Non-specific indefinites and Hungarian verb paradigms

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Contents

Introduction

(1) shows an alternation available for some speakers of Hungarian, where a non-specific interpretation of the direct object co-occurs with the so called *subjective paradigm* on the verb (glossed *φ*.SUBJ).

(1) a. Chomsky-nak nem olvas-t-ad vers-é-t.
Ch.-DAT not read-PAST-3SG.OBJ poem-3SG.POSS-ACC
'You haven't read Chomsky's poem /any poem of Chomsky's.'

b. %Chomsky-nak nem olvas-t-ál vers-é-t.
Ch.-DAT not read-PAST-3SG.SUBJ poem-3SG.POSS-ACC
'You haven't read any poem of Chomsky's.' (cf. Szabolcsi 1994: 226f.)

Claims ...

- Possessed direct objects co-occurring with the subjective paradigm are really non-specific indefinites.
- The Hungarian objective paradigm is triggered by the interaction of noun phrase structure and noun phrase semantics.

... and Goals

- Reevaluate existing approaches to Hungarian verb paradigms.
- Relate the alternation in (1) to Standard Hungarian.

1 Preliminaries: Hungarian verb paradigms and possessive structures

Hungarian has two transitive verb paradigms, the *subjective*, (2), and the *objective*, (3), verb paradigm. Both show person and number agreement with the subject, and the objective paradigm (glossed *φ*.OBJ) appears only with certain types of direct objects (DOs), very roughly definites.

(2) Olvas-ok egy / néhány / minden könyv-et.
read-1SG.SUBJ a some every book-ACC
'I read a / some / every book(s).'

(3) Olvas-om a / mindegyik könyv-et.
read-1SG.OBJ the each book-ACC
'I read the / each book.'

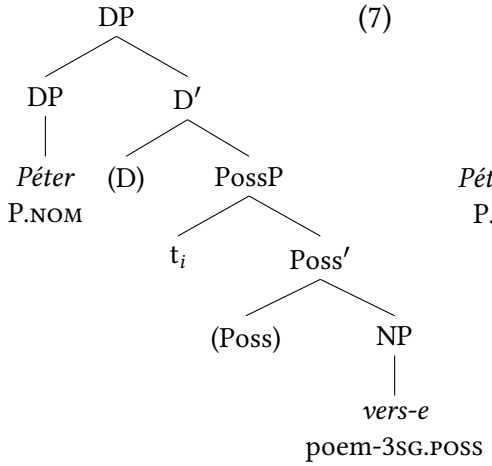
Hungarian possessive structures consist of a possessor which can be nominative, (4), or dative, (5). The possessor is cross-referenced on the possessum with a possessive suffix showing its person and number.

(4) Péter (*a) vers-e
P.NOM the poem-3SG.POSS
'Péter's poem'

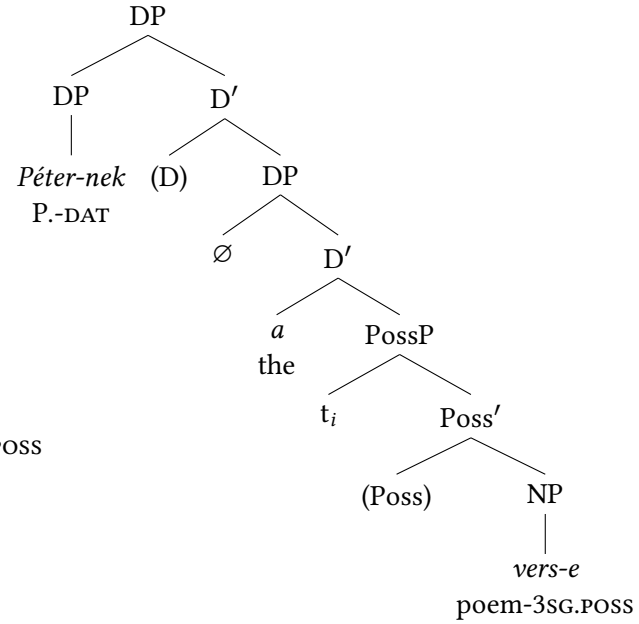
(5) Péter-nek a vers-e
P.-DAT the poem-3SG.POSS
'Péter's poem'

The structure of (4) and (5) is as follows, in accordance with much of the literature on the Hungarian noun phrase (cf. Szabolcsi 1994, Bartos 1999, É. Kiss 2002; details vary). (6) illustrates a nominative possessor, (7) illustrates a dative possessor.

(6)



(7)



Dative possessors can and sometimes *have to* be extracted, e.g. when expressing the relation of *possessing*. Hungarian lacks a verb *to have*, so this relation is expressed as in (9), with a dative possessor and a copula. Crucially, it is possible to show that (dative) possessor and possessum cannot form a constituent. Szabolcsi (1994) shows that the focus particle *csak* 'only' forces a single constituent into the pre-verbal slot. This is ungrammatical with extracted dative possessors, cf. (10).

(8) *Mari van vers-e.
M.NOM is poem-3SG.POSS
intended: 'Mari has a poem.'

(9) Mari-nak van vers-e.
M.-DAT is poem-3SG.POSS
'Mari has a poem.'

(10) *Csak Mari-nak vers-e van.
only M.-DAT poem-3SG.POSS is
int.: '(10b)'

(11) Csak Mari-nak van vers-e.
only M.-DAT is poem-3SG.POSS
'Only Mari has a poem.'

Szabolcsi (1994) further argues that in this construction, the possessum must be interpreted as non-specific and concludes that extraction of the dative possessor is thus a precondition on a non-specific interpretation of a possessed noun.

1.1 Possessives and verb paradigms

Possessive structures show are the only DOs which show variation with respect to paradigm choice. Some varieties (cf. Szabolcsi 1994: 'minority dialect'; Bartos 1999, Kiefer 2003, Coppock 2013) allow possessed DOs with the subjective paradigm, considered non-standard, shown in (1). This variation never arises with nominative possessors, (12), but only with *dative possessors*, (13). When the dative possessor is extracted, the subjective paradigm appears.

(12) Olvas-om Péter vers-é-t.
read-1SG.OBJ P.-NOM poem-3SG.POSS-ACC
'I am reading Péter's poem.'

(13) a. Péter-nek olvas-om vers-é-t.
P.-DAT read-1SG.OBJ poem-3SG.POSS-ACC
'I am reading Péter's poem.'

b. %Péter-nek olvas-ok vers-é-t.
P.-DAT read-1SG.SUBJ poem-3SG.POSS-ACC
'I am reading some poem by Peter.'

c. *Csak Péter-nek vers-é-t olvas-ok.
Only P.-DAT poem-3SG.POSS-ACC read-1SG.SUBJ
intended: '(13b)'

Following Szabolcsi (1994), I take the DO in (13b) to be extracted, i.e. removed from the constituent of the possessed noun, as shown by (13c).

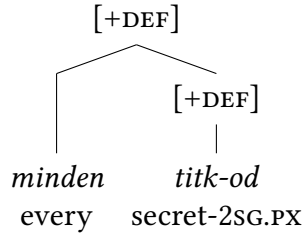
2 Triggering the objective paradigm

Two approaches to triggering the objective paradigm: a syntactic approach (Bartos 1999, É. Kiss 2002) and a semantic approach (Coppock and Wechsler 2012, Coppock 2013). The former relates the trigger of the objective paradigm to the presence of DP in the DO, i.e. a *syntactic generalisation*.

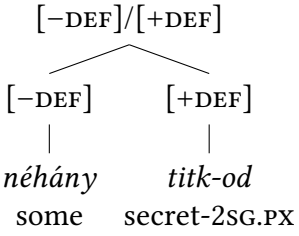
The latter, in particular Coppock (2013), assumes a feature which is present on certain lexical items, including the possessive suffixes, viz. [+DEF], expressing familiarity and introducing presuppositions, i.e. a *semantic generalisation*, e.g. (14).

For Coppock (2013), variation in paradigms follows from ambiguous feature specification, as in (15).

(14)



(15)



(Coppock 2013: 23f.)

On the syntactic approach, the variation is based on structural differences, as in (16). In (16a), the dative possessor is still in the noun phrase, while in (16b) it is extracted from the lower PossP and is external. As an additional complication, the possessor in (16a) can also move out of SpecDP, while still triggering the objective paradigm.

(16) a. [$_{DP}$ Péter-nek$_i$ [$_{DP}$ ∅ [$_{PossP}$ t$_i$ [$_{NumP}$ egy [$_{NP}$ vers-é-t]]]]]
P.-DAT a poem-3SG.POSS-ACC
'one of Peter's poems'

b. [$_{DP}$ Péter-nek$_i$] … [$_{PossP}$ t$_i$ [$_{NumP}$ egy [$_{NP}$ vers-é-t]]]
P.-DAT a poem-3SG.POSS-ACC
'any poem by Peter'

I take configurations triggering the subjective paradigm to have a representation like (16b), following mostly Bartos (1999) (cf. also Szabolcsi 1994). A DO like (16b) gets a non-specific interpretation and can appear in *van*-constructions, cf. (9).

Interim summary

- Possessive structures vary with respect to paradigm choice.
- This is arguably a non-standard phenomenon.
- Variation is not optional: it has structural and interpretational correlates.
- Non-specific noun phrases lack a DP layer or the right feature.

2.1 Issues

The feature-based analysis in Coppock (2013) has some problems. Coppock (2013) argues for the existence of both [+DEF] and [−DEF]. Having the positive specification marks the discourse referent of the noun phrase as familiar and induces an existence presupposition (Coppock 2013: 7f., 20). This does not predict the correct interpretation of certain possessive structures.

Two problems arise in Coppock's (2013) system. First, assuming possessive suffixes to be presupposition triggers makes wrong predictions about their distribution, cf. the lexical entries Coppock (2013) assumes in (17). Crucially, these entries in (17) predict a presupposition to arise when there is none, as shown in (18).

(17) a. $\textit{-ja}_{\langle e,\langle e,t\rangle\rangle}$ 'POSS' $\rightsquigarrow$
$\lambda R_{\langle e,\langle e,t\rangle\rangle}.\lambda x.\lambda y.[:>> [y : R(x,y)]]$ (Coppock 2013: 20)

b. macskája$_{\langle e,\langle e,t\rangle\rangle}$ 'cat of' $\rightsquigarrow$
$\lambda x.\lambda y.[:>> y : \textsc{cat}(y) \wedge \textsc{poss}(x,y)]]$ (Coppock 2013: 21)

(18) a. Mari-nak nincs macská-ja.
M.-DAT NEG.is cat-3SG.POSS
'Mari doesn't have a cat.'

b. Presupposition predicted by (17): *There is a cat.*

c. Actual meaning: $\neg\exists x[\textsc{cat}(x) \wedge \textsc{poss}(m,x)]$

A second problem is the distribution of the subjective paradigm with possessive DOs. On Coppock's (2013) view, variation arises when a noun phrase is specified for both [+DEF] and [−DEF], cf. (15). This doesn't predict the distribution in examples like (19):

(19) %Olvas-t-unk Péter-nek (öt) vers-é-t.
read-PAST-1PL.SUBJ P.-DAT five poem-3SG.POSS-ACC
'We read five poems by Peter.'

(Coppock 2013: 6, my glosses)

The subjective paradigm is also present without *öt* 'five', as indicated, but the proper name *Péter* is hardly [−DEF], thus the approach based on both features actually fails to account for variation here. Coppock (2013) does not take the structure of these possessed noun phrases into account, which allow a better explanation of these facts, as I argue in the next section.

Conclusions for now

- The objective paradigm does correlate with semantic interpretation.
- Possessive suffixes are not presupposition triggers, however.
- Syntactic structure is crucial to explain the alternation.

3 A different approach to non-specific possessive structures

How can we combine the insights of the syntactic generalisation in Bartos (1999), É. Kiss (2002) with Coppock's (2013) semantic generalisation? I will assume a 'feature' [D] with semantics like [+DEF] in Coppock (2013) but related to DP in noun phrase structure.

Two feasible ways of implementing this: first, like [+DEF], [D] is a feature in the lexical specification of certain elements, as well as of D^0 itself. If a nominative or dative possessor is present in the noun phrase, it is 'activated'.

A second way would be to see [D] as a null determiner which indicates a familiar meaning of its complement and gives rise to a presupposition. On this view, its syntactic licensing conditions include, again, the presence of dative possessors in the noun phrase. This is illustrated in (20).

(20) a. $[_{DP}$ Péter-nek$_i$ $[_{D'}$ (D) $[_{DP}$ $\boxed{\text{D}}$ $[_{PossP}$ t_i $[_{NumP}$ egy $[_{NP}$ vers-é-t ...
P.-DAT a poem-3SG.POSS-ACC
'a poem by Péter'

b. $[_{DP}$ Péter-nek$_i$] ... $[_{PossP}$ t_i $[_{NumP}$ egy $[_{NP}$ vers-é-t]]]
P.-DAT a poem-3SG.POSS-ACC
'a poem by Péter'

The alternation between paradigms in these cases is thus a consequence of the syntactic structure of the DO *and it correlates with interpretation.* There are attested examples which make the presence of a null determiner-like element less stipulative, cf. the following examples.

H. Varga (2010) gives examples attributed to the Hungarian author János Arany. These include dative possessors in DOs which appear with the subjective paradigm. The interpretation of the DO is non-specific.

(21) a. Petőfi-nek három arckép-é-t ismer-ek.
P.-DAT three portrait-$\boxed{\text{3SG.POSS-ACC}}$ know-$\boxed{\text{1SG.SUBJ}}$
'I know three portraits of Petőfi.'

b. Fi-á-t ismer-ek, de lányát nem
son-$\boxed{\text{3SG.POSS-ACC}}$ know-$\boxed{\text{1SG.SUBJ}}$ but daughter-$\boxed{\text{3SG.POSS-ACC}}$ NEG
ismer-ek.
know-$\boxed{\text{1SG.SUBJ}}$
'I know sons of his, but no daughters.'

c. 'I know one of his/her sons, s/he could have more than that, but I don't know them; I don't know whether s/he has daughters, I don't know any of them.' (H. Varga 2010: 49[1])

[1]Citing *Arany János 1860 — 1882. Prózai művek.* Németh, G. Béla (ed.), Arany János: Összes Művei XI.

(22) is cited in Rácz (1968), a line from a folk song showing the subjective paradigm with a dative possessor. The possessed noun *két lányát* 'two daughters of his' is non-specific, not implying uniqueness.

(22) Az egri kávés-nak két lány-á-t ismér-ek.
the Eger-FROM coffee seller-DAT two girl-3SG.POSS-ACC know-1SG.SUBJ
'I know two of the coffee seller's daughters.'
(folk song, cited in Rácz 1968: 279)

Further attested examples include the following:

(23) a. ... még a nádas-ból is szed-tek össze lábas-unk-at ...
even the reed-ELA too pick-3PL.SUBJ up pot-1PL.POSS-ACC
'... they picked up pots of ours even from the reeds.'[2]
b. Ha valaki meghív-ott egy vagy több barát-já-t ...
if someone invite-3SG.SUBJ one or more friend-3SG.POSS-ACC
'If someone invited one or more of his/her friends ...'[3]
c. Minden bánat-od-at elereszt-esz, ...
every problem-2SG.POSS-ACC let go-2SG.SUBJ
'You let go of all your problems.'[4]

The paraphrase in (22c) captures the intuitive sense of indefiniteness in such examples and suggests a way of testing the nature of such possessed DOs, viz. by comparing them to incorporated DOs (cf. Farkas and de Swart 2003).

3.1 Possessed DOs and incorporated DOs

Incorporated singular DOs have certain properties, e.g. they are number-neutral and they do not introduce discourse referents (Farkas and de Swart 2003).

(24) a. Az orvos beteg-et vizsgál-t.
the doctor patient-ACC examine-3SG.SUBJ
'The doctor examined a patient/patients.'
b. Az orvos vizsgál-t egy beteg-et.
the doctor examine-3SG.SUBJ a patient-ACC
'The doctor examined a patient.' (Farkas and de Swart 2003: 102)

Non-specific possessed DOs share some properties with incorporated DOs, e.g. being number-neutral (cf. (21c)) and not introducing discourse referents.

Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest. 1968, p. 59.
[2]Magda Szabó, *Az őz*, 1965. Olcsó Könyvtár, Budapest, p. 21.
[3]http://hu.pokerstrategy.com/forum/thread.php?threadid=116626&page=6, accessed 30 May 2013.
[4]http://www.kerdesem.hu/valaszok/57432_mit_kialtasz_a_vegtelenbe_/2, accessed 30 May 2013.

(25) a. Ismer-sz en-nek az orvos-nak beteg-é-t?
know-2SG.SUBJ this-DAT the doctor-DAT patient-3SG.POSS-ACC
'Do you know any patient(s) of this doctor?'
b. — #Igen, lázas.
yes fevery
'Yes, s/he has a fever.'
c. Ismer-ek en-nek az orvos-nak beteg-é-t.
know-1SG.SUBJ this-DAT the doctor-DAT patient-3SG.POSS-ACC
'I know patient(s) of this doctor's.'
d. — #Lázas.
fevery
'S/he has a fever.'

Semantically, this make sense if (25a,c) get interpretations analogous to (26) and (21c). The DO does not refer to an individual, but to a property (a set of individuals). This fits with the semantics suggested in Farkas and de Swart (2003) and the syntactic view in É. Kiss (2002: 155), viz. that different projections in the noun phrase have different denotations, individuals vs. properties.

(26) a. Nem ismer-ek lány-á-t.
not know-1SG.SUBJ girl-3SG.POSS-ACC
'I don't know any daughters of his/hers.'
b. $\neg\exists x[\textsc{daughter-of}(x, y)\wedge\textsc{know}(i, x)]$
c. 'I don't know anyone with the property of being his/her daughter.'

4 Conclusions, consequences and open questions

Conclusions

- The trigger of the Hungarian objective paradigm is still debated.
- Assuming a feature along the lines of Coppock (2013) allows for a *semantic generalisation* of triggers of the objective paradigm.
- The syntactic structure of noun phrase is relevant, however. A feature in D or a null determiner [D] is possibly preferable.
  - [D] in the DP layer makes a conceptual connection between the syntactic and semantic generalisations.
  - Explains a wider range of data than Coppock's (2013) approach.

Standard vs. non-standard

- Assuming the present approach explains alternation in the non-standard varieties, …
- … what about Standard Hungarian?
- Are there no non-specific possessed DOs? (cf. English? Partitive constructions?)
- Is there a dissociation between DP structure and interpretation in the Standard language? Back to Szabolcsi (1994)?
- Is DP independent of noun phrase interpretation in Standard Hungarian?

The relation to information structure

- Can these possessed DOs be topics and foci? They can, cf. (21c).
  - Contrastive topic and focus?
  - Different from other non-specifics like *valaki* 'someone', …

Definiteness effects and objective paradigm

- Do the same principles underlie the objective paradigm and definiteness effects like (27)?

(27) Van ∅ / néhány / *minden / *valamennyi / *a könyv az asztal-on.
is some every each the book the table-SUP
'There are ∅ / some books on the table.'
*'There is every / each / the book on the table.'

- Is the definiteness effect a syntactic restriction?
  - *minden* 'every' and *mindegyik* 'each' are both ruled out in (27), …
  - … and they have the same syntactic distribution elsewhere too.
- Only *mindegyik* triggers the objective paradigm, *minden* does not, because *mindegyik* has [+DEF]/[D]?

Longer term goal

- What kind of varieties show the alternation? Regional? Non-standard?
- How do people judge the data in question?
- Are there systematic connections to incorporation?

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