

Clitic vs. Agreement in Hungarian

Hungarian verbs have two different subject agreement paradigms, the *definite* and *indefinite conjugations*, which reflect the presence or absence, respectively, of a definite object. The definite conjugation has been analyzed in two different ways. Under the more traditional *agreement* analysis (e.g. Bartos 1997), the verb and the object enter into an agreement relation with respect to a formal definiteness feature. Under the *pronoun* analysis (Szamosi 1974; den Dikken 1999) the definite conjugation incorporates a third person object pronominal. Although the agreement analysis is largely accepted, several facts make the pronoun analysis attractive: the putative clitic pronoun seems to undergo “clitic climbing” (Szamosi, 1974); the restriction to third person can be explained under the Person-Case Constraint (den Dikken, 1999); it readily explains the sensitivity of the phenomenon to definiteness; agreement in definiteness is rare (Corbett 2006); and absence of the definite conjugation with quantified NPs follows from constraints on clitic left-dislocation (Rizzi 1986). To settle the issue, we present six new arguments for the agreement analysis:

(i) *Word order*. Under the pronoun analysis, a definite NP object doubles a clitic pronoun. Clitic doubles generally have marked discourse status (topic or focus). As Hungarian is discourse-configurational, the pronoun analysis incorrectly predicts that definite NP objects should be restricted to topic or focus position.

(ii) *Specific indefinites*. The distribution of incorporated and clitic pronouns in other languages is sensitive to the semantic but not formal definiteness of the associate (Austin and Bresnan 1996). In languages like Spanish, clitics induce a specific interpretation on their NP associate, and the associate can be formally indefinite (Suñer 1988). In contrast, the Hungarian definite conjugation is sensitive to *formal* definiteness. The definite conjugation is incompatible with an overt indefinite object, even if the indefinite is specific, as shown in (1).

- (1) Minden nap, egy görög énekes-t hallgat-t-ak/*hallgat-t-ák. Mária-nak hiv-nak.
 every day, a Greek singer-ACC listen-PAST-3PL.INDEF/listen-PAST-3PL.DEF Maria-DAT call-3PL
 ‘Every day, they listened to a Greek singer. Her name is Maria.’

(iii) *Reflexives*. A pro-dropped object cannot be coreferential with the subject (binding Principle B); cf. (2a). But an object reflexive pronoun requires coreference with the subject (binding Principle A); cf. (2b).

- (2) a. Péter utálja b. Péter_i önmagá-t_i utálja
 Peter.NOM hate-3SG.DEF Peter.NOM himself-ACC hate-3SG.DEF
 ‘Peter hates him/it/*himself’ ‘Peter hates himself.’

This follows automatically from the agreement analysis, since there is a null pronoun in (2a) and the reflexive is a true argument in (2b). But on the pronoun analysis, this contrast is mysterious because the definite inflection on the verb is an incorporated pronoun in both sentences, so that (2b) would be, in effect, ‘Peter_i hates him_i, himself_i.’

(iv) *Quantified NPs*. Universally quantified NPs generally do not associate with clitics (Rizzi, 1986), but improve when richer in descriptive content (Rizzi 1986, Austin and Bresnan 1996, 238). But descriptive content has no impact on the acceptability of the definite conjugation in Hungarian:

- (3) Tud/*Tudja minden titk-ot (ami-t nek-em mond-t-ál)
 know.3SG.INDEF/know-3SG.DEF every secret-ACC which-ACC to-1SGPOSS say-PAST-2SG.INDEF
 ‘He/she knows every secret you told me.’

(v) *Islands*. Verbs taking certain clausal complements appear in the definite conjugation with an optional object pronoun *azt* ‘it-ACC’. É. Kiss (1990) notes that *azt* makes such clausal complements into islands.

- (4) János holnap_i mond-t-a (*az-t) hogy érkezik t_i
 John.NOM tomorrow say-PAST-3SG it-ACC that arrives
 ‘It is tomorrow that John said he is arriving.’

Extraction of this kind is limited to the direct complements of bridge verbs in Hungarian (É. Kiss, 2002). Under the agreement analysis, the subordinate clause is an argument when *azt* is absent, but an adjunct associated with *azt* when it is present. Under the pronoun analysis, both clauses would be adjuncts, making the contrast mysterious.

(vi) *Focus raising*. A matrix verb agrees in definiteness with an accusative-marked focus-raised subject of an embedded clause, which is not an argument of the matrix verb (Coppock, 2004). On the pronoun analysis, an object pronoun is inexplicably doubled by a non-object in this construction.

We conclude in favor of the agreement analysis for the Hungarian definite conjugation. This result opens up new questions, including how this unusual kind of agreement arises; agreement is normally in ϕ -features (Corbett, 2006). Although it has been proposed that it derives from the erosion of a pronoun or case marker (Hajdú, 1972), we suggest that a potentially more explanatory source is focus-based differential object marking (Harms, 1977).

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