Volition-based expressions of advice: an English-Dutch contrastive approach

This paper focuses on the interplay between the modal semantics of volition and the weaker necessity-based meaning of advice. The construction under investigation is the use of ‘wanna / want to’ with second person subjects for the expression of advice (e.g. *You want to be careful with that saw*). This construction has gained great frequency in the second half of the previous century (cf. Krug 2000). Analysis of the patterns of use (mainly) with the form ‘want to’ in the informal spoken language data of the British National Corpus (Spoken Demographic subcorpus) has established this use as the third most frequent pattern for the full second person form, with approximately 12% of the utterances (Verplaetse 2008).

Further analysis of this pattern with and added question tag (e.g. *You don’t want to get involved with that sort of people, do you?*) has revealed the added pragmatic dimensions and interpretative layers of the forms ‘wanna’ and ‘want to’ for advice in comparison with use of the root modal ‘should’ or the (marginal) modal form ‘ought to’ for the same speech act. This involved interpretation in terms of frames and blending (cf. Fillmore 1982, Fauconnier and Turner (1996) and Desagulier (2003), (2005a), (2005b)), as well as force dynamic barriers. In the expression of advice with ‘wanna’ or ‘want to’ the added question tag may mitigate a force dynamic barrier and thus internalize the advice in the addressee’s own mental framework in a more easily acceptable way. As the addressee’s cognitive state is reshaped in this way a force dynamic barrier has (possibly) been removed (cf. Talmy: 1988), thus averting the face threatening act of giving advice (cf. also Langacker’s 2006: 22 description of ‘want to’ as a ‘mental extrapolation’ which extends from the speaker’s own experience to an other party in a vicarious way).

The current paper starts from the English constructions and considerations described above, and aims to provide a comparison with the use of the Dutch volitional modal form ‘willen’ for similar speech acts. This will be accomplished following different methods and sets of data. First the use of the pattern with Dutch ‘willen’ in declarative utterances (e.g. *Je wilt niet weten hoe laat het is*) will be considered on the basis of the Corpus Gesproken Nederlands (CGN – Corpus Spoken Dutch). It is expected that the hypothesis will be confirmed that this Dutch construction displays much more limited potential for actual use than the English counterpart, in that it is limited in terms of semantic types of verb complements and is further restricted to negated utterances. But the paper will also attempt to provide an answer for this expected outcome in contrastive diachronic and language typological terms.
For the second part of the methodology the analysis will rely on data from the Dutch Parallel Corpus (DPC - STEVIN-project): Dutch translations of the English second person pattern of advice with ‘want to’ / ‘wanna’ in its various possible configurations will be investigated.

This will be complemented with a third resource for data analysis, viz. Dutch subtitles from various English film scripts. Data from this resource are considered useful for the purposes of this paper (despite some typical requirements of subtitling vs. other types of translation) in view of the informal spoken character typical of the you wanna/want to-construction under investigation.

The expected results of the monolingual part of the analysis (Spoken Dutch Corpus - CGN) have been stated above. It is expected that the comparative part of the analysis based on a parallel translation corpus will yield a varied sample of different means to express advice in Dutch as translations for the English you wanna/want to-construction. These translations will be considered in terms of different parameters in interpersonal conversational relations, such as impersonal / personal address and degrees of subjectivity and objectivity. In this way the paper aims to fill in part of the area of interplay between volition and the necessity-based meaning of advice, as it is manifested in English and in Dutch.

References

Desagulier, G.


Langacker, R.W.


**Corpora and electronic sources**


Oxford University Computing Services / BNC Consortium

[http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk](http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk) [accessed 02/08/2008 - re.: British National Corpus]

