

Strange a construction: The “A egy N” in Hungarian

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ABSTRACT

The paper gives a detailed description of the “A egy N” construction in Hungarian based on a thorough investigation of carefully collected corpus data. Utterances containing this construction express a speaker-related (mostly derogatory, but sometimes appreciative) value judgement. The morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic characteristics of the construction are presented. Furthermore, some formally and pragmatically similar constructions are also discussed and some misleading pieces of information in the earlier literature are debunked.

KEYWORDS

Hungarian, syntax, morphology, semantics, pragmatics, constructions, constructional grammar

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims at describing a Hungarian construction which has been quite disregarded in the literature so far. We intend to do so in the spirit of the authors’ teacher, László Kálmán: following Kálmán (2001a), we give a non-transformational analysis, presuming that the linguistic structure of an utterance can be discussed in terms of overlapping constructions. The construction in the focus of this investigation provides an especially good example of those linguistic expressions whose characteristics are not derivable from the characteristics of their constitutive elements. We also follow Kálmán’s principle according to which the number of theoretical

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assumptions must be kept at the minimum in linguistic descriptions. Undoubtedly, some assumptions are inevitable – e.g. the presumption that some kind of categories, labeled as *Adjectives* and *Nouns*, exist.¹ We intend to describe the given construction similarly to the descriptions of various patterns in Kálmán (2001b).

Kálmán always stressed that linguistic research must be empirically grounded. In light of this advice, the authors feel it important to indicate the character of the linguistic examples in a more sophisticated way than is usual in the literature. Examples taken from the corpus (see below) or already published in the literature and considered as completely grammatical by the authors of the current article are unmarked. (These examples are sometimes simplified, but the authors consider that these modifications do not influence grammaticality.) Examples constructed by the authors for demonstration of agrammatical word sequences are marked by an asterisk (*). Those constructed examples whose grammaticality is uncertain or debated are marked with a question mark (?), which is sometimes doubled to indicate a higher degree of questionability. Grammatical but semantically or pragmatically odd examples are marked with a hash (#). Grammatical examples constructed by the authors are marked with a wrench (⚒). Finally, examples taken from the corpus or the literature whose grammaticality is questioned by the authors is marked by an inverted question mark (¿).

The construction under investigation consists of an adjective, the word *egy*, and a noun.

- (1) ⚒*furcsa szerkezet*
strange construction
'strange construction'
- (2) ⚒*egy furcsa szerkezet*
ART.INDEF/one strange construction
'a strange construction'
- (3) ⚒*furcsa egy szerkezet*
strange EMPH construction
'a really strange construction'

The “A *egy* N” exemplified in (3) belongs to the constructions Kálmán (2001a, 70–77) calls *syntactic idioms*: they require certain well-defined syntactic structures. In certain respects, it resembles *lexical idioms* as well (Kálmán 2001a, 68–70), as it is partially “filled in”, that is, a lexical slot in it is not variable (i.e. the word *egy*). However, the typical examples of lexical idioms are words with complements or existential sentences.

The meaning of this construction resembles, on the one hand, that of a noun modified by an adjective (1), and on the other hand, that of an indefinite noun phrase (2). Apparently, the

¹Parts of speech like “noun” (N) and “adjective” (A) are used here as intuitive categories. The intuitive judgement is based on the syntactic distribution of the word: adjectives need an (explicitly or implicitly) modified noun in the sentence, while nouns do not. In all probability, the intuitive judgement is based on the fact that those words which modify other nouns relatively frequently are judged to be adjectives, while others are considered to be nouns. In any case, the constructions represented in our examples contain words which were tagged in the corpus as adjectives and nouns, respectively.



function of *egy* in (2) and in (3) is somewhat different. By default *egy* is the numeral ‘one’ in Hungarian. In (2) *egy* can be replaced by other numerals,² while in (3) it cannot. This could be an argument for the supposition that in (3) *egy* must be identified with the indefinite article ‘a, an’ (developed from the numeral). Nonetheless, a definite article *a/az* cannot occur in the same position of a noun phrase (**furcsa a szerkezet*³). Additionally, by default, when a noun is modified by both an adjective (or several ones) and an article, the adjective is preceded by the article, as in (2). Thus it seems that the function of *egy* in (3) resembles that of an emphatic clitic; therefore, in what follows, we gloss it as EMPH. Despite the glossing, the authors do not want to state that the emphatic nature of the construction emerges from the clitic: it is rather a peculiarity emerging from the whole construction.

- (4) *✗Ez furcsa szerkezet.*
 this strange construction
 ‘This is a strange construction.’
- (5) *✗Ez a furcsa szerkezet.*
 this ART.DEF strange construction
 ‘This is the strange construction.’
- (6) *✗Ez egy furcsa szerkezet.*
 this ART.INDF/one strange construction
 ‘This is a/one strange construction.’
- (7) *✗Ez furcsa egy szerkezet.*
 this strange EMPH construction
 ‘This is a really strange construction.’

As examples (4) and (6) show, there is no significant difference between the meaning of a construction without an article and one with an indefinite article. However, the two constructions with *egy* ((6)–(7)) considerably differ from each other. As a consequence, it is reasonable to consider that the words *egy* in the two instances are distinct homophones synchronically (belonging to the same etymon, as well as the numeral ‘one’). However, it seems that the emphatic clitic cannot be used with articles, it is not completely detached from the indefinite article ((8)–(9)).

- (8) **Ez a furcsa egy szerkezet.*
 this ART.DEF strange EMPH construction
 ‘This is the really strange construction.’

²In Hungarian, nouns modified with a numeral are (almost) always in singular, so the form of the noun does not change.

³Although the same sequence of words can be grammatical, meaning ‘the construction is strange’.



- (9) ??Ez egy furcsa egy szerkezet.
 this ART.INDF strange EMPH construction
 ‘This is a really strange construction.’

The “A egy N” construction is not thoroughly analyzed in the literature. Traditional academic and university grammars solely mention the phenomenon that the indefinite article can stand between the adjectival modifier and the noun when the adjective is stressed, but they do not go further (Imre & Temesi 1962, 280; Velcsov 1968, 74; Rácz 1968, 341, 343). Another reason proposed in the literature for the emergence of *egy* in this position is simply emotional emphasis (Kugler 2000, 287). However, Deme (1962, 473) ignores even the possibility of this word order. The prescriptive literature does not show much interest in the phenomenon: Elekfi & Grétsy (1980, 463) remark that the indefinite article is completely unstressed when it stands between the modifier and the noun, but otherwise, they ignore the construction. According to Jakab (1998, 144), putting the indefinite article between the modifier and the modified for emphasis is “magyaros”, that is, typical Hungarian. Jakab (2000, 48–49) states that the construction can be applied even when the use of the indefinite article is incorrect. According to him, while (10) is correct, (11) is not. In fact, sentences like (11) are widely used in Hungarian, but stigmatised and labeled as “Germanisms” by prescriptive linguists.⁴

- (10) Bonyolult egy kérdés ez.
 complicated EMPH question this
 ‘This is a really complicated question.’
- (11) Ez egy bonyolult kérdés.
 this ART.INDF complicated question
 ‘This is a complicated question.’

In early generative approaches to Hungarian, such as Szabolcsi & Laczkó (1992), Kenesei, Vago & Fenyvesi (1998), or É. Kiss (2002) we could not find instances of the “A egy N” construction. However, more recent comprehensive generative studies on Hungarian do register it: Dékány (2011) gives an instance of the construction under discussion, but she does not provide an analysis treating it as “a special construction that does not represent garden variety DPs in Hungarian” (p. 34). The newest comprehensive grammar of Hungarian, Farkas & Alberti (2018) also gives an instance of the “A egy N” construction, stating that it “is only allowed in order to trigger some emphatic or funny effect” (p. 126). The same volume contains Szabó’s analysis of the use of the “A egy N” construction in exclamatives (Szabó 2018, 186–187). Both Dékány (2011) and Szabó (2018) refer back to den Dikken & Lipták (1997) as an already existing analysis of the structure. Den Dikken & Lipták (1997) provide a generative approach based on cross-linguistic data mainly from Germanic languages, analyzing the “A egy N” construction as a nominal-internal predication. While their approach

⁴One of our reviewers raises the question of whether the emergence of the emphatic *egy* construction is related to the spreading of the use of the indefinite article in constructions like (11), that is, in nominal predication. However, except for the fact that both phenomena show the expansion of the functions of the indefinite article, no connections between the two processes are observable.



is theoretical in nature, deriving comparative data, our investigation is rather descriptive, as atheoretical as possible, and restricted to Hungarian. We focus on the attested uses of the construction, relying on corpus data, and treating linguistic phenomena as gradual if possible, not as binary (Boolean).

The overall aim of the present study is the detailed and precise description of the “A *egy* N” construction from morphological, syntactic, and semantico-pragmatic aspects, based on linguistic data extracted from the Hungarian Gigaword Corpus (Oravecz, Váradi & Sass 2014). Such a data-based description can contribute to the clarification of misleading overgeneralizations/explanations on the construction under discussion, and to a better understanding of how the levels of morphology, syntax, and pragmatics interact in constructions.

In Section 2, a methodological description is sketched. In Section 3, constructions having similar structures (that is, non-emphatic “A *egy* N”) are presented, and it is explored how they can be distinguished from the construction with emphatic *egy*. In Section 4, the lexical inventory of words used in the given construction, and the purposes of their use are examined. In Section 5, the morphosyntactic features of the construction are overviewed, specifically what kind of morphemes can occur inside it and where, how complex its structure can be, and where it can occur inside a sentence. In Section 6, similar constructions in which we find a noun instead of an adjective are addressed. In Section 7, the important findings are summarised.

2. METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

This study was conducted in a corpus-driven manner (Tognini-Bonelli 2001, Chapter 5), that is, we investigated available corpus data without any preconception or preliminary hypothesis. To have an overall picture of the “A *egy* N” construction, we made a significant effort to select all available data from a de facto standard, balanced Hungarian corpus: the Hungarian Gigaword Corpus (Oravecz, Váradi & Sass 2014), version 2.0.5. We excluded the social media subcorpus, as it often contains multiple copies of the very same texts.

In order to get preferably all real corpus examples for the use of the construction with emphatic *egy*, a corpus search was carried out for word sequences in which an adjective is immediately followed by the word *egy* and a noun in a corpus.

In other words, we formulated a deliberately broad query which covers all examples we need with a good chance at the price that the result may contain many irrelevant hits. This is the usual approach to follow when *all* data for a phenomenon is to be collected, not just some random examples (Sass 2022, principle #2). Clearly, this approach often requires a large amount of manual work to filter out irrelevant hits. Accordingly, the following CQL (Corpus Query Language) query was run:

```
[ msd="MN\ .NOM" ] [ word="egy" ] [ msd="FN.*" ]
```

To make this CQL query more understandable, we break it down into parts. A condition of the form X="Y" surrounded by square brackets represents a word. In the case of the first and third word, we refer to the morphosyntactic description (*msd*) of the word, while we refer simply to the surface form (*word*) in the case of the second one. MN is the code for adjectives, FN is for



nouns. MN\ .NOM means an adjective in nominative case, i.e. without any suffixes and FN.* means a noun with any possible combination of suffixes.⁵

Running the above query resulted in 28,232 raw corpus hits, which we processed partly manually and partly automatically in the following way to obtain the dataset to base our study on.

To reduce the amount of manual work needed, firstly, we investigated the 17,719-element raw frequency list of the constructions without context and divided this list into two groups manually in an intuitive manner based solely on the construction itself: “A” containing possible good examples and “B” containing word sequences having very little chance of being a good example.

Secondly, we queried all hits for constructions for both lists automatically together with context and checked the 5,195-element list coming from group “A” one-by-one and, additionally, a small sample from the much longer list coming from group “B” as well to collect good examples. This is how the final, curated 1158-element dataset came about.

The dataset is made available for investigation and further research at <https://github.com/sassbalint/strange-a-construction>. Basic statistics of the dataset are presented in Section 4.1 after reviewing the formally similar constructions in Section 3 which were excluded from the scope of our study.

Undoubtedly, the linguist’s judgement on the data is always subjective to some extent. Corpus data help researchers to face linguistic facts they did not think of, e.g. constructions which are similar on the surface and can be different semantically or pragmatically (cf. Section 3). Additionally, corpus data can draw attention to marginal cases, which otherwise could be thought impossible by the researchers (see Section 5.1.1). We intend to be cautious with labelling such marginal cases, as they may be results of performance errors, reflections of individual or dialectal features, or typical for certain social groups.

Moreover, the exact interpretation of an expression, even in a wider context, can always be questioned. It is not always straightforward whether a statement is meant ironically or not, whether an assertion is intended to be praise or disapproval. (It is also a real problem in everyday communication, and sometimes ambiguity is intentional.)⁶

3. SIMILAR CONSTRUCTIONS

Apparently, “A egy N” sequences may occur in various constructions, such as a predicate and a subject (12), or by chance, not forming a construction on their own ((13)–(14)).

- (12) *Akkor sikeres egy ország, ha...*
 then succesful ART.INDF country if
 ‘A country is successful if...’

⁵Further information about CQL can be found at <https://www.sketchengine.eu/documentation/corpus-querying>.

⁶One of our reviewers pointed out on some occasions that they do not agree with our judgement on the examples: these cases of disagreement are mentioned below.



- (13) *Mennyi idő szükséges egy döntés*
 how.much time necessary ART.INDF decision
meghozatalához?
 bring;NMLZ;POSS.3SG.ALL
 'How much time is necessary to make a decision?'
- (14) *Ha egy zsidó egy gój által elvesztett tárgyat*
 if ART.INDF Jew ART.INDF goy by lose;PST.PTCP object
talál...
 find;PRS.3SG
 'If a Jew finds an object lost by a goy...'

There are cases when it is very difficult to identify the construction without the knowledge of the wider context and/or the intonation pattern. This is especially true for sentences that can be interpreted in two ways. (1) if the noun is the subject, or (2) if the subject is omitted, and the "A egy N" sequence is a manifestation of the construction described in this study, i.e. a phrase containing emphatic *egy* ((15)–(17)).⁷

- (15) *Veszedelemes egy nő.*
 dangerous ? woman
 1. 'She is a really dangerous woman.'
 2. 'A woman is dangerous.' ~ 'Women are dangerous.'
- (16) *Tudod, milyen veszélyes egy állat?*
 know;PRS.2SG how dangerous ? animal
 1. 'Do you know what a dangerous animal it is?'
 2. 'Do you know how dangerous an animal is?'
- (17) *Ilyen hülye egy anya... mindenre rá lehet venni...*
 such stupid ? mother all;SUBL on be.MOD.3SG take;INF
 1. 'She is really a stupid mother... She can be roped in anything...'
 2. 'A mother is so stupid... She can be roped in anything...'
 (or even: 'Mothers are so stupid. They can be...')

If the sequence did not represent unambiguously the construction we were interested in, we excluded it. Nonetheless, it is possible that in some cases the text sample given by the search engine of the corpus (five words both before and after the "A egy N" sequence) suggested that the sequence represents the construction we are looking for, although it could have been clear from a wider context that in fact, it did not.

In addition to the predicate–subject structure, there are cases in which the "A egy N" sequence forms a noun phrase but a different one. Two main types can be distinguished. In

⁷As such sentences usually have a general reading, it is more adequate to translate them into English with a plural noun, although the nouns are in singular in Hungarian.



one of them, *egy* is the numeral ‘one’ (3.1), in the other one, *egy* is an adjective ‘sole, only’ (3.2). However, the distinction is mostly problematic when we work with written texts: as the emphatic clitic *egy* is never stressed, while numerals and adjectives usually are, the construction under investigation could more easily be identified in spoken texts, but such a study goes beyond the scope of our current work.

In marginal cases, the “A *egy* N” sequence, in all probability, represented the construction we are interested in, yet was ignored. For example, the most frequent sequence was *kedves egy lány* ‘really nice girl’, but it always occurred as a nickname in an internet forum. As nicknames are much more typically noun phrases than complete sentences, and there seems to be no reason to interpret *egy* here as a numeral or adjective, it is most probably the emphatic clitic. Nonetheless, such cases were ignored, as they do not represent the typical use of the construction. Additionally, taking them into consideration would distort the statistical data on the frequency of adjectives in the construction with emphatic *egy*.

3.1. *egy* as a numeral

In constructions in which *egy* is a numeral, it can be replaced by other numerals as *két* ‘two’, *három* ‘three’, *fél* ‘half’, etc. Although the denotation of the construction varies according to the numeral, its function does not change: it expresses measure (cf. Footnote 2). In these constructions, nouns usually express time (*perc* ‘minute’, *óra* ‘hour’, *nap* ‘day’, *hét* ‘week’, *hónap* ‘month’, *év* ‘year’, *évtized* ‘decade’), distance (*centi/kilo)méter* ‘(centi/kilo)meter’), volume (*deci* ‘decilitre’, *liter* ‘litre’), currency (*korona* ‘crown’, *dollár* ‘dollar’, *schilling* ‘schilling’) or sporadically some other words which can be used as units (*megapixel* ‘megapixel’, *mondat* ‘sentence’, *gombóc* ‘scoop (of ice cream)’, *pont* ‘score, point (e.g. in games)’).

Such constructions can be divided into two subgroups depending on whether the numeral and the adjective can be reordered without a considerable change in meaning or not. The difference is less salient with sequences containing *egy* ‘one’, and much clearer with phrases containing some other numerals. In examples (18)–(20), the time of two months or three hours is said to be short or long, and the amount of hundred forints is said to be symbolic.

- (18) *rövid két hónap*
short two month
‘short two months’
- (19) *hosszú három óra*
long three hour
‘long three hours’
- (20) *szimbolikus száz forint*
symbolic hundred forint
‘symbolic one hundred forints’

Placing the adjective before the numeral would be understood to mean that the months, the hours, and the forints are short, long, and symbolic distributively, i.e. the adjective refers to each unit individually. It is especially strange with adjectives meaning smallness or negligibility



combined with a relatively high number. Example (21) is semantically odd, because even if the individual months are felt short, it does not count when there are so many of them. Speaking about a currency as in (22), the construction may be used when the currency was withdrawn from circulation or completely depreciates due to hyperinflation (in progress).

- (21) ?száz rövid hónap
hundred short month
'one hundred short months'
- (22) ♪egymilliárd szimbolikus forint
one.billion symbolic forint
'one billion symbolic forints'

Some adjectives are special in similar constructions. The adjective *jó* 'good' means rather 'about, at least', or even 'a bit more' when it is put before the numeral ((23)–(24)).

- (23) ♪Jó egy percet töltöttem ott.
good one minute spend;PST.1SG there
'I spent there at least one minute.'
- (24) ♪Egy jó percet töltöttem ott.
one good minute spend;PST.1SG there
'I spent there one good minute.'

Similarly to *jó*, *bő* 'loose-fitting, abundant' can be used meaning 'a bit more' and *szűk* 'fitting, narrow' as 'a bit less'. Their interpretation does not vary with the word order, but they sound odd when preceded by any other numeral than *egy* ((25)–(26)).

- (25) ?Két bő órát töltöttem ott.
two abundant hour;ACC spend;PST.1SG there
'I spent there more than two hours.'
- (26) ?Három szűk perc alatt kész lett.
three tight minute in ready become.PST.3SG
'It was ready in not more than three minutes.'

The situation is similar with relational adjectives, but in these cases, the difference is quite salient in sequences with *egy* as well. Constructions like (27) are used when one girl is expected from each city, and we are talking about the one from Budapest; more generally speaking: when the given number of things, people, etc. have already been introduced into the discussion. This type of construction with *egy* is semantically quite close to the one discussed in Section 3.2, but *egy* can be replaced by other numerals. On the contrary, constructions like (28) denote a given amount of girls who are from Budapest.



- (27) *♣budapesti egy lány*
 Budapest;ADJZ one girl
 ‘one girl from Budapest’
- (28) *♣egy budapesti lány*
 one Budapest;ADJZ girl
 ‘one girl from Budapest’

However, the change in the word order does not cause radical semantic difference when the adjective denotes quality (e.g. (29)–(30)), although the “A Num N” construction suggests that A characterises the Ns as a whole while the “Num A N” construction suggests that A characterises each N individually. In any case, these problems are out of the scope of our study.

- (29) *♣izgalmas két hét*
 exciting two week
 ‘exciting two weeks’
- (30) *♣szerencsétlen három kutya*
 unfortunate three dog
 ‘unfortunate three dogs’

These kinds of constructions with *egy* are typical only with words presented at the beginning of this section. These words usually occur as arguments ((31)–(32)), but rarely also as classifiers (33).

- (31) A *pályaudvaron kemény egy schillinget*
 ART.DEF railway.station;ADE hard one schilling
költöttem vécére.
 spend;PST.1SG toilet;SUB
 ‘I spent one precious schilling on the toilet at the railway station.’
- (32) *Csak ezzel a szerencsétlen egy témával*
 only this;INS ADJ.DEF wretched one subject
foglalkozik
 deal.with;PRS.3SG
 lt. ‘S/he is engaged only in this one wretched subject.’⁸
- (33) Az *ajtó is tetszett neki: szép egy darab*
 ART.DEF door also be.liked;PST.3SG 3SG.DAT beautiful one piece
keményfa.
 hardwood
 ‘S/he also liked the door: (it was) a beautiful single piece of hardwood.’

⁸In this case, the emphatic reading (‘S/he is engaged only in this really wretched subject.’) cannot be excluded. The interpretation depends on prosody: *egy* as a numeral is stressed, while the emphatic clitic is not.



These kinds of structures are possible when the adjective can also be interpreted collectively for the given quantity of entities as a unit. In the opposite case, the “A NUM N” sequence cannot be interpreted as one construction ((34)–(36)).

- (34) **apró ezer tárgy*
 tiny thousand thing
 ‘thousand tiny things’
- (35) **általános három iskola*
 general three school
 ‘three elementary schools’
- (36) **háztartási nyolc keksz*
 household;ADJZ eight biscuit
 ‘eight pieces/kinds of budget biscuits’

3.2. egy as an adjective

As it was mentioned above (3.1, 11), the “A egy N” in which *egy* is an adjective is very close to some examples in which *egy* is a numeral. Examples (31)–(33) can be interpreted as sentences in which *egy* is synonymous with the adjectives *egyedüli*, *egyetlen* ‘sole, single, only’. In such sentences, *egy* can be replaced with other numerals. However, there are certain cases when this is impossible or highly atypical ((37)–(40)).

- (37) *Jó, hogy jössz, édes egy komám.*
 good that come;PRS.2SG sweet one mate-POSS.1SG
 ‘It is good that you come, my dear only mate.’
- (38) *Kossuth Ferenc a nagy Kossuth Lajos édes egy fia.*
 Kossuth Ferenc ART.DEF great Kossuth Lajos sweet one
 SON;POSS.3SG
 ‘Ferenc Kossuth is the beloved sole son of the great Lajos Kossuth.’
- (39) *Megvédelmezem édes egy hazánkat.*
 defend;PRS.1SG sweet one homeland;POSS.1PL.ACC
 ‘I (will) defend our beloved homeland.’
- (40) *A termékekkel semmi baj nincs az égadta egy világon.*
 ART.DEF product;PL.INS nothing trouble NEG.be.PRS.3SG ART.DEF
 heaven.given one world.SUP
 ‘There is no problem with the products at all.’



It is noteworthy, that in similar structures with *egyetlen* the order of the two adjectives is reversible ((41)–(42)), although the two strings are semantically different: when *egyetlen* is in the first place, the construction does not mean anymore that there is only one entity (e.g. mate), which is additionally of the given quality (e.g. dear), but that there is only one entity of the given quality (and there can be entities without the quality, e.g. mates who are not dear). Nonetheless, the adjective *egy* ‘sole, single, only’ can only be used when it is preceded by another adjective, that is, a noun modified by the adjective *egy* always has to be modified by another adjective as well.

(41) *édes egyetlen komám*
 sweet sole mate;POSS.1SG
 ‘my dear only mate’

(42) *†egyetlen édes komám*
 sole sweet mate;POSS.1SG
 ‘my only dear mate’

The phrase *égsadta egy világon* (40) is idiomatic, its idiomaticity certainly played a role in the development of its variant *égsyadta világon*, morph-by-morph ‘heaven-one-given world-SUP’. The morphological structure of the latter seems to be unique in Hungarian, although, according to Google search, this latter variant is about twice as frequent as its original.

4. LEXICON, SEMANTICS, PRAGMATICS

The set of adjectives that can and actually do occur in the construction under discussion is strictly determined by the semantics and pragmatics of the construction. As the construction denotes a subjective derogatory (or, less frequently, appreciative) value judgement based on the high degree of a quality, the adjective must express a gradual quality. In Section 4.1, the words that can be and actually are present as an adjective in the construction are discussed. In Section 4.2, the ways of interpreting the construction are presented.

4.1. Authorised entry only

As for the “A egy N” construction with the emphatic clitic, the set of adjectives occurring in it is restricted. This fact is strongly related to the semantics and the pragmatics of the construction. As the construction expresses a high degree of the quality expressed by the adjective, the adjective has to indicate a gradual quality. The construction also expresses subjective value judgement and strong personal commitment to it, thus, one can expect that it can hardly be combined with *talán* ‘perhaps, maybe’. According to our interpretation, in examples like (43), *talán* does not express the uncertainty of the speaker but the opposite: it is irony over the possibility that someone can question the importance of the new data.



- (43) *Talán nem érdektelen egy adalék az irodalmi utóknak.*
 perhaps NEG uninteresting EMPH complementing.data ART.DET
 literature;ADJZ posterity;DAT
 'It might be a really interesting additional piece of information for the posterity interested in literature.'

The use of the "A egy N" construction expresses the speaker's attitude: his or her surprise, outrage, anger, or delight towards the degree of the quality denoted by the adjective.

We could collect 1,158 realisations of the construction in our gigaword corpus, which suggests that it is relatively rare. In these examples, 394 different adjectives are used. The most frequent one of these, *furcsa* appeared 120 times, which is more than 10% of the cases. Thirteen adjectives occurred in more than 1% of the cases (Table 1): one of these thirteen adjectives occurs in 37% of all the attested cases.

Additionally, most of the thirteen adjectives belong to one of three groups of synonyms. In almost 17% of the cases, the adjective means 'strange, odd' (*furcsa, fura, különös*). Moreover, *érdekes* 'interesting' can also be interpreted many times as 'unusual, odd' and some of the adjectives less frequently occurring in the construction also have a similar meaning: *sajátos* 'peculiar' (3), *szokatlan* 'unusual, uncommon' (2), *különleges* 'special' (2), etc. Even some other adjectives with a different primary meaning are used in this meaning. E.g. in (44), *ritka* 'rare, infrequent', generally occurring in the same meaning in the constructions with emphatic *egy* as well, can be understood only as 'strange, unusual'.

Table 1. The most frequent adjectives in the emphatic "A egy N" construction

Adjective	Meaning	Tokens	Proportion (%)
<i>furcsa</i>	strange, odd	120	10.3
<i>érdekes</i>	interesting	61	5.2
<i>fura</i>	strange, odd	46	3.9
<i>különös</i>	strange, odd	32	2.7
<i>hülye</i>	stupid, idiotic	30	2.5
<i>ronda</i>	ugly	26	2.2
<i>szép</i>	beautiful	19	1.6
<i>csodálatos</i>	wonderful	15	1.2
<i>gyönyörű</i>	beautiful, magnificent	14	1.2
<i>szörnyű</i>	horrible, terrible	13	1.1
<i>fantasztikus</i>	fantastic	13	1.1
<i>randa</i>	ugly	12	1.0
<i>csúnya</i>	ugly	12	1.0



- (44) *Kozmánénak hívták, ritka egy alak volt.*
 Kozmáné.DAT call.PST.3PL rare EMPH figure be.PST.3SG
 'She was called Mrs. Kozma, she was a really strange character.'

Another important semantic group contains adjectives meaning 'ugly', most frequently *ronda*, *randa*, *csúnya*, but also *ocsmány* (9), *rusnya* (4), *csúf* (2), etc., all meaning 'ugly' (although in some cases used rather as a negative moral than an aesthetic judgement). An additional considerable meaning is the opposite, 'beautiful', represented by *szép* and *gyönyörű* among the most frequent ones, and in some of the cases *csodálatos* 'wonderful' is also used as an aesthetic judgement.

However, all this does not mean that only a narrow set of adjectives can occur in the construction with emphatic *egy*. 229 adjectives occur just once in our material, and it is sure that there are many other adjectives which could easily have occurred and are only missing by chance. It is also clear that many frequent adjectives cannot occur in such a construction, and if they do occur, the construction must have a very specific reading. For example, adjectives denoting colours, nationality or ethnicity are quite frequent in the corpus, but in our material, they never occur as an adjective in the construction under discussion. However, this fact does not mean that it is impossible to use them in such cases as in the following constructed examples. (45) could be used when someone was specifically asked to buy a red apple, and s/he bought a green one.⁹ (46) could be used when someone was stated to have a French girlfriend, and it turns out that the girlfriend is not French at all. (Examples like (47) are exceptional because the name of the ethnic group denotes something else, e.g. a way of lifestyle.)

- (45) *♣Piros egy almát vettél!*
 red EMPH apple;ACC buy;PST.2SG.DO
 'You bought a red apple indeed!'
- (46) *♣Tényleg francia egy barátnője van!*
 really French EMPH girlfriend;POSS.3SG be.PRS.3SG
 'S/he really has a French girlfriend!'
- (47) *♣Elég cigány egy élet ez.*
 fairly gipsy EMPH life this
 'It is a fairly carefree/nomadic/chaotic life.'

As colour and origin are not gradual qualities,¹⁰ these constructions can be interpreted ironically: the construction suggests a high degree of a quality which is not gradual at all. Such

⁹One of our reviewers remarks that according to them, the construction can also be used when the speaker was surprised by the intensity of its redness. We consider that this use would be very atypical.

¹⁰In fact, one could argue that colour is a gradual quality, as a shade can be closer to typical red or can tend to yellow, purple or pink; or an object can be totally red or just dominantly red, but being some other colour on a bigger or smaller surface. Similarly, one can completely belong to one ethnicity, i.e. can have both parents, all the grandparents, etc. belonging to the given ethnicity, speaking the ethnic language, etc. or one can simply have a certain nationality for some reason, but s/he never occurred in the country, does not speak the language, etc. However, the linguistic units denoting these phenomena do not behave as gradual. E.g. *nagyon piros* can mean 'bright red', 'saliently red' or 'ablush', but not 'red on most of its surface'; *nagyon francia* can mean that 'typical French' or 'overacting being French' but not '100% French', etc. Similarly, comparative *franciább* and superlative *legfranciább* mean 'more/most typical for a French'.



examples are really rare in our material. (48) is a noteworthy exception, the peculiarity of which is difficult to reflect in the English translation. The emphatic clitic co-occurs with *kálvinista* ‘Calvinist’, which is a non-gradual quality. Moreover, without a comma between *ősi* and *kálvinista*, *ősi* in the phrase must be understood as a subsecutive adjective (similarly to as it is defined in (Partee 1995, 324), however, here it is a subsecutive adjective related to another adjective, not to a noun), that is, the family is not simply ‘ancient and Calvinist’, but ‘Calvinist for a long time’.

- (48) *Ősi kálvinista egy család sarja.*
 ancient Calvinist EMPH family descendant;POSS.SG3
 ‘She is a descendant of a really ancient Calvinist family.’

The sentence comes from István Szilágyi’s novel, *Kő hull apadó kútba* [Stone falling into receding well], and the context unambiguously shows that the sentence is somewhat intentionally ill-formed.

És bátya azt se felejtse el, hogy én egy ősi kálvinista család sarja vagyok. Ugye milyen jól hangzik. Hát csodállatos. Egy ősi kálvinista család sarja. Egy sarja ősi kálvinista család. Egy család ősi kálvinista sarja. Egy kálvinista ősi család sarja. Sarja egy ősi kálvinista család. Kálvinista sarja ősi egy család.

Te gyermek, megint ég a szemed.

Ősi kálvinista egy család sarja.

Ilka. Csillapodj, Ilka.

Család kálvinista ősi egy sarja.

And, uncle, do not forget either that I am a descendent of an ancient Calvinist family. It sounds good, doesn’t it? Really wonderful. The descendent of an ancient Calvinist family. Of an ancient Calvinist family descendent. An ancient Calvinist descendent of a family. The descendent of a Calvinist ancient family. Calvinist descendent of ancient a family.

You, my child, your eyes are daggering again.

A descendant of a really ancient Calvinist family.

Ilka, relax, Ilka.

A descendant of family Calvinist ancient.

The permutation in the word order is quite mechanical, and sometimes it results in ungrammatical or semantically strange sentences. In all probability, the sentence with the word order especially interesting for us is not standing in a featured position by chance. It emphasises the ancient Calvinism of the family, although the untypical use of the construction reflects the sarcasm of the character about her own pride in her origin.

Some non-gradual adjectives, e.g. nonsubsecutive ones (Partee 1995, 325), could hardly occur in the construction. Occasionally, examples (49)–(51) can be used even sarcastically, i.e. when the poet is alive, the director still fills his/her position and the reason is genuine (contrary to someone’s statements).

- (49) **Néhai egy költő!*
 late EMPH poet
 ‘S/he is a really dead poet!’



- (50) *Ő *aztán egykori egy igazgató!*
 s/he then one-time EMPH director
 'S/he is really a former director!'
- (51) *Ez *tényleg állítólagos egy ok!*
 this really ostensible EMPH reason
 'This is a really ostensible reason in fact!'

As the adjective is always emphasised in a way, it is no wonder that in some cases more expressive adjectives are more frequent than their basic synonyms. E.g. the most general adjective *rossz* 'bad' occurs only once, while the synonymous *szörnyű* 'horrible', *rémés* 'awful, terrible', *cudar* 'grim, foul', *pocsék* 'shoddy, atrocious', *szánalmas* 'pitiable; pathetic', *keserves* 'painful, troublesome', *ócska* 'rubbishy, paltry, shabby, dilapidated', *gyalázatos* 'shameful, disgraceful, atrocious', *vacak* 'shoddy, cheap', *rettenetes* 'terrible, horrible' all occur at least four times. The adjective *ronda* 'ugly, repulsive' is more frequent than *csúnya* 'ugly, unsightly', *hatalmas* 'huge, gigantic' than *nagy* 'big, large', *mocskos* 'scrotty' than *koszos* 'dirty', etc. However, it is not always the case, e.g. the moderate *szép* 'beautiful' is a bit more frequent than the more suggestive equivalent *gyönyörű*. However, as more than 95% of the adjectives occur less than 10 times in the corpus, it is quite difficult to prove statistically that more expressive adjectives are preferred. Even in this case, we should compare their frequency in the construction with emphatic *egy* to their frequency in the whole corpus. Additionally, in many cases the semantic network is complicated, e.g. *nehéz* 'heavy, hard, difficult' can be a synonym of *súlyos* 'heavy, weighty, serious', *bonyolult* 'complicated, difficult, tricky', *kemény* 'hard, tough', etc. in different cases.

4.2. Deprecation and approbation

The construction tends to denote a negative value judgement in general. This tendency is reflected by the fact that adjectives occurring in the construction denote a negative attribute by default. According to our calculations made on our material,¹¹ about 40–45% of the adjectives used in the construction denote negative ethic or aesthetic qualities, stupidity, unluckiness, discomfort, or misery. On the contrary, only 20–27% can be considered as positive. All the other adjectives are neutral in the sense that either they do not reflect any positive or negative value, or they reflect some value (negative, positive, or both) only under given circumstances.

As language users usually come across the construction in a deprecating context, it is expected that they tend to interpret (and use) it as a negative judgement even when the adjective itself does not denote negative characteristics. The pragmatic interpretations of the positive and negative adjectives are different. Although the constructions with positive adjectives can be interpreted as praise and tribute, often they express sarcasm or irony. In cases like (52), only the intonation pattern would show whether the utterance expresses recognition or mockery.

¹¹Two of the authors, independently of each other, marked all the adjectives as positive or negative. The adjectives were presented in isolation. The difference in the number is due to the fact that one of the evaluators tended to ascribe evaluative value (both positive and negative) to more adjectives than the other.



- (52) *✓Okos egy férje van.*
 smart EMPH husband;POSS.SG3 be.PRS.3SG
 ‘S/he has a really smart husband’

However, the opposite is not true: a construction with a negative adjective can never be interpreted as an approbation (53).¹²

- (53) *✓Hülye egy férje van.*
 stupid EMPH husband;POSS.SG3 be.PRS.3SG
 ‘S/he has a really stupid husband’

This irreversibility of the judgement by sarcasm is a specificity of the given construction and not of negative adjectives. In other cases, negative adjectives can express appreciation in sarcastic use: (54), with a special intonation pattern, indeed, can be used against someone criticising Chomsky, indicating that Chomsky is smart, just the critic cannot admit it.

- (54) *✓Mert Chomsky hülye.*
 because Chomsky stupid
 ‘Because Chomsky is stupid.’

5. MORPHOSYNTAX

This section presents the morphosyntactic characteristics of the construction. The morphological peculiarities are treated in Section 5.1, while the syntactic behavior is discussed in 5.2.

5.1. Morphology

The morphological features of the noun and the adjective in the construction are analyzed separately, in Section 5.1.1 and 5.1.2, respectively.

5.1.1. The morphology of the noun. In general, a Hungarian noun can take a plural marker, a possessive suffix, an anaphoric possessive suffix and a case suffix. The use of the case and possessive suffixes are not restricted, they are used as it is expected in the “A *egy* N” environment ((55)–(59)). However, both categories of suffixes are relatively rare in constructions with emphatic *egy*. Their combination is extremely rare, although completely grammatical instances can be constructed (60).

- (55) *Szép egy ordast lőttél.*
 beautiful EMPH wolf;ACC shoot;PST.2SG
 ‘You shot a really beautiful wolf.’

¹²One of our reviewers remarks that according to them, (53) could be used ironically when someone has a very smart husband, and the speaker and the hearer both know this. In any case, we did not come across such an example in our corpus, and according to us, such kind of use of the construction would be very strange.



- (56) *Csúnya egy disznóságnak tűnik nekem ez az*
 ugly EMPH shame;DAT seem;PRS.3SG 1SG.DAT this ART.DEF
egész.
 whole
 ‘That all seems like an ugly dirty trick for me.’
- (57) *Elég büdös egy csizmáról van szó.*
 fairly stinky EMPH boot;DEL be.PRS.3SG word
 ‘It is about a quite stinky boot.’
- (58) *Szörnyű egy éjszakám volt.*
 terrible EMPH night;POSS.1SG be.PRT.3SG
 ‘I had a really terrible night.’
- (59) *Keserves egy napunk volt.*
 troublesome EMPH day;POSS.1PL be.PRT.3SG
 ‘We had a really troublesome day.’
- (60) **Keserves egy napunkról kell beszámolnom.*
 troublesome EMPH day;POSS.1PL;DEL have.to.PRS.3SG report;INF;1SG
 ‘I have to report about a really troublesome day of ours.’

Similarly, there are no examples for the use of the anaphoric possessive suffix *-é* in the “A egy N” environment. As for the authors’ intuition, it can be used indeed as the nominal part of the predicate (61), but it cannot be combined with a case suffix (62).

- (61) **Hülye egy tanáré lehet ez a példa.*
 stupid EMPH teacher;ANP be.MOD.PRS.3SG this ART.DEF example
 ‘This example must be a really stupid teacher’s (one).’
- (62) **Hülye egy tanárét hallottam.*
 stupid EMPH teacher;ANP hear;PST.1SG
 ‘I heard a really stupid teacher’s (one).’ or
 ‘I heard a teacher’s really stupid one.’

The question of the use of the plural marker in the “A egy N” construction is more complex. Although [den Dikken & Lipták \(1997, 63, 68, 70–72\)](#) discuss constructions in which the noun is plural, e.g. (63), according to the authors’ native intuition, these constructions are ungrammatical or at least extremely odd.

- (63) *¿Véres egy napokat élünk.*
 bloody EMPH day;PL.ACC live;PRS.1PL
 ‘We live really bloody days.’



In our corpus material, we can find only a handful of examples with plural nouns ((64)–(70)). Their low number may suggest that they are just slips of the pen. Additionally, some of them are odd for other reasons. In (64), the noun is written with a capital letter, which may suggest that it is a proper name (e.g. of a theatrical company or a band).¹³ In (68) *netovább* ‘ne plus ultra’ should be agreed in number with *építmény* ‘building’, but it is singular. In (70), *egy* may also be interpreted as a numeral, in that case, the sentence means that such dramatic sole hits occurred elsewhere as well.

- (64) *ıSzép egy Bogarak vagytok.*
 beautiful EMPH bug;PL be.PRS.2PL
 ‘You are really beautiful bugs.’
- (65) *ıÉrdekes egy szülemények ezek.*
 interesting EMPH creature;PL these
 ‘These are really interesting creatures.’
- (66) *ıNyomorult egy emberek ezek.*
 miserable EMPH human;PL these
 ‘These are really miserable people.’
- (67) *ıÜgyes egy népek vagyunk.*
 skilful EMPH people;PL be.PRS.1PL
 ‘We are really skilful peoples.’
- (68) *ıSzörnyű egy építmények, a giccs netovábbja.*
 terrible EMPH building;PL ART.DEF kitsch ne.plus.ultra;POSS.S3
 ‘These are really terrible buildings, the pinnacle of kitsch.’
- (69) *ıFurcsa egy szokások voltak.*
 strange EMPH custom;PL be.PRT.3PL
 ‘They were really strange customs.’
- (70) *ıNem csak nálunk voltak ilyen drámai egy tusok.*
 no only IPL.ADE be.PST.3PL such dramatic EMPH hit;PL
 ‘It was not only at our place where such dramatic hits occurred.’

We have to conclude that even if these examples are grammatical for anyone at all, they are very marginal. In all probability, plural is severely dispreferred in this construction for historical reasons: the emphatic clitic *egy* emerged from the indefinite article ‘a(n)’, which cannot be attached to plural nouns. As *egy* in the emphatic constructions does not denote singleness

¹³Having checked the context of (64), we found *15-16 évesen már Gyereket szüiltök* ‘you give birth to children already at the age of 15–16’, where the word ‘children’ is also capitalised, although it should not be.



anymore, it becomes possible to use it with plural forms, and, maybe, the change in that direction has begun, but has not gone far yet.

Additionally, we have to mention that in some cases it seems that plural is avoided. In the constructed example (71), plural marking is more usual, and in that case, the sentence can be interpreted as ‘we are the specimens of a strange animal race’. However, singular marking is also possible, suggesting a meaning ‘we, as a community, belong to a strange animal race’. In the corpus example (72), singular is selected, and the plural form would sound quite strange in this construction. In the corpus example (73), agreement rules require a singular form of *fajzat* ‘breed’, but if *kettő* ‘two’ is changed to *ketten* ‘two of them’ (74), a plural form must be used: in this case, the use of emphatic *egy* would be strange. In the corpus example (75), a motivation for using a collective noun can be that this way plural agreement is not necessary at all.

- (71) *✗Furcsa állat/állatok vagyunk.*
 strange animal/animal;PL be.PRS.1PL
 ‘We are strange animals.’
- (72) *Furcsa egy állat vagyunk.*
 strange EMPH animal be.PRS.1PL
 ‘We are really strange animals.’
- (73) *Ocsmány egy fajzat mind a kettő.*
 ugly EMPH breed all ART.DEF two
 ‘Both are ugly breeds.’
- (74) *✗Ocsmány (?egy) fajzatok mind a ketten.*
 ugly EMPH breed all ART.DEF two.of.them
 ‘Both are ugly breeds.’
- (75) *Nem vagyunk mi barom egy nemzet?*
 NEG be.PRS.1PL 1PL idiot EMPH nation
 ‘Are not we a really idiot nation?’

5.1.2. The morphology of the adjective. As adjectival modifiers never agree with the noun either in number, case, or possessor in Hungarian, it is no wonder that the adjective in the construction with emphatic *egy* is never suffixed with any of them. Although [den Dikken & Lipták \(1997, 69–71\)](#) claim that the emphatic “A egy N” construction is “an inverted predicate of a small clause”, they find it disturbing (although not unexplainable) that while in predication the predicate adjective (or noun) agrees with the subject in number, in this construction this requirement might be overridden. As it has been argued in Section 5.1.1, constructions with plural nouns are extremely marginal. Even if they occur, most probably they emerge by the analogy of the existing constructions with singular nouns by the substitution of the singular noun with a plural one. In this case, no agreement can be expected.

The most important issue here is the comparability of the adjective. Adjectives in the construction with emphatic *egy* are never comparative or superlative ((76)–(77)).



- (76) **furcsább egy szerkezet*
 strange;COMP EMPH construction
 ‘a really stranger construction’
- (77) **legfurcsább egy szerkezet*
 strange.SUP EMPH construction
 ‘really the strangest construction’

As superlative adjectives denote an extremity of quality and thus they are never gradual, their absence is not surprising in a construction where adjectives are expected to express gradual qualities (cf. 4.1). However, comparative can be gradual at least in the sense that something can be a bit or much more characteristic of something – e.g. (76) could mean something like ‘a very much stranger construction’.

The oddity of sentences like (78) suggests that the “A egy N” construction itself expresses a comparison (to the expectation of the speaker, cf. 4.2); therefore, it cannot express a comparison to something else.

- (78) **Ez furcsa (egy) szerkezet, de az még furcsább*
 this strange EMPH construction but that even strange;COMP
egy szerkezet!
 EMPH construction
 ‘This is (really) a strange construction, but that is even stranger of a construction.’

5.2. Syntax

Here the morphosyntactic characteristics of the construction are presented. In Section 5.2.1, the inner structure of the construction is discussed. The problem how the construction can be integrated into a sentence is treated in Section 5.2.2.

5.2.1. The inner syntax of the construction. The adjective in the construction can be modified by an adverb. This is not a rare case, there were about 200 such cases attested in the corpus material. The most frequent modifier is *elég* ‘fairly, enough’ (45 examples, plus 4 examples of *eléggé* ‘id.’) and *nagyon* ‘very’ (30), but adverbial pronouns as *milyen* ‘what (kind of), what a(n)’ (21), *amilyen* ‘such as’ (5), *ilyen* ‘like this, such, so’ (5), *olyan* ‘like that, such, so’ (6), *mily* ‘(arch.) what (kind of), what a(n)’ (1), *bármilyen* ‘any (kind of), whatever’ (1), etc. are also popular.¹⁴ Additionally, *igen* ‘very’ (11) and *micsoda* ‘what a(n)’ (16), *igazán* ‘really’ (5), *ritka* ‘extremely, unusually’ (5) also occur often ((79)–(85)).

¹⁴These pronouns are used as adjectival ones in many cases. Therefore, one could suggest that such constructions should be analysed as containing multiple adjectives. Nonetheless, standing before adjectives, these adverbs are interpreted as denoting the degree of the quality expressed by the adjective, that is, they have an interpretation similar to those of adverbs.



- (79) *Elég ramaty egy honlapja van.*
fairly shoddy EMPH home.page;POSS.3SG be.PRS.3SG
'His/her home page is shoddy enough.'
- (80) *Palics valamikor nagyon pletykás egy hely volt.*
Palić some.time very gossip EMPH place be.PST.3SG
'Palić used to be a really very gossipy place.'
- (81) *Milyen ocsmány egy rendszer!*
what.a repulsive EMPH system
'What a repulsive system!'
- (82) *Amilyen gusztustalan egy állat, még le is pisilt.*
such.as disgusting EMPH animal even down also pee;PST.3SG
'Being such a disgusting brute, s/he even peed on me.'
- (83) *Miért is olyan eszement egy ország ez?*
why also so insane EMPH country this
'Why is this country so insane?'
- (84) *Hát micsoda érzéketlen egy pasit fogtam ki?!*
well what emotionless EMPH guy;ACC grab.PST.1SG VM
'Well, what an emotionless/insensitive guy I got!'
- (85) *Ritka gusztustalan egy alak vagy.*
unusually disgusting EMPH chap be.PRS.2SG
'You are an unusually disgusting character.'

Additionally, some other, mostly intensifying adverbs are also attested in the same position: *átkozottul* 'damned(ly)', *bitangul* 'damn, bloody', *egészen* 'entirely, totally', *eszméletlen* 'mind-blowingly', *igazán* 'really', *iszonyú(an)* 'terribly, awfully', *kegyetlenül* 'terribly', *kibaszottul* 'fucking', *kurva* 'damned, fucking', *marhára* 'fecking', *meglehetősen* 'fairly, considerably', *őrült* 'madly, extremely', *rettenet* 'terribly, awfully', *rohad(t)ul* 'damn, bloody', *roppant* 'enormously', *teljesen* 'completely, entirely', *tök* 'totally, completely', *túl* 'too, overly'. Theoretically, we could expect the use of adverbs which weaken the adjectives. In practice, only one contradictory case was attested: in (86), *tetű* 'louse' is an intensifier used exclusively with *lassú* 'slow', and this is moderated by *enyhén* 'mildly'.¹⁵

¹⁵According to the authors' native intuition, *tetű* and *lassú* form a compound here and should be written without a space between them. However, as none of the available orthographic dictionaries contain this (otherwise widely known) expression, and it is not crucial for the present discussion, the form is analyzed as it was in the corpus. Additionally, it is possible that *enyhén* 'mildly' should be interpreted here as a shortening for *enyhén szólva* 'putting it mildly', that is, not as an adverb modifying *tetűlassú/tetű lassú* but as a particle.



- (86) *Képekkel böngészni enyhén tetűlassú egy dolog.*
 image;PL.INS browse;INF mildly louse.slow EMPH thing
 'Browsing with images is a bit damned slow thing.'

Rarely, the adverb can denote epistemic circumstances (87), point of view (88) or reason (89).

- (87) *A hobbitok köztudottan ínycsiklós egy népség.*
 ART.DEF hobbit;PL well-known.that gourmet EMPH people
 'Hobbits are known as really gourmet people.'

- (88) *Motorikusan kellemes egy autó.*
 motor;ADJZ.ADVZ pleasant EMPH car
 'As far as the engine is concerned, it is a pleasant car.'

- (89) *A történelem attól bonyolult egy struktúra, ...*
 ART.DEF history that.ABL complicated EMPH structure ...
 'History is made such a really complicated structure by ...'

There are cases, in which it is difficult or impossible to determine whether the adverb (or rather a discourse particle) modifies the adjective or the whole phrase ((90)–(92)).

- (90) *Az valóban rémes egy látvány.*
 ART.DEF really horrible EMPH spectacle
 'That is a really horrible spectacle.' or
 'That is really a horrible spectacle.'

- (91) *Kétségtelenül dögös egy bige.*
 undoubtedly kicking EMPH chick
 'She is an undoubtedly kicking chick.' or
 'She is undoubtedly a kicking chick.'

- (92) *A szemezés tényleg furcsa egy dolog.*
 ART.DEF ogling indeed strange EMPH thing
 'Ogling is a really strange thing' or
 'Ogling is a strange thing, indeed.'

Marginally, the adjective can be negated ((93)–(94)). In these cases, the adjective is negated, the negative particle is interpreted similarly to a prefix deriving an antonym.

- (93) *Nem rossz egy csomag az.*
 NEG bad EMPH packet that
 'Really, that packet is not a bad one.'



- (43) *Talán nem érdektelen egy adalék az irodalmi utókornak.*
 perhaps NEG uninteresting EMPH complementing.data ART.DET
 literature;ADJZ posterity;DAT
 'It might be a really interesting additional piece of information for the posterity interested in literature.'
- (94) *Nem igazán fiatalos, nem rugalmas egy autó.*
 NEG really youngish NEG flexible EMPH car
 'It is not really a youngish, not a flexible car.'

Example (94) shows another peculiarity of the construction: there can be two (or even more) adjectives in it. In some cases, it is difficult to determine whether a word is an adjective or an adverb. In example (95), *szuper* can be an adjective ('super, great'), or an intensifying adverb ('very, super-').¹⁶

- (95) *Szuper jó egy oldal!*
 super good EMPH site
 'It is really a super, great / very great site.'

In example (96) it is not clear whether there is only one but coordinated adjective compound or two juxtaposed adjectives.

- (96) *Zsugori-fukar egy ember volt.*
 stingy-mingy EMPH human be.PST.3SG
 'S/he was really a tight-fisted wo/man.'

However, in about fifteen cases, two adjectives are separated by a comma ((97)–(99)). As example (99) shows, the adjectives themselves can be derived even from collocations. The two adjectives are usually synonyms, or at least similarly negative or positive words. When they are not, it is rather questionable whether it is an "A *egy N*" construction (100).

- (97) *Hihetetlen, örült egy futam volt.*
 unbelievable crazy EMPH race be.PST.3SG
 'It was a really unbelievable, crazy race.'
- (98) *Sunyi, lusta egy ember volt.*
 sneaky lazy EMPH human be.PST.3SG
 'S/he was really a sneaky, lazy wo/man.'

¹⁶In fact, if the word is an adjective, the two adjectives should be separated by a comma. However, if it is the intensifier, it should be written in one word with the adjective, and it should be analysed as a prefix-like element instead of being an adverb. There is no clear distinction between adverbs and prefix-like elements: e.g. the adverb *kurva* 'damned, fucking' (as a noun, 'whore') mentioned above is written in one word with the adjectives in one of the examples from the corpus: *kurvaértelmes (válasz)* 'fucking understandable/intelligent (answer)'.



- (99) *Gyönyörű szabású, tetszetős egy kard.*
 beautiful cut;ADJZ good-looking EMPH sword
 'It is a really beautifully-cut, good-looking sword.'
- (100) *Nem szól semmit semmihez, oly közönyös, csodálatos egy lány.*
 NEG say.PRS.3SG nothing;ACC nothing;DAT so stolid
 wonderful EMPH girl
 'She does not comment anything on anything, she is really so stolid, wonderful a girl.'
 or rather: '... she is so stolid, she is a really wonderful a girl.'

In constructions with multiple adjectives, emphatic *egy* tends to occur after the last adjective. In these cases, it is impossible to tell whether the emphasis applies to all the adjectives or just to the last one(s). We could identify only one example in which emphatic *egy* does not occur after the last adjective (101).

- (101) *Amilyen álnok egy kurva természete van...*
 such.as treacherous EMPH damn nature;POSS.3SG be.PRS.3SG
 'Having a such really treacherous damn character she ...'

Such examples are easy to construct if we choose relational adjectives to stand after the emphatic *egy* ((102)–(104)). Relational adjectives are closely connected to the modified noun, resembling compounds. In these cases it is impossible for the emphatic *egy* to stand after the relational adjective, as it cannot be attached to a relational adjective in general (cf. Section 4.1).

- (102) *¶borzalmas egy általános iskola*
 terrible EMPH general school
 'a really terrible elementary school'
- (103) *¶száraz egy háztartási keksz*
 dry EMPH household;ADJZ biscuit
 'a really dry budget biscuit'
- (104) *¶érdekes egy történelmi esemény*
 interesting EMPH historical event
 'a really interesting historical event'

In some cases, the adjectives are separated by a conjunction (105–107). In our corpus, no convincing examples could be found for the alternative coordination with *vagy* 'or'. The only example, presented in (107), is difficult to interpret. On the one hand, the adjectives can qualify the thousand different men who spent a lot of time with a woman-myth; in that case *egy* is the indefinite article modifying the compound *nő-mítosszal* 'with a woman-myth'. On the other



hand, the sequence of alternative properties expressed by the adjectives, with the mysterious phrase *sercegő bábos* ‘with scrapping puppet(s)’¹⁷ among them, qualify the woman-myth. In that latter case, *egy* can be interpreted as an emphatic clitic.¹⁸

- (105) *Elég durva és szomorú egy könyv.*
fairly crude and sad EMPH book
‘It is a really crude and sad book.’
- (106) *Az egy olyan forró, meg olyan szenvedélyes egy nyelv.*
that ART.INDF so hot and so passionate EMPH language
‘That is really such a hot and such a passionate language.’
- (107) a. *Ezer órákat töltött ezer férfi*
thousand hour.PL spend;PST.3SG thousand man
b. *nagyagyú kicsinyes nagyvonalú*
big.brained small-minded generous
c. *sercegő bábos vagy rosszindulatú*
scrape;PRS.PART puppet;ADJZ or malevolent
d. *egy nő-mítoszzal.*
?? woman-myth-INS
‘Thousand men – being clever, small-minded, generous, scraping-puppeted (?), or malevolent – spent thousand hours with a woman-myth.’ or: ‘Thousand men spent thousand hours with a clever, small-minded, generous, scraping-puppeted (?) or malevolent woman-myth.’

Example (108) is also interesting, because the whole phrase is used as a modifier of a noun (*barátnő* ‘girlfriend, female friend’).

- (108) *egy igazi kötött pulcsis, SZTK keretes*
ART.INDF real knit;PST.PART sweater;ADJZ NHS frame;ADJ
szerecséltlen egy hárpia barátnővel együtt
wretched EMPH harpy girlfriend-INS together
‘together with a girlfriend who is a real harpy wearing a knitted sweater and an NHS-financed (i.e. cheap, crippled) (eyeglass) frame’

¹⁷Or ‘scrapping, with a puppet/puppets’, if we suppose them to be two separate attributes of the woman-myth. According to the orthographic rules, they should be separated by a comma in that case, which was omitted in the poem. As the meaning of the whole sentence and the individual words are quite obscure, it is difficult to decode the author’s intention.

¹⁸The example is a complex phrase from a poem entitled *Csinszka-irodalom* ‘Csinszka-literature’ of a contemporary Hungarian poet, Tibor Gyurkovics. *Csinszka* is a nickname referring to Berta Boncza, a Hungarian poet from the beginning of the 20th century, who was the wife of Endre Ady and the love of several other poets and intellectuals of the era.



Example (108) is also strange in that it is preceded by an indefinite article. However, it does not belong to the “A egy N” construction but to *barátnő* ‘girlfriend, female friend’. As it will be shown in 5.2.2, “A egy N” constructions cannot be preceded by an article belonging to them. Nonetheless, there are eight examples in our material in which an indefinite article occurs before the “A egy N” construction. We consider these constructions ill-formed. A strong argument for this decision is that although constructions with adjectives modified by adverbs or with multiple adjectives represent a minority of the cases, in half of the examples with an indefinite article we find either an adverb or multiple adjectives or both ((109)–(111)). However, it is not always the case, cf. (112).

- (109) *∫Ez egy nagyon fura egy helyzet.*
 this ART.INDF very strange EMPH situation
 ‘This is really a very strange situation.’
- (110) *∫Én egy szerencsés, boldog egy ember vagyok.*
 1SG ART.INDF lucky happy EMPH human be.PRS.1SG
 ‘I am a really lucky, happy person.’
- (111) *∫Ez kérem egy roppant egyszerűen bonyolult egy kérdés.*
 this you.know ART.INDF enormously simply complicated EMPH question
 ‘This is an enormously simply complicated question, you know.’
- (112) *∫Milyen egy érdekes egy nép vagyunk.*
 what.kind.of ART.INDF interesting EMPH people be.PRS.1PL
 ‘We are such an interesting people.’

5.2.2. The outer syntax of the construction. In most cases the “A egy N” construction forms a bare predicate with a covert pronoun subject. The schematic structure of (113) is shown in (114) following the common analysis of Hungarian matrix clauses (Kálmán 2001b, 24–35). In Hungarian, copular *van* ‘be’ has to be omitted in 3SG in present tense, but has to be overt in first and second person, in plural, in past or future tenses, and in non-indicative moods (115).

- (113) *Furcsa egy helyzet – vélekedett Bob Barr.*
 strange EMPH situation opine.PST.3SG Bob Barr
 ‘What a strange situation, opined Bob Barr.’
- (114) \mathcal{F} [SUBJECT(*Ez*)] [PREDICATE *furcsa egy helyzet*]
 this strange EMPH situation
 ‘This is a strange situation’
- (115) \mathcal{F} *Furcsa egy helyzet volt.*
 strange EMPH situation be.PST.3SG
 ‘It was a really strange situation.’



In (113) the subject pronoun is deictic, its reference is the present situation of the discourse. However, the subject can also be a referential expression as in (116).¹⁹

- (116) *♣Szóval furcsa egy hely [volt] Japán.*
 well strange EMPH place be.PST.3SG Japan
 ‘Well, Japan is (was) a really strange place.’

In ordinary predication, the resulting declarative denotes a proposition (p) that can be negated ($\neg p$), see (117)–(118). Despite the fact that we found above that syntactically the “A egy N” construction behaves like a predicate, (120) shows that it cannot be negated; note that (122) is not the negated form of (119), but that of (121).

- (117) *♣Budapest szép.*
 Budapest beautiful
 ‘Budapest is beautiful.’
- (118) *♣Budapest nem szép.*
 Budapest NEG beautiful
 ‘Budapest is not beautiful.’
- (119) *♣Japán furcsa egy hely.*
 Japan strange EMPH place
 ‘Japan is a really strange place.’
- (120) **Japán nem furcsa egy hely.*
 Japan NEG strange EMPH place
 ‘Japan is not a really strange place.’
- (121) *♣Japán egy furcsa hely.*
 Japan ART.INDF strange place
 ‘Japan is a strange place.’
- (122) *♣Japán nem egy furcsa hely.*
 Japan NEG ART.INDF strange place
 ‘Japan is not a strange place.’

The ungrammaticality of the negative declarative in (120) can be an argument for the pragmatic marker status of *egy* in “A egy N” construction, which does not only have a semantic contribution, but a pragmatic one. (This would also be in accordance with what we stated above in 5.2.1 about the marginal examples (93)–(94).)

¹⁹Note that in Hungarian the subject can also occur postverbally, as in (116). In (116) the past form of the copula indicates the place of the verb; the original example is in the present tense.



Compared to its function as a predicate, quite rarely, the “A egy N” construction can also be the complement of the verb in the sentence. In (123) the function of the construction under discussion is the sentence subject. (124) is seemingly similar to (123), but (124) is a possessive sentence. In (84) the function of the construction is the sentence object.²⁰ In (125) the function of the “A egy N” construction is a locative complement.

- (123) *Ronda egy idő van.*
 ugly EMPH weather be.PRS.3SG
 ‘We have really ugly weather.’
- (124) *Furcsa egy ízlésed van.*
 strange EMPH taste;POSS.2SG be.PRS.3SG
 ‘You have a really strange taste.’
- (84) *Hát micsoda érzéketlen egy pasit fogtam ki?!*
 well what emotionless EMPH guy;ACC grab.PST.1SG VM
 ‘Well, what an emotionless/insensitive guy I got!’
- (125) *Érdekes egy országban élsz.*
 interesting EMPH country;INE live;PRS.2SG
 ‘You live in a really strange country.’

Although some examples of [den Dikken & Lipták \(1997, 65\)](#) suggest that the “A egy N” construction can occur postverbally if the preverbal focus position is filled by another element, there are no more than three occurrences of “A egy N” in our corpus sample where the construction is not immediately preceding the verb ((126)–(128)), of which only one (in (128)) is a postverbal occurrence. According to our native intuition, these examples are extremely odd.

- (126) *;Dica előbb mellre vette a labdát,
 Dica first breast;SUPESS take;PST;3SG;DO ART.DEF ball;ACC
 majd szép egy fordulással a jobb alsó
 later beautiful EMPH turn;INS ART.DEF right bottom
 sarokba küldte.
 corner;ILL send;PST;3SG;DO
 ‘Firstly, Dica took the ball on his breast, then with a very beautiful turn, he sent it to the right bottom corner.’*
- (127) *;Széles egy világ az enyém lett.*
 wide EMPH world ART.DEF mine become;PST;3SG
 ‘A wide world became mine.’

²⁰The sentence type of (84) is not declarative, but exclamative. Here, we do not want to go into detail about the occurrence of the construction under discussion in different sentence types. Later on, further data is given.



- (128) *Biztos van szegény egy lánynak egy csomó dolga.*
 sure be;PRS;3SG poor EMPH girl;DAT ART.INDEF lot thing;POSS.3SG
 ‘This poor girl has surely a lot of things to do.’

Corpus examples in (123)–(125) illustrate that, in fact, the complement realised by the “A egy N” construction in most cases occurs preverbally. Furthermore, (84) shows clearly that the construction under discussion occupies the immediate preverbal position, that is, the so-called focus position (see *É. Kiss 2002*, 83–104).²¹ The ungrammaticality of (129) reflects that, at least according to our native intuition, the construction cannot occur in the postverbal domain, and (130) presents that the construction under discussion cannot occupy a preverbal position other than the preverbal focus position either (inversion of the VM-V sequence).²²

- (129) **Kifogtam (egy) érzéketlen egy pasit.*
 VM;grab.PST.ISG ART.IND emotionless EMPH guy;ACC
 ‘I got a really insensitive/emotionless guy.’
- (130) **Érzéketlen egy pasit kifogtam.*
 emotionless EMPH guy;ACC VM;grab.PST.ISG
 ‘I got a really insensitive/emotionless guy.’

According to *É. Kiss (2002, 90)*, the function of the preverbal focus position is exhaustive identification. The predicate of the sentence holds only for the entity/entities expressed by the constituent in the preverbal focus position. Despite its similar syntactic position, the “A egy N” construction does not express “exhaustive identification”. In (84), the *érezketlen egy pasit* phrase does not identify the person I got, rather it states that the person I got is emotionless/insensitive. Note also that (84) can only be felicitous in contexts where flirting or having a significant other is already a question under discussion.

If we take a closer look at the syntactic behavior of sentences containing the “A egy N” construction, the question of their sentence type arises. Firstly, let us begin with sentences in which “A egy N” is a predicate, like the one in (116).

- (116) *Szóval furcsa egy hely [volt] Japán.*
 well strange EMPH place be.PST.3SG Japan
 ‘Well, Japan is (was) a really strange place.’

At first sight, (116) seems to be an ordinary declarative sentence. However, the corresponding polar interrogative matrix clause sounds somewhat strange ((131)–(132)); its embedded version is also weird (133). On the contrary, a biased negative polar interrogative with an outside

²¹In Hungarian, in focusless, neutral sentences the VM (verbal modifier) precedes the finite verb. In non-neutral sentences, e.g. when a constituent is focused, the VM occurs postverbally.

²²It is worth mentioning that the Comprehensive Dictionary of Hungarian (*Ittész 2006–2021*) also registers five examples of the “A egy N” under the emphatic uses of *egy*. Interestingly, the earliest example (from 1783) seems to contain a postverbal occurrence of the construction. This sentence sounds weird in current Hungarian. All other examples, from the early nineteenth century, contain preverbal occurrences.



negation reading can be felicitous (134). It can also be the anchor, so the declarative part of a tag question (135). As for *wh*-interrogatives, constructed examples (136)–(138) seem to be possible (at least as echo questions), although our grammaticality judgement is uncertain, as these kinds of structures are so rare that they do not occur at all in our corpus sample.

- (131) ?*Furcsa egy hely Japán?*
 strange EMPH place Japan
 ‘Is Japan a really strange place?’²³
- (132) ??*Furcsa egy hely-e Japán?*
 strange EMPH place-QPRT Japan
 ‘Is Japan a really strange place?’
- (133) **Péter nem tudja, hogy furcsa egy hely-e Japán.*
 Peter NEG know.PRS.3SG that strange EMPH place-QPRT Japan
 ‘Peter does not know whether Japan is a really strange place?’
- (134) ♪*Hát nem furcsa egy hely Japán?*
 well NEG strange EMPH place Japan
 ‘Well, isn’t Japan a really strange place?’
- (135) ♪*Furcsa egy hely Japán, ugye/nem?*
 strange EMPH place Japan UGYE.TAG/NEM.TAG
 ‘Japan is a really strange place, right?’
- (136) ♪*Mi furcsa egy hely?*
 what strange EMPH place
 ‘What is a really strange place?’
- (137) ♪*Milyen egy hely Japán?*
 what.like EMPH place Japan
 ‘What kind of place is Japan?’
- (138) ♪*Furcsa egy MI Japán?*
 strange EMPH what Japan
 ‘Really strange a what is Japan?’

In our corpus sample, we can hardly find sentences that seem to be interrogatives. The only example is (139), taken from the poem *Bárány Boldizsár* (Balthazar, the lamb) by Magda Szabó, where the construction is used as a doubtful repetition of what has recently been said.²⁴

²³Note that the sentence in (131) can be used felicitously in a so-called repeat question (with a multiple rising-falling intonation) in which the speaker echoes the previous utterance to signal his or her surprise or doubts.

²⁴One can argue that this sentence is an instance of declarative questions (see Kiss 2023).



- (139) *Szorgalmas egy menyecske? – duzzog Boldizsár*
 hardworking EMPH maiden sulk.PRS.3SG Boldizsár
 ‘Is she really a hardworking maiden?, sulks Boldizsár.’

All the other cases when the construction with emphatic *egy* and a question mark appear together belong to the following types: (i) tag questions with sentence-initial *ugye* (‘is that so?’) (140), sentence-final *nem* (‘not?’) (141), or *nem igaz* (‘isn’t that right’) (142); (ii) questions with tag-like elements: *mi?* (‘what?’) (143), *hallod-e?* (‘do you hear it?’) (144), or *tudod-e?* (‘do you know it?’) (145); (iii) negative polar interrogatives with outer reading (146); (iv) self-addressed/rhetorical questions (147).

- (140) *Ugye épületes egy ügy?*
 TAG instructive EMPH case
 ‘It is a really instructive case, isn’t it?’
- (141) *Eszement egy ötlet, nem?*
 crazy EMPH idea not
 ‘It is a really crazy idea, isn’t it?’
- (142) *Elég uncsi egy magyarázat, nem igaz?*
 enough boring EMPH explanation not true
 ‘It is a really boring explanation, isn’t it?’
- (143) *Furcsa egy világ ez, mi?*
 strange EMPH world this what
 ‘It is a really strange world, isn’t it?’
- (144) *Nevetséges egy figura vagy néha, hallod -e?*
 ridiculous EMPH guy be;PRS.2SG sometimes hear;PRS.2SG QPRT
 ‘You are sometimes a really ridiculous guy, don’t you think?’
- (145) *Te eszméletlen hülye egy ökör vagy tudod -e?*
 you unconsciously stupid EMPH bullock be;PRS.SG2
 know;PRS.2SG QPRT
 ‘You are extremely stupid bullock, don’t you know?’
- (146) *Nem vagyok én furcsa egy nő?*
 Not be;PRS.1SG strange EMPH woman
 ‘Am I not a really strange woman?’
- (147) *Vajon sértődékeny egy elnök?*
 PRT touchy EMPH president
 ‘I wonder whether he is a really touchy president.’



Secondly, let us examine also marginal cases where the “A egy N” construction is a complement, like the one in (125). In our corpus, there are no interrogatives in which the “A egy N” construction occurs; although we can construct examples ((148)–(152)).

- (148) *?Érdekes egy országban élsz?*
 interesting EMPH country;INE live;PRS.2SG
 ‘Do you live in a really interesting country?’
- (149) *??Érdekes egy országban élsz-e?*
 interesting EMPH country;INE live;PRS.2SG-QPRT
 ‘Do you live in a really interesting country?’
- (150) *#Nem tudom, hogy érdekes egy országban élsz-e.*
 NEG know.PRS.1SG that interesting EMPH country;INE
 live;PRS.2SG-QPRT
 ‘I do not know whether you live in a really interesting country.’
- (151) **Nem élsz érdekes egy országban?*
 NEG live;PRS.2SG interesting EMPH country;INE
 ‘Don’t you live in a really interesting country?’
- (152) **Érdekes egy országban élsz, ugye/nem?*
 interesting EMPH country;INE live;PRS.2SG UGYE.TAG/NEM.TAG
 ‘You live in a really interesting country, right?’

It has already been demonstrated that sentences containing the “A egy N” construction cannot be transformed to a corresponding interrogative; our corpus sample also lacks these types of data. However, we do have some sentences realising non-canonical, biased questions in which “A egy N” constructions can occur. What is common in these types of questions is that their sentence type is not interrogative. Thus, the construction under discussion cannot occur in interrogatives. It has also been demonstrated above that sentences containing the “A egy N” construction cannot be negated (120); and negative sentences hardly ever occur in our corpus sample.

The speaker-related evaluative and emotive nature of utterances containing the “A egy N” construction suggests that their sentence type may be exclamative. In Hungarian, some constructions are similar to *wh*-exclamatives in English. These include *micsoda*-exclamatives (see Section 6 below and [Lipták 2006](#)) and *de*-exclamatives. While *micsoda* ‘what’ may be followed by a noun or an adjective, *de* ‘literally: but’ may be followed by an adjective or an adverb. The “A egy N” construction occurs not only in *wh*-exclamatives, but also in *de*-exclamatives in our corpus sample: we found 18 instances like the ones in (153)–(156).

- (153) *De furcsa egy válság ez, ...*
 DE strange EMPH crisis this
 ‘What a strange crisis this is!’



- (154) *De szörnyű egy eset.*
DE awful EMPH case
'What an awful case!'
- (155) *De cudar egy anyag!*
DE bad EMPH stuff
'What a bad stuff!'
- (156) *Jajde etikus egy vitapartner vagy!*
EXCLAM.PRT ethical EMPH debate;partner be.PRS.2SG
'What an ethical debate partner you are!'

Sentences containing the “A egy N” construction (without *micsoda*, *mekkora*, or *de*) do not show all the characteristics of exclamatives (Lipták 2006, 374). It seems that they can be embedded under non-factive predicates, e.g. *úgy tudom* ‘I have the information that’ ((157)–(158)).

- (157) *Úgy tudom, furcsa egy helyzet volt.*
so know.PRS.1SG strange EMPH situation be.PST.3SG
'As far as I know it was a really strange situation.'
- (158) *Úgy tudom, érzéketlen egy pasit fogott ki.*
so know.PRS.1SG emotionless EMPH guy get.PST.3SG out
'As far as I know she got a really emotionless guy.'

Scalarity, another characteristic feature of exclamatives, characterises sentences containing the “A egy N” construction, as well. This is due to the fact that A in the construction should denote a gradual quality (see 4.1).

6. NOUNS INSTEAD OF ADJECTIVES?

According to den Dikken & Lipták (1997), Hungarian also has a “N/A egy N” construction. Up to this point, we used the terms *noun* and *adjective* as if they denoted well-defined and clearly distinguishable categories. In this section, it is demonstrated that it is not always easy to distinguish the two categories: some words show characteristics of both nouns and adjectives, and each individual word can be transitional in its own way. In any case, it will be argued that “N egy N” constructions do not exist in Hungarian.²⁵

Before looking at the problems with nouns and adjectives, let us consider another problem. In their paper, den Dikken & Lipták (1997, 69–71) argue that the “N/A egy N” construction is “an inverted predicate of a small clause” (den Dikken & Lipták 1997, 69). They support their claim by

²⁵It has to be mentioned that not all linguists being native speakers of Hungarian agree with the reservations of the authors of the current article. E.g. according to Dékány (2011, 34), “Den Dikken & Lipták (1997) convincingly analyze [the discussed construction] as nominal-internal predication”.



demonstrating the different syntactic behavior of two adjectives meaning ‘small’, *kis* and *kicsi*. Both can be used in attributive positions (159), but *kis* cannot occur in predicative positions.

- (159) *egy kicsi/kis kocsi*
 ART.INDF small car
 ‘a small car’
- (160) *Egy kocsi kicsi/*kis.*
 ART.INDF car small
 ‘A car is small.’
- (161) *Kicsi/*kis egy kocsit láttam.*
 small EMPH car;ACC see;PST;1SG
 ‘I saw a really little car.’

This demonstration cannot be accepted as a decisive argument, because *kis* cannot occur either when the noun is not present after it in such sentences as (162). In the same way, one could argue that there is an ellipsis in the “N/A *egy* N” construction. In any case, we do not want to argue either against or in the favour of any of these analyses.

- (162) *Ez egy nagy autó, de az kicsi/*kis.*
 this ART.INDF big car but that small
 ‘This is a big car, but that is a small one’

The test provided by den Dikken & Lipták (1997) is interesting for us because it is worth conducting similar tests for alleged nouns standing before *egy* in the supposed “N *egy* N” construction.

The statement that “N *egy* N” constructions exist is surprising, as most of the nominal predicative phrases cannot be associated to emphatic constructions with *egy*, despite the fact that the predicate classifies or identifies the subject ((163)–(166)).

- (163) *♣A cselló egy hangszer.*
 ART.DEF cello ART.INDF instrument
 ‘Cello is an instrument.’
- (164) **hangszer egy cselló*
 instrument EMPH cello
 ??? ‘what an instrument cello’
- (165) *♣A cselló az a gordonka.*
 ART.DEF cello that ART.DEF violoncello
 ‘Cello is the (same as) violoncello.’
- (166) **gordonka egy cselló*
 instrument EMPH cello
 ??? ‘what a violoncello cello’



Den Dikken & Lipták (1997, 62–63, 65, 68, 70–71) cite only three nouns occurring as the first noun in “N egy N” constructions: *csoda* ‘wonder’, *kutya* ‘dog’ and *fene* ‘hell’.

The case of *csoda* seems to be the most convincing, although even this is problematic. It is used as a noun undoubtedly, but it is also used in a position not so typical for nouns, as an attributive. According to Juhász et al. (1992), in that position it means ‘wonderful, extraordinary’. (Additionally, it is also used as an adverb, meaning ‘extraordinarily, remarkably, very’.) However, in many cases *csoda* is used in a prefix-like way, i.e. as a first constituent of a compound, basically in the very same meaning: *csodacsatár* ‘wonderstriker’, *csodacsapat* ‘wonder-team’, *csodafegyver* ‘wonderweapon’, *csoda(gyógy)szer* ‘wonder drug, magic pill’, *csodamasina* ‘wonder machine, wonder gadget’, etc. In these cases, the constituent rather means ‘extraordinary’ than anything ‘supernatural’. The difference is not striking, especially if we consider that *csoda* as an independent noun is also used in a similar meaning (*a művészet/természet csodái* ‘the wonders (extraordinary products) of art/nature’). However, the difference can be noticed if we compare these compounds with the rarer type of *csodaország* ‘wonderland’ or *csodaszarvas* ‘wonder deer (mythical animal)’, in which *csoda* really means something ‘supernatural’. In the supposed “N egy N” construction, it is also interpreted as extraordinary in some respect, not as anything supernatural ((167)–(169)).

(167) *csoda egy nyelv*
wonder EMPH language
?’a really wonderful language’, rather ‘a really extraordinary language’

(168) *♣Egy/A nyelv (egy/a) csoda.*
ART.IND/DEF language ART.IND/DEF wonder
‘A/The language is a/the wonder.’

(169) *♣egy csoda nyelv*
ART.INDF wonder language
?’a wonderful language’, rather ‘an extraordinary language’

Den Dikken & Lipták (1997, 68) state that **csoda kocs* ‘wonder car’ is agrammatical, which is basically true, but *csodakocsi* is perfect in the same meaning. Actually, it is very difficult to find examples in which *csoda* does not form a compound with the noun it modifies. Juhász et al. (1992) gives the example *Csoda szerencséje volt* ‘s/he had wonderful luck’: *csoda szerencse* ‘wonder(ful?) luck’ is certainly better than *csodaszere*. The behavior of *csoda* needs further investigation, here we can only point out two facts. On the one hand, while the usual second constituents in compounds with *csoda* denote objects or persons, *csoda* and *szerencse* are both abstract notions, which can also be almost synonymous: *Csak a csoda/szerencse segíthet* ‘Only a wonder/luck can help’. On the other hand, the behavior of adjectival modifiers and adjectival first constituents in the “A egy N” construction seems to be very similar. For example, *szuper hős* ‘super (terrific) hero’ can be contrasted to *szuperhős* ‘superhero, a hero with supernatural skills’. However, the constructed example (170) can also be used when we acknowledge that someone is a real superhero (or sarcastically, when someone was called a superhero, but s/he is not a hero at all).



- (170) *♣Ö aztán tényleg szuper egy hős!*
 S/he then really super EMPH hero
 ‘S/he is really what I call a super hero.’ or ‘...superhero.’

This kind of usage is metalinguistic, which can be demonstrated by another constructed example. In Hungarian, *jegesmedve* ‘polar bear’ is a compound consisting of the adjective *jeges* ‘icy, iced’ (derived from the noun *jég* ‘ice’) and the noun *medve* ‘bear’ (although the bear’s environment is usually icy, but the bear itself is not). It can be contrasted to *jeges medve* ‘icy bear’, a bear (even a brown bear, a panda, or a koala) covered by ice. However, a sentence like (171) can be expected when someone sees a photo of an icy polar bear and refers to the fact that this particular polar bear is icy in the literal sense of the word, as its name suggests. Even if the bear on the picture is not a polar bear, it will be interpreted as a reference to the name of the polar bear.

- (171) *♣Ez aztán tényleg jeges egy medve!*
 This then really ice-ADJZ EMPH bear
 ‘This is really what I call an icy bear.’ or ‘...a polar bear.’

Moreover, a similar metalinguistic use can occur even with compounds with a noun as their first constituent. The noun *látványpékség* ‘exhibition bakery’ denotes bakeries where the customers can see at least some parts of the manufacturing process (especially the ovens). The compound consists of *látvány* ‘sight, view, spectacle’ and *pékség* ‘bakery’. The constructed sentence (172) can be used for admitting that a bakery deserves its name, namely it is really spectacular.

- (172) *♣Ez aztán tényleg látvány egy pékség!*
 This then really spectacle EMPH bakery
 ‘This is really what I call an exhibition bakery.’

Based on the latter fact, one could argue that “*csoda egy N*” constructions belong to this type, that is, *csoda* is a noun in them. However, it could hardly be accepted. Examples as (172) are very marginal, we could not find any examples in the corpus, and maybe such constructions are not acceptable for all native speakers of Hungarian – while “*csoda egy N*” constructions are widely used. A process in the opposite direction is much more probable: as *csoda* can be a noun and “*csoda egy N*” is usual, constructions as (172) can emerge by the analogy of the constructions with *csoda*. The behaviour of *csoda* can be explained by its distribution, i.e. that it occurs in positions typical for both nouns and adjectives in the very same meaning.

Moving back to the examples of *den Dikken & Lipták* (1997), the case of *kutya* ‘dog’ is much more straightforward ((173)–(175)). As a noun, it is used in several positions. However, in the attributive position, it cannot mean ‘dog’ or anything ‘related to dogs’, but simply a swearword which can be generally translated as ‘damn’; except for some idiomatic phrases, such as *kutya idő* ‘nasty weather’, it is outdated and sounds strange. Otherwise, if it occurs at all, it is interpreted as something negative, depending on the meaning of the modified noun. If it is used with *nyelv* ‘language, tongue’, it can be interpreted as ‘difficult, complicated’, but also can be used as a simply defamatory attribute. An important point is that *kutya* as a predicate noun can only be



interpreted as ‘dog’. Consequently, the interpretation of *kutya* is completely different as a predicate than as the first noun in the supposed “N egy N” construction. As the word has a different meaning in the attributive position as generally otherwise, it is reasonable to analyze the attributive *kutya* as an adjective. This analysis is supported by the fact that in this position, *kutya* can be compared similarly to other adjectives: *kutyább/legkutyább idő* ‘nastier/nastiest weather’. As a consequence, the phrase *kutya egy nyelv* must be analyzed as an “A egy N” construction.

- (173) *kutya egy nyelv*
 “dog” EMPH language
 ‘a really ?difficult language’
- (174) *♣Egy/A nyelv (egy/a) kutya.*
 ART.IND/DEF language ART.IND/DEF dog
 ‘A/The language is a/the dog.’
- (175) *♣egy kutya nyelv*
 ART.INDF “dog” language
 ‘a ?difficult language’

It has to be remarked that *kutya* is often used as a euphemic expression instead of *kurva*, which means ‘whore’ as a noun (and it cannot be interpreted any other way as a predicate). However, as an attributive, it is used in a similar way as the attributive *kutya* ((176)–(178)).

- (176) *kurva egy nyelv*
 “whore” EMPH language
 ‘a really ?difficult language’
- (177) *♣Egy/A nyelv (egy/a) kurva.*
 ART.IND/DEF language ART.IND/DEF whore
 ‘A/The language is a/the whore.’
- (178) *♣egy kurva nyelv*
 ART.INDF “whore” language
 ‘a ?difficult language’

The case of *fene* is even more striking ((179)–(181)). Den Dikken & Lipták (1997, 62) gloss *fene* as ‘hell’, which is clearly perfect in some cases, as in the phrases *menj a fenébe* ‘go to hell’, *hol a fenében van?* ‘where the hell is it?’, *mi a fenét gondolsz?* ‘what the hell is on your mind?’, etc.; but it does not mean in general ‘underworld’ or any other ‘terrible place’. Originally it meant ‘ulcerated, purulent wound’, but it is not used in this meaning anymore. It just occurs in idiomatic expressions as (182)–(184). As a predicate, it cannot be interpreted in any way. On the contrary, it is interpreted similarly to an attribute in the “A egy N” construction: in this case, its meaning is negative and vague as in the case of *kutya* or *kurva*.



- (179) *fene egy nyelv*
damn EMPH language
'really damn language'
- (180) *♣Egy/A nyelv (egy/a) fene.*
ART.IND/DEF language ART.IND/DEF ???
'A/The language is a/the ???.'
- (181) *♣egy fene nyelv*
ART.INDF damn language
'a damn language'
- (182) *A fene egye meg!*
ART.DEF *fene* eat.IMP.2SG.DO VM
'Oh, blast!'
- (183) *Egye fene!*
eat.IMP.2SG.DO *fene*
'I don't mind/care!'
- (184) *A fenét csinálta meg!*
ART.INDF *fene*;ACC make;PST.3SG.DO VM
'Bollocks, he did not make it!'
- There are some cases in our corpus that suggest that the "A egy N" construction is closer to the attributive structure than to predication, and it is not a "N egy N" construction at all ((185)–(190)).
- (185) *suta egy szarvas*
clumsy EMPH deer
'really clumsy deer'
- (186) *♣Egy/A szarvas (egy/a) suta.*
ART.IND/DEF deer ART.IND/DEF ???
'A/The deer is a/the roe/clumsy (one).'
- (187) *♣egy suta szarvas*
ART.INDF clumsy deer
'a clumsy deer'
- (188) *Tiszta egy szőr lett a szoknyám.*
clean EMPH hair become.PST.3SG ART.DEF skirt;POSS.1SG
'My skirt became full of hair.'
- (189) *♣A szőr tiszta.*
ART.DEF hair clean
'The hair is clean.'



- (190) **tiszta szőr*
clean hair
'full of hair' or 'clean hair'

Examples with *csurom* 'soaking' and *merő* 'pure, full, complete' ((191)–(193)) are especially interesting with respect to our discussion, as they can be used in the "X egy N" construction, as well.

- (191) *Csurom egy lucsok lettél.*
soaking EMPH slush become.PST.2SG
'You became soaking wet.'
- (192) *Amit ír, az merő egy badarság.*
what write;PRS;3SG that pure EMPH nonsense
'It is pure nonsense what s/he writes.'
- (193) *Ha belegondolunk, merő egy kudarc.*
if come.to.think;PRS;1PL pure EMPH failure
'If we come to think of it, it is a pure failure'

Items occupying the position of A in these structures cannot be used as predicates ((194)–(195)), only as intensifying modifiers.

- (194) *A *lucsok csurom.*
ART.DEF slush soaking
'The slush is soaking.'
- (195) *A *kudarc merő volt.*
ART.DEF failure pure be;PST;3SG
'The failure was complete.'

Before concluding that the phrases with *csoda*, *kutya*, *fene* (and also *kurva*) are the representations of the "A egy N" construction, we have to consider one more fact: these words can also be used as adverbs, more precisely, in an "adjectival" position. All of them function as intensifiers (196). Although *csoda* is basically positive while the others are negative, this is manifested only in the fact that *csoda* is not combined with adjectives bearing negative connotations.

- (196) **csoda/fene/kutya/kurva jó/nagy/érdekes*
damn good/big/interesting
'damn good/big/interesting'

This fact allows us to raise the possibility that "*csoda/kutya/kurva/fene/etc. egy N*" constructions are in fact "ADV egy N" constructions, which developed from "ADV A egy N" constructions with omitting the adjective.



This possibility is supported by another observation. E.g. in example (44), it was argued that *ritka*, instead of its general meaning ‘rare, infrequent’, must be interpreted as ‘strange, unusual’. In Section 5.2.1 it has been demonstrated that *ritka* is also used as an adverb modifying the adjective of the “A egy N” construction. Based on these facts, we can interpret *ritka egy alak* as a “ADV egy N” construction, from which the adjective was omitted.

- (44) *Kozmánénak hívták, ritka egy alak volt.*
 Kozmáné.DAT call;PST.3PL rare EMPH figure be.PST.3SG
 ‘She was called Mrs. Kozma, she was a really strange character.’

This can be supported by the fact that although *egy* usually does not occur between an adverb and an adjective, we find several similar cases in the corpus. These constructions are emphatic, similarly to the “A egy N” constructions ((197)–(200)).

- (197) *ritka egy hülye név*
 rare EMPH stupid name
 ‘quite a stupid name’
- (198) *ritka egy hisztis pica*
 rare EMPH histeric bitch
 ‘quite a histeric bitch’
- (199) *ritka egy szar film*
 rare EMPH shit movie
 ‘quite a shit movie’
- (200) *ritka egy ocsmány jószág*
 rare EMPH ugly thing
 ‘quite an ugly thing’

Similar examples can also be found with *csoda* and *fene* ((201)–(202)) (however, just one of each), although not with *kutya* and *kurva*.

- (201) *csoda egy rendszerető ember*
 wonder EMPH orderly human
 ‘quite an orderly (wo)man’
- (202) *fene egy nyugtalan lélek*
fene EMPH restless soul
 ‘quite a restless soul’

The emergence of the forms in which *egy* occurs between the adverb and the adjective instead of between the adjective and the noun (which is also an unusual position) can easily be accounted for by the modification of the surface forms. The unexpected word order adds expressiveness to the collocation, which can be institutionalised (grammaticalised). Similarly, omitting the



adjective from the “ADV A egy N” construction gives an emphasis to the unusuality and extraordinality of the thing denoted by the noun, leaving out the specification of its exceptionality.

This assumption is supported by another type of the “X egy N” constructions, distinguished by [den Dikken & Lipták \(1997, 67–68\)](#), which they call *micsoda exclamatives*. As it was discussed in Section 5.2.1, *micsoda* is a relatively frequent adverbial-like modifier of adjectives in “A egy N” constructions. Additionally, “*micsoda egy A N*” constructions also occur in the corpus ((203)–(205)).

- (203) *micsoda egy istenáldotta család*
micsoda EMPH blessed family
 ‘what a blessed family’
- (204) *micsoda egy szemét banda*
micsoda EMPH vile band
 ‘what a vile band’
- (205) *Micsoda egy hisztis társaság vagyunk mi!*
micsoda EMPH hysteric company be.PRS.1PL 1PL
 ‘What a hysteric company we are.’

In these cases, it does not make a real difference that the emphatic clitic follows the adverb or the adjective. In addition to *micsoda*, other question words, *milyen* ‘what kind of’ and *mekkora* ‘what size of’ are used in the very same way ((206)–(210)). [Den Dikken & Lipták \(1997\)](#) do not discuss these together with *micsoda*, supposedly because they analyze *micsoda* as a noun, while *milyen* and *mekkora* as adjectives. According to us, in the constructions with emphatic *egy*, their adverbial (more precisely, “adadjectival”) behaviour plays a key role.

- (206) *Milyen egy gátlásos majom vagyok!*
 what.kind.of EMPH inhibited monkey be.PRS.1SG
 ‘What an inhibited monkey I am.’
- (207) *Ez milyen egy hülye szó!*
 this what.kind.of EMPH stupid word
 ‘What a stupid word it is.’
- (208) *Ezek a magyarok milyen egy gonosz nép.*
 this;PL ART.DEF Hungarian;PL what.kind.of EMPH evil people
 ‘These Hungarians, what an evil people they are.’
- (209) *Mekkora egy önző állat vagyok!*
 what.size.of EMPH selfish animal be.PRS.1SG
 ‘What a selfish bastard I am.’



- (210) *mekkora egy gusztustalan hullakefelő kis féreg*
 what.size.of EMPH disgusting corpse-fucker little worm
 ‘what a disgusting motherfucker little scum’

Similarly to the cases with *micsoda*, the adjective(s) can be completely omitted after *milyen* and *mekkora* ((211)–(215)). In most of the cases ((211)–(213)), the noun in the phrase is a word that could be used in the position of the adjective as well, so these can be analysed supposing that the noun was dropped. This latter interpretation is supported by the fact that the phrases with and without an adjective meaning great size are synonymous: *milyen/mekkora egy féreg!* ‘what a scum’ ~ *milyen/mekkora hatalmas egy féreg!* ‘what a great scum’, etc. However, examples (214)–(215) show that there are cases when it is sure that the adjective was omitted. Although *mekkora* appears in both of them, it can be changed to *milyen* in any case. Nonetheless, examples with *milyen* are more difficult to identify: *milyen* is a question word with quite a vague meaning. Therefore, exclamations starting with this question word, which resemble rhetorical questions, can be always interpreted as actual open-ended questions. On the contrary, exclamations with *mekkora* are much easier to identify, as not all the nouns in the structure denote things that have actual size.²⁶

- (211) *Én milyen egy dög vagyok!*
 1SG what.kind.of EMPH carcass be.PRS.1SG
 ‘What a bastard I am.’
- (212) *Milyen egy féreg ez a Deutsch!*
 what.kind.of EMPH worm this ART:DEF Deutsch
 ‘What a scum this Deutsch is.’
- (213) *Mekkora egy fasz vagyok!*
 what.size.of EMPH dick be.PRS.1SG
 ‘What a prick I am.’
- (214) *Mekkora egy kamu!*
 what.size.of EMPH phony
 ‘What a phony.’
- (215) *Ez mekkora egy érv!*
 this what.size.of EMPH argument
 ‘What an argument this is.’

Among the pronouns used in the “X egy N” construction *semmi* ‘nothing’, more exactly *nem semmi* ‘not nothing’ should also be mentioned. Although in Hungarian double negation is the

²⁶Although words like *kamu* and *érv* and they can be modified by adjectives usually denoting size, such as *hatalmas kamu* ‘huge (i.e. completely ungrounded) phoney’, *hatalmas érv* ‘huge (i.e. smashing, very convincing) argument’, *apró érv* ‘tiny (non-decisive) argument’, etc., these are rather idiomatic units and the question *mekkora?* ‘what size of?’ cannot be answered with them.



norm in some structures (216), in this case, double negation is used as something positive (meaning ‘uncommon, unusual, extraordinary; significant, considerable’). It is used in predication, as an attribute, and in emphatic constructions with *egy* as well ((217)–(219)).

- (216) *♣Nem csináltam semmit.*
 NEG do;PRT.S1 nothing;ACC
 ‘I did not do anything.’
- (217) *♣Ez a feladat nem semmi!*
 this ART.DEF task NEG nothing
 ‘This task is quite extraordinary.’
- (218) *♣Nem semmi feladatot adott a tanár.*
 NEG nothing task;ACC give;PST.3SG ART.DEF teacher
 ‘The teacher gave an extraordinary task.’
- (219) *Nem semmi egy feladat volt!*
 NEG nothing EMPH task be.PST.3SG
 ‘It was an extraordinary task.’

Before concluding that there are no “N egy N” constructions at all, we have to consider a specific group of nouns. A specific feature of these nouns is that they denote people (less typically animals, objects, etc.) who (which) can be characterised by some quality. For example, *hős* ‘hero’ is basically a *bátor ember* ‘brave, courageous person’, *zseni* ‘genius’ is a ‘intelligent, smart person’. These nouns can also be used in an attributive position, where their meaning is basically the same: *hős* ‘brave, courageous’, *zseni* ‘intelligent, smart’. (This case is completely different from cases like that of *kutya*, which has completely different meanings when used as a noun (‘dog’) and when used as an adjective (‘damn’).) Moreover, words like *hős* ‘hero’ and *zseni* ‘genius’ can be compared, although not in a way typical for adjectives, but with the comparative and superlative forms of the adjective *nagy*: *nagyobb hős* ‘greater hero; braver, more courageous person’, *legnagyobb zseni* ‘greatest genius; the most intelligent, the smartest person’. However, these compared forms cannot be used when the noun is in an attributive position. (On the contrary, *kutya* can be compared in the regular way (*kutyább, legkutyább*), and these forms can be used in the attributive position.) In any case, these words are rather nouns than adjectives due to their distribution, but they can occur in emphatic constructions with *egy* (220–221). However, these nouns can have no attributive adjectives modifying them (222–223).²⁷

- (220) *♣Hős egy szomszédod van.*
 hero EMPH neighbour-POSS.2SG be.PRS.3SG
 ‘Your neighbour is a real hero.’

²⁷ According to one of our reviewers, (222–223) are perfectly fine for them.



- (221) *✓Zseni egy férje van.*
genius EMPH husband-POSS.3SG be.PRS.3SG
'Her husband is a genuine genius.'
- (222) **Nagy/háborús hős egy szomszédod van.*
great/war hero EMPH neighbour-POSS.2SG be.PRS.3SG
'Your neighbour is a real great/war hero.'
- (223) **Igazi/matematikai zseni egy férje van.*
real/mathematical genius EMPH husband-POSS.3SG be.PRS.3SG
'Her husband is a genuine/mathematical genius.'

Additionally, there are also some nouns denoting persons (or less typically animals, things) by quality and used in attributive position as well, which are not comparable, and can be used in emphatic constructions with *egy*. For example, *vak* 'blind' is such a word, but in (224) it can rather refer to someone visually impaired (but not completely blind, although the phrase refers to the fact that the problem is serious); or in a metaphorical sense, suggests that the wife is unsuspecting and careless despite some evident signs (e.g. of cheating).

- (224) *✓Vak egy felesége van.*
blind EMPH wife-POSS.3SG be.PRS.3SG
'He has a really blind wife.'

Based on the examples of possible and impossible "X *egy* N" constructions, we have to conclude that the possible candidates for the position of X are not selected by their syntactic category, but rather based on their semantics. Words denoting gradual quality despite being adjectives, nouns, or specific elements like (*nem*) *semmi*, can occur before *egy*. Additionally, some adverbial-like elements modifying X in the construction can occur even when X is omitted, practically occupying the position of X, resulting in constructions that express that the referent of N is particular, and extraordinary due to some unidentified reason.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper presents a detailed description of the emphatic "A *egy* N" construction in Hungarian. We followed a corpus-driven methodology paying attention to collecting all relevant data from the corpus exhaustively and basing our investigation exclusively on linguistic data. The main findings of the investigation can be described as follows.

The "A *egy* N" construction is quite rare in written texts. In most cases, its form is composed of an adjective followed by *egy* followed by a noun. We argued that *egy* in this construction can be identified neither as a numeral nor as an indefinite article; in this paper, it is classified as an "emphatic clitic". It was demonstrated that the form of the construction can be generalised as "X *egy* N", where X is an expression denoting a gradual property. This construction itself has an emphatic nature that does not arise from one or other part of the construction.



Utterances containing an “X *egy* N” express subjective value judgement, which is most frequently derogatory, and less frequently appreciating, in a speaker-related way: its use expresses that the characteristic expressed by X of a certain property (specified by N), according to the speaker, surprisingly, unexpectedly differs in measure from what he/she expected. Due to this pragmatic function, the “X *egy* N” construction does not occur in neutral interrogative sentences, but it is frequently used in exclamatives.

The morphology of the elements of the construction shows some variation. The form of the adjective is fixed: it cannot be comparative, or superlative. The noun can be suffixed by possessive and case suffixes if it is necessary due to the syntactic position of the phrase. According to the native intuition of the authors, the occurrence of plural nouns in the given construction is extremely marked.

The internal syntax of the construction is somewhat fixed with little variation. Instead of one adjective, in some cases, two or more coordinated adjectives occur. More frequently, the adjective is modified by an adverb, almost exclusively intensifying the adjective. In these cases, *egy* can also occur between the adverb and the adjective. It is not an exceptional case when the adjective is omitted after the adverb: in this case, the construction expresses the unusuality of the denotation of the noun without specifying it.

The “X *egy* N” construction itself can be the nominal part of the predicate (frequently with a covert pronoun subject); or as a complement of the verb, it has to be placed into the immediate preverbal position (i.e. the focus position), although it does not get exhaustive interpretation.

Further research needs to be done on the prosodic patterns of the construction, as prosody was out of the scope of the current study since it was based on written corpus data. It would be important to describe the typical intonation patterns of the construction with special attention to the differences between the prosody of the very same phrases when used for appreciation and sarcasm. As it is probably impossible or extremely difficult to find enough occurrences of the pattern in speech corpora, it would be reasonable to carry out experiments with elicitation tasks to get examples proper for a thorough analysis.

Additionally, very little is known about the evolution and development of the construction. It is not yet clear when and how the construction emerged. A key issue can be whether the development of the construction was influenced by language contact. It must be emphasised that any cross-linguistic investigation, irrespective of whether it is historically or synchronically (typologically, theoretically) oriented, makes sense after a comprehensive and thorough description of the compared constructions in all the languages studied.

CONTRIBUTION

Most of the paper was written by László Fejes and Cecília Sarolta Molnár, except for Section 2 which was written by Bálint Sass, who also contributed to other sections with his remarks. Sections 3, 4, 5.1, 5.2.1 were predominantly written by László Fejes and Section 5.2.2 by Cecília Sarolta Molnár, but the final versions took shape through collaboration. The remaining sections are the result of joint work.



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ABBREVIATIONS

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
ABL	ablative
ACC	accusative
ADE	adessive
ADJZ	adjectiviser
ADVZ	adverbialiser
ANP	anaphoric possessor marker
ALL	allative
ART	article
COMP	comparative
DAT	dative
DEF	definite
DEL	delative
DO	definite object
EMPH	emphatic
FUT	future
IMP	imperative
INDF	indefinite
INE	inessive
INF	infinitive
INS	instrumental
MOD	modal (<i>-hat/-het</i> ‘can, may’)
NEG	negative
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PRS	present
PST	past
PTCP	participle
QPRT	question particle
SG	singular
SUBL	sublative
SUP	superlative
SUPESS	superessive



TAG tag-like element
 VM verbal modifier

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