

The interpretation of a “contrast-marking” particle

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Abstract

The paper discusses the interpretation of the accented *csak* discourse particle in Hungarian that is often referred to in the literature as a marker of contrast. It is argued that this particle has the function of an adversative context marker (Zeevat 2003, 2006). The discourse particle use of *csak* is contrasted to its older use as an exclusive particle, whose interpretation is described in terms of Beaver and Clark’s (2008) theory. It is shown that the meaning change in the course of which *csak* acquired its adversative particle interpretation can be accounted for in terms of semantic reanalysis, along the lines of Eckardt’s (2006) theory.

Keywords: adversative context marker, discourse particle, exclusive particle, ordered alternatives, semantic reanalysis.

1. Aims

The paper analyses the interpretation of the accented *csak* discourse particle in Hungarian, which has been claimed by some authors to be a marker of contrast (Kocsány 1986).¹ In the first half of the paper, we will provide an empirical characterisation of the necessary and sufficient conditions for the appearance of this particle in Hungarian sentences, and then we will try to formalize them in the framework of Zeevat (2003, 2006), relating the use of accented *csak* to the use of accented *toch* in Dutch and *doch* in German. The particle *csak* in Hungarian has a much more prominent and older use as a focus sensitive particle with an exclusive (scalar) interpretation analogous to English *only*. In the

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second half of the paper we will look at the contribution of this exclusive *csak* to the presuppositions and truth conditions of Hungarian sentences, proposing that they are best accounted for in the framework of the theory recently proposed by Beaver and Clark (2008). It will then be argued that the latter approach also leads naturally to an explanation of the meaning change in the course of which *csak* acquired its discourse particle use in terms of semantic reconstruction that took place in order to avoid pragmatic overload (cf. Eckardt 2006). The paper ends with a summary of the conclusions. In what follows, to avoid confusion, we refer to the obligatorily accented discourse particle as *CSAK*.²

2. The discourse particle *CSAK*

2.1. Data

Example (1) below illustrates a context where a sentence containing an obligatorily accented *CSAK* particle can appear in Hungarian:

- (1) A: *I don't think John will be invited.*
B: *I've just heard Mary invite him.*
A: *(Szóval) CSAK meghívták Jánost.*
so CSAK VM:invited:3pl John:ACC

“(So) John got invited after all.”

Although leaving the particle *CSAK* out from A's second utterance would not make the sentence ungrammatical or alter its truth conditions, it would definitely make the sentence inappropriate in the context, since the speaker would have to be attributed contradictory beliefs (given that he would be taken to utter two declarative sentences whose propositional contents are incompatible with each other).³ Thus, (1) suggests that the contribution of the particle to the interpretation of the sentence is to mark that the speaker is aware that the propositional context of his present utterance is

² There are other discourse particle uses of (non-accented) *csak* in addition to the one discussed in this paper, most of which are analogous to the discourse particle uses of German *nur* 'only' (cf. Gyuris 2007).

³ Note that the propositional contents of the first and the second utterances by A in (1) are not contradictory, since the first one is of the form 'I don't think that *p*', whereas the second is of the form *p*.

incompatible with the propositional content of a previous utterance of his. The above example is thus a typical case where the use of a particle serves the aim of making the discourse coherent, or, more specifically, as Zimmermann (to appear) puts it, indicates the “speaker’s epistemic attitude” towards the truth of the proposition. The latter interpretational features have been attributed in the literature to the so-called *modal* or *discourse particles* (cf. Kiefer 1988, Thurmair 1989, Meibauer 1994, Zimmermann, to appear, among others), whose characteristic features on the formal side include that they cannot be negated, do not answer any questions, cannot be coordinated, and do not form a constituent with other expressions. In the rest of this section we will specify what the presence of *CSAK* can signal about the context and in what cases it is necessary for the coherence of the discourse.

First, as (2) illustrates, *CSAK* can also appear in a sentence *S* that is uttered by a speaker different from the one who previously uttered the sentence expressing a proposition felt to be incompatible by the speaker of *S* with the propositional content of *S*:

- (2) A: *I think John will be invited.*
 B: *I don’t think so, Mary does not like him.*
 C: *I’ve just heard Mary invite him.*
 A: *Szóval (CSAK) meghívták Jánost.*
 so CSAK VM:invited:3pl John:ACC

“(So) John got invited after all.”

Note that in the context of (2), as opposed to that of (1), the presence of *CSAK* is not obligatory. In both contexts, however, a German sentence containing the accented particle *DOCH*, illustrated in (3), would be just as acceptable as the corresponding Hungarian sentences with *CSAK*:

- (3) (So,) *Hans ist DOCH eingeladen.* (German)
 so John is DOCH invited:PTCP

“(So) John got invited after all.”

The following contrast between the acceptability of accented Dutch *TOCH* and *CSAK* in parallel contexts shows that it is not enough for *CSAK* to be properly licensed

in a context where a sentence attributing some kind of attitude to somebody towards the negation of the propositional content of the *CSAK*-sentence has been uttered:

- (4) *Jan droomde dat hij was gezakt voor het examen,
maar hij had het TOCH gehaald.* (Dutch)

“John dreamt that he would pass the exam but he failed after all.”

(Zeevat 2000:14)

- (5) #*János azt álmodta, hogy megbukik a vizsgán, de CSAK átment.*
John that:ACC dreamt that fail the exam:on but CSAK passed

Intended: “John dreamt that he would pass the exam but he failed after all.”

There are two further important facts to be observed about the use of *CSAK*. The first one is that, as (6) shows, it is not a necessary condition for the use of this particle in a sentence *S* that there be precisely one sentence *S'* in the preceding discourse that expresses a proposition felt to be incompatible with the propositional content of *S*:

- (6) *Zsuzsi: Hisz' ez azé a kis tolvajé! oly kegyetlen volt
but this that:POSS the small thief:POSS so cruel was
nagyóságod, hogy elvette tőle?
your:majesty that VM:took from:him*

“But this belongs to that small thief! Was your majesty so cruel as to take it away from him?”

*Countess: CSAK nem hagyhattam a karján!*⁴
CSAK not leave:could:1sg the arm:POSS:on

“I could not leave it on his arm after all!”

Note that there is nothing incompatible between the propositional content of the second speaker’s sentence and those of the first speaker’s first or second sentences individually. What the propositional content of the second speaker’s sentence is incompatible with is

⁴ From the Hungarian Historical Corpus (<http://www.nytud.hu/hhc>).

the proposition expressed by the first speaker's first sentence, the presuppositions introduced by her second sentence, and default inferences based on the latter two. The second fact is that the acceptability of discourses with *CSAK* is a gradual matter, and depends not only on the content of utterances but also on the shared beliefs of the interlocutors. For example, the acceptability of (7) depends on how important B thinks A was in the campaign of János, and how efficient B thinks A is in performing the tasks related to the campaign:

- (7) A: *I campaigned hard for John.*
B: *CSAK nem választották meg.*
CSAK not elected:3pl VM
“He was not elected after all”

If B thinks A is a good campaigner and has a great influence on the campaign, then the fact that A worked hard in the campaign leads him to conclude that John was likely to be elected. B then marks the incompatibility between the latter inference and information pertaining to the actual outcome of the election by using *CSAK*. (Sentence (7B) can, naturally, also be meant ironically, to express the belief on the part of the speaker that the fact that A participated in the campaign does not legitimate an inference that John will be elected.)

The *yes-no* interrogative in (8) below, which would be coherent way to continue the discourse in (1) above, and the second, imperative sentence of the discourse in (9) illustrate that *CSAK* is not only possible in declaratives:

- (8) A: *(Szóval) CSAK meghívták Jánost?*
so CSAK VM:invited:3pl John:ACC
“(So) did John get invited after all?”

- (9) A: *I don't think John would come to the party if he got an invitation.*
B: *CSAK hívjuk meg!*
CSAK invite:IMP1pl VM
“(So) John got invited after all.”

As the parallel between the third sentence of (1) and (8) also shows, the conditions

under which CSAK-sentences belonging to any of the latter two sentence types can or must appear in a discourse are analogous to those under which the corresponding declaratives are licensed.

Having illustrated the basic facts about the use of the CSAK discourse particle, in the next section we will try to capture its meaning in terms of Zeevat's (2000, 2003, 2006) proposals.

2.2. CSAK as a context marker

Zeevat (2000, 2003, 2006) argues that a number of discourse particles in various languages, including English *indeed*, Dutch *immers*, *toch*, *wel*, or German *ja* and *doch*, serve as so-called *context markers*, that is, they mark whether the propositional content of the sentence they are situated in is viewed by the speaker as being part of the *common ground*, as having been suggested to be false in the context, as having been denied in the common ground, or as addressing a topic that has been addressed before. Zeevat assumes that context markers have to be present due to functional necessity, since in the lack of them, the hearer is determined to interpret any new sentence as carrying information to be added automatically to the common ground, independently of its previous content. In case the relevant information was already present in the common ground, the latter strategy results in having to view the incoming information as superficial, and in case the negation of the propositional content of the sentence was already part of the common ground, the strategy results in having to think that the speaker has contradictory beliefs.

Zeevat (2000, 2003, 2006) argues that German accented *doch* and Dutch accented *toch* are *adversative context markers*, which are defined by him as in (11) below. The definition of adversative context markers uses, assuming that φ is a proposition, the proposition *suggested*(φ), which is defined by Zeevat in a recursive fashion, shown in (10), and the proposition *normally*(φ), the truth of which in an information state requires, according to Zeevat, that $CG \models \psi_1, \dots, \psi_n$, where ψ_1, \dots, ψ_n together constitute a reason for thinking that φ , while at the same time the *CG* does not support a similar argument for $\neg p$ (Zeevat 2006:141).

- (10) *suggested*(φ) \leftrightarrow *may* $\varphi \wedge (\varphi \vee O_1 \varphi \vee \dots \vee O_n \varphi \vee \textit{suggested}(\varphi))$
the set $\{O_1, \dots, O_n\}$ contains operators like *x dreams that, x suggests that, x believes that*. (Zeevat 2003:182)

(11) *adversative*(CG, φ) holds iff $CG \models \textit{normally}(\neg\varphi)$ or $CG \models \textit{suggested}(\neg\varphi)$

(Zeevat 2003:182)

The data presented in the previous section suggest that Hungarian *CSAK* should be analyzed as an adversative marker analogous to Dutch accented *toch* and German accented *doch*. The approach seems to run into two problems, however. The first one is illustrated by (12)–(13) below, which contain the prosodically prominent particles *doch* and *csak*, respectively:

(12) A: *John wasn't invited.*

B: *Hans war DOCH eingeladenet.* (German)
John was DOCH invited:PTCP

“John WAS invited.”

(13) A: *John wasn't invited.*

B: #*CSAK meghívták Jánost.*
CSAK VM:invited:3pl John:ACC

Intended: “John WAS invited.”

The pair of sentences above point to an asymmetry between the behaviour of the two particles: although the propositional content p of sentences (12B) and (13B) satisfies the first requirement of adversativity in the relevant contexts, since there is a set of propositions in the common ground, namely the unit set $\{\neg p\}$, such that its elements constitute a reason for thinking that $\neg p$, the two sentences differ in acceptability. In Zeevat's framework, however, it is possible to find an explanation for this problem: in addition to the adversative markers, he also distinguishes so-called *corrective markers*, which mark the content of the sentence to be false in the common ground. The correction relation is an extreme case of adversativity, therefore, whenever the propositional content of a sentence is viewed as also satisfying this stronger relation to the common ground in addition to that of adversativity, it is a natural requirement that a context marker marking this stronger relation be chosen if available in the language. He argues that the prosodic realization of *doch* in (13B) is different from that of *doch/toch* in (3)–(4) above, the latter being only accented and the former contrastively stressed. Zeevat argues that this prosodic difference correlates with an interpretational difference, contrastively stressed *doch* being

a corrective marker.⁵ The unacceptability of (13B) in the relevant context thus indicates that *CSAK* cannot have an interpretation as a corrective marker. The second problem is illustrated by the contrast between (4) and (5) above, which suggests that *CSAK*, as opposed to *Duch* accented *toch*, does not get licensed in a sentence whose propositional content *p* is only *suggested* in the context according to definition (10), but does not follow by default reasoning from the common ground (that is, where *normally(p)* is not part of the common ground). Given these findings we will assume that Hungarian *CSAK* belongs to a subtype of adversative context markers that, when inserted into a sentence with propositional content *p*, can only mark that the following: there is a set of propositions in the common ground that constitute a reason for thinking that *p* is true, but that an analogous requirement does not hold for the negation of *p*.

Having illustrated the contribution of the discourse particle *CSAK* to the meaning of Hungarian sentences, we look at the interpretation of its homonym, the exclusive particle *csak*.

3. The meaning of the exclusive particle *csak*

Examples (14)–(17) illustrate four typical uses of the focus-sensitive exclusive particle *csak* ‘only’ in Hungarian. The syllables bearing the heaviest accent within the sentences (marking the information structural focus) are marked with capital letters.^{6,7} As the English translations indicate, English *only* has analogous interpretations:

⁵ Zeevat (2003, 2006) makes a systematic difference between these two prosodic realizations of the *doch/toch* particle even by typographic means: he capitalizes only the occurrences of the particles that he considers contrastively stressed. In this paper, I am ignoring this distinction for the sake of being able to emphasize the prosodic parallel between accented *csak* and *doch/toch*, which I mark with capitals in the examples.

⁶ In these examples, the constituents focused in an information structural sense are all identical to or included in the constituent in the syntactic focus position, referred to as [Spec,FP] in É. Kiss (2002).

⁷ The exclusive particle is normally unaccented in these examples. However, in certain cases (where the focus is a non-complex expression, as in (14), for example), the accent of the focus can move over to *csak* for prosodic reasons (I. Kenesei, p.c.).

(14) *Csak JÁnost hívták meg.*
only John:ACC invited:3pl VM

“Only John got invited.”

(15) *Csak KÉT diákot hívtak meg.*
only two student:ACC invited:3pl VM

“Only two students got invited.”

(16) *Csak a TITkárnökkel tudtam beszélni.*
only the secretary:with could:1sg talk:INF

“I could only speak to the secretary.”

(17) *Mari csak egy DIák volt.*
Mary only a student was

“John was only a student.”

(14) illustrates the simplest use of *csak*, on which it signals that no propositions generated by replacing the focus for a different element in the set of its alternatives (the set of contextually relevant people) are true. In addition, the presence of the particle in (14) conveys that the speaker has expected more alternative propositions of the latter kind to be true (that is, he expected that more people will get invited). (15) illustrates a case where *csak* excludes only those alternative propositions that are not entailed by the proposition denoted by the sentence. (That is, (15) does not exclude the truth of the proposition that there was one student who got invited.) In other words, the exclusive particle operates on an ordered set of propositions, that is, it has a scalar interpretation. The sentence also conveys that the speaker expected for alternative propositions ordered higher on the relevant scale to be true as well.⁸ The interpretation of (16) that comes most readily to mind illustrates the following scalar use of *csak*: the sentence expresses that there is no proposition more rewarding (Bonomi and Casalegno 1993) that is true, given the aims of the discourse, than the one that the speaker talked to the secretary. (In a prototypical situation this means that he could not talk to the director, for example. Given that the alternative propositions are not ordered by entailment, the truth of (16)

⁸ Apparently non-scalar uses of *csak* like in (14) can, naturally, be viewed as special cases of scalar *csak* (cf. van Rooij 2002, Beaver 2004, for example).

does not mean that all propositions less rewarding than the one expressed by the sentence are true.) This sentence also conveys that the speaker expected for alternative propositions ordered higher to be true. The scalar *csak* of (17) differs from the one in (16) in the following respect: assuming a prototypical situation where each person has only one job, *csak* seems to make a vacuous contribution to the truth conditions of (17). However, it cannot be considered superfluous even in such a context, since it also conveys, like all the examples above, that the speaker had expected that alternative propositions ordered higher would be true (e.g. like the one that Mari was a member of the staff).

The acceptability of sentences like (17), as well as the fact that the placement of constituents into the Hungarian syntactic focus position ([Spec, FP] in É. Kiss 2002) has also been claimed to result in an exclusive interpretation (cf. Kenesei 1989, Szabolcsi 1994, É. Kiss 1998, among others) have promoted approaches like that of Balogh (2005), which follows Zeevat's (2007) proposal for *only*, and argues that the contribution of *csak* to the meaning of Hungarian sentences is only pragmatic, and indicates that the proposition expressed by the sentence falls short of the speaker's expectations. This approach runs into the problem of not being able to account for the fact that the negated version of a *csak*-sentence like (14), illustrated in (18), and the negated version of its counterpart without *csak*, illustrated in (19), have different entailments: whereas the former entails that John was invited, the latter does not:

(18) *Nemcsak János* *hívták* *meg.*
not.only John:ACC invited:3pl VM

“Not only John got invited”

(19) *Nem János* *hívták* *meg.*
not John:ACC invited:3pl VM

“It was not John who got invited”

Szabolcsi's (1994) approach (based on Kenesei 1989, and Bonomi and Casalegno's 1993 theory for *only*) is able to account for the latter mismatch, and also for the apparent equivalence of the meaning of (14) and its variant without *csak* by suggesting a different division of the meaning of these two types of sentences into a presupposed and an asserted part. She proposes that *csak*-sentences presuppose that their *prejacent* (the proposition expressed by their variant without *csak*) is true. This

suggestion, however, runs into the problem of predicting that *csak* is superfluous in the case of (17).

In view of the problems previous approaches have to face with, I believe that the contribution of *csak* to the interpretation of the Hungarian sentences illustrated above is best captured with the help of the proposal by Beaver and Clark (2008), who argue for an interpretation for exclusives that equally takes into account their truth-conditional impact (excluding higher values on a scale), and their *mirative* function (the expression of the fact that a higher value was expected). Beaver and Clark's definition for the meaning of exclusives is repeated below, where *Current Question* refers to the question that the particular utterance addresses:

(20) *Meaning of exclusives*

The lexical meaning of exclusives is exhaustively described by:

Discourse function: To make a comment on the Current Question (CQ, [...]), a comment which weakens a salient natural expectation. To achieve this function, the prejacent must be weaker than the expected answer to the CQ on a salient scale.

Presupposition: The strongest true alternatives in the CQ are at least as strong as the prejacent.

Descriptive Content: The strongest true alternatives in the CQ are at most as strong as the prejacent. (Beaver and Clark 2008: 251)

This means that on Beaver and Clark's proposal to the meaning of exclusives, there is an ordering on the set of possible true answers to the Current Question, which includes the prejacent of the sentence containing the exclusive particle, from weak to strong.⁹ According to the authors, the ordering is either based on entailment or some relevant pragmatic notion, e.g. newsworthiness, and it creates a structure on the set of true alternatives that can either be a pre-order or a partial order.

On this proposal, none of the occurrences of *csak* in (14)–(17) are predicted to be superfluous, since each of them introduces a presupposition, described in (20), which amounts to saying that among the alternative true answers that the speaker would have found appropriate to the Current Question beforehand, all are stronger or at least as

⁹ In my CIL18 talk I made a suggestion for capturing the contribution of scalar *csak* to the presuppositions of Hungarian sentences that resembled Beaver and Clark's (2008) proposal very much, without having been aware of the latter.

strong as the prejacent. Given the descriptive content attributed to exclusives in (20), the proposal correctly predicts that in cases where the alternative propositions do not exclude each other, the truth of a *csak*-sentence entails the falsity of alternative answers stronger than the prejacent, but does not exclude the truth of weaker alternative answers.¹⁰

Having discussed the interpretation of exclusive *csak* in Hungarian, in the next section we will argue that assuming an interpretation of the type shown in (20) for exclusive *csak*, it is possible to put forth a reasonable explanation for how it acquired the discourse particle interpretation described in section 2 historically.

4. From exclusive particle use to discourse particle use: historical development through semantic reanalysis

In this section, I would like to show that assuming the interpretation proposed by Beaver and Clark (2008) for exclusives in (20), there is a natural way of accounting for the problem of how the adversative discourse particle use described in section 2 developed for *csak*, to which no real solution has been proposed in Hungarian historical linguistics so far.^{11,12} The explanation will be based on the idea that the semantic change in the course of which the particle *csak* acquired its adversative interpretation was a consequence of semantic reanalysis, which took place in order to avoid *pragmatic overload*, an important cause in meaning change, according to Eckardt (2006).

Eckardt (2006) claims that semantic reanalysis takes place in order to avoid

¹⁰ It appears to me that the contrast between the truth conditional meaning of Hungarian sentences with a constituent in preverbal focus position and those containing the exclusive particle *csak* could be captured by modifying Beaver and Clark's (20) formula along the lines suggested by van Rooij (2002), according to whom, the exhaustive interpretation of free focus amounts to saying that no better true answer could be given, whereas an exhaustive particle conveys that there is no alternative true answer that is equally good. For lack of space, and due to the fact that in accounting for the meaning change resulting in the discourse particle *CSAK* we will rely primarily on the presuppositions of exclusive *csak*, we will not elaborate on this issue further here.

¹¹ Cf. Pólya (2008) for an overview of the various interpretations of *csak* that it acquired historically.

¹² It would be a topic for further research to find out whether the homonymy of an adversative discourse marker and an exclusive particle is attested in other languages as well, and whether theoretical explanations for this homonymy in other languages (if available) can be adopted for the Hungarian case.

pragmatic overload when an expression is used in a particular type of construction where information necessary to compute the presuppositions/implicatures introduced by it is not readily available for the hearers, and therefore it requires too much pragmatic accommodation from them to understand the meaning of the construction. In such cases, assuming that they understand the intended overall meaning of the sentence, the hearers re-distribute the parts of meaning among the constituents in a way that frees the relevant constituents from the pragmatic overload.

The earliest appearance of *csak* as an exclusive particle is found in a codex (Jókai codex) written in the 14th–15th century. I found the earliest clear examples of the particle having the adversative discourse marker interpretation in texts dating from the middle of the 17th century.^{13,14} In (21)–(23) below, three examples from the latter period containing a use of *csak* are shown that can only be associated with an adversative interpretation. (A clear indication of the adversative reading is that speakers of present-day Hungarian only find these sentences grammatical if the particle is pronounced with an accent.)

(21) ... *noha szívesenn igyekeztem, de bizony csak nem leheté*
though with:pleasure strove:1sg but however CSAK not could

“... although I strove with pleasure, it was still not possible to do”

(from a letter by Miklós Bethlen, 1672)

¹³ Benkő (1993–1997) argues that the first occurrence of *csak* having the adversative interpretation (marked by the fact that it is translated into German as *doch*) dates back to the middle of the 16th century. There are, however, strong reasons to debate the accuracy of the author’s classification of the particular use of the particle as a synonym of *doch*, which cannot be discussed here for lack of space. Szabó T. (1978) cites an example he considers relevant from 1608.

¹⁴ Due to the fact that only a very limited number of written texts are available electronically from before the middle of the 18th century in Hungarian, more exact estimates cannot be provided.

- (22) ... *egy darabig mind igyekezénk a szelet megcsalni*
 one while:for continuously tried:1pl the wind:ACC cheat:INF
oldalfélt való ... mesterséges evezésekkel, ... de hiába, csak meg
 sideways being artificial rowing:PL:with but in:vain CSAK VM
kelle fordulni...
 must:PAST turn:INF

“... for a while we continuously tried to cheat the wind by rowing sideways artificially, ... but in vain, we still had to turn round...”

(from a letter by Miklós Bethlen, 1672)

- (23) *Kedveseb jószágunk nincsen az életnél*
 more:dear value:our be:NEG:3SG the life:than
Halálnak sarcoló pénzt ha fizethetnél
 death:DAT ransom money:ACC if pay:could:2sg
Van-é oly kedves jód, mellyet kimilhetnél,
 is-whether such dear good:your that:ACC save:would:2sg
Az mig kedved tartya, csak addig élhetnél.
 that as:longliking:your holds CSAK that:until live:could:2sg

“We have nothing valuable than our lives, If you could pay ransom to death, Would you save any of your dearest properties, To be able to live just long as you wish?”¹⁵

(from the poem *Murány Venus conversing with Mars*, by István Gyöngyösi, 1664)

The only analysis in the literature about the relation between the exclusive and the adversative interpretations of *csak* is from Simonyi (1881). According to him, the adversative interpretation of the particle developed from another discourse particle use of non-accented *csak* (which appears to be more directly derivable from the exclusive interpretation than from the adversative one), to be paraphrased as ‘without interruption’.¹⁶ One of the examples Simonyi considers relevant is shown below:

¹⁵ Literal translation, by the author.

¹⁶ The relevant discourse particle use of *csak* is illustrated by Simonyi’s (1881:193) following example:

- i) *csak beszélek, csak beszélek neki, de hiába*
 only talk:1sg only talk:1sg him but in:vain.
 “I keep talking to him, but in vain.”

(24) *Akár*mint *ragyogjon* a *nap*, *de csak* *nem lát* a *vak*
no:matter:how shine:SUBJ the sun but CSAK not see:3sgthe blind

“No matter how strongly the sun shines, the blind cannot see.”

(*Proverb*, cited by Simonyi 1881: 193)

The scarcity of the relevant data available prohibits one from deciding whether this explanation is on the right track. Nevertheless, I can see two potential problems with it. On the one hand, there seems to be no evidence for the fact that the use of non-accented *csak* on which it is to be paraphrased as ‘without interruption’ is earlier than the adversative use. (Neither Benkő (1993–1997) nor Szabó T. (1978) discusses the former interpretation.) On the other hand, Simonyi’s account would predict that immediately after the adversative interpretation for *csak* arises historically, constructions where *csak* associates with an activity or a state verb (phrase) should be more numerous than those where it associates with other types of verb phrases or is followed by a non-verb focus (as in (23), for example). The data I could get hold of do not support this prediction.

The alternative I would like to put forth is to say that the adversative interpretation of the *csak* particle came about as a result of semantic reanalysis. I claim that the change was initiated by constructions where the exclusive particle appeared to make a vacuous contribution to the descriptive content of the sentence, and where its contribution to the presuppositions gave rise to pragmatic overload. Let us first consider two examples of the construction type at hand. The first example is from the description of a religious dispute, and the second from the memoirs of a Hungarian aristocrat, citing the words of his second wife having the same illness as the one his first wife died from:

(25) ... *ha* a *lovak* *magokban* *mind* *sánták*, *ha* *öszve* *fogjákis*
if the horses alone:PL all lame:PL if together harness:also
tsak *sánták*.
CSAK lame:PL

“... if the individual horses are all lame, they are still lame if they are harnessed together.”

(from the *Sárospatak Dispute*, 1660)

(26) ... *csak úgy jár kegyelmed énvélem, mint az első asszonnyal.*
CSAK so go:3sg you I:with than the first wife:with

“... you fare the same way with me as with your first wife after all.”

(from the *Biography of Miklós Bethlen*, before 1710)

The examples in (25)–(26) (viewed in the context of the preceding sentences) have the following common features. First, the alternative answers to the Current Question in the sense of (20) (in which the foci of *csak* are replaced for their alternatives) exclude each other, therefore, *csak* does not make a contribution to the descriptive contents of the sentences (since more than one alternative answers could not be true simultaneously anyway). Second, the reason why the speakers of these examples use the *csak* particle is compatible with the discourse function of exclusive particles according to Beaver and Clark (2008), cited in (20), which is to make a comment on the Current Question “which weakens a salient natural expectation”. The natural expectation in the case of (25) is that the horses harnessed together are something better than lame, whereas the expectation in the case of (26) is that the husband will fare better with the second wife than with the first one, who died. Given, however that, as clear from the relevant contexts, the ordering on the set of alternative answers is based on the desirability of the states of affairs described by them, and the prejacent of both sentences describe states of affairs that are considered the least desirable, the presupposition that should be introduced by the exclusive use of *csak* in these examples according to (20) is that all relevant alternative answers describe states of affairs that are considered equally bad or better than the one described by the prejacent. This is what gives rise to the pragmatic overload, since the use of *csak* forces the interpreter to assume that there are alternative answers that are ordered below the prejacent with respect to the desirability of the states of affairs described by them, although it is not clear from the context what these alternative answers could be.

In both contexts, given that the foci of *csak* refer to minimal quantities, claiming that the state of affairs described by the prejacent is less desirable than expected is equivalent to saying that the former state of affairs is less desirable than any state of affairs compatible with the negation of the prejacent. Therefore, when interpreters are faced with the pragmatic overload, they can reorganize the meaning of sentences like (25)–(26) in a way that *csak* becomes responsible for conveying that it was a salient natural expectation that the negation of the prejacent would be true. (This is equivalent to saying that in a sentence *S* with a propositional content ϕ , *csak* conveys that Zeevat’s

condition *normally*($\neg\phi$) holds, as discussed above.) This component of the meaning of the sentence cannot, however, be considered a presupposition any more, since it is not cancellable, and the use of the particle is obligatory whenever the context has properties of a particular kind. The particle thus acquires the function of a context marker, characterized in section 2.2 above following Zeevat (2003, 2006).

It is assumed that the interpretation of *csak* as an adversative context marker spread afterwards to all three sentence types where it can appear now (declaratives, *yes-no* interrogatives and imperatives), including structures where *csak* cannot have an exclusive reading at all. Two relevant constructions of the latter type are illustrated in the examples below. In (27), (accented) *CSAK* is followed by a universal noun phrase, and in (28) by a negated noun phrase, neither of which can be interpreted as being the focus of an exclusive particle:

- (27) *CSAK mindenki Jánost hívta meg.*
CSAK everybody John:ACC invited VM

“Everybody invited John after all.”

- (28) *CSAK nem Jánost hívták meg.*
CSAK not John:ACC invited VM

“It wasn’t John who got invited after all.”

We have yet to account for the obligatory accenting of the *csak* particle on its interpretation as an adversative context marker. I assume that it is due to information structural constraints: given that both the prejacent and its negation count as given information in the context, the single new piece of information within a *CSAK*-sentence is carried by the discourse particle, which is then marked by accenting.¹⁷

5. Conclusions

In this paper, the interpretation of the Hungarian accented *CSAK* discourse particle was investigated. I was argued that the necessary and sufficient conditions for its appearance in discourses indicate that it has the function of an adversative context

¹⁷ I thank Manfred Krifka for suggesting this explanation.

marker, as proposed by Zeevat (2000, 2003, 2006). It was shown that a plausible motivation for the meaning change in the course of which the exclusive particle *csak* acquired this discourse particle use can be given by assuming Beaver and Clark's (2008) analysis for the interpretation of exclusive *csak*, and a process of semantic reconstruction due to pragmatic overload, a process of semantic change, described by Eckardt (2006).

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