Politeness Strategy: Modal Particles Acquisition of German Modal Particles through Self-Learning

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Abstract

Utilizing modal particles in communication can be regarded as a politeness strategy. Therefore, this study focuses on the teaching and learning of modal particles in the context of self-learning and communicative competence. Exploitation of spoken language samples of Bahasa Malaysia, the Indonesian and the Chinese language (Mandarin) is proposed in order to provide a source for deriving modal particles in authentic material of the learners' own language and to arrive at detecting those particles in the German language. With the use of concordance procedures, patterns of collocation could be established qualitatively, whereas the quantitative analysis of the German samples has shown which particles occur most frequently in spoken German. The degree of target-like use of modal particles in Malaysian learners of German was then determined in learners' self-recorded videos. Results show that learners of German are able to detect and understand those modal particles in the samples and find equivalents in their own languages. The study contributes to the current issues concerning 1. Acquisition of meaning and usage of German word categories through self-learning and 2. The German mediation requirements: How can teaching of German at the workplace be improved in order to find solutions to language barrier?

Key Words: Acquisition of German modal particles; Self-learning; Politeness strategy; Intercultural communication.

1. Introduction

Research revealed that employers in Malaysia–based multinational companies (MNC) appreciate a basic proficiency of their employees in the headquarters' language (Mayr et al. 2015; Ehrenreich 2010; Charles 2007). This is needed as 'emotional door opener' in conversations with native speakers on the MNC's management level as well as for attending training courses overseas. Thus, employees are expected to have a good command of intercultural communication skills. However, the very basic knowledge of the foreign language (here: German), is not enough because language learners are mainly exposed to commercial teaching materials rather than authentic language with the consequence that the learners' language used sounds often artificial, impolite or even rude. The reason is the learners' lack of sensitivity in important features of the German language, the so called modal particles. Not knowing about the importance of those modal particles can lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Therefore, the development of pragmatic competence is among others an important factor in the development of occupational action competence (Fig. 1: Bolten 2002: 3).
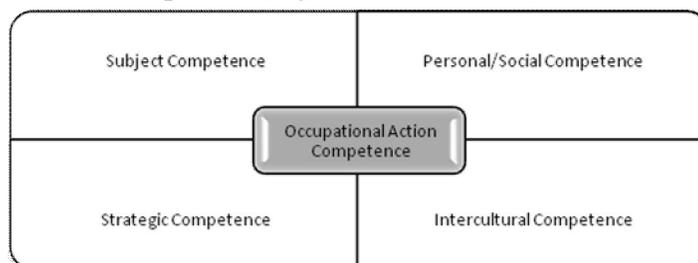
The term 'pragmatic competence' is used for this article in the sense of Siebold's (2008: 4) definition: "the ability to create relations in communication not only between linguistic features and their contexts but also between the situations inclusive the relevant persons." Being the basis in achieving occupational action competence, excellent general communication skills are pertinent. In this context the knowledge of the German modal particles, their meanings and functions in various contexts could provide German language learners a politeness strategy which could assist them succeeding in intercultural communication.

2. Theoretical background

Literature neglected modal particles for a long time as irrelevant filling words. Only since the late 1960s research discovered German modal particles due to a more pragmatically oriented approach to linguistics. Different terms were used in those research papers for the words that we call 'modal particles': "flavouring words" [Würzwörter] (Paneth 1981), "intentional particles (Held 1983), "discourse particles" (Abraham 1991b) and "toning particles" [Abtönwörter] (Helbig 1994). Thurmair (1989) named them finally "Modalpartikel". In the German language, modal particles include words like: auch, aber, bloß, denn, doch, eben, eigentlich, einfach, em, erst, etwa, halt, ja, mal, nur, ruhig, schon, sowieso, überhaupt, vielleicht, wohl. In a corpus study, Möllering (2001: 137) identified the following three modal particles as the most frequently used particles in German communication: *ja, auch, aber,* and *mal, doch, schon, denn, nur,* and *eben* in the second row of appearance.

As Vaih and Wellding phrase it, the frequent use of modal particles is beside intonation, rhythm and voice characteristics as well as facial expressions and gestures a special feature of spoken language that is especially utilized by German native speakers. Benes (1974: 173) and Rudolph (1991) identified it as typical for the communicative informal conversation. That means that the use of modal particles is part of the social communication ritual.

The functions of modal particles in conversations are content related or personal related. Referring to the content, modal particles assist in the orientation in the discourse; they ensure whether both interlocutors are still on track with the conversation. Beside this, utilizing particles allows connecting a current issue to an earlier statement in the same conversation. This function of modal particles is creating a network of relationship between the interlocutors (Weydt 1981: 164, 2006: 215). Usage of modal particles allows the speaker to express special views, intentions and evaluations or perceptions consciously (Wolski 1989: 352). These perceptions are evaluated as positive in the German society related to social-psychological issues (Steinmüller 1981: 143). Harden and Rösler (1981) state that the use of modal particles does not only provide assistance in interpreting the interlocutor's intention but that they also influence the relationship and image of the communication partners. Modal particles are seen as "social technique" (Harden and Rösler 1981), they indicate the speaker's attitude as well as the, in the listener intended perception. The listener feels the personal approach by the speaker to interact with him on a very personal basis. Subsequently, Held (2003: 6) calls modal particles "the little relationship signs that are pertinent for the communication wellbeing" of both interlocutors. Ankenbrand (2006: 3) puts it like this: "The speaker fulfills the maxim of feel good while using modal particles."

3. Modal particles in foreign language acquisition

It is not an easy task to describe the meaning of modal particles as Heringer (1988: 739) state: "The teaser of semantic description of particles is that they are more globally signalizing something. It is therefore difficult to describe the precise effect in a sentence, and equally difficult to specify a general meaning. Particularly problematic appears explicit paraphrasing as characterization of particle meanings." Other scholars are of the opinion that modal particles possess a modal meaning in so far as it expresses the speaker' s subjective viewpoint (Krivonosov 1963/1977; Weydt 1969) and also strongly his emotions (Heggelund 2001: 2). Whereas teacher tend to ignore the modal verbs because of their complexity, Busse (1992: 39) insists that "In spite of the problems of meaning description that are indeed problems of meaning mediation and thus the didactics, teaching of particles is absolutely necessary if the German learners should learn a not as 'rugged' or at least clearly as 'unidiomatic' labeled German." Consequently, Heggelund (2001: 11) is asking the questions "How could modal particles be taught?" He attaches special importance to the interface problem: the transfer of explicit knowledge into implicit knowledge. In other words, Heggelund doubts whether learners would be able to automatise the use of modal particles in their spoken foreign language use because of the complexity of that words. I agree to his argumentation that leads to the following framework (Fig. 2).

Fig.2: Framework of teaching modal particles in the foreign language classroom (adapted from CEFR, Heggelund 2001: 12, Rösler 1982: 35, Speight 1991: 211 and Warschauer 2001: 49 for this article)
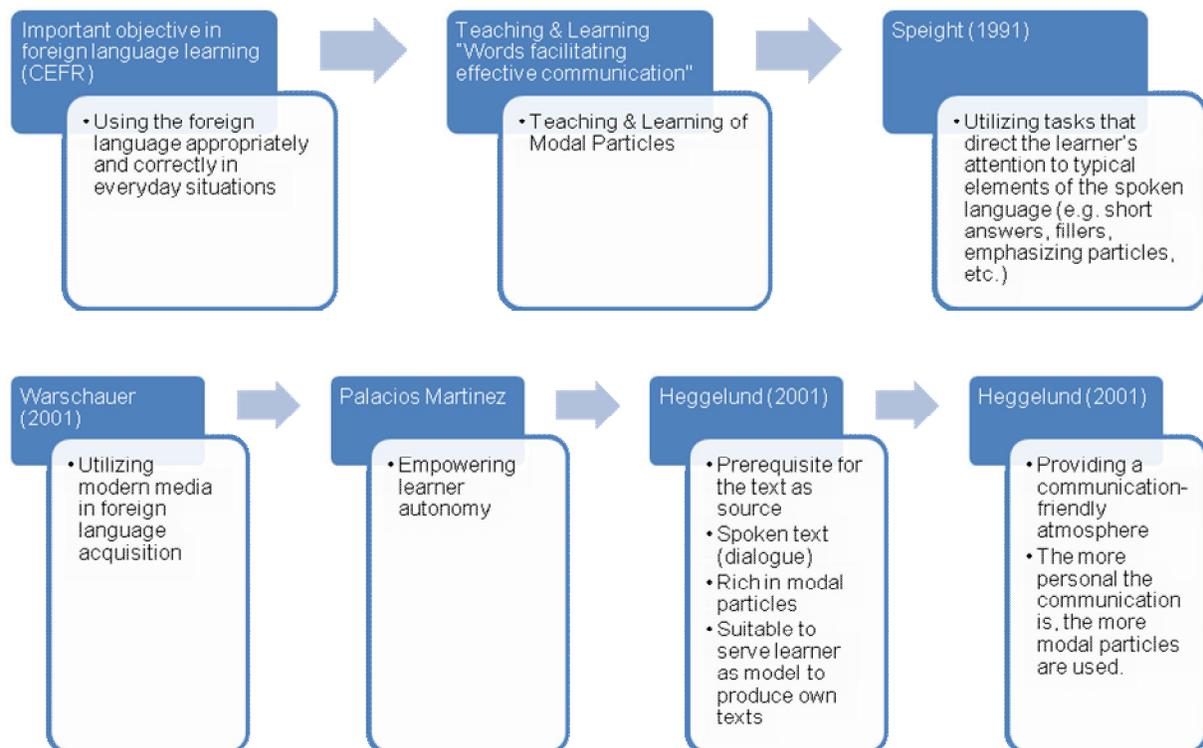

Figure 2 shows the theoretical background that led to the development of the modal particle project that is described in this article. Based on one of the main objectives of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), it must be the aim of each foreign language course to enable learners to use the foreign language appropriately and correctly in everyday situations (CEFR, p. 24 ff). This includes also sociolinguistic aspects as for example linguistic markers of social relations and politeness convention as they are reflected in the use of modal particles. Consequently, the teaching of modal particles is justified. In this context, Speight (1991: 211) emphasizes that teachers have to direct learners' attention to typical elements of spoken language (e.g. short answers, fillers, particles, etc.): "Übungen, die die Aufmerksamkeit auf typische Elemente der gesprochenen Sprache (z.B. Kurzantworten, Füllwörter und Verstärkungspartikel) lenken, könnten sehr nützlich sein." The purpose of these measures is to teach learners pragmatic and intercultural competence.

Warschauer (2001) adds another aspect in the discussion on the methodology of foreign language acquisition. He favours utilizing modern media as computers and the Internet in foreign language learning. "The computers thus become more than an optional tool for language tutoring, but rather an essential medium of literacy and language use. Finally, while the Internet is potentially the most democratic medium, it is simultaneously the most exclusive, with its use dependent on access to material resources, language, and education." (Warschauer 2001: 49) Learner autonomy is a factor in language learning that is highly supported in learner centered teaching and learning. It finds a follower in Reinders (2010: 44) and Palacios Martinez, "Learners should be given the tools to learn on their own, they should be made more autonomous and more responsible for their own learning." Gardner and Miller (1999) provide a specialist approach for fostering learner autonomy in suggesting self-access of learning material.

Heggelund (2001: 13) suggests providing text sources to the learners that contain a lot of modal particles. Those texts could function as models for own learner texts. A communication-friendly atmosphere could additionally result in a positive effect on particle rich text productions because the more personal the communication is, the more modal particles are used. Consequently, Heggelund suggests learning venues outside the normal classroom.

4. Research Questions

In line with those scholars' opinions, this paper describes a project that was carried out to teach modal particles to learners of the German language. It investigated the learners' ability to autonomous discovery of modal particles in authentic German communication as well as the effectiveness of their learning. The aim of the project therefore is to let students of the German language discover modal particles, their meanings, and function, by analyzing authentic communication in both the German and the learners' mother tongues.

Therefore, the research questions of the study are phrased as follows:

1.a) Which modal particles do learners of the German language detect in their mother tongue?
1.b) What is the meaning of those modal particles?
2.a) Which modal particles do learners of the German language detect in the German language?
2.b) Are learners able to detect the meaning of those modal particles?
2.c) Are learners able to determine the function of those modal particles?

2. Are learners of the German language able to include the self-learned German modal particles correctly in their own communication?

In order to be able to answer the research questions, the following methodology was applied.

5. Methodology

The project was carried out among five German language learners of the proficiency level A2.2., according to the European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The students came from different mother tongue backgrounds. There were four Malaysian students with Malay, Mandarin and Thai language background and one student from Indonesia whose mother tongue was the Indonesian language. Following the composition of this target group, the author picked up McCarthy and Carter's (1994: 68) argument that cross-linguistic comparisons could be an activity to enhance language learning.

Referring to paragraph 3 'Modal particles in foreign language acquisition', an additional aspect in the learning process is the utilization of authentic texts. Native speakers produce these texts without the intention to use them as teaching material later on in the foreign language classroom. This makes authentic material to an important issue in foreign language learning. Gishkaeva and Mitrofanova (2014: 361) emphasized on the objective nature of authentic material that reflects the actual situation in the target language country. Furthermore, they pointed out four parameters of authentic material: 1. Functional authenticity, 2. Lexical and phrase logical authenticity, 3. Grammatical authenticity and 4. Structural authenticity, criteria that allow learners to grasp the specification of the target language not only in lexical and grammatical aspects but also in the cultural aspect. According to Solmecke (1993: 38), the discourse with authentic material is an interaction between learner and text that results in language learning. In addition, authentic material enhances learner motivation because they are originated in a natural environment (Löschmann 1984). Keim (1994: 163) sees in the use of authentic material a chance to improve oral communication competence because learners identify themselves with the content and this stimulates their interest to express own ideas. As consequence, this would generate authentic situations in the classroom. Hence, the correct usage of modal particles could be practiced in various speech acts. Heggelund (2001: 13) also proposed other methods and media compared to the in Asia usually applied presentation – practice – production cycle, e.g. role plays and simulation exercises, comics, television programs and Internet.

Project Overview

Picking up these ideas and compiling the thoughts mentioned before to one project, the author created a task for modal particle acquisition that included authentic texts in off-classroom situations as well as in the Internet in a learner centered teaching approach. Learners created their teaching material by their own while interviewing friends in their own mother tongue in a relaxed personal atmosphere. It was hoped that this would elicit a modal particle rich conversation. The project continued with the learners' selection of a suitable source and text for a respective investigation in the German language.

Based on these four thoughts on methodology and media:

1. Cross-linguistic comparisons,
2. Learner autonomy,
3. Authentic texts, and
4. Use of Internet,

The author gave the students the following task:

Project description and instructions
A. In your language
1. Interview a family member or a friend about a topic of your choice in your own language (L1)
   (Learners agree to ONE topic that is compulsory for all)
2. Video record the conversation
3. Analyse the conversation regarding the following criteria:

   a) When do changes of gestures and facial expressions appear?
   b) When do the rhythm and the voice change?
   c) Are verbally expressed emotions recognizable? If YES, how are they expressed?
   d) Is there something similar in the German language?

B. In the German language

1. Watch a scene of a German soap opera, video, TV program, etc. and analyse the scene according to the same criteria as the conversation in your own language (L1).
2. Plan your procedure.
3. Report partly results of your step-by-step process.

C. Create a video clip of a conversation with your course mates in the German language. How good is your pragmatic competence in the foreign language?

Project Details

In this study, a mixed-mode research was utilized. In the first step, modal particles and the frequency of their occurrence in the sample text were determined by students in videos in their mother tongue as well as in videos in the German language. The students recorded their own communication with friends in order to produce videos in their own mother tongue. As for the German language, the learners utilized videos from the *youtube*-serie 'Easy German' that provides videos with German subtitles. The chosen topics were 1. Träume und Wünsche *(Dreams and wishes)* and 2. Was macht dich glücklich? *(What makes you happy?).*

In the second step, a qualitative analysis was employed to identify the meaning and function of those modal particles in the German language that were identified in step 1. The control function of whether the learners' results were correct was given to native language instructors at the University of Science Malaysia. They evaluated the students' findings in the Malay, Mandarin, Thai, and German language after completion of the project. A third step allowed learners to apply their acquired knowledge of modal particles in their own communication in the target language German. The appropriate usage of the German modal particles was revealing the learners' proficiency in the newly learned word category in the German language.

5. *Data Analysis*

5.1. **Quantitative Analysis**

At first, the frequency of particles that the learners had identified as "words that are not really necessary to understand the meaning of a sentence or question" was determined. Table 1 displays the frequency of word occurrence in the sample conversations (per 30 words in the six samples) according to the learners' mother tongues and the German language (Please refer to Table 1 on page 9). The figures revealed that the Malay language samples included the highest amount of 'modal particles' as per learners' perception with an average frequency of 3.85 per 30 words. The most used words were *lah* and *tak* (each f = 0.67). The Chinese language took place two with an average frequency of 2.80 per 30 words. The highest occurrence was found in the words *lor* (f = 0.62), *ma and maa* (each f = 0.33). At the same time, *lor* reached the highest frequency of all samples in totals. In Indonesian, the inspected words appeared equally often in the conversations (each f = 0.14). Referring to the German language, the modal particles *aber* (f = 0.20)*, denn, ja* and *mal (each f = 0.13)* demonstrated the highest frequency, a result that was similarly found by Möllering (2001:137).

The frequency shown in Table 1 does not necessarily reflect the real usage of modal particles in the samples because not all students were clear about the real function of these words of what they thought were modal particles.

It was their first approach to modal particles. As consequence, errors occurred while exploring the utilization of these words as adverb of time, conjunction, or modal particle. This multi-functionality of particles and the learners' confusion about it made concrete results difficult. Therefore, Table 1 functions here in two ways. On the one hand, it mirrors the grade of particle obviousness in learners' receptiveness and on the other hand, it shows the necessity for the second step of the analysis, the qualitative analysis.

Bahasa Malaysia (MALAY)	N No. of Occurrences	F Frequency per 30 words	CHINESE*	N No. of Occurrences	F Frequency per 30 words	INDONESIAN (Bahasa Indonesia)	N No. of Occurrences	F Frequency per 30 words	SUNDANESE	N No. of Occurrences	F Frequency per 30 words	GERMAN	N No. of Occurrences	F Frequency per 30 words
alamak	1	0.17	aiya	1	0.04	banget	1	0.22	mah	1	0.43	aber	3	0.20
dah	2	0.34	arr, aah	7	0.29	pastinya	1	0.22	mah kan	1	0.43	auch	1	0.07
jadi	1	0.17	ba liao	1	0.04	sih	1	0.22				dann	1	0.07
juga	1	0.17	harr	1	0.04							denn	2	0.13
kan	1	0.17	hoh	1	0.04		3	0.66		2	0.86	echt	1	0.07
kejap-kejap	1	0.17	hor	1	0.04							halt	1	0.07
lagi	1	0.17	la	7	0.29							irgendwie	1	0.07
lah	4	0.67	lah	2	0.08							ja	2	0.13
macam tu lah	1	0.17	leh	4	0.16	banget	1	0.14				mal	2	0.13
mungkin	1	0.17	liao	4	0.16	pastinya	1	0.14				quasi	1	0.07
ni	1	0.17	lor	15	0.62	sih	1	0.14				so	1	0.07
sangat	1	0.17	ma	8	0.33	mah	1	0.14				schon	1	0.07
tak	4	0.67	maa	8	0.33	mah kan	1	0.14						
tau	2	0.34	meh	4	0.16									
tu lah	1	0.17	na	1	0.04									
			oh	2	0.08									
			worr	1	0.04									
TOTAL	15	23	3.89	18	68	2.78	5	5	0.7				11	17	1.15
Average per 30 words	3.85			2.80				0.72						1.14

Table 1: Frequency of word occurrence in the sample conversations (per 30 words in the seven samples) according to the learners' mother tongues Malay, Mandarin, Indonesian as well as German.

* The term 'Chinese' language is here used instead of Mandarin because the samples reflect a very communicative, typical Malaysian Mandarin.

5.2. Qualitative Analysis

The second step of the analysis scrutinized the selected words in terms of their meaning and function in the context of the sample conversations. This was necessary to distinguish their use in modal particle function from other functions of the words.

5.2.1. Qualitative Analysis of the sample conversations in the various languages utilized in this research At first, I will give an overview of what the selected words mean one by one as indicated in the video subtitles that were prepared by the learners.

Malay Language

The identified words were:

Malay	German	English
dah	schon	already
juga	auch	too
kan	nicht wahr?	isn't it?
lagi	noch	still, more
lah	doch	still, after all
sangat	sehr	very
tau	wissen, mal	to know, once

dah

dah is a temporal auxiliary that indicates the perfective aspect, and it can function as a exclamatory particle too. It derives from the word **sudah**, which means *already*.

Example: Danial: Yup, betul.

> Safia: Aku dah macam wartawan **dah**.
>   *aux. verb*   *particle*
> Danial: Yes, correct.
> Safia: I'm *already* like a journalist!

> Danial: Jawohl.
> Safia: Ich bin *schon* wie eine Journalistin!

juga

juga is an adverb. It means *too*. In the following example, it is used as an adverb and it does not function as a modal particle.

Example: Saya berminat dengan pertanian **juga**, saya nak buat satu ladang nenas.

> I am interested *also* in agriculture; I would like to have a pineapple plantation.
> Ich interessiere mich *auch* für Landwirtschaft; ich möchte eine Ananasplantage haben.

lah

lah is an illocutionary particle that can soften or harden an utterance. It explains the speaker's intention, which is to correct a misunderstanding in some kind. It also expresses emphasis and personal involvement/interest in the previously said utterance.

Example:

(1)   Nenas, banyak**lah** sebenarnya, jagung, nak tanam jagung, dan nak buka rumah cendawan.
        Pineapple, much *in fact,* corn. I would like to plant corn and I want to open a mushroom house.
        Ananas. *Ja, in der Tat* viel, Mais. Ich möchte Mais anpflanzen und ich will ein Pilzhaus eröffnen.

(2)   Fatin: Bercadang bila nak kahwin **ni**?
        Danial: Emm... Sekarang umur 23. Mungkin target 27 dan keatas.
        Safia: Ha betul**lah**, lebih kurang.

        Fatin: When do you want to get married?
        Danial: Emm... I'm now 23. Maybe with 27 or later.
        Safia: Yeah, *that's great*. Me too, more or less.

        Fatin: Wann wollen Sie *denn* heiraten?

Danial: Hmm.. Ich bin jetzt 23. Vielleicht mit 27 oder später.
Safia: Ja, *das ist super*. Ich auch, mehr oder weniger.

kan

kan is an illocutionary particle to get hearer to respond in a certain way. It is utilized in Yes/No questions. It emphasises that the previous sentence is correct. It is the deminutive of the word **bukan** (not, not a...).
Example: Hari Khamis? Hari ini hari Selasa**kan**? Hari Khamis saya ada test.

On Thursday? Today is Tuesday, *isn't it*? On Thursday, I have a test.
Am Donnerstag? Heute ist Dienstag, *nicht wahr*? Am Donnerstag habe ich einen Test.

tau

tau is the deminutive of the word **tahu** (to know).
Example: Tu**lah**. Sebenarnya saya berminat dengan tanaman organik, memandangkan kat Malaysia ni kurang sebenarnya tanaman organik **tau**.

Exactly. Actually, I am interested in organic agriculture. Here in Malaysia, organic agriculture is actually not yet very popular, *you know*.

Genau. Ich interessiere mich eigentlich für organischen Anbau. Bei uns in Malaysia ist der organische Anbau aber *wie Sie wissen*noch nicht so beliebt.

Indonesian Language

The identified words were:

Indonesian	German	English
banget	auch	too, really, extremely
mah	X	X
mah kan	X	X
pastinya	natürlich	certainly, of course
sih	einfach	simply

banget

The word *banget* carries the meaning *too*. Using *banget* means, the speaker is adding information to a previous utterance. It functions as an adverb. In the example, a second meaning is obvious, confirming, and emphasizing information. Here the word *banget* works as a particle.

Example: …bisa lulus dengan nilai yang ok **banget**.
…can pass with a *really* good result.

…kann mit einem *wirklich* guten Ergebnis bestehen.

mah and mah kan

The words *mah* and *mah kan* are restricted to the position right behind the subject of the sentence. There is no direct translation into German or English. The meaning derives from the emphasis of the subject that is doing something good. The person does not want to appear arrogant.

Example: Abdi **mah kan** tinggal di Jawa Barat.
I am living in West Jawa.
Ich wohne im Westen von Jawa.

pastinya

pastinya means certainly. It is an adverb. Its function is assurance (naturally, certainly) and emphasis (of course).
Example: **Pastinya** jadi orang lebih baik.
Certainly, I will become a better person.
Of course, I will become a better person.
Natürlich werde ich ein besserer Mensch.

sih

sih carries the meaning *simple*. It is an adjective. In this example it does not function as a modal particle.
Example: Gitu aja **sih**.

That is *easy*.
Das ist *einfach*.

Mandarin Language

In the video sample, the persons were speaking a very communicative, typical Malaysian Mandarin that is typical among Malaysian Chinese, especially Penang Chinese. Those who are speaking standard Mandarin or other dialects may not be able to understand the conversation or few choices of vocabulary.

The identified words were:

Mandarin	German	English
啊arr..? 吗ma?	denn	then
咩meh, 蛤 har?!	etwa	
啦la	doch	
嘛 maa	nicht wahr	certainly, of course
了 liao	schon	already

吗*ma?*

ma is used at the end of a declarative sentence to transform it into a question and to indicate interest in the requested information.

Example:

知足了吗(ma) ?
zhī zú le ma ?

Are you satisfied?

Bist du zufrieden?

咩*meh*

meh is utilized in questions to express doubts.
Example:

看了有用咩(meh) ? 你不用追咩(meh) ?
kàn le yǒu yòng MEH ? nǐ bú yòng zhuī MEH ?

Do you only want to see the girls?

Willst du nur die Mädchen sehen?

啦*la*

la expresses that the speaker is impatient, he requests for a comforting tone or he emphasizes his statement.
Example:

走啦走啦！！
zǒu LA zǒu LA！！

Come, let's go!

Also los!!

嘛*maa*

maa is used at the end of an explanatory sentence to show what precedes it is obvious. Its position within a sentence is chosen to mark a pause. The speaker's tone shows a little impatience.

Example:

有女朋友也是一样可以看女孩子的嘛(maa)~是吗(ma) ?赞同吗(ma) ?
yǒu nǚ péng yǒu yě shi yī yàng kě yǐ kàn nǚ hái zi de ma~shi ma ?zàn tóng ma ?

Although I have a girlfriend, I *still* can see the girls, *isn't it*?

Do you agree?

> Obwohl ich eine Freundin habe, kann ich noch die Mädchen sehen, nicht wahr?
> Seid ihr einverstanden?

了 *liao*

liao is utilized while talking about a situation that has already passed.
Example:

> 现在的（LSP）402都搞到这样liao
> xiàn zài de（LSP）402dōu gǎo dào zhè yàng LIAO

Now it becomes like this, your LSP 402 (English language course) is *already* not good enough.

> Dein LSP ist nicht gut genug ....

Thai Language

In the video sample, the persons were speaking a "Thai" with a local dialect popularly spoken among Thai heritage speakers in Malaysia. Those who are speaking standard Thai or other dialects may not be able to understand the conversation or few choices of vocabulary.

The identified words were:

Thai	German	English
tea wa	aber	but
ko mean kan	auch	also, too
pen khun chop	halt	just, simply
nan lae	Das stimmt. Ich auch.	It is like that. Me too.

tea wa

tea wa means *aber*. It is here not the modal particle*cang* but a conjunction.

Example: **Tea wa …**

> …but I don't like to shop in the shopping center.
> Aber ich kaufe nicht gern im Einkaufszentrum ein.

ko mean kan

ko mean kan means *also, too.* It does not function here as the modal particle *aw, hue. It is an* adverb.

Example: **ko mean kan…**

> *I also like to watch TV.*
> *Ich sehe auch gern fern.*

The learner's recorded interview in the Thai language did not include many modal particles. Those words indicated by the student as equivalent to the German modal particles *aber* and *auch* have been used in their original meaning as conjunction and adverb. Subsequently, the examples listed below show only two modal particles that were found in the Thai interview:

Thai	German	English
pen khun chop	halt	That's the way it is.
nan lae	Das stimmt.	It is like that.
	Ich auch.	Me too.

pen khun chop

pen khun chop carries the meaning *That's the way it is*. It is used similar to the German *halt* from the speaker's perspective.

Example: (1) **Pen khun chop** kin

> *I just like eating.*
> *Ich esse halt gern.*

> (2) **Pen khun chop** fang phleng
>
> *I just like listening to music.*

> *Ich höre halt gern Musik.*

nan lae

nan lae is the corresponding reply from the hearer's perspective. It means *it is like that* or *me too*.

Example: A: **Pen khun chop** fang phleng   B: Nan lae.

          I just like listening to music.   *Me too.*

          Ich höre halt gern Musik.   *Ich auch.*

German Language

The identified words were:

German	English
aber	but, such a…
auch	also, too, sure
denn	then
ja	yes
mal	once

aber

aber is utilized in exclamatory sentences. The speaker indicates that he is surprised of that what he is seeing. It is literally translated as *but,* which makes it difficult for learners to differentiate it from the conjunction *but*.

Example: Das ist **aber** irgendwie ganz schön schwierig.

      Somehow, that's really tricky.

auch

auch is used to make a connection between old and new information during a conversation. The *auch*-statement provides a reason for the previously said. The literal translation of *auch* is *also* or *too*.

Example: Ja, gut, es dauert 'nen Moment, ne? Es ist *ja* **auch** in Bewegung.

      Well, yes, but it takes a while, right? It's *also* moving.

denn

denn indicates in questions the speaker's interest for the answer given to a question that was generated from the actual situation.

Example: A: Wo kommst du **denn** her?

       B: Aus Spanien.

      A: *So,* where are you from?

      B: From Spain.

ja

ja is commonly used to indicate that the hearer is expected to share the speaker's view because the proposition is evident for the hearer.

Example: Das ergänzt sich **ja** besonders gut.

That complements especially well.

mal

mal is used in imperatives. It smoothens the instruction that intends to get the hearer's attention just for a second and not on general.

Example: Darf ich euch **mal** *kurz* eine Frage stellen? Ja?

      May I *quickly* ask you a question? Yes?

5.2.2. Qualitative Analysis of the learners' sample conversation in the German language

In the third step of this project, the researcher investigated the proficiency degree of particle use by the German language learners. In their German chat in which they tried to incorporate the newly picked up German modal particles, they were using the following particles: *aber, auch, denn, doch, eben, ja, mal* und *schon*.

This selection shows that learners picked the most commonly used German modal particles also for their own conversation. The transcripts of these students' chats are attached in the appendix. The stronger students were using the modal particles *denn, ja* and *mal* in the appropriate way. However, uncertainty occurred in the use of *aber, auch*, *doch* and *eben.* Here are the examples:

Particle	Sample sentence	Comment
aber	Ich habe ein gutes Essen gegessen. Es war **aber** ganz lecker! *Intended meaning:* *I have eaten good food.* *It was **really** delicious!*	**aber** is here used in the sense of "***but** it was really delicious!*" This utterance contradicts the intended meaning as there should not be a 'but' if the food was already good.
auch	Sushi!!! Ich möchte **auch** Sushi essen! *Intended meaning:* *Sushi!!! I **also** want to eat Sushi!*	**auch** is here used in the literal meaning ***also, too***. It does not indicate a reason or cause to connect with the previously said.
doch	Sag mal **doch**! *Intended meaning:* *Tell us, please!!!*	**doch** is here used in the wrong position. The correct version would be: Sag **doch** mal!
eben	Farah: 40 Ringgit. Aryo: Das ist **eben** teuer! *Intended meaning:* *That is **really** expensive!*	**eben** is here used in the wrong context. With **eben** the speaker usually indicates that the situation that is expressed in the proposition cannot be changed and that consequently there is no sense for further discussion. However, the speaker's intention in the sample utterance is expressing a surprise upon a matter. The correct version would be: Das ist **aber** teuer!

The weaker students utilized the modal particles *aber, denn, doch, eben, mal* and *schon* correctly but showed weaknesses in the use of *aber, auch and ja.*

Particle	Sample sentence	Comment
auch ja	Nadth: Hallo, wie geht's? Fatin: **Auch** sehr gut. Hattest du wissen, dass Chelsea im Krankenhaus ist. Nadth: **Ja.** Ich wissen, dass sie krank ist. *Intended meaning:* *Nadth: Hello, how are you?* *Fatin: I'm fine **too**. Did you know that Chelsea is in hospital?* *Nadth: **Yes**, I know that she is sick.*	**auch** is here used in the literal meaning ***also, too***. It does not indicate a reason or cause to connect with the previously said. *ja* is here used in the meaning of ***yes***.
aber	(1) Mein Deutsch ist gut, **aber** besser nicht. *Intended meaning:* *My German is good but not better (than that).* (2) **Aber** wir haben die Modalpartikeln auf Deutsch gelernt, so dass wir können die Modalpartikeln verwenden, z.B.: **doch, ja, aber, also, eigentlich.** *Intended meaning:* *... but we have learned the modal particles in German, so we can use them, e.g. doch, ja, aber, also, eigentlich.*	**aber** is here used in the sense of "***but** it is not better than that.*"

6. Findings

The data analysis revealed that the learners in the sample group were able to detect modal particles in their mother tongue. They used correct samples from the videos that they had taken beforehand from interviews with friends and explained the particles' meaning and function correctly. Exceptions were the words *but* and *also*. Students of all the respective mother tongues usually chose samples in which the word *but* was functioning as conjunction and the word *also* as adverb in its literal meaning.

Regarding the German language, learners were able to discover 8 (of 9) modal particles in the German video no.1 and 7(of9) in the German video no. 2 that they had chosen.Those particles were aber, auch, *eigentlich, denn, doch, halt, ja, mal, nur, schon*. Their meanings were also correctly explained. In the application, learners proved generally a good command in the use of German modal particles. They could make sense of them in the sentences of the German sample videos and incorporate them with an average degree of correctness (50% for the stronger students and 41.67% for the weaker students) in their own communication. However, the wrong usage of *aber* and *auch* was consequently carried forward because learners used these words in their original meaning and not in their function as modal particles. Uncertainty could be noticed in the application of *doch* and *denn*.

An example for the wrong use of *aber*: "Mein Deutsch ist gut, *aber* besser nicht." [Correct: Mein Deutsch ist gut, *aber* nicht besser.] (In English: My German is good, *but* not better.) An example for the correct use of *aber* and *schon*: "*Aber* klar! Wir werden *schon* gut die Sprache lernen, so dass wir gut Deutsch sprechen."(in English: *For sure*! We will learn the language well (*as usual*) in order to speak German well.") This mistake can be explained with the missing control of the learners' findings after the video analysis. This control function was initially not planned because intentionally learners were requested to learn some of the German modal particles by themselves. Nevertheless, the control of their findings took place after step 3 of the project.

In addition, learners did not always use the modal particles in their correct position in the sentence. In these terms, they followed their own languages. It can be found, that weaker learners placed the German modal particles mostly at the beginning or at the end of the utterance whereas stronger learners tend to set the particles more in the middle of the sentence in accordance with the samples in the German language conversations. There, these particles are usually to be found in the middle field of the sentence. See here as an example the particle *doch*: "Sag mal *doch*!" [Correct: Sag *doch* mal!]. Another example for the wrong position of *doch* is "Ich denke ja, dass es Malaysische Kultur ist *doch*!" [correct: Ich denke ja, dass es *doch* Malaysische Kultur ist!"].

Furthermore, an error occurred while using the wrong word. For example, *aber* was interchanged with *eben.* This is a mistake easy to make, because the meanings of three modal particles *aber, eben* und *halt* are quite similar. As Bross (2012: 191-192) states, *aber* expresses an unexpected issue in an exclamatory sentence, whereas with *eben* and *halt* the speaker indicates a matter of fact that is familiar to the interlocutors and that is non alterable. As such, it has to be accepted from both, the speaker and the listener. While using *eben*, the speaker indicates that there is no use for further discussion because of the fact that the issue cannot be altered.

7. Conclusion

With regard to the frequency of occurrences of modal particles or modal auxiliary words, the findings cannot be generalized for the four languages that were explored in this project. The frequency of modal particles in the German language samples (youtube videos) is with $f = 1.14 / 30$ words lower than in the Mandarin language with $f = 2.80/ 30$ words, although previous research revealed that the German language is rich on modal particles that are also used frequently (Benes 1974: 173; Helbig & Kötz, 1985: 43). The reason is that the samples consist out of short *adhoc* surveys on the road. The various interviews are of different length and of various people that were unknown to the interviewer until the time of the conversation.

The consequence of these first approaches is that the interlocutors' reaction is rather short. Therefore, there is not much opportunity to use many modal particles. The topic (dreams and wishes) as well does not provide the atmosphere for modal particle usage. Namely, as Heggelund (2001: 12) stated, "The more personal the communication is, the more modal particles are used."

Subsequently, the learners' exposure to particles in various contexts and the acquisition of those particles is an important factor in language teaching. In communication, the *network of relationship* (Weydt, 2006: 215) between the interlocutors is mainly created through a system of modal particles. In this context, Ankenbrand (2006: 4) sees in utilizing modal particles a kind of realization of friendliness that is necessary in any kind of communication, especially in business communication. In her article *Modalpartikeln und Höflichkeit,* Ankenbrand proved then that modal particles can be identified as politeness tools (Ankenbrand, 2006: 5).

The limited exposure of learners to this word category in the limited samples of speech acts is not enough. Therefore, it is pertinent to create learners' awareness through increasing the teaching of modal particles in the foreign language classroom. Efforts have already been made by publishers to include particles into dialogues but teachers seem to pay little attention on these words. A reason might be the sometimes difficult translation.

Author's suggestion:

In order to reconfirm the meaning of the modal particles and their function in communication, it is necessary to compare with the students' mother tongue (L1). Therefore, I provide here an overview of the German top five modal particles and their equivalents in the Malay, the Mandarin, and the Thai language (Please refer to Table 2-5, p.14-15). From here, students can reconfirm the meaning and better understand the function of those particles. This might help for example to differentiate better between "aber" in its function as modal particle and as conjunction. In addition, it can assist learners to decrease special uncertainties in their use of German modal particles. In teaching and learning of modal particles, it is also pertinent that the teacher will follow up with exercises pertaining to the right choice and positioning of modal particles in various example utterances. At least, learners should have the opportunity – if possible – to emerge into the German language and to mix with native speakers instead of learning this word category through tedious exercises the 'hard way'. On the meta-conscious level, these particles are surely easier to understand and utilized.

Tab. 2: Malay equivalents to the top five most commonly used German modal particles

German Modal Particle	Malay Equivalent	Example
mal	lah	Dengar lah! Mai, dengar sat! *Listen please!* Come, listen a moment!
ja	kan	Kau tahu kan, dia mai minggu depan? Hang tau kan dia mai minggu depan? *You know, don't you, he will come weeknext?* *You know, don't you, he will come next week?*
aber	-nya	*Cantiknya topi hang!* *Such a nice hat du* *You have such a nice hat!*
auch	memang (lah)	A: Cantiknya topi hang! B: Memanglah, saya beli topi di Bali. *A: Such a nice hat you B: For sure I buy hat in Bali* * You have such a nice hat! For sure, I bought it in Bali.*
schon	nanti...lah	A: Aku takut dia tak mai. B: Nanti dia mai lah ... *A: I afraid he not come B: Will he come sure* * I'm afraid he will not come He will come, don't worry ...*
denn	kah	Besok hang mai kah? Besok hang mai? Tomorrow you come then? *Then you will come tomorrow QW?*

Tab. 3: Mandarin equivalents to the top five most commonly used German modal particles

German Modal Particle	Mandarin Equivalent	Example
mal	吧 **ba**	听吧 **tīngba** *Listen!*
ja	**-**	**-**
aber	啊 **ā**	啊，好漂亮的帽子！ **Ā, hǎo piàoliang de màozi.** *Oh, such a beautiful (-) hat*
auch	是啊 **shì ā**	是啊，我在巴厘买的。 **Shì ā, wǒ zài Bālí mǎi de.** *Yes. I at Bali bought (-)*
schon	的 **de**	不用担心，他会来的。 **Búyòng dānxīn, tā huì lái de.** *No need worry, he will be coming*
denn	到底 **dàodǐ**	你明天到底来不来。 **Nǐ míngtiān dàodǐ láibulái.** *You tomorrow (-) come not*

Tab. 4: Thai equivalents to the top five most commonly used German modal particles

German Modal Particle	Thai Equivalent	Example
mal	ni	Fang ni *Listen this!*
ja	chai mai	Khun ru chai mai kau ca maa athit na. *You know, don't you, he will come week next*
aber	cang	Muak khun suay cang *Hat you beautiful very*
auch	aw, hue	A: Muak khun suay cang B: Aw chan sue thi Bali *A: Hat you beautiful very B: Yes I bought in Bali*
schon	na	A: Chan klua kau ca mai maa B: Kau ca maa na *A: I'm afraid he will not come B: He will come don't worry*
denn	laew	Laew khun ca maa phrungni mai *Then you will come tomorrow QW*

Table 5: The top five most commonly German modal particles and their equivalents

German	Mandarin	Malay	Indonesian	Thai	English
mal	吧 ba	lah	donk	ni	-
ja	-	kan	-	chai mai	don't you isn't it
aber	啊 ā	-nya	banget	cang	such a, but
auch	是啊 shì ā	memang(lah)	banget	aw, hue	also, very
schon	的 de	nanti…lah	-	na	still, don't worry

Appendix

Transcript of student chat (stronger students)

The indicated words represent modal particles in the students' perception.

Aryo	:	Hallo, Chiau Hung!
Chiau Hung	:	Hi, Aryo! Guten Abend! Wie geht's?
Aryo	:	Ich fühle mich müde.
		Ich habe Sport getrieben.
		Was machst du ***denn*** hier?
Chiau Hung	:	Natürlich studiere ich hier!
		Wo ist mein Buch? Wo ist mein Deutschbuch?
Aryo	:	Ist das dein Deutschbuch? – Tut mir leid!
Chiau Hung	:	Oh! Da ist ***ja*** mein Deutschbuch.
		Gib mir ***mal*** mein Deutschbuch, bitte!
Chiau Hung &	:	Hi Farah!
Aryo		Komm ***doch*** her!
Chiau Hung	:	Farah, warum siehst du so glücklich aus?
Farah	:	Ich habe gutes Essen gegessen.
		Es war ***aber*** ganz lecker!
Aryo	:	Was hast du gegessen?
Farah	:	Es ist ein Geheimnis.
Aryo	:	Sag ***mal doch***!
Chiau Hung	:	Sag ***doch***!
Farah	:	Ich habe Sushi gegessen!
Chiau Hung &	:	Sushi!!! Ich möchte ***auch*** Sushi essen!
Aryo		
Aryo	:	Was kostet es?
Farah	:	40 Ringgit.

Aryo	:	Das ist *eben* teuer!
		Ich habe nur noch 10 Ringgit.
Chiau Hung	:	Ich auch!
Chiau Hung	:	Ich bin sehr hungrig! Ich habe Lust auf Hamburger!
Farah	:	Dann kommen wir zusammen *doch* zu KFC!
Chiau Hung	:	Aber du hast *denn* gegessen!
Farah	:	Kein Problem! Ich kann noch mehr essen!
Aryo	:	Also los!!!

Transcript of student chat (weaker students)

The indicated words represent modal particles in the students' perception.

Nadth	:	Hallo, wie geht's?
Fatin	:	Sehr gut. Und dir?
Nadth	:	*Auch* sehr gut. Hattest du wissen, dass Chelsea im Krankenhaus ist.
Fatin	:	*Ja.* Ich wissen, dass sie krank ist.
Nadth	:	Deshalb sie kann heute nicht mit uns treffen.
		Ich hoffe ihr gute Besserung. *Also* wir haben in LAG300 studieren. Wie gut sind deine Fähigkeiten der authentischen Kommunikation?
Fatin	:	Mein Deutsch ist gut, *aber* besser nicht. Wenn ich von die Wörterbuch sprechen schreiben kann. Was denkt du *denn*, Nadth?
Nadth	:	Ich sprache nicht gut Deutsch. Ich spreche nicht gut Deutsch, weil ich lange pausiere, wenn ich Deutsch spreche.
Fatin	:	Ja. Chelsea ist auch nicht so gut in Deutsch.
Nadth	:	Sag *mal*, woher weißt du das?
Fatin	:	Gestern habe ich Chelsea treffen. Und sie sagt, dass sie Deutsch formell spricht.
Nadth	:	Das ist es *eben*! Ich spreche Deutsch nicht in authentischer Kommunikation. Ich spreche Deutsch mit irgendwemmit Malaysia Modalpartikeln, z.B.: lah, kan, loh.
Fatin	:	*Ja*. Ich glaube, dass alle Malaysier nicht ohne Malaysia Modalpartikeln sprechen können.
Nadth	:	Für mich, spreche ich jede Sprache z.B.: Englisch, Chinesisch oder Thai mit Malaysia Modalpartikeln.
Fatin	:	Ich denke *ja*, dass es Malaysia Kultur ist *doch*!
Nadth	:	*Aber*wir haben die Modalpartikeln auf Deutsch gelernt, so dass wir können die Modalpartikeln verwenden, z.B.:*doch, ja, aber, also, eigentlich.*
Fatin	:	*Aber* klar. Wir werden *schon* die Sprachen gut lernen, so dass wir gut Deutsch sprechen.

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