

An ‘all-purpose’ particle or marker of expectations?

This paper wants to contribute to the study of the interpretation of discourse-particles by taking a new look at the interpretation of the most frequent discourse particle in Hungarian, *hát*, and comparing it to German *denn* and *also*, which have been suggested in the literature as the former’s closest translational equivalents. Hungarian *hát* is compatible with all sentence-types and can appear in various syntactic positions, but the different interpretations associated with it in the literature are even more numerous than the syntactic environments where it can appear. Benkő (1993-95) and Schirm (2011) provide lists of apparently different interpretations of the particle. Kiefer (1988) also discusses various, apparently unrelated interpretations of *hát* in interrogatives.

This contribution will argue that instead of considering *hát* multiply ambiguous it is possible to assign to the majority of its possible occurrences one of two, related interpretations, and account for apparent further interpretational differences on the basis of sentence-type, and the position of the particle within the sentence (obligatorily initial vs. possibly non-initial), thus, following the strategy applied in recent work by Zeevat (2000, 2003), and Zimmermann (to appear), among others. (The fact whether non-initial positions are available for the particle will be argued to correlate strongly with the fact whether *hát* is replaceable by the particle *tehát* ‘therefore’, cf. Vaskó 1998 for an analysis of the latter.)

Consider (1) and (2) below. Whereas the appropriate context for the first is that it is uttered by a male relative the addressee has never met before, the second can be uttered by the addressee of the previous context himself/herself after meeting Uncle John:

- (1) (*Hát*) *én vagyok* (**hát*) *a János bácsi* (**hát*)!
hát I be.1sg.pres hát the John uncle hát
‘So, I am Uncle John!’
- (2) (*Hát*) *ő volt* (*hát*) *a János bácsi* (*hát*)!
hát he/she was hát the John uncle hát
‘So, he was Uncle John!’

It will be argued that *hát* signals in sentences analogous to (2) that the propositional content of the declarative is entailed by the common ground (also marked by the fact that it is substitutable by *tehát* ‘therefore’). In (1), however, the use of the particle signals that there is an expectation in the common ground that one of the alternatives of the denotation of (1) is expected to be added to the common ground. The latter description correctly accounts for the fact that *hát* in (1) conveys that the hearer must have already heard about Uncle John, and have expected to find out who he is (that is, which of the propositions of the form ‘x is Uncle John’ is true), without expecting the proposition expressed by (1) (‘Uncle John is equivalent to the speaker of (1)’) itself to be true. In declaratives that serve as congruent answers to explicit questions, illustrated in (3), we also find the same interpretation of *hát* as in (2):

- (3) A: *És ki vezeti?* B: *Hát én.*
and who drives hát I
‘And who will be driving it?’ ‘Of course I will.’ (Péteri 2002:211)

We turn now to interrogatives. (4)–(5) below show polar and *wh*-interrogatives, respectively, where the particle can only be inserted in sentence-initial position:

- (4) (*Hát*) *az idő (*hát) jó volt-e (*hát)?*
hát the weather hát good was.PRT hát
'And was the weather good?'
- (5) (*Hát*) *az idő (*hát) milyen volt (*hát)?*
hát the weather hát how was hát
'And what was the weather like?'

(4)–(5) are felicitous in a situation where the interlocutors have been speaking about various aspects of the listener's holiday, where some information about the weather is also provided. We will argue that the intuitions about their meanings can be captured by saying that the presence of *hát* in the interrogative sentences above expresses that there is an expectation in the common ground that one of the congruent answers be added to it. The above proposal is related to the one proposed by Péteri (2002), according to whom *hát* in (4)–(5) and in similar examples indicates that the speech act expressed by the utterance follows from the situation, but makes it slightly more explicit.

The paper will consider the claim by Péteri (2002) according to which the interpretation of *hát* in interrogatives is very similar to that of German *denn*, will point out differences in the interpretations of the two, and will argue instead for a closer parallelism between *hát* and German *also*.

We will also elaborate on the issue of why the variant of the polar interrogative (4) in (6) where the sentence mood is marked by the sentence-final rise-fall intonation instead of the particle *-e* allows different placements of the particle and different interpretational possibilities (asking for confirmation of a fact that seems to be entailed by the common ground):

- (6) (*Hát*) *az idő (hát) jó volt (hát)?*
hát the weather hát good was hát
'Was the weather good then?'

References

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