

APPENDIX VI: Flavoring Particles

A number of adverbs and conjunctions are used in German as flavoring particles or modal particles. Although they are more characteristic of conversational German, they are also found quite frequently in theological writings. However, they are often quite difficult if not impossible, to translate into English in any consistent way because they do not have particular English counterparts. Nevertheless, flavoring particles cannot be ignored since they express the writer's attitude toward what he has written, or they may indicate certain nuances of meaning in the text.

Most often, flavoring particles may express emphasis, strong disagreement/agreement or reassurance, as well as annoyance or surprise. The following list contains only a few of the more frequently found flavoring particles and their most common uses: **aber**, **auch**, **denn**, **doch**, **eben**, **etwa**, **ja**, **mal** (**einmal**), **nur**, **schon**, and **wohl**.

Note: The examples given are by no means exhaustive, but are intended to be merely illustrative.

1. **aber** Most often used to emphasize the thought expressed, or to convey strong feelings of surprise or displeasure. One could also read a sense of irony into the expression. In English the flavor of **aber** is best expressed by stressing the word after the particle or by adding the words *indeed* or *really*.

Das ist aber eine sehr gute Interpretation.

That is (indeed) a very good interpretation.

or *That is a very good interpretation, I must say.*

Sie haben aber auch alles ausgelassen. (aber auch - even stronger emphasis)

They have (indeed) left out absolutely everything.

Das wird aber nicht möglich sein. - *That will not be possible, (I must say).*

2. **auch** Used to either reinforce a statement or to suggest that it can be justified or confirm its reality. It is also used to express strong emphasis of the word which follows. When found in questions (rhetorical) it may express doubt. **Aber** is often used with other flavoring particles, such as: **ja auch**, **aber auch**, **oder auch**, **auch nur**.

Auch die besten Bemühungen reichen nicht aus.....

Even the best efforts are not enough...

Haben sie Karl Jaspers auch verstanden?

Did they really understand Karl Jaspers? (One can doubt that.)

Wir sind nicht in der Lage, das Bild auch nur annähernd zu beschreiben.

We are incapable of giving even an approximate description of the picture.

Das Thema wurde sehr gründlich behandelt. Man hat aber auch sehr gute Quellen benutzt.

The topic was treated very thoroughly. But then/after all/no wonder one/they used very good sources.

3. **denn** As part of a question, **denn** is used to make the question sound less abrupt. It may also indicate that the speaker reacts with resolution, surprise, doubt, interest, impatience, disbelief, or even disappointment.

Wieso denn? - *How so?*

Worum geht es denn hier in diesem Abschnitt?

Say/ tell me, what is this passage all about?

Kann man das denn wirklich so verstehen?

I would like to know if one can really understand it this/that way?

Sind diese Quellen denn so entscheidend?

Are these sources really so crucial/ significant?

Wir können das nicht so sagen, es sei denn, wir finden bessere Textstellen.

We can not say that this way, unless we find better texts.

4. **doch** Used to express emphasis of the verb or confirmation of fear/concern. It may also be used by the writer to remind us of something we should know or what stands in contrast to what has been said or is generally believed. Note, that **doch** differs from **ja**. While the use of **ja** implies that the writer assumes agreement with him, **doch** implies that this may not necessarily be the case.

Das ist doch die Wahrheit.

That is indeed the truth. (may be or indeed contrary to what has been said or believed)

Das ist doch die Wahrheit? - *That is the truth, isn't it?*

Das kann doch nicht wahr sein. - *That can not be true, can it?*

Man wird doch wohl daran denken, daß

I hope one/we will remember the fact, that

5. **eben** Used to express agreement or a sense of resignation concerning a fact/conclusion that can not be changed. **Eben** is often used as a synonym of the more colloquial word **halt** - sometimes even together for greater emphasis.

Das ist halt eben so. - *That is indeed so, no one can't do anything about it/change it.*

Eben diese Aussage ist so wichtig für unsere Diskussion.

It is just this statement which is so important for our discussion.

Davon sprachen wir eben.

That is what we were talking about just now. (temporal)

Mir müssen eben etwas mehr tun. - *We will just have to do a little bit more.*

6. **ja** Used when stating a fact that is known, self-evident, or assumed to be known by the reader. Often **ja** must remain untranslated or rendered with phrases like "you know," "as you know," or "of course." **Ja** can also express feelings of surprise, satisfaction, joy, sadness, or indignation.

Das ist ja ausgezeichnet. - *That really is excellent.*

Was er sagte, ist ja wahr.

What he said is true, indeed/of course/you know/ of course.

Diese Texte brauchen wir nicht lesen; die kennen wir ja alle.

We do not have to read these texts; because we all know them.

Es kann ja nicht so weitergehen. - *It can not go on like this any longer.*

7. mal/einmal

Used (synonymously) to express acceptance of something that can not be changed. It is also used by a writer when a statement should sound less threatening, less blunt or abrupt. In those cases, the flavoring particle often remains untranslated.

Man sollte doch mal/einmal genauer hinhören.

One/We should indeed more carefully listen.

Wir müssen uns das mal/einmal vorstellen.

(I ask you) We must just picture that.

Das ist nun einmal/mal so.

That is the way/how it is. (one can't change that)

Er muß sich das einmal/mal sorgfältiger überlegen.

He has to think about that more carefully.

Seine Ausführungen werden wir einmal/mal genauer untersuchen müssen.

We will have to investigate his statements more closely.

8. **nur** Used often for emphasis, expressing reassurance, encouragement, intense interest, or indifference, warning or threat.

Lassen wir das nur so stehen. - *Let's stand it the way it is.*

Was können sie nur tun, um euch zu helfen?

What/Whatever can they do to help you?

Führen wir diese Gedanken nur weiter aus!

Let' expand these thoughts further!

Versuchen wir es nur! - *Let's go ahead and try it!*

Diese Argumente machen es nur noch schlimmer.

These arguments makes it even worse.

9. **schon** Used to express concession, impatience, encouragement. Writers also use **schon**

expressing a qualified agreement with confidence or reassurance that something has turned out alright or will so, although it may seem doubtful. In some cases, **schon** may even stand alone and must then be translated with a phrase like *that is/may be true alright, well, yes/may be, or I know*. A writer may also add the reason for his comment, introducing that clause with the word **aber**.

Das ist schon möglich. - *That is quite possible.*

Sie glauben ihm schon, aber - *They believe him (yes/maybe) but*

Diese Auslegung ist recht interessant. Das ist schon möglich, aber
This interpretation is quite interesting. That may be true alright/possible, but ...

Wer kann dem Teufel schon widerstehen. (rhetorical question)
After all/but then, who can resist the devil?

Man sollte nicht so viel von dieser Quelle erwarten. Schon. or Schon, aber ...
One/We should not expect/demand too much from this source. That is/may be true.
(or *That is/may be true, but*).

Der Herr wird uns schon helfen.
The Lord will surely help us. or The Lord will help us all right.

10. **wohl** Used by a writer to express supposition, probability, or concession when he is quite certain that his assumption is correct. It is also used to express approximation. Note that writers frequently use **wohl** with the future tense (**werden**), although the meaning of the sentence is in the present tense.

Man kann das wohl nicht anders sehen.
One/We can not see it any other way, no doubt/most likely/surely/probably.

Das war wohl im Jahre 1624. - *That must have been in the year 1624.*

Ob er wohl alles verstanden hat? - *I wonder/Do you think he understood everything?*

Das Wort kommt wohl aus der griechischen Mythologie.
No doubt, this word comes from Greek mythology.

Das wird wohl nicht anders gehen. - *That is not working any other way, I am sure.*