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SHARED KNOWLEDGE AND EPISTEMIC REDUCTIONISM: COVERT SEMANTICS OF THE GERMAN MODAL PARTICLES

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Abstract: The contribution advocates the use of the category of covertness in the semantic description of grammatical items. After a short presentation of the two different kinds of covertness we distinguish (resp. epistemological and structural covertness), it is shown that resorting to this notion makes it possible to propose a monosemic account of apparently polysemic *signifiants*. The two examples discussed here are the German modal particles *ja* (“yes”) and *wohl* (“well”), both of which are related to commitment and Theory of Mind. While *ja* is often said to be either a marker of consensus between speech act participants or an exclamative marker, we demonstrate the existence of a unique meaning, which can become covert depending on the illocutionary type of the sentence. Then, we prove that *wohl* is a strong commitment marker involved in covert evidential patterns. Thus, we can reduce the so-called “weak commitment” value of *wohl* to an external interpretative bias.

1. Basic features of German Modal Particles

German modal particles (hence GMPs) form a class of modal items which have now been extensively studied under various perspectives. The aim of this paper is to show that the semantics of GMPs has much to do with the problem of covertness in language. The study will make the case for internalism and reductionism as a means for identifying external impediments responsible for core features being covert. Consequently, we will underline the relevance of silent categories which seem to have caught little attention in the study of these modal particles up to now, such as the

interplay between commitment and evidentiality. Thus, we hope to explore the complex realm of modal features and their combinations throughout all types of *signifiants*. After the general presentation of the status and functions of GMPs as well as of our understanding of the notion of covertness (this part), the analysis will focus on two items: The first step will be devoted to *ja* (“yes”) and will present the positional regularities of the particle in the topology of the German sentence, which make the case for an interpretation of *ja* as a modal marker. In a second phase of the analysis of *ja*, we will argue that the alleged two meanings of the particle can be reduced to one and the same. The following part will present the GMP *wohl* (“well”), for which two readings are proposed, as well. There, too, we will reduce those two readings to one and the same. We argue that in both cases, semantic features pertaining to modality combine with other factors such as the illocutionary type and yield a variety of interpretations which make the modal meaning of GMPs covert in the sense defined in this introductory part.

German modal particles have been studied along pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic lines since the end of the 1960s (most notably by Weydt 1969), after being long considered mere “filling words” (*Füllwörter*) deprived of strict and systematic conditions of usage. Indeed, they do not alter the truth conditions of the proposition they are embedded in. For example, sentences (1a) to (1d) have the same truth conditions as (1):

- (1) Ich mag ihn sehr,
1SG like him much

aber	er	ist	ein	bisschen	übergeschnappt.
aber	er	ist	Ø	ein	über-ge-schnapp-t.
but	3SG	is	NO.PRT	a bit	over-PTCP-snatch-PTCP

“I like him much, but he is a little crazy.”

- (1a) Ich mag ihn sehr, aber er ist *ja* ein bisschen übergeschnappt.
“yes”
~ “I like him much, but he is a little crazy, as you know.”
- (1b) Ich mag ihn sehr, aber er ist *wohl* ein bisschen übergeschnappt.
“well”
~ “I like him much, but he seems to be a little crazy.”
- (1c) Ich mag ihn sehr, aber er ist *schon* ein bisschen übergeschnappt.

“already”

~ “I like him much, but he is a little crazy, I must say.”

(1d) Ich mag ihn sehr, aber er ist *eben* ein bisschen übergeschnappt.

“plainly”

~ “I like him much, but he is a little crazy, altogether.”

GMPs form a class of morphemes whose extension and exact value are still discussed intensively, even though a scientific consensus has been reached on several basic features (see, for instance, Thurmair 1989, or the summary in Ormelius-Sandblom 1997). These are the characteristics about which there is a (quasi-)unified stance:

- (i) GMPs are all phonologically identical with non-modal homonymes. Thus, for example, the GMP *ja* is identical with the *yes*-interjection *ja*, whereas *wohl* corresponds to the adverbial *wohl*, “well” and *eben* with the adjective *eben* “even” and with the temporal adverb *eben*, “just now, a short time ago”. Nevertheless, this homonymy has to be reduced to a segmental one, since GMPs tend to exhibit a prosodic feature of their own (see point ii).
- (ii) A feature making the case for grammaticalization hypotheses is the strong tendency of those GMPs to lose the lexical accent still presented by their non-modal cognates. Yet, this loss is not systematic and some particles present a merely weakened accent. This point will be discussed in section 2.
- (iii) GMPs cannot be syntactical heads, at least in traditional accounts. For a discussion on this point, see Struckmeier (to appear).
- (iv) GMPs cannot occupy the topical position preceding the finite verbal form in assertive matrix sentences.
- (v) GMPs are subject to strong usage restrictions in illocutionary dependent clauses (see Coniglio 2011).
- (vi) When GMPs scope over the whole proposition, which is the standard case, they occur before the structural position where the global negator *nicht* appears or would have appeared.
- (vii) More generally, GMPs occur at the juncture of *theme* and *rheme* (Abraham 1991)
- (viii) GMPs are not part of the propositional content, but, much rather, they mark illocutionary values supporting the felicity conditions of the appropriate speech act.
- (ix) Finally, the meaning of GMPs is heavily dependent on the state of knowledge of the addressee (on this point, see Abraham 2010, Egg

2010, Evans 2009, Gast 2008, König 1997).

The perspective we defend here relies on the following assumptions, shared by most of the recent literature on the topic and justifying the integration of GMPs to the domain of modality:

- (a) Each GMP has a precise meaning corresponding to one special distribution of propositional attitudes (knowledge, disbelief, surprise, inferability, wish, ...) among the speech act participants.
- (b) GMPs fulfill an epistemic modal function which is correlated with their syntactic position at the juncture of theme and rheme, a field where many other modal markers are to be found in German.

It is possible to isolate a number of GMPs forming a coherent and complete system pertaining at the distribution of knowledge between the speaker and the hearer in assertive as well as in interrogative sentences (*ja, wohl, doch, schon, denn, eigentlich, eben, halt*). Under the perspective defended here, these GMPs could be ordered according to just two criteria: First, the speaker's epistemic stance with respect to *p*, the propositional content of her utterance (whether *p* is true or not, and if so, whether it is absolutely true or only restrictedly so); and second, the speaker's evaluation of the hearer's supposed knowledge.¹ Given these two criteria, the relationship between GMPs and the concept of modality is relatively clear. The question of covertness, on its part, has more to do with the specific thesis that shall be defended in the present contribution. We have two reasons to consider GMPs relevant for the study of covert patterns of modality. The first has to do with the way those morphemes are commonly interpreted. The second is related to the problem of covert evidentiality within modal phenomena, i.e. the evidential values or interpretations triggered by apparently modal markers. Those two distinct problems are to be addressed respectively as EPISTEMOLOGICAL and as STRUCTURAL COVERTNESS. A similar distinction can be found in Abraham & Leiss (this volume) under the opposition of "undiscovered" and "silent" phenomena.

The most frequent problem of covertness regarding GMPs is related to

1 Another question regards the *evolution* of the speaker's evaluation of what is part of the Common Ground (CG) and what is not. This issue has been addressed among others by König (1997) or Gast (2008) in terms of relevance under the name of "context updating" or "CG updating". See Evans (2009) for a panorama of such "engagement and expectation" strategies, one of which has been represented more systematically by Abraham (2010) within the framework of Foreign Consciousness Alignment.

epistemological covertness. It must be noticed that the modal value of these morphemes has often been questioned or restricted, if not completely denied². This may be illustrated by the naïve descriptions delivered by many native speakers, who often consider those particles to be devoid of meaning, but also in much more accurate accounts by linguists who privilege external(ist) analyses leading to a multiplicity of values. The unstable terminology used in this domain epitomizes this tendency: GMPs are also called *Abtönungspartikeln* (roughly: “modulation particles”), *discourse particles*,³ *illocution particles* or (much more relevant in our perspective) *epistemic particles*. The main reason for such problems of classification is the ubiquity of some GMPs: They can appear in sentences of several illocutionary types where their meaning seem to differ considerably. This is mainly the case for *ja* and *wohl*. Especially *wohl* is subject to contradictory interpretations (strong commitment of the speaker v. distancing) depending on the syntactic and pragmatic context. This surface-bound polysemy has also been a problem for hypotheses about the grammaticalization of GMPs which postulate the persistence of a common core meaning (see Abraham 1991). The present contribution makes the case for a partly pragmatic or Gricean (Grice 1975), systematic account for the meaning of those particles. Thus, we want to restore the modal status of GMPs behind the superficial plurality of values.

The second aspect of covertness is a much more intrinsic one, since it has to do with the interplay of several semantic and functional categories within a unique *signifiant*. We assume this *signifiant* to exhibit only one of the several features at stake at the level of the *signifié*. In other words, silent categories are embedded in and intertwined with an overt one. As regards GMPs, structural covertness is exemplified by the presence of evidential features within modality, which questions the status of both categories and raises the question of their subsumption under one macro-category of epistemological marking (see Guentchéva & Landaburu 2007). As regards *ja* and *wohl*, we intend to show that their semantic opposition relies mainly on evidential constraints: It appears that *wohl* bears an additional inferential value which can be gained in a strict compositional way if we combine modality with other syntactic and semantic features.

² Accounts denying the modal value of GMPs can usually be quickly identified insofar as they tend to name them “Abtönungspartikeln”. The most prominent – and valuable – study based on such premises is the seminal monography of Weydt (1969).

³ This latter term is extremely problematic, since it is possible to distinguish another class of discourse markers which are not GMPs and therefore deserve the name of *discourse particles*. On this point, see Detges & Waltereit (2009).

Thus, *wohl* exhibits covert evidential inferential features, whereas *ja* is a canonical case of GMP marking intersubjective alignment. More generally, structural covertness can be interpreted as a symptom for the pervasiveness of the categories of modality and evidentiality. An evidential account is at the same time the condition for a unified description of all values, since inferential marking has dramatic consequences on the interpretation of *wohl* as a strong resp. weak commitment marker.

2. Modal reductionism: the case of *ja*

This section is devoted to the problem of epistemological covertness, i.e. to the semantic opacity of *ja* to the speaker, and above all to the multiplicity of values entailed by externalist accounts. The analysis advocates modal reductionism: *Ja* is to be described as a monosemic modal particle. In accordance with the literature, we consider that the modal value of GMPs is related to commitment as well as to Theory of Mind. Consequently, modality is tightly linked to the management of the common ground (CG, see König 1997, Gast 2008, Egg 2010 for similar accounts in the framework of relevance theory). On this basis, the demonstration of the advantages of modal reductionism will follow two steps. First, a short positional account will show how GMPs are fully integrated to the set of grammatical(ized) markers of modal meaning in German. Therefore, the modal value of *ja* has to be regarded as its core semantic and functional feature, and not as a secondary phenomenon. GMPs only exist as markers of informational status, i.e. as epistemic particles. In a second step, possible counterexamples will be discussed in order to show how apparently non-modal features are only external, usage-bound regularities and can be reduced to the postulated CG value.

2.1 Intersubjectivity and Epistemicity: On the role and place of Modal Particles

The first argument for modal reductionism is based on their well-known morphological status as *Doppelgänger* of non-modal morphemes. GMPs are provided with their modal and illocutionary features iff they receive precise syntactic and prosodic properties. As we shall see, this is not a coincidence: The syntactic and prosodic constraints are positively correlated to the conversion of the non-modal items to epistemic clitics. For prosodic reasons, such cliticized morphemes move to the positional field where modal markers are to be found in German. Following the syntactic and positional account by Abraham (1991), we assume that the

basic lexemes have been grammaticalized at the juncture of theme and rheme, a position described by Zemb (1984: 97ff., 1978: 403ff.) as the *pheme*, i.e. as the main place for modal evaluation. This field is centered on the global negation *nicht*, but it also contains sentence adverbs and evaluative markers, as illustrated in (2).⁴ In this theory, modality is not reduced to epistemicity, since some of the evaluative markers are clearly axiological (such as *leider*, “unfortunately”) and rather pertain to deonticity.

(2)	Das Wetter (“the weather”)	}	leider	unbeständig sein	
	heute (“today”)				dürfte
	in der Normandie (“in N.”)				(“unfortunately”) (“might be changeable”)
	TH		PH	RH (<i>basic order</i>)	

→ Heute dürfte das Wetter in der Normandie leider unbeständig sein. (Zemb 1978: 397)
 “Unfortunately, the weather in Normandy might be changeable today.”

A later position usually coincides with scope reduction: The GMP is placed immediately before the main focused element of the sentence, just as in example (3). Such positional rules are common to GMPs and to the negator *nicht*, suggesting a strong correlation between the use of GMPs and the evaluation of how valid the proposition is. Consequently, topological phenomena seem to support the hypothesis that GMPs primarily encode propositional attitudes. This scenario is confirmed by corpus data. The following examples have been collected in summer 2010 from radio interviews. To prevent possible dialectal variations from distorting the results, three geographically distinct broadcasters have been taken into account, respectively the national network DeutschlandRadio (*Deutschlandfunk-DeutschlandradioKultur*, glossed DLF-DRK), and two regional corporations, the Broadcasting Corporation of the South-West (*Südwestrundfunk*, glossed SWR) and the Bavarian Broadcasting

⁴ It is not our aim to discuss the highly difficult question of how to combine Zemb’s account of the theme/rheme distinction with Functional Sentence Perspective. In this paper, we use the concepts in the meaning of the Prague School. We just use Zemb’s concept of *pheme* as a useful hint at the presence of a third, modal field between theme and rheme.

Corporation (*Bayerischer Rundfunk*, BR). It turns out that in the overwhelming majority of assertive sentences, *ja* occurs at the end of the chain of enclitics after the finite verb. This position could be a sign of grammaticalization, the loss (or weakening) of the lexical accent turning the morphemes into clitic elements, which could then be integrated in the clitic chain, which may result from the Wackernagel movement.⁵ The position at the end of the clitic chain leads to a superficial ambiguity, since it most often coincides with the juncture of theme and rheme, especially in a strictly information-structural perspective:⁶ Pronouns being generally thematic, the first element coming after them is likely to be at the border of both fields. This is confirmed by one fact underlined in the literature: GMPs with global meaning appear immediately before the negation and other modal markers. Consequently, points (vi) and (vii) of the list of features exposed in the introduction appear to be tightly correlated. This could provide a first scenario for the grammaticalization of non-modal items into GMPs.

Table 2-1. Statistical survey of the positions of GMPs in verb-second assertive sentences.

Position of the GMP in verb-second sentences	DLF-DRK	SWR	BR	overall
Beginning of the pHEME	258	97	87	442
Other	11	0	0	11
- before focus particle	4	-	-	4
- others	7	-	-	7

We consider the 11 cases of later GMPs to be linked with a reduction of the scope to a strongly focalized element. In four cases, this is beyond any doubt because of the presence of a focus particle, e.g. in (3):

⁵ The Wackernagel movement is a hypothetical cross-linguistic generalization of the “Wackernagel Law” first identified in 1892 in Indo-European languages, mainly Greek. According to this law, clitics – above all pronominal elements – tend to concentrate behind the finite verbal form. This concentration is often described as a “movement” due to its origin in diachronic (Indo-European) linguistics as an explanation for the emergence of verb-front structures with accumulation of enclitics. Even though Germanic languages are among those where phenomena corresponding to this law can be observed, no “movement” can be attested in synchrony.

⁶ As opposed to the logical account proposed by Zemb (1978, 1984).

- (3) Die Hilfsorganisationen, sie legen sehr viel Wert auf Unabhängigkeit und sie führen ihre Erfolge *ja auch* auf diese Unabhängigkeit zurück (DLF 22.07.2010)

Sie führ-en	ihr-e	Erfolg-e	<i>ja</i>	<u><i>auch</i></u>
they lead-3PL	their-ACC.PL	success-PL	<i>ja</i>	<u><i>too</i></u>

auf dies-e	Un-abhängig-keit	zurück
to this-ACC.FEM	in-dependent-NMLZ	back(CVB)

“The relief organizations are very much attached (lit. “attach much value”) to their independence and they bring their successes in connection *ja* to this independence, as well.”

Another example illustrates that reduction of scope to the mere following adjunct or argument, namely a sentence where *ja* occurs twice, once with propositional scope and once with reduced scope:

- (4) Nun bietet sich *ja* eine Erklärung für die vielen Naturereignisse *ja* geradezu an, und nicht erst seit heute. (DRK 12.08.2010)

Nun biet-et=sich= <i>ja</i>	ein-e	Erklärung
now offer-3SG=REFL= <i>ja</i>	INDEF:ART-NOM.FEM.SG	explanation

für d-ie	viel-en	Natur-ereigniss-e
for the-ACC.PL	many-ACC.PL	nature-event-PL

<i>ja</i> =geradezu	an
<i>ja</i> =immediately	CVB

“Now, there is (lit. “proposes itself”) *ja* an explanation for the many natural phenomena *ja* immediately, and [this] not just since today.”

In six of the other seven cases, the GMP is placed immediately before a post-verbal subject, as in (5):

- (5) Das Hamburger Debakel in der Abstimmung über die Schulreform verantwortet *ja* eine grüne Kultusministerin! (DLF 20.07.2010)

D-as Hamburg-er Debakel in d-er Abstimmung über die
 he-ACC.N H.-ADJ disaster in th-DAT.FEM vote on the-ACC.

Schul-reform verantwort-et=ja
 school-reform be.responsible.for-3SG=JA

ein-e grün-e Kultus-minister-in!
 INDEF.ART-NOM.FEM green-NOM.FEM culture-minister-FEM

“It’s [notoriously] a Green culture minister who is responsible for the disaster with the vote on school reform in Hamburg!”

The last example, which even some native speakers would judge unacceptable, is a sentence where the particle occurs before the final, non-finite verb form, which itself introduces indirect speech. Since it is a passive sentence with an empty subject, one can assume that the verb form is the single element transmitting new information:

- (6) ?Es wurde nach den Anschlägen in New York *ja* festgestellt, dass man einen erweiterten Sicherheitsbegriff ansetzen muss. (DLF 22.07.2010)⁷

Es wurde-Ø nach d-en Anschlag-“e-n in NY
 it PASS:PAST-3G after the-DAT.PL attack-PL-DAT in NY

ja=fest-ge-stell-t, dass...
ja=CVB-PTCP-set-PTCP COMP...

“After the terrorist attacks in New York, it was *ja* remarked that one had to resort to a broadened security concept.”

The results from our small corpus support the thesis that *ja* is properly speaking at the juncture or theme and rheme, therefore at the heart of the *pheme*. When the scope of GMPs is global, they cliticize at the end of the verbal phrase: Their position corresponds to the default value of the theme/rheme boundary, exemplified by the global negation *nicht*. Cases of scope reduction are always linked to a reduction of the rheme. Correspondingly, cliticization no longer occurs at the default position but,

⁷ It might also be relevant to remind here that for Zemb (1984), tense adjuncts are thematic per default and are generally placed before the *pheme*.

iconically, at the beginning of the focal field. Thus, there appears to be a strong correlation between the position of GMPs inside the clause and the marking of informational structure, viz. the modal status of the new information conveyed in the proposition. Together with the cliticized form of GMPs, these regularities suggest that GMPs, in contrast to their non-modal cognates, are grammaticalized markers and that they encode propositional attitudes and CG updating. Thus, they seem to pertain to epistemic modality. Moreover, their place in the topology of the German sentence relates them to markers of propositional attitudes such as *leider* (“unfortunately”), evidential adverbs such as *offensichtlich* (“manifestly”) or other sentence adverbs such as *vielleicht* (“maybe”), which also appear at the juncture of theme and rheme and represent the different types of modality. Those features seem to converge and invite us to regard GMPs as proper modal markers.

2.2 A case for reductionism

Considering this topological and prosodic base, we can now ask whether all the usage values identified for a given GMP can be subsumed under one modal feature. Unlike what many accounts postulate, we assume that modal reductionism should be privileged. In this perspective, epistemological covertness becomes a major factor to account for apparent counterarguments. The standard felicity conditions for an utterance containing a proposition under the scope of *ja* are well-described: Both speech act participants have to agree about the propositional content, *p*. The nature of that consensus is still a matter of debate and it remains unclear if both speech act participants have to know *p* or if the speaker just expects the hearer not to contradict her. Adapting recent reflections on the so-called “distribution of propositional alternatives” (see Paillard 2009), according to which every proposition is located in a system of possible oppositions and alternatives, we opt for the following definition:

- (7) DEF *ja* (*p*): any alternative $\neg p$ to *p* has already been excluded from the paradigm of contextually possible propositions pre-existing between the speech act participants before the assertion of *p*.

In other words, *ja*-assertions implicate *p* to be without any possible alternative in the CG (or much rather: it implies no propositions $\neg p$ to be normally derivable from the CG). In contrast to this, standard illocutions are felicitous when the speaker is ruling out $\neg p$ from the CG by the very act of asserting *p*. An even more radical solution would be to dub *ja* (*p*) as

the marker for the absence of real CG-updating when p is asserted, since the possibility of $\neg p$ is supposed to have already been ruled out by both the speaker and the hearer. Thus, we are rather supportive of accounts focusing on the absence of contradiction, whereas interpretations where p is already known are not to be ruled out: They just represent a special case. Consequently, *ja* can be described as a marker of strong commitment involving both speech act participants. Corpus examples confirm that general intuition: The GMP *ja* is often used in sentences whose propositional content is a proverb or is presented as obvious or self-evident. There is also a strong compatibility with generic sentences.

- (8) Zeit ist *ja* bekanntlich relativ. (DRK 12.08.2010)
 Zeit ist *ja* bekannt-lich relativ
 time is *ja* known-ADV relative
 “Time is relative, as everybody knows.”
- (9) Recht haben und Recht bekommen sind *ja* immer zweierlei (DRK 29.07.2010)
 Recht hab-en und Recht bekomm-en sind *ja* immer zweier-lei
 right have-INF and right receive-INF are *ja* always two-ADV
 “To be right and to get one’s rights are notoriously not the same.”

The claim defended here is that it is possible to derive all contextual and external values which can be assigned to *ja* (p) from that one modal feature. We consider an external value (EV) to have been reduced to an internal one (IV) if it is possible to decompose EV into the combination of IV with a predictable pragmatic bias B. B does not alter the semantics of the item, but can explain how any linguistic sign bearing the semantic feature IV is likely to occur in contexts triggering the implicature of EV. For instance, we can trivially derive the privilege of sentences where p is already known by both speech act participants from definition (7), which is restricted to the absence of contradiction. The assertion of reciprocal strong commitment has very peculiar truth conditions: The speaker not only has to be sure of p , but also of the hearer’s attitude to p . If the speaker expects the hearer not to contradict her, she must have concrete evidence leading her to that assumption, and the status of p as a notorious part of the CG or as a self-evident truth would be an extremely reliable reason for such an assumption. Thus, sentences where p is already known by both speech act participants are most likely to be felicitous under the scope of *ja*. Nevertheless, this has nothing to do with modality nor with the core meaning of *ja*, but it is the contingent consequence of an external bias.

Most other values of *ja* can be inferred from the internal modal feature when it is combined with conversational hazards, especially with the maxim of quantity as Grice (1975) puts it. For instance, corpus studies signal a frequent use of *ja* (*p*) in contexts where *p* is clearly backgrounded and presented as the mere base for further developments, as in (10).

- (10) Es gibt *ja* auch den Vorschlag, Medikamente erst mal vorläufig zuzulassen. Wäre das eine Möglichkeit? (BR, Samstagsforum 12.06.2010)

Es ge<i>b-t=*ja* auch d-en Vorschlag,
it give<3SG.PRES>-3SG=*ja* too the-ACC.MASC proposal,

Medikament-e erst-mal vorläufig zu-zu-lassen.
medicament-PL first-time provisory into-INF-let.

“There is *ja* also the possibility to authorize medicaments temporarily at first. Would that be a possibility?”

It is thus a textual theme. Yet, we do not need to postulate the existence of a “backgrounding particle” or a “thematic particle” *ja*, even though that would be perfectly possible under a strict externalist perspective. We can propose reduction in three steps:

- (i) It is trivial that the felicity conditions of *ja*-utterances are exactly what should make those utterances irregular according to Grice’s principles.
- (ii) We can expect a consensual proposition to be rather on the background than on the foreground of the conversation, due to its lack of conversational relevance.
- (iii) If *ja* scopes over propositions being such matters of consensus, then there is no wonder to see that *ja* occurs very often in situations where *p* is backgrounded. Thus, it is superfluous to postulate a specific value, since the core feature exhausts the meaning and the pragmatics of the problematic examples. There is consequently no need to specify the value of *ja* beyond that of a marker of assumed shared commitment between speaker and hearer.

So far, there is no real problem of epistemological covertness, since the value of *ja* as a thematic particle has apparently never been advocated for in the literature. Yet, other cases where a reduction would also be possible

seem to present greater difficulties, most notably the so-called “exclamatory *ja*”. This last type is all too often presented as distinct from the “usual” modal value. This leads to the division of *ja* into two GMPs with different semantic features according to the illocutionary type of the utterance: An assertion type modifier, corresponding to what we have seen so far (ASSERT*ja*), is being opposed to an exclamation marker (EXCL*ja*). Even though this distinction might look relevant, we argue that it relies on an external, pragmatic bias. Here, too, a reduction similar the one proposed for (10) is perfectly possible. Meanwhile, it should not be overseen that the alternative between a mono- and a polysemic account is directly relevant for the issue of covert modality: If the distinction between ASSERT*ja* and EXCL*ja* is to be maintained, then *ja* is not primarily a modal marker, but strictly a marker of illocutive force. If a common function is postulated for both forms in this dual perspective, the illocutive force can hardly be defined with respect to the distribution of knowledge but, much more vaguely, in terms of vivification or expressivity. According to such accounts, the modal value of ASSERT*ja* would necessarily be a secondary phenomenon without clear explanation, so that both usages remain basically irreducible and divided along purely pragmatic lines. This would make a unified modal account impossible. Polysemic, illocutionary-based depictions of *ja* include above all the first works on this topic, especially by Harald Weydt (see for instance Hentschel/Weydt 1994: 283).⁸

- (11) Du bist *ja* ein guter Koch!
 du bist=*ja* ein-Ø gut-er Koch!
 you be:2SG:PRES=*ja* INDEF.ART-NOM good-NOM.MASC cook!
 “You’re *ja* a good cook!”

Under this perspective, what we gloss EXCL*ja* is supposed to be part of a distinct sub-system of exclamatory particles together with *vielleicht* and *aber*. For Weydt, *ja* is the exclamatory particle par excellence, whereas *aber* and *vielleicht* mark the quantitative resp. qualitative origin of the surprise. Thus, EXCL*ja* would be a marker of exclamatory illocution and could be compared with the prosodic pattern of exclamatory sentences in German, which play the same role of sentence type marker. There are indeed arguments for such a reading. The comparison between (10) and

⁸ Weydt (e.g. Hentschel/Weydt 1994:283) seems to be perfectly aware of the premises implied by such a qualification, if we consider the fact that he has preferred using the term *Abtönungspartikel* rather *modal particle* since his 1969 work.

(11) reveals one similar feature: In both sentences, *p* is a matter of consensus since no further contestation is expected. Yet, there is also a great difference: In (11), this no-contestation rule is linked to the sheer lack of interaction with the hearer. Apparently, no general agreement is necessary between the speech act participants: The fact that $\neg p$ is ruled out could just be related to the logical base of any assertion [“if *p*, then $\neg(\neg p)$ ”] rather than to definition (7). This is especially true if we regard exclamations as expressions of surprise, as is the case in Hentschel/Weydt 1994. Under this view, the distinction of both particles seems to be confirmed. Yet, following Olbertz (2009), we can distinguish mirativity from exclamation: Exclamation pertains to an expressive function of language whose main value is to comment highlight the speaker’s own propositional stance on the proposition – it is thus a highly pragmatic category (Olbertz calls exclamation a type of illocution). Mirativity, on its turn, is a semantic category. It deals with the proposition’s inferability in context. Mirative forms mark surprise and are not restricted to exclamative sentences: In some languages, “mirativity can be expressed in both declarative and interrogative utterances” (Olbertz 2009:71). Thus, the so-called “exclamatory *ja*”, if it is defined by a semantic feature of surprise, as assumed by Hentschel/Weydt, needs not be an exclamatory morpheme. It is much rather a “mirative particle”. Consequently, we have to distinguish between the value of the illocutive type and that of the particle, and thus to determine whether the difference between (10) and (11) can be reduced to that between assertion and exclamation. If this reduction to the sole opposition of illocutionary types provides a sufficient account for the difference between (10) and (11), then the alleged mirative feature of the particle would prove to be an illusion and the non-contestation feature shared by both (10) and (11) could become predominant for the analysis of *ja*. This would pave the way to a unified account. Such a reductionist assumption is encouraged by the comparison of (10) and (11) with (10b) and (11b), where the GMP is lacking. The difference in terms of “interaction-friendliness” is roughly the same with and without the GMP:

(10b) Es gibt auch den Vorschlag, Medikamente erst mal vorläufig zuzulassen. Wäre das eine Möglichkeit? (BR, Samstagsforum 12.06.2010)

Es ge<i>b-t	auch	d-en Vorschlag,
it give<3SG.PRES>-3SG	too	the-ACC.MASC proposal,

Medikament-e erst-mal vorläufig zu-zu-lassen.

medicament-PL first-time provisory into-INF-let.

“There is also the possibility to authorize medicaments temporarily at first. Would that be a possibility?”

- (11b) Du bist ein guter Koch!
 Du bist Ø ein-Ø gut-er Koch!
 you be:2SG:PRES a good-NOM.MASC cook!
 “You’re a good cook (indeed)!”

Assuming that the hearer’s viewpoint in (11) is backgrounded, and that this backgrounding is preserved in (11b), then the difference between (10) and (11) resp. (10b) and (11b) might be a question of sentence type. We are now provided with a hypothesis for the reduction of EXCL_{ja} to the particle defined under (7): The specific features attributed to the particle result from the combination of the modal meaning of *ja* with the illocutive idiosyncrasies of exclamation. The first consequence of this assumption is the necessity to correct the definition (7) in order to be able to combine it with several illocutionary types.

Considering that GMPs encode propositional attitudes related to the distribution of knowledge, it is possible to imagine a characterization of the two interacting viewpoints as purely informative roles. One plausible characterization would be “a speech act participant in charge with the main assertion of the modal evaluation of *p*” vs. “a speech act participant in respect to whose propositional stance the evaluation of *p* has to be situated”. For reasons of convenience, they will henceforth be called the “holder” and the “interpreter”.⁹ We assume no additional constraint on the instantiation of those roles into the respective speech act participants, most notably on the number of speech act participants involved. This instantiation occurs along different lines depending on the illocutionary type of the sentence: In an assertive utterance, the holder is the speaker and the interpreter is the hearer. Those roles are inverted in a question. Given what we have seen about the expressive function of exclamation as

⁹ Those instances should be taken as idealizations. The term of *interpreter* should be taken as an allusion to Davidson’s theory of the “triangulation of knowledge” introduced for the study of epistemicity by Leiss (2008). The interpreter is not primarily the empirical, external second person of interaction but much rather she is the representation of a real or possible counterpart of the holder by the holder herself (Theory of Mind), and our whole study aims at showing that she is not a secondary figure but a primary point of the epistemic system of coordinates as the holder. Of course, the holder herself is the interpreter’s interpreter.

an interaction-unfriendly type of illocution having to do with the speaker's regulation of her own propositional stances, it follows that in exclamatory utterances, the speaker can play both roles (holder and interpreter), whereas the hearer is just a possible, non-necessary candidate for the role of interpreter. We can now correct (7) into (12):

- (12) DEF *ja(p)*: any alternative $\neg p$ to p has already been excluded from the paradigm of contextually possible propositions pre-existing between the speech act participants before the assertion of p : the holder asserts the truth of p and assumes the interpreter not to disagree with her.

This new definition allows us to proceed to the reduction: First, we have to concentrate on the characteristics of exclamation as a highly expressive type in which the speaker comments upon her own propositional stance. In such an illocutive pattern, *ja(p)* is possible for two reasons: (i) It would mark the speaker's strong commitment to p and highlight the fact that her personal conviction is strong enough to provide p with the status of an intersubjectively valid assertion: The speaker claims both epistemic roles for herself; (ii) It would be highly compatible with the expressive (self-mirroring) function of that utterance type. At this stage, the reduction is fulfilled: If *ja* occurs in an exclamatory sentence, both epistemic roles are played by the speaker. This yields the value which is traditionally attributed to the particle EXCL*ja*. Far from undermining the modal accounts for GMPs, the case of *ja* is therefore a good example for the necessity to radicalize our modal readings by purging them of their pragmatic elements. In this respect, we can say that pragmatic roles recover the epistemic ones and are an epistemological obstacle. We can now move to the non-epistemological, structural aspect of modal covertness.

3. The metamorphoses of *wohl*

We now focus on *wohl* ("well"). When it is not a GMP, *wohl* can occur as a lexical item with the meaning of its English cognate "well":

- (13) Das hast du *wohl* gemacht!
 Das ha(b)-Ø-st du *wohl* ge-mach-t
 this have-PRST-2SG 2SG *well* PCTP-do-PTCP
 "This is well done!"

In the following, we base on the distinction between knowledge-holder and knowledge-interpreter to make the following distinction: Whereas *ja* points to the interpreter of the asserted propositional content, the assertive value of *wohl* is always centered on the epistemic standpoint of the knowledge-holder. This means that the most prominent semantic feature of *wohl* is not related to intersubjective alignment, but the modal evaluation of the proposition by the knowledge-holder. We defend the thesis that this difference can account for the apparent plurality of meanings of *wohl* under a reductionist perspective.

3.1 Weaknesses of the mainstream account

The second GMP we are faced with, *wohl* is a much more complex case. Traditionally, the literature on GMPs presents two particles identified as *wohl*. They are not strictly homonymous because of a prosodic difference: The stressed *wohl* (14) is supposed to highlight the status of the proposition as common shared knowledge, whereas the unstressed particle (15) is a weak commitment marker sometimes compared to a sentence adverb.¹⁰

- (14) Von Oktober bis März ist *wohl* primär Winterreifenzeit. (BR 17.10.2009)

Von Oktober bis März	ist= <i>wohl</i>
from October to March	be:3SG:PRES= <i>wohl</i>

primär Winter-reifen-zeit
 primarily winter-tyre-time.

“Clearly, from October to March, it’s basically time for winter tyres.”

¹⁰ An argument for such a reading would be the possibility to use *wohl* in preverbal position with a meaning very close to that of the weak commitment marker. Yet, postulating an identity between both forms, which would make a sentence adverb of the second *wohl*, is problematic given the fact that preverbal *wohl* normally occurs when *p* is followed by another proposition *q* linked to *p* by an adversative marker, typically *aber*, so that it can also be supposed that *wohl ... aber ...* is a grammaticalized form of its own, having lost its synchronic link to the GMP, even though this link is certainly real in diachrony.

- (15) Das ist sehr komplex, aber es sollen *wohl* die meisten Geldautomaten von der Chip-Erkennung auf die Erkennung des Magnetstreifens umgestellt worden sein. BR 09.01.2010

Es=sollen=*wohl* [die meisten Geldautomaten]
 EXPL=should=*wohl* [most of the cash dispensers]

um-<ge>-stell-<▷> worden sein
 converted<PART> AUX.PASS.PERF be.

“This is very complex, but most of the cash dispensers are apparently supposed to have already been converted from chip recognition to magnetic recognition”

As Abraham (1991) notices, the meaning of the first GMP can easily be derived from the core lexeme because a modal reinterpretation of “well” would be expected to have a strong corroborative value. Unfortunately, the path to a weak commitment marker is not so obvious. Yet, this dichotomy can be criticized for at least two reasons:

- (i) The distinction between stressed and unstressed items presupposes clear criteria of what lexical accent should be. In German, lexical, pragmatic and syntactic accent are all a combination of pitch, intensity and length variation. This formal identity makes it difficult to rule out the hypothesis that the difference could be a matter of contrastive (pragmatic) and not of lexical accent. As we shall see later, the hypothesis of a prosodic focus could lead more easily to a unified account.
- (ii) To our knowledge, there is no example of clearly stressed *wohl* with a weak commitment value. Yet, there are examples of sentences where *wohl* does not exhibit the weak commitment feature even though it seems difficult to identify it with the stressed particle.

This suggests that the unstressed *wohl* can mark both stances. One of those examples can be found in Stefan Zweig’s short story *The Star above the Forest* (*Der Stern über dem Walde*). Even though the source is a written text, the prosodic status of the particle seems to be relatively clear since most native speakers would be reluctant to set an accent on *wohl* here:

- (16) Er strich nach dem Souper über die zerknüllten Tischtuchfalten vor

ihrem Platze mit so zärtlichen und kosenden Fingern, wie man *wohl*
 liebe und weichruhende Frauenhände streichelt.

...wie man *wohl* lieb-e und weich-ruh-end-e
 ...how one *wohl* loved-ACC.PL and light-rest-PRS.PTCP-ACC.PL

Frauen-hand-“e streichel-t.
 woman-hand-PL caress-3SG

“After dinner, he stroke the crumpled folds of the tablecloth before
 her sit with so sweet and delicate fingers, such as one caresses *wohl*
 only beloved and gentle women hands.”

Zweig is alluding to something he presents as general knowledge (cf. the use of *man*, “one”, and the use of present tense with the value of a general truth): The felicity conditions and the degree of commitment are very close to what we would know from *ja*. Indeed, *ja* would also be felicitous here, even though the epistemic coloration would be slightly different. Another example comes from the very famous ballad by Heine, *Die Grenadiere*, where supposing weak commitment would lead to a radical misunderstanding of the text. The poem is centered on the blind faith of a dying soldier convinced that Napoleon will come back once. The last line of the following gloss shows the metric pattern of the verse, with 0 standing for unstressed syllables and 1 for stressed ones, confirming that there is no stress on *wohl*.

- (17) So will ich liegen und horchen still,
 Wie eine Schildwacht, im Grabe,
 Bis einst ich höre Kanonengebrüll,
 Und wiehernder Rosse Getrabe.

Dann reitet mein Kaiser *wohl* über mein Grab,
 Viel Schwerter klirren und blitzen;
 Dann steig’ ich gewaffnet hervor aus dem Grab –
 Den Kaiser, den Kaiser zu schützen.

Dann	reit-et	mein-Ø	Kaiser	<i>wohl</i>	über
then	ride-3SG	my-NOM.MASC	emperor	<i>wohl</i>	over
0	1	0	1	0	0
		0			1
					0

mein-Ø Grab

my-ACC.NEUTR	tomb
0	1

„So I want to lie and to hear in silence, just as a sentinel, in my grave, til once I can hear canonades and the noise of neighing horses. (§) **Then my Emperor is *wohl* riding above my grave**, many swords are tinkling and clashing, then I'm standing up, already armed, and leaving my grave, to protect my Emperor, my Emperor.“

Both examples (16) and (17) suggest that *wohl(p)* can mark a consensual status of *p*. Consequently, *wohl* can present a bi-affirmative value such as *ja*. Yet, it is undisputable that most of the time, the “unstressed” *wohl* corresponds to a lower degree of commitment. Thus, we should select the “strong commitment” value of *wohl* as the basic internal feature and derive the lower degree of commitment from the higher one. For this goal, two postulates are introduced:

- (i) *Wohl* has only one internal modal value, marking the acceptability of *p* for both the holder and the interpreter, viz. the speaker and the hearer.
- (ii) The place of *wohl* within the system of GMPs is made epistemologically unclear by a silent (i.e. covert in the narrow sense) evidential value. The interpretation in terms of weak commitment, yielding a secondary modal value, is an external, context-bound bias proceeding from the structurally covert evidential value as well as from cross-linguistically attested rules of pragmatic bleaching.

3.2 Delayed validation and epistemic roles

The key to the explanation of those phenomena can be found in the analysis of Zimmermann (2008:205ff.), corroborated by corpus data collected by Kwon (2005:166-171):

First, we find that the epistemic reference point of *wohl* in declarative clauses is the speaker (cf. Abraham 1991). This means that *wohl* in declaratives expresses uncertainty on the part of the speaker. (...) The picture changes with interrogatives. Here, the epistemic reference point of *wohl* is undetermined as long as it is not the speaker alone. Rather, an interrogative

clause containing *wohl* indicates that the addressee does not know the answer for sure. (Zimmermann 2008:205)

- (18) Was ist *wohl* die Hauptstadt von Tansania?
 Was ist=*wohl* d-ie Haupt-stadt von T.?
 what be.3SG.PRES=*wohl* the-NOM.FEM head-city of T.?
 “What do you presume is the capital of Tanzania?”
 (quoted after Zimmermann 2008:206)

In line with the information-distributional categories sketched for *ja*, we can describe the semantics of *wohl* as follows: In *wohl(p)*, the epistemic standpoint of the interpreter is constructed only secondarily; fundamentally, *wohl* encodes the epistemic standpoint of the knowledge-holder, whereas *ja* is oriented to the interpreter. This orientation to the holder could also explain why the meaning of *wohl* is perceived as less polyphonic as that of *ja*: *Wohl* is much more introverted. The same is true for the corresponding non-modal lexemes: *Wohl* deals with the degree of relevance of the proposition itself, whereas *ja* is a yes-interjection. Therefore, *wohl* is rather oriented to the proposition and *ja* rather to its intersubjective validity: The key concept here is that of Theory of Mind (ToM), which stands for the alignment of the speaker on the supposed propositional attitude of others, and more especially of the hearer (see Abraham 2010 for discussion). In the case of *wohl*, the representation of the interpreter’s ToM is constructed secondarily from the idea of strong commitment: Objective or third-personal truth can be interpreted as acceptable to the “second person” (cf. Davidson 2001). Given its core lexical meaning, the primary modal meaning of *wohl* is probably a rather speaker-oriented confirmation (e.g. of *p* meeting some truth-conditional requirements). Besides, as Kwon (2005:167) points out, unstressed *wohl* is often used in questions to orient the hearer’s answer (to a *yes* in a standard question, to a *no* in an interro-negative sentence). This suggests that *wohl* marks the holder’s commitment to *p*.

Such an orientation is a very favorable ground for evidentiality, for reasons linked to pragmatic implicatures. Once again, we can resort to the conversational rules postulated by Grice (1975): The Gricean maxim of quality entails the assumption that the speaker is strongly committing herself to *p* when there are no other overt indications. On a commitment scale, the default value is high. As a consequence, expressions coding this strong commitment tend to be structurally redundant: According to the rule of quantity, they should be avoided. Therefore, highlighting one’s commitment could undermine the idea that *commitment to p should have been self-evident*. To put it in a more casual way, if a marker suggests

explicitly that the holder believes in what she says, then this means that the truth of the propositional content was (to say the least) not self-evident. Either there might have been reasons not to believe it, or the reasons for such a belief are not beyond any doubt. This feature paves the way to inferential semantics. The question is now whether we can find empirical data confirming this hypothesis.

3.3 A compositional account for covert evidentiality

3.3.1 Restrictions of selection

According to the reductionist hypothesis, the interpretation of *wohl* as a weak commitment marker can be accounted for thanks to covert evidentiality. The weak commitment feature need not be present in the core meaning of the morpheme. This claim can explain some tendencies which are left uncommented in mainstream literature. If *wohl* reinforces the speaker's commitment to the proposition that would be left unasserted without the use of the GMP, we can expect *wohl* to take primarily irrealis propositions in its scope.¹¹ Indeed, Grimm's dictionary (Vol. 30, 1062) already pointed at this tendency, which is confirmed in our small corpus: *Wohl* preferably scopes over future, conditional or hypothetic propositions; it is also very frequently used in sentences containing a modal verb. In those sentences, *wohl* validates *p* as acceptable even though the proposition does not rely on direct evidence but rather on individual reckoning of inference. This is conform to what we could predict from the Gricean bias just described: Commitment is mediated by reflection, hearsay or inference. This is the point where we can postulate covert evidentiality within modality. Among 11 sentences with unstressed *wohl*-forms, 6 had a modal verb, 2 an epistemic adverb and 2 were at the future tense. Moreover, the last one dealt with rumors about unpublished opinion polls, representing the other context typical for evidential marking: hearsay.

- (19) Aber es geht ja *wohl* eher bergab, nicht bergauf. Die Zeitung schreibt „unter 40 Prozent“. (DLF 27.07.2010)

¹¹ Future tense as well as conditional and hypothetic constructions can be associated with an irrealis modal meaning. Consequently, they are representative for the class of propositions over which we suppose *wohl* to scope in the cases where a "weak commitment"-interpretation occurs.

Aber es geh-t=ja=*wohl* eher berg-ab,
 but it go-3SG=ja=*wohl* rather mountain-downwards,
 nicht berg-auf.
 not mountain-upwards.

“But manifestedly, it seems to go rather downwards, not upwards.
 The paper writes ‘under 40 percent’.”

Remember also the example by Heine (17): *p* is undoubtedly an inference from *q*, namely from the fact that the speaker hears the Emperor’s horse. The example by Zweig (16) resorts to a general truth with an impersonal subject, a context which is far from any direct cognitive accessibility of evidence – the criterion in respect to which evidentiality is constructed in German and in many other languages.¹² This suggests that the unstressed *wohl* is part of an evidential pattern: “strong commitment + no direct evidence” means “inferential”. More specifically, inferentiality can be marked by a construction “strong commitment + irrealis”.

Thus, weak commitment is simply a possibility induced by pragmatic implicatures. It is realized only if the proposition is already deprived of the default value of strong commitment. The example from Zweig (16) shows that a proposition without any peculiar restriction of commitment can also be selected by *wohl* and does not suffer any degradation. On the other hand, the example by Heine (17) shows that an irrealis proposition, when it is marked by *wohl*, can gain a strong epistemic status. In other words, neither weak commitment nor inferential marking are part of the stable meaning of the unstressed *wohl*. Weak commitment is just an irregular external implicature, whereas the inferential status is constituted by the presence of a strong commitment marker scoping over an irrealis proposition. The frequency of that evidential meaning is due to pragmatic regularities (the mentioned Gricean rules) entailing a selection privilege for irrealis clauses under the scope of *wohl*. This is the reason why we can speak of covert evidentiality within modality here: There is nothing evidential in the core meaning of *wohl*, nor in the fact that a proposition is marked as irrealis, but the co-construction of both appears to be an

¹² Haumann & Letnes (this volume) detect a strong bias towards evidential interpretations of *wohl(p)* in their study based on translations into Norwegian and English. Their examples also show two strong preferences for the proposition under *wohl*: on the one hand and as we have just seen, irrealis marking, and on the other hand many propositions having to do with Theory of Mind and conjectures on other people’s propositional attitudes, which are always part of indirect knowledge since they can only be inferred from observed behaviour.

evidential pattern in German. In a narrow meaning, we can even say that the hypothesis (ii) formulated in 2.1. goes too far: there is no “silent evidential value” in *wohl*: This covert evidentiality is already interpreted from a construction. Now, this presupposes that the core modal meaning of *wohl* has been left intact. A first argument for this affirmation is delivered by (16) and (17), which prove that the core meaning can still be present without restrictions. Thus, we are faced with a two-stage interpretation process: The first stage corresponds to the covert inferential pattern and the second to the implicature of weak commitment on the basis of inferentiality. This suggests that in the case of *wohl*, we are not faced with structural silent categories, but with two layers of epistemological covertness.

3.3.2 Strong commitment defended; prosodic aspects

Our thesis is that *wohl* reinforces the speaker’s commitment to irrealis propositions: In the contexts we are faced with, modality appears at several morphologic and syntactic levels and there can be important interactions between them; *wohl* is generally used either in a proposition in an irrealis tense (future, subjunctive II) or in co-construction with a modal verb (*x soll / muss / mag wohl p*) which is already carrying a dimension of epistemic distance to the propositional content of *p*.

- (20) Der dich so anrührte, *musz wohl* der könig und dein bräutigam selber sein, sonst hätte ers nimmer gewagt. (Grimm Dictionary, 30:1062)

D-er	d-ich so	an-rühr-te-Ø,
REL-NOM.MASC	2SG-ACC so	CVB-touch-PAST-3SG

<i>muss=wohl</i>	d-er König [...] sein.
<i>must=wohl</i>	the-NOM.MASC king [...] be.

“He who touched you so, *must wohl* be the king and your groom himself, else he wouldn’t have dared it.”

The higher scope of the particle tends to suggest that the particle here legitimates the assumption (*wohl(mag(p))* = one has to take it into account that it is possible that *p*). Actually, the meaning of *wohl* has not changed. What has been altered is the set of conditions for the selection of *p*, which is tends to be restricted to irrealis propositions. We have explained how a

unified modal account of *wohl* as a strong commitment marker oriented to the knowledge holder can pave the way to silent evidentiality and often (but not always)¹³ trigger the assertive weakening in conversational context.

We have not considered the stressed *wohl* so far, so that we now have to ask two questions: (i) Is a unified account for both particles possible, given that there is no trace of evidentiality in the stressed form? (ii) How can the latter difference be accounted for? As can be inferred from what has already been said, we take the modal-evidential account for *wohl* to be compatible with a unified semantic description of *wohl*. It is even the best way to succeed in such an attempt. Since we reduced so-called weak commitment to covert, compositional evidentiality involving the selection of irrealis propositions, we just have to explain how the path to this selectional privilege can be blocked. We have seen that this path is linked to Grice's laws. For the purpose of unifying the semantics of *wohl*, we propose the following thesis: We regard this evolution as a case of pragmatic bleaching, whereas the stressed *wohl* is the naked modal form with its original meaning. Now, we can observe that (i) the form preserved from bleaching is also the one which bears an accent and (ii) there is no difference between the phonetic realizations of pragmatic and lexical accent in German.¹⁴ A pragmatic accent would focus on the hearer's attention to the holder's modal evaluation of *p* as a mutually acceptable proposition. In this case, prosodic focus can preserve the original meaning of *wohl*. On the other hand, the absence of such a prosodic focus has left the way free for a restriction of selection to irrealis propositions. This hypothesis could be supported by cross-linguistic data: In French, sentence adverbs coding commitment such as *sans doute* "undoubtedly" or *sûrement* "certainly" are generally admitted to mark the fact that the speaker refuses to endorse *p* as a personal certitude – *sans doute* even represents the contrary of its compositional meaning, namely the fact that there are great doubts about the validity of *p*. The same is true for German, where *zweifelsohne* "without doubt" and *bestimmt* "certainly" are often subject to the same pragmatic weakening. If we look at the precise meaning of *sans doute* or *sûrement*, we nevertheless have to consider two restrictions: (i) Those markers have kept their strong commitment value when they are focused upon, especially with a pragmatic accent or as sentence-equivalent. (ii) Even when they bear no accent, they do not just

¹³ The irregularity of this implicature is itself a sign that those interpretations are biased by questions of contextual salience and should rather not be integrated to the internal semantic make-up of the GMP.

¹⁴ Both rely on a similar elevation of pitch and intensity (see section 2.1.).

mark weak commitment. They also add p to the CG under the restriction that the speaker has no direct access to the evidence. In other words, *sans doute* (p) marks the fact that p is an assumption per default: either a postulate or a proposition that seems to be more plausible than any $\neg p$. p is signaled to have been validated only after a phase of mental reckoning considering possible alternatives. The pragmatic implicature “weak commitment” is due to the fact that such a reckoning phase is possible only if the proposition would have failed to match the standard for the default level of strong commitment, i.e. if p would have been left unasserted without the intervention of the modal and inferential marker. We regard such a phenomenon as strictly parallel to what happened to *wohl* – therefore explaining the similarities of that particle with sentence adverbs.

3.4 Different semantic levels: the compositional solution

Far from undermining the modal account of *wohl*, the stressed particle rather confirms the assumptions made before. The overall semantics of *wohl* can be depicted as follows:

- (i) The modal conversion of “well” entails the emergence of a GMP marking the fact that p matches the requirements of validity in the eyes of the knowledge-holder. Thus, p is supposed to be objectively acceptable. The logical consequence of this is that the interpreter is supposed to share such a positive epistemic attitude to p , third-personal truth being defined as truth accessible for other minds. This is the core semantic value of *wohl*, which is completely preserved in accentuated uses.
- (ii) When *wohl* is not focused upon, the main informative value of the utterance is in the proposition. But given the felicity conditions of a *wohl*-marked proposition, this contradicts with Grice’s laws: The speech act is felicitous iff p is a proposition whose truth value had not been asserted yet. This entails a restriction of selection: When it is under the scope of the unstressed *wohl*, p is preferably a proposition for which no evidence is directly accessible to the knowledge-holder. This corresponds to irrealis semantics. Thus, the modal morpheme marks commitment to propositions with an inferential status: Covert evidentiality appears within modality. There is neither grammaticalization nor diachronic change in the sense of Construction Grammar here: The meaning of *wohl* is still

the same and the restriction of selection is synchronic and partly external, so that *wohl* + *irrealis* is not a grammaticalized “evidential construct”: Strong modal commitment to a proposition for which there is no accessible evidence is the very definition of an inference or of a postulate. In sum, evidentiality here can be gained in a strictly compositional way.

- (iii) An external, conversational bias derives weak commitment from inferential marking. Such a bias is context-bound and not part of the primary value of the GMP. *Wohl* is an affirmative modal marker which frequently occurs in co-construction with irrealis propositions because of conversational regularities. This causes a covert evidential meaning.

4. Conclusion

We can notice that we are faced with several types of covertness: First, *wohl* presents the epistemological covertness we had already been faced with in the case of *ja*, where the plurality of external uses and constructions seemed to cast a shadow on strict modal values. The external meaning of “weak commitment” is recovering both the compositional inferential meaning and the core modal value, which are nevertheless at the basis of the whole interpretation. Second, evidentiality and modality are shown to be intimately interwoven: Evidentiality can be gained compositionally out of a primarily modal pattern. The ubiquitousness of modality and evidentiality is exemplified by the fact that inferential meaning can be expressed in a construction involving a grammaticalized modal enclitic combined with a semantic feature of the proposition, namely an irrealis status – i.e. another modal feature. This irrealis value is sometimes marked overtly (e.g. by a conditional tense) but sometimes it has to be inferred out of the logical implications of the context. Another feature interacting in the construction of modal meaning is the sentence type: In the case of *ja*, we saw that the core modal meaning of the clitic becomes epistemologically opaque if it is combined with an exclamatory sentence. The variations of *wohl* also rely on whether the GMP is used in a declarative or in an interrogative sentence. Sensitivity to the illocutionary type becomes even more crucial if we adopt a definition of modal roles in terms of knowledge and not of speech acts (knowledge-holder and interpreter). We hope to have shown (i) that GMPs are not multifarious items and (ii) that covert modality, as regards those particles, may be reduced to the epistemological type. We have also tried to demonstrate that

they basically always function in co-construction with other linguistic signs, sometimes without any morphematic *signifiants*: sentence type, realis or irrealis status, or selectional restrictions. Such signs are also laden with modal relevance, so that the final modal meaning of an utterance appears to be a construction of several features distributed in diverse categories. This result confirms the high degree of pervasiveness presented by the category of modality. Yet, we hope that the analysis of *wohl* can make the case for a strictly compositional account of those co-constructional patterns. In such a perspective, we can wonder if there is still any place left for the concept of structural covertness: If strict compositionality is preserved, should not we link our difficulties for understanding it to the linguistic approaches rather than to intrinsic factors? Modal eliminativism seems to culminate in the reduction of structural covertness to mere epistemological obscurity.

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