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Morphosyntactic Microvariation in Gender Inflection

While pronominal gender in Standard Dutch has the three part gender system of masculine, feminine and neuter, nouns have a two part gender system: common and neuter. However, in the southern dialects and in some eastern ones, the original three part system is used, and in most dialects.
Gender is not signalised on nouns, but only on determiners and adjectives, that do agree with the noun's inherent gender.

The presence of the masculine gender suffix –en is sensitive for the following word initial context, it is present before e.g. vowel, /h, b, d, t, m/ and not before other consonants. The adjectival feminine suffix –e is sensitive for adjective-internal context, e.g. length of the stemvowel and sonorancy of the final stem consonant.The neuter suffix is zero after definite determiners, but –e after indefinite ones. This neuter –e is subject to the same adjective-internal contexts as the feminine one.

The phonological contexts where the masculine suffix –en is maintained (before vowel and /h, b, d, t, m/) are also valid for non-adjectives ending in –en. Examples are the noun *jongen* 'boy, the infinitive *lopen* 'walk', and the preposition *tegen* 'against'. In both cases geographical as well as factors of a social character may influence the maintenance of the gender-en. Not all linguistic contexts are equally significant in all dialects, and the general picture is one of extreme variability.

In predicative positions, in adverbial postion and in citation forms a group of adjectives is also ending in -e. These adjectives lose this word-final -e in attributive position, and take the normal adjectival endings according to the phonological contexts mentioned above.

We analyze predicative, adverbial and adjectival suffixation, not only with respect to adjectives, but also with respect to quantifiers like *veel* 'much', (degrees) of comparison (*veel meer* 'much more', *rijker dan ik* 'richer than me'). We will also examine the role of gender inflection in noun ellipsis constructions as *een groene appel en een rode* 'a green apple and a red one'.

The aim of our investigation is to sort out the linguistic systemic aspects from the geographical and social aspects in order to (1) gain insight in the syntactic relevance of the gender suffix and (2) determine if and how the morphological information is still emerging over and above the effects of phonology.
The method to sort out the significant effects belongs to multivariate analysis. The data are the fieldwork based databases that are at the heart of two new dialect atlasses SAND (syntax) and MAND (morphology).