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Changes in the use of the Frisian quantifiers *ea/oait* “ever” between 1250 and 1800

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This article presents an overview of the changes that took place in the syntactic use of the quantifiers *ea* and *oait* “ever” between 1250 and 1800 on the basis of the Frisian Language Corpus. Occurrences of Frisian *ea* and *oait* “ever” were classified and counted depending on the type of syntactic construction in which they were found. The constructions which were distinguished tend to correlate with the interpretation which the quantifier receives. This classification was performed for three main periods of the language: 1250–1550; 1550–1700; 1700–1800. It turns out that these periods saw some significant changes in the use of these quantifiers. Special attention is given to the peculiar behaviour of *ea* “ever” in relative clauses. It turns out that it displays properties both of free choice items and of negative polarity items. Furthermore, Frisian turns out to have been affected by language contact with Dutch at quite an early date, around 1700, when it borrowed *oait* to replace native *ea*. This change is analyzed as a case of reinforcement in the sense of Hopper & Traugott (2006). Our overall analysis supports a construction-specific analysis of changes in the use of quantifiers.

1. Introduction

1.1 Outline

This article investigates some of the changes that took place in the history of Frisian between 1250 and 1800 in the use of the quantifiers *ea* and *oait*, which both translate roughly as “ever.” Both these quantifiers have a negative counterpart with which they form a paradigm. *Ea* “ever” pairs up with *nea* “never,” and *oait* “ever” pairs up with *noait* “never.” The research presented here focuses on the investigation of the positive

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members of these pairs, as also tends to be the case in the literature (cf. Zaalberg 1977; Leuschner 1996; Hoeksema 1998, and the references cited there). The main aim of this article is to present an overall description of the changes affecting *ea* and *oait* by classifying the constructions in which they are found. This approach also helps us to gain more knowledge of the semantics of these items, for the meaning of quantifiers may correlate with the construction in which they occur.¹ For example, the English quantifier *ever* means “at least once” in the sentence *Have you ever been in London?*, whereas it means “always” in the collocation *for ever*. Similar observations apply to *ea* and *oait*.

Classifying the constructions in which they were found made it clear that *ea* and *oait* function as negative polarity items. It also brought to light a peculiar fact about (mainly) *ea*. It could occur in relative clauses with a definite antecedent, giving the construction as a whole an emphatic flavour. Relative clauses with definite antecedents are not a construction type in which negative polarity items normally occur. Hence we saw fit to devote some extra attention to this construction.

Another type of change involves the replacement of *ea* by *oait* around 1700 under the influence of Dutch. At that time, the Frisian lexicon was quite stable, and the question arises why the pair *ea* and *nea* should be replaced by *oait* and *noait*. It is argued that the theory of grammaticalisation may provide an answer to that question.

1.2 Data

Runes apart, the written history of Frisian begins around 1250. The period of 1250–1550 is traditionally referred to as Old Frisian, Early Modern Frisian is from 1550–1800, and Modern Frisian is from 1800 until the present time.² The quantifier *ea* went out of use around 1700, when it was replaced by *oait*. Our data come from the Language Corpus Frisian, a corpus of which a beta version is available on the Internet.³ Old Frisian is available in the form of raw text, Early Modern Frisian is available in the form of tagged and lemmatized text; the search function is able to find all spelling variants for a given word. The corpus Old Frisian contains about half a million tokens, as does the corpus Early Modern Frisian. The written data available allow us to investigate the main changes in the use of quantifiers. Even so, the numbers of occurrences are usually so small that chi-square tests may become

1. On the effect of syntactic context on semantic interpretation, see Postma (1995), Weerman & Vermeul (2002).

2. For a critical discussion of the periodisation of Frisian, see De Haan (2001), Versloot (2004).

3. The address is: <http://www.fryske-akademy.nl/tdb/>.

unreliable. The Fisher Exact test has been used to compute significance, because it is more reliable than the ordinary chi-square test when dealing with small or unbalanced sample sizes.⁴

1.3 Background information

Ea and *oait* and its equivalents in other languages are often referred to as negative polarity items or free choice items, depending on the properties of the items in question and on the definition which is adhered to.⁵ There is terminological dispute among semanticists about the definition of these two terms (cf. Giannakidou 2001 and the references given there), which need not concern us here. Negative polarity items tend to occur in negative sentences, as in (1) below:

- (1) a. Nobody saw anything
b. *I saw anything

These examples are straightforward, but negative polarity items also occur in sentence types which cannot directly be characterized as negative, such as clauses in the scope of a comparative, as in (2a) below:

- (2) a. He ran faster than anybody had thought possible
b. Nobody had thought it possible that he ran so fast

The negative character of such clauses, however, can be brought out by the paraphrase in (2b). The formal definition of ‘negative’ is a subject of ongoing debate among semanticists (cf. Van der Wouden 1994; Giannikidou 2002). They attempt to find a definition such that it exhaustively covers the constructions in which negative polarity items are found. This set of constructions may vary from one language to the next and from one lexical item to the other.

Free choice items have the property that they can occur in certain non-negative contexts, such as the word “any” in the following example:

- (3) a. Pick any card you want
b. Anything he does he does well

4. The Fisher Exact test can be found at the following address: <http://www.langsrud.com/fisher.htm>.

5. Negative polarity items and/or free choice items were studied in Fauconnier (1975), Hoeksema (1983), Ladusaw (1979), Van der Wouden (1994), Zwarts (1981, 1995), among others.

(3b) illustrates that the free choice item can be very close in meaning to a universal quantifier such as *every*.⁶ Sometimes, the same lexical item can be used either as a negative polarity item or as a free choice item, as happens to be the case with the word “any.” This also seems to be the case with the Frisian equivalents of “ever.” As the distinction between negative polarity items and free choice items is not always clear-cut, we will refer to the union of these two classes as polarity items. Thus we can say that *any* is a polarity item.

Research has focused on the synchronic descriptions of polarity items. Much less attention has been given to the diachronic development of such items. There are some notable exceptions such as Haspelmath (1995), Leuschner (1996), among others. Certainly, little attention has been paid to the development of these items in Frisian (the phenomenon was noted in passing by Tamminga 1963). Furthermore, Leuschner presents a comparative overview of quantifiers meaning “ever” in West Germanic languages, dealing with German, English and Dutch, but omitting Frisian, which has been researched less than the languages surrounding it. Our methodology is different from that of Leuschner, who relies on information in dictionaries and articles, whereas the research presented here is based on a modest quantitative sampling. Finally, our data were consistently correlated with syntactic context, unlike Leuschner’s, which turned out to be a fruitful approach.

Our first aim is to chart the set of constructions in which *ea* and *oait* “ever” are found in the three periods of Frisian that were distinguished.

2. Syntactic constructions

In all stages of the language between 1250 and 1800, the Frisian equivalents of “ever” shift between subsets of the following syntactic constructions:

- Rhetorical questions
- Clauses containing a negative DP such as *nobody*
- Clauses introduced by an excluding head such as *if, before, deny, alas (that)*
- Clauses with a clausal negation
- Relative clauses (free and nominal)
- Main (non-negative) clauses

6. Haspelmath (1995:369) notes that free choice items are regularly a diachronic source for universal quantifiers. The development of *ea* from Old Frisian (when it had the form *aa*) to Early Modern Frisian will be seen to move in the opposite direction, that is, its universal interpretation gradually disappears.

Excluding heads are heads which behave like negation in that they may license negative polarity items. With the exception of nominal relative clauses and non-negative main clauses, these are all contexts in which negative polarity items characteristically occur (but cf. note 7). Below examples are presented of the syntactic constructions which are distinguished.

- (4) Rhetorical question, example from 1748

Wa zoe dat oait fin Lyske zizze?

Who would that ever of Lyske say

“Who would ever say that about Lyske?”

Rhetorical questions constitute a characteristic context for negative polarity items. They strongly entail a negative proposition. In the example above, the negative proposition could be paraphrased as “Nobody would ever say that about Lyske.”

- (5) Clause containing a negative DP, 1755

Joa zille nin fortriet Oyt syæn

They will no sadness ever see

“They will never see any sadness.”

The presence of a negative DP provides a negative syntactic context, in which negative polarity items characteristically occur. Research on negative polarity has paid a lot of attention to this type of clauses (e.g. Zwarts 1981). Less attention has been paid to clauses or phrases in the scope of a head or predicate, that is in some sense negative (on this type, see Hoeksema & Klein 1995). They behave like negation in licensing negative polarity items, and, like negation, they trigger downward entailing patterns of inference. Below is given an example of the head *ear* “before” triggering *oait* “ever”:

- (6) Clause introduced by an excluding head, 1748

Dat mij ien koegel reitse ear ik ien slaaf oait hiet

that me a bullet hit.SBJV before I a slave ever be.called.1SG

“May a bullet hit me before I am ever called a slave.”

As mentioned, we refer to such heads for convenience as *excluding heads*. This class includes examples like the following: *noch* “nor,” *ear/foardat* “before,” *as* “if,” *as* “than,” *foei* “shame,” *bûten* “outside, apart from.”

- (7) (Free) relative clause

- a. Free relative, 1755

Joa trogzieke wis het hier ooyt trog toa

they search.through certainly what here ever through to

sieken is

search is

“They certainly search through whatever can be searched through.”

b. Relative with nominal antecedent, 1666

Om to rjuechtjen 't wird dat hy æ joe
 For to execute the word which he ever gave
 “So as to do whichever command he gave.”

Relative clauses come in two types. There are free relative clauses,⁷ which do not have a nominal antecedent, as in (a); they are directly introduced by the relative pronoun. And there are relative clauses with a nominal antecedent. We have chosen to put these two categories together, because of their syntactic similarity. Note that the appearance of negative polarity items in nominal relative clauses is quite unusual. These cases will be discussed in more detail in Section 3.4 below.

(8) Clause with a clausal negation, 1755

In dy zil oyt næt eyne
 And that shall ever not end
 “And that shall never end.”

A plain negative clause obviously provides a stock example of a negative context for polarity items. Nevertheless, sometimes polarity items are banned from this context such as the Dutch polarity item *ook maar iets/iemand* (“anything/anybody”), though they are fine with negative DPs (see e.g. Zwarts 1981; Van der Wouden 1985 for discussion of this problem).

(9) Non-negative clause, 1330

wand God bad a nethe
 because God offered ever mercy
 “For God always offered mercy.” (Hunsingo R. 30 [16])

In (9), the quantifier *a* receives a universal interpretation. Non-negative clauses do not provide a context in which negative polarity items may occur, but they are a possible context for free choice items. Thus, it cannot be said that *a* is *either* a negative polarity item *or* a free choice item: it rather seems as if the construction type determines whether the item functions as a negative polarity item or as a free choice item. The example above clearly reflects the observation that the meaning of the item correlates with the syntactic construction in which it occurs.

To the best of our knowledge, *ea* and *oait* do not occur outside these contexts in the written material that survives. Below we will investigate their distribution in more detail.

7. According to Dayal (1997), polarity items occurring in free relatives must be viewed as free choice items.

3. Distribution of “ever” in the history of Frisian 1250–1800

3.1 Old Frisian (1250–1550)

The word for “ever” in Old Frisian was *a* (in various spellings), and its negation was *na* “never.” The body of surviving texts is mainly legal. The laws reported in the texts have been transmitted orally before being written down from 1250 onwards, when monks began to produce manuscripts written in the vernacular (Bremmer 2004:91). In our corpus, the following distribution is found for Old Frisian *a*.

(10) Syntactic contexts for *a* “ever” in Old Frisian in absolute numbers

Rhetorical questions	0
Clauses containing a negative DP (XP)	0
Clauses introduced by an excluding head	10
(Free) relative clauses	16
Clause negation	3
Non-negative clauses	19 “always”

Old Frisian *a* is conspicuously absent in rhetorical questions and in the presence of a negative DP. The absence of *a* in rhetorical questions may well be due to a genre limitation. The Old Frisian corpus mainly consists of law texts, and these rarely contain rhetorical questions. *A* is also not attested in the presence of a negative DP; this fact is discussed in Section 3.2.

The relative clause is usually a free relative clause or a relative clause in the scope of a superlative. This is a well-known context for negative polarity items (Hoeksema 1986).

There is a relatively high number of occurrences in non-negative clauses, in which *a* is used to convey the meaning “always.” This may be related to the fact that Old Frisian lacked a universal temporal quantifier of the type of English “always” (Modern Frisian *altyd*, Modern Dutch *altijd*); the earliest attestations of a temporal quantifier in Frisian are from around 1500. In this respect, the situation in Old Frisian was identical to that in other Old Germanic languages like Old English, Old (Middle) Dutch and Old High German, which also used the etymological equivalent for *a* to express the meaning “always” (Leuschner 1996:473ff). English, Dutch and Frisian subsequently developed adverbials consisting of a compound with “all”; in German, such compounds also developed but they kept a marginal status. Corresponding to the rise of such compounds, we will see that use of *a* meaning “always” decreases and dies out in 17th century Frisian. This entails that the free choice aspect of the quantifier gets reduced, since the availability of a universal interpretation is a characteristic of free choice, not of negative polarity.

Alongside *a* and *na*, Old Frisian also featured the pair *ammer* and *nammer*. In Old Frisian, the quantifier *ammer* occurs 16×, and it invariably has a universal

interpretation: apparently, it could not function as a polarity item, as *a* could. In early Modern Frisian, *ammer* dies out: it occurs 4× in the corpus between 1550 and 1650, and it occurs 0 times between 1650 and 1750. After 1750, it is found again, presumably under the influence of Dutch, where it is characteristic of written language of a high register.⁸ Here we will focus on the development of *a* and *na*.

3.2 The period 1550–1700

In this period, Old Frisian *a* appears as *ea*. The set of constructions in which it is found has changed. Consider the table below:

(11) Syntactic contexts for *ea* “ever” (1550–1700)

Rhetorical questions	6
Clauses containing a negative DP	5
Clauses introduced by an excluding head	10
(Free) relative clauses	14
Clause negation	0
Main (non-negative) clauses	1 “always”

The use of *ea* meaning “always” has dwindled to almost zero. Correspondingly, the word *altyd* “always” has become quite frequent. The table below recapitulates (10) and (11) so that the changes can be compared that have taken place in the transition from Old Frisian to the period 1550–1700. The last column indicates whether the change is significant, and if so, the p-value is provided on the basis of the Fisher Exact test:

(12) Changes Old Frisian to Early Modern Frisian (1550–1700)

Construction	Old Frisian	1550–1700	Significant change
Rhetorical questions	0	6	yes: p < 0.01
Clauses with a negative DP	0	5	yes: p = 0.01
Clauses with an excluding head	10	10	no
Relative clauses	16	14	no
Clause negation	3	0	no
Non-negative clauses	19	1	yes: p < 0.01
TOTAL	48	36	

8. Dutch *immer* could be used as a negative polarity item in early Dutch, alongside its use as a universal quantifier. The latter usage is nowadays still possible, but its use as a negative polarity item has become obsolete. The nineteenth century still has attestations of *immer* as a negative polarity item (Van der Horst 2008:1872).

The following three changes are significant, as has been signalled in the table by a ‘yes’:

- a. The rise of *ea* in rhetorical questions
 - b. The rise of *ea* in the presence of a negative DP
 - c. The decrease of *ea* in non-negative clauses (where it means “always”)
- a. The absence of rhetorical questions in Old Frisian was hypothesized to be due to the fact that mainly law texts have survived. The examples in early Modern Frisian are found in literary works, which is a different genre.
 - b. Negative DPs are present as triggers in early Modern Frisian, but not in Old Frisian. The lack of triggering DPs in Old Frisian could be due to the effects of negative spread (also termed ‘negative concord’), as suggested by an anonymous reviewer. This yields sentences of the type *Nobody saw nothing*. In the oldest Old Frisian (the Brokmer manuscript), negative spread is encountered, but the trigger is not a negative DP but a negative verb form like *nellath* (not-want-3PL) or the negative clitic *ne*. Similarly, the negative polarity item *aeng* “any” is characteristically triggered by excluding heads introducing conditional and comparative clauses (Hoekstra & Siebinga 2007), but they consulted only a part of the Old Frisian material.

The generalization for Old Frisian seems to be that the trigger for negative polarity must be a head. A cursory examination of the Old Frisian data with respect to negation indicates that verbal negation and excluding heads played a crucial role in licensing negative polarity elements. This may be relevant to understanding why a negative DP cannot by itself trigger a negative polarity item: the obligatory presence of verbal negation seems to prevent that from happening.⁹ Further study of negation in Old Frisian may affect the way in which the Old Frisian data should be interpreted. Negation was studied in Bor (1990), who limited himself to studying the type of negation (clitic negation, double negation, adverbial negation), and concluded (Bor 1990: 40–41) “that in Old Frisian these stages are clearly recognizable, with an overall preference for double negation.” This suggests that clitic negation was still prominently present in Old Frisian. That clitic negation occupied a head position is clear from the fact that negation could merge with certain verbs, creating negative verbs like the example *nellath* mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

- c. The change that is most clearly visible is the dramatic decrease of the ability of *ea* to appear in non-negative clauses with the meaning “always.” It seems safe to conclude

9. However, it might also be supposed that Old Frisian *ne*, in its decline, was itself a negative polarity element, as has been argued by Breitbarth (2009) for Middle and Renaissance Dutch. In that case, we should reanalyse our data and allow for DP-triggers in Old Frisian.

that *ea* is losing the ability to carry this meaning, a fact that directly translates into the constructional observation made here, namely, the demise of *ea* in non-negative main clauses. This fits in with the fact that a lexical item carrying exactly this meaning, *altyd*, arose in late Old Frisian. In Early Modern Frisian (1550–1800), this item had already become very frequent, with some 350 attestations.

3.3 The period 1700–1800

After 1702, *ea* is not attested until 1824 (Van der Veen et al. 1987:220). After 1824, there are numerous attestations. It seems that *ea* was dead for some 130 years between 1700 and 1830. The same applies to its negative counterpart *nea*. What happened was that the word *ea* (and its negative counterpart *nea*) was resurrected by the Frisian Language Movement around 1830. As a result *ea* is nowadays, in 2009, still used in formal writing and speech. What happened around 1700 was that the word *oait* ‘ever’ was borrowed from Dutch.¹⁰ Thus we just find the word *oait* in the 18th century. The same applies to its negative counterpart *noait*.

The syntactic distribution of *oait* is presented below, together with the changes compared with the previous period:

(13) Syntactic contexts for *oait* ‘ever’ (1700–1800)

Rhetorical questions	26
Clauses containing a negative DP	35
Clauses introduced by an excluding head	31
(Free) relative clauses	11
Clause negation <i>oait net</i>	27
Non-negative clauses	0

(14) Changes *ea* (1550–1700) to *oait* (1700–1800)

Construction	1550–1700	1700–1800	Significant change
Rhetorical questions	6	26	no
Clauses with a negative DP	5	35	no
Clauses with an excluding head	10	31	no
Relative clauses	14	11	yes: $p < 0.1$
Clause negation	0	27	yes: $p = 0.14$
Non-negative clauses	1	0	no
TOTAL	36	130	

10. This form is nowadays found not only in Standard Dutch but in most dialects as well; for some exceptional cases, see De Vogelaer & Vandenberghe (2006).

Consider first the change involving relatives. Examples were given in (7), which is repeated below for convenience:

(7) (Free) relative clause

a. Free relative, 1755

Joa trogzieke wis het hier ooyt trog toa
 they search.through certainly what here ever through to
sieken is
 search is

“They certainly search through whatever can be searched through.”

b. Relative with nominal antecedent, 1666

Om to rjuechtjen 't wird dat hy æ joe
 For to execute the word which he ever gave

“So as to do whichever command he gave.”

A distinction was drawn between free relatives, which lack a nominal antecedent as in (7a), and relatives having a nominal antecedent, as in (7b). Furthermore, free relatives are introduced by question words (wh-words) in Frisian, whereas nominal relatives are introduced by relative pronouns.¹¹ When an analysis is made of the type of relatives in which *ea* is found, the following facts are found:

- Only 3 relatives are free relatives.
- The other 11 relatives have a nominal antecedent.
- The nominal antecedent is 9x introduced by the definite article, 2x by “all.”

Oait displays a somewhat different behaviour in relative clauses:

- Only 1 relative with *oait* has a nominal antecedent, and that is in fact a pronoun.
- All clauses except one (10) are free relatives.

The table below presents an overview of these results.

(15) Changes *ea* to *oait* in free and nominal relatives

Construction	1550–1700 (<i>ea</i>)	1700–1800 (<i>oait</i>)	Significant change
Free relatives	3	10	no
Nominal relatives	11	1	yes: $p < 0.1$
TOTAL	14	11	

11. In English, relative pronouns are either homophonous with questions words, such as *who* and *which*, or with the complementiser, such as *that*. In Frisian, they are homophonous with topic pronouns (*dy*, *dat*), except for the unchanging relative pronoun *der*, used as subject, object and prepositional complement. This latter relative pronoun is homophonous with the locative pronoun. In the course of the 19th century, it came to be used for prepositional complements only, as in Dutch.

The table makes it clear that *ea* was used more often in relative clauses with a nominal antecedent than in free relatives. For *oait*, the situation is reversed. However, the percentage of free relatives as a proportion of the total number of attestations (36 and 130, cf. Table 14) is 8% for both *ea* and *oait*. This means that the shift within the class of relatives can solely be attributed to the change within the subclass of nominal relatives.

3.4 Discussion of nominal relatives

The presence of polarity items in free relatives is not unusual. Free relatives may have a definite reading (exemplified in “I want to order what he is having”) or a universal reading (“I always order whatever he orders”), see, for example, Jacobsen (1995). Nominal relatives have polarity items when the quantifier of the antecedent of the relative clause is universal, or when the antecedent directly contains a superlative or an indefinite in the scope of negation. In fact, part of our nominal relatives exemplify two of these three contexts:

- (16) Types of nominal relatives
- | | |
|--|---|
| a. Universal quantifier inside the antecedent: | 2 |
| b. Superlative inside the antecedent: | 4 |

The remaining 5 examples all involve a definite determiner, which is peculiar. The remaining examples (apart from 7b) are provided below:

- (17) Nominal relatives with a definite determiner (without superlative)
- a. *In puwck-wondre fen 't jinge de hymmel æ faem*
 a top miracle of the-thing the heaven ever girl
mei beglanzge hie
 with illuminated had
 “a best part of the things heaven ever endowed a girl with”
- b. *Mar, ô, d' rie uwz Heer'ne, Dy Hy æ*
 But o the advice our Lord-GEN who he ever
uwt-erne, Stiet ijne' yvigheyt
 out-spoke stands in-the eternity
 “But O, the advice of our Lord, which he ever communicated, stands for all eternity.”
- c. *d' Yn-swiete paetkerye, Dy muwlke oon muwlck*
 the very-sweet kissing that mouth to mouth
æ flye
 ever joined
 “the kissing supremely sweet, which mouth to mouth ever joined”

- d. *d' Heel' Wrade' het de' Heere' ijn teamm'-twangs*
 The whole world has the Lord in gear-force-GEN
wâd', Mey 't jing' er ea djoeye' æf kriëele
 rule with the-thing there ever played or swarmed
 “The Lord keeps the whole world under the rule of the force of his gear
 and whatever played or swarmed on it.”

Such sentences are ungrammatical in both Modern Frisian and Modern Dutch. The nominal relatives with *ea* are therefore hard to interpret for us. The examples all have a strongly modal flavour, which is more characteristic of a weak free choice interpretation than of negative polarity. The disappearance of this interpretation after 1700 implies that the free choice aspect of the quantifier gets further reduced.

These examples are all found in the baroque language of the Frisian poet Gysbert Japicx. The interpretation of the definite antecedent seems to be universal. It is difficult to decide whether this universal quantification applies to the set of temporal moments referred to by the relative clause or to the interpretation of the nominal head of the relative clause. Consider the (d)-sentence for example. The set of things that played or swarmed on earth *at any moment* will be equivalent to the set of *all* things that played or swarmed on earth. All these sentences share the characteristic that they blur the distinction between quantification over time and quantification over the set of individuals to which the noun refers that is the head of the relative clause. The data available are not fine-grained enough to allow us to trace the historical process by which *ea* became available in nominal relatives, although it may be plausibly hypothesized that it began with its presence in free relatives, already in Old Frisian, which have an unambiguous universal interpretation.

In Modern Frisian, as in Modern Dutch, the meaning expressed in (17a–d) would be rendered by using a universal quantifier *alle* “all” in the antecedent of the relative clause, and by using adverbial particles like *(ek) mar* “also but” in the relative clause, as in the example below:

- (18) Modern Frisian translation of the relative clause of (17b)
Mar o, alle rie, dy't ús Hear (ek) mar joech,
 but o all.the advice which our Lord also but gave
stiet fêst yn alle ivichheid
 stands firm in all eternity

“But O, all advice which our Lord ever gave, stands firm for all eternity.”

Mar is an adverb that is a weak negative quantifier. Modern Dutch uses the same strategy, employing *(ook) maar*. This particle combination *(ook) maar* is involved in the formation of negative polarity items in Dutch and Frisian (for Dutch, see Van der Wouden 1994). It seems, then, that the semantic function of *ea* in relative clauses is

taken over by this adverbial particle combination (see Foolen 1993: 195–204 for some remarks on the history of *maar*).

3.5 Discussion of *oait* with clause negation

The other significant change involves the use of *oait* with clause negation in 18th century Frisian. There are no examples of *ea* with clause negation, whereas there are many examples involving *oait*. An example was given in (8) above. There are 4 different writers in our corpus who use this construction. These are responsible for the 27 occurrences encountered in the corpus. Thus it is a robust phenomenon, which, incidentally, is also found in Early Modern Dutch.

If it is a hypercorrection of double negation (whereby *noait net* becomes *oait net*), then there should be evidence for hypercorrection in prescriptive grammars. However, there were no prescriptive grammars of Frisian at that time. If prescriptivism was at stake, then the influence would have to come through Dutch. In that case, the written Frisian available would then also bear other hallmarks of Dutch prescriptivism, such as the use of accusative case endings. This is not the case, so that this hypothesis is not supported by independent evidence.

Alternatively, *oait* could be analyzed as a maximizer or emphasizer, as in: “I wouldn’t do it in a hundred years/ever” (on maximisers and emphasizers, see Israel 2001). However, the examples involved lack emphasis: they are just instances of ordinary negation. On the other hand, we know that emphasizers may lose their emphasis, such as French *pas*, which developed into regular negation.

What is peculiar is that *oait net* is used, but that we do not encounter the sequence **net oait*. Such examples are ungrammatical in Modern Frisian and Modern Dutch. It is known from the literature that certain polarity items may be excluded in that most negative of all contexts, the context of clause negation (e.g. Van der Wouden 1994: 69ff.): present-day *oait* (Frisian) and *ooit* (Dutch) are examples of that. Presumably, **net oait* is blocked by the form *noait*, but then it is unclear why *noait* fails to block *oait net*, seeing that *oait* became available at the same time as *noait* in Early Modern Frisian.

There is some evidence in support of the fact that *oait* and *noait* could function as emphasizers. Early Modern Dutch and Frisian testify to peculiar examples like the following:

- (19) a. Frisian, 18th century

Wa hat beljibbe noyt oyt za'n dey
Who has lived never ever such.a day
“Whoever lived through such a day!”

- b. Dutch (Bible), 17th century

ick ben oyt ende oyt niet wel ter tale geweest
I am ever and ever not good at language been
“I haven’t been good at speaking.”

The (a) sentence is reminiscent of examples in informal Modern English like “It’s never ever easy.” In Modern Dutch and Modern Frisian, this is ungrammatical:

- (20) a. **Het is nooit oait gemakkelijk*
 It is never ever easy
- b. **It is nea ea maklik* / **It is noait oait maklik*
 It is never ever easy/ It is never ever easy
 “It’s never ever easy.”

Thus, it is conceivable that *noait* and *oait* could function like emphasizes in Early Modern Frisian and Dutch. Apart from the suggestions made above, the precise origin and analysis of this construction in 18th century Frisian is unclear to us, and needs to be further investigated.

3.6 Why did *oait*, *noait* replace *ea*, *nea*?

The question arises why *oait* replaced *ea*. Note that this process is not just a question of frequency since lots of Dutch words, equally frequent, were not borrowed at that time. The influence from Dutch is generally assumed not to be substantial before the twentieth century (e.g. Sjölin 1976:56–57). Besides, most people who spoke Frisian around 1700 spoke it as their first language, and Dutch was really an imperfectly mastered second language until well into the 20th century. On the other hand, people who could write were fluent in Dutch.

It could be supposed that *ea* lacked phonological distinctness, when compared to its rival *oait*. Thus the replacement of *ea* by *oait* would be an instance of reinforcement (Lehmann 2002:20; Hopper & Traugott 2003:31). The idea is that the speaker prefers ease of articulation, whereas the hearer prefers distinctness; so there must be an optimal equilibrium between these two.¹² In the case of *ea*, the equilibrium is disturbed, because, just being a diphthong, it is not distinct enough. *Oait*, on the other hand, is more distinct. Thus the replacement of *ea* by *oait* can be seen as an instance of reinforcement.

At first sight, it seems unlikely that the replacement of *ea* by *oait* is merely an instance of reinforcement. However, there is independent evidence for such a process. In Dutch, the reinforced form *oait* won out against the weaker form *ie*, a process which took place around 1500 (Van der Horst 2008:957). This can also be understood as an instance of reinforcement. Thus the replacement of *ea* by *oait* around 1700 is not an isolated case.

12. For a formal implementation of this idea, see Versloot (2008:277–285).

One thing remains constant throughout the history of West Germanic: the paradigmatic relation between the two words denoting “ever” and “never.” In all cases, the negative member consists of prefixing an *-n* to the positive member, as in English:

- (21) Formula: *n-* + [positive member] = [negative member]
- | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---------------|---|
| <i>n-</i> + <i>ever</i> | = | <i>never</i> | |
| <i>n-</i> + <i>a</i> | = | <i>na</i> | Old Frisian |
| <i>n-</i> + <i>ea</i> | = | <i>nea</i> | Early Modern Frisian (1550–1700) |
| <i>n-</i> + <i>oait</i> | = | <i>noait</i> | Early Modern Frisian and Modern Frisian |
| <i>n-</i> + <i>ooit</i> | = | <i>nooit</i> | Dutch |
| <i>n-</i> + <i>immer</i> | = | <i>nimmer</i> | German |

This paradigmatic relation is preserved in the history of Frisian (and indeed in the history of English, German and Dutch as well), despite the fact that changes affected the meaning and the lexical shape of these elements. Apparently, then, this paradigmatic relationship is more stable than either the meaning or the lexical shape of these elements. This is underlined by the fact that no mixed system arose in Frisian (or elsewhere), that is, a language variety consisting of pairs like [*ea, noait*] or [*oait, nea*]. This shows that morpho-lexical regularities such as the negative *n*-prefix can be very well entrenched in the language.

This suggests to us another factor which may have favoured the use of *oait, noait* over *ea, nea*. Remember that the time adverb *altijd/altyd* became the normal way of expressing universal quantification over time in Frisian and Dutch in the late Middle Ages. This adverb encroached upon the semantics of *ie/ea*, which had been used to express universal quantification over time in Old Frisian and Old and Middle Dutch. In fact, there is not only a morphological paradigm but also a semantic paradigm:

- (22) Quantification scheme

	Negated	Existential	Universal
Old Frisian	<i>na</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>
Frisian 1550–1700	<i>nea</i>	<i>ea</i>	<i>altyd</i>
Frisian after 1700	<i>noait</i>	<i>oait</i>	<i>altyd</i>

We know that the semantic paradigm must be expressed morphologically in view of the stability of the negative prefix *n-*. Interestingly, the system after 1700 shows another morphological property: all three members of the paradigm end in /t/, unlike the paradigm current between 1550 and 1700. This may have been another factor promoting the introduction of *noait* and *oait*. Again, it would also apply to the history of Dutch, where, some 200 years earlier, *ooit* and *nooit* had replaced *ie* and *nie*. In Dutch, there is a relation between the rise of the universal quantifier *altijd* and the spread of the pair *ooit, nooit*, which competed with *ie, nie*. Within Frisian, there was no competition for the pair *ea, nea*. The competition came from Dutch, a language which was

mastered adequately only by that part of the population that could read and write, whereas the others merely had a passive command of it. This may explain why the development in Frisian lags behind for 200 years.

In sum, the introduction of *oait*, *noait* may well be motivated by a grammatical preference for the morphological expression of semantic factors:

- negation is marked by /n/
- the temporal paradigm is marked by /t/

Such preferences will be decisive when there is a choice between two competing pairs to begin with: we are not claiming that all languages will have this system. Furthermore, it seems that cross-linguistically marking of negation is more salient than marking the three members of the system of temporal quantification, seeing that English, for example, marks negation without having a marker for all three members: *ever*, *never*, *always*.

4. Questions and conclusions

In this article, the changes have been charted that took place in the use of the Frisian equivalents of the quantifier meaning “ever.” These changes were described by investigating in which syntactic constructions the quantifier was found. Syntactic construction, in turn, could correlate with the specific meaning of the quantifier. Some of the changes were quite dramatic, such as the wholesale replacement of native *ea* by Dutch *oait*. Other changes were more gradual such as the loss of the meaning “always” in non-negative main clauses, which gradually came to be expressed by the time adverbial *altyd* “always.” On the whole, it seems that the free choice character has disappeared over time, as witnessed by the decrease of *ea* having a universal interpretation in non-negative clauses and, possibly, by its decrease in nominal relatives. Many of the changes raise further questions. Why could *oait* co-occur with negation in Early Modern Frisian but not in Modern Frisian? Likewise the behaviour of *ea* in nominal relative clauses is fascinating, but how did it arise and why did it fail to survive? The present article does not answer such questions, but it is our hope that the description presented here will be instrumental in doing so in future research.

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