

## ATMOSPHERICAL PREDICATES IN HUNGARIAN

Evidence can be cited that cross-linguistically there exists a class of 'subjectless' verbs, that most commonly denote natural or atmospherical phenomena, conditions of the world or the weather. In many languages a 'dummy' pronoun may appear in sentences with these verbs and function syntactically – at least up to a certain point – as 'subject'.<sup>1</sup> These topicless/thetic sentences are characterized as messages conveying a single unstructured kind of judgement involving only the recognition or rejection of some judgement material, without predicating this judgement of some independently recognised subject.

Corresponding to the English *It is raining/ It is cold* type of weather expressions, in Hungarian there are two, syntactically different type of structures:

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| <p>Cf. (1a) <i>Esik (az eső).</i><br/>         falling the-rain<br/>         'It's raining.'</p> <p>(1b) <i>Havazik (*a hó).</i><br/>         snowing (*the-snow)<br/>         'It's snowing.'</p> <p>(1c) <i>Sötétedik (*a nap).</i><br/>         Darkening (the-day)<br/>         'It's growing dark.'</p> | <p>(2a) <i>Hideg van.</i><br/>         cold is<br/>         'It's cold.'</p> <p>(2b) <i>Nyár van.</i><br/>         summer is<br/>         'It's summer.'</p> |
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Though the two types of weather-expressions are quite similar both semantically and pragmatically, the first type (1a–c) is not productive, there are slightly more than a dozen of such verbs in the lexicon. The second type (2a, b) on the contrary is a highly productive pattern which comprises not only descriptions of weather conditions, but also thetic judgements with a broader atmospherical interpretation. (In the following I will call them copular atmospherical predicates.)

- (3a) *Demokrácia van.*  
 democracy is  
 'There is democracy.'
- (3b) *Ebédszünet van.*  
 lunchbreak is  
 'It's lunchbreak.'

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<sup>1</sup> In other languages nouns with a general meaning 'sky'/'world' are obligatorily or optionally used as the subject of some of these verbs. Cf.

(i) *ʕd-dúnya tʃ-shʕi*  
 the-world she-raining  
 'It is raining' (Palestinian Arabic; from Givón 1984: 90)

(ii) *Dörög (az ég).*  
 thunder the-sky  
 'It's thundering.' (Hungarian)

(iii) *Inmar zorä.*  
 god/sky thunder  
 'It's thundering.' (Udmurt; from Székely 1904: 32)

(3c) *Rend van.*  
order is  
'There is order.'

(3d) *Gond van.*  
problem is  
'There is a problem.'

Though in English or in Hebrew these atmospherical predicates does not seem to be limited to predicates of any particular semantic type, in Hungarian they certainly are.

(4a) *It's so green in Scotland* (from Hazout 2004: 400; eg. (19) b.)

(4b) \**Olyan zöld van Skóciában.*  
so green is in Scotland

(4c) *Olyan zöld Skócia.*  
so green Scotland

'Scotland is so green.'

(5a) *akuv can*  
sad here  
'It is sad here.'

(from Hazout 2004: 400; eg. (20) b.)

(5b) \**Szomorú van itt*  
sad is here

(5c) ?*Szomorú itt.*  
sad here

According to traditional analyses of Hungarian descriptive grammars, the nominal/adjectival part of these copular atmospherical predicates is the grammatical subject of the verb BE. In the generative tradition these constructions were regarded as similar to the weather verbs illustrated in (1a–c), and by analogy were considered subjectless (Komlósy 1994) or containing a phonetically empty quasi-argument as their subjects (Tóth 2000). Viszket 2002 argues that the sentence type *Hideg van* (cold is 'It's cold') has two possible syntactic structures, one with the adjective as predicative, and one with the adjective as subject. For the *Havazik* type she claims that in the GB+MP framework they can be considered to have a quasi-argument as their subjects, in the LFG framework they either do not have a subject or have a pro subject, and in the GASG framework they are subjectless, introducing only a 'situational referent'.

My purpose is to give a coherent account of the copular atmospherical predicates in their relation to the weather verbs, test the structural (dis)similarities of the two types of sentences, and formulate some valid generalizations regarding the semantic and pragmatic aspects of the former.

#### References:

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