

Differential object–verb agreement and information structure

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1. Claim

The pattern of **differential object–verb agreement** attested in Hungarian and other languages arose as **the marker of the topic status of the object**.

Claim to be refuted: Coppock and Wechsler (2012): Hungarian differential object–verb agreement is a purely formal phenomenon, „registering the object’s formal, not semantic, definiteness”.

Definiteness: a +DEF feature lexically – i.e., idiosyncratically – associated with certain determiners and certain types of pronominals, but not with others.

2. Facts of Hungarian object–verb agreement to account for

(1) The subjective/indefinite paradigm:

én	íro-k	(egy cikket)	‘I write (a paper)’
te	ír-sz	(egy cikket)	‘you write (a paper)’
ő	ír-Ø	(egy cikket)	‘(s)he writes (a paper)’
mi	ír-unk	(egy cikket)	‘we write (a paper)’
ti	ír-tok	(egy cikket)	‘you write (a paper)’
ők	ír-nak	(egy cikket)	‘they write (a paper)’

(2) The objective/definite paradigm:

én	íro-m	a cikket	‘I write the paper’
te	íro-d	a cikket	‘you write the paper’
ő	ír- ja -Ø	a cikket	‘(s)he writes the paper’
mi	ír- j -uk	a cikket	‘we write the paper’
ti	ír- já -tok	a cikket	‘you write the paper’
ők	ír- já -k	a cikket	‘they write the paper’

ja: definite obj. agr. suffix cognate with the Proto-Uralic 3rd person SG personal pronoun.

Types of objects eliciting the definite conjugation:

- (3)a. (Én) ismere-m **a cikket** /**Pál cikkét** /**Pált** /**őket**
 I know-DEFO.1SG the paper-ACC /Paul’s paper-ACC /Paul-ACC /them
 /**önmagamat/azokat**.
 /myself-ACC/those-ACC
 ‘I know the paper/Paul’s paper/Paul/them/myself/those.’

Types of objects eliciting the indefinite conjugation:

- (4)a. (Én) ismere-k **egy/néhány/sok** /**minden** híres nyelvészt.
 I know-INDEF.1SG a /some /many/every famous linguist-ACC
 ‘I know a/some/many/every famous linguist.’

- b. (Én) ismere-k **nyelvészeket/valakit** /**mindenkit**.
 I know-INDEF.1SG linguists-ACC/somebody-ACC /everybody-ACC
 ‘I know linguists/somebody/everybody.’

Gaps in the use of the definite paradigm:

No agreement with 1st and 2nd person objects:

- (5) Ő ismer- Ø **engem/minket /téged** /**titeket**.
 he know-INDEF.3SG me /us /you_{sg}-ACC /you_{pl}-ACC
 ‘He knows me/us/you.’

Bartos (2000): 1st and 2nd person pronouns are not DPs but indefinite NumPs.

Coppock and Wechsler (2012): 1st and 2nd person pronouns are [-DEF].

Evidence against the NumP/[-DEF] analysis of 1st and 2nd person pronouns:

(6)a.? Én **minket** is belevesze-**m** a névsorba.
I us-ACC also include-DEFO.1SG the namelist-in
'I also include us in the list of names.'

b.**Én **minket** is belevesze-**k** a névsorba.
I us-ACC also include-INDEF.1SG the namelist-in

cf. c. Én **magunkat** is belevesze-**m** a névsorba.
I ourselves-ACC also include-DEFO.1SG the namelist-in
'I also include ourselves in the list of names.'

--> the use of the definite vs indefinite conjugation is determined by clause-level relations.

Another problem: special object agreement suffix if the object is 2nd person and the subject is 1st person:

(7) Én) ismer-**le-k** **téged** /**titeket**.
I know-2OBJ-1SGyou_{sg}-ACC/you_{pl}-ACC
'I know you.'

3. Deriving the gaps from the Inverse Agreement Constraint

Comrie (1980), Bobaljik and Branigan (2006): in Chukchi, Koryak and Kamchadal, both subject and object agreement.

Participants of events are ordered with respect to animacy: 1st > 2nd > 3rd person; SG > PL

(8) INVERSE AGREEMENT CONSTRAINT

An object agreeing with a verb must be lower in the animacy hierarchy than the subject agreeing with the same verb.

(9) Animacy hierarchy (segmented differently in diff. languages)

1SG > 1PL > 2SG > 2PL > 3SG > 3PL

(10) Segmentation in Koryak: 1 > 2 > 3SG > 3PL

Blocked agreement complexes:

- (11) a. 2nd person subject – 1st person object
b. 3rd person subject – 1st/2nd person object
c. 3rd person plural subject – any object

The same hierarchy in Hungarian, segmented differently (É. Kiss 2005):

(12) 1SG > 1PL/2 > 3 (speaker-participant > other participants > non-participants)

(13) INVERSE AGREEMENT CONSTRAINT (for Hungarian)

An object agreeing with a verb must be lower in animacy than the subject agreeing with the same verb, unless both the subject and the object represent the lowest level of the animacy hierarchy

Excluded agreement complexes = the gaps in the definite conjugation

- (14) a. 1st person plural subject – 2nd person object
b. 2nd person subject – 1st person object
c. 3rd person subject – 1st/2nd person object

1st person SG subject – 2nd person object: a 2nd person object agr. morpheme (other than *-ja*)

(15) Én) ismer-**le-k** **téged** /**titeket**.
I know-2OBJ-1SG you_{sg}-ACC/you_{pl}-ACC 'I know you'
'I know you.'

Agreement with 1st and 2nd person objects also blocked in other languages: Trans-New Guinean **Waris** (Brown 1988), Oceanic **Sursurunga**, Papuan **Nanggu**, Carib **Waura** and **Parecis**, South American **Chacobo**, **Mapuche**, **Retuarã**, many **Zapotecan** languages (Siewierska 2004), Uralic **Tundra Nenets**, **Selkup**, **Nganasan** (Dalrymple–Nikolaeva 2011).

Is the Inverse Agreement Constraint a **semantically unmotivated, purely formal** constraint?

4. The proposal

Hungarian differential object – V agreement is grammaticalized object-topic – V agr. Agreeing objects were secondary topics, with the subject functioning as primary topic. → The Inverse Agreement Constraint is a requirement on information structure, prohibiting that the the secondary topic be more animate than the primary topic.

Facts/arguments to be integrated:

4.1. In the sister languages of Hungarian, e.g., Ostyak, O–V agreement marks the secondary topic role of the object (Nikolaeva 2001)

Ostyak is strictly SOV, with morphologically unmarked S and O.

Topic must coincide with the subject. Topic-subject identity established by passivization:

- (16) a. (luw) juwan re:sk-ə-s b. juwan xoj-na re:sk-ə-s-a
 he Ivan hit-EP-PAST.3SG Ivan who-LOC hit-EP-PAST-PASS.3S
 ‘He hit Ivan.’ ‘Who hit Ivan?’

Object is focus or secondary topic. The secondary topic status of O is marked by O–V agr.:

- (17) a. ma **tām kālaj** we:l-sə-**e**-m b. ma **tām kālaj** we:l-sə-**l**-am
 I this reindeer kill-PAST-**SG**-1SG I this reindeer kill-PAST-**PL**-1SG
 ‘I killed this reindeer.’ ‘I killed these reindeer.’
- c. ma **tām kālaj** we:l-sə-**ŋil**-am
 I this reindeer kill-PAST-**DU**-1SG
 ‘I killed these (two) reindeer.’ (Nikolaeva 1999, ex. 1)

No O–V agreement in all-new sentences:

- (18) a. What happened?
 b. ma tam kalaŋ we:l-s-**∅**m /*we:l-s-**e**-m
 I this reindeer kill-PAST-1SG /kill-PAST-**SG**-1SG
 ‘I killed this reindeer.’

In focus structures where O is presupposed, obligatory O–V agreement:

- (19) ma **ta:lōx** ta:ta a:kōt-l-**e**-m /*a:kōt-l-**∅**m anta to:ta
 I mushroom here collect-PRES-**SG**-1SG /collect- PRES-1SG not there
 ‘I collect mushrooms HERE, not THERE.’

Similar facts from Vogul (Skribnik 2001), Tundra Nenets, Selkup, Nganasan.

In Nenets, Selkup, & Nganasan: **1st and 2nd person objects never elicit agreement:**

- (20) a. Təp šinty qontyrtenta /*qontyrtentynty
 he you.ACC see.FUT.3SGSUBJ see.FUT.**OBJ**.3SGSUBJ
 ‘He will see you.’
- b. Təp kanap qontyrtenta /qontyrtentynty
 he dog.ACC see.FUT.3SGSUBJ /see.FUT.**OBJ**.3SGSUBJ
 ‘We will see a/the dog.’

4.2. Old Hungarian still displays relics of the sentence structure preserved in Ostyak

Non-finite SOV clauses with a morphologically unmarked Obj:

- (21) **o kedig è gondoluan** yme vrnac angala ièlenec nèki (Munich C. 8)
 he-NOM however this- NOM thinking lo Lord's angel appeared him

4.3. Old, & Mod. Hungarian still display relics of O–V agr. encoding topical O –V agreement

Old Hungarian finite clauses: O is accusative-marked, WO is flexible.

Topicality is shown by movement to Spec,TopP.

O–V agreement is licensed by definite objects.

Still, **occasional agreement with topical indefinite objects:**

- (22) a. **Kit** Amasias kiral auag pap gakorta **getr-ett-e-Ø** (Vienna Codex 214)
 whom Amasias king or priest often torture-PAST-defo-3SG

- b. es ottan **ven ysteny malaztnak latasatt** (Jókai Codex p. 131)
 and there take-INDEF.3SG divine grace-GEN sight-ACC
 'and there he took the sight of God's grace'

Modern Hungarian:

- (23) Egyes nőket a sötét ruhák öregítik.
 certain women.ACC the dark clothes make.look.old-DEFO-3PL
 'Certain women, dark clothes make look older.'

4.4. Differential object – V agreement is topical O–V agreement also in other languages.

Givón (1975): agreement morphemes on the V arose as topic-doubling pronominals.

Subject–V agreement: grammaticalized topic–V agreement.

Object–V agreement: grammaticalized secondary topic–V agreement – cf. Bantu, Creol languages, child language

Bantu: topical object – V agreement may develop into definite object – V agreement.

Dalrymple & Nikolaeva (2011): in differential object marking/object agreement languages across the world marked objects are associated with the information-structure role of topic. The association may be either synchronic or historical. Marked objects may become associated with semantic features typical of topics (animacy, definiteness, specificity).

Kallulli (2000): object clitic doubling in Albanian and Greek marks object topicality.

5. Summary

- Hungarian Obj–V agreement originally marked the secondary topic role of Obj.
- The Inverse Agreement Constraint requires that in SOV languages a topical Obj be less animate than the topical Subj. An Obj more animate than the Subj must be focus.
- Hungarian topical Obj–V agreement has been reanalyzed as definite Obj–V agreement.
- The gaps in definite Obj–V agreement are fossilized relics of the Inverse Agreement Constr.

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