept you waiting for so long’

In Example (39), the finite clause is the complement to the past participle *verwondert* ‘wondered’, which clearly denotes a feeling. Yet, early examples with *verba dicendi* also occur, for example, *segen* ‘say’ (line 2 in 40) and *schryft* ‘write’ (in 41):

(40) (Constantijn Huygens, *Diaries* 1695)

L1 Daernae quamen daer de vrouw v. Gendt met haer schoonsuster joff. van Oosterweel,

Thereafter came there the woman v. Gendt with her sister-in-law miss. van Oosterweel,

L2 en begosten wat te seggen *van dat ick haer visite geexcuseert had*,

and began something to say *van* that I her visit excused had,

L3 en geseght dat ick sanderen daeghs thuys soude wesen, maer gingh soo al lachende door.

and said that I the-other day home would be, but went so MOD laughing on.

‘After that, Mrs. v. Gendt with her sister in law Miss van Oosterweel arrived, and began to say that I had permitted her visit, and that I had said that I would be at home the other day, but they (or I) went on laughing.’

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In Example (41), *van dat ik lief ben* ‘VAN that I am sweet’ is coordinated with the direct object of the trigger verb *schryft* ‘writes: *een hope moois van zyne liefde*. Note that this object, *een hope moois van zyne liefde*, is in itself a noun phrase with the head noun *moois*, which is derived from the genitive of the adjective *mooi*. Indeed, there is reason to believe that historically, the quotative *van* construction is related to a genitive construction. Crucially in modern Dutch, most genitive constructions (especially the partitive genitives, such as in 42) have been replaced by constructions with the preposition *van* (as in 43).

(42) Ik zag iets blauws in dat schilderij  
     I saw something blue + gen in that painting  
     ‘I saw something blue in that painting’

(43) Ik zag iets van blauw in dat schilderij  
     I saw something *van* blue in that painting  
     ‘I saw something blue in that painting’

The general replacement of the genitive by *van* in this particular (similative) construction might be an important contributing factor to the quotative use of the preposition *van*. Indeed, from the beginning of the 19th century, the construction of existential quantifier *iets* ‘something’ and alternatively a genitive or *van* complement is often used in the context of expressions of feelings and inner states. It is also often accompanied by the adverb *zoo* ‘so’. At first, the construction seems limited to nouns and adjectives, as in (44 – 45):

(44) (N. Beets, *Camera Obscura*, 1839)  
     Nooit in zijn leven had hy *zoo iets moois* gezien of gehoord.  
     Never in his life had he so *something beautiful-gen* seen or heard  
     ‘Never in his life had he heard or seen something that beautiful.’

(45) (De Gids, 1898)  
     Men krijgt dan *zoo iets van weeheid* over al dit zinneloos gemor  
     One gets then so-*something van* sloppiness about all this senseless moaning  
     ‘One becomes a bit tired then with all this senseless moaning’
Yet, from the end of the 19th century, sentential quotations with *van* also begin to occur, and Example (46), dated from 1894, is structurally indistinguishable from the present day Dutch construction *zo iets van* (line 2):

(46) (Tine van Berken, *Een klaverblad van vier*, 1894)

L1 Veel menschen, de mooie geslepen glazen, wijn!
Many people, the beautifully cut glasses, wine!

L2 Pa rood en glimmend van pret, mij telkens een knipoogje gevend, *zoo iets van*: “Hoe voel je je nu, meid?”
Dad red and shining from fun, me repeatedly a wink giving, so something *van* “how feel you you now, girl?”

‘Many people, beautifully cut glasses of wine! Dad red and shining with fun, repeatedly winking to me, something like “How do you feel now, girl?”’

Note that Example (46) is one of the first clear examples of *zo iets van* with a full sentence as quotation. In the course of the 20th century, the construction with *zo, iets* and *van* becomes more frequent, and from the second half of the century, it also occurs with the light verb *hebben* ‘to have’, thus giving rise to another frequent form *zo iets hebben van* ‘to have something like’, which is nowadays subject to much language criticism. In the early 20th century examples of *van* with elaborate quotations as the object of *verba dicendi*, an approximative meaning tends to be apparent. Many occurrences contain verbs like *brommen* ‘growl’, *mompelen* ‘mumble’, *prevelen* ‘murmur’, which literally indicate unclear speech. However, with time this literal approximation of reported speech disappears and *van* generalizes across all sorts of *verba dicendi* and even in verbless constructions. What remains is a kind of typification of the quotation.

Most of these attestations occur in genres such as diaries, daily reports, personal letters (or literary suggestions of these), which obviously contain a wealth of features typical of the spoken register; other attestations appear in children’s literature with a lot of direct speech (from the second half of the 19th century onwards). This corresponds to the observation made in Section 3 that quotative marking is a typical property of spoken discourse or narratives (see Golato this volume; Steinbach and Herrmann this volume). Indeed, sources like these can be argued to approximate spoken discourse more closely than written language. They are obviously less likely to be constrained by literary convention and resemble (or aim to resemble) colloquial, everyday speech. Since quotative *van* can be found in such sources over many centuries, it seems to have been present in Dutch for a long time, albeit restricted to informal domains. For this reason, historical data are sparse; yet, the following four lines of development can be reconstructed for quotative *van* in Dutch:
i. *Van* as a marker for complements expressing thoughts and feelings: From the 16th century onwards, verbs, nouns and adjectives expressing thoughts and feeling have finite and infinite complement clauses with *van*.

ii. *Van* as marker of literal quotation: From the 17th century onwards, *verba dicendi* have complements with *van* and literal quotation *ja/nee* ‘yes/no’, elaborated with quotation-like clauses. From the beginning of the 20th century onwards, *verba dicendi* expressing unclear speech occur with *van* and reported speech with approximative meaning. During the course of the 20th century, the literal approximative meaning gradually disappears, making way for typifying meaning.

iii. *Van* with simulative meaning in the context of *iets* ‘something’: From the beginning of the 19th century onwards, existential *iets* ‘something’ occurs with *van* and genitive adjectives and nouns; the construction usually has simulative meaning and refers to feelings. From the end of the 19th century onwards, existential *iets* ‘something’ with simulative meaning also occurs with *van* and sentential quotations.

iv. Finally, from the second half of the 20th century onwards, *zo, iets* and *van* are combined with the light verb *hebben* to a quotative construction approximately expressing inner feelings and other nonverbal expressions.

It seems that in the course of history, these lines of development merge. Somewhere in the 19th century, the older construction with *van* as the complement of thoughts and feelings merges with its simulative function. In the course of the 20th century, the *verba dicendi* construction seems to merge with this line of development, giving rise to the modern construction with quotative *van*.

5. Conclusion

Quotative *van* has a strong place in the Dutch way of speaking, both in Belgium and in the Netherlands. It occurs in three types of syntactic construction: (i) within a reporting clause, triggered by a full verb or noun, (ii) within a reporting clause, triggered by a light verb construction involving simulative and/or demonstrative elements, and (iii) in an asyndetic construction, in loose connection between an utterance and an elaborative or illustrative quotation. Furthermore, quotative *van* occurs in all three types with a direct quotation as well as with indirect speech.

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11. Van den Toorn et al. (1997) also assume a relation with constructions like *en van je hela hola*, roughly translated as ‘and then we go hela hola,’ and with onomatopoeic quotations like *dat ging van auw* ‘that went ow’. This construction belongs to the family of *van* as a marker of literal quotation.
From a sociolinguistic perspective, the use of quotative van seems to have increased since Verkuyl first observed it in 1976. Nowadays, it is frequently used in spoken language in all Dutch-speaking regions and in all sociolinguistic layers of the language community in all spoken settings. It can be observed to a lesser degree in the new media and in informal written language. The increase sharply contrasts with a negative attitude which pertains especially to the constructions of the second type (namely, ik heb zoiets van). In contrast to the perception (of native speakers and linguists) of van as an innovative feature, quotative van has old roots. Some types of construction (van with infinitive indirect quotation, van with ja ‘yes’ and nee ‘no’) can be found as early as the 16th century, mainly in personal documents. Further examples suggest an origin in noun and verb complementation and in simulative constructions with a quantifying expression (iets van blauw ‘some of blue’). It is thus hard to determine when quotative van did not occur in spoken Dutch. However, there clearly has been a recent increase in frequency of use. Indeed, we would like to suggest that the informalization of the written language might have contributed to its visibility and attestation by linguists. It is time to give it a proper place in descriptive grammars of Dutch.

References


Dutch quotative van


