

Periphrastic prospective aspect constructions in Dutch and German

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Although Germanic languages are said to possess only a very limited set of grammaticalized aspectual constructions (e.g., the *ing*-progressive in English), the languages have developed periphrastic means for the expression of various types of viewpoint aspect. In our talk, we present a contrastive study on the expression of prospective aspect (cf. Comrie 1976:64-65). Whereas English expresses prospectivity by combining the copula *be* with various complements (e.g., *be about to/on the verge of/on the brink of*), Dutch and German prefer a construction headed by a semantically light verb meaning ‘stand’ (1).

- (1) a. *op het punt staan (om) te ontploffen*
‘be on the verge of exploding’ (lit. stand on the point to explode)
b. *davor stehen zu explodieren*
‘be on the verge of exploding’ (lit. stand in front of to explode)

In general, prospective constructions have only superficially been analyzed in the relevant literature (e.g., Fleischhauer & Gamerschlag 2019; Bogaards accepted). The mentioned literature claims that the predicate embedded within a prospective construction receives a transitional (i.e., change-of-state) interpretation and that the constructions show a clear preference for selecting transitional predicates. So far, this claim has been tested for neither Dutch nor German on the basis of a corpus study.

In our talk, we present the results of a corpus study on the Dutch and German constructions illustrated in (1). The Dutch construction was analyzed on the basis of 3000 tokens from the SoNaR corpus of written Dutch (Oostdijk et al. 2013), the German data (qual size) were taken from the German Reference Corpus DeReKo (Leibniz-Institut 2021). For each language, we manually annotated the Aktionsart properties of the infinitival complement of the respective constructions using a set of semantic diagnostics. The preliminary results indicate very similar results for the two languages under discussion. Both languages show a clear preference for transitional predicates – i.e., predicates denoting some type of change of state – as infinitival complements. Nevertheless, not all infinitives showing up in the construction are transitional. We analyze these ‘outliers’ qualitatively in order to determine whether these constructions’ affinity for transitionality constitutes a categorial restriction or a statistical tendency.

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