The discourse particle well and its equivalents in Swedish and Dutch*

KARIN AIJMER and ANNE-MARIE SIMON-VANDENBERGEN

Abstract

The aim of the article is to make a contribution to the description of the meaning and functions of well by looking at its translations into Swedish and Dutch. In order to study well cross-linguistically we have used electronic translation corpora. Our account of well is based on Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia as it is integrated within the systems of modality and evidentiality (White 1999, 2000). A comparison is made with earlier proposals by Carlson (1984), Bolinger (1989), Jucker (1993), Smith and Jucker (2000), and Schourup (2001). Both in Swedish and in Dutch we found a wide range of translations, testifying to the uses of well as a connective and as an interpersonal marker. We want to claim that these different uses can be explained from the general heteroglossic function that well fulfils. The translations also show that positive appraisal is still part of the meaning of well, though in some cases this meaning aspect is more salient than in others.

1. Introduction

Discourse particles are small words which do not contribute to the propositional content of the utterance which they modify. They are frequent in conversation, where they express the speaker’s attitudes to the addressee, negotiate background assumptions, express emotions and contribute to coherence (for an investigation of the attitudinal functions of discourse particles in different languages see Andersen and Fretheim 2000).

Well is particularly frequent in English conversation¹ and has probably attracted more attention than any other discourse particle in English. It has been studied from many different perspectives (e.g. Lakoff 1973; Halliday and Hasan 1976; Wierzbicka 1976; Svartvik 1980; Carlson 1984; Schiffrin 1987; Watts 1987, 1989; Bolinger 1989; Fraser 1990; Jucker...
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1993; Smith and Jucker 2000, 2002; Schourup 2001). However, the meaning of well is extremely hard to state and there is little agreement about what it means, why it is used and how it should be analyzed.

In this article we want to make a contribution to the description of the meaning and functions of well by looking at its translations into other languages. The analysis will be based on a contrastive study of well and its translations into Swedish and Dutch.

The examination of our translation data suggests that well can be a discourse particle with textual function and that it shares certain properties with concessive and adversative conjunctions. Well can, however, also be an interjection indicating emotions like surprise, reluctance or resignation, and it has a number of polite uses. In some contexts well seems to be consistent with deliberation and hesitation.

In order to study well cross-linguistically we have adopted a functional approach to interpersonal meaning (see White 2000; Martin 2000). In this approach Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of heteroglossia, positioning speakers and texts within the heterogeneity of world views and social interaction, is integrated within the system of modality and evidentiality, in which we also want to situate well. This view is in the spirit of analyses of discourse particles treating well as a marker negotiating common ground (Smith and Jucker 2000). In addition, the framework offers a way in which well can be assigned a unified meaning which is compatible with previous definitions.

In section 2 we shall briefly discuss those positions in the literature which have been most relevant to the present study. In section 3 we propose our own account of well.

2. Previous studies of well

There are several studies which have influenced our own views on well. These treatments can be roughly grouped into two approaches: those which look for a unified meaning of the discourse marker on the one hand (Carlson 1984; Bolinger 1989) and those which are primarily pragmatic or interactional and interested in the functions that well performs as a warning-signal in different discourse contexts on the other hand (Jucker 1993; Smith and Jucker 2000; Smith and Jucker 2002). Schourup’s study (2001) differs from either of these approaches in treating well in relation to interjections.

Carlson (1984) bases his description of the meaning of well on its semantic source, which is the adverb with the meaning of “according to one’s wish” (Oxford English Dictionary). The Oxford English Dictionary
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derives from this origin its description of the discourse particle well as implying that “the speaker accepts a situation” (Carlson 1984: 27). This meaning of “acceptance” is taken up as the core meaning of well by Carlson, because it is considered appealing “on etymological as well as on intuitive grounds” (1984: 28). Carlson then goes on to specify what it means to accept a situation and to describe the interaction of the meaning of well with different dialogue contexts. What is attractive in Carlson’s study is the fact that he posits a unitary meaning which offers a plausible explanation in many contexts, and the fact that he gives a detailed description of the functions of well in different contextual environments. However, the unified meaning approach still leads Carlson to recognize many subtypes, in particular well as frame and as qualifier.

Bolinger (1989), too, rejects the view that well is empty (a view e.g. defended by Schiffrin 1987) and points out that his own treatment is closest to Carlson’s. Like Carlson, Bolinger maintains that the meaning of discourse particle well (or “interjection” in his study) must be sought in its relation to other uses of well. The study of these other uses brings Bolinger to the notion of “norm” or “conformity”: by using well the speaker invokes “some standard” (1989: 321). The content of well in the locutionary sphere (“relatively good, relatively strong”) is transferred to the illocutionary sphere (“matched to a standard or norm”) (Bolinger 1989: 332). The link with Carlson is clear, since “acceptance” implies that one finds something “good”, that is, in conformity with a norm.

Schourup (2001) does not in the first place look for the meaning of well in the adverb, but posits a close link with interjections such as ouch or wow, which express “mental states.” In spite of the dissimilarities with prototypical interjections, well is claimed to be “usefully viewed as a species of gestural interjection” (Schourup 2001: 1046). Schourup puts well at one end of a continuum from interjections “which border on full lexicality” to those which are fully gestural and lexically empty (2001: 1049).

Three studies which look at well from the point of view of what it does in conversation rather than from what it “means” are Jucker (1993), Smith and Jucker (2000) and Smith and Jucker (2002). Jucker (1993) relies on relevance theory to explain the use of well and shows that in many cases well indicates a shift in context, in the sense that the speaker signals that the background assumptions need to be renegotiated in order to establish common ground. In Smith and Jucker (2000) a similar position is taken. Looking at actually, well and in fact, the authors find that they all “introduced repairs to the common ground”(Smith and Jucker 2000: 209). This means that well is used in contexts where speakers feel that there is a discrepancy between propositional attitudes of the
partners in conversation. Hence, well (along with other discourse particles) is used “to facilitate conversation” (Smith and Jucker 2000: 208). The same treatment of well as a facilitator when the common ground needs to be renegotiated is defended in Smith and Jucker (2002), which discusses well in contexts of replies to questions, assessments, invitations, and advice.

Comparing these approaches we find that they are, though proposed within different theoretical models and having different goals, not fundamentally incompatible. Carlson’s and Bolinger’s accounts are appealing because they look for a unified semantic description of well by establishing a link between the discourse particle and its semantic source, the adverb well. This type of approach is interesting from a contrastive perspective, because it allows one to set up comparisons between different languages with regard to which lexical words they have mobilized to fulfil discourse particle functions. If several languages use a cognate of well this cannot be a coincidence. As Schourup (2001: 1038) remarks, however, the relationship between the adverb well and discourse particle well is “far more tenuous” than that between locutionary and illocutionary uses of adverbs such as frankly, confidentially, seriously. This is a comment on Bolinger’s claim but it also applies to Carlson’s analysis The reason is, of course, that well has lost most of its original meaning in its evolution from a lexical adverb to a discourse particle. Schourup’s analysis in fact recognizes this development in putting well at the most lexical end of the continuum of interjections. Our translation data show that in some contexts purely emotive interjections are appropriate equivalents of well, but that other contextual uses of well require an explanation which allows for the existence of more lexical content. Finally, in Jucker’s (1993) and Smith and Jucker’s (2000) accounts in terms of negotiation of common ground, we can explain the contextual uses of well which are apparent in the translations as signals of the need to negotiate background assumptions and preceding discourse.

So where do we stand and what analysis is the best one for the contrastive study of well? On the one hand, a pragmatic account of what well does in conversation is necessary in order to account for its multifunctionality and its use as a warning signal and Jucker’s (1993) and Smith and Jucker’s (2000) analyses are plausible ways of finding a common denominator in the plurality of contextual uses. On the other hand, a contrastive approach like ours suggests the need to recognize a core meaning which is compatible with the translations in Swedish and Dutch and with the meaning of well as a fully lexical adverb. These cannot be explained from the definition of well as facilitator only, but need to be linked to the semantics as well as the pragmatics of the discourse particle.
In our own functional account we offer a definition of well which brings together its core meaning and its conversational function in one linguistic framework. In order to explain the multifunctionality of well we make use of Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of heteroglossia. We will argue that this can explain the ability of well to take up a variety of positions towards the addressee and the text.

3. The analysis of well: A functional and system-integrated account

Our translation data suggest that the unified meanings of “acceptance” (Carlson 1984), “matching to a standard or norm” (Bolinger 1989) go a long way towards explaining certain equivalences found in the target languages. On the other hand, these definitions do not have a place in the cognitive-interactional accounts (Jucker 1993; Smith and Jucker 2000), which are more comprehensive and thus cover more instances and more translations more naturally. This leaves us with the task of finding a core meaning of well that (i) relates the discourse particle to the adverb (and thus explains semantic cognates and related meaning extensions in the target languages); and (ii) is comprehensive enough to deal with all contextual meanings and translation equivalents.

Our position is to regard well as an interpersonal element since it is concerned with the speaker’s subjective “intrusion” in the proposition (Halliday 1970: 335).

Such subjective positioning is traditionally captured under “epistemic modality,” which is interpreted in a narrow sense as concerned with the speaker’s assessment of the truth value of the proposition, with his or her degree of certainty that something is the case. Thus Lyons (1977: 794) contrasts the subjectivity of modalized statements with the objectivity of so-called bare assertions. The expressions of epistemic modality in English are, for instance, modal auxiliaries (e.g. must, may) and adverbs of probability (e.g. perhaps, certainly). For our purposes, however, we need a framework which takes a broader view of subjectivity to find a place for such words as well. There are two approaches which situate epistemic modality in a larger framework of subjectivity and which are therefore potentially useful. We shall take a closer look at these.

One such approach is formulated by Chafe (1986). Under the heading of “evidentiality”, Chafe includes various linguistic expressions of attitudes to knowledge. These expressions can be subdivided according to whether they refer to degrees of reliability (i.e. the traditional expressions of epistemic modality) or to the mode of knowing and source of knowledge (belief, induction, deduction, sensory evidence, hearsay evidence).
Also included are expressions signalling expectations “against which knowledge may be matched” (Chafe 1986: 270). The latter class comprises elements expressing agreement with expectations (of course) or a conflict with expectations (oddly enough, surprisingly, actually). It is a positive point in this framework that it brings together such discourse particles as actually, in fact, of course with what is traditionally subsumed under modality and evidentiality. Further, in this framework well can also be seen as an evidential of some kind, since it signals the speaker’s awareness that the common ground needs to be reestablished, that expectations are somehow not borne out. On the other hand, well is more elusive than the other expressions of expectation and its function of signalling an attitude to knowledge is less obvious. It clearly functions not only as a marker of the speaker’s “subjective” assessment but also as a way of “intersubjective” positioning. Let’s consider the second approach.

White’s approach to “engagement” (1999, 2000) also situates modality in a broader framework which includes the same expressions as Chafe’s but looks at them from a slightly different viewpoint. Drawing on the Bakhtinian notions of heteroglossia and intertextuality (Bakhtin 1981), White posits that any utterance (also the so-called bare assertion) is interpersonally charged but that utterances differ in the extent to which they explicitly recognize or play down the possibility of divergence, the existence of other texts, and other viewpoints. In this view, epistemic modality or evidentiality as a broader concept do not necessarily relate to the speaker’s knowledge. They may do so, but they are basically rhetorical options chosen by speakers to position themselves intersubjectively in the context. We propose that the discourse particle well is also a heteroglossic option, accommodating the utterance to the context, in particular the hearer’s expectations. In that sense it can often be used as a politeness marker, since it respects the addressee’s face. This view accounts for the textual function of well (boundary marker, topic introducer) as well as for its interpersonal value (marker of politeness).

Well is not the only example where the speaker’s concern with alternative proposals and meanings results in multifunctionality. Under this analysis the use of “hedging” expressions and adverbs of probability can also be explained in nontruth-functional terms, as fulfilling rhetorical purposes. For example, surely is not normally used to express the speaker’s certainty but may function as a hearer-oriented strategy used to ask the hearer for confirmation.²

The semantic source of well suggests that it is a marker of positive attitude, which raises the question how this can be linked to the heteroglossic account. In the model of interpersonal meaning as proposed by Martin (2000), words such as the adverb well are regarded as positive
options in expressing the speaker’s subjective judgement (“appraisal”) of human behaviour by reference to implicit but tacitly accepted institutionalized norms. We suggest that the positive meaning of well makes it interactionally useful in cases where speakers are aware of possibly divergent interpretations, of possibly different expectations, and of the need to negotiate common ground. Such a view establishes a link between adverb and discourse particle within the same framework of appraisal (the subsystems of judgement and engagement) and allows us to combine a semantic with a pragmatic explanation.

The contrastive analysis with Dutch and Swedish further shows that such an account explains the variety of equivalences attested in the translations. Accounts of well which analyze it as signalling a discrepancy in the interaction would be too narrow (cf. Smith and Jucker 2000). From the Bakhtinian perspective well opens up the possibility of many different interpretations of an utterance. The multifunctionality of well makes it suitable as a rhetorical strategy whose function does not only depend on the context but also on the particular stance the speaker chooses to adopt.

Well and similar devices (actually, of course) which involve taking a particular intersubjective position can thus be used as a resource for many different, sometimes incompatible, purposes. In one context well may express enthusiasm and in another context it means reluctance. Our data have shown that it may express agreement or acceptance but also disagreement if the context is one of verbal conflict. Moreover, several different meanings can co-occur. For example, in (1) well means simultaneously resignation and dismissal:

(1) He gazed down at the sink, and the warmth from the dishes drifted gently up into his face. Well, you have to carry on. You have to carry on. (AT)

The specific function of well will vary according to the context of the situation, in particular the preceding context and the relationship between speaker and hearer. For example, the speaker uses well in answers to questions to which it is difficult to give a straight answer, to mark a transition to a new turn or topic, to signal corrections or counterclaims and to approve of something. Thus, for instance (Smith and Jucker’s example, 2002), if speaker A asks “Is it raining?” and speaker B, who has just come inside, replies, “Well, it is drizzling.” well serves as a signal addressed to the hearer that the assumptions behind the original claim are going to be challenged. In extract (2), on the other hand, well is used to embed the imperative in the context, linking the command to information just received:
(2) “I ate with Ty, Daddy.”
    “Well, then, sit down or go out. You’re making me nervous standing there.” (JSM)

Leaving out *well* in both examples (1) and (2) results in utterances which are statements or imperatives disconnected from the surrounding discourse.

To sum up, we have argued that *well* is best analyzed as a lexical item which has a core meaning and a core function but whose value depends very much on the contextual use that is made of it. We have proposed that *well* has the core meaning of positive appraisal. Its core function is to express the speaker’s heteroglossic stance, signalling awareness of heterogeneity, and more specifically counterexpectation. However, it can be used for many different rhetorical ends, including contexts where no approval or acceptance is involved, but where the situation is assessed by the speaker as problematical and the possibility of choosing between divergent positions needs to be negotiated. The meaning thus attributed to *well* is in line with the meanings of “acceptance” and “conformity with a norm” proposed by Carlson (1984) and Bolinger (1989) respectively. Our own proposal has the additional advantage that it offers a system integrated account of *well* functioning as an evidential of counterexpectation within the interpersonal system of engagement.

4. Method and material

For the functional-contrastive investigation of *well* we have made use of translation corpora of fictional texts. The contrastive perspective adopted has the purpose of providing further insight into the multifunctionality as well as into the kernel meaning of the discourse particle *well* in English. By looking at translation correspondences in two closely related languages (belonging to the same Germanic language family) we hope to throw further light both on the different ways in which these three languages have developed means to fulfil the relevant conversational functions and on the meaning of *well* in English. In this article it is the latter objective that is in focus.5

The contribution of translations and translation corpora to the further exploration of particular items in the source language has been recognized as valuable by linguists in the field (see e.g. the articles in the volume edited by Johansson and Oksefjell 1998, and Hasselgår and Oksefjell 1999; see also Noël 2003, who shows how a translation corpus complements a monolingual corpus for evidence of the meaning of the source
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language items). There are several things to be gained from using translations to study discourse particles. First, translations can be used to compare discourse particles in two or more languages (cf. Carlson 1984; Fleischman and Yaguello 1999). Secondly, if a discourse particle in the source language is shown to have been translated by a range of items in the target language, this finding forces one to consider the contextual meanings which the source language item adopts. The translations may thus highlight the contextual factors contributing to the apparent chaotic picture that such words as well present. As a consequence, the polysemic nature of the discourse particle becomes more tangible. Interesting semantic insights can also be arrived at by looking at translations bidirectionally. It has, for instance, been suggested that multiple translations of a discourse particle in language A are an indication of the closeness of the target language B items and are a help in constructing semantic fields in B (see also Fischer 2000 on this viewpoint). The process can also be reversed, so that the positions of source language A and target language B are changed, whereby translation equivalents in A allow us to put the item under investigation in a semantic field.

Discourse particles are a challenge to translators because of the problems of finding a translation which is appropriate and natural in the target language. Bazzanella and Morra (2000: 151) point out that the problems are greater than in other areas of the language because the discourse-boundness and multifunctionality of discourse particles will result in the choice of particular “equivalents” which are, however, “unlikely to preserve the different shades of meaning and all the different functions” of the source item. This might result both in underuse (discourse particles are often not translated) and overuse. The latter means that the translator may opt for corresponding items in the target language, although the frequency of (those particular types of) discourse particles is actually lower in the target language than in the source language.

Moreover, not only the source language but also the translator’s personal style may leave traces in the translation. Translators may have a preference for particular target language items, which consequently recur, regardless of whether another item may perhaps have been contextually more appropriate (“stock equivalents”; cf. Toury 1995: 97). In the present study, this risk has been minimized by studying extracts from target texts which have been produced by a large number of different translators.

For both Swedish and Dutch computerized corpora have been consulted. For Swedish the fiction part of the English-Swedish Parallel Corpus (ESPC) has been used totalling about 1.4 million words, including English and Swedish original texts and their translations into the other
The data consist of 40 samples of 10,000 to 15,000 words each. The Dutch data were extracted from the Oslo Multilingual Corpus (OMC) and the subcorpus used consists of 12 extracts of between 10,000 and 15,000 words from 12 English fiction texts. In both corpora, the original texts and their translations (Swedish in the ESPC, Dutch in the OMC) have been aligned “sentence-by-sentence”, and they allow for the search for occurrences of a certain word and its translations. In addition, it is possible to obtain as much context as one needs.

Since the corpus consists of written data, prosodic information is not available. This obviously means that important clues regarding the interpretation of well are missing. On the other hand, authors frequently add information about tone of voice and attitude of the personages, and the context (collocations and higher level contexts) is in most cases disambiguating. It follows that the translators as decoders are in the same position as the source language readers; they have access to the same information, which will inevitably be interpreted by them as individual members of the language community. The fact that the translations will reflect these subjective interpretations is therefore part of the normal reception process of texts and not a shortcoming of translation data.

It might be argued that, particularly in the case of discourse particles, naturally occurring data are to be preferred to fictional texts. While it is true that the dialogues in fiction reflect the authors’ decisions regarding discourse representation and hence bear the stamp of individual literary stylistic preferences, a number of considerations in this case override the problem. One is that it has been shown that the simultaneous interpreting of natural spoken data often leads to simple omission of discourse particles in the target language (Fischer 2000: 200), and is thus not to be preferred as a source of information for the purpose of this study. Further, fictional texts are translated by professionals, who make a conscious effort to produce a text for a new audience, the target language community. This text is very often revised by editors and publishers, who are further and further removed from the source language data, so that the final product becomes a target language text with its own history. Finally, it is to be expected that novelists make frequent use of discourse particles to characterize personages and situations. For the same reason, translators of fictional texts are likely to look for target language equivalents.

5. Translation paradigms

Translations provide the raw material for this study. The correspondences of well in Swedish and Dutch are presented in Tables 1 and 2, based on
formal classifications. We have opted for such a presentation in order not to prejudge the issue of the meaning of well (which a classification based on semantic criteria would do). In the classification, four broad categories are distinguished: discourse particles, modal particles, conjunctions and “routines”.

The definitions and terms proposed in the literature for what we here refer to as “discourse particles” are legion, and we shall not go into them as they have been amply discussed elsewhere (see e.g. Fischer 2000: 13ff.). We define a discourse particle as an indeclinable word which is “grammatically peripheral” (Fraser 1990: 391), has no or little conceptual content and may fulfill a wide range of interpersonal and textual functions. Following Fischer (2000: 14–15) we use the term as the hyperonym of segmentation marker (e.g. however), interjection (e.g. oh), and hesitation marker (e.g. eh). We further include in this category the so-called response particles (e.g. yes). The category of modal particles has likewise received a great deal of attention, especially in the German literature (see especially Weydt 1969 as a pioneering work) but also cross-linguistically (see e.g. the special issue of Multilingua 1991, edited by Abraham). We shall here adopt the definition given by Van der Auwera and Vandeweghe (1984: 12–13), including the semantic criterion (they give an indication of how the content of the sentence is to be embedded in a larger framework of speakers’ and hearers’ expectations and preferences), the prosodic one (they are always unstressed) and the positional one (they occur in the middle field of clauses). Some words actually belong to different categories. For instance, the Dutch word maar can be a conjunction, a modal particle or a focus particle. Finally, by “routines” we mean the Dutch and Swedish equivalents of such expressions as now listen, what shall I say, which have become conventionalized expressions fulfilling functions similar to discourse particles.

Table 1 gives the Swedish translations of well in the English-Swedish Parallel Corpus.

Table 2 gives the Dutch translations of well in the Oslo Multilingual Corpus.

While the findings are discussed in detail in the following sections, a few general conclusions suggest themselves at this point. The first striking result of the corpus search is the large number of translations in the two target languages. Excluding omissions there are 50 Swedish translations (including “other”) and 35 Dutch ones. The larger number in Swedish may, however, be due to the difference in size of the corpora (182 instances of well in the ESPC corpus; 117 instances of well in the OMC). More data are needed to allow us to say anything conclusive regarding similarities or differences in this respect. In any case the finding that well
Table 1. *Swedish translations of well in ESPC*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discourse particle</td>
<td>ja</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tja</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nå</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nåväl</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nga</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>jaha</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>jo</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nåja</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>då ('then')</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dååå ('then so')</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nej</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>jaså</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>all right</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>okej</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>jaaaa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ne-ej</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>javisst</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>just det ('just that')</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>jodå</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i alla fall ('anyhow')</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>òh</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse particle + modal particle</td>
<td>nåja ju</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>discourse particle + discourse particle</td>
<td>ja ... då</td>
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</tr>
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<td>discourse particle + modal particle</td>
<td>ja ... väl</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse particle + modal particle</td>
<td>ja ... ju</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse particle + discourse particle</td>
<td>Jae förstås ('yes of course')</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse particle + discourse particle</td>
<td>nej faktiskt ('no actually')</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse particle + discourse particle</td>
<td>ja ja</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse particle + clause</td>
<td>nej det är klart ('no it is obvious')</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse particle + discourse particle + modal particle</td>
<td>jovisst ja ... väl</td>
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</tr>
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<td>discourse particle + modal particle</td>
<td>nåja ju faktiskt</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Conjunction</td>
<td>men ('but')</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>eller ('or')</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>conjunction + discourse particle</td>
<td>fast egentligen ('although actually')</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conjunction + clause</td>
<td>fast det är klart ('although it is obvious')</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>conjunction + modal particle</td>
<td>men ju</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conjunction + modal particle</td>
<td>fast ju ('although as you know')</td>
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Table 1. Continued

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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>faktiskt (‘actually’)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ju (‘as you know’)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nog (‘probably’)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>väl (‘surely’)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>hur ska jag säga (‘how shall I say’)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>det vill säga (‘that will say’)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>det må jag då säga (‘that must I then say’)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>skall vi säga (‘shall we say’)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>där ser man (‘there sees one’)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nu ska du få höra (‘now shall you hear’)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>höra du (‘listen’; lit. ‘hear you’)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omission</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

is translated in many different ways in both Swedish and Dutch is in agreement with earlier work on the translation of both discourse and modal particles in other languages and finds an obvious explanation in the polysemic nature and multifunctionality of such words. In principle, the list of translations is indefinite, since new context-specific correspondences will come up in new contexts. On the other hand, such contextually restricted translations will occur in decreasing frequencies, and become less interesting from a system-descriptive point of view.

The second conclusion to be drawn from Tables 1 and 2 is that in both target languages there is one equivalent which is more frequent than the others, namely ja in Swedish, nou in Dutch. However, Swedish ja occurs as a translation in only 12% of the cases, while Dutch nou accounts for 30% of the translations. The difference in the relative frequencies of Swedish ja and Dutch nou suggests that Dutch has a discourse particle which covers more contextual meanings of well than any corresponding particle in Swedish. This hypothesis is investigated in the following sections.

A third feature emerging from the tables is the high frequency of the omissions or so-called zero translations in the Swedish data. While they
Table 2. Dutch translations of *well* in OMC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discourse particle</td>
<td>nou (‘now’)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nou ja (‘now yes’)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tja</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ach</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ja (‘yes’)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>goed (‘good’)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>zo (‘so’)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nu (‘now’)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tenminste (‘at least’)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>en (‘and’)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nu ja (‘now yes’)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>maar goed (‘but good’)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wel (‘well’)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mij best (‘best with me’)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>enfin (‘in the end’)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ja maar (‘yes but’)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>eh</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hm</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hé</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse particle + modal particle</td>
<td>nou … wel</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse particle + modal particle</td>
<td>nou ja … ook</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse particle + modal particle</td>
<td>ja … hoor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse particle + discourse particle</td>
<td>zo, en (‘so and’)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse particle + discourse particle</td>
<td>tja, nou</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal particle</td>
<td>maar (‘only’)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>toch</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nou eenmaal</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wel</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nou maar</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dan ook wel</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>toch wel</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hoor (‘hear’)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjunction</td>
<td>maar … ook (‘but … also’)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omission</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
account for about 7% of the translations in Dutch, they reach a frequency of 21% in Swedish. Here again, however, conclusions about possible differences between the two languages have to be postponed until more material has been examined. The general tendency to simply omit discourse particles in translations has, however, been remarked upon in previous research (see e.g. Aijmer and Altenberg 2002; Bazzanella and Morra 2000; Fischer 2000: 200) and can be explained from their lack of conceptual content. We shall come back to the phenomenon of omission in section 8.2.

Finally, the quantitative data in Tables 1 and 2 show up interesting differences. In both languages there are a number of single translations (equivalents which occur only once) whose proportion in the two corpora is similar, though it is slightly higher in the Swedish one: out of the 141 tokens in the Swedish data (this figure excludes “other” and omissions) 30 are single occurrences, that is, 21.5%, while 19 out of the 108 tokens in the Dutch data are single occurrences, that is, 17.5%. When we look at the proportion within the number of types (rather than tokens), we find again a small difference: in Swedish single translations account for 61% of the types, while in Dutch they account for only 56%. Comparing the two paradigms (Tables 1 and 2), we see, however, more significant differences. The highest relative frequency of any item is 30% (Dutch nou). This is still less than one third of the cases but much higher than the next frequent item in Dutch, which reaches 9.5% (Dutch nou ja). Dutch further has two more items in the frequency band of 5%–10%, namely tja (7%) and ach (5%). In Swedish, on the other hand, the highest relative frequency is 12% (Swedish ja), followed by two items in the frequency band of 5%–10%, namely tja (8%) and men (6%). This means that in terms of type/token relationship, the following picture emerges: Swedish has only 3 types which have a frequency of at least 5%, and together they add up to 26% of the tokens; Dutch has 4 types which have a frequency of at least 5% and together they add up to 51% of the tokens. Further research is needed to test the hypothesis that this quantitative pattern reveals a systematic difference between the two languages with regard to their semantic fields covering English well.

6. The Swedish equivalents

6.1. Well translated by ja

There is no discourse particle in Swedish with the same meaning as well. However, well has systematic translation correspondences in several
distribution classes such as discourse particles (including response particles, hesitation signals, interjections), modal particles and conjunctions (Table 1).

The Swedish translations represent different aspects of the meaning of well. It is therefore a challenge to describe the translations in functional terms and to see how they throw light on the core meaning of the source item. What types of words are used to express which meaning aspects of well? What do these translations tell us about well?

One point to note is that, although well is a marker of positive attitude, it need not have the function of complete agreement (acceptance) and speakers use it for a large number of reasons as a resource facilitating interaction. Okej, all right, just det, visst are closest to complete agreement, while tja, nja, jaa, ne-ef indicate hesitant agreement.

Ja (12% of the cases) was the most frequent translation in the corpus and is also among the most frequent discourse items in Swedish. It occupied rank 7 in the material of spoken Swedish investigated by Allwood et al. (1992) and occurs in many different contexts. Fischer (2000) found 13 different English translations for German ja (see note 10) and we can expect the Swedish particle to be equally multifunctional (cf. also Teleman et al. 1999: 756f). Ja is, for instance, a backchannel item, it can be the answer to a yes–no question and be used as an “uptaker” followed by a new utterance (Edmondson and House 1981).

The reason for choosing ja as a translation of well is not immediately obvious since well has the double function of acknowledging the receipt of information and signalling how the following information should be received by the addressee. One context where ja occurs as a translation of well is the second part of a question–answer or statement–comment pair. In such a context ja does not necessarily give a positive response to the question or the statement but indicates that the speaker is thinking about how to respond and that alternatives have been considered. In (3), ja is used to underline the fact that the speaker is only accepting something with qualifications after a statement:

(3) “You talk as if the obituary columns of the London Times were the Court Circular of the Kingdom of Heaven, prepared by the Recording Angel.”
“*Well*, that’s not a bad way of putting it. The New York Times had a much longer piece, but it isn’t really the same thing.” (RDA)
“Du låter som om nekrologspalten i London Times vore någon sorts rundskrivelse vid kungliga hovet i himlen, författad av den ängel som upptecknar händelser i livets bok.”
The meaning of *ja* in (3), seems to be the opposite of what is expressed by *ja* in (4), which is upgrading or intensifying. The speaker in the following extract uses *ja* as an intensifier, putting more emphasis on the request “we’ve got to hear that one”.

(4) “I’ve actually been trying to make up one about you, Miss Honey, while we’ve been sitting here.” “About me!” Miss Honey cried. “Well, we’ve certainly got to hear that one, haven’t we?” (RDA) “Jag har faktiskt försökt hitta på en om er, fröken Honung, medan vi har suttit här. “Om mig!” utropade fröken Honung. “Ja, den måste vi verkligen få höra, eller hur?”

The multifunctionality of *ja* is further illustrated in (5), where *ja* has been chosen as a marker of deliberation. The speaker entertains alternative options before coming up with the word he is looking for:

(5) The fact was that it seemed … well, foreign. (AT) Faktum var att det verkade … *ja*, utländskt.

Even in the same structural context *ja* may be used for different, to some extent incompatible reasons. For example, in answers to questions *ja* usually indicates that the answerer is deliberating before coming up with an answer or that the demands of the question are not met. In the following extract (6), however, the answer introduced by *ja* is not deliberative or hesitant. The speaker uses the word to signal that he accepts the question and cautions the addressee that it will be followed by an elaboration on the topic:

(6) “Like — ?” “Well, not a word about the stinking scandal that killed Jean-Paul Letztpfennig, and made Francis notorious in the art world.” (RDA) “Som till exempel?” “Ja, där står inte ett ord om den uppseendeväckande skandal som dödade Jean-Paul Letztpfennig och gjorde Francis allmänt känd i konstvärlden.”

Such contextual shifts depending on the speaker’s strategic use of the particle are mirrored in the multifunctionality of *ja*. However, multifunctionality is itself a fuzzy notion. *Ja* can express more than one meaning at a time. Besides acceptance it can, for instance, mean concession or signal reluctance (cf. Carlson 1984: 49) as shown in (7):

(7) We had this tremendous row with Oliver. *Well*, an argument, anyway. Or at least a disagreement. (JB) Vilket grål blev det inte med Oliver! *Ja*, ett häftigt meningsutbyte var det i alla fall. Eller åtminstone en diskussion.
Ja and *well* have partially overlapping functions. Both are, for example, used to express hesitation or deliberation and to signal upgrading. *Ja* is, however, not as multifunctional as *well* but restricted to certain contexts. The main difference between them is that *ja* cannot be used to express disagreement (or partial disagreement). This is reflected in the translation where the “recategorization” of *well* to signal disagreement would be marked by a conjunction (*men* ‘but’).

In example (8) the key notion associated with *well* is disagreement rather than agreement. *Well* is understood as signalling a forthcoming objection in the context of the ongoing argumentation. This meaning is rendered by the translation *men* ‘but’. In addition, the modal particle *ju* seems to capture some aspect of the meaning of *well* in arguments, both when it occurs alone or in combination with another item. *Ju* is an obviousness particle (‘as you know’) with a rhetorical, argumentative character.

(8) “Sarah, if I felt we were in the slightest danger I’d have pulled over long ago.”
   “*Well*, I don’t know that you would have,” Sarah said. (AT)
   “Sarah, om jag trodde att vi löpte minsta risk skulle jag ha stannat för länge sedan.”
   “*Men* jag kan *ju* inte veta vad du skulle ha gjort,” sade Sarah.

In (9), *ja* ... *ju* is used to acknowledge a conflict of interests and to mark the speaker’s willingness to defend a particular position against an accusation:

(9) “You’re not going shopping with her afterwards?”
   Marjorie blushes.
   “*Well*, she needs a new pair of shoes ...”
   “You’re a fool, Marje!” (DLO)
   “Det är inte så att ni ska och handla efteråt?”
   Marjorie rodnar.
   “*Ja*, hon behöver *ju* nya skor”
   “Du är en idiot, Marje!”

6.2. *Well* translated by *jo*

*Jo* and *ja* are used in somewhat different contexts in Swedish. What is interesting here is that both can be used as translations of *well* but with slightly different meanings.

*Jo* like *ja* is quite obviously associated with intersubjectivity and with functional open-endedness. When it signals an objection it cannot be
replaced by *ja*. When the contrastive *jo* occurs together with *men* it signals partial rather than full disagreement, as in (10):

(10) “Oh,” she said.
    “You’re not married?”
    “*Well*, I am, but she’s … living elsewhere. They don’t allow pets.” (AT)
    “Åhå,” sade hon.
    “*Ni* är inte gift?”
    “*Jo*, det är jag, men hon … hon bor på annat håll. Och där får man inte ha sällskapsdjur.”

Thus *jo* is similar to *well* in that it can be used to mark objection or contrast. However, the dividing line between *ja* and *jo* is fuzzy, reflecting the fact that *jo* is used also when no opposition is involved. In (11), *jo* is used instead of *ja* after a question asking for clarification. It does not simply mean that something new is coming but marks the start of a lengthy explanation.

(11) “No, my car’s in the shop.”
    “Your car? What’s wrong with it?”
    “*Well*, I was driving along and … you know that little red light on the lefthand side of the dash?” (AT)
    “Nej, jag har bilen på verkstad.”
    “På verkstad? Vad är det för fel med den?”
    “*Jo*, jag satt och körde och den där lilla röda lampan till vänster på instrumentbrädan, du vet.”

The fact that different meanings of *well* have been lexicalized might suggest that we are dealing with homonymous items in English. However, the same core meaning of *well* is involved both in *ja* and *jo*. They both signal that *well* indicates a positive attitude and simultaneously opens up the possibility of negotiation about meaning against the background of the preceding discourse and strategic purposes.

6.3. **Context-specific translations of well focusing on emotion** *tja, nja, jaha, and interjections*

Many equivalents in Table 1 have a restricted meaning and focus on specific uses of *well*. For example, the modal value of the discourse particles *tja* and *nja* is hesitant positive agreement. A typical context for *tja* is illustrated in (12), where the hearer takes up a defensive position after a question which is heard as an accusation:
(12) “How could nothing be done? You’ve been living there over a month.”
“**Well,** I’m not so wonderfully perfectly efficient as you are, Macon.” (AT)
“Hur kommer det sig att ingenting har blivit gjort? Du har ju bott där över en månad.”
“**Tja,** jag är inte lika underbart högeffektiv som du, Macon.”

These words express various emotions besides acceptance and we can describe them as combinations of acceptance and a particular emotion. Reluctance, resignation, concession, uncertainty are examples of emotions which are conventionally associated with the interjections in the Swedish translations. **Nja** expresses reluctance and hesitation besides acceptance and **jaha** signals resignation before a transition to a new part of the conversation.

It is also interesting to take a closer look at the cases where **well** was translated by a prototypical interjection (Swedish **nå,** **nåvål,** **nåja**). **Nå** resembles what Schourup (2001: 1049) calls a gestural interjection providing evidence for the speaker’s state of mind. It focuses on acceptance and in some contexts indicates such meanings as finality and impatience. The related **nåvål** implies resignation, disappointment, nonchalance. For example, in (13), **nå** signals the speaker’s resigned conclusion:

(13) “**Well,** gentlemen, if you had waited just a little while,” Aristotle remembered Plato saying to Socrates speaking to the jury that had just decreed his execution by hemlock, “**you would have had your way in the course of nature.**” (JH)
“**Nå,** mina herrar, hade ni va ¨ntat litet till,” kom Aristoteles ihåg att Platon hade bera¨ttat om Sokrates tal till domstolen som just hade do¨mt honom till avrättning medelst odo¨rt, ”så skulle ni ha fått er vilja fram enligt naturens gång.”

6.4. **Context-specific translations of well focussing on connectivity:**
**då,** **dåså,** and **conjunctions**

The translations of **well** by a discourse particle indicate that it has the textual function of establishing coherence. For example, in (14), **då** functions as a frame between two subtopics: the speaker has finished one topic and begins on another.

(14) “**Well,** where’d you sleep last night?” the woman said softly, “**You get kicked out?**” (GN)
“Var har du sovit i natt då?” frågade kvinnan mjukt. “Har du blivit utsparkad eller någonting?”

Dåså on the other hand, signals that what follows is a continuation of something which came before. Moreover, the conjunctions men ‘but’ and fast ‘although’ signal contrast and concession with no indication of interpersonal meaning.

6.5. Well and modal particles

Modal particles are frequent in spoken Swedish to express modal or affective meanings (Aijmer 1977, 1996). Only ju ‘as you know’ occurred more than once as the translation of well. In the context of verbal confrontation it was used in arguments, objections, defences, concessions, reservations to achieve common ground. It collocates with ja, jo, nåja, men and fast when greater emphasis is needed (cf. section 6.1).

6.6. Routines as translation strategies of well

Routines are a widely used strategy when there are problems in rendering well. For example, the choice of a routine phrase seemed to be the best translation for many cases where well was used when the speaker hesitated about what to say. In (15), the translator has used the routine hur ska jag säga ‘how shall I say’ rather than an alternative phrase such as ja:

(15) I remember how punctilious he was and how thorough and — well, dogged. (RR)
Jag minns hur pedantisk han var och hur grundlig och, hur ska jag säga — envis.

6.7. Summing up

Comparing English and Swedish there are several interesting observations to be made which are relevant for the analysis of well. The first point to make is that there is no discourse particle with the same meaning as well in Swedish. The data we extracted from the translation corpus show up a large number of translation correspondences which all reflect some aspect of the meaning of well. The analysis is furthermore made difficult by the fact that the translation equivalents sometimes overlap.

Nevertheless we believe that the mirror image of well in Swedish can sharpen the picture we have of the multifunctionality of the English
particle. As shown in Table 1, the translator has used items from many
different distribution classes to capture aspects of its meaning. As
expected, some translations had meanings associated with agreement and
were close to the core meaning of well. In other cases the meaning of
well had been reversed, as when speakers used it to include partial or
complete disagreement. The evidence for such developments was found
in the translations by conjunctions like men ‘but’ or fast ‘although’.

Ja can be used as a strategy for a number of contextual reasons, which
explains its use as a translation of well in many different contexts. For
example, we found that ja could be used to signal hesitation as well as
upgrading. However, it never signalled complete disagreement, which
was rendered by men ‘but’ and fast ‘although’. Jo, on the other hand,
was chosen when the speaker made an objection or gave an explanation
as a clarification of preceding discourse oriented to as unclear by a
previous speaker. Less frequent translations were context-specific and
suggest that well is often used with various emotional meanings.

The translations of well did not necessarily capture all aspects of its
meaning. For example when well was translated by men ‘but’, the inter-
personal function of the particle was lost. Moreover, the attempts by
the translator to render specific meanings of well (e.g. hesitant agree-
ment, agreement plus reservation) by special items sometimes resulted in
unnatural translations (Swedish tja, nja, nåväl).13

7. The Dutch equivalents

7.1. The most frequent discourse particles nou and nou ja

Table 2 shows that Dutch nou ‘now’ occurs as a translation in 30% of all
cases. The category of Dutch discourse particles which appear as equiva-
lents of well in the translations includes, however, 24 other expressions.
In addition, there are modal particles which occur as translations. In
this section attention will be paid to what we see as the important
features of the Dutch semantic field containing terms which function as
equivalents of well.

The Dutch discourse particle nou ‘now’ has a variant form nu, which
is, however much less frequent (only 2 occurrences in the data).14 We
shall therefore concentrate on nou, trying to explain its frequency from
its meaning and functions.

Nou as a discourse particle has as its semantic source a temporal adverb
meaning ‘now’. While well retains some of its adverbial meaning in its function of expressing “acceptance” (Carlson 1984) or positive
The discourse particle well retains traces of its temporal meaning. From an adverb of “external time” it has evolved into an item expressing discourse time (“internal time”), marking a point in the discourse where the speaker wishes to take stock of the situation. It is clear that the semantic cognate of nou in English, namely, the discourse marker now, also comes close to well in its textual function. As Schiffrin (1987: 230) points out, now marks “attention to an upcoming idea, orientation, and/or participation framework.” There is, however, a difference between the two English discourse markers in that well is both backward and forward-looking, while now is exclusively forward-looking. Schiffrin puts it in terms of a difference in indexical functions: well indexes an utterance to both speaker and hearer, while now indexes it to speaker and to upcoming text (Schiffrin 1987: 323–324). Intralinguistically, well and now are functional equivalents in some contexts, although they have different implications. When one compares English and Dutch, the functional overlap between well and nou is larger. Example (16) shows how nou functions as an equivalent of well.

(16) “I’d like to find a place of my own as soon as we get back,” Sarah told him.

“Place of your own,” Macon echoed, but he spoke so softly, and the rain beat so loudly on the roof, it looked as if he were only moving his lips.

“Well,” he said. “All right. If that’s what you really want.” (AT)

“Ik wil zodra we terug zijn graag op mezelf gaan wonen,” zei Sarah.

“Op jezelf wonen,” herhaalde Macon, maar hij zei het zo zachtjes en de regen hamerde zo luid op het dak dat het leek of hij alleen zijn lippen bewoog.

“Nou,” zei hij, “goed dan. Als je dat werkelijk wilt.”

As pointed out, the multifunctionality of well is created by the various contextual reasons why speakers find it necessary to explicitly recognize the need for a positive appraisal marker. Similarly, nou has turned into a plurifunctional word as a result of the various contextual reasons why speakers feel it appropriate to take stock by explicitly referring to the moment of speaking. Extract (16) is an example in which the appraisal sense of well is quite salient. Nou does not have that sense but fulfills a similar function by indicating “having come to this point”. In other words, while the semantic origins are different, their discourse functions are similar in that both recognize the need to “juxtapose”. What they juxtapose is past and present, preceding and following discourse, other and own viewpoints, or possible worlds. Example (17) illustrates their
use in adjacency pairs, introducing a comment on a preceding statement (signalling “in the light of the information you have just given me”), while example (18) illustrates their use as full utterances, expressing “mitigated disagreement” (Smith and Jucker 2002).

(17) He said, “I haven’t eaten meat in seven years.”
    “Well, then, you’re probably going to starve to death here.” (JSM)
    Hij zei: “Ik heb in geen zeven jaar vlees gegeten.”
    “Nou, dan zul je hier waarschijnlijk omkomen van de honger.”

(18) “You’re famous and everything.”
    “Famous? Well —” (ABR)
    “Je bent beroemd, enzovoort.”
    “Beroemd. Nou —”

Nou can also function in questions probing for the interlocutor’s response (the prompting function) as in (19):

(19) “Well, what did you think,” said Jack. (ST)
    “Nou, wat vond je ervan,” zei Jack.

These examples do not exhaust the contexts in which nou functions as a translation equivalent of well. Even in exclamations of surprise (such as Well, well, who would have thought that!) they behave in much the same way: both have moved towards “mental state interjections” (Schourup 2001) but retain the meaning of deliberation (Carlson 1984).

It seems plausible to suggest that the flexibility and vagueness of nou make it the prototypical counterpart of the equally vague word well, while the other options have a more specific, more context-restricted meaning. This does not mean that well occupies exactly the same position in the semantic field in English as nou does in the Dutch one. For a start, nou is linked to the temporal deictic and overlaps with it: there are contexts in which the boundary between the two functions (as adverb and as discourse particle) is shady. Secondly, well and nou differ on the level of register, as the latter is more marked for informality than the former is. Secondly, nou is regionally restricted to the northern variant of Dutch, while the southern one (Flemish) prefers wel (see section 7.4). Thirdly, nou is not only a discourse particle but also a modal particle whose meaning can be described in much the same terms as that of the discourse particle. The main difference between the two types of particles is their syntactic position (modal particles are integrated in the clause and occur medially). We shall not pursue this issue here because the modal particle nou does not occur as a translation equivalent of well in our corpus (though the combinations nou eenmaal and nou maar do), but the point is important because it means that Dutch nou has greater
syntactic freedom and even greater functional versatility than *well*. Finally, while *well* shows tendencies of developing into an intensifier (as in *Well of course! Well thanks!*), such development has gone much further in the case of *nou*.

In second position in terms of frequency comes *nou ja* (lit. ‘now yes’), which has a more specific meaning than *nou* and hence is an equivalent of *well* in some contexts only. It focuses on the “acceptance” aspect, indicating resignation and dismissal. This makes it an appropriate translation of *well* in contexts where this meaning is prominent, especially in collocations such as *well, at least*; *well, at any rate*; *well, anyhow*. Extract (20) illustrates this:

(20) and suddenly Pat remarked, “*Well, at any rate, it’s the best empty room there is.*” (DL)

en Pat merkte ineens op “*Nou ja, dat is de beste lege kamer die er is.*”

This focus excludes *nou ja* from such contexts as prompting in questions (*Well, what are you going to do?*) or surprise (*Well! What a surprise!*). The discourse particle has naturally evolved from frequent collocation of the two items *nou* (indicating taking stock) and *ja* (indicating acknowledgement).

7.2. *The response particle ja*

The words *ja* ‘yes’ and its variant *tja* can also by themselves function as equivalents of *well*. As in Swedish, the Dutch discourse particle *ja* has developed from the response particle expressing affirmation. It is thus basically positive, conveying the speaker’s confirmation. Its heteroglossic function resides in the fact that it acknowledges a situation or a viewpoint, and at the same time recognizes implicitly that diverging viewpoints are possible. Example (21) illustrates *ja* as a marker of deliberation, thereby focusing on what follows:

(21) But I think I really felt, *well*, more like a father towards her. (ABR)

Maar ik geloof dat ik me eigenlijk, *ja*, meer als een vader tegenover haar voelde.

The development of positive response particle *ja* into a discourse particle can be explained from the speaker’s explicit response to an implicit question or explicit acknowledgement of an implicit statement. In the case of (21), for instance, the speaker decides on the choice of the expression *like a father* after having rejected other options. While the positive signal
is explicit, the alternatives are implicit but acknowledged. This is the same use of Dutch *ja* as Swedish *ja* in example (5) in section 6.1. An interesting development is its acquisition of interpersonal meaning of intensification. The fact that both *nou* ‘now’ and *ja* ‘yes’ have developed into intensifiers requires further analysis. What seems to happen is that the discourse particles, focusing on the moment of speaking (in the case of *nou* ‘now’) or on the acknowledgement of a situation or preceding discourse (in the case of *ja* ‘yes’), thereby put greater emphasis on what follows and hence become mere intensifiers.

### 7.3. Interjections

The word *tja* is etymologically an emphatic form of *ja* (indicating a prolonged pronunciation) but is used only as a discourse particle, that is, before a following utterance, not as a response marker. It signals hesitation in a prominent way: the speaker is “taking in the situation” but in contrast with *nou* or *ja* it is more hesitant. Its onomatopoeic form symbolizes what Schourup (2001: 1047) refers to as a “gestural” function, that is, the function of portraying a mental state. This gestural function would situate it closer to the pure interjection end of the continuum as proposed by Schourup (2001) than *nou, nou ja* or *ja*.

Since there are several interjections which occur as equivalents of *well* in the Dutch corpus, it is useful to consider their status as a translation category. Apart from *tja*, there are the words *ach, o, hé*. They all focus on specific meaning aspects of *well* in particular contexts. What is interesting from a more general point of view, though, is that they bring out the gesturelike function of *well* as argued for by Schourup (2001). However, it is clear that the different interjections are not equivalents, as is also shown by the order in which they tend to occur. Carlson points out that in *Oh, well, she seems to have walked out on us* the succession of the two discourse particles mirrors “the rapid succession of uptake and appreciation of a new situation” (Carlson 1984: 70). In other words, it is normal for *oh* to precede *well*, rather than vice versa. On the continuum proposed by Schourup, *well* is clearly less gesturelike than other interjections such as *um* or *oh* because it borders on full lexicality, and its “semantic heritage” brings in the backward-looking element (Schourup 2001: 1050). Similarly, it would be interesting to examine to what extent the translation equivalents in Dutch can be put on a scale from more to less gesturelike. Certainly, the unmarked order in which they tend to co-occur, seems to point to such a continuum. For instance, the following are pragmatically possible combinations (in that order): *o, tja, nou ja*
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(surprise, taking in, acceptance); o, ach, nou ja (surprise, regret, acceptance). The more to the left, the more interjection-like the item seems to be; the more to the right, the more lexical traces it has and the more "deliberate" it is.

7.4. Semantic cognates of well

Other translation equivalents have a lexical source which conveys "something is good". They are: wel 'well', goed 'good', and mij best 'fine with me'. In spite of their semantic closeness to well they are infrequent.

The discourse particle wel is the cognate of English well and seems to have developed at least some of the functions of English well. Its infrequency in the corpus may be due to the fact that it has been superseded by nou in northern Dutch, which is the variety used in the corpus translations. The restrictions on Dutch wel are thus imposed not by its semantics or pragmatics but by register.

The expressions goed and mij best are much more context-bound than well. They are equivalents in contexts of agreement, concession after disagreement, that is, in contexts where English alright, okay are possible. This means that they have retained more of the lexical meaning 'good' than well has. Extract (22) is an example:

(22) "Well, I'll bear that in mind," Macon said. "Thank you very much." (AT)

"Goed, ik zal erover denken," zei Macon. "Hartelijk dank voor alles."

7.5. Modal particles

Table 2 shows that well is also translated by modal particles in Dutch. We shall not discuss the various specific meanings conveyed by these, but it is interesting to try to explain the overlapping functions. Modal particles such as toch, wel, maar, nou and combinations such as nou eenmaal, dan ook wel, toch wel are frequent in spoken Dutch to express attitudinal meaning (see de Vriendt et al. 1991 on the combinatorial aspects of Dutch modal particles). As translations of well they are appropriate to express various ways in which speakers position their utterances in the context at hand, that is, in which they explicitly recognize previous discourse, dissenting opinion, alternative world views. Their position in the middle field of the clause makes them less obvious candidates from the point of view of the translator, but the possibility that they are under-
used in a translation corpus as compared with their occurrence in original Dutch speech has to be considered. Since modal particles are also used as equivalents in the Swedish translations, further cross-linguistic research is called for, comparing the particles both intralinguistically and across languages (see also Mosegaard Hansen 1998: 362 on the need for typological research in this area, trying to find an answer to the question why some languages prefer modal particles, while others prefer discourse particles).

7.6. Conjunctions

The semantic field of Dutch equivalents of English *well* includes two coordinating conjunctions, *en* ‘and’ and *maar* ‘but’. The dual function of *well* as a both backward and forward-pointing element makes it semantically close to connectors such as conjunctions. Further, it is clear that the boundary between conjunction and particle is not a fixed one but can be crossed in the course of time. The Dutch modal particle *maar* has developed from the conjunction and the conjunction *en* has acquired the function of discourse particle. Conjunction *maar* puts the contrast between preceding and following discourse in focus and thus explicitates what *well* suggests (cf. also Swedish *men* with the same meaning). Conjunction *en* focuses on continuity and has become a discourse particle in interrogatives prompting the hearer to continue the narrative. Extract (23) illustrates this use of *en*:

(23) “*Well,*” said Pat, strolling to the window to stand by Alice, “have you heard that this happy little community is for the chop?” (DL)

“*En,*” zei Pat, terwijl ze naar het raam slenterde en naast Alice ging staan, “heb je al gehoord dat deze kleine knusse gemeenschap zijn langste tijd heeft gehad?”

8. Results

In this section we shall discuss three types of results that have come out of the corpus study, that is, the different patterns that were attested in Swedish as compared with Dutch, the similarities between them, and the contribution of the translation approach to the understanding of *well* in English.
8.1. *Swedish and Dutch equivalents of well: cross-linguistic differences*

When one studies discourse particles across languages, different types of cases emerge. One type of case is that described by Fleischman and Yaguello (1999) in their investigation of the similarities between the English discourse marker *like* and the French *genre*. Here we have a case of two words which have very similar functions in two languages and have acquired these functions following parallel functional itineraries: both words have developed similar pragmatic functions from the meaning of comparison. Such diachronic investigations are interesting in the search for possible cross-language generalizations to be made about grammaticalization and more specifically about the development of predictable pragmatic functions from certain lexical sources.

Fleischman and Yaguello’s approach differs from ours in that they use examples extracted from original discourse in the two languages, while we have used translation data. The approach we adopted in this study has revealed cross-linguistic patterns of a different kind.

Translations in our corpus show that the discourse particle *well* has no single corresponding item in the target languages but a variety of contextual equivalents. Although this finding simply confirms expectations (see also Mosegaard Hansen 1995: 7 on this), the resulting paradigms and the quantitative data are interesting and lay bare differences between Swedish and Dutch.

In Dutch there is one discourse particle, *nou*, which has very similar pragmatic functions to English *well*. In contrast with the *like/genre* case, the *well/nou* case does not testify to a parallel functional development from similar lexical sources but from different lexical sources. The English particle has developed from an adverb of positive evaluation, the Dutch one from a temporal adverb. Since we have not carried out diachronic research we cannot compare their respective itineraries. (On the diachronic development of *well*, see Finell 1989, and Jucker 1997). At some point *well* and *nou* seem to have developed very similar discourse functions, including the signalling of hesitation and emotions of various kinds. In other words, the case of *well/nou* shows how two related languages develop similar strategic discourse functions from different lexical origins. At the same time, English *now* and Dutch *wel*, semantic cognates of Dutch *nou* and English *well* respectively, have also developed into discourse particles. Further synchronic and diachronic investigation is needed to reveal how they are related intra- and interlinguistically.

Swedish represents yet another case in that it has no single “prototypical” equivalent for *well*. The most frequent translation is the response particle *ja*, but it only occurs in 12% of the cases and is often not a
possible translation. All other translations, of which there is a long list, are infrequent. The quantitative data, coupled with the qualitative study, suggest that the Swedish translator has mobilized a range of words from different distribution classes to find equivalents. Some of these are infrequent in original data. Of the ‘equivalents’ only the positive response marker has developed multiple pragmatic functions which partially overlap with those of *well*. Lexically *well* and *ja* share the positive meaning, and this explains their overlap in positively oriented contexts. In negatively oriented ones, *ja* is excluded and the conjunction *men ‘but’* takes over. Thus the Swedish semantic field of items covering some meaning aspects of *well* is very diversified.

Summing up, our translation corpora reveal different patterns in related languages: while all three languages have cognate lexical items (*E. well, D wel, Sw. väl; E now, D. nou/nu, Sw. nu; E. yes, D. ja, Sw. ja*), these items are used in different ways and show different paths of grammaticalization.

8.2. **Swedish and Dutch equivalents of well: Cross-linguistic similarities**

The study also reveals striking similarities between the two target languages. One parallel is the use of modal particles as translations of *well*. Both Swedish and Dutch make extensive use of such particles for various interpersonal functions. They express modality in a broad sense, including the speaker’s positioning of the proposition in the context of the addressee’s expectations. Modal particles, like discourse particles, often contribute to politeness in that they make the utterance less abrupt. In comparison with the discourse particle *well*, the modal particles in Dutch and Swedish, placed in the so-called middle field of the clause, are less in focus and hence less obvious choices as translations, even though they often express very similar meanings. Although there is an extensive literature on modal particles in Swedish and in Dutch, the cross-linguistic comparison with discourse particles is understudied.

A second similarity between the Swedish and Dutch data is the occurrence of *ja* as an equivalent in some contexts. This shows that the positive response marker has developed into a discourse particle in the two languages. Swedish and Dutch *ja* also overlap a great deal in their expression of *well* meanings, and both have textual and interpersonal functions. Further, in both languages *ja* is used as an intensifier as well as a hesitation marker. The development of intensifying functions of discourse particles is another aspect worth studying from a cross-linguistic perspective.
Both Swedish and Dutch have an onomatopoeic variant of the response particle in the word *tja*, which expresses hesitation and resignation in both languages. Further, both target languages make use of interjections expressing various emotional aspects of the meaning of *well*. Such interjections are context-bound and cover only part of the meaning but they clearly belong in the semantic field. On the other hand, it is also interesting that both languages make use of conjunctions to convey the textual and connecting functions of *well*. In sum, the Swedish and Dutch semantic fields covering the meaning of *well* contain very much the same word classes and even the same lexical items. These items overlap partially but not completely in their pragmatic functions.

Finally, both the Swedish and the Dutch corpora had cases of simple omission of any equivalent of *well*. Tables 1 and 2 show that translators have omitted an equivalent for *well* in 21% and 7% of the cases respectively. Zero translations are frequent in the case of nonpropositional elements (see sections 4 and 5) and can be seen as inadequate because some element of the interpersonal meaning is missing in the target text as compared with its source. Further, since both Swedish and Dutch clearly have the lexical means to cover the semantics and pragmatics of *well*, there seems to be no good reason for omission. Nevertheless, the question arises whether there are contexts which are more conducive to omission than others.

Discounting the erratic cases, there appears to be one factor in particular which can be filtered out as influential. This is what we would like to call “doubling of function”: utterances in which the meaning of *well* is also expressed by other lexical or grammatical means. A case in point is the *well* in expressions of surprise, whose meaning may be doubled in the syntax and lexis (e.g. *Well! Just fancy! Isn’t that nice, dear*). Another manifestation of doubling is *well* as an introducer of comment or exposition on a topic which is explicitly announced by such means as left dislocation, topic introducers (e.g. *As regards X, well ...*) or lexicogrammatical means such as questions (e.g. *You remember X? Well, ...*).

Extract (24) illustrates the exclamatory (mock) surprise meaning of *well*, doubled in the preceding utterance (*Oh, productive!*). The discourse particle is not translated in the Dutch version:

(24) “It’s not productive.”
   “Oh, productive! *Well, goodness, no, let’s not waste our time on anything unproductive.*” (AT)
   “Het is niet produktief.”
   “O, produktief! Hemeltje, nee, laten we alsjeblieft geen tijd verspillen aan iets onproductiefs.”
The following extract from the TRIPTIC corpus (25) illustrates doubling of function after the explicit introduction of the topic, and again the translation shows omission:

(25) “You remember that I began by saying we had a choice? Well, if I decide not to do this thing that I spoke of, then we may just possibly one day cease being poor.” (FBEE)
   “Herinner je je dat ik begon te vertellen dat wij een keuze hadden?
   Wanneer ik besluit niet te doen waar ik over sprak, zullen we op zekere dag misschien niet arm meer zijn.”

On the other hand, well is usually not omitted when it is focused on by syntactic means or explicitly oriented to by the participants in the discourse or by the author. The former is the case when well is either a full turn or separated from the rest of the turn (e.g. “Well,” he said, “that doesn’t mean he’s rich.”). Explicit orientation occurs in such instances as the following (Swedish) example, in which the adverb placatingly gives an indication of the function of well:

(26) “It’s not an industry, either, come to that.
   It’s a profession and it’s about time they started to act like professionals.”
   “Well …” says Marjorie placatingly. “What about Sandra?”
   “Det kallar inte jag aktivitet.
   Dom har för fan ett yrke och jag tycker det vore på tiden att dom började bete sig som yrkesfolk också!”
   “Jaja” sade Marjorie blidkande. “Och Sandra då?”

8.3. The contribution of the translation data to the description of well

The primary objective of this study was to find out more about the meaning and functions of English well. The method we adopted was based on the hypothesis that translation data could contribute to a sharper picture of the relevant item in the source language. If an item in the source language is translated by a wide range of target language items, this variety will bring the polysemic nature of the item in question into focus more clearly. On the basis of previous research (e.g. Fischer 2000; Bazzanella and Morra 2000) we had reasons to expect such a wide range of translation equivalents for the discourse particle well. It turned out that this was indeed the case and we consider the following findings to be particularly relevant for a further understanding of well.
First, the wide range of translations testifies to the multifunctionality of *well* and its strategic usefulness in various contexts. Some of the translations focus on the textual function of *well* (boundary marking, topic introducer, signalling elaboration, flagging a conclusion), others highlight its interpersonal function (marker of surprise, resignation, hesitation or intensifier). In other words, some target language equivalents have a clear connective function, others a clear emotive one, and most have both at the same time. These two aspects of the meaning of *well*, that is, its linking function and its interpersonal function, can be explained from the general function which we propose for *well*. We have formulated this function as modal in a broad sense, that is, to turn the utterance into a heteroglossic one, signalling the speaker’s awareness of the heterogeneity of views, positioning the utterance in the context of preceding and following texts. By doing this, speakers at the same time connect their utterance to other utterances and orient to addressees’ expectations.

Second, we found that functions of *well* could be derived from a core meaning. We have described this core meaning of *well* as “positive value judgement,” which is captured as “acceptance” by Carlson (1984) and as “conformity to a norm” by Bolinger (1989). The translations show that in some contexts this positive appraisal is still very much part of the meaning. First, it is saliently present in semantic cognates such as Dutch *goed*, *wel*, *mij best*. Second, the Swedish data contain various markers of agreement such as *okej*, *all right*. Third, the positive response signals which function as equivalents in both languages also point to the positive meaning element of *well*. On the other hand, there is a range of translations which do not signal a positive attitude. They are indications of the fact that the discourse particle has lost much of its lexical content, to the extent that so-called lexically empty interjections can function as contextually restricted equivalents. Schourup’s (2001) view of *well* as being situated at the most lexical end of a continuum which has “empty” items at its other extreme, links up with this cross-linguistic finding that interjections belong in the semantic field.

9. **Concluding remarks**

In this article we have used translations of fictional texts to further explore the meaning of the English discourse particle *well*. In the course of the discussion, however, we have raised a number of issues which are in need of further investigation.

For instance, an examination of the forms that lead to *well* in translation would show how the English discourse particle relates to other items.
To give an example: if *well* is translated by *nou* in 30% of all cases, how often and when is *nou* translated by *well* or any other word, and how do the other translations relate to *well*? Exploiting the translation corpus to the full, one can thus go back and forth from sources to targets, to obtain a more complete picture of the semantic fields in the three languages concerned.

It has also become apparent, in both the Swedish and the Dutch data that not all equivalents of *well* have the same stylistic value: some are colloquial, others more formal, and some are infrequent in natural speech. Further, geographical variation plays a role, especially in the case of Dutch, where the differences between Netherlandic and Belgian Dutch seem to be striking with regard to the use of discourse particles. Further research into variation in this area will be interesting.

This study has been purely synchronic. A diachronic study of the semantic cognates in the three languages would give information about grammaticalization paths followed by the different items, and perhaps show similarities in developmental processes.

Finally, the rich inventories of modal particles in Dutch and Swedish have not been explored in detail in relation to each other or in relation to discourse markers in English. Here also, further research is called for.

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**Notes**

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1. It is among the 100 most frequent words in the conversational part of the London-Lund Corpus, where it occupies rank 14 (Svartvik 1990: 66).
2. See Aijmer (2002) and Downing (2001) on the functions of *surely*.
3. The system of ‘engagement’ consists of all the options speakers may choose to acknowledge or ignore diversity of viewpoints and to ‘negotiate an interpersonal space for their own positions within that diversity’ (White 1999).
4. The abbreviations in brackets refer to the sources of the extracts.
5. This study is part of an extensive project that the authors are conducting on discourse particles in a contrastive perspective.
6. For a description of the corpus and its search possibilities, see Aijmer et al. (1996) and Altenberg and Aijmer (2000).
7. The Oslo Multilingual Corpus (OMC) is described on the website of the University of Oslo (http://www.hf.uio.no/iba/prosjekt/). The authors wish to thank Stig Johansson for kindly giving them access to the data for the purposes of this study.
8. A close study of a translator’s text before and after editorial revisions has revealed the extent of publishers’ intervention in some cases.
9. A search through another English-Dutch translation corpus (TRIPTIC fiction corpus), consisting of 100,000 words from four English novels and their Dutch translations, has yielded another three translations of *well* which did not occur in the OMC. Our thanks are due to Hans Paulussen for making his corpus available to us and for his generous help in retrieving data. For a description of the TRIPTIC corpus, see Paulussen (1999).
10. See for instance Fischer (2000: 206), who points out that German *ja* has 13 equivalents in English; see Abraham (1984) and Heinemann (1985) on the numerous German equivalents of Dutch *wel*; see Bazzanella and Morra (2000) on the wide variety of translations of *well* in Italian.
11. The additional TRIPTIC English-Dutch fiction corpus data (see note 9) show an even higher percentage for *nou* (35.5%), which confirms the OMC data; on the other hand, zero translations account for 19.5% of all correspondences in the TRIPTIC corpus, which is close to the results for Swedish in the ESPC.
12. *Jo* occurs after a negated question when the speaker wants to signal that he/she holds the proposition including the negation to be true, and after a negated statement to signal objection. Compare *nej* which occurs after a non-negative statement to signal objection. *Ja* is always associated with affirmation (cf. Teleman et al. 1999: 752).
13. For example, *tja* occurred 15 times in the Swedish translations but only 3 times as an item translated as *well*. *Nja* did not occur at all in the original texts. *Näval* occurred once in the original data (i.e. as a ‘source’ of *well*) compared with 6 occurrences in the translations.
14. For a discussion of the stylistic difference between the variants *nu* and *nou* see Van As (1992).
15. A search through the Dutch translations of *well* in the European Parliament debates in TRIPTIC reveals that *nou* does not occur in that corpus. Van As (1992) shows that *nou* belongs in the informal register.
16. De Vriendt et al. (1991: 51) define the modal particle *nu/nou* as ‘in the light of (currently) prevailing or given circumstances’. This is a definition which also fits discourse particle *nou*.
17. Modal particle *nou* has meanings which in dictionaries are described as ‘impatience’, ‘irritation’, ‘scorn’, ‘disbelief’, ‘surprise’, ‘embarrassment’, etc. (see e.g. *van Dale Groot Woordenboek der Nederlandse Taal*). The listing of seemingly ‘ad hoc’ emotional states is not unlike the practice in handbooks of intonation describing the meaning of tones (see e.g. Crystal 1975: 37ff.).
18. The intensifier meaning of *well* seems to be restricted to contexts of replies, to show that the speaker is “taken aback by the question” (Carlson 1984: 72). In such collocations no comma/pause occurs after *well*. The Dutch particle *nou* frequently has an intensifying function both in clause initial and in clause medial position.
19. The frequency of *ja* in spoken discourse seems to be very high, especially with some speakers, but is not as such reflected in the translation corpus. Its relatively infrequent occurrence may be due to the fact that the data are fictional dialogue (in contrast with spontaneous speech) and that *ja* has become a marker of hesitation. This would mean it has turned into a useful “filler” in online processing, at the same time adding force to
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the utterance in a way that other hesitation markers do not. This hypothesis, based on observation of native speakers’ discourse and on introspection, needs further exploration in a corpus of informal spoken Dutch.

20. Detailed information on its development of different meanings and pragmatic functions is provided by the Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal.

21. Abraham (1984: 35) claims that wel as “interjection” (i.e. discourse particle, in contrast with its function as modal particle) is typical of the Belgian variety of Dutch, while in the Netherlands preference is given to nou (ja), tja, goed. Heinemann (1985: 50) makes the same point, adding that the “Interjektion” wel “ist zum Teil auch veraltet”.

22. There is a fair amount of literature on the Dutch modal particles, including contrastive studies of German and Dutch particles. See, for example, Heinemann 1985; Westheide 1985, 1991.

23. The conjunction but has acquired discourse marker status (see Schiffrin 1987: 152ff.).

24. See Foonen (1984) for an interesting discussion of the link between conjunction maar and modal particle maar.

25. On other examples of omission in the Swedish data, see Aijmer and Altenberg (2002).

26. These findings support the hypothesis that discourse particles are grammaticalized items which have retained lexical traces (Hopper’s 1991 principle of ‘persistence’).

27. We wish to thank the anonymous referee who has drawn our attention to the fact that such research has been carried out in the Dutch-Belgian project Partikelgebruik in Nederland en Vlaanderen ‘Particle use in the Netherlands and Flanders’, 1998–2001, financed by NWO, the Dutch Organization for Scientific Research, and its Flemish counterpart FWO.

References


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Primary sources


