Marking of theta-roles in Hungarian morphosyntax

Hungarian is renowned for the complexity of its morphological case system. Different analyses present between sixteen and twenty-two separate case suffixes (c.f. Marácz 1989, Rounds 2001, Szende & Kassai 2001, Creissels 2003). In generative linguistics it is assumed that morphological case is associated with thematic role (excluding nominative and accusative, which are analysed as structural cases, Chomsky 1981). However, some approaches to theta-roles define a much smaller inventory of roles than there are case suffixes in Hungarian (e.g. Reinhart 2002). This paper will discuss the possibility of reconciling a restrictive inventory of theta-roles with such an elaborate morphological case system. Taking Reinhart's Theta System (2002) for my inventory of thematic roles, and applying this to Hungarian data, I will investigate how inherent case mediates the mapping between theta-roles and the morphological markings on the noun.

Firstly I discuss the range of morphological markings to be considered. I argue that nominative and accusative at least must be set aside, analysed as structural case. Dative may also belong to this set. However, in addition to the extensive system of suffixal cases which remain to be considered, I argue that at least some postpositions must also be taken into account. There are two classes of postpositions in Hungarian, henceforth termed 'dressed' and 'naked' (after Marácz 1989, who names them on the basis that the former carry number and agreement suffixes in the presence of a pronoun, whereas the latter do not exhibit agreement). When their behaviour is compared in the presence of full nouns, pronouns and demonstratives, dressed Ps exhibit identical and complementary distribution to that of the Hungarian case suffixes, whilst naked Ps combine with a noun marked with a case suffix. The main reason cited for drawing a line between case suffixes and postpositions is the fact that most of the suffixes undergo vowel harmony, whereas the postpositions do not. On the basis of overlap in interpretation and distribution of dressed Ps and case suffixes, I argue (contra Marácz 1989, and in support of Creissels 2003) that the dressed Ps should also be construed as realisations of case. I further discuss whether the same arguments may apply to include the naked (non-inflecting) postpositions. The inventory of cases to be discussed is therefore very wide indeed.

Reinhart's Theta System analyses theta-roles as items composed of binary features [±c] (depending on whether an argument causes change) and [±m] (depending on whether the mental state of the argument is involved). An inventory of nine theta-roles is outlined. There are four fully specified clusters: [+c+m] (corresponding to the agent role), [+c-m] (instrument), [-c+m] (experiencer), and [-c-m] (theme or patient). In addition there are five underspecified clusters: [+c] (cause), [+m] (sentient), [-m] (subject matter or locative source), [-c] (goal or benefactor), and finally an entirely unspecified role [ ], which has been found to be attested in certain middle constructions. This system has been found to capture successfully the subcategorisation requirements of verbs cross-linguistically. I will look into the possibility of applying it to the markings on the nominal arguments.

I will discuss the extent to which the Theta-System accounts for the nominal morphology and postpositions in Hungarian, investigating whether further elaboration is needed. Clearly it is undesirable to equate every suffix and postposition with a separate underlying theta-role. It will be necessary to allow for the idea that

postpositions and suffixes bring some further individual lexical meaning in addition to the theta-role. However, I will consider two areas where elaboration of the inventory of roles might capture interesting generalisations. Firstly, amongst the Hungarian cases and postpositions that do not correspond directly to any theta-cluster, certain apparently regular patterns emerge. Most notably, there is a three-way distinction in suffixes and postpositions with locational meaning (roughly corresponding the directions *towards* and *from*, and to static location *at*). Table 1 illustrates this for a selection of the case suffixes and Table 2 for postpositions (adapted from Marácz 1989:354).

Table 1

	towards	at	from
containment	illative 'into' *-be*/*-be*	inessive 'in' *-ban*/*-ben*	elative 'out of' *-ból*/*-ből*
surface	sublative 'onto' *-ra*/*-re*	superessive 'on' *-on*/*-en*/*-ön*	delative 'off' *-ról*/*-ről*
proximity	allative 'near' *-hoz*/*-hez*/*-höz*	adessive 'at' *-nál*/*-nél*	ablative 'from' *-tól*/*-től*

Table 2

	towards	at	from
under	*alá*	*alatt*	*alól*
before	*elé*	*elött*	*elől*
behind	*mögé*	*mögött*	*mögül*

The regularity of this pattern may be seen to require extension of the inventory, or elaboration on the analysis of certain roles. Secondly, case suffixes and postpositions which can be applied to subcategorised arguments may also be used to mark adverbial expressions, with some consistency in the interpretation of the suffix. Examples include some of the locational markings in the tables above. This consistency in marking suggests that the same system that expresses the thematic roles of subcategorised arguments, assumed here to be inherent case, is also active in expressing the meaning of non-subcategorised adverbial phrases. I will discuss how these issues may be reconciled with the inventory of theta-roles described.

References

Chomsky, N. (1981). *Lectures on government and binding: the Pisa lectures*. Dordrecht: Foris.
Creissels, D. (2003). 'Suffixes casuels et postpositions en hongrois.'
Marácz, L. (1989). 'Asymmetries in Hungarian,' PhD Dissertation: Groningen
Reinhart, T. (2002). 'The Theta System: an Overview.' *Theoretical Linguistics* 28(3).
Rounds, C. (2001). *Hungarian: an Essential Grammar*. London: Routledge.
Szende, T. & G. Kassai, (2001). *Grammaire fondamentale du hongrois*. Paris: L'asiathèque