What counts as relational in Hungarian?

Introduction: Hungarian displays two inflectional asymmetries which pertain to possessor agreement and verbal agreement, respectively. Although each of the splits is dealt with in detail in the literature, no analytical link between the two has as yet been suggested. The goal of the present paper is to establish precisely such a link. We propose that the common rationale of the two splits is the exponent of a pragmatic component in the relation denoted by nouns and verbs.

A split in the possessor agreement morphology: Hungarian possessor agreement exhibits (productively, for a phonologically-defined group of nouns) two different suffixes of the 3rd person (Kiefer 1985, Elekfi 2000). Observe the following contrast:

(1)   a. *ablak-a*   b. *ablak-ja*
          window-P'OR3SG   window-ALIENABLE.P'OR3SG
          'its window'   'his/her window'

In (1a) the window stands in an 'inalienable' part-whole relation, belonging to a house or a door, whereas in (1b) it is 'alienably' possessed by a person, in the literal sense of ownership. We conceive this alienability contrast as an opposition between semantic and pragmatic possession. Semantic possession implies that the relation between the noun's referential argument and the possessor is inherent to the noun's lexical meaning, whereas pragmatic possession indicates that the relation is contextually established.

A split in the verbal conjugation: This split involves two different conjugations, of which the so-called 'objective' conjugation not only displays agreement with the subject but also displays some referential property of the direct object:

(2) a. *Lát*   *egy*   *kutyá-t*   b. *Lát-ja*   *a*   *kutyá-t*
       see.3SG.SUBJECTIVE   INDEF   dog-ACC   see-3SG.OBJECTIVE   DEF   dog-ACC
       'S/he sees a dog'   'S/he sees the dog.'

Commonly the objective conjugation is analysed as being triggered by objects that are definite (e.g., Kenesei, Vago & Fenyvesi 1998, É. Kiss 2002, Coppock & Wechsler 2012) and therefore often referred to as 'definite conjugation'. Any analysis is confronted with certain peculiarities of the choice between the two conjugations, which concern the difference between clausal and infinitival complements, and among several wh-pronouns and quantifiers. Besides these peculiarities, we pay particular emphasis to the two following points:

A. The objective conjugation is also found with indefinite objects, provided that they are possessed or partitive-specific. We therefore follow the proposal by Coppock (2012), who makes use of the discourse-semantic notion of familiarity, by which she also accounts for the above-mentioned peculiarities. According to Coppock, if the referential argument of the object stands in a part-whole relation to some discourse referent, then it triggers the objective conjugation. We consider the objective conjugation to instantiate object agreement (in line with Bartos 1997, den Dikken 2004, and É. Kiss 2002, 2005). We argue that Hungarian object agreement is restricted by differential object marking (DOM): As an instance of language economy, the objective conjugation is avoided when the object is of little salience. Since definiteness is not the appropriate semantic notion we replace the specification [+DEF], which is unanimously assumed in the literature, by the specification [+PARTSPECIFIC]. Non-specific indefinites being the lowest step on the definiteness scale (Aissen 2003), it is possible to locate the split on the definiteness scale precisely (pace Bárány 2012).

B. When the object is a local person pronoun (i.e., 1st or 2nd person) the subjective rather than the objective conjugation is used. Obviously, this does not follow from DOM, since they are hierarchically higher than 3rd person objects. Contrary to what Coppock claims, we argue

that the local person agreement behaviour cannot be derived from her familiarity analysis either. Instead, we explain it by the typological observation that local person pronouns are so 'bad' as objects, in the sense that they are too high on the person scale in comparison to subjects so that they often fail to display the full range of object properties.[1] The fact that Hungarian has unusually complex accusative forms of 1st and 2nd person pronouns (*eng-em*, *tég-ed* lit. 'my me', 'your you') should be seen in the same light. There is even a tendency towards leaving out the accusative marker of 3rd person lexical objects when 1st or 2nd person possessor suffix precedes; e.g., *Elvesztet-t-em a tol-am(-at)* 'I lost my pencil'. We conceive the cease of accusative marking in the context of local person objects to be an analogy to the person sensitivity of the conjugation split.

The common denominator of A. and B., i.e., the ban against the object agreement at the top and at the bottom of the definiteness scale, is that the objective conjugation is economic and at the same time restricted to unmarked/harmonic scenarios. This excludes those scenarios where the internal argument is denied full object status because it is either unnaturally high compared to the subject, or it is too low in terms of referential individuation. In sum, objective agreement only occurs in what we subsequently define as a 'robust transitive scenario'.

Synthesis: Eventually, we draw on the close morphological parallels between the split in the verbal conjugation and that in the possessor agreement morphology. As is evident from (1b) and (2b), the suffixes of the objective conjugation are akin to the suffixes of the alienable possessor agreement. We explain this by assigning to -*jA* the status of indicating a pragmatic component in the relation of two individuals: (i) With nouns, in the sense that alienable (i.e., 'pragmatic') possession involves some contextual relation which is not required for semantic possession; (ii) with verbs, in the sense of robust transitivity, namely presupposing either the existence of the referent of the object phrase, or a domain of entities of which it is an element.

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[1] In referring to a person scale, our proposal resembles that by É. Kiss (2005), who refers to the inverse systems of, e.g., Algonquian languages; for criticism see Coppock & Wechsler (2010).