

POLARITY-SENSITIVE SCALAR PARTICLES IN EARLY MODERN AND PRESENT-DAY DUTCH: DISTRIBUTIONAL DIFFERENCES AND DIACHRONIC DEVELOPMENTS

Jack Hoeksema

University of Groningen

hoeksema@let.rug.nl, <http://www.let.rug.nl/~hoeksema>

Abstract

In this paper, two simultaneous developments in a small area of the Dutch particle lexicon are charted and related to one another: (a) the gradual emerge of particle clusters with the semantics of "even" in polarity-sensitive contexts, and (b) the growing specialization among Dutch particles which mark scalar endpoints. The particular ways in which Dutch particles and particle clusters become more specialized are discussed and an argument is provided that this growing specialization extends far beyond the small domain studied here, and is the driving force behind the development of particle clusters.

1. Introduction

Focus particles come in a number of flavours. There are additive and restrictive particles, as well as various other types, and both additive and restrictive particles can be cross-divided into scalar and nonscalar items. For instance, both *also* and *even* are additive, but only *even* is scalar. Similarly, *solely* and *merely* are restrictive focus adverbs, but only *merely* is scalar. Some words can be used in both scalar and nonscalar ways. An example of this dual usage is provided by the English particle *only*:

- (1) a. Only (solely/*merely) she was 16. [restrictive, nonscalar]
b. She was only (merely/*solely) 16. [restrictive, scalar]

Scalar particles that serve to mark a minimal endpoint may also help to express a *pejorative* connotation, compare the difference between *he was merely a peasant* and *#he was merely a king*, the latter of which is somewhat odd in ordinary contexts. This pejorative connotation is in all likelihood due to association of the focus adverb with an evaluative scale, the minimal endpoint of which indicates the least valued item among a ranked set of alternatives.

To make matters even more complicated, these additive and restrictive focus particles may or may not be negative polarity items. For example, many languages have special focus particles which link up with the minimal endpoint

of a pragmatic scale in negative contexts (cf. Fauconnier 1975, Zwarts 1981, Rooth 1985, König 1991, Israel 1996, 1998, Rullmann and Hoeksema 1997, Hoeksema and Rullmann 2001, Horn 2000), cf. e.g. the italicized expressions in the following examples:

- (2) She did not *so much as* lift a finger. (English)
 (3) Keiner hat *auch nur* einen Finger gekrümmt. (German)
 (4) Niemand heeft *ook maar* een vinger uitgestoken. (Dutch)

Dutch in particular has a rich set of expressions which are sometimes or even frequently used in this way. This set contains the particles in the left hand column of (5) below, but also various combinations of these particles, such as the ones in the right-hand column:

- | | | | |
|-----|---------|--------------|----------------|
| (5) | maar | ‘but’ | ook maar |
| | zelfs | ‘even’ | zelfs maar |
| | ook | ‘also’ | ook slechts |
| | slechts | ‘just’ | ook nog maar |
| | nog | ‘yet’ | zelfs ook maar |
| | eens | ‘once’ | zelfs nog maar |
| | immer | ‘ever; only’ | ook zelfs maar |

The particle clusters all contain as their right-hand member one of the pejorative scalar particles *maar* (cf. Foolen 1993) and *slechts*. There is greater variety in the elements occurring as lefthand members of a cluster than there is among the righthand members. I take this to be evidence that syntactically, the righthand element is the core or head of the combination, and that the lefthand element is a modifier of this core element, although it is doubtful that we can interpret these combinations compositionally. The pejorative character of the core apparently helps to identify the character of these clusters as markers of scalar endpoints.

Whereas the simple forms are to be found in far more contexts than just the negative ones, the complex forms in (5) are primarily restricted to negative contexts (in the wider sense of van der Wouden 1997, which includes conditional clauses, clausal complements of negative predicates, comparative clauses, restrictions of universal and superlative noun phrases, questions, in particular rhetorical questions, etc.), although none of the expressions studied here is used solely as a scalar endpoint marker in negative contexts. Some also appear in concessive clauses (e.g. *ook maar*), others can be used in negative as well as ordinary positive contexts. However, for the purposes of this paper, attention will be restricted to occurrences with scalar endpoint expressions in negative contexts. The mind-bogglingly complex issues surrounding the polysemy of particles such as *maar*, *nog* and *eens*, are hence not addressed here (but see e.g. Foolen 1993 for relevant discussion).

In this paper, I outline and compare the distributional differences among the various focus adverbials that can be employed in Dutch to mark minimal endpoints in negative contexts. I base this analysis on a corpus of some 8300 occurrences of focus adverbials, collected from books, newspapers, and electronic corpora.¹ The collection is large enough to allow one to sketch historical developments in this area, although more data would be welcome for early modern Dutch, in particular the 17th and 18th centuries. Before that time, there appears to have been very little explicit marking by scalar adverbs, so we look in vain for similar data in medieval texts. The how and why of the sudden trend to mark scalar meanings by means of various adverbs is still a mystery. Presumably, it has something to do with the emergence of a new, more rhetorical style of writing in the vernacular languages of Europe, which is also reflected in the simultaneous emergence of scalar connectives such as *much less*, *let alone*, *not to mention* and their Dutch, German and French counterparts, but little is as yet known about this matter.

This paper is set up as follows: In section 2, some attested examples are given of focus adverbs and adverbial clusters in negative contexts to illustrate the phenomenon, in section 3 some diachronic changes in the vocabulary of focus adverbs are detailed, in particular the emergence of two-word clusters, and in section 4 combinatory preferences for types of focus constituents are presented for the three most common expressions, *ook maar*, *zelfs maar* and simple *maar*. Section 5 contains conclusions and suggestions for further research.

2. Examples of scalar focus adverbials in negative contexts

Some examples of these focus particles are given in (6) below. The relevant focus particles or particle sequences are printed boldface.

- (6) a. Hoe had hij te Bel-Oeil **maar** een oogenblik kunnen twijfelen!²
 How had he at Bel-Oeil but a moment can doubt
 “How could he have doubted at Bel-Oeuil for even a moment”
- b. ‘Denkt u **maar** aan Kant,’ zei Beerta, zonder **zelfs** met zijn ogen te knipperen³
 think you but of Kant, said Beerta, without even with his eyes to blink
 “ ‘Just think of Kant,’ said Beerta, without so much as blinking his eyes.”
- c. Meermalen trof het mij, hoe zuiver mannen en vrouwen uit het volk melodieën welke zij eens gehoord hebben, nafluiten of nazingen, zonder zich **ook** in ééne noot te vergissen⁴
 Often struck it me, how clearly men and women from the people melodies they once heard have, whistle or sing, without REFL even in one note to err
 “It struck me more than once, how perfectly in tune ordinary men and women could sing back or whistle melodies which they had heard just once, without erring in even one note”

- d. Het zoude gelukkig, benijdenswaardig wezen, indien **slechts** één eenig zondaar daartoe niet behoorde!⁵
it would fortunate, enviable be if even one single sinner to-that not belonged!
“It would be fortunate, indeed enviable, if even one single sinner did not belong to it”
- e. Dat een yeghelick zeer scherpe hoede houden soude, met bloote rapieren in de hand, sonder **eens** eenige ooghe van den Indianen af te slane.⁶
that an everyone very sharp care keep should, with bare swords in the hand, without even one eye from the Indians off to keep
“That everyone should be very alert, with bare swords in hand, without taking even one eye off the Indians”
- f. Geen boek of schrift waarin de bijbel **ook maar** genoemd werd, mocht nog gedrukt of gekocht of gelezen worden⁷
no book or pamphlet wherein the bible even mentioned was, might still printed or bought or read become
“No book or pamphlet in which the bible was so much as mentioned was permitted to be printed or bought or read any longer.”
- g. was ik toen genoeg by myne zinnen, om dat **ook slegts** te vermoeden?⁸
Was I then enough at my senses, for that also just to suspect?
“Was I sufficiently in control of my senses, to even suspect that?”
- h. Nooit bereikte hij **zelfs maar** een halve finale in de ATP-tour.⁹
never reached he even a half finals in the ATP tour
“He never reached even the semi-finals in the ATP tour”
- i. De dorpelingen wilden mij, bij het afzijn huns bisschops, niet vergunnen om ook zelfs één van deze kostbare stukken aan te raken.¹⁰
the villagers wanted me, in the absence of-their bishop not permit for also even one of these expensive pieces on to touch
“The villagers would not allow me, in the absence of their bishop, to touch even one of these expensive pieces”
- j. Er is geen enkele aanwijzing, dat dit vermoeden **ook zelfs maar** grond van waarheid had¹¹
there is no single indication, that this suspicion even ground of truth had
“There is no evidence at all that there was even a kernel of truth to this suspicion”
- k. Hoe weinig tijdgenooten hebben die gewaardeerd, ja **zelfs ook maar** begrepen?¹²
How few contemporaries have those valued, yes even understood
“How few contemporaries have valued, or even understood those?”
- l. Ze weigert **ook nog maar** een woord Engels met hem te praten.¹³
She refuses even a word English with him to speak
“She refuses to speak even a word of English with him”

3. Distributional developments

The synchronic distributional differences among the combinations *ook maar* and *zelfs maar* were studied in Vandeweghe (1981) and, from a synchronic as well as from a diachronic perspective, in Rullmann and Hoeksema (1997), Hoeksema and Rullmann (2001). These two adverbials are nowadays the most common among the above list in their use as negated focus particles, with the important exception of *eens* which has developed into a fixed combination with *niet* and, somewhat sub-standardly, with *geen*. In older Dutch, *eens* could also be triggered by the negative preposition *zonder* ‘without’, as example (6f) illustrates, but this is no longer possible. Nowadays, the combination *niet eens* is more common than all other combinations of environments and focus adverbials taken together. In this paper I will largely ignore *eens*. The distribution of *eens* is a complicated issue, and so is its scalar character. A full discussion of the properties of *eens* would take me far beyond the limits of the present paper.

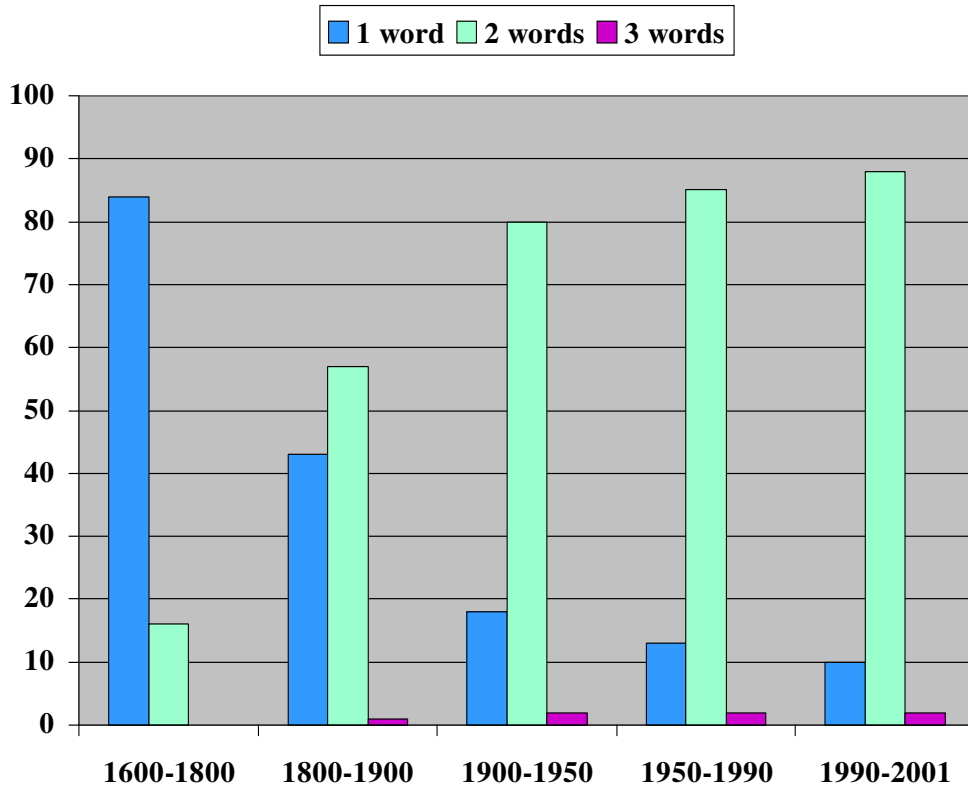
The adverbial cluster *ook slechts* is now clearly obsolete but it had some currency in the 19th and early 20th century. The same is true of *slechts* by itself.

Medieval and, by and large, 17th century Dutch did not employ adverbial clusters, but only the simple adverbs in the left-hand column of (5). The second half of the 18th century saw the emergence of the clusters, which became dominant toward the latter half of the 19th century. The use of the simple adverbs in negated positions declined accordingly. These developments are reflected in my database, cf. Table 1.

Table 1: *Usage percentages for focus adverbials in negative minimizer contexts*

Item	1600-1800 N=153	1800-1900 N=345	1900-1950 N=948	1950-1990 N=2468	1990-2002 N=4388
maar	50	18	14	13	10
zelfs	16	13	5	2	0.6
slechts	8	10	0.1	-	-
nog	-	0.3	-	-	0.02
ook	-	0.9	-	0.04	-
immer(s)	9	0.3	-	-	-
eens	(omitted)				
ook maar	6	34	63	67	67
ook zelfs	-	2	0.1	0.04	-
zelfs maar	6	12	15	16	20
zelfs ook	-	-	0.1	-	-
nog maar	0.7	-	0.2	0.3	0.4
slechts eens	1	-	-	-	-
zelfs eens	0.7	-	-	-	-
zelfs slechts	-	0.3	0.1	-	-
maar slechts	-	0.3	-	-	-
ook slechts	2	8	2	0.2	0.03
slechts maar	0.7	-	-	-	-
ook zelfs maar	-	0.6	0.9	0.04	0.02
ook maar zelfs	-	-	-	0.04	-
zelfs ook maar	-	-	0.5	0.6	0.3
zelfs nog maar	-	-	0.1	0.2	0.3
ook nog maar	-	-	0.5	1	0.8

Table 1 provides the basic data about usage, and usage developments. The growth of two-word clusters is shown in Figure 1, which summarizes the data in Table 1. Single word adverbials decline from 83% in the first period to a meagre 10% in the 1990's. Two word adverbials grow inversely from 16% to 88% in the same time span, whereas three word combinations never take up more than 2% and remain stable ever since the second half of the eighteenth century. I take this as an indication that three word adverbials are never more than occasional ad hoc combinations of available focus adverbs, and not fixed collocations comparable to *ook maar*, *zelfs maar* or *ook slechts*.

Figure 1: *One, two and three word focus adverbials*

In Rullmann and Hoeksema (1997), we studied, among other things, the differences among *ook maar* and *zelfs maar* with regard to triggering environments. Although we found some notable differences among these two particle clusters, their similarities are actually even more striking, as soon as we compare these two adverbials to occurrences of the simple adverb *maar*:

Table 2: *Focus adverbials per context*

context	ook maar N=5333	zelfs maar N=1487	maar N=1037
as soon as/comparative of equality	2	0.5	24
conditional clause	13	6	24
negation	34	44	5
negative predicate	10	13	1
universal quantifier	7	2	39
before clause	3	6	0.5
question	5	6	1
without clause	22	12	3
other	4	12	1

Maar, it appears, is only frequent in 3 of the 10 groups of contexts listed here. Moreover, these contexts themselves, such as conditional clauses and comparatives of equality, are fairly infrequent compared to negation. Unfortunately, the data are insufficient at this point to indicate with any amount of precision how the general picture that we discern in Table 2 has developed over time, but it would certainly be interesting to do so.

4. Combinatory preferences of polarity-sensitive focus adverbs: differences among focus constituents

Polarity sensitive focus adverbials not only show variation with respect to the triggering environment, but also with respect to the type of focus phrase which they operate upon. In Table 3, I present some data for the three most frequent expressions, *ook maar*, *zelfs maar* and *maar*:

Table 3: *Focus Constituents of Ook Maar, Zelfs Maar and Maar*

focus constituent	ook maar	zelfs maar	maar
adverbial	18	7	41
definite NP	1	8	0.5
one + N	17	3	2
a + N	20	16	6
any (enig) + N	6	0.3	2
indef. pronoun	19	0.5	5
bare noun	0.3	4	0.3
superlative	8	2	4
predicate	8	55	39
other	2	4	0.5

Most striking in the last column of the table is the class of adverbial focus constituents. They constitute about half of all occurrences of simple *maar*. If we look more closely at the adverbial expressions in question, we note that

they are always minimizers, typically expressions such as *enigszins* “somewhat,” *even* “just for a moment,” *een beetje* “a little bit,” *in de verste verte* “in the furthest distance, remotely.” Apart from this very strong collocational effect, the distribution of *maar* resembles that of *ook maar* more than that of *zelfs maar*.

As for the expressions *ook maar* and *zelfs maar*, it was noted in Rullmann and Hoeksema (1997) that *ook maar* tends to be used with absolute endpoints on a pragmatic scale, typically expressions which are conventionally used as such, for instance indefinite pronouns, superlative phrases with *least* or *slightest*, and so-called minimizers, like *a moment*, *an inch*, *a word*, whereas *zelfs maar* was used for relative low points on a scale, as well as endpoints on ad hoc rankings made available by the context. One important type of ad hoc ranking is provided by disjunctions (as noted first in Vandeweghe 1981), cf.:

(7) Mary did not sleep, eat, or even drink.

In this example, we provide a partially ordered set of three elements, with *drink* marked as the minimal member of that set. In Dutch, one can use *ook maar* as the focus adverbial in a disjunction, or *zelfs maar*, or simply *zelfs*. In Table 4, I have summarized the main trend regarding the choice of adverbial in disjunctions:

Table 4: *Focus adverbials in negated disjunctions*

Period	% <i>zelfs maar</i>	% <i>zelfs</i>	% <i>ook maar</i>	% other	N
1600-1850	19	65	-	16	26
1850-1950	56	13	26	5	199
1950-1990	68	8	23	1	239
1990-2002	91	4	5	1	339

What we see here is not just the emergence of adverb clusters and simultaneous decline of simple adverbs. Initially, *zelfs maar* advances at the expense of *zelfs*, until it becomes the main option for disjunctions (around 1900). After that it also begins to grow in frequency at the expense of *ook maar*, by then the most common marker elsewhere. These facts, taken together, indicate that the adverbial clusters themselves show clear signs of growing specialization, with *ook maar* developing a strong preference for indefinites and idiomatic minimizers, *zelfs maar* for predicates and disjunctions which are not inherently scalar on the basis of their lexical semantics, but may be used in such a way (based on pragmatic considerations) in context, and finally *maar* for adverbial minimizers.

5. Conclusions and speculations

The emergence of specialized clusters of focus particles is a very striking phenomenon in Dutch, with counterparts in other domains of particle usage (e.g. temporal and modal particles, cf. van der Wouden (2000)). An important question is what drives this change.

I submit that the change is due to a general trend toward greater lexical specialization, a trend which can also be noted in other languages and in other areas of the lexicon. For instance, Swan (1988) noted a strong and steady increase among sentence adverbs in modern English, whereas in Dutch the class of degree adverbs has increased significantly since the Middle Ages. In the same vein, Borst (1902) noted a geometrical increase in number and variety of intensifying adverbs in the history of English. Hoeksema (2001) reports rapid specialization and vocabulary growth among expletive minimizers in modern Dutch.

There are also signs of growing specialization among verbs. Duinhoven (1997), a grammar of Middle Dutch, claims that Dutch verbs have become increasingly transitive since the Middle Ages. I had some doubts about the correctness of this statement, which would have been puzzling, if true. Therefore, in Hoeksema (1999), I decided to test the claim by inspecting 100 arbitrarily chosen verbs which occur both in medieval and modern times. I found only one verb which became transitive and none which became intransitive. However, of the 100 verbs selected, 62 could be used both as transitive and as intransitive in Middle Dutch, whereas only 28 verbs can be used in both ways in modern Dutch. This finding clearly suggests that Dutch verbs, rather than have become more transitive, have undergone semantic specialization. Whereas it used to be common for verbs to have several related senses, a multifunctionality which gave rise to both transitive and intransitive uses, nowadays different verbs tend to be used to express these senses. Often, prefixes have been added to differentiate among various uses, in other cases different stems altogether are employed.

I do not profess to know what causes this remarkable trend toward ever greater lexical specialization that is noticeable in English and Dutch alike. It is possible that the emergence of a written standard has something to do with it. However, *if* we assume that there is indeed such a trend toward specialization in the lexicon, and *if* we consider the slow and haphazard way in which new simple focus adverbs arise through the process of grammaticalization, we have a ready explanation for the emergence of particle clusters: increasing specialization calls for more adverbials, but simple focus adverbs do not come about easily, and so it became necessary to coin new focus adverbials on the basis of existing ones, by combining them into clusters. Similar trends in areas such as temporal particles are likely to have a similar explanation.

Notes

¹ In particular, the on-line electronic corpora of the Dutch Institute for Lexicology (INL) were used, which are mainly, though not exclusively composed of newspapers and periodicals, as well as the Dutch part of the European Corpus Initiative cdrom, *de Volkskrant* (a daily newspaper) on cdrom, cdroms with the complete text of the historical periodicals *De Navorscher* (1852-1960), *Onze Taal* (1932-2000) and *Amstelodamum* (1900-1999), *Literom*, a cdrom with book-reviews from newspapers and periodicals, covering the period 1890-1999, and corpora on the Internet, such as the classical literary texts from the Laurens Jansz. Coster-project, the DBNL (“Digitale Bibliotheek Nederlandse Letteren”) and others, more numerous than can be mentioned here. In spite of this wealth of electronically available data, even more were gathered from ordinary printed sources such as books and newspapers. Many people were helpful in collecting these data, but Frans Zwartz and Ton van der Wouden deserve a special word of gratitude in this regard. Every effort was made to get a well-balanced and representative mix of data, reflecting not only different writing styles and text genres, but also all Dutch-speaking areas of the Netherlands and Belgium. I thank the audience in Brussels, Ton van der Wouden and an anonymous reviewer for their comments on the text, and Hotze Rullmann for his collaboration in the past on the differences between *ook maar* and *zelfs maar*, out of which this paper grew.

² Karel van de Woestijne, *Verzameld journalistiek werk, zevende deel, November 1913 - Maart 1915*. Cultureel Documentatiecentrum, Gent, 1991, p. 394.

³ J.J. Voskuil, *Meneer Beerta*, G.A. van Oorschot, Amsterdam, 1996, p. 132.

⁴ Gerrit Kalf, *Het lied in de middeleeuwen*, Brill, Leiden, 1883, p. 42.

⁵ C. Fransen van Lek, *Leerrede over 1 Sam. XVI: 14-17*, cited from J.P. de Keyser, *Neerland's Letterkunde in de negentiende eeuw*, 1e deel, D.A. Thieme, 's Gravenhage, 1877, p. 140. Notice that the example is in fact ambiguous, yielding also the non-intended reading “if only one single sinner did not belong to that”.

⁶ A. de Zarate, *Conqueste van Indiën*, Amsterdam, 1598 (cited from WNT).

⁷ Louis Paul Boon, *Het Geuzenboek*, De Arbeiderspers/Querido, Amsterdam, 1979, p. 59.

⁸ E. Bekker, wed. Wolff and A. Deken, *Historie van den Heer Willem Leevend*. 's Gravenhage, 1784-1785, vol. 7, p. 247.

⁹ *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 9-6-1997, p. 17. Note that semi-finals are hardly a “minimal scalar position” in the setting of a tournament. However, the relevant comparison here is with the finals only, since the discussion is about someone who never won a tournament. See also Rullmann and Hoeksema (1997), Kay (1990) and Schwenter and Vasishth (to appear), among others, for more thorough discussion of this particular point.

¹⁰ *De Navorscher*, 1860, 234.

¹¹ C. Gerretson, *De geschiedenis van de 'Koninklijke'*, vol. 1, 3rd pr., Bosch and Keuning, Baarn, 1971, p. 145.

¹² J.F.M. Sterck, *Het leven van Joost van den Vondel*, Erven F. Bohn, Haarlem, 1926, p. 105.

¹³ Kristien Hemmerechts, *Een zuil van zout*. 3rd ed., Maarten Muntinga, Amsterdam, 1992, p. 46.

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