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Huba Bartos

Hungarian Academy of Sciences

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The Nature of Object Agreement in Hungarian

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Huba Bartos

1. Introduction

Hungarian displays two verbal agreement paradigms, traditionally referred to as ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ inflection. In very general terms, intransitive verbs are invariably affixed with the subjective endings, while in the case of transitive verbs, the choice depends on some property of the object. The fundamental nature of this decisive factor is the main topic of the present paper. I will argue that all the previous accounts of the nature of this ‘object agreement’ are unable to cover all the cases involved, because they all fail to recognize the precise properties that condition the choice between the paradigms. I will therefore propose a new criterion for the distinction between nominal phrases that trigger objective agreement, and those that do not. At the heart of my suggestion lies the assumption that nominal phrases are not uniform categorially: some project a DP-layer, while others do not, and this entails important differences in their behavior. Specifically, my account capitalizes on the minimalist view on Case-licensing, according to which Case is a feature of D^0 , whereby nominal phrases not projecting a DP-layer will not participate in any Case-licensing mechanism, thus they will not be visible objects for the verb in the process of Case-checking. My proposal naturally incorporates some insights of the previous analyses, but it will be shown to be able to treat a wider range of data.

2. Previous analyses

2.1. The paradigms

Table (1) below shows the two paradigms in question, for the verb *lát* ‘see’, in present tense. The table is set up according

¹ I wish to thank Katalin É. Kiss for encouraging me to pursue research of the present topic, and discussing it with me in detail. I am also grateful to Ágnes Bende-Farkas, László Kálmán, Anna Szabolcsi, and Gabriella Tóth for helpful suggestions, and to Michael Brody, András Komlósy, Gréte Dalmi, and Viktor Trón, for their various comments.

to the number and person of the subject governing agreement. With other tenses/moods, and with front vowel harmony, some of the particular endings are slightly different, but the system of distinctions is the same, thus these alterations do not affect our discussion and results in any way.

(1)

	Subjective		Objective	
<i>lát</i> ‘see’	SG	PL	SG	PL
1st	lát-ok	lát-unk	lát-om	lát-juk
2nd	lát-sz	lát-tok	lát-od	lát-játok
3rd	lát	lát-nak	lát-ja	lát-ják

The ‘subjective’ forms in the table have no correlation whatsoever with any property of any other phrase than the subject, however, these forms are used (among other cases) when the object is a 1st or 2nd person non-reflexive personal pronoun, except for the single case when the subject is 1st person singular and the object is 2nd person—in this case the form *lát-lak* ‘I-see-you’ is used. This is the sole occurrence of clear person agreement with the object.² As regards the ‘objective’ series, those forms do not show number and/or person agreement with the object, in the strict sense, either. On the one hand, though it is true that they basically stand with 3rd person objects, reflexives in any person (and reciprocals) trigger this paradigm, as well. On the other hand, it is not the case that any 3rd person object forces the objective inflection—as will be discussed in much detail below, indefinites in many cases cooccur with the subjective paradigm. Thus we can immediately conclude that any attempt to explain the distribution of the two paradigms in terms of number/person object agreement is flawed.

2.2. Definiteness Agreement?

The now traditional analysis of the phenomenon relies on the notion of definiteness of the object: roughly speaking, if the ob-

² The suffix *-lak* can in fact be broken up into *-l-*, which is one variant of the marker of 2nd person, in the subjective paradigm (taking the place of *-sz* seen in Table (1) after stems ending in sibilants), followed by *-a-*, possibly analyzed as an epenthetic vowel, and the final *-k*, i.e. the 1st person subject agreement suffix (cf. the subjective endings).

ject is a definite NP, it goes together with ‘objective’ agreement on V, whereas if it is indefinite, the ‘subjective’ inflection is chosen, cf. (2).³ (This leading idea is implemented in most of the “standard” descriptive literature on Hungarian, for example in Rácz & Takács (1974) [a brief reference grammar], and, at least for 3rd person objects, in Szabolcsi (1992, 1994), Farkas (1987).)

(2a) Látom / *látok a fiút.
 see-1sg-ob / see-1sg-sub the boy-acc
 ‘I see the boy.’

(2b) Látok / *látom egy fiút.
 see-1sg-sub / see-1sg-ob a boy-acc
 ‘I see a boy.’

Furthermore, intransitive verbs pattern with verbs taking an indefinite object in this respect. This last fact is in itself a weak point of this analysis, in as much as it needs to be stipulated, since it is less than obvious that if the key factor in the choice between the paradigms is definiteness, then intransitive verbs should choose the ‘indefinite’ agreement affixes. Not having any object, they might as well go with the ‘definite’ agreement endings—the sole thing that could be evoked to remedy the situation is markedness, provided we rightfully regard the objective paradigm as more marked than the subjective one.⁴

There are several empirically rooted objections to the definiteness agreement hypothesis, too. Definiteness of a nominal phrase is to a large extent the function of the determiners. For instance, determiners such as *egy* ‘a/one’, *néhány* ‘some’, *öt* ‘five’, are called indefinite determiners, in keeping with the assumption that they render the NP they determine indefinite. Thus, as expected under the definiteness analysis, they occur with subjective agreement on the verb as objects; cf.

³ In the glosses all number/person agreement specifications are meant as agreement with the subject, unless explicitly indicated otherwise; ‘sub’ and ‘ob’ mark ‘subjective’ vs. ‘objective’ inflection; features (other than agreement) not overtly marked on a particular form, e.g. present tense indicative, are dropped from the glosses. Also, Hungarian displays no gender distinctions, not even on pronouns; for simplicity’s sake I will use the masculine forms in the glosses and translations throughout.

⁴ On a markedness account see Moravcsik (1988).

- (3) Látok / *látom öt embert.
 see-1sg-sub see-1sg-ob five man-acc
 ‘I see five men.’

However, when the object includes a possessive construction, the verb usually appears with the objective paradigm, even though the same indefinite determiner is present (and, accordingly, the NP is still interpreted as indefinite), as in (4):

- (4) Látom öt emberedet.
 see-1sg-ob five man-2sgPOSS-acc
 ‘I see five of your men.’

Another complication with a definiteness account is caused by the determiner *minden* ‘every’. Normally, *minden* triggers subjective agreement:

- (5) Látunk / *látjuk minden fiút.
 see-1pl-sub see-1pl-ob every boy-acc
 ‘We see every boy.’

This situation changes, however, in certain cases. For example, similarly to the above instances, the presence of a possessive construction results in a switch to objective agreement, as in (6a). Likewise, if *minden* is preceded by the definite article⁵, the objective pattern appears, cf. (6b). That definiteness should not be a decisive factor here is illustrated by (6c), a minimally differing case, requiring subjective conjugation.

- (6a) Ismerem (a te) minden titkodat.
 know-1sg-ob (the you-NOM) every secret-acc
 ‘I know your every secret.’
- (6b) Elégetem a tőled kapott minden levelet.
 burn-1sg-ob the from-you received every letter-acc
 ‘I burn every letter received from you.’

⁵ *Minden* (and a number of other determiners) cannot be directly preceded by the definite article, unless there is some intervening material between them. Szabolcsi (1994) offers a phonological account for this, claiming that there is nothing inherently wrong in the cooccurrence of the two, and in fact the article is there for syntactic and semantic purposes, but a PF-filter blocks them from appearing adjacent to each other, and deletes the article in those cases, while if there is some lexical material between them, the article can stay.

- (6c) Elégetek minden tőled kapott levelet.
 burn-1sg-sub every from-you received letter-acc
 ‘I burn every letter received from you.’

Moreover, there are interesting cases with a possessive construction lacking both an overt possessor, and an overt article, where the subjective paradigm optionally steps in ((6d)). (This is judged to belong to certain dialects or literary styles, though, by speakers of “standard” Hungarian.)

- (6d) % Ismerek (*a te) minden titkodat.
 know-1sg-sub (the you-NOM) every secret-acc
 ‘I know your every secret.’

Clearly, then, neither definiteness itself, nor the possessive construction (possibly seen as giving rise to definiteness), on its own, can be used as an explanation for the distribution of objective agreement.

A further problem is posed for the definiteness agreement hypothesis by the fact that 1st and 2nd person personal pronouns, when objects, occur with the subjective agreement pattern, witness (7a), as opposed to 3rd person object pronouns (7b).

- (7a) Péter lát engem / téged / minket / titeket.
 Peter see-3sg-sub me you(sg) us you(pl)
 ‘Peter sees me / you(sg) / us / you(pl).’

- (7b) Péter látja őt / őket.
 Peter see-3sg-ob him them
 ‘Peter sees him / them.’

It seems perfectly unreasonable to draw a distinction between 1st and 2nd person pronouns, on the one hand, and 3rd person ones, on the other, in terms of definiteness.⁶ The only phenomenon that may suggest so is exactly the one in question, namely the divergence in the choice of V-agreement paradigms.

Finally, in certain dialects of Hungarian, there is an interesting contrast correlating with the alternation of agreement endings, but (crucially) not involving any necessary difference in definiteness, as shown in (8a) vs. (8b):

⁶ As Farkas (1990) notes, 1st and 2nd person pronouns can be pro-dropped, and since pro-drop in Hungarian is confined to definites, this is a syntactic argument, added to the obvious semantic argument, for regarding these personal pronouns as definite.

- (8a) Olvastuk Péter (öt) versét.
 read-past-1pl-ob Peter(-nom) (five) poem-3sgPOSS-acc
 ‘We have read Peter’s (five) poems / (five) poems by P.’
- (8b) % Olvastunk Péternek (öt) versét.
 read-past-1pl-sub Peter-dat (five) poem-3sgPOSS-acc
 ‘We have read (five) poems by Peter.’

This contrast seems to be attributable to a difference in **specificity** of the object. In the absence of anything better, we may be inclined to say at this point that the specific–non-specific distinction plays a role in the choice between the objective and the subjective paradigms.

2.3. Specificity Agreement?

In the light of the problems discussed above, it is a natural move to examine the possibility that Hungarian ‘object agreement’ is at least partially a case of specificity agreement. More precisely, one might claim either that (i) the prime factor governing object agreement is definiteness, but under certain conditions (especially in the case of indefinite objects) specificity may intervene, or that (ii) specificity, rather than definiteness, is the key feature. Let us take a look at the previously mentioned problems once more, to see whether we are any better off with (i) or (ii).

As it happens, (3) is immediately problematic for a ‘specificity only’ approach. The object phrase *öt ember* ‘five men’ is ambiguous in this respect: it can be interpreted either specifically or non-specifically, however, it will invariably trigger subjective agreement. Moreover, the object in (4), albeit a possessive construction, is not necessarily any more specific than the one in (3), yet it tends to occur with objective agreement. A combined definiteness-and-specificity account may be more viable, as long as we can maintain that with non-possessives definiteness counts, and with indefinite possessives paradigm selection hinges on specificity. Definite possessives are obviously specific. The data in (6), however, gets us into trouble. Arguably, there is no definiteness or specificity difference between the objects of (6b) and (6c), yet the contrast in agreement patterns is perfectly clear.

It is necessary to make mention of Enç’s (1991) concept of specificity, where a nominal phrase counts as specific iff its discourse referent is linked to some previously established

discourse referent by a relation of inclusion, as opposed to the case of definites, where the relevant linking relation is identity. Now, it might seem promising to follow a line here building on the assumption that possessedness in fact satisfies the criteria of the inclusion relation, hence the possessive constructions would immediately qualify as specific, rightfully triggering objective agreement under a specificity approach. Enç's theory is all the more attracting, because it is syntactically anchored: in Turkish, specific objects stand with a distinctive case-suffix, in opposition to non-specific ones, which always occur bare. Hungarian thus apparently parallels the situation in Turkish, the difference being that here verbal agreement, rather than case morphology is the signal. However, on the one hand, the contrast in (8) does not easily yield itself to a neat explanation in Enç's terms, and, on the other hand, universal quantifiers show a striking mismatch: in Turkish they behave morphologically as specifics, and Enç actually argues that also from a semantic point of view they induce specificity. But in Hungarian, as (5) and (6) show, they clearly pattern with non-specifics. It is therefore reasonable to look for a better characterization of the Hungarian agreement choice than that in terms of specificity.

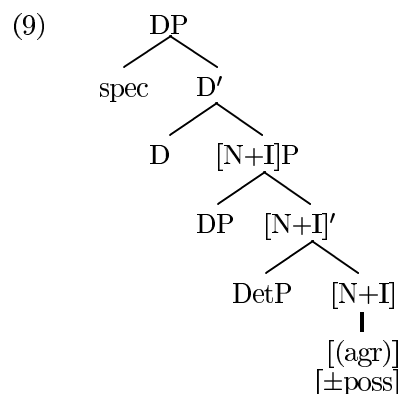
Furthermore, the split of personal pronouns remains a problem, unless one wants to claim that there really exists some specificity difference between 3rd person pronouns and the rest. Eventually, the data in (8) proves to be the only compelling motivation for seeking the solution in terms of specificity.

So what the data suggests is that although definiteness and specificity do show some correlation with the choice of object agreement, it is worth investigating other options, whereby it may turn out that this correlation is in fact an effect, rather than the cause.

3. The Proposal

3.1. A Generalization

For what follows, I adopt the phrase structure attributed to nominal phrases in Hungarian as presented in Szabolcsi (1992, 1994), shown here in (9).



An important property of this analysis is the strict separation of two classes of determiners. One class comprises the definite article *a(z)* ‘the’, and the demonstrative+article complex *ez/az a(z)* ‘this/that–the’—their category is D^0 , and they head the outmost projection of nominal phrases. In terms of distribution, they always precede nominative-marked possessors.

(10a) [DP *a* [[N+I]P *mi barátunk*]]
 the we(-nom) friend-1plPOSS
 ‘our friend’

As opposed to this group, there is another class, including simple demonstratives (e.g. *e(me)*, *ezen* ‘this’, *ama*, *azon* ‘that’), quantifiers (e.g. *minden* ‘every’, *kevés* ‘few’, *egy(ik)* ‘one’), and numerals (e.g. *öt* ‘five’). These are full maximal projections (DetPs in Szabolcsi’s term), and occupy a slot following nominative-marked possessors.

(10b) [DP *a* [[N+I]P *mi öt barátunk*]]
 the we(-nom) five friend-1plPOSS
 ‘our five friend(s)’

They are within a maximal projection smaller than DP; I will tentatively assume with Szabolcsi that they are in [N+I]P, whose head is an [N+I] complex (where I is the possessive-agreement inflection) and whose specifier is filled by the nominative possessor.⁷

⁷ Szabolcsi (1992, 1994) attributes entirely different func-

3.2. Non-possessives

Considering now the simple cases of ‘object agreement’, where no possessive construction is involved, we get a straightforward account on the following basis: whenever there is an overt D^0 in the object phrase, objective agreement is forced on the verb, and subjective agreement is the elsewhere case. Assuming a principle of projectional economy (see e.g. Grimshaw 1991), we can rephrase the situation, saying that whenever the object is a fully projected nominal phrase, i.e. a DP, it triggers objective agreement, and when it is not a full-fledged DP, i.e. a smaller nominal projection, such as $[N+I]P$, it does not—the default case being subjective agreement.

At this point it is clear already, why definiteness of the object nominal correlates with the paradigm selection. Either the article in D^0 is itself the source of definiteness, or (in keeping with Szabolcsi (1992, 1994)) there are matching rules between D^0 and DetP which ensure that the definite article only occurs when the DetP specifies its containing $[N+I]P$ as [+definite] (or at least [+specific]).

Additional support for my hypothesis comes from incorporated objects, as illustrated in (11). (For a discussion of these, see e.g. É. Kiss (1994).)

- (11) Almát eszünk / *esszük.
 apple-acc eat-1pl-sub / eat-1pl-ob
 ‘We are eating apples. (We are apple-eating.)’

As seen in the example, these bare nominals never stand with objective agreement. Since they are just X^0 s, this is what we expect.

3.3. Possessives

Let us now turn our attention to possessives. Recall that in some of these cases there is an option whether such objects stand

tions to these classes. She argues that D^0 s are pure subordinators, not determiners in the semantic sense, while instances of DetP are determiners, and may consist merely of features like $[\pm\text{definite}]$, $[\pm\text{specific}]$, in association with the ‘definite’ article occupying D^0 , hence the apparent role of the article in determining definiteness and specificity.

with subjective or objective agreement. The first-sight generalization seems to be that an overt definite article, or an overt nominative-case possessor, requires objective inflection (12a, b), while in the absence of both, that is, when the possessor is non-overt, or it is dative-marked and outside the object phrase, both agreement paradigms are grammatical, but with a specificity difference on the object (cf. (8a, b)).

(12a) Látom / *látok a kutyádat.
 see-1sg-ob / see-1sg-sub the dog-2sgPOSS-acc
 ‘I see your dog.’

(12b) Látom / *látok Péter kutyáját.
 see-1sg-ob / see-1sg-sub Peter(-nom) dog-3sgPOSS-acc
 ‘I see Peter’s dog.’

The presence of an overt D^0 fits the scheme sketched above: it necessitates the projection of the DP-layer. Without it, it is at least possible for the nominal phrase to lack this outermost layer. More trouble is caused by the possessors. In Szabolcsi’s now standard analysis (for details see e.g. her (1994)), the nominative-case possessor occupies the specifier of $[N+I]P$, while its dative-case counterpart is found in the spec of DP. Szabolcsi assumes that the two positions are movement-related: all possessors originate in the inner position, and can actually stay there, receiving nominative case, but they can (or in certain cases: must) raise up to the outer position, which is somehow associated with a dative(-like) ending, and which can serve as an escape hatch for further movement. Also, the outer position is an operator position (which the inner one isn’t).

This picture is incompatible with my proposal, because (i) nominals with a nominative possessor and without an overt D^0 would count as less-than-DPs, and should thus occur with subjective agreement, contrary to the facts; and (ii) dative-marked possessors would imply the presence of the DP-layer, being in need of a SpecDP, so subjective conjugation (as in (8b)) should be impossible with them. For the latter, I assume that in (8b)-type cases there is no DP projected, rather, the possessor moves directly out of the $[N+I]P$ -internal position. Overt D^0 is never found in these cases (that would immediately trigger the objective conjugation, and yield a definite interpretation).

We now have to say something about problem (i), i.e. the obligatory ‘DP-ness’ of nominative-possessor phrases. It is clear that if the possessor is non-overt (i.e. pro), then all depends

on the presence vs. absence of an overt D^0 , as shown in (13):

- (13a) Láttunk / *láttuk kutyádat.
see-past-1pl-sub / see-past-1pl-ob dog-2sgPOSS-acc
'We have seen some dog(s) belonging to you.'
- (13b) Láttuk / *láttunk a kutyádat.
see-past-1pl-ob / see-past-1pl-sub the dog-2sgPOSS-acc
'We have seen your dog.'

This neatly corresponds to the DP vs. [N+I]P difference. Furthermore, if the [N+I]P-internal possessor is an overt personal pronoun, the definite article must be present, and consequently the objective agreement and the definite reading is the only option:

- (14) Láttuk a te kutyádat.
see-past-1pl-ob the you(-nom) dog-2sgPOSS-acc
'We have seen your dog.' (*'We have seen some dog(s) belonging to you.')

This fact may serve as an indication that overt nominative possessors necessarily involve DPs, even if in many cases there is no overt D^0 , although an overt D^0 is frequently an option, cf. (15):

- (15) Láttuk (a) Péter kutyáját.
see-past-1pl-ob (the) Peter(-nom) dog-3sgPOSS-acc
'We have seen Peter's dog' (*'We have seen some dog(s) of Peter.')

Although it is true that if the nominative-marked possessor is a quantified nominal, the overt D^0 can never surface, this might be attributed to a PF rule deleting it, when it linearly immediately precedes the quantifiers in question—Szabolcsi (1992, 1994) needs a rule roughly to this effect in her analysis, too (cf. fn.5). It seems to be a legitimate assumption then, that the D^0 preceding nominative possessors is **syntactically** overt, though it may delete later, viz. at PF. Further support to the underlying presence of a D^0 comes from the fact that in each of these cases it is possible to have the possessor dative-marked, in SpecDP, followed by an overt definite article, with no meaning difference whatsoever, which is suggestive of the presence of D^0 with the nominative-case possessors, too.

Another interesting question concerns why object clauses mostly trigger objective agreement, as shown in (16):

- (16) Tudom [(azt) hogy Péter okos.]
 know-1sg-ob (it-acc) that Peter smart(-sg)
 ‘I know that Peter is smart.’

In the detailed analysis of Hungarian embedded clauses, Kenesei (1994) proposes to treat *that*-clauses as [DP, CP] chains, where CP is theta-marked by the matrix V, while DP is in a Case-position, Case-marked by the matrix V. In (16), *azt* ‘it-acc’ (an expletive) represents this DP. Consequently, object agreement holds with this DP. *Az* ‘it’ is a DP-equivalent pronoun, so objective conjugation is expected. If, however, this position is taken up by a phrase that counts, in the sense of the discussion above, as less (or other) than DP, subjective agreement is what we expect, and it is what we find:

- (17) Öt fiút_{*i*} akarok [hogy megverj *t_i*].
 five boy-acc want-1sg-sub that beat-imperative-2sg
 ‘It is five boys that I want you to beat.’

To sum up briefly, these cases do not constitute counter-evidence; their behavior is in full compliance with our theory, once we have the correct analysis for them.

4. A Minimalist Analysis

4.1. DPs, Case, and Object Agreement

In this section I turn my attention to the technicalities of implementing my proposal in a minimalist framework, the basics of which are found in Chomsky (1995). In keeping with the currently standard assumptions about the functional structure of clauses, I posit an object agreement functional head and projection: Agr_O^0 , and Agr_OP , and claim that Agr_O is the locus of checking the object agreement features on the verb, which are directly related to the ‘subjective’ vs. ‘objective’ inflectional morphology. Moreover, object DPs have to move to SpecAgr_O for reasons of Case checking. The essence of my proposal, in these terms, is that certain object phrases, which are not DPs, just NPs or [N+I]Ps, do not check features at SpecAgr_O , thus do not license objective agreement on V. In other words, they are Case-theoretically invisible to the verb+ Agr_O heads, unlike full DP objects, so the verbs theta-marking them will behave as intransitives from a Case-theoretic point of view. This immediately yields the fact that verbs taking ‘indefinite’ objects pattern with true (theta-)intransitives, as far as subjective vs.

objective agreement is concerned. Also, if the raising of XPs to agreement- and/or Case-checking positions is driven by the connection between the attracting features of functional heads, and the D-features of the raised phrases, then it is obvious that non-DPs will not get attracted to these positions. My proposal, then, is in line with Laka's (1993) analysis of Basque unergative predicates, sharing the DP vs. less-than-DP classification of objects with respect to Case theory—I actually generalize it to all predicates in Hungarian.

At this point it is natural to ask what is the Case-status of the less-than-DPs. I propose that they have inherent (theta-linked) Case, i.e. they are licensed via the theta-roles assigned to them. A remark is in place here about morphological case. Accusative morpho-case is not strictly linked to structural Case checking of objects, witness (18a, b).

(18a) Péter van itt a legtöbbet.
 Peter(-nom) be-3sg here the most-acc
 'Peter is here most frequently.'

(18b) Péter hatalmasat nőtt tavaly óta.
 Peter enormous-acc grow-past-3sg last_year since
 'Peter has grown enormously since last year.'

The accusative-marked phrases in these examples are not proper objects, and these verbs do not even have objective conjugation, yet the degree adverbials bear accusative case-suffixes as 'quasi-objects'. This shows that it is not unique for the non-DP proper objects to display accusative case-endings without being Case-licensed as objects.

4.2. Remaining Problems

The question immediately arises: If the hypothesis just laid out is on the right track, the difference between the raising of DP objects and the non-raising of non-DP objects should be either directly visible, or at least detectable somehow. Unfortunately, no such evidence can be shown. The reasons for this, I claim, are the following: (i) Hungarian is a language with wholesale overt A'-movement of nominals, to different operator positions, like topic, quantifier, or focus.⁸ Moreover the verb, too, raises

⁸ The original proposal to this effect is due to É.Kiss, especially her (1987); the matching between this set of positions and

at least as high as Agr_S in the overt syntax. Therefore one cannot expect to directly observe the A-raising of the object to SpecAgr_O . (ii) A-binding could be an indicator of raising an object over the VP-internal subject position. However, in her widely accepted analysis of Hungarian clause structure, É.Kiss (1987) claims that the Hungarian VP is flat, so subjects and objects are on a par, mutually c-commanding each other already at d-structure. This is confirmed by the lack of any subject-object asymmetries in this language. Moreover, as shown by É.Kiss (1991), thematic binding also plays a role in Hungarian. So it would in fact be more surprising to find binding theoretic consequences of object raising than to find their absence.

I have not offered any explanation for the fact, discussed in the first part of the paper, that 1st and 2nd person object pronouns do not stand with objective agreement, unlike 3rd person ones, which is contrary to expectations, on the assumption that they are all DP-equivalents. Note, though, that this case was equally problematic for analyses relying on definiteness, specificity, or even person/number object agreement. Farkas (1987, 1990), in fact, outlines an analysis for them in terms of feature structures, splitting apart 1st and 2nd person nominal phrases from 3rd person ones (including 3rd person pronouns) by a feature inherent in 1st/2nd person which induces definiteness only at a level following morphological input, so these pronouns will not trigger the (definiteness-based) objective agreement. What this analysis fails to satisfactorily explain, though, is why that inherent feature should induce this particular behavior.

To cope with the problem, I have two directions in mind, for subsequent work, to find out which (if either) is correct. One of them is to examine the categorial status of 1st and 2nd person pronouns: if some evidence can be found that they are less-than-DPs, then they fit into the scheme without further stipulation. The other possible path would be to relate the present facts to an ‘ergative-like’ split in the behavior of pronouns. This can presumably be related to the claims of Paris (1990) and Lindhout (1993), who believe that the whole objec-

those argued for in Beghelli and Stowell (1995) has been explored by Szabolcsi (1995), where she claims that Hungarian overtly displays all the operations that Beghelli and Stowell suspect at LF e.g. in English.

tive agreement phenomenon of Hungarian is an issue of ergativity: in these constructions the nominative-marked phrase is much like a possessor, where the possession is expressed by the nominally behaving verb. If this is true, then the fact that 1st and 2nd person pronouns (as objects) do not participate in this is similar to the pronominal split in several ergative languages: these pronouns only occur in the nominative-accusative pattern, not the ergative one.

I have not treated the sole case of person agreement with the object: the form *lát-lak* 'I-see-you'. If the above-mentioned ergative split exists, it is presumably derived from the properties of the Agr categories (cf. Laka (1993)). In this perspective, *lát-lak* is possibly an instance of collapsed Agr's: the subject and the object are two specifiers of one Agr-head: Agr_{S+O}, hence the dual person agreement.

5. Summary

I have discussed the nature of the choice in agreement inflection paradigms in Hungarian, in dependence of properties of object phrases. I have shown that previous accounts, in terms of definiteness and specificity, are unsatisfactory in some respects, they are on the wrong track, in as much as correlations in these features are not the decisive factor in the selection of agreement paradigms, but the parallel effect of the syntactic triggers. I set up a distinction between nominals having and lacking a DP layer, and took this to be the key factor, which, through Case-checking at an object agreement functional projection, determines the paradigm choice.

I consider it one of the important gains of the proposed system, that the identical behavior of verbs without an object, and ones with an 'indefinite' object falls out trivially. I have also offered an answer to the question about possessive constructions: they take the objective conjugation, regardless of (in)definiteness, because they contain a D at least in syntax. Finally, some paths have been sketched for the treatment of object personal pronouns.

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Research Institute for Linguistics
 Hungarian Academy of Sciences
 P.O.B. 19
 H-1250 Budapest
 Hungary
 bartos@nytud.hu