Miklós Kontra

A Hungarian syntax in hiding

Abstract

Among other things, the late Robert Hetzron (1937–1997) worked on a tonosyntax in the last decade of his life. This tonosyntax was near completion when Hetzron sent it to some of his friends for criticism and comments in 1990. Because this manuscript tonosyntax, totalling 122 pages, cannot be found in any Hungarian university or research library, and because it is unknown to most linguists studying Hungarian, in April 2014 the author donated a xerox copy to the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest and to the Library of the University of Debrecen.
Keywords: Robert Hetzron, Hungarian tonosyntax

When Robert Hetzron died, Grover Hudson began his obituary as follows: "Robert Hetzron left a wide and rich array of publications as evidence of his extraordinary knowledge of theory and data, his rare imagination and creativity, and great love of languages and linguistics which will be greatly missed in all the several fields in which he worked with unique insight and energy for over thirty-five years: Semitic, Hungarian, Cushitic, Afroasiatic, and theoretical linguistics encompassing phonology, morphology, and syntax" (Hudson 1997).

In his article on Hetzron, Cseresnyési (2009: 652) lists, among other things, an unpublished 106-page "Hungarian syntax-cum-prosody (1990-96)". Two published articles by Hetzron, one in Hungarian (1980) and one in English (1992), are precursors or foretastes of this syntax. In an interview I conducted with Hetzron in July 1990 (see Hetzron 1991), he referred to a Hungarian grammar in the works, which he would coauthor with Robert Vago. In all probability the planned Hungarian grammar was to appear in the short-lived Croom Helm Descriptive Grammars series. For various reasons it has not seen the light of day, nevertheless the authors of the Routledge Descriptive Grammar of Hungarian (Kenesei, Vago & Fenyvesi 1998) thanked Robert Hetzron for his "detailed comments on the inflectional morphology section" (p. xxxiv).

To oversimplify matters, Hetzron's tonosyntax is an attempt to systematically include stress and intonation in the description of Hungarian syntax. For instance, the pitch levels are different in (1) and (2), and the sentences differ in meaning. A raised ^{U} denotes ultrahigh (contrastive) stress on the following syllable, ^{H} denotes high (focus) stress, ^{M} stands for mid (neutral, normal) stress, ^{L} for low (secondary) stress, and $^{H\downarrow}$ for lowered high stress. The examples are copied from page 3 of Hetzron's manuscript syntax:

(1) ^{M}*Tibor* ^{M}*tegnap* ^{L}*sé*^{U}*tált?* (neutral, 'Did Tibor take a walk yesterday?')

(2)   ^M*Tibor* ^{H↓}*tegnap* ^U*sé*^M*tált?* (Adverb-Focus, 'Was is yesterday that Tibor took a walk?')

In (2) *tegnap* 'yesterday' is in Focus, but (1) is a neutral question.

I may be one of a few lucky owners of Hetzron's manuscript syntax. I have two somewhat different copies (Figures 1 and 2), both are dated Santa Barbara, California, 1990. One is titled *A Hungarian Grammar (Syntax) by Robert Hetzron*, to which *(full grammar in cooperation with Robert Vago)* is added. This copy has ix pages of front matter and 106 pages of main text. The other copy bears the title *A Concise Hungarian Syntax by Robert Hetzron*; it also has ix pages of front matter, but the main body of text is 122 pages long. The main difference between the two copies is that the first ends with Chapter 10 on Possessive Sentences, but the second also has a Chapter 11 (Emphasis, pp. 109-121), and a short Chapter 13 (Heavy Shift, pp. 121-122). A smaller difference between the two copies is a change in prosodic notation.

Hetzron's manuscript syntax is in a near-final form, not yet ready for printing, but perfect for students of Hungarian syntax who may wish to familiarize themselves with his unique analyses. As far as I can determine, there is not a single university or research library in Hungary that has a copy of Hetzron's syntax, therefore in April 2014 I donated a xerox copy to the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest and to the Library of the University of Debrecen. Readers, please spread the word.
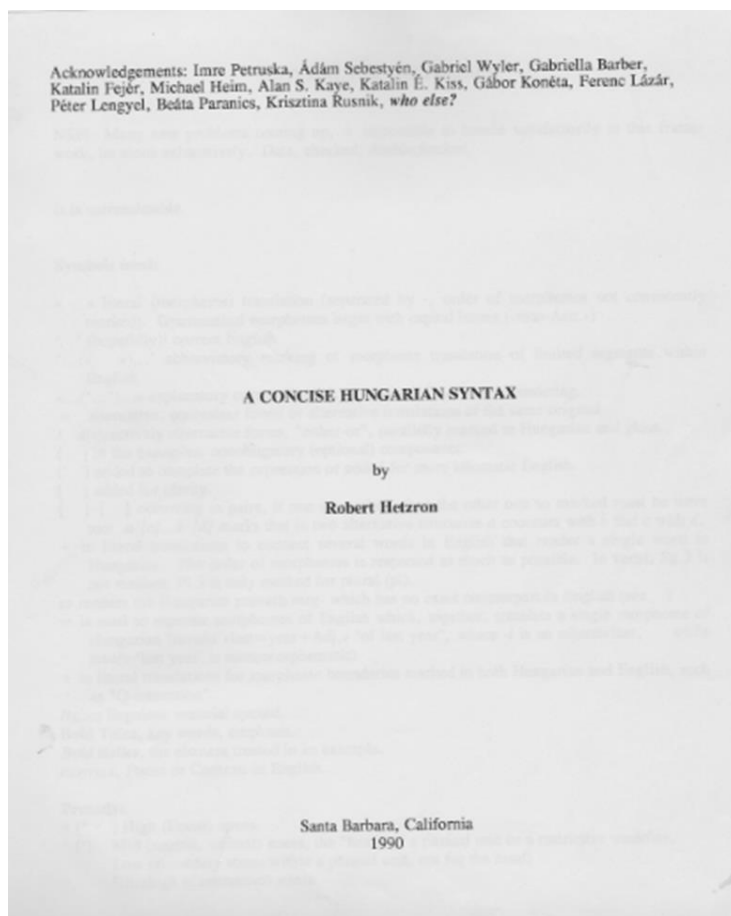

Figure 1

Figure 2

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Miklós Kontra
Department of English Language Teacher Education
and Applied Linguistics
University of Szeged
H-6722 Szeged, Egyetem u. 2.
kontra@lit.u-szeged.hu