

# Swedish *orka* viewed through its English correspondences – ability, insufficient strength/energy or insufficient volition?

Mats Johansson, Lene Nordrum

Lund University (Sweden)

**Abstract:** This paper explores the Swedish auxiliary *orka* and its English correspondences as reflected in English-Swedish parallel corpora. *Orka* is interesting from a contrastive perspective since it lacks a straightforward equivalent in English. We show that most of the English correspondences, both in the direction Swedish original to English translation and in the direction English original to Swedish translation, indicate a semantic analysis of Swedish *orka* involving a combination of two meaning components 1) *ability* and 2) *sufficient physical or mental strength/energy*. We suggest an analysis inspired by Nadathur (2016) where *ability* is the core semantic property, but sufficiency of physical or mental energy is included in the lexical meaning of the verb as a potential obstacle to ability. In addition, our material includes correspondences reflecting a second meaning involving *sufficiency of volition* (von Fintel, 2006), which we assume is derived from the meaning above. We also note that *orka* predominantly occurs in negative polarity contexts, and speculate that the relatively recent use of the imperative form *orka* in informal talk, meaning something along the lines of ‘I could not be bothered’, might have its source in such negative connotations. In addition to offering a specified semantic description of the Swedish verb *orka*, our study contributes to cross-linguistic studies of expressions of *sufficiency* meanings and sufficiency as a meaning component in verbs (Fortuin, 2013).<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** sufficiency verbs, *orka*, participant-internal possibility, parallel corpora, English/Swedish

## 1. Introduction

The Swedish verb *orka* is interesting from a contrastive perspective since it lacks a straightforward correspondence in English. *Norstedts Swedish-English Dictionary* (Petti, 2000: 665), for example, provides the following idiomatic correspondences of *orka*:

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<sup>1</sup>We are indebted to Bengt Altenberg for discovering the interesting translation patterns found for *orka* in the ESPC and for selflessly sharing with us his data and initial observations. We thank two anonymous reviewers of this paper for forcing us to clarify some of the ideas presented here. For all remaining mistakes, inconsistencies and plain errors, we assume full responsibility.

- (1) Jag (du etc.) **orkar (orkade)** + inf.  
He (you etc.) **can (could)** + inf.
- (2) Han **orkar** arbeta -  
He **is able** to work...He **is capable** of working.
- (3) Nu **orkar** jag inte [hålla på] längre.  
I **cannot** go on any longer; I am **too tired** to go on.
- (4) Om jag **orkar** [med det] ska jag...  
(har **krafter nog** [have sufficient strength]): if I **have strength** enough (the strength) for it...  
(har ork [have ‘energy’]): if I **can manage (am up to, have energy enough)** for) it...

As indicated in Norstedt’s list, *orka* can function both as a main verb, especially in sense 4, and as an auxiliary, but it is considerably more frequent as an auxiliary and has been since medieval times (Lagervall, 2014: 341). Our focus in this article is on *orka* as an auxiliary verb. In terms of the meaning of *orka*, we see that Norstedt’s list includes *ability* verbs (*can, be able to*) as well as expressions of the type *having strength (enough)*, which raises the question whether *orka* is polysemous. In the major Swedish reference grammar, *Svenska Akademiens Grammatik* (Teleman *et al.* 1999(4): 288), however, the two meanings, *ability* and *having strength*, are described as intertwined: *orka* is defined as a *potential auxiliary* which indicates whether the subject referent has sufficient strength or stamina to bring about the state of affairs in question, and further described as “a more specified meaning than *kunna* (can)” [our translation].

Observations such as these raise the question of what type of semantic properties compose the meaning of *orka*, and how these properties are related. In other words: How can we account for Teleman *et al.*’s observation of a more specified meaning of *kunna* (‘could’) in semantic terms? Drawing on the general methodology proposed by Johansson (2007), we have earlier shown that the semantic account of another Swedish potential auxiliary, *hinna*, roughly ‘having enough time to be able to do something’, can be sharpened through the lens of parallel corpora (Johansson and Nordrum, 2016). In this study, we use the same general approach to explore the semantics of *orka*. The idea is that if we consider word-to-word translations of a lexical item as well as lexical material typically occurring in the context of the item, the semantic properties figuring in the interpretation of the item are brought to the surface, and it becomes possible to say something about how these properties are related. We consider both how *orka* is translated from Swedish original texts into English and cases where *orka* shows up in translations of English original texts.

### 1.1 *Orka* on Modality’s Semantic Map

The starting point for our semantic analysis is Teleman *et al.*’s (1999(4): 288) observation that *orka* is a specialization of the modal auxiliary *kunna* (‘could’). A model suitable for illustrating such specialization and for pointing out contrastive differences with verbs in other languages is van der Auwera and Plungian’s (1998) account of modality: *Modality’s semantic map*. On Modality’s map, typologically general modal meanings are illustrated as separate boxes, but the map also allows for specialized modal sub-meanings as sub-domains inside the more general meaning categories. A lexical item in one language can thus cover a large area of several general meanings (several separate boxes) whereas its most frequent correspondence in another language might cover a more limited space on the map, or perhaps only a sub-domain of one category. English *may* and its Dutch counterpart *mogen* are a case

in point, where the latter is restricted to encoding deontic modality, whereas *may* has a wider range of meanings (see van der Auwera and Plungian, 1998: 89).

As illustrated in Fig. 1, the general meaning categories on Modality's semantic map are the semantic domains of *possibility* and *necessity*. The map is thus fairly restricted in terms of what is included as modality, focusing on what van der Auwera and Plungian (1998: 86) refer to as "a reasonable representation of core modality". Other accounts of modality can be more inclusive and include additional meanings, such as for example *volition* (see discussion in van der Auwera and Plungian, 1998: 84). The possibility/necessity distinction on Modality's map (Fig. 1) cuts across three types of modality: *participant-internal modality*, *participant-external modality* and *epistemic modality*. In addition, *deontic modality* is included as a sub-domain of participant-external modality (van der Auwera and Plungian, 1998: 82).

Participant-internal possibility	Participant-internal necessity
Participant-external possibility	Participant-external necessity
Deontic possibility	Deontic necessity
Epistemic possibility	Epistemic necessity

Figure 1. *Modality's semantic map* (based on van der Auwera and Plungian, 1998: 82).

Of the meaning categories in Fig. 1, *participant-internal possibility* and *necessity* capture possible and necessary states of affairs related to a core participant's capacities, mostly the Subject, whereas *participant-external modality* involves possibilities or necessities mediated by some participant-external circumstance. In the case of *deontic modality*, which is a specialization of participant-external modality, the external circumstance is some authority or social norm. *Epistemic modality*, lastly, expresses the speaker's judgment of the likely truth-value of a proposition.<sup>2</sup> Examples (5a)–(5d) illustrate the different types of possibility and examples (6a)–(6d) the different types of necessity (van der Auwera *et al.*, 2009: 274).

- (5) a. I **can** swim.  
(Participant-internal possibility)
- b. To get to the station, you **can** take bus 66.  
(Participant-external possibility)
- c. You **can** stay home – you have my permission.  
(Deontic possibility)
- d. He **may** come, or he may not – I don't know.  
(Epistemic possibility)
- (6) a. I **have** to have a cup of coffee, otherwise I can't function.  
(Participant-internal necessity)
- b. In order to get to the station, you **have** to take bus 66.  
(Participant-external necessity)
- c. You **must** stay home now, and this is an order.  
(Deontic necessity)

<sup>2</sup> An important distinction between epistemic modality and participant-internal and participant-external modality is that epistemic possibility takes scope over the entire proposition whereas the latter two types deal with "aspects internal to the state of affairs that the proposition reflects" (van der Auwera and Plungian, 1998: 82).

- d. He **must** be home now; he left for the office a long time ago.  
(Epistemic necessity)

Returning to *orka*, we note that Teleman *et al.*'s description places *orka* in the domain of *participant-internal possibility*. Specifically, in Teleman *et al.*'s (1999(4): 288) account, *orka* is part of a category referred to as *potentiella hjälpverb* ('potential auxiliaries'), which gives a latent possibility for something to happen or for someone's ability to do something. In the case of *orka*, the meaning proposed is that the Subject referent has enough strength or stamina to perform a certain action (Teleman *et al.*, 1999(4): 315). In our view, the reference to 'enough strength or stamina' relates *orka* to an interesting category of verbs referred to as *verbs of sufficiency* (Flint, 1980) or *sufficiency verbs* (Chesterman, 2007; Johansson and Nordrum, 2016).

## 1.2 Sufficiency verbs

The Scandinavian languages and the languages spoken around the Baltic Sea feature a number of sufficiency verbs, but to our knowledge sufficiency verbs are relatively infrequent outside of this region. The largest set of sufficiency verbs are found in Finnish: In her dissertation *Semantic structure in the Finnish lexicon: verbs of possibility and sufficiency*, Flint (1980) lists 45 such Finnish verbs. In Flint's study, the sufficiency verbs are given the features +[possibility] and +[sufficiency] and the sufficiency feature can then be further specified to something like [time] or [strength]. Table 1 illustrates four Finnish verbs with correspondences in Swedish.

As the glosses in Table 1 indicate, the semantic category of sufficiency can be encoded in other ways than as a semantic component of verbs, and such expressions of sufficiency are more commonly discussed in the literature. Many languages include a special sufficiency marker (like English *enough* and Swedish *nog*), a construction with a purposive clause, as well as other means of encoding sufficiency. In addition, sufficiency may be contextually derived, e.g. by simple juxtaposition (see Fortuin, 2013 for a survey of ways of expressing sufficiency across 59 typologically diverse languages). It is rare, however, for sufficiency to be incorporated in the meaning of verbs. As noted above, Finnish has a rich inventory of sufficiency verbs, English has *dare* and the more general *suffice*, whereas the Scandinavian languages fall somewhere in between with a handful of sufficiency verbs which specify the type of sufficiency (e.g. sufficiency with respect to a notion of strength/energy for *orka*).

**Table 1. Four sufficiency verbs in Finnish and Swedish with English glosses**

Sufficiency category	Finnish Verb	Swedish verb	English gloss
Time	<i>ehtii</i>	<i>hinna</i>	To have enough time
Energy	<i>jakssaa</i>	<i>orka</i>	To have enough strength/energy
Space	<i>passaa</i>	<i>passa</i>	'Fit' [to be big/small enough]
Boldness	<i>kehtaa</i>	<i>våga</i>	'Dare' [to be bold enough]

An interesting question is thus whether 'the sufficiency component' is the only semantic property of a sufficiency verb, and if it is not, whether it is the most salient property. In a previous study of the Swedish sufficiency verb *hinna* ('have enough time to be able to [do sth]') (Johansson and Nordrum, 2016), we argue that the English correspondences of *hinna* reflect a meaning where *time sufficiency* is the most salient, at-issue, meaning of the verb, but that the verb also reflects an *ability* meaning, which is backgrounded. In the terminology of van der Auwera and Plungian's Modality's map (1998), we view *time sufficiency* as

participant-external possibility and *ability* as participant-internal possibility, and *hinna* thus covers two contiguous areas on the map.

For *orka*, in contrast, the sufficiency component cannot really be disentangled from participant-internal possibility since both ‘having enough energy’ and ‘being able to’ reflect participant-internal modality. Rather, as suggested by Teleman *et al.*, (1999(4): 315), sufficiency seems to be a sort of ‘specialization’ of participant-internal modality. In this study, we use translation data in parallel corpora to shed light on how this specialization can be described, and explore whether there are other meaning components of *orka* that are not captured by the description in the Swedish reference grammar or by dictionary entries.

## 2. Method and material

Following the general methodology ‘seeing language through multilingual corpora’ (Johansson, 2007), this paper explores the meaning of *orka* as mirrored in parallel translation corpora. The material was drawn from *The English-Swedish Parallel Corpora* (ESPC), comprising approximately 650,000 words (Altenberg and Aijmer, 2000),<sup>3</sup> and from the Swedish-English components of *The European Parliament Proceedings Parallel Corpus* (Europarl) and the *Amsterdam Slavic Parallel Aligned Corpus* (ASPAC). The two components comprise 33,406,922 words and 1,516,943 words, respectively. All corpora are available from the search interface KORP,<sup>4</sup> managed by the Swedish Language Bank (‘Språkbanken’), University of Gothenburg (Borin *et al.*, 2012). The ESPC includes written texts, non-fiction and fiction, mainly published between 1980 and 2000, while the material from Europarl contains non-fiction texts in the form of scripted speeches from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. The ASPAC material, lastly, contains fiction texts from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. Both the direction Swedish original to English translation (SO→ET) and English original to Swedish translation (ST←EO) were investigated. Since the Europarl and ASPAC corpora do not allow searches that distinguish between the original texts and the translated text respectively, the data from these corpora were sorted manually into original and translations based on the metadata.

Data collection and analysis involved a sequence of steps. First, instances of *orka* were retrieved and manually cleaned so that only instances of *orka* as an auxiliary verb remained. Next, English correspondences were extracted from the parallel corpora’s sentence alignment interface, transferred to a database, and supplemented with information about the type of English correspondence and the syntactic and semantic context in both the original and the source text. The examples were then sorted according to translation correspondence and further analysed for patterns.

Some limitations should be noted. First, it is clear that the material does not provide a balanced empirical foundation for a comprehensive study of the meaning of *orka* across registers and dialects; for one, informal talk is not included in the material and some of the examples are retrieved from written texts from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It follows that *orka* may include meanings and meaning components that are not reflected in our material, and our study is therefore mainly exploratory. Further, the number of examples is limited, which means that frequency can only inform arguments, not validate them. Despite these shortcomings, however, our data has the unique advantage that meaning can be explored through the lens of authentic interpretations of *orka*. That is, neither the source texts

<sup>3</sup> A description of the corpus is also available at <http://www.sprak.gu.se/english/research/research-activities/corpus-linguistics/corpora-at-the-dll/espc/>.

<sup>4</sup> The KORP interface is available at <https://spraakbanken.gu.se/korp>.

nor the translations were produced with a theoretical agenda (see Aijmer, 2004), which ensures authenticity of data.

### 3. Exploring the English correspondences and contexts of *orka*

Table 2 gives the English correspondences of the lemma *orka* in our material. In this section, we use these correspondences to shed light on the semantic profile of *orka*, but it should be noted that the correspondences are not necessarily addressed in the order in which they are listed in Table 2. The section is organized so that we first deal with translations that seem to focus on ability meaning, such as *can* in Table 2 (Section 3.1), and then on such examples that seem to focus on sufficiency of energy or strength, such as *have the energy strength to* in Table 2 (Section 3.2). Next, we move to a more general discussion of sufficiency (Section 3.3), before addressing the observation that the overwhelming majority of our *orka* examples occur in non-assertive contexts (Section 3.4). We end the section with some observations of *orka* in translations with *be bothered/fed up with* (Table 2), which we argue focus on *volition* rather than *ability* (Section 3.5).

**Table 2. The English correspondences of *orka* in the parallel corpora\***

English correspondence	SO→ET		ST←EO	
	N 104	%	N 29	%
<i>Can</i>	29	27.9	10	33.5
<i>Be (un)able to</i>	12	11.5	4	14
<i>(Can) Manage</i>	17	16.3	2	7
<i>Can bear/cope/stand/face/bring</i>	9	8.7	1	3.5
<i>HAVE (enough/the) strength/energy to+inf</i>	8	7.7	1	3.5
<i>Be bothered/be fed up/feel like</i>	7	6.7	1	3.5
<i>too Adj to+inf</i>	5	4.8	3	10.5
<i>Can find the energy/have energy, get strength</i>	3	2.9	-	-
<i>Zero</i>	5	4.8	3	10.5
<i>Other</i>	9	8.7	4	14
<i>SUM</i>	104	100	29	100

\*The term ‘correspondence’ refers to both sources and translations of *orka* (Johansson, 2007: 23). Table 2 gives both congruent correspondences and divergent correspondences of *orka*. Congruent correspondences are those where the source syntax is kept intact (Johansson, 2007: 23-26) and *orka* corresponds to an auxiliary or semi-auxiliary, while divergent correspondences are those with a different syntactic structure, as in the correspondence *too Adj to + inf*. It should be noted, however, that none of the correspondences listed in Table 1 involves major syntactic changes.

#### 3.1 Ability

Roughly half of the translations and the sources of *orka* in Table 2 correspond to a modal auxiliary reflecting ‘ability’ meaning, which indicates that ability is a prominent meaning component in *orka*. Under ability, we include correspondences with *can*, *be (un)able to*, and *(can) manage*. However, a closer look at the correspondences with *ability* suggests that the meaning component *sufficiency of mental/physical strength* is usually reflected as well, or is supplied by the context.

In the vast majority of the ability correspondences, an aspectual/durative adverbial indicating that the ability is subject to exhaustion is present in the context, thus adding a sufficiency element, a pattern that is also noted in Norstedt’s dictionary (see entry 3 in (1), p.

156). Example (7) illustrates the context with an aspectual/durative adverbial in the direction SO→ET, and example (8) in the direction ST←EO.<sup>5</sup>

- (7) Hur länge skall jag *orka* vara dessa barns samlande punkt? (GT1)  
How long will he *be able to* be the center of these children's lives? (GT1T)
- (8) He shut his eyes and wondered if he *could* hold on any longer. (JRT1)  
 Han slöt ögonen och undrade om han skulle *orka* hålla sig fast längre. (JRT1T)

We note that the aspectual/durative adverbial is always present in both the English original and in the Swedish translation in our material, but can be added in the English translations, as in (9).

- (9) Han *orkade* inte prata utan gick och lade sig. (SL1)  
 He *could* hardly talk any more, so he went to bed. (SL1T)

We would argue that the addition of an aspectual adverbial in (9) is a way for the translator to capture that *orka* encodes *sufficiency* as well as *ability* meaning. Even if it is not possible to claim that the adverbial *any more* mirrors a sufficiency component, it does reflect the possibility that the Subject's ability to talk is not permanent, but subject to exhaustion, which can then be related to sufficiency. In (9), the sufficiency relation comes in via the coordinated clause, *so he went to bed*, which gives the likely reason why the Subject cannot talk any longer: *he* is probably too tired, implying that *he* lacked sufficient strength to talk due to tiredness. Without *any more*, in contrast, the English translation in (9) risks being interpreted as permanent inability since *could* on its own does not encode sufficiency meaning.

The presence of sufficiency meaning is even clearer in another context noted among the ability correspondences. The context in question involves an adjective modified by *so...that* indicating that a state of exhaustion has been reached which interferes with the Subject's ability. The context only shows up in the direction SO→ET, and is illustrated in (10) and (11).

- (10) Är vi helt enkelt trötta — är dagens unga kvinna så trött att hon inte längre *orkar* säga det hon känner att hon måste säga — eller har vi ingenting mer att säga varandra på det sedvanliga debattspråket? (MS1)  
 Is the woman of today so tired that she is *unable* to say what she ought to be saying in accord with her feelings? Or have we no more to say to each other in the current jargon? (MS1T)
- (11) Han var så dåsig, att han knappt *orkade* göra sig mödan att sänka blickarna. (SL1)  
 He was so drowsy that he *could* barely rouse himself enough to lower his glance. (SL1T)

It can also be noted that the Swedish original in (10) includes an adverbial, *längre*, which can be compared to *any more* in the English translation above (9).

<sup>5</sup> All the examples in the text mark *orka* and its source translation in italics, whereas other structures relevant in the discussion are underlined. In each case, the initials of the author of the text are provided in parentheses, where T indicates that the text is a translation. The source texts can be found in the search interfaces for the corpora listed under references.

A variant of the *so...that* context is the non-congruent correspondence *too* Adj *to+inf*, where it could be maintained that the expression involves a covert ability modal encoded as an infinitive (see Meier, 2003; Hacquard, 2005). This correspondence figures both as a source and as a translation of *orka*, and includes adjectives such as *tired, exhausted, feeble, ill, sick and weary*. Examples (12) and (13) are illustrations.

- (12) Nej, uppriktigt sagt inte. Men jag *orkar* inte leta efter den andra texten nu. (MG1)  
No, to be honest, it wasn't. But I 'm *too tired to* look for the other passage now. (MG1T)
- (13) There they dropped off one by one into uncomfortable sleep full of horrible dreams, as evening wore to black night ; and there we must leave them for the present, *too sick and weary to* set guards or take turns watching. (JRT1)  
Så föll de en efter en i en orolig sömn full av mardrömmar, medan kvällen övergick i svart natt, och där måste vi lämna dem för ett tag, alltför trötta och dåliga *att orka* sätta ut vakter eller turas om att speja. (JRT1T)

We suggest that both the ability correspondence (e.g., *be able to*) combined with an adjective modified with *so...that* and the *too* Adj *to+inf* correspondences provide a *sufficiency condition* related to the potential exhaustion of the Subject's ability. This sufficiency condition is specified by an adjective associated with sufficient/necessary amount of energy/strength (such as *tired* or *ill*) and thus related to a point on a scale that marks when the Subject has the necessary amount of some physical or mental entity to carry out a certain act.

In one example in the material, (14), the idea of a point on a scale is made specific by the sufficiency marker *enough*.

- (14) Jag var tillräckligt stark för att *orka* knuffa ned en fyllgubbe i vattnet. (SL1)  
I was strong enough to shove an old drunk into the water. (SL1T)

In (14), then, we would argue that ability is realized as covert modality in the *to*-infinitive and the sufficiency condition is realized in general sufficiency terms: with the adverb *enough*. (see e.g. Fortuin, 2013). The Swedish original also has *tillräckligt* 'enough', which, in a sense, 'doubles' the sufficiency component of *orka*.

### 3.2 Sufficiency

Table 2 also includes a HAVE (enough/the) *strength/energy to* + inf correspondence, illustrated in (15) and (16).

- (15) Han *orkade* inte bruka årorna, men i stället satte han sig att vagga och gunga i eka. (SL1)  
He *had not strength enough to* use the oars, but instead, he seated himself to swing and rock in the scow. (SL1T)
- (16) Och framför allt *orkade* han inte ta itu med den biten samtidigt som han skulle ge sig på Wennerström. (SL1)  
Above all, he did not *have the energy to* deal with that problem at the same time as he was tackling Wennerström. (SL1T)

We initially observe that there is a potential pattern in the material that *strength* is used for *physical strength* and *energy* for *mental strength*, but this pattern is not clear. For one, it is not always straightforward whether the reference to strength/energy is to physical or mental strength, as in (17), where both possibilities seem plausible.

- (17) Det har snart gått två veckor sedan jag skrev sist. Jag har inte *orkat*. (LH1)  
It has been almost a fortnight since I've written anything. I have n't *had the strength*. (LH1T)

Another observation for the correspondences with *strength/energy* is that the ability component of *orka* seems lost in translation. However, we would argue that it is not. In line with our observation about the *to*-infinitives in the *too* Adj *to*+inf correspondences (section 3.1), we note that the correspondence HAVE (enough/the) *strength/energy to* + inf arguably contains covert ability modality encoded in the infinitive. On this view, the correspondence profiles both a sufficiency condition, *have enough strength/energy*, as well as ability in the infinitive, roughly: *have enough strength/energy to be able to do something*.

Interestingly, our material includes only one example, (18), where *orka* is introduced as the correspondence of an expression with *strength* or *energy* in an English original text.

- (18) “Don't mind the house, child. I know it 's a mess but I *ai n't got the strength* I once had to keep it tidy”. (GN1)  
“Bekymra dig inte för oredan, lilla vän. Jag vet att det är rörigt, men jag *orkar* inte hålla det så fint som förr”. (GN1T)

The obvious reason why HAVE (enough/the) *strength/energy to* + inf is not a common source of *orka* is that the parallel corpora include very few examples of this construction, nine in total. We note, though, that six of these nine instances are translated with a corresponding phrase in Swedish, as exemplified in (19) and (20).

- (19) Would she *have the energy* to seek one out? (FW1)  
Skulle hon *ha energi nog* att leta upp en? (FW1T)
- (20) It seemed that bingo afternoons left her so exhausted both physically and emotionally that she never *had enough energy* left to cook an evening meal. (RD1)  
Det verkade som om hennes bingo eftermiddagar gjorde henne så utsjasad både fysiskt och psykiskt att hon aldrig *hade tillräckligt med energi kvar* för att laga middag åt dem. (RD1T)

This strategy may reflect a tendency for translators to pick a translation that represents the closest formal correspondence to the source item, in line with some principle of equivalence, a principle that has been debated from numerous angles in translation theory over the years (Nida and Taber, 1982; Baker, 1992), but this explanation remains speculative.

What can be concluded, however, is that similarly to the ability translations commented on in section 3.1, the pattern with an aspectual/durative adverbial is also prominent for the HAVE (enough/the) *strength/energy to* + inf translations, as in (21).

- (21) “Inget barn behöver svälta ihjäl, så länge Karlsson *orkar* släpa fram korv och potatis”. (AL2)

“No child need starve, as long as Karlson *has the strength* to deliver the sausage and mash”. (AL2T)

At this point, then, we note that a precise semantic definition of *orka* seems to include two semantic components: *ability* and *sufficiency of mental/physical strength*. The relation between the two components is difficult to tease out, but it is clear that the ability component is always overtly reflected in some form in the correspondence itself, whereas the sufficiency component can come in via the context. For the translations where *orka* corresponds to an ability modal such as *could* or *be able to*, sufficiency comes in via the expressions *so Adj that* in the context, or a sufficiency condition is suggested by an adverbial/aspectual adverbial. In the translations with *energy/strength*, ability is expressed by means of covert modality in the form of a *to*-infinitive and sufficiency is reflected in the HAVE (enough/the) *strength/energy* translation. For this correspondence too, an aspectual/durative adverbial is generally present in the context.

### 3.3 Sufficiency as an obstacle to ability

A possible way to view the relationship between the two meaning components, ability and sufficiency, is that the sufficiency component highlights that there is a potential *obstacle* to the ability component, specified to a point where the Subject’s physical or mental strength is insufficient or running out. This type of analysis has been forwarded by Nadathur (2016) to explain the semantics of Finnish *jaksaa*, a sufficiency verb corresponding to Swedish *orka*. Nadathur’s analysis is part of a discussion of implicative verbs, a discussion that is beyond the scope of our article, but some of her observations are relevant to our interpretation of *orka*. Inspired by a proposal by Baglini & Francez (2016), Nadathur proposes that *jaksaa* involves *sufficient strength* as a causally necessary, but contextually insufficient, factor for the realization of *jaksaa*’s complement verb. On this analysis, *orka* would reflect a Subject’s ability to do something, but also highlight that this ability is potentially obstructed by the amount of physical or mental strength available to the specific individual in the specific situation. The proposal that the factor is contextually insufficient explains that even if a Subject has sufficient strength to be able to do something, it does not follow that he or she actually does it – there may be other factors involved in this decision. Interestingly, Nadathur (2016: 1010) points out that *jaksaa* is similar to *manage* in assuming a potential obstacle, but that *manage* does not specify what the obstacle is.

The idea of sufficiency of strength as an obstacle fits with our data. For example, the translations (*can*) *manage* (Table 2) can be viewed as a generalization of the obstacle *sufficient strength*. In such instances, specification to *sufficiency of strength* is brought in by the context. In (22), the reference to the Subject being “ill and miserable” seem to achieve such specification.

- (22) “Det ska bli ganska intressant att se, om jag *orkar* mer än halvvägs, sjuk och eländig som jag är”. (AL2)  
 “It will be quite interesting to see if I *manage to get* further than halfway, while I am all ill and miserable like this”. (AL2)

Also, somewhat tentatively, we interpret another category of verbs found in the translations of *orka* as mirroring a general obstacle. The verbs in question are *bear*, *cope* and *face*. As shown in Table 2, the material includes nine translations where these verbs combine with the *ability* modal *can*, all in non-assertive contexts. Example (23) is an illustration.

- (23) Han påminde Lisbeth om att klockan var mitt i natten och påstod att han inte orkade tänka på saken. (SL1)  
 It was the middle of the night. He *could not face* thinking about the whole thing now. (SL1T)

In (23), we would argue that *ability meaning* is reflected in *can*, and that *face* in the English translation profiles a potential obstacle, but the context is necessary to specify the obstacle to sufficient strength. In (23), such specification is suggested by the reference to time, the middle of the night, which suggests that the Subject, *he*, might need sleep and thus does not have sufficient mental or physical strength to be able to think properly.

We also note that in most of the examples with *orka*, the obstacle is not overcome, i.e. *orka* appears in a non-assertive context. On an intuitive note, the non-assertive contexts can be expected from the type of obstacle profiled in *orka*: If you do not have sufficient strength to do something, you may want to make this obstacle salient. If, on the other hand, you have sufficient strength to do something, it might be more likely that you simply say that you did it. On a more formal note, however, the negative contexts raise the question of whether *orka* can be viewed as a so-called *Negative Polarity Item* (NPI), i.e. a lexical item that can only appear in contexts with negative grammatical polarity.

### 3.4 The negative association of *orka*

In the vast majority of the occurrences of *orka*, both in the SO and the ST texts, *orka* appears in non-assertive contexts where it has been shown that negative polarity items (NPIs) would be triggered (see Lawler, 2005 for an extensive list of NPIs and NPI triggers in English). This is also noted by Teleman *et al.* (1999(4): 311). Below, we refer to these contexts as *NPI triggers*. By far the most common NPI trigger in the material is sentence negation, as in (24).

- (24) Ronja förstod att det var synd om Skalle-Per som var så gammal, men hon förstod inte varför knektar och trindskallar skulle komma och bråka vid Vargklämman. Förresten var hon sömning och *orkade inte* bry sej om det heller. (AL1)  
 Ronia knew it was sad for Noddle-Pete to be so old, but she did not understand why soldiers and fools would come and make trouble at the Wolf's Neck. In any case, she was sleepy and *could not be bothered* thinking about it. (AL1T)

Sometimes, as in (24), *orka* is accompanied by an NPI (*heller* 'either', in this case), but more often it is not. Negation may also be in a higher clause, as in (25), where *orka* occurs in the complement clause of *förstod* 'understood', and the main clause is negated by *inte*. We may gloss the first sentence with *orka* in (25) as 'she did not understand that they ORKA-past'. This particular sentence is left untranslated in ARP1T, where only the next (also negated) sentence receives a translation with *couldn't be bothered*.

- (25) Och Henry instämde med kraft, och det blev en lovsång till Moralen och Ansvaret och Människokärleken som fastern hade kunnat klara sig utan. Hon förstod inte att de *orkade*. Själv orkade hon inte sitta här i den eländiga fåtöljen länge till, och när hon såg att klockan började närma sig två bad hon dem att skynda sig på. (ARP1)  
 It would have been indecent not to set to work," he said. Henry forcefully concurred, and then it all grew into a hymn of praise to Morality and Responsibility and Love of

Mankind which Auntie could have done without. She *couldn't be bothered* to sit there in that wretched armchair much longer, and when she saw it was almost two o'clock in the morning, she asked them to get a move on. (ARP1T)

In addition to sentence negation with *inte* ('not'), the material includes some other contexts that have been noted to trigger NPIs (e.g. by Lawler, 2005), such as negative adverbs like *aldrig* ('never') and negative pronouns functioning as Subjects or Objects, as in (26) and (27).

- (26) Man tror sig veta att vi finns där men det är aldrig någon som *orkar* lägga märke till oss. (KOB1)  
“They think they know we 're there, but nobody ever *manages* to notice us”. (KOB1T)
- (27) [...] och ingen hade under hela hösten *orkat* börja igen. (GT1)  
And no one had *been able to* start again throughout the fall. (GT1)

Another common NPI trigger in the material is questions, as in (28).

- (28) Där får han också syn på sitt bärande; just när han lagt henne ifrån sig och det far genom honom: “Hur länge skall jag *orka* samla barna?” (GT1)  
There he glimpses his burden, just after he has put her down. It tears through him: “How long *can I manage* to keep the kids together?” (GT1T)

Finally, our data contain a small assortment of other NPI triggers, including a conditional clause, as in (29), a comparative clause, as in (30), and a relative clause modifying *den ende* ('the only [family member]'), as in (31).

- (29) Han hade verkligen massor av kakel i denna källare bara han *orkade* ta sig ner i den och vågade trotsa kloakdofterna och öppna på dörren. (LG1)  
He actually had hoards of tiles in the cellar if he *could* only *manage* to get himself down there and face the stench of the lavatory and open the door. (LG1T)
- (30) Han höll kvar greppet så länge han *orkade*. (JG1)  
He held the grip as long as he *could*. (JG1T)
- (31) Karin hade varit den enda i släkten som kunnat och *orkat* ta sig an Nora. (MG1)  
Karin had been the only family member willing and *able to* take Nora on. (MG1T)

Conspicuous as this tendency may be, we nevertheless argue that it does not warrant an analysis of *orka* as an NPI. The obvious reason is that *orka* also occurs in unambiguously assertive contexts, as in (32).

- (32) Men... det var knappast den slags hästar som frestade hans spel. Den lät sig spännas för barnens trilla redan första söndagen. Och *orkade* dra dem alla. (SCO1)  
Then he showed me the pony, which he had also won. But... that kind of horse was hardly what tested his gambling. It allowed itself to be harnessed to the children's trap on the very first Sunday, and *managed to* pull them all. (SCO1T)

Although there is only one such example in the SO texts and none in the ST texts, the assertive context in (32) alone seems to invalidate an analysis of *orka* as a strict NPI, at least on the standard assumption that NPIs are barred from assertive contexts. Further, we note that the use of *orka* in (32) is perfectly idiomatic, and has no additional interpretation.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of *orka* in non-assertive contexts, all but one example, is real and needs to be accounted for. One potential approach is to regard *orka* as an NPI with a complex distribution across assertive and non-assertive contexts. English *much* is a notorious example of such complex distribution. For example, there is a sharp difference in acceptability between (33) and (34) (from Huddleston and Pullum, 2002: 826–827).

- (33) a. \*I enjoy sailing *much*.  
 b. I don't enjoy sailing *much*.
- (34) This means *much* to the American tradition.

Huddleston & Pullum argue that *much* is an NPI in (33) only, as indicated by its unacceptability in an assertive context, and that fairly fine-grained distinctions need to be made between different syntactic properties of a potential NPI. For *orka*, however, we see no comparable distinction between different uses of the verb that could account for the acceptability of example (32) above.

A second approach is to regard *orka* not as an NPI, but as part of a negative collocation associated with NPIs, an approach taken by van der Wouden (1994). While his approach is ultimately a formal semantic one, which is meant to account for the variability of use of NPIs within a particular language or across different languages, we adopt the basic idea. Specifically, the definition of collocations as co-occurrence tendencies between lexical items or, in an extended sense, between lexical items and syntactic/semantic contexts, allows the classification of *orka* as a polarity-sensitive verb with collocational tendencies to occur in non-assertive contexts.

A third interesting approach to explain the negative contexts of *orka* is suggested by Flint (1980: 134ff), who notes that Finnish verbs of possibility and sufficiency are very common in negative contexts. Her explanation, based on observations of the use of these verbs in interaction, is that they offer excuses, for example in response to requests or invitations. In other words, declining an invitation or refusing a request may be mitigated by making reference to a lack of sufficient time, energy, courage etc. For *orka*, then, which incorporates sufficiency with respect to mental or physical strength/energy, it is possible that its preponderance in non-assertive contexts stems from its frequent use as an excuse for non-compliance with invitations or requests. The exchange in (35) illustrates this use in our data.

- (35) — Var är Eva-Liisa, jag vill att hon också...Gå och hämta henne.  
 — Jag *orkar inte*. (GT1)  
 “Where 's Eva-Liisa? I want her, too... Go get her”.  
 “I *can't*”. (GT1T)

Notice, incidentally, that, in this exchange, that the ability modal *can* serves much the same purpose, by referring to inability as an excuse for non-compliance with a request. As has been noted repeatedly in the literature on indirect speech acts, reference to ability is a common strategy both for making polite requests and for declining to comply with them (e.g. by Searle, 1975). What sufficiency verbs like *orka* contribute, then, is a more specific (in)ability

than ‘bare’ ability modals like *can*. In our study of Swedish *hinna* ‘have enough time’ (Johansson and Nordrum, 2016), we do not explicitly address its use in negative contexts, but this verb, too, can certainly be used in a similar manner to express non-compliance, by referring to having insufficient time.

### 3.5 *Be bothered* and volitional modality

So far, we have argued that all correspondences of *orka* profile ability and involve sufficiency of strength/energy as an obstacle to ability. Further, we note that *orka* has collocational tendencies to figure in non-assertive contexts where *insufficient* strength/energy is highlighted as an obstacle to the Subject’s ability. However, an interesting (albeit small) group of translations does not entirely fit this description. This group involves phrases like *be bothered to* and *feel like* (Table 2), which may be understood as expressing a lack of sufficient *volition* rather than ability. Examples are given in (36)-(38).

- (36) Själv *orkade* hon inte sitta här i den eländiga fåtöljen länge till, och när hon såg att klockan började närma sig två bad hon dem att skynda sig på. (ARP1)  
 She *couldn't be bothered to* sit there in that wretched armchair much longer, and when she saw it was almost two o'clock in the morning, she asked them to get a move on. (ARP1T)
- (37) Nej, hon vill inte. Hon *orkar* inte. (MR1)  
 No, she did not want to. She *couldn't be bothered*. (MR1T)
- (38) Först på tisdagen *orkade* hon ta sig upp ur sängen.  
 She did not *feel like* getting up until Tuesday.

We take translations of this type to reflect a meaning that is derived from the sufficiency readings of *orka*. Some support for our assumption is that *The Swedish Academy Dictionary* (SAOB) explicitly claims that this meaning is secondary, and, moreover, that it is mainly found in informal registers today (although their earliest citation is from the 16th century).

### 3.6 Orka!

We end this section on a more speculative note, related to the volitional use of *orka* reflected in translations such as *couldn't be bothered*. In the speech of young Swedes, there is a relatively new development in the use of *orka*, common enough to be listed in internet dictionaries. Examples (39) and (40) are from *www.slangopedia.se*.

- (39) Ska vi gå en promenad?  
 shall we go [for] a walk  
 - Men *orka!* Vi tankar en film istället.  
 “but ORKA we download a film instead”.
- (40) - *Orka* gå till skolan när betygen redan är satta!  
 “ORKA go to school when the grades are already set”.

We interpret *orka* as volitional in these cases, i.e. what is conveyed is not a lack of sufficient energy to go for a walk or to school, but an unwillingness to do so. What is interesting about examples like these, however, is both that *orka* occurs in its base form (presumably as an imperative rather than an infinitive), and that the intended sense is negative, although there is

no explicit negation. This second point relates to the observation above about the overwhelming tendency for *orka* to occur in non-assertive contexts. In informal terms, it appears that in (29) and (30), *orka* itself is capable of conveying this negative sense.

There are (at least) two ways of regarding the negative sense conveyed by *orka* in these examples. First, we may assume that we are simply dealing with irony or sarcasm, either of which can be understood in terms of some notion of ‘saying the opposite of what you mean’. A similar explanation has been proposed within a variety of frameworks (e.g. Grice’s cooperative principle). A corresponding example from English would be the use of *Care!* In the sense ‘I don’t care’, illustrated by (41) (from *The Urban Dictionary*).

- (41) Person one: oh wow! look at me i’m so great.  
Person two: care.

A second approach to the negative use of *orka* is as a phenomenon referred to as *hyponegation* by Horn (2009), which can be found in expressions like *I could care less*, which is often castigated as a corrupted version of *I couldn’t care less*. Some support for this approach is that just like *I could care less*, *orka* licenses NPIs, like *längre* (‘any longer’), as illustrated in (31) and (32).<sup>6</sup>

- (42) I could care less about ever going back to school. (= Horn’s 28d)  
(43) Orka vänta på Kalle längre! (our example)

The near synonym *palla* in Swedish is also used in this way, i.e. with predominantly volitional meaning and negative import but no overt negation. To what extent hyponegation and this kind of meaning are systematically related is an interesting topic for further study.

#### 4. Concluding discussion

In this study, we aimed to shed light on the semantic profile of the Swedish verb *orka* as reflected in parallel corpus data. Our data support an analysis where most examples of *orka* reflect two meaning components: participant-internal ability *and* sufficiency of mental or physical strength. In line with Nadathur’s (2016) proposal for the semantic profile of Finnish *jaksaa*, a verb similar to *orka*, we suggest that the sufficiency component of *orka* reflects an assumed obstacle, i.e. the presence of sufficient strength/energy, to the event reflected in *orka*’s complement. We also assume that *orka* is a polarity-sensitive verb with collocational tendencies to occur in non-assertive contexts. This analysis is a specification of Teleman *et al.*’s (1999(4): 288) observation that *orka* refers to “whether the subject referent has sufficient strength or stamina to bring about the state of affairs in question, or “a more specified meaning than *kunna* ‘can’” [our translation]. In addition, our material includes some examples which reflect a second meaning of *orka* developed from the meaning presented above. In these cases, the sufficiency meaning concerns sufficient *volition* rather than physical or mental strength.

<sup>6</sup> An anonymous reviewer points out that a third possible approach to the imperative use of *orka* is the concept of *semantic prosody* (Sinclair 1991; Louw 1993). That is, it could be argued that *orka* has attained negative semantic prosody by way of its association with non-completion due to a lack of strength or willingness, and that this negative semantic prosody can be one contributing factor to imperative *orka*. This is an interesting approach for future studies.

Our analysis of *orka* might contribute to a description of sufficiency as a semantic component relevant to modality. In light of our data, we tentatively suggest that rather than viewing the sufficiency component in *orka* as a specification of ability – in effect a subcategory of participant-internal possibility – the sufficiency meaning comprises a separate meaning layer that stretches across the modal meanings on modality’s semantic map and also extends beyond the map.

Viewing sufficiency as a separate layer of a modality map makes sense since we see combinations of core modality and sufficiency all across the map. As we have shown here, *orka* combines ability (participant-internal possibility) and sufficiency. Further, we have previously shown that Swedish *hinna* ‘have the time to’ does the same, with sufficiency being participant-external (Johansson and Nordrum, 2016). Additionally, at least one other Swedish verb, *slippa* ‘not have to’ has a sufficiency component superimposed on participant-external deontic modality. Example (44) illustrates *slippa*.

- (44) Det fanns inget han hellre önskade än att hon dog. Då skulle han vara ensam kvar. Han skulle *slippa* att ringa henne, han skulle snart ha glömt hur hon ens såg ut. (HM1)  
 There was nothing he wanted more than for her to die. Then he'd be left alone. He wouldn't *have to* call her anymore, and soon he'd forget what she even looked like. (HMT1)

Our interpretation of *slippa* could be glossed as ‘not undergoing sufficient external force to do sth’. Notice that the translation introduces an indication, *anymore*, that the external pressure to call her is exhausted at some point.

Another observation relevant to viewing sufficiency as a separate layer on Modality’s map is the difference between so-called *anankastic conditionals* and similar constructions with *only* (see e.g. Huitink, 2005; von Stechow and Iatridou, 2007). This difference can be understood in terms of deontic modality with superimposed sufficiency. For example, the example of participant-external necessity offered in (6c) (section 1.1), and repeated here in (45), gets a sufficiency reading when supplemented by *only*.

- (45) In order to get to the station, you *have* to take bus 66.  
 In order to get to the station, you *only have* to take bus 66.  
 (i.e. it is sufficient that you take bus 66)

Our assumption that *orka* is a polarity-sensitive verb with collocational tendencies to occur in non-assertive contexts deserves some comments. We speculate that this collocational tendency is due to the status of *orka* as primarily an ability verb. Specifically, the added sufficiency component seems redundant in assertive contexts, where it is less relevant why someone was able to do something. Thus, we expect ‘pure’ ability modals where ability is asserted. Moreover, claiming that one has insufficient energy to do something by using negated *orka* serves the interactional purpose of politely declining invitations, refusing requests, etc., as pointed out by Flint (1980). This last observation raises a couple of interesting questions for further research. For example, it is possible that the use of *orka* in excuses has been instrumental in the development of a secondary volitional meaning, which, in addition, may carry the negative force on its own, as in the speech of young Swedish speakers.

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### Authors' address

Mats Johansson / Lene Nordrum  
Centre for languages and literature  
Lund University  
Box 201  
221 00 Lund  
Sweden

[mats.johansson@englund.lu.se](mailto:mats.johansson@englund.lu.se) / [lene.nordrum@englund.lu.se](mailto:lene.nordrum@englund.lu.se)