

On *etwa* as a modal particle at the syntax-semantics interface*

Federica Cognola (Venice) and Marco Coniglio (Göttingen/Venice)

Abstract

This paper deals with a less-researched modal particle of German, specifically *etwa*. Although the particle appears in different clause types, it will be shown to be generally more constrained from an illocutionary point of view. Drawing on observations in the literature that the presence of the particle consistently characterizes the propositional content of an utterance as unexpected or undesirable, it will be argued that assuming a FALSUM operator is necessary to account for the syntactic licensing of the modal particle.

1 Introduction

This paper examines the German word *etwa*, with a special focus on its usage as a modal particle (henceforth: MP).¹ The MP *etwa* frequently appears on lists of the most frequent MPs proposed by different authors (cf. Helbig/Buscha 1986: 467; Thurmair 1989, 2026; Gelhaus 1995: 371; Diewald 1997: 73 and Schoonjans 2018: 24, Paschke 2026). Thus, it can be considered to belong to the core elements of this class, which is notoriously difficult to define (cf. Thurmair this volume; Coniglio 2008; Cognola/Moroni 2022; among others). However, studies specifically devoted to this item are still missing. In this paper, we aim to fill this gap from both an empirical and theoretical perspective.

In the following section, we will review the different functions of *etwa*, focusing in particular on its function as an MP. In Section 3, we will consider the pragmatic functions of *etwa*, Section 4 will provide a syntactic analysis of this item. Section 5 will conclude.

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¹ According to the DWDS (s. v. *etwa*) originates in OHG *edde(h)wār/eddes(h)wār*, ‘somewhere’ (in MHG also ‘quite, very’) and consists of the adverb *(h)wār* ‘where’ with the indefinite marking *edde(s)-*.

2 On the different functions of *etwa*

As is typical of MPs (cf. Weydt 1969; Thurmair 1989; among others), *etwa* not only functions as an MP, but also exhibits other functions, which we briefly review in the following subsections.

2.1 Adverb

One use of *etwa* is as an adverb with the meaning of *ungefähr*, *circa* ‘around, about’ (cf. Thurmair 1989: 170). It is also found in the fixed expression *in etwa* ‘roughly’ (cf. *Duden online* s. v. *etwa*):

- (1) a. Wahnsinn, habe also **etwa** 11 Stunden geschlafen.
‘Crazy, I have slept about 11 hours.’
(Lejeune 2012)
- b. Ja, so **in etwa** meinte ich das ja auch.
‘Yes, that’s basically what I meant as well.’
(DWDS, s. v. *etwa*)
- c. Doch der Meeresspiegel steigt. Im vergangenen Jahrhundert um etwa 15 Zentimeter, durchschnittlich also **etwa** 1,5 Millimeter pro Jahr.
‘However, sea level is rising. Over the past century, it increased by approximately 15 centimeters, averaging about 1.5 millimeters per year.’
(*Zeit Campus* 2022)

Etwa can also be used adverbially with the meaning of *zum Beispiel*, *beispielweise* ‘for example, such as’. In this function, it can either precede or follow the constituent it refers to:

- (2) a. Aber wie auch schon bei anderen alternativen „Kanälen“ wie **etwa Podcasts** gilt: Die Botschaft, der Inhalt, muss im Mittelpunkt stehen.
‘But as is also the case of other alternative “channels”, such as podcast, the message, the content must be central.’
(Wohlfahrt 2007)
- b. Und hat es diesen Menschen Arbeit gebracht? **Etwa Arbeit** von der sie menschenwürdig leben können, ohne auf weitere Leistungen angewiesen zu sein? Nein!
‘And has this brought work to these people? Specifically/For example work on which one can live decently, without the need of relying on welfare? No!’
(Wohlfahrt 2013)
- c. Schon heute sind wir schnell zur Hand, wenn es darum geht, dass vermeintlich „Schuldige“ mehr zahlen sollen als andere. **Raucher_innen etwa** oder Dicke, die mit ihrem ungesunden Lebenswandel den Krankenkassen zur Last fallen.
‘Even today we are quick to act when it comes to ensuring that supposedly “guilty” individuals pay more than the others. For examples smokers or fat people, whose unhealthy lifestyle represents a burden for the health insurances.’
(hanhaiwen 2010)

2.2 Particle usages

According to Thurmair (1989), *etwa*, when used as an MP, only appears in positive (non-negated) yes-no questions, which may, but do not have to, be interpreted as rhetorical questions.²

Yes-no questions featuring the usage of *etwa* as a MP are usually connected with the previous context, namely either with a previous sentence or observation (also noted by Diewald 1997 as a typical property of MPs). Hence, *etwa* is primarily an element associated with the feature “Konnex” (‘connection, link’, cf. Thurmair 1989: 170).³ The role of this feature is exemplified in (3), where the yes-no question is tightly connected with the discourse situation, specifically with the immediate observation that the whisky bottle is empty.

- (3) Du, die Whisky-Flasche ist schon wieder leer. Trinkst du **etwa** heimlich?
 ‘Hey, the whisky bottle is empty again. Are you drinking secretly?’
 (Thurmair 1989: 170)

In addition to the feature “Konnex”, polar questions with *etwa* also express the fact that the sentence or the observation prompting the question contradicts some of the speaker’s expectations. Consequently, *etwa* questions are also associated with the feature “unerwartet” (‘unexpected’, cf. Thurmair 1989: 171).

This is illustrated in (4). Such an interrogative clause would be felicitous for example in a situation in which the speaker sees his/her parent’s suitcases on the floor (“Konnex”) and this is in contrast with his/her expectation that his/her parents are out of town until the following week (“unerwartet”).

- (4) Beim Nachhausekommen: #Sind meine Eltern **etwa** da?
 ‘When coming home: Are my parents actually there?’
 (adapted from Thurmair 1989: 171)

The last feature of *etwa* interrogative clauses discussed by Thurmair (1989) is that they express the speaker’s preference for a negative answer (“negative Tendenz” ‘negative tendency’, Thurmair 1989: 171). This implies that with an *etwa* question, the speaker expresses that he/she does not expect or – alternatively – does not like a certain state of affairs, based on his/her wishes or evaluations, not on considerations of the proposition’s probability judgement (“Wahrscheinlichkeitsurteil”, Thurmair 1989: 171). In example (5), the yes-no interrogative clause featuring *etwa* i) is a reaction to the observation that Max is putting his coat on (“Konnex”) which ii) is “unerwartet” (‘unexpected’), given that it is very late in the night and it contradicts the speaker’s

² Beside this function, the *Duden online* also records that *etwa* can appear in embedded conditional clauses, to express that the realization of the entire state of affairs described by the clause is rather unlikely (“dient in Konditionalsätzen dazu, auszudrücken, dass man ein Eintreffen des genannten Falles kaum erwartet” ‘[it] serves in conditional sentences to express that one hardly expects the occurrence of the mentioned state of affairs.’):

(i) wenn er **etwa doch** noch kommt, dann sag es ihm bitte.

‘In the remote case that he manages/if he ever really manages to come, please tell him this.’

(*Duden online*, s.v. *etwa/eventuell*)

The presence of *etwa* in yes/no questions and conditionals is not surprising, given that both types of clauses leave open whether p or $\neg p$ holds.

³ In the following, the semantic-pragmatic features are indicated as in the original works and should be interpreted as quotations, even in the absence of quotations marks.

expectation that Max would remain at home. Moreover, the interrogative clause indicates the speaker's preference for a negative answer, thus suggesting that a realization of the state of affairs expressed by the interrogative (i. e., Max goes out) is not desired, not hoped for, or feared (feature "unerwünscht", 'unwanted, undesirable', Thurmair 1989: 171).

(5) Max zieht seinen Mantel an.

Bea: Willst du **etwa** jetzt noch weggehen? Es ist 1 Uhr!

'Max puts on his coat on.

Bea: Do you really want to go out now? It's 1 o'clock!

(Thurmair 1989: 171)

The truth value of the state of affairs expressed varies across *etwa* yes-no interrogative clauses. In example (6), the probability judgment of the interrogative clause is very high, given the context preceding the question, and the yes-no question is closer to a rhetorical, rather than to a real, question.

(6) Er legt eine Packung Zigaretten und Streichhölzer auf den Tisch.

Sie: Rauchen Sie **etwa**?

'He places a pack of cigarettes and matches on the table.

She: Do you actually smoke?'

(Thurmair 1989: 172)

In rhetorical questions, *etwa* can be understood as a marker of the special interrogative clause, and has the same function as the MP *vielleicht* 'maybe', i. e., it indicates that the state of affairs expressed by the interrogative clause is just unexpected "unerwartet".

(7) a. Soll das **etwa** eine Entschuldigung sein?

'Is that supposed to be an excuse?'

b. Soll das **vielleicht** eine Entschuldigung sein?

'Is that perhaps an excuse?'

(Thurmair 1989: 173)

As shown by *etwa* rhetorical questions, the preference for a negative answer (feature "unerwünscht") is not obligatorily found in all questions with *etwa*. This appears to also hold for real *etwa* interrogative clauses. As shown in (8), the reading involving the preference for a negative answer is forced when the state of affairs expressed by interrogative clauses can be classified as "negative" according to general norms, like "do not steal" (8a). When, on the other hand, the state of affairs expressed by the interrogative clause can be judged as "positive" according to general norms (8b), the reading involving the preference for a negative answer is available (8b') but not obligatory (8b').

(8) a. Hast du das **etwa** gestohlen? → "unerwünscht"

'Did you steal that, by any chance?'

b. Hast du **etwa** die Steuererklärung gemacht?

'Did you happen to do the tax declaration?'

b'. (Das kann ich ja kaum glauben) → "unerwartet"

'(I can hardly believe that)'

- b". (Um Gottes willen, das kannst du doch gar nicht) → “unerwünscht”
 ‘(For God’s sake, you can’t possibly have done that)’
 (adapted from Thurmair 1989: 173)

Thurmair (1989: 174f.) also discusses the distribution of *etwa* in declarative clauses featuring the modal verb *sollen*, and imperative clauses, which, according to her, i) always involve the presence of the negation *nicht* preceding the MP *etwa*,⁴ and ii) is only compatible with *verba putandi* or *sentiendi*.

- (9) a. Denk **nicht etwa**, daß ich das einfach so hinnehme!
 ‘Don’t think for a moment that I’ll just accept that!’
 b. Also, ich ruf den Martin jetzt nicht an! Der soll **nicht etwa** glauben, ich laufe ihm nach!
 ‘Well, I’m not going to call Martin now! He shouldn’t think for a moment that I’m chasing after him!’

(Thurmair 1989: 174)

The position of *etwa* with respect to the negation in (9) is anomalous, given that a milestone in the tests used for the classification of MPs is their syntactic position within the so-called *Mittelfeld*, specifically in its higher portion found precisely above the negation (cf. Thurmair 1989; Coniglio 2011 a. o.). Moreover, *nicht* in (9) appears to function as a negation of the modal operator (also present in imperative clauses, cf. e. g., Kaufmann 2012).⁵

2.3 Summary

According to Thurmair (1989), *etwa* as an MP primarily appears in positive yes-no interrogative clauses. The presence of *etwa* forces a real interrogative clause i) to be interpreted as strongly connected to the context (it is uttered as a reaction to an observation or to a previous sentence); ii) to express an unexpected state of affairs; and iii) to express a strong tendency for the speaker’s preference for a negative answer. When the yes-no interrogative clause is interpreted as a rhetorical question, the only feature available is ii), i. e., the state of affairs expressed by the interrogative is unexpected and the pragmatic contribution of *etwa* is comparable to that of the MP *vielleicht* ‘maybe’ in rhetorical questions (see Table 1).

⁴ As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, the order *etwa nicht* would also be possible in the cases discussed in (9):

- (i) Sie dürfen **etwa nicht** glauben, dass ich religiös unwissend bin wie so manche Leute da in Wien.
 ‘You mustn’t even think, for example, that I am religiously ignorant like some people there in Vienna.’

(Buol 1948)

The relative order of *etwa* and the negation will be discussed in depth in Section 3. Here suffice it to say that the negation following *etwa* does not negate the speaker’s expectations.

⁵ This function must be distinguished by cases in which *etwa* follows the negation (*nicht etwa*) in main clauses with no restrictions on verb types, in which *etwa* cataphorically introduces the second conjunct of a coordinated structure (thanks to a reviewer for this observation), as in (i):

- (i) Räuber Kinder waschen sich **nicht etwa, sondern** schmieren sich das Gesicht mit Dreck ein.
 ‘Bandit children don’t wash themselves, but rather smear their faces with dirt.’

(Thurmair 1989: 175)

clause type	real interrogative	rhetorical interrogative
positive yes-no interrogative featuring <i>etwa</i>	“Konnex“ “unerwartet” “unerwünscht”	“unerwartet”

Table 1: Pragmatic contribution of *etwa* in yes-no interrogatives

Etwa can also appear in negative main declarative and imperative clauses featuring the modal verb *sollen* and *verba putandi/sentiendi* in the sequence *nicht etwa*.⁶ In this syntax (unusual for MPs), the negation functions as a negation that negates the modal operator or the speaker’s expectations.

3 The pragmatic function(s) of *etwa*

As argued by Diewald (1997) in her work on the meaning contribution of MPs, the notion of *pragmatischer Prätext* ‘pragmatic pretext’ is crucial for understanding their functions in the relevant context. MPs could be considered means that integrate an implicit utterance in the discourse or situation and, thus, they serve the Common Ground (CG) Management (also cf. Döring 2016 and Trotzke 2026). Let us consider example (10):

- (10) Hast du **etwa** das Buch gelesen?
‘Did you read the book!?’

By uttering this expression, the speaker is not only asking whether the addressee has read the relevant book in the context, but also indirectly expressing his/her attitude towards the propositional content of the utterance (cf. Weydt 1969: 68). Depending on the context, the question in (10) can be uttered by the speaker to signal that *p* is either not expected or not desirable. As shown in Section 2.2 above, besides recognizing the function of referring back to something in the preceding context – and thus the presence of a connective feature “Konnex” –, Thurmair (1989: 170–175) describes the semantic content of the MP *etwa* by using the additional features “unerwartet” (‘unexpected’) and “unerwünscht” (‘undesirable’).

Thus, in general, the MP *etwa* indicates the presence of a pragmatic pretext (say *p*) in the CG – either in the situation or in the discourse –, which is unexpected or is not desirable according to the speaker’s point of view. By adopting Diewald’s scheme for analyzing the contribution of MPs, let us consider Table 2, which illustrates example (10).

⁶ In the sequence *etwa nicht*, *nicht* typically negates the proposition. Consider the following examples (we thank an anonymous reviewer for providing example (iii)). In (i), the speaker has evidence for a positive sentence (“somebody drinks secretly”), and this question can be answered with “yes” or “no”. In (ii) and (iii), the speaker has evidence for a negative sentence instead (“you do not listen to me”; “you do not have read the book”) and the questions can be answered with “doch” if the hearer does not want to confirm the negative sentence.

- (i) Trinkst du **etwa** heimlich? Ja/nein. (based on Thurmair 1989: 170)
‘Do you drink secretly? Yes/no.’
(ii) Glaubst du mir **etwa** nicht? Doch. (cf. Thurmair 1989: 174)
‘Don’t you believe me? On the contrary.’
(iii) Hast du **etwa** das Buch nicht gelesen? Doch.
‘Didn’t you read the book? On the contrary’

In both (ii) and (iii), *nicht* thus functions as a real negation.

pragmatic pretext	Proposition under scrutiny: p
	<i>Someone thinks that p, i. e., that you have read the book.</i>
relevant situation	Speaker's attitude – expectation or preference – $\neg p$ wrt. to the proposition under scrutiny:
	<i>I would not expect or I don't like the idea that you have read the book.</i>
→ utterance	Proposition modified by means of <i>etwa</i> : p + <i>etwa</i> :
	<i>Hast du etwa das Buch gelesen?</i> ('Did you read the book!?!')

Table 2: The function of *etwa* in the spirit of Diewald (1997)

By uttering the sentence in (10), the speaker is first referring to the presence of a pragmatic pretext, which is either explicit in the discourse – because of a previous assertion by the interlocutor – or implicit in the context – e. g., because of the interlocutor's behavior. Thus, in the current example, somebody thinks or could think that the interlocutor has read the book. In the second place, the speaker intends to express his/her attitude towards the propositional content (p) of the utterance. Depending on the context, the content of p can range from something unexpected to something undesirable in the speaker's view. In the given situation, the speaker is maybe positively surprised that the interlocutor read a certain book or he/she is possibly disappointed by the fact that he/she did so. By uttering a sentence containing *etwa*, the speaker thus intends to take on a (potential) proposition p, to be added to the CG, and to express that his/her prior bias – in terms of expectation or desirability – was $\neg p$. The interlocutor is thus asked to take a stance to p.⁷

This seems to operate in two different ways according to the clause type considered (see Section 2.2). Taking interrogative clauses like (10) into account, both the feature “unerwartet” and “unerwünscht” can be realized by the MP.

Depending on whether the context is positively or negatively evaluated, e. g., whether the book is a good one or not according to the utterer of (10), the speaker's preference will be p or $\neg p$ respectively. Nonetheless, his/her expectation based on the previous context or situation will be the inverse one, i. e., $\neg p$ or p respectively. This means that the MP *etwa* has the function of signaling that a desirable situation is unexpected (or unknown) or that an expected or potential situation is undesirable.

Beside the interrogative clauses already discussed, *nicht etwa* is also possible in clauses with the syntax of a main declarative clause which are to be interpreted as interrogatives. Thurmair (1989: 223) explicitly claims that this construction is ruled out with *nicht etwa* (only modalized main clauses are compatible with *nicht etwa* according to her) and only possible with the MP combination *doch nicht etwa*, a fact which does not appear to hold according to our informant, who accepts the construction. Nonetheless, these types of clauses are very similar to rhetorical questions:

⁷ Note that p can feature a negation, i. e., the presupposed sentence can also be a negative sentence.

- (11) Du hast **nicht etwa** das Buch gelesen!?
‘You didn’t read the book, right?’

Here, if the speaker considers the book a good one, by means of (*nicht*) *etwa* he/she expresses that he/she desires the interlocutor having read the book, but he/she expects that he/she has probably not done so. In the presence of a bad book, he/she is expressing his/her regret that the interlocutor has (at least potentially) read it. So, his/her expectation is that p, but his/her hope is that $\neg p$.

Slightly different is the situation in some modalized declaratives (see Section 2.2). The presence of the verb *sollen* ‘should’ in combination with the negation in (12) makes an utterance similar to an imperative clause, because of its directive illocutionary force.

- (12) Also, ich ruf den Martin jetzt nicht an! Der soll **nicht etwa** glauben, ich laufe ihm nach!
‘Well, I’m not going to call Martin now! He shouldn’t think for a moment that I’m chasing after him!’

(Thurmair 1989: 174)

The situation can only be undesirable in this case, but the speaker expects that the interlocutor could have read or could read the book in the future.

Analogously, in the case of imperative clauses (see 2.2), the only bias that can be expressed by the MP is that p is undesirable for the speaker and that his/her expectation is that p could at least potentially occur:

- (13) Denk wohl **nicht etwa**, dass du solche Bücher lesen kannst!
‘Don’t think for a moment that you can read such books!’

To summarize the discussion above, consider Table 3. Here, the various contexts are presented according to whether p is expected or not by the speaker (thus wrt. the feature “unerwartet”) and to what the speaker’s preference is wrt. to the realization of p (and thus wrt. to the feature “unerwünscht”).

Clause type	Example	Speaker’s Preference	Speaker’s evidence
Interrogative	Hast du etwa das Buch gelesen?	p	$\neg p$ or \emptyset
		$\neg p$	p
Declarative	Du hast nicht etwa das Buch gelesen!?	p	$\neg p$
		$\neg p$	p
Modalized declarative	Der soll nicht etwa glauben, ich laufe ihm nach (Thurmair 1989: 174)	$\neg p$	p or \emptyset
Imperative	Denk wohl nicht etwa , dass du solche Bücher lesen kannst!	$\neg p$	p or \emptyset

Table 3: The pragmatic function of *etwa* in different clause types and situations

The presence of *etwa* in an utterance thus signals either that the speaker does not like or did not expect the state of affairs (“unerwünscht” or “unerwartet”).

4 Theoretical analysis

4.1 Modal usages of *etwa* across clause types

In this section, we provide a syntactic analysis of the modal usage of *etwa* across different clause types. In Section 2, we showed that *etwa* is compatible with three clause types: interrogative, declarative and imperative, and that only interrogative clauses feature the particle *etwa*, whereas the others feature *nicht etwa*. In Table 4, we also consider the distribution of *etwa* across illocutionary types, showing that the three clause types allowing for *etwa* can be mostly reduced to the same speech act, i. e., the directive speech act, given that “questions are directives, since they are attempts to get the hearer to perform a speech act.” (Searle 1975: 356 fn. 6). As for modalized main clauses featuring *sollen*, we suggest that they instantiate a directive speech act, specifically an order/advice (cf. Duden 2016: 555 for negated modalized main clauses as instances of imperative clauses), just like imperative clauses, which are compatible with *etwa*. This implies that *etwa* is typically compatible with a single illocutionary type.⁸

Clause type	Example	Illocutionary type	MP and negation
Interrogative	Hast du etwa das Buch gelesen?	directive (question)	etwa /* nicht etwa ⁹
Declarative	Du hast nicht etwa das Buch gelesen!?	directive (question)	nicht etwa
Modalized declarative	Der soll nicht etwa glauben, ich laufe ihm nach (cf. Thurmair 1989: 174)	directive (order)	nicht etwa
Imperative	Denk wohl nicht etwa , dass du solche Bücher lesen kannst!	directive (order)	nicht etwa

Table 4: Distribution of *etwa* across illocutionary types

Etwa can either precede or follow the negation *nicht* in sentences with negative polarity. We suggest that this is not due to two positions of *etwa*, but to the fact that the negation can appear in two positions: a lower position in the IP area, as a propositional negator, and a high position above the area hosting MPs:

- (14) [_{FP} High Negation [_{FP} *etwa* [_{NegP} Low Negation]]]

⁸ If so, *etwa* would provide evidence in favour of the fact that MPs can also be licensed by illocutionary type and not only by clause type, as has been shown for other MPs (cf. Thurmair 1993; Coniglio/Zegrean 2012; Coniglio 2014 a. o.). Note, however, that rhetorical questions containing *etwa*, which are not included in this taxonomy (e. g., *Bist du etwa doof?* ‘Are you stupid?’) should be better classified as representative speech acts (we thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out).

⁹ All the German speakers we consulted for the present study judge the sequence *nicht etwa* ungrammatical in interrogative clauses. However, we are aware of the fact that *nicht etwa* is (marginally) accepted by some speakers of German in interrogative clauses, under conditions which are poorly understood.

4.2 MPs as common ground managing operators

For an analysis of *etwa*, we start from the idea that MPs should be analyzed as CG-managing operators (cf. Repp 2013). With CG, Repp (2013), relying on Stalnaker (1978), Karttunen (1974) and Lewis (1979), refers to the set of propositions that are taken to be true by the participants in the conversation and also include the pragmatically presupposed propositions (cf. Repp 2013; Frana/Rawlins 2019). Moreover, we also assume that sentences involving a modal usage of *etwa* involve a negative polarity – a claim we will better motivate below.

For the case of *etwa*, we assume that the CG operators at play are VERUM and FALSUM, i. e., conversational epistemic operators (cf. Dretske 1970) which have been proposed for negative polar questions by Romero/Han (2004) and Repp (2013). Negative polar questions can either double-check for p or for $\neg p$; in the former type, so-called outer negation is found, whereas in the latter inner negation is attested (cf. Ladd 1981). The two types of negations can be distinguished in English through the distribution of positive and negative polarity items, with the former only being attested with outer negation and the latter with inner negation.

Consider the following examples, discussed in Romero/Han (2004: 610f.). The sentence in (15) is ambiguous with respect to its interpretation, i. e. whether it is a question about p or a question about $\neg p$. It can be disambiguated by using additional Positive (*too*) or Negative (*either*) Polarity Items:

- (15) Isn't Jane coming?
- (16) A: Ok, now that Stephan has come, we are all here. Let's go!
S: Isn't Jane coming too?
- (17) Scenario: Pat and Jane are two phonologists who are supposed to be speaking in our workshop on optimality and acquisition.
A: Pat is not coming. So we don't have any phonologists in the program.
S: Isn't Jane coming either?

According to Romero/Han (2004: 611), the speaker wants to double-check p (“Jane is coming”) in (16) and “presupposes the truth of a parallel *affirmative* proposition (“that Stephan has come”)”. Conversely, in (17), the speaker intends to double-check $\neg p$ (“that Jane is not coming”), while presupposing the negative proposition “that Pat is not coming” (Romero/Han 2004: 611).

In German, the two types of negations can be identified by adding the particle *auch* ‘also’: with outer negation, the negative particle *nicht* must precede *auch*, whereas with the inner negation interpretation, *nicht* follows (cf. Repp 2006, 2009).

- (18) a. Schläft Peter **nicht auch**? outer negation
 ‘Isn't Peter sleeping **too**?’
 b. Schläft Peter **auch nicht**? inner negation
 ‘Isn't Peter sleeping **either**?’

(adapted from Repp 2013: 238)

Note that outer negation involves a higher position for the negation, whereas inner negation is lower, and this correlates with the interpretation of the question. As shown in (19) from

Romero/Han (2004: 609f.), interrogatives with preposed negation contain an epistemic implicature, whereas the lower negation correlates with an unbiased question.

- (19) a. Doesn't John drink?
 Positive epistemic implicature: The speaker believes or at least expects that John drinks.
 b. Does John not drink?
 No epistemic implicature necessary

(Romero/Han 2004: 609f.)

For negative polar questions, the presence of two epistemic operators/CG-managing operators has been assumed: VERUM and FALSUM. The former, proposed by Romero/Han (2004) has the function of indicating that the speaker is certain that the proposition in the scope of VERUM should be in the CG. On the contrary, FALSUM is an illocutionary negation (Repp 2013) and “expresses that there are zero [...] degrees of strength for sincerely adding a proposition to the CG. This implies that p should not be part of the CG, according to the speaker.” (Repp 2013: 239). These two operators are responsible for the two readings of negative polar questions in (18), specifically, FALSUM is only found with higher negation (double-checks p) and VERUM with lower negation (double-checks $\neg p$).

4.3 On the MP (*nicht*) *etwa*

We propose that all sentences featuring *etwa* as an MP actually involve the presence of a negation, which can be either overt or remain silent. Crucially, when *etwa* is present, the higher Negation position must therefore be filled by either an overt or a silent negation.

We propose that the pattern *nicht etwa* found in declarative and imperative clauses (cf. Table 4) involves the presence of an overt high negation. Nonetheless, the sentence has a negative flavor.¹⁰

- (20) [_{FP} *nicht* [_{FP} *etwa* [_{NegP}]]]

The second pattern is found in positive interrogative clauses and involves the presence of *etwa* alone. We suggest that in this case the sentence has a positive polarity (therefore the lower negation position is empty), but the high Negation position is filled by a silent expletive negation.

- (21) [_{FP} NICHT [_{FP} *etwa* [_{NegP}]]]

The third pattern, *etwa nicht*, involves the presence of a low negation in a sentence with negative polarity, in which the low negation position is filled by an overt negation, and the higher hosts a silent negation (which must be silent due to the ban on two overt negations).

- (22) [_{FP} NICHT [_{FP} *etwa* [_{NegP} *nicht*]]]

¹⁰ The negative flavor arises from the presence of this high negation, which, however, operates at a higher level. Notice that the high negation does not prevent the low propositional negation to be present:

- (i) Du hast **nicht etwa nicht** geholfen, oder?
 ‘You didn’t actually not help, did you?’

Clauses featuring *etwa nicht* or only *etwa* are instances of negative polar questions featuring a higher negation, and – we claim – they involve the presence of a FALSUM operator like clauses featuring *nicht etwa* (cf. Section 4.2).

We suggest that the FALSUM operator is hosted in a dedicated Functional Projection for CG-managing operators immediately below ILL(ocutionary phrase) (cf. Repp 2013), which is taken to be a part of ForceP in works on the derivation of MPs (cf. Rizzi 1997; Benincà 2001, 2006; Frascarelli/Hinterhölzl 2007; Coniglio/Zegrean 2012; Cognola/Schifano 2018a, b; and more recently Krifka 2023 on the structure of the left periphery).

CG-managing operators appear below illocutionary operators (in CG) and thus precede the proposition. Below the position for the CG-managing operators, we suggest that a phrase CT for clause typing is found (cf. Coniglio/Zegrean 2012).

(23) [ILL directive [CG FALSUM [CT [TP ... *nicht/NICHT etwa* [proposition]]]]]

4.3.1 Derivation of (*nicht*) *etwa* in interrogative clauses

Let us now consider the derivation of (*nicht*) *etwa*-interrogative clauses. Recall that *etwa* can appear in both real and rhetorical questions: the MP is connected to the features “unexpected; undesired” in the former type and to the feature “undesired” in the latter.

In (24), we repeat an example from Thurmair (1989), in which the speaker has evidence for p and has a preference for a negative answer.

(24) Du, die Whisky-Flasche ist schon wieder leer. Trinkst du **etwa** heimlich?
(Thurmair 1989: 170)

We propose that in this example, the interrogative clause hosts a silent high negation (*Trinkst du NICHT etwa heimlich?*) and double-checks for p. Therefore, it should be analyzed as a sentence with outer negation involving the FALSUM epistemic operator (like (23)). This operator takes the proposition featuring the high negation NICHT in its scope and signals that the speaker is not committed to adding the proposition to the CG. The fact that the operator appears in an interrogative clause interferes with the interpretation of the operator, which does not express the full commitment that a proposition should not be added to the CG, but rather the hypothesis that this should not be the case (cf. Gast 2008).

By using Coniglio/Zegrean’s (2012) framework, we argue that, in this configuration, *etwa* enters the derivation with two sets of features: a “semanto-syntactic” one [+interrogative] which is to be checked through an Agree relation with CT, and a “pragmatic” one ([+intention]) to be checked by an Agree relation with ILL. We suggest that, in the case of *etwa*, this [+intention] corresponds to the [+unexpected/undesired] features. In (25), we give a complete derivation of an interrogative clause featuring *etwa*.

- (25) a. *etwa* [+interrogative]; [+unexpected/undesired]
 b. [ILL Q [+intention] [CG FALSUM [CT [+interr] [TP ... *nicht*/NICHT *etwa* [+intention] [+interr]]]]]
 [ILL Q [+intention] *trinkst* [CG FALSUM [CT [+interr] [TP *du* ... NICHT *etwa* [+intention] [+interr] [*heimlich* ~~*trinkst*~~]]]]]

The same derivation also applies to rhetorical interrogative clauses and to interrogative clauses with the syntax of a declarative clause, in which the [+intention] feature corresponds to [+unexpected].

4.3.2 *Nicht etwa* in other clause types

As discussed above and summarized in Table 4, *etwa* also appears in the form *nicht etwa* in other clause types beyond interrogative clauses, i. e., with imperative clauses, with modalized declarative clauses with the modal verb *sollen* ‘should’, when both clause types feature *verba putandi* or *sentiendi*. This reduced distribution of *etwa* in these clause types clearly speaks in favor of special usage contexts in comparison to interrogative clauses, which are, though, closely connected to the latter. All clause types, in fact, instantiate a directive speech act, specifically an order or advice, therefore, the clause types can be reduced to the same illocutionary type, i. e., directive, also involved in interrogative clauses featuring (*nicht*) *etwa*. Despite this, it is uncontroversial that these clause types represent a different context from interrogative clauses: first of all, because *nicht etwa* appears in a subset of possible sentences. Second, because, according to Thurmair (1989: 174f.), the feature “unerwünscht” is not associated with these contexts, where only the features “Konnex” and “unerwartet” are present. Third, because the negation is overt.

As for the first issue, we propose that the compatibility of *nicht etwa* exclusively with modalized contexts featuring *verba putandi* and *verba sentiendi* indicates that the MP usage of (*nicht*) *etwa* is grammaticalizing from interrogative clauses to (overt and hidden) imperative clauses in virtue of the illocutionary type, i. e., directive, shared by the clause types. As for the usage of *nicht etwa* with main clauses featuring *sollen*, we suggest that the MP appears precisely with this modal verb and not with the others due to the semantics of this modal verb. Specifically, this modal verb exclusively expresses an external source (“extrasubjektiv”, ‘extrasubjective’) of modality (cf. Duden 2016: 571–576), i. e., with non-epistemic usages of *sollen* the speaker expresses that the source of modality is outside the subject, i. e., that somebody should do something according to another person’s advice or indication. Therefore, this modal verb unambiguously expresses the directive illocutionary force, and thus expresses that the sentence is not a main clause, but rather a hidden imperative clause.¹¹

As for the distribution of *nicht etwa* with *verba putandi* and *verba sentiendi*, we propose that the key property at play here is that these verbs are non-factive verbs selecting for a biclausal structure. From a semantic point of view, these verbs are fully compatible with the semantic/pragmatic meaning of the MP *nicht etwa*, specifically with the fact that the speaker has evidence for *p* but would prefer $\neg p$ and expresses that the speaker is not committed to the truth

¹¹ This interpretation is also possible, but not obligatory, with the modal verb *müssen* ‘must’. In the case of imperative clauses, the connection between illocutionary force and clause type is made explicit by syntax, given that imperatives are typically V1 clauses.

value of the proposition in the *that*-clause. In overt/covert imperative clauses, the presence of a non-factive verb together with an overt negation expresses that the speaker's preference is for $\neg p$ (for which he/she, however, has no evidence, cf. the fact that *etwa*-interrogatives express hypotheses, cf. Gast 2008).

Note, finally, that the (overt and hidden) imperative clauses featuring *nicht etwa* might also be taken to function as “chunks”, i. e., prototypical usages of an MP (cf. Moroni 2017 on the presence of such prototypical chunks for the MP *doch*; cf. also the prototypical chunk *kann schon sein* ‘it could be’ and Cognola/Moroni 2024 and references therein for prototypical chunks and morphological contexts connected to single MPs in Romance) to be possibly involved in the grammaticalization process.

5 Conclusion

Despite being standardly considered an MP of German, *etwa* has not received much attention so far. This paper intends to offer a first systematic analysis of this particle, by focusing on its properties at the syntax-pragmatics interface. Existing literature has shown that *etwa* appears in different clause types. However, here, clauses featuring *etwa* were argued to be linked to directive speech acts. Starting from the observation that the presence of *etwa* signals a mismatch between the speaker's expectation and reality, either by expressing that p is unexpected or undesirable, the paper links the syntactic licensing of *etwa* to the presence of the FALSUM operator in directive speech acts, which is located in the left periphery. This operator indicates that the speaker rejects p as part of the CG.

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