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Rendering the German modal particle *denn* in Turkish: a translation-oriented analysis of literary texts

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Introduction: German modal particles pose a major challenge for translation because their meanings are primarily discourse-pragmatic, interactional, and context-dependent rather than lexical or propositional. This study examines how the German modal particle *denn* is rendered in Turkish learner translations of literary texts and why it is frequently omitted.

Methods: The empirical material was drawn from Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg*. A corpus search yielded 848 occurrences of *denn*. After excluding homonymous and non-modal uses, 200 modal-particle occurrences were identified, from which 29 examples were selected according to their pragmatic functions. Fifteen Turkish-speaking students of German Language and Literature at approximately B2 level translated these examples into Turkish, resulting in 435 translation units. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five participants. The translations were coded according to four strategies: omission/zero correspondence, functional substitution/transposition, paraphrase, and literal translation.

Results: Omission was the dominant strategy, occurring in 333 cases (76.55%), while functional substitution/transposition occurred in 102 cases (23.45%). No cases of paraphrase or literal translation were identified. Functional substitutions were realized through Turkish particles, adverbs, connectors, interjections, and pragmatic formulas, especially *ki, peki, zaten, gerçekten/gerçekten de*, and *bu yüzden*.

Discussion: The interview data indicate that omission was linked to insufficient pragmatic awareness, perceived structural differences between German and Turkish, the perception of *denn* as optional, simplification strategies, and a lack of explicit translation strategies. The study shows that translating *denn* requires pragmatic awareness and context-sensitive translation competence rather than direct lexical equivalence.

KEYWORDS

***denn*, functional equivalence, German-Turkish translation, literary translation, modal particles, omission, pragmatic meaning, translation strategies**

1 Introduction

German modal particles, traditionally referred to as *Abtönungspartikeln* in German linguistics, constitute a central means of expressing speaker attitude, interactional positioning, and discourse-pragmatic nuance. They do not primarily modify the propositional content of an utterance; rather, they contribute to how an utterance is to be interpreted in relation to the speaker's assumptions, expectations, emotional stance,

and the preceding discourse context (Diewald, 2007; Helbig, 1994; Thurmair, 1989; Weydt, 1969). Through modal particles, speakers can signal agreement, doubt, surprise, interest, reproach, confirmation, or reference to shared knowledge. For this reason, modal particles play an important role in the organization of interaction and in the pragmatic interpretation of utterances.

From a translation perspective, German modal particles are particularly challenging because their meanings are often semantically bleached, context-dependent, and difficult to separate from the communicative situation in which they occur. German is commonly described as a particle-rich language, whereas many other languages do not possess a comparable closed class of modal particles (Burkhardt, 1994; Diewald, 2013; Helbig, 1994). As a result, modal-particle meanings often cannot be transferred through direct lexical equivalence. Instead, translators must decide whether the relevant pragmatic function can be rendered through other linguistic means, such as particles, adverbs, connectors, interjections, syntactic restructuring, intonation, or contextual compensation (Blieberger, 2011; Zimmermann, 1981).

The translation of German modal particles into Turkish is especially relevant in this regard. Turkish does not have a closed word class directly corresponding to German *Abtönungspartikeln*. Previous contrastive studies on the German-Turkish language pair have shown that Turkish equivalents of German modal particles are typically found in different linguistic categories, including particles, adverbs, conjunctions, interjections, suffixes, syntactic constructions, and intonational or contextual-pragmatic means (Hepsöyler, 1986; Reiter, 1981; Uslu, 1987, 1998; Vural, 2001; Vural Kara, 2012). These studies also indicate that German modal particles frequently remain untranslated in Turkish, particularly when their pragmatic function is not perceived as essential for the target text.

The modal particle *denn* is a particularly suitable case for investigating these issues. The lexeme *denn* is polyfunctional in German and may occur as a conjunction, connector, modal particle, or in fixed expressions (Helbig, 1994; Métrich and Faucher, 2010). As a modal particle, *denn* is especially frequent in interrogative and dialogic contexts, where it can signal surprise, doubt, expectation, insistence, criticism, or reference to a preceding discourse situation (Bublitz, 1978; Hentschel and Weydt, 1983; Métrich and Faucher, 2010). Since the modal-particle function of *denn* cannot be reduced to a stable lexical meaning, its translation requires careful interpretation of the local context and the speaker's pragmatic intention.

Literary texts provide a particularly productive context for examining the translation of modal particles. Although modal particles are often associated with spoken language, they are also systematically used in literary dialogue and narrative passages to represent spoken interaction, speaker attitudes, interpersonal relations, and character voice (Helbig, 1994; Hentschel, 2010). For this reason, literary texts can offer rich material for analyzing how discourse-pragmatic meanings are rendered or lost in translation. Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* is especially relevant in this respect because it contains extensive dialogic passages and instances of fictional spoken language.

Against this background, the present study investigates how the German modal particle *denn* is handled in Turkish learner translations of selected literary passages from Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg*. The study combines a product-oriented analysis of translation strategies with a qualitative analysis of students' metalinguistic reflections. This combination makes it possible to examine not only how *denn* is rendered in Turkish, but also why students omit it or choose particular functional substitutes.

The empirical basis of the study consists of 29 selected occurrences of *denn* as a modal particle. These examples were selected from a corpus search of *Der Zauberberg*, which initially yielded 848 occurrences of the form *denn*. After excluding homonymous and non-modal uses, 200 relevant modal-particle occurrences were identified, from which 29 examples were selected according to their pragmatic functions. Fifteen B2-level students of German Language and Literature translated all 29 examples into Turkish, resulting in 435 translation units. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five of the participants in order to explore their reasons for omitting or substituting *denn*.

The study pursues two main research questions:

Research Question 1:

What reasons can be identified from the students' translations and metalinguistic comments for the omission of the German modal particle *denn* in the translation process from German into Turkish?

Research Question 2:

How are the pragmatic functions of the German modal particle *denn* realized in Turkish, and which linguistic means or translation strategies do students use?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to German-Turkish translation research in three ways. First, it provides quantitative evidence for the distribution of translation strategies used for *denn* in learner translations. Second, it identifies the Turkish linguistic resources used as functional substitutes for the German modal particle. Third, it reconstructs the learners' own explanations for omission, thereby linking translation products to metalinguistic awareness and translation strategy competence. The study therefore offers insights not only into the translation of German modal particles, but also into the didactic challenges involved in teaching discourse-pragmatic meaning in German-Turkish translation contexts.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 German modal particles

German modal particles, or *Abtönungspartikeln*, form a distinct subgroup within the broader class of particles. They are typically described as uninflected, unstressed, syntactically integrated elements that do not function as independent sentence constituents and do not usually occur in sentence-initial position (Helbig, 1994; Thurmair, 1989; Weydt, 1969). Their meaning is not primarily lexical or propositional. Rather, they contribute to the pragmatic interpretation of an utterance by indicating how the speaker positions the utterance in relation to the discourse context, the hearer, and the communicative situation.

A central feature of modal particles is that they express speaker attitude toward the proposition or toward the interactional setting in which the proposition is uttered. They can signal

assumptions, expectations, emotional stance, shared knowledge, agreement, disagreement, doubt, surprise, insistence, or reproach (Diewald, 2007; Helbig, 1994; Weydt, 1969). In this sense, modal particles contribute to the subjective-modal and interactional dimension of meaning rather than to the truth-conditional content of the sentence.

Modal particles are also closely connected to speech acts and sentence types. Their occurrence is often restricted to particular syntactic environments and communicative functions. They may modify or indicate the illocutionary force of an utterance, for example by making a question sound more insistent, a command more softened, or a statement more confirmatory (Helbig, 1994; Thurmair, 1989). For this reason, modal particles cannot be adequately described without reference to context, sentence type, and communicative intention.

In dialogic interaction, modal particles perform several discourse-organizational functions. They help anchor an utterance in the preceding discourse, mark the speaker's assessment of shared knowledge, establish a connection to previous or expected contributions, and guide the hearer's interpretation of the utterance (Franck, 1980; Hentschel and Weydt, 1983; Kemme, 1979). They may also contribute to the management of agreement and disagreement, topic development, and interactional alignment.

Although modal particles have long been associated primarily with spoken language, they also occur systematically in literary texts. In literary dialogue and narrative passages, they contribute to the representation of spoken interaction, speaker attitude, interpersonal relations, and character voice (Helbig, 1994; Hentschel, 2010). This makes literary texts a relevant empirical basis for examining how modal particles function and how they may be translated into languages that do not possess a comparable particle system.

2.2 The modal particle *denn*

The German lexeme *denn* is polyfunctional. It can occur as a conjunction, connector, modal particle, or as part of fixed and idiomatic expressions (Helbig, 1994; Métrich and Faucher, 2010). Because of this polyfunctionality, its interpretation depends strongly on syntactic position, sentence type, prosody, and discourse context. The distinction between conjunctional *denn* and modal-particle *denn* is particularly important in translation, since the two uses cannot be rendered in the same way.

As a modal particle, *denn* is especially frequent in interrogative contexts. It occurs in genuine questions, rhetorical questions, confirmation questions, and other dialogic utterances in which the speaker refers to the current speech situation or to preceding discourse (Bublitz, 1978; Hentschel and Weydt, 1983; Métrich and Faucher, 2010). In such uses, *denn* may signal that the question is motivated by something in the context, that the speaker is surprised or puzzled, or that the speaker expects the hearer to provide an explanation or confirmation.

In yes/no questions, unstressed *denn* can indicate that the speaker is questioning a state of affairs that was previously assumed, expected, or somehow implied by the discourse. This may create nuances of surprise, doubt, or insistence. In rhetorical questions, *denn* may contribute to a justificatory, critical, or reproachful reading depending on the surrounding context (Helbig, 1994; Métrich and Faucher, 2010). In wh-questions, *denn* often marks the question as contextually motivated and interactionally connected to previous discourse.

Fernandez Bravo's analysis of interrogative utterances in contemporary German further supports this context-oriented interpretation of *denn*. On the basis of a written corpus of 1,774 interrogative utterances, she emphasizes that the interpretation of German questions depends not only on formal linguistic markers but also on their relation to preceding and following co-text and to the communicative context (Fernandez Bravo, 1991). In this framework, questions with *denn* are described as requests for information legitimized by the preceding context (Fernandez Bravo, 1991). This account is relevant to the present study because it highlights precisely the contextual anchoring that makes *denn* difficult for learners to recognize and translate: if the learner does not identify the question as pragmatically motivated by the prior discourse situation, the modal-particle function of *denn* may remain unnoticed.

The pragmatic function of *denn* is therefore not stable in the sense of a fixed lexical equivalent. It must be inferred from the local context, the sentence type, and the interactional relation between speaker and hearer. This is one reason why *denn* represents a considerable challenge for translation. A formally identical or literal translation is usually not possible; instead, translators must identify the function of *denn* in context and select an appropriate functional equivalent or compensatory strategy in the target language.

In literary texts, *denn* may contribute to the representation of spoken interaction and to the characterization of speakers. By signaling hesitation, curiosity, insistence, surprise, or dialogic involvement, it can shape the tone of an utterance and the interpersonal relation between characters. Omitting *denn* in translation may therefore preserve the propositional content of an utterance while reducing its pragmatic or stylistic nuance.

2.3 Translating German modal particles into Turkish

The translation of German modal particles into Turkish is particularly complex because Turkish does not possess a closed class directly equivalent to German *Abtönungspartikeln*. While German frequently encodes pragmatic meanings through modal particles, Turkish tends to distribute comparable functions across a variety of linguistic resources, including particles, adverbs, connectors, interjections, suffixes, syntactic patterns, intonation, and contextual-pragmatic means (Hepsöyler, 1986; Reiter, 1981; Uslu, 1987, 1998; Vural, 2001; Vural Kara, 2012).

This structural asymmetry means that German modal particles cannot usually be translated through one-to-one lexical equivalence. Instead, the translator must identify the pragmatic contribution of the particle and determine whether this function can be rendered by a target-language element or by a broader contextual strategy. In some cases, Turkish may use particles such as *ki* or *de*, adverbs such as *zaten* or *gerçekten*, connectors such as *o halde* or *bu yüzden*, or interjections such as *peki*, *işte*, or *eee*. In

other cases, the function may be conveyed through word order, sentence structure, punctuation, or contextual inference.

Previous German-Turkish studies have shown that modal particles are often left untranslated in Turkish. Vural (2001), for example, emphasizes that German particles frequently remain without overt correspondence in Turkish and that their functions, when transferred, are realized mainly through lexical, syntactic, intonational, or contextual means. Similar observations can be found in Reiter (1981), Hepsöyler (1986), Uslu (1987, 1998), Erişek (1998), and Vural Kara (2012). These studies suggest that the translation of German modal particles into Turkish is best understood in terms of functional compensation rather than formal equivalence.

This issue is not specific to German-Turkish translation alone. Studies on other language pairs have also shown that German modal particles pose major translation problems because they encode meanings that are often implicit, interactional, and not tied to stable lexical content (Beerboom, 1992; Blieberger, 2011; Liefländer-Koistinen, 2004; Resende, 1995). Therefore, the translation of modal particles requires a pragmatic analysis of the source utterance and a target-language solution that reproduces the communicative effect as far as possible.

In the case of *denn*, this requirement is especially important because the particle can express different pragmatic effects depending on context. A Turkish rendering that is appropriate in one context may be unsuitable in another. For example, *ki* may render emphasis or doubt in some contexts, while *peki* may better reproduce a dialogic or response-oriented function. Similarly, *zaten* or *gerçekten* may express expectation, confirmation, or evaluative stance, whereas *o halde* or *bu yüzden* may convey inferential or argumentative relations. Thus, the Turkish translation of *denn* must be determined functionally and contextually.

2.4 Translation strategies for modal particles

The present study uses four categories to analyze the translation of *denn*: omission/zero correspondence, functional substitution/transposition, paraphrase, and literal translation. These categories draw on translation-theoretical approaches to equivalence, transposition, reformulation, and zero correspondence, as well as on previous research on modal particles as a translation problem (Beerboom, 1992; Koller, 2004, 2011; Koller and Henjum, 2020; Munday, 2008; Resende, 1995; Stolze, 2018).

Omission, or zero correspondence, refers to cases in which the modal particle has no identifiable counterpart in the target text. Such omission does not necessarily mean that the translation is semantically incorrect, because modal particles often do not contribute to the propositional core of the utterance. However, omission may result in the loss of discourse-pragmatic nuance, such as speaker attitude, contextual anchoring, or interactional involvement (Beerboom, 1992; Koller, 2004; Resende, 1995).

Functional substitution/transposition refers to cases in which the function of the German modal particle is rendered through a target-language element belonging to another word class or grammatical category. This may involve the use of a Turkish particle, adverb, connector, interjection, or pragmatic formula. The term transposition is relevant because the source-language category is shifted into another target-language category (Koller and Henjum, 2020; Stolze, 2018). At the same time, the term functional substitution emphasizes that the key criterion is not grammatical sameness but the target element's ability to reproduce the relevant pragmatic effect.

Paraphrase refers to cases in which the function of the modal particle is rendered through a broader reformulation of the utterance rather than through a local equivalent. This may involve restructuring the sentence or adding explanatory material in the target text. Paraphrase can be a useful strategy when the pragmatic meaning of the modal particle cannot be adequately expressed through a single target-language item (Koller, 2004; Munday, 2008).

Literal translation refers to word-for-word transfer. In the case of German *denn* as a modal particle, literal translation is generally not expected to produce an adequate Turkish rendering, because Turkish lacks a direct lexical equivalent for this function. Nevertheless, literal translation is included as an analytical category in order to determine whether learners attempt to transfer the form directly rather than interpreting its pragmatic function.

The use of these categories allows the present study to examine both the frequency of different translation strategies and the specific linguistic means used in Turkish. More importantly, it makes it possible to distinguish between cases in which *denn* is simply omitted and cases in which students attempt to compensate for its pragmatic contribution through functional equivalents. This distinction is central to assessing how discourse-pragmatic meaning is transferred, reduced, or lost in German-Turkish translation.

3 Materials and methods

3.1 Research design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design combining a quantitative analysis of translation products with a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interview data. The quantitative component examines how the German modal particle *denn* was rendered in Turkish learner translations, with particular attention to translation strategies such as omission, functional substitution/transposition, paraphrase, and literal translation. The qualitative component explores the reasons behind the omission of *denn* by analyzing students' metalinguistic comments on their translation decisions.

The combination of product-oriented and reflection-oriented data makes it possible to examine not only the observable translation solutions but also the learners' explanations, difficulties, and decision-making processes. This approach is particularly relevant for the study of modal particles, since their meanings are not primarily propositional but discourse-pragmatic and strongly dependent on context (Diewald, 2007; Helbig, 1994; Thurmair, 1989; Weydt, 1969). The thematic analysis of the interview data follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, which is suitable for identifying recurring patterns of meaning in qualitative data.

3.2 Corpus and selection of examples

The empirical material was drawn from Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg*, which was selected because of its extensive use of fictional spoken language and dialogic passages. Since modal particles occur particularly frequently in interactional contexts, literary dialogue provides a suitable basis for investigating their pragmatic and translational functions. Previous research has argued that fictional spoken language can, to a certain extent, serve as a substitute for naturally occurring spoken language when interactional and pragmatic phenomena are analyzed (Beerboom, 1992). Moreover, modal particles have been shown to play an important role not only in spoken interaction but also in literary texts, where they contribute to the representation of speaker attitudes, dialogic relations, and character voice (Helbig, 1994; Hentschel, 2010).

The corpus was systematically searched for occurrences of the German form *denn*. The initial search yielded 848 hits. Since *denn* can occur not only as a modal particle but also as a conjunction, connector, or component of fixed expressions, all hits were manually examined in context. This manual disambiguation was necessary because the lexeme *denn* is polyfunctional and its interpretation depends on sentence type, syntactic position, prosody, and discourse context (Helbig, 1994; Métrich and Faucher, 2010).

After excluding homonymous and non-modal uses, 200 relevant occurrences of *denn* as a modal particle were identified. From these 200 relevant occurrences, 29 examples were selected for the translation task. The selection was based on the pragmatic functions of *denn* and aimed to include different contextual and functional uses of the particle, especially in dialogic and interrogative contexts. The selected examples were presented to the participants together with their contextual surroundings in order to enable a pragmatically informed interpretation of the particle. This decision reflects the assumption that modal-particle meaning cannot be adequately analyzed in isolation from context (Diewald, 2013; Helbig, 1994; Thurmair, 1989).

3.3 Participants

Fifteen students participated in the translation task. All participants were native speakers of Turkish and students of German Language and Literature. They had German language proficiency at approximately B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The participants were selected because they possessed sufficient German competence to understand literary source-text passages while still representing advanced learners for whom German modal particles may pose particular difficulties.

This participant profile is relevant because previous research has shown that modal particles are often difficult for learners of German to recognize, interpret, and use appropriately, especially when their pragmatic functions are not explicitly addressed in instruction (Luchtenberg, 1987; Meißner, 2014; Muhr, 1989; Schoonjans, 2021). For Turkish-speaking learners, the difficulty is further increased by the fact that Turkish does not have a closed class of modal particles directly comparable to German *Abtönungspartikeln* (Reiter, 1981; Vural, 2001; Vural Kara, 2012).

All fifteen students completed the translation task. In addition, five of these participants took part in semi-structured interviews after the translation task. The interviews were conducted in order to obtain more detailed insights into the participants' reasoning, their awareness of the pragmatic functions of *denn*, and the reasons for omitting or substituting the particle in Turkish. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all data were anonymized before analysis.

3.4 Translation task

The translation task consisted of 29 selected passages containing the German modal particle *denn*. Each of the 15 participants translated all 29 passages from German into Turkish. This resulted in a total dataset of 435 translation units:

$$29 \text{ examples} \times 15 \text{ participants} = 435 \text{ translation units}$$

The translation task was conducted in the classroom. Participants were not allowed to use dictionaries, online translation tools, or internet resources during the task. This procedure was chosen in order to capture the students' own linguistic and pragmatic competence as directly as possible. The selected passages were presented with sufficient context, so that the participants could interpret the discourse-pragmatic function of *denn* within its literary and dialogic environment.

Each translation unit was analyzed with regard to how the modal particle *denn* was treated in the Turkish target text. The analysis focused on whether the particle was omitted, rendered through a functional Turkish equivalent, paraphrased, or translated literally.

The task was designed to identify the strategies used by students when confronted with a German modal particle that has no direct equivalent in Turkish. Since Turkish does not possess a closed class of modal particles equivalent to German *Abtönungspartikeln*, the analysis paid particular attention to compensatory strategies such as the use of particles, adverbs, connectors, interjections, pragmatic formulas, or syntactic restructuring (Hepsöyler, 1986; Reiter, 1981; Uslu, 1998; Vural, 2001; Vural Kara, 2012).

3.5 Coding of translation strategies

The 435 translation units were coded according to the strategy used to render the modal particle *denn* in Turkish. Four main categories were used: omission/zero correspondence, functional substitution/transposition, paraphrase, and literal translation. These categories were derived from translation-theoretical approaches to equivalence, transposition, paraphrase, and zero correspondence, as well as from previous work on modal particles as a translation problem (Beerboom, 1992; Koller, 2004, 2011; Koller and Henjum, 2020; Munday, 2008; Resende, 1995; Stolze, 2018).

3.5.1 Omission/zero correspondence

This category includes all cases in which *denn* was not represented by any identifiable lexical, grammatical, syntactic, or pragmatic element in the Turkish translation. In such cases, the propositional content of the source passage may have been preserved, but the modal or discourse-pragmatic nuance contributed by *denn* was not explicitly rendered. The category corresponds to the notion of zero correspondence in translation studies, where an element of the source text has no overt counterpart in the target text (Koller, 2004; Koller and Henjum, 2020; Resende, 1995).

3.5.2 Functional substitution/transposition

This category includes cases in which the pragmatic function of *denn* was rendered through a Turkish element belonging to a different word class or grammatical category. Such elements include particles, adverbs, connectors, interjections, and pragmatic markers such as *ki*, *peki*, *zaten*, *gerçekten*, *işte*, *o halde*, or *bu yüzden*. These solutions do not constitute direct lexical equivalents, but they may function as pragmatic or discourse-functional substitutes in the Turkish target text.

The term "functional substitution/transposition" is used in this study because the relevant Turkish renderings involve shifts from the German modal particle to other grammatical or lexical categories in Turkish. This corresponds to the concept of transposition as a change of grammatical category or word class in translation (Koller and Henjum, 2020; Stolze, 2018). At the same time, the label "functional substitution" emphasizes that the decisive criterion is not formal equivalence but the functional rendering of the particle's pragmatic contribution (Baker, 2018; Koller, 2011; Reiß and Vermeer, 1991).

3.5.3 Paraphrase

This category includes cases in which the pragmatic meaning of *denn* was rendered through a broader reformulation of the sentence or passage rather than through a local lexical item. A translation was coded as paraphrase only if the target text contained an explicit structural or semantic reformulation intended to convey the pragmatic function of *denn*. This category follows the understanding of paraphrase as a translation procedure in which the target text reproduces the underlying meaning of the source expression through reformulation rather than direct lexical substitution (Koller, 2004; Munday, 2008).

3.5.4 Literal translation

This category includes cases in which *denn* was translated word-for-word without regard to its modal-particle function. Since Turkish lacks a direct equivalent for German *denn* in its use as a modal particle, literal translation was expected to be rare or absent. This category was nevertheless included because literal translation is a relevant baseline strategy in translation analysis, especially when examining whether learners attempt to transfer source-language forms directly into the target language (Koller, 2011; Munday, 2008).

3.6 Analysis of Turkish functional equivalents

In addition to the general strategy coding, all cases classified as functional substitution/transposition were analyzed in more detail. The Turkish forms used to render *denn* were grouped according to their grammatical category and pragmatic function. This analysis made it possible to determine which Turkish linguistic resources students used when they attempted to compensate for the discourse-pragmatic meaning of *denn*.

The functional equivalents were classified into categories such as particles, adverbs, connectors, interjections, and pragmatic formulas. This classification reflects the fact that Turkish does not reproduce the German modal particle through a single equivalent form. Instead, the pragmatic functions of *denn* are distributed across several linguistic resources in Turkish (Hepsöyler, 1986; Reiter, 1981; Uslu, 1987, 1998; Vural, 2001; Vural Kara, 2012). The grammatical classification of Turkish forms was informed by Turkish grammar studies and descriptions of particles, adverbs, connectors, and interjections (Banguoglu, 2007; Ediskun, 2005; Ergin, 1984; Hacieminoglu, 1992; Korkmaz, 1969, 2009; Koç, 1996).

3.7 Semi-structured interviews

To complement the translation analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five of the participants. These interviews focused on the students' understanding of *denn*, their awareness of its modal-particle function, and their reasons for omitting or substituting it in Turkish.

The interviews were conducted in Turkish, which was the participants' native language. This allowed them to explain their translation decisions, uncertainties, and metalinguistic reflections more freely and precisely. The interviews were not audio-recorded. Instead, the participants' responses were documented in written form during or immediately after the interviews.

The interviews were designed to elicit metalinguistic reflections on the translation process. Participants were asked to explain how they interpreted *denn*, whether they recognized it as a modal particle, whether they considered it necessary to translate, and which difficulties they encountered when attempting to render its function in Turkish.

The interview data were used to reconstruct the subjective reasons behind the omission of *denn* and to identify recurring patterns in the students' decision-making processes. The interviews therefore served as a qualitative complement to the quantitative analysis of the translation products. This combination is particularly useful in learner translation research, since translation products alone do not fully reveal the reasons behind a particular strategy choice or omission.

3.8 Thematic analysis of interview data

The interview data were analyzed thematically following the approach of Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis focused on identifying recurring explanations for the omission of *denn* in the translation process. Thematic coding was guided by the research question concerning the reasons for omission, but it also allowed for the identification of recurring patterns in the participants' own comments.

Five main themes were identified:

insufficient understanding of the pragmatic function of *denn*;

perceived structural differences between German and Turkish;

perception of *denn* as optional or dispensable;

intention to simplify the target text;

lack of explicit translation strategies.

These themes were used to interpret the students' translation decisions and to relate the quantitative dominance of omission to underlying cognitive, linguistic, and didactic factors. The thematic categories also reflect issues discussed in previous research on modal particles in foreign language learning, especially the lack of explicit particle instruction, the low salience of modal particles, and the difficulty of transferring pragmatic meaning across languages (Luchtenberg, 1987; Meißner, 2014; Muhr, 1989; Schoonjans, 2021).

3.9 Ethical considerations

The study involving human participants was reviewed and approved by the Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Akdeniz University, Türkiye. The committee approved the study titled "Almanca 'Denn' Modal Edatinin Türkçeye Çevrilebilirligi: Edebi Metinlerde Işlevsel ve Pragmatik Aktarim Sorunlari" at its meeting dated October 2, 2025, meeting number 29, decision number 524. All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation. The translation data and interview responses were anonymized before analysis and were used exclusively for research purposes.

4 Results

4.1 Quantitative distribution of translation strategies

The analysis of the 435 translation units shows that the German modal particle *denn* was most frequently omitted in the Turkish translations. Omission/zero correspondence occurred in 333 cases, corresponding to 76.55% of the total dataset. Functional substitution/transposition was identified in 102 cases, corresponding to 23.45%. No cases were coded as paraphrase or literal translation.

This distribution indicates that the participants rarely attempted to render *denn* through explicit reformulation or word-for-word translation. Instead, they either omitted the particle entirely or compensated for its pragmatic function by using

TABLE 1 Distribution of translation strategies for German *denn* in Turkish learner translations.

Translation strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Omission/zero correspondence	333	76.55
Functional substitution/transposition	102	23.45
Paraphrase	0	0.00
Literal translation	0	0.00
Total	435	100.00

Turkish elements belonging to other grammatical or discourse-pragmatic categories. This pattern is compatible with previous findings showing that German modal particles are often omitted or rendered through compensatory means in translation, especially when the target language does not possess a directly comparable word class (Beerboom, 1992; Reiter, 1981; Resende, 1995; Vural, 2001; Vural Kara, 2012; Table 1).

The absence of literal translations confirms that the students did not treat *denn* as a directly transferable lexical item. This is consistent with the fact that Turkish does not possess a direct equivalent for German *denn* in its modal-particle function (Reiter, 1981; Vural, 2001; Vural Kara, 2012). The absence of paraphrase shows that when the students attempted to render the function of *denn*, they generally did so through local functional substitution rather than through broader syntactic or semantic reformulation.

4.2 Turkish functional equivalents used for *denn*

The 102 cases classified as functional substitution/transposition were analyzed in more detail in order to identify the Turkish forms used to render the pragmatic function of *denn*. The results show that the Turkish renderings are distributed across several word classes and grammatical categories. The most frequent equivalent was *ki*, which occurred 52 times. It was followed by *peki* with 18 occurrences, *zaten* and *gerçekten/gerçekten de* with 7 occurrences each, and *bu yüzden* with 5 occurrences.

This distribution shows that *denn* was not rendered through a single stable Turkish equivalent. Rather, the students relied on a set of Turkish pragmatic resources whose functions vary according to context. This supports previous contrastive findings that Turkish equivalents of German modal particles are found primarily in lexical, syntactic, intonational, and contextual-pragmatic domains rather than in a corresponding modal-particle class (Hepsöyler, 1986; Reiter, 1981; Uslu, 1987, 1998; Vural, 2001; Vural Kara, 2012; Table 2).

The high frequency of *ki* is particularly noteworthy. In Turkish, *ki* has been described as a multifunctional particle that may serve connective, intensifying, and doubt-marking functions depending on context (Ergin, 1984; Hacieminoglu, 1992; Korkmaz, 1969, 2009). In the translations analyzed here, this functional flexibility appears to make *ki* the most available Turkish resource for rendering certain pragmatic effects of *denn*.

TABLE 2 Turkish functional equivalents used for German *denn*.

Turkish equivalent	Word class/ grammatical category	Frequency
ki	particle; connective particle; intensifying or doubt-marking particle	52
peki	interjection; response particle	18
zaten	adverb; connective particle	7
gerçekten/gerçekten de	adverb	7
bu yüzden	connector; adverbial connector	5
işte	interjection; particle	3
o zaman	connector; adverbial connector	3
o halde	adverbial connector	2
sonuçta/nasil olsa	adverbial connector	1
Allah aşkina	interjection; pragmatic formula	1
de	particle; intensifying or connective particle	1
yine de	connector; adverbial connector	1
eee	interjection	1
Total		102

Other forms reflect different functional domains. Items such as *peki*, *işte*, and *eee* perform interactional or discourse-organizational functions and may therefore approximate the dialogic force of *denn*. Forms such as *zaten*, *gerçekten/gerçekten de*, *o halde*, *o zaman*, and *bu yüzden* express modal-evaluative, inferential, argumentative, or connective meanings. These functions correspond to descriptions of Turkish adverbs, connectors, particles, and interjections in Turkish grammar studies (Banguoglu, 2007; Ediskun, 2005; Ergin, 1984; Hacieminoglu, 1992; Korkmaz, 2009; Koç, 1996).

Overall, the findings show that Turkish realizations of *denn* are flexible and context-dependent. They do not operate as formal equivalents but as functional substitutes that may partially reproduce the discourse-pragmatic contribution of the German modal particle.

4.3 Thematic findings: reasons for the omission of *denn*

The semi-structured interviews with five participants were analyzed thematically in order to identify the reasons behind the frequent omission of *denn*. The analysis yielded five main themes:

insufficient understanding of the pragmatic function of *denn*;
perceived structural differences between German and Turkish;
perception of *denn* as optional or dispensable;
intention to simplify the target text;
lack of explicit translation strategies.

These themes show that the omission of *denn* cannot be explained merely as accidental non-translation. Rather, it reflects a combination of limited metalinguistic awareness, uncertainty about German modal particles, perceived structural incompatibility between German and Turkish, and a lack of conscious strategies for rendering discourse-pragmatic meaning. These findings correspond to previous research showing that modal particles are often overlooked by learners because of their low formal salience, semantic bleaching, and primarily pragmatic function (Luchtenberg, 1987; Meißner, 2014; Muhr, 1989; Schoonjans, 2021).

4.3.1 Insufficient understanding of the pragmatic function of denn

The first and most prominent theme concerns insufficient understanding of the pragmatic function of *denn*. Participants repeatedly stated that they did not know that *denn* could function as a modal particle and that they were mainly familiar with it as a causal conjunction. This lack of explicit knowledge led them either to ignore the particle or to treat it as irrelevant for the Turkish translation.

One participant explained that they could not adequately render the meaning of the omitted word because they were not aware that it functioned as a modal particle. Another participant stated that modal particles and their functions had not been addressed in their previous German courses, which made it difficult to determine whether *denn* had to be translated at all.

This theme suggests that the problem lies not simply in recognizing the form *denn*, but in identifying its function in context. When the participants associated *denn* primarily with its conjunctional meaning, they were unable to interpret its modal-particle function and therefore tended to omit it. This is consistent with descriptions of *denn* as a polyfunctional lexeme that can occur as a conjunction, connector, modal particle, or in fixed expressions (Helbig, 1994; Métrich and Faucher, 2010). The finding also supports learner-oriented studies that identify insufficient explicit instruction and weak pragmatic awareness as central causes of difficulties with modal particles (Meißner, 2014; Schoonjans, 2021).

4.3.2 Perceived structural differences between German and Turkish

A second theme concerns perceived structural differences between German and Turkish. This theme was less frequent than the others but analytically relevant. One participant explicitly referred to the position of *denn* in the German sentence as a source of confusion. The participant stated that they were familiar with *denn* mainly as a conjunction occurring at the beginning of a clause and therefore found its occurrence in sentence-medial position difficult to interpret.

This response indicates that the syntactic behavior of German modal particles may create problems for Turkish-speaking learners. German modal particles are typically syntactically integrated into the sentence, occur in the middle field, and do not function as independent sentence constituents (Helbig, 1994; Thurmair, 1989; Weydt, 1969). Since Turkish does not possess a structurally equivalent class of sentence-medial modal particles, students may

have difficulty assigning a function to *denn* when it appears in a position that does not match their expectations about conjunctions or connectors (Reiter, 1981; Vural, 2001).

4.3.3 Perception of denn as optional or dispensable

The third theme concerns the perception of *denn* as optional or dispensable. Several participants stated that they omitted the particle because they believed that the overall meaning of the sentence would remain unchanged without it. From their perspective, the propositional content of the utterance could be transferred into Turkish even if the modal particle was left untranslated.

This perception is closely related to the discourse-pragmatic nature of modal particles. Since *denn* does not usually contribute to the propositional core of the sentence, students tended to regard it as less important than content words. As a result, the pragmatic nuance encoded by *denn* was frequently lost, even though the basic referential meaning of the sentence was preserved. Similar explanations have been proposed in studies on modal particles in foreign language learning and translation, where learners often overlook modal particles because they are short, unstressed, formally inconspicuous, and semantically bleached (Luchtenberg, 1987; Rayner, 2009; Schoonjans, 2021).

4.3.4 Intention to simplify the target text

The fourth theme concerns the intention to simplify the target text. Participants reported that they omitted *denn* in order to make their Turkish translations clearer, more fluent, or easier to understand. In complex literary passages, the particle was sometimes perceived as an additional element that complicated the translation without contributing essential meaning.

This shows that omission was not always accidental. In some cases, the students consciously chose not to render *denn* because they believed that its omission would improve readability in Turkish. However, this strategy also reduced the discourse-pragmatic complexity of the source text, since the modal nuance conveyed by *denn* was not reproduced in the target text. This finding can be related to research on simplification in translation, which shows that translators may reduce complexity in the target text in order to increase readability and comprehensibility (Jasiukiewicz, 2017; Laviosa, 2002).

4.3.5 Lack of explicit translation strategies

The fifth theme concerns the lack of explicit translation strategies. Participants indicated that they did not know which Turkish linguistic resources could be used to render German modal particles. Some stated that they relied on intuition or *Sprachgefühl* when they chose a Turkish equivalent; others omitted *denn* whenever they could not infer a clear function from the context.

This theme is particularly important because it connects the quantitative dominance of omission with the participants' limited strategic repertoire. The students did not necessarily omit *denn* because they considered it meaningless. Rather, they often lacked a conscious method for transferring its pragmatic function into Turkish. When a local equivalent such as *ki*, *peki*, or *zaten* seemed intuitively appropriate, they used it; when no such solution was available, omission appeared to be the safest option.

This finding corresponds to translation-theoretical approaches that emphasize the need for functional equivalence when direct lexical equivalence is unavailable (Baker, 2018; Koller, 2011; Reiß and Vermeer, 1991). It also corresponds to research on modal-particle translation showing that pragmatic meanings are often transferred through compensatory means and may remain implicit, unsystematic, or unrecognized if learners lack explicit strategies (Schoonjans, 2021; Vural, 2001; Vural Kara, 2012).

4.4 Summary of results

The results show that the German modal particle *denn* was predominantly omitted in the Turkish learner translations. When it was rendered, the participants used a limited but functionally diverse set of Turkish resources, especially *ki*, *peki*, *zaten*, *gerçekten*, and connective or interjectional forms. These renderings did not constitute direct equivalents but rather context-dependent functional substitutions.

The thematic analysis further demonstrates that omission resulted from several interrelated factors: insufficient knowledge of modal particles, confusion caused by structural differences between German and Turkish, the perception of *denn* as optional, the intention to simplify the target text, and a lack of explicit translation strategies. Together, these findings indicate that the translation of *denn* requires not only lexical knowledge but also pragmatic awareness and strategic competence.

5 Discussion

5.1 Omission as the dominant translation strategy

The results of this study show that omission was by far the most frequent strategy used in the Turkish translations of German *denn*. Out of 435 translation units, 333 cases were coded as omission or zero correspondence. This finding confirms that the modal-particle function of *denn* was rarely represented explicitly in the Turkish target texts.

This dominance of omission can be explained by the specific semantic and pragmatic profile of German modal particles. Modal particles do not usually contribute to the propositional content of an utterance. Instead, they encode speaker attitude, interactional positioning, discourse anchoring, expectation, surprise, doubt, or confirmation (Diewald, 2007; Helbig, 1994; Thurmair, 1989; Weydt, 1969). Since these meanings are often implicit, context-dependent, and formally unobtrusive, learners may perceive them as less essential than lexical content words.

In the present data, the high omission rate does not necessarily indicate simple negligence. Rather, omission appears as the result of

several overlapping factors: the students' limited explicit knowledge of modal particles, their uncertainty about the function of *denn* in sentence-medial position, the absence of a structurally equivalent category in Turkish, and the perception that the propositional meaning of the sentence remains intact even without rendering the particle.

This interpretation is consistent with previous contrastive and translation-oriented studies on German modal particles. Earlier research has repeatedly shown that German modal particles are frequently omitted in translation, particularly when the target language does not possess a comparable grammatical category (Beerboom, 1992; Liefländer-Koistinen, 2004; Resende, 1995). For the German-Turkish language pair, previous studies have also emphasized that modal particles often remain untranslated and that their functions, when transferred, are realized through compensatory means rather than direct equivalence (Hepsöyler, 1986; Reiter, 1981; Uslu, 1998; Vural, 2001; Vural Kara, 2012).

The present study adds to this line of research by showing not only that omission occurs frequently, but also why students omit *denn*. The interview data demonstrate that omission is linked to a lack of functional awareness and to insufficient translation strategies. Thus, omission should be understood not merely as an absence of translation, but as a meaningful indicator of learners' difficulties in processing and transferring discourse-pragmatic meaning.

5.2 Functional substitution instead of direct equivalence

Although omission was the dominant strategy, 102 cases were coded as functional substitution/transposition. These cases show that students sometimes attempted to compensate for the pragmatic function of *denn* by using Turkish linguistic resources such as particles, adverbs, connectors, interjections, and pragmatic formulas.

The most frequent Turkish form used was *ki*, followed by *peki*, *zaten*, *gerçekten/gerçekten de*, *bu yüzden*, *işte*, *o zaman*, and *o halde*. These forms do not represent direct equivalents of German *denn*. Rather, they function as context-sensitive resources that can reproduce certain aspects of the particle's pragmatic contribution. This supports the assumption that modal-particle translation requires functional rather than formal equivalence (Koller, 2004; Koller and Henjum, 2020; Reiß and Vermeer, 1991).

This finding is important because it confirms that the translation of *denn* into Turkish is not a matter of lexical substitution. Turkish does not provide a single fixed counterpart for the German modal particle. Instead, the translation depends on the function of *denn* in the specific context. Depending on whether *denn* signals surprise, doubt, expectation, insistence, inference, or discourse continuation, different Turkish elements may be selected. This is in line with contrastive German-Turkish studies showing that Turkish equivalents of German modal particles are distributed across different linguistic categories, including particles, adverbs, conjunctions, interjections, suffixes, intonation, and contextual-pragmatic means (Hepsöyler, 1986; Reiter, 1981; Uslu, 1987, 1998; Vural, 2001; Vural Kara, 2012).

The frequent use of *ki* is particularly significant. In Turkish, *ki* can perform several discourse-related functions, including emphasis, connection, reinforcement, and the marking of doubt or insistence. This functional flexibility makes it a plausible candidate for rendering some pragmatic effects of *denn* in specific contexts (Ergin, 1984; Hacieminoglu, 1992; Korkmaz, 1969, 2009). However, *ki* cannot be treated as a general equivalent. Its suitability depends on the local context, the sentence type, and the intended pragmatic force of the source utterance.

Similarly, forms such as *peki*, *işte*, and *eee* show that some students rendered *denn* through interactional or discourse-organizational elements. These forms may reproduce the dialogic function of *denn* more effectively than purely lexical equivalents. Other items, such as *zaten*, *gerçekten*, *o halde*, and *bu yüzden*, tend to express modal-evaluative, inferential, or argumentative relations. These categories correspond to descriptions of Turkish particles, adverbs, connectors, and interjections in Turkish grammar studies (Banguoglu, 2007; Ediskun, 2005; Ergin, 1984; Korkmaz, 2009; Koç, 1996).

Therefore, the findings support a functional view of equivalence. The translation of German modal particles into Turkish cannot be assessed according to formal correspondence alone. Instead, the decisive criterion is whether the target-language solution reproduces the relevant pragmatic effect in context. This corresponds to translation-theoretical approaches that emphasize function, communicative effect, and target-language adequacy rather than formal sameness (Baker, 2018; Koller, 2011; Reiß and Vermeer, 1991; Stolze, 2018).

5.3 The problem of pragmatic awareness

The interview data show that many participants were not aware of the modal-particle function of *denn*. Several students stated that they knew *denn* primarily as a causal conjunction equivalent to "because" or "for this reason." When *denn* occurred in a sentence-medial position and did not function as a conjunction, they were unsure how to interpret it.

This finding points to a central problem in the translation of modal particles: learners may recognize the word form but fail to identify the relevant function. In other words, the difficulty does not lie only in vocabulary knowledge, but in pragmatic categorization. The same form *denn* can function as a conjunction, connector, or modal particle, and each use requires a different interpretive strategy (Helbig, 1994; Métrich and Faucher, 2010). The modal-particle use of *denn* is especially dependent on sentence type, discourse context, and speaker attitude, particularly in interrogatives and dialogic utterances (Bublitz, 1978; Hentschel and Weydt, 1983; Métrich and Faucher, 2010).

For learners, this heterosemy creates a high risk of misclassification. If *denn* is interpreted through its better-known conjunctional meaning, the modal-particle function remains unnoticed. Once the pragmatic function is not recognized, the likelihood of omission increases. This explains why the students often stated that they did not know whether *denn* needed to be translated or considered it unnecessary for the meaning of the sentence.

The findings therefore suggest that pragmatic awareness is a crucial prerequisite for translating modal particles. Learners need to understand that the meaning of *denn* is not restricted to propositional or causal relations. In its modal-particle use, it contributes to the interactional and discourse-pragmatic organization of the utterance. Without this awareness, learners tend to preserve the referential meaning of the sentence while losing the modal nuance. Similar difficulties have been discussed in studies on modal particles in foreign language learning and translation, where learners often overlook or inadequately render modal particles because their pragmatic functions are not explicitly taught (Cardenés Melián, 1997; Luchtenberg, 1987; Meißner, 2014; Prüfer, 1995; Schoonjans, 2021).

5.4 Structural differences between German and Turkish

The study also highlights the role of structural differences between German and Turkish. German modal particles typically occur in the middle field of the sentence and are syntactically integrated, unstressed, non-inflectable, and not independently usable as sentence constituents (Helbig, 1994; Thurmair, 1989; Weydt, 1969). Turkish, by contrast, does not possess a directly comparable closed class of sentence-medial modal particles. Pragmatic meanings comparable to those expressed by German modal particles are instead distributed across various lexical, syntactic, prosodic, and discourse-pragmatic means (Reiter, 1981; Vural, 2001; Vural Kara, 2012).

This structural asymmetry contributes to the difficulty of translation. When students encounter *denn* in a position where they expect a conjunction or connector, they may not be able to assign it a clear function. The modal particle becomes structurally unfamiliar and semantically opaque. As a result, omission may appear to be the most economical solution.

However, the Turkish data also show that the absence of a direct structural equivalent does not mean that the pragmatic function of *denn* is untranslatable. Rather, Turkish provides several alternative resources for functional compensation. The challenge is not the absolute impossibility of translation, but the need to select a contextually appropriate target-language strategy.

This finding is important for translation studies because it illustrates the limits of formal equivalence in the translation of pragmatic markers. The relevant question is not whether Turkish has a word class corresponding to German modal particles, but how Turkish can reproduce comparable communicative effects through its own linguistic resources. This is consistent with broader approaches to pragmatic markers and discourse particles, which emphasize that comparable functions may be distributed across different categories in different languages (Aijmer, 2014; Diewald, 2013; Kresić et al., 2017).

5.5 Simplification and loss of pragmatic nuance

One of the recurring explanations in the interview data was the intention to simplify the Turkish target text. Participants reported that they omitted *denn* in order to make their translations clearer, more fluent, or easier to read. This suggests that omission was sometimes a conscious strategy rather than an accidental failure.

From a translation perspective, simplification is ambivalent. On the one hand, it may improve readability and help produce a natural target text. On the other hand, it may reduce the pragmatic complexity of the source text. In the case of *denn*, simplification often means that the propositional content is preserved, while the interactional nuance, speaker attitude, or discourse anchoring is lost.

This is particularly relevant in literary translation. In literary dialogue, modal particles contribute to characterization, interpersonal dynamics, and the representation of spoken interaction. Omitting them may therefore affect not only local sentence meaning but also the stylistic and pragmatic texture of the literary text. Hentschel (2010) emphasizes that modal particles are not restricted to spoken language but also occur systematically in literary texts, where they contribute to the construction of speaker attitudes and interactional profiles. For this reason, their omission in literary translation can have consequences for the representation of dialogue and character voice.

The findings of this study suggest that students tend to prioritize semantic clarity over pragmatic subtlety. This is understandable from a learner perspective, especially when the source text is complex and the modal particle has no obvious equivalent. Nevertheless, the results show that translation instruction should draw attention to precisely these non-propositional elements, because they play an important role in literary and pragmatic meaning. Research on translation and comprehensibility has similarly shown that simplification may affect textual complexity and the distribution of linguistic information in translated texts (Jasiukiewicz, 2017; Laviosa, 2002).

5.6 Implications for translation didactics

The study has several implications for German-Turkish translation didactics. First, modal particles should be explicitly addressed in translation and German language courses. The interview data show that students often lacked explicit knowledge of modal particles and were not familiar with their pragmatic functions. This lack of awareness directly contributed to omission. Previous studies have similarly pointed out that modal particles are often underrepresented or insufficiently treated in German as a Foreign Language instruction (Bolacio Filho et al., 2017; Luchtenberg, 1987; Meißner, 2014; Muhr, 1989; Schoonjans, 2021).

Second, modal particles should not be taught as isolated lexical items. Since *denn* has different functions depending on sentence type, context, and discourse situation, instruction should focus on contextualized examples. Students need to learn how to distinguish between conjunctional *denn* and modal-particle *denn*, and how to infer the particle's function from the surrounding discourse. This is especially important because *denn* is highly polyfunctional and its interpretation depends strongly on pragmatic and interactional context (Helbig, 1994; Métrich and Faucher, 2010).

Third, translation training should emphasize functional equivalence rather than direct equivalence. Students should be shown that Turkish may render the pragmatic functions

of German modal particles through various means, including particles, adverbs, connectors, interjections, pragmatic formulas, word order, punctuation, or contextual reformulation. The goal is not to find one Turkish equivalent for *denn*, but to select a contextually adequate solution. This principle is compatible with functional approaches in translation studies and with contrastive studies of German modal particles in Turkish (Koller, 2011; Reiß and Vermeer, 1991; Vural, 2001; Vural Kara, 2012).

Fourth, students should be trained to recognize when omission is acceptable and when it leads to pragmatic loss. Not every omission is necessarily wrong. In some contexts, the modal nuance may be recoverable from the surrounding target text. However, in other contexts, omission may erase important signals of surprise, doubt, insistence, criticism, or interactional involvement. Translation instruction should therefore help learners make reflective rather than automatic decisions.

Finally, the use of literary texts can be particularly productive in teaching modal particles. Literary dialogue provides rich contextual environments in which pragmatic nuances are visible and interpretable. By comparing multiple Turkish translations of the same German passage, students can develop sensitivity to the range of possible functional equivalents.

5.7 Limitations of the study

The study has several limitations that should be taken into account. First, the analysis is based on selected passages from a single literary work, Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg*. Although the text provides a rich basis for investigating fictional spoken language and dialogic interaction, the findings cannot be generalized to all literary texts or all uses of *denn*.

Second, the study focuses only on one German modal particle. Since German modal particles differ in their functions, distribution, and translational possibilities, the findings for *denn* cannot automatically be transferred to particles such as *doch*, *ja*, *eben*, *wohl*, or *mal*.

Third, the participants were B2-level students of German Language and Literature. Their translation behavior may differ from that of professional translators, advanced C1/C2 learners, or bilingual speakers with more extensive pragmatic competence. Future studies could compare different proficiency levels or contrast learner translations with published literary translations.

Fourth, the qualitative component was based on semi-structured interviews with five participants. While these interviews provided valuable insights into the students' decision-making processes, a larger interview sample would allow for a broader qualitative interpretation.

Fifth, the interviews were conducted in Turkish but were not audio-recorded and fully transcribed. The responses were documented in written form. This procedure made it possible to include participants' metalinguistic reflections, but future studies could use audio-recorded interviews and full transcripts in order to conduct a more fine-grained qualitative analysis.

Finally, intonational and prosodic means were not systematically analyzed. This is a relevant limitation because pragmatic meanings comparable to those encoded by German modal particles may sometimes be expressed through intonation in Turkish. Since the present study is based on written translation products, such prosodic features could not be fully examined.

5.8 Future research directions

The findings of the present study point to two broader directions for future research. First, the investigation of pragmatic transfer and pragmatic loss could be extended beyond modal particles. Although German modal particles represent a particularly relevant category because of their discourse-pragmatic and interactional functions, implicit pragmatic meaning is also encoded through other linguistic units, including collocations, metaphorical expressions, discourse formulas, phraseological units, and lexicalized syntactic constructions. Future studies could therefore examine how such units are recognized, interpreted, translated, omitted, or compensated for in learner translations. This would make it possible to develop a broader model of pragmatic transfer in German-Turkish translation contexts.

Second, the results suggest the need for pragmatically annotated corpus resources for German as a foreign language and for German-Turkish translation training. Such a resource could include modal particles, discourse markers, pragmatic formulas, implicit meanings, phraseological units, and their possible functional equivalents in Turkish. A useful model in this respect is the Routinicon database, which describes routines as formulaic phraseological units functioning as reactions to, or comments on, standard extralinguistic situations (Rakhilina et al., 2025). Its annotation model is particularly relevant because it links formulaic units to situation structure, pragmatic function, conditions of use, and cross-linguistic comparability. A comparable German-Turkish resource could support linguistic search, contrastive analysis, and the development of teaching materials aimed at improving pragmatic awareness and context-sensitive translation competence among learners of German.

5.9 Summary of the discussion

Overall, the findings show that the translation of German *denn* into Turkish is shaped by the absence of direct equivalence, the discourse-pragmatic nature of modal particles, and the learners' limited strategic awareness. Omission is the dominant strategy, but it does not simply reflect carelessness. Rather, it results from the interaction of linguistic, pragmatic, didactic, and cognitive factors.

When students did render *denn*, they relied on Turkish resources such as *ki*, *peki*, *zaten*, *gerçekten*, connectors, and interjections. These forms show that Turkish can compensate for the pragmatic functions of German modal particles, but only through context-sensitive functional substitution. The central challenge is therefore not whether *denn* can be translated, but how its pragmatic contribution can be recognized and transferred in a given context.

6 Conclusion

This study examined how the German modal particle *denn* is handled in Turkish learner translations of literary texts and which reasons can be identified for its frequent omission. Based on selected passages from Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg*, the analysis combined a quantitative evaluation of 435 translation units with a qualitative thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with five participants.

The findings show that *denn* was predominantly omitted in the Turkish translations. Out of 435 translation units, 333 cases were coded as omission or zero correspondence, while 102 cases involved functional substitution/transposition. No cases were coded as paraphrase or literal translation. This distribution confirms that *denn* is rarely treated as directly transferable into Turkish. Instead, students either leave it untranslated or attempt to compensate for its pragmatic function through Turkish elements belonging to other grammatical or discourse-pragmatic categories.

The analysis of the 102 functional substitutions showed that the Turkish renderings of *denn* were distributed across several forms, especially *ki*, *peki*, *zaten*, *gerçekten/gerçekten de*, *bu yüzden*, *işte*, *o zaman*, and *o halde*. These forms do not constitute fixed equivalents of German *denn*. Rather, they function as context-dependent resources that may partially reproduce the discourse-pragmatic effects of the German modal particle. This supports the view that the translation of modal particles requires functional rather than formal equivalence, particularly in language pairs such as German and Turkish, where no directly corresponding modal-particle class exists (Baker, 2018; Koller, 2011; Reiter, 1981; Vural, 2001; Vural Kara, 2012).

The thematic analysis of the interview data further demonstrated that omission cannot be explained merely as an accidental failure to translate. Instead, it resulted from several interrelated factors: insufficient understanding of the pragmatic function of *denn*, perceived structural differences between German and Turkish, the perception of *denn* as optional or dispensable, the intention to simplify the target text, and a lack of explicit translation strategies. These findings indicate that the main difficulty lies not only in finding a Turkish equivalent, but also in recognizing the modal-particle function of *denn* in the first place.

The study therefore contributes to German-Turkish translation research by combining product-oriented translation analysis with learners' metalinguistic reflections. It shows that the translation of *denn* involves both linguistic and didactic challenges. From a translation studies perspective, the results underline the importance of context-sensitive functional equivalence. From a didactic perspective, they suggest that German modal particles should be treated more explicitly in translation and German language instruction, especially with regard to their discourse-pragmatic functions and possible Turkish compensatory strategies.

At the same time, the findings should be interpreted in light of the study's limitations. The analysis was based on selected examples from a single literary work and focused only on the modal particle *denn*. The participant group consisted of B2-level students of German Language and Literature, and the qualitative interview data were based on written documentation rather than audio-recorded transcripts. Future research could expand the dataset by including other German modal particles, additional literary texts, different proficiency levels, professional translators, or published Turkish translations. Such comparative work would allow for a more detailed understanding of how discourse-pragmatic meanings are transferred, compensated for, or lost in German-Turkish translation.

Overall, the study demonstrates that the German modal particle *denn* presents a complex translation problem because its meaning is not primarily lexical or propositional but pragmatic, interactional, and context-bound. Turkish can compensate for some of these functions through particles, adverbs, connectors, interjections, and pragmatic formulas, but such compensation requires both pragmatic awareness and strategic translation competence. The central challenge is therefore not whether *denn* can be translated, but how its discourse-pragmatic contribution can be recognized, evaluated, and rendered appropriately in Turkish.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The study involving human participants was reviewed and approved by the Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Akdeniz University, Türkiye. The committee approved the study titled "Almanca 'Denn' Modal Edatının Türkçeye Çevrilebilirliği: Edebi Metinlerde İşlevsel ve Pragmatik Aktarım Sorunları" at its meeting dated October 2, 2025, meeting number 29, decision number 524. The study was conducted in accordance with local legislation and institutional requirements. All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation. The translation data and interview responses were anonymized before analysis and were used exclusively for research purposes.

Author contributions

SÖ: Conceptualization, Project administration, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Data curation, Resources, Investigation. KD: Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Resources, Supervision, Investigation, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared that this work was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The author(s) declared that generative AI was not used in the creation of this manuscript.

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