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All good and well

Introducing an objection in Dutch

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The Dutch expression *goed en wel* 'good and well' is polysemous. In one of its uses, *goed en wel* combines with a universal quantifier *alles* or *allemaal* 'all' and the conjunction *maar* 'but'. The resulting construction is typically used to introduce a contrary reaction to an earlier utterance or suggestion. The combination is shown to fit into a larger class of pragmatic operators, which are argued to be instances of lexicalized pragmatics.

Keywords: pragmatics, construction, objection

In order to say what a meaning is, we may first ask what a meaning does, and then find something that does that.

-David Lewis1

1. Introduction

The paper deals with one use of the polysemous Dutch expression *goed en wel* 'good and well', as shown in (1) and (2) below.²

^{1.} Lewis, David General semantics (*Synthese* 22, 18–67 (1970), https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00413598) as quoted in Mastop (2005).

^{2.} The material in this paper builds on Hoeksema & Van der Wouden (this volume) (presented at the Grote Taaldag 2019). Thanks are due to the audience at the Grote Taaldag, January 31, 2020 and to the reviewers; remaining errors are my own. Most examples in this paper are from the spoken Dutch corpus (CGN) (Oostdijk 2000, Oostdijk & Den Broeder 2003), some of them are edited for didactic purposes.

- (1) Allemaal goed en wel maar 't gaat er om dat kinderen leren wat all good and well but it goes there round that children learn what er op 't bord staat.

 there on the board stands
 'That's all fine and dandy but what matters is that children know what is on the blackboard.'
- (2) <u>Alles goed en wel,</u> maar wat stáát er nou eigenlijk?³ all good and well, but what stands there now actually? 'That's all fine and dandy, but what does it say?'

The first example is taken from an interview with a teacher. In a conversation about the school's theo-philosophical background, the utterance in (1) returns to much more practical issues. Likewise, the utterance in (2) expresses a reaction to linguistic theories that all utterances are context-dependent and massively ambiguous.

The usage of *goed en wel* in (1)–(2) is easily distinguished from the other usage possibilities, as there is an obligatory universal quantifier *allemaal* 'all' or *alles* 'all', and *goed en wel* is obligatorily followed by *maar* 'but'. The English expression 'that's all fine and dandy, (but)' has a comparable meaning and function, and we will often use it as an idiomatic translation.

According to Hoeksema & Van der Wouden (this volume) (HW from now on), the adverbial combination *goed en wel* 'good and well' can be used in two more ways (cf. also *WNT* s.v. wel V), ways that are relatively easy to distinguish. The oldest use of the combination is also the most transparent one. An example is given below:

(3) 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 in New York.'

This usage, which is called "compositional" by HW, can usually be translated as 'safely'. For native speakers, this translation possibility is a good way to distinguish this usage from other ones. HW report that this particular usage is felt to be rather old-fashioned in the Netherlands, whereas it is quite normal in the Dutch-speaking parts of Belgium.⁴

^{3.} P.A. Coppen, *Trouw* 19 april 2019.

^{4.} A comparable idiom is gezond en wel 'healthy and well'. As far as we can see, the interpretation is usually compositional, e.g. twaalf broden zijn wel genoeg om Kevin gezond en wel in Amerika te krijgen 'twelve loafs of bread should be enough to get Kevin sound and well in America'.

Apparently the youngest use is what HW call "temporal". It is exemplified below:

(4) 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.'

HW hypothesize 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." They moreover suggest "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 [...] that the expression is increasingly being employed for rhetorical purposes." Typically, the two states mentioned are in two different syntactic clauses.

The use of *alles/allemaal goed en wel* as exemplified in (1)–(2) above will be the main topic of this paper. In the sections below, we will go into its history, its function and its structure. At the end of the paper, we will show the existence of other constructions with the same or a comparable function.

2. On the history of alles/allemaal goed en wel

In the WNT, the large historical dictionary of Dutch, the construction alles/allemaal goed en wel is mentioned twice, once under goed, once under wel. The oldest attestations date from the nineteenth century:

- (5) <u>Alles goed en wel!</u> zeide de Schoolmeester: <u>maar</u> enz.,⁵ 'All good and well, said the schoolmaster, but ...'
- (6) "Hoor eens," zeide hy, een ernstig gezicht zettende: "dat is nu <u>alles goed en</u> hear once, said he, a serious face putting: that is now all good and <u>wel</u>. <u>Maar ik moet u vooraf vragen</u>, of gy de boodschap, die ik well, but I must you before ask, whether you the message, that I u geven zal, zult kunnen volbrengen, zonder er iemand over te you give will, shall can deliver, without there someone about to spreken?"

speak

'Now listen, he said, that is all fine and dandy, but I have to ask you first whether you can deliver the message I am about to give you without talking about it with anyone.'

^{5.} V. HEMERT, Lekt. 9, 60 [1807]. [WNT s.v. goed]

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An even older example given in the dictionary is a variant of the construction, wel en mooi 'well and beautiful', which is now obsolete:

(7) Ja, dit is alles wel en mooi, maar myn papier waait geduurig op.⁷ yes this is all well and beautiful, but my paper blows constantly up 'That is all nice and dandy, but my paper is continuously blown up.'

The few examples given by the dictionary all have the quantifier *alles*. In modern corpora such as the Spoken Dutch Corpus (CGN), the string *allemaal goed en wel* outnumbers *alles goed en wel* (214 vs. 50 hits respectively). Given that the dictionary attestations all date from more than a century ago, there may have been a historical development, in which *allemaal* replaces *alles*. An additional indication for such a development is the fact that the paraphrase of *alles goed en wel* in the WNT s.v. wel uses *allemaal*. This lemma was published in 1991 (Moerdijk 1994); apparently, the dictionary editors unconsciously adopted the modern usage. The diachronic Delpher newspaper corpus (www.delpher.nl) offers support for such a historical development. Figures 1 and 2 generated by Delpher) illustrate this (note that the y-axes do not use the same scale). *Alles goed en wel* has 12227 hits, as opposed to *allemaal goed en wel* with 3335. It turns out that *alles goed en wel* has earlier attestations (ca. 1800) and a higher peak (ca. 0.02% vs. 0.006%) than *allemaal goed en wel* (first attestations ca. 1830).

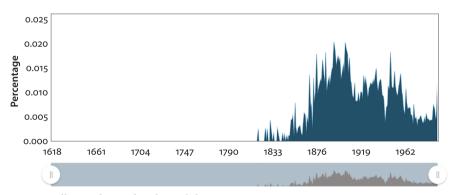


Figure 1. Alles goed en wel in the Delpher corpus

^{6.} V. LENNEP, E. Musch 3, 17 [1851]. [WNT s.v. wel]

^{7.} WOLFF en DEKEN, Leev. 8, 43 [1785]. [WNT s.v. wel]

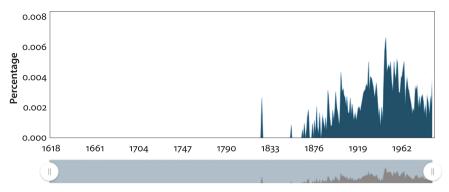


Figure 2. Allemaal goed en wel in the Delpher corpus

3. On the function of alles/allemaal goed en wel

The construction *allemaal/alles goed en wel* is not treated (or even mentioned) in any of the grammars we consulted. Some larger dictionaries, on the other hand, do (slightly) better. As was already mentioned above, the large *WNT* dictionary treats the expression twice. Under *goed* 'good', a functional description is given, as well as a paraphrase:

(8) WNT s.v. *goed*"als concessieve uitdrukking: best, laat dat zoo wezen"

'as a concessive expression: OK, let it be that way'

The lemma on wel, on the other hand, only offers a paraphrase:

(9) WNT s.v. wel V. "dat kan nou allemaal wel zoo zijn" 'that's all possible'

The Van Dale dictionary (Den Boon et al. 2015) is more into the right direction in describing *goed en wel* in functional terms as "to introduce an objection" ("ter inleiding van een bezwaar"). It gives the comparable form *leuk en aardig* 'nice and nice' as a synonym. Neither of the dictionaries, however, explicitly notes that the objection is obligatorily introduced by the conjunction *maar* 'but'. Apparently, the user has to derive this from the examples given.

In our view, the whole combination is a construction in the sense of construction grammar (cf. Goldberg 1995; Sag et al. 2003, etc.), a pairing of a form and a meaning. We propose the following sketch of a description of it:

- (10) Dutch has a construction consisting of
 - A universal quantifier (allemaal, alles)

- Two synonymous positive adverbs (goed en wel, leuk en aardig), coordinated with en
- The conjunction *maar* The construction introduces a contrary reaction that is expressed in the clause immediately following, it functions as a warning that objections are going to be raised.

The use of this type of construction fits into the larger picture of politeness (cf. Goffman 1967, Brown & Levinson 1987, etc.). To boldly contradict the one you have a conversation with is a face-threatening act towards the addressee. The construction under discussion is a way for the speaker to offer something positive before threatening the addressee's face by means of his/her contradiction.

Given this function, it comes as no surprise that the expression typically does not occur at the start of a conversation, where there is nothing to contradict, yet.

4. The elements of the construction

In this section, we will focus on the constituting parts of the construction.

4.1 The universal quantifier

As regards the universal quantifier, we already saw above that *alles* seems to be the oldest universal quantifier used in the construction, which is gradually being replaced by *allemaal*. There are differences in the syntax and semantics of the two quantifiers. Only *allemaal* can be used as a floating quantifier:⁸

- (11) Ik heb de kinderen <u>allemaal</u> een boek gegeven.
 - I have the children all a book given
 - 'I gave a book to all children.'
- (12) *Ik heb de kinderen alles een boek gegeven.
- (13) Ik heb de melk allemaal opgedronken.
 - I have the milk all up-drunk
 - 'I finished all of the milk.'
- (14) *Ik heb de melk alles opgedronken.

^{8.} Cf. for the history of Dutch floating quantifiers chapter 6 of Van de Velde (2009), and for the current use Coppen (1991), Cirillo (2009), Oudshoorn (2013), and Broekhuis & Den Dikken (2020).

Allemaal can be combined with noun phrases, either plurals or mass nouns, whereas the combination of *alles* with nouns is old-fashioned, and only found in idioms:

- (15) Er zijn <u>allemaal</u> mensen op straat. there are all people on street 'There's lots of people in the street.'
- (16) Er ligt <u>allemaal</u> zand op straat. there lies all sand on street 'There's lots of sand on the street.'
- (17) Het is niet <u>alles</u> goud wat er <u>blinkt</u>. it is not all gold that there glitters 'All that glitters is not gold'

Perhaps this latter fact may help explain why *alles* is being replaced in the construction by *allemaal*, but more research appears to be necessary.

4.2 The synonymous adverbs

We started our discussion with the variant involving *goed en wel*. From the dictionaries we learnt that in the oldest attestation, another combination, *wel en mooi*, was possible, whereas *leuk en aardig* was given as a paraphrase. A real life example is given below:

(18) Dat klinkt allemaal heel leuk en aardig maar dat lukt je dus that sounds all very nice and nice but that succeeds you thus gewoon niet.

normally not

'That all sounds very nice but you just won't succeed in that.'

• • •

A quick internet search moreover finds the combination *goed en aardig*:

(19) Dat is <u>allemaal goed en aardig, maar</u> weet u, wij gaan naar een that is all good and nice but know you we go to a privé-jachthaven.

private-marina

'That's all well and good, but see, we're going to a private marina.'

All combinations involve positive evaluative adverbs (or adjectives, the distinction is often difficult to make in Dutch), in all cases the order seems to be more or less fixed:

(20) [?]allemaal aardig en leuk

- (21) [?]allemaal aardig en goed
- (22) ?allemaal wel en goed

This fits into a more general pattern (cf. Cooper & Ross 1975).

Forms such as *goed en wel*, with a coordination of two synonyms, are marked – why bother saying something twice? The marked form functions as a signal for the addressee that a literal, referential interpretation is not called for (cf. Horn 1984 on "division of pragmatic labor" and Levinson 2000's "M-principle"). It warns the hearer that the phrase is to be interpreted in a different way. In this sense, the construction implements a form of iconicity: the marked form indicates a marked meaning, viz., the meta-pragmatic message that a contrary reaction is coming.

Sometimes, *goed en wel* in this usage is accompanied by a subject and a verb, e.g. in the dictionary examples (6)–(7) above, but also in contemporary cases such as the ones given below:

- (23) Dat <u>is allemaal goed en wel, maar</u> zeg me nu eens waar dat allemaal toe that is all good and well, but say me now once where that all to dient.⁹ serves
 - 'That is all fine and dandy, but please tell me the purpose of all this.'
- (24) Dat is allemaal goed en wel, maar ik denk toch dat er een andere that is all good and well, but I think yet that there an other verklaring is voor dat overgeven.¹⁰ explanation is for that vomiting 'That is all fine and dandy, but I think there is another explanation for that vomiting.'

Given that *goed en wel* is coordinated with a full clause (cf. below), and under the standard assumption that coordination by default combines like categories (Gazdar 1980, Sag et al. 1985), one might want to hypothesize that examples such as (23) and (24) exemplify the normal variant of the construction. Under this approach, the variants without verbal material given above (e.g. (1) and (2)) would contain a subject and verbal material after all, in some stage of the derivation

An argument against this approach may be constructed on the basis of the following example:

^{9.} Hans Magnus Enzenberger, Telduivel, via Google books.

^{10.} Heidi Rice, Opwindende flirt, via Google books.

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(25) Even goeie vrienden maar dat lukt gewoon niet. equally good friends but that succeed ordinarily not 'No offense but that is impossible.'

The expression *even goeie vrienden* 'equally good friends' appears to function in the same way as *goed en wel, leuk en aardig*, etcetera. However, whereas *goed en wel, leuk en aardig*, can be made into 'complete' sentences by means addition of a dummy subject *dat* 'that' or *het* 'it' and a corresponding form of the copula, this is impossible in the case of *even goeie vrienden*: *dat/het is even goeie vrienden* is simply ungrammatical.¹¹

4.3 The conjunction

The next element is *maar*, the contrastive conjunction comparable to English *but*. Often, the order of the groups combined by means of *maar* 'but' can be turned around (the same holds for *en* 'and') (Foolen 1993: chapter 7 calls this "symmetric"):

- (26) Klein maar dapper Small but brave
- (27) Dapper maar klein Brave but small

In other cases, change of the order involves change of meaning, often because natural language coordination is more than, or different from, logical coordination, for instance because the order of the conjuncts suggests some temporal or causal relation. The following examples are not equivalent, as the linear order of conjuncts is by default interpreted as reflecting the temporal order of the vents described:

- (28) together, they moved to Enchancia, and had a daughter, Sofia¹²
- (29) together, they had a daughter, Sofia, and moved to Enchancia

Our *alles goed en wel* is obligatorily the first conjunct: if we take example sentence (1) and switch the order, the result is ungrammatical:

(30) *'t gaat er toch met name om dat kinderen leren wat er op 't bord staat <u>maar</u> <u>allemaal goed en wel</u> (cf. (1))

^{11.} One might think of addition of *we blijven* 'we'll stay', which yields a sort of grammatical result, but if that is allowed, the theory becomes unrestrictive beyond repair.

^{12.} https://sofiathefirst.fandom.com/wiki/Birk_Balthazar.

4.4 The sentence containing the contrary reaction

The last part of the construction, the sentence containing the contrary reaction, is a complete main clause, usually with main clause order (V2), although a main clause question (cf. (2) above) or a main clause directive (31), with V1, is possible as well. Subordinate word order (Subject Object Verb as in (32)), on the other hand, is impossible:

- (31) Alles goed en wel, maar ga niet tegen me zeggen dat ik jou de deur uit heb all good and well but go not to me say that I you the door out have gegooid.

 thrown
 - 'All fine and dandy, but don't tell me that I have thrown you out.'
- (32) *Allemaal goed en wel maar (dat) 't erom gaat dat kinderen leren all good and well but (that) it there round goes that children learn wat er op 't bord staat (cf. (1)) what ether on the board stands

That is to say, the second part of the construction can be a standard assertive V2 clause, but also a V1 question or a V1 directive. This brings us back to the question touched on above about the status of the parts on either side of *maar*. The standard assumption is that coordination by default combines like categories. From a syntactic point of view, V2 clauses are not the same as V1 questions or V1 directives. One possible solution is to assume that *maar* is not active at the syntactic level here, but rather at the pragmatic level, in the sense that it combines utterances here. If this is correct, our discussion offers support for a suggestion already made by Foolen (1993: 126–130) that *maar* not only conjoins words, constituents and clauses, but utterances as well.

5. The broader picture

In the preceding sections, we have seen that *alles goed en wel maar* and *allemaal leuk en aardig maar* can be used to introduce a contrary reaction. The part preceding *maar* is a positive signal towards the hearer that mitigates the negative effect of the actual message. Note that the constructions discussed so far are not the only ones to introduce a contrary reaction. Consider the following examples:¹³

^{13.} Modern users may also use equivalent expressions from English such as *no offense* and *no hard feelings*. They fit into the general picture sketched here, but we will not go into the details here.

- (33) <u>Jullie hebben wel</u> <u>gelijk</u> maar mama is nu eenmaal zo. you have well even but mommy is no once so 'You are right but that is how mommy is.'
- (34) <u>Ik vind dit allemaal heel leuk maar</u> ik wil niet met je naar bed vanavond I find this all very nice but I want not with you to bed tonight 'I like this all very much but I don't want to sleep with you tonight.'
- (35) <u>Ia</u> maar dat vind 'k dan toch nog wat anders dan echt thuis yes but that find I then yet yet something different than really home wonen.

live

'Yes but I still think it is different from really living home.'

- (36) Inderdaad maar ik vind Jon Bon Jovi wordt echt steeds irritanter indeed but I find Jon Bon Jovi becomes really ever more-irritating gewoon.

 normally

 'You are right but I still think Jon Bon Jovi becomes more irritating by the day.'
- (37) Sorry maar daar hebben wij geen tijd voor. sorry but there have we no time for 'Sorry but we don't have time for that.'
- (38) Het spijt me, maar de voortekenen zijn heel slecht. it sorries me but the omens are very bad 'I am sorry but the omens are very bad.'

In all the examples in (33)–(38), a contrary or, more general, negative message is introduced by something positive. Note, however, that the 'compensation' that is offered for the face-threatening act of the negative message may take various forms. We can distinguish at least three types:

- Praise of the addressee: *alles goed en wel* 'all good and well', *allemaal leuk en aardig* 'all nice and nice', *het is allemaal heel leuk* 'it is all very nice', etc.;
- Confirmation of the addressee's position: Ja 'yes' (Droste 2017) and synonyms like inderdaad 'indeed'; jullie hebben gelijk 'you are right';
- Self-diminishing of the speaker: *sorry* and *het spijt me* 'I'm sorry'.

Some of the expressions given above are more lexicalized and grammaticalized (Lehman 1982, Hopper & Traugott 2003, etc.) than others: few native speakers of Dutch will take *het is allemaal leuk en aardig* as a sincere positive evaluation of the situation: the pragmatic function is immediately recognized, the original referential meaning is bleached. On the other hand, an expression like *jullie hebben*

wel gelijk 'you are right after all' in (33) is much less lexicalized: irony aside, it can only be uttered if the speaker really thinks that the addressees are right after all.

Viewed this way, *alles goed en wel maar* and comparable expressions fit into a much larger class of lexicalized pragmatic operators, such as pragmatic particles (Foolen 1996). Just like Dutch *kortom* 'in short' can be used to mark summaries, and *wat X betreft* 'concerning X' and *over X gesproken* 'speaking about X' can be used to mark topics, is it possible to use *alles goed en wel* and comparable expressions to mark contrary reactions.

6. Concluding remarks

In our investigations into the use and structure of the expression *allemaal goed en wel*, we have discovered various things:

- It is a form of lexicalized pragmatics;
- It is iconic in the sense that the special form (a tautological coordination) draws attention to the special (non-referential) semantics;
- The construction sheds new light on the functions of *maar*: it confirms a suggestion by Foolen (1993) that this conjunction can not only join words, clauses and sentences, but utterances as well;
- The expression fits into a larger class of lexicalized pragmatic operators.

As far as we know, this is the first time that this class of expressions has been investigated for Dutch. We assume that more is to be discovered. If this paper can be of inspiration for further research, it serves its goal.

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