

6th International Conference on Intercultural Pragmatics and Communication  
30 May–1 June 2011, Malta

# Theoretical and methodological issues of research into implicit arguments in Hungarian

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The presentation is supported by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund OTKA NK 100804 *Comprehensive grammar resources: Hungarian* as well as by the MTA-DE Research Group for Theoretical Linguistics.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

- Purely syntactic, pragmatic and lexical-semantic explanations of implicit arguments are inadequate (Cote 1996; Goldberg 2005; Németh T. 2010).
- Complex approaches consider both grammatical and contextual information (Goldberg 2005; García Velasco & Portero Muñoz 2002).
- Theoretical and methodological consequences.
- Spectrum of data.

## 1.2 Aims

To present some theoretical and methodological consequences related to research into implicit arguments in Hungarian:

- (i) An interaction between grammar and pragmatics has to be assumed.
- (ii) Implicit arguments must be explained in utterances instead of sentences.
- (iii) Various data sources (e.g. intuition, spoken and written corpora, thought experiments) must be integrated.

## 2 Purely syntactic, pragmatic, and lexical-semantic explanations

### 2.1 Purely syntactic approaches to implicit arguments

- Purely syntactic accounts analyze only those types of implicit arguments which can be explained on the basis of the syntactic structures of sentences.
- They are not sensitive to contextual analyses, they do not consider implicit arguments in utterances.
- They have a latent background assumption (cf. Kertész & Rákosi 2012: 85–128) that the occurrence of implicit arguments is a sentence-oriented phenomenon.

- (1) a. Mari vasal.  
Mari irons.INDEF  
'Mari is ironing.'
- b. \*Áron tologat.  
Áron pushes.INDEF  
'Áron is pushing [you] back  
and forth.'

(2) (A mother is walking with her children, the baby is sitting in the pushchair, and the elder brother, named Áron, is walking next to it. Suddenly, the mother notices the nurse and she wants to talk to her, but the baby begins to cry.)

- Ne sírj! Áron tologat [téged].  
no cry.IMP.INDEF.2SG Áron pushes.INDEF [you]  
'Don't cry! Áron is going to push [you] back and forth.'

Problem: Since purely syntactic approaches do not take into account contextual information, they should evaluate (1b) unacceptable.

## 2.2 Purely pragmatic approaches to implicit arguments

- Every argument can be omitted if it is inferable as a conversational implicature through Gricean maxims (Rice 1988).
- Elbourne (2008) investigates implicit content of utterances: implicit direct object argument of the verb *eat* in (3), unarticulated constituents ‘somewhere’ in (4) (Recanati 2007) or ‘at the dinner party’ in the reply in (5) (Neale 1990: 94–95).

(3) I haven’t eaten.

(4) It’s raining.

(5) – How your dinner party did go last night?  
– Everyone was sick.

- Elbourne (2008): the missing content is part of the literal content of utterances in (3)-(5).
- Relevance theory: pragmatic free enrichment is responsible for the interpretation of implicit contents in (3)-(5) (Sperber & Wilson 1986/1995; Carston 2002).
- The process of free enrichment contains only general-purpose inference rules and does not involve any decoding, grammatical procedures.

### Problems:

- There are evidence for null objects in the syntax.
- Occurrences of zero objects can be lexically determined.
- There are arguments inferable from the context which cannot remain implicit.
- Lexical alternations.

## 2.3. Purely lexical-semantic explanations

Verbs' lexical-semantic representation fully determine whether a verb can occur with implicit arguments and if yes, with what type and how.

- Fillmore's (1986): INC and DNC verbs.
- Gillon (2012): context sensitive and not context sensitive verbs.

Problems:

- The *pro*-drop languages attest the opposite: freer occurrence of implicit arguments can be predicted on the basis of various morpho-syntactic, semantic and contextual factors.

- In Fillmore's (1986) approach:
  - (i) markedness does not always make the right predictions about the behavior of verbs in different contexts,
  - (ii) definite implicit arguments do not necessarily have discourse antecedents,
  - (iii) the same verb can behave differently with regard to INC-DNC-phenomena in its different occurrences.
- In Gillon's (2012) approach: there is a contradiction.
  - Latent background assumptions:
    - (i) context sensitive occurrences of implicit complements must be analyzed in utterances, i.e. in language use,
    - (ii) not context sensitive, indefinite implicit arguments must be examined in sentences, i.e. in language.

## 2.4 The necessity of complex approaches

Interaction between lexical-semantic, grammatical and pragmatic factors must be assumed in explanation of implicit arguments (cf. e.g. Groefsema 1995; Cote 1996; Cummins & Roberge 2005; Goldberg 2005; Iten et al. 2005; Scott 2006, 2013; Bibok 2008; Pethő & Kardos 2009; Németh T. 2008, 2012, 2014; and Németh T. & Bibok 2010).

(6) Implicit arguments: arguments in lexical-semantic representations of verbs which are lexically unrealized, and whose implicit presence in utterances is attested by lexical-semantic, grammatical (phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic), and/or pragmatic (contextual) evidence (Németh T. 2012, 2014).

### 3. Theoretical and methodological consequences

#### 3.1. Interaction between grammar and pragmatics

- Grammar and pragmatics interact in contexts of language use.
- Grammar: explicit model of grammatical competence, not independent of pragmatics (Németh T. & Bibok 2010).
- Pragmatics: model of pragmatic competence, not independent of grammar (Németh T. & Bibok 2010).

(7) *A férj<sub>i</sub> elkísérte a feleségét<sub>j</sub> az orvoshoz, mert [Ø<sub>i/j</sub>] nagyon izgult.*  
the husband.NOM accompanied.DEF.3SG the his.wife.ACC the doctor.ALL because very.much  
was.nervous.INDEF.3SG

‘The husband accompanied his wife to the doctor, because [he/she] was very nervous.’



On the basis of the analysis of (7) it can be concluded that:

(i) the use or interpretation predicted by grammar can be considered only a typical one that emerges due to lack of any specific context,

(ii) grammar and pragmatics intensively interact in licensing and recovering of implicit arguments in Hungarian.

## 3.2. Utterances instead of sentences

- Implicit arguments cannot be explained in sentences which are units of grammatical competence strictly determined by the grammar of a particular language (cf. Chomsky 1986: 3; Németh T. 1995: 393).
- Instead, it is worth taking into account utterance environment; moreover, the utterance environment must be extended with information from a larger context (cf. Sperber & Wilson 1986/1995: 137–142; Németh T. & Bibok 2010).
- Utterances are meant as units of language use, which have both grammatical and pragmatic properties (cf. Németh T. 1995: 394, 1996: 17–40).

$$(8) u = (\text{ins } (pu, c, p, t))$$

$$(9) pu = (\left\{ \begin{array}{l} ls \\ le_{int} \end{array} \right\}, pf)$$

$$(10) pf = (f_{lit}, f_{ip}, f_{ill}, f_{att})$$

$$(11) c = (c_{phys}, c_{enc}, c_{disc})$$

On the basis of the two theoretical considerations discussed so far, I have studied implicit arguments in utterances in a complex approach, and not in sentences from basically purely syntactic or semantic perspectives as the majority of Hungarian researchers did (cf. e.g. Komlósy 1994, 2001; Tóth 2001).

### 3.3 Integration of various data sources

- The application of a complex approach has a third consequence: it influences the spectrum of data sources used.
- The sentence-oriented approaches have mostly relied on occurrences from intuition and introspection.
- To examine verbs' occurrence with implicit arguments in utterances makes it possible to study those occurrences of implicit arguments which were excluded because of their strong context-dependence by sentence-oriented approaches.

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- Data from various sources and a novel conception of data.
  - Data consist of an informational content and a plausibility value (Kertész & Rákosi 2012: 169-185). The initial plausibility values of data are determined by the reliability of sources which they come from.
  - Data are not only a pure occurrence of a linguistic phenomenon in a corpus or a sentence coming from one's intuition.

An example:

- In traditional grammars of Hungarian (cf. e.g. Keszler 2000) verbs of natural phenomena such as *hajnalodik* ‘[for day to] break’ are considered subjectless.
- Relying on the subjectless occurrences of *hajnalodik* ‘[for day to] break’ in Hungarian grammars and considering Kertész and Rákosi’s (2012: 169) definition of data we can reconstruct the conception of data in traditional grammars as (12).

(12) The verb *hajnalodik* is a verb of natural phenomena and it cannot occur with explicit subjects.



On the basis of (13) we can construct (14).

(14) The verb *hajnalodik* is a verb of natural phenomena and it can occur with explicit subjects.

- There is a contradiction between (12) and (14).
- This contradiction can be eliminated if we compare their plausibility values.
- (14) is more plausible than (12) since it comes from more data sources.

## Data sources of my research:

- Data on the basis of occurrences in spoken corpus: 310 minute long Hungarian spoken corpus.
- Data on the basis of occurrences in written corpora:
  - Hungarian National Corpus (<http://corpus.nytud.hu/mnsz/>)
  - Definitions of various verbs in Hungarian monolingual dictionaries.
  - Analyses of my previous papers (cf. e.g. Németh T. 2000, 2001, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014; Bibok & Németh T. 2001; Németh T. & Bibok 2010).
  - Comparisons with other languages treated in the literature as a corpus.

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- Data from my own and some informants' intuition.
  - Data from experiments: minimal pair and thought experiments.

The occurrences and interpretation mechanisms of Hungarian verbs with implicit arguments were systematically analyzed on the basis of data from the integration of various data sources in a complex approach.

## 4. Summary

- Theoretical and methodological considerations discussed served as background assumptions for my research into implicit arguments in Hungarian.
- In the evaluation of rivalling hypotheses of the literature as well as various occurrences of verbs with implicit arguments, I relied on these background assumptions.
- It was also necessary to reveal background assumptions of the rivalling solutions to decide whether their conclusions were plausible and compatible with my assumptions.



The assumption of

- (i) interaction between grammar and pragmatics,
- (ii) investigation implicit arguments in utterances,
- (iii) and use of data from the integration of various data sources

result in a more complete and plausible account of implicit arguments in Hungarian.

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**Thank you for your attention.**