

Pronouns and pronominal meanings

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In his grammatical studies, Professor László Hadrovics always considered meaning and/or function to be a central issue. He discussed changes of word meanings, including semantic depletion and semantic saturation, at several points in his *Historical Semantics of Hungarian*. With respect to semantic changes of nouns, he also mentioned cases where a noun becomes a pronoun or part of a pronoun (Hadrovics 1992: 222–223); in particular, the fact that “the more numerous connections a word establishes with other words, the wider its meaning becomes and the more blurred its outlines will be. Thus, a word of very wide meaning may finally become totally empty, it may mean virtually everything, and hence it will have no semantic content at all” (Hadrovics 1992: 65). This is how, according to TESz, the reflexive pronoun *maga* ‘himself/herself/itself’ may have come to exist (< *mag* ‘seed’ + 3sg possessive suffix); also, this is how the noun *csoda* ‘miracle’ may have turned into a pronominal constituent: its meaning became blurred and it joined interrogative pronouns as an emphatic element, as in *kicsoda* ‘who (on earth)’, *micsoda* ‘what (on earth)’. A similar role was formerly played by a number of other words like *ördög* ‘devil’, *manó* ‘imp’, *fene* ‘blazes’, *patvar* ‘quarrel’, *nyavalya* ‘malady’, *rosseb* ‘pox’, *franc* ‘the heck’, etc. Indeed, in historical documents, we find expressions like *mi ordog ez ky reank io?* ‘**What devil** is this coming against us?’ (SándK. 25), *Mi patvart iarnal te ott?* ‘**What on earth** would you be doing there?’ (Heltai 81v–82r). The difference is that in *kicsoda*, *micsoda*, the constituent *csoda* has become a regular compound member, whereas in the other cases (including cases involving *csoda* ‘miracle’ itself) a definite article came to be inserted between the pronoun and the noun: *Mi a csoda van veled?* ‘**What the blazes** happened to you?’, *Ki a fenét érdekel ez?* ‘**Who the hell** cares?’ (Hadrovics 1992: 223–224).

The opposite case also occurs: a pronoun, especially a general or indefinite pronoun may be saturated by concrete notional content. A good example is the compound pronoun *holmi* ‘where + what’. It occurs in its original pronominal meaning in e.g. *Holmi ócskaságokért nem kívánok pénzt adni* ‘I don’t want to pay for **sort of junk**’; in a nominal meaning in e.g. *Ezeket a holmikat nem viszem magammal* ‘I won’t take **these duds** with me’.

Hadrovics discussed the nominalization of the following indefinite and general pronouns: *valaki* ‘somebody’, *valami* ‘something’, *akárki* ‘anybody’, *akármi* ‘anything’, *senki* ‘nobody’, *semmi* ‘nothing’.

For instance, *valaki* has assumed the meaning ‘an important person’, as in *Azt hiszi, hogy ő már valaki* ‘He thinks he is **somebody** [important]’. Also, *valaki* may refer to being involved in a love affair: *Péternek van valakije* ‘Peter has got **someone**’ (cf. Hadrovics 1992: 274–275).

The case of *akárki* is also interesting. If a task can be completed by *akárki* ‘anyone’, it cannot be particularly difficult. In a negative sentence, the meaning of *akárki* is even more concrete: *Ő nem akárki* ‘He’s not just any Tom, Dick, or Harry’ (Hadrovics 1992: 275). *Akármi* and *semmi* can be nominalized in a similar manner. *Semmi* is generally used in a nominal role as in *Ez nem semmi* ‘This is great [lit. “not nothing”]’, but it also occurs as a scientific term.

Another general (adverbial) pronoun that can be saturated by notional meaning is *sehogyse* ‘in no way, by no means’, as in *Sehogyse érzem magam* ‘I feel shaky’ (Hadrovics 1992: 275).

In what follows, I will raise a few new issues in Hadrovics’ wake, primarily with respect to indefinite and general pronouns.

It is widely known (as Hadrovics 1992: 223 also mentions) that *ember* ‘human being’ can play the role of a general subject in sentences like *Néha az ember nem tudhatja, hogy jól döntött-e*. ‘Sometimes **one** does not know if one has decided in the right way’. In this connection, Hadrovics only speaks of the depletion of *ember* – but he does not draw any conclusion with respect to its part-of-speech affiliation.

In order to be able to draw a realistic conclusion in that respect, it is advisable to see what the European literature has got to say about pronouns in general: where pronouns are placed in the system of parts of speech and what set of words are identified as pronouns. Some authors (Helbig & Buscha 1977: 22–23; Flämig 1977: 39–52; Heidolph et al. 1981: 496; Kenesei 2000: 111, among others) do not consider pronouns as constituting an independent word class at all; others restrict the concept of pronouns to nominal pronouns (Quirk & Greenbaum 1977, Grevisse 1986), whereas other relevant items are lumped together with adjectives, numerals, and adverbs, respectively; yet other authors, on the other hand, augment the set of (usual types of) pronouns to additionally include certain semantically depleted items like *csinál* ‘make’, *tesz* ‘do’, *izé* ‘doodad’, *dolog* ‘thing’, *ember* ‘man’, *világ* ‘world’, *egy* ‘one’, *most* ‘now’, *ma* ‘today’ as (primarily general or indefinite) pronouns (Helbig 1977: 103–105; Heidolph et al. 1981: 496, 632–635; Hentschel & Weydt 1990: 229). The question then arises as follows. Whenever the word *ember* plays the role of general subject, as in *Az ember nem tudhatja, hogy...* ‘**One** does not know if...’, is it to be classified

as a general/indefinite pronoun? The pronominal function of *ember* is furthermore supported by the fact that it can have a general meaning not only as a subject but also as a direct object or as some other case-marked constituent, for instance: Az **embert** *bántja, ha így bánnak vele* ‘**One** [accusative] is affronted if treated like this’; *Ilyen körülmények között az embernek elmegy a kedve mindentől* ‘In such circumstances, **one** [dative] loses interest in everything’; *Könnyen megtörténhet az emberrel, hogy elfelejt valamit* ‘It may easily happen to **one** [instrumental] that one forgets something’. The examples prove that *ember* in these sentences is not simply a noun – rather, it is a depleted noun in a pronominal role or, in my view, a general pronoun. There are also cases in which *ember* can be either a general or a personal pronoun, e.g., *Roszzal esik, ha az emberrel udvariatlanul bánnak* ‘It is distressing if **one** is treated impolitely’ (i.e., if I am/we are/everyone is treated impolitely); *Az ember sokszor meggondolja, hogy mondjon valamit* ‘**One** often thinks twice before saying anything’ (i.e., I/we often think twice or everybody often thinks twice).

Another interesting point is the connection between indefinite/general pronominal meaning and reduplication. By reduplication, the literature usually means the repetition of a phoneme, a root, or a lexeme, either partially or in full.

In full reduplication, the phonological material of the whole morpheme or word is repeated; e.g., Japanese *yama* ‘hill’, *yama-yama* ‘hills’ (Fodor 1999c: 1671), Warlpiri (Australia) *kurdu* ‘child’, *kurdu-kurdu* ‘children’ (Marantz 1994: 3486).

In partial reduplication, part of the phonological material of a word form appears as a reduplicant. Partial reduplication may be initial, medial, or final. Examples of word initial reduplication: Gothic *haitan* ‘to name’, *haihait* ‘named’ (Hutterer 1975: 140); Agta (Polynesia) *takki* ‘foot’, *tak-takki* ‘feet’; *bari* ‘body’, *bar-bari kid-in* ‘my whole body’ (Marantz *op.cit.* 3486). Examples of word final reduplication: Hausa (Sudan) *cika* ‘fill’, *cikakke* ‘fill up’; *jefa* ‘throw’, *jefaffe* ‘throw away’ (Lindström 1995: 5). Examples of word internal reduplication: Hausa *littafi* ‘book’, *littatafi* ‘books’ (Fodor 1999b: 499).

Certain cases of reduplication are typologically characteristic of a given language, whereas others are non-automatic/irregular, appearing sporadically or occasionally in the language concerned.

Some authors claim that Proto-Indo-European may have been characterised by partial reduplication (and some Indo-European languages still are, cf. Hutterer 1999: 454; Conrad 1988: 194–5), whereas other languages (e.g., some African languages, Chinese, Japanese, Malay-Polynesian, American, Australian, etc. languages) tend to exhibit full reduplication (cf. Szerebrennyikov 1986: 13; Fodor 1999c: 1671).

Reduplication is usually attributed the following functions: plural marking; past, perfective or imperfective marking; comparative/superlative marking; intensity, aspect, or distributive marking; and reduplication may also have a role in word formation, especially in that of onomatopoeic items, interjections, items of child language, and hypocoristics.

Reduplication is found in Hungarian, too; this language has both full and partial reduplication. Its functions include (on the basis of the general functions listed above):

1. Aspect, especially iterative, frequentative, or habitual aspect, is marked by repeated preverbs: *át-átnéz* ‘look across repeatedly’, *be-benéz* ‘drop in repeatedly’, *fel-felsóhajt* ‘sigh repeatedly’, *hátra-hátranéz* ‘look behind one repeatedly’, *ki-kimarad* ‘stay away repeatedly’, *oda-odamond* ‘snap at somebody repeatedly’, *vissza-visszanéz* ‘look back repeatedly’, etc. This type of reduplication is productive (though not exceptionless), and is a characteristic feature of Hungarian.

2. Regular and automatic reduplication can also be found with numerals to express distributivity: *két-két ember ment be* ‘two persons went in **at a time**’, *három-három könyvet adtak a tanulóknak* ‘the pupils were given **three** books **each**’. The reduplicative form can often be replaced by a suffixed numeral as in *kettenként / kettesével mentek be* ‘they went in **two by two**’, *hármanként / hármásával adták a könyveket a tanulóknak* ‘the pupils were given books **three by three**’.

Both of the above cases are instances of grammatical reduplication. This is a form of reduplication that is basically a process of derivation or inflection.

3. Reduplication also has a role in word formation in this language, cf. *nana* ‘well, not so fast!’, *kuc-kuc* [child-language reply to coughing], *csip-csip* [onomatopoeic item of chirping], *papa* ‘Daddy’, *bibi* ‘wound [child language item]’, *Fifi*, *Lala* [nicknames], etc.

4. As the present author has pointed out elsewhere (Keszler 2001: 644), reduplication can also express indefiniteness or generality, as in *egy* ‘one’ vs. *egy-egy* ‘some’ or ‘each one separately’; *egyszer* ‘once’ (also in the sense ‘once upon a time’) vs. *egyszer-egyszer* ‘sometimes, occasionally’; *ki* ‘some person’ (as in *ki ezt mondja, ki azt mondja* ‘some say this, some say that’) vs. *ki-ki* ‘everybody’ (as in *ki-ki jól járt* ‘each of them was lucky (in different ways)’). Laczkó (2006: 71) comes to the same conclusion with respect to the concessive general pronoun *ki-ki* (as in *ki-ki megtalálhatja a párját* ‘anyone may find a partner’). The suffixed demonstrative pronoun *olykor* ‘sometimes’ expresses indeterminacy in itself; *olykor-olykor* accordingly means ‘very rarely’.

In addition to the three clear cases of full reduplication, similar phenomena can also be found with partial reduplication: *boldog-boldogtalan* ‘everybody, all and sundry (lit. happy

ones and unhappy ones)', *úton-útfélen* 'everywhere, at every step (lit. on the road and beside the road)'.

If echo words are also taken to be cases of partial reduplication (and I see no reason why they should not be), the number of relevant examples increases. In such cases, it is just one of the components that refers to generality: *giz-gaz* 'all sorts of mixed weedage', *gyim-gyom*, 'all sorts of parasitic weed', *retyerutya* 'the whole caboodle', *ringy-rongy* 'rags and tatters'. There are also similar dialect words: *dibbel-dábbal* 'with everything' (ÚMTsz.), *indefunde* 'by all means' (ÚMTsz.), *kelekuláz* 'ramble on pointlessly' (MTsz.), *retye-putya* 'kith and kin' (MTsz.), *ilmiholmi* 'odds and ends' (ÚMTsz.). (Dialect data are cited here from Szikszainé Nagy 1993.)

If final reduplication is taken to include paired forms with the same suffix, certain reduplicated verbs and adverbs are also relevant here.

However, general/indefinite meaning can also be traced back to other factors here. It is often the case that compounds are formed by pairs/sets of words of opposite meanings and the meaning of the components adds up in some indefinite meaning or one that applies to all members of a set, e.g., *csapot-papot otthagyt* 'he left everything (lit. tap and priest) behind', *egyszer-másszor* 'sometimes (lit. in one case and in another case)', *itt-ott* 'here and there', *jobbról-balról* 'from both sides (right and left)', *lépten-nyomon* 'at every step', *ország-világ előtt* 'for all the world (lit. country and world) to see', *széltében-hosszában* 'through the length and breadth of it', *szőröstül-bőröstül* 'lock, stock, and barrel; hide and hair', *úton-módon* 'one way or another'. In the following examples, it is just part of the meaning of the expression that is indefinite/general: *egyben-másban* 'in some respects', *hellyel-közzel* 'very rarely', *árkon-bokron (túl)* '(over) hedge and ditch', *hébe-hóba* 'very rarely', *hetet-havat (ígér)* '(promise) the moon and stars', *jóban-rosszban* 'through thick and thin', *tücsköt-bogarat (összehord)* 'talk rubbish (lit. cricket and beetle)', *tűzzel-vassal* '(put to) fire and sword'.

It is an open issue whether the general or indefinite meanings described here change the part-of-speech affiliation of the words concerned and whether some of these items (e.g., *egy-egy* 'one each, one at a time', *egyszer-egyszer* 'occasionally', *egyszer-másszor* 'sometimes') have indeed become pronouns (or something very similar); in fact, in defining pronouns as a class, the main criteria are usually formal ones (though not with full consistency, cf. *néhol* 'in some places', an adverbial pronoun, vs. *néha* 'sometimes', an adverb – according to the received classification).

The study of the role of reduplication in giving an item general/indefinite meaning and in changing part-of-speech affiliation, as well as the definition and definitive listing of pronouns, obviously require further efforts. The present paper only wished to represent a modest contribution.

Sources

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