

## **Introduction**

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On March 22 and 23, 2000, Leiden University hosted an international symposium under the title ‘Language, Culture, and Cognition’. The organizers (Vincent van Heuven, Jeroen van de Weijer, and José Birker) had decided that the presence in Leiden of a number of interesting linguists at the time provided an opportunity for a workshop that should not be passed up. They succeeded in persuading the participants to speak at the symposium, and Leiden University to sponsor it. At the end of the second day, the organizers and the participants agreed that despite the diversity of the topics addressed, there had definitely been more than one common underlying thread. One of these was the central position assigned to meaning and function in explaining linguistic phenomena, another the large role played by the analysis of actual utterances to lay an empirical foundation for the hypotheses being investigated, and a third one the ambition to account for characteristics of linguistic systems and for linguistic usage simultaneously, using the same conceptual tools. It was this sense of commonality that made us conclude that we should definitely pursue the somewhat vague plan for a volume that we already had before the symposium.

The diversity just mentioned concerned the levels of linguistic description, which ranged from that of bound morphemes (the smallest meaning bearing units) to texts (the most composite sort of structural and functional linguistic units). But many contributions to the symposium testified to the idea that the application of some form of usage-based approach actually reveals cross-level similarities. Slightly twisting an English proverb, one of these similarities that is arguably most important may be summarized as: ‘The sting is in the detail’. As scientists, linguists aim for broad, possibly grandiose generalizations, as scientists should. By the same token, however, they should also aim for accounting for a

maximum range of phenomena (with a minimum of conceptual distinctions). Especially since the development of computerized corpora has made the level of detail in patterns of linguistic usage much more amenable to investigation, paying attention to these details more often than not leads to the insight that something important was overlooked in the relatively abstract characterization that had been set up originally.

The original plan for this volume, as conceived immediately after the symposium, was to have a collection of papers demonstrating these points at different levels of description and in different languages. However, it became apparent after some time that the second part of this goal would be hard to achieve. We then decided to concentrate on a single language, viz. Dutch, rather than have a collection that would for the most part present material from one language, with a small but still mixed bag of contributions about a few other phenomena in a few other languages as a kind of appendix. The result is the present volume of six papers. It comprises a number of studies on relationships between the general and the specific in one language for a variety of domains, showing both individually as well as collectively that the specifics, although usually compatible with the general, cannot be taken for granted.

The part of our original plan that involved covering different levels of description has been maintained, and determines the organization of the volume. Starting with the lexicon, Ariane van Santen ('How feminine is a linguist?') takes her point of departure in the observation of an aspect in which Dutch differs both structurally and in terms of usage from English as well as German. This concerns the availability of several morphemes for feminine names of professions in the language and the way these are used, in relation to the way non-feminine names (among which the morphologically simplex ones) are used. The crucial issue is the question of the meaning of the *non*-feminine names. Van Santen discusses a number of more or less traditional semantic distinctions that may help to shed light on this issue; each has its merits, but in the end a full usage-based perspective is unavoidable if one seeks to account for the whole range of phenomena encountered. Ultimately, Van Santen concludes: "it is not the[] meaning [of words] that dictates the possibilities to use them, but the other way around: actual use is decisive for the meaning of non-feminine names of professions."

The study by Arie Verhagen ('The Dutch *way*') involves both specific lexical items as well as a specific grammatical construction.

Verhagen starts with a discussion of the Dutch analog of the well known English *way*-construction, showing both parallels and differences between Dutch and English. Besides obvious similarities, there are lexical, structural, and usage differences. The Dutch default lexical verb (*banen*) in the construction is also specific to it; it contains a reflexive pronoun and not a possessive one like English; the conditions for the proper use of the constructions do not fully overlap either. The latter two points turn out to be related to another difference between English and Dutch: the Dutch construction is a member of a small ‘family’ of constructions that does not seem to be a part of the grammar of English. In his conclusion, Verhagen discusses possible consequences of his analysis for very general ideas about the organization of the grammar of a language.

Moving ‘up’ further from words into grammar, Robert Kirsner (‘On the Interaction of the Dutch Pragmatic Particles *hoor* and *hè* with the Imperative and Infinitivus Pro Imperativo’) addresses a similar issue: the interaction between certain lexical items – in this case, two pragmatic particles – and certain grammatical constructions – two semantically distinct forms, each highly schematic, for issuing directive speech acts. On the basis of previous analyses of both the particles and the different imperative patterns, Kirsner derives a number of predictions about their interaction, i.e. going from a general to a specific level of description. He then tests these predictions against experimental as well as corpus data. Interestingly, the results not only corroborate the basic predictions, but also yield a number of unexpected results, which, on further scrutiny, point to the insight that *collocations* have different degrees of idiomaticity, and that some of them “lead a life of their own and have – almost like lexical items – emergent properties which are not entirely predictable from those of their components”. Kirsner also concludes by pointing out how the study of such details bears directly on ‘big’ general questions of the structure and function of language.

At a still higher level of abstractness, Judith Loewenthal (‘Meaning and use of causeless causative constructions with *laten* in Dutch’) considers the question of how the meaning of a general construction (the main Dutch causative construction) interacts with the way participants in the event are realized syntactically – or rather, *not* realized, as she specifically focuses on instances of use of the causative construction in which the causee-role is not filled (as in *Hij laat zijn huis overschilderen*, lit.: He lets his house repaint, i.e.: ‘He is having his house repainted.’).

Starting from previous studies, she first of all explores the ways in which the semantics of participant expressions and complement verbs interacts with the meaning of the causative construction. She thus shows that such previous studies actually give rise to conflicting predictions about the overall meaning of a causative clause from which an explicit causee is absent. Using actual usage data, she is able to resolve the conflict – but only by distinguishing systematically between different *subtypes* of such clauses. For example, a permissive reading of a causeless causative occurs only with a reflexive ‘affectee’ (object of the complement verb), while a nominal (especially inanimate) affectee appears to correlate with a coercive reading. Each of these and other specific subpatterns turns out to exhibit other semantic and pragmatic regularities as well.

The importance of regularities at the level of specific *combinations* of linguistic units also comes out clearly in the study by Thomas Shannon (‘Drift in Dutch: Fleshing out the factors of change’), on the changes in the relative ordering of subjects and pronominal objects in the history of Dutch since the 16<sup>th</sup> century – a ‘purely’ syntactic issue, if ever there was one. Shannon’s aim is to provide an explanation for what appears to be a rather radical change in the syntax of Dutch. Starting from a situation in which pronominal objects *as a rule* precede nominal subjects, Dutch has moved to a situation for which the reverse is true: in the modern language pronominal objects *as a rule follow* nominal subjects. As is well known – and Shannon strengthens the point with a wealth of evidence –, the change in no way occurred ‘overnight’, as if some switch was magically flicked. Although the ‘initial’ and the ‘final’ stage may give the appearance as if a rule has been replaced by its converse, close inspection of actual data from texts shows that the conditions of the linear ordering involve specific properties of both the pronominal objects (such as type: personal, reflexive, demonstrative; and case: dative, accusative) and the nominal subjects (such as definiteness, length, animacy). Actual utterances by speakers always involve combinations of such features, and it is a speaker’s estimate of the communicative success of her entire utterance that determines which order is used, thus producing, and over time changing, regularities in the grammar.

In his conclusion, Shannon draws attention to the fact that the type of usage-based explanation for grammatical regularities that he envisages, may also shed light on differences between parts of the grammar of closely related languages, such as Dutch and German. In other studies in this volume, a comparative dimension is sometimes also present, more or

less explicitly (e.g. Van Santen on usage of feminine and non-feminine nouns in Dutch as opposed to German and English, Verhagen on the Dutch *weg* construction as compared to the English *way* construction, Kirsner on pragmatic particles and imperative structures of Dutch not found in English). In each case, the comparative perspective confirms the relevance of the attention to details. Apparent similarities at a general level consistently seem to hide important differences, which only become obvious when one turns to the specifics.

This comparative dimension is a central concern in the last study of this volume by Liesbeth Degand and Henk Pander Maat ('A contrastive study of Dutch and French causal connectives on the Speaker Involvement Scale'). At the same time, this is also the study that explicitly concentrates fully on the analysis of structure and function at the most comprehensive level of language use, that of coherence relations in texts. In large corpora of French and Dutch newspaper texts, they chart the discursive contexts in which distinct 'backward' causal connectives naturally occur. On this basis, they are able to uncover "subtle meaning differences within a language but also cross-linguistically", which can nevertheless be conceptually connected: Degand and Pander Maat propose a general conceptual scale of 'speaker involvement', from which particular connectives in a particular language pick particular values. Thus they contribute to new possibilities for conceptualizing relations between general and specific dimensions of language, in this case especially in the domain of semantics and pragmatics.

The studies collected here vary not only in the specific topics they address, but to some extent also in the theoretical concepts and assumptions employed to analyze the phenomena. Communication between linguists using distinct theoretical instruments may lead to convergence on the theoretical level as well, especially if they share a fundamental view of language; we would be pleased if the present volume helped to advance such a convergence. On the other hand, the diversity of linguistic phenomena at the level of specifics is actually quite astonishing, so one should perhaps expect that a certain diversity of analytic tools is simply necessary. In that spirit, we would like to present the different perspectives offered here as contributing, individually and collectively, to the fulfillment of the common ambition to understand languages – in the present case especially the Dutch language – as they are actually used.

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