

**Eötvös Loránd University**  
**Faculty of Humanities**

**PH. D. DISSERTATION**

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**Special questions? – The form and the use of Hungarian utterances  
containing particle *ugye***

**ABSTRACT**

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## 1. The problem

*Ugye* is a highly frequently used element in contemporary Hungarian spoken language. Two typical uses of *ugye*-sentences are distinguished in the dissertation: the question-use (*ugye*-question, (1a)), and the assertion-use (*ugye*-assertion, (1b)). The word orders and the prosody of the utterances can vary in both types.

- (1) a. Ott magyarul beszéltek, ugye?  
there Hungarian.IN spoke.3PL UGYE  
'There you spoke Hungarian, didn't you?'
- b. Ott ugye magyarul beszéltek.  
there UGYE Hungarian.IN spoke.3PL  
'There, you know, they spoke Hungarian.'

## 2. The aim of the dissertation

The dissertation has two objectives: a descriptive and a theoretical one. Its descriptive goal is to investigate and describe the formal and functional characteristics of *ugye*-utterances. Its theoretical goal is to provide a restricted explanation for these different uses.

## 3. Methods

The dissertation explores the different *ugye*-uses in contemporary spoken language. It describes their formal (syntactic, prosodic), and functional (semantic, pragmatic) properties. Based on this exploration, it makes grammatical generalizations concerning the sentence type of *ugye*-sentences, the speech acts realized by them, and the lexical categorization of *ugye*. Then, based on Farkas – Roelofsen (2017), a theoretical explanation is proposed for modeling the discourse functions of *ugye*.

The dissertation has four empirical sources:

1. the structured interviews of the Budapest Sociolinguistic Interviews (BUSI) corpus;
2. a phonetic database containing short dialogues with different *ugye*-uses;
3. a syntax experiment, and
4. a pragmatic experiment.

## 4. Main results

Chapter 2 of the dissertation concentrates on the formal properties of *ugye*-sentences based on empirical investigations. It is found that the form of *ugye*-questions and that of *ugye*-assertions are typically different, although this difference is not categorical, rather prototypical. The main differences are the following:

- A prototypical *ugye*-question contains a sentence-final *ugye*, that is, it forms a tag question construction with an invariant tag (*ugye*). In this case, *ugye* is stressed, and it bears a rise-fall contour character. In contrast, an *ugye* occurring in a prototypical *ugye*-assertion is hardly ever stressed, and it does not bear a separable intonation contour (it is integrated into the melody of the adjacent constituents). However, there is no difference in the duration of *ugye*-s between the two form types, and pauses around *ugye* are also typical in both form types.
- *Ugye*-questions containing a non-sentence-final *ugye* have a different prosodic pattern. In this construction, the stress on *ugye* is optional, thus it has its own melody (rise-fall) only in case it is stressed, otherwise, it is prosodically integrated into a larger intonation unit. In the latter case, another constituent bears the rise-fall melody. Pauses are not typical in this construction.
- A prototypical *ugye*-question has a sentence-initial, or a sentence-final *ugye*. Thus, in case of questions, *ugye* prefers the peripheries of the sentence. In contrast, a prototypical *ugye*-assertion contains the *ugye* in a non-peripheral position, in most cases it occurs preverbally.
- Corpus data show a clearcut difference between the two uses concerning the preferred word order: *ugye* in questions is sentence-final (that is, postverbal), while it is non-peripheral and preverbal in assertions.

Based on the empirical investigations, Chapter 3 of the dissertation makes grammatical generalizations:

- It is argued that the sentence type of *ugye*-questions is neither interrogative nor declarative. Due to its complex form (declarative anchor + a tag with interrogative intonation contour), its sentence type is complex.

- The distinction between the two uses can be made on the level of speech acts. An *ugye*-question realizes a question and an assertion simultaneously, while an *ugye*-assertion realizes an assertion.

Section 3.2. focuses on the formal and functional properties of *ugye*-questions based on the literature of English tag questions.

- Based on formal analogies, it is argued that *ugye* can be treated as an invariant tag, thus the *ugye*-question is a tag question. The tag is a sentence-level category, which is attached to a full declarative sentence.
- It is showed that the inventory of uses of Hungarian *ugye*-questions can be described with the same functional categories as that of English tag questions.
- The analysis of the corpus data showed that *ugye*-questions are not typically used for information-seeking purposes, their function is rather to ask for confirmation for the proposition expressed by the declarative anchor (that is, they are biased questions). Beside this confirmatory function, *ugye*-questions can also be used for facilitation, or for expressing the speaker's attitude towards the propositional content of the anchor.
- It is hypothesized that *ugye* could have undergone a grammaticalization process similar to that of English *innit*.

Section 3.3. focuses on the formal and functional properties of *ugye*-assertions. The syntactic behavior of *ugye* is compared to that of adverbials and to that of parentheticals.

- It is presented that *ugye* shares grammatical features both with adverbials and parentheticals. Its syntactic distribution is the same as that of "higher adverbials", but it has a different intonation pattern. Its prosody and syntactic flexibility make it similar to parentheticals. Despite the fact that it is often used in a parenthetic sentence, not all occurrences are parenthetical. These investigations point to the conclusion, that *ugye* can be described neither as an adverbial nor as a parenthetical.
- It is argued that *ugye* is a particle in both of its uses. Its function is analogous to that of the answer particles (*igen* – 'yes'; *nem* – 'no'; *persze* – 'of course').

Chapter 4 raises the question of the possibility of a uniform interpretation of *ugye*.

- It is shown that using Northrup's thought experiment (Northrup 2014) the "bias profiles" of *ugye*-questions can be investigated.
- Having tested different *ugye*-question forms, it is claimed that the use of the form with sentence-final *ugye* is licensed in a given context if evidence for the positive answer (i. e. the propositional content of the declarative anchor) is available. In contrast, the Hungarian tag question formulated with sentence final *nem* is licensed in a given context if evidence for the negative answer (i. e. the negation of the propositional content of the declarative anchor) is available. *Ugye*-questions with sentence-initial *ugye* can be felicitously used in contexts in which the speaker has prior evidence for the positive answer to the question. Thus, it is hypothesized that the use of the different word-order patterns of *ugye*-questions is contextually restricted, that is, they have different "bias profiles".
- It is showed that a uniform interpretation of *ugye* can be carried out in the discourse model of Farkas – Roelofsen (2017).
- It is proposed that the *ugye*-sentence (realizing either a question or an assertion) denotes the propositional content of the sentence without *ugye*. The function of *ugye* is to provide information about the credence level of the speaker. If *ugye* is pronounced with a rise-fall intonation, the credence level is low, and the speaker seeks for confirmation from the partner in order to remove the issue raised by the utterance from the conversational TABLE (ideally by putting it to the COMMON GROUND). And in case *ugye* is not stressed and bears no intonation contour, the speaker's credence level is high or maximal, that is, she takes the piece of information for granted. Uttering the latter type has the discourse effect that the propositional content of the sentence can be removed from the TABLE and can be put directly into the COMMON GROUND without the partner's explicit reaction.

Chapter 5 presents three pragmatic experiments about the hypothesized "bias profiles" of Hungarian tag question forms.

- Experiment 1 investigates the naturalness of Hungarian tag question forms with *ugye* and with *nem* in two conditions: (1) The speaker has prior evidence for the positive an-

swer, and current evidence for the negative answer is available in the context. (2) The speaker has prior evidence for the positive answer, and no current evidence is available in the context (neutral).

- Experiment 2 investigates the naturalness of Hungarian tag question forms with *ugye* and with *nem* in two conditions: (1) The speaker has prior evidence for the positive answer, and current evidence for the positive answer is available in the context. (2) The speaker has prior evidence for the positive answer, and no current evidence is available in the context (neutral).
- Experiment 3 investigates the naturalness of Hungarian questions with sentence-final *ugye*, and the *ugye, hogy...* construction in two conditions: (1) The speaker has prior evidence for the positive answer, and current evidence for the positive answer is available in the context. (2) The speaker has prior evidence for the positive answer, and no current evidence is available in the context (neutral).
- The results showed that in case of positive speaker bias and the presence of current evidence for the negative answer, neither tag question forms are natural, but *nem*-questions are slightly preferred.
- In case of positive speaker bias and neutral context, tag questions with *ugye* and with *nem* are equally preferred (slight preference for the *nem*-question). The question beginning with *ugye, hogy...* is evaluated as unnatural in this context.
- The results showed that in case of positive speaker bias and the presence of current evidence for the positive answer, *ugye* is treated significantly more natural than *nem*. *Ugye, hogy* and *ugye* are interchangeable in this context.

## References

Farkas, D. F. – Roelofsen, F. (2017). Division of Labor in the Interpretation of Declaratives and Interrogatives. *Journal of Semantics*, 34, 237–289.

Northrup, Oliver (2014). *Gounds for Commitment*. PhD értekezés, University of California