

# In search of the function of the Dutch partitive genitive: a corpus analysis

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# Outline

- Introduction
- Methodology
- Results
- Function of the partitive **-s** suffix
- Conclusions

# Introduction

- Dutch partitive genitive

*iets*  
something  
'something fun'

*leuk-s*  
fun-GEN

[<sub>NP</sub> Q<sub>i</sub> Adj<sub>j</sub>-s ] ↔ [modifier<sub>j</sub> head-quantity<sub>i</sub>]

- *niets bijzonder-s* 'nothing special'
- *veel interessant-s* 'a lot of interesting things'
- *weinig concreet-s* 'few concrete things'
- *wat zinnig-s* 'something sensible'
- *zoveel goed-s* 'so many good things'

# Introduction

- Function of the **-s** suffix
  - Nominalisation (Van Marle 1996, Haeseryn et al. 1997)
  - N-movement (Abney 1987)
  - Empty noun (Kester 1996, Hoeksema 1998)
  - Predicative relation (Broekhuis & Strang 1996, Broekhuis 2013)
  - Construction marker (Booij 2010)
- However, variation:
  - The **-s** need not be expressed: *iets interessant(s)*

# Introduction

- If the **-s** may disappear in any given context, it is unlikely to bear an important, purely grammatical function
- Useless remnant of case system? Other function?
- Research question:
  - What factors determine the presence or absence of the partitive genitive **-s**?

# Methodology

- CONDIV corpus (see Grondelaers et al. 2000 for details)
- 3018 partitive genitives after manual checking
- Binary response variable: [+s] / [-s]
- Mixed models logistic regression
- Stepwise variable selection procedure

# Methodology

- Fixed effects

- Variety: Flanders, the Netherlands
- Register: chat, e-mail, mass-newspaper, quality-newspaper
- Quantifier: *iets* ('something'), *niets* ('nothing'), *veel* ('a lot'), *wat* ('something'), *weinig* ('little'), *zoveel* ('so much')
- Type-Adjective: other, deviant, colour
- Length-Adjective: 1, 2, 3, 4
- Number-of-words-AP 1, 2
- Frequency: log-transformed frequency of the phrase

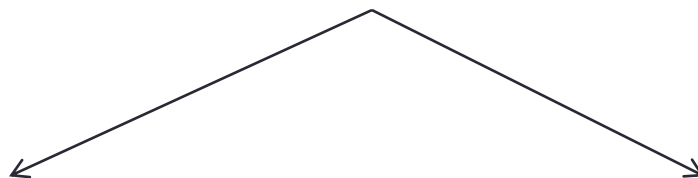
- Random effect

- Phrase iets leuk(s), iets zinnig(s), weinig leuk(s),...

# Methodology

- Deviant adjectives:
  - *Verkeerd* ('wrong'), *goed* ('good'), *beter* ('better'), *fout* ('incorrect')

*Of heb ik hier iets verkeerd verstaan...*  
or have I here **something wrong(ly)** understand



~~*[iets verkeerd] verstaan*  
[something wrong] understand~~

~~Partitive genitive  
'or did I understand something wrong?'  
[-s] or [+s]~~

*iets [verkeerd verstaan]*  
Something [wrongly understand]

Adverbial construction  
'or did I misunderstand something?'  
always [-s]



# Methodology

- Fixed effects

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- Type-Adjective: other, deviant, colour
- Length-Adjective: 1, 2, 3, 4
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- Random effect

- Phrase iets leuk(s), niets zinnig(s), weinig concreet(s),...

# Mixed effects logistic regression model

Predictors	Levels of categorical predictors	Estimates	Confidence intervals		P-values	
		success level = [-s]	2,5%	97,5%		
	intercept	0.07	-0.67	0.82	0.8482	
<i>Type-Adjective</i>	<i>other</i>	Reference level				
	<i>deviant</i>	1.96	1.45	2.46	< 0.0001	***
	<i>colour</i>	5.09	3.88	6.30	< 0.0001	***
<i>Variety</i>	<i>Flanders</i>	Reference level				
	<i>Netherlands</i>	-1.69	-2.01	-1.37	< 0.0001	***
<i>Register</i>	<i>chat</i>	Reference level				
	<i>e-mail</i>	-0.48	-0.77	-0.19	0.0013	**
	<i>mass-newspaper</i>	-1.08	-1.42	-0.74	< 0.0001	***
	<i>quality-newspaper</i>	-1.65	-2.22	-1.08	< 0.0001	***
<i>Quantifier</i>	<i>iets</i> ('something')	Reference level				
	<i>niets</i> ('nothing')	-0.05	-0.66	0.56	0.8809	
	<i>veel</i> ('a lot')	-1.14	-1.98	-0.29	0.0083	**
	<i>wat</i> ('something')	-2.00	-2.99	-1.00	< 0.0001	***
	<i>weinig</i> ('little')	-2.50	-4.12	-0.89	0.0023	**
	<i>zoveel</i> ('so much')	-2.35	-4.37	-0.34	0.0221	*
<i>Frequency</i>		-0.45	-0.79	-0.10	0.0109	*
<i>Interaction Variety – Quantifier</i>	<i>Flanders &amp; iets</i>	Reference level				
	<i>Netherlands – niets</i>	-0.33	-1.03	0.38	0.3635	
	<i>Netherlands – veel</i>	0.98	0.02	1.94	0.0443	*
	<i>Netherlands – wat</i>	1.22	0.19	2.25	0.0208	*
	<i>Netherlands – weinig</i>	2.33	0.66	4.00	0.0062	**
	<i>Netherlands – zoveel</i>	2.10	-0.94	5.13	0.1755	

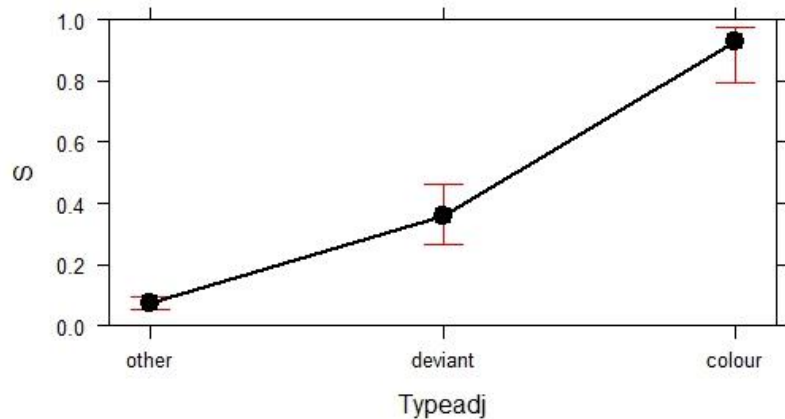
# Results

- Effect plots

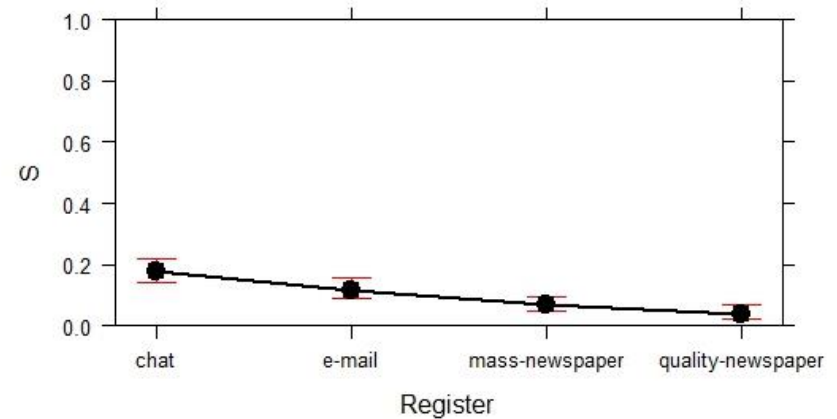
AIC: 2216

C-value: 0.872

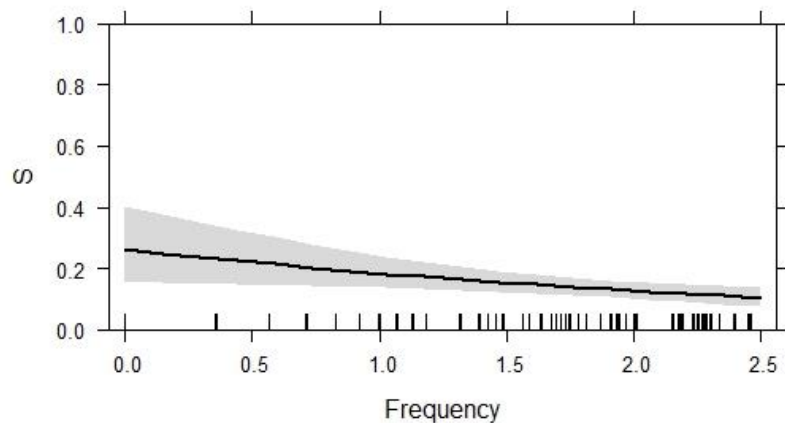
Typeadj effect plot



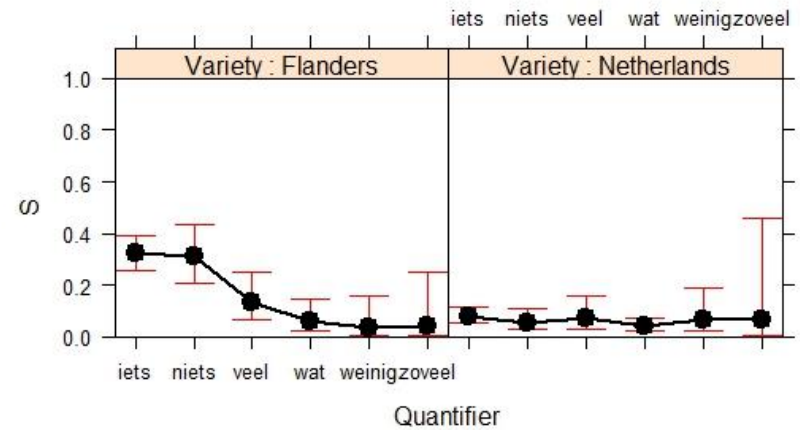
Register effect plot



Frequency effect plot



Variety\*Quantifier effect plot



# Results

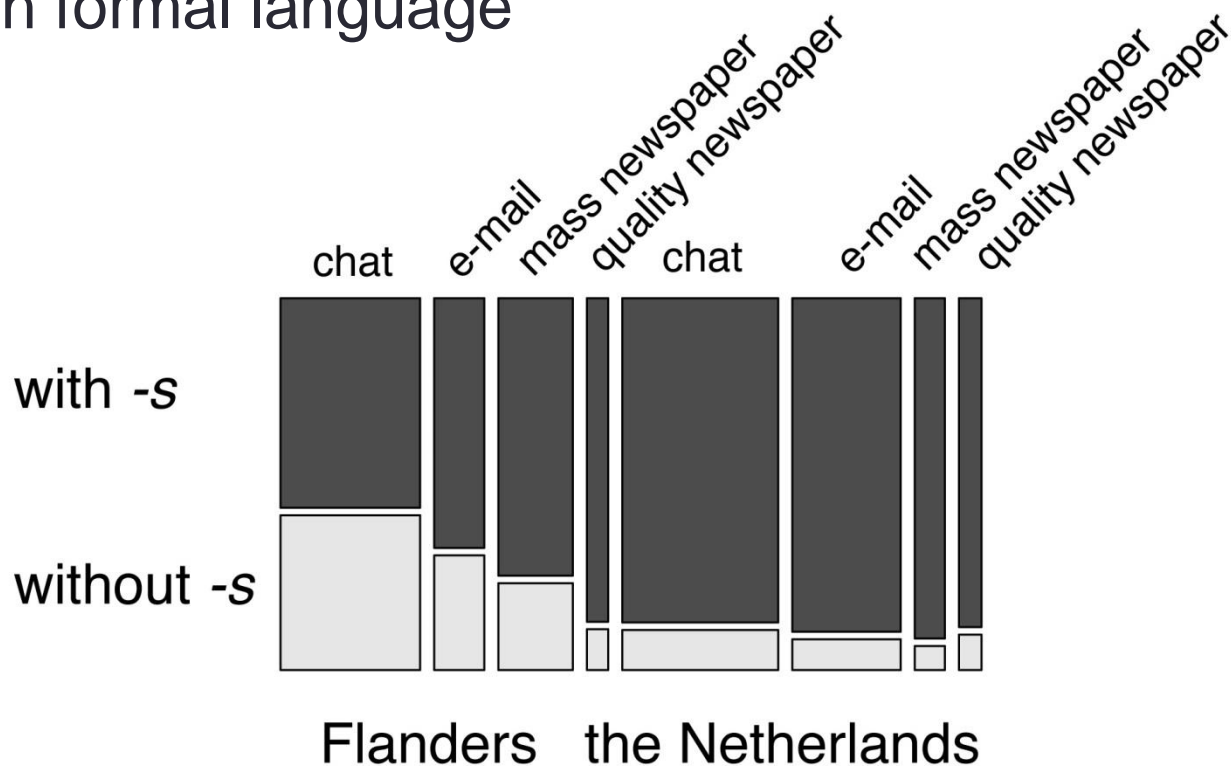
- **-s** omission is possible everywhere, but...
- We are quite capable of delimiting the contexts in which grand-scale **-s** omission is taking place
- Extralinguistic contexts:
  - Flemish informal language use

# Results

- Linguistic contexts: where the influence of adjacent constructions can be pointed at
- **-s** omission
  - Deviant adjectives: adverbial constructions
  - Colour adjectives: colour nouns
- **-s** retention
  - *Veel, weinig, zoveel*: modifier-noun constructions  
*veel water, weinig nieuws, zoveel lekkers*  
'a lot of water', 'little news', 'so much candy'

# Function of the partitive -s suffix

- The Netherlands: resilient **-s** retention outside of specific linguistic contexts
- Flanders: only in formal language



# Function of the partitive -s suffix

- Flanders:
  - *iets, niets*: signals the use of the standard language (non-grammatical = extra-linguistic function)
  - *veel, weinig, zoveel*: reïnterpretation as nominalisation suffix (new grammatical function)
- The Netherlands:
  - reanalysis of **-s** suffix (new grammatical function)

⇒ multifunctional

# Function of the partitive -s suffix

- New grammatical function in the Netherlands?
  - Nominalization
  - N-movement
  - Empty noun
  - Predicative relation
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  - **Construction marker**
- *iets*            *heel-s*            *uniek*            (Royen 1948)  
something    very-**GEN**            unique
- Prototypical instances cannot be reduced to other constructions

# Conclusions

- Synchronic: multifunctional **-s** suffix
- Diachronic: correspond to 2 ways to handle junk from earlier language stages (Lass 1990)
- Flanders
  - Throw it away: grand-scale **-s** omission
- The Netherlands
  - exaptation: new function shields it from waves of deflexion  
→ possible expansion to adverbs

# Conclusions

- Much left unexplored:
  - Diachronic dimension
  - Semantic difference between variants?
  - *iets heel-s uniek*
  - Lexical diffusion

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# Thanks!

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