

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE HUNGARIAN ADVERBIAL PARTICLE *MAJD*

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Abstract: The Hungarian particle *majd* has both a descriptive and an expressive meaning. Semantically it expresses futurity; at the same time it may also carry various pragmatic meanings, of which the most salient is the delaying function. The referential function of *majd* is foregrounded if it is the only element in the sentence with temporal meaning. It will be shown that there is also a parasitic use of *majd* in which case it can be omitted without loss of meaning. In some other cases the particle is used to reinforce the illocutionary meaning of the utterance.

Keywords: descriptive meaning, expressive meaning, referential function, delaying function, emphasis

In Hungarian grammar books, the particle *majd* is traditionally considered to be an adverb.¹ We are going to show that although *majd* does have an adverbial use, in which case it expresses futurity, it also carries

¹ The Hungarian Etymological Dictionary (Benkő 1970, 819) argues for the following cline for the semantic development of the particle *majd*: *itt* 'here' → *most* 'now' → *rögtön* 'at once' → *később* 'later' → 'some time later', modal meaning. The meaning 'later' implicates the modal meaning of uncertainty.

So far the only work specifically devoted to the particle *majd* is Vaskó (2001), where the author examines the particle in the framework of Relevance Theory. Accordingly, she distinguishes between conceptual and procedural information. The conceptual information conveyed by *majd* is paraphrased as 'later, or sometime in the future', the procedural information may be, among other things,

various pragmatic functions (uncertainty, delay) expressing the speaker's attitudes. We will see that in some cases, depending on context, the descriptive meaning is more important than the expressive one, in other cases the opposite situation holds. There is also a 'parasitic' use of *majd* in which case it can be omitted without loss of (semantic and/or pragmatic) meaning.

In what follows, we will refer to *majd* as an 'adverbial particle', thereby signalling its double function. For simplicity's sake, in cases where no confusion may arise we will simply use the term 'particle'.

In the first part of the paper we will look at some distributional properties of *majd*, which will be followed by a closer examination of its semantic and pragmatic meaning. It will be shown that *majd*, unlike genuine pragmatic particles, shares the distributional properties of temporal adverbials. On the other hand, in the majority of cases the future reference of *majd* is associated with pragmatic implications.

1. Some distributional properties of *majd*

The examples in (1a,b,c) show that *majd* can occupy any adverbial position in the sentence and the examples in (2a,b) illustrate the fact that *majd* can occur in interrogatives and imperatives as well.

- (1) (a) *Majd elolvasom a könyvedet.*
 prev.read.1sg det book.poss2sg.acc
 'I'll read your book.'
- (b) *Elolvasom majd a könyvedet.*
 prev.read.1sg det book.poss2sg.acc
- (c) *A könyvedet elolvasom majd.*
 det book.poss2sg.acc prev.read.1sg

The particle *majd* occupies the initial position in (1a), medial position in (1b) and the sentence final position in (1c). There seem to be no semantic and/or pragmatic differences between the three sentences, exactly like in the cases of other adverbs and unlike genuine pragmatic particles like, for example, *is* 'too' (cf. German *auch*).²

potentiality ('a conditional state of affairs'), the expression of an intention, or polite refusal.

² The pragmatic particle *is* ('contrary to expectation') is closely associated with the verb: it either immediately follows the verb as in *Megyek is* 'I'll go after all',

In addition to declaratives, the particle *majd* can also occur in interrogatives and imperatives; it is thus blind to sentence type variation. Once again, this is not the case with most pragmatic particles.

- (2) (a) Elolvasod majd a könyvemet?
 prev.read.2sg det book.poss1sg.acc
 ‘Will you read my book (sometime in the future)?’
- (b) Olvasd majd el a könyvemet!³
 read.imp.2sg prev det book.poss1sg.acc
 ‘Read my book (sometime in the future)!’

Distributionally, there is no difference between *majd* and other adverbs, say, manner or temporal adverbs. For example, *majd* could be replaced in (1a,b,c) and (2a,b) by *gyorsan* ‘quickly’ without any loss of grammaticality. We may thus conclude that, as far as the distributional properties are concerned, the particle *majd* is in no way different from most other adverbs.⁴

or it is placed between the preverb and the verb, as in *El is megyek* ‘I’ll go after all’. (There are some pragmatic differences between the two sentences, which need not concern us here.) The particle *is* is in certain ways similar to the German particle *auch*: compare *Ich werde auch gehen*.

³ Note that the preverb is separated from the verb under certain conditions (e.g. *El Péter ment* – prev Peter went – ‘It was Peter who went away’). Such sentences contain a contrastive topic, here *el* ‘away’. The details need not concern us here, cf. É. Kiss (2002).

⁴ It is interesting to see that—though there are some similarities between the German discourse particle *schon* (which is a genuine discourse particle and hence lacks descriptive meaning) and the Hungarian particle *majd*—*schon* does not share the properties of *majd* mentioned above. First, it can only occur in the medial field (“Mittelfeld”, cf. *Ich werde dein Buch schon lesen*); second, it predominantly occurs in declaratives (and rhetorical questions, which does not come as a surprise); third, it can have broad scope only (Meibauer 1994). Nevertheless, the use of the two particles comes very close in cases such as

- (i) Majd megoldom a problémát.
 prev.solve.1sg det problem.acc
 ‘I’ll solve the problem, don’t worry.’

Compare the German equivalent of (i) in (ii), which contains the discourse particle *schon*.

- (ii) Ich werde das Problem schon lösen.

This similarity is, however, rather restricted, as we will see presently. Nevertheless, a more detailed comparison between the two particles might be rewarding.

Note also that *majd* may occur in sentences containing a focussed constituent:

- (3) (a) *Majd aláírom a szerződést.*
 prev.write.1sg det contract.acc
 ‘I’ll sign the contract.’
- (b) *Majd én írom alá a szerződést.*
 I write.1sg prev det contract.acc
 ‘It will be me who will sign the contract.’
- (c) *Majd aláírom a szerződést én.*
 ‘It will be me who will sign the contract.’

(3a) is a plain statement about a future state-of-affairs and it does not refer to the immediate future. (3b) and (3c) are different in this respect. For some reason, which I cannot offer any explanation for, these sentences can also be used when there is a discussion going on about who will sign the contract in the case when the signature is imminent.

In sum, then, as far as distributional properties are concerned, there is no difference between (temporal) adverbs and the adverbial particle *majd*. Next it will be shown that *majd* functions as a marker of futurity.

2. The descriptive meaning of *majd*

The adverbial particle *majd* means ‘sometime in the future but not now’, that is, it can never refer to the immediate future. In this sense its meaning is not different from the meaning of the future auxiliary *fog*. It should be made clear, however, that—in contrast to the auxiliary *fog*—the particle *majd* almost never expresses a purely descriptive meaning. Futurity is almost always combined with some pragmatic meaning as we will see presently.⁵ In cases when the speaker wants to express the fact that—contrary to what his interlocutor expects—the act will be performed at a later point in time, he will use the particle *majd*. We will term this the **delaying function** of *majd*. Delaying something may also mean that it will never be done. In this sense delaying always implies negation; this is what is said in the second clause above (‘not now’). And, of course, delaying an act may make the future even more uncertain.

⁵ This may give the impression that *majd* is a discourse particle.

The importance of the descriptive meaning of *majd* can most clearly be shown by means of examples such as (4a), in which the particle *majd* is the only carrier of futurity in the sentence.

- (4) (a) *Majd eszem.*
 eat.1sg
 ‘I’ll eat later.’
 (b) *Eszem.*
 ‘I am eating (now).’

Without the particle *majd* the sentence can only refer to an ongoing activity, as in (4b). The same is true for all activity verbs: *olvasok* ‘I am reading’ vs. *majd olvasok* ‘I will read’ or ‘I will be reading’; *írok* ‘I am writing’ vs. *majd írok* ‘I will write’. The situation is different with verbs containing a preverb, which are no longer activity verbs: the preverb turns an activity verb into an accomplishment or achievement verb, which—being aspectually perfective—carry inherently future meaning in their present tense form. This is a well-known feature of perfective verbs cross-linguistically.

Word order and stress, too, play an important role in the interpretation of sentences with *majd*. Compare (5a) (= (4a)) and (5b).

- (5) (a) *Majd eszem.*
 (b) *Eszem majd.*

The particle *majd* may, but need not, carry stress in (5a) whereas it is always unstressed in (5b). The pragmatic difference between the two sentences is that whereas *majd* has a delaying function in (5a), this function is absent in (5b).

In this connection one may ask what, then, the difference is between the auxiliary *fog*, which, too, is used to express futurity and the particle *majd*. Note that there is no difference with respect to future reference between (5a), repeated here as (6a), and (6b).

- (6) (a) *Majd eszem.*
 (b) *Fogok enni.*⁶
 aux.1sg eat.inf

⁶ It is interesting to note that the sentence *Enni fogok* with reversed word order can neither be a promise nor a prediction. It can be used when preparations are

However, while (6b) commits the speaker to fulfil the action described by the sentence (it is either a promise or a prediction), (6a) does not. Since we know that we cannot live without eating, sooner or later the agent of (6a) will eat.

The difference in temporal reference and pragmatic meaning can be seen more clearly in comparing the sentences (7a,b,c).⁷

- (7) (a) Elül a vihar.
 prev.sit.3sg det storm
 ‘The storm is blowing over.’
 (b) Elül majd a vihar.
 (c) El fog ülni a vihar.

The sentence (7a) is a plain statement about an ongoing event, which is expected to terminate soon. While (7b), containing the particle *majd*, expresses the fact that the given state of affairs will possibly hold some time in the (near) future, (7c) is a statement about the more remote future. Furthermore, while (7b) contains a modal component which can be paraphrased as ‘let’s hope that *p* will happen in the foreseeable future’, there is no such modal meaning in (7c). Rather, (7c) is a prediction that can be uttered in a situation in which there are observable signs to the effect that the storm will blow over soon.

From the above observations we may thus conclude that the descriptive meaning of the particle *majd* is remote future while its expressive meaning has to do with the speaker’s uncertainty about the future of the given state of affairs. If there is no temporal adverb, preverb or auxiliary in the sentence expressing futurity, the particle *majd* may be the only carrier of future meaning.

If the particle *majd* has a descriptive meaning then it should be possible to negate it. However, as shown by the examples below, negation may pose some problems. First of all, sentences such as (5a,b) cannot be negated at all. Without any further context the sentences (8a,b) are ungrammatical if *majd* is interpreted as lying within the scope of negation.⁸

being made for an eating event. We exclude here the case when the sentence is uttered with contrastive stress which is associated with a different interpretation.

⁷ The examples (7a,b,c) and their interpretations are due to Eszter Kukorelli (see Kukorelli 2012).

⁸ It should be noted that (8a) is possible if we waive the delaying function of *majd*. In that case it is equivalent with the auxiliary *fogok*. The ungrammaticality of (8b)

- (8) (a) #Nem eszem majd.⁹
 neg eat.1sg
 Intended: ‘It is not later that I will eat.’
 (b) *Nem majd eszem.
 neg eat.1sg

That is, (8a) cannot be interpreted as the negation of *Eszem majd* with a delaying *majd* and, similarly, (8b) cannot be interpreted as the negation of *Majd eszem* expressing a kind of promise which need never be fulfilled. On the other hand, the auxiliary *fog* does not prevent negation but, of course, it does not carry any pragmatic meaning, either.

- (9) Nem fogok enni.
 neg aux.1sg eat.inf
 ‘I won’t eat.’

What blocks negation in cases such as (8a,b) is presumably the expressive meaning of *majd*.

3. The expressive meaning of *majd*

The pragmatic meaning of the particle *majd* comes to the fore when futurity is expressed by other means in the sentence. Compare the following two sentences:

- (10) (a) Csinálok.
 do.1sg.def
 ‘I am doing it.’
 (b) Megcsinálok.
 prev.do.1sg.def
 ‘I’ll do it.’

The sentence (10b) may be used to express immediate future (i.e., the speaker can utter (10b) when she is already doing whatever has to be done) as well as more remote future (sometime in the future). If we add *majd* to (10b), the ‘immediate future’ interpretation is excluded.

is due to the fact that the negative particle must occupy the position immediately preceding the verb.

⁹ The following, too, is possible: *Majd nem eszem*, which is equivalent to (8a).

The auxiliary *fog* ‘will’ introduces the ‘illocutionary act potential’ of making a promise, but even in that case *majd* may have a slight delaying effect.

- (11) (a) Meg fogom csinálni.
 prev aux.1sg.def do.inf
 ‘I’ll do it.’
 (b) Majd meg fogom csinálni.

While (11a) can be used to make a promise, the speaker of (11b) is not really committed to carrying out the action. Neither (11a) nor (11b) can refer to the immediate future, but *majd* in (11b) introduces uncertainty.

Utterances such as (12a,b) are conventionally used to take leave of somebody:

- (12) (a) Majd felhívlak.
 prev.call.subj1sg.obj2sg
 ‘I’ll call you.’
 (b) Majd beszélünk.
 talk.1pl
 ‘We’ll talk.’ (‘We’ll keep in touch.’)

The particle *majd* can be used as a one-word answer to questions or as a response to an order or request in cases when the addressee does not want to commit himself to carrying out the action.

- (13) A: Mikor akarsz felhívni Pétert?
 when want.2sg.def prev.call.inf Peter.acc
 ‘When do you want to call Peter?’
 B: Majd.
 ‘Later.’
 (14) A: Menj el az orvoshoz!
 go.imp.2sg prev the physician.to
 ‘You should go to see your physician.’
 B: Majd.
 ‘Later.’

In both cases *majd* has a clear delaying meaning, the addressee does not want to carry out the action in the immediate future and she does not

even want to commit herself to doing anything in the near future. Typically, the amount of the delay can be inferred from the literal meaning of the utterance and everyday knowledge. From (13A) it can be inferred that the addressee of (13A) wants to call Peter but the answer (13B) makes it clear that—for some unknown reason—the speaker of (13B) has not as yet made up her mind about when she will call Peter. But it would be awkward if the delay were longer than, say, a month. On the other hand, (14A) implicates that the addressee seems to have health problems and the speaker thinks that she should see a physician; the answer (14B) does not contradict this implicature but suggests that the addressee has not as yet made up her mind whether she should follow this advice. This may depend on how her health conditions develop, in this case the delay may be longer than a few days but, once again, it would be awkward to assume that it would take years.

The use of *majd* in requests may have a politeness effect in cases such as (16a–b):

(15) (a) *Vidd el a levelet!*
 take.imp.2sg prev the letter.acc
 ‘Take the letter with you.’

(b) *Hívd fel Annát!*
 call.imp.2sg prev Ann.acc
 ‘Give a call to Ann.’

(16) (a) *Vidd majd el a levelet!*
 ‘Please take the letter with you.’

(b) *Hívd majd fel Annát!*
 ‘Please call Ann.’

While (15a) can be an order, (16a) is more like a polite request. Similarly, (16b) is a polite request rather than an order. In fact, the particle *majd* can be considered to be a conventional means to make requests more polite. However, this effect works only if the action does not have to be carried out immediately, which, once again, shows the importance of the delaying meaning of *majd*.

Note that *majd* has no delaying effect if it takes scope over the adverb *mindjárt* ‘right away’ rather than over the whole sentence; in that case it means something like ‘wait a minute’. Incidentally, *majd mindjárt* may also be considered as a complex expression in which *majd* does not have any pragmatic meaning in itself. Notice also that—if taken literally—the

combination of the particle *majd* (in the sense of ‘sometime in the future’) and *mindjárt* ‘right away’ would lead to a contradiction:

- (17) *Majd mindjárt megoldom a problémát.*
 at.once prev.solve.1sg.def the problem.acc
 ‘Wait a little, I’ll solve the problem right away.’

In other cases there is no semantic difference between the auxiliary *fog* and the particle *majd*. However, they carry different pragmatic meanings. Consider (18a,b):

- (18) (a) *A csontváz vizsgálata számos kérdésre*
 the skeleton examination.poss many question.onto
fog választ adni // ad majd választ.
 aux.3sg answer.acc give.inf // give.3sg answer.acc
 ‘The examination of the skeleton will provide an answer to a number of questions.’
- (b) *Az új cégek közül csak az fog fennmaradni*
 the new firms among only that aux.3sg prev.remain.inf
 // marad majd fenn, amely...
 // remain.3sg prev which...
 ‘From among the new firms only those will survive, which...’

The sentence in (18a) with the auxiliary *fog* carries a prediction: under normal circumstances the event described by the sentence will take place. However, if *fog* is replaced by *majd*, the sentence no longer expresses a prediction; it just describes a future event which is likely to occur. The situation is the same in the case of (18b).

4. The parasitic use of *majd*

In some cases the particle *majd* does not add any extra meaning to the sentence and can easily be omitted without thereby affecting meaning:

- (19) (a) *A többi jön (majd) magától...*
 the other come.3sg itself.from
 ‘The rest comes automatically...’
- (b) *Jövőre (majd) kiderül...*
 next.year prev.become.clear.3sg
 ‘It will become clear next year...’

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- (c) Különös világ, amelyben idővel (majd) eligazodik az ember.
 strange world which.in gradually find.one's.way.3sg the man
 'This is a strange world, in which one will slowly find one's way.'

The utterances (19a,b,c) all contain implicit (as in the case of the verb *jön* 'come') or explicit temporal reference (*jövőre* 'next year' and *idővel* 'in the course of time', respectively) relating them to a more remote future. That is, if the sentence contains a temporal expression referring to a remote future, the use of *majd* does not add any new information to the sentence, though it may be used for emphasis.

5. The particle *majd* in idiomatic expressions

In a number of idiomatic expressions the presence of the particle *majd* is just used to reinforce the illocutionary meaning of the utterance. Consider the examples in (20a–d).

- (20) (a) Majd bolond leszek!
 fool be.fut.1sg
 'I am not that daft!' (lit. 'I will be a fool!')
- (b) Majd éppen rád bízom!
 just you.onto trust.1sg
 'You are just the person I can leave this to.'
- (c) Majd nem lesz ilyen jó kedved!
 not be.fut.3sg such good humour.poss
 'You will not be in such good spirits.'
- (d) Majd adok én neked!
 give.1sg I you.dat
 'You'll get what for!' (lit. 'I'll give to you.')

The utterance in (20a) expresses refusal and is used in contexts in which something which the speaker is supposed to do may have unpleasant consequences for the speaker. Consequently, (s)he refuses to act. The utterance can be paraphrased as 'I am not a fool to do that'. The utterance in (20b) implicates that the speaker does not trust the addressee; in fact, he or she would be the last person to be trusted. Apparently, the addressee had already proved untrustworthy earlier. The utterance in (20c) implicates that something bad is going to happen, something which will

put the addressee out of humour. Finally, (20d) expresses threat. It implicates that the addressee intends to do something which the speaker definitely disapproves of. The utterance also implicates a hierarchical relation between the speaker and the addressee. In sum, all four utterances in (20a–d) have negative connotations but these are not due to the presence of the particle *majd*. The connotations do not change if we omit the particle; consequently, the particle has only a reinforcing effect.

6. Conclusion

In this paper we have presented the most important facts about the behaviour of the adverbial particle *majd*. In particular, we have shown that *majd* has a referential function by expressing futurity; at the same time, however, it has a delaying effect, which is a pragmatic phenomenon. In other words, the particle *majd* has both a descriptive and an expressive meaning. If the sentence does not contain any other element with temporal reference the referential function of the particle is foregrounded. If, on the other hand, futurity is expressed by other means in the sentence, the delaying function of the particle becomes more important. If the delaying function is not relevant, the particle *majd* can be omitted without thereby modifying the meaning of the sentence. In some cases the future reference of the particle *majd* is coupled with the meaning element ‘uncertainty’ and contrasts with the meaning ‘prediction’ of the future auxiliary *fog*.

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