

Number as a neutralizing context for person in Dutch dialects: the odd one out or only part of the story?

If we look at the MAND (Morphological Atlas of Dutch Dialects) we can observe that in 587 out of 613 measure points (96%) in the Dutch speaking area person is marked in the indicative singular. In contrast, number is marked in only 241 out of 613 (39%) measure points in the indicative plural. Thus, in Dutch dialects the feature person seems to depend on the feature number. Dependency of the feature person on number is in line with deflection processes such as described by Lynch (2000) for the Oceanic language Anejom and in work by Kusters (2003) on deflection in four genetically different language families. On the basis of these works on deflection we could claim that the feature person is dependent on the feature number.

However, dependency of the number on person is defended by, for example Noyer (1992) and dependency of the feature number on person follows from the animacy hierarchy. The animacy hierarchy is formulated by Corbett (2000: 56) as in (1) where second person is considered less animate than first person and more animate than third person.

- (1) *Animacy hierarchy*
 1 > 2 > 3 > kin > human > animate > inanimate

The animacy hierarchy underlies what Cysouw (2003: 300) refers to as the horizontal homophony hierarchy. Since the likelihood of number marking depends on animacy, the most animate subject, first person, is most likely to encode number and the least animate subject, third person, is the least likely to encode number. The horizontal homophony hierarchy is visualized in (2).

- (2) Horizontal homophony hierarchy (taken from Cysouw 2003: 300)

	Sing	Plur	<	Sing	Plur.	<	Sing	Plur.	<	-
1										
2										
3										

In (2), there are four possibilities in the marking of plural. The condition furthest to the right represents cases where person is not encoded at all. If person is encoded somewhere, it is encoded in first person. Second person follows first person and third person follows second person.

Languages that follow the horizontal homophony hierarchy and where number depends on person are typologically common. The question is now how we can understand the observation that the situation in Dutch dialects is unlike many other languages. We could consider Dutch and other Germanic languages exceptions, we could claim that the dependency between number and person is flexible (cf. Aikhenvald & Dixon 1998) or we could claim that the direction of the dependency between the features number and person reflects different stages of the language. In this talk I defend the latter position.

I relate the horizontal homophony hierarchy to the rise of number marking in languages. Number is most likely to rise in the context of animate subjects. The rise of number marking is unrelated to what Nevins (2007) refers to as markedness-directed impoverishment since number marking in this case is least likely to appear in the unmarked context of third person. The dependency of person on number is in line with markedness-directed impoverishment since person is neutralized in the context of the marked value plural. I relate markedness directed impoverishment to the imperfect learning of second language learners. Language and dialect contact implies the rise of second language learners. The dependency of person on number in cases of deflection is therefore no coincidence.

Bibliography

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Person in the singular versus the plural

Absence of person in singular in Dutch speaking area



Absence of person in plural marking in Dutch speaking area (Frisia excluded)

