Well, about *wel!*

On the diversity and unity of the Dutch particle *wel*

Met dank aan…

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Introduction

Wel is a weird word. Just the presence of it in a sentence can add a whole new dimension to it. *Wel* could be called the positive counterpart of *niet* 'not'. When children disagree about a certain fact they often use those two words as recurring arguments: *wel(les)[1], niet(es), wel(les), niet(es)* 'it is, it is not, it is, it is not'. Because the affirmative meaning of a sentence is the unmarked one, adding the particle *wel* has to have another reason then just creating a positive meaning. The most obvious reason to use *wel* is to contradict a previous denial of a certain fact:

(1) *Jij heet echt geen Jan-Peter!*
      - Ik heet wel Jan-Peter!
      'Your name isn't Jan-Peter!'
      - 'My name *is* Jan-Peter!'

But it can bring about other, at first sight totally different meanings too:

(2) *Ik heb vandaag wel honderd boten geteld!*
      'I have counted no less than a hundred boats today!'

In (2) the speaker indicates by using the word *wel* that he thinks hundred boats is a lot.

Another function of *wel* is illustrated in (3):

(3) *Het feestje afgelopen zaterdag was wel leuk*
      'The party last Saturday was OK'

Here the speaker says that the party was OK, not good not bad. *Wel* functions as a moderator to the predicate *leuk* 'nice', and weakens its meaning.
And what about the, for non-native speakers of Dutch quite confusing use of both *wel* and *niet* 'not' right next to each other? In (4) the speaker expresses his surprise over a situation in which it appears that the addressee has eaten a lot of cake.

(4) *Grote grutten, hoeveel taart heb je wel niet gegeten?!*
      'My God, how much cake did you eat?!'

Besides the fact that the word brings about such different meanings there is another reason why it is interesting. It is used a lot! In the Spoken Dutch Corpus it takes the twentieth position in the frequency list containing all words!
In spite of these facts not much has been written about the word so far. While particles like *maar* 'but' (e.g. Foolen 1993, de Vriendt & P. van de Craen 1984), *toch* 'nevertheless' (e.g. Foolen 1994, Elffers 1992), *zelfs* 'even' (e.g. Coessens 1983) or *nog* 'still' (e.g. Vandeweghe 1984) have been the object of several studies, *wel* hasn't had much attention up till now. That is why in this thesis I will give an analysis of the Dutch word *wel*. That means I will make an inventory of the different meanings or functions *wel* expresses or fulfils. For this I will make use of the Spoken Dutch Corpus, a large corpus that contains nine million words of contemporary spoken

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[1] I don't know where the suffix (l)es comes from, it is used only by children or rather childish adults

Dutch. By interpreting the different occurrences of *wel* in the corpus, I will come to a set of meanings or uses I can group them by. Because I will abstract my data from the Spoken Dutch Corpus in a systematic way, I expect to capture the uses of the word that are most common in contemporary Dutch.

Let me note here that some uses of *wel* are similar to the English *well.* In that case *wel* has the meaning 'good' or 'right'. This is especially the case when *wel* is used in fixed expressions like *dank je wel* 'thank you' *wel te rusten* 'sleep well' and *vaarwel* 'farewell'. For the purpose of this thesis I am not interested in *wel* having the meaning 'good' because outside expressions such as the above, the use of *wel* meaning 'good' has become a bit archaic and very rare.

What type of word is *wel*? Although people disagree about the definition of the class, words like *wel*, which have no referential meaning, are often called particles.

Foolen (1993) considers the class of particles to include every element that doesn't add to the propositional meaning of a sentence. He subdivides them into the following classes: interjections, conjunctions, modal adverbs, focus particles and modal particles. When specific particles are discussed, their different meanings are usually grouped according to the different subclasses they belong to. That is why I will start this thesis by discussing the class of particles. I will give several views on how to define the class and what subclasses could be distinguished. Even though one may find the question how to label certain occurrences not that interesting, an ordering of more or less similar words according to their function or meaning may give us something to go by in describing the different meanings of *wel.*

It is often advocated that an analysis of a particle should involve a description of the relationship of the different readings of the element in addition to a detailed inventory of those different readings. Fischer (2000) claims that a semantic/pragmatic model of particles should include four levels:

"It accounts for the whole functional spectrum a particle may fulfil and for the relation between the different readings by motivating the individual interpretations by the invariant meaning. It also provides the relationship between the items of a word class by specifying the different reference elements which distinguish items from different word classes. Finally, it fulfils the requirement that the definition of the word classes be a natural consequence of the semantic/pragmatic model."

Why should the different meanings of a lexical item be related? Foolen (1993) formulates it as follows. Existing meanings are metaphorical and metonymical mapped on new experiences through cognitive processes. Meanings that already existed will coexist next to new meanings that are linked to the old ones by the cognitive processes that underlie them.

Part of the analysis of *wel* will therefore be a search for the underlying concept that lies at the basis of the different meanings *wel* brings about.

In addition to analyzing the different meanings of *wel* I am also very interested in how people come to the right interpretation, which is the interpretation that the speaker intended. It will sometimes be the case that the different interpretations of *wel* are in conflict with each other and that there are several possible interpretations. Yet people come to one interpretation and most of the times it's the right one. In this part of the thesis I will make use of Optimality Theory. In Optimality Theory language

phenomena are explained in terms of violable constraints. Because these constraints express very general statements with respect to language, they can be in conflict. Conflicts among constraints are resolved because the constraints differ in strength. The constraints can be ordered in a constraint hierarchy according to that strength (Hendriks 2004). What constraints could influence the interpretation of *wel*? How do hearers come to an optimal interpretation? These are questions I will try to answer in chapter four.

To summarize, in this thesis I will give an analysis of the Dutch word *wel*. This analysis consists of an inventory of the different meanings or functions *wel* has or fulfils, a description of the relation between those different readings and an Optimality Theoretic model that can account for the interpretation of the particle *wel.*

Chapter 1: Literature, about particles and the meaning of *wel*

Wel could be categorized under the class of particles. Although people disagree about the precise definition of the class, most of them will think of small uninflectable words that have no referential meaning. English examples of such words are *but, still, even, well, after all* etc.

Some of those words are thoroughly analyzed. The word *but* for example and its Dutch (maar) and German (aber/sondern) counterparts have been the object of several studies (a.o. Umbach 2004 (*but*), Foolen 1993 (*maar*), Diewald, G. & Fischer, K. 1998 (*aber*)).

In studies on particles their different meanings are usually discussed according to which subclass they belong to. Because different words sometimes have similar effects in meaning, one can group them accordingly. Such a division gives people analyzing the meaning of particles something to go by. In this chapter I will give several views on the class of particles. But before doing that it is wise to explicate a number of concepts that are closely related to particles and thus to the word *wel*. The concepts I would like to discuss are modality and speech acts and contrast and focus.

After discussing the particles I will discuss the literature that concerns the word *wel*. As I said, not much has been written about it but Abraham (1984) and Westheide (1985) both devote an article to *wel* and the effects *wel* can have on a sentence.

1.1 Speech acts and modality

Language can be used to make statements about the world. Such statements can then be true or false. The utterance *John is at home* for example is true if in reality it is the case that John is at home. We call such statements propositions. For a long time work on the philosophy of language focused on the truth conditional aspects of propositions. However, language has many other purposes too and it is not always possible to determine the truth value of an utterance. Utterances like *congratulations* or *I hope it's true* for example can not be called true or false. One of the other purposes language can have is performing speech acts. Austin (1962) saw that with language one can perform a certain act, for example congratulate, warn somebody, or make a request. He makes a distinction between the locution; what is said, a combination of words with a specific meaning, and the illocution: the intention of the speaker or the tenor or purport of the utterance. The locution of an utterance like *could you pass me the salt* is the pronunciation of those words in that combination. The illocution of that utterance is making a request to somebody, asking him to pass the salt.

Another aspect of language is called modality. Modality is the expression of the subjective position of the speaker in a sentence towards the proposition of that sentence. There are different types of modality. When a speaker expresses how likely he considers the proposition of the sentence to be true this is called epistemic modality. In the sentence *John is probably at home* for example the speaker utters his view on how likely he considers it to be the case that John is at home. He expresses his beliefs concerning the relation between the proposition of the sentence

John is at home and reality. Another type of modality is used to express one's emotions over or one's positions towards the proposition in the sentence. In the sentence *unfortunately John is at home* the speaker expresses his emotion over the fact that John is at home.

There are many ways to express modality. One can use adverbs like *probably, unfortunately, hopefully, likely, maybe* or verbs like *hope, think, suspect, wish, must* or sometimes a certain intonation or an adjusted word order.

1.2 Contrast and focus

Contrast is a discourse relation between two items which are similar in many ways and different in some ways, and a comparison is made between those items with respect to one of those differences. Such a relation can be established in several ways. One way is by combining contrastive conjuncts, often with a contrastive conjunction:

> (5)   My big sister loves the Ikea but my little sister hates it

Another way is with phonetic focus:

> (6)   My *big* sister loves the Ikea

Rooth (1992) formulated an influential theory concerning focus. This theory is based on the idea that focus evokes a set of alternatives. The idea of 'alternative semantics', as he calls it, is to formalize the notion of focus by adding a semantic value for a phrase containing focus. Assuming the semantic value of a sentence is a proposition, the focus semantic value of a phrase could informally be described as "the set of propositions obtainable from the ordinary semantic value by making a substitution in the position corresponding to the focused phrase" (Rooth 1992, p. 2). This means for a sentence like *John likes Mary* with phonetic focus on *Mary* the focus semantic value for that sentence is the set of propositions of the form *John likes x*. And if the focus were on J*ohn*, the focus semantic value would be the set of propositions of the form *y likes Mary*. The content of that set, the possible alternatives, must be recovered with the help of the context. The focus semantic value constrains the set of alternatives to all elements that share the relevant property (e.g. *liking Mary*). From the context one has to recover or construct the relevant alternatives which can be considered substitutes for the focused element.

The theory of alternatives has been applied to contrast in general (Valduvi & Vilkuna 1998, Molnár 2001). This means that contrast is seen as evoking a (set of) alternative(s) for the contrasted item. Two types of contrast are usually distinguished: exhaustive contrast, when all alternatives for the element mentioned are excluded and non-exhaustive contrast that results from the mere existence of alternatives (Umbach 2004).

1.3 Particles

Now that I have given some background information I will discuss the class of particles. Vandeweghe tries to define the notion of particles in his introduction to *Studies over Nederlandse partikels* (1984). Vandeweghe gives some external

characteristics which come down to the requirement that particles are not inflectable and don't have the status of a constituent. They function in between constituents (autonomous particles) or cling to a constituent and can be placed in front of the finite verb together with that constituent (non-autonomous particles). A semantic or pragmatic characteristic he considers to be the fact that particles have no referential meaning but much implicative meaning. They signal how the 'state of affairs', that what is explicated by the sentence, should fit into the bigger whole. He acknowledges that these criteria won't give a solid demarcation of the notion since there are many derivations of a lexeme that have another (related) meaning and that function in a different word-class.

Within the class of particles he distinguishes two main categories: the propositional particles and the 'schakeringspartikels' in English sometimes called downtoners. The propositional particles have a direct linking to the proposition of the sentence. They indicate how the state of affairs should be interpreted in the 'universe of interpretation' which allows for alternatives. They come as sentence particles, when the particle concerns the whole state of affairs. And they come as adjunct particles (also known as focus particles), when the particle concerns only a part of the state of affairs.

Downtoners don't signal how a proposition should be interpreted with respect to possible alternatives but they give a clue to the hearer about the intent of the utterance, the illocutive tenor in addition to an indication about how the utterance should fit into a broader framework of speaker-hearer-expectations and -preferences. Furthermore, Vandeweghe makes a distinction between including and excluding particles. Including particles include the evoked alternatives for the element mentioned in the proposition (*also, even, at least, already* etc.) and excluding particles exclude the evoked alternatives for the element mentioned in the proposition (*just, only, not* etc.)

Special propositional particles are the connective ones, since they signal the logical connection between two or more propositions.

Foolen (1993) gives a broad description of the class of particles in his dissertation *De Betekenis van Partikels* 'the meaning of particles'. Foolen considers every element that doesn't add to propositional meaning of an utterance to be a particle, although he admits that the distinction is sometimes hard to make. He distinguishes several different sub-classes of particles. I will discuss the several subclasses, some in more detail then others according to their relevance to this thesis.

As the first sub-class Foolen mentions the *interjections* or *discourse particles.* Those elements are not embedded in the sentence-structure. Their function is to express the speaker's emotion or to be an indicator for the course of the conversation. English examples are *oh, well, you know.* Dutch examples are *ja, hoor, zeg.*

Next Foolen mentions the *conjunctions*. Although it is hard to decide whether conjunctions contribute to the propositional meaning of a sentence, Foolen considers coordinating conjunctions to be particles because besides denoting a relation between propositions they can also indicate a relation between speech acts.

Another class of particles is formed by the *adverbs*. According to Foolen the connective adverbs like *bovendien* 'moreover' and *trouwens* 'besides' can be called particles. Because they have a primarily connective function they are comparable to the connectives.

Modal adverbs are prototypical non-propositional elements. They express the speaker's subjective position with respect to the proposition of the sentence. Some

adverbs indicate how likely the speaker considers the proposition to be true, for example *misschien* 'maybe' or *waarschijnlijk* 'probably'. Other elements express the emotional attitude towards the propositional content, for example *gelukkig* 'fortunately' or *helaas* 'unfortunately'.

Next Foolen distinguishes the *focus particles*. Focus particles come together with an element of a proposition in focus. The particle and that element usually form a constituent together but it is possible to separate them in a sentence. Every part of a sentence that can carry focus can be linked to a focus element. Certain formal markings, like the placing of the particle and focus element or phonetic focus, help to identify the element that the focus particle is linked with. Focus particles evoke a (set of) alternative(s) for the element in focus.

Foolen discusses two parameters that can be distinguished with respect to the function of focus particles. The first one is addition versus restriction. Additive focus particles indicate that the utterance is additionally true with respect to the element in focus. Restrictive focus particles exclude other elements with respect to which the utterance is true besides the focused element. This sometimes means the utterance is true only with respect to the element in focus (e.g. *exactly, only, precisely*) but this is not necessarily the case.

The second parameter is scalarity. A particle can be called a scalar particle when the element in focus and its alternatives are ranked with respect to each other. The focus particle indicates how the element in focus should be placed on the scale of ordered alternatives. This order can be social by nature, *only* in *John is only a secretary of state* implicates for example that being a secretary of state takes in a low position on some social scale, probably one also including being a minister or prime-minister. The ordering can be purely numeral as well, for example in *John has only two hundred books* or it can be otherwise.

Finally there are the *modal particles*. They seem to have scope over the whole sentence, in contrast to focus particles. And in contrast to modal adverbs they can't be in sentence-initial position on their own. A defining property of modal particles, according to Foolen, is that they function at the illocutionary level of a sentence. They do not define the illocutionary content but they indicate that a certain aspect from the context is relevant with respect to the illocutionary function of an utterance. A modal particle indicates that the speaker is aware of the existence of alternatives for the relevant speech act or an aspect of it. This alternative is usually the direct negation of the act or a related aspect. The alternative must be contextually relevant for the utterance to be adequate. According to Foolen, a modal particle can also relate to mental act, a decision a speaker takes in his mind. An example of the modal particle *maar* related to a mental act is:

>　(7)　*Nou, dan ga ik maar*
>　　　'OK, I think I'll go then'

Here *maar* is related to the decision the speaker made in his mind to go. By uttering it the speaker indicates that the status of the utterance is a decision he just took. The alternative would have been not taking the decision.

The views of Vandeweghe and Foolen are similar on some points and different on others. Since the main goal of my thesis is not to define the class of particles or to name the different subclasses I will leave the description of the class of particles at this. In determining the meaning of *wel* I will simply use the observations and

classifications that help me to describe the different uses of the word. Next I will discuss some literature that conern the particle *wel.* Those analyses include a classification of the different uses under word classes that possibly differ from the aforementioned.

1.4 Literature about *wel*

There has been done some previous analysis on the particle *wel*. I will discuss two articles, one of Abraham (1984) and one of Westheide (1985), that compare the Dutch *wel* to the German *wohl* and other German particles. But first I will report on what the Van Dale dictionary has to say about the word to give an indication of the diversity of the uses of *wel.* The Van Dale gives quite a broad description of the particle and distinguishes between several uses of it.

1.4.1 *Wel* in *De Dikke Van Dale* 'the fat Van Dale'

The word *wel* has five lemmas in the most influential dictionary in the Dutch language area: the Van Dale (thirteenth edition, 1999). The first one tells us a *wel* is a component of a pipe organ. The second one is about *wel* meaning 'spring'. I am not interested in those two since they are not related to the particle *wel* and they are hardly ever used. The fifth lemma discusses *wel* with the meaning 'good'. As I indicated in the introduction, I am not interested in that use of *wel* for the purpose of this thesis. The third and fourth lemma are the ones I am interested in, they state (free and shortened translation by me):

Wel originates from *willen* 'to want', the base meaning would be *naar wens* 'to ones liking'.
I (adverb of state) **1** In a good manner, as it is supposed to be. Synonyms: good, right. Expression that indicates that the speaker approves of something or understands something.
2 (In a couple of common expressions) good: *wel thuis* 'lit. well home; have a good trip' *als ik het wel heb* 'if I am right' *welterusten* 'good night'. **3** (With weaker interpretation) only to express the opposite of a denial: *het is wel aardig* 'it is OK' *dat weet je wel* 'you know that'.
4 *Goed en wel* 'good and well', is said to indicate that a certain action is completed or a certain state is fully accomplished. **5** (In reference to physical or mental health) in physically or mentally good condition. Syn: healthy.
II (Adverb of modality) **1** As affirmation: *ja* 'yes' *wel, wel ja, wel nee* 'no', *hij zal het wel doen* 'he will do it' **2** With emphasis, particularly when put against a denial: *het is wel waar* 'it ís true' **3** When admitting or affirming something: *hij is wel rijk maar niet gelukkig* 'he may be rich but he is not happy' **4** Expressed when one suspects, guesses or doubts something: *hij zal wel niet komen* 'he probably won't come' *kun je het wel doen?* 'are you capable of that?' (when used with numbers, time or measure) to indicate that no less then the mentioned amount is the case: *dat zijn er wel honderd* 'that's no less then an amount of hundred' with indefinite numbers: *hoeveel zijn het er wel niet?* 'how much are there?' **5** *Niet waar* 'not true': *u gelooft mij niet, wel?* 'you don't believe me, do you?' **6** *En* 'and' *wel,* namely: *er zijn drie bomen gerooid, en wel de iep, de eik en de kastanje* 'three trees are dug up, namely the elm, the oak and the chestnut'

Wel 1 As an introduction to a question: *Wel? Hoe denk je erover?* 'Well? What do you think?' After a negative question in the main clause: *je mag me niet erg, is het wel?* 'you don't like me, do you?'
2 To express ones surprise: *Wel! Wel! Wat zeg je daarvan* 'Well, well! What do you say about that'. To express indignation: *wel nu nog mooier!* 'Well, how about that!' With swearwords: *wel godverdomme!* 'Well I'll be damned!'

As we see Van Dale makes no clear-cut distinction between the *wel* meaning 'good' (lemma 1 / I / 1, 2, 4, 5*)* and *wel* as an expression of modality (lemma 1 / I / 3, lemma 1 / II / 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, lemma 2 / 1, 2). In my opinion *wel* as in 'good' is pretty well only used in fixed expressions nowadays. The use of *wel* maining 'good' outside those expressions is very rare and quite old fashioned. Since *wel* as an expression of modality is very vibrant and used very often, I decided to focus only on that use of *wel* in this thesis.

1.4.2 *Wel* according to Abraham
Two articles discuss the use of *wel* in comparison with *wohl* and other German particles. The first one is from Abraham (1984) the second one is from Westheide (1985). I will first discuss the article by Abraham. I will focus on what he describes as the meaning of *wel*. I will not elaborate on the comparison with German particles.

1.4.2.1 *Wel* with a comforting effect
Abraham lists several effects *wel* can have on the meaning of a sentence. First he mentions *wel* as a modal particle. According to Abraham the modal particle *wel* can appear in sentences that express the confidence of the speaker that a certain desired situation will occur. In this case *wel* has a comforting effect:

    (8)   *Dat lukt me wel*
             '(Don't worry) I will manage'

    (9)   *Ik zal wel voor hem zorgen*
             '(Don't worry) I will take care of him'

1.4.2.2 *Wel* in interrogative sentences
Next Abraham lists the effects of *wel* in interrogative sentences. Abraham compares *wel* in interrogative sentences with the German *schon*. When a speaker uses *schon* in a question he is convinced the answer will be either very positive or very negative. The Dutch *wel,* used in a question gives a slightly milder effect. In (10) for example the speaker indicates he expects a lot, and it could very well be really positive:

    (10)   *Wat zou mij daar wel te wachten staan?*
              'I wonder what will happen there'

Wel used in questions can also indicate the speaker knows the answer is a negative one:

    (11)   *Wat voor kansen zouden de Afghanen wel tegen de Russen hebben?*
              'What kind of change do the Afghans stand against the Russians?'

According to Abraham all these uses off the modal particle *wel* share the same base meaning, namely one of perfection and completeness. A meaning that is expressed in German with the word *schon.*

Another meaning or use of *wel* in a question is to attend the listener to something important:

> (12) *Denkt u er wel aan de hond te voeren?*
> 'Won't you forget to feed the dog?'

Wel implies the speaker assumes the hearer won't forget such an important duty. These sentences are in between questions and declaratives.

The next use of *wel* in interrogative sentences is where the speaker expresses with *wel* that he has doubts about whether the hearer has carried out the actions mentioned in the remaining of the sentence:

> (13) *Hebt u wel handschoenen meegenomen?*
> 'Did you bring hand gloves?'

Wel is also used when the speaker wants to bring a sense of indignation to the sentence. These sentences are in between questions and declaratives like (12). Here the meaning of *wel* also has to do with completeness and perfection, in the sense that the hearer has completely misunderstood a certain idea of the speaker:

> (14) *Wat denkt u wel?*
> 'What do you think of me?'

Wel is also used in yes/no-questions (in contrast with the aforementioned rhetorical questions). The speaker indicates he expects the answer to be negative:

> (15) *Had je dat wel van hem gedacht?*
> 'Had you expected that from him?'

1.4.2.3 *Wel* as a 'cognitive modal adverb'
Next Abraham discusses *wel* as, what he calls a cognitive modal adverb. By cognitive modality he means what is usually called epistemic modality. According to Abraham *wel* decreases the truthfulness of the proposition:

> (16) *Hij zal het wel gezien hebben.*
> 'He has (probably) seen it'

1.4.2.4 Stressed *wel*
Abraham also discusses the meaning of the stressed *wel. Wel* with main stress occurs as an answering particle, a particle of contradiction, an interjection and a conjunction.
Wel as an answering particle has a concessive meaning:

(17) *Wil niemand meer iets drinken?*
       - Ik wél.
       'Nobody wants a drink anymore?'
       - 'I do'

Wel as a particle of contradiction can be used after a negative declarative:

(18) *Hans mag jou niet*
        - Hij mag mij wel
       'Hans doesn't like you'
       - 'He *does* like me'

Wel as an interjection can be placed after an independent negative sentence. This is called a tag-question. The speaker uses it to question whether what he stated in the main question is right:

(19)   *Apen zijn geen mensen, wel?*
       'Monkeys are not people, right?'

And it can be placed in front of a main sentence. This is especially customary in the south of the language area. It functions as an introducer to the discourse:

(20) *Wel, hoe gaat het?*
       'Well, how are you?'

Wel as a conjunction is used in three ways. First, as the first member of a bipartite conjunction:

(21) *Dat is wel een goede, maar geen nieuwe gedachte.*
       'That is a good, though not a new thought'

Wel as an independent conjunction indicates a concessive opposition, comparable with the previous *wel-maar* construction:

(22) *De meeste dieren werden gered, wel bleven er twee katten over.*
       'Most animals were saved, although two cats remained'

Wel as a coordinating conjunction in combination with *en* 'and' is dependent on the previous sentence and it indicates an explanation or specification of the foregoing:

(23) *Hij kwam te laat, en wel twee uur.*
       'He was late, two hours'

At the end Abraham asks a couple of interesting questions concerning the fact that the Dutch *wel* has different German translations. Two of those questions are:
What do the German particles have in common since they can all be translated by the Dutch *wel*? What differences are there between the different uses of *wel* since German uses different lexical items for them? As part of an answer to that Abraham concludes that all uses of *wel* share two components: a reaction on the foregoing and

stressing the affirmative assertion. The differentiation is due to among other things the difference in sentence structure, type of speech act and stress.

1.4.3 *Wel* according to Westheide

Westheide (1985) sums up a couple of functions of *wel* in an article that compares the Dutch *wel* with the German *wohl.* He based his article on the article of Abraham I just discussed but he also adds some information about *wel.* I will discuss the uses of *wel* that were not mentioned by Abraham.

First Westheide discusses the use of *wel* as an adverb. *Wel* as an adverb has the meaning 'good' or 'fysically or mentally in good condition'. He gives a couple examples which he compares to examples with *wohl.* A couple of the Dutch examples he gives are:

> (24) *Dat is wel gezegd, wel te verstaan*
> 'That's well said; for good understanding

> (25) *Hij maakt het er wel*
> 'He is doing fine over there'

> (26) *Ik ben niet wel*
> 'I'm not feeling well'

Westheide correctly states that the use of *wel* as an adverb usually creates quite archaic phrases and according to him the Van Dale states that this use of *wel* has become quite unusual in spoken language.

Next he discusses *wel* as a 'Gradpartikel', a scalar particle. Again he quotes the Van Dale who says that *wel* in this use has the meaning 'that no less then the amount mentioned is the case'. He gives the following example:

> (27) *Dat zijn er wel tweehonderd!*
> 'That is no less then an amount of two hundred!'

Westheide realizes that the use of *wel* in this sense adds an element of surprise to what is said. He mentions that this type of particle is sometimes called a scalar particle or a focus particle.

Westheide discusses *wel* as a 'Gliederungspartikel'. He states that this use of *wel* has become a bit archaic as well. It can function as an introduction to the conversation:

> (28) *Wel, hoe denk je erover?*
> 'Well, what do you think?'

Or as an 'abtönende Gliederungspartikel' it can give a sense of surprise:

> (29) *Wel! Wel! Wat je zegt*
> 'Well, well! I agree'

Abraham and Westheide list a number of uses of *wel.* In the next chapter I will analyze the uses of the word in a more systematic way. In stead of thinking up some examples I will abstract my data from a large corpus containing contemporary spoken Dutch. That way we get a better image of the way *wel* is really used. I will compare my findings with the literature discussed above.

Chapter 2: The different uses of *wel*

In this chapter I will give an inventory of the different uses of *wel.* To come to that inventory I made use of the Spoken Dutch Corpus. I will begin this chapter by giving some information about this corpus and how I used it to find an answer to my questions.

2.1 The Spoken Dutch Corpus

The Spoken Dutch Corpus is a corpus that contains about nine million words of spoken Dutch. The data are a balanced sample of contemporary standard Dutch as spoken by adults in the Netherlands and Flanders. The corpus includes several types of speech:

- 225 h (2.626.000 w)	Spontaneous conversation ('face-to-face')
- 51 h (565.000 w)	Interviews with teachers of Dutch
- 92 h (1.209.000 w)	Telephone dialogues (recorded by a telephone exchange)
- 64 h (853.000 w)	Telephone dialogues (recorded on MD with local interface)
- 11 h (136.000 w)	Simulated business negotiations
- 64 h (790.000 w)	Interviews/discussions/debates (broadcasted on radio/television)
- 36 h (360.000 w)	(Political) discussions/debates/meetings (non-broadcast)
- 44 h (405.000 w)	Lessons (recorded in the classroom)
- 21 h (208.000 w)	Spontaneous (sport) commentaries (broadcasted on radio/television)
- 17 h (186.000 w)	Current affairs programs/reportages (broadcasted on radio/television)
- 36 h (368.000 w)	News bulletins (broadcasted on radio/television)
- 15 h (146.000 w)	Commentaries/columns (broadcasted on radio/television)
- 2 h (18.000 w)	Official speeches/masses/lectures
- 16 h (141.000 w)	Lectures/readings/colleges
- 104 h (903.000 w)	Read texts (from books)

Figure 1: speech types within the Spoken Dutch Corpus (information taken from the website of the CGN)

All data are orthographically transcribed and provided with lemma's and Part of Speech tags. About one million words of the corpus are additionally provided with phonetic transcription and syntactic and prosodic annotation.

In the corpus I made a selection within the recording units (sessions) picking out one session every 200. That way I included all types of conversations from all regions. Within those sessions I searched with the help of the orthographical transcription for occurrences of the word *wel*. The search produced about 350 hits (the word *wel* with the sentence containing it). I started grouping them according to their meaning. If I wasn't sure about the purpose of *wel* in the sentence I looked up the session that contained the sentence and let the context help me.

2.2 *Wel* in the Spoken Dutch Corpus

In analyzing the results I looked at what *wel* added to the meaning of the sentence. I brought together the sentences in which *wel* was used in a similar way and had a similar effect. Certain groups arose of different uses of *wel.* Next I explored those different groups by analyzing the effect of *wel* in the sentence more precisely and determining the contexts in which that use of *wel* is felicitous.

In this way I came to several classes of *wel* which I will discuss in this chapter. I will illustrate the uses of *wel* I distinguished with examples I found in the corpus. I sometimes had to think of examples though, to determine in what contexts that particular *wel* is used or to show what prototypical surroundings this *wel* requires or to make evident the difference between a felicitous sentence and an infelicitous sentence containing this *wel.* When I discuss the several uses of *wel* I distinguished I will also see if they can be categorized under a certain subclass of particles and hence if they are comparable to other particles. Furthermore I will compare my ideas about what *wel* means to the literature discussed in the previous chapter.

2.2.1 *Wel* as a correction

In some occurrences I found *wel* was used to correct a previous utterance. In that case *wel* is heavily stressed. In the case of sentence (30) a boy said to his brother over the telephone that he tried to call him at Floor's but he was not there. Then the brother says:

(30) *Ik zit wél bij Floor*
     'I *am* at Floor's'

Sometimes the word *degelijk* is used together with *wel,* indicating that the assumption that was made, is false. The main stress is on *degelijk* in these cases.

(31) *...dat in de meeste gevallen ze wel dégelijk een bekende donor hebben*
      'That in most cases they actually do have a familiar donor'

(32) *...dat in de eerste eeuwen van het Christendom relaties tussen mensen van hetzelfde geslacht wel dégelijk ingezegend werden*
      'That in the first centuries of Christianity relations between people of the same sex actually did get solemnized'

This use of *wel* is always preceded by an utterance containing an explicit negation and *wel* is used to deny or correct that previous denial. If one, for example, would state that Jan-Peter Balkenende is not the prime-minister of the Netherlands, another person could say:

(33) *Jan- Peter Balkenende is wél de premier van Nederland*
      'Jan-Peter Balkenende ís de prime minister of the Netherlands'

How could we classify this use of *wel. Wel* doesn't add to the propositional content in this sentence. Sentence (33) without *wel* would have the same truth conditions. The context in which this sentence is felicitous does differ from the sentence without *wel. Wel* signals that this sentence is a reaction to a previous sentence. A sentence in which the fact stated by the utterance containing *wel,* was denied. So with sentence (33) you do not only state that Jan-Peter Balkenende is the prime minister of the

Netherlands you also indicate that the previous state of information, brought about by the hearer's utterance, was false. Vandeweghe (1984) says about particles: 'it signals how the 'state of affairs', that what is explicated by the sentence should fit into the bigger whole'. That is indeed what *wel* does, it signals how the utterance should be interpreted with respect to previous utterances. These properties of the word make clear that *wel* falls under the class of particles. *Wel* concerns the whole state of affairs; it indicates how the whole sentence should be interpreted with respect to the previous conversation. *Wel* is directly linked to the proposition of the sentence since it indicates that the proposition is true in contrast to previous information. Therefore *wel* is what Vandeweghe (1984) would call a propositional particle that concerns the whole 'state of affairs' and what Foolen (1993) would call a modal adverb.

The use of *wel* with major stress was also recognized by Abraham (1984) who calls it a particle of contradiction: "*wel* as a particle of contradiction can be used after a negative declarative":

> (18)   *Hans mag jou niet*
>   *- Hij mag mij wél*
>   'Hans doesn't like you'
>   - 'He *does* like me'

This particle of contradiction is similar to my particle of correction. Indeed the speaker can also be contradicting something with the use of *wel.* When children disagree about a certain fact they often use these two words as recurring arguments:

> (34)   *wel(les), -niet(es), -wel(les), - niet(es)*
>   'Is not, -is too, -is not, -is too

To summarize, the 'correcting *wel*' is used to correct or contradict an utterance containing an explicit negation.

2.2.2 Contrastive *wel*

When this *wel* is used, it creates a relation of contrast with a previous utterance. In this case *wel* co-occurs with an element in focus. The focus evokes a (set of) alternative(s) for that element. The/one of those alternative(s) is present in the previous utterance. What is negated for the alternative is affirmed for the element in focus. I will clarify this with the following examples:

> (35)   *Pim is niet gelukkig*
>   'Pim is not happy'

> (36)   *Pom is wél gelukkig'*
>   'Pom *is* happy'

Wel co-occurs with the element in focus *Pim*. An alternative for the element in focus is present in the negated sentence, *Pom*. What is denied for *Pim* (being happy), is affirmed for Pom.
Because of the element in focus and the use of *wel* a relation of contrast is created. Contrast is a discourse relation between two items which are similar in many ways

and different in some ways, and a comparison is made between those items with respect to one of those differences.

In the next example this sentence was preceded by information about a flood in Poland and it was said that in Warsaw the situation isn't that bad.

(37) *In het zuiden van Polen is de toestand wél zorgelijk*
       'In the south of Poland the situation *is* alarming'

Here a comparison is made between Warsaw and the south of Poland, which are similar in that they are both areas in Poland and they are both flooded where as they differ in the fact that in Warsaw the situation is not alarming and in the south of Poland it is.

And in the next example *wel* and the element in focus *professor Hoksbergen* create a relation of contrast with the previous sentence; we don't know but professor Hoksbergen does know:

(38) *Wij weten niet uh professor Hoksbergen schijnt dat wél te weten wij weten niet hoe belangrijk het is voor een kind om te weten wie zijn biologische vader is.*
       'We don't know uhm it appears professor Hoksbergen *does* know that, we don't know how important it is for a child to know its biological father'

It is a property of focus particles that they come together with an element in focus. *Wel* could not be called a focus particle though. First of all it cannot form a constituent with the element in focus, like most focus particles. Compare the focus particles with *wel* in (39):

(39) *Zelfs/ook/alleen/*wel Elske gaat morgen naar de Ikea*
       Even/also/only Elske is going to the Ikea tomorrow

But is a *wel*, used in this way, semantically similar to a focus particle? As said, focus particles come together with an element of the propositional content in focus. Focus evokes a set of alternatives for the element in focus. At first sight it looks like *wel* takes scope over an element in the sentence. In the following sentence, for example, it looks like *wel* evokes a set of alternatives for *Jan*:

(40) *Volgens mij gaat er niemand naar het feestje.*
       - Jan gaat wél
       I think nobody is going to the party
       - Jan *is* going

By saying that Jan ís going, a set of alternatives is evoked of people who aren't going.

But there is a difference between *wel* and the focus particles. Focus particles should always be linked to one element in the sentence. When main stress is put on *wel* the whole sentence is in the focus of the word:

(41) *Piet huilt zelfs*
       'Even Piet is crying'

> (42) *Piet huilt wél*
> 'Piet *is* crying'

(41) Is actually ambiguous, for it could also mean that Piet is even crýing, but the focus particle has one of the two words in focus. *Wel* on the other hand takes both words into its scope. It looks like *wel* does not create a set of alternatives on its own. That actually makes sense, because the only alternative for a situation that ís the case, is a situation that isn't; the only alternative for *wel* is *niet* 'not'. *Wel* doesn't evoke the alternatives. It is the phonetic focus of the element they are alternatives for. *Wel* only tells us that for those alternatives the negation of the sentence containing *wel* holds. In (43) for example the phonetic focus on *Elske* evokes a (set of) alternative(s) for *Elske* for which it holds that they didn't go to the Ikea. Phonetic focus on *Ikea* would evoke a (set of) alternative(s) for *Ikea* for which it holds that Elske didn't go there:

> (43) *Elske ging wél naar de Ikea*
> 'Elske *did* go to the Ikea'

This *wel* can also be called a modal adverb. The presence of an element carrying phonetic focus causes that the effect is not correction but contrast.

2.2.3 *Wel* indicating implicit contrast

Sometimes when *wel* was used in a sentence, it was not a reaction on an utterance that stated the opposite, but from the context it could be inferred the opposite was the case. In the following example two girls are talking on the phone and one girl tells the other she had a vision that she would end up with a read-haired man and her new neighbour turned out to have red hair. Her friend asks her: "So you introduced yourself and told him you are sure you will be his new girlfriend". The first girl laughs and says:

> (44) *D'r zijn wel meer roodharige mensen op deze wereld*
> 'There are more red-haired people in this world (you know)'

Her friend doesn't explicitly say that her new neighbour is the only red-headed person in the world but since she implies he will be her boyfriend for sure, the first girl infers from that she acts as if he is the only one.

In the next example a person is talking about the paper she handed in which wasn't very good. Then she says:

> (45) *Ik had wel best wel veel bronnen*
> 'I did have quite a lot of sources'

Here *wel* is used to mark the contrast between the rest of the paper, which wasn't very good and the fact that she has a lot of sources, which is a good thing. Because of the quality of the paper you would not expect it to have many sources. *Wel* is used as a reaction to that expectation.

In the same conversation the person wonders if she did a good thing by adding a couple of articles to the paper. She thinks that it is perhaps not a good addition since she didn't write the articles her self. In contrast to that her conversation partner says:

(46)   *Je laat natuurlijk wel zien dat je er onderzoek naar gedaan hebt.*
        'You do show of course that you did a lot of research'

Often *wel* co-occurs with *maar* 'but', either it precedes or it follows it:

(47)   *Ik zorg dat de zaadgevende man wel bekend blijft maar een afstandsverklaring kan doen*
        'I will see to that the sperm donor stays known but gives up his paternal rights'

(48)   *Want het beweegt wel maar ik zie helemaal geen cijfertjes*
        'Because it moves but I don't see any figures'

(49)   *Dit soort operaties behoorde niet tot zijn dagelijkse werkzaamheden maar de politieman met z'n borstelige kapsel hield wel van dergelijke acties.*
        'This kind of operations weren't part of his daily activities but the policeman with his bristly haircut did love such actions.

(50)   *Ja maar ik vond wel dat ze wanneer de camera draaide was ze heel spontaan en aardig maar daarbuiten was ze toch wel minder hoor*
        'yeah, but I did think when the cameras were on she was really spontaneous and nice but outside of that not that much.

These occurrences of *wel* with *maar* 'but' are again a reaction on an implicit denial of the sentence containing *wel*. *Maar* 'but' indicates a relation of contrast. This could be a direct contrast where the second conjunct (*q*) contradicts an expectation caused by the first conjunct (*p*); *p* and *q* are directly contrastive if $p \rightarrow \neg q$. For example:

(51)   The sun shines but it is cold

If the sun shines (*p*) you expect it to be warm or at least not to be cold ($\neg q$) but in fact it is cold (*q*). It could also be an indirect contrast where *p* implies *r* but q implies *not r* ; *p* and *q* are indirectly contrastive if there is an *r* such that $p \rightarrow r$ and $q \rightarrow \neg r$. for example:

(52)   I love chocolate but I am on a diet

If someone loves chocolate (*p*) you would expect him to eat chocolate (*r*) but if someone is on a diet (*q*) this implies he won't eat chocolate ($\neg r$).

In example (47) *p* (the sperm donor stays known) implies something like 'the sperm donor could be expected to act as a father to the child some point in time' (*r*). q (The father gives up his paternal rights) implies that the sperm donor won't be expected to act as the father of the child, so *q* implies $\neg r$. The same holds for (48). That the thing is moving (*p*) implies it works (*r*), but that no numbers are visible implies that it

doesn't work (¬r). To come to the conclusion *not r* one would expect it not to move as well. The fact that it does move is contradicting the final conclusion ¬r.

In the case of *wel* following *maar* 'but' the contrast is often direct.

> (49) *Dit soort operaties behoorde niet tot zijn dagelijkse werkzaamheden maar de politieman met z'n borstelige kapsel hield wel van dergelijke acties.*
> 'This kind of operations weren't part of his daily activities but the policeman with his bristly haircut did love such actions.'

The fact that these kinds of operations are not part of his daily activities (*p*) could lead you to believe that he didn't love them (¬q) but in fact he does love them (*q*). This is also a case of contrasting an implicit denial, it is not said the policeman doesn't love the activities but one could infer it from the preceding.

Abraham does not mention the function of *wel* of contradicting an implicit denial. He does mention *wel* as conjunction. Besides *wel* co-occurring with *maar* he mentions *wel* as an independent conjunction as in (22):

> (22) *De meeste dieren werden gered, wel bleven er twee katten over.*
> 'Most animals were saved, although two cats remained'

According to Abraham this is comparable with the *wel-maar* construction. I would say it is more comparable with the *maar-wel* construction, which Abraham doesn't mention, because it can only indicate a direct contrast.

> (53) *Ik ben niet verkouden, wel moet ik soms niezen*
> 'I don't have a cold but I do have to sneeze sometimes'

> (54) *#Ik hou van honden, wel is mijn huis te klein*
> 'I love dogs but my house is too small'

Abraham calls these uses of *wel* conjunctions. In my opinion the *wel* in example (22) is a connective adverb because of its connecting function and its place in the sentence. Just like other connecting particles like *alleen* 'only' and *ook 'also'* it takes in the sentence initial position. The other occurrences of *wel* creating implicit contrast are modal adverbs. They indicate how the sentence should be interpreted with respect to the previous conversation. *Wel* is used by the speaker because he thinks his conversation partners are under the impression the opposite holds. He indicates that the sentence he utters could be contradicting the current state of knowledge of his conversation partners brought about by the previous conversation.

Abraham also mentions the use of *wel* in interrogative sentences where the speaker expresses with *wel* that he has doubts about whether the hearer has carried out the actions mentioned in the sentence:

> (13) *Hebt u wel handschoenen meegenomen?*
> 'Did you bring hand gloves?'

And Abraham mentions the use of *wel* in questions where it is used to attend the listener to something important:

> (12) *Denkt u er wel aan de hond te voeren?*
>   'Won't you forget to feed the dog?'

In my opinion these questions are both only used when there is something in the context from which it could be inferred that the speaker respectively didn't bring gloves or won't remember to feed the dog. I therefore claim that these sentences are also examples of *wel* reacting on an implicit denial.

To summarize, *wel* indicating implicit contrast is used to contradict a denial that could be inferred from the context. In the cases with *maar* or with the connective adverb *wel* the 'denied denial' is easy to find in the context. They are present in the connected sentence. In other examples it is not that clear. In the example of the girl and the red-headed neighbour there was not one particular sentence from which the denial of the sentence containing *wel* could be inferred. The whole conversation led to it.

2.2.4 Comforting *wel*

Another effect of *wel* is when it brings about a comforting meaning. The speaker indicates with the use of *wel* that a certain desired situation will occur and the hearer should not worry about it. Often the sentence containing such a *wel* is about future events:

> (55) *En de tegengestelde overtuiging bestaat als je de stukken leest bij de*
>   *gratie van een zekere vooruitgangsfilosofie men verwacht dat wij allen*
>   *verder zullen groeien en dat ook de andere landen in Europa*
>   *bijvoorbeeld wel verder zullen groeien.*
>   'And the opposite conviction exists if you read the pieces by the grace
>   of a certain philosophy of progress people expect that we all shall
>   grow and the other countries in Europe for example will also grow'

Here *wel* adds the meaning of reassurance. In this case it is used in a more or less ironic way. The writer criticizes the attitude of certain people that are optimistic and reassure themselves those other countries in Europe will develop by themselves.

> (56) *Bezig zijn ja gewoon ja j uh dat zien we nog wel in de toekomst*
>   'Are busy yes just yes y uh, we'll see in the future'

Here *wel* is used for reassurance as well. The speaker indicates the hearer should not worry, for things will become clear in the future.

Abraham also mentions this use of *wel*. According to Abraham the particle *wel* appears in sentences that express the confidence of the speaker that a certain desired situation will occur and it has a comforting effect. I agree with Abraham, it is indeed the case that this use of *wel* is only appropriate if the situation expressed is a desired one:

(57)   *Je wordt morgen wel beter*
        '(don't worry) you will get better tomorrow'

(58)   *#Je wordt morgen wel ziek*
        '(don't worry) you will get ill tomorrow'

The speaker expresses with *wel* his view on the likeliness and desirability the situation expressed by the sentence will occur. He expresses his subjective position with respect to the relation between the proposition of the sentence and reality. He expresses with *wel* that he considers the situation to be both likely and desirable. He also reacts to the previous discourse. One utters this sentence if in the previous discourse the hearer implicitly or explicitly made clear he feared the desired situation wouldn't occur. Because of that *wel,* used with this effect, can be classified under the modal adverbs.

2.2.5 Moderating *wel*
What I also encountered was *wel* placed in front of a predicate. *Wel* functions as a moderator and weakens the meaning of that predicate.

(59)   *Ja ' t was wel leuk*
        'Yes, it was quite nice'

(60)   *Dus ja dat uh loopt allemaal wel lekker*
        'So yes, uh everything is running quite good'

It is interesting to see that this is only possible with positive predicates:

(61)   *Het feestje was wel leuk*
        'The party was quite nice'

(62)   *#Het feestje was wel saai*
        'The party was quite boring'

The comforting *wel*, that can only be used when the situation expressed is a desirable one, can be used if in a particular context an in principle negative situation is desired. If one for example has to go to a family reunion tomorrow and the plan is to go picnicking, the weather needs to be good or else the thing will be cancelled. If that person really doesn't feel like going, someone could say to him:

(63)   *Maak je geen zorgen het wordt wel slecht weer*
        'Don't worry, the weather will be bad'

It is never possible though to use the moderating *wel* in front of a negative predicate. Even if someone wished the party to be boring for some reason, he still couldn't say (62), or at least not with *wel* having the function of moderator:

(62)   *# Het feestje was wel saai*
        'The party was quite boring'

Neither Abraham nor Westheide mention this use of *wel*. The Van Dale does mention this use of *wel: "*(with weaker interpretation) only to express the opposite of a denial: *het is wel aardig* 'it is OK' *dat weet je wel* 'you know that'". I agree with the observation that *wel* as a moderator is used to express the opposite of a denial. In the other example Van Dale gives, *dat weet je wel* 'you know that', *wel* also expresses the opposite of a denial but in my opinion these examples represent a different use of *wel*. *Dat weet je wel* 'you know that' is only uttered if the hearer somehow made clear he doesn't know. The utterance *dat weet je wel* contradicts that and *wel* can therefore be classified under one of the previous uses. *Wel* in *wel aardig* is not contradicting a previous denial. I will go deeper into this difference in the next chapter.

Although *wel* seems to form more of a unit with the predicate than is usual for this class, I think this use of *wel* is best classified under the modal particles. A modal particle indicates that the speaker is aware of the existence of alternatives for the relevant speech or mental act or an aspect of it. This alternative is usually the direct negation of the act or a related aspect. *Wel* indicates the speaker has taken into consideration the negation of the sentence, but decided that the negation was not true. In the case of (61) the speaker shows that in deciding how to evaluate the party he took into consideration the possibility of labelling the party as *not fun*. He decided that it was not the case that the party was not fun. Therefore he utters (61), which is interpreted as 'it is not the case that the party was not fun, but I can't say it was really fun either'.

To summarize, *wel* is used as a moderator to a positive predicate and weakens its meaning.

2.2.6 *Wel* with *eens* 'once'

Wel also occurs with *eens* 'once', together the two words mean 'once (in a while)' or 'ever':

(64)   *Heb jij 'm wel eens gezien in Goede Tijden Slechte Tijden?*
         'Have you ever seen him in *Goede Tijden Slechte Tijden?*'

(65)   *De helft van de mensen werkt ook wel eens op zaterdag of zondag*
         'Half of the people work on Saturdays and Sundays once in a while'

(66)   *Heb je wel 'ns Chinezen of Vietnamezen horen praten?*
         'Have you ever heard Chinese or Vietnamese people talk?'

Wel and *eens* are really a fixed combination, sometimes they are even written as one word; *weleens.* When *wel eens* is used in combination with the Present Perfect it has the meaning of 'at least once'. (64) Can be answered affirmatively if you saw him once in *Goede Tijden Slechte Tijden.* When they are used in combination with a Simple Present or Simple Past the words mean 'once in a while'. In (65) *wel eens* means that half of the people work on Saturday or Sunday once in a while. The frequency that is expressed by *wel eens*, is less than the frequency expressed by *soms* 'sometimes'. (68) Could mean the cooking is more or less equally divided between the two of you, while (67) means every now and again one of you cooks but most of the times you order in or eat microwave food.

(67) *Ik kook wel eens en mijn vriend ook wel eens*
 'Once in a while I cook , and my friend cooks once in a while too'

(68) *Ik kook soms en mijn vriend ook soms*
 'Sometimes I cook and sometimes my friend cooks too'

This *wel* is different from the other occurrences of *wel* since it can not be left out of the sentence. What the other uses of *wel* added to the meaning of the sentence they occurred in, could be determined by comparing the sentence containing *wel* to the same sentence without the use of *wel.* In this case this is not possible for if we remove *wel* we end up with an infelicitous sentence. In this case we should determine why *wel* and *eens* in a combination, together have the meaning I have just described. I think, as with the previous use of *wel*, the speaker shows by using *wel* he has taken into consideration the negation of the sentence. The negation of *wel eens* would be 'not once'. By using *wel* the speaker indicates that since the amount is that little 'not once' was an option. Following that theory *wel* can be called a modal particle. I admit that this effect is not as strong as with the moderating *wel.* That is due to the fact, I think, that *wel* and *eens* have become a fixed combination of words. Because of that the speaker uses them with less attention and in more situations and it becomes broader in use.

In conclusion, *wel* in combination with *eens* means 'once (in a while)' or 'ever'.

2.2.7 *Wel* indicating plausability
Another effect *wel* can have is that it weakens the affirmative strength of the sentence. In that case *wel* is combined with the verb *zullen* 'will'. The speaker expresses with *wel* that he expects the situation to occur or to be the case but that he is not totally sure about it.

(69) *'T zal wel met zo'n moeder en zo'n vader hè?*
 'That's likely with such a mother and father, isn't it?'

(70) *Ja maar dat zal wel door de medicijnen komen*
 'Yes but that's probably due to the medication'

(71) *Hij zal wel bij een bank werken zal wel naar z'n werk op weg zijn*
 'He probably works at the bank, he is probably on his way to work'

Van Dale mentions the use of *wel* "expressed when one suspects, guesses or doubts something: *hij zal wel niet komen* 'he probably won't come' *kun je het wel doen?* 'are you capable of that?'" The first example is similar to the use of *wel* I distinguish here. The second example shows a different *wel* to my opinion. One would utter that sentence if one had reason to believe the hearer is not capable of it. When *wel* is used in combination with *zullen* there is not anything in the context that indicates the opposite of the sentence containing *wel.* When (69), (70) and (71) are uttered, the context should actually fit the content of the utterances, and not indicate a negation of them, for the speaker to come to the conclusion he comes to.
Abraham discusses *wel* as, what he calls a cognitive modal adverb. By cognitive modality he means what is usually called epistemic modality. *Wel* expresses a degree of uncertainty of the speaker with respect to the proposition:

(16) *Hij zal het wel gezien hebben.*
      'He has (probably) seen it'

I agree with the qualification of *wel* as a modal particle. With *wel* one expresses his subjective position towards the proposition of the sentence. The speaker expresses his beliefs regarding the probability of the situation expressed by the sentence to occur or to be the case.

This use of *wel* expresses that the speaker expects the situation expressed by the sentence to occur or to be the case but he is not sure about is.

2.2.8 *Wel* indicating 'surprise'

I found three subclasses of occurrences of *wel* that more or less had the same effect. I grouped them by the name 'surprise'. I put that term between quotation marks because it is not always exactly surprise that *wel* expresses but the effects are all more or less related to that. I will discuss the three classes I distinguished.

Wel co-occurs with the verb *lijken* 'look like/seem':

(72) *Toen het bloed uit haar slurf begon te spuiten leek het wel of ze verblind raakte van woede*
      'When blood started spurting from her trunk, it looked like she became blinded by anger

(73) *Het lijkt wel een sollicitatiegesprek*
       'It looks like job interview'

What *wel* does in these sentences is adding an element of surprise or a sense that the situation is out of the ordinary. Notice that the use of *wel* is only possible if the thing that it looks like is in fact not the case:

(74) *Het lijk wel zaterdagavond*
       'It looks like Saturday night'

This utterance is only uttered if it is in fact not a Saturday night. And the following sentence you could only utter to a person who you know is not ill:

(75) *Je lijkt wel ziek*
      'You look ill'

If the fact that he is ill is not yet determined one chooses one's words differently. When 'look like' is used in the sense of showing resemblance to something, there are also restrictions on the use of *wel.* Compare (76) and (77):

(76) *Dat kind lijkt wel een beetje op mijn buurvrouw*
      'That child looks a little like my neighbour'

(77) *?Dat kind lijkt wel een beetje op zijn moeder*
      'That child looks a little like its mother'

(77) Is strange because it is very normal for children to look like their mother. (76) Is OK because it is not normal or usual for children to look like people they are not related to. These examples show that this use of *wel* expresses a sense of surprise of the speaker.

Wel indicates the position of the speaker towards the content of the sentence; the speaker expresses his surprise over it. The surprise concerns the whole state of affairs, explicated by the sentence. *Wel* can therefore be called a modal adverb.

Wel occurs in front of a gradual element, indicating that element is big or a lot. This *wel* also adds an element of surprise to the sentence or a sense that the situation is out of the ordinary:

> (78) *De organisatie denkt nog wel de hele week nodig te hebben om het feestterrein op te ruimen*
> 'The organization thinks it will take no less than a week to clean up the party area'

> (79) '*T had 't had normaal gezien wel twee keer goedkoper geko gekund zunne maar uh ...*
> 'Normally it could have been twice as cheap but uhm…..'

One uses *wel* if the amount is higher than could be expected or higher than usual. The next sentence could only be uttered if the speaker normally doesn't drink that much coffee a day:

> (80) *Ik heb vandaag wel 10 koppen koffie gedronken*
> 'I had no less than 10 cups of coffee today'

That gradual element in combination with *wel* also appears in sentences where *wel* is directly followed by *niet* 'not' and that begin with an interrogative word:

> (81) *Over die OV jaarkaart uh hoe goed ie dat wel niet gedaan had*
> 'About the public transport card, how well he has done that'

Van Dale says about this use of *wel:* "(when used with numbers, time or measure) to indicate that no less then the mentioned amount is the case: *dat zijn er wel honderd* 'that's no less then an amount of hundred' with indefinite numbers *hoeveel zijn het er wel niet?* 'how much are there?" Indeed the *wel-niet* sentences also contain a gradual element. In those cases the gradual element is being questioned but the speaker already knows it is a lot.

Westheide (1985) mentions this use of *wel* in combination with a gradual element. He also states that the use of *wel* in this sense adds an element of surprise to what is said. According to him this type of particle is sometimes called a scalar particle or a focus particle. I agree with that classification of this *wel.* A particle can be called a scalar particle when the element in focus and its alternatives are ranked with respect to each other. The focus particle indicates how the element in focus should be placed on the scale of ordered alternatives. With *wel* one indicates that the gradual element

has a high position on a scale with ordered alternatives. It is in that sense the counterpart of *maar* 'but' which indicates that the gradual element has a low position on the scale of ordered alternatives, for example in (82):

(82)   *Ik heb vandaag maar twee koppen koffie gedronken*
          'I only drank two cups of coffee today'

Wel also occurs with the word *misschien* 'maybe':

(83)   *Misschien is het wel een hele rijke…..*
          'Maybe it is a very rich……'

(84)   *Misschien willen jullie met z'n tweetjes wel effe weg*
          'Maybe the two of you would like to go away for a while'

Adding *wel* brings about the meaning that the situation expressed in the sentence is not likely to happen or to be the case but 'you never know'. Compare (85) and (86):

(85)   *Misschien komt mijn tante morgen*
          'Maybe my aunt will come tomorrow'

(86)   *Misschien komt mijn tante morgen wel*
          'Maybe my aunt will come tomorrow'

A speaker would utter (85) if he has perhaps spoken his aunt and she told him she may come. When a speaker utters (86) he has no indication she will come and therefore it is not very likely but 'you never know'. Consider also the next example:

(87)   *Misschien draagt zij wel een jurk*
          'Maybe she wares a dress'

One could say this about someone if she is a person that usually doesn't wear dresses. The speaker indicates that it is not likely she wears a dress but again, 'you never know'. So with this *wel*, in combination with 'maybe', one also expresses that the situation is out of the ordinary or against expectations.

This *wel* gives an indication of the speaker's thought about the relation between what is said and reality. The speaker indicates that the situation expressed by his utterance is not very likely to occur. Therefore *wel* can be called a modal adverb.

To summarize, *wel* in combination with a gradual element, *lijken* 'look like/maybe' and *misschien* 'maybe' indicates that the content of the utterance surprises the speaker or that it is against expectation or out of the ordinary.

2.2.9 Three expressions, you know what I'm saying
There were two regular expressions in the corpus that contained the word *wel*. These expressions are quite new in use and could be called flashy language. The first one is *echt wel:*

(88)   *Ja ik vond dat er echt wel mooie werkstukken bij maken*
       'Yeah, there were really good papers among them to my opinion'

(89)   *Ja het was echt wel uh..*
       'Yeah, it was really uhm…'

One says *echt wel* if one wants to stress some quality of something as in (90):

(90)   *Het was echt wel leuk*
       'It was really nice'

Strikingly, it can also occur with a negative quality:

(91)   *Het was echt wel stom*
       'It was really dull'

And remarkable is the fact that, when used as an answer, it can be both an agreement as well as a denial:

(92)   *Jij bent toch niet hoogbegaafd?*
       - echt wel!
       'you are not highly gifted are you?'
       '- yes I am'

(93)   *Leuk hè?*
       - Ja echt wel
       'Fun isn't it?'
       '- Yeah really'

Wel in (92) is a denial of the previous denial. In (88) and also in (90) and (91) *wel* is used to stress the predicate, making its meaning stronger. It functions as the opposite of only *wel* in front of a predicate, which weakens its meaning. Or actually it is more the counterpart of *best wel*. I didn't find the use of *best wel* much in the corpus but like only *wel,* putting it in front of a predicate weakens its meaning. But in contrast with only *wel* it can be put in front of a negative predicate as well:

(94)   *De toets was best wel moeilijk*
       'The test was pretty hard'

The other expression is *weet je wel:*

(95)   *Ik heb daar zo'n kruin zitten weet je wel*
       'I have a crown there, you know'

(96)   *Om ons te vertellen over 't rooster uhm weet je wel of 't rooster
       uhm…..*
       'To tell us about the schedule you know, whether the schedule uhm….'

Weet je wel is similar to English 'you know' or 'you know what I'm saying'. It is often used as a stopgap. Nowadays *wel* is often left out and people just say *weet je.* Or, if

you're really streetwise you say *je weet toch* something like 'you do know, don't you'. I think that shows that with utterances like these the speaker wants to express the connection between him and the hearer. He is saying something like 'you and I are the same so you know what I am talking about'.

What role *wel* plays in these expressions is hard to determine. When a combination of words becomes an expression, the meanings of the individual members often become blurred. I think *best wel* and *echt wel* are used to determine the strength of the affirmative nature of the sentence. When a question is asked as (93) one is asking if the hearer considers the utterance done by the speaker to be true. He is asking 'is it or isn't it the case that this is fun'. The speaker who agrees with him answers *echt wel* 'it really is'. If the speaker isn't that enthusiastic he could say *best wel* 'it is quite the case that it is fun'. When *echt wel* and *best wel* are used in declaratives that aren't an answer to a question the speaker uses the expressions to indicate how strongly he considers the content of his utterance to be the case.
In the case of *weet je wel* the speaker asks about the affirmative nature of the sentence. In some areas in the Netherlands people use the expression *weet je niet* 'don't you know'. I think *weet je wel* is somewhere in between a question and a declarative. The speaker asks whether the hearer knows what he is talking about but at the same time he expects the hearer knows what he is talking about.

2.2.10 *Wel* as a conversation marker
In the Belgian data *wel* is also used as a conversation marker at the beginning of a sentence:

(97)   *Wel, ik denk dat uh de nationale tendens wel voor een stuk zal meespelen.*
'Well, I think that uhm, the national tendency will also play a part'

(98)   *Wel wel wel, Gerrit Six is één van die koks Gerrit ik heb je aan de lijn nu.*
'Well, well, well, Gerrit Six is one of those cooks and I've got you on the phone right now'

Abraham says about this: *wel* can be placed in front of a main sentence. This is especially customary in the south of the language area. It functions as an introducer to the discourse:

(20)   *Wel, hoe gaat het?*
'Well, how are you?'

Westheide adds to this that it can give a sense of surprise:

(29)   *Wel! Wel! Wat je zegt.*
'Well, well! I agree'

I assume this use of *wel* is related to the English use of *well.* In English this word can be used as an introducer to the conversation as well and it can also bring about a sense of surprise. I therefore assume this *wel* is related to the *wel* with the

interpretation of 'good', just like the English *well.* As I mentioned in the introduction I will not incorporate the uses of *wel* with that meaning in my theory. I will therefore not discuss this use of *wel* in the next chapter.

2.3 Conclusion

In the Spoken Dutch Corpus I found many occurrences of *wel.* I grouped them along the meaning or effect the word added to or had on the sentence. I came to the following categories:

- The corrective *wel*, where *wel* is contradicting a previous utterance containing an explicit denial.
- Contrastive *wel: wel* co-occurs with an element in focus and creates a relation of contrast between the element in focus and an alternative.
- Implicit contrast: *wel* is a reaction on an implicit previous denial that can be inferred from the context.
- Comforting: *wel* is used to indicate that a certain desired situation will occur.
- Moderator: *wel* is used as a moderator to a predicate and weakens its meaning
- *Wel* with *eens* 'once': together they mean 'once (in a while)/ever'
- 'Surprise': *wel* is used to express surprise or the fact that something is out of the ordinary. There are three subclasses:
  a: *wel* with gradual element
  b: *wel* with *lijken* 'look like/seem'
  c: *wel* with *misschien* 'maybe'
- *Wel* indicating probability*: wel* in combination with the verb *zullen* 'will' *weakens* the affirmative strength of the sentence
- *Wel* used in three common expressions: *echt wel, best wel, weet je wel*
- *Wel* used as a conversation marker.

It is of course possible there are more functions or uses of wel that didn't occur in the subset of the corpus I examined. Because I made use of a corpus of spoken Dutch I argue that I did find the uses that are most frequent in contemporary Dutch and therefore I can make statements based on these data.

In the next chapter I will explore the similarities between all these seemingly very different functions and meanings of wel and argue for a core-meaning based on a denial of a denial.

Chapter 3: The core meaning of wel

In this chapter I will discuss the core meaning of *wel*. In the previous chapter I have shown the different ways in which *wel* is used in Dutch. At first sight they are very diverse. What is the connection between the 'moderating *wel*', that weakens a predicate and the focus particle *wel,* which emphasizes a scalar element for example? I claim they have one thing in common, namely that they are all a denial of an implicit or explicit previous denial. This property is easily recognizable when *wel* is used to correct a previous negation as in (18)

> (18)   *Hans mag jou niet*
> *- Hij mag mij wel*
> 'Hans doesn't like you'
> - 'He *does* like me'

In this chapter I will show that this property lies at the base of all the uses of *wel* I distinguished in the previous chapter.

3.1 Hypothesis

My claim is that every use of *wel* is a reaction on a negation in the context. The nature and the strength of that negation vary for the different uses of *wel.* It can be a literal negation in a previous utterance, as in example (18) above. It can also be a very implicit denial that is implicated by our general world knowledge. I will show that the strength of the negation *wel* is a reaction on decreases with the different uses of the word. Furthermore I claim the difference in stress between the various uses of *wel* is related to the difference in strength of the negation in the previous context. This claim is mainly based on my intuitions about Dutch but I will illustrate the difference in stress between the various uses, by displaying the waveform of an utterance containing an occurrence of the *wel* in question. The Spoken Dutch corpus provides the possibility to view the wave forms of the utterances recorded. Wave forms are visualizations of patterns of sound in time. The amplitude of a waveform determines its volume. The amplitude is the distance between the valley and the peak of a waveform. There is a degree of correlation between volume and stress (website of PHON2). So by viewing the sound *wel* is pronounced with, in relation to the surrounding words, we get an indication of its relative stress.

The idea of *wel* being a denial of a denial is not completely new. Sassen (1985) argues that the word *wel* can be seen as the lexical representative of a double denial. After I have laid out my hypothesis I will begin by discussing previous thoughts about the core meaning of *wel* and in particluar Sassen's theory about it. These arguments function as a starting point for my own argumentation. Since my approach of the problem is very different I will not implement Sassen's arguments in my argumentation.

In my argumentation I will discuss the similarities between negation and the effect of *wel.* Therefore I will first give a short elaboration on the phenomenon of negation.

After that I will discuss for each of the uses of *wel* I distinguished in the previous chapter how they fit the theory discussed above. I will indicate what kind of negation their context requires and how *wel* functions as a denial of that negation. I will show the negation in the various contexts decreases from very strong to very weak and that the stress *wel* is pronounced with varies accordingly.

3.2 Previous thoughts about the core meaning of *wel*

In previous literature some ideas have been put forward about the core meaning of the word *wel.* The Van Dale states that *wel* originates from the verb *willen* 'to want', and the base meaning would be *naar wens* 'to ones liking'. According to Abraham (1984) part of the uses of *wel* share the same base meaning, namely one of perfection and completeness. All uses of *wel* share two components according to Abraham: a reaction on the forgoing and stressing the affirmative assertion. The differentiation is due to among other things the difference in sentence structure, type of speech act and stress.

What I found the most interesting idea about the core meaning of *wel* which suited my thoughts about it, was put forward by Sassen (1985). Sassen wonders whether *wel* could be the lexical representative of a 'double denial'. He offers a couple of arguments in favour of that theory. Sassen mentions the formal semantic similarities between a sentence containing a negation and a sentence containing an occurrence of the stressed *wel*. This same similarity is found in English sentences like (99). The emphasized *did* in the second conjunct is connected with the presence of the auxiliary of denial in the parallel conjunct.

> (99) *You didn't see me, but Peter did*
>   'Jij zag me niet, maar Peter wel'

Another argument for his hypothesis is the fact that sentence (100) is felicitous for some speakers of Dutch while every speaker of Dutch finds sentence (101) ungrammatical:

> (100) *Jan werd tot 10 uur niet wakker, maar Piet wel*
>   'Jan didn't awake until 10 o'clock, but Peter did

> (101) **Piet werd tot 10 uur wakker*
>   'Piet awoke until 10 o'clock'

Because of this Sassen concludes the stressed *wel* in (100) represents a double denial and sentence (100) should be read as:

> (102) *Jan werd tot tien uur niet wakker, maar Piet werd niet tot tien uur niet wakker.*
>   'John didn't awake until 10 o'clock, but Peter did not not wake up until 10 o'clock'

Wel in (100) apparently represents the two denials of (102). Another sign of *wel* being the representative of a double denial, he considers to be the well-formedness of (103), where *wel* is combined with the negative polarity item *hoeven*.

(103) a *Hoeft dat eigenlijk?
       b Hoeft dat eigenlijk wel?
          'Is that really necessary?'

Additional evidence is found in the next example:

(104) *Daarom blijven ze wel*

(104) Is ambiguous. It can mean 'that is a reason for them to stay' or 'therefore they do stay'. But with emphasis on *blijven* it means 'that is no reason for them not to stay'. In the latter reading *wel* functions as a representative of the double denial again.

These examples indicate that *wel* in some sentences functions as a double denial. They offer an interesting starting point from which I will examine the different uses of *wel.* Let me note that I do not claim *wel* is the lexical representative of a double denial and that it can always be replaced by a double negation. I argue that every use of *wel* reflects a denial of a weak or strong negation in the context. Before I start the discussion of the position of the different uses of *wel* in this theory, I will give a brief elaboration on the subject of negation.

3.3 Negation

Aristotle was the first to discuss the phenomenon of negation within the domain of logic and language. His ideas about negation form the base for every theory about the subject up till now. Aristotle's theory has it roots within the opposition between pairs of terms. He distinguished four types of opposition (Horn 1989):

1: Correlation (between two relatives), e.g. double vs. half
There is interdependence of reference between the two items of the pair e.g.: A is half of B if B is double of A

2: Contrariety (between two contraries), e.g. good vs. bad
They can not both apply at once. Immediate contraries have no intermediate (e.g. odd vs. even) mediate contraries do (e.g. black vs. white)

3: Privation (privative to positive), e.g. blind vs. sighted
They apply to the same subject. That which is capable of some particular faculty or possession has suffered privation when the faculty or possession in question is in no way present in that in which, and at the time in which, it should be naturally present.

4 Contradiction (affirmative to negative), e.g. he sits vs. he doesn't sit.
It is necessary for the one to be true and the other to be false.

An important difference between contradictories and contraries is that contradictories exclude any middle term (e.g. black/not black). They cannot be both true at the same time and they cannot be both false at the same time. Contraries in principle do not exclude the middle term (something can be neither black nor white). They cannot be true at the same time though they can be both false at the same time. Two effects of

this difference Aristotle discovered are expressed in two laws concerning negation; the law of contradiction (LC) and the law of the excluded middle (LEM) (Horn 1989):

Law of contradiction (LC): the same thing cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same object. Goes for both contradiction and contrariety

Law of the excluded middle (LEM): in every case we must either affirm or deny, there is no in between. Goes only for contradictories

Related to the difference between contradictory and contrary opposition is the relation between internal and external negation. When a copular sentence (e.g. *The King of France is bald)* is uttered, the predicate consists of a copula (*is*) and the predicate term (*bald*). The entire predicate can be negated (*the king of France [is not] bald*). This results in a contradictory negation. One can also negate the predicate term (*the king of France is* [*not Bald*]). This results in a contrary negation. By uttering the contradictory negation one says that the subject *the king of France* doesn't have the property of being bald. By uttering the contrary relation one is asserting rather than denying something since one is saying that *the king of France* has the negative property of being not bald.

Since Aristotle a lot of new theories and ideas about negation have been formulated. This basic information is sufficient though to point out the similarities between negation and the effect of *wel.* In the following I will discuss the several uses of *wel* I distinguished. I will indicate what kind of negation *wel* is a reaction on and why this is a strong or a weak negation. Furthermore I will indicate how *wel* relates to the negation in terms of contrary and contradictory opposition. Finally I will verify the hypothesis of the connection between the stress on *wel* and the strength of the negation in the context.

3.4 From strong to weak negation

In this section I will discuss the uses of *wel* I distinguished in the previous chapter and how they function as a denial of a denial. I will discuss the several uses in order of strength. I will begin with the 'strongest *wel'* and end with the 'weakest *wel'*. The wave forms I inserted are not supposed to be a watertight proof of my theory concerning stress. They are used to illustrate my judgement on the stress on *wel.*

3.4.1 Correcting wel

As I indicated at the beginning of the chapter the idea that *wel* denies a previous denial is most obvious when it is used as a correction. When a sentence with a correcting *wel* is uttered there must be an utterance in the context that is a statement containing a denial. The sentence containing *wel* is contradicting that negated sentence. Sentence (106) for example could be uttered when the context contains sentence (105):

(105) *Jan Peter Balkenende is niet de premier van Nederland*
       'Jan Peter Balkenende is not the prime minister of the Netherlands'

(106) *Jan Peter Balkenende is wél de premier van Nederland*
       'Jan-Peter Balkenende *is* de prime minister of the Netherlands'

Wel negates the negation. That negation can both be an external as well as an internal one. This can be shown by the following sentence:

(107) *Niemand komt niet*
       'Nobody doesn't come'

Let's say for some reason someone utters (107) which can be formalized as $\sim\exists$ x (Hx $\rightarrow$ ~Cx) (there is no such x for which it holds that if x is human x doesn't come). Another speaker could undue both negations by *wel* (not at the same time though). Another speaker could answer *(on the contrary) niemand komt wél*. This would form a contrary opposition to (107). The speaker would have negated the internal negation from (107): $\sim\exists$x (Hx $\rightarrow$ ~~Cx) (there is no x for which it holds that if x is human x does not not come). The person could also negate the external negation by uttering the contradictory opposition *er komt wél iemand niet* ~~$\exists$x (Hx $\rightarrow$ ~Cx) (there is not no such x for which it holds that x is human and x doesn't come).

This use of *wel* occurs in a context that contains a strong denial. The strength of a denial depends on two factors; explicitness and factiveness. The negation in the context of this *wel* is both very explicit and factive. It is explicit because it is literally expressed in a previous utterance. The negation is factive because the negated sentence is presented as a fact. The negation in the context of this *wel* is the strongest of the different uses of *wel* I distinguished. I claim that because the negation in the context is strong, *wel* has to be strong as well. The stress on *wel* is indeed the strongest when it is used as a correction. This becomes visible in the wave form of the example I gave in the previous chapter:

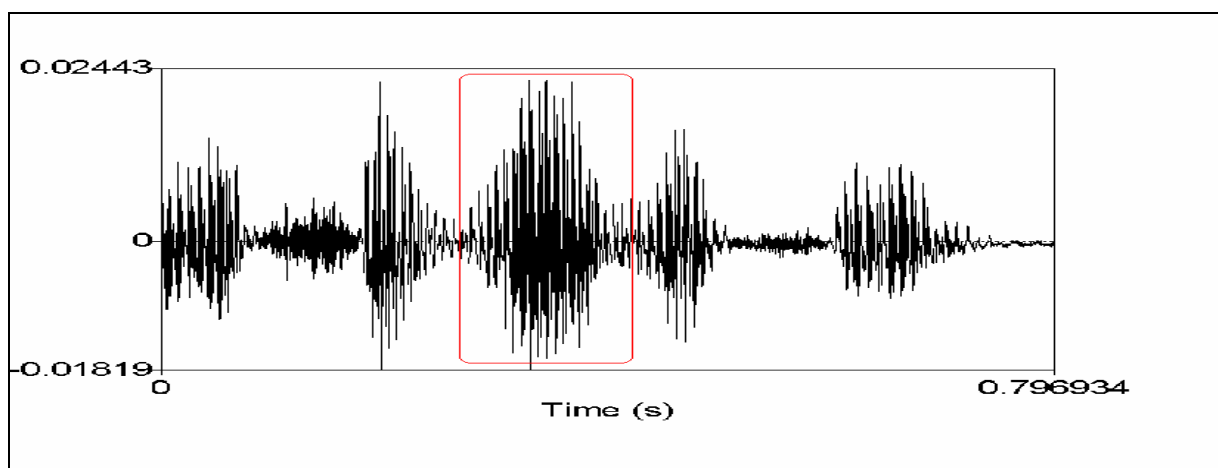(30)   *Ik zit wel bij Floor*
       'I ám at Floor's'

Figure 2: ik zit wel bij floor

The unit marked with the square represents the word *wel.* The numbers on both sides of the wave form indicate the time and duration of the utterance within the conversation. As we see, *wel* is the most prominent word of the sentence. It is more prominent than both its neighbours.

3.2.2 Contrastive wel

When a sentence containing a contrastive *wel* is uttered, there is a sentence in the previous context that contains a negation. *Wel* co-occurs with an element in focus. The focus evokes a set of alternatives for that element. One of those alternatives is present in the sentence containing the negation. What is negated for the alternative is affirmed for the element in focus. In the previous chapter I clarified this with the following examples:

> (35) *Pim is niet gelukkig*
> 'Pim is not happy'

> (36) *Pom is wel gelukkig'*
> 'Pom ís happy'

Wel co-occurs with the element in focus *Pim.* An alternative for the element in focus is present in the negated sentence, *Pom.* What is denied for *Pim* (being happy), is affirmed for *Pom.* If the negation in the negated sentence is internal (saying *Pim* has the negative property of being not happy, he is unhappy) *wel* evokes a contrary opposition between the fact that 'someone has the property of being not happy' (*Pim*) and the fact that 'someone has the property of being happy' (*Pom*). If the negation is external *wel* forms a contradictory opposition between the fact that 'someone does not have the property of being happy' (*Pim*) and the fact that 'someone does have the property of being happy' (*Pom*).

The negation in the context of this use of *wel* is explicit. There needs to be an utterance in the previous conversation containing a denial. The negation is factive too. The negated sentence is presented as a fact. Nonetheless this *wel* is weaker than the previous one. This is because the content of the sentence containing the negation is not conflicting with the content of the sentence containing *wel.* Therefore *wel* doesn't have to contradict the denial, it only creates contrast. When this *wel* is used it comes with an element carrying phonetic focus. This element and *wel* together share the main stress of the sentence.

In the waveform of the utterance (37) it is visible that *wel* is slightly more prominent than its neighbouring words. The most prominent unit of the sentence represents the utterance of the syllable *zui* in *zuiden.* That is indeed the element in focus.

> (37) *In het zuiden van Polen is de toestand wel zorgelijk*
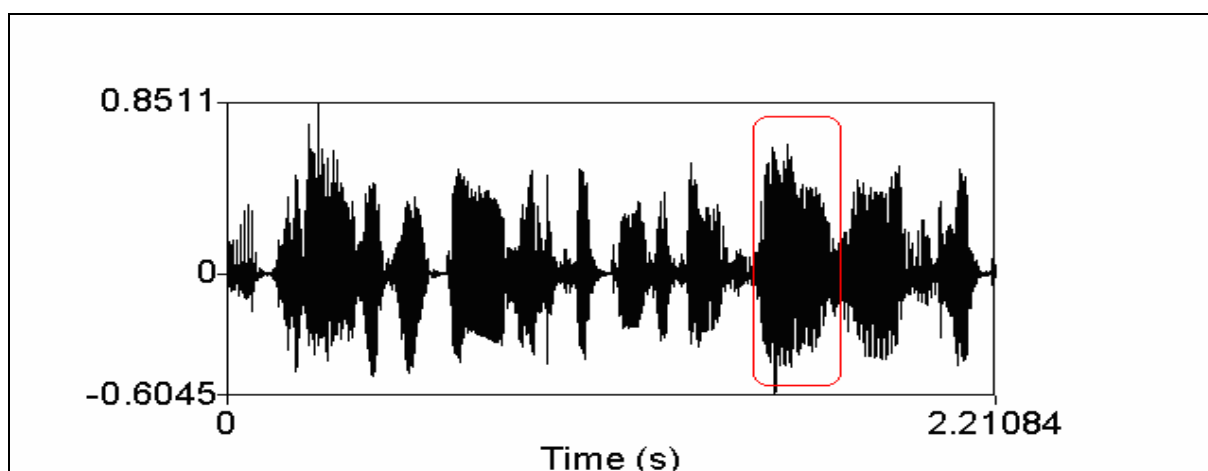> 'In the south of Poland the situation ís alarming'

Figure 3: In Polen in de toestand wel zorgelijk

3.2.3 Implicit contrast

When a *wel* of this type is uttered, there must be something in the context from which the opposite of the sentence containing *wel* could be inferred. This context could be a linguistic one like example (44) where one girl infers from the conversation that the other girl acts as if there are no more red-haired people on the world.

> (44) *D'r zijn wel meer roodharige mensen op deze wereld*
> 'There are more red-haired people in this world (you know)'

The relevant context can also be non-linguistic. For example if someone is doing his groceries really slowly at five minutes before five o'clock, the check-out boy could say:

> (108) *We gaan wel om 5 uur dicht hoor*
> 'We do close at 5 you know'

From the behaviour of the person doing his groceries, the cashier infers the man thinks the shop does not close at five or at least that he is not aware of the fact the shop closes at five.

This use of *wel* always contradicts the inference. *Niemand komt wel*, with *wel* used to indicate implicit contrast, is not a possible utterance. That utterance would require an internal negation creating a contrary relation with *niemand komt niet* 'nobody does not come', as we saw with the correcting use of *wel.*

When *wel* indicating implicit contrast is used, there is a (non-) linguistic context from which the negation of the sentence containing *wel* can be inferred. This negation is therefore not explicit. There is not one particular utterance containing the denial. The denial is factive. From the context it can be inferred the hearer considers the negation to be a fact. *Wel* is used to contradict that negation. Because of the implicitness of the negation this use of *wel* is weaker than the previous two. The stress *wel* is pronounced with is also weaker than the stress the previous two are pronounced with. Still it is a prominent word in the sentence.

The waveform of utterance (46) shows that the word *wel* is slightly more prominent than its neighbouring words. It is not the most prominent word in the sentence though; the highest unit in the wave form represents the word *laat.*

(46)   *Je laat natuurlijk wel zien dat je er onderzoek naar gedaan hebt.*
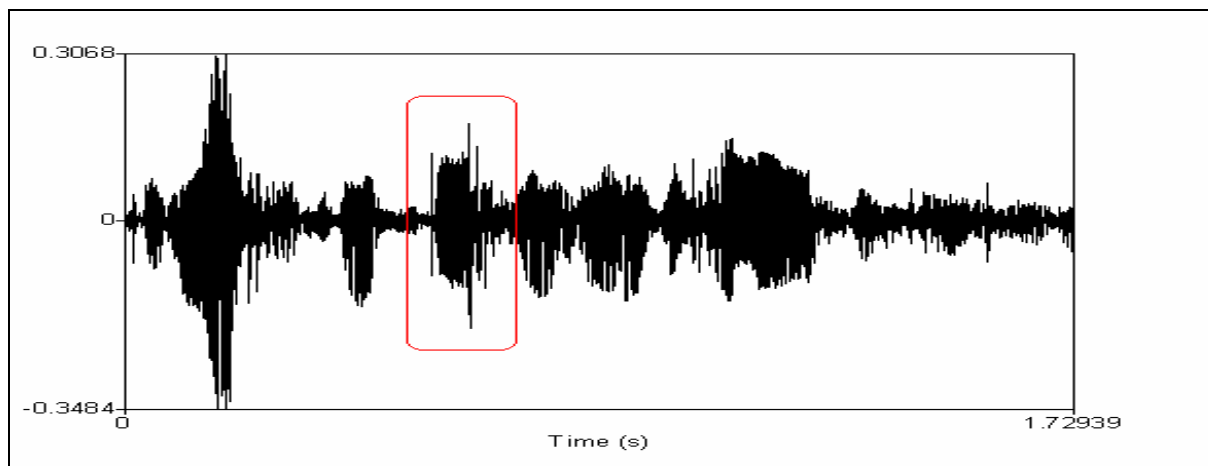   'You do show of course that you did a lot of research'

Figure 4: je laat natuurlijk wel zien.....

3.2.4 Comforting wel

When *wel* is uttered in a comforting way, there is something in the context from which it can be inferred that the hearer fears the opposite of the sentence containing *wel*. A speaker will utter (109) because he thinks the hearer fears things will not be all right.

(109)   *Het komt wel goed*
          'don't worry it will be alright'

The speaker can infer this from a linguistic or a non-linguistic context. If the person uttered his fear or other sentences from which his fear could be inferred, this would be a linguistic context. If the person for example cries or nervously bites his nails, this would be a non-linguistic context. This use of *wel* always creates a contradictory opposition. The negation is external for one is saying 'don't worry, what you fear won't happen'. If someone throws a party and for some reason he hopes at least somebody won't come, he could express his fear that 'nobody will not come' *niemand komt niet.* The speaker who wants to comfort him would express a sentence with the content 'don't worry; it will not happen that nobody won't come'. This can not be expressed by *niemand komt wel* since in that case the internal negation is negated.

When the comforting *wel* is uttered there is something in the (non-) linguistic context that says or from which it can be inferred that the hearer fears that the situation expressed by the sentence containing *wel* will not be the case. The negation can be explicit as well as implicit. The negation is not factive. The negation is not presented as a fact. The hearer doesn't state the negation is the case, he fears it will be the case. Because this negation is not factive, it is weaker than the previous negation I discussed. *Wel* used with a comforting effect is also expressed with less stress than the uses of *wel* I discussed in the above.
In the wave form of utterance (110) it is visible that the word *wel* is slightly less prominent than its neighbouring word.

(110) *Dus dat klopt wel*
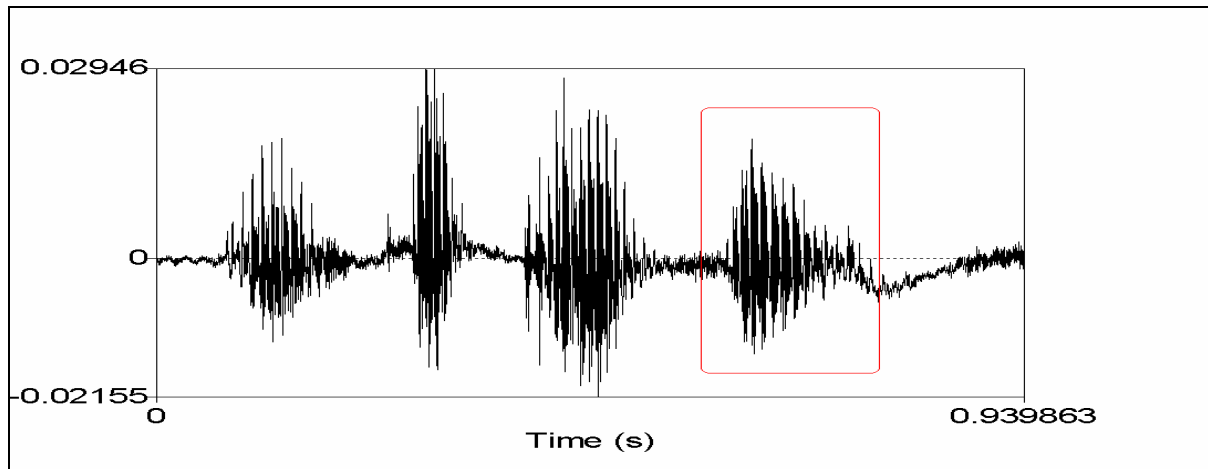‘So (don't worry) that's the way it is supposed to be’

Figure 5: dus dat klopt wel

3.2.5 Wel indicating surprise

The uses of *wel* I grouped by the name ‘surprise’ are found in a context in which the opposite of the sentence containing *wel* is plausible or normal.

Wel in combination with *misschien* occurs in a context in which the negation is plausible and expected. This context is a very broad one, often merely general world knowledge. With a broad context I mean a context that is not brought about by the previous conversation or the current surroundings. Sentence (111) for example could be uttered because general world knowledge tells us that men usually don't wear dresses.

(111) *Misschien draagt hij wel een jurk*
‘Maybe he wears a dress’

The plausibility of the negation can also be context dependent. Sentence (87) is for example uttered when we know that *she* is a person that usually doesn't wear dresses.

(87) *Misschien draagt ze wel een jurk*
‘Maybe she wears a dress’

Wel is pronounced with no particular stress. In the wave form of utterance (83) *wel* is slightly more prominent than its neighbouring words but is not the most prominent word of the utterance.

(83) *Misschien is het wel een hele rijke…..*
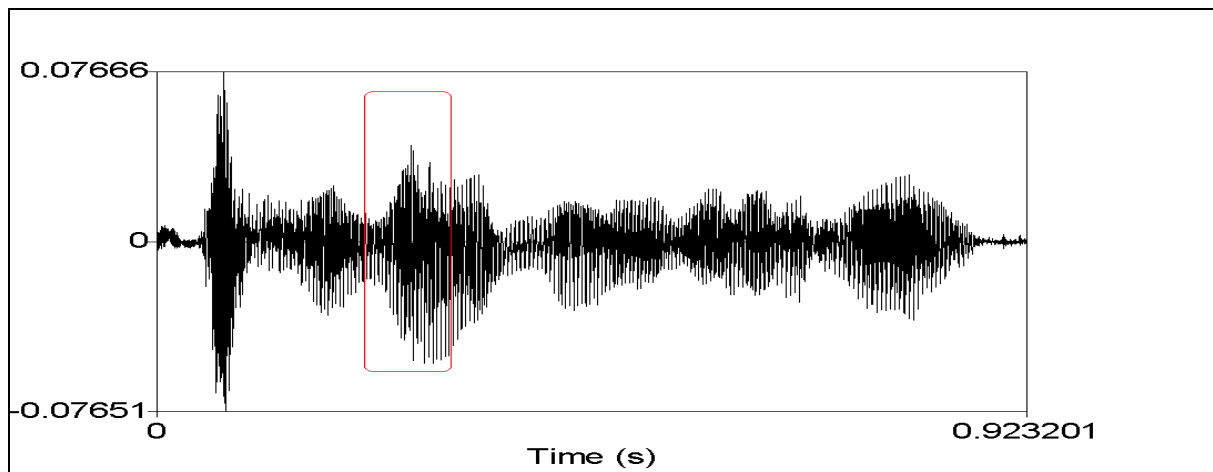‘Maybe it is a very rich……’

Figure 6: misschien is het wel een hele rijke....

Wel in combination with *lijken* 'look like/seem' also fits a context in which the negation of the sentence containing *wel* is plausible or normal. Sentence (112) is uttered to someone who is in fact not an elderly person. We all know that people that are not an elderly person usually don't look like an elderly person. But this person does look like an elderly person!

> (112) Je lijkt wel een bejaarde
> 'You look like an elderly person'

Because of our general world knowledge we know that children normally don't look like people they are not related to. Therefore the child in sentence (76) shouldn't look like the speakers neighbour. *Wel* is used because against expectations the child does look like *my neighbour*:

> (76) *Dat kind lijkt wel een beetje op mijn buurvrouw*
> 'That child looks like my neighbour'

In the wave form of sentence (73) it is shown that *wel* receives no particular stress.

> (73) *Het lijkt wel een sollicitatiegesprek*
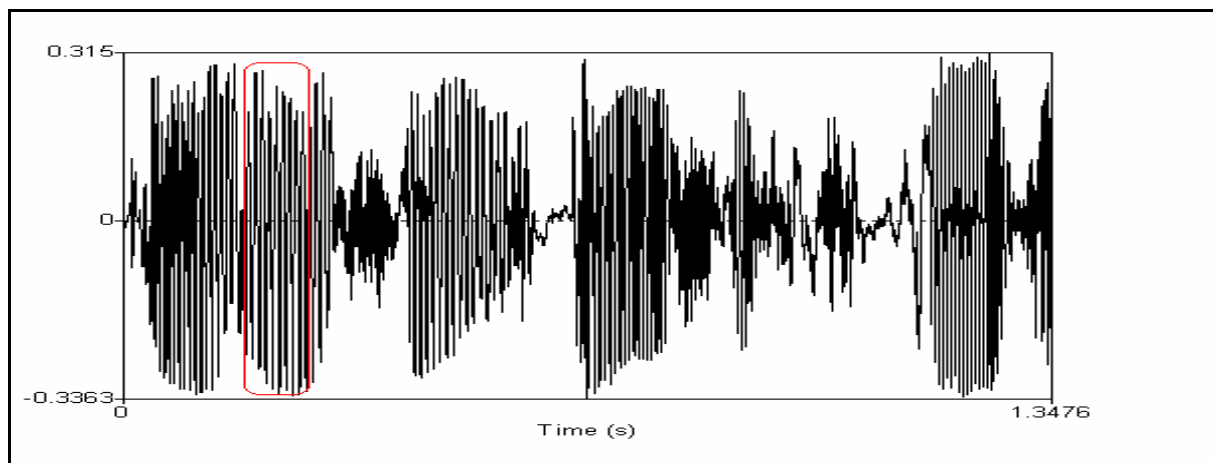> 'It looks like job interview'

FFigure 7: het lijkt wel een sollicitatiegesprek

Wel in combination with a gradual element is used when the amount is higher or than expected or higher than usual. Sentence (80) is uttered in a context in which the speaker usually doesn't drink that much coffee a day:

(80) *Ik heb vandaag wel 10 koppen koffie gedronken*
      'I drank no less than 10 cups of coffee today'

And (113) could be uttered because part of our general world knowledge is that people usually do not have that many children:

(113) *Mijn buurvrouws tante heeft wel 12 kinderen*
       'My neighbour's aunt has no less than 12 children'

Wel can be used when the number is exceptionally high. Why can't *wel* be used when the amount is exceptionally low? I claim this is due to the fact that *wel* is a denial of a negation. As Jespersen (1924) put it: '*not* means *less than*'. When someone utters *he does not read three books a year* he means he reads less than three books a year. When someone utters *War and Peace is not a good book* he means it is a less than good book, an inferior book.[2] This means when someone utters *I don't drink ten cups of coffee today* he means he drinks less than ten cups of coffee. If another negation is added to that sentence, the meaning arises as Van Dale described it for the focus particle *wel*: 'that no less then the mentioned amount is the case'. Sometimes *wel* actually means 'at least', this is especially the case with large numbers, for example in sentence (114):

(114) *Ik heb wel 200 boeken gelezen*
       'I have read at least 200 books'

In other cases *wel* does not mean *at least* but the fact that it denies *less than* causes *wel* to implicate the number is higher than expected and not lower than expected. The stress this *wel* is pronounced with is comparable with the other two that fall under surprise. In the wave form of sentence (79) *wel* is not a prominent word.

(79) *'T had 't had normaal gezien wel twee keer goedkoper geko gekund
      zunne maar uh ...*
      'normally it could have been twice as cheap but uhm…..'

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[2] In some occasions it may mean more than three or better than good but then the sentence is uttered with a marked intonation and the sentence is often followed by a specification as *it is not a good book, it is an outstanding book*.
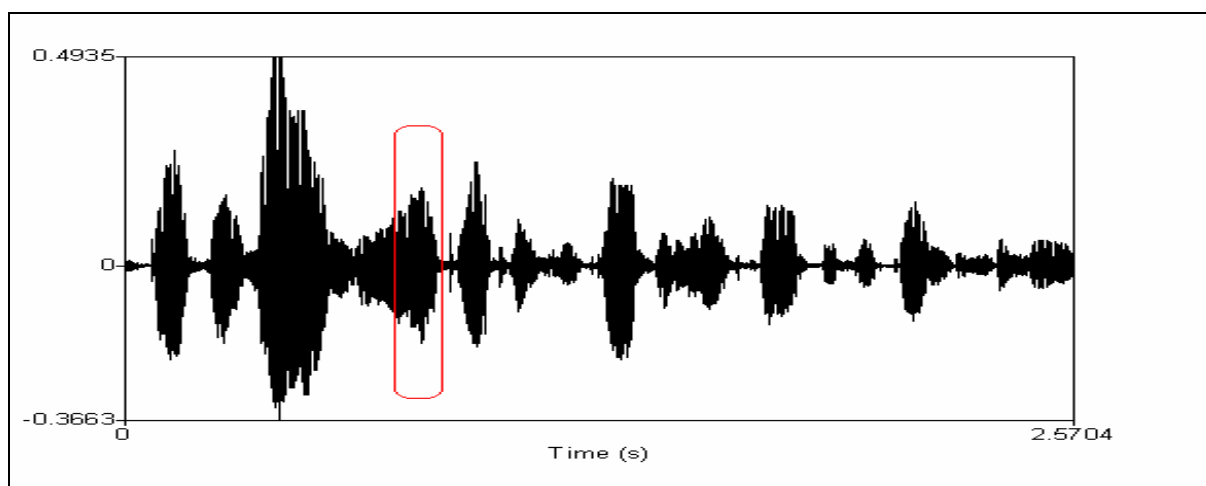
Figure 8: het had normaal gezien wel twee keer....

Wel expressing surprise always contradicts the expectation. That can be shown by the impossibility for *wel* to deny an internal negation. In a context where one would like to express his surprise over the fact people don't look old (for example in a retirement home) one could not say:

>   (115) *#Niemand lijkt wel oud*
>   'Nobody looks old'

The same goes for *wel* in combination with *misschien* and the focus particle *wel.*

The uses of *wel* indicating surprise are uttered in a very broad non-linguistic context in which the negated counterpart of the sentence containing *wel* is expected or normal. This negated counterpart is very implicit. It is not uttered in a sentence and often it can not be found in the immediate context. The negation is not factive either. It can not be inferred from the context that the negated situation actually is the case, it can only be inferred that the negated situation is likely to be the case. Therefore this *wel* is weaker than the correcting *wel,* the contrastive *wel* and the *wel* indicating implicit contrast. The negation from the comforting *wel* can be explicit or can be found in the immediate context. Because the negation of this *wel* can only be found in a broader context I interpret it to be more implicit than the previous one. Hence this *wel* is also weaker than the comforting *wel.* The stress on these occurrences of *wel* is less than the stress of the first three uses of *wel.* It is hard to determine whether the difference in strength between the *wel* indicating surprise and the comforting *wel* is reflected in the degree of stress.

3.2.6 Moderating *wel*

The uses of *wel* I will discuss as from here are different from the uses above. In the following *wel* is not a reaction on a context that indicates the opposite. In case of the moderating *wel* in (116) for example there does not have to be anything in the context that states the opposite or from which the opposite can be inferred.

>   (116) *Het feestje bij Jan Peter was wel leuk*
>   'The party at Jan Peter's was quite nice'

In this case the negation that *wel* negates is an internal one. The effect is similar to a well-known effect of double negation; litotes. Let me clarify this effect with the help of the previous example.

Let's assume the scale of "nice-ness" includes three states; *nice*, *neutral* and *not nice*. *Not nice* in a contrary opposition to *nice* covers the ranges *neutral* and *nice* from the nice-ness scale. When one says something was *not nice* that mostly implicates it was the contrary of *nice.*
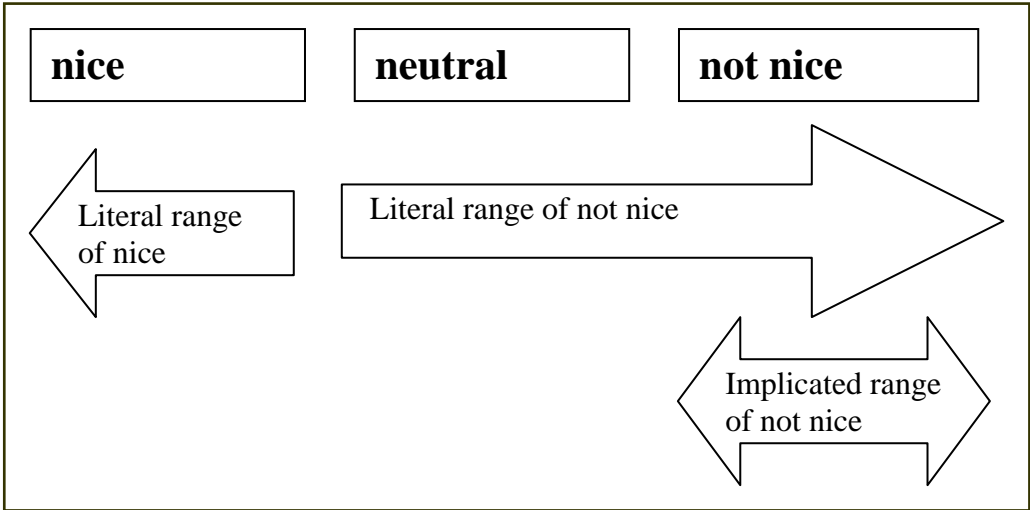

Figure 9: not nice

When one makes use of a double negation a different effect appears. What is literally expressed by *not not nice* encloses the states *nice* and *neutral*. What is implicated by that utterance though is covered by the neutral state for the biggest part (Blutner 2004).
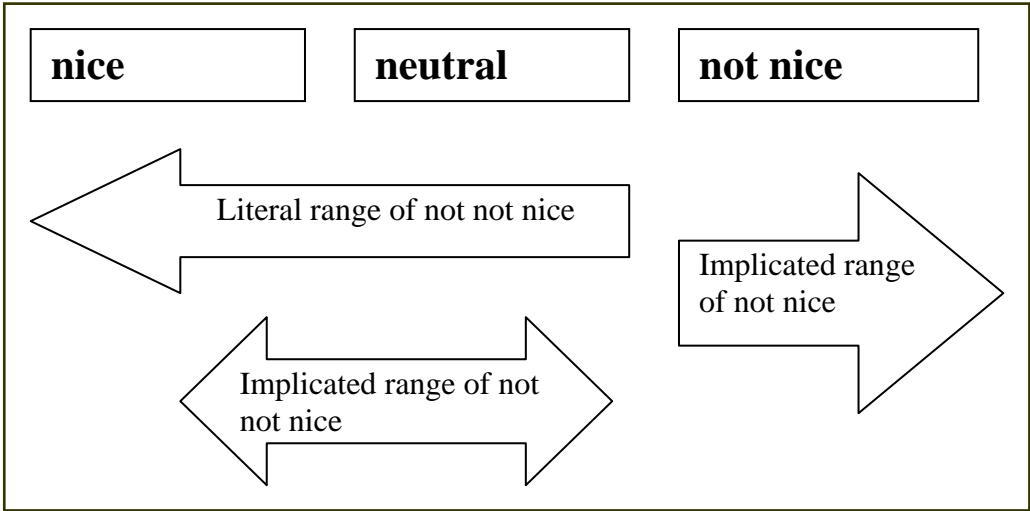

Figure 10: not not nice

The same effect is visible when *wel* is used*.* When someone utters *the party was 'wel' nice* that implicates he found the party somewhere in between *neutral* and *a little bit nice.*

As we saw in the previous chapter this *wel* is used in combination with positive predicates only:

(61) *Het feestje was wel leuk*
'The party was quite nice'

(62) *#Het feestje was wel saai*
'The party was quite boring'

This same restriction holds for the use of the double denial. It is possible to say about somebody that he is *not nót smart* or *not unhappy* (meaning he is not really smart nor really happy) but is not possible to say that someone is *not nót stupid* or *not nót sad.* Related to this fact is the impossibility to attach an affixal negation to a negative term. Notice that affixal negation is only possible with positive terms: *unhappy, unfriendly, unhealthy, uninteresting* vs. **unsad, *unhostile, *unsick, *unboring* (Horn 1989).
What causes the impossibility to use *wel* and a double denial in front of a negative predicate and why do we interpret a double negative the way we do? Below, I will briefly elaborate on an answer to that question that has been proposed by several linguists throughout the years.

Several linguists have formulated more or less the same ideas concerning a certain mechanism in language, namely that special meanings are expressed in a special way. Horn formulated it as follows: "there is a correlation between the stylistic naturalness of a given form, its relatively brevity and simplicity, and its use in stereotypical situations […] The corresponding periphrastic forms, stylistically less natural, longer, and more complex, are restricted […] to those situations outside the stereotype, for which the unmarked expression could not have been used appropriately." (Horn 1989, p.304). Levinson (2000a) articulated this idea in the M(anner)-principle: "what is said in an abnormal way, isn't normal; or marked message indicates marked situation" (in: Blutner 2004, p.25). More recently this idea formed the base of Bidirectional Optimality theory (Blutner 2000). The most important idea in this theory is that a hearer can only arrive at the most optimal interpretation of an utterance if he takes into account the alternative forms the speaker could have used to express this meaning. To put it very simple: if the speaker utters a marked form, the hearer interprets that utterance as having a marked meaning. After all, if the speaker would have wanted to utter the unmarked meaning, he would have used the unmarked form.

Negative concepts are (in general) more marked than positive concepts. This can be shown by (among others) the fact that the positive term is used to question whether something has or lacks a certain quality. You ask someone *how good was the play* and not *how bad was the play* (unless you already had an indication it was bad). Similarly you ask the question *how happy are you* and not *how unhappy are you* in neutral circumstances.
Similarly, an utterance containing a negation is more marked than an affirmative utterance (I refer the reader to Horn 1989, for extensive argumentation) These two facts are responsible for the impossibility to attach an affixal negation to a negative concept, turning it into a positive concept. An unmarked meaning (a positive one) would then be expressed by a marked form (a form containing a negation).
This is also why the effect called litotes does not occur when it concerns a double denial in front of a negative predicate. A negated negative predicate does not

implicate the contrary, as a negated positive predicate does. The contrary of a negated negative predicate would be a positive predicate. A positive predicate is, again, an unmarked concept that cannot be expressed by a marked form (a form carrying a negation). Therefore the contradictory reading emerges. That contradictory reading of the predicate covers the whole range of the scale besides the term itself. Adding another denial can therefore bring about no other meaning than the term itself again.
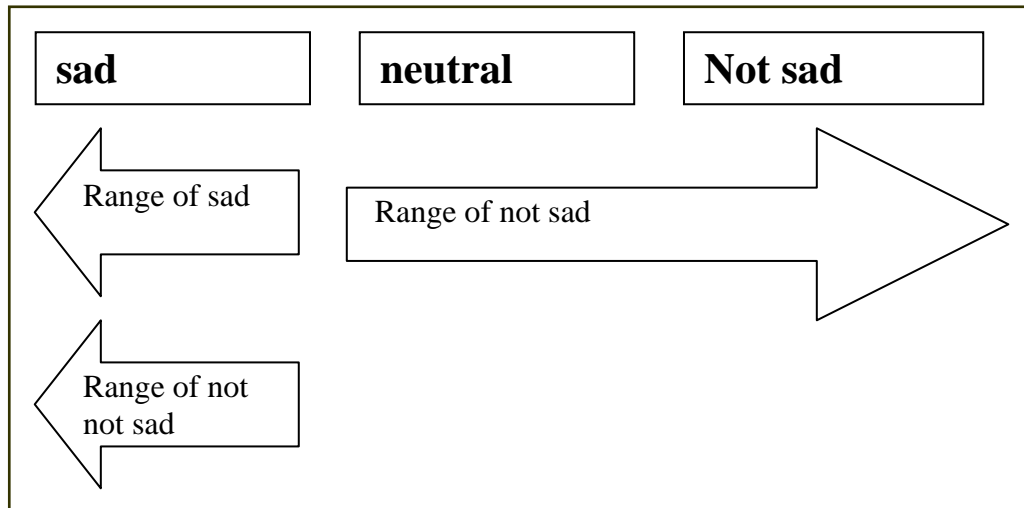

Figure 11: not not sad

A negated positive term brings about the contradictory reading as we saw. If another negation is uttered, the scale minus the negated term is in the range of interpretation. The fact that we interpret *not not nice* as *neutral* or *a little nice* is due to the fact that the unmarked concept 'nice' must be, and is, expressed by an unmarked term; the word *nice*. The neutral concept, in between *nice* and *not nice* is the most marked concept and is therefore expressed by the most marked expression (an expression carrying two negations).

It is very interesting to see that the same restrictions that hold for a double denial, hold for the use of *wel.* They also bring about the same effect; they weaken the strength of the predicate. *Wel* used in this way is a reaction on a very weak negation. The negation is implicit; it is not literally present in the previous context. The negation is the least factive among the *wel*'s I discussed up till now. The negation is not presented as fact nor is it even more plausible in the context than its affirming counterpart. From the context it can only be inferred that the negation is an option. The speaker of (116) took into consideration the possibility of labelling the party as *not nice.* He decided that such a label would not be describing the party adequately. This is reflected by the use of *wel.* The fact that this *wel* is very weak is reflected in the stress it is pronounced with. In the wave form of utterance (117) we actually see that *wel* is the least prominent word of the sentence.
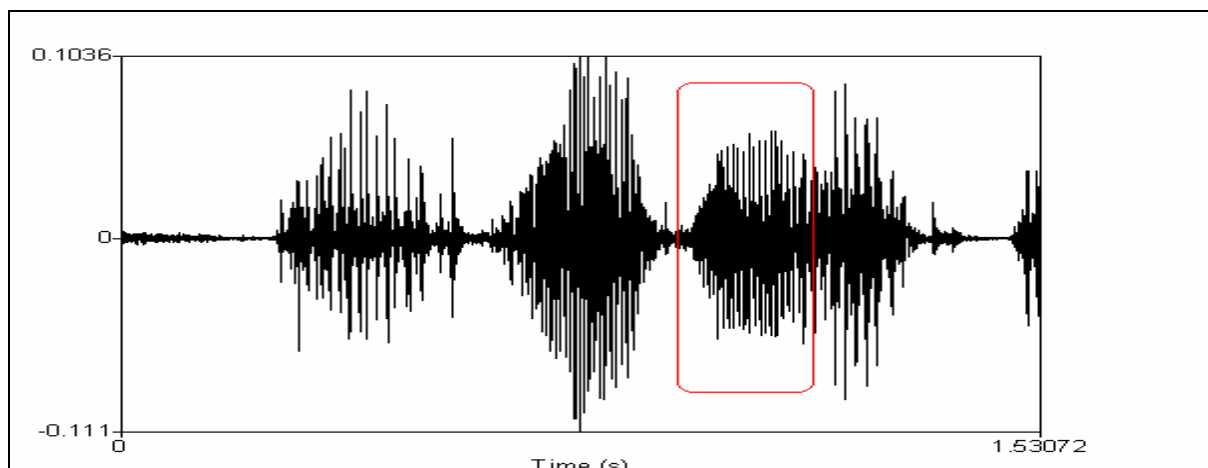
    (117) *Nee lijkt me wel leuk*
        'No it seems OK"

Figure 12: nee lijkt me wel leuk

3.2.7 *Wel* in combination with *eens* 'once'

When *wel* is used in combination with *eens* 'once' there is not anything in the context that indicates the opposite as well. Take for instance the example (64) from the previous chapter. There does not have to be anything from which the speaker infers that the hearer hasn't seen him in *Goede Tijden Slechte Tijden.*

> (64)   *Heb jij 'm wel eens gezien in Goede Tijden Slechte Tijden?*
>   'Have you ever seen him in *Goede Tijden Slechte Tijden?*'

Here *wel* has a similar effect as in the previous use. *Wel* denies the possibility of *not once.* On a (simplified) scale of frequency this leaves the ranges *ones, sometimes, often* and *always* open for interpretation. *Wel eens* indicates that the frequency lies just above *not once,* namely *once* or *sometimes.* This can again be ascribed to the mechanism I described in the previous section.
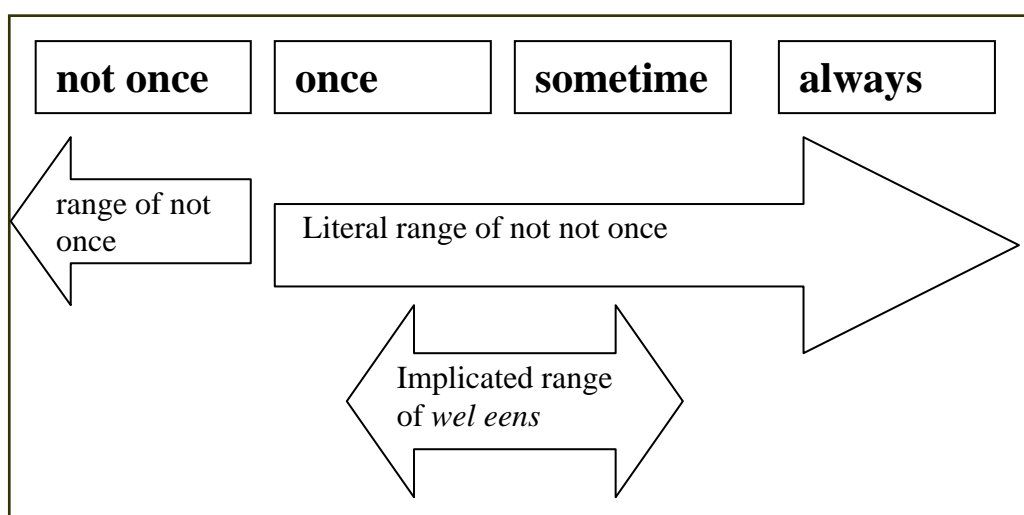
Figuur 13: *wel eens*

W*el* is used to deny *not once.* By doing that the speaker expresses *not never but very infrequent.* This negation is again a very weak one. It is not explicit; there is no literal negation in the previous context. It is also not factive. The negation is not presented as a fact nor is it even more plausible in the context than its affirming counterpart. Therefore this *wel* is in the same category of strength as the moderating

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wel. The stress is also very weak. In the wave form of utterance (65) we see that *wel* is one of the least prominent words of the sentence.

(65) *De helft van de mensen werkt ook wel eens op zaterdag of zondag*
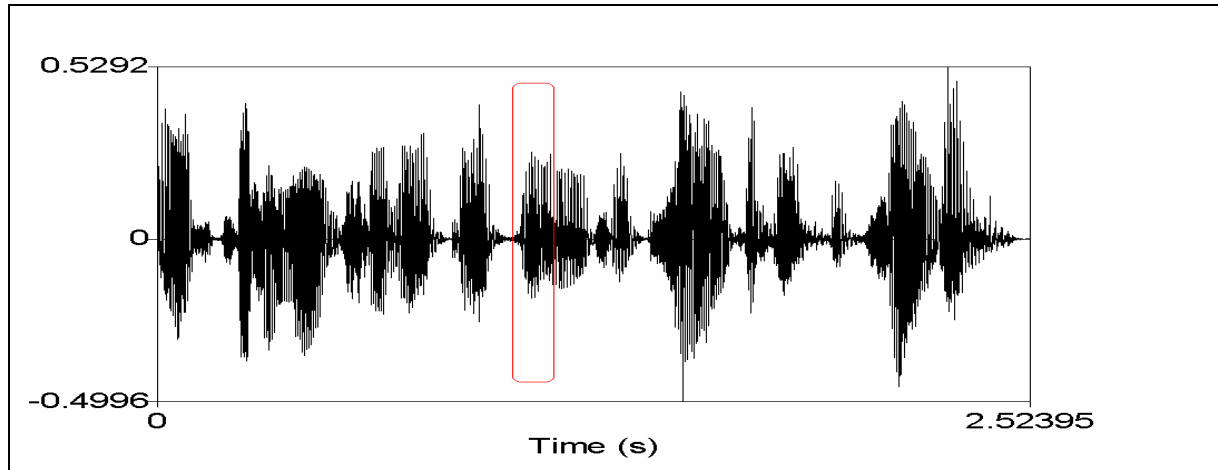'Half of the people works on Saturdays and Sundays once in a while'

Figure 14: de helft van de mensen werkt ook wel eens....

3.2.8 *Wel* in combination with *zullen* 'will'

When *wel* is used in combination with *zullen* 'will' there does not have to be anything from which the contrary can be inferred. Example (71) does not require a context in which the opposite is stated or more plausible.

(71) *Hij zal wel bij een bank werken zal wel naar z'n werk op weg zijn*
'He probably works at the bank he is probably on his way to work'

When *zal wel* is used, we make statements but we are not sure if they are true. Often those statements are about the future, those statements can be more or less plausible but they cannot (yet) be said to be true or false. However, LEM requires that of a proposition and its contradictory one must be true (Horn 1989).

Law of the excluded middle (LEM): in every case we must either affirm or deny; there is no in between. Goes only for contradictories

And another law of logic, the **Law of Bivalence (LBV),** as formulated by Horn (1989) tells us that every proposition is either true or false.

That is why I claim *wel* is a reflection of an inner weighing of a speaker of the truthfulness of a proposition. When we talk about future events or other things we cannot be sure about, we have ideas about the probability of the event to occur. Sometimes many clues indicate the event will occur. But even then we can not be sure about its truth although the opposite has become very unlikely. And since a proposition must be either true or false, there is nothing in between, we have to conclude that the event will occur. *Wel* reflects that *not* was taken into consideration and thereby shows the speaker is not totally sure about the proposition.

The negation *wel* is a reaction to is again an extremely weak one. It is not explicit since there is no literal negation in the context. It is not factive either. Just as with the previous uses of *wel* the context only indicates the possibility of the opposite. Therefore the strength of this *wel* is of the same category as the previous two. The stress is as weak as theirs too. In the wave form of utterance (71) *wel* is not more prominent than its neighbouring words.

(71) *Hij zal wel bij een bank werken zal wel naar z'n werk op weg zijn*
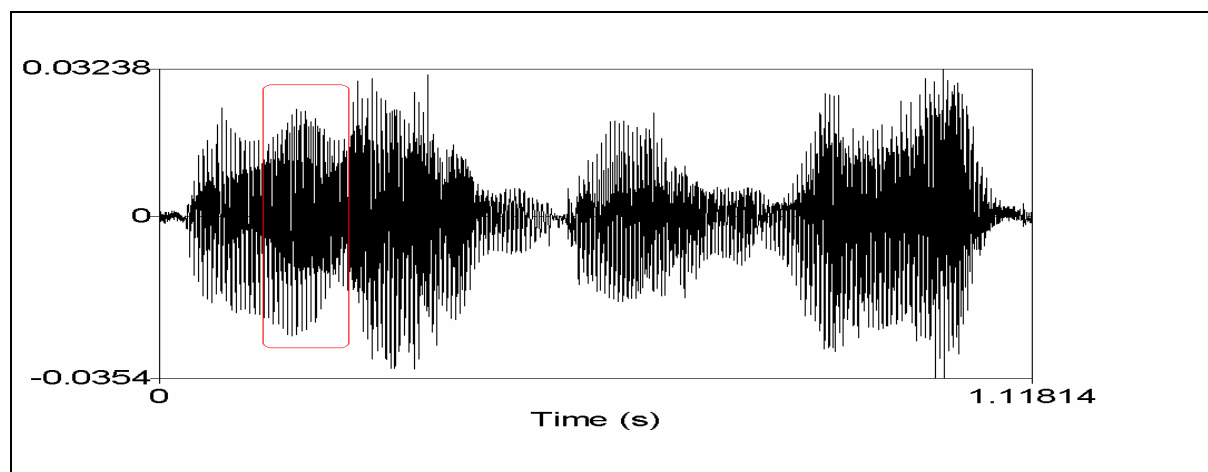   'He probably works at the bank he is probably on his way to work'

Figure 15: zal wel bij een bank werken…

3.2.9 Three expressions, you know what I'm saying

The use of *wel* in *best wel* and *echt wel* also reflects a consideration of *not*, though in a very abstract way. *Best wel* and *echt wel* are used to weaken or strengthen the affirmative nature of an utterance. An utterance can only be affirmatively weaker or stronger in comparison with its negated counterpart.

The fact that *best wel* and *echt wel* can be used with both positive as well as negative predicates is due to the fact that in contrast with the 'moderating *wel*' this *wel* is a negation of an external negation. When a negative term is negated this can only lead to a contradictory reading of the term, for reasons I have described in section 3.4.6. Therefore, when a negative concept like *sad* is negated twice this leads to the conception *it is not the case that it is not the case that this is sad*, which means *it is sad. Het is best wel stom* 'it is *best wel* dull' therefore means 'it is quite the case that this is dull'. *Het is echt wel stom* 'it is *echt wel* dull' means it is really the case that this is dull. This is in conflict with the Law of the Exlcuded Middle that states that of two contradictories one is true and the other is false and there is no in between. A statement is either true or false; it can not be a little true. Maybe that is why many speakers of Dutch find these expressions objectionable, like Jan Beijert in his column in *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* 21 juni 1997 (fragment taken from Van Oostendorp en Van der Wouden, 1998)

Ergens best wel een hele fijne avond. "best wel" is ook zo'n plaag. Je hoort het ministers zeggen, tienermeisjes, talkshowleuteraars en heroïnehoertjes die door de burgemeester van hun stek zijn gejaagd. Vanwege de openbare orde. "Het is best

wel een zwaar beroep weet je wel, vooral 's winters, en dan heb je zo'n afwerkplek best wel nodig."
'Somehow it is *best wel* a nice evening. *"Best wel"* is also a real plague. Ministers say it, teenage girls, talk show babblers and heroine hookers who are chased from their spot by the mayor. Because of the civil order. "It is *best wel* a harsh profession, you know, especially in the winter, then you *best wel* need such a work spot".

Wel in *Weet je wel* is used to question the affirmative nature of the sentence.

> (95)   *Ik heb daar zo'n kruin zitten weet je wel*
>   'I have a crown there, you know'

As I mentioned in the previous chapter *weet je wel* is similar to the English *you know.*

The uses of *wel* in these three common expressions are too unclear to incorporate in my theory. The expressions are quite new and especially used by younger people. The fact that they are more or less instances of 'flashy language' and that they are often used as stopgaps, makes it hard to analyze the precise meaning of the word *wel.* I will therefore not include them in my theory concerning the core-meaning of *wel* and the theory concerning stress.

3.3 Conclusions

In this chapter I have shown that all uses of *wel* share a core meaning. They are all a denial of a denial. The strength of *wel* decreases with the strength of the denial it denies. *Wel* is the strongest when it is used as a correction of a previous negation. This negation is both very explicit and factive. A little weaker is the contrastive *wel.* The negation that *wel* is a reaction to is also both explicit and factive. This *wel* is nonetheless weaker because the content of the sentence containing the negation is not conflicting with the content of the sentence containing *wel.* The *wel* indicating implicit contrast is again a bit weaker than the previous two. The negation it denies is factive though implicit. The next one on the scale of strength is the comforting *wel.* The negation it denies can be explicit or implicit. The negation is not factive since the negative counterpart of the sentence containing *wel* is not stated to be the case but only feared. Even weaker are the uses of *wel* I grouped by the name 'surprise'. The negation these occurrences of *wel* deny is not factive; the negated situation is not stated to be the case but more plausible than its affirmative counterpart. It is also very implicit since it can only be inferred from the context or mere general world knowledge. The weakest uses of *wel* are the moderating *wel, wel* in combination with *eens* 'once' and *wel* indicating plausibility. The negation they are a reaction on is very unfactive since it is only proposed by the context as a possibility. They are also implicit since there is no literal negation in the context.
I hypothesized that the stress on *wel* was related to the strength of the negation it is a reaction to. This hypothesis is supported by the observation that the instances of what I called the correcting *wel* are pronounced wit far more stress than the occurrences of *wel* I considered to form the weakest group. The uses of *wel* in between those two seem to decrease in stress according to their strength. This was shown by the wave forms of the utterances. Of course, the wave forms only represent one instance of each type of *wel* and although volume is related to stress it is not the only component. However, I think I have given an indication of the

connection between the strength of the negation *wel* reacts to and the stress the word carries.

Chapter 4: The interpretation of *wel*

Because *wel* brings about such different meanings it sometimes happens those meanings are in conflict. I found a nice example of that on a forum on the internet. On the forum there was a discussion going on about an article that announced the death of a famous Dutch person: Willem Oltmans. The article ended with the following line:

> (118) *Willem Oltmans zal wel in stilte begraven worden*
> 'Willem Oltmans will be buried in silence'

The person who placed (part of) the article on the forum finds the use of the word *wel* very inappropriate. 'Was he such a noisy man?' he wonders. Other forum members speculate about why the word *wel* is used here too. One discussant puts forward the idea that the word indicates that Willem Oltmans will nót be put on the centre spot of the Arena stadium (unlike the famous Dutch singer Andre Hazes who died close before the person discussed here). Another person suggests that the way he will be buried is put in contrast with the image of his rather turbulent life, that rises from the rest of the article. Finally a person suggests that *wel* indicates a contrast between the fact that he will be buried in silence and the fact mentioned in the previous sentence (not cited on the forum) that a public website has been created where people can offer their condolences.

The forum members interpret *wel* as creating contrast between some part of the sentence (*Willem Oltmans, begraven* 'buried') and elements in the context. There are actually several other possible interpretations that they do not take into account. One other possible interpretation is that the sentence corrects the view that Willem Oltmans will not be buried in silence. The other possible interpretation is that the writer of the article expresses with the word *wel* that he expects Willem Oltmans to be buried in silence but is not totally sure about it.

In this example there is a problem with the interpretation of *wel*. Most of the times, however, no problems occur in the interpretation of sentences containing the word. How is that possible; how do we interpret *wel* the right way? Of course, as I described in the previous chapter, stress plays a big part in the interpretation of *wel*. But when there is still confusion about the right interpretation or when it concerns written language I argue that the different meanings of *wel* form a hierarchy in interpretation according to their strength. In this chapter I will describe this hierarchy and how it effects the interpretation of the word *wel*. I will discuss the ideas within an Optimaly Theoretic framework. Therefore I will begin this chapter by discussing Optimality Theory.

4.1 Optimality Theory

Theories about human language have always included the description of constraints. Those constraints were described as strict rules that people had to keep, to utter felicitous sentences. In 1993 and in more detail in 1997 the phonologist Prince and the scientist Smolensky argued for a theory about human language based on a general strategy of the mind to process information: optimization. Translated to the field of linguistics that means that language is seen as a system of weak, potentially conflicting constraints. The idea was first picked up by phonologists. Later other

disciplines within the linguistic field followed and further developed the theory. I will discuss the basic concepts of Optimality Theory (henceforth OT) below.

In OT language is described as a system of ranked constraints. Those constraints are weak, which means they may be violated. However, some constraints are stronger than others. When constraints are in conflict, the weaker constraint may be violated to satisfy the higher ranked constraints. OT hypothesizes that every language shares the same set of constraints. The difference between languages is due to a different ranking of those constraints.

OT specifies the relation between the input and output. Two mechanisms play a part in that; GEN (for generator) and EVAL (for evaluator). Gen generates the possible output-candidates on the base of a given input. EVAL evaluates the different candidates. The output that best satisfies the ranked constraints emerges as the optimal output for the given input (Prince and Smolensky 1993). In phonology the input is an underlying linguistic representation and the output is an uttered combination of sounds. In syntax the input is a meaning or a concept one wants to express and the output is a combination of words that express that meaning. In semantics, finally, the input is an utterance and the output is the meaning one ascribes to that utterance.

As said, the optimal output for a given input is determined on the base of a set of ranked constraints. There are two types of constraints: faithfulness and markedness constraints. Faithfulness constraints constrain the output to be faithful to the input. Markedness constraints are solely concerned with the output. They indicate that an unmarked output is preferred over marked output. In the previous chapter I already gave a short description of the notion 'markedness'. To put it briefly, structures that are more complex are considered to be marked structures and structures that are less complex or more natural are considered to be unmarked. Markedness constraints cause that the output can not always be faithful to the input. Because of that, faithfulness constraints and markedness constraints are potentially conflicting (Prince and Smolensky 1997).

The process of evaluation of the possible outputs through a set of ranked constraints is visualized in OT by means of so-called tableaus. Let me clarify the process of optimization and the use of tableaus with an example. A common example that is used to illustrate OT is the difference between the way English and Spanish express 'it rains'. In the English sentence, *it rains,* the subject *it* is present, even though that word does not refer to anything. In the Spanish sentence, *piove,* no subject is present. This fact is ascribed in OT to two constraints that are ranked differently for the two languages. One is the faithfulness constraint Full-Int (full interpretation) and the other is the markedness constraint Subject (Hendriks 2004)

Full-Int: Constituents in the output must be interpreted
Subject: Clauses must have a subject

In Spanish the constraint Full-Int is ranked higher than Subject. In English it is the other way around. In English this leads to the following tableau.

Input: 'it rains'	Subject	Full-Int
☞ Output: it rains		*
Output: rains	*	

In the upper left box the input is given. The input in this case is the meaning 'it rains'. The two other left boxes contain the possible outputs which are generated by GEN. In the middle and right upper box the relevant constraints are given. The constraints are ordered along their position in the hierarchy; in this case Subject is ranked higher than Full-Int. The stars represent a violation of the constraint. In both possible outputs a constraint is violated. For the output *rains* however, a higher ranked constraint is violated than for the output *it rains*. This makes *it rains* the optimal output, which is indicated by the pointing finger.

In Spanish the constraint Full-Int is ranked higher than Subject. That makes the sentence without the subject the optimal output for Spanish, which leads to the following tableau.

Input: 'it rains'	Full-Int	Subject
☞ Output: piove		*
Output: *subject* piove	*	

These are the most important concepts of OT. My analysis concerns OT Semantics which was first described by Hendriks and de Hoop (2001) and de Hoop and de Swart (2000). As I mentioned before, in OT semantics the input is an utterance and the output is an interpretation of that utterance. When the word *wel* is uttered the possible interpretations for it are in conflict. In the next section I will discuss how that conflict is resolved by means of the interaction of two constraints.

4.2 The interpretation of *wel* in OT

In this section I will argue that two well-known constraints in OT semantics influence the interpretation of *wel.*

4.2.1 The constraints

The constraints that are involved in the interpretation of *wel* are Strength and Fit.

Fit: interpretations should not conflict with the linguistic context (Zwarts 2003)

Fit is a constraint that causes that we interpret discourse in a coherent way. If a possible interpretation does not fit the previous conversation or the context, it will not emerge as the optimal interpretation for the given utterance. This constraint was previously described by Hendriks and de Hoop (2001) as Avoid contradiction.

Strength: stronger interpretations are better than weaker interpretations (zwarts 2003)

Strength expresses that we should interpret utterances in the strongest way. This constraint is based on the Strongest Meaning Hypothesis that was formulated to account for the interpretation of reciprocals (Dalrymple et al. 1994, 1998).

Fit is ranked higher than Strength. The constraint Strength expresses that our starting point in interpretation is the strongest meaning. If that meaning conflicts with the context Fit comes into play and we are forced to come to a weaker interpretation.

4.2.2 *Wel* and the interaction of Strength and Fit

How does the interaction of the two constraints influence the interpretation of *wel?* In the previous chapter I described that the various uses of *wel* differ in strength. I described that the strength of *wel* depends on two factors: explicitness and factiveness. The more explicit and factive the negation in the context, the stronger the *wel.* Regarding that strength the following hierarchy exists in the different uses of *wel.*

Correction >> Contrast >> Implicit contrast >> Comforting >> Surprise >> Once/ moderator/probability

The strongest use of *wel,* the correction, is on the top of the hierarchy and the weakest group is on the bottom of the hierarchy.

The constraint Strength tells us that stronger meanings are better than weaker meanings. When *wel* is uttered we should, according to Strength, interpret it as correcting a previous utterance. However, if no utterance is present in the context that the sentence containing *wel* could be a correction of, this leads to a violation of Fit. In that case *wel* with the interpretation one step down in the hierarchy becomes available. Let's say one reads utterance (119).

> (119) *Het feestje was wel leuk*
>   'The party was *wel* leuk'

The constraint Strength expresses we must interpret *wel* in the strongest way. However, this leads to a violation of Fit if in the previous context there isn't a line that states the party was not fun. Next, 'contrast' is the strongest interpretation. If there is a line that states that something else (e.g. the dinner) was not fun, interpreting *wel* as creating contrast does not lead to a violation of Fit. In that case 'contrast' is the optimal interpretation, even if the interpretations ranked lower down the hierarchy are not in conflict with the context as well. After all, interpreting *wel* with one of the lower ranked interpretations would lead to more violations of the constraint Strength. *Wel* in sentence (119) in a context where it is said that 'the dinner was not fun' could for example still function as a moderator without violating Fit. However, interpreting *wel* that way violates Strength five times (there are five possible stronger interpretations) while interpreting *wel* as creating contrast violates Strength only one time. Hence the optimal interpretation is 'contrast':

'Het feestje was *wel* leuk'	Fit	Strength
Correction	*	
☞ Contrast		*
Implicit contrast		**
Comforting		***
Surprise		****
Once/moderator/probability		*****

Let us return now to the Willem Oltmans-example:

(118) *Willem Oltmans zal wel in stilte begraven worden*
'Willem Oltmans will be buried in silence'

The discussants do not interpret *wel* in the correcting sense because there is no previous line in the article that states that Willem Oltmans will not be buried in silence. Then the forum members try to find a fitting context for the contrastive reading. One discussant puts forward the idea that the word indicates that Willem Oltmans will nót be put on the centre spot of the Arena stadium, in contrast with Andre Hazes. Another person suggests that the way he will be buried is put in contrast with his rather turbulent life. Finally a person suggests that the word *wel* indicates a contrast between the fact that he will be buried in silence and the fact mentioned in the previous sentence that a public website has been created where people can offer their condolences. If none of these elements is considered to be a suitable alternative for an element in (118), interpreting *wel* as creating contrast leads to a violation of Fit. Then the forum members will be forced to come to a weaker interpretation. The interpretation of *wel* as indicating probability seems a plausible option in this case.

'Willem Oltmans……..'	Fit	Strength
Correction	*	
☞ ? Contrast	?	*
Implicit contrast	*	**
Comforting	*	***
Surprise	*	****
☞ ? Once/moderator/probability		*****

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed Optimality Theory. I showed that the interaction of two constraints influence the interpretation of *wel;* Strength and Fit. Of course, this cannot be the whole story concerning the interpretation of *wel.* For a full analysis constraints concerning stress have to be taken into account. Perhaps a bidirectional approach, which I discussed very briefly in the previous chapter, that takes into account the markedness of the interpretations of *wel* and the markedness of the stress on the word, can lead to a full analysis. This would be an interesting point for further research.

General conclusions

In this thesis I have investigated the use of the Dutch particle *wel.* In the first chapter I discussed some literature about the class of particles and I discussed the previous research that has been done on the word.
In the second chapter I gave an inventory of the different ways *wel* is used in Dutch. By examining occurrences of *wel* I found in the Spoken Dutch Corpus I came to the following categories.

- The corrective *wel*: *wel* contradicts a previous utterance containing an explicit denial.
- Contrastive *wel: wel* co-occurs with an element in focus and creates a relation of contrast between the element in focus and an alternative
- Implicit contrast: *wel* is a reaction on an implicit previous denial that can be inferred from the context
- Comforting *wel*: *wel* is used to indicate that a certain desired situation will occur.
- Moderator: *wel* is used as a moderator to a predicate and weakens its meaning
- *Wel* with *eens* 'once': together they mean 'once (in a while)/ever'
- 'Surprise': *wel* is used to express one's surprise or to express that something is out of the ordinary. There are three subclasses:
  a: *wel* with gradual element
  b: *wel* with *lijken* 'look like/seem'
  c: *wel* with *misschien* 'maybe'
- *Wel* indicating probability: wel in combination with the verb *zullen* 'will' weakens the affirmative strength of the sentence
- *Wel* used in three common expressions: *best wel, echt wel, weet je wel*
- *Wel* is used as a conversation marker.

In chapter three I discussed what all these different uses of *wel* have in common. I showed that all uses of *wel* share a core meaning. They are all a denial of a denial. The strength of *wel* decreases with the strength of the denial it denies. *Wel* is the strongest when it is used as a correction of a previous negation. This negation is both very explicit and factive. A little weaker is the contrastive *wel*. The negation that *wel* is a reaction on is also both explicit and factive. This *wel* is nonetheless weaker because the content of the sentence containing the negation is not conflicting with the content of the sentence containing *wel*. *Wel* indicating implicit contrast is again a bit weaker than the previous two. The negation it denies is factive though implicit. The next one on the scale of strength is the comforting *wel*. The negation it denies can be explicit or implicit. The negation is not factive since the negative counterpart of the sentence containing *wel* is not stated to be the case but only feared. Even weaker are the uses of wel I grouped by the name 'surprise'. The negation these occurrences of *wel* deny is not factive; the negated situation is not stated to be the case but more plausible than its affirmative counterpart. It is also very implicit since it can only be inferred from the context or mere general world knowledge. The weakest uses of *wel* are the moderating *wel*, *wel* in combination with *eens* 'once' and *wel* indicating plausibility. The negation they are a reaction on is very unfactive since it is only proposed by the context as a possibility. They are also implicit since there is no literal negation in the context.

Furthermore I showed in chapter three that there is a relation between the strength of the negation *wel* reacts to and the stress on *wel.*

In chapter four I asked the question how *wel* is interpreted the right way. I discussed Optimality Theory and I showed that the interaction of two constraints influence the interpretation of *wel*; Strength and Fit.

In this thesis I answered the questions that I was most interested in concerning the particle *wel.* Some questions still remain and could be an interesting subject for further research. One of those questions is how the word developed diachronically. My expectation is that the hierarchy I described in chapter three and four also reflects in the diachronic development of the word. It would be interesting to see if that is really the case. As a component of an answer to that question, *wel* with the meaning 'good' could be involved in the analysis. It will be interesting to see how the uses of *wel* I described relate to the use of *wel* with the meaning 'good'.

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Digital sources

http://www.personal.rdg.ac.uk/~llsroach/phon2/ (visited at 1-12-2006)

Other sources

For this thesis I made use of:

Corpus gesproken Nederlands
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For more information about the corpus I refer to their webpage:
http://lands.let.kun.nl/cgn/home.htm