

Exploring recent changes to the Dutch way-construction using a web-based corpus

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Though its English counterpart has been the subject of many studies in a constructionist framework (see e.g. Israel 1996, among many others), the Dutch way-construction (found in sentences such as *Wij banen ons een weg door de menigte* 'We make our way through the crowd') has received comparatively little attention. The most frequent verb in the construction is *banen* (equivalent to *make one's way* in English), a highly specific verb occurring only in this construction. Kramer (2002) shows that the verbs in the early stages of the construction besides *banen* were limited to force-dynamic verbs such as *openen* 'open'. The construction has since undergone considerable host-class expansion, with various verbs encoding the manner or means of motion now being used. Verhagen (2003: 38) hypothesises that, unlike in the English construction, verbs denoting an activity not causally related to motion (the 'incidental activity' reading, in Perek's (2018) terminology) cannot occur in the Dutch construction. In this paper, I use data from the web-based NLCOW14A corpus (Schäfer 2015; Schäfer & Bildhauer 2012) to show that the incidental activity reading of the Dutch way-construction is now very productive, contrary to Verhagen's claim. I hypothesise that this recent development is a result of increased contact with and exposure to English due to the Internet era. This hypothesis is supported by three pieces of evidence. Firstly, the overwhelming majority of these verbs are attested in the Internet era, when Dutch speakers' exposure to English language media increased. Secondly, the verb *maken* 'make' has sharply increased in frequency in the construction; data from the *De Gids* corpus show that it was not attested at all before 1950, and it was attested only once in the SoNaR corpus (1954-2011). The more typical equivalent to *make one's way* is the verb *banen*, not *maken*. Finally, many of these incidental activity verbs are of English origin; these include *quizzzen* 'quiz', *pokeren* 'play poker', *headbangen* 'headbang'. This shows that contact can play a role in constructionalization, i.e. the creation of form_{new}-meaning_{new} pairings, and that analysing these developments through a Diasystematic Construction Grammar (see e.g. Höder 2012) lens yields considerable promise.

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