

Adnominal and pronominal agreement with neuter nouns in Belgian Dutch

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In Dutch, the gender of nouns is marked on adnominal and pronominal elements. Some of these elements (like definite articles) can either take common or neuter gender, while for other elements (like personal pronouns), the traditional three-way division of masculine, feminine or neuter gender applies. Previous research has shown that the gender of Dutch pronouns is sometimes based on properties of the referent rather than on the grammatical gender of the antecedent (Audring 2006; De Vos & De Vogelaer 2011). However, it has not yet been studied comprehensively whether the dialectal gender of nouns can influence adnominal and pronominal gender in supra-regional varieties as well. Furthermore, for Belgian Dutch, systematic research on the variation in the gender of other agreement targets than the personal pronouns is still lacking.

This paper focuses on the gender of definite articles, demonstrative determiners, demonstrative pronouns and relative pronouns for reference to neuter nouns in colloquial Belgian Dutch. On the basis of the Flemish part of the Spoken Dutch Corpus (*Corpus Gesproken Nederlands*), the effect of language-internal (e.g. dialectal gender of noun) and language-external factors (e.g. dialect proficiency of speaker) is analyzed with logistic regression analyses.

The results indicate that the gender of these pronouns and determiners in Belgian Dutch is not affected by the same factors. On the one hand, concerning pronouns, the analysis corroborates the findings from previous studies. Referential properties can indeed influence pronominal gender: the biological gender of the referent can be used to agree with animate referents, while neuter gender correlates with inanimacy. On the other, semantic agreement cannot account for the use of non-neuter determiners for neuter nouns. Instead, deviations from neuter gender are only found in supra-regional informal Belgian Dutch with nouns that are non-neuter in Belgian Dutch dialects. This dialectal influence needs to be interpreted in terms of the specific nature of the Belgian Dutch stratificational continuum.