Natalie Verelst
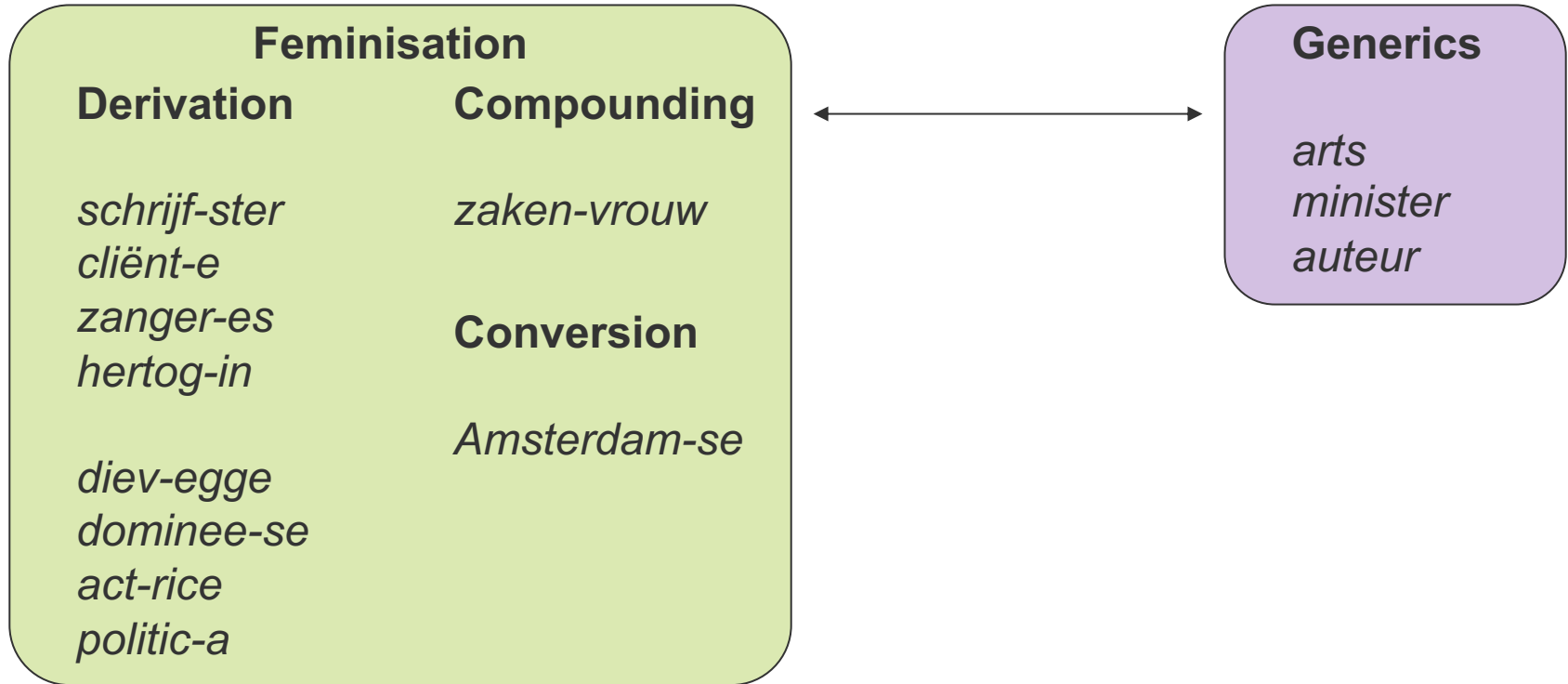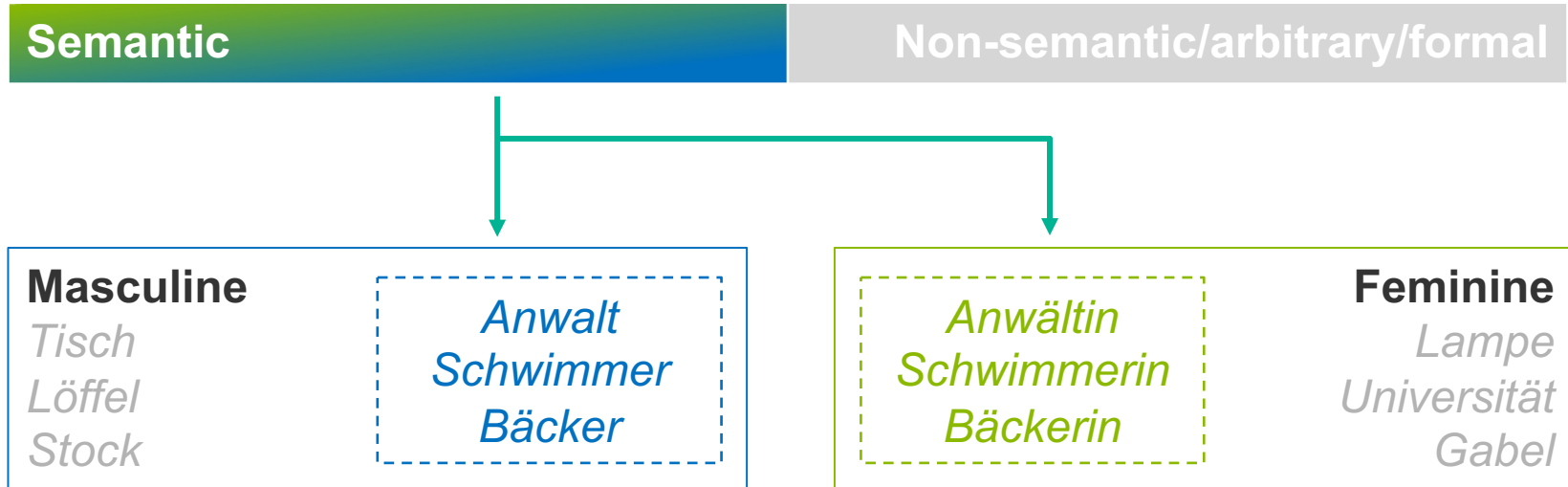**Institut für Deutsche und Niederländische Philologie**

Freie Universität Berlin

Language change in motion
The case of Dutch nominal gender morphology

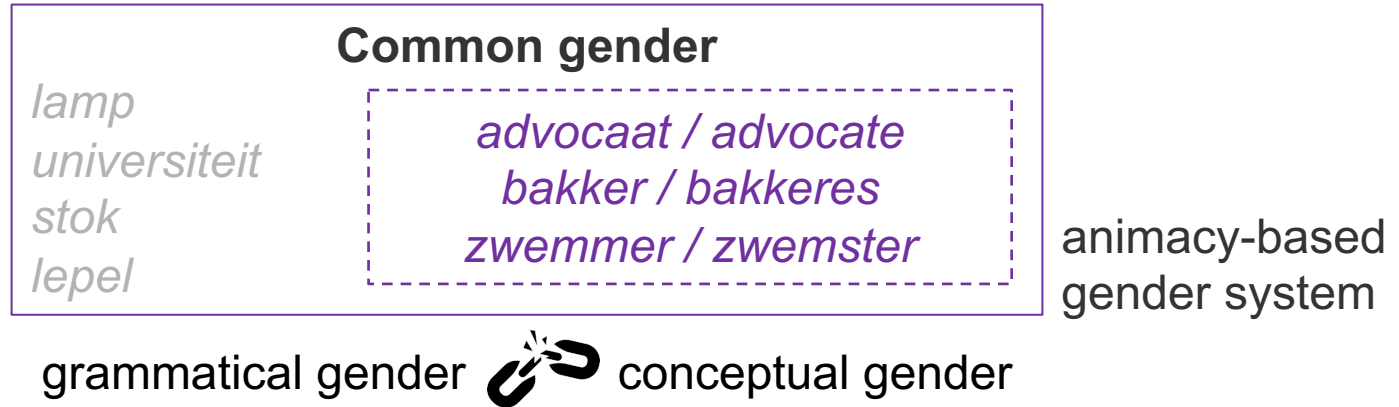# Gender morphology: feminisation of personal nouns

Feminisation

Derivation

schrijf-ster
cliënt-e
zanger-es
hertog-in

diev-egge
dominee-se
act-rice
politic-a

Compounding

zaken-vrouw

Conversion

Amsterdam-se

Generics

arts
minister
auteur

Semantics of grammatical gender

Gender assignment to animate nouns

Semantic	Non-semantic/arbitrary/formal

Masculine
Tisch
Löffel
Stock

Anwalt
Schwimmer
Bäcker

Anwältin
Schwimmerin
Bäckerin

Feminine
Lampe
Universität
Gabel

Sex-based gender system

Semantics of grammatical gender

Common gender

lamp	
universiteit	*advocaat / advocate*
stok	*bakker / bakkeres*
lepel	*zwemmer / zwemster*

animacy-based gender system

grammatical gender ⛓ conceptual gender

The same meaning exists twice within one grammatical category;
Relevance of gender marking?

↓

If possible, do not use gender-marking morphology

Gender marking: contexts

+animate
+referential

I. Subjects/objects
De psycholoog/psychologe opede haar eigen praktijk.

II. Predicates/appositions

a. Direct animacy
Mijn moeder is psycholoog/psychologe.

b. Metaphoric/metonymic animacy (cf. Szczepaniak 2014)
De overheid als hoeder/hoedster van de verzorgingsstaat.

-animate
-referential

Gender marking: contexts

+animate
+referential

I. Subjects/objects
De psycholoog/psychologe opende haar eigen praktijk. ✅

II. Predicates/appositions

   a. Direct animacy
   Mijn moeder is psycholoog/psychologe. ✅

   b. Metaphoric/metonymic animacy
   De overheid als hoeder/hoedster van de verzorgingsstaat.

-animate
-referential

Diachronically: metaphoric animacy

Middle Dutch (// Middle High German): Metaphoric personification of abstract concepts and natural objects (*wisdom, poverty, soul*; *moon, root, back*)
PN's in *-ster*, Corpus Middelnederlands (#15)

i. dat is die wortel / nochtans is si *voetster* ende beghin van alle den boem

ii. O here ghif mi die wijsheit / *besitster* dijnre stolen ende wil mi niet verwerpen van dinen kinderen

iii. die maen is een scierheyt des nachts ende is moeder alle der humoren / *dienster* ende vrouwe vander zee

iv. vntreuwe ist ir *ratgebinne* (MHG, cf. Hennig 1991)

Diachronically: metonymic animacy

Modern Dutch: metonymic personification of mainly collectives
(SketchEngine/nlTenTen14 & TS14-21: *de X als Y-ster*, #23)

- Collectives: *Kerk* (x5)*, gemeente* (x3)*, overheid* (x3), *commissie* (x3), *PLO, universiteit, vennootschap*
  e.g., *de Kerk als behoedster van de hemelse waarheid*
- Non-collectives: *aarde* (x2), *bloem* (x2)*, politiek, zon*
  e.g., *de zon als schenkster van leven*

→ No grammatical cue on the antecedent for gender attribution to inanimates;
  association of collectives with traditionally female gender roles (Szczepaniak 2014)

Diachronically: metonymic animacy

Data from Scott (2009): any PN with an inanimate referent, any fem. suffix

- Corpus Gesproken Nederlands (no data);
- INL 27 Miljoen Woorden Krantencorpus 1995;
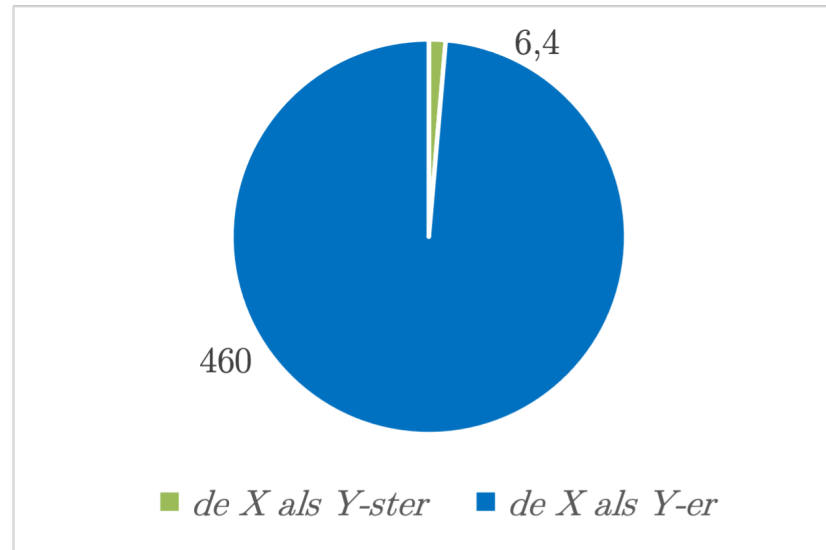- INL 38 Miljoen Woorden Corpus 1996.

#108

105 PN's have a collective noun as an antecedent
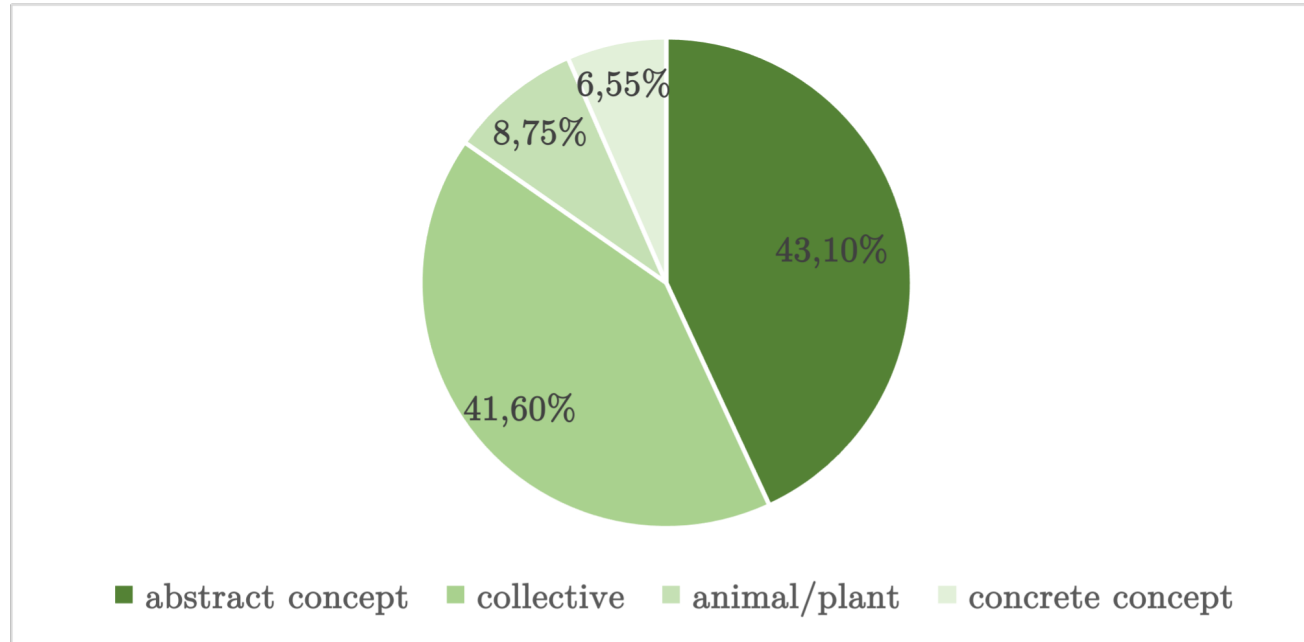
Personification & (non-)gendered language systems

Dutch: *de X als Y-ster* (e.g., *de Kerk als behoedster*) in nlTenTen14 + TS14-21

- Corpus size: 3.6 bln tokens

- PN's ending in *-ster* with inanimate referent: 23
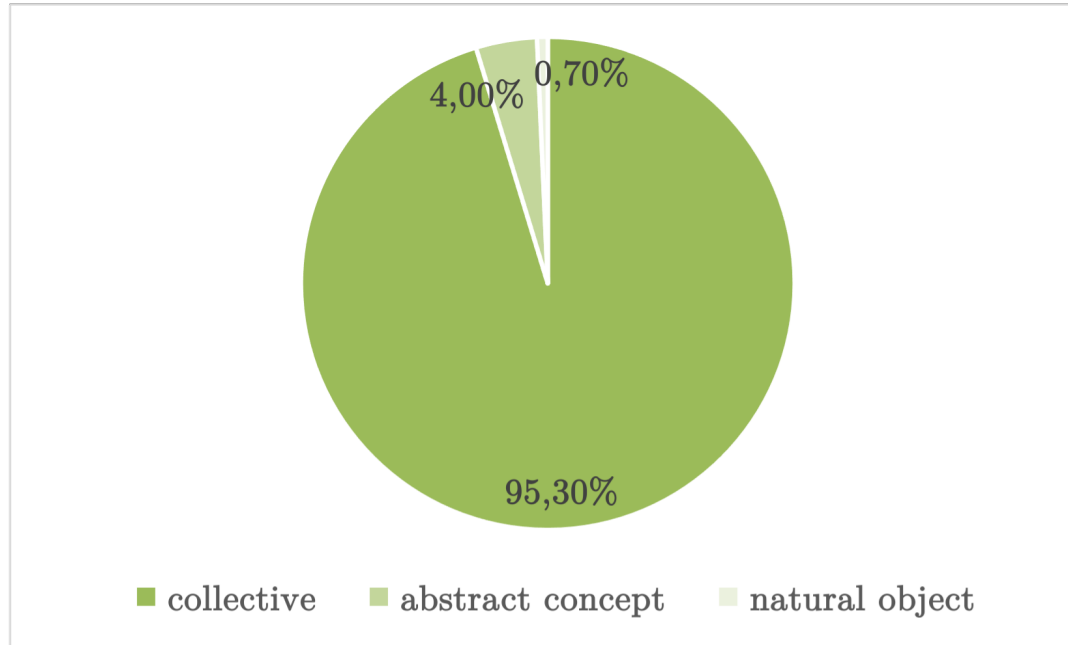
- # per billion: **6,4**

Diachronically: German

German: DWDS, Historical corpora (1469-1965): *die X als Y-erin* (#137)
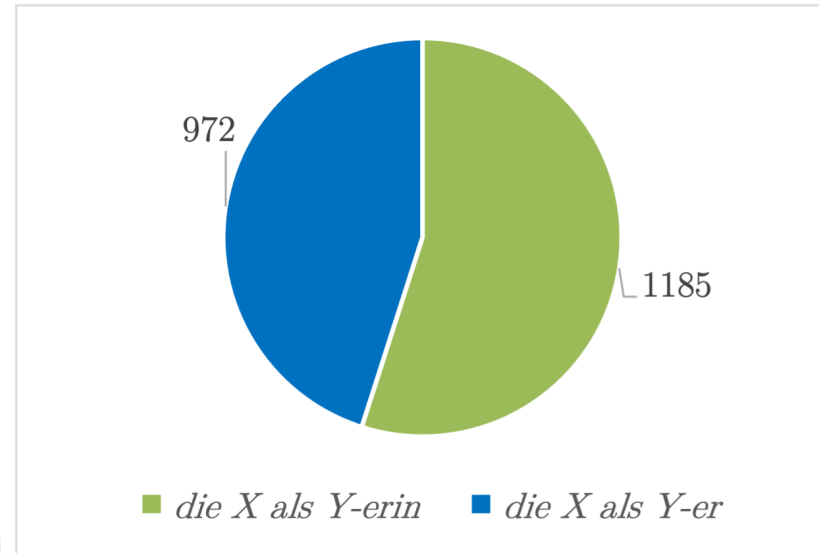e.g., *die Nationalgarde als Wächterin der bürgerlichen Ordnung*, 1840

- abstract concept
- collective
- animal/plant
- concrete concept

43,10%
41,60%
8,75%
6,55%

Diachronically: German

German: SketchEngine/TS 03-2021: *die X als Y-erin* (#150)
e.g., *die CDU als Hauptverliererin*

Pie chart: collective 95,30%, abstract concept 4,00%, natural object 0,70%

Legend: ■ collective   ■ abstract concept   ■ natural object

Personification & (non-)gendered language systems

German: *die X als Y-erin* (e.g., *die CDU als Hauptverliererin*)

- Corpus size: 126.7 mln tokens
- PN's ending in *-erin* with inanimate referent: 150
- # per billion: **1185**

→ 200x more frequent in German than in Dutch

Semantics of gender

Personification of concepts in art (Segel/Boroditsky 2011)

Influence of grammatical gender on gender attribution to inanimates (cf. Boroditsky et al. 2003, Cubelli 2011, Boutonnet et al. 2012)

La liberté guidant le peuple
Eugène Delacroix
1830

Semantics of gender

Dan Slobin's concept of *thinking for speaking*

> "Language […] surely directs us to **attend** – while speaking – to the dimensions of experience that are enshrined in grammatical categories." (Slobin 1996: 71)

Encoding of conceptual gender in grammar

Attend to conceptual gender when using language/grammatical gender

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Diachronically: -referential

Predicative constructions: PNs with female referents in NL and BE news media

"Ze/zij is een X"

Diachronically: +referential

Two Dutch newspapers: *De Volkskrant* & *NRC Handelsblad* between 2010-2015

Feminisation

> *ze is een…*   *actrice, atlete, heldin, zangeres*

Neutralisation

> *ze is een…*   *advocaat, kunstenaar, journalist, student*

Diachronically: +referential

Usually feminised		Rel. % fem.	Usually neutralised		Rel. % fem.
acteur 0	*actrice* 216	**100**	*advocaat* 6	*advocate* 27	**81,8**
atleet 0	*atlete* 13	**100**	*kunstenaar* 23	*kunstenares* 174	**88,3**
held 0	*heldin* 8	**100**	*journalist* 4	*journaliste* 49	**92,5**
zanger 1	*zangeres* 474	**99,8**	*student* 6	*studente* 84	**93,3**

De \w+ [a-z]\w+t (referent of *X* = female), e.g., *De advocaat/advocate zegt […]*
Data from nlTenTen14, SketchEngine