The emergence of particle clusters in Dutch[1]

Grammaticalization under adverse conditions

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1. Introduction

The development of discourse and modal particles from ordinary lexical items is often viewed as an instance of grammaticalization (cf. Abraham 1991; many of the papers in Van der Wouden et al. 2002; Wegener 2002, among others). Some languages abound in such particles, for instance Dutch and German (cf. Diewald and Ferraresi, this volume), while others, such as English and French, appear to make do by and large without them.[2] When Modern Dutch or Modern German is compared to its medieval predecessor, we note that both the number of discourse particles and their text frequency have increased significantly in the modern era (from 1600 to the present). This paper presents a case study of a small set of Dutch particles and the clusters formed from these items, in particular *best* 'best,' *wel* 'well,' *eens* 'once,' *best wel*, *best eens* and *best wel eens*. These expressions are quite interesting in their own right, especially the clusters, since their development has received very little attention.[3] In this paper, however, I propose to use them as evidence of a much more wide-ranging claim which I have presented elsewhere on

2. See Schourup (1985) and Schiffrin (1987), however, for a discussion of English discourse markers. It lies outside the scope of this paper to describe in detail the differences between German-type discourse particles and English-type discourse markers. One remarkable difference though is that English discourse markers often require comma intonation (cf., for example, Tabor & Traugott 1998), whereas Dutch and German discourse particles do not.

3. Notable exceptions are Zwarts et al.'s (2002) analysis of the Dutch particle clusters *wel eens* and *al eens*, and Van der Wouden's (2002) more general corpus study of particle combinations.

the basis of a different topic (Hoeksema 2002a, 2005), namely that certain parts of the lexicon, especially those relating to evaluative speaker stance, are constantly specializing and thus require rapid lexical expansion. Though new and no doubt controversial, this claim is eminently testable now that larger electronic corpora of historical text material have become available. Moreover, in my view, this specialization process is not unique to Dutch, since its effects are found in English and German as well, for instance in the rapid increase in number as well as text frequency of their degree adverbials.[4]

Rapid expansion may have different effects in different areas of the lexicon. In the case of degree adverbials, there is usually, at least initially, a transparent relation between the etymological meaning of the adverbial and its degree meaning. For instance, in *I am terribly sad*, we may still feel that a paraphrase such as *I am sad in a terrible way*, i.e. *I am very sad*, is not too far off, while examples such as *I am terribly happy* show that *terribly* has developed into a near-synonym of *very*. Given this transparent relation, it is a fairly simple task to add more items of a similar nature to the inventory of degree adverbials, for instance *awfully*, *wonderfully*, *desperately*, *frightfully* and so on. In the case of discourse particles, by contrast, the relation between the use of a given item as a particle and its original use and meaning is often rather more opaque. One obvious consequence is that new particles do not develop easily. A fundamental semantic leap has to be made in order for German *mal* 'once,' for instance, to turn into a focus adverb meaning 'even' in the context of negation, as in example (1) below.

(1) German

    Sie hat   nicht mal angerufen

    she have-PRS.3SG not   once up-call-PST.PTCP

    'She did not even call up.'

Further expansion of this part of the lexicon through the creation of new items from scratch will always be possible, given that it was possible in the past, although the process will not be a common one.[5] Instead, a language may re-use its particle

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4. Another spectacular case of rapid innovation and development is the lexical domain of sentence adverbs like *unfortunately*, *allegedly*, *hopefully* or *ironically*, expressions of speaker stance par excellence, which did not exist until a few centuries ago (cf. Swan 1988).

5. One of the reviewers points out that my claim that developing new discourse particles from lexical items is difficult and rare appears to be contradicted by the fact that a language like German has developed over a dozen discourse particles in precisely this way. However, it should be noted that these items serve a wide variety of functions. Some appear only in questions, others in commands and adhortatives, some express speaker attitude, some discourse relations and so on. Given such a wide variety of functions, a dozen or so particles is not actually that many. If each discourse particle were to develop a special form for three or more environments,

vocabulary by developing new uses for existing particles (leading to polysemy) or by forming idiomatic particle clusters, in which particles combine to form more specialized complex particles.

This paper is structured as follows: in Section 2 I provide a brief discussion of grammaticalization theory as it relates to the matter at hand, and in Section 3 I offer some evidence for the existence of rapid lexical expansion in certain areas of the lexicon. In Section 4 I examine the particle *best* and in Section 5 some particle clusters based on *best*. The discussion relies on corpus data which I have collected from printed as well as computer-readable texts. Finally, my conclusions are presented in Section 6.

2.   Grammaticalization as specialization

Before moving on to the case study, it may be useful to address briefly the more general issue of how particles and particle clusters fit into the larger framework of grammaticalization theory.

Of the many interpretations of grammaticalization, the one to which I subscribe is fairly minimalistic. In my view, grammaticalization involves the process whereby lexical items are recruited for special lexically-restricted contexts and constructions where they were not previously employable.[6] For instance, auxiliary

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as I will argue has been the case with Dutch *best* (cf. Section 4 below), the number of lexically-distinct particles in German would have to increase greatly beyond their current number. In the area of degree adverbs, this is precisely what we find in Dutch, English and German, but as far as discourse particles are concerned, no such lexical explosion has been attested. However, German, just like Dutch, makes heavy use of a variety of complex discourse particles created by stringing existing particles together. Consider, for instance, the German example in (i) below, where the particle string is in bold type.

(i)   German
      *So schön war   es **nun auch wieder** nicht*
      so pretty be-PST.3SG it now also again   not
      'It was pretty, but it was not **that** pretty.'

6.   Diewald (2002:114ff.) speaks in this connection of *isolating contexts*: contexts which unambiguously show the result of grammaticalization. She explains that change often arises in ambiguous contexts (*critical contexts*) where an item is used in a new way, but still compatible with old restrictions; this new way of using the item is then extended to contexts where previous usage would have precluded it from appearing. The oldest occurrences of *best* are indeed often compatible with a superlative interpretation and a discourse particle reading. This ambiguity later disappears, because *best* in its superlative interpretation is nowadays obligatorily preceded by an article, while the discourse particle *best* is not.

verbs often start out as main verbs; once these verbs are used as auxiliaries, they form part of a different construction, one which is severely restricted lexically. The change which this entails constitutes grammaticalization and since use in a different construction often goes hand in hand with meaning change, grammaticalization tends to lead to polysemy. Grammaticalization in this sense need not be unidirectional (although it is uncommon to see items used in specialized constructions move into more general open-class constructions),[7] nor does it necessarily involve a cline or the presence of phonological reduction (cf. Janda 2001 for extensive discussion of these points). A view on grammaticalization which is close to the one I adopt here is found in Traugott (2001).[8]

Note that the above definition of grammaticalization is fairly broad and includes developments which are not frequently mentioned in studies on grammaticalization, such as the development of negative polarity items out of non-polarity items (cf. Section 3 below and Hoeksema 1994), adverbs of degree out of regular adjectives and adverbs (cf. Peters 1990; Lorenz 2002) or the use of main verbs in the *swarm*-construction (cf. Fillmore 1968; Salkoff 1983; Dowty 2001). For example, while it may appear at first that (2a) and (2b) represent a pair of constructions in which certain lexical verbs may be employed, it is clear that (2b) is more restrictive and that many verbs are barred from it, often for reasons which are less than obvious.

(2) a. *Bees are swarming in the garden*
     b. *The garden is swarming with bees*

Consider also the examples in (3).

(3) a. *The hills are alive with the sound of music*
     b. **The hills are dead / dying with the sound of music*

It would not be unreasonable to suppose that the exclusion of *dead* or *die* from the construction exemplified in (2b) and (3a–b) is due to semantic reasons. By contrast, however, the counterparts of *live* and *die* are both permitted in the Dutch version of the construction, as shown in (4).

(4) Dutch
     Het leeft / sterft   hier van de muggen
     it   live / die-PRS.3SG   here of   the flies
     'This place abounds with flies.'

Likewise, *crawl* is frequently employed in this construction, whereas *creep* is not, as examples (5a–b) show.

(5) a. *The field was crawling with rabbits*
     b. **The field was creeping with rabbits*

As is well known, a tell-tale sign of grammaticalization is semantic bleaching (cf., for instance, Traugott & Heine 1991). Note that, in sentences like (5a), *crawl* has lost its usual manner-of-motion meaning and denotes only the existence of a large number of rabbits.

3. Domains with rapid lexical expansion

As mentioned in Section 1, there is growing evidence that the Dutch lexicon is expanding rapidly in the area of expressions for evaluative speaker stance. In this section I briefly review some of that evidence.

An area which is growing fast, both in English and Dutch, is that of indefinite negative polarity items meaning 'anything' (Hoeksema 2001, 2002b). Instead of *Fred didn't say anything all evening*, speakers of English have at their disposal a large variety of options, among them the following:

(6) *Fred didn't say {a word / a syllable / a dicky bird / a thing / a blessed word / a damn thing / shit / dick all / fuck all / bugger all / jack shit} all evening*

Expressions indicating minimal amounts or minimal extents are listed as polarity items. These have also come to include in the last two centuries numerous expressions with a taboo origin, such as sexual and scatological terms, and terms originating in religion and folk belief, such as terms for the devil, hell, thunder, lightning and anything involving blessings or curses. Figure 1 (under the heading "minimizers") shows the expansion of the Dutch lexicon in this particular area.

Even faster growth is observed in the domain of degree adverbs, especially those intensifiers used to indicate a high degree (cf., for instance, Stoffel 1901; Borst 1902; Van Os 1989; Peters 1990; Klein 1998). Consider the examples in (7).

(7) *I am very / beastly / bitterly / dead / exceptionally / quite / really / truly / extraordinarily / infinitely / bloody / darn / massively / highly / deeply / greatly / galactically / extremely / phenomenally / unspeakably / utterly / vastly / awfully disappointed*

The "high degree" category in Figure 1 also shows fast this growth has been since 1600 (cf. Hoeksema 2005).

Finally, there has also been a steady increase in the set of verbs and adjectives found in the *swarm*-construction, as illustrated in Figure 1.
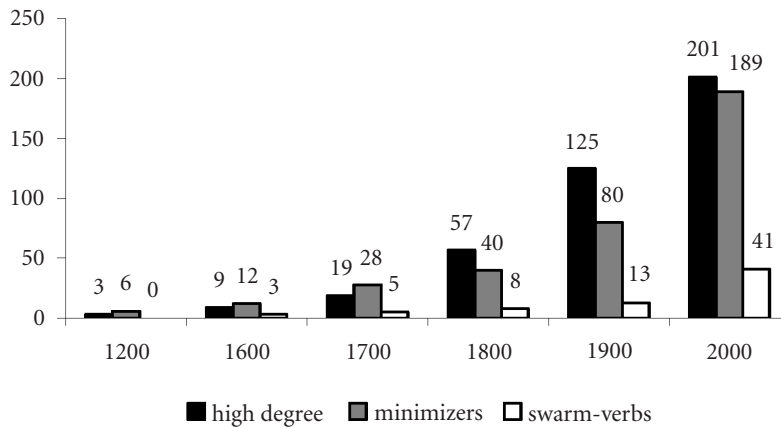
Figure 1. Lexical growth in three areas in Dutch

The factors behind this growth appear to be twofold: on the one hand, stylistic diversification and, on the other, semantic specialization. Different speakers / writers may use different expressions to give the same meaning; once a number of items are in place, there is a clear tendency toward semantic specialization. For instance, some degree adverbs may modify comparatives, whereas many others may not: *infinitely worse* is acceptable while *awfully worse and *highly worse* are not. Some adjectives, such as *possible*, permit only a few modifiers; compare *very possible*, *quite possible* with *awfully possible, *darn possible*. Moreover, some modifiers combine with only a few adjectives: *precious little*, *precious few*, vs. *precious many*, *precious rare*. Finally, some only combine with certain semantic classes: *radically different* vs. *radically similar*, *radically new* vs. *radically old*.

All three areas represented in Figure 1 have in common that they involve evaluative expressions which present the perspective of the speaker in some degree or amount. Stylistic variation and semantic specialization here are rampant.

4. The Dutch particle *best*

The Dutch item *best*, just like English *best*, started out as the superlative of *good*, and is, in fact, still often used as such. In addition, it may also be employed, though with certain restrictions, as a positive adjective meaning 'good, OK.' An example of this latter use of *best* is given in (8) below, where *best*, like all the other particles under analysis, is glossed as PRT.

(8) Dutch
Dat vind   ik best
that find-PRS I   PRT
'That is OK with me.'

Morever, *best* can also be used as a particle (i) in modal contexts,[9] (ii) with verbs of cognition, such as *weten* 'know' or *begrijpen* 'understand,' and (iii) in front of predicates,[10] as shown by examples (9) to (11) respectively.

(9) Dutch
Dat zou   best kunnen
that would PRT can-INF
'That would be entirely possible.' / 'That may very well be.'

(10) Dutch
Dat weet   je best
that know-PRS you PRT
'You know that very well.'

(11) Dutch
Je bent   best lief
you be-PRS.2PL PRT sweet
'You are sweet alright.'

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9.   Modal verbs and modal adjectives have rather special characteristics from the perspective of degree modification. Many regular degree adverbs, such as *zeer* 'very,' are barred from modifying modal expressions.

(i) Dutch
Dat is   zeer {slecht / *mogelijk}
that be-PRS.3SG very {bad / *possible}
'That is very bad.'

Here, however, forms related to *good* are all possible here, in particular *goed, zeer wel* and *best*. Consider (ii).

(ii) Dutch
Dat is   {goed / zeer wel / best}   mogelijk
that be-PRS.3SG {well / very well / best} possible
'That is quite / very possible.'

These expressions are clearly used as degree modifiers here, not as manner adverbs. See also Kennedy and McNally (2005) on the two uses of *well*.

10.   By predicate I mean the elements following the copular verb, normally a noun or adjective phrase.

Figure 2 below, based on a corpus of almost 2,200 occurrences of *best*,[11] shows that the occurrences of *best* in modal contexts are the oldest of the three particle uses of *best*. Instances of this first occur in texts from around the middle of the nineteenth century (the popular novel *Ferdinand Huyck* by Jacob van Lennep from 1840, for example, contains several occurrences). Around 1900, combinations with cognition verbs become popular, and, soon after that, combinations with gradable predicates emerge.[12]

In the group of modal contexts, the most common combinations involve *best* and a modal auxiliary verb (cf. example (9) above). The modal verbs which combine with *best* are the so-called weak modal verbs *kunnen* 'can,' *mogen* 'may' and *zullen* 'will, shall,' as well as *willen* 'want' and *durven* 'dare,' which grammatically are classed as modal verbs. The strong modal *moeten* 'must,' however, does not combine with *best*, as shown in (12).

(12) Dutch
   **We moeten best uitkijken*
   we must   PRT out-look-INF

Other modal contexts may also elicit the use of this particle, modal infinitives, for example, as in (13), and adjectives in *-baar* '-able,' as in (14), which have a modal meaning component.

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11. The corpus is based primarily on electronical texts, such as newspapers available through LexisNexis, various CD-ROMs and the rich collection of historical literature on the website of the Digital Library of Dutch Literature (www.dbnl.org). Examples from printed books, newspapers and magazines have also been collected. Only a single example dates from the eighteenth century, the rest is from the period 1840–2006. This is not due to limitations of the sources, but because the particle use of *best* does not date back any further.

12. Some sentences were problematic for classification, for instance because they involved both a cognition (main) verb and a modal auxiliary verb. The problem here is whether to classify the occurrences of *best* as involving combinations with modals or combinations with cognition verbs. Since the modal environment is the earliest one attested, it is likely that the earliest occurrences of *best* in these ambiguous contexts were licit due to the presence of the modal. A conservative classification would therefore treat the earliest ambiguous cases as instance of modal contexts. For later occurrences, the same classificatory step was taken, for the sake of consistency. The number of ambiguous cases is, however, not very high, so the conclusions of the paper will not be affected by this conservative classification scheme. It is conceivable that the existence of ambiguous cases may be the trigger for *best* spilling over onto contexts other than modal ones (cf. Diewald (2002) for a discussion of the importance of ambiguous contexts for grammaticalization; cf. also Footnote 5). However, the data for the crucial period 1880–1920, when the diversification of uses took place, are not sufficiently abundant to analyse the matter in any detail.
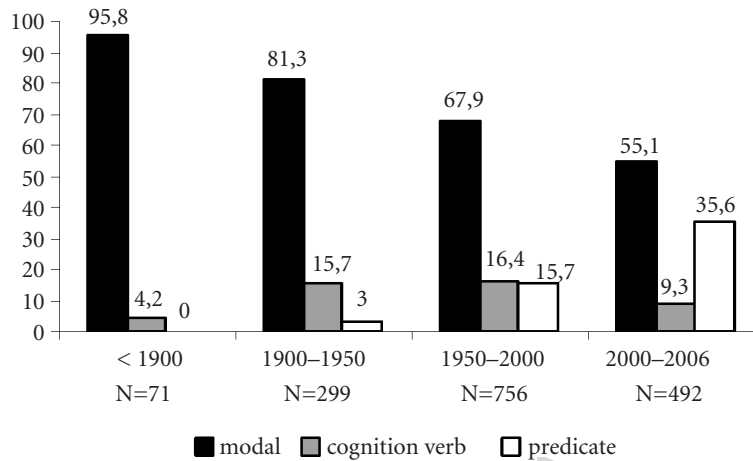
Figure 2. Chronological distribution of the particle *best* in three contexts (in percentages)

(13) Dutch
Dat is   best te doen
that be-PRS.3SG PRT to do-INF
'That is entirely doable.'

(14) Dutch
Zoiets is   best denkbaar
such be-PRS.3SG PRT conceivable
'Such a thing is quite conceivable.'

It is reasonable to assume that contexts of this kind involving modal predicates may explain the subsequent use of *best* with non-modal predicates, as in (11) above.

The set of verbs of cognition which combine with *best* appear to be the same as those which combine with *full well* in English (cf. (15) and (16) below), and with the cluster *zeer wel* 'very well' in Dutch (cf. (17) and (18) below).[13] This suggests the existence of a close parallel between English and Dutch *best*, the superlative of English *good* / Dutch *goed*, and English *well* / Dutch *wel*, the adverbial counterparts of English *good* / Dutch *goed*. Compare:

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13. The verbs and verbal idioms of cognition involved are, in order of decreasing frequency: *weten* 'know' (84 occurrences), *begrijpen* 'understand' (57 instances), *snappen* 'understand' (18 examples), *geloven* 'believe,' *zien* 'see, understand' (five occurrences each), *begrip hebben voor* 'have understanding for = understand' (three instances), *in de gaten hebben* 'be aware of,' *merken* 'notice,' *zich realiseren* 'realize' (two examples each), *beseffen* 'realize,' *inzien* 'realize,' *kennen* 'know,' *aannemen* 'suppose' and *doorzien* 'see through' (one instance each).

(15) *He knows / realizes / understands it full well*

(16) **Ed dances / sings / writes / drives full well*

(17) Dutch

Ik begrijp   dat zeer wel
I   understand-PRS.1SG that very well
'I understand that very well.'

(18) Dutch

*Hij danste   zeer wel[14]
he   dance-PST.3SG very well

Unlike *full well* in English, which only combines with cognition verbs, Dutch *zeer wel* may also combine with modal verbs, as in (19), and adjectives, as in (20), making the parallel with *best* even more complete.

(19) Dutch

Dat zou   zeer wel kunnen
that would very well can-INF
'That would be very possible.'

(20) Dutch

Regenval is   zeer wel mogelijk
rainfall   be-PRS.3SG very well possible
'Rainfall is entirely possible.'

Both *full well* and *zeer wel* have to be viewed as specialized clusters which appear in only a fraction of the sentence types where they used to show up. In this respect, they are similar to the clusters with *best*, discussed in the next section.

A typical property of (at least some) modal particles in Dutch is that they cannot be topicalized.[15] This property clearly distinguishes them from regular adjectives and adverbials. The examples in (23) to (25) below correspond to those in (9) to (11) above and demonstrate that, while *best* as a modal particle cannot be topicalized, topicalization is possible as a predicative or an adverb, as in examples (21) and (22).

(21) Dutch

Best vind   ik het niet
PRT find-PRS I   it   not
'It is not OK with me.'

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14. This example would be acceptable in older Dutch, but is no longer used.

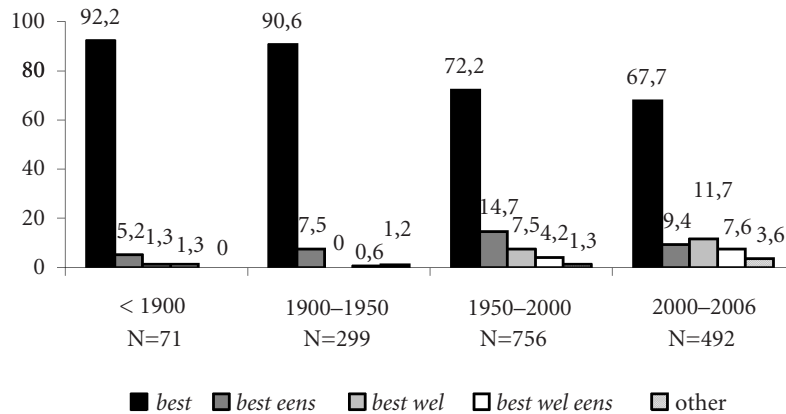**15.** A similar situation holds in German too.

Figure 3. Chronological distribution of *best* and its clusters (in percentages)

(22) Dutch
Best   zingt   hij niet
PRT sing-3SG.PRS he   not
'He does not sing well.'

(23) Dutch
*Best zou   dat kunnen
PRT would that can-INF

(24) Dutch
*Best weet   je   dat (niet)
PRT know-PRS.2SG you that (not)

(25) Dutch
*Best was   het leuk
PRT be-PST.3SG   it   nice

5. The particle clusters *best eens*, *best wel* and *best wel eens*

Figure 3 below shows the frequency of the various clusters analysed in the present paper.[16]

Occurrences of the sequence *best eens* are nearly as old as the first appearances of the particle *best* on its own,[17] though it is not until the mid-twentieth century

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16. The total number of occurrences is 53 for the period before 1900, 247 for the period 1900–1950, 922 for 1950–2000 and 622 for 2000–2006.

17. The oldest occurrence I have been able to trace is from D.P. Bohn-Beets, *Onze Buurt* (1861).

that *best eens* makes a significant jump in frequency. It is reasonable to suppose that what we are dealing with here is accidental co-occurrence of two high-frequency items. The retreat of *best eens* in the latter period (from 15 to ten per cent) is due to the rise of *best wel eens*, which, as we will see later on, appears in much the same set of contexts as *best eens*. As for *best wel*, it makes a more sudden appearance in the 1970s, while *best wel eens* is attested since the 1960s (not counting one isolated occurrence in 1889). These particle clusters are illustrated in (26) to (28).

(26) Dutch
    Het zou   best eens kunnen
    it   would PRT   can-INF
    'It is quite possible.'

(27) Dutch
    Ik ben   best wel ijdel
    I   be-PRS.1SG PRT   vain
    'I am pretty vain.'

(28) Dutch
    Ik zou   hem best wel eens willen   ontmoeten
    I   would him PRT   want-INF meet-INF
    'I would like to meet him some time.'

The category "other" in Figure 3 comprises the following clusters, which are not studied in this paper: *best een keer*, *best eens een keer*, *best eens een keertje*, *best nog een keer*, *best nog eens*, *best nog wel*, *best nog wel een keer*, *best nog wel eens*, *best weer eens*, *best wel een keertje* and *best wel eens een keertje*. None of these clusters is very frequent, the most common being *best nog eens*, which appeared 11 times in my material. In these clusters, *een keer* 'one time' is a variant of *eens* 'once,' *een keertje* is its diminutive and *nog* 'yet' and *weer* 'again' are temporal particles.

The distributional characteristics of *best* and its three most common clusters are summarized in Table 1.[18]

(i) Dutch
    Gij [...] *kunt mij dus best eens aan het een en ander hebbedingetje* [...]
    you   can me thus PRT   at   the one and other thingy
    helpen
    help-INF
    'You could therefore help me very well to obtain one or the other knick-knack.'

18.   In order to show the specialization of the various particles and particle clusters more clearly, only data for the current millennium are used in this table. The distributional patterns evolve over time and become gradually more pronounced. The frequency of the clusters is not stable either, but increases over time (cf. Figure 2).

Table 1. Distribution of *best* and its three most common clusters
(only data from 2000–2006)

Item	Modal		Cognition verb		Predicate		Other		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
best	271	55.0	46	9.3	175	35.5	–	–	492
best eens	68	100	–	–	–	–	–	–	68
best wel	13	15.1	3	3.5	70	81.4	–	–	86
best wel eens	44	78.6	–	–	2	3.5	10	17.9	56

As Table 1 shows, *best eens* is restricted to modal contexts.[19] As is the case with *best* on its own, *best wel* is found in all three categories of contexts, but primarily with predicates. Finally, *best wel eens* shows a distribution which mostly resembles that of *best eens* (78.6 per cent of occurrences are in modal contexts), but differs from all other *best*-clusters in that it may also occur in instances which do not relate to any of the three relevant contexts (17.9 per cent of occurrences); cf. example (29).

(29) Dutch
    Hij heeft   best wel eens gelogen
    he   have-PRS.3SG PRT   lied-PST.PTCP
    'He has definitely lied (occasionally).'

These contexts are also typical for *wel eens*, analysed by Zwarts et al. (2002) as an imperfective marker. Perhaps, therefore, we ought to view *best wel eens* as having a double derivation: as a combination of *best* plus *wel eens* and as a variant of *best eens* with intervening *wel*.

Within the set of modal contexts, there are some major distinctions which are worth discussing. For instance, modal adjectives and other non-verbal modal expressions, such as *mogelijk* 'possible' or *in staat* 'capable,' combine with *best* but not with *best eens* (cf. Footnote 18). The latter expression is used strictly with modal auxiliaries. Thus, no non-verbal modal contexts in the corpus feature *best eens*, and introspective judgements likewise rule *best eens* out.

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19.   One difference between *best* and *best eens* is that the former may combine with stative modal predicates, such as *mogelijk* 'possible,' whereas the latter may not.

(i) Dutch
    Het is   best mogelijk dat het gaat   regenen
    it   be-PRS.3SG PRT possible that it   go-PRS.3SG rain
    'It is entirely possible that it will rain.'

(ii) **Het is best eens mogelijk dat het gaat regenen*

In my corpus data, there are 59 occurrences of *best* with *mogelijk*, but none of *best eens* with a stative modal predicate of this kind.

(30) Dutch
  a. *Dat is   best eens mogelijk
     that be-PRS.3SG PRT   possible
  b. *Hij is   best eens in staat tot moord
     he be-PRS.3SG PRT   capable of murder

These restrictions make sense if we take into account that *best eens* combines the
modal features of *best* with a requirement of aspectual *eens*, namely that it modifies
events and not states (cf. Zwarts et al. 2002). This is illustrated by the examples in
(31) below. Their translation is tricky, as there is no exact counterpart in English.
Moreover, note that *eens*, in addition to its aspectual use, can also be employed as
a temporal adverb meaning 'one time, once,' a use by no mean restricted to event
predicates and which should be disregarded here. The two uses of *eens* are distin-
guished syntactically by the fact that the temporal adverb, but not the aspectual
particle, can be topicalized (cf. (31c)).[20]

(31) Dutch
  a. Jan kuchte   eens
     Jan cough-PST once
     'Jan gave a cough.'
  b. Jan was   eens ziek
     Jan be-PST.3SG once sick
     'Jan was sick at one time.'
  c. Eens kuchte   Jan
     once cough-PST.3SG Jan
     'Once, Jan coughed.'

Modal auxiliaries may combine with event predicates, but the predicates *mogelijk*
and *in staat* are strictly stative. *Wel eens*, on the other hand, is perfectly compatible
with stative predicates (cf. also Zwarts et al. 2002), so it should not come as a
surprise that *best wel eens* may also combine with predicates / predicatives, as in
(32) below, given our hypothesis that *best wel eens* may derive from *wel eens*, in
combination with *best* (see above).

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20. Further complications arise if we consider the use of *eens* in imperatives and adhortative
sentences such as the following.

(i) Dutch
    Wees   eens lief voor je   moeder
    be-IMP PRT nice to your mother
    'Please treat your mother nicely.'

Here likewise there is no ban against predicative contexts.

(32)   Dutch
Hij is   best wel eens in staat tot moord
he be-PRS.3SG PRT   capable of   murder
'He is occasionally quite capable of murder.'

Among modal verbs, there is a distinction between contexts with single modals, such as *kunnen* or *willen*, and the more clearly counterfactual contexts with double modals, such as *zou kunnen* 'might can = could possibly' and *zou willen* 'might want,' as Table 2 below shows. In this table, the category "other" covers *best wel, best nog wel, best nog eens*, etc. There is also a significant difference between *zal* 'will,' used mainly as a future auxiliary or epistemic modal, and *zou* 'would,' a counterfactual or irrealis modal.

Note in particular that *best eens* is especially common with double modals (especially *zou kunnen*, to a lesser extent *zou willen*), and that it is more frequent with counterfactual *zou* than with future or epistemic *zal*.

As soon as clusters emerge and achieve some degree of frequency, they tend to specialize and compete with previously established uses of *best*. This is noticeable even in the cluster *best eens*, which is limited to modal contexts throughout the period studied. However, within that set of contexts, specialization continues: the

Table 2. Distribution of *best* and clusters over various modal contexts

Item	*best*		*best eens*		*best wel eens*		Other		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
kunnen 'can'	461	84.6	56	10.3	11	2.0	17	3.1	545
zou kunnen 'could possibly'	95	36.5	112	43.1	47	18.1	6	2.3	260
Willen 'want'	114	78.1	15	10.3	4	2.7	13	8.9	146
zou willen 'might want'	40	49.4	23	28.4	7	8.6	11	13.6	81
zal 'will'	48	75.0	3	4.7	6	9.4	7	10.9	64
zou 'would'	18	62.1	5	17.2	1	3.4	5	17.2	29

Table 3. Modal contexts for *best eens*

Modal	< 1940		1940–1990		1990–2006	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
kunnen 'can'	10	6.1	30	15.4	17	9.6
zou kunnen 'could possibly'	3	12.0	41	43.2	68	48.6
Willen 'want'	2	13.3	5	13.5	8	8.5
zou willen 'might want'	1	14.3	13	31.1	9	24.3
zal 'will'	–	0	1	7.7	2	4.7
zou 'would'	1	14.3	3	17.6	1	16.7

double modal *zou kunnen* gradually becomes the preferred environment of this cluster, as can be seen in Table 3.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, I have discussed the emergence of particle clusters based on the particle *best* in Dutch. Both this particle and the clusters based on it are of fairly recent origin; to judge from the written record, they go back no further than the nineteenth century. Starting out with quite a limited distribution involving only modal contexts, *best* has since spread to two other environments: combinations with verbs of cognition, such as *weten* 'know' or *begrijpen* 'understand,' and gradable predicates, usually in copular constructions. Clusters based on *best* show up in subsets of these contexts and thus constitute more specialized variants of *best*. I have argued that the contexts of modal and cognition verbs are also of relevance for other types of expressions, including degree modifiers (*full well* in English, *heel wel* in Dutch) and negative polarity items.

A tendency to create semantically specialized clusters of particles is by no means restricted to the combinations studied in the present paper. In Hoeksema (2002a), similar developments were noted in the area of polarity-sensitive focus adverbs in Dutch, such as *ook maar* 'also but = even,' *zelfs maar* 'even but = even,' *zelfs ook maar* 'even also but = even' and *ook slechts* 'also only = even,' among others. In the last two centuries, these clusters have developed out of existing focus particles and show systematically greater specialization than the particles out of which they are constructed. It is to be hoped that work within the framework of grammaticalization theory will shed additional light on the whens and whys of particle cluster formation.

A tendency toward increasing specialization can be seen in many areas of the lexicon and may lead to rapid lexical expansion as a result of borrowing, enlisting existing words for new purposes and re-using resources through combination into clusters. I have argued that clustering is especially likely to be found in areas where grammaticalization by other means may be more difficult, hence the subtitle "grammaticalization under adverse conditions." This paper offers a number of examples where this process of rapid lexical expansion can be seen at work, including degree modifiers and negative polarity items. I have hypothesized that the lexical areas involved relate to expressions of evaluative speaker stance, where stylistic and lexical variation may be more relevant than in other lexical domains, such as motion verbs or geographical adjectives.

Another question, which I cannot fully answer here, is why the Dutch lexicon shows such great diversification and growth in the modern period, whereas at other stages, such as medieval Dutch, the language did not experience a compara-

ble development. It might be speculated that one reason for a more sophisticated stylistic variation is the growth of literacy since the invention of the printing press, which has brought a much larger proportion of the population into contact with written registers. Written language has much less need for lexical parsimony than spoken language, since writers usually have enough time to look for the best word or idiom to express their thoughts and to convey the stylistic effects which they hope to achieve. Speakers do not have that luxury, since they need to find a word quickly or else lose the floor. However, the rise of literacy is not the only relevant development since the Middle Ages. Of equal importance might be judged the emergence of a wide variety of new genres, each with their own stylistic innovations, such as editorials, columns, sports journalism or e-mail, which have completely altered the nature of written language. Finally, the very nature of spoken language itself has probably changed remarkably over time, partly under the influence of the written language, partly as a result of exposure to mass media such as radio, television and, more recently, the Internet.

For historical linguistics, the study of monotonically growing areas of the lexicon is important, because it suggests that not all parts of the lexicon are alike and that arguments based on parsimony, often invoked in historical linguistics (e.g. an expression disappears *because* another takes its place), may have a more limited validity than is sometimes envisaged. More work needs to be done to see how widespread the phenomenon is and what its ultimate causes are.

Abbreviations

1	first person	PRS	present
2	second person	PRT	particle
3	third person	PST	past
INF	infinitive	PTCP	participle
PL	plural	SG	singular

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