Abstract

Against the background of Talmy’s (2000) typological distinction between Satellite- and Verb-framed languages, the present lecture reports on results from an on-going project on static locative relationships as expressed (mainly) by verbs in English, French, and Dutch (both applied to L1 and to L2). The data analysed is drawn from video-taped picture descriptions where subjects were asked to talk about the location of certain entities on these pictures. The typological differences show to have considerable consequences for the attention that speakers attribute to manner of location as well as how and where this is expressed (confirming our earlier analyses of Dutch posture and placement verbs, see e.g., Lemmens 2002, 2005, 2006, 2015; Lemmens & Perrez 2010, 2012, forthc.). This talk mainly focuses on differences between Dutch and French, for native speakers as well as francophone learners of Dutch. We will consider differences at different levels of analysis.

At the lexical level, clear differences can be observed: (1) the L2-speakers underuse posture verbs and overuse existential verbs, with too high density (L1-transfer); (2) they overuse perception verbs (L1-transfer); and (3) there is occasional overgeneralisation and contextual contamination in choice of posture verbs (e.g., influence of the type of Ground). Also in their use of constructions (presentational clauses, basic locative constructions, etc.), the learner data reveal interesting tendencies: (1) they overuse the presentational constructions which does not appear to be transfer from L1 and (2) their constructions reveal that they use the posture verbs as such, rather than as more grammaticalised locative verbs (L1 transfer). At discourse level, these difficulties can be attributed to different strategies of structuring information in French and Dutch: whereas Dutch follows a train-model, chaining locative information of one entity to the next (as wagons in a train), French has more an onion-model, where additional layers of information is given on the item already mentioned.

Finally, several differences emerge at the gestural level. First of all, gestures do differ across the languages, especially in shape, and they often encode information that remains lexically unexpressed. For example, Dutch speakers use more representational gestures which express location, direction, shape and size, whereas the French speakers gesture much less frequently (if at all), and their gestures are less precise and of more meta-communicative nature. Another striking finding is that in the pictures to be described (the same set for all subjects), there are scenes which lead to what Corts (2006) has called “gestures burst”, where not only more speakers gesture but they also tend to gesture more intensively (multiple gestures applied to the same reality; see Lemmens & Perrez, in prep.). Our data allows us to draw up gestural “heat-maps” which indicate the variable degree of gestural density for specific spatial configurations. As it turns out, these are typically more complex spatial configurations, where the gestures facilitate and/or augment the descriptive task at hand. In the learner data, such gesture bursts often occur to compensate their lack of lexical resources or accuracy (see also Gullberg 2009). On the whole, the learners use more reality-anchored gestures, but also more meta-communicative gestures pertaining to their linguistic shortcomings, such as open hands or shrugs, search for words gestures (see Ladewig 2011; Debras 2014, 2015). In addition, aligned with verbal hesitations and retakes, there is more “gestural stuttering”. Finally, it turns out that speakers have “idiogests” (Brannigan 2011),
that is, a kind of gestural idiolect that can be shown to reflect a semantic focus on the scene they are describing (see Lemmens, in prep.).

References
Lemmens, M. (in prep.) “Idiogests: gestural idiolects as semantic foci”
Lemmens, M. & J. Perrez (in prep.). “Gestural density and gesture bursts in L1 and L2 spatial descriptions.”