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Maarten Lemmens and Julien Perrez

French onions and Dutch trains: Typological perspectives on learners' descriptions of spatial scenes¹

1 Scope and issues

Space is a universal cognitive domain whose linguistic realization shows a great deal of variation across different languages, as has been pointed out by numerous typological studies (see, for instance, Ameka and Levinson 2007; Levinson 2003; Talmy 2000).² One of the most influential taxonomies accounting for this variation is Talmy's typological distinction between verb-framed languages and satellite-framed languages. Verb-framed languages (from now on V-languages), like French, are languages in which the direction of the movement is encoded in the main verb and manner of motion is optionally expressed in an adjunct. Satellite-framed (from now on S-languages), like Dutch, are languages in which manner of motion is encoded in the main verb and the direction of movement in a satellite.

These typological differences between V- and S-languages have been confirmed (but also nuanced) by cross-linguistic studies focusing on the encoding of motion and locative events (see among others Gullberg 2009; Hellerstedt 2013; Hickmann 2007; Hickmann and Hendricks 2006; Lemmens and Slobin 2008; Özçalışkan and Slobin 2003), but also by studies analysing the co-verbal gestures produced when talking about space (see among others Brown and Chen 2013; Gullberg 2009; Kendon 2004; Kita 2009; Kita and Özyürek 2003; Tutton 2013). At the same time, it has become clear that these two types of languages should be considered as two extremes on a continuum rather than as sharp dichotomies (see Berthele 2004; Berthele, Whelpton, Naess, and Duijff 2015; Kopecka 2006; Slobin 2004).

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Maarten Lemmens, Université de Lille 3

Julien Perrez, Université de Liège

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Applied to the domain of static location, the typological differences between V- and S-languages result in a tendency of the latter to specify the manner of location, by using a specific posture verb, like the Dutch verbs *staan* ‘stand’, *zitten* ‘sit’ and *liggen* ‘lie’, whereas the former tend to use a single dummy verbs like French *être* ‘be’ or *se trouver* ‘find oneself’ to encode the spatial orientation of entities in space, often leaving the manner of location unexpressed (see among others Hickmann 2007; Hickmann and Hendricks 2006; Lemmens and Slobin 2008). This quasi-automatic use of posture verbs to locate entities in space is not without impact on their frequency and their extensive and complex semantic networks, allowing them to express a whole range of metaphorical meanings going beyond the simple postural or locational, for instance to locate abstract entities in concrete space or concrete entities in abstract space (see Lemmens 2002 and Lemmens and Perrez 2010 for a detailed description of the semantic networks of the Dutch posture verbs).³

From the perspective of foreign language learning, these typological differences are a source of learning problems, especially in the case of native speakers of V-languages who learn S-languages (Ellis 1994; Gullberg 2009; Kellerman 1995). More particularly, going from a V-language to a S-language means that learners have to readjust semantic categories acquired in the L1; more specifically, they need to go from a single large semantic category in the L1 to several specific categories in the L2 (see Gullberg 2009; Ijaz 1986; Narasimhan and Gullberg 2011), which represent pedagogical challenges (see, for instance, De Knop and Perrez 2014). These learning difficulties have been reported for native speakers of V-languages learning S-languages, moving from a less complex system to a more complex system, but some studies have pointed out that also moving from a L1 S-language to a L2 V-language leads to learning problems (see, for instance, Cadierno 2004; Cadierno et al. 2016). More specifically, Cadierno et al (2016) show that intermediate Danish learners of Spanish tend to overgeneralize the use of the generic verb *poner* ‘put’ for configurations where more specific placement verbs such as *dejar* ‘leave [in a place]’ or *meter* ‘put in’ would be more idiomatic. They suggest that “when the two languages vary with respect to the number of semantic categories [...], the process of L2 meaning reconstruction becomes difficult irrespective of the nature of the transition that has to be made” (Cadierno et al. 2016: 214).

For French-speaking learners of Dutch, going from a L1 V-language to a L2 S-language, the semantic reconstruction process means they have to (i) get used

³ Note that in this respect English stands out in the group of Germanic languages (all S-framed) by not using the posture verbs *sit*, *lie* and *stand* as often as do its Germanic peers (see Lemmens 2014) for some discussion.

to using a posture verb instead of general verb such as *être* ‘be’ commonly used in French in locative sentences, (ii) understand in which context a given posture verb is to be used, and (iii) deal with the metaphorical extensions of these posture verbs.

These alleged difficulties have been confirmed by cross-sectional studies, looking at various typologically different languages, focusing on the encoding of motion events (see, for instance, Cadierno 2004, 2008; Hendriks and Hickmann 2011; Hijazo-Gascon 2015), dynamic location events (see Gullberg 2009; Alferink and Gullberg 2014; Narasimhan and Gullberg 2011), and static location events (Lemmens and Perrez 2010; Lemmens and Perrez 2012). The study by Lemmens and Perrez (2010) concentrated on the use of the Dutch posture verbs *staan* ‘stand’, *zitten* ‘sit’ and *liggen* ‘lie’ by French-speaking learners in spontaneous written productions (learner corpus analysis). When compared to native usage, the learners tend (i) to underuse posture verbs in their target language (“posture verb underuse”), (ii) to select erroneous posture verbs to encode the location of given entities (“posture verb confusion”), and (iii) to use posture verbs in contexts where such verbs do not apply (“posture verb overuse”). As stressed by Lemmens and Perrez, these different characteristics of the learner use of postures verbs suggest their use is influenced by negative transfer from their mother tongue (“posture verb underuse” and “posture verb confusion”) but also by patterns typical of a developing learner interlanguage (“posture verb overuse”). A more specific analysis of the contexts in which posture verbs were used further reveals that the learners tend to use the posture verbs in their basic postural and locational domains, whereas the natives more frequently used them in abstract metaphorical extensions.

In a follow-up cross-sectional experiment, based on an oral picture description task in which the subjects were to describe the location of entities on various pictures taken from a children’s book, Lemmens and Perrez (2012) observed similar tendencies, namely (i) that French-speaking learners of Dutch, when compared to native speakers of Dutch, significantly overused neutral verbs and underused posture verbs in their spatial encodings, (ii) that about 30% of the erroneous uses of posture verbs were instances of posture verb confusion, and (iii) that some learners tended to overgeneralize the posture verbs in some contexts. Interestingly, when assessing the evolution of the use of posture verbs at various stages of foreign language development, Lemmens and Perrez (2012) observed that the use of posture verbs by French-speaking learners remains problematic even at a high level of foreign language proficiency. More specifically, although the most proficient learners appear to show a more native-like behaviour, in that their use of posture verbs significantly increases and their

1 use of neutral verbs significantly decreases, they concurrently appear to produce
2 a higher percentage of erroneous uses of these verbs.

3 Building on these two studies, the study reported on in this contribution
4 further zooms in on how speakers of Dutch and French encode locative events
5 on a more general level, by moving away from the (typical) exclusively verb-
6 centred approach to a more global perspective by analysing the syntactic con-
7 structions used to encode locative events and the role they play in the overall
8 discourse strategy in Dutch and French. The research questions underlying our
9 study are thus the following. Are there any differences in the constructions used
10 by learners of Dutch when giving spatial descriptions and, if so, what are these
11 differences and how do they interact with lexical differences (cf. Lemmens and
12 Perrez 2012)? Are they due to interference of their mother tongue (French) or to
13 some other strategy (like overgeneralization or avoidance)?

14 This article is structured as follows. The following section (Section 2) sketches
15 the methodological underpinnings of our study, presenting the data, the elicit-
16 ation task, the participants, and the coding method. Section 3 presents the results
17 and is structured around the discussion of constructional patterns on the one
18 hand and discourse patterns on the other. The results are more specifically
19 tackled from the perspective of the contrasting differences between French
20 and Dutch and of developmental patterns of French-speaking learners of Dutch.
21 Section 4 concludes the article.

24 2 Data and method

26 2.1 Task

28 The data on which this research is based are part of a larger data set for different
29 languages (including English, Dutch, and French) and the procedure that has
30 been used to collect these data has been described extensively in previous
31 papers (see, for instance, Lemmens and Slobin 2008; Lemmens and Perrez
32 2012). In a nutshell, the data are free picture descriptions of five pictures from
33 two wordless children's books.⁴ Each picture depicts a different kind of environ-
34 ment: (1) a clothing shop for kids, (2) a shoe store, (3) a bedroom where a family
35 is getting dressed for a party, (4) a street market, and (5) a butcher's shop; each
36

37 ⁴ The two books are (1) Capdevila, R. 1984. *La festa* [The party]. SA Editorial. Dutch edition by
38 Casterman 1996. ISBN 90-303-0658-0 (used for P1, P2, & P3) and (2) Ribas, T. P. Casademunt &
39 R. Capdevila 1984. *Les botigues* [The shops]. SA Editorial. Dutch edition by Casterman ISBN 90-
40 303-0653-X (used for P4 & P5).

picture thus has a typical array of objects, respectively clothes (P1), shoes and shoeboxes (P2), furniture and clothes (P3), vegetables (P4; at three vegetable stands), and meat and delicacies (P5). However, they also show people interacting with objects, such as a shop assistant carrying shoe boxes, a market woman holding up a bunch of carrots, a woman folding clothes on a counter, people trying on shoes, a man tying his tie in front of the mirror, or a butcher slicing meat or laying it on a dish.

The subjects were asked to describe each picture, one after the other, on the basis of a lead-question, targeting particular entities, e.g., for picture 1 (a clothing shop for kids) the lead-question was *Can you tell me where the clothes are in this shop and what type of clothes they are?* The resulting descriptions are monologic, told to the experimenter, situated in front of them. The subjects were presented one picture at a time, in a random order for different participants to avoid any order effect. The subjects were seated on a chair without armrests. Before starting the description, they could hold the picture for a while to study it and then were asked to place it on a stand placed slightly to the right of them (at about 1m distance) and start their description. The productions were videotaped and transcribed verbatim. Afterwards the data were annotated in ELAN (see below).

2.2 Participants

In total 46 participants took part to the elicitation study that we report on in this paper, 12 native speakers of (Belgian) Dutch (3 male and 9 female students from the University of Leuven, Belgium), 12 native speakers of French (7 male and 5 female students from the university of Lille, France), and 22 French-speaking learners of Dutch (18 female and 4 male students from the University Saint-Louis Brussels, Belgium). These learners are all undergraduate students majoring in Dutch and one other Germanic language (English or German in this case). Prior to the experiment, they all took a foreign language proficiency test, set at a B2-level of the Common European Framework of Reference. The test was developed at the Institute of Modern Languages (ILT) of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (University of Leuven) in collaboration with other institutions.⁵ The test, composed of 80 items, aims at measuring the grammatical and lexical knowledge of the students as well as their reading and listening proficiency. The learners

⁵ Many thanks to our colleagues of the Dutch department at the Leuven Language Institute at the KU Leuven (ILT) for generously granting us the privilege to use this test for our experiment. More information on this test can be found at <http://www.itna.be/>.

were divided into three proficiency groups based on a gap of 3 points which occurred between the MIN and MAX scores (53–56 for groups 1 and 2, and 64–67 for groups 2 and 3). An ANOVA test ($F_{(2,19)} = 121.58$, $p < 0.001$) confirms the significance of this division.

Both the learners and the native speakers have learned English as a foreign language at school; some may also have studied other languages. This has not been controlled for in this experiment but the influence of notably English on the learners' performance can be assumed to be minimal given that the preferred English verb for coding location events, *be*, is no facilitating factor in the semantic recategorization involved in the acquisition of Dutch posture verbs. Furthermore, the exposure to English (in mass media, films, etc.) is fairly limited in the southern French-speaking part of Belgium, most audiovisual cultural products being dubbed.

2.3 Coding

Our basic units of analysis are locative clauses. In our approach, a locative clause is broadly defined as any clause containing locative information, be it a locative verb (such as posture or placement verbs, e.g., *staan* 'stand' in example [1]) or a locative adjunct (adverbs like *there* or *here*, prepositional phrases like *on the bed* or *next to the counter*, or particles, such as in example [2]), or a combination of these two (example [1] is in fact such a combination).

(1) *De meeste schoenen staan in de etalage* (OPD-DU-01)⁶

'most of the shoes stand in the display'⁷

(2) *Vous avez trois boîtes à chaussure sur une chaise au fond* (OPD-FR-02)

'you have three shoeboxes on a chair behind'

While this may be straightforward at first sight, delineating what counts as a locative clause is more complex than it seems, due to embedding of different locative clauses. Consider the following example:

⁶ Examples with a reference like this are taken from our corpus of oral picture descriptions (OPD), the labels DU, FR and Du2F refer respectively to native speakers of Dutch, natives speakers of French and French-speaking learners of Dutch. The first digit (01, in this case) identifies the speaker and the second digit (only for the learners) refers to his/her level of proficiency, ranging from 1 (lowest) to 3 (highest).

⁷ While they are not glosses, the English translations are fairly literal (and thus possibly non-idiomatic), to capture the semantics of the original.

1 (3) *tussen de twee [...] nachttafels is er een bed waarop [...] twee hemden en*
 2 *een broek liggen* (OPD-Du2F-12-2)

3 ‘between the two [...] bedside tables, there is a bed on which [...] two
 4 shirts and one pair of trousers lie’
 5

6 From a strictly syntactic point of view, there are two separate locative clauses
 7 presenting two different locative events: the main clause (*tussen de twee*
 8 *nachttafels is er een bed* ‘between the two [...] bedside tables, there is a bed’) locates bed which functions as the Ground for the location of the clothes, presented in the following relative clause (*waarop twee hemden en een broek liggen* ‘on which two shirts and a pair of trousers lie’). On a functional level, however, this can be regarded as one single locative event, as the speaker is targeting the location of the clothes, where the main locative clause is merely an auxiliary event to locate the Ground (the bed). In other words, while on the level of the main clause, the bed is a figure located within the room (Ground), it functions as a secondary Figure in the larger locative event the speaker is targeting, i.e., the location of the clothes which thus can be considered the primary Figure.

18 As we are interested in the expression of the location of entities, we have
 19 considered clauses as separate locative clauses whenever they locate two
 20 different figures; in the case of the example above, we have thus annotated the
 21 two clauses separately. At a higher level, these clauses will be taken together
 22 as a larger discourse unit. As detailed below, such complex clauses do reveal
 23 interesting strategies of information packaging, which turn out to be different
 24 in Dutch and in French.

25 Each locative clause has subsequently been annotated according to various
 26 parameters, including identification of the Figure (the entity located), of the
 27 Ground, the verb (lemma form), the (semantic) verb type, the construction type,
 28 and the verb satellites. This method makes it possible to analyse the encoding of
 29 location events from a combined lexical and constructional perspective.

30 The verb types have been characterized via the following categories:

- 31 – POSTURE verbs: *zitten* / *être assis* ‘sit’, *liggen* / *être couché* ‘lie’, *staan* / *être*
 32 *debout* ‘stand’, and *hangen* / *être suspendu* ‘hang’⁸
 33
 34

35 —————
 36 **8** As specified earlier, French disfavours the use of posture verbs which cannot be used to
 37 refer to the location of inanimate entities; however, they do exist and can be used to refer to
 38 the posture of human (or human-like) beings. Strikingly, however, these verbs tend not to be
 39 used even in those contexts and French speakers will, unless there are reasons to the contrary,
 40 resort to using *être* ‘be’, leaving the posture unspecified (which can usually be pragmatically
 inferred).

- 1 – NEUTRAL verbs: verbs that are semantically quite empty, often existential or
2 dummy verbs, e.g., *zijn* ‘be’, *zich bevinden* lit. ‘REFLEXIVE find’ = ‘be found’;
3 *être* ‘be’, *il y a* ‘there is/are’
- 4 – DISPOSITIONAL verbs: these are (locative) verbs which provide some more
5 precise information about how the entity is located in space. These can be
6 attachment verbs, such as *coller*, *attacher* ‘attach’, arrangement verbs, such
7 as *éparpiller* ‘scatter’, *verspreid* ‘spread out’, or configuration verbs, such as
8 *drapé* ‘draped’.
- 9 – PERCEPTION verbs, e.g., *zien/voir* ‘see’, as in *On voit des vêtements sur le lit*
10 ‘One sees some clothes on the bed’
- 11 – POSSESSION verbs, e.g., *De mevrouw heeft kleren over haar arm* ‘The woman
12 has some clothes over her arm’
- 13 – OTHER: any other verb that is used in what is considered a locative clause,
14 e.g., *de papa knoopt zijn das voor de spiegel* ‘the dad ties (= ‘is tying’) his tie
15 in front of the mirror’
- 16 – ELLIPSIS: no verb, e.g., *er hangt vlees aan haken rechts en Ø worsten links*
17 ‘there hangs meat on hooks to the right and Ø sausages on the left’

18 The construction types in the data have been characterized as: basic locative
19 constructions, presentational constructions, identificational constructions, tran-
20 sitive constructions, progressive constructions, non-locative constructions, and
21 complex constructions (combinations of the previous ones). Each construction
22 type is briefly presented below.

23 Basic locative constructions (BLC), a concept introduced by Wilkins (1998,
24 1999), are constructions of the form <Figure> + <predicate> + <relator> (mostly
25 a preposition) + <Ground>, as illustrated in the earlier example (1) (reproduced
26 here for convenience) which has the canonical word order (Figure precedes the
27 Ground) and (4) which has a topicalized Ground.⁹

28 (1) *De meeste schoenen staan in de etalage* (OPD-DU-01)

29 ‘most of the shoes stand in the display’

30 (4) *Naast het bed staan twee nachtkastjes* (OPD-DU-01)

31 ‘next to the bed stand two night tables’

32 Presentational constructions (PRES) are constructions in which a figure is intro-
33 duced by presentational markers such as *er* in Dutch or *il y a* in French, the
34 equivalent of English presentational *there* constructions.

35 ⁹ Such word order changes are typically motivated by discourse constraints, i.e. when the
36 Ground (the bed in this example) has been introduced previously and is thus old information.
37 For the coding of the type of construction, abstraction has been made of these word order
38 variations and both have been coded as basic locative constructions (BLC).

1 (5) *Er ligt een bloes in de badkamer* (OPD-DU-03)

2 ‘there lies a blouse in the bathroom’

4 (6) *et il y a donc une dame à la caisse* (OPD-FR-04)

5 ‘and there is thus a woman at the desk’

7 Identificational constructions (ID) are typically introduced by cleft-markers to
8 identify a given figure.

10 (7) *les premiers clients que je vois, c’est une dame et une petite fille à la caisse*
11 (OPD-FR-06)

12 ‘the first clients that I see, it is a lady and a little girl at the desk’

14 Transitive constructions (TRANS) include various constructions with transitive
15 verbs (as opposed to intransitive location verbs or copula-like existential verbs);
16 they come in various subtypes (usually because of the type of verb that is used)
17 such as perception constructions (see [8]), possessive constructions (including
18 viewer-based possession clauses such as in [9] as well as character-based
19 possession clauses, such as in [10]) or causative constructions (see example [11]).

21 (8) *en in de slaapkamer ziet ge een stapelbed* (OPD-DU-06)

22 ‘and in the bedroom you see bunk beds’

24 (9) *à droite de ces chaussettes, on a des tee-shirts avec différents motifs*
25 (OPD-FR-09)

26 ‘to the right of these socks, one has tee-shirts with different patterns’

28 (10) *en ze heeft ook nog kisten onder haar tafel, allez één kist en een mand*
29 (OPD-DU-08)

30 ‘and she has also boxes under her table, I mean one box and a basket’

32 (11) *de verkoper legt ook worsten in een weegschaal* (OPD-DU-10)

33 ‘the shop assistant is also laying sausages in the scales’

36 A special category had to be created for progressive constructions (PROG) which
37 in Dutch can either be built with *aan het V zijn* ‘be at the V’ (the verb ‘be’
38 followed by a nominalized infinitive expressing the ongoing activity) or, more
39 relevant to the current study, with a (grammaticalized) posture verb followed
40

by an infinitive, as illustrated in example (12). Although such constructions are primarily used to refer to the ongoing or durative aspect of an event, and not so much to locate entities in space, the fact that they are structured around one of the three basic posture verbs *staan* ‘stand’, *liggen* ‘lie’ or *zitten* ‘sit’ does, to some extent, add some manner of location information to the event.¹⁰

(12) *en iemand die in de etalage staat te kijken* (OPD-DU-04).

‘and someone who in the display stands to look (= is looking into the display window)’

Non-locative constructions (NON-LOC) are constructions where there is no locative complement (a prepositional phrase, a locative adverb, etc., see example [13]). Although such constructions are not locative in nature (but more existential or purely presentational), they were still included and annotated because they can be used to introduce some information that can be used in a subsequent locative clause (between square brackets), such as in example (14).

(13) *en dan zijn er ook winkeltjes [die eerder kledij verkopen]* (OPD-DU-02)

‘and then there are also shops [that rather sell clothes]’

(14) *Er is ook een bed [waar kleren op liggen]* (OPD-DU-01)

‘there is a bed [where clothes (on) are lying on]’

Another context in which a clause was marked as NON-LOC is when a clear locative verb (such as a posture verb) was used without any locative complement, as in the example below:

(15) *Dus [...] vlees hangt* (OPD-Du2F-20-2)

‘so [...] meat is hanging’

(16) *Een andere vrouw die staat* (OPD- Du2F-19-2)

‘another woman who is standing’

¹⁰ Interestingly, the Dutch posture verbs in such progressive constructions have undergone a grammaticalization process, such that the locative meaning of the verb in such constructions does not always correspond to the basic human posture prototypically denoted by the verb when used in isolation. At the same time, they do retain a certain locative character, as argued in Lemmens (2005, 2015, 2017).

Example (15) is considered a locative clause in our data set following the criterion that there is a posture verb, but the absence of a locative phrase is quite marked (though not impossible). Example (16) is a pure postural clause which says something about the posture of the (human) Figure, but it is only indirectly locative (she necessarily stands somewhere). The mark-up NON-LOC allows us to distinguish these from clauses where there is an overt locative complement (e.g., ‘there lie clothes on the bed’, ‘people stand near the counter’). As it turns out, this will be relevant for the analysis of learner data (overusing the NON-LOC pattern) and for complex constructions, discussed below.

In addition to these categories, there are also complex constructions in which one type of construction is embedded in another construction. This is more specifically the case with basic locative constructions (BLC), which can be introduced by a presentational construction (17) or a perception (transitive) construction (18).

(17) [*en daarnaast zijn er ook schoenen [die zich voor de zetel bevinden]*]
(OPD-DU-02).

‘[and next to it are there also shoes [that find themselves in front of the sofa]]’

(18) [*je vois aussi des t-shirts [qui sont collés au mur du fond]*] (OPD-FR-04)
‘[I see also tee-shirts [that are stuck onto the wall at the back]]’

Because such complex constructions are a specific way of construing a spatial event where the first construction is used to introduce the Figure and the subsequent locative construction (the second clause) specifies its location, these embedded basic locative constructions have been regarded as a separate category, coded as X+BLC, where the X represents the type of matrix construction, e.g. PRES+BLC for example (17) and PERC+BLC for example (18).

In such complex cases, the main clause can either have a locative complement, e.g., *daarnaast* ‘next to it’ in example (17), or not, as in (18), with a perception verb.

Elliptical constructions have also been marked as such; while it may sometimes be possible to reconstruct the construction type, this may not always be so and it is therefore deemed relevant to be able to exclude these.

Finally, the category OTHER unites constructions of various types that are less relevant to (pure) locative events, like intransitive or transitive constructions (active or passive) with verbs such as *verkopen* ‘sell’, *passen* ‘try on’, etc.

3 Results and analysis

3.1 Overview of the data set

The learners produced on average 33.8 locative clauses per interview. Although there is a slight, but non-significant ($F_{(2,19)} = 0.207$, $p = 0.815$) increase of the average number of locative clauses across the levels of proficiency (level 1: 41.8; level 2: 39.1; level 3: 44.0), the high level of individual variation in the learners' production of locative clauses is quite striking, both within and between proficiency groups. For instance, the most prolific learner (FLP1) produced 70 locative clauses, whereas the least prolific one (FLP2) only produced 22 locative clauses. The same observation goes for the native speakers: the most prolific one produced 115 locative clauses, whereas the least prolific one only produced 41 clauses (which equals the mean production score of the learners). The high level of individual variation in the production of locative clauses is illustrated by Figure 1, which suggests that the native speakers on average produce more locative clauses per interview than the learners (means for each group: FLP1: 41.87; FLP2: 39.14; FLP3: 44.00; Natives: 75.66). A one-way ANOVA confirms that this difference is significant ($F_{(3,30)} = 10.502$, $p < 0.0001$). Further post-hoc tests

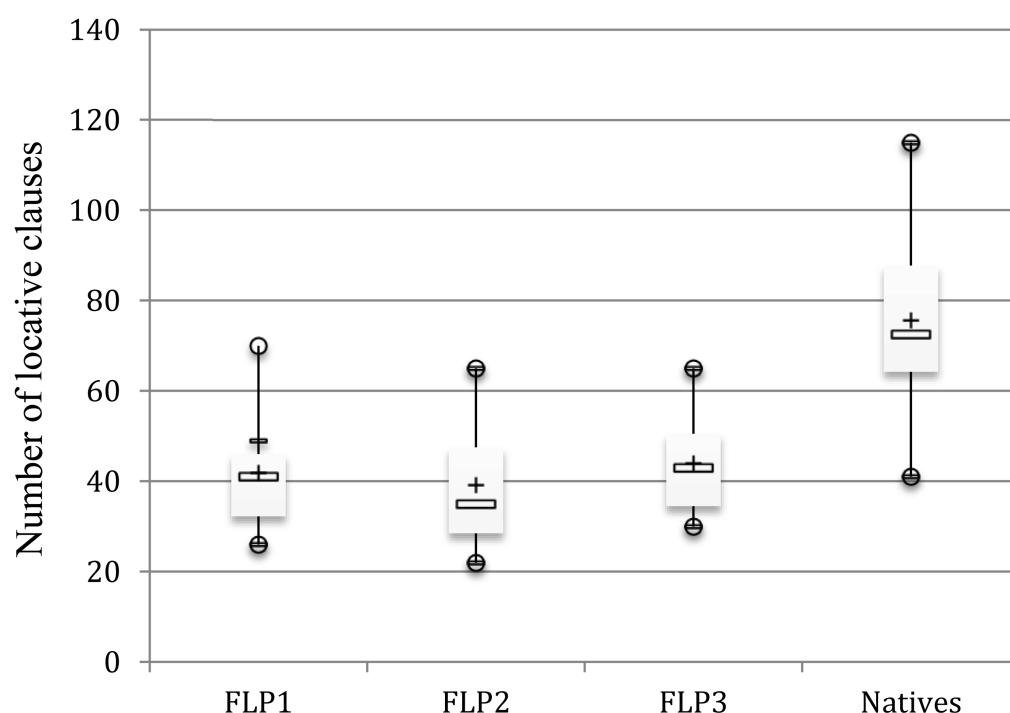


Figure 1: Production of locative clauses across the proficiency levels (Dutch; from Lemmens and Perrez 2012)

(Bonferroni) indicate, on the one hand, that the native speakers significantly produce more locative clauses than the learners of the three proficiency groups (Natives vs. FLP1: $p < 0.002$; Natives vs. FLP2: $p < 0.001$; Natives vs. FLP3: $p < 0.001$) and, on the other hand, that there are no differences between the learners of the different proficiency ($F_{(2,19)} = .092$, $p = .912$; $p = 1.000$ for all inter-group comparisons). These results suggest that the overall production of locative clauses by the learners is not dependent on their level of proficiency in the target language.

3.2 Lexical patterns

The aim of the present article is to complement the typical exclusively lexical focus of comparative studies with a constructional perspective, i.e., to evaluate the role that particular constructions play on the choice of lexical items (in both native and learner data). As extensively discussed in Lemmens and Perrez (2012), there are relevant lexical differences. Figure 2 nicely summarizes these: at all three levels, the learners still follow the tendency of their native language (French) of using a neutral verb in locative contexts; there is a decrease over the three levels (49.5% – 44.9% – 38.2%), but Level 3 speakers still use these verbs almost twice as often as the native Dutch speakers (38.2% vs. 20.2%). However, this decrease is not paralleled with a comparable increase of posture verbs (only 5% increase). Once again, at all three levels, the learners underuse the posture verbs compared to the native speakers, confirming the overall underuse of these verbs in their descriptions ($\chi^2 = 12.735$; $df = 3$; $p < 0.005$).

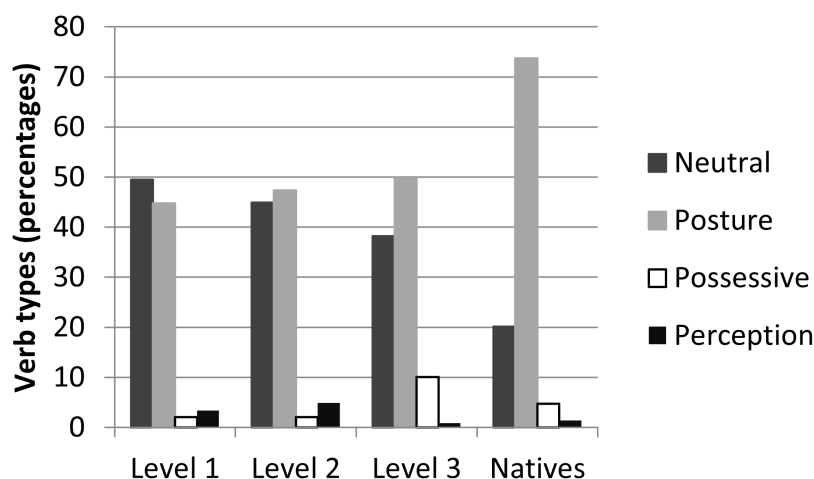


Figure 2: Overall distribution of verb types for learners and native speakers (Dutch; from Perrez and Lemmens 2012)

3.3 Constructional patterns

The analysis presented in Lemmens and Perrez (2012) focused on the lexical choices made by native and non-native speakers, with a particular attention to the degree of idiomaticity (qualitatively and quantitatively) in the learners' use of posture verbs. One of the surprising results in the analysis is that the native Dutch speakers still had a fairly high use of the neutral verb *zijn* 'be' (about 20% versus 73% posture verbs); intuitively, most speakers of Dutch would regard the use of *zijn* in a locative clause, such as for example, *De kleren zijn op het bed* 'the clothes are on the bed' or *Er zijn kleren op het bed* 'there are clothes on the bed' as (highly) unidiomatic or even incorrect. However, when the perspective is widened to include construction types, the high percentage of *zijn* 'be' can be explained, as will be shown in this section.

Table 1 summarizes the overall frequencies of the various constructions for the three language data sets, represented visually in Figure 3 for the relevant construction types. As far as the native speakers are concerned, the following tendencies can be observed. Firstly, the L1 speakers of Dutch appear to produce more presentational and basic locative constructions than the native speakers of French (respectively 26% vs. 24% and 32% vs. 22%). The French speakers, in turn, are more inclined to produce more transitive constructions on the one hand (respectively 11% vs. 4%) and more embedded basic locative constructions on the other (12% vs. 3%, see Section 2.3 Coding). Concerning the former, a more fine-grained analysis, given in Figure 4, shows that the high proportion of transitive constructions can be attributed to a more frequent usage of perception constructions.

Table 1: Frequencies of the construction types in the productions of native speakers of French, native speakers of Dutch and French-speaking learners of Dutch

CX Type	French L1		Dutch L2		Dutch L1	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
NON-LOC	65	13.4	126	12.98	77	8.71
ID	2	0.41	4	0.41	9	1.02
TRANS	57	11.75	59	6.08	40	4.52
PRES	114	23.51	342	35.22	232	26.24
BLC	111	22.89	290	29.87	289	32.69
X+BLC	60	12.37	61	6.28	31	3.51
PROG	0	0.00	0	0.00	42	4.75
ELLIPSIS	72	14.85	84	8.65	136	15.38
OTHER	4	0.82	5	0.51	28	3.17
TOTAL	485	100	971	100	884	100

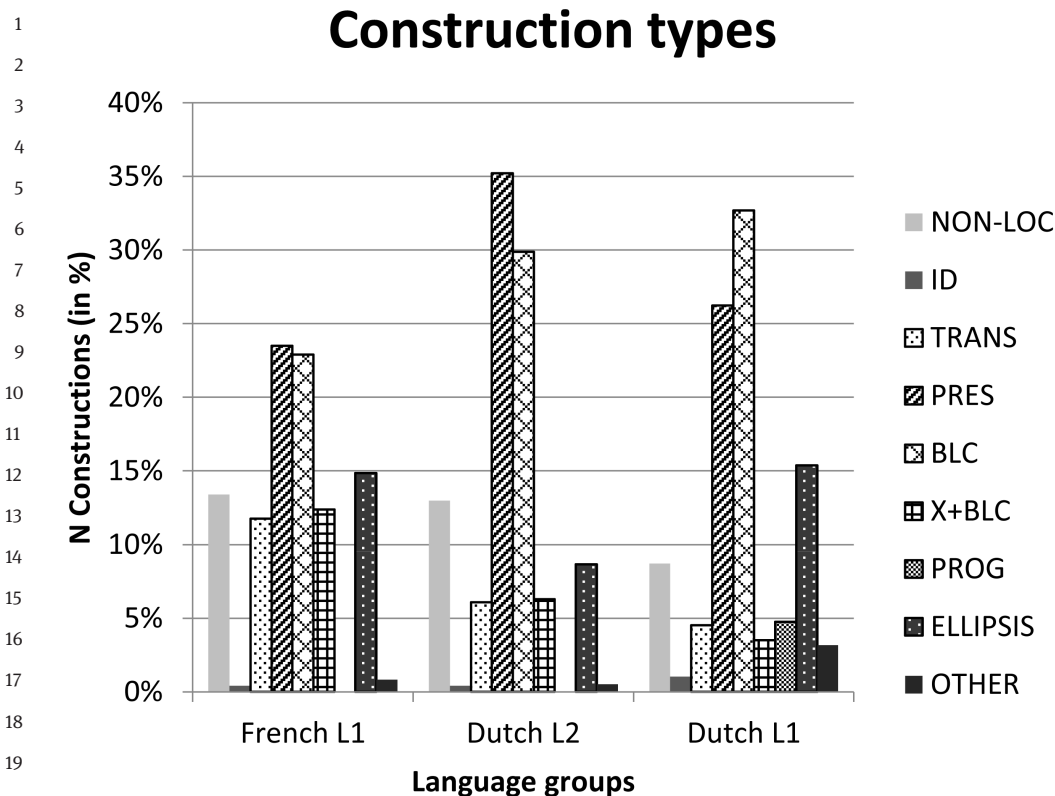


Figure 3: Construction types in the three language data sets

Turning to the learner data, one can summarize the main developmental tendencies over the different proficiency levels as follows. The number of presentational sentences decreases over the three levels and the number of BLCs increases. Similarly, the non-locative constructions go down over the different levels as does the frequency of X+BLC, both coming closer to the native speaker frequencies. Also the frequency of elliptical constructions increases over the three levels towards those of the native speakers. However, two of these evolutions are not linear: the FLP2 group has a strikingly higher percentage of BLCs than both FLP1 and FLP3; conversely, it has a strikingly lower percentage of non-locatives compared to the other groups. We will return to this below, after a more detailed discussion of these evolutions.

The learners occupy an intermediate position between the native speakers of French and the native speakers of Dutch as far as the use of transitive and basic locative constructions are concerned. This observation emphasizes the developmental processes they undergo when going from constructions that appear to be typical of their mother tongue to constructions that are more typical of their target language.

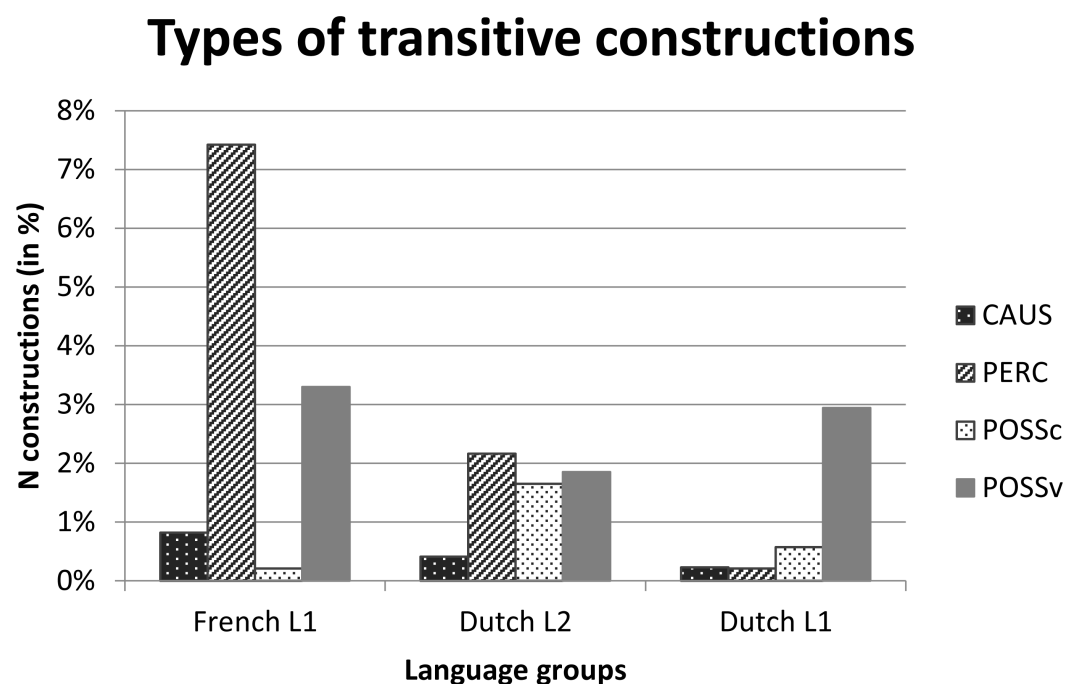


Figure 4: Transitive constructions in the three language data sets

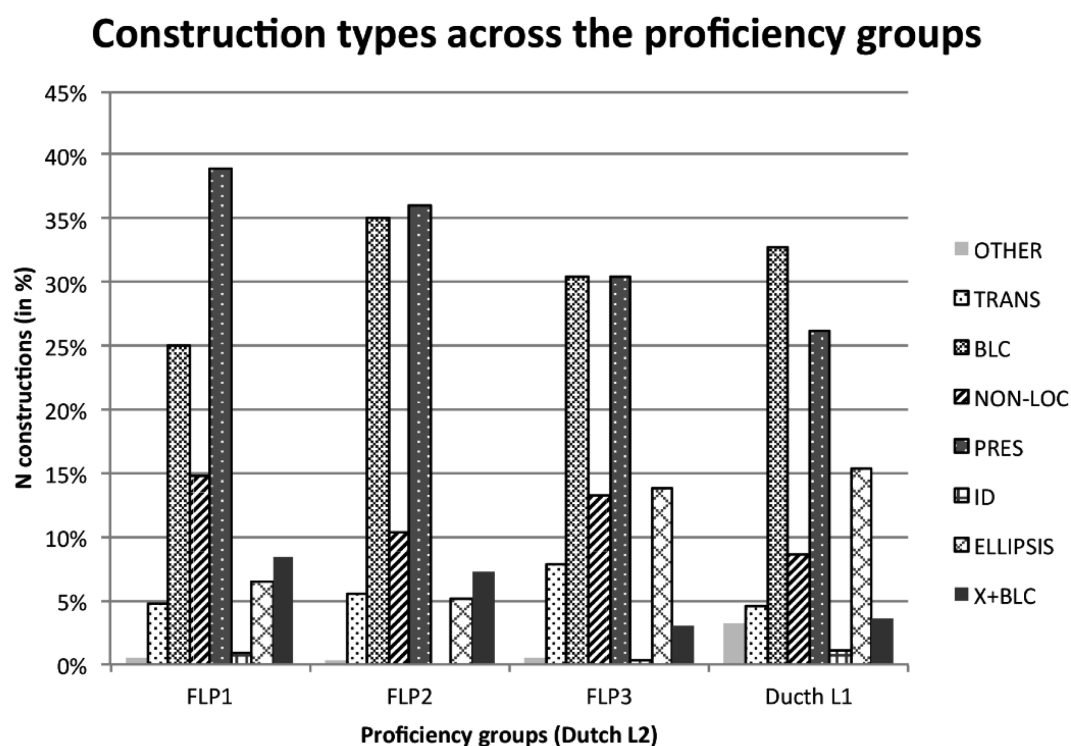


Figure 5: Construction types across the Dutch L2 proficiency levels

Interestingly, the French-speaking learners of Dutch show a peak in their use of presentational constructions, which – despite a clear improvement as the level of proficiency increases (FLP1: 38.92% > FLP2: 36.11% > FLP3: 30.51%) – remain overrepresented in their locative descriptions, in comparison to both the native speakers of French (23%) and the native speakers of Dutch (26%). This peak could be explained by the learners' tendency of using the presentational construction as equivalent of the French *il y a*-construction ('there is/are'-construction in English) as a kind of prefab construction that is repeatedly applied to produce locative descriptions. Since this tendency does not appear to be typical of native-like usage in French, it could more globally be regarded as being part of a developmental compensatory strategy consisting in the repeated use of an "all-purpose or catch-all" construction (cf. Dörnyei 1995) in such descriptive contexts. It is, after all, also quite frequent in the descriptions by the native Dutch speakers (PRES being the second most frequent construction). This strategy can be illustrated by the following longer passage in which this learner almost invariably begins each new utterance with this *er is/er zijn*-construction (for the sake of clarity, these have also been highlighted in the gloss).

(19) *Dus we zijn in een schoenenwinkel. Er zijn veel schoenen. Er zijn schoenendozen in het voorhand van de winkel euh naast het sofa euh links van de prent. Er zijn ook dozen euh in de handen van de winkelier euh in het midden van de prent. Er zijn ook dozen naast het glas? [...] Er zijn ook dozen euh voor het sofa rechts van de prent en ook voor het sofa links van de prent. Euh er zijn dozen euh ... ja, het is alles voor de dozen, denk ik. Ah, nee nee! Er zijn ook dozen op de stoel naast de kassa euh en er zijn schoenen boven de twee grote sofa's. Er zijn ook schoenen voor de klant die probeert te dragen, die probeert de schoenen te dragen. En er zijn veel schoenen in het euh in de etalage.* (OPD-Du2F-02-01)

'So we are in a shoe shop. There are many shoes. There are shoeboxes in the front of the shop err next to the sofa err left of the picture. There are also boxes err in the hands of the shopkeeper err in the middle of the picture. There are also boxes next to the glass? [...] There are also boxes err in front of the sofa right of the picture and also in front of the sofa left of the picture. Err there are boxes err ... yes, that's it for the boxes, I think. Ah, no no! There are also boxes on the chair next to the counter err and there are shoes above the two large sofas. There are also shoes in front of the customer who tries to wear who tries to wear the shoes. And there are many shoes in the err in the display window'.

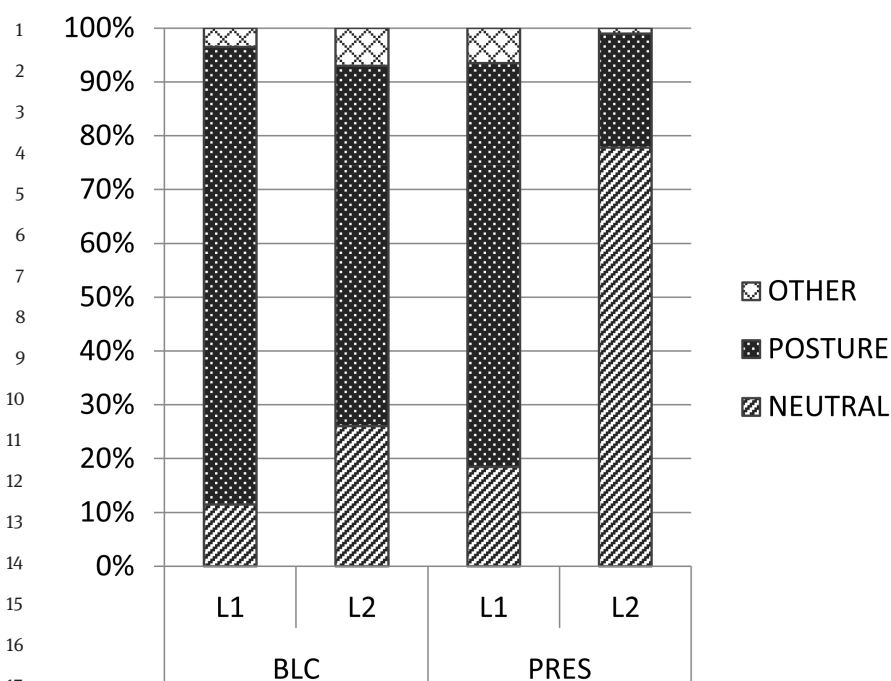


Figure 6: Verb types in presentational and BLC constructions in Dutch L1 and L2 data

Technically speaking, this construction is a correct construction in Dutch, but two elements make it stand out as unidiomatic. Firstly, the presentational construction in this excerpt (illustrative of the learner data in general) almost invariably occurs in a syntactically simplex clause ('there is X LOC', with LOC being the location where X is) while the native data shows a different pattern (see below). Secondly, the accumulation of such (identical) constructions in such a short text span suggests this learner is relying on one of the few constructions s/he knows to encode locative information, which results in a low level of constructional variation. Besides, the overall production shows, because of this repetition, a low level of target language idiomaticity, which seems to go hand in hand with a lower level of foreign language proficiency.

This example moreover suggests that French-speaking learners of Dutch tend to use neutral verbs (mostly *zijn* 'be') in their presentational constructions. This tendency is confirmed by a more specific analysis of the verb types used by the learners and the natives when producing presentational and basic locative constructions (see Figure 6). This analysis confirms that the learners are strongly inclined to use neutral verbs in presentational constructions (77% of the cases) whereas the natives show the reverse tendency of using a higher proportion of posture verbs (*zitten* 'sit', *liggen* 'lie', *staan* 'stand') in such constructions; 75% of the presentational constructions are thus of the form 'there lie/sit/stand X'. The

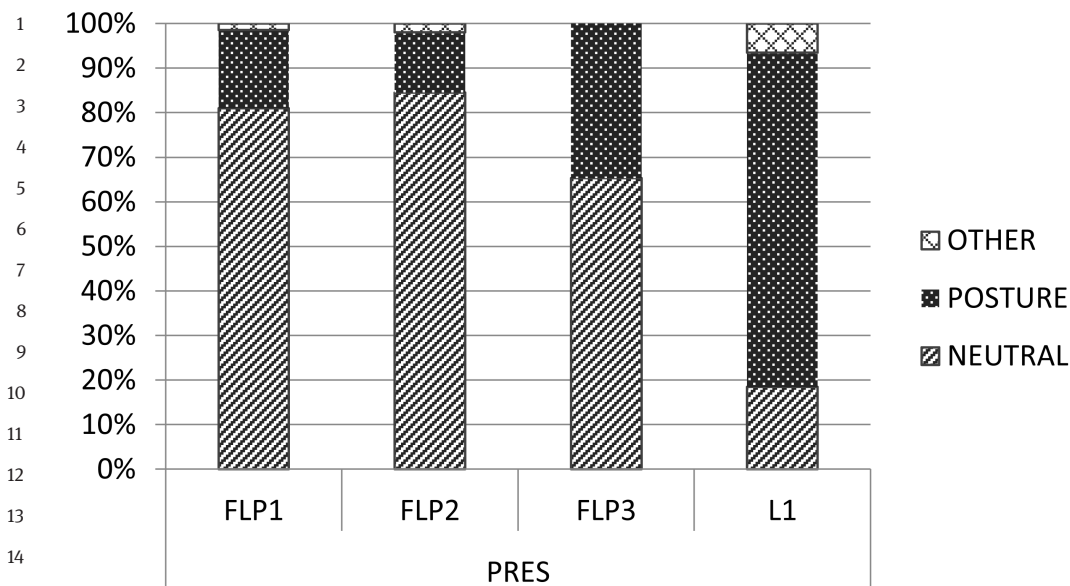


Figure 7: Verb types in presentational constructions across different levels of foreign language proficiency

use of posture verbs in presentational constructions remains fairly limited in the productions of the learners, suggesting that such constructions, specific to Dutch, only appear at an advanced stage of language development. This suggestion is partly confirmed by Figure 7 which shows an increase of the use of posture verbs in presentational constructions over the different proficiency levels (FLP1: 17%, FLP2: 13%, FLP 3: 34%), suggesting that such constructions typically appear at a later stage of foreign language development, even though this specific structure remains underrepresented in the productions of the learners with the highest level of proficiency in comparison to the natives. More generally, these results tend to confirm the observations made in Lemmens and Perrez (2012) according to which the learners with the highest level of proficiency tend to come closer to native-like patterns when encoding locative information.

When turning to basic locative constructions (Figure 8), our data indicate a strong decrease of neutral verbs in the production of the learners (26% of the cases) which goes hand in hand with a higher proportion of posture verbs (67% of the cases). When producing basic locative constructions, the learners thus seem to prefer posture verbs. This observation applies at all levels of foreign language proficiency, but it is more outspoken for the intermediate and most advanced learners.

These two figures reveal the mixed nature of the second level group (FLP2): they do have a higher frequency of posture verbs in the BLC than the FLP1

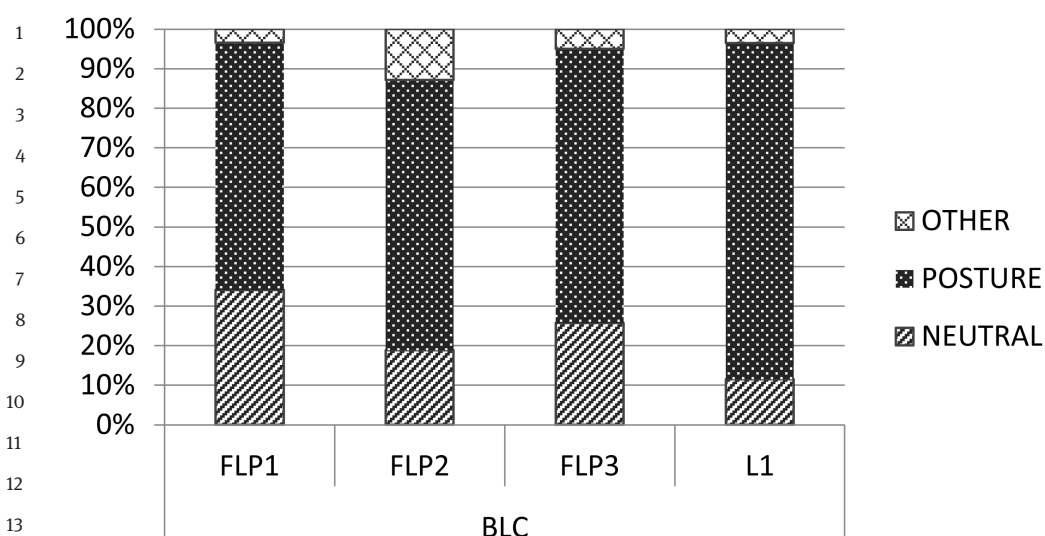


Figure 8: Verb types in basic locative constructions across different levels of foreign language proficiency

group, but at the same time a higher frequency of neutral verbs in the presentational construction than the lower level which goes counter to what could be expected. This suggests that this group is indeed struggling to reconcile lexical and constructional features of the target language. This provides an explanation for the non-linear (and opposite) developments for BLC and PRES in Figure 5 above.

When further considering the interaction between the construction types and the verb types used by the learners in their description of locative events, another interesting tendency emerges, viz. the learners' non-idiomatic use of posture verbs without any other specific locative element, as in the following two examples (coded as NON-LOC).

(20) *Dus euh vlees hangt* (OPD-Du2F-20-02)¹¹

'so euh meat hangs'

(21) *Er is een vrouw die in de winkel werkt en die staat euh debout*
(OPD-Du2F-19-02)

'there is a woman who in the shop works and she stands euh debout'¹²

¹¹ In this sentence, the learner also omits the (neuter) definite article (*het*) required in front of the noun *vlees* 'meat'; this has the same effect as the omission of the definite article in English (generic reading instead of a definite one). As this error is not relevant to the current discussion, we will ignore this.

¹² The learner is mixing up the French construction *être debout* lit. 'be upright' (= 'stand') and the Dutch posture verb, leading to *staan debout*.

Although such non-locative constructions with a posture verb are quantitatively fairly limited (see Table 2), they occur with comparable frequency in the productions of both the L1 speakers of French and the L2 learners of Dutch (around 2% in both cases). In such examples, the posture verb is used in isolation, not so much to express the location of an entity but rather to specify the posture of an entity. Such examples illustrate that some learners have picked up the explicit focus on the postural information typical of Dutch, which can be regarded as a sign of their growing awareness of the importance of Dutch posture verbs in Dutch spatial descriptions. Strikingly though, such non-locative constructions with a posture verb are quite unidiomatic in the kind of locative descriptions that the learners produce. A locative description with a posture verbs generally requires the specification of a ground; the more idiomatic counterpart to example (20) would have been *Het vlees hangt aan een haak* ‘the meat hangs on a hook’, that of example (21), *Er staat een vrouw in de winkel (te werken)* ‘there stands a woman in a shop (to work)’. Uses of posture verbs without a Ground, as the learners do here, are purely postural, whereas what is needed here is a locative use of the posture verb (even if it still expresses the posture or orientation of the Figure). In other words, in Dutch *De man staat* ‘The man stands’ and *De man staat voor het huis* ‘The man stands in front of the house’ do not express the same thing, even if in both cases the man is necessarily in a standing position. The former is exclusively postural, the latter is postural and locative.¹³ In French, such descriptions of posture are more idiomatic, especially when added in a subclause:

- (22) a. *en bas, à droite, il y a trois filles qui essayent des chaussures,*
 ‘below, on the right hand side, there are three girls who are trying on shoes’,
 b. *dont deux qui sont assises.* (OPD-FR-05)
 ‘two of whom are sitting’.

In other words, while such “non-locative” uses of posture verbs could be indicative of the learners’ increased awareness of the postural logic in Dutch, it cannot be excluded that this is a simple transfer from their native language (French).

Table 2: Non-locative constructions with a posture verb in the three language data sets

CX Type	French L1		Dutch L2		Dutch L1	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
NON-LOC with posture verb	12	2.47	23	2.37	2	0.23

¹³ Such exclusively postural uses are often used in a contrastive context, e.g., ‘the bottles do not lie, they stand’ or when the (postural) properties of the entity are at issue.

Summing up the findings for the learner data, these observations point at different developmental stages in the interlanguage of the learners with respect to the encoding of locative events. The first stage is characterized by a frequent use of presentational constructions with neutral verbs, as part of a compensatory strategy resulting in the use of the *er is/zijn*-construction as a prefab construction. In the second stage, the learners tend to produce basic locative constructions with neutral verbs, a pattern that is present in French as well. In the third stage, characterized by an increase in proficiency and a growing awareness of the importance of posture verbs in Dutch to encode not only postural information but also locative information, the learners use posture verbs in BLCs. In the fourth stage they tend to produce presentational constructions with posture verbs. Although these different stages are partly confirmed by our data, their validity should be verified by further experimental research.

3.4 From syntax to discourse: French onions and Dutch trains

As in any text, the constructions do not appear in isolation in the elicited descriptions produced by the informants, but in a given discourse with a particular focus and information flow. Due to the limitations of our coding schedule, a full-blown discursive analysis is currently not possible, but our data have allowed us to uncover some pertinent differences between Dutch and French at discourse level, pertaining to the way in which locative information is provided. In a nutshell, the difference is that between an onion-type structuring of information (French; see Figure 10 below) versus that of a train-structure (Dutch; see Figure 11 below).

This difference is revealed in our data through the basic locative constructions embedded in a main clause (coded as X+BLC, see above). These embedded constructions are instances of complex clauses in which more locative information about an entity that has been introduced in the first part of the matrix clause is given in a subclause as, for instance, in examples (15), (17) and (18) already mentioned above and repeated here for convenience, and example (23).

(15) *Er is ook een bed waar kleren op liggen* (OPD-DU-01)

‘there is a bed where on clothes are lying’

(17) [*en daarnaast zijn er ook schoenen [die zich voor de zetel bevinden]*]
(OPD-DU-02).

‘[and next to it are there also shoes
[that find themselves in front of the sofa]]’

1 (18) [*je vois aussi des tee-shirts [qui sont collés au mur du fond]*]
 2 (OPD-FR-04)

3 ‘[I see also tee-shirts [that are stuck onto the wall at the back]]’
 4

5 (23) *On peut y apercevoir un tabouret sur lequel il y a une robe orange*
 6 (OPD-FR-04)

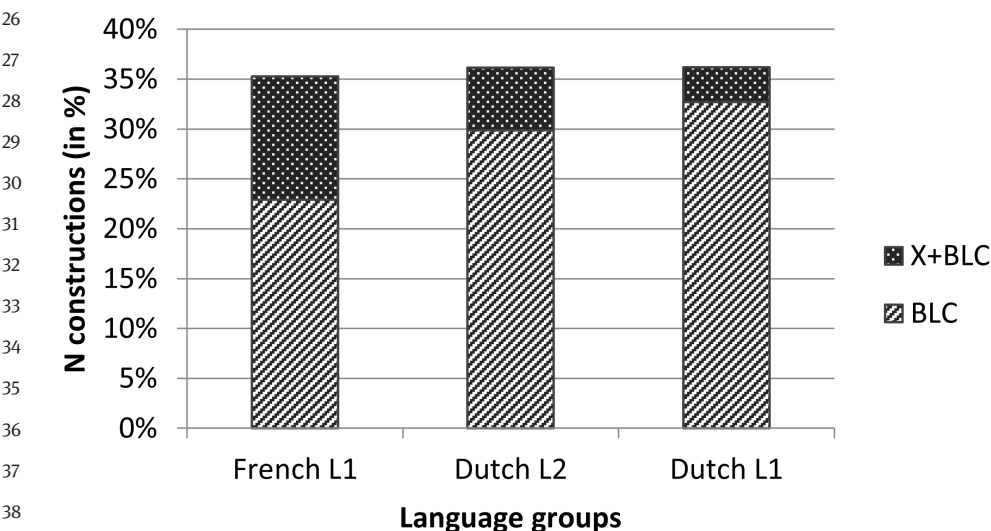
7 ‘we can see there a stool where on there is an orange dress’
 8

9 The information structure in these examples is not the same. In examples (15)
 10 and (23), the matrix clause introduces a Figure (‘bed’ and ‘stool’, respectively)
 11 which subsequently serves as the Ground for the location of another Figure
 12 (‘clothes’ and ‘dress’, respectively). In examples (17) and (18), in contrast, the
 13 matrix clause introduces a Figure (‘shoes’ and ‘tee-shirts’, respectively) and the
 14 following subclause provides supplementary (locative) information on that same
 15 Figure. Recall that in our coding scheme the former are considered as two
 16 separate locative clauses, whereas in the second, they are not.

17 As illustrated by Figure 9, when independent and embedded BLCs are taken
 18 together, their frequencies in French and Dutch are comparable (respectively
 19 35% and 36%). However, when considering both construction types separately,
 20 embedded BLCs are more frequent in French than in Dutch: 12% of the overall
 21 constructions in the L1-French corpus and 3.5% in the L1-Dutch corpus. The
 22 learners situate themselves perfectly in the middle (6%).

23

24 Independent vs. embedded BLCs



40 **Figure 9:** Independent vs. embedded BLCs in the three data sets

These findings suggest two important differences between French and Dutch with respect to information structuring. Firstly, the data indicates that in French BLCs are more often presented in a subordinate clause in comparison to Dutch. This suggests that the locative information is often backgrounded, much like manner of motion is subordinate in the case of motion events (see Slobin 2003, among others). Secondly, this points at different ways of structuring locative information in French and Dutch, in particular with respect to Figure and Ground relations. In French, native speakers have the tendency to introduce an entity (Figure) and then provide supplementary locative information on that same entity, such as in example (18). This explains the higher percentage of embedded basic locative constructions in the L1 French corpus, as the French speakers typically use such an accumulative pattern. While such patterning is clearly possible in Dutch (see example [17]), it is not very common (only 3.5%); the typical information structuring pattern in Dutch, illustrated by example (15), is to locate an entity which subsequently serves as the Ground for the location of another entity expressed in the following subclause.

Metaphorically, the difference can be characterized in terms of an onion-model (French) versus a train-model (Dutch). Consider the following examples, representing the contrast.

(24) *vous avez un premier client qui est assis sur un fauteuil vert* (OPD-FR-02)

‘you have a first customer who is seated on a green sofa’

(25) *tussen de twee [...] nachttafels is er een bed waarop [...]*

twee hemden en een broek liggen (OPD-Du2F-12-2)

‘between the two [...] bedside tables, there is a bed on which [...]

two shirts and one pair of trousers lie’

The French pattern is that of a layered onion: the centre is the Figure (‘customer’), to which an additional layer of information is added (‘sitting on sofa’); the Dutch pattern is that of a chain of information, much like wagons in a train, where different entities play different roles: Figure₁ (‘bed’) becomes the Ground for Figure₂ (‘clothes’). Schematically, these information structure models can be represented as in Figures 10 and 11.

As indicated by the event labels, in the French example, we are dealing with the same locative event in both clauses (location of the customers), whereas in the Dutch example, we are dealing with two different locative events, even if, as we mentioned earlier, from a functional perspective one could regard these as building one single event, targeting the location of the clothes. In such a perspective, the first locative event (location of the bed) is auxiliary to the second (the location of the clothes).

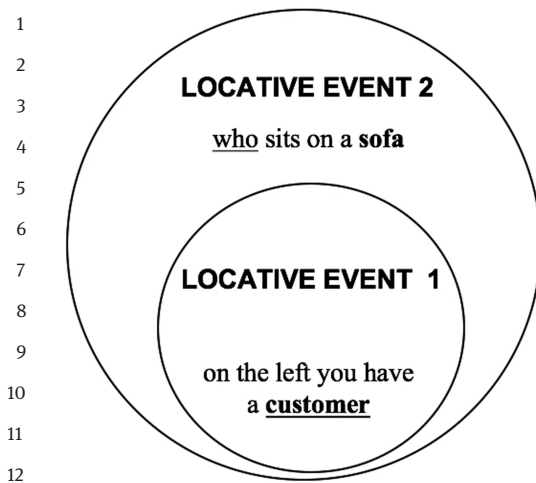


Figure 10: The French onion model

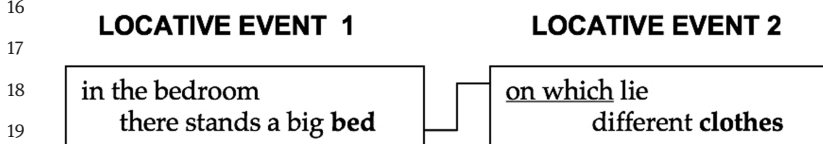


Figure 11: The Dutch train model

These different tendencies are confirmed if we look at the Figure-Ground relationships within subordinate clauses, presented in Figure 12 below.

The tendency for French is clear: in 91% of the cases the following sub-clause gives further information on the entity (either the Figure or the Ground) already introduced the Matrix clause (cf. +BLC above). The tendency for Dutch is more mixed: in about 40% of the cases, more information is given on a Figure or Ground and in about 40% there is a Figure-Ground reversal, i.e., the Figure in the matrix clause becomes the Ground to locate a new Figure (two different locative events). Strikingly again, the learners straddle the middle.

The above results clearly point to differences between Dutch and French with respect to both the weighing of information (backgrounded in a subordinate clause or not) and the structuring of information (onion-type layering vs. train-like chaining). However, some caution is in order. First of all, the tendencies represented in Figure 12 only concern subordination; in the current analysis, we have not (yet) included coordinated patterns. Secondly, we have not considered non-clausally expressed locative information, such as in the following examples (relevant parts have been highlighted).

Figure-Ground relationships in complex sentences

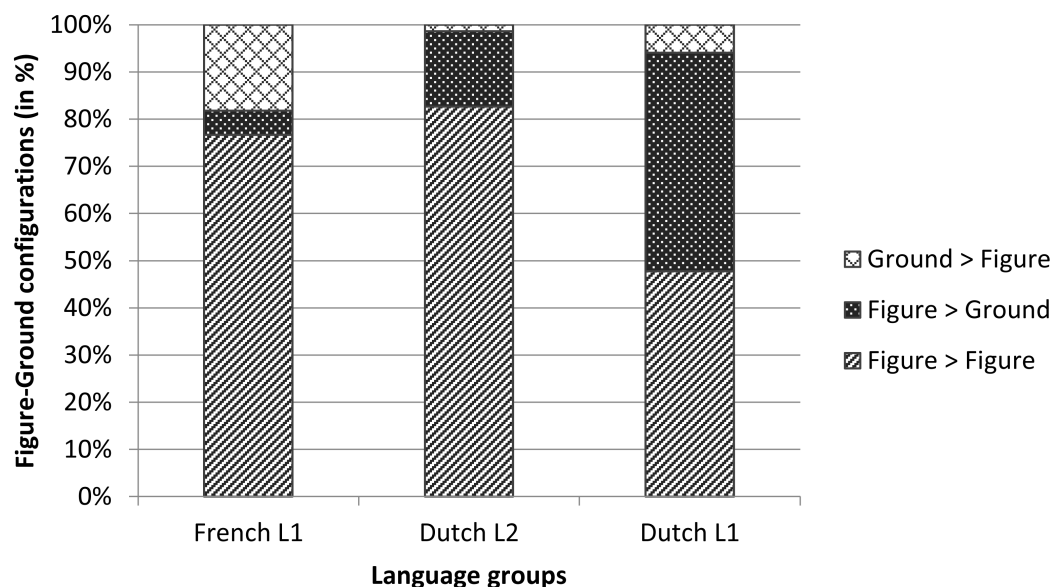


Figure 12: Figure-Ground relationships in complex sentences

(26) *In de slaapkamer staat een stoel met jas erover* (OPD-DU-09)

‘In the sleeping room stands a chair with a jacket there on’

(27) *A gauche de cette entrée, il y a une chaise avec une veste turquoise dessus* (OPD-FR-04)

‘On the left hand side of this entrance, there is a chair with a turquoise jacket on’

In these non-clausal encodings of location, there is also a Figure-Ground reversal where the first Figure that is introduced clausally serves as the Ground for the prepositional complement phrase. Even for these prepositionally encoded locative events, things are more complicated than they seem, since the prepositional phrase can be with or without an explicit locative element. The examples above both have such a locative expression, but in a sentence like *Er is een vrouw met een roze jurk* ‘there is a woman with a pink dress’ there is no such locative element in the prepositional phrase.

In sum, while the above discursive perspective on the data confirms the locative nature of Dutch that has been established by the lexical and constructional patterns, some more careful research on the different strategies of information structuring is needed.

4 General Discussion

The elicitation study reported on in this paper confirms the typological differences between Dutch and French in the expression of location. Overall, the data confirm the Talmian typology, in that Dutch typically expresses the manner of location via posture verbs and French is essentially “manner-poor”, much like in the expression of motion events. As confirmed by our data, French-speaking learners of Dutch struggle with the abundant use of the posture verbs in Dutch, even if there is an improvement for the higher levels of proficiency. At the lowest proficiency level, learners clearly overuse neutral verbs, a cross-over from French, but they do use them more often (but not necessarily correctly) as they get more proficient. The lexical difficulty French learners face is thus that of the one-to-many mapping that Viberg (1985, 1998) and Gullberg (2009) talk about: instead of one general verb (*être* ‘be’), they have to use three verbs (*liggen* ‘lie’, *zitten* ‘sit’ and *staan* ‘stand’) that each come with their own semantic specifications and constraints (see also Cadierno *et al.* 2016).

An important complement that was offered via our study is that these typological difficulties go beyond the verb, but also concern the construction type which interacts in intricate ways with the verbs that are used. Also here, a similar progression was observed in the type of constructions that the learners use: low-proficient speakers overuse the presentational construction with a neutral verb (*er zijn* ‘there is/are’) as a formulaic all-round prefab. In the two higher levels of proficiency, one notices a significant increase of locative constructions (BLCs) as well as presentational constructions with posture verbs.

Looking at the complex clauses in our data has further generated insights into how locative information is either foregrounded or backgrounded and how the information is structured. Also in this area, the data confirm the high locative nature of the Dutch descriptions, which present the location of entities in a more autonomous fashion than do the French descriptions; Dutch speakers chain individual locative events (in about half of the cases with a Figure-Ground reversal), whereas French speakers talk about one entity and give complementary information on this entity (which often is not locative information at all). Also here, the learners nicely straddle the middle between the two and develop an intermediate language system by combining the different locative features of French and Dutch.

In other words, our data show that learners become increasingly aware of the overall locative nature of Dutch in the context at hand (picture descriptions targeted at the location of entities), as reflected in lexis, grammar, and information structure. The challenge for French learners is not just restricted (as the previous studies by Viberg and Gullberg may have led one to believe), to figuring out the correct one-to-many lexical mappings but learning how to “locativize”

their descriptions, not just through the use of the correct lexical items, but also via the constructions (notably, the use of the BLC) and the way in which they present the locative information in the discourse (not independent of the constructions, as has been shown). Currently, we are also investigating how non-verbal gestures complement the information that is verbally expressed. Also here, differences in learner and native speaker productions point at different degrees of locativization of their narrations. It would also be interesting to reverse the perspective and see to what extent Dutch speakers learning French succeed in “de-locativizing” their descriptions of such scenes. This is a study planned for the future.

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