

# Complex and even more complex reflexives: the case of the Hungarian *önmaga* ‘himself’

György Rákosi

University of Debrecen

<http://ieas.unideb.hu/rakosi>

**1. THE BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM** Faltz (1985) argues that there is a typologically valid correlation between the binding constraints and the form of a reflexive pronominal (The term *reflexive pronominal* is intended here to cover both traditional binding theoretic pronouns and anaphors). This includes the claim that complex reflexives tend to be subject to strict(er) locality constraints, and if a language has a long distance reflexive, then it is strikingly often morphologically simple (cf. Bresnan 2001 and Büring 2005 for recent discussions of this issue). Therefore, and this is what we expect, if a language has simple/complex reflexive pairs, then increasing morphological complexity will decrease the size of the binding domain of the pronominal. The Norwegian *seg* and *seg selv* are a case at hand: as Dalrymple (1993) and Bresnan (2001) argue, *seg selv* is a nuclear reflexive (i.e. the antecedent must be an argument in the minimal nucleus), but *seg* is nonnuclear.

In Faltz’s (1985) characterization, this sort of complexity can derive from two sources. One is the pattern represented by the Norwegian (*seg selv*) or the English (*himself*), where a pronoun combines with an emphatic/intensifying morpheme. The other typologically frequent pattern is where the reflexive pronominal is, or goes back historically to, a possessive nominal expression, meaning ‘my body’, ‘my soul’, or the like.

The correlation between reflexive form and the size of the binding domain has primarily been investigated on the Norwegian/English pattern: Norwegian has both a simple and a complex reflexive, and they behave as expected; English has only a complex reflexive, *therefore* it does not have a long distance reflexive.

This (implicational) typological universal is not without exceptions (see Bresnan 2001 for a general discussion). For example, as Pan (1998) reports, the Chinese simply reflexive *ziji* and its more complex counterpart, *ta ziji*, both allow long distance uses under certain conditions. But more importantly, the correlation has not been tested systematically on languages that have the possessive-type complex reflexives.

Hungarian is one such language. The basic reflexive, *maga* ‘himself’, is a grammaticalized possessive construction with the by-now obscure etymology ‘his body’. Formally, it has the full possessive paradigm, contrast *mag-am* ‘myself’ with *mag-om*, seed-1SG.POSS ‘my seed’, etc. The distribution of *maga* is roughly similar to that of the English *himself*: it is a nuclear reflexive that may take a more prominent co-argument noun phrase as its antecedent.

There are no morphologically less complex reflexives in Hungarian, but there are four more complex ones. What they each share is that they are relatively *freer* than the basic reflexive *maga* ‘himself’: they may either take discourse antecedents, show logophoric properties, or take non-local antecedents. Hungarian therefore seems to represent a problem for Faltz’s (1985) typology, as the correlation between reflexive form and the size of binding domain seems to go in the opposite direction than predicted.

**2. AIMS AND CLAIMS** In this talk, I focus on the most frequent and, for our purposes, the most illustrative complex reflexive in Hungarian. *Önmaga* ‘himself’ is the compound of the basic reflexive *maga* ‘himself’ and the combining form *ön-* ‘self’. This combining form occurs with some productivity in complex nouns like *ön-gyilkosság* ‘self-killing, i.e. suicide’, *ön-ámítás* ‘self-deception’, etc.

By thoroughly examining the distributional and interpretative properties of *önmaga*, I make an attempt at explaining why Hungarian seemingly runs counter to Faltz’s typology. The key factor is that whereas the regular reflexive *maga* must be semantically bound by its antecedent, *önmaga* is a marked reflexive form in the sense that it can establish the weaker semantic relation of *coreference*. What morphological complexity brings about then in this case is a change in the semantic properties of the reflexive, and that change is primarily responsible for the fact that *önmaga* has a wider distribution than *maga*. The argumentation runs as follows.

(i) Making use of the typology of König and Gast (2006), I show that the *önmaga* is not an intensifier (contrary to what descriptive grammars of Hungarian claim). To render any of the universal intensifying functions, like in *I did it myself*, the basic reflexive *maga* has to be used, and *önmaga* is either deviant or unacceptable in these contexts. *Önmaga* is not a true logophor either (see Bresnan 2001 for a discussion of strict logophoricity).

(ii) The point that *önmaga* has a wider distribution than the nuclear reflexive *maga* is missed even in the generative literature on Hungarian. In particular, *önmaga* can function as a subject if it is no more prominent thematically than its antecedent (1a); it may take non-clausal antecedents (1b) - with intervening potential binders possibly showing blocking effects -; it may even take linguistically unexpressed discourse antecedents (not shown), and occupy true adjunct positions (not shown).

(1) a. *János-nak nagyon tetszik \*maga / önmaga.*  
John-DAT much appeals himself himself  
‘Himself appeals to John a lot.’

b. *János attól tart, hogy \*magá-nak /önmagá-nak lesz ez az ügy a legkínosabb.*  
John that.from afraid.is that himself-DAT himself-DAT will.be this case the most.embarrassing  
‘John is afraid that this case will be the most embarrassing for himself.’

It is important to stress that, unlike in the Norwegian case, this is not a difference between a nuclear (*seg selv*) and a nonnuclear (*seg*) reflexive, but between a reflexive that is only grammatical in nuclear contexts (*maga*) and a more complex one that is grammatical in nuclear and nonnuclear contexts alike (*önmaga*).

(iii) What makes *önmaga* especially interesting is that it patterns up with proper names in certain syntactic contexts. In particular, it can be modified, just like a name (2), and it can function as a predicate in identity statements (3).

- (2) a. *Nem ismertem a korábbi Péter-t.*  
not knew.1SG the former Peter-ACC  
'I didn't know the former Peter.'
- b. *Nem értek egyet a korábbi \*magam-mal / önmagam-mal.*  
disagree.1SG the former myself-with myself-with  
'I disagree with my former self.'
- (3) a. *Te Péter vagy.*  
you Peter are  
'You are Peter.'
- b. *Újra \*magam / önmagam vagyok.*  
again myself myself am  
'I am myself again.' [Both reflexives are ok on the idiomatic reading 'alone'.]

Proper names and *önmaga* also share further distinctive grammatical features which distinguish both from *maga*, like definite article use in possessive constructions (not shown). This, I argue, is not a simple coincidence.

(iv) Accordingly, I will present an LFG-theoretical analysis in which *önmaga*, unlike a true reflexive anaphor, is capable of participating in proper coreference relations, and it need not be subject to true semantic binding (cf. Reinhart 1983, Bresnan 2001, and Büring 2005, among others on this distinction). It cannot replace *maga* in every bound variable context, and in particular, it can license strict (coreference) and sloppy (bound variable) readings as well, cf., respectively, the (i) and (ii) glosses in (4).

- (4) a. *Csak én szavaztam önmagam-ra.*  
only I voted.1SG myself-for  
(i) 'Nobody else voted for me, I am the only person who voted for me.'  
(ii) 'Nobody else voted for himself, I am the only person who voted for himself.'
- b. *Csak én szavaztam magam-ra.*  
only I voted.1SG myself-for  
(i) \*'Nobody else voted for me, I am the only person who voted for me.'  
(ii) 'Nobody else voted for himself, I am the only person who voted for himself.'

More generally, *önmaga* is preferred over *maga* in contexts in which the mind is differentiated from the body, or in which the same individual is conceptualized as having two distinct *selves* of some sort (cf. (3b)), or in which an individual and its representation is distinguished (as in the Mme Tussaud context of Jackendoff 1991, not shown here).

To conclude, *önmaga* is preferred whenever a degree of conceptual differentiation is intended between the denotation of the antecedent and that of the reflexive, that is, whenever the true semantic binding reading would not suffice. What makes *önmaga* special is that its morphological complexity allows it to assume a richer semantics, and that results in a wider distribution than what is expected from a regular nuclear reflexive anaphor, which is what the less complex reflexive *maga* is. The distinction between coreference and true semantic binding has not received much emphasis in the glue-logic LFG accounts of anaphora (see Dalrymple 2001 for an overview). In this talk, I show that this distinction is vital in understanding the difference between the Hungarian *maga* and *önmaga*, for only the latter is specified lexically to license true coreferential readings.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bresnan, Joan.** 2001. *Lexical-Functional Syntax*. Oxford: Blackwell. • **Büring, Daniel.** 2005. *Binding Theory*. Cambridge: CUP. • **Dalrymple, Mary.** 1993. *The Syntax of Anaphoric Binding*. Stanford: Center for the Studies of Language and Information. • **Dalrymple, Mary.** *Lexical Functional Grammar*. San Diego: Academic Press. 2001. • **Faltz, Leonard.** 1985. *Reflexivisation: A study in universal syntax*. New York: Garland. • **König, Ekkehard & Gast, Volker** 2006. Focussed assertion of identity: a typology of intensifiers. *Linguistic Typology* 10. 223-276. • **Pan, Haihua.** 1998. Closeness, prominence, and binding theory. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 16. 771-815. • **Reinhart, Tanya** 1983. *Anaphora and semantic interpretation*. University of Chicago Press. • **Smith, Mark.** 2004. Light and heavy reflexives. *Linguistics* 42 (3). 573-615.