

The Definite Conjugation in Hungarian: What is it and what triggers it?

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An unusual kind of agreement

- Verb agreement is normally sensitive to the ϕ -features (person, number and gender) of the subject (Corbett 2006:91ff).
- In Hungarian, verbs appear to show agreement in *definiteness* with the *object*.
- Is this type of agreement really possible?

Two subject-verb agreement paradigms

indefinite paradigm (present tense)

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	-ok/-ek/-ök	-unk/-ünk
2	-(a)sz/-(e)sz or -ol/-el/-öl	-(o)tok/-(e)tek/-(ö)tök
3	∅	-(a)nak/-(e)nek

definite paradigm (present tense)

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	-om/-em/-öm	-juk/-jük
2	-od/-ed/-öd	-jatok/-itek
3	-ja/-i	-ják/-ik

Basic distribution of the (in)definite conjugation

Verb is indefinite with indefinite determiner *egy*:

Lát-**ok** egy madar-at
see-1.SG.I an bird-ACC
'I see a bird'

Definite with definite determiner *a/az*:

Lát-**om** a madar-at
see-1.SG.D the bird-ACC
'I see the bird'

Basic distribution of the (in)definite conjugation

Indefinite is default:

Vár-ok

wait-1SG.I

'I'm waiting'

Question 1: Pronoun or agreement?

Agreement analysis

Finite verbs agree in [DEF] with their object.

(Bartos 1997; É. Kiss 2002)

Pronoun analysis

The definite conjugation contains an incorporated third person object clitic pronoun.

(Szamosi 1974; den Dikken 2006)

We conclude in favor of the **agreement analysis**.

Question 2: Nature of the trigger

DP-hood analysis

Only DPs (not NPs) are [DEF].

(Bartos 1997, 2001)

Morphological analysis

Only certain morphemes are [DEF].

We conclude in favor of the **morphological analysis**.

Outline

- 1 Pronoun vs. Agreement
 - Some apparent virtues of the pronoun analysis
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Object *pro*-drop predicted

Objects are correctly predicted to be omissible:

Lát-om

see-1.SG.D

'I see it'

Sensitivity to definiteness

“The link between ... the use of a third person object clitic ... and the definiteness ... of the object (here, the noun phrase that the clitic doubles) ties in with the fact that object clitic doubling is generally known to impose definiteness ... restrictions.”

(den Dikken 2006:13)

Spanish clitics and definiteness

Clitic doubling OK with definite objects:

La oían a [Paca]/ a [la niña]/ a [la gata]
CL listen.3PL.PAST to Paca/ to the girl/ to the cat
'They listened to Paca/ to the girl/ to the cat.'

Not indefinite objects:

No (*lo) oieron a [ningún ladrón]
not CL hear.3PL.PAST to any thief
'They didn't hear any thieves.'

(Suñer 1988)

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In a nutshell

- Clitic doubling sensitive to semantic properties: definiteness, specificity, topichood.
- Hungarian object agreement is not.

Real clitic doubling is sensitive to semantics

Porteño Spanish:

Diariamente, **la** escuchaba a [una mujer que cantaba tangos]
 daily her listened.3SG to a woman who sang tangos
 'Every day they listened to a woman who sang tangos.'

(Suñer 1988)

⇒ Possibility of clitic doubling not predictable based on the form of doubled object.

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Specific indefinite objects in Hungarian

An object introduced by *egy* ‘a’ triggers the indefinite conjugation in Hungarian— even when specific:

Minden nap [egy görög énekes-t] hallgatt-ak/*-ák.
every day a Greek singer-ACC listened-3PL.I/-3PL.D
‘Every day, they listened to a Greek singer.’

... Máriá-nak hív-ják.
... Maria-DAT call-3PL.D
‘...Her name is Maria. [lit. They call her Maria]’

Possessed Quantified Noun Phrases

QNP triggers **indefinite** conjugation:

Ismer-**ek**/*Ismer-**em** [minden titk-ot]
know-1SG.I/know-1SG.D every secret-ACC
'I know every secret.'

unless they are possessed (Bartos 1997):

Ismer-**em**/*Ismer-**ek** [minden titk-**od**-at]
know-1SG.D/know-1SG.I every secret-**2SG**-ACC
'I know your every secret.'

QNP is non-referential \Rightarrow semantically indefinite, regardless of whether they are possessed.

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Clitic doubling can be sensitive to topichood

Kallulli (2000): Albanian/Greek clitic doubling sensitive to topichood, not specificity or definiteness:

(E) pashë Jan-in
him.CL saw.1SG John-the
'I saw John.'

With clitic: John is discourse topic

Without clitic: Can be uttered out of the blue

Hungarian def. conj. not sensitive to topichood

Hungarian: discourse-configurational; focus occurs pre-V and topic occurs pre-focus.

Definite conjugation, even if the object is in focus:

[János-t] talál-t-uk meg.
John-ACC invite-PAST-1PL.D PERF
'We invited *John*.'

Indefinite conjugation, even if object is topic:

[Egy lány-t] mi talál-t-unk meg.
a girl we invite-PAST-1PL.I PERF
'We invited a girl.'

Definite conjugation vs. Clitic doubling

Predictable solely based on the object's form?

- Hungarian definite conjugation: **yes**.
- True clitic doubling: **no**; semantically determined.

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Binding

Disjoint reference with *pro*-drop:

Péter szeret-i
 Peter.NOM love-3SG.D
 'Peter loves him/her/it/#himself'

Yet reflexive objects co-occur with definite conjugation:

Péter_i szeret-i [önmagá-t_i]
 Peter.NOM love-3SG.D himself-ACC
 'Peter loves himself.'

Agreement analysis: Principle B, Principle A

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Explaining the binding properties

Pronoun analysis: Binding facts mysterious

Péter szeret-i ~ Peter love-him

Péter szeret-i önmagát ~ Peter love-him himself

(Cf. Baker 1996 on Mohawk: Jelinek's (1984) 'Pronominal Argument Hypothesis' predicts absence of reflexives.)

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Azt creates islands (É. Kiss 1990)

János mond-t-a (az-t) [hogy *holnap* érkezik]
John.NOM say-PAST-3SG.D it-ACC that tomorrow arrive.3SG.I
'John said (it) that he is arriving tomorrow.'

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Explaining the island effect

Agreement analysis: Adjunct is island; complement is not.

- verb [that ...]
COMPLEMENT
- verb it [that ...]
OBJ ADJUNCT

Pronoun analysis: No difference expected.

- verb -cl [that ...]
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- verb -cl it [that ...]
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Conclusion

Hungarian really does have object agreement!

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Question 2: Nature of the trigger

DP-hood analysis

Only DPs (not NPs) are [DEF].

(Bartos 1997, 2001)

Morphological analysis

Only certain morphemes are [DEF].

We argue for the **morphological analysis**.

Morphological analysis

The following forms bear the [DEF] feature:

- Definite determiners: *a/az* 'the', *ez* 'this', *az* 'that', *melyik* 'which', *valamennyi* 'each', ...
- Certain pronouns: 3rd person pronouns (overt or null); reflexive and reciprocal pronouns (which are morphologically 3rd person).
- Possessive suffixes: *-ad* 2SG, *-ja* 3SG, etc.
- The C *hogy* 'that'.
- Proper names

DP-hood analysis

- DPs trigger definite conjugation:

[a [madar-at]_{NP}]_{DP}
the bird-ACC

- NPs trigger indefinite conjugation:

[egy madar-at]_{NP}
a bird-ACC

DP-hood analysis

Two types of determiner in Hungarian (Szabolcsi 1994):

- D: *a(z)* 'the'
- Det: *minden* 'every', *e, eme, ezen* 'this', *ama, azon* 'that', *melyik* 'which', *kevés* 'few', *sok* 'many', *egy(ik)* 'one', etc.

Two positions: [D [Det N]_{NP}]_{DP}

D and Det can co-occur

Nominative possessor separates the two positions:

[[a]_D [te [valamennyi]_{Det} titk-od]_{NP}]_{DP}
the you.NOM each secret-2SG.POSS
'each of your secrets'

The *D+Det Constraint

The *D+Det Constraint: D and Det cannot be adjacent.

a [től-ed kap-ott] valamennyi levél
the from-2SG get-PAST.3SG.I each letter.NOM
'each letter received from you'

(*a) valamennyi levél
the each letter.NOM
'each letter'

Szabolcsi 1994: Haplology rule

Haplology: Delete D at PF if Det immediately follows it.

(Szabolcsi 1994:210)

[[a]_D [[valamennyi]_{Det} levél]_{NP}]_{DP}

↓

[[~~a~~]_D [[valamennyi]_{Det} levél]_{NP}]_{DP}
the each letter

DP-hood analysis: Summary

V has definite conjugation iff it has a DP as its object.

(Bartos 2001, 320)

- The only D is *a(z)* ‘the’, which heads a DP shell
- Indefinites like *két levél* ‘two books’ and *egy madarat* ‘a bird’ are NPs (no DP shell)
- Nominals like *valamennyi levél* ‘each letter’ are DPs headed by a silent *a(z)* ‘the’, deleted by a haplology rule.

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minden 'every' vs. *valamennyi* 'each'

Valamennyi triggers the definite conjugation:

Eltitkol-**om** valamennyi találkozás-t.
keep.secret-1SG.D each meeting-ACC
'I keep each meeting secret.'

But *minden* triggers indefinite:

Eltitkol-**ok** minden találkozás-t.
keep.secret-1SG.I every meeting-ACC
'I keep every meeting secret.'

(Szabolcsi 1994, ex. 106)

Both undergo haplology

Under the DP-hood hypothesis, both *valamennyi* and *minden* would undergo haplology because they co-occur with *a(z)*:

a Mari { valamennyi / minden } kalap-ja
the Marie { each / every } hat-3SG.POSS
'each/every one of Marie's hats'

And cannot immediately follow it:

(*a) { valamennyi / minden } kalap-ja
(*the) { each / every } hat-3SG.POSS
'each/every one of her/his hats'

Overgeneration with indefinite Dets

Through haplology, this structure should be generated:

[a minden kalap]_{DP}
~~the~~ every hat

So *minden kalap* should trigger the definite conjugation!

Agreement analysis: *minden* lacks [DEF] feature.

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Complement clauses are [DEF]

János mond-t-a (az-t) [*hogy holnap érkezik*]
John.NOM say-PAST-3SG.D it-ACC that tomorrow arrive.3SG.I
'John said (it) that he is arriving tomorrow.'

- When V takes a complement clause, it has definite conjugation.
- On DP-hood analysis, complement must be a DP.
 - Kenesei (1994): *azt* always present but can be silent.
 - Problem: CP is island only when *azt* is present.
- Morphological analysis: *hogy*-CPs are [DEF].

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1st/2nd person pronouns trigger indefinite

Lát-**ják** őt/őket
see-3.PL.D it/them
'They see it/them'

Lát-**nak** engem/téged/minket/...
see-3PL.I me/you/us/...
'They see me/you/us'

- Under the DP-hood analysis, 3rd person pronouns are DPs, 1st and 2nd person pronouns are not.
- No evidence for this assumption has been offered.

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Conclusion: Morphological analysis

- DP-hood does not determine presence of [DEF].
- Rather, [DEF] is encoded in each of a small finite set of morphemes, plus the proper names.

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General Conclusion

- Hungarian verbs really agree with the object, in [DEF].
- [DEF] is determined by the morphological content of the object, not by semantic definiteness or DP-hood.
- Compare grammatical gender: related to biological gender but not fully predictable.

Thank you!

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