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‘EN’ EN IS NIET WAT WE DACHTEN: A FLEMISH DISCOURSE PARTICLE*

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1 Introduction

The aim of this paper is twofold. We will argue that Flemish *en* has hitherto been misanalysed, mostly as a marker of negation or polarity, and that a number of its distributional and interpretive properties have previously been ignored. In contrast to previous analyses of this particle (Haegeman, 1998, Jayaseelan, 2010) we propose that the specific properties of *en* that we have identified are not syntactically encoded but instead follow from its lexical semantics. Following a Relevance Theory approach, we will propose a new analysis of *en* as a discourse marker, arguing that it has undergone grammaticalization as a procedural item, or processing instruction, instructing discourse participants on how to integrate the utterance containing it into the discourse context.

En is used at a low but apparently stable frequency in spoken Flemish, in traditional dialects as well as the so-called *tussentaal* (‘in-between language’), the colloquial regiolect widely used in the Flemish speaking part of Belgium.¹ The findings in the current paper are based on four types of data,

- (i) transcriptions of spoken dialogues in West Flemish dialects (Dudzele and Moerkerke) recorded in the 1960s (Department of Dutch Linguistics, Ghent University)
- (ii) licentiate’s theses on the grammar of several East Flemish dialects: Ghent Leemans (1966), Geraardsbergen Vergauts (1971) and Buggenhout-Opstal Pauw (1973)
- (iii) anecdotal observations of spontaneous speech (both dialectal West Flemish and *tussentaal* of speakers with East and West Flemish backgrounds)
- (iv) native speaker intuitions (West Flemish, LH)

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¹Cf. the work on negation done within the *Syntactic Atlas of the Dutch dialects* (SAND) for the Flemish dialects (Neuckermans, 2008, Barbiers et al., 2009) and Tældeman (1992) for a discussion of the *tussentaal*.

2 Background

Spoken Flemish (Southern Dutch) allows the at first sight optional use of a particle *en* in finite negative clauses (a.o. Haegeman and Zanuttini, 1991, Haegeman, 1995). *En* is a clitic that strictly precedes the finite verb, and always co-occurs with a clause-mate constituent expressing sentential negation, like the sentential negator *niet* ‘not’ (1a) or a negative indefinite like *niemand* ‘no one’ (1b)

- (1) a. Ik (**en**) kennen dat **niet**.
 I EN know that not
 ‘I don’t know that.’
 b. Ik (**en**) kennen hier **niemand**.
 I EN know here no one
 ‘I don’t know anyone around here.’

It can occur in finite main (1) and embedded clauses, questions, and imperatives (2a-d), but not in infinitival clauses (2e). This sets it apart from e.g. French *ne*, which is equally optional in finite negative clauses, but obligatory in infinitival clauses, (3).²

- (2) a. *complement clause*
 Ze zeid da ze doa neu niemand (**en**) kent.
 She said that she there now no one EN knows
 ‘She said that she doesn’t know anything there anymore.’
 b. *adverbial clause*
 T’is atent vervelend oa-j niemand (**en**) kent.
 It=is always bothersome if=you no one EN know
 ‘It’s always annoying if you don’t know anyone.’
 c. *question*
 (**En**)-ee-j gie doa niemand gezien?
 EN=have=you you there no one seen
 ‘Did you (really) not see anyone there?’
 d. *imperative*
 (**En**)-komt doa (tet) nie an!
 EN=come there PART not on
 ‘Don’t touch that!’
 e. *infinitive*
 Dienen boek nie (***en**)-kennen is oast onmeugelijk.
 that book not EN=know.INF is near impossible
 ‘To not know that book is almost impossible.’
 (3) *(**ne**) pas savoir sur quel pied danser
 NE NEG know on which foot dance
 ‘Be unsure of what to do’, lit. ‘To not know on which foot to dance’

²See also (Haegeman, 2002:187, n.19).

Only the presence of a clause-mate negative constituent with sentential scope can license *en*, therefore the sentences in (4) are ungrammatical. In (4a), there is no such constituent, in (4b), it is not in the same clause, in (4c), it does not have sentential scope:³

- (4) a. Ik (***en**) kennen dienen coureur.
 I EN know that cyclist
 'I know this cyclist.'
- b. Ik (**en**) zeggen niet dan-k dat (***en**) kennen.
 I EN say not that=I that (***en**) know
 'I am not saying that I know him.'
- c. Z'(***en**) eet dat gedoan vu niets.
 she=EN has that done for nothing
 'She did that for free.'

Historically, *en* is a negation marker. Dutch, like all Germanic languages, has undergone Jespersen's cycle (JC), the diachronic development of the expression of negation by which an original negator at stage I (Common Germanic *ni* > *ne* > *en*), is first joined by a reinforcing element at stage II (*niet* < Old Dutch *niuuht* 'nothing'), which then turns itself into the standard expression of negation and ultimately replaces the old one at stage III (a.o. Burridge, 1993, Beheydt, 1998).

³ The statement that only clausemate negation licenses *en* has to be qualified. There are some dialects in which a non-negative affective context is sufficient to license *en*:

- (i) a. *conditional*
 en aa't slecht weer **en** is
 and if=it bad weather EN is
 'and if the weather is bad'
 (Ghent, Leemans, 1966:191)
- b. *before-clause*
 Je moet niet komen voordat ik geschreven **en** heb.
 you must not come before.that I written EN have
 'You mustn't come before I wrote.'
 (Kortrijk, Barbiers et al., 2009:60)
- c. *standard of comparison*
 Marjo heeft nu meer koeien dan ze vroeger **en** had
 Marjo has now more cows than she earlier EN had
 'Marjo now has more cows than she had earlier.'
 (Overijse, Barbiers et al., 2009:60)
- d. *restrictive adverb*
 Ik **en** heb maar drie knikkers.
 I EN have only three marbles
 'I only have three marbles.'
 (Brugge, Barbiers et al., 2009:60)

This is not the case in all Flemish dialects, and some may allow *en* only in a subset of these contexts. Unlike the cases discussed in section 4.3 below, these cases still involve affective contexts, though not sentential negation.

(5)

	stage I	stage II	stage III	stage I'
English	<i>ne V</i>	<i>ne V .. noht</i>	<i>V .. not</i>	<i>don't .. V</i>
Dutch	<i>ne V</i>	<i>en V .. niuueht > niet</i>	<i>V .. niet</i>	

At the intermediate stage II of JC, which might seem to be optionally preserved in spoken Flemish, negation appears to be expressed twice, or rather, negation appears to be expressed by a discontinuous bipartite particle *en..niet*.⁴ Haegeman (1995), applying Pollock's (1989) NegP hypothesis to West Flemish, therefore analysed *en* as the realization of the functional head Neg°.

3 Interpretive and distributional properties of *en*

En has a number of interpretive properties that cannot be accounted for by assuming that it is an optional spellout of the head of NegP, a mere remnant of JC. First, it cannot express sentential negation on its own (a.o. Haegeman, 1995), while negation can be expressed without it.⁵ Second, it expresses an opposition between the negation of the clause it occurs in and a (positive)

⁴But cf. Breitbarth (2009) for an alternative analysis of stage II of Jespersen's cycle in West Germanic. For more details, see section 4.2 below.

⁵We follow Ryckeboer (1986) in taking elliptical (negative) replies involving vicarious *doen* 'do' as (near-)fossilized expressions, not productive negative clauses, unlike Van Craenenbroeck (2004:part II). Their fossilized status is clear from the fact that they can only occur with weak pronoun subjects ((ib, d), (iia)), often not referential (id), not strong pronouns or full DP subjects (iib, c), and only in present tense (iid), even if they have past reference (ib):

- (i) a. Maar ja, en ze zat vroeger alijk alle dagen in huis Mariette, ton?
but yes and she sat then probably all days in home Mariette TAG
'Well, and she sat probably all days at home back then, Mariette, didn't she?'
- b. Z'en doet, ze kwam eten.
She=EN does, she came eat
'But she didn't, she came to eat.'
- c. O, 'k peide kik da'se zij daar altijd was.
oh I thought I=I that=she she there always was
'Oh, I thought she was there all the time.'
- d. 'T en doet, gij.
it EN does, you
'That's not true, you know.'

(Ryckeboer, 1986:329)

- (ii) a. k'en doen
I=EN do
- b. *Ik en doen
I EN do
- c. *Marie en doet
Marie EN does
- d. *K'en degen
I EN did

(Haegeman, 1995:160)

expectation explicitly or implicitly present in the discourse. Of course, according to Horn's (1989) Gricean view of negation, negation in itself is in contrast to a positive expectation. The effect of *en* however is stronger, it explicitly marks the negative clause as unexpected by selecting its positive counterpart as the most expected state of affairs. Third, doing so, it does not change the propositional content of the clause, which remains a negative clause as if *en* was not present. The speaker-oriented evaluation of the conflict between the negation and the expectation, as well as certain emotional overtones such as surprise, irritation, defiance or apology, constitute expressive meaning added by *en*.

As was already noted by Overdiep (1933, 1937), *en* adds a certain 'emphasis' to the negation it co-occurs with. Beheydt (1998:93) mentions a similar interpretation for *en* in Early Modern Dutch.⁶

- (6) a. Ge weunt al vijftien jaor in Gent, in g'**en** ken nog d'Universiteit nie?
 you live already fifteen years in Ghent and you=EN know still the=university not
 'What? You have lived in Ghent for fifteen years, and you are telling me you still don't know the university?!'
 b. Dat **en** is toch mijn schuld nie!
 that EN is PRT my fault not
 'You can't say that this is MY fault!'
 (Ghent, Overdiep, 1937:456-457)

Roughly, what *en* expresses is that there is a contrast between the negative proposition in the utterance and an assumption or expectation of the contrary state of affairs entertained by one or more discourse participants. The constructed example in (7a) and the attested example in (7b) illustrate this. In (7a), the emphatically refuted expectation is held by speaker A, in (7b), it is held by the French speakers referred to by the subject pronoun *ze* ('they').

- (7) a. A: Geef me nen keer Valère zenen telefoon. B: k'**en** een-k ik Valère
 give me once Valère his phone number I=EN have=I I Valère his
 zenen telefoon nie.
 phone not
 'Can you give me Valère's phone number?' '– I don't have Valère's number.'
 (Haegeman, 2002:180)
 b. Ze moeten niet denken dat ge in een Vlaamse gemeenteraad Frans kunt spreken.
 they must not think that you in a Flemish council.meeting French can speak
 Dat **en** gaat niet!
 that EN goes not
 'They should not think that you can speak French in a Flemish council meeting. That's out of the question!'
 (HDP, Flemish *tussentaal*)

The remainder of this section will show the difficulties of assimilating *en* to other, more studied phenomena with which it appears to bear some similarity.

⁶See also Haegeman (2002) for a first discussion of the emphatic effect of *en* in West Flemish.

3.1 Polarity emphasis and contrast

Because *en* expresses a conflict with an opposite expectation present in the discourse, Breitbarth and Haegeman (2010) have argued that *en* encodes polarity emphasis or polarity focus. The problem with this analysis is that polarity emphasis (as far as this phenomenon is understood) is often assumed to be represented cross-linguistically in structurally high functional heads which are either absent or unavailable in embedded domains such as temporal, conditional or relative clauses and are thus confined to root clauses (Haegeman, 2007b, 2010a,b, 2012, Danckaert and Haegeman, 2012)⁷, cf. for instance Martins (2007, to appear), Batllori and Hernanz (2010, to appear).⁸ *En* on the other hand is not restricted to root clauses, compare (8b) to (8c):

- (8) a. **Poc** ho farà la Maria.
 not it do.FUT the Mary
 ‘Mary WON’T do it’
 (from Batllori and Hernanz, 2010:11)
- b. Començaré pel capítol 2. *Si (ells) **poc** ho poden seguir, tornaré al
 begin.FUT.1SG by chapter 2 if they EMPH.NEG it can follow return to
 capítol 1.
 chapter 1
 ‘I’ll start with chapter 2. If they (really) can’t follow, I’ll return to chapter 1’
 (M. Batllori, p.c.)
- c. Oa’t nie **en** regent, moe-j de blommen wouter geven.
 if=it NEG EN rain.3SG, must.2SG=you the flowers water give
 ‘If it DOESN’T rain, you must water the flowers.’
 (after Haegeman, 2002:154)

The notion of contrast itself may not be entirely appropriate here, given the way other expressions of contrast in language behave. Generally, “contrast is a complex information-structural notion” with a “dual semantico-pragmatic character” (Molnár and Winkler, 2010:1393). In most syntactic treatments of contrast (e.g., Frey, 2006, Molnár and Winkler, 2010), the concept is related to the clausal left periphery, or derived pragmatically (cf. Konietzko and Winkler, 2010:5). This makes sense, given that “contrast is regarded as a pragmatic phenomenon requiring a limited number of contextually given alternatives” (Molnár and Winkler, 2010:1395) – under a syntactic approach operating with ‘contrast’ features, the interface to the discourse context is via the clausal left periphery (Rizzi, 1997). However, since *en* can occur in embedded clauses that normally resist root phenomena, a syntactic encoding in the left periphery is unlikely.

3.2 Presuppositional negators

Examples like (7a), on the other hand, make *en* appear to be similar also to ‘presuppositional’ negators like Italian *mica* or Brazilian Portuguese sentence-final resumptive *não*. These are

⁷ For the earliest discussion of root phenomena, cf. Hooper and Thompson (1973) and Emonds (1976).

⁸ Individual approaches differ in the exact nomenclature for the left-peripheral projections involved; e.g., CP_{PolFoc}, PolP, CP-Foc(us), or V(erum)Foc(us)P, besides just FocP, cf. Batllori and Hernanz (2010, to appear), Danckaert (2009), Holmberg (2001, 2007), Lipták (2003), Martins (2007) or Poletto (2009). Generally though, they can be unified as assuming syntactic movement of a TP-internal polarity head (‘Pol’ or ‘Σ’) or its specifier to the (specifier of the) (contrastive) Focus head in the extended left periphery (Rizzi, 1997).

pragmatically restricted to (emphatically) negating propositions that are 'discourse-old' and 'contextually activated' (Cinque, 1976, Zanuttini, 1997, Schwenter, 2005, 2006, Visconti, 2009).

(9) *Italian*

- a. A. Chi viene a prenderti?
'Who's coming to pick you up?'
B. Non so. Ma Gianni non ha (# **mica**) la macchina.
'I don't know. But Gianni doesn't have the car.'
(Schwenter, 2006:(6a))
- b. Questa non è **mica** una festa data in nostro onore, ma in onore di Ada e Guido! Parla di loro!
'This is not *mica* a party given in our honour, but in honour of Ada and Guido! Talk about them!'
(I. Svevo, *La coscienza di Zeno*, 6 [LIZ XX]; from Visconti, 2009:944)

(10) *Brazilian Portuguese*

- A: Voce gostou da palestra da Maria?
you liked of.the talk of.the Maria
'Did you like Maria's talk?'
B: Eu não fui **não**.
I NEG went NÃO₂
'I didn't go.'
(Schwenter, 2005:1449)

This similarity is spurious for two reasons. First, presuppositional negators like *mica* and resumptive *não* appear to be restricted to root clauses, as examples like (11) show. *Mica* for instance appears to be unavailable in restrictive relative clauses (11a), Brazilian Portuguese sentence-final resumptive *não* is unavailable in conditional clauses (11b).

(11) a. *Italian*

- Mi ha regalato quei libri che non leggeva (***mica**)
me has given those books that NEG read MICA
'He/she has given me those books that he/she didn't read.'
(Cinque, 1976:313)

b. *Brazilian Portuguese*

- Mas se o João não comprou um carro (***não**), qual carro é com que o vi
but if the João NEG bought a car NÃO₂ which car is with what him saw
ontém?
yesterday?
'But if João DIDN't by a car, what car did I see him with yesterday?'
(J.S. Magalhães, p.c.)

As shown above (8c), *en* is not restricted in this way.

Second, Italian *mica* can occur in rhetorical questions, which are pragmatically assertive, and it can do so even without the presence of the standard negator *non* (12a). If *en* is inserted in what would be a rhetorical question, the rhetorical reading is unavailable: the negation in (12b)

is not expletive, rather, (12b) is literally negative. Moreover, *en* cannot occur without a negative constituent, as discussed in section 2.

- (12) a. (Non) Hai **mica** una sigaretta/un fiammifero?
 NEG have MICA a cigarette/a lighter
 ‘Would you happen to have a cigarette/ a lighter?’
 (Cinque, 1976:319)
- b. (# **En**) ee-j geen cigaretje vu myn?
 EN have=you no cigarette.DIM for me
 intended: ‘Would you have a cigarette for me?’
 lit.: ‘Don’t you have a cigarette for me?’, ‘Do you really not have ...’

In sum, despite cases like (7a), the distribution of *en* does not overlap sufficiently with that of presuppositional negators to be treated as one of them.

3.3 Speaker-orientation

As already discussed, *en* adds a speaker-oriented evaluation, in addition to conveying a range of emotional overtones such as defiance (13a), surprise (13b) or irritation (13a,b).

- (13) a. Wa ga je gij doen van uw leven [a je niet **en** trouwt]?
 what go you you do of your life if you NEG EN marry
 ‘What are you going to do with your life if you don’t marry?’
 (Neuckermans, 2008:99)
- b. **En**-ee-j gie doa niemand gezien?
 EN=have=you you there no.one seen
 ‘Did you (really) not see anyone there?’
 (Haegeman, 2007a:15,fn.3)

This makes it similar to evaluative adverbs, and one may ask whether it can be treated as a such. The problem with positing such a parallel is that (strong) evaluative adverbs (or more broadly ‘Speaker Oriented Adverbs’, SpOAs) such as *surprisingly* or *oddly* are positive polarity items (Nilsen, 2003, Ernst, 2009), and are therefore banned from weak NPI contexts such as conditional clauses (8c, 13a) and interrogative contexts (2c, 13b), while *en* is licit in these:

- (14) a. *What are you going to do with your life if you **oddly** don’t marry?
 b. *Did you **surprisingly** not see anyone?

Secondly, SpOAs appear to be root phenomena as well, unlike *en*, cf. for instance (13a), which in syntactic approaches to their placement (e.g. Cinque, 1999) is reflected in a very high positioning (see Haegeman 2010b for an account).

In many of the Flemish examples above, it is hard to find any SpOA that could render *en*’s contribution to a clause. *En* can therefore not be identified with speaker-oriented adverbs.

3.4 Modal particles

The contribution of *en* to the meaning of a clause appears to be that of adding a sort of speaker’s comment on the clause it occurs in, conveying that the negative proposition is somehow

contrary to the speaker's or the hearer's expectations. This adding evaluative meaning to the descriptive/propositional content of a clause seems similar to what has been proposed by Kratzer (1999) for the German modal particle *ja*, which adds roughly 'as you may well know':

- (15) *Ja* α is appropriate in a context *c* if the proposition expressed by α in *c* is a fact of w_c which - for all the speaker knows - might already be known to the addressee. (Kratzer, 1999:1)
- (16) a. Webster runs into Spencer at the bus stop:
 Webster: Du hast **ja** 'ne neue Frisur.
 You have JA a new hairdo.
- b. Webster asks Spencer: "Who did Austin marry?"
 Spencer: *Austin hat **ja** Ashley geheiratet. (Kratzer, 1999:2)
 Austin has JA Ashley married

In fact, as pointed out by an anonymous reviewer on an earlier version of this paper, *en* seems to make a contribution to the interpretation of a sentence similar to the German modal particles *doch* (unstressed) and *denn*, depending on the context.⁹ In cases like (7a), according to that reviewer, *en* would make a contribution similar to *doch* in (17a), and in cases like (2c) and (12b), *en* would be similar to *denn* in (17b):

- (17) a. Ich hab seine Nummer **doch** nicht.
 I have his number DOCH not
- b. Hast du **denn** niemanden gesehen?
 have you DENN no one seen
- c. Hast du **denn** keine Zigarette für mich?
 have you DENN no cigarette for me

A well-known problem with modal particles is of course that their semantic contribution is very hard to pin down and that (as a consequence) they are not easily translatable. In fact, the adverb *wirklich* 'really' comes a bit closer to the effect of *en* in (17b) and (17c). However, Dutch, also its Flemish varieties, has modal particles with very similar properties to German *doch*, *ja*, *denn* etc. Examples include unstressed *toch* and *wel*. Like their German relatives, these Dutch modal particles are strictly confined to the Middle Field, they cannot be coordinated, and they cannot be modified. It is not easy to compare them to *en* concerning these properties, as *en*, necessarily cliticizing to the finite verb, is subject to very different placement restrictions. Essentially, its position covaries with the finite verb.

They can, however, be compared in one important property, and they crucially differ with respect to it. Unstressed modal particles such as Dutch *toch* and *wel* cannot be used in the type of embedded clauses resisting root clause phenomena, cf. (18a), while Flemish *en* can, as shown above. Likewise, they cannot be used in examples like (13a), cf. (18b).

⁹On (unstressed) *doch* and *denn*, cf. Grosz (2010) and references cited therein, which builds on Kratzer's account of *ja*, among others.

- (18) a. Als hij dit tekst ***toch** (^{OK}TOCH) een beetje / ***wel** (^{OK}WEL) te veel verandert,
 if he this text PRT PRT e bit PRT PRT too much changes
 dan doe ik het opnieuw.
 then do I it again
 ‘If he changes the text a little bit too much (for my liking), I will do it again.’
- b. Wa ga jij doen met jouw leven [als je ***toch** / ***wel** (^{OK}TOCH / ^{OK}WEL) niet
 what go you do with your life if you PRT PRT PRT PRT NEG
 trouwt]?
 marry
 ‘What are you going to do with your life, if you’re not going to marry?’

Note that the stressed counterparts (TOCH, WEL) of these particles *can* be used in clauses resisting MCP. While they are of course historically related to the unstressed particles, they have rather different semantic and syntactic properties, they are syntactically more flexible and they are used to contrastively focus utterances.¹⁰

Summarizing the discussion, while *en* intuitively shares interpretive properties with certain modal particles, it cannot be assimilated to them due to its completely different syntactic distribution. That does not a priori take away the possibility of analysing its semantic contribution in a comparable way. But given that the precise semantic contribution of *en* is so much dependent on the context it is used in, as seen in the previous subsections, a treatment such as Kratzer’s for modal particles in terms of a fixed expressive meaning that is compositionally computed into the truth-conditional meaning does not seem to work.

3.5 Summary

We have shown that *en* adds expressive meaning to the descriptive content of a clause. Its precise expressive contribution is hard to pin down: roughly, it is appropriate in a context where the negation of the clause it occurs in is unexpected, given the discourse context, to some discourse participant (speaker, hearer, or other, cf. for instance (7b)), and it adds additional emotional overtones, depending on the context. Although its interpretive effect may be diverse and elusive, this effect is automatically triggered by the presence of *en*, cf. (12b). The difficulty to paraphrase its contribution to the interpretation of the utterance recommends it for a treatment as a discourse marker, but its context-dependence for determining its precise contribution to the interpretation of a clause shows the need for a different analysis from Kratzer’s.

4 Analysis

We have already seen that attempts to associate *en* with specific syntactic features like negation, polarity, contrast etc. fail to capture the specific contribution it makes to the interpretation of the utterance. We therefore abstain from providing a syntactic account for the interpretive contribution of *en*. Morphologically, *en* is a bound morpheme on the finite verb, which has inspired older analyses of it as a functional head (Neg°, Pol°, C_{pol}°). This property is however simply a result of *en*’s historical development from a preverbal negation clitic, cf. 4.2 below. In the present-day

¹⁰See Zimmermann (2004) for some discussion of the difference between stressed *WOHL* and unstressed *wohl* in German.

language, one plausible analysis of its syntactic status is in terms of an adjunction analysis, not unlike that proposed for focus particles such as *only*, but which is lexically restricted to finite verbs.

En's historical development can also account for the absence of a restriction to main clauses found with other, interpretatively similar, elements, as well as the restriction to negative clauses: *en* is a (strong) NPI in the present-day language, although it may be a weak NPI in some varieties (cf. footnote 3).¹¹ Historically, it is the residue of an old preverbal negation marker (long) after the language underwent Jespersen's cycle.¹²

We argue that the specific interpretive contribution of *en* to the utterance as described above is not syntacticized and can best be captured using a *Relevance Theory* approach, treating *en* as a discourse particle encoding procedural meaning, that is, as a **processing instruction** to the hearer on how to integrate the containing utterance within the ongoing discourse context.

4.1 Relevance Theory and the meaning of *en*

We first summarize the basic tenets of Relevance Theory which will constitute the ingredients for our analysis.

According to Relevance Theory, new information is *relevant* to a discourse participant if, in a given context, it interacts in a certain way with existing assumptions about the world, through what is called *contextual effects* (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, Wilson and Sperber, 1990, 2006). New information can interact with, and be relevant in, a context of existing assumptions (Wilson and Sperber, 1990:43):

- (i) by combining with the context to yield contextual implications;
- (ii) by strengthening existing assumptions; and
- (iii) by contradicting and eliminating assumptions.

An utterance is *optimally relevant* if it has the maximal number of contextual effects for the minimal amount of processing effort (Wilson and Sperber, 1990:44). The *principle of relevance* states that every utterance creates a presumption of optimal relevance with the hearer (Wilson and Sperber, 1990:45). In accordance with this principle, hearers of an utterance will (automatically) seek the most accessible and salient interpretation available.

Utterance interpretation in Relevance Theory involves performing computations over conceptual representations. Linguistic meaning has one of two forms depending on the kind of cognitive information an expression encodes: a *concept* or a *procedure* (Blakemore, 1987). Concepts are constituents of the conceptual representations that are input to inferential computations (the contextual effects) while procedures formulate restrictions on such computations. In constraining processing they reduce processing effort and they directly contribute to the relevance of an utterance, because relevance is indirectly proportional to processing effort. Typically, discourse particles encode procedural meaning.

¹¹Cf. Zeijlstra (2009) for a similar proposal concerning French *ne*, treating it as an NPI. Unlike Flemish *en*, however, French *ne* has not (yet) evolved into an emphatic discourse particle, apart from *ne* in some Swiss French varieties (Fonseca-Greber, 2007).

¹²This is also one major difference between Flemish *ne* and the presuppositional negators in Italian or Brazilian Portuguese, which are incipient *new* negators under Jespersen's Cycle. These are therefore not expected to disappear as *en* is, not expressing negation anymore (cf. (4a) above), but on the contrary to eventually develop into the neutral expression of sentential negation and to then oust the original negators.

We propose that Flemish *en* encodes procedural meaning. The presence of *en* in an utterance signals the need for the elimination of a salient and possibly preferred or expected positive proposition in the discourse context in favour of its negative counterpart in which *en* occurs. The addition of Flemish *en* to an utterance can thus be said to trigger a contextual effect of type (iii), viz. contradicting (and eliminating) assumptions. This accounts for the fact, for instance, that *en* is infelicitous in polite rhetorical questions, where negation is expletive (12b): the insertion of *en* automatically triggers the effect of contradicting a contextually salient assumption, which, in the given context of the rhetorical question, the hearer will attempt (and fail) to reconstruct. Depending on the discourse context, the conflict signalled by *en* may entail additional effects such as surprise, irritation, disappointment, defiance, apology, warning etc. on top of the basic contextual effect of contrast and elimination.

4.2 Grammaticalization

The proposal elaborated here can account for the preservation of *en* in spoken Flemish (dialects and *tussentaal*) at a low but stable frequency even though it has lost its conceptual meaning of expressing negation or polarity. Relevance Theory can successfully account for the grammaticalization of *en*.

Nicolle (1998) argues that the hallmark of grammaticalization of *grammatical* markers in Relevance Theory equals the gradual loss of conceptual meaning with the simultaneous acquisition of procedural meaning. We propose that the development of *en* shows that the same holds for the grammaticalization of *discourse* markers. This follows Wilson (2011) in assuming that essentially all lexical items have both conceptual and procedural meaning in different proportions and that grammaticalization can be understood as a shift along this continuum from ‘more conceptual’ to ‘more procedural’. Taking conceptual meaning to be truth-conditional meaning, negation markers, albeit it partially grammaticalized (if they have arisen through a process like Jespersen’s Cycle) retain a certain amount of conceptual meaning, besides procedural meaning. We argue that Flemish *en* is maximally semantically bleached and has lost any conceptual meaning altogether, keeping procedural meaning only. Following Aijmer (1997) one might also refer to this process involved as pragmaticalization, by which an element loses its conceptual meaning and increases its potential for conversational implicatures and attitudinal meaning (referred to as *pragmatic strengthening*).

Our analysis is also able to explain why Flemish *en* has not suffered the fate of its West Germanic cognates. In English and High German, the old preverbal marker disappeared soon after the language entered stage II of Jespersen’s Cycle, that is, the stage in which negation is expressed by a bipartite form. Jäger (2008:324) even argues that High German did not have a separate stage II, reaching stage III as early as 1300, and also Wallage’s (2005:195, 2008:645) English data show a rather rapid transition between 1350 and 1420. Breitbarth (2009) has argued that in all West Germanic languages, the old preverbal marker is reanalysed as the spell-out on the finite verb of the feature ([+affective]) of a CP-related polarity head at the moment the new postverbal element (En. *not*, Du. *niet* etc.) becomes the neutral expression of sentential negation. But only in those West Germanic dialects in which the new affective marker was able to spread to non-negative affective contexts was there a (temporarily) stable stage II of Jespersen’s cycle. Middle High German and Middle English, where the old particle largely remained restricted to negative clauses, had no stable stage II.¹³ On the other hand, the preverbal marker did survive

¹³For English, cf. also Iyeiri (2001:176).

for a little longer in (Middle) Dutch and Middle Low German, where such non-negative affective contexts were diachronically more stable, indicating to language acquirers that *en* was in fact an affective marker, not just a remnant of Jespersen's cycle in negative clauses. (19) illustrates one of the non-negative affective uses of *en* in Middle Dutch: the standard of comparison is an affective context (cf. the use of weak NPIs in English, *more than ever/#always*), not a negative one, yet *en* is found on its own in the *dan*-clause:¹⁴

(19) *Middle Dutch*

Ghien moget niet vorder rechten dan u manne **en** wijsen
 you.EN can NEG further judge than your men EN tell
 'You cannot judge more than your men tell you.'
 (Beheydt, 1998:16)

Eventually, however, the former preverbal negator was lost in all West Germanic languages – apart from the Flemish dialects. Arguably, after *en* spread to a number of non-negative affective contexts there as well, which created an initial stabilizing factor for its preservation, the eventual loss of any conceptual meaning (negation/polarity) and the retention of the procedural meaning described above has made *en* immune to the loss that applied to its cognates.

4.3 Further developments

The analysis according to which *en* has developed as a discourse marker with the described properties is furthermore able to account for the previously more or less mysterious fact observed in the literature (Neuckermans, 2008) that *en* is also occasionally found on its own in non-negative non-affective clauses.¹⁵ In (20) we provide one example from our West Flemish sample corpus, where *en* expresses conflict with an expectation salient in discourse in a non-negative clause:¹⁶

- (20) a. Me kwamen doa toe. K'**en** zoagen't al...
 We came there on I=EN saw=it already
 'We arrived there and I immediately saw it...'
 (Dialect of Lapscheure, MJL, 5.12.2008)
- b. Wachte, wachte, wachte... K'**en** zyn ier, wè.
 Wait wait wait I=EN am here WÈ
 'Wait, wait, wait – I'm coming!'
 (Dialect of Heist, MV 16.08.2009)

(20a) is uttered in relation to the weekly visit by the speaker to her sister in a care home. On arrival on the particular visit referred to, the speaker is disappointed because her sister is sitting in the common lounge watching TV, not in her room, as the speaker had expected on the basis of previous experiences. So, the speaker sees something that conflicts with her expectations. In (20b), the addressee finds herself in front of a closed door though she had expected that the speaker

¹⁴The examples quoted in footnote 3 may be remnants of this historical availability in non-negative affective contexts, although the expressive function as a discourse marker plays a role as well.

¹⁵We would like to stress that such instances are extremely rare and that many speakers would judge using *en* in such contexts as ungrammatical.

¹⁶Cf. also Neuckermans (2008) for similar examples.

would have opened it by then, and the speaker's utterance signals that contrary to what the closed door may suggest ('I am not coming'), she is on her way ('I am here'). Similar examples have been noted by Neuckermans (2008), all of them in embedded clauses:

- (21) Ik dacht da=ge op café **en** zat
 I thought that=you on café EN sat
 'I thought you were in the café' (Neuckermans, 2008:176)

Neuckermans (2008:177) points out that such cases are restricted to dialects which no longer systematically use *en* together with sentential negation and hypothesizes that such examples constitute a further diachronic development. Under our proposal, we would say that *en* has lost the property of being an NPI in these varieties, and is now merely a bound morpheme on the finite verb that has retained only the procedural meaning described above, highlighting a contrast to an explicit or implicit expectation on the side of a discourse participant.

5 Conclusion

We have argued in the present paper that the Flemish particle *en* has hitherto been misanalysed, mostly as a marker of negation or polarity, and proposed an alternative analysis taking into account *en*'s distributional and interpretive properties. We have argued that *en* has become dissociated from the expression of sentential negation as such. *En* has turned into an NPI discourse marker with only procedural rather than conceptual meaning, and triggers a contextual effect of contradicting and eliminating salient assumptions or expectations by discourse participants. Additional emotional overtones are contextually derived. Syntactically, *en* is a historical remnant, a bound morpheme adjoining to a finite verb. It is a strong NPI, and is thus restricted to negative contexts. Once expressing negation/polarity itself, it is now devoid of any conceptual meaning and encodes procedural meaning only.

Under the proposed analysis, the diachronic development of *en* is also explained: after losing its syntactic independence, the original negator eventually lost its conceptual meaning, making it an extreme case of grammaticalization. Ironically, this turns around one of the oft-cited aphorisms of grammaticalization theory: Faarlund's (1989:71) assertion that "Today's syntax may be the product of yesterday's discourse pragmatics" – based on Givón's (1971:413) slogan "Today's morphology is yesterday's syntax": in case of *en*, yesterday's syntax happens to have turned today's pragmatics.

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