SOME NOTES ON SEMI-LEXICAL SILENCE IN DUTCH NOUN PHRASES

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Abstract: In this article, it is argued that the Dutch nominal expression *Anna's* in the dialectal Dutch sentence *We kwamen Anna**'s** tegen* (We met Anna's; 'We met Anna') is a hidden possessive noun phrase consisting of the proper name *Anna* and a silent grammatical noun PERSON in the sense of Kayne (2003). A similar analysis will be proposed for a temporal expression like *Dinsdags* (Tuesday-s; '(on) Tuesday'), with the difference that TIME is the silent noun. It is further argued that PERSON and TIME have the characteristics of what Emonds (1985) calls a grammatical (i.e. semi-lexical) noun.

1. Some notes on grammatical nouns and silent nouns

A well-known dichotomy in the classification of lexical items is that between lexical categories ("content words") and functional categories ("function words"). Functional categories are assumed to play a more grammatical role in the syntactic representation and contribute more abstract semantic meaning (e.g. D contributing (in)definiteness), whereas lexical categories have a rich semantic content and convey the core meaning of the sentence.

In spite of the intuitive plausibility of this dichotomy, it was already noted in Ross (1973) that the distinction arguably is not as clear-cut as often thought. Several proposals have been put forward to make the distinction more precise (cf. Corver and Van Riemsdijk (2001) for an overview). Concerning the category Noun, Emonds (1985) argued for a distinction between lexical nouns (open class) and grammatical nouns (closed class); the latter class is also referred to by the label 'semi-lexical' in Corver and Van Riemsdijk 2001. Emonds defined grammatical nouns as "being the most frequently used and least semantically explicit members of the category noun" (p. 162). The closed class of grammatical nouns includes lexical items such as: *self, one, people, thing, place, reason, time, way.* In Emonds (2000: 9), this proposal is generalized as follows:

> **Definition.** A closed grammatical class X (including N, V, A, P) is one whose members have no purely semantic features *f*, but only cognitive syntactic features *F*. [1]

Following Chomsky (1965:142), he argues that semantic features play no role in any syntactic rule, whereas cognitive syntactic features do (see also Chomsky 1995:230). This distinction at the featural level is exemplified in (1a) for the lexical noun *thing* (cf. (2a)) and in (1b) for the semi-lexical noun *thing* (cf. (2b)).

(1) a. *thing* {[+N,-V], [+Common], [-Animate], [+Count], [semantic features]}
b. *thing* {[+N,-V], [+Common], [-Animate], [-Count]}

(2) a. I bought a nice *thing* (*thing* as a lexical noun)
b. I bought some*thing* (*thing* as a semi-lexical noun)

[1] Thus, purely semantic features f are only present in the lexical make-up of the open class of lexical categories N, V, A and (lexical) P. Chomsky (1995:230) gives [artifact] as an example of such a feature. Emonds's cognitive syntactic features F are present in the lexical make-up of lexical, functional and grammatical (i.e. semi-lexical) categories. They contribute centrally to meaning (i.e. are interpretable at the CI-interface level; cf. Chomsky (1995)). The set of cognitive syntactic features includes properties such as: +/-N, +/-V, +/-PROXIMATE, +/-PLURAL, +/-DEFINITE, *et cetera*. In Chomsky (1995:230), these are referred to by the term 'formal features'.

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The examples in (3) and (4) show that both types of nouns display a different (morpho)syntactic behavior. More particularly, lexical *thing*, being [+count] can be pluralized; see (3a). This is impossible with the [-count] semi-lexical noun *thing*, as shown by (3b) A further distinction regards displacement: a semi-lexical noun *thing* is able to undergo N-to-D raising across an attributive adjective, yielding the surface pattern *some+thing nice* (cf. 4b) This movement step is impossible with the lexical noun *thing*; see ***some things nice***. The only possible order is that in (4a).

(3) a. I bought some *thing**s*** (plural formation)
b. *I bought some*thing**s*** (no plural formation)
(4) a. I bought [some nice *thing(s)*] (no N-to-D)
b. I bought [some+*thing*$_j$ nice t_j] (N to D raising across an adjective)

Summarizing, Emonds (1985, 2000) argues that grammatical nouns are nouns with poor semantics, which fulfill a purely grammatical role in the syntactic representation (e.g. they don't have any argument structure associated with them) and display distinctive syntactic behavior.

Although Kayne (2003) does not specifically refer to Emonds' notion of grammatical nouns, he proposes a category that seems similar in nature, although different in realization: silent nouns (orthographically distinguished from other nouns by using CAPITALS, henceforth). Silent nouns are phonetically unrealized nouns, which are nevertheless active in syntax and interpretation. In the direct object noun phrase in (5), for example, a silent noun NUMBER is taken to be present.

(5) John ate [a few NUMBER sandwiches]

Presence of a silent noun NUMBER accounts for the occurrence of the singular indefinite article *a*, which obviously does not belong to the plural noun *sandwiches*. Under such an analysis, *few*, which is an adjective in view of the comparative form *fewer*, can be taken to modify the silent noun NUMBER. As Kayne (2003) points out, the occurrence of a silent noun is subject to a licensing requirement that there be some sort of antecedent which makes it possible to recover the (semantic) contents of the silent noun. This antecedent is not 'strong' in the sense that there is a lexical item (say, a lexical noun *number*) present that 'antecedes' the silent item. Rather, an interpretable formal feature (i.e a cognitive syntactic feature in Emonds's sense) functions as an antecedent (i.e. identifies the semantic contents) of the silent noun. In (5), for example, the feature [+number], which arguably is part of the lexical make-up of the quantifying adjective *few* functions as a sort of antecedent for silent NUMBER (see Kayne 2003). Besides NUMBER, Kayne proposes other silent nouns such as PERSON, PLACE, HOUR.

In this paper, we apply Kayne's approach to several nominal constructions in Dutch. We combine the proposals by Emonds (1985, 2000) and Kayne (2003) and assume that Kayne's silent nouns are phonetically unrealized instantiations of Emonds's grammatical nouns. The Dutch nominal constructions that we will focus on have in common that they feature the grammatical marker *'s*. This marker is well-known for its occurrence in possessive noun phrases such as *Piet**s** auto* (Piet-s car, 'Piet's car') and *vader**s** hoed* (father-s hat, 'father's hat'), where *–s* is attached to a possessor (i.e. a proper name or a kinship term) and is followed by a noun representing the possessum. As I will show, the Dutch silent nouns PERSON, PLACE and TIME can fulfill the role of possessum.

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2. Proper name + *-s*

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 (6), which represents Alblasserwaard Dutch (cf. Van Haeringen *ibidem*):[2]

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

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

Traditionally, *Anna's*, *moeders* and *Aries* in (6) have been analyzed as noun phrases carrying an overt accusative/oblique case morpheme (i.e. *–s*). *Anna's* and *moeders* are complements of the verb and *Aries* is a complement of P.

Observe in this context also the following fact:[3]

(7) Ik hoorde [*Harrie**s*** huilen] (dialect of Asten)
I heard Harrie-s cry
'I heard Harry cry.'

This example represents an ECM (exceptional case marking) environment: *Harries* occupies the subject position of an infinitival clause. Under a case analysis of *–s*, the appearance of *–s* on the subject in (7) directly follows: the verb *hoorde* is able to 'assign' accusative case to the subject argument *Harrie*.

Thus, the facts in (6) and (7) 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).

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[2] In some dialects, we also find the bound morpheme *–e* on certain proper names

(i) Ik kwam *Jann**e*** tegen (Gilze Dutch)
I met Jan-e PRT; 'I met Jan.'

In traditional Dutch grammars, this *–e* is referred to as a weak genitival form. This form also appears on possessors in possessive noun phrases: e.g. Dat is J*ann**e*** pet; That is Jan-e hat; 'That's Jan's hat.'

[3] Interestingly, *-s* does not show up on a proper name /a kinship term that functions as the subject of a tensed clause. Compare, for example, (ia) with (ib):

(i) a. Is *vaaier(*s)* zie^{j}k? (dialect of Oerle)
Is father(-s) ill; 'Is father ill?'
b. Hedde *moeier**s*** be.w?
Have-you mother-s with-you; 'Have you taken mother with you?'

See Corver (2007) for an ECP-account of this subject-object asymmetry.

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Although, at first sight, a case analysis appears to be on the right track, it is faced with two serious questions: First of all, 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 (8) (cf. Overdiep 1940:110):

(8) Ik ben [$_{PP}$ bij [*Piet(*-e)* fan Nelles]] eweest
I have with Piet(-e) of Nelle-s been
'I visited Piet, who is Nel's son.'

If *–s* is a case marker, it is not so obvious why the pattern in (8), featuring the marker *-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; see the German example in (9):

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

A second problem for the accusative/oblique case-analysis of a form like *Anna's* concerns the absence of *–s/-e* on proper names that behave like predicate nominals. Consider the examples in (10a,b), which are taken from the Katwijk Dutch dialect and the Asten Dutch dialect, respectively:

(10) 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 (10) is strongly suggested by the fact that when we 'pronominalize' the proper name, we get the adverb-like pro-form *zo*, which typically functions as a pro-predicate in Dutch:

(11) We noemen hem zo
We call him so

Clearly, *Jáepje Skúit* and *Harrie* in (10a,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:

(12) We noemen [$_{SC}$ hem Harrie]

It seems very unlikely that, in this small clause configuration, *Harrie* represents a nominative case form (i.e. a non-accusative/non-oblique form). If it carries any case form, it

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should be an accusative one, given the widespread case agreement attested with subject-predicate relations. In short, the 'bareness' of the proper name in (10) 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 not an accusative/oblique case marker, what can it be? What I would like to propose is that *–s* on *Anna's* in (6a) is precisely the same element as the one we find on the possessive noun phrase in (13).

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

Thus, the linguistic expression *Anna's* in (6a) 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 (14):

(14) $[_{DP}$ D $[_{PosP}$ Anna$_j$ $[_{Pos'}$ -s $[_{NP}$ *Possessum* t$_j$]]]]

If *Anna's* in (6a) is the same element and occupies the same (DP-internal) structural position as *Anna's* in (13), 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 (15a), this is illustrated for a regular possessive noun phrase, in (15b) for a possessive noun phrase featuring a silent possessed noun.

(15) a. Dat is [*Krijn Haezenoot**e*** huis] (dialect of Katwijk)
that is Krijn Haezenoot-e house
'That is Krijn Haezenoot's house.'
b. Ik hep *Krijn Haezenoot**e***-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:

(16) a. Laten we *vader**s*** 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 vader**s*** 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.'

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A similar contrast is found with 'normal' possessive constructions:[4]

(17) a. [*Vader**s** fiets*] is gisteren gestolen
father-s bike has yesterday (been) stolen
b. ?*[D*ie arme vader**s** fiets*] is gisteren gestolen
that poor father-s bike has yesterday (been) stolen

If *Anna's* in (6a) has the more complex 'underlying' representation *Anna's POSSESSUM*, the question arises as to what exactly the silent noun is. I propose that PERSON is the silent semi-lexical noun that fulfills the role of possessum. Interestingly, the silent grammatical noun PERSON has a lexical equivalent:

(18) 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 (18), 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).

The (hidden possessive) structure in (14) can now be refined as (19):

(19) $[_{DP}$ D $[_{PosP}$ Anna$_j$ $[_{Pos'}$ -s $[_{NP}$ *PERSOON* t$_j$]]]]

Remember from section 1 that silent nouns are typically 'licensed' by some sort of weak antecedent. More specifically, a cognitive syntactic feature F associated with some category in the local syntactic environment of the silent noun in a way identifies (the semantic contents of) the silent noun. It is quite obvious which element functions as the licensing antecedent for the silent noun PERSON in nominal expressions like *Anna's* PERSOON in (1). The proper name *Anna* arguably carries a feature like [+person] or [+human] and as such is able to identify the contents of the silent semi-lexical noun PERSOON.

4. More silent semi-lexical nouns: PLACE and TIME

Thus far, I have argued that an expression like Anna's in (6a) has the following more abstract representation: Anna's PERSOON. The question arises whether this hidden possessive construction — 'hidden' in the sense that only the possessor + 's part surfaces phonetically — is found more widely in natural language syntax. Remember that according to Emonds (1985), the class of semi-lexical nouns includes lexical items such as: one, place, time,way. It should be investigated then whether silent counterparts of some of these elements ever show up in hidden possessive environments. In this section, I will simply provide some

[4] Compare (16b) with the doubling possessive construction in (i), which is much better than (16b):
(i) [Die arme vader z'n fiets] is gisteren gestolen
That poor father his bike has been stolen

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further examples of this hidden possessive pattern, without entering into any in-depth discussion of each of these constructions.

A first example (from Groningen Dutch) is given in (20), where arguably the silent semi-lexical noun PLACE functions as the possessum (cf. ter Laan 1953):

(20) Wie hebben vandoag bie *Haartenhof**s*** west?
who has today with Haartenhof-s been
'Who's been with the Haartenhof family today?'

The abstract representation of (20) is given in (21), where the [+LOCative] feature associated with the lexical P *bè* arguably functions as a weak antecedent for the silent noun PLACE, which denotes the location point (i.e. the reference object).

(21) $[_{PP}$ bie$_{[+LOC]}$ $[_{DP}$ D $[_{PosP}$ Haartenhof$_j$ $[_{Pos'}$ –s $[_{NP}$ $[_{N}$ PLACE] $t_j]]]]]$

A second illustration of the hidden possessive construction featuring a silent semi-lexical noun is given in (22), where the temporal noun *Dinsdag* is followed by *–s*. In traditional grammatical studies, these adverbial temporal noun phrases are often referred to as 'adverbial genitivals'.

(22) Ik kom *Dinsdag**s*** altijd later thuis (Dutch)
I come Tuesday-s always later home
'On Tuesday, I always come home later.'

As shown in (23), *Dinsdag-s* can combine with a lexical noun which also denotes time:

(23) Ik bezoek mijn moeder *Dinsdag **s** ochtend/Dinsdag **s** avond*
I visit my mother Tuesday-s-morning/Tuesday-s-evening

From the construction in (23), it is only a little step towards an analysis of (22) that has a silent semi-lexical noun TIME following *dinsdags*. I will tentatively assume that a property like [+time] is part of the lexical entry of names of days, and functions as an antecedent for silent TIME.

(24) $[_{DP}$ D $[_{PosP}$ Dinsdag$_{[+time]\ j}$ $[_{Pos'}$ –s $[_{NP}$ $[_{N}$ TIME] $t_j]]]]]$

Support for this analysis of a temporal noun phrase like *Dinsdag**s*** in (22) comes from more complex temporal noun phrases such as those in (25):

(25) a. *'s Avond**s** laat* dronk Jan een glas wijn
–s evening-s late drank Jan a glass (of) wine
'Late in the evening, Jan drank a glass of wine.'
b. *'s Ochtend**s** vroeg* dronk Jan een glas melk
–s morning-s early drank Jan a glass (of) milk
'Early in the morning, Jan drank a glass of milk.'

The interesting property of the temporal expressions in italics is the occurrence of an adjective *laat/vroeg* after the temporal noun (+-*s*). If *'s avonds/'s ochtends* was analyzed as a

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non-hidden possessive structure, the question would arise as to why the modifying adjective occurs in a postnominal position; normally, this placement of adjectives is excluded in Dutch. Under a hidden-possessive analysis like (26), *laat* and *vroeg* can be treated as attributive adjectival modifiers of the silent noun TIME. Schematically:

(26) $[_{DP}$ D $[_{PosP}$'s avond$_{[+time]\ j}$ $[_{Pos'}$ –s $[_{NP}$ laat $[_{NP}$ $[_{N}$ TIME] $t_j]]]]]]$

5. Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to provide evidence for the existence of silent, semi-lexical nouns in the sense of Kayne (2003) and Emonds (1985). It was shown that semi-lexical nouns such as PERSON, PLACE and TIME occur as a possessum in what I called hidden possessive constructions.

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