

# A peculiar Lithuanian particle *mat* or *Mat jā bala, irgi mat dalelytė!*

**Vladimir Panov**

---

Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania & Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

**Ringailė Trakymaitė**

---

Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania

**Abstract.** In this paper, we discuss the morphosyntactic properties and the functional contribution of the discourse-structuring element *mat* in Lithuanian, which was largely overlooked in previous research. We demonstrate that in each function *mat* is associated with peculiar morphosyntactic behaviour. We argue that it is the construction in which it occurs as a whole that bears meaning, rather than *mat* as a lexical unit on its own. In our analysis, we invoke insights and some apparatus of Construction Grammar approaches, which fit well with our observations in their focus on non-compositional aspects of linguistic structure.

**Keywords:** particle, discourse marker, modal particle, pragmatic marker, mirative, clitic, Construction Grammar

## 1 Introduction

In this brief contribution, we examine the functions and syntactic properties exhibited by the element *mat* in Lithuanian. Although it is a relatively frequent discourse-structuring device, especially in the literary language, *mat* has not yet been properly investigated. For example, it is altogether overlooked in the most comprehensive grammar of contemporary Lithuanian (Ambrasas 2006),

where it is absent from chapters on both particles and conjunctions, and it is only given very brief accounts in the Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language and the Dictionary of Contemporary Lithuanian Language, respectively.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, *mat* presents an interesting polysemy model, which, to our knowledge, is cross-linguistically rare, if not unique.

In the following chapters, we discuss the problem of morphosyntactic word-class attribution of *mat* (2) and its various functions in their relation to syntactic behaviour (3). In the concluding chapter (4), the reader is presented with some deliberations about its diachronic path.

Finally, we would like to note that due to its discourse-structuring polysemous nature and pragmatic implications, it is impossible to offer a precise translation equivalent of *mat*. Moreover, it is only possible to provide free translations of the examples cited in hope of achieving the intended meaning of the source language expressions.

## 2 Morphosyntactic classification

### 2.1 General context

In linguistic literature, elements such as *mat* often receive less attention than the categories conventionally viewed as the constituents of the “core” grammar, namely, the syntax and morphology of noun phrases (NPs) and verbs (Vs). This is often due to the assumption that such “peripheral” elements belong to lexicon and not grammar; it does not mean, however, that traditional dictionaries contain adequate accounts of them either, which is the case with *mat*.

The past three decades witnessed an increased interest in discourse phenomena, both language-particularly and cross-linguistically. As special attention was paid to the issue of *classification* of discourse-structuring devices (Degand, Cornillie & Pietrandrea 2013; Fedriani & Sansò 2017), such labels as *discourse markers*, *discourse particles*, *modal particles*, *pragmatic markers*, *pragmatic particles* came to be widely used, although there is little consensus on the exact meaning of each of these terms. However, to our mind, a majority of classification attempts fail in rigorously distinguishing between language-particular descriptive categories, established upon language-internal idiosyncratic struc-

1 See <http://www.lkz.lt> and <http://lkiis.lki.lt>.

tural criteria, and cross-linguistic comparative concepts (Haspelmath 2010). In a number of works, such as Fischer & Alm (2013), also Panov (2020a; 2020b), a solution to this methodological controversy was proposed, which entails a separate treatment of functional and formal properties of the studied phenomena. Fischer and Alm (2013) demonstrate that the Swedish *alltså* and the German *also*, although demonstrating a significant functional overlap, exhibit different morphosyntactic properties and occur in different language-specific idiosyncratic constructions. Thus, they cannot be uncontroversially attributed to pre-established natural-kind-like cross-linguistic categories such as modal particles and discourse particles. Another interesting development in a similar field to be mentioned here is the idea that discourse-structuring devices are better treated as part of grammar rather than lexicon and are in principle not very different in nature from the “core” grammatical categories (Diewald 2006; Haselow 2013). As the latter, they provide cues to the listener about how the communicated concepts are to be “glued” together or interpreted within a concrete linguistic and extralinguistic context.

## 2.2 The place of *mat* in the structure of Lithuanian

As shown in Panov (2019), the traditional classification of discourse-structuring devices of Lithuanian, such as the one provided in Ambrazas (2006), is not based upon a consistently applied clear set of criteria, and hence should be revised.

The morphosyntactic properties exhibited by *mat* are partly shared with other conjunctions and particles (see below), but they are also idiosyncratic to some extent. Let us list some of its properties. *Mat* is clearly a bound element in the Bloomfieldian sense, viz. it is unable to occur as an independent utterance. On the other hand, *mat* is clearly not an affix either, as it does not attach to any particular class of words. Finally, *mat* is prosodically deficient and normally cannot receive an utterance accent. In other words, *mat* is most often a typical *clitic*.

Regarding its position in the host clause, *mat* exhibits a strong inclination toward the clause-initial position in both main and subordinate clauses as in (1):<sup>2</sup>

2 Unless specified otherwise, examples are cited for the corpus ItTenTen14 (Lithuanian Web 2014): <https://app.sketchengine.eu/#dashboard?corpname=preloaded%2FIttenten14>.

- (1) *Jos tarsis meno kūriniai, mat*  
 she.NOM.PL as if art.GEN.SG[M] work.NOM.PL.[M] PTC  
*kiekvieną jų dekoruoja dailininkai*  
 every.ACC.SG she.GEN.PL decorate.PRS.3 painter.NOM.PL[M]  
*profesionalai.*  
 professional.NOM.PL[M]  
 ‘They resemble works of art as it appears each of them is decorated by  
 a professional artist.’<sup>3</sup>

Clause-initial position in subordinate clauses is frequent in the corpora.<sup>4</sup> However, other positions are also possible, e.g. the second (Wackernagel) position in independent clauses as in (2):<sup>5</sup>

- (2) *Atsirado mat žinovė.*  
 appear.PST.3.RFL PTC expert.NOM.SG[F]  
 ‘What a pathetic self-proclaimed expert.’

Moreover, it seems that in this position, *mat* normally follows a verb. Finally, *mat* occurs in a fixed combination *irgi mat*, *irgi* ‘also, too’ + *mat*, typically followed by an NP with a clearly pejorative, sarcastic meaning. Although *irgi mat* normally occurs at the beginning of an utterance, it can also be used sentence-internally, immediately before the constituent it takes scope over:

- (3) *Miltonas poetas irgi mat menininkas*  
 Milton.NOM.SG poet.NOM.SG[M] also PTC artist.NOM.SG[M]  
 ‘Milton, the poet, a caricature of an ‘artist’’
- (4) *Irgi mat profsqjungų draugas atsirado...*  
 also PTC union.GEN.PL[F] friend.NOM.SG[M] appear.PST.3.RFL  
 ‘What a joke! Calling himself ‘a friend’ of the unions...’

3 In this paper we use the Salos Glossing Rules, accessible here: [https://www.journals.polon.uw.edu.pl/pliki/bl/BL6\\_Nau\\_Arkadiev\\_The\\_Salos\\_Glossing\\_Rules.pdf](https://www.journals.polon.uw.edu.pl/pliki/bl/BL6_Nau_Arkadiev_The_Salos_Glossing_Rules.pdf).

4 The two corpora of the Lithuanian language, viz. DLKT and ItTenTen14, see the Data Sources.

5 <https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/gyvenimas/1010649/kauniete-kaltina-medikus-ligonineje-papludo-krauju>; comment of August 27, 2019 at 2019:24:58

Therefore, in terms of its morphosyntactic properties, *mat* resembles both the prototypical Lithuanian conjunctions introducing subordinate clauses such as *nes* ‘because’, modal/discourse particles such as *juk* or *gi* with a meaning resembling that of ‘~after all’ when occurring in the second position in main clauses, and also exhibits idiosyncratic properties in the construction *irgi mat*.

In what follows, we turn to the functions signalled by *mat*, and to the relationship which seems to exist between the function and the morphosyntax.

### 3 The functions of *mat*

Findings of the corpora, as well as the native speaker intuition of one of the authors, support the idea that at the present stage, *mat* exhibits a number of different functions and that synchronic relationship between them seems unclear. However, one can postulate some general meaning components which are arguably exhibited by all uses of *mat*.

Crucially, one finds clear correlations between functions exhibited and morphosyntactic properties. In other words, it makes little sense to talk about functions of *mat* in isolation: it is *mat* within a particular morphosyntactic and lexical surrounding, or *construction*, which expresses a particular function as a whole. Indeed, recent studies of discourse-structuring devices in spoken language have demonstrated the fruitfulness of *Construction Grammar* (CxG) approaches in this field. In CxG, constructions are understood as form-meaning pairings, in which the meaning of a construction (the whole) is not immediately deducible from its constituents (Hoffmann & Trousdale 2013). Constructions may vary as to their degree of idiomaticity, being fully schematic, fully idiomatic, or idiomatic with fixed parts and free slots, which can be filled by closed or open sets of elements (which, in their turn, can also be constructions with variables). In the application to discourse level, Fischer & Alm (2013) and Alm, Behr & Fischer (2018) demonstrate that the modal particles of the Germanic languages cannot be adequately accounted for without reference to a construction they occur in, e.g. a speech act type.

In our further analysis, we provide elementary construction schemas for each type of use of *mat*. The above row of each schema presents an account for the morphosyntactic form of a construction. Parts in *ITALICS* stand for fixed parts of constructions, whereas parts in [SQUARE BRACKETS] indicate free slots, which may contain free strings, lexical categories such as NPs, or specific

units (in *ITALICS*). The lower row of a schema presents the meaning of the construction (which may contain variables from the above row).

### 3.1 *Mat* as a causal conjunction with the condition of epistemic uncertainty

There is an immediate temptation to think of *mat* as a discourse particle. In the Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language *mat* is represented as two different units, one of which is marked as a “particle”, and the other as a “modal word” (no definition is provided for either of the terms). However, we claim that *mat* is undoubtedly most frequently used as a prototypical *conjunction* or *connective*. In this use, *mat* exhibits a complex meaning consisting of two semantic components: (i) it indicates a causal relation between clauses and (ii) a general uncertainty of the speaker about the reliability of this causal relation, e.g., in the case of a lack of first-hand evidence. In this function, *mat* is also characterised by certain restrictions on its morphosyntactic behaviour. It demonstrates only one type of the three discussed in the previous section, namely, *it occurs clause-initially*. In written texts, clauses with this type of *mat* can be presented as overt subordinate clauses separated by a comma as in (5)<sup>6</sup>, or can take a form of an independent (main) clause being, however, semantically related to the previous discourse fragment as in (6):

- (5) [...] *investicijų rizikos beveik nelieka,*  
 investment.GEN.PL[F] risk.GEN.SG[F] almost NEG.remain.PRES.3  
*mat įmonės yra valdomos*  
 PTC company.NOM.PL[F] be.PRS.3 managed.NOM.PL.F  
*vyriausybės*  
 government.GEN.SG[F]  
 ‘[...] investment risk is almost non-existent, as the companies are managed by the government.’

- (6) *Tačiau dalis radikaliau nusiteikusių JAV*  
 yet part.NOM.SG[F] radical.COMP minded.GEN.PL USA  
*elito atstovų, regis, nieko*  
 elite.GEN.SG[M] representative.GEN.SG[M] seemingly nothing.GEN.SG

6 This example is cited from the DLKT.

*prieš*     *paaštrinti*     *padėti.*                     **Mat**     *tokiu*  
 against     exacerbate.INF     situation.ACC.SG[F]     PTC     this.INS.SG.M  
*būdu*                     *jie*                     *tikisi*                     *susilpninti*     *ir*     *ES,*  
 manner.INS.SG[M]     they.NOM.M     hope.PRES.3.RFL     weaken.INF     and     EU  
*ir*     *Rusiją.*  
 and     Russia.ACC.SG[F]

‘However, some of the more radical elements among the US establishment seem to have nothing against exacerbating the situation. After all, in this way they hope to weaken both the EU and Russia.’

Needless to say, the spelling of a full stop or a comma in the written language is to a large extent arbitrary, and there are no essential semantic differences between *mat* in (5) and in (6). In both cases, *mat* indicates the cause of the state of affairs described in the previous sentence, clause, or a larger discourse fragment. However, crucially, it is not the speaker who proposes the causal relationship, but the participants of the situation under discussion; moreover, the speaker actually highlights his/her doubts about the validity of the proposed causal explanation. Thus, in (6), the author of the text is sceptical about the stance of certain US officials that fostering a tension between the EU and Russia will result in weakening both. Therefore, schematically, this use of *mat* can be presented in the following way:

[CLAUSE OR DISCOURSE FRAGMENT 1]	<i>MAT</i>	[CLAUSE OR DISCOURSE FRAGMENT 2]
‘State of affairs 1’		‘The cause of the state of affairs 1 proposed by the participants of the state of affairs 1, which speaker has doubts about’

The presented *construction schema* is relatively loose—its sole restrictions are (a) the position of *mat*, and (b) the fact that both slots on the left and on the right from *mat* have to be full clauses (or larger discourse units). Importantly, the order of slot 1 and slot 2 is irreversible.

### 3.2 *Mat* as a mirative discourse marker

Utterance-initially, *mat* signals a state of affairs presented by the speaker as unexpected, peculiar or surprising (sometimes, also, with a hint of scepticism). In typological studies, this function is often addressed as *mirative* (Delancey 1997). Among all the uses described in this paper, this is the only one in which *mat* is able to bear the utterance accent—in other words, it is more autonomous and less grammaticalised than it is in other functions; in traditional terms, it can be classified as a classical *discourse marker*. However, as in the use described in the previous section, this use of *mat* also imposes certain restrictions on the construction it takes scope over. Consider the example:

- (7) *Mat*            *ką*                            *išgalvojo!*  
 PTC            what.ACC            come\_up\_with.PST.3  
 ‘Look, what he/she /they came up with!’

The restriction on the use of *mat* in that it must be obligatorily followed by a *wh*-pronoun (in Lithuanian, it makes sense to call such elements *k*-pronouns, as they normally start with the letter *k*), and this is the only structural restriction on this construction. Any *wh*-element can be used as in (8):<sup>7</sup>

- (8) *Tai mat kodėl aš durnius ir tinginys*  
 so PTC why I.NOM fool.NOM.SG[M] and idler.NOM.SG[M]  
*pabėgau į Š.Airiją ir čia jau*  
 escape.PST.1SG to Northern.Ireland.ACC.SG[F] and here already  
*daug metų gyvenu ir esu gyvenimu*  
 many year.GEN.PL[M] live.PRES.1SG and be.PRS.1SG life.INS.SG[M]  
*patenkintas!*  
 happy.NOM.SG.M  
 ‘So that’s why I, a fool and a layabout, escaped to Northern Ireland,  
 I have lived here for years and I am happy with my life!’

In this function, a minimal utterance only contains *mat* and a *wh*-element:

7 [https://www.respublika.lt/lt/naujienos/lietuva/lietuvos\\_politika/kodel\\_svetimi\\_mielesni\\_nei\\_savi](https://www.respublika.lt/lt/naujienos/lietuva/lietuvos_politika/kodel_svetimi_mielesni_nei_savi); comment of June 3, 2017 at 19:15:59.



- (9) *Mat*            *kaip!*  
 PTC            how  
 ‘So this is how things are.’

The schema for the mirative *mat*-construction looks as follows:

<i>MAT</i>	[WH-WORD]	[CLAUSE (OPTIONAL)]
‘Pay attention the peculiar state of affairs or object referred to by WH-WORD’		

### 3.3 *Mat* as a marker of scepticism/sarcasm towards a situation participant

In independent clauses, *mat* can be used as a marker of generalised scepticism of the speaker toward the state of affairs and, particularly, toward a person/persons or object/objects involved in it. In this case, we are dealing with an idiomatic construction whose meaning is clearly non-compositional. Consider the example:

- (10) “*Mama,                    soriukas,                    bet   tokios                    yra*  
 mother.VOC.SG.[F]   sorry.COLLOQ   but   such.NOM.PL.F   be.PRS.3  
*kelių                    eismo                    taisyklės*”.  
 road.GEN.PL.[M]   traffic.GEN.SG.[M]   regulations.NOM.PL.[F]  
 “*Pfi,   atsirado                    mat   taisyklės...                    Man*  
 Phew   appear.PRS.3.RFL   PTC   regulations.NOM.PL.[F]   I.DAT.SG  
*tai   šimtu                    procentų                    atrodo,                    kad*  
 so   hundred.INS.SG.[M]   percent.GEN.PL.[M]   seem.PRS.3   that  
*čia   turi   būti                    ne   taip.*”  
 here   must   be.INF   not   so  
 ‘Mum, sorry, but these are the traffic regulations.’ ‘Well, what a sorry  
 excuse for a regulation... I am 100% sure that it’s not right.’

In this example, *mat* occurs in the second (Wackernagel) position and follows the verb form *atsirado* (‘appeared, showed up, popped up, turned up’). In this sentence, the message communicated by the speaker is that (s)he is deeply dissatisfied with the existing traffic laws. The function of the construc-

tion is holistic: the meaning of the verb *atsirado* cannot be perceived literally, and it is rather the whole that contributes the meaning of dissatisfaction previously described. Interestingly, whenever *mat* is preceded by a verb (most often *atsirado*), the verb must be in third person regardless of the actual (non-)speech act status of the criticised person. Consider another example with *atsirado mat* as in (11)<sup>8</sup>:

- (11) *Atsirado, mat, kažkoks neva urbanistas!*  
 appear.PST.3.RFL PTC some quasi urbanist.NOM.SG[M]  
 ‘Look at him, calling himself an ‘urbanist’, what a clown!’

In the context where the example was found, forum participants discuss some person, presenting him/herself as an urbanist, who they are critical of. However, the same sentence can be pronounced in face-to-face communication, the object of criticism being the addressee; the verb does not change its form to second person.

Although *atsirado* is the most frequent verb used in this construction, other verbs with close meanings of a sudden appearance such as *išlindo* ‘popped up’ may occur as well:

- (12) *Pravažiavo 16k km ir išlindo mat su savo*  
 drive.PST.3 16 K km and pop\_up.PST.3 PTC with own  
*svaria nuomone :lol:. Kai pravažiuosi*  
 weighty.INS.SG.F opinion.INS.SG LOL<sup>9</sup> When drive.FUT.2SG  
*bent 160k km tada jau galėsi ir*  
 at\_least 160 K km then already be\_able.FUT.2SG and  
*parašyt kažką*  
 write.INF something.ACC  
 ‘He did 16k km and popped up with his weighty opinion: lol:. First you do at least 160k km, then you can start expressing yourself in writing.’

8 <https://klaipeda.diena.lt/naujienos/laisvalaikis-ir-kultura/namai/urbanistas-klaipedaibu-tu-naudinga-kooperuotis-su-kaliningradu-ir-liepoja-529878?komentarai>

9 Interjection, used online, meaning ‘laughing out loud’, often replaced with a face with the tears of joy emoji.

Here, the meaning of *išlindo* ‘popped up, resurfaced, sprung up’ is arguably somewhat more literal than that of *atsirado* (‘appeared, showed up, turned up’) in the previous example (11); however, a constructional non-compositional meaning is still there.

Finally, with the same holistic meaning, *mat* can be preceded not by a verb but by the additive marker *irgi* ‘also, too’.

- (13) *Irgi mat mokslo šviesuliai*  
 also PTC science.GEN.SG.[M] luminary.NOM.PL.[M]  
 ‘Look at them, the so-called *science luminaries*.’

Interestingly, *irgi mat* can co-occur with verbs previously described; in this case, a verb occurs in the clause following *irgi mat*:

- (14) *Irgi mat poilsiautojai atsirado!*  
 also PTC holidaymaker.NOM.PL.[M] appear.PST.3.RFL  
 ‘What pathetic holidaymakers!’

Summing up, *mat* in the second position in independent clauses, following a presentative marker or a verb with a meaning of a sudden appearance, is part of a construction the non-compositional meaning of which is a negative evaluation of the main participant (animate or inanimate) of the clause. The construction includes two free slots. The first slot (preceding *mat*) is occupied by a restricted (though, not completely closed) set of elements, whereas the second free slot must at least contain one argument whose activities are negatively evaluated by the speaker. Schematically, this partly idiomatic construction can be presented as follows:

[ <i>IRGI</i> ‘also’; A VERB OF SUDDEN APPEAR- ANCE IN 3RD PERSON PAST]	<i>MAT</i>	[A PERSON OR AN OBJECT <i>X</i> , OR A FULL CLAUSE WITH NP]
‘I am sceptical/sarcastic about NP’		

### 3.4 *Mat* in curses

The last group of uses of *mat* that we would like to present here is that of syntactically atypical curse constructions. Example (15) illustrates this use:

- (15) *Mat*        *jį*                    *velniai*  
PTC            he.ACC.SG            devil.NOM.PL.[M]  
'Damn him'/'He can go to hell'

The main peculiarity of this construction is that despite the presence of a direct object expressed by a pronoun, it is verbless. One can argue that it may have originated in an elliptical omission of a verb (e.g. 'to grab'); however, at least with *mat*, the use of verbs is synchronically ungrammatical:

- (16) \**Mat*    *jį*                    *velniai*                    *pagriebtu*  
PTC            he.ACC.SG            devil.NOM.PL.[M]        grab.SUBJ.3  
[the direct translation would be 'May he be grabbed by the devils']

Verblessness is idiosyncratic for curses.<sup>10</sup> For instance, semantically and structurally close "goodwill" constructions do not allow for verb omission. In the following constructed examples, the speaker wants to wish the addressee to successfully pass an exam and wants to omit the word 'exam' (masculine in Lithuanian) by substituting it with a pronoun, the verb 'pass' cannot be omitted:

- (17) \**Kad*        *tu*                    *jį!*  
may            you.NOM.SG            he.ACC.SG [referring to the exam]  
[the intended meaning 'Good luck passing [the exam]]

Rather, the speaker would omit the object altogether but would use a verb:

- (18) *Kad*        *tu*                    *išlaikytum!*  
may            you            pass.SUBJ.2SG  
'Hope you do well [in the exam].'

10 In Lithuanian, there are cursing constructions including verbs, e.g. *Velniai griebtu!* 'Damn', where the verb like *griebtu* (grab.SUBJ.3) cannot be omitted. We will not be examining them in this paper.

Turning to the structure of curses such as in (15), one can make some further observations. Firstly, there is a restriction on word class for the direct object slot, which can only contain a personal pronoun. Even the use of proper names is altogether unacceptable:

- (19) \**Mat*      *Joną*                      *velniai*  
 PTC          Jonas.ACC.SG[M]      devil.PL.NOM[M]  
 [the intended meaning ‘Damn John’]

Secondly, the nominal slot after the direct object is restricted semantically: it may only contain words denoting natural or supernatural forces (*perkūnas*, *griausmas* ‘thunder’, *biasas* ‘devil’, *pekla* ‘hell’, *devynios* ‘nine (a “bad” number)’) or their euphemistic substitutes, the most common being *bala* ‘puddle’, which is quoted in our title.

Finally, *mat* can be relatively freely substituted by *kad* – a generalised complementizer (‘that’):

- (20) *Kad*          *jį*                      *velniai*  
 may          he.ACC.SG          devil.PL.NOM.[M]  
 ‘Damn him’/ ‘He can go to hell’

With *kad*, the construction remains verbless in actual use, although the addition of a verb is not ungrammatical in such cases (unlike in *mat*-curses):

- (21) *Kad*          *jį*                      *velniai*                      *pagriebtų*  
 may          he.ACC.SG          devil.PL.NOM.[M]          grab.SUBJ.3  
 ‘He can go hell’

Verb omission is possible in curses organised on the basis of a more regular model, in which all participant slots are free, i.e. semantic classes of the agent and the patient are not determined by the construction:

- (22) *Kad*          *tu*          *skėtį*                      *prarytum*  
 may          you          umbrella.ACC.SG.[M]          swallow.SUBJ.2SG  
 ‘Go swallow an umbrella’

- (23) \**Kad*      *tu*      *skėtį*  
 may          you      umbrella.ACC.SG.[M]  
 [the intended meaning ‘Go [swallow] an umbrella’]

Summing up, the verblessness of *mat/kad*-curse construction is an inherent part of this construction. It can be argued that the absence of a verb is meaningful: by pronouncing a curse, the speaker does not mean any concrete action, but wishes the listener or someone else a general harm from the side of natural or supernatural forces. Schematically, the *mat/kad*-curse construction may be presented as follows:

<i>MAT/KAD</i>	[PRON.ACC]	[NATURAL OR SUPERNATURAL FORCES NP.NOM]
‘I wish <i>PRON</i> harm on behalf of <i>NP</i> ’		

#### 4 Discussion and concluding remarks

In this paper, we have examined the types of uses exhibited by the Lithuanian element *mat*. These are: (1) a causal conjunction with the condition of epistemic uncertainty, (2) a mirative discourse marker, (3) a marker of scepticism towards a situation participant, and (4) a curse-introducing marker. In each of the uses, *mat* occurs in a particular environment, or a construction, which varies as to the degree of idiomaticity. While the use of causal *mat* (1) presupposes free clausal strings on the left and on the right of *mat*, a curse-introducer *mat* (4) is quite idiomatic and rigid in its structure; uses (2) and (3) lay in-between.

Morphosyntactically, *mat* is an element exhibiting idiosyncratic properties not only cross-linguistically but also language-internally; as demonstrated, the morphosyntax of *mat* is construction-specific. Moreover, *mat* does not fall into any of the well-established word classes of Lithuanian. One might even argue that it constitutes a word class of its own, being its single member, yet partly sharing properties with other word classes. A similar one-member category, occurring with a similar set of properties cross-linguistically, was described by van der Auwera & Sahoo (2015) under the label *similative*; it is represented by the English *such* or the Dutch *zulk*. At the same time, the uniqueness of the categorical properties of such elements as the Lithuanian *mat* or the English

*such* is a good argument in favour of an emergent nature of parts of speech in a natural language—a position advocated in the CxG approaches, especially in the “radical” version of CxG (Croft 2001).

Obviously, *mat* as a discourse-structuring device grammaticalised from the verb *matyti* ‘see’. Fraenkel (1962, 220) derives it from the form of the second person singular of the present tense *matai* ‘see.PRS.2SG’, and this etymology seems quite likely, although the direct path is unknown due to the lack of written evidence. This makes a detailed diachronic analysis as the one conducted for the rise of English *by the way* (Traugott 2020) impossible in our case.

A use of *mat* testifying to its roots in a verb of vision can be observed in yet another combination with an additive marker *kaip* ‘how, as’ preceding it, as in *kaip mat* or the merged variant *kaipmat*<sup>11</sup>, which is to be found in the dictionaries; in the Dictionary of Contemporary Lithuanian Language, it appears alongside the *kaip matai* ‘as you see’ in the same lexicon entry. It has to be noted that in the web-based corpus, the uses of both spellings are very high, sometimes with *kaip mat* being marginally higher. In uses such as (24), the meaning of something happening so rapidly that participants of a speech act are caught looking on, witnessing the event is evident:

- (24) *Vienos iš tokios situacijos tik*  
 one.NOM.PL.F of such.GEN.SG.F situation.GEN.SG.[F] just  
*pasijuokia, o kitas kaipmat išmuša*  
 laugh.PRS.3 while other.ACC.PL.F instantly strike.PRS.3  
*raudonis.*  
 blush.NOM.SG.[M]  
 ‘Some just laugh at such a situation, while others instantly blush.’  
 [speaking about young women]

Nevertheless, it is clear that the grammaticalisation path of *mat* from a vision verb to its current discourse uses is not unique, and the tendencies for perception and cognition verbs to develop discourse functions are well established cross-linguistically (Rhee 2001; San Roque et al. 2018). After all, the

11 *Kaipmat* is the one to be found in Lithuanian dictionaries, an adverb meaning ‘at once, immediately, instantly, while looking on’.

full form *matai* is still used in contemporary Lithuanian as a discourse marker in different functions, including that reminiscent of the use of *mat* (2) as a mirative marker (as we argued, the least grammaticalised use):

- (25) *Ale matai koks kietas*  
But see.PRS.2SG what.NOM.SG.M tough.NOM.SG.M  
'Look, what a tough man he is'

Although different *mat*-constructions signal different functions, one can argue that they have a common semantic component, namely the meaning of unexpectedness, counter to expectations, or unnaturalness (the meaning of dissatisfaction being the extreme on this scale). However, one cannot speak of the functions of *mat* on its own without considering the construction it occurs in.

### Acknowledgements

We thank Paul Ames and Ruth Clarke for helping us with the English translations of our examples, which was a rather difficult task. We also thank Kathleen Newman for proof-reading and editing this article.

Finally, we are grateful to Axel Holvoet without whom we would have never met, and who plays a pivotal role in our growth as linguists and researchers.

### Data Sources

BNC – British National Corpus, accessed through <https://app.sketchengine.eu>  
Dabartinės lietuvių kalbos tekstynas – *Corpus of the Contemporary Lithuanian Language* DLKT, available here: <http://tekstynas.vdu.lt/tekstynas/>  
Dabartinės lietuvių kalbos žodynas – *Dictionary of the Contemporary Lithuanian Language*, accessed through <http://lkiis.lki.lt/dabartinis>  
Lietuvių kalbos žodynas – *Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language*, electronic version, available here: <http://lkz.lt/>  
ltTenTen14 – Lithuanian Web 2014 corpus, accessed through <https://app.sketchengine.eu>

### References

- Alm, Maria, Janina Behr & Kerstin Fischer. 2018. Modal particles and sentence type restrictions: A construction grammar perspective. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 3(1), 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.5334/gjgl.702>.  
Ambrasas, Vytautas, ed. 2006. *Lithuanian Grammar*. 2., rev. ed. Vilnius: Baltos lankos.



- Auwera, Johan van der & Kalyanamalini Sahoo. 2015. On comparative concepts and descriptive categories, such as they are. *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 47(2), 136–173.
- Croft, William. 2001. *Radical Construction Grammar: Syntactic Theory in Typological Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Degand, Liesbeth, Berth Cornillie & Paola Pietrandrea, eds. 2013. *Discourse Markers and Modal Particles: Categorization and Description*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Delancey, Scott. 1997. Mirativity: The grammatical marking of unexpected information. *Linguistic Typology* 1(1), 33–52. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lity.1997.1.1.33>.
- Diewald, Gabriele. 2006. Discourse particles and modal particles as grammatical elements. In *Approaches to Discourse Particles*. Kerstin Fischer, ed. Amsterdam: Elsevier. 403–426.
- Fedriani, Chiara & Andrea Sansò, eds. 2017. *Pragmatic Markers, Discourse Markers, and Modal Particles*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Fischer, Kerstin & Maria Alm. 2013. A radical construction grammar perspective on the modal particle-discourse particle distinction. In *Discourse Markers and Modal Particles: Categorization and Description*. Liesbeth Degand, Berth Cornillie & Paola Pietrandrea, eds. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 47–88.
- Fraenkel, Ernst. 1962. *Litauisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Vol. I. Heidelberg & Göttingen: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag.
- Haselow, Alexander. 2013. Arguing for a wide conception of grammar: The case of final particles in spoken discourse. *Folia Linguistica* 47(2), 375–424. <https://doi.org/10.1515/flin.2013.015>.
- Haspelmath, Martin. 2010. Comparative concepts and descriptive categories in crosslinguistic studies. *Language* 86(3), 663–687.
- Hoffmann, Thomas & Graeme Trousdale, eds. 2013. *The Oxford Handbook of Construction Grammar*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195396683.001.0001>.
- Panov, Vladimir. 2019. Juk and gi, and “particles” in contemporary Lithuanian: Explaining language-particular elements in a cross-linguistic context. *Kalbotyra* 72, 58–86. <https://doi.org/10.15388/Kalbotyra.2019.3>.
- Panov, Vladimir. 2020a. The marking of uncontroversial information in Europe: presenting the enimitive. *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 52(1), 1–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03740463.2020.1745618>.
- Panov, Vladimir. 2020b. Final particles in Asia: Establishing an areal feature. *Linguistic Typology* 24(1), 13–70. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lingty-2019-2032>.
- Rhee, Seongha. 2001. Grammaticalization of verbs of cognition and perception. *Studies in Modern Grammar* 24, 111–135.

- San Roque, Lila, Kobin H. Kendrick, Elisabeth Norcliffe & Asifa Majid. 2018. Universal meaning extensions of perception verbs are grounded in interaction. *Cognitive Linguistics* 29(3), 371–406. <https://doi.org/10.1515/cog-2017-0034>.
- Traugott, Elizabeth Closs. 2020. The development of “digressive” discourse-topic shift markers in English. *Journal of Pragmatics* 156, 121–135. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2019.02.002>.

Submitted: 17 January 2021