

Sentence-types, Discourse Particles and Intonation in Hungarian

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Abstract

The paper looks at the Hungarian particle *ugye*, which has traditionally been classified as an interrogative particle but can also legitimately appear in declarative sentences in present-day Hungarian, and explores the possibility of assigning it a core interpretation that covers all of its uses and attributing apparent remaining differences between its meanings in the various sentence-types to intonation.

1 Introduction

The aim of the paper is to characterise the interpretation of the Hungarian particle *ugye*, which can equally appear in utterances having the force of a question or that of an assertion. (1-b), pronounced with the intonation shown in Figure 1, can be uttered in order to provide a felicitous answer to a question like (1-a), whereas the string-identical (2-a), pronounced with the intonation pattern shown in Figure 2, can be used to ask a question.¹

- (1) a. Why is Thomas so upset?
b. Mari Jánost léptette ugye elő.
Mary John.ACC promoted PRT VM
'As you know, Mary has promoted John.'²
- (2) a. Mari Jánost léptette ugye elő?
Mary John.ACC promoted PRT VM
'Mary has promoted John, hasn't she?'
b. Yes, she has.

Given the lack of substantial evidence for assuming that the syntactic structures of the string-identical (1-b) and (2-a) should be different (cf. É. Kiss (2002)), it seems to

¹Note, importantly, that the contribution of *ugye* to the sentences intended as assertions and as questions must be translated differently into English. The particular choices made will be motivated later on.

²The abbreviation 'VM' stands for *verbal modifier*.

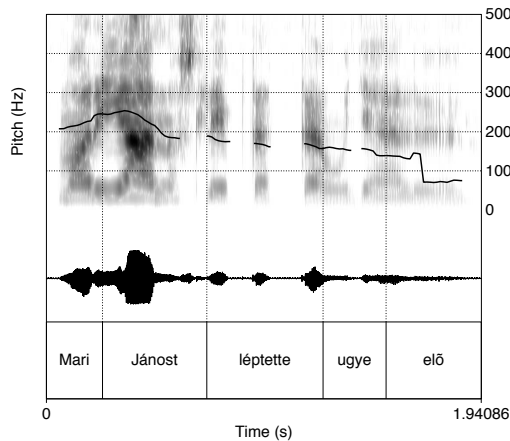


Figure 1: Intonation of (1-b)

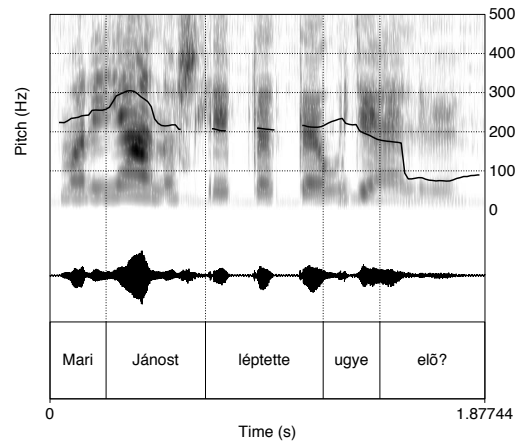


Figure 2: Intonation of (2-a)

be a reasonable assumption that their different functions in the dialogues above should be attributed to their different intonational contours.

The above strategy runs into two difficulties, however. First, the differences between the intonations of (1-b) and (2-a) do not mirror those between ‘ordinary’ declarative sentences and their string-identical polar interrogative counterparts in Hungarian. According to the standard view (cf. Fónagy and Magdics (1967), Kornai and Kálmán (1988), Rosenthal (1992), among others), Hungarian declaratives are pronounced with a falling contour, whereas polar interrogatives bear a characteristic rise-fall on their penultimate syllable. Figures 3–4³ illustrate the standard intonation of declarative and polar interrogative sentences without *ugye*, examples of which are shown in (3) and (4):

- (3) Mari Jánost léptette elő.
Mary John.ACC promoted VM
‘Mary has promoted John.’
- (4) Mari Jánost léptette elő?
Mary John.ACC promoted VM
‘Has Mary promoted John?’

(5) and (7) below, pronounced the way indicated in Figures 5 and 7, would both be substitutable for (1-b) in (1), as would (6) and (8), having the prosody indicated in Figures 6 and 8, be substitutable for (2-a) in (2).

- (5) Mari ugye Jánost léptette elő.
(6) Mari ugye Jánost léptette elő?
(7) Mari Jánost léptette elő, ugye.

³The ToBI labeling of these examples closely follows the suggestions made by Rosenthal (1992) for analogous cases. Due to the lack of consensus concerning the appropriate representation of the system of Hungarian intonation in the ToBI framework (cf. Pierrehumbert (1980)), I have refrained from providing any labels for the rest of the examples, though.

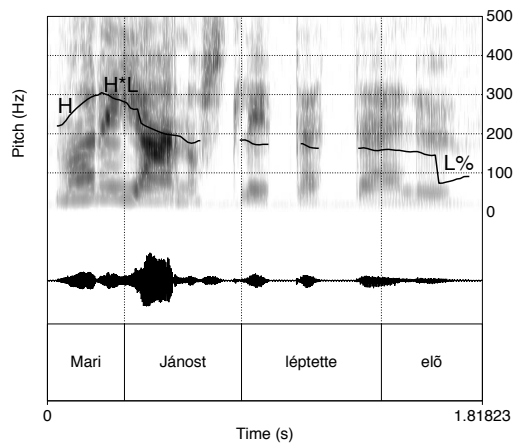


Figure 3: Intonation of (3)

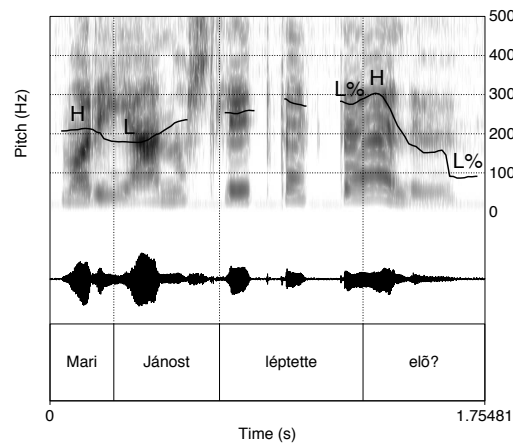


Figure 4: Intonation of (4)

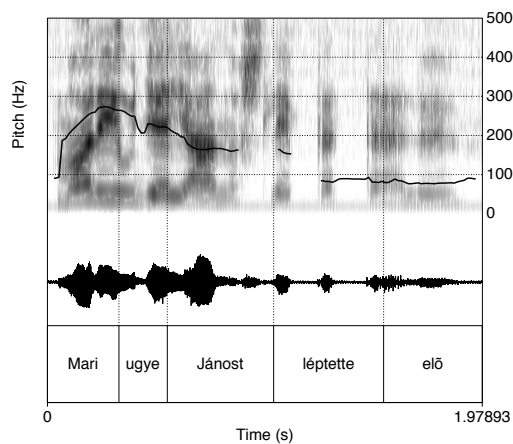


Figure 5: Intonation of (5)

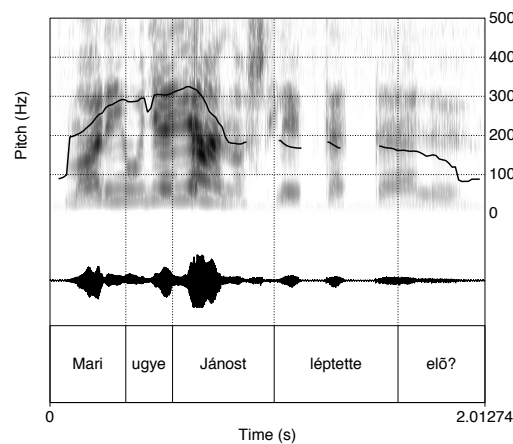


Figure 6: Intonation of (6)

(8) Mari Jánost léptette elő, ugye?

Figures 1-2 and 7-8 show that sentences with postverbal *ugye* that are intended to express questions differ from those intended to express assertions in that the former has a rise-fall pitch, analogous to the final rise-fall of ordinary interrogatives, falling exactly on the bisyllabic particle (cf. Figure 4 above), whereas the prosody of the latter does not differ from that of ordinary declaratives, cf. Figure 3. There is no rise-fall contour on the particle in sentences where it precedes an immediately preverbal pitch-accented focus constituent, but the prosodic difference between sentences of this type intended as questions, as shown in Figure 6 and assertions, in Figure 5, is still apparent.

In the rest of the paper, when we talk about declarative sentences containing *ugye* (ending in a period), we will mean those with a prosodic pattern analogous to that shown in Figures 1, 5 or 7. A question mark at the end of an *ugye*-sentence will indicate that its prosodic pattern is assumed to be analogous to those shown in Figures 2, 6 or 8.

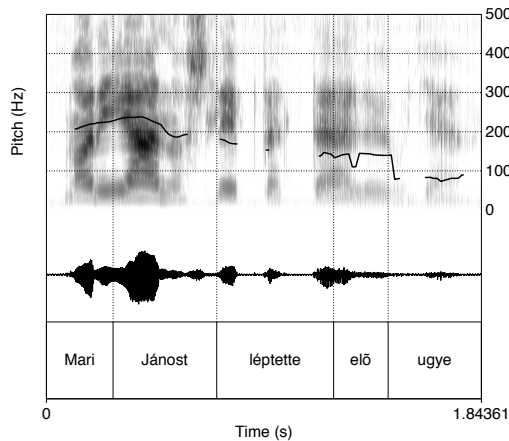


Figure 7: Intonation of (7)

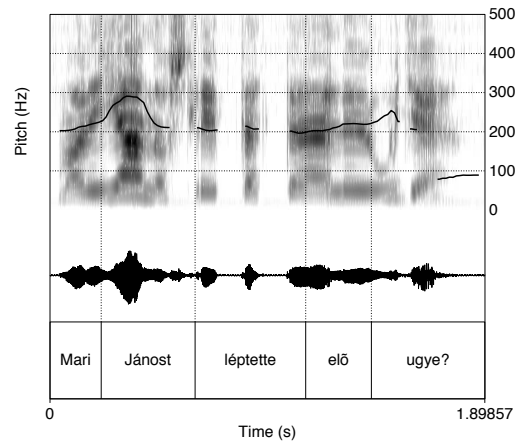


Figure 8: Intonation of (8)

The second difficulty in the way of providing a unified semantic interpretation for the particle is that sentence-internal *ugye* is traditionally viewed in the Hungarian literature as an interrogative particle, that is, as a sufficient means of creating the (form) type of interrogative sentences. (References include H. Molnár (1968), Kugler (1998)⁴, Keszler (2000).)

The latter view is most certainly due to the (still transparent) etymology of the particle, according to which it is the result of composing the adverb *úgy* ‘so’ with the interrogative particle *-e*, which resulted in the interpretation ‘is that so?’. The occurrence of *ugye* in sentences that satisfy the criteria of the declarative form type (discussed below) is a relatively new phenomenon (first attested in 1923 according to Benkő (1995)), although quite a pervasive one (in spite of being under great attack by normative linguists).

In the rest of the paper, I wish to explore the possibilities for proposing an interpretation for sentences like (1-b) and (2-a) compositionally, by assuming a unique interpretation for the particle in both sentence-types, and attributing the difference in their illocutionary force potentials to their different intonation patterns. Section 2 looks at the use of the particle in what formally appear to be declarative sentences, and compares it to those of two German particles, whereas Section 3 is concerned with its use in sentences that have traditionally been classified as polar interrogatives. Section 4 describes two proposals for capturing the interpretation of the particle in a way that accounts for both of its usage patterns. The paper closes with the conclusions in Section 5.

2 *Ugye* in declaratives

The only work so far where the use of *ugye* in declaratives has been looked at is Péteri (2002), which argues that *ugye* has an interpretation there that is relatively similar to that of German (unaccented) *ja*. He characterises the difference between the two by saying

⁴Kugler (1998) mentions, however, that *ugye* also has a so-called *shading particle* use.

that with German *ja* the speaker only reminds the hearer of their common knowledge base, whereas with Hungarian *ugye* she also expresses the expectation that the hearer will agree with the propositional content of the sentence. Given the latter proposal, it seems reasonable that the search for the interpretation of *ugye* in declaratives should start with comparing its distribution to that of German *ja*, which seems to be well-described in the literature.

According to Zimmermann (to appear), adding *ja* to a sentence with a propositional content *p* indicates that the speaker considers *p* to be uncontroversial, that is, either being part of the common ground, or its truth being based on evidence that the speaker considers the addressee to be in possession of. The intended meaning of (9-a), containing *ja*, is adequately expressed in its Hungarian counterpart with the help of *ugye*, as shown in (9-b):

- (9) *First brother to second brother:*
- a. Morgen wird Mama ja siebzig
tomorrow turns mum PRT seventy
'Mum turns 70 tomorrow, y'know.' (from Zimmermann (to appear))
 - b. Anyu ugye holnap hetven éves lesz.
mother PRT tomorrow seventy years old be.3SG.FUT
'As you know, Mum turns 70 tomorrow.'

The following examples, however, point to some differences between the two:

- (10) *S is climbing the stairs in front of W.*
- a. W: Du hast ja 'n Loch im Ärmel.
you have PRT a hole in sleeve
'You've got a hole in your sleeve, you know.' (from Lindner (1991))
 - b. W: Van (#ugye) egy lyuk az ingeden.
be.3SG PRT one hole the shirt.your.on
'You've got a hole in your shirt.'
- (11) A: Maria is also coming along.
- a. B: Sie ist #ja verreist.
she is PRT left
'She has left.' (from Karagjosova (2004))
 - b. B: Nem, ő ugye elutazott.
no he/she PRT VM.left
'No, as you know, she left.'

On the one hand, the contrast between (10-a), which is compatible with a continuation of the form *Where?* on the part of the addressee, and the infelicitous (10-b) indicates that it is not enough for the licensing of *ugye* in an utterance that the speaker assumes that the addressee has enough evidence for judging the propositional content of the sentence to be true. On the other hand, the fact that (11-a) is infelicitous in the context indicated, whereas (11-b) could be felicitous if intended as a reminder shows that *ugye* is licensed if there is a way, according to the speaker, for the addressee to arrive at the truth of the proposition, given the information in the common ground. The asymmetries illustrated

above indicate that the conditions for the felicitous use of *ugye* are not equivalent to those of German *ja*.

The fact that in the context of (11), the version of (11-a) with the particle *doch*, illustrated in (12-b), is as felicitous as (11-b), might suggest that *ugye* has an interpretation that is more similar to that of German unaccented *doch*.

- (12) a. A: Maria is also coming along.
 b. B: Sie ist doch verreist.
 she is PRT left
 ‘She has left.’ (from Karagjosova (2004))

The parallel etymologies of *ugye* and *doch* support the same conclusion. According to Hentschel (1986) (cited in Zeevat and Karagjosova (2007)), German *doch* is of Indogermanic origin, and is composed of the demonstrative *to*, the question marker *-u* and an emphatic marker *h*, and could therefore be paraphrased as *That?* or *Is that so?*

According to Zimmermann (to appear) (based on work by Lindner (1991)), the use of *doch* in a declarative with propositional content *p* indicates the speaker’s assumption that the addressee is not aware of *p*, either because he has forgotten about it, or because he believes it to be false.

The above characterization for *doch* does not apply to *ugye*, however. On the one hand, as opposed to the case of (12-b), without the negative particle *nem* ‘not’, (11-b) cannot convey the interpretation that B’s utterance contradicts that of A. On the other hand, the two utterances of B in (13-a) and (13-b) give rise to different effects:

- (13) *Employee*: Shall I come to work tomorrow?
 a. *Boss*: Du bist doch ernsthaft krank!
 you are PRT seriously ill
 ‘But you are seriously ill!’
 b. *Boss*: Te ugye súlyos beteg vagy!
 you PRT serious ill be.2SG
 ‘But you are seriously ill, as we know!’

According to the assumptions about the interpretation of *doch* summarized above, Boss’s utterance in (13-a) can only convey that he believes Employee to be temporarily unaware of his own serious illness. With the utterance of (13-b), however, Boss can express his doubt about whether the illness that Employee has previously reported to him is a reality. This is due to the fact that *ugye* does not serve the aim of explicitly indicating a contrast between the current utterance and the previous one, but summarizes instead what is in the common ground or what follows from it under normal circumstances according to the speaker, which leads indirectly to the contrast effect.

Thus, we have established that the distribution of *ugye* in declaratives neither corresponds to that of German *ja* nor to that of *doch*, which indicates that the semantic interpretation of the Hungarian particle cannot be equivalent to those of the German ones. Given that neither of the German particles is allowed to appear in polar interrogatives, cf. Thurmair (1989), this is actually a welcome result.

Based on the examples discussed above, the contribution of *ugye* to the interpretation of Hungarian declarative sentences seems to be best described as marking that, according to the speaker, the propositional content of the sentence follows due to default reasoning from the common ground. Given that p is a proposition, Zeevat (2003) defines the truth of *normally*(p) in an information state along the following lines: the truth of *normally*(p) requires that the “ $CG \models \psi_1, \dots, \psi_n$, and that ψ_1, \dots, ψ_n together constitute a reason for thinking that p , while at the same time the CG must not contain a reason for thinking that $\neg p$ ” (p. 183). Given the above definition, I propose that the contribution of *ugye* to the interpretation of Hungarian declaratives can be captured as follows:

- (14) In a Hungarian declarative sentence with a propositional content p , given a CG , *ugye* marks that *normally*(p).

Note, importantly, that the above characterisation of the interpretation of a declarative with *ugye* having a propositional content p does not require that p should be in the common ground. Otherwise, the contribution of speaker A in (11), for example, could only be interpreted as committing her to the truth of a proposition that stands in contradiction with the common ground, which is not the case.

Having made a proposal for capturing the interpretation of *ugye* in declaratives, we turn now to the analysis of *ugye*-sentences that have traditionally been classified as interrogatives in the literature.

3 *Ugye* in ‘interrogatives’

As mentioned in Section 1 above, *ugye* is viewed in many studies as a constituent that is responsible for the formation of interrogative sentences. In this section we take this view under close scrutiny. As also reviewed above, one characteristic type of polar interrogative main clauses in Hungarian has the same surface order as the corresponding declarative, cf. (3) vs. (4), differing from the latter in its intonation, as shown in Figures 3 and 4 above. The other characteristic type, illustrated in (15), is formed with the help of the interrogative particle *-e*, and has the same, falling intonation contour as declaratives:

- (15) Mari volt-e Párizsban?
 Mary was-PRT Paris.IN
 ‘Has Mary been to Paris?’

The following example shows that *ugye* is not compatible with the interrogative particle *-e*:

- (16) (**Ugye*) Mari (**ugye*) volt-e (**ugye*) Párizsban (**ugye*)?

The unacceptability of (16) can, naturally, be accounted for within the frameworks referred to above by saying that *ugye* and *-e* serve the same function, therefore their simultaneous appearance is either excluded by economy principles, or even blocked on syntactic grounds, for example, due to a principle regulating the filling of a functional head like Force^o (cf. Rizzi (1997)).

The following examples illustrate, however, that the functions of the latter two particles are still not identical:

- (17) Józsi tudja, hogy Mari volt-e Párizsban.
Joe knows that Mary was-PRT Paris.IN
'Joe knows whether Mary has been to Paris.'
- (18) Józsi tudja, hogy Mari ugye volt Párizsban.
Joe knows that Mary PRT was Paris.IN
'Joe knows that, as you know, Mary has been to Paris.'

A comparison between (17) and (18) shows that only the particle *-e* is capable of indicating the interrogative status of an embedded clause. The subordinate clause of (18) can only be interpreted as a declarative. A further evidence for the dissimilar behaviour of polar interrogative main clauses with or without *-e* and *ugye*-‘interrogatives’ is that whereas the former do support negative polarity items, *ugye* is incompatible with these (cf. Gunlogson (2003)):

- (19) Mari volt(-e) valaha is Párizsban?
Mary was-PRT ever Paris.IN
'Has Mary ever been to Paris?'
- (20) #Mari ugye volt valaha is Párizsban?
Mary PRT was ever Paris.IN
'Has Mary ever been to Paris?'

The above data thus point to the conclusion that, as opposed to the standard view, *ugye*-sentences intended as question acts do not exemplify the interrogative form type. In this case, however, the question arises what the basis of viewing *ugye* as being responsible for the illocutionary force of the question in examples like (2-a) above is. The etymology of the particle, discussed above, as well as the fact that historically it first appeared in peripheral positions (sentence finally and then sentence-initially) makes it very similar to tags in various languages. The informal descriptions about *ugye*-‘interrogatives’, according to which they denote biased questions (cf. Károly (1957-62), Fónagy and Magdics (1967), Varga (2002), among others) give further support to viewing them as tag questions, most types of which are also attributed a biased question interpretation in the literature.

According to one dominant view, represented by Sadock (1974), Ladd (1981), Quirk et al. (1985), Reese and Asher (2006), and Reese (2007), among others, the biased question interpretation of most varieties of tag questions⁵ is due to the fact that they express two illocutionary acts at the same time: an assertion (due to the declarative sentence) and a question (due to the tag).

The latter claim has been supported by the application of Sadock (1974)’s diagnostics for illocutionary force. According to Sadock (1974), compatibility with the discourse marker *after all* signals that the sentence under consideration expresses an assertive act (at least), whereas compatibility with *by any chance* and *tell me* marks that

⁵One notable exception are negative-anchor postnuclear tag questions, which can have an interpretation of neutral questions (cf. Ladd (1981), Reese and Asher (2006) and further references in the latter).

it expresses a questioning act (at least). The latter two diagnostics can also be used to discriminate between neutral and biased questions: whereas the former is restricted to neutral questions, the latter can appear with both. As the contrast between the following examples shows, Hungarian *mondd csak* ‘tell PRT’, behaves analogously to English *tell me*. (‘\’ at the end of (21) is to distinguish the declarative sentence from its string-identical polar interrogative counterpart.) The translations of the Hungarian examples illustrate the relevant tests for English:

- (21) **Mondd csak, János itt van.* \
 tell PRT John here is
 *‘Tell me, John is here.’
- (22) *Mondd csak, János itt van-e?*
 tell PRT John here is-PRT
 ‘Tell me, is John here?’

The fact that (23) patterns with (22) as far as compatibility with *mondd csak* is concerned, indicates that it expresses a question (possibly among other illocutionary acts):

- (23) *Mondd csak, János ugye itt van?*
 tell PRT John PRT here is
 ‘Tell me, John is here, isn’t he?’

Insertion of *véletlenül* ‘by any chance’ into the sentences above confirms that questions expressed with the particle *-e* are neutral, whereas those expressed by *ugye* are biased:

- (24) *János itt van-e véletlenül?*
 John here is-PRT by any chance
 ‘Is John here by any chance?’
- (25) **János ugye itt van véletlenül?*
 John PRT here is by any chance
 *‘By any chance, John is here, isn’t he?’

Negative questions with *ugye*, which are compatible with *véletlenül*, seem to constitute an exception to the generalization above, and, therefore, seem to pattern with negative anchor postnuclear tag questions in English:⁶

- (26) *János ugye nincs itt véletlenül?*
 John PRT be.NEG here by any chance
 ‘By any chance, John isn’t here, is he?’

Having shown that Hungarian sentences with *ugye* having ‘question-prosody’ do satisfy the tests proposed by Sadock (1974) for questioning acts, it remains to be seen whether they can also be proven to express assertive acts as well. There are some trans-

⁶Reese and Asher (2006) account for the neutral question interpretation of the latter tag questions (available in addition to the biased question interpretation) by claiming that the negation of the anchor is to be interpreted as metalinguistic, that is, taking wide scope over an assertion operator. Limitations of space prohibit me from discussing the applicability of this kind of analysis to the Hungarian example in (26).

lation equivalents of the English discourse marker *after all*, such as *elvégre* or *mindennek ellenére*, that seem to be compatible only with sentences that express assertive acts:

- (27) Elvégre János itt van.\
 after all John here is
 ‘After all, John is here.’
- (28) *Elvégre János itt van-e?
 after all John here is-PRT
 ‘*After all, is John here?’
- (29) Elvégre János ugye itt van?
 after all John here is
 ‘After all, John is here, isn’t he?’

The data discussed above thus suggest that *ugye*-sentences that can express question acts have an interpretation analogous to English tag questions, that is, they actually express a question and an assertion at the same time. This conclusion is strongly supported by prosodic data, discussed in Section 1, according to which *ugye*-sentences intended to express question acts differ from the corresponding declarative sentences with or without *ugye* in the melodic pattern of the particle itself, which resembles that of a one-word polar interrogative (disregarding the interaction of pitch-accented focus and *ugye* immediately preceding it). This means that in structures where *ugye* appears sentence-medially, we are talking about an internalized tag. This raises, however, the question of how these sentences are also capable of expressing a simple assertion, as illustrated in (1-b). The next section will address this issue, by trying to disentangle the interpretation of the particle from that of the intonation.

4 Towards a unified interpretation for *ugye*

Having considered the relevant data concerning the interpretation of the particle *ugye* in declaratives and in tag questions, in this section we will explore the possibilities of integrating the two into one unified interpretation. There seem to be two ways this could be achieved. On the one hand, we could follow the path of the historical development and consider the interpretation of *ugye* in tag questions, described in Section 3, as basic and its contribution to sentences that have been classified as declaratives in Section 2 as a derived case. On the other hand, we could consider the interpretation of *ugye* in declaratives as basic, and describe its contribution to tag questions as the result of an interaction between the former meaning and the meaning of the question intonation on the particle.

Let us first assume that the particle *ugye*, that originated as an independent clause, but later became available for being integrated into the sentence structure, is to be analysed as a tag in all its occurrences. Semantically, this means that it always contributes a question to the interpretation of the sentence it occurs in that asks about the truth of the proposition *p* asserted by the rest of the sentence (the anchor). In the default case, the contribution of the particle to interpretation is mirrored by its intonation, which is analogous to that of a polar interrogative in Hungarian. How can this account be ex-

tended to cases where the intonation of an *ugye*-sentence is not to be distinguished from those of its declarative counterparts with or without *ugye*, and therefore the sentence can only be used felicitously to answer a question, as shown in (1-b), but not to ask one? Let us assume that low pitch on the particle has its standard iconic function, indicating confidence, assurance and certainty (cf. Ohala (1994)), in other words, the rhetorical question status of the question contributed by the tag. On these assumptions, an *ugye*-‘declarative’ could be taken to assert that *p* and assert that the answer to the question whether *p* holds is obvious. This characterisation more or less corresponds to the way the interpretation of *ugye*-declaratives was captured in (14) above. This approach, according to which *ugye*-sentences of all kinds are to be considered to belong to the same form-type, namely, tag questions, entails, naturally, that there cannot be any sentence containing *ugye* that is well-formed when pronounced with the question-intonation on the particle, but not when it is pronounced with low pitch, or vice versa. However, there are at least two types of examples, illustrated below, that are only well-formed when pronounced with low pitch on the particle:

- (30) (Hát) én mit tehetek ugye?
 PRT I what.ACC do.POSS.1SG PRT
 ‘What can I do?’
- (31) Kár, hogy nem volt ugye idő.
 pity that not was PRT time
 ‘It’s a pity that there was no time, as we know.’

(30) is a constituent interrogative with a rhetorical question reading where *ugye* (pronounced with low pitch) marks the truth of the proposition indirectly conveyed by the rhetorical question to be obvious, whereas (31) shows that it can appear in an embedded clause, which is not normally the case with tag questions.⁷

The above data indicating that the particle *ugye* is not equally compatible with all sentence types on both of its pronunciations brings us to the second proposal, which takes the interpretation of *ugye* in declaratives as basic and derives the interpretation of tag questions with *ugye* from the contribution of the anchor, from that of the particle, and from that of the question intonation on the particle. Let us assume that this basic interpretation of *ugye* is equivalent to that described in (14) above. According to this, the particle marks that the propositional content of the sentence it appears in is assumed by the speaker to be entailed from information in the common ground by default reasoning. If we want to make this the basic interpretation of the particle, and assume that localisation of the question intonation contour on a particular constituent means that it is only the contribution of the constituent to the meaning of the sentence is questioned (instead of the propositional content of the whole sentence), the interpretations of the three relevant parts of a tag question with *ugye* could be represented as follows:

⁷There might also be a possibility of analysing (31) as an embedded root phenomenon, cf. Hooper and Thompson (1973). However, this analysis would also have to account for the obligatory low pitch on the particle.

(32) A proposal for capturing the interpretation of tag questions with *ugye*

	Anchor	<i>Ugye</i>	Question intonation on <i>ugye</i>
<i>INTERPRETATION</i>	p	<i>normally(p)</i>	? <i>normally(p)</i>

According to (32), on the assumption that *ugye* has a basic meaning characterised in (14), tag questions with *ugye* would have to assert the propositional content p of the anchor, to assert that p follows from the common ground under default reasoning, and to question the truth of the proposition according which p follows from the common ground under default reasoning. Unfortunately, this proposal does not capture the intuitive meaning of tag questions with *ugye* correctly: the answer given to such a question by the hearer does not depend on whether he considers the propositional content p of the anchor to follow by default reasoning from the common ground, but on whether he considers p to be true or not.

5 Conclusion

The present paper investigated the interpretation of the Hungarian particle *ugye*, that can equally appear in sentences intended to express assertive acts as well as in those intended to express questioning acts. We have argued that in the former case, it has an interpretation of a context marker, whereas in the latter case it is to be interpreted analogously to English tags. Two attempts at unifying the interpretation of *ugye* across its two uses were explored, but both of them were found to run into some difficulties. This suggests that the particle has two distinct interpretations in the two sentence-types it can appear in, which are not to be derived from each other.

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