

Agreement with possessed direct objects in Hungarian

An experimental approach

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This presentation

Questions

- What kind of variation do we find?
- What kinds of factors determine variation?
- What determines object agreement?

Methods and results

- Series of online surveys
- Acceptability judgments with and without contexts
- Forced choice tests with and without contexts

Object agreement in Hungarian

(1) a. *Mari lát egy kutyá-t.*

M. see.3SG a dog-ACC

‘Mari sees a dog.’

b. *Mari lát-ja a kutyá-t.*

M. see-3SG.OBJ the dog-ACC

‘Mari sees the dog.’

- Roughly sensitive to definiteness of the DO
- Possessed direct objects are an exception
- Indefinite possessed DOs trigger agreement
- But: dialectal variation?

Object agreement

- Definiteness often a good predictor; not with possessed DOs
- Indefinite possessed DOs require agreement

(2) a. *Mari lát/ *lát-ja egy kutyá-t.*

M. see.3SG see-3SG.OBJ a dog-ACC

‘Mari sees a dog.’

b. *Mari lát-ja/ %lát egy kutyá-m-at.*

M. see-3SG.OBJ see.3SG the dog-1SG.POSS-ACC

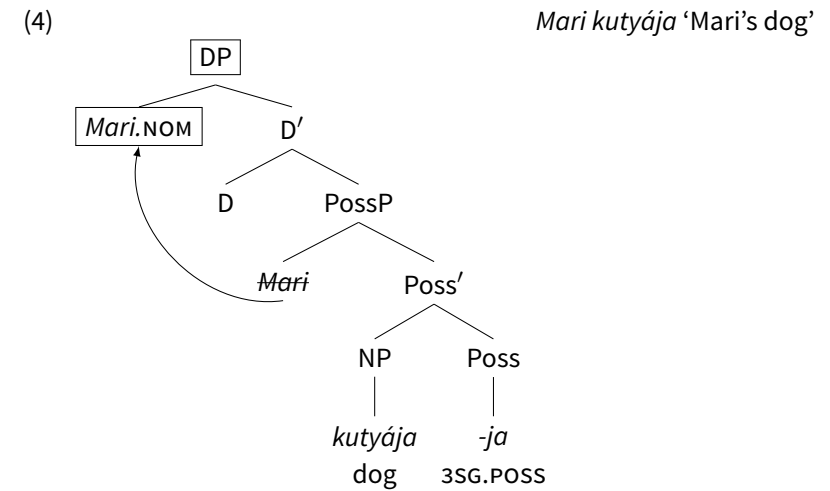
‘Mari sees a dog of mine.’

Types of possessed NPs

- (3) a. *Mari* (*a) / *egy kutyája* Nominative possessor
 Mari.NOM (the) a dog-3SG.POSS
 'Mari's dog', 'Mari's one dog'
- b. *Mari-nak a / egy kutyája* Dative possessor
 Mari-DAT the a dog-3SG.POSS
 'Mari's dog', 'a dog of Mari's'
- c. *az ő kutyája* Pronominal possessor
 the s/he.NOM dog-3SG.POSS
 'her/his dog'
- Distribution suggests different heights in the NP (Szabolcsi 1994; Bartos 1999; den Dikken 1999; É. Kiss 2000; Dékány 2015)

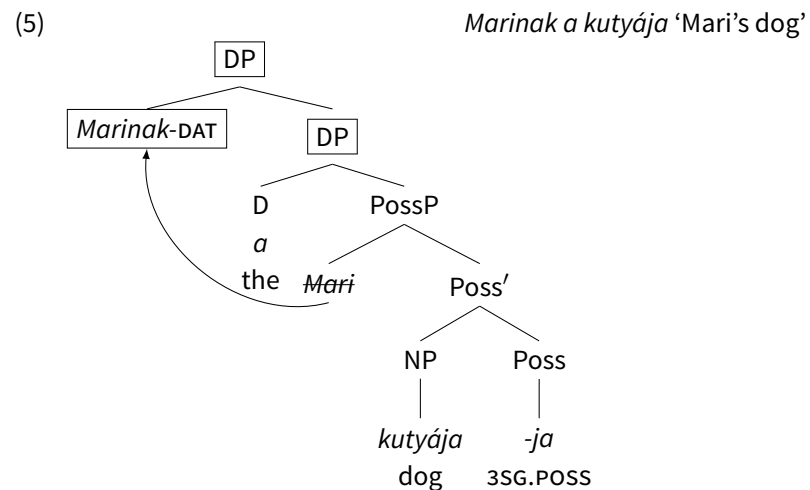
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Structures: NOM possessor



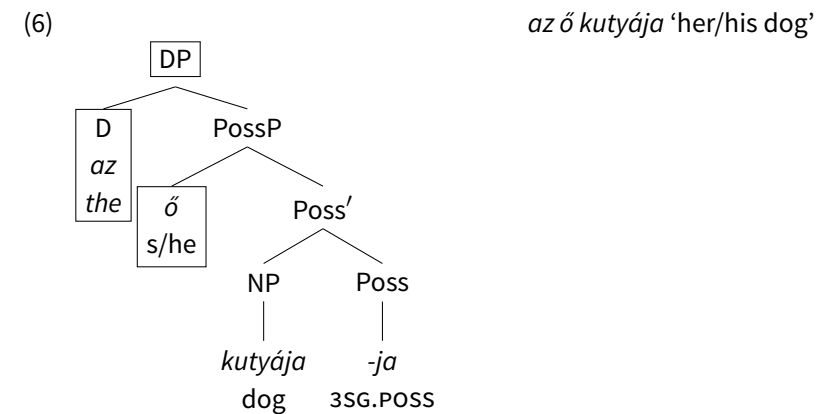
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Structures: DAT possessor



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Structures: pronominal possessor



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Syntactic and semantic properties

Extraction

- ▶ Dative possessors can be extracted (Szabolcsi 1994)
- ▶ Only extracted possessors in definiteness effect-contexts (7a)
- ▶ Non-specific reading in (7a)

(7) a. *Mari-nak van kutyá-ja.*
 Mari-DAT is dog-3SG.POSS
 ‘Mari has a dog/dogs.’

b. **Mari van kutyá-ja.*
 Mari.NOM is dog-3SG.POSS

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What triggers object agreement?

- ▶ Syntax? DP structure (Bartos 1999)
- ▶ Semantics? [DEF] introduces presupposition (Coppock 2013)

Goals of the surveys

- ▶ Mapping the variation
- ▶ Finding out which factors determine variation ...
- ▶ ... and agreement

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Variation

- ▶ Szabolcsi (1994): DOs with extracted possessors show variation
- ▶ Semantic agreement? Only specific DOs agree

(8) a. %*Chomsky-nak nem olvas-t-ál vers-é-t.*
 Chomsky-DAT NEG read-PST-2SG poem-3SG.POSS-ACC
 ‘You haven’t read a poem of Chomsky’s.’

b. *Chomsky-nak nem olvas-t-ad vers-é-t.*
 Chomsky-DAT NEG read-PST-2SG.OBJ poem-3SG.POSS-ACC
 ‘You haven’t read a poem of Chomsky’s / Chomsky’s poem.’

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Methodology

- ▶ Online surveys hosted on <http://spellout.net/ibexfarm/>
- ▶ APR/MAY/SEP 2015: 174 (mean age: 31), 65 (22), 304 (17)
- ▶ Acceptability judgments (7 pt. Likert, rep. measures ANOVA):
 - ▶ Subject vs. object agreement
 - ▶ Nominative vs. dative possessors
 - ▶ Positive vs. negative polarity (semantic effect?)
 - ▶ Word order (no effect?)
 - ▶ Contexts: definite (unique) vs. indefinite (non-unique) reading of the DO
- ▶ Forced choice (logistic mixed effects):
 - ▶ Nominative vs. dative possessors
 - ▶ Presence vs. absence of determiner
 - ▶ Contexts: definite (unique) vs. indefinite (non-unique) reading of the DO

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Data: Acceptability judgments with possessors

(9) In literature class, the children were reading Petőfi and Arany.

a. *Mari olvas-ott Petőfi vers-ét.*

Mari read-3SG.PAST Petőfi.NOM poem-3SG.POSS

b. *Mari olvas-t-a Petőfi vers-ét.*

Mari read-PAST-3SG.OBJ Petőfi.NOM poem-3SG.POSS

c. *Mari olvas-ott Petőfi-nek vers-ét.*

Mari read-3SG.PAST Petőfi-DAT poem-3SG.POSS

d. *Mari olvas-t-a Petőfi-nek vers-ét.*

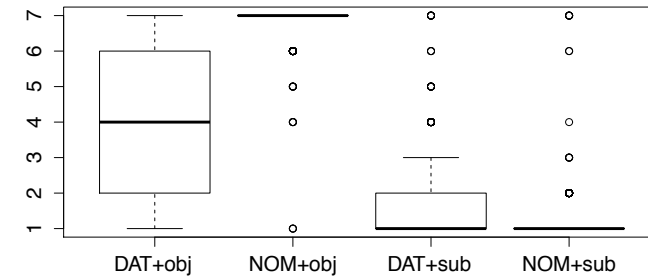
Mari read-PAST-3SG.OBJ Petőfi-DAT poem-3SG.POSS

intended: 'Mari read Petőfi's poem / a poem by Petőfi.'

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Results: Acceptability judgments with possessors

Object agreement is always significantly better than sub



→ We do not find judgments reported in the literature

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Data: Acceptability judgments without possessors

(10) Petőfi was a famous writer.

a. *Mari olvas-ott vers-ét.*

Mari read-3SG.PAST poem-3SG.POSS

b. *Mari olvas-t-a vers-ét.*

Mari read-PAST-3SG.OBJ poem-3SG.POSS

c. *Mari olvas-ott néhány vers-ét.*

Mari read-3SG.PAST some poem-3SG.POSS

d. *Mari olvas-t-a néhány vers-ét.*

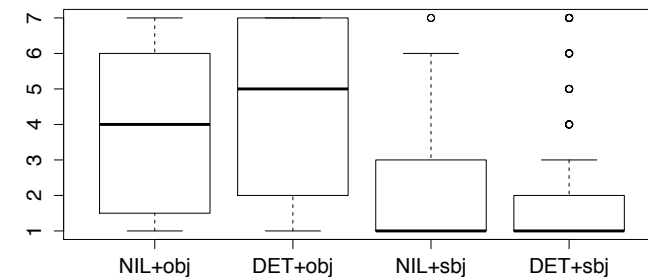
Mari read-PAST-3SG.OBJ some poem-3SG.POSS

intended: 'Mari read his poem(s) / some poem(s) of his.'

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Results: Acceptability judgments without possessors

No possessors with and without determiners: *néhány* 'some', *minden* 'every', \emptyset



→ presence of determiner significantly better

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Data: Forced choice, no context

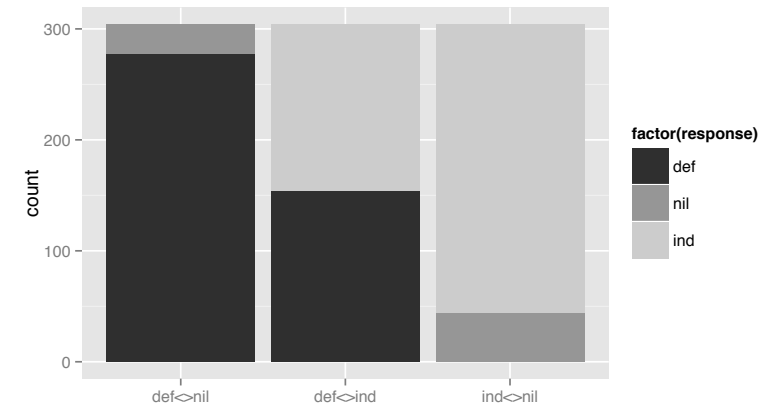
Ismerte a szomszéd nővérét.	Ismerte a szomszédnak nővérét.
Ismerte a szomszéd nővérét.	Ismerte a szomszédnak a nővérét.
Ismerte a szomszéd nővérét.	Ismerte a szomszédnak egy nővérét.
Ismerte a szomszéd nővérét.	Ismerte a szomszéd egy nővérét.
Ismerte a szomszéd egy nővérét.	Ismerte a szomszédnak nővérét.
⋮	⋮

- *S/he knew the neighbour's daughter / the daughter of the neighbour / a daughter of the neighbour / ...*

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Results: Forced choice, no context

DAT possessors with and without determiners: *a(z)* 'the', *egy* 'a', \emptyset



→ presence of determiners significantly better

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Data: Forced choice, def. context

- *... is a famous writer, but she also painted a landscape.*

Péter látta a költő egy tájképet.	Péter látta a költő tájképet.
Péter látta a költő egy tájképet.	Péter látta a költőnek tájképet.
Péter látta a költő egy tájképet.	Péter látta a költőnek egy tájképet.
Péter látta a költő egy tájképet.	Péter látta a költőnek a tájképet.
Péter látta a költő tájképet.	Péter látta a költőnek tájképet.
⋮	⋮

- *Péter saw the painter's one landscape / the painter's landscape / the landscape of the painter / ...*

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Data: Forced choice, indef. context

- *... is a famous writer, but she also painted several landscapes.*

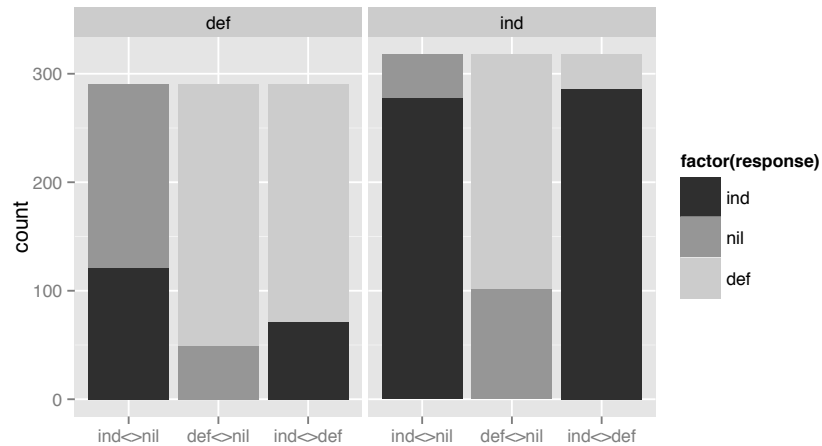
Péter látta a költő egy tájképet.	Péter látta a költő tájképet.
Péter látta a költő egy tájképet.	Péter látta a költőnek tájképet.
Péter látta a költő egy tájképet.	Péter látta a költőnek egy tájképet.
Péter látta a költő egy tájképet.	Péter látta a költőnek a tájképet.
Péter látta a költő tájképet.	Péter látta a költőnek tájképet.
⋮	⋮

- *Péter saw the painter's one landscape / the painter's landscape / the landscape of the painter / ...*

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Results: Forced choice with context

DAT possessors with and without determiners: *a(z)* ‘the’, *egy* ‘a’, \emptyset



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Conclusions and future

- ▶ Object agreement is not semantic
- ▶ poss suffix does not influence definiteness
- ▶ We have not found data corroborating the variation reported
- ▶ Subject agreement with poss. DOs very unnatural
- ▶ The results highlight the role of determiners for acceptability
- ▶ Why D?
 - ▶ Bernstein (2008) and Longobardi (2008): D as the syntactic locus of referentiality; DPs as arguments?
 - ▶ Arguably explains extraction facts: no place for possessor?
- ▶ Future: Non-specific possessed DOs? Other determiners?

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Summary of results

- ▶ Object agreement is always significantly better than subject agreement
- ▶ Subject agreement was always marked as unnatural
- ▶ We find significant effects between items with and without determiners

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