

**The Theses of the doctoral (PhD) dissertation**

**Types of Agreement in Finno-Ugrian Languages  
(Hungarian, Finnish, Estonian, Northern Sami)**

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## **Objectives of the dissertation**

Examining the similarities and differences of the types of agreement in the different language families and within the languages from the same language family has proved to be an interesting field of linguistics. To date, a lot of Hungarian and foreign linguists have published their results on the topic but a study comparing certain types of agreement in four Finno-Ugrian languages has not been published so far. The results of the comparison can contribute towards further research in the field of agreement.

My dissertation examines the types of agreement from a comparative point of view in four Finno-Ugrian languages (Hungarian, Finnish, Estonian and Northern Sami). The choice of these languages was not arbitrary. I have chosen these languages on the basis of my studies devoted to the four abovementioned languages. The original idea for my thesis covered agreement issues in Hungarian and Northern Sami to which I gradually added Finno-Baltic languages such as Finnish and Estonian.

The aim of my dissertation is to examine the internal agreement between the attribute and the head noun in the NP phrase and agreement between the subject and the predicate (NP – VP/Kop – NP/AP). The scope of the analysis is the sentence. The aim of the comparison is to display the observed similarities and differences between the languages under examination.

For that purpose I described and analysed the main types of agreement common to all four languages while I systematised the findings in a table. Hungarian is the base language of my research; the types of agreement found in it are compared with the agreement practice in three distant genetically related languages. Moreover, where necessary I gave examples from Indo-European languages (i.e. English) while at the end of the articles I show the agreement practice in a Slavonic language (*i.e.* Bulgarian).

Apart from the cited literature, I used newspaper articles and fiction while in some cases native speaker informants provided me with useful information. Where I could not find original sentences or where necessary, I had the original Hungarian sentences translated into the other three languages under examination with the help of native speakers.

## **Research methods**

During the examination, I applied traditional methods and terminology relating to Finno-Ugrian comparative linguistics.

At the outset of my dissertation, I outlined some of the theories and trends that have played a decisive role in modern agreement research. Many linguists have examined agreement as their field of interest resulting in a variety of theories and quite a number of published studies.

I would like to highlight two cornerstone studies that have influenced my research. One of them is Endre Rácz's monography („Agreement in Hungarian”), the other „Agreement” by Greville Corbett. Rácz's study helped me obtain a comprehensive picture of agreement phenomena.

Subsequently, Corbett's papers and his „Agreement hierarchy” helped my understanding of how agreement works and as a source of useful ideas.

### **Structure of the dissertation**

My dissertation consists of six units broadly falling into two bigger parts. In the first part I gave an overview of the history of research and an analysis of agreement phenomena.

Chapter 3 dedicated to grammatical *versus* semantic agreement explains the mechanisms of grammatical agreement with examples from Wechsler–Zlatić's theory based on their research in Serbo-Croat. I concentrated in particular on semantic agreement as different factors contribute towards agreement mismatch. The second part starts with chapter 4 which constitutes the essence of my dissertation.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 follow the same structure. Hungarian is always the base language followed by Finnish, Estonian and Sami. First I introduce agreement between the modifier and the head noun in NP phrases. I examine the behaviour of the modifiers in attributive constructions. In Chapter 5 which is the biggest chapter of all, I examine the cases of agreement in number between the subject and the verb in all four languages. The chapter is subdivided into two smaller chapters: the first one shows the agreement of the verb with one subject while the second deals with verb agreement with conjoined nouns. Chapter 6 deals with agreement in person between the subject and the verb.

Most of the empirical material in the dissertation is taken from grammars and publications relating to Finno-Ugrian languages. I gathered and systematised the examples. My second source is fiction and the language of quality newspapers. The cited examples originate from written sources, I referred to the spoken language only in the case of possessive constructions in Finnish.

For the interpretation and translation of some of the sentences, I relied on native speakers and informants: Sanna Lähde, Petteri Laihonen, Susanna Virtanen (Finnish lectors) as well as Kirli Ausmees and Kai Tiislär (Estonian lectors). Some of the Sami examples were provided by Ante Aikio, Marjatta Jomppanen and Kaarina Vuolab-Lohi.

In order to clarify some of the constructions, I used English and Bulgarian examples as well. For some types of agreement for which I could not find original sentences I had some of the

original Hungarian sentences translated into Finnish, Estonian, Sami. This enabled me to complete the analysis. All languages under examination are foreign to me and I used Bulgarian as a language of reference when discussing types of agreement.

### **Results of the dissertation**

I came across a great variety of definitions of agreement. I can comfortably state that there are as many definitions as approaches. In my view, Susan Steele provides the best definition of what constitutes the essence agreement phenomena: „The term 'agreement' commonly refers to some systematic co-variance between a semantic or formal property of one element and a formal property of another.”

On the basis of Steele's definition and of my research, the following working definition could be given: Agreement is the relationship between two elements determined by the fact that a constituent (controller) in the sentence affects morphosyntactically another constituent (target).

When we discuss subject –verb agreement we discuss it in terms of grammatical (syntactic) agreement, semantic agreement and agreement by proximity. We talk about subject-verb grammatical agreement where the verb agrees with the subject in number and person and *for* example: *Krisztián* [NomSg] *iskolába ment* [Vx3Sg]. 'Krisztián went to school' – *A diákok* [NomPl] *iskolába mentek*. 'The children went to school' | *A diák* [NomSg] *finn* [NomSg]. 'The student is Finnish' – *A diákok* [NomPl] *finnek* [NomPl]. 'The students are Finnish' The singularity is marked by  $\emptyset$  morpheme while the plurality is marked by the plural mark on both constituents. In all other cases in which there is no such 'mechanical' agreement, it means that there is grammatical incongruence. The relationship between the syntagmas is not grammatical but logical or semantic.

Semantic agreement means that the verb agrees not with the form of the controller (singular, plural) but with its meaning, e.g. *Az Egyesült Államok* [NomPl] *csatlakozott* [Vx3Sg] *a javaslatához*. 'The United States joined the agreement.' In fact, semantic agreement affects the number of the verb.

We may conclude that it is semantic agreement that makes agreement phenomena an interesting and challenging area of research because it is an area in which languages differ mostly. A dilemma arises when in a subject phrase one phrase is singular and the other is plural. This is resolved by recourse to the principle of 'proximity', *i.e.* whichever phrase comes last determines the number of the verb. The principle of proximity concerns not only

agreement in number but also agreement in person as well, e.g. *nemcsak én, hanem te is nyertél.* 'not only I but you too have won.'

The principle of proximity can be found in all languages under examination as well as in Indo-European languages. In Finnish, a special type of agreement exists though linguists are not unanimous about whether it is agreement or some kind of government. In my view, this type of agreement could be explained on the basis of certain cognitive principles. *Poika* [common noun] *on laiha* [NomSg]. 'The boy is weak.' – *Kahvi* [material] *on laihaa* [PartSg]. 'The coffee is weak.'

In the Nom – Part opposition, Finns indicate that the subject complement is uncountable while [PartSg] indicates countable and indefinite subject complement. The difference is observed in plural nouns as well.

### **NP agreement (attributive constructions)**

In Finno-Ugrian languages, the modifier is usually placed in front of the modified word (head noun). The different types of determiners behave in a different way. In this respect, it is important to mention agreement or lack of agreement in cases of adjective modifiers and numerals. (*finn lányoknak* - *fi. suomalaisille tytöille* 'to the Finnish girls' In a separate group, we can place the demonstrative pronominal attribute constructions (*ez a ház – ebben a házban*, *lp. dát dállu – dán dálus*, 'this house- in this house'). The combination of demonstrative pronominal and numerical attributes form a separate subgroup (*ez a két ház*, *fi. nämä kaksi taloa*, 'these two houses').

The possessive attribute (*a lány lakása – az én lakásom*, *fi. tytön asunto, minun asunto* ~ *mun asunto*, 'the girl's flat-my flat') and the appositive complement constitute a separate group. (*azt a lányt, a legszebbet*, *fi. tuon tytön kauneimman*, 'that girl, the most beautiful one'). Apposition complements are preceded by their heads. Their function is similar to that of nouns and inflect as nouns. The constructions of qualifiers and numerical attributes show significant differences in the related languages under examination. There are uninflected adjectives in all of these languages: it is common in Hungarian, rare in Finnish and Estonian, while in Sami it can be seen as an „in-between” Hungarian and Baltic Finnish because most of the adjectives appear unchanged in attributive constructions. In Bulgarian, the adjectives agree with the head word in number and person.

There is full congruence (Hungarian, Baltic Finnish), or a semi-congruence (Lapp) (partial agreement) between the demonstrative pronominal attribute and the head noun. In Bulgarian

the demonstrative behaves as a typical adjective and agrees in number and gender with the head word.

The numeral attribute probably shows the greatest diversity in the languages examined: it is uninflected in Hungarian, the nominative and the accusative cases correspond in Finnish and Estonian while the partitive and the genitive are different from the former two grammatical cases. The agreement practice in Sami is similar to that in (Baltic) Finnish although there is no partitive in Sami, the genitive used in numeral attributive constructions bear great resemblance to the partitive in Finnish. In my opinion, this is an areal phenomenon (I would like to point out that in Russian numerical attributes are used in the genitive as well). This supposition is also borne out by the relation between the interrogative pronominal attribute and the head noun. The most archaic type prevalent in all these languages is the unmarked attributive characteristic of all related languages. The agreement of the pronominal attribute found in cases of demonstrative, interrogative/relative and personal pronominal attributes, proves that this type of agreement is also ancient in origin.

The relationship between the possessed and the possessor is always marked. In Finnish, Estonian and Sami, this relation is expressed by the genitive, the possessed noun is unmarked and in the nominative: fi. *Pekka talo*, et. *minu raama*, f. 'Pekka's house', en. 'my book'. It is an interesting fact that in Hungarian in the possessive construction, the possessive suffix appears in the possessed word: *Pekka háza*, the possessor is unmarked and the possessive suffix Px3Sg is added to the possessed word. Possessive suffixes (e.g. hu. *könyvem*, fi. *kirjani* 'my book') have gradually lost their importance in possessive pronoun constructions, e.g. possessive suffixes have disappeared in Estonian (*minu raamat*), Finnish is facing changes in possessive marking. Whereas the possessive suffixes strictly belong to standard written Finnish, modern colloquial Finnish does not use them, some varieties almost totally ignoring them (*mun kirja*, 'my book'). At present the use of possessive suffixes mainly occur after case endings fi. *kirjassani*, 'in my book', lp. *goađistan* 'in my tent')

### **Subject-verb (predicate constructions) number agreement**

The biggest part of my dissertation is devoted to subject-verb number agreement.

The head noun governs the agreement between the subject and the adjective. The use of singular or plural verbs, the choice between grammatical or semantic agreement is decided on by the number, the nature and the semantics of the head word. The rules governing grammatical agreement are universal to all languages, including Indo-European and Finno-Ugrian. Most languages differ as regards semantic agreement.

In fact, semantic agreement primarily affects the number. What is considered semantic agreement is in fact grammatical incongruence. We can argue that it is semantic agreement that makes languages interesting and in this area most languages are different. The following constituents are associated with semantic agreement: coordination, comitative phrases, quantifier phrases, numerals, collective nominals, plurale tantum. Plurale tantum nouns are language-specific and every language operates within its own system.

In numerical constructions, the Hungarian language consistently uses the singular while in Finnish and in Estonian, semantic factors as well as word order influence the choice between singular and plural: *Számtalan út vezet [Vx3Sg] a sikerhez.* 'Numerous roads lead to success.' In Sami the dual makes the situation even more complicated as in numerical phrases plural verbs are customarily used, the dual appearing only in limited cases lp. *guok'te [NomSg] ol'bmu bōttik [Vx3Pl]* 'két ember jön'. The variation of singular and plural use depends on the nature of the subject, whether animate or inanimate.

In *habeo* constructions, the meaning of the verb is 'have, own something' (*a lánynak van lakása, nincs pénzem, fi. tytöllä on asunto, minulla ei ole rahaa, lp. nieiddas lea dállu, mus eai leat ruhta, the girl has a flat, I have no money*'). In *habeo* possessive constructions in Finnic languages and in Sami, the word expressing possession is usually unmarked. In Finnish and in Estonian only the 3rd person of the verb 'to be' is used: fi. *minulla oli hyviä koiria* 'I had good dogs'. On the other hand, in Sami the verb 'to be' agrees with the number of the possessor: *mus leat buorit beatnagat,* 'I had good dogs'.

I also discussed predicative possessive constructions. In such constructions, the use of the genitive is common: fi. *kota on sedän* 'a sátor a nagybácsié', 'the tent belongs to my uncle', *kirja on minun/mun* 'a könyv az enyém', 'the book is mine' lp. *goahti lea čeazi* 'a sátor a nagybácsié', *girji lea mu* 'a könyv az enyém'). Overall in Hungarian, a non-attributive possessive suffix/genitive: *-é* is found: *a könyv a tanáré*, which to a great extent agrees with the possessive word (*a könyvek a tanáréi*, the books belong to the teachers). This rule is particularly valid for the possessive pronouns: *A kutya a tied. – A kutyák a tieid.* 'The book is yours-The books are yours'

Where there is a choice of agreement, this is usually made possible by the controller. There are certain controller types that regularly permit agreement choice. The choices arise from a mismatch of semantic and formal properties of the controller. In case of a nominal with a comitative complement, two agreement choices are found. From a formal point of view, a subject like that is singular although semantically it is plural (occasionally dual). This explains variations in agreement. In constructions with a singular noun and comitative,

Hungarian prefers the use of a singular. If the subject is implicit, then a plural verb is possible. In the languages under examination, the verb is in the singular and in the plural. *A lányommal utaztam ~ utaztunk.* 'I travelled with my daughter.' In Sami due to the dual, a special agreement practice is the norm.

A controller consisting of conjoined noun phrases may also give rise to an agreement option. It may allow agreement with both conjuncts or all of the conjuncts and it may allow agreement with just one of the conjuncts. It can be concluded that the examined languages show a big variety and in certain cases, there is variation between singular and plural. In cases of agreement with two or more singular conjuncts, most Hungarian sentences take a singular verb. This practice is even more conspicuous where there is a contrasting or disjunctive conjunction between subjects.

In a numerically-modified noun phrase denoting two or more entities, the verb in Hungarian is in the singular. In Finnish, the verb can be either singular or plural while in Estonian it is usually plural. In Sami, the number of the verb depends on the animate-inanimate nature of the subject.

In case of a conjoint noun phrase where the conjuncts are in the plural and in the singular, the verb in Hungarian agrees with the nearest noun. In other languages and despite the word order, plural use of the verb is the rule: et. *Õpilased [NomPl], õpetaja [NomSg] ja direktor [NomSg] osalesid [Vx3Pl] pidustustel.* 'Részt vettek [Vx3Pl] az ünnepségén a diákok [NomPl], a tanár [NomSg] és az igazgató [NomSg].'' The students, the teacher and the director took part in the celebration.'

Returning now to a single noun head with coordinated modifiers, we notice that in Hungarian the verb is in the singular while research shows that in the other languages, the verb is usually plural: hu. *A bolgár és a magyar kormány [NomSg] közös egyezményt írt alá [Vx3Sg],* 'The Bulgarian and the Hungarian government signed a joined agreement.' fi. *Lämmin ja kylmä sää ovat [Vx3Pl] vuorotelleet.* 'Warm and cold weather alternate'

### **Subject-Verb personal agreement**

In the case of coordinated subjects different in person, the predicate is in the plural while the person of the predicate is always determined by the person associated with the lowest number, i.e. the 1<sup>st</sup> person is the most powerful, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person is the least powerful: *Te és Dennica moziba mentetek.* 'You and Dennica went to the cinema.' An exception to this rule occurs where there is a contrasting or disjunctive conjunction between the subjects. In accordance with the principle of proximity, the last noun phrase determines the person of the verb.



In Hungarian, polite address 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular and plural verb forms are used depending on the number of people addressed. (*Mit csinál, uram?* 'What are you doing, Sir?' *Mit csinálnak, uraim?* 'What are you doing, Sirs?') In Finnish, Estonian and Bulgarian the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural is used for expressing politeness. *Mitä te piditte elokuvista?* The verbal predicate is always expressed in the plural and agrees with the subject's grammatical number while the nominal predicate (adjective, noun, participle) tends to show variety in agreement. In Sami there are no polite verbal forms.

Relative pronominal subjects generally require 3<sup>rd</sup> person predicates. However, if the relative clause refers to 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person personal pronouns or terms of address, the predicate agrees with the appropriate person. Furthermore, the predicate in the relative clause agrees with the relative pronominal subject in two ways: it can be either in 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular or in the plural. (*Te voltál az, aki megcsaltál ~ megcsalt!* 'You were who cheated on me'). From these examples, we can see that in Finnish, Estonian, Sami and Bulgarian, this type of agreement shows similarities while Hungarian points towards different alternatives.

## Summary

In the course of my research I made use of the following 'agreement' definition: the relationship between two elements is determined by the fact that a constituent (controller) in the sentence affects morphosyntactically another constituent (target). According to the definition in predicative constructions the formal or semantic features of the controller decide on the morphosyntactical properties of the subject complement.

1. In the course of my research I also made a distinction between formal (grammatical), semantic and last but not least agreement by proximity ('the principle of proximity')
2. The singular is more commonly used in Hungarian than in the other languages under examination where either fluctuation is noticed between singular and plural or in compliance with the rules in Indo-European languages rather semantic agreement dominates
3. Possession can be expressed in four ways: a) by possessive structures where the possessed is preceded by a genitive attribute, b) by possessive suffixes (*könyvem* 'my book', *könyveim* 'your books' stb.), c) by the *habeo*-construction (*van/nincs valamije* 'have /have not smth'), d) predicative possession constructions (*valami valakié* ', .....is somebody's).

In Hungarian, there is no primary genitive/possessive suffix, instead the nominative is used. The possession is expressed by a possessive suffix on the possessed word: *a tanár könyve/könyvei* – *a tanárok könyve/könyvei* 'the teacher's book/ books-the teachers' book/books' (and not: *\*a tanárok könyvük/könyveik!*). It is always the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular

possessive suffix that is added to the word denoting the thing possessed. Although the possessor is in the plural, the word denoting the possession has a singular suffix, only personal pronouns in the genitive requiring concord: *az ő könyve* his book-*az ő könyvük* their book. In Finnish there is the genitive but unlike Hungarian no possessive suffix is used on the possessed word (e.g. *opettajan/opettajien \*kirjansa*). Possessive suffixes are gradually disappearing. Modern colloquial Finnish does not use them, possessive suffixes have disappeared in Estonian. However, it is mainly in Saami that they have lost their significance. Personal pronouns in the uninflected genitive (ie nominative) case can also function as premodifying genitives which are followed by the head noun containing a possessive suffix. (*az én*) *könyvem/könyveim*, fi. *minun kirjani* 'my book'. The head always contains the appropriate possessive suffix. But in most cases the premodifying genitive is omitted. fi. *mun kirja/kirjat*, lp. *mu girji/girjjit*, et. *minu raamat/raamatud* 'my book/books'.

Hungarian lacks the equivalent of the verb *habeo*, which is commonly used in the Indoeuropean languages. Possession is expressed by the existential verb 'to be' and in this respect, the examined languages show similarity. (*van/nak, nincs/enek*). In Hungarian in addition to the existential verb, the appropriate suffix must be attached to the word denoting possession. There are no possessive suffixes in Finnish or Estonian while the existential verb is used only in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular: *tytöllä on vaaleat hiukset* 'the girl has fair hair' (and not: *\*ovat*'have') There is no possessive suffix in Sami either but as in Hungarian, the existential verb agrees in number with the subject: : *mus lea buorre beana – mus leat buorit beatnagat.* 'I have a good dog-I have good dogs.'

Only in Hungarian do we find a non-attributive possessive suffix /genitive-é: *a szótár a tied – a szótárák a tieid*, 'the dictionary is yours-the dictionaries are yours' *a sapka a diáké – a sapkák a diáké(i)* 'the cap is the boy's-the caps are the boys'. The non-attributive genitive suffix usually agrees with possession in number. The non-attributive genitive suffix is not to be confused with possessive suffixes, the latter being added to the word denoting the thing possessed and indicating the person and the number of the possessor. In the rest of the examined languages in predicative possessive constructions the genitive is used: fi. *kirja on opettajan/opettajien, kirjat ovat opettajan/opettajien.* 'the book is teacher's- the book is teachers'.

4. The types of agreement and their direction (progressive/aligned to the right-regressive/aligned to the left) diachronically is related to the word order rules. In Finno-Ugrian languages the reconstructed word order is: S–O–V. In Western Finno-Ugrian languages it has changed into S–V–O. In predicative constructions the subject is followed by

the verb. It is logical to conclude that the subject (the head) governs the verb and the number and person of the verb are determined by the nature and semantics of the subject. The basic criterium for agreement is that a constituent (in this case the semantics of the noun) affects morphosyntactically another constituent (target).

In my dissertation, I do not cover the object constructions. According to the basic word order rules the accusative-partitive opposition found in objective constructions could be regarded as a case of agreement. In Hungarian, the indefinite or definite object is expressed by the indefinite or definite conjugation of the verb which shows the aspect of the verb: *tv-híradót nézek – a tv-híradót nézem.* 'I am watching the news-I have watched the news.'

The unmarked attribute in attributive constructions proves to be an interesting phenomenon. In languages where the attribute follows the head word agreement marks the relation between them. In such languages (e.g. Latin, Russian), the adjective attribute agrees with the head word, for example Latin: *panem nostrum quotidianum [AccSg] da nobis hodie, et dimitte nobis debita nostra [AccPl] ... (Pater noster)*

In Finno-Ugrian languages, the attribute is followed by the head noun and the lack of agreement is explained by the tight bond between the constituents. Agreement in the Baltic-Finno languages is considered secondary. The demonstrative pronouns agree with the head word (full agreement in Hungarian and partial in Sami). The agreement there is explained by the fact that the inflected form of the demonstrative pronoun has been attached post factum to the attributive construction: *Ott lakom abban, ti. az erdőben.* 'I live in that (forest)' *Odamegyek a mögé, ti. a ház mögé.* 'I go behind (the house)'

5. Although I have examined genetically-related languages and that I expected great similarities, it is quite interesting to notice that there are remarkable differences related to agreement. It is true that Hungarian has its own specific ways of dealing with agreement and is quite different from the rest of the languages but even related languages such as Finnish and Estonian show differences in certain aspects.

6.. The results of the dissertation could be used as a starting-point in contrastive and typology research as well as in foreign language teaching for foreign students. The present dissertation could also serve as an useful teaching material for Bulgarian native speakers engaged in Hungarian or Scandinavian Studies at University. The examples found in the paper could be used in translation practice as most of the Hungarian sentences are translated into Finnish, Estonian and Sami.

## **Publications related to the topic of the dissertation**

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- Peneva, Dennica 2007: Egyeztetési típusok a magyarban, a finnben, az észtben és a lappban III. (Értelmező jelzős és predikatív szerkezetek) *Folia Uralica Debreceniensia* 14. Debrecen, 87–101.
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## **Reviews**

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- Riho Grünthal: Finnic adpositions and cases in change. *Folia Uralica Debreceniensia* 11. Debrecen 2004. 167–170
- L'udmila Gromova: Aiga lugie i paissa karielakši. *Folia Uralica Debreceniensia* 12. Debrecen 2005. 150–151.
- M.M.Jocelyne –Vest (ed.): Les langues ouraliennes aujourd'hui. *Folia Uralica Debreceniensia* 12. Debrecen 2005. 133–137.