

Concessive constructions in Hungarian

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In this talk, we investigate a family of Hungarian constructions associated with a concessive interpretation, illustrated in (1)–(3). We highlight the shared and distinct meaning components of these constructions, identify the constituents and structural relations that encode these meanings, and distinguish the patterns with a concessive interpretation from a superficially similar pattern without a concessive interpretation.

- (1) Bár/Noha/Jóllehet esik az eső, megtartjuk az előadást.
'Although it's raining, we'll hold the show.'
- (2) a. (Még) ha esik is az eső, megtartjuk az előadást.
'Even if it's raining, we'll hold the show.'
b. (Még) ha (csak) húsz néző jön is (csak) el, megtartjuk az előadást.
'Even if only twenty spectators show up, we'll hold the show.'
- (3) (#Még) ha csak húsz néző is eljön, megtartjuk az előadást.
'If just twenty spectators show up, we'll hold the show.'

We consider concessive constructions to be complex sentences consisting of a subordinate clause and a main clause where the subordinate clause expresses a proposition p that together with the proposition q expressed by the main clause is presupposed by an epistemic source – typically, the speaker – to be less epistemically probable than an alternative of p together with q . We argue that only the constructions in (1) and (2) strictly satisfy these criteria, whereas the one in (3) does not, despite its superficial similarity to (2b).

We interpret (1) as shown in (4), where the presupposition is triggered by the complementizer *bár* or its synonyms. The assertive content is that it rains and we hold the show, and the presupposition is that it rains and we hold the show is less epistemically probable for the epistemic validator v than that it rains and we don't hold the show (where the notion of epistemic validator is taken from Stirling 1993). This presupposition is arguably a relic of the meanings of the expressions from which these complementizers arose (Simonyi 1882, Halm 2023).

- (4) Assertive content of (1): [it-rains \wedge we-hold-the-show]
Presupposed content of (1):
[it-rains \wedge we-hold-the-show] $<_{\text{epistemically-probable}(v)}$ [it-rains \wedge \neg we-hold-the-show]

The interpretation of (2a), a conditional sentence, is given in (5), where the assertive content is that if it rains, then we hold the show, and the presupposed content is that for every other focus-alternative proposition p of [it-rains] in the context c , if p holds, then we hold the show, and furthermore, that it rains and we hold the show is less epistemically probable for the epistemic validator v than that p is the case and we hold the show.

- (5) Assertive content of (2a): [it-rains \rightarrow we-hold-the-show]
Presupposed content of (2a):
 $\forall p([p \in \text{ALT}_c([\text{it-rains}]) \wedge p \neq [\text{it-rains}]] \rightarrow [p \rightarrow \text{we-hold-the-show}] \wedge$
[it-rains \wedge we-hold-the-show] $<_{\text{epistemically-probable}(v)}$ [$p \wedge$ we-hold-the-show])

Intuitively, the focus-alternative propositions of [it-rains] in (2a)/(5) (relative to the context c) describe alternative weather conditions that are appropriate for our holding the show, where extreme weather conditions such as [it-snows] would be excluded in most situations.

Syntactically, the subordinate *ha*-clause of (2a) – the antecedent – is an adjunct of the main clause (or the consequent), and the particle *is* (lit. 'also') in the antecedent indicates that the TP of the antecedent is focused, which evokes context-dependent focus alternatives of this TP. The prosodic focus (or nuclear pitch accent) falls on the head of this TP (here, *esik* 'rains') and *is* cliticizes to its head, although it has semantic scope over the TP of the an-

tedent. Finally, the presupposition concerning relative epistemic probability (for the epistemic validator v) would be reinforced by the explicit presence of the adverb *még* ‘even’.

The interpretation of (2b) is given in (6), where the assertive content is that if exactly 20 spectators show up, then we hold the show, and the presupposed content is that for every focus-alternative number m' of 20 that is greater than 20, if m' spectators show up, then we hold the show, and furthermore, that 20 spectators show up and we hold the show is less epistemically probable for the epistemic validator v than that m' spectators show up and we hold the show.

- (6) Assertive content of (2b): $[n\text{-spectators-show-up} \wedge n = 20 \rightarrow \text{we-hold-the-show}]$
 Presupposed content of (2b):
 $\text{ALT}_c(20) = \lambda m[20 \leq m]_c \wedge$
 $\forall m'([m' \in \text{ALT}_c(20) \wedge m' \neq 20] \rightarrow [m'\text{-spectators-show-up} \rightarrow \text{we-hold-the-show}] \wedge$
 $[20\text{-spectators-show-up} \wedge \text{we-hold-the-show}] <_{\text{epistemically-probable}(v)}$
 $[m'\text{-spectators-show-up} \wedge \text{we-hold-the-show}])$

The focus-alternative numbers of 20 in (2b)/(6) (relative to the context c) are numbers greater than or equal to 20, but there may be an upper limit, depending on the context c , so there’s no requirement that the set of focus alternatives $\lambda m[20 \leq m]_c$ – namely, numbers greater than or equal to 20 in the context c – be (upwardly) infinite.

In (2b), the nuclear pitch accent falls on the numeral *húsz* ‘twenty’ that forms part of the DP *húsz néző* ‘twenty spectators’ raised to Spec,FocP. The particle *is* (lit. ‘also’) cliticizes to the Foc head occupied by the raised verb *jön*. Since the numeral *húsz* ‘twenty’ is in Spec,FocP, numbers greater than 20 are excluded from the assertive content. The adverb *csak* ‘only’ has scope over FocP and specifies 20 as the least value for the number of spectators that would be sufficient for our holding the show. As in (2a), the presupposition concerning relative epistemic probability (for the epistemic validator v) in (2b) would be reinforced by the explicit presence of the adverb *még* ‘even’.

The interpretation of (3), given in (7), differs from the interpretation of (2b) both in its assertive content and in its presupposed content. In contrast to (2b), where the assertive content includes ‘exactly twenty’ (see (6)), the assertive content of (3) is that if twenty or more spectators show up, then we hold the show. This difference is due to the fact that the DP *húsz néző* ‘twenty spectators’ isn’t in Spec,FocP in (3). In contrast to (2b), the presupposed content of (3) is that for every focus-alternative number m' of 20 that is less than 20, if m' spectators show up, then we *don’t* hold the show (which follows from the special function of *is* when adjoined to NumP, an idea originally due to Simonyi 1882: 27).

- (7) Assertive content of (3): $[n\text{-spectators-show-up} \wedge n \geq 20 \rightarrow \text{we-hold-the-show}]$
 Presupposed content of (3):
 $\text{ALT}_c(20) = \lambda m[m \leq 20]_c \wedge$
 $\forall m'([m' \in \text{ALT}_c(20) \wedge m' \neq 20] \rightarrow [m'\text{-spectators-show-up} \rightarrow \neg \text{we-hold-the-show}])$

As seen in (6) and (7), a major difference between (2b) and (3) lies in the set of focus alternatives of ‘twenty’: in (2b)/(6), the set of focus alternatives includes numbers *greater than* or equal to 20 (in the context c), whereas in (3)/(7), the set of focus alternatives includes numbers *less than* or equal to 20. Furthermore, in contrast to (2b)/(6), there’s nothing in the semantics of (3)/(7) that indicates that if exactly twenty spectators showed up, then this would be less favorable to our holding the show, which is why (3) isn’t a concessive construction, despite its superficial similarity to (2b).

References: Guerzoni, E., D. Lim. 2019. *Even if*, factivity, and focus. In E. Puig-Waldmüller (ed.), *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung* 11, 276–290. Universitat Pompeu Fabra. Halm, T. 2023. Az *akár*- és a *bár*- névmási paradigmák diakrón szemantikája. In *Nyelvelmélet és diakrónia* 5, 155–180. PPKE BTK. Panizza, D., Y. Sudo. 2020. Minimal sufficiency with covert *even*. *Glossa* 5(1): 98. Simonyi, Zs. 1882. *A magyar kötőszók*. MTA. Stirling, L. 1993. *Switch-reference and discourse representation*. CUP.