Licensing of nominal ellipsis in Hungarian possessives

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Abstract. We argue, based on novel data, that the possessor head (Poss) can license ellipsis of its complement in Hungarian. That is, contra existing claims in the literature, possessor morphology can survive nominal ellipsis and be stranded on the remnant. Adopting Saab & Lipták (2016)’s account of ellipsis licensing, we propose that there is variation in the size of the ellipsis site in Hungarian: nominal ellipsis can be licensed by either Num or Poss. We further propose that nominal ellipsis licensed by Poss can capture a previously unanalyzed variation in the Hungarian possessive pronoun paradigm. Specifically, the two variants of possessive pronouns correspond to two different structures: one is the anaphoric possessive (see Dékány 2015), while the other exists only as a consequence of nominal ellipsis, which, as we show, is a productive possibility.

Keywords. ellipsis; nominal ellipsis; possessives; Hungarian

1. Introduction. In this paper we argue that *P-Ellipsis in Hungarian can be licensed not only by the Num(ber) head, as claimed in previous literature, but also by the Poss(essor) head. This is based on novel data that shows that possessor morphology can indeed survive nominal ellipsis and be stranded on the remnant. Furthermore, our proposal for *P-Ellipsis allows us to provide a new analysis for the Hungarian possessive pronoun paradigm.

We begin by introducing the basic facts of Hungarian possessive morphology. Following that, we turn to the analysis of nominal ellipsis in Hungarian. In particular, we discuss existing empirical observations, as well as Saab & Lipták (2016)’s proposed analysis.

1.1. Nominal morphemes in Hungarian. The basic order of nominal morphemes in Hungarian is the one in (1), illustrated in the examples in (2) (É. Kiss 2002).

(1) noun – possessedness suffix – number – agreement – case

(2) a. játék-a-i-m-at
   toy-POSS-PL-1SG-ACC
   ‘my toys (acc)’

b. diák-ja-i-m-at
   student-POSS-PL-1SG-ACC
   ‘my students (acc)’

c. könyv-e-i-m-et
   book-POSS-PL-1SG-ACC
   ‘my books (acc)’

d. kert-je-i-m-et
   garden-POSS-PL-1SG-ACC
   ‘my gardens (acc)’

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The possessedness suffix (glossed as POSS) indicates that the head noun is a possessum. As (2) demonstrates, depending on the (morpho)phonological environment, this suffix appears in the forms -a, -ja, -e and -je. The number suffix (-i in (2)) corresponds to the number of the head noun, i.e. the possessum. The agreement suffix (-m in (2)) corresponds to the person and number of the possessor. Lastly, the case morpheme marks the case of the noun, as shown via the accusative -at/-et (depending on vowel harmony) in (2). It is worth noting that when the head noun is singular, the possessedness and agreement suffixes are fused (-om in (3)).

(3) játék-om-at
    toy-POSS.1SG-ACC
    ‘my toy (acc)’

1.2. NOMINAL ELLIPSIS IN HUNGARIAN. As (4-a) shows, in non-elliptical sentences number and case marking only show up on the noun. Examples where they appear both on the noun and the adjective, or only on the adjective are ungrammatical, as (4-b)-(4-c) show:

(4) a. a piros játék-ok-at
    the red   toy-PL-ACC
    ‘the red toys (acc)’
b. *a piros-ak-at játék
    the red-PL-ACC toy

c. *a piros-ak-at játék-ok-at
    the red-PL-ACC toy-PL-ACC

In cases of nominal ellipsis, however, affixes that otherwise show up on the noun, e.g. -okat (PL-ACC) in (4), appear on the rightmost remnant of the ellipsis site (i.e. the adjective), as shown in (5):

(5) a piros-ak-at ∅
    the red-PL-ACC
    ‘the red ones (acc)’

Based on such observations, Saab & Lipták (2016) argue that nominal ellipsis in Hungarian targets the nP, hence the name nP-Ellipsis (or nPE). On their proposal, affixes attach to their host via the process of leaning, and ellipsis applies early on the PF branch to bleed such processes. When this happens, the affixes can no longer lower onto the noun. The stranded affixes are thus reattached to a non-canonical host: the rightmost remnant (the adjective in (5)) instead of the noun. This is schematized in (6):

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1 Note that the plural marker of possessed nouns (-i) is different from the regular plural marker (-k):

(i) játék-ok
    toy-PL
    ‘toys’
Importantly, on Saab & Lipták (2016)'s analysis, nPE can only be licensed by the Num head.

2. Novel empirical generalization. Contra previous literature (i.e. Saab & Lipták 2016 and Kenesei et al. 1998), which claimed that possessive morphology cannot be stranded on the adjectival remnant, in (7) we show that possessor morphology can also survive nPE, with the stranded affixes showing up on the adjectival remnant:

(7) a. Mari kölcsönkérte a te piros játék-od-at és az én kék-em-et.
    Mary borrowed the you red toy-POSS.2SG-ACC and the I blue-POSS.1SG-ACC
    ‘Mary borrowed your red toy and my blue (toy).’

b. Mari kölcsönkérte a te piros játék-a-i-d-at és az én
    Mary borrowed the you red toy-POSS-PL-2SG-ACC and the I
    blue-POSS-PL-1SG-ACC
    ‘Mary borrowed your red toys and my blue (toys).’

We argue that this difference in judgements is due to the fact that the examples reported in existing literature were remnants presented in isolation, e.g. a ti érdekes-e-i-tek ‘your interesting ones’ (fn. 13 in Saab & Lipták 2016). Testing sentences where nPE is licensed by an appropriate antecedent, we find that the relevant examples (7) are in fact grammatical—this judgement is shared by 8 native speaker informants.

Parallel examples where the remnant has a second or third person possessor are also grammatical, as (8)-(9) shows (note that the agreement marker for third person is null):

    Mary borrowed the I red toy-POSS.1SG-ACC and the you blue-POSS.2SG-ACC
    ‘Mary borrowed my red toy and your blue (toy).’

b. Mari kölcsönkérte az én piros játék-a-i-m-at és a te
    Mary borrowed the I red toy-POSS-PL-1SG-ACC and the you
    blue-POSS-PL-2SG-ACC
    ‘Mary borrowed my red toys and your blue (toys).’

(9) a. Mari kölcsönkérte a te piros játék-od-at és az ō kék-jé-t.
    Mary borrowed the you red toy-POSS.2SG-ACC and the (s)he blue-POSS-ACC
    ‘Mary borrowed your red toy and her/his blue (toy).’
b. Mari kölcsönkért a te piros játék-a-i-d-át és az űk
Mary borrowed the you red toy-POSS-PL-2SG-ACC and the (s)he
kék-je-i-t.
blue-POSS-PL-ACC
‘Mary borrowed your red toys and her/his blue (toys).’

Importantly, such examples are also not limited to color adjectives: sentences parallel to (7) (as well as (8) and (9)) are judged to be grammatical (by 6 native speakers) when the adjectives are long, short, interesting, long, English. This suggests that possessive morphology being stranded under nominal ellipsis is indeed a productive possibility in Hungarian. Some examples are provided below:

(10) a. Mari elolvasta az én unalmas esszé-m-et és a te
Mary read the I boring essay-POSS.1SG-ACC and the you
érdedes-ed-et.
interesting-POSS.2SG-ACC
‘Mary read my boring essay and your interesting one.’

b. Mari ellenőrizte az én francia házi-m-at és a te
Mary checked the I French homework-POSS.1SG-ACC and the you
angolodat.
English-POSS.2SG-ACC
‘Mary checked my French homework and your English one.’

3. Analysis. Based on the observation that possessor morphology can show up on the adjec-
tival remnant after nPE, we argue that it is not only the Num head (that is, “number” in (1)), but also the Poss head (that is, “possessedness” in (1)) that licenses ellipsis of its complement. On Saab & Lipták (2016)’s account of nPE in Hungarian, the Num head bears an [E] feature, which triggers ellipsis of its complement, as schematized in (11):

(11) nPE licensed by Num

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      DP
    /   \
   D    NumP
    /  \      --
   AP   nP    → nPE
     Num[ε]
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Likewise, we propose that in the cases discussed above (e.g. (7)), Poss is the head bearing the [E] feature, as (12) shows:
In sum, we argue that both (11) and (12) are possible nPE structures in Hungarian; in both cases the material that is elided is nPE, but there is variation in the licensing head, which is either Num or Poss.

Crucially, our analysis makes the prediction that the same pattern of alternation should exist in other contexts as well, where the Poss head is present. In what follows, we show that this prediction is borne out in the domain of possessive pronouns.

4. Possessive pronouns. In what follows, we first describe the anaphoric possessive in nouns and pronouns in Hungarian, then move onto a systematic alternation we observe in the pronoun paradigm, which our analysis of nPE sheds new light on.

4.1. Anaphoric possessive in nouns and pronouns. To fully understand the patterns observed in the Hungarian possessive pronoun paradigm and, in turn, to check the validity of the prediction our possessive nPE proposal makes, let us first consider the so-called anaphoric possessive in Hungarian.

The anaphoric possessive -é is used in place of regular possessive morphology in cases where the only remnant is the possessor noun, e.g. there is no adjective, as shown in (13-a) (i.a. Dékány 2015 and references therein):

(13) a. a fiú játék-a
    the boy toy-POSS
    ‘the boy’s toy’

b. a fiú-é
    the boy-é
    ‘the boy’s one’

The anaphoric possessive -é is in complementary distribution with the possessedness suffix (-ja, -je, -a, -e). That is, whenever the anaphoric possessive is present, the regular possessedness suffix must be absent:

(14) a. *a fiú-é-ja
    the boy-é-POSS
    ‘the boy’s one’

b. *a fiú-ja
    the boy-POSS
    ‘the boy’s one’

The anaphoric possessive is found not only in nouns, but also in possessive pronouns, e.g. miénk (ours), tiétek (yours), etc. The internal structure of these pronouns is illustrated below:
Table 1 shows the full paradigm, including the different forms based on the number and person of the possessor, as well as the number of the possessum. They all follow the template in (15):

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c|c|c}

\text{sg possessum} & \text{pl possessum} & \text{sg possessum} & \text{pl possessum} \\
1\text{sg} & \text{eny-é-m} & \text{eny-é-m-ek} & 1\text{pl} & \text{mi-é-nk} & \text{mi-é-i-nk} \\
2\text{sg} & \text{ti-é-d} & \text{ti-é-i-d} & 2\text{pl} & \text{ti-é-tek} & \text{ti-é-i-tek} \\
3\text{sg} & \text{öv-é} & \text{öv-é-i} & 3\text{pl} & \text{öv-é-k} & \text{öv-é-i-k} \\
\end{array}
\]

Table 1. Possessive pronouns

4.2. ALTERNATION IN THE PRONOUN PARADIGM. While the anaphoric possessive has been extensively studied in the literature on Hungarian (see i.a. Bartos 1999, 2000, 2001; Dékány 2015; Laczkó 1995), there exists a systematic alternation in the possessive pronoun paradigm that has received considerably less attention. Specifically, in the first and second persons, the anaphoric possessive -é forms of pronouns alternate with forms that contain -e instead, e.g. miénk vs. mienk (ours). The full paradigm is shown in Table 2:

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c|c|c}

\text{sg possessum} & \text{pl possessum} & \text{sg possessum} & \text{pl possessum} \\
1\text{sg} & \text{eny-é-m/%eny-i-m} & \text{eny-é-m-ek/%eny-i-m-ek} & 1\text{pl} & \text{mi-é-nk/mi-e-nk} & \text{mi-é-i-nk/mi-e-i-nk} \\
2\text{sg} & \text{ti-é-d/ti-e-d} & \text{ti-é-i-d/ti-e-i-d} & 2\text{pl} & \text{ti-é-tek/ti-e-tek} & \text{ti-é-i-tek/ti-e-i-tek} \\
3\text{sg} & \text{öv-é} & \text{öv-é-i} & 3\text{pl} & \text{öv-é-k} & \text{öv-é-i-k} \\
\end{array}
\]

Table 2. Possessive pronouns: -él-e alternation

To our knowledge, the -él-e alternation has only been briefly discussed by Dékány (2011), who claims that it is a phonological alternation with no syntactic or semantic import. However, this would predict that such a phonological alternation should be found elsewhere in Hungarian, which is not borne out.

Instead, given our proposal that nPE can be licensed also by Poss, and not just Num, the alternation in Table 2 can now be understood as a syntactic one, not merely an allomorphic one. In particular, we argue that the -e versions of the pronouns exist as a consequence of nPE, licensed by the Poss head. In other words, the -e pronouns can be derived by adding to the nominative pronoun (e.g. mi ‘we’) the suffixes that would ordinarily surface on the noun (e.g. -enk, POSS.1PL) —see (Murphy 2018) for a similar account of pronominal inflection in German.

In (17) we reiterate the order of nominal morphemes in Hungarian; crucially, we claim that either the anaphoric possessive or the possessedness suffix (but not both) can be attached after the nominative pronoun. If the anaphoric possessive attaches to the pronoun, we obtain the form in (18), while nPE results in the form in (19):
(17) nom. pron. – {anaphoric possessive | possessedness suffix} – num – agr – case

(18) mi-é-i-nk
  IPL.PRON-é-PL-1PL
  ‘our ones’

(19) mi-e-i-nk
  IPL.PRON-POSS-PL-1PL
  ‘our ones’

5. Open questions. A number of open questions remain. Most notably, there seems to be a difference in what persons allow nominal ellipsis in possessives. When the remnant is an adjective, nPE that is licensed by Poss is allowed with all persons, as demonstrated in examples (7), (8), and (9) above. But when the only remnant is the possessor pronoun, Poss-licensed nPE is only allowed with first and second persons; the third person form is the invariant övé ‘his/her’, as shown in Table 2. Likewise, when the only remnant is the possessor noun, only the anaphoric possessive can be attached. This is expected given that nouns are third person.

To account for this difference, we propose a restriction on leaning, whereby in Poss-licensed nPE, remnant morphology can only attach to possessors that are first or second person pronouns. Note that third person possessive pronouns in Hungarian are also exceptional in other respects, e.g. they exhibit the so-called anti-agreement pattern (É. Kiss 2002). The third person singular (nominative) pronoun is űr (‘he/she’), and the third person plural is ők (‘they’). But, as (20-b) shows, ők loses its -k plural marker when it is used as an overt, caseless possessor:

(20) a. az űr diák-ja-i-∅
    the (s)he student-POSS-PL-3SG
    ‘his/her students’

   b. az űr diák-ja-i-k
    the (s)he student-POSS-PL-3PL
    ‘their students’

The above example is a case of anti-agreement whereby the possessor lacks the expected number morphology. Additionally, anti-agreement in the third person shows up in the other direction as well. When the possessor is a lexical noun phrase, the possesum is missing the agreement marker -k, see (21-b):

(21) a. a fiú könyv-e-i
    the boy book-POSS-PL
    ‘the boy’s books’

   b. a fiú-k könyv-e-i
    the boy-PL book-POSS-PL
    ‘the boys’ books’

For more details on the analyses of the anti-agreement patterns, see i.a. Csirmaz (2006); den Dikken (1998); Dikken (1999).

While it is clear that the third person is exceptional in many respects in the domain of possessive morphology, future research will have to further explore precisely how the different patterns are connected.
6. Conclusion. In this paper we show that, contra previous claims in the literature, there are two possible licensors of nominal ellipsis in Hungarian. We propose that it is not only the Num head, but also the Poss head, that can license ellipsis of its complement. Our proposal also makes it possible to offer a novel analysis of the systematic variation in the possessive pronoun paradigm: while the -é versions of pronouns arise anaphoric possessive (following the proposal in Dékány 2015), the -e versions of pronouns are the result of nPE licensed by Poss.

References


