

Felix Frühauf

Leibniz University Hannover

[felix.fruehauf@germanistik.uni-hannover.de](mailto:felix.fruehauf@germanistik.uni-hannover.de)

# The German Discourse Particles

## *JA* and *ruhig*

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## Introduction

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- Subject of the talk: particles *JA* and *ruhig*, mainly discussed in the context of imperatives.

(1) Geh JA zum Arzt!  
go JA to.the doctor  
'Go see a doctor! (you have to)'

(2) Geh ruhig zum Arzt!  
go RUHIG to.the doctor  
'Go see a doctor. (I don't care)'

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- Interested in German *um*- and *damit*-clauses, usually used for Rationale Clauses  $\approx$  “in order to...” (Frühauf 2024).

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- Interested in German *um*- and *damit*-clauses, usually used for Rationale Clauses  $\approx$  “in order to...” (Frühauf 2024).
  - Question on the side: which discourse particles are licensed in German Rationale Clauses? Found *JA* (and *BLOSS*).
- (3) Er stellt sich den Wecker, um JA/BLOSS nicht zu spät zu kommen.  
'He sets the alarm in order to JA/BLOSS not to be too late.'

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- Interested in German *um*- and *damit*-clauses, usually used for Rationale Clauses  $\approx$  “in order to...” (Frühauf 2024).
  - Question on the side: which discourse particles are licensed in German Rationale Clauses? Found *JA* (and *BLOSS*).
- (3) Er stellt sich den Wecker, um JA/BLOSS nicht zu spät zu kommen.  
‘He sets the alarm in order to JA/BLOSS not to be too late.’
- Grosz (2014): *ruhig* is also found in Rationale Clauses (but degraded).
  - Grosz (2010, 2011, 2014): *ruhig* and *JA* are opposite ends of the same spectrum

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- Similarities and differences of both particles.
- Anticipating: very different use conditions.

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- JA and *ruhig* are consistently characterized as discourse/modal particles:
  - not truth-conditional, use-conditional
  - cannot bear main sentence accent
  - relate to sentence mood/illocution
  - only occur in the middle-field
  - ...

- Our *JA* is not to be confused with Verum *JA* (Gutzmann 2010).  
Compare *WOHL*, *DOCH*, *SCHON* (Egg and Zimmermann 2012).

- (4) A: Tom isn't home.
- a. B: Tom IS home!
  - b. B: Tom is JA home!
  - c. # B: Tom IS JA home!

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- b. B: Tom is JA home!
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- Apart from different interpretations, different intonation contours (Doherty 1987; Meibauer 1993).

- (5) a. Go JA<sup>↑*boul*</sup> home!  
b. Tom is JA<sup>↓*Verum*</sup> home!

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(5) a. Go JA<sup>↑<sub>boul</sub></sup> home!  
b. Tom is JA<sup>↓<sub>Verum</sub></sup> home!

- But: both *JAs* involve the activation of the negation of its host clause.

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# Priority modality for both particles

- Grosz (2011): no non-priority modality.

## Priority modality for both particles

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(6) Der Kastenjakl kann ruhig der Mörder sein.

the Kastenjakl can RUHIG the murderer be

‘Kastenjakl can RUHIG be the murderer.’

- a. \* In view of what we know, it's possible that Kastenjakl is the murderer.  
(epistemic)
- b. In view of what I want to be the case, it's possible that Kastenjakl is the murderer. (bouletic)

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murderer. (bouletic)

(7) Der Privatjet soll JA um 15 Uhr angekommen sein.

the private jet shall JA at 3 PM arrived be

‘The private jet shall JA have arrived at 3PM.’

a. \* In view of what we know from hearsay evidence, it is necessary that the  
private jet arrived at 3PM. (reportative)

b. In view of what I want to be the case, it is necessary that the private jet  
arrived at 3PM. (bouletic)



➤ Grosz (2011): No modal, no particle.

- (8) Der isst \*JA/\*ruhig den Spinat.  
he eats \*JA/\*RUHIG the spinach  
'He eats \*JA/\*RUHIG the spinach.'

- Grosz (2011): No modal, no particle.

(8) Der isst \*JA/\*ruhig den Spinat.  
he eats \*JA/\*RUHIG the spinach  
'He eats \*JA/\*RUHIG the spinach.'

- Schwager (2010): But sometimes, there is no modal at all.

(9) a. Wer also eines der Hefte will, schreibt ruhig schon mal eine Email.  
who thus one.of the booklets wants writes RUHIG already MAL an email  
'Who wants to have one of the booklets should simply write an email.'

b. Du gehst jetzt ruhig schon mal vor und ich komm dann nach.  
you go now RUHIG already MAL ahead and I come then after  
'You go ahead and I'll follow.'

- Still: the interpretation is modal: adding an overt modal or using the imperative would not change anything.

- Furthermore: *JA* frequently occurs in *want*-complements, *ruhig* does not.

- (10) Judith wollte JA/\*ruhig nicht zu spät zum Dinner kommen.  
“Judith wanted to JA/RUHIG not be late to dinner.”



# Literature Review

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- The MPs are modal matching expressions, *JA* requiring universal force, *ruhig* requiring existential force (Grosz 2010, 2011).

- (11)  $\llbracket JA \rrbracket = \lambda M \lambda p \lambda w: M \text{ expresses non-dynamic root modality} \wedge M \text{ is } \mathbf{positive}. \exists d[d = \mathbf{max}(S_M) \wedge M(d)(p)(w)]$   
 where  $\mathbf{max}(S_M)$  is the maximum of the (upper or totally closed) scale of  $M$  and **is positive** means that  $\text{NECESSITY}(p)(w)$  exceeds the degree that  $M$  combines with
- (12)  $\llbracket ruhig \rrbracket = \lambda M \lambda p \lambda w: M \text{ expresses non-dynamic root modality} \wedge M \text{ is } \mathbf{negative}. \exists d[d = \mathbf{min}(S_M) \wedge M(d)(p)(w)]$   
 where  $\mathbf{min}(S_M)$  is the minimum of the (lower or totally closed) scale of  $M$  and **is negative** means that  $\text{NECESSITY}(p)(w)$  is lower than the degree that  $M$  combines with

- In short: *JA* is identical to *mandatorily*, *ruhig* to *perhaps* in modal matching constructions (modulo differences in flavor).

- (13) Er soll JA nach Hause kommen.  
≈ He mandatorily has to come home.

- Schwager criticizes Grosz's (2011) on the grounds that *ruhig* does not only appear with possibility modals.

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- (14) a. Er soll ihn JA verklagen. Er muss es unbedingt tun.  
'He should JA sue him. He absolutely has to'  
b. Er soll ihn ruhig verklagen. Ist mir egal.  
'He should RUHIG sue him. I don't mind.'



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- b. Er soll ihn ruhig verklagen. Ist mir egal.  
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- Use-conditional approach, bound to the speech act instead of a modal, simplified:  $p$  is optimal after *ruhig(p)*, but was not optimal before.

- Rapp claims that *JA* cannot just be a degree modifier.

(15) Use condition for  $JA(p)$ : There is a contextually relevant individual that wants  $\neg p$ .

- That's why *JA* is not good in advice.

(16) A: Was soll ich in New York sehen?

B: Geh auf jeden Fall/unbedingt/#JA ins Kunstmuseum!

'A: What should I see in New York?

B: Be sure to visit the museum!'



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# Contextual desires play no role for JA

- (17) Use condition for  $JA(p)$ : There is a contextually relevant individual that wants  $\neg p$  (Rapp 2018).

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➤ This condition is too strong. No one needs to want  $\neg p$  in (10).

- (10) Judith wollte JA nicht zu spät zum Dinner kommen.  
“Judith wanted to JA not be late to dinner.”

- But still:  $\neg p$  has to be somehow ‘activated’ (see also Meibauer (1993)).

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- 87/125 *um/damit*-Rationale Clauses in a corpus containing JA also contained negation.

- But still:  $\neg p$  has to be somehow ‘activated’ (see also Meibauer (1993)).
- Most natural examples contain negation, but not necessarily.
- 87/125 *um/damit*-Rationale Clauses in a corpus containing JA also contained negation.
- Other ways to make  $\neg p$  salient: *dieses Mal* ‘this time’ makes salient a time where he didn’t go to the beach (because there was some hinderance).

- (18) a. Fritz hat Wanderstiefel eingepackt, um (??JA) in den Bergen wandern zu gehen.  
‘Fritz has packed hiking boots to JA go hiking in the mountains.’
- b. Fritz hat Wanderstiefel eingepackt, um dieses Mal JA in den Bergen wandern zu gehen.  
‘Fritz has packed hiking boots to JA go hiking in the mountains this time around.’



- (19) *A is very lazy in the mornings and often oversleeps. Their mother usually wakes them up, but she won't be home tomorrow. She utters:*  
Steh JA pünktlich auf morgen!  
'Get JA up on time tomorrow!'

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- (20) *A is usually never late to school. Tomorrow is a very important exam.*  
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'Get JA up on time tomorrow!'
- (20) *A is usually never late to school. Tomorrow is a very important exam.*  
Steh JA pünktlich auf morgen!
- (21) *A is usually never late to school. Tomorrow is a normal day of school.*  
Steh #JA pünktlich auf morgen!

➤ Either  $\neg p$  is a very probable live option or its consequences would be really bad.

- Not discussed before: *ruhig* (and *JA*) shows up in complements of attitudes like *(auf)fordern* 'to prompt so. to do sth.', *empfehlen* 'to recommend', *raten* 'to advise', *verlangen* 'to demand' (22) that are used to report directive utterances.

- (22) Er forderte sie auf/empfahl ihr/riet ihr/verlangte (von ihr), ruhig  
 he prompted her up/recommended her/advised her/demanded (from her), RUHIG  
 mal mit der Faust auf den Tisch zu hauen.  
 MAL with the fist on the table to hit  
 'He prompted her/recommended her/advised her/demanded (from her) to RUHIG  
 MAL take a hard line.'

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MAL with the fist on the table to hit

'He prompted her/recommended her/advised her/demanded (from her) to RUHIG  
MAL take a hard line.'

- Ruhig* is furthermore considerably worse in complements of *hoffen* 'to hope' (23), and virtually not found in the corpus.

(23) Er hoffte, dass sie ??ruhig mal mit der Faust auf den Tisch haut.

he hoped that she RUHIG MAL with the fist on the table hits

'He hoped that she would ??RUHIG MAL take a hard line.'

- *ruhig* requires some relevant individual to want *p*.
- It also requires that someones is believed to not want *p*, but that's hard to show.

- (24)
- a. A: Tom called, he wants to come over:  
B: Er kann ruhig rüberkommen.  
'He can RUHIG come over.'
  - b. A: Tom called, he wants to come over.  
B: Er kann #ruhig zuhause bleiben.  
'He can RUHIG stay at home.' (only ironic)
  - c. A: Tom called, he first said that he didn't want to come over, but now he said he would.  
B: Er kann ruhig zuhause bleiben/rüberkommen.  
'He can RUHIG stay at home/come over.'



# Analysis

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- Grosz (2011) (a.o. after him): *JA* and *ruhig* depend on quantificational force.



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- Problem: canonically universal modals allow *ruhig*.

(25) Er soll ihn ruhig verklagen. Ist mir egal.  
'He should RUHIG sue him. I don't mind.'

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- Possible solution: variable force for *soll/sollte*.
- Has been claimed for *sollen* (and *wollen*) by Ehrich (2001), for *should* by Staniszewski (2022).
- Has often been claimed for the imperative (Oikonomou (2016) a.o.).

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- Possible solution: variable force for *soll/sollte*.
- Has been claimed for *sollen* (and *wollen*) by Ehrich (2001), for *should* by Staniszewski (2022).
- Has often been claimed for the imperative (Oikonomou (2016) a.o.).
- Has not been claimed for the complements of attitude verbs, afaik. But if true for the imperative, it could be true for the complements of imperative reporting verbs.

→ to be explored on another day.

- Unlike what Grosz (2011) said and what I adopted in my abstract: *JA* and *ruhig* are unlikely to be modifiers of the modal/attitude.

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- Unlike what Grosz (2011) said and what I adopted in my abstract: *JA* and *ruhig* are unlikely to be modifiers of the modal/attitude.
- While *unbedingt*  $\approx$  “absolutely” seems to behave like a modifier of the modal, *JA* has to occur in its scope.

(26) Er will    unbedingt/JA    pünktlich sein.  
         he wants unconditional/JA punctual be  
         ‘He absolutely wants to be on time.’

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- (26) Er will unbedingt/JA pünktlich sein.  
he wants unconditional/JA punctual be  
'He absolutely wants to be on time.'
- (27) Er will unbedingt/\*JA, dass Sabine zur Party kommt.  
he wants unconditional/JA that Sabine to.the party comes  
'He absolutely wants Sabine to come to the party.'

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he wants unconditional/JA that Sabine to.the party comes  
'He absolutely wants Sabine to come to the party.'
- (28) Er will, dass Sabine ?unbedingt/JA zur Party kommt.  
he wants that Sabine unconditional/JA to.the party comes  
'He wants Sabine to absolutely come to the party.'

- In usual discourse particle fashion, *JA* and *ruhig* take a propositional argument and do not add to the at issue meaning.



- In usual discourse particle fashion, *JA* and *ruhig* take a propositional argument and do not add to the at issue meaning.
- They do, however, depend on a higher bouletic event (compare Oikonomou (2021) on mood).

(29)  $\llbracket \text{JA} \rrbracket = \lambda p.p$

- a. **Bouletic event:**  $e$  projects a bouletic domain.
- b. **Non-optimality:**  $\text{AH}(e)$  believes that  $\text{EU}(\neg p) < \text{some threshold}$ .

- where  $e$  is bound by the nearest event that satisfies the specified conditions.

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$$(29) \quad \llbracket \text{JA} \rrbracket = \lambda p.p$$

- Bouletic event:**  $e$  projects a bouletic domain.
  - Non-optimality:**  $\text{AH}(e)$  believes that  $\text{EU}(\neg p) < \text{some threshold}$ .
- where  $e$  is bound by the nearest event that satisfies the specified conditions.
  - The expected utility of  $\neg p$  is low, either because  $\neg p$  is very likely to happen or because its utility value is very low.

(30)  $\llbracket \text{ruhig} \rrbracket = \lambda p.p$

- a. **Speech event:**  $e$  is a speech event and projects a bouletic domain
- b. **Desire:**  $Sp(e)$  believes that  $\exists x[\forall w' \in O(f, g_x)[p(w')]] \approx$  someone wants  $p$
- c. **Non-optimality:**  $Ad(e)$  believes that  $\forall w' \in O(f, g_i)[\neg p(w')]$  relative to some contextually salient ordering  $g_i \approx$  the addressee believes that  $\neg p$  is wanted or mandated
- d. **Indifference:**  $\exists w' \in O(f, g_{sp-boul}, Sp(e))[p(w')] \wedge \exists w'' \in O(f, g_{sp-boul}, Sp(e))[\neg p(w'')] \approx$  the speaker doesn't care whether  $p$

➤ where  $e$  is bound by the nearest event that satisfies the specified conditions.

- (31) Er empfahl            ihr, ruhig mal mit der Faust auf den Tisch zu hauen.  
he recommended her RUHIG MAL with the fist on the table to hit  
'He recommended her to RUHIG MAL take a hard line.'
- a. **Speech event:** recommending event  $e$
  - b. **Desire:** Speaker of  $e$  believes that Addressee of  $e$  wants  $p$
  - c. **Non-optimality:** Speaker of  $e$  believes that Addressee believes that  $p$  is a non-optimal choice
  - d. **Indifference:** Speaker of  $e$  does not have a clear preference for  $p$

- *Ruhig* is out in *hope-* (and *want-*) complements either because:  
they are not used to report on imperatives,  
or they don't allow for non-speaker bouletic interpretations.
- The imperative takes on “existential” readings when its ordering source takes into account addressee-bouletic propositions (Kaufmann 2012) (alternative to force-variability).
- *Ruhig* is fine in any bouletic attitudes that report non-speaker-bouletic imperatives (alternative to force dependency).

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- $JA(p)$  is sensitive to the saliency of  $\neg p$ .
- $ruhig(p)$  is sensitive to the saliency of  $WANT_x(p)$  and  $BEL_y WANT_z(\neg p)$  (where  $x, y$  might be the same person).
- $ruhig$  is licensed in non-speaker-bouletic speech acts and speech reports.
- $JA$  is used in speaker-bouletic speech acts and reports.

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(32) Thomas isst Spinat.  
'Thomas is eating spinach.'

- (32) cannot usually mean: I want Thomas to eat spinach. Adding *ruhig* or *JA* does not work.

(33) Du gehst jetzt vor.  
'You go ahead now.'

- (33) already has a directive force. Adding *JA* is possible. (*ruhig* usually requires more marking *jetzt ruhig schon mal...*).
- You cannot add *JA* or *ruhig* to sentences that are not already interpreted as bouletic.

- *ruhig* does occur in *wollen*-complements, but mostly in a specific type of construction, announcing that the speaker wants to say something (lots of examples in parliamentary debates).

- (34) a. Jetzt stelle ich unsere Kandidatin vor. Etwas selbstkritisch will ich ruhig zugeben, dass wir am Anfang auch zuerst einen männlichen Kandidaten hatten.  
'...self-critically I want to RUHIG admit...'
- b. Es tut uns Leid - ich will das ruhig so sagen -, dass wir mit diesem Gesetz Landwirte stärker belasten müssen als in der Vergangenheit.  
'...I want to RUHIG say it like this ( $\approx$ openly)...

- *ruhig* sometimes occurs in questions (contra Schwager (2010)), and when it does, the doubt switches to the speaker.

- (35) a. Kann man Weihnachtsbäume ruhig an Straßenständen kaufen?  
'Can one RUHIG buy Christmas trees on the streets?'
- b. Soll das alles in eine Datei oder soll ich das ruhig in drei Dateien aufteilen?  
'Should everything go in one file or should I RUHIG divide it in three files?'

- Alternatively, *JA* and *ruhig* are analyzed as modal modifiers that always modify a modal like *soll/sollte*.
- If they are embedded under *verlangen* 'demand' and other attitudes, there is a covert modal in the clause (Kratzer 2013).

(36) Tom verlangt, dass sie JA den Raum verlässt  
= Tom verlangt, dass sie JA den Raum verlassen soll

- Problem: has not been claimed (and is not attested) for *wollen* 'want'.

(37) \*Ich will, dass ich nicht zu spät kommen soll  
\*Ich will nicht zu spät kommen sollen

(38) ??Sie will, dass er nicht zu spät kommen soll.

- The exact differences between *soll* and *sollte* are still unclear. *soll* seems to be used (/usable) in a disinterested advice fashion, while *sollte* seems to involve (more) speaker endorsement:

- (39) a. Er soll mich ruhig verklagen. I don't care.  
b. Er sollte ruhig mehr investieren. #I don't care.

