Relative and comparative clauses in Frisian:
Feature specification and complex left peripheries

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In Frisian, the complementiser "as" regularly introduces equative (e.g. "Marje is like âld as Piet" 'Marje is as old as Piet') and comparative (e.g. "Marje is âlder as Piet" 'Marje is older than Piet') clauses. Similarly to German "als" (see Jäger 2018, Bacskai-Atkari 2023), "as" occupies the highest head position in the left periphery of Frisian comparison clauses. This head selects for a lower CP projection, the head of which can be lexicalised by the finite complementiser "dat" (e.g. "Marje is {like âld / âlder} as dat Piet is" 'Marje is {as old as / older than} Piet is'). This pattern is altogether quite unique in West Germanic: neither English "that" nor German "dass" are attested in the same constellations and Dutch "dat" is only marginally acceptable (showing inter-speaker differences, see Bacskai-Atkari & Baudisch 2018). I argue that this is due to the particular distribution of "dat" in Frisian relative clauses: it regularly appears in its reduced form alongside the declinable common gender relative pronoun "dy" (e.g. "se ha de man sjoen dy 't de hûn útliet" 'they saw the man who took the dog out', Hoekstra 2015: 166) and the indeclinable relative pronoun "dêr" (e.g. "it famke dêr 't ik mei prate" 'the girl that I talked to', Hoekstra 2015: 168); the absence of the reduced complementiser alongside the neuter gender pronoun "dat" can be explained purely phonologically ("dat + 't" yielding "dat"). Hence, the complementiser does not type the relative clause on its own: instead, it lexicalises the C head triggering the movement of the relative pronoun, i.e. it is equipped with an uninterpretable [u-rel] feature that must be checked off by the [i-rel] operator. In equative and comparative clauses, the lower C head is likewise specified as [u-rel], triggering operator movement (Bacskai-Atkari 2023, following Kennedy 2002). This contrasts with English "that", which types headed relative clauses on its own and is specified as [i-rel], and with German "dass", which is not compatible with [rel] at all. The Frisian pattern can thus be explained by the particular featural properties of "dat".

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