

Being ‘cool’ while doing something: the grammaticalisation of ‘lie’ into a progressive aspect marker

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The grammaticalisation of the posture verbs ‘sit’, ‘stand’ and ‘lie’ into markers of progressive aspect is a crosslinguistically frequently attested phenomenon (see e.g. Bybee et al. 1994, Kuteva 1999, Heine and Kuteva 2002). Dutch is among the languages in question, the verbs *zitten* ‘sit’, *staan* ‘stand’, and *liggen* ‘lie’ with infinitival complements all being subject to this development (see e.g. Haeseryn et al. 1997, Lemmens 2005). Full acceptability is not (yet?) reached, however, the original postural meanings often still being relatively dominant. This is especially the case for *liggen*; see e.g. the following exchange on an internet forum:

- (1) A: dus wat ligt je te zeuren meisje
 so what lie you to whine girl
 ‘So why are you whining, girl?’
 B: ik ben geen MEISJE maar een VROUW. En ik
 I am no girl but a woman. And I
 LIG niet ik ZIT.
 lie not I sit.
 ‘I am not a GIRL but a WOMAN. And I’m not LYING, I’m SITTING.’

Whilst the typological literature generally treats the grammaticalisation of *liggen* in the same way as that of the other posture verbs, there is evidence that matters are actually a bit less straightforward. Song (2002), for example, has shown that in Korean the progressive meaning is only available for the vulgar verb *cappaci-* ‘lie’, not for *nwup-* ‘lie (plain)’.

With respect to the Dutch data (mostly obtained with the web concordancer KWicFinder) this paper will argue that in addition to progressive aspect (and remnants of the postural semantics) the meaning of *lie* may include a *sociolinguistic* dimension. Specifically, it appears to be used as a marker of the speaker’s assessment of themselves as ‘cool’ or ‘tough’ — *cool* and *stoer* in Dutch. (Following the sociological literature ‘coolness’ and ‘toughness’ are defined as social constructs, see e.g. Adler et al. 1992, Morgan 1998; or, in a Dutch context, Dibbitts 2006). As to why Dutch *liggen* but not *zitten* or *staan* is associated with ‘coolness’ or ‘toughness’ I will draw on Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) suggestions concerning the embodied nature of thought and language, and argue that there is a metaphorical connection between horizontal posture and the ideas of being ‘cool’ or ‘tough’. Consider in this relation also expressions such as being ‘laid back’ or ‘relaxed’, which are both connected to ‘coolness’.

Since the metaphors we live by are often not language-specific one may suspect that the link between the ‘lie’ progressive and ‘coolness’ or ‘toughness’ is not restricted to Dutch. Indeed, I will speculate that this link may also help explain Song’s (2002) observation that the Korean *cappaci-* construction carries connotations of a negative assessment on the part of the speaker of the event described.