Two sides of the same pragmatic move: The German discourse particles *etwa* and *nicht*

German has almost two dozen discourse particles (**DiPs**) which are truth-conditionally inert, but affect the discourse conditions [1][2][3]. DiPs are homophonous with adverbs or modifiers that have truth-conditional import but DiPs and their corresponding adverbs/modifiers occur in different syntactic positions and/or different clause-types and/or different contexts [4]. A systematic description and account of DiPs in German is still needed. In this paper, we contribute to this enterprise by investigating the DiPs *nicht* and *etwa* and showing that they are two sides of the same pragmatic move (unless otherwise noted, all the data we discuss are new). We also suggest an account for the pragmatic contribution of *nicht* and *etwa* within an independently motivated theory of discourse.

PUZZLE 1. The DiPs *nicht* and *etwa* impose different requirement on the discourse/context. The two DiPs in (1) occur in the same syntactic position, but they are not felicitous under the same discourse conditions. (The English translations do not fully render the effects of DiPs in German.)

(1)   War **nicht / etwa**   auch Uschi Glas gestern   an der Schule?
       was   DiPs   also Uschi Glas yesterday at the school
       With *nicht*: 'Is it not the case that Uschi Glas was at school yesterday too?'
       With *etwa*: 'Was Uschi Glas at school yesterday? She wasn't, right?'

Let's imagine the following context. Anna and Marta are talking about their children and school. Marta's child was sick the previous day and did not attend school. Anna says: "Many famous German actors and actresses came and talked to the children yesterday!" Let's now imagine two different scenarios. **Scenario 1**. Marta had heard rumors (and therefore has reason to believe) that the actress Uschi Glas was at school too and replies with (1). (1) is felicitous with *nicht*, but infelicitous with *etwa*. **Scenario 2.** Marta thinks that the actress Uschi Glas is shooting a movie abroad right now (and therefore she has reason to believe that that she could not have been at school the day before) and replies with (1). (1) is infelicitous with *nicht*, but felicitous with *etwa*.

PUZZLE 2. The DiPs *nicht* and *etwa* occur only in polar interrogatives, while they are unacceptable in constituent interrogatives (2) or declaratives (3) [2].

(2)   Wer hat (* **etwa** / * **nicht**) den Kuchen gemocht? 'Who liked the cake?'
       Who has   DiP   the cake   liked

(3)   Der Junge hat (* **etwa** / * **nicht**) den Kuchen gemocht. 'The boy liked the cake'
       The boy   has   DiP   the cake   liked

PUZZLE 3. Two instances of *nicht* or *etwa* can occur in the same polar interrogative (see [4] for a similar point regarding DiPs different from *nicht* and *etwa*):

(4) Hat **nicht** Max die Prüfung damals **nicht** bestanden? 'Is it not the case that Max did not pass the exam?'
    has DiP   Max the exam   then   not   passed

(5) Hat **etwa** Max die Prüfung mit **etwa** 90% bestanden? Did Max pass the exam with approximately 90%?
    has DiP   Max the exam with approx. 90% passed   – He didn't, right?'

PROPOSAL. [5], [6], and [7] develop a discourse model to explain discourse effects of answer particles and declaratives. The idea is that each type of utterance modifies the discourse context in a different way. Declaratives have the effect of committing the speaker to their content. This is modeled by means of a set of propositions called the ***s(peaker)'s commitment set*** (cs_s), which is speaker specific and contains all propositions the speaker has publicly committed to. A standard polar interrogative, instead, does not commit the speaker to its propositional content **p** but just raises the issue whether **p** or **~p** is true. Turning to the DiPs *etwa* and *nicht*, we propose they are closely related pragmatic operators. They both apply to the propositional content **p** of a polar interrogative and they both change the speaker's commitment set cs_s. So they enforce the same pragmatic move. On the other hand, they differ because *nicht* commits the speaker to **p** while *etwa* commits the speaker to its complement/negation **~p.** Going back to Puzzle 1 and the example in (1), **p** is (roughly) 'that Uschi Glas was at school yesterday'. The DiP *nicht* applies to it and adds it to cs_s, i.e. the speaker commits herself to the truth of 'that Uschi Glas was at school yesterday'. This is why *nicht* is felicitous in Scenario 1 where Marta has evidence for the truth of **p**, but it is infelicitous in Scenario 2 where Marta has evidence for the truth of **~p**. The DiP *etwa* applies to **p** as well, but adds **~p** to cs_s, i.e. the speaker commits herself to the truth of 'that Uschi Glas was <u>not</u> at school yesterday'. This is why *etwa* is infelicitous in Scenario 1, where Marta has evidence for the truth of **p**, but it is felicitous in Scenario 2, where Marta has evidence for the truth of **~p.**

However, the commitment indicated by the DiPs is weaker than the commitment triggered by declaratives. Although the speaker has evidence for $p/\sim p$ independently from the addressee - as specified by the use of the DiP *nicht* or *etwa*, she has reason to ask for the addressee's involvement in the issue and for confirmation of her commitment (for instance, her evidence may not be direct or strong enough). To account for this lighter form of commitment, we follow up on [7]'s suggestion that commitment may have different statuses and propose that cs_s is articulated into ***speaker's pending commitment*** (cs^P_s) and ***speaker's settled commitment*** (cs^S_s). In order for **p** to be added to the **common ground** (**CG**), it needs to be in cs^S_s and the addressee has to agree (<u>often silently</u>). If **p** is in cs^P_s, instead, it cannot be added to CG, unless the addressee <u>explicitly</u> intervenes and adds it to her own cs^S. While the contribution of declaratives is to add **p** to cs^S_s, the contribution of the DiPs *etwa/nicht* is to add **p** or $\sim$**p** to cs^P_s. This light form of commitment contributed by the DiPs *nicht/etwa* (by affecting cs^P_s) is compatible with polar interrogatives which raise an issue without affecting cs_s, but not with declaratives which affect cs^S_s rather than cs^P_s. Intuitively, the speaker cannot be expressing strong and weak commitment to the same **p** by means of the same clause. The DiPs *nicht/etwa* cannot occur with constituent interrogatives since the content of the latter is not a simple **p** (it is either an open proposition or a set of propositions). This addresses Puzzle 2.

As pragmatic operators, the DiPs *etwa/nicht* do not affect the semantic denotation of the polar interrogatives they occur in. They are identity functions applying to **p** and returning the same. The question operator applies after the application of DiPs *etwa/nicht* and returns {p, $\sim$p}. This is why the DiPs *etwa/nicht* can occur with their homophones *nicht* 'not' and *etwa* 'approximately', which have semantic import, but do not impose any (possibly contradictory) conditions on cs^S_s (Puzzle 3).

[8], [9], and [10] looked at the behavior of negation in English polar interrogatives. Their findings show resemblance to the behavior of the DiP *nicht* discussed here. However, English does not have a correlate to the DiP *etwa* and we do not see how [9]'s or [10]'s analysis for English could be extended to account for *etwa* and its being complementary to *nicht*.

FURTHER SUPPORT 1. Our proposal predicts that the DiPs *etwa/nicht* (not their adverbial counterpart!) cannot occur together in the very same clause since they would impose opposite discourse constraints (**p** and $\sim$**p** can't be both added to cs^P_s). This prediction is confirmed.

(6) #Hat **nicht** Max **etwa** die Prüfung bestanden   (7) #Hat **etwa** Max **nicht** die Prüfung bestanden?
    has DiP Max DiP the exam   passed   has DiP Max DiP the exam   passed

FURTHER SUPPORT 2. PPIs, unlike NPIs, are not licensed in polar interrogatives or DE environments, such as the scope of a negative element, as shown in (8) by the PPI *ziemlich* 'quite'.

(8) Hat Max nichts / den Kuchen **sonderlich**/(*****ziemlich**) gemocht? 'Did Max like nothing/the cake at all?'
    has Max nothing / the cake   NPI / PPI   liked

However, PPIs are licensed in polar interrogatives with the DiP *nicht*, <u>if not</u> under negation (9), or with the DiP *etwa*, <u>if</u> under negation (10). The opposite pattern is found with NPIs. They are licensed in polar interrogatives with the DiP *nicht*, <u>if</u> under negation (9), while they are not licensed with the DiP *etwa*, <u>if not</u> under negation (10).

(9) Hat **nicht** Max (*****nichts**)/**den Kuchen ziemlich**/(*****sonderlich**) gemocht? 'Is it not the case that Max
    has DiP Max   nothing the cake   PPI / NPI   liked   liked the cake?'

(10) Hat **etwa** Max **nichts/(*****den Kuchen**) **ziemlich/(*****sonderlich**) gemocht? 'Did Max like nothing?
    has DiP Max nothing the cake   PPI   NPI   liked   He did like something, right?'

These effects of DiPs *nicht/etwa* on the licensing of polarity items supports our proposal according to which these DiPs are related and complementary (they both affect the polarity of the **p** they apply to, but in opposite ways). Also, a very tentative generalization seems to emerge which could contribute to the open issue of a full understanding of polarity items: polarity items can occur in a sentence s_1 if s_1 does not affect cs_s (polar interrogatives without DiPs), or if s_1 affects cs_s by adding a proposition to cs_s that can be the denotation of a sentence s_2 that licenses the polarity item.

REFERENCES: [1] **Weydt**, H.: 1983 Partikeln und Interaktion' [2] **Thurmair, M**: 1989, 'Modalpartikeln und ihre Kombinationen'. [3] **Karagjosova, E**.: 2004, Dissertation: 'The meaning and function of German modal particles'. [4] **Bayer, J**: 1993, 'German particles in modular grammar'. [5] **Farkas, D. and Bruce, K.**: 2007, 'Context Structure for Dialogues'. [6] **Farkas**, D: 2007, 'The Grammar of Polarity Particles in Romanian'. [7] **Gunlogson**, C.: 2008: 'A Question of Commitment'. [8] **Büring, D. and Gunlogson, C.**: 2000, 'Aren't Positive and Negative Polar Questions the Same?'. [9] **Van Rooy, R. and Safarova**, M: 2003. 'On polar questions'. [10] **Romero, M. and Han, C.**: 2004, 'On Negative Yes/No-Questions'.