

canonical and optional (and relatively rare) process, namely case morphology in a language without a case system. One solution, proposed by Weerman & de Wit (1999: 1184), is to state that the Dutch genitive is formed by a ‘conversion rule’ from a construction with *van*, e.g. (2a), and to conclude that ‘there is no such thing as a morphological genitive in Modern Dutch’ (Weerman & de Wit 1999: 1164).

Such an approach, however, does not account for speakers’ ability to (usually) use the correct genitive marker (*des* or *der*) depending on the number and gender of the noun – corpus data suggest that the morphological structure of the nouns involved is used as guidance – and, in the case of constructions with *des*, to attach the agreeing suffix *-s* to the subject noun (as in 3a). Even if the genitive is used as an artificial conversion of a *van*-construction, it clearly still involves some morphological knowledge on the part of language users. Furthermore, the approach does not explain the examples encountered in spontaneous, informal speech (such as (3b)). Nor does it account for mismatches between the marker and subject (4), which also suggest that the Dutch genitive is used by speakers as a productive morphological process.

- (4) **de mildheid des jaren*
 the mildness the.GEN.MASC/NEUT year.PLU
 ‘the mildness of the years’ (CGN: fn008413)

This paper proposes that the Dutch genitive can be accounted for as a living and productive morphological process (rather than a fossilised relic or an artificial conversion rule) in a cognitive approach. In a constructionist framework, the Dutch genitive may be described as a type of construction, namely a ‘partially lexically filled [...] linguistic pattern’ (following the definition in Goldberg 2003: 219); it may also be viewed as a type of ‘formulaic sequence’ (as defined by Wray 2000: 465). It is proposed, based on the situation observed in the corpora (namely the productivity within a relatively constrained structure in written and spoken language), that the productive Dutch genitive is used in frames with gaps – X and Y in (4) – that can be filled by NPs. Thus, parallel to the examples in (3), the following frames are posited, within which the genitive maintains its productivity (albeit restricted in comparison with earlier periods) in present-day Dutch:

- (4) a. X *des* Y.s
 X the.GEN Y.MASC/NEUT.GEN
 ‘X of (the) Y’
- b. X *der* Y
 X the.GEN Y.FEM/PLU
 ‘X of (the) Y’
- c. één *der* Y
 one the.GEN Y
 ‘one of the Y’

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