

A dummy and a diminutive in Dutch verbal lore

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1. Introduction

In her study of subject omission in present-day written English, Liliane Haegeman draws our attention to the theoretical relevance of peripheral data for linguistic theorizing (see also Schmerling 1973, Trasher 1977). Specifically, English (core grammar) does not allow subject omission in finite clauses, as shown in (1), but in specific written registers such as diaries, personal letters, e-mails or notes, English does allow for a subject to be non-overt. This is exemplified in (2); examples drawn from Haegeman (1990, 2007).

- (1) a. *Have bought a book.
b. I have bought a book.
- (2) a. ∅ Have done 110 pages. (*Diary of Virginia Woolf*, p. 33; 11 November)
b. ∅ Dreamt that I picked up a New Yorker. (Plath 304)

In this article I discuss a peripheral phenomenon attested in Dutch nursery rhymes and children's songs (so-called verbal lore), namely the pattern *van je XP*, where *XP* can be a linguistic expression that designates a sound-symbolic, sequential (e.g. counting) or repetitive activity. The Dutch children's song in (3) displays four instances of this phenomenon, each of which is marked in boldface. The left part in (3) represents the Dutch nursery rhyme, while the right part gives the (literal) English translation for each line of the Dutch verse.¹

- (3)
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Twee emmertjes water halen | two bucket-DIM-PL water get-INF |
| Twee emmertjes pompen | two bucket-DIM-PL pump-INF |
| De meisjes op de klompen | the girls on the wooden-shoes |
| De jongens op hun houten been | the boys on their wooden leg |
| Je mag niet door mijn straatje heen | you may not through my street-DIM PRT |
| Van je ras ras ras | of <i>je ras ras ras</i> |
| rijdt de koning door de plas | goes the king through the puddle |
| Van je voort voort voort | of <i>je ahead ahead ahead</i> |
| rijdt de koning door de poort | goes the king through the gate |
| Van je erk erk erk | of <i>je erk erk erk</i> |
| rijdt de koning naar de kerk | goes the king to the church |
| Van je één, twee, drie! | of <i>je one two three</i> |

The article is organized as follows: Section 2 examines the grammatical nature of *van* in expressions such as *van je ras ras ras*, and section 3 does the same for the element *je*. It will be proposed that *van* is a dummy (i.e., meaningless) element that spells out the categorial node n^0 and that *je* is a diminutive morpheme, which appears to be able to occur on its own; that is, it does not need a lexical category —a noun— to which it can attach. Section 3

¹ The nursery rhymes and children's songs can be found in the following data sources: Van Vloten & Brandts-Buys (1894), Abramsz. (1911) and the following website: <http://www.overtuin.net>.

discusses a few other structural environments in which this "independent" diminutive morpheme possibly is present. Section 4 concludes the article.

2. *Van* + *XP* in Dutch verbal lore

Before turning to the pattern *van je XP*, I discuss a different but arguably related pattern, viz. *van* + *XP*. Some illustrations are given in (4):

(4)

Daar ging een meisje over het land.	there walked a girl across the land
Zij had een korfje al in haar hand.	she had a basket-DIM PRT in her hand
Daar was in van gladderdeglad .	there was in of smooth- <i>er-de</i> -smooth
Daar was in van strijkerdestrijk .	there was in of pet- <i>er-de</i> -pet
Daar was in van kijkerdekijk .	there was in of look- <i>er-de</i> -look
Daar was in van krolderdekrol .	there was in of caterwaul- <i>er-de</i> -caterwaul
(riddle rhyme)	

Twee kinderen zouden naar school gaan.	two children would to school go
Ze waren zo vrolijk en blij.	they were so cheerful and happy
In de verte hoorden ze een orgeltje.	in the distance heard they a barrel-organ-DIM
Daar moesten ze eventjes bij.	there had.to.stand they briefly PRT
En 't orgeltje speelde van holie ha hij .	and the barrel-organ-DIM played of <i>holie ha hij</i>
En de kinderen dansten er bij.	and the children danced there with (= while the organ played)

The linguistic expression *van gladderdeglad* fulfills the role of (argumental) subject of a clause. The sentence *Daar was in van gladderdeglad* can be paraphrased as "something very smooth was in it, i.e. in the basket". The other *van+XP* expressions fulfill the same role and have a similar meaning: *van strijkerdestrijk* designates something strokeable, *van kijkerdekijk* something which is looking around, and *van krolderdekrol* stands for something which can caterwaul. Arguably, the expression *van holie ha hij* in the second nursery rhyme fulfills the role of direct object. The sentence containing it can be paraphrased as: "And the barrel-organ played this", where *this* corresponds to "holie ha hij".

The question obviously arises how to analyze *van*. What I would like to propose is that *van* 'of' is a minimal manifestation of the syntactic category 'noun'. In a way, it acts like a dummy noun, whose contents is provided by the expression that follows *van* (e.g., *gladderdeglad*). In what follows, I will briefly give some background for this analysis of *van*, basing myself on earlier generative-linguistic analyses of English *of*.

In Chomsky (1986), the element *of* is considered to be a manifestation of genitival case. As Chomsky (p. 194) notes, "Genitive Case is realized morphologically by affixation of some element to the NP: *of* in complement position, the possessive element POSS [= 's; NC] in subject position." These two modes of morphological realization are depicted in (5):

- (5) a. the [destruction [the city]] → the [destruction_N [**of** + [the city]]]
 b. [[the city] destruction] → [[the city] + '**s**] destruction]

In Emonds (1985) and Pesetsky (2013), it is argued that Case is not a primitive category but rather an affixal realization of a Part-of-Speech. In other words, Case is a part-

of-speech-suffix, or in Emonds's terms: an 'alternative realization' of a categorial head. According to this approach, genitival Case is an affixal realization of the category 'noun'. More specifically, *of* and *-s* in (5) are *nominal* affixes "assigned" by the noun *destruction* to the satellite constituent *the city*. To phrase it differently, the nominal property (i.e., N) associated with *destruction* is realized alternatively (i.e. affixally) on the satellite phrase. Schematically, for a phrase like *the destruction of the city*:

(6) the [destruction [the city]] → the [destruction_N [N_{aff} (= *of*) + [the city]]]

With Pesetsky (2013), I take there to be two ways in which Case can appear on a constituent: (i) syntactic case assignment, as, for example, in (6), and (ii) Case as a lexical property. As regards this last way of Case appearance, Pesetsky (2013:8) makes the following statement:

“[...] every element that comes from the lexicon as a noun, determiner, verb or preposition could equally well be described as coming from the lexicon assigned to the corresponding case-categories. In other words, from the point of view of syntax, every noun can be described as "born genitive", every verb as "born accusative", every determiner as "born nominative", and every preposition as "born oblique".”

According to this statement, one should be able to find overt manifestations of genitival Case (i.e., affixal N) on nouns. I will argue that this is exactly what we find with *van* in (3) and (4). That is, *van* is the manifestation (spell-out) of the "genitival property" with which N is born. In Pesetsky's (p. 8-9) terms, *van* is a surface manifestation of "the noun's primeval state —that is, the form in which it entered the syntactic derivation [...]". But before elaborating on this, I would like to make one more theoretical step. In line with Marantz (1997), Borer (2005) and others, I assume that lexical categories (nouns, verbs, *et cetera*) have the form f-Root, where f is a categorial head and the Root (henceforth $\sqrt{\quad}$) is unspecified as to category. Thus, the English noun *car* and its Dutch counterpart *auto* have a composite structure: [_{nP} n^o [_{√P} $\sqrt{\text{car/auto}}$]]. For the above-mentioned approach to Case, this means that genitival case is an affixal n^o. This categorial affix can surface on a satellite constituent of the noun through case assignment, or it can surface on n^o itself (the "n^o-as-born-genitive" way; i.e. primeval genitive). The latter strategy can be represented as follows: [_{nP} n (= *van*) [Root]].

The question obviously arises whether there are any nominal expressions displaying the "n^o-as-born-genitive" strategy. Notice that we do not find *van* in the following nominal expressions: [_{DP} *de* [_{nP} (**van*) [$\sqrt{\text{auto}}$]]]; (the (of) car; intended meaning: 'the car'). Possibly, this relates to the fact that the nominal nature of the phrase is already clear from the presence of the definite article *de*. Furthermore, raising of the Root *auto* to n^o yields the amalgam [$\sqrt{\text{auto}}+n^o$]. The overtness of the Root may make the appearance of *van* superfluous and, for reasons of economy, impossible. That is, I take the surfacing of n^o as *van* to be a last resort strategy, just like English *do*-support (Chomsky 1957, Lasnik 2000), which is found, for example, in clausal environments featuring a silent verbal complement of T (*John did \emptyset too*) or an overt pro-form that substitutes for the verbal complement (*John did so too*). In short, *van*, just like the auxiliary *to do*, is a dummy element that surfaces in order save a structural representation.

I take the element *van* in (7B') to instantiate the "born-genitive" strategy. That is, *van* represents a nominal expression of the following type: [_{nP} n (= *van*) [Root]]. More specifically, I take it to be an indefinite pronominal phrase which, just like its definite

counterpart 't 'it' (i.e. $[_{DP} 't [_{nP} \emptyset]]$) in (7B), has the proposition 'Jan passes the exam' in (7A) as its antecedent.²

- (7) A: Haalt Jan het examen?
 passes Jan the exam
 'Will Jan pass the exam?'
 B: Ik denk $[_{DP} 't]_i$ wel/niet t_i . ('t = proposition 'Jan passes the exam')
 I think it for.sure /not
 'I think so / I don't think so.'
 B': Ik denk $[_{nP} van]_i$ wel/niet t_i . (*van* = proposition 'Jan passes the exam')
 I think of for.sure/not
 'I think so / I don't think so.'

Let us now return to the linguistic expressions *van gladderdeglad* and *van holie ha hij* in (4). I propose that the element *van* is a surface manifestation of the categorial head n^0 . I tentatively propose that its appearance relates to the special status of the Root. That is, the Root designates something which is not directly associated with the conceptual meaning of a noun (say, denoting an entity or individual). For example, *holie ha hij* has sound-symbolic meaning, *gladderdeglad* designates an attribute ("being smooth"), and *kijkerdekijk* designates an event/activity ("to look"). Possibly, the inner structure of these expressions —maybe, a coordinate structure consisting of coordinated roots; see Corver (2014, 2015)— blocks raising of the Root to n^0 . As a result of the special nature of the Root, n^0 surfaces as *van* in order to make the nominal nature of the entire expression recoverable. Thus, *van gladder de glad* and *van holie ha hij* have the structures in (8).³

- (8) a. $[_{nP} n^0 (= van) [_{ConjP} \sqrt{gladder} [_{Conj} [_{Conj} de] \sqrt{glad}}]]$
 b. $[_{nP} n^0 (= van) [_{ConjP} \sqrt{holie} [_{Conj} Conj_\emptyset [_{ConjP} ha [_{Conj} Conj_\emptyset hij]]]]]]$ ⁴

The next section discusses the pattern *van je ras ras ras*, which was introduced in (3). The question that needs to be answered is: what is the grammatical nature of *je*?

3. Van je XP

Before the question regarding the nature of *je* is addressed, it is useful to give some additional examples of children's songs containing the pattern *van je XP*.

(9)

In Holland staat een huis (2x)
 In Holland staat een huis, ja, ja.
Van je singela singela hopsasa

in Holland stands a house
 in Holand stands a house yes yes
 of *je* singela singela hopsasa

² Interestingly, *van* in (7B') requires the presence of the polarity marker *wel/niet*. Thus, the string *ik denk van* is ill-formed. The pro-form 't, on the contrary, can occur without *wel/niet*, as in: *Ik denk 't* (I think it, 'I think so'). Another contrast between *van* and 't in (7) regards the possibility of combining it with the demonstrative element *zo* 'so'. Thus, *Ik denk [zo van wel/niet]* is fine, but *Ik denk 't van wel/niet* is impossible.

³ I take *de* to be decomposable into *-d* and *-e*. The latter element is a minimal spell-out (viz., schwa) of the Conj-head (see Corver 2014, 2015). The presence of *d* presumably results from a phonological rule: insertion of /d/ in the phonological environment *r _ er*. Compare insertion of /d/ when the agentive suffix *-er* is attached to a verbal root: *verhuur* 'to let', *verhuur-d-er* 'landlord'.

⁴ The representation *Conj_∅* stands for a phonologically empty coordinate conjunction.

In Holland staat een huis (2x)

In Holland stands a house

Drie schuintamboers die kwamen uit het oosten (2x)

three drummers they came from the east of *je* rombom why whine I about.it they came from the east rombom

Van je rom bom, wat maal ik erom?
Zij kwamen uit het oosten, rombom

En **van je hela hola**,
houdt er de moed maar in! (3x)
En **van je hela hola**
houdt er de moed maar in! (2x)

and of *je* hela hola
keep there the courage PRT in (= stay positive)
and of *je* hela hola
keep there the courage PRT in

En **van je hotsie knotsie knetter**,
van je jippie jippie jee.
Maar zijn paard was zeer vermoeid en die wou niet verder mee.
Maar hij moest de boeven vangen
dus nam hij een ander beest
en nu mag je zelf bedenken
wat voor beest dat is geweest

and of *je* hotsie knotsie knetter
of *je* jippie jippie jee
but his horse was very tired and it wanted not further PRT
but he had.to the bad-guys catch
so took he a different animal
and now may you yourself imagine
what kind.of animal that has been

The first hypothesis that comes to mind with regard to *je*'s grammatical nature is the following: *je* is a second person singular weak possessive pronoun (see Haeseryn *et al* 1997). Such a pronoun normally appears in possessive noun phrases such as *je adres* in (10).

- (10) Is dit *je* adres?
is this your address
'Is this your address?'

The question obviously arises whether there is any support for such a possessive pronominal analysis. If it is a second person pronoun, one might try to connect its appearance to the availability of an addressee (the hearer/reader) in the discourse context. The sequence *En van je hela, hola, houdt er de moed maar in!* is interesting in this respect, since *van je XP* precedes an imperative clause. As has been shown in the literature on Dutch imperatives, there is a silent pronominal subject (say, YOU) present in the imperative clause; see e.g. Bennis (2006). It is imaginable that *je* in *van je XP* is somehow connected to the second person pronominal subject of the clause. Schematically:

- (11) En van je_i hela hola, houdt pro_i er de moed maar in!
and of *je* hela hola keep there the courage PRT in
'And *hela hola*, keep it up! / stay positive!'

Clearly, this argument from imperative clauses does not have much strength, since many other clauses preceded by *van je XP* do not contain a second person subject, but rather a first or third person subject.

- (12) a. Van $je_{2P.SG.}$ rom bom, wat maal $ik_{1P.SG.}$ erom?
of *je* rom bom why whine I about.it

'Boom boom, why whine about it?'

- b. Van *je*_{2P.SG} ras, ras, ras, rijdt *de koning*_{3P.SG} door de plas.
of *je* ras ras ras goes the king through the puddle
'Go go go, there goes the king through the puddle!'

Notice also that the *possessive* pronominal analysis faces a number of problems: First of all, it is not clear at all what exactly the possessive relationship is between, for example, *je* and the sound symbolic sequence *hela hola*. Secondly, the weak possessive pronoun cannot be replaced by its strong counterpart *jouw*: **Van jouw ras ras ras*. If *je* is a second person possessive pronoun, it is unclear why the strong pronominal form is impossible.

Instead of claiming that *je* is a possessive pronoun, I tentatively propose that *je* is a diminutive morpheme. Thus, *je* corresponds to the element that we normally find attached to a nominal host, as in (13):

- (13) Ik heb *vlecht-je-s* in mijn haar.
I have braid-DIM-PL in my hair

At first sight, this diminutive analysis does not seem very plausible. For one thing, *je* cannot occur independently; that is, it needs a nominal host to which it can be attached:

- (14) a. *Ik heb *een je* in mijn haar.
I have a DIM in my hair
'I have something small in my hair.'
b. *Ik heb *jes* in mijn haar.
I have DIM-PL in my hair
'I have small things in my hair.'

Even though it is true that the diminutive morpheme normally needs a nominal host to which it can attach, there are structural environments in which the diminutive *-je* does not combine with a noun, at least not with an overt noun (cf. Corver to appear). Consider, for example, the italicized patterns in (15):

- (15) a. Jan reed [*erg zacht-je-s*]
Jan drove very slow-DIM-s
'Jan drove very slowly.'
b. [*Hoe zacht-je-s*] reed Jan?
how slow-DIM-s drove Jan
'How slowly did John drive?'

In these examples, *je* is directly preceded by an adjective and followed by the bound morpheme *-s*. This *-s* must be present: **erg/hoe zachtje*. The phrase *erg/hoe zachtjes* in (15) has an adverbial function; it designates the manner in which Jan's driving took place. Although an analysis according to which *erg/hoe zachtjes* is an adverbially used adjective phrase is tempting, it faces the problem that the diminutive *-je* normally does not attach to adjectives. It typically combines with nouns. Sticking to the generalization that *-je* only attaches to nouns, I propose an alternative analysis for *erg/hoe zacht-je-s*, namely the one given in (16):

- (16) [_{FP} [_{erg/hoe zacht}] [_F F [_{ClasP} -je [_{nP} n^o (= -s) [_{√P} √WAY]]]]]]

According to this analysis, *erg/hoe zacht* is an attributive adjective phrase contained within a nominal expression whose Root is silent. As indicated by WAY, I take this silent root (Kayne 2003) to designate manner.⁵ Following Wiltschko (2005), I analyze the diminutive morpheme as a classifier that conveys 'small piece' (see also De Belder 2011). In informal terms, *-je + WAY* designates "small manner", which possibly is at the basis of the affective flavor of expressions such as *zachtjes*. In the spirit of what was said about "genitival Case" in section 2, the bound morpheme *-s* is analyzed as an affixal manifestation of the categorial head n^0 . The appearance of dummy *-s* has a last resort flavor: it must appear to make the nominal status of nP recoverable at the surface.⁶

Let's return to expressions such as *van je ras ras ras* and *van je hela hola*. I have just argued that *je* is the diminutive morpheme and, in section 2, I proposed that *van* is a dummy element; more specifically, it is a surface manifestation of the categorial head n^0 . These analyses of *je* and *van* bring me to the following analysis of the pattern *van je ras ras ras* (and other instantiations of this pattern):

- (17) a. base structure:
 $[_{\text{ClasP}} -je [_{\text{nP}} n^0 [_{\text{ConjP}} \sqrt{\text{ras}} [_{\text{Conj}'} \text{Conj}_\circ [_{\text{ConjP}} \sqrt{\text{ras}} [_{\text{Conj}'} \text{Conj}_\circ \sqrt{\text{ras}}]]]]]]]$
 b. derived structure:
 $[_{\text{ClasP}} [n^0 (= \textit{van}) + je] [_{\text{nP}} \mathfrak{n}^\circ [_{\text{ConjP}} \sqrt{\text{ras}} [_{\text{Conj}'} \text{Conj}_\circ [_{\text{ConjP}} \sqrt{\text{ras}} [_{\text{Conj}'} \text{Conj}_\circ \text{ras}]]]]]]]$

As indicated in (17), the linear order *van je* results from head movement and adjunction of n^0 to the classifier head *-je*. I tentatively propose that this movement is triggered by the affixal status of the diminutive morpheme *-je*; that is, *je* must have a host to which it can be attached, quite analogously with the fact that the dummy verb *to do* provides a host for the Tense and inflectional features associated with the functional head T (cf. Lasnik's (2000:123) Stranded Affix Filter: "A stranded affix is no good").

4. The most diminutive of words⁷

In the previous section I tried to show that *je* can occur independently, in the sense that there is no overt noun to which it can attach. Occurring on its own due to the absence of an overt noun, one might characterize this "independent" diminutive as "the most diminutive of words". A pertinent example was *zachtjes* in (15), where *-s* was analyzed as a dummy element that spells out the categorial node n^0 . The question, obviously, arises as to whether there are more linguistic expressions featuring this "most diminutive" *je*. In what follows, I present

⁵ The silent noun TIME is also possible in this structural environment: *even-tje-s* (just-DIM-s, 'just, a little while').

⁶ If *je* in (16) is a classifier that must be followed by *-s*, one would expect there to be other classifiers in Dutch displaying the same behavior. A plausible candidate is *stuks* (piece-s) in an utterance like (iB). Just as in *zachtjes*, *-s* must be present in this context. I propose *stuks* has the structure in (ii).

- (i) A: Hoeveel broeken neem je mee? B: Twee stuk*(-s)
 how-many pants take you with two piece-s
 'A: How many pants do you take? B: Two.'

- (ii) $[_{\text{NumP}} \textit{twee} [_{\text{ClasP}} \textit{stuk} [_{\text{nP}} n^0 (= -s) [_{\sqrt{\text{P}}} \sqrt{\emptyset}]]]]]]$

⁷ After Shakespeare's 'the most diminutive of birds' (Macbeth, Act 4, scene 2, words spoken by Lady Macduff)

some potential candidates, but I emphasize that further research of these ill-understood patterns is definitely needed.

Consider the following pair:

- (18) a. Dit is een leuk *adres-je* voor Spaanse wijn.
 this is a nice address-DIM for Spanish wine
 b. Dit is *JE adres* voor Spaanse wijn!
 this is *je* address for Spanish wine
 'This is THE address for Spanish wine' (*THE* pronounced with a long vowel)

In (18a), *je* is a diminutive morpheme attached to the noun *adres*. Just as *zachtjes* in (15), *adresje* has an affective flavor. It does not imply that the address is literally small (e.g., a short street name). Rather, *je* contributes evaluative or expressive meaning (*in casu* positive valence) to the noun. Thus, objects that are big (e.g. a villa or a big car) can be referred to by N+DIM when the diminutive carries evaluative meaning, as in: *aardig huisje!* (nice house-DIM) and *leuk autootje!* (nice car-DIM). In a way, the literal meaning of the diminutive (small size) is bleached and an expressive-evaluative meaning is associated with it.⁸

Consider next the expression *JE adres* in (18b), which has the characteristic property that the element *je*, which normally is a phonologically weak element, carries accent. The meaning associated with *je* can be paraphrased as "par excellence" (see Broekhuis and Den Dikken 2012:735). Traditionally, *JE* in (18b) is analyzed as a possessive pronoun (see Haeseryn *et al* 1997). Even though a paraphrase like "the address for you (= addressee)" is imaginable for *JE adres*, the question arises as to why *je* cannot be replaced by the strong possessive pronoun *jouw*: **Dit is jouw adres voor Spaanse wijn!*. Instead of analyzing *JE* in (18b) as a possessive pronoun, I tentatively propose that *JE* is a diminutive morpheme, which, in line with Wiltschko (2005), I take to be a classifier. More specifically, I take it to be the same expressive-evaluative diminutive morpheme as in (15). By using this affective diminutive *je*, the speaker indicates that the referent of *JE adres* is the representative *par excellence* of the total set of addresses.

One may wonder where the *par excellence* meaning finds its origin. Given the fact that classifiers are often used to make things countable and therefore modifiable by a numeral, one might hypothesize that the *par excellence* reading finds its origin in the (hidden, i.e. silent) presence of the Dutch numeral *één* 'one'. Thus *JE adres* has the representation in (19), where *EEN* represents a silent numeral designating singularity (and uniqueness).⁹

- (19) [NumP EEN [ClasP je [n_P n⁰ [√_{VP} √adres]]]]

Interestingly, this *par excellence* reading is also attested in sentences like (20a), where *eentje* consists of the numeral *een* 'one' and the diminutive morpheme (*t*)*je*. The element *er* is the so-called quantitative pro-form *er*, which arguably substitutes for nP. (20b) gives the structure of *eentje*; see Barbiers 2005 for further discussion of the numeral 'one'.

- (20) a. Je bent me er eentje!
 you are me there one-DIM
 'you are really something! / you are one-of-a-kind!'

⁸ This evaluative meaning is also found with other classifiers. For example, the classifier noun *stuk* ('piece') is used in evaluative expressions such as '(jij) *stuk ongeluk!*' (you piece bad-luck 'you piece of shit!') and '(jij) *lekker stuk!*' (you gorgeous piece, 'you gorgeous!')

⁹ Note that the *par excellence* reading is also found in the English expression *one and only*, which features the numeral *one*. For example, *the one and only Tina Turner*.

- b. Je bent me er_i [_{NumP} één [_{ClasP} tje [_{nP} t_i]]]

Notice that just like *zachtjes* in (15) and *adresje* in (18a), *eentje* has an affective flavor: the speaker, whose "presence" is clear from the ethical dative *me*, qualifies (and evaluates) the addressee as being unique in a certain sense.

I finish this section with another construction that possibly features the "independent" diminutive *je*.¹⁰ This construction is the italicized expression *van je welste* in (21), which acts as a modifier of *krijste*.

- (21) De baby krijste *van je wel-st-e*.
 the baby screamed of *je* considerable-SUP.-e
 'The baby screamed enormously.'

Observe that, at the surface, *van je welste* looks a bit like the expression *van je XP*, discussed in section 3; see also *van je ras ras ras* in example (3). In both constructions, the sequence *van je* occurs at the beginning of a phrase. In the spirit of the analysis given in (17) for *van je ras ras ras*, I tentatively propose that *van je welste* has the base structure in (22a) and the derived structure given in (22b):

- (22) a. base structure:
 [_{ClasP} -je [_{nP} n^o [_{FP} welste [_{F'} F [_{nP} n^o [_{√WAY}]]]]]]]
 b. derived structure:
 [_{ClasP} [n^o (= *van*) + je] [_{FP} welste [_{F'} F [_{nP} n^o [_{√WAY}]]]]]

According to this analysis, *welste* is an attributive superlative AP that modifies a silent manner noun (WAY). The element *van* is analyzed as the surface manifestation of the categorial node n^o. I assume that *van* surfaces due to the silence of the Root; compare *do-support* in VP-ellipsis environments. The categorial node n^o raises across the attributive AP and adjoins to the classifier *je*. This yields the amalgam [n^o (= *van*) + *je*].

¹⁰ Other constructions with a *par excellence* reading that possibly feature diminutive (i.e., classifier) *je* are *je dát* in (i) and *jé van hét* in (ii); the diacritic ' designates that these words carry accent. I leave the analysis of these constructions for future research.

- (i) a. Ik vond het niet [*je dát*]
 I found it not *je* that
 'I wasn't very enthusiastic about it.'
 b. Ik vond het niet [*jé van hét*]
 I found it not *je* of it
 'I wasn't very enthusiastic about it.'

Observe that besides *je dát* in (ia), we also find the expression *een datje* (a that-DIM) in fixed expressions such as (iia,b). In these examples, diminutive *je* is attached to the demonstrative pronoun.

- (ii) a. Hij heeft altijd wel een ditje of een datje.
 he has always PRT a this-DIM or a that-DIM
 'He has always something critical to say about it.'
 b. Zij spraken over ditjes en datjes.
 they spoke about this-DIM-s and that-DIM-s
 'They made small talk.'

5. Conclusion

Haegeman's (1990, 2007) study of subject omission in English finite clauses in certain written registers, draws our attention to the relevance of peripheral data for linguistic theorizing. In this article I examined the grammatical behavior of a peripheral construction (*van je XP*) found in Dutch verbal lore. I proposed an analysis according to which *van* is a surface manifestation of the categorial node n^0 and *je* a diminutive, which was analyzed as a classifier head. I hope to have shown that, even though the *van je XP* pattern looks peripheral and "exotic" from the outside, the atoms and rules that underlie this construction are those that are used for the formation of simple and more familiar constructions; see also Chomsky (2015).

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