

Abstract

This research aims to find out whether and to what extent the valency of psych-verbs influences the word order in the Dutch sentence. Valency is defined as the ability of a verb to bind a number of elements in order to form a grammatically correct sentence. However, valency has to be seen not only from the syntactic, but also from the semantic point of view. In other words, we are not only interested in the number of elements a verb requires, but also in the semantic features of these elements.

It has been noted by a number of linguists that certain verbs allow for the nominal subject to be placed behind the nominal direct or indirect object in the middle field of the Dutch sentence, i.e. between the finite verb and the final verb cluster in the main clause or between the complementizer and the verb cluster in the subordinate clause. This is contrary to the tendency to put nominal subject before the nominal object in the middle field. Most of the verbs described to behave in this manner are called psych-verbs or psychological verbs. These verbs refer to a situation in which an animate entity is subject to a change of psychological state.

The analysis of sentences with psych-verbs has shown that animacy is the most important factor to influence word order in the middle field, followed by the distinction between concrete and abstract entities. A subject that refers to an inanimate and abstract entity has a chance of being placed behind the direct or indirect object in the middle field, whereas an animate subject or a subject that refers to an inanimate and concrete entity comes before the object. We can say that both subject and object lose their features under certain conditions. The subject acquires the properties of object, which in turn acquires the properties of subject.

Keywords: Dutch – valency – psych-verbs – word order – middle field – direct object
– indirect object – subject