

Suzan van Ierland

Grammatical features influencing information structure

The case of L1 and L2 Dutch and English

All people tell stories. But what happens, when you're asked to tell a story in a language that is not yours? In this dissertation I research storytelling and event retelling by speakers of Dutch and English, in their native language, but also in their second language. I pay special attention to those aspects of grammar that could influence information structure.

The experiments in this thesis show that word order and progressive aspect are important grammatical features for deciding how to structure your information. However, the results also show that even though native speakers of English and Dutch behave very differently, it is possible for some very advanced learners to perform native-like in their second language.

Theoretically, these results present evidence against Levelt's implication that language-specific requirements only come into play at the microplanning level. Slobin's model of 'thinking for speaking' cannot explain the results either. Therefore, in the final chapter, an adapted model of language production is proposed.

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