Object Agreement in Hungarian
with Inverse Contexts as *Gaps* and *Avatars* in Direct Contexts

Gábor Alberti, Anastasia Saypasheva Feltizi–Veress & Judit Farkas (U. Pécs)

motto: – Tudsz játszani? / – Tudok.
– És szeretsz is? / – És szeretlek is.
(Ákos Fodor (2013):
Tündérpárbeszéd 'Dialogue between fairies')

With 1SG subjects, three types of objects can be differentiated in Hungarian by conjugation (1a), in contrast to the cases of 2SG or 3SG subjects, when there are only two different conjugations according to objects (1b-c). An unexpected distribution in the latter two cases is that first- and second-person objects pattern with indefinite objects in the type of conjugation they trigger—they trigger no object agreement—while the two persons in question refer to such definite participants as the addresser and the addressee of the given conversation (1b-c). It is also a puzzle why the accusative pronouns *engem* 'me' and *téged* 'you_SG' do not pattern with other objects, obligatorily marked with *-t* in Hungarian (e.g., *ő-t* 'him/her', *nő-t* 'woman-ACC') but, instead, have strange "(self-?)possessed" forms 'my me'/'your you' (Den Dikken 2004: 466–468, Simonyi 1907).

(1) **Subject- and object-agreement suffixes of verbs in Hungarian (a-c) and in Basque (d)**

     a. én [fog*lak*$_{1\to2}$ téged]   / [fog*om*$_{1\to3}$ őt]   / [fog*ok*$_{1\to4}$ valakit]
       I   hold-2OBJ.1SG   you_SG-ACC / hold-DEFOBJ.1SG (s)he-ACC / hold-1SG   someone-ACC
       'I hold you_SG / [him/her] / someone'

     b. te   [fog*sz*$_{2\to4}$ engem/valakit]   / [fog*od*$_{2\to3}$ őt   / magad] $_{2\to1}$?
       you_SG hold-2SG   I-ACC   / someone-ACC / hold-DEFOBJ.2SG (s)he-ACC / yourself
       'you_SG hold me / someone / [him/her] / yourself'

     c. ő   / valaki [fog$_{3*\to4}$ engem / téged   / valakit]   / [fog*ja*$_{3*\to3}$ őt] $_{3*\to1/2}$?
       (s)he_SG / someone hold-3SG   I-ACC   / you_SG-ACC / someone-ACC / hold-3SG   (s)he-ACC
       '(s)he / someone holds me / you_SG / [him/her]'

     d. ikusi z-*in*-t-ud-an$_{1\to2}$ / n-u-en$_{1\to3}$ / n-*ind*-u-zu-n$_{2\to1}$ / n-*ind*-u-en$_{3\to1}$
       seen   2-x-PL-have-1-PAST / 1-have-PAST / 1-x-have-2-PAST / 1-x-have-PAST
       'I saw you' / 'I saw him' / 'you saw me' / 'he saw me' (Béjar&Rezac 2009: 37)

The intricate Hungarian pattern can be accounted for by following Bárány (2017) in analyzing Hungarian **(i)** as having *four* categories of 'person': "first, second, and third, … and a fourth one, which … triggers no object agreement"; and **(ii)** as a *person-hierachy sensitive* language (Béjar&Rezac 2009) in which transitive verbs show agreement with objects only in *direct* contexts, where the complement set of *inverse* contexts is defined in (2c).

(2) **Clustering the eight roles (types of participation in conversations) according to three types of subject/object sensitivity**

     a. Subject agreement: {SG1}, {PL1}, {SG2}, {PL2}, {SG3*}, {PL3*}, where 3*={3, 4}

     b. Object agreement: {SG1, PL1}, {SG2, PL2}, {SG3, PL3}, {SG4, PL4, $\varnothing$}

     c. The partition that inversion in Hungarian is based on:
          $\langle\{SG1\}, \{PL1, SG2, PL2\}, \{SG3; PL3; SG4; PL4\}\rangle$

     d. The partition that inversion in Basque is based on: $\langle\{1, 2\}, \{3\}\rangle$

It is shown in (2a-c) that there are various clusterings among the eight roles in Hungarian, on which a double agreement system relies. As held traditionally, six (two times three) roles are differentiated according to subject agreement since definite and indefinite 3*-person subjects trigger no distinct conjugation (2a). According to object agreement, however, persons 3 and 4 are differentiated but the number value is irrelevant; that is why there are four clusters according to object agreement (2b). As for inverse contexts, the eight roles form three clusters with the

ordering given in (2c), which should be interpreted so that context ⟨x,y⟩ is inverse if the cluster of x is preceded by that of y in (2c); the commas and semicolons mean that the three roles within the second cluster form inverse contexts pairwise while no pair in the four-element third cluster forms an inverse context. In Hungarian, thus, 1SG enjoys a distinguished role while the second cluster is such that it includes roles of different persons as well as different numbers (cf. É. Kiss 2013: 8). In Basque, by comparison, the first person and the second person form inverse contexts in both directions (2d), witnessed by the inverse-status marker *-in(d)-* in (1d).

Languages may also be such that inverse contexts are marked by placing some affixes on objects, as discussed by Bárány (2017: 107–108), who illustrates this option in Kashmiri, among others. He argues that Kashmiri (Wali&Koul 1997) differs from Hungarian in that the morphosyntactic exponent that is sensitive to the person features of subjects and objects is case morphology and not verb morphology.

As the appearance of the puzzling first- and second-person accusative personal pronouns is strongly linked to inverse contexts (1b-c), we feel motivated for taking a stand against Bárány's conclusion, by claiming that inverse contexts in Hungarian are primarily indicated not on the morphology of verbs but on that of objects. We follow É. Kiss–Mus (2022, 50-51) in assuming that "…the *-g-* morpheme intervening between the pronominal stem and the possessive suffix in the Hungarian *en-g-em* 'me', *té-g-ed* 'you-acc' is … a residue of *-ki*, a Proto-Uralic noun meaning 'shape, form, soul' (Xelimskij 1982)]." We claim that it cannot be a coincidence that objects in inverse contexts pattern with objects in the fourth person in not triggering object agreement but the puzzling "possessed objects" that can be observed in inverse contexts ('x's shape/soul') *are* fourth-person objects. Despite their *reference* to conversational participants due to their first- or second-person possessor-components, they function in the grammar as "remote"/"demoted" participants, that is, fourth-person objects. They serve in the conversation as low-prestige *avatars* of the highest-prestige interlocutors, the use of which means that all contexts assumed to be inverse contexts so far in (1b-c) are factually *direct* contexts with pairs of subjects and objects *meeting* the person hierarchy. [My shape/soul], for instance, referentially coincides with 'me', the speaker, but the Agent-/Experiencer-like *ego* in the given conversation is conceptualized differently from the poor "part" being said to be influenced by other Agents in the stories under discussion. The spirit of using avatars can also be illustrated by sayings such as *Hordd el az irhádat!* 'Go away / Get out of here!' – literally 'Take away your fur!'

The Basque suffixation pattern illustrated in (1d) serves as an argument in favor of the *avatar* hypothesis: Bárány (2017) should explain why it is that no explicit inverse-context markers appear in contexts such as those in (1b-c). We claim that fourth- and third-person objects (see *magad* 'yourself' in (1b)) can be found in the given contexts, so they are factually direct contexts, due to the applicability of avatars. Hungarian thus needs no markers for inverse contexts: these are paradigmatic gaps in (the morphology of) the agreement system; but there are no gaps in the *pragmasemantic* system of subject–object pairs, due to *avatars*.

Our talk will also explain why infinitives (e.g. *fog-n-om téged/őt/valakit* 'for me to hold you/her/someone') and *Ás*-nominals (*a fog-ás-od/-a/-a* 'holding you/her/someone') pattern with other types of non-finite/non-verbal agreement (e.g. *alatt-am* 'under me', *vel-em* 'with me', *eny-é-m* 'mine') in not showing double agreement (i.e., simultaneous agreement with two arguments).

Bárány 2017: *Person, Case, and Agreement,* Oxford UP ♣ Béjar&Rezac 2009: Cyclic agree. *LI* 40(1) ♣ Den Dikken 2004: Agreement and 'clause union', in *Verb Clusters,* Benjamins ♣ É. Kiss 2013: The inverse agreement constraint in Uralic languages, *FULL* 2/3 ♣ É. Kiss&Mus 2022: The reflexive cycle, *JUL* 1(1) ♣ Simonyi 1907: *Die ungarische Sprache,* Trübner ♣ Wali&Koul 1997: *Kashmiri: A cognitive-descriptive grammar,* Routledge ♣ Xelimskij 1982: The oldest Hungarian–Samoyedic language parallels [in Russian], Nauka