

Review

The syntax of Hungarian. By Katalin É. Kiss. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Pp. xii, 278. ISBN: 0-521-66047-5 (hardback), 0-521-66939-1 (paperback). \$??.??

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The Syntax of Hungarian is an excellent book — a wonderful kaleidoscope brimming with the phenomenal results of concentrated research conducted by a fairly small group of mostly generative linguists (mostly but not quite exclusively made up of native speakers of the language) over the past three decades. The author herself has, from the outset, been one of the leading contributors to the study of Hungarian syntax, in many instances having been the first to study the key facts. Her scope over the empirical and scholarly playing field is admirable, and this book is an outstanding reflection thereof — not least because of her generous acknowledgement and candid discussion of other people’s work on the syntax of the language (and some of the semantics as well).¹ What follows, including the critical remarks about the weaknesses of the book, should be read, therefore, against the background of the three opening sentences of this review.

Major highlights of the book’s ten chapters include its very methodical and comprehensive overview of the Topic–Predicate structure of the Hungarian sentence (§§2.5–2.6), the excellent treatment of the difficult subject of agreement (§3.5), its careful handling of the empirical facts and the skilful sailing between the head- and phrasal movement accounts in the discussion of the (in)famous ‘verbal modifier’ and its aspectual role (§3.6),² the concise and accessible survey of quantifiers and their syntactic properties (chapter 5), the critical précis of the extensive literature on the structure of the Hungarian noun phrase (chapter 7), the quick wrap of the intricate facts of verbal clustering in Hungarian and their theoretical

implications (§9.3),³ and its meticulous unraveling (in chapter 10) of the empirical and analytical intricacies of argumental and adjunct subordinate clause types, relative and adverbial clauses, their distribution in the matrix clause and the role of sentential pronouns connected to them, a discussion which devotes much space to extraction possibilities out of CPs, so-called long operator movement, and detailed analyses thereof. And the cherry on top of it all is the nice little argument (given in §10.6) for a unified ('forking') chain approach to parasitic gap constructions, *contra* Chomsky's (1986) *Barriers*. In addition, the book features discussions of the structure of the minimal predicate, focusing, negation, and the postpositional phrase. The book's empirical coverage is extensive, therefore; É. Kiss has done a remarkable job in making the sometimes extremely intricate facts, their analysis and their theoretical consequences accessible to the generative syntax community at large.⁴ This book should thus serve as an outstanding starting-point for anyone interested in but not yet intimately familiar with aspects of the syntax of Hungarian.

In many sections, the level of detail of the discussion actually goes well beyond initiating the novice: though at the outset she states that it is the goal of her 'empirical rather than technical approach ... to present the theoretically relevant facts of Hungarian explicitly, but without necessarily providing accounts in terms of the most recent theoretical innovations' (p. 7), É. Kiss often actively engages in debates on controversial issues. A particularly striking example of this is her discussion (in §4.2) of the well-known adjacency of a focused constituent and the finite verb in Hungarian. Focusing (in single-focus constructions) involves the obligatory fronting of the focused constituent to a position in the left periphery (SpecFP; Brody 1990), and the placement of the finite verb to the immediate right of the focused constituent. This immediately post-focus placement of the verb is commonly analyzed in terms of a Verb Second-like derivation: the focus raises into the specifier of a functional projection whose head comes to host the fronted

verb. É. Kiss deviates from the mainstream in pushing an account that, instead of raising the verb to Foc^0 stranding its verbal modifier in SpecAspP (1a), has *both* the verb and the verbal modifier stay in their *base* positions, inside the VP (1b).⁵ That the verbal modifier must follow the verb then follows from the assumption that, within the Hungarian VP, the verb is the *initial* constituent;⁶ and since the ordering of the other elements in the Hungarian VP is assumed to be free and since VM stays inside the VP, É. Kiss's analysis predicts that VM's placement *vis-à-vis* other VP-internal material should be entirely free, a prediction which she shows is borne out.

- (1) a. $[\text{FocP } \text{PÉTER}t_i [\text{Foc}' \text{mutatta}_j [\text{AspP } \text{be}_k [t_j [\text{VP } t_j t_k \text{János } t_i \text{Marinak}]]]]]$
 Péter-ACC introduced VM János Mari-DAT
- b. $[\text{FocP } \text{PÉTER}t_i [\text{Foc}' \text{Foc } [\text{VP } \text{mutatta be János } t_i \text{Marinak}]]]$

É. Kiss's analysis in (1b), in comparison with (1a), is noteworthy for the absence of AspP : É. Kiss claims that AspP must be absent whenever there is a FocP projected in the structure, a complementarity that she later extends to NegP and AspP as well, taking care of the fact that the presence of sentential negation likewise results in post-verbal placement of the VM. In support of this, she points out that negation neutralizes aspect: past-tense sentences featuring a negation and a VM are 'vague aspectually', being compatible with both a progressive and a perfective reading. So the fact that such sentences are aspectually neutral is taken to plead for the *absence* of AspP . But since, whichever way one interprets such sentences, they will *always* have *some* aspectual value, É. Kiss's claim that their structure lacks an AspP altogether then seems to suggest that aspectual interpretation is not tied to AspP at all — which fundamentally erodes

the case for AspP in general. Besides, if AspP is indeed in complementary distribution with NegP and FocP (but not with other operator projections outside VP, such as DistP⁷), one faces the tantalizing question of why it is precisely these two projections that AspP refuses to combine with.

The second property of (1b) that deserves some comment is its *flat VP* — all of the verb's arguments as well as secondary predicates and sundry adverbial material are tied together under a single, unanalyzed VP–node, with the word order within this flat VP being totally free, except for the fact that the verb is assumed to be systematically in initial position. This is, in essence, a continuation of É. Kiss's (1987) seminal position on the configurationality issue in Hungarian. Though outside the VP É. Kiss now deems the structure of Hungarian to be fully configurational, for the VP she continues to subscribe to the non-configurationality thesis, spending ten excruciating pages on the kinds of arguments that can be brought to bear on the issue and concluding that '[t]he facts are controversial' (p. 33),⁸ some supporting a flat VP and others a hierarchically structured one. What she ends up adopting in the end is a flat structure amplified with a thematic hierarchy. While she realizes that this stance may be problematic 'for theories stipulating that all linguistic structures are binary branching', mentioning Kayne's (1994) antisymmetry as the prime representative of such theories,⁹ she leaves the discussion on the (overly) optimistic note that a flat VP might be reconcilable with 'a somewhat relaxed version of this theory' (p. 43), whatever that might look like (not much like Kayne 1994, in any event).

In the discussion of the postpositional phrase in chapter 8, É. Kiss once again collides with Kayne, adopting a highly peculiar analysis insisting at first (and in line, so far, with Kayne) that the Hungarian postpositional phrase 'is syntactically a prepositional phrase', but then, within the confines of just half a page, shifting gears radically to propose that the adposition and its nominal complement entertain 'a non-

linearized relation in abstract space’ that gets linearized ‘in the morphological component’ thanks to P’s ‘[+suffix] feature’,¹⁰ which ‘corresponds to the linearization command “right-adjoin to the lexical head of the projection”’ (p. 188). This story is puzzling in too many respects to enumerate within the confines of this review.

Four key ingredients keep popping up, to varying degrees of awkwardness, in many of the accounts outlined in É. Kiss’s book — *(i)* morphology, *(ii)* features, *(iii)* cliticization and *(iv)* PF-rules and constraints. We encountered the first two in the previous paragraph. ‘Cliticization’ is omnipresent in the book (except in the index), being invoked in a variety of ways and contexts (once in combination with ‘excorporation’; p. 85), whenever straight syntax does not quite seem to deliver the desired output. On top of that, É. Kiss resorts to a PF-rule of Stylistic Postposing (see fn. 7, above), and to a family of ‘constraints’ which all, in some way, refer to PF-‘edges’ of syntactic constituents.¹¹ É. Kiss’s heavy reliance on PF-rules and constraints occasionally gives the reader the impression of reading a book about the *phonology* rather than the *syntax* of Hungarian; the intermittent use of such rules/constraints and syntactic principles results in an eclectic mix that, though generally empirically adequate, hardly deserves the predicate ‘explanatorily adequate’.

In all fairness, we should recall at this point that it was never É. Kiss’s intention to provide ‘accounts in terms of the most recent theoretical innovations’, and that her emphasis is on presenting ‘the theoretically relevant facts of Hungarian explicitly’ (p. 7). But oftentimes, as we pointed out in the foregoing, the discussion transgresses her self-imposed boundaries and engages in detailed theoretical discussions. To the extent that these discussions actually lead to attractive accounts (as they do, for instance, in the chapter on quantifiers), this is perfectly fine. But there are various points in the discussion throughout the

book where a mere exposition of the empirical facts would have been superior to muddled and confusing discussions in terms of *ad hoc* constraints, peculiar features and cavalier appeals to things like ‘cliticization’ — discussions whose level of complexity often exceeds the level of complexity of the empirical facts. The idiosyncrasy of some of the accounts proposed also reduces the representativeness of the book in some places, while in other places the author’s attempt at representing the literature results in a suboptimal presentation of the facts — especially so in the discussion of subject and object agreement (section 3.5.2), which takes the form of a dialectic between Bartos (1999) and Den Dikken (1999) moderated by É. Kiss.

But at the end of the day, the facts are all there, and that is where É. Kiss’s book makes its most laudible contribution: in bringing a wealth of facts about Hungarian together in a mere 263 pages of main text. The discussion of the facts is sometimes awkward, *qua* presentation and/or content, but it is always very well informed, admirably comprehensive in scope, and extremely rich in detail. And for this reason alone, this book fully deserves all the praise that we bestowed upon it in the opening paragraphs of this review. In brief, *The Syntax of Hungarian* is a treasure harboring the treasures of Hungarian syntax and syntactic research.

Notes

1. A quick look at the four-page index of the book reveals the names of many of the scholars who have worked on problems in the syntax of Hungarian — except for the author’s own name, interestingly. The same quick look at the index also reveals how few *other* linguists (i.e., linguists whose work has not focused on Hungarian) are referred to in the book. Indeed, the bibliography is made up in large measure of works specifically devoted to Hungarian. For a book entitled *The Syntax of Hungarian*, this is not

particularly surprising, in and of itself. However, since many of the phenomena discussed in the book are well known from other languages as well, some strategic references anchoring the discussion to work on languages other than Hungarian would certainly have been welcome. As it stands, the discussion in many places makes it look as if the facts in question or their accounts are unique(ly relevant) to Hungarian, which obviously they are not.

2. Though É. Kiss uses the abbreviation ‘VM’ consistently throughout the book, when she first brings up the ‘verbal modifiers’ (things like *el* in *el-olvas* ‘VM-read, i.e., (finish) read(ing)’) she refers to them as ‘verbal prefixes’ (attributing this label to traditional Hungarian linguistics), leaving the abbreviation ‘VM’ a bit of a mystery at first.

3. The syntax of the Hungarian verbal complex is one of the main topics of Koopman & Szabolcsi’s (2000) recent monograph. É. Kiss gives a very concise summary of many of the facts discussed in detail in that monograph; surprisingly, however, she gives very short shrift to their analyses of these facts, relegating most of her references to Koopman & Szabolcsi (2000) to the footnotes.

4. The book is explicit, right from the outset, about its theoretical persuasion: ‘this book adopts the basic theoretical assumptions and the basic methodology of generative linguistics’ (p. 7).

5. É. Kiss seems to have come round to this idea fairly late in the writing of the book — there are a number of places beyond the point at which (1b) is first presented (p. 86) where she still invokes V-raising to Foc. And indeed, the V-to-Foc analysis has its empirical appeal. Thus, the fact (noted by É. Kiss on pp. 202–3 but not linked to the earlier discussion of the pros and cons of V-raising) that in infinitival constructions including a focus, inversion of the verb and the verbal modifier is *optional* (while it is absolutely obligatory in finite contexts) suggests a parallel with similar observations for French, where

infinitives undergo optional raising out of the VP where finite verbs raise obligatorily (cf. Pollock 1989)—on a raising analysis to Hungarian VM–placement, this parallel would seem to fall out directly.

6. The assumption that the verb is systematically the initial constituent in the Hungarian VP is by no means a standard one in the literature on Hungarian. Kálmán (1985), Kenesei (1986) and Marác (1989), among others, all argue that Hungarian neutral clauses are SVO, not VSO. Peculiarly, É. Kiss never refers to any of these works in her discussion of the structure of the VP and the neutral clause.

7. In chapter 6, É. Kiss argues that NegP may fuse with DistP, the functional projection for distributive quantifiers (which, by the way, is not ‘officially’ introduced until p. 110 of the book, although it is appealed to at several points earlier in the discussion, as early as p. 29 — this is one of the, fairly few, organizational glitches of the book).

8. The formulation is peculiar here: the *facts* are not controversial (the judgments on things like disjoint reference, anaphora and weak crossover are largely uniform); the controversy lies in the question of whether the facts argue for a hierarchical VP or not.

9. Of course it is quite outrageous to say, as does É. Kiss (p. 43), that Kayne (1994) *stipulates* binary branching: the binary branching restriction *follows* from his LCA.

10. While this particular feature has a(n unfortunate) precedent in Chomsky’s (1995:269) work, some of the other features invented by É. Kiss have a decidedly more dubious ring to them — what to think, for instance, of (ostensibly binary) features like [+determiner] or [+VM]?

11. Thus, the ‘Head-finality Constraint’ (p. 88) demands that a phrase in SpecFocP be head-final, the ‘Case Constraint’ (p. 174) has a case suffix ‘cliticize’ to the right edge of the noun phrase, and the ‘That-clause Constraint’ (p. 237) says that a *that*-clause cannot be internal to a lexical projection.

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