Another look at the Germanic Sandwich: 
Dutch between German and English

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What started in 2005 as a small-scale workshop in Berlin under the name Nederlands tussen Duits en Engels (‘Dutch between German and English’), commemorating the publication of C.B. Van Haeringen’s famous publication with the same title in 1956, grew into a series of conferences with an increasing number of participants. After Berlin came Sheffield (2008), Oldenburg (2010) and Leuven (2013), and at the time of writing of this introduction, the 2015 edition in Nottingham has passed as well. Since the second edition, the conference goes under the name of A Germanic Sandwich, an apt metaphor for the idea that Dutch occupies a middle position in-between its bigger West-Germanic neighbours English and German, both geographically and linguistically.

Each of these Germanic Sandwich conferences yielded inspiring proceedings. The Berlin papers were collected in Hüning et al. (2006), the Sheffield workshop led to a thematic issue of Journal of Germanic Linguistics (Vismans et al. 2010), and the Oldenburg papers found an outlet in a thematic issue of Leuvense Bijdragen – Leuven Contributions in Linguistics and Philology (Ruigendijk et al. 2012). The current issue of Leuvense Bijdragen has sprung from the Leuven 2013 conference. Several papers had been submitted, and after peer-review, we ended up with a selection of four articles. As in the previous Germanic Sandwich special issue in this journal, not all papers investigate all three languages at the same time. Two papers focus on Dutch and German – though they side-remark on English as well – and one paper focusses on Dutch and Old and Middle English. The remaining paper is true to Van Haeringen’s original spirit, and takes the three languages into account.

The first paper, by Ton Van der Wouden and Ad Foolen, explores some means of intensification in English, Dutch, and German adjectives. In particular, the authors look at the difference in the choice between adverbial, compound, and prefixoid intensification (English very high, Dutch aalglad, literally ‘eel-slippery’, and German hochaktuell, literally ‘high-actual’), comparative and superlative forms (German Wir haben ein größereres Problem, ‘We have a bigger problem’, Dutch Ik maak me de grootste zorgen ‘I have the biggest concerns’) and specific constructions like the one with ‘possible’ etc. (Ndl. de grootst mogelijke, literally ‘the biggest
The general picture is that the three languages all use these forms for intensifying purposes, but that they display differences in their preferences. These preferences tend to follow the Germanic sandwich cline, although deviations are observed as well, like in the case of \textit{as ADJ as possible}, and its German and Dutch counterparts, where Dutch shows a stronger internal integration of the construction. A more systematic comparison, both on the level of the language system and on the level of language use, would be the next step.

In the second contribution, Liesbeth Augustinus and Frank Van Eynde study the phenomenon known as Infinitivus Pro Participio (IPP). Whereas the auxiliaries of the perfect in the West-Germanic languages canonically select a past participle, some verbs in Dutch and German take the infinitival form instead. The proposed typology of such IPP verbs is based on two mutually independent distinctions. First of all, it distinguishes between subject-oriented IPP verbs and object-oriented ones, depending on whether or not the unexpressed subject of the infinitival complement is identified with the subject of the IPP. Secondly, a distinction is drawn between the obligatory IPP verbs and the optional ones.

By applying the typology in a uniform manner to both Dutch and German IPP verbs, it is possible to identify their similarities and their differences, yielding a more comprehensive and accurate classification than the existing ones, in particular that of Schmid (2005). The main similarities between Dutch and German concern the modals and the benefactives: The former are obligatory IPPs in both languages and are also the most commonly used IPPs in both languages, whereas the latter are optional IPPs in both languages and are also the least commonly used. The main difference concerns the aspectual verbs: they comprise several members in Dutch, mostly of the obligatory type, and are only outranked by the modals in terms of frequency, but they are absent altogether in German. Another difference concerns the subject control IPP verbs, which are much more numerous in Dutch than in German.

Relating these findings to the general topic of the Germanic Sandwich enterprise, it turns out that the IPP phenomenon does not conform to the general mold: it is relatively common in Dutch, considerably less common in German and absent in English. This puts German in the middle, rather than Dutch.

The two remaining papers both deal with gender in Dutch. This has grown into a hot topic in Dutch linguistics in the past decade, after three seminal papers on Dutch gender in comparative perspective in the year 2006 (Audring 2006a, b and De Vogelaer 2006). Subsequent years have seen an explosion of work in this area (see Blom et al. 2008; Cornips & Hulk 2008; De Paepe & De Vogelaer 2008; Audring 2009; De Vos 2009; De Vos & De Vogelaer 2011; De Vogelaer & De Sutter 2011; De Vogelaer 2012; Kraaiikamp 2012; Semplicini 2012a, b, 2013; De Vogelaer & Klom 2013; Franco et al., ms., to name a number of representative articles).
The first gender paper in the present thematic issue is by Jan Klom and Gunther De Vogelaer and looks at the pronominal gender use by school children (6-8 year olds) in Dutch- and German-speaking areas, to investigate dialectal differences in the extent to which the pronominal gender system resemanticises along the lines sketched out in Audring (2009). Their data show that children from areas with dialects that mark gender inflectionally are more resistant against resemanticisation. This suggests that Audring’s explanation for what triggered the resemanticisation of pronominal gender, namely the mismatch between two adnominal genders and three pronominal genders, should be supplemented by factors like syncretism and deflection.

The second gender paper, by Chiara Semplicini and Letizia Vezzosi looks at multi-gender nouns in Dutch, and draws a parallel with Old and Middle English. Multi-gender nouns are nouns that can display variability in adnominal gender agreement, like Dutch diamant (‘diamond’) occurring both with definite article de (the:COMMON) and with het (the:NEUTER), depending on whether it is a discrete countable entity or a continuous mass noun. Semplicini and Vezzosi show that in Dutch, gender assignment in such nouns goes beyond semantic conceptualisation, but can be triggered by pragmatic discourse factors, such as information structure as well. Like Klom & De Vogelaer, Semplicini & Vezzosi argue that flexible semantically or pragmatically driven gender assignment is a consequence of inflectional breakdown. When the formal gender system loses its inflection ground, basic cognitive distinctions kick in and have a resemanticisation effect.

Overall, this collection of four papers is not fully representative of the entire conference. What is lacking in the present thematic issue is work on phonology and L2 acquisition, for instance, which have become central issues in the current Germanic Sandwich community (see Van der Wouden 2012). Furthermore, while the Van Haeringen constellation of the three biggest West-Germanic languages is ultimately due to historical factors (see Weerman 2006), none of the papers deal with diachronic data of Dutch, though the comparison with Old and Middle Dutch in Semplicini & Vezzosi puts their findings in a diachronic perspective. Still, we think the present thematic issue testifies to the fertility of Van Haeringen’s (1956) ideas. After 60 years, these ideas still inspire scholars, who take the contrastive approach of the study of the Dutch language to heart.

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