

## The first person singular in Dutch dialects

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### 1 The first person singular in Dutch

Recent years have witnessed a renewed interest in the study of the phonological differences between morphological categories, in particular between nouns and verbs (e.g. Smith (2001), Burzio (2000, 2003), McCarthy (2003)). Generally speaking, there seem to be three types of approach to these distinctions within constraint-based grammar:

1. Assume that there are separate (faithfulness) constraints or constraint rankings for nouns and verbs. This is the least restrictive analysis which also does not shed light on the question why morphological categories should differ at all. Hence this option can only be used as a last resort, when other options fail (as in Postal 1968, Smith 2001), and we will not pursue it here.
2. Assume that verbs are organized in paradigms, whereas nouns are not (or are organized in paradigms of a different structure). These paradigms have a uniformizing effect, and this explains the different behaviour of the two categories. We will call this a *paradigmatic* approach.
3. Assume that the structure of nouns and verbs is somehow different, for instance because the latter are always inflected, whereas the former are not (or are inflected in a different way). We will call this a *structural* approach.

The last two options share the assumption that the differences between the two categories are not random, but somehow related to (or derived from) the morphologies of nouns and

verbs. It is the goal of this article to compare these two approaches in dealing the special phonology of the first person singular in varieties of Dutch.

## 2 Standard Dutch

The special behaviour of the first person singular in Standard Dutch is a classic in Dutch phonology following an illuminating discussion by Zonneveld (1982), who gives a number of arguments in favour of a structural approach. In particular, he argues that Dutch regular verbs end in an abstract (inaudible) theme vowel whereas nouns obviously do not have such a theme vowel.

Even though Zonneveld (1982) lists a number of arguments in favour of this approach, we will discuss only one of them — *n* deletion in detail. In certain varieties of (Standard) Dutch, *n* can be optionally deleted after a tautosyllabic schwa (cf. van Hout and van der Velde 2000):

- (1) a. *tegen* ‘against’ (P) [teɣə / teɣən]  
 b. *open* ‘open’ (A) [opə / opən]  
 c. *teken* ‘sign’ (N) [tekə / tekən]  
 d. *teken+en* ‘to draw’ (V+INFINITIVE) [tekənə / tekənən]

The process thus applies in all categories. It is also productive, and is a distinguished feature of a Dutch accent in foreign languages (pronouncing e.g. *Boston* as [bɔstə]). (1d) shows that the process only occurs in coda’s: \*[tekəə] is not an option. Furthermore, we know that the process is *n* deletion rather than insertion, because there are words which end in a schwa and which do not alternate (*inzake* ‘concerning’ (P) [inzakə / \*inzakən], *oranje* ‘orange’ (A) [oranjə / \*oranjən], *mode* ‘fashion’ (N) [modə / \*modən], *lev+e* ‘live!’ (V+IMPERATIVE) [levə / \*levən]).

Now there is one environment in which this process does not apply — the first person singular of verbs. This form does not have an overt ending, so if a verbal stem (such as *teken* ‘draw’) ends in a schwa+coronal nasal sequence, we might expect the /n/ to be deleted. But this in fact is disallowed:<sup>1</sup>

- (2) *ik teken* ‘I draw’ [ɪk \*tekə / tekən]

Zonneveld (1982) explained this fact by reference to his theme vowel. Like the inflectional schwa of *tekenen* ‘to draw’, this theme vowel would protect the *n* from deletion, just like

<sup>1</sup>In an empirical study on *n* deletion in spontaneous speech among speakers of Standard Dutch, Ernestus (2000) shows that deletion does indeed occur in this context, be it more rarely than in other contexts. Yet it is an undeniable fact that every speaker of Standard Dutch has the intuition that [tekə] is much worse as a verb than as a noun. The issue thus is what constitutes an important fact of phonology. In this article we take the position that — strong — intuitions should still be counted as the primary facts to be explained in phonological analysis.

the inflectional schwa protects it in *wij teken+en* ‘we draw’ [wɛi tɛkənə / \*wɛi tɛkəə].<sup>2</sup>

Zonneveld (1982)’s analysis is a rule-based one based on absolute neutralisation. He assumes that verbal stems end in a weak vowel (schwa) underlyingly: it first prevents *n* deletion, and afterwards it disappears itself. The most natural translation of this in non-derivational terms seems to be a structural one. We could assume for instance that verbal stems end in a ‘catalectic’ syllable, without a pronounced head:

(3)	ADJECTIVE	VERB
	$\sigma$ $\sigma$      / $\mu$ $\mu$        \ o   p   ə   n	$\sigma$ $\sigma$ $\sigma$      /    / $\mu$ $\mu$ $\mu$             \ o   p   ə   n

If *n* deletion only affects coda consonants, the verb is exempted from this process, even though the ‘vowel’ heading the syllable with an *n* onset is empty.

Next to a structural account of these facts, a paradigmatic one is also available, however.<sup>3</sup> The following is the present tense paradigm of the standard Dutch verb:

- |     |                                |                                      |
|-----|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| (4) | <i>ik tek[ən]</i> ‘I draw’     | <i>wij tek[ənə(n)]</i> ‘we draw’     |
|     | <i>jij tek[ənt]</i> ‘you draw’ | <i>jullie tek[ənə(n)]</i> ‘you draw’ |
|     | <i>hij tek[ənt]</i> ‘he draws’ | <i>zij tek[ənə(n)]</i> ‘they draw’   |

The plural forms all have a schwa suffix, blocking deletion. The second person (outside of conversion) and the third person singular have an ending *t* which also blocks deletion (also in other environments). In other words, the *n* shows up in all other forms of the paradigm, so the fact that it cannot be deleted in the first person singular can be seen as a consequence of paradigm uniformity.

Zonneveld (1982) mentions a number of other factors distinguishing nouns (and sometimes other categories) from verbs. Some of them have to do with rules which are no longer productive in Dutch, and some of them involve complicated argumentation which

<sup>2</sup>In Standard Dutch present tense paradigms, there is one other form which consists of a stem only without an inflectional ending: the second person singular in a so-called inversion context (*open jij* ‘open you’; the non-inversion form is *jij opent*, so with an inflectional /t/). I do not have clear evidence whether or not /n/ deletion is blocked in this environment as it is in the first person singular form. It seems to me that there is a contrast between *tekenen (ook) jullie* ‘draw also you’, in which the final /n/ is part of the plural inflectional ending /ən/ and in which this /n/ can be deleted quite freely, and *teken (ook) jij* ‘draw also you’, in which the /n/ is part of the verbal stem and resists deletion. The contrast is clearer if we add the word *ook*, because of the unstable nature of *nj* sequences, but still my own intuitions are not as strong as in the case of the first person singular. If this weaker intuition is shared by other speakers (as it seems to be), the explanation may be that the second person singular in this particular context also has extra morphological structure. Otherwise, the second person would have a different structure. (The central line of argumentation of this paper does not seem to be affected either way.) Something similar holds for the imperative singular, which is also *teken!*, without the possibility of *n* deletion (and historically a schwa ending).

<sup>3</sup>If Zonneveld (1982) is an early proponent of a structural analysis, Kooij (1981) (which is a reply to Zonneveld (1978)) may count as an early proponent of a paradigmatic approach.

we cannot reproduce here. One case requires special attention: the observation that denominal verbs lose their schwa. This seems in line with the more general observation that nominal stems can end in schwas, but verbal stems never do (Trommelen 1989):

- (5) a. *schade* ‘damage (N)’ [sxadə] - *ik schaad* ‘I damage’ [ɪk sxat] (\**ik* sxadə)  
 b. *score* ‘score (N)’ [skɔ:rə] - *ik score* ‘I score’ [ɪk skɔ:r] (\**ik* skɔ:rə)

This can be related to the fact that Dutch schwas (Booij 1995, van Oostendorp 2000) are always deleted before vowels, including other schwas. In the paradigmatic approach, we can observe (again) that at least all the plural forms in the paradigm have a schwa, so that these can act as attractors for a schwaless first person singular form. In the structural approach, on the other hand, we can generalize the process stating that vowels delete before all vocalic positions, even if these are not filled.<sup>4</sup>

Under the assumptions of Zonneveld (1982), then, we can conclude that there is an underlying vowel which opaquely interacts with several phonological processes. But if we do not accept rule ordering or absolute neutralisation as phonological devices, we have two analytical options, a structural and a paradigmatic one, and the facts of Standard Dutch do not give us a clear indication which of these two is correct.

### 3 Formalization

Let us give a slightly more formal implementation of these two theoretical options in terms of Optimality Theory. The most restrictive version of a paradigmatic account is Paradigm Uniformity (McCarthy 2003). The idea behind analysis on these terms would be that the nasal in *open* is protected from deletion by a special faithfulness relation to a form somewhere else in the paradigm, which does have an overt schwa following it (e.g. the plural form *wij openen* ‘we open’). Because schwa is not deleted in the latter form, it is also not deleted in the former.<sup>5</sup>

- (6) a. **OPENSCHWA**: Schwa should occur in an open syllable (van Oostendorp 2000).  
 b. **PARADIGMUNIFORMITY (PU)**: Base forms in the paradigm should be the same (in particular if some segment is deleted in one form, it should be deleted throughout the paradigm).  
 c. **\*HIATUS**: Two vowels should be separated by at least one consonant.

<sup>4</sup>Notice that if we take this seriously, we could have it that *n* deletion in e.g. verbal *teken* would potentially result in a schwa-final form; the schwa would then also be deleted, so that we would get \*[tek], which would somehow be ‘too short’. But that is a notion which seems hard to formalize, given the fact that there is actually a large number of adjectives which conform to this template (e.g. *weet* ‘know’, *breek* ‘break’, etc.) We could not even say that this template holds only for derived forms, because that is not true for the examples in (5).

<sup>5</sup>We deliberately ignore many details of the analysis — e.g. the fact that only *n* can be deleted to satisfy **OPENSCHWA**, or for that matter the question why we would need something like **OPENSCHWA** at all — because they seem neutral to the two types of analysis at hand, and would severely complicate the tableaux. Similarly, the fact that there is variation in the case of nominal and adjectival stems will be ignored here; the tableaux are based on the simplification that deletion is obligatory.

(7)

/o:pən - o:pən+ən/	PU	*HIATUS	OPENSCHWA
☞[o:pən - o:pənə]			*
[o:pə - o:pənə]	*!		
[o:pə - o:pə]		*!	

PU is the crucial constraint. It identifies /o:pən/ as the base form in all parts of the paradigm, and requires this base to be identical everywhere. PU would not play a similar role in the case of adjectives such as *open* (which do not have an inflectional ending):

(8)

/o:pən/	PU	*HIATUS	OPENSCHWA
[o:pən]			*!
☞[o:pə]			

In a structural account, the difference between the adjective and the verb should be a difference in syllabification, as depicted in (3). The adjective has the default syllabification, maybe due to a constraint against empty-headed syllables — such syllables are depicted here by a  $\mu$ :

(9) FILL: Mora's should not be empty.

(10)

/o:pən/	FILL	OPENSCHWA
[o:pən]		*!
[o:pə.n $\mu$ ]	*!	
☞[o:pə]		

In the verbal form, we need some constraint which will still select the empty-headed syllable. Since the idea is that this syllable expresses some morphological property of the verb, this will be a faithfulness constraint. There are two options: we can choose the features [1, Sg], or we can follow Zonneveld (1982) and choose the theme vowel. Here we will choose the first option without discussion, and return to it in section 5. The idea is that empty phonological material may only be used if it is morphologically licensed, if it serves to express underlying morphological distinctions:

(11) EXPRESS-1SG: The first person singular should be expressed.

(12)

/o:pən/	EXPRESS-1SG	FILL	OPENSCHWA
[o:pən]	*!		*
☞[o:pə.n $\mu$ ]		*	
[o:pə]	*!		

Also these formalisations do not give us a direct reason to prefer one type of analysis over the other. One might claim that a paradigmatic approach is more 'concrete', because it refers to a representation which is independently necessary (the plural form of the verb).

Yet the *correspondence relations* between segments in the singular and plural are obviously abstract, and actually extend the computational power of the theory to a large, or even unacceptable, degree (Potts and Pullum 2002). On the other hand, if we accept that syllable structure representations are to some extent independent of subsegmental structure, empty-headed segments will come for free, as it were. None of these arguments are based on empirical observation, however.

#### 4 Dutch dialects

We now turn to non-standard varieties of Dutch, to discuss some evidence on the first person singular that is not present in the standard language (and which therefore was not discussed in Zonneveld (1982)).

In Brussels Dutch (De Vriendt and Goyvaerts 1989, De Vriendt 2003), words cannot end in a velar nasal. Words which have such a segment underlyingly, develop a [k] at the end by some process of /k/ insertion:

- (13) ‘k-insertion’  
 [puliŋk] ‘eel’      [puliŋə] ‘eels’  
 [ɣaŋk] ‘corridor’    [ɣaŋə] ‘corridors’

We can see that the /k/ is inserted here at the end of the word since it does not occur in the plural forms, before a schwa (there is a difference here with a form such as *plank-planken* ‘plank(s)’ which do have an underlying /k/ which shows up both in the singular and in the plural).<sup>6</sup>

Yet velar nasals can be found at the end of verbs in the first person singular (present):

- (14) a. *ik hang* ‘I am hanging’ [ikaŋ]  
 b. *ik zing* ‘I am singing’ [iksɪŋ]

The behaviour of this form could again be explained in various ways, depending on one’s analysis of the behaviour of the velar nasal. In a structural approach one could state that a velar nasal is not allowed to occur as the last segment of the syllable coda. In the first person singular, this condition would not apply, since there is an (empty) syllable head following the velar nasal. The segment therefore would occur in the onset of such a syllable, and there would be no need to insert a /k/.

Under a paradigmatic view, we could alternatively consider the paradigm for this verb, and observe that at least in the plural forms (which are all *zingen* [siŋə]) there is no obstruent.

<sup>6</sup>Alternatively, one might argue that these words end e.g. in /ŋg/ underlyingly, which devoices at the end. In this case, we need to say that the /g/ is deleted in the first person singular, just as it is deleted before a schwa. The puzzle for the phonology-morphology interface stays the same, but in addition we will have chosen a more abstract analysis, assuming underlying segmental content (the feature [+voice]) of /g/ which never surfaces, and we will have created a problem with Richness of the Base (van Oostendorp 2001).

- (15) *ik zi[ɲ]* ‘I sing’      *we zi[ɲə]* ‘we sing’  
*ge zi[ɲt]* ‘you sing’      *ge zi[ɲt]* ‘you sing’  
*ei zi[ɲt]* ‘he sings’      *ze zi[ɲə]* ‘they sing’

It thus seems that we have the same situation as in the Standard Dutch cases studied above, where it is hard to distinguish between the two approaches. But on second thought, there is a formal problem here for the paradigmatic approach which does not arise for the structural account. In order to prevent the candidate \*[ikɑŋk] from surfacing, we have to make sure that the final /k/ is part of the ‘base’ of this particular form. Yet the [k] is epenthetic, i.e. only present for phonological reasons, so that it is not clear that it should be part of this ‘base’ (a morphological category after all) and establish any correspondence relation to other parts of the paradigm at all (just like the suffixal [t] in the 2 and 3 Person does not ‘correspond’ to anything in the other forms).

While this might still be considered a minor point, the problems become more difficult if we also study paradigms such as the following (again from the Brussels dialect, cf. De Vriendt and Goyvaerts (1989)):

- (16) a. *kleden* ‘to dress’ [klejə]  
b. *hij kleedt hem* ‘he dresses himself’ [a+klɪt+əm] (shortening)  
c. *ik kleed mij* ‘I dress myself’ [ik+klej+ma]

One way of analysing this is to assume that the verb ‘to dress’ has an underlying /d/ (it is /kledə/), which is subject to final devoicing at the end of the word and to a process of lenition before a vowel (neither of these are uncommon in Dutch dialects, cf. Zonneveld 1978, Swets 2004).

The important point is that the first person singular patterns with the first and third person plural forms rather than with the third person singular or second person singular and plural, even though the latter are a majority. In other words, the first person singular behaves as if it stands in front of a vowel which is not there. Again, this is something which can be understood if we assume a structural approach.

Yet in a paradigmatic approach, two questions arise. First, why would the first person singular be faithful to a minority (two against three) of other forms in the paradigm? And second, why would this faithfulness be restricted to the first person singular, and not be extended to the second and third persons, i.e. why are the latter not subjected to a similar paradigmatic pressure? There does not seem to be an obvious answer to this within the paradigmatic approach.<sup>7</sup>

We now turn to a third example of the special behaviour of the first person singular, the lack of final devoicing in Twente Dutch (Goeman 1999, Schoemans and van Oosten-

<sup>7</sup>As a matter of fact, Zonneveld (1978, 1982) discusses a phenomenon which is very similar to this in western varieties of Dutch, where we find e.g. *bloeien* ‘bleed’ [blujə] from historical /bludə/. This /j/ shows up in all forms of the verb, including the first person singular where it is obviously not in the right context, or in the second and third person singular.

dorp 2004).<sup>8</sup> Even though this dialect displays the effects of final devoicing elsewhere pervasively — in particular, there are no words ending in voiced obstruents —, we find forms such as *ik geleuv* ‘I believe’ (or occasionally *ik geleuw* with a labiodental sonorant) in the first person singular. Importantly, Goeman (1999) and Schoemans and van Oostendorp (2004) note that we find a schwa serving as an overt first person singular suffix in the neighbouring dialects where the suffix has not yet been lost.

Goeman (1999, 216-217) lists a large number of dialects where this phenomenon has been found in previous studies; furthermore such dialects could be discovered in quite a large part of the Dutch language area in previous times.<sup>9</sup> The reason Goeman gives for this, is a historical one: the first person singular schwa has been deleted ‘recently’ in the history of most Dutch dialects and therefore the final devoicing has not yet taken place. We could see this as an opacity of diachronic language change: the final devoicing process proceeds as if the historical ending were still there.

A paradigm uniformity approach cannot be invoked for the analysis of the Twente facts.<sup>10</sup> In the first place, in the Twente dialects the plural suffix (as well as the suffix for 2d and 3d person singular) is not a (schwa) vowel, but *-t/*; in these cases the fricative is subject to regressive voicing assimilation and thus surfaces as  $[(\gamma\text{el}\emptyset)\text{f}(t)]$ . There thus is no form in the (present tense) paradigm to which the fricative in *geleuv* could be ‘faithful’. The infinitive does have a schwa, but it is hard to see why and how this would be part of the paradigm, and if it is, why the first person singular would be the only one that is systematically sensitive to its attraction; why would not e.g. the plural forms come out as either  $[\gamma\text{el}\emptyset\text{vt}]$  or  $[\gamma\text{el}\emptyset\text{vd}]$ ? (If the phenomenon would occur in one dialect, this could still be a coincidence, but since this pattern is recurrent in various dialects, this is not very likely.)

Another argument is dialectological: *ik geleuv* type dialects always occur in an area which is adjacent to an area where the first person singular suffix is still pronounced. This type of language change has a natural explanation in a structural approach: we assume that the geography mirrors a change in progress and the exceptions to final devoicing fully pronouncing the suffix and not pronouncing it at all: the schwa disappears, but it can leave its position. In a paradigmatic approach no explanation for this geographic distribution is available, as far as I can see. It is a random fact, since paradigm uniformity constraints could become high-ranking anywhere on the geographical map.

Exceptions to final devoicing thus posit a severe problem for paradigmatic accounts. The last dialect I want to discuss here is Stellingwerven Dutch (Bloemhoff 1991). This

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<sup>8</sup>Twente is a region in the north-eastern part of the Netherlands. Similar facts have been reported for the so-called Westfrisian dialect of Dutch, spoken north of Amsterdam, and for Flemish dialects around Ghent in Flanders.

<sup>9</sup>The phenomenon is rare at present: there is a small number of dialects which have it, and within some of those dialects the data are not consistent. Both of these observations may be attributed to the fact that this phenomenon can only be found on a geographical border between an area where the schwa is pronounced and another area in which it is completely invisible for final devoicing. This gives an unstable situation almost by definition. Another important restriction is that the phenomenon involves only fricatives in Twente and most other regions; see Schoemans and van Oostendorp (2004) for discussion.

<sup>10</sup>This point is made in more detail in van Oostendorp (in press).



dialect is spoken in the Dutch provinces of Fryslân, Overijssel and Drente<sup>11</sup> Like Twente, it has an exception to final devoicing in the first person singular, and in this case the suffix schwa even sometimes shows up in certain contexts in the dialect.

There are also a few differences between Stellingwerven and Twente. Least important for our present concerns, the exception in Stellingwerven mainly involves the plosive /d/, not fricatives. Furthermore, the devoicing here is optional in certain contexts (i.e. before a vowel) rather than disallowed (17a); but it is still the case that devoicing is obligatory in other categories, like nouns (17b-i):

- (17) a. i. ɪg bʌt ok ɲ kɪ:əʔ  
I offer also a time  
'I also made one offer'  
ii. ɪg bʌd ok ɲ kɪ:əʔ
- b. i. hɛj də hu:t əl ɒp<sup>12</sup>  
have-you the hat already on  
'Are you already wearing your hat?'  
ii. \*hɛj də hu:d əl ɒp

We will concentrate on the variety where there is no devoicing (17a-ii). We will have to say that final devoicing applies both lexically and postlexically. Lexically, there is no final devoicing because of the protective first person singular suffix. Postlexically, morphological information is no longer available, hence there will be final devoicing, except if the consonant can resyllabify into the next words. Nouns like *hoed* 'hat' do not have a suffix to protect them, so that they devoice already lexically.

A new problem arises in this case for the paradigmatic approach to the extent that it is inherently nonderivational. In this case the issue of whether a verb-final /d/ devoices is dependent both on the underlying structure of the segment and on the context. But it seems a little far-fetched to assume that the whole context is involved in the definition of paradigms:<sup>13</sup>

- (18) a. ɪk bʌd ɔ:k ... , ie bʌdən ɔ:k ... , hi'j bʌd ɔ:k ... 'I/you/he offer too ...'  
b. ɪk bʌt nɔx ... , ie bʌdən nɔx ... , hi'j bʌt nɔx ... 'I/you/he offer still ...'

But even if we allow megaparadigms of this sort, it is not clear how the context (being before a vowel), the category (being a verbal form rather than a noun) and the underlying feature specification (being voiced or voiceless) could interact to give the right result.

The attraction of paradigmatic account thus is that it refers to a representation which is independently necessary. The downside of this is that the extra representational device sometimes does not (and should not) influence the other forms in the paradigm, but only the first person singular. A structural approach, which posits an empty vocalic position by

<sup>11</sup>As the name suggests, most dialects spoken in Fryslân are Frisian, but this is not true for Stellingwerven.

<sup>12</sup>We know that *hoed* ends in underlying /d/, because it shows up e.g. in the plural: *hoe[d]en*.

<sup>13</sup>These paradigms are based on Bloemhoff (2002).

way of the first person singular, seems a parsimonious theoretical device to express exactly this.

## 5 The morphological status of the empty vowel

I conclude that the deviant behaviour of the first person singular is best represented by an abstract morpheme, not as a paradigmatic effect. There have been several proposals in the literature that *all* word-final consonants are onsets rather than codas (cf. Piggott 2002, for an overview). Most of these do not differentiate between morphological contexts: *all* words are supposed to end in an onset. Such proposals cannot differentiate between the two instances of *open* in Standard Dutch, and the two instances of *geleuv* ‘belief’ (the verbal form which ends in a voiced consonant and the nominal form which is subject to final devoicing) in Twente, or at least they have to find another way to do so. A similar point is made by Rice (2003) who demonstrates that if we assume that word-final consonants are onsets in Athna (a dialect of Athabaskan), we are forced to conclude that there are two kinds of empty nuclei — one is present for purely phonological reasons and the other one has a morphological source. The two display different phonological behaviour.

Until this point, we have tacitly assumed that the empty vocalic position is related to, and licensed by, the first person singular morpheme in Dutch. Yet Zonneveld (1978, 1982)’s original proposal was different: he suggested that the underlying schwa expressed a theme vowel. This proposal was basically adopted by Bloemhoff (1991) in his analysis of the Stellingwerven Dutch given above.

The most cautious assumption might be that different dialects have slightly different morphologies. The most important test for distinguishing between an abstract theme vowel and an abstract first person singular morpheme is seeing whether the third person singular displays the same result (the second person singular often has a peculiar kind of behaviour of its own). There are no dialects in which the third person singular suffix is schwa (it might be *-t/* or something else), so that it is not plausible that it will have developed into an empty position alongside the first person singular.

Different dialects give different results on this test. Notice that in the Stellingwerven example in (18a), the third person singular ends in a voiced [d] just like its first person singular counterpart; this might then be seen as an indication that indeed in this case we have a theme vowel rather than a 1Sg suffix.

On the other hand, comparison of the Brussels examples in *hij kleedt hem* ‘he dresses himself’ [a+kli:t+əm] in (16b) and *ik kleed mij* ‘I dress myself’ [ik+klej+ma] in (16c) shows that here the third person singular behaves differently from the first person singular: /d/ does not turn into [j] in the former case. Rather, the long tense vowel /e/ turns into a short lax vowel [ɪ]. This shortening or laxing usually happens in syllables which end in a consonant cluster, so that it can be seen as an indication that the morphological structure of the third person singular form is /kled+t/ (degememination has to take care of this cluster somehow). Positing a theme vowel would actually be damaging to the analysis here, because it would break up this cluster and prevent shortening from happening.

It thus seems that Brussels does not have a theme vowel, whereas Stellingwerfen does. Furthermore, it should be noted that this theme vowel has to be posited on the past tense of a strong, irregular Stellingwerfen verb in example (18a), although Zonneveld (1982)'s original proposal was that this vowel only shows up on weak, regular verbs. This would reflect a difference in the morphology of theme vowels between Standard Dutch (which would have the most impoverished morphological system of all the varieties discussed here) and that of Stellingwerfen.

All of this means that more work needs to be done on the comparative morphology of Dutch dialects. What is clear, for all of these cases, however, is that an approach positing some abstract morpheme is more successful than one referring to paradigm structure. That was the point I wanted to make in this article.

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