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# On the Dutch temporal adverbial *goed en wel*

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The paper investigates the origin, the development, the semantics and the pragmatics of the temporal use of the Dutch expression *goed en wel* ‘good and well’. We argue that the expression has developed from a meaning “safe and sound” into an indicator of the end of a preparatory phase or transition period, as well as a marker of the beginning of a new state. We observe that temporal *goed en wel* always requires a secondary state of affairs that is temporally related to the transition point initiating the primary state of affairs, and we show that the expression is increasingly being employed for rhetorical purposes.

**Keywords:** temporal expression, Dutch, transition period, rhetoric, language change

## 1. Introduction

The Dutch expression *goed en wel* (lit. ‘good and well’) has various usages. A straightforwardly compositional use can be found in sentences such as (1):<sup>1</sup>

- (1) *Na een lange tocht kwamen we goed en wel in New York aan.*  
after a long journey came we good and well in New York on  
‘After a long journey, we arrived safely and well in New York.’

An idiomatic well-known use of *goed en wel*, explicitly noted in the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (WNT, s.v. *wel V*), is the concessive use, comparable to

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1. Corpus data and remarks from the audience at the Grote Taaldag suggest that the compositional “safe and sound” use of *goed en wel* (as in (1)) may be more popular in Belgium than in the Netherlands, where it is all but extinct. Investigation of this dimension of variation is beyond the scope of this paper. We would like to thank our audience at the Grote Taaldag 2019 and in Leiden on October 17th, 2019, as well as three anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

English *fine and dandy*, in which something is admitted in order to contrast it with something else:

- (2) *Dat is allemaal goed en wel, maar we moeten weg.*  
 that is all good and well but we must away  
 ‘That is all fine and dandy, but we have to leave.’

The oldest instance of this use given by the WNT dates from 1851, with a variant (*wel en mooi* ‘well and beautiful’) from 1785. Concessive uses can easily be distinguished by the presence of the quantificational elements *allemaal* or *alles* ‘all’; they are addressed in a separate paper (Van der Wouden 2020).

Another use of the expression *goed en wel* is described in the WNT as “used to indicate that an action has just been completed when something else takes place” (our translation). We will modify this assessment somewhat below, but we will follow the WNT in assuming that *goed en wel* has among its uses one that is primarily temporal in nature, and which is represented by sentences such as:

- (3) *Toen we goed en wel binnen waren, begon het te regenen.*  
 when we good and well inside were started it to rain  
 ‘It started to rain shortly after we were inside.’

The oldest appearance of this temporal *goed en wel* in the WNT is from 1903, so we may assume it to have originated not too long before, in the late 19th century (our data go back to the 1860s). We will assume the “safe and sound” use illustrated in (1) to be the oldest one, and the source of temporal *goed en wel*. Below, we will elaborate on the origin of the temporal interpretation (Section 2), then we discuss diachronic developments in its distribution (Section 3), we sketch a semantics for the expression (Section 4), investigate some aspects of pragmatics (Section 5) and present our conclusions (Section 6). Throughout, we base our discussion on corpus data as well as our own native-speaker intuitions.

The way in which temporal *goed en wel* requires a temporal connection between two events causes it to have a very special syntactic distribution. With very few exceptions, it must appear in complex sentences involving a main clause and a subordinate clause, connected by temporal complementizers.

## 2. *Origin of temporal goed en wel*

In order to get an idea of the historical development of temporal *goed en wel*, we checked 100 occurrences of *goed en wel* in the newspaper site Delpher ([www.delpher.nl](http://www.delpher.nl)), restricting ourselves to occurrences from 1900–1909, and manually removing any double hits (from articles appearing in more than one newspaper),

and compared them with 100 occurrences from the period 2010–2019. We divided the occurrences into three categories: compositional (the “safe and sound” reading), temporal, and concessive. Two cases we had to put in the category ‘other’. The results are given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Readings of *goed en wel*

Category	1900–1909	2010–2019
Compositional	57	5
Temporal	23	87
Concessive	20	6
Other	–	2

The compositional cases often describe the safe arrival after a journey, as in (3) above. The predicates modified are typically verbs of arriving, such as *aankomen* or *arriveren*. In other cases, the context is that of a captured criminal, who is *goed en wel* (safely) behind bars. When the sentence does not highlight or mention what happened immediately after this, the occurrence is counted as compositional, otherwise as temporal. Compare (4), compositional, and (5), temporal:

- (4) *De ontsnapte crimineel zit weer goed en wel achter de tralies.*  
 the escaped criminal sits again good and well behind the bars  
 ‘The escaped criminal is safely behind bars again.’
- (5) *De crimineel zat goed en wel achter de tralies toen hij ontsnapte.*  
 the criminal sat good and well behind the bars when he escaped  
 ‘The criminal was just behind bars, when he escaped.’

We assume that the temporal interpretation has developed out of the compositional interpretation in contexts such as the safe arrival after a journey. The moment someone arrives safely signals the beginning of a new state, that of being at the place of destination. Such contexts function as a “critical context” in the sense of Diewald (2002): they support both the old compositional interpretation ‘safe and sound’ and a new temporal interpretation, involving the completion of a change. Precisely in such ambiguous contexts the development of a new interpretation is to be expected.

### 3. Diachronic developments

In order to discover if the distribution of temporal *goed en wel* exhibits any shifts during the relatively short period from 1860 to the present, we collected 600 occurrences of temporal *goed en wel*, mainly from the newspaper repository Delpher and from DBNL.org (the digital library of Dutch literature and language), and divided them in three portions of 200 occurrences each, stretching over periods of 50 years (the first period is 60 years, but for the first decade we could only find 2 occurrences). The sentences were classified according to the temporal connectives that were employed. During the relatively short period from 1860 to the present, the distribution of temporal *goed en wel* exhibits some remarkable shifts (see Table 2).<sup>2</sup>

In some cases represented in the table, we do not list a connective, but have a so-called *balansschikking* (“balanced ordination”), a special construction of Dutch, not found in English (cf. Bos 1964, Welschen 1999, Broekhuis 2018), involving negation in one clause and a disjunction with another clause, e.g.:

- (6) *Nauwelijks zaten we goed en wel, of het begon te regenen.*  
 hardly sat we good and well or it began to rain  
 ‘Hardly had we sat down, when it started to rain.’

There are a number of semantic subtypes associated with the *balansschikking*, including one that is very pertinent to the use of *goed en wel*, namely immediate succession. In (6), an event of sitting down is followed right away by the onset of rain. The WNT in fact explicitly connects *goed en wel* with the *balansschikking*, noting that sentences with *goed en wel* are either instances of the *balansschikking*, or have the characteristics of such sentences (cf. also Malepaard 2008).

There are also a few cases without a temporal connective where two events are connected by sequential *en* ‘and’. An example from our database is given in (7):

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2. We did not include occurrences of *net goed en wel* ‘just good and well’, since they appear to have a different distribution, with more commonly a secondary event that is implicit and has to be construed from the context, as was noted by a reviewer. We also note that *net goed en wel*, unlike *goed en wel* without *net*, does not appear in *voor(dat)*-clauses. The sequence *net goed en wel* is not highly frequent. Study of the intricacies of this combination is left for another occasion.

**Table 2.** Connectives for *goed en wel* sentences over three periods

Temporal context	1860–1919		1920–1969		1970–2019	
	N=200	%	N=200	%	N=200	%
–	7	3.5	7	3.5	3	1.5
als ‘when’	16	8	9	4.5	4	2
alvorens ‘before’	1	0.5	2	1	–	–
balansschikking	17	8.5	16	8	7	3.5
V1-clause (conditional)	3	1.5	1	0.5	–	–
eenmaal ‘once’	–	–	–	–	1	0.5
eer ‘ere, before’	7	3.5	5	2.5	1	0.5
en ‘and’	1	0.5	–	–	1	0.5
na(dat) ‘after’	4	2	3	1.5	4	2
nu ‘now’	6	3	3	1.5	2	1
op het ogenblik dat ‘at the moment that’	–	–	1	0.5	–	–
tegen de tijd dat ‘around the time when’	–	–	–	–	1	0.5
terwijl ‘during’	1	0.5	–	–	2	1
toen ‘when’	83	41.5	68	34	25	12.5
tot(dat) ‘until’	10	5	4	2	2	1
voor(dat) ‘before’	29	14.5	76	38	146	73
vooraleer ‘before’	1	0.5	–	–	1	0.5
wanneer ‘when’	5	2.5	2	1	–	–
zodra ‘as soon as’	9	4.5	3	1.5	–	–

- (7) *Maar de reorganisatie is goed en wel een halfuur aan de gang en nu al doemen tal van problemen en bezwaren op.*  
 but the reorganisation is good and well a half hour on the going and now  
*al doemen tal van problemen en bezwaren op.*  
 already loom lots of problems and objections up  
 ‘But the reorganization has been ongoing for just about half an hour, and  
 already lots of problems and objections emerge.’

Here, two events (the start of the reorganization and the emergence of trouble) are described, and the connective is a conjunction. In our dataset there are 2 sentences with *en* rather than subordination.

In other cases, the lack of a connective is due to the grammatical structure that was chosen. If one event is described in a nonfinite adjunct, there is usually

no overt complementizer, but a temporal connection between the event described in the main clause and the one described in the adjunct may be implicit (Stump 1985). An example from our dataset is given in (8).

- (8) *Goed en wel in de lucht stond de Prins zijn plaats af aan de piloot van het toestel*  
 good and well in the air stood the Prince his place off to the pilot of the aircraft  
 'Once in the air, the Prince gave his seat to the pilot of the aircraft.'

The main connectives in Table 2 are *toen* 'then' and *voor(dat)* 'before (that)'. While the frequency of *toen* drops steeply, the frequencies of *voor* and *voordat* rise from 14.5% to 73% of occurrences. Among the connectives, *toen* has a special status. Mostly, *goed en wel* shows up in subordinate clauses introduced by one of the connectives listed in Table 2. In the case of *toen*, however, we note that 18 out of 176 occurrences ( $\approx 10\%$ ) involve main clauses. The examples in (9) and (10), both from our dataset, illustrate the two options:

- (9) *Het meisje was goed en wel in slaap, toen ze wakker schrok*  
 the girl was good and well asleep when she awake startled  
 'The girl had just fallen asleep, when she woke up with a start.'
- (10) *Toen het schip goed en wel buiten de pieren was, begon de lading te werken*  
 when the ship good and well outside the piers was began the cargo to shift  
 'Once the ship was outside the piers, the cargo started to shift.'

We take the special status of *toen* to be related to the fact that it is a semantically symmetric connective, unlike *voor(dat)* 'before' or *nadat* 'after': *A toen B* is truth-functionally equivalent to *B toen A* (although there are pragmatic differences). The basic meaning of *toen* is temporal overlap, whereas *before* and *after* denote temporal order in an asymmetric way. Other symmetric connectives are *terwijl* 'while' and *wanneer* 'when'. We have only 3 occurrences each for these connectives in our material. These involve only cases of *goed en wel* in the adjunct clause, but that does not mean much if only 12% of *goed en wel* is expected to end up in a main clause, based on what we found for *toen*. Our linguistic intuitions suggest that both options exist:

- (11) *We zijn goed en wel binnen wanneer het gaat regenen.*  
 we are good and well inside when it goes rain  
 'We are just inside when it starts to rain'
- (12) *Wanneer we goed en wel binnen zijn, gaat het regenen.*  
 when we good and well inside are goes it rain  
 'Just when we are inside, it starts to rain.'

We will say more about the change from *toen* to *voor(dat)* in Section 5, where we look at the pragmatics of *goed en wel*-sentences. But first we take a look at the semantics of the expression.

#### 4. Semantics of *goed en wel*

The key to understanding *goed en wel* is that it depends on a binary relation between two states of affairs. One of them we call the “primary event/state of affairs” (corresponding to the upper level in Figure 1), the other the “secondary event”. The primary event is expressed by the predicate directly modified by *goed en wel*, the secondary event is usually expressed by the main clause (when *goed en wel* appears in a subordinate clause). We assume that *goed en wel* splits the primary event/state of affairs into two component parts: a brief transitional period, followed by a resultant state. The secondary event/state of affairs is then localized with regard to the moment of transition.

The semantics we propose for *goed en wel* requires a few definitions. Let  $e_1$  and  $e_2$  be the primary and secondary event, respectively. Let  $e_1 = t + s$  (where  $t$  denotes the transitional period, and  $s$  is the resulting state). Finally,  $i(e)$  is the initial moment of  $e$ . We then require the following two conditions to be true:

- (13) Temporal subjection:  $e_2 \subseteq e_1$  ( $e_2$  is temporally contained in  $e_1$ )
- (14) Relation:  $i(e_2) R i(s)$ . (the beginning of  $e_2$  and the beginning of  $s$  are temporally related by  $R$ .  
 $R$  is a temporal relation such as overlap or precedence, given by the syntactic context, usually a temporal connective, or else by the context.)

Consider the following example:

- (15) *Wallage wees dat idee af voordat het goed en wel was gepubliceerd.*  
 Wallage rejected that idea prt before it good and well was published  
 ‘Wallage rejected that idea before it was even published.’

We let  $e_2$  = Wallage’s rejection, and  $i(s)$  = the moment of publication.  $R$  is temporal precedence, in view of the connective *voordat* ‘before’ so we have  $i(e_2) < i(s)$ . See Figure 1.

Transition	Article is published
Rejection	State of being rejected

Figure 1. Event structure for Example (15)



Next, consider Example (16):

- (16) *Toen de Starfighter goed en wel aan de grond stond, had het toestel geen druppel brandstof meer aan boord.*  
 drop fuel anymore on board  
 ‘When the Starfighter had properly landed, the plane did not have a drop of fuel on board anymore.’

Here,  $e_2$  is the state of being without fuel,  $e_1$  the state of being grounded. R is temporal overlap (symbol:  $\circ$ ), based on the connective *toen* ‘when’, so we have  $i(e_2) \circ i(s)$ . Notice that we only require the initial moments of the two states to overlap. While the plane is grounded, it may be refueled – sentence (16) says nothing about that possibility.

Transition	The Starfighter is grounded	
	The airplane is without fuel	

Figure 2. Event structure for Example (16)

Note that we interpret (15) to involve an act of rejection shortly before the moment of transition, i.e. during the transitional period, and not, say, years before that. Our corpus material does not contain any cases that would have to be interpreted as involving events that took place well before the primary event. A sentence such as (17) below is intuitively very odd, in light of the fact that the death of William of Orange took place in 1584 and the other event in 1984, four centuries later. Temporal subjection (cf. 13) rules the sentence out.

- (17) \**Willem van Oranje stierf voordat Hoeksema goed en wel gepromoveerd was*  
 William of Orange died before Hoeksema good and well promoted was  
 ‘William of Orange died before Hoeksema had defended his PhD thesis.’

The predicates modified by *goed en wel*, which denote the primary state of affairs, overwhelmingly belong to two categories: stative predicates and perfects. The stative predicates in our dataset include the so-called posture verbs *zitten* ‘sit’, *liggen* ‘lie’, *staan* ‘stand’, and the cognitive verbs *weten* ‘know’, *beseffen* ‘realize’, *in de gaten hebben* ‘be aware of’, as well as a number of copular constructions such as *op dreef zijn* ‘be on a roll’. In Table 3, we present our corpus data.

Some cognitive verbs, e.g. *beseffen* ‘realize’ and *zich realiseren* ‘realize’, are not stative, but inchoative, i.e. they denote the beginning of a state. Perfects also introduce a state, resulting from an event (Nishiyama & Koenig 2010). For that reason, they are compatible with *goed en wel* too. Among the perfects we found, most

**Table 3.** Classes of predicates that combine with *goed en wel*

Type of predicate	#	%
Posture verbs	66	11
Cognitive verbs	72	12
Perfective or copula BE	367	61.2
Perfective HAVE	55	9.2
Other	40	6.7

notable is *begonnen zijn* ‘have begun’, which appears no less than 55 times in the 600 cases we sampled.

### 5. *Pragmatics of goed en wel*

The rise of *voor* and *voordat* in combination with *goed en wel* was documented in Section 3 above. This change is very striking and pervasive, and calls for an explanation. We believe it may have to do with a change in the pragmatic conditions under which *goed en wel* is used. There is evidence that the use of this item has become associated with more rhetorical usage: to wit, pragmatic strengthening in the sense of Traugott (1988).

We noted that quite a few occurrences of *voor* and *voordat* are preceded by *nog* ‘still, yet’:

- (18) *Nog voordat het goed en wel is verschenen, is de eerste druk al  
yet before it good and well is appeared is the first edition already  
grotendeels uitverkocht.  
largely out-sold  
‘Even before it has properly appeared, the first edition is largely sold out.’*

Note that the English translation makes use of the scalar item *even*, another well-known rhetorical device. In Table 4, we take a look at data from the NL COW corpus of online texts (Schäfer 2015).

Note that in sentences with *goed en wel*, about a third of all occurrences of *voor* is preceded by *nog*, whereas the general distribution is roughly one in twenty. This highly significant effect points toward a rhetorical function. We submit that *voor(dat) + goed en wel* is stronger than *toen + goed en wel*. We illustrate this by means of a rhetorical device which marks climbing strength, the connective *sterker nog* ‘stronger yet = in fact’ (cf. Van der Wouden 2000, footnote 12):

**Table 4.** *Nog + voor* in NL COW

voor ik goed en wel	152	voor ik	44261
nog voor ik goed en wel	50	nog voor ik	1856
voor hij goed en wel	101	voor hij	19999
nog voor hij goed en wel	47	nog voor hij	1191
voor we goed en wel	154	voor we	27209
nog voor we goed en wel	46	nog voor we	908

- (19) a. *Hij steelt weleens, sterker nog, vrij vaak.*  
 he steals occasionally stronger yet quite often  
 ‘He steals occasionally, in fact quite often.’  
 b. *#Hij steelt vrij vaak, sterker nog, weleens.*  
 he steals quite often stronger yet occasionally  
 ‘#He steals quite often, in fact occasionally.’

In (19) we see that the weaker expression must precede the stronger one. Applying this to clauses with *goed en wel*, we note a similar contrast as in (19):

- (20) a. *Het regende toen we goed en wel in Parijs gearriveerd waren, sterker  
 it rained when we good and well in Paris arrived were stronger  
 nog, voor we er goed en wel waren.*  
 yet before we there good and well were  
 ‘It rained when we arrived in Paris, in fact before we had properly arrived  
 there.’  
 b. *#Het regende voor we goed en wel in Parijs waren, sterker nog, toen  
 it rained before we good and well in Paris were stronger yet when  
 we er goed en wel waren.*  
 we there good and well were  
 ‘#It rained in Paris before we had properly arrived, in fact when we had  
 properly arrived.’

Assuming then that clauses with *voor(dat)* are indicative of a more pronounced rhetorical nature than clauses with *toen*, we would expect to see the rise of *voor(dat)* reflected in an increase in other rhetorical elements in *goed en wel* sentences, and this is indeed the case. In Table 5, we tabulated the occurrences of *nog* ‘yet’ and *al* ‘already’ among all sentences in our dataset.

The two particles *al* and *nog* are well-known aspectual markers, but also have a scalar interpretation (Löbner 1989, Van der Auwera 1993). We hypothesize that it is this factor, in combination with the increasingly rhetorical character of *goed en wel*-sentences, which explains the climbing numbers of *nog* and *al* in our dataset.

**Table 5.** Nog/al ‘yet/already’ in sentences with *goed en wel*

Period	# nog	% (of 200)	# al	%
1870–1919	15	7.5	13	6.5
1920–1969	32	16	19	8.5
1970–2019	65	32.5	58	29

## 6. Conclusions

From the compositional meaning ‘safe and sound’, the Dutch expression *goed en wel* ‘good and well’ has developed two additional uses: (1) a concessive use, where the compositional meaning is basically kept, but exploited to introduce a contrast, and (2) a temporal use, which indicates the end of a preparatory phase or transition period, and marks the beginning of a new state.

What is remarkable about temporal *goed en wel* is the fact that it requires a secondary state of affairs that is temporally related to the transition point initiating the primary state of affairs. This would normally be seen as a property associated with connectives, but *goed en wel* is not syntactically a connective. Rather, it is an adverbial modifier, but one which, in our semantics, requires a contextually provided temporal relation R. This is arguably the reason why 97% of all 600 occurrences in our dataset involve complex sentences in which the clause that hosts *goed en wel* is connected to another clause that expresses the secondary state of affairs by means of some temporal connective. This connective provides the value of R. In the remaining 3%, we still have two events, but with an implicit temporal relation.

We have hypothesized that temporal *goed en wel* started out in contexts of arrival, where both safety and a change of state are prominent semantic features. We have shown that it has undergone some remarkable changes in distribution in the course of the last 150 years. While the early period had *toen* as the main connective, the currently most common connective is *voor(dat)* ‘before’. This was linked to evidence pointing toward an increasingly rhetorical function for *goed en wel*-sentences, in particular a strong increase of the frequency of *al* and *nog* throughout the same 150 year period.

We hope the present paper will provide some incentive to study elements like *goed en wel*, elements that are not themselves temporal connectives, but seem to be parasitic on them.

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