Hungarian as an OV language: A reappraisal

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1. According to the received view of Hungarian clausal syntax, the Hungarian sentence is split into a hierarchical functional left periphery and a possibly non-configurational nuclear clausal domain with free constituent order (É.Kiss, 1987; Brody, 1990; Puskás, 2000, *i.a.*). The latter is often identified as the lexical domain, i.e. the verb phrase (É.Kiss, 2002, 2006; Puskás, 2000; Surányi, 2002). After a short period of debates, by now it is seen as settled that this lexical domain is verb-initial (É.Kiss, 2002, 27), rather than verb-final (Marácz, 1989; Ackema, 2004). In this presentation we revisit the issue of the head-directionality of the Hungarian VP and explore the potential merits of a syntactic account according to which Hungarian has a right-headed VP, with obligatory verb raising in finite clauses (Marácz, 1989), as in (1).

(1) Left Periphery $[_{\text{FuncP}}$ V_i $[_{\text{VP}}$ X $[_{V'}$ Y $[_{V'}$ Z $<V_i>$ $]]]]$

2. We start by reviewing the original arguments that were made previously either directly against the verb-final analysis of the Hungarian VP, or directly in favour of a verb-initial analysis (Horváth, 1986; É.Kiss, 1978, 2004, 2013). We argue that most of them go through only if it is assumed that no verb-movement takes place in the Hungarian clause. As this latter assumption can be shown to be incorrect (Surányi, 2009), these original arguments are effectively inconclusive.

3. We support a V-final analysis of the Hungarian VP by demonstrating that under this OV analysis a number of syntactic properties of Hungarian fall into place both from a language-internal and from a typological perspective:

- the availability of verb-final ordering in non-finite constructions would be the base order that occurs in the absence of verb raising, which would be merely optional in non-finite clauses

- the postverbal word order variability in matrix clauses would be originally preverbal word order variation as found in most OV languages, which also explains why the word order variation is of the A-scrambling type and certain subject–object asymmetries are absent (Surányi, 2006)

- the properties of the auxiliary-verb complex are typical of an OV language (e.g. Ackema, 2004): a) word order variability between the verbs of the complex, as in the Germanic OV languages, and b) verb-clustering (a ban against non-verbal interveners in the verb complex) in V-Aux ordered verb complexes

- a directly preverbal focus position, which is almost exclusively attested for OV languages (Czypionka, 2007)

- the general typological profile, *viz.* word order correlations (e.g. pospositions, preverbal manner adverbials), is that of an OV language

These points mostly capture well-known facts about Hungarian and relate them to phenomena apparent in OV languages, and mostly absent from VO languages (Haider, 2013). The result of this comparison is a localization of Hungarian in the typological landscape that places it closer to OV languages than to VO languages, also within the Uralic family.

4. An OV analysis of Hungarian also raises a number of questions. Given that on this analysis the clustering auxiliary-final order is basic, the auxiliary-initial verb complex that surfaces in the absence of narrow focus and that allows for intervening material needs to be derived. We will explore the possibility that Aux-V order needs to be derived in order to ensure that the dependent verbs are not interpreted as focus. Therefore, they need to be extraposed, resulting in stacked verb phrases that allow for individual modification which is why Aux-V order allows for intervening material. We will also argue that the possibility of extraposition is not confined to verb phrases but that it is more generally available, as it is in Dutch. It is the combination of extraposition and scrambling that results in the high degree of word order variability in the postverbal domain.

In conclusion, reconsidering Hungarian as an OV language allows us to reframe many questions of Hungarian syntax pertaining to the domain below the functional left periphery.

References

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