

**Differential object–verb agreement is (fossilized) topic–verb agreement**Katalin É. Kiss PPKE ([ekiss@nytud.hu](mailto:ekiss@nytud.hu))**1. Goal:**

- to account for the apparently idiosyncratic gaps in Hungarian object–verb agreement;
- to motivate the inverse agreement constraint (cf. Comrie 1980 and É. Kiss 2005), prohibiting verbal agreement with an object that is higher in animacy (i.e., inherent agentivity) than the subject.

**Claim:**

agreement with definite objects derives from agreement with secondary topic objects.

What the inverse agreement constraint restricts is not the relative animacy of the subject and object as such but the relative animacy of the primary and secondary topics. The secondary topic cannot be more animate than the primary topic. An object more animate than the subject can only be focus.

**Road map:**

Section 2: facts of object–verb agreement in Hungarian

Section 3: a hypothetical evolutionary road to object–verb agreement in Hungarian

Section 4: reinterpretation of the inverse agreement constraint as a discourse-motivated interface requirement.

**2. Differential object–verb agreement in Hungarian****2.1. The definite conjugation**

Two agreement paradigms:

„subjective/indefinite” conjugation with intransitive V<sub>s</sub> and V<sub>s</sub> taking an indefinite object:

(1)	én	író- <b>k</b>	(egy cikket)	'I write (a paper)'
	te	ír- <b>sz</b>	(egy cikket)	'you write (a paper)'
	ő	ír- <b>Ø</b>	(egy cikket)	'(s)he writes (a paper)'
	mi	ír- <b>unk</b>	(egy cikket)	'we write (a paper)'
	ti	ír- <b>tok</b>	(egy cikket)	'you write (a paper)'
	ők	ír- <b>nak</b>	(egy cikket)	'they write (a paper)'

„objective/definite” conjugation with V<sub>s</sub> taking a definite object:

(2)	én	író- <b>m</b>	a cikket	'I write the paper'
	te	író- <b>d</b>	a cikket	'you write the paper'
	ő	ír- <b>ja</b>	a cikket	'(s)he writes the paper'
	mi	ír- <b>juk</b>	a cikket	'we write the paper'
	ti	ír- <b>játok</b>	a cikket	'you write the paper'
	ők	ír- <b>ják</b>	a cikket	'they write the paper'

**Definite objects:** NPs with a definite determiner/possessor, personal/demonstrative pronouns:

(3)a.	(Én) ismere- <b>m</b>	a cikket	/Pál cikkét	/Pált	/öket /azokat.
	I know-DEFO.1SG	the paper-ACC	/Paul's paper-ACC/Paul-ACC	/them/those-ACC	
	'I know the paper/Paul's paper/Paul/them/myself/those.'				

embedded CPs (pronominal head?):

b.	(Én) ismere- <b>m</b>	(azt), amit	János írt	erről.
	I know-DEFO.1SG	that what	John wrote this-about	
	'I know what John wrote about this.'			

c.	(Én) tudo- <b>m</b>	(azt), hogy	János írt	erről.
	I know-DEFO.1SG	it that	John wrote this-about	
	'I know that John wrote about this.'			

**Indefinite objects:** indefinite NPs, indefinite and universal pronouns:

(4)a.	(Én) ismere- <b>k</b>	egy/néhány	/sok	/minden híres	nyelvészt.
	I know-INDEF.1SG	a /some	/many/every	famous	linguist-ACC
	'I know a/some/many/every famous linguist.'				

- b. (Én) ismere-**k** valakit /mindenkit.  
 I know-INDEF.1SG somebody-ACC /everybody-ACC  
 'I know somebody/everybody.'

Bartos (2000): the definite conjugation is elicited by a DP object.

Its *ja/e/i* is an object agreement suffix, cognate with the Proto-Uralic 3SG personal pronoun.

- |        |                    |                  |    |                      |                 |
|--------|--------------------|------------------|----|----------------------|-----------------|
| (5) a. | író-m              | 'write-DEFO.1SG' | b. | ismer-e-m            | 'know-DEFO.1SG' |
|        | író-d              | 'write-DEFO.2SG' |    | ismer-e-d            | 'know-DEFO.2SG' |
|        | ír- <b>ja</b> -Ø   | 'write-DEFO-3SG' |    | ismer- <b>i</b> -Ø   | 'know-DEFO-3SG' |
|        | ír- <b>j</b> -ük   | 'write-DEFO-1PL' |    | ismer- <b>j</b> -ük  | 'know-DEFO-1PL' |
|        | ír- <b>ja</b> -tok | 'write-DEFO-2PL' |    | ismer- <b>i</b> -tek | 'know-DEFO-2PL' |
|        | ír- <b>ja</b> -k   | 'write-DEFO-3PL' |    | ismer- <b>i</b> -k   | 'know-DEFO-3PL' |

### A problem:

a verb with a 3rd person subject and a 1st or 2nd person object is in the indefinite conjugation:

- (6) a. Ő ismer-Ø engem/minket /téged /titeket.  
 he know-INDEF.3SG me /us /you<sub>sg</sub>-ACC /you<sub>pl</sub>-ACC  
 'He knows me/us/you.'
- b. Ők ismer-nek engem/minket /téged /titeket.  
 they know-INDEF.3PL me /us /you<sub>sg</sub>-ACC /you<sub>pl</sub>-ACC  
 'They know me/us/you.'

Bartos (2000): 1st and 2nd person pronouns are indefinite, i.e., not DPs but NumPs.

But: 1st and 2nd person objects elicit definite agreement if the subject is 1st person:

- (7) a.? Én minket is belevesze-**m** a névsorba.  
 I us-ACC also include-DEFO.1SG the namelist-in  
 'I also include us in the list of names.'
- b. \*\*Én minket is belevesze-**k** a névsorba.  
 I us-ACC also include-INDEF.1SG the namelist-in
- cf. c. Én magunkat is belevesze-**m** a névsorba.  
 I ourselves-ACC also include-DEFO.1SG the namelist-in
- (8) (Én) ismer-le-k téged /titeket.  
 I know-2O-1SG you<sub>sg</sub>-ACC/you<sub>pl</sub>-ACC

## 2.2. The inverse agreement constraint

Comrie (1980): In Chukchi, Koryak, & Kamchadal both S-V and O-V agr, constrained by (9):

### (9) INVERSE AGREEMENT CONSTRAINT

An object agreeing with a verb must be lower in the animacy hierarchy than the subject agreeing with the same verb.

Two strategies of avoiding a violation of (9):

- (i) an inverse morpheme prefixed to the V marks the suspension of the inverse agr. constraint;
- (ii) the verb only agrees with its subject, but not with its object.

Animacy hierarchy:

- (10) 1SG > 1PL > 2SG > 2PL > 3SG > 3PL

Koryak variant of (10):

- (11) 1/2 > 3SG > 3PL

Kamchadal variant of (10):

(12) 1/2/3SG > 3PL

Koryak: subject agr. morpheme preverbal, object agr. morpheme postverbal.

The inverse agreement constraint invoked in case of the following S-O combinations:

- (13) a. 2nd person subject – 1st person singular object  
b. 2nd person subject – 1st person plural object  
c. 3rd person singular subject – 1st person singular object  
d. 3rd person singular subject – 1st person plural object  
e. 3rd person singular subject – 2nd person object  
f. 3rd person plural subject – any object

(13a,c): no V-object agreement (the V has intransitive morphology, with both prefix and suffix agreeing with the subject).

(13b,d,e,f): the inverse agreement constraint is suspended by the inverse morpheme *ne-*.

Hungarian avoids violating the inverse agreement constraint by applying strategy (ii).

Hungarian variant of the animacy hierarchy:

- (14) 1SG > 1PL/2 > 3  
[+speaker,+participant] > [-speaker,+participant] > [-speaker,-participant]

(15) INVERSE AGREEMENT CONSTRAINT (in Hungarian)

An object agreeing with a verb must be lower in the animacy hierarchy than the subject agreeing with the same verb, unless they both represent the lowest level of the animacy hierarchy.

The definite conjugation is ruled out in case of the following S-O combinations:

- (16) a. 3rd person subject – 1st/2nd person object  
b. 2nd person subject – 1st person object  
c. 1st person plural subject – 2nd person object

These are the gaps in the definite conjugation!

Agr. with 2nd person object if the subject is 1SG:

(17) (én) ismer-**l-ek** (téged/titeket)

I know-2O-1SG you<sub>sg</sub>-ACC/you<sub>pl</sub>-ACC

*-ja/e/i-* : agrees with 3rd person object, *-l-* : agrees with a 2nd person object.

### 3. The origins of the definite conjugation

#### 3.1. Givón's (1975) theory of verbal agreement:

agreement morphemes on the verb arose as topic-doubling pronominals.

Evidence:

i. the hierarchy of the likelihood of verb agr. governed by the universal hierarchy of topicality

- (18) a. HUMAN > NON-HUMAN  
b. DEFINITE > INDEFINITE  
c. MORE INVOLVED PARTICIPANT > LESS INVOLVED PARTICIPANT  
d. 1ST PERSON > 2ND PERSON > 3RD PERSON

ii. topic-doubling pronouns reanalyzed as subject agr. in pidgin and creol, and in child language.

Obj. agr. in Bantu languages, representing various stages of the same diachronic process.

Obligatory S-V agreement:

- (19) **vikopo**      **vi-li-vunjika**      'The cups broke.'  
                         **vi-li-vunjika**      'They broke.'

An object pronoun can also be cliticized to the verb:

- (20) ni-li-vunja      vikopo      'I broke some cups.'  
 ni-li-**vi**-vunja      'I broke them.'

topicalized object → obligatorily object clitic (O-V agreement):

- (21) vikopo, ni-li-**vi**-vunja 'The cups, I broke them.'

Object clitic reinterpreted as a definitizer for object nouns:

- (22) a. ya-bonye umunhu      'He saw a man.'  
 b. ya-**mu**-bonye umunhu      'He saw the man.'

### 3.2. Marcantonio's (1985) theory of the origin of Hungarian verb-object agreement

In SOV Proto-Ugric, V-O agr. arose in OSV sentences where the object had the topic role.

Later; agr. topicalized objects reinterpreted as agr. with definite objects.

A 3-stage diachronic process:

1. *-t* marks topical objects. Later *-t* extended to all objects.
2. Then the topic role of objects came to be marked on the V, i.e., topical object-V agr.
3. When free topic movement evolves, topical object-V agr. reinterpreted as definite object-V agr.

Stage 1 and stage 2 preserved in various present-day dialects of Vogul and Ostyak.

A Vogul dialect representing stage 1:

- (23) kwal: 'house.NOM/house.ACC';  
 kwal-me: 'the house-ACC' (Collinder 1960)

Vah Ostyak has skipped stage 1; topical obj-V agr. without generalized accusative suffix.

- (24) a. ku rit tus-Ø      b. ku rit tus-t  
 man boat take-PAST-INDEF.3SG      man boat take-PAST-DEF.3SG  
 'The man took a boat.'      'The man took the boat.'

Steinitz (1950:75): verbal agreement with a definite object is optional in Ostyak!

Relics of stage 2 in 14th and early 15th century Hungarian codices.

Topicalized indefinite object eliciting agr.:

- (25) a. **Kit** Amasias kiral auag pap gakorta **getrette** (Vienna Codex p. 214)  
 whom Amasias king or priest often torture-PAST-DEFO-3SG  
 'whom king or priest Amasias often tortured'

Non-topic definite object not eliciting agr.:

- b. es ottan **ven** **ysteny malaztnak latasatt** (Jókai Codex p. 131)  
 and there take-INDEF.3SG divine grace-GEN sight-ACC  
 'and there he took the sight of God's grace'

### 3.3. New data from Ostyak: the secondary topic construction (Nikolaeva 1999a,b, 2001)

Problems with Marcantonio (1985):

- i. V-obj. agr. present in all branches of the Uralic family, hence it originated in Proto-Uralic.
- ii. Nikolaeva (1999, 2001): no OSV in Ostyak;  
 V-obj. agr. marks the secondary object role of topics in SOV.

Evidence that Ostyak and Vogul have preserved Proto-Ugric properties:

Archaisms of the first Old Hungarian documents, relics of Proto-Hungarian, usually have still active counterparts in them (cf. É. Kiss 2011).

E.g., OV order with a caseless object:

- (26) a. [**ø kenček megnítuan**] aianlanac neki aiandokocat  
 their treasures-Ø unlocking offer-INDEF.3PLhim presents-ACC  
 'unlocking their treasures they offer him presents'

(St Matthew 2,11, Munich Codex 1416-1466)

- cf. b. [megnytuán az ew kincheket] adnak neki aiandokokat  
 unlocking thetheir treasures- ACC give-INDEF.3PL him presents-ACC  
 (Gábor Pesti's translation of Novum Testamentum, 1536)

Cf. Vah Ostyak:

- (24) a. ku rit tus-Ø  
 man boat take-PAST-INDEF.3SG  
 'The man took a boat.'

In Ostyak, **SOV is obligatory**. S must be topic, O is typically focus.  
 S/topic identity via passivization:

- (27) a. tam xuj xoj-na an wa:n-s-a  
 this man who-LOC not see-PAST-PASS.3SG  
 Nobody saw this man.

- b. \*xoj tam xuj an wa:nt-ðs /wa:nt-ðs-li  
 who this man not see-PAST.3SG /see-PAST-DEFO.3SG  
 Nobody saw this man.

- (28) a. (luw) juwan re:sk-ə-s  
 he Ivan hit-EP-PAST.3SG  
 'He hit Ivan.'

- b. juwan xoj-na re:sk-ə-s-a  
 Ivan who-LOC hit-EP-PAST-PASS.3S  
 'Who hit Ivan?'

Passive voice was also available in Old Hungarian:

- (29) keseruen kynzathul uos cegegkel werethul  
 bitterly torture-PASS-INDEF.2SG iron nails-with thrust-PASS-INDEF.2SG  
 'you are bitterly tortured, you are thrust with iron nails'  
 (Old Hungarian Mary's Lament, 1300)

In Ostyak, differential verb-object agreement in SOV sentences!

(30) Word orders attested for transitive clauses in Pápay (1906-1908):

	403 sentences without V-O agreement		611 sentences with V-O agreement	
	sentences	%	sentences	%
SOV(X)	329	81	199	32.4
SXOV	39	10	14	2
SOXV	35	9	155	25.5
OS(X)V	0	0	10	1.6
S(X)VO	0	0	7	1

Nikolaeva: O-V agr. signals that the object in SOV is secondary topic rather than focus.

- (31) SECONDARY TOPIC  
 an entity such that the utterance is construed to be about the relationship between it and the primary topic.

- (32) Activation status of the object
- | non-agreeing objects (412 clauses) |             | agreeing objects (677 clauses) |             |
|------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|-------------|
| activated                          | inactivated | activated                      | inactivated |
| 46                                 | 366         | 561                            | 116         |
| 11%                                | 89%         | 83%                            | 17%         |

52% of agreeing objects analyzed as inactivated are activated clause-internally:

- (33) What did he do?  
 luw kalaŋ-ðl re:sk-ðs-li /\*re:sk-ðs  
 he reindeer-3SG hit-PAST-DEFO.3SG/\*hit-PAST.3SG  
 Hei hit his<sub>i</sub>/\*<sub>j</sub> reindeer (Nikolaeva 2001, ex. (45))

The secondary topic is only licensed in the presence of a primary topic. Cf.

- (34) a. What happened?  
 b. ma tam kalaŋ we:l-s-ðm /\*we:l-s-e:m  
 I this reindeer kill-PAST-1SG /kill-PAST-DEFO.1SG  
 I killed this reindeer.

In focus structures the presupposed object always elicits agreement:

- (35) ma ta:lðx ta:ta a:kðt-l-e:m /\*a:kðt-l-ðm anta to:ta  
 I mushroom here collect-PRES-DEFO.1SG /collect-PRES-1SG not there  
 I collect mushrooms HERE, not THERE.

In ditransitive constructions either the patient or the recipient can be secondary topic:

- (36) a. (ma) a:n Juwan-a ma-s-e:m  
 I cup John-LAT give-PAST-DEFO.1SG  
 I gave the cup to John.  
 b. (ma) Juwan a:n-na ma-s-e:m /\*ma-s-ðm  
 I John cup-LOC give-PAST-DEFO.1SG /give-PAST-1SG  
 I gave John a cup.

#### 4. The inverse agreement constraint revisited

- (37) INVERSE AGREEMENT CONSTRAINT (in Proto-Hungarian)  
 A secondary topic must be lower in the animacy hierarchy than the primary topic,  
 unless they both represents the lowest level of the animacy hierarchy.

When Hungarian changed from SOV to Topic Focus V X\*, agreement between the primary topic and the verb grammaticalized as obligatory subject–verb agreement, and secondary topic–verb agreement grammaticalized as obligatory definite object–verb agreement.

The inverse agreement constraint fossilized as a gap in definite object–verb agreement in case of '3rd person subject/1st or 2nd person object', and '2nd person subject/1st person object' combinations.

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