

Objective conjugation and pragmatic possession in Hungarian

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1. Introduction

Goals:

- connect two inflectional asymmetries in verbal agreement and in possessor agreement
- draw on the close morphological parallels between the split
- explain them against the typological background of cross-linguistic generalizations and theoretical notions such as alienability, D-linking, DOM, markedness, and transitivity
- give the two splits a common rationale: They both involve a restriction in terms of a pragmatic component in the anchoring of the referent of the internal argument
- introduce and define the notion of ‘robustness’ of a transitive scenario
- point out the role of presupposition regarding the identifiability of the referent of the object

2. A split in the possessor agreement morphology

2.1 Typological context: the morphosyntax of alienability

(i) **inalienable possession** involves an inherent affiliation

(ii) **alienable possession** involves temporary affiliation, where p’ or typically has control over p’um

Some ways of expressing an (in)alienability distinction in contexts of possession:

(1) Jamul Tiipay (Yuman < Hokan, Mexico; Miller 2001: 145ff)

a. *me-ntaly*

2-mother

‘your mother’

b. *me-shally*

2-hand

‘your hand’

c. *me-ny-a’naak*

2-POSS-chair

‘your chair’

We construe the conceptual basis of the alienability dichotomy as the opposition of **semantic possession** and **pragmatic possession**, parallel to that of semantic and pragmatic definiteness in the sense of Löbner (2011).

2.2 An alienability split in the possessor agreement morphology

Hungarian displays an alienability split first investigated by Kiefer (1985); see also Elekfi (2000), Moravcsik (2003).

<p>(2) ‘inalienable’: <i>ablak-a</i> window-P’OR3SG ‘its window’ (e.g., of a house or a door, part-whole relation)</p> <p><i>üveg-e</i> ‘its glass (of a window)’ <i>zseb-e</i> ‘its pocket (of a coat)’ <i>taréj-a</i> ‘its crest (of a cock)’ <i>keret-e</i> ‘its frame (of a picture)’ <i>anyag-a</i> ‘its material (of something)’ <i>talp-a</i> ‘his/her sole (of a person’s body)’ <i>küszöb-e</i> ‘its threshold (of a house)’ <i>gép-e</i> ‘its machine’ <i>fonal</i> ‘thread (of a ball of wool)’ <i>lék</i> ‘part cut out of a melon’</p>	<p>‘alienable’: <i>ablak-ja</i> window-ALIEN.P’OR3SG ‘his/her window’ (literally possessed, by a person)</p> <p><i>üveg-je</i> ‘his/her glass’ <i>zseb-je</i> ‘his/her pocket’ <i>taréj-ja</i> ‘his/her crest’ <i>keret-je</i> ‘his/her frame’ <i>anyag-ja</i> ‘his/her material’ <i>talp-ja</i> ‘his/her sole’ <i>küszöb-je</i> ‘his/her threshold’ <i>gép-je</i> ‘his/her machine’ <i>fonal-ja</i> ‘his/her thread’ <i>lék-je</i> ‘his/her part cut out of melon’</p>
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Input conditions for the alternation:

- Semantic input condition: the noun is relational; specifically, it denotes a meronymous artefact
- Phonological input condition: the noun ends in a consonant other than a strident or palatal consonant, or in vowel other than [a]

⇒ **Typological context of the Hungarian data:**

- alienability split, in line with the generalization ‘less conceptual distance between possessor and possessee corresponds to less structural markedness’
- in particular, the /j/-ful suffixes have the function of morphologically establishing a non-inherent contextual POSS relation, mostly with meronymic artefacts

Representations:

- (3) /j/-less form simply saturates the p’or argument (underlying relational concept maintained):
 scheme for RCs: $\lambda y \lambda x [((\text{SortalComponents}(x))) \dots \& \text{RelationalComponent}(x,y)]$
 instantiation by *ablak*: $\lambda y \lambda x [‘\text{WINDOW}’(x) \dots \& \text{PART-OF}(x,y)]$
 applied to *-a* ‘it’: $\lambda x [‘\text{WINDOW}’(x) \dots \& \text{PART-OF}(x, ‘it’)]$

/j/-ful form indicates a shift $\text{RC} \rightarrow \text{SC}$ with a contextual relation (thus, $\text{RC} \rightarrow \text{SC} \rightarrow \text{RC}$) and at the same time saturates the p’or argument:

- ja*: $\lambda \text{RC} \lambda x \exists y [\text{RC}(x,y) \& \text{POSS}_{\text{context}}(‘s/he’,x)]$
 applied to *ablak*: $\lambda x \exists y [‘\text{WINDOW}’(x) \dots \& \text{PART-OF}(x,y) \& \text{POSS}_{\text{context}}(‘s/he’,x)]$

Conclusions:

- The interaction of morphological and semantic distinctions is well-known from typology
- *-j* with ‘alternating’ nouns indicates pragmatic possession which presupposes a contextual instantiation and denotes a type shift: $\text{RC} \rightarrow \text{SC} \rightarrow \text{RC}$

3. A split in the verbal conjugation

3.1 Basic facts

Hungarian differentiates between a subjective and an objective verbal conjugation. The objective conjugation involves ‘j-full’ forms as they also occur with nouns (dealt with in the previous section). The *j* occurs with subjects of 3.SG as well as all persons in the PL:

(4) Paradigm for *lát* ‘to see’, possessor agreement paradigm for *ablak* ‘window’

	objective	subjective	objective preterite	subjective preterite	possessor
1SG	<i>lát-om</i>	<i>lát-ok</i>	<i>lát-t-am</i>	<i>lát-t-am</i>	<i>ablak-om</i> ‘my window’
2SG	<i>lát-od</i>	<i>lát-sz</i>	<i>lát-t-ad</i>	<i>lát-t-ál</i>	<i>ablak-od</i> ‘your window’
3SG	<i>lát-ja</i>	<i>lát</i>	<i>lát-t-a</i>	<i>lát-t</i>	<i>ablak-a/-ja</i> ‘its window’ (inal.)/ ‘his/her window’ (al.)
1PL	<i>lát-juk</i>	<i>lát-unk</i>	<i>lát-t-uk</i>	<i>lát-t-unk</i>	<i>ablak-unk</i> ‘our window’
2PL	<i>lát-játok</i>	<i>lát-tok</i>	<i>lát-t-átok</i>	<i>lát-t-atok</i>	<i>ablak-otok</i> ‘your window’
3PL	<i>lát-ják</i>	<i>lát-nak</i>	<i>lát-t-ák</i>	<i>lát-t-ak</i>	<i>ablak-uk/-juk</i> ‘their window’ (inal./al.)

- (5) a. *Lát-játok a kutyá-t*
see-2PL.OBJ DEF dog-ACC
‘You (pl.) see the dog.’
- b. *Lát-játok ő-t*
see-2PL.OBJ PRON3SG-ACC
‘You (pl.) see him/her.’
- c. *Lát-tok egy kutyá-t*
see-2PL.SUBJ INDEF dog-ACC
‘You (pl.) see a dog.’
- d. *Lát-tok / *-játok*
see-2PL.SUBJ /-2PL.OBJ
‘You see.’

Commonly the objective conjugation is analysed as being triggered by the definiteness of the object: in informal terms (Comrie 1977, Kenesei, Vágo & Fenyvesi 1998, Coppock & Wechsler 2010), in terms of syntactic DP structure (Bartos 1997, 1999, É. Kiss 2002), or in terms of a feature [+DEF] that is either purely formal (den Dikken 2004, Coppock & Wechsler 2012) or semantically motivated (Coppock 2013).

Accordingly, the objective conjugation is often referred to as the ‘definite’ conjugation.

3.2 Complexities of the distribution: ±definite only as a rule of thumb

3.2.1 ‘Local’ objects

1st and 2nd person objects trigger the subjective rather than the objective conjugation:

- (6) a. *Engem lát-sz / *-od.*
PRON1SG.ACC see -2SG.SUBJ/*-2SG.OBJ
‘You see me.’
- b. *Téged lát-nak / *-ják.*
PRON2SG.ACC see -3PL.SUBJ/*-3PL.OBJ
‘They see you.’

3.2.4 Infinitival and clausal objects

Complement clause objects trigger the objective conjugation:

- (11) a. *Tud-ta, hogy Péter csal-t egy vizsgá-nál.*
 know-PRET.3SG.OBJ COMPL Peter cheat-PRET3SG.SUBJ INDEF exam-ADESSIVE
 ‘He knew that Peter cheated in an exam.’
- b. *Nem tud-om hogy miért csinál-ta azt.*
 NEG know-1SG.OBJ COMPL why do-PRET3SG.OBJ DEM-ACC
 ‘I don’t know why he did that.’

Infinitives trigger the subjective conjugation:

- (12) a. *János szeret-Ø mosogat-ni ebéd után.*
 John like-3SG.SUBJ wash_dishes-INF dinner after
 ‘John likes to do the dishes after dinner.’
- b. *Nem akar-ok haza men-ni.*
 NEG want-1SG.SUBJ home go-INF
 ‘I don’t want to go home.’

Motivation: Complement clauses are (onto)logically affine to individual terms and as such to definite NPs. By contrast, infinitives can logically be regarded as properties, not as individuals; hence they do not correspond to definite NPs.

3.2.5 Possessed or specific indefinite objects

The objective conjugation is also used with indefinite objects, provided that they are possessed:

- (13) a. *egy magyar író könyv-é-t olvas-om*
 INDEF Hungarian author book-POR3SG-ACC read-1SG.OBJ
 ‘I read a book of a Hungarian author.’
- b. (a) *János könyv-é-t olvas-om*
 DEF János book-POR3SG-ACC read-1SG.OBJ
 ‘I read János’s book.’
- c. *János egy könyv-é-t olvas-om*
 János INDEF book-POR3SG-ACC read-1SG.OBJ
 ‘I read a book of János’s.’
- d. *egy könyv-em-et /-ünk-et olvas-om*
 INDEF book-P’OR1SG-ACC -POR1PL-ACC read-1SG.OBJ
 ‘I read a book of mine/ours.’

⇒ The distribution cannot be explained as a definiteness effect.

- (14) *Ismer-ek/-em* *néhány* *könyv-ed-et* (Bartos 1999)
 know-1SG.SUBJ/1SG.OBJ some book-POR2SG-ACC
 ‘I know some of your books.’

⇒ The presence of an indefinite p’ or phrase suffices to trigger the objective conjugation.

Besides definiteness and possession, some notion of specificity also plays a role:

- (15) a. *Olvas-t-uk* *Péter* (*öt*) *vers-ét* Bartos (1997: 368)
 read-PRET.1PL.OBJ Péter five poem-POR3SG-ACC
 ‘We have read Peter’s (five) poems.’

- b. *Olvas-t-unk* *Péter-nek* (*öt*) *vers-ét*.
 read-PRET.1PL.SUBJ Péter-DAT five poem-POR3SG-ACC
 ‘We have read (five) poems by Peter.’

- (16) *Könyv-ek-et* *kölcsönkér-t-∅* / **-t-e*. Trommer (1995: 25)
 book-PL-ACC borrow-PRET.3SG.SUBJ PRET. 3SG.OBJ
 ‘S/he borrowed books.’

⇒ The distribution is governed by the semantic concept of partitive specificity (Enç 1991) and D(iscourse)-linking.

⇒ We therefore follow Coppock’s (2013: 7) ‘Lexical Familiarity Hypothesis’: “If the referential argument of a phrase is *lexically specified* as familiar, then the phrase triggers the objective conjugation.”

- Contrary to what Coppock claims, however, we argue that this does not account for the local person objects (see 3.2.1), and this is where our proposal will diverge.
- Since definiteness is not the appropriate notion we replace the feature specification [+DEF] by [+PARTSPEC].

4. Typological context of the conjugation split: Differential object marking (DOM)

4.1. The realisation of object case and object agreement

Object case and object agreement markers are typically restricted to noun phrases with either human (or animate) referents or with a definite (or specific) interpretation:

- (17) Swahili (Givon 1976: 159):
- | | |
|--|--|
| a. <i>ni-li-soma</i> <i>ki-tabu</i>
1SG-PAST-read 7-book
‘I read a book.’ | b. <i>ni-li-ki-soma</i> <i>ki-tabu</i>
1SG-PAST-CL7-read 7-book
‘I read the book.’ |
| c. <i>ni-li-mw-ona</i> <i>m-tu</i> <i>m-moja</i>
1SG-PAST-CL1-see 1-person 1-one
‘I saw one person.’ | d. <i>ni-li-mw-ona</i> <i>yula m-tu</i>
1SG-PAST-CL1-see DEF 1-person
‘I saw the person.’ |

(18) Maltese (Semitic; Fabri 1993:117f):

a. *Raj-t il Pawlu.*
see-1SG CASE Paul
'I saw Paul.'

b. *Xtraj-t il-ktieb.*
buy-1SG DEF-book
'I bought the book.'

Hierarchies responsible for (among others) DOM (Siewierska 2004, Aissen 2003):

- (19) a. Person hierarchy: 1st > 2nd > 3rd
b. Animacy Scale: Hum(an) > Anim(ate) > Inan(imate)
c. Focus hierarchy: not in focus > in focus
c. Definiteness Scale: Pronoun > Name > Definite > Indefinite Specific > NonSpecific

⇒ Object case and object agreement are avoided where the object does not have typical properties of subjects such as animacy or definiteness, hence is an unmarked object.

Claim: Although the Hungarian objective conjugation apparently displays only subject agreement, we are in fact dealing with object agreement.

The 'objective' series specifies '1/2/3→3rd person object'. Besides, there is the portmanteau form -*IVk*: 1SG→2.

What we are dealing with in Hungarian is:

- object agreement that is restricted in the sense of the hierarchies (19)
- at the lower end, in terms of the feature [+PARTSPEC]
- at the upper end, in terms of the person sensitivity (see 3.2.1)

4.2 The lower end of the hierarchy

Proposal: The Hungarian objective conjunction is analysed (i) as object agreement, (ii) as restricted in terms of DOM, and (iii) with [±PARTSPEC] as the threshold.

⇒ Explains why the presence of would-be subject agreement is governed by object properties

⇒ [-PARTSPEC] NPs are 'unmarked' objects, while [+PARTSPEC] objects are more akin to subjects

⇒ The split is (pace Bárány 2012) in line with DOM as in most other languages

5. The upper end of the hierarchy:

The person asymmetry, or: 1st and 2nd person objects are 'bad' direct objects

Proposal: The person sensitivity is owing to the tendency of local person pronouns not displaying the full range of objects properties.

5.1 Typological context: Why local person objects are dispreferred

The most natural and 'unmarked' objects are low in salience, animacy, definiteness. This means that 1st and 2nd person are the most unnatural and 'marked' (the worst, so to speak) objects:

- Some languages employ very special morphological linking systems, e.g. an inverse system as found in the Algonquian languages.
- Another reaction to 'bad' objects is to exclude them from object privileges.

- In Selkup (Samoyedic), according to Polinsky (1992: 415f), 1st and 2nd person pronouns fail to show direct object status altogether since they are not ‘passivisable’.
- Cf. also Bresnan et al. (2001): If the agent is lower on person scale than the patient, the passive is preferred/obligatory. Conversely, if the agent is higher the passive is dispreferred/precluded.

5.2 Accusative marking in Hungarian

The accusative is left out in certain environments:

- 1st and 2nd pronouns:

Hungarian has unusually complex accusative forms of the 1st and 2nd person pronouns.

Passage from the old folk song “Tavaszi szél” (‘Spring wind’):

- (20) *Hát én immár kit válasszak, virágom, virágom.*
 so I now who.ACC choose.1SG.SUBJ flower.POR1SG flower.POR1SG
 ‘Who should I choose now? my flower, my flower’

Te eng-em-et ‘s én tég-ed-et, virágom, virágom.
 You I-POR1SG-ACC and I you-POR2SG-ACC flower.POR1SG flower.POR1SG
 You me and I you my flower, my flower.’

- (21) a. *Tég-ed(-et) szeret-lek.* b. *Eng-em(-et) látsz.*
 you-2SGPOR-ACC love-1SG→2.OBJ me-1SGPOR-ACC see.2SG.SUBJ
 ‘I love you.’ [Its you who I love.] ‘You see me.’

- 3rd person lexical objects possessed by 1st or 2nd person: the accusative marker is only optional.

- (22) a. a. *Elvesztet-tem a tol-am(-at) / tol-ad(-at)*
 loose-PRET.1SG.OBJ DEF pen-P’OR1SG-ACC pen-POR2SG-ACC
 ‘I lost my pen / your pen.’

b. *Elvesztet-tem a tol-á-t*
 loose-PRET.1SG.OBJ DEF pen-P’OR3SG-ACC
 ‘I lost his/her pen.’

c. *Elvesztet-tem a tol-unk(-at) / tol-atok(-at)*
 loose-PRET.1SG.OBJ DEF pen-P’OR1PL(-ACC) pen-P’OR2PL(-ACC)
 ‘I lost our pen / your pen.’

d. *Elvesztet-em a tol-uk-at*
 loose-PRET.1SG.OBJ DEF pen-P’OR3PL-ACC
 ‘I lost their pen.’

Our idea: For Hungarian the cease of accusative marking with local person objects is an analogy to the person sensitivity of the conjugation split.

Evidence comes from the inventory of portmanteau markers. Hungarian displays only one genuine such marker, namely for the combination 1SG→2.

⇒ Portmanteau suffixes are a common typological option. To the extent they exist in Uralic, they should be analysed as belonging to the objective series since they specify the object.

- ⇒ Local person arguments are ‘bad’ (marked) objects. The unavailability of objective conjugation is just one ramification of this status, others are the cease of accusative case and the unavailability of passive.
- ⇒ Hungarian resolves the conflict of faithfulness and markedness by allowing for just one combination with a ‘bad’ object, namely the least marked one in terms of the hierarchy $1 > 2 > 3$, in the morphological inventory: 1SG→2 SG(/PL) *IVk*.
- ⇒ The objective series should be seen as portmanteau forms for the ‘unmarked’ combinations in which the object does not outrank the subject on the hierarchy: $1 \rightarrow 3$, $2 \rightarrow 3$, and $3 \rightarrow 3$
- ⇒ All ‘bad’ scenarios ($1\text{PL} \rightarrow 2$, $2 \rightarrow 1$, $3 \rightarrow 1$, and $3 \rightarrow 2$) are ignored in the objective conjugation. Instead the subjective series can only be employed.

6. ‘Robust’ transitive scenarios and agreement splits restricted by pragmatic factors

- How does the distribution fit with typological generalisations concerning subject-and-object-scenarios, thus, with transitivity?
- Why does the objective agreement series, thus, the j -full of the two conjugation paradigms, align with the alienable variant of possessor agreement?

6.1 Restrictions on grammatical ‘objecthood’ and the notion of robust transitivity

Object marking is constrained by (i) low saliency (DOM), see section 4, and (ii) properties of the event denoted by the verb:

aspect-based: e.g. Mordvin (Uralic), object agreement only in the perfective aspect
aktionsart-based:

- in Italian, e.g., two argument activities (*eat spaghetti*) do not allow for passivization
- ergative languages: e.g. Samoan, ergative-absolutive case pattern not available when the verb is taken to denote an activity rather than an accomplishment

⇒ A two-place activity is treated as an intransitive rather than a transitive scenario

Van Valin & LaPolla (1997:122ff): when the internal argument is non-specific or non-referential it often behaves as an inherent argument. E.g., it can be omitted (*speak/beszél*) or incorporated.

⇒ The internal argument of a two-place verb may fail to fulfil all morphological and syntactic properties of direct objects, or it even may not enjoy the status of a direct object at all.

6.2 The role of presuppositionality for the internal argument

Analysis: Conceptually grounded scale that elaborates on the definiteness hierarchy (19d), and the semantic-pragmatic definition of the two cut-off points for Hungarian.

(23) Scale of referentiality of internal arguments and their presuppositional contents

	Status of internal argument in terms of definiteness and referentiality	Example (reference)	Presuppositional contents	
subjective	definite local pronouns	(7)	identifiability only in speech situation	indexical
objective	non-local (= 3rd) person pronouns	(5b)	identifiability via coherence in discourse set (previously mentioned)	anchoring via coherence in discourse
	unique concepts, proper names	<i>Látom a napot/Jánost</i> 'I see the sun / John'	identifiability via utterance-independent common ground and discourse	
	anaphoric (including ellipsis)	(5a)	identifiability via coherence in discourse set (previously mentioned) plus some utterance-independent common ground	
	indefinite: possessed [+PARTSPEC]	(13b-d) (8b,c), (9b), (10b)	existence and coherence; anchoring via superset that contains the referent	
subjective	[-PARTSPEC]: epistemically or scopally specific	(5c), (10a)	(existence asserted, not presupposed)	no referential anchoring
	not referentially anchored: non-specific indefinite	<i>Nem üt (egy) kutyát.</i> 'He doesn't beat dogs.'	(no anchoring, only warranted by speaker)	
	(pseudo-)incorporated arguments	<i>fagylaltot eszek</i> 'I ice-cream-eat'		
	no genuine exponent: inherent objects	<i>beszélek</i> 'I speak' <i>szólok</i> 'I call out'		
	existentially bound arguments	(5d)		
	no internal argument (monadic verbs)	<i>megyek</i> 'I walk'		

The use of an NPs includes a presupposition concerning the identifiability of the referent:

- For local pronouns, the anchoring is purely indexical, that is, determined by the context of utterance.
- Non-local NPs presuppose some background of coherence.
- Utilising the notion of coherence, partitive-specific indefinites are 'on board' since they

presuppose an identifiable superset to which the referent belongs.

- The reference of merely epistemically specific and further [–PARTSPEC] indefinites is only warranted by the speaker, thus, not anchored in the common ground of speaker and hearer.
- ⇒ Objective agreement is restricted by (or, in fact, it signals) the need for discourse coherence in the anchoring of the referent.

6.3 Pragmatic factors in conjugation and possessor agreement splits

The forms of the objective paradigm, most of which feature *-j* as a component, indicate a presupposition pertaining to the relation denoted by the verb and to its internal argument. Much in the same way, the forms of the alienable sub-paradigm, which also regularly involve the ingredient *-j*, indicate that the possessor is in a pragmatically determined relation with the possessum.

7. Conclusions

- The talk has connected two inflectional splits, pertaining to possessor agreement and to verbal agreement. The splits display close morphological parallels.
- We argued that Hungarian objective agreement is restricted by a refined definiteness hierarchy.
- We assume a combination of two dimensions: not too low referentiality (in terms of [+PARTSPEC], and in line with DOM), and speech situation-independent identifiability (manifest in terms of sensitivity to grammatical person).
- Taking these restrictions together, an intermediate segment on the refined definiteness scale is circumscribed, which we refer to as robust transitivity, and which triggers objective agreement.
- The morphological parallels between the two splits are thus given a semantic rationale by analysing both the alienable and the objective paradigm as involving a restriction in terms of a pragmatic component in the anchoring of the referent of the internal argument:
 - (i) for possessed nouns, in the sense that pragmatic possession presupposes a contextual instantiation which is not presupposed for semantic possession
 - (ii) for transitive verbs, in the sense of including a presupposition concerning the anchoring via discourse coherence.

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