



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Phraseology in children's literature: a contrastive analysis

Verkade, S.A.

Citation

Verkade, S. A. (2023, October 25). *Phraseology in children's literature: a contrastive analysis*. LOT dissertation series. LOT, Amsterdam. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3646098>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3646098>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

7 BIDIRECTIONAL ANALYSIS (NL↔IT)

In this paragraph both points of view (NL→IT and IT→NL) will be combined: which conclusions can we draw from the analysis of the phraseological units in the Dutch source text and their translantants in the Italian target text, and vice versa from the Italian phraseological units in the starting text and the Dutch portions of text corresponding to them? And how does a bidirectional approach help us to better understand phraseology across languages?

It is interesting to highlight that both the Dutch and the translated Italian text contain similar amounts of phraseological units: 1415 in Dutch, 1346 in Italian. As will become clear in the following, the nature of these phraseological units varies immensely. It is quite unexpected that the Italian text almost has the same amount of PUs as the Dutch text: in a previous research (Terrenato & Verkade 2020, Verkade 2020) the amount of Dutch PUs was almost double the amount of Italian PUs¹¹¹, and among Dutch PUs only separable complex verbs were included, but no other compounds. To put that into context: excluding all compounds besides SCVs, *Wiplala* contains 1070 PUs. It is clear that these results cannot be fully compared, not only because of the different limitations of PUs,

¹¹¹ 1527 Dutch PUs versus 790 Italian PUs.

but also because in the previous project the starting text was of a different genre (novel: *The Cloven Viscount* by Italo Calvino) and, more importantly, an original Italian text with a Dutch translation. Is this major difference caused by source text interference? Do specific translation strategies for Children's Literature play a role? These are just some of the questions that come to mind regarding this issue, that seems worthy of further investigation elsewhere.

7.1. NL↔IT: Types of phraseological units

A first, very evident difference between Dutch and Italian PUs in *Wiplala/Uiplalà* is the enormous amount of compounds in Dutch: 63,2% of Dutch PUs is a compound, opposed to only 3,3% of Italian PUs. That means the other types of PUs are not only relatively, but also numerically much more frequent in Italian (see Table 51; also cf. Figure 11 and Figure 16).

Type of PU	Amount NL	% NL	Amount IT	% IT
Idiom	178	12,6%	263	19,5%
Collocation	187	13,2%	449	33,4%
Other	156	11,0%	589	43,8%
Compound	894	63,2%	44	3,3%
Saying	-	-	1	0,1%
Total	1415	100%	1346	100%

Table 51 Types of phraseological units in Dutch and Italian

Whereas in Dutch the three types of phraseological units besides compounds have relatively similar recurrence, in Italian the more semantically transparent, the more common the type of PU: “other” (43,8%), collocations (33,4%), idioms (19,5%). Both Dutch and Italian PUs mostly have non-phraseological TLs (58,3% and 56,4% respectively). Less than a third of PUs have a phraseological translantant (30,4% for Dutch, 31,4% for Italian). 11,3% of Dutch PUs do not have a translantant in Italian, versus 12,2% of Italian PUs without a Dutch TL. While the percentages are very similar, there is a big difference in Dutch between idioms, collocations, “other” PUs, and compounds: the first three types have mostly phraseological translantants in Italian, while

compounds have very few phraseological TLs and many non-phraseological TLs. In Italian, while there are quite big differences between types, these percentages are more stable: non-phraseological TLs are always more common than phraseological TLs¹¹².

The difficulty of ‘translation’ roughly follows semantic transparency/opacity in both Dutch and Italian: the more opaque, the more difficult¹¹³. Idioms seem to be the hardest type of PU to convey: they have the highest amount of cases where there is no translant (12,4% in Dutch→Italian, 17,9% in Italian→Dutch). Next, Dutch compounds in 11,6% of cases lack an Italian translant. Collocations follow for both NL→IT and IT→NL with no translant in, respectively, 11,2% and 12,0% of occurrences. The “other” (semantically transparent) PUs have TLs the most often (no TL in 8,3% of cases in NL→IT and 10,2% in IT→NL). Only 6,8% of Italian compounds does not have a Dutch TL, and the one Italian saying has a TL as well (0% of no TL).

Idioms thus seem to be the type of PU that cause the most difficulties in ‘translation’. That is not only suggested by the lack of TLs, but in Dutch also by the amount of phraseological and non-phraseological translants. Excluding the compounds, that have many monorematic and thus non-phraseological translants in Italian, Dutch idioms relatively have the least phraseological translants (48,3%), and the most non-phraseological translants (39,3%). For Italian idioms the situation is a bit different. While the amount of idioms without a

¹¹² The only exception is the one saying present in Italian (0,1%), that has an idiom as a translant in Dutch and hence 100% of phraseological TLs. Cf. §6.1.5..

¹¹³ May it be clear that this is a generalisation, based on the data gathered in the parameter “type of phraseological unit”, that indicates the semantic transparency/opacity of PUs and the type of translant. A future study could focus only on the cases in which there is no translant: it might be possible to pinpoint different strategies and motives in the broader co-text that lead to untranslated, or too freely translated phraseological units. Another study could focus on the other parameters of phraseological and non-phraseological TLs: which parameters tend to correspond or, on the contrary, differ? And is it possible to identify specific translation strategies when a translator prefers a non-phraseological solution above a phraseological unit?

Dutch translantant is very high (17,9%), the amount of phraseological translantants is relatively not the lowest (29,3%, opposed to 28,7% of “other” PUs), and the amount of non-phraseological translantants is relatively not the highest (52,9%, opposed to 61,1% and 53,2% among “other” PUs and collocations, respectively). This means that other types of PUs in Italian more often than idioms have a non-phraseological translantant, but this does not change the difficulty the percentage of no translantants suggests: for 9,5% of Italian idioms no translantant could be indicated because the Dutch text was too free, and 8,4% has not been “translated” at all.

Collocations have no translantant in 11,2% of Dutch cases and 12,0% of Italian cases. The amounts of phraseological and non-phraseological translantants differ greatly, however. 56,7% of Dutch collocations have an Italian phraseological translantant, opposed to only 34,7% of Italian collocations with a Dutch phraseological TL. Non-phraseological TLs correspond to 32,1% of collocations in Dutch, but to 53,2% in Italian.

The same inversion between phraseological and non-phraseological translantants can be found among the “other” type of PUs, those which are semantically transparent. 58,3% of “other” Dutch PUs have a phraseological TL, and 33,3% a non-phraseological TL; in Italian 61,1% have a non-phraseological TL and only 28,7% a phraseological TL. 10,2% of Italian “other” PUs have no translantant, mostly because the Dutch text was too free to identify a clear TL (7,0%), and in less cases because the PU is not present at all in Dutch (3,2%). Dutch “other” PUs, however, are left untranslated more often (5,8%), while only 2,6% is translated too freely into Italian to identify a clear TL.

The situation of compounds is very different – not only between the two texts, but their use in both languages as well. Dutch tends to compounding, and Italian does not. Dutch makes massive use of separable complex verbs, while Italian does have a verb-particle construction (syntagmatic verbs), but not as a

(peculiar kind of) compound¹¹⁴. The Dutch compounds are 894, and compose 63,2% of all phraseological units in *Wiplala*; Italian compounds are only 44, 3,3% of PUs in *Uiplalà*. Just three of these have no translant in Dutch (6,8%), and the amount of phraseological and non-phraseological TLs is rather similar (45,5% and 47,7%, respectively). The former macro-category consists mostly in Dutch compounds (38,6% of the total amount of Italian compounds), while the latter consists mostly of monorematic, simple words (43,2%). It is striking that even with the enormous amount of compounds in the Dutch text, Dutch TLs to Italian compounds are more often monorematic. The Dutch compounds have a very different outcome in Italian: 62,5% of translantants are a monorematic word, and only 2,1% a compound in Italian (which mostly underlines the enormous amount of compounds in Dutch). Among the phraseological TLs, idioms, collocations and “other” PUs are more common than compounds (2,7%, 5,4% and 6,3% respectively), thus showing the preference of multiple word units as opposed to compounds. This data illustrates that, indeed, the use of compounds in Dutch and Italian is very different.

7.2. NL↔IT: Types of meaning

The vast majority of both Dutch (88,3%) and Italian (81,4%) phraseological units have no figurative meaning. Those PUs are either fully compositional (NL 29,5%, IT 42,6%) or non-compositional (NL 58,7%, IT 38,8%), i.e. the overall meaning does not equal the sum of the single constituents and is agglutinated. It is interesting to notice that the amount of compositional PUs in Italian, and the amount of non-compositional PUs in Dutch, are significantly higher. In the former case, this has to do with the high quantity of

¹¹⁴ Also see §7.3. and §7.4. on separable complex verbs in Dutch and syntagmatic verbs in Italian. Given the frequency of separable complex verbs and the challenges they pose not only for translators but also for language learners, it would be very useful to carry out a detailed study on SCVs and the nature of their translantants in Italian and other languages.

the “other” type of PU, i.e. those which are semantically transparent. All non-figurative, compositional PUs are of the “other” type. In the latter case, the large amount of non-compositional PUs is due to the frequent occurrence of compounds. Over two-thirds of Dutch non-figurative, non-compositional PUs is a compound; and the majority of compounds (64,1%) have a non-compositional meaning.

A total of 11,7% of Dutch phraseological units has a figurative meaning, versus 18,6% of Italian PUs. In both texts, most of those are generically figurative (NL 9,0%, IT 14,3%). In Dutch relatively more metaphoric (2,0%) than metonymic (0,7%) PUs are present, while in Italian a metonymical meaning (2,8%) is more common than a metaphorical one (1,4%).

As for the translantants: both Dutch (64,8%) and Italian TLs (68,2%) are mostly non-figurative and compositional, because the majority of translantants are not a phraseological unit (NL→IT 69,6%, IT→NL 68,6%). The other types of meaning are thus much, much less common among translantants – especially considering that PUs without a TL, naturally, do not have a type of meaning (NL→IT 11,3%, IT→NL 12,2%). The largest decrease, both in the Dutch and Italian starting texts, can be found in the non-figurative, non-compositional meaning: 58,7% of Dutch PUs have this type of meaning, while it characterizes only 10,2% of Italian translantants. For the Italian → Dutch pair this reduction is smaller, but still significant: from 38,8% of Italian PUs to 16,8% of Dutch TLs. This data suggests that in general the non-figurative, agglutinated meaning is more frequent in Dutch than in Italian. Generically figurative translantants, overall, are more common in Italian: while 14,3% of Italian phraseological units is characterised by a generically figurative meaning, and only 4,8% of Dutch translantants, Italian translantants of Dutch PUs almost maintain the same level of generically figurative meanings (NL 9,0%, NL→IT 8,4%). Both in metaphorically (NL→IT 1,3%, IT→NL 1,2%) and metonymically (NL→IT

0,5%, IT→NL 0,3%) figurative meanings, there is a small reduction in frequency between PUs and TLs.

7.3. NL↔IT: Types of structural composition

The structural composition of the Dutch and Italian phraseological inventory varies greatly. Table 52 illustrates these differences.

Type of structural composition	Amount NL	% NL	Amount IT	% IT
Compound	894	63,2%	44	3,3%
Co-occurrence of lexical morphemes	242	17,1%	325	24,1%
Light verb construction	114	8,1%	177	13,2%
Other	83	5,9%	132	9,8%
Expression with preposition(s)	46	3,3%	532	39,5%
Irreversible binomial	19	1,3%	13	1,0%
Simile	17	1,2%	26	1,9%
Syntagmatic verb	-	-	97	7,2%
Total	1415	100%	1346	100%

Table 52 Types of structural composition in Dutch and Italian

As discussed throughout this chapter, the major difference between Dutch and Italian, that impacts all results, is the vast use of compounds in the Dutch phraseological inventory (63,2%) compared to the Italian inventory (3,3%). The typical Dutch verb-particle construction, separable complex verbs, is included in these compounds (61,4% of compounds, 38,8% of total amount of Dutch PUs). In Italian, however, verb-particle constructions are considered separately in the type of structural composition, as they always form a multiword expression. These syntagmatic verbs make up 7,2% of the Italian phraseological inventory. Just 37,1% of these have an SCV as a translantant. Light verb constructions recur more often in Italian (13,2%) than in Dutch (8,1%), even though in general verbal PUs are more frequent in Dutch (see §7.4). One might suspect that the so frequently used Dutch separable complex verbs are equivalents of Italian light verb constructions, but this is not the case: only 6,2% have a SCV as a translantant. Just 20,9% of Italian LVCs is also a LVC in Dutch. Almost half (49,7%) have a free combination of words or a simple, monorematic

word as translantant, and 11,9% have no translantant. Dutch LVCs have a LVC translantant in 39,5% of cases; 31,6% have a non-phraseological translantant (free combination of words or monorematic word), 13,2% have no translantant.

The structural composition that characterises most Italian phraseological units (39,5%), is that of expressions with one or more prepositions. Given the lexical categories of Italian phraseological units, this comes as no surprise. In fact, adverbial and prepositional PUs are very frequent in the Italian inventory (see §7.4. for a discussion), and 73,1% of expressions with (a) preposition(s) are adverbial phrases, and 20,7% prepositional phrases. Dutch, on the other hand, has much less phraseological units of adverbial and prepositional nature, and only 3,3% of PUs has a structural composition characterised by the presence of one or more prepositions.

Co-occurrence of lexical morphemes is a very common structural composition in both Dutch and Italian, but significantly more frequent in the latter (17,1% versus 24,1%). Most Dutch co-occurrences are a verb phrase (62,8%), which means co-occurrences characterise 53,5% of all verb phrases, while the remaining ones are mostly light verb constructions. 14,5% of Dutch co-occurrences is a nominal phrase – almost all the nominal phrases in the Dutch inventory, except for three irreversible binomials. Adverbial phrases compose 12,0% of co-occurrences, which are only 24,8% of all adverbial phrases; adverbial PUs thus have mostly different structural compositions. That is confirmed by the amount of Italian adverbial co-occurrences: only 15,1% of co-occurrences are an adverbial phrase, which means only 10,0% of adverbial PUs are characterised by that structural composition. Most adverbial PUs (79,7%) are, in fact, an expression with (a) preposition(s). Almost half (49,2%) of Italian co-occurrences are verb phrases – in other words, 34,6% of verb phrases are a co-occurrence, a similar amount to light verb constructions (35,0%). Many Italian co-occurrences (27,7%) are of nominal nature. Indeed, nominal phrases are more common in Italian than in Dutch (see §7.4.), and all Italian nominal phrases are co-

occurrences of lexical morphemes. This explains almost two-thirds of the increase of co-occurrences in Italian compared to Dutch¹¹⁵.

The “other” structural composition, i.e. the category that houses phraseological units that do not fit well into any of the other compositions, is more common among Italian phraseological units (9,8%) than in Dutch (5,9%). 34,9% of the latter have an Italian translantant structurally characterised by a preposition, while 50,6% has either a non-phraseological translantant or no translantant. On the other hand, over three quarters (77,3%) of Italian “other” phraseological units have a translantant in Dutch that is non-phraseological or not present.

Both irreversible binomials and similes compose similar parts of the phraseological inventories, respectively 1,3% and 1,2% in Dutch, and 1,0% and 1,9% in Italian.

7.4. NL↔IT: Lexical categories

Most Dutch phraseological units are verbal (59,2%), nominal (22,1%) or adverbial (11,3%). Italian translantants – keep in mind that 11,3% of Dutch PUs has no translantant, which, naturally, means these have no lexical category – tend to roughly follow these amounts (51,9% are verbal, 20,0% nominal, 8,6% adverbial). Italian phraseological units, however, are divided very differently into lexical categories: 36,6% are adverbial, 34,5% verbal, and 9,0% nominal. Dutch translantants roughly correspond to these percentages, considering 12,2% of Italian PUs without a TL in Dutch: 29,6% are adverbial, 31,0% are verbal, 8,2%

¹¹⁵ The Italian phraseological inventory has 325 co-occurrences of lexical morphemes, the Dutch inventory 242 – a difference of 83 phraseological units. As Italian has 90 nominal phrases (all co-occurrences) and Dutch 38, 35 of which are co-occurrences, this means Italian has a “surplus” of 55 nominal co-occurrences of lexemes compared to Dutch, i.e. 66,3% of the original difference. While this is an interesting method to see where phraseological inventories differ, naturally it does not take into account other factors, such as the different amounts of phraseological units (1415 in Dutch and 1346 in Italian).

are nominal. The drop from adverbial PUs to TLs is, however, quite big. In Table 53 the lexical (macro-)categories of both Dutch and Italian phraseological units are illustrated.

Lexical categories of PUs	NL	% NL	IT	% IT
Verbal	837	59,2%	464	34,5%
verb phrase	284	20,1%	463	34,4%
verb	4	0,3%	1	0,1%
separable complex verb	549	38,8%	-	-
Nominal	313	22,1%	121	9,0%
noun phrase	38	2,7%	90	6,7%
noun	275	19,4%	31	2,3%
Adverbial	160	11,3%	492	36,6%
adverbial phrase	117	8,3%	488	36,3%
adverb	43	3,0%	4	0,3%
Adjectival	48	3,4%	60	4,5%
adjectival phrase	29	2,0%	60	4,5%
adjective	19	1,3%	-	-
Prepositional	16	1,1%	112	8,3%
prepositional phrase	14	1,0%	112	8,3%
preposition	2	0,1%	-	-
Conjunctival	1	0,1%	19	1,4%
conjunctival phrase	-	-	19	1,4%
conjunction	1	0,1%	-	-
Pronominal	-	-	30	2,2%
pronominal phrase	-	-	30	2,2%
Formula	40	2,8%	48	3,6%
Total	1415	100%	1346	100%

Table 53 Lexical categories of phraseological units in Dutch and Italian

It is clear that the majority of Dutch phraseological units are of verbal nature (59,2%), while only slightly over a third of Italian phraseological units have a verbal function. This is mostly due to the large amount of separable complex verbs in Dutch (38,8%). In fact, Italian has more verb phrases than Dutch (34,4% versus 20,1%). These verb phrases only cover separable complex verbs (for

instance by the use of syntagmatic verbs) for a very small part, but are mostly used to express concepts for which non-phraseological expressions are used in the Dutch text (49,5%). The same is true for Dutch separable complex verbs: only 20,4% are translated with a verb phrase (of which roughly three-fifths are phraseological), and 66,3% are a verb, of which only one verb is a compound (and thus considered of phraseological nature).

Nominal phraseological units are also much more frequent in Dutch than in Italian (22,1% versus 9,0%). This is due to the large amount of non-compositional compound nouns in Dutch (19,4% of the total amount of PUs), whereas in Italian these compound nouns only account for 2,3% of the total amount of PUs. The Italian nominal compounds have a noun as Dutch translantant in 90,3% of the cases, half of which are compounds as well. The Italian translantants to Dutch compound nouns, however, are nouns in 66,9% and noun phrases in 21,5% of cases. Only 9,2% of the noun translantants are compounds, while 55,9% of the nominal phrases are of phraseological nature. On the other hand, as was the case for verb phrases, phraseological nominal phrases are more frequent in Italian (6,7% versus 2,7% in Dutch). Only one in five (20,0%; of which 83,3% are of phraseological nature) have a multiple word nominal translantant in Dutch, while 62,2% is a noun (73,2% of which is a compound). While the tendency of Dutch to compounding was a given, this data illustrates that this is the case also for agglutinated compounds, for which phraseological nominal phrases are used in Italian.

On the contrary, adverbial phraseological units recur much more frequently in Italian (36,6% versus 11,3% in Dutch). Almost all of these PUs are adverbial phrases, just four are adverbial compounds. 16,4% of these does not have a translantant in Dutch, a significantly large amount if compared to the average of 12,2%. In 53,8% of the cases, the Dutch text is too free compared to Italian and no clear translantant could be identified; in 46,3% of the cases the Italian PU had no correspondence whatsoever in Dutch. 36,7% of Italian

phraseological adverbial phrases have an adverb as translantant in Dutch, almost all (92,7%) simple, monorematic words. Only 35,9% is also an adverbial phrase, of which 64,0% is a free combination of words. It is thus clear that Italian recurs frequently to adverbial phraseological units, which more often than not have no phraseological equivalent in Dutch. The Dutch adverbial PUs are also mostly adverbial phrases (8,3%), but adverbs are more frequent than in Italian (3,0% versus 0,3% in Italian). 18,6% of the adverbs do not have a translantant in Italian, and only 11,6% is also an adverb in Italian, all monorematic words. 46,5% is an adverbial phrase, of which three-fifths are of phraseological nature. Dutch phraseological adverbial phrases have more success when translated into Italian: 12,8% (just slightly above average) does not have a translantant, but 66,7% is also an adverbial phrase – of phraseological nature in 84,6% of cases. The data of Dutch PUs and their Italian TLs confirms the high frequency of phraseological adverbial phrases in Italian.

Prepositional phraseological units are also very common in Italian and not in Dutch (8,3% versus 1,1%). All prepositional PUs, except two compounds in Dutch, are prepositional phrases. Most Dutch prepositional PUs have a prepositional phrase as translantant in Italian, all except one are of phraseological nature. Thrice a Dutch prepositional PU has been translated with an adverbial phrase into Italian; two have no translantant. Most Dutch translantants to Italian prepositional PUs, however, are single graphic word prepositions (63,4%), of which 91,5% is monorematic. The few prepositional phrases (9,8%) are mostly free combinations of words (72,7%).

What comes forward from a general outlook on lexical categories among PUs in Dutch and Italian, is that Dutch PUs in *Wiplala* are heavily lexical. Only one PUs is properly functional (a compound that is actually an adverb, but has a conjunctive function; see §5.4.3.). In Italian conjunctive phrases are a bit more frequent (1,4%). Especially if we consider prepositional and pronominal expressions to be mostly functional and not lexical, 12,0% of Italian PUs is

functional, against only 1,2% of Dutch PUs. Verbal and nominal phraseological units only make up for over four-fifths (81,6%) of the Dutch phraseological inventory, against 43,5% of the Italian inventory. This difference seems very much worthwhile to further investigate, especially in the light of second language learning and teaching.

7.5. NL↔IT: Language varieties

Both Dutch and Italian phraseological units and their translantants in *Wiplala/Uiplalà* tend to belong to standard language: 95,1% of Dutch PUs, 95,0% of TLs present in Italian, 93,3% of Italian PUs and 97,3% of present Dutch TLs. Some other recurring language variety marks are “spoken” and “colloquial”. While spoken language is more common among Dutch PUs (spoken 5,5%, colloquial 1,0%), colloquial language is more common in Italian TLs (spoken 2,0%, colloquial 6,1%). This trend can be found in the Italian → Dutch language pair as well. 8,2% of PUs is characterised by colloquial language, and just 0,2% by spoken language, whereas spoken language is more common among Dutch TLs (3,6%) and colloquial language almost inexistent (0,3%). Although colloquial and spoken language partially overlap, it seems worthwhile to further investigate this difference in future research.

7.6. NL↔IT: Use values

The vast majority of both Dutch and Italian phraseological units and translantants have a neutral use value: 97,0% of Dutch PUs and 97,0% of Italian TLs, and 93,8% of Italian PUs and 94,0% of Dutch TLs¹¹⁶. The most frequent

¹¹⁶ Other studies that have used the same parameters but with an Italian novel as a starting text and arrival texts in a variety of languages (including Dutch) confirm “neutral” as the most common use value (see single studies in Koesters Gensini & Berardini 2020). The use values other than “neutral” might mostly depend on the contents of the texts in the corpus, but it is also possible that some general tendencies for the use of particular values in different genres could be identified. While the present analyses could contribute data

non-neutral use values are interjectional, pejorative, and hyperbolic. Interjectional values are a bit more frequent in translantants (NL 1,4% → IT 2,0%; IT 1,9% → NL 2,4%), it is not clear why this is the case. Pejorative (NL 1,2% → IT 1,1%; IT 2,5% → NL 1,9%) and hyperbolic (NL 1,0% → IT 0,5%; IT 1,0% → NL 0,8%) use values are a bit less frequent in translantants.

7.7. NL↔IT: Semantic fields

The most frequent semantic field among Dutch phraseological units (22,8%) and Italian translantants (17,8%) is “human activity”. Next, “movement”, for 13,1% of Dutch PUs and 10,0% of Italian TLs. While the semantic field “materials – objects” characterises 9,3% of Dutch PUs and 8,6% of Italian TLs, “physical action” is more frequent among translantants (9,0%), and less frequent among phraseological units (7,2%). Both “human activity” and “physical action” are also among the most common semantic fields for Italian PUs and Dutch TLs, but do not recur as frequently as was the case for the Dutch → Italian pairing (“human activity” IT 8,2%, NL 7,6%; “physical action” IT 7,8%, NL 7,3%). The most common semantic fields are “spatial relation” (IT 17,1%, NL 15,1%), “temporal relation” (IT 10,6%, NL 9,4%), and “modality of action” (IT 10,3%, NL 11,3%). The shift in frequency of semantic fields is related to the different lexical nature of the Dutch and Italian phraseological inventories. The semantic fields of “human activity”, “movement” and “physical action” refer to actions, designated almost exclusively¹¹⁷ by phraseological units (and translantants) of

to such a cause, more specific research on use values is needed to be able to draw any (partial) conclusions.

¹¹⁷ 98,5% of Dutch PUs within the semantic field of “human activity” are of verbal nature (verb phrase, compound verb, separable complex verb). The same is true for “movement” (95,1%, and specifically 92,4% of separable complex verbs) and “physical action” (91,2%). The remaining phraseological units within these fields of non-verbal nature, are mostly of adverbial nature, with some exceptions for nouns. These three semantic fields house 51,4% of verb phrases within the Dutch phraseological inventory, 3 out of 4 compound verbs, and 79,8% of separable complex verbs.

verbal nature – much more common in Dutch. The semantic field “materials – objects” is used exclusively for nominal phraseological units¹¹⁸ – also much more frequent in Dutch. On the other hand, “spatial relation”, “temporal relation” and “modality of action” typically refer to adverbial and prepositional phraseological units¹¹⁹, that characterise the Italian phraseological inventory.

7.8. NL↔IT: Translational equivalence

As discussed in the previous paragraphs on translational equivalence (§5.9. and §6.8.), semantic equivalence almost always prevails on formal equivalence. From a semantic point of view, the higher the grade of equivalence the more frequent, while this is the opposite on a formal level (the higher the grade of equivalence, the lower the frequency). In fact, 78,1% of pairs of a Dutch phraseological unit and an Italian translant have a high or total semantic equivalence, and 78,2% low or no equivalence whatsoever on a formal level. Italian phraseological units and their Dutch translants have a high or total semantic equivalence in 81,1% of cases, and an absent or low formal equivalence in 73,6% of cases.

In general, equivalence is higher, both on semantic and formal level and on every grade, between Italian phraseological units and Dutch translants¹²⁰.

¹¹⁸ 93,1% are non-compositional compound nouns, the remaining 6,9% nominal phrases. 44,4% of all non-compositional noun compounds refer to materials or objects; 23,7% of all nominal phrases.

¹¹⁹ The semantic field of “spatial relation” is used for Italian adverbial phraseological units in 59,3% of occurrences, 58,8% for adverbial phrases and 0,4% for adverbs; 34,5% is a prepositional phrase. Adverbial PUs are even more common within the semantic field of “temporal relation”: 83,7% is an adverbial phrase, 0,7% an adverb. Within this semantic field a prepositional nature is less common (3,4%). Similar results can be found for the field of “modality of action”: adverbial phrases make up 85,6% of the PUs, adverbs 0,7% and prepositional phrases 2,9%. These three semantic fields house over three quarters (76,8%) of the very common Italian phraseological adverbial phrases, 3 out of 4 compound adverbs, and 77,7% of prepositional phrases.

¹²⁰ From absent to total equivalence on semantic level: 12,9% – 6,0% – 17,8% – 63,2%, versus NL→IT 12,9% – 9,0% – 20,1% – 58,0%. From absent to total equivalence on

There does not seem to be a specific reason. The amount of phraseological units with no translant is higher for Italian PUs (12,2%) than for Dutch PUs (11,3%), which impacts equivalence negatively (by default absent both on semantic and formal level). As it is perceived as more difficult and complex to translate a phraseological unit with a phraseologism in the target language, which could cause lower equivalence, one might expect there to be more non-phraseological translantants in the Italian → Dutch pairing. However, the amount of Dutch non-phraseological translantants is lower (56,4% versus 58,3% of non-phraseological Italian translantants of Dutch phraseological units), and the amount of phraseological translantants higher (31,4% versus NL→IT 30,4%).

formal level 44,4% – 29,2% – 22,4% – 4,0%, versus NL→IT 50,1% – 28,1% – 18,2% – 3,5%.