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Epistemic modal adverbs of certainty in an English-Swedish perspective

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It would be fruitful in further studies of modals and other terms with epistemic meanings to investigate the extent to which they intersect with evidentials, and the extent to which the whole semantic field of epistemics arises by similar paths and regularities. (Traugott 1989: 48)

1. Introduction
In cross-linguistic studies there has been a tendency to focus on lexical and grammatical categories that can be abstracted away from the context with the idea that such categories can be directly compared across languages. However modality is a broad and fuzzy area and categories are not isomorphic across languages. As a result a modal device in Language A does not necessarily have a direct correspondence in Language B (eg modal auxiliaries in English may become adverbs or modal particles in Swedish translations). Moreover it is often the case that modality disappears in the translation.

It is clear that epistemic certainty is a fuzzy concept. For example, *must* is associated with inference and a degree of commitment rather than with certainty. The meaning of *must* to indicate a weak degree of commitment has, for instance, been discussed by Lyons (1977: 808) who suggests that in saying 'Louise is singing' rather than 'Louise must be singing', the speaker is more strongly committed to the factuality of the utterance. The introduction of such modal markers as *must, necessarily* and *certainly* into the utterance betray limitations in the speaker's knowledge whereas eg 'Louise is singing' is epistemically stronger.

For Hoye, Lyons' argument is 'an exercise of ingenuity' which 'has only a remote relationship to experience' (Hoye 1997: 60). According to Hoye, 'expressions of the speaker's commitment do not necessarily weaken it;
'CERTAINLY, for instance, among other adverbs, denote a high degree of probability' (Hoye 1997: 61).

In this paper I will discuss the modal adverbs surely, certainly and no doubt which have a lexical source involving certainty in a cross-linguistic perspective. The adverbs need to be dealt with both in terms of modality and of discourse. Surely can, for instance, be analysed as a discourse connective. Palmer discusses surely as a discourse feature 'that shows their relationship between one sentence and another' (Palmer 1986: 88). From another point of view surely suggests a question or doubt (cf Bolinger 1989: 130).

A cross-linguistic approach to these adverbs makes it possible to study if there are parallel semantic and pragmatic developments in two or more languages.

- How are certainly, surely and no doubt translated into Swedish? What similarities and differences are there?

- To what extent can the meanings of the adverbs be explained in a grammaticalization perspective and how can the results contribute to our knowledge of process of grammaticalization?

The corpus I have used is the English-Swedish Parallel Corpus. The corpus consists of 2 million words of fiction and non-fiction. It contains translations in both directions (English->Swedish and Swedish->English) and makes it possible to make many different types of comparison. In a wider investigation I would like to include must to get a better picture of the extent to which different lexical items with the same or partly the same meaning develop similar polysemies.
I will show that the same fluctuation between discourse functions and modality is found in several languages by looking at translations from English into Norwegian and German in the multilingual corpus that has been compiled in Oslo.

2. Surely
The problem of translating epistemic modal adverbs seems to be very delicate because of their context-dependence. Surely can mean certainty (100% probability) but it can also indicate doubt or uncertainty. Such meaning contrasts are not unusual when one discusses discourse phenomena and how new meanings develop out of older ones.

Table 1: The correspondences of surely in Swedish transitions in the English Swedish Parallel Corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>surely</th>
<th>tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>säkert</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>väl</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nog ('probably')</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ø</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visst ('certainly’, ‘it is said’)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naturligtvis ('of course')</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>menar du ('do you mean'?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>måste ('must')</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nog måste väl</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nog väl</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>otvivelaktigt väl ('undoubtedly’ väl)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dock ('however')</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i alla fall ('anyway')</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What we can see in Table 1 is a semantic or functional map of *surely* arrived at not by introspection or by semantic analysis but by looking at translational data.

There are some observations we can make at the outset on the basis of the correspondences in the table. *Surely* does not always correspond to *säkert* although *surely* and *säkert* are semantic cognates. In roughly half of the examples the translations were associated with certainty (a hundred per cent probability). For example, *definitivt, utan tvivel, naturligtvis* are synonymous in the meaning a high degree of certainty. Other translations denote more uncertainty (*nog, väl, visst, måste*) and are further removed from the literal meaning of 'certainty'.

The translation by *säkert* stands out in the table although it only occurred in 26% of the cases. Out of 19 different correspondences of *surely* 13 examples occurred only once. Many examples in the Swedish translation were modal particles (17 examples). *Väl* and *nog*, both occurring five times, were the most frequent particles. Modal particles carry meanings of certainty/uncertainty; they are oriented to the speaker (*nog*) or the hearer (*väl*); they refer to evidence (*visst*). In a single example *surely* corresponded to an auxiliary (*måste* 'must'). Moreover it was not translated in two examples. The low number of deletions suggests that *surely* has an important function in the sentence.

*Surely* is a flexible element as shown by the large number of translations. In order to avoid having to say that *surely* is homonymous we need to look at some senses as derived:
a new meaning derives from an old one (ie a 'Grundbedeutung') at first as a conversational implicature which is later conventionalized.

The development from certainty to a degree of uncertainty can be treated in terms of pragmatic inferencing and conversational maxims. Since the unqualified assertion implies truth (according to the Gricean maxim of quality), surely would give more information than required and generate the implicature that the speaker is actually less than certain according to the maxim of informativeness. If I say that I am sure that something will be the case the hearer can infer that I am not fully committed to the truth of the proposition. However there remains the problem that all element of certainty do not develop the meaning of uncertainty. Bolinger neatly sums up the problem presented by adverbials with the meaning certainty:

To sum up: there is a gradient range of adverbials, not themselves questions, which manifest various degrees of stereotyping as question-markers. Even though many of them are literal expressions of certainty, it seems that by so much as bringing up the matter of certainty they tend to pose a doubt about it, which favours ‘question.’ This is not true of all such expressions and there is no apparent reason why some should develop an affinity to questionnness and others not, from the standpoint of thier literal meaning: definitely is literally no more ‘certain’ than surely, but surely makes a good question-marker, definitely does not. (Bolinger 1989: 130)

Surely was frequent in initial position. In (1), it introduces a question:

(1) Her life had been freakish enough so far, surely she could find a way our of this particular trap?
‘Hittills hade hennes liv inte visat brist på lättsinne, säkert kunde hon ta sig upp ur sin nuvarande vågdal? Since the meaning of certainty has been weakened it can be used to invite a response from the listener:’ (MD)

(2) Surely it isn't a serious possibility?
‘Menar du att ni på allvar överväger den möjligheten?’ (PDJ)
Lit. 'Do you mean'

In the collocation but surely, surely is weakly connective as well as modal:

(3) But it was surely too much to hope that it had taught the father a permanent lesson
'Men det var nog att hoppas för mycket att hennes pappa skulle ha fått sig en varaktig läxa' (RD)

The weakened meaning is also illustrated in (4):

(4) But that's surely not right, Mrs Phelps said
'Men det är väl inte rätt, sa fru Gudomlig' (RD)

2.1 Surely and combinations
It would be wrong to look at the modal adverbs only when they occur alone. As suggested by Hoye (1997), modal elements show a propensity towards phraseology, ie they are chunks or fixed phrases stored in the long-term memory. A modal auxiliary may, for instance, select an adverb which is semantically compatible with it for emphasis or to express a nuance of meaning
These chunks are functionally complete units that are translated as wholes.

The adverb 'fits the meaning of the auxiliary in *may possibly*. Lyons has described such combinations as *may possibly* as modally harmonious. About 43% of the examples of *surely* were part of modally harmonious combinations including examples where *surely* was placed initially at some distance from the modal auxiliary. In this environment the seeds can be discovered for *surely* developing new discourse functions and for a weakening of its meaning.

Johansson & Løken (1997) found even higher figures for combinations when they looked at modal particles (in Norwegian). *Nok* and *vel* were immediately followed by a modal auxiliary in about one fifth of the cases, as against 10% for the less grammaticalized *visst* and *sikkert*.

Modal combinations with *surely* provide a mixed picture. In *will/would surely* (cf *certainly*), *will* approximates the meaning of *must*, and *surely* expresses a high degree of certainty or emphasis.

(5) He *surely would* have discovered it if farming was his business, but it wasn't.

'Han hade säkert upptäckt det om han hade haft jordbruk, men det hade han inte' (SK)

In (6), the speaker's expression of certainty strengthens the directive force of the declarative:

(6) You *can surely* make a wonderful biography, Simon

'Du kan säkert skriva en underbar biografi, Simon' (RD)
However modally harmonious combinations also include the following examples where *I suppose* and *would surely* collocate with each other. In the Swedish translations we typically find modal particles signalling uncertainty.

(7) *I suppose* he 'd surely
be too ashamed, he 's become too sly for that.
'Det skulle han *nog* skämmas
för, han har blivit för slipad för sådant.' (NG)

Surely might is translated by a modal auxiliary and modal particles:

(8) **SURELY THE SENATOR** might have argued a little more, said the Daimon Maimas.

‘NOG BORDE VÄL senatorn ha protesterat lite mer, sa daimon Maimas’.
(RD)

In the English original surely+ a tag question are harmonious with each other. In Swedish, we find a sequence of modal particles:

(9) An error, she thought, surely they meant 'God Bless', didn't they
‘Ett misstag, tänkte hon, *nog måste* de väl ändå ha menat 'Gud välsigne'.
(ST)

Surely cooccurs with must. The Swedish translation has *väl ändå*:

(10) **Surely the bank** must care what happened to twenty-five dollars
Banken *borde* väl ändå vara intresserad av vad som hände med tjugofemtusen dollar (SG)

2.2 Swedish säkert
More information about the meaning of *surely* can be derived by analysing how Swedish *säkert* and related words (*nog*, *väl*) are translated into English. If one translates *säkert*, *nog*, *väl*, etc into English some of the correspondences would no doubt be translated by *certainly* or by *surely* but the degree of correspondence need not be the same in both directions. *Säkert* was, for instance, translated by *surely* in five examples (8%) while the correspondence from English to Swedish was 26%. *Säkert* has as many as 20 different correspondences; the majority occur only once.

Table 2 shows the English translations of *säkert*. The most frequent adverb was *certainly* (strong certainty). The high number of *probably* suggests that weakening to a degree of commitment frequently occurs:

Table 2: The translations of Swedish *säkert* into English in the ESPC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>certainly</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>probably</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(be) sure</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>surely</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ø</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no doubt</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for certain</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure (it sure is)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obviously</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all the same</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be certain of</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for sure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The meaning of Swedish säkert ranges from certainty (*certainly,* *undoubtedly,* *doubtless*) to uncertainty (*probably,* *I expect*). According to Johansson & Løken (1997), *certainly* and *surely* 'seem to express nearly the opposite meaning of that expressed by Norwegian sikkert (cf the Swedish cognate 'säkert') in certain contexts:

Han var sikkert eldre. (uncertainty)
Han var certainly older.(certainty)

However in (11) säkert is an emphasising particle indicated by stress on the adverb:

(11) Hon var säkert lyckligare nu än hon skulle ha kunnat bli efter resans slut.  
    ‘She was surely better off now than she would have been at the end of the trip’  (JG)

*Säkert* was translated as *probably* rather than by *certainly*:

(12) En hel hög stamrör av gjutjärn, som han en gång fått i byte för någonting annat, och som var avsedda för ett rörstamsbyte som det säkert redan var för sent för.  
    'A whole pile of cast-iron pipes that he 'd once got in exchange for something else and that were meant for a pipe-replacement job that it was probably already too late for. (LG)
In (13), both *I'm sure* and *säkert* express less than 100% certainty:

(13) Inte för att du är man –; gör det inte så enkelt för dig –; men du är *säkert* en mycket konventionell människa i alla fall, säger jag.

'Not because you 're a man. You must n't simplify in this way. But *I'm sure* you 're a very conventional person none the less.' (MS)

Certainly was used in the translation only when stressed and in certain environments (eg together with negation) which do not favour new meanings. In (14), *säkert* was translated as 'almost certainly' (focus particle use):

(14) Fönsterna är små som gluggar och interiören ter sig påver för oss, vilket *säkert* också var fallet då

‘The windows are as narrow as slits and the interior seems very bare, as was *almost certainly* the case’ (LI)

3. *Certainly*

While *surely* occurred 42 times, *certainly* was found in 90 examples. *Certainly* cooccurred with modals only in 5 examples (mainly *would certainly*).

Table 3: *Certainly* in Swedish translations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>verkligen ('really')</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>förvisso ('certainly')</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>definitivt ('definitely')</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>säkert</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sannerligen</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following translations occurred once: *nog, X var säker på, helt säkert, i vilket fall som helst, förstås, självefallet, och visst, javisst, med största sannolikhet, egentligen, onekligen,visserligen, otvivelaktigt, än mindre, sannerligen, faktiskt, givetvis, i varje fall, ändå, och nog*

*Certainly* was translated in 36 different ways. In 20 examples it had a single translational correspondence. In 11 examples it was not translated which suggests that it was often experienced as redundant.

One reason why *certainly* and *surely* behave differently is no doubt that *certainly* expresses stronger certainty. The meaning of *certainly* was interpreted as *verkligen, förvisso, definitivt* in the Swedish translations.

The emphatic discourse function can be derived by inference (cf *surely*). If the truth of the assertion is emphasised, there must be some reason for it, for example that the hearer has some doubt or that the situation involves a contrast. In (15), *certainly* is translated by *men verkligen* (Lit. 'but certainly'):

(15) *'Certainly I haven't a scientific vocabulary',* said Maria.
'Men jag har verkligen ingen vetenskaplig vokabulär', sa Maria. (RDA)

Certainly was frequent as focus particle in negative environments in the meaning '(helt) säkert' which is not an environment favouring grammaticalization.

3. No doubt
Also the meaning of no doubt varies between strong and weak certainty:

Table 4: No doubt in Swedish translations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Swedish</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>säkert</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utan tvivel ('without doubt')</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utan tvekan ('without hesitation')</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>förmodligen ('probably')</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>givetvis ('of course')</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>väl</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>säkerligen</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Säkert (säkerligen, inget tvivel, ingen tvekan) stand out as the most frequent translation equivalents.

In (16), the translator has used väl to express more uncertainty:

(16) "And no doubt the man on the stairs is her husband."
"Och mannen i trappan är väl hennes man." (RR)

Förmodligen was used as a translation in:
Blame him for so meekly moving to the kitchen with the others, for placing his hands flat against the wall as he was ordered and no doubt bouncing slightly on the balls of his feet.

'Ethans fel som så beskedligt följde med ut i köket tillsammans med de andra, pressade händerna mot väggen som han blev tillsagd att göra och förmodligen studsade en smula på fotsulorna.’ (AT)

4 Modality and grammaticalization
The focus in this paper has been on showing the relation between the synchronic uses of the adverbs of certainty by looking at their translations in the domain of certainty or uncertainty. What Bolinger (1989: 131) refers to as ‘the element of arbitrariness’ in the restrictions on how elements of certainty are used must be explained in the framework of grammaticalization. Diachronically both certainly and surely have developed from manner adverbs into sentence adverbs on a cline where the end-point is a discourse marker certainly= 'in a manner that is certain'; surely = safely, securely; cf Traugott 1995). The manner adverb is dislocated from its position close to the verb and becomes a sentence adverb. As a result of its wider scope the adverb comes to evaluate the whole proposition. The change undergone by the adverbs also involves subjectification, ie a higher degree of grounding in the speaker's attitude and perspective on what is said (Traugott 1995). The translational paradigm reflects different stages of the grammaticalization process and is consistent with the constraints imposed by the unidirectional development from the literal meaning of certainty to emphasis or to a degree of uncertainty.

The regularity with which new senses develop is a continuous challenge to studies in modality. Surely, no doubt and certainly have developed along
different lines but have overlapping uses. *Certainly* has, for instance, developed emphatic or expressive uses and may be compared with *really, indeed*. *Surely* and *no doubt* have the weakened meaning to express some degree of uncertainty. *Surely* is often hearer-oriented as seen from its functional translations.

Modal adverbs that have become grammaticalized could be regarded as modal particles. Johansson & Løken (1997) regard Norwegian *sikkert* as a modal particle although it has not been grammaticalized to the same extent as the other Norwegian modal particles (*vel, nok, visst*). The concept of 'modal particle' is relevant to the classification of modal adverbs in English as well. Cf Hoye:

> It would not be implausible to redefine subjuncts expressing modality as 'modal particles' subdivided into the following categories: evidential particles (CLEARLY, OBVIOUSLY); hearsay particles (APPARENTLY); reinforcement or emphasizing particles (CERTAINLY, SURELY, WELL); and focus particles (ONLY, SIMPLY). (Hoye 1997: 212)

According to the degree of their integration in the clause structure and the nature of their association with the modal verb head, *surely, certainly, and no doubt* display various degrees of grammaticalization.

A further property of the modal particles is that they can become unaccented. In Swedish, the accent on *säkert* creates a difference in meaning and English *surely* seems to have become unaccented in some of its uses. Finally, if we consider the manner adverb as a diachronic source, it is typical of grammaticalization that the original meaning as a manner adverb 'persists' (*slowly but surely*).

According to the grammaticalisation analysis, adverbs have developed from non-epistemic sources and acquire ‘stronger’ epistemic meanings. In a
grammaticalization perspective modal forms do not only become (more) subjective but they can acquire functions which are more closely related to discourse and to interaction (hearer-orientation) and to affect (emphatic strengthening). For example, 'emphatic affirmation may be treated either as a matter of discourse (in which case the adverb has rhetorical function. or as a kind of 'strong' epistemic modality expressing complete confidence in, or knowledge of, what is being said (cf Palmer 1986 92).

5 Conclusion
Cross-language studies profit from including more languages into the investigation and looking at cognate lexical sources. For example, the functional evolution from a sentence adverb to a subjective marker indicating a degree of lack of speaker commitment takes place in Swedish translations from French as well.

French sans doute is often translated by troligen, antagligen, väl in addition to säkert, helt visst which suggests that a development from certainty to uncertainty has taken place (L.Lindvall, pc). In comparative data from Norwegian and German from the OMC (the Oslo Multilingual Corpus). you find translations both for certainty or for uncertainty; for example for certainty you find sicherlich, bestimmt, gewiss, sicher, zweifellos (68%) and for uncertainty wohl, denn, oder. In Norwegian surely was translated by a word indicating certainty in 23% of the examples (sikkert, unektelig, uten tvil). A modal auxiliary måtte, må and a modal particle vel were frequent functional correspondences of surely in the meaning uncertainty.

References


A. English originals - Swedish translations

| AT  | Tyler, A. *The Accidental Tourist/Den tillfällige turisten* |
| MD  | Drabble, M. *The Middle Ground/ Mellanläge* |
| NG  | Gordimer, N. *My Son’s Story/Min sons historia* |
| PDJ | James, P.D. *Devices and Desires/Böjelser och begär* |
| RD  | Doyle, R. *Paddy Clark Ha Ha Ha/ Paddy Clark ha ha ha* |
| RDA | Davies, R. *What’s Bred in the Bone/ I köttet buret* |
| RR  | Rendell, R. *Kissing the Gunner’s Daughter/Dödligt sällskap* |
| SG  | Grafton, S. *D is for Deadbeat/’D’ som i drunknad* |
| SK  | King, S. *Cujo/Cujo* |
ST  Townsend, S. *The Queen and I/Drottningen och jag*

B. Swedish originals /English translations
JG  Guillou, J *Fiendens fiendel The enemy’s enemy*
LG  Gustafsson, L. *En kakelsättares eftermiddag/ATiler’s*
LI  Ingvar, I. (ed), *Lund tusenårsstaden/Lund 1000 Years*
MS  Scherer, M. *Kejsarvalsen/The Emperor Walz*