Levels, contexts, and domains: back to *maar*

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A recurrent observation in research on particles is their polyfunctionality. Typically, particles contribute meanings which are not exactly the same across contexts. This variation has been labeled as monosemy, polysemy, or heterosemy, depending on the assumed degree of similarity between the different uses.

In my dissertation of 1993, I analyzed the polyfunctionality of the Dutch particle *maar* 'but, only, just' in detail. Besides the modal particle uses of *maar*, I also looked at uses as focus particle (*maar 5* 'only five'), conjunction (*klein maar dapper* ´small but brave'), and interjection (*maar Jan!* 'expression of surprise in relation to Jan').

When I wrote this study in the early 1990s, the idea was prevalent that you had to choose between a monosemic or polysemic/heterosemic description (heterosemy comes into play when different word classes are involved, which is the case for *maar*: conjunction, adverb, interjection). I felt that a monosemic description would not do sufficient justice to the various meaning aspects that are a conventionalized part of the meaning of the particle in its different uses. For example, in *het regende maar* 'it rained on and on', *maar* expresses the long duration of the process plus a negative evaluation of it, which both are meaning aspects that disappear in an abstract, monosemic description of the item *maar*. I thus decided for a 'richer' description, putting the different uses of *maar* in a heterosemic network.

In the past 25 years, new developments in cognitive linguistic theorizing have taken place which make the dilemma of choosing between a monosemic or polysemic analysis less urgent. A central insight of Construction Grammar (as part of Cognitive Linguistics) is that descriptions of linguistic phenomena should take place on different co-existing levels of abstraction. This makes it possible to postulate a general schematic meaning, at the same time adopting more specific lower level descriptions. In fact, I had given such a description already in 1989 for the German particle *ja* (see Foolen 1989, cf. also Alm et al. 2015, who applied the model to the Swedish modal particle *ju*), but I must admit that my 1989 description was not theoretically embedded in something like a constructional framework.

The schematic meaning of *maar* can be characterized as 'p, and not a contextually relevant alternative for p'. The particle is, thus, a two-place operator, taking p in its scope and relating it to a contextually relevant alternative. What exactly constitutes p and what exactly the contextually relevant alternative is, has to be construed by the hearer/reader in a process of pragmatic interpretation, on the basis of the syntactic, textual and situational context.

In different contexts, the schematic meaning is enriched with additional features. Sentence types are important differentiating constructional contexts, but within sentence types, it is useful to make further differentiations. For example, in the declarative sentence *Ik ga maar naar huis* 'I better go home', the first person subject and the action verb play a role in interpreting *maar* in the 'decision domain', implying at the same time that the chosen option of leaving is the dispreferred one. The durative meaning aspect that we signaled in the declarative sentence *Het regende maar* doesn't play a role here.

Besides Construction Grammar, Cognitive Linguistics has developed primarily semantically oriented theories, in which metaphorical projection across domains plays a central role. This part of the theory played already a role in my 1993 analysis, although in a modest way. My analysis of *maar* was partly inspired by Sweetser (1990), who modeled the different uses of English conjunctions (*and, but, or, if*) and modal verbs (*can, must*) with the help of the notion 'domain'. The same lexical item is used in different domains. In her view, the primary domain of use is typically the propositional domain, whereas the other uses are understood as metaphorical projections into more abstract (epistemic, speech act) domains. The different domains are, thus, seen as directionally related: there is a source domain and one or more target domains. This configuration holds more generally for metaphor as we know it for words which conceptualize 'the world'; think of body part terms like

head, arm, foot, which are used for conceptualizations in other domains ('head of an institution', 'head of a linguistic constituent', 'arm of a river', 'foot of a mountain', etc.).

In Cognitive Linguistics, theorizing about domains has developed further in the past 25 years. One of these developments has to do with a stronger focus on domains that play a role in the direct context of language use. We could label research on such phenomena as 'Cognitive-Pragmatic Linguistics' or 'Cognitive Pragmatics'. This development is relevant for the semantic and pragmatic analysis of particles, as the domains that are relevant for their interpretation are not domains in the referential world, but domains in the contextual world of the speech event.

By analyzing particles in this cognitive pragmatic perspective, it has become clear that the contextually relevant domains cannot be restricted to Sweetser's epistemic and speech act domains. In addition, domains defined in terms of speaker and hearer preferences, emotions, and perspectives should be taken into consideration. Take, for example *kom maar binnen* 'do come in', said to someone who hesitates to come into the room of the speaker, and contrast this with *spring maar* 'just jump', said by a sports teacher to a pupil who hesitates to make a challenging jump. In the first case, a permission interpretation arises, in the second example the encouragement meaning is more prominent. The difference clearly has to do with such contextual aspects as speaker and hearer rights with respect to personal space (the speaker's office versus a sports hall), preferences (the hearer's wish to come into the room), fears (the pupil's fear of jumping), the role of the sports teacher (responsibility), etc.

A descriptive framework with levels, contexts, and domains easily opens the way to diachronic studies. Because time will not allow to go into this, I refer to Blühdorn et al (2017), where the relevance of notions like grammaticalization, pragmaticalization, and subjectification for the diachronic development of particles are discussed. To give just one example of how such diachronic reasoning could look like, we can take a short look at the interjectional use of *maar*. Extrapolating Traugott's ideas about unidirectional development from textual to subjective ('subjectification'), the contrastive conjunctional use would be a candidate for source status, whereas the more subjective, emotional, expressive uses of particles are candidates for target status. The exclamative, mirative use of *maar* as in Dutch *Maar Jan!*, is probably a later target development. In my Brabant dialect, the mirative *maar* can also be used 'bare', being confronted with an unexpected situation, and in French the combinations *mais oui* and *mais non* are frequently used. These mirative examples show, that for each language, a precise description of the conventionalized uses stays a necessary part, a schematic meaning in itself can never do the whole job.

Summarizing: What I intend to do in my presentation is to go once again through a number of different uses of *maar*, and to apply Construction Grammar and Cognitive pragmatic domain theory in order to construe (part of) *maar*'s network.

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