
Reconsidering the Internal Structure of Personal Pronouns in Hungarian

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Abstract

Determining the internal structure of personal pronouns in Hungarian involves complex problems of relating syntactic structures to morphological interpretations of these structures. In particular, the Hungarian paradigm of NOM and ACC pronouns seems to suggest that the ACC forms are more complex than the NOM forms (cf. Table 1). In addition, the shape of the ACC (but not the NOM) forms may be taken to indicate that they are related to possessive DPs (cf. (1); cf., a.o., Bartos 1999; den Dikken 2006; Rocquet 2013 for relevant syntactic analyses).

Singular		Plural	
Nominative	Accusative	Nominative	Accusative
1 én	engem(et)	mi	minket, bennünket
2 te	téged(et)	ti	titeket, benneteket
3 ő	őt	ők	őket

Table 1: The paradigm of the NOM and ACC personal pronouns in Hungarian

- (1) a. az én könny -em (-et)
the I tear 1SG ACC
'my tear'
- b. eng -em (-et)
I 1SG ACC
'me'

Most analyses of these pronouns proposed in the literature differentiate between them in structural terms along two dimensions (for discussion, cf., e.g., Bartos, 1999; É. Kiss, 2002):

- Firstly, the syntactic composition of 1/2 person pronouns has been proposed to be different from the syntactic composition of the 3 person pronoun, with the latter containing the DP layer and the former lacking it.

- Secondly, the representations of 1/2 person NOM and ACC pronouns have been taken to be different.

The primary aim of the present contribution is to suggest an alternative analysis of the internal structure of personal pronouns in Hungarian in the hope of accounting for the relevant facts within a broader set of assumptions concerning the mechanisms operative in natural language grammar. The relevant assumptions are that (i) syntactic heads containing only uninterpretable features are illegitimate (Chomsky, 1995) and that (ii) the case feature is valued in the course of the derivation as a reflex of Agree.

These assumptions have the consequence that the structure of nominal phrases cannot be taken to include heads such as Agr and K and cannot be dependent on whether a phrase is merged in the NOM or ACC environment, a nominal phrase being built in the syntax before its case feature is valued. A uniform syntactic structure for NOM and ACC pronouns will thus be proposed, with the differences between the forms of the pronouns being attributed to the working of morphological impoverishment rules.

The analysis of personal pronouns will form a basis for further suggestions showing how the proposal can contribute to the understanding of the mechanisms underlying the anti-agreement effect within possessive DPs (cf. (2); cf. Dékány 2011; den Dikken 1999 for discussion and alternative proposals).

- (2) a. a nők kalap-ja/ *kalap-juk
 the women hat-3SG hat-3PL
 ‘the women’s hat’
 b. az ő kalap-juk/ *ők kalap-juk
 the she/he hat-3PL they hat-3PL
 ‘their hat’

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