On an agreement asymmetry in Dutch dialects: An alienable-inalienable distinction on possessive pronouns

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Lend me your ears:
The grammar of (un)transferable possession

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1. Data (Vriezenveen Dutch)

(1) *mien-n   hoond*   (4) *mien-ø   va*
    my-M   dog.M   my   father.M
(2) *mien-e   auto*   (5) *mien-ø   moe*
    my-F   car.F   my   mother.F
(3) *mien-ø   huus*   (6) *mien-ø   döchter-tie*
    my-N   house.N   my   daughter-DIM.N

Generalization: The possessed noun determines the form of the possessive pronoun.

   i. Non-kinship noun: agreement
    ii. Kinship noun: no agreement

The dialects Wambeek Dutch and colloquial Flemish display the same behavior.

2. Research questions

i. Why do possessive pronouns display an agreement asymmetry?

ii. What determines the agreement asymmetry?

3. Geographic distribution

Comparison of the phrases 'my mouth' or 'my dog' to 'my father' (all masculine nouns) in dialects of Dutch

- Agreement asymmetry (MAND) (178)
- Agreement asymmetry (own study) (3)
- No agreement asymmetry (MAND) (317)
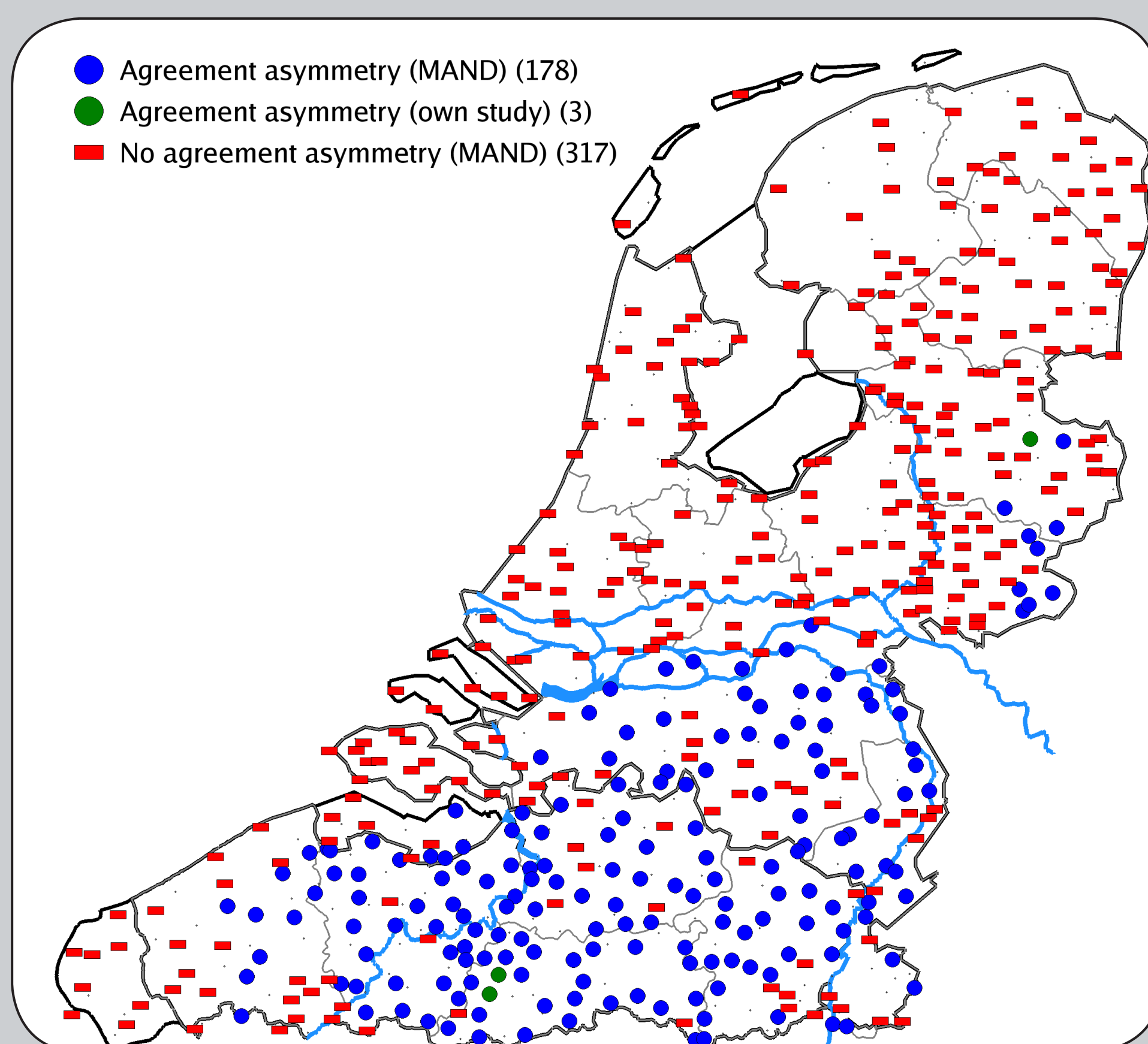
The map presents the geographic distribution of the observed agreement asymmetry.

The data for the blue and red symbols were obtained from the Morphological Atlas of the Dutch dialects (MAND). The green circles are based on my own study.
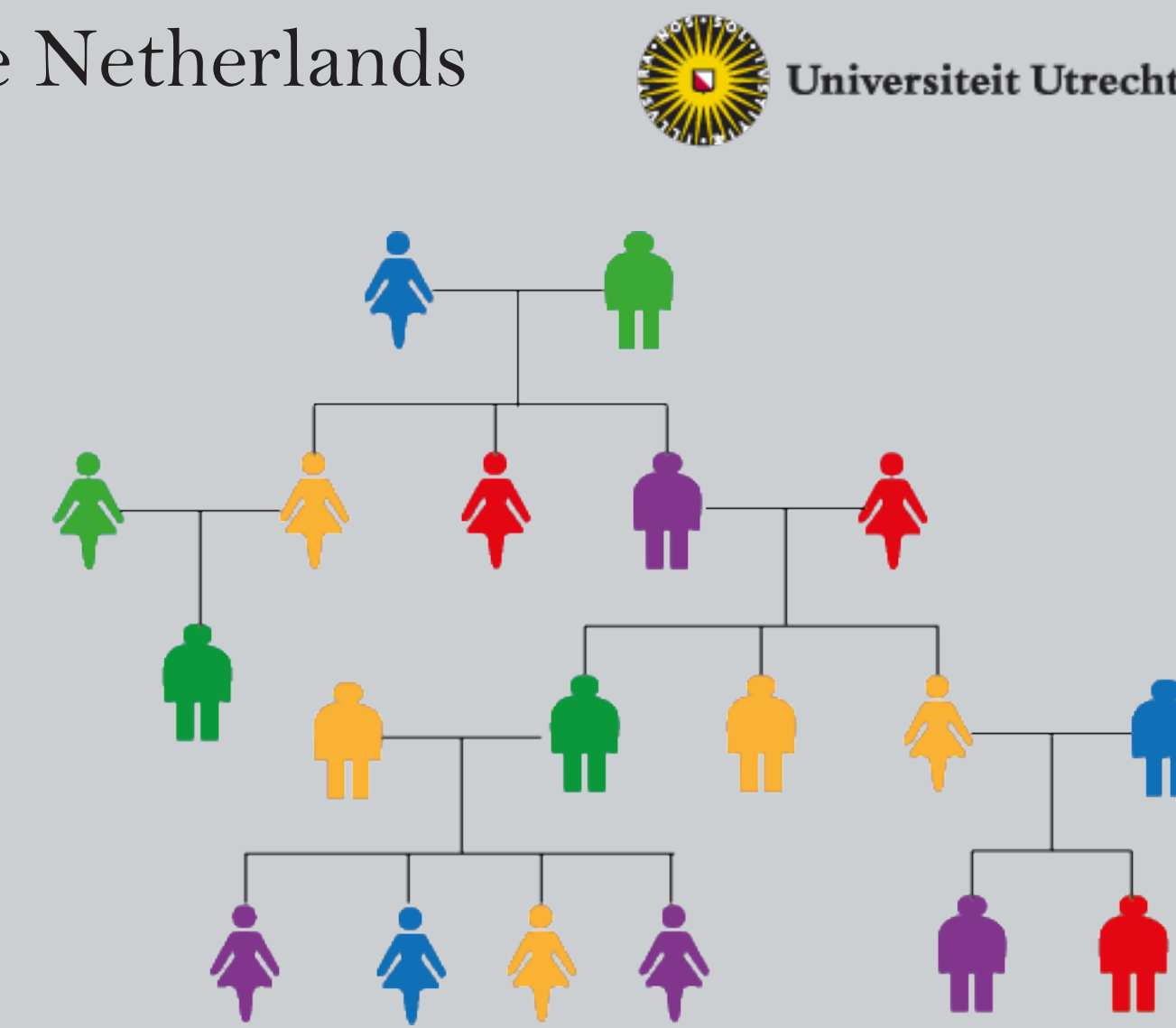
4. Methodology in-depth study of 3 dialects

Vriezenveen Dutch: oral interviews with 2-3 dialect speakers, in dialect. Translation and grammaticality judgment task.

Wambeek Dutch and colloquial Flemish: written questions to colleague linguists. Translation and grammaticalization task.
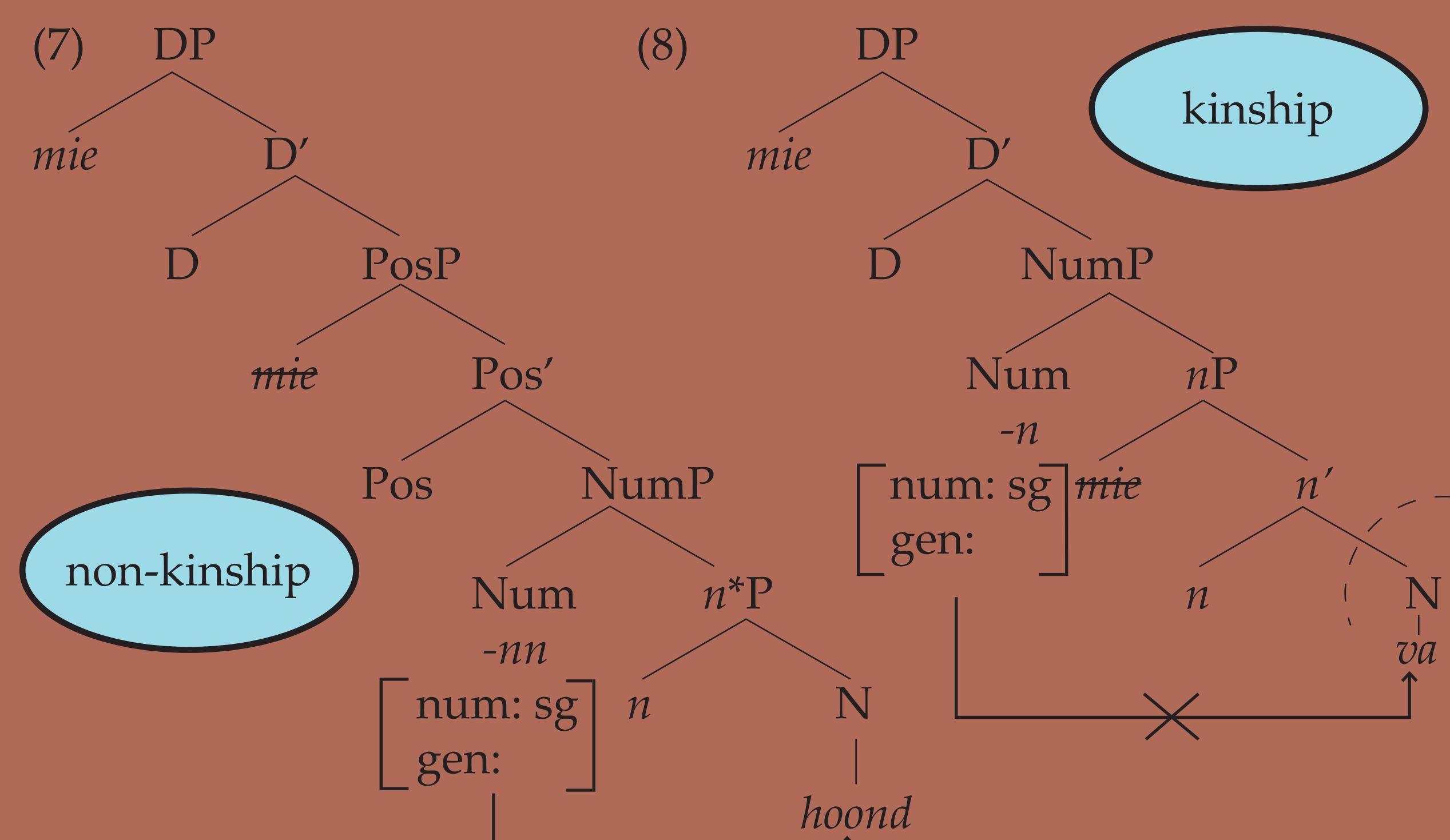
5. Proposal

Part 1: decomposition of possessive pronouns

Oblique pronoun + spurious indefinite article → *mie + n*

Support: inflectional paradigms in Vriezenveen Dutch

	Indefinite article	Inflection poss pronoun	Poss pronoun + article + inflection
m	*nen*	-n(e)n	mie-n-(e)n
f	*ne*	-ne	mie-n-e
n	*n*	-n	mie-n-ø

Part 2: Possessor argument of N

(7) [tree diagram: DP / mie, D' / D, PosP / ~~mie~~, Pos' / Pos, NumP / Num (-nn), n*P / [num: sg, gen:] n, N / hoond] — non-kinship

(8) [tree diagram: DP / mie, D' / D, NumP / Num (-n), nP / ~~mie~~, n' / n, N / va] — kinship

6. Predictions

i. Different inflection on adjective → borne out

(9) *mien-n   grot-n   hoond*
    my-M   big-M   dog.M
(10) *mien-ø   oal-e   va*
    my   old-DEFAULT father.M   (Vriezenveen Dutch)

ii. Normal agreement without possessor argument → borne out

(11) *'n   riek-n   brör*
    the.M   rich-M   brother.M   (Vriezenveen Dutch)

7. Conclusion

i. The observed agreement asymmetry seems to reflect an alienable-inalienable distinction.

ii. The argument structure of N and locality determine the inflectional form of possessive pronouns.

8. Further issues

i. Not all relational nouns trigger absence of agreement. What about words like *neighbor*? And body parts? Could they have a different argument structure?

ii. Wambeek Dutch and colloquial Flemish differ from Vriezenveen Dutch with respect to the inflectional paradigm on adjectives modifying a kinship noun. They display normal instead of default agreement (see (10)).

(12) *men-e   raaik-e   father*
    my-M   rich-M/F   father.M   (Wambeek Dutch)

Selected references Barker, C. (1995). Possessive descriptions. Stanford: CSLI • Chomsky, N. (2006). On phases. In Freidin, R., C. Otero & M. Zubizarreta (eds.), Foundational issues in Linguistic Theory. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press • Corver, N. (2003). A note on micro-dimensions of possession in Dutch and related languages. In Koster, J. & H. van Riemsdijk (eds.), Germania et alia. A linguistic Webschrift for Hans den Besten, 1-12 • Entjes, H. (1970). Die Mundart des Dorfes Vriezenveen. PhD dissertation, Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität, Münster. Groningen: Sasland • Goeman, T. et al. (2008). Morphological Atlas of the Dutch Dialects. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press • Leu, T. (2008). The internal syntax of determiners. PhD dissertation, NYU • Postma, G. (2013, 2015). Possessor truncation in kinship terms: An anthropological feature? Ms Meertens Institute • Radford, A. (2000). NP Shells. Essex Research Reports in Linguistics 33, 2-20 • Vergnaud, J. & M. Zubizarreta (1992). The definite determiner and the inalienable constructions in French and English. Linguistic Inquiry 23(4), 595-652.