



Varga on prosody: an appreciation

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I am very happy to be asked to contribute a brief appreciation of Laci's work on Hungarian prosody. For the most part, the essence of my comments can be summed up in a single sentence: if you need to know anything about Hungarian prosody, read Laci's book (Varga 2002). It brings together in a single place the essence of his life's work on topics in and around prosody. (It is especially valuable in this respect because his career was influenced by the political division of Europe during the second half of the 20th century: many of his earlier short articles, in both English and Hungarian, appeared in sources that only ever had limited distribution and are in some cases now virtually unobtainable.) It combines the sensitivity of a native-speaker observer and the thoroughness of a lifelong language teacher with the outlook of an internationally-oriented linguist who is interested in questions of linguistic theory and in the implications of his observations for current theoretical ideas.

As the blurb on the book's jacket puts it: "The emphasis is on description, but since the analysis is embedded in current theoretical thinking, it goes far beyond the concerns of a language-specific description." Nothing else on Hungarian prosody matches its scope or subtlety. The range of problems that Laci has considered in the course of his career includes the phonology of pitch contours, the relation between pitch accents and stress patterns, and the nature of the domain types that make up hierarchical prosodic structure. He clearly believes in the importance of universal theories but doesn't hesitate to venture far into areas of language-specific detail—for example, he goes beyond the simplistic claim that Hungarian prosody is uniformly left-headed to explore what happens as phrases get longer and longer. All of this is in the book.

I don't, of course, mean to suggest that everything stopped once the book was published. Laci has continued to work on topics in Hungarian prosody and to explore their implications for current phonological theo-

ries, notably his *Phonology* paper on the Hungarian calling contour (Varga 2008) and his recent paper on the question of intermediate phrases and the universality (or not) of the prosodic hierarchy (Varga 2010). But the book — and the research career that it encapsulates — will retain its place as a standard reference for some time to come.

REFERENCES

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