Differential object marking in Hungarian?

András Bárány

Department of Finno-Ugric studies, University of Vienna
ba@tud.at

1 Hungarian verb morphology

Hungarian has two verbal paradigms, each of which appears with objects of a certain type, see (1) and (2).

(1) Lát-ok egy kutyá-t.
see-1SG.SUBJ one dog-ACC
'I see a dog.'

(2) Lát-om a kutyá-t.
see-1SG.OBJ the dog-ACC
'I see the dog.'

It seems to be a property of the object that determines whether a verb has subjective morphology (cf. (1)) or objective morphology (cf. (2)). The objective conjugation is suggested to be a relic of an incorporated pronoun (cf. Bresnan and Mchombo 1987, É. Kiss 2011, Givón 1976, Havas 2004).

Subjective conjugation	Objective conjugation
bare nouns	Proper names
indefinite article (*egy*)	definite article (*a(z)*)
numerals (*három, öt, ...*)	definite determiners (*ez a, az a, ...*)
certain determiners (*minden, néhány*, ...)	**possessive constructions**
1st and 2nd person singular pronouns	3rd person pronouns
ki 'who', *mi* 'what'	reflexive and reciprocal pronouns
	hogy-complement clauses
	null (elided) objects

Table 1: Subjective and objective conjugation triggers

A simple generalisation? An indefinite object (or no object at all) triggers the subjective conjugation and a definite object triggers the objective conjugation?

A recent (morpho)syntactic approach tries to analyse the difference using the presence or absence of a **DP layer** in the noun phrase (cf. Bartos 1999, É. Kiss 2002, 2003). DP objects trigger the objective conjugation, non-DPs (NumPs, NPs) trigger the subjective conjugation.

Coppock and Wechsler (2010) argue that the DP view is not tenable, they propose that a **morphological feature DEF** is responsible for triggering the objective conjugation.

→ **There is no generally accepted analysis of Hungarian object "agreement"!**

2 Differential object marking (DOM)

The term DOM covers a phenomenon in many languages in which not all objects of transitive verbs are marked in the same way. This difference is often expressed morphologically, though it might also be structural (word order). Which objects are marked differently is language-specific, though it is always "subject-like" objects, i.e., objects with properties that subjects usually have (topicality, animacy, definiteness).

What triggers DOM? Different properties can determine DOM:

- Animacy: Spanish, Hindi, ...(cf. e.g., de Swart 2007)
- Definiteness: Hebrew (cf. Danon 2006)
- Specificity: Turkish (cf. Enç 1991), Spanish, Hindi
- Topicality: Northern Ostyak (cf. Nikolaeva 1999, 2001)

How is DOM marked? DOM marking on the object noun phrase:

- Spanish and Hebrew have prepositional markers
- Hindi and Persian have suffixes
- Turkish has case markers

Some languages mark DOM in **verb morphology**, using affixes:

- Northern Ostyak has verb suffixes that agree with certain objects in person and number (Nikolaeva 1999, 2001)
- Several Bantu languages have object agreement related to topicality and definiteness: Chichewa (Bresnan and Mchombo 1987), Swahili, Rwanda (Givón 1976)

2.1 DOM and hierarchies

DOM has been analysed with reference to prominence hierarchies, e.g. the definiteness hierarchy in (3). In languages with DOM, if an object on a certain level of a hierarchy is marked differentially, all objects with properties above that cut-off point require that marking as well.

(3) Personal pronoun > Proper name > Definite NP > Indefinite specific NP > > Non-specific NP (Aissen 2003: 437)

3 Applying DOM to Hungarian

In a literal sense, Hungarian has DOM. But sticking to the technical sense (mostly following Aissen 2003), Hungarian verb morphology is a bit odd. Triggers of each conjugation should share some feature (be it syntactic, semantic or morphological) and the data *should* fit a hierarchy (arguably definiteness).

→ **Do the triggers of each conjugation share a feature, e.g. definiteness?**

Szabolcsi (1994: 223) states that "the range of noun phrases that trigger definite conjugation is semantically inhomogeneous."

Possessives Are possessives definite? They do not always show definiteness effects:

(4) a. Érkezett egy vendég-e.
arrive one guest-PX3SG
'One of his guests arrived.'
b. Van egy/*a barát-ja.
is one/the friend-PX3SG
'He has a/*the friend.'
c. **Lát-om**/*lát-ok egy barat-já-t.
see-1SG.OBJ/see-1SG.SUBJ one friend-PX3SG-ACC
'I see a friend of his.'

***minden* 'every'** This quantifier does show definiteness effects!

(5) a. *Érkezett minden vendég.
arrive every guest
'Every guest arrived.'
b. *Van minden könyv.
is every book
*'There is every book.'
c. **Lát-ok** minden kutyát.
'I see every dog.'

Possessives and *minden* 'every' behave **in opposite ways** with respect to subjective and objective verb morphology to what would be expected regarding their definiteness alone (this is not easy to explain in either the DP hypothesis or the morphological DEF hypothesis).

Morphology DOM morphology usually alternates with a ∅-morpheme, so there are ∅:ACC, ∅:P variations. In Northern Ostyak and some Bantu languages there is a ∅:OBJ alternation. It is an issue of debate whether the objective conjugation in Hungarian is more marked than the subjective conjugation.

4 Short-term conclusions

The presence of distinct verb morphology makes it a trivial truth that Hungarian marks different objects differently. However, in the technical sense, the characteristics of DOM do not provide an explanation for the different verbal paradigms in Hungarian. One might conclude that, although once present, the usual properties of DOM are no longer active in Hungarian and that the differential verb morphology is a relic of an earlier stage in its history (where DOM might have been topicality-based, as in Northern Ostyak today, cf. É. Kiss 2011; later reanalyzed as definiteness, cf. Coppock and Wechsler 2010).

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