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Pronominal reference to persons and things. A case study of third person and demonstrative pronouns in Hungarian

In this talk, we examine correlations between Hungarian Sg3 personal pronouns and demonstrative pronouns referring to things from the perspective of Cognitive Grammar and functional pragmatics. From the point of view of our study, it is a key theoretical insight that Sg3 personal pronouns and demonstrative pronouns that can be classified as deictic expressions do not typically function either as prototypical deictic elements that establish a grounding relation based on spatio-temporal continuity or continuity or as prototypical grounding elements that do not profile this grounding relation (cf. Langacker 2002; Brisard 2021).

Hungarian does not differentiate between grammatical genders, and natural genders are not formed in the personal pronoun system either, so there is no differentiation between masculine, feminine and neuter genders. By default, Sg3 personal pronoun (*ő* 'he/she') refers to a a human being, regardless of gender. Inanimate things are denoted by demonstrative pronouns (*ez* 'this', *az* 'that') in the default case, with the spatial near-far mapping always at work.

In the framework of a corpus-based study, we ask to what extent this generic schema prevails in the non-gestural use of Sg3 personal and demonstrative pronouns. Our research questions are as follows:

Q1: In which cases does the generic schema outlined above not apply, that is, in which cases do third-person pronouns refer to things and demonstrative pronouns to persons?

Q2: To what extent is the validity of the generic schema influenced by the focal prominence of the designated entity in the sentence, that is, whether it functions as trajector or landmark in the sentence (cf. Langacker 2008)?

Q3: To what extent does it affect the validity of the generic schema if the pronoun appears at the beginning of the sentence, functioning as an anchoring starting point for the conceptual processing of clausal information (cf. Langacker 2015)?

For this study, we used the Hungarian National Corpus, focusing exclusively on singular realizations of the pronouns, and we did not set up any statistical hypotheses. From the corpus, we retrieved a sample of 250 occurrences for each of the three pronouns in 50-word contexts. In the case of demonstrative pronouns, we marked constructional uses separately, that is to say, constructions in which the pronoun co-occurs with a determiner, e.g.: *ez a könyv* 'this book', lit. 'this the book', so the results contain data on constructional and independent uses both collectively and separately.

Based on the corpus-based study, we can conclude that the singular forms of personal and demonstrative pronouns only partially follow the generic schema based on gestural use. The results confirmed that prominence and anchoring have a clear effect on the use of third person and demonstrative pronouns in Hungarian.

References

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