

Book Review

Veronika Hegedűs & Katalin É. Kiss (eds.). 2021. *Syntax of Hungarian: Postpositions and postpositional phrases*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 480. ISBN: 9789463725910.

Reviewed by **János Egressy**, Department of Linguistics, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA, USA; and **Anikó Lipták**, Leiden University Centre for Linguistics, Leiden, The Netherlands,
E-mail: egressyjanos@gmail.com (J. Egressy), A.Liptak@hum.leidenuniv.nl (A. Lipták)

<https://doi.org/10.1515/flin-2022-2041>

1 Introduction

Postpositions and postpositional phrases is the most recent volume published on Hungarian in the ‘Comprehensive Grammar Resources’ series. It is the third volume of the estimated nine that will together form the largest descriptive survey of Hungarian syntax ever undertaken. The aim of the series is to provide a grammatical description of the language, inspired by empirical discoveries of theoretical (mostly generative) research, some of which was hitherto only available in Hungarian. Subscribing to the view that descriptive information should not be concealed by theoretical constructs, the series aims to produce theory neutral description as much as possible, targeting a broad audience of linguists and grammarians interested in the grammatical description of Hungarian. In line with this, *Postpositions and postpositional phrases* does not presuppose sophisticated technical terminology of generative grammar, beyond basic terms of grammatical description and occasional terms like ‘movement’ referring to displacement of a word or phrase out of its basic position or the ‘high/low’ position of some morpheme in a tree structure representation. In some places, background information about word order and clause structure of Hungarian does come handy, which can be obtained from reference works such as Kenesei et al. (1999) or É. Kiss (2002), or by reading pages 273–181 and 412 of the book – these pages present a useful description of Hungarian word order in neutral and non-neutral simple clauses and specify the order of constituents in the left periphery. As a grammar describing the entire system of adpositions and their phrases in a maximally exhaustive manner, yet using minimal means, this book does an admirable job.

Adpositional heads and their phrases are surveyed here with remarkable depth and breath. The book presents a cogent overview of all categories and (sub) categories of postpositions and related items, including case markers and adverbial case suffixes and their phrases – namely case-marked NPs, postpositional

phrases, adverb phrases and verbal particles. The first half of the book (up to Chapter 4) deals with the classification of P heads and the internal syntax of their phrases, while the second half (starting from the second half of Chapter 4) deals with the external syntax of PPs.

Empirical richness and the systematicity of the approach is definitely a unique selling point of this book. Anyone who picks up this book will be impressed by the transparent and easy-to-navigate presentation and the systematic classification of the data. It must be noticed, however, that systematic classification sporadically comes at a price. There are few places where certain phenomena are described as if they are PP-specific, while they are not. For example, that bare nominal complements of Ps must be generic or focused (see Section 3.2.2.3, pp. 198–205) is not limited to the realm of PPs but is a general property of bare nouns in Hungarian. In other places, classificatory rigor also causes that the description of some phenomena is repeated. Generally, this is not a problem, but it is slightly confusing when the same constituent is referred to by distinct terminology, which the book admits is the case with participant PPs in Chapters 5 and 7: the former calls them non-core arguments and the latter treats them as adverbial adjuncts.

Just as in any other work of this scale, size and ambition, there are some omissions in our view, which we will list in the remainder of this review together with a summary of the book's content. Before we present a chapter-by-chapter overview, a note about the book's title is in order. As mentioned above, the book is not only on postpositions (Ps) and postpositional phrases (PPs), but it also surveys items that are related to these in Hungarian-specific ways: case-markers, which are often analysed as P-morphemes of the same category as postpositions (Asbury 2008; Dékány and Hegedűs 2015; Marác 1989); adverbs, which are analysed (for historical reasons) as PPs containing a case-suffix (cf. e.g. Horváth 2006); and verbal particles (as well as verb modifiers), which predominantly comprise P-type heads, adverbs and PPs. That case-markers, adverbial endings and verbal particles are treated together with postpositions is an understandable choice, it is unfortunate, however, that the volume's title and the 'Contents' section in the prelims does not call attention to this. For readers coming from a descriptive tradition or those familiar with Indo-European languages, the inclusion of adverbs and adverb phrases in a book on PPs is not evident. This includes those who are familiar with the grammatical description of Dutch in the same series, *The Syntax of Dutch* volumes: in there adverbs are treated in the *Adjectives and Adjective Phrases* volume (as adverbs in Dutch can be defined as adverbially used adjectives), and adverbials are discussed in the third volume of *Verbs and Verb Phrases*.

2 Chapter-by-chapter overview of the content

After a short introduction by one of the editors in Chapter 1, setting the volume's scope and defining the Hungarian-specific phenomena to be treated, Chapter 2, 'Postpositions: Formal and semantic classification', presents an exhaustive overview of case suffixes, postpositions, adverbs and verbal particles, providing a formal characterization for all of them, as well as the classificatory backbones of the entire volume on 176 pages. The authors, Éva Dékány and Veronika Hegedűs, choose the effective methodology of starting with formal characterizations that differentiates case affixes, case-like postpositions and case-assigning postpositions on the basis of syntactic and morphological criteria in Section 2.2, including the bound versus free nature of the item, complementation, separability of the complement, combination with case affixes and behaviour under conjunction reduction. The formal properties of complementation extend to discussing whether complements can be dropped, whether a P-morpheme occurs after a demonstrative in a nominal complement and whether pronominal complements are allowed to begin with – the latter property has not figured in previous works yet and yields a host of novel observations, such as that the translative(-essive), the terminative and the essive-formal case suffixes cannot combine with personal pronouns: e.g. *én-vé-m* I-TRANSL.ESS-1SG 'into me' (or allowing for the expected consonant assimilation *én-né-m*) are ill-formed.

The second part of this chapter provides a semantic classification of Ps into spatial, temporal and third type (non-spatiotemporal) items, and concludes with an excellent and entirely novel contribution on classifying borderline cases of postpositions. These are the P-type words that are not yet fully grammaticalised: participial postpositions, containing a verbal stem followed by the *-va/ve* participial suffix (like *kezd-ve* begin-PART 'beginning from' and *fog-va* regard-PART 'regarding') and possessive postpositions originating in possessive constructions (like *hely-é-ben* place-POSS-IN 'in X's place/shoes', *eset-é-n* case-POSS-SUP 'in case of'). Applying the same criteria that they used for the classification of the ordinary Ps, the authors show that participial Ps are really in-between categories, but closer to Ps than to participial verbs. This can be seen from the fact that they cannot take an accusative-marked complement or degree phrases as modifiers. In addition, they can be used as modifiers of nouns only when followed by a participial verb, and not with the *-i* attributivizer suffix (1b), unlike ordinary postpositional PPs (1c).¹

¹ The glosses in this review follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules.

- (1) a. *tavaly-tól fog-va / kezd-ve tartó bojkott*
 last.year-ABL regard-PART start-PART lasting boycott
 ‘the boycott that has been going on since last year’ (p. 162, [479a])
- b. **a tavaly-tól fog-va-i bojkott*
 the last.year-ABL regard-PART-ATTR boycott
 intended: ‘the boycott that has been going on since last year’ (p. 162, [480a])
- c. *a vonal-on felül-i írás*
 the line-SUP above-ATTR script
 ‘the writing above the line’ (p. 78, [204b])

As for possessive Ps, examination of the most frequently used ones shows that there are substantial individual differences to be found. Some are more postposition-like than others: For example, *helyében* allows a definite article after a dative demonstrative, as possessives obligatorily do, but *esetén* does not:

- (2) a. Possessive DP
*en-nek *(a) könyve*
 this.DAT the book.POSS
 ‘the book of this’ (p. 184, [541])
- b. Possessive postposition
ennek [?](a) hely-é-ben
 this.DAT the place-POSS-IN
 ‘instead of this’ (p. 184, [542])
- c. Possessive postposition
ennek ^(?)(az) eset-é-n
 this.DAT the case-POSS-IN
 ‘in case of this’ (p. 185, [544e])

Our most general concern regarding this chapter is that the various criteria to classify postpositional morphemes are sometimes applied simultaneously. Most significantly, while Section 2.3 is supposed to focus on the semantic classification of P-type items, its subsections are still dedicated to morphologically established categories. We believe that this obscures the fact that P heads coming from various morphological classes *can* be composed of very similar types of semantic properties. For instance, the case suffix *-ban/ben* ‘in/inside’ and the case-assigning postposition *belül* ‘inside of’, are semantically almost identical even if they belong to different morphological classes. We also think that an international audience would have appreciated to see some kind of classification based on Axial Parts, the denominated part of the Ground involved in the action also determining the PP’s orientation in space (Svenonius 2007). The last of our general worries is that

readers not familiar with the description of Hungarian (and of similar languages) may need a more detailed discussion of the term ‘case’, which here refers to the formal, morphological category ‘suffix’ contrasting with the free standing word status of postpositions, as opposed to the structural, syntactic definitions used in the cross-linguistic generative literature.

Chapter 3 discusses the internal syntax of postpositional phrases, by the same authors as Chapter 2. The first part of the chapter surveys the types of complement Ps can have, which can variably be nominal, adjectival, postpositional in nature or correspond to clauses or small clauses. The second part shows what kind of adverbial modifiers Ps can associate with. Similarly to Chapter 2, Chapter 3 is richly illustrated and logically structured. In some cases – see also our comments on Chapter 2 – we do not find explicit motivation for treating the complement-taking properties of case-suffixes, case-like, and case-assigning postpositions separately. Except for complementation by adjectives (which is only possible for case-markers), such morphological classification does not yield proper natural classes with respect to the kind of complements Ps can take. For example, only a small subset of spatiotemporal case-suffixes (namely delative, sublative, terminative, and ablative) can take PP-complements apart from the cases where such suffix-ation of PPs by case-markers is required by the subcategorization of verbs. Note also that despite the fact that there is no subsection dedicated to it, it can be worth illustrating that a finite subclause can appear as complement to a case suffix selected by a case-assigning postposition, like *kívül* ‘apart from’, as in (3):

- (3) *Nem mond-ott semmi-t az-on kívül, hogy nem jön.*
 not say-PST.3SG nothing-ACC it-SUB apart that not come.3SG
 ‘He/she said nothing apart from (the fact) that he/she is not coming.’

Similarly to Chapter 2, the discussion of Axial Parts could have proven useful occasionally. For instance, the possibility of body part complements to case affixes, mentioned on p. 199, such as *váll-ig (ér)* ‘shoulder-TER (reach) ‘to reach one’s shoulder’ are reminiscent of Axial Part morphemes at early stages of their grammaticalization. Similarly, a PP’s ability to take measure phrases as modifiers (see page 244) seems to depend on the presence of certain Axial Part-like properties rather than the P’s morphological status as the presentation of examples would imply.

Chapter 4, ‘Predicative PPs’, by Katalin É. Kiss is dedicated to postpositional phrases that function as predicates. They can be primary predicates, such as time or space denoting PPs in combination with the copula or they can be secondary predicates, in the default case being predicated of an internal argument of the verb. Secondary predicates comprise not just PPs but also case-marked nominals, case-marked adjectives or verbal particles, collectively called verbal modifiers, with

reference to their distinguished immediately-before-the-verb position in neutral clauses. Together with the verb, these words and phrases form what this chapter refers to as ‘complex predicates’, with reference to the fact that the verbal modifier and the verb form a semantic unit and a prosodic unit as well (at least in neutral clauses). As far as their semantic contribution is concerned, the chapter further classifies predicative PPs according to their role in determining the aspectual property of the verb phrase, as resultative and terminative secondary predicates mark telicity in Hungarian, while atelic verbal modifiers modify stative verbs or verbs of existence. Note that the term ‘terminative’ in this chapter refers to PPs denoting the end location of an entity and not to the oblique case-suffix *-ig* as in Chapter 2.

Verbal particles are also treated in Chapter 5, ‘PPs used as arguments’, authored by György Rákosi, which is dedicated to argument PPs selected by verbs, the verbal particle – verb complex, an adjective or a noun. The first part covers PP complements of particle verbs, in which the particles are either adverbial, case-like postpositions, case-assigning postpositions or a cognate of a case-affix, and the chapter zooms in on the formal properties of complex predicates containing these (thus complementing Chapter 4). It is shown that PP complements of complex predicates can in many cases occur as verbal modifiers of the verb when the particle is not present, but is always outcompeted in this position by the particle, if the verb has one. The second part of the chapter presents a cogent survey of participant PPs, and argues that they are two such types: core and non-core arguments. Core arguments are subcategorised and selected by the verb and they are entailed by the predicate’s denotation, while non-core arguments are not selected and not entailed. This discussion brings up a very useful finding, something that one could call a ‘cline’ of P-morphemes that can be selected for (see p. 307): Selected P-morphemes are most often cases-suffixes or case-like postpositions, in fewer cases case-assigning Ps, while one can never find selected borderline postpositions. We consider this a highly important observation that reflects on the entire system of adpositions and their grammaticalisation path and supports the findings of Chapter 2 in this respect. Chapter 5 closes with a survey of adjectival PP complements, using the same core versus non-core distinction already established. There are three complement-taking types of adjectives singled out here: agentive adjectives, adjectives describing mental states and symmetric adjectives. While this is a potential way of classifying the data, it is not clear how e.g. agentive *barátságos* ‘friendly’ and subject experiencer *dühös* ‘furious, vexed’ describing a mental state differ in any meaningful way when it comes to their formal behaviour. The chapter concludes with a brief section on PP complements to nouns, which could have been left out, with reference to the lengthy Section 2.1. on this topic in the *Nouns and Noun phrases 2* volume, which appeared in this series in 2018.

Chapter 6, ‘PPs used as obligatory adjuncts’ by Katalin É. Kiss is a short piece characterising contexts in which PP adjuncts with the right discourse properties can come to the rescue of otherwise ungrammatical sentences. It describes the behaviour of so-called definiteness effect verbs, i.e. verbs of coming into being and creation, such as *születik* ‘be born’, *készül* ‘be prepared’ or *akad* ‘occur’ or *talál* ‘find’. These verbs and many others cannot have a definite internal argument, but the addition of any kind of adjunct PP in the preverbal focus position removes the problem, cf. the contrast in grammaticality between (4a) and (4b) (small capitals mark focus):

- (4) a. **Van a pénz.*
 is the money
 lit. ‘There is the money.’ (p. 356, [1a])
 b. *A pénz a FŐK-BAN van.*
 the money the drawer-IN is
 ‘The money is in the drawer.’ (p. 356, [1d])

The reader needs to keep in mind that *obligatory* in the chapter’s title does not refer to being obligatory as required by any lexical entry subcategorizing for the adjunct in the sentence. Rather, the role of adjuncts in these sentences is that of being a potential carrier of focus, as it is focus that lifts the effect, as the chapter also makes clear. When focus falls on the verb or the internal argument, there is no need for any other adjunct phrase to be added:

- (5) a. **Talál-t-am a pénz-t.*
 find-PST-DEF.OBJ.1SG the money-ACC
 ‘I found the money.’
 b. *A pénzt TALÁL-T-AM, nem lop-t-am.*
 the money-ACC find-PST-DEF.OBJ.1SG not steal-PST-DEF.OBJ.1SG
 ‘I found the money, not stole it.’ (p. 367, [36])
 c. *A PÉNZ-T talál-t-am, nem az ékszer-ek-et.*
 the money-ACC find-PST-DEF.OBJ.1SG not the jewel-PL-ACC
 ‘It was the money I found, not the jewels.’

The final chapter, ‘PPs as adjuncts’, by Barbara Egedi provides a formal classification of adverbial adjunct phrases of all types: those with and without a transparent PP structure. From the start, the chapter differentiates between VP adverbials and clausal adverbials, which is a distinction that proves most useful for understanding the placement of adverbials in Hungarian. VP adverbials modify the core event, appear with primary stress before the verbs, can be focused and questioned, but can never precede topics (unless they are referential) and fall into the scope of sentential operators. Clausal adjuncts on the other hand are

unstressed or have secondary stress, cannot be focused or questioned, can occur before or between topics and do not fall into the scope of sentential operators. The chapter provides two paraphrase-tests to differentiate between the two readings. The first of these is a version of the *azt teszi* ‘does that’ test introduced in Chapter 5 (the equivalent of the *do so* test in English), where the pro-VP *azt teszi* allows a VP-adjunct next to the verb, but disallows a clausal adverbial in the same position, cf. (6):

- (6) a. *A felügyelő döntés-re jut-ott, és az-t könnyen tet-t-e*
 the inspector decision-SUB get-PST.3SG and that-ACC easily do-PST-3SG
 ‘The inspector arrived at a decision and she did it easily.’
 b. **A felügyelő döntés-re jut-ott, és az-t szerencsé-re tet-t-e.*
 the inspector decision-SUB get-PST.3SG and that-ACC luck-SUB do-PST-3SG
 intended: ‘The inspector arrived at a decision and she did it luckily.’
 (p. 377, [21a,b])

The second test is the *az a helyzet, hogy...* ‘the situation/thing/case is, that...’ paraphrase, which accepts only clausal adverbials in the matrix clause:

- (7) a. *Szerencsé-re az a helyzet, hogy a felügyelő döntés-re jut-ott.*
 luck-SUB that the situation that the inspector decision-SUB get-PST.3SG
 ‘It is luckily the case that the inspector arrived at a decision.’
 b. **Könnyen az a helyzet, hogy a felügyelő döntés-re jut-ott.*
 easily that the situation that the inspector decision-SUB get-PST.3SG
 intended: ‘It is easily the case that the inspector arrived at a decision.’
 (p. 378, [22b,a])

The chapter applies these tests rigorously in addition to the tests of focusing, topicalisation and scope taking, and illustrates the results for all adverbial types: spatio-temporal ones, contingency adverbials, manner adverbials, participant adverbials, domain adverbials, speaker-oriented and discourse-adverbials, aspectual adverbials of all kinds as well as degree and measure adverbials. It is shown that there is quite a lot of variation between the types, including substantial speaker variation and that some adverbial types – primarily degree and habitual adverbials – cannot be classified with the help of the paraphrase tests alone and constitute an in-between type.

The chapter concludes with a slightly different and very useful overview of the possible position of adverbials, building on the result of the classification arrived at, now viewed from the perspective of flexibility of placement and defined in terms of ‘height’ of positioning along the clausal spine, using topic, focus, quantifiers and the verb as relative position markers. According to this, there are two types of adverbials: adverbials with flexible position and adverbials with fixed

position, which can correspond to a high, a middle or a low position in the pre-verbal domain (postverbally, the placement of adverbials is always free). Interesting observations concerning prosody are also presented: low and high adverbials can be distinguished by stress and comma intonation and there is obligatory stress on some modal adverbials. Generally speaking, this final chapter assumes more syntactic knowledge than the previous ones, however, we believe that this is well-motivated as the theoretical notions used lead to a more accurate description.

3 Conclusion

The material discussed in *Postpositions and postpositional phrases* definitely goes beyond what can be found on the often neglected category of adpositions and adverbs elsewhere, in the few traditional descriptive works on the topic (primarily written in Hungarian) and the handful of analytical works in the last 50 years of generative theorising. This book is the first complete overview of this rich grammatical domain, which will no doubt become the standard reference on the topic. It has all qualities of a reference grammar and it reads as a homogeneous and coherent product, clearly the result of substantial team effort and thorough editing. Typos and inconsistencies are few and far between, and concern basically only the glosses.

All in all, we find that the book can be profitably read by students and researchers alike or even by language enthusiasts with a linguistic bent. Nevertheless, many readers will probably not read this book in its entirety but rather look up specific phenomena. In such cases, we recommend to consult multiple chapters from the volume or even multiple volumes in the series, as certain phenomena are discussed in more than one section. We are certain that this volume will finally bring the fascinating world of Hungarian PPs to the attention of the larger international audience.

References

- Asbury, Anna. 2008. *The morphosyntax of case and adpositions*. Utrecht: Utrecht University dissertation.
- Dékány, Éva & Veronika Hegedűs. 2015. Word order variation in Hungarian PPs. In Katalin É. Kiss, Balázs Surányi & Éva Dékány (eds.), *Approaches to Hungarian. Vol. 14: Papers from the 2013 Piliscsaba Conference*, 95–120. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- É. Kiss, Katalin. 2002. *The syntax of Hungarian*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Horváth, László. 2006. Az ősmagyar kor [The Ancient Hungarian period]. In Ferenc Kiefer (ed.), *Magyar nyelv* [Hungarian language], 335–364. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
- Kenesei, Istvan, Robert M. Vago & Anna Fenyvesi. 1999. *Hungarian*. London: Routledge.
- Marác, László. 1989. *Asymmetries in Hungarian*. Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen dissertation.
- Svenonius, Peter. 2007. The emergence of Axial Parts. *Nordlyd* 33(1). 49–77.