Split definiteness and historical language documentation: Observations from Wangerooge Frisian*

Sune Gregersen
Department of Frisian Studies, Kiel University

This paper investigates the use of definite articles in Wangerooge Frisian (Germanic, northern Germany) and discusses a number of methodological problems in the analysis of definiteness in an extinct linguistic variety. I show that Wangerooge Frisian exhibited a 'split' definiteness system with two formally and functionally distinct definite articles: the 'weak' article de/'t *and the 'strong' article* dan/djuu/dait/daa*. Similar systems have been described for other languages of the world, including other Germanic varieties. However, the analysis of the Wangerooge Frisian system is complicated by a number of factors relating to the nature of the linguistic documentation, most of which was collected from an elderly speaker in the mid-19th century. The paper discusses five such issues, such as the lack of metadata about the elicitation situation and the inconsistent stress marking in much of the documentation. I then present a brief sketch of the definiteness system which takes these limitations into account.*

1 Introduction

In this paper I investigate the use of definite articles in Wangerooge Frisian, an East Frisian variety which was extensively documented before it went extinct in the middle of the 20th century. A large number of the world's languages have definite articles (see e.g. Dryer 2013), and it has been noted that some of these distinguish between two articles in different definite contexts. Wangerooge Frisian appears to have been such a language, as the linguistic documentation contains two distinct definite articles with different usage profiles: the 'weak' article *de/'t* and the 'strong' article *dan/djuu/dait/daa* (with a number of morphophonological variants). However, several factors relating to the surviving documentation make it difficult to reach a full understanding of this system, which in addition appears to have been subject to variation. This paper is devoted both to a description of definiteness in Wangerooge Frisian and a discussion of the methodological problems in reconstructing this system. Thus, I hope it will be of in-

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terest not just to scholars of Frisian and specialists of definiteness, but also to other linguists working with historical language documentation.

The paper begins with an introduction to 'split' definiteness and some central works on this topic (Section 2). After this I introduce the linguistic documentation of Wangerooge Frisian and provide an initial overview of the definite articles (Section 3) before moving on to the discussion of five methodological issues in the reconstruction of the definiteness system (Section 4). In the last two sections, I present a sketch of this system (Section 5) and conclude with a few suggestions for future work (Section 6). In an online appendix, I have included a glossed version of one of the analysed texts.

2 Split definiteness

2.1 Strong and weak articles

Definite articles play a central role in the grammar of many languages. Of the 620 languages surveyed by Dryer (2013), 377 languages (i.e. 60.8%) were found to have some kind of definite articles. In a subset of these languages, two distinct articles are available. This kind of distinction was noticed by Stern (1880: 107–108) in Bohairic Coptic and by Heinrichs (1954: 85–103) in the Low Franconian dialect of Amern in western Germany. The most well-known study of such a system is probably Ebert (1971) on Fering, the Insular North Frisian dialect of Föhr in northern Germany. More recently, Schwarz (2013, 2019) has provided comparative overviews of the phenomenon, while his earlier dissertation (Schwarz 2009) focusses on the distinction in written German.[1] There seems to be no generally accepted term for the phenomenon, but in many discussions of individual languages – and in Schwarz's comparative work – a distinction is made between a WEAK and a STRONG definite article. I will follow this terminology here. For the overall phenomenon, I will use the term SPLIT DEFINITENESS, which appears to have been first used by Wespel (2008: 182–201).

[1] In written German the distinction is limited to a specific syntactic context, namely after those prepositions that have a contrast between contracted and non-contracted forms (e.g. *ins* vs. *in das* 'into the.N', *zur* vs. *zu der* 'to the.F'; for details see e.g. Nübling 2005, Schwarz 2009). In spoken varieties of German, however, a more general distinction between two definite articles is widely reported (e.g. by Hartmann 1982; Harweg 1989; Himmelmann 1997; Studler 2011). Other languages where two definite articles have been reported include Hausa (Afroasiatic; Jaggar 2001: 316–323) and Lakhota (Siouan; Rood 1985; Curl 1999). As pointed out to me independently by Eugénie Stapert and Arjen Versloot, Dutch also has what appears to be a split definiteness system. Ortmann (2014: 302–304) indeed proposes such an analysis and suggests that the distinction may have been overlooked in the literature because one of the forms (*die/dat*) is traditionally analysed as a demonstrative (cf. Section 2.2 below).

Split definiteness systems do not behave in a uniform way across languages, but what unites them is the distinction made between several kinds of definiteness. In her work on the Fering North Frisian article system, Ebert (1971) describes the different usage contexts of the two definite articles in this dialect. I will not give a detailed summary of Ebert's account here, but the minimal pair in (1) may serve to illustrate some of the most salient differences:

(1) a. *A* *hünj* *hee* *tuswark.*
WDEF.M dog have.3SG toothache
'The dog has a toothache.' (Ebert 1971: 82)

b. *Di* *hünj* *hee* *tuswark.*
SDEF.M dog have.3SG toothache
'The dog has a toothache.' (Ebert 1971: 83)

The articles *a* and *di* in (1) are both translated with English *the*, but the Fering articles are not used in exactly the same situations. According to Ebert, the weak article *a* can be used when the identification of the referent – in this case a particular dog – depends on the situation, whereas the strong article *di* is used anaphorically to refer back to a referent that has been introduced in the preceding discourse. One could imagine (1a) occurring in a context where two people living in the same house talk about the household dog, while (1b) would occur when the addressee cannot be expected to have prior knowledge of the dog, but the speaker has had to introduce it into the discourse with an indefinite noun phrase (e.g. 'My aunt has a dog and a cat. The dog has a toothache').[2]

Another example of a split definiteness system comes from the Bohairic dialect of Coptic (Afroasiatic, Egypt), an extinct language like Wangerooge Frisian. As mentioned above, the distinction between a weak and a strong definite article was noticed at least as early as Stern (1880), but has also been discussed in later grammatical work on Coptic, for example by Shisha-Halevy (2007: 387–398) and Müller (2021: 20–23). Egedi (2017) analyses the distinction between the weak and strong articles in Bohairic Coptic in more detail and points to the Fering and German parallels. She describes the strong article as anaphoric, whereas the weak article is used "with inherently unique nouns […] whose referents can be identified through a general knowledge of the world, or else,

[2] For further details on the differences between the two articles in Fering, see Ebert (1971: Ch. 5–7), Arfsten et al. (2021: 25–27) and the brief overview in Walker & Wilts (2001: 290–291). Note that this aspect of the grammar appears to be undergoing language change (Walker & Wilts 2001: 291; Arfsten et al. 2021: 27), and that the system described by Ebert around 1970 may not be representative of current linguistic usage. A comparative investigation of article usage across Frisian varieties would be an interesting topic for future work.

through the knowledge of the actual situation" (Egedi 2017: 92). However, Egedi also notes that there are some examples in the Bohairic Coptic texts which seem to contradict these generalisations, but that the absence of native-speaker consultants makes it impossible to know what the significance of these may be. This issue is of course also relevant in the case of Wangerooge Frisian.

2.2 Definiteness and demonstratives

Another important observation about definite articles is that they often show a clear link to adnominal demonstratives ('this' or 'that'). In some languages – about 11% in Dryer's (2013) survey – a single form or set of forms may function both as definite article and demonstrative. In other languages, the definite article is clearly diachronically related to a demonstrative element, and the development from demonstrative to definite article has featured prominently in the cross-linguistic literature at least since Greenberg (1978); see Kuteva et al. (2019: 137–139) for examples and references. The discourse contexts where this kind of change may happen are studied in detail by Himmelmann (1997).

The link between demonstratives and definite articles is also obvious in the case of Wangerooge Frisian. The determiner *dan/djuu/dait/daa*, which I will refer to as the strong definite article, also appears in contexts where the grammatical tradition would characterise it as a demonstrative. For instance, such a use is found in some indirect speech reports in Wangerooge Frisian fairy tales, such as (2). In this example from the text in the online appendix, the hero of the story is instructed by a princess to come to a specific room in the castle where she lives. The determiner *dan* is underlined in the source, which is almost certainly meant to indicate a more emphatic pronunciation:

(2) *nu sant yu na him to, dat hi sil faraiven bi*
now send.3SG 3F after 3M.OBL to COMP 3M shall.3SG tonight by

hiri kumme in <u>dan</u> pizel in 't slos, deer
3F.OBL come.INF in SDEF.M room(M) in WDEF.N castle(N) there

is yu
be.3SG 3F

'Now she sends him the message that he must come to her tonight in <u>that</u> (particular) room in the castle, there she will be.' (449.20)

Note that the English definite article *the* is not an appropriate translation of *dan* here. Based on such examples, one might wonder if the 'strong' article could not simply be described as an adnominal demonstrative corresponding to English

that. This would make the split definiteness analysis superfluous, and the only definite article in Wangerooge Frisian would be *de/'t*. I think such an approach is unsatisfactory, however. As already observed, several languages have been found to use the same (or diachronically related) elements as both definite article and demonstrative, and the Wangerooge Frisian strong article clearly also occurs in contexts which are not considered demonstrative in the linguistic tradition. For instance, it can occur in noun phrases whose referents have only been introduced indirectly in the preceding discourse, so-called ASSOCIATIVE ANAPHORS. In (3), for instance, *dan weert* 'the innkeeper' is mentioned for the first time, but is definite because the associated referent *dait naast weertshuus* 'the nearest inn' has just been introduced. In languages with formally distinct articles and demonstratives, this kind of context normally excludes demonstratives (see e.g. Hawkins 1978: 127; Himmelmann 2001: 833).

(3) *da kumt hi deer den, gungt in dait naast weertshuus*
then come.3SG 3M there then go.3SG in SDEF.N near.SUP inn(N)

[…] *"e, qua* ***dan weert*** *un sin wüüf*
yes say.3SG SDEF.M innkeeper(M) and 3M.POSS wife

'Then he arrives there, goes into the nearest inn [and asks if he can get a meal and a bed]. "Yes", the (*that) innkeeper and his wife say' (449.17–18)

Hence, I believe that *dan/djuu/dait/daa* is best analysed as a determiner which can function both as a definite article ('the') and a demonstrative ('that').

2.3 Classification of definiteness

For the analysis of article usage in the material, I have used the classification in Table 1, which is based mainly on Hawkins's (1978) study of English and Himmelmann's (1997) cross-linguistic investigation; for the sake of illustration I give an English example of each type. Note that there are several alternative classifications in the literature, with differences concerning both terminology and the exact number of types and subtypes. For instance, Schwarz (2009) uses the term 'bridging' for the associative anaphoric type and distinguishes between two types corresponding to Hawkins's and Himmelmann's 'larger situation' use. Himmelmann (1997: 37), on the other hand, suggests that the generic use can be analysed as a subtype of larger-situation definiteness.[3]

[3] I will not go further into these theoretical differences here; neither will I discuss some additional subtypes which have been proposed in the literature but which I have not encountered

The difference between the types is the basis on which the speaker assumes that the addressee can identify the referent. With anaphoric definiteness, the speaker refers back to a previously mentioned referent, whereas with the associative anaphoric type, a closely associated referent has been introduced into the discourse, and the speaker assumes that the addressee is aware of this "associative relationship" (Hawkins 1978: 100) between the two referents. In the example in Table 1, *the exhaust fumes* is definite because the speaker assumes that the addressee can link this to the NP *a car*, the associative relationship being that cars usually produce exhaust fumes.

Table 1: Classification of definite article uses. (Most examples from Hawkins [1978] or Himmelmann [1997], some of them modified slightly.)

Types and subtypes	**Examples**
Anaphoric	*And a man comes along with a goat ... and **the goat** obviously is interested in the pears.*
Associative anaphoric	*The man drove past our house in a car. **The exhaust fumes** were terrible.*
Immediate situation	*Pass me **the bucket**, please* (a bucket is present in the situation)
Larger situation	***The prime minister** has just resigned.*
Generic	***The horse** is a useful animal* (referring to the species)
Proper noun	***The Netherlands**, **The Rocky Mountains***
Relational time expression	[a man who] *in **the meantime** has come down from the ladder*
Unfamiliar referent	
– establishing relatives	*Bill's fed up with **the book** which I've just given him.*
– NP-complements	*Bill is amazed by **the fact** that there is so much life on earth.*
– superlatives	***the fastest person** to sail to America*
– ordinal numerals	***the first person** to sail to America*
– 'uniqueness' modifiers	*My wife and I share **the same secrets**.*

In the case of the immediate-situation, larger-situation, and generic types, the speaker relies exclusively on (assumed) shared world knowledge with the addressee; the NP is definite because the speaker assumes that the addressee can readily identify the referent, either because it is present in the immediate situation, because it is part of a more general knowledge of the world (the "larger situation"), or because it is a type of entity rather than a specific token, i.e. the generic use. In the various types grouped under the heading 'unfamiliar referent', the NP is definite because of the presence of a particular modifier; in these cases the NP is definite "by default", and the speaker does not have to assume that the addressee can identify the referent in question. In the case of relational

in the material, such as nominal modifiers of the type *the colour red* (Hawkins 1978: 146–147).

time expressions (on which see Himmelmann 1997: 40–41), the speaker refers to a point in time within the narrative itself; these are also definite by default.

Some types of definiteness thus depend on the shared knowledge of the interlocutors, or rather on the knowledge which the speaker assumes is shared between them. Consider the larger-situation example in Table 1, originally from Hawkins (1978), and repeated as (4):

(4) ***The prime minister*** *has just resigned.*

If uttered in the UK by one British person to another, the subject referent of (4) will by default be the current British prime minister. But, as Hawkins (1978: 116) asks, "what happens if I am in a foreign country which also has a prime minister, talking to an Englishman whom I have just met?". In such cases the intended referent could be either the British prime minister or the prime minister of the foreign country, and the speaker will either have to rely on the context or specify which prime minister is meant. A comparable example from Fering is discussed by Ebert (1971: 84–88), who presents an overview of the different possible interpretations of *a prääster* 'the vicar' on the island of Föhr, which has three parishes. The reference of *a prääster* depends both on who is talking and where the conversation is taking place. According to Ebert, if the interlocutors are from the same parish, *a prääster* will refer to their own vicar no matter where the conversation is taking place. If they are from different parishes, however, the reference depends on the speech situation: if the interlocutors are talking in the speaker's parish, the NP refer to his vicar, but if they are talking in the addressee's parish, it refers to her vicar. The identification of the referent of definite NPs may thus be sensitive to several extralinguistic and pragmatic factors which in the case of historical linguistic data cannot always be reconstructed.

3 Wangerooge Frisian

3.1 Documentation and earlier work

Wangerooge Frisian is a language or dialect which was spoken on Wangerooge, an island in the German part of the Wadden Sea. A survey of the documentation can be found in the introduction to Versloot (ed. 1996). An overview of the phonology and morphology is available in Versloot (2001a), while the working paper by Gregersen (2023) provides a syntactic sketch of the language.[4]

[4] Whether Wangerooge Frisian at the time of documentation should be called a 'language' or 'dialect' is largely a terminological question. It historically formed part of a larger East Frisian continuum, but most of the other dialects were extinct by c. 1800 (see Versloot 2001b). The only East Frisian variety which survives to this day is Saterlandic, spoken by a small

The earliest known documentation of Wangerooge Frisian are a word list and some lexical and grammatical notes from around 1800 (see Bräuning-Octavio 1958; Versloot 1995). The large majority of the surviving material is from the middle of the 19th century. Most importantly, the autodidact linguist H. G. Ehrentraut (1798–1866) did fieldwork on Wangerooge in the period from 1837 to 1841 and collected a large number of texts in a self-devised orthography, mainly fairy tales and ethnographic texts about life on the island. Most of the texts were collected from Anna Metta Claßen (1774–1846), an elderly woman who appears to have spent her whole life on the island. Some of the material was published by Ehrentraut (1849, 1854) during his own lifetime, but the majority of the texts only appeared in the edition by Versloot (1996). Other 19th-century sources include a translation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Winkler (1874) and a few short texts in Firmenich (ed. 1854). Slightly later sources are Littmann (1922) and Siebs (1923), who both collected their material around 1900.[5] The last speaker of Wangerooge Frisian is believed to have died around 1950; on the decline and eventual extinction of the language, see e.g. Versloot (ed. 1996: lii–liv) and Gregersen (2023: 1–3).

Although Wangerooge Frisian is well documented, there is only little linguistic work on its morphosyntax. As far as I am aware, the definiteness system has never been analysed in any detail. In the morphological overview in Ehrentraut (1849), it is noted that the definite article has alternative forms, and that the variant *de* is used "especially when there is no emphasis on it" (Ehrentraut 1849: 18).[6] Ehrentraut also suggests that the use of this form – which is syncretic between masculine singular, feminine singular, and plural – may be so frequent because the speakers are often uncertain about the gender of nouns. This line of thought is picked up in the study of North Sea Germanic gender systems by Wahrig-Burfeind (1989: 204–205), one of the few linguistic works that discuss the Wangerooge Frisian articles. Wahrig-Burfeind describes the form *de* as a genderless "Einheitsform" for all nouns and takes it to represent an ongoing simplification of the nominal gender system. As the analysis in the following will show, this characterisation is inaccurate. The weak article was in fact functionally distinct from the strong article, not merely a reduced form of it. Furthermore, neither of the two articles was genderless – while the weak article had

community in western Lower Saxony. It is structurally quite similar to Wangerooge Frisian, but it is now of course impossible to ascertain to what extent they were mutually intelligible. Arjen Versloot (pers. comm.) suggests that Wangerooge Frisian and Saterlandic probably differed as much as the Mainland Scandinavian languages, if not more so.

[5] There are also a few sound recordings from the 1920s which remain to be analysed. I have decided to focus on the more substantial documentation from the mid-19th century here, but a comparison between the earlier and the later material would certainly also be of interest.

[6] This and all other translations in the following are mine.

syncretism between plural and masculine and feminine singular (*de*), there was a distinct form for the neuter singular (*'t*). The inventory of article forms will be presented in the following.

3.2 Overview of article forms

Wangerooge Frisian had a nominal system with three grammatical genders – masculine (M), feminine (F), and neuter (N) – and the numbers singular (SG) and plural (PL). Gender is not visible from the form of the noun, but is distinguished in articles and demonstratives, anaphoric and possessive pronouns, attributive adjectives, and the numerals 'one' to 'three'. An overview of the strong and weak article forms is given in Table 2. As the table shows, the articles do not distinguish gender in the plural, and in the weak article the only distinction is between neuter singular *'t* and the syncretic form *de.*

Table 2: Strong and weak definite article forms.

	Strong	Weak
N	*dait*	*'t* (*det*)
F	*djuu*	
M	*dan*	*de* (*d'*, *'e*, *'er*, *der*)
PL	*daa*	

Table 2 also lists some alternative forms of the weak article which are found with varying frequency in the Ehrentraut material.[7] The rare weak N.SG form *det* appears to be interchangeable with the form *'t*:

(4) *de* ***det*** ***best*** *rid* *kan,* *un* ***'t*** ***liikst***
REL WDEF.N best ride.INF can.3SG and WDEF.N straightest

schioᵉt *kan*
shoot.INF can.3SG

'… whoever can ride the best and shoot the straightest' (449.17)

The weak article *de* has a number of optional allomorphs, as shown in Table 3.

[7] Note that the edition by Versloot (1996) uses a modified version of Ehrentraut's orthography. Most importantly, long vowels are represented by doubling rather than a circumflex, e.g. <ée> for stressed /e:/ instead of Ehrentraut's <ê>. In this paper I give all Wangerooge Frisian forms, also those cited from Ehrentraut (1849, 1854), in Versloot's orthography. The references beginning with '446' and '449' are to Versloot (ed. 1996).

Table 3: Optional allomorphs of the weak non-neuter article.

	Before /t d/	Elsewhere
In some PPs	*'er*	*'e*
Elsewhere	*der*	*de* (*d'*)

Before some nouns beginning with /t/ or /d/ – and very occasionally /n/ – the article may appear as *der*, as discussed by Hoekstra (1998). After certain prepositions, the article may be reduced to *'e* or *'er* depending on the context. Two examples are given in (5).

(5) a. *nuu laítert yaa hírii iin hállii uut* ***'er tuun***
now let.PL 3PL 3F.OBL home fetch.INF from WDEF church
'Now they have her brought home from the church.' (449.162)

b. *bliiv up* ***'e gruun****, saa fálstuu nich*
stay.IMP on WDEF ground then fall.2SG not
'Stay on the ground, then you won't fall down.' (proverb; 446.164)

It should be noted that the strong definite article – or, more accurately, a homonym of it – may also occur independently. In such cases it does not function as a determiner, but as a free anaphoric or demonstrative pronoun (glossed DEM). An example is given in (6a). The neuter weak article is also homonymous with an independent pronoun, the third-person singular neuter anaphoric pronoun *'t*, as shown in (6b). These pronouns will not be investigated in this paper.

(6) a. *Aínmool is der 'n óol-en buur,* ***dan*** *hää*
once be.3SG EXPL INDF old-M.INDF farmer DEM.M have.3SG

three fént-er
three.M young.man-PL

'Once upon a time there is an old farmer, he has three sons.' (446.438)

b. *man hii weil* ***'t*** *doch ni' doo*
but he want.PST.3SG 3N CTR not do.INF
'… but he did not want to do it after all.' (446.313)

Having introduced the Wangerooge Frisian corpus and the inventory of article forms, I will now turn to the central issue which motivated this study – i.e. the use of the two articles – and the methodological problems I encountered while trying to analyse this.

4 Five methodological issues

The entire Wangerooge Frisian corpus runs to more than 100,000 words. Unsurprisingly, the definite articles are among the most frequent items in the corpus, accounting for several thousand tokens in total. Because of the large amount of data, and because a proper analysis of definiteness requires close attention to the discourse context of the individual examples, I had to make a smaller selection of texts for the investigation of the articles. The texts I used for this study are listed in Table 4. Most of them are from the Ehrentraut material, which was introduced in Section 3.1, but in order to compare the different 19th-century sources I also included the Wangerooge Frisian text from Winkler (1874) and two of the texts from Firmenich (ed. 1854). Some of the differences between these texts – including their varying documentary value – will be discussed below.

Table 4: Texts analysed for this study.

Text	Genre	Source	Words
The three golden rings	Fairy tale	Versloot ed. 1996: 449.16–34	2,777
King Dagobert	Fairy tale	Versloot ed. 1996: 449.102–130	4,680
Aalewiina Gräävendaal	Fairy tale	Versloot ed. 1996: 449.142–166	3,490
Hebel, *Schatzkästlein…*	Literary translation	Versloot ed. 1996: 446.98–101	665
Popular beliefs	Ethnographic	Ehrentraut 1854: 13–20	2,560
Luke 15: 11–32	Bible translation	Winkler 1874: 171–173	963
Luke 16: 19–31	Bible translation	Firmenich ed. 1854: 8–9	308
Unexpected help	Anecdote	Firmenich ed. 1854: 10–11	593

All texts were carefully read and translated, during which I noted down all definite noun phrases and attempted to identify the type of definiteness in question. Several examples from the texts are given below. I have also included an appendix with a glossed excerpt of one of the texts, the fairy tale ‘The three golden rings’. This excerpt allows the reader to see how the two articles are used in a longer stretch of discourse and also served as a source of examples for the analysis in Section 5. Before presenting this, however, I will discuss the methodological issues I encountered while working with the material.

4.1 Possibility of translation effects

A common problem in historical linguistics is the presence of translations in the surviving corpora of many languages (see e.g. Versloot 2018 on another East Frisian variety, Harlingerland Frisian). While written texts may differ from spontaneous spoken language in several ways, an additional problem in the case of translations is the possibility of source-language influence. In the case of

Wangerooge Frisian, a number of the recorded texts are translations from German, often of Bible texts.

Given that split definiteness in standard written German is a more restricted phenomenon than in Wangerooge Frisian (see footnote 1), one could easily imagine source-language influence on the use of the articles in the translated texts. This indeed appears to be the case in one of the texts surveyed here, the translation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) published by Winkler (1874). This source almost exclusively uses the strong article, even in contexts where other texts consistently use the weak article. One such context is the definite noun phrase *dan hemmel* 'the sky, Heaven' in (7):

(7) *ik häb sün dain jen* ***dan hemmel*** *un far di*
1SG have.1SG sin do.SUP against SDEF.M heaven and before 2SG.OBL
'I have sinned against Heaven and before you.' (Winkler 1874: 172)

In the Ehrentraut material, this noun almost without exception appears as *de hémmel*, i.e. with the weak article. This is always the case when it means 'Heaven'. In the two exceptions I have found – both from translated texts – the noun phrase refers to the sky, cf. (8). The example in (8b) is especially surprising because it uses the feminine strong article. Ehrentraut (1849: 371) writes elsewhere that the noun *hémmel* is masculine.

(8) a. *won hii in* ***dan hémmel*** *full stiir uumhóoch la'uk-et*
when 3M in SDEF.M sky full star[PL] upwards look-3SG
'… when he looks up at the sky full of stars' (translation from Hebel's *Schatzkästlein*; 446.98)

b. *un Gaad hiit dait fä'stens* ***djuu hémmel***
and God call.PST.3SG SDEF.N firmament SDEF.F sky
'… and God called the firmament "the sky"' (Genesis 1: 3; 446.116)

While it cannot be ruled out that translation effects may also have played a role in the examples in (8), it is worth noting that both of them are somewhat atypical instances of the noun *hémmel*. In (8a) the definite NP contains the postnominal modifier *full stiir* 'full of stars', which might have played a role in the choice of article. In (8b) *djuu hémmel* is an object complement, the only example of *hémmel* in this syntactic position in the corpus; in this instance influence from German is perhaps unlikely anyway, as the German cognate *Himmel* is also a masculine noun. In other words, the strong articles in (8) might be due to other factors than influence from the source texts. As far as I can see, however, influence from the source text is the most likely explanation for the high frequency of the

strong article in Winkler (1874). Unfortunately, Winkler only lists the translator as "N. N." and does not provide any information about how the text was translated. It is possible that the translation is from the hand of a Wangerooge Frisian speaker, but the person responsible may also have been an outsider who dictated the source text to a native speaker and had it translated phrase by phrase or sentence by sentence. At any rate, at least with respect to article use the text is probably not representative of spontaneous Wangerooge Frisian usage.

4.2 "Normalisation" of texts

Another challenge in working with older linguistic documentation is that norms about the handling of primary data have changed significantly since the emergence of linguistics as an academic discipline. Clear standards for the quality and management of research data are of recent date, and it is quite possible that many earlier scholars – even trained linguists – "corrected" their primary field materials to better correspond to their own impression of the language. That this is not merely a theoretical possibility is shown by the example of the famous American linguist Leonard Bloomfield, who did fieldwork on Menominee (Algonquian, Wisconsin) in the 1920s and published several studies of the language. As discussed by Goddard (1987) and Macaulay & Salmons (2019: 196–197), Bloomfield made sometimes quite major changes to his own data in order to suppress variation and make it conform to what he called the "community norm". Examples which appeared to deviate from this (imagined) norm were often explained away as due to "clumsy" or "bad" speakers (see especially Goddard 1987: 196–201; some examples of such negative evaluations of speakers can be found in Bloomfield 1927). Most modern linguists would surely agree that this kind of practice is unscientific. As Goddard (1987: 200) puts it, "The description of a language as refractively defined by a postulated community norm is fundamentally incompatible with the descriptivist ideal of documenting and accounting for the totality of actual speech". It is impossible to know for certain how common this kind of "normalisation" is in older linguistic documentation. In the Wangerooge Frisian case, however, there is positive evidence of it in at least two sources.

In the case of Winkler (1874), which has already been discussed above, the representation of the language appears to be quite close to the pronunciation and shows clear inspiration from the orthography used by Ehrentraut (1849, 1854). For instance, the digraph <ôe> is used for the centering diphthong /oːə̯/ in accordance with Ehrentraut's practice. At least in one respect, however, the orthography in Winkler (1874) deviates from this principle, namely in words like *sjêrl* 'man' and *bêrn* 'child'. Here the lowered <r> represents a historical phoneme which had been lost by the 19th century. Fortunately, Winkler (1874: 174) mentions this explicitly, noting that this letter "is not pronounced at all", and

that the two words are actually pronounced *sjêl* and *bên*. It is not mentioned if any other words in the text were adjusted to reflect their etymology.

Another case in point is a slightly later source, Littmann (1922). This consists of three texts in a practical orthography, collected from the speaker Christian Christians in 1897. However, it is clear from the notes that the text does not always reflect the spoken word. Although Littmann (1922: 28) writes at one point that he "of course thought it necessary to comply with my own transcript", a number of changes have in fact been made where his consultant deviated from the forms found in the Ehrentraut material. Some of these are additions which are indicated with square brackets in the text, but other forms have been silently emended. For instance, Littmann (1922: 32) mentions that he consistently writes the masculine possessive determiner *siin* "against other information in my transcript". In this case it is not indicated what the transcript originally said, and one has to wonder if other forms in the Littmann material may have been silently "corrected". For this reason, this source should probably be used with caution.

The Ehrentraut material is generally considered the most reliable record of Wangerooge Frisian, and Ehrentraut himself stressed that he had attempted to represent the spoken language as accurately as possible (see Versloot ed. 1996: lxv–lxvi). The weak definite article is a case in point, as shown by the many variants forms recorded in the material (see Table 2). In the case of the strong article, however, it is worth considering whether there may have been a degree of normalisation. The reason is that Ehrentraut (1849: 18) in one place notes that the "initial letter" in the strong feminine article *djuu* was often dropped, so that the article was pronounced *juu* – but such a spelling does not appear to be attested anywhere in the texts he collected. One might thus wonder if a degree of normalisation of the articles has taken place after all, meaning that Ehrentraut does not always write the definite articles as they were actually pronounced. However, I think the discrepancy may be explained in another way. As briefly mentioned in Section 3.1, most of Ehrentraut's textual material was collected from a single speaker, the elderly woman Anna Metta Claßen. The corpus thus primarily reflects her individual linguistic usage, but Ehrentraut undoubtedly spent time with other Wangerooge Frisian speakers as well, and his notes contain several examples of linguistic variation between the older and younger generations (see Ehrentraut 1849: 16; Versloot ed. 1996: 446.16, 447.73). I think it is quite possible that Ehrentraut had frequently heard the form *juu* when visiting the island, but that his primary consultant had the more conservative variant *djuu*. If this is the case, the discrepancy between the description in Ehrentraut (1849: 18) and the forms found in the corpus is due to interindividual variation rather than any normalisation of the textual data.

4.3 Limits on discourse contexts

Even if the Ehrentraut corpus is a highly reliable record of Wangerooge Frisian, the nature of the material means that certain discourse contexts are rare or absent. The vast majority of the texts in the corpus are monologic, and most of them are narratives such as fairy tales, anecdotes, or stories from the Bible. Most of these stories take place far away from Wangerooge, and even the few texts that are set on the island are not bound to the here and now, but are retellings of past events, such as the anecdotes in the text "Popular beliefs" (Ehrentraut 1854: 13–20) or the account of the execution of two islanders during the Napoleonic Wars (Versloot ed. 1996: 446.326–338). For the analysis of the definite articles, this has the implication that there are no certain attestations of immediate-situation definiteness in the corpus, i.e. definite reference to objects present in the speech situation. At the very least, there are none in the texts surveyed for this study and I have not encountered any in the other texts in the corpus.

Some possible candidates for immediate-situation contexts are found in the dictionary material (e.g. Ehrentraut 1849: 27–109, 357–406). Here Ehrentraut often gives example sentences illustrating the use of the lemmata, and some of these refer to household objects or food items, usually with the weak article. These could possibly have been spoken in situations where the items in question were present in the room:

(9) a. *lauk naa* ***de krog****, wut hii sjuth*
look.IMP after WDEF pot whether 3M boil.3SG
'Check the pot, whether it is boling.' (Ehrentraut 1849: 62)

b. *iik wul* ***de áriit*** *óonwook*
1SG want.1SG WDEF pea[PL] soak.INF
'I want/am going to soak the peas.' (Ehrentraut 1849: 63)

However, without any additional context, it is impossible to know for certain which kind of definiteness is instantiated in such examples. It is unclear whether the objects in question were actually present in the situation and whether the sentences were overheard by Ehrentraut or deliberately constructed by his consultants to illustrate the use of the words. For this reason, the details of article use in immediate-situation contexts will so far have to remain uncertain, but hopefully further analysis of additional texts will turn up at least some unambiguous examples.

4.4 Uncertain common ground and lack of metadata

The lack of context is also a problem in the case of the longer texts. Specifically, what is missing from almost the entire corpus are metadata about the extralinguistic context: Who were the speakers responsible for the individual texts, who else might have been present during elicitation, when were the texts recorded, and in which order? Ehrentraut (1849: 14–16) writes that he collected his material during four visits to Wangerooge between 1837 and 1841, and that most of it was recorded from Anna Metta Claßen, whom he describes in very positive terms. It is thus clear that they knew each other personally, but we of course cannot know how well and how extensive their common ground (assumed shared knowledge) was. Furthermore, because of the lack of metadata, we do not know what discourse occurred before the individual texts. This has consequences especially for the identification of anaphoric definiteness, where the speaker refers back to a previously mentioned discourse referent.

In the case of fairy tales and other fictional narratives, the characters of the story are usually explicitly introduced with an indefinite NP, as in beginning of 'The three golden rings' (example [1] in the appendix):

(10) *Deer is ainmool 'n oo$_e$l-en groo$_e$v mit sin*
EXPL be.3SG once INDF old-INDF.M count with 3M.POSS

wüüf, da häbb-et ***ään ä'änsiigs-ën fent.*** *nu qua*
wife DEM.PL have-PL one.M single-INDF.M young.man now say.3SG

dan fent *jen sin allers…*
SDEF.M young.man against 3M.POSS parents

'Once upon a time there is an old count with his wife, they have only one son. Now the son tells his parents…' (449.20)

In some of the other texts in the corpus, however, the discourse referents are not introduced with indefinite NPs, but are definite at first mention. Consider the beginnings of two of the ethnographic texts collected by Ehrentraut, "Popular beliefs" and "Children's games":

(11) a. *bii óolen tíid-en, won* ***de wü'üf-er*** *stíin-en too sjénn-en*
by olden time-PL when WDEF woman-PL stand.PST-PL to churn-GER
'In the olden days, when the women were churning butter…' (Ehrentraut 1854: 13)

b. *fon toofö'ören ha'id-en* ***daa*** ***béen-er*** *állerlei spil*
of beforehand have.PST-PL SDEF.PL child-PL all.kinds game[PL]
'Beforehand the children had all kinds of games' (Ehrentraut 1854: 4)

Both of these texts are about customs on Wangerooge, the subject NPs in (11) apparently referring to the women and children of the island in general. At first glance this would make them clear examples of larger-situation definiteness. However, because we do not know what went before the utterances in (11) in the actual speech situation, it cannot be ruled out that the Wangerooge women and children had already been discussed by the interlocutors, making them candidates for anaphoric definiteness instead. Unless some additional information about Ehrentraut's fieldwork were to be discovered – most importantly when the individual texts were collected – examples such as the ones in (11) will have to remain somewhat uncertain.

4.5 Lack of prosodic information

The final problem I wish to mention is common to all written linguistic sources, namely that writing can never accurately reproduce all aspects of the spoken language. As I noted in Section 2.2, the Wangerooge Frisian strong article in fact had two related functions – definite article and demonstrative – which in some cases both appear possible. In the following example from "The three golden rings" (see [14] in the appendix), for instance, I have been unable to determine whether *dan* functions as definite article or demonstrative:

(12) *yu wet gans nich wut* ***dan*** ***ring*** *bidüüd sil*
3F know.3SG at.all not what SDEF.M ring mean.INF shall.3SG
'She doesn't know at all what the/that ring is supposed to mean' (449.19)

It is likely that the strong article could be pronounced with additional emphasis when used as a demonstrative. Unfortunately, only the Ehrentraut material has indications of emphatic pronunciation, and apparently only inconsistently. In the edition by Versloot (1996), underlining is used (see [2] above), whereas in Ehrentraut (1849, 1854) some instances of the strong article are printed with spaced letters, as shown in Figure 1:

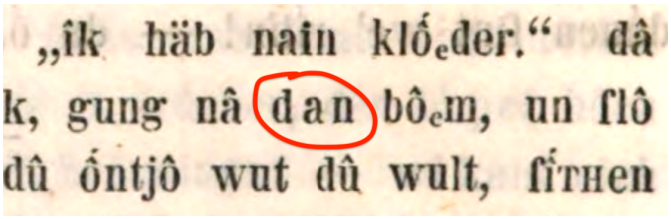

Figure 1: Marking of stress on the determiner *dan* (Ehrentraut 1854: 80).

In this example, from a version of the Cinderella story, the strong article is quite clearly used with a demonstrative function:

(13) *daa quaa djuu duuv: „deer häst duu än stok, gung*
then say.3SG SDEF.F dove there have.2SG 2SG INDF stick go.IMP

naa ***dan*** ***boo͡em****, un sloo deer an mit dan stok*
after SDEF.M tree and beat.IMP there on with SDEF.M stick

‘Then the dove says, “There you have a stick, go to *that* tree and beat it with the stick…”’ (Ehrentraut 1854: 80)

All instances of emphasised strong articles in the corpus are compatible with a demonstrative reading. However, this kind of typographic emphasis is quite rare in the corpus, and it is far from certain that all demonstratively used strong articles are emphasised. On the other hand, it is also quite likely that a more emphatic pronunciation was not obligatory when the strong article was used as a demonstrative, only optional (on this point in Fering, see Ebert 1971: 103–104). Whatever the reasons, it seems that typography alone cannot be relied on to distinguish the demonstrative and definiteness functions of the strong article.

5 Wangerooge Frisian split definiteness

In spite of the methodological obstacles discussed in the preceding pages, it is possible to make at least some generalisations about the distribution of the two articles. In this section I will present the conclusions I have managed to draw so far. A summary of the main articles used in the different definite contexts is given in Table 5; some additional examples will also be given below.

As discussed in Section 4.3, I have not been able to find any unambiguous immediate-situation contexts in the corpus, so this type is listed with a question mark in Table 5. The other types in the table are represented in the corpus, though not necessarily very frequently. This should be kept in mind along with

the fact that most of the observations are tendencies rather than absolute generalisations.

Table 5: Definite article uses in the corpus (main generalisations).

Type of definiteness	**Article**	**Examples**
Anaphoric	SDEF (WDEF)	see (10) and (14)
Associative anaphoric	WDEF/SDEF	see (3) and (16)–(17)
Immediate situation	?	
Larger situation	WDEF (SDEF)	see (15) and possibly (11)
Generic	WDEF	*un daa farkóo$_e$pet yaa him an* ***de*** *fránsmon* ‘and then they sell him to the French’
Proper noun	WDEF	***de*** *Turkíi* ‘Turkey’, ***de*** *Tääms* ‘the Thames’
Relational time expr.	SDEF	*nuu seíket daa állers* ***dan*** *gánse aíven* ‘now the parents are searching the whole evening’
Unfamiliar referent		
– establishing relatives	SDEF	***daa*** *béener****,*** *deer nuu áardiig sint…* ‘the children that are well-behaved…’
– NP-complements	SDEF	*nu kumt* ***dait*** *gerücht far Líioon, dat sin swóoger de krich nich hool kan* ‘now the rumour reaches Liioon that his brother-in-law cannot win the war’
– superlatives	WDEF/SDEF	***de*** *állersómst síiTHen klóo$_e$der* ‘the nicest silk clothes’ ***dait*** *naast weertshuus* ‘the nearest inn’
– ordinal numerals	SDEF	*daa kumt* ***dan*** *thrääd* ‘then comes the third [man]’
– ‘uniqueness’ modifiers	SDEF	***dait*** *éegenst reegemént* ‘the same regiment’

The weak article is the default choice with proper nouns, generic noun phrases, and noun phrases containing a superlative. With proper nouns like *de Turkíi* ‘Turkey’, this generalisation appears to be without exceptions. The strong article is the default in anaphoric definite contexts. A canonical example was seen in (10) above, and further instances may be found in the appendix. This generalisation is not absolute, however. Consider the following excerpts from the fairy tale ‘King Dagobert’. In (14a) an ogre is introduced into the narrative with an indefinite NP. The ogre is referred to several times after this, but not consistently with the strong article – as shown in (14b), the weak article is also used:

(14) a. *deer licht* ***'n*** ***gróo$_{e}$t-en*** ***riiz*** *far dan barg,*
EXPL lie.3SG INDF big-M.INDF ogre before SDEF.M mountain

deer ***dan*** ***riiz*** *uurwin kan, dee kricht djuu faun*
REL SDEF.M ogre defeat.INF can.3SG REL get.3SG SDEF.F girl

'There is a big ogre lying in front of the mountain, whoever can defeat the [that?] ogre will get the girl [i.e. the princess]' (449.116)

b. *daa sjucht hii* ***dan*** ***groo$_{e}$t*** ***riiz*** *al fon fiirens.*
then see.3SG 3M SDEF.M big ogre already of distance

daa ropt ***de*** ***groo$_{e}$t*** ***riiz****:* […]
then shout.3SG WDEF big ogre

'Then he can already see the big ogre from a distance. Then the big ogre shouts…' (449.120)

In her discussion of the strong article in Fering, Ebert (1971: 111–112) suggests that the weak article may sometimes be used for anaphoric definiteness in narratives. This is only possible, however, when the character or object is unique in the story, such as the fisherman (*a fasker*) in Ebert's example (26). The same principle may have been at work in Wangerooge Frisian. In 'King Dagobert', the ogre is indeed a unique character, and this also seems to be the case with all other anaphoric uses of the weak article in this fairy tale (*de kö'öniing* 'the king', *de prinséssin* 'the princess', *de súltan* 'the sultan'). A more thorough investigation of a larger number of texts would be necessary to confirm if this is a general tendency, however.

Two other types of definiteness occur with either the strong or the weak article, namely larger-situation and associative anaphoric definiteness. In the former case, there are some possible examples with the strong article (see Section 4.4), but the default appears to be the weak article, as in (15):

(15) *hi wul weg 'nin* ***de*** ***warlt*** *henoon*
3M want.3SG away in WDEF world into
'he wants to go out into the world' (449.16)

In the case of associative anaphors, the distribution between the weak and the strong articles is more even. An example with the strong article from 'The three golden rings' was given in (3) in Section 2.2. In (16) is another example, from 'King Dagobert':

(16) *daa schrift yuu dait naa hírii mon too, un hírii mon*
then write.3SG 3F DEM.N after 3F.POSS man to and 3F.POSS man

siin maam líbb-et noch […] *yuu fang-t* ***dan búdde***
3M.POSS mother live-3SG still 3F catch-3SG SDEF.M messenger

mit dan breif up
with SDEF.M letter up

'Then she [the queen] writes that to her husband, but her husband's mother is still alive … she [the mother-in-law] intercepts the messenger with the letter' (449.102)

In (16) we learn that one of the main characters, a queen, has written to her husband, but that her mother-in-law has stopped *dan búdde* 'the messenger'. Presumably, the speaker uses a definite NP here because the act of writing a letter is usually associated with some kind of messenger or postman.

In many other cases, however, an associated NP uses the weak definite article. This is especially frequent in cases where the definite NP refers to an inherent part of the previously mentioned referent. Ebert (1971: 114–125) discusses this under the heading "Anknüpfung durch Mitgegebenes", Schwarz (2009) refers to "Part-Whole Bridging". The prototypical instance is body-part reference, as in (17):

(17) *un jéeder fent hää 'n góolen ring uum* ***'e hals.***
and each boy have.3SG INDF golden ring around WDEF neck
'And each boy has a golden ring around his [lit. the] neck' (449.114)

Further examples of this phenomenon can be found in the appendix (examples [5]–[6]). In cases where there is a more indirect relation between the two referents, such as 'inn' – 'innkeeper' in (3) above or 'letter' – 'messenger' in (16), the strong article seems to be more common. However, like the other tendencies discussed above, the distribution of the strong and weak articles in associative anaphoric NPs requires further investigation.

6 Concluding remarks

This paper has presented a first analysis of split definiteness in Wangerooge Frisian and discussed some of the challenges I have encountered while analysing this system. Some of these – such as the lack of prosodic information and the unfortunate normalisation efforts by some earlier linguists – are by no means

unique to this topic, but are always worth keeping in mind when attempting to analyse a language on the basis of historical written records. Other challenges are probably of more "local" relevance, presenting problems for particular linguistic topics or subdisciplines. In the case of the Wangerooge Frisian articles, two central issues are the apparent absence of certain discourse contexts in the material and the lack of metadata about when, where, and how the individual texts where collected. As I discussed in Section 2, split definiteness systems may make fine distinctions depending on the common ground of the speaker and the addressee. When working with historical linguistic documentation, it is impossible to reconstruct this common ground with absolute certainty, and it is important to keep these limitations in mind when working with material such as the Wangerooge Frisian corpus.

In spite of these methodological challenges, it is still possible to describe the Wangerooge Frisian definite articles in quite some detail. In this article I have shown that Wangerooge Frisian had a split definiteness system similar to the ones described for Fering, Bohairic Coptic, and several other languages. The weak article was not merely a reduced form of the strong article, but a distinct grammatical item with its own usage profile. In light of the considerable interest in split definiteness in recent years (e.g. Egedi 2017; Ortmann 2014; Schwarz 2013, 2019; Wespel 2008), the Wangerooge Frisian case should certainly be of interest for cross-linguistic studies of article systems. In particular, the extensive and highly reliable corpus by H. G. Ehrentraut and Anne Metta Claßen would be well suited for a larger quantitative investigation of article usage. This would be necessary to determine what governed article choice in associative anaphoric contexts and to confirm the other generalisations suggested in this paper. It would also be a necessary prerequisite for a comparative study of split definiteness across the Frisian languages.

Abbreviations

1/2/3	first/second/third person	NP	noun phrase
COMP	complementiser	OBL	oblique
CTR	contrastive particle *doch*	PL	plural
EXPL	expletive	POSS	possessive
F	feminine	PST	past tense
GER	gerund	REL	relativiser
IMP	imperative	SDEF	strong definite
INDF	indefinite	SG	singular
M	masculine	SUP	supine (past participle)
N	neuter	WDEF	weak definite

Appendix

The appendix containing a glossed excerpt of the fairy tale 'The three golden rings' can be found here: https://zenodo.org/doi/10.5281/zenodo.11085248.

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Sune Gregersen
Department of Frisian Studies
Kiel University
s.gregersen@isfas.uni-kiel.de
https://sgregersen.github.io/