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On the Morphology of Proverbs in Afrikaans and Dutch

Abstract

Afrikaans, being very closely related to Dutch, inherited from Dutch not only almost all its vocabulary, but also numerous phraseologisms and proverbs. Then, due to the process of deflection, its morphological system was radically simplified. The very paper, applying a morphology-oriented research perspective, discusses the way in which Afrikaans proverbs differ from Dutch proverbs. The research material of the study is based upon Anton F. Prinsloo's *Spreekwoorde en waar hulle vandaan kom* (Kaapstad 2005). This dictionary was chosen to conduct the study because of the fact that it contains a representative collection of proverbs and phraseologisms of the contemporary Afrikaans language. The research under discussion is limited to Afrikaans adages that derive from Dutch. The method of the analysis is a comparative one. Afrikaans proverbs are compared with their Dutch equivalents.

Keywords: Afrikaans proverbs, Dutch proverbs, morphology, deflection, Anton F. Prinsloo

1.

Afrikaans – which is very closely related to Dutch – inherited from Dutch not only almost all its vocabulary, but also numerous phraseologisms and proverbs. Then, as a result of the process of deflection, its morphological system was very much simplified. The present paper discusses how Afrikaans proverbs differ, morphologically speaking, from their Dutch equivalents from which they derive. The text corpus upon which the analysis is based has been taken from Anton F. Prinsloo's *Spreekwoorde en waar hulle vandaan kom* (Kaapstad, 2005)¹. The reason for selecting this particular dictionary was the

1 A.F. Prinsloo, *Spreekwoorde en waar hulle vandaan kom*, Kaapstad 2005.

fact of its containing a representative collection of about 8000 contemporary Afrikaans proverbs and phraseologisms. The analysis concerns only these Afrikaans adagia which derive from Dutch. The applied method is based on the eight-language-proverb dictionary (*Van Dale Spreekwoordenboek*) compiled by H. L. Cox² and regards comparing Afrikaans proverbs with their Dutch equivalents. Morphological differences between Dutch proverbs and deriving from them Afrikaans adagia concern all inflected parts of speech which one can find in the adagia under scrutiny. For the sake of the transparency of the paper it is going to refer only to the differences between articles, nouns and verbs.

2. Differences between Afrikaans and Dutch proverbs regarding the articles

2.1.

While comparing the Afrikaans proverb, e.g.: *Die hemp is nader as die rok*, deriving from Dutch: *Het hemd is nader dan de rok* [“The smock is nearer than the petticoat.”], one can easily notice that both Dutch definite articles *de* and *het* are substituted in Afrikaans by the definite article *die*. The contemporary Dutch language has two definite articles in the singular number: *de* for the common gender, and *het* for the neuter gender; in the plural number Dutch has only one definite article *de*, which is taken by all nouns regardless of their gender. One has to add that this substitution of articles *de* and *het* and the article *die* regards all Afrikaans proverbs:

Die appel val niet ver van die boom.

De appel valt niet ver van de boom.

[The apple never falls far from the tree].

Die gees is gewillig, maar die vleis is swak.

De geest is gewillig, maar het vlees is zwak.

[The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak].

The difference is particularly visible when one considers Afrikaans nouns the equivalents of which take the definite article *het* in Dutch, e.g.:

Uit die oog, uit die hart.

Uit het oog, uit het hart.

[Far from the eye, far from the heart].

Die doel heilig die middele.

Het doel heiligt de middelen.

[The end justifies the means].

The above-presented substitution of the definite articles *de* and *het* by the article *die* can be regarded as a simplification of Afrikaans.

2 H.L. Cox, *Van Dale Spreekwoordenboek: Nederlands, Fries, Afrikaans, Engels, Duits, Frans, Spaans, Latijn*, Utrecht, Antwerpen 2000.

2.2.

In the contemporary Dutch there is quite a number of archaic forms of the definite article, like, e.g.: *der*, *des*, *den* and *'s*³. These forms can still be found in Dutch proverbs and phraseologisms. It is going to be presented what has happened to them in their Afrikaans equivalents:

2.2.1.

die tand(e) van die tijd,

de tand des tijds,

[tooth of time; the ravages of time]

die dag van die Here,

de dag des Heren

[the day of the Lord]

Kinders is 'n seen van die Here, maar hulle hou die mot(ten) uit die kleren.

Kinderen zijn een zegen des Heren, maar ze houden de noppen van de kleren.

[Children are Lord's blessings but they are wearing their clothes out].

[Wife and children are bills of charges].

Des is an archaic Dutch form of the genitive of the definite article of the masculine gender. In its Afrikaans proverb equivalent forms the above form was substituted by the following construct: the preposition *van* and the definite article *die*.

2.2.2.

'n Mens se wil is 'n mens se lewe.

's Menschen zin is 's menschen leven.

[All happiness is in the mind].

's is the remnant form of the archaic Dutch genitive form of the definite article of the masculine gender. In its Afrikaans equivalent form it was substituted by the construction of the type *Jan se boek*. However in the research material under investigation there is only one case of such a construction.

2.2.3.

Lands wys, lands eer.

's Lands wijs, 's lands eer.

[So many countries, so many customs].

In the above case *'s* is a remnant of an archaic Dutch form of the definite article of the neuter gender. This *'s* is omitted in its Afrikaans proverb equivalent; nevertheless the archaic genitive ending *-s* of the noun is retained.

2.2.4.

Versichtigheid is die moeder van die wysheid.

Voorzichtigheid is de moeder der wijsheid.

3 W. Haeseryn et al., *Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkunst*, deel 1, Groningen, Deurne 1997, p. 187.

[± Discretion is the better part of valour.]

Die vrese van die Here is die beginsel van die wijsheid.

De vrese des Heren is het beginsel der wijsheid.

[The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.]

In the above examples *der* is the archaic Dutch genitive form of the definite article in the feminine gender for the singular number which in its Afrikaans proverb equivalents was substituted by the construction *van die*.

2.2.5.

In die land van die blindes is eenoog koning.

In 't land der blinden is éénoog koning.

[In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.]

Baie honden is 'n haas se dood.

Vele honden zijn der hazen dood.

[Many dogs may easily worry one hare.]

In the above examples *der* is the archaic Dutch genitive form of the plural number which in its Afrikaans proverb equivalents was substituted by the construction *Jan se boek* or *van die*.

2.3.

The contemporary Dutch language has one indefinite article *een* which in its Afrikaans phraseologisms and proverb equivalents is substituted by the indefinite article *'n*, for instance:

Al dra 'n aap 'n goue ring, hy is en bly 'n lelijke ding.

Al draagt een aap een gouden ring, het is en blijft een lelijk ding.

[An ape 's an ape, a varlet 's a varlet, though they be clad in silk and scarlet].

'n Vrou dra meer uit met 'n lepel as wat 'n man inbring met 'n skepel.

De vrouw draagt meer uit met een lepel dan een man inbrengt met een schepel.

[A thriftless wife is a husband's undoing.]

It needs to be underlined that the indefinite article *'n* in Afrikaans and the Dutch indefinite article *een* are pronounced in the same way, so in this case we face just the difference in spelling.

3. Differences between Afrikaans and Dutch proverbs as regards nouns

At the beginning we discuss differences regarding noun allomorphs, and then differences we concern the way in which the plural number of nouns is created.

3.1. Differences regarding noun allomorphs

3.1.1.

Eendrag maak mag.

Eendracht maakt macht, tweedracht breekt kracht.

[United we stand, divided we fall].

Aan die vrug word die boom geken.

Aan de vruchten kent men de boom.

[A tree is known by its fruit].

In the above examples Dutch nouns: *eendracht* “unity,” *macht* “strength,” *vrucht* “fruit” retain [t] in the final position in the singular number. In Afrikaans nouns such as: *eendrag* “unity,” *mag* “strength,” *vrug* “fruit” one can observe the apocope of [t] in the singular number. However, in the plural number [t] can be observed again in such words as, e.g.: *magte*, *vrugte*. Therefore those nouns have two allomorphs: with the apocope [t], and without the apocope [t]. There is no plural number of the noun *eendrag* in Afrikaans.

3.1.2.

Ná reën kom sonskyn.

Na regen komt zonneshijn.

[There’s always sunshine after rain].

Een voël in die hand is beter as tien in die lug.

Eén vogel in de hand is beter dan tien in de lucht.

[± A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush].

In the above cases in the Dutch nouns *regen* “rain,” *voël* “bird” there is no syncope of the intervocalic [ɣ]. In the corresponding Afrikaans nouns *reën* “rain,” *voël* “bird,” one can observe the syncope of the intervocalic [x]. Therefore one can note that Afrikaans nouns *reën* “rain,” *voël* “bird,” have shorter allomorphs than their Dutch nouns *regen*, *voël*.

3.1.3.

Iemand uit die saal lig.

Iemand uit het zadel lichten.

[To knock somebody off their perch].

Iemand oor die skouer aan kyk.

Iemand over die schouder aanzien.

[Give someone the cold shoulder].

In the above Dutch examples in the nouns *zadel* “saddle,” *schouder* “shoulder,” there is no syncope of the intervocalic [d]. In the corresponding Afrikaans nouns *saal* “saddle,” *skouer* “shoulder,” one can observe the syncope of the intervocalic [d]. Therefore Afrikaans nouns *saal* “saddle,” and *skouer* “shoulder” have shorter allomorphs than their corresponding Dutch nouns *zadel* and *schouder*.

3.2. Differences regarding the formation of the plural number

On the basis of the research material one can conclude that there are the following differences regarding the formation of the plural number:

3.2.1.

Nuwe here, nuwe wette.

Nieuwe heeren, nieuwe wetten

[New masters, new laws.]

Soveel hoofde, soveel sinne.
 Zoveel hoofden, zoveel zinnen
 [So many men, so many opinions.]

In the abovementioned examples, Dutch nouns *heer* “master,” *wet* “law,” *hoofd* “head,” *zin* “sense,” “mind”, form the plural number with the use of the ending *-en*, and their Afrikaans equivalents by the use of the ending *-e*. To be exact, one has to mention that the ending *-en* is usually pronounced in Dutch as [ə]. Therefore also in this case the only difference we have is the difference in spelling.

3.2.2.

Ander tye, ander sedes.
 Andere tijden, andere zeden.
 [Other times, other manners.]
 Nie alle veranderings is verbeterings nie.
 Alle verandering is geen verbetering
 [All changes are not for the better.]

In the abovementioned examples, such Dutch nouns as: *zede* “custom,” *verandering* “change,” *verbetering* “improvement” for the formation of the plural number use the ending *-en*, and their Afrikaans equivalents use the ending *-s*. Therefore the difference between Afrikaans and Dutch concerns a different way of joining lexical and grammatical morphemes: *-en* and *-s*.

3.2.3.

Die henne wat die meeste kekkel, lê nie die meeste eiers nie.
 De hennen die het meeste kakelen, leggen de meeste eieren niet.
 [The greatest talkers are always the least doers].
 Kinders is ‘n seën van die Here, maar hulle hou die mot(ten) uit die klere.
 Kinderen zijn een zegen des Heren, maar ze houden de noppen van de kleren.
 [Children are Lord’s blessing but they are wearing their clothes out].
 [± Wife and children are bills of charges].

In the abovementioned examples, such Dutch nouns as: *ei* “egg,” *kind* “child,” take *-eren* for the formation of the plural number, and their Afrikaans equivalents take the ending *-ers*. The difference between the two languages regards the fact that Afrikaans uses the grammatical lexem *-ers* which is unknown in Dutch.

4. Differences between Afrikaans and Dutch proverbs as regards verbs

4.1.

Soos boom val, bly hy lê.
 Zoals de boom valt, blijft hij liggen.
 [As a tree falls, so it shall lie.]
 Die mens wik, maar God beskik.
 De mens wikt, maar God beschikt.
 [Man proposes, God disposes.]

In the above examples Afrikaans verbs *val* “fall,” *bly* “remain,” *wik* “weigh” and *beskik* “dispose of” have no inflectional endings. The difference between Afrikaans and Dutch regards the deflection of the former one.

4.2.

Aan wie het, sal gegee word.
Die heeft, dien zal gegee word.
[Unto him who has shall be given].
Waar gekap word, waai spaanders.
Waar gehakt word, vallen spaanders.
[From chipping come chips].

In the abovementioned examples *participia perfecti* of Afrikaans verbs: *gee* “give,” and *kap* “chop,” are created in a regular way. A) There is no change in the root vowel. B) There is no additional participial ending *-t* or *-d*. The differences between Afrikaans and Dutch regards the changes as shown in A) and B); it is particularly explicit as concerns Afrikaans verbs the equivalents of which belong in Dutch to strong verbs (irregular), *gee* “give,” *meet* “measure,” e.g.:

Eens gegee, bly gegee.
Eens gegee, blijft gegee.
[A gift remains a gift.]
Met die maat waarmee jy meet, sal sy gemeet word.
Met de maat waarmee je meet, zul je gemeten worden.
[Measure for measure.]

It needs to be added that in a few cases Afrikaans participles retain Dutch root vowels, e.g.:

begin ‘begin’, *wen* ‘win’, *baar* ‘bear’:
Goed begonne is half gewonne.
Goed begonnen is half gewonnen.
[Well began, half done].
As jy vir die galg gebore is, sal jy nie deur ‘n koeël sterf nie.
Die gebore is voor de galg, verzuip niet.
[He that is born to be hanged, shall never be drowned].

4.3.

Als jy die dogter wil hê, moet jy eers na die moeder vry.
Wie de dochter trouwen wil, moet de moeder vrijen.
[He that would the daughter win, must with the mother first begin.]
Elkeen moet sy eie pakkie dra.
Iedereen moet zijn eigen pak naar de markt dragen.
[Everyone must bear their own burden.]

In the abovementioned examples Afrikaans infinitives such as: *hê* “have,” *vry* “neck,” *dra* “bear” are shortened to just one syllable. Their equivalent Dutch infinitives: *hebben*, *vrijen*, *dragen* are two-syllable words. The reduction of infinitives can be treated as a mode of simplification of Afrikaans.

5. Conclusions

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On the basis of the conducted analysis one can note that there are smaller or more significant differences between all Afrikaans and their equivalent Dutch proverbs and phraseologisms. The differences regard all inflected parts of speech. In the conducted analysis we have taken into consideration only the differences which concerned articles, nouns and verbs. It needs to be stressed that in the vast majority of the analyzed examples the differences are of a regular nature, therefore they are predictable.

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