# A *Wh* Discourse Particle: Dutch *Hoezo*

**Summary:** This paper provides an analysis of a special kind of *why*-questions in Dutch, formed with *hoezo* (lit. 'how so'). Our core proposal is that *hoezo* is both a question word and a discourse particle, and signals resistance to updating the Common Ground (or other component of the discourse model) by asking the interlocutor to provide a reason for their preceding discourse move. We contrast *hoezo* with the canonical Dutch counterpart of 'why', *waarom*.
**Basic facts:** Syntactically, *hoezo* appears in three types of construction: as a complete question by itself (as in (1a)); followed by a single word or constituent (1b); or as the first element in a full verb-second clause (1c). We provide a unified semantic-pragmatic analysis of all three types. The prototypical use of *hoezo* is in response to an immediately preceding assertion of a proposition *p*. This can often be paraphrased in English as "What do you mean, *p*?", signalling resistance to adding *p* to the Common Ground (CG). But *hoezo* can also be used to challenge a presupposition or conversational implicature of a preceding utterance (2,3), or in response to other speech acts such as questions or commands (4,5). Some, but not all, of *hoezo*'s uses may be characterized as being metalinguistic.
**Proposal:** Our analysis can be summarized as follows:
   a. *Hoezo* signals resistance on the part of the speaker to updating the CG or other component of the discourse model (or "context structure"; Farkas and Bruce 2010), such as the QUD Stack (Roberts 2012) or the To-Do List (Portner 2004).
   b. It does so by asking the interlocutor to provide a reason for their preceding discourse move; in that sense, *hoezo* is a (pragmatic) question word.
   c. But *hoezo* also functions as a discourse particle (Grosz 2021 a.o.), because as its not-at-issue meaning it expresses the speaker's atttitude towards the current state of the discourse model and whether/how it should be updated (cf. Krifka 2008's "Common Ground management").
   d. Because it is a discourse particle, *hoezo* is not a variable-binding operator, unlike canonical *wh*-words such as *waarom*/*why*. (*Why did she leave?* can be paraphrased as 'What is the reason *x* such that she left because of *x*?'). *Hoezo* is base-generated in Spec-CP and does not undergo *wh*-movement.
**Hoezo vs. waarom:** Point (d) accounts for several syntactic differences between *hoezo* and *waarom*, which (as far as we know) haven't been observed previously. *Hoezo* doesn't allow long-distance construal (see (6)), can't introduce an embedded clause (7), and can't appear in multiple-*wh* or echo questions (8,9).
**Conclusion:** This study contributes to the broader literature on adjunct questions (reason, manner, etc.), by extending the typology and analysis of *why*-questions (Zwicky & Zwicky 1973, Schwarz & Simonenko 2018, Cox 2021, a.o.). It also provides evidence for a hitherto unrecognized lexical category, that of *wh* discourse particles (pragmatic question words). Other potential members of this class include English *so what* and *what of it*, and their Dutch counterpart *wat dan nog* (lit. 'what then still').

(1)   [*Context*: Interlocutor A says:   Ons plan is  totaal  mislukt.
                                                our  plan is totally failed
                                                'Our plan has totally failed.'
      Interlocutor B responds by saying:]
      a.   Hoezo?                          b.   Hoezo {mislukt/totaal  mislukt/ons plan}?
           HOEZO                                HOEZO {failed   /totally failed   /our plan}
           'What do you mean?'                  'What do you mean, {failed/totally failed/our plan}?
      c.   Hoezo is ons plan totaal  mislukt?
           HOEZO  is our plan totally failed
           'What do you mean, our plan has totally failed?'

(2)   A:   Bob Dylan is geen goede zanger meer.
           Bob Dylan is no    good   singer  anymore
           'Bob Dylan is not a good singer anymore.'
      B:   Hoezo geen goede zanger meer?    (Ik heb  hem altijd   vreselijk gevonden!)
           HOEZO no    good  singer anymore I   have him  always terrible  found
           'What do you mean, not a good singer anymore? (He's always been terrible!)'

(3)   A:   Het water is warm.            B:   Hoezo warm? (Het is gloedheet!)
           the water is warm                 HOEZO  warm    it  is glow-hot
           'The water is warm.'              'What do you mean, warm? (It's scalding!)'

(4)   A:   Ben je   ziek?                B:   Hoezo?
           are  you sick                     HOEZO
           'Are you sick?'                   'Why?'; 'Why do you ask?'

(5)   A:   Doe je    jas  aan!          B:   Hoezo? (Ben jij  de  baas soms?)
           do   your  coat on                HOEZO    are  you the  boss maybe
           'Put on your coat!'               'Why? (Are you my boss?)'

(6)   Waarom/Hoezo zei   de   politie dat  de  verdachte gearresteerd is?
      why     /HOEZO said  the  police  that the suspect    arrested      is
      'Why did the police say the suspect was arrested?'
      - with *waarom*: ambiguous between main-clause and embedded-clause reading
      - with *hoezo*: only main-clause reading is available

(7)   Ik vraag me af  waarom/*hoezo  het regent.
      I  ask    me off why     /*HOEZO it   rains
      'I wonder why it's raining.'

(8)   Wie  is waarom/*hoezo  afgetreden?        (9)   Zij  is WAAROM/*HOEZO afgetreden?
      who is why     /*HOEZO resigned                 She is why       /*HOEZO  resigned
      'Who resigned why?'                             'She resigned WHY?'

Cox, R. 2021. How *why*-interrogatives work. *Synthese* 198:4651-4688.
Farkas, D.F. & K.D. Bruce. 2010. On reacting to assertions and polar questions. *J. of Sem.* 27:81-118.
Grosz, P.G. 2021. Discourse particles. In *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Semantics*, Vol. 1, p. 619-652.
Krifka, M. 2008. Basic notions of information structure. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 55:243-276.
Portner, P. 2004. The semantics of imperatives within a theory of clause types. *SALT* 14:235-252.
Roberts, C. 2012. Information structure in discourse. *Semantics & Pragmatics* 5(6):1-69.
Schwarz, B. & A. Simonenko. 2018. On the logical make-up of *how*- and *why*-questions. *SALT* 28:533-545.
Zwicky, A.M. & A.D. Zwicky. 1973. How come and what for. In *Papers in Honor of Henry and Renée Kahane*, p. 923-933. University of Illinois Press.