Proper Names used as Common Nouns in Belgian Dutch and German

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1. Introduction[i]

Proper names used as common nouns (henceforth PUCs) come in three different semantic classes: PUCs denoting events (1), PUCs denoting objects (2) and PUCs denoting persons (3).

(1) She wants to do a Britney
Meaning: a.   She wants to have a breast enlargement.
               b.   She wants to go out without underwear.
               c.   She wants to shave her hair off.
               d.   She wants to ill-treat her baby

(2) She bought a Picasso.
Meaning: She bought a painting by Picasso.

(3) There's a Britney in my class.
Meaning: a.   There's a girl in my class named Britney.
               b.   There's a girl in my class who looks and behaves like Britney.

Proper names like those in (1)-(3) are traditionally regarded either as nonprototypical proper names (Van Langendonck 2007) or as common nouns due to the syntactic environment in which they appear (Borer 2005). I regard

them as nominalizations with a √Person at their core. This paper is organized as follows. First, I present the basic data (section 1) focussing in particular on the grammatical gender of PUCs in Belgian Dutch (Dutch spoken in the northern half of Belgium) and German. Second, I examine the possibility of a PF-deletion analysis for PUCs. This will turn out to be successful for the German data, but not for the Belgian Dutch data (section 3). In section 4, I argue against an empty noun analysis for the Belgian Dutch data and in section 5, I present my own account, which crucially involves postulating an empty suffix in Belgian Dutch PUCs. Section 6 sums up and concludes.

2.   The basic data

In this section I first compare the gender of Belgian Dutch PUCs with German ones. Both languages display a three-way gender system (neuter, feminine and masculine). They reveal a striking difference, however, in the gender of object-denoting PUCs.

2.1.   Gender

2.1.1.   Belgian Dutch

The event-denoting PUC in (4a) combines with the masculine article *ne*. Since the proper name *Jeroen* refers to a male person, there thus appears to be agreement between the determiner and the noun. In the PUC in (4b), however, the name *Paris Hilton* refers to a female person, and yet the article is still masculine. In other words, event-denoting PUCs always trigger masculine gender, regardless of the gender of the person referred to by the proper name.

(4)   a. Ze   deed   ne/ *een/*e   Jeroen.
          she   did $a_{Masc}\,a_{Fem}\,a_{Neut}\,Jeroen_{Masc}$
          She did a Jeroen.
       b. Ze   deed   ne/ *een/*e   Paris Hilton.
          she   did $a_{Masc}\,a_{Fem}\,a_{Neut}\,Paris\;Hilton_{Fem}$
          She did a Paris Hilton.

Object-denoting PUCs behave identically. For example in (5) both Picasso and Kahlo (referring to the female painter *Frida Kahlo*) trigger masculine gender on the indefinite article.

(5) a. Ze   heeft   ne/   *een/   *e   Picasso   gekocht.
      she   *has* a_{Masc} a_{Fem} a_{Neut} *$Picasso_{Masc}$*   *bought*
      She bought a Picasso.
    b. Ze   heeft   ne/   *een/   *e   Kahlo   gekocht.
      s*he*   *has* a_{Masc} a_{Fem} a_{Neut} *$Kahlo_{Fem}$*   *bought*
      She has bought a Kahlo.

Note that the same holds for brand names, i.e. all of them are masculine, though of course in this case it is often hard to determine the gender associated with the proper name itself (6).

(6) Ze   heeft   ne/   *een/   *e   Miele   gekocht.
    she   *has* a_{Masc} a_{Fem} a_{Neut} *Miele*   *bought*
    She bought a Miele dishwasher.

In short, the indefinite article of an object-denoting PUC takes masculine gender regardless of the gender of the proper name it combines with.
Person-denoting PUCs behave differently. In (7a) the PUC requires a feminine indefinite article and as such agrees with the proper name *Britney* it combines with. The article in (7b) displays masculine article, again showing agreement with the proper name Guido.

(7) a. Er   zit   *nen / een/ *e   Britney   in mijn klas.
      there   *sits* a_{Masc} a_{Fem} a_{Neut} *Britney $_{Fem}$*   *in my class*
      There is a Britney in my class.
    b. Er   zit   ne/   *een/ *e   Guido   in mijn klas.
      there   *sits* a_{Masc} a_{Fem} a_{Neut} *$Guido_{Masc}$*   *in my class*
      There is a Guido in my class.

Summing up, Belgian Dutch object- and event-denoting PUCs always take masculine gender on the article regardless of the gender of the proper name it combines with. In person-denoting PUCs on the other hand there is agreement between the gender on the article and the proper name.

2.1.2. *German*

German does not have all three types of PUCs: only object-denoting and person-denoting PUCs occur in German.[ii] Moreover, the gender properties of PUCs are rather different from those in Belgian Dutch.

In the object-denoting PUC in (8a) the article is neuter, in spite of the masculine proper name it combines with. The same holds for (8b), where the proper name is feminine. In (9) on the other hand the article is feminine when combined with the brand name *Bosch* and masculine when it comes with the brand name *Danone*.

(8) a. Ich habe *eine/*einen/ein Picasso gekauft.
         I   have a_{Fem} a_{Masc} a_{Neu} Picasso$_{Masc}$ bought
         I have bought a Picasso
     b. Ich habe *eine/*einen/ein Kahlo gekauft.
         I   have a_{Fem} a_{Masc} a_{Neut} Kahlo$_{Fem}$ bought
         I have bought a Kahlo
(9) a. Sie kauft eine/*einen/*ein Bosch.
         she buys a_{Fem} a_{Masc} a_{Neut} Bosch
         She buys a Bosch washing machine.
     b. Es gibt noch *eine/ einen/*ein Danone im Kühlschrank.
         it gives still a_{Fem} a_{Masc} a_{Neut} Danone in-the refridgerator
         There is another Danone yoghurt left in the fridge.

Although it is hard to determine the gender of a brand name, it is clear that neither in (8) nor in (9) there is agreement between the article and the proper name. The distribution of the article behaviour seems rather arbitrary.
Person-denoting PUCs in German behave like their Belgian Dutch counterparts. For example, in (10a) the gender on the article is feminine, in agreement with the female name *Inga*. In (10b) the proper name *Hans* is masculine as is the article.

(10) a. Ich hatte *einen/eine/*ein Inga in meiner Klasse.
          I   had a_{Masc} a_{Fem} a_{Neut} Inga$_{Fem}$ in my class
          There was a Inga in my class.
      b. Ich hatte einen/*eine/*ein Hans in meiner Klasse.
          I   had a_{Masc} a_{Fem} a_{Neut} Hans$_{Masc}$ in my class
          There was a Hans in my class.

2.1.3. *Conclusion*

The differences and similarities between Belgian Dutch and German PUCs are summarized in table 1.

	Belgian Dutch	German
Event-denoting PUCs	no gender agreement (always masc)	
object-denoting PUCs	no gender agreement (always masc)	no gender agreement (masc/fem/neuter)
person-denoting PUCs	gender agreement	gender agreement

Table 1

3. PF-deletion

Under a PF-deletion analysis PUCs are elliptical constructions which have the same syntax as non-elliptical structures, but a part of which is not pronounced (cf. e.g. Merchant 2001). An illustration of this analysis is given in (11).

(11) She bought a Kahlo = She bought a Kahlo ~~painting~~

The example in (11) presents the PUC *a Kahlo* as syntactically equivalent to the phrase *a Kahlo painting*. Struck-out of *painting* indicates that this word is deleted at PF. A PF- deletion analysis predicts that the gender of the article of a PUC does not agree with the proper name, but with the deleted noun following the proper name. Consequently, the PF-deletion analysis might offer a good way to approach the PUCs.

3.1. *German*

Recall that in German object-denoting PUCs there is no gender agreement between the PUC and the proper name. On the contrary, at first glance the gender distribution seemed to be completely arbitrary (cf. 8 and 9). However, a PF-deletion analysis of German object-denoting PUCs can provide a straightforward account of their gender behaviour. In (12a) (= 9a) the feminine gender of the brand results from the underlying presence of the feminine noun *Machine* 'machine'. In (12b) (=9b) the brand name is masculine, because so is the understood noun *Becher* 'container'. In (12c) (=8a) and 12d (=8b) the PUC is neuter, because the elided noun *Gemälde* 'painting' is a neuter noun.

(12) a. Sie kauft eine/*einen/*ein Bosch [~~Machine~~].
  she buys a_{Fem} $a_{Masc}$$a_{Neut}$ *Bosch* *machine$_{Fem}$*

She buys a Bosch washing machine.

b. Es   gibt noch *eine/ einen/*ein Danone   [Becher]
   it   gives still a_{Fem} a_{Masc} a_{Neut} Danone   container$_{Masc}$
   im Kühlschrank.
   in-the fridge
   There is another Danone yoghurt left in the fridge.

c. Ich   habe *eine/*einen/ein Picasso   [Gemälde] gekauft.
   I   have a_{Fem} a_{Masc} a_{Neut} Picasso$_{Masc}$ painting$_{Neut}$ bought

d. Ich habe *eine/*einen/ ein   Kahlo   [Gemälde] gekauft.
   I   have a_{Fem} a_{Masc} a_{Neut} Kahlo$_{Fem}$ painting$_{Neut}$ bought
   I have bought a Kahlo

The PF-deletion analysis gives correct results for German object-denoting PUCs. However, the same analysis does not seem to apply so straightforwardly to person-denoting PUCs. Since the gender on the article of person-denoting PUCs agrees with the gender of the proper name, it is rather superfluous to assume an extra underlying noun, like *Mann* 'man' (13 a) or *Frau* 'woman' (13 b), in order to make the analysis for German PUCs homogeneous.

(13) a. Ich   kenne   einen   Hans   [Mann].
        I   know a_{Masc} Hans   man$_{Masc}$
        I know a Hans.

     b. Ich   hatte eine Inga [Frau]   in meiner Klasse.
        I   had a_{Fem} Inga woman$_{Fem}$ in my   class
        There was an Inga in my class.

Moreover, in case we do postulate an underlying noun it is more logical to choose for the neuter noun *Mädchen* "girl" in (14b) instead of *Frau*. However, the neuter *Mädchen* cannot account for the feminine gender on the article as shown in (14).

(14) *Ich hatte eine Inga   [Mädchen] in meiner Klasse.
       I   had a_{Fem} Inga$_{Fem}$ girl$_{Neut}$ in my   class
       There was an Inga in my class.

Summarizing, the PF-deletion analysis is probably not the right analysis for German person-denoting PUCs since 1) it is superfluous to assume an elided noun when the article agreement is fulfilled by the presence of the proper name alone and 2) more logical nouns than *Mann* or *Frau* do not necessarily yield agreement with the article. The analysis I will propose for Belgian Dutch person-

denoting PUCs (cf. section 5 below) will turn out to be applicable to German person-denoting PUCs as well.

3.2. *Belgian Dutch*

The PF-deletion analysis cannot be successfully applied to the Belgian Dutch data. For example, in (15) the masculine article does not agree in gender with the neuter elided noun *schilderij* 'painting'. In (16) the masculine article does not correspond to the feminine gender of *wasmachiene* 'dishwasher' in West-Flemish.

(15) *Ze kocht nen/ *een/*e van Gogh [schilderij].
 she bought a_{Masc} a_{Fem} a_{Neutt} *vanGogh* *painting$_{Neut}$*
 She bought a Van Gogh.

(16) *k een nen/ *een/*e Miele [wasmachiene].(Haegeman 2000:131)
 I have a_{Masc} a_{Fem} a_{Neut} *Miele* *dishwasher$_{Fem}$*
 I have got a Miele dishwasher.

Again, as in German, a PF-deletion analysis could be proposed for person-denoting PUCs, assuming that the underlying noun is *man* 'man' or *vrouw* 'woman'. However, with the more logical underlying neuter noun *meisje* 'girl' the agreement cannot be fulfilled. Consequently, the PF-deletion analysis is not the right candidate for Dutch person-denoting PUCs since 1) it is superfluous to assume an elided noun when the article agreement is fulfilled by the presence of the proper name alone and 2) more logical nouns than *man* or *vrouw* do not necessarily yield agreement with the article.

3.3. *Conclusion*

A PF-deletion analysis can explain the gender properties of German object-denoting PUCs. However, it cannot be extended to German person-denoting PUCs and Belgian Dutch PUCs. To come to an analysis for Belgian Dutch PUCs in general and for German person-denoting PUCs, I will first argue against an other possible analysis for the Belgian Dutch object- and event-denoting PUCs, namely the empty noun analysis.

4.   Against the empty noun analysis for Belgian Dutch data

Under an empty noun analysis an object-denoting PUC like the one in (17) is followed by an empty noun (indicated here by capital letters). This noun is empty in the syntax and at PF.

(17) She bought a Kahlo = She bought a Kahlo PAINTING

A typical property of such an empty noun is that it can be endowed with default gender (Haegeman 2000). An empty noun in Belgian Dutch object- and event denoting PUCs would get masculine gender. As such, the apparent lack of agreement between the article and the proper name would then in actual fact be agreement between the article and the empty noun. Haegeman (2000) assumes such an empty noun taking default masculine gender for West Flemish constructions like (18).

(18) k' een   [$_{DP}$ nen   Miele   [$_N$ ∅]]   gekocht.
      I have   a$_{Masc}$ Miele   bought
      I have bought a Miele.

However, there are some serious problems for an empty noun analysis. First, if there is an empty N in (19a), i.e. if the proper representation of (19a) is as in (19b), then *Britney* must be a prenominal modifier. A prenominal modifier allows modification by *very*. In (20a) the prenominal modifier is modified by *very* and the empty noun of (19b) is now filled with *thing*. Since (20a) is grammatical, the same should be true for the sentence in (20b), where the empty noun THING replaces *thing*. However, this is not the case.

(19) a.   She did a Britney.
      b.   She did a Britney THING
(20) a.   She did a very Britney thing.
      b.   *She did a very Britney THING

Second, one of the criteria to argue for the presence of an empty noun is its restriction to a particular lexical context (Kayne 2005, De Belder 2007). For example, De Belder (2007) shows that the silent noun DAG in date constructions only occurs when it is selected by an ordinal between 1 and 31.

(21) de   derde   DAG VAN februari   (De Belder 2007:28)
      the   third   day   of   February
      'the third of February'

(22) *de warmste DAG VAN februari
the hottest day of February
intended meaning: 'the hottest day of February'

On the contrary, the PUC-constructions do not display such restriction. They can be used in different contexts as shown in (23), (24) and (25). As opposed to (22) the changed context does not cause semantically ill-formed PUCs.

(23) Den Britney die ik gisteren zag was cooler dan dienen
the$_{Masc}$ Britney that I yesterday saw was cooler than that$_{Masc}$
van vandaag.
of today
The Britney I saw yesterday was cooler than today's Britney.

(24) Er hangt ne Picasso in mijn salon.
there hangs a$_{Masc}$ Picasso in my living room
There's a Picasso in my living room.

(25) Ik heb gisteren ne Jan gekust.
I have yesterday a$_{Masc}$ John kissed
I kissed a John yesterday.

4.1. *Conclusion*

The fact that empty nouns can be endowed with default gender made the empty noun analysis an attractive analysis to approach the gender behaviour of Belgian Dutch object- and event-denoting PUCs. However, it turned out that Belgian Dutch PUCs are not accompanied by an empty noun.

5. The analysis

The analysis I propose for Belgian Dutch PUCs and German person-denoting PUCs is couched in the framework of Distributed Morphology (Halle and Marantz 1993; Harley and Noyer 1999). In this section I first discuss a prerequisite for my analysis. Then, in 5.2., I turn to my analysis of person-denoting PUCs and in 5.3. I provide an analysis for object- and event-denoting PUCs. Finally, I support my analysis with corroborating evidence.

5.1.   *A prerequisite for the analysis*

In order to come to analysis of Belgian Dutch PUCs and German person-denoting PUCs it is necessary to point to an interesting gender-animacy correlation in the PUCs.
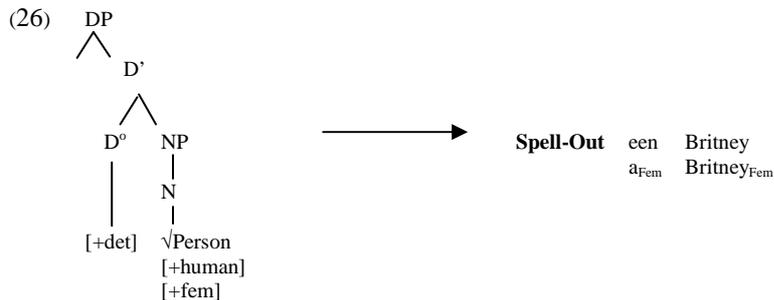
Belgian Dutch object- and event-denoting PUCs are masculine regardless of the gender of the proper name. Masculine gender in Belgian Dutch thus correlates with a [-animate] feature specification. Conversely, person-denoting PUCs agree in gender with the proper name. As such, gender agreement between PUC and proper name correlates with [+animate] or [+human].

Also in German the correlation between gender agreement and [+animate] holds for person-denoting PUCs. However, the correlation between one specific gender and a [-animate] does not exist for object-denoting PUCs. Nevertheless, we could say that lack of agreement is also associated with [-animate].

This distinction between [+animate]/[+human] and [-animate] is crucial for the analysis I develop in next section.
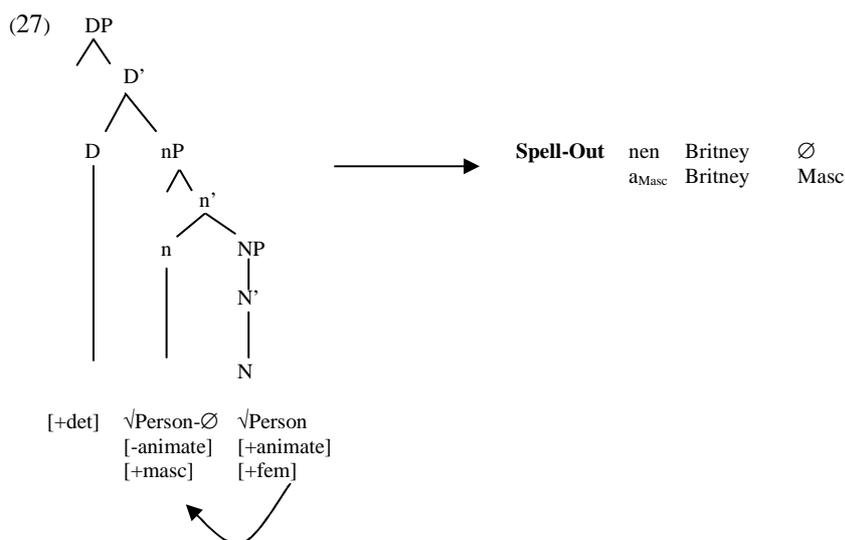
5.2.   *Person-denoting PUCs*

Person-denoting PUCs consist of an l-morpheme (Harley and Noyer 1999), a root denoting 'person' (henceforth √Person), that carries the morphosyntactic features [+human] and [+masc] or [+fem]. Due to the c-commanding f-morpheme, [+det], the root becomes a noun at Spell-Out. At Spell-Out an article is inserted into the [+det] and a proper name (Vocabulary Item) into the root. Whether the inserted proper name is masculine or feminine depends on the available gender feature on the root. At Spell-Out the agreement relation between the determiner and the noun is established. The tree in (26) illustrates the derivation. I have inserted the traditional category labels for convenience sake.

(26)

```
        DP
       /\
          D'
         /\
      D°    NP
      |     |
      |     N
      |     |
   [+det]  √Person
           [+human]
           [+fem]
```

$\longrightarrow$ **Spell-Out**   een   Britney
                                  a_{Fem} Britney$_{Fem}$

5.3.   *Object- and event-denoting PUCs*

The derivation for the event-denoting PUCs is based on the derivation for person-denoting PUCs. It is illustrated in (27). To create an event-denoting PUC which carries masculine gender on the article, I postulate a masculine empty suffix. The √Person, carrying the features [+ human] and [+masc] or [+fem], attaches -after movement- to an f-morpheme, which carries the features
[-animate] and [+ masc] and is located at what we would traditionally call little n. The [+masc] and [-animate] features of the f-morpheme make the features of the √Person inaccessible once they attach to the root. C-commanded by [+det] a noun is created at Spell-Out. An article is inserted into [+det], a proper name into the root and an empty suffix into the new morpheme. The determiner will agree in gender with the masculine empty suffix.

(27)

```
        DP
       /\
         D'
        /\
      D    nP
      |    /\
          n'
         /\
        n    NP
        |    |
             N'
             |
             N

[+det]  √Person-∅   √Person
        [-animate]  [+animate]
        [+masc]     [+fem]
```

Spell-Out   nen   Britney   ∅
         a_Masc   Britney   Masc

In spite of the semantic difference between object-and event-denoting PUCs, both PUCs are [-animate]. Therefore, the syntactic analysis for object-denoting PUCs goes exactly as in (27).

5.4.   *Corroborating evidence*

Since a gender-changing suffix is at the heart of my analysis, I will provide some support for this choice by comparing the empty suffix from my analysis with

diminutive suffixes in Dutch. Dutch diminutive suffixes (-*je/ - ke*) can change the gender of a word. First, in the example in (28a) the diminutive suffix -*ke* changes the gender of the event-denoting PUC into neuter. The representation in (28b) shows that the root is feminine. However, when the inanimate morpheme ($\varnothing$ at Spell-Out) attaches the complex head becomes masculine and finally, after attachment of the diminutive morpheme (-*ke* at Spell-Out) it becomes neuter.

(28) a. Ze   deed *ne/ *een/e   Britneyke.
        She   did   a_{Masc} a_{Fem} a_{Neut} Britney-dim
    b. [_{neut} [_{masc}[_{fem} $\sqrt{}$Britney]- $\varnothing$] –ke]

Moreover, in my analysis the features on the root become inaccessible or opaque once the new f-morpheme attaches. This is illustrated in (29). In (29a) reference to the feminine noun *Britney* is impossible, whereas reference to the masculine DP *nen Britney*, (29b), is possible.

(29) a. *Ze   doet [nen [[Britney$_i$]- $\varnothing$]].Hebt ge   haar$_i$ gezien?
        she   does a_{Masc} Britney_{Fem}   have   you   her   seen
        She did a Britney. Did you see it?
    b. Ze   doet [nen [[Britney]-$\varnothing$]]$_i$. Hebt ge   hem$_i$ gezien?
        she   does a_{Masc} Britney_{Fem}   have   you   him   seen
        She did a Britney. Did you see it?

The same happens in (30a) the adjective *groen* 'green' can be modified by the adverb *zeer* 'very'. However, once the stem merges with the suffix –*tje*, illustrated in (30b), the stem is inaccessible for further syntactic processes and can not longer be modified by *zeer* 'very'.

(30) a. groen -   zeer groen
        green   very green
    b. groentje - *zeer groentje
        green-little very green-dim
        greenhorn

6.   Conclusion

In this article I have analysed proper names used as common nouns in Belgian Dutch and German. First, I have looked at the gender on the article of the PUCs. Belgian Dutch object- and event-denoting PUCs have default masculine gender,

whereas object-denoting PUCs in German displayed a seemingly arbitrary gender behaviour of the article. German and Belgian Dutch person-denoting PUCs both agree in gender with the proper name. PF-deletion turned out to be the correct analysis for German object-denoting PUCs. I argued that neither the PF-deletion analysis nor the empty noun analysis are viable candidates for Belgian Dutch PUCs and German person-denoting PUCs. I therefore proposed a unified analysis for them. The person-denoting PUCs are derived by a √Person carrying [+human] and [+masc] or [+fem] in which a proper name is inserted at Spell Out. The resulting noun agrees with the determiner. I built on this analysis for object-and event-denoting PUCs: a √Person with the features [+human] and [+masc] or [+fem] combines with the morphemes [+masc] and [-animate]. These features overrule the features on the root when it comes to gender agreement at Spell-Out.

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[ii] It remains puzzling why German does not have event-denoting PUCs like *Sie machte einen Britney (she did a Britney).* I leave this as a topic for further research.