

Semantic and constructional variation with verbs of seeming in English, Dutch and German

In my presentation, I want to address *seem*-type verbs in English (mainly *seem*, see e.g. Aijmer (2009)), German (*scheinen*, see e.g. Diwald 2001) and Dutch (*schijnen*, *lijken*, *blijken*, see e.g. Mortelmans 2017) from a contrastive perspective. All of them can express evidential (mostly inferential) meanings, as in the following example, taken from the Nicci French novel 'Sunday Morning Coming Down' and its translations in German and Dutch. It can be argued that EN *seem*, DU *lijken* and GE *scheinen* express a similar inferential meaning in (1): on the basis of the observable behaviour of the addressee, the speaker concludes (i.e. infers) that the addressee has a particular problem.

- (1) EN You **seem to have** a problem answering any kind of questions. (NF, SMCD, 4, 15)
DU U **lijkt** sowieso moeite **te hebben** met het beantwoorden van vragen. (NF, ZBA, 4, 13)
GE Fragen zu beantworten **scheint** Ihnen überhaupt **schwerzufallen**. (NF, BS, 40)

At the same time, these verbs can be shown to exhibit a considerable amount of semantic and formal variability, i.e. with respect to the **constructional patterns** they can appear in, the actual **frequency** of these constructional patterns, the **degree of subjectivity** with which the speaker is construed, and the (types of) **meanings** they express (non-evidential, evidential (inferential, reportive), mirative). To give but one example: the Dutch verb *lijken* occurs remarkably more often than both other verbs as a matrix verb in constructions followed by *alsof* 'as if' (expressing a (non-evidential) unreal comparison); in English and especially in German, however, speakers seem to prefer different verbs or constructions here.

- (2) DU Het **leek net alsof** hij ermee in gevecht was. (EN, NF 34)
EN He **looked as if** he was doing battle with it. (EN, NF 34)
GE Crawford **sah aus, als** würde er mit dem Ding kämpfen. (EN, NF 34)

This variation will be uncovered by means of a new corpus analysis on the basis of a self-compiled parallel German-Dutch-English corpus that consists of present-day literary crime novels written in either Dutch, German or English and their translations. The main aim of my presentation will consist in describing the different dimensions of variation and showing there is a correlation between (a preference for) particular constructional patterns and the meanings these verbs express. Furthermore, it will be shown that the evidential meaning is least conventionalized in Dutch *lijken*, somewhat more strongly conventionalized in English *seem* and most strongly present in German *scheinen*, which (of the three verbs) patterns most often as a (semi)-auxiliary with inferential meaning.

References

- Aijmer, Karin (2009). *Seem* and evidentiality. *Functions of Language* 16:1, 63-88
Diwald, Gabriele (2001). *Scheinen*-Probleme: Analogie, Konstruktionsmischung und die Sogwirkung aktiver Grammatikalisierungskanäle. In: *Modalität und Modalverben im Deutschen*. Reimar Müller & Marga Reis (eds.), 87-110. Hamburg: Buske.
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