

PÁZMÁNY PÉTER KATOLIKUS EGYETEM  
BÖLCSÉSZETTUDOMÁNYI KAR

DOKTORI DISSZERTÁCIÓ

HALM TAMÁS

THE GRAMMAR OF FREE-CHOICE ITEMS  
IN HUNGARIAN

**THESIS BOOKLET**

NYELVTUDOMÁNYI DOKTORI ISKOLA  
ELMÉLETI NYELVÉSZET MŰHELY

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## 1. Preliminary considerations and the main problem

The topic of this PhD thesis is the behaviour of free-choice items (FCIs) in Hungarian. FCIs such as *any* have been at the forefront of research interest in the past decades (e.g. Ladusaw 1979, Kadmon-Landman 1993; Giannakidou 2001). The close interdependence of syntactic, semantic and even pragmatic considerations makes the study of FCIs one of the most interesting research programmes.

While Hungarian is otherwise a much-studied language in generative syntax, relatively limited attention has been paid to FCIs so far. Hunyadi (1991, 2002) analysed *akár*-pronouns as universal quantifiers with obligatorily narrow scope with regard to modal operators. Abrusán (2007) provided a compositional semantic analysis in which she attempted to derive the meaning and behaviour of *bár*- and *akár*- FCIs from the meaning of their constituent parts. Szabó (2012) examined whether the two paradigms of FCIs are different in terms of their syntactic distribution.

The goal and achievements of this thesis are twofold. On the one hand, I provided a theoretically well-established model with good empirical coverage concerning FCIs in Hungarian. On the other, my exploration of FCIs in Hungarian yielded results that are relevant for the cross-linguistic study of FCIs as well.

## 2. Methodology

In terms of methodology, I analyzed FCIs in the framework of Giannakidou (2001) as intensional indefinites, which are grammatical only in contexts providing alternatives (worlds or situations). FCIs are thus licensed in non-veridical and non-episodic contexts (e.g. modals, generics), and ungrammatical in extensional veridical contexts (e.g. episodic sentences, negation, interrogatives). More formally, FC phrases are represented as:

$$(1) \quad [[\text{any student}]] = \mathbf{student}(x)(w) \text{ (or: } \mathbf{student}(x)(s))$$

The world/situation and individual variable(s) are to be bound by an appropriate Q-operator (i.e. generic, habitual, modal, intensional) in order for the FC phrase to be licensed. Under this analysis, the universality of FCIs is derived from their intensionality and exhaustive variation: the FCI variable is to be assigned a distinct value in each world or situation under consideration (Dayal 1997: i-alternatives).

As far as Hungarian sentence structure is concerned, I adopted the syntactic structure for the Hungarian sentence outlined in É. Kiss (2010):

$$(2) \quad [TP [\text{NegP} [\text{FocP} [\text{NegP} [\text{NNP} [\text{PredP} [\text{vP} [\text{VP} \dots]]]]]]]]]$$

Furthermore, I adopted the analysis of Q-raising as adjunction (optionally left-adjunction or right-adjunction, targeting the functional projections PredP, FocP or NegP (É. Kiss 2010).

The syntactic position of FCIs was explored using the usual tests

(e.g. relative position with regard to sentential adverbials to test possible topic position, word order and stress phenomena to test quantifier position or focus position.)

As far as the quantificational properties of FCIs were concerned, I used the standard tests (cf. Surányi 2006): *almost-* modification, donkey anaphora, predicative use, *is-* modification, incorporation and split readings with modals.

Specificity was examined using the standard tests involving verbs of creation and appearance/coming into being.

In general, the grammaticality judgments reflect what I believe to be the consensus among speakers of Standard Hungarian, except where indicated otherwise. To a limited extent, I also included results of simple queries from corpora.

### 3. New results

I have shown that FCIs in Hungarian can be successfully modelled using the dependent indefinite analysis (Giannakidou 2001). This is a significant contribution to the cross-linguistic debate concerning FCIs.

Significantly, I provided a satisfactory model for FCIs in Hungarian using the dependent indefinite analysis and utilizing the standard accounts for quantification, focus, aspect, quantificational force etc. in Hungarian. While there have been previous works on FCIs (Hunyadi (1991, 2002), Abrusán (2007), Szabó (2012)), my thesis is the first unified account for the syntax and semantics of FCIs, covering such a wide range of phenomena as syntactic position, quantificational force, specificity, interaction with focus and interaction with aspect. My individual results concerning these topics are as follows:

Syntax-semantics: I proved that the dependent indefinite analysis is suitable for FCIs in Hungarian.

Syntactic position: I showed that the canonical position for FCIs is the same quantifier position that is occupied by distributive universal quantifiers: I motivated this by the universal implicature carried by the FCI.

Quantificational force: I demonstrated that FCIs can have both universal and existential interpretation in Hungarian (note similar findings of Surányi 2006 for n-words). This further corroborates the dependent indefinite analysis. Heimian indefinites are known for quantificational plasticity (lacking quantificational force on their own), and as I show in the thesis, FCIs as dependent indefinites, while not having quantificational force as such, carry a universality implicature due to their intensionality and

exhaustive variation: the FCI variable is to be assigned a distinct value in each world or situation under consideration (Giannakidou 2001).

Specificity: while the usual tests involving verbs of creation and coming into being indicated that FCIs are [-specific] (in line with Hunyadi 2002), FCIs were also grammatical with verbs of coming into being with a verbal particle. I have derived this effect from the universal implicature of FCIs (see above).

Regarding FCIs and *is*, I have proved that in weakly non-veridical environments (Tóth 1999), the emergence of an optional *is* is the result of an analogy with *valaki is*. The *is* optionally appearing next to FCIs in the focus position has been identified as an instance of permissive *is*. I also provided a clear account as to why *is* is ungrammatical next to FCIs in quantifier positions.

My analysis of how focused FCIs elicit a free-relative like meaning (similar to *wh-ever*) in English has cross-linguistic relevance and presents a useful contribution to the general debate on FCIs in many ways: 1) it presents a clear-cut case of the universal/existential reading of an FCI being constructed compositionally on the sentence level which is consistent with the account of FCIs as (dependent) indefinites (Giannakidou 2001), and 2) shows that the free relatives with an FCI flavour (*wh-ever* words) can either be encoded in the lexicon separately from general-purpose FCIs (a strategy employed by English) or can be brought about compositionally, by using the focus construction and exploiting the presuppositions of existence and exhaustivity (maximality) associated with it (as in Hungarian).

Finally, my examination of the interaction of verbal particles and FCIs in Hungarian yielded the proposal that sentences containing verbal

particles and FCIs are interpreted as generics/habituals, and the FC-phrase (analyzed as a dependent indefinite) is bound (and thus, licensed) by a silent GEN operator carried by the verbal particle. This proposal is supported by independent evidence (both from Hungarian and cross-linguistic) and fits into current theories FCIs, genericity and the quantificational force of verbal particles. Beside the finding that verbal particles in Hungarian are capable of generic quantification, I have also shown that 1) genericity in Hungarian is primarily a pragmatic phenomenon and that 2) languages differ in terms of the formal semantics of individual-level predicates (presence/absence of inherent GEN operator), and the licensing of FCIs can be used as a diagnostic tool here. My thesis also sheds light on the conundrum why FCIs are straightforwardly licensed in generics in many languages (e.g. English) but not in Hungarian. Finally, this result lends considerable further empirical support to the dependent indefinite analysis of FCIs.

## **Relevant publications**

### **Conference presentations:**

2nd Central European Conference in Linguistics for Graduate Students (CECILS2)

Piliscsaba, 23-25th August, 2012

*Free choice and focus: the distribution and quantificational force of FCIs in Hungarian.*

5th Conference on Syntax, Phonology and Language Analysis (SinFonIJA 5)

Vienna, 27-29th September, 2012

*Free choice and Focus: FCIs in Hungarian.*

11th International Conference on the Structure of Hungarian (ICSH 11)

Piliscsaba, 29-31st August, 2013

*Telicity and Free Choice: FCIs and Verbal Modifiers in Hungarian.*

### **Publications:**

*Free Choice and Focus: FCIs in Hungarian.* (2013) In: Surányi, Balázs (ed.): Proceedings of the Second Central European Conference in Linguistics for Postgraduate Students. Pázmány Péter Catholic University,



Budapest, 109-121.

*Free Choice and Aspect in Hungarian.* (2015) In: É. Kiss, Katalin – Surányi, Balázs – Dékány, Éva (eds.) *Approaches to Hungarian. Volume 14: Papers from the 2013 Piliscsaba Conference.*