Modality is a semantic-pragmatic concept that has recently attracted increased attention and is discussed in detail with respect to spoken languages worldwide. Portner (2009) suggests the following introductory definition: “Modality is the linguistic phenomenon whereby grammar allows one to say things about, or on the basis of situations which need not be real.” Various linguistic aspects fall under the notion of modality and a variety of modal words, modal phrases, and modal constructions have been identified so far. Most prominently, research on modality includes the description of lexical items such as auxiliary verbs (e.g. *must*), adverbs (e.g. *maybe*), and adjectives (e.g. *possible*) (cf. Portner 2009: 2-3). Specific aspects of modal meaning such as modal particle induced meaning components, however, are often neglected in a taxonomy of modality.

Therefore, this chapter discusses the notion of ‘modality’ and specifically focuses on modal meaning that is triggered by modal particles in spoken languages. The first section 5.1 defines modality (section 5.1.1) and modal meaning (section 5.1.2) and integrates modal particles into a broader framework of modality. I show that modal particles are instantiations of modal meaning along with various means such as sentential adverbs, tag questions, and prosody. The meaning nuances that are triggered by modal particles or equivalent expressions are the main issue of interest in this study. Related terms like ‘context’ and ‘common ground’ are defined briefly in this section as well.

Section 5.2 deals with the notion of ‘particles’ and discusses different approaches to the categorization of this class of words. By explaining the properties of particles in section 5.2.1, it becomes obvious how they can be distinguished from other lexical elements. Opposing the minimalistic and the maximalistic approach to particles and more specifically modal particles, the word class debate is explored in section 5.2.2.

Section 5.3 looks more closely at modal meaning that is evoked by modal particles. The properties of modal particles are discussed in section 5.3.1. A brief overview of the state of the art summarizes the research on modal particles as they are crucial for the context development of the target sentences used in the studies of this book. Examples of the relevant German and Dutch
modal particles that have been used as resources for the investigated modal meanings are given in section 5.3.2. In section 5.3.3, a list of English expressions that can be used as equivalents to the German or Dutch modal particle sentences, explains the different strategies used in a language that does not have modal particles.

Modal meaning triggered by modal particles is one of the main issues of this investigation. As a further subgroup of the particle class, focus particles such as *only*, *also*, and *even* are the second of the two major topics of interest in my cross-linguistic study. The analysis and distribution of focus particles in spoken and signed languages are elaborated on in chapters 7 and 8.

5.1. Modality and modal meaning

Starting from a broad perspective of modality in language, this section discusses, first, the different aspects of modality such as deontic, epistemic, and further subgroups of modality related to speaker’s attitude. Second, it disentangles the basic levels of meaning that an utterance may convey. This is particularly relevant for a modal particle analysis, as modal particles contribute to the meaning of an utterance in a very specific way that is independent from truth conditional content.

Thus, the terminological section in 5.1.1 generally defines modality from a spoken language perspective and section 5.1.2 explains the more specific issue of modal meaning. A list including various means of how modality might be expressed in language provides an overview of the realization methods for modality. I focus on modal meaning defined as a specific aspect of modality that is conveyed by modal particles and equivalent instantiations. A separation between the propositional content and the modality-related meaning aspects of a sentence provides insight into compositional approaches to meaning.

5.1.1. Modality

Modality is defined as a semantic category that conveys the attitude of a speaker towards the validity of the content of a proposition. Apart from morphological forms of mood (indicative, conjunctive, and imperative), modality also relates to sentence types such as declaratives, interrogatives, and impera-
Modality and modal meaning

Dietrich (1992: 23) defines modality as a category specifying the manner of an event or state described by a sentence, and the speaker’s attitude towards the utterance expressed by this sentence. Research on modality traditionally distinguishes between two forms of modality. On the one hand, there is ‘deontic modality’, referring to obligations, recommendations, permissions, and intentions, and thereby to the speaker’s attitude towards the necessity or possibility of an act or event. On the other hand, there is ‘epistemic modality’, referring to the speaker’s judgment about the probability and truth of a proposition (knowledge and belief). Similarly, Portner (2005) distinguishes between epistemic and deontic meaning and notes that epistemic meaning concerns what is known, whereas deontic meaning concerns possibility and necessity. He defines modality from a possible worlds semantic point of view and says that “modality refers to language whose meaning depends on alternate possible worlds” (cf. Portner 2005: 154). The identification of which worlds are relevant is essential for the understanding of the modal meaning of a sentence.

Portner (2009) more specifically discusses three different categories of modality, namely sentential modality, subsentential modality, and discourse modality. Focusing on sentential modality, he subdivides sentential modality into epistemic (pertaining to the speaker’s knowledge), priority (including deontic and goal oriented modals), and dynamic (volitional and quantificational) (cf. Portner 2009: 135). Other researchers have categorized modality in slightly different ways. Palmer (2001: 7-8), for instance, distinguishes between propositional modality (epistemic and evidential), which is related to the speaker’s judgment of the proposition, and event modality (deontic and dynamic), which is related to the speaker’s attitude towards a future event. Bybee (1985) and Bybee & Fleischman (1995) further subdivide the deontic category and generally suggest a tripartite distinction between ‘agent-oriented modality’, ‘epistemic modality’, and ‘speaker-oriented modality’.44

As briefly indicated in the above definitions, mood is a subsystem of modality. It is important to differentiate mood and modality terminologically, as these notions are often confused. Usually, ‘mood’ is used to refer to verbal...
mood, thus verbal inflections such as ‘indicative’ and ‘subjunctive’ or ‘realis’ and ‘irrealis’. As an instantiation of modality, I subsume mood under the notion of modality, which comprises all the different phenomena related to the modal aspects of languages.

Considering the various strategies to express modality related meanings, I distinguish between lexical, morphological, syntactic, and prosodic means. Lexical elements are, for instance, modal verbs/auxiliaries (deontic and epistemic), modal adverbs (e.g. probably), modal nouns (e.g. it is a necessity), and modal adjectives (e.g. possible). Morphological phenomena related to modality are tense and aspect (future tense, progressive, etc.), affixation (evidential markers), and verbal mood (indicative, subjunctive), for instance. Syntactically, modality is related to clause type distinctions, conditionals, and perhaps modal subordination. Intonational pitch variations and intonation contours are prosodic means that may express modal aspects of language. These means, of course, are not mutually exclusive and very often overlap and co-occur (cf. Portner 2009).

Modal verbs are classical examples of lexical instantiations of modality. They have been studied extensively in research on modality in various languages (e.g. Kratzer 1981; Brennan 1993; Auwera & Dendale 2000). As seen in the above definitions, modality might be categorized into ‘deontic’ or ‘dynamic’ when the attitude is related to a later action or potential event, and ‘epistemic’ and ‘evidential’ modality when the speaker’s attitude is referring to the actual proposition judging the truth of the sentence. Modal verbs in German can either be used in a deontic or epistemic way. See (9) for an example of sollen (should) conveying different meanings depending on the modal reading. Other modal verbs such as dürfen (may) and müssen (must) function similarly in these respects. Example (9a) clearly expresses a recommendation that Tim should eat a banana. The sentence refers to an event in the future and the speaker somehow expects it to take place. When using soll in an epistemic way as in (9b), the speaker adds information about the probability of the proposition and about how evident this information is. Indicating a distance to the content of the utterance, the speaker is not committed to the truth of the sentence, whereas in example (9a) s/he is.

(9) Tim soll eine Banane essen.
Tim should a banana eat
a. ‘Tim should eat a banana.’ (deontic)
b. ‘Someone told me (so it is possible) that Tim eats a banana.’ (epistemic)
Selected examples of modality-related expressions such as prosodic means, sentential adverbs, and modal particles that are relevant for this research are listed and described in section 5.1.2. In the literature on modality, modal particles are only discussed very rarely. Palmer (2001: 60) briefly mentions their existence, but claims that they are more or less irrelevant to discourse and probably not even part of a grammatical system. Portner (2009) does not refer to modal particles within his book on modality as most research is based on English. Fintel (2006) mentions German modal particles and points out that these expressions deserve special attention.

I do not discuss the above mentioned issues such as modal verbs and mood in further detail, but concentrate on modal meaning induced primarily by modal particles, as this investigation focuses on the specific realization of modal meaning in sign languages. Therefore, the following sections define the term ‘modal meaning’ more precisely. I explore the effects that modal particles have on discourse and show in which way they express modal meaning as a separate level of meaning in addition to the descriptive content of a sentence.

5.1.2. Modal meaning

As mentioned above, modal particles can be subsumed under the notions of ‘modality’ and more narrowly ‘modal meaning’. As the latter term is not yet defined clearly, I briefly summarize what I understand it to be and what can be gained from this notion for the analysis in this book.

I assume modal meaning to be the meaning of an utterance that does not contribute to the truth-conditional meaning of an utterance and is componentially added on a separate level of meaning in order to convey different degrees and shades of probability, speaker’s attitudes, and implicit discourse functional updates to the common ground. Modal meaning is very much dependent on the context and can therefore be linked to the notion of expressive meaning as defined by Potts (2007a). An important aspect of expressive meaning is its general independence, so it is detached from the descriptive content and always related to a particular perspective evaluating the content. The term descriptive ineffability shows how difficult it is to grasp the meaning of expressives. Immediacy, non-displaceability, and repeatability are further characteristics of expressive meaning (cf. Potts 2007a: 166-167,176). Modal meaning operates on a similar extra level of meaning and Potts (2007a: 194)
briefly discusses the modal particle *ja* in German and suggests further stud-
ies on the relation between modal particles and expressive meaning. Modal
meaning is independent of the descriptive content, dependent on the perspec-
tive, immediate, and their description is usually vague (ineffability). There-
fore, expressive meaning and modal meaning have many characteristics in
common. Expressive meaning, however, is a broad category and includes a
variety of phenomena excluded here in the narrow definition of modal mean-
ing. Thus, I take them to be separate concepts operating on the same level of
meaning.

Modal meaning is a universal property of language, but the linguistic de-
vices used are clearly language-specific. In various languages, different meth-
ods can be used to modify the meaning of a sentence in such a way as modal
particles do in German or Dutch, for instance. Without the aim of complete-
ness, the following list provides means for the realization of modal mean-
ing. Note that modal verbs are excluded from the narrow definition of modal
meaning that refers more directly to the epistemic and modal particle induced
aspects of modality.

- prosodic means, intonation
- sentential adverbs
- interjections
- tag questions
- specific collocations
- modal particles

Prosodic elements of language such as intonation and accentuation play an
important role as a means of expressing modality and modal meaning in many
languages of the world. Particularly for English, the functions of intonation
have been analyzed extensively (cf. Bohlinger 1989; Wells 2007; Halliday &
Greaves 2008; and more specifically Kärkkäinen 2003 on epistemic stance in
English conversation). Intonation may express the speaker’s attitude towards
the addressee or towards the utterance. It may show certainty or uncertainty
about the proposition and indicate whether a sentence is self-evident for the
speaker or not (cf. Féry 1993; Gussenhoven 2004 on such issues in German
intonation). Different shades of politeness may also be expressed by prosodic
patterns. Kohler (1991: 162) explicitly mentions specific tonal patterns like a
late peak of the fundamental frequency (f0) co-occurring with modal particles
to reinforce their meanings. Even without the modal particle, the peak is said to convey a modal meaning similar to that of a modal particle in certain cases. The strong interrelation between modal particles and intonational patterns is quite obvious, but requires more systematic investigation in the future (see Ikoma 2007; Ikoma & Werner 2007 for a prosodic analysis of different modal particles in German).

Sentential adverbs such as *vermutlich* (supposedly) and *wahrscheinlich* (probably) are lexical forms that may express modal meaning. They relate to the entire clause and modify the sentence inasmuch as they express the speaker’s judgment of the proposition. Adverbs such as *hoffentlich* (hopefully) and *leider* (unfortunately) express the attitude of the speaker towards the proposition.

Modal particles usually modify the illocutionary force of a sentence and express a certain attitude towards the proposition and not towards a future issue. They may relate to the speaker’s and addressee’s knowledge and refer to their common ground. Thus, Doherty (1985) discusses modal particles as epistemic modality markers. As members of the above list, modal particles are clear instantiations of modal meaning. The above means are language-specific to a high degree. This is why we find modal particles in languages such as Dutch and German, but not in English. In most languages, including German, Dutch, and English, intonation plays an important role to express modal meaning. As mentioned above, the strategies may often be combined as can be seen with the interrelation of intonational means and modal particles. I further discuss this issue and the consequences for sign language studies in chapter 6.

In general, the functions and communicative goals conveyed by modal meaning may be paraphrased as follows:

- soften or enhance an utterance
- express the speaker’s attitude towards a proposition
- indicate the speaker’s judgment of the discourse situation
- refer to the addressee’s knowledge or common knowledge
- place the content of a sentence on a continuum from probability to improbability

This study focuses on meaning nuances that are mainly induced by modal particles in German and Dutch or similar expressions in English. Thus, I build up a basic framework for particle research and specifically discuss modal
particles as the most relevant group. I explain the different means that are used to express modal meaning in the three investigated spoken languages to gain further insight and a theoretical basis for the investigation into the equivalent means found in sign languages.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, I am aware that it is not possible to explicitly compare specific modal particles in spoken and signed languages, but I base the analysis of modal meaning in those languages on modal particle induced meaning nuances that are triggered in certain situational contexts in discourse.

Within the actual experiments, however, I do not assume a spoken language perspective, as the tasks are independent of particular modal particle items. Thus, this study more abstractly investigates modal meaning, although it is based on modal particle contexts. This is a huge advantage of this approach and the data still guarantee comparable sentences and results.

5.2. Particles

To explore the difficulties of pinning down a general definition for particles, it is necessary to briefly summarize the debate about the status of particles as a word class. More specifically, along the lines of a rather minimalistic approach, I argue that modal particles constitute a separate subclass within the particle class.

A short list of common properties that all particles inherently share is given in section 5.2.1. Furthermore, the differences between various particle groups are described to distinguish individual particle classes. Some overall distinctions and systematic differentiations of various types of particles help to categorize and integrate modal particles and focus particles in a classification system, even though the literature still lacks a consensus and a clear use of terminology.

Section 5.2.2 briefly opposes minimalistic and maximalistic accounts for particles. In principle, core meanings for identical and historically related elements (heterosemy) and unified semantic bases for various functions of the same particle (polysemy) are preferred over complex semantic and functional differentiations. I also explain the implications that the different approaches have for modal particle research.
5.2.1. The particle class and its properties

Different approaches for how to separate particles from other elements of speech have been proposed in the literature. Thus, it is important to list the general properties of the words categorized as particles. In the debate about word class distinction, categorical classifications are made following semantic, syntactic-distributional, and/or morphological properties of words. In some cases, the paradigmatic category and substitution tests are included in the scheme of distinctions. However, different grammars consider different categories and also rank them differently. A homogeneous criterion can be the basis for a word class distinction, but very often a heterogeneous classification is applied. The Duden Grammar (Eisenberg & Klosa 1998; Razum & Eisenberg 2005) uses the three above-mentioned classical criteria for word classification and, hence, follows a heterogeneous account. However, the morphological component has priority over the other criteria. The Wahrig Grammar (Götze & Hess-Lüttich 2002) also considers the three categories within a heterogeneous approach, but in this case the syntactic component is ranked most important. The Grammars of Gerhard Helbig and Joachim Buscha (Helbig & Buscha 2000, 2002) solely regard syntactic properties as relevant. These few examples show that the underlying definitions and applications of criteria may lead to different views on how to categorize words.

The systematization of particles is an especially challenging task. The following list provides an overview of the general characteristics of particles.

- Particles are non-inflecting
- Particles cannot be expanded and cannot project
- Particles can be combined
- Particles have flexible distributional properties with some restrictions depending on sentence types

There are two main divergent views concerning the definition of particles: a broad and a narrow perspective. All of the approaches, however, define particles as non-inflecting entities. The broader definitions explained below differ with respect to the fact that they either include or exclude prepositions, adverbials, and junctions. More narrow definitions either assume particles to be a subgroup of adverbials or apply the term to only a few particular items.

The Duden Grammar (Razum & Eisenberg 2005: 573-575) follows a medial definition, saying that all non-inflecting words apart from prepositions,
adverbials, and junctions are called particles. Parts of speech are thus divided into two main categories (see table 5).

Table 5. Division of parts of speech

|---------------|---------------------|

Furthermore, the following categories are listed in an attempt to further distinguish different types of particles: scalar particles, focus particles, negation particles, modal particles, discourse particles, interjections, and onomatopoeia. This medial account is also supported by Musan (2008) who follows a definition of particles similar to the definition of the Duden Grammar. According to her, all of the items in the particle class are non-inflecting entities, but adverbs, junctions, and prepositions are excluded. Particles are subdivided into many subclasses because of their very different functions. Musan (2008: 27-30) lists scalar or intensifying particles (*ziemlich, sehr*), focus particles (*nur, selbst*), negation particles (*nicht*), modal particles (*schon, ja*), discourse particles (*ja, hm, bitte?*), interjections (*Oh!, Huch!*), and onomatopoeia (*boing, kikeriki*). Helbig (1988: 31) assumes six subgroups of particles, namely modal particles, scalar/focus particles, comparative particles, answering particles, negation particles, and infinitive particles.

Menzel (1986) is another representative of a broad definition of particles. Menzel (1986: 17) notes that particles are on a par with non-inflecting words in general and lists adverbials, junctions, prepositions, and interjections as subgroups of that class. He does not propose any further distinctions with respect to particle subgroups like those mentioned above.

Taking a narrower perspective, Götze & Hess-Lüttich (2002: 127) subsume particles under the category of adverbials and differentiate between modal particles, scalar particles, and negation particles that either enrich and modify or negate a sentence. Another concept using a narrower definition only applies the term ‘particles’ to a small group of words that can be summarized as modal and focus particles (Zifonun et al. 1997).\(^{50}\)

Despite various differences in the categorizations and no clear consensus regarding the different subgroups of particles, modal and focus particles are mentioned in almost all classification systems. The terminological indecisiveness, however, is due to various aspects that are still unresolved in particle research. To separate particles from adverbials and conjunctions, for instance, it is usually argued that adverbials can occur in the German ‘Vorfeld’ (hence-
Particles

forth pre-field), whereas particles cannot be topicalized and are not found sentence initially. However, the distinction is not always clear-cut.

(10) *Auch hat MaRIA sich gefreut.*
    also has MaRIA self happy
    Also MaRIA was happy.

Some examples like in (10) from Musan (2008: 30) are discussed as evidence for an adverbial analysis of some particles. I revisit this debate when discussing the theoretical approaches to focus particles in chapter 7, section 7.1.1. Nevertheless, I follow the medial broad definition as suggested by Musan (2008) and the Duden Grammar (Razum & Eisenberg 2005) and categorize particles as a separate word class independent of adverbials, prepositions, and junctions. Modal particles are a subgroup of the particle class and as instantiations of modal meaning, they are further characterized in section 5.3.1.

Some researchers have introduced the term ‘discourse markers’ as a superordinate concept for non-inflecting words. Fraser (1999: 931) states that discourse markers have also been studied under different terms like “discourse connectives, discourse operators, pragmatic connectives, sentence connectives, and cue phrases.” Discourse particles are defined as a subclass of particles within the above definition and sometimes they are used synonymously to the term ‘discourse markers’. In addition, modal particles, for example, are sometimes included and sometimes excluded from this category, which shows the vague usage of these terms. This is the reason why I decided not to include these terms in the word class debate.

Different elements such as conjunctions, adverbs, prepositional phrases, and according to Fraser (1999: 943), idioms may function as discourse markers and are therefore excluded by the medial definition of particles discussed above. A further differentiation of the respective terms is required as it might be useful for discourse and narrative analysis. However, being irrelevant for the purposes of this study, this will be neglected in the course of this book.

Summarizing the results, I use the generic term ‘particles’ for a separate word class as defined above, and then distinguish between subcategories such as focus particles, negation particles, modal particles, discourse particles, interjections, and onomatopoeia. From a semantic and syntactic point of view, a clear description and separation of particles and modal particles is of utmost importance. The following section discusses two opposing approaches to the linguistic analysis of particles and further applies the discussion to modal particles.
5.2.2. Minimalistic and maximalistic analyses of particles

As seen above, particles are a very heterogeneous class. Most problematic is the fact that they have corresponding expressions across other word classes (heterosemy) and additionally exhibit various functional variants within one subclass (polysemy). One lexical item may function as a particle, sentential adverb or conjunction. Even within one and the same sentence, the German lexical item *doch* may be a modal particle (11a), a sentential adverb (11b), a conjunction (11c), or an answering particle (11d) (cf. Karagjosova 2004: 15).

(11) a. *Maria ist doch* verreist.
   Mary is modal-particle left
   ‘Mary has left.’

b. *Maria ist doch* verreist.
   Mary is sentential-adverb left
   ‘Mary has nevertheless left.’

c. Doch *Maria ist verreist.*
   conjunction Mary is left
   ‘But Mary has left.’

d. *Maria ist nicht verreist.* - *doch.*
   Mary is not left - answering-particle
   ‘Mary has not left. - She has!’

German *einfach* (simple) and *ruhig* (quiet) are further examples for words that can be modal particles and adverbs. *Aber* (but) and *denn* (because) may be modal particles and conjunctions, for instance. Also within the particle class, we find heterosemous lexemes. Some items such as *auch* (also), *nur* (only), and *schon* (already) may be modal particles in one sentence and focus particles in another (see (12) for an example with *nur* (only)).

(12) *Warum hat Emma nur angerufen?*
   why has Emma PRT called
   a. ‘Why on earth did Emma call?’ (modal particle interpretation)
   b. ‘Why did Emma just call? I told her to also visit Tim personally.’ (focus particle interpretation)

Furthermore, a particle may show various meaning nuances and functional differences within one single subcategory such as the modal particle class. Pursuant to Helbig (1988: 165-166), there are four different variants of the
modal particle *ja* (yes), two unstressed variants and two stressed variants. They are categorized according to the distributional properties concerning sentence types and the meaning nuances that the particles may convey. The examples in (13) show two of the unstressed items as used in declaratives and exclamatives. Stressed *ja*, by contrast, occurs in imperatives or polar questions.

(13)  

   Monika is PRT again from England back
   ‘Monika is back again from England, as you know.’

b. *Du hast ja keinen Bart mehr!*
   you have PRT no beard more
   ‘Oh, your beard is gone!’

Example (13a) represents *ja* in declaratives, which signals the content as evident, relates to common knowledge, or reminds the addressee of formerly known content. In exclamatives as in (13b), the modal particle expresses surprise and astonishment about an unexpected event. To subsume the different functions under one single meaning description, Helbig (1988: 172) defines the meaning of the lexical item *ja* as a commitment of the speaker to an assertive attitude, judging the content of a proposition or an event to be correct. This, however, is a vague paraphrase that cannot always account for all variants that can be found.

This vagueness in describing the meaning and the problem of polysemy or heterosemy is the reason why there are two contrasting approaches for describing individual particles: the minimalistic and the maximalistic account. The minimalistic strategy gives one lexical entry for all meanings of a particle, which sums up the general meaning of the particle and tries to find a common base. The account thus tries to find a core meaning for each particle. On the other hand, the maximalistic account simply assumes two or more lexical entries for different kinds of particles, defines them as homonyms, and further subdivides the entries of a subgroup according to their different functions and meaning nuances in different contexts.

Authenrieth (2002) - similarly to Doherty (1985) - assumes an underlying semantic basis for the homonyms and supports a minimalistic approach. Although Helbig (1988) lists different variants of the particles, he similarly tries to find a generic meaning for each lexical item. Even though the definitions are often unspecific and difficult to grasp, this approach is much more effec-
tive than just giving an extensive list of all particle items that show different functions and uses.

In addition, the diachronic perspective of how individual particles developed from their homonyms does not logically allow a maximalistic point of view. Some modal particles developed from other words quite early and are already found in Old High German, but others such as halt constitute a more recent phenomenon emerging sometime between the 13th and 18th century (see Hentschel 1986). Their historical developments clearly relate them to their origins. A purely minimalistic account traces back the etymological source and tries to find a core semantic base underlying the different variants.

Concerning specific subgroups of particles such as modal particles (see section 5.3 below), it is even difficult to find core meanings for a single modal particle as it may convey various meaning nuances in different contexts or sentence types. It might also be the case that prosodic marking and contextual information are the reasons for different interpretations and seemingly variants. This multi-functionality, however, can be similarly accounted for by either minimalistic or maximalistic descriptions. Since the seminal works of Krivonosov (1963, 1977) and Weydt (1969, 1977), modal particles were given much attention in linguistic research. Over time, they overcame their negative reputation as unnecessary and stylistically negative items of speech. Due to increasing linguistic research, the relevance of modal particles for discourse and interaction has been emphasized and the discussions have led to fruitful debates about whether modal particles constitute an individual subclass or not. I briefly review the different positions within this debate.

Abraham (1991a) is close to the minimalistic position, but he also emphasizes a few weak points. The general meaning of a modal particle may often be vague and context-dependent and one and the same modal particle may have contrasting and differing meanings as seen in (13) above. This is the reason why the maximalistic viewpoint merely assumes different lexical entries for the heterosems, calling them homonyms (cf. Hopper 1988, for instance). However, “modal particles may be seen as true samples of an ongoing process of grammaticalization” (Abraham 1991a: 250). This diachronic perspective is a clear argument against the maximalistic account. Thus, Abraham assumes that the differences between the various functions of a modal particle are triggered by the context, and he argues for a strong minimalist position. Abraham (1991a: 208) sums up ‘Ockam’s razor principle’ in saying that lexicmatic listing is unnecessary “unless it can be shown that no derivational reconstruction can be invoked.”
Jacobs (1991: 154) carefully attenuates these assumptions by saying: “Although I am very sympathetic to this strongest variant of the minimalistic approach, I think it is bound to fail.” He offers a compromise by pointing out the relation between two functions of a particle and that they have a ‘common denominator’ (cf. Jacobs 1991: 155), which means that they have something like the same basis and are related diachronically but still provide different functions that have to be accounted for separately.

Favoring the minimalistic position, this book treats the problem in a similar way. I assume a core meaning for each modal particle, but define separately the individual contributions of a particle with respect to different sentence types, contexts, and communicative functions. This investigation is restricted to 30 specific situations and contexts. As this study does not deal with a particular set of modal particles, the definition and description of particular modal particle items of spoken language will only play a secondary role. I define the modal meaning contribution that is triggered by modal particles in the contexts I created to elicit modal meaning. The target sentences of the data elicitation are based on modal particles such as ja, wohl, doch, denn, nochmal, nur, etc., but I also include further strategies in the analysis that may convey the same meaning such as intonational patterns (see chapter 6 for further details on the elicitation method and the task).

5.3. Modal particles under investigation

Modal particles are a language-specific phenomenon not found in many spoken languages of the world. However, all languages have means to express the modal meaning triggered by modal particles in languages such as German, Dutch, Frisian, and Italian. This is why these lexical items are such an interesting linguistic issue with respect to typology. The question whether sign languages exhibit lexical items like modal particles or how visual languages such as DGS, NGT, and ISL realize these specific meaning nuances is a fascinating issue of investigation that allows a typological subcategorization of sign languages.

In the final section 5.3.1 of this chapter dedicated to modal particles, a systematic overview of the properties of modal particles is given. I explain the meaning contribution of modal particles to an utterance and the different communicative functions they may have. Finally, sections 5.3.2 and 5.3.3 present a cross-linguistic spoken language overview of particular modal particles or
equivalent expressions in more detail. I exemplify the functions of modal particles by showing contexts from my data set and analyzing the meaning contribution in these cases. From a list of German and Dutch modal particles, a few examples are selected that are relevant for this study. Furthermore, I briefly mention English strategies to express the modal particle induced meaning in certain contexts and explain the differences between these means and modal particles.

5.3.1. Properties of modal particles

In this section, I recount the properties of modal particles in spoken languages and discuss their functions in language use. A sentence is composed of different levels of meaning and modal particles contribute to a non-propositional extra level of meaning. Up to now, modal particles have mostly been a colloquial phenomenon, but they also appear in certain genres of literature, in letters, and informal written correspondence. It is possible that some modal particles may find their way into formal written German in time.

Bußmann (1990: 491-492) lists various names for this particle class, which is primarily defined according to the semantic-pragmatic functions. Modal particles are called Abtönungspartikeln (softening particles), Satzpartikeln (sentence particles), Illokutive Partikeln (illocutionary particles), and Einstellungspartikeln (attitudinal particles). They either modify a proposition or express an attitude towards the proposition. Thus, modal particles modify the illocutionary force of a sentence and specify its conversational function, thereby adding a certain usage constraint to the sentence meaning. The lack of clear definitions is due to the strong linguistic and situational context dependency of modal particles.

As mentioned above, heterosemy is an essential aspect in particle research. Modal particles have corresponding lexical items in other non-inflecting word classes such as adverbs (doch (nevertheless), vielleicht (maybe)) and conjunctions (denn (because/than), auch (also)), but also among other particle classes such as discourse particles or answering particles (ja (yes), schon (already)) and focus particles (nur (only) and auch (also)), for instance. Karagjosova (2004: 16-17) distinguishes between the lexical elements of a language that have a relatively clear semantic function in discourse (adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, and focus particles) and the more pragmatic aspects and functions of elements of speech such as modal parti-
Modal particles under investigation

Modal particles have inherent properties that distinguish them from other word and particle classes. Some of the properties, however, are still debated. In certain borderline cases, the distinction between modal particles and other word classes such as adverbials, for instances, is not always clear-cut. I nevertheless assume with Meibauer (1994), Ornelius-Sandblom (1997), and Authenrieth (2002) that modal particles constitute a distinct particle class. These discussions are briefly outlined in the following, but I focus on standard assumptions and analyses. The meaning contributions investigated in this study are triggered by modal particles that represent the classical cases.

Table 6. Properties of modal particles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lexical-morphological</td>
<td>are non-inflecting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical-morphological</td>
<td>cannot be asked for or appear in isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical-morphological</td>
<td>usually cannot be stressed or intensified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical-morphological</td>
<td>are insensitive to information structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical-morphological</td>
<td>can not be involved in word formation processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic</td>
<td>operate on sentence level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic</td>
<td>are optional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic</td>
<td>cannot be expanded and do not project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic</td>
<td>cannot be negated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic</td>
<td>have scope over and precede modal adverbials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic</td>
<td>can be combined and occur adjacent in a restricted distributional way (even more than two items)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic</td>
<td>cannot be coordinated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic</td>
<td>cannot appear in the pre-field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic</td>
<td>appear in the middle field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic</td>
<td>are subject to selectional restrictions with regard to sentence types</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantic-pragmatic</td>
<td>are non-truth conditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantic-pragmatic</td>
<td>modify the illocutionary force of the sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantic-pragmatic</td>
<td>express the speaker’s attitude towards the proposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantic-pragmatic</td>
<td>are mainly oriented to the addressee in dialogs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reviewing the lexical, syntactic, and semantic-pragmatic properties sketched in table 6 is essential to distinguish modal particles from other particle classes. It is, however, not always obvious how to categorize the properties according to lexical, syntactic or semantic aspects. Depending on the approach, some properties may be either semantically or syntactically driven.  

Like all particles, modal particles are non-inflecting. To systematically separate them from other particles, further properties have to be considered. Modal particles cannot serve as an answer or appear in isolation and are thus distinguished from answering particles such as *doch* or *ja*. In addition, modal particles are traditionally said to be incapable of bearing stress. However, Helbig (1988) also lists stressed modal particles in his descriptive work. Doherty (1987) analyzes stressed modal particles as having contrastive accent and Thurmair (1989) distinguishes between contrastive and emphatic accent. Stress on *denn*, *wohl*, and *doch* is analyzed as contrastive accent. In sentences with stressed *JA* or *BLOSS*, it is argued that the increased pitch level is an emphatic stress (see (14)).

(14)  
\[
\text{'Mach ja deine Hausaufgaben!'}
\]
\[
\text{make PRT your homework}
\]
\[
\text{‘Do your homework now, in any case!’}
\]

Due to these terminological and categorical differences, some items such as stressed *DOCH*, for instance, have been either analyzed as modal particles or as adverbs. See Meibauer (1994: 88-90) for an extensive discussion on this controversy of stressed or unstressed modal particles. He explains the stress on modal particles such as *eigentlich*, *ja*, *doch*, *schon*, *denn*, and *eh* as modal contrast. Modal contrast is a form of contrastive stress related to modal particles.

Modal particles are insensitive to information structure and cannot refer to a specific constituent as focus particles do. The specific properties of focus particles such as *only*, *also*, and *even* are discussed in chapter 7. Focus particles systematically relate to the focus of a sentence whereas modal particles modify the entire sentence. For this phenomenon, Hentschel (1986: 25) introduces the term ‘meta-communicative deixis’ as modal particles externally refer to the text or the spoken utterance on a meta level.

Syntactically, modal particles operate on the level of the clause, but not beyond the sentence domain. Therefore, they are also different from discourse particles that structure the discourse beyond the sentence unit. Modal par-
Modal particles under investigation

Modal particles under investigation

Modal particles under investigation

Modal particles take a propositional argument and have sentential scope, even though Potts (2005: 42) calls them ‘scopeless’, as they do not interact with other sentential operators. Furthermore, it is usually said that modal particles cannot project, as they cannot be expanded (see (15)).

(15) *Emma hat sehr halt das Fenster bemalt.
    Emma has very PRT the window painted
    *‘Emma has very PRT painted the window.’

Thus, an interesting aspect with regard to the syntactic status of modal particles within the X-bar theory is the fact that modal particles seem to be neither heads (\(X^o\)) nor phrases (XP). They are quite similar to other functional elements, but can be separated from their complement. Usually, functional elements are projecting heads. Modal particles, on the other hand, do not project (Meibauer 1994: 53-54). They are somehow maximal, but not classical XPs. They cannot be extended and, furthermore, they cannot be topicalized; these should be seen as arguments in favor of a head analysis and against an XP status of modal particles. Unlike adverbs, which are XP categories, modal particles cannot be modified and cannot occur in the pre-field. Nevertheless, arguments against a head status come from syntactic analyses of verb movement (cf. Grosz 2005; Gutzmann 2008). In German, modal particles in head positions between CP and VP should block verb movement to \(C^o\), but actually do not interfere. This means that they cannot occupy a head position in the middle field.

Thus, modal particles are somehow neither true XPs, even though they are maximal, nor of a \(X^o\) category, even though they are lexical elements. Brandt et al. (1992: 73-75) analyze them as adjuncts attached to the VP in German. To derive the different positions of modal particles within the middle field, many approaches assume scrambling. Furthermore, assuming projections in the left periphery, Coniglio (2007a, 2011) provides a syntactic analysis of German modal particles and their distribution in main and embedded clauses. I will not discuss these approaches any further, but briefly come back to the issue in chapter 6, section 6.4.2.

Example (16) shows that modal particles cannot be negated. This means that they scope over negative elements and not the other way round. Again adverbs and focus particles, for instance, can be negated.

(16) *Das ist nicht halt typisch!
    that is not PRT typical
If modal particles co-occur with sentential adverbs like *vermutlich* (presumably), modal particles have scope over these modal adverbs and always precede them. Example (17) exemplifies this scope behavior (cf. Karagjosova 2004: 20).

(17) a. *Peter kommt ja vermutlich.*
   Peter comes PRT probably
   ‘Peter probably comes, as you know.’

b. *Peter kommt vermutlich ja.
   Peter comes probably PRT

In addition, other operators such as quantifiers, question-forming, condition-alization, and modals, never scope over modal particles (cf. Gutzmann 2008: 23 for examples).

An interesting phenomenon is the fact that modal particles can be combined, but not coordinated as, for instance, adverbs can be (cf. Lindner 1991: 168). See (18a) for a correct and (18b) for an ungrammatical sentence containing the modal particles *ja* and *halt*.

   Tim has PRT PRT no time
   ‘It’s the way it is. Tim doesn’t have time, as you know.’

   Tim has PRT and PRT no time

Modal particles often occur in clusters that can contain many more than two items. See (19) for an example in German, which is a border case but judged to be grammatical.

(19) *Emma hat ja halt wohl doch mal eben das Fenster bemalt.
   Emma has PRT PRT PRT PRT PRT the window painted
   ‘Emma has painted the window, hasn’t she?’

Thurmair (1989) has extensively studied the combinatory properties of different modal particles in German and defines rules on how modal particles may combine. Authenrieth (2002: 29) assumes a maximum number of four combinable modal particles in discourse.

With a few exceptions, modal particles occur in the middle field only. As mentioned in the list of properties above, they cannot appear in the pre-field of a sentence. In X-bar terms, modal particles appear between $C^\circ$ and
VP. This makes them distinctively different from other non-inflecting word classes such as adverbs and conjunctions. Even focus particles may appear in the pre-field, for instance. Thus, the positional restrictions are one of the main reasons for assuming that modal particles are a distinctive part of speech.

Meibauer (1994: 31) provides an example of a rhetorical question where a modal particle connecting with a wh-element appears in the pre-field of a sentence (see (20)).

(20)  
\textit{Wer denn von uns allen will \(\text{das}\)?}  
\textit{who PRT of us all wants that}  
\textit{‘Who if anyone of us wants this?’}  

If \textit{denn} is analyzed as a clitic, the distributional constraint would still hold for modal particles in general (see Brandt et al. 1992). However, modal particles do not seem to exhibit typical properties of clitics, as they do not phonologically fuse with a host and inherently show a complex syntactic distribution. Meibauer (1994: 56-58) shows that they are neither clitics nor affixes. Adverbs such as \textit{sonst} may equally attach to the wh-word without being analyzed as clitics. Thus, the exceptional cases are rather due to some properties of the wh-word and do not generally constitute counter examples to the rule that modal particles cannot appear in the pre-field. At this point, I will leave this discussion an open issue for further research.

Modal particles are subject to selectional restrictions with regard to sentence types. Gutzmann (2008: 24-25) refers to these restrictions as intersentential restrictions as opposed to intrasentential positional restrictions. Unstressed \textit{ja}, for instance, exclusively occurs in declaratives and exclamatives, and not in interrogatives or imperatives. If the modal particle \textit{ja} appears in imperatives, it is usually the stressed variant. Under the condition that \textit{JA} combines with \textit{auch} (auch \textit{JA}), the stressed variant can also appear in interrogatives. \textit{Denn} only occurs in interrogatives and \textit{wohl} is restricted to interrogatives and declaratives. Unstressed \textit{doch} can be found in declaratives, assertive questions, interrogatives, imperatives, wh-exclamatives, and optatives (cf. Meibauer 1994: 108).

In a nutshell, modal particles share the property of non-inflectability with adverbs, conjunctions, interjections, and prepositions. They have many characteristics in common with adverbs and they are very similar to interjections as they can occur quite flexibly in different positions within a sentence. It has become obvious, however, that modal particles have additional inherent
properties, which make it impossible to assign modal particles to one of the aforementioned or any other word category. Even though they were sometimes referred to as modal adverbials or subsumed under the word class of interjections, I favor the separate word class approach for modal particles which clearly differentiates them from other particle subgroups (cf. Meibauer (1994) and examples above).

With respect to the semantic-pragmatic characteristics and functions of modal particles, it is noteworthy that they are non-truthconditional. This distinguishes modal particles from adverbs and other particle classes such as focus particles, which may contribute to the truth conditions of a sentence. This characteristic property has usually lead to the assumption that modal particles are a pragmatic phenomenon. Modal particles are generally used to reflect the attitude of the speaker and used to contribute to the illocutionary force of a sentence.

Note, however, that there is a debate on the way modal particles contribute to the meaning of a sentence. Gutzmann (2008) argues along the lines of Kaplan (2004) that modal particles interact with the sentence mood of an utterance and provides a semantic account for modal particles. Kwon (2005) discusses the interaction of sentence mood and German modal particles in a minimalistic syntactic approach based on corpora data. The term ‘sentence mood’ is taken to be on a par with sentential force as defined in Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet (2000). To briefly elaborate on the different categories for the analysis of utterances, table 7 distinguishes terminologically between clause type, sentential force, and illocutionary force.

Table 7. Clause type, sentential force, and illocutionary force

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clause type</th>
<th>Sentential force</th>
<th>Illocutionary force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammatical level</td>
<td>syntax</td>
<td>syntax-semantics-pragmatics interface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>declarative assertion</td>
<td>depending on communicative aim (stating, asking, threatening)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cognizant of the above mentioned debate, I take a more classical pragmatic perspective and analyze modal particles as modifiers of the illocutionary force and indicators of the speaker’s attitude towards a proposition. Thus, I assume they are illocutionary force indicating devices like intonation, punctuation, interrogative pronouns and adverbs, modal verbs, special affixes and constructions, performative expressions, etc. (cf. Bußmann 1990: 324).

Modal particles may interact with sentence types such as imperatives, interrogatives, and declaratives and modify the impact of a sentence type. Thus, they change the illocutionary force of an utterance. Whether modal particles directly interact with the sentence type or the sentential force of an utterance is an interesting question, which I leave to future exploration. In the target sentences of the studies in this book, sentence type and sentential force have the same attributes as I do not consider specific cases where the two categories diverge.

For now, I investigate modal particles as instantiations of modal meaning and as means that may change the illocutionary force of a sentence. The function of modal particles is thus to denote the speaker’s attitude towards the proposition and to influence the addressee in a certain manner that differs depending on the discourse context and the sentence type. Modal particles are mainly addressee oriented elements of modality and are frequently used in daily dialogs. This context dependency is an important point of issue for modal particle research. The exact semantic contribution is defined by the combination of a core meaning and the different usage constraints based on the communicative aim in the situational context.

As modal particles are non-truth conditional, they contribute on a separate level of meaning. For the purpose of this chapter, I call this extra level of meaning that is separate from the propositional level ‘modal meaning’. More specific distinctions will be given in the analysis in chapter 6. As mentioned above, Potts (2007a) defines expressive meaning, which can be assumed to be on the same level as modal meaning.

I illustrate the way that modal particles contribute to the meaning of an utterance with two of the contexts from my data set and analyze the respective meaning contributions in these cases. The regular sentence of the first context is given in (21a). The information in (21b) provides a background and sets up a context in which the utterances or dialogs are embedded. (21c) shows the discourse in which the target sentence was supposed to be inserted ([...]). Section 6.2.3 in chapter 6 explains the experimental design in detail.
    Tim has his car sold
    ‘Tim has sold his car.’
  
b.  *Info: Tim fährt eigentlich immer mit dem Auto.*
    Info: Tim drive usually always with the car
    ‘Info: Usually, Tim always takes his car.’
  
c.  *Lena: Oh. Das ist aber komisch, Tim kommt zu Fuß. [...]*
    Lena: Oh. That is but strange, Tim come by foot [...] 
    ‘Lena: Oh. That’s strange, Tim is walking. [...]’
  
d.  *[..] = ‘Tim hat wohl sein Auto verkauft.’*
    Tim has PRT his car sold
    ‘Tim has proably sold his car.’

In (21) the target sentence that should be inserted as indicated by [..], usually contains the modal particle *wohl*. In contrast to the regular sentence without the particle, the sentence ‘*Tim hat wohl sein Auto verkauft*’ is not a clear statement. The particle turns an assertion into an assumption and expresses the attitude of a speaker towards the sentence. The speaker is not committed to the truth of the proposition (cf. Helbig 1988: 238). In general, *wohl* is said to be an indicator of emphatic affirmation on the one hand (usually stressed WOHL) and of assumption or supposition on the other hand (unstressed *wohl*).

(22)  a.  *Wir kommen immer zu diesem Spielplatz.*
    we come always to this playground
    ‘We always come to this playground.’
  
b.  *Emma: Mama, ich will hier nicht länger spielen!*  
    Emma: Mum, I want here not longer play
    ‘Emma: Mum, I don’t want to play here any longer!’
  
c.  *Mutter: Was ist los mit dir? [...]*
    mother: what is up with you [...] 
    ‘Mother: What’s up with you? [...]’
  
d.  *[..] = ‘Wir kommen doch immer zu diesem Spielplatz.*
    we come PRT always to this playground
    ‘We always come to this playground, I don’t understand.’

Example (22) most effectively triggers the modal particle *doch*, which indicates that the mother does not understand the intention of Emma, as their common knowledge is based on the fact that they usually come to the same playground and usually Emma likes it. As the child’s reaction contradicts
common experiences, the mother reminds the child of this inconsistency. Thus, in general, the particle wohl verifies contradictions or inconsistencies (cf. König 1997: 69). The speaker contradicts another interlocutor and confirms the content of dispute (cf. Helbig 1988: 119).

In spoken languages, the meaning differences triggered by the contexts may be expressed by a combination of means such as modal particles, intonation, and gestural means. Nevertheless, the modal particles are quite prominent and frequently triggered in these contexts (see section 6.3.4 in chapter 6 for the results of a control group experiment with German native speakers).

5.3.2. Modal particles in German and Dutch

For German, different researchers have different suggestions for which lexical item may be called a modal particle. Thurmair (1989: 49) lists German modal particles without aiming at an exhaustive list. This list comprises the canonical modal particles ja, schon, nur, wohl, doch, halt, and also bloß, aber, auch, denn, eben, etwa, mal, ruhig, and probably more. Borderline cases are vielleicht, eigentlich, überhaupt, genau, nämlich, and mir (the ‘dativus ethicus’) (see Wegener 1989; Gutzmann 2007).

Hartmann (1998: 660) similarly suggests the following list: aber, auch, bloß, denn, doch, eigentlich, eben, etwa, einfach, erst, halt, ja, nun, mal, nur, schon, vielleicht, ruhig, wohl. The bold marked modal particles are not mentioned by Thurmair (1989). Ikoma (2007: 107-108) additionally lists allerdings, eh, einmal, gar, glatt, gleich, immerhin, jedenfalls, man, ohnehin, schließlich, sowieso, überdies, and übrigens. I do not discuss these items further, but concentrate on the modal particles that were relevant to my experiments (see section 6.2 in the next chapter).

Like German, Dutch exhibits different modal particles such as maar, toch, een keer, wel, gerust, rustig, eventjes, etc. The most intensely investigated particles in Dutch are wel and toch. The Dutch modal particles behave similarly to the German modal particles, exhibit the same general properties, and are subject to selectional constraints. Nevertheless, there are some differences. Foolen (1995) investigates toch and compares it to German doch on the basis of translation corpora. In declaratives, toch is frequently translated by German doch. In wh-interrogatives, however, doch rarely replaces toch. Various means and particles such as German nur, dann, bloß, eigentlich, and even a zero marking were used instead.
From a semantic point of view and adopting a core meaning analysis, Dutch *toch* and German *doch* are quite similar. In their contextual uses, however, the two particles behave differently in certain sentence types. The examples of my Dutch data set quite systematically triggered specific particles in Dutch that were comparable to the respective German modal particles. Further investigations between German and Dutch modal particles, however, were not a primary issue and will be neglected throughout this book. The German and Dutch contexts created identical situations and clearly triggered comparable modal meanings.

5.3.3. Modal particles or equivalent expressions in English

English is a language without modal particles. Equivalent lexical expressions to German or Dutch modal particles cannot be found. Even though English as well as German and Dutch belong to the family of the West-Germanic languages, English behaves more like Romance languages in this respect (cf. Waltereit 2001: 1392). In part, this is due to the lack of a structural middle field in these languages, as this is an idiosyncratic property of German, Dutch, and Frisian (cf. Abraham 1991a: 205). Bublitz (1978) and Waltereit (2001) mention, however, that all languages can convey the same meanings. Everything that a speaker of one language may say, can equally be expressed by a speaker of another language (cf. Bublitz 1978: 209 and also the ‘principle of expressibility’ in Searle 1969: 19-22). Thus, the meaning expressed by modal particles in German and Dutch should have equivalent expressions of some kind in English. Some authors doubt this and say that equivalence across languages cannot exist (cf. Scuffil 1982: 77). Especially with regard to modality, cross-language comparison has proven a difficult task, as languages differ in the way they map semantic content onto linguistic form (cf. Bybee & Fleischman 1995). Nevertheless, I adopt the concept of translatability across languages and assume that an equivalent meaning may be conveyed through different linguistic means.

The German-English translations given in König et al. (1990) show that there are no one-to-one translations for the required German modal particles in English. English uses different lexical items, prosodic, and morphosyntactic means to attain the same meaning that modal particles convey in other languages. This is mostly achieved implicitly by minimal accommodation of the sentence or the speech situation to express the different modal
meaning nuances. Various means are used to modify the meaning such as intonation, tag questions, change of sentence type, implicit questions, adverbs, collocations, and paraphrases or combinations of two or more of these devices. A translation of one modal particle often has more than one realization in English depending on the context. In many cases, complex combinations of different means are used to gain a modal meaning parallel to the German sentence with a modal particle.

I explain a few of the different means such as intonation, tag questions, and adverbs, and show the translation for the above mentioned context in example (22). Speaker’s attitude in spoken German can be expressed through either intonational means, gestures, modal particles or other illocutionary devices. Esser (1984) claims that modal particles are optional means and can be replaced by German intonation. Altmann (1993) points out that, within the debate of sentence types, intonation is often underestimated. Nevertheless, intonation alone is not sufficient and specific enough to express certain modal particle interpretations in German (cf. Bublitz 1978: 207). English intonation, however, is frequently used to express speaker’s attitude in translated utterances (cf. Tench 1988: 382-385). On the prosodic level, intonation in English is quite strong and a crucial method of expressing modal meaning. In many English cases, intonation functions as an equivalent means for modal particles (Bublitz 1978: 191).

Intonation is often used in combination with other modal expressions. Interjections, adverbs, and tag questions usually trigger particular intonation patterns that are expressed with the sentence. Furthermore, English often uses collocations to create the modal interpretation of a sentence. Examples of such paraphrases are to be sure, I suppose, don’t dare, and where on earth.

Tag questions fulfill many different functions and can also be used to evoke modal meaning. The tag alleviates the illocutionary force of a question or utterance and indicates the speaker’s attitude towards the proposition (cf. Holmes 1982: 46). For the expression of modal particle meaning, both invariant tags such as eh? or huh?/hunh? (see Norrik 1995) and canonical tags such as has she? or haven’t you? can be used (Holmes 1982: 41). Tags can be affirmative or negative. In example (23), the tag aren’t we? in combination with intonational patterns translates the meaning contribution of the German modal particle doch (cf. Herrmann 2004: 34).

(23)    Wir wollen doch heute Abend    ins Theater gehen!
        we want    PRT today evening in    theater    go
        ‘We’re to go to the theater tonight, aren’t we?’
The particle *doch* and the tag question both link the sentence to previous discourse. The speaker reminds the addressee of a certain appointment and expresses a lack of understanding towards something that was said or has happened before. Thus, through the use of tag questions, “the speaker modalizes the utterance by introducing implicit information denoting her or his attitude about the communicative exchange” (cf. Cuenca 1997: 10). Similarly to modal particles in German, tags relate to the knowledge and the attitude of both the speaker and the addressee.

In many cases, modal particles are translated by English sentential adverbs such as *really* and *probably*. Operating on a sentential domain, they may similarly express attitudes or degrees of probability. *Probably* may be used to translate modal particles such as *schon* and *wohl*.

There are no systematic rules for how to translate an individual modal particle into English, as the translations are very context dependent. It is thus possible that different modal particles are translated in the exact same manner, and yet by contrast, one individual particle may have various translations in English.

As there are no modal particles in English, the contexts and situations in the experimental tasks were meant to elicit the instantiations of modal meaning that equate with modal particles in German and Dutch. These could be means mentioned above such as intonation, tag questions, adverbs, and collocations.

(24) a. Sentence: Tim has sold his car.
   Info: Tim usually drives around in his car.
   Emma: Look, how strange, Tim arrives by foot. [...]
   Engl.: ‘Tim has probably/Maybe Tim has sold his car.’
   Ger.: ‘Tim hat wohl sein Auto verkauft.’

In the case of the above context (example (24)), this means that the combination of the sentence adverbs *probably* or *maybe* and intonational means would replace the modal particle and similarly expresses the meaning that is conveyed by the modal particle *wohl* in German.

For the ISL data, however, the English realizations were not directly relevant. The task described in chapter 6 ‘Modality and Modal Particles in Sign Languages’ independently elicited modal meaning without the spoken/written language specifications of a modal sentence in English. For comparative reasons, the English expressions were considered when analyzing
the results for sign languages. The important question, however, was to find out how modal meaning is realized in sign languages. The results are shown in chapter 6.

5.4. Conclusion

Setting the stage for an investigation of modal meaning in sign languages, this chapter has discussed modality, modal meaning, and modal particles by summarizing spoken language research on these issues. As a semantic-pragmatic notion, ‘modality’ was defined as the linguistic phenomenon of expressing thoughts about situations that need not be real. The various means such as modal words, modal phrases, and modal constructions can broadly be divided into epistemic and deontic expressions. A specific subcategory of modality defined as ‘modal meaning’ in this book equates the meaning that is usually conveyed by modal particles in some languages such as German, Dutch, and Italian. Modal particles have inherent characteristics that allow us to distinguish them from other particles. Reviewing the debate about a minimalistic and a maximalistic approach, this book takes side with a moderate minimalistic account and divides the particle class into subgroups such as focus, particles, modal particles, negation particles, and discourse particles.

Modal particles operate on the level of the clause and modify the illocutionary force of the sentence in a non-truth conditional way. More specifically, they express the speaker’s attitude towards the proposition. The particular meaning contribution triggered by modal particles in German and Dutch is investigated in this study. In English, modal particles do not exist and usually find their equivalents in means such as intonation, sentential adverbs, tag questions, and collocations. I developed and presented a specific context creation task that triggers modal particles in spoken languages and elicits modally modified target sentences without direct written translations. Thus, the task elicits aspects of modal meaning in general, and the results from spoken languages and signed languages can be compared with each other in a modality-independent fashion. The results of the task showing how this extra level of meaning is expressed in sign languages are presented and explained in chapter 6 that investigates modal particles in DGS, NGT, and ISL.