

## DISCOURSE MARKERS IN TALK SHOWS: THE EXAMPLES OF HUNGARIAN *HÁT*<sup>1</sup>

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## ДИСКУРСИВНИ МАРКЕРИ В ТОК ШОУТА: ПРИМЕРИ С *HÁT*<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract:** *I discuss the roles of Hungarian discourse marker hát in organizing discourse. Through examples I demonstrate what speaker attitudes enrich the meaning of the particle, and what can assist in recognizing its discourse functions. Results show that the particle hát in questions can transform questions into statements, thus showing the different opinion of the speaker. Hát occurs mainly in rhetorical and debating questions, and its roles are related with facework.*

**Key words:** *discourse marker, talk show, facework, semi-institutional discourse.*

**Резюме:** *В статията се описват ролите на унгарския дискурсивен маркер hát при организацията на дискурса. Чрез посочените примери се показват какви нагласи на говорещия обогатяват смисъла му, както и какво може да помогне за разпознаването на неговите дискурсивни функции. Резултатите показват, че използването на hát във въпроси може да ги трансформира в изречения, като по този начин изразява различното мнение на говорещия. Това се случва най-вече в реторични и в дискуссионни въпроси и неговите роли могат да бъдат свързани с невербалната комуникация.*

**Ключови думи:** *дискурсивен маркер, ток шоу, невербална комуникация.*

### 1. Introduction

Even though discourse markers constitute a group of elements of language that is difficult to define, researchers (cf. [1]) usually agree that discourse markers connect segments of discourse and mark pragmatic relations. There is a considerable difference between the written and spoken language manifestations of some discourse markers, however, since in speech such

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elements occur more often and with more functions, most likely due to the spontaneous and less pre-planned nature of spoken language. Of the various spoken language genres, this paper aims to focus on the roles of the Hungarian discourse marker *hát* in television talk shows. *Hát* is one of the most frequently used Hungarian discourse markers [2], occurring in a variety of roles besides that of speech planning. In previous research [3], I discussed the grammaticalization and modern functions of *hát*, mostly on the basis of written language discourse. Now my goal is to examine what roles of *hát* can be identified in spoken discourse which do not occur in written discourse. My hypothesis has been that *hát* fulfills roles related with facework in television talk shows due to the nature of this particular genre.

## 2. The characteristics of discourse markers

Discourse markers connect segments of discourse: they play a discourse directing role and mark pragmatic relations. They form a functional category rather than a part of speech – which makes them difficult to characterize as a group, since their interpretation is heavily dependent on the context, and, also, since the same element functions as a discourse marker in some contexts but not in others, it is difficult to provide an exhaustive list of them. The most frequently used discourse markers in Hungarian are as follows: *aha* ‘aha’, *akár* ‘even’, *azért* ‘because’, *aztán* ‘then’, *bár* ‘although’, *bizony* ‘sure’, *csak* ‘only’, *csakhogy* ‘except’, *-e* [‘question particle’], *egyáltalán* ‘at all’, *egyébiránt* ‘by the way’, *egyébként* ‘by the way’, *egyik* ‘one of them’, *elvégre* ‘after all’, *éppenséggel* ‘actually’, *és* ‘and’, *de* ‘but’, *hát* ‘well’, *hiszen* ‘but’, *hm* ‘hmm’, *így* ‘thus’, *illetve* ‘rather’, *is* ‘also’, *izé* ‘this thing’, *jaj* ‘ouch’, *lám* ‘see’, *legalább* ‘at least’, *már* ‘already’, *még* ‘yet’, *na* ‘so’, *nemde* ‘no?’, *nemhogy* ‘rather than’, *netalán* ‘perhaps’, *no* ‘there!’, *pedig* ‘even’, *persze* ‘of course’, *pláne* ‘what’s more’, *sőt* ‘what’s more’, *szóval* ‘that is’, *talán* ‘maybe’, *tehát* ‘thus’, *tényleg* ‘really’, *tudniillik* ‘that is to say’, *tulajdonképpen* ‘in reality’, *úgy* ‘thus’, *ugyan* ‘no way’, *ugye* ‘no?’, *ugyebár* ‘right?’, *úgymond* ‘so to say’, *vagyis* ‘that is’, *vajon* [‘question particle’], *valóban* ‘really’, *viszont* ‘however’, and *voltaképpen* ‘in reality’.

I regard the following characteristics of discourse markers the most salient among those identified in the literature (cf. [4], [5], [6]): they usually (although not exclusively) occur turn-initially and often undergo phonological reduction. Syntactically and as far as their part of speech affiliation is concerned, they are very varied, with a varying scope, and their pragmatic functions include the expression of attitude, multifunctionality, and context dependence. Besides expressing attitudes, they also have textual roles, since by marking the relationships of discourse segments, they also contribute to creating text coherence. Semantically, they have procedural meanings, usually not affecting the truth conditions or propositional content of utterances but fulfilling emotional and expressive functions [5].

Some discourse markers were considered „filler elements” used in spoken language even in Hungarian linguistics for some time – elements that have no particular function and do not add anything to the content of a sentence. For this reason, the use of some discourse markers (including *hát*) was strongly stigmatized for quite some time. However, their role in language use was soon recognized as a result of pragmatics research.

According to Bell’s 1998 core/periphery model [7], discourse markers have a central, core meaning as well as several peripheral meanings. The core meaning is related to the earliest meaning of the element, and the peripheral meanings can be derived from it. Bell calls the core meaning also as ‘pragmatic instruction’, referring to the fact that the marker provides instructions to the listener regarding the relationship of discourse segments as well as their interpretation, since this is what assists the listener in drawing correct conclusions.

### 3. Corpus and method

In order to map up the functions of the discourse marker *hát*, I have investigated television talk shows, using a highly empirical, data centered method of analysis. The identification of the various functions of *hát*, however, is not unproblematic. It is the textual function associated with discourse markers, which is easiest to grasp – however, the precise description of interactional and attitude marking functions is more difficult. When examining the functions of discourse markers, it is important to bear in mind that „a function is not a rigid category [...] but a process-like phenomenon which is created through processing by the speaker or the listener” [8: 350]. Thus, when marking roles of the discourse marker, I have considered contextual factors as well as the characteristics of the material under investigation.

The corpus analyzed for this paper consists of 3 hours of spoken text from 4 Hungarian talk shows: the *Médiaegyensúly* ‘Media balance’ part of the program *Pro és kontra* ‘Pros and cons’ and the program *Közhang* ‘Popular voice’ broadcast by the Hungarian ATV channel in 2002, and two shows of the program *A szólás szabadsága* ‘The freedom of speaking’ broadcast by the Hungarian channel MTV in May 2010. I purposefully chose these programs to include materials of slightly different structure since my assumption was that the role of *hát* in facework is also affected by program structuring. In the program *Pro és kontra* two well-known Hungarian personalities, Imre Kerényi and Ilona Kocsis, representing two different points of view were debating the issue of what is referred to as media balance (i.e. a balanced representation of the ruling political party vs. the opposition in the media) in Hungary with the help of a moderator. *Közhang* was an interactive program involving two guests each, who debated issues with the host of the program directing the conversation, and with viewers having the possibility of sending text messages and calling in to the program. This program is especially suitable for analyzing facework since, beyond the fact that the two debate partners represented two



very different points of view, viewers also affected the debate of the program with their texted and called in opinions. With an agenda of focusing on topical issues of public interest, the program *A szólás szabadsága* differed from the other two programs in having more subdued confrontations in the conversations, with the host taking turns talking to the guests – curbing verbal conflicts through an exclusive role asking questions and directing the discourse.

Talk shows are typical examples of face-to-face interaction, and this type of programs provides information and entertains at the same time – being basically viewer-oriented. Talk shows usually have multiple audiences: first, the listeners who are addressed directly and are closely touched by the topic, second, the audience in the television studio, and, third, the television viewers who are watching the program (possibly accidentally).

The programs chosen for analysis here involve semi-institutional media discourse [9], [10], which has expectations and rules that have to be followed during the conversation, but the level of control is much lower than in the case of institutional discourse but higher than in completely casual conversation. The kind of programs selected typically have two types of actors: the moderator or host of the program who directs the conversation and the debate partners. The rules of the conversation are, to some extent, role dependent in the case of semi-institutional discourse, since there are expectations regarding who can produce what kind of utterances [11: 133–134]: there are in-character and out-of-character utterances. Moderators' questions are only constrained by journalist's neutrality [12: 163], whereas the debate partners' utterances cannot include personal questions directed at the host and cannot question the host's right to ask questions or the relevance of the questions the host asks. In addition to the rules of the program deriving from its institutional nature, the conversational character is manifested in the right to change topics, to ask questions, and to control the length of conversational turns not being limited to the host but extended to all participants.

The use of the discourse marker *hát* did not turn out to be limited to any particular role in the analyzed programs: both the host and the debate partners used it in their utterances, but, due to its typical answer marking role, it occurred much more often in the utterances of the latter, as will be evident from the illustrations in the following section.

#### 4. Results

The element *hát* occurred altogether 61 times in the corpus, and these occurrences patterned very similarly to the functions identified in written texts analyzed by me before, exhibiting a rich pattern of meanings. Question–answer adjacency pairs are typical units of political talk shows – thus, it is not surprising that *hát* often occurred in an answer marking role. In such cases the speaker used this element before expressing their own opinion – as is evidenced by example (1), from the program *Közhang*:

(1)

C: Illetve nagyon furcsállom, hogy a hölgynek a kokárdáról, erről az áprilisi kokárdaviselésről az jutott eszébe, hogy itten Trianon revízióját akarják, nem is tudom, hogy akkor

R: Ugye nem alaptalanul jut ez az embereknek az eszébe?

C: **Hát** szerintem teljes mértékben alaptalanul jutott eszébe.

C: „I find it very strange that cockades, the wearing of these cockades, in April, made her think of the revision of [the Treaty of] Trianon, I don't know, so then”

R: „You don't think that people don't have a reason to make this association?”

C: „Well, I think that the association made by her was completely unwarranted.”

Another function of the answer marking role also occurred among the examples in the corpus where *hát* marked the speaker launching into a longer answer, monologue or story [1: 162]. Example (2), from the program *Közhang* exemplifies this:

(2)

D: Hogy erről mi a véleményetek, hogy ítélték meg, mennyire tudtok vele azonosulni? És hogyha nem, akkor mi az, amiben nem?

C: **Hát** ezt próbáltam elmondani, hogy a miniszterelnök úrnak az volt a beszédének az volt a lényege, hogy egy olyan közszolgálati televízióra van szükség, ahol a baloldali értékrend és a jobboldali értékrend megfelelő egyensúlyban van. Tehát legalább a választási eredményeknek megfelelő egyensúlyt tud alkotni, ami azt jelenti, hogy 51-49, tehát a baloldal 51%-ot kapott áprilisban, a jobboldal 49-et.

D: „What is your opinion about this, how do you experience this, can you identify with this? And if not, what is it you can't identify with?”

C: „Well, I was trying to say that the gist of the prime minister's speech was that public television should be representing the values of the left and those of the right in a balanced way. The balance should reflect the election results, like 51% vs. 49%, like the left got 51% in April, while the right got 49%.”

The *hát* used to introduce answers to questions often expresses hesitation and bargaining for time, as can be seen in (3):

(3)

A: De mitől fél?

B: **Hát**, sajnos Magyarországon sokaknak félniük van kell.



A: „But what is she afraid of?”

B: „Well, unfortunately, many people need to be afraid these days in Hungary.”

In such cases, *hát* is followed by pause and also often by other hesitation markers (such as *ööö*). Such use of *hát* is very frequent also in statements, as in (4):

(4)

B: Menjünk tovább!

A: Menjünk, ezen lépünk túl, mert mind a két oldalról mondom lehetne hozni ilyen-olyan példákat és *hát* ööö nem tudom.

B: „Let’s go on.”

A: „Let’s. Let’s go on with this, because we could bring various examples from both sides and well, hmmm, I don’t know.”

In addition to expressing the subjectivity of the answer and hesitation, *hát* was used in the talk shows when the person asked presented their opinion as if it were fact. In such cases the discourse marker receives emphatic stress, signaling that it is used by the speaker to emphasize their statement – as can be seen in example (5), from *Közhang*:

(5)

A: És mitől fél?

B: *Hát* nem fogja nyilvánosan kiadni magát!

A: „And what is she afraid of?”

B: „Well, she won’t publicly disclose that.”

In this example the discourse marker *hát* expresses that the person answering the question considers the answer completely as a matter of fact.

The corpus provided various other examples for the use of *hát* beyond its signaling an answer. As is evidenced by the data, in television talk shows *hát* can signal the continued holding of the floor and serve as a disfluency marker fulfilling a self-repair role or as a means of explaining oneself. It can also stand for a question particle, communicate affirmation, and serve as a conjunction of conclusion. Of various speaker attitudes, it can signal a heightened emotional state such as discomposure, doubt, indignation, and amazement. But it can also serve as a face threatening element by emphasizing the rhetorical nature of a question – an aspect I discuss in detail next.

## 5. Facework

The linguistic notion of face originates with Goffman's work and refers to a group of characteristics that everyone possesses: „Face is an image of self, delineated by approved social attributes” [13: 5]. In conversation, participants usually try to minimize face loss and sustain their face, which they usually achieve by employing the strategy of avoiding acts of losing their own face, and, ideally, of threatening that of their conversation partner.

The semi-institutional talk shows analyzed by me contain various instances of face threatening acts. Regardless of topic, the debate usually follows the same basic pattern associated with specific face work. Dissecting conversations into turns, Muntigl and Turnbull [14: 227] define the structure of arguing in the following ways: they presuppose two speakers, A and B. Speaker A makes a claim in Turn (T) 1, which B disputes in T2 – an act that Speaker A then disputes in T3 either by supporting their own original claim from T1 or by directly disagreeing with B's disagreement in T2. By analyzing facework, Muntigl and Turnbull have found that in verbal conflicts Speaker B's utterance in T2 damages Speaker A's face. Speaker A responds by attempting to restore their face – depending on how aggressive T2 has been, by either supporting T1 or attacking T2.

Because argumentation and arguing are necessary components of political talk shows, it is not surprising that facework is accorded great importance in them. In conversations involving several participants (such as in the analyzed programs *Pro és kontra* and *Közhang*), it is the moderator's job to begin the debate, to elicit the differing opinions of the participants, and to make sure the arguing does not get out of hand. It is then the moderator's job to control and direct the face threatening and face enhancing acts of the conversation participants while attempting to remain neutral themselves. Conversation partners cannot just say anything they want and in the way they want to, since their utterances are controlled. In the talk shows analyzed by me, conversation participants often used the strategy of using rhetorical questions to express their opposing opinions rather than making open statements. This typically occurred in argumentation monologs offered by participants – by using them, participants protected their own face as well as attracting greater attention since, as a figure, rhetorical questions worked very effectively. In such cases, what conversation participants said was slightly different than what they thought, but their speaker attitudes were made evident by the discourse markers they used. *Hát* was such an often used discourse marker: its typical use in rhetorical questions is illustrated by an excerpt from *Pro és kontra* in (6):

(6)

A: És szerintem maga is érti, hogy mi miről beszélünk, és maga segítsen nekünk, és mi okosak szépen bújjunk össze, nem így, a televízióban, meg a Parlamentben, hatan-nyolcan; hívjon meg embereket, a Hankiss tanár urat hívja meg, a Verebes Istvánt hívja meg. Egy csomó ember a



ballibból érte ám, hogy mi mit beszélünk. *Hát* milyen alapon lehet megmagyarázni a magyarországi médiahelyzetet? Melyik isten hatalmazta fel a szoclib tábor, hogy ez így legyen? Mi ezt vitatjuk, és kérjük a maguk segítségét, és ezért ki kell mennünk az utcára. És akkor engem nem zavar, hogy a magyar ATV-n a Fási Ádám hetvenöt darab műsort csinált egyfolytában MSZP-s polgármesterjelöltekkel és képviselőjelöltekkel, mer’ akkor majd a mi képviselőjelöltünk, őket bemutatjuk ott. De *hát* így hogy lehet? Hogy az MSZP-s jelöltek hetvenöt műsorban, a mi jelölteink meg sehol. Melyik isten hatalmazta fel magukat erre?

A: „And I think you understand what we are talking about, so help us, and us clever people should get together, not like this, on television and in the Parliament, six or eight of us. Invite people – invite Dr. Hankiss, and invite István Verebes, a whole lot of people from the among the liberals and the left wing understand what we are talking about. Well, on the basis of what can one explain the situation of Hungary’s media? Which god authorized the camp of socialists and liberals to do this? We are contesting it and are asking for your help, and that’s why we have to go out in the street. And I’m not bothered that Ádám Fási made seventy-five programs one after the other on the Hungarian ATV with socialist mayor candidates and candidates for members of Parliament, because then it’s our candidates, we’ll introduce them there. But how can this happen? That socialist candidates in seventy-five programs, while our candidates in none. Which god authorized you to do this?”

This example contains four rhetorical questions, each of which can be equated with an opposing statement (*Semmilyen alapon nem lehet megmagyarázni a magyarországi médiahelyzetet* „On no basis can one explain the situation of Hungary’s media”, *Semelyik isten nem hatalmazta fel a szoclib tábor* „No god authorized the camp of socialists and liberals”, *Így sehogy sem lehet* „This cannot happen”, and *Semelyik isten nem hatalmazta fel magukat erre* „No god authorized you to do this”). The speaker did not expect an answer to any of their questions but used them for effect, since when these questions were asked, mental answers formed in the minds of the conversation partners which were not actually the answers they would give but answers suggested by the person asking the question and wanting to prove the point. If we leave the discourse marker *hát* out of the two questions where it occurs, the questions still remain rhetorical but their rhetorical nature loses both considerable emphatic force and marking of speaker attitude. Taking into account a wider context of this example as well as the intonation with which it was delivered, *hát* can be unequivocally identified as expressing opposition, strong discomposure and indignation, and defined as a face threatening element.

Another typical question type occurring frequently in the corpus is the debating question, which also often involved the use of *hát*. A typical example is in (7), from *Közhang*:

(7)

A: Az az igazság, hogy mind a két oldalról lehetne mindenfajta példát felhozni, tehát a jobboldal részéről is lehetne ugyanilyen példákat felhozni.

B: Konkrétan gyerektáborról?

A: Most nem gyerektáborról beszéltem; lehetne felhozni példákat.

B: *Hát* akkor honnan?

A: „The truth is that we could bring all sorts of examples from both sides, so we could cite the same kind of examples about the political right as well.”

B: „Specifically about children’s camps?”

A: „I was not talking about children’s camps; we could cite examples.”

B: „Then from where?”

The question *Hát akkor honnan?* „Then from where?” can be regarded as a debating question since the person asking it actually expects an answer. But it is also very much like a rhetorical question in the sense that it involves a statement of the opposite sense (*Sehonnan* „From nowhere”), since speaker A is questioning the truth value of an utterance that came before. He does not request information but, instead, openly debates B’s stand, and the intonation with which the question is asked makes it clear that *hát* is used to emphatically express the view that no such example can be cited, and the discourse marker strengthens the opposition as well as makes the question rhetorical. By doing so, *hát* is used in a face threatening role here as well.

In television talk shows the discourse marker *hát* often occurs in widely different functions, making it impossible to treat the facework associated with it in a unified manner. In the corpus analyzed for this paper, *hát* occurred in both face threatening and face protecting functions: in bargaining for time, hesitation, and expressing speaker uncertainty, *hát* can be regarded as a means of protecting face (examples 3 and 4), whereas its use in rhetorical and debating questions plays a face threatening role (examples 6 and 7).

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the functions of discourse marker *hát* in semi-institutional television talk shows. The analysis of the corpus has shown that *hát* occurs in a great range of roles in this particular spoken language genre. In addition to having a general answer marking function, this discourse marker can signal the subjectivity or uncertainty of utterance content and the hesitation of the speaker, as well as interpretation of the utterance content as evident. Beyond demonstrating that *hát* can express a great range of functions, the analysis has



also shown that, as far as questions used in strongly confrontational discourse are concerned, *hát* occurs primarily in rhetorical and debating questions, and its role is to assist in the process of interpretation: it strengthens the interpretation of questions as statements, thereby signaling the relationship between the discourse segment and speaker and expressing speaker attitude.

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