The spurious NP ellipsis of Hungarian

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Aims and claims: NP ellipsis is generally taken to be deletion of the phonological features of the noun and possibly some of its satellites. The process does not affect the order of the non-elided NP-satellites, as expected. This talk presents an interesting apparent counterexample to the above generalization from Hungarian. Dékány and Csirmaz (2010) observe that a) Hungarian has optional classifiers and b) low adjectives such as color an nationality (cf. Cinque 1994, Scott 2002) follow the classifier, while high adjectives such as size precede the classifier (1). In ellipsis with an overt classifier, however, all types of adjectives must precede the classifier (2).

(1) két nagy (*piros) szem (*nagy) piros rizs
two big red CL big red rice
two big red grains of rice

(2) két nagy piros szem (*nagy/*piros)
two big red CL big/ red
two big red ones (eg. grains of rice)

This phenomenon, which I term spurious NP ellipsis, has not been discussed in the literature so far. This talk proposes that the spurious NP ellipsis is not genuine ellipsis, after all.

Against a focus-movement analysis: NP ellipsis has been argued to be licensed by focus (Corver and van Koppen 2009, Ntelitheos 2004). A plausible working hypothesis is that the classifier is in the same position in (2) and (1), with the low adjective moving around the classifier of spec, FocP. A DP-internal low focus position (below Num) has been utilized in Scott (2002), Truswell (2004), and Svenonius (2008) to analyze marked adjective orders such as *three BLACK big (~~black~~) cars*. However, on the basis of phonological, semantic and syntactic evidence, I argue that (2) does not involve focus movement of the adjective. Unlike in *three BLACK big cars*, the adjective does not have to be phonologically stressed and does not have a contrastive interpretation. If (2) is licensed by focus movement of an adjective, then a high adjective originating above the classifier, eg. *big*, should also be able to move to spec, FocP, and this should be enough to license ellipsis. In this case a low adjective is predicted to occur in its default position, following the classifier. This is contrary to fact.

(3) két $[_{FocP}$ NAGY $[_{AdjP}$ ~~NAGY~~ $[_{CLP}$ szem $[_{AdjP}$ piros]]]
two big CL red
two big red ones

Background assumptions and theoretical framework: As for the functional sequence of extended noun phrases, I follow Borer's (2005) decomposition of the DP: D > Num (her #) > Cl (her Div) > N. Bare nouns have a mass (or "stuff") denotation. This mass needs to be divided before it can interact with a counting system (numerals and quantifiers). Classifiers as well as the plural perform the division of mass and sit in Cl.

As for the theory of Lexicaliczation and Spell Out, I use Ramchand's (2008) "Spanning" theory. In this system every lexical item is specified for one or possibly more category feature(s). Lexical items project all the category labels they have. This in turn means that lexical items with more than one category label are associated to (or spell out) more than one syntactic head, they "Span" the heads in question. That is, lexical insertion is not restricted to terminal nodes. Spell Out is constrained by Underassociation. Underassociation allows a lexical item to spell out only a subset of the features it is specified for. Thus a lexical item specified for features [A, B] may spell out both A and B or only A or only B. Features that a lexical item is specified for but does not spell out in a given structure are "Underassociated".

Proposal: I propose that Hungarian classifiers are specified for both the N and the Cl features. I further propose that in the spurious NP ellipsis classifiers Underassociate their CL feature: they spell out only the N feature and hence appear in the regular noun position. Thus in (2) and (1), the adjective *red* sits in the same position, while *szem* does not. Note that this result is obtained without positing a lowering operation on the classifier.

Deriving the properties of the construction: The proposal amounts to saying that the spurious NP ellipsis does not involve ellipsis, it rather involves a classifier in the position of the noun. As a result, no focus-related stress or contrast is predicted on any of the constituents of (2), which is a welcome result. The unusual position of the classifier, below the low adjectives, falls out automatically because the classifier is inserted into the N node, below any functional material in the DP.

The definite article does not allow overt classifiers to appear in the DP (5), but this condition is relaxed in the spurious NP ellipsis construction (6). This property follows from the analysis because the classifier does not spell out the Cl feature and in effect, does not have the classifier function. It thus falls outside of the classifer-blocking effect of the article.

(4)	a saláta	(5)	*a fej saláta	(6)	a zöld fej
	the lettuce		*the CL lettuce*		*the green CL*
	the lettuce		the head of lettuce		the greed one (eg. lettuce)

Finally, it is also explained why the plural can co-occur with classifiers only in the spurious NP ellipsis. It is a robust cross-linguistic generalization that the plural is in complementary distribution with classifiers, as in (7)-(9) (c.f. Sanches and Slobin 1973, Tsou 1976, Borer 2005). Borer's (2005) explanation of this generalization is that both the classifier and the plural are specified for the feature Cl, so in garden variety DPs they compete for the same (Cl) position. Thus we cannot get both at the same time. Importantly, the present proposal allows us to maintain Borer's elegant account of the complementary distribution. According to the proposed analysis, in the spurious NP ellipsis the classifier spells out only N, but not Cl. This means that the plural and classifiers are not in competition for the spell-out of the Cl node, and the Cl position is freed up for the plural (10). (When the plural and classifiers do compete for the Cl position, the complementary distribution is predicted to hold.)

(7)	ez a fej saláta	(8)	ez-ek a salátá-k	(9)	*ez-ek a fej salátá-k
	this the CL lettuce		*this*-PL *the lettuce*-PL		*this*-PL *the CL lettuce*-PL
	this head of lettuce		these lettuces		these lettuces

(10) ez-ek a fej-ek
this-PL *the CL*-PL
these ones (eg. heads of lettuce)

The analysis also allows to maintain the generalization that (genuine) ellipsis does not change the order of the non-elided constituents.

Selected references

Borer, Hagit. 2005. *In name only.* New York: OUP. Corver, Norbert and Marjo van Koppen. 2009. Let's focus on noun phrase ellipsis. *Groninger Arbeiten zur Germanistischen linguistik* 48:3–26. Dékány, Éva and Aniko Csirmaz. 2010. *Classifiers and the functional sequence in DPs.* Slides of a talk delivered at the Syntax of Finno-Ugirc Languages and UG Workshop, Piliscsaba, Hungary, August 2010. Ramchand, Gillian. 2008. *Verb meaning and the lexicon: a first phase syntax.* Cambridge: CUP.