

Variations on Factive Verbs in Hungarian

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What is factivity? On one extreme, it was claimed to be a lexical property of certain predicates (Kiparsky and Kiparsky 1970) on the other extreme, it was claimed to be a myth (Hazlett 2010). In between, recent experimental findings did not find a homogeneous class of factive predicates, but a gradient scale of more or less strong factive inferences (Degen and Tonhauser 2022).

In this talk I examine the empirical properties of so-called factive verbs in Hungarian, with an emphasis on various syntactic, morphological and pragmatic factors that induce factivity alternations with the same predicates. On the basis of these facts I argue that factivity, at least in Hungarian, is not lexically encoded. First, factivity is not a single, well-defined property, but a set of properties: an objective veridical inference, a subjective veridical inference and the projection of the objective veridical inference in the scope of entailment canceling operators. Second, syntax, certain morphological factors, information-structural considerations, and the probability of the conveyed information all influence the presence or absence of these inferences. These facts are difficult to reconcile with the traditional idea that factivity is a lexically encoded property. I propose that the (projective) veridical inference is a hypothesis made by the hearer about the information state of the speaker (see Wilson and Sperber 1979, Qing et al. 2016, Roberts and Simons 2023 for related ideas.) I outline how this hypothesis formation is influenced in Hungarian by grammatical and pragmatic factors.

References

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