expectation management in Dutch dialogue – discourse markers and intersubjectivity

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Discourse markers are linguistic elements that have no propositional meaning but mark a relation between the utterance and the (non-)linguistic context. In this paper we will discuss two discourse markers in Dutch that encode a relation with discourse expectations or, more specifically, the non-alignment between what is expressed and what is expected given the prior context:

(1) \textit{Het heeft toch gesneeuwd vannacht.} It has [toch] snowed last night

(2) \textit{Maria is eigenlijk een man.} Maria is [actually] a man

\textit{Toch} in (1) expresses that the message (\textit{it snowed last night}) is unexpected given the context (e.g. it was warm yesterday, the weather forecast did not predict any snow). \textit{Eigenlijk} in (2) encodes that the message (\textit{Maria is a man}) is in contrast with the most plausible expectation that someone called Maria is a woman (for detailed analyses, see Hogeweg et al. 2011, van Bergen et al. 2011). Both \textit{toch} and \textit{eigenlijk} mark the contrast between the expressed and the expected message, but in these contexts they are not interchangeable.

We will argue that the meaning difference between \textit{toch} and \textit{eigenlijk} is captured by the notion of \textit{intersubjectivity}, i.e., the incorporation of the interlocutor’s perspective into ones language (cf. Verhagen 2005). More specifically, we will claim that the difference between \textit{eigenlijk} and \textit{toch} requires separate perspectives on the \textit{common ground}: we propose that \textit{toch} encodes a contrast with what the speaker believes is common ground, whereas \textit{eigenlijk} marks a contrast with what the speaker considers the hearer to believe is common ground.

Current formal discourse models usually assume one representation of the discourse that holds for all discourse participants, “assuming that the agents’ individual representations of the context do not differ substantially enough to impede the progress of the discourse” (Gunlogson 2008: 108). We will argue that multiple perspectives on the discourse may be indispensable to account for the differences between \textit{toch} and \textit{eigenlijk}. We will illustrate how the difference in perspective taking correlates with the division of labour of \textit{toch} and \textit{eigenlijk} across various types of dialogue in the spoken Dutch corpus (CGN 2006).

References