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The processing of secondary information conveyed by German modal particles

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Modal particles (MPs) convey secondary information by expressing the speaker's attitude about him-/herself and his/her model of the addressee with respect to the propositional content of the utterance (Bayer & Obenauer 2011). As such, they display an expressive meaning (cf. Kratzer 2004, Gutzmann 2013). Every MP has a counterpart which affects the propositional content. In contrast, MPs take the propositional content of the sentence as their argument and operate at a different meaning dimension (Gutzmann 2013). We ask whether this two-dimensionality can be made visible by psycholinguistic methods. If the MP conveys an additional meaning, it should lead to higher processing costs. In a series of self-paced reading studies and an auditory sentence completion task, we used minimal pairs (1, 2) containing up to ten particles (boldface). We created contexts (underlined) that triggered either the MP (1) or the counterpart meaning (2).

- (1) Jetzt ist Maria mal wieder total pleite, warum hat sie **bloss** das Kleid gekauft?
'Maria is completely broke again, why did she buy the dress (I can't find a reason)'
- (2) Maria hätte sich viel mehr leisten können, warum hat sie **bloss** das Kleid gekauft?
'Maria was able to afford much more, why did she buy only the dress?'

We found a processing advantage of the counterpart meaning after the particle and of the MP meaning towards the end of the sentence. The secondary meaning seems to be activated in an additional processing step, supporting the existence of a two-dimensional meaning representation. Furthermore, we found differences between MPs: MP *bloss* was processed faster than MP *nur* and there was a preference for *bloss* to occur with an MP-intonation, which was absent for *nur*. This suggests that *bloss* is conventionally marked as conveying expressivity. These results offer promising insights into the meaning representation of MPs and build the foundation for further psycholinguistic studies on the processing of secondary information.

References: • Bayer, J. & Obenauer, H.-G. (1989), *The Linguistic Review* 28, 449–491. • Gutzmann, D. (2013): In: *Beyond Expressives: Explorations in Use-Conditional Meaning*, 1–58, Leiden: Brill. • Kratzer,

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