

# **What could *them* have that *they* does not?**

The use of the third person plural  
dative in subject position in Dutch

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## Abstract

In this thesis I will claim that the use of the Dutch third person plural dative pronominal *hun* in subject position is caused by two factors that are both necessary and insufficient without the other. The first factor is the underspecification of case on the pronominal *hun*. This factor explains why the third person plural accusative pronominal *hen* cannot be used in subject position. The second factor is the animacy restriction posed by the pronominal *hun*. This factor explains why the third person singular dative pronominal *haar* cannot be used in subject position. The combination of the two factors is unique for *hun* and therefore explains its unique distribution. I will substantiate my claim with data of spoken Dutch which I have drawn from the Corpus Gesproken Nederlands.

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## Introduction

When doing research and examining language, linguists focus on the way language is actually used and what our intuitions are about how it could be used. When studying grammar, syntacticians try to give an accurate description of the grammatical rules within language. Besides these *descriptive* grammar rules we have *prescriptive* grammar rules, which are commonly meant when one uses the term 'grammar rules'. Even though I'm a linguist, I am personally also very interested in the prescriptive grammar rules. Especially the ongoing debate on the tension between language use and the prescriptive rules greatly interests me.

I believe that prescriptive rules are useful; they provide a norm for communication and try to disambiguate language to ensure a means to align our internal grammars<sup>1</sup>. However, languages change and when the gap between the internal grammars of language users and the norm becomes too great, the norm should be changed. This point is a source of great debate; when is the gap so great that the norm should be changed and when is the gap small enough to be closed by proper grammar education?

In this thesis I will not try to answer that question<sup>2</sup>, I will however focus on an example of this issue that has been discussed in the media recently<sup>3</sup>, the use of the Dutch third person plural dative pronominal *hun* in subject position. I will examine this use from a linguistics point of view and try to find what exactly distinguishes the internal grammar of Dutch speakers that use this construction from Dutch speakers that don't use it. The use of this pronominal as subject is not allowed according to the prescriptive rules. It is also not really common, there are still many people who never use *hun* as subject. Its use seems to be increasing however, suggesting that in a few years it could become common. I will therefore make use of three different 'levels' of grammar in this thesis, the first level consists of the prescriptive grammar rules, which I will also call the *prescriptive norm*. The second consists of the Dutch that is most commonly used by native speakers. I will call this *common Dutch*. As I will discuss later, common Dutch includes the 'misuse' of the third person plural dative pronominal as the accusative and vice versa, but not the misuse as subject. The third level is the Dutch in which the pronominal *hun* is used as subject.

I will try to avoid the use of the term standard Dutch, since this is an ambiguous term that linguists sometimes use when they mean common Dutch, while officially, *Standaardnederlands*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>They disambiguate in the way mentioned, they try to form a norm that I can adjust my internal grammar to. There are of course many ambiguities in the norm itself. However, if we all share the same ambiguities, we are all aware of their existence, which again helps communication.

<sup>2</sup>A short exposition (in Dutch) on this question was written by Van der Sijs (2004).

<sup>3</sup> A video fragment of a debate (in Dutch) in the popular Dutch talkshow *De Wereld Draait Door* on this issue between linguist Helen de Hoop and politician Ronald Plasterk can be found here:

<http://dewerelddraaitdoor.vara.nl/media/66145>

<sup>4</sup>*Standaardnederlands* is a relatively new term, the official form of Dutch is formerly known as *Algemeen Beschaafd*

(literally: standard Dutch) is the name used for the Dutch as prescribed by the official prescriptive norm.

## *Overview*

In this thesis I will explore the use of the Dutch third person plural dative pronominal *hun* in subject position. I will mainly focus on the following question:

- (1) Why can the third person plural dative be used in subject position while the third person plural accusative cannot?

In the first chapter I will give a brief sketch of the full Dutch pronominal system and elaborate somewhat on the third person plural pronominals in Dutch. In the second chapter I will discuss the use of the third person plural dative in subject position and a recent theory on this matter. In the third chapter I will explore some general theories on pronominals to see what they can contribute to the question in (1). In the fourth chapter I will move towards formulating a new theory to answer this question and the new question that arises:

- (2) Why can the third person plural dative be used in subject position while the third person singular dative (feminine) cannot?

In the fifth chapter I will formulate the new theory. Last I will sum up the conclusions and discuss unsolved problems and possibilities for further research.

### **CGN Intermission I: The *Corpus Gesproken Nederlands***

Throughout this thesis I will substantiate my claims by giving data I collected from the *Corpus Gesproken Nederlands* ('Corpus Spoken Dutch', CGN in short). The CGN is a database containing transcribed and annotated spoken text from spontaneous conversations and telephone dialogues, interviews with teachers, simulated business negotiations, television and radio broadcasts (interviews, discussions, debates, commentaries, news reports), classroom recordings, lectures and (political) discussions and debates. For more information see the CGN website: <http://lands.let.ru.nl/cgn/ehome.htm>.

Because the material in this corpus is not only transcribed but also annotated, search queries in this corpus can include not only words but also syntactic and morphological categories. The data I collected and the search queries I used to do so will be described in the text boxes titled 'CGN Intermission'.

Box 1: the *Corpus Gesproken Nederlands*

# 1 The Dutch pronominal system

## 1.0 Pronominals in Dutch

Dutch is not a language that is rich in pronominal case. For most pronominal forms there are just two forms; nominative and accusative. There is one pronominal that has three forms: the third person plural. See table 1 below for an overview of the Dutch pronominal system according to the prescriptive norm.

Singular					
		Nominative	Accusative	Dative	
<b>First</b>		ik	mij	mij	
<b>Second</b>	<b>Informal</b>	jij	jou	jou	
	<b>Formal</b>	u	u	u	
<b>Third</b>	<b>Masculine</b>	hij	hem	hem	
	<b>Feminine</b>	zij	haar	haar	
	<b>Neuter</b>	het	het	het	
Plural					
		Nominative	Accusative	Dative	
<b>First</b>		wij	ons	ons	
<b>Second</b>		jullie	jullie	jullie	
<b>Third</b>		zij	hen	hun	

Table 1: pronominals in Dutch

The pattern for the singular forms is (almost) homogeneous; the nominative has a form that differs from the form that is used for both the accusative and the dative. Exception is the second person formal, this has only one form. The plural pattern is more heterogeneous; the second person has only one form, the first person patterns with the singular forms and the third person has three separate forms (3).

- (3) a. **Zij** liepen in de tuin.  
**3pINOM** walked in the garden.
- b. Tina sloeg **hen**.  
Tina hit **3pIACC**.

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*Nederlands* (General Civilized Dutch) but renamed since the old term would suggest that other forms of Dutch are less civilized.

- c. Janne gaf **hun** een kado.  
Jane gave **3plDAT** a present.

There is one more thing about the third person plural that merits attention: the possessive is spelled out the same as the third person plural dative. This is the same for other plurals and the third person singular feminine, but all other Dutch singular pronominals have a distinct possessive form (table 2).

Singular					
		Nominative	Accusative	Dative	Possessive
<b>First</b>		ik	mij	mij	mijn
<b>Second</b>	<b>Informal</b>	jij	jou	jou	jouw
	<b>Formal</b>	u	u	u	uw
<b>Third</b>	<b>Masculine</b>	hij	hem	hem	zijn
	<b>Feminine</b>	zij	haar	haar	haar
	<b>Neuter</b>	het	het	het	-
Plural					
		Nominative	Accusative	Dative	Possessive
<b>First</b>		wij	ons	ons	ons
<b>Second</b>		jullie	jullie	jullie	jullie
<b>Third</b>		zij	hen	hun	hun

Table 2: possessives in Dutch

Looking at the overall pattern in table 2, the third person plural is unique in having three forms of which the dative and the possessive are the same. The other pronominals that have three forms (all singular pronominals except the third person feminine) have the same form for accusative and dative. The other pronominals that have the same form for dative and possessive (the other plurals and the third person singular feminine) also use this form for the accusative. The third person singular feminine *haar* is also an odd one out here, since it patterns not with the other singulars, but with the plural pronominals. This property of *haar* will become relevant later on when formulating the theory on *hun*. I will elaborate somewhat on the use of *haar* in common Dutch in chapter 4.

Most pronominals in Dutch also have a distinct reduced form that can be used when the pronominal is not stressed. The regular form must be used when the pronominal is stressed, but the reverse is not the case: when a pronominal is unstressed both the regular and the reduced form

can be used. See table 3 for the reduced forms of all the Dutch pronominals. The dash (-) means there is no distinct reduced form.

Singular					
		Nominative	Accusative	Dative	Possessive
<b>First</b>		'k	me	me	m'n
<b>Second</b>	<b>Informal</b>	je	je	je	je
	<b>Formal</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>Third</b>	<b>Male</b>	-	'm	'm	z'n
	<b>Female</b>	ze	'r	'r	'r
Plural					
		Nominative	Accusative	Dative	Possessive
<b>First</b>		we	-	-	-
<b>Second</b>		-	-	-	-
<b>Third</b>		ze	ze	ze	-

Table 3: reduced pronominals in Dutch

Notice that the reduced form for the third person plural is the same (*ze*) for nominative, accusative and dative.

Looking at these patterns it can be concluded that in Dutch multiple case forms can respond to one phonological form (4) as well as one case form can correspond with multiple phonological forms (5).

- (4)
- a. **Jullie** gaan naar oma.  
2pINOM go to grandma
  - b. Johan schopt **jullie**.  
John kicks 2pIACC
  - c. Vader geeft **jullie** een cadeau.  
Father gives 2pIDAT a gift
  - d. Dat is **jullie** stoel.  
That is 2pIPOS chair
- (5)
- a. Ik zag **hen** gisteren op de boulevard.  
I saw 3pIACC yesterday on the boardwalk.



- b. Ik zag **ze** gisteren op de boulevard.  
I saw **3plACC** yesterday on the boardwalk

It can therefore be concluded that in Dutch there is no one-to-one correspondence between form and function.

To make the patterns even more complicated, the actual use of third person pronominals in Dutch is even less strict than described above. Both the accusative and the dative form (*hen* and *hun*) are also used in positions they are not officially allowed in.

### *1.1 Third person pronominals in Dutch*

Since this thesis focusses on the use of the third person plural dative I will elaborate somewhat further on the use of the third person pronominals in Dutch.

The official grammar rules for Dutch are formulated by the *Nederlandse Taalunie*<sup>5</sup> (Dutch Language Union). They state that *zij* is the subject form, *hen* is the form for direct and prepositional objects and *hun* is the indirect object form<sup>6</sup>. All three forms can be replaced by the reduced form *ze* when they are not stressed<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore the rules state that the full forms *hen* and *hun* can only be used to refer to humans<sup>8</sup>, for reference to things the reduced form *ze* must be used.

The actual use of third person pronominals differs from the official rules. In all object positions *hen* and *hun* are used interchangeably without distinction (6).

- (6) a. Jan zag **hen** langslopen.  
Jan zag **hun** langslopen.  
John saw **3pl** walking by
- b. Linda gaf **hen** een lift.  
Linda gaf **hun** een lift.  
Linda gave **3pl** a ride

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<sup>5</sup>All official grammar rules can be found on the website of the Nederlandse Taalunie: <http://www.taaladvies.net>

<sup>6</sup><http://taaladvies.net/taal/advies/tekst/12>

<sup>7</sup><http://taaladvies.net/taal/advies/vraag/374>

<sup>8</sup><http://taaladvies.net/taal/advies/vraag/375>

- c.        Martin rende naar **hen**.  
               Martin rende naar **hun**.  
               Martin ran to **3pl**

The 'misuse' of *hen* as indirect object and of *hun* as direct object in common Dutch dates back to 1625, when Van Heule published 'De Nederduytsche grammatica ofte Spraec-konst' (The Dutch grammar or art of speaking). Or actually, the way it is used dates from far before this point, but in this book Van Heule was the first to formulate official rules stating Dutch should have a separate third person plural accusative and dative. This rule was forced and it never really became natural, so one could state (spoken) Dutch might not have a real separate accusative and dative. In Dutch, the accusative is used as indirect object, see also table 1 for the other pronominals<sup>9</sup>. *Hen* and *hun* are not real synonyms however, there are some positions in which *hun* can be used in spoken Dutch where *hen* really cannot.

Since the use of *hen* is valued stylistically higher (and the use of *hun* is associated with socially lower classes) the *Nederlandse Taalunie* even advise to just use *hen* when in doubt. In actual speech however, *hun* is used more often than *hen*. See box 2 for the numbers of uses for *hen* and *hun* in different grammatical positions.

Aside from the use in positions where *hen* should actually be used, *hun* is sometimes also used in the subject position, where *zij* should actually be (7). *Hen* is never used in this position.

- (7)        **Zij** werken in de tuin.  
               **Hun** werken in de tuin.  
               **3pl** work in the garden

This use of the third person plural dative in subject position is the main issue discussed in this thesis. This 'misuse' of *hen* is highly frowned upon by teachers and grammar fanatics and associated with socially lower classes and illiteracy. The use is however increasing and therefore interesting to examine.

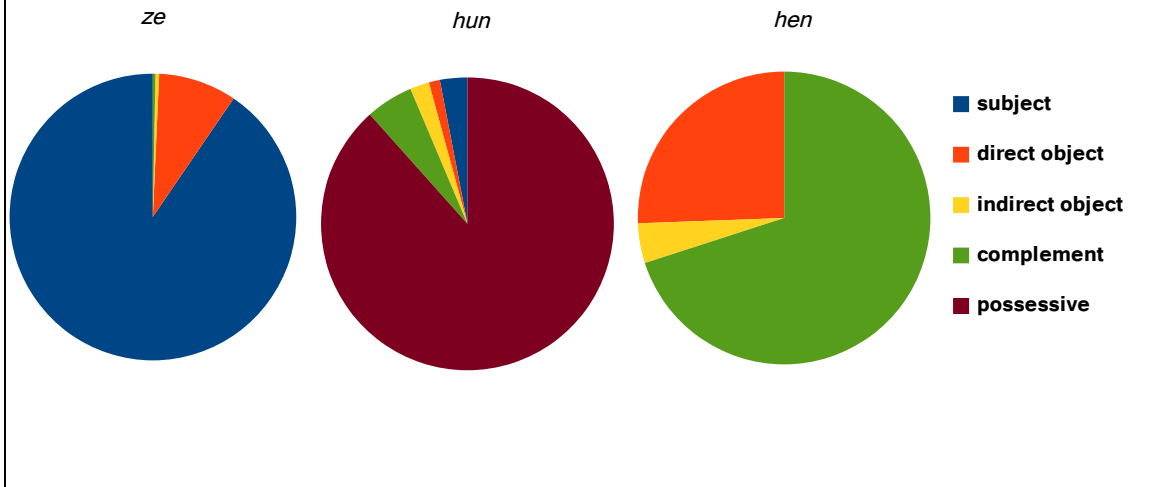
**CGN Intermission II: Third person plural pronominals and case positions**  
 When looking for third person plural pronominals in the CGN, I use the Part-of-Speech tag information in the search queries for *zij* and *ze*, since these can also be third person singular feminines and I did not

<sup>9</sup>In this thesis I will still dub *hen* as third person plural accusative and *hun* as third person plural dative to distinguish them, even though the latter is not a 'real' dative case.

want to add those to the dataset used here.

In total there are 44131 instances of *ze* in the CGN that are annotated as third person plural reduced pronominal. There are 3692 instances of *zij* that are annotated as third person plural full pronominal.

There are 1457 instances of *hen* and 7173 instances of *hun* in the CGN. Van Bergen et al. (2011) have counted all the instances of *hun* and the first 1000 instances of *ze* and grouped them according to case. I have done the same for the first 500 instances of *hen*. I have also looked at all instances of *zij* and as expected these were all subjects. Numbers and percentages for the other pronominals are depicted below.



	<i>zij</i>		<i>ze</i>		<i>hen</i>		<i>hun</i>	
<b>subject</b>	3692	100%	912	91%	-		217	3%
<b>direct object</b>	-	-	89	9%	128	26%	89	1%
<b>indirect object</b>	-	-	4	0%	22	4%	151	2%
<b>complement</b>	-	-	3	0%	350	70%	375	5%
<b>possessive</b>	-	-	-		-		6341	89%
<b>total</b>	3692	100%	1008	100%	500	100%	7173	100%

Box 2: the use of third person plural pronominals in different case positions

## 2 The use of the third person plural dative in subject position in Dutch

### 2.0 An Optimality Theory based explanation

As mentioned in the previous chapter and described by Van Bergen et al. in their 2011 article, there is an increasing amount of Dutch speakers that use the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural dative pronominal *hun*, where actually the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural nominative pronominal *zij*<sup>10</sup> should be used (8).

- (8) a. **Hun** zijn maandag naar de kermis geweest.  
**3plDAT** have Monday to the carnival been
- b. Toen hebben **hun** een suikerspin gekocht.  
Then have **3plDAT** a candyfloss bought

Van Bergen et al. explain the use of the dative in this position in terms of a competition between three forms: *zij* (3<sup>rd</sup> person plural nominative full), *ze* (3<sup>rd</sup> person plural reduced<sup>11</sup>) and *hun* (3<sup>rd</sup> person plural dative/possessive).

The possibility for multiple forms is the result of a degradation of the Dutch case system. As shown in the previous section, one phonological form often represents multiple case forms, which means there is no longer a one-to-one correspondence between form and case. Case is no longer the sole determiner for a certain form so other factors start competing.

According to Van Bergen et al., one of the important features competing in the pronominal selection is animacy. *Hun* has an animacy restriction which gives it an advantage over *zij* and *ze* that do not pose this restriction. They use the following example (9) to illustrate this:

- (9) a. Hoe goed zijn **ze** in het uitdrukken van een derde persoon meervoudig subject?
- b. Hoe goed zijn **zij** in het uitdrukken van een derde persoon meervoudig subject?
- c. Hoe goed zijn **hun** in het uitdrukken van een derde persoon meervoudig subject?
- all: How good are **3pl** in the expression of a third person plural subject?

In (9a) and (9b), the third person plural pronominal can refer to both animate or inanimate

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<sup>10</sup> Or the reduced form *ze*

<sup>11</sup> As also mentioned in the previous section, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural *ze* is not strictly nominative. It can be used as nominative, accusative or dative.

entities. In this example it could refer either to a group of people that are expressing something or to a group of pronominals that is used to express something (e.g., the group that consists of *they* and *them* is very good in expressing a third person plural subject, the group that consists of the pronominals *she* and *he* is not very good in expression a third person plural subject) . In (9c) however, according to Van Bergen et al., the pronominal *hun* cannot refer to a group of pronominals, it has to refer to something animate. I share this intuition and apparently so do other Dutch speakers, as can be seen in box 3, which depicts the animacy of *hun* and other third person plural pronominals in Dutch.

<b>CGN Intermission III: Animacy of third person plural pronominals</b>								
The data collected for the previous box is further divided here into animate referents and inanimate ones. The data on <i>zij</i> , <i>ze</i> and <i>hun</i> is again taken from Van Bergen et al (2011). 500 instances of <i>zij</i> were counted, 1000 instances of <i>zij</i> and 1000 instances of possessive <i>hun</i> plus all the other instances of <i>hun</i> . For <i>hen</i> I counted all 1457 instances. Since I only determined case for 500 instances, I have multiplied those numbers as if I counted them all to determine the percentage. Those numbers are starred * in the table.								
	<i>zij</i>				<i>ze</i>			
	animate	% of total	inanimate	% of total	animate	% of total	inanimate	% of total
<b>subject</b>	497	99%	3	1%	854	94%	58	6%
<b>direct object</b>	-	-	-	-	33	37%	56	63%
<b>indirect object</b>	-	-	-	-	4	80%	1	20%
<b>complement</b>	-	-	-	-	3	100%	0	0%
<b>possessive</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	<i>hen</i>				<i>hun</i>			
	animate	% of total	inanimate	% of total	animate	% of total	inanimate	% of total
<b>subject</b>	-	-	-	-	217	100%	0	0%
<b>direct object</b>	373*	100%	0	0%	89	100%	0	0%
<b>indirect object</b>	64*	100%	0	0%	151	100%	0	0%
<b>complement</b>	1020*	100%	0	0%	375	100%	0	0%
<b>possessive</b>	-	-	-	-	960	96%	40	4%

Box 3: the use of animated referents for third person plural pronominals

Other features that are competing are the marking of plurality, the marking of case and economy. In addition to the advantage in animacy, *hun* also has an advantage in terms of plurality since it

can solely refer to plural entities, while *ze* and *zij* in Dutch are also used for singular feminine entities. *Ze* has an advantage in terms of economy; since it is a reduced form it is cheaper than the full forms *zij* and *hun*. *Zij* has an advantage when it comes to marking case, it is the only of the three forms that solely refers to subjects. The use of different third person plural pronominals in different case positions can be found in the previous chapter in box 2.

To determine the outcome of the competition between the different features, Van Bergen et al. use Optimality Theory<sup>12</sup>. The OT-tableau they use is pictured below:

3pl subject	Mark animacy	Mark function	Economy	Mark PL
☞ <i>ze</i>	*	*		*
☞ <i>zij</i>	*		*	*
☞ <i>hun</i>		*	*	

Table 4: OT-tableau for 3pl subjects

The last three constraints here are valued equal (grey line), which leads to the possibility of all three forms. There is however one more factor that is important here; the prescriptive standard. For people that want to adhere to the standard, *hun* cannot be used as subject. This would lead to the following tableau, also taken from Van Bergen et al.:

3pl subject	Standard	Mark animacy	Mark function	Economy	Mark PL
☞ <i>ze</i>		*	*		*
☞ <i>zij</i>		*		*	*
<i>hun</i>	*		*	*	

Table 5: OT-tableau for 3pl subjects including standard

So in this case, *hun* is definitely not possible as third person pronominal subject, which is also the case if one wants to obey the prescriptive grammar rules.

## 2.1 What about *hen*?

The theory as stated by Van Bergen et al. seems to work pretty well in explaining why *hun* can be used in stead of *ze* or *zij*. There is one major problem for this theory though: the third person plural accusative pronominal *hen*. Van Bergen et al. do not discuss this pronominal at all in their article. Since it is used interchangeably with *hun* in (in)direct object positions, one could think it could be regarded as a synonym of the same form. This is not the case however, unlike *hun*, *hen* is

<sup>12</sup>For more on Optimality Theory, see Prince & Smolensky (1993)

never ever used in subject position (10).

- (10) a. \***Hen** zijn maandag naar de kermis geweest.  
           **3plACC** have Monday to the carnival been
- b. Toen hebben \***hen** een suikerspin gekocht.  
       Then have **3plACC** a candyfloss bought

Of all instances of *hen* in the CGN, none are in subject position, see box 2 in the previous chapter. If we add *hen* to the OT-tableau by Van Bergen et al. however, it yields the same result as *hun*:

3pl subject	Mark animacy	Mark function	Economy	Mark PL
☞ ze	*	*		*
☞ zij	*		*	*
☞ hun		*	*	
☞ hen		*	*	

Table 5: extended OT-tableau for 3pl subjects

3pl subject	Standard	Mark animacy	Mark function	Economy	Mark PL
☞ ze		*	*		*
☞ zij		*		*	*
hun	*		*	*	
hen	*		*	*	

Table 6: extended OT-tableau for 3pl subjects including standard

Of all instances of *hen* in the CGN, none are inanimate, see box 3 in the previous section.

From these facts I conclude that the Optimality Theory based explanation for the occurrence of *hun* in subject position is not sufficient, since it lacks to explain why the same is not true for *hen*. I will therefore try to find an alternate explanation for the occurrence of *hun* in subject position. In order to do so I will examine some other theories on pronominals and test these against the properties of *hun* and *hen*. These properties will be determined by use of the CGN.

### 3 On pronominals

In this chapter I will discuss three different theories on pronominals to see whether any of them can provide an accurate and sufficient explanation for the use of *hun* in subject position. I will thereby focus on finding some kind of distinction between *hun* and *hen*. Note that I will not go into any further discussion regarding whether these theories are accurate in explaining other pronominal phenomena, since this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

When testing the three different theories, I will first turn to my own intuitions to determine whether the relevant constructions are possible. I will also look in the CGN for any occurrences of the mentioned constructions. The results of these searches can be found in the CGN data intermission boxes. Since the CGN consists of a limited set of data, a construction that does not occur in it is not necessarily non-existent. Where my own intuitions were unclear<sup>13</sup> I have asked an additional set of people for their judgements. The relevant results of this small survey are mentioned in this chapter. The full survey can be found in appendix A.

#### **Survey Intermission I: The survey**

To get a better understanding of what is possible in Dutch for constructions I had doubts about, I conducted a small survey with 7 participants. This number is too small to be able to do statistics, but that was not the goal of the survey. I just wanted to see whether certain constructions were possible for someone. I asked the participants to score sentences on a 1-5 scale rating from 'this is really not possible' to 'this is fine Dutch'. In appendix A all survey questions can be found. In the actual survey, the sentences were put in random order and accompanied with an instruction. The sentences in the appendix are marked for grammaticality according to the results of the survey. To determine the grammaticality I looked at the highest and lowest scores and at the average score. I have scored those sentences ungrammatical where the highest score was 3 or less, or the average 2 or less. I have scored sentences grammatical when the lowest score was 4 or more, or where the average was above 4. Everything else gets a question mark. I tested two constructions: a pronominal followed by a full noun complement and a pronominal followed by an *of*-complement. I tested the third person plural pronominals *zij*, *ze*, *hen* and *hun*, but also the first and second person plural pronominals *wij*, *ons* and *jullie* for reference. Furthermore I have tested some basic sentences with *hun* in subject, direct and indirect object position, to see whether my participants did in fact also use *hun* in ways that are not allowed by the official grammar rules for Dutch. It turned out they did, so their judgements were in fact useful, also because they did not always coincide with my own. Another interesting find from these last sentences was that even for the sentences

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<sup>13</sup>My internal grammar does not allow for *hun* in subject position, making my judgements about sentences where it occurs in that or a similar position unusable for this research.



that are proper Dutch according to the official rules, there were participants that were doubtful. Apparently the rules are so unclear that some people don't use *hun* at all<sup>14</sup>.

Box 4: the survey

### 3.1 A theory based on coordination and reference to humans

In their 1999 article, Cardinaletti and Starke (from here on C&S) group pronouns into two major structural classes, of which one can be divided into two subclasses, making a total of three distinct underlying, structural classes. Evidence for the different classes comes from languages in which each pronominal class has a distinct phonological form. In other languages however, one phonological form of a pronoun can correspond to different structural underlying forms, which are therefore homonyms. The two major class distinctions are based on the behaviour of the pronoun regarding coordination and possible reference to humans or non-humans. Because of Van Bergen et al.'s explanation regarding the animacy of *hun* especially this last part of C&S's pronominal theory seems relevant.

C&S distinguish between strong pronouns, which can be coordinated and are only allowed to have human referents (11a) and deficient pronouns that cannot be coordinated and are allowed to have both human and non-human referents (11b).

- (11) a. **Esse** (\*e quelle accanto) sono troppo alte. (Italian)  
b. **Loro** (\*e quelle accanto) sono troppo alte.  
**3pIFNOM** (and those besides) are too tall/high

The pronominals in each group share further characteristics: strong pronouns can appear in positions where a semantic role is assigned<sup>15</sup>(12a) while deficient pronouns cannot (12b), strong pronouns can appear in peripheral positions<sup>16</sup> (13a) while deficient pronouns cannot (13b), strong pronouns can be modified by c-modifiers<sup>17</sup> (14a) while deficient pronouns cannot (14b), strong

<sup>14</sup>During my research I have discovered myself to actually be one of those people, I use *hen* also where *hun* would be correct.

<sup>15</sup>A semantic role is also called a theta-role and the position where it is assigned is called a theta-position. This position was first described by Fillmore (1968). For more on theta-positions, theta-roles and theta-theory see also Chomsky (1981) and Jackendoff (1981, 1990) and for a good overview see Reinhart (2002).

<sup>16</sup>A peripheral position is a position at the periphery of the sentence (structure). The example used here is a cleft construction. For more on cleft constructions, see Smits (1989).

<sup>17</sup>A c-modifier is an adverb that modifies the entire noun phrase.

pronouns cannot be expletives (15a) while deficient pronouns can (15b) and strong pronouns cannot be impersonal (16a) while deficient pronouns can (16b). For even more characteristics see C&S article.

- (12) a. **(Lei)** forse l'ha fatto **(lei)** da sola. (Italian)  
**She** maybe it-has done DA alone
- b. **(Essa)** forse l'ha fatto **(\*essa)** da sola.  
**It** maybe it-has done DA alone
- (13) a. E' **lei** che è bella. (Italian)  
b. E' **\*essa** che è bella.  
It is **3sgF** that is pretty
- (14) a. vraiment **lui** (French)  
b. vraiment **\*il**  
truly **him** ('typically him')
- (15) a. **\*Lui** pleut. (French)  
b. **Il** pleut.  
**he** rains ('it rains')
- (16) a. **Eux** m'ont vendu un livre pas cher. (French)  
**they**<sub>REFERENTIAL</sub> me have sold a book not expensive  
**\*they**<sub>IMPERSONAL</sub> me have sold a book not expensive
- b. **Ils** m'ont vendu un livre pas cher.  
**they**<sub>REFERENTIAL</sub> me have sold a book not expensive  
**they**<sub>IMPERSONAL</sub> me have sold a book not expensive

Within the group of deficient pronouns a further structural distinction is made between weak pronouns that occupy the same structural position as strong pronouns and clitics that occupy a different type of position. Strong and weak pronouns occupy XP-positions and are therefore phrases, clitics head X<sup>0</sup>-chains and are therefore heads.

An overview of the different properties for the three different classes is depicted below in table 7:

Strong	Deficient	
	Weak	Clitic
can be coordinated	cannot be coordinated	
only human referents	human and non-human referents	
can appear in theta-positions	cannot appear in theta-positions	
can appear in peripheral positions	cannot appear in peripheral positions	
can be modified by c-modifiers	cannot be modified by c-modifiers	
cannot be expletive	can be expletive	
cannot be impersonal	can be impersonal	
phrase - occupies XPposition		head - heads X <sup>0</sup> -chain

Table 7: the three pronominal classes

If *hun* should belong to a different pronominal class than *hen*, this could be an explanation of why it can be used in subject position while *hen* cannot. Especially if *hun* has properties in common with *zij* (or *ze*) that *hen* does not. To determine whether this is the case I will look at some of the properties mentioned above and see whether they apply to *hun*, *hen* and *zij*.

### Testing Cardinaletti & Starke's theory

As mentioned in the previous chapter, see also box 3 for the CGN data, both *hun* and *hen* can only refer to animate referents, with the exception of possessive *hun*, which can also refer to inanimates. And even though Van Bergen et al. only give CGN data for a restriction on animacy, they actually claim that non-possessive *hun* can only refer to humans. So according to Van Bergen et al., (17a) should not be possible, but 17c should.

- (17) a. Marja heeft mooie honden. Tom speelt graag met **hun**.  
 Marjorie has pretty dogs. Tom plays gladly with **3pIDAT**.
- b. Marja heeft leuke kinderen. Tom speelt graag met **hun**.  
 Marjorie has nice kids. Tom plays gladly with **3pIDAT**.
- c. ?Marja heeft mooie honden. Tom speelt graag met **hen**.

Marjorie has pretty dogs. Tom plays gladly with **3plACC**.

- d. Marja heeft leuke kinderen. Tom speelt graag met **hen**.

Marjorie has nice kids. Tom plays gladly with **3plACC**.

According to me all sentences in (17) are possible however, though 17c is slightly odd. There are also some instances of *hun* and *hen* in the CGN where they refer to animals, see box 5 for CGN data on reference to (non-)humans. So the CGN data agrees with my intuitions. There seems to be no difference here between *hen* and *hun*, apart from possessive *hun*.

Coordination is possible for both *hun* (18b) and *hen* (18a) as well as for *zij* (18c). It is not possible for *ze* (18d), since coordination requires some kind of focus.

- (18) a. Ik zag Jan en **hen**.  
I saw John and **3plACC**
- b. Ik gaf Jan en **hun** en kado.  
I gave John and **3plDAT** a gift
- c. Jan en **zij** liepen op de stoep.
- d. Jan en **\*ze** liepen op de stoep.  
John and **3plNOM** walked on the pavement

The coordination construction with the pronominal *hun* or *hen* in a case position (subject or (in)direct object) does not occur in the CGN however, probably because it is slightly odd; there needs to be a specified group of people to which *hen* or *hun* refers of which *Jan* is specifically not a member. Coordination structures with the pronoun in a PP do occur, for both *hen* and *hun*. There seems to be no difference in behaviour here between *hen* and *hun*.

Theta-positions, meaning the option to stay in the base position, are possible for all Dutch pronominals, see (19) for *zij*, *ze*, *hen* and *hun*.

- (19) a. Ik zie dat **zij** een rode auto hebben gekocht.  
I see that **3plNOM** a red car have bought
- b. Ik weet dat **ze** niet graag naar feestjes gaan.  
I know that **3plNOM** not gladly to parties go

- c. Ik sloeg **hen**.  
I hit **3plACC**
- d. Ik gaf **hun** iets leuks.  
I gave **3plDAT** something nice

There is no difference here between *hun* and *hen*.

Peripheral positions do not seem to be possible in Dutch for third person plural pronominals (20). There are also no occurrences of this construction in the CGN.

- (20) a. ?Het zijn **zij**, Janne en Tom, die voor ons zorgen.
  - b. \*Het zijn **ze**, Janne en Tom, die voor ons zorgen.
  - c. \*Het zijn **hun**, Janne en Tom, die voor ons zorgen.
  - d. \*Het zijn **hen**, Janne en Tom, die voor ons zorgen.
- It are **3pl**, Jane and Tom, that for us care

Again, *hun* and *hen* behave the same in this respect.

*Hen* and *hun* (21c-d) allow for C-modifiers, *zij* and *ze* do not (21a-b), which is to be expected since for the singular form also the accusative is used in this construction (22)

- (22) a. \*Dat is nou typisch **zij**, om zoiets niet te vertellen.  
That is NOU typically **3pl**, to something-like-that not to tell
  - b. \*Dat is nou typisch **ze**, om zoiets niet te vertellen.
  - c. Dat is nou typisch **hen**, om zoiets niet te vertellen.
  - d. Dat is nou typisch **hun**, om zoiets niet te vertellen.  
That is NOU typically **3pl**, to something-like-that not to tell
- (22) a. ?Dat is nou typisch **hij**, om zoiets niet te vertellen.  
That is NOU typically **3sgMNOM**, to something-like-that not to tell
  - b. Dat is nou typisch **hem**, om zoiets niet te vertellen.  
That is NOU typically **3sgMACC**, to something-like-that not to tell

In the CGN, these constructions do not occur at all, but since they are not very common this does

not have to mean anything. There is again no difference between *hen* and *hun*.

The expletive in Dutch is *het*, other pronominals cannot be used as expletives so we cannot use this construction to test *hun* and *hen*.

The same applies to impersonal constructions; in Dutch the separate pronoun *men* is used as a subject with arbitrary interpretation(23).

- (23) a. **Men** verkocht daar goedkope boeken.  
\***they**<sub>REFERENTIAL</sub> sold there cheap books  
**they**<sub>IMPERSONAL</sub> sold there cheap books
- b. **Zij** verkochten daar goedkope boeken.  
**they**<sub>REFERENTIAL</sub> sold there cheap books  
\***they**<sub>IMPERSONAL</sub> sold there cheap books<sup>18</sup>

#### **CGN Intermission IV: Some more on third person plural pronominals**

##### **Human referents**

To see whether the third person plural pronominals had any non-human referents I looked at 500 instances of each of the pronominals and determined what it referred to. For *hen* I looked at all 1457 instances. In box 3 I have already discussed the animacy of all third person plural pronominals, so here I looked at those pronominals that were animate, but did not refer to humans, so pronominals that refer to animals or plants. For *ze* I found 22 instances of non-human animate referents, for *zij* I found 2, for *hun* 7 and for *hen* I found 4 of 1457 total, but 3 of these are animals that are the main protagonists in a story. They are not regular animals, they are sentient beings. For one instance of *hen* and also for the other pronominals, the referents were regular animals:

'De honden, jankten en klommen van opwinding over elkaar heen maar ze werden onmiddellijk stil toen de man tussen **hen**, doorliep.'

The dogs cried and climbed of excitement over eachother - but they were immediately quiet when the man in-between them walked

'Die vogels, hebben we ook heel veel gezien en die waren echt heel agressief want het was kennelijk net broedseizoen, ook voor **hun**.'

Those birds have we also very much seen and those were really very aggressive because it was apparently

<sup>18</sup> There are some Dutch speakers that do allow this interpretation.

just breeding-season, also for them

### Coordination

To find instances of coordination I did a search query in the CGN for word combinations of the pronominal with the conjunction element *en* ('and'). I found a lot of coordination cases where two sentences were conjoined but since that construction is not relevant here I will give only the numbers for the other cases.

*zij*: there is 1 instance of a coordination with *zij* in subjectposition:

'De ministers, ex-ministers en zij hebben het goed gehad tijdens de rust.'

the ministers, ex-ministers and 3plNOM have it good had during the recess

*ze*: there are no instances of a coordination with *ze*

*hen*: there are no instances of a coordination with *hen* in subject or object position. There are 5 cases in complement position, all using *tussen* ('between'):

'afstand tussen hen en de Russen'

distance between 3plACC and the Russians

'tussen hen en de burger'

between 3plACC and the commoner

'tussen hen en de rest van de Koninklijke familie'

between 3plACC and the rest of the Royal family

'tussen hen en mij'

between 3plACC and me

'tussen hen en de rand'

between 3plACC and the border

*hun*: there are no instances of a coordination with *hun* in subject or object position. There are 2 cases in complement position, of which one is with possessive *hun*:

'er is geen contact tussen hun en mijn muur'

there is no contact between 3plPOSS and my wall

'het heuveltje zit bij hun en een hele oude boom'

the hill sits with 3plDAT and a really old tree

As mentioned in this chapter, if a construction does not appear in the CGN it does not mean it is ungrammatical, since the CGN is a limited dataset and some constructions, like this one, are rare.

### Peripheral positions

To find instances of pronominals in peripheral position I did a search query in the CGN for word

combinations of the pronominal followed by a proper name. None of the results from this query turned out to be peripheral position constructions (except for one instance of *zij* that was labelled as plural but was actually the singular).

### C-modifiers

To find instances of pronominals that are modified by *c*-modifiers, I looked for two specific cases that I know are possible in Dutch for singular pronominals: *typisch*+pronominal and *echt*+pronominal, which both have a meaning similar to 'typically him'.

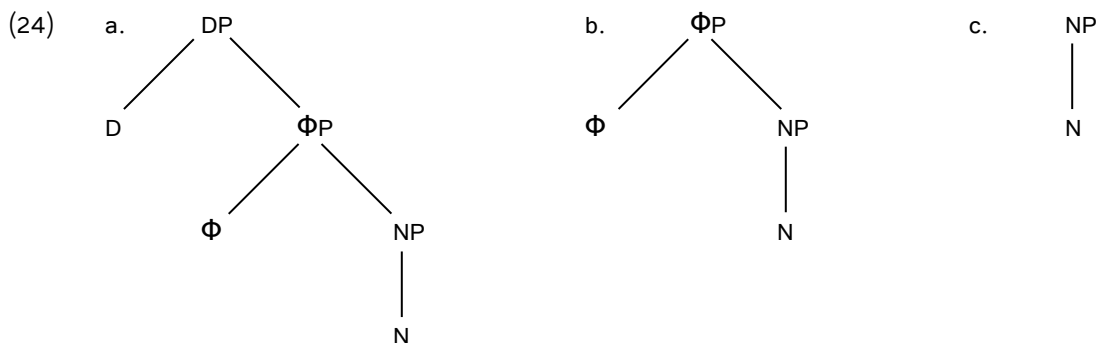
The CGN had no occurrences of these combinations, not even for singular pronominals. There were a couple with proper names ('typically Ben'), 15 for *typisch* and 17 for *echt*.

Box 5: more data on the use of third person plural pronominals

From the facts stated above it can be concluded that the pronominal theory by C&S does not provide any explanation for the difference in behaviour between *hen* and *hun* in Dutch.

### 3.2 Three pronominal primitives

In their 2002 article, Dèchaine & Wiltschko (from here on D&W), distinguish three groups of pronouns based on their underlying structure. They go a bit further than C&S and claim that these three groups do not only have a different structure but also form three distinct syntactic categories<sup>19</sup>. According to D&W the notion 'pronoun' is not a primitive but consists of three primitives, pro-DP, pro-ΦP and pro-NP. See (24) for the syntactic structures corresponding to each of these categories.



The different structures and different categories of the pronominals determine some of their

<sup>19</sup>Note that the three categories by D&W do not correspond to the three groups by C&S. According to D&W, the three groups of C&S all belong to the second category, pro-ΦP.



important properties. A pro-DP has the syntactic properties of a determiner and therefore is restricted to argument position. As can be seen in (24), a pro-DP contains a pro- $\Phi$ P, which again contains a pro-NP. A pro-NP has the syntactic properties of a lexical noun and only occurs in predicate position. A pro- $\Phi$ P intervenes between these two and encodes  $\Phi$ -features. It has neither the syntax of a noun nor that of a determiner and can function either as argument or as predicate.

If *hun* is part of a different pronominal category than *hen*, that could explain why it can be used in subject position while *hen* cannot. Since the different categories have such distinct structures and properties, testing the the pronouns for each category should not be too difficult.

If a pronoun is a pro-NP, it should have the syntax of a lexical noun. This means it should be able to follow a determiner, a quantifier or a modifier. An example D&W use is the English proform *one* (25):

- (25) a. the **one**  
 b. **someone**  
 c. the real **one**

If a pronoun is a pro-DP, it should have the properties of a determiner. This means it should also be able to function as a determiner and take a lexical noun as its complement (26).

- (26) **We linguists** really like John and Mary.

Pro- $\Phi$ P's have some properties that pro-DP's have, but they cannot function as determiners and therefore cannot take nominal complements.

Dutch pronominals cannot follow a determiner (27), a quantifier (28) or a modifier (29).

- (27) a. \***De hij** sloeg een meisje.  
**The he** hit a girl  
 b. \*Bert ging met **de ons** naar het park.  
 Bert went with **the us** to the park

- (28) a. \***Alle ik** gaan naar bed.

- All I** go to bed
- b. **\*Een paar jullie** blijven op.  
**A few youPL** stay up
- (29) a. **\*De echte zij** is geen aardig meisje.  
**The real she** is not-a nice girl
- b. **\*Ramon kent de echte jullie.**  
Ramon knows **the real youPL**

For third person plural pronominals, the pattern is similar (30-32)<sup>20</sup>. Modification is ungrammatical, so none of the third person plural pronominals are NP's.

- (30) a. **\*De zij** sloegen een meisje.  
**The 3pINOM** hit a girl
- b. **\*Bert ging met de hen** naar het park.
- c. **\*Bert ging met de hun** naar het park.  
Bert went with **the 3pl** to the park
- (31) a. **\*Alle zij** gaan naar bed.  
**All 3pINOM** go to bed
- b. **\*Een paar hen** blijven op.  
**\*Een paar hun** blijven op.  
**A few 3pl** stay up
- (32) a. **\*De echte zij** zijn aardige mensen.  
**The real 3pl** are nice people
- b. **\*Ramon kent de echte hen.**  
**\*Ramon kent de echte hun.**  
Ramon knows **the real 3pl**

So in terms of modification, there is no difference between *zij*, *hen* and *hun*.

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<sup>20</sup> The construction requires focus and is therefore not possible with *ze*.

Like English, Dutch has plural pronominals that behave like determiners in the respect that they can take a noun as complement (33).

- (33) a. **Wij linguïsten** houden niet zo van dat soort grappen.  
**We linguists** like no so of that sort jokes
- b. **Wij leden van de PvdA** willen liever een andere oplossing vinden.  
**We members of the PvdA** want more a different solution to-find

For third person plural pronominals, the pattern is somewhat unclear. The CGN was not helpful here (box 6). I have therefore used a survey to ask for additional judgements. The results can be found in box 7. The judgements differentiate between *zij*<sup>21</sup> on the one hand and *hen* and *hun* on the other. The constructions where *hen* and *hun* take the complement are ungrammatical (34b,c), while the ones with *zij* are less felicitous than those with *wij*, but not necessarily ungrammatical (34a).

- (34) a. ?**Zij politieagenten** doen ook zelf niet alles volgens de wet.  
**3pINOM police-officers** do also themselves not everything by the law
- b. \*De ouders zeiden lelijke dingen over **hen gymnasiasten**.  
The parents said ugly things about **3pIACC gymnasium-students**
- c. \*De belastingdienst stuurde **hun zelfstandige ondernemers** een brief.  
The IRS sent **3pIDAT independent entrepreneurs** a letter

So in terms of taking nominal complements, subjects behave differently from objects. There seems to be no difference between *hen* and *hun* however. At best one could conclude that *zij* has a different pronominal category than *hen* and *hun*, *zij* is a pro-DP while *hen* and *hun* are pro- $\Phi$ P's. Unfortunately this still leaves the question why *hun* could also function as a pro-DP, while *hen* cannot.

#### **CGN Intermission V: Third person plural pronominals and full noun complements**

I did a search in the CGN for pronominals followed by a proper noun to find full noun complement constructions. I found only 1 instance of this construction with *zij*, none at all for *hen* and *hun*. For

<sup>21</sup>Again, this construction requires focus and can therefore not be formed with *ze*.

reference, I have also looked at *wij*, which appears in this construction 48 times. So the construction itself is not that rare, it is however with third person plural pronominals.

Box 6: the use of full noun complements with third person plural pronominals (1)

**Survey Intermission II: Third person plural pronominals and full noun complements**

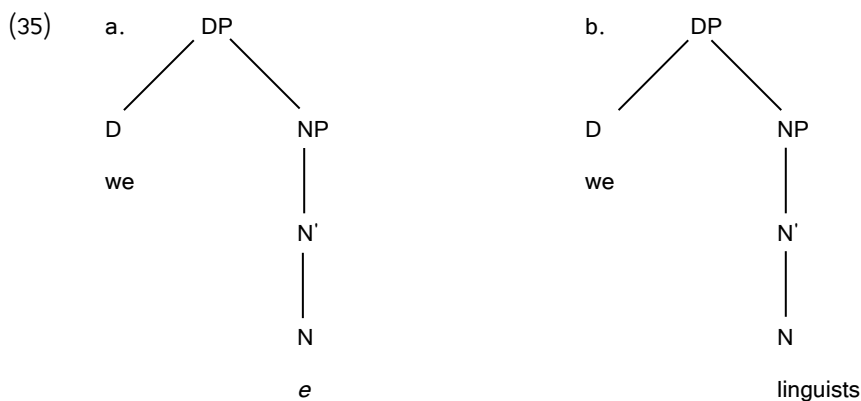
In the survey I included 16 sentences with full noun complements. 4 with *we*, 4 with *zij*, both in subject position, 4 with *hun* in indirect object position and 4 with *hen*, of which 3 in direct object position and 1 in a PP complement.

All 4 sentences with *we* are judged as grammatical, all 4 sentences with *hen* and all 4 sentences with *hun* are judged as ungrammatical. The sentences with *zij* received mixed judgements.

Box 7: the use of full noun complements with third person plural pronominals (2)

*3.3 Pronominals as determiners with null complements*

Panagiotidis (2003) states in his article on the pronominal count noun *one* that pronominals are D's which are complemented by null nominals (35a). He bases this theory on the work of Postal (1969), Cardinaletti (1994), Ritter (1995) and Corver and Delfitto (1999). The pronominal itself does not have a separate feature that gives it the pronominal interpretation but it is the lack of descriptive content from the null nominal that induces this interpretation. In certain cases, the nominal is not null, but a full nominal, like in (26), (33) and (34) in the previous section (35b).



Since English pronominals, like *one*, are unable to combine with *of*-complements (36), Panagiotidis concludes that *one* and the null nominal are either N'- or NP-level elements. Therefore they occupy the head as well as the complement position. Since specifiers appear to the left of the head, this makes it impossible for an *of*-complement to combine with them.

- (36) a. \*The students of physics are taller than the ones of chemistry.  
 b. \*We students of physics are taller than you of chemistry.

As mentioned in the previous section Dutch third person object pronominals cannot combine with full nominals (34b,c). This could mean that they have a different structure from English pronominals and Dutch subject pronominals that do have this possibility. Maybe they are not D's, but NP's, N''s or even N's. To test this, I used the same test as Panagiotidis, the possibility to combine with *of*-complements (37-38).

- (37) a. **Zij van hierachter** is een aardig meisje.  
**She from here-back** is a nice girl ('She that lives behind us is a nice girl')  
 b. **Wij van marketing** zijn veel gezelliger dan **jullie van de postkamer**.  
**We of marketing** are much more-sociable than **youPL from the post-room**

- (38) a. **Zij van hierachter** zijn aardige mensen.  
**3pl from here-back** are nice people ('They that live behind us are nice people')  
 b. ?Thomas heeft college met **hen van natuurkunde**.  
 ?Thomas heeft college met **hun van natuurkunde**.  
 Thomas has class with **3pl from physics**

The subject pronominal *zij* can combine with an *of*-complement, the object pronominals *hen* and *hun* cannot. The second person plural object pronominal *jullie* can combine with an object pronominal however, so there is no clear subject vs. object distinction. I will not further discuss this unclear pattern, since the distinction I was looking for, one between *hen* and *hun*, is not found here.

#### **CGN Intermission VI: Third person plural pronominals and *of*-complements**

To find *of*-complements I have simply done a search for the pronominal followed by *van* ('of'). I did a search on the third person pronominals (except for *ze* since the *of*-complement construction is a focus construction) and on the first person plural pronominal, to see how common it is. For *wij* I found only 4 instances, so the construction is quite uncommon. I did however also find 2 instances for *zij*. *Hun* and *hen* do not occur in this construction in the CGN, but since the construction is rare nothing can be concluded from the absence of the construction.

**Survey Intermission III: Third person plural pronominals and *of*-complements**

In the survey I included 18 sentences with *of*-complements. Half the sentences contained two *of*-complements in a (more) than-construction. For reference there were two sentences with full nouns and *die van* ('those of'). In total there were 4 sentences with *wij* in regular subject position, 4 with *jullie* in subject position of which 2 in a than-construction, 4 with *zij* in subject position of which 2 in a than-construction, 4 with *ons* of which 2 in direct object position and 2 in indirect object position, 4 with *hun* in indirect object position of which 2 in a than-construction and 4 with *hen* in direct object position of which 2 in a than-construction.

Of all these sentences, the ones with the full nouns, *die van*, *wij*, *jullie* and *zij* were judged as grammatical. The judgements on the sentences with *hen* and *hun* were mixed.

It was suggested that the than-construction might improve the grammaticality of the construction but that is not reflected in the judgements given in this survey.

## 4 Towards a new theory

The theories discussed in the previous chapter were unable to shed light on the difference between *hen* and *hun*. To explain the behaviour of third person plural pronominals in Dutch a new theory will be needed. To come to this new theory I will again sum up some functional properties of these pronominals, see table 8.

	<b>Animate</b>	<b>Human</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Case</b>	<b>Distribution</b>
<i>zij</i>	±	±	-	NOM	S
<i>ze</i>	±	±	-	NOM/ACC/DAT	S, DO, IO
<i>hen</i>	+	±	-	ACC	DO, IO
<i>hun</i>	+ <sup>22</sup>	±	-	DAT	S, DO, IO, POS

Table 8: functional properties of third person plural pronominals in Dutch

There seems to be only one noticeable difference between *hen* and *hun* besides the fact that *hun* can be used as subject; *hun* can be used as a possessive while *hen* cannot. Since this is the only difference, it should provide the key to why *hun* can be used as subject.

A new problem arises when the possibility to function as possessive is distinctive for the use as subject; Dutch has another third person pronominal that is both (in)direct object as possessive; the third person singular feminine *haar*. See also the paradigm in table 9.

	<b>Animate</b>	<b>Human</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Case</b>	<b>Distribution</b>
<i>zij</i>	±	±	-	NOM	S
<i>ze</i>	±	±	-	NOM/ACC/DAT	S, DO, IO
<i>hen</i>	+	+	-	ACC	DO, IO
<i>hun</i>	+ <sup>22</sup>	±	-	DAT	S, DO, IO, POS
<i>hij</i>	±	±	Masc	NOM	S
<i>'ie</i>	±	±	Masc	NOM	S
<i>hem</i>	±	±	Masc	ACC/DAT	DO, IO
<i>zij</i>	±	±	Fem	NOM	S
<i>ze</i>	±	±	Fem	NOM	S
<i>haar</i>	±	±	Fem	ACC/DAT	DO, IO, POS

Table 9: functional properties of third person pronominals in Dutch

<sup>22</sup>There is no animacy restriction on possessive *hun*.

A theory explaining why *hun* can function as subject can therefore not be solely based on the difference between *hen* and *hun*, but also needs to be based on the difference between *haar* and *hun*.

A theory that incorporates all the previously mentioned facts will be problematic for any framework that has a narrow relationship between feature distribution and spellout. I will therefore need to formulate an explanation based on nanosyntactic theory, in which the form-function relationship is more flexible than in any other framework.

#### 4.1 A bit on nanosyntax

As mentioned briefly in the previous section, in nanosyntax there is no one-to-one relationship between form and function. Syntactic structures are not made up of words that are a collection of features with a certain structure and spellout that fall into specified categories. Rather syntactic structures are made up of part-structures that can correspond to words but do not have to, and that can have unfilled parts. So even when two words seem to be of the same category (say for instance: pronominals) it does not mean that they have the same structure or structure-parts that are filled.

There are three important principles used in nanosyntax (adapted from Starke (2009)):

(39) The Superset Principle:

A lexically stored tree matches a syntactic node iff the lexically stored tree contains the syntactic node

(40) Cyclic Override:

Biggest wins: Each successful spellout overrides previous successful spellouts and since merger is bottom-up, the biggest match will always override the smaller matches.

(41) The Elsewhere Principle<sup>23</sup>:

At each cycle, if several lexical items match the root node, the most specialised form wins.

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<sup>23</sup>Starke himself uses the 'Minimise Junk' principle, which he derives from the Elsewhere Principle. I find the Elsewhere Principle itself (as first formulated by Kiparsky (1973)) more useful here than the derivation.



In the next chapter I will use the basics of nanosyntax to formulate a new theory on the use of *hun* in subject position.

## 4.2 A bit on *haar*

As I previously mentioned, the third person singular feminine pronominal *haar* shares with *hun* the property of being able to function both as dative and possessive (and also as accusative). Some other properties of *haar* are summed up in table 9, partly repeated below as table 10.

	<b>Animate</b>	<b>Human</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Case</b>	<b>Distribution</b>
<i>haar</i>	±	±	Fem	ACC/DAT	DO, IO, POS

Table 10: functional properties of *haar* according to the prescriptive norm

To make sure the properties mentioned are also the actual properties of *haar* as used in common Dutch, I searched the CGN, the results are in box 10.

**CGN Intermission VII: The third person singular feminine**

To make sure that the third person singular feminine *haar* is really never used as subject I searched the CGN. My assumption turned out to be correct, there are no instances of *haar* as subject in the CGN. I also searched the CGN to make sure there is no animacy restriction on *haar*. Of the first 1000 instances of *haar*, there are 3 instances where it refers to an inanimate entity while in object position:

'hij onderscheid de wellust van het genot als de geur<sub>i</sub> van bloemen die **haar**<sub>i</sub> verspreiden of de klank van het instrument dat die voortbrengt'

he distinguishes the lust from the pleasure like the scent<sub>i</sub> of flowers that **her**<sub>i</sub> spread or the sound from the instrument that it produces

'de kwintessens als het ware van het genot<sub>i</sub> de kunst om er wijs gebruik van te maken **haar**<sub>i</sub> verstandig te doseren en met gevoel te ondergaan'

the quintessence like it were of the pleasure<sub>i</sub> the art of there wise use of to make **her**<sub>i</sub> wisely to dose and with feeling to undergo

'ook vandaag is deze obsessie<sub>i</sub> met het werkeethos slechts eigen aan onze westerse cultuur en vind je **haar**<sub>i</sub> nog niet vaak terug in andere continenten en culturen'

also today is this obsession<sub>i</sub> with the work-ethos only own to our western culture and find you **her**<sub>i</sub> not often back in other continents and cultures

And 5 while appearing inside a complement:

'ik deed een aanbod aan de commissie-Kalsbeek<sub>i</sub> om **haar**<sub>i</sub> vertrouwelijk over de hoofdlijnen te informeren'

I did an offer to the commission-K<sub>i</sub> to **her**<sub>i</sub> confidentially on the headlines to inform

'ik dank de commissie<sub>i</sub> voor de door **haar**<sub>i</sub> verrichte werkzaamheden'

I thank the commission<sub>i</sub> for the by **her**<sub>i</sub> performed duties

'GroenLinks<sub>i</sub> heeft daar het voor **haar**<sub>i</sub> principiële punt naar voren gebracht'

GL<sub>i</sub> has there the for **her**<sub>i</sub> principled point to front brought

'[de zijde van de abaya]<sub>i</sub> is licht en soepel, valt prachtig en waaiert bij elke stap op, er is de wil van een hand voor nodig om **haar**<sub>i</sub> bijeen te houden.'

[the silk of the abaya]<sub>i</sub> is light and supple falls beautifully and waves with each step on there is the will of a hand needed to **her**<sub>i</sub> together to hold

'De magnetiseur maakt alleen maar gebruik van de energie om zich heen, bundelt die energie<sub>i</sub> om **haar**<sub>i</sub> gericht daar waar nodig in 't lichaam aan te wenden'

the magnetiser makes only use of the energy around him - bundles that energy<sub>i</sub> to **her**<sub>i</sub> directed there where necessary in the body on to avert

For reference, I did the same search for third person singular feminine nominative *zij*, here there were 7 instances amongst the first 1000, so there seems to be no significant difference in animacy between *zij*<sub>sg</sub> and *haar*.

Also notable: not all of the instances of *haar* stated above refer to feminine words. It seems that *haar* does not even have a specific gender feature, it can be used to refer to non-feminine nouns.

I also searched the CGN for possible case positions for singular *ze*. Unlike plural *ze*, singular *ze* cannot be used in object position.<sup>24</sup>

Box 10: the use of the third person singular feminine in different positions and constructions

It turns out that *haar*, unlike *hun* is indeed never used as subject. It also turns out that *haar*, unlike *hen*, does not impose an animacy restriction. And furthermore: *haar* is not just used for reference to entities of which the noun has feminine gender. It can also be used for nouns that have masculine gender, for instance *de geur* ('the scent'). *Haar* does not have an inherent gender restriction.

	<b>Animate</b>	<b>Human</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Case</b>	<b>Distribution</b>
<i>hun</i>	+*	±	-	DAT	S, DO, IO, POS
<i>haar</i>	±	±	-	ACC/DAT	DO, IO, POS

<sup>24</sup>According to myself and the data from the CGN. There are speakers that do allow this.

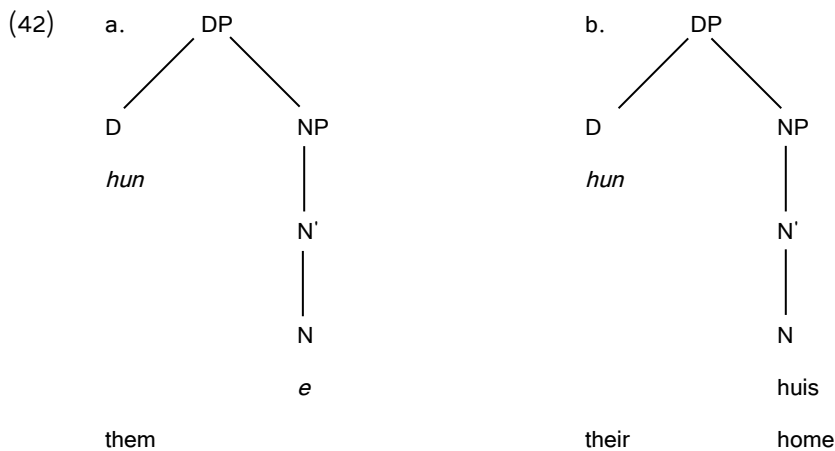
Table 11: functional properties of *haar* and *hun*

For more on the pronominal *haar* and gender, see Audring (2006, 2009) and Audring & Booij (2009).

## 5 *Hun* as underspecified nominal

### 5.0 How *hun* differs from *hen*

To explain the difference between *hen* and *hun* I assume the pronominal structure as used by Panagiotidis (2003) mentioned in chapter 3. Dutch subject and object pronominals are DP's with a null nominal inside (42a). Possessives are different however, they have a filled N (42b).



I assume, like Panagiotidis that the pronominal interpretation comes from the null nominal in N. I further assume that the null nominal also determines the case of the pronominal. As objects both *hen* and *hun* combine with an *e* that has accusative case<sup>25</sup>. For *hen* this is also the only nominal it can combine with. As discussed in chapter 3, *hen* does not have the possibility to combine with a full noun. Even though the object form of *hun* also lacks this possibility, possessive *hun* does have this possibility, as we can see in (42b). From these facts I conclude that *hun* is not a DP with a null nominal in N, but a DP with just an open position for a N. If combined with  $e_{ACC}$ , which is the case when it is used in object position, it can no longer take on another nominal. It can however take on another nominal when it is used in a different way, like when it is possessive. And it is this ability to take on any N that also allows *hun* to take  $e_{NOM}$  in N, which renders it suitable to be used in subject position.

<sup>25</sup>As mentioned in chapter 2, Dutch does not have a real dative and the accusative is used also for indirect objects.

## 5.1 How *hun* differs from *haar*

Since *haar*, like *hun*, can also be used in object position as well as a possessive, I have to assume that like *hun*, *haar* is also underspecified for what kind of N it selects. This raises the question why *haar* is never used in subject position. If it is underspecified like *hun*, it should also be able to select an  $e_{NOM}$ . I answer this question not by assuming that *haar* cannot select  $e_{NOM}$ , but by assuming that to be used in subject position, something more is needed than just the ability to select  $e_{NOM}$ .

As mentioned in chapter 2, Van Bergen et al. assume that the use of *hun* in subject position is due to the animacy restriction it imposes. This is also a point where it significantly differs from *haar*, which does not pose an animacy restriction, see example (43), taken from the CGN, and see box 10 for the CGN data.

- (43) [...] ook vandaag is [deze obsessie]<sub>i</sub> met het werkethos slechts eigen aan onze westerse  
also today is this obsession with the work-ethos only own to our western  
cultuur en vind je **haar**<sub>i</sub> nog niet vaak terug in andere continenten en culturen.  
society and find you **her** yet not often back in other continents and cultures

I assume that it is this animacy restriction that *hun* imposes that triggers it to be used as subject. According to the Elsewhere Principle discussed in the previous chapter, if there are multiple lexical items that match a certain root node, the one with the more restricted use wins. For *hun* and plural *zij* there is no clear winner, since *hun* is more restricted in terms of animacy, while *zij* is more restricted in terms of case, see table 1 in the previous chapter. For *haar* and singular *zij* there is a clear winner, *zij* is more restricted in terms of case, while *haar* is in no way more restricted than *zij*. This means that even though *haar* can select  $e_{NOM}$ , it is never used in subject position because it has no advantage over *zij*.

## 6 Conclusions & Discussion

### 6.0 Conclusion

The use of *hun* in subject position is caused by two necessary factors, which are both insufficient on their own. The first factor creates the possibility of using *hun* in this manner and the second factor triggers the actual use. The possibility is caused by the underspecification for case. Since *hun* has an unfilled N, it has no inherent case and can therefore take on any case. The possibility alone is not enough for actual use however, there needs to be an advantage that triggers the use of *hun* over the use of the regular subject pronominal *zij*. The trigger is the animacy restriction that *hun* poses. These two factors together make *hun* unique and explain why no other Dutch pronominal behaves in the same manner.

### 6.1 Discussion

In this thesis I have provided an explanation for both the possibility and the trigger to use *hun* in subject position. As mentioned in the beginning, the use of *hun* as subject seems to increase, which raises the interesting question to which point it will increase. Since it has a unique use due to its animacy restriction, one could imagine that it might one day become more common than the pronominal *zij* for this specific use. Since *hun* has this animacy restriction, *zij* will however always have to exist alongside *hun*, to be able to refer to inanimate entities. Language purists might not like this development, but it does add to the expressiveness of Dutch since it allows to distinguish between animate and inanimate referents.

The animacy restriction does pose the question of its origin, why does *hun* have this feature? And did it always have this feature, or is it something that arose simultaneously with its use as subject? If the point could be determined when *hun* was actually first used as subject this could also provide a nice insight into the process of language change.

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'Hen, hun / ze (verwijzing naar zaken)': <http://taaladvies.net/taal/advies/vraag/375>

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<sup>26</sup>All websites were last checked on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July, 2012



## Appendix A

### *Survey with judgements*

#### **Pronominals with of-complements:**

De studenten van natuurkunde zijn langer dan die van scheikunde.

De kinderen van Tom zijn veel minder knap dan die van Johan.

Wij van geowetenschappen zijn intelligenter dan jullie van letteren.

Wij van marketing zijn veel gezelliger dan jullie van de postkamer.

Jullie van Engels doen ook niet gezellig mee.

Jullie van de overkant zeggen ook maar wat.

Wij van geschiedenis weten veel meer feiten dan zij van muzikwetenschappen.

Wij van wiskunde zijn veel preciezer dan zij van sterrenkunde.

Zij van Frans doen ook altijd moeilijk.

Zij van onderwijskunde denken ook altijd dat ze het beter weten.

? De universiteit besloot ons van diergeneeskunde veel minder geld te geven dan hun van geneeskunde

? Zijn ouders gaven ons van de Dorpsstraat veel minder snoepgoed dan hun van de Kerkweg.

\* De professor gaf hun van Spaans erg hoger cijfers.

? Hun vader gaf hun van hierachter erg veel cadeaus.

? De schooldirecteur besloot ons van VWO5 veel harder te straffen dan hen van VWO6.

? De docent was tegen ons van taal- en cultuurstudies veel strenger dan tegen hen van literatuurwetenschappen.

? Ik zag hen van hier om de hoek in de supermarkt lopen.

? Jij stond met hen van de FNV te kletsen.

#### **Pronominals with full noun complements:**

Wij linguïsten houden niet zo van dat soort grappen.

Wij doktoren vinden het wel prima zo.

Wij studenten van de bèta-faculteit zijn tegen deze maatregel.

Wij leden van de PvdA willen liever een andere oplossing vinden.

? Zij artsen zijn wat serieuzer dan wij.

- ? Zij politieagenten doen ook zelf niet alles volgens de wet.
- ? Zij medewerkers van de universiteit gaan dat mogelijk maken.
- ? Zij studenten van de letterenfaculteit zullen een leuke activiteit organiseren.
  
- \* De ouders zeiden lelijke dingen over hen gymnasiasten.
- \* De wandelaars zagen hen boswachters erg hard lopen.
- \* De leraren wilden hen leerlingen van de middelbare school liever niet zien tijdens de vakantie.
- \* De trollen zagen hen eenhoorns met lange manen over het veld galopperen.
  
- \* Ik gaf hun brandweermannen een bos bloemen als bedankje.<sup>27</sup>
- \* Johanneke gaf hun ambtenaren een koekje van eigen deeg.
- \* De belastingdienst stuurde hun zelfstandige ondernemers een brief.
- \* Zij gaven hun studenten van de letterenfaculteit slechte beoordelingen.

***Hun* in different positions:**

- ? Hun hebben het gedaan.
- ? Hun deden erg hun best het zo goed mogelijk te doen.
- ? Hij stuurde hun een brief.
- ? Simone gaf hun drie kussen op elke wang
- ? Ik gaf aan hun een kado.
- ? De secretaresse wilde aan hun echt iets moois geven.
- ? Ik gaf een gigantische bos bloemen aan hun.
- ? De scheidsrechter gaf meerdere gele kaarten aan hun.
- ? Ik sloeg hun heel hard.
- ? De bokser stompte hun meerdere keren.

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<sup>27</sup>I added a note to these test items that the object form of *hun* was meant, not the possessive.