

*Bon appétit* in Dutch: one function, many forms.

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Eating is often a social event, a social event that is rife with social conventions and norms (Elias 1939). When people in the Netherlands have lunch or dinner together, there is considerable social pressure to postpone starting to eating until all are seated. The habit of praying before the meal is dying out, but most often, still some kind of formula is uttered by all present to explicitly mark the starting point, and it is part of social education to learn to master the rules and habits of the event. At home and in kindergarten, children are taught either a standard utterance or a tailored variant.

There are quite a number of utterances that are used in this situation. One might borrow French *Bon appétit*, one may use the formula that is common in the family (and possibly only there, cf. de Jong 2012), but there are also a number of native alternatives that can be used. Consider the following constructions with forms of the verb *eten* ‘to eat’.

- (1) *Eet smakelijk* ‘bon appétit’
- (2) *Smakelijk eten* ‘bon appétit’
- (3) *Eet ze* ‘bon appétit’

The construction in (1) combines an imperative form *eet* ‘eat!’ with an adverbially used adjective *smakelijk* ‘tasty, savory’. Using just the imperative without an adverb (or a modal particle, cf. Vismans 1993) is impossible here, as it would be far too directive, harsh, and threatening to the hearer(s) (Broekhuis & Corver 2018). Example (2) combines the very same adverb with the infinitive form, which can be used as a directive as well (Broekhuis & Corver 2018). Again, an adverb such as *smakelijk* is necessary to mitigate the directive force of the verbal form. The variant in (3) is traditionally (Haeseryn et al. 1997) analyzed as an imperative form plus a third person plural non-nominative personal pronoun (‘them’), which again mitigates the imperative force somehow. Alternative analyses have been proposed as well (van der Wouden 2018).

Rather than competing, the variants in (3) live happily together in the speech community (cf. De Smet et al. 2018), together with a great many others; some of the variants tend to get associated with social or regional groups (pictures 1 and 2 show the regional distribution of the variants (1) and (2) above in a large corpus of twitter data). On the other hand, formulas with *smakelijk* are considered to be a breach of good manners in certain circles, as it goes without saying that the food will be enjoyed. But then, other variants are available.

In our presentation, we will elaborate on the linguistic constructions in Dutch that are used to start a meal. We will say more on the division of labor between the variants in terms of geographical and social dimensions, and show once again that “there is more to formulaic sequences than *just* their agreed form, because that form is compulsory associated with an agreed function and context.” (Wray 2002, 73).

### **Selected references**

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- Hendrik De Smet, Frauke D'hoedt, Lauren Fonteyn and Kristel Van Goethem: The changing functions of competing forms: Attraction and differentiation. *Cognitive Linguistics* 2018 prepublication <https://doi.org/10.1515/cog-2016-0025>.
- Norbert Elias: *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*. Basel: Verlag Haus zum Falken 1939.
- Haeseryn, Walter, Kirsten Romijn, Guido Geerts, Jaap de Rooij & Maarten C. van den Toorn. *Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkunst*. 2e druk. Martinus Nijhoff/Wolters Plantyn 1997.
- Jaap de Jong: "Smakelijk". Oude en nieuwe eetspreuken. *Onze Taal* 2012, 80-83.
- Roel Vismans: *Modal Particles in Dutch Directives: A Study in Functional Grammar*. Phd Thesis Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam 1994.
- Ton van der Wouden. Modal particle or emerging inflection? The Dutch 'success imperative' revisited. Submitted 2018.
- Alison Wray: *Formulaic Language and the Lexicon*. Cambridge University Press 2002.

Searched in: 719677596 tweets. From 4/18/2015, 12:00:00 AM until 4/17/2018, 9:23:00 PM.  
Found 58882 tweets with "eet smakelijk" (0.008%)

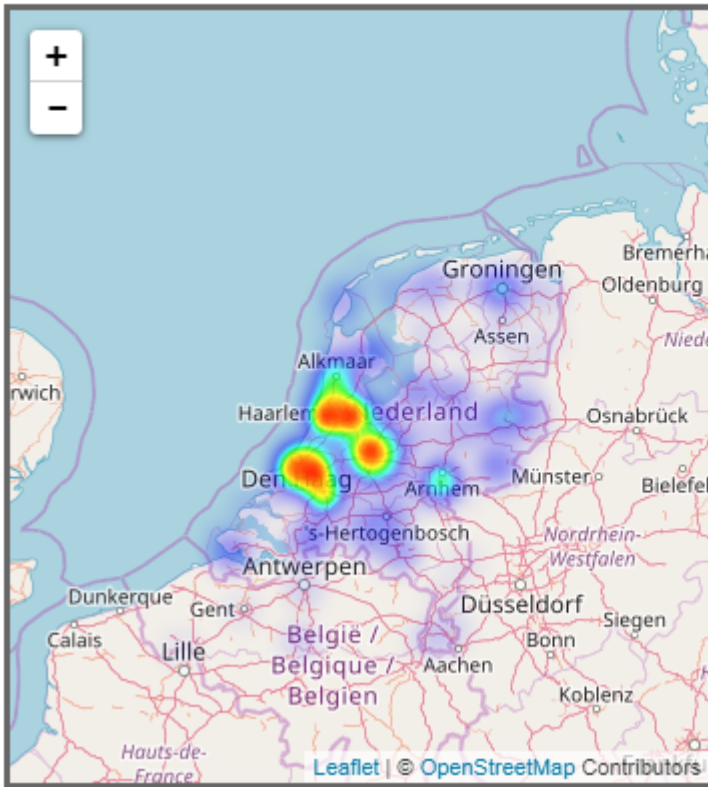


Figure 1

Searched in: 719677596 tweets. From 4/18/2015, 12:00:00 AM until 4/17/2018, 9:23:00 PM.  
Found 17242 tweets with "smakelijk eten" (0.002%)

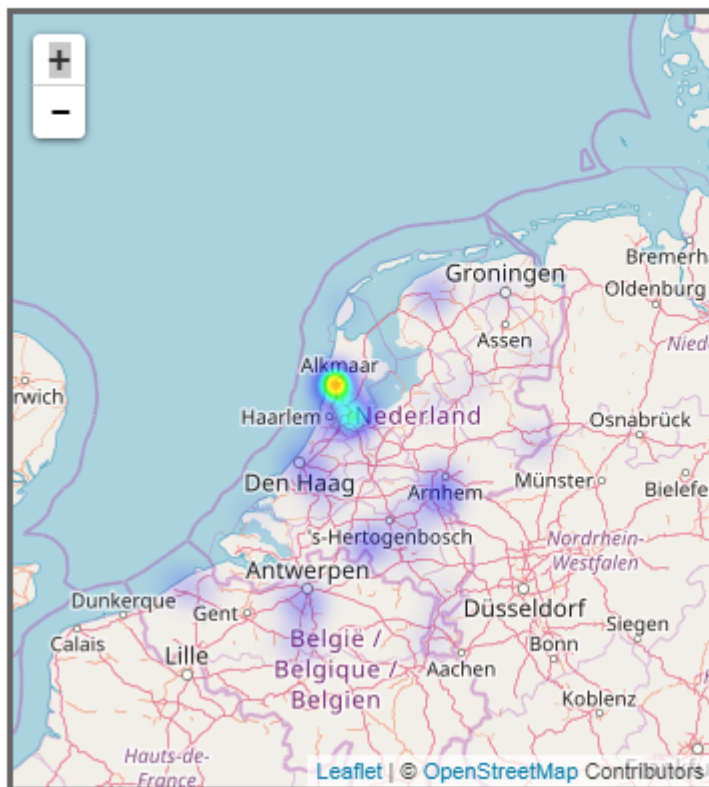


Figure 2