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Dutch Modal Particles:  
The Relevance of Grammaticalized Elements  

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1. Introduction. In this paper I will first discuss some grammatical aspects of Dutch modal particles and then concentrate on their meaning.\textsuperscript{1} I will use the particle \textit{maar} (‘only’, ‘just’) as my main example, because that is the particle which I studied in some detail recently (cf. Foolen 1993).

The term modal particle (abbreviated MP below in the glosses) does not belong to the tradition of Dutch grammar. In fact, the recognition of this group of adverbs as a distributional class that deserves distinct attention is rather recent. German linguistics has been of considerable influence here. During the last 20 years, much research on particles has been carried out in Germany (cf. the bibliography by Weydt and Ehlers 1987, Weydt 1989, Abraham 1991, König 1991, Hartmann 1994, among many others). This work has been picked up abroad and applied to other Germanic languages such as Norwegian (cf. Andvik 1992) and Dutch (cf. Van der Auwera & Vandeweghe 1984, and Vandeweghe 1992, among others).

In the field of “particle research”, the term “particle” is not strictly defined. I will use the term here to refer to those elements in a language that do not contribute to the propositional meaning, such as focus particles (\textit{too, even, just}, etc. in English), discourse markers (\textit{well, anyway}, etc. in English), and modal particles, a class that is missing in English. Such elements are also referred to as “constraints on implicatures” (Wilson & Sperber 1993) and as “pragmatic operators” (Ariel 1994). I will concentrate here on the subclass of modal particles in Dutch, of which the elements in (1) are representatives:\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1} I would like to thank all colleagues who have recently contributed to my thinking on particles: The participants of the workshop in Briesen, Germany (27–29 August, 1993), in particular Armin Burkhardt and Harald Weydt; the participants of the Berkeley Conference on Dutch Linguistics, in particular Werner Abraham, Theo Janssen, and Elizabeth Closs Traugott; the participants of my seminar on Dutch particles at the Dutch Department, University College London (January 1994), in particular Reinier Salverda; and those who discussed with me the paper that I gave at the Linguistics Department of UCL on January 19, 1994, in particular Robyn Carston, Villy Rochota, and Deirdre Wilson. I hope that listening to all their valuable remarks did not lead to too much incoherence in my own view. If that is the case, I am the one to blame.

\textsuperscript{2} The English translations give the “literal”, nonmodal meaning of the particles.


What particle research would like to achieve is a description of the function of each of these elements—and of those which are not listed here, but which turn out to belong to the class—in relation to the functions of the others. In other words, what we finally want is a total picture of the system of Dutch modal particles. But this is a goal for the enterprise of particle research as a whole, and it cannot, of course, be realized in this paper.

2. **Grammatical properties of modal particles.** If a Dutch sentence contains one of the modal particles listed above in (1), this element must stand in the so-called middle field. Dutch and German are verb-final languages, that is, the finite verb or the cluster of finite and nonfinite verbs stands at the end of the sentence. But in main clauses, the finite verb has to move to what in generative grammar is called the complementizer position, which can informally be identified with the second position in a declarative sentence (hence the name V2 for the transformation that moves the finite verb to this position). Thus we get:

(2a)  *Ik zal maar naar huis gaan.  
I will MP go home

(2a’)  *Maar zal ik naar huis gaan.

(2b)  *Kom maar mee.
come MP with

(2b’)  *Kom mee maar.

Abraham (1991) has suggested that having a middle field is a structural precondition for developing (diachronically) a class of modal particles. This claim seems problematic, however. Russian and classical Greek have modal particles, but they do not seem to have a middle field. One could, however, consider a variation on Abraham's idea: if a language has a middle field, then it places its modal particles, if it has any, in this middle field. Let us compare the Dutch situation with two typologically different languages: English, which is strongly verb-second, and Japanese, which is a well-known example of a verb-final language. English places its particles (or "discourse markers", as they are often called; cf. Fraser 1990) typically at the beginning of the sentence. Examples are *well, anyway, still, and so. Japanese, on the other hand, places its particles after the final verb. Examples are *ka, ne, yo, often called “sentence-final particles” (cf. Itani 1992, 1993). It would be interesting to take other languages into consideration to see whether this first impression of a correlation between position of the verb and the place that is favored for particles could find further confirmation.
Now, one might ask what do Dutch modal particles have to do with English discourse markers or Japanese sentence-final particles. To quote Jucker (1993: 436): “These elements in German, Dutch and Norwegian appear to serve functions that are clearly distinct from those in English.” I wonder how he can feel so sure about this. For me at least, it is an open question. And if we can consider them as functionally equivalent, a typological comparison is legitimate.

Besides the middle field position of the Dutch modal particles, I want to mention a few other formal characteristics of this distributional group. A modal particle is more often than not restricted in its use to certain sentence types (cf. Thurmaier 1993). Thus, for example, maar is not felicitous in questions, cf. (3):

(3)a Kom maar binnen. (imperative) ‘Please, come in.’
(3)b Ik ga maar naar huis. (declarative) ‘I guess I’d better go home.’
(3)c *Weet je maar hoe laat het is? (question) ‘Do you know what time it is? know you MP how late it is

If a sentence contains more than one modal particle, they tend to cluster in one group, cf. (4):

(4)a Breng die boeken maar eens hier. ‘Bring those books here.’
(4)b *Breng maar die boeken eens hier. bring those books MP MP here
(4)c Breng die boeken nou eens hier. bring those books MP MP here.
(4)d Breng nou die boeken eens hier. bring those books MP here

As (4c) and (4d) show, this clustering is a strong tendency, but not an absolute rule. It is further interesting to note that there are constraints on which particles can cluster and what their linear order in a cluster has to be (cf. Thurmaier 1991 for German and de Vriendt et al. 1991 for Dutch). The clusters can be rather long, as a classic example from Hoogvliet’s book Lingua (1903) demonstrates:

(5) Geef die boeken dan nu toch maar eens even hier.
give those books MP MP MP MP MP MP here

One could even add a seventh particle to this cluster, namely ook, and native speakers of Dutch have clear intuitions where ook would fit in (after toch).

If the sentence has other lexical material in the middle field, the question is where exactly the modal particle(s) stand(s) in relation to this other material. Again it seems difficult to give a strict rule, but the tendency seems to be that the modal particles stand on the ‘watershed’ between given and new information (cf. de Vriendt & van de Craen 1986):
(6a) Geef hem [given] toch een boek [new].
give him a book

‘Why not give him a book?’

(6b) Geef hem het boek [given] toch.
give him the book

‘Do give him the book.’

(6c) Géef hem een boek [new] toch.
give him a book

A further typical property of modal particles is that they are unaccented. In general, this also holds for focus particles and conjunctions, so that this property does not differentiate between these distributional classes. But if the modal particle has a counterpart in the class of sentence adverbs, then the possibility of accenting without function switch can be used as a criterion to decide in a concrete case whether the element functions as modal particle or not: 3

(7a) Dat is nou (= NOU) vervelend. that is nasty

‘That’s nasty.’

(7b) Het is nou (= NOU) twaalf uur. it is now twelve o’clock

‘It’s now twelve o’clock.’

Again, exceptions confirm the rule, both in German and in Dutch: cf. (8):

(8a) Komm JA nicht in meine Nähe. (German) come MP not in my vicinity

‘Don’t dare to come near me.’

(8b) Jij bent OOK lastig! (Dutch) you are MP troublesome

‘You’re a pain.’

(8c) Jij bent ook NOOIT tevreden! (Dutch) you are MP never content

‘You’re never satisfied.’

Whether German accented ja should be treated as different from the unaccented ja is controversial in German particle research (cf. Meibauer 1993). In Dutch the accent on ook does not make a difference in meaning. Dutch ook (like German auch and English too) gets an accent as a focus particle if the focus precedes (Jan komt OOK, John is coming TOO, with John as the focus of the sentence). If ook precedes the focus, then the focus gets the accent, which is the normal situation: Ook JAN komt. Apparently, Dutch ook has preserved the property of exceptional accent in some of its modal particle uses, as can be seen in (8b).

The class of modal particles is generally considered to be a closed class, but there seems to be some diachronic “growth” of the class. I would consider rustig ‘quietly’, langzaam ‘slowly’, snel ‘quickly’, toevallig ‘accidentally’ and gewoon ‘simply’ to be modal particles in statu nascendi; cf. their use in (9):

(9a) Je kunt rustig schreeuwen.
you may MP scream

‘You can go ahead and scream.’

3 In the examples, stress is indicated by SMALL CAPS.
As a final property of modal particles I mention the fact that they always have a counterpart with the same form in another distributional class. For example, *maar* is used as a scalar-restrictive focus particle (*Ik heb maar 5 boeken* ‘I have only 5 books’) and as the general adversative conjunction (*Jan is klein maar dapper* ‘Jan is small but brave’); *ook* is used as an additive focus particle; *nu/nou* (*nou* is a phonological variant of *nu* which sounds more informal) is used as a temporal adverb, etc. The same polyfunctionality can be observed for German and Norwegian particles. I do not see this property as inherent to the modal particles, but rather as a historical coincidence. If we consider the nonmodal use as the diachronic source of the modal use, then it is theoretically possible that the original use of the form could disappear and that only the secondary use would survive. But as it happens, the nonmodal uses of the modal particles have all survived.

The fact that modal particles typically have a nonmodal counterpart might be one of the reasons why traditionally the class of modal particles was not generally recognized. The nonmodal uses of the forms are the more prominent ones, so that, for example, *nu* was primarily seen as a temporal adverb, with, if noticed at all, a secondary, less clearly identifiable, modal use.

Each of the formal characteristics of modal particles mentioned in this section should be further tested empirically before it can be considered a proven fact. And listing such characteristics does not, of course, mean that we understand WHY the properties are as they are. It is my conviction that at least some of the properties find an explanation in the meaning and function of the modal particles. Although meaning provides less solid ground than the area of syntactic and phonological properties, we will have to delve farther into it to see whether we can reach any firm conclusions here.

3. Modal particles in relation to the nonmodal uses. In modern linguistics there are adherents of the thesis “one form—one meaning.” This view is also represented in Dutch linguistics (cf. Janssen, this volume). In this view, the unity of an element on the form side, for example Dutch *maar*, implies unity on the semantic side. Categorial distinctions—in this case between *maar* as a modal particle, focus particle, and conjunction—are secondary or unimportant. What
the linguist has to do, in this view, is to explicate the meaning of the form *maar*. which would hold for all its uses. This approach does not, of course, give priority to the study of the modal particles as a class of its own.

The thesis of “one form—one meaning” is more or less axiomatic in several schools of linguistics with a structuralist orientation (research in the footsteps of Roman Jakobson, William Diver, Gustave Guillaume; cf. Tobin 1990), but some linguists with a different theoretical background consider semantic unification to be an important descriptive goal as well. Thus, for example, Blass (1993:93), who works in the framework of relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson 1986) argues in her study on the particle *sié* in Sissala as follows: “... *sié* has two different translations in English. I will consider the possibility that it is ambiguous, and argue that on a relevance-based approach it can be treated as having only one meaning, i.e. one processing function. By contrast, a coherence-based approach would have to treat it as ambiguous.”

Of course, the general methodological criterion of simplicity gives preference to a unificatory description wherever such a description seems feasible. But in my own research (cf. Foolen 1993), I came to the conclusion that a unification of the meaning of a modal particle with its counterpart(s) does not always do justice to the data. A unification can point out commonalities in meaning between the different uses, but the danger is that other semantic features of the different uses are neglected by this approach. That is why I prefer to restrict unification to the uses of a form within one grammatical or distributional class. Thus the strategy is the following: I try to explicate the unitary meaning of the modal particle *maar* (see section 5), thereby attributing what is felt as different uses of the particle to different pragmatic constellations. The same strategy would hold for *maar* as a focus particle and for the conjunction use.

Does this imply that there is no longer a place for looking at cross-categorial links between the meanings of one and the same form? Or, to make it more concrete, is there no place left for looking at the meaning of *maar* as a modal particle in relation to the meanings of *maar* as a focus particle and as a conjunction? On this point, I have found ideas from grammaticalization theory (cf. Hopper & Traugott 1993) very helpful. Some of the central ideas of this approach can be summarized as follows.

The grammaticalization perspective is primarily a diachronic perspective. The idea is that certain uses of a linguistic element are diachronically derived from other, more primary, uses. In this diachronic process, the form of the element may change; often we see a reduction of form, but that does not have to occur. At the same time, the meaning of the element can undergo some change. Semantic bleaching and pragmatic enrichment are the relevant processes here. Bleaching means that the primary meaning loses some of its semantic features. Pragmatic enrichment means that certain conversational implicatures, in particular those which occur again and again in typical contextual constellations, are
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conventionalized, i.e. become part of the meaning. It can often be observed that the element in this specific context takes on a grammatical status that is different from that of the element in its original use.

Synchronically, the new meaning cannot be fully identified with the primary meaning (which in most cases continues to exist as before), as adherents of one form—one meaning would like to have it. Of course, certain links between the different meanings can often still be seen. In particular, linguists see them, but it is questionable whether these links play a role for the native speaker in the acquisition, representation, and use of this form. The results of relevant psycholinguistic research would be of great interest in this connection, but I am not aware of any.

Confronted with a form that functions in different grammatical categories, as is the case with all the forms that function as modal particles, the grammaticalization approach aims at finding out which use was the primary one and which is derived. Answers can be found empirically, if diachronic data are available. Diachronic research on corpora seems to be a promising source of information in future particle research (see Vismans 1994, chapter 4, who studied the occurrence of modal particles in directives in a corpus of Dutch plays from the 15th to the 20th century).

Diachronic research should be guided by hypotheses like the one that is central to grammaticalization theory: function words are derived from content words. And within function words, we can distinguish different grammatical uses, some of which seem to be further grammaticalized than others. For example, focus particles seem to be derived from content words, but the class of focus particles is in its turn one of the sources for the modal particles. In general, the class of modal particles seems to be a typical endpoint for grammaticalization chains that can take different grammatical classes as their source.

4. Modal particles as function words. In the previous section, I used the term “function word” without defining it. This term means different things to different researchers, but in the present context an explication along the following lines is useful. Some elements in an utterance contribute to building up a proposition. They contribute to representations or explicatures, as relevance theory prefers to say. In communication, propositions are processed in a context. The proper context for processing a proposition is, however, not given in advance. The context is something that at least partly has to be built up ad hoc, on the basis of the proposition itself. Now the speaker might want to give the hearer some help so that he is able to quickly build up a proper context. Such help can be given by adding extra cues to the utterance. Here the modal particle comes in or, in other languages, the sentence-initial discourse marker (English) or sentence-final particle (Japanese). Such elements indicate that the context which has
to be built up for processing the proposition at hand must have characteristics of a certain type.

I want to stress the word “type” here, because particles etc. do not represent a concrete aspect of the context, they only indicate in an indexical way (in a procedural way, as one prefers to say in relevance theory) that contextual assumptions of a certain type have to be constructed by the hearer. The fact that function words, as understood in this sense, are indexical, implies that they trigger a process of pragmatic interpretation, in which the actual context is constructed. This view is in accordance with the characterisation that Fillmore (1984: 132-133) has given of what he calls “pragmatic particles”: “Their role ... is more to ‘fit’ the context than to communicate new information ... Pragmatic particles ... reflect choices among the numerous ways in which individual utterances can be situated in their discourse context.”

If context building is what the particles contribute to, then we should have a theory about what aspects can be part of possible contexts. Relevance theory has concentrated on discourse markers like so, after all, therefore, and moreover, which point to cognitive-rational assumptions that have to be made in the context (cf. Blakemore 1987). Without going further into context theory, I would like to stress that in particle research we should look at the speaker and the hearer not only as cognitive possessors of shared and unshared knowledge. They are at the same time interlocutors with faces, power, and interests. These aspects are important in processing utterances and thus have to be “managed”, for example with the help of particles. It is an empirical question which aspect of the context each particle indicates. And it is also an empirical question whether Dutch modal particles tend to point to other aspects of the context than, say, English discourse markers or Japanese sentence-final particles.

I want to conclude this section with a methodological remark. Some researchers stress the importance of a corpus in particle research (for example Schiffirin 1987). But those who might think that particle research means first and foremost going through a corpus and examining which contexts a certain particle occurs in will soon be disappointed. A corpus is a good thing to have as a background, a source for examples and a piece of reality to test your hypotheses against. But, in my opinion, the real work to be done here looks more like syntactic research. One takes a particle, a sentence, and a context. Each of these three ingredients can be varied. Sometimes one gets a felicitous result, a well-formed instance of language use, sometimes one does not. The intuitions of the native speaker decide what fits and what does not, although I immediately admit that intuitions are very subtle and often uncertain here. Different combinations of particle, sentence, and context lead to different interpretative results. These results have to be explicated by giving a paraphrase of the resulting effects. The theoretical step then is to propose a meaning for the particle which explains the different interpretative effects in the different contexts. The proposed meaning
must be such that it allows you to calculate the effects on the basis of the interaction between particle meaning, the meaning of the rest of the sentence, and the context, the latter being at least in part indexically triggered by the particle itself.

5. The modal particle *maar* and its uses. To start with the real descriptive work, let us look at the directive in (10), which the speaker uses to invite the hearer to come in:

(10)  *Kom maar binnen.* ‘Come on in.’

This sounds like a rather friendly invitation. If we change the particle, for example to *nou, toch*, or a combination of them, then the directive sounds less friendly, more impatient:

(11)  *Kom nou/toch binnen.* ‘Do come in.’

If we change the rest of the sentence, the friendly effect that occurred in (10) can once again disappear, as in (12):

(12)a  *Bekijk ‘t maar.* ‘Do what you want, it is not my business.’

(12)b  *Nou, vooruit (dan) maar.* ‘Ok then, go ahead, if you insist.’

Finally, let us look at the nonverbal context as a variable. Imagine the speaker sitting in his room and a hearer knocking at the door. The normal thing for the speaker to do is to invite the hearer in by saying *Ja, kom binnen.* Inserting the modal particle *maar* would sound a little bit strange in this situation. That would be more appropriate if the visiting hearer appeared in the doorway, but stayed there, apparently hesitating. Then the speaker could encourage him to come in, by saying (10), *Kom maar binnen.*

On the basis of such manipulations and observations we can propose a first hypothesis about the meaning of the particle in question. For *maar* I found it helpful to use the semantic model of forces and barriers that has been proposed by Leonard Talmy (1988) and applied to the analysis of the English modal verbs in Sweetser (1990, chapter 3). The context of directive verbal interaction can be seen as a varying constellation of forces and barriers. One possible constellation is that the hearer wants to do something, for example he wants to come in. But he perceives a barrier, or acts as if there were a barrier. If it is the speaker who has control over the situation, for example because he lives there, he can remove the barrier or encourage the hearer to step over it. Here *maar* comes in. The speaker indicates with *maar* that he sees and understands how the hearer perceives the situation, namely as a situation which contains a barrier for the realization of his, the hearer’s, intentions. At the same time, the speaker indi-
cates with the use of *maar* that in his own perception the barrier is nonexistent, or if it was there, it does not have to be there anymore, for example because the speaker does not consider the situation as one with a barrier. The strange thing then is that *maar*, by indicating a new definition of the situational context, gets a kind of performative force: I, the speaker, hereby take away the barrier. We could summarize the proposed meaning as the “barrier-perceiving-and-lifting” function of the modal particle *maar*.

The friendly effect that normally occurs when *maar* is used in the sketched situation is seen as an effect of the distribution of power and interests between speaker and hearer: the hearer respects the power of the speaker and the speaker shows sensitivity and understanding for the hesitation of the hearer.

But imagine a situation in which a sports teacher encourages a pupil to jump:

(13)  *Spring maar!*  ‘Go ahead and jump!’
      jump  MP

Here, the barrier is mainly the pupil’s problem; he is, for example, afraid to jump. The face or personal integrity of the teacher is not involved. The main effect of *maar* is now adhortative.

To continue our analysis of *maar*, we look again at example (12a) *Bekijk het maar*. This utterance can be used in the following context: The hearer wants to do X. The speaker is against it, he actively creates a barrier. The hearer insists, and the speaker finally gives up or gives in and says: *Bekijk ‘t maar*. The speaker retires from the scene and thereby removes the barrier. The relational effect is often unfriendly, distancing. Speaker and hearer might go their own way without greeting each other at the end of the interaction. The unfriendly effect can be attributed to the special constellation of interests, speaker and hearer are opposed now, whereas they were not opposed in the cases of the visiting hearer and the (non)-jumping pupil. In *Bekijk ‘t maar* a generalized conversational implication is that the speaker removes the barrier unwillingly.

The examples discussed so far were of the imperative type. But *maar* can also occur in declarative sentences, cf. (14):

(14)  *Ik ga maar naar huis.*  ‘I guess I’d better go home.’
      I go MP  to  home

A hearer can infer from such an utterance that the speaker’s decision to go home is made here and now and that it is made unwillingly. The speaker seems to decide against his own preferences. *Maar* gives the utterance a resigned tone: circumstances force me to this decision.

The contextual constellation for using a declarative sentence is of course in general different from that for an imperative. There is no addressee with interests; only a speaker with interests is involved—that makes a big difference. The speaker is interested in staying were he was, for example at a party, and not in-
terested in going home. There is a barrier to the option of going home based on his preferences. With maar the speaker indicates this barrier and at the same time lifts it for himself.

Our hypothesis on the function of maar as a modal particle seems to hold rather well for the different examples considered so far. I would like to look briefly at two other uses, where again the effect differs a little, and where we can again ascribe that effect to the typical contextual constellation. The first case is for Dutch native speakers a very recognizable interactional sequence, it seems:

(15) A: Zegt u het maar.
    say you it MP
    ‘Can I help you?’

    B: Mag ik een ons ham?
    may I an ounce ham
    ‘Can I have 100 grams of ham?’

    A: De ham is helaas op.
    the ham is unfortunately up
    ‘I’m sorry, we’re out of ham.’

    B: Doet u dan maar cornedbeef.
    ‘do you then MP corned beef.’
    ‘Make it corned beef then.’

The shopkeeper opens the interaction with zegt u het maar, in which we have the friendly use of maar as illustrated in (10). Then, the customer orders what he wants. If the ordered product is unexpectedly unavailable, the customer might choose an alternative. The typical way of ordering such an alternative is as in the last line of (15): Doet u dan maar cornedbeef. This utterance contains an implicit reference to the preferred first ordered product, and thus implies a dispreference and barrier to the other products. This dispreference is, however, not a strong one, simply because when ordering the first choice, the alternatives were not taken into consideration, neither in a positive nor in a negative way. This constellation gives the second choice an arbitrary character. The choice is made here and now, against the background of a preferred first choice. As a contextual effect, a connotation of arbitrariness arises.

Our last example is from a Dutch popular song by Johnny Jordaan:

(16) Geef mij maar Amsterdam, dat is mooier dan Parijs.
    give me MP Amsterdam, that is more beautiful than Paris
    ‘I prefer Amsterdam, it’s more beautiful than Paris.’

It might seem strange that maar now relates to a preferred choice, whereas in the previous two examples the preferences of the speaker pertained to the alternative to the actual option. But look at the context. As is implied by the second conjunct in (16), the general opinion apparently is that Paris is to be preferred. One might expect that the speaker would share this general opinion. For the speaker that would then also be the unmarked, expected alternative, with an implicit barrier to other choices. The speaker indicates with maar that he is aware that his option is marked, that there was an implicit barrier against his choice, which barrier he thereby declares as nonexistent for him.
6. Conclusion. The analysis of the examples in section 5 is not without explanatory value. I hope to have shown how different effects that result from the use of maar can be attributed to the application of a constant schematic meaning in varying contextual constellations. The relevant contextual aspects turned out to be preferences and power and their distribution between speaker and hearer. But further questions on the explanatory level could be asked, like the following:

- Why is it that maar is infelicitous in questions?
- Why is it that maar has the contextualizing function that it has, and not a different one, or why is this function not fulfilled by eens or nou?

As to the first question, the answer might sound circular if we say that in questions apparently no barriers, based on power and preferences, are involved. In imperatives, maar is naturally related to actions. In declarative sentences, the content of the sentence must also be related to an action, namely to a decision, to a mental act. As soon as a question has a directive function, the insertion of maar does not sound too bad; cf. (17):

\[(17) \quad \text{Wilt u mij maar volgen?} \quad \text{‘Would you please follow me’?}\]

will you me MP follow

Thurmair (1993) has considered whether the distribution of modal particles in German depends on the form or the function of an utterance. Her conclusion is that the distribution is uniformly determined by the form type of the utterance (imperative, declarative, etc.). The occurrence of maar in questions like (17) raises at least some doubt about Thurmair’s conclusion.

The other question why maar as a modal particle has the function it does is not of the type: Why is a horse called a horse? The meaning of a modal particle is at least partly motivated. Modal particles are derived from one of their non-modal counterparts, which have a specific meaning. In the case of maar, the counterparts are the focus particle maar and the conjunction maar. As shown in Foolen (1993), the meaning of those uses of maar can be explicated as follows:

- **maar q** (q is the focus of the focus particle) = q, and not an alternative r for q with a higher value on a scale. The alternative r has a higher preference or is expected to be the case, in general or in this specific context.
- **maar q** (q is the second conjunct in a conjunction) = q (or something inferentially based on q), and not an alternative r, which could reasonably have been expected on the basis of the foregoing (the first conjunct, in most cases).

It is clear that these paraphrases share a schematic meaning that is also to be found in the modal particle use of the same form:

- **maar q** (q is the action performed by the utterance, for example an invitation, an adhortation, a decision) = q, and not an alternative action r, which was the unmarked alternative in the ongoing interaction.

But there are differences between the three uses too. They relate to different aspects of the utterance (its focus, its relation to another utterance in a conjunction, its speech act status) and to different aspects of the context (preferences and
out explanation; the use of meaning in mind out to hearer. But owing:

and not a say that in involvement, tenences, the assertion of expectation which determine what is the unmarked option in the actual context. These differences correlate with differences in the semantic features that make up the meaning of each of the three uses of the particle. For example, in the focus use of maar, the excluded alternative represents a higher value on a scale. This scalar meaning feature is not shared by the conjunction and the modal use of maar. A one form--one meaning approach which restricts itself to stating the one unified meaning of the form maar does not do full justice to the polyfunctional nature of such a small word as Dutch maar.

References


