

# The Swedish modal particle *väl* in a contrastive perspective<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The article analyses the Swedish modal particle *väl* by studying how its meanings are reflected in translational correspondences into English and French. The translations will be the input for discussing the type of lexical semantics needed to account for the multifunctionality of *väl*. They raise questions about whether *väl* has a unitary meaning or if it has several meanings (polysemy) and how meanings should be related to the context.

## 1 Introduction

Modal particles are small words which are typically unstressed and uninflected. They have scope over the clause in which they occur and are restricted to a position in the so-called ‘middle field’ after the finite verb. Semantically they function at the speech act level and ‘generally speaking, express pragmatic meanings related to the attitude or the knowledge of speaker and hearer as regards the utterance where they appear’ (Cuenca 2013: 195). They are found mainly in the Germanic languages such as German and Swedish. However this does not mean that their meaning cannot be rendered also in languages which do not have modal particles, such as English.

The aim of the present study is to analyse the Swedish modal particle *väl* by studying how its meanings are reflected in its translations into English and French. *Väl* conveys that the speaker ‘tentatively supposes something’ and can be paraphrased by *I guess that* or *I suppose that*. However, depending on the situational context it can acquire different meanings. By using a bidirectional translation corpus (such as the English-Swedish Parallel Corpus)<sup>2</sup> we can get a rich description of the functions of *väl* in concrete situations as interpreted by the translator. The translations will be the input for discussing the type of lexical

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<sup>2</sup> For a description of the English-Swedish Parallel Corpus, see Altenberg and Aijmer (2000) and Altenberg et al. (2001).

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semantics needed to account for the multifunctionality of *väl*. They raise questions about whether *väl* has a unitary meaning or if it has several meanings (polysemy) and how meanings should be related to the context. Translations into more than one language can reveal additional meanings or uses and provide evidence for meanings which are found in the translations in one language only. I will therefore compare English and French translations.

I will first discuss previous work on *väl*. This will be followed by an analysis of the functions of *väl* as reflected in its translations into and out of English. The data from the English translation will then be compared with the French translations. In the concluding discussion the results from the contrastive study and the implications for the semantic representation of *väl* will be discussed.

## 2 Previous work

The uses of *väl* have been discussed in the Swedish Reference Grammar (Teleman et al. 1999: 115). According to Teleman et al., *väl* is a modal sentence adverbial expressing a high degree of likelihood. Teleman et al. also mention the use of *väl* as a careful question or appeal to the listener to agree. In speech acts expressing evaluation *väl* signals for example that the speaker aligns herself with the evaluation and appeals to the hearer for consensus. The meaning of consensus can be strong and conventionalized for example when *väl* is used in declarative sentences with the function of a suggestion or advice.

*Väl* (and other modal particles) have also been discussed on the basis of their uses in actual speech situations by Eriksson (1988). According to Eriksson (1988: 98) '*väl* expresses conventionally that the speaker does not know if the sentence is true but considers it to be likely and therefore asks the hearer to agree' (my translation from Swedish). Eriksson compares the modal particles in interviews and focus group discussions and finds differences in their function depending on the speech situation. In interviews *väl* was used to express the speaker's reservation about the truth of what is said and signals 'low involvement, inexactness and mitigation of evaluation' (Eriksson 1988: 100; my translation from Swedish). In the discussion data the sentences containing *väl* were either evaluations where the speaker wants the hearer to agree or assertions where *väl* indicated the presence of an objection. *Väl* is also used in

combinations such as *kan väl* (can 'väl') which are equivalent to an imperative. By means of *väl* the speaker signals that the speech act should be understood as an appeal and not as a command.

Aijmer (1996) describes the semantics of the Swedish modal particles *nog* ('probably'), *visst* ('certainly'), *ju* ('as you know') and *väl* along several dimensions and examines their translations into English on the basis of a corpus including some texts which are now part of the English-Swedish Parallel Corpus.<sup>3</sup> Several of the translations were shared by all the modal particles suggesting that they have closely related meanings. Aijmer emphasised that *väl* for example expresses both modality (attitude to the proposition), evidentiality and an appeal to the person who has the best knowledge. She also mentioned the interpersonal function of *väl* (associated with hedging and politeness). The overview of previous work will serve as the background for the cross-linguistic investigation of the functions of *väl*. To what extent do the translations confirm the functions of *väl* found in the reference literature? Can the method help us to discover functions which are not found in a monolingual corpus? What can the methodology contribute to our knowledge of contextual factors determining how *väl* is used and to its semantic representation?

### 3 English correspondences of väl

We can assume that translations are interesting for the semantic description of lexical items:

For one thing, translations take place on a very large scale and bring a desirable multi-lingual perspective into the study of lexical semantics, which traditionally is heavily monolingual in its scope. For another, the activity of translation is one of the very few cases where speakers evaluate meanings without doing so as part of some kind of metalinguistic, philosophical or theoretical reflection, but as a kind of normal linguistic activity. (Dyvik 1998:51)

Translations bring in a new perspective. If *väl* is translated in a particular way, *väl* and the translation share one or several semantic features. The English correspondences of *väl* in the English-Swedish Parallel corpus (ESPC) indicate that *väl* (like other modal particles) does not have a

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<sup>3</sup> See also Aijmer (1977) on *ju* and *väl*. However this article is not contrastive.

fixed meaning but a semantic potential. Table 2a shows the English correspondences of *väl* in two different translation directions: Swedish originals and their English translations (SO > ET) and Swedish translations with their English sources (ST < EO).

Table 3a: English translations and sources of *väl* in the ESPC

	SO > ET	ST < EO	Total
tag question (or 'don't you think')	20	11	31
must	19	3	22
probably	19	2	21
I suppose	11	6	17
surely	7	12	19
interrogative sentence	7	8	15
will	4	6	10
I guess	4	4	8
I think (I don't think)	2	4	6
really	5	1	6
of course	4	-	4
maybe	2	-	2
I'm sure	2	-	2
couldn't	3	-	3
had better	1	1	2
would	1	1	2
no doubt	1	1	2
non-recurrent correspondences	10	7	17
zero	62	47	109
other (translations involving some restructuring)	5	5	10
Total	189	119	298

The non-recurrent translations in the data were: *scarcely, don't tell me, can, it seemed, simply, most likely, perhaps, it must mean, just*. In sources the following lexical items were represented only once: *I thought, ought to, might, look, presumably, oh, huh*.

We can conclude from the table that *väl* is multifunctional, having 36 different correspondences in English (including the items occurring once). In both translations and sources we find tag questions, *probably, must, I suppose, surely*, interrogative sentences (either affirmative or negative), *will, I guess, I think, really, had better, would, no doubt*. In a large number of cases *väl* was not translated (or did not have an obvious source in English originals; i.e. ‘zero’ correspondences) suggesting that the meaning of *väl* can be more or less desemanticized.

The correspondences are non-congruent or divergent (the modal particle does not correspond to a modal particle in the translation) (Johansson 2007: 25). ‘Adverbialization’ (the choice of a modal adverb in the translations; O. Eriksson 2013) is the most frequent translation strategy (after the choice of zero correspondences). The translations also contain ‘modal tags’ (de Haan 2006:38) (*I suppose, I guess*), tag questions, interrogative sentences and modal auxiliaries. See Table 3b which also includes zero examples and ‘other’ categories.

Table 3b: Major syntactic categories corresponding to *väl* in the ESPC

<b>English correspondences of <i>väl</i></b>	Translations	Sources	Total
zero	62	47	109
(modal) adverb ( <i>probably, surely, of course, really, maybe, no doubt</i> )	35	13	48
tag question (or interrogative sentence)	27	19	46
modal auxiliary ( <i>must, will, couldn't, would, had better</i> )	25	13	38
modal tag ( <i>I think, I suppose, I guess, I'm sure</i> )	20	10	30
non-recurrent categories	10	13	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>294</b>

Translations are the raw material for the semantic description. In order to describe the variability and flexibility of *väl* we also need to distinguish sub-functions.

The classification into sub-functions is based on the meanings of *väl* suggested by previous research. The functions can be either modal or interactive. *Väl* occurs both in declaratives expressing the speaker's certainty (or commitment to what is said) and in questions (interactive functions). The interactive functions include uses where *väl* is used in requests and offers. *Väl* can also be used as an argumentative strategy.

### 3.1 *Väl and modality*

#### 3.1.1 *Väl with the meaning of probability*

Teleman et al. (1999, IV: 116) classify *väl* together with (other) adverbs signalling a high degree of certainty. This meaning was confirmed by the translations with *probably*. *Probably* expresses that the speaker is 'almost certain' that something is the case (probability):

- (1) Det är väl så man gör. (KE1)<sup>4</sup>

That's probably what you do. (KE1T)

*No doubt* and *probably* are similar in meaning (high likelihood).

- (2) Jag är fotograf. Jag tänkte att jag skulle plåta den där tjejen som är med och då är det bra med en intressant bakgrund. Det är ganska igenvuxet där, skyndade sig skomakaren att säga. Ni har väl en yxa liggande, sa Pettersson. (SC1)

I'm a photographer. I thought of photographing the woman I've got with me and it might make an interesting background. "It's fairly overgrown," the shoemaker said quickly. "No doubt you've got an axe lying around," said Pettersson. (SC1T)

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<sup>4</sup> The Swedish version is placed first in the following examples both as an original and when it is a translation from an English source text.

The speaker (the photographer Pettersson) wants to take a picture of a girl against the background of an ancient monument. It is highly likely that the shoemaker has an axe and can remove the vegetation.

### 3.1.2 *Väl* expressing a tentative statement (the hedging *väl*)

When *väl* was translated by a modal tag (a clause such as *I think*, *I suppose* or *I guess*) its function is only tentative. The speaker expresses some reservation about the truth of what is said while conveying the possibility that it is true.

(3) Det är väl sant att jag ingenting förstår. (PE1)

I suppose it is true that I understand nothing. (PE1T)

In (4) the speaker expresses a low degree of commitment or involvement as shown by the translation with *I guess*:

(4) “Jag har haft så mycket att göra att jag väl helt enkelt har glömt bort det. (GN1T)

“I’ve been so busy, I guess I haven’t noticed. (GN1)

*Väl* can here be regarded as a polite ‘hedge’ with the function to express low involvement, and mitigation. The translations *maybe*, *perhaps* similarly suggest that the speaker makes a less confident statement about what is the case in order not to sound too abrupt.

In example (5) the translator has chosen *simply* to express that *väl* can also come to express distancing:

(5) Kärleken tog väl slut.

Jag tror det är vad som hände — kärleken upphörde — eller den var inte stark nog från början. Jag vet inte.— Det är väl då man måste ta konsekvenserna och skiljas, säger jag.(MS1)

Love has simply come to an end. I think that’s what it was — there was no more love.

Or perhaps it wasn’t strong enough from the start.

I don’t know. (MS1T)

## 3.1.3. Väl with the meaning of epistemic certainty

*Must* was the most frequent modal auxiliary among the English correspondences. It is associated with epistemic certainty and has inference as an additional evidential dimension (cf *seem* with inferential meaning as a translation of *väl*):

- (6) Ljuset föll inte ner i den. Det var däruppe. Han kunde se det. Men det verkade inte härnere. Brunnshålet var för djupt. Någon hade grävt och grävt, i hoppfull förvissning först eftersom rönnklykan hade böjt sig neråt just här, sen i ursinne. Så småningom hade han väl tjurgrävt, vem det nu var. Inte Aldas karl. Det måste vara den som röjt här och byggt stugan. (KE1)

The light did n't reach down here. It was up above. He could see it. But it had no effect down here. The well shaft was too deep. Someone had dug and dug, confidently hopeful at first because the divining rod had turned down just there, then in sheer rage. Eventually, he must have dug on from sheer pigheadedness, whoever it was. Not Alda's husband. It must have been whoever had cleared the forest and built the cottage. (KE1T)

The speaker is convinced that the man did the digging out of pigheadedness. This can be inferred from what he could see. The well shaft was for example too deep.

In (7) the speaker infers that the hearer must have spies since he had discovered him hidden behind a palm tree:

- (7) Jag såg att du var intresserad av mitt morgondopp. Du borde pröva på det själv. Det skulle stärka din hälsa. Det är en gåta för mig hur han kunde upptäcka mig bakom palmen. Han har väl sina rapportörer. (LH1)

“I saw you were interested in my morning swim. You should try it yourself. Do you a power of good. “It’s a mystery to me how he was able to detect me behind that palm tree. He must have his spies. (LH1T)

### 3.2 *Väl* with interactive functions

#### 3.2.1 *Väl* asking the hearer to respond

*Väl* functions as a pragmatic cue turning the declarative sentence into a yes-no question. The clauses in which *väl* occurs can be regarded as ‘careful questions’ or ‘queclaratives’. Queclaratives are declaratives which are intended as questions rather than as declarative statements (Downing 2006: 42; following Geluykens 1987 and Sadock 1974). They can be followed by a question mark but do not have the syntactic form of questions. *Väl* fits into contexts where the speaker does not know whether something is true but thinks that the hearer knows and appeals to the hearer for consensus.

In (8) the queclarative sentence containing *väl* is positive. The translator has used a negative interrogative sentence to render the meaning of *väl*.

(8) (Nog hade hon väl varit lycklig?) (AT1T)

(Hadn't she been happy?) (AT1)

A positive hearer response is expected (‘she had been happy’). The ‘old’ assumption (‘she had not been happy’) is negative but new evidence now suggests that she is happy.

(9) Det blir väl bra? (MG1)

Won't that be all right?" (MG1T)

(10) "Jag kunde väl också behöva tröst", sade Macon. (AT1T)

"Shouldn't I need comfort too?" Macon asked. (AT1)

The expected response is positive (you will need comfort).

*Väl* could also be translated as a (negated) tag question asking the hearer to agree with the content in the (positive) host sentence.

(11) Men han var väl gammal. (GT1)

But he was old, was n't he?" (GT1T)

The speaker is not sure whether what is said is true and therefore asks the hearer to confirm the claim.

Similarly, example (12) contains a negative tag question after the positive host sentence. A positive response is expected ('There is an explanation why Johan cannot have told on Torsten'):

- (12) Dom rör inte ett hår på grabbens huvud när hon ser det. Så du begriper att Johan kan få det besvärligt om dom får för sig att han skvallrat på Torsten. — Det kan man väl förklara. Han visste ju inte att vi var här. (KE1)

They dare not touch a hair on the boy's head when she's looking. So you see Johan may have trouble if they start thinking he's told on Torsten."

"That can be explained, can't it? He didn't know we were here." (KE1T)

In (13) *väl* has been translated by an interrogative tag sentence with *think*.

- (13) Det låter väl spännande? (HM1)

"That sounds exciting, don't you think?" (HM1T)

*Väl* is concerned with stance (attitudes and emotions). The speaker invites the hearer to align herself with a particular emotion ('something is exciting'). However opposition (disalignment with the hearer or what is said) seems to be more frequent than alignment when *väl* is used as is apparent from its other translations.

### 3.2.2 *Väl* implying resistance

When the declarative sentence containing *väl* is negated it implies some resistance from the hearer. A question form (an affirmative interrogative sentence) has been used in the translation in the next example:

- (14) Du tror väl inte att du är klokare än Trevithick?  
Du lever blott hundratrettiosex år senare.  
Den unge vet alltid mer än den äldre, sade han. (JMY1)

"Do you think you are smarter than Trevithick?  
You are only living 136 years later!

The young always know more than the old,” he said. (JMY1T)

In such a sentence a negative interrogative sentence could not have been used in the translation (*don't you think...*). The sentence contains a challenge (*you should not think you are smarter than T*).

In (15) *väl* in the negated declarative has been translated with *really*:

- (15) Med glada tjut kom hon farande ut mellan ett par täta granar, och där rände hon rakt på Birk. Då sköt ilskan upp i henne igen. Inte ens i skogen fick man nu vara i fred!  
“Se dej för, rövardotter”, sa Birk.  
“Så bråttom har du väl inte?” (AL1)

Shouting with joy, she came shooting out between a couple of close-growing firs and ran straight into Birk. Then rage welled up in her again. She could no longer have any peace even in the forest!

“Look where you’re going, robber’s daughter,” said Birk.  
“Are you really in that much of a hurry?” (AL1T)

The implication is that should not be in such a hurry). By means of *really* the speaker can also express surprise or annoyance directed at the hearer. Ronia had hoped to be at peace in the woods when she ran into Birk. Another English correspondence of *väl* implying resistance is *surely*. *Surely* like *must* is a marker of evidentiality (inferencing). However, it has a different function from *must* since it is argumentative (it takes a stance towards contrary assumptions). In (16) a young local farmer helps Eriksson to mow the hay. The expected answer to the question (why does he go on mowing) is negative. ‘He wouldn’t go on if it wasn’t worthwhile’.

- (16) Men varför håller han på, sa främlingens vän.  
Han skulle väl inte hålla på om det inte lönade sig.  
Det är svårt att svara på, sa Eriksson. (SC1)

“Who mows your hay?” asked the stranger’s friend.  
“Surely he wouldn’t go on with it if it wasn’t worthwhile?”  
“That’s difficult to answer,” said Eriksson. (SC1T)

*Surely* has several meanings simultaneously. It marks certainty, ‘contrary assumptions’, the source of information (inference or perceptual evidence) and an appeal to the hearer to answer. Because of its argumentative function *surely* can also acquire a deontic bias (‘you ought to know this’) (cf. Downing 2006: 44).

*But surely* makes reference to contradictory assumptions as is also indicated by *but*. A woman has been found dead and is believed to have committed suicide. The speaker judges that the hearer should have been worried by the barbiturate in the whisky glass. In addition *surely* can express a negative attitude if it is clear that the hearer is involved and does not do what he should do:

(17) “Att jag tog miste i förra veckan.”

“Men sömnmedlet i whiskyglaset borde väl oroa er?”

“Mathilda avskydde att svälja tabletter hela”, sade hon i förklarande ton. (MW1T)

“That I was wrong last week.”

“But surely the barbiturates in the whisky glass trouble you?”

“Mathilda hated swallowing anything whole,” he said apologetically. (MW1)

The attitude expressed by *väl* is quite different if the subject is the first person:

(18) Efteråt låg jag länge på undersökningsbritten och såg rakt upp i taket och en sköterska böjde sig över mig och frågade om jag mätte bra.

Och jag nickade. Jo. Det borde jag väl göra. (PE1)

Afterwards I stayed for a long time on the examination couch, looking straight up at the ceiling and a nurse bent over me and asked me if I was all right.

And I nodded. Yes. I dare say I was. (PE1T)

*I dare say* (expressing uncertainty rather than certainty) suggests that the speaker is contemplating (taking up a position towards) possible reasons why he should not be all right.

### 3.3 Vål interacting with speech acts

Declaratives with *kan vål* often correspond to an English imperative in the translation. *Vål* is mitigating and appealing. In (19) the translator has used the emphatic imperative *do*:

- (19) Men Natalie stirrade bara ut genom en dimmig ruta som varken vindrutetorkare eller defroster på maxfart kunde rå på.  
"Ni kan vål vara tysta, barn", bad hon utan att egentligen höra ett ord av vad de sa. (FW1T)

But Natalie just said, peering through a misty windscreen, which neither wipers nor demister at full blast would clear:  
"Do be quiet, children," without actually hearing a word they were saying. (FW1)

In (20) *please* has the similar function to signal that the imperative should be taken as a polite request expressing appeal:

- (20) "Ni kan vål tala med Victor om saken är ni snäll. (JC1T)  
"Please let old Victor know our troubles. (JC1)

In (21) *huh* (functioning as an appealing tag question) is used with the imperative to translate a Swedish declarative with *vål*:

- (21) Under det, med mindre bokstäver: Du kan vål hjälpa till? (SK1T)  
Beneath that, smaller type: Give Us a Hand, Huh? (SK1)

In (22) the English text uses an imperative followed by a polite tag question ('will you'), corresponding to a declarative with (*kan*) *vål*:

- (22) Om kriminalarna i Norfolk lägger vantarna på Visslaren, kan du vål ta dig en titt på honom åt mig och kolla så att han inte också är vår kille i Battersea?" (PDJ1T)  
If the Norfolk CID do lay their hands on the Whistler, take a look at him for me, will you, check he isn't our chap in Battersea." (PDJ1)

*Aren't you going to* renders a polite offer made by *kan väl* (no imposition is involved):

(23) Morsan, som gått ut och fixat i köket, sa att du kan väl ha en nattmacka tillsammans med Krister, innan du smiter av. (PP1)

Mum, who'd been out doing things in the kitchen, said, Aren't you going to have a sandwich with Christopher before you go home? (PP1T)

In (24), neither Swedish nor English uses an imperative. The Swedish original ('you can't 'väl' manage to') is translated not by an imperative but by a declarative containing *couldn't* with the illocutionary force of a (polite) request:

(24) Du rår väl inte med att ta in vattne. (KE2)

"You couldn't manage to bring in some water...?" (KE2T)

The subject is also important for how *väl* is interpreted. In examples (24) and (25) 'kan väl' with the inclusive *vi* ('we') as the subject is used with the function to 'invite collaboration in a joint action' (*why don't we*) (see Downing 2006: 52).

(25) "Vi kan väl gå och se efter allihop tillsammans?" sa han. (RD1T)

"Why don't we all go and look together?" he said. (RD1)

(26) Och vad beträffar alla dom där sladdertackorna uppe i backen, som skulle kunna springa till honom med en massa fula lögner — så kan vi väl ta bakvägen bort till fältet. (GN1T)

And as for them foul-minded old crows up on the hill who might run back to him with a pack of lies — why don't we just take the back road to the cane field? (GN1)

One example contained *får väl* (Swedish *får* = 'may', 'be allowed to', 'must'). The translator has used 'you'd better' to change the command into a reluctant admission.

(27) ”Den här dimman skrämmer mej lite”, sa han.

”Jaså, är du rädd att du inte hittar hem till ditt tjuvanäste? Du får väl dela lya med rävarna då, du tycker ju om att dela!” (AL1)

This mist scares me a little,” he said.

“I see — you’re frightened of not getting home to your thieving people? Then you’d better share the foxes’ lair with them, since you’re so fond of sharing!” (AL1T)

### 3.4 Zero correspondences

Zero correspondences were frequent. In 34.6 % of the examples *väl* had no correspondence in the English translations. In the sources the percentage was even higher (40.9%). In other words, there was no correspondence of *väl* in the English originals. The examples of non-translation are interesting because they suggest that *väl* can lose its meaning in some contexts.

Modal particles frequently occur with other modal expressions. According to Nuyts (2001: 257), ‘a quite prominent feature of the particles is that they show a strong tendency to co-occur with other epistemic expression types’. It is also suggested that they appear as ‘supportive’ only rather than as an ‘independent epistemic expression type’ (Nuyts, *ibidem*). As a result a modal expression is not needed for idiomatic reasons in the English translation but is sufficiently expressed by the modal auxiliary. This is an example of a context in which the particle may lose its meaning, illustrated in (28) and (29), where *väl* has disappeared in the translation.

(28) Men han måste väl veta om det är han?

— Du får väl fråga honom om du är så intresserad. (GT1)

“But he must know if it’s him?”

”You can ask him if you’re so interested.” (GT1T)

(29) Snart måste väl förklaringen komma. (BL1)

The explanation must come soon. (BL1T)

In (30) *väl* has been added in the translation from English into Swedish. An important reason for adding *väl* is politeness. *Väl* functions as a hedge or a softener when the speaker uses *must*.

(30) Jag menar, jag måste väl ha inbillat mig det. (RR1T)

I mean, I must have imagined that. (RR1)

Also included in this category are examples where the modal particle co-occurs with other ‘harmonizing’ modal elements in the same sentence. In (31) the translator has used *probably* as a translation of *antagligen* (‘probably’) ... *väl*:

(31) Antagligen är jag väl efterlyst vid det här laget. (MS1)

I’m probably already officially listed as a missing person. (MS1T)

The translator could have translated both *antagligen* (lit. ‘probably’) and *väl* (e.g. *I suppose*) but is sensitive to how modal concord is expressed in the target language and in many cases chooses a single modal expression. In (32) the English source contains a tag question and the Swedish translation a modal combination (*väl* and a tag question):

(32) För det var väl det du menade, eller hur?” (GN1T)

That’s what you meant, wasn’t it?” (GN1)

In (33) the Swedish translation contains a complex modal cluster. *Surely* corresponds to *nog ändå* and *måste väl* to *didn’t they* in the English original:

(33) Ett våldsamt åskväder hade skingrat dem innan hon kom hem, men hon såg de slängda plakaten från fönstret i sin limousin.  
GUD FÖRBANNE ERS KUNGLIG HÖGHET!  
Ett misstag, tänkte hon, nog måste de väl ändå ha *menat* “Gud välsigne...”?  
På kvällen samma dag märkte hon att tjänstefolket var surmulet och samarbetsovilligt. (ST1T)

A violent thunderstorm had dispersed them before she returned, but she saw the discarded placards from the window of her limousine.

“GOD DAMN YOU MA’AM”

An error, she thought, surely they meant “God Bless”, didn’t they?

That evening, she noticed that her staff were surly and uncooperative. (ST1)

The translations give evidence of a large number of functions that *väl* can have. Table 3c below summarises some of the information from the translations:

Table 3c. Types of meaning illustrated by the translations of *väl*

Modality (commitment to the truth of what is said)	Signalling a high degree of likelihood	Probably, no doubt
	Expressing reservation ‘the hedging <i>väl</i> ’	I think, I suppose; perhaps, maybe
	Expressing inference and certainty	Must, seem
Interactive modality	Asking for the hearer’s opinion	Don’t you think
	Asking for the hearer’s positive response	Negative interrogatives Tag questions
	Adversative, challenging, threatening, critical, reproachful	Surely
Speech act modality	Polite imperatives, reluctant admission	Do+imperative, please, why don’t you, aren’t you going to

#### 4. Comparing data from French

The Swedish-English correspondences can be compared with the French correspondences of *väl* taken from *Corpus Parallèle Suédois-Français* (CPSF) (Ramnäs 2008).<sup>5</sup> The texts are parallel in both translation directions as in the ESPC. However the texts represent whole books (rather than text samples). A sample of 200 examples was used from the Swedish original texts. All the examples from the French sources were used (169 examples).

To judge from the correspondences of *väl* in the CPSF (shown in Table 4a) the French data support many of the observations about the functions of *väl* made on the basis of the English-Swedish Parallel Corpus.

Table 4a: Translations and sources of *väl* in the CPSF

French correspondences	SO > FT	ST < FO	Total
bien	11	19	30
devoir	13	11	24
negative interrogative sentence (ne voyait-elle pas, ne désiraient-ils pas, ne pouvaient-ils)	3	20	23
sans doute	14	2	16
pourtant (tu suis pourtant, il fallait pourtant, devoir pourtant)	9	4	13
imperative (crois-moi, ne me dis pas, voyons, espérons )	3	9	12
n'est-ce pas	6	-	6
il faut	3	3	6
hein	5	-	5
quand meme*	4	1	5
negative declarative (tu n'ignores pas, tu ne trouves pas, tu n'imagines tout de meme pas)	4	1	5
peut-être	4	1	5
non (as tag question)	-	5	5
je pense que	4	-	4
sûrement	3	-	3
je crois	2	1	3
tout de même	2	1	3

<sup>5</sup>I am grateful to Mårten Ramnäs for granting me access to the French corpus.

added pronoun (moi, vous)	-	3	3
vouloir que	-	3	3
pas vrai	2	-	2
parfaitement	2	-	2
je suppose que	2	-	2
conditional (serait)	1	1	2
même (que)	1	1	2
Non-recurrent correspondences	11	3	14
zero	77	69	146
Other (restructured)	14	11	25
Total	200	165	365

\* including *mais il faut quand même*

There is a wide range of correspondences (34 correspondences including non-translations). The following correspondences were found only once:

Translations:

*vraiment, il faut croire, eh bien alors, d'ailleurs, certes, certainement, elle se dit que, à vrai dire, et puis, estimant que, avoir l'impression que*

Sources:

future tense (*sera*), *tu crois que, il m'est arrivé*)

13 of the correspondences are shared (in particular *sans doute, devoir, bien, pourtant*). The number of zero-correspondences is roughly the same as in the English translations (38.5). In the source texts it was slightly higher (41.8%).

Similar grammatical means are used in the two languages (see Table 4b). However a difference with English is that French has a 'congruent' modal particle *bien* placed after the final verb in French. The non-congruent correspondences are adverbs, modal auxiliaries, connectives, clauses. The imperative was also used as a correspondence of *väl* (in particular as a translation of *kan väl*).

Table 4b: Major categories corresponding to *väl* in the CPSF

	Translations	Sources	Total
zero	77	69	146
modal particle <i>bien</i>	11	19	30
modal auxiliary ( <i>devoir, il faut</i> )	16	14	30
adverb ( <i>sans doute, peut-être, sûrement, vraiment</i> )	26	3	29
negative interrogative sentences ( <i>ne voyait-elle pas, ne pouvaient-ils pas</i> )	3	20	23
connective ( <i>quand même, tout de même, pourtant</i> )	15	6	21
tag question ( <i>n'est-ce pas, hein, non, pas vrai</i> )	13	5	18
imperatives ( <i>crois-moi, espérons</i> )	3	9	12
modal tag ( <i>je suppose que, je crois que, je pense que</i> )	8	1	9
negative queclaratives ( <i>tu n'ignores pas, tu ne trouves pas, tu n'imagines pas</i> )	4	1	5
other constructions	24	18	42

There are several differences from the English correspondences. As mentioned, French uses the modal particle *bien* with no correspondence in English. Connectives with adversative meaning were not found in the English translations. Negative interrogative sentences were frequent in both French and Swedish but negative 'queclaratives' were only found in the French translations. Finally, the number of zero expressions is somewhat greater in the French translations than in the English translations. The French correspondences thus confirm that *väl* is both a marker of modality and a question marker.

#### 4.1 *Väl* as a marker of modality

*Bien* was a frequent translation. *Le Petit Robert* (1984) defines the meaning of *bien* as 'réellement', 'véritablement', 'vraiment', 'tout à fait',

all of which express certainty and emphasis. Consider the following example:

(34) Du ser väl att vi är mitt i skogen (Queffelec ST)

Tu vois bien que nous sommes en pleine forêt. (Queffelec FO)

*Bien* after a verb of perception expresses certainty rather than doubt. In (35) *bien* modifies *je le pense*. The sentence expresses more certainty than the same sentence without *bien*. Correspondences of the emphatic use of *väl* were not found in the English data:

(35) “De framhåller baron Philipot som ett exempel för mig”, sade hon, “därför att han har tagit deras äldsta flicka utan en sou.  
Det kan jag väl tro. (Mauriac ST)

‘Ils me donnent en exemple le baron Philipot, disait-elle, qui a pris l’aînée sans un sou.  
Je le pense bien! (Mauriac FO)

The most frequent adverb indicating certainty was *sans doute*. *Sans doute* is similar to ‘probably’ and expresses a high degree of certainty:

(36) Faran var väl inte så stor. (Bergman SO)

Il n’y avait sans doute pas grand danger dans ce domaine.  
(Bergman FT)

The modal tag *je crois* expresses weaker modal meaning (cf. English *I think, I guess*):

(37) Er salig far dog inte han 1916, var det väl? (Magnan ST)

Votre pauvre père Il est mort en 16, je crois? (Magnan FO)

*Je crois* expresses the speaker’s reservation to the truth of the sentence and has a hedging function.

The translations can spell out a meaning which is not apparent on the basis of a single language. In (38) the meaning is concessive. The speaker went shopping once or twice but it was usually his wife who

went. The implication associated with the translation ‘il m’est arrivé de’ (corresponding to *någon gång* ‘some time’) is that the speaker is little involved.

(38) Jag gick väl in och handlade någon gång, men det var oftast min fru som... (Simenon ST)

Il m’est arrivé d’y entrer pour un achat, mais c’était le plus souvent ma femme qui... (Simenon FO)

The modal auxiliary *devoir* corresponds to *väl* (and *must* in English). It represents something as inferred by the speaker:

(39) Du var väl fjorton år då. (Simenon ST)

Tu devais avoir quatorze ans. (Simenon FO)

#### 4.2. Väl with the function of interactive modality

We also find evidence for the ‘question’ function of *väl*. Several types of tag questions (*hein, n’est-ce pas, non*) are represented in the French material. However, tag questions are not as frequent as in the English material:

(40) Du kan väl int’ tala engelskan heller? (Moberg SO)

Mais tu ne sais pas parler anglais, hein? (Moberg FT)

(41) Så är väl alla karlar (Simenon ST)

Tous les hommes sont comme ça, non? (Simenon FO)

The tag question invites a positive response from the hearer.

In (42) and (43) *väl* corresponds to a negative-interrogative question also biased towards consent from the hearer:

(42) Och hon såg väl hur glad han var åt barnen, som hon hade fött honom förut. (Moberg SO)

Ne voyait-elle pas combien il était heureux de ceux qu’elle lui avait déjà donnés? (Moberg FT)

(43) Ni har väl förhört honom? (Simenon ST)

Ne l'avez-vous pas questionné? (Simenon FO)

An utterance with *väl* can also be rendered by a negative declarative sentence intended as a question (as marked by the question mark) and biased towards a positive response (a negative declarative). These correspondences were not found in the English data but do not seem impossible to use:

(44) Men ni visste väl ändå hur det låg till? (Simenon ST)

Vous n'en étiez pas moins au courant de la situation? (Simenon FO)

In (45) the mistress didn't tell the hearer about the marriage settlement although this would be expected. The translation makes clear that a positive response is expected:

(45) Under de elva månader ni umgicks, måste väl er älskarinna ha talat om för er att hon inte hade något äktenskapsförord när hon gifte sig. (Simenon ST)

Votre maîtresse, au cours de vos onze mois de relations, ne vous a pas confié qu'elle était mariée sous le régime de la communauté des biens? (Simenon FO)

A distinction is made in the translation between 'checking what the facts are' and asking for the hearer's opinion or sharing an evaluation. In (46) the translation 'tu ne trouves pas' (English 'don't you think') conveys that the hearer is asked to align himself with the speaker's opinions.

(46) Det är väl roligt? (Myrdal SO)

Tu ne trouves pas ça drôle? (Myrdal FT)

*Väl* can also be rendered as *pourtant*, *quand même*, *tout de même* which can have an adversative quality. However as a translation of *väl* they seem to be used for mitigation rather than for argumentation. In (47)

*pourtant* is used in an affirmative declarative biased towards a positive response ('yes I did').

(47) Du fick väl mina brev. (Simenon ST)

Tu as pourtant reçu mes lettres? (Simenon FO)

### 3 Väl with imperatives

The sentence with *väl* and a second person subject can be translated as imperative where the appealing function is only implicit:

(48) Du tror väl mej, Kal Oska: Hon dog för en stunn sen. (Moberg SO)

Crois-moi, Karl Oskar : elle est morte tout à l'heure. (Moberg FT)

The imperative is also used as a correspondence of *kan väl*. (This is similar to the English translations.)

(49) För resten kan du väl se efter själv. (Green ST)

Et puis, regarde toi-même. (Green FO)

(50) Du kan väl ringa på Françoise och beställa nånting. (Simenon ST)

Sonne donc Françoise et commande à boire... (Simenon FO)

In (51) (*får väl* ('may', 'be allowed to' väl) with the inclusive *vi* ('we') as the subject has been translated as an imperative inviting collaboration (*espérons* 'let us hope'):

(51) Vi får väl hoppas det finns bättre makter, sade Arne. (Sundman SO)

Un meilleur pouvoir, espérons que cela existe, dit Arne. (Sundman FT)

In (52) the translation (*ne pouvions-nous*) indicates that the speaker appeals for reconciliation.

(52) Jag drabbades av ett ögonblicks impuls att gå fram till den stackars mannen och räcka honom handen, vi kan väl försonas nu efter alla dessa år, är vi inte kvitt egentligen, varför skulle vi hata varandra så här långt efter kalabaliken (Bergman SO)

Mon premier mouvement fut d'aller vers ce pauvre homme et de lui tendre la main, après tant d'années, ne pouvions-nous pas nous réconcilier, en fait, nous étions quittes, pourquoi continuer nous haïr si longtemps après notre bagarre? (Bergman FT)

#### 4.4 Summarising French translations of *väl*

There are both similarities and differences between the English and French translations of *väl*. Both languages use modal adverbs, modal tags and tag questions. French, however, has a modal particle *bien* corresponding to *väl* which is used with emphatic function. The French translations confirm that *väl* can also express a high degree of certainty and that it often has a hedging or mitigating function. Moreover it is used in interactive contexts to appeal to the hearer and ask for a positive or negative response as indicated by translations as interrogative sentences or 'queclaratives'. It could also be translated by a connective with adversative meaning. The translations also show that *väl* can be used as a conventional marker of appeal in imperatives. Finally, zero correspondences were frequent in both English and French.

#### 5. Conclusion

The translations give a panoramic picture of how the meanings or functions of *väl* in the concrete communicative situation have been interpreted by the translator. They are compatible with a description of modal particles as flexible and variable in the context.

Moreover the translations can bring out the polysemous nature of *väl*. The English correspondences of *väl* in English highlight semantic aspects or sub-functions of *väl* such as certainty, hedging, asking for a response, appeal, argumentative uses where the speaker pretends to know best. Some of the translations focus on the modal functions of *väl* to

express a high or low degree of certainty while others highlight the function to appeal to the hearer as ‘the best knower’. However uncertainty and invitation to the hearer to answer can also be present in the same example (or certainty and opposition). The semantic description of *väl* must take into account both the speaker’s perspective (how certain the speaker is) and the interactive use (asking the hearer to respond). The core aspects have an important role. *Väl* conventionally expresses a high degree of likelihood but it has developed new interactive uses. We have seen for example that *väl* was frequently translated with a sentence which could be interpreted as a question. Opposition was another frequent function of *väl* in interactive discourse. *Väl* is used by the speaker to take up a stance to contrary assumptions. If the hearer is involved it can acquire a deontic bias (eg you shouldn’t do this). The translations also show that *väl* can express the speaker’s negative attitudes such as reproach or annoyance. *Väl* furthermore interacts with imperatives and can change the command into a polite imperative with an appealing function.

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