

# Proleptic Agreement as a Good Design Property

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(Appeared in: J. Costa & M.C. Figueiredo Silva (eds.). *Studies on Agreement*: Benjamins)

Abstract: This article investigates the phenomenon of proleptic (i.e. anticipatory) agreement, more specifically the anticipatory occurrence of the Dutch inflectional morpheme *-e* on degree modifiers that modify a gradable attributive adjective carrying the bound morpheme *-e* (e.g. *een [erg-e leuk-e] auto*; a very-AGR nice-AGR car; ‘a very nice car’). Although at first sight the appearance of this proleptic agreement morpheme, which enters into an agreement relationship with the noun, seems to be highly imperfect, it turns out to be a property of natural language that satisfies the design specifications of human language. An analysis is proposed according to which the sequence ‘degree modifier – gradable adjective’ is a derived word order. More specifically, it is argued that the degree modifier originates as a post-adjectival predicate contained within a DegP-internal small clause configuration and undergoes predicate displacement to the left periphery (i.e. edge) of the (attributive) extended adjectival projection (i.e. DegP). This phrasal movement to [Spec,DegP] goes together with a head movement operation that raises the small clause head, which is instantiated by the proleptic inflection (*-e*), to the left peripheral head position Deg. Occupying the left peripheral Deg-position (i.e. edge position) after head movement, the proleptic inflection is able to enter into an agreement relation with the noun.

## 1. Proleptic (‘anticipatory’) agreement and (im)perfection

The Minimalist Program explores the thesis that human language may be a “perfect system,” a system that is optimally designed for interaction with other cognitive systems that are internal to the mind. As noted in Chomsky (2000), one may explore the perfection of the language system by means of the quest for potential “imperfections” of language, i.e. properties that language should not have. Chomsky notes that apparent imperfections come in several varieties. More in particular, one may identify a property P of language L, where:

- (1) (i) P is real, and an imperfection
- (ii) P is not real, contrary to what had been supposed
- (iii) P is real, but not an imperfection; it is part of a best way to meet design specifications

According to Chomsky, the third option is the most interesting one. As a core instance of such an apparent imperfection, the phenomenon of inflectional morphology is mentioned. That is,

why should certain constituents of human language be marked with inflectional morphology? As Chomsky (2002:111) notes, number marking (i.e. singular versus plural morphology) on a noun is not really an imperfection. This property of language seems to be a natural design property of the language system in view of the fact that singularity or plurality of some object is a meaningful distinction, also arguably for the external systems with which human language interacts. This same property (i.e. number marking) appears to be an imperfection, though, when it is realized on a verb, or an adjective. The occurrence of morphological number marking on these lexical items seems to be redundant and does not seem to contribute to the meaning of the whole expression. Strictly speaking, number (i.e. plurality versus singularity) is only interpreted on the noun. As Chomsky (2002:111) notes, this asymmetry in the interpretability of inflectional morphology was correctly captured in traditional grammars by the statement that verbs and adjectives agree with nouns, and not conversely. In short, agreement involves an asymmetric relationship between an inflectional feature (hosted by some category) that conveys meaningful information and another inflectional feature (hosted by some other category) that does not. The general idea is that by means of the agreement relation (established by the operation Agree), the uninterpretable inflectional feature(s) of the inflected verb or adjective is deleted under feature-identity with the interpretable inflectional feature on the noun. Agree becomes operative by virtue of the uninterpretable inflectional feature. Thus, the uninterpretable feature has the role of activating the agreement process. The activating, uninterpretable feature that searches the syntactic structure for a matching feature is called a ‘probe’ and the matching, interpretable feature is called the ‘goal’. Matching of probe-goal induces Agree, eliminating uninterpretable features that activate them.

Chomsky (2001) notes that the probe-goal relation is also at the basis of adjective-noun agreement in attributive adjectival constructions like *old cars* or *cars old enough to buy*. He states that “[W]hatever the correct analysis may be, these constructions involve a relation between N and the head of the predicate phrase.” More specifically, the phi-set of N values and deletes the matched uninterpretable features of the predicate. This is schematically represented in (2), where, for the sake of discussion, a structural analysis is adopted in which the attributive AP is located in the specifier position of some functional head (cf. Cinque 1994); <u:φ> stands for “uninterpretable phi-features”, and <i:φ> for “interpretable phi-features”.

(2) [<sub>FP</sub> old<u:φ> [<sub>F</sub> F [<sub>NP</sub> cars<i:φ>]]] (*old*<φ> = Probe; *cars*<φ> = Goal)

In English, adjective-noun agreement is not morphologically expressed (i.e. overtly spelled-out) on the attributive adjective. In a language like Dutch, adjectival inflection is also very poor. Agreement is only spelled out overtly on (prenominal) attributive adjectives in the form of the element *-e* (cf. (3a)). As shown by (3b), *-e* does not appear on adjectives modifying indefinite neuter singulars. I will assume that these take a zero-morpheme ( $\emptyset$ ):

- (3) a. het leuk-e huis  
       the nice-e house  
       b. een leuk- $\emptyset$  huis  
           a nice house

Having provided some background of the role of agreement in natural language syntax, let us now turn to the phenomenon that will be central in the present study, viz. proleptic (i.e. anticipatory) agreement. This phenomenon, quite familiar from traditional grammar but thus far largely ignored in generative grammar, involves the occurrence of some agreeing inflectional morpheme on a constituent which is not considered to be a designated host for this morpheme. The unexpected bearer of this morpheme is immediately followed by a constituent which is a ‘normal’ bearer of this morpheme and which is involved in an agreement relation with some other constituent. The type of proleptic agreement that will be central in this paper concerns the occurrence of the Dutch inflectional morpheme *-e* on degree modifiers that modify a gradable attributive adjective carrying the bound morpheme *-e*.<sup>1</sup> Schematically (XP being the degree modifier):

- (4) [FP [AP [XP X<sub><φ></sub>] A<sub><φ></sub>] [F' F [NP N<sub><φ></sub>]]]

The proleptic appearance of *-e* on the degree modifier is exemplified in (5). The inflectional morpheme *-e* on the degree word anticipates the *-e* on the attributive adjective. Not only the

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<sup>1</sup> Arguably, there is also proleptic agreement with zero-inflection. However, this type of prolepsis is indistinguishable from the pattern in which the degree adverb does not carry a proleptic inflectional feature. One potential indication might be the phonetic realization of the focus/emphasis property associated with proleptically agreeing elements. Further research is needed here.

adjective but also the degree word appears to enter into an agreement relationship with the noun.<sup>2</sup>

- (5) a. een erg(-e) leuk-e auto  
a very-AGR nice-AGR car  
'a very nice car'
- b. erg(-e) leuk-e huizen  
very-AGR nice-AGR houses  
'very nice houses'
- c. dat erg(-e) leuk-e huis  
that very-AGR nice-AGR house  
'that very nice house'

As pointed out above, the proleptic inflection *-e* on the degree word only appears when it is followed by an adjective carrying the inflection *-e*. So, when the attributive adjective is followed by a superficially bare adjective (i.e. one with  $\emptyset$ -inflection), the degree word does not carry the morpheme *-e*:

- (6) a. \*een erg-e leuk huis  
a very-AGR nice house
- b. een erg leuk huis

Proleptic agreement seems to be a good candidate for being qualified as an imperfection of language, i.e. a property that language should not have. A strong indication for this seems to be its optionality: the inflection *-e* is not required on the degree word modifying the attributive adjective (cf. (5)). In this respect, it differs from the pronominal attributive adjective, on which the inflectional morpheme *-e* must appear in the right nominal contexts (see above):

- (7) het leuk\*(-e) huis  
the nice(-e) house  
'the nice house'

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<sup>2</sup> Proleptically agreeing 'adverbs' can be found within attributive adjective phrases that are part of definite or indefinite DPs. See G. Royen (1948) for numerous illustrations from Dutch texts.

Another imperfection of the proleptically agreeing constituent is the fact that it does not appear to convey any semantic information; i.e. the occurrence of the inflectional feature on the degree modifier is uninterpretable (just like the inflectional feature *-e* on the attributive adjective).

The aim of the present paper is to show that proleptic agreement is a real property of natural language morphosyntax and that it should not be qualified as an imperfection of language. Rather, it is part of a best way to meet design specifications (i.e. legibility conditions at the interface).

## 2. Proleptic agreement as a systematic design property

Does proleptic agreement represent a true design property of human language, and is it good design? In this section, I hope to show that proleptic agreement is a real design property of human language syntax. It is part of our competence system and certainly should not be interpreted as performance property (e.g. related to sloppy speech). The evidence for this comes from the systematicity and boundedness of the phenomenon: the phenomenon is not arbitrary and not unsystematic.

A first restriction on the phenomenon of proleptic agreement relates to the host of the proleptic inflectional feature: the host must always be an (adjectival) degree modifier. Other types of modifiers (“adverbs” in traditional terms) never display proleptic agreement (cf. also Corver 1997), as is exemplified in (8). Just to show how common this phenomenon is in Dutch, I have given a large number of examples illustrating proleptic agreement with degree words in (9) (see also Royen (1948) for numerous examples, also from texts).<sup>3</sup>

- (8) a. een [waarschijnlijk(\*-e)dur-e]                      fiets                      (modal adverb)  
       a    probable-AGR            expensive-AGR bike  
       ‘a probably expensive bike’

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<sup>3</sup> Importantly, an example like (8d) is well-formed under the interpretation: a local road which is slippery. In that case, of course, *plaatselijke* functions as an attributive AP modifying *gladde weg*. Schematically: [<sub>DP</sub> een [*plaatselijke* [*gladde weg*]]]. The intended meaning in (8d) is: ‘a road which is [locally slippery]’; i.e. *plaatselijk(e)* modifies the adjective *gladde*.

- b. een [gelukkig(\*-e) goedkop-e] fiets (evaluative adverb)  
 a fortunate-AGR cheap-AGR bike  
 ‘a fortunately cheap bike’
- c. een [tijdelijk(\*-e) goedkop-e] fiets (temporal adverb)  
 a temporary-AGR cheap-AGR bike  
 ‘a temporarily cheap bike’
- d. een [plaatselijk(\*-e) glad-de] weg (locative adverb)  
 a local-AGR slippery-AGR road  
 ‘a locally slippery road’
- (9) a. een [afgrijselijk(-e) dur-e] fiets  
 a horrible-AGR expensive-AGR bike  
 ‘a horribly expensive bike’
- b. een [afschuwelijk(-e) dur-e] fiets  
 a horrible-AGR expensive-AGR bike  
 ‘a horribly expensive bike’
- c. een [enorm(-e) stomm-e] opmerking  
 a enormous-AGR stupid-AGR remark  
 ‘an enormously stupid remark’
- d. een [godsgruwelijk(-e) dur-e] fiets  
 a goddamned-AGR expensive-AGR bike  
 ‘a goddamned expensive bike’
- e. een [onbeschrijfelijk(-e) dure] fiets  
 a indescribable-AGR expensive bike  
 ‘an extremely expensive bike’
- f. een [ongelofelijk-e dur(-e)] fiets  
 an unbelievable-AGR expensive-AGR bike  
 ‘an unbelievably expensive car’
- g. een [verschrikkelijk(-e) dur-e] fiets  
 a extreme-AGR expensive-AGR bike  
 ‘an extremely expensive bike’
- h. een [waaninnig(-e) dur-e] fiets

- an insane-AGR expensive-AGR bike  
 ‘an extremely expensive bike’
- i. een [geweldig(-e) domm-e] opmerking  
 a enormous-AGR stupid remark  
 ‘an enormously stupid remark’
- j. een [vreselijk(-e) stomm-e] opmerking  
 a extreme-AGR stupid-AGR remark  
 ‘an extremely stupid remark’
- k. een [heel(-e) stomm-e] opmerking  
 a very-AGR stupid-AGR remark  
 ‘a very stupid remark’

Another indication of the systematicity and boundedness of this phenomenon is the fact that proleptic agreement only occurs with a subset of the class of “degree adverbs”. To illustrate this, I will adopt, without much further discussion, the classification of degree adverbs as given in Klein (1998). Based on other proposals for the classification of degree adverbs, Klein distinguishes the following classes.

- adverbs of absolute degree: adverbs that indicate that the gradable element applies without any reservation, or that the gradable element applies to the whole of the subject (cf. (10a))
- adverbs of approximative degree: adverbs that modify a gradable element that denotes an absolute endpoint on a scale, to express that the range of the scale which applies is very close to this endpoint (cf. (10b))
- adverbs of (extremely) high degree: adverbs that express an (extremely) high degree on the scale of degrees, including those that express more than a high degree by their extreme emotive value (cf. *unbelievably*) (cf. (10c))
- adverbs of moderate degree: the moderate degree indicates that the gradable element is applicable, but not much more than that: the lower bound of the range is not far from the norm (cf. (10d))

- adverbs of minimal degree: adverbs that indicate that the gradable element is applicable, but they minimize the degree since the lower bound of the range is lower than the unmodified gradable word itself normally indicates (cf. (10e)).
- adverbs of (quasi-)negative degree: adverbs that indicate that the property is absent, or that the property is present to a less than neutral or expected degree (cf. (10f)).

- (10) a. een [compleet blinde] man  
 a complete blind man  
 ‘a completely blind man’
- b. een [praktisch lege] zaal  
 a practical empty room  
 ‘a practically empty room’
- c. een [erg/ongelofelijk mooie] fiets  
 a very/unbelievable beautiful bike  
 ‘a very/unbelievably beautiful bike’
- d. een [tamelijk dure] fiets  
 a rather expensive bike
- e. een [lichtelijk nerveuze] man  
 a slightly nervous man
- f. een [weinig gelukkige] man  
 a little happy man  
 ‘a not very happy man’

Of all these classes of degree adverbs, it is only the class of (extremely) high degree that permits proleptic agreement. The expressions in (9), for example, all contain (extremely) high degree adverbs. The impossibility of proleptic agreement with all the other classes of degree adverbs is exemplified in (11)-(14):

- (11) a. een [compleet/\*complet-e blind-e] man  
 a complete/\*complete-AGR blind-AGR man  
 ‘a completely blind man’
- b. een [volledig/\*volledig-e naakt-e] man  
 a entire/entire-AGR naked-AGR man

- ‘an entirely nude man’
- (12) een [praktisch/\*praktisch-e leg-e] zaal  
 a practical/practical-AGR empty-AGR room  
 ‘a practically empty room’
- (13) a. een [vrij/\*vrij-e dur-e] auto  
 a fair/fair-AGR expensive-AGR car  
 ‘a fairly expensive car’
- b. een [tamelijk/\*?tamelijk-e dur-e] auto  
 a fair/fair-AGR expensive-AGR car  
 ‘a fairly expensive car’
- c. een [aardig/\*aardig-e kale] jongen  
 a pretty/pretty-AGR bold boy  
 ‘a rather bold boy’
- d. een [matig/\*matig-e gelukkig-e] jongen  
 a moderate/moderate-AGR happy-AGR boy  
 ‘a quite happy boy’
- e. een [betrekkelijk/\*betrekkelijk-e dure] fiets  
 a relative/relative-AGR expensive-AGR bike  
 ‘a relatively expensive bike’
- (14) een [lichtelijk/\*lichtelijk-e nerveuze] man  
 a slight/\*slight-AGR nervous man  
 ‘a slightly nervous man’

In short, the proleptic inflectional feature is only found on degree adverbs that indicate a (very) high degree. As noted in Verdenius (1939), these adverbs typically have a strongly affective/emphatic force.

A third illustration of the grammatical design of proleptic agreement concerns what could be called the locality of the phenomenon. Consider the examples in (15) where we have an attributive adjective phrase with the linear sequence: adverb (*heel*) + adverb (*erg*) + attributive adjective (*dure*). Both *heel* and *erg* designate a high degree. In (15a), the inflectional feature *-e* is only present on the attributive adjective. (15b) exemplifies the proleptic occurrence of *-e* on the degree adverb *erg*. In (15c), proleptic agreement (i.e. *-e*) is

also attested on the leftmost degree modifier *heel*, which arguably modifies the degree adverb *erg*. Interestingly, the adverb *heel* cannot bear a proleptic inflection if the head (i.e. *erg*) of the larger modifying phrase does not carry a proleptic inflection itself. The impossibility of this pattern is shown in (15d).

- (15) a. een[heel erg dure] fiets  
 a real very expensive-AGR bike  
 ‘a really very expensive bike’
- b. een [heel erge dure] fiets  
 a real very-AGR expensive-AGR bike
- c. een [hele erge dure] fiets  
 a real-AGR very-AGR expensive-AGR bike
- d. \*een [hele erg dure] fiets  
 a real-AGR very expensive-AGR bike

A fourth illustration that the proleptic agreement is a bounded phenomenon comes from what could, descriptively, be called PP-intervention effects. As discussed in Corver (1997), PP-complements in Dutch must occur to the left of the adjective, when the adjective heads an attributive adjectival phrase. With certain adjectives, the PP-complement can either appear in between the degree modifier and the attributive adjectival head (yielding: degree – PP – A; cf. (16)) or to the left of the degree adverb and the attributive adjective (yielding: PP – degree – A; cf. (17)).

- (16) a. een [erg daarvan afhankelijke] jongen  
 a very there-upon dependent boy  
 ‘a boy who is very dependent on that’
- b. een [erg daarvoor gevoelige] jongen  
 a very there-to sensitive boy  
 ‘a boy who is very sensitive to that’
- (17) a. een [daarvan erg afhankelijke] jongen  
 b. een [daarvoor erg gevoelige] jongen

The crucial observation now is that proleptic agreement on the adverb is only permitted if the PP-complement does not intervene. That is, the proleptically agreeing adverb must be adjacent superficially to the attributive adjectival head. The contrast is illustrated in (18) versus (19):

- (18) a. \*een [erg-e daarvan afhankelijke] jongen  
 b. \*een [erg-e daarvoor gevoelige] jongen  
 (19) a. een [daarvan erg-e afhankelijke] jongen  
 b. een [daarvoor erg-e gevoelige] jongen

Let me, finally, point out that proleptic agreement also typically occurs in expressions where extremely high degree is expressed by means of repetition of the degree word:

- (20) a. een [erg-e, erg-e, erg-e dur-e] fiets  
 a very-AGR, very-AGR, very-AGR expensive-AGR bike  
 ‘an incredibly expensive bike’  
 b. een [hel-e, hel-e, hel-e lange] man  
 a very-AGR, very-AGR, very-AGR tall-AGR] man  
 ‘an incredibly tall man’

Although I won’t go into the precise syntactic structure of these syntactic patterns, it seems plausible that these patterns of iterative proleptic agreement relate to the syntactic property of recursivity of phrase structure.

The above considerations should provide sufficient empirical basis for concluding that proleptic agreement is a real property of the present-day Dutch language. In the next section, I will show that also cross-linguistically the phenomenon is quite well attested.

### 3. Proleptic agreement as a cross-linguistic phenomenon

Not unexpectedly, proleptic agreement is also found in older variants of Dutch. (21) and (22) provide examples of this phenomenon for Middle Dutch (cf. Stoett 1923, De Vooy 1967) and Seventeenth century Dutch (cf. Koelmans 1978), respectively:

- (21) a. up enen [ser-en hog-en] berech (Middle Dutch)  
 at a very-AGR high-AGR mountain  
 ‘at a very high mountain’
- b. met [hard-en fell-en] oogen  
 with very-AGR vivid-AGR eyes  
 ‘with very vivid eyes’
- (22) a. [ongewoonlijk-e groot-e] vygen (17th century Dutch)  
 unusual-AGR big-AGR figs  
 ‘unusually big figs’
- b. [slecht-e beseuld-e] schepen  
 bad-AGR sailed-AGR ships  
 ‘bad sailers’

Proleptic agreement is also attested in a great variety of Dutch/Germanic dialects spoken in the Netherlands and Flanders (cf. Ter Laan 1953, De Bont 1962, Pauwels 1958):

- (23) a. ’t is n [hail-e best-e] kou (dialect of Groningen)  
 it is a very-AGR bad-AGR cold
- b. Dä’s [bëestig-e kooi-e] grond (dialect of Kempenland)  
 That’s beastly-AGR bad-AGR soil  
 ‘That’s extremely bad land’
- c. a biberde van den [donig-e gruet-e] sxrik (dialect of Aarschot)  
 He trembled of the such-AGR big-AGR fear

In Afrikaans (cf. (24)) and Frisian (cf. Hoekema 1996), we also find the phenomenon of proleptic agreement.

- (24) ’n[blakend-e gesond-e] kind (Afrikaans)  
 a glowingly-AGR healthy-AGR child

- (25) a. Se hiene dêr in [bjusterbaarlik-e grutt-e] sporthal (Frisian)  
 They had there an uncommon-AGR big-AGR sports hall  
 b. Wat wenje sokke minsken al yn [freeslik-e lyts-e] huzen!  
 What live such people PRT in extreme-AGR small-AGR houses

In his *Deutsche Grammatik*, Herman Paul (1916-1920:§ 100) mentions constructions like (26) and cites the example *recht-e gut-e Leute* (really good people) from Goethe and *eine rechte gute Frau* from Lessing.

- (26) a. eine [ganz-e gut-e] Frau (German varieties)  
 a very-AGR good-AGR woman  
 b. ein [ganz-er gut-er] Mann  
 a very-AGR good-AGR man

In his *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte* (1909:366), Paul further observes the phenomenon of proleptic agreement in Romance languages: "So sagt man in Franz. *toute pure, toutes pures*; entsprechend it. *tutta livida* (=blackblue, NC), span. *todos desnudos* etc.; ebsenso it. *mezza morte*, span. *medios desnudos*." Some further illustrations are given in (27):

- (27) a. ¡Vienes [toda mojada]! (Spanish)  
 You-are real/entire-fem.sg wet-fem.sg  
 'You are entirely wet.'  
 b. Maria era [tutta nuda] (Italian)  
 Mary was entire-fem.sg nude-fem.sg  
 'Mary was entirely nude.'  
 c. Elle en était [toute honteuse] (French)  
 She of-it was entire-fem.sg ashamed-fem.sg  
 'She was entirely ashamed of it.'

For the sake of illustration, I would also like to add the examples in (28) from French (examples drawn from: Grevisse (no year) (See also Jespersen 1969:9). In those examples, a non-degree modifier ('adverb') of the adjective displays proleptic agreement. According to the descriptive grammars, this pattern used to be quite common in older variants of French.

- (28) a. une rose [fraîche cueillie]  
 a rose fresh/new-fem.sg picked-fem.sg  
 ‘a newly picked rose’
- b. des fenêtres [grandes ouvertes]  
 Ind.Art. windows wide-fem.pl open-fem.pl  
 ‘wide open windows’
- c. des yeux [larges ouverts]  
 Indef.Art. eyes wide-fem.pl open-fem.pl  
 ‘widely open eyes’

Let me close off this section with some potential cases of proleptic agreement in English. The standard rule in English is to have the adverbial marking *-ly* attached to an ‘adverb’ that modifies an adjective: e.g. *really nice*, *terribly tough*, *extremely old*, *et cetera*. In certain contexts, though, the adverbial marking can be absent (cf. Jespersen 1969, Bolinger 1972):

- (29) a. a real nice linguist  
 b. terrible tough meat  
 c. a terrible old man  
 d. in perfect good temper  
 e. in extreme old age  
 f. in high good humour

Note that all the degree adverbs in (29) designate a (very) high degree. Other classes of degree adverbs typically do not display this proleptic behavior, for example:

- (30) a. a completely/\*complete blind person (absolute degree)  
 b. a slightly/\*slight afraid person (minimal degree)

Although I haven’t given any in-depth analysis of the various instantiations of the proleptic agreement pattern thus far, it seems fair to say on the basis of the cross-linguistic evidence,

hinted at in this section, that proleptic agreement (on modifying degree words) is a real property of natural language grammar.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. Predicate displacement within the Adjective Phrase : evidence from Romanian

Now that we have determined that proleptic agreement belongs to the design of human language, we should address the question of how to analyze these modifying expressions featuring the grammatical marker *-e* and in what way this expression satisfies the interface legibility conditions. As a first step in the investigation, I will first explore the internal syntax of the adjective phrase. I will argue that degree adverbs are predicates that undergo displacement within the adjective phrase. It will be shown that the position in which the degree adverb ends up can be of two types: an A-bar position (i.e. an operator-like position) or an A-position (i.e. non-operator-like position). The A-bar position (i.e. edge) turns out to be the relevant position for the phenomenon of proleptic agreement.

The standard analysis of the sequence ‘degree adverb + adjective’ (e.g. *extremely tall*) is one in which the two constituents are simply combined via the operation Merge: the adverb and the adjective combine. There are phenomena, though, in certain languages which hint at the application of displacement in adjectival constructions featuring a degree adverb. A very suggestive case is provided by Romanian (cf. Corver 2000, 2001). As exemplified in (31), Romanian has adjectival constructions in which the degree adverb (e.g. *extrem*) and the gradable adjective (e.g. *înalt*) are separated from each other by an intervening preposition-like element *de* (examples drawn from Mallinson (1986)).

- (31) a. Ion e [extrem de înalt]  
Ion is extrem of tall-ms  
‘Ion is extremely tall.’
- b. Maria e [enorm de fericită]  
Mary is enormous of happy-fem  
‘Maria is enormously happy.’

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<sup>4</sup> In this article, I will concentrate on the phenomenon of proleptic agreement in Dutch.

- c. Aleargă [enorm de repede] dar înoată cam încet  
run-3s enormous of quickly but swim-3s rather slowly  
'He runs enormously quickly but swims rather slowly.'
- d. un rol [deosebit de important in aceasta action][...]  
a-ms role particular of important-ms in this-fem action  
'a particularly important role in this action [...]'

As noted in Corver (2000, 2001), this *A de A* construction displays syntactic behavior which is quite similar to that of the well-known *N of/de N* construction (cf. Kayne 1994). As shown in (31) and (32), the first lexical element cannot be moved away from the sequence *of N/de A*. Furthermore, the latter sequence cannot be fronted to the beginning of the clause (cf. (33)).

- (32) a. *Fools of policemen*, they certainly are -- !  
b. \**Fools*, they certainly are [-- of policemen]!

- (33) a. *Extrem de deștept* te mai crezi tu! (Grosu 1974)  
Extremely of clever yourself still believe you  
'You fancy yourself extremely clever!'  
b. \**Extrem* te mai crezi tu [-- de *deștept*]!

- (34) a. \**Of policemen* they certainly are *fools*  
b. \**De deștept* te mai crezi tu [extrem --]!  
Of clever yourself still believe you extremely  
'You fancy yourself extremely clever!'

Clearly, the above examples are suggestive of a parallel treatment of the two construction types. In recent years, various studies have appeared that analyze the nominal *N de/of N* construction in terms of DP-internal predicate movement (cf. Kayne 1994). In what follows, I will elaborate on the implementation of the DP-internal predicate displacement analysis as given by Den Dikken (1995). He proposes that in constructions like (35), the displaced predicate originates in a DP-internal Small Clause configuration (XP in (35)) and raises across the Small Clause subject to the Spec-position of a higher functional head FP (cf. also Bennis, Corver & Den Dikken 1998 for discussion). Schematically:

(35) [<sub>DP</sub> that [<sub>FP</sub> *idiot*<sub>i</sub> [<sub>F</sub> F (= of)+X<sub>i</sub> (= a) [<sub>XP</sub> doctor [<sub>X'</sub> t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub>]]]]]]

According to Den Dikken, predicate movement as found in (35) is taken to be an A-movement operation. What characterizes this movement operation is that the inverted nominal predicate skips an intermediate A-position, viz. that of the small clause subject (i.e. XP). Hence, the movement of the nominal predicate appears to be a non-local A-movement. As Den Dikken points out, however, the predicate movement is local if one adopts Chomsky's (1993) locality theory in terms of equidistance. Under this theoretical proposal, the moved predicate can cross the subject as long as the two nominals are technically equally far away from the predicate's extraction site. Under Chomsky's assumptions, this situation is obtained by the application of a domain-extending head movement operation that creates a minimal domain that contains both the raised predicate and the small clause subject. Den Dikken argues that in the case of DP-internal predicate inversion, the requisite domain extending head-movement operation consists of raising of the functional head (X) of the small clause to a higher functional head (labeled here as 'F'). He further claims that the element *de/of* is a nominal copula, which surfaces at PF as a result of X-to-F raising; in fact, this nominal copula is the (nominal) equivalent of the verbal copula *to be*, which obligatorily appears in predicate inversion structures in the clausal domain (e.g. *I consider the best candidate \*(to be) John*); cf. Moro (1991).

In Bennis et al. (1998), it is argued that next to DP-internal predicate displacement of the A-type (henceforth: Predicate Inversion), there is predicate displacement of the A-bar type (so-called: Predicate Fronting) in the nominal domain. They give the following examples of the latter type:

- (36) a. wat 'n boek(en)!  
           what a book(s)  
           'what books!'
- b. wat voor 'n boek(en)?  
           what for a book(s)  
           'what kind of books?'

It is assumed that in both the exclamative construction (36a) and the interrogative construction (36b), there is a predication relationship between the noun *boek(en)* — the

subject — and the predicate *wat*. The surface pattern in (36a) is derived by fronting of the predicate *wat* across the Small Clause subject *boek(en)* to a left edge (i.e. A-bar) position within the extended nominal projection (i.e. Spec,DP). It is proposed that the exclamative interpretation of *wat* is the result of its being moved into the Spec of a functional projection whose head (D) is specified for the illocutionary feature [+EXCL]. Thus, this [+EXCL] operator head, just like the C-head in clausal constructions, triggers overt raising of the *wh*-form *wat* to its specifier. By raising to Spec,DP, *wat* ends up in a position to the left of its subject, as required in the light of the word-order facts. The derived structure then looks as follows:

(37) [<sub>DP</sub> wat<sub>j</sub> [<sub>D'</sub> [<sub>D</sub> [+EXCL] [<sub>X'</sub> 'n]<sub>i</sub>] [<sub>XP</sub> boek(en) [<sub>X'</sub> t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub>]]]]

As indicated in (37), Bennis et al. assume that movement of *wat* to [Spec,DP] requires the [+EXCL] operator head (i.e. D) to be lexical in exclamative DPs. They interpret this head movement to D as being parallel to the Verb Second effect in (main) clauses. The way to provide D with content is to raise 'n, the X-head internal to the Small Clause, to D. Notice that *een* is the spurious indefinite article: it does not belong to the noun that follows it, as is clear from the fact that a plural noun (*boeken*) can follow it. Nor does it belong to the *wh*-form *wat* (i.e. the fronted predicate).

If one adopts a predicate displacement analysis for the *N of N* construction, one should also do so for the Romanian *A de A* construction. Such an analysis leads to the following derivation of a linguistic expression like *extrem de înalt* in (31a): In the 'underlying' structure, there is a predicative relationship between the gradable adjective *înalt* — the 'subject' of the predication — and the degree adverb *extrem* — the predicate of the relationship. Under the assumption that this predication relationship is configurationally defined in terms of a Small Clause configuration, we end up with an underlying structure as in (38). I will assume that predication involves association (say: coindexation) of the external argument (i.e. 1) of *extrem* with the *G(rade)*-argument of the gradable adjective *înalt*. This association leads to the interpretation: 'tall to degree D, where D is extreme'.

(38) [<sub>XP</sub> înalt<sub><1,G></sub> [<sub>X'</sub> X extrem<sub><1></sub>]]



- (43) a. *Tare deștept te mai crezi tu!* (Grosu 1974)  
 extremely clever yourself still believe you  
 ‘You fancy yourself real clever!’  
 b. *Tare te mai crezi tu [-- deștept]!*

(44) [<sub>DegP</sub> tare<sub>j</sub> [<sub>Deg'</sub> Deg [<sub>XP</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> deștept] [<sub>X'</sub> X [<sub>AP</sub> t<sub>j</sub>]]]]]]] (Predicate Fronting)

### 5. Predicate displacement within the Dutch adjectival phrase

Having provided some evidence for the existence of predicate displacement within the adjectival system on the basis of Romanian, let us see whether there is evidence for predicate displacement within the Dutch adjectival system. Given Chomsky’s (2001:2) Uniformity Principle, which states that “In the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary, assume languages to be uniform, with variety restricted to easily detectable properties of utterances”, one would expect there to be instances of predicate movement in the Dutch adjectival projection. Even though I know of no examples in which the preposition-like element *van* intervenes between the degree word and the gradable adjective, there are examples in which a linking element *-s* appears in between the two constituents. In Royen (1948: 342), the following examples are given from late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Dutch.

- (45) a. ...alhoewel dat [dekselkaters lastig] aan me vallen zal  
 ...although that cover+tom-cat-s difficult to me fall will  
 ‘...although that will be deucedly difficult for me’  
 b. Ben jij die jongendie [zobliksems mooi] kan teekenen?  
 Are you that boy who so lightning-s beautifully can draw  
 ‘Are you that boy who can draw so bloody/devilsihly well?’  
 c. Ja die Marianne weet [weerga’s handig] het vuurtje te stoken  
 Yes that Marianne knows lightning-s handy the fire to make  
 ‘Yes, Marianne knows devilishly well how to make a fire.’  
 d. Het was [verdraaid lekker]  
 It was distorted/s tasty  
 ‘It was deucedly tasty.’

But also in present-day Dutch we run into adjectival expressions like: *sterven-s benauwd* (die-s sultry; ‘very sultry’), *dood-s bang* (death-s afraid, ‘very afraid’), *hond-s brutaal* (dog-s impudent; ‘very impudent’), *bliksem-s goed* (thunder-s good; ‘very well’), *mieter-s lastig* (damned-s difficult; ‘very difficult’), *deksel-s mooi* (deuced-s beautiful; ‘very beautiful’), *drommel-s heet* (deuced-s hot; ‘very hot’), *duivel-s aardig* (devil-s kind; ‘very kind’), *hel-s koud* (hell-s cold; ‘very cold’).

The examples in (45) are all cases in which the adjective phrase has a non-attributive function. But, of course, the pattern is also found with attributive adjective phrases:

- (46) a. een bliksems mooie meid  
       a lightning-s pretty girl  
       ‘an extremely pretty girl’  
    b. een deksels brutale jongen  
       a deaced-s impudent boy  
       ‘an extremely impudent boy’

In all of these expressions, the degree denoting element and the gradable adjective are separated from each other by an intervening ‘linking’ element *-s*. In traditional grammar, this *-s* is generally interpreted as an “adjectivalization” suffix, i.e. a derivational suffix that turns a nominal-category into an adjectival one; e.g. attachment of the derivational suffix  $[_A -s]$  to the noun *bliksem* gives the derived word:  $[_A [_N \textit{bliksem}]-s]$ . In view of the parallelism with the Romanian adjectival construction in (31), I will reinterpret *-s* as a nominal copula, i.e. the surface reflex of the presence of F in predicate inversion environments. The derived structure then looks as follows:

- (47)  $[_{FP} \textit{bliksem}_j [_F F (= -s) +X_i [_{XP} \textit{mooi} [_X' t_i [_{AP} t_j]]]]]$   
       lightning        -s                pretty                                (‘very pretty’)

Interestingly, expressions like *honds brutaal* (dog-s impudent), *doods bang* (death-s afraid), *hels koud* (hell-s cold) and *bliksems mooi* (lightning-s pretty) have a sort of ‘simili’ interpretation: the meaning of a phrase like *honds brutaal* can be paraphrased as: ‘impudent to degree d, where d is like a dog’. The simili-expression expresses a high degree. Also in

Romanian, high degree can be expressed by a simili-expression. As shown in (48a), the nominal copula *de* is absent when the simili-expression occupies a post-adjectival position. When it precedes, the element *de* surfaces:

- (48) a. Pădurea e [deasă ca peria] (Mallinson 1986)  
 wood-det be-3.sg thick-fem.sg as brush-det  
 ‘The woods are as thick as a brush.’  
 b. Pădurea e [ca peria de deasă]

Having argued that *-s* is a nominal copula, let us next turn to the status of *-e* in contexts of proleptic agreement. One might hypothesize that *-e* is an allomorph of the nominal copula. This hypothesis is incorrect, however, given the existence of adjectival constructions in which the two bound morphemes cooccur (where *-e* is optionally present). This is illustrated in (49):

- (49) a. een [bliksem-s(-e) mooie] meid  
 a lightning-s(-e) pretty girl  
 b . een [donder-s(-e) mooie] meid  
 a thunder-s(-e) pretty girl  
 c. een [verrekken-s(-e) dure] fiets  
 a damned-s(-e) expensive bike  
 d. een [godverdomme-s(-e)] dure fiets  
 a goddamned-s(-e) expensive bike

How to interpret *-e* on the degree word in these examples? A comparison with variants (‘allophrases’) of the *N of N* construction may help us here. Consider the following two examples (50):

- (50) a. die duivel van ’n jongen (Standard-Dutch)  
 that devil of a boy  
 b. die duivel-s-e jongen  
 that devil-s-e boy

- (51) a. zo'n dorie van n kwoajong (dialect of Groningen: Ter Laan 1953:109)  
 sucha damnedof a rascal  
 'such a jerk of a boy'
- b. zo'n dorieze kwoajong  
 such a damned-s-e rascal  
 'such a jerk of a boy'

In Bennis, Corver and Den Dikken (1998) (henceforth BCD), the indefinite article preceding the second noun in the *N of N*-construction (see 'n in (50a) and n in (51a)) is analyzed as a so-called spurious indefinite article. Its spurious nature relates to the fact that it does not seem to belong to any element within the noun phrase. The normal indefinite article 'n must be followed by a singular indefinite article (e.g. 'n boek(\*-en); a book(\*-s)). The spurious indefinite article 'n can be followed by a noun that typically does not combine with an indefinite article, e.g. a proper name, as in: *die duivel van 'n Jan* (that devil of a Jan; 'that devillish Jan'). As shown by an example like *die duivels van 'n jongens* (those devils of a boys), where a plural noun both follows and precedes the article 'n, the spurious article does not belong either to the preceding noun. In short, the indefinite article 'n can rightfully be called spurious in its behavior. The question, of course, arises in what structural position the spurious article finds its origin? BCD propose that spurious 'n is the head (X) of the small clause that configurationally defines the predicational relationship between the small clause subject and the small clause predicate. Crucially, the availability of spurious 'n is dependent on DP-internal predication, represented as a small clause headed by 'n. Thus, (50a) has the following derived structure:

- (52) [<sub>DP</sub> die [<sub>FP</sub> *duivel*<sub>j</sub> [<sub>F'</sub> F (= van)+X<sub>i</sub> (= 'n) [<sub>XP</sub> jongen [<sub>X'</sub> t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub>]]]]]]  
 'that devil of a boy'

Let us now turn to the structures in (50b) and (51b). Following the analysis presented earlier, I take *-s* to be the bound-morphemic copula that surfaces in contexts of predicate inversion. Thus, *-s* is the equivalent of *van* in (50a) and (51a). Now what about *-e*? Adopting the view of cross-constructural parallelism of these meaning-related expressions, I propose that, quite parallel to spurious 'n, the attributive inflectional morpheme *-e* is the Small Clause head X. This analysis leads us to the following representation of an example like (50b):

(53) [<sub>DP</sub> die [<sub>FP</sub> *duivel*<sub>i</sub> [<sub>F</sub> F (= -s) +X<sub>j</sub> (= -e) [<sub>XP</sub> jongen [<sub>X'</sub> t<sub>j</sub> t<sub>i</sub> ]]]]]]

Note that this analysis of attributive adjectival modification arguably extends to expressions like *een mooi-e auto* (a beautiful-AGR car): the AP *mooi* starts out as a DP-internal predicate. The predication relation is configurationally defined in terms of a small clause XP, headed by the adjectival inflection *-e*. The subject of XP, i.e. *auto*, stands in a Spec-head relation with the attributive inflection *-e*. The prenominal occurrence of the attributive inflection results from application of predicate displacement to the AP *mooi*.

(54) [<sub>DP</sub> een [<sub>FP</sub> *mooi*<sub>i</sub> [<sub>F</sub> F (= -∅) +X<sub>j</sub> (= -e) [<sub>XP</sub> auto [<sub>X'</sub> t<sub>j</sub> t<sub>i</sub> ]]]]]]

Within XP, the inflectional head *-e*, which just like spurious N mediates between the subject NP (*auto*) and the predicate (i.e. *mooi*), and the subject NP in Spec,XP enter into an agreement relation.

Note that this analysis of the DP-internal placement of attributive APs is reminiscent of Kayne's (1994) analysis of strings like *the yellow book* in (55):

(55) [<sub>DP</sub> the [<sub>CP</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> yellow<sub>j</sub>] [<sub>C</sub><sup>0</sup> [<sub>IP</sub> [<sub>livre</sub>] [<sub>I</sub><sup>0</sup> [e]<sub>j</sub> ]]]]]]

In this representation, CP is the complement of D. As indicated, the attributive adjectival phrase (here represented as XP) originates in the predicate position and is moved to a position (viz. Spec,CP) preceding the subject NP. In short, pronominal APs are not (E-)merged in a pronominal position; rather, they occupy a position derived by displacement (i.e. I-merge).<sup>5</sup>

## 6. Proleptic agreement

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<sup>5</sup> I have no explanation for why the AP, generally, does not remain in post-nominal position (cf. also Kayne 1994: 100). There are certain more archaic examples, in which the AP can remain in postnominal position in Dutch: e.g. *een ridder koen* (a knight brave) versus *een koene ridder* (a brave-AGR knight). Interestingly, attributive inflection only appears on the adjective in prenominal position.

Now that we have provided support for the application of (degree-)predicate displacement within the Dutch adjectival system, we will turn again to the instances of proleptic agreement as found in (9) — the pattern featuring *-e* — and (49) — the pattern featuring *-s+-e*. Let's first consider the latter pattern, e.g. *een [vreselijk(-e) mooi-e] fiets* (an extreme-AGR beautiful-AGR bike; 'an extremely beautiful bike'). Since there is no nominal copula (*-s*) present in this structure, I will take predicate displacement to be of the A-bar movement type here (i.e. Predicate Fronting; cf. the analysis of *tare deştept* in (44)). This means that the degree word is fronted to a left peripheral A-bar position (i.e. an edge position) within the extended adjectival projection. Schematically:

(56) [<sub>DegP</sub> vreselijk<sub>j</sub> [<sub>Deg'</sub> -e<sub>j</sub> [<sub>XP</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> moo*i*] [<sub>X'</sub> t<sub>j</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> t<sub>j</sub>]]]]]]]

As indicated, I take *-e* to be a small clause head (X) that has undergone head movement to Deg. This head movement operation is quite similar to the head movement of spurious 'n to D within the exclamative DP in (37). More in general, this head movement operation may be interpreted as being parallel to V-to-C movement operations in clausal environments in which operator movement (e.g. wh-movement, focus fronting) has applied. Just like with the exclamative DP in (37), I will assume that the fronted predicate in (56) receives a “discourse related” meaning property in [Spec,DegP]. In view of its affective/emphatic (i.e. focalized) force (cf. Verdenius 1939) — a discourse property compatible with the semantic property of (extremely) high degree — I will characterize the force feature as [+FOCUS]. Fronting of the focalized high degree adverb to the Spec-position of Deg<sub>[+foc]</sub> places the degree adverb in the right structural configuration.

(57) [<sub>DegP</sub> vreselijk<sub>j</sub> [<sub>Deg'</sub> [<sub>Deg[+FOC]</sub> -e<sub>j</sub>] [<sub>XP</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> moo*i*] [<sub>X'</sub> t<sub>j</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> t<sub>j</sub>]]]]]]]

As shown by the representation in (57), the inflectional element *-e* occupies a position in the left periphery of the extended adjectival projection, viz. the head of DegP. I would like to propose now that being in a left peripheral (i.e. edge position), *-e* (the probe) is able to enter into an agreement relation with the noun (the goal). The uninterpretable  $\phi$ -features associated with *-e* (i.e. the proleptic inflection) are deleted under matching with the interpretable  $\phi$ -features of the noun. This possibility of having an agreement relationship between the edge (in our case an “edge head”) of a phrase XP and another element is in line with Chomsky's (2000) Phase-impenetrability condition, which informally states that the spec-position and the head position of

some phrase XP are accessible for entering into a dependency relation with some element outside of XP. Proleptic agreement within the Dutch attributive adjectival system is an empirical domain which further substantiates the accessibility of the edge of phrases.<sup>6</sup> Importantly, proleptic agreement is not an imperfection of natural language. It is a phenomenon which is compatible with the design features of human language

Let us now turn to the analysis of proleptic agreement in a string like *een bliksem-s(-e) mooie meid* in (49a). In line with what I have stated above, I will take *-e* to be a mediating small clause (inflectional) head and *-s* to be the nominal copula that shows up in contexts of Predicate Inversion. I will assume that the derived structure looks as follows:

(57) [<sub>DegP</sub> bliksem<sub>j</sub> [<sub>Deg'</sub> [-s+-e]<sub>k</sub> [<sub>FP</sub> t'<sub>j</sub> [<sub>F'</sub> t<sub>k</sub> [<sub>XP</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> moo*i*] [<sub>X'</sub> t<sub>i</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> t<sub>j</sub>]]]]]]]]]

According to this analysis, *bliksem* starts out as a predicate in the complement position of X. It then undergoes Predicate Inversion to [<sub>Spec,FP</sub>], after the small clause head *-e* has been raised to F (for reasons of domain extension). The complex head F+X (i.e. *-s-e*) moves on to Deg, into whose Spec position the focalized degree item *bliksem* lands after application of Predicate Fronting. Thus, the string *bliksemse mooie* is characterized by the application of two types of predicate displacement: first Predicate Inversion (i.e. movement to [<sub>Spec,FP</sub>]), and then Predicate Fronting (i.e. movement to [<sub>Spec,DegP</sub>]). We saw this same sequence of predicate displacement operations within the Romanian phrase *cît de frumoasă* in (42). The inflectional element *-e*, which is part of the complex head *[-s+-e]*, occupies a left peripheral position within DegP. Being in this “edge head” position, *-e* (a probe) is able to enter into an agreement relationship with the noun.

Thus far, I have just considered the structure of the attributive adjectival phrase. When these adjectival phrases are placed in their nominal environments (i.e. *een vreselijke mooie fiets*; *een bliksemse mooie meid*), we get the following structures (irrelevant details omitted):

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<sup>6</sup> The accessibility of edge-positions for agreement and case licensing relations has also been pointed out by Kayne, among others in connection with such data as (i) and (ii):

- (i) Qui<sub>i</sub> crois-tu [<sub>CP</sub> t'<sub>i</sub> [<sub>C'</sub> C [<sub>t<sub>i</sub> être venu</sub>]] ?
- (ii) the people [<sub>CP</sub> who Clark think [<sub>CP</sub> t'<sub>i</sub> [<sub>C'</sub> C [<sub>t<sub>i</sub> are in the garden</sub>]]]]

In (i), movement of *qui* through [<sub>Spec,CP</sub>] makes it accessible to accusative case assignment by the matrix verb. In (ii), the wh-phrase *who* can enter into an agreement relationship with the finite verb (*think*) of the higher clause after it has been moved through Spec,CP. For further discussion, see Kayne 2000.

(58) [DP een [FP [DegP vreselijk<sub>j</sub> [Deg' -e<sub>j</sub> [XP [AP mooi] [X' t<sub>j</sub> [AP t<sub>j</sub>]]]]]]]<sub>i</sub> [F' -e<sub>j</sub> [XP auto [X' t<sub>j</sub> t<sub>i</sub>]]]]

(59) [DP een [FP [DegP bliksem<sub>j</sub> [Deg' [-s-e]<sub>j</sub> [XP [AP mooi] [X' t<sub>j</sub> [AP t<sub>j</sub>]]]]]]]<sub>i</sub> [F' -e<sub>j</sub> [XP meid [X' t<sub>j</sub> t<sub>i</sub>]]]]

I will now briefly return to one of the properties of proleptic agreement that was mentioned in section 2, viz. the locality of proleptic agreement (cf. (15)), leaving the PP-intervention effect here as an observation (though see Corver 1997). Let's start with the well-formed pattern *een [hele erg dure] fiets* in (15c), in which a proleptic inflectional feature appears both on the high degree adverb *erg* and on the high degree adverb *heel*. Suppose that *hele* is a modifier of *erge* and *hele erge*, in turn, is a modifier of *dure*. Schematically: *[[hel-e erg-e] dure]*. The phrase *hele erg* is derived by Predicate fronting along the lines in (60):

(60) [DegP heel]<sub>j</sub> [Deg' [Deg[+FOC] -e<sub>j</sub>] [XP [AP erg] [X' t<sub>j</sub> [AP t<sub>j</sub>]]]]]

This complex degree-modifier (i.e. *hele erg*) itself also undergoes Predicate Fronting:

(61) [DegP [DegP hele erg]<sub>k</sub> [Deg' [Deg[+FOC] -e<sub>j</sub>] [XP [AP duur] [X' t<sub>j</sub> [AP t<sub>j</sub>]]]]]]]

This complex adjective phrase enters into an agreement relation with the noun. What is important for us is how the two degree adverbs (i.e. *hele* and *hele erge*) enter into an agreement relationship with the noun. The *-e* on *heel erg* is in the edge head position of the highest DegP; as such it is accessible for entering into an agreement relation with the noun. What about the proleptic inflection on the more deeply embedded *hele*? I will assume that the edge of an edge (e.g. an edge-head (*-e*) of an edge-Spec (*hele erg*)) is also accessible for entering into an agreement relationship with the noun. Finally, what about the ill-formedness of (15d) (i.e. *\*een [hele erg dure] fiets*)? I will tentatively assume that bare degree adverbs like *erg* (i.e. those which do not have a proleptic inflection attached to them) have not moved to the left peripheral A-bar position via Predicate Fronting, but rather have been moved via Predicate Inversion to a lower spec-position within the extended adjectival projection (suppose [Spec,FP]). If the DegP *hele erg* does not occupy the spec-position of the

dominating DegP, the proleptic inflection on *hele* is not part of a true edge constituent. As such, it won't be able to enter into an agreement relationship with the noun *fiets*.

### 7. -e in non-agreeing contexts

At the end of this paper, I should point out that in certain adjectival contexts a morpheme *-e* can appear on degree adverbs even though the adjective itself does not bear the inflection *-e*. Some examples are given in (62):

- (62) a. een verdomd-e leuk huis  
      a   damned-e nice house  
      b. een verrekt-e leuk huis  
      a   damned-e nice house

This same phenomenon is found in predicative contexts, where in Dutch the adjectival head never displays overt agreement (i.e. *-e*) with the subject-noun phrase:

- (63) a. Die auto is [verdomd-eduur]  
      That car is damned-e expensive  
      b. Dat meisje is [verrekt-e aardig]  
      That girl is damned-e nice

It should be noted that this phenomenon is restricted: many degree adverbs that allow proleptic *-e* in attributive adjectival contexts do not permit *-e* in structural contexts like (62) and (63). Compare, for example, (64) with (62)-(63):

- (64) a. Die auto is [erg(\*-e)/ongelofelijk(\*-e) leuk]  
      That car is very(-e)/unbelievable(-e) nice  
      ‘That car is very/unbelievably nice.’  
      b. een [erg(\*-e)/ongelofelijk(\*-e) leuk] huis  
      a   very(-e)/unbelievable(-e) nice house  
      ‘a very/unbelievably nice house.’

The question arises how to interpret this *-e*. As noted in Verdenius (1939), this *-e* also has the meaning property that it designates emphatic/affective force. I will tentatively assume that this *-e*, which is homophonous with the proleptic inflection *-e*, is a bound-morphemic Deg-head which bears the (LF-)interpretable property [+emphatic/affective]. Being LF-interpretable, this *-e* does not enter into an agreement relationship with a noun which ‘checks off’ uninterpretable features. Thus, the degree degree adverb undergoes Predicate Fronting to the Spec position of the Degree head *-e*. Schematically:

(65) [<sub>DegP</sub> verdomd<sub>j</sub> [<sub>Deg'</sub> *-e*<sub>[+EMPH]</sub> [<sub>XP</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> duur] [<sub>X'</sub> X [<sub>AP</sub> t<sub>j</sub>]]]]]]

## 8. Conclusion

This article started with Chomsky’s statement that one may explore the perfection of the language system by means of the quest for potential “imperfections” of language, i.e. properties that language should not have. In this article, I have investigated a property of language that at first sight seems to be highly imperfect, viz. the property of proleptic agreement. Although not all dimensions (e.g. the cross-linguistic aspect, and the PP-intervention effect) of this property of human language have been examined in this paper, I hope to have shown that proleptic agreement is what Chomsky calls an *apparent* imperfection. It is a property of natural language that satisfies the design specifications of human language.

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