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## Searching for definite clues in Hungarian: On *pro*-dropped possessors and the definite article<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

While overt pronoun possessors must co-occur with the definite article in Hungarian, possessor *pro*-drop allows for the omission of the definite article in definite possessive noun phrases. This type of article omission has received explicit attention in the recent literature (see especially Dóla et. al 2017, Viszket & Dóla (to appear) and Virovec (to appear)), and the emerging consensus is that a complex web of factors is responsible for the non-appearance of the definite article in licensing contexts. This paper offers a corpus study of pertinent data in search of an answer to the question whether the presence or the absence of the definite article by *pro*-dropped possessors can be systematically linked to the presence or the absence of clause-mate antecedents for the possessor. We argue that the answer is in the negative, and the data altogether support an analysis in which definite article drop in this construction is essentially a phonological phenomenon, with no obvious syntactic relevance in current Hungarian.

*Keywords:* antecedent, corpus study, definite article, possessor *pro*-drop, possessive structure

### 1 Introduction

It is a well-known feature of Hungarian that personal pronoun possessors show agreement with the head of the possessive noun phrase, the possessum. This agreement morphology licenses the *pro*-drop of the possessor, as in (1b).

- (1) a. \*(az) én ház-am  
       the I house-POSS.1SG  
       ‘my house’  
       b. % (a) *pro* ház-am  
       the *pro* house-POSS.1SG  
       ‘my house’

The definite article is compulsory if the possessor is overt (1a), but it may be optional if it is *pro*-dropped (1b). This type of article omission is subject to substantial variation across

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<sup>1</sup> I dedicate this paper to József Andor and Sándor Martsa on their 70th birthdays. They both witnessed my first steps in linguistics: Sándor Martsa was a very supportive and benevolent reviewer of the essay I submitted to the National Scientific Students’ Associations Conference twenty years ago, and József Andor taught us an enthusiastic and thought-provoking linguistics course when I was a fresh PhD student. I have felt privileged to know them ever since.

speakers and registers, and several morphosyntactic and pragmatic factors seem to be relevant in its licensing. Crucially, the spellout of the article is always a grammatical option in this construction, and it is its non-appearance that requires an explanation.<sup>2</sup>

The descriptive landscape behind the disappearance of the article has recently been investigated by Dóla et al. (2017), Visket & Dóla (to appear) and Virovec (to appear). In particular Dóla et al. (2017) and Visket & Dóla (to appear) note that definite article omission by *pro*-dropped possessors may be influenced by the nature of the search for an antecedent. If the possessor is referentially linked to the subject of the clause, then the article is more likely to be omitted; and if the antecedent is outside of the sentence embedding the target possessive phrase, then the article is more likely to be present. In general, the increased salience and availability of the antecedent seems to correlate with the decreased probability of the use of the definite article. Or, to be more precise, there appears to exist a *tendency* that points towards this correlation.

My aim in this paper is to further investigate this issue with the inclusion of data from the *Hungarian National Corpus* (Oravecz et al. 2014). In recent work (Rákosi 2017, to appear), I argue that the definite article plays an important role in licensing referential dependencies between anaphoric pronominal possessors and clause-mate antecedents in Hungarian: such a dependency can only be local if the article is absent. Since, as is standardly assumed, personal pronouns cannot be bound to *local* antecedents, it follows that the definite article must always be present in the possessive noun phrase in their case to protect, as it were, the pronoun. This entails that the definite article has a covert, syntactically active version in the construction represented by (1b), and the apparent disappearance of the article in certain cases is a non-syntactic issue. In this paper, I argue that the corpus data that we discuss here do not warrant a conclusion to the contrary, even if the tendencies that Dóla et al. (2017) report may be real.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In Section 2, I give a more detailed overview of the pertinent literature, focussing on issues that are directly relevant in the context of the current paper. Section 3 presents the results of the corpus query and a discussion of these results. Section 4 is a summary and an outlook on the questions that remain.

## 2 Definite article drop and possessor *pro*-drop: The background of the study

### 2.1 On the factors that license definite article drop

This section gives an overview of some of the factors relevant in the licensing of article drop based on Dóla et al. (2017) and Virovec (to appear). The former provides a detailed summary of the descriptivist literature on this topic, as well as presents the results of a corpus study that included manually selected and appropriately annotated examples from the Hungarian translation of Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking*. The latter reports the results of a questionnaire survey that was designed to test the grammaticality of definite article omission by *pro*-dropped possessors. The findings of these two studies are not fully compatible in

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<sup>2</sup> The article is ungrammatical across the board when these possessives are used as vocatives, irrespective of whether the possessor pronoun is overt or *pro*-dropped (see Szabolcsi 1989). It is also well-known that possessors can be dative-marked in Hungarian, and in this case, they may not form a constituent with the possessum. In fact, dative personal pronoun possessors cannot form a constituent with the rest of the possessive noun phrase in standard Hungarian. Vocatives and dative possessors are not relevant in the context of the current inquiry, and therefore we do not discuss them here.

every respect, indicative of the fact that the issue at hand is an empirically complex phenomenon.

Dóla et al. (2017) found that the relative position of the verb and the possessive noun phrase matters: the definite article is more likely to be missing by *pro*-dropped possessors if the possessive noun phrase precedes the verb. Virovec (to appear), however, reports on judgements that go in the other direction. In her questionnaire study, article drop was higher rated in the postverbal domain. There was fine-grained variation in the preverbal domain conditioned by the agreement features of the possessor: article drop is somewhat better in topic position if the possessor is 1SG, but if the possessive phrase is in focus, 3SG possessors fare better than 1SG possessors. As we will see in Section 3, the data collected from the Hungarian National Corpus (henceforth: *HNC2*) also show variation in this respect.<sup>3</sup> Here are two sentences from the *HNC2* for illustration. The possessive noun phrase follows the verb in (2a) and it is a preverbal topic in (2b).

- (2) a. Nagyvárad-on ellopták táská-já-t, ... #239034130  
 Nagyvárad-on stole.3PL bag-POSS.3SG-ACC  
 ‘They stole his bag in Nagyvárad, ...’
- b. Könyv-é-ben foglalkozik az erdei fák-kal, ... #1433556  
 book-POSS.3SG-IN deal.3SG the forest trees-with  
 ‘He deals with trees of the forest in his book, ...’

The definite article is absent from the possessive noun phrase in both examples, and the possessor is a *pro*-dropped 3SG pronoun in both. There is certainly no grammaticality difference between the two sentences, warning us that this kind of definite article omission is a phenomenon arising at the confluence of many, partially independent factors.

Dóla et al. (2017) explicitly argue that style and register differences are important among these factors. In general, contemporary colloquial varieties of Hungarian favour the use of the article in the target construction, and article drop may often be felt to be archaic or awkward. Much depends, nevertheless, on the nature of the possessive relation, as both studies cited here claim. Inalienable possession is a facilitator of article drop, whereas alienable possession appears to be a blocking factor. This is another crucial dimension in understanding this phenomenon, but this too is a weak predictor, as we will see in Section 3.

The question we want to address here is whether article omission in this construction plays a role in the search for potential antecedents for the possessor. Even this brief overview presented here will suggest that it is unlikely that such a role has been grammaticalized in the strong sense. But to be able to reach this conclusion, we need to enter the realm of anaphoric possessors for a closer look.

## 2.2 *Anaphoric possessors and the definite article*

A recent line of inquiry has shown that there is a strong typological correlation across languages between the structure of the possessive noun phrase and the availability of dedicated possessive reflexives (see especially Despić 2011, 2015 and Reuland 2011). Dedicated possessive reflexives can be found in languages that do not employ pronominal definiteness markers, including, among many other languages, Icelandic, Korean, Russian,

<sup>3</sup> The data reported here are all from the Hungarian National Corpus 2, version v2.0.4. The number after the Hungarian examples is the unique corpus identifier of the token that the search included.



The question we address here is whether anaphora resolution facts provide arguments for or against this claim. Dóla et al. (2017) and Viszket & Dóla (to appear) point out that the corpus data they study show a certain correlation between the use of the definite article and the interpretation of the *pro*-dropped possessor. If the article is not present, then the covert possessor is more likely to be linked to the (local) subject (Kati in the two examples below), and if it is present, a non-local antecedent is more probable (Sára in 5b, or some other individual not mentioned in either case).

- (5) a. Kati<sub>i</sub> meglátogat-ta (a) férj-é-t<sub>i/j</sub>.  
 Kati visit-PAST.3SG the husband-POSS.3SG-ACC  
 ‘Kati visited her husband.’
- b. Sára<sub>i</sub> tud-ta, hogy Kati<sub>j</sub> meglátogat-ta (a) férj-é-t<sub>i/j/k</sub>.  
 Sára know-PAST.3SG that Kati visit-PAST.3SG the husband-POSS.3SG-ACC  
 ‘Sára knew that Kati visited her husband.’

They treat this nevertheless, as a pragmatic phenomenon: more accessible antecedents require less (overt) linguistic coding. Furthermore, Viszket and Dóla (to appear) agree with Rákosi (to appear) that what they refer to as the *reduced form of the article* is a syntactically active entity without a phonological shape.

The ambiguities that (5) represents are only present with third person possessors, because it is in their case that the referent of the (*pro*-dropped) pronoun may be selected from a pool of available discourse participants. In first and second person, such ambiguities are absent, since the identity of the speaker(s) and the hearer(s) tends to be fixed in a given piece of discourse. It is an analytical option therefore, that the third person – non-third person difference may have been grammaticalized in a relevant way in the construction that we are investigating. For some independent motivation to support such an approach, consider the following contrast noted in den Dikken & Dékány (2018: 61):

- (6) a. a kalap-ja széle  
 the hat-POSS.3SG rim-POSS.3SG  
 ‘his/her hat’s rim’
- b. \*az ő kalap-ja széle  
 the he/she hat-POSS.3SG rim-POSS.3SG  
 ‘his/her hat’s rim’

They point out that while (6b) is not grammatical, (6a) is fully acceptable. This is problematic if we assume that the missing pronoun is represented in (6a) as a silent *pro*, and therefore den Dikken & Dékány (2018) conclude that (6a) is an instance of radical *pro*-drop, i.e. no silent pronoun is present in the syntactic structure at all, and it is only the morphology on the head noun that identifies the possessor.<sup>5</sup> If we assume, for the sake of the argument, that radical *pro*-drop is an option for third person pronominal possessors across the board at least in the case of the presence of clause-mate antecedents (as in 5), then that may obviate the need for the inclusion of the definite article in the possessive structure. There is no syntactic urge to have the definite article if the possessor pronoun is genuinely absent, since there is nothing to

<sup>5</sup> See also Bartos (1999) for claims that radical *pro*-drop may occur in Hungarian.

protect then. In other words, when the article is not pronounced in (5), one may assume that the structure involves no silent definite article, contra what is claimed here for (4b).

There are thus two theoretical alternatives to consider if one wants to argue that the definite article may be genuinely absent in this construction. If the article/no article contrast is grammaticalized in the strong sense, then the definite article is expected to show at least a strong tendency to “disappear” in each person in the case of potential clause-mate antecedents. If, however, this grammaticalization process has been restricted to third person, then we expect the lack of the article to be much more prominent in third person than in non-third persons. If no such overt contrasts emerge, or if they do not appear to be substantial enough, then we can interpret this distribution of data patterns as an argument for the postulation of a silent definite article. The corpus study we discuss in the following section has been designed with these questions in focus.

### 3 Definite article drop and possessor *pro*-drop: A corpus study

#### 3.1 *The design of the corpus study*

The corpus query was conducted on version v2.0.4. of the Hungarian National Corpus. It included the following parameters:

- i. 10 nominal search lemmas: *nagyapa* ‘grandfather’, *könyv* ‘book’, *barátnő* ‘girlfriend, female friend’, *iskola* ‘school’, *születésnap* ‘birthday’, *kabát* ‘coat’, *kocsi* ‘car’, *férj* ‘husband’, *láb* ‘leg’, *táska* ‘bag’
- ii. first vs third person possessors (N. Poss1 vs N. Poss3)
- iii. first vs third person verb forms (V.1 vs V.3)
- iv. preverbal vs postverbal occurrences of possessive phrases with the target lemma as the head, within a search window of at most 2 words (Pre vs Post)

The rationale behind this design is as follows. These nouns were selected because they are likely to occur in colloquial speech, and they represent different degrees of (in)alienability when used as heads of possessive noun phrases (i). The only filter on the morphological form of these lemmas was that they were to bear first or third person possessive morphology (ii).<sup>6</sup> The search targeted first and third person *pro*-dropped possessors (see below). The thus specified possessive phrases were restricted to occur in the context of first or third person verbs (iii). If binding theoretic considerations play a role in the distribution of the definite article, as discussed in the previous section, then we expect the article to be significantly less frequent in the case of same person combinations (N.1 - V.1 and N.3 - V.3) than in the case of different person combinations (N.1 - V.3 and N.3 - V.1).<sup>7</sup> Pre- and postverbal occurrences of the target possessives were queried separately with a search window of at most two words between the edge of the possessive noun phrase and the verb (iv). The underlying assumption is that this way we get hits that include the verb and the possessive phrase in the same clause. Manual checks on the hits confirmed that this gives us within-clause occurrences with good precision.

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<sup>6</sup> In other words, the search included the Hungarian equivalents of *my (adj) bag(s)* and *his/her (adj) bag(s)*, and any case-marked form of these possessive noun phrases.

<sup>7</sup> I did not restrict the number feature of either the possessed noun or the verb, so the data include both singular and plural forms. The plural forms were rare in the corpus in this search.

The search terms were defined in the Corpus Query Language (CQL).<sup>8</sup> The occurrences that included the definite article (+Art) and a possessive phrase with a *pro*-dropped possessor were queried using the following type of search terms (informal descriptions):

- a) definite article + 0-1 adjective + possessive head noun + 0-2 words + verb (preverbal)
- b) verb + 0-2 words + definite article + 0-1 adjective + possessive head noun (postverbal)

The first of these searched for preverbal occurrences (a), and the second was used to find postverbal occurrences of the target possessives (b). At most one adjective was allowed between the article and the head noun, and at most two words could occur between the head noun and the verb (preverbal occurrences) or between the verb and the definite article (postverbal occurrences). The following are two examples from the list of the hits gained through the use of this query:

- (7) a. A bal láb-om-ra támaszkodva áll-ok. #275533821  
 the left leg-POSS.1SG-onto leaning stand-1SG  
 ‘I stand leaning on my left leg.’
- b. Jön a hideg a láb-am-ra. #427553868  
 come.3SG the cold the leg-POSS.1SG-onto  
 ‘Cold air is moving in on my leg.’

To estimate the number of the occurrences of *pro*-dropped possessors without a definite article (-Art), I conducted additional searches in which only the possessive head noun and the verb were specified.<sup>9</sup> This gives us the estimated total number of *pro*-dropped cases in the preverbal and postverbal conditions, respectively. From this number, I deducted the number of hits in the +Art conditions, and the result is a good estimate for the total number of -Art cases. I performed several random checks on these results, and both the precision and the recall appear to reach a level that gives us a reliable picture of the relevant data patterns. I discuss these results in the next subsection.

### 3.2 *The results of the corpus study*

Table 1 below provides an overview of the results with a focus on two of the conditions: the person feature of the head noun (first vs third), and the presence or absence of the definite article. The figures are given for each nominal lemma separately in each condition. I added two additional columns that list the ratio -Art/+Art for each lemma. Since article drop constitutes the focus of this study, this ratio is included to provide us with an estimate on how likely article drop is to occur for each lemma.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.sketchengine.eu/documentation/corpus-querying/> for a description.

<sup>9</sup> I added an additional filter here that was not necessary for the +Art cases, a negative constraint against nouns and pronouns in the position to the left of the possessed nominal head. This has the effect of ruling out nominal and pronominal possessors, which are not relevant in the study of possessor *pro*-drop.

SEARCH LEMMA		N.Poss1			N.Poss3		
		-ART	+ART	-ART/+ART	-ART	+ART	-ART/+ART
<i>nagyapa</i>	<b>grandfather</b>	3483	1127	<b>3,09</b>	1531	1070	<b>1,43</b>
<i>könyv</i>	<b>book</b>	2607	1626	<b>1,6</b>	15398	2973	<b>5,18</b>
<i>barátnő</i>	<b>girlfriend</b>	4498	4120	<b>1,09</b>	5022	3838	<b>1,31</b>
<i>iskola</i>	<b>school</b>	342	330	<b>1,04</b>	5590	631	<b>8,86</b>
<i>születésnap</i>	<b>birthday</b>	504	739	<b>0,68</b>	7754	2862	<b>1,44</b>
<i>kabát</i>	<b>coat</b>	306	474	<b>0,65</b>	541	1328	<b>0,41</b>
<i>kocsi</i>	<b>car</b>	460	1023	<b>0,45</b>	1777	2578	<b>0,69</b>
<i>férj</i>	<b>husband</b>	3016	8719	<b>0,36</b>	7987	10195	<b>0,78</b>
<i>láb</i>	<b>leg</b>	2705	7574	<b>0,36</b>	9305	19145	<b>0,75</b>
<i>táska</i>	<b>bag</b>	189	1616	<b>0,12</b>	482	1643	<b>0,29</b>
SUM		<b>18110</b>	<b>27348</b>		<b>55387</b>	<b>46263</b>	

Table 1. An overview of the results

These figures show a surprisingly large scale of variation. In the first person condition, for example, the definite article is dropped only once out of 10 occurrences of the possessive *táska* ‘bag’, whereas the article is present once out of 4 instances if the head noun is *nagyapa* ‘grandfather’.<sup>10</sup>

These results can only be interpreted as strong evidence against the assumption that the loss of the definite article has been grammaticalized in a syntactically relevant sense. In Subsection 2.2 above, I argued that the definite article plays the role of marking the edge of a local domain relevant for binding purposes. The definite article may be phonologically unrealized, but it is still present in the syntactic structure when the possessor is *pro*-dropped. If the drop of the article amounts to its genuine absence from the structure, contrary to what I claim here, and if the thus construed article drop is tied to the presence of local (here: clause-mate) antecedents, then we do not expect the amount of variation that is actually attested across the head nouns. A grammaticalization process of this kind should not be sensitive to the difference between *táska* ‘bag’ and *nagyapa* ‘grandfather’, whatever this difference might be due to. In other words, we have no reasons to assume that variation in the value of the -Art/+Art ratio strictly correlates with the frequency of taking clause-mate antecedents. Nor can we see such tendencies in the data. Therefore, we can conclude from these data alone that the drop of the definite article has not been grammaticalized as a marker of locally available antecedents for the possessor.

There is, nevertheless, a difference between first person and third person possessors. In first person, +Art hits outnumber -Art hits, whereas in third person it is the other way around. Some care needs to be exercised here, since if we disregard the figures for the lemmas *iskola* ‘school’ and *könyv* ‘book’, then the numbers for third person reveal a distribution of the data more similar to what we have in first person. But, in comparison with first person, there does seem to be a weak preference for article drop in third person, at least for most lemmas. This might indicate that article drop does play a disambiguating role in third

<sup>10</sup> Virovec (to appear) reports on similar tendencies based on a pilot corpus study of accusative-marked possessives.

person as an indicator of a weak bias for clause-mate antecedents. Let us turn to the finer details to see whether this is the case.

As the breakdown of the data shows (Table 2), there is no evidence for article drop to play a syntactic role in first person. If article drop were grammaticalized as a distinct construction, then we would expect -Art hits to dominate in the context of V.1 (a clause-mate antecedent is present for the possessor), and +Art hits to dominate in the context of V.3 (a clause-mate antecedent is probably not present). But in both conditions, it is the use of the definite article that dominates, which means that the drop of the article does not correlate strongly with the presence or absence of clause-mate antecedents.

N.Poss1		V.1				V.3			
		-ART		+ART		-ART		+ART	
		PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
<i>nagyapa</i>	<b>grandfather</b>	267	338	98	151	1606	1272	542	336
<i>könyv</i>	<b>book</b>	453	393	260	421	886	875	386	559
<i>barátnő</i>	<b>girlfriend</b>	801	653	665	988	1623	1421	1488	979
<i>iskola</i>	<b>school</b>	90	60	36	51	87	105	197	46
<i>születésnap</i>	<b>birthday</b>	95	78	167	124	198	133	153	295
<i>kabát</i>	<b>coat</b>	67	104	90	135	47	88	122	127
<i>kocsi</i>	<b>car</b>	52	35	196	239	204	169	219	369
<i>férj</i>	<b>husband</b>	341	577	786	2240	1125	973	3690	2003
<i>láb</i>	<b>leg</b>	417	542	947	1869	1001	745	1845	2913
<i>táska</i>	<b>bag</b>	32	25	272	447	56	76	638	259
SUMS		<b>2615</b>	<b>2805</b>	<b>3517</b>	<b>6665</b>	<b>6833</b>	<b>5857</b>	<b>9280</b>	<b>7886</b>
		<b>5420</b>		<b>10182</b>		<b>12690</b>		<b>17166</b>	

*Table 2. First person possessors*

Thus, we are safe to conclude that article drop plays no syntactic role by first person possessors. It is also interesting to note that the relative position of the possessive phrase (preverbal vs postverbal) does not seem to correlate well with article use, either.

Consider now the details for third person possessors (Table 3). When the verb bears first person agreement morphology, then the possessor is likely to have no clause-mate antecedents. What we can see in Table 3 is that article drop is roughly just as frequent in this case as article retention. This again suggests that article drop plays no grammatical role.

N.POSS3		V.1				V.3			
		-ART		+ART		-ART		+ART	
		PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
<i>iskola</i>	<b>school</b>	162	43	24	12	3244	2141	262	333
<i>könyv</i>	<b>book</b>	1126	621	202	225	8176	5475	1053	1493
<i>nagyapa</i>	<b>grandfather</b>	10	14	20	20	648	859	556	474
<i>születésnap</i>	<b>birthday</b>	299	290	134	114	3210	3955	1018	1596
<i>barátnő</i>	<b>girlfriend</b>	41	59	123	143	2298	2624	1621	1951
<i>férj</i>	<b>husband</b>	36	62	176	215	3333	4556	3847	5957
<i>láb</i>	<b>leg</b>	127	175	607	341	5318	3685	7053	11144
<i>kocsi</i>	<b>car</b>	16	30	95	73	983	748	990	1420
<i>kabát</i>	<b>coat</b>	17	14	49	42	255	255	538	699
<i>táska</i>	<b>bag</b>	34	0	23	39	183	265	834	747
SUMS		<b>1868</b>	<b>1308</b>	<b>1453</b>	<b>1224</b>	<b>27648</b>	<b>24563</b>	<b>17772</b>	<b>25814</b>
		<b>3116</b>		<b>2677</b>		<b>52211</b>		<b>43586</b>	

Table 3. Third person possessors

When the verb has third person morphology, +Art examples are almost as frequent on the average as -Art examples are. Nevertheless, we do see significant variation among the individual lemmas. Should we interpret this as a sign that some nouns are more likely to be possessed locally by the subject referent than others? So, are books more likely to be linked up referentially to the individual denoted by the subject than, say, husbands? This could only be determined if these examples were manually annotated, but even in the absence of such a count, pilot investigations reveal that the correspondence between article drop and clause-mate antecedents is not necessarily that neat. Consider the following examples for illustration:

(8) a. Vacsorá-t készített férj-é-nek. #9583527  
 dinner-ACC made.3SG husband-POSS.3SG-DAT  
 ‘She made dinner for her husband.’

b. Nem megy-ek el a nő-höz. #314345561  
 not go-1SG away the woman-to  
 ‘I won’t go to the woman.’

És utána nem jövök vissza férj-é-t hazakísér-ni...  
 and then not come.1SG back husband-POSS.3SG-ACC home\_accompany-INF  
 ‘And then I won’t come back to walk her husband home...’

As it is clear from the context (not shown here), the possessor is bound by the subject in (8a). This is not the case in (8b), where the antecedent of the possessor is in the preceding sentence. Article drop by third person covert possessors is not infrequent in the corpus even if the antecedent is outside of the clause, and such a dependency is natural as long as there is no intervening third person noun phrase between the possessor and the antecedent. This is satisfied in (3b), as no third person intervener is present. As Dóla et al. (2017) show, article

drop is best when a salient antecedent for the possessor is available, but that does not necessarily require the antecedent to be clause-mate. On the other hand, the definite article is very frequently retained even in the presence of a clause-mate antecedent:

- (9) A férjé-re nézett. #272058762  
 the husband-onto looked.3SG  
 ‘She looked at her husband.’

Here the subject and the possessor refer to the same individual (which is again obvious in the original context), but the article is still present. So, the emerging picture is what Dóla et al. (2017) argue for: that third person *pro*-dropped possessors frequently show up without the definite article when a salient antecedent is present, but a salient antecedent does not necessarily trigger the drop of the article. We may add to this that a salient antecedent is often not clause-mate, and since this whole phenomenon seems to be restricted to third person possessives only, the data surveyed here do not constitute evidence for the assumption that article drop has been grammaticalized in this pocket of Hungarian grammar. This means that it is legitimate to maintain the assumption that the definite article has a covert variant, which is structurally present even in apparent instances of article drop.

#### 4 Conclusions

I have presented and discussed corpus data in this paper to provide support for the claim that definite article drop by *pro*-dropped possessors is not a syntactically relevant phenomenon in Hungarian. Definite article drop may be a weak indicator in third person that the possessor is linked to a salient, possibly clause-mate antecedent; but no such effect is detectable in the case of first-person possessors. Third person possessors are perfectly compatible with overt definite articles even when a clause-mate antecedent is present, and therefore there is no obvious correlation between article drop and referential dependence on the local subject in their case either.

Our results give further support to the account that Dóla et al. (2017) and Visket & Dóla (to appear) present. They treat this kind of article drop as a phenomenon governed by pragmatic, rather than syntactic factors. These results also provide additional arguments for the claim that this article drop is essentially the presence of a phonologically null, but syntactically active definite article. This claim is substantiated in Rákosi (2017, to appear), where the definite article is analysed as a binding domain delimiter, required to be present by overt and covert personal pronoun possessors alike.

One limitation of the current study is that the data collected may possibly hide individual variation in the use of the definite article. Though the Hungarian National Corpus is meant to be a representative of contemporary colloquial Hungarian, the texts it contains show variation in terms of register, genre, and dialect; and some portion of them are not contemporary in the strict sense of the word. It is conceivable that these data patterns are subject to variation as well as to possible change, but further inquiries are required to test whether this is the case. The current study has shown that article drop by *pro*-dropped possessors is unlikely to be a syntactic issue in the narrow sense in contemporary Hungarian.

## Acknowledgements

The Project no. 111918 (New approaches in the description of the grammar of Hungarian pronominals) has been implemented with the support provided from the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund of Hungary, financed under the K funding scheme.

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