

Language Project 1: Pronouns, Nouns, and Nominal Concord in Frisian

This project will discuss morphosyntax analysis in the Frisian language. Frisian is one of the multiple Germanic languages, which includes English, Dutch, Afrikaans, German, etc. Frisian is spoken in three main areas in The Netherlands and Germany. There is a concentrated population of about 10,000 speakers of North Frisian on the western coast of Schleswig-Holstein in Germany just beneath the Danish border (Tiersma, 1999). In this paper, I will enumerate and analyze the pronominal system in the Frisian language as well as the number of marking on nouns. Additionally, I will analyze data from the language and determine if nominal concord exists in the noun phrase with either adjectives or demonstratives.

Part 1: Pronominal System

In this section of the paper, I will be discussing the pronominal system (subject pronouns) in the Frisian language. The nominative pronouns are given below in the following table, taken from *The Frisian Reference Grammar*.

Table 1: Subject Pronouns in Frisian

| | SG | PL |
|-----------------|---|---------------|
| 1 st | <i>ik</i> | <i>wy</i> |
| 2 nd | familiar: <i>do</i> , polite: <i>jo</i> | <i>jimme</i> |
| 3 rd | <i>hy, sy/hja, it</i> | <i>sy/hja</i> |

The table above shows the nominative pronouns in the Frisian language. Frisian makes three-person distinctions in its pronouns: first, second, and third, and it marks two number

distinctions. Also, Frisian has gender distinction in its personal pronouns. Singular pronouns are broken down into *ik* (I), *do/jo* (you), *hy* (he), *sy/hja* (she), *it* (it), and plural pronouns are *wy* (we), *jimme* (you), and *sy/hja* (they). The 3rd person SG *sy/hja* for ‘she’ and the 3rd person PL share the same form of personal pronouns. Also, the 2nd person SG has two forms *do* (familiar) and *jo* (polite). *Do* is often used for close friends and children. Tiersma points out that the use of the familiar pronoun in Frisian is more conservative than in German or Dutch. In contrast, *jo* is used with strangers, people that you do not know very well, and with people that are older to establish a certain measure of respect. In addition, the SG neuter 3rd person form ‘*it*’ in Frisian is equivalent to the same form in English (Tiersma, 1999). The following examples demonstrate how nominative pronouns are used in a sentence.

- (1) *ik wit* *datso* (or *datst* [dɔst]) *thús* *bist*
 1.SG know that.you home are
 ‘I know that you are at home’
- (2) *asto* *moarn* *farst*, *wol* *ik* *graach* *meigean*
 if.2.SG tomorrow sail, want 1.SG please go-along
 ‘if you sail tomorrow, I’d like to go along’

Examples (1) and (2) show the nominative pronoun in Frisian. Both of these sentences use the familiar 2nd person SG *do*. We can notice the use of clitics, which do not occur directly after the verb but succeeding subordinate conjunctions. Clitic is a word or part of a word that is dependent on a neighboring word since it cannot stand on its own. Based on the data presented, one can infer that Frisian is an SOV language. There are questions that can be raised, such as the

consonant deletion as shown in (1) *datso* and in (2) *asto*. These examples give a general overview of the nominative pronouns in the Frisian language.

Part 2: Number marking on nouns

This section focuses on another aspect nominal domain: number marking on nouns. The number system in Frisian can distinguish between SG and PL nouns. Singular nouns do not undergo grammatical change and the noun stays intact. The number is marked by affixation adding a suffix to the root of the word or to the SG noun. Plurals are formed by adding /-s/ or /-en/ to the original noun form. In addition, the suffix /-en/ is used for nouns in which the final syllable is stressed.

(Tiersma, 1999: 49)

(3) *biezem* → *biezem-s*

broom.SG brooms-PL¹

(Tiersma, 1999: 49)

(4) *doarp* → *doarp-en*

village.SG villages-PL²

Examples (3) and (4) above shows how suffixation is done in Frisian. The suffix /-s/ or /-en/ is attached to the noun to form the plural form. Tiersma gives a detailed analysis of the formation of plurals and how words (nouns) ending in unaccented /-en, -em, -er, -el, -ert/ take the plural marker /-s/, and the marker /-en/ is added elsewhere. In addition, a number of plurals that are irregular do not adopt the same ending (Tiersma, 1999). I would not provide any descriptions of irregular plural formation because it consists of a list with different

¹ Glossing added by me.

² Glossing added by me.

endings.

(Dyk, 2020)

(5) *reed* → *red* -en -s

skate.SG skates-PL-PL³

(Dyk, 2020)

(6) *lears* → *learz-en-s*

boot.SG boot-PL-PL⁴

There are certain nouns that have double pluralization, such as /-en/ and /-s/ shown in examples (5) and (6). The formation of double pluralization /-ens/ occurs with nouns whose referents are in groups or pairs. Example (5) undergoes a deletion of vowel /e/ in the formation of the PL form whereas example (6), shifts its consonant from /s/ to /z/ in the formation of the PL form. Double plurals are not very common in Frisian and these particular examples are from West Frisian (Dyk, 2020).

Part 3: Nominal concord

This section will try to answer two main questions about whether or not adjectives, as well as demonstratives, agree with nouns in Frisian. Dyk provides a detailed explanation of the agreement of an adjective in the noun phrase. For example, Frisian adjectives agree with both the head noun and the noun phrase in gender and with the determiner. The prenominal adjectival inflection in Frisian is demonstrated in the prenominal position. The following examples will demonstrate this concord between adjectives and nouns.

³ Glossing added by me.

⁴ Glossing added by me.

(Tiersma, 1999: 44)

(7) *dy hûn is âld*
DEM dog V ADJ⁵
'that dog is old'

(Tiersma, 1999: 44)

(8) *goede milke*
ADJ milk⁶
'good milk'

(Tiersma, 1999: 44)

(9) *goer bier → goede bieren*
ADJ beer ADJ beers
'good beer' 'good beers'

(Tiersma, 1999: 44)

(10) *goede wyn → in goede wyn*
ADJ wine DET ADJ wine⁷
'good wine' 'a good wine'

Example (7) shows no inflection in the noun because when an adjective stands alone often times as a predicate adjective, it does not change. If a noun phrase is composed of a noun and an adjective, the adjective is inflected, which results in the addition of the suffix /-e/ before common nouns as shown in example (8). The suffix /-e/ can be SG and PL depending on the noun. If the noun is neuter, meaning gender, the noun phrase remains inflected and does not

⁵ Glossing added by me.

⁶ Glossing added by me.

⁷ Glossing added by me.

undergo any changes shown in example (9). Furthermore, the plural form is always inflected as Tiersma makes an observation about how adjectives are affected. Examples (9) and (10) demonstrates how adjectives are inflected and do not change regardless of the determiner added to the noun phrase (Tiersma, 1999).

In order to answer the second question about whether or not demonstratives agree with nouns in Frisian, one must analyze the data. According to Tiersma, demonstratives agree with both gender and noun. The most common demonstratives are *dizze* ‘this’ and *dy* ‘that’ for common singular. Common singulars serve as plural forms. It also uses *dit* ‘this’ and *dat* ‘that’ for neuter singular words. In addition, *dizze* and *dit* have a proximal reference, referring to persons or objects near the speaker, and *dy* and *dat* have a distal reference, referring to persons or objects away from the speaker. Tiersma provides an explanation of how *dizze*, *dat*, and *dy* are used substantively as singular. The table and examples below give a better understanding of the demonstrative pronouns in the Frisian language.

| Gender | SG: PROX | SG: DIST | PL: PROX | PL: DIST |
|--------|--------------|------------|--------------|-----------|
| Common | <i>dizze</i> | <i>dy</i> | <i>dizze</i> | <i>dy</i> |
| Neuter | <i>dit</i> | <i>dat</i> | <i>dizze</i> | <i>dy</i> |

(Dyk, 2020 - Hoekstra 2013: 2)

- (11) Der binne om distiid⁸ fan it jier gjin ierdbein
there are on this.DEM.C.SG.time.C.SG of the year no strawberries
‘There are no strawberries at this time of the year’

⁸ This word has been underlined by me to draw attention.

(Dyk, 2020 - Hoekstra (2013: 2)

(12) Wennet se yn dit hûs of datte⁹?
lives she in this.DEM.N.SG house.N.SG or that.DEM.N.SG.EMP
'Does she live in this house or in that one?'

Example (11) undergoes truncation when combined with certain nouns such as *tiid* 'time'. As a result, the pronoun *dizze* undergoes a deletion of the final /-e/ in the process of creating this sentence. On the other hand, example (12) shows that the suffix /-e/ can be added to *dit* or *dat*. In addition, these emphatic demonstratives (*ditte*, *datte*) can only be used without an overt noun (Dyk, 2020).

Conclusion

The purpose of this essay is to shed some light on some aspects of morphological patterns in the Frisian language. The morphology analysis is divided into three parts that look at the formation of subjects, numerical count, and agreement between nouns with adjectives and demonstrative pronouns. Part one focuses on the pronominal system and how Frisian makes a distinction between familiar and polite forms in the 2SG pronoun. Part two discusses the number marking, especially in the PL forms with the addition of the suffix /-s/ or /-en/ as the formation of double PL /-ens/. Part three dives into the concord of adjectives and demonstrative pronouns agreement and how they function with a noun. There were many aspects of the formation of sentences and noun agreement that I wanted to analyze but were not covered due to insufficient data and limited time to complete the project.

⁹ This word has been underlined by me to draw attention.

References

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Abbreviations

Most of these abbreviations are taken from Tiersma, 1999; Dyk, 2011 and Hoekstra, 2013. In addition, I used Leipzig's glossing rules for some of these abbreviations.

1st = first person

2nd = second person

3rd = third person

ADJ = adjective

C = common

DEM = demonstrative

DET = determiner

DIST = distal

EMP = emphatic

N = neuter

PL = plural

PROX = proximal

SOV = subject-object-verb

SG = singular

V = verb