

Sentence-types, discourse particles and intonation in Hungarian

Beáta Gyuris

The paper aims to discuss a novel approach to the interpretation of the Hungarian discourse particle *ugye* that can equally appear in declaratives, as in (1), and sentences that have traditionally been described as polar (*yes/no-*) interrogatives, as in (2):

- (1) *Mari ugye elolvasta a könyvet.* (2) *Mari ugye elolvasta a könyvet?*
Mary UGYE VM.read.PAST the book.ACC Mary UGYE VM.read.PAST the book.ACC
'Mary UGYE has read the book.' 'MARY UGYE has read the book?'
(≈'As you know, Mary has read the book.')

As (3) shows, the position of *ugye* is relatively free. Like other discourse particles, it is excluded from the preverbal operator positions [Spec,FP] and [Spec,DistP] (cf. É.Kiss 2002), whose interpretational features (contrastability vs. semantic type) it is not compatible with. As the parentheses indicate, the presence of *ugye* is not essential for well-formedness:

- (3) (Ugye) Mari (ugye) elolvasta (ugye) a könyvet (ugye)./?

There is a marked difference between the intonation of interrogatives with vs. without *ugye*: whereas ordinary polar interrogatives (having the same syntactic structure as declaratives) are pronounced with a characteristic final rise-fall, their counterparts with *ugye* bear a final fall. Given that declaratives are also pronounced with an end-falling contour, the only difference between (1) and (2) is that the latter is pronounced all along with a higher pitch than the former (cf. Fónagy & Magdics 1967, Varga 2002). The general consensus among authors discussing *ugye* (e.g. H. Molnár 1959, Keszler 2000, Péteri 2002) is that in (2) it marks a polar interrogative sentence-type by morphological means, like the *-e* particle does, which obligatorily appears in embedded polar interrogatives, optionally in main clauses, but in the latter case obligatorily triggers the declarative intonation (due to reasons of economy).

As far as the interpretation of *ugye* in declaratives is concerned, it seems to have the same role as that attributed by Zeevat (2003) to German *ja*: marking the content ϕ of the current utterance as common ground (CG) between speaker and hearer (cf. Péteri 2002 for the same view). This explains why (1) primarily appears in reminders or in the premisses of inferences. This might suggest that *ugye* is similar to German unaccented *doch*, which indicates that the speaker takes the hearer not to be aware of the fact that the propositional content of the sentence is true (Lindner 1991, Zimmermann to appear). The following felicitous exchange shows that this is not the case (since a person is usually aware of his sickness):

- (4) Worker: *Who should come to work tomorrow?*
Boss: *Te ugye beteg vagy, tehát Annának kell bejönnie.*
you UGYE sick be.2SG so Anna.DAT must VM.come.INF3SG
'You are sick, as we know, so Anna must come in.'

The standard way to think about the interpretation of *ugye* in (2) is to view it as a means of producing a biased question, that is, as being analogous to (English reversed-polarity) tags (Kiefer 1988, Varga 2002). Following one approach to tags, recently defended by Reese (2007), among others, this would mean that sentences like (2) with *ugye* express a complex speech act consisting of the assertion expressed by the declarative counterpart of the sentence without the particle and a question introduced by the particle. Although this suggestion reflects the way interrogatives with *ugye* came about historically (*ugye*, having the etymology 'is that so?', was appended to a declarative sentence), it can only account for the fact that *ugye* can also appear in declarative sentences by assuming that *ugye*, together with the heightened pitch of the whole sentence, is responsible for introducing a complex speech act of the kind described above (and *ugye* with a normal falling pitch on the whole sentence for introducing the context-marking function discussed in connection with (1)). The same

assumption has to be maintained under the approach advocated by Culicover (1992), among others, that analyzes tags as illocutionary operators turning an assertion into a question.

The approach to be advocated here for the first time is based on the following assumptions. First, the particle *ugye* has a same role in (2) as in (1): it marks the propositional content of the sentence as being part of the common ground. Second, (2), in spite of traditional wisdom, is not to be considered an interrogative sentence as far as its form is concerned, but a declarative one, which acquires a question interpretation indirectly, similarly to the so-called declarative questions in English or German. The assumption that (2) represents the declarative sentence type is supported by the following facts (cf. Gunlogson 2003): i) the expression *vagy nem?* 'or not?' can be added immediately after this sentence, as in (5), but not after an ordinary (rise-fall) interrogative; ii) negative polarity items (like *valaha is* 'ever') are excluded from the construction, as in (6); iii) (2) is incompatible with the morphological marking *-e* of polar interrogatives, as in (7); and iv) *ugye* cannot appear in alternative questions, as in (8):

- (5) *Mari ugye elolvasta a könyvet?Vagy nem?* (8) *Mari ugye cikket vagy verset olvasott?*
 'Has M. UGYE ever read the book? Or not?' Mary UGYE article.ACC or poem.ACC read
 (6) **Mari ugye valaha is elolvasta a könyvet?* 'Is it the case UGYE that M. read an
 (7) **Mari ugye elolvasta-e a könyvet?* article or a poem?'

The process in the course of which (2) evokes the question interpretation can be described as follows. The non-standard intonation of the declarative sentence signals that the speaker does not intend to express a prototypical assertive act. As claimed by Gussenhoven and Chen (2000), high pitch has the universal non-grammatical (paralinguistic) meaning of marking dependence and questioning. The basic meaning of *ugye*, i.e., marking the content of the sentence ϕ as CG, can only be reconciled with the universal meaning of the heightened pitch if the speaker believes that ϕ is indeed common ground (otherwise there would be no point in using the particle) and wonders about whether the hearer also thinks so.

The presentation will discuss the derivation of the "desired-state" bias of utterances like (9), and the compatibility of *ugye* with *wh*-interrogatives viewed as rhetorical questions, (10):

- (9) *Ugye mindig szeretni fogsz?* (10) *De én ugye mit tehetek?*
 UGYE always love.INF be.FUT.2SG but I UGYE what.ACC do.POSS.1SG
 'UGYE Will you always love me?' 'But UGYE what can I do?'

References:

- Culicover, P. W. 1992. English tag questions in universal grammar, *Lingua* 88: 193–226. Gunlogson, Ch. 2003. *True to Form. Rising and Falling Declaratives as Questions in English*. New York: Routledge. • É. Kiss, K. 2002. *The syntax of Hungarian*. Cambridge: CUP. • Fónagy, I. & K. Magdics 1967. *A magyar beszéd dallama. [The melody of Hungarian speech.]* Bp.: Akadémiai Kiadó. • Gussenhoven, C. & A.-J. Chen 2000. Universal and language-specific effects in the perception of question intonation. *ICSLP 6. Vol. II*. Beijing. 91-94. • H. Molnár, I. 1959. *A módosító szó mondattani arculatának kérdéséhez. [On the syntactic properties of modifiers.]* Magyar Nyelv 55: 357-61, 470-80. • Keszler, B. 2000. *Magyar grammatika. [Hungarian Grammar]*. Bp.: Tankönyvkiadó. • Kiefer, F. 1988. Modal particles as discourse markers in questions. *Acta Linguistica Hung.* 38: 107-25. • Lindner, K. 1991. 'Wir sind ja doch alte Bekannte' The use of German *ja* and *doch* as modal particles. In W. Abraham (ed.) *Discourse Particles*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 163-201. • Péteri, A. 2002. *Abtönungspartikeln im deutsch-ungarischen Sprachvergleich*. Budapest: ELTE. • Reese, B. 2007. *Bias in Questions*. PhD Diss. Univ. of Texas, Austin. • Varga, L. 2002. *Intonation and Stress: Evidence from Hungarian*. Houndmills, New York: Palgrave Macmillan. • Zeevat, H. 2003. *Particles: presupposition triggers, context markers or speech act markers*. In R. Blutner & H. Zeevat (eds.) *Optimality theory and pragmatics*. Houndmills, New York: Palgrave Macmillan. • Zimmermann, M. to appear. Discourse Particles. In P. Portner, C. Maienborn & K. von Stechow (eds.) *Handbook of Semantics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.