

The Imperative of *Say* as a Pragmatic Marker in English and Dutch

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This article examines the imperative of *say* as a pragmatic marker in English and Dutch. Present-day *say* and *zeg* ‘say’ are contrasted on the basis of comparable corpus data. This comparison, together with additional diachronic data, serves as input for a study of the typical developments of the imperative of *say* as a pragmatic marker. Furthermore, on the basis of a wider range of European and other languages, the article explores the possibility of the developments in English and Dutch being an areal phenomenon.*

1. Introduction.

The last 25 years have witnessed an increasing interest in pragmatic markers (for example, Schiffrin 1987, Fraser 1996, Mosegaard Hansen 1998, Fischer 2006, and Brinton 2008). They have been studied for the way they organize discourse (for example, as a topic introducer or an interruption device); for the interpersonal functions they fulfill (for instance, as an establisher of common ground or a marker of disagreement with the addressee’s position); for the development from propositional over textual to subjective or speaker-related and intersubjective or addressee-related meanings that they go through (see Traugott & Dasher

* Earlier versions of this article, which expands on Van Olmen 2011a, were presented at the Ninth Biennial Conference of the Association for Linguistic Typology in Hong Kong and the 20th International Conference on Historical Linguistics in Osaka in 2011. Thanks are due to Adri Breed (North-West University Potchefstroom), Yanyan Duan (Shijiazhuang University), Ewa Fiuk (University of Antwerp), Nada Gbегble (University of Education Winneba), Erika Jasionytė (Vilnius University), Deogratias Nizonkiza (North-West University Potchefstroom), Lauren Van Alsenoy (University of Antwerp), Johan van der Auwera (University of Antwerp), Ton van der Wouden (University of Groningen), Jianwei Xu (Free University Brussels), two anonymous reviewers, and the editor of the *Journal of Germanic Linguistics*.

2002). The English literature has focused largely on pragmatic markers of adverbial origin (see, among others, Oh 2000, Smith & Jucker 2000, Clift 2001, Taglicht 2001, and Aijmer 2002:251–276 on *actually*). The markers of verbal origin, and in particular those of imperatival origin, have received significantly less attention. The only detailed study on *look*, for example, is Brinton 2001.

For Dutch, the situation is somewhat different. The research into this language's pragmatic markers has a remarkably rich history (see, for instance, Kirsner & Deen 1990, Foolen 1993, and Vismans 1994). *Kijk* 'look', for instance, has been discussed in some depth (see, for example, De Vriendt 1995 and Janssen 2006). The contrastive literature on pragmatic markers of imperatival origin, however, is restricted to Van Olmen 2010a,b. In these articles, the Dutch imperatives of intentional visual and auditory perception, *kijk* 'look' and *luister* 'listen', are compared to their English counterparts, *look* and *listen*. The present study concentrates on another imperative from which the two languages have derived pragmatic markers, that is, that of *say*. Its main goals are to map the pragmatic functions that *say* and *zeg* 'say' currently fulfill and to examine their development.

Say has already been discussed by quite a few linguists (for example, Goossens 1982 and Stvan 2006). The most recent as well as the most comprehensive contribution is Brinton 2008:73–110. She describes the functions of *say* as a pragmatic marker in contemporary English and sketches its evolution on the basis of exploratory diachronic research. The present article may be regarded as complementing her work, for two reasons. First, it looks not at written but at spoken language. The spoken language data give rise to a slightly different picture of *say*'s functions and especially of the functions' distribution. Second, the English marker is compared to its counterpart in Dutch. This contrastive approach offers an additional dynamic-synchronic perspective on the way(s) in which the imperative of *say* turns into a pragmatic marker. Following Waltereit (2002:1008), who notes for Italian *guarda* 'look' that "a comparison of the DMs [discourse markers] resulting from the imperative 'look!' in several languages might [...] provide interesting insights into the typical sequence of changes," the present study examines how not only the synchronic functional variation within one language but also the (dis-)similarities between languages reflect historical developments (but note that it consults diachronic data, too).

Obviously, the comparison to Dutch requires a good understanding of *zeg*. The literature on this marker is fairly limited, though. Apart from the occasional remark (e.g., Stroop 2006 and Van der Wouden 2007) and some modest papers (for instance, De Vriendt 1995, Landsmeer 2007, and Valstar 2010), there is only one linguist who discusses it at any length. Schermer (2007) gives an intuitive overview of *zeg*'s functions in contemporary Dutch and formulates a number of hypotheses about its development. The present article makes it possible to check her claims against corpus data and—assuming that one can indeed gain insight into the development of the imperative of *say* as a pragmatic marker from the (dis)similarities between *zeg* and *say*—against English. It also differs from Schermer's (2007) study in that it is not confined to *zeg*. In contemporary Dutch, the combination of *zeg* and the modal particle *maar* 'only' is frequently employed for a number of pragmatic purposes that overlap only partially with those for which *zeg* alone (or *say*) is used.¹ Since this article seeks to chart all the pragmatic functions of the imperative of *say*, the collocation *zeg maar* is examined as well.²

This introduction is followed by five more sections. In section 2, the results of a study of *say* in the spoken part of the *International Corpus of English—Great Britain* (see Survey of English Usage 2006, henceforth abbreviated as ICE-GB) are presented. The corpus consists of 637,682 words and includes dialogues and monologues.³ Section 3 deals with *zeg*

¹ The modal particles in Dutch are hard, if not impossible, to paraphrase in one or two words. Foolen (1993:178) describes the effect that *maar* has in the imperative as removing a barrier for the realization of the benefit of the hearer. The gloss here refers to the meaning that *maar* had before it developed into a modal particle.

² One of the reviewers points out that *zeg* also often combines with the modal particle *eens* 'once' and with *op* 'up'. The former collocation, though absent from the corpora of present-day Dutch used in this article, can function as an attention-getter and is implicitly subsumed in the discussion of clause-initial *zeg* (see section 4 and Schermer 2007:377). *Eens* can be said to strengthen or weaken the force of the original directive depending on the context (see Fortuin 2004:349 and Van Olmen 2011b:161–163). The latter, however, falls outside the scope of the present study as it serves as a literal directive to say something to the speaker here and now (see Den Dikken 1998 on the semantics of *op* in Dutch imperatives).

³ The private dialogues (phone calls and face-to-face conversations) account for

(*maar*) in a comparable corpus—that is, a corpus with similar texts and a similar design (see Johansson 1998:5)—of 300,590 words, a selection of the syntactically annotated files of the Northern Dutch component of the *Corpus Gesproken Nederlands* (see Nederlandse Taalunie 2004, from now on referred to as CGN).⁴ Special attention is paid to the similarities with—and differences from—English. Note that the analysis in sections 2 and 3 relies not only on the ICE-GB and the CGN but also on a small collection of recent plays and their translations. This translation corpus, or parallel corpus (see Mauranen 2002:162), contains 96,452 words of original British English, 70,280 words of original Northern Dutch, as well as their respective translations into Northern Dutch and British English (see Van Olmen 2011b:115–117 for more information) and is mostly used as a control corpus. The choice of plays here is motivated by the assumption that such texts are a rough approximation of the spoken language and of the private dialogues in the other corpora, in particular (see Vismans 1994:76 and Culpeper & Kytö 2000).⁵ Section 4 is an intermediate summary.

Section 5 answers the question what insights the comparison of *say* and *zeg* (*maar*) provide into the developments of the imperative of *say* in general. It also consults various diachronic corpora and the quotation banks of a number of historical dictionaries, not so much for quantitative as for qualitative support. As Brinton (2008:19) argues, “a rigorous quantitative [diachronic] study of pragmatic markers is often not feasible or fruitful” because of, inter alia, the paucity of attestations and the diffi-

33% of the material, the public ones (lessons, business transactions, interviews, and so on) account for 27%. The scripted monologues (talks and broadcast news) make up 17% of the data and the unscripted ones (presentations, commentaries, and speeches) make up 23%.

⁴ The corpus of Dutch is not entirely similar to the ICE-GB, however. Its scripted monologues account for only 10% because of a lack of material, while the unscripted ones make up 30% (see Van Olmen 2011b:58–61 for a detailed description of its composition).

⁵ As pointed out by Van der Wouden (personal communication), drama does have its own characteristics. It probably exhibits fewer hesitations, fewer incomplete sentences and fewer discourse elements than spontaneous speech. For that reason, I do not draw any definitive conclusions about spoken language from the parallel corpus. It mainly serves to verify certain tendencies.

culties in interpreting “forms as pragmatic rather than as purely propositional in meaning.” Of course, the use of dictionaries is not unproblematic either: Certain writers may be overrepresented, the quotations differ considerably in length, and they first and foremost serve illustrative purposes, often of fairly infrequent items (see Brinton 2008: 20). However, like the quotation bank of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), those of the *Vroegmiddelnederlands Woordenboek* (VMNW) for Early Middle Dutch and the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (WNT) for 16th to 20th century Dutch, for example, are probably large enough to be used—with care—by historical linguists for exploratory research (see Hoffmann 2004 on the OED). Finally, section 6 discusses the overall results. It concludes by looking into the imperative of *say* as a pragmatic marker in a range of other languages and raising the possibility of it being an areal phenomenon or, in other words, of its occurrence in a particular set of neighboring languages being due to language contact.

2. English.

Table 1 presents the distribution of *say* when it does not function as a genuine directive to speak. It provides the raw number of attestations of *say* for the ICE-GB as a whole and for each subcorpus, and it also gives the number of attestations per 100,000 words.

Corpus		Raw frequency	Frequency per 100,000 words
Dialogues	Private	9	4.38
	Public	38	22.21
	<i>Total</i>	47	12.48
Monologues	Unscripted	12	7.85
	Scripted	3	2.77
	<i>Total</i>	15	5.75
Total		62	9.72

Table 1. The distribution of nonliteral *say* in the spoken component of the ICE-GB.

The absolute frequencies are, of course, too low to make any definitive statements about the distribution of *say*. Still, it is remarkable that the private dialogues, normally the subcorpus where pragmatic markers flourish (see, for instance, Van Olmen 2010b:77 on *look* and *listen*), contain so few cases. The explanation probably lies in the functions that *say* fulfills. They are discussed one by one in the following subsections. Special attention is paid to the text types in which a particular function is likely to occur and to the position(s) it occupies in the clause. Syntactic behavior plays an important role in the dynamic-synchronic study of the imperative of *say*'s developments discussed in section 5.

2.1. *Clause-Initial Conjunction-Like Marker.*

In 1a, the imperative of *say* introduces a supposition in the form of a conditional clause. Example 1b shows that *if* does not even have to be present, so *say* exhibits a conjunction-like behavior (see Brinton 2008: 78).

- (1) a. **Say** if you wanted to change that all you have to do is type seven in seven and then you can put any number you want. (ICE-GB: s2a058.30)
- b. **Say** X one is strictly less than X two, then you know than [*sic*] F X one is less than F X two. (ICE-GB: s1b013.24)

It is not implausible that this use is favored in contexts where speakers are constructing an argument. The lessons in the subcorpus of public dialogues, for one, fit the description. They contain half of the 14 attestations of this *say* in the ICE-GB. Unsurprisingly, it does not occur in the corpus of plays.

2.2. *Clause-Medial Preposed Marker of Potential Example.*

Another possible reason for *say*'s infrequency in the private dialogues is its use to characterize something as a potential example. In 2a, for instance, the imperative of *say* is followed by a rather arbitrary and noncommittal suggestion. Its hypothetical overtones are, to some extent, reminiscent of the examples in 1. In 2b, however, the speaker selects the black painting from a limited number of options, for a specific purpose. The function under discussion is expected to come in handy in lengthy

expositions, such as the cross-examinations and lessons in the subcorpus of public dialogues, and the speeches and talks in the subcorpus of monologues. It should not come as a surprise that *say* is not used in this manner in the parallel corpus.

(2) a. I mean nothing could stop it regenerating unless uhm in an experimental situation you actually actively stopped it by **say** tying a great big knot in it or something. (ICE-GB: s1b009.74)

b. So in the painting like **say** the black one cos that's the only real one that's been really been uh pushed anywhere yet. (ICE-GB: s1b018.19)

According to Brinton (2008:76), the position of this adverbial *say* is flexible: "It may be either preposed ... or postposed to the word it focuses. It may also refer at a distance." However, the 33 attestations of this use in the ICE-GB all immediately precede the potential example, which points to a strong preference for this position. *Say* is flexible in another way: As its position after the head of the prepositional phrase in 2a makes clear, it can easily break up constituents.

2.3. Clause-Medial Preposed Approximative Marker.

This function of *say*, which seems to be related to the one exemplified in 2, can be compared to *approximately*. Sentence 3a exemplifies the most common context of use: The speaker preposes the imperative of *say* to a number to indicate that he or she is making an estimate or, in words reminiscent of the function discussed in section 2.2, a potential value. Another context in which this approximative meaning emerges, and which is not mentioned by Brinton (2008:76), is the combination with a moment in time or a date. *Say* in 3b is a case in point.

(3) a. OK we can guarantee **say** a thousand barrels of oil per day over this particular route. (ICE-GB: s1b005.48)

b. This would have been **say** the first of December when we moved. (ICE-GB: s1b074.99)

In the ICE-GB, the use in 3 occurs 14 times (and makes up 5 of the 9 attestations in the private dialogues). The corpus of plays also contains a few cases. So it appears that the spoken language data confirm Brinton's (2008:80) results: "Say3 [that is, the use in 2] is the majority form ... [but] say2 [that is, the use in 3] is fairly common as well."

2.4. *Clause-Medial Marker of Potential Formulation.*

Brinton (2008:74–76) does not distinguish between the use of *say* in 2 and that in 4. Like 3, the latter use—which is found three times in the ICE-GB—does resemble the former use (interestingly, the pragmatic marker is able to break up constituents in all these functions). In 4, too, the imperative of *say* presents something as a possibility.

- (4) And some people have said oh well the films are very **say**
claustrophobic in a way. (ICE-GB: s1b045.102)

The difference is that *say* in 2 pertains to some exemplary entity or state of affairs, and in 4 to the choice of words: The movies are said to have a property that *could* be described as claustrophobic. It becomes clear in section 3 why it is important to make this distinction.

2.5. *Additional Functions of Say.*

The four preceding sections do not cover all uses of *say*. Brinton (2008), among others, mentions two more functions. In 5, the American national anthem provides an example of the first function, that of a clause-initial interrogative attention-getter. In this case, the imperative of *say* acts as a pointer to the question that it introduces and as an additional stimulus prompting to give an answer.

- (5) Oh, **say**, can you see by the dawn's early light?

The second function is that of a clause-initial marker of subjectivity exemplified in 6. *Say* behaves like a true clause-initial interjection here. It is used "to express a (rather weak) emotional response [...] to what is (about to be) said," as in 6a, and/or "to evoke the hearer's attention" (Brinton 2008:77), as in 6b.

- (6) a. “**Say**,” Mr. Cooper said, “you’ve got quite a baby here.”
(Richler 1968, *Canadian Short Stories*; OED s.v. *say* v. 12b)

- b. **Say**, pal, you can’t go. How about the joke you promised to tell.
(Ballington 1933, *Tittle Tattle*; Stvan 2006:68)

What is striking is that, with the exception of a few English translations of *zeg*, the use of *say* in 5 and 6 is entirely absent from both the ICE-GB and the parallel corpus. This fact undermines Brinton’s (2008:80) claim that “they are the most colloquial of the forms.” This statement was meant to explain their low frequency in her written data. The OED (s.v. *say* v. 6c) is probably right in writing that the use in 5 is limited to poetic language. With respect to the use in 6, Stvan (2006:73) may very well have a point: “[It is] used less in current English than in the early 20th century. The current low use is partly accounted for by the use of newer terms [such as *hey*].”

3. Dutch.

Table 2 presents the distribution of *zeg* (*maar*) when it does not function as a true directive to say something. For each subcorpus and for the comparable corpus of Dutch (the corpus similar to the ICE-GB) as a whole, it provides the raw number of occurrences of *zeg* (*maar*) as well as the number of occurrences per 100,000 words.

Corpus		Raw frequency	Frequency per 100,000 words
Dialogues	Private	107	106.95
	Public	22	27.52
	<i>Total</i>	<i>129</i>	<i>71.67</i>
Monologues	Unscripted	39	43.32
	Scripted	0	0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>32.34</i>
Total		168	55.89

Table 2. The distribution of nonliteral *zeg* (*maar*) in the comparable corpus of Dutch.

The comparison of tables 1 and 2 shows that, in terms of frequency, the English imperative of *say* is no match for its Dutch counterpart as a pragmatic marker. *Zeg (maar)* occurs almost six times more often than *say* (that is, their relative frequencies are, respectively, 55.89 and 9.72 instances per 100,000 words). Furthermore, of all attestations of the Dutch imperative of *say* as a pragmatic marker, 135 co-occur with the modal particle *maar*. This collocation appears to be characteristic of the private dialogues and the (surprisingly informal) news reports in the sub-corpus of unscripted monologues. The dialogues and news reports contain 78 and 29 cases, respectively. Thus, *zeg (maar)* also differs greatly from *say* in terms of distribution despite the fact they have a number of functions in common. This overlap becomes apparent in the one-by-one treatment of *zeg (maar)*'s uses in the following subsections. As in section 2, particular attention is given to the text types in which *say* tends to fulfill a specific function and to its position(s) in the clause.

3.1. Clause-Medial Preposed Approximative Marker.

Zeg maar in 7a and 7b has roughly the same meaning as *say* in 3. Van der Wouden (2006:260), on the one hand, rightly points out that this approximative use can break up constituents, as 7c makes clear. In the comparable corpus of Dutch, on the other hand, all 24 attestations of this use are found before the constituent that they pertain to.

- (7) a. Ik denk dat ik eerst **zeg maar** twee uurtjes thuis ga leren.
(CGN: fn000573.197)
'I think that I am first going to study at home say for two hours.'⁶
- b. Er zijn wat verandering opgetreden in 't Surinaamse beleid uh **zeg maar** na uh medio vorig jaar.
(CGN: fn007349.33)
'There have been some changes in Surinamese policy uh say uh since the middle of last year.'

⁶ All translations of examples and quotes are mine. The translations of the examples are meant to capture the gist of the source language. They may not always be idiomatic.

- c. Een tonijn van **zeg maar** vijftig kilo.
'A tuna of say fifty kilograms.'

Interestingly, this approximative function can also be fulfilled by *zeg* without *maar*. The noun phrase in 8 can serve as an example.

- (8) Een langere periode van **zeg** tien jaar. (GWNT s.v. *zeggen* ww. 4b)
'A longer period of say ten years.'

This use of *zeg* is attested neither in the comparable corpus of Dutch nor in the corpus of plays but, intuitively, it has exactly the same positional properties as *zeg maar* in 7.

3.2. Clause-Medial Marker of Potential Formulation.

This function is exemplified in 9. In this sentence, *zeg maar*, just like *say* in 4, introduces a potential formulation, a neologism to be precise. However, as its 70 hits in the comparable corpus suggest, this use is much more established in Dutch. In English, it is probably better regarded as a rather marginal extension of the use in 2.

- (9) En hier zitten is dus **zeg maar** de dakpangeschiedenis van
Nederland uitgestald? (CGN: fn007280.7)

'And so this is an exhibition of say the roof tile history of the Netherlands?'

In 9, the imperative of *say* is preposed to the constituent for which "de spreker het juiste woord of de juiste omschrijving zo gauw niet kon vinden" (Stroop 2006:5).⁷ That is not always the case, though. In 10a and six other attestations of this use, *zeg maar* defies constituent boundaries. What is more, in 10b,c and 41 other attestations, it follows the potential formulation, possibly at the end of the clause.

⁷ "The speaker could not immediately find the right word or the right description."

- (10) a. De belangrijkste overweging die 'k nu hoor van de heer Van O ook voor 't uh 't voorstel voor deze tijdelijke **zeg maar** vervolgc commissie of tijdelijke taak voor deze commissie uh.

(CGN: fn000146.26)

'The most important thought that I'm hearing now from mister Van O also in favor for the uh the proposal for this temporary say follow-up committee or temporary task for this committee uh.'

- b. Ja bij die uhm bij die uhm uh die polikliniek **zeg maar** daar hadden ze dus ook een ambulance of twee misschien ik weet het niet.

(CGN: fn000260.290)

'Yes at that uhm at that uhm uh that polyclinic say they also had one or two ambulances maybe I do not know.'

- c. Ik gebruik dit als uh kunstenaar **zeg maar** ik kan 't anders niet formuleren hoor.

(CGN: fn007267.4)

'I am using this as uh an artist say I cannot formulate it in another way you know.'

Note that this last position is by far the most popular one in the private dialogues: It occurs in 22 of the 27 attestations of this *zeg maar*.

3.3. *Hedge*.

Unlike *say*, *zeg maar* can be employed as a hedge. The answer in 11, for instance, does not include any value that has to be described as an approximation; nor does it contain a word that has been chosen for lack of a better term. The speaker adds the pragmatic marker to mitigate his utterance (consider the use of *ik denk* 'I think' and *niet echt* 'not really' as well). The statement is presented as one of a number of possible statements, as provisional and uncertain. *Zeg maar* allows the speaker to hide behind a half-hearted commitment to the proposition in case the latter is challenged (see Landsmeer 2007:29, too).

- (11) Ga je ook mee dan?—Nou ik denk dat uh dat niet echt op prijs wordt gesteld door de familie **zeg maar**.

(CGN: fn000573.390–392)

‘So you are also going?—Well I think that uh that would not really be appreciated by the family say.’

Stroop (2006:5) claims that this use of *zeg maar* is often associated with the clause-final position. However, examples such as 12 make up almost half of its 41 attestations in the comparable corpus of Dutch. Still, the proportion drops to just seven out of 30 hits in the private dialogues. This subcorpus appears to be the discourse type in which the (probably newer) nonpreposed position of *zeg maar* thrives (see section 3.2 as well). Van der Wouden’s (2007:260) claim is confirmed: As a hedge and as an introducer of a potential formulation, *zeg maar* respects the constituent boundaries.

- (12) Kijk het het midden is **zeg maar** Partij van de Arbeid voor mij altijd geweest.

(CGN: fn008024.241)

‘Look the Labor Party has always been say the middle for me.’

Following Landsmeer 2007:28, one could say that in 9 and 10, *zeg maar* has to do with the form of a single constituent, while in 11 and 12, it relates to content of the whole sentence. She also points to a possible bridging context, a context that is vague between the two functions. In 13, the speaker does not draw on *zeg maar* because he cannot think of the correct expression for homosexual. It is clear from the preceding reference to *Pinkeltje*—a helpline for gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth—that the speaker knows what he is talking about. The pragmatic marker seems to be used primarily to present the perhaps not entirely unproblematic word *homo* ‘homo’ in a careful, noncommittal manner.

- (13) Chris die werk trouwens bij zo’n uh bij Pinkeltje ... Voor als je ja als je **zeg maar** homo bent en dan uh ja gewoon nie ja je weet niet hoe je het met je ouders moet ’t erover hebben of zoiets weet je wel dan kun je hun bellen.

(CGN: fn000541.298)

‘Chris he works at such uh at Pinkeltje by the way ... For if you yeah if you are say gay and then yeah just not yeah you do not know how you have to talk about it with your parents or something like that you know then you can call them.’

The emphasis is still on the form, as in 9 and 10 (for that reason, this example and some ten similar cases are counted as instances of the function discussed in section 3.2). Just as in 11 and 12, however, the speaker’s low degree of commitment plays a crucial role here.⁸

3.4. *Clause-Initial Attention-Getter.*

The imperative of *say* in Dutch also occurs as a pragmatic marker without *maar*. Resembling *say* in 5 and 6, *zeg* is sometimes found at the beginning of a clause to attract the addressee’s attention, as in 14a. Somewhat surprisingly, this use accounts for only 5 of the 33 remaining attestations in the comparable corpus of Dutch. The Dutch plays contain an additional 14 examples. De Vriendt (1995:157) is right in pointing out that this *zeg* can be followed by any clause type.

In 14a, it precedes an interrogative and serves as an attention-getter and—in line with its original meaning of telling someone to say something—as an extra stimulus to answer the question. *Zeg* here looks a lot like *say* in 5 but seems much less old-fashioned.⁹ In 14b, the marker is

⁸ Both reviewers raise the question whether *zeg* (*maar*) in sections 3.1 to 3.2 can be analyzed as a focus particle (see König 1991). It definitely has certain properties in common with this type of particle. Its positional variability and its ability to have scope over either a constituent or an entire clause come to mind. Its semantics of a potential value, formulation or statement, however, do not really fit in with the inclusive or exclusive focus meaning of prototypical class members such as *even*, *too*, *only*, and *just*.

⁹ Then again, as Van der Wouden (p.c.) remarks, its rather low rate of occurrence in the comparable corpus of Dutch, together with its slightly higher frequency in the undoubtedly somewhat less modern parallel corpus, may suggest that the imperative of *say* as a clause-initial marker is disappearing in Dutch too. However, based on my impression of everyday conversation in Southern Dutch, I find it hard to believe this scenario, which raises the question of whether there are any differences between Northern Dutch and Southern Dutch. Moreover, do the conditions under which the data of the CGN have been collected somehow affect the occurrence of clause-initial *zeg* adversely? The

followed by an imperative. The speaker is trying to attract the addressee's attention as well as trying to get a reaction out of him or her, not in words this time but in deeds, or at least some sign of compliance. In 14c, *zeg* is used before a declarative. In this case, the marker indicates "dat de spreker het meegedeelde opmerkelijk genoeg vindt om onder de aandacht van de aangesprokene te brengen: wat na *zeg1* komt, is voor de spreker 'reactiewaardig'" (Schermer 2007:379).¹⁰

Interestingly, the English imperative of *say* can combine with a declarative as well, as in 6, but it does not have the same effect as its Dutch counterpart. *Say* in 14d may resemble *zeg* in 14c in functioning as an attention-getter, but it does in no way attempt to draw a reaction from the addressee. The speaker in 14d is mainly concerned with expressing his or her disbelief, astonishment, or joy, which is not true for 14c. It appears, in other words, that *say* is more subjective than *zeg*, and *zeg* is more interpersonal than *say*. Moreover, this second difference explains why the combination with an imperative is strange in English, as 14e makes clear.

- (14) a. **Zeg** Jean-Paul waar was je naartoe? (CGN: fn000400.1)
 'Say Jean-Paul where were you off to?'
- b. Hé **zeg**, kom eens hier. (GWNT s.v. *zeg* tw.)
 'Hey say, come here.'
- c. **Zeg**, Els neemt vandaag afscheid. (Schermer 2007:377)
 'Say, Els is leaving today.'
- d. ?**Say**, Els is leaving today.
- e. ***Hey say**, come here.

answers are beyond the scope of this article, but note, with one of the reviewers, that "there is ample evidence [for] ... regional differences in particle use" (see, for instance, Devos & Vandeweghe 1985, and Van der Wouden 2002).

¹⁰ "That the speaker finds the message remarkable enough to draw the addressee's attention to it: What follows *zeg1* is 'worthy of a reaction' according to the speaker."

Note, finally, that, notwithstanding 14b,c, there is a clear preference for interrogatives in Dutch. All nineteen attestations of the clause-initial *zeg* conform to the pattern in 14a.

3.5. *Clause-Final Prompt to React.*

Unlike *say*, the Dutch imperative of *say* without *maar* is found in clause-final position. In the comparable corpus, it occupies this position in 21 of the 33 attestations (the parallel corpus contains just a few examples). Schermer (2007:379–380) gives a good description of this use:

In overeenstemming met de positie aan het eind van de zin of uiting ontbreekt het aandachttrekkende aspect; de spreker heeft zich al tot de toegesprokene gericht, dus het is niet meer nodig diens aandacht te trekken. Wel wordt nog een reactie verwacht op het voorafgaande.

In accordance with its position at the end of a clause or utterance, the attention-getting aspect is missing; the speaker has already addressed the hearer, therefore it is no longer necessary to attract his or her attention. The speaker still expects a reaction to what precedes, though.¹¹

However, her claim that “vragen en aanmaningen ... bij *zeg2* ... evenzeer voor[komen] als bij *zeg1*” (Schermer 2007:380) is not borne out by the data.¹² Cases such as 15a are not found in the comparable corpus of Dutch and even sound somewhat peculiar to me. The only interrogative in the material, that is, 15b, has more of an exclamatory character.¹³ This also holds for the 10 declaratives, the five exclamatives, and the five elliptical instances, which are illustrated in 15c, 15d, and 15e, respectively. This fact should not come as a total surprise: When one thinks that something is worthy of the addressee’s reaction, one is

¹¹ The notion of reaction is to be understood in a fairly broad sense here. It can be a full-blown verbal response, as in 15b, but it can also be some (non)verbal sign of (dis)agreement, perhaps even what one of the reviewers describes as “shoulder-shrugging.”

¹² “Questions and exhortations ... co-occur with *zeg2* [that is, clause-final] to the same extent as with *zeg1* [that is, clause-initial].”

¹³ In the same vein, one of the reviewers points out that 15a may be interrogative syntactically but “could have an exclamative function ... [and] be said with a slightly exasperated tone.”

probably involved in the matter emotionally (see Schermer 2007:381). Occasionally, *zeg*'s subjectivity even gains the upper hand. In 15e, for example, the marker does not really ask for a response any more.

(15) a. Zit het zo goed, **zeg**? (Schermer 2007:380)
 'Does it fit now, say?'

b. Maar ammoniak uh geeft uh de lust-uh-werking uh eigenlijk uh door.—Hoe weet jij dat allemaal **zeg**?—Omdat ik dat hele dagen ruik. (CGN: fn000400.266–269)

'But ammonia uh actually uh passes uh on uh the craving uh process.—How do you know all that say?—Because I smell that the entire day.'

c. Zo dat zijn pittige druiven **zeg**. (CGN: fn000962.172)
 'Now these are some nice grapes say.'

d. Wat een idiote bedragen **zeg**. (CGN: fn000280.131)
 'What ridiculous prices say.'

e. Ja en hier zitten nog een paar uh docenten hier uh ja.—Leuk **zeg**. (CGN fn000260.107–108)

'Yeah and there are also a couple of uh lecturers here uh yeah.—Fun say.'

In fact, the utterance itself is a positive reaction to what the interlocutor has just said. According to Schermer 2007:382, in such a case *zeg* signals that the speaker regards the addressee to be "een geschikte 'reactiegever' [...] [of, anders gezegd,] een passend 'klankbord'." ¹⁴

3.6. Free-Standing Subjective Clusters.

In each of the seven remaining attestations of *zeg* without *maar* in the comparable corpus of Dutch, it is part of a free-standing cluster of

¹⁴ "A suitable 'reaction giver' [...] [or, put differently,] an appropriate 'sounding board'."

interjections (though it can fulfill the present function on its own as well). The examples in 16 are cases in point.

- (16) a. Ja die die zwarte ... die roetmop.—Nou **zeg**.
(CGN: fn000979.92–96)

‘Yeah that that black one ... that nigger.—Now say.’

- b. Gereformeerde dames zo te zien ... een jurkje allebei.—Oh **zeg**
man. (CGN: fn000979.99–104)

‘Reformed ladies it appears ... both wearing a dress.—Oh say
man.’

By means of such a cluster, the speaker reacts to a statement or an event and can express, *inter alia*, his or her surprise or disapproval as in 16a. Not infrequently, this use appears to imply a further utterance. In 16b, for instance, the second speaker seems to make some tacit appeal to the first one to stop talking in that way. Note, for the sake of completeness, that *say* does not share this function of its Dutch counterpart either.

4. Intermediate Summary.

Figure 1 gives an overview of the various functions of *say* and *zeg* (*maar*). It is solely for clarity’s sake, and not intended as a semantic map à la Haspelmath 2003 but just sums up the similarities and the differences in usage between the two languages.

Figure 1 is to be interpreted as follows. First, the dashed line delineates the English uses, the full line the Dutch ones. Second, the subscripted numbers refer to the examples in sections 2 and 3. Third, the partial inclusion of the upper left function alludes to the fact that in English, presenting a potential formulation is a rather peripheral extended use of the imperative of *say* (see sections 2.4 and 3.2). Fourth, the clause-initial attention-getter use is split into an interrogative and a non-interrogative case to reflect the fact that *say* can only precede questions, while *zeg* can precede other clause types as well.

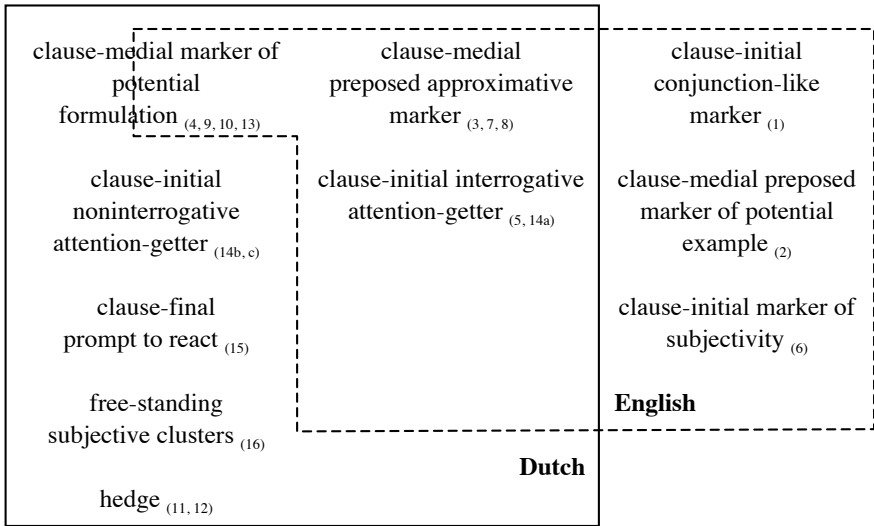


Figure 1. The usage of *say* and *zeg*.

5. Development.

As mentioned in the introduction, this section investigates what the comparison of English and Dutch in figure 1 can reveal about the development of the imperative of *say* into a pragmatic marker, and about its further evolution. It also takes diachronic material into account, though.

5.1. Clause-Initial Conjunction-Like Marker.

Brinton (2008:89) writes that the conjunction-like *say* is attested as early as the 16th century; it results from an evolution which is completely independent of the English imperative of *say*'s other developments: "[It] is fossilized in form and reduced syntactically from a matrix clause to a subordinating conjunction." Her claim is confirmed by the fact that *zeg* (*maar*) shares both adverbial and interjection uses with *say* but cannot serve as a conjunction-like marker (if there was a link between the former functions and the latter function, one would expect *zeg* (*maar*) to exhibit this conjunction-like use too).¹⁵ Still, it is hard to deny the

¹⁵ For this function, Dutch draws on the less grammaticalized imperative of the verb *stellen* 'state'. Unlike *say*, it cannot be analyzed as conjunction-like since it is followed either by a subordinate clause introduced by *dat* 'that' or by a matrix clause conveying direct speech.

semantic resemblance between this use of *say* and its use as an introducer of a potential example, as in 1b and 2a, respectively. It would not be unreasonable to suppose that the hypothetical meaning of the former in the 16th century had some influence on the development of the latter, a 17th century innovation (see Brinton 2008:83), and that the absence of one function in Dutch explains the absence of the other. Consider 17, though.

- (17) **Segt** 34 $\frac{3}{8}$ geeft 200 de geheele langte van de Cylinder, wat zal 30 geven? (De Graad 1679, *Roy-Konst*; WNT s.v. *zeggen* ww. 17)

‘Say 34 $\frac{3}{8}$ gives 200 the whole length of the cylinder, what will 30 give?’

The fact that in the past *zeg* could actually be used to present a hypothesis is at odds with the supposed link between the absence of the two functions.

5.2. *Potential Formulation and Example, Approximation, and Hedging.*

Concerning *say* as an introducer of a potential example and approximative *say*, Brinton (2008:89) argues: “[They] are likewise fossilized and reduced syntactically, here from matrix clause to an adverb. This change [...] is contingent on the prior change of the imperative *say* from a main verb to a parenthetical.” Strangely, no possible connections and/or differences between the adverbial functions are mentioned. For Dutch at least, the following scenario seems very plausible. Originally, *zeg maar* occurs exclusively before a potential formulation. The imperative occupies its normal position and its lexical meaning—in combination with *maar*, *zeg* could be paraphrased as ‘there are no objections to saying, it is allowed/possible to say ...’—is still palpable.¹⁶ Subsequently, the marker is increasingly associated with the speaker’s caution and uncertainty, as in 13. The focus shifts from form to content. The imperative is finally reanalyzed as a parenthetical and thus positionally more flexible item—in other words, a “comment clause” (see Brinton 2008:2)—and functions as a hedge.

Unfortunately, this hypothesis (see Landsmeer 2007, too) is hard, if

¹⁶ See Foolen 1993:176–179 on this modal particle in imperatives.

not impossible, to verify. An exploratory study of a diachronic corpus of drama and fictional prose, the *Compilatiecorpus* (CC, see Coussé 2010), the *38 Miljoen Woorden Corpus* (38MWC, see Instituut voor Nederlandse Lexicologie 2011a), and the *Eindhoven Corpus* (EC, see Instituut voor Nederlandse Lexicologie 2011b) suggests that *zeg maar* fulfills all functions at the same time, in its first attestations in the EC data from 1960–1976 (but see Valstar 2010:5 for an example dating back to 1906).¹⁷ One possible explanation for this is that *zeg maar* rapidly goes through the various stages under pressure of or by analogy with some existing construction. *Zal ik maar zeggen* ‘I will just say’ in the EC seems a likely candidate. Compare 18a to 7a, 18b to 9, and 18c to 11.

¹⁷ The diachronic corpus of drama and fictional prose combines a small collection of comedies and farces from 1680 to the present (see Van Olmen 2011b:271 for more information) with other plays and fictional prose from 1600 onward taken from the *Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren* (see Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde 2012) and *Ceneton* (see Universiteit Leiden Opleiding Nederlands 2011). It contains an average of 545,302 words per century. The CC is made up of administrative texts from 1250 to 1800 and of narrative texts from roughly 1600 to the present, 607,660 words in total. The 38MWC contains roughly 38 million words and consists of three parts: a newspaper component with data from 1992 to 1995, a juridical component with data from 1814 to 1989, and a diverse component with data from 1970 to 1995. The EC is a 768,000-word collection of written texts and transcribed conversations from 1960 to 1976.

The lack of a large representative corpus of historical Dutch forces this exploratory study to rely on a fairly diverse set of existing corpora and databases. Some of the text types in this set (for example, the administrative texts in the CC and the judicial ones in the 38MWC) differ considerably from the spoken data on which most of section 3 is based and of which *zeg maar* is probably typical. For this reason, it is perhaps not so surprising that it is in the EC, with its transcribed conversations, where the first attestations are found. However, the diachronic data described above also include a substantial amount of drama. This text type has been claimed to approximate spoken language, or, at any rate, to be the closest that one can get to “real” historical speech (see Vismans 1994, Culpeper & Kytö 2000, and note 5). Arguably, the same could be said of dialogues in fictional prose, which also makes up a large part of the diachronic data examined here. If *zeg maar* was already around in, say, the 19th century, one would expect to at least find some traces of its use in the plays and novels of this period.

- (18) a. Maar als wij vroeger, **zal ik maar zeggen**, vijfendertig cent zakgeld kregen. (EC: cgtIII.50508)

‘But if we in our time got an allowance of, I will just say, thirty-five cents.’

- b. Maar ja, gelukkig had ik dan ’n harkmachine **zal ik maar zeggen**. (EC: cgtIII.43531)

‘But yeah, fortunately, I then had a raking machine, I will just say.’

- c. Maar net als vroeger, **zal maar zeggen** [*sic*], net als je nou bijvoorbeeld moest bevallen **zal ik maar zeggen**. (EC: cgtIII.50442–50443)

‘But just like before, will just say, just like for instance if you had to give birth now I will just say.’

Strikingly, in the EC, *zal ik maar zeggen* is still 2.5 times more frequent than its imperative twin. However, in the comparable corpus of Dutch, it has a rate of occurrence of only two cases per 100,000 words, while *zeg maar*’s relative frequency has gone up to 45 cases. The imperative of *say* may be regarded as the quick successor of the construction in 18. Both serve as some type of stopgap, and the frequent use of such a marker is extremely conspicuous. Stopgaps often even cause irritation (see Stroop 2006:5, who characterizes *zeg maar* as a “wauwelwoord” or prattle word). Therefore, they can feel outdated and fall into disuse quite fast, and other, more recent forms can fill the “functional lacunae” that they leave behind (see Van Oostendorp & Van der Wouden 1998 on the bad press received by the particle combination *best wel* ‘quite’, Van der Wouden & Caspers 2010:55–56 on its popularity in the 1970s and 1980s and its infrequency in present-day Dutch, and Van der Wouden 2002:10 on the 30-year rise and demise of *ergens* ‘somewhere’ as a mitigator). The not unproblematic nature of *zal ik maar zeggen* as a stopgap is nicely illustrated in 19.

- (19) 'n Oude Domburger maakte er zoveel gebruik van dat hij in de wandeling **Zàk-mè-zeie** werd genoemd.

(Ghijsen 1964, *Woordenboek der Zeeuwse Dialecten*; WNT s.v. *zeggen* ww. 1)

‘An old citizen of Domburg used it so often that he was usually called I-will-just-say.’

With respect to the approximative use of *zeg maar*, it is important to note that it need not have developed straight out of its other adverbial uses, despite the semantic contiguity. *Zeg* without *maar* has the meaning ‘approximately’ too, as in 8, but it seems to be fairly rare nowadays (see section 3.1). From the fact that the WNT (s.v. *zeggen* ww. and *zeg* tw.) makes no mention of this use of *zeg*, it could be inferred that it is a 20th-century innovation as well. Its first and only attestation in the aforementioned diachronic corpora and in the dictionary quotation banks, in 20, provides supporting evidence for this hypothesis.

- (20) Het schip heeft averij en er is nog maar voedsel voor, **zeg**, vijf dagen, terwijl het tien dagen zal duren alvorens een haven wordt bereikt.

(Wickevoort Crommelin 1931, *Wereldwetgevers*; WNT s.v. *rantsoen* znw. 1)

‘The ship is damaged and there is food for just, say, five days, while it will take ten days before a port will be reached.’

This example is earlier than the first occurrence of *zeg maar* as an approximator in the present data. Interestingly, in the more recent GWNT (s.v. *zeggen* ww), the approximative use is still attributed exclusively to *zeg*, and *zeg maar* is characterized solely as introducing a potential formulation. This description could be interpreted as a reflection of this attested difference in timing.¹⁸ If the approximative *zeg* indeed predates the approximative *zeg maar*, it is possible that the latter marker has received its meaning from the former—as well as from *zal ik*

¹⁸ With a caveat pointed out by one reviewer that “dictionary descriptions of particles, hedges, etc., are notoriously unreliable.”

maar zeggen, of course—(partly) as a result of the formal similarities. In this respect, it is worth noting that the approximative *say* appears two centuries after *say* as an introducer of a possible example, in the middle of the 19th century to be exact (see Brinton 2008:82).

5.3. *Clause-Initial Attention-Getter and Marker of Subjectivity.*

The comparison of clause-initial *say* and its Dutch equivalent seems to indicate that they do not have the exact same history. Evidently, they do both originate from a directive to provide the answer to the subsequent question. Brinton's (2008:89) claim that the development involves "a syntactic reversal of matrix and subordinate clause" needs to be questioned. This scenario, the so-called "matrix clause hypothesis" (Brinton 2008:36), includes a stage at which the clause following the imperative of *say* is subordinate to it, as in 21a. However, already in Old Dutch and Old English, one finds examples such as 21b, where the imperative of *say* precedes not the subordinate but the main clause.¹⁹

This fact points to a source construction different from 21a, namely 21c, which is to be preferred for two reasons. First, if 21b developed out of 21a, it remains to be explained what motivated the reanalysis of matrix clause + subordinate clause as parenthetical + main clause. Second, it is not clear how it could happen in the first place, given the difference in word order between a subordinate clause (that is, the verb in final position) and an interrogative main clause (that is, the verb in initial or second position).

In contrast, if 21a developed out of 21c, word order poses no

¹⁹ Word order may not have been as fixed at that time as nowadays, but there is considerable evidence that main and subordinate clauses already had fairly distinctive patterns. Traugott (1992:170), for one, writes: "Word order in OE [that is, Old English] is organized according to two main principles. In main clauses, the verb is typically in nonfinal position. In subordinate clauses, the verb is typically in final position." For the *Wachtendonck Psalms*, the first undisputed longer text in Old Dutch, Van der Horst (2008:329, in translation) observes that "Vf2 [that is, verb-second] was already the normal position in main clauses and probably Vfn [that is, verb-final] in subordinate clauses." Other Old Dutch texts such as the *Rhinelandic Rhyming Bible* and the *Leiden Willeram* exhibit a fairly strong correlation between Vfn and subordination (see Van der Horst 2008:337–340). It is thus safe to assume that the clause following *saga uns* in 21b is not a subclause.

problem and, in line with Waltereit's (2002:999) argument that "functional change may be provoked by speakers who use a form in a new way that serves a frequently occurring communicative purpose," speakers can start exploiting the parenthetical imperative of *say* for specific discourse objective as a trigger for its further development. Interrupting counts as such an objective. In 21d, for instance, the knight Gawain makes optimal use of the appealing nature of the imperative *sege* 'say!' to get the attention of a passerby.

(21) a. **Say** us where your friend has disappeared to!

b. **Saga** uns, ware is thin wino untwichan.

(Willeram ca. 1100; ONW s.v. *sagon* ww. 1)

'Say us, where has your friend disappeared to?'

c. **Say** us: where has your friend disappeared to?

d. Aldus quamen si beneuen een forest darsi ontmoeten enen coleman
disi groten ende her walewain sprac hem an **sege** mi seithi live
coleman welc es die weh te cardole.

(1260–1280, *Wrake van Ragisel*; VMNW s.v. *segghen* ww. 3)

'And thus they got close to a forest where they encounter a coal
man who they greet and Sir Gawain addressed him say me he
said dear coal man which is the way to Cardole.'

Present-day *say* and *zeg* differ with respect to the clause types that can follow them. The Dutch options can be linked to one another in a neat way. Preceding an interrogative, the pragmatic marker urges the addressee to react verbally. In the case of an imperative, according to the WNT (s.v. *zeg* tw. 2), the second most common context of use, the type of reaction constitutes an action, or, more generally, a sign of compliance or disobedience. It is not difficult to think of a bridging context for the two uses: Many a question has an unmistakably directive function. Finally, when heading a declarative such as 14c, *zeg* is reduced to a stimulus to acknowledge the speaker's message. In the VMNW and WNT citations and the aforementioned diachronic corpora, the first truly

pragmatic cases of clause-initial *zeg* surface in the 17th century. As expected, the imperative of *say* patterns exclusively with the interrogative here, as in 22a. The 18th-century data contain an occasional ambiguous combination with an imperative, such as 22b, and even one with a declarative serving as a question, such as 22c (in both cases, *zeg* could also relate to the preceding question, see example 15a). Only from the 19th century onward does the imperative of *say* introduce non-interrogatives on a regular basis. In addition, *zeg* appears to extend to all clause types at once, including the imperative in 22d, the inquisitive declarative in 22e, the asserting declarative in 22f, and the exclamative in 22g. The explanation lies in the fact that, by its very nature, the diachronic material makes it impossible to document the detailed history of as colloquial a phenomenon as *zeg*—which, in a way, licenses the present article’s dynamic-synchronic approach.

- (22) a. **Segh**, leelickert, sal ick geen antwoord van u krijgen?
(Westerbaen 1663, *Gedichten*; WNT s.v. *leelijkerd* znw. 1)

‘Say, ugly guy, will I not get an answer from you?’

- b. Wagt je van de Zot ’er meê te steeken, gelyk te zingen maar niet beî gelyk te spreken, **zeg** Rabb’laar, maak het niet te grof.—
Ga voort, ‘k zal zwygen als een Mof.
(Van Hoogstraten 1724, *Tys Onverstand*;
Universiteit Leiden Opleiding Nederlands 2011)

‘Do you dare to make fun of it, to sing at the same time but to not speak at the same time, say chatterer, do not be too impolite.—Continue, I will keep completely silent.’

- c. Zo komt ge uw man hier kroonen? Ze is nog al mooy van smoel, **zeg** zoete meid, ik wed gy wel gedogen zult, ’k hem ook een kroon op zet?
(Van Burg 1712, *De Gehorende Schout*;
Universiteit Leiden Opleiding Nederlands 2011)

‘So have you come to crown your husband here? She [that is, the woman addressed in the previous sentence] has quite a beautiful

face, say sweet girl, I bet you will tolerate that I put a crown on his head as well?’

- d. **Zeg**, van den Broek, laat me dat eens gauw kijken!
(Daum 1888, *Hoe Hij Raad van Indië Werd*;
WNT s.v. *kijken* ww. II)

‘Say, van den Broek, let me quickly have a look at it!’

- e. **Zeg**, Pieterse ... je zit toch niet op den zak met soezen?
(Multatuli 1877, *Verzamelde Werken*; WNT s.v. *zak* znw. 1)

‘Say, Pieterse ... you are not sitting on the bag with pastries, are you?’

- f. **Zeg**, ik hoû zoo veel van je, zei hij nat-zacht, zijn lippen tegen Willems oor aan.
(Van Deyssel 1889, *De Kleine Republiek*;
WNT s.v. *vriendschap* znw. 1)

‘Say, I love you so much, he said wetly-softly, his lips against Willem’s ears.’

- g. **Zeg**, wat een knappe jongen!
(Robbers 1909, *De Gelukkige Familie*; WNT s.v. *intiem* bw. 2)

‘Say, what a handsome boy!’

The scenario sketched above does not apply to *say*, though. The English imperative of *say* cannot really co-occur with imperatives. In all probability, declarative instances such as in 6 have a different origin, that is interaction with *I say*. This marker was already used as an attention-getter in the 17th century and, like the older form *say*, it could fulfill this function in combination with interrogatives (see Brinton 2008:85). As a result of this overlap, the imperative of *say* must have also sometimes served as an alternative to *I say* in the latter’s more recent “emotive function” (Brinton 2008:84). What is more, this scenario can explain the difference in subjectivity between *say* and *zeg*, in particular in com-

bination with declaratives (see section 3.4). Unlike *say*, *zeg* has not been influenced by a marker in which the speaker takes center stage (that is, is overtly expressed as *I*) and which conveys his or her attitude. It originates straight from an additional stimulus to answer the question that follows and is therefore more interpersonal than subjective.

5.4. Clause-Final Prompt to React and Free-Standing Subjective Clusters.

In Schermer 2007, the clause-final *zeg* is argued to derive from its clause-initial use. For her, the fact that *zeg* at the end of a clause requires no intonation break, carries no accent, and cannot cluster with other interjections or particles is

een blijk van verdergaande grammaticalisatie, want ook imperatieven, het “startpunt” van de grammaticalisatie, staan—geaccentueerd—vooraan en kunnen vergezeld zijn van partikels en vocatieven.

a sign of more advanced grammaticalization, because imperatives too, the “starting point” of the grammaticalization process, are located at the beginning of the clause, are accentuated, and can be accompanied by particles and vocatives. (Schermer 2007:379)

However, already in the earliest Dutch sources, the imperative of *say* occurs in clause-final position, as 23 shows.²⁰

- (23) Doe sprac samuel [tote] isai heestu meer kinder **sech** mi.
(Maerlant 1285, *Rijmbijbel*; VMNW s.v. *kint* znw. 2.1)

‘Then Samuel said to Jesse do you have any other children say me.’

One should not dismiss the possibility of a parallel evolution of the two

²⁰ One of the problems for diachronic research on pragmatic markers and their source constructions is that the Old/Middle English and Dutch texts where they occur are almost always in verse. As one of the reviewers rightly points out, *sech mi* in 23 “is in rhyming position” and “writers may [actually] violate the rules of syntax to obey the rules of rhyme.” It is important to stress, though, that 23 is not an isolated example (for instance, the quotation bank of the VMNW contains an additional eleven cases in rhyming position), and that, contrary to Schermer’s (2007:379) hypothesis, the first truly pragmatic attestations of clause-final *zeg*, as in 24a, coincide with those of clause-initial *zeg*.

uses (see Van Olmen 2010a:237 on *kijk*). It is not implausible that the clause-final *zeg* originates from contexts such as 23. In this example, the imperative of *say* is used to repeat the appeal—inherent to the foregoing interrogative—for an answer. Its primary purpose is to add emphasis to the stimulus prompting the reaction to the preceding inquiry, and it is precisely this pragmatic effect that is exploited in uses such as 15. Moreover, this additional call for reaction is not necessary from a strictly informational point of view. As a result, the clause-final *zeg* may be understood as more than just a call on the addressee to react, and its subjective connotations in modern Dutch may be accounted for. The diachronic data provide supporting evidence, for what it is worth. The first clear cases of the pragmatic clause-final *zeg* date from the same period as those of its clause-initial counterpart, as the comparison of 22a and 24a shows. In addition, 24b suggests that the further developments of both functions are simultaneous, too.

- (24) a. Hee, waar blijft Jurjen, **zeg**?
(Anonymous 1660, *Klucht van de Schoester*; WNT s.v. *zeg* tw. 1)

‘Hey, what is keeping Jurjen, say?’

- b. Hahaha! ... Goeie, **zeg**. ... Flauwe bliksem!
(Falkland 1896, *Schetsen*; WNT s.v. *flauw* bnw. 13)

‘Hahaha! ... Good one, say. ... Lame dude!’

Finally, as part of a cluster of interjections or on its own, *zeg* resembles the clause-initial use in that a further clause often seems to be implied. For example, *toe zeg* in 25 could be argued to suggest a directive to stop doing something, which becomes explicit later on. Its high level of subjectivity is reminiscent of the clause-final use.

- (25) Z’n vrouw doofde dat dadelijk door d’r bazig gejouw van ‘Toe zeg ... as je me nou! ... mot jij nou óók beginne?’
(Brusse 1903, *Boeffje*; WNT s.v. *zeg* tw. 4)

‘His wife immediately put an end to that with her bossy screams of “Come on say ... are you serious? ... do you have to start as well?”

The earliest attestations of *zeg* in clusters or on its own in the diachronic material, one of which is given in 25, coincide with 22b to 22g and 24b.

6. Discussion and Conclusion.

Figure 2 is a summary of the developments of *say* and *zeg* (*maar*) as discussed in section 5 and may be considered as an elaboration on Brinton 2008:89, whose map has been described in the previous section. It charts the paths that the imperative of *say* has followed in English and Dutch. The vertical and diagonal lines connect a source function at the top end to a target function at the bottom end, and the horizontal lines connect a source function at the left end to a target function at the right end. For instance, the vertical line between “clause-initial interrogative attention-getter” and “clause-initial non-interrogative attention-getter” indicates that the latter has evolved out of the former. The figure also allows the author to distinguish between the two languages under examination: In Dutch, the clause-initial interrogative attention-getter gave rise to the noninterrogative one, while in English, it developed into the clause-initial marker of subjectivity. Note that in figure 2, the white and grey boxes are used for functions exclusive to Dutch and English, respectively; the striped boxes represent functions the two languages have (or had) in common (see 4 and 17 for “clause-medial marker of potential formulation” and “clause-initial conjunction-like marker”).

A number of comments are in order here. First, in no way does figure 2 represent the precise timing of the developments. For example, the fact that “hedge” and “clause-initial interrogative marker” are situated at the same height does not imply that these developments are simultaneous. It is clear from section 5 that this is not the case and, more generally, that the chronologies of *say* and *zeg* (*maar*) are just too different to be captured in one figure in a straightforward way. Second, the bold lines stand for links in English and Dutch that have been established under the influence of other forms. These include *zal ik maar zeggen*, the approximative *zeg*, and *I say* for the respective connections between imperative of *say* and “clause-medial marker of potential formulation”, “clause-medial marker of potential formulation” and “clause-medial approximative marker,” and “clause-initial interrogative attention-getter” and “clause-initial marker of subjectivity.” Third, the dashed lines represent cases of influence for which the arguments are inconclusive, such as the so-called hypothetical link between “clause-initial con-

junction” and “clause-medial marker of potential example.”

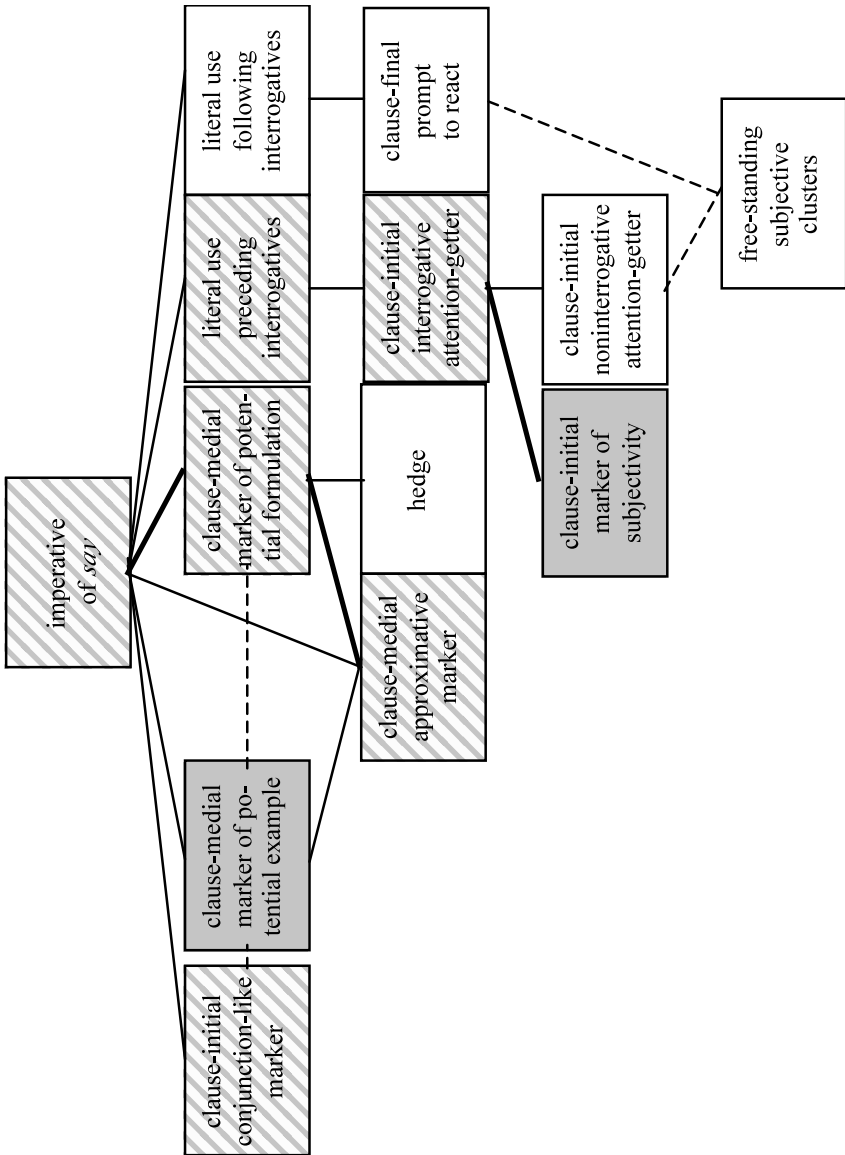


Figure 2. The developments of the imperative of *say*.

The three bold lines in figure 2 show that the history of the imperative of *say* has been affected by a range of other forms of the verb *say*. Denoting a basic speech act, this verb appears to be a continuous source of various new markers (see Brinton 2008:73–110 on *let's say*, *I daresay*, *(as) you say*, and *that is (to say)*, Güldemann 2008 on quotative indexes in African languages, and Chappell 2012 on attitudinal discourse markers in Sinitic). For the diachronic investigation of *say* and *zeg (maar)* and, for that matter, all pragmatic markers that derive from verbs with basic meanings (*do*, *make*, etc.), this means that one should not study each of them in isolation. The present article has tried to take items related to *say* and *zeg (maar)*, such as *I say* and *zal ik maar zeggen*, into account as much as possible. For future research, it may be interesting, or, perhaps, even necessary to take this approach a step further and examine all pragmatic markers based on verbs of saying together instead of focusing on those of imperatival origin.

Together with figure 1 and tables 1 and 2, figure 2 makes it clear that apparently similar pragmatic markers in two languages can differ in frequency, distribution, usage, and historical developments (see Van Olmen 2010:91). At various points in this article, the corpus study of the historical developments is argued to be rather tricky. As mentioned in section 1, the paucity of attestations in diachronic corpora and the difficulty in interpreting them make a “rigorous quantitative study of pragmatic markers ... not feasible or fruitful” (Brinton 2008:19). In addition, section 5 touches upon, inter alia, the potentially distorting impact of verse in the oldest texts of a language (see section 5.4 and note 20) and the fact that, when a particular pragmatic marker finally surfaces in the data, it appears to fulfill all functions at the same time (see section 5.2). In the present article, I hope to have shown that a dynamic-synchronic approach or, in other words, “a comparison of DMs [...] in several languages” indeed “provide[s] interesting insights into the typical sequence of changes” (Waltereit 2002:1008) and constitutes a valid alternative or, rather, complement—this article takes historical data into consideration as well—to purely diachronic studies.

The developmental paths of the imperative of *say* represented in figure 2 are based on only two languages and need to be tested against other languages. However, this task is left for future research. Here it is sufficient to illustrate the potential fruitfulness of this approach and draw attention to some (dis)similarities between *say* and *zeg*, on the one hand,

and Lower Rhineland German *sach (ens)* ‘say (once)’ (see Bergs 2003) and French *dis (donc)* ‘say (thus)’ (Dostie 2004), on the other hand. As 26a shows, *sach (ens)* resembles *say* and *zeg* in that it can serve as a clause-initial attention-getter. The similarity between *sach (ens)* and *zeg* goes even further, as the German marker occurs in clause-final position in 26b as well (it is not clear whether it can combine with clause types other than the interrogative). Lamiroy & Swiggers (1991:139) point out that *dis (donc)*, too, is able to occupy both the clause-initial and the clause-final position.

(26) Lower Rhineland German (Bergs 2003:2)

- a. Sach’, meinst du dat ernst?
say mean you that seriously
‘Say, do you really think so?’
- b. Meinst du dat ernst, sach’?
mean you that seriously say
‘Do you really think so, say?’

The examples in 27 indicate that the French marker has more than one function in common with its Dutch counterpart.²¹

(27) French (after Lamiroy & Swiggers 1991:134, Dostie 2004:89–95)

- a. Dis donc, Jeanne, as-tu vu Sophie?
say thus Jeanne have-you seen Sophie
‘Say, Jeanne, have you seen Sophie?’
- b. Dis donc, tu pourrais peut-être m’ouvrir la porte.
say thus you could perhaps me.open the door
‘Say, you could perhaps open the door for me.’
- c. Dites donc, Monsieur le Président,
say thus mister the president

²¹ Both *ens* and *donc* are optional elements here. The former is a cognate of Dutch *eens* (see note 2), and the latter seems to behave like a modal particle, too (see Dostie 2004:92–93).

quelle belle voiture vous avez!
 what beautiful car you have
 ‘Say, Mister President, what a beautiful car you have!’

d. Tu viens?— Dis donc, tu es bien pressé toi.
 you come say thus you are well hurried you
 ‘Are you coming?—Say, you are really in a hurry you.’

e. Eh ben, dis donc! (C’est curieux ça!)
 oh well say thus that.is peculiar that
 ‘Oh well, say! (That is peculiar!)’

According to Dostie 2004:88, *dis donc* in 27a serves to change the topic, to attract the addressee’s attention, and to encourage her to answer the question. The similarities to *say* in 5 and *zeg* in 14a are obvious. The French marker can also be used as a response to unexpected propositions or behavior and to invite the addressee to consider and/or explain what the marker introduces (see Dostie 2004:90–92). As 27b, 27d, and 27e demonstrate, *dis donc* is not unlike *zeg* in 14b,c in that it can be followed by directives, exclamations, and statements respectively. In 27e, *dis donc* is in clause-final position and the speaker indicates: “Cette situation, à laquelle je ne me serais pas particulièrement attendu, suscite chez moi un certain questionnement et me laisse perplexe [comme si je demandais qu’on me dise pourquoi les choses sont ainsi]” (Dostie 2004:92).²² This use is close to that of *zeg* in 15c–e.

The aforementioned similarities raise the final question that this study wants to address: To what extent is the development of clause-initial and clause-final uses of the imperative of *say* in English and Dutch an areal phenomenon or, put differently, due to language contact? Bergs (2003:8), who investigates whether the imperatives of visual and auditory perception and *say* can serve as pragmatic markers, observes that “*look* appears to be the crosslinguistically most common, followed by *say* and, finally, *hear*.” His (rather small) sample of languages in which the imperative of *say* fulfills one of the pragmatic functions in the two

²² “This situation, which I would not really have expected, makes me question things and leaves me perplexed [as if I was asking people to tell me why things are the way they are].”

rightmost branches of figure 2 includes English, French, Lower Rhine-land German, and Spanish. In Greek and Italian, the imperative of *say* does not seem to exhibit any of these functions.

The present article adds to the sample the Indo-European languages Afrikaans (Breed, p.c.), Dutch (see section 3), Lithuanian (Jasionytė, p.c.), and Polish (Fiuk, p.c.); the Niger-Congo languages Ewe (Gbegble, p.c.) and Rundi (Nizonkiza, p.c.) and the Sino-Tibetan language Mandarin Chinese (Duan & Xu, p.c.).²³ Interestingly, only in Dutch can the imperative of *say* be used as a clause-initial attention-getter and a clause-final prompt to react. In some of the other languages, it can only serve as a full-fledged directive to give an answer to the question that it precedes, as in 21a–c. In the remaining languages even this use is absent.

Lithuanian *sakyk* ‘say.SG’ is a case in point. Its status as a full-fledged imperative is also evident from the fact that it needs to be pluralized when the question is addressed to more than one interlocutor, as in 28. As Lamiroy & Swiggers (1991:134) show for Romance, “in the case of imperatives [as what they call discourse signals], agreement in person with the addressee is not obligatory.” They are more interjection-like in this way.

(28) Lithuanian (Jasionytė, p.c.)

Sakykit, gal žinote,
say.you.people maybe you.people.know

kiek dabar valandų?
how.many now hours

‘Say, do you people know what time it is now?’

In Rundi, it is not the imperative of *vuga* ‘say’ but that of ‘tell’ which can be used to introduce an interrogative. Example 29 also differs from 28 in that the imperative here requires an indirect object.

²³ See the acknowledgments for the informants’ full names and affiliations.

(29) Rundi (Nizonkiza, p.c.)

Mbarira/Tubarire, vyagenze gute?
 tell.me/tell.us, things.went how
 ‘Tell me/us, what happened?’

These data, though still limited, suggest that the imperative of *say* as a clause-initial or -final pragmatic marker is not a frequent phenomenon crosslinguistically, which makes its concentration in Western Europe all the more remarkable.

A positive answer to the question about areal influence is not implausible for two reasons. First, the area under consideration is known for the many properties its languages have in common. Haspelmath (1998) refers to this phenomenon as the STANDARD AVERAGE EUROPEAN SPRACHBUND (henceforth SAE). He regards continental West Germanic and Gallo-Romance as its nuclear members and situates the other Germanic and Romance languages close to the center, too. The shared features include the existence of both definite and indefinite articles and the formation of the perfect by means of *have* and the passive particle (see Haspelmath 1998:275–281 for an additional nine properties). Haspelmath (1998:285) argues that the origin of this Sprachbund can be traced back to “the time of the great migrations at the transition between antiquity and the Middle Ages” (see van der Auwera’s 1998:824 Charlemagne Sprachbund) but acknowledges “the possibility (or even likelihood) that different SAE features are due to different historical circumstances.”

Second, pragmatic markers constitute a domain in which languages seem to influence one another quite easily. The body of literature about their borrowing, for instance, is fairly extensive (see Brody 1987, Salmons 1990, Fuller 2001, and many others). On Matras’ (2007:61) frequency-based hierarchy of categories borrowed crosslinguistically, discourse markers are the third most common category (nouns and conjunctions are ranked first, verbs second). In addition, Matras’ (1998:307) pragmatic detachability scale—that is, the less content-oriented and the more operational the marker, the easier it is borrowed—suggests that the imperative of *say* as an attention-getter or a prompt to react is not an unlikely candidate. Obviously, to prove that some of the developments of the imperative of *say* in Western Europe indeed result from contact, one needs to compare in detail all the languages involved

and look at diachronic data for all of them, as done for English and Dutch in sections 4 and 5. However, the fulfillment of either requirement is beyond the scope of the present article.

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