

# The use of *gaan* + infinitive in narratives of older bilingual children of Moroccan and Turkish descent\*

Leonie Cornips  
Meertens Institute

## 1. Introduction

In this paper, I will focus on the use of the verbal cluster *gaan*+infinitive 'go' in Dutch jokes told by bilingual children aged between 6 and 13 years of Turkish and Moroccan descent. The children told these jokes at the so-called *Salaam Lombok*, a multicultural market which is held every year around September in the neighbourhood of Lombok/Transvaal in Utrecht. This neighbourhood is object of research within the TCULT-program (Cornips and Jongenburger 1999). The recordings took place in 1998 and the corpus is collected by all TCULT-researchers.

The Moroccan and Turkish children have told their jokes in Dutch or in their native language Berber and Turkish, respectively.<sup>1</sup> If we consider the Dutch jokes, it is striking that these bilingual children use the verbal cluster *gaan*+infinitive, as shown in (1), to a large extent (see Cornips t.a.):

- (1) Hij *ging* *springen* toen *ging* 't hij ook *proberen* toen...  
he GO-PAST jump-INF then GO-PAST it he too try-INF then  
hij *ging* op z'n kop *vallen*... [non-indigenous]  
he GO-PAST on his head fall-INF  
'He jumped, then he tried it too and then he fell on his head'

In standard Dutch the auxiliary *gaan* may express inchoative aspect 'is about to' and/or it has a future modal reading 'is going to' and/or it may express that the subject is moving in order to perform his action (*zich verplaatsen*), as shown in (2a) and (2b), respectively. In addition to *gaan*, the children also use the auxiliary *zullen* 'shall' to express future tense, as in (2c):

- (2) a. Hij *gaat* zwemmen  
 he goes swim-INF  
 'He is going to/is about to swim'
- b. Hij *gaat* zijn tas pakken  
 he goes his bag catch-INF  
 'He is moving in order to catch his bag'
- c. ik *zal* het vertellen [Turkish girl]  
 I shall it tell  
 'I will tell it'

Slightly more than half of the children produce *gaan*+infinitive in their jokes, namely 36 out of 69. Moroccan and Turkish children do not differ with respect to the use versus the non-use of *gaan*+infinitive. Further, the high frequency of *gaan*+infinitive is striking, in particular, the 36 children produce a total number of 86 tokens (see Cornips t.a. for more details). The transcript of their Dutch jokes counts 7,586 words. One recording of two adult women in Lombok/Transvaal speaking monolingual Dutch reveals that they only produce 10 tokens of *gaan* although their transcript counts 9,239 words. In addition, other recordings of native children of the same age who are telling jokes contain the verbal cluster *gaan*+infinitive to a far lesser extent.

In this paper, it is argued that the use of *gaan* is not part of an acquisition procedure to facilitate the acquisition of V2 in Dutch. Instead, it is argued that apart from the future modal reading and inchoative aspect the high frequency of *gaan* indicates that these older bilingual children produce it to denote an ongoing event. This assumption will be supported by the fact that the use of *gaan* goes hand-in-hand with predicates that from an aspectual point of view yield a temporal scale such that every sequence of a subevent does not denote a different point on a time-axis, that is to say, they do not inherently allow an endpoint. Subsequently, these predicates have aspectual properties such that they express continuation or duration of the event.

The structure of this paper is as follows: Section 2 addresses the question whether *gaan* acts like a dummy verb due to an acquisition procedure of Dutch as a second language; Section 3 deals with the aspectual restrictions on the verbal cluster *gaan*+infinitive and Section 4 offers a conclusion and remaining questions.

## 2. The use of *gaan* as an acquisition procedure?

According to Van Kampen (1997:49), the appearance of dummy verbs in monolingual Dutch child language such as *gaan* and *doen* 'do' is related to the acquisition of the V2 structure. In standard Dutch in the matrix clause the finite verb has undergone movement whereas in the embedded clause the finite verb remains in its base-

generated position where it follows its complement, as illustrated in (3a) and (3b), respectively:

- (3) a. Het kind *eet* een appel *t*<sub>i</sub>  
 the child eats an apple
- b. Het kind dat een appel *eet*  
 the child who an apple eats

According to the references cited in Van Kampen (1997:50), the acquisition of moving the finite lexical verb to the second position in the matrix clause is fairly early between 107 and 120 weeks. Before this period, the children already use modals and auxiliaries in this position. The insertion of dummy verbs such as *doen* 'do' and *gaan* 'go' takes place simultaneously when the V2 rule starts to apply to lexical finite verbs. The relation between V2 and the use of a dummy verb is established by the facts that in Dutch child language the insertion of *gaan* (i) is always absent in the embedded clause and (ii) disappears once the V2 rule is clearly established (cf. Van Kampen 1997).

From this, we may posit the hypothesis that the use of *gaan* such as in (1) can be considered as an acquisition or learning procedure of Dutch as a second language. In examining the data, no *gaan*+infinitives were found in embedded clauses, as in (4):

- (4) a. toen ging de meester kijken of iedereen zijn  
 then go the master look-INF if everyone his  
 haar...sch... afgeknipt hebt [non-indigenous]  
 hair cut-off has
- b. keek 'ie of 'ie het kon halen [Moroccan]  
 looked he if he it could make

The corpus, however, hardly contains embedded clauses. In this respect, nothing can be said about the possible asymmetrical distribution of *gaan* in matrix and embedded clauses since more conclusive data is needed. Suppose, however, that the children indeed do not use *gaan* in embedded clauses. There are strong arguments in favour of the assumption that this strategy, however, has nothing to do with the application of the V2 rule. First, the joke corpus has massive instances of V1 expressing successive actions in the narrative similar to the use of the adverb *en toen* 'and then', as presented above in (4b) (cf. Bennis t.a.). This 'narrative V1' indicates that the children master lexical verb movement in the matrix clauses. Second, as we will see in the following section, *gaan* is used in a very systematic way: that is, it is not simply used in all cases where overt movement of the verb is obligatory. Therefore, it is not very likely that the use of *gaan* indicates that these bilingual children fail to perform V2.

Let us now consider the data of the bilingual children in more detail. Strikingly, in contrast to the frequent use of *gaan*, the corpus shows that the children produce a great range of auxiliaries in Dutch. Some examples are presented in (5) through (8):

Modal auxiliaries *kan* 'can', *mag* 'may', *moet* 'must', *wil* 'want', and *laat* 'let'

- (5) a. *Mag ik een andere vertellen?* [non-indigenous]  
 may I an other tell-INF  
 'May I tell an other (joke)?'  
 b. *Je moet eerst nog shampoo doen* [Yunis, Moroccan, 6 yrs]  
 you must first shampoo do-INF

Aspectual auxiliaries *heeft* 'have' and *is* 'is':

- (6) a. *En krokodil kwam vogeltjes tegen die heeft 'ie opgegeten* [Moroccan]  
 'and the crocodile encountered little birds, he has eaten them'  
 b. *Ze is in de sloot gevallen* [non-indigenous]  
 she is in the ditch fallen-PC  
 'She has fallen in the ditch'

Copula *is* 'is' + N/V/A/P predicate

- (7) *Was de Nederlander bang* [Samir, Moroccan]  
 'Was the Dutch man afraid'

Locational, aspectual auxiliaries + to infinitive; only *zit* 'sit':

- (8) *Hij zat voetbal te kijken* [non-indigenous]  
 he sat football to watch-INF  
 'He is watching football'

### 3. The use of *gaan* and aspectual restrictions

It is claimed that the high frequency of the verbal cluster *gaan*+infinitive indicates that in this narrative corpus the bilingual children may use it to express an ongoing event. This reading of *gaan*+infinitive can also be found in very young monolingual child Dutch. According to Jordans (1990: 1433–34) and Van Kampen (1997: 46), *gaan* may be analysed as a grammatical aspectual structure, i.e. it is a progressive structure expressing an ongoing activity, as illustrated in (9a) and (9b), respectively:

- (9) a. *We gaan allemaal ete* (30;1)  
 we go all eat-INF  
 'We are all eating'  
 b. *Poes ga slapen* (L. 3;6.9)  
 cat go sleep-INF  
 'The cat is sleeping'

In Lalleman (1986:75) too, it is argued that young Turkish children use the construction *gaan*+infinitive as an alternative expression of the present tense, that is to say "as an avoidance of the present tense".

The following fragment of discourse shows that the bilingual children also use *gaan*+infinitive in the case when the event, i.e. in this case one child is imitating the other has already started. This can not be accounted for if *gaan*+infinitive expresses only inchoative aspect or a future modal reading:<sup>4</sup>

Child 1: "Jantje was op school, en ze deed steeds broembroem" (non-indigenous)

Child 2 [verontwaardigd]: "Hebtie van mij. Hij naapt mij a. Hé, stop stop. Hij naapt, hij naapt mij a. Hij gaat me naäpen." (non-indigenous)

Child 1: 'Jantje was at school and she said increasingly broembroem'

Child 2 [indignant]: 'he has it (the joke) from me, he is imitating me, stop stop he is imitating me, 'he goes me imitate-INF''

#### 3.1 Transitive predicates

Another source of evidence in support of the assumption that the older bilingual children may produce the cluster *gaan*+infinitive as an expression of an ongoing event comes from the aspectual restrictions on these predicates. I will show that the use of *gaan* goes hand-in-hand with predicates having aspectual properties such that they express continuation or duration of the event. To this end, let us consider the transitive constructions including *gaan*. Figure 1 reveals that 47 out of 86 tokens concern infinitives belonging to the transitive class of verbs of which only 32 contain a direct object:

| The object consists of:  | Total % |
|--|---------|
|  | N = 47  |
| mass, (bare) plural, collective noun                                 | 20 43%  |
| noun that is concrete, singular, countable, referential and definite | 5 11%   |
| no object present  | 15 32%  |
| pronoun  | 6 13%   |
| other (quote)  | 1 2%    |

Figure 1. *Gaan*-insertions and the type of direct object

Strikingly, the great majority of the direct objects (20 out of 47 (43%)) consists of nouns that determine the aspectual properties of the VP such that the object is not able to measure out the event. Hence, the direct objects consist of mass nouns, collective nouns, bare singulars and plural nouns. First, the direct object is a mass noun, such as *bier* 'beer' or a collective noun such as *politie* 'police' and *aardrijks-*

*kunde* 'geographics' or a non-concrete noun such as *nee* 'no' in (10a), (10b, c) and (10d), respectively:

- (10) a. Marokkaan *ging bier, brie halen* [non-indigenous]  
 Moroccan went beer fetch-INF  
 b. Toen *ging (...) ging die politie bellen* [Halit: Turk]  
 then went went he police call-INF  
 c. Jantje en Jip *gingen aardrijkskunde doen* en òh [Turk]  
 Jantje and Jip went geographics do-INF  
 d. En *ging tie nee zeggen* [Yunis, Moroccan]  
 and went he no say-INF

Furthermore, the direct object may consist of a bare singular or a bare plural, as illustrated in (11a) and (11b), respectively. And, the referent of the direct object may express an unspecified quantity, as shown in (11c). Note that both the construction in (10d) and in (11c) are unacceptable in Standard Dutch:

- (11) a. *Ging Jan banaan eten* [non-indigenous]  
 went Jan banana eat-INF  
 b. Toen *gingtie billen afvegen* [non-indigenous]  
 then went he bottom off-wipe-INF  
 c. En toen *ging hij Supermanfilm kijken* [non-indigenous]  
 and then went he Superman-movie watch-INF

It is assumed that all the objects in (10) and (11) do not have the status of real objects but they must be interpreted as part of the predicate, i.e. as a predicate modifier. Interestingly, De Hoop (1992) argues that if object NPs have to be interpreted as part of a one-place predicate, the phenomenon of object incorporation can be conceived as the final morphological realization of this interpretation. In this respect, the use of *gaan* signals that object incorporation has taken place. It is remarkable that in this use the bilingual children differ from adult speakers of Dutch in that they apply object incorporation more consistently and adapt the morphological form of the object to it more frequently. Hence, the constructions in (10b), and (11a, b) are acceptable in adult Dutch if the object is a full DP, such as *de politie* 'the police', *een banaan* 'a banana' and *zijn billen* 'his bottom', respectively. Obviously, the presence of *gaan* is linked to the aspectual properties of the predicate as a whole such that the object is not able to measure out the event. As a result, the predicates depict the event as atelic i.e. they express continuation or duration of the event.

By contrast, 5 out of 47 utterances (= 11%) involve predicates having a direct object that consists of a noun that is concrete, singular, countable, and definite, as shown in (12).<sup>2</sup> This means that in (12) the direct object is able to measure out the event. These constructions have the same (incorporation)-interpretation as in (10) and (11) but the objects have the correct definite form. Note that (12c) is ungrammatical in standard Dutch:

- (12) a. toen *ging Jantje zijn broek uittrekken* [non-indigenous]  
 then went Jantje his trousers off-take-INF  
 b. kom *ga de televisie uitdoen* [Harun, Turk]  
 come go the television out-turn-INF  
 c. Jantje *ging zijn vinger opsteken* [Demet, Turk]  
 Jantje went his finger raise-INF

However, given this assumption, we would expect that in the majority of cases *gaan* is absent in transitive predicates with objects that consist of nouns that are concrete, singular and countable as in (12). This expectation is borne out, as illustrated in (13). Surprisingly, the children now produce a concrete, singular and countable noun even when it is unacceptable in adult standard Dutch, as shown in (13a):

- (13) a. hij zag *een vijftwintig gulden* [Murad, Moroccan]  
 he saw a twenty-five guilder  
 b. toen raakte die *zijn kontje* aan [non-indigenous]  
 then touched he his bottom part  
 c. pakt 'ie *z'n zakmes* [Moroccan]  
 catches he his knife  
 d. toen vond Wietst vond Jantje *een knaak* [non-indigenous]  
 then found Wietst found Jantje a two guilders fifty  
 e. gooide die *de schil* weg [non-indigenous]  
 threw he the skin away

Finally, in the corpus the use of *gaan* may apply to infinitives belonging to the class of verbs that are optionally or more or less obligatorily transitive. 15 out of 47 tokens show that the object is absent (see Figure 1 in Section 3.1). By this composition an atelic reading emerges:

- (14) a. toen zei de meester... (...) *gingtie aaien* [non-indigenous]  
 then said the master (...) went he stroke-INF  
 b. ik *ga wel even uitvegen* [non-indigenous]  
 I go PART out-sweep-INF  
 c. ik *ga even drinken...* [non-indigenous]  
 I go for a moment drink-INF  
 d. ik *ga wel zelf zoeken* [non-indigenous]  
 I go PART by myself look-INF  
 e. *ga maar in je handen doen* [non-indigenous]  
 go PART in your hands do-INF

To summarise, the children apply object incorporation more consistently and adapt the morphological form of the object to it more frequently than is the case in adult Dutch. Further, the children prefer to leave out the direct object. The aspectual composition of these predicates yield an atelic event, that is to say, they do not inherently allow an endpoint but express the continuation or the duration of the event.

## 3.2 Intransitive predicates

More evidence is the fact that *gaan*+infinitive combines easily with infinitives belonging to the unergative class of verbs, as illustrated in (15) (22 out of 39 tokens of intransitive verbs, 56%). It is generally accepted that in Dutch unergative verbs forming the perfect tense with the auxiliary *hebben* denote an event that does not inherently allow an endpoint. All utterances such as in (15) with the exception of (15f) are acceptable in standard adult Dutch. Remarkably, the children use repetition of the infinitive in order to intensify the reading of the continuation of the event, as shown in (15d,e). Moreover, one child combines *gaan* with the two infinitives *blijven staan* (remain stand) that is unacceptable in Standard Dutch, illustrated in (15g). This utterance clearly expresses the duration of the event:

- (15) a. Jantje *ging poepen...* [non-indigenous]  
Jantje went (to have a) crap-INF
- b. Toen *gingtie werken* [non-indigenous]  
then went he work-INF
- c. Hij *ging springen* [non-indigenous]  
he went jump-INF
- d. *Ging Jantje weer lopen lopen* [non-indigenous]  
went Jantje again walk-INF walk-INF
- e. Toen *ging 'ie huilen huilen huilen* [Harun, Turk]  
then went he cry-INF cry-INF cry-INF
- f. Toen *ging hij gewoon even blijven staan* [non-indigenous]  
then went he just a moment remain-INF stand-INF

Furthermore, it is predicted that *gaan* will not occur with infinitives belonging to the unaccusative class of verbs since in general these verbs select *zijn* as their perfect auxiliary denoting perfective (resultative) aspect. However, 17 out of 39 tokens constitute counterexamples. The great majority of these tokens, namely 13 out of 17 (=76%) concerns the same lexical infinitive *vallen* 'fall'. Murat, a Turkish boy produces more than the half of these tokens, namely 7 out of 13. Informally, the frequent use of the verb *vallen* 'fall' is triggered by the point of a particular joke that is very favourite among the children. In addition, by his frequent use of the verbal cluster *gaan*+*vallen*-INF Murat does distinguish himself from the other children and, as a result, his data are not representative of the corpus. Besides the fact that this verbal cluster seems to be typical for Murat, the remaining data show that the type-token ratio of the combination of *gaan* + infinitive-UNACC is 4/17. It is obvious that *gaan* occurs only with a very restricted subset of possible lexical infinitives-UNACC, as illustrated in (16).<sup>3</sup> This is in striking contrast to the utterances *gaan*+infinitive-UNERG, as discussed above:

- (16) a. Toen *ging die wegrennen* [Halit, Turk]  
then went he away-RUN-INF

- b. hij *ging weer doorlopen* [non-indigenous]  
he went again walk-on-INF
- c. Toen *ging de politie komen* [Khalid, Moroccan]  
then went the police come-INF

With this in mind, we now go on to look at what happens to the other verbs that belong to the unaccusative class. It is predicted that in the majority of cases the children do not insert *gaan*, i.e. the utterances in (16) are counterexamples. And, indeed, this is the case. Some of the many examples are presented in (17):

- (17) a. toen *gleed de oma uit uit bananeschil* [Ümit, Turk]  
then slipped the grandmother PART banana-skin
- b. dan *kom ik weer terug* [non-indigenous]  
then come I again back
- c. en hij *viel van de boom* [non-indigenous]  
and he fell off the tree
- d. dus meester zei *hou maar op* [non-indigenous]  
thus master said stop (it) PART
- e. er *komt een geest uit* [non-indigenous]  
there comes a spirit out
- f. de volgende keer *viel portemonnee van haar oma* [non-indigenous]  
the next time fell purse of her grandmother

## 3.3 State verbs

Given the constraint on the aspectual nature of the predicates occurring with *gaan*, we would also expect that *gaan* does not combine with verbs denoting states. Hence, it is a common observation in the literature that stative verbs differ from eventive verbs in that the former lack implications of a passage of time. This expectation is borne out. Note that the use of *gaan* in the constructions in (18) will also lead to an ungrammatical result in Dutch:

- (18) a. ik *weet niet wat ik wil zeggen... o ik weet 'm* [Turk]  
I know not what I want say... o I know it
- b. ik *ken een hele mooie mop in het Marokkaans* [Moroccan]  
I know a very beautiful joke in Moroccan
- c. Jantje z'n vriendje *heette Homo* [non-indigenous]  
Jantje his friend was called Homo
- d. ze *stond niet op het lijstje* [non-indigenous]  
she stood 'was' not on the list
- e. hij *had geen geld* [Halit, Turk]  
he had no money

#### 4. Conclusion

The very high frequency of *gaan*+infinitive in Dutch jokes told by bilingual children aged between 6 and 13 years of Turkish and Moroccan descent indicates that in addition to denoting inchoative and future modal readings these children use *gaan* to describe an ongoing event. More evidence for this assumption comes from the fact that the use of *gaan* goes hand-in-hand with predicates that from an aspectual point of view yield a temporal scale such that every sequence of a subevent does not denote a different point on a time-axis, that is to say, they do not inherently allow an endpoint. Subsequently, these predicates have aspectual properties such that they express continuation or duration of the event.

In future research, the most important question that has to be addressed is to what extent these bilingual children rely in their use of *gaan*+infinitive on their L1 grammatical system such as Turkish, Berber or Moroccan Arabic. Future research has to determine whether the use of *gaan*+infinitive may be considered as evidence for a rather long transitional stage in bilingual children in the sense that bilinguals use *gaan* in a similar way as monolingual (younger) children do but to a much higher degree (cf. Müller et al 1999).

An intriguing question remains whether from a sociolinguistic point of view the use of *gaan* may interplay with ethnicity as extralinguistic condition. It might be the case that these older bilingual children exploit their linguistic repertoire such as the high frequency of *gaan* in attempting to mark social identity in a dynamic multicultural setting brought about by immigration. This raises the following important interrelated theoretical issues (Holmes 1997): (i) is *gaan* also present by the descendants of immigrants who acquire the new language natively? (ii) is *gaan*+infinitive significantly related to ethnicity, that is to say, is this features occurring only in Moroccan Dutch and Turkish Dutch?

#### Notes

\* I like to thank Aafke Hulk. Thanks to Sjeff Barbiers for his valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper. Of course, all errors remain mine.

1. The category non-indigenous includes only Moroccan and Turkish children.
2. Significantly, the only monolingual Dutch child who is recorded produces one counterexample (out of 5) with a definite direct object:

(i) en toen gingen ze een banaan kopen [indigenous]  
and then went they a banana buy-INF

3. In monolingual child Dutch, the younger children may also combine an unaccusative verb such as *weglopen* 'walk-away' with *gaan* as a progressive auxiliary, as illustrated in (i) (Jordans 1990: 1433–34):

(i) Jij gaat ook altijd *weglope* soms (29;3)  
you go always walk-away-INF sometimes  
'You are walking away'

4. Thanks to Louis Boumans for pointing this out to me.

#### References

- Bennis, H. (to appear) 'V1; de plaats van het werkwoord in multiculturele moppen'. In T. Meder, ed., *Moppen vertellen in de multiculturele wijk Lombok*.
- Cornips, L. and W. Jongenburger. (1999) 'Het TCULT-project'. In E. Huls and B. Weltens, eds., *Artikelen van de Derde Sociolinguïstische Conferentie*. Eburon: Delft, 99–110.
- Cornips, L. (to appear) 'Etnische variëteit van de Nederlandse kindertaal: aspectuele eigenschappen van *gaan*+infinitief'. *Moppen vertellen in de multiculturele wijk Lombok*.
- Holmes, J. (1997) 'Maori and Pakeha English: Some New Zealand social dialect data'. *Language in Society* 26: 1.
- De Hoop, H. (1992) *Case configuration and Noun Phrase interpretation*. PhD Dissertation, Groningen.
- Jordens, P. (1990) 'The acquisition of verb placement in Dutch and English'. *Linguistics* 28, 1407–1448.
- Lalleman, J. (1986) *Dutch language proficiency of Turkish children born in the Netherlands*. Foris Publications: Dordrecht.
- Müller, N., A. Hulk and C. Jakubowicz (1999) 'Object omissions in bilingual children: Evidence for crosslinguistic influence'. *Proceedings of BUCLD 23*, Vol. 2, 482–494.
- Van Kampen, J. (1997) *First steps in WH-movement*. PhD Dissertation, Utrecht.
- Zuckerman, S., R. Bastiaanse and R. van Zonneveld (1999) 'Verb movement in acquisition and aphasia: same problem different solutions. Evidence from Dutch'. Ms Graduate School for Behavioral and Cognitive Neurosciences and University of Groningen.