



# Reflections on the teaching of German Modal Particles in an extension course: Needs assessment and experiences of students and teachers

Reflexões sobre o ensino das partículas modais alemãs em um curso de extensão: levantamento de necessidades e experiências de estudantes e professoras

Marceli Cherchiglia AQUINO\*

Gabriela Sarmiento BADAIN\*\*

Article received: 12.18.2023

Article approved: 02.22.2024

**ABSTRACT:** This article critically discusses the teaching of German Modal Particles (MPs) from the perspective of teachers and students who participated in an Extension course offered by the University of São Paulo. Despite being essential for everyday interaction in the German language, MPs are rarely linguistically contextualized in the teaching of German as an additional language (GAL) (Thurmair, 2010; Weydt, 1983; Aquino, 2020). Our research group has been engaged in the discussion and dissemination of teaching and learning approaches for MPs, especially in the local context. With the goal to better understand the needs and knowledge of Brazilian GAL teachers and students, we conducted two data collections through online questionnaires, before and after the extension course. The findings indicate the relevance of the course in raising awareness about the MPs, having a positive impact on the participants' education, significantly increasing their confidence in dealing with the subject in the GAL classroom. Considering the lack of proposals based on practical and theoretical concepts that consider the experiences of our target audience, this study represents a significant contribution to the teaching of MPs in Brazil.

**KEYWORDS:** German as an Additional Language. Teaching German Modal Particles. Perspective of teachers and students.

**RESUMO:** Este artigo apresenta uma discussão crítica sobre o ensino das Partículas Modais Alemãs (MPs) a partir da perspectiva de professoras e estudantes que participaram de um curso de Extensão oferecido pela Universidade de São Paulo. Apesar de serem essenciais para a interação cotidiana em língua alemã, as MPs raramente são abordadas de forma linguisticamente contextualizada no ensino de alemão como língua adicional (ALA) (Thurmair, 2010; Weydt, 1983; Aquino, 2020). Nesse sentido, o nosso grupo de pesquisa tem se engajado na discussão e divulgação de propostas de abordagens de ensino e aprendizado

---

\* Docente do Departamento de Letras Modernas da Universidade de São Paulo (USP – FFLCH). [marceli.c.aquino@usp.br](mailto:marceli.c.aquino@usp.br)

\*\* Mestranda em DaF e DaZ do Instituto Herder da Universität Leipzig. [gabi\\_s.badain@hotmail.com](mailto:gabi_s.badain@hotmail.com)

das MPs, especialmente para o contexto local. Tendo em vista a compreensão acerca das necessidades e conhecimentos de professoras e estudantes brasileiras de ALA, realizamos duas coletas de dados por meio de questionário *online*, antes e depois do curso de extensão. O resultado desta pesquisa indica a relevância do curso para a sensibilização do tema das MPs, tendo um impacto positivo na formação das participantes, aumentando significativamente sua confiança e segurança no tratamento do tema em sala de aula de ALA. Considerando a carência de propostas baseadas em conceitos práticos e teóricos que levem em conta as experiências do nosso público-alvo, este trabalho representa uma contribuição significativa para o ensino das MPs no Brasil.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Alemão como língua Adicional. Ensino de partículas modais alemãs. Perspectiva de professoras e estudantes.

## 1 Introduction

Teaching Modal Particles (MPs) in the context of German as an additional language (GAL)<sup>1</sup> has always been a challenging task for teachers in different environments and levels of learning. This difficulty is partly due to the lack of teaching materials that address the topic of MPs objectively, critically<sup>2</sup>, and with linguistic-theoretical basis, taking into account the needs and knowledge of their target audience (Aquino, 2020). Considering that the teaching and learning of any Additional Language (AL) needs to go beyond the study of rules and grammatical structures, it seems fundamental to expose learners to different language and social experiences and perspectives, and in this sense, MPs play a crucial role. Words with modal function, such as *aber*, *denn*, *doch*, *mal*, *ja*, *halt*, and *wohl*, are essential elements of

---

<sup>1</sup> We opted for the term "additional language" (AL) over "foreign language" (FL), because while the designation FL indicates that the learning was developed outside of social interaction, AL refers to the language as a relevant resource for participation in social practices. Thus, the term AL is associated with the use of a language as a means of integration into everyday life and social interaction, considering other languages or varieties that make up the linguistic repertoire of learners (Schlatter; Garcez, 2009). In the field of teaching German, the term "DaF," *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* (German as a Foreign Language), has been used since the 1970s, which denotes the teaching of the language from the German perspective (Uphoff, 2013). Therefore, we consider that the term "German as an additional language" tends to broaden perspectives, participation, and contextualization of language teaching in Brazil.

<sup>2</sup> According to Monte Mór (2013), a critical stance is one that identifies and questions the socio-historical contingencies of knowledge categories, aiming to prepare students for the uncertainties of the postmodern world. In the context of the training of AL teachers, such a critical stance manifests itself in the development of an active and questioning attitude towards the didactic choices of pedagogical practices (Uphoff, 2018).

communication in German, and mastering them is crucial for proficiency and sociocultural participation in the target language. Therefore, failing to address this topic in the classroom results not only in a learning omission but also in frustration for students and teachers.

MPs are important pragmatic elements for communication and interpersonal cohesion, as they assist in negotiating meaning between interlocutors, as well as in recognizing the type of social act performed. The elements of this word class can be classified as: non-flexible; not negatable (*kein, nein*) or intensifiable (*mehr, viel*); not answering questions (yes and no); not able to form sentences alone; positioned in the central field (*Mittelfeld*), between *rhema* and *tema*; possessing scope in the entire sentence; occurring in specific types of clauses; combinable with other MPs (*doch mal*); possessing non-modal homonyms in other word classes (e.g., *aber* as a conjunction); possessing inferential meaning and specific communicative functions (Aquino, 2020; 2023). Moreover, it is emphasized that these particles are highly frequent in daily communication in the German language, being part of formal and informal interactions, occurring in written and spoken texts (Weydt, 1969).

When part of speakers' cognitive environment, MPs are immediately processed and used unconsciously. Nevertheless, systematizing the teaching of MPs has represented a huge obstacle in various GAL environments. Many studies have been carried out on grammatical categorization, pragmatic description, critique of teaching materials, and theoretical discussions for teaching MPs (Abraham, 1991; Thurmair, 2010; Diewald, 2013; Bolácio Filgo; Lima; Barros, 2017; Aquino, 2023), but there is still a demand for practical and linguistically-based approaches for the didacticization of these elements for the GAL context, especially within a local and contrastive perspective (Weydt; Rösler; Harde, 1983; Schröder, 2020; Aquino; Arantes, 2021).

In view of this context, since 2018, our research group at the University of São Paulo has been developing research at different levels (undergraduate research, undergraduate thesis, master's, doctoral, and post-doctoral) and outreach projects,

offering seminars, courses, workshops, and an open website<sup>3</sup> on the topic of MPs for GAL students and teachers in the local context. With the aim of sharing a more conscious understanding of the use, communicative functions, and teaching-learning of MPs, as well as understanding the needs and experiences of our target audience, in 2023 we offered the free extension course "How to Teach German Modal Particles? The didactic sequence as a teaching tool" in an online format for GAL teachers and students. The 12-hour course had a group of 40 students with a diverse profile (beginner students, teachers, speakers of German as L1) and is aimed primarily to discuss approaches and teaching strategies of MPs. The course was offered by the Culture and University Extension Service of FFLCH - USP and was advertised on the website and Instagram of this program.

The didactic suggestions were based on the results of the postgraduate discipline Teaching and Learning Modality of the same institution, offered by the project coordinator teacher, with the participation of the teachers of the extension course. The sequences were conceived as a final evaluation of the course and aimed to mediate the knowledge acquired on the subject during the encounters. These materials were elaborated using authentic texts (not produced for didactic purposes), such as comic strips, Instagram posts, short videos (reels, tiktok), series episodes, and movie excerpts. Therefore, the course aimed to disseminate the group's research and enable the discussion of didactic proposals for teaching MPs. In addition, it was expected to create a conducive space for dialogue with the target audience of learners and teachers of the German language in Brazil.

In order to understand the knowledge and needs of the participants and the awareness of the theme of MPs, we applied two anonymous online questionnaires (before and after the extension course) with open and closed questions elaborated in Google Forms (attached). The first questionnaire aimed to establish the profile and

---

<sup>3</sup> Available at: <https://sites.usp.br/particulasmodais/>

subsequent experience of the participants regarding the teaching and learning of German in general, as well as MPs. The second questionnaire sought to investigate the role of the course for improving the learning skills, present knowledge, and didactic applications about MPs in various contexts. In addition, we sought to ascertain if the extension course met the expectations of the participants and provided adequate and objective solutions for their professional and individual demands.

In this article, we present the results and discuss the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data collected in the two questionnaires. We aim to reflect on the possibilities and challenges of teaching and learning MPs based on didactic strategies as well as the perspectives of GAL students and teachers in Brazil.

In the following section 2, we contextualize the problem of teaching MPs, as well as describe the proposals, tools, and organization of the extension course. In section 3, we introduce the elaboration, structure, and forms of analysis of the data collected with the questionnaires. In section 4, we present the results, and in section 5, we perform a compendium of the work and identify future perspectives.

## **2 Contextualization**

German courses, both at regular levels (schools and language institutes) and academic levels, often superficially address the topic of modal particles (MPs), which could be justified by the following limitations: time (for preparation and implementation of classroom activities) and knowledge about MPs or instructional material (didactic or access to base texts). According to Bolácio et al. (2017), besides being generally overlooked at initial levels, there is a discrepancy in the teaching of GAL between the everyday dialogical use of MPs and their occurrence in textbooks. Furthermore, according to Aquino (2020), most teachers do not feel prepared to work with particles (or other pragmatic and language-in-use issues), causing them to avoid the subject. Such reports were recurrent in the extension course offered in 2023 at the University of São Paulo, in which participants indicated not having satisfactory

support on the topic to identify, use, or teach these modal elements in their context. All these issues lead to MPs not being included in the repertoire of use and activities in classrooms, which tends to perpetuate a vicious cycle.

The task of teaching and learning MPs becomes even more challenging due to the lack of instructional materials that adequately cover the subject. From a communicative perspective, many textbooks present occurrences of MPs - however, in highly didacticized texts (such as dialogues) and often without accompanying a grammatical explanation or their communicative function. Upon examining the content of three German publishers' textbooks for GAL at the beginner level (Studio 21 A1, DaF-Kompakt neu A1, and Momente A1.1), we found, predominantly in dialogues, around 350 occurrences of MPs (mainly *doch*, *denn*, *ja*, *mal*), with the theme not explicitly addressed in any of the books. Considering the lack of relevant guidance for teachers and students on these words, i.e. what position they occupy in the sentence, which word class they belong to, what are the possible implications in each context, and which communicative function they present, these words end up being superficially addressed. The scarcity of materials to assist in understanding and systematizing MPs thus constitutes a central hindering factor for the articulation of these elements in teaching, learning, and research in the German language.

In light of this, our research group has been developing various forms of investigation, awareness, and dissemination on the topic of MPs since 2018. Our goal is to develop in the future a didactic material focused on teaching MPs in a local context (especially in the Brazilian academic context and with contrastive approaches). However, to achieve this proposal, it is fundamental to understand the experiences and needs of our target audience, to develop relevant and theory-based guidelines and practical alternatives for various contexts. In the extension course offered in 2023 at the University of São Paulo, we sought to present an introduction to the topic of MPs within the minimalist approach (the difference between the minimalist and maximalist

approaches will be addressed later), which focuses on the core functions of these elements (Aquino, 2023).

In total, six weekly meetings were offered with the following content distribution: Program presentation and introduction to MPs; Introduction to MPs; Didactic Sequence I focusing on occurrences in textbooks; Didactic Sequence II focusing on contrastive analyses with MPs in Portuguese<sup>4</sup>; Didactic Sequence III focusing on triangulation activities (core function, homonyms, and equivalents in other languages); Production and discussion activity. The first two classes were taught by the coordinating docent and aimed to provide an introduction to the topic of MPs (classification, approaches, perspectives, communicative function, context, among others). The three meetings with the didactic sequences were the responsibility of the teachers who developed such material during the aforementioned postgraduate course (a master's student, a doctoral student, and a postdoctoral student). The last class was reserved for participants to develop their own material, focused on their individual teaching and learning context. Throughout the course, students were encouraged to actively participate in discussions, which allowed for an adaptation of the course content to their interests and needs.

During the extension course, we could perceive the progressive motivation of the participants regarding the different possibilities for teaching and learning MPs. The exchange space was enriching in all aspects, being complemented by the responses to the questionnaires (cf. section 3).

---

<sup>4</sup> Research on the description and classification of MPs in other languages has grown exponentially in recent years (Franco, 1991; Johnen, 1997; Waltereit, 2007; Aquino; Arantes, 2021; Diewald, 2013). In the Portuguese language, we find the following words with modal function: “mas”, “ai”, “então”, “é que”, “bem que”, “lá”, among others.

### 3 Questionnaires and course organization

Data collection through two online and anonymous questionnaires (before and after the extension course) had the following main objectives: (i) to understand the profile of the extension course participants; (ii) to comprehend their previous experiences and knowledge on the topic of MPs; and (iii) to reflect on proposals for teaching and learning MPs in various local German teaching contexts. The questionnaires were answered asynchronously by the participants, with the first questionnaire being sent and answered one week before the start of the course, and the second being sent on the last day of the course which could be answered within fifteen days.

As mentioned earlier, the responses to these questionnaires were of great relevance not only for the preparation, development, and evaluation of the extension course itself but also for obtaining a broader understanding of the experiences, knowledge, challenges, needs, and expectations of our target audience for the future development of local teaching materials. The questionnaire contained both open and closed questions and began with a statement of agreement for the (anonymous) use of the responses for future publications.

The questionnaires (at the end of the paper as an attachment) were conducted on the Google Forms online platform and contained a total of 32 questions, divided into objective and essay questions. The first thirteen questions covered sociodemographic information such as education, professional activity, and level of knowledge of the German language. The remaining questions focused on the course theme, that is, the teaching and learning of MPs. We obtained 38 responses for the first questionnaire and 35 for the second from the same group of participants (altogether, 40 students were enrolled in the course).

The participants' profile was heterogeneous, including German language teachers, students from the Department of Modern Languages at the University of São Paulo (undergraduate and graduate), students from other institutes, and researchers



from various fields of knowledge (philosophy, theology, physics, hotel management, etc.)<sup>5</sup>. The age range was also varied: 17.6% between 23 and 25 years old, and 82.4% between 35 and 40 years old. The respondents had completed or were in progress of completing higher education (80% focused on Modern Languages); 30% claimed to have postgraduate degrees, and 20.6% claimed to have some form of specialization. Regarding German language proficiency, participants' levels were intermediate to advanced, ranging from B1 to C2 (55%), with language learning primarily occurring at the university (68%). Finally, 53% of participants were German language teachers.

In order to develop an online data collection format that provided reliable results, we adopted the mixed questionnaire model suggested by Dörnyei (2003). According to Dörnyei (2003), obtaining responses consistent with the analysis objectives, clear instructions are necessary, whether general or specific. At the outset, it is necessary to explain the purpose and importance of the questionnaire, emphasizing that it is not a test, meaning there are no right or wrong answers. Additionally, it is important to highlight the confidential nature of the document and, if necessary, opt for anonymity, as this may encourage honesty and participation from respondents. Furthermore, questions allowing for both quantitative and qualitative data provide a more robust understanding of the results.

Thus, in addition to providing an informative initial presentation text with the assurance of anonymous data collection, we developed multiple-choice and essay questions to encourage participant cooperation and facilitate a better understanding of the responses. To do this, we selected the Google Forms tool, where the questionnaire could be created and distributed online. Moreover, this tool provides a quantitative compilation of the data at the end of form completion, where the percentage and frequency of closed questions are summarized in the form of graphs, allowing for

---

<sup>5</sup> We didn't inquire about gender, however, the course was mostly attended by women.

statistical analysis of closed questions. Open-ended responses were transferred to Excel for data filtering and organization.

In the next section, we present the analysis of the relation between the quantitative and qualitative results of the questionnaire.

## 4 Data analysis

The discussion of the results is based on three main blocks: (i) the participants' overall experience and knowledge of MPs; (ii) the participants' experience and knowledge of teaching and learning MP; and (iii) the participants' expectations and experiences regarding the course and future perspectives.

### 4.1 Experience and knowledge of MPs

In Questionnaire I (QI), administered before the course began, we asked participants to try to define in their own words what MPs are. The responses obtained were diverse, but we note that the majority (about 70%) stated not knowing or having difficulty defining what MPs were, while another portion (about 10%) evoked general definitions commonly found in instructional materials, such as: they express kindness, intensify some information, do not have a specific communicative function, are seasoning words or accessories. About 20% of the responses provided arguments regarding the importance of MP for communication: "essential in communication, they transform the sentence's meaning or show the relationship between interlocutors and social [sic]" (P1)<sup>6</sup>; "they are an essential part of the German language (P2)"; and "they can greatly help in communicating more naturally" (P3). In general, the questionnaire responses, as well as the discussions in class, tend to highlight a lack of understanding (at least theoretically) on the subject, which is consistent with our hypothesis of a gap in teaching and learning MPs. This data is even more notable when considering the

---

<sup>6</sup> We chose to use the letter "P" and a number according to the order of response in the questionnaire.

experience (53% work in teaching German) and language proficiency (between B1-C1) of the participants.

There were also recurring reports about the difficulty of understanding and teaching MPs, as stated by one informant: "I graduated in German, I have already taught in language schools, at the university language center, in a German school, and at the Goethe Institute and I have never been able to address the topic in the classroom because I have difficulty understanding it" (P4). In the questionnaire responses and throughout the course, it became evident how much the participants recognized the need to address MPs in the classroom, emphasizing that the lack of foundation on the subject is detrimental to their performance in GAL. Even with the lack of theoretical and practical grounding, 64% of respondents mentioned having previous contact with MPs through language interactions and believed in the possibility of integrating MPs into teaching through communicative contexts related to authentic dialogues in the language.

The experience with language use is relevant since it constitutes the main means of contact with MPs, since 79.5% of the participants had not received (or were unsure if they had received) specific instructions on the subject. The fact that the greatest contact with MPs occurred outside the classroom justifies the belief that MPs can only be learned and used after achieving greater fluency in the language, as highlighted in the following excerpt from a written response in the questionnaire:

MPs are the 'spice of the German language,' in my view, and it is necessary for the speaker to have a good deal of experience in the language and it is directly linked to fluency. Their meaning depends on the context and can express, among others: surprise, affirmation, confirmation, emphasis, less formal or more (less) 'harsh' imperative. The dictionary meaning does not always correspond to their use in dialogues (P5).

We note that P5 recognizes the linkage of the meaning of MPs to their context, one of the most challenging characteristics regarding the understanding of this word

class. However, descriptions like "the spice of the language" and the need for fluency in the language to use them validate the impact of the lack of systematization and discussion of the grammatical and pragmatic characteristics of MPs. According to Schoonjas:

Before the growth of research on particles, terms like Färbewörter (color words), Füllwörter (filler words), Flickwörter (patch words), and Würzwörter (spice words) were also used [...] (Schoonjas, 2018, p. 11, our translation)<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, despite being outdated, the association made by P5 is still quite common in GAL and it was even found in other reports from the questionnaire. Such terminologies demonstrate how outdated or even neglected the teaching of MPs is, reinforcing false conceptions and consequently making the task of teaching and encouraging the use of these elements more challenging. Nevertheless, the participants showed great motivation to expand their knowledge on the subject, as we can observe in the following comment on the topic "What do you expect from the course?", "I would like to learn a little more about modal particles, how they work and how to use them. I would also like to learn ways to convey this knowledge in the classroom, in a didactic way (P6)".

P6's comment is representative of the general interest of the students regarding the course, which can be summarized in three central objectives: (i) understanding the topic of MPs; (ii) comprehending how to use MPs; and (iii) learning strategies and approaches to teaching MPs. With the use of active methodologies, such as various elaboration and discussion activities, we were able to build on the prior knowledge of the participants to construct theories and discussions about the topic addressed.

---

<sup>7</sup> Original: "Vor dem Aufschwung der Partikelforschung mit dem Erscheinen von Harald Weydts Buch *Abtönungspartikel* im Jahre 1969 wurden auch Begriffe wie Färbewörter, Füllwörter, Flickwörter und Würzwörter verwendet [...]".

Therefore, the constant process of relating theory to practical examples, especially using authentic materials, and including the experiences of the participants proved to be a productive approach, as it intensified motivation and encouraged the students to take an active and discursive stance in the meetings. From Questionnaire II (QII), we were able to verify an evolution in theoretical knowledge and a reduction in stereotypes reproduced in the definitions presented earlier. Even with little time in the course, in QII all students provided more conscious descriptions of MPs, that is, taking into account the approach and theory presented:

They are non-declinable words that connect the clause with a specific context. They are very recurrent in written, spoken, informal and formal language and can be described by communicative functions and contextualized meaning (P7).

For example, P7 can use the theoretical aspects presented during the course to define in a simple and concise way what MPs are and what their functions are. One of the aspects responsible for this change was raising awareness about the subject:

I began to observe the MPs present in the instructional materials used in the courses and classes that I conduct. It is evident how much they are present in texts and, even, in oral language, in our daily lives (both in German and Portuguese) (P8).

It is interesting to note that P8 began noticing the presence of MPs and their equivalents in Portuguese in various contexts. Another recurring description of MPs in QII was the "relationship between interlocutors":

[...] when used as modal particles, they bring information about the context, **the relationship between interlocutors**, their expectations... In class, they are often difficult to explain, but they do not need to be avoided at the beginning of learning so that the learner becomes familiar with them and can use them in their productions (P9, emphasis added).

From P9's comment, a more precise understanding of the communicative function of MPs and their relevance in establishing or even influencing interactions is noticed. We consider that such reports demonstrate perspectives more sensitive to the communicative importance of MPs. Furthermore, it was noticeable in the discussions during classes that the participants were able to create a greater familiarity with MPs and an intention to avoid eventual resistance to the subject. Thus, we consider that the approaches, strategies, and activities presented and discussed in the course had a significant impact for the participants, which will be discussed in more detail in the next subsection.

#### **4.2 The teaching of MPs**

According to Aquino (2020), in recent years there has been an increasing interest on issues related to the acquisition of pragmatic and sociolinguistic competencies in the teaching of GAL. To the author, these competencies are of great relevance for the development of communicative and intercultural skills, important for the learning process. In this sense, the teaching of MPs plays a significant role in GAL, as it enables the culturally appropriate use of linguistic means. Nevertheless, outside of an immersion context, it is particularly important to make the best possible use of the classroom environment to raise awareness about these elements.

From this perspective, one of the objectives of the extension course was to provide suggestions on how MPs can and should be addressed during classes at initial levels. Thus, in order to meet the needs of the participants regarding their didactic experiences, we presented questions in QI related to the teaching of MPs, with emphasis on: "Have you ever worked with MPs in the classroom?" and "In general, do you feel confident addressing the topic of MPs in university work or in the classroom?". Regarding the first question, 76.5% of respondents stated they had not yet addressed the topic in the classroom, which, considering that 53% of them were teachers or worked in the GAL teaching area, represents a quite concerning number and reinforces

the existence of an omission of MPs in German learning. This omission, however, cannot be considered intentional but rather as one of the results of how the topic was (or was not) presented in teacher training. According to Bolácio et al.:

it is not surprising that most teachers feel overwhelmed when asked to explain MPs because – even if they are native speakers – MPs have never been addressed in their training as teachers of German as a foreign language (Bolácio et al., 2017, p. 53, our translation)<sup>8</sup>.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, there is a lack of materials to meet this need. This scenario implies the lapse of MPs exposure during GAL teacher formation, which generates frustration, as emphasized by the report from P10:

This topic was never addressed in my training, and when some examples appear in the textbook in my classes, I confess that I skip over it. I am curious to learn more about the topic and, who knows, have some basis to help my students next time they ask me, "But why is there a 'ja' there in the middle of the sentence?" (P10).

Therefore, the lack of knowledge and theoretical experience about MPs, highlighted in the previous subsection, and the lack of assistance available in the market are factors responsible for maintaining the vicious cycle in which the teaching and use of MPs are almost always disregarded by GAL learners and teachers. However, in the hope of reversing this situation, our research group develops content for theoretical and practical dissemination of solutions for teaching MPs<sup>9</sup>. For the extension course, we began the discussions with the presentation of the defining characteristics of MPs, which define them syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically:

---

<sup>8</sup> Original: "Es ist also nicht verwunderlich, dass die meisten Lehrer überfordert sind, wenn sie die MPn erklären sollen, weil sie – selbst wenn sie Muttersprachler sind – die MPn in ihrer Ausbildung als DaF-Lehrer in der Regel nie behandelt haben".

<sup>9</sup> For more information please consult: <https://sites.usp.br/particulasmodais>

1. They are not inflected, cannot be negated or intensified;
2. They do not answer questions and do not form sentences alone;
3. They can be combined with other MPs;
4. They have a specific communicative function;
5. They are positioned in the central field of the clause (Mittelfeld);
6. They occur in specific types of sentences<sup>10</sup>;
7. They have pragmatic scope over the entire sentence (relating the context to the proposition);
8. They are used especially in colloquial speech but not exclusively;
9. They have non-modal homonyms in other categories;
10. They have inferential meaning.

A classification identified as relevant by the participants was the relation between MPs and their non-modal homonyms, which was addressed through comparisons, such as: "Das war aber eine Reise" and "Ich möchte reisen, aber nicht dieses Jahr." With these two sentences, it is possible to discuss some defining characteristics of the word class of MPs, such as inferential meaning (and not grammatical, with pragmatic-communicative function), positioning in the central field (not in position 0 and separated by commas, as is the case with most uses of conjunctions) and scope in the sentence (not related to specific elements but linking the clause with the context). Such discussion was received with great surprise by the participants, who were not familiar with such classification and its usefulness for identifying words with and without modal function. Consequently, in QII, the students showed greater confidence in working with the topic in the classroom, reporting that they now consider it possible to address the topic more objectively:

---

<sup>10</sup> The MP *denn*, for example, occurs only in questions.



I used it in the school context, with beginner students, in a didactic sequence about 'aber.' We had learned about the connector and used it in exercises, and soon after we discussed, starting from simple sentences, if the meaning of the word 'aber' was the same as we had learned. The students concluded that it was not, and then we reached the meaning that the modal particle had, besides being a connector (P11).

Considering the practical challenges of teaching a FL (schedule, curriculum, authentic materials accessible to all levels, etc.), we included in the course program possibilities of working with MPs based on their occurrences in textbooks (Studio 21, DaF-Kompakt neu A1, and Momente). The proposal proved to be productive, as the participants showed interest in discussing ways to develop the topic using familiar materials, as pointed out in the following report:

Now, when my students ask me about MPs (which happens very often), I can answer them. I didn't prepare any material regarding this, but I can guide them to understand what MPs mean through examples available in the textbook itself (P12).

The confidence conveyed by P12 in her comment is reinforced by the quantitative data from QII, in which 88.5% of respondents stated that they feel, after the course, more confident in addressing MPs, whether in university work and/or in GAL teaching contexts. This data is significant, as it demonstrates a turnaround in positioning (an increase of 85.5%) compared to QI. Therefore, through objective strategies based on defined rules, the course had a positive impact on the training of participants, which will be discussed in the next subsection.

### 4.3 Course evaluation

As previously mentioned, our research group has been working since 2018 to promote projects and disseminate the topic of MPs. In this context, the extension course "How to Teach German Modal Particles? The didactic sequence as a teaching tool"

emerged as an opportunity to expand this discussion to the community outside the University. Considering the inaugural nature of the course, ways to assess the participants' experience were devised. Taking into account the objectives previously established by the respondents in QI (to deepen knowledge about MPs through clear and objective explanations to learn teaching-learning strategies and/or tools) and the quantitative data collected by QII, we believe that their expectations were met, as 100% stated that the extension course had a positive impact on their training as students and/or teaching professionals.

Such a significant approval rating reaffirms the relevance and necessity of providing information that addresses the subject of particles. However, to continue with new similar projects, we believe it is essential to understand what can be improved and which of the approaches raised during the course were considered relevant for our target audience. To obtain this information, evaluative questions were presented in QII, so that the participants could express which approaches were more or less relevant. The results indicate that 77% of the students considered the proposal to compare sentences with and without the presence of the MP (e.g., *Setz dich!* x *Setz dich doch!*)<sup>11</sup> as relevant to address the theme within their respective contexts.

According to Heggelund (2001), the meaning of MPs can be easily demonstrated by comparing sentences containing particles and the corresponding sets without them. Comparing sentences (with and without MP or between different MPs) provides clear analogies about the communicative function of MPs, allowing for a creative space in which students can create different usage contexts for each sentence.

The second most well-rated didactic proposal by the participants was working with authentic texts: 73% of respondents mentioned preferring to approach the subject through non-didactic examples that are more relatable to their target audience's

---

<sup>11</sup> “*Setz dich!*” can be translated as “*Sente-se!*” or “*Sti down*” and “*Setz dich doch!*” as “*Senta aí!*” or “*Come in, sit down*”. According to Johnen (1997), *ai* can be considered a MP, having the function of indicating an action that should be carried out immediately.

context. It was also mentioned that examples from textbooks and ready-made phrases (like chunks) tend to be less contextualized and thus can further complicate their explanation. In the course, we preferred authentic texts such as songs, series, movies, and social media posts (Instagram, Twitter), like the example below with the occurrence of the MP *denn*

Image 1 — Tweet with the MP *denn*.



Source: Instagram profile @buzzfeedaustria.

Considering that the meaning of MPs is directly dependent on the context of use, working with authentic texts allows for a greater understanding and connection with the use of MPs, making the learning process more interesting, creative, and conscious, as confirmed by the participants' accounts. Through examples like this, we can discuss the communicative function of MPs more relevantly. In the text of the above post, the MP *denn* is used to indicate that the reason for the question is related to a direct communicative situation, in which the interlocutor has something to say.

Using authentic examples may require greater awareness of other aspects of oral language that often do not appear substantially in didactic texts, such as the reduction of the accusative form of the masculine "einen" which appears in the example spelled only as "nen". Thus, access to authentic materials allows for closer contact with other important aspects for fluency in the target language. The example above could

be worked on with beginner classes (A2), to address the conjunction "wenn" and differentiate the accusative forms in the German language. Therefore, the teacher can work with other aspects of the language besides MPs. In addition, extension course participants mentioned that examples like this, taken from social media posts, can be well received by students of different age groups, as they engage with their interests and daily lives.

The third teaching proposal with the most interest from the participants, at 61.5%, was understanding MPs through their nuclear communicative function, derived from the minimalist approach. According to Aquino (2023), unlike the maximalist perspective, the minimalist one does not attempt to provide a list of specific definitions for each MP, but describes its main communicative function, in which pragmatic meaning is obtained from the context. In the sentence "Er kann nicht fahren, er ist doch betrunken", from a minimalist point of view, the MP *doch* indicates a contradiction, which may, for example, be in the fact that someone needs to take into account or acknowledge that the person being talked about ("Er") is drunk and therefore cannot drive. The maximalist analysis emphasizes the meaning of MPs in the communicative situation (in this case, a warning or surprise), not presenting an objective definition of their function, but a list of possible meanings for each MP. Therefore, the minimalist approach considers that, for all MPs, specific nuclear functions can be delimited that are recurrent in all their uses, such as: the MP *doch* has a function of contradiction or adversity; the MP *ja*, of agreement or common knowledge; the MP *halt*, of justifying an unchangeable reality; and the MP *aber*, of breaking expectations. Such a proposal allows for a more conscious learning process that takes into account the capacity for metarepresentation, rather than memorization of a list of possible meanings for each particle, which could further burden teachers and students. The benefits of this approach were noted by the participants during the course meetings – many affirmed numerous times how useful the existence of more objective and regular definitions is.

In addition to the reports about the theoretical and didactic strategies, the participants, when responding to QII, highlighted emotional implications with their participation in the extension course. For example, they pointed out an increase in security, confidence, and empowerment, as can be observed in the following narratives:

The course made me more enthusiastic about studying German and using MPs, something I had never been able to do before. I feel more confident and made new friends (P16).

For my knowledge, yes, but also thinking about addressing this issue in the classroom, or when a MP appears in dialogue and the students really want to know why that is, and what it means, lol. Now I feel much more confident to deal with it - which was something that gave me a certain anguish... (P17).

I learned and grew a lot during the course. It's a pity that, due to time constraints, we couldn't see more MPs. In fact, it would be a great subject to have in the Portuguese-German Letters curriculum, Modal Particles I and II. I would definitely take it (P18).

In light of these reports, we highlight the relevance of continuing training projects on MPs, as the needs of students, both professional and personal, often go unaddressed in the language teaching and learning process, due to MP being a complex rarely tackled topic. Considering their frequency of occurrence in various communicative media and their importance for social interaction, MPs represent a fundamental topic for teaching language, culture, and interculturality in the language classroom.

Finally, several students encouraged the development of teaching materials with the concepts presented in the course, for the continuation of their individual training, as well as for the dissemination of the proposals presented in the project. In this sense, we consider that the course objectives were not only achieved but

surpassed, as the questionnaire results indicated the need and relevance of extension activities for teaching MPs aimed at colleagues and students of GAL in Brazil.

## 5 Conclusion

The research project associated with this article aims to introduce the topic of MPs and raise awareness about their communicative functions, as well as to provide inputs and practical didactic strategies for German teachers and students. In this paper, we described the activities of an extension course and the results of two data collections through online questionnaires, before and after the course. The discussion of the results was based on three aspects: (i) the participants' prior knowledge of MPs; (ii) the participants' experience with teaching and learning MPs; and (iii) the participants' expectations and experiences regarding the course and future perspectives.

Regarding the first two aspects, the data highlighted the assumptions grounded by the theoretical foundations of this work, namely, the existence of a gap in understanding, using, and teaching MPs in different learning environments. Even in the absence of theoretical and practical background on the topic, the participants demonstrated linguistic awareness by identifying the importance of MPs for negotiating meaning, their contextual implications, and their dimension for interaction. The lack of suitable materials for learning and teaching MPs was also evidenced as one of the factors that negatively influence the frustration of not knowing how to address the topic in the classroom, as well as a general demotivation about the use of the German language.

Regarding the third item, i.e., the experience with the extension course and the presented approaches, the participants were very satisfied, especially with the work on an objective classification of how to identify and describe MPs. Another aspect highlighted by the participants was the practical teaching proposals, which did not need to take up the entire class and delve into advanced linguistic particulars but could easily assist in discussions about German language and culture in various learning

environments. The activities most highly rated for teaching MPs were as follows: discussions through comparison between sentences with and without MPs (e.g., Heute ist warm x Heute ist aber warm); working with MPs through authentic examples from different genres, especially Instagram posts, short videos, and comics; and analyzing the meaning and function of MPs through the minimalist approach, i.e., with the Nuclear Communicative Function of each MP.

In this sense, we argue that with the proposal, presented in a six-week course, to introduce the topic of MPs objectively and based on recent linguistic theories, with examples of concrete didactic proposals and authentic texts, the participants were able to achieve an understanding of MPs, both for use and for teaching, and feel more confident in addressing the topic in the classroom and using MPs in interactions. Although the topic may be considered challenging, we found that through the prior assessment of participants' knowledge and experiences, the course made it possible to understand the needs of the target audience, raise awareness about the relevance of understanding and using MPs, and define clear didactic strategies on how to approach them in different GAL learning environments.

Finally, the activities of the extension course presented in this article represent an inaugural project, thus we recognize the need to expand the sample of participants and experiences of courses and disciplines. As a future perspective, we intend to develop didactic material for individual study and teaching of MPs for the Brazilian context. To this end, we have already begun the dissemination of an open website (<https://sites.usp.br/particulasmodais/>) of our research group containing the introduction to the topic of MPs, suggestions for texts and articles, explanations of teaching-learning strategies, comprehension exercises (accompanied by answers), and a corpus of authentic texts of German and Brazilian MPs.

Translated by: Marceli Aquino

Revised by: Adriano Cherchiglia and Rayan Abou Khzam

## References

ABRAHAM, W. Discourse particles in German: how does their illocutive force come about? *In: ABRAHAM, W. (ed.). Discourse particles: descriptive and theoretical investigations on the logical, syntactic, and pragmatic properties of discourse particles in German.* Amsterdam: Johns Benjamins, 1991. p. 203-252. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.12.08abr>

AQUINO, M. The teaching of German modal particles: didactic strategies in GFL. **Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada**, Belo Horizonte, v. 20, n. 1, p. 131-161, 2020. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1590/1984-6398201914637>

AQUINO, M.; ARANTES, P. C. C. Partículas modais em alemão e seus equivalentes funcionais em português brasileiro: proposta de análise e classificação para o uso. **Pandaemonium Germanicum**, São Paulo, v. 23, n. 40, p. 166-190, 2020. DOI <https://doi.org/10.11606/1982-88372340166>

AQUINO, M. **Nuclear Communicative Function as Teaching Strategy for German Modal Particles: Relevance of the Minimalist Approach.** *In: SciELO Preprints*, 2023. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1590/SciELOPreprints.5906>

BOLACIO, E.; LIMA, T; BARROS, B. Modalpartikeln im DaF-Unterricht. Vermittlung und Lehrwerkanalyse. **Periodicos Caderno de Letras (Ufpel)**, n. 29, p. 51-65, 2017. DOI <https://doi.org/10.15210/cdl.v0i29>

DIEWALD, G. Same same but different: modal particles, discourse markers and the art (and purpose) of categorization. *In: DEGAND, L.; PIETRANDREA, P.; CORNILLIE, B. (ed.). Discourse markers and modal particles: categorization and description.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2013, p. 19-46. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.234.02die>

DÖRNYEI, Z. **Questionnaires in Second Language Research: Construction, Administration, and Processing.** London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2003.

FRANCO, A. Partículas modais do português. **Revista da Faculdade de Letras do Porto Línguas e Literatura**, Porto, II série, n. 7, p. 175-196, 1990.

HEGGELUND, K. Zur Bedeutung der deutschen Modalpartikeln in Gesprächen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Sprechakttheorie und der DaF-Perspektive. **Linguistik Online**, Berna, v. 9, n. 2, n.p, 2001. DOI <https://doi.org/10.13092/lo.9.969>



HENTSCHEL, E.; WEYDT, H. **Handbuch der deutschen Grammatik**. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013. v. 4. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110312973>

JOHNEN, T. Aí como partícula modal do português. *In*: Congresso Internacional da Associação Brasileira de Lingüística, n.1., 1997, Salvador: Instituto de Letras da Universidade Federal da Bahia. **Anais**: Abralín, 1997. p. 4-10.

MONTE MÓR, W. Crítica e letramentos críticos: reflexões preliminares. *In*: ROCHA, C. H.; MACIEL, R. F. (org.). **Língua estrangeira e formação cidadã: por entre discursos e práticas**. Campinas: Pontes, 2013. p. 31-50.

SCHLATTER, M.; GARCEZ, P. Educação linguística e aprendizagem de uma língua adicional na escola. *In*: **Referencial curricular: Lições do Rio Grande**. V. 1. Linguagens, códigos e suas tecnologias: Língua Portuguesa e Literatura; Língua Estrangeira Moderna. Porto Alegre: Secretaria Estadual de Educação do RS, 2009.

SCHOONJANS, S. **Modalpartikeln als multimodale Konstruktionen**: Eine korpusbasierte Kookkurrenzanalyse von Modalpartikeln und Gestik im Deutschen. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110566260>

THURMAIR, M. Alternative Überlegungen zur Didaktik von Modalpartikeln. **Deutsch als Fremdsprache**, Regensburg, v. 47, n. 1, p. 3-9, 2010. DOI <https://doi.org/10.37307/j.2198-2430.2010.01.02>

UPHOFF, D. A área de Alemão como Língua Estrangeira: desenvolvimento histórico e perspectivas atuais. **Pandaemonium Germanicum**, v. 16, p. 219-241, 2013. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1982-88372013000200012>

UPHOFF, D. O lugar da criticidade na formação inicial de professores de alemão. *In*: FERRAZ, D. M.; KAWACHI-FURLAN, C. L. (org.). **Educação linguística em línguas estrangeiras**. Campinas: Pontes, 2018. p. 231-247. DOI <https://doi.org/10.35572/rlr.v8i3.1467>

WALTEREIT, R. Different functions, different histories: modal particles and discourse markers from a diachronic point of view. **Catalan Journal of Linguistic**, Barcelona, p. 61-80, 2007. DOI <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/catjl.124>

WEYDT, H. **Abtönungspartikel**. Die deutschen Modalwörter und ihre französischen Entsprechungen. Bad Homburg v.d.H. Berlin: Gehlen, 1969.

WEYDT, H. (org.). **Partikeln und Interaktion**. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1983. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111661643>

## Attachments

### Attachment 1: Questionnaire I (before the extension course)

Introduction: This form is part of the research works of the research group – from undergraduate research to post-doctoral research – that investigates the topic of Modal Particles (MPs) in various contexts (teaching, linguistics, and translation). With this questionnaire, we have the following objectives: (i) to know the profile of participants in the extension course; (ii) to understand the experiences and prior knowledge about the topic of MPs; (iii) to reflect on teaching-learning proposals of MPs in the various local contexts of teaching German. The answers are completely anonymous and very relevant to our research. You should allocate around 20 minutes to answer the entire questionnaire. It is important that you fill out the questionnaire before our first meeting. We greatly appreciate your contribution!

Do you agree that your response will be used for a future publication?

Yes ( ) No ( )

#### Respondents' Profile

1. Age: ( ) 17-20 ( ) 21-22 ( ) 23-25 ( ) 26-28 ( ) 29-31 ( ) 32-35 ( ) 35-40 ( ) 41-45 ( ) 46-50 ( ) over 50
2. Nationality
3. What is your highest level of education?  
( ) Did not attend school ( ) Incomplete elementary school ( ) Complete elementary school ( ) Incomplete high school ( ) Complete high school ( ) Incomplete higher education ( ) Complete higher education ( ) Postgraduate ( ) Others
4. If you have marked higher education (complete or incomplete) and post-graduate (complete or incomplete), please specify briefly your education(s):
5. What is your experience as a German learner?:  
( ) Studied/am studying German Language and Literature  
( ) Learned in language courses and/or institutes  
( ) Learned at university in extension courses or as a special student in German
6. Language courses  
( ) Learned in an immersion context in a German-speaking country  
( ) Learned from family and/or friends (outside of an immersion context)  
( ) Learned autonomously  
( ) I am a native German speaker (L1 or bilingual)

7. How do you rate your average level of German language proficiency in all skills: ( ) A1-A2 (beginner) ( ) B1-B2 (intermediate) ( ) C1-C2 (advanced)
8. Do you speak other languages, and at what average level of proficiency?
9. Do you work/have you worked in teaching German language? Yes ( ) No ( ) Others ( )
10. If yes, how long have you been teaching/have you taught German and in what context?
11. Do you work/have you worked in teaching other languages? Yes( ) No( ) Others( )
12. If yes, how long have you been teaching/have you taught other languages, in what context, and which languages?
13. Do you work/have you worked in teaching Portuguese language? Yes ( ) No( ) Others ( )
14. If yes, how long have you been teaching/have you taught Portuguese and in what context?

### **Conceptualization of Modal Particles**

In your own words, how would you define Modal Particles (MPs):

### **Learning Modal Particles (MPs)**

15. Have you had contact with the topic of MPs? You can select more than one option:  
( ) Yes, at university  
( ) Yes, in language courses  
( ) Yes, in contact with German speakers (native or non-native)  
( ) Yes, in self-study (grammar books, materials, oral or written texts)  
( ) Maybe, but it was very superficial.  
( ) No, never had contact.  
( ) Others
16. Have you received specific instructions and/or performed didactic activities on MPs? Yes ( ) No ( ) Not sure ( )
17. If yes, please briefly tell us about this experience.

18. Would you have liked to deepen your knowledge of MPs during your German language education? Yes ( ) No ( ) Others ( )

19. How do you imagine it would be possible/interesting to learn about MPs in your educational context?

### Teaching Modal Particles

20. In your opinion, how important is the use and understanding of MPs in communication in the German language: Scale of 1 (very important) to 5 (not important at all)

21. In your opinion and experience, how important is the teaching-learning of MPs: Scale of 1 (very important) to 5 (not important at all)

22. In your opinion, should MPs be taught (with the appropriate didactic-methodological adaptations). You can select more than one option.

- ( ) Only in university courses (Language and Literature)
- ( ) In all types of German language courses
- ( ) Only at advanced levels
- ( ) From the initial levels
- ( ) From intermediate levels (between B1 and B2)
- ( ) Only for those seeking high proficiency in the language
- ( ) Only for teacher training and practicing
- ( ) Others

23. Have you worked with MPs in the classroom? Yes ( ) No ( ) Others ( )

24. If yes, briefly describe your experience:

25. If no (and yes, if you have ideas for future activities), how would you address the topic in the classroom in your context of teaching or learning?

26. What material would you consider using to teach MPs? You can select more than one option.

- ( ) Authentic texts (oral and written)
- ( ) Elaborated or didactic passages (chunks) for teaching MPs
- ( ) Oral texts
- ( ) Written texts
- ( ) Examples taken from textbooks
- ( ) Digital media
- ( ) Others

27. Overall, do you feel confident addressing the topic of MPs in university assignments or in the classroom? Yes ( ) No ( ) Not sure ( )

### **Contrastive approach**

28. Do you believe that other languages have elements equivalent to MPs?

Yes ( ) No ( ) Don't know ( ) Others ( )

29. Do you believe that Portuguese has linguistic elements equivalent to MPs?

Yes ( ) No ( ) Others ( )

30. If yes, what would these linguistic elements in Portuguese and/or other languages be?

31. Do you believe that a contrastive proposal (relationship between German and other languages) could be a relevant tool for teaching MPs: Yes ( ) No ( ) Not sure ( )

### **Acknowledgment and completion**

32. What do you expect from the course?

33. Would you like to make any additional comments?

### **Attachment 2: Questionnaire II (after the extension course)**

Introduction: This form was prepared by the research group that investigates Modal Particles (MPs) in various contexts (teaching, linguistics, and translation). This survey has the following objectives: (i) to know your experience regarding the course (ii) to reflect on the teaching-learning of MPs; (iii) to improve and adapt the course for future offerings. The responses are anonymous and very relevant to us. Please answer the questionnaire by March 30th. We greatly appreciate your contribution!

Do you agree that your response will be used for a future publication?

Yes ( ) No ( )

### **Profile**

The profile questions were the same as in questionnaire I

### **About MPs**

11. How would you define Modal Particles (MPs):

12. How important is the use and understanding of MPs for communication in the German language: Scale of 1 (very important) to 5 (not important at all)

13. How important is the teaching-learning of German MPs: Scale of 1 (very important) to 5 (not important at all)

14. In your opinion, should MPs be taught:

- Only in university courses (Language and Literature)
- In all types of German language courses
- Only at advanced levels
- From the initial levels
- From intermediate levels (between B1 and B2)
- Only for those seeking high proficiency in the language
- Only for teacher training and practicing

15. Did you apply the knowledge from the extension course in any teaching and/or learning context? Yes  No

16. Please, share your experience (teaching or studying MPs) or justify in case of a negative response.

17. What material(s) and/or approaches would you recommend for teaching and/or learning about MPs?

18. From the approaches seen in the course, which do you consider most relevant for your teaching and/or learning context?

- You can select more than one option
- Relationship between MP and non-modal homonym (e.g., aber conjunction and modal)
- Relationship of the same clause with and without MPs (e.g., Das ist nett; Das ist aber nett)
- Relationship of the same clause with different MPs (e.g., Ich habe ja gesagt; Ich habe doch gesagt)
- Nuclear communicative function (minimalist approach: all occurrences of a MP have the same function, meaning depends on context))
- List of meanings (maximalist approach: presenting a list of different possible pragmatic meanings per MP)
- Using the table with the main characteristics of MPs
- Contrastive approach (relating to Portuguese and/or other languages)
- Creative discussion with the creation of stories and contexts for MP usage
- Adapting the approach depending on the level
- Development of didactic sequences

- Using examples from didactic material to deepen the topic
- Use of authentic examples (oral and written)
- None of the approaches

19. After the course, do you feel more confident addressing the topic of MPs in university assignments and/or teaching? Yes  No  Not sure

20. Was the course relevant to your development as a student and/or teacher?  
Yes  No  Not sure

21. What impact did your participation in the course have, for example: on your knowledge about MPs; on your experience in teaching and learning German; emotional issues; others:

### **Acknowledgment and completion**

22. Overall, how would you rate the course:

23. Would you like to participate in new courses on MPs?  
Yes  No  Not sure

Would you like to make any additional comments? (free response, not mandatory)