

Topic change in Hungarian

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This talk is devoted to topic change in Hungarian (Pléh 1982). In a recent talk, Alberti and Farkas (2017) revealed the core system, that is, they investigated cases in which only one potential antecedent is available. They pointed out that the following factors count in the choice between the demonstrative pronoun *az* ‘that’ (i.e., a [-HUMAN] pronoun) and strong and weak forms of the [+HUMAN] personal pronoun *ő* ‘(s)he’ in back-referencing: (i) the [\pm HUMAN] character, (ii) the referentiality degree of the antecedent, (iii) the (nominative/accusative *versus* oblique) case marking of the pronoun, and (iv-v) the information structural function of the antecedent and that of the pronoun.

In the psycholinguistic literature, however, sentences like *Peter shot John because he was sad* are typically used, which are potentially ambiguous (the pronoun *he* can pick either of the two potential antecedents in the matrix clause). In the case of this kind of topic change, both the demonstrative pronoun *az* (Pléh 1982) and the personal pronoun *ő* can be used to refer back to a [+HUMAN] postverbal antecedent in certain cases (1b) (but cf. (2b)), while in the case of topic retainment, neither the strong version of the [+HUMAN] personal pronoun nor the demonstrative pronoun can appear in the second clause (1a).

- (1) a. Péter imádja Marit, de nem bízik benne.
Péter adores Mari.Acc but not trusts Ine.3Sg
‘Péter adores Mari, but *he* does not trust in her.’
- b. Péter imádja Marit, de *az* nem bízik (ő-)benne.
Péter adores Mari.Acc but *that* not trusts (s)he-Ine.3Sg
‘Péter adores Mari, but *she* does not trust in him.’
- c. Péter imádja Marit, de *ő* mégsem bízik (*ő-)benne.
Péter adores Mari.Acc but (s)he not trusts (s)he-Ine.3Sg
‘Péter adores Mari, but *she* does not trust in him.’

The talk points out that significantly different grammaticality judgments are associated with the same pronominal forms when only one potential antecedent is available (2a) and when the pronoun can pick either of the two potential antecedents in the matrix clause (2b). As can be seen in (2c), it also counts how many pronouns appear in the second clause (cf. (2b)).

- (2) a. A kéthetes karibi útra meghívták Pétert,
thetwo_week.Adj Caribbean journey.Sub invited.3Pl Péter.Acc
de *az* / *ő* sajnos csak a karrierjét hajtja.
but *that*/(s)he unfortunately only the career.Poss.3Sg.Acc chases
‘As for the two-week-long Caribbean journey, *Péter* has been invited, but unfortunately *he* is only chasing after his career.’
- b. Mari kedveli Pétert, de *az* / **ő* nem bírja őt.
Mari likes Péter.Acc but *that*/(s)he not is_fond_of (s)he.Acc
‘Mari likes *Péter*, but *he* is not fond of her.’
- c. Mari elküldte Pétert egy konferenciára, de *az* / *ő* nem ment el.
Mari sent Péter.Acc a conference.Sub but *that*/(s)he not went away
‘Mari sent *Péter* to a conference, but *he* did not go there.’

The talk aims to systematically examine all relevant cases by means of which each factor influencing the choice between the pronominal variants can be revealed. As a part of this project, all factors discussed by Alberti and Farkas (2017) will be considered. Their work is also followed in accounting for the data by means of an OT-style rule system, which is, however, somewhat different from their rule system generating the aforementioned “core system”.

References

- Alberti, Gábor and Judit Farkas. 2017. The relationship in Hungarian of animacy features of pronouns to information-structural functions and degrees of referentiality. Talk at *Debrecen Workshop on Pronouns*, Debrecen, 24-25. February 2017.
- Pléh, Csaba. 1982. Topic and subject prominence in Hungarian. In *Hungarian Linguistics. Linguistic and Literary Studies in Eastern Europe 4*, ed. Ferenc Kiefer, 447–465. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.