

The Operator Structure of the Modal Existential *Wh*-Construction in Hungarian¹

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In our talk the operator structure of the modal existential *wh*-construction, MEWh (1a-a') (Lipták 2003, Šimík 2011) is compared to those of other embedded finite (1b) and non-finite (1b-c) verb phrases / deverbal nominal constructions. Topic, quantifier and narrow focus positions are investigated in the constructions, as illustrated by the alternative fillers given in (1d).

(1) SENTENCE TYPES CONSIDERED (PRESENTED HERE WITH NO GRAMMATICALITY JUDGMENTS)

- a. ⟨A munkára⟩ van/nincs ⟨⟩ kit ⟨⟩ felbérel[-ni/-nem/-jek] ⟨⟩.
the task.Sub is/not_is who.Acc up.hire[-Inf/-Inf.1Sg/-Subj.1Sg]
Intended meaning: 'There is someone/noone for me to hire to do the task.'
- a'. ⟨A munkára⟩ van/nincs ⟨⟩ kit ⟨⟩ bérel[-ni/-nem/-jek] fel ⟨⟩.
the task.Sub is/not_is who.Acc hire[-Inf/-Inf.1Sg/-Subj.1Sg] up
Intended meaning: 'There is someone/noone for me to hire to do the task.'
- b. ⟨A munkára⟩ hiba volt ⟨⟩ Józsi ⟨⟩ felbérel[-ni/-nem/-jek]/ bérel[-ni/-nem/-jek]_fel ⟨⟩.
the task.Sub mistake was Józsi.Acc up.hire[-Inf/-Inf.1Sg/-Subj.1Sg] hire[-Inf/-Inf.1Sg/-Subj.1Sg]_up
Intended meaning: '(Me) hiring Józsi to do the task was a mistake.'
- c. ⟨A munkára⟩ hiba volt ⟨⟩ Józsinak a ⟨⟩ felbérelése / bérelése_fel ⟨⟩.
the task.Sub mistake was Józsi.Dat the up.hire.Nmn.Poss hire.Nmn.Poss_up
Intended meaning: '(My) hiring Józsi to do the task was a mistake.'
- d. ⟨⟩: ⟨A munkára⟩_{Topic} / ⟨mindkét munkára⟩_Q / ⟨a festésre is⟩_Q / ⟨csak a festésre⟩_{Focus}
the task.Sub both task.Sub the paintwork.Sub also only the paintwork.Sub
'to do [the task] / [both tasks / [also the paintwork] / [the paintwork]'

It will be pointed out in our talk that MEWh essentially patterns with infinitival and deverbal nominal constructions in tolerating both the internal and the external scope taking (see indices _[Ext:..., Int:...]) of certain construction-internal operators (partly depending on their position), discussed in Farkas, Alberti and Szabó (2017: 41–42). As for the *wh*-expression in the modal existential *wh*-construction, we do not follow Lipták (2003: 6) in assuming that this expression occupies a construction-internal narrow-focus position, which is the case in finite Hungarian clauses. Such a hypothesis can be refused on the basis of the data presented in (2b), in which the verb stem – preverb order is excluded (see also Šimík 2011: 169), while this order is readily tolerated in the non-finite verbal constructions in (2c). Anyway, even in finite clauses, only *wh*-expressions with a real semantic-focus interpretation (and not with a universal-quantifier interpretation) behave as narrow foci (É. Kiss 1992: 144). As Lipták (2003: 6) herself accepts, the *wh*-expression in MEWh has no focus interpretation. Rather, in respect of interpretation, it is closest to the type of finite-clause-internal existential pronoun illustrated in (2e), which is claimed to occupy a topic position by É. Kiss (1992:157), primarily on the basis of its word-order position. All in all, the more or less well-formed word order variants in (2d) suggest that the *wh*-expression occupies a (undoubtedly special, non-referential) topic position in the MEWh. Even its interchangeability with a quantifier in (2a) does not refuse this hypothesis if we accept Szeteli and Alberti's (2018: 165) arguments for assuming that quantifiers can belong to either pole of the topic–comment dimension of the Hungarian sentence.

(2) The syntactic position of the *wh*-expression in the modal existential *wh*-construction

- a. ⟨Mindkét munkára⟩_[Ext:✓, Int:*] van ⟨⟩_[Ext:?, Int:*] kit ⟨⟩_[Ext:??, Int:(?)] felbérelnem.
both task.Sub is who.Acc up.hire.Inf.1Sg
Internal reading: 'There is someone for me to hire to do both tasks.'
External reading: 'In the case of both tasks, there is someone for me to hire to do that.'
- b. ⟨Mindkét munkára⟩_[Ext:*, Int:*] van ⟨⟩_[Ext:*?, Int:*] kit bérelnem fel.
both task.Sub is who.Acc hire.Inf.1Sg up
- c. Van kit csak a festésre felbérel[✓-ni/✓-nem] / bérel[^(?)-ni/^{??}-nem]_fel.
is who.Acc only the paintwork.Sub up.hire[-Inf/-Inf.1Sg] hire[-Inf/-Inf.1Sg]_up
'There is someone (for me) to hire to do nothing else but the paintwork.'

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- d. ✓⟨A festésre⟩ van ?⟨⟩ kit ?⟨⟩ felbérelnem ✓⟨⟩.
 the paintwork.Sub is who.Acc up.hire.Inf.1Sg
 ‘There is someone for me to hire to do the paintwork.’
- e. Valaki mindenkit értesített.
 someone everyone.Acc informed.3Sg
 ‘Someone has informed everyone.’

References

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