

## The long and winding road of the Danish evidential *vel* - from epistemic modality via concessivity to evidentiality

The meaning of the Modern Danish modal particle *vel* (cognate *well*) has been analysed as expressing an appeal to the addressee to verify the truth of the proposition (cp. Davidsen-Nielsen 1996: 286). For its Modern Swedish cognate *väl*, the same meaning has recently been rendered in terms of *engagement* (Bergqvist 2020: 471).

However, these analyses only address the contextualized meaning. In utterances like (1) and (2), it would be absurd to hold that the speaker appeals to the addressee for verification:

- (1) Jeg fik ca. 30 sting og det gjorde **vel** ondt i en måneds tid.  
'I got approx. 30 stitches and it hurt VEL for a month approximately'
- (2) Jeg har **vel** sikkert gjort forsøg på at falde ind i dialekten.  
'I have VEL certainly tried to adapt to the dialect'

*Vel* does not necessarily seek confirmation but marks the proposition as put forth without having evidence for it, i.e., as a guess or conjecture. Thus, *vel* is so to speak grammaticalized 'gut feeling' (distinct from epistemic possibility since it readily combines with epistemic necessity markers, cp. (2)). Based on this meaning the contextual function to seek confirmation emerges: If the addressee can (dis-)confirm the proposition, a cooperative move would be to do so. In my paper, I will present an account of the development of this meaning.

Based on corpus studies, starting its development a millennium ago, the semantic path of evidential *vel* appears to be reconstructable as follows:

- (3) 'good, in satisfactory manner > 'easily' > epistemic necessity > concessive > evidential conjecture

With this semantic path, the development of *vel* can be accounted for based on small-scale hearer-driven reanalyses in terms of Hansen (2021).

The development of concessives out of epistemic modality markers is fairly uncontroversial (cp. e.g., Sweetser 1990: 70-72; Bybee et al. 1994: 226-227, Squartini 2012). The central part of the development is the transition from concessive to evidential meaning (cp. Thurgood 1986: 217-218). In line with Aikhenvald (2004: 276; 2011: 610) who argues that one source of evidential meanings are so-called evidential strategies whereby non-evidential markers are used evidentially in particular contexts, I argue that the conjecture meaning emerges based on contextual meanings in concessive sequences as rendered in Couper-Kuhlen & Thompson (2000: 382): The second, conceding, move in these sequences is a reiteration and an acknowledgment of the validity of others' statements. As pointed out by Squartini (2012: 2123), the conceded proposition is thus reported. Therefore, such sequences provide latent, contextually given evidential meanings where the addressee puts forth a proposition as true relying on others' assessment and hence, crucially for *vel*, without having supportive evidence for the assessment herself. In a pragmatically driven reanalysis (Hansen 2021), this second aspect ('lack of evidence') is then conventionalized as the coded meaning of *vel*.

The exact nature of the evidential meaning can only be understood in taking into account the paradigmatic oppositions of *vel* diachronically. Being grammaticalized, *vel* enters into opposition with the other evidential modal particles *nok* and *vist* which respectively express that the evidence is only subjectively or intersubjectively available (cp. Hansen & Heltoft 2011: 1058-60). Thus, only through paradigmaticization (Lehmann [1982]2015: 174; Nørgård-Sørensen et al. 2011; Diewald & Smirnova 2012), *vel* semantically finds its current position in the paradigm of evidential modal particles.

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