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**Inflectional economy and politeness : morphology-internal and morphology-external factors in the loss of second person marking in Dutch**

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## Chapter 4

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### *The loss of *du* as a form of economy*

#### 1 Introduction

In chapter 2, we looked at sources of syncretism, where our main goal was to illustrate that morphology-internal factors alone cannot explain deflection. We looked at two types of evidence for the role of politeness in deflection, namely agreement with pronouns and socio-pragmatic conditioning. Deflection that is (also) triggered by politeness usually affects verbal inflection as well as speakers' pronoun choice. Morphology-internally motivated inflection only affects verbal inflection. In addition, morphology-internally motivated deflection begins in informal situations whereas politeness-triggered substitutions begin in formal situations.

In chapter 3, we looked at the effect of politeness on the Dutch inflectional paradigm, and we saw that the loss of the non-polite pronoun *du* coincides with the most profound change in Dutch verbal inflection, namely, the loss of second person marking in the singular. Since loss of second person singular marking in Dutch co-occurs with the loss of the non-polite pronoun (referred to as T), and since the substitution of second person singular by second person plural began in formal situations, it is evident that politeness plays a role in the loss of the original second person singular.

The loss of T, however, cannot be fully related to politeness. Politeness cannot explain the loss of T from all domains. In line with the observation that socio-pragmatic factors cannot explain full loss of T is the observation that the loss of T is unique to English and Dutch. Only Dutch and English lost their original second person singular pronoun and suffix from all usage domains. The fact that loss of *du* is only partly understandable from a socio-pragmatic angle, suggests that politeness is not the full story.

The main claim in this chapter is that the loss of *du* and the suffix *-s* is the result of the interaction between politeness and morphology-internally motivated syncretism (cf. Aalberse 2004b, 2006). The hypothesis is that the inflectional marker *-s*, that *du* combined with, was less economical than the inflectional marker *-t*, which *gi* combined with. One motivation for using a polite pronoun (referred to as V) instead of T has to do with avoiding non-economical inflection. By using the pronoun *gi* instead of *du*, language users could mirror their input, and use more economical inflection at the same time.

In sections 2 and 3, we will look into why English and Dutch lost T when other languages did not. We will approach this issue by focusing on the economy hypothesis. In section 2, we see that English and Dutch belong to the relatively small group of languages where the pronoun is obligatorily expressed in combination with finite verbs (non-prodrop languages). This relationship between pronouns and finite inflection makes deflection via pronouns more likely. In section 3, we will zoom in on the question of whether the replacement of T by V yields a more economical paradigm. Dutch and English belong to an even smaller group of languages where the suffix that combines with V is more economical than the suffix that combines with T. The economy hypothesis can thus explain why English and Dutch have lost T, whereas other languages have not.

Apart from an explanation for the question of why English and Dutch lost T and other languages did not, we still need an answer as to why T was lost from all domains. In section 4, we will see that extra pressure from inflectional economy can explain loss of T from usage domains where a socio-pragmatic motivation is lacking. The conclusion from sections 2 through 4 is that the economy hypothesis can help in answering the questions that we could not answer in chapter 3. We can then understand why English and Dutch lost T whereas other languages did not, and why T was lost from all usage domains.

In section 5, we will look at two other examples of deflection via pronouns in French and Brazilian Portuguese. We will first look at the social and stylistic distribution of the old pronoun and then we will consider types of evidence for the role of morphology-internally motivated deflection in the loss of the old pronoun.

The central question in this chapter is the mirror image of the central question in chapter 2. Whereas in chapter 2 we looked at evidence for the hypothesis that deflection is not (only) related to morphology-internal factors, we now consider evidence for the hypothesis that deflection in combination with pronoun loss is not related exclusively to politeness or to other pragmatic factors. The empirical evidence we present in this chapter will be the starting point for chapter 5 and 6, where we will discuss additional empirical evidence for the role of morphology in the loss of T in synchronic and diachronic variants of Dutch.

## **2 The likelihood of deflection via pronouns**

In chapter 3, we saw that on the basis of socio-pragmatic factors alone, we were unable to account for the observation that T was lost in English and Dutch and not in other languages. In the following, we will argue that this phenomena can be better understood if we view the loss of T from the perspective that T-loss is a form

of deflection. The central question in this section is: What type of language deflection via pronouns is most likely to occur?

Deflection via pronouns is a form of deflection that reduces deviation from the input. During this process, a pronoun that triggers relatively uneconomical inflection is replaced by a pronoun that triggers more economical inflection. The relation between pronouns and verbal inflection is strongest in languages where the expression of a pronoun in combination with a finite verb is obligatory. We find the obligatory expression of pronouns in non-pro-drop languages. Koenenman (2000: 134-141) shows that non-pro-drop languages encode less than six number/person combinations inflectionally. Deflection via pronouns is most likely to occur in non-pro-drop languages because maintaining the relationship between a pronoun and the suffix it combines with is most relevant when the pronoun-suffix combination is frequently attested in the input.

In (1), we reproduce the list of address pronouns in the languages of Europe from chapter 3. In addition, however, we add further information regarding the inflectional paradigm. In (1), numbers in brackets indicate the number of inflectional distinctions in the present indicative paradigm. Spanish, for example encodes six inflectional distinctions. French encodes less than six inflectional distinctions.

## (1) Address pronouns in the languages of Europe

| Language Family | Language          | T                                | V   | Origin of V   |
|-----------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Romance         | Spanish [6]       | <b>tu</b>                        | <i>vos</i><br><i>el/ella</i><br><b>usted</b>                  | (2p)<br>3s masc/fem<br>Respectful title             |
| Romance         | Italian [6]       | <b>tu</b>                        | <i>vos</i><br><b>lei</b>                                      | 2p<br>Respectful title                              |
| Romance         | Portuguese [6]    | <b>tu</b>                        | <i>vos</i><br><b>voçe</b>                                     | 2p<br>Respectful title                              |
| Romance         | →French [<6]      | <b>tu</b>                        | <b>vous</b>   | 2p  |
| South Slavonic  | Bulgarian [6]     | <b>тие (tie)</b>                 | <b>вие (vie)</b>  | 2p  |
| South Slavonic  | Macedonian[6]     | <b>тие (tie)</b>                 | <b>вие (vie)</b>  | 2p  |
| South Slavonic  | Serbian[6]        | <b>ти (vi)</b>                   | <b>ви (vi)</b>  | 2p  |
| South Slavonic  | Croatian[6]       | <b>ty</b>                        | <b>vy</b>   | 2p  |
| South Slavonic  | Bosnian[6]        | <b>ti</b>                        | <b>vi</b>   | 2p  |
| South Slavonic  | Slovenian [8]     | <b>ti</b>                        | <b>vi</b><br><i>oni</i>                                       | 2p<br>3p  |
| West Slavonic   | Czech [6]         | <b>ty</b>                        | <b>vy</b><br><i>Pan</i><br><i>vašnost</i>                     | 2p<br>Respectful title<br>Respectful title          |
| West Slavonic   | Slovakian [6]     | <b>ty</b>                        | <b>vy</b><br><i>oni</i> 3p                                    | 2p<br>3p  |
| West Slavonic   | Lower Sorbian [8] | <b>ty</b>                        | <b>wy</b>   | 2p  |
| West Slavonic   | Upper Sorbian [8] | <b>ty</b>                        | <b>wy</b>   | 2p  |
| West Slavonic   | Polish [6]        | <b>ty</b>                        | <b>wy</b> 2p<br><i>pan/panii</i><br><i>(oni)</i>              | 2p<br>Respectful title<br>3p (dialectal)            |
| West Slavonic   | Polabian [6]      | <b>ty</b>                        | <b>jaĵ</b>  | Middle low German 2p                                |
| East Slavonic   | Russian [6]       | <b>ты (ty)</b>                   | <b>вы (vy)</b>  | 2p  |
| East Slavonic   | Belarusian [6]    | <b>ты</b>                        | <b>вы (vei)</b>   | 2p  |
| East Slavonic   | Ukrainian [6]     | <b>тиє</b>                       | <b>вие (vie)</b>  | 2p  |
| Uralic          | Finnish [6]       | <b>sinä</b>                      | <b>te</b>   | 2p  |
| Uralic          | Hungarian [6]     | <b>te</b>                        | <b>maga</b><br><b>ön</b>                                      | 'his body'<br>self (via German)                     |
| Turkic          | Turkish [6]       | <b>Sen</b>                       | <b>Siz</b>  | 2p  |
| West Germanic   | → German [<6]     | <b>du</b>                        | <i>ihr</i><br><i>er/sie</i><br><b>Sie</b><br><i>Dieselben</i> | 2p<br>3s masc/fem sing<br>3p<br>anaphoric pronoun 3 |
| West Germanic   | → Dutch [<6]      | <i>du</i><br><i>gij/jij</i> (2p) | <i>gij</i><br><b>u</b>  | 2p<br>Respectful title                              |
| West Germanic   | → English [<6]    | thou<br><i>ye/you</i> (2p)       | <i>ye/you</i>   |   |
| North Germanic  | → Danish [<6]     | <b>du</b>                        | <i>i</i><br><b>de</b>   | 2p<br>3p  |
| North Germanic  | → Swedish [<6]    | <b>du</b>                        | <i>i</i> → <b>ni</b>  | 2p  |
| North Germanic  | → Norwegian [<6]  | <b>du</b>                        | <b>De</b>   | 3p  |

In (1), we also present information on address terms. As mentioned in chapter 3, pronouns printed in bold are the address forms that are used in present day variants

of the languages; the address forms printed in italics are no longer used. In the column ‘origin of V,’ we list the origin of the polite pronoun. The three most common sources of polite pronouns include (i) the second person plural pronoun (referred to as 2p in (1)); (ii) grammaticized respectful titles, for example Spanish *usted* < *vuestra merced* ‘Your Honour’, (referred to in (1) as respectful title) and (iii) third person pronouns which are referred to as 3s and 3p for third person singular and third plural pronouns, respectively.

If we consider the verbal paradigm of the languages in (1) per language family, we see that most Slavonic languages encode six distinctions inflectionally in the present indicative paradigm. This is true for Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Czech, Slovak, Sorbian, Polish, Polabian, Russian, Belorussian and Ukrainian (Browne 1993: 335, Friedman 1993: 274, Mayo 1993: 914, Polański 1993: 816, Rothstein 1993: 710, Scatton 1993: 210, Shevelov 1993: 966, Short 1993a: 491, 1993b: 563, Timberlake 1993: 852-853). Slovene (Priestly 1993: 418) and Sorbian (Stone 1993: 648) encode eight distinctions inflectionally.

The Uralic languages: Hungarian and Finnish both encode six number and person combinations in the present indicative paradigm (Abondolo 1998a: 171, 1998b: 448). In fact, there is more variation in the present indicative paradigm in Hungarian because the form of the finite verb does not only depend on person and number features, but also on the animacy relation between the subject and the object. A different conjugation is used depending on the degree of animacy of the subject (see Abondolo 1998b: 447). For now, it is sufficient to know that both languages have a rich inflectional paradigm. A rich inflectional paradigm is also attested in Turkish, where we find six person and number combinations encoded on the verb (Kornfilt 1997: 382).

If we move to the Romance languages, we see that most languages encode six distinctions in the present indicative paradigm. This is true for Spanish (Green 1988: 98), Italian (Vincent 1988: 293), and Portuguese (Parkinson 1988: 150). The only Romance language in our list that encodes less than six distinctions is French (Harris 1988: 224). All of the Germanic languages encode fewer than six distinctions inflectionally.

Languages that encode fewer than six distinctions in the verbal paradigm inflectionally include French, German, Dutch, English, Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian. Since in these languages, pronouns are obligatorily expressed in combination with finite verbs, the relation between the inflectional suffix and the pronoun is strong. Since language learners attempt to replicate the input as exactly as possible, and since the combination of pronouns and inflectional suffixes is strong in non-pro-drop languages, deflection via pronouns is a possible means of uniting

two seemingly opposing goals: selecting an economical suffix and maintaining the strong relation between suffix and pronoun as presented in the input. Selecting a new pronoun as a means of inflectional economy is only possible if the new pronoun combines with more economical inflection than the old pronoun. In the next section, we will look into languages whether it is true that a suffix that combines with V is more economical than a suffix that combines with T.

### 3 Effects of the loss of T on the inflectional paradigm

In chapter 2, we saw that not all forms of syncretism are economical. In this section we will look at the effects of T-loss per language. We only expect T-loss when it results in a more economical inflectional paradigm. The most important aspect of inflectional economy in this section is the direction of neutralization patterns. According to our definition in chapter 2, only the neutralization of person features in the context of number features is economical. The neutralization of number features in the context of person is not economical. The syncretism between second person singular and second person plural, as shown in (2), is not an economical syncretism. The overlap between second and third person in (3) and the overlap between first and second person in (4) is economical.

(2) Neutralization of number features in the context of person

---

|   | Singular | Plural |
|---|----------|--------|
| 1 | A        | D      |
| 2 | B        | B      |
| 3 | C        | F      |

---

(3) Neutralization of person in the context of number

---

|   | Singular | Plural |
|---|----------|--------|
| 1 | A        | D      |
| 2 | C        | E      |
| 3 | C        | F      |

---

(4) Neutralization of person in the context of number

---

|   | Singular | Plural |
|---|----------|--------|
| 1 | A        | D      |
| 2 | A        | E      |
| 3 | C        | F      |

---

If politeness triggers the replacement of second person singular by second person plural, this always yields neutralization of the number feature in the context of person. This is the case in (2). This type of feature reduction is not in accordance with feature structure. It is possible however, that the replacement of second person singular by second person plural inflection does yield a more economical paradigm which is in accordance with feature structure. Economy according to feature structure occurs if (i) T combines with a unique suffix and (ii), and if V combines with a suffix that is homophonous with first or third person.

If the suffix that combines with V is homophonous with third person singular inflection, replacement of T by V yields a paradigm where the speaker (first person) is opposed to non-speakers (second and third person), as is the case in the paradigm in (3). In chapter 2, we saw that this neutralization of person features is in line with feature structure. If second person plural inflection is homophonous with first person singular inflection, replacement of second person singular inflection by second person plural inflection yields a more economical paradigm; speech act participants (first and second person) are opposed to non-speech act participants (third person), just like in (4). In chapter 2, we saw that this neutralization pattern is also in accordance with feature structure. The first requirement for deflection via T-loss is thus that V combines with a suffix that is homophonous with first or third person singular.

If V combines with inflection that is homophonous with first or third person singular, it does not necessarily mean that the paradigm becomes more economical. If T also combines with a suffix that is homophonous with first or third person singular, replacement of T by V will, at most, yield a paradigm that is equally economical. It will not yield a paradigm that is more economical. Deflection via pronouns requires that the paradigm becomes more economical. The second



requirement for deflection via T-loss is thus that T combines with inflection that is not homophonous with first or third person singular.

Here, I will not consider V in the form of a third person pronoun. I only consider V in the form of the second person plural pronoun. There are reasons why replacement of T by V derived from third person is less likely than replacement of V derived from second person plural. First, the loss of person distinctions in the pronominal paradigm is highly uncommon (Cysouw 2003). Loss of second person in the singular pronominal paradigm is more marked than loss of number distinctions in the pronominal paradigm (Heath 1998). Second, third person polite forms are more polite than second person polite forms, and thus less suitable in all pragmatic contexts (Simon 2003b). Thus, they are less suitable replacements. Note that the first argument only holds for third person pronouns like German *Sie* ('they') and not for grammaticized titles like Polish *pan* ('lord'). If grammaticized titles replace the second person pronoun, the replacement does not imply a loss of the distinction between second and third person in the pronominal paradigm.

Let us now consider the effect of replacement of T by V on the verbal paradigm in the set of languages described in (1). In tables (5)-(17), a box indicates that person features have been neutralized. The verbal paradigm of Middle Spanish is presented in (5) (Penny 1991: 151). A hypothetical paradigm of Middle Spanish with substitution of second person singular by second person plural inflection is presented in (6). If we compare the two paradigms, we observe that the only difference between (5) and (6) is the absence of number marking in the context of second person. This neutralization is not in line with feature structure. The replacement of second person singular inflection by second person plural inflection does not yield neutralization in person marking. Thus, it does not yield a more economical paradigm in terms of feature structure. Second person plural inflection is not homophonous with first or third person singular in all languages with six or more suffixes. Therefore, replacement of second person singular inflection by second person plural inflection does not result in inflectional economy in any of the languages that are marked with [6] or [8] in (1).

## (5) Middle Spanish based (cf. Penny 1991: 151)

---

|   | Singular | Plural   |
|---|----------|----------|
| 1 | canto    | cantamos |
| 2 | cantas   | cantaís  |
| 3 | cantat   | cantan   |

---

## (6) Hypothetical: 2p replaces 2s in Middle Spanish

---

|   | Singular | Plural |
|---|----------|--------|
| 1 | -a       | -um    |
| 2 | -iP      | -iP    |
| 3 | -aR      | -a     |

---

Let us now move to languages that encode with less than six suffixes inflectionally. We will consider Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian. In (7), we see that in Middle Scandinavian, there is already an overlap between second and third person singular forms. This does not conform to our first condition on T-loss. The suffix that encodes second person singular also encodes third person singular, and, as a result, the paradigm is economical. T-loss will not trigger a more economical paradigm. As we can see in (8), if the suffix that is associated with T is replaced by the suffix that is associated with V, the paradigm becomes less economical rather than more economical: The neutralization of number in the context of (second) person is not supported by feature structure. T-loss thus does not result in a more economical paradigm, and therefore T is not lost from the Scandinavian languages.

The timing of the selected paradigms influences the outcome of effects economy. In none of the cases presented here would a paradigm from a different period yield a higher chance of deflection via pronouns. Present day Scandinavian languages, for example, have no number or person marking on verbs. Consequently the observation that the replacement of second person singular by second person plural does not yield a more economical paradigm remains.

(7) Middle Scandinavian (cf. Haugen 1976: 302)

---

|   | Singular | Plural |
|---|----------|--------|
| 1 | -a       | -um    |
| 2 | -aR      | -iP    |
| 3 | -aR      | -a     |

---

(8) Hypothetical: 2p replaces 2s in Middle Scandinavian

---

|   | Singular | Plural |
|---|----------|--------|
| 1 | -a       | -um    |
| 2 | -iP      | -iP    |
| 3 | -aR      | -a     |

---

Let us now consider the effects of T-loss in French by comparing (9) and (10).

In French, second person plural never combines with a first or third person singular suffix. The requirement for T-loss was not obeyed in any diachronic stage of the language. The requirement that T combines with a unique suffix is obeyed if *-es* encodes second person singular, but it is not obeyed if *-e* encodes second person singular. The crucial point here is that there is no diachronic stage where both requirements for T-loss are ever obeyed. Again, deflection via the T-pronoun is not an option because loss of T does not result in a more economical paradigm.

## (9) French inflection (Old French in brackets cf. Rickard 1989)

|   | Singular | Plural |
|---|----------|--------|
| 1 | -e       | -on[s] |
| 2 | -e[s]    | -ez    |
| 3 | -e[t]    | -e[nt] |

## (10) Hypothetical: 2p replaces 2s in French

|   | Singular | Plural    |
|---|----------|-----------|
| 1 | -e       | -on[s]    |
| 2 | -ez      | -ez       |
| 3 | -e[t]/-Ø | -e[nt]/-Ø |

Let us now consider the German paradigm as presented in (11) and 0. In the German case, replacement of second person singular by second person plural would yield a more economical paradigm, since the replacement of second person singular by second person plural results in a syncretism between second and third person singular. Deflection via T-loss was thus an option in German, however T-loss did not occur. The question is: Why not?

Weerman (2006) compares the deflection process of German, Dutch, and English, and he finds that, if we compare the West-Germanic languages, deflection is consistently the most extreme in English, whereas German is relatively conservative. Dutch deflects more than German and less than English. German is conservative in the nominal domain, where we still see remainders of case marking. It is conservative in the adjectival domain where case and three genders are encoded (Harbert 2007), German is also conservative in the verbal domain. Weerman (2006) relates the differences in the rate of deflection to the language and dialect contact situation. As we saw in chapter 2, an increase in language or dialect contact implies more deflection. In comparison to English and Dutch, German shows fewer effects of levelling due to language and dialect contact. The retention of *du* fits into this

general pattern of inflectional conservatism in German.

(11) Middle High German (cf. Schmidt, Langner & Wolf 2000)

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|   | Singular | Plural |
|---|----------|--------|
| 1 | binde    | binden |
| 2 | bindest  | bindet |
| 3 | bindet   | binden |

---

(12) Hypothetical: Middle high German 2s replaced by 2p

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|   | Singular | Plural |
|---|----------|--------|
| 1 | binde    | binden |
| 2 | bindet   | bindet |
| 3 | bindet   | binden |

---

Let us now consider the paradigm of Southern English, upon which Standard English is based (see (13) and (14)). In Southern English, both conditions for deflection via pronoun loss are obeyed: second person singular is encoded by a unique suffix, and second person plural combines with an suffix that is homophonous with first person singular. The replacement of second person singular by second person plural inflection results in a more economical paradigm. T-loss in English is thus in line with the perspective of deflection via pronouns.

## (13) Southern English around 1500 (cf. Lass 1999)

---

|   | Singular | Plural |
|---|----------|--------|
| 1 | -∅       | -∅     |
| 2 | -st      | -∅     |
| 3 | -th      | -∅     |

---

## (14) Southern English 2s is replaced by 2p

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|   | Singular | Plural |
|---|----------|--------|
| 1 | -∅       | -∅     |
| 2 | -∅       | -∅     |
| 3 | -th      | -∅     |

---

If we compare the inflectional paradigm of Southern English to the paradigm in Northern English (as presented in (15)), we see that in Northern English, only one of the conditions for deflection via pronoun loss is obeyed. The requirement that second person plural inflection is homophonous with first or third person singular is fulfilled. Second person plural and third person singular are both encoded with *-es*. However, the requirement that second person singular is encoded by a unique suffix is not met. Replacement of T by V does not yield a change in the inflectional paradigm since both second person singular and second person plural are encoded with *-es*. Replacement of T by V does not result in a change in the inflectional paradigm. Since the replacement of second person singular inflection does not yield more economy, we do not expect T-loss in Northern English. Upton & Widdowson (1996) confirm that T is indeed retained in Northern English.

## (15) Northern English since 1300 (cf. Lass 1992)

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|   | Singular | Plural |
|---|----------|--------|
| 1 | -(e)     | -es    |
| 2 | -es      | -es    |
| 3 | -es      | -es    |

---

If we look at the paradigm of Middle Dutch in (16) and (17), we see that the two requirements for T-loss are obeyed. Second person singular is encoded by the unique suffix *-s*, and second person plural is encoded by a suffix that is homophonous with the suffix of third person singular; both are encoded by *-t*. As was the case in Southern English, we see that T-loss yields a more economical paradigm.

In Dutch, there is a difference between second person plural marking and third person singular agreement. Schwa is retained in more cases in second person plural than in third person singular. Zwaan (1939: 394) uses a prologue in the grammar from De Hubert (1624) who says that in the singular, we find *Gij looft* ('you praise') with the suffix *-t*, whereas in the plural we find *Gij lovet* ('you praise') with the suffix *-et*. The crucial point is that second person plural and third person singular can be homophonous because *-et* and *-t* alternate in the plural. The possible homophony between *-t* of third person singular and of *-(e)t* for second person gives the language learner the possibility to reinterpret second and third person singular as one feature without departing from the input.

## (16) Middle Dutch (cf. Van Gestel, Nijen Twilhaar, Rinkel &amp; Weerman 1992)

---

|   | Singular | Plural |
|---|----------|--------|
| 1 | hore     | horen  |
| 2 | hoors    | hoort  |
| 3 | hoort    | horen  |

---

(17) Middle Dutch 2s is replaced by 2p

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|   | Singular | Plural |
|---|----------|--------|
| 1 | hore     | horen  |
| 2 | hoort    | hoort  |
| 3 | hoort    | horen  |

---

In sum, we have seen that in the Scandinavian languages, in French, as well as in Northern English, T-loss does not yield a more economical paradigm, and thus we do not get T-loss as a means of deflection. In German, a more economical paradigm via T-loss is possible. The retention of T in German can be related to inflectional conservatism. The observation that the German inflectional system is relatively conservative in all inflectional domains can be attributed to the language contact situation. In English and Dutch, T-loss provides a more economical paradigm, and there was more language and dialect contact in comparison to German. More language contact increases the chance of deflection. It is thus due to two factors, namely the possibility of economy through pronoun replacement (i) and pressure on the inflectional system due to language contact (ii) that T was lost in English and Dutch.

#### 4 Loss of T out of all domains and functions

In 2 and 3, we looked into why English and Dutch lost their T-pronoun, but most other languages did not. We related the unique position of Dutch and English to two factors: first, to the tight connection between pronouns and second, to verbal inflection in the input. Additionally, there are two factors that made inflectional economy through pronoun loss possible in English and Dutch. The first has to do with the actual characteristics of the forms in the inflectional paradigm (non salient suffixes, less than six suffixes expressed in the singular) and the second is related to language contact. T-loss was made possible by the combination of the fact that deflection was desirable and that T-loss could provide a more economical paradigm. We now have a better understanding of why English and Dutch lost T while most other languages did not. There is, however, another question from chapter 3 which remains unanswered, namely: Why was T lost in all usage domains? The claim in this subsection is that if a polite form combines with more economical inflection



than the non-polite form, the use of the polite form receives extra formal motivation. The extra formal motivation for the use of the polite form can yield full loss of the original second person singular from all usage domains.

The claim in this subsection is that pressure from the inflectional system can explain why T was lost in domains where socio-pragmatic factors alone cannot explain the loss. In chapter 3, we described prototypical uses of T, where the loss of T is not explainable from a socio-pragmatic angle. We expect retention of T in situations that are characterized as [+intimate and –status], for example when addressing children and pets. We also expect T-retention in situations where the offensive association of T agrees with the offensive intention of an utterance, such as in sentences like *Du valsche hoer liegest* ('thou mean whore liest'). Moreover, we expect that it remains possible to use T as a form of positive politeness, as used in the sentence *Wat aetstu?* ('what did thou eat'), which we described in chapter 3. Here, the T-form is used by the bear in the *Fox Reynard* to promote a sense of intimacy in hopes that the fox Reynard will share his honey. However in English and Dutch, T is lost in all these contexts as well.

If we assume that there is pressure from the inflectional system not to use T, this will first stretch the use of T in situations where originally T and V use was both possible, such as in addressing close friends. If the chance to use T or V are socio-pragmatically both likely, inflectional pressure can increase the chance of V. Pressure from the inflectional system will be resisted longest in situations where the use of T is pragmatically the most likely choice. T is the most likely choice when its use adds the most information. T adds the most information in those situations where T expresses disdain, such as *thou art a villain*, or in those situations where use of T reflects (failed attempts of) intimacy, as in *wat aetstu?* ('what did thou eat?').

When there is more pressure from the inflectional system not to use T, speakers will devise alternative methods to convey the derogatory or intimate meaning. For example, instead of *wat aetstu* ('what did thou eat?'), speakers say *Lief Reynaerd wat aet ghi* ('Dear Reynaerd what did you eat'), where the intimate association of T is expressed by the adjective *lieve* ('dear'). Derogatory intentions can also be expressed via swear words. Even without the pronoun T, the vocative *hoer* ('whore'), for example, reveals the offensive nature of the utterance in a sentence such as *hoer gi lieget* ('whore you lie'). If inflectional economy plays a role in the loss T, there is pressure on T from two sides. On the one hand, there is pressure from above to use polite V and on the other hand, there is pressure from below to use a pronoun that promotes inflectional economy. These two forces together yield T-loss.

In descriptions of T and V use in English and Dutch, the last uses of T are used in emotional contexts, for example to express love and in anger (Brown & Gilman 1960, 1989, Lass 1999, Stein 2003, Vermaas 2002, Vor der Hake 1908). Most theories on the loss of T relate its full loss to emotional uses. In the deflection hypothesis, the late appearance of emotional uses of T is interpreted the other way around. Since the inflectional suffix that combines with the pronoun T is under pressure, T is only used in situations where it adds information such as disrespect or intimacy. Since, the surplus value of the pronoun is highest in situations of anger and emotion, it is retained the longest. When there is more pressure from the inflectional system, the surplus value of T is substituted by another construction. Alternative means to express T might include the use of an endearing or offensive adjective such as *lieve* ('dear') or *vuile* ('filthy').

In short, we have seen that the economy hypothesis can answer the two questions that we carried over from chapter 3, namely why English and Dutch lost T whereas other languages did not, and why T was lost from all domains. The next question we will investigate is: What additional evidence is available to further substantiate the claim that pronoun loss is related to inflectional economy? In section 5, we answer this question by looking at the combined loss of pronouns and inflection in French and Brazilian Portuguese. This information forms the basis for chapters 5 and 6, where we will consider additional evidence for the economy hypothesis in Dutch.

### **5 Independent empirical evidence for deflection via pronouns**

A relatively well known form of deflection connected to pronoun loss occurs in French. In this case, the replacement of the first person plural pronoun *nous* that combined with a unique suffix *-ons* is replaced by the originally indefinite pronoun *on*, that combines with third person singular inflection (Coveney 2000). The competition between the French indefinite pronoun *on* and the first person plural pronoun *nous* is restricted, meaning, the use of the pronoun *on* is only possible in unstressed subject position. The French verbal paradigm appears in (18). We present the verbal paradigm with the new pronominal system in (19).

## (18) French inflection with old pronominal system

---

|   | Singular   | Plural       |
|---|------------|--------------|
| 1 | (je) –e    | (nous)-on[s] |
| 2 | (tu) -e[s] | (vous) -ez   |
| 3 | (il) -e[t] | (ils) -e[nt] |

---

## (19) French inflection with new pronominal system

---

|   | Singular   | Plural       |
|---|------------|--------------|
| 1 | (je) –e    | (on) -e[t]   |
| 2 | (tu) -e[s] | (vous) –ez   |
| 3 | (il) -e[t] | (ils) -e[nt] |

---

The paradigm in (19) shows less inflectional distinctions than the paradigm in (18). The decrease in suffixes is related to a change in the pronominal system; the use of the pronoun *on* instead of the pronoun *nous* implies the use of the more general suffix -e rather than the unique first person plural suffix *-ons*. The question we will consider now is whether the change in the pronoun is pragmatically motivated or if it is also triggered by inflectional economy in the verbal paradigm.

Coveney (2000) supports the hypothesis that the use of new pronouns is related to verbal deflection. First, Coveney (2000: 475) shows that if the pronoun *nous* combines with a finite verb in informal situations, it combines with a finite verb that belongs to the group of common irregular verbs. If deflection plays a role in the decrease of the use of *nous*, the preference for common irregular verbs in combination with *nous* is understandable. Because of their high frequency, common irregular verbs are more resistant to deflection than low frequency verbs. Avoiding problems with agreement is thus less relevant for high frequency verbs.

Originally, *on* was used as an indefinite pronoun. There is referential overlap between the first person plural pronoun and the indefinite pronoun. This referential overlap is exemplified for English in (20) and (21), whereby the sentences have similar meanings despite using different pronouns (*one* and *we*).

- (20) That's what one often sees in PhD-students: periods of frustration followed by periods of ecstatic creativity.
- (21) That's what we often see in PhD-students: periods of frustration followed by periods of ecstatic creativity.

The competition between first person plural pronoun *nous* and the indefinite pronoun *on* resulted in a change in the referential system. The meaning of the French indefinite pronoun *on* was extended so that it can replace the first person plural pronoun *nous* in nearly all contexts including contexts that are defined as [+definite]. Coveney (2000) shows that the subject *nous* is absent from the speech of less educated speakers. It is likely that inflectional economy played a role in the extension of the referential properties of the pronoun *on*.

What is even more interesting than the observation that the meaning of *on* has shifted to cover all meanings of the subject *nous*, is the observation that *on* also occurs in contexts where it was not in competition with *nous*. This is true for the use of *on* in cleft sentences and for the use of *on* in what Coveney (2000) refers to as imperatives. Let us first look at the use of *nous* in imperatives. Imperatives in French can be expressed by second person singular, second person plural, and by first person plural. (22) offers an example of a first person plural used in an imperative construction.

- |      |                 |           |
|------|-----------------|-----------|
| (22) | Calmons         | nous!     |
|      | Calm down (1p)  | REFL (1p) |
|      | Let's calm down |           |
|      | Calm down       |           |

The use of first person plural imperatives requires the use of first person plural inflection. In these constructions, the subject can be omitted. Mougeon (1995) observes that when addressing young children and animals, there is a greater tendency to use the construction in (23) where the pronoun *on* and third person singular inflection are used.

- |      |  |           |                |
|------|--|-----------|----------------|
| (23) | On                                       | se        | calme!         |
|      | We                                       | REFL (3s) | calm down (3s) |
|      | 'Calm down'                              |           |                |
|      | (Mougeon 1995: 116 in Coveney 2000: 462) |           |                |

Apart from the introduction of the pronoun *on* in imperative constructions, Coveney (2000) offers another example of the introduction of *on* in a construction where it was not in competition with *nous*. Since *nous* carries stress in cleft structures, the pronoun cannot be replaced by *on* because it cannot carry stress. An example of a cleft sentence with *nous* is given in (24).

- (24) C'est nous qui sommes les vainqueurs.  
 It is us who are (1p) the winners  
 'It is us who are the winners'

The appearance of *nous* in (24) triggers first person plural agreement. In corpora from the 1970s, we find a new grammatical construction as a variant of (24) which makes third person singular agreement in cleft structures possible. An example is shown in (25).

- (25) C'est nous qu'on est les vainqueurs.  
 It is us who us is (3s) the winners  
 'It's us who's the winners'  
 (Price 1971: 138 in Coveney 2000: 459)

In (25), *nous* is still used in the stressed position, but the clitic *on* is inserted which triggers third person singular agreement. This construction with *on*-insertion is now stigmatized and therefore no longer appears in modern corpora. The fact that the alternative construction existed at one stage, strongly supports the claim that the use of *on* triggers more economical inflection: We are not dealing with the replacement of *nous* by *on*, rather, we are dealing with an extra insertion of *on* without a functional motivation.

Apart from the insertion of *on* in cleft structures, third person agreement in combination with the pronoun *nous* is attested in Montreal French (as shown in (26)).

- (26) C'est nous-autres qui reçoit à Noël.  
 It is us who receive (3s) with Christmas  
 (Laberge 1977: 130 in Coveney 2000: 460)

The fact that first person plural agreement is replaced by third person singular agreement (and never the reverse) supports the hypothesis that first person plural inflection is under pressure.

Coveney (2000: 453) writes: ‘One might suppose then that the vast number of children who had to learn French as their second language (or dialect) would have cheerfully made their task easier by avoiding *nous* + 4p verb [first person plural verb, S.A.] whenever possible.’ A similar claim that avoiding a violation of the connection between a pronoun and the inflectional markers as provided by the input, forms a motivation for the use of the new pronoun is made by Zilles. She writes about the use of the indefinite pronoun *a gente* rather than the first person plural pronoun *nós* in Brazilian Portuguese. Zilles (2005: 50) writes: ‘*a gente* provides a safe way of avoiding the heavy stigma associated with omitted agreement, that is, given the choice between making a mistake in agreement and using a nonstandard but generalized new pronoun, people prefer the second option.’

Both Coveney (2000) and Zilles (2005) provide circumstantial evidence for the role of verbal deflection in changes in the pronominal paradigm. As we saw in chapter 2, deflection becomes more prominent when languages come in contact with one another (Kusters 2003, Trudgill 1986, Weerman 2006). Language contact entails second language acquisition. The average rate of success in the acquisition of inflection is substantially lower for second language learners than it is for first language learners. It is therefore not surprising that there is a correlation between deflection and the level of language contact in a community. If the use of the new pronouns *on* and *a gente* are both forms of deflection, we expect that the use of the new pronouns correlates with language contact. This is indeed the case. In both French and in Brazilian Portuguese, increased use of the indefinite pronoun *on/a gente* instead of the original first person plural pronoun *nous/nós* coincides with urbanization and immigration, which, naturally, entails language contact (Coveney 2000: 452, Zilles 2005: 30).

In both French and Brazilian Portuguese, the new pronouns *on* and *a gente* are favoured in informal and semiformal contexts (Coveney 2000: 472-474, Zilles 2005: 31). The use of *a gente* was attested first in the speech of the lower classes and in the speech of uneducated speakers (Zilles 2005: 30). Coveney (2000: 475) reports that French speakers with a lower linguistic market score (i.e. a lower socio-economic need to use Standard French) only use *on* as a first person plural subject form. They never use *nous*. In contrast, more educated speakers use *nous* in formal contexts. The observation that the use of the original first person plural pronoun and first person plural agreement is limited to formal situations suggests that the original pronoun has prestige. The choice for the new pronouns *a gente* and *on*, on the other

hand, does not seem to be related to extra-linguistic factors such as prestige. Rather, it is an internally motivated change that meets less resistance in informal situations. Deflection is a form of internally motivated language change. Thus, the stylistic and social distribution of *on/a gente* corroborates the hypothesis that the use of the new pronoun is a form of deflection.

One might argue that our conclusion that the use of the new pronoun is not related to extra-linguistic factors is premature. Whereas the new pronouns *on* and *a gente* are not associated with overt prestige, given its social and stylistic distribution, it is imaginable that semantics or pragmatics play a role in the choice for the new pronoun. For example, it has been claimed that *on* is preferred in situations for first person inclusive, or that the use of *on* implies familiarity with the included referents. However, Coveney (2000: 465-472) shows that the use of French *on* in many cases cannot be explained on the basis of semantic or pragmatic grounds. The lack of semantic and pragmatic motivation in the use of *on* is in line with the hypothesis that the loss of the original first person plural pronoun is a language internally motivated change.

In short, we looked at linguistic evidence for the role of inflectional economy in the loss of the original first person plural pronoun in French. The old pronoun is retained longest in combination with high frequency verbs. If the loss of an old pronoun is a form of deflection, the preference for high frequency verbs is expected since high frequency verbs can resist deflection the longest. Moreover, we find *nous* in constructions where its appearance used to be ungrammatical and where *nous* and *on* were not in competition, namely in cleft sentences and in imperatives. Apart from linguistic evidence, we saw circumstantial evidence for the role of verbal deflection in both French and Brazilian Portuguese. We saw that deflection via pronouns has a specific social and stylistic distribution. The new pronoun is favoured first in lower classes and in informal speech. This distribution suggests that the new pronoun does not have overt prestige. Changes that lack overt prestige are associated with language internally motivated change.

## **6 Conclusion**

The central claim in this chapter is that the loss of the second person singular pronoun and inflection in English and Dutch is the combined effect of politeness strategies and inflectional economy. Politeness motivated the use of second person plural as a singular form of address. The loss of second person singular inflection and the loss of the second person singular pronoun were triggered by inflectional economy.

If we look at the loss of second person from the perspective of inflectional economy, we can understand why T was lost in English and Dutch and not in other languages in our sample. English and Dutch belong to the small group of languages where replacement of second person singular inflection by second person plural inflection yields a more economical verbal paradigm. Moreover, the histories of English and Dutch are characterized by language and dialect contact and thus by deflection.

Apart from understanding why English and Dutch are the only two languages in our sample that lost T, the economy hypothesis can also explain why T was lost from all domains. Inflectional pressure results in an even larger decrease in the uses of T. T was retained longest in situations where use of T added extra information, namely in offensive utterances and in intimate circumstances. When inflectional pressure prevented use of T, speakers applied other strategies to express contempt and love, such as using adjectives like *lieve* ('dear') and *vuile* ('filthy'). Without inflectional pressure, speakers would not have had to switch to alternative strategies, and they could have maintained use of T in intimate and offensive situations.

We also presented evidence for the role of deflection in pronoun changes. We looked at two examples of deflection via pronouns in French and in Brazilian Portuguese. We saw that the new pronouns *on* and *a gente* both have a specific social and stylistic distribution. The new pronouns are favoured first in informal speech. This distribution is expected for a language internally motivated change. Apart from the social and stylistic distribution of deflection via pronouns, we also saw formal evidence for the role of deflection in the loss of pronouns. The old pronoun is retained longest in combination with high frequency verbs. If the loss of an old pronoun is a form of deflection, the preference for high frequency verbs is expected since high frequency verbs can resist deflection the longest. Moreover, we found *nous* in constructions where its appearance used to be ungrammatical and where *nous* and *on* were not in competition, namely in cleft sentences and in imperatives. The use of *on* in these new grammatical constructions cannot have any other motivation than deflection.

The theories we developed in this chapter will serve as a basis upon which we can evaluate changes in the pronominal system in Dutch. This will be the focus of chapters 5 and 6, where we will look at diachronic and synchronic evidence for the role of inflectional economy in T-loss in Dutch.