A diachronic study of the negative polarity item *syn leven* ‘his life > ever’ in West Frisian between 1550 and 1800.
Abstract

This article investigates the distribution of the negative polarity item syn leven (lit. his life) ‘ever’ between 1550 and 1800 in West Frisian on the basis of the Frisian Language Corpus. Phonological and syntactic evidence is presented in order to argue that the expression was borrowed from Dutch. An overview is presented of the syntactic contexts in which it is found. These contexts are characteristically contexts in which negative polarity items are found. The distribution of syn leven is shown to conform only partly to Haspelmath’s (1991) theory of the semantic map. Furthermore, it is investigated to what extent the original expression syn leven was grammaticalized as a negative polarity item. Its distribution is compared to that of the near synonyms and rival expressions ea and oait ‘ever’, which turn out to have a broader context of usage. It is argued that syn leven failed to become the unmarked way of expressing the semantic content ‘ever’ for syntactic, semantic and sociolinguistic reasons.*

Keywords: negative polarity, grammaticalization, semantic map, indefinite pronoun, Early Modern Frisian

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1. INTRODUCTION. 1.1. OUTLINE. This article investigates some of the changes that took place in the use of the construction syn leven/libben (lit. ‘his life’) ‘ever’ in West Frisian between 1550 and 1800. Syn leven/libben (lit. ‘his life’) ‘ever’ will henceforth be abbreviated as SL. A global description will be presented of the variation involved in its usage. As will be seen, some of the variation targets the lexical shape of the construction. The outline of this article is as follows.

- Section 2 deals with the question of how Frisian acquired this construction.
- Section 3 charts the syntactic distribution of this expression, and argues that its distribution identifies it as an NPI (NEGATIVE POLARITY ITEM) and that its distribution impressionistically conforms to the theory of the SEMANTIC MAP proposed by Haspelmath (1997).
- Section 4 investigates to what extent SL was grammaticalized as an NPI. It compares its distribution to that of the unmarked quantifiers ea and oait, the near synonyms for SL.

The proposed analysis of the construction’s history is multidisciplinary in its scope, combining insights from syntax, semantics, phonology, and sociolinguistics.

1.2. DATA. Our data are taken from West Frisian. Frisian is a language family consisting of three minority languages: North Frisian (on the west coast of Germany near the Danish border), Sater Frisian (in Saterland in the northwest of Germany, close to Oldenburg), and West Frisian. West Frisian is a minority language spoken in the province of Frysln in the north of the Netherlands. In the early Middle Ages, Frisian was spoken in the coastal area between the river Weser (near the city of Bremen) and the IJ (near Amsterdam). For sociopolitical reasons, part of the population switched to Low Saxon in the course of history, which explains why Sater Frisian is separated from West Frisian by an area in which Low Saxon is spoken. Sater Frisian is the only surviving descendant of East Frisian, which was spoken in Germany west of the River Weser. North Frisian came into existence after two waves of migration in the 8th and 11th centuries from the area in Germany where East Frisian was spoken (Århammar 2001). For more information about the history of the three branches of the Frisian language family, see the relevant articles in Munske’s (2001) Handbook of Frisian Studies.

Our data stem from the period 1550-1800. This period used to be referred to as Middle Frisian, but nowadays the term Early Modern Frisian tends to be preferred; on the periodization of Frisian, see De Haan 2001 and Versloot 2004. The source of our data is the
Frisian Language Corpus, a corpus of which a beta version is available on the Internet. It consists of written Frisian from between 1300 and 2000 as well as a sprinkling of runic Frisian.

The Corpus Early Modern Frisian (1550-1800) contains about a million tokens. It has been tagged for all types of agreement, and the words have been brought under lemmas as well. Various spellings of the same word can be inspected; certain collocational properties, especially for verbs, have been made explicit, and various members of the same inflectional paradigm can be researched. Furthermore, information as to the source is available, such as author, date, dialect, and so on. In short, the subcorpus has been extensively annotated with syntactic, semantic, and bibliographical information. It contains all the Early Modern Frisian that has survived the test of time.

2. HOW DID FRISIAN ACQUIRE THE CONSTRUCTION? The quantifying construction syn leven consists of the noun leven ‘life’, preceded by the possessive pronoun. Interestingly, the construction comes in two forms. It can either be built around the noun leven or around the noun libben.

The noun leven exhibits phonological characteristics of Dutch. The letter v, here representing the phoneme /v/, does not occur in intervocalic position in native words in Early Modern Frisian. West Germanic /β/, a voiced bilabial fricative, generally became /v/ in Old Frisian (1250-1550). It was vocalized to /w/ in intervocalic position and subsequently absorbed in the preceding vowel, creating diphthongs or long vowels. West Germanic /b/ survived as a single consonant. It is also found, after degemination, in examples like libben. As a result of these developments (cf. Siebs 1901:1266ff), intervocalic /v/ was absent in native words in Frisian. This pattern was sometimes obscured by the operation of analogy and by the introduction of loanwords which were sometimes slow to adapt to Frisian phonology due to the influence of Dutch. As a result, there are only a few Early Modern Frisian cases in which an intervocalic /v/ is found such as leven, wiven, i.e. ‘wives, women’. These can plausibly be argued to be due to Dutch influence for the following two reasons. They are homophonous to Early Modern Dutch leven, wiven, and they have competitors such as libben and the diphthongized variant wijuen, which do exhibit Frisian vocalism.

The following facts can be gleaned from a study of the frequency of SL in the Corpus Early Modern Frisian. The construction with the meaning ‘ever’ occurs 64 times. The numbers for syn leven versus syn libben are as follows.
Use of the nouns *leven* and *libben* in the SL construction

POSS PRONOUN + *leven* ‘ever’ : 28 x
POSS PRONOUN + *libben* ‘ever’ : 36 x

However, the noun *libben* can also be used outside this construction in its literal meaning ‘life’ as in sentences like ‘She has a wonderful life’, whereas the noun *leven* is exclusively found in this SL construction. A count was also made of how often *leven* and *libben* are found in the corpus, if they are not used in the SL construction.

Use of the nouns *leven* and *libben* outside the SL construction

*leven* ‘life’ : 0 x
*libben* ‘life’ : 409 x

What this shows is that *syn leven* ‘ever’ was indeed borrowed from Dutch, and that the word *leven* ‘life’ as such was not borrowed, but rather the construction *syn leven* as a whole, tied to the meaning ‘ever’. Apparently, this didn’t affect the distribution of the Frisian lexical item *libben* in its meaning ‘life’. The fact that a construction as a whole was borrowed with a specific semantic interpretation is a case in point for frameworks such as construction grammar (Goldberg 1995, 2006, Verhagen 2007, among others) and cognitive grammar (Langacker 1987, 1991, among others), which take constructions to be basic elements of grammar having psychological reality.

What then is the relationship between the two constructions *syn leven* and *syn libben*?

The chronology of the two variants throws light on this question.

Oldest attestations

*Syn leven*: 1614, 1641, 1675

*Syn libben*: 1671, 1675

These facts point to a scenario in which *syn leven* was first borrowed from Dutch. Later some speakers of Frisian brought it in line with Frisian phonology by changing the word *leven* to *libben*. However, both forms continued to exist side by side, and there are even examples of one and the same writer using both constructions.

The construction *syn leven* thus came into existence as a borrowing from Dutch, which was later given a Frisian form to bring it into line with Frisian phonology, thus creating the
variant syn libben. In the next section, the distribution of the construction in Early Modern Frisian will be examined in detail.

3. SL as an NPI. 3.1. Negative polarity. NPIs are closely related to Free Choice Items (FCIs). There is terminological disputation among semanticists about the definition of these two terms (cf. Giannakidou 2001, 2002, and the references given there), which need not concern us here. The question whether SL can be an FCI is discussed in Section 3.3. Section 3.2 argues that its distribution identifies SL as an NPI. Section 3.4 discusses the relevance of Haspelmath’s (1997) theory of semantic maps to the problem of understanding the syntactic distribution of SL.

Negative polarity items characteristically occur in negative sentences, as in 4a below.

(4) a. Nobody has ever heard of them again.
    b. * I have ever heard of them again.

In 4a, the negative constituent in subject position, nobody, licenses the negative polarity item ever. These examples are straightforward, but NPIs also occur in sentence types that cannot directly be characterized as negative, such as rhetorical questions.

(5) a. Dick running for president? Who has ever heard of him?
    b. Dick running for president? Nobody has ever heard of him.

The negative character of rhetorical questions as in 5a can be brought out by a paraphrase as in 5b above. The formal definition of the set of contexts in which NPIs are found is a subject of ongoing debate among semanticists, especially those working within the framework of Generalized Quantifier Theory (see Ladusaw 1979; Zwarts 1981, 1995; Van der Wouden 1994; Giannikidou 2001, 2002; and others). They are searching for a definition that exhaustively covers the semantic contexts in which NPIs are found. They have convincingly argued that the contexts in which NPIs are found are, roughly, monotone decreasing, but they have not yet been able to refine the theory of generalized quantifiers in such a way that differences among several NPIs can be accommodated in a generally accepted manner.
3.2. SL is an NPI. Negative polarity items have a restricted syntactic distribution, which holds true for SL as well. In Early Modern Frisian, all occurrences of this construction occur in the following syntactic environments:

- Clauses with sentence negation
- Rhetorical questions
- Comparative relatives
- Exclamatives
- Following the universal quantifier *all*

Two examples of each of these construction types are given below.

(6) Clause with negation
(6a) Goenacht mijn lieve Hoonne, mijn leven sioegh ick dy neat weer.
    good.night my dear dog my life see I you not again
    ‘Good night, my sweet dog, never in my life will I see you again.’
(6b) Dat giet zijn leven net goed!
    that goes his life not good
    ‘That will never end well’

(7) Rhetorical question
(7a) Wa het zijn libben herd fen socke botte dingen?
    who has his life heard of such terrible things
    ‘Who has ever heard of such terrible things?’
(7b) Heste dijn libben zok foelbekjen wol heard?
    have.2SG your life such foul.speak indeed heard
    ‘Have you ever heard such foul speech?’

(8) Comparative relative
(8a) It is zok maol praat az ik mijn leven heard hab!
    it is such crazy talk as I my life heard have
    ‘It is such crazy talk as I have never heard before.’
(8b) Hij joeg mij zokke eermhartige en leave wudden,
    he gave me such tender and sweet words
    az ik mijn leven fen him hân hab.
as I my life from him had have

‘He gave me such tender and sweet words as I had never received from him before.’

(9) Exclamative

(9a) Nou hab ik mijn leven! … hoe bijtinke dij Minschen ‘t!
now have I my life … how think those people it

‘Well upon my soul! … How do those people come up with it!’

(9b) Wa het sijn libben, sjugh uws Rinse
who has his life see our Rinse
begint om boostgjen nu to tinsen.
begins of marrying now to think

‘Upon my soul! Look here! Our Rinse is thinking of marrying.

(10) Following the universal quantifier all

(10a) Wa iensen stelt Is all zijn leuen ien tieeff.
who once steals is all his life a thief

‘Once a thief, always a thief.’

(10b) Ven sokke lieuwe sil ik al mijn libben spijë.
of such people shall I al my life vomit

‘Such people always make me sick.’

It is not surprising that an NPI like syn leven/libben is found in sentences with a negation. Correspondingly, it is absent in plain, affirmative sentences. Rhetorical questions are questions that imply a negative answer. In that sense, it comes as no surprise that negative polarity items may occur in them. There are also a few examples of the construction occurring in comparative relatives. This may seem surprising, but note that the clause in 8a has a negative implication that may be paraphrased as: ‘I never heard such crazy talk in all my life.’ The same applies to 8b. For the fourth category, exclamatives, establishing a link with negation is less obvious. These exclamatives express a strong emotion of surprise; possibly, the link with negation is a negative implication like ‘I would not have expected this’, but this is not straightforward. In the fifth category, the construction occurs as the complement to the universal quantifier all. This is not a syntactic environment that is intuitively negative, but it is monotone decreasing in the sense of generalized quantifier theory. Correspondingly, it licenses entailments about subsets (just like negation does): for example, a phrase like ‘all boys laughed’ entails that all small boys laughed, all naughty boys
laughed, and so on. The table below lists the frequencies of the five types of syntactic environment cross-classified for *syn leven* and *syn libben.*

Table 1. The distribution of SL in syntactic contexts

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<th></th>
<th><em>syn leven</em></th>
<th><em>syn libben</em></th>
<th><strong>totals</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clauses with negation</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rhetorical questions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>comparative relatives</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>exclamatives</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>after universal quantifier</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>totals</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both variants occur in the same types of syntactic environments. The differences in the numbers are not significant, except for the rhetorical questions. *Syn libben* occurs significantly more often in rhetorical questions than *syn leven.* It is unclear why this difference exists between the two variants. If *syn libben* is ‘more Frisian’ than *syn leven*, although both belong to the Frisian language, then the use of rhetorical questions could be more characteristic of (spoken) Frisian than of Frisian influenced by (written) Dutch. In the next section, we will investigate whether SL is a free choice item (FCI).

### 3.3. Free choice item? 

It could also be claimed that SL is a free choice item (FCI). FCIs have the property that they can occur in certain non-negative contexts, such as the word ‘any’ does in the following examples.

(11) a. Pick any card you want.
    b. Anything he does he does well.
    c. You can come anytime.
    d. Anytime is snack time.

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’. A free choice item can be very
close in meaning to a universal quantifier such as *every.* No stand is taken here on the issue of the formal definition of these items.

NPIs can be distinguished from FCIs on the basis of their syntactic distribution. NPIs cannot occur in affirmative clauses such as 11 above. The question arises as to whether SL could be used as an FCI, like English *any.* In our corpus, we found no cases where SL occurred in non-negative sentences. This does not prove with any certainty that SL could not be used as an FCI. After all, it is conceivable that the frequency of SL as an FCI was too low to be visible in our corpus, which contains all the Frisian that has survived the test of time. Hence, we can only conclude that if SL was used as an FCI, its frequency was lower than when used as an NPI.

Furthermore, it may be added that SL can still be used as an NPI in Modern Frisian. Nowadays it takes the form of a PP with *fan* ‘of’. Below we have constructed four Modern Frisian examples, each illustrating a separate syntactic context.

(12) Clause with negation

Hy wol fan syn leven net yn Ljouwert wenje.
he wants of his life not in Ljouwert live
‘He doesn’t ever want to live in Ljouwert.’

(13) Rhetorical question

Wa hat fan syn leven heard fan sokke nuvere dingen?
who has of his life heard of such strange things
‘Who has ever heard of such strange things?’

(14) Exclamative

Wel haw ik fan myn leven!
well have I of my life
‘Upon my soul!’

(15) Universal quantifier

Wa’t ien kear stelt, is al syn libben in dief.
who one time steals is al his life a thief
‘Once a thief, always a thief.’

However, if SL could be used as an FCI, then this use did not survive into Modern Frisian, that is, it is not possible to construct examples in which SL functions as an FCI, as in the ungrammatical examples below.
(16a) *Meist dyn leven komme.
    may.2SG your life come
    ‘You can come anytime.’

(16b) *Syn leven is snackleven.
    his life is snack.life
    ‘Anytime is snack time.’

(16a) is constructed on the analogy with (11c), (16b) analogous to (11d), showing that FCI use of SL is ungrammatical in Modern Frisian. To sum up, if SL could be used as an FCI in Early Modern Frisian, then instances of such use do not occur in our corpus, nor have they survived into Modern Frisian.

3.4. SEMANTIC MAPS AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF SL. The distribution of SL is such that it is found in a restricted set of syntactic constructions: in clauses with negation, in rhetorical questions, in exclamatives, in comparative relatives, and following the universal quantifier. The question arises as to whether this is an arbitrary set of syntactic constructions or whether they have something in common. A theory of the relationship between syntactic constructions is presented in Haspelmeth 1997. Haspelmath’s theory is designed as an explanation of the various functions of indefinite pronouns in various languages. These functions are often correlated with constructions, and it is therefore important that the uses of the indefinite pronoun are well defined, or that it is made clear in which constructions an indefinite pronoun is found. Haspelmath illustrates a number of uses of indefinite pronouns by means of the following sentences.

(17) Specific, known to speaker:
    Somebody called while you were away: Guess who!

(18) Specific, unknown to speaker:
    I heard something, but I couldn’t tell what sound it was.

(19) Irrealis non-specific:
    Please try somewhere else.

(20) Question:
    Did anybody tell you anything about it?12

(21) Conditional:
If you see **anything**, tell me immediately.

(22) Indirect negation:

I don’t think that **anybody** knows the answer.

(23) Comparative

In Freiburg the weather is nicer than **anywhere** in Germany.

(24) Direct negation:

**Nobody** knows the answer.

(25) Free choice

**Anybody** can solve this simple question.

The predictions from Haspelmath’s theory take the form of implicational universals. Basically, his claim is that the various functions of a given pronoun form a non-interrupted continuum, that is, they are adjacent in the map. Hence, if a pronoun has function 17 and 19, it must also have function 18. However, a given function can also have three neighbors. For example, the neighbors of 20 in Haspelmath’s semantic map are: 19, 21, 22. The implicational relationships between constructions/functions are given in the semantic map below (Haspelmath 1997:4 ff). The map is a way of expressing which constructions differ minimally from each other. In the second map below, gray shading has been used to mark the uses in which SL can be found in Early Modern Frisian.

Figure 1. The semantic map of functions of the indefinite pronoun.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>17 Specific, known to speaker</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>18 Specific, unknown to speaker</td>
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<td>19 Irrealis, non-specific</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20 Question</td>
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<td>22 Indirect negation</td>
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<td>24 Direct negation</td>
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</table>
Figure 2. Uses of SL on Haspelmath’s map, marked in gray.

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<th>17 Specific, known to speaker</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 Specific, unknown to speaker</td>
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<td>24 Direct negation</td>
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</table>

It can be gleaned from the map of SL that its uses almost conform to Haspelmath’s generalization. The missing link, so to speak, is the absence of examples of indirect negation. However, this may well be due to the fact that our corpus is small, along with the fact that the construction of indirect negation is not very frequent as compared to its neighboring constructions. For Modern Frisian, it is marginally possible to use SL in a sentence with indirect negation.

(26) ? Ik hie net toch dat ik fan myn leven winne soe!
        I had not thought that I of my life win would
‘I hadn’t thought that I would ever win.’

Thus the absence of examples like 26 in Early Modern Frisian may be due to the size of our corpus and the infrequency of the construction of indirect negation. However, there is another problem with the semantic map as well. It was noted that SL is also found in exclamatives and following the universal quantifier, and these uses are not represented in Haspelmath’s map. Of course, we could view the exclamative use, which represents a high-degree reading, as a special case of the comparative use, but it is not clear whether such an extension of the
notion ‘comparative’ is warranted, nor is it clear whether exclamatives always pattern with comparatives. As for the use of SL following a universal quantifier, it is not clear how this should be represented in Haspelmath’s semantic map. Thus, it seems that the use of SL only partly and impressionistically conforms to Haspelmath’s semantic map generalization, and that a further evaluation of Haspelmath’s proposal depends on how he would treat exclamatives and universal quantification. However, it must be conceded that the type of approach which Haspelmath proposes is attractive, since it relates constructions to each other on the basis of semantic or cognitive features such as specific/unspecific and so on. We haven’t discussed this aspect of his proposal, but it would certainly be good to have a theory that reveals something about the underlying cognitive building blocks of various constructions, and their degree of similarity. Such a theory could predict in which order the extension of the use of the indefinite pronoun will target various constructions. In defense of Haspelmath, it must be noted that SL is, strictly speaking, not an indefinite pronoun, at least not with respect to its form, although its meaning comes close to that of an indefinite pronoun of time that is used as an NPI. It is therefore all the more surprising that SL seems to fit Haspelmath’s map reasonably well, with the provisos that were noted in this section. To sum up, this section shows that Haspelmath’s theory of the semantic map can only partly accommodate the distribution of SL. In the next section, we will discuss the question of how SL was semantically grammaticalised as a NPI, and why it wasn’t morphologically grammaticalised as a single word, and why it didn’t become the unmarked way of expressing the semantic notion ‘ever’.


Literal expressions can become quantificational or functional by a process of semantic abstraction (e.g. Lehmann 2002:1, who cites Von Schlegel 1818:28 as one of the first linguists to formulate this idea; see also Postma 1995 for the role of constructions in causing an otherwise literal expression to receive a quantificational interpretation or to be interpreted as an NPI). Such a process, in which ambiguity and reanalysis play a role, may be seen as a step in the process of the grammaticalization of a lexical item towards a functional or quantificational destination (on reanalysis, see for example Harris and Campbell 1995:50ff). The literal meaning of *syn leven/libben* ‘his life’ implies animate creatures having a certain life span. However, by metaphorical extension, it can also be applied to objects, as in the sentence: This chair had a short life. This sentence still entails some notion of life span, which is metaphorically applied to inanimate objects. In its NPI usage, SL has become
restricted to negative contexts, whereas its metaphorical extension to inanimate subjects is not thus restricted, showing that these two processes must be considered distinct steps in the process of semantic abstraction. It is hard to pinpoint the steps in the process by which a phrase develops into an NPI, but it may well be that the universal quantifier is instrumental in associating SL with negative polarity. As mentioned earlier, the oldest occurrences of SL feature its use following the universal quantifier. An example is repeated below as 27.

(27) Wa iensent stelt Is all zijn leven een dieven.
  who once steals is all his life a thief
  ‘Once a thief, always a thief.’

In this sentence, the universal quantifier applied to SL may have the literal meaning ‘for all his life’, but it may also have the more abstract meaning ‘always’. Furthermore, the universal quantifier is monotone decreasing with respect to its complement, which in this example is SL. Hence, this use of SL will characteristically associate it with a monotone decreasing environment. This may easily lead language learners to the hypothesis that SL is an NPI, which, as a result, is used in other monotone decreasing environments as well, such as rhetorical questions and negated clauses. Positive evidence for this scenario is lacking, apart from the fact that the oldest occurrences of SL are found in the company of the universal quantifier. However, the scenario ties in with what we know about semantic abstraction and the distribution of NPIs. In the next section, SL is shown to display some other signs of being grammaticalized as an NPI, apart from its distribution.

4.2. SIGNS OF THE GRAMMATICALIZATION OF SL AS AN NPI IN FRISIAN. The interpretation of a phrase, literal or quantificational, may be signaled in various ways. Hoeksema (2005) draws attention to the fact that the phrase in years has become an expression of high degree for time in negative contexts. This is illustrated by the sentences below.

(28a) He hasn’t been home in years.
(28b) *He has been home in years.
(28c) He has been home for years.

The semantics of these two phrases are quite different, which is due to the NPI character of the phrase in years. Use as an NPI is signaled in this case by the preposition in. To escape
negative polarity, a different preposition must be chosen, as in the 28c example. A similar contrast occurs in Modern Frisian in the case of the expression *fan syn libben/leven*, ‘of his life’; remember that the Modern Frisian equivalent of SL features the preposition *fan*, ‘of’. *Syn libben/leven* has its literal meaning in cases where it is combined with the preposition *yn*, ‘in’, whereas it has its quantificational interpretation as an NPI in cases where it combines with the preposition *fan*, ‘of’. This distinction can be illustrated by two systematic contrasts. When combining with *yn* ‘in’, it can occur in affirmative sentences in Modern Frisian, but when combining with *fan* ‘of’, it cannot.

(29a) Hja hat it twa kear yn har libben meimakke.
    she has it two time in her life experienced
    ‘She has experienced it two times in her life.’
(29b) *Hja hat it twa kear fan har libben meimakke.
    she has it two time of her life experienced
    ‘She has experienced it two times in her life.’

When combining with *yn* ‘in’, it is restricted to animate subjects, but when combining with *fan* ‘of’, it can have inanimate subjects.

(30a) *De doar woe yn syn libben net iepen.
    The door wanted in his life not open
    ‘The door wouldn’t open in a million years.’
(30b) De doar woe fan syn libben net iepen.
    The door wanted of his life not open
    ‘The door wouldn’t open in a million years.’

Another sign of tentative grammaticalization is that the possessive pronoun is never separated from the noun *leven/libben* by an adjective. It is otherwise quite normal for adjectives to occur between a possessive pronoun and a noun within a noun phrase. The fact that this doesn’t happen with SL could be interpreted as a sign of grammaticalization, although it might also be the case that a noun like life is seldom premodified by adjectives anyway.

Early Modern Frisian SL did not yet feature a preposition in its NPI usage. The preposition was introduced at the end of the 18th century. The absence of a preposition may be taken as circumstantial evidence for the scenario by which its NPI usage first originated.
before a universal quantifier, seeing that the universal quantifier did not combine with a *fan* PP in Early Modern Frisian, nor, for that matter, in Modern Frisian. Thus sentences like the following, considered ungrammatical in Modern Frisian, are absent from Early Modern Frisian.

(31) * Wa’t ien kear stelt, is al fan syn lidben in dief.  
  who one time steals is all of his life a thief  
  ‘Once a thief, always a thief.’

In Frisian, the universal quantifier does not combine with a partitive NP, as it can in English. It is not clear why a preposition was introduced before SL towards the end of the 18th century. The choice of the preposition that was introduced is not surprising, seeing that *fan* ‘of’ is the most functional of all prepositions, which in many of its uses hardly has any meaning of its own. To sum up, *syn lidben/leven* ‘his life’ shows the following signs of grammaticalization in its usage as an NPI. The noun *lidben/*life has lost its literal meaning, being associated with a quantificational (NPI) meaning instead. Concomitantly, it is no longer restricted to animate entities. Before 1800, SL appears as an NP; after 1800, it takes the more specific form of a PP, built on the preposition *fan* ‘of’. Apart from the change in categorical status, from NP to PP, there is no visible sign of further grammaticalization in the period after 1800.

4.3. RELATIVE LACK OF LEXICAL FREEZING. Grammaticalization is a term that may have many meanings (Lehmann 2002:8ff). Following Lehmann (2002:17), grammaticalization is seen as changing analytic constructions into synthetic ones (cf. also Hopper & Traugott 2003:31). This may entail the reinterpretation or reanalysis of an expression as a single word. This section investigates the question of whether SL underwent such reanalysis, and if so, to what extent. SL consists of a possessive pronoun and a noun. The possessive pronoun agrees in person and number with the subject of the sentence in the majority of cases. Some examples are given below.

(32) The possessive pronoun agrees with the subject  
(a) 1SG  
  ick hie t oors mijn leven neat ljœuwed  
  I had it else my life not believed
‘Otherwise, I would never have believed it.’

(b) 2SG

du hefste my dijn leven soo folle wille neat joon
you have me your life so much fun net given
‘You never gave me so much pleasure.’

c) 3SG

hij zoe ‘t zijn libben net dwaan!
he would it his life not do
‘He would never do it!’

(d) 1PL

It slynnen kinne wy uWz libben næt ney litte
the self.spoil can we our life net after let
‘We can never resist spoiling ourselves.’

(e) 2PL

Ried ij t soo naet, soo rijed ij t lon leuen naet.
guess you it so not then guess you it your life not
‘If you can’t guess it like this, you will never guess it.’

(f) 3PL

(No examples.)

It is not the case that there is always agreement with the subject. Of all 64 examples, there are five that unambiguously exhibit lack of agreement. In those cases, the possessive pronoun is either 1SG or 3SG, whereas the subject has different features for person and number. Two examples are given below.

(33) The possessive pronoun fails to agree with the subject

(a) Possessive pronoun is 3SG

Hab jimme zijn leven zok Folk meer heard?
have you.PL his life such folk more heard
‘Have you ever heard of such people?’

(b) Possessive pronoun is 1SG

Za hab ik Jjerren lang æak ney de vammen Rjon
so have I years long also to the girls walked
der hat mijn Boese noyt myn leeven net van wjon
there has my pocket never my life not of gain

‘I for one went after girls for years; upon my soul, my wallet never profited from it.’

The remaining 59 examples exhibit agreement of the possessive pronoun with the subject. Note, though, that strictly speaking the first and third person singular cases are ambiguous between an agreement analysis and an invariable 1SP/3SG analysis.

The significance of these facts is as follows. For a construction to grammaticalize into a word, its shape must be lexically fixed. In the construction under discussion, the possessive pronoun covaries with the subject. For the construction to become fixed, the possessive pronoun must be invariant. Interestingly, the examples with a fixed, non-agreeing possessive pronoun are all from the end of the 18th century. It seems then as if the construction shows a slight development towards being reanalyzed as a single word, as indicated by the occasional freezing of the (non-agreeing) pronoun. However, the bulk of the examples exhibits a pronoun that covaries with its antecedent. The lack of grammaticalization of SL thus correlates with the covariation of the possessive pronoun.14

Lexical freezing of the syntactic construction is a precondition for reanalysis as a single word. Lexical freezing is a gradual process, by which an expression becomes opaque for syntactic processes; this can often be observed in idiom formation. The lack of lexical freezing of the possessive pronoun neatly correlates with the failure of the construction to grammaticalize into a single word. In addition, the split between leven and libben may have been a further obstacle to grammaticalization, since the two items each have only about half of the total frequency that would have been available for one item.

The development of SL in West Frisian contrasts neatly with what happened in Sater Frisian, a branch of the Frisian language family that is almost extinct. Kramer (1970) notes that the Sater Frisian translation of ever is siläärge. He argues for the following etymology: siläärge < *siläärege < *siläädege < sien Lääwdoage ‘his life days’. This example is comparable in its phrasal structure to West Frisian SL. There is a crucial difference: the Sater Frisian construction froze the possessive pronoun, choosing the (unmarked) 3SG. Correspondingly, the construction was able to undergo further grammaticalization and developed into a single word. Kramer reports that speakers of Sater Frisian are nowadays unaware of the (historical) connection between siläärge and sien Lääwdoage, a sure sign of grammaticalization. The fact that grammaticalization in Sater Frisian coincided with the freezing of the possessive pronoun supports the idea that the agreeing (hence changeable) pronoun in the West Frisian equivalent was an important factor blocking grammaticalization.
Seeing that the most common expressions signifying ‘ever’ and ‘never’ are single words in the West Germanic languages, the failure of SL to develop into a single word may well have been a point disfavoring SL, and favoring its 18th century competitors *oait* and *noait*.15

### 4.4. DISTRIBUTIONAL RESTRICTIONS OF SL AS COMPARED WITH RIVAL EXPRESSIONS. SL was not the only way of expressing the semantic content ‘(n)ever’ in Early Modern Frisian. In the 17th century, the descendant of Old Frisian *ā*, that is *ea*, was still in use. It was replaced around 1700 by *oait*, a borrowing from Dutch (*ooit*). The distribution of *ea* and *oait* was studied in Hoekstra, Slofstra and Versloot (2012).16 The table below summarizes the distribution of *ea* and *oait*, and compares it to that of SL:

Table 2. The syntactic contexts of SL, *ea* and *oait* (1550-1800)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><em>syn leven/liben</em></th>
<th><em>ea</em></th>
<th><em>oait</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>negation</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rhetorical question</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comparative relative</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exclamatives</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>after universal quantifier</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative NP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>words of exclusion such as <em>before, if, except, shame that</em></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relative clauses</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What this table makes clear is that SL was apparently excluded in syntactic contexts, which in themselves were relatively frequent. Thus, it couldn’t occur (or occurred so sporadically as to remain outside our corpus) in the following contexts, in which either *ea* or *oait*, or both, scored occurrences:

- sentences with negative NPs
- sentences introduced by words of exclusion
- relative clauses
These are syntactic contexts which are not infrequent, certainly when compared to the comparative relatives, in which SL was attested. Therefore, the absence of SL in these frequent syntactic contexts is a telling fact, from which it may reasonably be deduced that SL could not be used in them.\textsuperscript{17} SL could not score occurrences in those syntactic environments, or at best very little, which lowered its overall frequency as compared to \textit{ea} and \textit{oait}. This was not compensated for by the syntactic contexts in which only SL was allowed to occur, but in which it did not score many occurrences:

- comparative relatives
- exclamatives
- following the universal quantifier

These contexts had low relative frequencies and therefore hardly contributed to raising the overall frequency of SL. SL had one big advantage over \textit{ea}, which was not allowed to co-occur with sentence negation. However, this advantage disappeared in the 18th century when \textit{ea} was replaced by \textit{oait}, which could co-occur with sentence negation. Thus distributional restrictions prevented SL from competing optimally with \textit{ea} and \textit{oait}.

\textbf{4.5. Sociolinguistic Restrictions}. There is evidence that SL was felt or came to be felt by writers to be substandard. The writer Gysbert Japix, who writes in a high register, is responsible for most of the textual material that survives from the 17th century (Breuker 1989). However, he never uses SL. The most productive writer of the 18th century is Jan Althuysen, who translated most of the psalms. In the psalms, he never uses SL, but in lighter work (smaller in size than the psalm translations), he uses it twice. In addition, we have a farce and a comedy dating from the 18th century. The farce, \textit{Waatze Gribberts Bruyloft} (‘The Wedding of Waatze Gribberts’, 1701), generally features SL, to the exclusion of \textit{ea} and \textit{oait}. The comedy, \textit{It Libben fen Aagtje IJsbrants} (‘The Life of Aagtje IJsbrants’, 1779), written by Eelke Meinerts, regularly but not exclusively uses SL. The substandard character of SL is due to its being a maximizer (on maximizers and minimizers, see Israel 2001), just like, for example, the expression ‘in a million years’ in the following sentence:

(34) It’s not going to happen in a million years.
Maximizers, and exaggeration in general, tend to be avoided in higher registers of language use. Thus SL has a tendency to show up in the lower register to which comedies belong and not in the high register of the psalm translations. This corroborates the idea that SL was felt to belong to a lower register. The main rival of SL in the 18th century, oait ‘ever’, does not show signs of being thus restricted. It may equally well show up in the psalm translations of Jan Althuysen as in the comedy of Eelke Meinerts. SL was apparently felt to be subject to sociolinguistic restrictions, which helps to explain why it lost out against its 18th century rival, oait.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS. In this article, we investigated the distribution of syn leven/libben in Frisian in the period 1550-1800, arguing that syn leven originated in Frisian as a loan from Dutch. This explains that the variant syn leven displays a phonological characteristic of Dutch: the presence of an intervocalic /v/. The form syn leven was adapted to Frisian phonology by replacing leven with native libben. Evidence for this scenario came from the fact that the oldest attestations of syn leven predate the oldest attestations of syn libben, and from the fact that leven is only found in this construction, whereas libben is also found outside this construction. The distribution of SL across syntactic environments made it clear that SL was a negative polarity item. It was also shown that its distribution partly confirmed the semantic map of the relationship between various uses of indefinite pronouns proposed in Haspelmath 1997. Evidence was presented that SL failed to occur in certain frequent syntactic contexts in which its near synonyms ea and oait ‘ever’ could be found. In addition, SL was slightly substandard, which also contributed to its markedness as compared to its 18th century rival oait. SL was not reanalyzed as a single word, as the possessive pronoun agreed with the subject of the sentence. In comparison, the possessive pronoun was fixed in Sater Frisian, and the Sater Frisian equivalent of SL was frozen into a single word. To sum up, sociolinguistic, distributional, and semantic-syntactic factors conspired in order to prevent SL from becoming the unmarked way of expressing the semantic content ‘ever’.
REFERENCES


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

Some sources occur twice or more in the Corpus Early Modern Frisian, because reprints, which may differ slightly from the original, have been included. The numbers have been corrected so that two or more identical occurrences (spelling apart) count for one occurrence.

One occurrence of *syn leven* can in fact be found before 1550 in a text containing the annals and memoirs of Edo Jongama. It can be dated with certainty to the time span between 1513-1536 (Carasso-Kok, 1981:251, in her overview of medieval chronicles and hagiographies). The text has been published by Gerbenzon (1965:68-75). The text is riddled with Dutchisms, which makes it doubtful whether this occurrence is characteristic of Frisian. Because of this doubt, this occurrence has not been included in the frequency counts. If it is accepted, then the time lag between *leven* and *libben* becomes even larger than suggested in the text.

Frisian, being a minority language with a weak normative standard, should not be viewed as a monolithic entity. It rather involves a spectrum where one end is ‘Frisian’ and the other shades off into Dutchified Frisian, that is, Frisian which exhibits interference from Dutch (for a general overview of issues pertaining to interference from Dutch, see Breuker 2001; for a list of interferences from Dutch in all areas of the grammar of Modern Frisian, see Sjölin 1976; for an analysis of such interferences, see De Haan 1997). Hence there may be competition between two forms of the same expression, one being more Frisian (*syn libben*), the other being more Dutch (*syn leven*). Such a state of affairs is well known from dialects, where dialect-specific words compete with, and may be replaced by, words which are more similar to their semantic equivalents from the dominant, standard language.

Negative polarity items and/or free choice items were studied in Fauconnier 1975, Ladusaw 1979, Van der Wouden 1994, and Zwarts 1981, 1995, among others. Hoeksema 1983, 1986, Hoeksema and Klein 1995, and De Swart 1991 drew attention to the fact that words of exclusion such as *than, as, before, if, deny that*, and relative pronouns preceded by a superlative introduce sentences in which negative polarity items may be found. Goldberg (2006:171-173, 178-181) notes that polarity is a constructional property in the case of Subject-Aux Inversion in English.

A monotone decreasing context allows for entailments to subsets. For example, the quantifier ‘nobody’ is monotone decreasing. As a result, entailments to subsets are valid: ‘nobody sleeps’ entails ‘nobody sleeps restlessly’, where the denotation of ‘sleep restlessly’
is a subset of the denotation of ‘sleep’. In contrast, no downward entailment is valid for a sentence like ‘John sleeps’: ‘John sleeps’ does not entail ‘John sleeps restlessly’.

According to Abels (2004), exclamatives can have the same denotation as questions, while differing with respect to the presuppositions that are associated with them, and it is possible to treat exclamatives as rhetorical questions.

P < 0.05 by Fisher’s Exact Test, http://www.langsrud.com/fisher.htm.

Haspelmath (1995:369) notes that free choice items are regularly a diachronic source for universal quantifiers.

Al syn libben ‘all his life’ nowadays is found only in written language. Spoken language would feature syn hiele leven ‘his whole life’.

Example sentences from Modern Frisian were constructed by the authors.

In the semantic map (p. 4), Haspelmath uses the term ‘question’; in the characterization of the exemplifying example sentences (p. 2), he uses the term ‘polar question’. The index of subjects only features the term ‘question’, not ‘polar question’. The same is true for ‘conditional protasis’ versus ‘conditional’ (index: both absent) and for ‘standard of comparison’ versus ‘comparative’ (index: ‘comparative’). This is no petty criticism. The terminological uncertainty reflects the fact that the constructions/uses have not been sharply defined. For example, it becomes clear on p. 247 that ‘without’ clauses are analyzed as cases of indirect negation, as are clauses in the scope of a head with a negative meaning such as ‘difficult’. To us, it seems that such constructions are quite different from each other, and should be kept separate. In a similar way, Haspelmath uses direct negation to conflate clause negation such as ‘not’ and negative constituents like ‘nobody’. Our data reveal that SL was used with clause negation, but not with negative constituents. In addition, there are NPIs that require clause negation to be licensed, but which are ungrammatical with negative constituents, such as the Dutch adjective pluis ‘safe’ (Van der Wouden 1994:53). Thus a conflation of clause negation with negative constituents is not warranted. This makes it clear that Haspelmath’s semantic map, though on the right track, must be further refined to accommodate other known uses (constructions) involving the indefinite pronoun.

A reviewer objected that these sentences are not comparable. Our point is that one of the two phrases is banned from affirmative sentences, which leads us to conclude that it is an NPI, and that it is the choice of preposition which determines whether or not the phrase in question is an NPI or not.
An anonymous reviewer notes that the real question is why the possessive pronoun covars with its antecedent in the majority of the examples, thus blocking reinterpretation of SL as a single word. Similarly, it may be asked why the possessive pronoun did not covary with its antecedent in Sater Frisian (see below). While we note the correlation between covariation and lack of grammaticalization, we cannot explain why covariation continued to exist in West Frisian, but cf. note 15.

An anonymous reviewer claims that lack of grammaticalization is not something that needs to be explained or studied: lack of change is unsurprising, only change is surprising and deserves to be studied, since change entails a cause of change, and lack of change does not require a cause. However, a body of facts involving lack of change (e.g. lack of grammaticalization) may become an object of scientific inquiry when there is an expectation that there will be change or when there is no a priori reason to expect either change or the absence of change. When a theory would lead us to expect change, lack of change is interesting. In the case at hand, the lack of grammaticalization of SL is interesting since expressions such as SL often do grammaticalize, as happened in Sater Frisian. Hence studying the linguistic behavior of such expressions is relevant. The subject raised in this note is extensively discussed in Walkden 2012, who presents arguments countering views similar to the one expressed by the anonymous reviewer.

On the semantic development of these words in the transition from Old Frisian to Early Modern Frisian, and the loss of their aspectual properties, see Slofstra 2011.

A reviewer asks whether our corpus is not too small to deduce anything from the absence of SL in a given syntactic context. To this, it may be replied that the relevance of a corpus depends on its size relative to the frequency of a given syntactic context: Our corpus would be irrelevant for very infrequent syntactic contexts. Conversely, our corpus is big enough to be relevant for syntactic contexts that are frequent. In fact, we even found occurrences of SL in our corpus in infrequent syntactic contexts such as comparative relatives. In addition, we also have a sort of control. We can partition our corpus of occurrences of SL into two sub-corpora: one defined by syn leven, the other defined by syn libben. By and large, both sub-corpora display the same distribution of SL over syntactic environments, which is encouraging.