The epenthetic consonant in West-Germanic diminutives is syntactic

1. Summary Epenthetic consonants (ECs) are *in se* phonological. Yet, typological work suggests that they may have a syntactic role as well (Zygis 2010). I show that this is the case for the EC in Substandard Dutch diminutives: it spells out a scale. It is also found in Yiddish diminutives. In contrast, the EC cannot co-occur with an honorific morpheme that is only morphophonologically, but not syntactically, similar to the diminutive.

2. Main data Dutch substandard diminutives with *–ke* show an epenthetic /s/ if the root ends in a velar consonant. This epenthetic consonsant ('EC') is obligatory.

(1) tak-*(s)-ke /k/ (2) dag-*(s)-ke /x/ (3) ring-*(s)-ke /ŋ/
branch-EC-DIM day-EC-DIM ring-EC-DIM
'small branch' 'short day' 'small ring'

The /s/ depends both on the velar C and the diminutive (henceforth DIM). It thus does not appear in other phonological contexts (4-5) or other morphosyntactic contexts (6):

(4) duif-(*s)-ke (5) vrouw-(*s)-ke (6) melk-(*s)-koek
pigeon-(*EC)-DIM woman-(*EC)-DIM milk-(*EC)-cookie
'small pigeon' 'small woman' 'milk cookie'

3. Background Zygis' (2010) typology of ECs distinguishes between ECs that are triggered syntactically, those that are exclusively triggered by the segmental context and those that are triggered by prosodic domains. The /s/ meets all the criteria she lists for the first type. It depends on the syntactic context (see below). It is language-specific (see below). It is obligatory in the relevant context (see 1-3). It is a coronal sounds (i.e. an /s/), it is not sensitive to speaker variation or speech rate. This suggests that it is triggered syntactically even though it is sensitive to its segmental context. Below I develop this claim. I show that the EC spells out a syntactic head.

4. Same syntax, different phonological context: ✓ epenthetic consonant
If we can find an EC in a context which differs phonologically, but which is identical syntactically, we can conclude it is triggered syntactically. Yiddish shows exactly this. Yiddish DIMs show an EC in the exact same syntactic position, i.e. between the root and the diminutive morpheme in a DP (see 7). As in Dutch, the EC only occurs in the DIM (see 8) (Pierce & Boas 2010:215). Yet, the segmental context differs. Yiddish has an EC in between a root ending in /n/ and the DIM morpheme –*l* (see 7 vs. 9).

(7) beyn-*(d)-l-(ex) (8) payn-(*d)-lex (9) benk-(*d)-l
bone-*(EC)-DIM-PL pain-(*EC)-SUFFIX bench-(*EC)-DIM
'small bone(s)' 'painfully unpleasant' 'small closet'

I conclude that it is the syntax of the diminutive in these closely related languages (i.e. Dutch & Yiddish) that triggers the EC in between the root and the diminutive.

5. Same morpophonological context, different syntax: * epenthetic consonsant
Substandard Belgian Dutch interjections may select a diminutive morpheme –*kes*. (To be exact, it is unclear at this point whether –*kes* is composed (i.e. *ke+s*) or not. I ignore this issue as nothing hinges on it.) This process is productive, yet, -*kes* is sensitive to the sonority of the root's rhyme. The higher the sonority, the better. It easily attaches to vowels and glides (10 a-d), it may select sonorants (e), it is marked and rare, but not entirely excluded after the fricatives /f/ and /s/ (f-g), but it is not productive after /x/ (h) or after plosives (i-j).

(10) a. sorry-kes b. salu-kes c. oei-kes d. aw-kes e. shalom-kes
sorry-DIM bye-DIM oy-DIM ouch-DIM shalom-DIM
'Sorry!' 'Bye!' 'Oy vey!' 'Ouch!' 'Bye!'

f. ? helaas-kes g. ? oef-kes h. * ach-kes i. * lap-kes j. njet-kes
alals-DIM phew-DIM well-DIM damn-DIM nope-DIM
'Alas!' 'Phew!'

If the EC were triggered morphophonologically, the EC /s/ should be able to improve the occurrence of –*kes* on interjections with a root ending in /x/ and /k/. Yet, interjections cannot contain the EC /s/. The contrast is very clear for minimal pairs with nominal DIMs and interjections. The nominal DIMs allow for the EC (11,13), whereas the interjections do not (12,14).

(11) twee dag-s-ke-s   (12) *Dag-s-kes!   (13) twee kak-s-ke-s   (14) * Kak-s-kes!
     two day-EC-DIM-PL   day-EC-DIM   two shit-EC-DIM-PL   shit-EC-DIM
     'two days'   Intended:'Bye!'   'two turds'   Intended: 'Shit!'

Morphophonologically, -*kes* is comparable to –*ke* in (1-3): they are phonologically similar and they are both diminutive(-like). Yet, the syntax is different: interjections are not nominal, they rather have their own syntax (Corver 2012). In the interjection the morpheme realizes a head expressing informality. In other words, it is an honorific morpheme. Cross-linguistically, interjections may select honorifics (see e.g. Koul 1984 on Kashmiri and Zeisler (2006) on Ladakhi). I argue that Dutch interjections may contain honorific heads expressing (in)formality more generally. Blankenberge Dutch has the minimal pair in (15-16). The form in (15) is neutral. The form in (16) has a dragged vowel. It can only be uttered to someone one has met before, i.e. it obligatorily implies familiarity. I will argue that the dragged tone spells out an honorific head.

(15)   Hey!   (16)   Heeeey!
      greeting   greeting (implies familiarity obligatorily)

6. The /s/ expresses a head connected to a semantic scale

From the previous section one can deduce that the EC may not merge below a honorific morpheme. What does the EC realize, then, such that it shows this effect? One might suspect it realizes a nominal head. Yet, it is not restricted to nominals. It occurs in diminutivized adverbs as well:

(15)   a.   bleek-s-kes   b.   ziek-s-kes
           pale-EC-DIM   ill-EC-DIM
           'slightly pale' (Adverb)   'slightly ill' (Adv)

Now note that DPs and adverbs on the one hand do introduce a scale, whereas interjections do not: in the DP the diminutive introduces a scale of size (i.e. smallness). In the adverbs the diminutive introduces a scale on which a degree is mapped (e.g. *bleekskes* 'slightly pale' is a certain degree of paleness). However, in interjections the honorific only adds informality (see above), not a degree. *Merci-kes* 'Thanks', for example, is informal, but it certainly does not express a low degree of gratitude. The EC /s/ is thus restricted to contexts in which the diminutive expresses a scale. De Belder (2011:116-117) argues that the diminutive in the DP introduces a scale on which a certain degree of smallness is mapped. Its semantics is thus comparable to that of an adjective such as *small* as proposed by Kennedy (1999): it introduces a scale, a degree on that scale and a standard degree of comparison. The semantics of diminutives is thus composed out of several elements, of which *smallness* is just one element, at least one head refers to the scale. I conclude that the EC expresses a piece of this syntactic structure related to the scale. I assume the EC in the Yiddish data has the same role.

7. Conclusion
In this talk I argue that the epenthetic consonant in Dutch and Yiddish is triggered syntactically even though it depends on the segmental context.

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