

German modal particles and recent typological perspectives on epistemicity and assertions

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Abstract

This paper investigates German modal particles in the light of recent typological work on epistemic marking in assertions. The starting point is the semantic flip observed in the meaning of particles between assertions and interrogations: under the name “interrogative flip”, this feature has recently become a well-established test for egophoricity in a variety of languages. Following this strain of thought, I show that the kind of intersubjective modality marked by modal particles is essentially egophoric: propositional attitudes have to be associated to a modal judge and her ratifier; these modal roles, which need not be epistemic, are instantiated on interaction participants only in a second step, via additional markers (most prominently sentence mood). Further recent developments try to mingle egophoricity with speech act theory, using the concept of “enimitives”, a class of markers devoted to “uncontroversial assertion”. While the concept of enimitives proves inadequate for the fine-grained studies of German modal particles, I show that it provides helpful insights into the intricacy of sentence types and epistemicity-in-interaction.

1 Introduction: Typological concepts for language-specific Modal Particle research

The study of modal particles (MP) and discourse particles¹ has long been a matter of language-specific research, e. g. on High German or on Russian. Cross-linguistic investigations have also played an important theoretical role since Weydt’s (1969) study on German particles and their French equivalents. But these were mostly contrastive studies, comparing either two languages or two families of languages (Germanic vs. Romance, Germanic vs. Slavic, etc.). Typologists, on the other hand, have also investigated particles in a variety of languages. For a long time, there was little discussion between these various traditions of research, especially because theoretical language-specific research on German or Slavic particles have almost become autonomous subfields of linguistics. Things, however, have begun to change in the last years. Typologists have recently proposed to include German modal particles within a broader set of cross-linguistic phenomena pertaining at the grammaticalization of epistemic authority. In other words: instead of doing “particle research”, they are investigating epistemic meanings and/or the expression of speaker commitment within intersubjective spaces, and they name the modal

¹ I temporarily leave aside the differences to be made between these two subgroups, but cf. Detges/Waltereit (2009) for a discussion.

particles of Germanic as one language-specific incarnation of this functional realm. The present paper is intended as a discussion of these newer developments from the perspective of German-language particle research. As I will try to see, the questions raised by typologists echo long-standing issues discussed among scholars working on German and Romance particles (exemplified for instance by Munaro or Atayan/Moroni in the present volume). Conversely, the huge amount of empirical and theoretical knowledge accumulated on German may help us articulate language-specific research with typologically-informed linguistics. As a whole, this study follows the definition of epistemicity put forward by Boye (2012: 2f.): epistemicity is a descriptive category encompassing all kinds of strategies marking information justification (i. e. evidentiality, with the accessibility of the source of information as a central matter) and information support (i. e. epistemic modality, where the central issue is the commitment of the speech act participants, most notably the speaker, towards the content of the utterance). This definition embeds the study of epistemic meaning into a set of premises regarding cognition and communication, one of which is the centrality of justification and support in the linguistic manifestation of any claim or viewpoint. Once this question is thought of in terms of intersubjective adjustment (cf. Leiss 2009: 19–22), unequal epistemic authority between speech act participants and the anticipation of possible contradictions become central issues in the analysis – an issue that was already highlighted in the study of modal particles and their cross-linguistic equivalents by several authors, and most notably by Waltereit (2006). This claim is the starting point of the present paper, which is concerned with two proposed categories implementing such theoretical assumptions into the grammatical description of language-specific data: egophoricity and enimitives.

The first notion to be discussed is egophoricity, a concept put forward, among others, by Floyd/Norcliffe/San Roque (2018). Egophoricity designates the grammaticalization of person-bound epistemic authority. As such, egophoricity research has much in common with approaches to particles that insist on epistemicity and knowledge-in-interaction, a tradition going back to at least Doherty (1985). Evans/ Bergqvist/ San Roque (2017: 165) and Bergqvist (2020: 469–496 and 2021: 1–13) have explicitly mentioned the modal particles of Germanic (German, Swedish) as sensitive to egophoric mechanisms. Egophoricity will be discussed in section 2. I then turn to the “enimitive”, a comparative concept (in the sense of Haspelmath 2010) put forward by Panov (2020) to designate functional items that, like Latin *enim*, mark the speaker’s epistemic authority on the content of the utterance. Panov names several German and Russian particles as prototypical examples of enimitives, such as *ja* and *doch*, or Russian *zhe* (see below section 3.1).² His theoretical stance owes much more to speech act theory than to the “shared knowledge” hypotheses that typically underlie approaches centered on epistemicity. Moreover, assessing the relevance of the enimitive is a good opportunity to discuss the heuristic use of comparative concepts for language-specific research. This will be the heart of section 3, at the end of which I show how the semantic depiction of modal particles can help bridge the gap between egophoricity and enimitivity – an issue that is relevant beyond German, since both concepts were coined for a comparative use (section 3.4).

² The meaning of modal particles or enimitives is strongly procedural. For that reason, translating these items outside of their context of occurrence can be misleading, at least when the target language lacks any comparable form. In what follows, I will not translate the particles in the main text, neither will I provide a word-to-word translation of particles in the examples.

2 Egophoricity

2.1 Generalities

Egophoricity designates the sensitivity of a grammatical morpheme to the epistemic asymmetry between speech act participants. This concept is terminologically reminiscent of logophoricity, a category used to point out at how bound forms, e. g. pronouns, can have a distribution that is not dependent on general anaphoric relationships, but relies on the person whose speech or whose thought is represented. Similarly, the distribution of egophoric markers is dependent on the person who enjoys epistemic authority. For instance, predicates of internal states are classically associated with first-person authority in declarative clauses, and in some languages, this asymmetry between the first person and all others may be marked on mental verbs. But egophoricity scholars are not only concerned with person-bound epistemic authority that is dependent on the ontology of predicates. They also study phenomena like the “interrogative flip”, i. e. the behavior of forms associated with first-person authority in declarative clauses, which become associated with the second person in questions. In this matter, the reversal of epistemic authority is directly related to a theoretical question that is autonomous from the ontology of processes: the fact that the role of modal judge is sensitive to the kind of speech act completed through the utterance. According to Bergqvist (2020), the use of the Swedish modal particles *ju* and *väl* is correlated to person-bound epistemic authority. *Ju* stands for uncontroversial assertion. In a *ju*-marked assertion, the speaker’s authority is deemed undisputable. This means that in the context of interaction, the addressee has no *prima facie* legitimacy to dispute the truthfulness of the utterance’s content.³ The most typical contexts involving unquestionable speaker authority are first-person constructions of mental state predicates. More generally, first-person predicates often display a privileged access of the speaker to the knowledge underlying the claim. Similarly, second person predicates occurring in questions tend to involve the addressee as bearer of privileged access to knowledge (cf. Bergqvist 2021: 5). Speaker authority is primarily determined by the accessibility of evidence supporting the claim: depending on the evidential background of the discussion, any kind of propositional content can be used as the content of an contextually unquestionable assertion, due to a mutually salient knowledge gap between the speech act participants on the matter at stake.

Bergqvist (2021) was able to show that *ju* is strongly preferred in assertions displaying a verb inflected in the first-person verb or with the impersonal *man*:

³ Against the view of one anonymous reviewer, this implies that uncontroversial assertion and presupposition are no equivalent concepts. Asserting or re-asserting presupposed contents is a kind of “uncontroversial assertion” (although we should keep in mind the case of contradictions within the common ground – see below the section on contrastive enimitives). But epistemic authority can be asymmetric: when the speaker enjoys complete epistemic authority on the matter at stake and the addressee is in an epistemically weaker position, the speaker can utter uncontroversial assertions without the content being presupposed. Moreover, presupposition is not a speech act type, it is a status, which can be devoted to the whole content of a speech act, or only to a part of it: the notions of presupposition and of uncontroversial assertion belong to different levels of analysis.

- (1) *Man får ju också se på priset.*
 one needs MP also look at price.DEF
 ‘One also needs to look at the price.’

(Bergqvist 2021: 6, after Teleman/Hellberg/Andersson 1999)

Bergqvist claims that by using *väl* in assertions, the speaker weakens her own epistemic authority and grants some degree of it to the hearer. As could be expected following the egophoricity hypothesis, *väl* seems to be preferred in second-person assertions.

- (2) *Du har väl hört vad som hänt.*
 you have MP heard what REF happened
 ‘You must have heard what happened’

(Bergqvist 2021: 7, after Aijmer 1977)

Bergqvist (2021) is concerned with a subsystem consisting of two of the four Swedish modal particles. Scherf’s (2017) study corroborates the claim that *ju* and *väl* do form a distinct subset with its own distributional properties. With just two particles in the subset, the data is indeed compatible with an opposition between speaker authority and hearer authority. However, in German, the paradigm of modal particles is much more diverse, and thus its description must include additional, plausibly non-egophoric parameters, or the concept of egophoricity must be taken in a less stringent way, with less insistence on the grammatical person of the subject. What is left, then, is an interactional view on epistemic authority, as opposed to the “shared knowledge” approach to modal particles going back to Doherty (1985). But the insistence upon the link between epistemic authority and speech act type points to a common concern of those scholars working on egophoricity and on German modal particles: the necessity to distinguish between the modal judge and the speaker, and the claim that some functional elements are bound to the modal judge, so that discrepancies in their behavior depending from the speech act type of the utterance can be accounted for on the basis of how the role of modal judge is instantiated in that speech act or in that speech act type.

2.2 Judge-orientedness vs. speaker-orientedness

The clearest example of a modal particle of German that is oriented towards the modal judge and not towards the speaker is *wohl* (cf. Zimmermann 2004; Gutzmann 2017 a. o.). In assertions, *wohl* marks that the assertion is not uncontroversial, and the speaker does not claim indisputable epistemic authority. For instance, in example (3), the speaker (journalist) refers to the inner mental states of several persons, to which she has no access. But drawing on social roles, she can infer that the only person of an organization who can spontaneously be happy to see the membership fee rise is the person accountable for the organization’s finances. This is a case of indirect knowledge via inference:

- (3) *Erst sollten nur die Beiträge der Junioren erhöht werden, was auf Opposition stiess. Präsident Andy Willi liess daraufhin mehrmals abstimmen, bis keiner mehr wusste worüber. Es entstand ein hochkompliziertes Hin und Her. Das Resultat der mehrstündigen Versammlung: Erhöht wurden die Beiträge aller Mitglieder – was eigentlich niemand wollte. Dafür reichte eine*

“Mehrheit” von 49 Stimmen, obschon wegen einiger Spätankömmlinge rund 120 Stimmberechtigte im Saal waren. Richtig Freude am Ergebnis hat **wohl** nur der Kassier des FC Goldach.⁴

‘At first, it was planned to increase only the contributions of the juniors, which was met with opposition. President Andy Willi then called several votes until no one knew what they were voting about. Very confused exchanges followed. The result of the meeting, which lasted several hours, was that the contributions of all members were increased – something nobody actually wanted. A “majority” of 49 votes was enough for this, even though there were approximately 120 voters in the hall because of some late arrivals. The only one to be happy about this result is probably the treasurer of FC Goldach.’

<i>Richtig</i>	<i>Freude</i>	<i>am</i>	<i>Ergebnis</i>	<i>hat</i>	<i>wohl</i>
real	joy	at.the	result	has	MP
<i>nur</i>	<i>der</i>	<i>Kassier</i>	<i>des</i>	<i>FCGoldbach</i>	
only	the	treasurer	the.GEN	FCGoldbach	

(*St. Galler Tagblatt* 12.07.1997: “Zapfen”, quoted from DEREKO, A97/JUL.14160)

In questions, *wohl* is restricted to two contexts which suggest that an interrogative flip takes place. First, *wohl* occurs in deliberative questions that do not demand an answer, but merely signal that something is unknown:

- (4) *Wusstest Du wohl darum, wie ein warmes Wort zu wirken vermag? Ich begegnete Dir fast täglich. Ich freute mich über Dich. Welche Gedanken hattest Du wohl über mich? Was bedeutete ich Dir? Ich kann es nicht ahnen. – Warum auch fragte ich Dich nie danach? Eigentlich auch sonderbar, so will mir jetzt scheinen.*

‘Did you know at all what can be the effect of a nice word? I met you almost every day. I was happy about you. What thoughts did you have about me? What did I mean to you? I cannot guess. – After all, why didn’t I ever ask you about it? Actually, that’s also strange, so it seems to me now.’

Welche Gedanken hattest Du wohl über mich?

which thoughts had you MP about me

‘What thoughts did you have about me?’

(*St. Galler Tagblatt* 01.11.1997: “Auf eines Bekannten Tod”, quoted from DEREKO, A97/NOV.33085)

Further, *wohl* appears in questions where the hearer’s epistemic authority is not undisputable. The threshold of authority requested to give an answer is lowered via the use of *wohl* in the interrogative utterance. For instance, when asking a child what job she will do in twenty years’ time, one cannot expect her to have hard evidence at hand:

- (5) *Was machst Du wohl in 20 Jahren? – Ich bin Sportlehrerin und im Nebenberuf Tierärztin. Oder nur eines von beiden.*

⁴ An anonymous reviewer rightly observes that in example (3), like in many others, the MP is followed by another particle-like element, which can be a focus particle (like here), another MP or a negation. There are various hypotheses concerning these phenomena, but one should not necessarily assume that the presence of one item licenses the occurrence of a second one. It is a well-established fact that the late (or right) part of the clause in German is occupied by rhematic material, and that this rhematic part tends to form a rather homogeneous syntactic and prosodic block exhibiting information focus. Epistemic markers, the negation and focus-sensitive items all tend to be placed immediately before this block. The result is the existence of clustered epistemic and metapragmatic markers.

‘What will you be doing in 20 years? – I will be a sports teacher, and as a part-time job, a veterinarian. Or just one of the two.’

(*Braunschweiger Zeitung* 24.03.2007: “Ich will Sportlehrerin werden”, quoted from DEREKO, BRZ07/MAR.05481)

Was machst Du wohl in 20 Jahren?

what do.2SG you MP in 20 years

‘What will you be doing in 20 years?’

(ibd.)

Previous research has already demonstrated that *wohl* operates on the epistemic base underlying the modal judgement, undermining the authority of the speaker in assertions, and of the hearer in questions (cf., among others, Hauman/Letnes 2012; Modicom 2017; Zimmermann 2004). The deictic component of the particle’s meaning is egophoric. However, there is no comparable consensus on other modal particles. Even the criteria to test judge-orientedness vs. speaker-orientedness are open to discussion. In the next step, I will address Gutzmann’s (2017) view about *ja*, which he claims to be an exponent of speaker-orientedness, as opposed to *wohl*. For Gutzmann, *ja* is a sentence-mood particle and not a contextual judgement particle like *wohl*. His main argument is that *ja* cannot be shifted to non-speakers. In that sense, one could even wonder if *ja* should not be called a logophoric MP.

But not everyone agrees that sentence moods and basic speech act types are the relevant pragmatic units to study MPs. For example, in her work on the fine-grained pragmatic features of particles and of the speech acts they modify, Müller (2012) advocates for a case-by-base approach of the compatibility between modal particles and illocutionary types. Indeed, a quick look at the DEREKO shows that *ja* is acceptable even while embedded in indirect speech constructions where the modal judge is not the speaker. In (6), the speaker explicitly casts epistemic and moral doubt on the speech that she is reporting:

- (6) *Es grenzt schon an Unverfrorenheit, wenn sich ein Wirtschaftsminister und Aufsichtsratsmitglied bei Volkswagen hinstellt und in einem Interview mit Ihrer Zeitung behauptet, dass man ja nicht das Know-how besitzt und nun die Firma Porsche dazu benötigt, um erfolgreich bei Volkswagen zu werden.*

‘It is almost shameless that a Minister of Economic Affairs and member of the Board at Volkswagen stands up and claims in an interview with your newspaper that they don’t have the know-how and now need the contribution of the Porsche company to become successful at Volkswagen.’

[...] *behauptet dass man ja nicht das Know-How besitzt*

... claim.3SG that one MP NEG the know-how posses.3SG

‘... claims that they [notoriously] don’t have the know-how’

(*Braunschweiger Zeitung* 30.08.2006: “Zu: Hirche-Interview, Madonna-Konzert und Urlaubsverzicht”, quoted from DEREKO, BRZ06/AUG.14347)

Note that *ja* is also acceptable in embedded clauses where the speaker’s attitude is more neutral, as in (7):

- (7) *Der Lebkuchenmann (Maximilian Heckmann) macht seinem Namen alle Ehre, auch wenn die Wissenschaft behauptet, dass Lebkuchen ja gar nicht von Leben kommt.*

‘The gingerbread man (Maximilian Heckmann) lives up to his name, even though science claims that the word for gingerbread (*Lebkuchen*) does not come from the word for life (*Leben*) at all.’

die Wissenschaft behauptet dass Lebkuchen ja gar nicht
 the science claim.3SG that *Lebkuchen* MP INT NEG
von Leben kommt.
 from *Leben* come.3SG

‘[...] science claims that the word for gingerbread (*Lebkuchen*) does not come from the word for life (*Leben*) at all.’

(*Nordkurier* 02.12.2013: “Das Publikum fordert schon”, quoted from DEREKO, NKU13/DEZ.00120)

Part of the disagreement about the acceptability of embedded *ja* under “non-speakers” may be due to the fact that the carrier of the embedded proposition may not be “the speaker”, but it is still *a* speaker, namely a second-order one. That distinction is crucial for Ducrot (1984)⁵ and plays an important role in Waltereit’s (2006) argumentation: contexts where the reconstruction of the original speech act is transparent allow for the presence of *ja*. Hence the fact that these examples are better accepted with the subjunctive, as acknowledged by Gutzmann (2017: 161):

- (8) *Und der Autor provoziert ganz bewusst. Sport sei nicht natürlich, behauptet er, denn Tiere trieben ja auch keinen Sport.*

‘And the author is deliberately provocative. Sport is not natural, he claims, because after all, animals don’t do sport, either.’

Tiere trieben ja auch keinen Sport
 animals do.QUOT.3PL MP also NEG.ART.ACC sport
 ‘Animals don’t do sport, either.’ (quotative mood)

(*Hannoversche Allgemeine*, 15.10.2008, “Gesünder ohne Sport”, quoted from DEREKO, HAZ08/OKT.02460)

- (9) *Die triumphierende Art, mit der sie behauptet, er sei ja noch ihr Mann, während er doch schon mit der jüngeren und attraktiveren neuen Frau weitgehend die gemeinsame Zukunft besprochen hat, das alles hört sich an wie eine kleine Alltagstragödie.*

‘Her triumphant way when she claims that he is still her husband, whereas he has already largely discussed their future together with the younger and more attractive new woman, all this sounds like a small everyday tragedy.’

sie behauptet er sei ja noch ihr Mann
 she claim.3SG he be.QUOT.3SG MP still her husband

(*Salzburger Nachrichten* 25.11.1991: “Das qualvolle Auseinanderbrechen einer Ehe”, quoted from DEREKO, N91/NOV.21484)

As we have seen, the “interrogative flip” appears to be a good test for egophoricity. But as we know, *ja* is essentially banned from utterances used to fulfill interrogative speech acts. A

⁵ Ducrot (1984) would call a first-order speaker directly participating in the interaction a “speaking subject” whereas the person responsible for an utterance is called a “locutor”: reported speech is a typical case of mismatch (“external polyphony”, in Ducrot’s wording) between the “speaking subject” and the “locutor”. Here, this distinction would imply that *ja* can be embedded under locutors who aren’t proper “speaking subjects” provided the “polyphony” is marked explicitly.

straightforward hypothesis is that *ja* is speaker-oriented, hence there would be a contradiction in using it in a standard question, but not in rhetorical questions, where the speaker may still enjoy epistemic authority. A quick look at embedded questions suggests that things are more complicated. For instance, we do not expect MPs *denn* and *ja* to combine, because *denn* is typical for interrogative contexts and *ja* is supposed to be banned from these. Still, occurrences of this very combination can be found in contexts where no question is addressed to anyone else than to the very bearer of the interrogative stance – but still, these are no embedded rhetorical questions where one of the participants would enjoy undisputed epistemic authority. Much rather, these are requests for confirmation, where someone tries to access a position as modal judge over an uncertain representation of her own, as in (10) or (11):

- (10) *Dabei schienen sie aus sich selbst herauszutreten, um sich auch selbst zu kontrollieren, ob sie **denn ja** alles “gut“ und “richtig“ machten, und verwendeten nahezu alle Kraft darauf, einzelne Handlungsschritte aus ihrer schriftlichen Unterrichtsvorbereitung von einer dem inneren Auge vorgehaltenen Merktafel abzurufen.*

‘They seemed to step out of themselves in order to also look at themselves and to check whether they were doing everything “well” and “correctly”, and spent almost all their energy on recalling individual steps from their written lesson preparations from a memory board that they held up before their inner eye.’

ob sie denn ja alles gut und richtig machten
 whether they MP MP everything good and correct do.PAST.3PL
 ‘whether they were doing everything “well” and “correctly”’

(Beyer 2008)

- (11) *Für jemand, der sich selbst umsehen würde, ob er **denn ja** auch nicht beobachtet wird, wenn er sich schnaufend ausruhen muss, ist es klar, dass das der Grund ist, weshalb sich der andere auch umdreht.*

‘For someone who would look around himself to make sure that he is not being watched when he is taking a break while still grumbling, it is clear that this is the reason why the other person is also looking around himself.’

ob er denn ja auch nicht beobachtet wird
 whether he MP MP also NEG observed become.3SG
 ‘whether he is not being watched’

(Runner’s World 2006)

In example (12), taken from a sermon, the first-person speaker is not the bearer of the question. But this time, the indirect speaker whose question is represented, being god and being endowed with the capacity of a controller, may be assumed to enjoy absolute epistemic authority. But the framework is an irrealis hypothesis, so one could still wonder “who speaks” here:

- (12) *Als ob Gott wie ein Kontrolleur wäre, der schaut, ob ich **ja** auch fromm genug lebe und für meinen Glauben alles geben und tun würde.*

‘As if God were like a controller who checks whether I live piously enough and would give and do everything for my faith.’

ob ich ja auch fromm genug lebe
 whether I MP also piously enough live.1SG
 ‘whether I live piously enough’

(Evangelisch 2011)

Other occurrences in embedded contexts suggest that it is not the one who asks the question who enjoys epistemic authority, as in (13), where the requested knowledge is a typical example of situation where the hearer enjoys first-person authority:

- (13) *Ich würde gerne mal hören, ob du ja vielleicht eine Musikalische Ader hast oder sowas.*
 ‘I would like to hear whether you have a musical streak or something.’

ob du ja vielleicht eine musikalische Ader hast
 whether you MP maybe a musical blood.vessel have.2SG
 ‘whether you have a musical streak’

(R-B-A 2019)

The same is true in (14), where the reported question was addressed by an association to a legal office enjoying epistemic authority about the matter at hand, because of their professional expertise:

- (14) *Daraufhin wurde das Schützenmeisteramt beauftragt, doch mal genauere Informationen einzuholen, ob es ja vielleicht doch die eine oder andere Möglichkeit gäbe, eine Genehmigung zu bekommen um eine Kompanie aufzustellen.*
 ‘Thereupon the Shooters’ Office was assigned the task to nevertheless obtain more exact information whether there would perhaps still be some possibility of getting the permission to set up a company.’

ob es ja vielleicht doch die eine oder die andere
 whether it MP maybe still the one or the other
 Möglichkeit gäbe
 possibility EXIST.IRR.3SG
 ‘whether there would perhaps still be some possibility’

(FSG-SOB 2014)

In (15), *ja* is embedded under a first-person speaker (i. e. there is no speaker switch), but it is still the hearer’s expertise which is requested, while the speaker underlines her lack of knowledge:

- (15) *Ich möchte gerne mal in die Runde fragen, ob ja jemand Erfahrungen hat, ob es rechtliche Aspekte zu berücksichtigen gibt und ob da eventuell Absprachen möglich sind.*
 ‘I would like to ask if anyone might have any experience, if there are any legal aspects to consider and if there any agreements are possible.’

ob ja jemand Erfahrungen hat
 whether MP someone experience.PL have.3SG
 ‘if anyone has any experience’

(Bundeswehrforum 2014)

Example (15) is not a *hapax*, as (16) below presents essentially the same configuration:

- (16) *Ja, ich weiß, ne ziemlich dumme Anfrage in diesem Forum, aber bevor ich mich woanders anmelde und vielleicht auch nichts erfahre, probier ich erstmal hier ob ja einer was weiß.*
 ‘Yes, I know, a pretty stupid request in this forum, but before I knock at another door and perhaps also learn nothing, I’ll first try to see here if anyone knows anything.’

ob ja einer was weiß
 whetherMP one what know.3SG
 ‘if anyone one knows anything’

(Virtualracing.org 2009)

Note, however, that these examples involve a speaker asking a question to check the addressee’s capacity to do something, even if the embedded predicate is not necessarily in the second person. Some of these predicates are cases of mental state predicates where the first-person enjoys direct, non-descriptive knowledge, whereas the asking person would have to rely on descriptive knowledge (knowledge by observation, and not by acquaintance) to draw any conclusion. These contexts bear some similarity with predicates triggering the interrogative flip in strongly egophoric languages, as if there had been a shift of authority towards the hearer. But then, why is *ja* hardly found in interrogative utterances? The explanation may be of purely pragmatic nature: Standard questions do not fit with the value of uncontroversiality and immediate accessibility carried by *ja*. Why should one ask a (sincere) question if its answer is immediately accessible to anyone in the room? The distribution of particles throughout illocutionary types would then be due to matters of (in)compatible illocutionary values. If it is so, then the pragmatic notion of uncontroversial assertion is as important as the notion of epistemic authority. This is exactly the idea underlying Panov’s (2020) proposal to construct a comparative concept of “enimitives”.

3 Enimitives

3.1 Presentation of the concept

Panov (2020: 1f.) is concerned with cross-linguistic questions that make a strictly semasiological perspective hard to maintain. For that reason, he defines enimitives as “a specific functional domain” that “could be exemplified by the German *doch* and *ja*, or the Russian *вед’* and *že*.” Thus, its vicinity to the realm of modal particles is obvious. It is acknowledged by Panov 2020: 10: “For the majority of languages in the list in Table 1 [a table of languages displaying enimitives], the enimitive is expressed by elements usually termed in the literature discourse particles or modal particles”.

To circumvent the ongoing disagreements about particles among scholars of individual languages, Panov adopts a strictly functional view and posits the notion of uncontroversial assertion as the core of the enimitive domain. The morphosyntactic status of the markers comes second. “The functional core of the category may be best defined as marking the proposition as un-controversial. To give the category a name, I propose the label *enimitive* derived from the Latin particle *enim* which is an instance of a marker expressing this category” (Panov 2020: 3).

According to Panov (2020: 2), “uncontroversial assertion” involves the following features: obviousness, “belonging to the necessary informational background”, but also “being highly relevant under the given circumstances, and crucial for the interpretation of the context.” From linguists used to investigating modal particles and other discourse-related markers, that last two

criteria may seem pragmatically contradictory: elements that are crucial in the interpretation of context, if they are obvious and belong to the informational background, are not supposed to be recalled, unless a contradiction appears in the common ground: in that case, indeed, flagging the content of the assertion as uncontroversial is a convenient strategy of accommodation. As was shown by Gast (2008), this is the role of at least one modal particle in German, *doch*, which signals the existence of a contradiction within the common ground and updates the informational background via re-asserting the uncontroversiality of the propositional content. But this is not what *ja* does.

Belonging to the background or being obvious raise the issue of hearer knowledge. This notion does not play a major role in Panov's definition. Moreover, he insists that the uncontroversiality of assertion is essentially a matter for the speaker: "By contrast, the hearer is not expected to share this view a priori" (Panov 2020: 5). This does not mean that Panov's proposal is blind to such problems of intersubjective alignment, which form the heart of the common-ground-based analyses of modal particles going back to Gast (2008). The opposition between *doch* and *ja* is explicitly mentioned as an example of "contrastive" vs. "non-contrastive" enimitive: „However, *doch* and *ja* in German also exhibit differences, the crucial one being the presence of contrastive meaning component in *doch* and its absence in *ja*." (Panov 2020: 7).

Contrastive enimitives are forms that occur "in contexts when the speaker points at some inconsistencies in the hearer's beliefs" (Panov 2020: 14) for the sake of reminding the hearer of something, of correcting her, or of "argumenting" (probably in the sense of counter-argumentation). Significantly, Panov that while "simple (i. e. non-contrastive) enimitives" are "only possible in assertions" (Panov 2020: 12), "contrastive enimitives" may occur in "impatient imperatives" or "in wh-questions with an expected content".

In what follows, I present several aspects of the semantics and syntax of particles in German that question the ability of the notional pair simple enimitive vs. contrastive enimitive to address the data at hand.

3.2 How many contrastive enimitives in German?

Given the definition proposed by Panov, the best candidate for the role of contrastive enimitive in German is probably *doch*. By using *doch*, the speaker brands the assertion as uncontroversial, but under the background of the addressee seemingly entertaining a contrary view (hence the notion of "contradiction in the common ground" put forward by Gast 2008). Example (17) is typical for this kind of conflict about what is uncontroversial or not:

- (17) *Viele Leserbriefschreiber begründen ihre Unterstützung aus Dankbarkeit, "Kämpfer für die Gerechtigkeit" usw.... Dass sich ein Landammann für des Volkes Wohl einsetzt, ist doch selbstverständlich (oder sollte es sein).*

'Many writers of readers' letters justify their support out of gratitude, "fighter for justice" etc.... It is obvious that a Landammann works for the good of the people (or it should be).'

Dass [...] ist doch selbstverständlich
 That [...] is MP self-evident
 ‘It is obvious that ...’

(*St. Galler Tagblatt* 24.04.1997: “*Leserbriefe*”, quoted
 from DEREKO, A97/APR.00271)

The notion of “impatient order” is inadequate to describe *doch*’s contribution to imperative utterances, but *doch*’s behaviour is consistent with a broad notion of contrastive imperatives that suits the general purposes of a “comparative concept”: *doch* does not mark that the speaker is impatient, but that the addressee seems to be reluctant to fulfill the action (for whatever reason) and that the speaker regards this reluctance as baseless: this needs not be an expression of impatience, it can also be used to embolden someone to do something (18), or to give an informal advice (19):

- (18) *Zugegeben, es ist manchmal schwierig, richtig zu entscheiden. Lassen Sie sich orientieren anhand von Zeitungen, Radio und Fernsehen. Wenn Sie trotzdem nicht zu einer Entscheidung finden, fragen Sie **doch** eine Vertrauensperson aus Ihrem Verwandten- oder Bekanntenkreis.*
 ‘Admittedly, it is sometimes difficult to make the right choice. Let yourself be guided by newspapers, radio and television. If you still can’t take a decision, ask a trusted person from your circle of relatives or acquaintances.’

Fragen Sie doch eine Vertrauensperson
 ask FORM MP INDEF confidence-person
 ‘Ask a trusted person’

(*St. Galler Tagblatt* 06.08.1998: “*Seniorenforum*”,
 quoted from DEREKO, A98/AUG.50977)

- (19) *Auf den unbemannten Stationen der Seelinie sind Lautsprecheranlagen geplant, die von Kreuzlingen aus bedient werden. So könne man die Reisenden über allfällige Verspätungen jederzeit informieren. “Der Zug kommt erst in einer Stunde, gehen Sie **doch** einen Kaffee trinken”, so stellt sich Robert Gamper eine Durchsage vor.*
 ‘Loudspeaker systems are planned for the stations deprived of human staff on the Lake Line, which will be operated from Kreuzlingen. This would enable passengers to be informed of any delays at any time. “The train won’t be here for an hour, why don’t you go and have a coffee?”: that’s how Robert Gamper imagines an announcement.’

gehen Sie doch einen Kaffee trinken
 go FORM MP INDEF.ACC coffee drink
 ‘Why don’t you go and have a coffee?’

(*St. Galler Tagblatt* 26.07.1997: “*Bahngeflüster*”,
 quoted from DEREKO, A97/JUL.16079)

Doch is acceptable in *wh*-questions, even though it is rather rare (cf. Schoonjans 2013). These *wh-doch*-questions show features of an interrogative flip: this time, it is the speaker that acknowledges that the matter of her question was supposed to be part of the common ground, hence the affinity with so-called “remembrance questions”. These are questions raised by the speaker about a matter which was actually supposed to be part of the common ground, but which the speaker has forgotten, as in (20):

- (20) *Warten Sie mal, wie hieß der Mann **doch** gleich?*
 ‘Wait a minute, could you recall me what was this man’s name?’

*Wie hieß der Mann **doch** gleich?*
 Howbe.called the man MP just.now
 ‘Could you recall me what was this man’s name?’

(Métrich/Faucher/Courcier 1995: 133)

It would be relevant to see which fine-grained information-structural profiles are exhibited by the items dubbed as contrastive enimitives in other languages: are they rhetorical questions used to perform indirect assertions? Are they remembrance questions?

Further, if the simple enimitive is *ja*, why not consider stressed *JA* to be the contrastive enimitive? One reason could be that *JA* is hardly ever used in proper assertions: it occurs mainly in exclamations and orders, especially in verb-final clauses. These utterances claim indisputable epistemic or deontic authority against any possible alternative, even though these alternatives are not directly fathomed out as opposed to the content of the utterance. For instance, *JA*-imperatives are often prohibitives with a slightly paternalistic subtone, as in this satirical example, a pastiche of The Little Red Riding Hood (*Rotkäppchen*, which is also the name of a sparkling wine):

- (21) *Bitte schicke mir unser liebes Rotkäppchen, damit sie mir etwas zu Essen servieren und einen guten Wein kredenzen kann. Dass sie mir **ja** nicht mit dem Wolf kokettiert und von dem Rotkäppchensekt probiert! Das letzte Mal ist sie alkoholisiert durch den halben Wald mäandert!*

‘Please send me our dear Little Red Riding Hood so that she can serve me something to eat and serve a good wine. But she’d better not flirt with the wolf and tastes of the Rotkäppchen sparkling wine! The last time she meandered drunk through half the forest!’

dass sie mir ja nicht mit dem Wolf kokettiert
 that she 1SG.DAT MP NEG with DEF.DAT wolf flirt.3SG

‘She’d better not flirt with the wolf!’

(*Rhein-Zeitung* 23.12.2010, “Märchen-Satire”, quoted from DEREKO, RHZ10/DEZ.29039)

This contrastivity-yielding role of particle stressing is probably never as clear as with *schon*. An assertion containing the MP *schon* is branded both as indisputably true and... as contextually disputed: on the basis of the contextually salient background knowledge, the propositional content was not necessarily the most plausible inference to draw. The major difference between *doch* and *schon* is that by using *schon*, the speaker legitimates the existence of contrary expectations before discarding them (whereas *doch* is used to flag these contrary expectations are illegitimate, since the speaker regards the content of the clause to be obvious in spite of everything).

- (22) *Katharina Meili, die Präsidentin der SVP-Ortspartei, sagt: “Wir waren **schon** etwas erschrocken über seinen Rücktritt, obwohl wir damit gerechnet haben, dass er seine Amtsperiode nicht mehr zu Ende führen wird. Das stellt uns natürlich vor neue Herausforderungen.”*

‘Katharina Meili, chairwoman of the local SVP party, says: “Indeed, we were a bit shocked by his resignation, although we had expected that he would not go to the end of his term. Of course, we are now facing new challenges.”’

Wir waren schon etwas erschrocken
 we were.1PL MP somewhat shocked
 ‘Indeed, we were a bit shocked...’

(*St. Galler Tagblatt* 10.07.2008: “Überlegt und realistisch“, quoted from DEREKO, A08/JUL.02799)

This value is not necessarily a contrastive enimitive, but it is still very comparable to it and lies in-between the two poles of the comparative concept of enimitivity. Another way to put it is to disentangle the display of authority from the (un)controversiality of assertion: a contrastive enimitive like *doch* marks a contradiction as to whether the content of the assertion is controversial or not (in line with Gast, for whom the use of *doch* signals the existence of a contradiction within the common ground itself). In comparison, *schon* signals the same display of authority than *doch*, but concedes that the assertion is not *prima facie* uncontroversial (cf. Ormelius-Sandblom 1997; Pérennec 2002; Zimmermann 2018; Modicom 2023). This reading is especially tempting in contexts where *schon* would be stressed, as in (23):

- (23) *Wie gesagt, ich will den Film nicht verteidigen. Aber ich finde schon, man sollte ihn sehen.*
 ‘As I said, I do not want to defend this movie. But I still think that one should see it.’

ich finde schon, man sollte ihn sehen
 I find.1SG MP one should 3SG.ACC see
 ‘I still think that one should see it.’

(*Braunschweiger Zeitung* 01.03.2006: “Man soll den Film ansehen“, quoted from DEREKO, BRZ06/MAR.00089)

Stressed *SCHON* is the combination of *schon* and of modal contrast: the speaker sets her epistemic authority behind the content of her assertion and frames it as unquestionable in spite of the contrary view being entertained by some other bearers of propositional attitudes.⁶

However, other distributional properties of *schon* are reminiscent of contrastive enimitives. For instance, in *wh*-questions, *schon* the most typical particle for rhetorical questions used to fulfill indirect assertions or exclamations. For instance, in example (24), only the content “he had nowhere to go” is expected:

- (24) *Einen Schritt vor dem Dieb blieb er stehen. Er ließ sich Zeit, ihn zu betrachten. Wohin sollte der schon fliehen? Um sie herum ragten die dunklen, kalten Rücken der von vorn so eleganten und vornehmen Georgstraßenhäuser. Dazwischen die hohe Backsteinmauer, die zwei Hinterhöfe teilte und dem Fliehenden zum Verhängnis geworden war.*

⁶ An anonymous reviewer asks whether the notion of polyphony could be helpful here. The concept of polyphony, as put forward by Ducrot (1984), doesn’t have any particular interactional value. However, the analytical tools developed in this framework are useful to capture what is part of the content of the clause and what corresponds to the management of potentially conflicting propositional attitudes towards that content (these propositional attitudes, in turn, may or may not be carried by specific speech act participants). Similarly, the use of conceptual tools from formal pragmatics, most notably Common Ground Management and Common Ground Content (cf. Krifka 2008), or the formal semantics of expressive meaning (cf. Gutzmann 2017) can be extremely useful. Note, however, that the goal of this chapter is not to provide a model-theoretic formalization of the modal particle meaning, but to discuss the relevance of modern cross-linguistic research on epistemic meaning for the study of modal particles.

‘He stopped one step before the thief. He took his time to look at him. Where should he flee to? Around them stood the dark, cold backs of the Georgstraße houses, all so elegant and distinguished when seen from the front. Between them was that high brick wall between two backyards, which had become the doom of the fleeing man.’

Wohin sollte der schon fliehen?

where.DIRshould 3SG MP flee

‘Where should he flee to?’

(*Hannoversche Allgemeine* 01.03.2008: “Das Gliederpüppchen”, quoted from DEREKO, HAZ08/MAR.00005)

Schon is rather rarely used in imperatives, but still often enough to qualify as a marker of properly “impatient imperatives”, for instance in (25), where the chairman of the Berlin house of representatives interrupts a member who does not name the minister to whom he is asking a question:

(25) *Herr Abgeordneter Gersch! Bitte suchen Sie sich eines von den Senatsmitgliedern aus. Das müssen Sie uns **schon** bitte benennen, an wen Sie Ihre Frage richten!*

‘Mr. Gersch. Please pick one of the members of the Senate. You must tell us who you are addressing your question to!’

Das müssen Sie uns schon bitte benennen

it must.3PL FORM (=3PL) 1PL.OBL MP please name

‘You must say it to us’

(Protokoll der Sitzung des Parlaments Abgeordnetenhaus Berlin am 08.11.2007, quoted from DEREKO, PBE/W16.00020)

3.3 Other “simple enimitive” modal particles?

However, the notion of “simple enimitive” may also prove broad enough to enclose several modal particles in German. For instance, one could include *halt* and *eben*, whose function is to chase away any alternative representation to the content of the assertion, which was itself pre-constructed in context, and only pending for its final validation. Both highlight the indisputability of the assertion. The difference between them is the preference for *eben* in argumentative contexts, probably due to its stronger relationship to a pre-constructed propositional content (cf. discussion. in Thurmair 1989: 119–127; Métrich/Faucher/Courcier 2002: 71). According to the general thesis defended by Duplâtre (1996) in his monograph on *eben*, *eben* marks the lack of alternatives to the content of the assertion, on the basis of a conversational background that pre-selects this content. For instance, in (26), it is not unexpected that a book on the landscapes of the Rhine valley will be illustrated, and the reference to the publisher’s order points at this necessity to illustrate the book as something that should not be surprising. In turn, this matter of fact logically entails the necessity to select a place that is used for illustration:

(26) *Doch weil ich “mein Rheintal” auftragsgemäss **eben** auch bebildern muss und sich weder Gefühle noch Sozialstrukturen fotografieren lassen, muss ich **eben** doch einen Platz bestimmen, der aktuell “mein Rheintal” illustriert.*

‘But because I also have to illustrate “My Rhine Valley” according to the order and neither feelings nor social structures can be photographed, I have to choose a place that currently illustrates “My Rhine Valley”.’

weil ich „mein Rheintal“ auftragsgemäss eben auch bebildern muss
 because I my Rhine-Valley order-conform MP also illustrate must
 ‘because I also have to illustrate “My Rhine Valley” according to the order’
muss ich eben doch einen Platz bestimmen
 must I MP MP INDEF.ACC place determine
 ‘I have to choose a place’

(*St. Galler Tagblatt* 09.09.1998: “Kein bestimmter Ort oder Platz, sondern – Heimat”,
 quoted from DEREKO, A98/SEP.55777)

Similarly, in (27), the second utterance is a trivial implication from the previous one:

(27) *Dass ich nach Niederlagen schlechter aussehe als nach Siegen, ist doch verständlich. Da mag ich eben nicht fröhlich sein.*

‘It should not be hard to understand that I look worse after defeats than after victories. I may not be cheerful then.’

Da mag ich eben nicht fröhlich sein.

Then may I MP NEG happy be

‘I may not be cheerful then.’

(*St. Galler Tagblatt* 10.11.2007: “Steiniger Weg in die Playoffs”, quoted from DEREKO,
 A07/NOV.05020)

This value of contextual entailment is less salient with *halt*: *halt* utterances seem to be more open to contradiction by the speaker than *eben* utterances, and whereas *eben* can always be replaced with *halt*, the opposite is not true (cf. Thurmair 1989: 125), suggesting that *halt* generally excludes the alternatives to the content of the utterance, but doesn’t request the same discourse background. For instance, *eben* would hardly be acceptable in (28):

(28) *Nachdem ein grosser Auftrag wegen des Krieges ins Wasser gefallen war, ging ich halt nach Hause nach Flawil und begann mit meiner eigenen Bildhauerei.*

‘After a large order fell through because of the war, I went home to Flawil and started my own stonemason’s yard.’

ging ich halt nach Hause nach Flawil

wentI MP to home to Flawil

‘I went home to Flawil’

(*St. Galler Tagblatt* 06.10.1999: “Bildhauer mit Herz und Seele”, quoted from
 DEREKO, A99/OKT.69992)

(29) *Zwischendurch bin ich halt lieber ein Gutmensch als ein Dummschwätzer.*

‘Meanwhile, I just prefer to be a naive do-gooder than an empty talker.’

(*St. Galler Tagblatt* 04.04.2008: “Lieber ein Gutmensch”, quoted from DEREKO,
 A08/APR.01469)

Zwischendurch bin ich halt lieber ein Gutmensch

between-through be.1SG I MP rather a good-human

‘I just prefer to be a naive do-gooder’

None of the caveats presented until now is really a major problem for the enimitive view: if enimitivity is a functional domain, this means that it may be more or less grammaticalized at the language-specific level, and that simple enimitives and contrastive enimitives are best understood as archetypes or even as poles of a continuum. In some languages, the paradigm of

enimitives may be binary (just like the subparadigm of egophoric particles in Swedish, see above). In that case, we may expect Panov's modal to be manifested more straightforwardly in language-specific data. In other languages like German, there may be a plurality of enimitives, expressing various flavors of each of the two poles. This issue of granularity is a frequent matter with cross-linguistic concepts, and one of the function of heuristic "semantic maps" is to capture this degree of possible variation.

3.4 Non-enimitive particles?

However, we also have to come up with the fact that not all modal particles of German can be sorted between the two subgroups of enimitives. Let us take *wohl*, which played a prominent role in the discussion above, about egophoricity and modal particles: *wohl* does not mark the uncontroversiality of the asserted content, but rather the refusal to qualify it as self-evident and authoritative (see example 3 above).

This means that we should at least posit a third value, a "non-enimitive", different from a zero-marker and marking the speaker's incapability to assert something in an uncontroversial way. Conversely, the case of *wohl* may help us to combine the enimitive view with the egophoric theory of epistemic authority, by resorting to Waltereit's (2006) definition of *Abtönung*, the semantic contribution of modal particles, as "anticipation of reaction". From such a speech-act-theoretic point of view, "marking the assertion as uncontroversial" would actually mean that the modal judge pre-empts the ratification of the assertion by the modal ratifier (in the canonical model of assertion: the addressee). Acting so can only be felicitous iff there is a strong asymmetry between the epistemic authority of both modal participants. Simple enimitives mark this display of epistemic authority in situations when there is no contextually available contrary claim by the modal ratifier; contrastive enimitives mark this display of authority against the background of contrary alternatives. Non-enimitives, on the contrary, mark a lack of epistemic authority, inviting the modal ratifier to amend the judge's view. In the case of *wohl*, this reversal of asymmetry goes along with a strong bias for indirect evidence (cf. Hauman/Letnes 2012; Modicom 2012). The notion of anticipated reaction may also explain the place of *ruhig* among the modal particles of German imperative utterances:

- (30) "*Kommen Sie **ruhig** herein*", *fordert der Mann mich auf, der bereits den Türgriff in der Hand hält, um das kleine Geschäft zu betreten.*

'Please come in!' tells me the man, already holding the door handle to enter the small store.'

Kommen Sie ruhig herein!
 come.3PL FORM (=3PL) MP INSIDE.DIR
 'Please come in!'

(*St. Galler Tagblatt* 02.09.2000: "Getroffen", quoted from DEREKO, A00/SEP.58850)

This example is the contrary of an "impatient imperative". Much rather, it is a statement of admissibility, uttered as the anticipation of a likely wish of the addressee. At best, this intention of the addressee is uncontroversial, or the practical premises underlying this intention is uncontroversial, but it is not the speaker's or the judge's entertained content that is uncontroversial.

In a nutshell, the enimitive view has many advantages: First, it arises from the refusal to split pragmatic markers from the rest of grammar. This is a common concern with many scholars from the field of modal particle research. Second, it enables us to move on from the question “has language X or Y modal particles?”, which all too often boils down to a controversy about language-specific formal criteria. Third, it belongs to those research that take some distance with the “shared knowledge” view, and concentrate on the interaction with sentence mood (cf. Jacobs 1991; Bayer/Obenauer 2011 a. o.). Fourth, the notion of contrastive enimitive raises the question of Verum focus, “modal contrast” (Meibauer 1994) and information structure (cf. Grosz 2016). As we have seen, while the concept of contrastive enimitive is too broad to capture the meaning of individual particles, it can help classify them via the kind of contrast which they express, if at all.

The main shortcoming of enimitivity as a theoretical proposal is probably that it is centered on assertions, entailing a bias in the analysis of sentence mood specification via particles. Further, “uncontroversiality” or “contrastive uncontroversiality” are only two possible values within a broader spectrum covered by other German modal particles. One must at least admit a third possible value: “non-uncontroversial assertion” (*wohl*).

Finally, the functions of simple enimitive and contrastive enimitive are not instantiated via one item for each: they are clusters of modal particles sharing a family resemblance. But this last point is not a major weakness, since enimitives were thought of as a comparative concept: this only reminds us that there is also a language-specific interest of originally cross-linguistic “comparative concepts” for the comparison of various, neighboring items within one and the same linguistic variety. The same could be said, for instance, for notions like “exclusive focus particle” or “scalar additive operator”.

4 Conclusion

Egophoricity and enimitivity are neighboring concepts, even though they do not have the same relationship to the notion of epistemicity, which is central for egophoricity, whereas enimitivity is rather embedded in a speech-act-theoretic perspective. This is a usual conflict in modal particle research, as well. But the study of egophoricity includes a decisive speech-act-theoretical component, the interrogative flip, which is also a major argument for claiming that modal particles are at least sensitive to egophoric parameters. The investigation of the behavior of German modal particles in order to determine whether they are egophoric markers has not been totally conclusive. The notion of (un)controversial content of the assertion appears to be a central feature of the semantics of modal particles that is not totally reducible to egophoricity. It is captured in a more convenient way by the notion of enimitivity, albeit with some caveats.

Modal particles actually invite us to combine both notions, defining “uncontroversial assertion” as a display of modal authority in an interactional context. In assertions, modal authority is epistemic in nature, but since imperatives play an important role in the analysis, we have to remain agnostic on the kind of modality that is exhibited by particles: this modal specification occurs in co-construction with sentence mood operators. Conversely, the interactional weighing of modal authority has to be regarded as an alteration of sentence mood.

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