The correct particle: testing the semantics of the Dutch corrective particles *toch* and *wel* and the cluster *toch wel*

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In this talk we discuss the results of an experiment which was designed to test the difference in semantics between the Dutch corrective particles *toch* and *wel.* Hogeweg at al. (2011) hypothesized that the difference between the two particles, which can both be used to correct a previous statement, is that *wel* responds to a proposition which is still under discussion while *toch* responds to a proposition that was already part of the common ground. Hogeweg et al. (2011) analyzed these different uses by means of Farkas & Bruce's (2009) model of discourse representation which, in addition to the common ground, includes an element called the Table, which represents the propositions in the discourse that are at issue. In the experiment, subjects had to read contexts that consisted either of a disagreement between two speakers (representing a correction of a proposition on the Table) or a reconsideration of old information (representing a correction of a proposition in the Common Ground). The context ended with a pair of sentences which were similar except that one contained the particle *wel* and the other contained the particle *toch.* Subjects had to indicate their preference for one of the sentences on a scale from one to five. (1) exemplifies a contexts representing a correction of the Common Ground.

(1) Je organiseert een huiswarming. Je hoorde net van je huisgenoot dat Janneke niet kan komen. Als het feest al begonnen is, komt dezelfde huisgenoot naar je toe en ze zegt:

'You organize a house warming. You've just heard from your housemate that Janneke can't come. When the party has begun, the same housemate comes to you and says:'

1 2 3 4 5

Janneke komt wel.	Janneke komt toch.
'Janneke comes WEL.'	'Janneke comes after TOCH.'

In addition, we tested in what contexts the combination of the two particles *toch wel* occurs. While the two particles often occur together, this cluster is not addressed in Hogeweg et al. (2011).

The results show that it is indeed the case that *toch* is preferred for corrections of the Common Ground and *wel* for corrections of the Table, although the latter preference is less pronounced. The combination *toch wel* scores higher as a correction of the Common Ground than as a correction of the Table. Still, subjects generally preferred the use of the single particle *toch* over the combination *toch wel* in corrections of the Common Ground. The precise conditions of use for the cluster *toch wel* require more investigation.

With this talk we would like to contribute to two goals of the workshop. First, we would like to argue that comparing discourse particles within one language provides more insight into the structure of the common ground and our representation of the discourse in more general than studying individual particles. The functions of particles are often elusive and subtle. By contrasting the contexts in which two very similar particles can occur, we can identify the subtle differences between properties of those contexts, and as such about the nature of our representation of our

discourse. The fact that *wel* and *toch* indeed seem to be specialized for correcting information on Table or in the Common Ground strengthens the argument for the existence of the two components. Further research on the use of the cluster *toch wel* could identify other relevant properties of the discourse, perhaps reflecting additional components. The second is goal more methodological by nature. We would like to discuss whether experiments like the one discussed are indeed a good way to test the hypothesized semantics of discourse particles.

References

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