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Hungarian clausal proleptic demonstratives as predicates

Abstract

In this paper I argue for a treatment of Hungarian clausal associate proleptic demonstrative proforms that is in line with ideas put forward by den Dikken’s (2017) and Szűcs (to appear 2024). Namely, these pronouns should be analyzed as predicates. This approach captures the non-referential but meaningful nature of the pronouns in question, thereby avoiding the theoretical and empirical problems with other analyses, which take them to be either fully meaningless (expletives) or standard discourse-deictic referential arguments. Evidence from distribution, number features, nominalization, focussing, and the general patterning of demonstrative predicates point in the direction that the proleptic proforms are a member of the “verbal modifier” category of Hungarian grammar, which are arguably all predicative in nature (Hegedűs 2013). The analysis is further motivated by the existence of such analyses for English proforms.

Keywords: demonstrative pronouns, predicates, arguments, expletives, embedding, correlates

1 Introduction

Pronouns¹ can refer not only to extralinguistic entities but elements of the linguistic discourse itself as well. (1a) shows a simple example of such a usage, where the demonstrative pronoun *azt* ‘that’ functions as the object argument of *mond* ‘say’ and refers anaphorically back to the proposition “Kate is smart”. The utterance in (1b) is a cataphoric variant.

- (1) a. Kati okos. Mindenki {az-t / ez-t} mondja.
 Kate smart everyone that-ACC this-ACC says
 ‘Kate is smart. Everyone says {that/this}.’
- b. Mindenki {az-t / ez-t} mondja: Kati okos.
 everyone that-ACC this-ACC says Kate smart
 ‘Everyone says this: Kate is smart.’²

¹ I would like to thank my two reviewers (as well as the audience of the Theoretical and Experimental Linguistics Workshop 2024 at Károli Gáspár University) for the very helpful comments on my ideas and the paper itself. Remaining errors are mine.

² Note that the distal pronoun in English would be unacceptable: *Everyone says {that/this}: Kate is smart*. An account of this in terms of the recycling of the deictic feature is offered by Staps & Rooryck (2023). The reasons why Hungarian works differently is an intriguing direction for future research.

This kind of “discourse deixis” is quite common in all languages (see e.g. Diessel 1999, section 5.1.).

In Hungarian we find a more special use of demonstratives, which is shown in (2).

- (2) Mindenki {az-t / ???ezt} mondja, hogy Kati okos.
 everyone that-ACC this-ACC says COMP Kate smart
 ‘Everyone says that Kate is smart.’ Lit.: ‘Everyone that_{dem} says that_{comp} Kate is smart.’

In (2), the embedded clause is cataphoric in nature and can be used either as a wide-focus sentence (answering a question like “What’s up with Kate?”) or as a response to an inquiry about what everyone says about Kate. This usage of the proform is the focus of the current paper.

The accusative-marked demonstrative functions as the object of the main verb (*mond* ‘say’) but it can also be a subject or an oblique element, depending on the matrix predicate. The case-marking follows from the grammatical function and (in the case of obliques) the idiosyncratic case-assignment properties of the predicate.³

- (3) a. Az valószínű, hogy Kati okos.
 that likely COMP Kate smart
 ‘It is likely that Kate is smart.’
 b. Mindenki ar-ról beszél, hogy Kati okos.
 John that-DEL speaks COMP Kate smart
 ‘Everyone speaks about it that Kate is smart.’

This construction is markedly different from the straightforward discourse-deictic usages in (1). First, the associated clause is a syntactically integrated subordinate clause, not an independent root clause as the ones in (1). Secondly, while both the proximal and distal versions are felicitous in (1), the proximal demonstrative is only marginally acceptable in (2). Another formal contrast is that while plural forms are generally dispreferred in discourse deixis, such forms are absolutely impossible in (2).⁴

- (4) a. ... ??Az-ok-at én nem mondtam. (referring back to previous utterances)
 those-PL-ACC I not said.1SG
 ‘Those, I did not say.’
 b. *Az-ok-at mondtam, hogy Kati okos és János becsületes.
 those-PL-ACC said.1SG COMP Kate smart and John honest
 ‘I said (those) that Kate is smart and John is honest.’

³ With many predicates, the manner adverbial demonstratives *úgy/így* ‘so.DIST/PROX’ are also possible (e.g. they could be inserted into (2), with the same grammaticality ratings. In this paper I am going to focus on the nominal demonstratives. My conclusions (about a potential predicative analysis) should straightforwardly carry over to the adverbial forms as well, but further investigations are definitely warranted, see also footnote 5 below and Teptiuk (2020).

⁴ The reason for the markedness of (4a) may be that discourse deixis is already a partially grammaticalized usage of demonstratives and grammaticalization is often associated with the loss of inflections (see Diessel 1999: 118–119).

From such contrasts it can be concluded that (1) and (2) have to receive different analyses. Thus in (1) we find a clearly referential pronoun, interpreted in the discourse-space. (2) features what may be called a “proleptic” / “correlative” / “anticipatory” / “associate” demonstrative. To my knowledge at this point, this usage of demonstratives, as standard, grammaticalized associates of subordinate clauses, is unique to Hungarian.⁵ Similar constructions in English are various structures involving clausal extraposition and the third person neuter personal pronoun *it*, as well as existential sentences with *there*. A perspective on similar structures in German (with *es*) and Dutch (with *het*) is offered by Sudhoff (2016).

- (5) a. It seems that Kate is smart.
 b. It is that Kate is smart.
 c. It was Kate who was the smartest.
- (6) There was a student in the room.

The proper analysis of (2) is an open issue in Hungarian linguistics. The main questions are the following:

- i. What is the syntactic/semantic nature of the proform?
- ii. How is it associated with the embedded clause?
- iii. What are the conditions on its appearance?

In this paper, my primary aim is to answer the first question above, with attention to the second. I will not have anything new to say about the third question but references to the relevant literature will be made.

I will argue against viewing the demonstrative pronoun as a meaningless expletive item but I will also discard analyses that see it as a fully referential standard demonstrative, conflating the uses in (1) and (2). I will argue that the proform is best analyzed as a predicative element.

The structure of the paper is the following. In section 2, I survey the two most prominent lines of analyses in the literature. The analysis that can be considered as standard was first articulated in Kenesei (1992, 1994) and holds that the pronoun is an expletive. Later this was challenged by several researchers who viewed the proform as a referential argument (Tóth 2000, Rákosi & Laczkó 2005, Szűcs 2015). I will show that both lines of research fall short of giving a theoretically and empirically satisfactory account of the construction. In den Dikken’s (2017)⁶ analysis, the proform is a predicate and this has also been endorsed by Szűcs (to appear 2024). Importantly, den Dikken’s argumentation was mostly based on general theoretical considerations on phrase structure and Szűcs (to appear 2024) provides some empirical support for the analysis. The main novel contribution of this paper is section 3, whereby I strengthen the predicate-based position with further empirical observations as well as insights about the uses and analyses of demonstratives in general. Section 4 aims to provide further plausibility

⁵ However, some Finnish data in Teptiuk (2020) have been brought to my attention very recently. Constructions like (i) below should be further investigated.

(i) Hän ajatteli niin että aika on neljäs ulottuvuus.
 3SG thought.3SG so.DIST COMP time is fourth dimension
 ‘He thought (so) that time is the fourth dimension.’

⁶ See also den Dikken (2018: 26–40).

for the proposed analysis by surveying a number of English constructions which, paralleling the Hungarian construction, in traditional accounts involve expletives but predication-based alternatives have also been offered. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2 Previous approaches⁷

As noted, there is no consensus in the literature about the proper analysis of the construction involving the clausal proleptic demonstrative in (2), which I repeat here for convenience.

- (7) Mindenki {az-t / ???ezt} mondja, hogy Kati okos.
 everyone that-ACC this-ACC says COMP Kate smart
 ‘Everyone says that Kate is smart.’ Lit.: ‘Everyone that_{DEM} says that_{COMP} Kate is smart.’

In this section, I survey the two major approaches that have been put forward and show that viewing the proform neither as an expletive nor as a referential argument is satisfactory. Note that the debate is only relevant for sentences like (7), most accounts implicitly or explicitly recognize that the discourse-deictic demonstratives in (1) are clearly arguments (see e.g. Brandtler & Molnár 2016).

2.1 The proform as an expletive

The standard analysis of the cataphoric clausal associate proform can be traced back to Kenesei (1992, 1994). The basic idea posits that *azt* ‘that.ACC’ in sentence (6) functions as a semantically empty filler element – an expletive pronoun, forming a chain with the clausal associate.⁸ This type of construction is akin to what happens with the subject *it* English sentences involving *seem* and a finite clause, according to traditional analyses (but see section 4 for an alternative). An example for this is sentence (8). In Kenesei’s analysis of Hungarian, the pronoun serves to “represent” the CP in positions that the CP itself, due to independent constraints, cannot occupy. An instance of this is the preverbal focus position in Hungarian.⁹

- (8) It seems that Kate is smart. (c.f. *That Kate is smart seems.)
 (9) *Mindenki [_{FocP} [_{CP} (csak) hogy Kati okos] mondja].
 everyone only that Kate smart says
 ‘Everyone says only that Kate is smart.’

Since the original formulation, a significant number of researchers have adopted this perspective, see Lipták (1998), Gervain (2004), de Cuba and Ürögdi (2009), Brandtler & Molnár (2016). Influential though, the analysis is not without challenges. The fundamental problem stems from the inadequacy of employing such an expletive pronoun for this gram-

⁷ This section is partially based on Szűcs (to appear 2024).

⁸ Here the strict sense of “expletive” is used, an element that is totally devoid of meaning, as opposed to some element with a bleached semantics.

⁹ The reason why clauses are barred from such positions may be either phonological (Vogel & Kenesei 1987) or syntactic in nature (É. Kiss 2003).

matical context within the larger framework of typological and theoretical literature related to expletive pronouns.

First, regarding the proform as an expletive is in tension with the fact that Hungarian is a pro-drop language. Such languages are not expected to contain expletives cross-linguistically: as the structural subject-position can remain vacuous (and having an object cannot be an absolute requirement, intransitive verbs exist in every language), there is no need for grammatical slot-fillers in such a language.

Secondly, it should be mentioned that *azt* ‘that-ACC’ in (7) and (3a) is in fact optional, which is again not expected from an expletive element, functioning as a necessary filler of some structural slot.¹⁰

- (10) a. Mindenki mondja, hogy Kati okos.
 everyone says COMP Kate smart
 ‘Everyone says that Kate is smart.’
 b. Valószínű, hogy Kati okos.
 likely COMP Kate smart
 ‘It is likely that Kate is smart.’

Furthermore, expletives by the standard definition are expected to occur only as subjects, but (7) and (3b) feature the proform in object and oblique forms, which makes their expletive status questionable. Admittedly, there are some proposals in the literature about object-expletives, e.g. *I regret it that I called Kate smart*. According to Postal and Pullum (1988) *it* in this sentence is an expletive while Rothstein (1995) contests this. Svenonius (2002: 9) is also sceptical about the expletive status of *it* in this sentence. At any rate, an oblique, inherently case-marked expletive would be even more striking.

It is interesting to note that Horvath (1997, footnote 15) (who in her analysis of *wh*-related versions of the construction at hand, otherwise subscribes to the expletive-based approach) mentions that “the use of the term ‘expletive’ in this paper is not meant to imply that it is a pure expletive in the sense of Chomsky (1995)”.¹¹

There has been a general concern about the status of many elements that had been analyzed as syntactic dummies, the trend gravitating towards a more restricted use of expletives as analytical solutions. For instance, Haider (2019) argues that genuine expletives only occur in SVO languages. Hungarian, being a discourse-configurational language with a relatively free word-order, is not predicted to have expletives, based on this criterion. Haider allows for the occurrence of “semantically void arguments”, but arguably, the demonstrative under scrutiny is neither an argument (see the next section), nor semantically void (it likely carries an interpretable deictic feature). Further examples of giving content to formatives standardly thought of as expletives include Moro (1997), Tortora (1997) on specific English copular

¹⁰ Oblique-marked demonstratives are sometimes droppable, with constraints partially explored in the literature, see Kálmán (2001: 175–176).

¹¹ This in the literature is known as the *wh*-scope marking construction:

(i) Mit gondolsz, hogy ki a legokosabb?
 what.ACC think.2SG COMP who the smartest
 ‘What do you think, who is the smartest?’

sentences involving *it* and *there* (e.g. see (5)–(6) above), Levin & Krejci (2019) on weather-*it* (*it is raining*) and Hinterhölzl (2024) on German clausal associates.

2.2 The proform as a referential argument

Tóth (2000), Rákosi & Laczkó (2005) and Szűcs (2015) address the issues outlined in the previous section by positing that *azt* ‘that.ACC’ in (7) is a fully-fledged referential argument, not fundamentally different from exophoric or straightforwardly discourse-deictic uses of the demonstrative.

While those general theoretical issues are indeed addressed, such a viewpoint brings about its own problems. First, in this analysis, the CP is seen as an appositive adjunct clause. This is semantically counter-intuitive as the expressed proposition is divorced from the governing predicate. Furthermore, the matrix predicate often imposes various morphosyntactic restrictions on the embedded clause (e.g. mood in (11)), which points towards a more direct relationship between them.

- (11) Kati az-t kérte, hogy mindenki {*távoz-ik / távoz-zon}.
- Kate that-ACC asked COMP everyone leave-3SG.IND leave-3SG.IMP
- ‘Kate asked that everyone should leave.’

The contrasts concerning the deictic and number features illustrated in (1), (2) and (4) also argue for the separation of the clearly argumental discourse-deictic usages ((1), (4a)) and the proleptic clausal associate uses ((2), (4b)) of the demonstrative.

Furthermore, as discussed in de Cuba & Ürögdi (2009) and Brandtler & Molnár (2016), the occurrence of the proleptic proform is subject to lexical and syntactic licensing conditions. In particular, verbs without assertive or other illocutionary force (e.g. factive verbs such as *regret* or non-factives like *doubt*) can only co-occur with the proform if the latter is focussed. No such restrictions can be observed with straightforwardly argumental uses.¹²

- (12) a. *Mindenki az-t {sajnálja / kétli}, hogy Kati okos.
- everyone that-ACC regrets doubts COMP Kate smart
- ‘Everyone regrets/doubts that Kate is smart.’
- b. Mindenki CSAK AZ-T {sajnálja / kétli}, hogy Kati okos.
- everyone only that-ACC regrets doubts COMP Kate smart
- ‘Everyone regrets/doubts only that Kate is smart.’
- (13) Az-t {sajnálom / kétlem}.
- that-ACC regret.1SG doubt.1SG
- ‘I regret/doubt that.’

¹² As one of my reviewers pointed out, this has to be qualified in that the syntactic licensing requirement is relevant for the preverbal occurrences of the proforms. Postverbally the proforms are fully acceptable (e.g. *sajnálom azt, hogy...* ‘regret.1SG that.ACC that...’). This apparent paradox can be resolved under the assumption that these postverbal uses are referential, in line with Alberti’s (1997) approach to the distribution of referential and nonreferential elements in the Hungarian sentence, see section 3.1.

Based on the considerations discussed in this section, we can conclude that neither of the major previous approaches (expletive, referential argument) can provide a satisfactory view of the proleptic demonstrative at hand. In the next section, I argue that a recently emerged third alternative is the optimal solution.

3 The proform as a predicate

Den Dikken (2017) argues that *azt* ‘that.ACC’ in (7) should be viewed as a secondary predicate for the complement clause. In this analysis, the matrix predicate may take the CP alone as its propositional argument or the entire proform-clause complex, where the proform is the predicate for the clause.¹³

According to Szűcs (to appear 2024), such an approach optimally reconciles the conflicts presented by the previous accounts. A predicate is a meaningful element, thus the issues concerning the typology and theory of expletives do not arise. In other words, the proform is not referential, but meaningful. At the same time in this approach, as the whole proform-clause complex serves as an argument of the main predicate, a direct link between the main predicate and the clause may be established.

Importantly, Szűcs’s (2024) approach argues for placing the proleptic proform into the established category of Hungarian verbal modifiers, which are, according to Hegedűs (2013), all predicative in nature.

I concur with this view and in this section, I aim to fortify the argumentation with novel insights. In the subsequent section 4, I will also show that such an approach is not without parallels in the literature, a number of other constructions have been (re-)analyzed as involving predicative proforms (extrapositions, clefts, existential sentences in English).

3.1 Distribution

Verbal modifiers (VMs) in Hungarian include elements like preverbal particles (14a), nonreferential bare nouns, predicate adjectives or adverbs (14c), secondary predicates (14c), predicate adjectives/adverbs (14d) and idiom chunks (14e). According to Hegedűs (2013) what unites all these elements syntactically/semantically is that they are not referential, but predicative in nature.

- (14) a. Mindenki meg_{VM}-mondta, hogy Kati okos.
 everyone PRT-said.3SG COMP Kate smart
 ‘Everyone said that Kate is smart.’
- b. Kati TV-t néz.
 Kate TV-ACC watches
 ‘Kate is watching television (“television-watching”).’

¹³ Szűcs’s (2022) contribution in the framework of Lexical-Functional Grammar offers an analysis which is similar in spirit.

- (17) a. Kati legyen tanár!
Kate be.3SG.IMP teacher
‘Let Kate be a teacher!’
b. Fesd piros-ra a kerítést!
paint.2SG.IMP red-SUB the fence
‘Paint the fence red!’
- (18) Mondd az-t, hogy Kati okos!
say.2SG that-ACC COMP Kate smart
‘Say that Kate is smart!’

3.2 Number features

As noted for (4b), repeated here as (19), a plural proleptic demonstrative is ungrammatical, even when multiple clauses are associated. This is comparable to the behavior of bare nouns in the VM position, as these are also usually singular only.¹⁴

- (19) *Az-ok-at mondtam, hogy Kati okos és János becsületes.
 those-PL-ACC said.1SG COMP Kate smart and John honest
 ‘I said (those) that Kate is smart and John is honest.’

- (20) *János TV-k-et néz.
 John TV-PL-ACC watches
 ‘John is watching television(s).’

This parallelism is not surprising if both of them nonreferential in nature. As predicates, they can still contribute the relevant semantic content to the utterance.

3.3 Nominalizations

Bare nouns of the type illustrated in (14b) may often be parts of a participle-based nominalization with the main verb. The demonstrative pronoun in question is capable of undergoing the same process once again highlighting the categorial connection between the two.

- (21) TV-néz-ő / fa-vág-ó / újság-olvas-ó
 TV-view-er wood-cut-ter newspaper-read-er
 ‘TV viewer / lumberjack (lit.: wood-cutter) / newspaper-reader’
- (22) János a-mond-ó, hogy Kati okos.
 John that-say-er COMP Kate smart
 ‘John is of the opinion that Kate is smart.’

Admittedly, what we see in (22) is not a productive process (e.g. **a-gondoló* ‘that-thinker’). Nevertheless, the claim is not that the demonstrative pronoun in question is exactly like bare nouns, which are just one member of the VM-class. Every member of this group has their own properties as well. The other examples in (14) would not work in (21), e.g. **pirosrafestő* ‘red.SUB.painter’. So while this argument is of limited scope, the scope it has fits into the general pattern that I am endorsing.

¹⁴ Admittedly, there are exceptions to this generalization. Laczkó (2016, footnote 138) mentions *újság-ok-at olvas* ‘newspaper-PL-ACC reads’. It might be noted that a (marginally) small number of sentences of the type shown in (19) can also be found in the Hungarian National Corpus.

3.4 Focus and predication

As mentioned with respect to (12), focus can license otherwise illicit occurrences of the proleptic demonstrative.

- (23) Mindenki {*az-t / AZ-T} sajnálja, hogy Kati okos.
 everyone that-ACC regrets COMP Kate smart
 ‘Everyone regrets that Kate is smart.’

It is relevant here that É. Kiss (2006) argues that focussing is a predicative process. This is why *öregember* ‘old man’ and *professzor* ‘professor’ can refer to the properties of an individual and not the individual themselves, otherwise (24) would be nonsensical if the same individual is referenced. (The example itself is from Szabolcsi (1981).)

- (24) Az ÖREGEMBERNEK_i adtam át a helyem, nem a
 the old.man.DAT gave.1SG over the seat.1SG.POSS not the
 professzornak_i.
 professor.DAT
 ‘It was to the old man that I gave my seat, not to the professor.’

Thus focussing, predication and proform-licensing form a natural set of phenomena, reinforcing the predicative nature of the proleptic demonstrative.

3.5 Demonstrative pronouns as predicates

Finally, it should be pointed out that demonstrative pronouns can naturally assume predicative functions in Hungarian. When they do, they show similarity to the proleptic proform in that they default to the distal version. Example (25) is based on den Dikken (2017), footnote 7, (26) is my example with a secondary predicate and (27) is (2) repeated.¹⁵

- (25) Magyar vagyok és {an-nak/???en-nek} is tartom magam.
 Hungarian am and that-DAT this-DAT too consider.1SG myself
 ‘I am Hungarian, and I consider myself as one, too.’
- (26) János szén-né égette a hús-t és én is {az-zá / ???ez-zé}
 John coal-TRA burned.3SG the meat-ACC and I too that-TRA this-TRA
 égettem.
 burned.1SG
 ‘John burned the meat to cinders and I burned it like that too.’
- (27) Mindenki {az-t / ???ezt} mondja, hogy Kati okos.
 everyone that-ACC this-ACC says COMP Kate smart
 ‘Everyone says that Kate is smart.’ Lit.: ‘Everyone that_{dem} says that_{comp} Kate is smart.’

¹⁵ Note this English example, with the same pattern as (25), from Poole (2017: 47): Donald thinks that he is a success, but no one else considers him {that/*this}.

Moreover, there is lesser-studied Hungarian construction which involves the distal demonstrative as the main predicate, subcategorizing for a subordinate clause. Kálmán (2001: 180) mentions the following sentence.

- (28) Nem az, hogy zsugori vagyok, de add már meg a pénzemet.
 not that COMP stingy am but give already PRT the money.1SG.POSS.ACC
 ‘It’s not that I’m stingy but give me back my money already.’

Like in (25)–(27), the proximal form would be highly marked. Note that the sentence is probably not to be analyzed as one involving a zero copula in the main clause. While that construction is also possible, (28) obligatory involves negation, which restriction (together with the interpretational difference indicated by the translation) does not apply to (29), making their underlying equivalence unlikely.¹⁶

- (29) Az van, hogy zsugori vagyok.
 that is COMP stingy am
 ‘The situation is that I am stingy.’

While the construction in (28) does merit further investigation (e.g. it is not clear why the initial negation is obligatory), but the general point, the predicate nature of the demonstrative pronoun, is valid.

Szűcs (to appear 2024) argues that the deictic restriction (to distal) could be explained in terms of discourse-deictic conditions on pronominal reference, so the deictic feature is interpreted. This is supported by the fact that a proper discourse-environment can support a proximal form. For further details of this line of argumentation, see Szűcs (to appear 2024). For my current purposes here, the important fact is that in all these examples, *az* ‘that’ is analyzable as a predicative element.

3.6 Interim summary

In this section I argued that while they are not complete, the similarities between verbal modifiers and predicative elements in general on the one hand and the proleptic, clause-associated demonstrative pronoun on the other, do merit an analysis of the latter in terms of the former. That is, the proforms under scrutiny should be seen as predicates.

A natural question that may be asked is about the connection between this analysis and the straightforwardly argumental, discourse-deictic uses of the demonstrative, e.g. the one found in example (1) at the beginning of this paper (*everyone says that*). Without going into the details, here I only refer to Szűcs (to appear 2024), who argues that the two lexical entries should be related through a nanosyntactic approach to lexical entries. There, the argumental proform (30a) has a syntactic layer responsible for referentiality, which is discarded in predicative uses (30b). In other words, there is only one lexical entry (the full item in 30a), but based on the syntactic

¹⁶ As one of my reviewers rightly pointed out to me, (29) is also best analyzed as involving a predicative proform, similarly to how the (unstressed) copula occurs with other predicative elements like *meleg van* ‘it is hot, literally ‘hot is’. The difference is between (28) and (29) is that in (28), the demonstrative serves as the primary (only) predicate, while in (29) it is secondary one licensed in Spec-CP as mentioned in footnote 12 below.

environment,¹⁷ it can “shrink” to the appropriate size, the predicative proform being a subset of the argumental use (in the sense of being included in it).¹⁸

- (30) a. [RefP [DP [...]]] → argument b. [DP [...]] → predicate

In the section before the conclusion, I survey some English constructions and their analyses, which are relevant in that a pronominal usually thought of as an expletive may and has plausibly been analyzed as a predicate. This reinforces the general idea put forward in this paper.

4 Predicative proforms in English

As noted in section 2.1, a number of syntactic formatives that had been standardly thought of as expletives have been reanalyzed as more meaningful elements by various researchers. Especially relevant for the topic of this paper are cases where the pronominal may be seen as a predicate. In this connection, I will briefly discuss the English copular sentences involving the pronominals *it* and *there*, mentioned in (5) and (6). For convenience, I repeat these examples here.

- (31) a. It seems that Kate is smart.
 b. It is that Kate is smart.
 c. It was Kate who was the smartest.

- (32) There was a student in the room.

Moro (1997, chapter 4) concentrates on structures in (31a), (31b) and (32). He takes issues with the standard treatment of the proforms as expletives. For (31a) and (31b), he capitalizes on parallels between the copula verb *be* and *seem*, arguing that the latter verb is a “quasi-copula”, while *it* is a “pro-predicate”. Note the parallel in (33).

- (33) a. Kate is *(smart). b. Kate seems *(smart).

¹⁷ In particular, Spec-CP, the base-generation site of the predicate proform, is an A-bar position, which does not license arguments. The Spec-CP has to have some sort of licensing condition (e.g. along the lines of Brandtler & Molnár 2016), to account for restrictions illustrated in (12).

From Spec-CP, the proform moves into the preverbal field to whatever position VMs should move into, as described in 3.1. (This is the standard derivation in the literature see e.g. Lipták (1998), Brandtler & Molnár (2016). Den Dikken (2020: 26–40) endorses a markedly different, nonstandard, bottom-up derivation. The evaluating the merits of the different specific syntactic realizations are outside the scope of this paper.

¹⁸ For an outline of the nanosyntactic framework, see Caha (2020). Note also that the DP-layer is present in both instances, which answers a question by one of my reviewers about the source of the definite conjugation on the verb when the proform functions as an object, e.g. in (2), following Bartos (1997). The same reviewer also mentioned that if the proform is the adjectival *olyan* ‘such’ (*ő olyat mondott, hogy...* ‘(s)he such.ACC said.3SG.INDEF that...’) then the conjugation is indefinite. This is because the lack of DP-layer on the adjective. In Szűcs (2022), I argue that the adjectival proform-construction is substantially different from the nominal one and should receive an analysis involving a covert NP.

In Moro's (1997) analysis, both sentences in (33) involve the base-generation of the subject *Kate* and the predicate *smart* in a small clause and moving the embedded subject to the matrix subject position.

(34) Kate_i {is/seems} [_{sc} Kate_i smart].

In this analysis, in the case of (31a) and (31b) it is the pro-predicate *it* that carries out the same movement.

(35) It_i {is/seems} [_s[that Kate is smart]_{subj} [*it*_{pred}]_i].

According to Moro (1997), the trigger for the movement in (35) is the relatively light semantics of *it*. However, he does not seem to argue for a complete lack of semantic contribution. This quote, from Moro (1997: 196), is a clear indication of this:

Saying *it's that John is sad* is not simply equivalent to *John is sad*. Its meaning is rather 'reinforced' as if it were: 'the fact is that John is sad'. This fits in with the hypothesis that the structure involving raising of a propredicative *it* is interpreted as assigning a sentential predicate to the subordinate clause.

Den Dikken's (2013) analysis of *it* in specificational cleft sentences (31c) harbors the same underlying idea.¹⁹

(36) It_i was [Kate_{subj} [*it*_{pred}]_i] who was the smartest.

In support of this analysis, den Dikken (2013) draws attention to the parallel in (37), namely that in the raising-to-object/ECM construction both a straightforward predicate and *it* mandate the overtiness of the copula:

- (37) a. I consider [his best friend]_{pred} *(to be) Brian_{subj}.
b. I consider [*it*_{pred}] *(to be) Brian_{subj} who is his best friend.

Another supportive argument for this treatment comes from the fact that although the most common proform in clefts is indeed *it*, a proper context would support alternatives (see also Hedberg 2000, Reeves 2013):

(38) {It/this/that} was John that I saw.

About *there* in (32) Moro (1997, chapter 2) notes that seeing it as an expletive raises the question why an empty syntactic formative would make the PP-part of the sentence optional:

(39) a. A student was *(in the room). b. There was a student (in the room).

¹⁹ Den Dikken's (2013) paper contains an independent section about the clausal part of (36), arguing that it "is a right-dislocated headless relative dependent on a formal licensing relationship with the operator inside the relative clause and a content-licensing relationship with the focus" (den Dikken 2013: 35). This aspect is not relevant for our discussion of the proform itself.

His answer is that *there* is not an expletive but a predicate. In (39a) the PP is the predicate, which is not to be deleted for obvious reasons (a sentence should have a predicate), while the predicate is *there* in (39b), rendering the PP an adjunct. Observe that extraction-contrast in (40), which follows from (40b) containing an adjunct-island (Moro 1997: 119).

- (40) a. [To whom]_i does it seem that [_{clause} [many persons]_{subj} are [indebted t_i]_{pred}]?
 b. *[To whom]_i does it seem that [_{clause} [there]_{pred} are [many persons]_{subj} [indebted t_i]_{adjunct}]?

It is worth mentioning here that according to Tortora (1997: 160), this analysis might not be suitable for similar *there*-sentences involving lexical unaccusative verbs, as in such instances the PP is always optional.

- (41) a. A student arrived (at the station). b. There arrived a student (at the station).

Crucially, Tortora's (1997, chapter 5) analysis again does not involve treating *there* as an expletive. Rather, she argues that *there* in sentences like (41) is a “weak locative” argument, contrasting with the “strong locative” use of *there* (e.g. as in *Look there!*). From our current perspective, the duality of a semantically stronger (referential/(strong) argumental) and weaker (predicative/weak argumental) versions of the proforms at hand ties in well with the general position advocated here and Szűcs (to appear 2024), stated for the uses of the discourse-deictic and proleptic clausal associate demonstratives in (1) and (2), see also the interim summary above.

5 Summary and conclusion

In this paper I argued for a treatment of Hungarian clausal associate proleptic demonstrative proforms that is in line with ideas put forward by den Dikken's (2017) and Szűcs (to appear 2024). After showing that the analyses which see the proform as an expletive or a fully referential argument are inadequate, I endorsed the view that these demonstratives are to be seen as predicates. Thus, their nonreferential but still meaningful nature can be substantiated. This led us to explore how they fit into the well-established group of Hungarian verbal modifiers. We found that there are significant parallelisms, in terms of distribution, number features, nominalizations, and connection to focus, which warrant the predicative analysis. Also, the predicative nature was shown to be in line how demonstrative pronouns in other predicative environments behave, as well as with a general outlook on English proforms that have been (re-)analyzed by some researchers as predicates.

Future research directions include a detailed syntactic analysis of the construction (licensing, association with the clause), the analysis of the semantic/syntactic features built into the demonstrative pronoun and its comparison with related constructions both within Hungarian and cross-linguistically.

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