

IS ER IETS ERMEE AAN DE HAND? The Syntax of Pronominal Adpositional Constituents in Surinamese, Netherlandic, and Belgian Dutch as a Barometer for Endonormative Standardization

Dutch is a pluricentric language with at least three norm-setting centers – The Netherlands, Belgium (Flanders), and Suriname – each exhibiting distinct lexical and grammatical features. While the syntactic norms of Netherlandic and Belgian Dutch have been relatively well documented, the extent to which Surinamese Dutch exhibits systematic syntactic differentiation remains underexplored. This paper addresses that gap by investigating the use of pronominal adpositional constituents (PACs) – constructions in which a pronominal adverb (e.g. *er*, *daar*, *waar*) combines with an adposition (e.g. *van*, *mee*, *in*) – across Surinamese, Belgian, and Netherlandic Dutch.

Existing literature suggests that PACs in Surinamese Dutch may exhibit syntactic patterns that diverge from those typically found in European varieties. These include omission of the pronominal adverb (1), doubling (2), and configurations in which the pronominal adverb appears attached to the adposition in syntactic positions that are unusual in Netherlandic or Belgian Dutch (3):

(1) *Ze weten niks van.* (de Kleine 2007, 115)

they know nothing of

‘They don’t know anything about it.’

(2) *Dus ik hoop dat er wel iets eraan gedaan kunt worden.* (de Kleine 2007, 115)

so I hope that there indeed something thereon done can be

‘I hope something can be done about it.’

(3) *Mijn vraag was of zij geen probleem ervan maakten.* (Ventura 2013, 52)

my question was whether they no problem thereof made

‘My question was whether they made a problem of it.’

These forms have been interpreted as signs of internally motivated language change (simplification through form loss), hypercorrection, Sranan influence and second language learner influence (de Kleine 2007), and might point to endonormative standardization (Ghyselen et al. 2022), yet little is known about their actual frequency, distribution, or sociolinguistic status.

This paper analyzes PACs across multiple corpora. For Surinamese Dutch, we use the Surinamese component of the *Corpus Hedendaags Nederlands* (CHN) and the spoken corpus of Surinamese Dutch (Ghyselen 2023). For Belgian and Netherlandic Dutch, we include data from the newspaper component of the SoNaR corpus (STEVIN Nederlandstalig Referentiecorpus; Oostdijk et al. 2013) and from spontaneous face-to-face conversations in the *Corpus Gesproken Nederlands* (CGN) (Oostdijk 2000). PACs were extracted based on the presence of a pronominal adverb (e.g. *er*, *daar*) and one of nine adpositions, with a search window of 0–8 words between the two elements. Relevant tokens were annotated for features including constituent splitting, doubling, register, grammatical function, clause type, verb frequency, and presence of intervening constituents. Deletion phenomena were also manually coded in the Surinamese spoken corpus.

Using logistic regression, we assess whether Surinamese PACs behave differently from their Belgian and Netherlandic counterparts, and whether their distribution can be modelled equally

well based on linguistic and contextual variables. The latter question is relevant as predictability has been proposed as an index of endonormative standardization (Grondelaers, Speelman, and Geeraerts 2008). By zooming in on medium and register effects, we shed light on the sociolinguistic status of the studied variants in Suriname.

Preliminary findings show that deletion and doubling of pronominal adverbs in PACs (examples (1) and (2), respectively) are peripheral in Surinamese Dutch, occurring in only 3.7% and 2.3% of cases in the spoken data). Deletion often appears in formal language test settings where speakers were instructed to speak standard Surinamese Dutch, suggesting linguistic insecurity. The doubling is strongly speaker-dependent and restricted to existential constructions. Overall, the data provide limited evidence that these phenomena are inherent features of a Surinamese Dutch norm.

However, the data do reveal clear national variation in splitting behavior. Specifically, unsplit PACs (see example (3)) are more frequent in Surinamese Dutch than in European varieties, appearing in 59% of spoken data and 49% of written data. They also occur in syntactic positions uncommon in Netherlandic or Belgian Dutch. A significantly higher preference for unsplit forms among younger Surinamese speakers points – under an apparent-time interpretation – to endonormative standardization. Interestingly, while overall splitting rates differ across national varieties, the factors guiding splitting behavior – identified through regression modelling – exhibit a high degree of cross-varietal similarity. This is interpreted as a sign that the same functional ‘motor’ underlies splitting across the three varieties of Dutch, but that the distinct sociolinguistic trajectory of Dutch in Suriname – marked by widespread second language acquisition – has led to a stronger preference for unsplit forms in Surinamese Dutch.

Ultimately, this paper offers a concrete case study of how macro-sociolinguistic forces (migration patterns and postcolonial nation building) interact with language-internal variables in determining grammatical choices, thereby contributing to the development of a more empirically grounded socio-syntax.

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