

Definiteness Agreement in Hungarian Multiple Infinitival Constructions

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Abstract: Based on evidence from multiple infinitival constructions and their parallels with preverb climbing data, the paper argues for a cyclic account of definiteness agreement in Hungarian as opposed to earlier long distance agreement proposals. Though in sentences taking only one infinitival complement it is sensible to assume that the agreeing finite verb agrees with the object of its infinitive, multiple infinitival constructions unambiguously show that, in spite of the lack of a morphological marker for definiteness on the infinitives themselves, the properties of the infinitive also play a role in definiteness agreement: infinitives covertly agree with their objects in definiteness and the finite verb agrees with the more local definiteness feature of its infinitival complement.

Keywords: Hungarian; infinitive; object agreement; definiteness; locality

1. Definiteness Agreement with the Object

1.1 The Data

As observed among others by É. Kiss (1989; 2002), Hungarian verbs show what is called definiteness agreement with the object: if the object is definite, it is the definite conjugation of the verb that appears (2), and we have indefinite conjugation when the object is indefinite (1). The form of the indefinite conjugation is the same form that appears when the verb has no object (3).¹ The two paradigms can be seen in Table 1.

1 Though the kind of agreement discussed in this paper is usually called definiteness agreement we would like to emphasize that there is no 100 percent correlation with the definiteness of the object, so the underlying feature must be something else (see, e.g., the possessive examples in [4]). For more subtle details on the nature of the object and the form of the verb and a proposal concerning the nature of the underlying feature see Bányai (2015).

	Intransitive <i>fut</i> “run”	Transitive <i>lát</i> “see”	
		indefinite	definite
1sg	<i>fut-ok</i>	<i>lát-ok</i>	<i>lát-om</i>
2sg	<i>fut-sz</i>	<i>lát-sz</i>	<i>lát-od</i>
3sg	<i>fut-Ø</i>	<i>lát-Ø</i>	<i>lát-ja</i>
1pl	<i>fut-unk</i>	<i>lát-unk</i>	<i>lát-juk</i>
2pl	<i>fut-tok</i>	<i>lát-tok</i>	<i>lát-játok</i>
3pl	<i>fut-nak</i>	<i>lát-nak</i>	<i>lát-ják</i>

Table 1. Hungarian verbal conjugations

- (1) Anna lát/*lát-ja egy könyv-et.
 Anna.NOM see.INDEF/see-DEF a book-ACC
 “Anna sees a book.”
- (2) Anna *lát/lát-ja a könyv-et.
 Anna.NOM see.INDEF/see-DEF the book-ACC
 “Anna sees the book.”
- (3) Anna fut/*fut-ja.
 Anna.NOM run.INDEF/run-DEF
 “Anna runs.”

Our research questions concern why we end up with the same form when there is no object and when there is an indefinite object, the exact nature of the trigger, and what agrees with what in the case of definite agreement. Whether the indefinite agreement pattern is the result of no agreement or default indefinite agreement is hard to decide in light of the data above. More complex structures can say more about the nature of agreement, as shown by studies on possessive DP objects (Bárányi 2015; Bartos 1999; 2000). The present paper is a further contribution along these lines focusing on infinitival complement clauses. The importance of these constructions lies in the fact that in these cases there is no direct syntactic relationship between the agreeing verb and the object of the infinitive, this way providing an optimal testing ground for the common assumption that what the finite verb agrees with is the object itself.

1.2 Previous Accounts

Concerning the exact nature of the trigger, Bartos (1999; 2000) proposes a structure based account: assuming that nominal expressions come in (at least) two types, DP and NumP, and that only definite nominals project a full-fledged DP, the necessary and sufficient condition for object agreement can be identified to be the presence of a DP projection,

whereas indefinite nominals, which project only a NumP, surface with the indefinite form of the verb. The claim is based among others on the observation that possessive DPs can be both definite and indefinite, but in spite of this, possessive nominals trigger definite agreement (4). This is easy to explain with the help of a structural account: Possessive nominals are DPs and, as such, trigger definite agreement, irrespective of whether they themselves have a definite or indefinite interpretation.²

- (4) (a) Anna lát-ja Mari-nak a könyv-é-t.
 Anna.NOM see-DEF Mari-DAT the book-POSS-ACC
 “Anna can see Mari’s book.”
- (b) Anna lát-ja Mari-nak egy könyv-é-t.
 Anna.NOM see-DEF Mari-DAT a book-POSS-ACC
 “Anna can see a book of Mari’s.”

Bartos’s account is made more subtle by Bárány (2015) based on, e.g., possessor extraction data cited from Szabolcsi (1994) where the verb appears in its indefinite form due to the extraction of the dative possessor (5).

- (5) Chomsky-nak nem olvas-t-ál vers-é-t. (Szabolcsi 1994, 227)
 Chomsky-DAT not read-PST-INDEF poem-POSS-ACC
 “You haven’t read any poem of Chomsky’s.”

Bárány’s (2015) account is a structural and feature based hybrid claiming that “[o]bject agreement is only triggered by a D head that is specified for person features. If D lacks person features, it does not trigger agreement” (Bárány 2015, 75). The person feature in Hungarian is argued to grammaticalize referentiality in the D head position.

Though the presence of definite agreement clearly depends on the properties of the object, the exact nature of the features concerned is immaterial to the purposes of the present paper, which focuses on the locality issues of definiteness agreement. Whatever the exact nature of the feature on the constituent triggering agreement turns

2 Prenominal definiteness agreement sensitive to person and number (with the definite agreement form surfacing only in third person and indefinite agreement forms appearing in first and second person) poses further problems not discussed in the present paper.

out to be, it is indicated as a [\pm DEF] feature in our paper. For the data discussed here the conclusions of Bárány (2015) can be assumed to carry over without modification.³

2. Definiteness Agreement in Infinitival Constructions

2.1 The Data

When an infinitive takes a definite or indefinite object there is no difference in the form of the infinitive; infinitives do not show overt agreement with their objects, the ending is always the same *-ni* infinitival morpheme:

- (6) Anna készül olvas-ni egy/a könyv-et.
 Anna.NOM prepare.INDEF read-INF a/the book-ACC
 “Anna is preparing to read a/the book.”

In certain well definable cases, however, the finite verb taking the infinitival clause as its argument shows definiteness agreement with the object of its infinitive. Based on their behaviour concerning definiteness agreement in the presence of an infinitival complement clause, finite verbs follow two patterns (É. Kiss 1989; Kálmán C. et al. 1989): they can be *non-agreeing*, when the form of the finite verb consistently follows the indefinite paradigm irrespective of the definiteness of the object of its infinitival complement (6), or *agreeing*, when the form of the finite verb is contingent on the presence/form of the object of its infinitive: when the infinitive takes a definite object, it appears in the definite form (7), otherwise it is indefinite (8a–b).

- (7) Anna *akar/akar-ja olvas-ni a könyv-et.
 Anna.NOM want.INDEF/want-DEF read-INF the book-ACC
 “Anna wants to read the book.”

- (8) (a) Anna akar/*akar-ja olvas-ni egy könyv-et.
 Anna.NOM want.INDEF/want-DEF read-INF a book-ACC
 “Anna wants to read a book.”

3 It is not necessarily true for the second person agreement marker *-lak/-lek* in (i).

- (i) (Én) lát-lak (téged).
 I.NOM see-1SG>2SG you-ACC
 “I can see you.”

For more discussion see K. Szécsényi (2017).

- (b) Anna akar/*akar-ja fut-ni.
 Anna.NOM want.INDEF/want-DEF run-ACC
 “Anna wants to run.”

Agreeing verbs are usually but not exclusively transitive verbs that can also take a (definite or indefinite) DP complement, thus having the definite agreement paradigm independently of the infinitival pattern: *akar* “want,” *utál* “hate” (9a) (Kálmán C. et al. 1989). Some of the exceptions are the auxiliaries *fog* “will,” *szokott* “usually does,” *talál* “happen to” and the auxiliary-like element *kezd* “begin.”

Non-agreeing verbs that take infinitival complements are fewer in number and include verbs like *készül* “prepare,” *fél* “be afraid,” *igyekszik* “eager, be in a hurry,” *segít* “help.”⁴ In case they have an argument of their own it is not in accusative case (9b).

- (9) (a) Péter akar egy bicikli-t.
 Péter.NOM want.INDEF a bicycle-ACC
 “Péter wants a bicycle.”
- (b) Anna készül a verseny-re.
 Anna.NOM prepare.INDEF the race-SUB
 “Anna is preparing for the race.”

Apart from auxiliaries and auxiliary-like elements verbs taking infinitival complements can also take finite complement clauses introduced by the complementizer *hogy* “that.” In this case an expletive pronoun associated with the subordinate clause can also appear in the finite clause⁵ in the case form required by the selecting verb. Agreeing verbs have an accusative marked pronoun *azt* “that.ACC” indicating that the finite clause is an object of these verbs (10a). Non-agreeing verbs have the pronoun in the oblique case form they require (*arra* “that.SUB” in [10b]). Crucially, when an agreeing verb takes a finite clause as its complement it always surfaces in its definite paradigm (10a).

- (10) (a) Anna az-t akar-ja,
 Anna.NOM that-ACC want-DEF
 hogy Péter el-olvas-son egy könyv-et.
 that Péter.NOM PV-read-SUBJ.INDEF a book-ACC
 “Anna wants Peter to read a book.”

4 Hungarian control constructions are fewer than those cross-linguistically. In a lot of cases embedded finite clauses (indicative or subjunctive) are used instead. For further details see K. Szécsényi (2016).

5 For more details concerning when the presence of the expletive pronoun is optional, obligatory, or banned see Kenesei (1994, 310–18).

- (b) Anna ar-ra készül,
 Anna.NOM that-SUB prepare.INDEF
 hogy el-olvas-sa a könyv-et.
 that PV-read-DEF the book-ACC
 “Anna is preparing to read the book.”

In light of the data in (6)–(8), infinitival constructions lead to further questions regarding definiteness agreement. Besides our original research questions (How exactly does agreement take place? What triggers agreement?), there emerge some more subtle issues to deal with. The logical assumption is that agreement is either triggered by the object or the finite verb (or potentially both). However, if the trigger is the object it is hard to explain why there is no agreement in (6), and if it is assumed to be the finite verb, answers for questions like what the agreeing verb agrees with (if anything at all) in (8) are far from straightforward.

2.2 Previous Accounts

The data introduced in this section are usually accounted for by assuming clause union (É. Kiss 1989; Den Dikken 2004) or Long Distance Agreement (LDA) taking place between the finite verb and the object of the infinitive (É. Kiss 2002). Both approaches assume that agreement is between the finite verb and the object DP. When the infinitive has no object the finite verb selecting the infinitive shows the indefinite agreement pattern. The predictions these approaches make is that the only factor to consider is the definiteness of the object (however long distance) and that other intervening constituents do not play a role. In the next section we show that this is not supported by the data.

Considering clause union, our problems are twofold: on the one hand clause union does not necessarily have to be assumed in the definiteness agreement cases: under traditional approaches no clause union is assumed to take place in the finite clauses under discussion, which trigger the definite agreement paradigm. On the other hand, assuming that non-agreeing verbs fail to participate in clause union with their infinitival complement fails to capture that these verbs actually show other clause union effects, such as scrambling. In example (11) the subject of the matrix verb, Anna, is scrambled with the constituents of the infinitival clause, but the matrix verb itself does not show definiteness agreement due to its non-agreeing nature.

- (11) Holnap készül el-olvas-ni Anna a könyv-et.
 tomorrow prepare.INDEF PV-read-INF Anna.NOM the book-ACC
 “Anna is preparing to read the book tomorrow.”

3. Multiple Infinitives

3.1 New Data

As stated before, our research question concerns the exact nature of agreement: its trigger and what exactly agrees with what. We cannot say that agreement depends on the argument structure of verbs: it is not only verbs also taking DP objects that can agree, the auxiliaries of Hungarian and some auxiliary-like elements also show agreement. Agreement does not exclusively depend on the presence of a definite object either: there are verbs that fail to agree with it. The data in (12) (first described in T. Szécsényi [2009], and extensively discussed in T. Szécsényi and K. Szécsényi [2016]) can shed some light on the agreement patterns observed. In (12a–b) containing *akar* “want,” a verb that also shows definiteness agreement when finite, the verb *fog* “will,” also an agreeing verb, shows agreement for definiteness. In (12c–d) the verb *fél* “be afraid” is one not showing definiteness agreement. As a result, *fog* “will” cannot show definiteness agreement with the object of the infinitive embedded into the non-agreeing infinitival clause either: the presence of the non-agreeing verb blocks agreement.

- (12) (a) Péter fog/*fogja akarni nézni egy filmet.
 Peter will.INDEF/will.DEF to.want to.watch a film.ACC
 “Peter will want to watch a film.”
- (b) Péter *fog/fogja akarni nézni a filmet.
 Peter will.INDEF/will.DEF to.want to.watch the film.ACC
 “Peter will want to watch the film.”
- (c) Péter fog/*fogja félni nézni egy filmet.
 Peter will.INDEF/will.DEF to.be.afraid to.watch a film.ACC
 “Peter will be afraid to watch a film.”
- (d) Péter fog/*fogja félni nézni a filmet.
 Peter will.INDEF/will.DEF to.be.afraid to.watch the film.ACC
 “Peter will be afraid to watch the film.”

These data indicate that agreement is not the result of LDA between the finite verb and the object of the infinitive, and clause union does not necessarily have to be assumed either (at least in order to account for agreement). Definiteness agreement seems to have a cyclic nature: the type of the infinitive also has an effect on the availability of definiteness agreement in the main clause. Based on the data in (12) we arrive at the conclusion that the infinitive also agrees with the object covertly, and that the verb selecting the infinitive agrees not with the object itself, but with the definiteness feature of the infinitive selecting it, if the infinitive has one.

The problem LDA runs into is the result of the seemingly non-unidirectional nature of definiteness agreement. In simple infinitival constructions an LDA account seems to be feasible, but multiple infinitives draw attention to the fact that definiteness agreement is the result of a more complex interaction between the clauses concerned. Definiteness agreement depends on the properties of both constituents participating in definiteness agreement: the finite verb in one clause and the object potentially appearing in the embedded clause. As we have already seen earlier in (6)–(8), if the trigger is the object it is not clear why there is no agreement in (6), and if it is assumed to be the finite verb, answers to questions like what the agreeing verb agrees with (if anything at all) in (8) are far from straightforward. It is even more highlighted in the multiple infinitival constructions in (12), which shows that the properties of the intervening verbs also play a role.

3.2 Preverb Climbing

Patterns similar to what we have just identified in the multiple infinitival constructions in (12) can be observed in the case of multiple instances of preverb climbing (for detailed discussions of preverb climbing see É. Kiss [1999]; Koopman and Szabolcsi [1999; 2000] and É. Kiss and Van Riemsdijk [2004]). Whether preverb climbing takes place depends on a property independent of definiteness agreement and hence the group of verbs participating in it differs from the division of verbs into agreeing and non-agreeing groups along the definiteness agreement property. Certain verbs identified as stress avoiding verbs (e.g., the agreeing verbs *fog* “will,” and *akar* “want,” and the non-agreeing verb *készül* “prepare”) trigger preverb climbing which leads to the patterns shown in (13). The preverb (PV) *be* “in” belongs to the infinitive which is reflected in the translation of the sentence as well. However, due to the stress avoiding property of these verbs, in neutral sentences the preverb appears in a position preceding the stress avoiding verb.⁶

6 If the infinitival complement has no preverb of its own, it is another dependent (i) or the infinitive itself (ii) that appears in the position preceding the stress avoiding verb. Another strategy for avoiding stress is with the help of a focused constituent (iii) the position of which in Hungarian is the specifier of a FP projection directly preceding the verb. In the presence of a focused constituent (in the capital letters) bearing focus stress the verb automatically sits in a position with no stress.

- (i) Péter könyv-et akar olvas-ni.
 Péter.NOM book-ACC want read-INF
 “Peter wants to read a book.”
- (ii) Péter olvas-ni akar.
 Péter.NOM read-INF want
 “Peter wants to read.”

(16) (a) *Anna be fog be utál-ni be men-ni a szobá-ba.
 ▲ ▲ x |
 Anna.NOM will hate-INF PV go-INF the room-INE
 “Anna will hate to go into the room.”

(b) *Anna fog utál-ni be men-ni a szobá-ba.
 Anna.NOM will hate-INF PV go-INF the room-INE
 “Anna will hate to go into the room.”

(c) ANNA fog utál-ni be men-ni a szobá-ba.
 Anna.NOM will hate-INF PV go-INF the room-INE
 “Anna will hate to go into the room.”

What we see in the preverb climbing data is that the properties of the intervening verbs influence whether preverb climbing takes place or not, and whether it does is also subject to strict locality requirements. Accordingly, analyses of preverb climbing propose a cyclic account where the properties of the intervening verbs are also taken into consideration.

If the accounts of preverb climbing are on the right track, we need a similar description for definiteness agreement as well due to the number of relevant parallels: the locality restrictions observed in definiteness agreement, namely that the agreeing finite verb agrees with the object only if all the intervening verbs are agreeing as well, indicating that agreement is not directly between the finite verb and an embedded infinitival object. The multiple infinitival constructions discussed above show that definiteness agreement is cyclic, taking place from clause to clause.

4. Potential Implementation

Based on the observations of the present paper the description of the properties of definiteness agreement in infinitival constructions needs the following components:

- The most embedded infinitive agrees with its object covertly, it is just a morphological property of Hungarian infinitives that they do not show overt definiteness agreement with their objects.⁷
- In order to account for the blocking effect of non-agreeing verbs we have to assume that what the agreeing verb agrees with is the definiteness feature of its own infinitival complement. Non-agreeing verbs have a lexically defined indefinite feature.

⁷ Hungarian infinitives do show person and number agreement with their subjects under certain conditions, for further details see Tóth (2000).

- Agreeing verbs always need to agree with something, therefore agreeing with an objectless infinitive is the result of default indefiniteness. The same can be stated of intransitive constructions: the lack of a definite object results in a default indefinite feature leading to the same agreement paradigm in intransitives and transitive verbs appearing with an indefinite object. The claim that clauses can also have a definiteness feature is supported by the data in (10a) as well: we have seen that finite agreeing verbs taking finite clauses as objects appear in the definite paradigm, whereas the same verbs surface in their indefinite form when they take an infinitive. This indicates that both finite and non-finite clauses have to be specified for the definiteness feature.

In what follows we consider the properties of the different potential patterns one by one. The two-headed arrows indicate definiteness agreement between the constituents and in this respect are to be distinguished from the arrows in the preverb climbing data, which indicate movement. Of course the parallels observed still obtain and suggest a cyclic process in both construction types.

Definiteness agreement with agreeing verbs: in the presence of a definite object and no non-agreeing verb the definiteness feature can reach the finite verb as a result of cyclic agreement (17). If the embedded object is indefinite, it is the indefiniteness feature that spreads from clause to clause (18).

(17) Anna fog-ja akar-ni olvas-ni a könyv-et.
 [+DEF] [+DEF] [+DEF] [+DEF]
 ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲
 Anna.NOM will-DEF want-INF read-INF the book-ACC
 “Anna will want to read the book.”

(18) Anna fog akar-ni olvas-ni egy könyv-et.
 [-DEF] [-DEF] [-DEF] [-DEF]
 ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲
 Anna.NOM will. INDEF want-INF read-INF a book-ACC
 “Anna will want to read a book.”

Definiteness agreement with a non-agreeing verb (default indefinite): when a verb takes a non-agreeing infinitive (like in the case of *készül* “prepare”) the result is default indefinite agreement (19). The lexically determined default indefinite feature blocks definiteness agreement with the object of its infinitival complement, but agreement with the default indefinite feature is still possible and the result is a grammatical sentence.

- (19) Anna fog készül-ni olvas-ni a könyv-et.
 [-DEF] [-DEF]_{default} [+DEF] [+DEF]
 ▲ ▲ ▲ × ▲ ▲ ▲
 Anna.NOM will.INDEF prepare-INF read-INF the book-ACC
 “Anna will prepare to read the book.”

Definiteness agreement with an objectless infinitive (default indefinite): this proposal also accounts for those patterns where the infinitive has no object: it can be argued to have a default indefinite feature; this is what the agreeing finite verb in need of a definiteness feature agrees with (20).

- (20) Anna fog akar-ni fut-ni.
 [-DEF] [-DEF] [-DEF]_{default}
 ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲
 Anna.NOM will.INDEF want-INF run-INF
 “Anna will want to run.”

Objectless finite verbs are also claimed to be the result of default indefinite agreement for the following reasons: when they appear in more complex constructions, such as infinitival complements of a verb (e.g., [20]), their properties with respect to definiteness agreement also play a role, they can be agreeing or non-agreeing. If they are agreeing, the process of agreement takes place according to the patterns we saw in (17) or (18). Non-agreeing verbs follow the pattern in (19). When they are the finite verb in a sentence and appear with no object their form can only be the result of default indefinite agreement. If they are agreeing verbs they need a feature to agree with, which can only be a default indefinite feature in the construction under discussion. If they are non-agreeing they have the default indefinite feature assigned to them in the lexicon.

- (21) Anna fut.
 [-DEF]_{default}
 Anna.NOM run.INDEF
 “Anna runs.”

The implementation of all these slightly different constructions can be a feature-based analysis operating with default features as seen above, or, following Bartos (1999), a structural difference between definite and indefinite constituents can be assumed. Bárány (2015) offers a combination of the two for definiteness agreement in simple sentences along the following lines: in order for object agreement to arise, *v* has to be valued by a person feature via Agree with a DP direct object; and when there is no person feature a default value is assigned. Turning to infinitival complement clauses we can propose a

similar account: the finite *v* probes for a formal feature, but this time one appearing on the infinitive. As opposed to earlier accounts Agree does not have to target the nominal (DP or NumP) object, but the definiteness feature of its infinitive. The next infinitive in turn also probes for a definiteness feature it can agree with. Ultimately, each and every *v* has to be valued either via Agree with a DP or a default indefinite feature. The account proposed by Bárány has to be complemented by a proposal for non-agreeing verbs, which, similarly to those cases that lack a person feature, can be described in terms of a default indefinite feature.

An important difference between Bárány's account and ours is in the treatment of the formal feature participating in definiteness agreement. Since Bárány discusses differential object marking in simple sentences his conclusion on a person feature appearing on the D head is straightforward. When we turn to definiteness agreement in infinitival clauses we have two alternatives: either claiming that the formal feature in question is something different from the person feature or that it is the person feature we can see in Bárány (2015) but it does not have to be associated with the D head. Since the patterns observed in infinitives are parallel with the data discussed in Bárány, arguing for a different feature would lead to the loss of important generalizations. However, the multiple infinitive data suggest that the person feature is not (or not only) a D head, it can be associated with the C head as well, or, alternatively, an independent PersonP could be assumed following, e.g., Cornilescu (2016). This is nicely in line with Bartos's (1999; 2000) proposal, which argues that definiteness agreement takes place in a (then) Agr₀P, which is projected only when a DP (as opposed to a NumP) appears as the object of the verb. Our PersonP, however, should always be projected as seen in the default agreement cases. We leave the question whether the person feature is associated with a C head or it has its own projection for future research.

5. Conclusion

In this paper we have presented evidence for the cyclic nature of definiteness agreement. With the help of new, hitherto not systematically studied data showing definiteness agreement in multiple infinitival clauses and their comparison with preverb climbing data we can make the following claims:

- Definiteness agreement is more local than previously assumed;
- Properties of the intervening infinitives also play a role;
- Agreement takes place not between the matrix verb and the object of the most embedded infinitive but cyclically from infinitival clause to infinitival clause;
- Intransitive verbs and verbs with no definite object have default indefinite agreement.

Our proposal is a further addition to the growing number of proposals according to which long distance agreement is not that long distance after all.

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