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# Translating pragmatic markers

*– or whatever you want to call them*



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## Abstract

This study analyses the translation of pragmatic markers from English into Swedish. The source text that was translated and used as a basis for the study is an article called “Black Books”, which was published in the British music magazine *Prog* in January 2013. The study is limited to question tags, general extenders and single-word pragmatic markers. It aims to investigate how these types of pragmatic markers can be translated in a dynamic and natural way, as well as how a careful analysis can facilitate the search for appropriate translation equivalents. Previous research and theories were used to determine the functions of the pragmatic markers in the source text, and the translation choices made on the basis of these findings were supported by corpus searches in the English-Swedish Parallel Corpus and Korp. The study revealed that because of the different ways in which pragmatic functions are expressed in English and Swedish, almost none of the pragmatic markers in the source text could be translated directly into Swedish. Formally equivalent solutions such as *tja* as a translation of *well* were generally considered too unnatural. While the study is too small to provide any general guidelines, it shows how a careful analysis may help the translator find more dynamically equivalent and natural solutions in the form of, for instance, other Swedish pragmatic markers, modal particles, adverbs and conjunctions.

**Keywords:** dynamic equivalence, general extenders, interviews, modal particles, music journalism, naturalness, pragmatic functions, pragmatic markers, question tags, translation.

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# 1 Introduction

Translations surround us wherever we turn: on web pages, products and advertising signs and in films, books and magazines. Yet, we rarely notice them unless there is something wrong with them. As Newmark (1988:189) notes, “a bad translation is easier to recognise than a good one”. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the translation of speech, such as in subtitling or translation of fictional dialogue. While occasional mistakes may at best give the reader a laugh, awkward and unnatural translations that do not appear like realistic speech, such as *Ni har alltid solsken, inte sant?* (ESPC: Fiction), could easily ruin the whole reading experience.

The present study will focus on the translation of pragmatic markers, such as *well, so* and *isn't it?*, which are frequent in spoken discourse and well known to cause trouble in translation. The study is based on my translation of a music article, since it contains written renderings of authentic speech in the form of interviews, which, in turn, are rich in pragmatic markers. Moreover, in Swedish music journalism, translations of interviews with foreign musicians are usually carried out by journalists with little or no knowledge of translation theory. Needless to say, it is a challenge which may result in far from flawless translations. Indeed, even renowned Swedish music journalist Andres Lokko (interviewed in Polback 2002:46) reveals that 90 per cent of his interviews are with foreign musicians, and that the most difficult part of translating these interviews is to capture the language and personality of the musicians.

While pragmatic markers in general have been studied extensively, it is still a rather untouched area in translation studies. While both Aijmer (2008) and Mattsson (2009) have studied the translation of English pragmatic markers into Swedish, Aijmer's study is mainly concerned with how translation studies may help us learn more about pragmatic markers, whereas Mattsson's thesis deals with subtitling. To my knowledge, there is no previous research analysing the actual process of translating pragmatic markers, since previous studies only examine translations that are already finished. Hopefully, my study can shed some light on the difficult process of translating pragmatic markers and show that theory and analysis may help translators and journalists avoid mistakes and awkward solutions and create more natural translations.

## 1.1 Aim

The aim of this study is to analyse the translation of pragmatic markers in a music article from English into Swedish. The scope of the study will be limited to question tags, general extenders and single-word pragmatic markers, and the following research questions will be addressed:

- How can pragmatic markers be translated in a dynamic and natural way?
- How can a careful analysis of the functions of pragmatic markers, combined with previous research and corpus searches, facilitate the search for appropriate translation equivalents?

## 1.2 Material

The material used in the analysis consists of an English music article and my Swedish translation of it. The article, “Black books”, consists of 5,904 words and deals with progressive rock musician Steven Wilson’s new solo project. It was chosen mainly because of its great content of written renderings of speech: it contains one long interview, several shorter text boxes (some of which are also based on interviews), and a shorter interview with the illustrator Hajo Müller, who made the artwork for the album. The major parts of the article were written by Stephen Humphries, while Chris Roberts compiled one of the text boxes and the interview with Hajo Müller was carried out by Philip Wilding. The article was published in the January 2013 issue of British music magazine *Prog Magazine*, which deals exclusively with progressive music, that is, music characterised by musical “complexity and intellectualism” (Virginia Tech Multimedia Music Dictionary, 1996–2012). It can therefore be assumed that most of the readers of the source text have some previous knowledge of progressive music. The text was translated for a fictional Swedish edition of *Prog Magazine*, which means that the readers of the target text can be assumed to have the same previous knowledge as the source text readers. Thus, no adaptations or additions on the informational level of the text were considered necessary.

## 1.3 Method

The material for this study was obtained by translating a music article from English into Swedish. As a starting point for the analysis, previous research and theories were used along with corpus searches in order to combine “the complementary strengths of both

quantitative and qualitative analyses”, as recommended by Schiffrin (1987:72) for the study of pragmatic markers. To this end, I used the English–Swedish Parallel Corpus, henceforth the ESPC (www), and Språkbanken’s concordance tool Korp (www). The ESPC is a translation corpus containing both English texts and their Swedish translations and Swedish texts and their English translations. It represents two text categories: fiction and non-fiction. However, since there was a shortage of pragmatic markers in the non-fiction texts, I only used the fiction part of the corpus in my searches. Korp allows searches in an extensive collection of monolingual Swedish corpora consisting of many different kinds of texts, such as blog posts, newspaper articles and academic texts. The use of corpora will be discussed further in Section 2.2.3 below.

While my translation choices are usually supported by quantitative data from the corpora, the present study is mainly qualitative, since it discusses each pragmatic marker with regards to its specific context rather than making generalising claims. Although a quantitative study of, for instance, the frequency of different translation solutions could be interesting and helpful, it would require a larger database of translated material. Moreover, the multifunctionality of pragmatic markers (see 2.2.2) further underscores the significance of taking the specific context of each marker into careful consideration when translating.

## 2 Background theory

### 2.1 Defining pragmatic markers

Pragmatic markers are not easily defined. Previous research, referred to by Fisher (2006:1) as a “jungle of publications”, covers a multitude of different characteristics and items. Furthermore, many different terms, such as *discourse markers*, *discourse particles* and *pragmatic connectives*, have been used throughout the years and there is still no terminological consensus in sight. In this study, the term *pragmatic markers* will be used. As Brinton (1996:30) claims, “*pragmatic* better captures the range of functions filled by these items”. Brinton’s argument is relevant, since the most important criterion for the classification of pragmatic markers in this study was the demonstration of some kind of pragmatic function. Brinton (ibid.:29–30) further maintains that *marker* is a suitable term, because in contrast to *particle*, it encompasses both single-word items and

phrases. While some scholars limit the definition of pragmatic markers to small words (e.g. Michailinienė 2007:4), both single words (such as *well*) and phrases (such as *or whatever you want to call it*) are considered pragmatic markers in the present study. Because of the apparent impossibility of finding one description that suits all possible occurrences of pragmatic markers, the definition used in this study is a combination of some of the most frequently mentioned characteristics in previous research. However, these characteristics should be considered a starting point for my classification rather than a strict framework of obligatory criteria.

Firstly, pragmatic markers are usually considered to have little or no propositional meaning (e.g. Brinton 1996:33; Aijmer 2002:2). This can be explained by the fact that pragmatic markers have undergone a “pragmaticalization process”, in which the lexical meaning has been replaced, or partly replaced, by pragmatic meaning (Aijmer 2007:36; Mattsson 2009:10). Thus, a word or expression that is considered a pragmatic marker in some contexts may not be considered a pragmatic marker in other contexts, as illustrated by the following examples from the source text:

- (1) We got on very *well* and understood each other’s music. (ST p. 47)
- (2) *Well*, he doesn’t engineer or produce anymore because he’s doing his own thing. (ibid.)

In (1), *well* is used as an adverb and serves a semantic function (i.e. it changes the referential meaning of the utterance) while in (2), the semantic function has been lost due to pragmaticalization. However, while *well* in (2) does not change the meaning of the utterance, it serves a pragmatic function in the sense of marking the speaker’s attitude to the rest of the utterance (see Section 3.3 of the analysis).

Secondly, pragmatic markers are frequently used in spoken discourse (e.g. Brinton 1996:33; Mattsson 2009:10). They are also multifunctional (e.g. Brinton 1996:35; Andersen 2001:59), context-sensitive (e.g. Schiffrin 1987:31; Andersen 2001:40) and often grammatically optional (e.g. Brinton 1996:34), all of which is illustrated in the following example (3), found in the British National Corpus, BNC (www):

- (3) It 's cold *isn't it?* (BNC: Spoken)

Depending on the context, the functions of *isn't it* in the utterance above could differ substantially. If (3) is uttered by a stranger at a bus stop, it could be interpreted as a polite conversation-starter. If, on the other hand, it is uttered by a friend in your living room, the tag could just as well be interpreted as a covert request to turn up the heat. Moreover, *isn't it*, could be omitted in both contexts without rendering the utterance ungrammatical, uninformative or nonsensical. However, it would change the pragmatic function of the utterance by turning it into a simple declarative statement without any clear pragmatic functions.

As shown in (3), pragmatic markers often convey extra-linguistic information, such as the speaker's background assumptions, beliefs, emotions or attitude towards the addressee or the conversation (Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg 2003:1123; Michailinienė 2007:1). Finally, many scholars agree that pragmatic markers are generally difficult to translate (Brinton 1996:34; Michailinienė 2007:2; Aijmer 2008:96; Mattsson 2009:25). To sum up, I will use the following definition of pragmatic markers:

Pragmatic markers are words or phrases with mainly pragmatic and often multiple functions that may convey extra-linguistic information and are frequent in spoken discourse. They are context-sensitive, often grammatically optional and usually difficult to translate.

### **2.1.1 The functions of pragmatic markers**

While the multifunctionality of pragmatic markers makes it difficult to determine their functions in different contexts, it is perhaps even more difficult to find a taxonomy that covers all of the possible functions of pragmatic markers in all possible contexts. Brinton's (1996) and Andersen's (2001) approaches will therefore be viewed not as a fixed inventory, but rather as a starting point for an analysis based on a combination of functional theories, corpus searches and previous studies of the individual markers or their Swedish equivalents.

Based on general studies of pragmatic markers, Brinton (1996:36–38) has compiled a list of nine functions, presented here in its entirety:

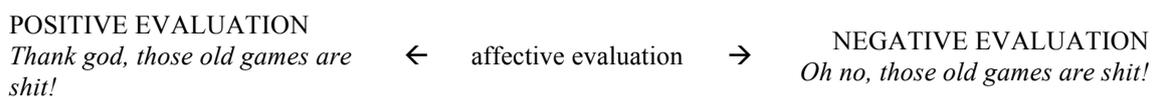
- (a) to initiate discourse, including claiming the attention of the hearer, and to close discourse;
- (b) to aid the speaker in acquiring or relinquishing the floor;
- (c) to serve as a filler or delaying tactic used to sustain discourse or hold the floor;
- (d) to mark a boundary in discourse, that is, to indicate a new topic, a partial shift in topic (correction, elaboration, specification, expansion), or the resumption of an earlier topic (after an interruption);
- (e) to denote either new information (Erman 1987: 201; Schiffrin 1987a) or old information (Quirk et al. 1985: 1482; Schiffrin 1987a);

- (f) to mark “sequential dependence”, to constrain the relevance of one clause to the preceding clause by making explicit the conversational implicatures relating the two clauses, or to indicate by means of conventional implicatures how an utterance matches cooperative principles of conversation (Levinson 1983: 128–129, 162–163, what he calls a “maxim hedge”);
- (g) to repair one’s own or others’ discourse;
- (h) subjectively, to express a response or a reaction to the preceding discourse or attitude towards the following discourse, including also “back-channel” signals of understanding and continued attention spoken while another speaker is having his or her turn and perhaps “hedges” expressing speaker tentativeness; and
- (i) interpersonally, to effect cooperation, sharing, or intimacy between speaker and hearer, including confirming shared assumptions, checking or expressing understanding, requesting confirmation, expressing deference, or saving face (politeness).

The list of functions is a useful guide in the process of identifying the functions of the pragmatic markers in the source text. However, it can be combined with Andersen’s (2001) theories for a wider picture of the interpersonal and subjective functions of pragmatic markers. While Brinton (1996:38) makes a two-fold distinction between textual (a–g), and interpersonal (h–i) functions, Andersen (2001:65) has identified three functional domains: one subjective, one interactional (comparable to Brinton’s interpersonal function) and one textual domain. Brinton (1996:38) does include subjective functions as a subtype to her interpersonal functions. However, Andersen’s division offers a more extensive perspective, which turned out to be useful, since many of the pragmatic markers of the source text displayed subjective functions.

According to Andersen (2001:67), pragmatic markers with subjective functions convey the speaker’s attitude towards the proposition of the utterance. They may display a variety of subjective stances, which, in turn, may vary in strength. This is illustrated in Figure 1, presented here in its original form:

<b>range</b>	<b>Type of attitude</b>		<b>range</b>
STRONG COMMITMENT <i>Those old games are shit. Absolutely!</i>	←	epistemic stance: endorsement of P	→ TENTATIVE ATTITUDE <i>Those games are shit, I guess.</i>
DOWNRIGHT REJECTION (IRONY) <i>Those old games are shit. As if!</i>	←	epistemic stance: rejection of P	→ WEAK DOUBT <i>Those old games are shit. Really?</i>
SPEAKER’S OWN CLAIM <i>I mean, those old games are shit.</i>	←	source of knowledge	→ OTHER’S CLAIM (HEARSAY) <i>Those old games are shit, apparently.</i>
STRONG LEXICAL COMMITMENT <i>Those old games are what I would definitely call shit.</i>	←	metalinguistic stance	→ WEAK LEXICAL COMMITMENT <i>Those old games are, sort of, shit.</i>
SURPRISE <i>Those games are shit, actually.</i>	←	newsworthiness	→ PREDICTABILITY <i>Those old games are shit, of course.</i>



**Figure 1.** Andersen’s subjective functions (2001:67)

Pragmatic markers with interactional functions are “hearer-oriented” and convey what the speaker assumes to be “the hearer’s relation to the proposition” (Andersen 2001:69). Andersen (ibid.:72) divides interactional functions into “A-signals”, which express “contextual alignment”, and “D-signals”, which express “contextual divergence” between the interlocutors. For example, the pragmatic marker *you know* is considered an A-signal because it shows the speaker’s assumption that the hearer already is, or could be, acquainted with the content of the utterance (ibid.:73). The pragmatic marker *actually*, on the other hand, is considered a D-signal, because it shows that the speaker does not expect the hearer to be acquainted with the content of the utterance – it may very well come as a surprise (ibid.).

Finally, Andersen (2001:76–77) describes pragmatic markers with textual functions as markers that contribute to “coherence and textuality in discourse” by marking, for instance, the relation between two propositions or utterances, a change of topic or the beginning or end of the turn of a speaker.

## 2.2 Translating pragmatic markers

As mentioned in the previous section, pragmatic markers are usually considered a problematic area of translation. Michailinienė (2007:47) notes that all languages have different norms for the use of pragmatic markers, and as Aijmer (2008:95) points out, there are rarely any “satisfying correspondences”. Aijmer (ibid.: 98) even claims that pragmatic markers “do not translate well”, and has found that many translators omit them altogether. Whereas omission may sometimes be a justified solution, it should arguably never be considered a simple way of evading the translation problem. Even if pragmatic markers are usually grammatically optional and their lexical meaning may have been reduced, they still serve important pragmatic functions. As Fraser (1988:22) claims, their absence could “remove a powerful clue” and result in “unnatural”, “awkward” or even “impolite” utterances. Even if Fraser actually refers to the general use of pragmatic markers, his claim is just as valid for the omission of pragmatic markers in translation.

### 2.2.1 Dynamic equivalence and naturalness

Since direct translation of pragmatic markers is hardly ever possible, Nida & Taber's theories of dynamic equivalence and naturalness will be used as a starting point for the analysis. Nida & Taber distinguish between two contrasting forms of translation in terms of formal and dynamic equivalence. While formally equivalent translations focus on the form and content of the message, dynamically equivalent translations are freer, and based on "the principle of equivalent effect" (Munday 2001:42). According to Nida & Taber (1974:24), a dynamically equivalent translation receives basically the same response from its readers as the source text did. Although the effects of an original text and its translation will never be identical, Nida & Taber (ibid.) claim that a high degree of equivalence is necessary for a translation to accomplish its purpose. A requirement for dynamic equivalence, according to Nida (1964:163), is naturalness. He quotes Phillips, who claims that "a real translation [...] should not read like translation at all". Although Nida (ibid.) admits that this is not an easy task, he emphasises that a "natural style" is "essential" to producing a similar response.

The difference between formal and dynamic equivalence is illustrated in (4a) and (4b) below, where (4a) is an example of a formally equivalent translation, and (4b) is the more dynamically equivalent translation that was actually used in the target text:

- (4a) I suppose there's no point in asking Alan Parsons, *is there?* Jag antar att det inte är någon poäng i att fråga Alan Parsons, *är det?*
- (4b) Det är *väl* ingen idé att fråga Alan Parsons, antar jag?

While (4a) is grammatically correct, it is unnatural and unmistakably a translation. The translation in (4b) is further from the original, but conveys the message and function of the source text utterance in a much more natural way.

Nida & Taber's theories are significant for this study for two reasons. Because of the language-specific nature of pragmatic markers, they often require dynamically equivalent translations to appear like natural speech when transferred into another language (cf. Mattsson 2009:36–37). In addition, music articles are written with the purpose of entertaining, expressing opinions and conveying an image of the interviewees to the readers. Too close and formally equivalent translations could result in unnatural, inexpressive and awkward target texts that would fail to accomplish these

functions. Mattsson (2009:25) agrees that Nida's theories are relevant for the translation of pragmatic markers, but notes that the multifunctionality of pragmatic markers can make it difficult to create a similar effect on the target text readers. The most appropriate translation equivalent of a single pragmatic marker may vary depending on the function served by the pragmatic marker in each context (ibid.). Thus, to be able to create natural translations that convey the functions of the pragmatic markers of the source text, one must combine Nida's theories with deeper insights into the functional spectrum of pragmatic markers.

### **2.2.2 Corpora and translation**

Apart from the theories presented above, the analysis will be complemented by corpus searches in order to support my translation choices. As Aijmer et al. (2006:111) maintain, corpus searches "can yield deeper insights or provide answers to questions that cannot be easily answered based on conversation analysis alone". Aijmer (2008:3) further notes that corpora of translations are valuable for testing "hypotheses" or "intuitions". In this study, the ESPC was used with this aim in mind. Although the corpus is fairly small, the results may still give some hints as to how pragmatic markers may (or may not) be translated. As Aijmer et al. (2006:112) note, parallel corpora also make it possible to "reverse the translation process" and search for expressions both as originals and translations. This may give a more extensive picture of which solutions can be considered natural use, and which solutions are more frequent in translations than in original texts. While Aijmer (2008:99) warns that translation corpora should be used with caution, since some translations may be "bad" or "slanted towards the source language", bad translations may actually provide helpful insights into which solutions should be avoided. As a measure of precaution, and a further aid in the analysis, the concordance tool Korp was used to access monolingual Swedish corpora in order to test hypotheses and achieve a clearer picture of whether possible solutions were natural or not.

## **3 Analysis**

Before proceeding with the analysis of a number of selected pragmatic markers, a few general statements will be made about the translations in the target text. As a result of the language-specific nature of pragmatic markers, formally equivalent translations (see 2.2.1) could only be used for three of the 27 items that were classified as pragmatic

markers in the source text. While a variety of different forms of Swedish equivalents were used as dynamically equivalent translations, some stood out as more frequent solutions than others. The most frequent equivalents were Swedish modal particles (e.g. *ju*). They were used in seven cases, one of which was in combination with an adverb (*väl egentligen*). Adverbs (e.g. *lite*) were also used four times individually and once in combination with a conjunction (*eller... faktiskt*). Swedish pragmatic markers (e.g. *eller nåt*) were used in three cases. Other solutions included a single pronoun (*du*), a combination of a subject and a verb (*grejen är*) and omission of the pragmatic marker.

The following sections of the analysis will examine three types of pragmatic markers found in the source text: question tags, general extenders and single-word pragmatic markers. The examples discussed in these sections were chosen because they seemed to epitomise the intricacy of translating pragmatic markers.

### 3.1 Question tags

A tag question is an utterance consisting of two clauses, an anchor and a question tag, which usually display reversed polarity (Tottie & Hoffmann 2006:283–284). Tag questions with reversed polarity are either positive-negative (e.g. *it's hot, isn't it?*) or negative-positive (e.g. *you're not cold, are you?*) (ibid.). While the terms *tag question* and *question tags* are sometimes used interchangeably, the term *question tag* will, in line with Tottie & Hoffmann (ibid.:284) and Axelsson (2009:82), be used for the pragmatic marker itself (e.g. *isn't it?, are you?*) while *tag question* will refer to the whole unit of which the question tag is a part.

As Tottie & Hoffmann (2006:299) remark, question tags are multifunctional, just like pragmatic markers in general. This is well illustrated by the first example (5):

- (5) I suppose there's no point in asking Alan Parsons, *is there?* Det är *väl* ingen idé att fråga Alan Parsons, antar jag?  
[p. 47]

Two main functions of *is there* can be identified in this particular context. First, it serves an interactional function. In accordance with Andersen's (2001:69) description of pragmatic markers with interactional functions, the question tag conveys "the speaker's conception of the hearer's relation to the proposition". Since the speaker assumes that there is no point in asking Alan Parsons, and that the hearer shares this belief, the question tag in (5) can be considered an example of what Andersen calls an A-signal (see 2.2.2). It also illustrates Brinton's (1996:38) interpersonal function, (i), which

implies “confirmation of shared assumptions”. In fact, this type of question tag is referred to as a “confirmatory tag” by Tottie & Hoffmann (2006:300). The interactional function of the tag is, in other words, to ask for confirmation of the assumption by turning the utterance (*I suppose there’s no point in asking Alan Parsons*) into a question, which seeks and receives an answer from the hearer.

However, there is also another functional dimension to *is there?* in this particular context. On a subjective level, the question tag functions as a hedge, which is given as an example of Brinton’s (1996:37) subjective function, (h). Similarly, it denotes what Andersen (2001:67) refers to as speaker’s epistemic stance towards the utterance (see Figure 1 in Section 2.2.2). By using a tag question rather than a declarative statement or a direct question, the speaker assumes a tentative attitude towards his own utterance (see *ibid.*). While the question tag signals that the speaker still hopes that there is a point in asking Alan Parsons, which is referred to by Roesle (see Axelsson 2011:46) as a “hoping/fearing tag”, it is also a face-saving hedge that will let both the speaker and the hearer avoid humiliation if the hope is not fulfilled. While Andersen (2001:76) views face-saving as a subjective function, Brinton (1996:38) connects it to her interpersonal function, (i). Combining their approaches, one could actually argue that such a hedge is both subjective and interactional, since it expresses the speaker’s attitude as well as his/her wish to maintain a polite conversation with the hearer.

While a formally equivalent translation would be possible in (5), I found a less direct but more natural solution. Theoretically, the question tag could have been translated with a Swedish invariant tag such as *eller hur* or *inte sant*, which is the closest Swedish equivalent to a question tag. However, Axelsson’s research shows that invariant tags tend to be “overused” in Swedish translations of question tags, in the sense that they are used much more frequently in Swedish translations than in Swedish sources (Axelsson 2009:81). Thus, to avoid an unnatural sentence and find a more dynamically equivalent solution which better conveyed the functions and effects of the original question tag, I used the Swedish modal particle *väl*. As Aijmer (1996:402) notes, it is an “epistemic modal particle” that signals “uncertainty or weak commitment”. Axelsson (2009:90) further claims that *väl* is multifunctional and can function “as a question appealing for support from the listener”. Finally, Aijmer (1996:402) confirms its validity as a face-saving marker. Although she refers to *väl* as a device that can make a request more polite by giving the hearer the choice to turn it

down, it arguably serves the same function in questions such as (5). Thus, *väl* could be said to encompass all of the identified functions of *is there* in this particular context.

My corpus searches provided further support for this solution. In the ESPC, *is there* did not occur as a question tag. However, a search for *väl* as a Swedish translation in the ESPC showed that out of the 179 occurrences of the modal particle *väl* among the Swedish translations, 18 were translations for various English question tags. Moreover, a search in the reverse direction showed that in 17 out of 209 cases, *väl* was translated into English with a question tag. The fact that *väl* occurs both as a translation of and a source for English question tags is good proof of its validity as a translation equivalent. Finally, a search for the expression *det är väl* received 28,976 hits in Korp, while *eller hur* and *inte sant* as invariant tags only received 18,376 and 2,511 hits respectively. Although all of these solutions are frequent, the search results reaffirm that *väl* is the most frequent and arguably the most natural solution.

The question tag in (6) has slightly different functions:

- |                |   |   |
|----------------|---|---|
| (6)<br>[p. 40] | It's the original 'seize the day' story, <i>isn't it?</i> Seize your life and enjoy it! | Det är <i>väl egentligen</i> den ursprungliga 'fånga dagen'-berättelsen. Fånga livet och njut av det! |
|----------------|---|---|

First, (6) also seeks confirmation of a shared belief, but on a subtler level. While (5) explicitly sought and received an answer, the speaker does not really expect an answer from the hearer in (6), which is indicated by the fact that he makes another utterance immediately after the first. Another difference between the two examples is that while the question tag is used subjectively as a hedge in (5), it could be argued to have the opposite effect in (6). It emphasises the speaker's stance by marking his assumption that the speaker shares his opinion. Tottie & Hoffmann (2006:300) refer to this type of question tags as attitudinal question tags, and since the tag expresses the speaker's attitude, it could also be connected to Brinton's subjective function, (h). Moreover, recalling Andersen's subjective functions, *isn't it* in (6) could be argued to express the speaker's epistemic stance in the form of strong commitment to the proposition.

The difference between (5) and (6) is also reflected in my translation choice. The modal particle *väl* was, once again, used to express the interpersonal function of the question tag. However, it would not work on its own in (6), because even without the question mark, *det är väl den ursprungliga 'fånga dagen'-berättelsen* appears more like a question or even an ironical statement, depending on how it is accentuated. This

would definitely not cause the intended effect on the reader. However, the addition of another word, the Swedish adverb *egentligen*, solves this problem. As Nilsson (2005:119, 200) claims, *egentligen* sometimes has a mitigating function – it can tone down an utterance. Indeed, *egentligen* could be argued to mitigate the unintentional functions of *väl*, and with this solution, the utterance no longer appears like a question or an ironic statement. *Egentligen* also has a subjective function partly comparable to the subjective function of the original question tag. While *isn't it* in (6) stresses the speaker's stance, *egentligen* may signal remarkability, or the fact that the proposition just occurred to the speaker (ibid.:118). Even if these functions are not identical, both express the speaker's attitude to the proposition in a way that works quite well in the context of (6). Taking the wider context into consideration, it appears as if the speaker just thought of the fact that the story he refers to is the original 'seize the day' story, and the exclamation mark after the succeeding sentence indicates that he finds this a somewhat remarkable fact.

The translation of (6) might seem like a far-fetched solution, but it is the closest alternative I could find that served similar functions while still appearing like natural speech. In fact, the combination *väl egentligen* received 3,880 hits in Korp, which proves that it is a natural solution. Overall, this example shows that dynamically equivalent translations are not only advisable in order to create a natural translation, but may be mandatory in cases where there is no direct equivalent, or when a direct equivalent would result in an awkward translation.

### 3.2 General extenders

General extenders are “phrase- or clause-final expressions” that typically consist of a conjunction (*and* or *or*) and a noun phrase (as in (7) below) or a *wh*-clause (as in (9) below) (Overstreet 2005:1847; Martínez 2011:2454). However, as illustrated in (8), the conjunction is sometimes omitted (see Aijmer 2002:212). As Terraschke (2010:450) notes, general extenders may serve a variety of textual, interpersonal, and subjective functions, which will be illustrated by (7), (8) and (9) below. In (7), the speaker talks about a busker who inspired one of his songs:

- |                |  |   |
|----------------|--|---|
| (7)<br>[p. 47] | I had this idea: maybe one day this guy is just going to die of hypothermia <i>or something</i> . And even when he dies, he's still going to be there. | Tanken slog mig att en dag kanske han bara fryser ihjäl <i>eller nåt</i> . Och när han dör kommer han fortfarande vara där. |
|----------------|--|---|

Two functions can be identified in (7). To some extent, *or something* illustrates the textual function of general extenders as “category indicators”, which suggests that the item or items preceding the general extender represent a more general category of items (Terraschke 2010:450). As Terraschke (ibid.) puts it, the general extender indicates that the item (in this case *hypothermia*) “is only one of many [...] that could be named in this context”. However, as Overstreet (2005:1852) notes, some general extenders “do not actually indicate any additional items”. Although (7), to some extent, indicates the existence of other possible causes of death, it also suggests that the expression preceding it “should not be taken too literally”, which is another function mentioned by Overstreet (ibid.:1856). Since the speaker refers to an idea and not a real belief, *or something* may emphasise that he does not truly believe that the busker will die of hypothermia – it is merely an imaginative idea. Thus, it could also be related to Andersen’s subjective functions as an example of a marker of the speaker’s metalinguistic stance in the form of weak lexical commitment (see 2.2.2).

In (7), the general extender could be translated more or less directly into Swedish. It is, in other words, one of the few cases in which a formally equivalent translation could be used. *Eller nåt*, a reduced and more colloquial form of the literal translation *eller något*, was chosen in order for the target text sentence to appear like natural speech. According to a search in Korp, *eller nåt* was also slightly more frequently used in sentence-final position than *eller något*, with 3,837 hits compared to 3,461, which indicates that it is slightly more likely to be used as a general extender than its more formal counterpart.

The second example (8), serves a range of different functions:

- |                |   |  |
|----------------|---|--|
| (8)<br>[p. 49] | My first attempts were very much influenced by the aesthetic illustration and art from 1910–1925. Art Nouveau, Gustav Klimt – <i>that sort [of] stuff</i> , but I tried to show a touch of modernity in the work. | Mina första försök var väldigt inspirerade av estetiska illustrationer och konst från 1910–1925. Jugend, Gustav Klimt <i>och sånt</i> , men jag försökte få med lite modernitet. |
|----------------|---|--|

First of all, it is clearly an example of a category indicator: the speaker mentions two types of influences that should be interpreted as examples of a larger group of influences. However, the fact that the speaker decides not to mention more examples could also be related to Grice’s maxim of quality, i.e. the conversational rule of not saying more than is necessary (cf. Overstreet 2005:1847). Brinton (1996:37) describes

this function as a “maxim hedge” that indicates “how an utterance matches cooperative principles of conversation”. While Brinton refers to this function as textual, it is arguably interactional as well. As Aijmer (2002:248) points out, the avoidance of “a detailed but tedious description” may be an attempt to retain the interest of the hearer. However, (8) is also interactional in another sense. From Andersen’s perspective, it could also be considered an A-signal (see Section 2.2.2), because it reveals the speaker’s assumption that the hearer is sufficiently familiar with the subject to be able to imagine what *that sort of stuff* indicates (cf. Andersen 2001:73). As Aijmer (2002:248) puts it, “the speaker counts on the hearer’s ability to make inferences”. To sum up, (8) is a good illustration of the multifunctionality of general extenders, and all of its functions should be kept in mind when searching for an appropriate translation equivalent.

While it was possible to translate (7) more or less directly, the literal Swedish translation of (8), *den sortens grejer*, received only 5 hits in Korp. This clearly indicates that a dynamically equivalent translation is necessary for the target text sentence to read naturally. While *that sort of stuff* did not receive a single hit in the ESCP, the closely related expression *that sort of thing* received two hits as an English original and six hits as an English translation. The English originals were translated with the general extenders *och så vidare* and *och sådana saker*, whereas the Swedish originals included the single word items *sånt*, *sådant* and *så*. While it would be impossible to make any generalising claims based on such few hits, I was able to use the Swedish equivalents as a starting point for a search for a range of Swedish general extenders<sup>1</sup> in sentence-final position in Korp. The search (displayed in Table 1 below) revealed that the general extender *och sånt* (‘and such’), which like *eller nåt* in (7), is a reduced and colloquial form, was the most frequent expression and presumably the most natural equivalent.

Expression	Frequency
<i>och sånt</i>	5,316
<i>och sådant</i>	1,119
<i>och sådana saker</i>	168
<i>och såna saker</i>	138
<i>och såna grejer</i>	59
<i>och sådana grejer</i>	20

<sup>1</sup> I chose not to include the individual single-word expressions in the search because they could not be naturally integrated into the TT sentence.

**Table 1.** Frequency of possible equivalents to *that sort of stuff* in Korp

Recalling the various functions identified in (8), *och sånt* could indeed be argued to function textually as a category indicator, textually and/or interactionally as a maxim hedge and interactionally as an A-signal, just like *that sort of stuff*. This shows that even if the lexical meaning of *och sånt* diverges from *that sort of stuff*, the expression conveys the various pragmatic functions of the original pragmatic marker in a more natural way.

Moving on to (9), the general extender *or whatever you want to call it* displays a combination of the functions found in (7) and (8):

- (9) I think that the soul, or an energy, Jag tror att själen, eller nån energi,  
[p. 48] *or whatever you want to call it,* *eller vad man nu ska kalla det,*  
remains after someone has left. stannar kvar när man dör.

It is a category indicator in the sense that it suggests that there are other possible ways to describe what the speaker refers to. At the same time, it could be argued to display a subjective function similar to that of (7). While the speaker in (7) showed weak lexical commitment in the sense of not being completely serious, the speaker in (9) shows weak lexical commitment in the sense of being uncertain of the accuracy of his choice of words. As Aijmer (2002:245) notes, a general extender introduced by *or* may function as a "tentativizing" hedge that makes it possible to make utterances one is not completely certain of. Moreover, there is also a politeness-related dimension to the function of (9). While (8) was a maxim hedge in a quantitative sense, (9) could rather be described as a qualitative maxim hedge (cf. Overstreet 2005:1855). By informing the hearer of the possible inaccuracy of the expression, the speaker protects his face. Finally, (9) serves another interactional function, because it involves the hearer. The expression *or whatever you want to call it* indicates that the speaker is aware of the fact that the hearer might prefer another name for *the soul* or *an energy*. Thus, in a way, (9) could even be argued to exemplify Andersen's interactional D-signals (see 2.2.2), since the expression is used because the speaker expects a possible divergence between the hearer's attitude to the utterance and his own.

While this plethora of functions makes the task of finding an appropriate equivalent seem quite impossible, there is actually a range of different Swedish general extenders that are rather close to the English expression with regards to its meaning as well as its function. A search in Korp also revealed that many of them are quite frequent

(out of the nine expressions included in the search, only two received fewer than 100 hits), and could therefore be regarded as more or less natural expressions. Thus, in this particular case, the difficulty is not the lack of natural equivalent expressions in the target language, but the fact that we need to determine which of all the available expressions would be the most appropriate translation choice.

*Eller vad du nu vill kalla det* and *eller vad du vill kalla det*, which are the most direct translations of the original expression, received only 19 and 9 hits respectively, which indicates that, once again, a more dynamically equivalent translation is required. Although *eller vad det heter* was the most frequent expression with 1,101 hits, it would denote that the speaker is actually searching for an established term. However, in this case, the speaker is vague because there are many possible ways to express what he tries to express, none of which is particularly better than the other. Thus, the expressions *eller vad man ska kalla det* and *eller vad man nu ska kalla det* could be considered more appropriate, because they do not refer to the existence of an established term in the sense that the other expressions do. Since *eller vad man ska kalla det* received more than twice as many hits as *eller vad man nu ska kalla det* (738 compared to 320 hits), it could be considered the most natural equivalent of the two. However, *vad* is not a direct translation of *whatever*, and a search in the ESPC for original English sentences containing *or whatever* showed that the word *nu* was included in 9 out of 11 Swedish translations. This indicates that a translation including both *vad* and *nu* better captures the meaning of *whatever*.

To sum up, *eller vad man nu ska kalla det*, conveys both the function and meaning of the original expression, and while some other similar expressions with slightly different functions were more frequent in Korp, my solution is arguably still a natural expression. Overall, it is interesting to note that all of the general extenders in the source text could be translated with Swedish general extenders. This indicates that general extenders have closer Swedish equivalents than many other kinds of pragmatic markers. However, there are still nuances among these equivalents, and therefore it is important to analyse them carefully rather than just choosing the closest or most frequent possible equivalent, in order to find equivalents that do not only capture the functions of the original expressions, but are also as natural as possible.

### 3.3 Single-word pragmatic markers

*Well* has been referred to as the most frequent and the most studied of all pragmatic markers, but there is still little agreement on its functions and how it should be translated (Brinton 1996:36; Mattsson 2009:77). The marker occurred twice in the source text, and because of its apparent ambiguity, I decided to include both occurrences in the analysis. The first, (10), occurs after a moment of hesitation:

- (10) [p. 47] [...] the top E-string was prone to popping out of the bridge whenever I hit it too hard, rendering it all but unusable. It did just that at one point during my solo but... *well*, Keith Richards always seems to cope with just five strings, so I figured it would be churlish to let a little mishap like that ruin the whole take!
- [...] den översta E-strängen hade en tendens att hoppa ur stallet om jag spelade för hårt, vilket i princip gjorde den oanvändbar. Just det hände vid ett tillfälle under mitt solo men... Keith Richards verkar *ju* alltid klara sig med bara fem strängar, så det kändes dumt att låta ett sånt litet missöde förstöra hela tagningen!

According to Mattson (2009:88), a pause like this is typical when *well* marks “a conclusion or a beginning of a topic”. This function is comparable to one of Brinton’s textual functions, (d), where the speaker marks “a boundary in discourse” by changing the topic, partly changing the topic or resuming an earlier topic. Indeed, in (10), the speaker hesitates before moving on to a resumption and a conclusion of the topic of his loose E-string. However, this is not the only function of *well* in (10). According to Svartvik (see Mattsson 2009:81), *well* may also function as an introduction to explanations and clarifications. In (10), *well* marks that the second part of the succeeding utterance, the fact that the speaker did not let the incident ruin the take, is explained with a reference to a known fact: the fact that Keith Richards usually plays a five-string guitar. Thus, it could also be connected to Andersen’s interpersonal functions as another example of an A-signal (see 2.2.2). Once again, the speaker expresses an assumption that the hearer knows what he refers to. If the speaker had not assumed that the hearer was familiar with Keith Richards and his guitar, he would probably have used another example. While the interpersonal function could be argued to be embedded in the utterance as a whole, Andersen (2001:22) points out that pragmatic markers facilitate the identification of the purpose of an utterance. Thus, even if the function would remain, however subtly, if *well* was removed, the use of *well* emphasises and facilitates the interpretation of the interpersonal function of the utterance.

In order to choose a natural translation that captured the functions of *well*, I decided to use the Swedish modal particle *ju*. While a closer equivalent such as *tja* or *nåja* (discussed below) would retain the textual function of *well* as a marker of topic resumption and conclusion, *ju* better captures the interpersonal and explanation-marking functions of the *well*. This can be explained with the following example from Korp:

(11) De är *ju* av metall så skrotvärdet är stort. (Korp: News)

[They are, as you know, made of metal, so the scrap value is high.]

As Mattsson (2009:103) argues, *ju* typically “indicates the function of shared knowledge”, just like *well* does in the source text. This is true in (11), where *ju* signals the obviousness of the fact that “they” are made of metal. However, *ju* also works as a marker of explanation, because just like *well* in (10), it emphasises the fact that the second part of the utterance (the high scrap value), is explained by the first (the fact that they are made of metal). Thus, I chose *ju* as a translation because it captures both of these functions very well.

Although a search in the ESPC did not show a single occurrence of *ju* as a translation of *well*, and only two occurrences of *ju* as a Swedish source translated with *well* into English, it is, as will be argued presently, a more natural translation than the more frequent alternatives found in the ESPC. Apart from omission, which was not considered an option since there were other ways to express the functions of the marker, the most frequent solutions in the ESPC were all small words in sentence-initial position, such as *ja*, *tja*, *men*, *nå* and *nja*. Although a translation such as *Tja, Keith Richards verkar alltid klara sig med bara fem strängar* would convey the textual function of *well* and be closer to the original expression, it is not a very natural solution. As Aijmer (1996:402) notes, *ju* is “extremely frequent” in conversations. In fact, a search for *ju* in Korp received more than 1.5 million hits, while neither of *tja*, *nja* and *nåja*<sup>2</sup> received more than 7,000 individual hits. Similarly, in the ESPC, *ju* occurred 484 times in the Swedish original texts, while *tja* occurred six times, *nåja* occurred three times and *nja* did not occur at all. If anything, these results show that *ju* is a natural part of the Swedish language while the other items are far less common.

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<sup>2</sup> The previously mentioned translations *ja*, *men* and *nå* were excluded from the search because of the difficulty of discerning their uses as pragmatic markers from their uses as other word classes.

In a notable contrast to the absence of *ju* as a Swedish translation in the ESPC, Mattsson's study of pragmatic markers in subtitling showed that *ju* was the most frequent translation of *well* in her corpus (Mattsson 2009:102). While it could be argued that subtitlers may have a better command of natural translation of speech, the frequency of *ju* in Mattsson's corpus compared to its absence in the ESPC could also be explained by the fact that *ju* is a short word that meets the time and space constraints of subtitling (cf. *ibid.*:47). Nevertheless, the fact that *ju* was the most frequent translation of *well* among the subtitles reaffirms its legitimacy as an equivalent to *well*.

While *ju* could theoretically work as a translation of *well* in both examples, there is a slight difference to the function of *well* in (12):

- |         |  |  |
|---------|--|--|
| (12)    | It just never occurred to me that there would be a possibility because I thought, 'Well, he doesn't engineer or produce anymore because he's doing his own thing. And he certainly wouldn't go back to being an engineer [...] | Det slog mig aldrig att det fanns en möjlighet, för jag tänkte: 'Han jobbar <i>nog</i> inte som ljudtekniker eller producent längre eftersom han håller på med sina egna grejer. Och han skulle säkert inte vilja vara ljudtekniker igen [...] |
| [p. 47] |  |  |

Since *well* in (12) introduces the speaker's own train of thought, it arguably marks speculation rather than common knowledge. The fact that the subject of the utterance does not engineer or produce anymore is not common knowledge, but rather something the speaker believes to be probable. Thus, in a sense, *well* in (12) has a subjective rather than interpersonal function. Recalling Andersen's subjective functions (see figure 1 in Section 2.2.2), *well* in (12) could be argued to express the speaker's epistemic stance in the form of endorsement of the proposition somewhere between strong commitment and a tentative attitude. The speaker is quite sure of the fact but still not completely certain. This is emphasised when the utterance is put in contrast with the succeeding sentence, where the modal adverb *certainly* expresses strong commitment. This function of *well* is also mentioned by Aijmer (2002:24), who claims that *well* may convey "hesitation or reservation". Finally, it is an example of Brinton's subjective function, (h), where the speaker may express his attitude towards the following utterance (see 2.2.2).

In order to convey the subjective function of *well* in (12), the Swedish modal particle *nog*, which literally means 'probably', was chosen. While *nog*, just like *ju*, did not occur as a translation of *well* in the ESPC, it was used three times as a translation of *well* in Mattsson's study (Mattsson 2009:101). It also received more than 650,000 hits

in Korp, which indicates that it is a far more natural item than the more formally equivalent *tja*, *nja* or *nåja* in Swedish. Mattsson (ibid.:36) even refers to *nog* as an illustrative example of a dynamically equivalent translation of *well*, which “gives the viewer a more implicit and nuanced picture of the emotive state of the speaker, and possibly triggers an experience of the statement that is closer to what the ST audience had”. While she refers to subtitling, Mattsson’s statement perfectly conveys my motivation for the use of *nog* as a translation of *well* in (12). While a more formally equivalent translation with *tja* or *nåja* might capture the hesitant function of *well*, *nog* serves the same function in a more subtle way. Similarly, whereas *tja* or *nåja* runs a risk of producing the wrong effect on the reader because of its awkwardness and unnaturalness in modern Swedish (cf. Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg 2003:1144), *nog* would most likely produce a more similar effect, since it is both a natural item and a typical feature of Swedish speech, just like *well* is in English.

The last example (13) is another short word, *so*, which might seem easy enough to translate, but which, just like the general extenders in 3.2, may require a careful analysis in order to avoid an unnatural translation:

- |                 |   |   |
|-----------------|---|---|
| (13)<br>[p. 47] | I had this idea: maybe one day this guy is just going to die of hypothermia or something. And even when he dies, he’s still going to be there. <i>So</i> it’s this idea of this busker that dies and doesn’t realize that he’s dead and just carries on performing in the street. | Tanken slog mig att en dag kanske han bara fryser ihjäl eller nåt. Och när han dör kommer han fortfarande vara där. Tanken är <i>alltså</i> att den här gatumusikanten dör och inte inser att han är död utan bara fortsätter uppträda på gatan |
|-----------------|---|---|

In (13), *so* has a concluding function, since it sums up the idea described by the speaker prior to the utterance and ends the topic. While there is no explicit description of this particular function in either Brinton or Andersen, it could be compared to three of Brinton’s textual functions: the closing of discourse (a), the denotation of old information (e) and finally, the marking of how one clause relates to the preceding one (f) (see 2.2.2). Similarly, Andersen (2001:77) notes that pragmatic markers with textual functions may mark the connection “between one utterance and the next”. Thus, with Brinton’s and Andersen’s functions in mind, *so* could be said to close the topic by indicating that the utterance following the marker will be a conclusion of old information, i.e. the utterances preceding it.

This function is captured quite well by the Swedish modal particle *alltså*, which I chose as a translation for *so*. As Aijmer (2007:40) claims, *alltså* can be used as an “inferential marker” which signals that “the force of the utterance is a conclusion which follows from the preceding discourse”. Thus, just like *so*, *alltså* can be used as a marker of conclusion. While Aijmer (2007:34) claims that *so* is the closest equivalent to *alltså* and could be considered a literal translation, the closest Swedish equivalent to *so* is arguably *så*. *Så* was also found to be the most common translation of *so* in the ESPC, where *so* as a pragmatic marker was translated into *så* in 67 out of 147 cases. The second most frequently used solution in the ESPC was the omission of *so*, which was used in 20 cases. *Alltså*, which was used in 19 cases, was only the third most frequent equivalent. However, while *så* is not unnatural per se, *alltså* could be argued to convey the function and effect of the original pragmatic marker in a slightly more natural way in Swedish. A search for *alltså* as a Swedish translation in the ESPC showed that in 19 out of 50 cases, it was used as a translation of *so*. Furthermore, *alltså* had been added in 12 cases where there were no detectable equivalents in the English source. The fact that some translators feel the need to add *alltså* indicates that it is a natural part of the Swedish language, and further supports my translation choice.

## 4 Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to investigate how English pragmatic markers could be translated into Swedish in a dynamic and natural way, and how a careful analysis could facilitate the translation process. The scope of the study was limited to question tags, general extenders and single-word pragmatic markers. Using the theoretical framework of Nida & Taber (1974), Andersen (2001) and Brinton (1996) as a starting point, I analysed and discussed my own translation of the music article “Black Books” from English into Swedish. Previous research and corpus searches were also used in order to support my translation choices.

The analysis confirmed the common notion that pragmatic markers are a difficult aspect of translation. Because of the different ways in which pragmatic functions are expressed in English and Swedish, there are perhaps no perfect solutions or infallible methods for finding appropriate equivalents. However, the fact that dynamically equivalent translations, including a range of different solutions, were considered necessary for almost all of the pragmatic markers in the source text, certainly underscores the importance of analysing them carefully in order to find the most

appropriate equivalents. While this study is too small to provide any general guidelines, it shows how a careful analysis may facilitate the process of translating pragmatic markers. By taking the functions of pragmatic into careful consideration, I could find solutions that, while being quite different from the English markers, captured their functions in a natural way. Furthermore, corpus searches and previous research helped me achieve a clearer picture of the which words and expressions were natural in Swedish and which were not. This helped me discard unnatural alternatives and find more natural solutions. In summary, many of the translation solutions used in the present study would probably never have been considered without a careful analysis.

While a more extensive study would be required in order to draw any general conclusions on how pragmatic markers could or should be translated from English into Swedish, it is worth noting that certain Swedish forms, such as modal particles and adverbs, seem more likely to convey the functions of English pragmatic markers than other forms. It would be interesting to see whether a more extensive analysis would generate similar or different results. Hopefully, this study can be a starting point for further research on the process of translating pragmatic markers, that could lead to the identification of patterns in the use of different translation strategies or solutions. Furthermore, it would be interesting to extend the research to cover other problematic aspects of the translation of music journalism, such as evaluative adjectives, creative metaphors or reporting verbs, in order to provide journalists with a larger framework that would guide them through the translation process and help them avoid unnatural solutions.

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