

Interpreting *vajon*

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ICSH8, New York, May 24-26, 2007

What is *vajon*?

Insertability of the particle *vajon* has been used as a diagnostic for interrogative sentences (Kenesei 1992, Kálmán/Trón 2001).

Vajon has been categorized as
a question word (Molnár 1959, Klemm 1928–42)
a question particle (Fábricz 1981)
a particle marking sentence type (Keszler 1995) and
as a particle marking a basic modal value (Kugler 1998).

Unlike obligatory Q-particles in Korean (Sohn 1994), *vajon* appears to be optional.

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Unlike obligatory Q-particles in Korean (Sohn 1994), *vajon* appears to be optional.

Constituent questions (*wh*-interrogatives):

Ki jön el (vajon)?

who come VM VAJON

'Who is coming?'

Yes/No questions:

Mari eljön(-e) (vajon)?

Mary come-E VAJON

'Is Mary coming?'

Alternative questions:

Mari jön vagy megy (vajon)?

Mary comes or goes VAJON

'Is Mary coming or going?'

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However, insertion of *vajon* has a peculiar pragmatic effect, leading to contextual restrictions:

A meets friend B in the streets of Budapest.

A: (#*Vajon*) *hogy vagy?*

VAJON how be.2SG

'How are you?'

Police officer A starts interrogating newly arrested B.

A: (#*Vajon*) *hogy hívják magát?*

VAJON how call.3PL you.ACC

'What is your name?'

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Microsoft Windows asking user:

(#*Vajon*) *folytatja* *a leállítást?* [Igen/Nem]

VAJON continue.3SG the closing.ACC yes/no

'Do you want to continue closing the program? Yes/No.'

These contexts are incompatible with the "contemplative" (Ferenczy 1964), "subjective" (Fábricz 1981), or rhetorical (Pólya 2006) component introduced by *vajon*.

Claim: inserting *vajon* into an interrogative suspends the request by the speaker for an answer by the addressee.

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Possible analysis: *vajon* modifies the speech act value of an interrogative (cf. Truckenbrodt 2004, Zaefferer 2001).

WANT(S, MAKE(A, CG(?p)))
↓*vajon*
WANT(S, CG(?p))

Prediction: as a speech act modifier, *vajon* should disallow genuine subordination.

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Prediction: as a speech act modifier, *vajon* should disallow genuine subordination.

*Tudom, hogy János (#/*vajon) vett-e kenyeret.*
know.1SG that János VAJON bought-E bread.acc
'I know whether John bought bread.'

Azon tűnődöm, hogy János (vajon) vett-e kenyeret.
that.ON wonder.1SG that János VAJON bought-E bread.ACC
'I wonder whether John bought bread.'

This contrast suggests that *vajon* in putative subordinate clauses leads to "embedded root phenomena" (Hooper and Thompson 1973). For analyses invoking speech act sensitivity see Krifka (2001) and McCloskey (2004).

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Next steps:

- A. Test and refine our claims against further data.
- B. Give a motivation for why *vajon* has its specific pragmatic function.
- C. Fit interrogatives into a systematic picture of sentence-types, sentence-moods and illocutionary forces in Hungarian.

Here we can only sketch this "program".

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ad A)

Vajon occurs predominantly in biased (rhetorical, suggestive, etc.) questions.

Van-e vajon más választása Magyarországnak,
 be-E VAJON other choice Hungary.DAT

mint az Unióhoz való csatlakozás?
 than the Union.TO being joining

'Does Hungary have any other chance than joining the Union?'

Vallyon [zednek-e á tövifékről [zölőket,
 VAJON pick3PL-E the thorns.FROM grapes.ACC

vagy a bojtorjánokról fűgéket?
 or the burdock.FROM figs.ACC

'Are grapes picked from thorns or figs from burdock?'

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Rhetorical questions can be analyzed as triggering indirect assertions (Meibauer 1986). This effect is often induced by insertion of expressions indicating that the speaker considers the answer to the question obvious/trivial. Examples are negation, negative polarity items, modals and modal particles.

Is Mary ill? / Is Mary not ill?

Answer set: {Mary is ill, Mary is not ill}

NEG(p) \rightsquigarrow speaker assumes that addressee considers p true or likely (Jacobs 1991).

Isn't Hungary an exceptionally beautiful country?

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Juhász 1999: 180: "*Vajon* is probably to be derived from the third person singular form of the *val-* copula, that bears an *-n* personal suffix and shows *l>ly* palatalization, with or without a *-j* imperative mood suffix. Its original meaning was therefore possibly *legyen* 'let it be' or *van* 'is', but its use was probably reserved already at the end of the Ancient Hungarian period for (polarity) questions [. . .].

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We are skeptical of the existence of third person imperative forms, and would prefer an analysis of *vajon* as a third person optative or subjunctive.

Originally *vajon* could have introduced a modal-like component such as "may be"/"should be" into interrogatives, and thereby have induced a widening effect.

John is the murderer. $\{w_1, w_4\}$

John may be the murderer. $\{w \mid w_1 R w \vee w_4 R w\}$

Who is the murderer? $\{\{w_1, w_4\}, \{w_2, w_5\}, \{w_3, w_6\}\}$

Who may be the murderer? $\{\{w_1, \dots, w_6\}\}$

Insertion of the modal makes the answer (more) obvious/trivial.
The question is less likely to be a genuine request for information.

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Oh, Istenem, én vajon meddig élek,...
oh god.MY I VAJON how.long live.1 SG
'Oh, my God, how long may I live...'

The effect that is grammaticalized with *vajon* can be derived transparently by inserting a *bona fide* modal.

Lehet-e más választása Magyarországnak,
can-E other choice Hungary.DAT
mint az Unióhoz való csatlakozás?
than the Union.TO being joining

'Could Hungary have any other chance than joining the Union?'

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ad C)

For the analysis of (modal) particles in German (Thurmair 1989), it has proven useful to start from an inventory of sentential form types (sentence-types). The identification of these types rests on the combinatorics of properties like verb position, categorial filling of the prefield, global intonation contour and local pitch accents. From this matrix, one can define a set of bona fide main clause types, a set of bona fide subordinate clause types, and various sets of "mixed" types.

For Hungarian, we will look at the behaviour of *vajon* in

- *wh*-exclamatives
- rising declaratives
- "challenge" questions
- directive questions
- constituent questions with *wh*-expletives
- the modal existential construction
- various subordinate clauses

One type of exclamatives in Hungarian shares a formal feature with *wh*-questions – *vajon*, however, is excluded from them.

(**Vajon*) *Mennyi bort megivott (*vajon)!*

VAJON how.much wine.ACC PV.drunk VAJON

'How much wine he drank!'

This could be excluded either by purely syntactic means (*vajon* must be inserted into a CP headed by C_{INT}) or by semantico-pragmatic means (*vajon* operates on a +volitional speech act component in the sense of Zaefferer 2001).

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It is not clear whether Hungarian possesses rising declaratives.

You're still in New York?

If *vajon* were incompatible with the Hungarian counterpart of RDs, this could be excluded either by purely syntactic means (*vajon* must be inserted into a CP headed by C_{INT}) or by semantico-pragmatic means (*vajon* is incompatible with the hearer-commitment effect of RDs, argued for by Gunlogson 2003, which seems to call for (dis-)confirmation of the addressee).

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(#/* *Vajon*) *hogyhogy elutazott?*

VAJON HOGYHOGY VM.travelled

'How come he left?'

(#/* *Vajon*) *mi az, hogy nem*

VAJON what DEMONSTR that not

veszi fel a telefont?

picks VM the phone.ACC

'How come he does not pick up the phone!'

If these are interrogative sentences formally, and *vajon* thus passes the syntactic insertion criteria, these have to be excluded on semantico-pragmatic grounds (presumably because their "challenge" interpretation calls for a justificatory response by the hearer).

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The German counterpart of Hungarian questions with *vajon* (built from "ob . . . wohl") can be used for making requests.

(#/* *Vajon*) *Ideadnád(-e) a só?*
VAJON VM.give.2SG.POSS-E the salt.ACC
'Will you give me the salt?'

Since *vajon* seems to pass the syntactic insertion criteria, this has to be excluded on semantico-pragmatic grounds. Given the clear addressee-orientedness of these directives, it is more surprising that the German "ob . . . wohl" requests are acceptable – at least from the perspective of Truckenbrodt (2004).

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Constituent questions with *wh*-expletives

(*Vajon*) *Mit akar, hogy (#/*vajon) kivel találkozzanak?*
VAJON what.ACC wants that VAJON who.WITH meet.SUBJ.3PL
'Whom does he want them to meet?'

*Önök mit gondolnak, Hubner Irma vajon
you.PL what.ACC think I.H. VAJON
melyik márkát választotta?*
which brand.ACC chose
'What do you think, which brand was chosen by I.H.?'

This contrast (note presence/absence of *hogy*) suggests that the second example can be reanalyzed as a paratactic sequence of two questions (separated by colon?), which is in line with our view on *vajon* as a root phenomenon.

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*Önök mit gondolnak, Hubner Irma vajon
melyik márkát választotta?*
you.PL what.ACC think I.H. VAJON
which brand.ACC chose
'What do you think, which brand was chosen by I.H.?'

This contrast (note presence/absence of *hogy*) suggests that the second example can be reanalyzed as a paratactic sequence of two questions (separated by colon?), which is in line with our view on *vajon* as a root phenomenon.

The modal existential construction

Van(-e) ki meggyógyítsa vajon a beteget?
be3SG who VM.treat.subj VAJON the patientACC
'Is there someone to treat the patient?'

*Van orvos, aki (#/*vajon) meg tudja gyógyítani a beteget?*
be3SG doctor who VAJON VM can treat.INF the patientACC
'Is there a doctor who can treat the patient?'

This contrast suggests that *vajon* has to be locally inserted into an interrogative (*pace Grosu 2004*). However, the second example seems to contain *vajon* in a non-root interrogative. Thus clearly the root/nonroot issue has to be studied more intensively.

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... *az emberben felötlik a lehetőség, hogy vajon*
the person.IN VM.appear the possibility that VAJON

az egész nem csak egy vágykép volt csupán...
the whole not only one wish was only

'...one is struck by the possibility whether the whole of it was not simply a wish ...'

Absence of *-e* makes the second clause root-like (see the co-existence of *that* and V2 in mainland Scandinavian), while presence of *hogy* makes it non-root-like.

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Our corpus research yielded a couple of counterexamples to our analysis in the domain of reported questions introduced by *ask*. It is unclear at this point how to integrate them.

... *a pedagógusoktól azt kérdeztük meg,*
the teachers.FROM that.ACC asked.1PL VM

vajon mennyire elégedettek a tantervekkel.
VAJON how.much satisfied.PL the curricula.WITH

'... we asked the teachers to what extent they were satisfied with the curricula.'

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'... we asked the teachers to what extent they were satisfied with the curricula.'

Our corpus search also yielded some counterexamples in the domain of main questions.

- *Én már munka után nézek, még ezen a héten.*
 I already work after look.1SG already this.ON the week.ON
 'I am going to look for work this week already.'
- *Vajon hol?*
 VAJON where
 'Where?'
- *Hát a Caffé Hungarianben, ott a Second Avenue-n ...*
 well the C. H.IN there the S. A.ON
 'Well, in the Cafe Hungarian, on Second Avenue ...'

(A nagy kaland [The Great Adventure], by Ákos Dutka, 1959.)

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