Do in English, Dutch and German

History and present-day variation

edited by

Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade,
Marijke van der Wal
and
Arjan van Leuvensteijn

Changes in the use of Dutch *doen* and the nature of semantic knowledge

Arie Verhagen

1. Introduction[1]

Addressing the topic of *do/doen/tun* in English, Dutch and German in itself already poses an important conceptual problem. We assume that in some sense we are talking about the same element, but on the other hand, of course, the reason for making such a small element a topic of discussion at all is that its use over different languages and different periods shows large amounts of variation. What should an analysis which aims at accounting for unity and diversity simultaneously, then look like? In this paper, I will propose a particular type of answer to this general question by reviewing some theoretical consequences of an analysis of a specific issue, viz. that of changes in the use of causative *doen* in Dutch over the last three centuries. Empirically, this is only a small portion of the entire area defined by the general topic, but conceptually the situation in this relatively small area gives rise to exactly the same paradox as the one I just mentioned – and because of that, its solution can also be assigned wider significance.

In section 2, I will first describe the semantics and pragmatics of the causative use of *doen*, on the basis of earlier work (especially Verhagen and Kemmer 1997), establishing a strong correlation between the use of *doen* and inanimacy of the causer of the event described. Section 3 describes changes in this correlation over the last three hundred years in two different dimensions: the first is the fact that animate causers were used much more frequently with *doen* in the eighteenth century, the second is that the pattern of change differs for different text types. The changes involved are seen as relating to more general cultural changes: diminished importance of authority in narrated events on the one hand, and increased use of personal perspective in modern narrative on the other.

Section 4 examines the theoretical implications of these findings for the notion "knowledge of meaning". The analyses presented imply that in one important sense the meaning of the element *doen* is the same now as it was three hundred years ago, while on the other hand it has also changed in certain respects. It is argued that in order to accommodate such a description, knowledge of meaning must be assumed to consist of

---

knowledge of a network of related uses; this is the way that unity and diversity can simultaneously be accounted for. Some further consequences of this view, as well as contrary ideas, will be discussed.

2. *Causative* doen

The word *doen/do* is used causatively when it is combined with a non-finite form of another verb to indicate that the state or process denoted by the latter is somehow caused by the referent of the subject of *do* (which may therefore be called the causer of the event). This usage has apparently been present in the Western Germanic languages since early times. The OED (s.v. *do*, IV:905) describes causative *do* in the following way:

22.   With *obj.* and *infin.* (the obj. being logical subject of the infin.): To make or cause a person, etc., to do something [...] e.g. "he did them come". *to do him die*: to cause or make him die, to put him to death. *Obs.* or *arch.*

Two examples, from the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries respectively, are:[2]

(1)   1154   *O.E. Chron.* an 1140, þe biscop of Wincestre ... dide heom cumen þider
(2)   1460   CAPGRAVE Chron. 264 The Kyng ... ded his officeres arestin ... his uncil the Duke of Gloucestir.

As the OED indicates, causative *do* no longer exists in English. In Dutch, however, it has been present from the oldest records on (see the *Middelnederlandsch Woordenboek*, Verwijs and Verdam 1885–1952), to the present day. Some twentieth-century examples[3] are given in (3)–(7):

(3)   De stralende zon doet de temperatuur oplopen
       "The bright sun makes [lit.: does] the temperature rise"

---

[2]The youngest example given by the OED is from 1828, but even if this is correct, it does not mean that the causative use of *do* was general in English at the time. I am not making any claims here about the actual development in English; I only want to indicate that this usage is an originally Germanic one.
   [3]The examples in this section are taken from the Eindhoven Corpus, which was used for the analysis of the causal verbs *doen* and *laten* in modern Dutch reported in Verhagen and Kemmer (1997), and from newspaper texts in which I happened to encounter some illuminating instances, such as (5). For the diachronic study reported here, a separate set of data was collected; this material is described in section 3.1 below.

(4)   Een blik op de voorste rij, waar zijn voorgangers gezeten waren, deed de
        nieuwe PvdA-voorzitter beseffen dat hij het niet gemakkelijk zou krijgen
        "A glance at the first row, where his predecessors were seated, made [lit.: did]
        the new leader of the Labour Party realize that his job was not going to be
        easy"

(5)   CDA doet problemen "paars" even vergeten (Newspaper headline *NRC*, August
        20, 1994)
        "The Christian Democratic Party makes [lit.: does] (one/people) briefly forget
        the problems of the purple coalition [i.e.: the coalition of liberals and social
        democrats]"

(6)   Zij smeekte Jezus, haar de goede weg te doen bewandelen
        "She begged Jesus to make [lit.: do] her walk in the right path"

(7)   De regering stelt zich voor deze herstructurering gefaseerd te doen plaatsvinden
        "The government intends to have [lit.: do] this reorganization take place in
        stages".

Note that the first three of these instances contain inanimate causers. The sun in (3) is
a physical cause, and the glance at the first row in (4) is clearly also an inanimate, non-
intentional cause. Example (5) is interesting in this respect, because collective organis-
ations and institutions such as political parties are easily regarded as intentional entities
(on a par with individual humans in that respect), but what is meant here is the general,
highly chaotic, situation of the Dutch Christian Democratic Party making observers
forget that the coalition of liberals and social-democrats has its problems as well; with
no intention on the part of the CDA, the party is an inanimate causer here. It is with this
type of causation, with an inanimate, non-intentional cause, that *doen* is most commonly
used, and intuitively felt to be completely appropriate.

   This does not mean, however, that *doen* never occurs with animate causers: the
causers in (6) and (7) must definitely be taken as animate, intentional ones. However,
this combination is less frequent, and also felt to be less usual, at least when the
sentences are considered out of context (I will return to these cases in section 3.2 below).
In any case, the causal verb commonly found with animate causers is *laten*, rather than
doen. Dutch *laten* has a wider sphere of use than English *let*, as it ranges from
permissive causation as in (8), via intermediate cases such as (9), to coercive causation
as in (10):

(8)   De agent liet hen passeren
        "The policeman let them pass"

(9)   Zij liet de agent haar rijbewijs zien
        "She showed [lit.: let see] the policeman her driver's license"

(10)   De sergeant liet ons door de modder kruipen
        "The sergeant had/made [lit.: let] us crawl through the mud".

Quantitatively, the relationship between *laten* and animacy of the causer is rather strong in modern Dutch. In constructions involving a causer as well as an explicit causee,[4] only 1% of the instances of *laten* has an inanimate causer, as against 58% of the instances of causative *doen* (cf. Verhagen and Kemmer 1997:65, Table 1).

Verhagen and Kemmer (1997) propose to explain this distribution in terms of a combination of two ideas. One is the hypothesis that *doen* categorizes an event as involving "direct causation", while *laten* indicates "indirect causation", where "indirect" is to be taken as meaning that there is some other force, besides the causer of the entire event, which is involved more directly in producing the effect: in (8)–(10) these other forces are the more or less autonomous activities of the causees that most directly produce the effects of (respectively) passing, seeing the license, and crawling through the mud. *Doen*, on the other hand, presents an event in such a way that the causer's activity produces the effect itself, without an intermediary (more or less autonomous) force.

The second idea is that of Talmy's model of relationships between animacy and causation types (cf. Talmy 1976, 1988; Croft 1991:167). People usually think in terms of a naive dualism, involving the world of animate beings on the one hand, and the inanimate[5] world on the other, which have distinct causal properties but can be connected in particular ways. Within the inanimate world, causes are normally thought of as producing their results directly, so when the sun shines brightly the temperature inevitably rises; this type of causation is indicated by means of *doen* (cf. example (3)). Within the animate world, on the other hand, causal relations are normally thought of as indirect, since no mind can cause a change in another mind directly; this type of causation – involving, in one way or another, communication between humans – is indicated by means of *laten.*

Turning to interactions between the animate and the inanimate world, causation from a source in the inanimate world to a target in someone's mind is an event involving perception; since perception is a kind of process that has a physical (non-intentional) cause producing an inevitable result, it is usually indicated in Dutch by means of *doen* (cf. examples (4) and (5)). Finally, causation from the animate world to a result in the inanimate world can in principle be considered direct as well as indirect, but will most often turn out to be categorized as indirect, as someone's actions are the intermediary

---

[4]Not all causatives have to specify a causee: when the verb indicating the result is itself transitive, the only participants mentioned are often the causer and the object of the result-predicate. An example from modern Dutch is (5), and the phenomenon is also mentioned by the *OED* for English; in fact, this pattern occurs quite generally cross-linguistically (see also Kemmer and Verhagen 1994).

[5]Talmy and others use the term "physical" for the opposite of "mental", but the relevant distinction (determining causal properties) should be animate vs. inanimate. Perceptions or behaviour are not naturally taken as physical causes per se, but they share causal properties with physical forces in being inanimate; as we shall see, this is the property that is linguistically relevant in Dutch.

between (mental) intention and (physical) result, or some physical force is itself the most immediate causal factor.[6] For example, when I intentionally remove the plug from the tub, I *let* the bath-water flow away, because another force, in this case gravity,[7] produces the actual result most immediately.

3. Changes in usage: two asymmetries

All in all, there is a strong correlation of animacy of the causer with *laten*, and another, though somewhat less strong, correlation of *in*animacy with *doen*. One immediate consequence of this analysis is that it provides the basis for understanding the greater general frequency of *laten* as compared to *doen*: most discourse happens to be about activities and interactions of humans. However, this has not always been the general distribution: as recently as two or three hundred years ago, *doen* was much more frequent than it is nowadays, while there are no compelling reasons to believe that language users did not talk and write as much about humans then as they tend to do now. So the above analysis faces the problem of how it can accommodate such diachronic variation. An additional complication – i.e. a constraint on such an accommodation – is that there has not been a *general* decline in the use of *doen*; rather, there seem to have been asymmetries in the development, and I will mention two of them here which I will call the authority factor (section 3.2) and the text type factor (section 3.3).[8] But first I will describe the data used for this study.

3.1. Material

The material used here was originally collected for a comparison of the use of the *two* Dutch causative verbs, *doen* as well as *laten*, over the last three hundred years (Landré 1993, Verhagen forthc.). Apart from the requirement of being sufficiently comparable across the centuries, two other major demands that the material had to meet were, firstly, that there should be enough instances of both *doen* and *laten* to allow for reliable conclusions about changes within the set of usage types of each verb, and secondly, that the total amount of text material considered should be large enough to allow for equally reliable conclusions as to possible factors related to such changes. To meet these require-

---

[6]The use of *doen* for causal events of this type emphasizes some non-communicative aspect of the event, as in *Zij deden een dreigende verklaring uitgaan* ("They issued [lit.: did go out] a threatening statement"); cf. Verhagen and Kemmer (1997:77).

[7]Or, in an pre-Newtonian, Aristotelian, world-view: the water's inherent downward tendency. Interestingly, this shift is not really consequential for the naive typology of causation.

[8]For more details of the account, see Verhagen (forthc.)

ments, instances of (causative) *doen* and *laten* were collected from a number of different texts,[9] two-thirds fictional prose and one-third non-fiction (the complete list of texts used is given in the appendix); the motivation for this distribution was that in this way, a sufficient variety of causal situations could be expected to be represented in the material. For each causal verb for each century, 75 instances of use were collected. The total amount of text that had to be searched in order to reach this number of instances for each verb in each century was about 120,000 words (with a significant exception for *doen* in the twentieth century: a much larger amount of text had to be searched in order to collect enough instances of this verb). Therefore, the frequencies of use were normalized to absolute numbers per 120,000 words, and these normalized frequencies formed the basis for the quantitative analysis, thus also for the tables to be presented below.

3.2. The authority factor

The first asymmetry in the development of *doen* involves animacy. Even impressionistically, it is obvious that eighteenth-century texts contain many more cases of causative *doen* with animate causers than modern texts. Two typical examples (the first from a non-fictional text, the second from a fictional one) are:

(11) [...] dog dat Sijn Hoogheydt nogtans in dese wel gedaan hadde, omme alvorens sijn opstel aan de Raidpensionaris te doen zien
"[...] but that His Highness had nevertheless done well in this case, in first showing [lit.: to do see] his document to the Counsellor"

(12) [...]; en ik poogde myn kinderen te doen begrypen, dat zy óók genoeg zouden hebben, indien zy hun begeerten vroeg leerden beteugelen
"[...]; and I tried to make [lit.: do] my children understand that they would also be satisfied if they learned to control their desires early".

A comparison of the frequencies (i.e. numbers of instances per 120,000 words, see section 3.1) reveals the following pattern:

---

[9]There is considerable variation among the texts, in each century, as to the number of causal verbs they contain. Section 3.3 shows that different text types exhibit partly different developments in at least one respect, so it might very well be that more detailed consideration of the texts would reveal an even greater dependency of the mechanisms of change on the specifics of each text. However, that would not change the general argument presented here (particularly in section 4), on the contrary.

	animate	inanimate	*total*
eighteenth century	54 (60%)	35 (40%)	89 (100%)
twentieth century	10 (22%)	34 (78%)	44 (100%)

Table 1. *Animacy of causers with* doen *in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.*

The difference in the distribution clearly shows the asymmetry. Animate causers constituted a considerable majority in the eighteenth century: examples like (11) and (12) are not at all uncommon; but such cases now make up not even a quarter of the entire set of *doen*-instances. And it is particularly striking that while in absolute terms the number of animate causers with *doen* has dropped dramatically, the number of inanimate causers has not diminished at all.

In Verhagen and Kemmer (1997) an additional feature is proposed beyond the ones mentioned above (section 2) in order to account for certain variations within modern standard Dutch. Briefly, this involves the idea that motivation for categorizing an event as involving direct causation may also come from the causer having so much power or authority that the result can be considered inevitable; a possible intermediary force, even if present, can then be said to be inconsequential, i.e. not relevant for assigning the event to a particular type of causation, and thus *doen* may be justified. This is the explanation required for examples (6) and (7) (mentioned in section 2, but not yet analysed there):

(6)   Zij smeekte Jezus, haar de goede weg te doen bewandelen
        "She begged Jesus to make [lit.: do] her take the right path"
(7)   De regering stelt zich voor deze herstructurering gefaseerd te doen plaatsvinden
        "The government intends to have [lit.: do] this reorganization take place in stages".

In (6), the request is not that Jesus *communicate* with the main clause subject referent ("She"), but rather that He directly interfere with her mind, and He is presented as having the power to do so. Example (7) is from a statement by the government itself, presenting its own activity as sufficient for producing the result indicated.

These considerations give rise to the hypothesis that one should look for the factor "authority" in the historical texts analysed as a possible explanation for the variation observed. Therefore, within the set of animate causers mentioned in Table 1, so-called institutional authorities were counted: persons identifiable from the immediate contexts (essentially: paragraphs) as government officials, as belonging to the aristocracy, or as having a high military rank, as well as lawyers or doctors when professional (i.e. legal or medical) issues were the matter, and parents when the causees were children. For example, (11) provides an example of the causer being a prince, and (12) of the causer

being a parent, in this case the mother.[10] This count was done for all animate causers of all causative constructions in the text, including *doen* as well as *laten*. The results are given in Table 2 below. The main tendency clearly is a *general* decrease in frequency of authorities as causers: more than half of *all* animate causers in the eighteenth century are authorities, against only 15% in the twentieth century. Therefore, what appears to have been going on with respect to causative *doen* is that its frequency has decreased over the last three centuries largely because the frequency of an important motivating factor has decreased (though not disappeared completely). The overall reduction of authority-causers has mainly been realised in a reduction of *doen*-causatives with such causers (it should be noted that I have only counted authorities which are recognizable as such in the immediate context), and understandably so, given the strong connection between authority of the causer and inevitability of the result. As is evident from Table 1, the frequency of *doen* with inanimate causers has in fact remained the same. Thus the point simply appears to be that nowadays authority is no longer an important aspect of interpersonal relationships, at least not in the way we talk and write about them, and this is what apparently accounts for the lower frequency of causative *doen*.[11]

	animate causers	proportion of authorities
eighteenth century (*laten+doen*) - *doen*	122 54	63 (=51%) 40 (=74%)
twentieth century (*laten+doen*) - *doen*	63 10	10 (=15%) 4 (=40%)

Table 2. *Authority of animate causers in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.*

---

[10]The famous novel *Sara Burgerhart* (1782) by Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken is a rich source of examples of this type, precisely because issues of educating young people, and especially young women, so as to find their proper place in society constitute a major part of its subject matter.

[11]Note that Table 2 also shows that the other causative construction, with *laten*, has not really "taken over" from *doen*, at least not generally. Rather, what appears to have happened is that in circumstances similar to those in which *doen* used to be employed, Dutch speakers nowadays make greater use of lexical verbs, for example *zeggen* ("say"), *vertellen* ("tell") or *meedelen* ("inform"), which do not categorize the event as involving a specific type of causation. Other possibilities are not excluded either.

3.3. The text type factor

The other asymmetry I want to point out concerns a disproportionate development in the ratios between *doen* and *laten* in different text types. Tables 3 and 4 present these ratios in fiction on the one hand, and in non-fiction on the other (for ease of comparison, the frequency of *laten* in the eighteenth century for each text type is set at 100). The difference is obvious: the decrease of *doen* is much larger in non-fiction than it is in fiction:

eighteenth century	*doen* : *laten*	=	108 : 100
twentieth century	*doen* : *laten*	=	80 : 98

Table 3. *Development of* doen/laten *ratio in fiction.*

eighteenth century	*doen* : *laten*	=	173 : 100
twentieth century	*doen* : *laten*	=	16 : 60

Table 4. *Development of* doen/laten *ratio in non-fiction.*

In the previous section we have seen that the frequency of *doen* with animate causers decreased drastically. We have also seen that its frequency with inanimate causers remained constant. This means that the relative *proportion* of causative *doen* with inanimate causers has become substantially larger. So we should be looking for something special about that subset that can explain why it should occur especially in fiction, in fact so much so that it may partly compensate for the reduction of *doen* with animate causers. Furthermore, it seems obvious that we should then look especially at events involving an animate causee, as these are much more likely to play an important role in narratives than purely physical events of the type exemplified in (3) ("The bright sun makes the temperature rise").

To see what is special about an event with an inanimate causer producing some effect in an animate being, we must consider what someone must be assumed to know when reading or writing about such an event. This is effectively conceptualizing a report from inside a person's mind, so the conceptualizer must have access to this other mind. In other words, saying that something caused a particular mental or emotional state in a person, creates an internalised, personal perspective. Some examples (from the fictional texts used for this study) are:

(13)   [...;] zij [= zijn herinneringen] kwamen hem 's avonds gezelschap houden en deden hem lachen of somber voor zich uit staren
         "[...;] they [= his memories] came at night to keep him company and made [lit.: did] him laugh, or gloomily stare in front of him"

(14)   Eerst waren het angst en pijn die hem huilen deden, ...
         "At first it was fear and pain that made [lit.: did] him cry, ..."

(15)   Een poort naar niets en voor niemand, in geen enkel opzicht geschikt haar een gevoel van triomf te bezorgen, of te doen denken dat hij alleen voor haar gebouwd was
         "A gate to nothing and for nobody, in no way fit for giving her a feeling of triumph, or for making [doing] her think that it was built just for her".

Such cases evoke a character's subjective point of view, and therefore they do not really fit into a purely objective report. Another example is (4), repeated here for convenience:

(4)   Een blik op de voorste rij, waar zijn voorgangers gezeten waren, deed de nieuwe PvdA-voorzitter beseffen dat hij het niet gemakkelijk zou krijgen.
         "A glance at the first row, where his predecessors were seated, made [lit.: did] the new leader of the Labour Party realize that his job was not going to be easy".

When we encounter a sentence like this in a newspaper article, we immediately know that it is not a front page news report; instead, we identify it as a background story, in which personal points of view and involvement are allowed. So it seems natural to expect this particular type of usage to occur relatively frequently in fiction, more often than in non-fiction.[12] Table 5 contains the figures indicating the number of instances evoking such a personal perspective, with respect to the *doen* cases referred to in Tables 3 and 4:

---

[12]In her study on the use of *doen* and *laten* in three medieval Dutch epic poems, Lo-Fo-Wong (1997) observes that many of these cases would strictly speaking have to be classified as "inducive causation" in the typology of Talmy (cf. the discussion of "naive dualism" in section 2 above), since causers such as memories and fear (cf. (13) and (14)) are mental rather than physical phenomena. It is particularly interesting to look at such cases as they constitute a type that is entirely absent from the medieval texts studied. Lo-Fo-Wong suggests that this would be understandable on the basis of a specifically mechanistic view of the causes of mental events within the individual, in the twentieth century: causes of the type cited are uncontrollable ones according to the folk model of the mind (D'Andrade 1987), which is a property they share with physical causes (cf. note 5). This hypothesis makes it very interesting to look for the ways in which internal mental events actually were described in the medieval texts. This point makes no difference for the present argument, which depends on the internal perspective of the *causee*.

		doen	personal perspective	
Fiction	eighteenth century	108	26	(24%)
	twentieth century	80	37[13]	(46%)
Non-fiction	eighteenth century	173	14	(8%)
	twentieth century	16	4	(24%)

Table 5. *Frequency of* doen *with personal perspective.*

There is indeed an asymmetry here: the use of *doen* for perspectivized reports is becoming relatively more frequent, and especially so in fiction. More importantly, it is in fiction that even the absolute frequency of this way of using *doen* has increased between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries (from 26 to 37). In the present-day fictional texts analysed, almost half of the instances (37 out of 80) of causative *doen* is accounted for by this type of use, exemplified in (13)–(15), as opposed to only a quarter (26 out of 108 cases) in the eighteenth-century texts. I therefore want to suggest that this change in the use of *doen* is related to the rise of a subjective, personal perspective[14] in modern narrative, of which the so-called free indirect style is the best known manifestation. So what we have here is another cultural change, now providing motivation for an *increase* of the frequency of *doen* in a particular type of text.

4. Meaning and usage-based networks

The two sets of considerations presented above have some important theoretical consequences, which need to be looked at in more detail. The way the asymmetries have been presented so far might suggest that what has changed over the last three centuries is not the meaning of *doen*, but the culture, i.e. in these cases: prevalent views in society about the role of authority in personal interactions, and certain narrative conventions. In other words: it seems as if we could say that the circumstances providing motivation for the use of the linguistic element *doen* have changed, but not the meaning of this element "itself".

However, such a statement, simple though it may seem, would lead to serious con-

---

[13]Sixteen of these instances contain the verbal combination *doen denken aan* ("make think of", "remind of").
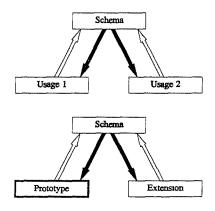
[14]To be precise, the notion of "subjective perspective" involved here is that of a *character's* perspective, as opposed to the subjective perspective of the writer (and/or reader) of the text, i.e. the "I" and "you" in the communicative situation (cf. Sanders 1994:65, and elsewhere). The latter type of subjectivity actually is less usual in fiction nowadays than it used to be.

ceptual problems, as it presupposes a sharp conceptual distinction between "knowing the meaning of *doen*" and "knowing when to use *doen*". But the criterion of knowing the meaning of the word *doen* consists, of course, in the ability to use it adequately in appropriate circumstances, and in that sense our eighteenth-century ancestors knew other things about *doen* than we do today. Furthermore, the meaning of a word is generally learned from its being used, not from explications of its meaning, and since the uses in the eighteenth and in the twentieth centuries differ, the conclusion seems unavoidable that in some respects people do not learn the same things when they learn the meaning of *doen* at the end of the twentieth century than when they learned it two or three centuries earlier.

What we need in order to overcome this paradox is a way of conceptualizing meaning that allows us to specify, without internal contradiction, in what sense the meaning of *doen* may have changed, and in what sense it has not. It is here that I believe that Langacker's notion of usage-based linguistic description is particularly helpful (Langacker 1988, forthc.).

Consider a linguistic usage event involving a particular word. To a person for whom this word is a new element, all that can be known about its meaning is that it is apparently compatible with this usage event, and so all kinds of perceived features of this event may be associated with that word. Upon encountering the word another time, the situation will not be completely identical. The language user will therefore have to abstract some aspect of the situation similar to the first one, in such a way that this might account for the use of the same word; the use of the same word invites the recognition of similarity between the situations of its use, and by the same token this similarity, abstracted from the usage events, is associated with this particular word. This in effect amounts to the creation of a (structured) category, symbolized by the word in question. We can represent the similarity of the members of the category as a schema *abstracted* from the usage events; at the same time, these events (the category members encountered so far, so to speak) can be seen as *instantiating*, or *elaborating*, the schema, and thus as *categorized* by the schema. This is what is represented at the top of Figure 1 (see the next page). Crucially, the construction of the generalizing schema does not have to lead to elimination of memory traces from the specific usage events.

It is natural to assume that the similarity between two usage events involving the same element will normally be maximized. As experience accumulates, new events are assimilated to previous ones that are similar in as many respects as possible, and as a consequence, the (re)occurrence of usage events that share many features gives rise to particular subschemas (Langacker 1988:139–140). Such subschemas (as the generalized memory effects of similar usage events) bear the same kind of relationship to more general schemas as the memory trace of a single usage event to a schema. Thus, a category symbolized by a word will usually consist of a *network* of more specific and more general schemas, i.e. with a number of levels and "groupings", as indicated schematically in Figure 2 on the page below.
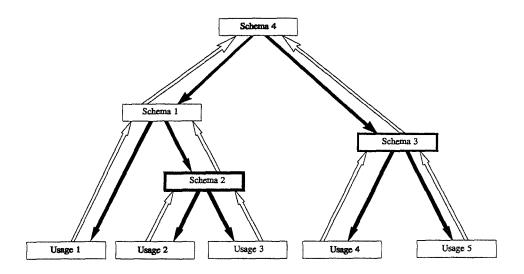
Figure 1. *The elementary structure of a category network*

Figure 2. *A schematic network, with higher and lower level generalizations*

When the procedure just sketched is repeated on more occasions, a new situation will often be considered as a complete instantiation of an already established schema, so that it will not lead to further abstraction of similarities, but to entrenchment of the sub-schema categorizing those instances, increasing its salience (ease of being activated on a particular occasion of use; Langacker 1988:138–140). A particular subschema may thus acquire the status of prototype, as having the highest degree of salience. This relationship is depicted in the lower half of Figure 1; the bold line of the prototype box is meant to indicate its relatively high salience (note that the structure of the relationships is exactly parallel to the one involving schemas and usage events). Other usage events may be considered as extensions with respect to a prototype, but they are still subsumed under the same category, as sufficient similarity to other usage events is recognized to justify this categorization. Since salience (ease of activation) is a matter of degree, there can be several schemas in a network with different degrees of salience; this is what is indicated by the difference in "boldness" of the lines in Figure 2.

In this conception of structured categories, memory traces of usage events are not "erased" when a schema is abstracted from them that generalizes over these events (sets of usage types). So knowing the meaning of a word involves not just knowing the most general semantic schema for this word; it involves knowing the *network* of both abstract and more detailed representations of experience with that word. Using the English verb *run* as his example, Langacker formulates this idea as follows:

> A strict reductionist approach would seek maximum economy by positing only a single structure to represent the meaning of a lexical category. However, if our goal is to properly characterize a speaker's knowledge of linguistic convention, any such account is unworkable. From neither the category prototype alone, nor from an all-subsuming superschema (should there be one), is it possible to predict the exact array of extended or specialized values conventionally associated with a lexeme (out of all those values that are cognitively plausible). A speaker must learn specifically, for instance, that *run* is predicated of people, animals, engines, water, hosiery, noses, and candidates for political office; the conventions of English might well be different. Equally deficient is the atomistic approach of treating the individual senses as distinct and unrelated lexical items. The claim of massive homonymy implied by such an analysis is simply unwarranted – it is not by accident, but rather by virtue of intuitively-evident semantic relationships, that the meanings are symbolized by the same form. (Langacker 1988:135–6)

As mentioned above, different parts of a category network may have different degrees of salience. Sometimes, or for certain speakers, all-subsuming abstract schemas will be virtually non-existent, or they are only created ad hoc. In other cases, certain "sections" of a network may be absent for one speaker but not for another (e.g. because they have not been learned by a speaker, or a particular group of speakers), while the overall struc-

ture of the networks for the element involved may still be sufficiently similar to allow communication to take place rather effortlessly in many situations. And when necessary, language users may rearrange parts of their network for an element, or add sections to it, in order to arrive at mutual understanding – a task much less difficult with partially similar networks in place, than without *any* similarly structured knowledge of meaning.

This kind of flexibility is precisely what makes the usage-based conception so useful.[15] For example, it is the kind of representation that makes it possible to say that in an important sense English *let* and Dutch *laten* have the same meaning up to a certain point.[16] In the same vein, this is the kind of meaning conception that we need in order to be able to say that *doen* is the same word when used in causative constructions as when used, for example, anaphorically or periphrastically; we can construct a link from "performing some action" to both "causing" and "being involved in a process specified elsewhere". It does not seem likely that the schema generalizing over causative and anaphoric or periphrastic *doen* has a high degree of salience, but such a situation is not at all uncommon.

More importantly in the present context, it is this kind of representation that allows us to describe the gradual and asymmetric changes in the use of causative *doen*. At lower levels in a network, the representation of a usage type is relatively rich and detailed. It is here that we would locate features such as "authority" as an aspect of situations in which the use of *doen* is motivated, as an instance of a more abstract, and more inclusive feature "direct causation", which is located at a higher level in the network. We can then naturally assume that this was a well-established, salient usage type for people 300 years ago, but much less so for many members of the community today – where "language community" and "cultural community" are actually indistinguishable. Thus the respective networks differ subtly, but they still have the same general structure, and in fact also the same content at higher levels. That is, this particular change may be represented as the transition shown in Figure 3 (leaving out the rest of the *doen* network).

---

[15]Cf. Geeraerts (1997:113), who views the combination of structural stability and flexible adaptability as major functional explanations for the (prototypical) network structure of semantic categories. Without disagreeing, I think the usage-based conception goes beyond such a view in that it allows one to see how the network structure actually arises out of universal features of usage. In other words, starting from usage has greater explanatory power, as the relevant aspects of linguistic structure can be shown to be not only functional, but in fact "emergent": synchronic links between senses of a word do indeed "coincide" with mechanisms of change (Geeraerts 1997:6), precisely because changes arise out of regularities in usage (cf. Hopper and Traugott 1993:70–72, 87–93).

[16]The permissive use of *laten* overlaps with the network for *let* (or may even be identical to it), but the complete network for *laten*, unlike the one for *let*, also includes coercive causation, and has a top-level schematic meaning "indirect causation"; cf. Verhagen and Kemmer (1997).
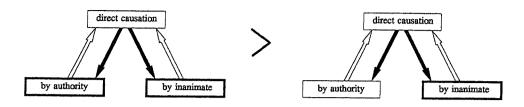
Figure 3. *Change in part of the* doen *network*

On the other hand, "inanimate cause producing result in a person's mind" (as used in narratives) may have become a new, relatively salient subschema at a level below that of the schema for inanimate causation in general. More radical changes could be envisaged as the outcome of such gradual processes, of course. In particular, a continued reduction of the salience of the subschema for animate-causers-as-authorities could in the end conceivably result in its complete disappearance, first for some members of the community, and then more – a development that might be reinforced by the increase of well-established subschemas for causation by inanimate causes; that is, the present situation could develop into one where *doen* is a marker of inanimacy of the causer. The present situation in Dutch is not like that, and it is not really predictable how this will actually develop; but the mechanism of such a development is clear: a decrease of the salience of a subschema, ultimately resulting in its disappearance for all members of the linguistic community, while other parts are extended and may become more salient. At some point in the history of English, for example, something of this kind must have happened when causative *do* became obsolete, while other parts of the entire *do* network did not change essentially. That is to say that we can maintain, for example, that English *do* and Dutch *doen* are "the same element", while still being able to explicate the differences in usage.

In concluding, I would like to elaborate this last point in order to state explicitly one consequence of this result for theoretical presuppositions about meaning. Usually we think of the relation between meaning and usage, or meaning and interpretation, in such a way that meaning is something constant "in" usage, or "in" the message – an instance of the famous CONDUIT-metaphor analysed by Reddy (1979). In other words, this conception entails a view of meanings as "building blocks" of interpretations, in which meanings are in some way logically prior to usage. The usage-based view makes this conception impossible: it is not the case that entire *networks* enter into the interpretation

of instances of use.[17] Instead, what it suggests is that by using a particular word a speaker or writer invites his/her audience to find one or more aspects of the situation that fit some part, preferably a well-entrenched part, of the network associated with that word, i.e. to assimilate it to the result of previous experiences with the word; the meaning of a word is thus viewed as a constraint on interpretations, rather than as a part of them (see Verhagen 1997 for general discussion).

This type of meta-theoretical conclusion may seem far removed from the specifics of the use and the history of *doen*, but it is important to see that the connection is actually quite tight: without such a theoretical position the description of the development of *doen* reported in Section 3 of this paper would actually be inconsistent, as it would at the same time imply change of meaning and no change of meaning. More generally, such a position seems a theoretical prerequisite for discussion of a topic, such as that of *do/tun/doen* in English, German and Dutch, that is simultaneously considered coherent (in some sense these are the same element) and divergent: the same word is definitely not used for exactly the same things at different times and different places.

---

[17]It is precisely for this reason, I think, that some linguists would tend to assign only the most abstract schema the status of "meaning". But this has the undesirable effect that differences in usage, for example those between English *do* and Dutch *doen*, become hard to describe, or are viewed as falling outside the scope of linguistics proper. Recognizing that it might be the building-block-view that ultimately induces this idea may help in overcoming this tendency, while it is still possible to hold on to the principle that one linguistic element normally has one meaning (now conceived as a network).