

Constructions in the mind and in society: the grammaticalisation of ‘lie’ into a progressive aspect marker

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The grammaticalisation of the posture verbs ‘sit’, ‘stand’ and ‘lie’ into markers of progressive aspect is a crosslinguistically frequently attested phenomenon (see e.g. Bybee et al. 1994, Kuteva 1999, Heine and Kuteva 2002). Dutch is among the languages in question, the verbs *zitten* ‘sit’, *staan* ‘stand’, and *liggen* ‘lie’ with infinitival complements all being subject to this development (see e.g. Haeseryn et al. 1997, Lemmens 2005). However, full acceptability is not (yet?) reached, the original postural meanings often still being relatively dominant — especially for the constructions other than *zitten*. Consider the following example involving *liggen*, from an exchange on an internet forum:

- (1) A: *dus wat ligt je te zeuren meisje*
so what lie you to whine girl
‘So why are you whining, girl?’
B: *ik ben geen MEISJE maar een VROUW. En ik*
I am no girl but a woman. And I
LIG niet ik ZIT.
lie not I sit.
‘I am not a GIRL but a WOMAN. And I’m not LYING, I’m SITTING.’

Whilst the typological literature generally treats the grammaticalisation of *liggen* in the same way as that of the other posture verbs, there is evidence that matters are actually a bit less straightforward. Song (2002), for example, has shown that in Korean the progressive meaning is only available for the vulgar verb *cappaci-* ‘lie’, not for *nwup-* ‘lie (plain)’. In addition, it is said to carry connotations of a negative speaker evaluation of the event described, which is also true for the Tamil *kita-* ‘lie’ construction (Lehmann 1989:223) as well as for Dutch *liggen* (Haeseryn et al. 1997:973, Lemmens 2005:209).

With respect to the Dutch data (mostly obtained with the web concordancer KWicFinder) this paper will argue that in addition to progressive aspect (and remnants of the postural semantics) the meaning of *lie* may include a sociolinguistic dimension. Specifically, it appears to be used as a marker of the speaker’s assessment of themselves as ‘cool’ — also *cool* in Dutch. (Following the sociological literature ‘coolness’ is defined as a social construct, see e.g. Adler et al. 1992, Morgan 1998; or, in the Dutch context, Dibbitts 2006). As to why Dutch *liggen*, but not *zitten* or *staan*, is associated with ‘coolness’ I will draw on Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) — and many others’ — suggestions concerning the embodied nature of thought and language, and argue that there is a metaphorical connection between resting in horizontal posture and the idea of being ‘cool’. Consider in this relation also expressions such as being ‘laid back’ or ‘relaxed’, which are both connected to ‘coolness’.

Since the metaphors we live by are often not language-specific one may suspect that the link between the ‘lie’ progressive and ‘coolness’ is not restricted to Dutch. Indeed, I will speculate that this link may also help explain the peculiar status of the Korean *cappaci-* and Tamil *kita-* constructions.

The paper concludes with some remarks concerning the desirability of a social dimension in cognitive linguistics. Croft (to appear) shows how cognitive linguistics may be extended to account for what he calls “first-order variation”, i.e. variation where the variants don’t carry social meaning. I take this a step further, by illustrating how “second-order variation” — where variants *have* been invested with social meaning — may be brought within the scope of a social cognitive linguistics as well.