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Introduction – German and Dutch in contrast: synchronic, diachronic and psycholinguistic perspectives

The present volume is a contribution to Contrastive Linguistics (= CL), a branch of comparative linguistics whose remit is the fine-grained, potentially holistic comparison of a small number of socioculturally and/or genealogically related languages with a focus on divergences rather than convergences (Gast 2011). Unlike typological comparison, which draws on large samples of diverse languages in search of constraints on linguistic diversity (Croft 2003), Contrastive Linguistics came into being in the mid-20th century in the context of foreign-language pedagogy. Its earliest supporters (Fries 1945; Lado 1957) started from the “Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis” (Wardhaugh 1970), i.e. the belief “that a detailed comparative and contrastive study of the native (L1) and the second (L2) language might reveal exactly which problems learners with the same L1 have in learning the L2” (Ringbom 1994: 737). While this assumption soon proved untenable in its original form (ibid.: 738–740), a later, more moderate version known as Error Analysis (James 1998) was more successful. Treating the learner’s first language as just one factor among many in the complex process of language acquisition/learning, it continues to play an important role in language pedagogy alongside related approaches, not least in contexts such as second-language teaching in multicultural societies (Leontiy (ed.) 2012). The recent surge in the development of learner corpora (Gaeta 2015) has also helped keep the pedagogical implications of CL in focus.

Even as early optimism regarding Contrastive Analysis gave way to disillusionment and then realism, the practice of contrastive research was taking hold in linguistics. Involving a large number of European languages on either side of the Iron Curtain, often in combination with English, many of the respective projects and conferences yielded impressive results that were quite independent of their original pedagogical objectives (Ringbom 1994: 741f.). This on-going emancipation reached its apex with John Hawkins’ aptly titled monograph *A comparative typology of English and German: Unifying the contrasts* (Hawkins 1986), in which the comparison of two genealogically related, yet in some ways markedly different languages was re-cast as an application of linguistic typology. Looking beyond

individual contrasts between German and English for potential generalisations, Hawkins suggested that these two languages were located at opposite poles of “a typological continuum whereby languages vary according to the degree to which surface forms and semantic representations correspond” (ibid.: 123). According to this hypothesis, German grammar is semantically more transparent than English grammar in part because German inflectional morphology clarifies the functional roles of NPs in the clause (ibid.: 121–127, 215–217; cf. Fischer 2013 and Hawkins 2018 for recent discussion). Although a more mixed picture is now presented in König and Gast’s survey *Understanding German-English contrasts* (König/Gast 2018, first published in 2007 and today in its fourth, repeatedly revised and expanded edition), Hawkins’s approach was able to highlight two strengths of CL: its ability to serve as “small-scale typology” (König 2012: 25) or “pilot typology” (van der Auwera 2012), and its capacity to unify specific contrasts in a broader, potentially holistic perspective. This ensures the continuing relevance of CL, not only for language pedagogy and linguistic typology, but also for other disciplines with an intrinsic interest in contrastive comparison such as translation studies (Vandepitte/De Sutter 2013) and psycholinguistics, given the role of crosslinguistic evidence in the language-and-cognition debate (cf. below).

Besides these affiliated fields, a particularly close ally of CL is historical-comparative linguistics. A well-established line of research on the borderline between CL and historical-comparative linguistics is the sustained trilingual comparison of German and English with Dutch. First conceived by van Haeringen (1956) in his book *Nederlands tussen Duits en Engels* (‘Dutch between German and English’), its aim is to profile Dutch through a comparison with German and English, a configuration aptly labelled the “Germanic Sandwich” (see inter alia Ruigendijk/van de Velde/Vismans 2012). Van Haeringen’s main observation is that Dutch holds the middle between German and English, systematically and for historical reasons, in domains of the linguistic system as diverse as the relationship of orthography to phonology, the amount of foreign influence on the lexicon, the richness of nominal and verbal morphology, the productivity of nominal compounding, and the flexibility of word order. The desire to test this hypothesis against new phenomena or data, and indeed to expand it to new combinations of languages as long as Dutch remains in focus, has spawned the now well-known Germanic Sandwich conference series which began in Berlin (2005) and then moved on to Sheffield (2008), Oldenburg (2010), Leuven (2013), Nottingham (2015), Münster (2017) and Amsterdam (2019), with Cologne (2021) waiting in the wings. It has also produced publications such as the volume commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of van Haeringen’s original monograph (Hüning et al. (eds.) 2006), several thematic journal issues (*Journal of Germanic Linguistics* 22.4, 2010, and 28.4, 2016; *Leuvense Bijdragen/Leuven Contributions in Linguistics and Philology* 98,

2012, and 101, 2017) and indeed the present volume, which brings together papers that were mostly presented at the 2017 conference in Münster.

The book is organized in three sections, reflecting different perspectives on the contrastive comparison of German, Dutch, English and/or other Germanic languages. They include a section of synchronic studies in the tradition of CL, a section of diachronic studies in the historical-comparative tradition and, for the first time in a Sandwich-related volume, a section on psycholinguistics, a multi-disciplinary field which has recently come to focus increasingly on processes of acquisition and on the use of experimental data from a contrastive perspective.

1 Synchronic perspectives

While tackling topics already addressed by van Haeringen (1956) such as the distinction between weak and strong verbs, nominal number morphology, and the grammatical gender system, contributions to the Germanic Sandwich meetings and collections have been broader in scope, often including linguistic phenomena outside the analytic-synthetic dimension as traditionally defined. Citing at random examples from the relevant collections, we find discussions of phenomena from the expected domains of phonology, morphology and syntax like impersonal pronouns (Weerman 2006; van der Auwera/Gast/Vanderbiesen 2012), the formation of clippings (Leuschner 2006), combinations of modal particles (Braber/McLelland 2010) and voice onset in the laryngeal system (Simon/Leuschner 2010), but also sociolinguistic topics such as lexical borrowing from French (Hunter/Foolen 2012; cf. Sapir 1921: 140 on a possible link with the analytic-synthetic dimension) and learners' perceptions of interlinguistic distance (Vismans/Wenzel 2012). While some papers refer only to two of the three original languages, the total set of languages in focus has become broader than van Haeringen had envisaged and now includes languages like Swedish or Afrikaans. Not surprisingly, the extent to which Dutch appears to hold an intermediate position between German and English (or indeed between any other pair of contrasting languages) differs between individual papers, and so does the apparent strength of any links between the contrasts observed and more general typological differences between the languages in focus. The range of theories and methodologies is markedly broader, too, drawing routinely on cognitive frameworks, corpus data and psycholinguistic methods.

As for the synchronic perspective on contrastive research, the present volume opens with two papers revealing classic Sandwich patterns in linguistic domains not previously investigated from this perspective. Sebastian Kürschner examines German, Dutch, and English nickname formation through a contrastive corpus

of nicknames as found in the online profiles of amateur athletes. As prototypes, parallels and divergences in the formation and creation of nicknames are highlighted, Dutch turns out to hold an intermediate position between German and English in several respects. In the second article of this section, Tanja Mortelmans and Elena Smirnova address the English *way*-construction [SUBJ_i V POSS_i *way* OBL] and its reflexive analogues in German and Dutch from a cognitive point of view, arguing that the different constructions are best compared using conceptual terms describing middle situations in the domain of autocausative motion. Again, a Sandwich pattern emerges, with Dutch part-way between the extremes of English, where the *way*-construction has come to predominate at the cost of the historically prior reflexive resultative construction, and German, which has no schematic *Weg*-construction at all. Next, Tom Bossuyt compares the distribution of English *-ever*, German *immer* and/or *auch*, and Dutch (*dan*) *ook* in universal concessive-conditional and free relative subordinate clauses (e.g. German *was immer du auch willst* ‘whatever you want’) and in their elliptically reduced versions (e.g. Dutch *of wat dan ook* ‘or whatever’), based on more than 38,000 example sentences from a combination of large language-specific corpora with the smaller multilingual *ConverGENTiecorpus*. Although a sandwich-like pattern emerges in this case, too, it has German between Dutch and English rather than Dutch between German and English. In the closing paper of the synchronic section, Peter Dirix, Liesbeth Augustinus and Frank Van Eynde investigate the “infinitivus pro participio” (IPP) effect, a type of construction in which some verbs select an infinitive instead of a past participle to form the perfect in Dutch, German and Afrikaans. Using corpus data to identify the verbs which (obligatorily or optionally) show the IPP effect in Afrikaans, they compare the verb classes showing the IPP effect in Afrikaans with those in Dutch and German, pinpointing crosslinguistic similarities and differences without any clear Sandwich pattern emerging.

2 Diachronic perspectives

A landmark in the contrastive study of Dutch, van Haeringen’s (1956) book was not written primarily with pedagogical application in mind, nor did van Haeringen engage directly in historical research. Instead, he set out to broadly compare the structures of Dutch, German and English and thereby seek insights into diachronic divergences leading to synchronic contrasts. His key diachronic concept in explaining the divergences is *analytische verbrokkeling* (‘analytic crumbling’), i.e. the process by which the West Germanic languages shifted from the synthetic to the analytic type. This process, he shows, has progressed further in English than

in Dutch and further in Dutch than in German, which still displays significant similarities to the West Germanic ancestor language (cf. also König 2012 for a broader Germanic view).

The holistic nature of van Haeringen's account and its explanatory aspirations are reminiscent of typological work by linguists like Sapir (1921). Seeking to identify more general, abstract structures in languages so as to develop more powerful hypotheses on the causes of language change, Sapir identifies three parallel "drifts of major importance" in Indo-European languages (ibid.: 134), viz. the reduction of the case system, the tendency towards fixed word order and, finally, the "drift toward the invariable word" which Sapir regards as the dominant development of the three (ibid.: 139). Although van Haeringen (1956) does not mention Sapir by name, the similarities are striking, as indeed are the affinities with Hawkins (1986), who interprets the apparent lack of semantic transparency in English grammar as the synchronic consequence of a diachronic realignment of form-meaning mappings resulting from case syncretism (ibid.: 123, citing Sapir 1921), i.e. again from the drift towards the invariable word. At the same time, van Haeringen's close comparison of Dutch, German and English challenged any too sweeping categorisations in holistic typology. First, Dutch resists a straightforward synchronic classification as either synthetic or analytic; in fact, it does so to such an extent that van Haeringen (1956: 36) labels it "artistically unsystematic" (*artistiek onsystematisch*). Second, although van Haeringen (ibid.: 22–23) adopts the traditional view that the reduction of final syllables as observed in 'analytic crumbling' is diachronically linked to the fixation of Germanic word accent on the first syllable, he also points out that the typological status of Dutch casts doubt on any straightforward causal, indeed mechanical relationship between, on the one hand, the fixation of word accent or the resulting reduction of morphological richness, and compensatory developments in the realm of syntax on the other hand (ibid.). He therefore leaves open the possibility of a reverse causal relationship, with greater restrictions on word order potentially creating room for morphology to become redundant (ibid.; see Hüning 2006 for a more detailed analysis of van Haeringen's account and its place in the history of linguistics). From the perspective of modern historical linguistics, compensatory developments involved in 'analytic crumbling' invite an explanation in terms of grammaticalisation, a process which in many cases led to the replacement of cognate synthetic structures with language-specific analytic ones in West Germanic. Examples are the rise of auxiliaries fulfilling functions associated with verbal morphology (e.g., Landsbergen 2006; Poortvliet 2016) and of prepositions replacing case endings (e.g., van der Wouden 2006).

Apart from identifying and comparing structures based on functional equivalence, some research has tried to link diachronic variation to aspects of linguistic cognition, including factors like processing efficiency and linguistic complexity

(Hawkins 2004). Deeper functional or cognitive explanations of cross-linguistic variation and change figure increasingly in computational simulations of language change, such as Van Trijp's (2013) study of the effects of cue reliability, processing efficiency and ease of articulation on syncretism in the German definite article, and Pijpops/Beuls/Van de Velde's (2015) study of the rise of the weak preterite in Germanic. Some factors are rooted in the social environment in which language is used. For instance, referring to work by Thomason/Kaufman (1988) on English and Boyce Hendriks (1998) on Dutch, Weerman (2006) hypothesizes that deflection in West Germanic languages intensified in periods of language contact, when there were more L2 learners.

The three explicitly diachronic articles in the present collection illustrate the most recent developments in the field. Mirjam Schmuck's comparison of the use of the definite article in German, Dutch and English shows that the German article's functional domain has been expanding into generic usages and combinations with proper nouns, suggesting a more advanced grammaticalisation process than in Dutch and English. While confirming the position of Dutch between German and English, Schmuck's account stands out because in this case it is German grammar that allows the more progressive options within West Germanic, casting doubt on any straightforward characterisations of German as a conservative language. The article by Joachim Kokkelmans uses the diachronic comparative perspective to relate s-retraction in /rs/ clusters, a well-known phonological development in Middle High German, to a broader typological feature of the language. By extending his scope to include non-standard varieties of German, Dutch and English, and indeed data from beyond (West) Germanic, Kokkelmans links s-retraction to the general development of sibilant inventories, which are more conservative in Dutch and Low German than in varieties having previously phonemised /j/ as a second sibilant. Finally, Jessica Nowak's article on the sentence-internal capitalisation of nouns shows how the diffusion of innovations across German and Dutch, although driven by linguistic factors (i.e. initially emphatic and/or honorific use, then animacy and concreteness of the referent), is linked to cultural contact and standardisation processes.

3 Psycholinguistic perspectives

Whereas the synchronic and diachronic papers in this volume are concerned with the analysis and explanation of contrasts and changes in surface structure, the psycholinguistic papers employ CL in the explanation of human behavior (Gardner 1985; Tervoort et al. 1987). Psycholinguistics, a multidisciplinary field,

came into being in the 1950s with the rise of cognitive science, which aims to “characterize human knowledge – its forms and content – and how that knowledge is processed, acquired used and developed” (Gardner 1985). Human language can be regarded as a cognitive system (Sloan Foundation 1978) that is either treated as universal and relatively autonomous (Chomsky 1980; Pinker 1994) or as closely interrelated with and mutually affected by other processes like cognition, consciousness, experience, embodiment, brain, self, and human interaction (Tomasello 2003; Robinson/Ellis 2008).

After an early surge of empirical studies on language and color perception in the 1950s and 1960s (see Gentner/Goldin-Meadow 2003; Everett 2013; Athanassopoulos/Bylund/Casasanto 2016 for overviews), issues of language-and-cognition have again become an area of active investigation over the past few decades. Semantic analyses carried out in the 1970s by Talmy (1975), Langacker (1976), Bowerman (1980) and others brought to light major differences in the way languages carve up the world, not only in the domain of color terms but also, for example, through spatial prepositions (Gumperz/Levinson (eds.) 1996) and grammatical aspect (Comrie 1976). Follow-up studies based on acquisition data or psycholinguistic experiments showed that some of this typological diversity carries over to sets of related languages (see e.g., Garnham et al. 2016 on gendered articles and nouns in European languages; Coventry et al. 2018 on spatial prepositions), including pairs of Germanic ones (e.g., Athanassopoulos/Bylund 2013 on aspect in Swedish and English; and Mills 1986 on grammatical gender in German and English). This diversity was taken by some to imply a refutation of the universalist view of language and conceptual structure, and by others as an indication that semantic and conceptual structure operate independently of one another (see above). This debate is still unresolved today. While empirical data provide little support for universalist views of language and conceptual structure (Dabrowska 2015; Ibbotson/Tomasello 2016), some authors continue to argue in favor of universalist stances (Everaert et al. 2015; Boxell 2016).

Bilinguals, a term used here to refer to the variety of individuals employing multiple languages, started to receive attention as a favorable testing case for effects of language on cognition during the 1960s and 1970s. After 1980, bilingualism was consolidated as a field of research (see e.g., Baker 1993; Grosjean 1982), and the subsequent rise of new empirical methods such as eye-tracking, EEG, and fMRI resulted in several volumes also addressing non-linguistic behavior in bilinguals (Kroll/De Groot 2005; Pavlenko 2014). In addition to studies comparing L1 and L2 production, empirical studies with behavioral measures (memory accuracy, speed of reaction, eye movement) have documented cognitive effects associated with bilingualism in certain conceptual domains (e.g., Koster/Cadierno 2018 on recognition memory for object position in German/Spanish placement events).



In line with the topic of the present volume, all contributions in the psycholinguistic section focus minimally on German and Dutch, and some on additional languages as well. Leah Bauke examines whether L1 verb-second word order affects how German, Dutch and Norwegian learners respond to a grammaticality judgment task in L2 English. Her data reveal a representational conflict in terms of competing grammars, with Norwegian of English learners behaving differently from Dutch and German learners. Gunther De Vogelaer, Johanna Fanta, Greg Poarch, Sarah Schimke and Lukas Urbanek examine regional similarities and differences in the production and perception of Dutch pronominal gender by both Dutch and German speakers. Besides pointing out intra- and cross-linguistic differences, their data shows that increased uncertainty with respect to grammatical gender is leading to a resemanticization of Dutch pronominal gender. Paz González and Tim Diaubalick examine representations of tense in German and Dutch learners of L2 Spanish. They argue that the different options of expressing aspect in L1 German or Dutch may have profound effects on L2 tense production. Finally, Dietha Koster and Hanneke Loerts provide an up-to-date review of empirical studies on the perception of gender language in L1 and L2 German and Dutch speakers. They identify gaps in psycholinguistic research on the topic and define three fields of future inquiry to move the study of language, bilingualism and cognition forward.

Like the earlier parts of the volume, the psycholinguistic section testifies to the diversity of present-day contrastive research, addressing questions relating to the description and explanation of cross-linguistic differences, the understanding of patterns found in various L2s, or the language-and-cognition debate. Interestingly, some contributions address phenomena that were earlier investigated in synchronic and/or diachronic research, illustrating the potential of an ever closer integration of the three perspectives in the future. The strong cognitive orientation of present-day linguistics has increasingly brought psycholinguistic explanations for synchronic and diachronic variation into the limelight, and will continue to do so. At the same time, future interaction can help bring psycholinguistics “out of the lab” (cf. Speed/Wnuk/Majid 2017), with the rich empirical tradition in both synchronic and diachronic contrastive research on German, Dutch, English, and (West-)Germanic at large lending psycholinguistic theorizing a greater “ecological validity”.

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