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## Setting the standard: norms and usage in Early and Late Modern Dutch (1550-1850)

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## Chapter 9 – Direct and indirect object of the plural personal pronoun

A grammatical feature that is frequently discussed in language advice publications of Dutch is the alternation between the personal pronouns *hen* and *hun* ‘them’. Although both pronouns are employed for referring to an animate plural referent as a grammatical object, according to prescriptive sources, *hen* and *hun* should not be used interchangeably. When to use *hen* or *hun* depends on the syntactic function of the object. More specifically, as is shown in the examples below, *hen* should be applied when referring to the plural referent as a direct object (Example 1), a causative object (Example 2) or after a preposition (Example 3), whereas *hun* should be used when the plural pronoun acts as an indirect object (Example 4). These diverging prescriptions for *hen* and *hun* correspond to the distinction that was made in the old case system in Dutch, where *hen* was prescribed in the accusative case, and *hun* was expected in the dative case.

- (1) *Ik heb **hen** gisteren gezien.*  
‘I saw them yesterday.’
- (2) *Wij zijn **hen** beu.*  
‘We are tired of them.’
- (3) *Ik heb de boeken **aan hen** gegeven.*  
‘I gave the books to them.’
- (4) *Ik heb **hun** de boeken gegeven.*  
‘I gave them the books.’

Although the accusative-dative distinction between *hen* and *hun* is clear-cut in normative grammars, this certainly is not the case in usage. In fact, in modern-day Dutch, *hen* and *hun* are often used interchangeably (Haeseryn et al., 1997, p. 248).<sup>70</sup> This was also the case in Middle Dutch, where generally no case

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. also e-ANS, section 5.2.5.2.3.

distinction was made for these pronouns (De Rooij, 1991, p. 4). In the seventeenth century, however, the Hollandic codifier Christiaen Van Heule (1625) aligned the pronouns with the case system, and thus allocated distinct syntactic functions to the pronouns. Although similar case distinctions existed in Dutch (e.g. the case inflection of the definite article), the case alternation between *hen* and *hun* is an invented distinction that was not made in actual language use (De Rooij, 1991, p. 5). Apart from the use of *hen* and *hun* as personal pronouns, the variant *hun* serves also as a possessive pronoun in Dutch, as is demonstrated in Example 5. This possessive use of *hun* is not part of the present case study.

- (5) *Ik heb hun **hun** boeken gegeven.*  
'I gave them their books.'

In addition to *hen* and *hun* as personal pronouns, a variety of forms could be used to refer to a plural entity in object position. In Middle Dutch, for example, the plural character of a pronoun was stressed by elongating the pronoun with *-lieden* or *-luiden* (Van Loon, 2014, p. 136). These elongated pronouns were applied both in subject position, as in *gijlieden* 'you', and in object position, as in *ulieden* 'you', but thus also in *henlieden* and *hunlieden*. While these elongated forms disappeared from modern-day Dutch, remnants of the extension are still found in the plural pronoun *jullie* 'you' (< *jelui* in eighteenth-century Dutch) (ibid.). Similar processes of assimilation probably explain the existence of plural object forms like *hullie* and *hulder* as alternatives for *hun(lieden)* and *hen(lieden)*. These forms were especially in use in dialects from Vlaanderen, the eastern parts of Brabant, Holland, and Utrecht (De Rooij, 1990, p. 126; De Rooij, 1991, pp. 4-5). Pronouns like *haer* and *heur* were also in use as plural object forms, and lastly, the pronoun *ze* was employed as well (De Rooij, 1991, pp. 4-5). In fact, the variant *ze* is today also frequently used for denoting plural entities in a non-subject position. This variant is stylistically valued lower compared to *hen* and *hun*, which may explain why *ze* typically shows up in informal and spoken registers (Weverinck, 2012, p. 52).<sup>71</sup> Moreover, as opposed to *hen* and *hun*, which can refer only to persons in modern-day Dutch, *ze* is also applied for denoting inanimate or 'inhuman' plural referents, as in *de stoelen, ik heb ze aan de tafel gezet*

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. e-ANS, 2024, section 5.2.5.2.3

'the chairs, I have put them at the table' (Van Bergen et al., 2011, p. 19; Bennis & Hinskens, 2014, p. 140).

This case study is thus centred around changes in the object forms of the third-person plural personal pronoun. I specifically focus on the case distinction that was introduced in seventeenth-century norms. More specifically, I investigate how consistently the accusative-dative distinction was made in language norms, and I explore whether this syntactic alternation was also implemented in written usage.

## 1 Previous research

So far, it is not clear to what extent the accusative-dative distinction between *hen* and *hun* in language norms was also made in historical usage. Although a few studies analyse which personal pronouns were applied in historical language use, most research investigates the grammatical opposition between *hen* and *hun* in modern-day Dutch. This literature review therefore commences with a discussion on the different variants that were attested in historical usage. The investigations of the normative developments are subsequently summarised, before I reflect on the syntactic pronoun distinction in contemporary language use.

As a first study on historical data, De Vogelaer & Coussé (2008) analyse which personal pronouns were employed in the history of Dutch via a corpus of official texts (viz. Corpus Coussé), and another corpus of prosaic texts (viz. Corpus of Earlier Modern Dutch). For the plural personal pronouns, they (ibid., p. 34) attest forms with *-lieden* and *-luiden* already in the thirteenth century. These elongated forms appeared most prominently in Vlaanderen, from whence they spread to other regions (De Vogelaer & Coussé, 2008, p. 24). The forms with *-lieden*, however, lost importance from the sixteenth century onwards, as they were being replaced by their shortened forms *hen* and *hun* (ibid., pp. 25-26). Although the first occurrences of *hen* and *hun* were attested in Brabant in the fourteenth century, the variants appeared in all investigated regions in the sixteenth century (viz. Vlaanderen, Brabant, and Holland). The variants *hen* and *hun* then steadily increased in the eighteenth century, where they accounted for the majority of the plural object forms in usage (ibid.).

In addition to *hen* and *hun*, and their elongated counterparts, the pronoun *haer* was applied as an alternative variant to refer to both masculine and feminine referents, and especially from the fifteenth century onwards (Van der Sijs, 2004, p. 479; Van der Horst, 2008, II, p. 1097). Yet, De Vogelaer & Coussé (2008, p. 24) note that pronouns like *hem* and *haar* declined again in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, in favour of *hen* and *hun*. According to De Rooij (1991, p. 5) also *heur* was in use as a plural object form since Middle Dutch, although this pronoun also did not last in usage. This is also evidenced by Van Megen (2002), who does not attest the form anymore in private letters of the seventeenth century. The pronoun *ze*, conversely, is rarely included in corpus studies investigating plural object forms in historical writings (e.g. De Rooij, 1990; 1991, De Vogelaer & Coussé, 2008). Little is therefore known about the occurrence of this form in earlier stages of Dutch. De Vos (2022), however, shows that *ze* was discussed in the Dutch normative discourse of the seventeenth century, where the form was even prescribed as an alternative variant for referring to plural objects. The fact that codifiers mentioned the variant *ze* as an alternative form suggests that the variant may also have been in use in certain writings in the seventeenth century.

Previous research investigating personal pronouns in historical Dutch thus indicates that variation in the plural object forms was found in usage, although *hen* and *hun* convincingly gained ground from the sixteenth century onwards. These two variants even appear to suppress alternative variants from usage in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This finding is also corroborated by De Rooij (1991, p. 4), who confirms that the pronouns *hen* and *hun* prevailed already in sixteenth-century usage, yet he also asserts that particularly *hen* was commonly used, both in the accusative and the dative case. As such, these studies suggest that the syntactic distinction between *hen* and *hun* was not consistently operationalised in historical writings.

I now continue with a discussion of research on the normative developments in plural personal pronouns. When discussing Northern norms on the topic, Van der Sijs (2004, p. 479; 2021, p. 427) illustrates that multiple grammarians adhered to Van Heule's case distinction between *hen* and *hun*. While norm givers like Ampzing, Vollenhove, Moonen, and Huydecoper, and literary authors like Vondel and Hooft, thus prescribed the syntactic distinction, Van der Horst (2008, II, p. 1096) indicates that other authoritative normative sources like the

*Statenbijbel*, i.e. the first official Dutch translation of the Bible, did not adopt Van Heule's prescription. The fact that not all norm givers adopted the syntactic split between *hen* and *hun* suggests that the distinction may not have been uniformly implemented among grammarians, and that prescriptions on the topic were possibly more variable than expected.

The assumed diversity in language norms is also indicated by De Vos (2022). When investigating developments in Northern language norms from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, De Vos shows that grammarians often allow for variation to a certain extent. Although some codifiers prescribe different variants in the form of free variation, most norm givers employ different approaches to eradicate variability (De Vos, 2022, pp. 129-130). Seventeenth-century grammarians either ascribe multiple meanings or grammatical functions to one form, or they restrict the use of a pronoun to a specific linguistic context, often according to the gender of the referent and the syntactic case (*ibid.*).<sup>72</sup> This is shown, for example, in the paradigm of the previously discussed grammarian Van Heule (1625, pp. 38-39), who prescribes the pronouns *hen* for masculine referents in the accusative case, and *hun* for masculine referents in the dative case, yet he also argues that feminine antecedents should be referred to by *heur* or *heurlieden* in both cases (cf. De Vos, 2022, p. 117). Although these distinct prescriptions differ between codifiers at the time, De Vos (2022, pp. 136-137) suggests that there was more inter-grammarians agreement on the prescribed pronouns towards the end of the seventeenth century. Also De Rooij (1990, pp. 120-121) asserts that the case distinction between *hen* and *hun* became an established topic in grammars of the eighteenth century.

As was already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the distinct syntactic functions are still assigned to *hen* and *hun* in modern-day Dutch. Normative reference works like the *Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkunst (ANS)* 'General grammar of Dutch', for example, thus still mention the syntactic distinction that was introduced in the seventeenth century. However, these reference works also acknowledge that many language users do not adhere to the distinction between *hen* and *hun* (Haeseryn et al., 1997, p. 248). In fact,

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<sup>72</sup> Note that De Vos (2022) investigated the prescribed pronouns for the third-person singular and plural, and focused on masculine and feminine referents. The pronouns for neuter referents, which are also included in this case study, were not part of her analysis.

mother-tongue language users tend to use the pronoun *hen* in the written language, regardless of the function of the pronoun, whereas the pronoun *hun* is often overgeneralised in spoken usage. De Rooij (1991, p. 5) therefore states that *[v]oor veel sprekers [...] hen een 'papieren' woord [is], dat ze wel uit [hun] pen, maar niet over [hun] lippen krijgen* 'for many speakers, *hen* is a word that they can write down, but not say out loud'. Rather than applying a syntactic distinction, contemporary language users thus make a medium distinction between *hen* and *hun*. This is also confirmed in the experiment conducted by Hubers et al. (2020), who observed that pupils in secondary schools did not apply the grammatical distinction between *hen* and *hun* correctly in writing. The pupils mostly did not consider the syntactic difference between the two pronouns, and rather opted for the more prestigious variant *hen* in all cases (cf. also Stroop, 2011, p. 142). Although the study of Van der Meulen (2023, pp. 157-158) suggests that there is awareness of the codified norm – at least among editors of parliamentary proceedings –, Stroop (2011, p. 142) concludes that there is no grammatical issue in Dutch that is violated as often as the syntactic distinction between the personal pronouns *hen* and *hun*.

Previous research on the personal pronouns thus indicates that many pronouns were in use as plural object forms in earlier stages of Dutch. Scholars already indicated that the variants *hen* and *hun* clearly emerged as main object variants in sixteenth-century usage. Grammarians, conversely, promoted different variants until the eighteenth century. These codifiers not only prescribed a case distinction but also distinguished different pronouns for the grammatical genders. Not only *hen* and *hun* thus prevailed in the normative discussions, but also *haar*, *heur* and *ze* were prescribed. However, this case study will show that solely *hen* and *hun* can be considered main variants of the plural personal pronoun in historical language use. I therefore approach this feature as a variable that consists of a binary opposition, i.e. *hen* vs. *hun*. While the focus is on the pronoun alternation based on case, alternative personal pronouns – like *ze*, *haar* and *heur* – are also discussed to give a complete overview of variability in norms and usage.

## 2 Hypotheses

As for the variants *hun* and *hunlieden*, I underpin the expectations in language norms by the work of Van der Sijs (2021) and De Vos (2022). I assume that the normative classification of *hun* as the dative variant is adopted by the majority of (Northern) grammarians from the seventeenth century onwards. Although there is presumably variation between the individual prescriptions based on grammatical gender, I suppose that the prescriptions show consistency in advocating *hun* as the dative variant for masculine and neuter referents, especially from the eighteenth century onwards. For language use, I rely on De Vogelaer & Coussé (2008) in hypothesising that both *hunlieden* and *hun* will be applied in the sixteenth century. The variant *hun* will probably incline in all investigated regions and will become a majority variant by the eighteenth century. It is still unclear whether this variant will increase in general, or only in the dative or accusative case. In the scenario where *hun* inclines in the dative, this rise may be related to prescriptive efforts. This assumption would be strengthened by the stronger presence of *hun* in a printed or formal genre, like the pamphlets and administrative texts. In the case of a general increase of *hun*, prescriptivism could still have impacted usage, yet the form would then be overgeneralised to other contexts. However, a general incline of the form could also be influenced by patterns in the spoken language (cf. De Rooij, 1991). So, in sum, I expect an increase of the pronoun *hun* in eighteenth-century usage. Depending on the syntactic context in which the pronoun increases, an impact of the prescribed case distinction is possible but not necessary (**hypothesis 1**).

Following De Rooij (1991), Van der Sijs (2004), and Van der Horst (2008), the variants *haar* and *heur*, and their elongated forms with *-lieden*, were already in use since the fifteenth century, so they may certainly show up in usage, and most prominently in the sixteenth century. Although I retrieved from De Vos (2022) that these variants were also prescribed by seventeenth-century grammarians to refer to masculine referents, I assume that these prescriptions did not influence usage. Due to the rise of *hen* and *hun* in usage, I presume that the variants *haar* and *heur* will decline in (or even disappear from) seventeenth- and eighteenth-century usage. This assumption is based on Van Megen (2002) and De Vogelaer & Coussé (2008), who also noticed a decrease of *haar* and *heur* in

usage, and even a complete vanishing of the form in seventeenth-century ego-documents (**hypothesis 2**).

As was also the case for *hun(lieden)*, the research of De Rooij (1990, 1991) indicates that the variants *hen* and *henlieden* are probably main variants in sixteenth-century usage. De Vogelaer & Coussé (2008) thereby suggest that the elongated form will decrease in favour of *hen*, so that *hen* becomes the dominant pronoun by the eighteenth century. Since many (Northern) grammarians will adhere to Van Heule's case distinction, the increase of the form in eighteenth-century usage may be correlated with the prescriptions. Prescriptivism successfully influences usage only if *hen* increases in the context of a direct object, though. The results in the *HCD* will reveal whether the expected prevalence of *hen* aligns more closely with the prescribed case distinction or with an organic evolution towards this form in written Dutch (cf. Stroop, 2011; Hubers et al., 2020). As for the results from the Southern Netherlands, it is important to note that previous research does not give us any insight into the stance of Southern codifiers towards the accusative-dative distinction, nor on historical developments of this exact distinction in usage. Although previous research (Vosters, 2011; Vosters et al., 2014) shows that Southern codifiers generally orient their prescriptions towards the Northern norm from the nineteenth century onwards, this case study will shed light on possible geographic differences for this specific feature (**hypothesis 3**).

As Haeseryn et al. (1997) showed, the variant *ze* is frequently applied as an object form in modern-day usage for referring to both animate and inanimate referents, where the form appears most often in spoken and informal registers. Although little is known about the occurrence and the embedding of the form in historical usage, based on De Vos (2022), I assume that the variant will also appear in the seventeenth century. The pronoun *ze* may be prescribed as an alternative variant in language norms, although the form may also show up in usage. It is possible that the object form *ze* could refer to both inanimate and animate referents in historical contexts as well. Since the variant is frequently in use today, it is reasonable to expect an increase of *ze* after the seventeenth century. This increase may be related to prescriptive interference, although the wider linguistic applicability of the form may also have invoked the rise of the variant. After all, in line with the findings in contemporary usage, the variant *ze*

is most frequently used in informal contexts and in spoken usage (**hypothesis 4**).

### 3 Methodology

The delineation of the feature and the operationalisation thereof in this case study is described in the current section. In section 3.1, I discuss the method in language norms, whereas the search expression and annotation procedure in the usage corpus are explained in section 3.2.

#### 3.1 Language norms

For the analysis of language norms, I extracted all the explicit comments and implicit references on the object forms of the plural personal pronouns from the corpus of normative works. Just like in the other case studies, these metalinguistic commentaries are categorised into explicit and implicit prescriptions.

Grammarians typically discuss the case inclination of pronouns in a case paradigm. This means that many codifiers do not write lengthy passages on which plural pronoun to use in the accusative or dative case, but they simply include a paradigm that clarifies the case differences between pronouns. As the case paradigm of Séwel (1712, p. 233; cf. Example 6) also illustrates, norm givers distinguish the following cases: nominative (i.e. the subject), genitive (i.e. the possessor), dative (i.e. indirect object), accusative (i.e. direct object), and ablative (i.e. origin). While prescriptions in paradigms are generally included as implicit prescriptions, these case paradigms explicitly present the plural pronouns that should be used in the accusative and dative case. In this case study, the presentation of plural pronouns in a case paradigm is therefore considered an **explicit prescription**.

	<i>Meerv.</i>	'plural'
<i>Nom</i> [inative]	<i>Zy</i>	'they'
<i>Gen</i> [itive]	<i>Hunner</i>	'their'
<i>Dat</i> [ive]	<i>Hen, Hun, Zich, of Aan Hen</i>	'them'
<i>Acc</i> [usative]	<i>Hen, Zich, Ze</i>	'them'
<i>Abl</i> [ative]	<i>Van Hen</i>	'of them'

Other elaborations on the accusative-dative distinction or the use of plural personal pronouns as a direct or indirect object more broadly, as in the comment of Vollenhove (1685, p. 567) in Example 7, are also included as explicit prescriptions.

- (7) *En dus most men in dativo en ablativo casu van mannen, en dingen, die masculyn zyn zeggen, dat hun iet toegebracht, of benomen wort, of iet van hun komt, of wort bedreven. De accusativus pluralis wort aldaar door hen betekent, met eos in 't Latyn overeenkomende*

'and thus one must say in the dative and ablative case for men and things that are masculine, that something is brought to them [*hun*], or taken from them [*hun*], or something comes from them [*hun*], or is performed by them [*hun*]. The accusative plural is there signified by *hen*, corresponding to *eos* in Latin'

Metalinguistic commentaries are categorised as **implicit prescriptions** if plural personal pronouns are not discussed in the context of the case system. Common implicit prescriptions include brief paradigms of pronouns, like in Example 8, or example sentences in which a plural personal pronoun is used, for instance to illustrate the semantic difference between homonyms, as Example 9 shows. In the latter case, we can imply that the grammarian prescribes the pronoun *hen* for the indirect object.

- (8) *Hy wordt op deese wyse geboogen:*  
*Eenvoud. Meervoud.*  
*Hy, sijns, hem. Sy, hunner, hun*  
 (Leupenius, 1653, p. 49)

'Hy is declined in the following way:

Singular	Plural
<i>Hy, sijns, hem</i>	<i>Sy, hunner, hun'</i>

(9) *Gaet eens by de gebueren hooren; en vraegt hen na die hen (kieken), die ik gisteren verloóren heb*

(Ter Bruggen, 1817-1818, p. 54)

‘Go visit the neighbours and ask them [*hen*] about that hen [*hen*] that I lost yesterday’

If norm givers made a distinction between grammatical genders in their prescriptions, these differences are also considered in the analysis by distinguishing between the masculine, feminine, and neuter gender of the referent. If a codifier formulated a general prescription, thus without discussing gender differences in the use of plural pronouns, the prescription is not included in the correlation of norms and grammatical gender, but only in the general discussion of language norms. The prescriptions are not encoded for the animacy of the referent.

Different from the other case studies, **grammarians’ usage** is not analysed. The reason for this is that the current case study discusses exactly the difference between plural personal pronouns as a direct and indirect object, and particularly focuses on the distinction between the pronouns *hen* and *hun*. As the distinction between these pronouns mainly takes place in contexts in which is referred to a group of people as a plural animate referent, few results of this feature are found in the language practice of the codifiers. Due to the extremely low frequency of observations, it was impossible to ascertain whether a case distinction was made for the plural personal pronouns.

### 3.2 Language use

For the analysis of language use, multiple regular expressions were compiled to search the *HCD* for the personal pronouns that could refer to a plural referent in object position. The usage corpus was therefore searched for the following variants: *hullie, hulder, hunlieden, hunluiden, hun, hunl., haarlieden, haarluiden, haarl., haar, heurlieden, heurluiden, heurl., heur, henlieden, henluiden, henl., hen, zijlieden, zijluiden, zijl.,* and *ze*.<sup>73</sup> Although *hem* can refer only to singular

<sup>73</sup> While this list shows only the standardised form, spelling differences of these pronouns were considered (cf. Appendix).

masculine referents today, it could be employed too for plural referents in earlier stages of Dutch (De Vogelaer & Coussé, 2008, p. 24). The corpus was checked for the form, yet *hem* was not attested as a plural personal pronoun. Also the variant *heur* is not found as a plural pronoun in the *HCD*. The highly dialectal *hullie* and *hulder* and the abbreviated forms *hunl.*, *haarl.*, *heurl.*, *henl.* and *zijl.* did not occur in the *HCD* either.

1.909 observations were obtained and verified manually for the function of the pronoun. Results that did not appear in the accusative or dative case were removed from the dataset. Most of the invalid observations were attestations of possessive pronouns, as illustrated in Example 10, or personal pronouns that denoted a singular referent, as Example 11 shows. Observations for which it was unclear whether the pronoun referred to a singular or plural referent were also removed from the dataset.

- (10) *omtrent twalif uren wierd getrommelt daar na volgde enige personen in **hun** hemde te paard met blote swaarde in de hand*  
(EGO-1750-HO-2)

‘Around twelve o’clock there was drumming, after which some people followed on horseback in their shirts, with bare swords in hand’

- (11) *nochtans weijgherde zij vut te ghane, zegghende, men heeft mijnen lieuen man, om dwoorts wille ter doot ghebrocht, ende al ons ghoet wech ghenomen, waer bij zal Jc aerme vrouwe nv ghaen leuen, men trooste **haer**, ten besten datmen conde*  
(EGO-1550-VL-1)

‘Nevertheless, she refused to leave, saying, they have put my dear husband to death for the sake of his words, and taken away all our goods; where shall I, a poor woman, go now to live? They comforted her as best as they could’

As several codifiers do not discuss reflexive pronouns as part of the accusative or dative case, plural pronouns with a reflexive function were not involved in the analysis either. Also dative constructions with *aan* ‘to’ (cf. Example 12) and other prepositional constructions were excluded from the results, as the prescription for the pronoun *hen* after a preposition was formalised only in the nineteenth century, while the general distinction between *hen* as the pronoun for the

accusative and *hun* as the pronoun for the dative was established already in the seventeenth century (Van der Horst, 2008, II, p. 1097; Van der Sijs, 2021, p. 427).

(12) *Wy begeiren [...] dat hun deel sal ontfangen worden door den Officier exploitteur, die het selve aen hun sal betaelen* (PAM-1750-VL-1)

‘We desire that their share shall be received by the executing officer, who will pay the same to them’

After cleaning the data, 331 personal pronouns that functioned as a direct or an indirect object and referred to a plural referent remained. These observations were annotated for the syntactic function (i.e. direct or indirect object) and the animacy of the referent. Except for four observations, all animate referees were human. For determining whether a personal pronoun was used in the accusative or dative case, I relied on my own sense of language, for which I applied the modern distinction between direct and indirect objects. In the discussion of the results, I therefore employ the concepts direct and indirect object alongside the concepts accusative and dative case.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Language norms

In this section, the results in language norms are presented. I first discuss the metalinguistic salience of the feature, before I elaborate on the prescriptions for the plural personal pronouns in the context of a direct or indirect object.

#### 4.1.1 Metalinguistic salience

Compared to other grammatical features that are investigated in this dissertation, the direct and indirect object forms of the plural personal pronoun are more prominently discussed in normative works. As Figure 62 shows, no fewer than 30 of the 73 works (41%) involve an explicit prescription on the topic, and thus discuss the pronouns that should be used as a direct and/or indirect object explicitly. The higher metalinguistic salience for this grammatical feature

is probably related to the fact that almost all full grammars include a discussion of case paradigms. Also compared to other grammatical features, like the comparative markers, for example, the issue is also mentioned early in the period under investigation. While comparative markers were explicitly discussed only from the eighteenth century onwards, explicit prescriptions on the plural personal pronouns appear more than a century earlier. This is related to the introduction of the accusative-dative distinction between *hen* and *hun* in the first half of the seventeenth century, of course. The drop in the metalinguistic salience in the second half of the seventeenth century, conversely, can be explained by the smaller number of grammars offering a comprehensive discussion of the case system. Most normative works in the corpus that were published in that period are spelling guides or basic elementary schoolbooks, which rarely discussed such case distinctions. From the eighteenth century onwards, the frequency of explicit prescriptions remains more or less the same.

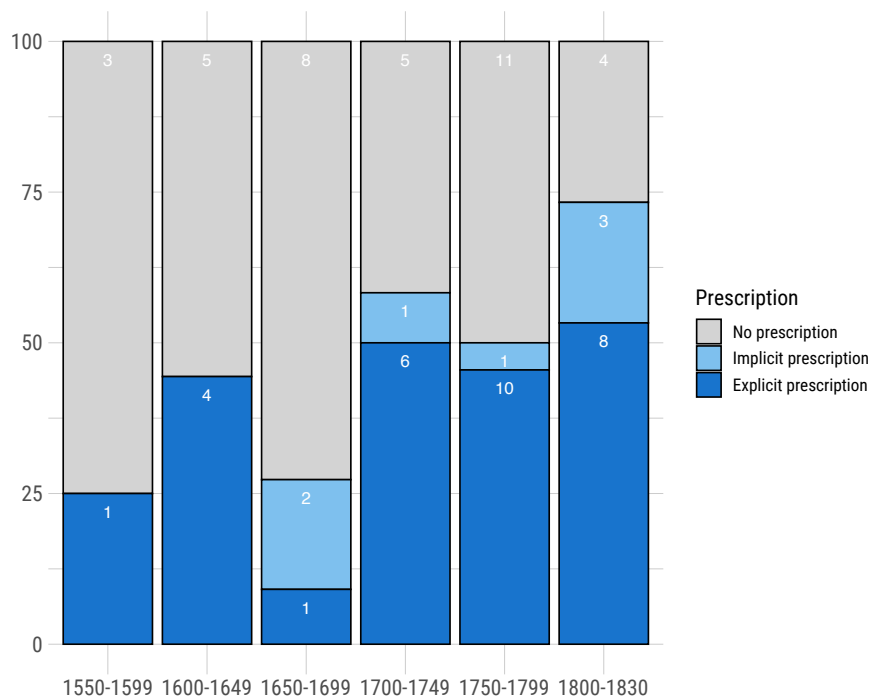


Figure 62: metalinguistic salience of the third-person plural object forms

#### 4.1.2 Prescriptions

Turning to the prescriptions now, which are first presented across the different grammatical genders. The discussion thus indicates which personal pronouns are prescribed for referring to masculine, feminine, and neuter plural referents. The prescriptions are merged into four variant types: *hun(l)*, *haar(l)/heur(l)*, *hen(l)*, and *ze*. For the first three types, both the short form and the elongated form fall within the mentioned variant. After this general overview of prescribed pronouns in Figure 63 and Figure 64, the discussed plots in this section show the prescriptions for masculine plural referents only. I decided to focus solely on the prescriptions for the masculine referents, since we know from the normative tradition that the pronoun alternation between *hen* and *hun* mainly applies to masculine referents.

##### Norms per grammatical gender

For the overview of prescriptions across grammatical gender, Figure 63 presents the pronouns that are prescribed as a direct object, while Figure 64 depicts the differences in prescribed forms for an indirect object.

As for the direct object forms, codifiers generally allow for more than one variant. However, the prescribed pronouns depend on the grammatical gender of the referent. Especially the prescriptions for the feminine plural referents diverge from their masculine and neuter counterparts. More specifically, the pronouns *haar(l)/heur(l)* are with 68.3% (n=28) of the prescribed variants the dominant variant for feminine referents, while the forms appear only once (neuter) or twice (masculine) in the prescriptions for the other grammatical genders. For masculine and neuter referents, the variant *hen(l)* is clearly the main prescribed form. It makes up for 64.8% (n=35) of the prescriptions for the masculine referents, and for 57.7% (n=15) of the neuter gender. The variant *hun(l)* is only a minority form in the prescriptions for the masculine (7.41%, n=4) and neuter (7.69%, n=2) referents. The pronoun *ze* shows up for all grammatical genders, and it is often prescribed as an alternative variant (cf. Table 19 in section 4.1.3).

### Direct object - accusative

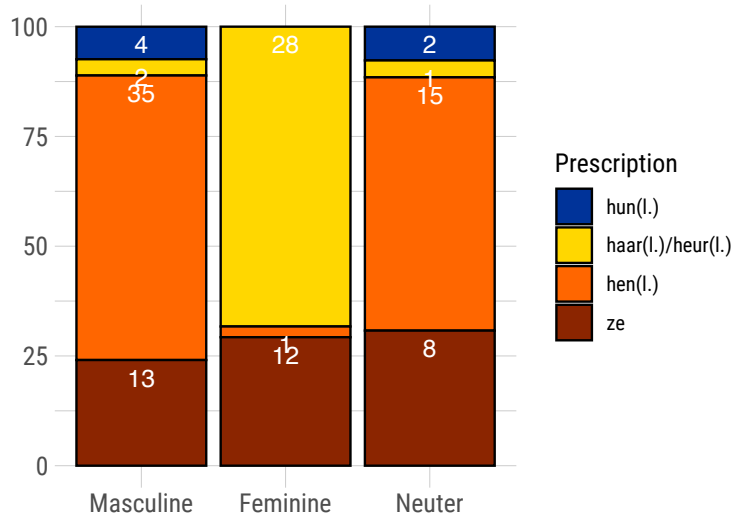


Figure 63: prescriptions for the direct object forms of the plural personal pronoun

### Indirect object - dative

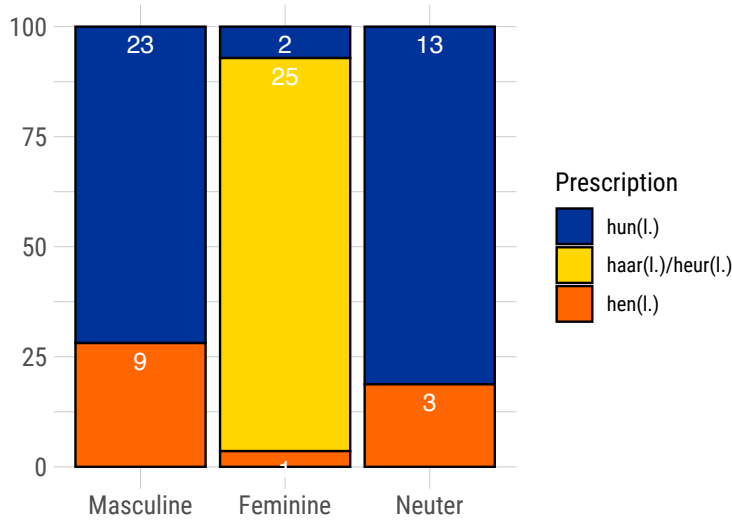


Figure 64: prescriptions for the indirect object forms of the plural personal pronoun

The prescriptions for the indirect object are less variable than those for the direct object, as Figure 64 summarises. Most apparent is the variant *ze*, which does not appear as a prescribed pronoun for an indirect object. Also, the variant *haar(l.)/heur(l.)* is clearly the preferred variant of norm givers for the feminine referents in the dative case (89.3%, n=25). The masculine and neuter forms again exhibit a similar pattern in the prescriptions, yet this time, *hun(l.)* is the main prescribed variant (i.e. 71.9%, n=23 for the masculine gender; 81.2%, n=13 for the neuter gender). The variant *hen(l.)* is prescribed (as an alternative variant) only by a few grammarians (cf. Table 19 in section 4.1.3).

### Norms per period – masculine referents

When we divide the results per century, and focus solely on the prescriptions for the masculine gender while also visualising differences between explicit and implicit prescriptions, we obtain Figure 65 for the direct object and Figure 66 for the indirect object.

Both plots show that grammarians increasingly discuss the syntactic distinction between the plural pronouns. As for the pronouns prescribed for the direct object, a preference for *hen(l.)* emerges in the seventeenth century (55.6%, n=5). While the proportions of the prescriptions remain more or less stable until the nineteenth century, the absolute frequencies indicate that more grammarians formulated an explicit prescription in the two most recent periods. Variability in the prescriptions persists in the nineteenth century. The pronoun *ze* is still explicitly prescribed, yet most codifiers choose *hen(l.)* as the preferred variant in the direct object position. The same preference for *hen(l.)* is observed in the (small number of) implicit prescriptions.

In Figure 66, we see the opposite pattern unfolding. The choice for *hun(l.)* as the prescribed variant for the indirect object is made in the seventeenth century. And although the variant *hen(l.)* is prescribed in 35.3% (n=6) of the explicit prescriptions in the eighteenth century, the pronoun *hun(l.)* remains the main prescribed variant. While the prescriptions for the direct object are still variable in the nineteenth century, *hun(l.)* thus clearly establishes as the only prescribed pronoun for the indirect object.

### Direct object - accusative

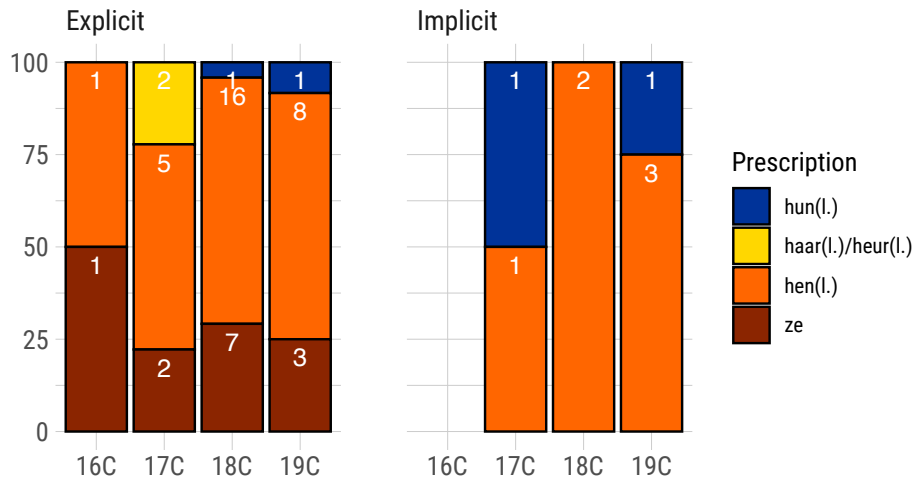


Figure 65: prescriptions for the direct object forms of the plural personal pronoun per period and per type of prescription – only prescriptions for masculine referents

### Indirect object - dative

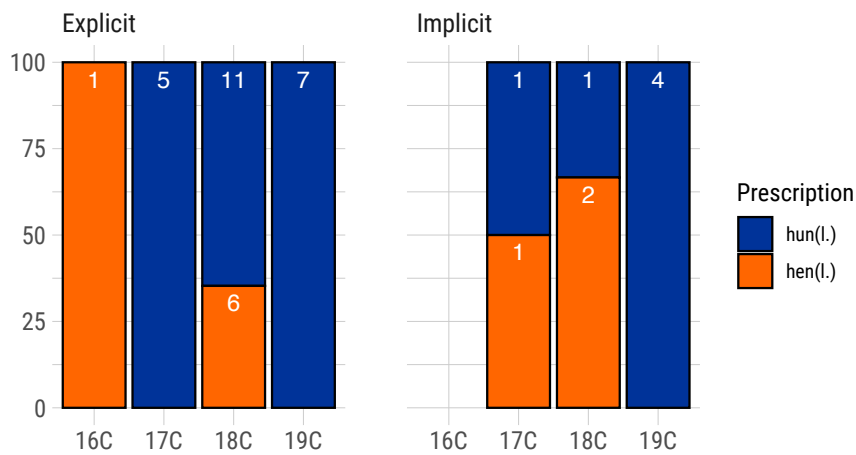


Figure 66: prescriptions for the indirect object forms of the plural personal pronoun per period and per type of prescription – only prescriptions for masculine referents

**Norms per period and area – masculine referents**

Splitting up the results for the Northern and the Southern Netherlands in Figure 67 and Figure 68, it is apparent that the object forms of the plural personal pronouns are more frequently discussed in normative works from the Northern part of the language area. This metalinguistic prominence in the North, however, also introduces a lot of diversity in the prescribed pronouns for the direct object. While the few Southern prescriptions favour *hen(l.)* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Northern norms prescribe four different variants in the seventeenth century. This variability in the North gradually disappears until only *hen(l.)* remains in the nineteenth-century prescriptions. At that time, more grammarians from the Southern Netherlands also formulate a prescription, which leads to an increase of variability in the Southern prescriptions. In addition to *hen(l.)*, Southern codifiers now also prescribe *hun(l.)* or *ze*, frequently treating them as equivalent variants to *hen(l.)* (cf. Table 19 in section 4.1.3).

For the indirect object, there is a distinctly defined norm in both parts of the language area. Almost all Northern grammarians recommend *hun(l.)* since the seventeenth century, whereas the Southern grammarians prescribe *hen(l.)*. This implies that Southern grammarians preferred the pronoun *hen(l.)* in both the accusative and dative case up until the nineteenth century.

As such, the accusative-dative distinction between the variants *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* is particularly pronounced in Northern language norms, where a preference for *hen(l.)* as the direct object form and *hun(l.)* as indirect object form emerges in the seventeenth century. However, the strict distinction, with prescriptions leaving no room for alternative variants, surfaces only in the nineteenth century. In the same period, the prescribed pronoun alternation emerges in Southern norms.

### Direct object - accusative

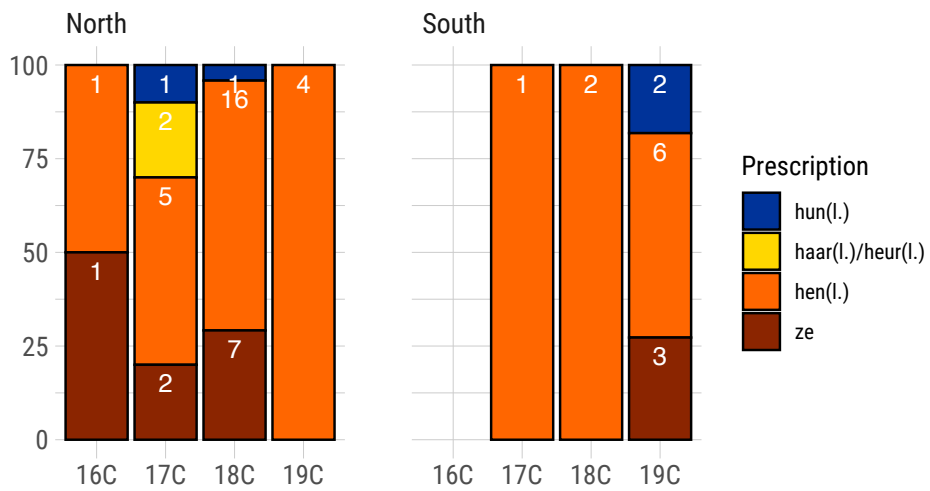


Figure 67: prescriptions for the direct object forms of the plural personal pronoun per period and area – only prescriptions for masculine referents

### Indirect object - dative

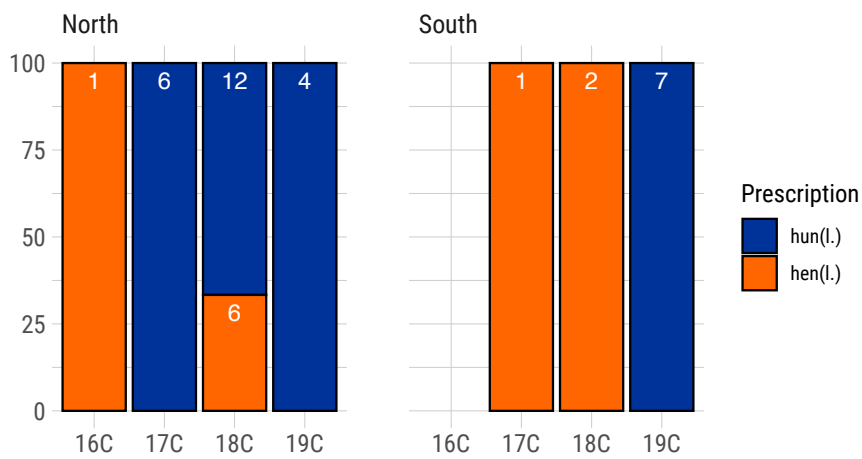


Figure 68: prescriptions for the indirect object forms of the plural personal pronoun per period and area – only prescriptions for masculine referents

### 4.1.3 Treatment of alternative variants

The prescriptions for the direct and indirect object forms already revealed that variability in the plural personal pronouns was accepted to a certain extent. Apart from the diverging pronouns that were prescribed for the different grammatical genders, norm givers frequently allowed for multiple pronouns within one grammatical gender, and especially in the accusative case. Table 19 gives a detailed overview of variation in language norms on the topic.

In Northern norms, a development from acceptance of variability to the one-form-one-function principle is observed. More specifically, in the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth centuries, the prescriptions for the direct object differ between grammarians, who frequently allow for optional variation within one grammatical gender. For example, a codifier like Van Heule (1633) prescribed *hen*, *haer*, and *ze* as masculine forms of the direct object, while Ten Kate (1723) favoured both *hen* and *hun* in the same context. As De Vos (2022, pp. 136-137) already suggested, more inter-grammarians consistency is attested in the further course of the eighteenth century. Northern grammarians then seem to align their prescriptions while also restricting the number of pronouns that could be used. Only the variant *ze* is maintained as a tolerated variant. In the nineteenth century eventually, most norm givers do not allow for optional variation anymore. Even though the introduced accusative-dative distinction for masculine and neuter referents faces strong criticism at the time, with norm givers like Siegenbeek (1804, p. 174) claiming that the case distinction between *hen* and *hun* is *ongegrond en noodeloos* ‘unfounded and unnecessary’, the same grammarians assert that the distinction is now widely applied that is better to maintain it. As such, *hen* and *hun* are set as the only personal pronouns for the masculine and neuter accusative and dative case respectively.

*daar de onderscheiding, welke Huydecoper tusschen hun en hen gemaakt heeft, door het gebruik alreeds gevestigd is, achte ik het raadzaamst, dezelve te behouden [...]. Den dichteren nogtans blijve het vrij, om hen en hun, even als haar en heur, onverschillig te gebruiken*  
(Siegenbeek, 1804, pp. 174-175)

‘Since the distinction that Huydecoper made between *hun* and *hen* has already been established in usage, I consider it advisable to maintain it. Nevertheless, poets should still be free to use *hen* and *hun*, as well as *haar* and *heur*, interchangeably’

The acceptance of alternative variants evolves differently in Southern prescriptions. The first codifier targeting a Southern readership with an explicit prescription is the Northern E.C.P. (1713), who prescribes only one variant for the masculine forms, and another variant for feminine referents, without even considering a case difference. Although a pronoun distinction between the accusative and dative case is still not made in the middle of the eighteenth century, more variation is then allowed for the direct object. Des Roches (s.d. [1761], p. 37), however, restricts the use of the alternative direct object variant *ze* to *den gemeenzaemen styl of samenspreékinge* ‘the colloquial style or way of speaking’. This restriction in norms evaporates soon, as most codifiers in the nineteenth century consider *ze* an equal variant to *hen* for the direct object. As for the indirect object, little variation is accepted, and the only optional form of variation that is tolerated, are prepositional forms like *aan hen* ‘to them’ (e.g. Ter Bruggen, 1817-1818) or the elongated form with *-lieden* (cf. Moke, 1823).

The direct and indirect object forms of the plural personal pronoun are thus prone to variation in language norms, with codifiers not only prescribing separate variants for the different grammatical genders in the accusative and dative case, but also tolerating – or even prescribing – optional variants which the writer can choose from. This rather liberal attitude towards optional variation is particularly pronounced in the norms for the direct object. However, Northern norms become stricter and more consistent in the second half of the eighteenth century. Southern codifiers, on the contrary, adopt a more lenient stance in the nineteenth century, at the time that the accusative-dative distinction in the plural personal pronouns gains prominence in the Southern normative discourse.

GRAMMARIAN	YEAR	AREA	DIRECT OBJECT		INDIRECT OBJECT		OTHER VARIANT
			PRESCR EXPL	PRESCR IMPL	PRESCR EXPL	PRESCR IMPL	
Lambrecht	1550	South	--	--	--	--	
Sexagius	1576	South	--	--	--	--	--
De Heuiter	1581	North	--	--	--	--	
Spiegel	1584	North	m:hen(luiden), ze f:haarluiden, ze	--	m:hen(luid en) f:haar(luide n)	--	--
Van der Schuere	1612	North	--	--	--	--	--
De Hubert	1624	North	--	--	--	--	--
Van Heule	1625	North	m:hen f:heur, heurl, haer	--	m:hun f:heur, heurl, haer	--	--
Dafforne	1627	North	--	--	--	--	--
Ampzing	1628	North	m:hen f:heur	--	m:hun f:heur	--	se: tolerated as DO
Plemp	1632	North	--	--	--	--	--
Van Heule	1633	North	m:haer, ze, hen f:heurr, ze	--	m:hun f:hun	--	--
Montanus	1635	North	--	--	--	--	--
Kók	1649	North	m:haar, ze, hen f:huer, ze n:haar, ze, hen	--	m:hun f:hun n:hun	--	--
Van der Weyden	1651	North	--	--	--	--	--
Leupenius	1653	North	--	m:hun f:heur	--	m:hun f:heur	--
Bolognino	1657	South	--	m:hen f:hen	--	m:hen f:hen	--
De Gelliers	1661 [± 1640]	North	--	--	--	--	--
Van Niervaart	1669 [± 1600]	North	--	--	--	--	--
Van Atteveld	1682	North	--	--	--	--	--
Gosens van Helderer	1683	North	--	--	--	--	--
Winschooten	1683	North	--	--	--	--	--
Vollenhove	1686	North	m:hen	--	m:hun	--	--
Duykerius	1696	North	--	--	--	--	--
Francius	1699	North	--	--	--	--	--
Van Geesdalle	1700	South	--	--	--	--	--
Nylöe	1703	North	--	--	--	--	--
Hilarides	1705	North	--	--	--	--	--
Moonen	1706	North	m:hen, ze f:haer, ze n:hen, ze	--	m:hun f:haer n:hun	--	--
Nylöe	1707	North	--	--	--	--	--
Séwel	1708	North	m:hen, zich, ze f:haar, ze	--	m:(aan) hen, hun, zich f:(aan) haar, zich	--	--

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Séwel	1712	North	m:hen, zich, ze f:haar, ze	--	m:(aan) hen, hun, zich f:(aan) haar, zich	--	--
E.C.P.	1713	North	<b>m:hen</b> lieden f:haerlieden	--	<b>m:hen</b> lieden f:haerlieden	--	--
Ten Kate	1723	North	<b>m:hen</b> , hun f:haer(lieden), heur <b>n:hen</b> , hun	--	<b>m:(aen)</b> hen, (aen) hun f:(aen) haer, (aen) heur <b>n:(aen)</b> hen, (aen) hun	--	<b>ze:</b> tolerated as DO
Huydecoper	1730	North	hen	--	hun	--	--
Hakvoord	1746 [1698]	North	--	<b>m:hen</b>	--	<b>m:hen</b>	--
Van Belle	1748	North	--	--	--	--	--
Verpoorten	1752	South	--	--	--	--	--
Van Belle	1755	North	--	--	--	--	--
P.B.	1757	South	--	--	--	--	--
Verpoorten	1759	South	--	--	--	--	--
Des Roches	[1761]	South	<b>m:hen</b> f:haer	--	<b>m:(aen)</b> hen f:(aen) haer	--	<b>ze:</b> tolerated as DO
Elzevier	1761	North	<b>m:hen</b> , ze f:haer, ze <b>n:hen</b> , ze	--	<b>m:hun</b> f:haer <b>n:hun</b>	--	--
De Haes	1764	North	<b>m:hen</b> , ze f:haer, ze <b>n:hen</b> , ze	--	<b>m:(aen)</b> hun f:(aen) haer <b>n:(aen)</b> hun	--	--
Van der Palm	1769	North	--	<b>m:hen</b> f:haer	--	--	--
Zeydelaar	1769	North	--	--	--	--	--
Zeydelaar	1772	North	<b>m:hen</b> , ze f:haar, ze <b>n:hen</b> , ze	--	<b>m:(aan)</b> hun f:(aan) haar <b>n:(aan)</b> hun	--	--
Van Belleghem & Waterschoot	[1773]	South	--	--	--	--	--
Janssens	[1775]	South	--	--	--	--	--
Van Boterdael	1776 [± 1774]	South	--	--	--	--	--
Cramer	1777 [± 1769]	North	--	--	--	--	--
Zeydelaar	1781	North	hen, ze	--	--	(aan) hun	--
Stéven	1784 [1714]	South	--	--	--	--	--
Ballieu	1792 [1771]	South	<b>m:hen</b> f:haer <b>n:hen</b>	--	--	<b>m:hen</b> f:haer <b>n:hen</b>	<b>hun:</b> reallocated
Van Bolhuis	1793	North	<b>m:hen</b> f:haar <b>n:hen</b>	--	<b>m:aan</b> hun f:aan haar <b>n:aan</b> hun	--	<b>heur:</b> tolerated for the feminine gender
Wester	1797	North	<b>m:hen</b> f:haar <b>n:hen</b>	--	<b>m:hun</b> f:haar <b>n:hun</b>	--	--
Van Varik	1799	North	<b>m:hen</b> f:haar, heur	--	<b>m:hun</b> f:haar, heur	--	--

Weiland	1799	North	m:hen f:haar n:hen	--	m:(aan) hen f:(aan) haar n:(aan) hen	--	hun: tolerated for m. + n. IO
Siegenbeek	1804	North	hen	f:haar, heur	hun	f:haar, heur	poets are free to choose
Weiland	1805	North	hen	--	hun	--	poets are free to choose
Schilperoort	1806	North	--	--	--	--	--
Anslijn	1814	North	--	m:hen f:haar	--	m:hun f:haar	--
Henckel	1815	South	m:hen, ze f:haer, ze n:hen, ze	--	m:aen hun f:aen haer n:aen hun	--	--
De Neckere	1815	South	hen	--	--	hun	--
Ter Bruggen	1817-1818 [1815]	South	m:hen, ze f:haer, ze n:hen, ze	hen	m:(aen) hun f:(aen) haer n:(aen) hun	--	--
Behaegel	1817	South	--	--	--	--	--
Cannaert	1823	South	--	--	--	--	--
Moke	1823	South	m:hen(lieden), ze f:haar(lieden), ze n:hen, ze	--	m:hun(lieden) f:haar(lieden) n:hun(lieden)	--	--
Willems	1824	South	--	--	--	--	--
Behaegel	[± 1825]	South	m:hun, hen f:haar n:hun, hen	--	m:hun f:haar n:hun	--	--
Bilderdijk	1826	North	--	hen	--	hun	--
De Simpel	[1827]	South	m:hen f:haar n:hen	--	m:hun, aan hen f:(aan) haar n:hun, aan hen	--	<b>heur:</b> tolerated as a feminine form in literature
Behaegel	[± 1829]	South	--	hun	--	hun	--

Table 19: norms and variant treatment third-person plural object forms

## Conclusion

The discussion of the language norms shows that the distinction between the accusative pronoun *hen(l.)* and the dative form *hun(l.)* was indeed a prominent topic in Northern grammars from the seventeenth century onwards. However, as was also indicated by De Vos (2022), the normative discussion on the feature reaches far beyond this binary distinction of plural personal pronouns. Not only do we attest different prescriptions for the individual grammatical genders, also the prescribed forms for the masculine gender diverge greatly. While *hen(l.)* clearly emerges as the main prescribed variant in the accusative case, and *hun(l.)* in the dative case, most grammarians promote multiple variants for masculine referents. The pronoun *ze* thereby holds a notable position as an alternative

variant in the accusative but not in the dative case. This optionality in accusative forms disappears from Northern norms in the nineteenth century, when codifiers strive for one-form-one-function symmetry. Northern codifiers then become consistent and stricter in their prescriptions, and solely *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* remain as the prescribed direct and indirect object forms.

In Southern norms, the accusative-dative distinction between *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* only becomes a topic of importance in the nineteenth century. In earlier times, Southern codifiers prescribed the variant *hen(l.)* for direct and indirect objects, and they thus did not make the case distinction that was introduced in Northern norms. In the nineteenth century, Southern norm givers suddenly shift their dative prescriptions from *hen(l.)* to *hun(l.)*. For the first time, Southern norms thus introduce an accusative-dative distinction, as is also indicated by the Flemish grammarian Moke (1823, p. 49), who mentions:

*Het onderscheid tussen hen en hun, wegens naamval, werd éértijds niet waargenomen, oók ziet men dit in de vlaamsche spraakkunsten méést verkeérdelijk opgegeven. Wij gelooven niet dat dit onderscheid van een groot gewigt zij, evenwel hebben wij dienaangaande het hedendaags méést doorgaande gebruik, hoe kortelings oók ingevoerd, als den verkieslijken regel voorgehouden* (Moke, 1823, p. 49)

‘The distinction between *hen* and *hun*, based on case, was not previously distinguished, and it is also often incorrectly stated in Flemish grammars. We do not believe that this distinction is of great importance; nevertheless, we have held the most common contemporary usage, although recently introduced, as the preferable rule’

Since this normative change takes place in the early nineteenth century, and particularly during the period of Dutch reign in the Southern Netherlands, the increased contact with Northern language norms may have influenced Southern codifiers in adopting the ‘Northern’ case distinction between *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* (cf. Vosters et al., 2014).

## 4.2 Language use

In this section, the results for the direct and indirect object forms of the plural personal pronouns in language use are discussed. The observed results from the *HCD* are analysed with descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. For the descriptive analysis of the results, all variants that are attested in the usage corpus are analysed. As for the inferential statistics, a binomial logistic regression analysis is carried out on the results of *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* as the main variants in the usage corpus. The minority variant *haar(l.)* is not included in the regression analysis, since the variant is commonly used as a feminine pronoun and can therefore not simply be juxtaposed to traditionally masculine and neuter pronouns. The variant *ze* is not considered in the statistical analysis either, since the form is mostly used for referring to inanimate referents and can therefore not be seen as a full equivalent of *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)*, which are primarily used for referring to animate referents.

I began model building with a minimal logistic regression model, using the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) to identify the base model with the best balance between fit and complexity. I incrementally added different fixed predictors and interactions of interest, retaining them if they improved model quality and accuracy. While I considered incorporating random effects to account for potential variability across individual texts, a mixed-effects approach led to excessive model complexity and convergence issues.

Ultimately, the best model fit and accuracy were achieved with a simple logistic regression model that included the fixed predictors *period*, *region*, *genre*, and *function* of the pronoun, along with interactions between *period* and *function*, and between *region* and *function* (AIC: 214.36, C-statistic: 0.94,  $R^2$  Tjur: 0.59, classification accuracy: 85%). However, the model encountered complete separation issues for the response variable (i.e. the occurrence of *hen* vs. *hun*) within the reference level, leading to inflated standard errors and unreliable estimates for the interaction terms. Attempts to address this by altering the reference level or excluding the levels where complete separation occurred (specifically, the entire sixteenth century) were unsuccessful.

Therefore, I opted to use a regression model which retained the same fixed predictors but excluded the interaction terms. This model avoided the problems associated with complete separation and provided more reliable estimates. The results of this logistic regression analysis are summarised in Figure 69, where the estimates show the log-odds of the pronoun *hun(l.)* as incoming form. With an  $R^2$  Tjur of 0.54, a C-index of 0.92, and a classification accuracy of 82%, the model performance metrics indicate that the regression model is effective in discriminating between classes and has a good overall predictive power.

<b>Main effects on the occurrence of 'hun(l.)' as incoming form</b>			
<i>Predictors</i>	<i>Log-Odds</i>	<i>CI</i>	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	-5.59	-7.25 – -4.17	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
PERIOD - 17th century	3.83	2.61 – 5.29	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
PERIOD - 18th century	4.50	3.30 – 5.94	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
PERIOD - 19th century	5.01	3.78 – 6.49	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
REGION - Zeeland	-0.25	-1.52 – 1.00	0.694
REGION - Brabant	1.22	0.30 – 2.18	<b>0.011</b>
REGION - Vlaanderen	2.36	1.29 – 3.52	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
GENRE - Administrative	0.76	-0.10 – 1.68	0.091
GENRE - Ego-documents	1.47	0.29 – 2.78	<b>0.020</b>
FUNCTION - Indirect object	1.26	0.49 – 2.08	<b>0.002</b>
Observations	281		
$R^2$ Tjur	0.537		

Figure 69: regression table of the main effects on the occurrence of *hun(l.)* as the incoming form in language use

In what follows in this section, I present the observed results in language use, employing descriptive statistical techniques, alongside the predictions of the regression model. Where applicable, effect plots are used to shed light on the significant effects.

### General distribution

The plural personal pronouns that are employed in the *HCD* as direct or indirect object forms are presented in Figure 70, which shows the general distribution of the variants in language use. From the 331 observations that were obtained, two main variants arise. The pronoun *hun* is the dominant variant with a relative proportion of 45.3% (n=150), followed by *hen* which shows up in 34.4% (n=114) of the results. The remaining 20.3% of the datapoints are divided among the pronouns *haar* (8.2%), *ze* (7.0%), *henlieden/-luiden* (4.2%), and *hunlieden/-luiden* (0.9%).

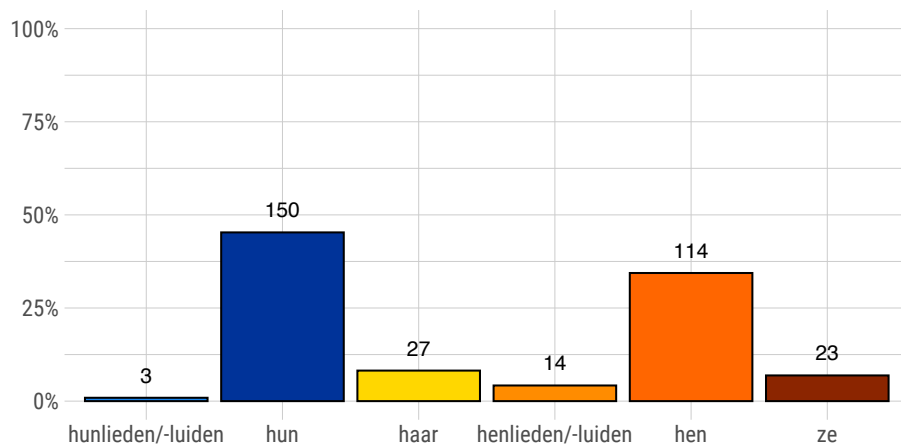


Figure 70: general distribution of object forms of the plural personal pronoun

Merging these pronouns into the four variant categories that were also discussed in language norms, Figure 71 summarises the distribution of the variants across the syntactic function of the pronoun, i.e. whether the pronoun acts as a direct or indirect object.

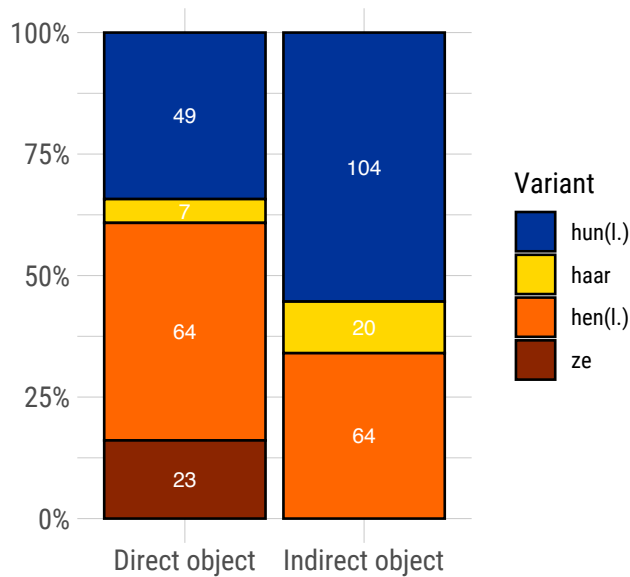


Figure 71: general distribution of object forms of the plural personal pronoun per function

From the 143 plural pronouns that function as a direct object, the form *hen(l.)* is dominantly used (44.8%,  $n=64$ ). For the indirect object, 188 results were attested in the usage corpus. In this syntactic case, 55.3% ( $n=104$ ) of the results were observations of *hun(l.)*. Figure 71 demonstrates that the pronoun use for the direct and indirect object is variable, and that the variant *hen(l.)* is also the second largest variant for the indirect object (34.0%,  $n=64$ ), while the form *hun(l.)* is also applied for the direct object (34.2%,  $n=49$ ). Nonetheless, as the effect plot in Figure 72 illustrates, the regression model indicates a significantly higher occurrence of the variant *hun(l.)* as an indirect object compared to the direct object as the reference level ( $p = 0.002$ ).

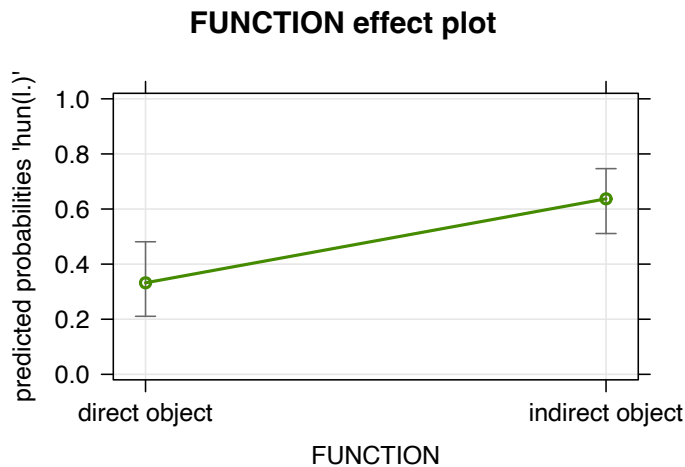


Figure 72: effect plot *function* – object forms plural personal pronoun

Turning to the other possible pronouns, Figure 71 shows that the plural form *haar* takes up a minority position in usage (i.e. 4.8% as a direct object; 10.6% as an indirect object). Note that, while *haar* was only rarely prescribed for masculine referents, these results summarise the occurrence of the form across the different (grammatical) genders. Example 13, for instance, illustrates that the observations of *haar* also include references to plural feminine referents. This anyhow suggests a very low overall frequency of the pronoun *haar* as a plural object form.

- (13) *Na de mis, geweerdigt hy zich het ontbijt in het huis der overste te nemen, daarna geeft hy aen de vereenigde Beggynen eene vaderlyke vermaning, haer opwekkende om met moed en vertrouwen, niet tegenstaende alle moeijelykheden, het begonnen werk der herstelling van het Hof voortzetten*  
(EGO-1850-VL-3)

‘After the mass, he honoured himself by taking breakfast in the house of the superior; afterwards, he gave a fatherly admonition to the united beguines, encouraging them to continue the work of restoring the court with courage and confidence, despite all difficulties’

The pronoun *ze*, which historical codifiers often promoted as an alternative variant for the direct object, indeed appears exclusively as a direct object in usage (16.1%, n=23). However, further investigation reveals that 15 out of the

23 observations of *ze* (65%) referred to inanimate referents, as demonstrated in Example 14. *Ze* is thus solely a minority variant for plural animate referents in usage.

(14) *De wetgevende magt maakt de Wetten, de regterlijke magt past ze toe*  
(PAM-1850-HO-5)

‘The legislative power makes the laws; the judicial power applies them’

### Per period

Measuring the probability that *hun(l.)* will be used instead of *hen(l.)* across the different periods, the regression model shows a positive significant effect in the seventeenth ( $p < 0.001$ ), eighteenth ( $p < 0.001$ ), and nineteenth ( $p < 0.001$ ) centuries, when compared to the sixteenth century as the reference level. A pairwise comparison additionally reveals that the use of *hun(l.)* differs significantly between the seventeenth and the nineteenth century ( $p = 0.02$ ), but not when comparing the seventeenth to the eighteenth, and the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. As the effect plot in Figure 73 illustrates, the statistical analysis thus indicates that the use of the pronoun *hun(l.)* increases over time, yet the increase is only significant when compared to the sixteenth century, or when the nineteenth century is set against the seventeenth century.

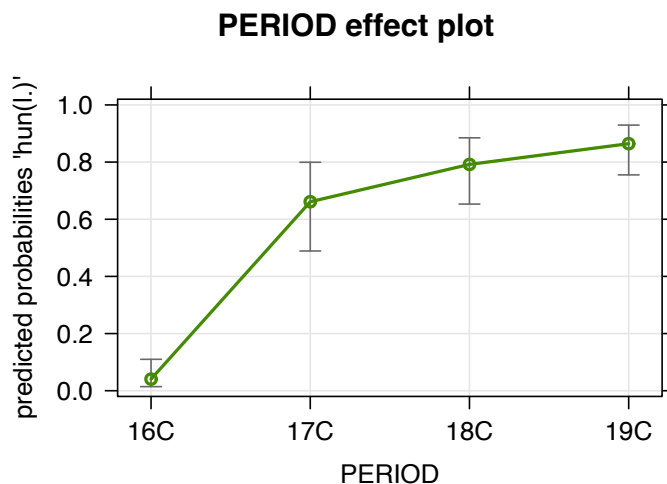


Figure 73: effect plot *period* - object forms plural personal pronoun

Of course, the regression model considers only the occurrence of *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* over time, not accounting for the function of the pronoun. All observations from the usage corpus are therefore summarised into Figure 74, where the relative proportions of each variant category are visualised per period, also factoring in the syntactic function of the pronoun.

It is immediately clear that *hen(l.)* was the most common plural pronoun in the sixteenth century, irrespective of the grammatical function. With 97.2% (n=35) of the instances of the direct object, and 77.4% (n=41) of the indirect object, *hen(l.)* is indeed the majority variant both as a direct and indirect object. However, the variant experiences a general decline in seventeenth-century usage. As a direct object, the form is then used only in 13% (n=3) of the instances. Although *hen(l.)* rises again as a direct object in the eighteenth century (44.4%, n=16), the variant does not grow into a dominant variant anymore, as is indicated by its decrease in the nineteenth century (20.8%, n=10). As an indirect object, the pronoun *hen(l.)* knows a gradual decline until it becomes a marginal variant in the nineteenth century (9.5%, n=4).

This demise of *hen(l.)* as an indirect object is accompanied by a strong increase of the variant *hun(l.)*. This pronoun increases until it reaches 92.7% (n=38) in the nineteenth century. Moreover, along with its dominance as an indirect object, the variant *hun(l.)* also takes up a considerable role as a direct object, where its frequency strongly inclines from 2.8% (n=1) in the sixteenth century to 52.2% (n=12) in the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the pronoun *hun(l.)* stabilises as a direct object with proportions ranging from 33.3% (n=12) to 50% (n=24).

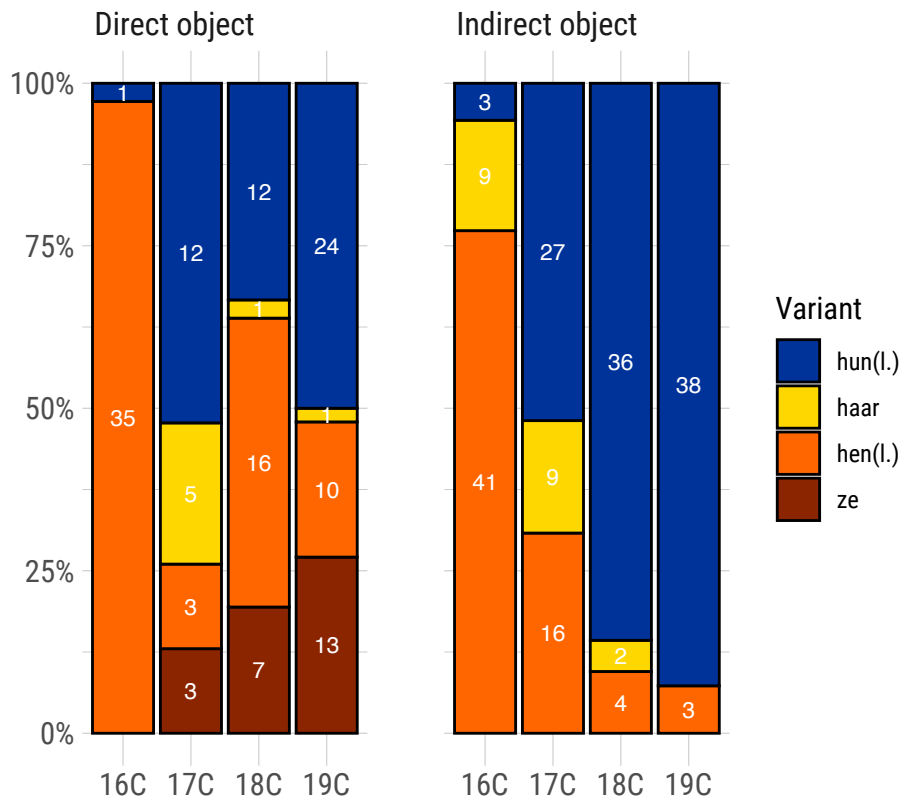


Figure 74: object forms of the plural personal pronoun per period and function

The variant *haar* shows up as a minority variant in the accusative and dative case. After its strongest use in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with occurrences of around 17-21% in both cases, the proportions of form decline to less than 5% in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The alternative variant *ze* appears only as a direct object. This pronoun shows up for the first time in the seventeenth century (13%, n=3), from whence it gradually increases to 27.1% (n=13) in nineteenth-century usage. However, as mentioned before, most of these observations refer to inanimate referents.

While a compelling shift to *hun(l.)* is thus observed for the indirect object, the pattern of change is much less clear for the direct object. In this grammatical case, more variability is attested, and there certainly is no convincing increase of one variant. Perhaps regional differences shed more light on the matter.

### Per period and region – area

In addition to the influence of *period*, the regression model indicates a main effect of the predictor *region*. More specifically, a significant effect is determined for Brabant ( $p = 0.011$ ), and Vlaanderen ( $p = < 0.001$ ), suggesting a significantly increased use of *hun(l.)* in the two Southern regions, when opposed to Holland as the reference level. Furthermore, a pairwise comparison of the different regions also indicates a significant effect of Brabant ( $p = 0.012$ ) and Vlaanderen ( $p = < 0.001$ ) when contrasted to Zeeland. The usage between Holland and Zeeland, on the contrary, does not differ significantly. While such predictions initially suggest a broader distinction between Northern and Southern usage, the regression model shows that differences within the individual regions explain more variation than broader geographical categorisations. After all, the pairwise comparison demonstrated that the use of the pronoun *hun(l.)* also deviates significantly when comparing Vlaanderen to Brabant ( $p = 0.02$ ), with the model predicting a stronger use of *hun(l.)* in Vlaanderen. This means that we cannot simply distinguish between Northern and Southern usage when it comes to the use of these plural pronouns. While there is no significant difference in usage between Holland and Zeeland, Brabant and Vlaanderen show distinct variations, not only from the Northern regions, but also from each other. As shown in the effect plot in Figure 75, the regression model thus suggests an increased use of *hun(l.)* in Brabant, and an even higher frequency of the form in Vlaanderen.

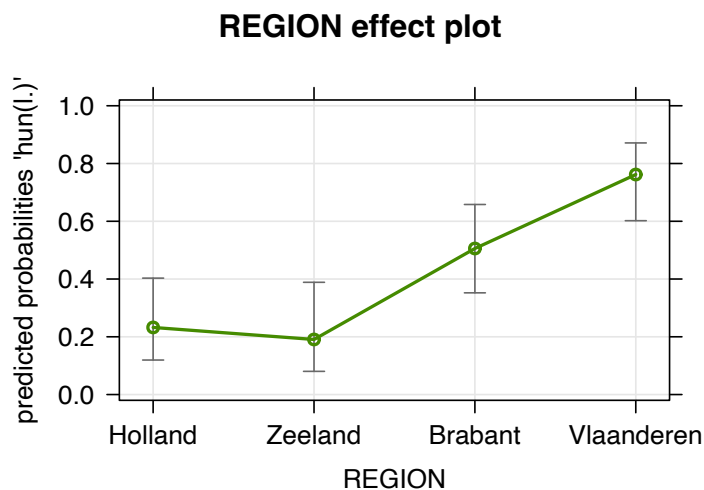


Figure 75: effect plot *region* - object forms plural personal pronoun

Turning to the actual observations, Figure 76 outlines usage across the investigated regions while also accounting for the function of the pronoun. Note that we are observing a relatively small number of observations, which leads to a skewed view of the relative proportions, especially in the regions of Holland and Zeeland.

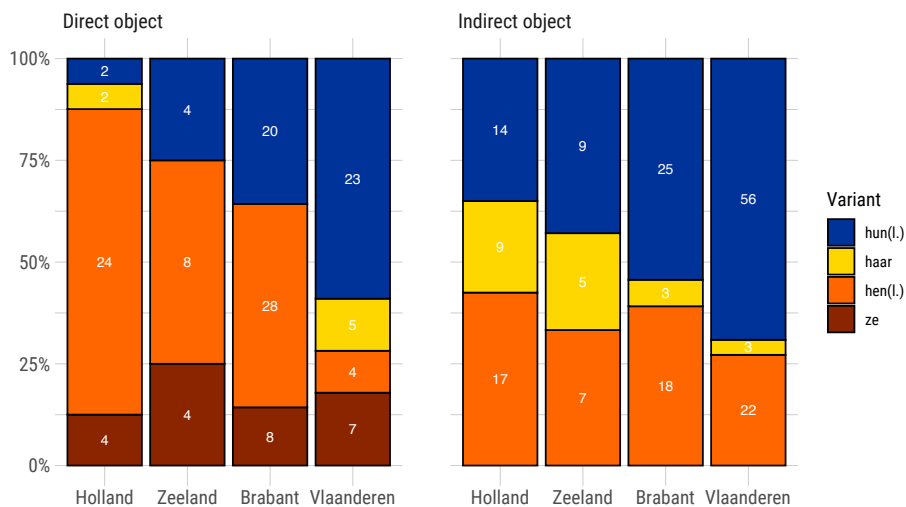


Figure 76: object forms of the plural personal pronoun per region and function

First, the alternative variants *ze* and *haar* are attested in every region. Both are minority forms with comparable frequencies across the four regions. Focusing on the two main variants, then, the proportions of *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* differ considerably across the investigated regions. As was also indicated by the regression model, the pronoun *hun(l.)* is used more frequently in Brabant and Vlaanderen. However, the observed data now also illustrate that *hun(l.)* maintains strong as both a direct and indirect object in the Southern regions. In Vlaanderen, the variant is actually the predominant pronoun in both syntactic cases (viz. 69.1% as direct object; 59.0% as indirect object). In the Northern regions, conversely, *hun(l.)* is never a dominant variant. In Holland, in particular, *hen(l.)* prevails as a direct object form (75.0%), yet it is also frequently applied for the indirect object (42.5%). Zeeland and Brabant demonstrate less pronounced proportions of one variant. Although both regions employ *hen(l.)*

more often as a direct object, and *hun(l.)* as an indirect object, Zeeland and Brabant use the two variants to a considerable extent in each syntactic case.<sup>74</sup>

Although the results so far already showed that a division by parts of the language area is not appropriate due to strong regional differences, I present the results divided by area and by period in Figure 77. This is necessary if we want to shed light on the diachronic development while also considering geographic differences. The interaction between region, period, and function contains only a very low number of datapoints, resulting in a possibly unreliable representation of the development. Thus, despite using the North-South division, the results are interpreted with nuance for the regional differences.

When analysing whether a distinction is made between the pronouns used as a direct and indirect object, no rigid distinction is made in one of the areas. In the Northern Netherlands, it is possible that a case distinction is at play from the eighteenth century onwards. At that time, the use of the prescribed *hen(l.)* as direct object increases to 57.1%, whereas for the indirect object, the promoted variant *hun(l.)* inclines from 42.9% to 83.3%, yet only in the nineteenth century. A detailed look at the results per region reveals that an absolute distinction between *hen(l.)* and *ze* as direct object forms, and *hun(l.)* as the indirect object variant, is made in Holland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Zeeland, variability in the use of pronouns remains, with both *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* being used as direct and indirect object forms.

For the Southern Netherlands, Figure 77 shows a temporary increase of *hen(l.)* as a direct object in the eighteenth century (36.4%). The alternative variant *ze* inclines to 25% in the nineteenth century, while *hen(l.)* decreases again in favour of *hun(l.)*. The regional differences also indicate that the initial increase of *hen(l.)* in the eighteenth century is entirely situated in Brabant. Language use in Vlaanderen does not show any sign of *hen(l.)* at the time.

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<sup>74</sup> Direct object: 50.0% *hen(l.)* vs. 25.0% *hun(l.)* in Zeeland; 50.0% *hen(l.)* vs. 35.7% *hun(l.)* in Brabant  
Indirect object: 42.9% *hun(l.)* vs. 33.3% *hen(l.)* in Zeeland; 54.3% *hun(l.)* vs. 39.1% *hen(l.)* in Brabant

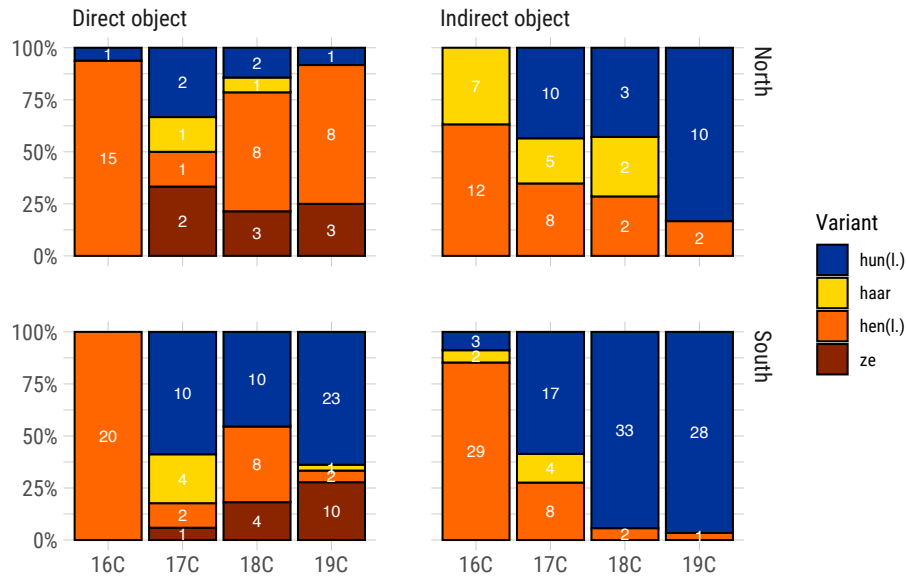


Figure 77: object forms of the plural personal pronoun per period, area, and function

While the picture is thus somewhat scattered for the direct object, Brabant and Vlaanderen completely align for the indirect object. The pattern that Figure 77 draws for Southern usage is thus applicable to both regions. Brabant and Vlaanderen showcase a considerable proportion of *hun(l.)* already in the seventeenth century (viz. 43.8%, n=7 in Brabant vs. 76.9%, n=10 in Vlaanderen), and the use of this pronoun increases in the eighteenth century until uniformity is (almost) reached (viz. 84.6%, n=11 in Brabant vs. 100%, n=22 in Vlaanderen).

Thus, these results indicate that the proposed syntactic distinction between the plural pronouns *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* was possibly made in Holland and Brabant during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, yet other regions do not convincingly follow this syntactic differentiation. In Zeeland, the usage rates of *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* remain high for both direct and indirect objects, whereas in Vlaanderen, *hun(l.)* is typically used regardless of the syntactic context.

### Per genre

Finally, the regression model indicates a significant effect of the predictor *genre*, with usage in the ego-documents differing significantly from the pamphlets as a reference level ( $p = 0.02$ ). As the effect plots in Figure 78 shows, the regression model predicts a positive effect, which means that a significantly higher frequency of *hun(l)* is estimated for the genre of ego-documents.

#### GENRE effect plot

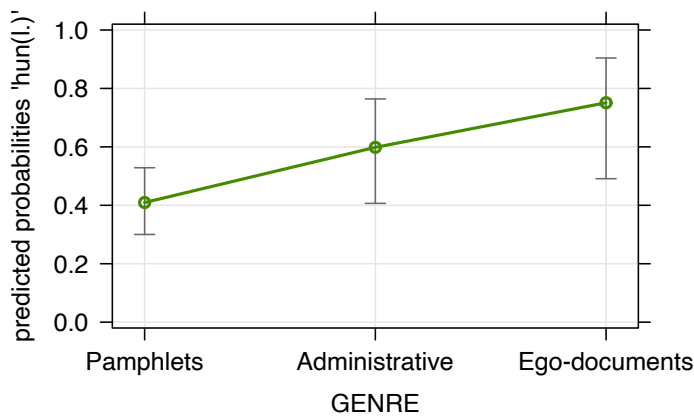


Figure 78: effect plot *genre* - object forms plural personal pronoun

The observed results from the usage corpus confirm the predictions of the regression model, although nuance is required with regards to the pronouns *haar* and *ze*. In fact, the relative proportions of *haar* and *ze* are the highest in the ego-documents, as Figure 79 shows. *Ze* is with 12.1% used most often in ego-documents. This is not very surprising, since we know from contemporary grammars (e.g. Haeseryn et al., 1997) that *ze* is typically used as a plural pronoun in spoken and informal registers. Although the differences between the other genres in the *HCD* are small, a similar register distinction possibly existed in the past as well. As for the plural pronoun *haar*, the form also is used most frequently in the genre of ego-documents, where it constitutes 40% of the results of the indirect object. Apart from an individual occurrence of *haar* in the administrative texts, the pronoun also shows up in the pamphlets (viz. 7.4% as direct object and 8% as indirect object), albeit to a smaller extent than in the ego-documents.

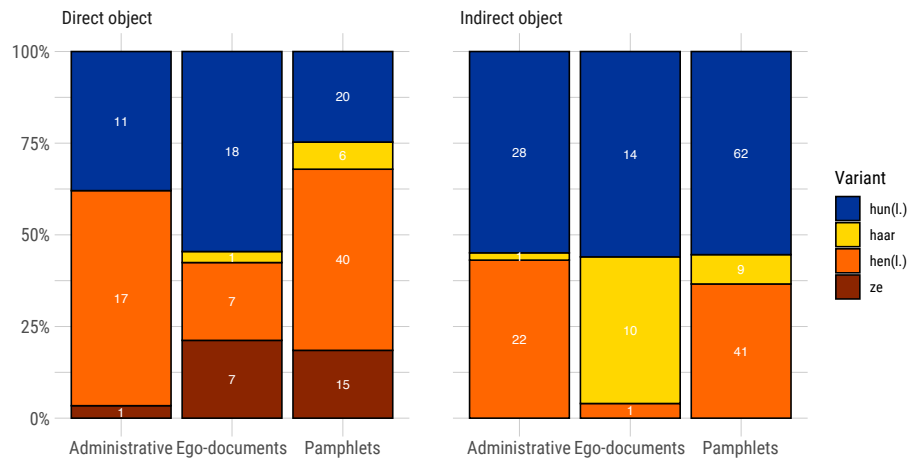


Figure 79: object forms of the plural personal pronoun per genre and function

Of course, the main variants in usage are still *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)*, which are employed as direct and indirect object forms across all genres. This is also illustrated in Figure 79. The plot shows that the pronoun *hen(l.)* is used most frequently as a direct object in the administrative texts (58.6%) and pamphlets (49.4%), yet these formal or printed genres also have the greatest use of *hen(l.)* as an indirect object (viz. 43.1% in the administrative texts; 36.6% in the pamphlets), suggesting that no strict case distinction was applied in these genres. Interestingly, this exact pattern, in which administrative texts and pamphlets apply *hen(l.)* as the dominant variant for the direct and indirect object, is pronounced in the Northern and Southern Netherlands. The ego-documents, on the contrary, have the smallest use of *hen(l.)*. As such, these findings show that the use of plural pronouns also differs between the genres in the usage corpus. While (especially Southern) ego-documents have the greatest proportions of *hun(l.)*, the more formal administrative texts and printed pamphlets employ *hen(l.)* most frequently, regardless of the syntactic function.

## Conclusion

As could be expected from previous studies (e.g. De Vogelaer & Coussé, 2008), the results in language use revealed that variation is prevalent for the object forms of the plural personal pronouns. The current analysis shows that large parts of variation appear to be driven by sociolinguistic forces. Focusing on the pronouns *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)*, a general change from *hen(l.)* to *hun(l.)* is observed after the sixteenth century. This is particularly true for the indirect object, where a gradual change to *hun(l.)* emerges in the period under investigation. This pronoun, however, also gains prominence as a direct object in the seventeenth century. Although the use of *hen(l.)* thus decreases in favour of *hun(l.)*, the pronoun *hen(l.)* remains a main variant in usage. It is mainly used as a direct object, alongside alternative forms like *ze* and *haar*.

General genre differences are also observed. The results from the corpus analysis indicate that pamphlets and administrative texts strongly adhere to *hen(l.)* in both grammatical contexts, whereas ego-documents exhibit more variable usage and are more influenced by geographical differences. These findings may align with what is attested in contemporary research, which shows that the written language prefers the pronoun *hen* irrespective of the grammatical function of the pronoun (e.g. De Rooij, 1990, 1991; Hubers et al. 2020).

Furthermore, no compelling syntactic distinction in pronoun usage is attested before the eighteenth century. Instead, the results from language use suggest that the use of certain pronouns rather depends on regional preferences. Despite the reigning variation in usage, *hen(l.)* appears to be specifically favoured in Holland, while *hun(l.)* is predominantly used in Vlaanderen. Brabant also shows a stronger inclination towards *hun(l.)* compared to Holland (and to a lesser extent, Zeeland). After the eighteenth century, a clearer syntactic distinction emerges in pronoun usage, with solely *hen(l.)* and *ze* being used as direct object variants, and *hun(l.)* as the indirect object form. This distinction seems most pronounced in Holland and Brabant. In Vlaanderen, *hun(l.)* remains the dominant form for both direct and indirect objects.

While these changes in usage certainly reveal broader sociolinguistic patterns in pronoun use and suggest the possibility of syntactic differentiation, it is important to approach this conclusion with caution. Due to the low frequency of

data, especially when correlating multiple sociolinguistic factors in the analysis, providing a solid overview of the development of plural pronouns and the presence of a syntactic distinction is not feasible. It would therefore be prudent to consider the patterns identified here as hypotheses for further investigation in larger corpus studies. Although the scarcity of data also complicates the evaluation of prescriptive influence, particularly in determining the extent of prescriptive interference in a fine-grained manner, the analysis presented in the remaining of this chapter builds on the current observations. However, these findings are also supplemented with the usage patterns of individual language users. By incorporating this micro-level analysis, I aim to achieve the granularity that cannot be attained at the macro level due to the aforementioned reasons.

### **4.3 Prescriptive influence**

In this section, I investigate whether the changes attested in usage were caused or influenced by prescriptivism. The results in language norms and language use are discussed together, and patterns of variation and change are compared in both to determine the chronology of language change. For both syntactic functions, the developments in language norms and usage are visualised per year in Figure 80 and Figure 81 for the direct object, and in Figure 82 and Figure 83 for the indirect object. For the visualisation of the development per year, the observed results are projected onto an underlying numeric scale with equal distance between the different variants.

**Chronology of language change**

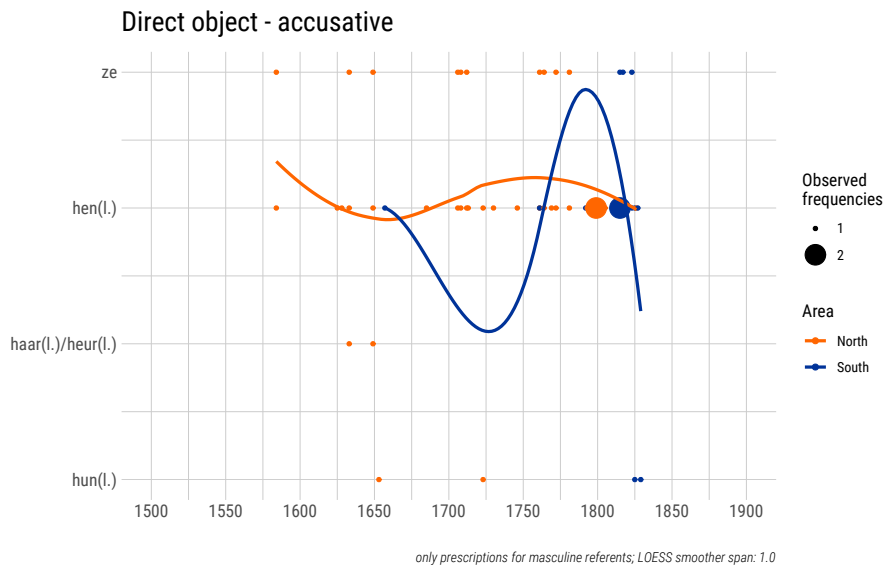


Figure 80: prescriptions direct object forms of the plural personal pronoun per year and per area

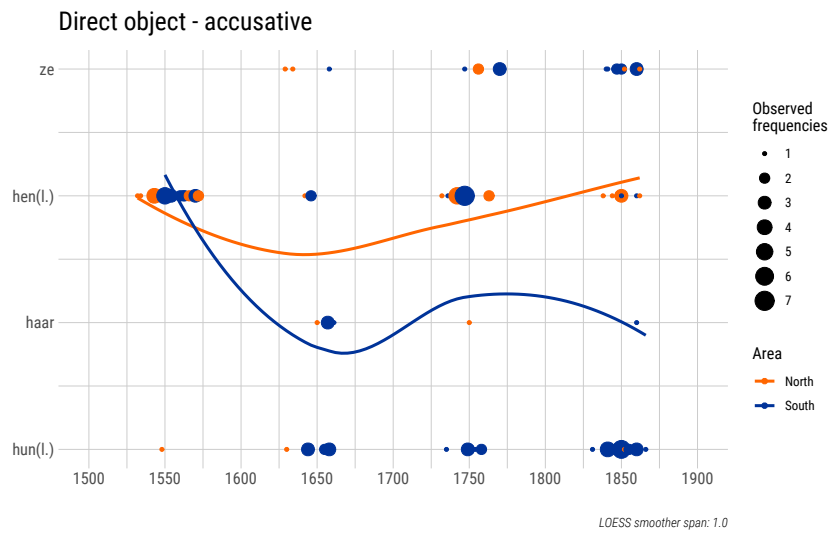


Figure 81: language use direct object forms of the plural personal pronoun per year and per area

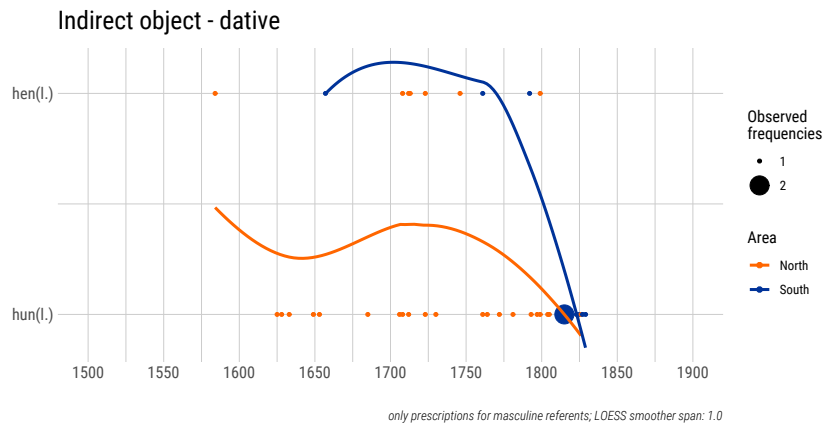


Figure 82: prescriptions indirect object forms plural personal pronouns per year and per area

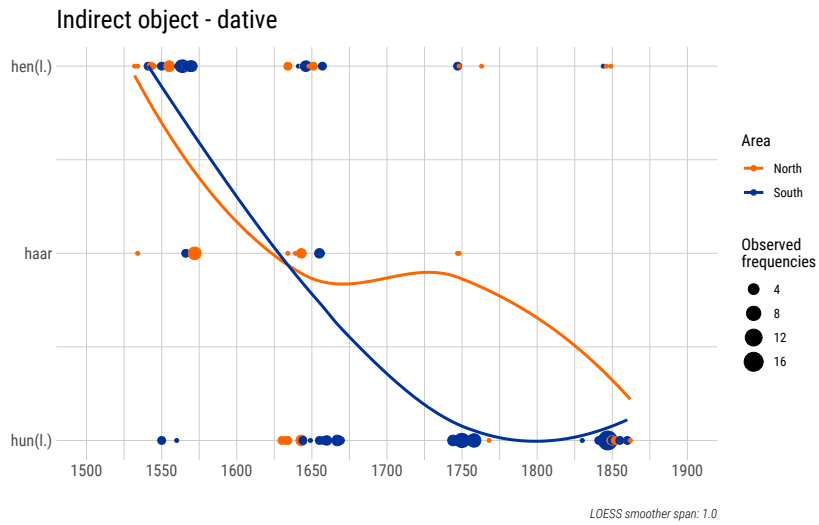


Figure 83: language use indirect object forms of the plural personal pronoun per year and per area

Before the first language norms on the object forms of the plural personal pronouns were formulated, language use in the sixteenth century was more or less uniform, with language users in the Northern and Southern Netherlands using the pronoun *hen(l.)* for both the direct and indirect object. The variant *hun(l.)* was rarely applied, and only by individual language users. When Spiegel (1584) formulated the first explicit prescription on the topic, he promoted the variant *hen(l.)* for both the accusative and dative case, and thus did not make a case distinction for the plural pronouns. This codifier therefore rather reflects patterns in usage in the sixteenth century, without exerting an impact on usage. A few decades later, Van Heule (1625) introduced the famous accusative-dative distinction between *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)*. In 1633, he reiterated this distinction, while also adding the pronouns *haer* as an alternative variant for plural masculine referents, and *heurr* for plural feminine referents in the accusative case. The prescriptions for these alternative forms, which diverged from general usage, do not seem to have changed usage. As for the diverging use between *hen(l.)/ze* vs. *hun(l.)*, however, Northern usage aligns with the syntactic distinction that Van Heule introduced in norms, as we observe usage for the indirect object changing to *hun(l.)* in the seventeenth century, whereas eighteenth-century usage indicates that *hen(l.)* remains in use as a direct object. Most of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century codifiers in the North also adhere to Van Heule's distinction, and Northern usage thus largely reflects the exact difference that norms propagated. With Northern prescriptions and usage aligning, possibilities of prescriptive interference certainly arise in Northern usage.

As was already explained in section 4.1, the object forms of the plural personal pronouns are less frequently discussed in normative works in the Southern Netherlands, which makes prescriptive influence already less evident. For example, the first (implicit) prescription on the topic emerges only in the seventeenth century, and it is not until the beginning of the eighteenth century that a Northern grammarian targeted a Southern readership and explicitly prescribed *hen(l.)* as the accusative and dative variant in Southern usage. The example of solely prescribing one variant for both syntactic cases is also followed by other norm givers in the South, like Des Roches (s.d. [1761]) and Ballieu (1792) in the eighteenth century. Before these prescriptions appeared, Southern language use was already applying both pronouns *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* as a direct object, and *hun(l.)* as an indirect object. Although large-scale prescriptive

interference of these grammarians is thus unlikely, there is still an instance in which norm givers may have influenced Southern language use, as I will explain later. While patterns in Southern norms and usage thus largely diverge until the eighteenth century, a partial convergence of norms and usage is attested for the dative case in the nineteenth century. In this case, the change in usage entirely precedes the adapted norms, thus diminishing the possibility of prescriptive interference. Although the scatter plots also do not suggest aligning developments for the direct object, I will explain that a (very) small effect of prescriptivism is still possible in the nineteenth-century South.

As such, for the object forms of plural personal pronouns, several options in which prescriptivism possibly interfered in language use are detected in the Northern and the Southern Netherlands. The instances in which prescriptivism may have steered a new change or influenced an ongoing change in usage are summed up below. These options of prescriptive success are interpreted and discussed in the remaining of this chapter.

- (1) In the seventeenth century, Van Heule (1625) was the first codifier to introduce the pronoun distinction between the direct and indirect object. While most language users in the sixteenth century still employed *hen(l.)* in both syntactic contexts, a change that aligns with the proposed distinction, viz. *hen(l.)* or *ze* as direct object vs. *hun(l.)* as indirect object, arises in Northern usage.
- (2) The syntactic distinction of Van Heule is followed by most codifiers in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A few grammarians from the North, like Leupenius (1653) and Ten Kate (1723), however, prescribe *hun(l.)* in both contexts, or allow for variation between *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* in the direct and indirect object, thus subverting Van Heule's syntactic distinction.
- (3) Although criticism towards Van Heule's distinction emerges in the normative discussions of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, almost all Northern grammarians at the time prescribe this exact distinction. The same distinction is now almost uniformly adopted in Northern usage.

- (4) Southern language use shows the start of a change from *hen(l.)* to *hun(l.)* in the seventeenth century. Although the shift to *hun(l.)* is attested for the direct and indirect object, the increase of the form takes place after the introduction of the syntactic distinction between *hen(l.)/ze* and *hun(l.)* in Northern norms.
- (5) Explicit prescriptions on the topic targeting a Southern audience show up only from the eighteenth century onwards. These prescriptions do not make a case distinction and promote the pronoun *hen(l.)* for the direct and indirect object. A slight increase of *hen(l.)* as a direct object is observed in Southern usage in the middle of the eighteenth century.
- (6) In the early nineteenth century, Southern norm givers abruptly adapt their prescriptions and they now also promote Van Heule's syntactic distinction. Although Southern language users still dominantly use *hun(l.)* without making a case distinction, an increase of the alternative variant *ze* is attested in the accusative case.

#### **Pronoun use of individual writers**

As was already mentioned in the conclusion of section 4.2, relatively few results are obtained in language use to consistently correlate the syntactic function of the pronoun with other sociolinguistic factors, like region or genre. Moreover, since grammarians either opted for prescribing a single pronoun for both contexts (e.g. Southern grammarians in the eighteenth century) or for making a case distinction (e.g. Van Heule), it is important to also look at the usage patterns of individual writers to check whether these writers actually made the prescribed (lack of a) case distinction. Figure 84 is therefore employed as an additional tool in evaluating prescriptive impact. In this visualisation, I included the 45 texts from the corpus that contained plural personal pronouns in both the context of a direct and an indirect object. This allowed me to determine for each text – or for each writer, for that matter – whether they consistently used *hen(l.)* or *hun(l.)* in the accusative and dative case, mixed different pronouns, or applied the syntactic distinction advocated by Van Heule and his followers.

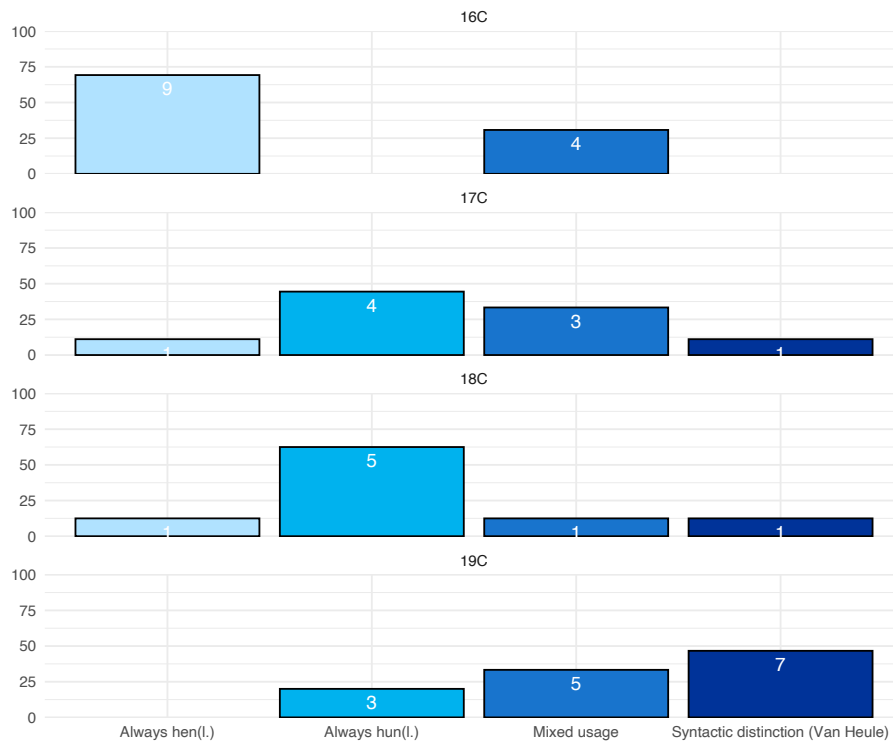


Figure 84: usage patterns object forms of the plural personal pronoun per period

Figure 84 illustrates that individual writers prefer *hen(l.)* in the sixteenth century but increasingly use *hun(l.)* in the following centuries. Individual writers generally make a complete shift in that they always use *hun(l.)*, regardless of the syntactic function of the pronoun. Although there are still individual language users who only use *hun(l.)* in the nineteenth century, the case distinction that Van Heule proposed also rises in usage. While one writer in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries applies the pronoun alternation correctly, seven authors employed the syntactic distinction in the nineteenth century. The fact that the proposed case distinction was applied already in the seventeenth century, and was further adopted in later centuries, suggests that prescriptivism was successful in influencing usage. In the next section, I discuss whether an interference of prescriptivism is likely in this case. I also interpret the individual usage patterns to find out which writers and genres were possibly influenced by the prescriptions.

## 5 Discussion

Starting with the possible interferences of prescriptivism in Northern usage, in **option 1**, I evaluate the impact of the ‘inventor’ of the accusative-dative distinction between the pronouns *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)*. While Van Heule’s impact on fellow norm givers is crystal clear – almost all Northern codifiers after him promote the same distinction –, his proposed distinction appears to be implemented in Northern usage as well. An influence of Van Heule is at least suggested when exploring Northern usage in the seventeenth century. Despite the initial absence of clear evidence for the direct object – only very few results are available for Northern usage in this period – the form *hun(l.)* appears as an indirect object a few decades after Van Heule prescribed the variant. This use of *hun(l.)* is noticeable in two administrative texts and two pamphlets from Holland. The fact that the pronoun *hun(l.)* emerges as an indirect object, viz. in a context where it was not used before the prescription, and specifically in formal and printed texts, suggests that prescriptive influence may be at play. More specifically, the potential influence on writers of administrative texts and pamphlets from the Hollandic region suggests that Van Heule’s possible impact was limited to the region where he and his followers (e.g. Ampzing, 1628; Kók, 1649) were active, which is the same region where his normative work was published.

Additionally, the usage patterns presented in Figure 84 show evidence of the application of the accusative-dative distinction in one text from the seventeenth century, which uses plural *ze* as a direct object and *hun(l.)* as an indirect object. The fact that the prescribed distinction was made in an ego-document from Zeeland (viz. EGO-1650-ZE-2), suggests a possible wider geographical spread of Van Heule’s influence by the middle of the seventeenth century.

In **option 2**, I evaluate the influence of the late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century prescriptions that also promoted the syntactic difference. I determine whether the few prescriptions that did not adhere to this distinction influenced Northern language use in the eighteenth century. As was already explained before, most grammarians in the Northern Netherlands supported the syntactic distinction of Van Heule, and thus adopted the same distinction in their prescriptions. Yet, some Hollandic norm givers, like Leupenius (1653) and

Ten Kate (1723), did not adopt the introduced case distinction. Leupenius prescribed the pronoun *hun(l.)* for both the direct and indirect object, and Ten Kate allowed for both *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* irrespective of the syntactic function of the pronoun. Despite the diverging prescriptions, Northern language use seems to favour Van Heule's distinction. While there is limited data on Northern usage regarding the indirect object in the eighteenth century, sufficient results from this period are available for the direct object. These results show that Northern language users opt for *hen(l.)* or *ze* when it comes to the direct object. It should be noted, however, that all these Northern observations of *hen(l.)* and *ze* derive from pamphlets from Holland and Zeeland, as well as from administrative texts from Zeeland. In fact, one of the Hollandic pamphlets (i.e. PAM-1750-HO-7) features both direct and indirect objects, and makes the exact distinction between *ze* and *hun(l.)* that the Northern prescriptions propose. The only eighteenth-century ego-document from which I have results, uses the pronoun *hun(l.)* for the direct object, and thus does not align with the prescriptions of Van Heule's followers. With caution, it can thus be proposed that the accusative-dative distinction in norms was implemented in some printed texts from Holland and Zeeland, and similarly in some formal handwritten texts in Zeeland. In contrast, ego-documents do not (yet) appear to be influenced by prescriptivism in this matter.

The diverging prescriptions of grammarians like Leupenius and Ten Kate, moreover, seem to have had little or no influence on usage. This is evidenced by the usage patterns in Figure 84. Although this plot shows that there are four texts in the seventeenth century that use the pronoun *hun(l.)* in the accusative and dative case, thus aligning with Leupenius's prescription, these observations represent exclusively Southern documents. In the Northern regions, Leupenius's prescription is thus not followed. There are also no Northern documents that contain both direct and indirect objects with varying pronouns. The single eighteenth-century document that always uses *hen(l.)*, derives from the North, and is a Zeeland pamphlet. That makes it unlikely that a Hollandic grammarian, like Ten Kate, would have exerted influence with his flexible prescriptions in Zeeland, without having an impact in Holland itself.

**Option 3** is the last discussion that focuses on prescriptive influence on Northern usage. This option deals with the stronger adoption of the case distinction in nineteenth-century usage. While almost all Northern grammarians advocated

the syntactic distinction at the time, certain norm givers, including Siegenbeek (1804) and Weiland (1805), express critical views about the – in their words – trivial distinction between the accusative pronoun *hen(l.)* and the dative form *hun(l.)*. Despite that criticism, Northern grammarians no longer prescribe the alternative form *ze* for the direct object, and thus prescribe only *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* as the two variants for respectively the direct and indirect object. Although *ze* was not explicitly rejected for usage, the results from this usage corpus reveal that the pronoun *ze* was rarely in use as a direct object for referring to plural animate referents. Except for two individual occurrences, the variant is used only for referring to inanimate referents in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The fact that grammarians omitted *ze* as an alternative variant may thus simply reflect patterns in Northern usage.

In the nineteenth century, Northern usage thus aligns almost perfectly with the accusative-dative distinction that has been advocated in norms. However, most of the results I am observing here derive from the genre of pamphlets, which may skew the patterns in usage.<sup>75</sup> Figure 84 shows that seven documents make the pronoun distinction that the norms introduced. A closer inspection of these texts indicates that four of the seven documents were, in fact, pamphlets from the North. It turned out that especially pamphlets that were published in Holland made the syntactic distinction between *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)*. The small share of results from administrative texts and ego-documents, conversely, makes it difficult to determine whether the syntactic distinction is also made in these genres. However, with one ego-document from Zeeland (i.e. EGO-1850-ZE-5) applying the accusative-dative distinction, and another using the variants interchangeably as an indirect object, this genre appears more variable in pronoun use, with some writers that are influenced by the prescriptions and others that are not. The same is probably true for the administrative texts, albeit to a lesser extent.

While Southern grammarians only discuss the plural pronouns from the eighteenth century onwards, **option 4** addresses the possible influence of Northern prescriptions on Southern usage in the middle of the seventeenth century. I am particularly interested in whether the famous prescription of

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<sup>75</sup> More specifically, I rely on the results from 1 administrative text, 4 ego-documents, and 6 pamphlets.

Van Heule impacted Southern language users. This may be the case since Southern usage also changes in the middle of the seventeenth century. While Northern usage shifts towards the introduced distinction in norms already in the seventeenth century, Southern usage changes in a different direction. Most language users from the South employ the pronoun *hun(l.)* in both the accusative and dative case. Although the variant is not uniformly used, and variation thus exists, a careful analysis of the results indicates that most documents from the South use either *hen(l.)* or *hun(l.)* in all contexts. These writers thus do not make a case distinction. This is also indicated in Figure 84, where all writers who always use *hun(l.)* derive from the Southern Netherlands. Although there are also authors that apply different forms for the accusative and dative case (viz. the three documents representing 'Mixed usage' in the seventeenth century, cf. Figure 84), the use of pronouns then appears arbitrary. Such findings suggest that the case distinction of Van Heule did not influence Southern usage in the seventeenth century.

The lack of a case distinction in the South is also confirmed in norms later in the eighteenth century. When explicit prescriptions on the topic emerge in the South, grammarians do not propose a case distinction, and codifiers like E.C.P. (1713), Des Roches (s.d. [1761]) and Ballieu (1792) prescribe *hen(l.)* for both the direct and indirect object. In **option 5**, I therefore examine whether the increase of *hen(l.)* as a direct object in eighteenth-century usage is related to these prescriptions. First, for the indirect object, Southern usage continues using *hun(l.)*, indicating no influence of prescriptions in this regard. For the direct object, however, the increase of *hen(l.)* is accompanied by a rise in the use of *ze*. As such, the distinction that emerges in Southern usage resembles the one made in the Northern Netherlands, with *hen(l.)* and *ze* being used for the direct object, and *hun(l.)* for the indirect object. A closer inspection of these results reveals that two pamphlets from Brabant use *hen(l.)* to refer to plural animate entities, while *ze* is applied only for referring to inanimate objects. Unfortunately, there are no observations from these sources regarding the indirect object, so it cannot be confirmed whether these Brabantine pamphlets follow the prescriptions of Southern grammarians. Although an influence of prescriptivism is certainly possible – especially given the origin and prominence of Des Roches in the region of Brabant – it is anyhow temporary. Moreover, it would indicate a very limited influence on specific individuals in Brabant (cf. option 6). In fact, two of the five documents that consistently use *hun(l.)* in the eighteenth century (cf. Figure 84)

are also texts from Brabant. This means that other writers from the same region were not influenced by the prescriptions for *hen(l.)*.

While eighteenth-century grammarians may thus have influenced individual writers of printed texts in only using *hen(l.)*, in the early nineteenth century, Southern codifiers suddenly shift their norms and prescribe the exact case distinction that had been advocated in the North. Of course, this sudden change in norms is probably related to broader socio-political developments, with Northern norms entering the Southern language area due to the political reunification of the Low Countries into the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (Vosters, 2011; Vosters et al., 2014). In **option 6**, I therefore determine whether the introduction of the case distinction in Southern norms impacted Southern usage.

Although Southern grammarians also prescribe *ze* as an alternative variant for the direct object, in addition to *hen(l.)*, the increase of the variant in the nineteenth century largely denotes references to inanimate objects. As such, with only four observations of *ze* for plural animate referents in Southern usage (viz. in pamphlets and ego-documents), the increase of the variant in nineteenth-century usage is probably not related to the prescriptions for this form. Also when focusing on the case distinction between *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)*, Southern usage does not appear to be influenced by the recent changes in the prescriptions. This is evidenced in the developments of the accusative and dative case. As for the dative case, Southern language users were almost exclusively using *hun(l.)* already before the prescriptions in the nineteenth century. It is thus unlikely that usage oriented towards the prescriptions for the dative case. For the direct object, on the contrary, some Brabantine documents were employing *hen(l.)* in the eighteenth century (cf. option 5). While *hen(l.)* was still prescribed for the accusative case in the nineteenth century, the form disappears almost entirely from Southern usage at the time. As Figure 84 shows, three documents from the South evidence the use of the pronoun *hun(l.)* in each syntactic case. Two of these documents derive from Vlaanderen (viz. ADM-1850-VL-1; PAM-1850-VL-4), the region that strongly adhered to *hun(l.)*. Also in Brabant, however, language users are not convincingly influenced by the introduced accusative-dative distinction. Only two Brabantine writers (i.e. PAM-1850-BR-2; PAM-1850-BR-4) follow the prescribed case distinction in their pamphlet. So, apart from

influencing individual writers of printed texts, prescriptivism did not have a large-scale impact on language use.

## 6 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to determine whether prescriptions regarding the object forms of the plural personal pronoun were successfully implemented in language use. Central to this investigation was the accusative-dative distinction between the pronouns *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)*, which was introduced in seventeenth-century language norms. Before arriving at a general conclusion about prescriptive influence on the matter, I reflect on the hypotheses that were formulated for each of the variants in the beginning of this chapter.

Hypothesis 1, discussing the development of the pronoun *hun(l.)*, is only partly confirmed. Although the elongated variant rarely shows up in usage, and *hun* is indeed the common variant of the two, the pronoun *hun* is not dominant in all investigated regions. In fact, in the North of the language area, *hun* is only the majority variant as an indirect object in the nineteenth century. Here, the increase of the variant was attributed to prescriptive influence. In the South, conversely, *hun* is the main variant already in seventeenth-century usage, both as a direct and indirect object, which excluded the possibility of prescriptive interference.

The variants *haar* and *heur* were the subject of hypothesis 2. As was expected, the variants are in use in the sixteenth century but decline already in the seventeenth century. While *haar* and *heur* rarely appear in the *HCD*, the forms do not disappear entirely and remain in use as plural object forms until the nineteenth century. No effect of the single prescriptions for *haar* and *heur* were attested for the masculine forms.

As for the other main variant, *hen(l.)*, hypothesis 3 received partial confirmation, as the pronoun was dominant in sixteenth-century usage. What is more, *hen(l.)* was indeed the most common pronoun for the direct and indirect object at the time. The form also increased in eighteenth-century usage, although this was only true for the Northern Netherlands. In the South, *hen(l.)* is solely a minority variant from the seventeenth century onwards. While the increase of the form in

the North was explained by an influence of prescriptivism, no considerable effect of prescriptions was found in Southern usage.

Finally, also hypothesis 4, regarding the variant *ze*, was partially supported. As expected, the variant was prescribed as an alternative form for the direct object. In language use, *ze* indeed appears from the seventeenth century onwards and its use increases over time. However, the pronoun is mostly used to refer to inanimate entities. So, despite the prescriptions as an alternative variant, no compelling influence of prescriptivism was attested for this pronoun. Perhaps the form was not as common as it is today or – considering that the form is today typically used in speech and in informal texts – the documents in the *HCD* may not be closely enough aligned with the conceptually spoken code to capture the variant in usage (cf. Koch & Oesterreicher, 1985).

As for prescriptive influence, this case study demonstrates that the accusative-dative distinction between *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* is primarily a Northern phenomenon, with Van Heule as the inventor of the distinction influencing later generations of Northern grammarians. While most of these norm givers thus adopted and prescribed the same distinction, the issue remained largely unnoticed by Southern codifiers, who prescribed no case distinction until the nineteenth century. The lacking reflection on such a case distinction in the South possibly indicates that the Northern norms on the subject did not reach the South, and Southern norms therefore developed somewhat independently. It is not until the period of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands that Southern grammarians adopt the case distinction in their prescriptions.

The fact that the case distinction did not reach the South before the political reunification in the nineteenth century already suggests something about the spread of the syntactic distinction between *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* in language use. Although Van Heule's prescriptive rule did not fail, the results in language use show that the effect was initially visible only in the region where the prescriptions were published, i.e. in Holland. From there, the prescriptive effect slowly spread geographically. In the eighteenth century, the distinction appeared more frequently in Zeeland, and after Southern grammarians also prescribed the syntactic distinction in the early nineteenth century, a few pamphlets from Brabant applied the distinction as well. In Vlaanderen, the norm did not take hold, as *hun(l.)* was used as the main pronoun in the accusative and dative case.

While Van Heule and his followers thus actuated a slowly progressing change at a geographical level, the influence of prescriptivism appears to stagnate at the level of the genre. Although it is necessary to confirm this conclusion in a larger corpus, throughout the investigated period, the impact of the prescribed case distinction remained largely confined to pamphlets. Administrative texts were influenced by prescriptivism to a smaller extent. Along with ego-documents, it is more likely that certain writers of these handwritten texts were aware of the norm, and thus applied the syntactic distinction, while other writers were not influenced. This suggests that the implementation of the case distinction between *hen(l.)* and *hun(l.)* was mainly limited to the elite circles of norm givers and other printed genres, which were edited and thus typically subject to influences 'from above'.