

Dutch ‘Proper name + -s’

A hidden possessive

Norbert Corver

Utrecht University/UiL-OTS

1. Introduction

The Dutch grammatical marker *-s* is well-known for its occurrence in possessive noun phrases such as *Piets auto* (Piet-*s* car, ‘Piet’s car’) and *vaders hoed* (father-*s* hat, ‘father’s hat’), where *-s* is attached to a proper name and a kinship term, respectively. As has been observed by various Dutch traditional grammarians, the marker *-s* also shows up in a great variety of Dutch dialects in what appear to be non-possessive contexts (cf. Van Haeringen 1947, Overdiep 1940). An example of this quite remarkable phenomenon is given in (1), which represents Alblasserwaard Dutch (cf. Van Haeringen *ibidem*):

- (1) We kwamen Anna’s tegen
we met Anna-*s* PRT; ‘We met Anna.’

The question, obviously, arises how to interpret here the occurrence of *-s* on the proper name, which seems to function as an argument within the main clause. The approach taken by traditional grammarians is to analyze *-s* as a case morpheme. In this paper I will propose an alternative analysis according to which a linguistic expression like *Anna’s* in (1) is, in fact, a ‘hidden’ possessive construction, with *-s* as a possessive marker occupying a functional head position. More specifically, *Anna* is a possessor which enters into a possessive relationship with an unpronounced (i.e. silent) nominal possessum. Thus: [*Anna* + *-s* + POSSESSUM]. If this is the correct analysis, this would provide another instance of a nominal construction featuring an element which is syntactically and interpretively active, but yet not pronounced (cf. Kayne 2003).

2. Two analyses: -s as an enclitic article and -s as a case morpheme

Before discussing two potential analyses of the linguistic expression *Anna's* in (1), let me give some additional examples in order to show that this phenomenon is broadly attested in Dutch dialects and that the -s appears on proper names (and kinship nouns) fulfilling a variety of argumental functions.

Dialect of Alblasserwaard; Van Haeringen (1947)

- (2) a. We kwamen Anna's tegen(= (1))
we met Anna-s PRT; 'We met Anna.'
b. We zullen het *moeders* maar niet vertellen
we shall it mother-s but not tell; 'We won't tell it to mother.'
c. Dat is de hoed van *Aries*
that is the hat of Arie-s; 'That's Arie's hat.'

Dialect of Katwijk; Overdiep (1940:108)

- (3) a. Hè-je *Jantjies* iet ezien?
have-you Jan-DIM-s not seen; 'Haven't you seen Johnny?'
b. Ik hep et *Jantjies* ezâat
I have it Jan-DIM-s told; 'I told it to Johnny.'
c. Isset mit *Jantjies* choed?
is-it with Jan-DIM-s good; 'Is everything okay with Johnny?'

Dialect of Gilze

- (4) a. Ik kwam *Janne* tegen¹
I met Jan-e PRT; 'I met Jan.'
b. Ik gaaf *Teune* un kado
I gave Teun-e a present; 'I gave Teun a present.'
c. Des de stoel van *Janne*
that-s the chair of Jan-e; 'That's Jan's chair.'

In the a-examples, the proper name functions as a direct object, in the b-examples as an indirect object, and in the c-examples as the complement of P.²

Now that we have a rough picture of the distribution of -s, let us address the question as to what analysis could be assigned to this grammatical marker. A first hypothesis that comes to mind is that an expression like *Anna's* consists of a proper name and an enclitic definite article that attaches to the nominal stem. In the spirit of Longobardi's (1994) treatment of proper names as Determiner Phrases (DP) involving N-to-D movement in overt or covert syntax, one might want to argue that *Anna's* is derived by overtly moving the proper noun to the expletive article -s, which, being a bound morpheme, needs a nominal host to which it can attach.

- (10) a. Ik hoorde [Harries huilen] (dialect of Asten)
I heard Harrie-s cry; 'I heard Harry cry.'
b. Ik vind [*Harries* aardig]
I find Harrie-s nice; 'I consider Harrie a nice guy.'

These examples represent ECM (exceptional case marking) environments: *Harries* occupies the subject position of an infinitival clause or a small clause. Under a case analysis of -s, the appearance of -s on the subjects in (10) directly follows: the verbs *hoorde* and *vind* are able to 'assign' accusative case to the subject argument *Harrie*.³

Notice also that the marker -s (or -e) does not occur on vocative nominal expressions (examples drawn from the dialect of Katwijk).

- (11) a. Piet(*-e), lech iet te vloouke! (Overdiep 1940: 134)
 Piet(*-e), lay not to curse; 'Piet, don't curse!'
 b. Bin óm en brok sââl, Klaes(*-e)! (Overdiep, 1940: 195)
 put around a piece canvas, Klaas(-e)
 'Klaas, put a piece of canvas around it'

If -s/-e represents a non-nominative (i.e. accusative/oblique) case form, then the absence of this morpheme on these vocative nominals is expected. As shown by (12), where we have a pronominal element for the addressee, Dutch vocatives typically carry a 'nominative' case form:

- (12) Kom eens hier, jij/*jou!
 come PRT here, you_{NOM}/you_{ACC/OBL}; 'You, come here!'

Thus, the facts in (10) and (11) are suggestive for a Case analysis of the pattern *Proper Name* + -s, i.e. -s is a case form that appears on the proper name when it appears in a structural position to which accusative/oblique case can be assigned (e.g. by V or P).

Although, at first sight, such a case analysis appears to be on the right track, it is faced with one serious question: the marker -s/-e never appears on the proper noun when it takes a PP-complement. This is illustrated by the Katwijk Dutch example in (13):⁴

- (13) a. Ik ben [_{PP} bij [*Piet*(*-e) fan Nelles]] eweest (Overdiep 1940: 110)
 I have with Piet(-e) of Nelle-s been
 'I visited Piet, who is Nel's son.'
 b. Wij hebbe teuges den aevent gistere [_{PP} *Piet*(*-e) van Klemme-n] epraajt
 we have against the evening yesterday (with) Piet(-e) of Klem-e spoken
 'Towards evening, we spoke with Piet, who is Clemens's son.'

If -s is a case marker, it is not so obvious why the pattern in (13), featuring -e, is excluded. Under an analysis in which *Piet* enters the syntactic derivation with the case suffix -e attached to it, it is entirely unclear why such a case marked noun would block the appearance of a PP-complement. Languages that display morphological case marking on nouns do not block such marking when a noun combines with a following PP-complement; cf. the example in (14):

- (14) Ik habe [den Kinder-*n* [_{PP} von Karl]] süßigkeiten gegeben
I have the children-DAT of Karl sweets given

Also for a case analysis in which *-s* would instantiate a functional case head (say, K; cf. Bittner and Hale 1996), the facts in (13) are problematic. If *-s/-e* were in K and the form *Piet-e* were derived in terms of N-to-K-movement (see (15)), it would be unclear why such head movement is blocked by the presence of a PP-complement.⁵

- (15) a. [_{KP} -e [_{NP} Piet [_{PP} fan Nelles]]]
b. [_{KP} Piet_j-e [_{NP} t_j [_{PP} fan Nelles]]]

Besides the ‘PP-complement’ problem posed by (13), there is another problem, which concerns the absence of *-s/-e* on proper names that behave like predicate nominals. Consider the examples in (16a,b), which are taken from the Katwijk Dutch dialect and the Astén Dutch dialect, respectively:

- (16) a. [Jáepje Skúit(*-e)] *nòmde* ze *die* (Overdiep 1940:226)
Jaap-DIM Skuit(-e) called they that; ‘They called him Japie Skuit.’
b. We *noemen* hem *Harrie*(*-s)
we call him Harrie(-s); ‘We call him Harrie.’

The predicative function of the proper name in (16) is strongly suggested by the fact that when we ‘pronominalize’ the proper name, we get the adverb-like proform *zo*, which typically functions as a pro-predicate in Dutch:

- (17) We *noemen* hem *zo*
we call him so

Clearly, *Jáepje Skúit* and *Harrie* in (16a,b) should be interpreted as predicate nominals that predicate over the external arguments *die* and *hem*, respectively. As is especially clear from the pronominal form *hem* ‘him’, these external arguments carry accusative (i.e. non-nominative) case, and arguably should be analyzed as subjects of the small clause selected by *nòmde/noemen*. Schematically:

- (18) We *noemen* [_{SC} hem Harrie]

It seems very unlikely that, in this small clause configuration, *Harrie* represents a nominative case form. If it carries any case form, it should be an accusative one, given the widespread case agreement attested with subject-predicate relations.⁶ In short, the ‘bareness’ of the proper name in (16) also seems to go against a case analysis of the *Proper Name* + *-s* construction.

3. -s as a possessive marker

If -s (or -e) is neither an enclitic definite article nor an accusative/oblique case marker, what can it be? What I would like to propose is that -s on *Anna's* in (1) is precisely the same element as the one we find on the possessive noun phrase in (19).

- (19) We kwamen [Anna's moeder] tegen
we came Anna-s mother PRT; 'We met Anna's mother.'

Thus, the linguistic expression *Anna's* in (1) is a hidden possessive noun phrase, in which the possessed noun is silent, i.e. unpronounced. The internal structure which I will assume for *Anna's* is the one in (20):⁷

- (20) [_{DP} D [_{PosP} Anna_j [_{Pos} -s [_{NP} Possessum *t_j*]]]]

If *Anna's* in (1) is the same element and occupies the same (DP-internal) structural position as *Anna's* in (19), one would expect parallelism in their syntactic behavior. This, in fact, seems to hold true. A first sign of parallelism is the fact that the marker -s (or -e) typically attaches to the last proper noun in the case of a complex proper name (i.e. first name + family name). In (21a), this is illustrated for a regular possessive noun phrase, in (21b) for a possessive noun phrase featuring a silent possessed noun.

- (21) a. Dat is [Krijn Haezenoote huis] (dialect of Katwijk)
that is Krijn Haezenoot-e house; 'That is Krijn Haezenoot's house.'
b. Ik heb *Krijn Haezenoote*-n-ezien
I have Krijn Haezenoot-e seen; 'I saw Krijn Haezenoot.'

Another parallel property relates to Van Haeringen's (1947) observation that the expression *Proper Name* + -s is typically found with 'bare' proper names, i.e. proper names that are not accompanied by any determiner-like element. Van Haeringen gives the following contrast:

- (22) a. Laten we *vaders* daar nou maar buiten houden
let we father-s there PRT but outside keep
'Let's not involve father in this.'
b. *Laten we *die arme vaders* daar nou maar niet mee lastig vallen
let we that poor father-s there PRT but not with bother
'Let's not bother poor father with this.'

A similar contrast is found with 'normal' possessive constructions:⁸

- (23) a. [*Vaders fiets*] is gisteren gestolen
father-s bike has yesterday (been) stolen

- b. ?* [*Die arme vaders fiets*] is gisteren gestolen
that poor father-s bike has yesterday (been) stolen

A third piece of parallelism concerns the fact that the grammatical morpheme *-s* that we find in expressions like *Anna's* in (1) is also found on the demonstrative pronoun *die* ('that') and the interrogative pronoun *wie* ('whose') (cf. (24)); that is, those elements that also have *-s* attached to them in regular possessives (cf. (25)):

- (24) a. *Wies sag ik taer?* (dialect of Katwijk; Overdiep 1940:110)
who-s saw I there; 'Who did I see there?'
b. *Neen, dies ken æk iet foor dat werrek gebruiken*
No, that-s can I not for that work use
'No, I can't use him for that kind of work.'
- (25) a. *Wies hoed is-tat?*
whose hat is-that
b. *Neen, dies hoet is æt iet* (Overdiep 1940:131)
no, that-s hat is it not; 'No, it isn't that person's hat.'

Notice also that the ill-formedness of the pattern *Piet-e fan Nelles* in (13) follows quite straightforwardly: a possessor-noun (i.e. proper name + *-s*) never takes a PP(-complement) to its right. This restriction can quite nicely be shown on the basis of English, which permits PP-satellites going with proper names as long as the grammatical marker *'s* follows the entire complex [N+PP]. That is, [N+PP]*'s* is permitted, whereas [N+*'s*+PP] is not:

- (26) a. [[the man [_{PP} with the beard]]*'s* bike
b. * [the man*'s* [_{PP} with the beard]] bike

Clearly, *'s* attaches to the entire possessor noun phrase, and not just to the head noun (N). This restriction on the attachment of *'s* is also at the basis of the ill-formedness of the sequence *Piet-e fan Nelles*; the bound morpheme *-e* is attached to the head *Piet*, which takes a PP to its right.

Let me say a few more words on the sequence *Piet van Nelles* in (13). If we look closely at the nominal form *Nelles*, we distinguish a sequence of two markers, viz. *-e* and *-s* (see Overdiep 1940: 110).⁹ Thus, *Nelles* has the following composition: *Nel*+*-e*+*-s*. If both bound morphemes are grammatical markers of possession, there should be two possessive relationships involved: *Nel* is a possessor, which has *-e* attached to it and combines with an empty possessum; the complex '*Piet van Nell-e* POSSESSUM' also functions as a possessor and is 'linked' to the possessum via the grammatical marker *-s*. Schematically:

- (27) [[*Piet van* [[*Nel*]-*e* POSSESSUM]]-*s* POSSESSUM]

The linear ordering of the grammatical morphemes *-e* and *-s* corroborate the idea that the possessive marker does not combine directly with the proper noun (i.e. *Piet*), but rather with a phrasal projection.

4. A subject-object asymmetry

So far, I have argued that the linguistic expression *Anna's* in (1) is a hidden possessive noun phrase, whose possessum noun is phonetically empty (see (20)). I will now address the question as to why the nominal pattern *Proper Name + -s* is permitted in object position but not in subject position (see (9)). The contrast is also shown by the pair in (28):

- (28) a. Is vaaier(*s) ziejk? (dialect of Oerle)
 is father(-s) ill; 'Is father ill?'
 b. Hedde *moeiers* be.w?
 have-you mother-s with-you; 'Have you taken mother with you?'

I will make us here of Longobardi's (1994) insight regarding the distribution of bare nouns in Italian and English. He observes that Romance bare nouns are usually excluded from preverbal subject position, but admitted in internal argument position (ibidem: 616); see the contrast in (29), where the bare noun is a mass noun:

- (29) a. *Acqua viene giù dalle colline
 water comes down from the hills
 b. Ho preso acqua dalla sorgente
 I took water from the spring

Assuming that a bare noun like *acqua* is a DP consisting of a phonetically empty determiner and the lexical N(P) *acqua*, Longobardi (1994:617) proposes that the distribution of the bare noun phrase *acqua* is determined by the requirement that the empty determiner be lexically governed.¹⁰ In (29a), the empty determiner of the DP [_{DP} [_D *e*] [_{NP} *acqua*]] is not governed by any lexical head. The closest head is T, but T is not lexical. In (29b), on the contrary, the verb *preso* (lexically) governs the empty D of the DP *acqua*.

Longobardi (1994:621) further points out that under an analysis in which arguments are always DPs, proper names like *Gianni* in (30a) and *John* in (30b) have the 'underlying' structure in (30c); i.e. an empty D is syntactically present in the structure.

- (30) a. *Gianni* mi ha telefonato (Italian)
 Gianni me has called-up
 b. *John* called me up
 c. [_{DP} [_D *e*] [_{NP} Gianni/John]]

If (30c) is the structure of the proper names in (30a,b), the question obviously arises as to why the sentences are not ill-formed. Notice that the empty D would not be lexically governed, the closest head being T. Longobardi's solution to this puzzle is the following: the proper name *Gianni/John* raises and substitutes for D, so that there is no empty D present in the representation which is subject to the lexical government requirement. Evidence for N-to-D raising in Italian comes from the ordering of an attributive adjective and a proper name. The proper name precedes the modifying adjective, which arguably is obtained by moving the proper noun to D across the left branch attributive adjective:¹¹

- (31) a. **E' venuto* [vecchio Cameresi] (Longobardi 1994:624)
 has come older Cameresi
 b. *E' venuto* [Cameresi vecchio]

Now what about the English example (30b)? Should we also assume overt N-to-D raising for English? In view of the word order *old John* (and the ill-formedness of *John old*), the conclusion is inescapable that movement of the proper noun to D does not take place in overt syntax. Taking the idea seriously that languages that differ superficially as regards their word order can be computationally the same (i.e. the uniformity hypothesis), Longobardi (1994: 641) argues that English N-to-D raising only differs from Italian in the timing of the movement. More specifically, N-to-D movement takes place in covert syntax (i.e. after Spell-Out) in English. After N-to-D raising (i.e. substitution) has taken place, the (LF-)representation does not contain any empty D, and consequently the structure is no longer excluded by a head government violation.

Taking Longobardi's approach towards proper names as our background, let's return to the ill-formed example (28a), where *vaaiers* is in subject position. Remember that *vaaiers* is a hidden possessive noun phrase, whose internal representation before Spell-Out is the one in (32a). Let's further assume, in line with Longobardi's (1996) hypothesis that Saxon genitive constructions in the Germanic languages are hidden Construct States, that the head noun (i.e. the possessum) undergoes N-to-D raising (arguably for reasons of genitive case 'assignment'). In a possessive construction in which the possessed noun is lexical (e.g. *vaders huis*; father's house), this results in an LF-representation in which D is lexically filled. Consequently, the lexical government requirement does not apply. In a hidden possessive like *vaaiers* in (28a), however, the empty D remains empty even after LF N-to-D raising has taken place, this for the very simple reason that the

raised (possessum) noun has no phonetic content. Thus, schematically, the LF-representation of *vaaier*s is like (32), where I have added the clausal environment (i.e. TP):

- (32) a. $[_{TP} [_{DP} D [_{PosP} \text{vaaier} [_{Pos'} -s [_{NP} [_{N'} e]]]]] [_{T'} T \dots]$
 b. $[_{TP} [_{DP} [_{N'} e]_j [_{PosP} \text{vaaier} [_{Pos'} -s [_{NP} [_{N'} t]_j]]]]] [_{T'} T \dots]$

D, which is substituted for by an empty Noun, remains empty. Since the empty head is lexically ungoverned at LF, the structure is ruled out. When it is lexically governed, as in (33), the structure is well-formed:

- (33) $\dots [_{DP} [_{N'} e]_j [_{PosP} \text{moeier} [_{Pos'} -s [_{NP} [_{N'} t]_j]]]] \text{hed} (=V)$ (see (28b))

Recall that an expression like *Anna's*, which we now take to be a hidden possessive noun phrase whose unpronounced possessed noun raises to D in covert syntax, also occurs as an indirect object (2b) and a complement of P (2c). In the former case, V arguably fulfills the role of lexical governor of the empty noun that occupies D after N-to-D raising; in the latter case, P is the lexical governor. The ECM-examples in (10) are also accounted for: the matrix verb lexically governs the raised empty head noun occupying D. The impossibility of 'Proper name + -s' as a vocative expression (cf. (11)) also follows: the vocative phrase, clearly, is not governed by any lexical head.

5. A silent grammatical noun

A question which, obviously, should be addressed is: What is the nature of the phonetically empty noun that raises to D in covert syntax? I propose that this noun belongs to the class of grammatical/semi-lexical nouns (Emonds 1985). According to Emonds, these are words of the lexical category N which can be characterized as being the most frequently used and least semantically explicit members of the category noun. In English, the (closed) class of grammatical nouns includes lexical items such as: *self, one, people, thing, place, reason, time, way*. I propose that the silent noun that represents the possessum is a grammatical noun PERSON (capitals indicate non-pronunciation). Thus, *Anna's* in (1) looks as follows in overt syntax:

- (34) $[_{DP} D [_{PosP} \text{Anna}_j [_{Pos'} -s [_{NP} \text{PERSON } t_j]]]]$

Interestingly, the silent grammatical noun PERSON has a lexical equivalent:

- (35) Jan gaf mij informatie over [*Anna's persoon*]
 Jan gave me information about Anna's person

In a way, the possessive expression *Anna's persoon* is an indirect way of referring to the individual *Anna* (see Jespersen (1977:217) for this phenomenon of indirect reference). The fact that, in (35), the noun phrase *Anna's persoon* cannot be coordinated with a truly lexical noun phrase (e.g. *?[[*Anna's persoon*] *en* [*Anna's vriend*]], *Anna's person* and *Anna's friend*; meaning: 'Anna and Anna's friend') is suggestive for the different grammatical status of the noun *persoon*. Also the fact that the noun *persoon* cannot be coordinated with another noun (e.g. **Anna's persoon en vriend*; *Anna's person* and *friend*) shows that it has a special (viz. semi-lexical) status (compare e.g. with: *Anna's zoon en dochter*; *Anna's son* and *daughter*).

In view of the above, I conclude that *Anna's* in (1) is actually *Anna's PERSON*, with *PERSON* being a silent grammatical noun that raises to D in covert syntax. The distribution of *Anna's* is determined by a lexical government requirement on the empty grammatical noun that has been (LF-)raised to D.

Notes

1. These examples feature the bound morpheme *-e* rather than *-s* on the proper name. As shown by the example in (i), *-e* (also *-en*) appears on proper names in possessive noun phrases. This *-e* is referred to as a weak genitival form in traditional Dutch grammars.

- (i) Dat is *Janne* pet (Alblasserwaard Dutch; Van Haeringen 1947)
that is Jan-e hat; 'That's Jan's hat.'

2. In (2a), *Anna's* appears to be the direct object of (*tegen*)*kwamen*; see also (4a). Since this is an unaccusative verb, *Anna's* arguably should be analyzed as the subject of a small clause which is the complement of *komen*, as in (i), where for the sake of simplicity we use the embedded word order:

- (i) ..dat we [_{SC} *Anna's tegen*] *kwamen*

3. I abstract away here from the exact technical analysis of case licensing; e.g. in terms of case assignment, checking, or Agree.

4. In many Dutch dialects, the pattern 'Proper name + [_{PP} P + proper name]' is a very common way of expressing family relationships: e.g. *Kees van Klaas*, *Kees of Klaas*; 'Kees, who is Klaas's son.'

5. In (15), I have abstracted away from the potential presence of a DP-layer in between KP and NP.

6. See, for example, the German example in (i); Henk van Riemsdijk p.c.:

- (i) Sie nannten Napoleon [den kleinen General]
they called Napoleon the-ACC small-ACC general

As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, the presence of accusative case on the predicate nominal in Dutch is also suggested by an example like (ii):

- (ii) We noemen hem haar/*zij om iedereen in verwarring te brengen
 we call him her/*she in-order-to everyone in confusion to bring

7. See e.g. Longobardi (1996) for a structural layering as in (20). The functional layer (PosP; also AgrP) in between DP and NP is the locus where the pronominal possessive relationship is defined.

8. Compare (23b) with the doubling possessive construction in (i), which is much better than (23b):

- (i) [Die arme vader z'n fiets] is gisteren gestolen
 that poor father his bike has-been yesterday stolen

9. Overdiep (1940:110) points out that this pattern featuring *-es* (arguably: *-e* + *-s*) at the end is typically found with names of older people.

10. The DP-status of the bare noun *acqua* is based on the idea that a nominal expression is an argument only if it is introduced by a category D.

11. As noted by Longobardi, the order 'adjective + proper name' is attested with nominal expressions featuring an expletive definite article:

- (i) E' venuto [il vecchio Cameresi] (Has come the older Cameresi)

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