

# A Lexical-Functional Approach to Inflectional and Word Order Phenomena in Hungarian and English

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*In this paper I give a brief account of my second Fulbright research grant to Stanford University. After shortly introducing myself and the theoretical model I use, I explain my Stanford orientation and also the reason why I had two host institutions practically: I worked on two parallel projects. Then I discuss the most significant aspects of both the professional-academic and the social-cultural dimensions of this prestigious grant. I point out that I consider the grant very successful and rewarding in both dimensions. I accomplished my goals, and one of the projects I started there is going to be continued within the framework of international collaboration. On the basis of our experiences, I also argue that it is worth considering taking dependents with oneself. All my family members benefited greatly from accompanying me. Towards the end of the paper I show a few photos highlighting some memorable moments of the trips we had the chance to make. In the Appendix I give some practical advice to prospective grantees.*

# 1. Introduction

I was awarded a senior research grant to Stanford University for the academic year 2005/2006. In this paper, I set out to highlight its most significant and most memorable aspects.



In the first section, I briefly introduce myself, my research and explain why my target university was Stanford. In the second section, I discuss the professional side of this grant coin (my projects, my host institutions, my results and future plans). In the third section, I elaborate on the other, nonprofessional side (nonacademic activities, social and cultural experiences, trips, etc.). This is followed by some concluding remarks and acknowledgements in the fifth section. In the Appendix I offer some tips to colleagues considering applying for a Fulbright grant.

## 1.1. About myself

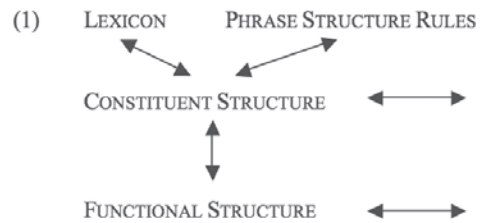
I am a linguist in the position of associate professor at the Department English Linguistics, University of Debrecen and currently (as of July 2007) dean of the Faculty of Humanities. My main research areas include Hungarian and English syntactic, morphological and morphosyntactic phenomena with especial attention to noun phrases, nominalization, possessive constructions, attributive participles and bracketing paradoxes. I am also interested in the teaching of Hungarian and English as

foreign languages. I do my research in the framework of Lexical-Functional Grammar (henceforth: LFG). I was one of those two Hungarian linguists who introduced LFG in Hungary and I am still one of the major practitioners of this model in this country. At

the department, I teach introductory and advanced courses on generative grammar in general and LFG in particular, both at the undergraduate and at the graduate levels.

## 1.2. On LFG

LFG is one of the most significant alternative theories within Noam Chomsky's generative linguistic paradigm. It was developed in the late 1970's. It is a non-transformational, non-derivational,



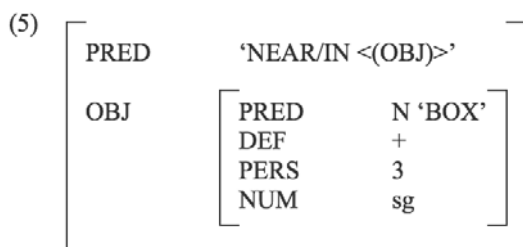
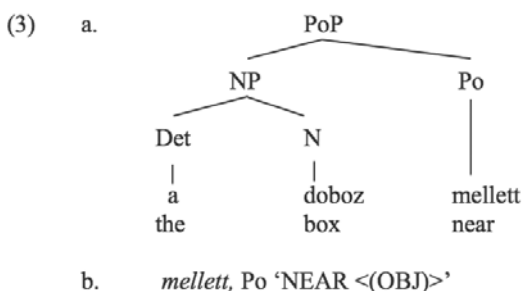
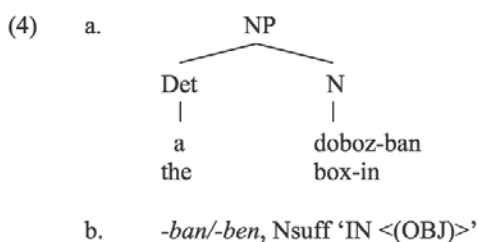
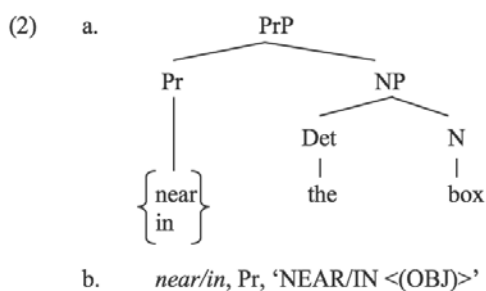
parallel representational model, with a very powerful lexical component. It has the following architecture.

In its syntactic component, LFG assigns two structures to every well-formed sentence of a language: constituent structure and functional structure. The constituent structure is designed to capture 'surface' constituency relations, that is, the actual arrangement of the elements of sentences,

and it is phonologically interpreted. The functional structure represents the basic grammatical relations in the sentence, and it is semantically interpreted. Constituent structures are designed to encode language-particular phenomena, whereas functional structures are intended to capture grammatical generalizations across languages. LFG provides an excellent tool for explicitly and systematically capturing regular similarities and dissimilarities between typologically diverse languages, e. g., English and Hungarian. Moreover, LFG is readily and successfully implementable computationally.

Let me briefly illustrate the relationship between constituent structure and functional structure through a very simple English vs. Hungarian contrast. Consider the following examples.

As (2a) shows, in English spatial relations are typically expressed by prepositional phrases (PrPs). By contrast, for this purpose Hungarian employs either postpositional phrases (PoPs) as in (3a) or (locative) case-marked noun phrases (NPs) as in (4a). Therefore, the constituent structures represented in (2a), (3a) and (4a) are radically different. However, intuitively we feel uniformity characteristic of all the three constructions: the very same grammatical relation is expressed in three different ways. This sameness is formally and explicitly captured at the functional level. (5) is the generalized, uniform functional structure related to all the three constructions. The essence of this treatment is that in the relationship in question it is the



preposition, postposition or locative case-ending that serves as the predicate of the construction taking the NP or (in the case of the locative suffix) the rest of the NP as its object argument. The simplified lexical forms of these predicative items are given in (2b), (3b) and (4b).

### ***1.3. The Stanford connection***

My first visit to Stanford was within the framework of a Soros Foundation grant to a six-week Linguistic Institute in 1987. There I attended an LFG course taught by Prof. Joan Bresnan, one of the two founders of the theory. This experience gave me dual motivation: on the one hand, it convinced me that I had chosen an ideal linguistic model for my research interests, and, on the other hand, it urged me to opt for Stanford as my host institution in future research grant applications. Incidentally, the other founder of the theory, Prof. Ronald Kaplan is also partially affiliated to Stanford University, so no wonder that this university together with Palo Alto Research Center (PARC for short), where Ronald Kaplan and his colleagues launched an international, LFG-based, computational linguistic research project in 1994, has been the most significant intellectual centre for the LFG community ever since the theory was developed.

I received my first research grant to Stanford from the Soros Foundation for the academic year 1991/92. It was very useful, and the research I carried out there provided the basis for my C.Sc. (“candidate of science”) dissertation defended in 1994. Seven years later I was awarded my first Fulbright research

grant to Stanford for the academic year 1998/99. It also proved to be extremely fruitful: it efficiently paved the way for my habilitation dissertation, which I defended in 2000. Another seven years later I was overjoyed to receive my second Fulbright research grant to Stanford (2005/06), the grant this paper is about. On the basis of these dates and facts, the following scientific generalization suggests itself: my lucky number is seven with respect to my getting a research grant to Stanford University. Of course, it remains to be seen whether this series will continue in the future or not.

## **2. The professional side of the grant coin**

### ***2.1. Two projects and two host institutions***

My primary goal, specified in my research proposal, was to work on several chapters of a book at the Linguistics Department of Stanford University. In the meantime, while preparing for the grant, I received an invitation from PARC to start a new project in the framework of their international computational linguistic program called ParGram (Parallel Grammars) which is based on the computational implementation of LFG. Naturally, I was more than happy to accept this invitation. So PARC became my other (unofficial) host institution, and starting the Hungarian ParGram project became my other major research objective.

Given that practically I had two host institutions, I was in an extremely favorable

position. Stanford University and PARC provided me with an outstanding combination of ideal conditions and facilities for achieving my research goals. I had an office at each, and I had a chance to benefit from the best aspects of both of them. For instance, Stanford has a fantastic library, and PARC provided me with ideal computer and (other related) facilities for my computational linguistic research project. My hosts and colleagues were exceedingly friendly and helpful, providing a special, very pleasant atmosphere for me.

## ***2.2. Professional activities, results and future plans***

At Stanford, I conducted a seminar discussion in December 2005, and I gave a public lecture on part of my research there in May 2006. At PARC, I participated in a one-week workshop in March 2006, and gave two presentations.

I wrote the first draft of three chapters for a book (about 140 pages) and the final versions of four papers (after the reviewing process) submitted for publication (two of these as a co-author). At PARC, with very efficient help from the colleagues there, I started a computational linguistic research project, which is part of the large scale international research program launched at PARC in 1994 and organized and developed by PARC ever since. Within this new project, I worked on implementing my theoretical research findings.

Professionally, I benefited from this grant enormously. In addition to what I accomplished, I carried out extensive library research, and I audited four courses

taught by my colleagues at Stanford. In this way I also learnt what the most topical issues in my field are. On these grounds, I am in the process of upgrading some of my advanced course materials, especially at the graduate level at my home university. Furthermore, I plan to offer a new course based on what I learnt at PARC and also on a course taught at Stanford by Prof. Kaplan and Prof. Tracy King (who was my host at PARC).

After my return to Hungary, I organized a research group for the ParGram project. We plan to collaborate with PARC on a long-term basis. We applied for funding to OTKA (*Országos Tudományos Kutatási Alapprogramok* ‘Hungarian Scientific Research Fund’) and received financial support for four years, starting in July 2008.

## **3. The other side of the grant coin**

### ***3.1. Enrichment activities***

I and my wife took part in most of the enrichment program activities (which included lectures, receptions, a baseball game in San Francisco, etc.). We greatly appreciated the variety and absolutely friendly atmosphere of these events in the international spirit of mutual interest and understanding. We had plenty of opportunities to meet fellow Fulbrighters and their families from a whole range of countries and to discuss all kinds of professional and topical issues with them or to simply chat with them about interesting every-day aspects of our lives.

We were grateful to the enrichment team for carefully planning and organizing these memorable programs. We and some of the people we met on these occasions mutually invited one another to our place for a dinner. And this immediately leads us to the next section on some social aspects of my grant.

### **3.2. Social aspects**

Given that this was my third research grant to Stanford University, we enjoyed the social benefits of the previous two. We had quite a few friends there (colleagues at Stanford and at PARC and other people we had met accidentally and made good friends with), so finding temporary accommodation, then getting excellent and reasonable accommodation in the spirit of friendship, getting a car temporarily for the initial period, getting shopping advice etc. were invaluable benefits from my previous grant periods. We invited each other to dinners, hikes and sporting events, and this gave us several opportunities to experience and learn about each other's cuisines, discuss similarities and differences between the two countries with respect to economic, social and political matters.

Practically all our friends who we invited to dinner admired those aspects of Hungarian cuisine that my wife, Edit, presented for them. The dishes we offered (of course, not all of them on the same occasion) included (but were not limited to) *gulyásleves*, *töltött káposzta*, *töltött paprika*, *gombás-tejfölös csirkepörkölt*, *túrós csusza*, *pogácsa*, *palacsinta*, and *somlói galuska*. Here I do not translate these names into English for the following

reason. If a non-Hungarian knows these dishes, (s)he does not need translations. If a non-Hungarian is not familiar with them then I wish to appeal to their curiosity and to whet their appetite by withholding the translations.

We met new people as well who were also extremely open, friendly and helpful. Let me mention just one example of this. One of my colleagues' friends went abroad for several months (December-July). They generously let us use their car during that period (and they didn't even mind the paperwork this meant, because officially the car had to be gifted to us for insurance purposes, not to mention their unconditional trust in us, as legally the car became our property, and of course, at the end of the period we gifted it back). Needless to say, this was an enormous help, and we appreciated it greatly. From December onwards we had two cars at our disposal, which is more than simply convenient for a family of four in California.

Over the years, some of these friendly relations have grown into very close friendships: whenever the occasion arises we visit each other either in the US or in Hungary, and besides this we are in touch on a regular basis via email or Skype. I hasten to add that not infrequently the Fulbright Program has the most welcome "side-effect" of bringing Hungarian scholars and their families together. In 2005, our gain in this respect was Zita Zoltay Paprika (and her family) from Corvinus University of Budapest, who had a grant to Sacramento. We met on several official enrichment occasions, and we have been on friendly terms ever since.

### ***3.3. With 3 dependents***

Just like on my previous grant, this time, too, I was accompanied by my family: my wife, Edit, and two sons: Péter (21) and Gábor (19).

It was not easy for the boys to find suitable and affordable (community) college level education. When 7 years before we went to Stanford on my first Fulbright grant, the situation was much more favorable: the boys went to middle school, which was free of charge practically, but higher education is a different matter. Eventually the boys managed to find one year certificate programs the completion of which, we hoped, would be very useful for them after their return to Hungary and to their Hungarian university studies: Peter studied bioinformatics and Gábor majored in international business studies at Foothill College. Naturally, in the case of their tuition fees we had to rely on our own financial resources from Hungary, but we think this was a worthy investment on the one hand, and it was very important for all of us that the family should not be split up for a whole year, on the other. It is also a significant factor to consider in such a situation that if one leaves a child or two behind then their expenses for a year in Hungary are not negligible at all. The boys were very satisfied with both the format and the content of education at the college. Their only complaint was that, this being a community college, practically there was no student social life on campus.

Our investment in the case of the boys seems to be paying off already. Péter got a summer internship to the University of Nebraska - Lincoln, so he returned to

Hungary two months later than we did, and he was invited back to Nebraska for the following summer as well, and he was pleased to return (and the invitation is still open). Gábor, whose major at Corvinus University of Budapest in Hungary is international studies, had a few courses he completed at Foothill College accepted at Corvinus, and in the States he acquired skills that he is making very good use of.

My wife's main task was to organize our family's every-day life, including her performing the role of our regular designated taxi-driver during the first couple of months, when we had one car and several different destinations (very often simultaneously). She also frequented the local library. In addition, the International Center on campus organized a whole variety of activities for dependents of visiting scholars (Friday morning coffees, international movies series, international cuisine, various trips and courses), and my wife really enjoyed these occasions and she benefited from them greatly. She also made her own contribution: she gave a presentation on Hungary and she also organized a Hungarian cuisine event, that is, she taught her fellow dependents how to cook two popular Hungarian dishes.

### ***3.4. Trips***

In addition to short week-end trips in the Bay Area, during the winter and the spring breaks I and my family had a chance to travel around a bit (the Monterey area, Sacramento, Lake Tahoe). All of these trips were very memorable. However, the highlight was Hawaii. We found a very reasonably priced package tour offer.

This was a once-in-a-lifetime chance and experience for all of us. Exceedingly pleasant and exotic. Below are some photos we took on these trips.

#### 4. Concluding remarks and acknowledgements

On the basis of my impressions during two Fulbright grants I can safely make the following generalization. The Fulbright name is very prestigious: it is widely recognized and highly appreciated. It is an honor to belong to this community.

I consider the Fulbright Program a gold(en) coin. (A little pun: launching this program was a fully bright idea.) It has a solid academic-professional side, and it also has a massive social-cultural side. Both are exceedingly and equally important, and the merit of the program is that it ideally combines these two vitally indispensable aspects of international

collaboration and mutual understanding.

I also had a chance to advertise the program in my modest way. At Stanford, in October 2005 I was interviewed by Hungarian Television for a three-episode program entitled *Amerikába mentek* ('They Went to America'). This gave me a chance to talk about my research at Stanford and about the Fulbright Program, and to encourage Hungarian colleagues and students to apply for grants.

In sum, the research grant I received for 2005/06 was a great success for me professionally, socially and culturally. My family members also benefited from it tremendously. For our two sons, the most important gain was their pleasant and professionally rewarding encounter with and immersion in American higher education at the college level. My wife had ample opportunity to familiarize herself with various aspects of American life (through organized programs, TV, books and newspapers).

We are ever so grateful for this



Monterey: Aquarium



Seventeen-mile drive

fantastic Fulbright experience! Many thanks to the Fulbright Program for the framework and the grant, to my hosts and host institutions for their remarkable hospitality, to the Hungarian-American Fulbright Commission for their extremely efficient assistance, and to the Fulbright enrichment team in San Francisco for enthusiastically organizing a variety of high quality programs.

***Appendix: Some advice for prospective grantees from my perspective***

Below is a list of tips based on my experiences primarily for those Hungarian colleagues who are considering applying for a Fulbright grant (in practically any category), but several of these points may be of interest to an ordinary reader as well,

given that they highlight some additional (mainly practical) aspects of my grant life that I did not discuss above.

1. It's very useful if you can find a host institution for yourself and you can include it in your application in general and in your research proposal in particular. You may need to work on this several months prior to your application.
2. Arranging accommodation before departing from Hungary via the internet is possible, reliable and hassle-free. But it also makes a lot of sense to stay at a cheap motel for a couple of nights (or with a friend or colleague, if possible) and look around for accommodation then. I did both (on different occasions) and both worked out.
3. Unless there are other preferences



Sacramento: the Capitol



Santa Cruz: a haven and heaven for seals



or considerations, it is usually convenient to open a bank account at the university's credit union if there is one (it always has a branch on campus, it treats its members in a friendly way etc., and mine, for instance, is outstanding at e-banking). Getting a Visa card is normally faster and easier at these credit unions.

4. You can save a lot of money by renting an unfurnished apartment. You can get everything you need at garage sales (and also there is usually a lot of fluctuation on campus, and therefore, quite a few moving sales are advertised). Naturally, this only works if you have a car to carry those things home (if you haven't bought one, you can always rent one for this purpose).
5. Unless your apartment is ideally located, you will definitely need a car. To buy one is no big problem. Before buying it, it is advisable to have it checked in a garage (it is worth the expense). Don't buy a very cheap car (roughly, for less than \$ 2000). Many people (including us) prefer buying a used car from an owner (and not from a company/agency). Towards the end of the grant period, start advertising your

car for sale widely in time.

6. It is very useful to obtain an American driver's license.
7. Shop around on the net for insurance. There are big differences.
8. Don't be afraid to take your family with you. If you look and shop around, economize on whatever you can, then you don't have to add too much from your home resources. And definitely not more than the other members of the family would have spent in Hungary during that period anyhow. This was the case with us 7 years ago. The really big expense was the three extra plane tickets. This time the situation was different, because our two sons went to college. For their tuition we had to rely heavily and exclusively on our Hungarian resources. But the investment hopefully pays off.
9. Take some genuine Hungarian presents with you (embroidery, CDs, paprika, drinks etc.). They are greatly and gratefully appreciated.
10. If you can cook, it is usually a good idea to invite colleagues you are on friendly terms with to a Hungarian dinner at your place, preferably in the first quarter of your stay.

