German modal particles and the common ground

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detail

Abstract

The German language makes use of many so called modal particles, noninflected words marking the speaker's mood or attitude towards the proposition expressed in the uttered sentence.[1] Since there are just a few languages making use of similar types of grammatical particles it is very difficult to understand their (very elusive) meaning. This article provides a basic introduction to what German modal particles are and what they mean and what their function is. A short review of two main approaches to their meaning will be given and a new account based on Stalnaker's common ground will be outlined. Based on this account the function of German modal particles is said to create a common basis for continuing a conversation by the speaker's appraisal of the mutual knowledge.

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[1] German: 'Modalpartikel' (f.), plural: 'Modalpartikeln' sometimes 'Abtönungspartikeln' (e.g. Weydt 1969) or discourse particles. Modal particles are a phenomenon of spoken German and are seldom used in written language. The use of modal particles counts as a sign of high language competence in L2 learners.

Introduction

Particles are a heterogeneous lexical category which lack the potential to inflect. In English, particles are e.g. conjunctions like *for* or *and* or sentence connectors like *well* or *yet*. Modal particles are metalingual expressions indicating to the hearer the mood or attitude of the speaker towards a proposition. In the following I will concentrate on particles in German. Sentences (1a) and (1b) give examples of a sentence with and without use of the modal particle *schon*. Where (1a) can be read as a neutral statement (1b) expresses the same proposition but contains an admonition to the hearer to act. The abbreviation MP means modal particle.

(1) a.	Gib	mir		den	Regenschirm.
	Hand	me		the	umbrella.

b.	Gib	mir	**schon**	den	Regenschirm.
	Hand	me	MP	the	umbrella.

Describing modal particles by their properties is hard so they are mostly just listed. König (1997:57) lists 17:

(2)   German modal particles = {*aber*, *auch*, *bloß*, *denn*, *doch*, *eigentlich*, *eben*, *etwa*, *erst*, *halt*, *ja*, *nun* (*mal*), *nur*, *schon*, *vielleicht*, *ruhig*, *wohl*}

But there are different views about the members of this class. E.g. Weydt (1969:68f.), Weydt & Hentschel (1983:4f.), Helbig (1988:26) or Diewald (2007:118) seperate between a core class of modal particles (*aber*, *auch*, *bloß*, *denn*, *doch*, *eben*, *eigentlich*, *etwa*, *halt*, *ja*, *mal*, *nur*, *schon*, *vielleicht* and *wohl*) and a class of peripheral modal particles (*fein*, *ganz*, *gerade*, *gleich*, *einfach*, *erst* and *ruhig*).[2] This opposition is made because the latter class is still under a process of grammaticalization. There are two conspicious differences between this two groups. The modal particles of the core class cannot be in a sentence initial position and do have homophones in other lexical categories.[3] This contrasts with the peripheral class, whose members do not have any homophones but can be in a sentence initial position.

Particles in German

Spoken German has—compared to many other languages of the world—a rich system of particles. In a non-representative analysis of a German literary text Weydt (1969:10f.) found that 13 of 100 counted words were (on average) particles. Particles in general are uninflectable words which do not have a rich meaning by themselves, so one could call them non-autosemantica. Particles are distinct from

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[2] See also Weydt (1969:69).
[3] These homophones can be in a sentence initial position.

e.g. adverbs or prepositions in their syntactic behaviour. They share the following features (for more details cf. Helbig 1988:21ff.):

1. Particles can be parts of immediate constituents (IC) but cannot form an IC on their own. In contrast e.g. adverbs can.
2. Particles cannot be in a sentence initial position, i.e. they cannot precede the finite verb alone in a declarative sentence.
3. One cannot ask about a particle, i.e. a particle cannot serve as an autonomous answer.
4. Particles do not change the truth value of a sentence.

Diewald (2007:119) provides the follwing table (based on Zifonun et al. 1997:66f.) which gives an overview of the particles used in spoken German:[4]

name (German name):	characteristics:	examples:
modal particles (Modalpartikeln/ Abtönungspartikeln)	relating to knowledge/ anticipation	*eben, vielleicht, ja*
focus particles (Fokuspartikeln/Gradpartikeln)	grades what was said	*ausgerechnet, bereits, sogar, vor allem*
intensifiers (Intensitätspartikel/ Steigerungspartikel)	specifies characteristics	*recht, sehr, ungemein, weitaus*
connecting particles (Konnektivpartikeln)	relate proposition to preceding propositions	*erstens, allerdings, dennoch, indessen, sonst, zwar*

Table 1: Overview of particles in German (see Diewald 2007:119 and Zifonun et al. 1997:66f.)

König (1997:57) emphasizes that there are overlaps between the class of modal particles and other lexical categories. So *doch*, *etwa*, *vielleicht*, *wohl*, *einfach*, *ruhig*, *mal*, *nun* (*mal*), *halt* and *eben* overlap with adjectives and adverbs, *erst*, *auch*, *nur*, *bloß* and *schon* with focus particles, *aber* and *denn* with conjunctions and *ja* und *eben* with so called "Antwortpartikeln", which are used to answer a question and can be equated to a whole sentence. With the exception of *halt* the core class of modal particles in German are derived from these other classes and their meanings which are still in use (Burkhardt 1994:131). But let us turn to the modal particles. One of the first publications about German modal particles was Weydt (1969) who defines them as:

> noninflectable words which indicate the speaker's attitude towards what was said. In this meaning they cannot serve as an answer to a question and cannot occur in a sentence initial position. They operate over whole sentences; they are integrated in sentences. Put in other syntactic positions or stress differ-

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[4] The table was slightly modified.

ently they all have one or more meanings. In the other meanings they belong to different functional classes. (p. 68)[5]

Weydt's definition is a good point to start to understand what a modal particle is. In the following section I will briefly outline the characteristics of modal particles.

What modal particles are and what they are not

This section offers a list with criteria to identify modal particles which is mainly based on Weydt (1969:68), Helbig (1988:32ff.), König (1997:58) and Diewald (2007):

1. Modal particles are noninflectable.
2. They serve as an expression of the speaker's mood or attitude towards the proposition.
3. They cannot serve as an answer to a question (without changing their meaning).
4. They cannot be in a sentence initial position.
5. They refer to the whole sentence.
6. They do not change the truth value of a sentence.
7. Their occurence is restricted to certain sentence types/moods.
8. They follow the finite verb.
9. Modal particles cannot be negated and therefore precede the negation.
10. Modal particles have homophones in other lexical categories.
11. They cannot be coordinated with *and* or *or* (German: *und* or *oder*).

A short comparison of this list and the feature list of particles in general reveals that some points appear in both of them. Helbig (1988:34f.) provides a list of features which are characteristic for modal particles and not for other particle subclasses:

1. Modal particles do not refer to a special constituent of a sentence but to the sentence as a whole.
2. They do not change the truth values of sentences but their function lies on a communicative level.
3. Most modal particles are restricted to certain sentence types/moods.
4. One cannot negate modal particles.
5. The core class of modal particles cannot occur in sentence initial position.

Modal particles do not have a lexical meaning on their own so their meaning is context dependent and very elusive. In the next sections I will briefly sketch what differentiates modal particles from other particle subclasses and present a short

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[5] My translation.

outline of what their special characteristics are before discussing what they mean (or what their function is).

Differentiation to other particle subclasses

Based on Helbig (1988:37ff.) I will only briefly introduce important features which differentiate the other particle classes from the modal particles. Focus particles do not refer to the whole sentence but to a certain constituent of the sentence and they are not restricted to certain sentence types/moods. Focus particles do not change the truth values of sentences either, but their contribution to the meaning of a sentence is nevertheless semantic in nature, because they are used to quantify meanings. In contrast to modal particles, intensifiers do not relate to the whole sentence and are not restricted to certain sentence types or moods. Moreover, their meaning is semantic in nature, although their meaning is also not autosemantic and they do not change a sentence's truth value but graduate certain properties expressed in a sentence, see sentence (2).

(2)   Die Tasse ist **sehr** schön.
        'The cup is very nice.'

A short note on history of research in German modal particles

Until the seminal works of Krivonosov (1977)[6] and Weydt (1969), modal particles were regarded just as 'flavouring words'[7] (Thiel 1962), 'patch words'[8] (von der Gabelentz 1969 [1901]) or as 'parasites of language'[9] (Reiners 1943). Since particles are non-autosemantica they are highly interesting for pragmatics. For Helbig (1988:17f.) it is no coincidence that the interest of linguists arose at the beginning of the 70s because at the same time more and more linguists all over the world explored language not as a closed system but from a viewpoint of its function in communication (see also Helbig 1986:13).

Excursus: the topological field model

So far we said that German modal particles cannot be in a sentence inital position. This restriction can be described in more detail with the topological field model (German: "topologisches Stellungsfeldermodell"). This is a model developed especially for describing the structure of German sentences by Drach (1963 [1937]). In this model the sentence is divided into three fields: the pre-field ('Vorfeld'),

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[6] A dissertation written in 1963.
[7] German: "Würzwörter".
[8] German: "Flickwörter".
[9] German: "Läuse im Pelz der Sprache". For more descriptions given to modal particles in the history of German research see Vural (2000:13).

the middle field ('Mittelfeld') and the post-field ('Nachfeld'). These fields arise by the assumption that finite and infinite verb forms divide a sentence. The verb forms build something like brackets which are called the left bracket ('linke Satzklammer') and the right bracket ('rechte Satzklammer'):

(3)	Peter	ist	gestern	gerannt	wie der Teufel.
	Peter	is	yesterday	run	like the devil.
	Pre-field	**left bracket**	**middle field**	**right bracket**	**post-field**

'Peter ran like the devil yesterday.'

It is not necessary for all positions to be filled. So, in sentence (4), the pre-field and the post-field are empty.

| (4) | □ | Ist | Peter gestern | gerannt? | □ |
| | **Pre-field** | **left bracket** | **middle field** | **right bracket** | **post-field** |

'Did Peter run yesterday?'

With regard to German modal particles they can only occur in the middle field. Helbig (1988:36) illustrates this behavoiur with the following sentence:

| (5) | Peter hat ( ) gestern ( ) seiner | Freundin ( ) die Uhr ( ) geliehen. |
| | Peter has yesterday his | girlfriend the watch lend. |

'Peter lent the watch to his girlfriend yesterday.'

The core class of the German modal particles can occur in the brackets, whereas the peripheral class of modal particles can also occur in the pre-field. In contrast to Helbig's (1988) analysis, Ickler (1994:379) believes that German modal particles are not all in the same structural position. He argues that the only difference between (6a) and (6b) are the different modal particles *denn* and *eigentlich*.[10] It seems as if they fill in the same slot.

(6) a. Wie spät ist es denn?
     b. Wie spät ist es eigentlich?
     c. Wie spät ist es denn eigentlich?

But—as shown in sentence (6c)—they are combinable so he argues for a structure like the one in (7a) and (7b).

(7) a. Wie spät ist es   denn x   ?
     b. Wie spät ist es   y   eigentlich ?

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[10] *Wie spät ist es?* means 'What's the time?'

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I think we should assume that there is one big slot which can be filled with a different number of elements rather that many different slots, because in general more elements can appear in the in the middle-field and we do not assume that there are different slots for each of them.

Restrictions of German modal particles

There are several restrictions in the use of modal particles—in particular in respect to sentence type or mood—which cannot all be described here. E.g. *ruhig* can only be used in imperative and declarative sentences containing a modal verb, like in *Du kannst ruhig kommen* 'You can MP come'.[11] It seems feasable that the further left an particle appears in a sentence the more general its meaning is (cf. Ickler 1994:379).

We will differentiate between seven sentence types, on which I will refer to in Latin. The following overview of these seven types is based on Thurmair (1989:44f.), who assumes that each type has certain formal characteristics:

Declarative sentences: Sentences with the finite verb in second constituent position (V2) which do not contain an interrogative word (*w*-element):

(8) Ich bin dein Vater.
    'I am your father.'

Polar interrogative sentences: Sentences with the finite verb in first position (V1):

(9) Kannst du das Fenster aufmachen?
    'Can you open the window?'

W-interrogative sentences: Finite verb form in second position; the first position is filled with a interrogative element (*w*-element):

(10) Wo ist das Auto?
    'Where is the car?'

Imperative sentences: Finite verb form in the first position with imperative marking. In some cases it may be hard to distinguish imperative from polar interrogative sentences. Then it is necessary to watch for shifts in pitch. An example of an imperative sentence is given in (10).

(11) Gib mir den Hut!
    'Give me the hat!'

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[11] *Ruhig* can be used in contexts in which there are rules or conventions against a hearer's wish and is used by a speaker to encourage her to do something (cf. König 1997:72).

Optative sentences: Sentences in which the Konjunktiv II form of the verb is in the first position:

(12) Wäre ich doch ein berühmter Schauspieler!
 'If only I were a famous actor!'

Exclamatory sentences: In exclamatory sentences the finite verb form (mainly with indicative marking) can be in the first or second position. This sentence type is marked by a characteristic pitch shift:

(13) Hast du diese Schuhe gesehen!
 'Have you seen these shoes!'

W-exclamatory sentences: The indicative marked verb is in second position, in the pre-field there is a *w*-element (mostly *wie* or *was für ein*):

(14) Was für eine Verschwendung!
 'What a waste!'

There is no real one-to-one-correspondence between these seven form types and functional types but prototypically a declarative sentence is used to make an assertion, while polar and w-interrogative sentences are used to ask a question, imperative sentences usually express a command, optative sentences are use to express wishes and exclamatory and w-exclamatory sentences are used to make exclamations. In summary, the following restrictions apply to German modal particles with regard to the form types:

	declarative	polar interrogative	w-interrogative	imperative	optative	exclamatory	w-exclamatory
aber						+	
auch	+	+	+	+			+
bloß			+	+	+		+
denn		+	+				
doch	+		+	+	+		+
eben	+			+			
eigentlich		+	+				
einfach	+	+		+			
etwa		+					
halt	+			+			
ja	+						
mal	+	+		+			
nur			+	+	+		+

ruhig	+			+			
schon	+		+	+			
vielleicht		+				+	
wohl	+	+	+				

Table 2: Restrictions of German modal particles concerning sentence types (taken from Thurmair 1989:49, slightly modified)

The meaning of German modal particles

As mentioned above, modal particles have a weak lexical meaning. Instead of referring to extralinguistic concepts they refer to relations between concepts/states of affairs or to relations between concepts/states of affairs and the speaker and/or hearer (cf. Hentschel 1986:120). Burkhardt (1994:133) explains:

> In general these particles express the speaker's subjective evaluation in regard to certain elements of the communicative situation. Part of this situation is the hearer's knowledge and her wishes, the way to connect to previously uttered sentences or executed acts, the speaker's opinion or preferences.[12]

In general we can divide the hitherto existing approaches to the meaning of modal particles in two opposing positions: semantic minimalism and semantic maximalism. Posner (1979:361) outlines:

> *Semantic maximalists* try to explain as much as possible by the meaning of linguistic expressions and tend to assume that words have rich meanings and that there are many ambiguous words. *Semantic minimalists* acknowledge that there are pragmatic rules of reinterpretation of given lexical meanings and tend to assume that words can only have minimal and clear-cut meanings.[13]

That means that the question arises if the meaning of the several modal particles is a primary (i.e. semantic) or secondary one, inferred by pragmatic rules (cf. Ickler 1994:377). It seems plausible to me to assume that there is a core meaning of each modal particle from which the speaker can derive the special meaning from case to case because of economic considerations. After reviewing modal particles as operators of the illocutionary force and modal particles in a relevance-theoretic account I will try to carve out the meaning or rather the function of some selected modal particles in an approach based on an expanded model of Stalnaker's (2002) common ground. But first I will present—based on the literature—a short overview of what German modal particles mean one by one.

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[12] My translation.
[13] My translation.

Aber:

The modal particle *aber* is restricted to exclamatory sentences as illustrated in sentence (15).

(15) Hast du aber einen schönen Hut!
      have you MP a nice hat!
      'You have such a nice hat!'

With *aber* the speaker indicates that what she is saying is unexpected for her (cf. Coniglio 2011:18).

Auch:

The particle *auch* can be used in all sentence types and establishes a relationship between old and new information. Therefore the utterance in which it appears is often a reason or a cause:

(16) A: Du bist sehr betrunken. B: Ich habe auch 10 Bier getrunken.
      A: You are very drunk. B: I have MP 10 beers drunk.
      'A: You are very drunk. B: I drank 10 beers.'

With *auch* the speaker points out that she expected the proposition expressed in a preceding utterance and the *auch*-sentence provides an explanation why it was expected (Thurmair 1989:155).

Bloß:

Partially synonymous with *nur*; see *nur*.

Denn:

With the use of *denn* in interrogatives the speaker indicates that her question has an actual reason which is motivated by the situation and that she is interested in an answer (cf. Burkhardt 1994:143). Ickler (1994:381) writes that it is common sense that the question in which it appears is "triggered by parts of the conversational situation which are accessible for the hearer."[14]

Doch:

Indicates a contradiction between the utterance and an act, knowledge, conventions or something else. So it is used when the speaker thinks that the hearer has not payed attention to something. It is often used to assure a premise that is needed in the following conversation. Ickler (1994:402) shows with the following example that *doch* is used to assure the premise that the interlocutor is able to speak French. An answer is in this cases not expected, except for the case that the proposition is false.

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[14] My translation.

(17) Du kannst doch Französisch. Was heißt denn *bricolage*?
     You can MP French. What means MP *bricolage*?
     'You can speak French, can't you. What's the meaning of *bricolage*?'

So in short, the speaker indicates that the hearer is familiar with the proposition expressed but that she now has to take it into account.

Eben:
See the partially synonymous *halt*.

Eigentlich:
Eigentlich is used to signal a change of topic in interrogatives. But the topic does not change totally. The context and pretext won't change in most cases just the aspect under which the context is viewed changes (cf. Ickler 1994:384). So *eigentlich* indicates how the question relates to the context.

Einfach:
This particle marks a proposition as an obvious explanation for something which is only accesible to the speaker. In sentence (18), adopted from Thurmair (1989:131) Iris uses *einfach* to indicate what the reason for her anger is.

(18) Eva: Wieso bist du denn so sauer?
     'Eva: Why are you so angry?'

     Iris: Ich habe heute einfach keine Lust zu arbeiten.
     'Iris: I'm not in the mood for working.'

Etwa:
Etwa is used in polar questions when a negative answer is expected. These questions relate to a previous utterance or action.

Halt:
With *halt* the speaker indicates that both the speaker and the hearer are familiar with the facts expressed in the utterance, that these can not be altered, and therefore have to be accepted (cf. Burkhardt 1994:144). Its meaning is very similar to *eben* but they are not always interchangeable. With the use of these two particles the speaker indicates that she can't change the situation expressed in the proposition and that she is not willing to discuss more about the topic.

Ja:
As commonly interpreted, unstressed *ja* is typically used when the speaker wants to indicate that the proposition is, should be or can be evident for the hearer (cf. Coniglio 2011:28). Used in imperatives *ja* reminds the hearer of responsibilities

or scold her for participating in banned activities. Ickler (1994:380) criticizes this view using the following sentence from Helbig (1988:165):

(19) Sie   wissen ja, dass er   nächste   Woche operiert   wird.
      You   know MP that he   next   week operate   will be.
      'As you know he will be operated on next week.'

The evidence for the hearer is already in the proposition. If we assume that *ja* indicates that the proposition should be evident, the sentence's meaning is that the hearer knows that she knows that someone will be operated. This is not feasible. The meaning of *ja* could better be described as 'I want you to consider in this context that' or 'In this context I want to call attention to'. Ickler (1994:399) argues that this particle says that the proposition is not controversial for the speaker.

Mal:
In imperatives *mal* is used by the speaker to stress that the command conveyed holds for now and not in general (cf. Ickler 1994:397f.):

(20) Hör   mal!
      Hear   MP!
      'Listen!'

So in (19) the speaker wants the hearer's attention, not in general but for a second.

Nur:
Used in optatives, *nur* is used to indicate that there were contrary expectations or hopes. In imperatives the speaker wants to signal—against the hearer's expectations—that there are no obstacles to act in a certain way. Used in interrogative constructions, the speaker shows that she had not expected an event or that she cannot identify the reason for the situation (cf. Bukhardt 1994:146f.).

Ruhig:
The utterance of sentences with *ruhig* indicate that an act can be performed without obstacles (cf. Burkhardt 1994:146).

Schon:
Used in contexts in which something seemingly contradicts a prediction made in the utterance and sometimes establishes a relationship between the actual utterance and general premises (König 1991:66):

(21) Du wirst schon gesund (wie immer)
      'You will get well (as always)'

When used in imperatives it sounds reproachful because the speaker "admonishes the hearer with a direct speech act to do something and suggests that the problems are on the hearer's side" (ibidem). In short, the meaning of *schon* is that the speaker accepts parts of the meaning of a preceding utterance and refuses other parts, i.e. the speaker wants to indicate that he knows that there are counter-arguments (Thurmair 1989:148ff.).

Wohl:
Wohl is used to signal the uncertainty of the speaker towards the proposition:

(22)   a. Werde ich *wohl* noch eine Karte bekommen?
            'Will I still get a ticket?'
       b. Der Typ da drüben, der hat sie wohl nicht mehr alle![15]
            'This guy over there, he's crazy!'

With *wohl* the speaker can indicate that she is not sure about the truth of the proposition. Therefore, questions with and without *wohl* differ in the expressed uncertainty towards a proposition. With questions containing *wohl* the speaker adresses herself but is awaiting a response (not a concrete answer) (Thurmair 1989:143). This is because whether the proposition expressed in *wohl*-sentences is true or not is not known to the speaker and at the same time she assumes that this is also not known to the hearer.

Vielleicht:
Like *auch*, *vielleicht* is restricted to exclamative sentences and is also used to indicate surprise. Ickler (1994:390) believes that the difference between *auch* and *vielleicht* lies in the viewpoint: whereas with the use of *auch* the speaker expects the hearer to explain something, with *vielleicht* the speaker is the one who knows the reason for something surprising (or exciting).

Modal particles as operators of the illocutionary force

It seems plausible to interpret modal particles as sentence operators which add the speakers attitude towards a proposition which is based on a common ground to the propositional content. Since—as we have seen—the concepts 'speaker' and 'hearer' are needed in order to explain the meaning of modal particles, it seems that we should start at an more abstract level: the illocutionary one (Coniglio 2011:19). Every speech act can be divided in three parts: the locutionary act as the act of uttering with an ostensible meaning, the illocutionary act with the intended meaning and the perlocutionary act, i.e. the effect evoked by speaking. The function of a sentence is what is meant by the illocutionary level. Every sentence can therefore be divided into a proposition p and an illocutionary operator Φ. So an uttered sentence should look like (22):

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[15] Example from Thurmair (1989:142).

(22)   Φ(p)

As we have seen there is a difference between the formal sentence types (declarative, imperative, interrogative, etc.) and the illocutionary force of a sentence which prototypically coincide but do not have to. To simplify matters I will assume that they coincide, i.e. the meaning of a declarative sentence is an assertion etc.

In a speech act theoretical framework modal particles can be interpreted as illocution modifiers or indicators (cf. Helbig 1988:57f., Thurmair 1989:201, Coniglio 2011:20f.). That means that if we have a sentence with an illocutionary type X to which we add a modal particle we get a sentence with an illocutionary type X' with a more specific usage (Jacobs 1986:103).

Ickler (1994:375) criticizes that there is no finite set of illocutionary types so that many authors have to invent new types *ad hoc* to classify a modal particle. So to describe the illocutionary type of utterances containing *ja* the subtype JA-ASSERT can be assumed. But it is doubtful whether this makes sense, because we have to assume a very large set of special subtypes.

A relevance-theoretical approach

König & Requard (1991) and König (1997) propose an account to explain the meanig of modal particles based on relevance theory. König (1997:59) and König & Requard (1991:64f.) critizise the following points in the disscussion about modal particles and the analysis of their meaning:

1. Aspects of the meaning of the context in which modal particles appear are often ascribed to the meaning of the particles themselves
2. Instead of looking for a superordinate meaning of modal particles *per se* many analyses assume polysemy
3. The analysis of modal particles often does not account for the difference between sentence meaning and utterance meaning
4. The detailed study of the meaning of the individual modal particles often hinders the adherence to the general properties of the whole class

The central claim of the relevance theory is that all interlocutors tend to maximize their representations of the world. According to Sperber & Wilson (1986) this is achieved in an economic way, i.e. all participants try to weigh the costs against the benefits. They define input as relevant when an individual can interrelate new information with old information such that she can draw new conclusions. In addition, the interlocutors aim to find evidence for preexisting assumptions. König (1991:62) lists three important roles which such an inference system can play and should be considered regarding to an analysis of modal particles:

1. An inference system can detect inconsistencies in a set of assumptions and can therefore guide the hearer to reject old assumptions and replace them with new information
2. An inference system can guide the hearer to affirm old assumptions
3. Old and new information can be combined and therefore new conclusions can be drawn

The problem with which an interlocutor is faced is how she should integrate new informations into background knowledge. Equipped with these considerations König inprets modal particles as meta-pragmatic instructors picking out an appropriate context in which an utterance should be understood. Based on the roles identification of inconsistencies (i), strengthening of assumptions (ii) and guidance of context selection (iii) (König 1991:65) sorts—note the overlappings—the modals particles as follows:

Identification of inconsistencies: *doch*, *etwa*

Strengthening assumptions: *aber*, *vielleicht*, *erst*, *schon*, *ja*, *wohl*, *eben*, *nun mal*, *halt*, *bloß*

Guidance of context selection: *auch*, *eben*, *nun mal, halt, schon, denn, eigentlich, einfach, nur, bloß, wohl*

And indeed: *doch* and *etwa* do serve as a signal for conflicting assumptions of the interlocutors and the second group does refer to evidences of assumptions. But let's take a closer look at the third group. König (1991:66) distinguishes group three into the following subgroups:

Context selection:	Inference:	Premisses:	Base/Premise:
eigentlich	*wohl, schon, eben, einfach, bloß*	*nun mal, eben, halt*	*denn*

Table 3: Context selection (taken from König 1991:66)

In König's minimalistic analysis modal particles are not interpreted as modifiers or indicators of illocution. For him the meaning of modal particles lies in their contribution to the processing of an utterance in a context.[16]

Modal particles and the common ground

As we have seen there are different proposals of what the meaning and function of modal particles in general are. At the beginning of her detailed work (Thurmair

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[16] Maximalistic approaches do not seem plausible because of the enormous amount of memory needed for thousands and thousands of words. Helbig & Kötz (1981) for example, assume that there are seven different modal particles *doch* alone.

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1989:2) writes that modal particles operate in the illocutionary domain and characterizes them as follows:

> The main task of modal particles is to integrate utterances in the interaction context. The interlocutor uses them to refer to the mutual knowledge and to the speaker's or hearer's assumptions and expectations, to recent utterances or the importance attached to the utterance.[17]

Thurmair is not alone in ascribing the function of modal particles to the context. Ickler (1994:382) states that they "relate to a context"[18] and that they are a "comment on the specific utterance in which they appear, a comment with regard to the logical or rhetorical classification into the communicative context" (p. 404). On the other hand, modal particles were analyzed as indicators and modifiers of the illocutionary force (Jacobs 1986), indicators for interpersonal relationships (Franck 1980), as speaker's instructions on how to make use of shared knowledge (Lütten 1979), and as a means of expression of epistemic attitude (Doherty 1985) and many more. All approaches have in common that they act on the assumption that modal particles act on a meta-level and not on a propositional level.

I will attempt to explain what modal particles mean by expanding Stalnaker's (e.g. 1978, 2002) common ground. His basic assumption is that utterances in natural language usually engage a speaker or signer (S) who makes an utterance (U) which is addressed to an attender (H). But to utter a sentence, S has to make some background assumptions about H's knowledge and beliefs. Or in other words: S and H share some information and they need to know which information they share to communicate properly. Stalnaker (2002:704) defines a common ground (or common belief) in a simple way as follows:

> [the mutual beliefs] of the parties to a conversation are the beliefs they share, and that they recognize that they share: a proposition Φ is common belief of a group of believers if and only if all in the group believe that Φ, all believe that all believe it, all believe that all believe that all believe it, etc.[19]

The problem with this notion of common ground is that S cannot really know what H knows or believes, a problem the socilologist Niklas Luhmann (1984) called 'double contingency': we can't see into each other's heads.[20] S just knows

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[17] My translation.

[18] My (loose) translation. He writes: "weil [...] alle Modalpartikeln einen [...] Kontextbezug herstellen."

[19] Although Stalnaker (2002:705ff.) argues that common ground and common beliefs may diverge we will keep it simple for the moment and identify the two.

[20] Gripp-Hagelstange (1989:65) puts it the following way: "'I don't know what you are really thinking and you don't know what I'm really thinking, but I know that you could drive at something else than you pretend; similarly you can't really know what I want to do because we both know that what is apparent of us is quasi the tip of the iceberg'—this situation is untenable; the constituting uncertainness of this situation has to be counterbalanced if we want to interact." (My translation, German original: "'Ich weiß nicht, was Du wirklich denkst, und Du weißt nicht, was ich wirklich denke, aber ich weiß,
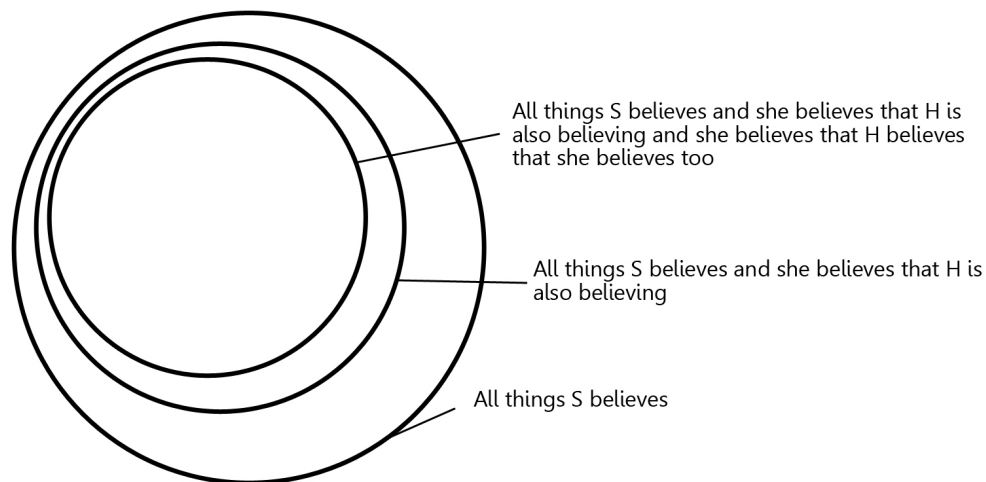
Figure 1: Set of propositions constituting all beliefs of S (outer circle), CG_{S_1} and CG_{S_2}

(or better: has to believe) that what she hears (what H is saying). Put simply: S only has introspective access to her own beliefs and her own knowledge. In some languages there are grammatical markers for indicating that we can't really know what others think or feel. E.g. in Japanese you cannot simply say that someone has a headache—you have to mark that the evidence for the headache is indirect:

(24)   Ken   wa   atama ga   ita- sô   da.
          Ken   TOP   head   NOM   pain-EVID   KOP.PRES
          'Ken seems to have a headache.'[21]

Because the real common ground lies outside the heads of the interlocutors and is not accessible to them it can't explain their behaviour. The common ground is "an abstraction, […] only observable by a god-like, omniscient outsider with privileged access to the participants' representational inventories" (Koschmann & LeBaron 2003:93). Therefore, I will assume that there are as many common grounds as there are interlocutors in a conversation—an idea similar to what Stalnaker (2002:708) calls "beliefs about common beliefs" and what Kecskes & Zhang (2009:344) call an "assumed common ground". If we look at the conversation between S and H, S has a common ground CG_{S_1} which we can think of as a set of propositions which S believes to be true and believes that H also believes to be true, and a 'deeper' common ground CG_{S_2} which is the set of propositions S believes to be true, she believes

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daß Du auch anderes wollen kannst, als Du zu wollen vorgibst, so wie Du ja auch nicht wissen kannst, was ich wirklich will, weil wir beide wissen, daß das, was von uns 'sichtbar' ist, gleichsam nur die Spitze des Eisberges ist' – diese Situation ist unhaltbar; die sie konstituierende Unsicherheit muß, soll ein Sichverhalten zueinander möglich werden, kompensiert werden." To overcome this uncertainty we have language to express what we think—Zaefferer (2007), therefore, called language a "mind sharing device" and humans "mind sharing animals".
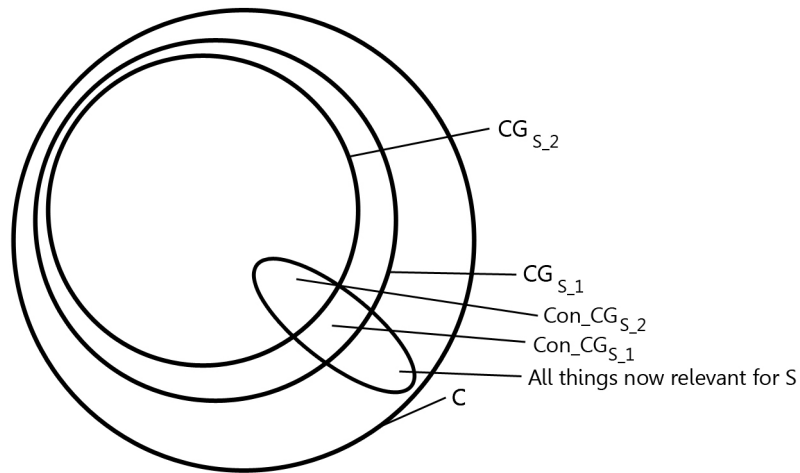[21] Example taken from Löbner (2003:240).

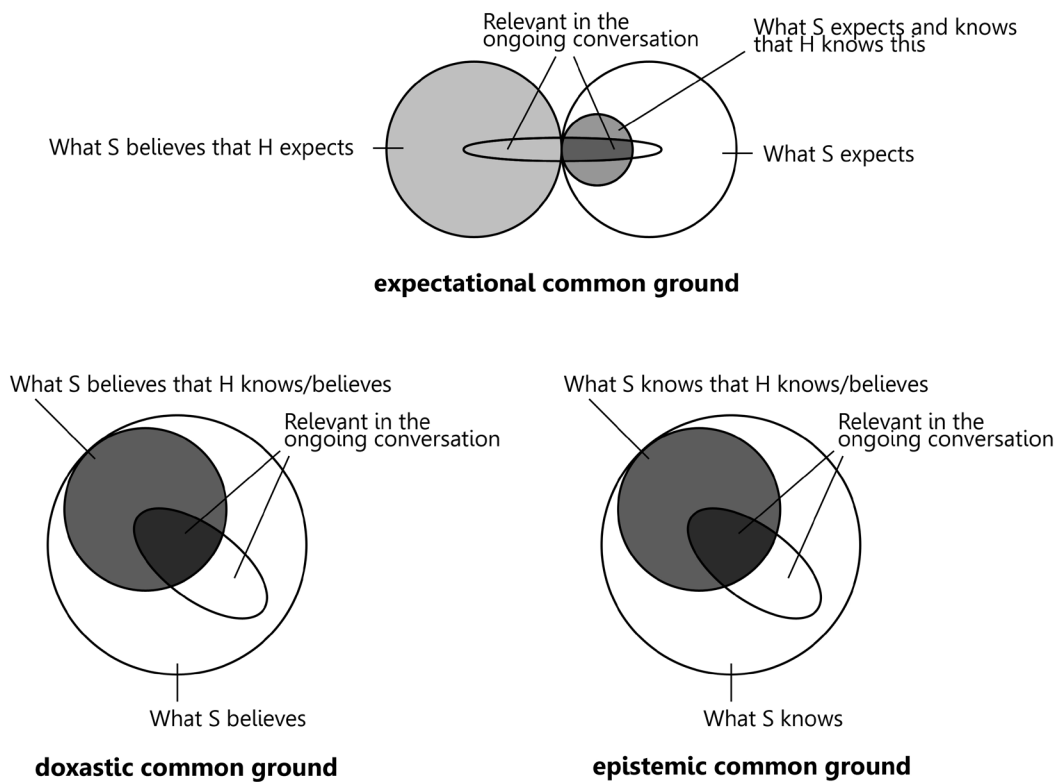**Figure 2**: Con_CGs_1 and Con_CGs_2

Figure 3: A mental common ground model of the speaker's viewpoint. Doxastic, epistemic and expectational common ground
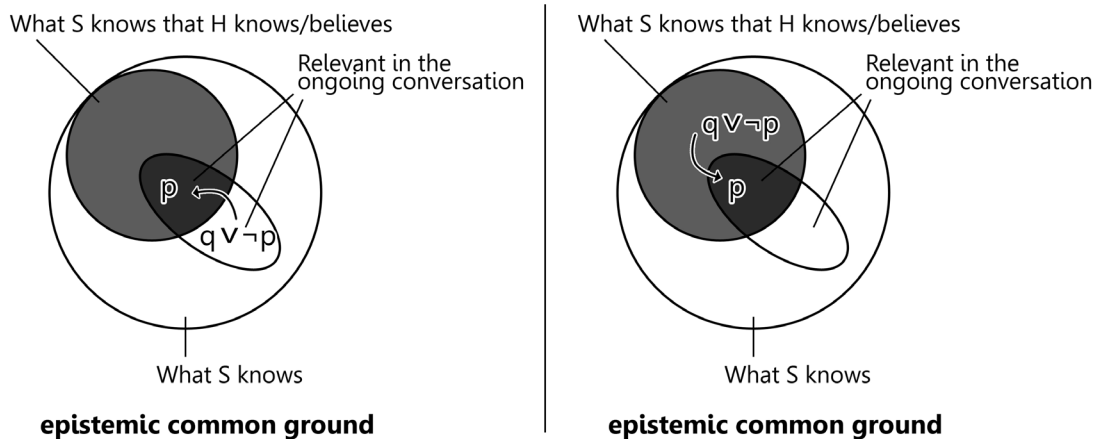
Figure 4: Epistemic common ground of an assertion without and with using *doch*

that H believes and she believes that H believes that she also believes.[22] Figure 1 shows CG_{S_1} as a subset of all beliefs of S (which I called G here) and CG_{S_2} as a subset of CG_{S_1}. This takes into account the consideration that the speaker's know-legde and beliefes "involve[...] constructing a model of the hearer's knowledge relevant to the given situational context" (Kecskes & Zhang 2009:335).

All three sets G, CG_{S_1} and CG_{S_2} are constantly changing in the interaction/conversation, a process called grounding (see Clark & Brennan 1993). Note that in this process S is not only uttering for example a proposition p which H is adding to her common ground, but S's utterance has the form $\Phi(p)$, so it is possible that her utterance was a question and not an assertion. In this case H knows that S does not know p and wants to know if p (in the simple case of a polar question). But even if S is making an assertion, things are not that simple. What is accepted in most cases is that by making an assertion, a proposition p is added to the common ground (and adding means that this proposition is accepted for the purpose of communication). But this is the best case scenario. If the hearer believes a contradicting proposition q, she will not add p to her common ground. So in real grounding, she has to accept a proposition (by commenting on it or by remaining silent) or to reject/correct/ modify it before it is added to the common ground (see Kecskes & Zhang 2009). But what does this have to do with modal particles and their meaning or function? As Thurmair (1989:94) puts it, their meaning lies in the fact that S can provide with them indications of how to relate a proposition expressed in an utterance to a given context. So not all propositions in CG_{S_1} and CG_{S_2} are relevant, and it is therefore necessary to assume context-relevant subsets, to which I will refer as $Con\_CG_{S\_1}$ and $Con\_CG_{S\_2}$, as shown in figure 2.[23] For the role of these salient or relevant meanings, see Giora (2003).

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[22] This is a bit oversimplified because S does not really have to believe that the propositions are true (they could talk about unicorns). So the propositions are taken to be true, i.e. they are accepted for the purpose of the conversation.

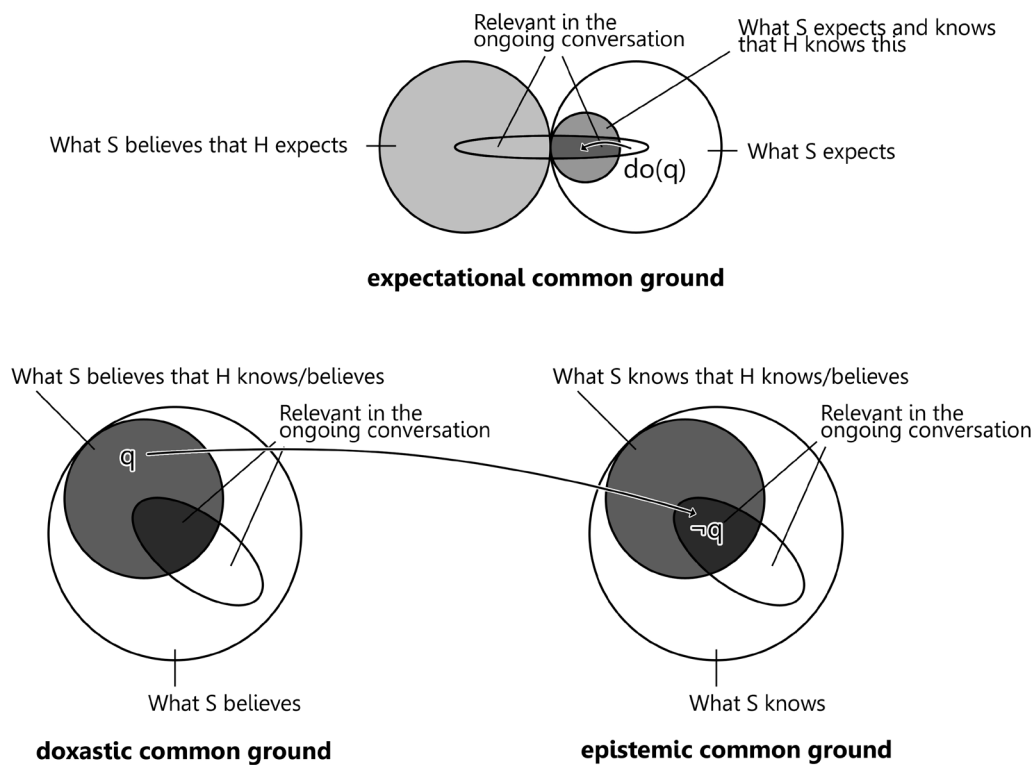[23] You do not have to keep in mind these abbreviations.

Figure 5: Process of a directive with *ruhig*

It is important to note that the common ground must have some sort of mental representation (we could call it a mental common ground) but the model I present here is just this: an abstract model. To simplify matters I will refer to both (to this model and to the mental state or mental processes it represents) with the notion of mental common ground. Up to now this model does not distinguish between what is believed and what is known. Furthermore, it does not represent all the things that are expected (or wanted). Figure 3 shows a more elaborate model of a speaker's mental common ground which not only takes the speaker's beliefs into account but also her knowledge and beliefs.

What is believed by the speaker (the doxastic common ground) has already been explained. In the epistemic common ground are all propositions the speaker knows to be true or rather accepts for the purpose of a specific communicative situation. I have said that S cannot really know what H knows or believes, but let us assume that she knows a proposition p which H knows or believes when H has made an assertion (a proposition p) or when she has acted as if p. Note that it is not the whole circles that are the (mental) common grounds, but just the grey ones. In what I have called the expectational common ground there are the expectations of S and the expectations of S of which S knows that H knows that she expects it. This is a part of S's knowledge, i.e. a subset of what she knows. What S believes that H expects is in contrast to that part i.e. a subset of her beliefs. With this model I will try to explain what happens in communicative situations when modal particles are used. As examples, I will use the particles *doch*, *ruhig*, *ja* and *halt*.
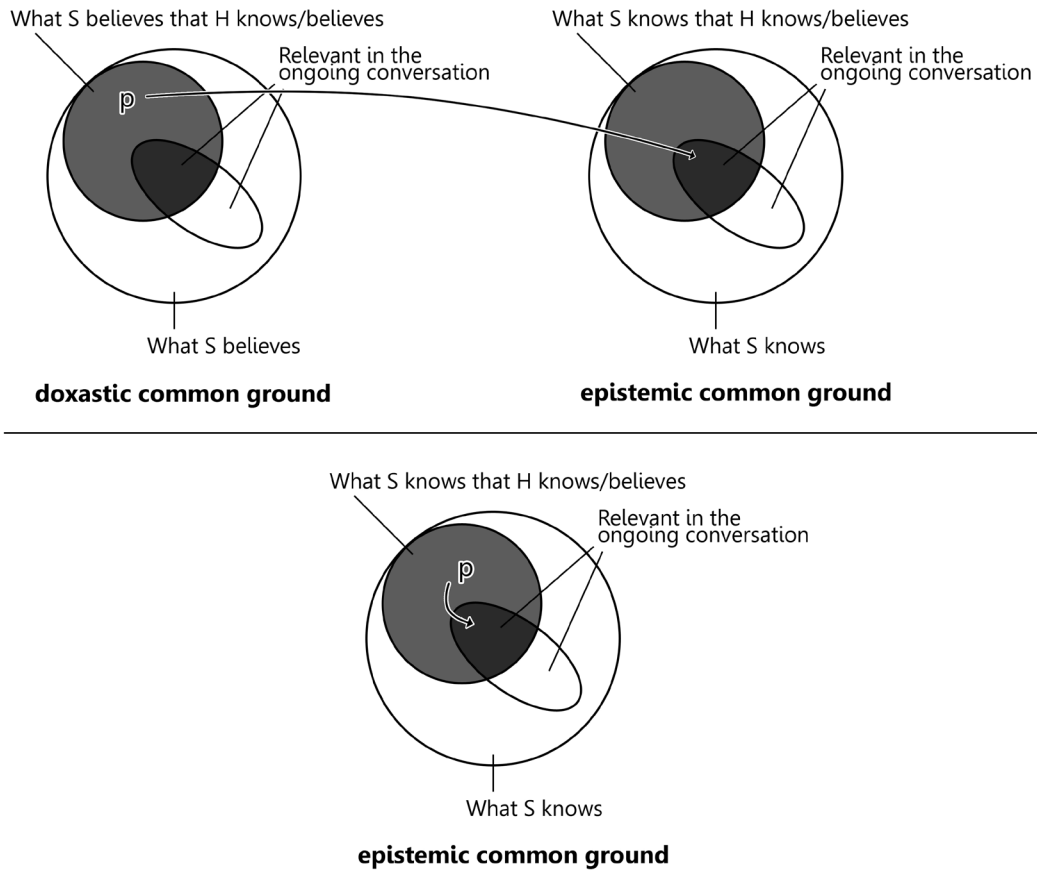
Figure 6: Common ground process in sentences with *ja*

Doch :
Let us assume that two friends, S and H, are having a conversation:

(25)   H: Schau Dir mal diesen lustigen Hund an!
        'H: Look at this funny dog!'

        S: Das ist **doch** eine Katze!
        'S: That is a cat!'

What is happening is that H is uttering a proposition p which is now in the epistemic common ground as shown in figure 4. This does not mean that S thinks that p is true but that S knows that H believes p to be true. The model on the left show what would happen if S utters the sentence without using doch.[24] The model on the right shows that S knows that q and therefore ¬p should be evident for H but that he is not considering this in the actual situation. So with uttering the sentence with *doch*, S indicates that H should know that q and ¬p.

_____
[24] Something like: *This is a cat (and no dog).*

What S knows that H knows/believes

Relevant in the ongoing conversation
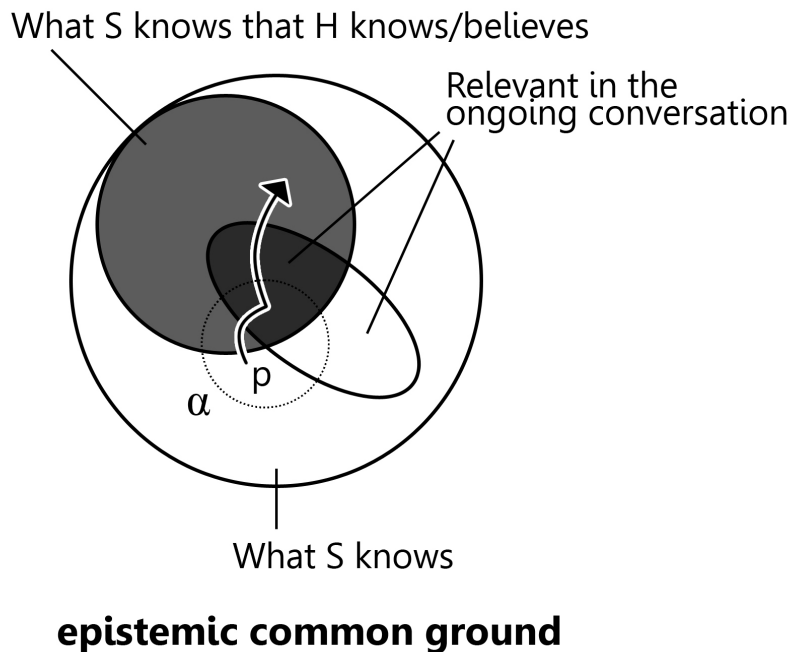
What S knows

epistemic common ground

Figure 7: Process of a assertion with *halt*

***Ruhig*:**
Imagine a situation where a student, H, is in the office of professor S to talk about the thesis that H wants to write. S is sitting in his office chair behind his desk and H is standing in front of it. Due to our culture it is normal to take a seat in such a situation. So S assumes that H believes that there is some reason p for her not take a seat so he says:

(25)   S: Setzen Sie sich ruhig hin.
           S: 'Take a seat.'

With the use of *ruhig* S indicates that she believes that there is no such reason ($\neg$q*)*. Sentences with *ruhig* are always directives, so the sentence (with or without *ruhig*) says something like: do(q) because there is no reason p not to. See figure 5.

***Ja*:**
In a conversation between two friends, S and H, the former says:

(26)   S: Lena hat ja ein Stipendium bekommen.
           'S: Lena got a scholarship.'
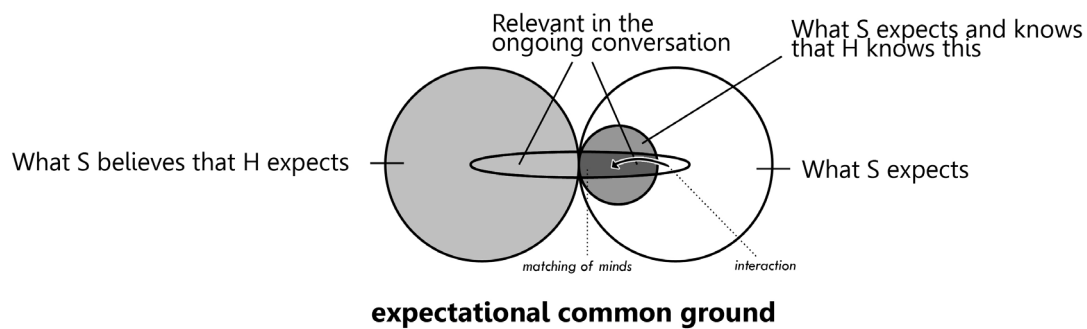
expectational common ground

Figure 8: Operations in the expectational common ground in Japanese sentence-final particles

because she is not sure whether H has already heard this and wants to use the proposition made in the utterance to continue the conversation. So the model should look like the top one in figure 6. In some cases it could look like the model on the bottom of the picture, but this is not relevant for the hearer to understand what was meant.

Halt:

Halt (and the partial synonymous *eben*) is used to answer a preceding question, like the dialog in (27):

(27)   H: Warum arbeitest du nicht?
        'H: Why don't you work?'

        S: Ich hab **halt** keine Lust.
        'S: I'm not in the mood.'

S's answer with *halt* signals H that S does not want to talk about his reasons further. But the proposition expressed in his utterance is an answer to the question. Questions can be modeled as a set of possible answers, i.e. a set of propositions (Hamblin 1958), which we will refer to as α—shown in figure 6 as the dotted circle. By uttering the answer the proposition p is added to the common ground but is marked as not relevant for the future conversation (illustrated by the intermediate stop of the arrow in figure 7).

In the presented view modal particles verbalize—similar to e.g. Japanese sentence-final particles—"relations between the speaker's mind and his estimation about the hearer's mind regarding the proposition uttered" (Schanz 2009:31). For these Japanese sentence-final particles Schanz (2009:31) considers the following sub-tasks to describe their function:

Matching of minds: This is information about whether the speaker expects the hearer's mind to agree with the proposition

Interaction between proposition and hearer's mind: This represents the speaker's expectation of how the hearer should deal with the proposition in regard to his own knowledge and experience

Intensity of expectation: Combined with the expectation criterion above, there is a certain degree of relevance pressure which is laid on the hearer regarding its intended fulfillment

Weight of relevance: This expresses how important it is to the actual topic that the proposition is presented by the speaker

As we can see, the functions of these Japanese particles are very similar to German modal particles. The first three subtasks are operations in what I have called expectational common ground. The fourth is an operation in the epistemic common ground. Figure 8 shows the first two subtasks: with the matching subtask the speaker wants to indicate that her proposition is expected to be accepted by H too and with the interaction subtask she wants to indicate that H should deal with the expressed proposition, like the German modal particle *ruhig* (see the arrow in figure 8). The intensity and weight subtasks can be modeled by assuming that the sets of relevant propositions contain a subset with propositions that are more relevant to the context.

Conclusion and requirements for further models

The model presented above showed that the function of German modal particles lies in the guidance of speaker-hearer relevant information based on the speaker's assumptions about their mutual knowledge. Or as Abraham (2012:76) aptly puts it: "The speaker appraises what the hearer knows and what he is aware of, lets her know of this act of appraisal, and invites her to comment on this appraisal of p (to affirm, to correct, to modify)."[25] Modal particles work against the general tendency of speakers to "in general underestimate the ambiguity of their utterances" (Keysar & Henly 2002:207) by a targeted process of evaluating the common ground.

The biggest problem of this model is that it can barely handle aspects of time. For example the modal particle *mal* narrows the time a proposition is valid so a sentence like *Hast du mir **mal** ne Zigarette.* ('Do you have a cigarette.') means that the speaker wants a cigarette now and will not ask for another one later. This is not to be modeled by the presented approach because of its limitation in time. Future models of the (mental) common ground should include all aspects of real conversational situations consisting of pairs <sentence, context>. According to Wunderlich (1971:177f.), such a communicative situation consists of: 1. a speaker, 2. a hearer, 3. the time of the utterance, 4. place (what is perceived by the speaker), 5. pho-

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[25] My translation. The original quote says: "Der Sprecher schätzt den Stand des Hörerwissensbewusstseins ab, lässt den Hörer von diesem Einschätzungsakt wissen und lädt ihn ein, zu dieser seiner (des Sprechers) Einschätzung von p Stellung zu nehmen (zu bestätigen, zu korrigieren, zu modifizieren)."

nological-syntactic properties of the utterance, 6. cognitive content of the utterance, 7. several assumptions (a. speaker's assumptions, knowledge, and skills; b. hearer's assumptions, knowledge, and skills; c. assumptions about what the hearer perceives; d. social relationship between speaker and hearer; e. what the speaker thinks about what the preceding utterances meant); 8. what was intended by the speaker with her utterance, and 9. the interrelation between speaker and hearer caused by the utterance.[26]

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[26] Further requirements to a common ground model could be how exactly questions operate in a common ground and an integration of theories of theories of mind.

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