

THE ASPECTUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF EVENT PARTICLES

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Abstract

Several linguists and philosophers have argued that natural language-predicates are Davidsonian in that they have an extra argument position for eventualities. In what follows, we explore the idea that the Dutch particle *eens* and its German counterpart *mal* are overt manifestations of this Davidsonian argument.

1. Introduction

Several linguists and philosophers have argued that natural language-predicates are Davidsonian in that they have an extra argument position for eventualities.¹ Although Davidson (1967) himself was only concerned with action sentences, Kratzer (1995) has extended his proposal to stage-level predicates in general, while Chierchia (1995) even goes so far as to suggest that every predicate, whatever its internal structure and aspectual characteristics, has a Davidsonian slot. Despite these differences, it is widely held that temporal and adverbial modifications are realized through the hidden event place. In other words, adverbs and tense must be construed as properties of eventualities.²

In what follows, we will explore the idea that the Dutch particle *eens* and its German counterpart *mal* are overt manifestations of the Davidsonian argument. On the basis of a sample of 179 Belgian and Dutch texts from the second half of the twentieth century, several patterns can be identified that are consistent with such an analysis. Before expounding the details of the argument, we must emphasize that there are various related and unrelated uses of *eens*. The picture that emerges is one of a highly polysemous word that fulfills a number of grammatical functions. Although polysemy may be the rule rather than the exception (Hoeksema, 1999: 152), particularly with highly frequent words, we cannot exclude the possibility that there is an upper bound on the number of alternative senses. If so, this may help explain why in some contexts the role of *eens* has decreased ever since the sixties and some of its functions have been taken over by the competing adverb *ooit*. In discussing the behavior of *eens*, we will try to shed light on the intricacies of its distribution, deferring a formal semantic analysis. In particular, we will show that the vast

majority of its instances represent two different uses, one temporal, the other aspectual. Ever since Verkuyl's (1972) conclusive demonstration, now thirty years ago, that languages like Dutch and English express aspectual distinctions at sentence level, it has been known that the Slavonic system of perfective and imperfective aspect has different manifestations in different languages. We will add another piece of evidence and argue that aspectual *eens* and *mal* are event particles carrying perfective force. Their imperfective counterparts, *wel eens* and *schon mal*, differ in that they typically occur in frequentative habituais, although both have an existential reading as well. Finally, we will argue that Belgian *al eens* sometimes has the perfective meaning of its Dutch equivalent, but can also be used as a substitute for imperfective Dutch *wel eens*. This ambiguity of the Belgian expression is the same as the one that characterizes German *schon mal*.

2. Event particles

The Dutch present-tense sentence *Zij hoest* can be understood as a statement about an ongoing event ('She is coughing') or as a generalization over events ('She coughs'). In studies on genericity it is customary to call the first reading episodic, whereas the second one is referred to as the habitual or characterizing reading. Languages that have explicit aspectual marking of the verb typically use imperfective aspect to express habituality. Although it might seem natural to associate the episodic reading with perfectivity, this would be mistaken on two accounts.³ To begin with, the expression of progressive meaning normally requires imperfective verb forms. Secondly, since the present tense is used to describe, rather than to narrate, it is considered essentially imperfective, either habitual or continuous, and not perfective (Comrie, 1976: 66; Lindstedt, 1985: 141). Yet, the semantic ambiguity of *Zij hoest* disappears when we add the particle *eens*, as in *Zij hoest eens*. This example can only be interpreted as an episodic statement with nonprogressive meaning. Although we are in present time, the sentence has a narrative character that is reminiscent of the so-called reportive use of the present tense.⁴ As in the corresponding past-tense statement *Zij hoestte eens* and its German analog *Sie hustete mal*, the reference is not to a situation in progression, but to a complete action with beginning, middle, and end. We must therefore assume that sentences with *eens* and *mal* carry perfective force, as argued by De Vriendt, Vandeweghe, & Van de Craen (1991: 53) and Hentschel (1991: 145-7) on independent grounds. Since the presence of the particle is essential in establishing this interpretation, we conclude that the expressions *eens* and *mal* have aspectual significance and will henceforth refer to them as perfectivizing event particles.⁵ More precisely:

(1) Perfective event particles

The Dutch event particle *eens* (German *mal*) is an existential quantifier over eventualities that binds the Davidsonian argument and induces the presence of implicit perfective aspect in its local environment. That is to say:

[_{TnsP} TNS [_{AspP} PFV [_{VP} ... V ... *eens* (*mal*) ...]]]

The idea is that aspectual *eens* and *mal* cannot stand on their own and need to be licensed by the perfective operator. The parallel that comes to mind is with negative polarity items (Chierchia, 1995: 202). They too cannot occur independently but must be licensed by a negative under certain locality conditions. The event particles *eens* and *mal* may therefore be regarded as aspectual polarity items that require the presence of the perfective operator, giving us an episodic statement with nonprogressive meaning. It follows as a corollary that neither expression can be fronted, as shown by the ungrammaticality of Dutch **Eens hoest zij*, with present time reference, and German **Mal hustet sie*.⁶

Interestingly, the Dutch particle *wel eens* ‘occasionally, at times, once in a while’, which is often referred to as a frequency adverb,⁷ produces a characterizing reading when it replaces *eens*. Like its German equivalent *Sie hustet schon mal*, the sentence *Zij hoest wel eens* ‘She coughs occasionally’ can only be understood as a generalization over events. This suggests that *wel eens* and *schon mal* have aspectual significance as well, being the imperfective counterparts of *eens* and *mal*.

(2) Imperfective event particles

The Dutch event particle *wel eens* (German *schon mal*) is an existential quantifier over eventualities that binds the Davidsonian argument and induces the presence of implicit imperfective aspect in its local environment. That is to say:

[_{TnsP} TNS [_{AspP} IPFV [_{VP} ... V ... *wel eens* (*schon mal*) ...]]]

The intuition is that *wel eens* and *schon mal* must also be treated as aspectual polarity items. They differ from *eens* and *mal* in that they require the presence of the imperfective operator in their local environment, giving us a habitual statement in the present case. Belgian *al eens* resembles German *schon mal* in this respect, a fact we will return to later on. Like *eens* and *mal*, neither *wel eens* nor *schon mal* can be fronted.

In light of the frequentative character of *wel eens* and *schon mal* it might seem questionable to represent them as existential quantifiers. There are, however, many contexts in which the corresponding sense of iteration is absent. An illustrative example is the present-tense sentence *Zij komt wel eens*

langs, which can be understood either as a frequentative habitual ('She drops by occasionally'), or as an existential statement about the future ('She will drop by sometime'). The latter reading involves what is known as the prospective present, since here the discontinuous verb *komt... langs* refers to a future action. This suggests, as we will argue, that *wel eens* and *schon mal* are true existential quantifiers, their occasional frequentative character being due to the habitual interpretation of the sentence.

It is important to realize that *eens* can also be used as a temporal adverb that expresses indefinite past or future time, its English counterparts being retrospective *once* and prospective *sometime* or *someday*. Sentences with this expression are therefore often ambiguous when they involve past or future tense. As an illustration consider *Zij hoestte eens*, where *eens* has both an aspectual reading (corresponding to episodic 'She coughed') and a temporal reading ('She once coughed', with either episodic or habitual force). In its latter use *eens* still acts as an existential quantifier, not over events, to be sure, but over time intervals. What differentiates the two meanings is that temporal *eens* allows fronting, as in *Eens hoestte zij* 'Once she coughed'.⁸ Although some speakers report a preference for the habitual interpretation in such cases, this is by no means necessary. As shown by the sentence *Eens hoestte zij eens*, featuring both temporal and aspectual *eens*, the time adverb in initial position is compatible with the episodic reading induced by the event particle. The observed ambiguity of the expression *eens* makes it necessary to have a closer look at its various other uses.⁹

3. Uses of *eens* without aspectual or temporal force

When addressing the distribution of *eens*, Dutch dictionaries make a distinction between adjectival and nonadjectival usage. The former relates to instances that occur in predicative position, e.g. *Je hoeft het niet met me eens te zijn hoor, zei Van Grouw* 'You don't have to agree with me, Van Grouw said' (Jan Wolkers, *Kort Amerikaans*, 1962: 29). In what follows, we will ignore such forms and concentrate on nonadjectival *eens*.¹⁰

3.1 *Eens* as a numerical adverb

To begin with, *eens* can act as a numerical adverb, comparable to English *once* in the expressions *once and for all*, *more than once*, and *once a week*. Typical examples of this usage are the sentences in (3).

- (3)a Toen ik de deur opendeed, stond daar een man van jouw leeftijd, die ik al meer dan eens voorbij mijn huis had zien wandelen, met een hond. (Hugo Raes, *Hemel en dier*, 1964: 69)
 ‘When I opened the door, there was a man of your age standing there, who I had more than once seen walking by my house, with a dog.’
- b De oude korsetterie in Granada, waar zij al sinds haar huwelijk eens in de twee of drie jaar ondergoed kocht, bleek echter niet meer te bestaan. (Rascha Peper, *Een Spaans hondje*, 1998: 243)
 ‘The old corset shop in Granada, where she ever since her marriage bought underwear once every two or three years, appeared however no longer to exist.’

3.2 *The focus particle niet eens*

A second use of *eens* involves the fixed combination *niet eens* ‘not even’, which belongs to the class of negative scalar focus particles in Dutch. Like the closely related expression *zelfs niet*, it serves to contrast the associated focus constituent with possible alternatives. Typical examples are the ones in (4).¹¹

- (4)a Ik bestelde nog een borrel voor hem, al was hij nog niet eens aan zijn koffie begonnen en rekende af. (Rinus Ferdinandusse, *Naakt over de schutting*, 1966: 24)
 ‘I ordered another drink for him, although he hadn’t even started with his coffee yet, and paid.’
- b De chauffeur was doorgereden, had misschien niet eens iets gemerkt. (Kristien Hemmerechts, *Zonder grenzen*, 1991: 17)
 ‘The chauffeur kept driving, probably didn’t even notice anything.’

According to the semantics proposed by Karttunen & Peters (1979) and Rooth (1985), focus particles induce a comparison between the element in focus and contextually given alternatives with respect to the property expressed by the remainder of the sentence. If we refer to this part as the focus frame (F) and let α denote the element in focus, then the role of the focus particle is to compare the likelihood of $F(\alpha)$ with the likelihood of $F(\beta)$, where β is a possible alternative to α . In the case of the negative scalar focus particles *niet eens* and *zelfs niet* the presupposition is that $F(\alpha)$ has a higher probability than $F(\beta)$, even though neither $F(\alpha)$ nor $F(\beta)$ is true. By way of illustration, consider the statement *Niet eens de naam delen we* ‘Not even the name do we share’ (Nelleke Noordervliet, *Uit het paradijs*, 1997: 16). Following Rooth’s (1985) analysis of polarity-sensitive *even* and Rullmann & Hoeksema’s (1997) and Hoeksema & Rullmann’s (2001) account of the corresponding Dutch focus particles *ook maar* and *zelfs maar*, the use of *niet eens* in our example introduces a dual presupposition. The first part says that except for the element in focus ($\alpha = de naam$ ‘the name’) there is an alternative element β to which

the property expressed by the focus frame (F = *delen we* ‘do we share’) does not apply. According to the second part, F is more likely to apply to α than to β .

It is important to note that the latter clause does not require that the focus element is the highest one on the associated probability scale. There may be other things that are more likely to be shared than a name. In other words, *niet eens* carries a relative presupposition with respect to the focused expression and is not necessarily associated with scalar endpoints. In this respect, the proposed analysis of *niet eens* and *zelfs niet* follows Rullmann & Hoeksema (1997) and Hoeksema & Rullmann (2001), who argue that the presupposition introduced by *ook maar* is absolute, whereas the one associated with *zelfs maar* is not.

3.3 The coordinating conjunction *nu eens... dan (weer) (eens)*

Another use of *eens* concerns the combination *nu eens* as part of the complex coordinating conjunction *nu eens... dan (weer) (eens)*.¹² Although the coordinated elements are likely to correspond grammatically, (5a) being a typical case, the requirement of parallelism leaves room for minor exceptions, as shown by the example in (5b).

- (5a) Nu eens raakte iemand door een machine gegrepen, dan begon een vrouw met dierlijk geschreeuw te baren waar ze stond. (Louis Paul Boon, *De zoon van Jan de Lichte*, 1961: 202)
 ‘At times someone would be grabbed by a machine, then a woman, with bestial cries, began to bear where she was standing.’
- b Wolken trokken snel over, onthulden nu eens de maan en verhulden hem dan weer. (Maarten ’t Hart, *De nakomer*, 1996: 23)
 ‘Clouds passed over quickly, at times unveiling the moon and then shrouding it again.’

3.4 The subordinate conjunction *eens*

That *eens* can also act as a subordinate conjunction is shown by the examples in (6). English *once* has a similar usage, as is clear from the corresponding translations. The first case involves an instance of *eens* that introduces a small clause. For this reason it is not always regarded as a conjunction.

- (6a) Eens binnen houden ze een kassierster en enkele klanten onder schot en eisen al het aanwezige geld. (Hugo Gijssels, *De Bende & Co*, 1990: 52)
 ‘Once inside they keep a cashier and some customers covered and demand all the money that is there.’

- b Maar eens dat je minister af bent, val je in één dag tijd terug op minder dan de helft van je inkomen zonder de minste pensioenregeling. (Kris Hoflack, *De achterkant van de premier*, 1995: 101)
 ‘But once you have resigned as minister, you drop in one day’s time to less than half of your income without any pension scheme whatsoever.’
- c ‘Ah, maar ge zult nog zo blij zijn eens ge uw nieuw bed hebt!’ probeerde oma de twee snel te verzoenen. (Geertrui Daem, *Zotverliefd*, 1997: 192)
 ‘‘Ah, but you will be so happy once you have your new bed!’’ grandma quickly tried to reconcile the two.’

The forty cases in our sample of texts from the sixties and nineties all involve Belgian authors. Speakers from the Netherlands generally judge these sentences ungrammatical, although the one in (6a) can be made acceptable by substituting the related expression *eenmaal* ‘once, one time’ for *eens*. That this is a twentieth-century development is shown by the following passage from Paul van ’t Veer’s *De Atjeh-oorlog* (1968: 189), which cites a report about the religious and political situation in Northern Sumatra, written in 1892 by the Dutch Arabist C. Snouck Hurgronje: *Oemar zou, ‘eens gewonnen, de gehele Westkust en een deel der XXV Moekims voor ons toegankelijk kunnen maken. Het bestuur zou echter eerst volkomen overtuigd moeten zijn, dat zijne belangen met de onzen samengingen.*’ (‘Omar could, ‘once won over, make the entire West Coast and a part of the xxv Mukims accessible to us. The administration, however, would first have to be completely convinced that his interests coincided with ours.’) Other nineteenth-century Dutch examples of the conjunction *eens* can be found in the monumental *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (1864-1998).

4. Aspectual and temporal uses of *eens*

What we mean when we classify *eens* and *mal* as event particles is perhaps best illustrated by the sentences in (7). In each case, the occurrence of *eens* must be understood as an existential quantifier over eventualities, giving us a nonprogressive episodic reading. These examples are interesting in that the sole function of the aspectual particle is to indicate a bounded action. The perfectivizing nature of *eens* forces us to view the event being described as a single complete whole, with beginning, middle, and end folded into one. Particularly instructive is sentence (7b), because it highlights a pattern that has been discussed by Comrie (1976: 31) on the basis of Russian data. The reference here is to a combination of aspectual values, the adverbial *vaak* ‘often’ serving to establish a habitual context, while perfective *eens* is used to distinguish the aspect that would be assigned to an isolated occurrence of tapping. Lindstedt (1984, 1985) shows that this form of nesting is a pervasive feature of language, Bulgarian with its elaborate system of primary and

secondary aspect being the most conspicuous case.¹³ Note that in both examples *eens* is completely devoid of temporal meaning.

- (7)a Maar lang voordien, toen Brych het alleen nog maar op zichzelf kon toepassen had hij na een volgend consult van juffrouw Avondzwa zichzelf eens flink bespoten en was van top tot teen purperrood te voorschijn gekomen. (Raoul Chapkis, *Ik sta op m'n hoofd*, 1966: 55)
 ‘But long before, when Brych could only apply it on himself, he had after the next consultation with Miss Avondzwa sprayed himself liberally and emerged a purple red from head to toe.’
- b Vaak bleef hij nog even rondhangen in de buurt van de garage, tikte eens tegen de afvoerpijp, plukte een halfafgewerkt nest uit de goot of veegde zijn schoen schoon aan een graspol. (Patricia de Martelaere, *Littekens*, 1990: 32)
 ‘Often he kept hanging around the garage for a while, tapped on the drainpipe, plucked a half-finished nest from the gutter or brushed his shoe clean on a clump of grass.’

There are a number of contexts that favor the purely aspectual interpretation of *eens*, but many others do not. A simple past-tense sentence like *Zij hoestte eens* is ambiguous. On the one hand, it can be understood as an episodic statement (‘She coughed’) in which *eens* serves to convey the perfective viewpoint. On the other hand, it is also possible to interpret the sentence in question as a habitual statement (‘She once used to cough’), in which case *eens* receives a temporal reading. When it is used this way, *eens* functions as a regular frame adverbial that expresses existential quantification over time intervals. Although the event particle has no obvious English counterpart, temporal *eens* does, *once* being its closest match in retrospective contexts. Because of the potential overlap between both uses, it is not an easy task to separate the aspectual instances of *eens* from its temporal instances. One useful test involves the pseudocleft-construction. When applied to an example like *Zij heeft haar kleren eens laten stomen* ‘She (once) let her clothes be dry-cleaned’, there are two ways of splitting the sentence: either *eens* becomes part of the focus constituent, as in (8a), or it is embedded in the free relative, as in (8b).

- (8)a Wat zij heeft gedaan is haar kleren eens laten stomen.
 ‘What she did was let her clothes be dry-cleaned.’
- b Wat zij eens heeft gedaan is haar kleren laten stomen.
 ‘What she (once) did was let her clothes be dry-cleaned.’

It is important to observe that *eens* must be interpreted as an event particle if it is part of the focus constituent. This means that the pseudocleft-construction provides a sufficient condition for aspectual force. On the other hand, if *eens* is embedded in the free relative, as in (8b), it can be either temporal or aspectual.

4.1 Contexts favoring aspectual *eens*

4.1.1 Reportive present

There is a kind of use of the present tense, often referred to as reportive speech, in which each sentence establishes a new utterance time for itself, with the implication that the described event happens just as the sentence is uttered (Kamp & Reyle, 1993: 538; Smith, 1997: 110-2). What makes such cases interesting is that they telescope time: we understand them punctually, as though the events take only an instant, suspending our knowledge of their normal duration. Because they present the situation as closed, these sentences have perfective force. Typical Dutch examples are the ones in (9), where the presence of aspectual *eens* brings out the perfective point of view. One of the characteristic features of the reportive present is its incompatibility with temporal *eens*.

- (9)a Hij monstert even het ding, frons het voorhoofd, laat mij ook eens turen en zegt drie woordjes: ‘Verre à vitres?’ (Karel Jonckheere, *Ik heb eens...*, 1962: 60)
 ‘He inspects the thing a moment, frowns his forehead, lets me also have a look and says three words: ‘Verre à vitres?’’
- b Zij frons haar hoge voorhoofd, haalt haar teugels strakker aan en klakt eens met haar kleine tong. (Tom Lanoye, *Zwarte tranen*, 1999: 315)
 ‘She frowns her high forehead, tightens the reins and clucks with her little tongue.’

4.1.2 Imperatives

Imperatives and other directive sentence types provide a natural context for the aspectual particles *eens* and *mal*. Thus the examples in (10) can all be interpreted as an order or request to bring about an event of the appropriate kind. The presence of perfectivizing *eens* serves to emphasize the completeness of the action being described. At first sight it might seem questionable to assign aspectual force to imperatives, but there are languages in which the distinction between perfective and imperfective runs through all moods, Modern Greek being one of them. Note that the imperative in (10b) has a subject, whereas the one in (10a) does not.

- (10)a ‘Denk je eens in,’ mijmerde Anna, ‘welke beroemdheden hier in de loop der eeuwen allemaal hebben gekuurd. Zelfs tsaar Peter de Grote.’ (Tessa de Loo, *De tweeling*, 1993: 58)
 ‘‘Just imagine,’ Anna mused, ‘which celebrities all took a cure here through the centuries. Even czar Peter the Great.’

- b Zegt u eens meneer, had men de blozende jonker nog zaterdag, in onze overvolle salon, gevraagd, waar komt u nou precies vandaan? (Margriet de Moor, *De virtuoos*, 1993: 87-8)
 ‘Just tell us, sir, one had asked the rosy squire only Saturday, in our overcrowded drawing room, where exactly do you come from?’

Although the instances of *eens* in (10) are unambiguously aspectual, there has been some discussion as to whether this is always the case. Vismans (1994) observes that the context may give rise to a directive that need not be obeyed immediately. One of his examples is *Kom eens langs*, which he claims to be ambiguous between an aspectual reading (‘Just drop by’), on the one hand, and a temporal reading (‘Drop by sometime’), on the other. What remains unnoted is that *eens*, like German *mal*, can be combined with a variety of temporal adverbs.¹⁴ As a consequence, we find imperatives like *Kom volgende week eens een keer langs* ‘Drop by sometime next week’, where *volgende week* ‘next week’ acts as a frame adverbial, *een keer* is the counterpart of English *sometime*, and *eens* appears to be the marker of perfective aspect.

4.1.3 Infinitives

When associated with an infinitive, *eens* often carries aspectual force. Although a temporal reading is sometimes also possible, as in *Zij verlangde ernaar eens zwanger te worden* ‘She wanted to become pregnant (someday)’, the two instances of *eens* in (11) have no such interpretation, their sole function being to convey the perfective viewpoint. In each case, the focus appears to be on the event’s inception, which may help explain why these examples can be understood as having an ingressive character. Note that *eens* is part of an infinitival clause in (11b), while (11a) features a root infinitive.

- (11)a ‘Wat wil je dan doen?’ / ‘Haar eens flink onder druk zetten,’ antwoordde ik peinzend. (Hermine de Graaf, *De weg naar het pompstation*, 1996: 185)
 ‘‘What do you want to do instead?’ / ‘Put a lot of pressure on her,’ I answered pensively.’
- b De kerel met de mocassins verspert haar de weg: ‘Heb je echt geen tijd om eens lekker te rampetampen?’ (Virginie Despentès, *Genaaid*, 1998: 44)
 ‘The guy with the moccasins bars her way: ‘Do you really have no time to have a good fuck?’’

4.2 Contexts favoring temporal *eens*

4.2.1 Fronting

The semantic difference between aspectual and temporal *eens* appears to correspond with differences in syntactic behavior, the event particle *eens* and its German counterpart *mal* being restricted to the middle field, whereas the

time adverbial can freely be fronted. In addition to *Zij hoestte eens* we have *Eens hoestte zij*, which can be understood as an episodic or a characterizing sentence. Other examples of preposing are given in (12). The relevant part of (12a) represents a prospective statement, with *sometime* as the English equivalent of temporal *eens*, while (12b) involves a retrospective context in which *once* is the matching element.¹⁵

- (12)a En iedereen weet: er is iets groots op komst, nog ongeweten, eens komt de dag. (A. de Swaan, *Amerika in termijnen*, 1967: 87)
 ‘And everyone knows: there is something big coming, as yet unknown, but sometime the day will come.’
- b Eens woonde er een adellijke familie, ze was er als voorname juffrouw vaak op bezoek geweest. (Lieve Joris, *De melancholieke revolutie*, 1990: 93)
 ‘Once an aristocratic family used to live there, being a distinguished lady she had often been there to visit.’

4.2.2 Preattributive position

Another environment that provides a clear distinction between aspectual and temporal usage concerns the preattributive position. As the examples in (13) demonstrate, such contexts license instances of the time adverb *eens*. By contrast, aspectual use appears to be impossible since none of the unstressed forms is acceptable in this position.¹⁶ Parallel to *de eens populaire clown* ‘the once popular clown’ we do not have **de ’s populaire clown*.

- (13)a Sedert hun republiek, hebben de Indiërs dit eens koene monument nog niet afgebroken. (Karel Jonckheere, *Ik heb eens...*, 1962: 25)
 ‘Since their republic, the Indians have not yet torn down this once proud monument.’
- b Het is een imitatie van de eens populaire clown Buziau, maar de referentie gaat op dat moment aan David voorbij. (Nelleke Noordervliet, *Uit het paradijs*, 1997: 241)
 ‘It is an imitation of the once popular clown Buziau, but the reference eludes David at that moment.’

4.2.3 Initial position in subordinate clauses

Finally, instances of *eens* in initial position in subordinate clauses, preceding the subject, are invariably associated with a temporal reading, as shown by the examples in (14).

- (14)a In dat land ligt Fontaine-au-Pire, een vergeten gehucht in een vergeten streek. Want zo lijkt het: waar eens de kolen goudmijnen waren, waar de ijzer- en staalindustrie tienduizenden werk bood, daar heeft nu het crisisspook toegeslagen. (Peter Ouwerkerk, *Tourkoorts*, 1996: 134)
 ‘In that land lies Fontaine-au-Pire, a forgotten settlement in a forgotten region. For so it looks: where once coal was a gold mine, where the iron and steel industry offered tens of thousands employment, there the specter of depression has now struck.’
- b Ze hadden als verloren tegenover elkaar gestaan in het oudste deel van de Hofburg, een kille zaal met beschilderde zuilen en een gewelfd plafond, waarin eens de Habsburgers werden opgebaard. (Monika van Paemel, *Rozen op ijs*, 1997: 164)
 ‘They had stood opposite each other, as forlorn, in the oldest part of the Court Castle, a chilly hall with painted pillars and a vaulted ceiling, in which once the Habsburgers were laid out.’

5. Trends in the distribution of aspectual-temporal *eens*

In studying the distribution and meaning of *eens*, we have created a corpus of 179 Belgian and Dutch texts from the sixties and nineties. They have been selected in such a way that a reasonably even distribution over each decade would be obtained. All instances of *eens* and its orthographic variants were extracted, with the exception of the predicative adjective *eens*, which is not the focus of our interest. In addition, text samples were collected (*ab initio*) to determine the relative frequency of nonadjectival *eens*. On the basis of the total number of lines and the mean number of words per line in the corresponding sample, estimates were made of the text size. Because of suspected differences between Belgian and Dutch authors, we have used a two-way classification with country of origin and decade as our experimental variables. Table 1A gives a summary of the number of authors and translators per cell, Table 1B shows the estimated corpus size, and Table 1C records the attested instances of nonadjectival *eens* per country and decade. Interval estimation indicates that the computed corpus size of 10,449,688 words is within 68,938 words (0.7 percent) of the true total ($\alpha = .05$). Bounds on the error of estimation are somewhat larger in the case of subcorpora, varying from 1.0 percent (34,901 words) for the sample of Dutch texts from the nineties to 1.8 percent (33,218 words) for the Belgian texts from the sixties. Estimates of the size of individual texts are less accurate: in 67 cases the estimated number of words is within 5 percent of the true total, in 62 cases the bound on the error of estimation is between 5 and 10 percent, and in 50 cases it exceeds 10 percent.

Table 1A: Number of authors and translators per country and decade

	1960-1969	1990-1999	Total
Belgium	41	47	88
Netherlands	45	46	91
Total	86	93	179

Table 1B: Estimated corpus size per country and decade

	1960-1969	1990-1999	Total
Belgium	1,871,593	2,703,882	4,575,476
Netherlands	2,272,851	3,601,362	5,874,213
Total	4,144,445	6,305,244	10,449,688

Table 1C: Distribution of nonadjectival *eens* in the sixties and nineties (number of attested instances according to grammatical function; in parentheses, mean frequency of use as text percentage)

	Belgium		Netherlands	
	1960-1969	1990-1999	1960-1969	1990-1999
1. Nonadjectival <i>eens</i>	2,295 (.130)	2,779 (.108)	3,323 (.149)	3,987 (.120)
2. Numerical adverb <i>eens</i>	80 (.004)	93 (.003)	68 (.003)	82 (.002)
3. Focus particle <i>niet eens</i>	521 (.026)	434 (.016)	540 (.024)	779 (.023)
4. Coordinators <i>nu eens, dan eens</i>	23 (.001)	36 (.001)	24 (.001)	40 (.001)
5. Subordinate conjunction <i>eens</i>	21 (.002)	19 (.001)	-	-
6. Total: 2 + 3 + 4 + 5	645 (.033)	582 (.021)	632 (.028)	901 (.026)
7. Aspectual-temporal <i>eens</i> : 1 – 6	1,650 (.097)	2,197 (.087)	2,691 (.121)	3,086 (.094)

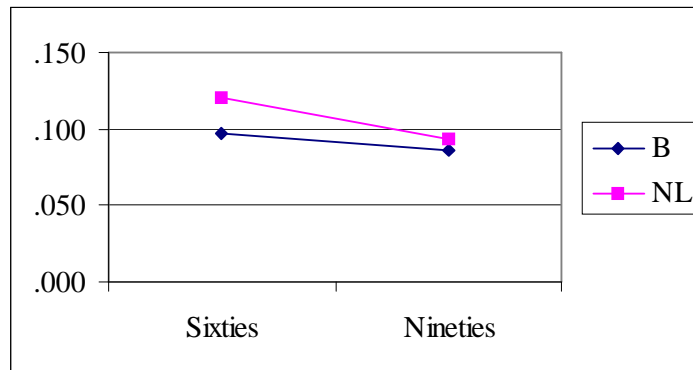
To determine whether there are any significant differences in the use of aspectual-temporal *eens*, the frequency scores have been cast in terms of a two-way classification. The levels of factor *A* (country of origin) are Belgium and the Netherlands, those of factor *B* (decade), the sixties and the nineties. A summary of the analysis of variance is given in Table 1D.¹⁷

Table 1D: Summary of analysis of variance (unweighted means)

Source of variation	SS	Df	MS	<i>F</i>
<i>A</i> (origin)	.15	1	.15	3.98*
<i>B</i> (decade)	.19	1	.19	5.12**
<i>AB</i>	.02	1	.02	.41
Error	6.39	175	.04	
Total	6.74	178		

$$*F_{.95}(1,175) = 3.90; **F_{.97}(1,175) = 4.79$$

Because a scale of measurement in terms of percentage generally does not provide homogeneity of variance, an arcsine transformation on the original observations has been applied before carrying out the relevant computations. The degrees of freedom for the within-cell variation (experimental error) are $179 - 4 = 175$. Assuming factors *A* and *B* fixed, MS_{Error} is the proper denominator for all tests. By using the .05 level of significance, the critical value for the test on the interaction is $F_{.95}(1,175) = 3.90$. Since the observed *F* ratio, $F = .41$, is smaller than the critical value, the data are consistent with the hypothesis of zero interaction. However, the observed *F* ratio for the test on the main effects of factor *B*, $F = 5.12$, is even larger than the critical value for a .03-level test. Hence the data contradict the hypothesis that the main effects of factor *B* are zero. Inspection of Table 1C indicates that the mean frequency of aspectual-temporal *eens* decreases significantly in the period between the sixties and the nineties, as shown in Figure 1. The observed *F* ratio for the test on the main effects of factor *A*, $F = 3.98$, likewise exceeds the .05 level of significance, providing evidence that there is a difference between Belgium and the Netherlands with respect to the mean frequency of use of aspectual-temporal *eens*.

Figure 1: Mean frequency of aspectual-temporal *eens*

We suspect that this development is related to the recent evolution of the polarity-sensitive adverb *ooit* ‘ever’ into a regular nonsensitive expression equivalent in meaning to the English temporal adverbs *once* and *sometime*. As documented in several diachronic studies by Hoeksema (1996, 1998, 1999), nonsensitive *ooit* emerged in the sixties, spread over Belgium and the Netherlands in the seventies and eighties, and has by now become completely standard.¹⁸ Being no longer in need of a licensing context, *ooit* gained access to positions that used to be typical of temporal *eens* and thereby became an outright competitor. The two examples in (15) illustrate this development, both of them from the sixties and each involving a clear case of nonsensitive *ooit*, the first one retrospective, the second one prospective. Sentence (15b) has special significance because it concerns an extract from the Dutch translation of Saul Bellow’s *Mosby’s memoirs and other stories* by Else Hoog, with the original as its English analog. Not only does it show that nonsensitive *ooit* can be the counterpart of *eventually*, but the passage also makes clear that *ooit*, like other time adverbials, cooccurs with *eens*.

- (15)a Toen ze in wat ooit de berm geweest was stonden – er lag een omgevallen kilometerpaaltje, nog kalkwit – dacht Josias dat hij het bewustzijn ging verliezen, de officier scheen het op te merken en ondersteunde hem. (Jacques Hamelink, *Het plantaardig bewind*, 1964: 123)
 ‘When they were standing on what once had been the side of the road – there was a kilometer marker that had fallen down, still chalk white – Josias thought that he would lose consciousness, the officer seemed to notice it and supported him.’
- b ‘Ik was wel van plan ze ooit eens op te sporen. Ik ben ervan overtuigd dat de gravin goed voor haar gedichten heeft gezorgd.’ (Saul Bellow, *Mosby’s herinneringen en andere verhalen*, 1969: 135)
 ‘I thought eventually I’d try to trace them. I’m sure the countess would have taken good care of her poems.’

The existence of clusters like *ooit eens* proves that the relationship between the two expressions is not solely one of competition. On our account, such combinations are to be explained as the merger of temporal *ooit* and aspectual *eens*, the latter serving to convey the perfective point of view. In line with this analysis, we also expect to find sentences with the imperfective variant *ooit wel eens*. The following two examples from our corpus show that such cases exist. In (16a) we have an instance of *wel eens* that is naturally understood as frequentative in the light of the quantifying adverb *een paar keer* ‘a couple of times’. The one in (16b), translated by the author himself, must likewise be regarded as frequentative, although the presence of *ooit* creates the impression of existential use.¹⁹

- (16)a Dat vroeger niet onaardige lijf van deze trut, daar had ik ooit wel 's een paar keer met m'n handen en m'n mond aangezeten. (Herman Brusselmans, *Ex-minnaar*, 1993: 13)
 'That body of this frumpy woman, which didn't use to be bad, that body I had touched with my hands and my mouth a couple of times in the past.'
- b 'Ben je ooit weleens eenzaam, Karen? Do you ever get lonely?' (Guido van Heulendonk, *Paarden zijn ook varkens*, 1995: 131)

That other time adverbials can also be combined with aspectual *eens* is shown by the sentences below, both of which feature *ooit*'s negative counterpart, *nooit* 'never'.²⁰ Example (17b) involves a characterization of the Belgian national anthem and its composer.

- (17)a In deze straten zag je nooit eens een propje papier of een stuk bananeschil. Een onzichtbare straatveger leek je voetstappen uit te wissen. (Eva Hoornik, *Ontbijt met z'n drieën*, 1968: 7)
 'In these streets you never saw a piece of paper or part of a banana peel. An invisible street cleaner seemed to erase your footsteps'
- b Componist Van Campenhout (van wie helaas nooit eens een ander stuk ten gehore wordt gebracht) heeft zijn uiterste best gedaan om de snoeverige toon van de tekst te evenaren. (Paul Ilegems, *De frietkotcultuur*, 1993: 110)
 'Composer Van Campenhout (of whom unfortunately never another piece is performed) has done his level best to equal the bragging tone of the text.'

As Zwarts (1995) and Hoeksema (1996: 6-8) have shown, the cluster *ooit eens* serves as a vehicle for nonsensitivity. The incidence rate of this combination accordingly goes up steeply in the seventies (33 instances per 1,000 occurrences of *ooit* in Hoeksema's database) and levels off in the nineties (18 instances per 1,000 occurrences of *ooit*, still three times as high as in the fifties and sixties).²¹

The picture that emerges from these observations is that only in its temporal use *eens* competes with nonsensitive *ooit*. It seems plausible to us that this is what accounts for the decreasing frequency of aspectual-temporal *eens*. The strongest piece of evidence for the assumption that nonsensitive *ooit* has affected the distribution of temporal *eens* involves a comparison of fronted instances of both expressions. In our sample, we have come across 104 cases of *ooit* in initial position, two of which are recorded below.

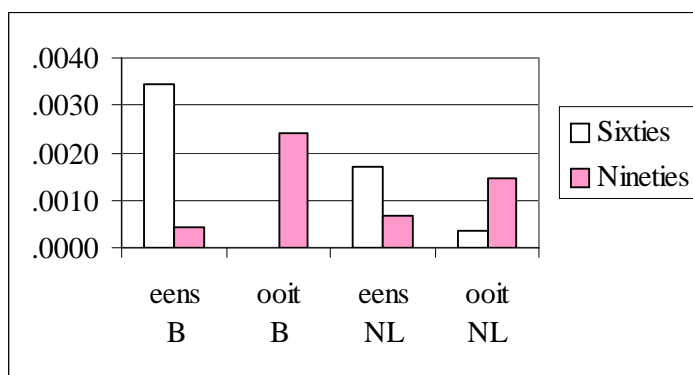
- (18)a Nergens kan ik heen, wie zal ik mijn leven vertellen, geen sterveling die luistert, en al twintig maanden zeg ik Ooit kom ik hier uit, uit deze wereld- en miljoenenstad, dit centrum van Europa en hart van alle dingen, deze hoer onder alle steden die ook mij heeft ontvangen en niet meer loslaat. (Jeroen Brouwers, *Groetjes uit Brussel*, 1969: 48)
 ‘Nowhere can I go, who shall I tell my life to, no mortal who listens, and for twenty months now I say: Sometime I will get out of here, out of this multimillion metropolis, this center of Europe and heart of all things, this whore of all cities that also let me in and won’t let me go anymore.’
- b Het kletterde jeugdherinneringen: ooit was hij lid geweest van een christelijke jongensbeweging, de CSB, die jaarlijks uit kamperen ging in de Vlaamsche velden. (Guido van Heulendonk, *Paarden zijn ook varkens*, 1995: 14)
 ‘It splashed childhood memories: once he had been a member of a Christian boys club, the CSB, which yearly went camping in the Flemish fields.’

As Table 2 and its graphic representation in Figure 2 demonstrate, over a period of four decades fronted *eens* has given way to fronted *ooit*, although the trend seems to be more pronounced in Belgium.²²

Table 2: Fronting of *eens* and *ooit* in the sixties and nineties (number of attested instances; in parentheses, mean frequency of use as text percentage)

	Belgium		Netherlands	
	1960-1969	1990-1999	1960-1969	1990-1999
Fronted <i>eens</i>	60 (.0034)	10 (.0004)	37 (.0017)	23 (.0007)
Fronted <i>ooit</i>	- (.0000)	61 (.0024)	5 (.0004)	38 (.0015)

Figure 2: Mean frequency of fronted *eens* and *ooit*



6. The imperfective nature of *wel eens*

The particle cluster *wel eens*, when used as a frequency adverb, only occurs in imperfective sentences expressing habituality.²³ *Zij huilde wel eens* ‘She used to cry at times’ is not a statement about a particular episode, but describes an extended period of time that is characterized by infrequently recurring events of crying. In this respect, *wel eens* differs from the related expressions *af en toe* ‘(every) now and then, once in a while’, *nu en dan* ‘now and then, at times, occasionally’, and *soms* ‘sometimes’, which do allow episodic readings.²⁴ Each of the sentences *Hij hoestte af en toe* ‘He coughed once in a while’, *Zij dronk nu en dan* ‘She drank now and then’, and *Zij niesten soms* ‘They sneezed sometimes’ can have a perfective or an imperfective reading. The difference is that *af en toe*, *nu en dan*, and *soms* are neutral with respect to the aspectual value of the sentence, whereas *wel eens* acts as a marker of imperfectivity. The following examples from our corpus underscore this feature of *wel eens*.

- (19)a Mijn vrouw deed er haar inkopen en vond zijn echtgenote, die hem wel eens in de winkel bijstond, bereid tot oppassen. (S. Carmiggelt, *Fluiten in het donker*, 1966: 65)
 ‘My wife did her shopping there and found his spouse, who occasionally assisted him in the store, willing to baby-sit.’
- b Lucas trok wel eens met ons op, maar we vonden hem eigenlijk te radicaal. (Anne Provoost, *Vallen*, 1994: 250)
 ‘Lucas hang around with us once in a while, but we considered him actually too radical.’

An interesting property of *af en toe*, *nu en dan*, and *soms*, which confirms the aspectual neutrality of these quantifying adverbs, is their ability to cooccur with *eens* or *wel eens*. Since the expression of iterative meaning is arguably not dependent on choice of aspect (Comrie, 1976: 27; Mønnesland, 1984: 53; Lindstedt, 1985: 151), the addition of *wel eens* serves to establish an imperfective context that indicates frequentative habituality. *Zij huilde af en toe wel eens* ‘She used to cry every now and then’ is not about a single event involving repetitive patterns, but refers to the occurrence of several essentially similar events that go together to make up the characteristic feature expressed by the sentence. In cases like this, where habituality is combined with iterativity, the function of *af en toe*, *nu en dan*, and *soms* is to provide the quantitative basis for the generalization that the imperfective marker *wel eens* signals. The examples in (20) present additional evidence for this view.

- (20)a Soms vraag ik me wel eens af wat een nuchter mens gezien zou hebben inplaats van het geëxalteerde kind dat ik was. (Inez van Dullemen, *De schaduw van de regen*, 1960: 43)
 ‘Sometimes I wonder what a sensible person would have seen instead of the exalted child that I was.’
- b Zo nu en dan lachte hij wel eens tegen mij, maar hij heeft nooit een woord tegen me gezegd, laat staan mij een chocolareep aangeboden. (Willem Frederik Hermans, *Een wonderkind of een total loss*, 1967: 132)
 ‘Every now and then he laughed at me, but he has never spoken a word to me, let alone offered me a chocolate bar.’
- c Goed. Ik doe af en toe wel eens koel tegen haar. Maar wreed? Ik? (Suzanne Binnemans, *Scheidslijnen: hemel en hel*, 1998: 84)
 ‘All right. I act now and then cool to her. But cruel? Me?’

When we replace *wel eens* by the perfectivizing particle *eens*, as in *Hij hoestte nu en dan eens* ‘He coughed now and then’, the meaning of the sentence changes. To be sure, the habitual interpretation is still possible (‘He used to cough now and then’), giving us another instance of aspectual nesting, with the quantifying adverb *nu en dan* serving to establish habituality, while perfective *eens* distinguishes the aspect that would be assigned to an isolated occurrence of coughing. But the reference can also be to a single event involving iteration. The sentences in (21), featuring the adverbials *zo nu en dan* and *af en toe*, are examples in which the latter reading is dominant.²⁵

- (21)a Ze stonden, met hun ruggen naar het publiek, in een groepje bij elkaar, keken elkaar slechts zo nu en dan eens aan en hadden duidelijk aan een half woord meer dan genoeg. (Heere Heeresma, *Geef die mok eens door, Jet!*, 1968: 73-4)
 ‘They stood, with their backs to the public, together in a group, looked at each other only now and then and clearly needed no more than half a word.’
- b ‘Hoe zit het daar beneden?’ vroeg Morre aan Minne, die het niet kon laten om af en toe eens over de rand van de kuil te gluren. (Frank Adam, *Waterman*, 1993: 45)
 ‘How is it down there?’ Morre asked Minne, who couldn’t stop peeping over the edge of the pit now and then.’

Although *wel eens* is traditionally referred to as a frequency adverb, there are contexts in which the corresponding sense of iteration is absent. One is the so-called existential perfect, as in *John has been to America* (McCawley, 1971: 104; Comrie, 1976: 58-9; Lindstedt, 1985: 84-7, 96-107, 216-34; Lindstedt, 2000: 369-71).²⁶ What this sentence says is that on at least one occasion John did in fact go to America, there being no restriction on when he went, other than that it was before the present. In Dutch, such environments often involve existential rather than frequentative use of *wel eens*, as shown by the examples

in (22). The question in (22a) is not about the number of visits to Monaco, nor about a particular visit for that matter, but serves to determine whether the addressee has ever been in this principality.²⁷ Sentence (22b) likewise lacks the sense of repetition that characterizes the corresponding past-tense statements in (19). It merely says that on some occasion in the past the Dutch soccer player Wim Kieft lost his temper.

(22)a ‘Bent u wel eens in Monaco geweest?’ vroeg Max. (Mensje van Keulen, *De rode strik*, 1994: 67)

‘Have you ever been in Monaco?’ Max asked.’

b Ik heb Wim Kieft weleens tegen een scheidsrechter horen roepen: ‘Ik steek die vlag straks in je reet.’ (Arnon Grunberg, *Blauwe maandagen*, 1994: 265)²⁸

‘I have heard Wim Kieft scream at a referee: ‘I will stick that flag up your ass later on.’’

What makes these sentences interesting is that languages with explicit aspectual marking of the verb often use the imperfective to distinguish an existential perfect.²⁹ In his study of tense and aspect in Bulgarian, Lindstedt (1985: 216-34) discusses this phenomenon at length and treats it as an instance of what he calls the imperfective of isolated event. One of his examples is *Viždali li ste tozi film?* ‘Have you ever seen this movie?’, where the past participle *viždali* carries imperfective morphology. Here the speaker simply wishes to establish whether the addressee has indeed seen the movie in question, without any implication of progressive or habitual meaning. Existential *wel eens* appears to be the Dutch counterpart of this general factual use of the imperfective.³⁰ In the light of these observations we regard *wel eens* as a true existential quantifier over eventualities, its frequentative character in (19) and (20) being due to the habitual interpretation of the sentence. The relationship between the two readings can be clarified in terms of logical strength, frequentative *wel eens* being stronger than existential *wel eens* in that it properly entails the latter. Note that the only situation that distinguishes the two uses is the one in which a unique eventuality satisfies the truth conditions of the sentence.³¹ Subtle as this difference may be, it means that frequentative use of *wel eens* must be considered a special case of existential use of *wel eens*. An important restriction that differentiates the two is the impossibility of an existential reading in combination with past tense.

Inspection of Table 3A and its graphic representation in Figure 3 reveals that Belgium and the Netherlands differ with respect to the frequency of use of *wel eens*, the mean rate of occurrence being twice as high in the Netherlands.

Table 3A: Distribution of *wel eens* in the sixties and nineties (number of attested instances; in parentheses, mean frequency of use as text percentage)

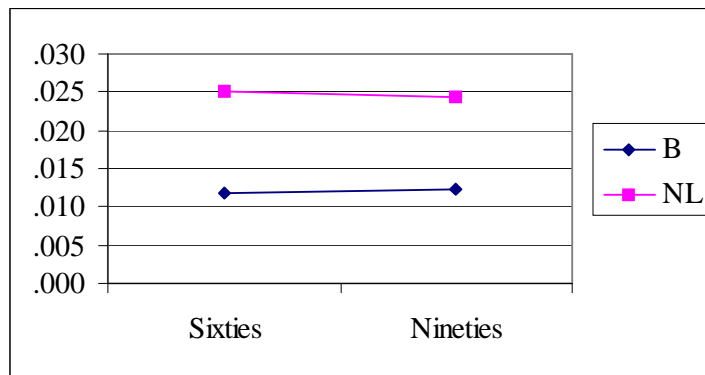
	1960-1969	1990-1999
Belgium	201 (.012)	317 (.012)
Netherlands	550 (.025)	791 (.024)

Table 3B: Summary of analysis of variance (unweighted means)

Source of variation	SS	Df	MS	<i>F</i>
<i>A</i> (origin)	.39	1	.39	33.81*
<i>B</i> (decade)	.00	1	.00	.00
<i>AB</i>	.00	1	.00	.04
Error	2.04	175	.01	
Total	2.43	178		

* $F_{.999999}(1,175) = 26.08$

Figure 3: Mean frequency of *wel eens*



The analysis of variance, summarized in Table 3B, shows that the observed *F* ratio for the test on the main effects of factor *A*, $F = 33.81$, is even larger than the critical value for a .000001-level test. To appreciate the magnitude of the statistical evidence, what this means is that the chance of rejecting the null hypothesis of equal frequency of use when it is in fact true (type I error) is less than one in a million. There are several factors that contribute to the difference between Belgium and the Netherlands, one of them being the existential perfect. Before clarifying the details of the argument, we will have a closer look at the pluperfect.

Although the pluperfect can also be used to indicate the existence of past events, McCawley (1971: 102-3) and Comrie (1976: 56) have argued that in English the semantic distinction between perfect meaning and past time

reference is neutralized in these cases. As a consequence, such forms often have two interpretations, either as a perfect-in-the-past, or as a past-in-the-past. A sentence like *Bill had arrived at six o'clock* can mean that six o'clock is the vantage point in the past from which we are observing the earlier event of Bill's arrival and its continuing relevance (perfect-in-the-past). On the other hand, if interpreted without perfect meaning, the sentence simply says that six o'clock was the time of Bill's arrival and that this event preceded some other past situation (past-in-the-past). The same is true of the pluperfect in Dutch and many other languages.³² Because of its ambiguous nature, sentences in which *wel eens* is associated with a pluperfect can have either existential or frequentative force, depending on whether the pluperfect is understood as a perfect-in-the-past or a past-in-the-past. The following two examples from our corpus illustrate the existential reading. Note that the relevant part of (23a) involves the novelistic device of indirect speech, or *oratio obliqua*, in which the pluperfect associated with *wel eens* denotes the narrative past of a perfect. It is the narrator's version of the present perfect in the speaker's original question *Heeft u generaal x wel eens ontmoet?* 'Have you ever met general x?'. Example (23b) differs from (23a) in that the presence of the anaphoric pronoun *toen* 'then' forces us to assign an existential interpretation to *wel eens*.³³

(23)a Op een avond had hij de Rus ondervraagd, je kon het niet anders noemen; waar hij zijn opleiding had gekregen, welke rang hij in het leger bekleedde, of hij generaal x wel eens had ontmoet? (Monika van Paemel, *Rozen op ijs*, 1997: 237)

'One night he had interrogated the Russian, you couldn't call it anything else; where he had received his training, which rank he held in the army, whether he had ever met general x?'

b Hij had de verzorger wel eens gevraagd hoe hij toch aan die geavanceerde spullen kwam en José had toen geantwoord: 'Jij hebt medestanders in de koers, ik heb vrienden in mijn metier. Zo zit dat.' (Mart Smeets, *De kopgroep*, 1999: 153)

'He had asked the helper one time how on earth he got hold of that advanced stuff and José had answered then: 'You have allies in the race, I have friends in my métier. That's the way it is.'

There are also cases in which association with a pluperfect leads to a frequentative reading of *wel eens*, the ones in (24) being typical examples. Sentence (24b) has special significance because the relative clause containing *wel eens* is meant to express distribution, 'the performance on one or more occasions of similar actions involving different subjects or objects' (Forsyth 1970: 154; Mønnesland 1984: 57).³⁴

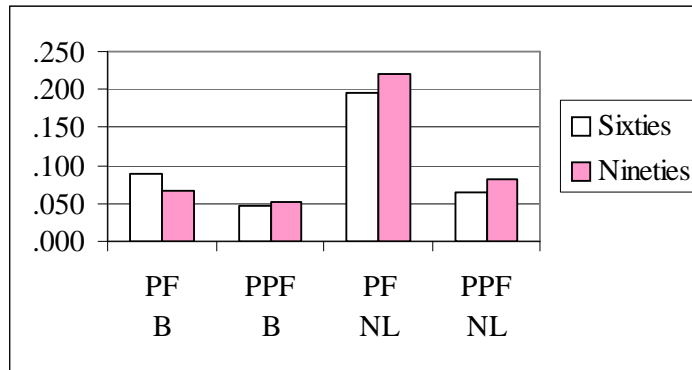
- (24)a Het was de eerste keer dat ik een echte vrouw spiernaakt zag staan. Ik had wel eens stukjes naakt gezien bij m'n moeder en zo, maar nooit helemaal. (Jan Cremer, *Ik Jan Cremer*, 1964: 41)
 'It was the first time that I saw a real woman stand stark naked. I had occasionally seen pieces of nudity with my mother and that sort of thing, but never completely.'
- b Ze herinnerde zich enkele frasen uit feministisch georiënteerde boekjes die ze wel eens had gelezen. (René Appel, *De derde persoon*, 1990: 60)
 'She remembered some phrases from feminist booklets that she had occasionally read.'

When we calculate the mean probability of an associated perfect or pluperfect given *wel eens*, a clear difference emerges between the two tenses. As Table 4 and the corresponding graph in Figure 4 show, association with a present perfect in the sixties and nineties is twice as high in the Netherlands ($F = 39.82$, $p < .0000001$). Since there are many contexts in which Belgian use of existential *wel eens* does not diverge from that in the Netherlands, modals being one of them,³⁵ the difference can only mean that use of the existential perfect is much more restricted in Belgium. We assume that this is one of the factors contributing to the low frequency rate of Belgian *wel eens*. That the difference between the two countries is less pronounced with the pluperfect ($F = 5.72$, $p < .02$) must be due to its ambiguous character, which allows associated *wel eens* to be interpreted as frequentative on the past-in-the-past reading.

Table 4: Association between *wel eens* and present or past perfect in the sixties and nineties (number of attested instances; in parentheses, mean probability of association given *wel eens*)

	Belgium		Netherlands	
	1960-1969	1990-1999	1960-1969	1990-1999
Associated perfect	14 (.088)	14 (.067)	94 (.196)	156 (.220)
Associated pluperfect	11 (.048)	14 (.053)	42 (.063)	81 (.082)

Figure 4: Mean probability of an associated perfect (PF) or pluperfect (PPF) given *wel eens*



7. Belgian *al eens* as a competitor of *wel eens*

Another factor affecting the frequency rate of *wel eens* concerns the semantic range of the expression *al eens*. Although the Dutch scalar temporal particle *al* ‘already’ and its German analog *schon* have received a great deal of scholarly attention, particularly in imperfective contexts, their use as markers of bare anteriority is considerably less well-known. Vandeweghe (1992: 106) shows that *al*, when combined with perfectivizing *eens*, expresses no more than that event time precedes speech time.³⁶ Belgian *al eens* differs, however, from its Dutch counterpart in that it can also be used as a substitute for *wel eens*, giving us a characterizing statement with imperfective force. This is particularly clear in present-tense sentences, like the ones in (25) below, where no other interpretation is available than ‘once in a while, occasionally’. In examples involving past tense or perfect, on the other hand, Belgian *al eens* can express the same semantic value as its Dutch equivalent, meaning ‘already, before’. This ambiguity of the Belgian expression resembles the one that characterizes German *schon mal*.³⁷ The sentence *Sie hat schon mal ihre Eltern besucht* ‘She has already visited her parents’ can be understood as an episodic statement with perfective force, whereas *Sie besucht schon mal ihre Eltern* ‘She visits her parents occasionally’ must be read as a frequentative habitual.

(25)a Uit de gemeenschap kan al eens een dromer worden gemist. (Karel Jonckheere, *Ik heb eens...*, 1962: 96)

‘The community can occasionally do without a dreamer.’

b In elk huishouden is er al eens iets. (Hugo Claus, *Belladonna*, 1994: 291)

‘In every household there is something the matter once in a while.’

- c Hij brengt al eens een zelfgebakken brood, rond en plat, bijkans zo groot als een velowiel. (Bart Plouvier, *Het gelag*, 1995: 130)
 ‘He occasionally brings a self-baked bread, round and flat, almost as big as a bicycle wheel.’

Inspection of Table 5A and its graphic representation in Figure 5 reveals that Belgium and the Netherlands differ with respect to the frequency of use of *al eens*, the mean rate of occurrence being significantly higher in Belgium.

Table 5A: Distribution of *al eens* in the sixties and nineties (number of attested instances; in parentheses, mean frequency of use as text percentage)

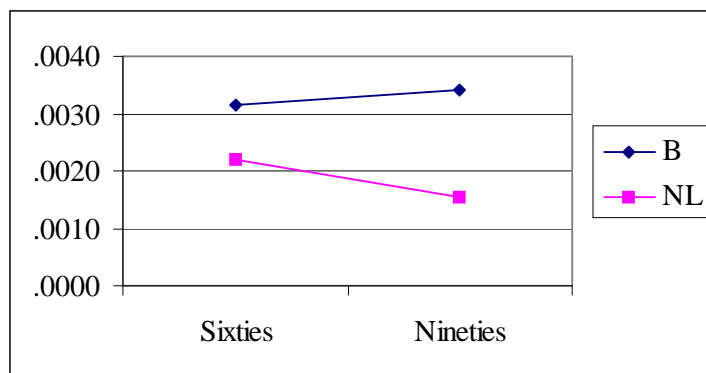
	1960-1969	1990-1999
Belgium	51 (.0032)	90 (.0034)
Netherlands	51 (.0022)	52 (.0016)

Table 5B: Summary of analysis of variance (unweighted means)

Source of variation	SS	Df	MS	F
A (origin)	.02	1	.02	3.98*
B (decade)	.00	1	.00	.00
AB	.00	1	.00	.45
Error	.85	175	.00	
Total	.88	178		

* $F_{.95}(1,175) = 3.90$

Figure 5: Mean frequency of *al eens*



The analysis of variance, summarized in Table 5B, shows that the observed *F* ratio for the test on the main effects of factor *A*, $F = 3.98$, is larger than the

critical value for a .05-level test. We assume that this difference is another factor contributing to the low frequency rate of Belgian *wel eens*.³⁸

8. Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that the Dutch particle *eens* and its German analog *mal* can function as temporal or aspectual markers. In the latter case, they are event particles carrying perfective force. As such, they can be regarded as overt manifestations of the Davidsonian slot, the extra argument position for eventualities proposed by Davidson (1967) and subsequent literature. We have moreover demonstrated that the particle combination *wel eens* (German *schon mal*) has an aspectual usage as well, it being the imperfective counterpart of *eens* (German *mal*). Many Dutch speakers from Belgium, however, deploy *al eens* rather than *wel eens* for this function. All in all, our analysis not only sheds new light upon some of the more elusive Dutch particles, but it also furthers our understanding of the many different ways the distinction between perfective and imperfective aspect manifests itself across languages.

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Notes

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² For a criticism of event semantics, see Verkuyl (1993: 242-67). A more elaborate account, specifically aimed against the neo-Davidsonian variant developed by Parsons (1989, 1990), is presented in Verkuyl (1999: 15-51).

³ In an attempt to clarify the distinction between episodic and generic statements, Dahl (1995: 425) is forced to conclude that 'no language seems to have a general overt marking of all and only episodic sentences'.

⁴ For discussion of the reportive present and its perfective nature, see Comrie (1976: 77), Dahl (1984: 6), Lindstedt (1985: 139), Kamp & Reyle (1993: 567), and Smith (1997: 111), among others. Dutch and German differ from English in that the range of the present tense can be extended so as to include the past. A typical example is what Comrie (1976: 60) would call the present of persistent situation, as in *Zij woont sinds 1968 in New York*. The English translation equivalent, *She has lived in New York since 1968*, features the present perfect. Marion Krause

and Michaela Wenzlaff point out that the German sentence *Sie hustet mal* is not acceptable as a reportive present. This is in line with Hentschel (1991: 147), who observes that present-tense statements containing the particle *mal* cannot have present meaning. Thus *Ich überarbeite den Text mal* 'I will revise the text' can only be used to describe a future event, whereas *Ich überarbeite den Text* also refers to the present (for instance, when answering the question *Was machst du gerade?* 'What are you doing?').

⁵ In emphasizing the completeness of the perfective viewpoint, we by no means wish to deny that the distinction between open and closed eventualities may be more appropriate to explain the differences between imperfective and perfective aspect. For an illuminating discussion of this issue, see Lindstedt (1985: 47-59) and Kamp & Reyle (1993: 557-66). Klein's (1994: 99-119) time-relational reconstruction of the notion of aspect in terms of event time and reference time (his topic time) is also very promising. Although Vandeweghe (1979, 1985, 1992) has contributed immensely to clarifying the aspectual properties of Dutch particles, we believe that the status of *eens* as an aspectual marker has not received sufficient attention. To be sure, De Vriendt, Vandeweghe, & Van de Craen (1991: 53) observe that downtoning *eens* 'normally occurs with action verbs which are presented under a perfective aspect' and Hentschel (1991: 142) argues on the basis of a comparison with Serbo-Croatian that its German counterpart *mal* is to be analyzed as a perfectivizing element. But neither study has led to a systematic exploration of the aspectual properties of *eens* and *mal*. The most elaborate account so far is Vismans' (1994) study of modal particles in Dutch directives. He proposes to treat nontemporal *eens* as a reinforcing particle, by which he means that its communicative function is to strengthen the force of the speech act. Particularly relevant from our perspective is Foolen's (1993) observation that certain uses of the particle *maar* also have aspectual significance in that they serve to mark durativity. Notwithstanding its subtitle, which translates as 'Aspectual particles in Dutch', Smessaert (1999) hardly deals with the kind of aspectuality we are interested in here, and does not even mention *eens*.

⁶ In a context where *Eens hoest zij* does not have present meaning, but describes a future situation ('Someday she will cough'), the sentence is grammatical. However, such cases involve the time adverb *eens*, as shown by the use of *someday* in the English counterpart. Another example of this construction is *Eens loopt hij tegen de lamp* 'Someday he will get into trouble'. It will be argued below that the possibility of fronting distinguishes temporal *eens* from aspectual *eens*.

⁷ See the entry *wel eens* in the thirteenth edition of *Van Dale Groot woordenboek der Nederlandse taal* (1999).

⁸ Hentschel (1991: 145-6) points out that *mal* can also serve as a temporal adverb, as in the German sentence *Ich habe mal Gedichte geschrieben* 'I once wrote poems'. Since the particle *eben* 'just (for)(a moment)' (Dutch *even*) only combines with aspectual *mal*, it is enough to show that we do not have **Ich habe mal eben Gedichte geschrieben*. Unlike *eens*, German *mal* can never be fronted. This option is only available with *einmal* 'once, sometime' and archaic *einst* 'once'. In his treatment of temporal meaning in German, Nerbonne (1983: 19-20) proposes that *mal* be analyzed as a marker of indefinite time reference. The advantage of this approach is that it enables us to maintain that tense is an indexical category, as Partee (1973) and Enç (1981) have argued. The issue of *mal*'s aspectual significance is not addressed by Nerbonne. Recent studies by Kratzer (1998) and Walsh Dickey (2001: 16-26) argue on the basis of the English past and the Dutch and German perfect that tense is both quantificational and referential.

⁹ Dutch has several ways of indicating the intended interpretation, stress being one of them. Thus accentuated instances of *eens* always have temporal force, whereas aspectual *eens* is typically unstressed. Orthographic conventions for representing absence of stress include *'ns*, *'s*, *'es*, *es*, *is*, and *us*.

¹⁰ An additional argument for the adjectival status of predicative *eens* is the fact that it forms the basis for prefixation with *on-*, as in *We zijn het oneens* ‘We are in disagreement’. A reviewer suggested that the term ‘adverbial *eens*’ might be more appropriate than ‘nonadjectival *eens*’, but we disagree in light of the fact that *eens* may be used as a conjunction as well (cf. Section 3.4).

¹¹ Dutch has another negative scalar focus particle, *geeneens*, which is equivalent in meaning to *niet eens* but restricted to informal discourse. An example is *En niemand die zich iets van hem aantrok, hij ging nog dood ook, en het was de lievelingsoom van die arme agent, die geeneens ouders had* ‘And no one who cared about him, what’s more, he died, and he was the favorite uncle of that poor cop, who didn’t even have parents’ (Janwillem van de Wetering, *Drijflijk*, 1993: 29). Note that not all instances of *niet eens* are to be analyzed as focus particles. In Marcella Baete’s *Jaren van leem* (1995: 160) we find a passage that features aspectual *eens*, even though it follows *niet*: ‘*En ik ben het die geluidloos roep: ‘Kan Alain dat dan niet eens halen?’*’ ‘And I am the one who calls silently: ‘Can’t Alain get it?’’. This happens frequently in negative questions, where *niet* often functions as a modal particle instead of a negation.

¹² There exist several variants, including *nu eens... dan eens*. A relevant example is *Hij sprak veel te langzaam, verstrikte zich nu eens hier, dan eens daar in zijn woorden, alsof hij zelf niet precies wegwijs werd tussen de gebeurtenissen van zijn eigen leven* ‘He spoke much too slowly, got now here, now there caught in his own words, as if he himself wasn’t exactly familiar with the events of his own life’ from Péter Nádas’ *De levensloper* (1997: 240-1), translated from Hungarian by Rob Visser. Note that the English counterpart features the coordinate conjunction *now... now*. In Willem Brakman’s collection of stories *Water als water* (1965: 174) we find a passage that involves the combination *dan weer eens... dan weer eens*: *Ik zette dan grote verbaasde ogen op, eigenlijk was ik altijd een beetje bang, ja ik was altijd een beetje bang, dan weer eens meer, dan weer eens minder* ‘My eyes then nearly popped out of my head, in fact I was always a bit afraid, yes I was always a bit afraid, now more, now less’.

¹³ Compare Verkuyl’s (1993: 12-4; 1999: 17, 122-3) distinction between inner and outer aspectuality and his criticism of Lindstedt (1984, 1985).

¹⁴ Compare Nerbonne (1983: 10) for German *mal* and Hoeksema (1999: 166) for Dutch *eens*.

¹⁵ In the usage note at *someday*, the fourth edition of *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2000) states that *someday* and *sometime* can only be used to express indefinite future time. For example, *We’ll succeed someday* or *Let’s get together sometime*. The temporal adverb *once*, on the other hand, typically refers to intervals in the past, as in *Once they used to smoke*. David Dowty observes that *once*, when it co-occurs with future tense, loses its temporal interpretation and acts as a numeral adverb instead. This is illustrated by the sentence *They’ll meet each other once*. Dutch adverbial *eens* differs from *sometime* and *once* in that it does not discriminate between retrospective and prospective usage, as shown by the examples in (12).

¹⁶ In other words, we regard absence of stress as a necessary condition for aspectual force.

¹⁷ Because the number of observations per cell differs for reasons not related to the experimental variables, an unweighted-means analysis has been applied. This method considers each cell as if it contained the same number of observations as all other cells, at least with regard to the computation of main effects and interaction effects. The observed criterion scores in each cell are therefore replaced by their mean, which is treated as a single observation.

¹⁸ This is not to say that nonsensitive *ooit* did not occur before the sixties. In Albert Helman’s novel *Het vergeten gezicht* (1939: 210) we find the following example: *Nog met de glimlach om dit uithangbord op zijn gezicht, stapte Rufino over de gaanderij naar binnen, in de ruimte waar een oud biljart stond, dat ternauwernood nog plaats liet voor twee tafeltjes en een buffet,*

en aan de andere kant een automaat waaruit vermoedelijk *ooit* muziek gekomen was ('With the smile about this sign still on his face, Rufino walked across the gallery inside, into the room where an old billiard table was standing that hardly left any space for two tables and a sideboard, and on the other side a machine from which presumably once music had come'). Hoeksema (1999) shows that there has been a steady undercurrent of nonsensitive use, going back to the first half of the nineteenth century. The fact remains that this trend did not become general until the sixties and seventies.

¹⁹ The use of *wel eens* in imperfective present-tense questions is frequentative rather than existential. To see this, consider the following two examples from Kris Hoflack's collection of interviews with Belgian prime ministers *De achterkant van de premier* (1995: 106, 116). In both cases, the addressee is Jean-Luc Dehaene: *Een persoonlijk vraagje over de macht: volgens Freud heeft macht een erotische aantrekkingskracht op vrouwen. Heeft u daar wel eens last van?* 'A personal question about power: according to Freud, power has an erotic appeal to women. Does that ever bother you?' and *Gaat u wel eens naar de film?* 'Do you ever go to the movies?' These questions do not ask for a particular event, but serve to determine whether there is a pattern of events. This is what makes the two sentences habituals. As Smith (1997: 34) points out, such readings arise because the present tense is incompatible with an event presented perfectly unless it has the special force of the reportive present. Hedin's (2000) theory of the type-referring function of the imperfective would qualify these cases as instances of type-focusing event reference (see also Dahl & Hedin, 2000). Other examples that illustrate this use of *wel eens* are '*Wordt die 's avonds wel eens ontstoken?*' vraag ik voorzichtig 'Is it ever put on at night?' I ask cautiously' (Lieve Joris, *De melancholieke revolutie*, 1990: 71) and '*Laat jij je wel eens in je kont neuken?*' 'Do you ever let yourself be fucked in your ass?'' (Lydia Rood, *Gedeelde genoegens*, 1996: 134). Note that substitution of perfective *eens* for *wel eens* often results in ungrammaticality, as expected. Thus **Heeft u daar eens last van?* 'Does that bother you?' is not well-formed. On the other hand, *Gaat u eens naar de film?* 'Do you go to the movies?' is acceptable because prospective use of the present tense permits a perfective reading.

²⁰ As opposed to *ooit wel eens*, the imperfective cluster **nooit wel eens* is ungrammatical.

²¹ In our database we find 42 instances of *ooit eens*, 35 from the nineties and 7 from the sixties.

²² Hoeksema (1999: 164-5) reports that usage of fronted *ooit* increases from 3 instances per 1,000 occurrences of *ooit* in the sixties to 63 instances in the nineties. Our data show the same trend, although its magnitude is less spectacular. On the basis of Table 2, we arrive at 6 instances of fronting per 1,000 occurrences of *ooit* in the sixties, and 47 instances in the nineties.

²³ Besides the orthographical variants mentioned in note 9 we also find *wel ereis*. The only example in our corpus is from Robert van Gulik, *4 vingers* (1964: 71): *Ik vond het een leuk ding en daarom liet Oom Twan me 'm wel ereis drage* 'I thought it was a nice thing, so Uncle Twan let me wear it occasionally'.

²⁴ Van der Auwera (1984) notes that *soms* is like Polish *czasem* in that it can also be used as a modal particle, equivalent in meaning to English 'perhaps, maybe, possibly'. This is frequently the case in questions and conditionals. Adverbial clauses headed by *alsof* 'as if' sometimes also give rise to such a reading. An illustrative example is the following passage from Rascha Peper, *Een Spaans hondje* (1998: 20): *Zij keek hem fel aan, alsof hij soms tot het kamp van de voorstanders van medicijngebruik van zijn broer behoorde* 'She looked at him fiercely, as if he perhaps belonged to the camp of proponents of medication for his brother'.

²⁵ Although there are no convincing examples of perfective *soms eens* in our corpus, such sentences do exist. Thus *De patiënt zuchtte soms eens* 'The patient sometimes sighed' can easily be used to describe a situation involving repetitive patterns.

²⁶ Other terms found in the literature are ‘experiential perfect’ and ‘indefinite perfect’. See Smith (1997: 187) as well as her discussion of the Chinese suffix *-guo* (1997: 266-71).

²⁷ As Lindstedt (1985: 224) observes, the existential perfect typically, though not always, occurs in questions and within the scope of negatives. It is therefore not a coincidence that English *ever* often serves as a diagnostic. This raises interesting questions as to the relationship of *ooit* and *wel eens* in Dutch.

²⁸ Note that *wel* and *eens* in (22b) are joined. We saw the same orthographic convention be used in example (16b). There is a tradition going back at least as far as the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* to distinguish between *wel eens* and *wel eens* (see also Renkema (1995: 156). Although it is not immediately clear how to interpret this convention, one possibility is that these prescriptive sources mean to contrast frequentative and existential use of *wel eens*. A potentially decisive argument against any version of the one-word theory is the existence of the cluster *wel weer eens*, where *wel* is separated from *eens* by the reiterative adverb *weer* ‘again’. Thus corresponding to the frequentative habitual *Hij drinkt wel eens* ‘He drinks occasionally’ we have *Hij drinkt wel weer eens* ‘He drinks again occasionally’, which in addition expresses reiteration. An example of existential use of *wel weer eens* is the following sentence from Rudolf Geel, *De magere heilige* (1963: 153): *Goed, je ziet me wel weer eens* ‘O.K., you will see me again (sometime)’. Note that this is a case of future reiteration.

²⁹ Comrie (1976: 61-2) points out that there are exceptions. One such language is Modern Greek, where the perfect can only be formed from perfective verbs. Thus corresponding to *éxo féri* ‘I have carried’ there is no imperfective **éxo féri*.

³⁰ Forsyth (1970: 82-102) speaks about the constative general factual, or simple denotative meaning of the imperfective. See also Comrie (1976: 113), who regards this use of the imperfective as the strongest single piece of evidence for considering the perfective to be the marked form.

³¹ Hoeksema (1999: 159-60) points out that this is what differentiates standard existential use of Dutch *ooit* from its southern variant found in Brabant, where *ooit* can have a frequentative reading.

³² See also Lindstedt (1985: 108-10) and Steedman (1997: 907), among others. Related proposals concerning the semantics of the pluperfect are presented in Lascarides & Asher (1993a, 1993b) and Kamp & Reyle (1993: 593-611). Steedman rightly points out that Reichenbach (1947), though one of the first to provide an insightful description of tense, seems to have failed to notice that there are two uses of the narrative pluperfect.

³³ Existential *wel eens* can also be associated with counterfactual pluperfects, as in the following passage from Weverbergh, *Een dag als een ander* (1965: 16): *Jammer dat ik met die moderne dingen niet mee kan. Ik geloof, met haar had ik graag wel eens gewalst* ‘Too bad that I can’t keep up with those modern things. I think I would have liked to waltz with her sometime’. The futurate character of the Dutch construction manifests itself in the English translation equivalent, where we find the past future perfect *would have liked* instead of the pluperfect. This is important because Steedman (1997: 910) argues that the temporal profile of English counterfactual pluperfects is the same as that of a past tense. Since existential *wel eens* is not compatible with the simple past, it must be the futurate component of the Dutch pluperfect in this context that licenses the existential interpretation of *wel eens*.

³⁴ Although the cluster *wel eens meer* ‘more often’ tends to be associated with a frequentative reading, this is by no means necessary. The following example from René Appel, *De derde persoon* (1990: 157) provides a clear illustration of existential use: *Dat had ze wel eens meer gehoord, dat vrouwen alleen een echt vriendschappelijke relatie met een man konden onderhouden als hij homoseksueel was* ‘She had heard it before, that women could only have a genuinely friendly relationship with a man if he was gay’. What this sentence says is that on at least one more occasion she did in fact hear the same opinion being voiced. As many

dictionaries observe, because of the existential force of *wel eens meer* in this particular context ‘before’ seems a better translation equivalent than ‘more often’.

³⁵ The following sentence from *Willy-Gate* (1995: 37) by the Belgian journalist Ann Bats provides a typical example of existential *wel eens* in a modal context: *Dit zou wel eens de genadeslag voor de vice-eerste minister kunnen zijn* ‘This could be the final blow for the vice-premier’.

³⁶ Compare Nerbonne (1983) for a related proposal concerning German *schon mal*. König (1977: 182n) points out that the negation of *Warst du schon mal in den USA?* ‘Have you ever been in the USA?’ is *Nein, noch nie* ‘No, never’, whereas the negation of *Warst du schon in den USA?* ‘Have you been in the USA yet?’ is *Nein, noch nicht* ‘No, not yet’.

³⁷ We owe this crucial observation to Veronika Ehrich.

³⁸ Belgian *al eens* resembles Dutch *wel eens* in that it can also have an existential reading. An illustrative example is the following extract from Bart Plouvier, *Het gelag* (1995: 125): *Frans piste in de gang, in de gang naar de keuken, en hij betaalde mij, juste gelijk hij gezegd had. Dat boeltje opkuisen was wel niet zo plezierig, want hij had een blaas gelijk een peerd. Maar voor dat geld kan ne mens al eens iets tegen zijn goesting doen* ‘Frans peed in the corridor, in the corridor to the kitchen, and he paid me, just as he had said. Cleaning that mess was not very pleasant, for he had a bladder like a horse. But for that money a person might do something against his will’.

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