

## A COMPARISON OF SOME ENGLISH AND HUNGARIAN FREEZES

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In this analysis, which is partly a preliminary report and partly a detailed summary of a somewhat lengthier study in progress, I compare English and Hungarian examples of what have variously been called "fixed-order conjuncts", "fixed order coordinates", "irreversible binomials" and other "binary pairs" or "compounds", and more recently, "freezes".

In examining the freezing process and in trying to identify the rules operating in it, one can largely disregard certain distinctions that are for other purposes made between various sub-types of word pairs, as e.g. the distinction between "irreversible binomials proper" like *war and peace*, *fish and chips*, or *father and son* on the one hand, and various "reduplicative word pairs", whether actually forming one word, as *mishmash*, hyphenated like *fiddle-faddle*, or otherwise linked as e.g. *tit for tat* on the other, and one can also include examples of what are called "verbal binomials", like *wheelings and dealings* or *come and go*, as in "easy come, easy go"; and eventually, perhaps even much more complex units. Much in accordance with this, relatively little attention is paid, for the time being, to "the strength of the irreversibility", or, to the fact that the degree of fixedness in word order is often variable.

Diachronic considerations have not, or at least not yet, been entered into the analysis, I must therefore entirely disregard at this point for instance the interesting-looking and potentially significant fact that *cats and dogs* used to be "dogs and cats", or that Standard Hungarian *kanadai francia* (lit.: "Canadian French") has recently shown signs of reversing its order, and thus appears to be becoming a mirror, as it were, of *French Canadian*. However, diachronic factors, wherever suspected to have operated, should eventually be included in any thorough analysis, otherwise we remain in danger of never being able to give satisfactory answers to even the basic questions about freezing and freezes; the most important ones involving the problems 1) of the determining

factors of the sequence of the elements, and 2) whether and to what extent these factors operate cross-linguistically.

The aim of the present paper is to take a step in this direction by confronting and extending to Hungarian certain rules established earlier for English, the language which therefore functions in this confrontation as the "source language" — to borrow a term from translation theory.

As it has been observed and pointed out by some authors before, the ordering in freezes is to a remarkable degree *phonologically determined*. The phonological rules that act and interact in freezing have so far been most thoroughly and relatively most accurately described for English by William E. Cooper and John Robert Ross (1975), who identify altogether seven phonological rules that operate in freezing with various amounts of strength. Some of these are somewhat tentative, but there are three basic ones that are clearly convincing; they can be briefly summed up as follows:

— *Rule No. 1* — (also called Panini's law) says that, other factors being more or less equal, the number of syllables in the second element exceeds that in the first, or, to put it in a "weaker" version, the first element should not contain more syllables than the second. Other authors, as e.g. Gustafsson (1975), call this the "short+long" rule.

According to *Rule No. 2.*, or the *consonant rule*, the second element, other factors being equal, contains more initial consonants than the 1st, and *Rule No. 3* — (also called *F2*) says that the second element in the freeze contains a vowel with, to use acoustics phonetics terminology, a lower second formant frequency, lower, that is, than for the vowel in the first element.

This means in practice that the sequence of vowels for American English should be something like this:

$i > I > \quad \varepsilon > \text{æ} > a \text{ (hot)} > \text{o} \text{ (hall)} > u$

which, in a loose approximation corresponds to Hungarian

$i, i \text{ (ü)} \quad (\text{ë}), (\text{ö})e \quad \acute{a} > a \text{ (o)} > u$

Now, the rules having been applied to a relatively large Hungarian corpus — nearly a hundred word pairs in each case — the following picture emerges:

1. For Panini's law (the syllable law):

The common 1+2 pattern as we have it in English — as e.g.

— hot and heavy

— free and easy

— bread and butter etc., is not a firm ground for direct comparison, given

the fact that, contrary to English, monosyllabic elements occur only in a small minority of the cases in Hungarian. A frequent pattern, however, is 2+3, as e.g. in:

— béke és barátság

— irni — olvasni

— sirás — nevetés

— szivvel — lélekkel

— foggal — körömmel

— sarló és kalapács, and so forth.

A large group, containing most reduplicatives, minimal pairs and near-minimal pairs, shows a 2+2 pattern:

— illeg — billeg

— ázva-fázva, — izeg-mozog

— ütött — kopott

— ide — oda

— oda — vissza

— eszem — iszom etc.,

and there is a group with a 1+1 pattern, with again numerous examples, as e.g.:

— le — föl,

— lim — lom,

— rissz — rosz,

— kip — kop,

— itt — ott, and so forth.

There are a few examples of the 1+2 pattern, and also of a 1+3 type:

— ló és lovas

— csür — csavar

— fur — farag

— bús — keserű

— férj — feleség

— Góg és Magóg and

— bús — borongós, respectively.

The syllable law can be extended to trinomials and multinomials, an area where it seems to operate with an even greater force. The ones I have found — and they are quite numerous in Hungarian — invariably show either a partial or a gradual linear increase in the number of syllables:

— huj-huj, hajrá (hip-hip, hurrah)

— zsip-zsup, kenderzsup

— itt-ott, amott (here, there, everywhere)

or — bort-búzát, békességet, respectively.

One partial counterexample I found is

— jelen, múlt, jövő, (lit.: present, past, future), but this is a type of chronological ordering, another matter that will be touched upon below.

The last three days of the Hungarian week are

— péntek, szombat, vasárnap ("Friday, Saturday, Sunday"), which, in terms of syllable pattern, corresponds precisely with more usual

— Thursday, Friday, Saturday.

The four strokes in competitive swimming are

— mell, hát, gyors, *pillangó* (breast, back, free, butterfly — in that order),

and although there is some disagreement among native speakers as to the ordering of the first three strokes (some say there is *no* ordering), they almost invariably put *pillangó* in the 4th place.

All in all, it seems that Hungarian can safely be added to the list of languages that clearly confirm Panini's syllable law; in fact, Hungarian seems to be the clearer case the two, as one does not have to worry much about cases like

- hippity-hop
- flickety-flack or
- hickory-discory dock;

examples of something like a reversed Panini's law.

The counterexamples I have found for Hungarian are very low in number, and with one or two exceptions they are governed by chronological or other forceful semantic factors, as

- kezdet és vég ("beginning and end")
- or — észak-dél ("North-South").

One counterexample for which there is no apparent explanation — phonological or semantic — is

— háború és béke ("war and peace" all one can do for the time being is put the blame on Tolstoy)

(cp. Russian Война и мир).

Rule No. 2, the consonant rule, like P's law, can be rephrased into a more modest version by saying that the number of initial consonants in place 1 elements should not exceed that in place 2 elements, which at the same time allows for an infinitely larger number in place 2 elements, with special regard to the fact that there is a large group of freezes in Hungarian — probably forming a majority — in which the first element begins with a vowel. This goes especially for many reduplicatives, as

A) — ákom-bákom  
or — illeg-billeg, etc.

B) a second group is represented by zero initial consonant in both elements, as

- erre-arra ("this way-that way")
- itt-ott ("here and there")
- emide-amoda
- emigy-amúgy
- eszem-iszom, and

C) there is a third group where both elements begin with a single consonant, as in

- csip-csup
- térül-fordul
- hetet-havat
- dinom-dánom
- szánom-bánom
- csapot-papot
- tüzzel-vassal and others.

Of the hundred or so examples examined, I have found no counterexamples. Further, it seems that Rules 1 and 2 form an alliance, as it were, to reduce the first element of the freeze as much as possible.

Rule No. 3, the vowel rule, looked equally promising at first sight. Both English and Hungarian abound in examples showing any one of the sequences  $i(I, i)$ ,  $H \ddot{u} > \text{æ}$ ,  $a, \acute{a}$ ,  $o (\acute{o})$ , with hardly a trace of the reversed order under any circumstances. Of the many occurrences, take e.g.

- knick-knack,
- shilly-shally,
- or — tit for tat, and
- bikk-makk
- lig-lóg
- or — füt-fát etc. respectively.

However, the F2 principle holds only as long as there is a *high front vowel* in the first element and whatever the second contains is a low and/or back vowel with relation to it (as in the sequences shown above). In Hungarian, the F2 rule does not work for pairs with a back vowel in their first elements. Especially conspicuous in this respect is the frequent  $/u + \dots/$  pattern. The  $u$ , with the lowest second formant frequency of all the vowels, should not occur in first place elements to begin with, or at best it should be restricted to reduplicatives and near-reduplicatives as

- pooh-pooh, or
- hook and crook, as in *by hook or by crook* or -choo-choo as in *choo-choo train*.

This, however, is far from being the case in Hungarian. In fact, the proposed  $(o)a > u$  sequence occurs precisely in the reverse in an overwhelming majority of the cases, as in

- kutya-macska,
- hu-ha,
- huz-von, (huza-vona)
- csúszik-mászik
- rug-kapál
- búbanat

— búz-borongós etc.,

while the only example I have found clearly confirming F2 is

— lótfut, and this may well go back to historical reasons.

What helped solve the problem is what looked most discouraging at first. Namely: upon closer examination it turns out that the F2 principle does not really work for English either. Cooper and Ross (1975) remark at one point that they have found "one serious counterexample" to their proposed ordering in

— ooh and aah.

Now, to this we can easily add the trinomial-like interjection

— brou-ha-ha,

and, upon some further search, a number of other pairs with nearly the same pattern that have apparently escaped the authors' attention, as e.g.

— foot and mouth (disease)

— hook and eye

— room and board

and — root and branch

although these latter two could also be accounted for by the possible overriding effect of a short  $\rightarrow$  long rule.

So for good measure and also a sort of control testing, consider the following examples from German:

(von) — Ruf und Rang,

(Das) — Drum und Drang

— Lust und Laune

— Sturm und Drang

(Der Ritter) (ohne) — Furcht und Tadel,

(über) — kurz und lang, and so forth,

with — Hab und Gut being the only counterexample that comes to mind without a thorough search.

These examples are in themselves so overwhelming that one can hardly resist the temptation to add to the list — going back to English again —:

— Cooper and Ross, notwithstanding the syllable rule and alphabeticism, respectively.

The point, of course, is that what we are dealing with is not just a large group of random exceptions from different languages from an otherwise valid rule, but that a new rule is emerging or at least the F2 has to be considerably modified.

Tentatively, this can be very simply stated. As we have seen from the examples, the *u*, a high back vowel, is almost never followed by a high front or even a low front one. The sequence is almost exclusively from high back to lower back.

In the cases where the F2 does seem to work perfectly (i.e. with the front

vowels), a similar *high to low* and/or *front to back* shift in the points of vowel formation can be observed. Consequently, the F2 could — and I am arguing that it should — be replaced by a "low-back", or *back and open, rule*, covering both *higher to lower* and/or *front to back* movements.

Some question marks remain; consider e.g.

— calm and cool, as especially in:

— calm, cool and collected; or Hungarian

— *jár-ke* — I shall presently come back to this one — but the number of counterexamples, for one thing, is incomparably smaller than that for the originally proposed rule. All in all, both *English and Hungarian conform to a single vowel rule* with about the same degree of accuracy that we saw for the other two rules discussed.

Concluding this part of the report, I would like to note that one field the extensions of my studies so far are beginning to be directed at is a group of larger and more complex constructions where freezing seems to be operative, including ditties, nursery rhymes, proverbs and sayings, such as e.g.

— *Amit nyer a réven, elveszti a vámon*, (approximately: what is lost on the swings is made up on the rounds), and

— *Jobb ma egy veréb, mint holnap egy tuzok* (roughly: a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush).

(Note the vowel sequences in place 1 and place 2 elements).

Briefly for the semantic component in freezing. Unfortunately, it is at this point that the picture so promisingly bright for universalists in the phonological area suddenly turns bleak. As numbers of sizable and diversified groups of examples have shown, "if there is anything that can go wrong, it *does*" (Murphy's law), in other words, whenever it appears necessary for a semantic factor to override a phonological rule or even a group of such rules acting (or: trying to act) in unison, it mercilessly does so; and this seems to equally apply to both English and Hungarian.

A highly unusual  $\sigma >$  (önear[e]) sequence becomes rigid for instance in:

— *megszokik* vagy *megszökik* (approx.: "make or break"), and a similar force may have been active in

— *foggal-körömmel*, ("tooth and nail"), although this pair has the syllable rule going for it, too. Similarly in English, there exist relatively rigid pairs going against basic phonological predictions, as e.g.

— husband and wife

or — brother and sister, both victims of a semantic rule that says "*Male first*".

This remarkable strength of semantic constraints would, of course, not by itself jeopardize the search for semantic universals in freezing, which is *really the most controversial issue*. In fact, one could almost logically predict

a state of affairs pointing in just the reverse direction. That this is not the case, is clear, however, from the work of authors dealing not only with freezing in English but also occasionally considering examples of various other languages.

One the whole, the picture seems better than absolutely hopeless. Of the 19 semantic domains that for instance Cooper and Ross identify for English, i.e. for which they have found freezes, Hungarian seems to confirm, and thus, reinforce, almost every single one, except where a domain clearly does not apply, such as e.g. *count* vs. *mass* (count and mass nouns), or where it simply lacks a comparable freeze.

The ordering of the cardinal geographical referents and their sub-compounds (North, South, East, West, Northwest, North by Northwest etc.) is strictly and rigidly the same in Hungarian, even at the price of having to violate the otherwise powerful syllable rule:

— Észak-dél (North-South), but this may be little solace for the would-be universalist, also aware, for instance, of German and Spanish that have *West(en)* und *Ost(en)* and *del sur al norte*, respectively.

At one other point, Hungarian conspires with Yiddish to ruin an otherwise uniform cross-linguistic picture in space-axis ordering,

cp.: Y — orop un aroyf (“down and up”),

and H — le-fel and

lent-fent (both: “down and up”).

In addition Hungarian has

— ki-be,

— kint-bent (“out and in”),

which may be a rare example of a phonological rule operating successfully against semantics.

And the worst is perhaps yet to come. Cooper and Ross suggest 2 potential semantic universals that — as they put it — have not yet been shot down. One of them is “*Chronology* in a freeze of two verbs which are intended to be in a temporal sequence, the place 1 verb denotes the earlier action”.

So, for a painful but necessary universals-shooting, consider

— *jár-kel*, an absolutely irreversible pair meaning “wander around, be on the move, come and go, walk about, travel around” ect., where both *jár* and *kel* are otherwise separate, individual verbs, *jár* meaning *walk* and *kel* meaning *get up* or *rise*.

Finally, here are a few examples of a select list of Hungarian freezes that might be worth noting, partly in terms of “priorities of values inherent in the structure of a given society” or what may partly be attributed to various cultural characteristics:

— ... *sirjak* vagy *nevessek/kacagjak*

(... whether to “cry or laugh”).

— *sarló* és *kalapács*

(“sickle and hammer” cp. also Russian *serp i molot*)

— *kereslet* és *kinálat*

(“demand and supply”) (lit.: “what is being looked for” on the one hand and “what is being offered” on the other).

— *ige*, *főnév*

(“verb and noun” as opposed to much more usual *nouns and verbs*),

— *koldus* és *királyfi*

(“pauper and prince”).

These, and many similar, examples indicate another possible subdirection of further cross-linguistic, and cross-cultural, research.

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