

Overt infinitival subjects (if that's what they are)

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1. Introduction

The interpretive contrast between (1) and (2)–(3) indicates that in the latter examples *too* associates with the infinitival subject:

- (1) Mary wants to be tall. I want to be tall too.
'I, too, want to be tall'
- (2) Trees are tall. I want to be tall too.
'I want it to be the case that I, too, am tall'
- (3) Mary slipped on the wet floor. I don't want to slip too.
'I don't want it to be the case that I, too, slip'

The second sentence in (3) has two near-equivalents in Hungarian, (4) and (5):

- (4) Nem szeretnék [szintén/*is elcsúszni].
not would.like_{1sg} likewise/*too slip_{inf}
'I wouldn't like for it to be the case that I likewise slip'
- (5) Nem szeretnék [én is elcsúszni].
not would.like_{1sg} I_{nom} too slip_{inf}
'I wouldn't like for it to be the case that I, too, slip'

Krifka (1998) argues that stressed postposed additive particles associate with a clausemate contrastive topic, which need not be overt as long as it satisfies the appropriate contextual role. English *too* is stressed. Of the two Hungarian particles, *szintén* is stressed, *is* is not.

Although the fact that *too/szintén* may apparently associate with a covert subject is interesting, this squib wishes to draw attention to the puzzle of (5).¹

2. The phenomenon

The immediately striking property of (5) is that the infinitival complement has an overt and, probably, nominative subject (something as unusual in Hungarian as it would be in English).² Thanks to this fact, the construction may contain any operator which, unlike *szintén*, needs to associate with an overt stressed element: *is* 'too', as in (5), *nem* 'not', as in (6), *csak* 'only', as in (7), or the subject may be focussed on its own, as in (8). Consider (6) through (8) in a context where the car available is too small for the whole party and someone must take the bus.

- (6) Jobb szeretnék [nem én menni busszal].
better would.like_{1sg} not I_{nom} go_{inf} bus-with
'I'd prefer for it not to be me who takes the bus'
- (7) Nem akarok [csak én menni busszal].
not want_{1sg} only I_{nom} go_{inf} bus-with
'I don't want to be the only one to take the bus'
- (8) HOLNAP fogok [ÉN menni busszal].³
tomorrow will_{1sg} I_{nom} go_{inf} bus-with
'Tomorrow is when it will be me who takes the bus'

Not just the interpretations make it clear that the pronoun belongs within the infinitival complement. Whereas *én is*, *csak én* and plain focussed *én* might occur in postverbal position in uncontroversially monoclausal examples (although with a different interpretation than in the examples

¹ Although the construction is productive and colloquial, the data in this squib has not, to my knowledge, been noted in the literature. I discovered it in 1988 and have over the years made several attempts to come to grips with it. I thank Zoltán Bánréti, Huba Bartos, András Komlósy, Maria Polinsky, Márta Abrusán, and Chris Collins for discussions.

² Hungarian has over 20 case suffixes, but the nominative is morphologically unmarked.

³ Small caps indicate focus accent. I mark it only where the phrase is not accompanied by an overt focussing operator like *csak* 'only', etc.

above), *nem én* cannot; therefore its position in (6) can only be analyzed as immediately preverbal within the infinitival complement. Moreover, the focussed pronoun at hand can be preceded and scoped over by the same operators within the infinitival complement as the focus of any finite clause or run-of-the-mill infinitival clause can (Koopman and Szabolcsi 2000, 118-121). Compare (9) with (10) and (11).

- (9) Nem vagyok hajlandó [mindent ÉN csinálni
not am willing everything_{acc} I_{nom} do_{inf}
helyetted].
instead.of.you
'I am not willing to do everything for you (i.e. to have a situation where for everything, it is me who does it for you)'
- (10) Mindent ÉN csinállok helyetted.
everything_{acc} I_{nom} do_{1sg} instead.of.you
'For everything, it is me who is doing it for you'
- (11) Nem vagyok hajlandó [mindent INGYEN csinálni
not am willing everything_{acc} for.free do_{inf}
helyetted].
instead.of.you
'I am not willing to do everything for you for free (i.e. to have a situation where for everything, it is for free that I do it for you)'

The construction is only possible with subject control verbs and the future auxiliary *fog*.⁴ For example, the following are unacceptable, irrespective of the relative order of the infinitival and the matrix clauses, and irrespective of whether the matrix subject is arbitrary PRO or an overt dative:

- (12) a. *[Csak én menni busszal] jó lenne.
only I go_{inf} bus-with good would.be
'It would be good if only I took the bus'
- b. *Jó lenne (nekem/neked) [csak én menni busszal].
good would.be I-for/you-for only I go_{inf} bus-with
'It would good (for me/for you) if only I took the bus'

⁴ Hungarian has a narrower range of infinitival complements than English, so not all environments that might come to the reader's mind are possible to check.

Given subject control, the infinitival subject invariably agrees with the matrix verb. Compare the examples above with (13).

The construction seems to be subject to two main constraints of its own. First, the infinitival subject has to be a pronoun, although it is not restricted with respect to person and number:

- (13) Nem akar [csak ő menni busszal].
 not want_{3sg} only 3sg.nom go_{inf} bus-with
 ‘He/she doesn’t want to be the only one to take the bus’
- (14) *Nem akar [csak Péter menni busszal].
 not want_{3sg} only Peter go_{inf} bus-with
 ‘Peter doesn’t want to be the only one to take the bus’

Second, examples with an overt subject in the matrix clause are judged unacceptable or degraded:

- (15) ??Péter nem akar [csak ő menni busszal].
 Peter not want_{3sg} only 3sg.nom go_{inf} bus-with
 ‘Peter doesn’t want to be the only one to take the bus’

The challenge is to account for these constraints, together with the fact that the infinitival subject is capable of being spelled out at all.

Two other properties shared by the examples need not be particular to this construction. One is that the matrix clauses all contain negation, focus, or a verbal modifier. This is simply because otherwise the infinitival material would be broken up by inversion or climbing (Koopman and Szabolcsi 2000); so this certainly does not need a special explanation. The other property is that the pronoun in the infinitival complement is always focussed and/or modified by an operator. The reason may be that it would be pro-dropped otherwise. But it is possible that, in addition, emphasis is important in the construction at hand; see below.

3. Some analytical possibilities

The fact that the infinitival subject is spelled out and the matrix subject cannot be might suggest that the construction at hand is an instance of backward control (Polinsky and Potsdam 2002). Backward control is a phenomenon brought to light by Hornstein’s (1999) proposal that control is to be subsumed under raising. On that analysis, the elements traditionally

known as the controller and PRO are copies of the same thing. Some languages allow the lower copy to be spelled out: this is backward control.

But the rest of the phenomenology does not support the backward control analysis. First, the overt element in backward control does not have to be a pronoun, so the unacceptability of (14) is not predicted. Second, there tends to be a division of labor between forward and backward control in languages that attest both, with different control verbs participating in each pattern. In contrast, all subject control verbs in Hungarian participate in the overt infinitival subject construction, as long as the result makes sense. The list above can be easily extended:

- (16) Utálok [mindent ÉN csinálni helyetted].
 hate_{1sg} everything_{acc} I_{nom} do_{inf} instead.of.you
 ‘I hate to be the one doing everything for you’
- (17) Context: A postcard was supposed to be signed by all members of the family.
 Elfelejtettem [én is aláírni].
 forgot_{1sg.defobj} I_{nom} too sign_{inf}
 ‘I forgot to sign it too (i.e. to bring it about that I, too, sign it)’
- (18) Context: The actor’s career was in decline.
 Elkezdte [nem ő kapni a főszerepeket].
 began_{3sg.defobj} not he_{nom} get_{inf} the leading.roles_{acc}
 ‘He began not to be the one getting the leading roles’

Finally, the pronoun is focussed and thus in an operator position. If it formed an A-movement chain with the matrix subject, this would be a case of improper movement.

A second analytical possibility is that the pronoun is in fact the matrix subject, and the surface order is a result of a series of leftward movements. This would work roughly as follows. I use English glosses to make the derivation easier to decipher:

- (19) a. [I_{nom} want_{1sg} [CP PRO go_{inf} bus-with] ...] ⇒ prepose
 b. [XP [CP PRO go_{inf} bus-with]_i [I_{nom} want_{1sg} t_i...]] ⇒ focus
 c. [_{FocP} I_{nomj} [_{XP} [CP PRO go_{inf} bus-with]_i [t_j want_{1sg} t_i...]]] ⇒ prepose
 d. [_{YP} [t_j want_{1sg} t_i...]_k [_{FocP} I_{nomj} [_{XP} [CP PRO go_{inf} bus-with]_i t_k]]]]

But while this analysis would explain why the only overt subject appears to be inside the infinitival complement, it would not explain the pronoun restriction. This might not be a problem if the unacceptability of (14) can be attributed to Condition C. But then the binding theoretic explanation does not make it obvious why an overt pronoun in the same position does not violate Condition B. If the focussed subject pronoun is replaced by a focussed non-subject pronoun, the result is marginal, and a reflexive is highly preferred:⁵

- (20) Nem akartam [csak magamat/??engem említteni].
 not wanted_{1sg} only myself_{acc}/I_{acc} mention_{inf}
 'I didn't want to mention only myself / ??me'

Moreover, this analysis would rest on a large number of coincidences in creating exactly the same ordering patterns that preverbal operator sequences standardly exhibit, see (9) through (11), and it is not clear where the negation preceding *want*_{1sg}, still absent from (19), would be merged to able to scope over the infinitival material.

A third analytical possibility, suggested to me by Márta Abrusán, is that the pronoun in the infinitival complement is not a subject at all. Instead, it is an emphatic element. On this analysis, (5) is a variant of (21):

- (21) Nem szeretnék [(én) magam is elcsúszni].
 not would.like_{1sg} I myself too slip_{inf}
 'I wouldn't like for it to be the case that I, too, slip'

The advantage of this analysis is that it explains why the infinitival subject cannot be a full non-pronominal DP, and that it provides a more specific reason for its emphatic character than the pro-drop reasoning. On the other hand, there remain some differences between the two constructions. One is that a plain pronoun may serve as an emphatic element here. The matrix subject of a control construction is generally too local for a pronoun – see (20). Two, it remains unexplained why the matrix clause is degraded with an overt subject. The bias against overt matrix subjects is not in effect when an emphatic reflexive is present.

⁵ A subject control verb in Hungarian exhibits definiteness agreement with the direct object of the infinitival complement; but the 1sg.past form is the same in both conjugations.

- (22) a. Péter szeretné [(ő) maga feladni a levelet].
 Peter would.like_{3sg} he himself mail_{inf} the letter_{acc}
 ‘Peter would like to mail the letter himself’
 b. ??Péter szeretné [ő feladni a levelet].
 Peter would.like_{3sg} he mail_{inf} the letter_{acc}
 ‘Peter would like for it to be him who mails the letter’

The relationship between the two constructions is also weakened by the fact that examples like (18) are entirely natural with a plain pronoun but not with an emphatic reflexive, as in (23):

- (23) Context: The actor’s career was in decline.
 *Elkezdte [nem (ő) maga kapni a főszerepeket].
 began_{3sg.defobj} not he himself get_{inf} the leading.roles_{acc}
 ‘He began not to be getting the leading roles himself’

4. Conclusion

At this point the analysis and, therefore, the theoretical significance of the data remains unsettled. The emphatic pronoun analysis, suggested by M. Abrusán, might eventually be correct, if the difficulties mentioned above can be resolved in view of a better understanding of the working of the emphatic pronoun+reflexive complex.

References

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