

The morphosyntax and morphophonology of (in)alienable possession: The Hungarian contribution

1 The allomorphy of the Hungarian possessedness marker (*-a/e*, *-ja/je*) is to a large extent phonologically determined, but it is well known that a simple phonological account of the distribution of the *-j-* form and the *-j-*-less form is not forthcoming: while stems that end in a sibilant or palatal consonant always take the *-j-*-less form (*ház-a* ‘house-POSS’, *fény-e* ‘light-POSS’), the *-j-* has a much less systematic distribution for other consonant-final stems (*nap-ja* ‘day-POSS’ ~ *nép-e* ‘people-POSS’). There are even head nouns for which the *-j-* form and the *-j-*-less form alternate. For some of these head nouns, the choice of the *-j-* or *-j-*-less form has no semantic repercussions (thus, *szék-e* and *szék-je* ‘chair-POSS’ are synonymous). But for others, a semantic subregularity emerges involving (in)alienability. As Kiefer (1985) and Moravcsik (2003:134) have pointed out, (1a) and (2a) denote inalienable possession while the *-j-* forms in (1b) and (2b) denote alienable possession.

(1)	a.	ablak-a	INALIENABLE	(2)	a.	anyag-a	INALIENABLE
	b.	ablak-ja	ALIENABLE		b.	anyag-ja	ALIENABLE
		window-POSS				fabric-POSS	

In the voluminous literature on the Hungarian possessed noun phrase, the pattern in (1/2) has received very little attention. Hungarian is by no means unique in making a morphophonological distinction between two possessive forms and to single the simpler one out for inalienable possession. Dobler (2008) notes similar patterns for Acholi and Nivkh. In Acholi, the two allomorphs of the singular possessedness marker differ in that one consists of an *-n* plus a vowel that covaries with the person features of the possessor while the other lacks the *-n*; with consonant-final stems, inalienable possession constructions do not use the *-n* form while alienable possession constructions must. Similarly, in Nivkh, the possessedness prefix is obligatorily separated from the alienable possessum by an epenthetic /i/ while epenthesis never occurs with inalienable possessums. For all three languages, this paper argues that the additional element that shows up in alienable possession constructions has morphemic status — following Rebrus’ (2000) lead for Hungarian (with *-j-* and the vowel treated as separate morphemes), and translating it into a syntax of the alienable *vs* inalienable possession dichotomy based on Den Dikken’s (2006) theory of predication and predicate inversion.

2 The difference in syntax between alienable and inalienable possession is one of direction of predication. In Den Dikken’s (2006) theory of predication, predicates and their subjects are systematically related to one another in an asymmetrical syntactic structure, with one term asymmetrically c-commanding the other and a functional category (the RELATOR) establishing the relationship between the two; the predicate can either be merged in the complement position of the RELATOR (as in (3a), a ‘predicate-complement structure’) or as the specifier of the RELATOR (as in (3b), a ‘predicate-specifier structure’), with the subject merged in the other phrasal position in the small clause.

(3)	a.	[_{RP} SUBJECT [_{R'} RELATOR [PREDICATE]]]
	b.	[_{RP} PREDICATE [_{R'} RELATOR [SUBJECT]]]

This paper’s central hypothesis is that alienable possession constructions involve a predicate-complement syntax *à la* (3a) while inalienable possession constructions are built on a predicate-specifier structure of the type in (3b). In both structures in (4), the possessum is the subject of predication.

(4)	a.	[_{RP} POSSESSUM [_{R'} RELATOR [_{PRED} POSSESSOR]]]
	b.	[_{RP} [_{PRED} POSSESSOR] [_{R'} RELATOR [POSSESSUM]]]

Embedding (4b) in a DP and spelling the RELATOR out as the *-j*-less possessedness marker straightforwardly delivers the surface form of Hungarian inalienable possession constructions with nominative possessors, with the RELATOR being suffixed to the possessum postsyntactically: (5b). In the syntax of Hungarian alienable possession constructions, based on (4a), the predicate inverts with its subject, contingent on raising of the RELATOR to a functional head outside the small clause (the LINKER); this external functional head can itself be spelled out, as *-j-*, yielding (5a) as the output.

- (5) a. $[_{DP} a [_{FP} [_{PRED} Mari]_i [_{F'} F=-j-+RELATOR=-a [_{RP} ablak [_{R'} t_{REL} t_i]]]]]$ ‘Mari’s window’
 b. $[_{DP} a [_{RP} [_{PRED} szoba] [_{R'} RELATOR=-a [ablak]]]]]$ ‘the room’s window’

3 This analysis of the Hungarian possessedness marker treats its vocalic portion (*-a/e*) as a RELATOR and its glide portion (*-j-*) as a LINKER. Moreover, by analyzing alienable possession constructions as predicate inversion constructions, it assimilates them to other DP–internal predicate inversion constructions, such as *csoda egy nyelv* ‘wonder (of) a language’ (Den Dikken & Lipták 1997), in which the indefinite article *egy* serves as the lexicalization of the RELATOR (raised to F). With both indefinite and definite articles being capable cross-linguistically of serving as RELATORS of DP–internal predication constructions, Hungarian mobilizes both for this role, in different contexts: *egy* in qualitative binominal noun phrases; the harmonizing suffixal definite article (*a/e*) in possessed noun phrases. The LINKER is systematically silent in Hungarian qualitative binominal noun phrases; in alienable possession constructions it is often silent as well (*szék-(j)e* ‘chair-POSS’), but under circumstances that are partly phonologically and partly morphosemantically determined, it can and sometimes must be lexicalized, as *-j-*. The conditions mandating lexicalization will be discussed.

4 If *-j-* is the sign of the LINKER in a predicate inversion construction based on (4a), the structure underlying alienable possession, then why *must -j-* be used in *ap-ja* ‘his/her father’ and *any-ja* ‘his/her mother’, which are quintessential cases of inalienable possession with inherently relational nouns? Our account starts out from the hypothesis that the final *a* of the citation forms of the Hungarian nouns for ‘father’ (*apa*) and ‘mother’ (*anya*) is itself an inalienable possession morpheme (i.e., the lexicalization of the RELATOR in (4b)): (6) is the structure underlying *apa* and *anya* (hence *anya* means ‘someone’s mother’). When *apa/anya* is alienably possessed, (6) serves as the subject of (4a), with the derivation ensuing as in (5a), yielding both *-a* (lengthened to *-á*) and *-ja*: *a világ legjobb ap-á-j-a/any-á-j-a* ‘the world’s best father/mother’. When *apa/anya* is inalienably possessed, (6) is used by itself, with the possessor replacing *pro_{arb}*. If the inflection on the head noun remained the same, non-arbitrarily possessed *apa/anya* would be indistinguishable from the citation form. To mark the difference, *-j-* is used, by analogy (see also Rácz 2010). In these cases, *-j-* is not a LINKER.

- (6) $[_{RP} [_{PRED} pro_{arb}\text{-POSSESSOR}] [_{R'} RELATOR=-a [ap/any]]]$

5 The central hypothesis in (4) also brings forth an explanatory perspective on the structural difference between what Hornstein *et al.* (1994) call the spatial (alienable) and integral (inalienable) readings of *There is a new engine in this car* and *This car has a new engine in it*. It explains the fact that the locative inversion construction *In this car is a new engine* only supports an alienable interpretation: the part–DP (*engine*) is the subject of a predicate-complement eligible for predicate inversion only in the structure of alienable possession/part-whole relations (as illustrated in (4a)).

REFERENCES Den Dikken 2006, *Relators and linkers*, MIT Press • Den Dikken & Lipták 1997, in *Linguistics in the Netherlands* • Dobler 2008, in *ACL/CLA Proceedings* • Hornstein *et al.* 1994, *Integrals; University of Maryland Working Papers in Linguistics* • Kiefer 1985, in *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* • Moravcsik 2003, in *Noun phrase structure in the languages of Europe* • Rácz 2010, MA thesis, ELTE • Rebrus 2000, in *Strukturális Magyar Nyelvtan 3: Morfológia*