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Authors' choice? Differences in the usage of or

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The aim of our research is to show how the usage of the Hungarian connective *vagy* 'or' is different in everyday communication and in literary language. Ariel–Mauri's (2018) and Ariel's (2020) investigation in the Santa Barbara Corpus of spoken American English raised the question of the distinction between the common (logical/semantic) and the actual interpretation of *or*. Their main findings are that *or* is rarely used in the traditional logical sense; the alternatives often do not have different contextual interpretations; and the most frequent reading is 'Higher-level category' (HLC), where the alternatives do not even establish distinct discourse entities (1).

(1) *Who was the king or queen?* HLC='nonpolitical ruler, monarch' (Ariel, 2020)

In order to describe the Hungarian connective *vagy* 'or', Visket–Kárpáti–Kleiber (2021) adapted Ariel's (2020) system, and examined 250 random examples from the personal subcorpus of MNSZ2 (Hungarian National Corpus). Their results supported Ariel's (2020) aforementioned findings, though suggested some clarifications, such as taking prominence into account when categorizing ambiguous occurrences. They also found that some *or* constructions – mostly 'Raised options' and HLC – only have rhetoric functions in many cases, where the alternatives are not real possibilities, their function is to express enhancement or exaggeration.

Both researches investigated informal texts, spoken language and personal subcorpus, therefore it is not surprising that they reached similar results regarding the frequency of the categories. In this study, our aim is to explore different kinds of texts, primarily literary language. First, we analyzed a corpus consisting of the work of Attila József, a famous Hungarian poet. We found that (i) the traditional exclusive and inclusive interpretation is not present; (ii) there are no real questions; (iii) HLC has no semantic but pragmatic usage: almost all *or* occurrences can be regarded as a HLC, meaning 'maybe'. We have also analyzed other Hungarian

poets/writers' works, such as Péter Esterházy, Sándor Weöres, and Ervin Lázár, and found many similarities.

In sum, the meaning of *or* cannot be explained thoroughly in one linguistic (e.g. syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic) module. The examples in different textual types show that even stylistic features can overrule the common pragmasemantic function, putting pressure on us to decide where the boundaries of linguistics are.

References

- Ariel–Mauri (2018): Why use *or*? *Linguistics* 56: 5. 939–994.
Ariel (2020): *Or* constructions, argumentative direction and disappearing 'alternativity'. *Language Sciences* 81.
Viszket–Kárpáti–Kleiber (2021): *Why use Hungarian or?* Presentation at LingBaw 2021.