

## **Differential object–verb agreement is (fossilized) topic–verb agreement**

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The starting point of the talk is the claim made in É. Kiss (2005) that the apparently idiosyncratic gaps in Hungarian object–verb agreement are manifestations of the inverse agreement constraint (observed by Comrie (1980) in the Chukotko-Kamchatkan language family), prohibiting verbal agreement with an object that is higher in animacy (i.e., inherent agentivity) than the subject. It will be argued – relying on Marcantonio’s (1985) and Nikolaeva’s (1999a, 1999b, 2001) analyses of Obi-Ugric and Old Hungarian data – that verbal agreement with definite objects attested in present-day Hungarian derives from verbal agreement with objects functioning as secondary topics. The proposed analysis puts the inverse agreement constraint into a new perspective: what is constrained is not the relative animacy of the subject and the object as such but the relative animacy of the primary and secondary topics of a sentence. The proposal provides evidence for Givón’s (1975) theory analyzing subject–verb and object–verb agreement as (grammaticalized) topic–verb agreement.