

## Research Article

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# Inferential Processes in English and the Question whether English has Modal Particles

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**Abstract:** In this paper, we ask whether English pragmatic markers may evoke similar inferential processes in discourse as German modal particles, studying *alright/all right*, *already* and *then* in more detail. Moreover, we investigate whether specific formal features are associated with these uses and thus whether there is any evidence for a productive modal particle category that can serve as a guideline for the creation and interpretation of modal particle uses of English pragmatic markers. Our analysis shows that even though evidence for a schematic modal particle construction is not conclusive, modal particle uses of pragmatic markers may be potentially widespread in English, and the inferential processes involved may be similar across languages.

**Keywords:** modal particles; pragmatic markers; construction grammar

## 1 Introduction

Various suggestions have been made in the literature concerning the equivalents of modal particles in English, and more recently, it has been suggested that English may be developing a modal particle category itself (e.g. Haselow 2013). Indeed, it seems strange that modal particles should play such an important role in some languages and not at all in English, especially if viewed from the perspective of the inferences made in interaction. That is, if modal particles involve certain inferential processes in interaction in some languages, then similar processes might arise in English as well. Nevertheless, the widely held belief is that English does not have modal particles, or if so, then much less frequently; for instance, Fillmore (1984: 133–134) suggests that speech formulas like *after all* are translation equivalents, but since they are not syntactically integrated, they occur in much lower frequencies than German modal particles.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, such a category does not appear in standard reference grammars such as Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999), Huddleston and Pullum (2002) in the relevant sense.

However, recent attention to the pragmatics of argumentative structure and of dialogal interaction has suggested that a modal particle category may indeed be developing, starting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lenker

<sup>1</sup> Because German modal particles have been addressed in such a broad range of studies and from so many different perspectives (e.g. Abraham 1991, 2012; Coniglio 2011; Doherty 1985; Thurmair 1989, 2013; Waltereit 2006), they serve here as a point of departure for the discussion of English modal particle candidates in this paper.

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2010). For instance, Lenk (1998) argues that final uses of *anyway* are similar to German modal particles. Hoyer (1997:210) suggests that *certainly* can be used as a modal particle. Schwenter and Waltereit (2010) discuss recent (since the 1900s) non-additive uses of English *too*, which they compare to the German modal particle *auch*. Furthermore, König et al. (1990: 205-206) identify many translation equivalents of German modal particles in English; for example, they suggest that the German modal particle *schon* can be translated by means of English *all right* or *anyway*, as in *ich glaub Dir schon* ‘I believe you all right’, or in *wer will schon in New York leben* ‘who wants to live in New York anyway’. More recently, Haselow (2013: 378) suggests that utterance-final particles like *actually*, *anyway*, *but*, *even*, *so*, *then* and *though* constitute “an emerging paradigm” with some properties akin to modal particles in German. These works suggest that there are equivalent uses of (German) modal particles in English.

The answer to the question whether English has modal particles or not obviously depends on what is understood to be a modal particle. In fact, the meanings and functions suggested for modal particles are highly diverse even within the same language context. For instance, it has been suggested that German modal particles fulfill downtoning functions (*Abtönung*, e.g. Waltereit 2006), i.e. they modulate the impact or force of the utterance; that modal particles operate on illocutionary force, i.e. they indicate, specify or modify the illocutionary force of an utterance (e.g. Altmann 1987; Helbig 1988; Thurmair 1989, 2013; Jacobs 1991; Engel 1996; Helbig & Buscha 1998; Coniglio 2011); that they express the speaker’s attitude (Möllering 2004); that they fulfill epistemic functions (Doherty 1985; Aijmer 1997, 2009); or that they anchor the utterance in common ground (e.g. Diewald & Fischer 1998; Diewald 2006; Fischer 2007; Abraham 2012; Bross 2012; Haselow 2012). Our first step will therefore be to define modal particles and to describe their function in German in order to provide a basis for our analysis of English modal particle candidates.

Another question we need to address is whether, if English has items that evoke similar inferential processes as (German) modal particles, they occur with a relatively similar frequency, i.e. quite frequently<sup>2</sup> (e.g. Brünjes 2014). Answering this question about English would presuppose that we know about all possible functional equivalents. Because a cross-linguistic comparison relies on function (cf. Croft 2001; Abraham & Leiss 2012) and because our focus is on identifying similar inferential processes in the two languages, possible translation equivalents of modal particles can potentially be all kinds of linguistic signs. Correspondingly, also prosodic marking (Schubiger 1965) and grammatical means, like the comparative (Fischer 2007), have been proposed to be functionally equivalent to modal particles, in addition to adverbs, auxiliary or mental verbs, tag questions, and pragmatic markers (e.g. Fillmore 1984; Abraham 1991; Fischer & Drescher 1996; Winters 2009).

A more feasible approach is to focus on pragmatic markers in English only, i.e. to start off from items that share some features (they are words or short speech routines with pragmatic functions) with German modal particles. For these items, we can investigate whether English has a construction (in the Construction Grammar sense, see Goldberg 1995, 2006), i.e. a potentially schematic form-meaning pair, that encodes the same inferential processes as modal particles, which generalizes over all existing modal particle candidates, and which can serve as a model for other, new creations of modal particle uses. We shall therefore investigate whether occurrences of pragmatic markers with modal particle function in English are isolated, spurious instances or whether the phenomenon is potentially widespread so that the existence of a general category can be assumed. For example, it has been proposed that final particles in English are developing into such a construction (cf. Haselow 2013; Traugott 2016). Our next step is then to examine whether the uses identified share both formal and functional features and thus to investigate whether there is evidence for an emerging modal particle construction, i.e. a productive category with form- and meaning side that can give rise to the development of new modal particle uses of final particles. Here we leave our initial functional focus and turn to the identification of form-function correlations.

<sup>2</sup> Rudolph (1991) finds 23.8% of German conversation to be particles, comprising however also discourse, scalar and focus particles, in addition to modal particles. Möllering (2001) reports *ja* to be the most frequent particle with 19.5 occurrences per 1000 words, and Brünjes (2014) suggests that 40% of the occurrences of *ja* are modal particle uses, which would amount to modal *ja* occurring 7.8 times per 1000 words. We can conclude that modal particles in German are comparatively frequent.

In order to determine whether English pragmatic markers fulfill functions similar to those suggested for German modal particles (Diewald & Fischer 1998; Fischer 2000, 2007; Diewald 2006; Alm et al. in press), we will first discuss utterance-final *then* (cf. Haselow 2011, 2012, 2013). We will then study certain utterance-final uses of *already*, which have emerged recently and so far only in American English. Given that the modal particle use of *already* is such a recent (and regionally restricted) phenomenon, it will provide indirect evidence concerning the question whether there is an emerging modal particle category in English. The third example we will discuss is *alright* in order to address to what extent final particles in English have a contradictory flavor to them, as, for instance, Traugott (2016) suggests. Finally, in order to investigate to what extent the phenomenon is restricted to final particles in English, we briefly discuss some other possible examples, namely *after all*, *indeed* and *just*.

Our analysis will thus address the following questions:

1. May English pragmatic markers fulfill the functions of German modal particles? That is, can English pragmatic markers be used in similar functions as German modal particles at all, i.e. are there uses of pragmatic markers that can be analyzed in similar ways as German modal particles?
2. How common are such uses? I.e., is it only a small group of specific pragmatic markers that fulfill functions similar to German modal particles, or does the phenomenon concern a larger group of items? Are such uses of English pragmatic markers rather exceptional, or do they constitute a considerable proportion of the polysemous pragmatic marker tokens?
3. Are there specific formal features associated with these uses? I.e. is the potential group of modal particle candidates in English restricted to specific positions (for instance, utterance-finally) or are they spread out over many different positions?
4. Is there any evidence for a productive modal particle category that can serve as a guideline for the creation and interpretation of modal particle uses of English pragmatic markers? That is, how are the type and token frequencies of these uses distributed?

Before we can address these questions, we need to define modal particles and specify their meanings and functions.

## 2 Inferential Processes in German Modal Particles

For German, the language we focus on here as a starting point for the comparison with English, only few features of modal particles are accepted unanimously; these include (see, for instance, Helbig 1988; Thurmair 1989, 2013):

1. Modal particles are non-inflecting.
2. They have scope over the entire clause.
3. They cannot function as sentence constituents.
4. With very few exceptions, they occur inside the clause in a particular sentence-medial position, the so-called syntactic middle field.
5. The occurrence of most modal particles is restricted to certain sentence types/moods.

Some of these criteria are negative criteria, some are not exclusive to modal particles (sentence adverbs, for instance, also have scope over the whole clause) and in general they do not define the function modal particles carry out. Syntactic criteria are very useful for identifying modal particles in a German clause, but since we are looking for similar inferential processes in two languages, we have to rely on functional, not on formal criteria (Croft 2001; Fischer & Alm 2013). Additional criteria have been suggested (see, for instance, Gutzmann 2015 and Haselow 2012, whose lists have many more criteria), but these are not as unanimous as the ones listed above; especially the functions of modal particles are heavily debated.

## 2.1 The Functions of German Modal Particles

Much work on modal particles focuses on the pragmatic effects modal particles can have in the different sentence types in which they occur (cf., for instance, Kwon 2005; Thurmair 2013; Weydt et al. 1983). Because their pragmatic interpretations may differ according to the sentence types in which they occur, they are often conceived of as illocutionary operators (e.g. Altmann 1987; Helbig 1988; Thurmair 1989, 2013; Detges & Waltereit 2009), where they are taken to modify or even specify the utterance's speech act meaning. For example, *nur* (roughly: 'only') can turn a directive into an encouragement, permission or threat (Zifonun et al. 1997: 1218). Furthermore, modal particles are often taken to have different readings depending on the sentence types in which they occur; for instance, Weydt et al. (1983: 122) assume the modal particle *ja* to have four different functions:

- in exclamations, it may express marvel and astonishment, for instance, *Du hast ja ein neues Auto!* ('You have PTC a new car!')
- in imperatives, it can be used as a warning or threat, for instance, *Mach das ja nicht noch mal!* ('Don't you dare PTC do this again!')
- in assertions, it appeals to common knowledge, for instance, *Du weißt ja, dass ich morgen Geburtstag habe* ('You know PTC that I have a new car.')
- in responses in combination with *nicht* ('not'), it enforces the rejection, for instance in *ja nicht* (lit. 'yes not').

Irrespective of whether modal particles are best thought of as illocutionary operators or not, their functions thus clearly interact with the sentence types in which they occur (cf. Alm et al. in press), and some approaches focus on the pragmatic features of modal particles in context, such as to express marvel or astonishment, a warning or threat or to appeal to common knowledge, as Weydt et al. (1983: 122) suggested for *ja*, for instance.

Other approaches focus on more general functions of modal particles; one such function that has commonly been proposed for German modal particles is to connect the current utterance to common ground. This function is essential to the models by Lindner (1991), Haselow (2011) and Bross (2012), to name but a few, and it is at the heart of the model we are going to take as a starting point in this investigation (e.g. Diewald & Fischer 1998; Diewald 2006, 2015; Fischer 2000, 2007; Alm et al. in press). It is also at the core of models that assume polyphony, where the voice taken to be evoked by the modal particle corresponds to the pragmatically presupposed proposition suggested to be part of common ground (Bross 2012). In accordance with this previous work, in the model we build on here, modal particles are taken to refer to given but not usually verbalized<sup>3</sup> propositions, which are suggested to be shared, and thus to mark the utterances in which they occur as non-initial, i.e. as related to, and coherent with, previous discourse. The function we are going to look for in English is thus the function to connect the current utterance to an aspect of common ground (a pragmatically given unit). Thus, instances of modal particles give rise to a paraphrase in terms of common ground, for instance, *as you and I both know; as we have discussed before; as we have been thinking all along; as is generally assumed; as we both can see; one might have expected that..., but*, depending on what kind of common ground is alluded to (shared perception, shared cultural background, shared dialog history, etc., cf. Clark 1996: 100-120) and depending on whether the modal particle affirms or rejects the pragmatically given unit. This proposed function of modal particles accounts for the fact that modal particles are inherently dialogical and significantly related to dialogical text types (cf. Diewald 2015).

Diewald and Fischer (1998) present a basic semantic schema that suggests a three-part relationship; in particular, the schema comprises 1) a pragmatically given unit, a non-verbalized proposition, which is in most cases a logical variant of the host utterance<sup>4</sup> (Foolen 1989); 2) the speaker's stance towards this

<sup>3</sup> The Pragmatically given unit: may also be given because it was mentioned in prior discourse; however, in contrast to conjunctions, modal particles do not connect the current utterance directly to that prior discourse (cf. Diewald 2006).

<sup>4</sup> This means that, depending on the respective modal particle, the pragmatically given unit is either the same proposition as expressed in the current utterance (like in the case of *ja*), or its negation (like in the case of *aber*), or some other particle-specific variant of the current utterance (for instance, 'one may expect that there is a problem doing p', like in the case of *ruhig*).

pragmatically given unit (the current situation, i.e. what the speaker wants to express); and 3) the host utterance with the modal particle (the current utterance):<sup>5</sup>

### Basic Schema for the Description of Modal Particles

pragmatically given unit:	proposition at hand (logical variant of current utterance)
current situation:	speaker evaluation of proposition at hand
→ utterance:	modified proposition with particle

The relationship between the pragmatically given proposition and the speaker's attitude towards this proposition, i.e. what the speaker wants to express, determines (speaker's perspective) the choice of the modal particle, and in turn the choice of modal particle in the current utterance determines the pragmatically given unit (hearer's perspective). For instance, some modal particles evoke a relationship of agreement with the pragmatically given unit, in which case the host utterance is identical with the pragmatically given unit, which is just re-iterated and thus strengthened by the modal particle. Unstressed *ja* (roughly: 'yes') is such a particle. In contrast, if the speaker disagrees with the pragmatically given unit, i.e. a proposition taken to be common ground, the pragmatically given unit is the negation of the host utterance, for instance, when the modal particle is *aber* (roughly: 'but').

'Pragmatically given' does not mean that the speakers have to have agreed on it or that it has been explicitly discussed and is part of the discourse record; instead, by using the modal particle, the speaker *suggests* that the proposition evoked is shared.

The modal particle thus presents the current utterance as non-initial, such that it is oriented to a proposition that is presented as shared, but since the current utterance with the modal particle specifies exactly what this proposition is, it does not really matter whether this proposition is discourse-old, hearer-old or even activated by the hearer; the current proposal is thus neutral with respect to the specific model of common ground assumed (we are using Clark's (1996) typology of common ground because it is the most comprehensive). Moreover, since the proposition indexed is retrievable from the host utterance with the particle (it's a logical variant of the host utterance), it can also be imposed onto the hearer, who is then suggested to have shared the information (cf. Alm & Larsen 2015).<sup>6</sup> The pragmatically given units comprise cultural facts, assumptions about human nature, shared perception, as well as the discourse record and all the other aspects of common ground listed in Clark (1996). Alm & Larsen (2015) show that the kinds of propositions evoked by modal particles may differ based on the respective communication partner and topic of conversation; for instance, in child-directed speech, modal particles evoke mostly perceptually given information, whereas when teenagers discuss music styles, the most commonly evoked common ground concerns cultural facts.

By providing a schema for describing the pragmatically given unit as a "logical variant" (Foolen 1989) of the current utterance (for instance, its negation), the model provides a systematic method for retrieving the pragmatically given unit referred to, which is in contrast to other models that also rely on evoking aspects of common ground (e.g. Blakemore 2010; Haselow 2011; Bross 2012).

Our approach to identifying the pragmatically given unit is semantic; in particular, we assume that it is the meaning of the respective modal particle lexeme (Diewald & Fischer 1998; Fischer 2000; Diewald & Kresic 2010) and the grammatical meaning of the word class (Diewald 2006) that characterize the work modal particles do. The different pragmatic functions in the different speech acts are therefore taken to be epiphenomenal. For instance, regarding Weydt et al.'s (1983) four meanings of *ja*, they are all accounted for using the same model in our approach. Weydt et al. argue that in exclamations, *ja* may express marvel and astonishment, e.g. *Du hast ja ein neues Auto!* In our model, such examples are analyzed as follows:

<sup>5</sup> Note that in more recent work, Kresić et al. (2017) have revised the schema slightly to facilitate cross-linguistic comparison.

<sup>6</sup> This function has been noted already by Reiter (1980) and has been discussed, for instance, as presupposition accommodation (e.g. Schwenter & Waltereit 2010) or common ground negotiation (e.g. Abraham 2012). Thus, modal particles may construe a supposedly shared background; however, modal particles do not invite the addressee to challenge this background so that they do not necessarily serve to negotiate the common ground.

Pragmatically given unit	at hand is: You have a new car.
current situation:	You have a new car.
→ utterance	<i>Du hast ja ein neues Auto!</i> ‘you have PRT a new car!’

That is, the modal particle links the current utterance to the (possibly perceptually available) common ground, reiterating what the participants can both see, and the fact that the current utterance is an exclamation causes the utterance to receive the interpretation of astonishment. That is, we take the meaning encoded in the modal particle construction to be only to evoke a pragmatically given unit to which the current utterance is anchored, while the sentence type construction with the given modal particle is responsible for encoding the pragmatic effects, including effects at the illocutionary level (see Alm et al. in press).

Similarly, we analyze the use of (stressed) *ja* in imperatives, where it can be used as a warning or threat, e.g. *mach das ja nicht noch mal!* ‘don’t you dare do this again!’, using the same schema, where the difference in meaning is due to the difference in sentence type, which is part of the current situation:

Pragmatically given unit	You know as much as I do: don’t do this again – take it into account.
current situation:	I demand: don’t do this again.
→ utterance	<i>Mach das ja nicht noch mal.</i>

We take the prosodic stress on *ja* to add to its meaning that not only the information is shared and agreed upon, but that the listener should take it into account (see also Abraham 2012: 39, who takes stressed *ja* to communicate a high commissive expectation). The imperative contributes the directive interpretation (I demand that you don’t do this again).

Also *ja* in assertions, for instance in *Du weißt ja, dass ich morgen Geburtstag habe* (you know that my birthday is tomorrow), is analyzed with the same schema:

Pragmatically given unit	we both know: you know that my birthday is tomorrow.
current situation:	you know that my birthday is tomorrow.
→ utterance	<i>Du weißt ja, dass ich morgen Geburtstag habe.</i>

In our model, we thus analyze all of these examples in the same way, arguing that *ja* has the same meaning in all of them, namely to express agreement between the current situation and the pragmatically given aspect of common ground to which it refers. That the examples differ in pragmatic function, i.e. that they can convey astonishment or make a threat or an assertion, is the result of the modal particle occurring in exclamations, imperatives and declaratives respectively. These functions thus arise as contextual effects, which however differ from the grammatical function of the modal particle word class construction (see Diewald 2006). In our analyses, these differences are accounted for in the paraphrases of the illocutionary force of the host utterance, for instance *I wonder* for questions and *I demand/I expect* for directives (cf. Alm et al. in press).<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, the relation introduced by the respective particle (e.g. agreement in the case of *ja*) also contributes to the interpretation of the modal particle in its host utterance. In order to illustrate the contribution of each modal particle, we present an analysis of the sentence above, just with the modal particle *aber*; *aber* is a particle that evokes the negation of the current utterance:

Pragmatically given unit	at hand is: You don’t have a new car.
current situation:	You have a new car.
→ utterance	<i>Du hast aber ein neues Auto</i> ‘you have PRT a new car’.

<sup>7</sup> In a construction grammatical model (cf. Alm et al. in press), the interaction is specified in lexeme-specific sentence type constructions; that is, we distinguish here between the contribution of the modal particle itself, the modal particle word class construction and the sentence type constructions in order to account for these different paraphrases (for more detail, see Alm et al. in press).

Such an utterance is plausible, for instance, in a situation in which the communication partner has just complained that nothing is changing in his life, thus behaving as if he did not have a new car. In the model presented, the grammatical function of the modal particle use is to anchor the current utterance to the shared background. Thus, even though both interactants know in principle that the partner has a new car, evoking this information from common ground serves to make it relevant for the current line of argumentation. For this reason, we have argued the main function of German modal particles to be to mark the current utterance as non-initial, i.e. as related to some pragmatically given proposition (cf. Diewald & Fischer 1998; Diewald 2006) and to anchor the current utterance to argumentative common ground (Fischer 2007).

Now, before we set out to identify modal particle uses of a set of pragmatic markers in English, let us consider Haselow's recent suggestions concerning modal particles in English. He bases his analyses on the model proposed by Diewald & Fischer (1998) as well, not only by citing Diewald & Fischer (1998) and Diewald (1999, 2006, 2008) as the framework for his analysis (e.g. Haselow 2011: 3620), but also by using similar formulations concerning the functions of modal particles, such as "they imply the existence of a prior turn and thus specify the communicative context" (Haselow 2013: 389) and mark the unit they accompany as "non-initial" (Haselow 2013: 378). The question thus arises whether the issues addressed in the current study have already been sufficiently addressed by Haselow, rendering the current study superfluous.

This is, however, not the case. First, Haselow's starting point is final particles in English, for which he aims to identify their functions, whereas our starting point is the identification of modal particle functions in English pragmatic markers, which does not restrict us to the final position. Second, even though Haselow claims to base his analyses on the Diewald/Fischer model, he does in fact not make use of its key tool for identifying the pragmatically given proposition to which the utterance containing the modal particle is anchored. That is, although the Diewald/Fischer model provides a systematic, mechanistic approach to identifying the pragmatically given unit to which the utterance containing a modal particle refers, Haselow does not apply the schema. While the results are often similar – it would in fact be a bad sign if intuitions and plausibility yielded different results than those afforded by the model proposed by Diewald & Fischer – they may lead to different interpretations. Third, Haselow (e.g. 2013: 387) distinguishes categorically between verbalized and non-verbalized pragmatically given units, counting only the latter as modal particles, which leads to different numbers of instances of modal particle interpretations (for detail see the discussion of *then* below). Consequently, a quantification of the modal particle readings of English pragmatic markers based on the current model is still missing. In the following we therefore shall have to see how widespread the phenomenon really is.

## 2.2 Corpus Study

In order to determine whether for English pragmatic markers similar inferential processes can be assumed as for German modal particles, a corpus study was carried out with the purpose to determine a) whether similar uses can be identified, b) how frequent these uses are, c) to what extent these uses are connected to certain formal characteristics, and d) to what extent these uses are restricted to particular sentence type constructions.

### 2.2.1 Modal Particle Candidates in English

The English pragmatic markers we investigate in this study are *alright*, *already* and *then*. Of these, only *then* has previously been suggested to function as a modal particle (cf. Haselow 2011), whereas the others are mentioned in König et al. (1990) as translation equivalents of German modal particles, yet they have not been investigated as such in their own right.

### 2.2.2 The Corpora

Three corpora (The British National Corpus, The Corpus of Contemporary American English, and The Corpus of American Soap Operas) were chosen for the present study to ensure a broad overview with regard to the usage patterns of the possible modal particles. Both the BNC and the COCA comprise many different registers and represent British and American English respectively. However, both corpora have a very limited amount of informal conversational data compared to the amount of written material. At the same time, modal particles are characteristic of spoken interaction (Diewald 2015). For this reason, the Corpus of American Soap Operas was included in the database. All three corpora can be searched via the same interface (offered by BYU) and display occurrences in a similar fashion, which increases the comparability of the results.

The British National Corpus (BNC) is a 100 million word corpus of British English, 10 percent of which are orthographic transcriptions of unscripted informal conversations and spoken language collected in various contexts. At the time of access, all data had been collected between the 1980s and 1993.

The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) is a large and balanced corpus of American English, containing more than 450 million words of spoken discourse, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic texts. It includes 20 million words each year from 1990-2012 and is updated regularly (the most recent texts, at time of access, were from summer 2012). About 20% are spoken language data.

The Corpus of American Soap Operas (SOAP) contains 100 million words in more than 22,000 transcripts of ten American soap operas from between 2001 and 2012. According to the composers of the corpus, the language used in soap operas, though scripted, can be taken to be a good representation of naturally occurring spoken interaction: “Even though the dialogue in the soap operas is scripted, we believe that it provides very useful insight into informal, colloquial American speech, and that it complements other similar corpora. For example, there are many informal phrases and words that are much more common in this corpus of soap operas than in the spoken portion of COCA and the BNC” (SOAP, 2015).

### 2.2.3 Corpus Methods and Procedure

The current corpus study was carried out by retrieving a number of instances from the corpora and by annotating these instances for possible modal particle functions.

#### 2.2.3.1 Search Parameters

Given that the potential modal particles have homonyms in other lexical categories, there was high risk that an unrestricted search would yield a very low percentage of instances with modal particle functions in the data. Since recent work (e.g. Haselow 2011, 2013; Traugott 2016) suspects that modal particle meanings occur only in sentence final position, to increase the likelihood of encountering these uses, we investigated the pragmatic markers under consideration in final position, using punctuation marks in the search parameters: full stop/period, exclamation mark and question mark. For each of these punctuation marks, our aim was to elicit 200 occurrences per word and corpus. To sum up, we targeted 600 occurrences for each of the modal particle candidates *alright/all right*, *already* and *then* in each corpus; for *all right/alright*, we elicited 600 occurrences for each of the two spelling variants *alright* and *all right*. However, sometimes the corpus search yielded fewer than 600 instances; specifically, the corpora returned 9,785 occurrences in total, due to limited occurrences of some pragmatic markers.

In addition, in order to evaluate the role of the final position, we investigated the three different pragmatic markers also in other positions on the basis of 100 additional occurrences per modal particle candidate from the corpus in which the modal particle uses occurred most frequently. Here, the search was not restricted by syntactic position.



### 2.2.3.2 Data Analysis

The data were coded first for their function, in particular, whether they allow the interpretation as a modal particle according to the Diewald/Fischer model or not. Some cases could not be clearly decided, as they allowed both the conventional and the modal particle interpretation; these occurrences were annotated as *undecided*. Furthermore, some occurrences did not allow for any analysis because there was not enough context available to make any decision; these occurrences were discarded. The four categories annotated are thus *modal particle use*, *other use*, *undecided*, and *discarded*.

Finally, the distribution across sentence types was analysed for all instances that allow a modal particle interpretation.

## 2.3 Modal Particle Uses in English

In this section, we present the results from our corpus analysis, which suggest that there are uses of pragmatic markers (to use the potentially most neutral term, cf. Fraser 1999) in English that can be analysed in accordance with the model suggested above, and which may therefore provide evidence for similar inferential processes as those modal particles evoke in German. For these pragmatic markers, uses can be identified that can be assumed to evoke a pragmatically given proposition that is suggested to be common ground.

### 2.3.1 Then

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (OALD, Hornby & Wehmeier 2005) classifies the current uses of *then* as either adverbial or adjectival. Since the adjectival uses **A-F** are very far from a possible modal particle function (e.g. “That decision was taken by the *then* president”), the modal particle uses will be found among the adverbial uses of *then*. Several adverbial uses can be distinguished:

- G.** Used to refer to a particular time in the past or in the future
  - a. Life was harder **then** because neither of us had a job;
  - b. I've been invited too, so I'll see you **then**
- H.** Used to introduce the next item in a series of actions
  - a. He drank a glass of whisky, **then** another and **then** another
- I.** Used to show the logical result of a particular statement or situation
  - a. If you miss that train **then** you'll have to take the next one;
  - b. **S1:** You haven't done anything to upset me. **S2:** So what's wrong **then**
  - c. **S3:** My wife's got a job in Glasgow. **S4:** I take it you'll be moving **then**.
- J.** Used to introduce additional information
  - a. She's been very busy at work and **then** there was all that trouble with her son.
- K.** (formal) Used to introduce a summary of something that has just been said
  - a. These, **then**, are the main areas of concern
- L.** Used to show the beginning or end of a conversation, statement, etc.
  - a. **S5:** I really have to go. **S6:** Ok. Bye **then**
  - b. OK **then**, I think we've just about covered everything on the agenda.

The modal particle use is generally the one under **I** (in final position, when it is not part of an *if-then* construction); using our model, example **I b.** can be analysed as follows:

S1: You haven't done anything to upset me.

Pragmatically given unit: it is open what is wrong.

Current situation: I wonder: what is wrong?

→ utterance (S2): So what's wrong **then**?

We thus take the function of final *then* in this example to indicate that the question “What’s wrong?” was already pragmatically given and thus obvious to ask. One may argue that *then* in this example conveys a certain attitude, like annoyance. While this may be true, we consider such meanings to be pragmatic effects of the exchange. In contrast, the grammatical function of modal particles in the Diewald/Fischer model is to anchor the current utterance in argumentative common ground, i.e. to evoke a pragmatically given unit to which the current utterance responds (see Diewald 2006). The pragmatic effects are thus secondary to the primary, grammatical function (and rather due to the interactions between sentence type and particle meaning, see section 2.1 and below).

As the above examples illustrate, besides in interrogatives, *then* can also be found in declarative sentences in the modal particle function. Whereas in questions the role of *then* is to anchor the current question to the common ground by indicating that the question follows from the common ground, in statements we take *then* to present the current utterance as a logical conclusion from prior discourse or common knowledge and therefore to be pragmatically given. See, for instance, the analysis of example **I c.**:

S3: My wife’s got a job in Glasgow.

Pragmatically given unit: if one has a job in Glasgow, then one may want to move.

Current situation: I think: you may want to move.

→ utterance (S4): I take it you’ll be moving **then**.

So while final *then* in questions serves to indicate that asking the question is motivated by the common ground, in declaratives it presents the current utterance as following from common ground and thus as communicatively given. The analyses thus differ depending on whether *then* occurs in a question or in an assertion; as argued above, modal particles are sensitive to the sentence types and their illocutionary potential (see, for instance, Gast 2008; Alm et al. in press; among many others). To sum up, the function of *then* in general is to indicate that the question or assertion follows naturally from the interlocutors’ common ground. In this way, *then* marks the question or assertion as pragmatically given.

König et al. (1990: 52) argue that *then* is a possible translation for the German modal particle *denn* when it refers back to a statement or an action of the interlocutor that provides the reason for the speaker’s question and shows that the respective interaction has a previous history;<sup>8</sup> examples for this use are (König et al. 1990:52):

(1) German: Wo ist es denn? English: Where is it **then**?

German: Was willst du denn nun tun? English: What are you going to do, **then**?

Furthermore, *then* may function as a translation equivalent of stressed *denn* if it refers to a previously discussed but negatively answered possibility and requests delivery of the missing information.<sup>9</sup> An example for this use is (König et al. 1990: 54):

(2) German: A: Warst du in Berlin? B: Nein. A: Wo warst du **denn**?

English: A: Were you in Berlin? B: No, I wasn’t. A: Where were you, **then**?

Thus, the stressed and the unstressed versions of *denn* in German fulfil the same grammatical function, namely to mark the current utterance as non-initial (cf. Diewald 2006), but the stressed version stresses the fact that the question is open and in need of an answer, and English *then* covers both interpretations.

Corresponding to the fact that in German, *denn* is restricted to interrogative sentence types (e.g. Kwon 2005), all of König et al.’s (1990: 52-54) examples containing *then* are questions, and also Haselow (2011)

<sup>8</sup> German original: “verweist zurück auf eine Aussage oder Handlung des Gesprächspartners, die Anlass zur Frage des Sprechers gibt; zeigt an, dass die jeweilige Interaktion eine Vorgeschichte hat” (König et al. 1990: 52)

<sup>9</sup> German original: “bezieht sich auf eine vorangegangene verneinte Möglichkeit und fordert auf, die fehlende Information zu liefern” (König et al. 1990: 54)

argues that *then* is used as a modal particle only if it occurs finally in “information seeking directives of the wh-interrogative type;” however, as the examples in the OALD above suggest, the modal particle interpretation is also possible in declarative sentences.

Haselow (2011, 2012, 2013) analyzes *then* as a modal particle in the International Corpus of English (ICE) based on the semantic schema introduced by Diewald and Fischer (1998). He presents, for instance, the following example of *then* as a modal particle (Haselow 2011: 3614):

- (3) **B:** Matt won't (.)  
       Fiona may well do (.) if I can uh (.) persuade her (.)  
**A:** what's up with Lee at the moment **then**  
**B:** I dunno (-) don't know (.)  
       I think uh people are tired (.)

Haselow (2011: 3614) argues that *then* in this example is a modal particle because

the propositional content of the directive does not refer to any state of affairs related to Matt or Fiona that serves as the background for the utterance with final *then*. Rather, speaker B introduces a new subtopic with the directive, marking it as fitting into the context by means of creating a contrastive relation between a pragmatic pretext, i.e. non verbalized proposition (here: 'I expected Lee to be involved as well.'), and the situation (here: 'Lee has not even been mentioned thus far.').

By evoking a topic-organizing function and by freely paraphrasing the proposition that is assumed to be common ground, Haselow passes the opportunity to use the basic semantic schema introduced by Diewald & Fischer (1998), in spite of his claims to base his analyses on this model (Haselow 2011). Our analysis of this example of *then* relies on the application of the schema:

**Semantic schema applied to *what's up with Lee at the moment then*:**

Pragmatically given unit:	it's open what is up with Lee
current situation:	I wonder: what's up with Lee
→ Utterance:	<i>What's up with Lee at the moment then</i>

The work done by *then* is thus to present the current question as a consequence of something communicatively given, in particular that the question at hand, which concerns a member of the same category as the other possible candidates discussed before, has not been sufficiently addressed yet – which is largely equivalent to Haselow's paraphrase and can be considered as an instance of data triangulation. However, while our analysis rests on the application of a semantic schema, Haselow's procedure is generally more prone to error.

Another example from Haselow (2011) shows that the fact that he does not use the semantic schema provided leads to different analyses. In particular, Haselow (2011: 3616) suggests that example (4) is not an instance of a modal particle because the reference unit (the implied relationship between being happy and not writing) is in fact verbalized:

- (4) **A:** oh he's fairly happy (.)  
       uhm (.)  
**B:** why do (-) why do you think he doesn't write **then**  
       Does he not have the time

In our analysis, *then* is indeed a modal particle, suggesting that the question, why doesn't he write, is communicatively given, i.e. that it is obvious to ask this question:

**Semantic schema applied to *why do you think he doesn't write then***

Pragmatically given unit (PGU):	it is open why he does not write.
current situation:	I wonder: why doesn't he write
→ Utterance:	<i>why do you think he doesn't write then</i>

According to the Diewald/Fischer model, the expectation that someone who is happy is likely to write is perhaps implicitly alluded to by the fact that the question why he does not write is presented as open. However, for the reconstruction of the relationship between happiness and writing, other mechanisms than the workings of the pragmatic marker are responsible. For example, such inferences might be accounted for by the topoï developed in the Argumentation in Language Theory (Anscombe and Ducrot 1983) or in a frame semantic representation (e.g. Fillmore 1982). The model of the inferences involved in modal particles and their translation equivalents presented here allows only to reconstruct that the failure to write constitutes an open issue that is taken to follow from the common ground, including the discourse record.

To sum up, while Haselow (2011, 2012, 2013) takes the same theoretical starting point by alluding to the Diewald/Fischer model, his results only overlap partially with our own. Therefore, given the differences identified, in order to be on the safe side concerning the number of modal particle readings he identifies (34 out of 57 instances of *then* in final position in interrogative clauses (Haselow 2011: 3616)), we take a fresh look at the corpus for *then*, as well as for the other pragmatic markers.

In our corpus study, we coded between 504 and 601 instances of final *then* in the BNC, COCA and the SOAP corpora (depending on availability), and find between 10.67% (COCA) and 30.45% (BNC) of modal particle uses of *then*, using the Diewald/Fischer model. So especially for British English, the modal particle function seems to be a very common use, see Table 1.

**Table 1:** Modal particle uses of final *then* in the three corpora

Corpus	Adverbial use (In percent)	MP use (In percent)	Undecided (In percent)	Discarded <sup>10</sup> (In percent)	Total number analyzed (In percent)
BNC	126 (20.97)	183 (30.45)	1 (00.17)	291 (48.42)	601 (100)
COCA	310 (51.67)	64 (10.67)	3 (0.50)	223 (37.17)	600 (100)
SOAP	196 (38.89)	85 (16.87)	0 (0)	223 (44.25)	504 (100)

We distinguish between clear cases to which the model applies, cases with clear temporal uses, unclear, undecided cases and uses that do not allow any decision because of lack of context. Table 2 illustrates the kinds of corpus instances classified as undecided; these examples oscillate between a possible temporal reading (e.g. where was Roscoe the guard dog at that time?) and a modal particle interpretation (the question is open: where was Roscoe the guard dog).

**Table 2:** Undecided cases of final *then*

A. describe had been changed at the town house? Where was Roscoe the guard dog then? # Of course, it had probably been nothing, just her case of
B. great Hamlet there only last month. „ Was the woman a St. Claire, then? # It was his lucky day. # „ So what then, Father
C. the government's coming after their taxes, Scrap. What you going to do then? „ # „ What's the government got to find but my good word
D. what to do -- shoot the buggers.“ Where's the humane killer then?“ Under the coffee pot.“ There's only an old

Example (5) below illustrates how *then* can serve to mark the upcoming question as non-initial and as following from what previously was said (pragmatically given is the question whether I can ask a question), whereas example (6) illustrates final *then* fulfils in an imperative clause (Aidan suggests that it is pragmatically given that Anita should tell him):

- (5) F7FPS001: And I think kids should be encouraged (pause) to erm (pause) think about themselves rather than just tick boxes (pause) and I think er, er er a group of sentences down here written by the form teacher, by the (pause) subject teacher and the pupil (pause) erm, as it's been done for about, for a few years, a good (pause) habit to get the kids into, erm (pause) especially as a record of achievement should start from year seven.

<sup>10</sup> The number of discarded occurrences for *then* is particularly high since because its meaning is consecutive, the context is particularly important to identify the presence of the modal particle function.

F7FPSUNK Mm. Can I just ask **then**, if you're saying to be it should be a joint statement, but you  
F7FPS001: Mm.

F7FPSUNK: think that format's alright, is that not a contradiction because (pause) if it's a joint statement and this format's alright you've got staff comment (pause) divorced from pupil comment? (BNC, Teachers' Conference 1992)

(6) Aidan: Shooting star. Quick, make a wish.

Anita: I see it, I see it!

Aidan: Did you make a wish?

Anita: Of course.

Aidan: Well, tell me, **then**. What did you wish for? (SOAP, All my children 2005)

The modal particle uses of final *then* were subsequently analyzed further according to their occurrence in different sentence types. We distinguish here between declarative, interrogative and imperative sentence types, as well as between their occurrence in quoted (direct) and reported (indirect) speech. Table 3 provides an overview of the grammatical contexts of modal particle uses of final *then* across the corpora.

**Table 3.** Distribution of modal particle occurrences for final *then* by sentence type

Corpus	Sentence type	# Instances (in percent)
BNC	Declarative	14 (7.65)
	Direct speech	1 (0.55)
	Imperative	7 (3.83)
	Interrogative	161 (87.98)
COCA	Declarative	13 (20.31)
	Direct Speech	4 (6.25)
	Imperative	8 (12.5)
	Interrogative	39 (60.94)
SOAP	Declarative	15 (17.65)
	Direct speech	3 (3.53)
	Imperative	11 (12.94)
	Interrogative	47 (55.29)

The analyses confirm that the modal particle uses of final *then* are mostly associated with interrogatives, but they also show that other sentence types are possible, as also the examples from the OALD suggested.

The analysis of 100 additional instances in all kinds of positions shows that the modal particle reading can generally only be found in final position, as suspected by Haselow (2011, 2013). Of the 10 final instances of *then* in our sample of 100, there were three undecided cases, six modal particle uses and four adverbial uses.

To sum up, we have seen that *then* in final position is used with modal particle meanings between 10% and 30% of the time, predominantly in interrogative clauses, but also in some other sentence types.

### 2.3.2 Already

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* classifies *already* as an adverb and lists the following uses:

**A.** Before now or before a particular time in the past

a. S1: 'Lunch?' S2: 'No thanks I have eaten **already**'

**B.** Used to express surprise that sth has happened so soon or so early

a. S3: Is it 10 o'clock **already**?

- C. Used to emphasize that a situation or problem exists  
 a. There are far too many people **already**

As a temporal adverb, *already* denotes a relation between a certain pragmatically given, i.e. expected, transition point (ETP) and a real transition point (TP). Together with the tense, *already* indicates that the TP has occurred prior to the time of utterance ( $T_u$ ), as in (7) (original *already* often occurs with present perfect):

(7) \_\_\_\_\_ TP \_\_\_\_\_  $T_u$  \_\_\_\_\_ ETP \_\_\_\_\_

Now, the English adverb *already* can also be found in clause-final position in ways that deviate from its previous temporal use,<sup>11</sup> as illustrated in (8) and (9):

- (8) ... Carabinieri officers honked impatiently, with one shouting, 'Move those sheep **already!**' (New York Times 2009 [COCA])
- (9) Esme: ... you don't love him, and –  
 Fancy: Oh, get to the point **already!**  
 Esme: Well, the point is maybe the two of you aren't meant... [Soap]

This use is described in the Oxford English Dictionary as originally and chiefly American English, especially in Jewish usage, "as an intensifier after a word or phrase, esp. to express impatience, exasperation, etc. frequently in **enough, already!**" The first example of this usage they provide is from 1903.

In the modal particle analysis of *already*, the function of the novel use of *already* is taken to anchor the current utterance in common ground. If our utterance is, for instance, 'Move those sheep **already!**' (example 8 above), a perceptually available aspect of common ground is that the addressees, here the shepherds, appear to assume that they may move the sheep later, so that the analysis is:

**Semantic schema applied to *Move those sheep already!***

Pragmatically given unit:	you seem to think you may move those sheep later
current situation:	I think you should move those sheep now.
→ Utterance:	<i>Move those sheep already!</i>

This analysis assumes that *already* evokes an inference as to the existence of a pragmatically given proposition. In this example, the perceptually available situation (Clark 1996) may be taken to indicate that the addressees are behaving as if they were thinking that they could move those sheep later. *Already* serves here to evoke this contextual background and to relate the current utterance to that background, thus indicating 'why that utterance here now' (Fischer 2007). In line with other contextualization cues, *already* is thus taken to contribute to the interactive constitution of the shared situation (see also Gumperz 1992).

Our analyses of the distributions of this novel use of *already* in the BNC, COCA and SOAP corpora show that the proportion of modal particle uses of *already* is relatively high in the COCA corpus and highest in the SOAP corpus (almost 22%), whereas it is virtually non-existent in British English; in fact, we found a single example, which however was a quote from a speaker of US English (Madonna):

- (10) '...to live in the public eye, I mean, I would slit my wrists **already**. I can't understand how this poor girl can take it.' (The Daily Mirror, London 1992, BNC)

<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, a detailed discussion of *already* and the other items under consideration would be far beyond the physical limits of the current paper; however, please confer to Fischer & Traugott (2016), in which we discuss two different analyses of these new uses of *already*, and we draw on additional work on the temporal adverb.

Table 4 shows the distribution of occurrences for *already* across corpora.

**Table 4.** Distribution of uses of *already* across corpora

Corpus	adverbial use (in percent)	new use (in percent)	undecided (in percent)	discarded (in percent)	total number analysed (in percent)
BNC	413 (99.04)	1 (0.24)	2 (0.48)	1 (0.24)	417 (100)
COCA	478 (79.40)	116 (19.27)	4 (0.66)	4 (0.66)	602 (100)
SOAP	426 (77.17)	121 (21.92)	2 (0.36)	3 (0.54)	552 (100)

We thus have to assume that this use of *already* is a) recent and b) regionally restricted. This makes *already* particularly interesting for our analysis since it can shed light on the question whether an abstract constructional schema can be assumed in English that might license the new uses. Table 5 shows examples of undecided occurrences, which allow both a temporal and a modal particle reading.

**Table 5.** Undecided occurrences of final *already*, SOAP corpus

Gail, drag your lazy butt in here! Greenlee: I'm coming, already! Ryan: No. Oh, God. # Braden: You're such a screw up n't get to ask me those kind of questions anymore. # Kendall: All right already! Ryan: Wow. Expecting somebody else? Kendall: I'm fixing something. Ryan:

While this use of *already* is most common in the imperative, it is not restricted to it (even though a directive meaning is implicit in all of the examples, cf. Diewald 2008 for similarities with the German modal particle *ruhig* (roughly: 'calm')):

- (11) My husband - well, he says I just need to relax **already**. (Today's Magazine 2011, COCA)
- (12) With a speaker this cool, maybe your teen will remove the earbuds **already**. (Rebook Magazine 2011, COCA)
- (13) I just want him to leave it alone **already**. (Guiding Light 2003, SOAP)

Thus, even though *already* as a modal particle is most common with the imperative sentence type, previous work on German has shown that such restrictions tend to disappear over time (Diewald 2008), and as the examples below illustrate, it is used also in other constructions:

**Imperative:** Gabrielle: Right, just take the money. Asa: Gotcha. Tillie: **Stop fighting it and die already!**

Sam: I never loved you. (One Life to Live 2002, SOAP)

**Interrogative:** Selena Gomez is opening up today about being under fire for dating Justin Bieber.

**Should everyone just leave this poor woman alone already?** I say yes. (Showbiz Tonight 2011, COCA)

**reported speech:** My husband - well, **he says I just need to relax already**. Lately, even I have been worrying that I worry too much. (Today's Magazine 2011, COCA)

**Declarative:** Max: Mr. C wants his 20 mill. Milo: **You need to quit stalling and find it already**. Spinelli:

Yes, there has been an uncharacteristic delay in procuring the results – (General Hospital 2011, SOAP)

Furthermore, as suggested by the Oxford English Dictionary, it may occur in combinations without a verb:

- (14) ...can have some indoor options in mind, advises Chapman. Enough togetherness, **already!** Sure, it's great to take a break from the busyness of work (Today's Parent Magazine 2008, COCA)
- (15) S.K. KENSLER, San Francisco: Enough is enough with the election polls **already!** (San Francisco Chronicle News 2010, COCA)

Table 6 shows the quantitative distribution of the modal particle uses of *already* across sentence types.

**Table 6.** Modal particle occurrences of final *already* by sentence type

Corpus	Sentence type	# instances (in percent)
BNC	Declarative	1 (100)
COCA	Imperative	47 (40.52)
	Question	22 (18.97)
	Indirect speech	4 (3.45)
	Declarative	2 (1.73)
	No verb	41 (35.34)
SOAP	Imperative	66 (55.0)
	Question	26 (21.49)
	Indirect speech	1 (0.83)
	Declarative	5 (4.13)
	No verb	22 (18.33)

The additional analysis of *already* in all kinds of positions shows that the modal particle function is restricted to the final position only, where the three modal particle uses identified among the 100 occurrences in the SOAP corpus occurred in final position only.

To sum up, our suggestion is that *already* in final position indicates a discrepancy between a pragmatically given expectation (concerning a certain temporal order in which things are expected to happen) and the current situation and thus anchors the current utterance to some kind of common ground, which may comprise a number of different resources, such as the shared perception, shared cultural facts, or dialog history (see Clark 1996; Alm & Larsen 2015). The modal particle provides a clue by indicating what the kinds of contents are to which the current utterance is oriented and how to identify these.

### 2.3.3 Alright/all right

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* describes *all right/alright* as an adjective, adverb, and an exclamation and lists the following major uses (*alright* is described as an informal version of *all right*):

#### Adjective/Adverb

- A. Acceptable, in an acceptable manner
  - a. Is the coffee **all right**?
- B. Safe and well
  - a. I hope the children are **all right**.
- C. Only just good enough
  - a. Your work is **all right** but I'm sure you could do better
- D. That can be allowed
  - a. Are you sure, it's **all right** for me to leave early?
- E. Used to emphasize that there is no doubt about something
  - a. Are you sure it's her? Oh, it's her **all right**.



## Exclamation

- F.** Used to check that somebody agrees or understands
  - a. We've got to get up early, **all right**?
- G.** Used to say that you agree
  - a. 'Can you do it?' 'Oh, **all right**.'
- H.** Used when accepting thanks or when sb says they are sorry
  - a. 'I'm really sorry.' 'That's **all right**, don't worry'
- I.** Used to get somebody's attention
  - a. **All right** class, turn to page 20.

In example **E**, *all right* modifies the entire sentence, which is a typical feature of modal particles (Diewald & Fischer 1998). Furthermore, in König et al. (1990) this usage of *all right* is suggested to serve as a translation equivalent for the German modal particle *schon* and to express emphatic affirmation and confirmation of a circumstance or situation, often in contrast with the view of a conversational partner (König et al. 1990: 205).<sup>12</sup> König et al. (1990: 205) provide the following examples (among others):

- i. **G:** Ich glaub dir *schon*. **E:** I believe you *all right*.
- ii. **G:** Es ist *schon* eine Schande! **E:** It's a shame *all right*!
- iii. **G:** ...das ist *schon* möglich, aber... **E:** ...that's possible *all right*, but...
- iv. **G:** ...das Geld hat er *schon*, aber... **E:** ...he has the money *all right*, but...
- v. **G:** ... das ist *schon* wahr, aber ich warte ab. **E:** ...that's true *all right*, but I'll wait and see.

Just as in example **E** from the OALD, in these instances *all right* modifies entire clauses, and the paraphrase offered by König et al. (1990: 205), that it affirms a given proposition, indicates the relational nature of *alright*, where the proposition in question is part of the suggested common ground. Accordingly, our analysis of example **E** *Oh, it's her all right* is as follows:

### Semantic schema applied to *Oh it's her all right*:

A: Are you sure it's her?	
Pragmatically given unit:	It is open whether it is her or not
Current situation:	I think: it's her.
→ Utterance:	B: <i>Oh it's her all right</i> .

The pragmatic marker serves here to evoke a proposition in common ground that presents the proposition expressed as in question. While König et al.'s paraphrase of *schon* suggests that the communication partner is taken to expect the contrary, we believe that the contrast evoked results from the fact that the speaker's confirmation may only be partial; *all right/alright* serves to indicate what can be agreed on before the part that cannot be taken to be settled is presented. Thus, *alright* marks a particular information as uncontroversial – potentially in contrast with information that is controversial. Accordingly, in the analysis of example (iv.) in König et al.'s collection, the current utterance affirms one of the alternatives in the common ground; however, the concession is already alluded to by *but*:

### Semantic schema applied to *He has the money all right, but...*:

Pragmatically given unit:	It is open whether he has the money or not
Current situation:	I think: he has the money, but...
→ Utterance:	<i>He has the money all right, but...</i>

<sup>12</sup> German original: "drückt empathische Bejahung und Bestätigung eines Sachverhalts aus, oft im Gegensatz zur Einstellung eines Gesprächspartners" (König et al. 1990: 205).

A comparable example from the BNC is:

- (16) GUIL: we're delivering Hamlet  
 ROS: Who's he?  
 GUIL: (Irritated) You've heard of him  
 ROS: Oh, I've heard of him **all right** and I want nothing to do with it.  
 (Stoppard, Tom: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*. London 1986)

Our quantitative analysis indicates rather few uses of final *alright/all right* with modal particle function, yet these are relatively equally distributed across corpora:

**Table 7.** Distribution of *alright/all right* across corpora

Corpus	Other use (In percent)	MP use (In percent)	Undecided (In percent)	Discarded (In percent)	Total (In percent)
BNC (Alright)	508 (95.13)	10 (1.87)	2 (0.37)	14 (2.62)	534 (100)
BNC (All right)	467 (93.59)	30 (6.01)	-	2 (0.40)	499 (100)
COCA (Alright)	420 (93.33)	19 (4.22)	1 (0.22)	10 (2.22)	450 (100)
COCA (All right)	578 (96.82)	17 (2.85)	1 (0.17)	1 (0.17)	597 (100)
SOAP (Alright)	231 (99.57)	1 (0.43)	-	-	232 (100)
SOAP (All right)	593 (98.83)	6 (1.00)	-	1 (0.17)	600 (100)

Without exception, all modal particle uses of *alright* and *all right* in all corpora were found in declarative utterances.

Further examples from our corpus analysis include the following:

- (17) (SP:KPJPSUNK) And he sa-- and he said to me one day, are you fucking deaf! And I heard it. I says, I haven't got any, and he came down here and I said to him, I'll give you fucking deaf **alright!** I said, when you press that button upstairs it muffles it and there's nothing you can do. (BNC)
- (18) Fox: Hey, they'll get over it, **alright**. I don't hate you. (SOAP)
- (19) Yeah, you got dumped, **all right!** It happens to the best of us. (Wallace & Wallace, *The Meanest Hound Around* 2004, COCA)

Examples for undecided cases in the BNC, which allow both the modal particle interpretation and the literal, adverbial interpretation, are listed in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Undecided occurrences of final *alright*, BNC

- A. you hear alright?. (SP:D95PS000) No, no, I think they can hear alright. It's (unclear) necessary for you to stand.  
 (SP:D95PS001) Erm, the first
- B. ones that was growing in the shelter of the oak trees, they were surviving alright. Patch here and there. (unclear) But as soon as you cut the the
- C. the unwashed masses demand this. HOLDEN (off comic) This is easy, alright! And right now it pays the bills. Just don't forget that we

The investigation of 100 position-independent instances of *all right* in the corpus with the most frequent occurrences, the BNC, revealed six uses with modal particle interpretation, all of which occurred in final position. It seems thus that the modal particle uses are restricted to the final position.

### 3 Some Other Potential English Modal Particles

In fact, many other pragmatic markers are likely to fulfil functions similar to those discussed above, see, for instance, Mulder & Thompson (2008) for *but*, Haselow (2013) for *actually*, *anyway*, *even*, *so*, *though* as well as *but*, Schwenter & Waltereit (2010) for *too*, among many others.

#### 3.1 after all

Another pragmatic marker that may be a candidate for a modal particle is *after all* (see Fillmore 1984). The OED offers several paraphrases for this adverb that indeed suggest expectation management and therefore the marking of a relationship between the current utterance and a pragmatically given unit: *in spite of any indications or expectations to the contrary; when all is said and done, nevertheless*. The OALD treats it as an idiom with two uses:

- A. despite what has been said or expected
  - a. So you made it **after all**!
- B. used when you are explaining something, or giving a reason
  - a. He should have paid. He suggested it, **after all**.

The modal particle function is obvious in use A; our analysis of this example is:

Pragmatically given unit:	you might not have made it.
current situation:	you made it.
→ utterance	<i>you made it after all.</i>

The violation of expectation is even more obvious in example (20), which presents a rather common type of example from the BNC from a meeting between seven career counselling staff; at issue is the usefulness of discussing with the participants their experiences with the courses they take:

- (20) (SP:PS21E) Because I've, I've spoken to staff who, who thought it was awful but when chatted to them about it  
 (SP:H5EPSUNK) Mm.  
 (SP:PS21E) they have, they have got something out of it  
 (SP:H5EPSUNK) Yeah.  
 (SP:PS21E) and certain parts of it were useful, and perhaps it wasn't so bad *after all*,  
 (SP:PS21D) Mm.  
 (SP:PS21E) once you'd discussed it with them.

In this example, the speaker makes it explicit that initially, the participants' expectations were different. It is to these negative expectations that the host utterance orients:

Pragmatically given unit:	the course was bad (awful even).
current situation:	the course was not bad, they got something out of it.
→ utterance	<i>it wasn't so bad after all.</i>

Thus, *after all* signals a contrast between the discourse common ground, that the course was awful, with the evaluation after the discussion, that it was actually not that bad. That is, with *after all* the speaker orients the current utterance to a pragmatically given proposition that made the opposite expectable. Based on uses like this, Fillmore (1984) suggested that English speech routines ('formulas') correspond to German modal particles.

### 3.2 indeed

As an example for a confirming, iterative modal particle use, let us consider *indeed*. According to the OALD, *indeed* is an adverb with five different readings:

- A. used to emphasize a positive statement or answer (e.g. ‘You said you’d help?’ ‘I did **indeed**—yes.’ ‘It is **indeed** a remarkable achievement’.)
- B. (especially British English) used after *very* and an adjective or adverb to emphasize a statement, description, etc. (e.g. ‘Thank you very much **indeed**!’)
- C. (formal, especially British English) used to add information to a statement (‘I don’t mind at all.’ ‘**Indeed**, I would be delighted to help.’)
- D. (informal, especially British English) used to show that you are surprised at something or that you find something ridiculous (‘A ghost **indeed**! I’ve never heard anything so silly.’)
- E. (informal) used when you are repeating a question that somebody has just asked and showing that you do not know the answer (‘Why did he do it?’ ‘Why **indeed**?’)

Here, the modal particle reading is the one under **A**, with the alleged function to emphasize a positive statement or answer. While *indeed* can be a focus particle in ‘It is indeed a remarkable achievement’ and have scope only over ‘a remarkable achievement’, it can also be analyzed as having sentence scope and relating to a proposition in common ground stating that it is a remarkable achievement, which is confirmed by the current utterance:

Pragmatically given unit	It is a remarkable achievement.
current situation:	I think: it is a remarkable achievement.
→ utterance	<i>it is indeed a remarkable achievement.</i>

As a modal particle, *indeed* serves to iterate (and hence to emphasize) a proposition which is suggested to be part of the speakers’ common ground.

In the following example from an advertising text from the BNC, we find *indeed* in a statement that retaining control on a wet road can save your life:

- (21) CFT W\_advert: The S2’s ABS brakes have internally ventilated discs that won’t lock. So even with the brake pedal to the floor on wet roads, you can still retain steering control. Which may *indeed* save your life.

This use is most similar to reading **A**, given that it is used to emphasize a positive statement; however, our analysis can shed light on how it may achieve this function and why it is persuasive (used in an ad):

Pragmatically given unit	retaining steering control may save your life.
current situation:	retaining steering control may save your life.
→ utterance	<i>it may indeed save your life.</i>

In this example, *indeed* points the reader to information, which is presented as given, that retaining control can save lives. Thus, the ad does not only present the conclusion, it pretends that this conclusion is common knowledge and that the reader has known this all along – which can be taken to make the ad more effective: the reader has reached the conclusion him- or herself. Thus, with *indeed* the writer asserts that the conclusion is uncontroversial and based on the reader’s shared knowledge. In these uses, *indeed* is therefore a confirming, re-iterating pragmatic marker that connects the current utterance to a pragmatically given unit – and thus it is very similar to modal *ja* (see also König et al. 1990: 145-148; Fischer 2000).

### 3.3 just

*Just* is listed as an adverb and an adjective in the OALD. Because of the requirement of sentence scope, we are going to focus on the adverbial uses; for *just* as an adverb, 14 uses are listed:

- A. Exactly (This Jacket is **just** my size)
- B. At the same moment as (The clock struck six **just** as I arrived)
- C. No less than equally (She's **just** as smart as her sister)
- D. By a small amount (I got here **just** after nine)
- E. Did sth very recently (I've **just** heard the news)
- F. At this moment/ now ((I'm **just** finishing my book)
- G. Going to do sth only a few moments from now or then (The water is **just** about to boil)
- H. Simply (I can't **just** drop all my commitments, It was **just** an ordinary day)
- I. Really completely (The food was **just** wonderful)
- J. Only (I decided to learn Japanese **just** for fun.)
- K. Used in order to get somebody's attention, give permission, etc. (**Just** listen to what I'm saying, will you!)
- L. Used to make a polite request (Could you **just** help me with this box, please?)
- M. Used to show a slight possibility that something is true or will happen (Try his home number –he might **just** be there.)
- N. Used to agree with somebody (S1: 'He's very pompous.' S2: 'Isn't he **just**?')

Among these various uses, the readings of *just* that are candidates for modal particle uses are those labelled **H** and **K** since, according to König et al. (1990), they translate into modal particles in German, for instance, for **H**: "Ich kann nicht *einfach* all meine Verpflichtungen abwählen" and for **K**: "Hör mir *einfach* zu!". Below are examples provided by König et al. (1990: 80):

- (22) a. German: Du kannst doch nicht **einfach** weglaufen!  
 English: You can't **just** run away!
- b. German: Beschwer dich doch **einfach**!  
 English: Why don't you **just** complain?/ **Just** complain!

In König et al. (1990: 80), the meaning of *einfach*<sup>13</sup> is described as either characterizing a solution or explanation as self-evident and obvious, or as underlining that the solution the speaker offers to a problem is unproblematic (yet essential) compared to other options. The above examples of *just* (**H,K**) match one of these two meanings described by König et al. (1990): In example **H**, the speaker characterizes his explanation that 'he can't *just* drop all his commitments' as obvious, and dropping all commitments is furthermore presented as not simple. In **K**, the listening can be viewed as the speaker's unproblematic solution to a problem.

However, besides German *einfach*, also the modal particle *ruhig* may be a translation equivalent of *just*, as also examples from König et al. (1990: 193) suggest, for instance: *Du kannst ruhig hier bleiben* – *just stay here*. According to them, *ruhig* expresses encouragement, permission or consent, that doubts can be discarded and that consequences can be accepted.<sup>14</sup> Similar to the German modal particle *ruhig* (Diewald 2008), the English pragmatic marker *just* thus indicates that there is no problem, so that the analysis of Nike's slogan "Just do it" would be:

<sup>13</sup> German original: "charakterisiert eine Lösung bzw. eine Erklärung als naheliegend und offensichtlich; macht deutlich, dass es sich (im Vergleich zu anderen Möglichkeiten) um eine unproblematische (und dennoch entscheidende) Lösung eines Problems handelt, mit der der Sprecher argumentiert (als Begründung oder Schlussfolgerung)" (König et al. 1990: 80).

<sup>14</sup> German original: "drückt Ermunterung, Erlaubnis, Duldung aus; die Bedenken können zurückgestellt werden; wird aber auch verwendet, wenn Handlungen und Verhalten Sanktionen oder negative Konsequenzen nach sich ziehen können" (König et al. 1990: 193).

Pragmatically given unit: one may think that there might be problems doing it.  
 Current situation: I suggest: you should do it  
 → Utterance: *Just do it!*

Our analysis reveals between 27% (BNC) and 63% (SOAP) modal particle uses of *just* (see table 9).

**Table 9:** Distribution of modal particles uses of *just* across corpora

Corpus	Adverbial use (In percent)	Modal particle use (In percent)	Discarded (In percent)	Total number (In percent)
BNC	418 (69.67)	164 (27.33)	18 (3.00)	600 (100)
COCA	412 (68,78)	175 (29,22)	12 (2.00)	599 (100)
SOAP	192 (32.00)	379 (63.26)	28 (4.76)	600 (100)

While *just* receives an interpretation as modal particle predominantly in imperative clauses, this reading is also possible in interrogatives, especially in expansion questions, for instance:

(23) “What do you suggest couples do then, Mr. Davenport? Just live together?” (Macomber, Debbie: Marriage wanted, COCA)

(24) Isn’t that what they do in these situations? Just arrest everybody that coulda had anything to do with it? Then let the lawyers and God sort it out? (Knopf, Chris: *Bad Bird*, New York 2011, COCA)

To sum up, all of the uses discussed can be analysed using the model by Diewald and Fischer, suggesting that they fulfil similar functions as German modal particles and evoke similar inferential processes in interaction.

## 4 General Discussion

Our analyses above show that there are pragmatic markers in English that can be analysed in the same way as German modal particles; concerning question 1), whether English pragmatic markers may fulfill the functions of German modal particles and thus give rise to similar inferences in conversation, we can now state that yes, it is possible that they do.

Note however that in each case, other interpretations of the respective functions of the pragmatic markers under consideration are possible, as obvious from the paraphrases provided by the OALD, for instance; thus, while it is possible that English pragmatic markers lead speakers and listeners to similar inferences as German speakers, other kinds of inferences are also possible. For instance, Traugott (2016) takes pragmatic markers at the right periphery to be used first as “subjective metatextual comments on what precedes” (2016: section 4.5), some of which may then develop into retrospective pragmatic markers, which, in Lenker’s (2010: 198) words, “force a re-processing or even reinterpretation of the preceding assertions,” such as like *then*, *though*, *however*, *after all*, and *actually*. In a recent talk, Fischer & Traugott (2016) argue that the novel functions of *already* can be explained not only as modal particle uses, but also by independent sense-extension mechanisms. The novel readings of the pragmatic markers considered could build on each marker’s individual semantics, but following general sense extension mechanisms, such as metaphor and metonymy. Thus, while it is possible that the items under consideration fulfil modal particle functions, it cannot be excluded that each pragmatic marker has developed these functions independently, and that possibly other pragmatic functions (such as signalling annoyance) describe their uses better than anchoring the current utterance in common ground.

Regarding question 2), how frequent such uses are, we have provided frequency data for *all right/alright*, *already*, *just* and *then* and found that at least some show considerable proportions of modal particle uses

(e.g. 30.45% for *then* in the BNC and 63.26% for *just* in the SOAP corpus), whereas for others, especially for *alright/all right*, modal particle interpretations are rather rare. While this does not answer the question how frequent modal particle meanings are in English in general, we can estimate their frequency once we know the general frequency of those pragmatic markers in English that may be used in this way. In any case, we can conclude that potential modal particle uses in English are too common to be ignored.

As for formal criteria (question 3), while there are clear positional features that identify modal particles in German, in English, position seems to be flexible for some particles and relatively fixed for others: While some of the modal particle candidates investigated were found to be restricted to the utterance-final position, *indeed* may receive modal particle interpretations in medial position while *just* cannot occur in final position at all. Thus, there is no clear association between form and meaning for the whole range of items that may evoke similar inferences as German modal particles.

This has consequences for question 4, what our findings may mean for postulating the existence of a schematic construction for modal particles in English since the first type of evidence for constructional status is whether there are form-function correspondences at all, since a construction is a conventional association of form and meaning (e.g. Goldberg 1995). Taking a function-oriented starting point for the cross-linguistic comparison revealed that items in different positions may fulfil modal particle functions and thus that the function cannot be uniquely assigned to a single grammatical position. Furthermore, the meaning side of a possible construction, to relate the current utterance to an aspect of common ground, may not be specific to the pragmatic markers under consideration, either. For instance, the context evoking function of German modal particles has also been suggested for negation (e.g. Ducrot 1996). For example, the utterance *I'm not coming* evokes a pragmatically given proposition that it was expectable that the speaker might have been coming. Conversely, items in the same position, for instance, in utterance-final position, do not necessarily take a modal particle meaning. In German, for some modal particles, this is very different; for instance, when *ja* or *aber* occur in the typical middle field position, they automatically receive a modal particle interpretation. However, for other modal particles in German, the situation is not much different from the situation we have observed for English: The interpretation of the particle word *auch* in middle field position, for instance, depends crucially on the placement of the sentence accent (e.g. 'Kannst Du das auch?' may mean either 'can you do that, too?' (accent on *auch*) or 'are you at all able to do that?' (accent on the verb)). Hence, the characteristic middle field position alone does not automatically cause all particles to receive a modal particle interpretation. This is what we have observed in our corpus study: Modal particle interpretations can be assigned to some instances of pragmatic markers in the positions studied but not to all, and some cases were undecidable based on the transcripts only. Most likely, prosodic information would facilitate the disambiguation, which was unfortunately beyond the scope of the current study. In any case, we can conclude that a one-to-one correspondence between form and function could not be identified; no single grammatical position is associated with this use, not even within the same sentence type constructions. For instance, in imperative sentence type constructions, *already*, *alright* and *then* occur in utterance-final position, whereas *just* occurs utterance-initially. Nevertheless, since the function to evoke a pragmatically given unit in the common ground depends on the respective item having sentence scope, the modal particle candidates investigated occur predominantly in positions that favour sentence scope readings, most of them occurring in utterance final position only. Since pragmatic markers in English usually fulfil discourse marker functions in initial position (e.g. Schiffrin 1987), it is likely that they develop other functions in other positions, and that these positions need to indicate scope over the whole clause. Thus, while no single position seems to be reserved for English modal particle candidates, their occurrences are restricted to a few positions.

Besides form-function correlations, as evidence for a schematic category may count if a development concerns various different lexical types (e.g. Bybee 2010). The large number of different pragmatic markers with modal particle functions suggests that there may be a general construction that licenses the modal particle interpretation across items. That a schematic category may license modal particle interpretations is supported by the fact that the newcomer *already*, which is so new that it has not even spread to British English yet, is probably understood there, since Madonna's quote was not edited by the Daily Mirror and hence was not seen as problematic for the British audience. While our study analysed only six modal particle

candidates, it still seems that the final position is the one that allows generalization to new instances best (see also Haselow 2013; Traugott 2016).

Another example that may provide evidence for a schematic category is a recent final use of a contrastive pragmatic marker in Australian English, namely *but*, which, according to Mulder, Thompson and Williams (2009), fulfils sociolinguistic functions, signalling Australianness, as well as contrast marking and turn-yielding functions. The authors argue that “there is no implication of semantically contrastive material left ‘hanging’” (Mulder et al. 2009:351), for instance:

- (25) Coach: That’ll do it,  
          lads.  
          Good work but.

This example can be perfectly well analysed using our schema:

Pragmatically given unit	One may think it is not good work.
current situation:	I think: it is good work.
→ utterance	<i>good work but.</i>

The possible pragmatically given unit, that the lads had not been doing good work, may either be an inference from the coach’s own suggestion that they stop doing what they are doing, or may have another basis, which is suggested to be shared. The fact that *but* in this position is used as a signal of community membership and has thus developed into a sociolinguistic marker is of course unaccounted for in our model. However, the fact that it is interpretable and has spread so readily in Australia suggests that speakers and hearers have certain resources at their disposal that facilitate this interpretation. This could be a schematic construction with a modal particle meaning, or it could be the knowledge about final *though*, in analogy with which *but* is interpreted.

We can conclude that no clear form-function pairing can be established, but that the final position may be developing in this direction. At the same time, it may not be necessary to assume a modal particle construction in English since the inferential processes peculiar to modal particles may exist without a specific category. As Langacker (1991, 2008) suggests, one exemplar suffices to give rise to similar creations by means of analogy, and the case of the recent Australian use of *but* may be a case in point since it is possible that it is interpreted in analogy with final *though*. Thus, a schematic category may license novel uses, and exemplars may cluster and reinforce each other; in the usage-based model, exemplars, subschematic and schematic constructions may co-exist and encode linguistic information redundantly (cf. also Alm et al. in press). From that perspective, the common ground anchoring functions proposed for the pragmatic markers under considerations could be related so that they inspire each other and thus form clusters of instances rather than a fully-fledged category yet.

## 5 Conclusion and Future Work

We conclude from our analysis that even though a schematic modal particle construction could not be demonstrated, it still became apparent that modal particle uses of pragmatic markers are in fact potentially very wide spread in English. From the perspective of inferential processes involved in English interaction, the suggested interpretations for the particles under consideration and thus the underlying inferential processes that anchor utterances in speakers’ common ground, are comparable to those involved in German interaction with its pervasive use of modal particles. Thus, despite of the potential lack of a category of modal particles, the underlying inferential processes may actually be quite similar after all.

One big question to be addressed in future work concerns the role of other formal features than position. For instance, our corpus study has shown that monosyllabic modal particle candidates have larger proportions of modal particle uses than those with two or more syllables. Given that our quantitative



analysis covers only four modal particle candidates, this observation serves only as a starting point for future research, but it is in line with Fillmore's suggestion that what keeps speech routines in English from being used as modal particles as often as their German translation equivalents is their length and lack of integration. In addition, prosody should be included in the analysis, as it also plays a big role in the definition of German modal particles (e.g. Helbig 1988; Thurmair 1989). Moreover, while we have restricted our investigation to pragmatic markers here only, in the long run also other lexical and grammatical means that may give rise to the same inferential processes as German modal particles should be investigated further (e.g. Fischer 2007).

Furthermore, future work will have to clarify the temporal relationship between the final and the other uses in order to determine whether it is the final position that gives rise to the new uses. This will then provide further evidence for the development of a schematic modal particle construction in English. Similarly, such a diachronic study may also want to address the relationship between the number of different grammatical contexts in which a particular pragmatic marker may fulfil modal particle functions and their general frequency since higher context variability may suggest increasing grammaticalization (cf. Diewald 2008). In our corpus study, we found that two markers (*then* and *already*) with relatively high proportions of possible modal particle readings were common in several sentence type constructions, whereas *just*, in spite of its high proportions of possible modal particle interpretations, and *all right/alright* were very restricted with respect to the sentence type constructions in which they can occur. Thus, future work should address whether the variability concerning the different sentence type constructions observed for some modal particle candidates corresponds to increasing grammaticalization.

Future work may also want to address the role of regional differences; concerning *already*, considerable differences between corpora could be found such that the modal particle use was hardly present in British English, while *then* was more commonly used with modal particle functions in British than in American English. Tracing these developments over time and for more modal particle candidates (for instance, for *indeed*) will inform us about the development of a possible schematic category as well.

Finally, the study of potential modal particles in English needs to be broadened to even more modal particle candidates in order to get a better understanding of how widespread the phenomenon really is.

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