

# Reconstructing the definite determiner system of Wangerooge Frisian

Sune Gregersen

ISFAS, Kiel University

“Methodological Challenges in Historical Sociolinguistics”  
University of Amsterdam, 23 May 2023

# Outline

- 1 Definiteness
- 2 Wangerooge Frisian definite determiners
- 3 Methodological challenges
- 4 Conclusions

## Section 1

# Definiteness

# Instructional view of definiteness

- Definite determiners as instruction from speaker (S) to addressee (A): A should be able to identify the intended referent.
  - “... a form of instruction to the hearer to match the linguistic referent of the definite description with a particular object in his mind” (Hawkins 1978: 108)

# Articles and demonstratives

- DEFINITE ARTICLE: instruction to A that there is a unique appropriate referent
- DEMONSTRATIVE: instruction to A to identify the appropriate referent, possibly out of several candidates

# Articles and demonstratives

- (1) *We bought a cat yesterday.*
- (2) *We bought the cat yesterday.*
- (3) *We bought this cat yesterday.*

# Main uses of definite articles

- IMMEDIATE SITUATION: *Please pass me **the** salt.*

# Main uses of definite articles

- IMMEDIATE SITUATION: *Please pass me **the** salt.*
- LARGER SITUATION: ***The** prime minister has just resigned.*
  - UNICA: *the moon, the Himalayas, the Bible*



# Main uses of definite articles

- IMMEDIATE SITUATION: *Please pass me **the** salt.*
- LARGER SITUATION: ***The** prime minister has just resigned.*
  - UNICA: *the moon, the Himalayas, the Bible*
- GENERIC: *Is **the** platypus a mammal?*

# Main uses of definite articles

- IMMEDIATE SITUATION: *Please pass me **the** salt.*
- LARGER SITUATION: ***The** prime minister has just resigned.*
  - UNICA: *the moon, the Himalayas, the Bible*
- GENERIC: *Is **the** platypus a mammal?*
- ANAPHORIC: *My aunt has a cat and a dog. **The** dog barks a lot.*

# Main uses of definite articles

- IMMEDIATE SITUATION: *Please pass me **the** salt.*
- LARGER SITUATION: ***The** prime minister has just resigned.*
  - UNICA: *the moon, the Himalayas, the Bible*
- GENERIC: *Is **the** platypus a mammal?*
- ANAPHORIC: *My aunt has a cat and a dog. **The** dog barks a lot.*
- ASSOCIATIVE ANAPHORIC: *I just bought a new bike, but **the** gears don't work properly.*

# “Split” definiteness in Fering (North Frisian)

Table 1: Fering definite determiners (Arfsten et al. 2022)

	N/F	M	PL	Eng.
A-article	<i>at</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>	‘the’
D-article	<i>det</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>dön</i>	‘the’
DIST.DEM	<i>det(diar)</i>	<i>de(diar)</i>	<i>dön(diar)</i>	‘that, those’
PROX.DEM	<i>detheer</i>	<i>deheer</i>	<i>dönheer</i>	‘this, these’

# “Split” definiteness in Fering (North Frisian)

- IMMEDIATE SITUATION: A-article
- LARGER SITUATION: A-article
- GENERIC: A-article
- ANAPHORIC: D-article
- ASSOCIATIVE ANAPHORIC: D-article or A-article

# Minimal pair in Fering

- (4) A hünj hee tuswark.  
the dog has toothache  
‘The dog has a toothache’ (“der gemeinte Hund [braucht]  
nicht näher spezifiziert zu werden”)
- (5) Di hünj hee tuswark.  
the dog has toothache  
‘The dog has a toothache’ (“wenn der Hund im vorher-  
gehenden Text spezifiziert wurde”) (Ebert 1971: 82–83)

# “Split” definiteness

- Systems with two definite articles have been described for a number of languages (cf. Schwarz 2013). These include:
  - Various varieties of German (e.g. Heinrichs 1954, Hartmann 1982, Haberland 1985, Harweg 1989, Schwarz 2009)
  - Lakhota (Siouan; Schwarz 2013: 546–548)
  - Hausa (Chadic < Afroasiatic; Jaggar 2001: 316–323)
  - ... and Wangerooge Frisian!

## Section 2

# Wangerooge Frisian definite determiners



# Wangerooge Frisian

- Frisian language spoken on Wangerooge (Northern Germany) until early 20th century
- Well-documented, esp. thanks to H.G. Ehrentraut (1798–1866) and his consultant Anna Metta Claßen (1774–1846)
- Total corpus of more than 100,000 words – main genres fairy tales, ethnographic descriptions, anecdotes (“tall tales”), translations from the Bible

# Sources

Table 2: Sources analyzed here

Text	Genre	Source	Words
Aalewiina Gräävendaal	Fairy tale	Versloot 1996	3,490
King Dagobert	Fairy tale	Versloot 1996	4,680
Hebel, "Schatzkästlein"	Literaty transl.	Versloot 1996	665
"Popular beliefs"	Ethnographic	Ehrentraut 1854	2,560
"Unexpected help"	Anecdote	Firmenich 1854	593
Luke 16: 19–31	Bible transl.	Firmenich 1854	308
Luke 15: 11–32	Bible transl.	Winkler 1874	963

- ... plus additional examples excerpted from the Ehrentraut material (Ehrentraut 1854, Versloot 1996)

## 8. Volksglauben.

## Heren.

bî ólen tíden, won de wúfer stínen tô fjénmen, un haíden  
dait fjénnen in de fjen farfínd \*) — dait kan gans licht farfínd  
wêr mit tô heit wátter óder tô kôl — den kreígen yâ nain  
búter. óder mónnich môl kreígen yâ 'n lets ful, dait wêr júst  
as mélkstíppel, dait híten ya fon héxenbúter. won der den 'n  
wúfminsk úrtó kaum dait wêr 'n hex. fâ wêr der aínmôl 'n  
wúf bî 't fjénnen, yû kan nain búter kríg, dà kumt 'er 'n ôl  
wúf 'erdín un fídert híri an, wut yû nain wôn hâ? dà bit \*\*)

Example of a text (Ehrentraut 1854: 13)

# The definite determiner system

Table 3: Wangerooge Frisian definite determiners

	N	F	M	PL	Eng.
“WEAK”	<i>'t</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>de</i>	‘the’
“STRONG”	<i>dait</i>	<i>djuu</i>	<i>dan</i>	<i>daa</i>	‘the’
DIST.DEM	<i>dait</i>	<i>djuu</i>	<i>dan</i>	<i>daa</i>	‘that, those’
PROX.DEM	<i>dit</i>	<i>dis</i>	<i>din</i>	<i>díz(z)e</i>	‘this, these’

# Allomorphy in weak article

Table 4: Optional allomorphs of *de* (cf. Hoekstra 1998)

	Before /t, d/	Elsewhere
In some PPs	<i>'er</i>	<i>'e</i>
Elsewhere	<i>der</i>	<i>de</i>

# “Split” definiteness in Wangerooge Frisian

- IMMEDIATE SITUATION: unattested?
- LARGER SITUATION: weak (occasionally strong)
- GENERIC: weak
- ANAPHORIC: strong (occasionally weak)
- ASSOCIATIVE ANAPHORIC: strong or weak

# Larger situation: usually weak article

- (6) **de sun** gungst únner  
the sun goes under  
'The sun is setting'
- (7) hii mut mit all siin folk naa **de turkíi**  
he must with all his people to the Turkey  
'He [the king] has to go to Turkey with all his men'

# Generic: weak article

- (8) in 't djúnkens muuzt        **de kat** am best.  
in the dark        catches\_mice the cat PTCL best  
‘The cat catches mice best in the dark’ (proverb)



# Anaphoric: usually strong article

- (9) nu kumt 'er 'n lœv un fint daa twoo béener deer,  
now comes EXPL a lion and finds the.PL two children there  
nuu nimt **djuu lœv** ain fon daa béener thwäärs in 'er  
now takes the.F lion one of the.PL children sideward in the  
tuut un brengt him naa hírii hœl  
mouth and brings him to her cave

‘Then a lion comes and finds the two children; then the lion  
takes one of the children in the mouth [= its mouth] and  
carries him of to its den’

# Associative anaphoric: weak or strong

- (10) nu kumt 'er 'n lœv un fint daa twoo béener deer,  
now comes EXPL a lion and finds the.PL two children there  
nuu nimt djuu lœv ain fon daa béener thwäärs in 'er  
now takes the.F lion one of the.PL children sideward in the  
**tuut** un brengt him naa hírii hœl  
mouth and brings him to her cave  
'Then a lion comes and finds the two children; then the lion  
takes one of the children in the mouth [= its mouth] and  
carries him of to its den'

# Associative anaphoric: weak or strong

- (11) daa schrift yuu dait na hírii mon      too, un hírii mon  
then writes she that to her husband to    and her husband  
siin maam líbbet noch [...] yuu fangt    **dan búdde**  
his mother lives still                      she catches the.M messenger  
mit **dan breif** up  
with the.M letter up  
'Then she [the queen] writes that to her husband, but her  
husband's mother is still alive [...] she intercepts  
the messenger with the letter'

# Wangerooge Frisian definite articles

- Distribution comparable to the Fering system described by Ebert (1971), but:
  - No attestations of immediate-situation contexts?
  - Unexpected strong articles in larger-situation contexts?
  - Unexpected weak articles in anaphoric contexts?
  - Some apparent strong articles may be distal demonstratives
  - Almost exclusively strong article in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Winkler 1874)

# Unexpected larger-situation use of strong article?

- (12) fon toofö'ören ha'idén **daa** **béener** állerlei spil  
of previously had the.PL children all\_kinds games  
[Beginning of an ethnographic description:] 'Back in the day  
the children had all kinds of games'

# Unexpected anaphoric use of weak article?

- (13) daa sjucht hii **dan** **grooet riiz** al fon fiirens. daa  
then sees he the.M big ogre already from distance then  
ropt **de** **grooet riiz**: wut wult duu kleiner Erdwurm?  
shout the big ogre: what want you small earthworm  
'Then he sees the big ogre from a distance; then  
the big ogre shouts: "What do you want, you puny  
earthworm?"'

# Unexpected strong articles in Winkler (1874)

- (14) Un da queid dan fent: bab! ik häb sün dain jen  
and then said the.M son: father! I have sin done against  
**dan hemmel**  
the.M heaven  
'And then the son said: "Father! I have sinned against  
heaven ...' (Luke 15: 21)

## Section 3

### Methodological challenges



# Four methodological problems

- 1 Lack of appropriate discourse contexts
- 2 Uncertain common ground in elicitation
- 3 Possibility of translation effects
- 4 Lack of stress distinctions in orthography

# Lack of appropriate discourse contexts

- Documentation almost exclusively monologic and not tied to immediate discourse context → apparent absense of immediate-situation uses?

# Lack of appropriate discourse contexts

- Documentation almost exclusively monologic and not tied to immediate discourse context → apparent absense of immediate-situation uses?
- Might be attested in some example sentences, but this is uncertain because of the lack of context:
  - *iik wul **de áriit** óonwook* ‘I am going to soak the peas’

# Uncertain common ground in elicitation

- Split definiteness in other languages tied to shared knowledge (common ground) of interlocutors
  - Identification due to linguistic co-text → strong
  - Identification due to extralinguistic context → weak

# Uncertain common ground in elicitation

- Split definiteness in other languages tied to shared knowledge (common ground) of interlocutors
  - Identification due to linguistic co-text → strong
  - Identification due to extralinguistic context → weak
- Ehrentraut corpus carefully recorded, but without metadata:
  - Who was present during elicitation?
  - What else was discussed during the session?
  - How well did the fieldworker know the consultant?

# Uncertain common ground in elicitation

- Split definiteness in other languages tied to shared knowledge (common ground) of interlocutors
  - Identification due to linguistic co-text → strong
  - Identification due to extralinguistic context → weak
- Ehrentraut corpus carefully recorded, but without metadata:
  - Who was present during elicitation?
  - What else was discussed during the session?
  - How well did the fieldworker know the consultant?
- Some uses of strong article may represent continuation from previous discourse which we do not have access to

# Anaphoric reference to previous discourse?

- (15) fon toofö'ören ha'idén **daa** **béener** állerlei spil  
 of previously had the.PL children all\_kinds games  
 [Beginning of an ethnographic description:] 'Back in the day  
 the children had all kinds of games'

# Possibility of translation effects

- Almost complete absense of weak article in Winkler (1874) – but this is a rather close Bible translation
- Anonymous translator, not necessarily a native speaker of Wangerooge Frisian



# Translation effects in Winkler (1874)?

- (16) Un da queid dan fent: bab! ik häb sün dain jen  
and then said the.M son: father! I have sin done against

**dan hemmel**

the.M heaven

‘And then the son said: “Father! I have sinned against  
heaven ...’ (Luke 15: 21)

- *Vater/ Ich hab gesündigt in den Himel* (High German, 1545)
- *Vader, Ick hebbe gesondight tegen den Hemel* (Dutch, 1637)

# Lack of stress distinctions in orthography

- Strong article and distal demonstrative almost certainly distinguished by stress, but this is not consistently indicated in the material
- Some apparent attestations of the strong article may actually be the distal demonstrative

# Stress in Ehrentraut (1854)

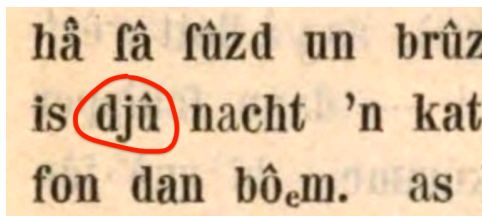
„ik hâb nain kló<sub>e</sub>der.“ dâ  
k, gung nâ d<sub>a</sub>n bô<sub>e</sub>m, un flô  
dû óntjô wut dû wult, fírhen

(Ehrentraut 1854: 80)

# Demonstrative or article?

- (17) daa is **djuu**      **nacht** 'n kat bii yam kíimiin.  
 then is the/that.F night a cat by them come  
 'Then a cat came to them that night [in the night?]'

# Lack of stress marking?



(Ehrentraut 1854: 16)

## Section 4

# Conclusions

# Summing up

- Two definite articles in Wangerooge Frisian – distribution apparently very similar to Fering (North Frisian)
- Methodological limitations preventing a complete reconstruction of the system:
  - Monologic texts belonging to limited number of genres
  - No access to the common ground of interlocutors
  - Stress not consistently marked
  - At least one text with clear translation effects

# Take-home message

- Some features of the spoken language are lost even in high-quality written sources
- ... and this has consequences even for an (apparently) purely structural phenomenon



# Thank you for your attention!



Comments and questions are always welcome:  
[s.gregersen@isfas.uni-kiel.de](mailto:s.gregersen@isfas.uni-kiel.de)

# References I



Arfsten, Antje, Anne Paulsen-Schwarz & Lena Terhart. 2022. *Friesische Gebrauchsgrammatik: Fering*. Bredstedt: Nordfriisk Instituut.



Ebert, Karen H. 1971. *Referenz, Sprechsituation und die bestimmten Artikel in einem nordfriesischen Dialekt (Fering)*. Bräist/Bredstedt: Nordfriisk Institut.



Ehrentraut, H. G. 1854. Mittheilungen aus der Sprache der Wangeroger. *Friesisches Archiv* 2. 1–84.



Firmenich, Johannes Matthias (ed.). 1854. *Germaniens Völkerstimmen: Sammlung der deutschen Mundarten in Dichtungen, Sagen, Märchen, Volksliedern u. s. w.* Vol. 3. Berlin: Friedberg & Mode.



Haberland, Hartmut. 1985. Zum Problem der Verschmelzung von Präposition und bestimmtem Artikel im Deutschen. *Osnabrücker Beiträge zur Sprachtheorie* 30. 82–106.



Hartmann, Dietrich. 1982. Deixis and anaphora in German dialects: The semantics and pragmatics of two definite articles in dialectal varieties. In Jürgen Weissenborn & Wolfgang Klein (eds.), *Here and there: Cross-linguistic studies on deixis and demonstration* (Pragmatics & Beyond III.2–3), 187–207. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. DOI: 10.1075/pb.iii.2-3.10har.

# References II



Harweg, Roland. 1989. Schwache und starke Artikelformen im gesprochenen Neuhochdeutsch. *Zeitschrift für Dialektologie und Linguistik* 56(1). 1–31. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40503116>.



Hawkins, John A. 1978. *Definiteness and indefiniteness: A study in reference and grammaticality prediction*. London: Croom Helm.



Heinrichs, Heinrich Matthias. 1954. *Studien zum bestimmten Artikel in den germanischen Sprachen*. Gießen: Schmitz.



Hoekstra, Jarich. 1998. R-yinfoeging yn it Wangereagersk. *Us Wurk* 47. 25–48.



Jaggar, Philip J. 2001. *Hausa*. (London Oriental and African Language Library 7). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.



Schwarz, Florian. 2009. *Two types of definites in natural language*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Amherst. (Doctoral dissertation). DOI: 10.7275/1077454.



Schwarz, Florian. 2013. Two kinds of definites cross-linguistically. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 7(10). 534–559. DOI: 10.1111/lnc3.12048.

## References III



Versloot, Arjen P. (ed.). 1996. *"Mittheilungen aus der Sprache der Wangeroger": De neilittenskip fan H.G. Ehrentraut oangeande it Eastfryske dialekt fan it eilân Wangereach út it argyf fan it Mariengymnasium yn Jever*. Ljouwert/Leeuwarden – Aurich: Fryske Akademy – Ostfriesische Landschaft.



Winkler, Johan (ed.). 1874. *Algemeen Nederduitsch en Friesch Dialecticon*. Vol. 1. Groningen: Nijhoff.