Word valence and its effects

Ad Foolen
Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, Netherlands

Cognitive science underwent an ‘emotional turn’ in recent years. Besides the rational part of the brain, the ‘other half of the human mind’ (see Parisi 2011) is now taken into consideration as well. Linguistics, with its strong orientation and links to cognitive science, cannot neglect this development and has to ask itself in which way emotions should play a role in theories about language (cf. Foolen 2012). The present paper intends to give an overview of recent research in psychology and linguistics on emotive expressivity in language. In the first section, we will discuss the emotive-expressive function of language in relation to the descriptive, referential function. In Section 2, we will have a look at research on emotion-laden words (‘valence’), both in L1 and L2. Then, in Section 3, we will shift the attention from content words to function words, to intensifiers in particular. Section 4 takes a short look at expressive elements on other linguistic levels (phonology, morphology, syntax), and Section 5 rounds off this paper.

Keywords: emotion-laden words, language processing, intensifiers, negativity bias, positivity bias

1. “Without emotion no language”

Van Berkum’s 2011 inaugural lecture at Utrecht University was entitled Zonder gevoel geen taal (‘without emotion no language’). This conditional claim (“no emotion then no language”) is a deep truth in at least 3 perspectives: on-line language use, ontogeny and phylogeny.

To start with online language use: if a human being doesn’t have the drive, the motivation, to talk about a specific topic, then speech will be very restricted, as Stern (1965/1931: 54) already stated: “[I]f a thing were quite indifferent to me I would not say it.” At the same time, there must be a motivation to be in contact with other human beings and to share information and feelings. Also, if you feel that the listener is not interested in what you are saying, it is hard to continue speaking. A mutual interest, a positive attitude, and a bond of trust are necessary ingredients; otherwise the verbal interaction dies down quickly.
Turning to ontogeny, we see that the early interaction between caregiver and child is non-verbal, expressive, and full of emotion. Research on language acquisition has shown that language has its own line of development, starting in the womb, but developing in the context of emotion-interactional exchange (cf. Bloom 1993). When this context fails, language development is impaired (Lüdtke 2012). In recent years, it has been increasingly recognized that in the process of second language acquisition the dimension of affectivity plays an important role as well (see Gabryś-Baker and Bielska 2013).

Recently, it has been argued that emotion might play an important role in the early learning of abstract words. Whereas the grounding of concrete meanings in perceptual and motor experience has found a lot of experimental support (see Barsalou 2008), the grounding of abstract words, both in the learning process and in actual language use, was a problem for embodiment theory. Emotion might offer (part of) the solution, see Meteyard et al. (2012:800):

Abstract words tend, on the whole, to have more affective associations than concrete words, and the greater the affective associations, the earlier those abstract words are acquired (especially for positive words, Kousta et al. 2009). Thus, affect may play a critical role in allowing the learning, or bootstrapping of abstract knowledge. Of course it is the case that not all abstract words are affectively loaded. Affect, nonetheless, could have an important role in allowing for knowledge that cannot be grounded to the external world to begin developing. Once the system is set in place, other abstract concepts can be learned based on linguistic information only.

We will pay a little bit more attention to phylogeny, taking as a point of departure the discussion in Jablonka et al. (2012). For hominids, the whole body, including positioning in relation to others (proxemics), was available for communication. The signals were strongly emotive and at the same time strongly context-bound (iconic and deictic). Jablonka et al. point out that early humans distinguished themselves from the other hominids through strong inner group interaction, in which cooperation was important (see Tomasello and Vaish 2013:237f), for example in the form of alloparenting (taking care of each other’s offspring). This required control of emotions, in particular the suppression of aggression. In other words, self-domestication was a useful evolutionary step. This context was favorable for the development of communicative tools which were free from too much emotional involvement. Every small venture in that direction was awarded by evolutionary forces, first as a social practice, then co-evolutionary incorporated in the genes, because individuals who were good at this type of signals (“symbols”) had an advantage.

An important part of self-domestication has to do with the control of emotions. With the help of a non-emotional communicative instrument, communication can take place in a more neutral, objective way than with body language; see Jablonka et al. (2012:2157):
The arbitrariness of linguistic signs may not be just an inevitable by-product of the cultural evolution of language (…), it may also be a product of positive cultural selection. (…) It could be advantageous for the signs themselves (…) not to carry any inherent emotional baggage. Using the abstract word ‘lion’, rather than the sound of a roaring lion, allowed the instructive symbol to move between contexts, and enabled the individual to perform combinations and operations with other symbols that would otherwise be difficult because of the emotional associations of iconic signs. (Jablonka et al. 2012:2157)

This is reminiscent of a defense of the traditional linguistic view on the design features of language. Language is arbitrary, discrete, compositional and the meanings are non-emotional and have a certain abstractness. These features define a powerful communicative tool that is emancipated from individuals and their emotions, from the here and now, from the idiosyncratic properties of the referent.

A second building block for the view on language we are developing here, is provided by Clark (2006). In his short paper Language, embodiment, and the cognitive niche, Clark points out that language empowers cognition and thought, because “[b]y materializing thought in words, we create structures that are themselves proper objects of perception, manipulation, and (further) thought” (p. 370). Language does not only convey thought, it makes our thoughts more easily accessible for inspection, for keeping them in memory, for making changes to them. The later discovery of writing dramatically amplified this effect (see Heyes 2012). Pictures have the same objectifying advantage, but they often keep a link to one specific referent, and abstract concepts and events are hard to depict. In contrast, language overcomes these restrictions, mainly due to its properties of arbitrariness and compositionality. Combining the views of Jablonka et al. and Clark in this way, it becomes clear how language gave an enormous boost to both communication (in comparison to emotional-bodily communication) and to cognition (in comparison to “languageless” inner thought).

Coming back to the slogan Zonder gevoel geen taal (‘without emotion no language’): indeed, emotion was and is conditional for language, in phylogeny, ontogeny and actual use. But the conditional relation does not hold the other way around. Once humans (in phylogeny) and children (in ontogeny) have acquired language, language use can take place without emotion playing a central role, except for providing the impetus to communicate at all. It is exactly this “neutrality” that makes language a unique instrument, something that only human beings have. Part of the picture seems to be a split between cognition and emotion. It is plausible that language has strongly contributed to this split. It is hard to imagine that an animal feels a tension between what his heart and his head tell him to do. This split has its advantage, but it is also sometimes experienced as a disadvantage, when it leads to tension between cognition and emotion, between the rational and the emotional, that we humans sometimes experience as a problematic dilemma.

Up to this point, our argument has taken the direction of separating language and emotion. But language is used by human beings, with bodies and emotions, interacting with other human beings, from subjective perspectives but also sharing perspectives.
with others, etc. It is to be expected that all these aspects leave their traces in the communicative tool, so that it becomes a tool that fits smoothly in its context of use by humans. The field of linguistics has had a hard time coming to terms with this subjective and contextual aspect of language, due to factors like its philological origin (which contributed strongly to the “written language bias”) and, more recently, due to the dominant view on language processing in which the computer provided an important model and metaphor. Recent grammatical models like Functional and Cognitive Linguistics have as one of their concerns to give the human and contextual aspects their proper place in language theory.

As argued by van Berkum in his inaugural lecture, emotions color everything in our daily life. Maiese (2014) calls this “affective framing,” which is meant “to capture the idea that emotions are a matter of active appraisal, and also that bodily affectivity permeates our interpretations and patterns of attention” (p. 12). It is unavoidable that emotions also color language, as language is part of our everyday life. And apparently, language can live with this coloring, the emotional “infection” does not undermine its conceptualizing role. The emotional coloring is most clearly observable in the emotive meaning of words, also known as connotation or valence, to which we will turn in the next section.

2. Emotion-laden words

The word lion refers to a certain type of animal, we have a concept “lion,” but, apparently, we cannot fully suppress the feelings that are associated with the real animals that the concept evokes. The word is not only associated with the concept, but also with these feelings. It is a rather fruitless discussion whether these emotive aspects of words are considered a part of the meaning of the word or not. Words have connotations, and these are not purely private associations. For most words, the emotional associations of different people tend to go in the same direction, see the following section.

2.1 The measurement of valence

Osgood et al. (1957) developed a practical way of measuring non-conceptual aspects of word meaning. They asked subjects to score words on three different scales: valence, arousal, and potency. Much has been written about the relation and correlation between these scales; see Kuppens et al. (2013) on the relation between valence and arousal. In the present paper, we will restrict ourselves to valence, the scale which measures the degree of positive or negative feeling a word evokes.

In recent years Osgood et al.’s method has been applied to different languages, for example by Bradley and Lang (2010) in their ANEW project. More than 1000 English words were scored on valence, from 1 to 9, where 1 is very negative and 9 very positive.
This led to their ANEW list: Affective Norms for English Words. Since then, other lists have been produced for English (Warriner et al. 2013) and for other languages, for example Moors et al. (2013) for Dutch, and Kanske and Kotz (2010) for German.

Interesting cross-cultural research has been done based on these valence lists. Creusen (2012) translated 100 words from the ANEW list into Dutch and asked 64 Dutch subjects to evaluate the translated words. A remarkable score was observed for Dutch vuurwerk ‘fireworks’. This word had the biggest standard deviation: nearly 2, whereas for other words it was between 1 and 1.5. Moreover, the American scores for fireworks were nearly 2 points higher: 7.55 (American) against 5.66 (Dutch). Both the big standard deviation in Dutch and the lower score can be interpreted as a reflection of the controversial status of fireworks in the Netherlands. In recent years, a public discussion took place regarding whether or not people should be allowed to light fireworks themselves on New Year’s Eve.

Creusen (2012) also looked at possible gender differences in the scores. Men gave an average score of 5.27 for the 100 words, while women had an average of 5.28. This was not a significant gender effect. However, research that explicitly focused on gender differences in relation to specific groups of words did find a difference. Witherell et al. (2012) asked subjects to score lexical items on two scales, running from 1 to 8. One scale was danger, running from not at all dangerous for human survival to extremely dangerous, and the other scale was useful: not at all useful for human survival to extremely useful. Circle was rated 1.64 on the danger scale and crime 6.00. On the usefulness scale bagpipe was rated 2.16 and health 7.19. The main experiment was a lexical decision task. It was found that lexical decision times were shorter and the decisions were more accurate for men if the emotive aspect had to do with danger, whereas “the beneficial effect of usefulness on accuracy was greater for women than for men” (p. 183).

The findings of Creusen (2012) and Witherell et al. (2012) show that variation in valence scores can be found between and within languages. Cultural and social factors have an impact on how individuals feel about a certain word. Despite this variation, research using scales for measuring valence has also shown that there are general tendencies within a linguistic community. If we realize that we have to do abstraction over individual scores, it is acceptable to claim that word A in language B has valence C.

2.2 Difference in valence in L2 and L2

Pavlenko (2008) provides an overview of research on emotion-laden words in the bilingual lexicon. Following up on this research, Koenders (2011) and Rooswinkel (2013) tested foreign language students to find out whether their L1 and L2 words differ in valence. In her master thesis, Koenders compared the scores of Dutch students of French with those of French native speakers. Rooswinkel did the same for native Dutch speakers in comparison with German learners of Dutch. In a web survey, she asked German students of Dutch to score the 100 words Creusen (2012) used in her
research on Dutch. No significant differences between the L1 and L2 scores were found in either study. This finding is against expectation, as it has been claimed in the literature that the emotionality of words in L2 is typically lower than in L1, see Pavlenko (2005). This discrepancy can be explained if we assume that the method using valence scores only shows that the students have learned the emotional value of a L2 word. At the same time, it is very well possible that they don’t experience the associated feelings in the same way as native speakers do. The method of measuring skin conductance response (SCR) gives a “deeper insight” in the real experience; see Harris et al. (2003, 2006). Degner et al. (2012: 187) reflect on this issue as follows:

[C]ultural and language immersion is an important factor in emotional language processing. Bilinguals immersed in the L2 culture use their second language frequently in daily life, that is, in action contexts that certainly lead to a higher weighting of affective connotations. When bilinguals are involved in social interactions in L2, perceiving and expressing subtle nuances of what is typically seen as positive and negative become highly relevant and well practiced. It is one thing to learn that a given word is a taboo word in L2, but quite another to experience the reaction of native speakers of L2 if one uses this word. (…) In contrast, participants who live in the culture of L2 but use it only infrequently do not show these effects. (Degner et al. 2012: 187)

In other words, if L2 words are taught in a school context but are not used in everyday life, their emotional associations are cognitively known, but not “entrenched.” The age of acquisition of L2 plays a role too, see Pavlenko (2012: 426), who gives an overview of studies which “identify a difference between ‘affective properties’ of two populations: late bilinguals who process affective valence in the L2 semantically and early bilinguals who also display somatovisceral reactivity.”

A real difference in experienced emotionality between L1 and L2 words was found by Colbeck and Bowers (2012). Subjects were presented a series of words on a screen and had to identify the words for color that occurred at unpredictable positions in the series. Sometimes, a target color word was preceded by a taboo word (ass, dildo, shit, tits, etc.). For L1 speakers of English the taboo words impaired the performance on the target word but not for Chinese learners of English. This supports the hypothesis that at least in online processing a first language is more emotional than a second language.

2.3 Valence and processing

The impact of emotive meaning on language processing has been proven again and again. The effect is strongly comparable with word frequency: higher frequency and higher emotion both speed up processing. For frequency, this is intuitively plausible, but for emotion, this prediction is less evident. The effect could as well be the other way around: the extra emotional meaning could slow down the processing, for example because more associations have to be processed. But research has shown again and again that valence speeds up processing.
For memorizing, the advantage has been shown in Jay et al. (2008) and Ferré et al. (2012). The latter experiment went as follows. First, they asked bilingual Catalan-Spanish subjects (with one of the two languages being dominant) to rate words on different scales. In one test, the words had to be scored on the dimension “abstractness,” so this rating was related to content, and in the other test the attention was directed to the form of the words: the subjects had to count the number of letters. After a nonverbal distracter task, the subjects had to write down all the words they could reproduce. It was found that emotional words did better, in both tasks and both languages. The effect showed up even in the non-dominant language and even when the task was focused on the form of the word, not the content. This demonstrates the strong force of emotion in language processing.

A specific aspect of Ferré et al.’s findings had to do with the direction of the valence: “Positive words showed a higher recall than neutral words across tasks and languages. However, the advantage in memory for negative words was more restricted” (p. 10). The authors claim that “[t]his superiority in recall for positive words is also a common pattern in monolingual studies.” This finding is somewhat surprising, as other research has shown that negative emotions are typically stronger than positive ones (see Baumeister et al. 2001). Ferré et al. speculate about possible explanations for their finding, like “a mood congruency effect” and the idea that positive words are learned earlier, which would favor good recall.

Although Kousta et al. (2009) state that “emotion words, regardless of polarity, have a processing advantage over neutral words,” it is to be expected that the impact of polarity on processing depends on the specific task. Nasrallah (2010), for example, found an advantage of negative valence in a lexical decision task. And in another study, Wu and Thierry (2012), the difference between positive and negative valence turned out to play a role in the degree in which reading of L2 words co-activated related words in L1. They found that

reading negative words in the second language fails to automatically activate translation equivalents in the native language – a novel effect of native lexical access suppression – whereas reading positive and neutral words leads to language co-activation. (Wu and Thierry 2012: 6488)

A possible explanation could be that “emotional processing interacts with language access in a preventative manner, automatically repressing the full realization of semantic integration when the targeted meaning is potentially distressing” (p. 6488f). Such findings show that language processing is not an encapsulated process; it interacts with the other cognitive and affective systems. As positive and negative objects of perception (including valenced words) have different meanings for the organism, it is natural that they are treated differently by the processing system in different tasks, and even in the language system itself, see Rozin et al. (2010), who show that positive words are used more often, even though languages typically have more words for negative events.
3. Intensifiers

Research on the valence of words and its impact in cognitive tasks has mainly taken place in the context of psychological research. This research has focused on content words (nouns, adjectives and verbs). In linguistics, on the other hand, the focus has been on function words, like interjections, particles and adverbs. Certain uses of modal particles have emotive connotations. Dutch maar in utterances that communicate a decision, like Ik ga maar naar huis, (‘I go home maar’) expresses a certain resignation (see Foolen 1993:182). Koo and Rhee (2013) observe an emerging paradigm of sentence-final particles in Korean -tam, -lam, -kam, and -nam, which express discontent.

Potts and Schwarz (2010) found a correlation between the demonstrative pronoun “this” and affective words. In their corpus study of hotel and book evaluations on the internet, they found that “evaluative language is more common in this-headed cases” as in: This Henry Kissinger is really something! It seems that in Dutch it is rather the distancing die/dat ‘those/that’ (instead of proximate ‘this’) that can be used with emotional overtones: die idioot ‘that idiot’, Ik ben doodziek van die lui van hiernaast ‘I am fed up with those people nextdoor’, Dat gedoe altijd! ‘Always that hassle!’. In this section, we want to take a closer look at one specific group of function words, namely intensifiers.

Intensifiers are adverbial words which ‘strengthen’ content words, like verbs (to sweat heavily) and adjectives (very high). The intensifier indicates that according to the speaker the property holds to a high degree. In addition to this, such intensifiers often have an emotional connotation, indicating that the speaker doesn’t feel neutral about the high degree. Foolen et al. (2013) collected Dutch emotional intensifiers in Dutch and found that many are recruited from emotive content words, in particular from negatively laden content words, like akelig lekker ‘scary delicious’, gruwelijk leuk ‘horribly nice’, etc. For more examples see the list in the appendix.

The preference for negative words as a source for intensifiers can be explained on the basis of two principles, or biases, see Jing-Schmidt (2007): The negativity bias and the positivity bias, also known as the Pollyanna hypothesis, as Boucher and Osgood (1969) called it. According to the negativity bias, negative feelings are stronger than positive feelings. This has an evolutionary explanation: it is more important to react to negative things which can harm you than to enjoy positive things. Enjoyment is a bonus, but need not be very strong to survive. So negative laden words are stronger and thus better candidates for strong intensification. They are grammaticalized into intensifiers, backgrounding their literal meaning and foregrounding their strong emotional meaning.

The positivity bias claims that everyday discourse is not neutral but positive. The emotional baseline of conversation is thus positive. Recently, the positivity bias has been checked empirically by Garcia et al. (2012). They analyzed English, German and Spanish lexica and found that averaging the emotional content over all the words in each of them leads to a neutral result.
Considering, however, the everyday usage frequency of these words we find that the overall emotion of the three languages is strongly biased towards positive values, because words associated with a positive emotion are more frequently used than those associated with negative emotion. (Garcia et al. 2012:1)

Like the negativity bias, the positivity bias can be explained from an evolutionary perspective: it motivates us to see the world in a sunny perspective; we like to be with people who tend to such a perspective, etc. When used against such a positive background, the negative words stand out even more strongly than they are already in themselves. Together, the negativity and positivity bias strengthen the impact of negative words when used as intensifiers.

In relation to this, it is remarkable, that when positive words are used as intensifiers, they typically lead to moderate degree intensifiers, see the following examples:

- *Vrij mooi* ‘free beautiful’, *tamelijk mooi* ‘properly beautiful’, *redelijk mooi* ‘reasonably beautiful’, *behoorlijk mooi* ‘properly beautiful’, *een lief bedrag* ‘a sweet amount’, *een aardig bedrag* ‘a nice amount’, *dat is mooi gelukt* ‘that has worked out beautifully’, *ik ben het goed zat* ‘I am fed up good’. [all translations are literal, meaning ‘rather’ or ‘rather strongly, much, etc.’]

Rounding off this section on intensifiers, it might be interesting to report an exercise we carried out after we made the inventory of intensifiers presented above. We selected some words from Bradley and Lang’s (2010) ANEW list with strong negative scores: *Cancer, unhappy, torture, rape* that we didn’t have yet in our intensifier list. We predicted that Dutch equivalents of these words would be good candidates as sources for future intensifiers. A search on the internet showed, however, that many of them were already in use on fora where young language users express their opinions, see the following examples:

(1) *kijk die vrouw ze stelt zich kanker dik aan hahahaha.* ‘Look, that woman, she carries on very much’ (literally ‘cancer fat’)
(2) *zometeen komt; jason mraz – i won’t give up, dan ga ik de tv sowieso kanker hard zetten* – ‘In a bit Jason Mraz will be on – I won’t give up, then I will switch on the TV cancer hard’
(3) *Stop die fietsen maar goed diep onder de grond, anders krijg je net zo’n ongelukkig lelijk station als in Nijmegen.* – ‘Dig those bikes deep into the ground, otherwise you will have just such an unhappy ugly station as Nijmegen’
(4) *Lang bleef de speurtocht vruchteloos. Kwel lend moeilijk bleek het om nog levende getuigen te vinden van het kleine drama bij Moriaanshoofd.* – ‘For a long time the search was fruitless. It turned out to be torturous difficult to find witnesses of the Moriaanshoofd drama who were still alive’
(5) *Kinks-voorman Ray Davies – doorgaans de nuchterheid zelve – had het over Mary’s zang als martelend mooi.* – ‘Kinks frontman Ray Davies, usually a very down to earth man – talked about Mary’s singing as torturously beautiful’
(6) *Lol vind ik ook.. ze zijn echt verkracht lelijk geworden! de meeste zijn gewoon robots vind ik:*P – ‘Lol, I think so too – they turned out really raped ugly. Most are simply robots, I think:*P’

Apparently, the communicative need to intensify the content of an utterance, which is particularly striking in adolescents, leads to a steady recruitment of new intensifiers with a strong expressive value.

4. Emotive expressivity in phonology and grammar

We restrict ourselves to a few references here, just to illustrate research on expressivity as it occurs in phonology, morphology and syntax. On the phonological level, there is a lot of expressivity, in prosody (see Hancil 2009), and in phonetic variation in the process of language use (see Mischler 2008). Myers-Schulz et al. (2013) show that phonemes are not emotionally neutral, they have an emotional connotation, for example depending on the rising and falling formants in consonants. In *bupaba*, the F2’s in all 3 labial consonants rise, in *dugada*, a word with non-labial consonants they fall. Meyers-Schulz et al. asked subjects to pair these words with pictures of aggressive and cute dogs, and the subjects associate *bupaba* with the cute dog and *dugada* with the aggressive one. The authors conclude (p. 6) “that certain strings of English phonemes have a non-arbitrary emotional quality, and, moreover, that the emotional quality can be predicted on the basis of specific acoustic features.” And they also claim

that our data suggest that *Darth Vader* (...) is an acoustically more appropriate name for an intergalactic miscreant than *Barth Faber*, by virtue of the downward frequency shifts and thus inherently negative emotional connotation.

(Myers-Schulz et al. 2013:7)

Besides expressive morphology, for example in diminutives (see Fortin 2011), there are syntactic constructions which are expressive, see Foolen (2004) on the *hell of a job* construction. In Dutch, this construction is rather productive. The first N is typically occupied by a valenced word like *schat* ‘treasure’ or *duivel* ‘devil’, but more neutral words like *wolk* ‘cloud’, *kast* ‘cupboard’, *boom* ‘tree’ or *dijk* ‘dike’ occur as well. When such words are used, the construction foregrounds the emotive associations we possibly have with the word. For example in the word *boom* ‘tree’, the size and the associated impressiveness will be foregrounded. In certain contexts, this impressiveness can be further interpreted as threatening impressiveness: *een boom van een kerel kwam op me af* ‘a tree of a guy approached me’ (suggesting that the speaker was frightened).
5. Rounding off

In this paper, we started with contrasting two views on language, which imply a tension. On the one hand, language is abstract, logical, conceptual, rational, informational, neutral, geared to factual information. Language provides a tool that helps us to take a distance to the world and our “real life.” But the other part of our message, the good news if you will, is, that language is not a “cold instrument.” It is strongly colored by emotion. When we simply count the number of linguistic publications devoted to expressive language phenomena, it seems that linguistics is in the process of following the emotional turn in cognitive science, see the overview in Majid (2012). Corpus analysis, primarily of spontaneous spoken language and of informal language on the internet, will be an important empirical basis for such studies, besides more experimental work that gives insight in emotional processes that take place when we use language.

Acknowledgements

I thank the audience of the Discourse op dinsdag colloquium at the University of Utrecht (March 12, 2013) for their feedback on an earlier version of this paper, in particular Jos van Berkum, Henk Pander Maat and Nivja de Jong. Many thanks to Martine Zwets and Verena Wottrich, who worked with me on the project about intensifiers. Thanks also to Vera van Mulken for correcting my English.

References


All rights reserved


All rights reserved


Kousta, Stavroula-Thaleia, Vinson, David P. and Vigliocco, Gabriella. 2009. “Emotion words, regardless of polarity, have a processing advantage over neutral words.” *Cognition* 112: 473–481. DOI: 10.1016/j.cognition.2009.06.007


Maiese, Michelle. 2014. “How can emotions be both cognitive and bodily?” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 13 (4): 513–531. DOI: 10.1007/s11097-014-9373-z


Appendix

New (and less new) intensifiers in Dutch derived from content words with a negative connotation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dutch</th>
<th>English translation</th>
<th>Dutch</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abnormaal mooi</td>
<td>‘abnormal beautiful’</td>
<td>Achterlijk lekker</td>
<td>‘retarded delicious’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adembenemend mooi</td>
<td>‘breathtaking beautiful’</td>
<td>Akelig goedkoop</td>
<td>‘scarily cheap’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beangstigend mooi</td>
<td>‘frighteningly beautiful’</td>
<td>Bloedirritant</td>
<td>‘bloody annoying’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brutaal lelijk</td>
<td>‘cheeky ugly’</td>
<td>Crazy lekker</td>
<td>‘crazy delicious’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dik raar</td>
<td>‘fat weird’</td>
<td>Donders mooi</td>
<td>‘thunderous beautiful’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doodlekker</td>
<td>‘dead delicious’</td>
<td>Ernstig leuk</td>
<td>‘seriously funny’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gemeen lekker</td>
<td>‘mean delicious’</td>
<td>Gevaarlijk mooi</td>
<td>‘dangerously beautiful’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gruwelik leuk</td>
<td>‘horribly funny’</td>
<td>Hels mooi</td>
<td>‘hellish beautiful’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hondsmoeilijk</td>
<td>‘doggish difficult’</td>
<td>IJselijk irritant</td>
<td>‘icy annoying’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapot gezond</td>
<td>‘broken healthy’</td>
<td>Klere moeilijk</td>
<td>‘cholera difficult’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotsvervelend</td>
<td>‘vomitingly annoying’</td>
<td>Moordlekker</td>
<td>‘murderously delicious’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ondenkaar mooi</td>
<td>‘unimaginably beautiful’</td>
<td>Ongenadig goed</td>
<td>‘mercilessly good’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>English translation</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>English translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onmetelijk mooi</td>
<td>‘unmeasurably beautiful’</td>
<td>Onnavolgbaar knap</td>
<td>‘inimitably gorgeous’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onooglijk mooi</td>
<td>‘unsightly beautiful’</td>
<td>Onwijs irritant</td>
<td>‘unwisely annoying’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pismooi</td>
<td>‘piss beautiful’</td>
<td>Pooplekker</td>
<td>‘poop delicious’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotmooi</td>
<td>‘rotten beautiful’</td>
<td>Rete duur</td>
<td>‘butt expensiv’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schandalig lag</td>
<td>‘scandalously low’</td>
<td>Schurend goed</td>
<td>‘abrasively good’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smerig mooi</td>
<td>‘dirty beautiful’</td>
<td>Spuugmooi</td>
<td>‘spittingly beautiful’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stervensmooi</td>
<td>‘dyingly beautiful’</td>
<td>Stinkend gezond</td>
<td>‘stinkingly healthy’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stinkvervelend</td>
<td>‘stinkingly annoying’</td>
<td>Stront origineel</td>
<td>‘shit original’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernietigend mooi</td>
<td>‘destroyingly beautiful’</td>
<td>Verrot moeilijk</td>
<td>‘rotten difficult’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verschrikkelijk lekker</td>
<td>‘terribly delicious’</td>
<td>Vet dun</td>
<td>‘fat thin’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vies mooi</td>
<td>‘dirty beautiful’</td>
<td>Waanzinnig mooi</td>
<td>‘insanely beautiful’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wreed subtiel</td>
<td>‘cruelly subtle’</td>
<td>Ziek mooi</td>
<td>‘sickly beautiful’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>