Language contact and linguistic complexity—the rise of the reflexive pronoun *zich* in a fifteenth century Netherlands border dialect

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La langue n’accepte des éléments de structure étrangers que quand ils correspondent à ses tendances de développement (Roman Jakobson 1938)

7.1 Introduction

Among diachronic linguists, there has been some discussion whether grammatical borrowing is possible or not. On the one hand, there is the tradition that assumes that a grammatical feature can only be borrowed if it fits within the existing grammar of the receiving language (Meillet 1921; Jakobson 1939; Weinreich 1953; Bickerton 1981). Campbell (1993) coins this position the ‘structural-compatibility hypothesis’. On the other hand, there are the functionalists who claim that—though structural-compatibility facilitates borrowing—it is in no way absolute: if the structural-compatibility hypothesis were true, a language could never change its typology as a result of foreign influence (Campbell 1993; Thomason and Kaufman 1988). The study at hand will display that both approaches are at the same time right and wrong, since they ignore the role of Universal Grammar as a structuring force. Universal Grammar can act as a conservative and an innovative force that may lead two languages in contact away from their respective inputs.

In this study we examine a prototypical case of grammatical borrowing from a neighboring language: the introduction of the reflexive pronoun in the Lower Countries from the late Middle Ages onwards. While Middle Dutch did not make a distinction between local and non-local binding using pronominal (e.g. English ‘him’) and
reflexive pronouns (e.g. English 'himself'), Dutch dialects began using *sich* 'himself' as a reflexive, borrowed from neighboring German dialects. From a language where binding features did not seem to play a role, Dutch developed into a language where binding features are fully active. We will demonstrate in this article that the change has not been triggered by an imposition of the binding features (anaphoric/pronominal) from outside, through prestige of the Eastern grammatical system, but that it was internally triggered. It was triggered by the decline of a marked parameter setting that neutralized the Binding Theory. We will show that rules of Universal Grammar are active in a change that was fueled by simplification through internal areal convergence (in the sense of Andersen 1988) in this globalizing and state-building period of the Low Countries. Internal factors created a gap in the system, which attracted the Eastern reflexive forms.

7.2 The problem: reflexivity in Middle Dutch

Around 1400, the Middle Dutch (and Middle Frisian) dialects did not have a separate reflexive pronoun for local binding. So, while most languages have two forms of the third person pronoun, like German *ihn* 'him' vs *sich* 'himself', the Middle Dutch (and Frisian) dialects used a general form *hem* 'him/himself', equally for anaphoric and pronominal contexts.

(7.1) Nu keert *hem* daer toe mijn zin (Middle Dutch)
    Now turns himREFL there to my mind
    'My mind turns itself to it'

(7.2) …datter *hem* in dat claster byjout, mer is dat dat
    …that-he himREFL in the monastery PART-gives, but be it that
    naet en
    not NEG

    schyth, so schel Sywert da landen to *hem* nemma
    happens, so shall Sywert the lands to himself take (Middle Frisian, 1438)
    'that he goes into the monastery, but if that does not happen, then Sywert will
take the lands to himself'.

While Frisian continued to use the pronoun reflexively until the present day, cf. (7.3b), the situation has changed in the Dutch variants in the north,¹ which started to use a separate reflexive form from the fifteenth century onwards. In present-day Dutch, the use of a reflexive pronoun is obligatory, cf. (7.3a).

¹ South-western dialects, such as Flemish still use the pronoun 'him', while in other parts a new possessive pronoun *z’n eigen* has been used since the eighteenth century.
Language contact and linguistic complexity

(7.3) a. Jan₁ wast zich/"hem₂ elke dag
   'John washes himself every day'

b. Jan wasket him elte dei
   'John washes himself every day'

The lexical form of the reflexive in Dutch, zich, was undoubtedly borrowed from the German, which had and has the reflexive from sich. Was it the prestige of the German reflexive/pronominal system that made Dutch borrow the system (Van der Wal and van der 1995), for instance through religious writings? Or did it occur by German immigration (Boyce 1998) in the Dutch cities of Holland? Both proposals suffer from various problems, which I will not review here (cf. Postma 2004). The subject of investigation in this chapter is how Dutch could accept this new form. Was there a grammatical gap (in the sense of Heath 1978) that was filled through borrowing? Is this gap of a functional nature, for example to reduce functional load, or was it of an abstract morphosyntactic nature? Why was Dutch made susceptible to borrowing in this very period? By what process did it occur? Did it take over an entire grammatical module, in this case the Binding Theory? Or was the system already underlingly present, but did it just lack a specific lexicalization? We will study these questions by studying a Dutch region where the change occurred quite early: the province of Drenthe during the fifteenth century.

This chapter is divided into four parts. In Section 7.3, we will study the change in Drenthe during the fifteenth century using a newly established corpus of fifteenth-century legal texts. In the second part, we will see that the change correlated with another grammatical change in the pronominal system during this period (Section 7.4). This change did not have a direct correlation with German language contact. In Section 7.5, we will discuss two scenarios by which these two correlated changes proceeded. We will conclude that it is highly probable that the Drenthe-dialect developed a gap in the pronominal paradigm, which had to be filled. This gap caused functional problems both for non-reflexive and for reflexive uses of the pronominal system. While the gap in the non-reflexive use could be functionally filled or rather camouflaged by topic pronouns (and this functional solution survives until the present-day), the gap in the reflexive paradigm could not be camouflaged by such strategy. In the final section we will summarize and discuss the consequence for the structural-compatibility Hypothesis.

7.3 The rise of the reflexive sick/sich in fifteenth-century Drenthe

In the fifteenth century, the northeastern province of Drenthe was an interesting area, politically, socially, and linguistically. It was not only on the border of Frisian–Dutch linguistic spaces, but also on the border of Dutch–German linguistic spaces. During

2 But see Barbiers and Bennis (2003) who argue that this German form was reanalyzed as a possessive.
the fifteenth century, the city of Groningen (the first free-city in the Netherlands but still under the influence of the bishop of Munster), the Hansa-cities Zwolle, Kampen, and Deventer, and the bishop of Utrecht competed for influence in this rural ‘landscape’. During this period, the rural ‘landscape’ Drenthe was integrated with the world around it. While basically under Frisian-type law, the jurisdiction was executed by six rural judges, who were subject to the bailiff at Coevorden (lit. ‘Oxford’), installed by the bishop of Utrecht. During the fifteenth century, the local judges assembled three times per year on two locations in Drenthe. During one century, they produced around 5,000 verdicts, made by the bailiff and written by local scribes—around 225,000 words. The language is local with some Frisian legal terms. Using this corpus, which recently came available in digital format (Postma 2004), we were able to study the rise of the reflexive, with very high temporal precision, that is from year to year. During this period, the Drenthe dialect changed from a language that almost exclusively used the pronoun hem (‘him’) in reflexive use (around 1400), to a language with two reflexive forms sick and sich (around 1450), and then to a language with one reflexive form sich (around 1500).

The relevant period has been divided into arbitrary slices of seven years. All reflexive contexts in the corpus have been counted (225 cases) and the ratio of pronominal forms versus reflexive forms has been displayed per slice. Figure 7.1 gives a good impression of the ongoing change.

Roughly speaking, there are three periods: From 1400–1427 there are hardly any reflexive forms, from 1427 until 1470 the number of specific reflexive forms and pronominal forms balance each other, and from 1470 onward pronominal forms become rare. Since it is sometimes open to discussion whether a context is reflexive, we have repeated the counting with the inherently reflexive verb sich/hem vermeten to (commit ‘oneself’). This is a rather frequent verb in the corpus, since it is part of a juridical formula (around 110 tokens). In Figure 7.2, we render the results.

![Figure 7.1 Rise of the reflexive in fifteenth-century Drenthe](image-url)
The results in Figure 7.2 roughly copy the results in Figure 7.1. This indicates that our judgments on the reflexivity of the contexts in Figure 7.1 were mostly correct. Secondly, it indicates that the change simultaneously proceeded both in free text and in formulas. Probably, we may take this as an indication that the linguistic change was one with a low level of consciousness, that is, in Labovian terms, 'bottom-up'. For reference purposes, we rephrased the decline of the pronominal reflexive in terms of these three periods.

At this point, it might seem that we chose these three 'periods' on impressionistic grounds. Later, we will give further justification and interpretation of this split into three separate periods.

### 7.3.1 Plural use of hem/om

The emergence of reflexive forms was not the only change. During this century, the Drenthe dialect underwent a second change. Around 1400 hem/om was used both as a singular pronoun ('him') and as a plural pronoun ('them'), as illustrated in (7.4).

(7.4) Item tusschen den monnyken van Assen ende Daem Syen is gewyst, dat hy om oir achterstedigen mudden geven sal. (Etstoel, verdict 502, 1405)

‘Likewise between the monks of Assen and Daem Syen has been sentenced that he shall give them their overdue interests’

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3 We abstract away from short-term fluctuations. I have nothing interesting to say about the 100% sich peak around 1500 apart from that the time slice coincides with a change of writer. See also section xx.
Change in the Nominal Domain

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>0%</th>
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**Figure 7.3** The rise of *zich* in *zich vermeten* 'to commit oneself'

The underlining indicates co-reference. This under-specification for number holds true in reflexive contexts as well, (7.5).

(7.5) Text Item tusschen Pelgrim Egbertus son an de ene zyt ende Cleys Snoken sonne ande an der zyt, is beyde partien dach gelet des sonnendaeges nae Odulfi to Covorden, elck bij enner penen bij 50 Franssche scilden, to te bren- gen, alse sie **hem** vermeten hebn. *(Etstoel, verdict 22, 1400)*

'Likewise between the pilgrim Egbertus' son at one side and Cleys Snoken's son at the other side: both parties are called in court to Coevorden, on the sunday after St Odulphus, each on penalty of 50 French shields, to contribute, as they have committed themselves.'

This under-specification for number was a general feature within the entire Dutch linguistic space. Interestingly, from 1400 onward, we see a gradual decline of number neutralization. This decline happened both in reflexive and non-reflexive contexts. Since, as we have seen, reflexive use of *hem/om* was declining as well, only the decline in pronominal contexts is an independent phenomenon. In Figure 7.4 we display the number of plural use *him/om* in non-reflexive contexts.

In Postma (2004), we argued that the joint decline of number neutralization and the rise of the reflexive is not an accident. According to the Constant Rate Hypothesis, 'the various contexts of a change advance at the same rate' (Kroch 1989). In this case, not only are the two rates equal but also the onsets of the two processes.
From 1400 onward, reflexive *hem* and plural *hem* decline in the course of a century. This means that the two processes might be appearances of the same underlying parametric change. The parameter involved is not difficult to grasp. In fact, Reuland and Reinhart’s (1995) Theory of Reflexivity predicts this correlation. According to Reuland and Reinhart (1995), pronouns can be used as dependent elements within chains only if they are under-specified with respect to some referential feature. By being underspecified for a referential feature, such as number or gender, pronouns become less ‘referential’. In Reuland and Reinhart’s terms: they become [–R]. In this way, the cross-linguistic number (and gender) neutralization in SE-forms, like German *sich* must be understood. We suggest applying this insight to *hem/om*. As long as the pronoun *hem/om* was underspecified, it could be used anaphorically without violating the Chain Condition, which is part of Reinhart and Reuland’s Binding Theory. However, as soon as *hem/om* becomes inherently singular, it becomes inappropriate for reflexive use and a new reflexive form is needed. In this way, the Chain Condition can shed light on the fact that the Drenth dialect became susceptible to the linguistic influence of neighboring German dialects, where separate reflexive forms were available. In this ‘internal’ scenario, there was an internal change that caused a gap and, in turn, attracted German forms.
Van der Wal (pers. comm.) pointed out to me that the causal chain of events might also be reversed: it might also be the case that the borrowing of the reflexive *sich* occurred first and was *conditional* for the (functionally favorable) specification of *hem/om* as a singular. This ‘external’ scenario takes the external (German) contact as the trigger. In both scenarios, the Chain Condition links up the two phenomena of Figures 7.1 and 7.3, but they are reversed in terms of cause and effect. In a certain sense, the explanation suggested by Van der Wal is more satisfactory at first glance, as it locates the trigger outside the linguistic system: prestige factors introduced the reflexive and the grammatical system responded by specializing *hem/om*. In the internal scenario, on the other hand, we are still left with the question as to why *hem/om* specialized to a singular pronoun.

There are four considerations, though, that indicate that the area-internal scenario might be what really happened. Subsequently we will discuss: (1) the rise of the two alternative forms of the reflexive (*sick/sich*); (2) frequency fluctuations of reflexive constructions; (3) a gap in the pronominal paradigm; and (4) a 25-year wave in the decline of *hem/om*.

### 7.3.1.1 Alternative reflexive forms *sick/sich*

The first argument that it is not the prestige of a specific reflexive form that provoked the change is that at first it was far from clear what form the new reflexive would take. Would it be the more northern *sick* form [sIk], or the more southern *sich* form [sIχ]? For a period of 40 years both forms were more or less equally popular, with a slight preference for *sick*. Only after 1472 is the *sich* form clearly dominant. This is shown in Figure 7.5.

So, in the external scenario, one is led to assume that both *sick* and *sich* were prestigious. In other words, the use of a separate reflexive was prestigious rather than its specific lexicalizations. Put differently, a *syntactic feature*, (say [+anaphoric]) was a prestigious rather than an outer form. Prestige, however, is usually tied to outer forms rather than abstract grammatical features (Labov 2001). Moreover, one is bound to assume that in the sociological space, there was already language variation prior to the language change. As a consequence, we do not explain why language variation shows up, but we presuppose it. In the internal scenario, on the other hand, language variation is expected. If a grammatical gap in the reflexive paradigm is created by language-internal mechanisms, any appropriate available form can fill the gap. By attraction, language in such a susceptible state scans in its social space for solutions. Attraction, therefore, *predicts* the emergence of language variation, while prestige predicts standardization. Though the argument given is not conclusive against the external scenario, it makes the internal scenario a more satisfactory theory, as it puts the emergence of two distinct forms, *sick* and *sich*, on a fundamental footing.

### 7.3.1.2 Frequency fluctuations

The second argument in favor of the internal scenario concerns frequency fluctuations in reflexive constructions.
A simple counting of a randomly chosen essayistic nineteenth-century text shows that reflexives occur with a rate of 50 cases per 10,000 words. In juridical texts, the occurrence is slightly lower. An estimation using modern jurisprudence shows that reflexive constructions have an incidence of 12.8 tokens per 10,000 words. If we now look at our Drenthe-corpus, it turns out that there is an incidence of 11.9 per 10,000 words. Our corpus, therefore, behaves as a standard juridical text. This impression changes completely, however, if we look at how the occurrence distributes over time. Figure 7.5 gives an impression of the situation in Drenthe in the period 1400–1500. Apparently, the use of reflexive constructions displays high peaks and deep dips. We take this as an indication that language users have had periods of uncertainty, but also periods of extreme enthusiasm.

This alternation in fact defines different periods. We may define the moment that—after a period of uncertainty (a dip)—the incidence returns at mean value (11.8) as the beginning of a new period. We then identify new periods around 1427 and 1472. This corresponds nicely with the periods found in Figure 7.3 and which periods could, in view of Figure 7.5, be described as: (1) a period without a need of a separate reflexive; (2) a period of attraction of a reflexive (be it sick or sich); and (3) a period of consolidation through standardization of the sich form.

The pattern in Figure 7.6 shows another important effect. It shows that the intrusion of the German reflexive did not come about in a period where reflexives were very much used, but rather in a period of major uncertainty about reflexive constructions.
in general. It is difficult to see how the prestige of reflexive forms would be operative in periods with few reflexive constructions. It would rather predict system change upon abundant use. The ‘internally motivated’ scenario in which a gap emerged in the paradigm explains both facts in a straightforward way: the disappearance of reflexive *hem/om* caused uncertainty about how to realize reflexive constructions, and attracted foreign forms, be it *sick* or *sich*, that is the theory *explains* both the rise of language variation and the dip. The frequency fluctuations constitute a compelling argument against the prestige scenario.

7.3.1.3 Gaps in the pronominal paradigm in Modern Dutch  

The final consideration in favor of the internal scenario through paradigmatic gaps is the fact that a personal pronoun gap is still there in modern spoken Dutch. In the internally motivated theory, the neutralization of *hem/om* for plural disappeared and, as a consequence, these pronouns could not be used reflexively anymore. So, two interrelated gaps in the pronominal paradigm arose. After *hem/om* being exclusively used as singulars, there was a gap for the slot corresponding to *them* and a gap for the 3rd person reflexive (corresponding to Eng. *himself/themselves*). We have seen that the gap in the reflexive paradigm was filled through borrowing. A remaining question is what filled the plural gap in the pronominal paradigm. The reader must have noticed that Figure 7.6 differs from the previous diagrams (Figures 7.1–7.5) that gave relative occurrences (e.g. *hem* as fraction of *sich*+*hem*). In Figure 7.6, we did not give relative uses of plural *hem/om* with respect to any other form. The reason is that no other personal pronoun filled the slot of plural *hem/om*. *Hem/om* remains, strictly speaking, over 100 percent of the entire corpus, but the frequency decreases dramatically. In order to make comparison between periods possible, we displayed the incidence of plural *hem/om* per number of words in the
Present-day defectiveness in the Dutch pronominal paradigm

<table>
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<tr>
<th>NOM</th>
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<th>deictic</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>jij</td>
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<td>hij/zij/het</td>
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<tr>
<td>zij</td>
<td></td>
<td>hen/hun</td>
<td>ze</td>
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</tbody>
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**Figure 7.7**

texts. So, plural *hem/om* gradually disappears without being replaced by any other personal pronoun. It thus appears that the Drentse-paradigm of the personal pronoun becomes defective in the slot for 3rd person plural: no corresponding pronoun to English 'them' exists. Although this might be shocking at first glance, upon closer examination it is less strange. In present-day spoken Dutch there is a similar defect. The official grammars of Dutch, admittedly, give the forms *hen/hun* as 3rd person plural pronouns, but according to the frequency tables of the personal pronouns (Uit den Boogaart 1984) these forms hardly occur in the spoken language, among neither literate nor illiterate people. Present-day spoken Dutch allows the weak form *ze* in this position (object 3pl). In a stressed context, therefore, a problem remains. Modern Dutch fills the 'gap' in the paradigm of the personal pronouns *functionally*, that is by resorting to the deictic pronoun *die*.4 It is used as a so-called discourse pronoun (Smedts and van Belle 1997: 162). For an overview see the defective scheme in Figure 7.7. The gap is indicated with a dash.

Discourse pronouns and personal pronouns have distinct properties. Three of them are listed here. Discourse pronouns cannot be used in coordination (7.7), they cannot enter into reflexive formation (7.8), and they cannot have a c-commanding antecedent (7.9).

(7.7)  Ik geef het aan jou en hem/*die
'I give it to you and him/pers/him/deic'

(7.8)  Zij zagen %hunzelf/%diezelf/%zezelf
'They saw themselves'

4 In English, they, them, and their have the same deictic origin, but developed into true personal pronouns. Whether these Nordic pronouns found their way into English by attraction to gaps in the English paradigm or by prestige of the Nordic forms is an intriguing question that is outside the scope of this chapter.
Change in the Nominal Domain

   My children find [me give them * deic, * them, * them, * them, * them, * hen, too little money]

   The boys heard [the director mock them, * deic, * them, * them, * them, * them, * hen, pers]

As we can see from (7.7–7.9), the weak pronoun ze behaves on a par with deictic pronouns in these tests. This implies that the present-day Dutch personal pronoun paradigm is defective in the spoken language.

Armed with this knowledge of the difference between personal and deictic pronouns, let’s return to our corpus. When we inspect our corpus, it looks as if the plural accusative pronoun hem/om was gradually being replaced by plural object pronoun sie, which was already present in the language. A typical early example is given in (7.10).

(7.10) Item tusschen Wylken Jalynge ende Lammen Walbringe is gewist, dat hy syne mudden penden sal in dat guyt, dair hij sie uut hevet, ende anders nergent.
       (Etstoel, verdict 14, AD1399)

‘Item between Wylken Jalynge and Lammen Walbringe is sentenced that he shall pawn his yields in the property from which he obtained them and nowhere else.’

This plural pronoun sie has all properties of the modern Dutch discourse pronoun die (‘them’) and not of the personal pronoun hem/hun (‘them’). First, while hem/om can occur after prepositions just as modern hen/hun, sie cannot. While plural hem/om can refer to both humans and non-humans/inanimates, the plural object pronoun sie only refers to things and animals in the first part of the corpus (yields, horses, etc.). While hem/om occur in co-ordinations, for example den Loberdynge ende om (‘to Loberdyng and them’), sie never does. While hem/om occur as reflexives in formations with -self (e.g. hemselven and omselven), the pronoun sie never enters into reflexive use or combinations with -self (* sieselven).

So, it seems justified to conclude that sie was not a personal pronoun in fifteenth-century Drenthish, nor did it develop itself into a personal pronoun but that the personal pronoun paradigm continued to be defective.

(7.11) The paradigm of the Drenthe dialect around 1450 was defective in the 3rd person plural object case.

5 In later verdicts, when plural hem/om gradually disappears, the plural pronoun sie occurs more and more as referring to human objects and seemingly occupies the place of plural hem/om, as in (i). (i) Item tusschen Hermen Huysinge ende Roloff Smyt van halve Westebringe guet, dat Hermen van Hinrick Wiltynge gekoört hef na uuthwysynghye syns rogbriefe, syn die drossard myt den gemenen etten verdraghen, dat die drossard tusschen dyt ende Pinzieren sal vescryven achtidage te voren alle retheners, olt ende jonck, myt all horen segele ende brieven te komen to Ghieten ommne dan to hoeren ende syen, oft men sie samentlicke elck nae hoeren zegelen, breven ende rechten verlyken kan. I cannot be sure whether such use carries a rough connotation, as is the case with in situ use of die in modern Dutch. But all other discourse pronoun properties of sie continue over the entire corpus.
It is tempting to make a small excursion to the situation outside Drenthe. Half a century later, the Dutch grammarian Spieghel (1540–1612) listed the somewhat artificial forms *hen/hun* in his description of the emerging standard (Dibbets 1985: 465). In the perspective of the previous discussion, one might suggest that Spieghel could introduce these forms precisely because of the defectiveness of the system.

We are now in a position to compare the internal and external scenario. According to the internal scenario, the decline of the singular/plural neutralization in *hem/om* was the cause and was deterministically related to the disappearance of reflexive *hem/om*. There were, hence, three gaps in the paradigm: one gap in the pronominal paradigm and two gaps in the reflexive paradigm. This transition is represented by the first accolade (see Figure 7.8).

These gaps had to be filled, at least functionally. Functionally, the slots could be filled language internally by the deictic pronoun *sie*. These deictic forms, however, structurally block reflexive use because of universal principles. The gaps in the reflexive paradigm, therefore, could only be filled by attraction. One option is borrowing.

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6 Deictic pronouns behave like WH-elements and get interpretation in specCP. This causes, when they are used reflexively, a strong crossover effect (principle C violation), cf. Chomsky 1981

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**Figure 7.8** Mechanisms of change in the Drenthe pronominal paradigm: loss of neutralization, attraction, and prestige. The accolades indicate the domain of explanation. The question mark represents the gap unaccounted for in the prestige scenario.
Change in the Nominal Domain

from neighboring dialects (second accolade, Figure 7.8).\(^7\) This makes the entire scenario a necessary chain of cause and effect. It predicts that all dialects that underwent the first transition participate in the second transition as well. This puts all the dialects on the same footing and, hence, takes the 3rd person plural gap in present-day Dutch as not accidental.

The prestige scenario, on the other hand, takes the second arrow as the cause. Prestige caused two forms within the reflexive paradigm to be replaced. This replacement (second accolade) was a necessary condition for the possible decline of the neutralization, but not a sufficient condition. This makes it impossible to cover the entire process, as the 3rd person plural gap (the step to the question mark) is accidental. In this, non-deterministic scenario, one would expect variation among the relevant dialects. In this scenario, the defectiveness of the modern Dutch personal pronoun paradigm is a mere accident.

In sum, the internal scenario is theoretically superior to the prestige scenario. It is theoretically superior in making the connection between the two accolades in Figure 7.8, while the external scenario leaves them disconnected. It is empirically superior as it makes the correct claim on language variation. Where one sees variation (sick/sich), it is predicted. Where one does not see variation (all dialects behave equally in having a 3rd person plural defect), it is predicted as well.

The internal scenario has a disadvantage, though: it does not provide a cause for the decline of number neutralization. The prestige scenario does not suffer from this problem, since prestige is an extra-linguistic factor.

We will postpone to Section 7.4 the question of the internal mechanism by which number neutralization came about.

7.3.2 Prestige as an opposing factor to language change

If we consider the relative incidence of the hem-reflexives with respect to the total number of reflexive constructions, we can see how the hem-reflexive reflexive gradually decreases from 100 percent to about 20 percent. This decrease does not show a linearly decreasing pattern, though. A wave of roughly 25-years seems to be superimposed on this decreasing line, (Figure 7.9).

It is not immediately clear how this wave of about a generation should be interpreted. I will discuss two hypotheses: (i) Prestige of the sich-form; (ii) prestige of the hem-form.

(i) Immigration + prestige of the sich-form. This hypothesis takes the first dip in the use of hem as a result of immigration of a number of sich-speakers. The next

\(^7\) It is unclear to me why in this period no language-internal process of reflexive creation is used, e.g. through the use of body parts as a way of object shielding (cf. Postma 1997) or through an intensifier strategy (König and Siemund 1999). This is the more remarkable as these strategies are used in later stages of Dutch (e.g. modern dialectal Dutch zijn eigen lit. his own ‘himself’. One reason might be that the participle eigen ‘property of (the landlord)’ was not yet bleached to eigen ‘own’.
dip, 25 years later, would then be a result of the children of these *sich*-speakers. These *sich*-speakers might have expanded at the cost of the more traditional *hem*-speakers, be it through a higher fertility or by a higher prestige. However, if we take into account the character of our corpus, we must reject this hypothesis. We are not dealing with a large number of speakers but rather with a tendency within a small circle of scholars/literates. Physical generations do not play a role.

(ii) Influence of literacy and prestige of the *hem*-form. This scenario is, in fact, contrary to the one in (i) It takes the gradual increase of *sich* as underlying and considers the bending back of the curve's bending back in favor of *hem* as a result of contact of the judges/scribes/etc. with the older juridical texts that only had *hem* as a reflexive. This could have come about because the judges increasingly cited from older verdicts, but could also be a result of studying older juridical literature. This would mean that the *hem*-form was more prestigious than the more modern *sich*-form. This is, in itself, a plausible hypothesis: generally modern forms are of little prestige. This scenario gets a nice confirmation at the installation in 1471 of the bailiff Johan Schelling, the son of bailiff Wolter Schelling. While the father is still a heavy *hem*-user, the newly appointed bailiff starts his new career as an enthusiastic *sich*-user. Gradually, during his reign, his texts display more and more *hem*-reflexives.

Balancing pros and cons, I find the latter scenario more plausible: the *sich/sick* reflexive advances unmistakably and lets itself roll back only marginally by the prestige of the
7.4 Areal convergence of Frisian and Dutch dialects

In the previous section we gave four reasons why we think that the change from *hem* to *sich* was not a result of the prestige of the German *sich*-forms but rather a consequence of the fact that *hem* became inappropriate for reflexive use. While all Dutch and Frisian dialects could use the pronominal form reflexively, where did the change come from?

In this section we will argue how two dialects that share a particular property can lose this very property, when they come in close contact. Put differently, dialects in contact may acquire a new property that was not part of either of the input dialects. For the sake of concreteness, we will study the interaction between a Frisian and a Dutch dialect when they came into contact, that is in Drenthe around 1400.

As we have seen in the first section, both the Frisian and the Dutch of around 1400 could use and used the *hem*-form as a reflexive. However, they did so for different reasons. As we have seen in Section 7.2, the Dutch pronoun *hem* had an under-specification for number. According to the theory of Reinhart and Reuland (1993), this under-specification made it appropriate for use within referential chains. While Dutch uses under-specification with respect to number, Frisian *hem* displays under-specification to an oblique feature. This can be seen as follows. As was argued in Hoekstra (1994) Frisian has a particular property in that it possesses a feature $[\pm \text{oblique}]$. This can be seen from (7.12).

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{(7.12)}
  \begin{enumerate}
    \item Ik seach se \hspace{1cm} \text{(Frisian)}
      \begin{itemize}
        \item ‘I saw them’
      \end{itemize}
    \item Ik soarge foar * se
      \begin{itemize}
        \item ‘I cared for them’
      \end{itemize}
  \end{enumerate}
\end{itemize}

The pronoun *se* (‘them’) may occur in the complement of verbs (7.12a), but not in the complement of prepositions (7.12b). This leads Hoekstra (1994) to suppose that Frisian has a feature $[\text{oblique}]$. The Frisian pronoun *se* is apparently specified for $[\pm \text{oblique}]$. There is another pronoun *har* in Frisian, with the same meaning and which can be used in both contexts, as can be seen from (7.13).

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{(7.13)}
  \begin{enumerate}
    \item Ik seach harren
      \begin{itemize}
        \item ‘I saw them’
      \end{itemize}
    \item Ik soarge foar harren
      \begin{itemize}
        \item ‘I took care for them’
      \end{itemize}
  \end{enumerate}
\end{itemize}
In other words, *harren* ‘them’ is under-specified for this feature.⁸ *Harren* is \[±\text{oblique}\]. Reuland 1995 correlates these facts that *har* can be used in reflexive construction, while *se* cannot, see (7.14).

(7.14) a. Hja wosken harren(sels)
    b. *Hja wosken se(sels)

‘They washed themselves’

In terms of the Theory of Reflexivity, under-specification with respect to oblique makes the pronoun [–R] and can be used as dependent terms in chains. For further reference we summarize Reuland’s findings in (7.15).

(7.15) The Frisian pronoun *him/har/harren* is underspecified for [oblique]

{}Fr
tian *se* = [+R]; Frisian *him/har* = [–R]

In Middle Frisian, the situation was similar. *Him* occurs as complement of verbs and prepositions (7.2). Accusative *se* only occurs in the complement of verbs. No occurrences can be found of preposition+*se*.

We conclude that in Middle Frisian and in Middle Dutch, the pronoun *hem/har* could be used as reflexives, but for different reasons. In Frisian it was possible because of under-specification for the feature [oblique], in Middle Dutch it was possible because of under-specification for the feature [plural]. In the next sub-section we will develop a theory of what happened when these languages came into contact.

7.4.1 Language contact and simplification

An extreme case of language contact is the environment where creole languages come into existence. Within a model of Principles and Parameters (Chomsky 1981), creolization can be described as language contact to an extreme degree, since virtually all parameters are involved and lapse into their default values. More moderate cases of language contact can then be formulated in similar terms, where only a limited set of parameters are affected, but where similar rules govern the outcome of the contact. One of the major patterns in language contact is the rule formulated by Bickerton (1981) who assumes that where languages come into contact they interact through their particular parameter settings of universal grammar. Bickerton (1999) formulates this as in (7.16). We will call it the global-scale Bickerton Hypothesis.

(7.16) (Global scale) Bickerton Hypothesis

⁸ The plural form *harren* ‘them’ alternates with *har* ‘her/them’, i.e. a form that is underspecified for number. *Har* behaves like *harren* in the relevant contrastive tests with *se*. It shows that underspecification for the oblique feature [±R] determines reflexivity in Frisian, not underspecification for number.
When a speaker devoid of bias toward any particular setting encounters no evidence of any other setting, he chooses the default setting (after Bickerton 1999).

Now, if we assume that creolization is not sui generis, but is only an extreme case of language contact, we may assume that (7.16) also holds for ordinary language contact, albeit in more moderate form. So let us assume what we will call the Micro-Scale Bickerton Hypothesis, as formulated in (7.17).

(7.17) (Micro-scale) Bickerton Hypothesis

If two languages $L_1$ and $L_2$ with respective parameter settings $L_1(+\pi_1, -\pi_2)$ and $L_2(-\pi_1, +\pi_2)$, being in mutual contact, produce the inter-language $L_{1.2}$, then $P(L_{1.2}(+\pi_1, +\pi_2)) < < P(L_{1.2}(-\pi_1, -\pi_2))$

where $[+\pi]$ denotes a non-default parameter setting, $[-\pi]$ a default setting, and $P(\zeta)$ is the probability of $\zeta$.

The two hypotheses are in fact not distinct, only their scope is different: be it in extreme form (creolization) or in a micro-scale form (simplification).

In order to apply the Bickerton Hypothesis on the language contact between Dutch and Frisian with respect to the parameters involved, we have to determine the relevant settings and whether they are default or not.

7.4.1.1 Number neutralization

Number neutralization in personal pronouns is a relatively rare phenomenon, cross-linguistically. We might say it is marked. To see, however, whether it is the default value, we should look at the set of creole languages. According to Holm (2000) and Pieter Muysken (pers. comm.) most creole languages do not use the same pronoun for singular and plural. This is evidence that number neutralization is a non-default parameter setting. It must be kept in mind that the parameter is distinct from the feature itself. In this case we might identify the possibility of a morpheme $\alpha = [\pm \text{number}]$ as a non-default possibility. In most languages and most creole languages, the valuation of features has separate lexicalizations. It might be clear from this discussion that parameters are distinct from features. For further reference, we will call the Middle-Dutch parameter setting $[+D]$. The modern-Dutch setting, we will call $[-D]$. We define the settings this way in order to project the non-default setting on a positive sign.

7.4.1.2 The oblique feature

The dimension of oblique contexts as separate from direct object contexts is not a relatively rare phenomenon. Cross-linguistically, it is not clear which state of affairs is marked or unmarked: to separate ACC and PREP viz. not to separate them. However, the important point is the default setting, which is not identical to the occurrence rate in all languages (Bickerton 1999). So, a look at the creole languages is essential. Now, in creole languages it virtually never happens that oblique case is separate from direct object case (Pieter Muysken, pers. comm.).
So let us define the realization of the oblique dimension as a non-default setting. For further reference we will call this (Middle-)Frisian setting as [+F], while the middle-Dutch situation is [−F]. Middle-Frisian and Middle-Dutch, hence, realize opposing feature setting with respect to the two parameters. Middle-Dutch is [+D, −F] while Middle-Frisian is [−D, +F]. Neither of them requires a reflexive form but for different reasons. In the next section we will analyze what happens when these language areas come in contact with each other.

7.4.1.3 Frisian and Dutch language contact  
From 1400 onward, the Frisian and Dutch linguistic areas came into more direct contact, especially in the cities. We describe a period which saw the increasing power of the cities and when, in fact, a new bourgeois estate of power was emerging. Cross-border trade contacts increased, for example the Levant (the oriental league). For our purpose, the east-sea trade league will be the most important (Hansa). This will be described in more detail in Section 7.4.2. In this section we will apply the theoretical consideration of (7.17) on the language contact at hand. When two languages with respective parameter settings [+D, −F] and [−D, +F] come into contact and create an inter-language, there are four possible outcomes with respect to these two features: [+D, +F], [+D, −F], [−D, +F], and [−D, −F]. The second and third options describe the situation that the inter-language patterns with one of the input languages. In this situation, the status quo is retained with respect to the use of pronouns as reflexives. So let us concentrate on the options [+D, +F] and [−D, −F]. In this case the inter-language realizes a setting distinct from the input languages. In the setting [+D, +F] the inter-language continues to use pronouns as reflexives as these pronouns have even more neutralizations than before: both for number and for oblique. In the case of [−D, −F], on the other hand, pronouns lose their neutralizations at hand. Moreover, according to (7.19), the latter has much more probability of occurring as it has two default settings. So, in the most probable scenario of language contact between the Dutch and the Frisian areas, pronouns lost their capability to be used as reflexives. A gap in the reflexive paradigm is the result. We see that a Bickerton-type scenario, applied on small scales gives the correct results in micro-scale creolization or simplification processes. While underlyingly the contact languages simplify, that is come closer to the default setting, we encounter an apparent rise in complexity on the phenomenological level: the need of separate reflexive pronouns.

7.4.2 Socio-linguistics of the Frisian–Dutch language contact
In this section we will speculate where the contact processes as described in the previous sections were going to occur first.

Strictly speaking, Dutch is of course not an identity independent from Frisian. Historically, we may identify Dutch as those Franconic and Saxonic dialects that came in close contact with the Frisian dialects in the territory around the North Sea,
especially in the Rhine-delta. Although it is even defensible that Dutch is a Franco-
Frisian mixing dialect, Dutch has sufficient identity at the time under scrutiny to be
treated as separate from Frisian. In the period of our research, Frisian has already been
in retreat for four centuries, while the new language 'Dutch' is getting more and more
expansionistic. However, as usual, substrate activity is strongest in second-language
learners and the way the Frisian language influences Dutch is noticeably stronger from
the 1400s onwards than the Dutch influence on Frisian. The imminent language-death
of Frisian is probably the last outburst of this extreme influence. Groningen is the most
noteworthy city demonstrating this tendency. Groningen, the center and the strongest
city within the Frisian regions, was Saxonified at a very early date. The first and second
Groninger War had made it the first free-city in the Low Countries. Independent
from the German emperor, from the bishop, and governing its own part of the Frisian
regions, it was a cultural force in itself. Most Old-Frisian legal documents have been
saved in the Groninger archives. Groningen used its own standard that was neither
close to Frisian, not to the Eastern Standards of Lübeck or Münster. It was probably
the city where the linguistic convergence within the Low Countries was taking place
earliest. A second area with strong language contact is Drenthe. Traditionally subject
to Frisian law, now subject to the legal aspirations of the bishop of Utrecht, but also in
close contact with the Saxonic areas, as well as with the Hansa-cities along the river
Ysel, while the city of Groningen tried to expand its influence, Drenthe had an early
areal convergence in the linguistic domain. It is this area where the corpus used in this
study was formed.

This gives an indication of the path within the Lower Countries of the new need
for a new reflexive. We predict that it occurs on the Frisian–Dutch contact line, more
precisely, where the Frisian–Dutch contacts occurred earlier and most intensely, we
predict the need earlier. As we can see, this contact occurred earliest in Groningen
(before 1400), the Drenthe (fifteenth century), while Holland itself was latest (seventeenth century). Moreover, the sketched scenario predicts not so much a gradual shift
in the *sich/hem* isogloss to the west, but rather a popping up, at those places where it
was needed. Although much of the dynamics is still unknown (various databases are
under construction just now) the first results are promising.

### 7.5 Discussion

We have made a generative implementation of a theory of gap filling as an attraction
force. However, we made no use whatsoever of functional arguments but were able to
explain the change from *hem-to-sich* by Dutch–Frisian language-internal grammati-
cal factors. The real trigger was areal convergence. Two interacting linguistic systems

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9 It is to be compared with proposals in Vachek (1972) in his study of borrowings of Spanish comple-
mentizers by Pipil.
lapsed into a micro-scale default setting, a kind of micro-scale version of creolization. New linguistic phenomena show up that were not part of one of the giving languages. The ‘third player’ is Universal Grammar which provides new realizations through its imposition of default settings. Put differently, the third player is UG rather than the apparent ‘giving language’ German, which did not play role of any significance: it just served to furnish the forms needed, that is the impetus in this case comes from the receiving language, not from the giving language (German) as in the case of prestige (Van Coetsem 1989).

The analysis presented here contributes to another discussion: the discussion of linguistic complexity. In the linguistic contact between Frisian and Dutch in the late Middle Ages, an—as to the outer form—more complex grammar emerged. A language variant that uses hem as a pronoun with number neutralization turns into a language variant with separate reflexive forms. However, this came about by a lapse into less marked values of the parameter settings allowed by UG. At the level of the parameters we find a reduction of complexity. In this respect, the process fits perfectly into the intimate link between language contact and decrease of complexity as described in Kusters (2004), provided that this link is taken at the deep level of parameter settings rather than in terms of outer forms as in McWhorter (2001).

### 7.6 Conclusions

We have described a process of areal convergence: a new linguistic variant emerges that has properties that were not part of either of the input languages. The ‘third player’ in the field is Universal Grammar that provides new variants through the lapsing into default settings. In the process under scrutiny, a grammatical gap is created by UG, which in turn attracts new forms from variants that are available. With such a process of attraction, the giving language does not play a crucial role, neither with respect to prestige, nor as to grammatical structure. The receiving language attracts the forms needed. This gives rise to language variation (as long as it fits), rather than to standardization.

Furthermore, the default setting of the newly created variant realizes at the surface level as apparent increase of complexity, rather than simplification. This implies that complexity should not be defined at the surface level but at the level of parameter setting.