

Definiteness and the Structure of Noun Phrases in Hungarian

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It is a widely-held view that a Hungarian verb appears in the objective conjugation if and only if its object is a DP or larger phrase (the *DP-hood hypothesis*; Bartos 2001; É. Kiss 2000; É. Kiss 2002: 49,151–157). This paper argues that the objective conjugation is triggered by the feature DEF, which is passed up within a noun phrase from heads to their phrasal projections, and from complements to their extended projections, with heads taking precedence over complements (the *DEF-feature hypothesis*). Thus a noun phrase can be definite without being a DP (or larger). There are at least two empirical arguments for the DEF-feature hypothesis.

Argument 1. The only determiner of category D in Hungarian is the definite determiner *az* ‘the’ (Szabolcsi 1994; É. Kiss 2002). Yet many nominals lacking *a(z)* ‘the’ trigger the objective conjugation. For example, *valamennyi levél* ‘each letter’ triggers the objective conjugation, even though *valamennyi* is not a D:

- (1) Eltitkol-om valamennyi találkozás-t.
keep.secret-1SG.DEF each meeting-ACC
‘I keep each meeting secret.’

Proponents of the DP-hood hypothesis have claimed that such phrases are DPs despite appearances. According to Szabolcsi (1994) and Bartos (2001); *az* is deleted before another determiner under a rule of haplology that applies when the second determiner is specific; É. Kiss (2002) proposes that determiners like *valamennyi* move to Spec,DP unless this movement is blocked by intervening material, in which case D is spelled out as *az* (similarly to how Delsing (1993) accounts for double definiteness in Scandinavian). Evidence for these theories comes from the fact that *valamennyi* ‘each’ does co-occur with *a(z)* when there is intervening linguistic material such as a nominative possessor; cf. *a *(Mari) valamennyi titok* ‘each of Mary’s secrets’. These analyses both predict that *minden* triggers the objective conjugation, contrary to fact (Szabolcsi 1994: ex. 106):

- (2) Eltitkol-ok/*-om minden találkozás-t.
keep.secret-1SG.IN/-1SG.DEF every meeting-ACC
‘I keep every meeting secret.’

This false prediction arises because *minden* can co-occur with *a(z)*:

- (3) a Mari minden kalap-ja
the Marie every hat-3SG.POSS
‘every one of Marie’s hats’

This fact means that *minden* should undergo haplology/raising in the absence of intervening linguistic material, making the phrase into a DP.

Argument 2. Finite object clauses trigger the objective conjugation, and these clauses are, *prima facie*, CPs rather than DPs. To explain this in a manner consistent with the DP-hood hypothesis, Bartos (2001: p. 320) invokes Kenesei’s (1994) analysis of such clauses as adjuncts associated with an expletive DP pronoun. But Kenesei’s analysis cannot explain the fact that when the object pronoun is overt, the finite clause becomes an island, nor can it explain focus-raising with indefinite adjuncts. Hence complement clauses really are CPs, yet they trigger the objective conjugation.

Analysis. The proposed analysis employs a boolean feature DEF: lexical items may be specified [DEF +] or [DEF –]; or they can be unmarked for DEF. If a verb takes an accusative complement phrase bearing the [DEF +] specification, then that verb appears in the objective conjugation; otherwise it appears in the subjective conjugation.

The objective conjugation triggers (specified [DEF +]) include proper names, definite determiners, third person ordinary pronouns, reflexive and reciprocal pronouns of all persons, possessive suffixes, and complementizers.

Minden ‘every’ is unmarked; hence, it appears with a subjective conjugation verb in general. But if the head daughter is unspecified for DEF while the complement daughter is so specified, then the DEF feature is passed up from the complement daughter to its extended projection instead. Possessive suffixes provide one example of this.

- (4) Ismer-em minden titk-od-at.
 know-1SG.DEF every secret-2SG.POSS-ACC
 ‘I know your every secret.’

Possessed nouns do not always trigger the objective conjugation, however. With the indefinite determiner *néhány* ‘some’, either objective or subjective conjugation is possible:

- (5) Ismer-em/Ismer-ek néhány titk-od-at.
 know-1SG.DEF/know-1SG.IN some secret-2SG-ACC
 ‘I know some secrets of yours.’

- (6) Lát-om/Lát-ok valaki-d-et.
 see-1SG.DEF/see-1SG.IN someone-2SG-ACC
 ‘I see someone of yours.’

Apparently, the inherent indefiniteness of determiners like *néhány* ‘some’ can take precedence over the inherent definiteness of possession. This is modelled under the assumption that *néhány* is optionally [DEF –]. Since it appears on the head daughter, this feature, when specified, takes priority over the [DEF +] feature contributed by the possessive suffix. More generally, any feature clashes between daughters are resolved in favor of the head daughter.

To account for the fact that nominals introduced by dative possessors are always definite – even when the possessor and the possessum are both indefinite (Kiss 2002, p. 173, ex. 50) – it is proposed that the definiteness is carried by a Poss head, whose specifier the dative possessor inhabits. Support for the view that dative possessors have a dedicated position, rather than being adjoined, for example, comes from the fact that the pre-article position is not available to other case-marked arguments of the noun (among other facts).

In summary, it is proposed that the formal definiteness of a nominal or complement clause is determined primarily by lexical feature specifications, which are passed up the tree from heads to their phrasal projections, and from complements to their extended projections, with heads taking precedence over complements whenever the feature values would otherwise clash. The phrasal category of the nominal does not determine the verb conjugation. These assumptions account for differences in definiteness between determiners of the same syntactic category, the use of the objective conjugation with CP complements, and the variable definiteness of possessed noun phrases.

References: Bartos, H. (2001). Object agreement in Hungarian: A case for minimalism. In Alexandrova, G. M. and Arnaudova, O., editors, *The Minimalist Parameter: Selected Papers from the Open Linguistics Forum, Ottawa, 21-23 March 1997*, volume 192 of *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory*, pages 311–324. John Benjamins, Amsterdam. Delsing, L.-O. (1993). *The Internal Structure of Noun Phrases in the Scandinavian Languages*. Team Offset, Malmö. É. Kiss, K. (2000). The Hungarian noun phrase is like the English noun phrase. In Alberti, G. and Kenesei, I., editors, *Papers from the Pécs Conference*, volume 7 of *Approaches to Hungarian*, pages 121–149. JATE Press, Szeged. É. Kiss, K. (2002). *The Syntax of Hungarian*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Kenesei, I. (1994). Subordinate clauses. In Kiefer, F. and É. Kiss, K., editors, *The Syntactic Structure of Hungarian*, volume 27 of *Syntax and Semantics*. Academic Press, New York. Szabolcsi, A. (1994). The noun phrase. In Kiefer, F. and É. Kiss, K., editors, *The Syntactic Structure of Hungarian*, volume 27, pages 179–274. Academic Press, New York.