West Germanic languages have plural/case markers inside compounds which do not have the distribution or meaning of the corresponding morphemes outside of compounds. These are commonly called linkers (L), e.g. Dutch *dorp-s-cafe* (village-L-cafe). In this paper we (i) establish that these morphemes, both in and outside of compounds, are not plural or case markers, but realizations of inflectional class markers with a systematic distribution and a predictable interpretation; (ii) show that L interact with the number system, revealing the existence of split number in West Germanic; and (iii) propose that the function of L is to disambiguate the structure of compounds that would otherwise be ambiguous.

**West Germanic Compounds.** L occur inside compounds with different forms, see examples (1-3) from Dutch. The form of L, in the b. examples, is mostly homophonous to the inflectional-PL, presented in the a. examples. L and PL can be the same, (1-2), or they can mismatch, (3): -en-PL and -s-L.

1. a. kok-(s/^en)/ 2. a. katt-(en/^s) 3. a. dorp-(en/^s)
   - cook-(PL)  - cat-(PL)  - town-(PL)
   - ‘cook(s)’  - ‘cat(s)’  - ‘town(s)’
   b. kok-s-buis  b. katt-en-luik  b. dorp-s-café
   - kok-s-mes  - katt-en-drol  - dorp-s-plein
   - chef-L-jacket  - chef-L-knife  - cat-L-turd
   - ‘chef’s jacket’  - ‘chef’s knife’  - ‘cat turd’

Despite variation for both L and PL in meaning, form and choice depending on the identity of the noun, several generalizations arise. (i) Both L and PL do not force a plural reading: A noun with L can be interpreted singular (Mattens 1984, Booij 2001 i.a.): in (1b) the jacket is worn by one chef; infl-PL can also be non-plural (Sauerland et al. 2008). (ii) Usually, the choice of L depends on the non-head element, alternating the heads in (1/2/3b) does not change L, but there are exceptions (Hoekstra 1996, DeBelder 2013, 2017, Augst 1975, Krott et al. 2007). This contrasts with PL (1/2/3a), which can never alternate. (iii) The choice of the L is more restricted than the choice for PL. This is even the case when looking at languages that have a more complicated PL/L system, like German. The PL/L, being homophonous, for Dutch and German are in (4).

4. a. Dutch: (-er) > -en > -s  
   b. German: -er > -e > -en > @ > -s

The forms are in a subset relation (see Mattens 1984, De Belder 2013 for Dutch). The PL choice for a given noun is usually fixed (cf. 1a/2a/3a). The L that a noun takes will either be identical to the PL or more to the right on the scale in (4): -en PL noun may occur with all L to the right, (2-3), but -s PL noun may not occur with any other L: (1) has never -en inside compounds. (iv) L can condition a special meaning of the non-head (Dutch 5) and German (6), (Becker 1992, Neef 2009, i.a.). This is not possible for infl-PL, (5a/6a).

5. a. hond-en/^s  b. hond-s-dol  a. kind-er/^s  b. Kind- s- computer
   - dog-PL  - dog-L-crazy  - kind- PL  - child- L- computer
   - ‘dogs/crazy’  - ‘rabid’  - ‘children/silly’  - ‘fetal/silly computer’

(v) L can be used to derive adverbs (De Belder 2013), nouns, or verbs, when used outside of compounds, (Dutch, 7a; German 7b) and follow the hierarchy in (4). (vi) Multiple PL forms are observed in certain dialects with -er and -s plurals (8). The two PL-positions are also seen in some dialects of German where -er occurs inside the diminutive, and -s only occurs outside of it, (8b, Ott 2011).

6. a. gind-s-er  b. Leid-er  (8) a. kind-er-tje-s  b. Kind- er- ke- s
   - ‘over there’  - ‘unfortunately’  - ‘little children’  - ‘little children’ (Low Rhenisch)

**Generalization.** Based on properties (i-vi), summarized in table 1, L vs PL correspond to the split found between inflectional and derivational elements, despite more variation in the German forms. Even though L are derivational, they interact with number the same way as PL in allowing non-plural readings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>infl</th>
<th>der</th>
<th>PL</th>
<th>L</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) non-PL interpretation</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Non-determinacy</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) Selectional restrictions</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv) Idiosyncratic meaning</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(v) Derivational contexts</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Proposal.** We propose that L and PL are class markers (building on De Belder 2013) that occur on different heads in the DP: L is on the category defining head n (Marantz 1997, 2001 i.a.), PL is num (9). We assume that the subset relation between L and PL is a result
of accumulation of features, table 2. Crucially, since L/PL can both be (non)-plural, but never occur in the singular, class features must interact with the number system; and since L have derivational properties, number must also occur on n. This corresponds to high (inflectional) and low (derivational) number cross-linguistically (Acquaviva 2008, Kramer 2016). Therefore, we assume number is composed of several features (Harbour 2011, Cowper and Hall 2014), distributed over location. Note that the compounds in (14) are nonce compounds in Dutch (14a,c) and German (14b,d).

is borne out, (14), where only a right (14a-b) or left branching structure (14c-d) is allowed, based on expected: Roots should not appear structurally peripheral to an element carrying L, since L signals outside of categorized material (13b,c). If the absence of L indicates the absence of a categorizing head and then attach to an element that is of the size root+.

It can be attached (Harðarson 2016, DeBelder 2017). Hence roots can form a root compound, headed by It has been argued that compounding is layered and the size of the element determines the layer at which it can be attached (Harðarson 2016, DeBelder 2017). Since the category defining head of the non-head kat is not specified for number, it can be interpreted plural or singular and the insertion of the -en-L is not blocked. Since the head of the compound turd is specified for [+singular], no material is inserted. In case of the non-deterministic L and PL mismatches, we propose that the compound structure serves as a context for deleting a class feature.

Deriving L-compounds. We derive the compounds with the following structure, including VI rules (10-11) (Chomsky 1970, Lieber 1982, Borer 2003 i.a. on primary compounds), for illustration kat-en-drol, (2b). Since the category defining head of the non-head kat is not specified for number, it can be interpreted plural or singular and the insertion of the -en-L is not blocked. Since the head of the compound turd is specified for [+singular], no material is inserted. In case of the non-deterministic L and PL mismatches, we propose that the compound structure serves as a context for deleting a class feature.

L disambiguate structure As the L are features on n, the presence/absence of L can be taken as a diagnosis of the size of the non-head element, i.e. stems in the presence of L and acategorial root in the absence of L. It has been argued that compounding is layered and the size of the element determines the layer at which it can be attached (Harðarson 2016, DeBelder 2017). Hence roots can form a root compound, headed by a categorizing head and then attach to an element that is of the size root+n (13a,d), but roots cannot occur outside of categorized material (13b,c). If the absence of L indicates the absence of n, bracketing effects are expected: Roots should not appear structurally peripheral to an element carrying L, since L signals n. This is borne out, (14), where only a right (14a-b) or left branching structure (14c-d) is allowed, based on L’s location. Note that the compounds in (14) are nonce compounds in Dutch (14a,c) and German (14b,d).

Conclusion Careful morphological investigation into a Germanic phenomenon reveals a systematicity to the system of West Germanic linkers, which has often been assumed to be un governed and arbitrary. Furthermore the study of linkers connects to deeper theoretical issues regarding the grammatical representation of number, specifically the split number hypothesis.