

# TÉZISEK (ANGOL NYELVEN)

BIRTOKOS SZERKEZETEK AZ ANGOL, NÉMET ÉS MAGYAR NYELVBEN  
DISKURZUSHOZ KÖTHETŐ JELENSÉGEK ÉS A BIRTOKOS DP

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POSSESSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN ENGLISH, GERMAN AND HUNGARIAN  
DISCOURSE ORIENTED PHENOMENA AND THE POSSESSIVE DP

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EÖTVÖS LORÁND TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM  
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TÉZISEK  
(ANGOL NYELVEN)

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Birtokos szerkezetek az angol, német és magyar nyelvben  
Diskurzushoz köthető jelenségek és a birtokos DP

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Possessive constructions in English, German and Hungarian  
Discourse oriented phenomena and the possessive DP

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Kelt: Budapest, 2015. november 30.

Horváth Katalin  
a doktori értekezés szerzőjének aláírása

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## **1. Rationale**

Possession is a very interesting and large topic which is widely discussed in the literature. However, the structure of possessive constructions and the exact syntactic status of their constituents have always provoked debate. There have been many analyses proposed concerning these issues but, to my knowledge, none of them are capable of accounting for a wide range of cross-linguistic data. In particular, the discourse status of the individual elements of the possessive DP seems to be problematic. This is the motivation behind my thesis on discourse oriented phenomena and the possessive DP. It is a relatively poorly examined area and the majority of its researchers base their models on the Split-DP Hypothesis, which poses more problems than it solves as is demonstrated in my thesis.

## **2. Theoretical background**

The dissertation is based on the Phase Theory version of the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 2001; 2008) and makes use of the cartographic approach (based on Chomsky (1986), Abney (1987), Pollock (1989), Sportiche (1990), Koopman (1992) and Rizzi (1997)) in order to be able to account for the fact that in agglutinative languages, e.g. in Hungarian, the suffixes are realised in a strict order. The strict order of suffixes is an important tool in describing the structure of possessive DPs because the series of suffixes reflect the order of the different layers in the construction (cf. Baker (1985)'s Mirror Principle). Hence, it is proposed that the phonologically realised or unrealised affixes enter the derivation under heads. Therefore, lexical heads have to undergo head movement so that these bound morphemes can be affixed to them.

In addition, phrases have to move to specifier positions e.g. to check features or receive case. Beside movements targeting a specifier position, features can also be checked off as a result of head movement. So, in the framework used in the thesis, feature checking is not necessarily bound to spec-head agreement. An important idea that is explored here is that discourse features may also percolate from an element to an XP which contains it and on which they can travel to a specifier position where they can be checked.

### 3. Research questions

My dissertation provides an analysis of possessive DPs in English, German and Hungarian with special attention on discourse oriented phenomena. First and foremost, it intends to show that the discourse features [WH], [CONTR], [TOP] and [FOC] are not checked within the possessive DP as this does not contain any CP, ContrP, TopP and FocP layers. Therefore, it is proposed that the discourse features associated with the different constituents of the DP percolate onto the topmost DP node of the possessive construction after competing with each other to determine which will succeed in undergoing this process. In this way, the DP has the discourse function in the CP determined by the features it inherits.

The Split-DP account works with DP-internal TopP, FocP and ContrP layers, so it has to assume a double set of discourse features (a verbal and a nominal one) in order to account for why the whole DP undergoes CP level discourse movements, although it is only one of its constituents which bears discourse features. The nominal discourse feature set motivates the DP-internal movements targeting [Spec, TopP], [Spec, FocP] and [Spec, ContrP], whereas the verbal set motivates the clausal counterpart of these movements. However, in the feature percolation approach only one set of discourse features is needed because it dispenses with DP-internal TopP, FocP and ContrP layers. Consequently, the discourse features are not checked in the DP, so they are still accessible for the heads of the left peripheral projections in the CP. The resulting analysis is simpler and it provides a better explanation for CP-level discourse movement phenomena.

The specific research questions that the dissertation addresses include how it is possible to give a uniform structural analysis of English, German and Hungarian possessive constructions which can also account for the differences between these languages. On the basis of the proposed structure, a second research question is formed: how do discourse features behave inside the DP? Finally, a third research question is how to analyse possessive constructions which are traditionally assumed to be derived in an effort to express special discourse functions, specifically those involving possessor doubling, pro-drop and double genitives.

#### **4. A brief summary of the chapters**

My dissertation is divided into six chapters. The introductory chapter is followed by a chapter which introduces the data to be analysed and reviews some influential analyses of possessive constructions. This is followed by the description of the framework used in this dissertation.

In the light of the CP-DP parallelism proposal, chapter 3 argues for a uniform DP structure for the analysis of English, German and Hungarian possessive constructions which is also able to account for the differences between these languages. In the course of the discussion the structural place of the different DP internal elements is established. This chapter aims at identifying the positions in the DP which the possessor, the possessum, adjectives, quantifiers and demonstratives occupy.

As a next step, chapter 4 examines how the discourse features [WH], [CONTR], [TOP] and [FOC] behave in the possessive DP. It is questioned whether they induce DP-internal movements to [Spec, ContrP], [Spec, TopP] and [Spec, FocP] positions. Concluding negatively on this issue and making use of the findings accumulated in chapter 3, this chapter proposes a feature percolation based approach to the description of topic-focus relations in connection with possessive constructions, arguing that it is better to abandon the Split-DP account.

In chapter 5 possessive constructions are analysed which, according to some traditional approaches, speakers derive in order to express special discourse functions. In the course of the discussion it is claimed that not all of them have such a special meaning. In addition, this chapter aims to extend the analysis proposed in the previous two chapters to Hungarian nominal pro-drop and to possessor extraction in Hungarian and some Southern German dialects.

Finally, chapter 6 summarises the main findings in this dissertation and draws the conclusion.

## 5. The structure of the possessive DP

In chapter 3, my dissertation discusses the structure of possessive DPs in English, German and Hungarian so that it can find a uniform analysis which can be adapted to all three languages. In doing so my thesis draws on the analyses of Szabolcsi (1994), Roehrs (2005) and Haegeman and Guéron (1999) among others. It is proposed that the DP and the CP display parallel structures in as much as both contain lexical and functional projections. The lexical projections are the NP and the nP which are the nominal counterparts of the verbal VP and vP respectively. The functional projections are the NumP, the I<sub>nom</sub>P, the DefP and the DP in the nominal domain, and the IP, the FinP and the CP in the verbal domain. It is also said that within the possessive DP the possessor behaves like the subject in the sentence and the possessum is, in several aspects, similar to the verb in the CP.

In English and German the possessor can be realised prenominally (1) or postnominally (2). However, the possessor cannot be spelled out postnominally in the Hungarian DP.

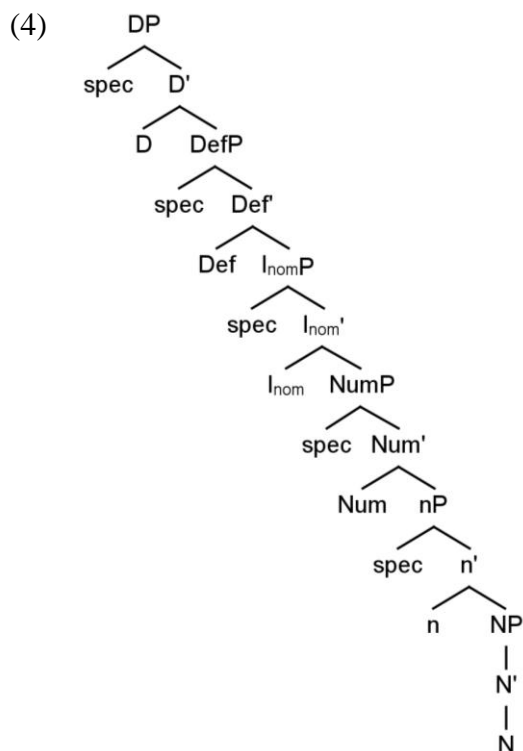
- (1) a. *Peter's house*  
b. *the man's house*  
c. *Peters Haus*  
Peter-GEN house  
d. *Péter háza*  
Péter-NOM house-POSS-SG-3.SG  
e. *a férfi háza*  
the man-NOM house-POSS-SG-3.SG
- (2) a. *the door of the house*  
b. *das Haus des Mannes*  
the house the-GEN man-GEN  
c. *das Haus von dem Mann*  
the house of the-DAT man-DAT

In some German dialects and in Hungarian it is possible to extract the possessor from the possessive construction to be able to derive sentences in which the possessor and the possessum take part in topic-focus relations independently of each other.



- (3) a. *Péter kalapja tűnt el.*  
 [Peter-NOM hat-POSS-SG-3.SG]-FOC disappeared  
 ‘It is Peter’s hat which disappeared.’
- b. *Péternek tűnt el a kalapja.*  
 Peter-NOM-EDGE-FOC disappeared the hat-POSS-SG-3.SG  
 ‘It is Peter’s hat which disappeared.’
- c. *A kalapja Péternek tűnt el*  
 the hat-POSS-SG-3.SG Peter-NOM-EDGE-CONTR-FOC disappeared  
 ‘It is Peter’s hat which disappeared.’

(4) illustrates the structure my dissertation associates with the possessive DP. (4) depicts the tree diagram associated with English and German DPs. In the Hungarian nominal domain the phrases are head final except for the DP and the DefP which are head initial.



Based on Roehrs (2005), it can be said that the possessum is merged into the structure under N and the possessive morpheme under n. As the possessive morpheme is a bound morpheme the possessum has to raise from N to n to host it. Then, the possessor is merged into the [Spec, nP] position. Possession can be interpreted in several ways, so the context has to disambiguate the exact relation between the possessor and the possessum. Hence, it is assumed that the possessive relationship is not interpreted with the help of theta roles but possession is formally marked with case which makes it possible for the possessor to be interpreted at LF.

At this point it has to be underlined that my dissertation deals exclusively with possession involving a referential noun possessum, so deverbal nouns and other nouns associated with arguments lie outside the scope of the discussion.

Based on Ritter (1991) it is proposed that the number feature of the possessum is hosted in Num. In order to check these features, the possessum and the possessive morpheme undergo n-to-Num movement. In this position the possessum can enter into a spec-head agreement with the quantifier occupying [Spec, NumP].

Then, based on Szabolcsi (1994) and Haegeman and Guéron (1999: 427), the claim is made that there is an inflectional projection inside the DP which is labelled  $I_{nom}$ . In Hungarian the possessum raises to  $I_{nom}$  to host the bound nominal inflection but remains in Num in English and German. In the latter two languages the inflectional element is taken to be a phonologically realised (possessive linkers and the Saxon Genitive 's) or an unrealised free morpheme, so the complex consisting of the possessum and the possessive affix does not amalgamate with it.

Prenominal possessors move from [Spec, nP] to [Spec,  $I_{nom}$ P] to receive case from the nominal inflectional head, whereas postnominal possessors remain in situ and are case marked in [Spec, nP] by a preposition.

The Def head hosts the definiteness feature, whereas D is responsible for encoding deictic information. In Hungarian these features are spelled out by separate elements. As a consequence, Def hosts articles while D is occupied by demonstratives. Nevertheless, in English and German articles cannot co-occur with demonstratives, so demonstratives and articles undergo Def-to-D movement in order to check the definiteness and the deictic features. In addition, based on the analysis in Szabolcsi (1994), [Spec, DP] is the escape hatch for the EDGE-marked possessors leaving the possessive DP in some southern German dialects and Hungarian.

The following table summarises which positions the different constituents occupy in the English, German and Hungarian possessive DP at Spell-Out.

(5)

	<u>The structural place of the constituents in the possessive DP</u>		
	<b>English</b>	<b>German</b>	<b>Hungarian</b>
possessor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prenominal: [Spec, I<sub>nom</sub>P]</li> <li>• postnominal: [Spec, nP]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prenominal: [Spec, I<sub>nom</sub>P]</li> <li>• postnominal: [Spec, nP]</li> <li>• on the Edge: [Spec, DP]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prenominal: [Spec, I<sub>nom</sub>P]</li> <li>• on the Edge: [Spec, DP]</li> </ul>
possessum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Num</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Num</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I<sub>nom</sub></li> </ul>
adjective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [<sub>N</sub> A, N]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [<sub>N</sub> A, N]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [<sub>N</sub> A, N]</li> </ul>
quantifier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• X<sup>0</sup>: D</li> <li>• X<sup>max</sup>: [Spec, NumP]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• X<sup>0</sup>: D</li> <li>• X<sup>max</sup>: [Spec, NumP]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• X<sup>max</sup>: [Spec, NumP]</li> </ul>
demonstrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• D</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• D</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• D</li> </ul>
possessive linker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• none</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I<sub>nom</sub></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• none</li> </ul>
Saxon Genitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I<sub>nom</sub></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• none</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• none</li> </ul>
wh-elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• same as non-wh</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• same as non-wh</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• possessor: [Spec, DP]</li> <li>• not the possessor: same as non-wh</li> </ul>

## 6. Feature percolation

Based on the DP structure described above, the thesis explores the ways English, German and Hungarian can express topic-focus relations in possessive constructions. The discussion breaks with the traditional Split-DP Hypothesis which assumes that there are TopP, FocP and ContrP projections in the DP against whose heads the individual constituents can check their discourse features ([WH], [CONTR], [TOP] and [FOC]). The following discourse functions are examined:

(6) Discourse function	Features	Use
Topic	[TOP]	reference to a discourse-old entity about which something is predicated
Contrastive topic	[CONTR][TOP]	reference to a discourse old entity about which something is predicated in contrast with another discourse-old element
Focus	[FOC]	e.g. providing answer to a wh-question → providing new information
Contrastive focus	[CONTR][FOC]	e.g. correction → providing new information instead of another piece of information for which the predication is not true
Wh-element	[WH]	asking for information
Contrastive wh-element	[CONTR][WH]	asking for information which is in contrast with a discourse old piece of information  (similar to Pesetsky's (1987) D-linking)

My dissertation utilises Webeluth's (1989) and Yoon's (2001) ideas about feature percolation by proposing that while discourse features are checked via spec-head agreement, those features internal to the DP and which cannot therefore be checked, percolate from a daughter node to its mother until they reach the top DP node which then moves to check off these features against an appropriate head in the CP.

It is assumed that discourse features have three components: a syntactic, a semantic and a phonological sub-feature. The syntactic sub-features of discourse features hosted by the different constituents compete with each other. Then, the winner set percolates onto the DP. As a result, the DP inherits the most dominant syntactic sub-feature set and behaves in the CP accordingly. This happens after the whole phase (the DP) has been built but before it is spelled out.

As a first step, the dominance hierarchy of the discourse features must be set up. Therefore, the dominance relations between the six types of elements listed in (6) above are scrutinised. For this, the thesis exploits a huge range of contextualised test dialogues on the basis of which

it can be established which features dominate over which ones and to what extent the syntactic status of the host constituents influences the effects of the hierarchy when it comes to feature percolation. It seems that the dominance of the discourse features is independent of the syntactic status of the constituents bearing them. The following table summarises the outcome of the 18 possible competitions based on which the hierarchy of the discourse features can be sketched as in (8):

(7)<sup>1</sup>

		<u>Constituent A</u>					
		<b>T</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>CT</b>	<b>CF</b>	<b>WH</b>	<b>CWH</b>
<u>Constituent B</u>	<b>T</b>	T	F	CT	CF	WH	CWH
	<b>F</b>	F	F	CT	CF	WH	CWH
	<b>CT</b>	CT	CT	CT	CF	WH	CWH
	<b>CF</b>	CF	CF	CF	CF	WH	CWH
	<b>WH</b>	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	CWH
	<b>CWH</b>	CWH	CWH	CWH	CWH	CWH	CWH

(8) [WH] > [CONTR] > [FOC] > [TOP]

After competition, the syntactic sub-features of the winner discourse feature set percolate until they reach the phase boundary, i.e. the maximal projection of the DP. According to the analysis presented, feature percolation is a copy-delete operation proceeding from node to node in a step by step fashion. This means that at every step a new copy of the syntactic sub-features is created and the copy on the lower node is immediately deleted. After feature percolation the DP is spelled out and later it undergoes movement to the left periphery of the CP to check the inherited syntactic sub-features against a C, Contr, Top or Foc head.

On the other hand, the semantic and phonological sub-features of the discourse features do not compete or percolate. They stay on their original host element and do their job at the interfaces. As LF has access to the semantic sub-features, it is always clear what discourse function a given element plays even if its syntactic sub-features lose the competition. PF maps stress and intonation onto the DP based on the phonological sub-features.

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<sup>1</sup> T = topic ([TOP]), CT = contrastive topic ([CONTR][TOP]), F = focus ([FOC]), CF = contrastive focus ([CONTR][FOC]), WH = wh-element ([WH]), CWH = contrastive wh-element ([CONTR][WH])

The following paragraphs illustrate this on a concrete example. As all of the languages examined behave in the same way regarding this mechanism it is enough to illustrate the whole process on a Hungarian dialogue in (9).

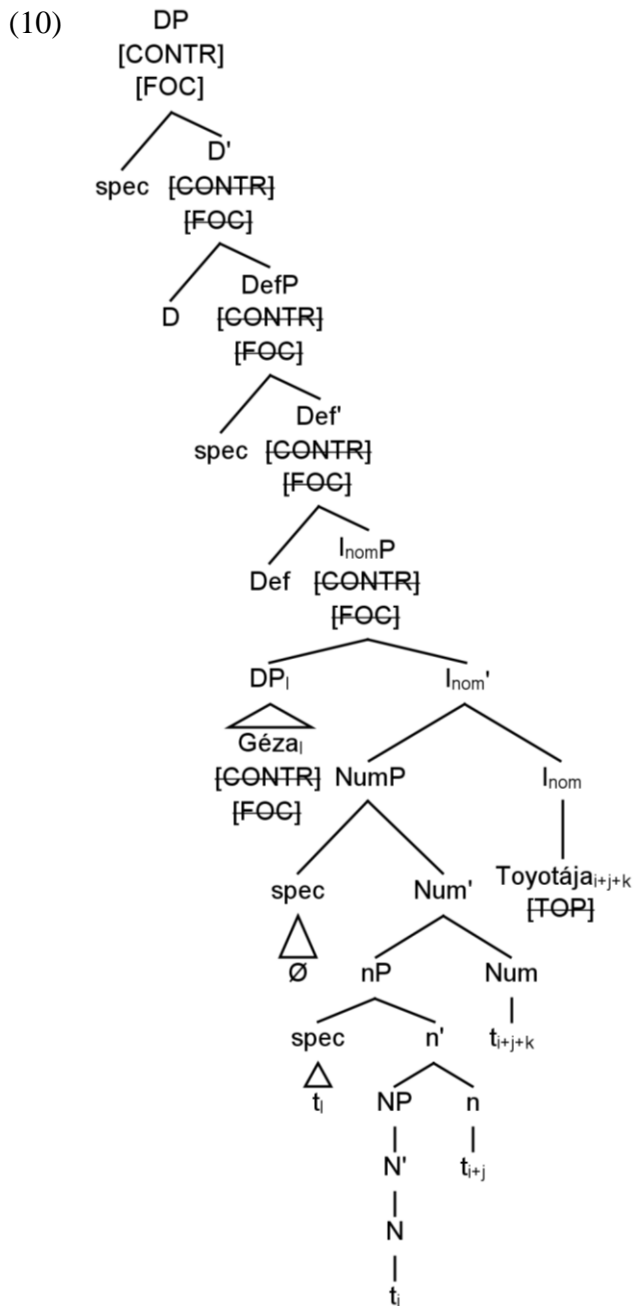
(9) Context: A and B are talking about their colleagues, Péter and Géza. Both Péter and Géza have a Toyota.

A: *Péter Toyotája eltűnt.*  
 Peter Toyota disappeared  
 ‘Peter’s Toyota disappeared.’

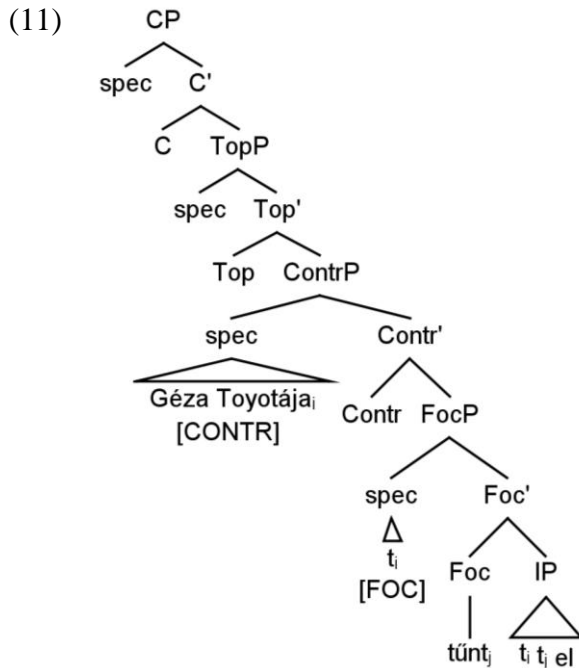
B: *Nem, [Géza Toyotája] tűnt el (és nem Péteré).*  
 no Géza-CONTR-FOC Toyota-TOP disappeared (and not Peter’s)  
 ‘No, it was GÉZA’s Toyota which disappeared (and not Peter’s).’

The DP *Géza Toyotája* is a construction containing a contrastive focus possessor and a topic possessum. In Hungarian the pre-verb (*el*) must follow the verb (*tűnt*) if the verb is preceded by a focus. In contrast, topics require the reverse order of these two elements. So, in (9) it seems that the possessive DP *Géza Toyotája* must have inherited [FOC] from the possessor. The presence of the corrective phrase *és nem Péteré* indicates that the possessor also gave over [CONTR] to the possessive DP. So, the possessive DP became a contrastive focus in the CP. How exactly did this happen?

Based on the hierarchy of the discourse features the {[CONTR][FOC]} set of the possessor dominates over [TOP], so its syntactic sub-features are entitled to undergo percolation. These sub-features travel from the possessor onto the topmost DP node of the possessive construction. Thus, syntactically the possessive DP will be a CP-level contrastive focus. (10) is the graphic illustration of the DP under discussion.



(10) shows that the syntactic sub-feature set  $\{[CONTR][FOC]\}$  percolates from the possessor in  $[Spec, I_{nom}P]$  to the maximal projection of the DP after structure building of this phase. As a result, from this time on the whole possessive DP is syntactically marked for  $[CONTR][FOC]$ . Then, *Géza Toyotája* is spelled out. Finally, the syntactic sub-features which the possessive DP inherited are checked in the CP:



In (11) the possessive DP *Géza Toyotája* moves from its IP-internal subject position ([Spec, IP]) to [Spec, FocP] to check [FOC] against Foc, and from here to [Spec, ContrP] to check [CONTR] against Contr. The verb raises from I to Foc and leaves its pre-verb behind.

This analysis is preferable over the Split-DP account because it does not work with vacuous movements, so it is more economical and its explanatory power is greater. As seen, the analysis can also explain why it is possible that a given DP contains two elements of two different discourse status (e.g. a contrastive focus and a topic) and it inherits the discourse features of only one of them.

## 7. Extending the proposal to further constructions

Finally, the dissertation turns to some constructions which are traditionally assumed to be discourse related: Hungarian nominal pro-drop (12), the English double genitive (13), the alternation of pre- and postnominal possessors in English (14) and possessor doubling (15)-(16) and possessor extraction (17)-(18) in southern German dialects and in Hungarian.

- (12) *a pro<sub>i</sub> házam<sub>i</sub>*  
 the house-POSS-SG-1.SG  
 'my house'



- (13) *a dog of Peter's*
- (14) a. *the man's dog*  
 b. *the dog of the man*
- (15) *dem Vater sein Haus*  
 [the father]-EDGE his house  
 'the father's house'
- (16) *a nőknek az ő házuk*  
 the woman-PL-NOM-EDGE the she house-POSS-SG-3.PL  
 'the women's house'
- (17) *Dem Vater ist sein Haus schön.*  
 [the father]-EDGE is his house beautiful  
 'The father's house is beautiful.'
- (18) *A nőknek eltűnt a kalapjuk.*  
 the woman-PL-NOM-EDGE disappeared the hat-POSS-SG-3.PL  
 'The women's hat disappeared.'

The constructions in (13)-(15) are not ways of expressing topic-focus phenomena in English and German. It is proposed that (13) expresses partition (that x belongs to the group y), in (14) the alternation of pre- and postnominal possessors is attributed to the different realisations of  $I_{\text{nom}}$  (whether it is associated with a possessor or a determiner) and in (15) the element *sein* is not a pronominal possessor but an inflectional element (Lühr 2002; Horváth 2013). In (16) *ő* is analysed as a resumptive pronoun which is the spell out of the possessor's trace in [Spec,  $I_{\text{nom}}P$ ] and it does not express any special discourse related meaning.

In my dissertation the motivation behind Hungarian nominal pro-drop is described by virtue of the competing feature sets. The thesis describes possessor extraction as a subcase of feature percolation in which the discourse feature set of the possessor does not take part in the competition prior to percolation.

## 8. Concluding remarks

The analysis provided in my dissertation is not complete as several issues have had to be left open for future research. For instance, the exact structural place of adjectives has to be defined more carefully and the precise nature of the CP-level movements to the specifiers of Top, Foc and Contr need to be observed in more detail. In addition, it would also be worth

examining whether other features percolate and which XPs can be their destination. Nevertheless, my dissertation achieved the aims set by the research.

Partly, my aim was to set up a uniform structure for the analysis of English, German and Hungarian possessive DPs which is also able to account for the differences between these languages. On the whole, the structure presented here seems capable of describing a wide range of data. Nevertheless, my primary aim was to show that discourse oriented phenomena in connection with possessive constructions can be approached more effectively if we abandon the Split-DP analysis for the sake of feature percolation because it can account for a wider range of data and it does not stipulate vacuous movements inside the DP. All in all, in terms of the analysis of discourse features my dissertation seems to offer a more explanatory approach than the Split-DP account.

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## 11. List of my conference presentations

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