

Modal Particles: cross-linguistic perspectives and multimodal analysis

University Ca' Foscari, Venice: 24-25-26 September 2025

The aim of this conference is to bring together scholars working on modal particles in a variety of approaches, with a special focus on comparative and multimodal perspectives.

With modal particles (henceforth: MPs) we refer to words such as Germ. "ja", in "Das ist ja klasse" 'this is ja great'; It. "mai" in modal (non-temporal) usages such as: "Cosa vorrà mai?" 'What does he want?', which express the speaker's attitude towards the proposition in a similar fashion to epistemic usages of modal verbs and speaker's oriented adverbs (such as "unfortunately", "frankly", high adverbs in Cinque 1999). While traditionally the identification of this class of elements has mostly been confined to German linguistics (cf. Thurmair 1989), recent work has shown that other languages/language families exhibit elements functionally and formally corresponding to German MPs (cf. Cognola/Moroni 2024 and references therein for an overview on Romance). However, despite parallels, there is no one-to-one overlap between German and other languages' MPs, and factors such as socio-linguistic variation, TAM contexts and polarity are known to play a role in favoring non-modal usages of elements in languages different from German.

Recent work (Schoonjans 2018) has also shown for German that MPs should be understood as multimodal constructions which has opened a new very promising line of research on the interaction between MPs, gestures, and prosody in face-to-face communication. This line of research remains still unexplored in relation to MPs in Romance languages.

References

- Cinque, Guglielmo (1999): Adverbs and functional heads. Oxford: OUP
Cognola, Federica; Moroni, Manuela Caterina (2024) *Modal particles*. In Anna-Maria De Cesare & Giampaolo Salvi (eds), *Manual of Romance Word Classes*, Walter de Gruyter, vol. 36, pp. 449-470
Schoonjans, Steven (2018): *Modalpartikeln als multimodale Konstruktionen*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.
Thurmair, Maria (1989): *Modalpartikeln und ihre Kombinationen*. Tübingen: Niemeyer

We encourage submissions on the following topics:

- description and analysis of potential MPs in single languages;
- cross-linguistic description and analysis of MPs;
- multimodal analysis of MPs in a single language;
- cross-linguistic description and analysis of MPs;
- differences between German MPs and other language's MPs;
- definition of the factors favoring / disfavoring modal usages of specific elements.

The confirmed keynote speakers are:

Marco Coniglio (Göttingen)
Anna Czypionka (Konstanz)
Gabriele Diewald (Hannover)
Steven Schoonjans (Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt)

Submission details:

We invite submissions of anonymous abstracts for 40-minute talks including discussion. Submissions should not exceed two pages, 12pt. single spaced, with 2.5cm margins on all sides. Abstracts should be in PDF format and can be written in English or German.

Abstract should be sent via e-mail to federica.cognola@unive.it

by June 15th 2025.

All information concerning the conference including travel information and programme will be published on the RUM project webpage: <https://www.unive.it/rum>

Local organisers

Federica Cognola, federica.cognola@unive.it

Giovanni Palilla, giovanni.palilla@unitus.it

Erika Petrocchi, erika.petrocchi@unive.it

Contacts

federica.cognola@unive.it