Explaining an exception: Generating Hungarian verbal affix order

Hungarian presents with an unusual affix order, *aspect > verb > tense*:

(1) Pál meg-csinál-ta a lecké-jé-t.
Paul PERF-do-PAST the homework-POSS.3SG-ACC
'Paul did his homework.' (Kenesei et al. 1998: 300)

This construction is puzzling because multiple large-scale typological studies (e.g. Julien 2000, Trommer 2002, Trommer 2003) have thus far failed to account for the existence of such an ordering, leaving us with an apparent exception to morphological theory. I am working, however, in a wider theoretical framework which takes as its most basic assumption that the significant surface variation visible across languages results from a relatively restricted inventory of independently-motivated mechanisms acting on a universal, basic syntactic structure (Chomsky 1995). The impetus of such a framework is to demonstrate that all attested surface forms can be generated. In this view, Hungarian affix order cannot be understood as truly exceptional as it must be fully derivable by general principles.

In this thesis I take a combined methodological approach using Distributed Morphology (DM, Halle & Marantz 1993) and Optimality Theory (OT, Prince & Smolensky 1993) to derive the *aspect > verb > tense* ordering. I presume successive head movement occurs first in the narrow syntax and the Local Dislocation operation of DM ultimately generates the output affix order. I then use optimized constraint rankings to concretize the DM derivation, demonstrating why Local Dislocation operates in the specific way it does to produce the target output. I additionally account for the effects of negation or a focused constituent on verbal affix order, in which the *meg* prefix ultimately surfaces as a suffix. By using these two recently-developed tools of morphological analysis, I demonstrate that a seemingly exceptional phenomenon can, in fact, be generated by our grammar. In doing so, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the morphological variation present across languages.

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