

Variation in Dutch pragmatic markers - the case of Limburg

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Speakers of Dutch use lots of pragmatic markers to manage the relationship with their conversation partner:

- (1) *Ja!* 'yes' (interjection expressing agreement or consent)
- (2) *Ga maar zitten* 'please sit down' (modal particle weakening the directive force of the imperative, making it more polite, less face-threatening)
- (3) *Mooi hè* 'beautiful, isn't it' (discourse-marker asking for agreement)
- (4) *Hé, een taalconferentie in Limburg!* 'wow, a linguistics conference in Limburg' (mirativity marker expressing surprise)

As in other parts of the language, any language, there is geographical (and other) variation in the usage of Dutch pragmatic markers. Some of this variation is reported on in works of reference. The large Van Dale dictionary, for instance, notes that the interjection *amai* is found mainly in Belgian varieties of Dutch, whereas *nou* as an interjection is reported to be used almost exclusively by speakers from the Netherlands. Moreover, the comprehensive [ANS grammar's](#) recently revised chapter on interjections lists comparable coarse corpus-based geographical information for the most frequent interjections of the language. But for other types of pragmatic particles, this type of information is lacking. Moreover, hardly anything is known about more fine-grained variation in these lexical elements.

In this paper, we will report on an exploratory study into differences into the use of pragmatic particles in the two Limburg provinces, an area on both sides of the Dutch-Belgian border that is linguistically extremely interesting. We use twitter data as a proxy for a corpus of spoken language with location information to investigate whether we can find any variation in the use of pragmatic particles. The method seems to work: *amai*, for instance, occurs far more often in the Belgian Limburg data than in its Dutch counterpart, whereas the findings the other way around for *nou*, as expected.

Permitting our corpus, we will try to find answers to questions such as the following:

- Are indigenous (i.e. Dutch) particles used the same ways in Belgian and Dutch Limburg?
- Do we find differences between Hasselt and Maastricht, the province capitals, with and between Heerlen and Genk, the central cities of the mining areas?
- Are there any particles borrowed from other languages, and if so, did this happen in the same way, and from the same languages, in Belgian and in Dutch Limburg?
- Can we perhaps explain any differences found in terms of the separate historical developments of the two Limburg areas or in terms of sociocultural factors such as prestige?