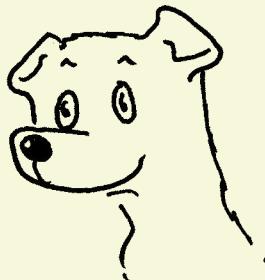


Lijntje Pronk

Speaking Dutch like a Native



*Best moeilijk
zeker?*



*Nee joh, niks
aan!*

A Quick Guide to Colloquial Dutch

Speaking Dutch Like a Native

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Lijntje Pronk

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Eentje

/'entjə/ or ['ençə] one, just one

The diminutive ending *-je* is not just added to nouns, but also to some numerals. The most common numeral that can be turned into a diminutive is *een*, forming *eentje*. *Eentje* is normally used to say that you want just one of the items previously mentioned. *Eentje* is not used in counting and is never followed by a noun.

Wil je twee klontjes suiker? Nee hoor, *eentje* is genoeg.' — 'Would you like two sugar lumps?' 'No thanks, just one is enough.'

Hij heeft twee fietsen en ik heb er maar eentje. — He's got two bikes and I've only got one.

Wil je nog een koekje? Nou, nog *eentje* dan.' — 'Would you like another biscuit?' 'Well all right, just one more then.'

In all the examples above, *eentje* can be replaced with *een* with practically no change in meaning. The only difference between the two is that *eentje* is not used in formal writing.

Diminutive forms are often used to indicate that something is small or insignificant or to express affection. *Eentje*, however, can be used for objects of any size or significance:

Zijn alle olifanten overgestoken? Nee, daar komt er nog *eentje*.' — 'Have all the elephants now crossed the road?' 'No, there's another one coming.'

On Your Own

Eentje is also used in the expression *in je eentje*, 'on your own'. A more informal equivalent is *in je uppie*, 'on your tod'.

Ik ga in m'n eentje. — I'm going on my own.

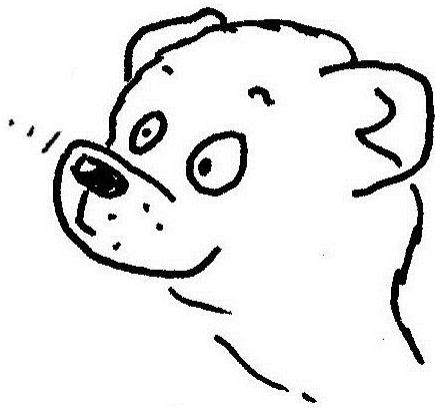
Hij heeft het allemaal in z'n eentje opgegeten. — He ate it all up himself.

Ze woont al jaren in haar uppie. — She's been living on her tod for years.

The plural form *in hun eentje* normally means 'each on their own' but it may also — illogically — mean 'by themselves':

Zij gaan in hun eentje. — They're going by themselves.

The phrase *met z'n tweeën/drieën/vieren* etc. means 'two/three/four of them'. In this phrase, diminutive forms can be used as well: *met z'n tweetjes/drietjes/viertjes*. This is more informal and not commonly used from *vijf* onwards (*met z'n vijven/zessen* etc.).



'Dat ruikt verschrikkelijk lekker, zeg!'

Heel and Wel

Heel and *erg* can be combined — in this order only — to mean ‘very very’: *heel erg mooi* — very very beautiful. *Erg*, *heel* and *heel erg* can also be combined with *wel* to mean ‘a bit too much’:

Dat boek is wel erg dik. — That book is a bit too fat.

Dat is wel een erg groot stuk taart. — That piece of cake is a bit too big.

Even

/'evə/ just

The Dutch word *even* and the English word ‘even’ may look the same but they have completely different meanings. The English ‘even’ is *zelfs* in Dutch. The Dutch *even* usually means ‘just’ or ‘briefly’ (its other meanings include ‘even’ as opposed to ‘odd’; ‘equally’; ‘a bit’).

The word *even* is used a lot in informal Dutch. You cannot speak Dutch for a day and not use *even*. The reason for this is not so much that there is a constant need to indicate the duration of activities, but that *even* is also used as a modal particle to adjust the tone of a sentence. *Even* softens the tone of orders, questions, and announcements by implying that the activity mentioned does not

require much time or effort. This has the effect of making questions and orders less direct or pushy. Statements made by the speaker about their own actions take on a slight sense of self-effacement when *even* is used.

Wacht even, hoor. — Hang on a minute.

Kun je me even de krant aangeren? — Can you hand me the paper, please?

Ik ben even naar de supermarkt. — I'm just off to the supermarket.

The Dutch modal particles often occur in strings of two or three (sometimes four, rarely five), and *even* often pairs up with *eens*. *Eens even* has roughly the same meaning as *even* on its own. (Note that *eveeneens* is the formal equivalent of *ook*, ‘also’.) In casual speech, *eens even* is often pronounced just like the numeral *zeven*, /'sevə/ or /ə'sevə/.

Kom eens even hier. — Come here a moment.

Nou moet je eens even luisteren. — Now, listen to me, for once. (expression of irritation)

Eventjes and Effe

Even has two variations. One of these is *eventjes*, which takes the form of a plural diminutive (like *zachtjes*, ‘gently’ or ‘softly’, and *netjes*, ‘neatly’). The difference in meaning between *even* and *eventjes* is very subtle, if not non-existent. It could be argued that *eventjes* is an even more modest form or that it is simply more informal, but any native speaker of Dutch would be hard-pressed to articulate the exact difference between *wacht even* and *wacht eventjes*.

Another commonly used form of *even* is *effe*, /'efə/. This is in fact the older, medieval form of *even*, but has recently become its very informal equivalent. As its pronunciation is the same as the plural form of the letter f ('two f's' is *twee effen*), the word is often written *ff* in informal writing, such as text messages and online chat.

Flauwекul

/'flauwə'kyl/ nonsense

Flauwекul consists of two words: *flauw* and *kul*. Although mostly used in this combination, *kul* can also be used on its own to mean ‘nonsense’. In the Middle Ages, *kul* meant testicle. By the eighteenth century, it had developed into the

Graag

/χrɑːg/ please; to like (in combination with a verb)

No matter how harsh this tongue-twister for many learners of Dutch may sound, the word *graag* is used to sound more polite when responding to requests. In answers to questions, *ja graag* is the equivalent of ‘yes, please’:

‘Wil je een kopje thee?’ *Ja, graag.* — ‘Would you like a cup of tea?’ ‘Yes, please.’

‘Zal ik de deur even voor je openhouden?’ *Ja, graag.* — ‘Shall I hold the door open for you?’ ‘Yes, please.’

The polite phrase for a negative answer to the questions above is *nee, dank je* or *nee, dank u*. Not impolite but less elegant is *nee, bedankt*. The phrase *graag gedaan*, literally ‘done with pleasure’, is what you can say when someone thanks you (‘you’re welcome’). *Graag of niet* means ‘take it or leave it’.

Graag is also used to express a fondness for a particular activity, or to talk about preferences when making polite requests:

Ik ga graag wandelen. — I like to go walking.

Hij leest graag Roald Dahl. — He likes to read Roald Dahl.

Hij wil graag mee. — He’d like to come along.

Ik zou graag de groene willen. — I’d like to have the green one.

Graag does not have comparative and superlative forms: *grager* and *graagst* do not exist. Instead, the forms *liever* and *liefst* are used:

Ik ga liever op vakantie naar Italië dan naar Spanje, maar het liefst blijf ik gewoon thuis. — ‘I’d rather go on holiday to Italy than to Spain, but I’d like nothing better than to simply stay home.’

Haast

/hast/ almost

Haast is not only a noun meaning ‘hurry’ but also a synonym of *bijna*, meaning ‘almost’ or ‘nearly’. *Haast* is more informal than *bijna*.

Het heeft hem haast drie dagen gekost. — It took him nearly three days.

Gratis je auto in het centrum parkeren? Dat gaat haast niet. — Parking in the town centre for free? That’s almost impossible.

Hoor

/hor/ makes the preceding sentence sound more resolute or more friendly and reassuring.

Hoor is in fact the imperative form of *horen*, ‘to hear’, but when tacked onto the end of a sentence *hoor* has nothing to do with hearing. It certainly does not have the same meaning as ‘hear, hear!’ in English, the equivalents of which are *precies*, *inderdaad* or *helemaal mee eens* in Dutch.

In most cases, *hoor* is used to stress that what you have just said is really true. Tacking *hoor* onto the end of the sentence is like saying ‘believe me’ or ‘trust me’, or more resolutely ‘make no mistake’.

Hij gaat je niet echt natspetteren, hoor. — He’s not really going to splash you.

Die soep is lekker, hoor. — That soup really is tasty.

In instructions and recommendations, *hoor* also indicates that the speaker personally cares that the instruction or recommendation is taken seriously:

Goed uitzoeken, hoor! — Be careful!

Wel je wekker zetten, hoor! — Don’t forget to set your alarm clock!

Ja hoor, Nee hoor, Momentje hoor

In response to a question, *hoor* is mainly used to add some friendliness to *ja* or *nee* and other short responses, which on their own sound rather curt. *Ja hoor* may be rendered as ‘yes, sure’, ‘yes, that’s correct’ or ‘yes, please’. *Nee hoor* may mean ‘certainly not’, ‘no that’s not correct’ or ‘no thanks’.

Wil je me even helpen? Ja, hoor. — ‘Can you give me a hand?’ ‘Yes, sure.’

Klopt het dat je gaat verhuizen? Nee, hoor. — ‘Is it true that you’re going to move away?’ ‘No, I’m not moving anywhere.’

Momentje, hoor. — Hang on a minute.

Ja ja

If someone says *ja ja* in response to what you are saying, this does not necessarily mean that they strongly agree with you. If *ja ja* is pronounced in a careless way, it may mean that they are listening to what you are saying and taking it in, without either expressing agreement or disagreement. However, if the second *ja* is pronounced at a lower pitch than the first one, it is an expression of disbelief:

Ik heb net 2 miljoen gewonnen in de loterij.’ Ja ja, dat zei je vorig jaar ook.’ — ‘I just won 2 million in the lottery.’ ‘Really? You said that last year?’

Tja

Tja – or *tja* – is derived from *ja* but it is used for expressing doubt or hesitation, usually in response to a question:

Is hij te vertrouwen?’ Tja, ik weet het niet.’ — ‘Is he to be trusted?’ ‘I don’t know.’

Tja can also be used to express resignation:

Tja, zo gaan die dingen. — Well, it’s just one of those things.



‘Tja, ik weet het eigenlijk ook niet.’

Yes

Like many loanwords, *yes* is not used in exactly the same way in Dutch as it is in English. In Dutch, *yes* is not normally used as an affirmative response but as an expression of enthusiasm or triumph:

Yes, we hebben gewonnen! — Yes! We won!

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