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Nominal ellipsis

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Chapter 7

Nominal ellipsis

Anikó Lipták

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7.1. NP ellipsis: the basic data

In Hungarian, the head noun in a noun phrase can be unpronounced in contexts where its content is recoverable from the preceding discourse (cf. Section 4.4.1. in Chapter 4 and Bánréti 1992, 2007, Lipták 2018). When this happens to the exclusion of a modifier, numeral or (quantificational) determiner in the (extended) noun phrase, we are dealing with noun ellipsis. In the following examples, the part of the noun phrase that is understood to be missing is indicated by __.

- (554) a. Ezt a házat nagyobbra tervezték, mint azt a kettő__-t.
 this.Acc the house.Acc big.Comp.Sub design.Past.3Pl than that.Acc the two -Acc
 ‘This house was designed to be bigger than those two.’
- b. Ez a régi kis ház nagyobb, mint az az új nagy__.
 this the old small house big.Comp than that the new big
 ‘This old small house is bigger than that new big one.’
- c. A hideg sör finomabb, mint a meleg__.
 the cold beer tasty.Comp than the warm
 ‘Cold beer is tastier than warm beer.’
- d. A régi ház eltakarta az új__-ak-at.
 the old house conceal.Past.3Sg the new -Pl-Acc
 ‘The old house concealed the new ones.’
- e. Levi kért egy pár ceruzát. Adtam neki néhány__-at.
 Levi ask.Past.3Sg a couple pencil.Acc gave.1Sg 3Sg.Dat some -Acc
 ‘Levi asked for some pencils. I gave him some.’
- f. A: Ehhez a filmhez magas férfiakat keresnek.
 this.All the film.All tall man.Pl.Acc search.Pl
 ‘They are looking for tall men for this film.’
 B: Milyen magas__-akat?
 how tall -Pl.Acc
 ‘How tall?’

The noun can also be missing together with one or more adjectival modifiers, in which case we talk about noun phrase ellipsis. To illustrate, the following example is ambiguous between two readings: one in which the missing constituent corresponds to the noun *ház* ‘house’ alone and one in which the missing constituent is a modified noun, *új ház* ‘new house’.

- (555) Ezt a négy új házat nagyobbra tervezték, mint azt a
 this.Acc the four new house.Acc big.Comp.Sub design.Past.3Pl than that.Acc the
 kettő__-t
 two -Acc
 ‘These four new houses were designed to be bigger than those two {houses / new houses}.’

In the rest of this chapter, we will refer to noun ellipsis and noun phrase ellipsis under the cover term NP ellipsis.

The missing nominal in NP ellipsis can be understood with reference to an entity in the linguistic or the extra-linguistic context. In the previous examples, the linguistic context provides a fully pronounced antecedent for each elliptical noun phrase. When the context foregrounds a salient entity that is unambiguously recoverable to both the speaker and the hearer (accompanied by pointing for example), nominal ellipsis can apply without a linguistic antecedent as well:

(556) [Context: Standing in front of a heap of melons at the market]

- a. Kérek két nagy__-ot!
ask.1Sg two big -Acc
'I'd like to have two big ones.'
- b. Megkóstolhatok egy__-et?
taste.Mod.1Sg one -Acc
'May I taste one?'

7.2. Type of remnants in NP ellipsis

NP ellipsis can leave behind adjectives, numerals and determiners and their combinations.

- (557) a. A szép piros rózsákat kérem.
the nice red rose.Pl.Acc ask.1Sg
'I'd like the nice red roses.'
 - b. A szép piros__-akat kérem.
the nice red -Pl.Acc ask.1Sg
'I'd like the nice red ones.'
 - c. A szép__-eket kérem.
the nice -Pl.Acc ask.1Sg
'I'd like the nice ones.'
-
- (558) a. Azt a négy szép piros rózsát kérem.
that.Acc the four nice red rose.Acc ask.1Sg
'I'd like those four nice red roses.'
 - b. Azt a négy szép piros__-at kérem.
that.Acc the four nice red -Acc ask.1Sg
'I'd like those four nice red ones.'
 - c. Azt a négy szép__-et kérem.
that.Acc the four nice -Acc ask.1Sg
'I'd like those four nice ones.'
 - d. Azt a négy__-et kérem.
that.Acc the four -Acc ask.1Sg
'I'd like those four.'

The adjectival remnants can be lexical adjectives as in the previous examples or adjectival participial clauses, see (559) and (560):

- (559) a. Csak közjegyző által hitelesített iratokat fogadunk el.
 only notary by certify.Part document.Pl.Acc accept.1Pl Prt
 'We only accept documents certified by a notary.'
- b. Csak közjegyző által hitelesített__-eket fogadunk el.
 only notary by certify.Part -Pl.Acc accept.1Pl Prt
 'We only accept ones certified by a notary.'
- (560) a. A lemásolandó iratokat ide teszem.
 the Prt.copy.Part document.Pl.Acc here place.1Sg
 'I place the documents to be copied here.'
- b. A lemásolandó__-kat ide teszem.
 the Prt.copy.Part -Pl.Acc here place.1Sg
 'I place the ones to be copied here.'

The remnant of ellipsis can also be an argument to the missing nominal, which is normally linked to the noun by *való*. The postpositional phrase *cikkre* 'to article(s)' is an argument of the derived nominal *hivatkozás* 'reference'.

- (561) A könyvre való hivatkozások rövidebbek, mint a cikkekre való__-k.
 the book.Sub VALÓ reference.Pl short.Com than the article.Sub VALÓ -Pl
 'References to books are shorter than references to articles.'

The definite determiner cannot appear as the final remnant of an elliptical noun phrase, which shows that NP ellipsis is licensed by the leftmost item in the NP being overt:

- (562) a. A rózsákat kérem.
 the rose.Pl.Acc ask.1Sg
 'I'd like the roses.'
- b. *A __-kat kérem.
 the -Pl.Acc ask.1Sg
 'I'd like the ones.'

Demonstratives on the other hand can appear without a nominal following them (cf. (563)), yet arguably this is not a case of NP ellipsis, but the context-dependent distal use of a demonstrative. (564) shows that demonstrative pronouns cannot have the interpretation of an elliptical noun phrase in cases where a numeral is also part of the elided material.

- (563) a. Azokat a rózsákat kérem.
 that.Pl.Acc the rose.Pl.Acc ask.1Sg
 'I'd like those roses.'
- b. Azokat kérem.
 that.Pl.Acc ask.1Sg
 'I'd like those ones'

- (564) a. Azt a két szép rózsát előbb veszik majd meg, mint ezt.
 that.Acc the two nice rose.Acc sooner buy.3Pl then Prt than this.Acc
 'Those two nice roses will be sold sooner than {this / *these two nice ones}.'
- b. Ezt a három feladatot már megoldottam. Mindjárt elkezdem
 this.Acc the three exercise.Acc already Prt.solve.Past.1Sg soon Prt.begin.1Sg
 azt is.
 that.Acc too
 'I have already solved these three exercises. Soon I start {that / *those three} too.'

That the problem in (563) and (564) is not the morphological singularity of the demonstrative is shown by examples in which the elliptical reading is available. The singular demonstrative can be understood as an elliptical noun phrase (containing a numeral) when it contrasts with a preceding correlate in parallel syntactic position (that of contrastive topics or contrastive focus).

- (565) a. Én AZT A KÉT SZÉP RÓZSÁT kérem, nem EZT ____.
 I that.Acc the two nice rose.Acc ask.1Sg not this.Acc
 'I'd like those two nice roses, not {this / these two nice roses}.'
- b. Ezt a három feladatot már megoldottam, azt ____ viszont nem.
 this.Acc the three exercise.Acc already Prt.solve.Past.1Sg that.Acc however not
 'I have solved these three exercises already, {that / those three}, however, I didn't.'

The elided constituent in these examples, however, is bigger than in the cases of NP ellipsis: it contains not only the noun phrase, but also the definite determiner and the numeral.

7.3. Morphological marking of elliptical noun phrases

When NP ellipsis applies in Hungarian the overt number and case morphemes that normally appear on the noun (and only there) must appear on the linearly *last remnant* preceding the missing noun, as was shown above. This last remnant can be an adjective (cf. (557b,c)), a numeral (cf. (558d)), a participial modifier (cf. (559b), (560b)) or the linking element *való* (cf. (561)). This morphological requirement must hold for all case morphemes and postpositions alike ((566)–(568)) and applies also when the morphemes are inherited by complex remnants such as modified adjectives or adjectival participial clauses (569).

- (566) a. Szép piros rózsákra vágyom.
 nice red rose.Pl.Sub long.1Sg
 'I am longing for nice red roses.'
- b. Szép piros__akra vágyom.
 nice red -Pl.Sub long.1Sg
 'I am longing for nice red ones.'
- (567) a. Szép piros rózsákból kötök csokrot.
 nice red rose.Pl.Ell tie.1Sg bouquet.Acc
 'I am making a bouquet from nice red roses.'

- b. Szép piros__-akból kötök csokrot.
 nice red -Pl.Ell tie.1Sg bouquet.Acc
 'I am making a bouquet from nice red ones.'
- (568) a. Szép piros rózsák mellett döntöttünk.
 nice red rose.Pl next decide.Past.1Pl
 'We decided on nice red roses.'
- b. Szép piros__-ak mellett döntöttünk.
 nice red -Pl next decide.Past.1Pl
 'We decided on nice red ones.'
- (569) a. A festmények közül a nagyon értékes__-eket külön szobában
 the painting.Pl from.among the very valuable -Pl.Acc apart room.Ine
 őrizték.
 keep.Past.3Pl
 'Of the paintings, the very valuable ones were kept in a separate room.'
- b. Csak közjegyző által hitelesített__-eket fogadunk el.
 only notary by certify.Part -Pl.Acc accept.1Pl Prt
 'We only accept those certified by a notary.'

In case these endings contain harmonic vowels, they harmonize with the linearly last remnant, too (Bánréti 1992, 2007, Kenesei *et al.* 1998, Laczkó 2007). For example, an adjectival remnant containing back vowels triggers the back variant of the sublative case ending (cf. (570b)), an adjectival remnant containing front vowels triggers the front variant of the same case ending (570c). These examples also show that the linking vowel of the plural morpheme *-(V)k*, which always occurs if the noun ends in a consonant, must harmonize with the adjectival remnant as well.

- (570) a. Szép piros rózsá-k-ra vágyom.
 nice red rose-Pl-Sub long.1Sg
 'I am longing for nice red roses.'
- b. Szép piros__-ak-ra vágyom.
 nice red -Pl-Sub long.1Sg
 'I am longing for nice red ones.'
- c. Szép fehér__-ek-re vágyom.
 nice white -Pl-Sub long.1Sg
 'I am longing for nice white ones.'

There are three exceptional remnants that cannot inherit case morphology (either overt or covert) under NP ellipsis: the numeral *két* 'two' (unlike *kettő* in the same meaning) (571), the adjective *kis* 'small' (unlike *kicsi* in the same meaning) (572) and the determiner *minden* 'every', unlike *mind* in the same meaning (573).

- (571) a. Két rózsára vágyom.
 two rose.Sub long.1Sg
 'I am longing for two roses.'
- b. {*Két__-re / 'kettő__-re} vágyom.
 two -Sub two -Sub long.1Sg
 'I am longing for two.'

- (572) a. Kis rózsákat vettem.
small rose.Pl.Acc buy.Past.1Sg
 'I bought small roses.'
- b. { *Kis ___-eket / 'kicsi ___-ket } vettem.
small -Pl.Acc small -Pl.Acc buy.Past.1Sg
 'I bought small ones.'
- (573) a. Minden rózsát megvettem.
every rose.Acc Prt.buy.Past.1Sg
 'I bought every rose.'
- b. { *Minden ___-t / 'mind ___-et } megvettem.
every -Acc every -Acc Prt.buy.Past.1Sg
 'I bought every one.'

In case the remnant of NP ellipsis contains conjoined adjectives, the inherited morphemes appear on all conjoined entities (in line with the fact that members of a conjunction always appear with the same case morphology):

- (574) a. A festmények közül a szép ___-eket és értékes ___-eket külön
the painting.Pl from.among the nice -Pl.Acc and valuable -Pl.Acc apart
 szobában őrizték.
room.In keep.Past.3Pl
- b. *A festmények közül a szép ___ és értékes ___-eket külön
the painting.Pl from.among the nice and valuable -Pl.Acc apart
 szobában őrizték.
room.In keep.Past.3Pl
 'Of the paintings, the nice and valuable ones were kept in a separate room.'

NP ellipsis can also occur with zero, morphologically unmarked case on the elided constituent if that stands for nominative case (575). If, however, a zero case ending is idiosyncratically licensed on a noun in free alternation with oblique case, as in *az első vasárnap(on)* 'on the first Sunday', the zero case ending cannot be inherited by any remnant when the noun is missing as a result of ellipsis. In this case only the oblique case marker is licensed in the elliptical noun phrase (cf. (576b,c)), even if it has no overt correlate (576b).

- (575) a. Egy szép piros rózsza-Ø volt a vázában.
a nice red rose-Nom was the vase.Ine
 'There was a nice red rose in the vase.'
- b. Egy szép piros ___-Ø volt a vázában.
a nice red -Nom was the vase.Ine
 'There was a nice red one in the vase.'

- (576) a. Az első vasárnap-Ø kirándultunk. *A második ___ viszont otthon
 the first Sunday hike.Past.1Pl the second however at.home
 maradtunk.
 stay.Past.1Pl
- b. Az első vasárnap-Ø kirándultunk. A második ___-on viszont otthon
 the first Sunday hike.Past.1Pl the second -Sup however at.home
 maradtunk.
 stay.Past.1Pl
- c. Az első vasárnapon kirándultunk, a második ___-on viszont otthon
 the first Sunday.Sub hike.Pst.1Pl the second -Sup however at.home
 maradtunk.
 stay.Past.1Pl
 ‘On the first Sunday we went hiking, on the second, however, we stayed at home.’

7.4. Semantic properties of NP ellipsis

Adjectival and numeral remnants of NP ellipsis must have a restrictive interpretation: they must further restrict the reference of the nominal constituent denoted by the antecedent. Because of this, NP ellipsis is not allowed after a non-restrictive modifier of the noun or repeated (given) modifiers. In the following examples, the elliptical noun phrase shares the same modifier and the same referent as its antecedent (577a,b).

- (577) a. Vettem három új könyvet. #Odaadom a hárm ___-at.
 buy.Past.1Sg three new book.Acc Prt.give.1Sg the three -Acc
 lit. ‘I bought three new books. I give you the three.’
- b. A szorgalmas norvégok heti 45 órát dolgoznak. #Csodálom a
 the hardworking Norwegian.Pl weekly 45 hour.Acc work.3pl admire.1Sg the
 szorgalmas ___-okat.
 hardworking -Pl.Acc
 lit. ‘The hardworking Norwegians work 45 hours a week. I admire the hardworking ones.’

Non-intersective and non-subjective adjectives (using the terminology of Partee 1995) can be used as NP ellipsis remnants, but only when they are interpreted as restrictive modifiers. Thus, non-intersective *állítólagos* ‘alleged’ cannot be used when it is not restrictive, as in (578b), but can be used when it is restrictive (578c), similarly to the restrictive use of *előző* ‘former’ in (579).

- (578) a. Az FBI tegnap letartóztatott egy állítólagos terroristát.
 the FBI yesterday Prt.arrest.Past.3Sg an alleged terrorist.Acc
 ‘The FBI arrested an alleged terrorist yesterday.’
- b. #Terroristákról szólva, az FBI tegnap letartóztatott egy állítólagos ___-t.
 terrorist.Pl.Del talking the FBI yesterday arrest.Past.3Sg an alleged -Acc
 ‘Talking about terrorists, the FBI arrested an alleged one yesterday.’

- c. Milyen terroristát tartóztattak le? Egy igazi__-t vagy egy
 what terrorist.Acc arrest.Past.3pl Prt a real -Acc or a
 állítólagos__-t?
 alleged -Acc
 ‘What kind of terrorist did they arrest? A real one or an alleged one?’

- (579) Péter kedveli az igazgatót. Az előző__-t is kedvelte.
 Péter like.3Sg the director.Acc the former -Acc also like.Past.3Sg
 ‘Péter likes the director. He liked the former, too.’

The need for restrictive remnants is usually explained with reference to the necessarily partitive interpretation of NP ellipsis (Lobeck 1995, Sleeman 1996). According to this, NP ellipsis only allows for remnants that express a partitive relation, that is, they must refer to a *subset* of a contextually provided set. To illustrate, consider the following cases of pragmatically controlled NP ellipsis.

- (580) Context: There are two red apples on the table.

- a. #Kéred a piros__-akat?
 want.2Sg the red -Pl.Acc
 ‘Do you want the red ones?’
 b. #Kérsz egy piros__-at?
 want.2Sg a red -Acc
 ‘Do you want a red one?’

- (581) Context: There are two apples on the table: a red and a green one.
 Kéred a piros__-at?
 want.2Sg the red -Acc
 ‘Do you want the red one?’

The utterances in (580) are infelicitous, as the elliptical NP in them does not single out a subset of the contextually provided set of apples. In a similar way, NP ellipsis in a DP yields a partitive interpretation, too. In (582), the elliptical phrase *a fehérét* ‘the white one’ preferably implies that Péter has more cars than just one, and that the others (which he didn’t sell) are not white.

- (582) Eladtam az autómát. Péter is eladta a fehér__-et.
 sell.Past.1Sg the car.Poss.1Sg.Acc Péter also sell.Past.3Sg the white -Acc
 ‘I sold my car. Péter also sold the white one.’

7.5. Information structural properties of NP ellipsis

Further, there are some information structural criteria that NP ellipsis complies with. Preferentially, NP ellipsis contains adjectival remnants that are new/not given in the discourse – in the sense of not having been mentioned yet. Consider the following examples.

- (583) a. Régóta gyűjtök egy autóra. Ma vettem egy piros__-at.
 for.long save.1Sg a car.Sub today buy.Past.1Sg a red -Acc
 'I have been saving up for a car for long. Today I bought a red one.'
- b. János vett egy kék autót, én pedig egy piros__-at.
 János buy.Past.3Sg a blue car.Acc I Prt a red -Acc
 'János bought a blue car and I a red one.'

If an adjectival remnant is given, it usually undergoes deletion. In (584), the version without the adjective *kék* 'blue' in the elliptical noun phrase sounds slightly better than the retention of the adjective (even though the latter is by no means ungrammatical):

- (584) János vett egy kék autót. Mari is vett egy (?kék) __-et.
 János buy.Past.3Sg a blue car.Acc Mari also buy.Past.3Sg a blue -Acc
 'János bought a blue car. Mari also bought one/a blue one.'

In case the given adjective is contrastive in its own right, the preference for deletion does not apply. In the next examples, the elliptical NP is the contrastive focus (cf. (585)) and the contrastive topic (cf. (586)) of the sentence.

- (585) Vettem egy fehér autót. CSAK FEHÉR __ volt eladó.
 buy.Past.1Sg a white car.Acc only white was on.sale
 'I bought a white car. Only white ones were on sale.'
- (586) Vettem egy szürke autót. Egy szürké__-t ugyanis nem kell sokszor
 buy.Past.1Sg a grey car.Acc a grey -Acc Prt not need frequently
 mosni.
 wash.Inf
 'I bought a grey car. A grey one does not need frequent washing.'

The preference for deletion of a given adjective also does not apply if the retention of the given adjective disambiguates the meaning. In (587a), the elliptical adjective can only be interpreted with reference to a red car. In (587b), the elliptical noun phrase is preferably interpreted as a red car, but can also be understood as a car with an unspecified colour. To avoid interpretation with the latter reading, speakers can use (587a) instead.

- (587) a. Vettem egy piros autót. Erre a szomszéd is vett egy
 buy.Past.1Sg a red car.Acc this.Sub the neighbour also buy.Past.3Sg a
 piros__-at.
 red -Acc
 'I bought a red car. As a reaction, the neighbour also bought a red one.'
- b. Vettem egy piros autót. Erre a szomszéd is vett
 buy.Past.1Sg a red car.Acc this.Sub the neighbour also buy.Past.3Sg
 egy__-et.
 a -Acc
 'I bought a red car. As a reaction, my neighbour also bought {?a car / a red car}.'

As a last point, it should be noted that there is no preference for deletion of given numerals as remnants of NP ellipsis. Numerals can be remnants of NP ellipsis also when they are completely identical to a previously mentioned numeric modifier.

- (588) Levi kivett két almát a kosárból. Én is kivettem kettő__-t.
Levi take.Past.3Sg two apple.Acc the basket.Ela I also take.Past.1Sg two -Acc
'Levi took two apples from the basket. I also took two.'

7.6. Grammatical functions of elliptical noun phrases

7.6.1. Syntactic functions

Elliptical noun phrases, both definite and indefinite ones, can have various grammatical functions. They can be subjects, objects, and oblique complements and adjuncts.

- (589) a. A nagy macska fekete volt. A kicsi __ fehér.
the big cat black was the small white
'The big cat was black and the small one white.'
- b. A nagy macska nyalogatta a kicsi__-t.
the big cat lick.Past.3Sg the small -Acc
'The big cat was licking the small one.'
- c. A nagy macska odaszaladt egy kicsi__-hez.
the big cat Prt.run.Past.3Sg an small -All
'The big cat ran to a small one.'
- d. Egy esős vasárnapon több ember szomorú, mint egy napsütéses__-en.
a rainy Sunday.Sup more people sad than a sunny -Sup
'More people are sad on a rainy Sunday than on a sunny one.'

Definite noun phrases can also be used as predicates when elliptical:

- (590) A darabban Péter volt a rossz orvos, és Pál volt a jó __.
the play.Ine Péter was the bad doctor and Pál was the good
'In the play, Péter was the bad doctor and Pál was the good one.'

Elliptical noun phrases with an indefinite article, however, come out ungrammatical when used as sentential predicates, as in the following two examples.

- (591) Péter egy rossz orvos. *De a fia egy jó __ lesz.
Péter a bad doctor but the son.Poss.3Sg a good be.Fut.3Sg
'Péter is a bad doctor. But his son will be a good one.'
- (592) Zsiga egy ügyetlen kertész. *Pedig az apja egy ügyes __ volt.
Zsiga an awkward gardener while the father.Poss.3Sg a skillful was
'Zsiga is an awkward gardener. Even though his father was a skillful one.'

Note that ungrammaticality only shows up with elliptical indefinite noun phrases that function as predicates. As the following examples show, elliptical noun phrases with

an indefinite article are perfectly fine when used referentially, and not predicatively (even when the referential reading is not specific, as in (593b)).

- (593) a. Ebben a rendelőben egy jó orvos dolgozik. Ott viszont egy
 this.Ine the medical.office.Ine a good doctor work.3Sg there however a
 rossz ___ rendel.
 bad work.3Sg
 ‘A good doctor is working in this medical office. There, on the other hand, a bad one is working.’
- b. Ehhez a szerephez egy magas lány kell, ahhoz pedig egy alacsony
 this.All the role.All a tall girl need that.All however a short
 ___ lenne jó.
 be.Cond.3Sg good
 ‘For this role, a tall girl is needed, for that a short one would be good.’

It is also important to note that indefinite predicative NPs without an indefinite article are similar to (591), in that they cannot be elliptical, consider the examples in (594):

- (594) a. Anna gyerekkorában vidám kislány volt. Bea szomorú volt.
 Anna childhood.Poss3Sg.Ine happy girl was Bea sad was
 ‘Anna was a happy girl in her childhood. Bea was {sad / *a sad one}.’
- b. Annát gyerekkorában vidám kislánynak tartották. Beát
 Anna.Acc childhood.Poss3Sg.Ine happy girl.Dat consider.Past.3Pl Bea.Acc
 szomorúnak tartották.
 sad.Dat consider.Past.3Pl
 ‘People considered Anna a happy girl in her childhood. They considered Bea {sad / *a sad one}.’

Where determinerless indefinite predicative noun phrases differ from those with an indefinite determiner are syntactic contexts where the elliptical noun phrase occurs in a clause in which the copula undergoes gapping. In these contexts, the elliptical interpretation is possible for the indefinite noun phrases, cf. (595) in comparison to (594):

- (595) a. Anna gyerekkorában vidám kislány volt. Bea szomorú.
 Anna childhood.Poss3Sg.Ine happy girl was Bea sad
 ‘Anna was a happy girl in her childhood. Bea was {sad / a sad one}.’
- b. Annát gyerekkorában vidám kislánynak tartották. Beát
 Anna.Acc childhood.Poss3Sg.Ine happy girl.Dat consider.Past.3Pl Bea.Acc
 szomorúnak.
 sad.Dat
 ‘They considered Anna a happy girl in her childhood. They considered Bea {sad / a sad one}.’

When the verb is spelled out in the clause containing the purported noun phrase, as in (594), the possibility of ellipsis is not present and the interpretation of the adjective must be that of a clausal predicate and not a prenominal modifier of an elided noun. In contexts of gapping (595), both interpretations are available.

7.6.2. *The obligatoriness of ellipsis in noun phrases*

NP ellipsis is an entirely optional process in many cases, that is to say, the elided nominal constituent can be fully pronounced without a change in meaning.

- (596) a. A hideg sör finomabb, mint a meleg (sör).
the cold beer tasty.Com than the warm beer
‘Cold beer is tastier than warm beer.’
b. A régi ház eltakarta az új (ház)-akat.
the old house conceal.Past.3Sg the new house-Pl.Acc
‘The old house concealed the new ones.’

In some cases, NP ellipsis is preferred to the retention of the nominal constituent, especially after numeric and amount-denoting determiners. Here the repetition of the noun sounds unnatural.

- (597) Levi kért egy pár tollat. Atdam neki néhány (?toll)-at.
Levi ask.Past.3Sg a couple pen.Acc give.Past.1Sg 3Sg.Dat some pen-Acc
‘Levi asked for some pens. I gave him some.’

One can also find syntactic environments in which NP ellipsis is obligatory: contexts of contrastive sluicing (Chapter 5) being a prime example for this. If a nominal constituent contains a contrastive adjective or numeral, the noun must be missing under sluicing:

- (598) a. Gondoltam, hogy pár diák megbukik, de nem gondoltam volna, hogy
think.Past.1Sg Compl couple student fail.3Sg but not think.Past.1Sg Cond Compl
tíz (?*diák).
ten student
‘I thought that some students would fail, but I wouldn’t have thought that ten would fail.’
b. Azt hittem, hogy csak két levelet bontottak ki. Nem
that.Acc thint.Past.1Sg Compl only two letter.Acc open.Past.3Pl Prt not
gondoltam volna, hogy {mind__-et / ?*minden levelet}.
think.Past.1Sg Cond Compl every -Acc every letter.Acc
‘I thought they opened only two letters; I wouldn’t have thought that they opened all (letters).’

Note that the crucial factor forcing NP ellipsis in these cases is the ellipsis of the finite predicate. In case a verb or auxiliary is present in these examples, the nominal need not undergo ellipsis and can be spelled out without causing any degradation:

- (599) a. Gondoltam, hogy pár diák megbukik, de nem gondoltam volna, hogy
think.Past.1Sg Compl couple student fail.3Sg but not think.Past.1Sg Cond Compl
tíz diák fog (megbukni).
ten student Fut.3Sg fail.Inf
‘I thought that some students would fail, but I wouldn’t have thought that ten would.’

- b. Azt hittem, hogy csak két levelet bontottak ki. Nem
 that.Acc believe.Past.1Sg Compl only two letter.Acc open.Past.3Pl Prt not
 gondoltam volna, hogy minden levelet ki szoktak (bontani).
 think.Past.1Sg Cond Compl every letter.Acc Prt Habit.3Pl open.Inf
 ‘I thought they opened only two letters; I wouldn’t have thought that they usually open all letters.’
- c. Azt hittem, hogy csak két levelet bontottak ki. Nem
 that.Acc believe.Past.1Sg Compl only two letter.Acc open.Past.3Pl Prt not
 gondoltam volna, hogy minden levelet kibontottak.
 think.Past.1Sg Cond Compl every letter.Acc Prt.open.Past.3Pl
 ‘I thought they opened only two letters; I wouldn’t have thought that they opened all letters.’

7.7. Anaphoric possibilities in possessed nominals

In contrast to non-possessed noun phrases, possessed noun phrases do not allow for nominal ellipsis.

7.7.1. *Anaphoric possessives with -é*

In case the sole surviving remnant of ellipsis is the possessor, either a dative and or a nominative one (see Szabolcsi 1994 for differences), NP ellipsis is impossible:

- (600) a. *Nádasdynak a könyv-e hosszabb, mint Esterházynak ____.
 Nádasdy.Dat the book-Poss.3Sg long.Comp than Esterházy.Dat
- b. *Nádasdy könyv-e hosszabb, mint Esterházy ____.
 Nádasdy.Nom book-Poss.3Sg long.Comp than Esterházy.Nom
 intended: ‘Nádasdy’s book is longer than Esterházy’s.’

The lack of elliptical possessives stems from the fact that anaphoric possessives make use of a pronominal strategy and substitute a nominal *pro*-form for the possessed noun, as Bartos (2000), Laczkó (2007), Dékány (2011), Lipták (2018) unanimously point out. The pronominal strategy is earmarked by the use of the *-é* suffix, whose analysis is somewhat unsettled (Bartos 2000 equates it with the Poss head that selects the noun, Laczkó 2007 with the *pro*-form and Bartos 2001, Dékány 2015 with genitive case).

The anaphoric pronoun is incompatible with any overt adjectival modifier (601a) or numeral (601b). The possessor agreement morpheme and the number morpheme indicating plurality of possession are always obligatory on pronominal possessors: both when these are non-anaphoric and when they are anaphoric. For the latter, consider (601c), where *-i* indicates plural possession and *-tek* spells out agreement with a 2Pl possessor. (Note that in some pronominal forms *-é* is rendered as *-e*.)

- (601) a. Nádasdy(nak az) új könyv-e hosszabb, mint {Esterházy-é /
 Nádasdy(Dat the) new book-Poss.3Sg long.Comp than Esterházy-Posr
 *Esterházy új-é}.
 Esterházy new-Posr
 ‘Nádasdy’s new book is longer than {Esterházy’s book / Esterházy’s new book}.’

- b. Nádasdy(nak az) összes könyv-e rövidebb, mint {*Esterházy
Nádasdy(Dat the) all book-Poss.3Sg short.Comp than Esterházy.Nom
legutóbbi kettő-é}.
last two-Posr
intended: 'All of Nádasdy's books are shorter than the last two of Esterházy.'
- c. a ti- -é -i -tek
the you.Pl -Posr -Pl -2Pl
'your(pl) ones'

7.7.2. Apparent cases of NP ellipsis in possessives

A set of examples in which NP ellipsis appears to be possible in possessed noun phrases are given in (602). In these examples, the ellipsis remnants are an adjective or numeral, and the possessor cannot be spelled out overtly. Note that the interpretation of the missing noun in the following examples can be that of a possessed nominal or that of a non-possessed noun.

- (602) a. Mari régi kabát-ja-i szebbek, mint az új__-ak.
Mari old coat-Poss-Pl nice.Comp.Pl than the new -Pl
'Mari's old coats are nicer than { the new coats of Mary / the new coats}.'
- b. Az idei diák-ja-i-m okosabbak, mint a tavalyi__ -ak.
the this.year.Adj student-Poss-Pl-1Sg clever.Comp.Pl than the last.year.Adj -Pl
'This year's students of mine are cleverer than {last year's students of mine / last year's students}.'

There are two indications that the possessed interpretation is only pragmatically controlled for in cases like this and that we are dealing with an unpossessed nominal undergoing ellipsis here. One indication is the nominal morphology found in the elliptical nominals: the endings are characteristic of non-possessed noun phrases. In possessed noun phrases, the plurality of the possession is spelled out by the invariable *-i* morpheme (*kabát-ja-i*, *diák-ja-i-m*), while in the elliptical *új-ak* and *tavalyi-ak* the plural marker is the ordinary *-(V)k* morpheme, which is found on non-possessed nouns. As the ungrammatical forms furthermore illustrate in (603), there is no other variant of the noun phrase that is acceptable in these contexts (as noted in Kenesei et al. 1989).

- (603) a. Mari régi kabát-ja-i szebbek, mint az {új__-ak / *új__-a-i / *új__-i}.
Mari old coat-Poss-Pl nice.Comp.Pl than the new -Pl new -Poss-Pl new -Pl
'Mari's old coats are nicer than the new ones.'
- b. Az idei diák-ja-i-m okosabbak, mint a {tavalyi__ -ak /
the this.year.Adj student-Poss-Pl-1Sg clever.Comp.Pl than the last.year.Adj -Pl
*tavalyi-ja-i-m}
last.year.Adj-Poss-Pl-1Sg
'This year's students of mine are cleverer than last year's students of mine.'

The other argument against a possessed NP analysis of these data comes from the observation that the possessor can never be overtly present in the elliptical nominal, either in dative or nominative case (604).

- (604) a. Mari régi kabát-ja-i szebbek, mint (*neki) az (*ő) új__-ak.
 Mari old coat-Poss-Pl nice.Comp.Pl than 3Sg.Dat the 3Sg new -Pl
 ‘Mari’s old coats are nicer than her new ones.’
- b. Az idei diák-ja-i-m okosabbak, mint (*nekem) (az) (*én) tavalyi __-ak.
 the this.year.Adj student-Poss-Pl-1Sg clever.Comp.Pl than 1Sg.Dat the 1Sg last.year.Adj-Pl
 ‘This year’s students of mine are cleverer than last year’s students of mine.’

These two observations jointly confirm that the elliptical noun phrases of the sort exemplified in (603) are not possessed but unpossessed nominals.

The same conclusion must also carry over to those noun phrases in which the possessed item is singular, such as (605). Note that this example, just like those in (604), no possessor can be added to the elliptical phrase.

- (605) Mari új barát-ja nagyon kedves, egyáltalán nem hasonlít a (*Sára) régi__(*-jé)-re.
 Mari new boyfriend-Poss3Sg very kind not.at.all not resemble.3Sg the Sára old -Poss3Sg-Sub
 #‘Mari’s new boyfriend is very nice; he is not at all like the old one of Sára.’; ‘Mari’s new boyfriend is very nice; he is not at all like the old one (of Mari).’

The only contexts in which an overt possessor occurs next to an elliptical possessive nominal – contradicting the claim that possessives cannot undergo NP ellipsis – can be found in the expression of *sentential possession*, where the possessive relation is the main predicate of the clause. Consider (606) in which we find an elliptical noun phrase and a dative-marked possessor.

- (606) A: Van macskátok?
 be.3Sg cat.Poss.1Pl
 ‘Do you have a cat?’
- B: Igen, nekem egy fehér __ van.
 yes 1Sg.Dat a white be.3Sg
 ‘Yes, I have a white one.’

If the possessor in possessive sentences is generated as part of a possessed noun phrase, as usually assumed (see Szabolcsi 1992), this suggests that the elided NP in (606) must be a possessed nominal. An interesting quirk of these kinds of sentences is that the possessor can also show up when the elliptical noun phrase is plural, and in line with the observations in (603), carries the non-possessive plural marker. It is important to note that not all speakers find (607) perfectly fine, while all speakers accept the singular variant in (606).

- (607) A: Vannak macskáítok?
 be.3Pl cat.Poss.Pl.2Pl
 ‘Do you have cats?’
- B: %Igen, nekem fehér__-ek vannak.
 yes 1Sg.Dat white -Pl be.3Pl
 ‘Yes, I have white ones.’

7.8. Summary

The Hungarian head noun in a noun phrase can be unpronounced in contexts where its content is recoverable from the preceding discourse. When this happens to the exclusion of a modifier, numeral or (quantificational) determiner in the (extended) noun phrase, we have to do with noun ellipsis. NP ellipsis is an entirely optional process in many cases, that is to say, the elided nominal constituent can be fully pronounced without a change in meaning. In Hungarian NP ellipsis the overt number and case morphemes that normally appear on the noun (and only there) must appear on the linearly *last remnant* preceding the missing noun, be that an adjective, a numeral, a participial modifier or the linking element *való*. This morphological requirement must hold for all case morphemes and postpositions alike and applies also when the morphemes are inherited by complex remnants such as modified adjectives or adjectival participial clauses.

In contrast to non-possessed noun phrases, possessed noun phrases do not allow for nominal ellipsis. A set of examples in which NP ellipsis appears to be possible in possessed noun phrases exhibit that ellipsis remnants are an adjective or numeral, and the possessor cannot be spelled out overtly.

The only contexts in which an overt possessor can be found next to an elliptical possessive nominal – contradicting the claim that possessives cannot undergo NP ellipsis – can be found in the expression of *sentential possession*, where the possessive relation is the main predicate of the clause.

7.9. Bibliographical notes

Discussion of Hungarian nominal constituents without a noun can be found in Kenesei et al. (1998) in descriptive terms. The reader can find distinct analytical approaches to these data and the representation of the missing noun in Bánréti (1992, 2007), Moravcsik (2001), Laczkó (2007) as well as Saab and Lipták (2016).

The structure of anaphoric possessive noun phrases, with special attention to the role that the *-é* suffix plays in them, is investigated by Bartos (2000c), Laczkó (2007) and most recently in Dékány (2011, 2015, 2021). Arguments to the effect that the anaphoric possessed noun phrases do not contain nominal ellipsis that occurs in non-possessed noun phrases are provided in Lipták (2018).

