

Learning and Teaching Modal Particles in Argentina and Brazil: Didactic Experiences with an Original Material

[Aprender e ensinar as Partículas Modais na Argentina e no Brasil:
experiências didáticas com um material autoral]

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Marceli Cherchiglia Aquino¹

Sofia Leria Alcoforado²

Maria Luiza Sgnolf Martins de Sá³

Abstract: This article discusses the experience of two extension courses on the teaching of modal particles (MPs) at the National University of Córdoba (UNC) and the University of São Paulo (USP). Using an original teaching material developed by a research group from USP, the study involved the application of questionnaires and field notes to assess: (i) the participants' profiles; (ii) their initial knowledge and needs regarding MPs; and (iii) the role of the course and the material in understanding the teaching and learning of MPs. Based on linguistic theories, the material employs the minimalist approach (DIEWALD, 2013; AQUINO 2024) to create practical activities that help comprehend the meaning of MPs through authentic examples. The results reveal significant gaps in the understanding of the topic due to a lack of instruction and appropriate teaching materials. Participants' feedback indicates the relevance of this material in addressing the needs of students in Brazil and Argentina concerning the teaching and learning of MPs.

Keyword: modal particles; extension course; teaching and learning of German; development of teaching materials

¹ Universidade de São Paulo, Departamento de Letras Modernas, Avenida Luciano Gualberto, 403, Cidade Universitária, São Paulo, SP, 05508-010, Brasil. E-Mail: marceli.c.aquino@usp.br. ORCID: 0000-0003-0518-7639.

² Universidade de São Paulo, Departamento de Letras Modernas, Avenida Luciano Gualberto, 403, Cidade Universitária, São Paulo, SP, 05508-010, Brasil. E-Mail: sofialeria@usp.br. ORCID: 0009-0007-3680-1247.

³ Universidade de São Paulo, Departamento de Letras Modernas, Avenida Luciano Gualberto, 403, Cidade Universitária, São Paulo, SP, 05508-010, Brasil. E-Mail: malusgnolf@usp.br. ORCID: 0009-0003-2690-5377.



Resumo: Este artigo discute a experiência de dois cursos de extensão sobre o ensino de partículas modais (PMs) na Universidade Nacional de Córdoba (UNC) e na Universidade de São Paulo (USP). Utilizando um material didático autoral, desenvolvido por um grupo de pesquisa da USP, o estudo envolveu a aplicação de questionários e anotações de campo para avaliar: (i) o perfil das participantes; (ii) o conhecimento e as necessidades iniciais em relação às PMs; (iii) o papel do curso e do material para o conhecimento acerca do ensino e aprendizagem das PMs. Baseado em teorias linguísticas, o material utiliza a abordagem minimalista (DIEWALD, 2013; AQUINO 2024) para criar atividades práticas que ajudam a compreender o significado das PMs por meio de exemplos autênticos. Os resultados revelam lacunas significativas na compreensão do tema, devido à falta de instrução e de materiais didáticos adequados. O relato das participantes dos cursos indica a relevância deste material desenvolvido para atender às necessidades das estudantes no Brasil e na Argentina com relação ao ensino e aprendizagem das PMs.

Palavras-chave: partículas modais; curso de extensão; ensino e aprendizagem de alemão; elaboração de material didático

1 Introduction

The teaching of German modal particles (hereafter MPs) in the context of German as an additional language (hereafter GAL)⁴ has always represented a challenging task for teachers and learners in different learning environments and at various proficiency levels. This difficulty stems partly from the lack of didactic materials that approach the topic with both theoretical and practical foundations, meaning that few resources objectively present the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic descriptions of the MP word class while addressing the specific needs of their target audience (AQUINO, FERREIRA 2023). Considering that the teaching and learning of any Additional Language (AL) must go beyond the study of grammatical rules and structures, it seems essential to expose learners to different experiences, perspectives, and materials related to the language, and in this regard, MPs play a crucial role. Modal particles such as *aber*, *denn*, *doch*, *mal*, *ja*, *halt*, and *wohl* are essential elements for interpersonal cohesion in German, making their

⁴ We chose the term additional language (AL) over foreign language (FL) because, while the latter indicates that the learning took place outside of social interactions between speakers of the target language, AL refers to language as a resource for participation in social practices. The term LA is associated with the use of a language as a means of integration into everyday life and social interactions, taking into account the other languages or varieties that make up the learners' linguistic repertoire (SCHLATTER, GARCEZ 2009). In the field of German teaching, the term *DaF*, *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* (German as a Foreign Language), has been used since the 1970s, which refers to teaching from a European perspective (UPHOFF 2013). We therefore believe that the term German as an additional language tends to broaden the prospects for learning the language in Brazil.

comprehension fundamental for discursive and sociocultural participation (SCHRÖDER 2024). Thus, failing to address this topic not only omits relevant content for oral and written communication but can also lead to frustration for learners and teachers, negatively affecting their motivation and sense of belonging⁵ in the use of the language, since these elements frequently appear from the early stages of learning GAL and play a key role in both understanding and producing the language.

While MPs are processed unconsciously when part of a speaker's cognitive environment, their systematization for teaching purposes remains a constant challenge in various learning contexts (AQUINO 2017). Several studies have contributed to the grammatical categorization, pragmatic description, translation, critical analysis of teaching materials, and theoretical discussions surrounding the teaching of these elements (ABRAHAM 1991; THURMAIR 2010; DIEWALD 2013; BOLACIO FILHO *et al.*, 2017; AQUINO 2017, 2020). However, there remains a significant demand for practical and linguistically grounded approaches, with local and contrastive perspectives (WEYDT 1983; SCHRÖDER 2020; AQUINO 2023).

Taking these challenges into account, a research group was established in 2018 focusing on four main areas: (i) the development of theoretical research in the fields of teaching, linguistics, and translation of MPs; (ii) the creation of teaching strategies and didactic materials for the learning and teaching of MPs with a local focus;⁶ (iii) the undertaking of contrastive studies in the language pairs German/Portuguese, German/English, and German/Spanish. In the didactic field (ii), the project focuses on exploring practical and contextualized teaching proposals for MPs, offering explanations grounded in linguistic theories (such as the minimalist approach) and activities using a variety of examples drawn from authentic oral and written texts. Currently, the project offers (freely and openly) a virtual material organized as a website,⁷ with weekly

⁵ By enabling a new understanding of the possible uses of the language, increasing learners' confidence to use and teach these modal elements through an objective approach, based on linguistic studies and contextualized examples.

⁶ By "local perspective," we refer to the experiences and needs of the students within their linguistic and cultural context - in this study, the learning of German by Brazilian and Argentine women in the university environment of teacher education.

⁷ <https://sites.usp.br/particulasmodais/>

publications on social media (Instagram).⁸ The aim of this material is to provide both theoretical and practical support for the teaching and learning of MPs, featuring explanations, examples taken from a proprietary corpus, and exercise proposals.

The teaching materials produced by the research group have been disseminated since 2023 through conference presentations, article publications, and the offering of extension courses. The extension courses are essential to the project, as they allow the team to implement and refine their proposals while engaging in dialogue with German language teachers and learners interested in the topic. Additionally, these courses offer an excellent opportunity to collect opinion data regarding the experience, interests, and needs of the target audience in relation to MPs - data that is intrinsically valuable for the ongoing development of the research and the didactic materials. In 2024, the project had its first international experience with the course “La enseñanza de las partículas modales alemanas: estrategias didácticas con materiales auténticos” offered at the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (UNC), Argentina. With the necessary adaptations (language, contrastive examples), the course was later taught at the University of São Paulo (USP) under the title “Teaching strategies for German MPs using authentic materials.” Both courses, consisting of six sessions, were offered free of charge and online to GAL teachers and learners in both countries. The aim was to discuss teaching approaches and strategies for MPs, promoting dialogue with learners’ prior knowledge and needs.

To better understand the participants’ experiences, as well as the role of the course in expanding knowledge on the teaching and learning of MPs, two online questionnaires (pre- and post-course) were administered via Google Forms (attached). The first questionnaire sought to establish the participants’ profiles and prior knowledge, while the second aimed to assess the course's impact on professional practice and learning regarding MPs. In addition to the questionnaires, field notes were taken during class interactions. Despite forming groups with distinct characteristics, both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the participants' responses from UNC and USP pointed to a positive impact

⁸ <https://www.instagram.com/modalpartikeln/>

regarding the materials, activities, and authentic examples presented in the extension courses.

To support the data analysis, the next section presents a review of the categorization of MPs and the challenges associated with their teaching and learning, aspects that guided the development of the local didactic materials. Subsequently, we detail the teaching materials produced by the research group, specifying their objectives, structure, and implementation in the extension courses, as well as the data collection and analysis methodology. In the fourth section, the results are discussed based on a comparative analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data from the questionnaires and field notes. Finally, the last section presents the conclusions and future perspectives of the project.

2 The teaching of MPs

German modal particles (MPs) form a word class comprising elements with essential pragmatic functions for negotiating meaning between interlocutors, as well as for recognizing the type of social act being performed (ARANTES 2017). In addition to their relevance for discourse coherence, MPs are highly frequent in everyday German communication, occurring in both formal and informal interactions, as well as in spoken and written texts (WEYDT 1969). Regarding their classification, the following syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic characteristics of MPs are highlighted (AQUINO 2020):⁹

- they are invariable (non-inflectable);
- they cannot be negated (*kein, nein*) or intensified (*mehr, viel*);
- they do not form independent clauses or answer yes/no questions;
- they are positioned in the middle field (Mittelfeld) of the sentence;
- they have scope over the entire clause, relating the sentence to the context;

⁹ Regarding the phonological level of MPs, there are some divergent views within Linguistic Studies, particularly concerning whether they can carry sentence stress. However, the general consensus seems to be that most MPs do not receive sentence stress, with exceptions such as *doch, ja, and aber*.

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- they occur in specific types of sentences;
- they can be combined with other MPs (e.g., *doch mal*);
- they have homonyms in other word classes with non-modal meanings;
- they carry an inferential meaning.

Traditionally, teaching modality presents numerous challenges, starting with raising learners' linguistic awareness regarding these words—such as their context-dependency and the difficulty of distinguishing them from their homonyms—and further intensified by the burden on the teacher to develop explanations and complementary activities, since most didactic materials do not offer a systematic treatment of the topic. Since the rise of the communicative approach, there has been an effort by textbook authors to integrate the spoken language of German-speaking countries. Nevertheless, in attempting to balance real spoken usage with grammatical and vocabulary instruction, textbooks often end up presenting overly artificial dialogues that fail to spark interest or engagement among learners (MAIJALA 2007; SCHOONJANS 2018; AQUINO, FERREIRA 2023). This situation directly affects the learning of language in use, such as MPs.

Consequently, German courses, both in regular and academic contexts, tend to address MPs superficially, lacking theoretical foundations and without offering concrete activities for production and comprehension. In addition to time constraints and, in some cases, insufficient teacher training on the topic, this situation is aggravated by the lack of adequate didactic materials. According to Bolácio *et al.* (2017), beyond often being neglected in the classroom—especially at beginner levels, there is also a large discrepancy between the everyday use of MPs and their occurrence in textbooks. Along the same lines, Aquino and Badain (2023), supported by reports from teachers and students, indicate that many GAL teachers do not feel prepared to teach MPs in class, although these elements arouse much curiosity and interest among students. The authors also surveyed the occurrence of MPs in three German textbooks (Studio 21 A1, DaF-Kompakt neu A1, and Momente A1.1), finding around 350 instances, primarily in dialogues, yet without any explicit instructional focus on the topic.

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As an example, we present the first lesson of the DaF-Kompakt neu A1 textbook (Braun *et al.*, 2016), currently used as a primary resource at USP, which includes examples of the MPs *denn* and *ja*:

Image 1: Example of the occurrence of MPs *denn* and *ja* in the DaF-Kompakt neu A1 textbook

The image shows a page from the DaF-Kompakt neu A1 textbook. It contains several exercises:

- Exercise c:** "Und Sie? Welche Sprachen sprechen Sie?" (And you? Which languages do you speak?). It shows two examples: "Welche Sprachen sprechen Sie? Ich spreche Türkisch und Englisch." and "Was sprichst du? Ich spreche Russisch und ein bisschen Deutsch." The particle "ein" is highlighted in the second example.
- Exercise 2:** "Was macht ihr hier?" (What are you doing here?). It includes a listening exercise (a) where students order a conversation and a matching exercise (b) where they match phrases like "Danke, gut.", "Na ja, es geht.", "Nicht so gut.", and "Sehr gut, danke." to questions.
- Exercise c:** "Fragen Sie im Kurs." (Ask questions in the course). It shows a dialogue between Leonie and Rodrigo. The particle "ja" is highlighted in "Ihr lernt Chinesisch – das ist ja super!" and "Das ist ja super." The particle "denn" is highlighted in "Was macht ihr denn im Sprachzentrum?"

Source: Braun *et al.* (2016)

Exercise two, found in the first lesson of the book (page 10, section 1b), presents a listening comprehension activity in which learners must determine the sequence of sentences as they appear in the audio. The MP *ja* appears in the sentence "Das ist ja super" ("That's really great"), while *denn* is used in the question "Was macht ihr denn im Sprachzentrum?" ("What are you doing at the language center?"). These MPs, therefore, already appear in the first lessons of level A1.1. However, it is evident that they occur

within a non-authentic text and without clear references to their discourse functions. The text's primary purpose seems to be providing input for grammar and vocabulary work, with MPs being used merely to imitate spoken language without the necessary contextualization for their understanding (SCHMIDT, AQUINO, 2025). Nonetheless, it is important to highlight the relevance of MPs occurring in the first lessons of beginner levels, which could encourage teachers to introduce the topic, even as a general awareness-raising activity.

In light of these challenges, our research group developed a didactic resource for the teaching and learning of MPs, offering solutions and teaching strategies grounded in the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic characteristics of this word class, illustrated through authentic texts with contextualized usage. This material is hosted on the USP portal and organized into the following sections: project presentation and suggestions for relevant readings; a detailed explanation of MPs focusing on the relationship between communicative function and meaning (from a minimalist perspective); a description of the word class and its differentiation from non-modal homonyms; a contrastive analysis of MPs in other languages; access to an original authentic corpus; and a set of exercises with answer keys. In the next section, we present a detailed description of this material. To further disseminate this work, we also provide biweekly posts on an Instagram page, fostering interaction with audiences both within and beyond the university.

To ensure the successful practical application of this material, we created opportunities for its use, such as in extension courses at USP, organized by the Culture and Extension Service and the Interdepartmental Language Center. In 2024, we also had the opportunity to present the course proposal to the International Relations Office at UNC in April. The Faculty of Languages at UNC offers German teacher education, while USP provides a dual degree in bachelor's and teacher training programs. With differing class sizes, the universities formed distinct groups: UNC had around fifteen German students per semester, while USP had over eighty. Consequently, the participant profiles varied, with most students at UNC being experienced teachers (76.9%), and the USP group composed mainly of German language students (64.5%). This data, collected

through anonymous online questionnaires and field notes (with authorized data usage), will be discussed in more detail in section four.

As previously mentioned, the courses were designed both to present and test the teaching material developed by the research group and to foster exchanges between German language teachers and learners in Brazil and Argentina. We believe it is essential to strengthen the ties between countries learning German as an Additional Language in South America, thus expanding collaboration and giving greater visibility to work developed from a local perspective. In the next section, we present a description of the didactic material and the structure of the extension courses, along with a discussion of the data collection and analysis methodology.

3 Teaching materials and extension courses

Both extension courses, conducted at USP and UNC, were based on the teaching materials available on the website developed by the research group. As mentioned earlier, these materials are primarily intended for teachers but are also accessible to university-level students. The content is built upon linguistic categorizations and the minimalist approach, which describes the core communicative functions of each modal particle. The website also offers exercise proposals and an extensive corpus composed entirely of authentic materials from various sources (ranging from journalistic texts to memes from social media). The breadth and diversity of the corpus allow the material to be used for teaching classes ranging from beginner to advanced levels. Therefore, the website aims to assist both teaching, by providing theoretical explanations (and learning) by offering practical exercises, on the topic of MPs, delivering linguistically grounded explanations and a wide variety of authentic examples:

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AQUINO *et al.* – Learning and Teaching Modal Particles in Argentina and Brazil**Image 2:** German Modal Particles Project Website**Source:** the authors

The website is divided into six main sections beyond the homepage shown above: “The Project,” “The MPs,” “The Corpus,” “Queer Eye Project,” “Exercises,” and “Give Your Feedback.” The section “The Project” introduces visitors to the history of the project and its members. In “The MPs,” users will find explanations about MPs, their functions, meanings, and homonyms, as well as reflections on “how and why” to teach and learn MPs. This section also includes a contrastive analysis of MPs in German and other languages such as Portuguese, English, French, and Catalan.

Regarding the use of authentic texts, the “Corpus” section offers numerous examples of the use of German and Brazilian MPs. In the “Queer Eye Project” section, inspired by the Netflix series *Queer Eye Germany*, a teaching sequence proposal is presented, which can be adapted to various learning contexts. In the “Exercises” section, teachers and students have access to practice activities on MPs, with answer keys provided. These exercises are based on authentic corpus materials and theoretical-linguistic explanations, and are presented in the following formats: classification and usage rule exercises; recognition of MPs compared to their non-modal homonyms; understanding the communicative function and meaning of sentences with and without

MPs; and a list of exercises organized by specific MPs, allowing for receptive and written practice.

Alongside the website, a page was created on the digital platform Instagram, with a different purpose: while the website focuses on providing descriptive content and exercise lists, the Instagram page aims to raise awareness of the topic and promote the project. Posts contain shorter, more accessible explanations for a wider audience. Each post includes examples drawn from the corpus and proposes exercises related to the featured MP, complete with answer keys. Additionally, the page provides a space for resolving questions through comments and private messages. The Instagram page is an important tool for promoting materials and events—such as the extension courses—and for facilitating various forms of interaction with the public, including polls, question boxes in stories, comments, and direct messages. Although the Instagram page targets a broader audience and thus offers more accessible content, the materials remain entirely authentic and are shared in a way that stimulates learner engagement—counteracting the artificial texts commonly found in major publishing house textbooks.

Considering the objectives of the materials developed by the research group, the extension courses offered at USP and UNC aimed not only to introduce content about MPs but also to provide participants with opportunities to discuss and reflect on these linguistic elements, connecting new content to their prior knowledge and learning strategies for teaching MPs. The courses, consisting of six sessions in total, were structured similarly at both universities. Before the classes began, participants completed an introductory questionnaire (further detailed in this section) which collected personal and academic profile information such as age, education, and professional background, as well as questions regarding their prior knowledge and experience with German MPs (e.g., what they believed MPs role were and whether they had previously studied or used them). In the first session, responses from the questionnaire were presented to initiate a discussion about the participants' knowledge, experiences, and gaps related to the teaching and learning of MPs. The data helped instructors adapt the lessons to the specific needs of each group.

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In the second session, general explanations were provided about the use, didactic approach, and linguistic classification of MPs. This included their grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic categorization; their communicative function in discourse (both formal and informal); their frequency of occurrence in the corpus; and the teaching strategies to be used throughout the course.

Starting from the third session, the content deepened into discussions of specific MPs: in Córdoba, the focus was on *doch* and *ja*, and *denn* and *halt*; in São Paulo, it was on *doch* and *ja*. These focused sessions included the following activities: comprehension exercises and discussions based on authentic corpus examples; the formulation of new usage examples with attention to context; recognition and discussion of MPs in relation to their homonyms; and analysis of the function of MPs in sentences with and without their presence. Examples of these exercises are shown in the following table, which outlines some of the teaching strategies employed in the extension courses:

Table 1: List of MP Learning Strategies Used in the Extension Courses

Type of activity	Example
Comparison between sentences: with MPs and homonyms	Sie ist klein, <i>aber</i> stark vs. Ihr seid <i>aber</i> groß geworden
Comparison between sentences: with and without MPs	Setz dich! vs. Setz dich <i>doch</i> !
Comparison between sentences: different MPs	Wir sind <i>ja</i> alte Bekannte vs. Wir sind <i>doch</i> alte Bekannte
Explanation of nuclear communicative function	<i>Doch</i> : indicating contradiction; <i>Ja</i> : marking agreement or shared knowledge between interlocutors
Recognition of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features	Positioned in the middle field (<i>Mittelfeld</i>); do not form independent clauses; can be removed without grammatical loss, etc.
Authentic examples in various text genres	Tv shows, comic strips, songs, Instagram posts, videos, etc.
Contrastive analysis	Relation to pragmatic elements in other languages

Source: the authors

In addition to the examples shown above, at the end of each session, tasks were proposed for participants to work on collaboratively and discuss at the beginning of the next class. In the final session, participants were invited to prepare an individual presentation on aspects learned during the course. Topics selected included: the use of artificial intelligence to create exercises on German MPs; possibilities for translating MPs in literary texts; contrastive analysis between German and Japanese MPs; the use of MPs in comic strips about international law and human rights; and teaching proposals for specific MPs. Discussions based on participants' interests allowed for a deeper critical engagement with the course content and visibly increased motivation and participation.

As previously mentioned, the results of the courses are based on two data collection tools: two questionnaires (pre- and post-course) and field notes. The questionnaires were created in Google Forms and included open- and closed-ended questions, with anonymous responses and consent for research use. The first questionnaire collected 23 responses from USP participants and 18 from UNC. The second questionnaire collected 13 responses from USP and 8 from UNC. The next section will present the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the collected data, focusing on participants' experiences and expectations, as well as the role of the materials in fostering individual reflections and establishing teaching and learning strategies for MPs.

4 Results

This section is divided into three subsections, which present the results of the questionnaires and field notes, establishing connections between the extension course experiences at the two universities. Subsection 1 presents the profiles of each group participating in the extension course. It also addresses data regarding each participant's prior experience (in teaching, learning, and using) with MPs, as well as their expectations and needs regarding the lessons. The second subsection outlines the structure of each session, highlighting the most relevant discussions and questions that arose during the classes. Finally, the third subsection discusses the role of the course and the teaching materials in expanding knowledge about MPs, focusing primarily on the data collected from the second questionnaire of each extension course.

4.1 Participants profiles

The following table presents information on the age, academic, and professional profiles of the participants from USP and UNC. The first column contains the questions from the initial questionnaire, while the second and third columns display the respective responses of participants from USP and UNC.¹⁰ These columns also include the corresponding

¹⁰ Due to the length of the questionnaires, we chose to present only the responses selected by the majority of participants, as our analysis focused primarily on the data represented by these answers. Nevertheless, all responses can be accessed in full in the questionnaires provided in the appendix.

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percentages for each answer, reflecting how many participants selected each option in relation to the total number of respondents. It is important to note that, in some questions, participants could select more than one option, meaning some percentages reflect the frequency of each response rather than the exact number of respondents.

As shown in Table 2, the participant groups in each course displayed both similarities and differences, which we believe directly influenced the classroom discussions and the development of the course content. Firstly, it is noteworthy that the USP group consisted of participants with less teaching experience in German. This difference seems to have had a direct impact on the responses to the fifth question in the table: “What do you feel you lack the most when it comes to teaching or learning about MPs?” While USP students mostly indicated a need for greater linguistic knowledge on the topic, Argentine participants emphasized the lack of adequate teaching materials. In both cases, however, there was a clear demand for solutions, strategies, and materials that could effectively address these linguistic elements in their respective teaching contexts. As seen in the table, both Argentine and Brazilian participants highlighted the need for theoretical explanations and practical approaches to MPs as the main gaps in their learning.¹¹

¹¹ The complete questionnaire is available in the appendix for consultation of other response options selected by the participants.

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AQUINO *et al.* – Learning and Teaching Modal Particles in Argentina and Brazil**Table 2:** Profiles of the Brazilian and Argentine University Participants

Participants' Profiles (USP and UNC)		
Category	USP	UNC
Age	26.1% - 36 to 40 21.7% - 22 to 26 21.7% - over 45	33.3% - over 45 27.8% - 27 to 30
Academic Background	65.4% - German language student	83.4% - German language teacher
Language Knowledge	47.8% - B1/B2	61.1% - C1/C2
Currently or previously teaches German?	69.6% - No	77.8% - Yes
Satisfied with how you learned or taught MPs?	47.8% - Not sure	44.4% - Not sure
What do you feel is most needed to teach or learn about MPs?	73.9% - More linguistic knowledge on the topic 60.9% - Production and comprehension exercises	72.2% - Appropriate teaching materials / specific activities 61.1% - More linguistic knowledge on the topic

Source: the authors

These findings are directly related to the participants' responses to the last question in the table, which asked how they had learned or taught MPs. For this, the majority of respondents in both universities selected the option "General Explanation" (UNC 72.2%, USP 56.5%). Therefore, with either only general explanations or the absence of explicit discussion in class, combined with the lack of didactic materials (BLACIO FILHO *et al* 2017, AQUINO 2023), it is unsurprising that German learners and teachers face a range of difficulties when approaching and using these pragmatically complex words. Nevertheless, we emphasize that even with greater linguistic experience and teaching practice in GAL, both groups displayed gaps in their linguistic knowledge of MPs during the course. Both in the initial questionnaire responses and in the first classes, the UNC teachers indicated they already had a reasonable understanding of the

topic. However, during the course, numerous difficulties emerged, such as recognizing MPs (in contrast to their homonyms) and identifying their modal function (understanding MPs as discourse markers or intonational nuances).

Additionally, the vast majority of the Argentine participants admitted that they did not address MPs in the classroom and often actively avoided the topic. Among the Brazilian participants, who reported little or no prior experience with MPs, a greater consistency was observed in their linguistic perceptions and prior knowledge, which had significant implications for the discussions and content development during the sessions. For both groups, it was essential to explicitly address the linguistic descriptions of the MP word class, to open spaces for debate (both in plenary sessions and in small groups), and to engage in tasks aimed at reflecting on, and recognizing, communicative functions, focusing on a limited number of MPs and examples from authentic corpus texts.

Both Argentine and Brazilian participants emphasized the need for specific materials with production and comprehension exercises to better understand MPs, as well as suggestions for teaching strategies. These findings highlight the complementarity of practice and theory, which became a key point in both extension courses. Thus, through the development of exercises and discussions grounded in well-established theoretical foundations, it was possible to foster meaningful reflections and more complex explanations of the functioning of these modal elements.

As for each group's expectations, both highlighted the desire to gain greater linguistic and didactic mastery over MPs. Most responses referred to the need for teaching strategies and exercises focused on this linguistic resource, as well as a renewed interest in being able to use MPs with greater confidence.¹² Another interesting finding from the first questionnaire involved the definition of MPs. In both the first and second questionnaires, we asked the participants to write a brief definition of MPs. Our aim was to gauge the students' prior knowledge of the topic and to observe whether, by the end of the course, there were any changes in their understanding and/or perception. In both

¹² The data was presented using keywords in order to preserve the participants' identities. The expectations were categorized based on patterns identified in the responses, which allowed us to determine the participants' main interests regarding the development of the course.

universities, there was a significant improvement in the formulation of responses, indicating that participants had developed greater linguistic and reflective mastery over MPs. It is worth noting that participants already demonstrated a heightened sensitivity to the topic, requiring only further theoretical and practical knowledge to deepen their understanding.

4.2 Course structure and discussions

As mentioned earlier, the courses were designed to introduce the word class of German modal particles (MPs), present their communicative function within the minimalist approach, and then deepen these topics through lessons focused on specific MPs. These sessions explored the particles' functions, contextual meanings, differences from their homonyms, and contrastive relationships with MPs in other languages. The lessons were structured to always provide participants with authentic examples of MP usage through various formats such as videos, memes, comic strips, and different platforms like Instagram and the research group's website. Through these resources, we aimed to ensure that the participants could understand MPs using contextualized teaching materials while actively engaging in their own learning process.

The courses consisted of six two-hour lessons. The first session was dedicated to introducing the project, the teaching materials, the instructors, and the participants themselves, using the data collected from the initial questionnaire. In addition to initiating a preliminary discussion about participants' needs and experiences, we introduced the main theoretical aspects guiding our approach to MPs. Based on the questionnaire results and this initial conversation, we were able to adapt the lesson plan to include the participants' interests. The second session focused on establishing descriptive rules and structures for MPs, covering their main distinguishing features, relating them to their homonyms, and describing their communicative function using the minimalist approach.

According to the minimalist approach, the meaning of each MP can only be accessed through semantic-lexical parameters and a recoverable context (WEYDT 1983; SCHOONJANS 2018; AQUINO 2023). Unlike the maximalist approach, which describes MPs through a semi-fixed list of meanings, the minimalist approach defines their nuclear

communicative function, with meaning being derived from contextual analysis. From this perspective, each MP has a recurring communicative function across its uses. For example, *doch* expresses contradiction, *ja* indicates shared knowledge, and *denn* signals a question regarding immediate contextual information. Meaning is thus understood as the relationship between the communicative function and the context, whether irony, politeness, surprise, happiness, sadness, and so on. In this article, we adopt the premise that the minimalist approach is particularly relevant for teaching these elements, as it establishes objective parameters for their recognition and categorization based on communicative function.

Following the second session on classification rules, the lessons focused on analyzing specific MPs using authentic examples from the corpus (including comic strips, songs, movies, series, Instagram posts, among others). These sessions explored the relationship between modal and homonymic functions, the nuclear communicative function of each MP in comparative sentences (e.g., *Das ist die Wahrheit, Das ist doch die Wahrheit, Das ist wohl die Wahrheit*), as well as contrastive analyses, particularly with modal usages in Portuguese, such as *mas, ai, bem que, então*, and others. The tasks were carried out through plenary discussions and small group work. Finally, the last session was dedicated to individual presentations by the participants, which resulted in a highly productive exchange of ideas and reflections on various approaches and perspectives concerning MPs. Looking ahead to future extension courses, we plan to expand opportunities for individual presentations to allow for deeper exploration of participants' personal experiences and interests, enabling them to move from passive recipients of information to active contributors to the discussion.

As outlined in this section, the course sessions were structured to first introduce the program, the materials, and the perspectives of the course, while also exploring the participants' needs and prior experiences. After this initial phase of clarification and collaborative discussion, we moved on to raising awareness of the topic by focusing on the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic descriptions of MPs to delineate their communicative functions and uses in discourse. Based on this theoretical foundation, illustrated with contextualized examples, we then adopted a more practical focus, working

in detail with specific MPs (such as *doch*, *ja*, and *denn*) and their meaning relationships within context, with homonyms, and with other MPs. Throughout the course, we used the materials developed by the research group and fostered critical reflections on the relationship between this topic, teacher education, and the use of international teaching materials. We believe this approach allows for a meaningful exploration of various aspects beyond MPs themselves, addressing issues of language in use, learner motivation, participation, and teaching and learning strategies more broadly. In addition to the lead researcher-instructor, two undergraduate teaching assistants participated in the development and delivery of the course, making for an enriching didactic experience.

4.3 Perceptions after the course

In general, the results from the field notes and questionnaires indicated a significant positive impact from participation in the course, particularly in raising awareness about the functions and use of MPs in both universities. The participants also reported an increased sense of belonging when using the language in different communicative situations and greater confidence in teaching these modal elements within their own professional contexts. The following table summarizes the key questions from the second questionnaire answered by the students at each university. As shown, the quantitative data in the second and third columns represent the percentage of the most frequently selected answers for each question listed in the left column.

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AQUINO *et al.* – Learning and Teaching Modal Particles in Argentina and Brazil**Table 3:** Perceptions After the Extension Course

Participant's Perception after the course		
Question	USP	UNC
How did participation in the course impact your knowledge of MPs?	100% - expanded my knowledge	87.5% - expanded my knowledge
Of the approaches presented in the course, which do you consider most relevant to your teaching and/or learning context?	76.9% - comparing the same sentence with and without MPs 69.2% - the individual nuclear communicative function of each MP	100% - comparing the same sentence with and without MPs 87.5% - the individual nuclear communicative function of each MP
What did you think of the materials from the modal particles project?	“authoral”; “creative”; “innovative”; “accessible”; “helps in teaching MPs”	“authentic”; “multimodal”; “creative”; “current”; “interesting”
Overall, how do you evaluate the course, what did you like, and what was missing?	“very positive”; “highlight for the explanations and interactions”; “would have liked more time for discussion and practice”	“exceeded expectations”; “complete”, “well structured”; “missed having more real-life practice”

Source: the authors

As the table shows, most participants from both USP and UNC reported that the course expanded their knowledge of MPs. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous subsection, other data from the questionnaires and field notes support this finding, such as the gradual increase in group participation throughout the extension courses, the improved recognition of MPs, and a greater involvement of participants in class discussions. It is also evident that this increased engagement was accompanied by the progressive application of the knowledge acquired during the course. Additionally, in both classroom discussions and written comments, some participants mentioned that they were already applying what they had learned in their own German language production and/or in their teaching practices. This marks a significant shift compared to their initial questionnaire responses, indicating increased confidence and a greater sense of agency in using and teaching the language.

Regarding the teaching approaches explored in the course, both groups (as reported in the questionnaire responses and classroom discussions) overwhelmingly highlighted one activity as the most helpful: comparing sentences with and without MPs (*Es ist nicht weit* vs. *Es ist ja nicht weit*), selected by 76.9% of USP participants and 100% of UNC participants. In second place for both groups was the preference for a communicative approach to teaching and learning MPs, that is, focusing on the nuclear communicative function of each particle and interpreting its meaning based on context. Despite the different teaching contexts, the participants from both groups favored the same approaches, emphasizing the importance of reflection through comparison, contrastive analysis, and contextual interpretation of meaning, rather than relying on a fixed list of potential meanings (as proposed by maximalist approaches). Instead, they appreciated approaches grounded in the communicative function of the particles. According to participants' reports, these approaches enabled greater awareness and autonomy in the use and teaching of MPs.

Another point frequently mentioned by USP and UNC participants in the second questionnaire was the creative, accessible, and innovative nature of the teaching materials used during the course. These descriptors were mentioned by several participants in both the questionnaires and in class discussions. Throughout the sessions, participants repeatedly shared that they lacked appropriate teaching resources or authentic examples for working with MPs and that existing materials offered no theoretical or didactic basis for addressing this topic in the classroom. We believe that in the context of teaching MPs, and in German language learning more broadly, working with materials from a local perspective, which consider the learners' knowledge and needs, can be an excellent way to maintain motivation and engagement.

By offering this extension course, we aimed to approach the topic of MPs through original teaching materials containing contextualized usage examples taken from an authentic corpus, paired with activities and explanations based on established linguistic theories, such as the minimalist approach and the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic classification of these elements in formal and informal, spoken and written contexts. The diversity, accessibility, and authenticity of the corpus were, without a doubt, among the

aspects most frequently highlighted by participants when responding to the second questionnaire about their experiences and opinions of the materials used in the course. These findings are highly relevant for our research group, as one of the goals of the extension course was to test the application of the materials and gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and needs of our target audience.

The strategies and approaches used in the course and the materials were particularly designed to meet the needs of German language teachers and students in teacher education programs, but also extended to others interested in German language and culture, who, in the Brazilian context, made up a significant portion of the participants. We believe that the combination of theoretical-linguistic explanations and practical didactic activities was well received by the participants and encouraged them to actively engage throughout the course. Equally important was the creation of opportunities for exchange and discussion through various activities and authentic examples, fostering critical and creative awareness of the topic. In summary, we observed that the authenticity of the materials made a clear difference for the participants, especially the inclusion of immediately recognizable usage contexts, which fostered a sense of representation and increased learners' interest in expanding their understanding and use of the language in various forms and contexts. This also contributed to a noticeable increase in their confidence when teaching these modal elements, thanks to an objective approach grounded in linguistic studies and contextualized examples.

5 Conclusion

The extension course experiences offered at the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (UNC) and the University of São Paulo (USP) demonstrated the effectiveness of the original teaching materials, which used an authentic text corpus to teach German MPs. The data collected from the two questionnaires and field notes revealed a significant gap in the understanding and teaching of MPs, even among participants with extensive experience in teaching German as an additional language (GAL). The lack of adequate didactic materials and insufficient theoretical training on the topic were identified as common

barriers. However, the material developed by the project and applied during the courses—using a minimalist approach and authentic examples, helped to fill these gaps, providing participants with a deeper understanding of the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic functions of MPs. Participants in both Argentina and Brazil considered the strategies of comparing sentences with and without MPs, and explaining their meaning through the nuclear communicative function, as the most relevant approaches in the course.

The data analysis showed that, regardless of the differences between the UNC and USP groups, the course methodology and the teaching materials were considered effective in raising awareness and improving the teaching and use of MPs. The participants' final feedback reflected a high level of satisfaction with the course, highlighting the innovative and accessible nature of the material. This success suggests that implementing contextualized teaching materials grounded in solid theoretical frameworks can not only enhance the understanding of MPs but also increase broader engagement and motivation of students and teachers regarding the German language. Furthermore, we believe that the courses served as a platform to strengthen collaborations between GAL teaching institutions in both countries, fostering an exchange of experiences and practices that can enrich language teaching approaches across South America.

The results of this study emphasize the importance of addressing MPs in an authentic and meaningful way in GAL instruction. The participants' responses in the questionnaires and classroom discussions further highlight the considerable demand for specialized teaching materials that address local needs, with analyses based on the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic categories of these elements, as well as authentic examples and exercises. This approach was adopted by the instructors throughout the course and resulted in strong participant engagement. Nevertheless, there is still a need for ongoing efforts and deeper reflection on the teaching and learning practices of MPs to support the development of increasingly effective didactic solutions aligned with the learning needs of Latin American students.

Finally, future perspectives for this work include expanding the extension courses to different learning contexts and needs within GAL instruction; developing longer

courses that allow for longitudinal data collection; expanding and adapting the teaching materials for future publication as a reference resource; investigating the relationship between MPs and other languages beyond Portuguese; and continuing and broadening the research on the effectiveness of the didactic approaches used, always in dialogue with learners and users of our materials.

Appendix

Questionário I - UNC:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KTMcbtzbjxL0lOhP8uY1UdZaLai1v1NW/view?usp=sharing>

Questionário I - USP:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1i-U87ddxifuWtFXokqYzEpjj7UQHdVnZ/view>

Questionário II - UNC:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/11pIC31gZSubOqWDMIXP55FfU5j5-V28n/view?usp=sharing>

Questionário II - USP:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/17K6Q75q61W_1Yy1qLC71ccN-zGe6-MXA/view?usp=sharing

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