

Telicity and free choice: FCIs and Verbal Modifiers in Hungarian

This paper concerns the interaction of free-choice items (FCIs) and aspect (as indicated by the presence or absence of a verbal modifier) in Hungarian. FCIs such as *any* have been at the forefront of research interest in the several past decades (e.g. Ladusaw 1979, Kadmon-Landman 1993; Giannakidou 2001); see Vlachou 2007 for an overview; Abrusán 2007, Halm 2013 on FCIs in Hungarian). Despite this, the interaction of FCIs and aspect has garnered relatively little attention (Quer 2000, Menéndez-Benito 2005) so far.

In Hungarian, FCIs and verbal particles (É. Kiss 2006, Csirmaz 2009) display an intriguing pattern inasmuch as the verbal particle seems to license the FCI in environments where it would otherwise be ungrammatical:

- (1) **Bármít* *olvasok.*
 anything-ACC read-SG1P
 ‘I read anything.’
- (2) *Bármít* *el olvasok.*
 anything-ACC PRT read-SG1P
 ‘I read anything.’ (telic)

Note that this works not only with the verbal particle as such but also with the more general class of verbal modifiers:

- (3) **Bármít* *rúgok.*
 anything-ACC kick-SG1P
 ‘I kick anything.’
- (4) *Bármít* *a kapuba rúgok.*
 anything-ACC into the goal kick-SG1P
 ‘I kick anything into the goal.’ (telic)

By way of an explanation, one may suppose that sentences with the verbal particle have a future reading, which introduces possible worlds and thus makes the FCI grammatical. This, however, can be quickly excluded by considering the following sentences:

- (5) *Bármít* **(el) fogok olvasni.*
 anything-ACC PRT AUX-FUT-SG1P read-INF
 ‘I will read anything’
- (6) *Gyermekkoromban bármít el olvastam.*
 in my child age anything-ACC PRT read-SG1P-PAST
 ‘As a child, I read anything.’ (telic)

Alternatively, we might entertain the possibility that the grammatical sentences contain an implicit subtrigging element (LeGrand1975, Quer 2000.):

- (7) *Bármít* *el olvasok (, ami érdekel engem).*
 anything-ACC PRT read-SG1P that interests me.
 ‘I read anything that I am interested in.’ (telic).

Then, however, we would erroneously expect (8) to be grammatical too:

- (8) **Bármít* *olvasok (, ami érdekel engem).*
 anything-ACC read-SG1P that interests me.
 ‘I read anything that I am interested in.’

The solution we shall argue for is based on the intuition that these sentences have a willingness or capability reading:

- (9) *Bármít* *el* *olvasok.*
 anything-ACC PRT read-SG1P
 ‘I read anything.’
 ~‘I am willing to read anything.’
 ~‘I can read anything.’

This quasi-modal, non-episodic environment can naturally license FCIs (Aloni 2002). The question, of course, is why this reading is triggered by the presence of the verbal particle. I will argue that this reading is facilitated by the telicity introduced by the presence of the verbal particle (É. Kiss 2006). In a telic event, the event described is carried out in its entirety (cf. measuring out Tenny 1994), which naturally evokes a non-episodic capability-willingness reading:

- (10) *Bármít* *el* *olvasok.*
 anything-ACC PRT read-SG1P
 ‘I read anything.’ (telic) ~ ‘I read anything (from the beginning) to the end.’
 ~‘I am willing to read anything from the beginning to the end.’
 ~‘I can read anything from the beginning to the end.’

In the present tense, this non-episodic reading is readily evoked. In the past tense, it is only accessible if the non-episodicity of the sentence is contextually indicated:

- (11) *(*Gyermekkoromban*) *bármít* *el* *olvastam.*
 in my child age anything-ACC PRT read-SG1P-PAST
 ‘As a child, I read anything.’ (telic)
 ~‘As a child, I was willing/able to read anything in full.’

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