

Hungarian *hát*: new perspectives on old puzzles

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The aim of the paper is to take a new look at the interpretation of one of the most frequent Hungarian discourse particles, *hát*. It originated as a temporal adverb meaning ‘then’, which later turned into a conjunction of reason (cf. Benkő 1993-95, Péteri 2002, Schirm, in progress). (1) illustrates a typical example of an interrogative sentence with *hát*:

- (1) *Hát* ti mit csináltok itt?
hát you(2pl) what.acc do.2pl here
‘What are you doing here *hát*?’

Péteri (2002) argues that *hát* in (1) and in similar examples indicates that the speech act expressed by the utterance follows from the situation, and that the example above is to be translated into German with the help of the particle *denn*, as in (2):

- (2) Was macht ihr *denn* hier?
what.acc do.2pl you(2pl) *denn* here
‘What are you doing here *denn*?’

The parallelism illustrated above suggests that the standard analysis of German *denn* should be adopted for *hát*, according to which the particle expresses that the utterance is connected to an immediately preceding utterance, to particular aspects of the situation, the context or other kinds of background information available to the hearer (cf. König 1977, Thurmair 1989, Grosz 2005, among others). However, there are certain finer distinctions between the uses of Hungarian *hát* and German *denn*, and certain peculiarities of *hát* itself that need to be looked at and that will be addressed in the paper:

1. Whereas (3) in German is a perfectly acceptable way to ask a local person in order to find out the location of the railway station, its Hungarian equivalent in (4) is only appropriate in a situation where the hearer has already observed the speaker making some attempts at finding the answer to the question:

- (3) Wo ist *denn* hier der Bahnhof?
where is *denn* here the railway station
‘Where is *denn* the railway station?’
(4) Hol van *hát* itt a vasútállomás?
where is *hát* here the railway station
‘Where is *hát* the railway station?’

2. Whereas Hungarian *hát* is compatible with *vajon*, the marker of reflective question acts (cf. Gärtner 2010a, 2010b), as in (5), German *denn* is only compatible with verb-final interrogative sentences, also encoding reflective question acts, when the particle *wohl* is also present, as in (6) (cf. Gärtner 2010a):

- (5) De *hát* ebben a [...] reklámtengerben *vajon* mi a jó?
but *hát* this.in the advertisement.sea.in *vajon* what the good
‘What is *hát vajon* good about this sea of advertisements?’ (Hungarian National Corpus, www.nytud.hu/mnsz)

- (6) a. Ob es denn *(wohl) Bionade auf der Party gibt?
 whether it denn wohl Bionade on the Party is
 ‘Is there going to be Bionade at the Party denn wohl?’
- b. Wer denn *(wohl) das Licht angelassen hat?
 who denn wohl the lights left.on have
 ‘Who left the light on denn wohl?’

3. There is a difference between the interpretation of the polar interrogatives in Hungarian that are marked simply by intonation, as in (7), and those that are marked by the *-e* interrogative particle, as in (8): whereas the former only seems to ask for confirmation of a fact that seems to follow from the common ground, the latter is interpreted as a genuine unbiased information question:

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| (7) | <i>Hát</i> megjött János?
<i>hát</i> pv.came John
‘ <i>Hát</i> John has arrived?’ | (8) | <i>Hát</i> megjött-e János?
<i>hát</i> pv.came-e John
<i>Hát</i> did John arrive? |
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4. Whereas German *denn* is only compatible with interrogative sentences, Hungarian *hát* is both compatible with imperatives and with declaratives. For the former case the analysis according to which the particle signals that the speech act follows from the context can naturally be extended, but the latter case, illustrated in (9B), the consequence-relation holds not between speech acts but between propositions in the common ground and the propositional content of the utterance containing *hát*:

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| (9) | A: És ki vezeti?
and who drives
‘And who will be driving it?’ | B: | <i>Hát</i> én.
<i>hát</i> I
‘ <i>Hát</i> I will.’ (Péteri 2002:211) |
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References

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