A CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF LEXICAL RELATIONS IN ENGLISH AND HUNGARIAN

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"Contrastive analysis", according to R. L. Hadlich (1965:426), "seeks to catalogue, through the comparative analysis of the native and foreign language systems, the points of difference, so that more effective learning materials, based precisely on the learning problems, can be developed". Hadlich has no doubts concerning the validity of this procedure at the levels of pronunciation and syntax, but considers the application of "contrastive analytic procedure" to vocabulary learning not only "incorrect", but even "harmful", at any rate for the purposes of developing active oral production in a foreign language.

The author of the present paper thinks — on the basis of a good deal of experience in teaching English as a second language — that the contrastive analysis of the vocabulary is certainly not harmful, as teaching vocabulary presents as many instances of interference as teaching grammar.

The purpose of this paper is simply to find out the semantic relations among a number of English terms, and then match them against their Hungarian equivalent(s). Here we shall not go into any details of the intricate areas of interference, but by presenting the structures as they are we hope that they will be of interest to those who work on the structure of English lexicon.

Lexical contrastive analysis, as a special branch of contrastive synchronic linguistics, is not confined to bringing out only problem pairs; i.e., words that always seem to cause difficulties in second language learning. It should also deal with the elementary lexical units (or lexemes) and with the elementary meaning units (sememes) in order to define also those correspondences which present the least problems of all — the one-to-one correspondences, if there are any — and also much more complicated differences than one-to-two correspondences.

Given the necessary working conditions, lexical contrastive analysis should investigate all elementary meaning units of the source language and their potential equivalents in the target language. This procedure, however, presupposes exact definitions of the semantic range of words, a segmentation of the total meaning into its individual sememes, subvariants and submeanings. This, in turn, would entail an exact semantic breakdown, particularization of meaning discrimination in the source language itself. The finer the discriminations, the better will be the chances of discovering semantic overlapping of two or more words in certain areas of meaning. The enormous complexity will, however, set limits to the scope of such work, so what the scholar can do is to confine himself to the investigation of units lying in the highest frequency ranges, because here are those units which are most urgently needed by the learner for productive purposes.

Superordinate and subordinate concepts

Let us start with the generally accepted fact that language is not a mere reflection of the physical world; unlike mental images, linguistic forms do not replicate aspects of external reality. In addition to this, there are bound to be differences between language in the way how they segment the conceptual universe. Languages, owing to their divergent historical and cultural backgrounds, do not segment reality in the same way; i.e. the investigation of word-meaning cannot be separated from a detailed research on the cultural background of the civilization of the particular language in question. "The study of semantics is meaningless apart from the cultural context of usage" (Nida 1951:2).

The characteristic semantic properties of Hungarian lexemes (e.g., the number of lexemes in a given semantic field) can be compared to the corresponding features of English lexemes on the basis of certain general traits underlying both languages. In the course of the investigation one has to start with general (universal) categories — such as the relations in the conceptual sphere and the way the individual languages segment the conceptual universe (which we consider common to all languages) — as it is a matter of common experience that in a given semantic field the number of lexemes is usually not the same in any two languages. Given the fact that both languages have a word which denotes a thing in general, in the subordinate sphere one may find that one language uses more lexemes than the other. (We shall call lexemes in the subordinate sphere *hyponyms*, in the sense of Lyons 1968: 453). We shall consider the relations within groups of lexemes of semantically closely connected words and see whether the language uses a word to denote the entity in general (superordinate term A), whether there are words in the subordinate sphere and what their number is ($a_1, a_2, a_3 \ldots a_n$), and also the kind of linguistic resources the languages use in

the subordinate sphere (compounding, derivatives, attributive noun phrases, simplexes, etc.).

In the segmentation of the conceptual universe the following main types can be distinguished (cf. Károly 1970: 336): the language has a term for the superordinate concept, but none for the subordinate ones (1a, below); the subordinate concepts are named, but the superordinate is not (1b); the number of subordinate concepts is different in the languages (2a, 2b). The mixture of types 1 and 2 provides the interesting case of a subordinate term used both ways, subordinate and superordinate (3). The following tables give a rough indication of the types suggested:

(1a) A	(1b) ø	(2a) A or ø	(2b) A or ø	(3) A
ø | ø	a_1 | a_2	a_1 | a_2	a_1 | a_2 | a_3	A | a_1 | a_2

Let us consider these types in detail:

1a. The words *divat — fashion* seem to illustrate the difference shown in *1a*: in Hungarian there is no further specification in the subordinate sphere. There are no handy terms to denote the various kinds of *divat*; the same word can refer to practically any type:

divat			
ø	ø	ø	ø

In English, on the other hand, we have:

fashion

mode	style	vogue	fad
somewhat old-fashioned	mainly of clothes, furniture	latest, newest	fanciful, unlikely to last

The opposite is the case with *unokatestvér — cousin*, where Hungarian does not only express the subordinate sphere (English does not) but gives further specification of age (younger — older than EGO):

cousin	
ø	ø

unokatestvér

m a l o	unokabáty (older than ego)	unokanővér (older than ego)	f e m a l e
	unokaöcs (younger than ego)	unokahug (younger than ego)	

1b. This type is represented by the words *zenekar — orchestra/band*, where English has no word denoting 'a group of persons playing music together' in general, whereas the Hungarian word is such a general term; the English words refer to specific kinds of groups:

zenekar		ø	
ø	ø	orchestra	band

The English hyponyms are simplexes; further specification in Hungarian is achieved by the use of the various appropriate attributives (*jazz* zenekar, *szimfónikus* zenekar, *fuvós*zenekar, *cigány*zenekar, etc!)

Similarly:

szokás		ø		
ø	ø	habit	custom	usage (in language)

2. This type can be illustrated with the following examples:

hang	sound			
	voice	note	cry	ring etc.

The subordinate English simplex terms are expressed in Hungarian either by attributive structures (note: zenei hang) or by genitive constructions (ring: csengö hangja; cry: állat hangja, etc).

As a result of metonymic transfer based on the continuity of senses, we find the same word denoting the system of linguistic signs (language) and the organ of speech (tongue).

	anatomical	linguistic
nyelv		tongue / language

Thus, Hungarian *nyelv* has two equivalents in English, one used only in a linguistic sense (*language*), and another one used both in refence to anatomy and to language (*tongue*),

Type 3 can also be frequently found, i.e., the case of *A* (superordinate term) functioning as *a* (subordinate term), but not in the same way in different languages:

erdő	forest	
őserdő	woods	jungle

Here the main difference lies in the number of subordinate terms and in the strange circumstance that most native speakers of English do not seem to re-

gard *jungle* as a kind of 'forest': We have a difference in the number of subordinate terms also in:

szél	wind		
szellö	szél	breeze	wind	gale

As was indicated in the foregoing examples of structured vocabulary sets showing inclusion relations between superordinate terms and hyponyms, English and Hungarian display considerable differences in the semantic organization of lexemes, and these differences are manifest even in the basic layers of the word-stock, among high-frequency words, presenting numerous pitfalls for the learner.

Taxonomy of kinship terms

We use the term 'taxonomy' here simply to mean the arrangement of a particular subclass of a lexical domain whose numbers display certain formal properties (cf. Kay 1971: 866). Principles of taxonomy, for the most part and especially folk taxonomies, represent universal principles of classification and are thus applicable to any language; kinship terms are probably the easiest to classify in this way. If we consider the kinship terms of English and Hungarian, we shall find certain important differences; the differences lie in the fact that the two languages lexicalize their semantic primitives (feature complexes) differently. Let us see *testvér* (sibling?) in detail:

testvér				sibling		Level 1
fiútestvér		leánytestvér		brother	sister	Level 2
bátya	öcs	nővér	hug			Level 3

The depth of the taxonomic structure is the same in both cases, but the status of the elements is considerably different. The pair *testvér* (meaning roughly 'of the same blood') and *sibling* cannot be said to be *on a par* with each other (Level 1), because the former is an important, high-frequency word, whereas *sibling* is a sporadically realized taxon (it is not even recorded in Hornby's ALDCE). Moreover, the latter is polysemous, denoting not only the first consanguineous group of descendants, but also consanguineals, kinsmen in a wider sense, persons related by blood. In Level 2 the case seems to be the opposite, as Hungarian *fiútestvér* and *leánytestvér* (note the use of the generic *testvér* in the compounds) are terms not much used in everyday parlance, as they are meanings rather than names of taxa; on the other hand *brother* and *sister* are lexemes, neutralizing the Hungarian specification by age between *bátya* and *öcs* 'older brother' and 'younger brother' respectively (Level 3).

The semantic components (male), (female), (young), (immediate descendent

of), etc., have been lexicalized in Hungarian in a different way from English. If we consider the taxa and lexemes in the first descending generation from EGO, we find the following:

gyerek		child			
fiu	leány	boy	son	girl	daughter

$gyerek_1$	$child_1$
fiu_1 | $leány_1$	boy | girl
(non-relational)	(non-relational)

$gyerek_2$	$child_2$ ('offspring')
fiu_2 | $leány_2$	son | daughter
(relational)	(relational)

A brief analysis of the incorporated semantic features shows up further differences. (The explanation of the notation used is the following: $(+)$ the feature is relevant; $(-)$ the term does not show that feature; (0) the feature is irrelevant).

|	age	young	sex	male	relation	immediate descendent of
gyerek/child	+	+	−	0	−	0
fiu	−	0	+	+	−	0
boy	+	+	+	+	−	0
son	−	0	+	+	+	+

What *fiu* and *boy* (or *leány* and *girl*) have in common is that both terms are one-place predicates, by contrast with *son* and *daughter* which, in addition to their denotation, express a binary relation of offspring to parent. As may be inferred from the above tables, the generic terms fiu_1, fiu_2 and $leány_1$ and $leány_2$ are likely to cause interference for Hungarians learning English — although the 'error' of using *boy* for *son* and *girl* for *daughter* may no longer be a capital offence, since more and more native speakers do the same in speaking informally about their children.

Analysis of body parts

Here we give part of the hierarchical taxonomic classification of body part lexemes in English and Hungarian, and distinguish the main part — whole relations of the field. The inventory given below is by no means exhaustive, since our purpose is to point out certain systematic and important differences in the meaning of the respective body parts.

As is seen in the following charts, the terms are arranged in a hierarchy, the

vertical direction representing the inalienable inclusion of HAVE (i.e., the body has a head, the head has a face, etc.), and the depth of the taxonomy is from one to five levels. The point to illustrate below is that in Hungarian terms with a more general meaning (Level 2: *fej, kéz, láb*) are also found at lower levels (Level 3, 4, 5):
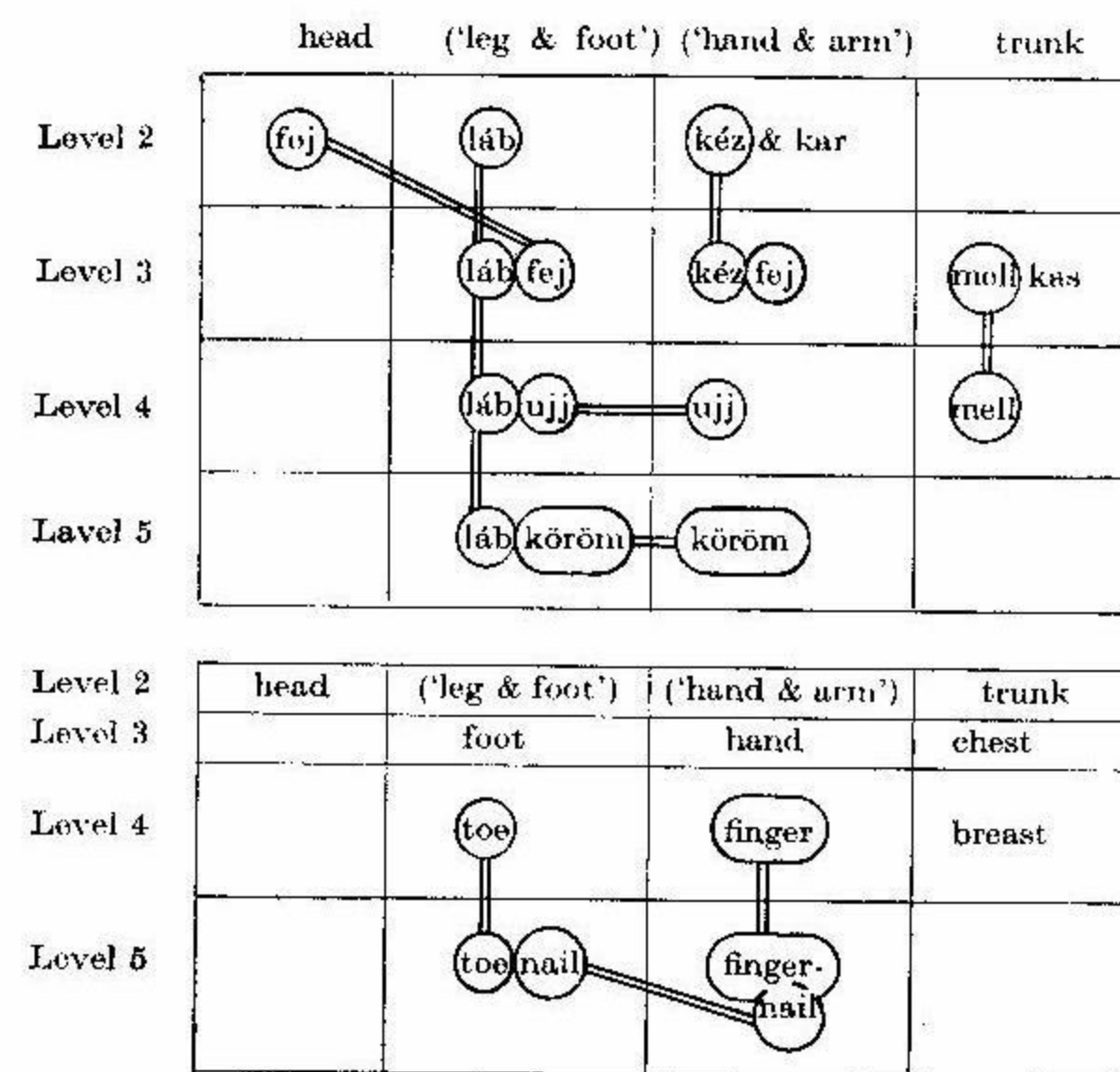
The above tables show related aspects of the inventories of Hungarian and English body parts, contrasting a network of derivational relationships in Hungarian with the general formal discreteness of the English terms. The notation ('leg & foot') is used to denote the meaning of a Hungarian term which has no equivalent in English, as *láb* in Hungarian covers the area of both *leg* and *foot*; it depends on the context which of the two is appropriate: Megütöttem a *láb*am 'I hurt my *leg*'; Nagyobb a *láb*am, mint a tiéd 'My *feet* are larger than yours'; A *láb*amra lépett 'He stepped on my *toes*'.

Number and lexical structure of subordinate terms

The number of semantic domains, sets of semantically related words subsumed under some common heading can be virtually infinite, but some are composed of lexemes of higher frequency than others. Let us now consider such sets of lexemes with emphasis on the number of subordinate lexemes in the respective-

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fields in both languages, and also the types of linguistic resources these languages employ to name them. The point to illustrate here is that in Hungarian linguistic motivation plays a much greater role than in English, Hungarian is marked by a tendency to reuse its lexical resources over and over again, while in English we find the contrary tendency to create new items (simplexes) on the level of subordinate terms. A generic superordinate term is used as the second element of a compound on the subordinate level, so in the majority of the cases it is very easy to form the hyponyms. Let us see a few examples:

ól 'shelter for animals' vs. ø

disznóól	kutyaól	baromfiól	nyulól	tehénól	ló/istálló/
pigsty pigpen	kennel	chicken-coup roost pen	hutch	cowshed byre	stable

Similarly, in the names of trees:

fa — tree

tölgyfa	szilfa	nyirfa	nyárfa	gosztenyefa	bükkfa	akácfa
oak	elm	birch	poplar	chestnut	beech	acacia locust

In the domain of geographical terms (natural phenomena, ground forms, etc.) English has a great variety of lexemes where Hungarian employs general/generic terms. The large difference in the number of terms is naturally determined by the differences in the geographical situations of Great Britain and the United States on the one hand, and Continental Hungary on the other:

	small	medium	large
		bay	
öböl	inlet creek cove	bay bight	gulf

magnitude →

We have the following equivalents of Hungarian *hullám* in English:

wave					
type			location		
large	long	white	at sea	on coast	behind vessel
breaker	roller	white-cap	billow	surf	wake

hullám

The use of the dotted line in the following table indicates that the word for the superordinate term is reused one level lower, in the names of the subordinate terms:

eső				
szitáló eső	zápor (eső)	felhőszakadás	jégeső	havas eső

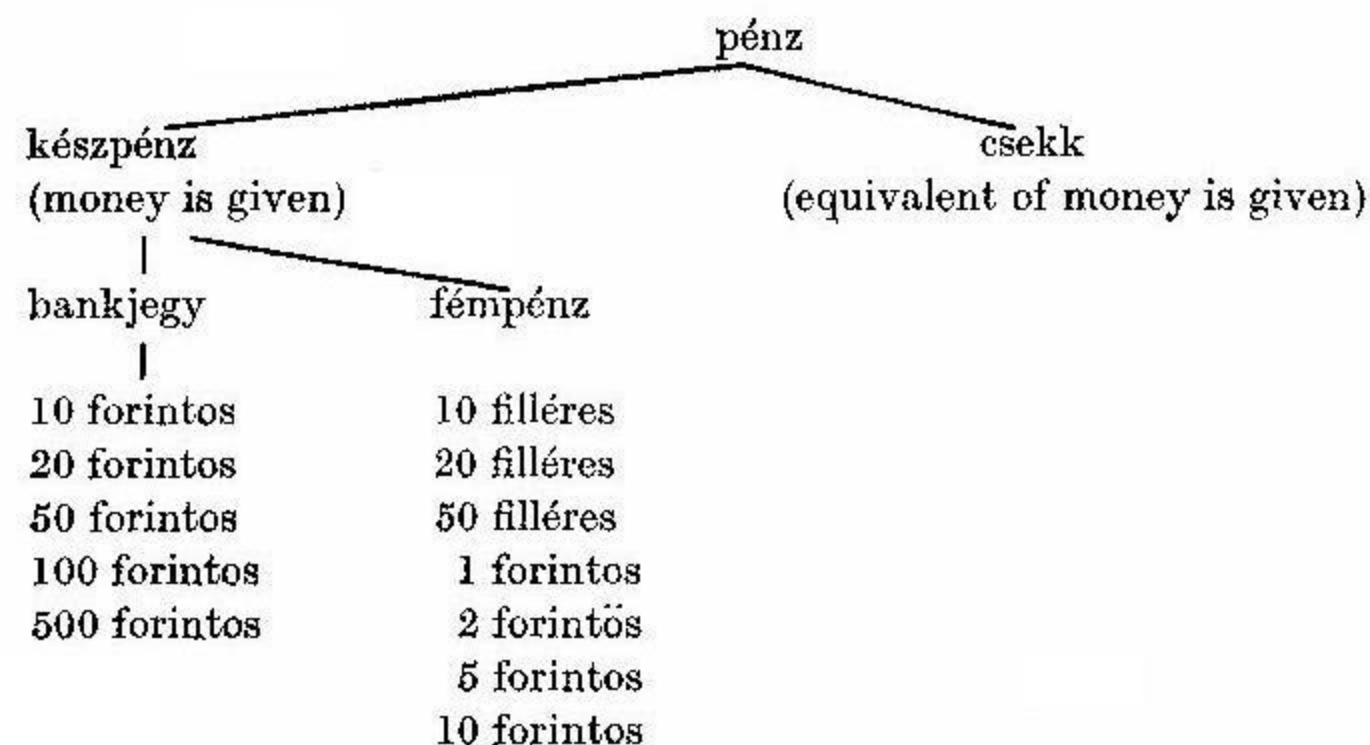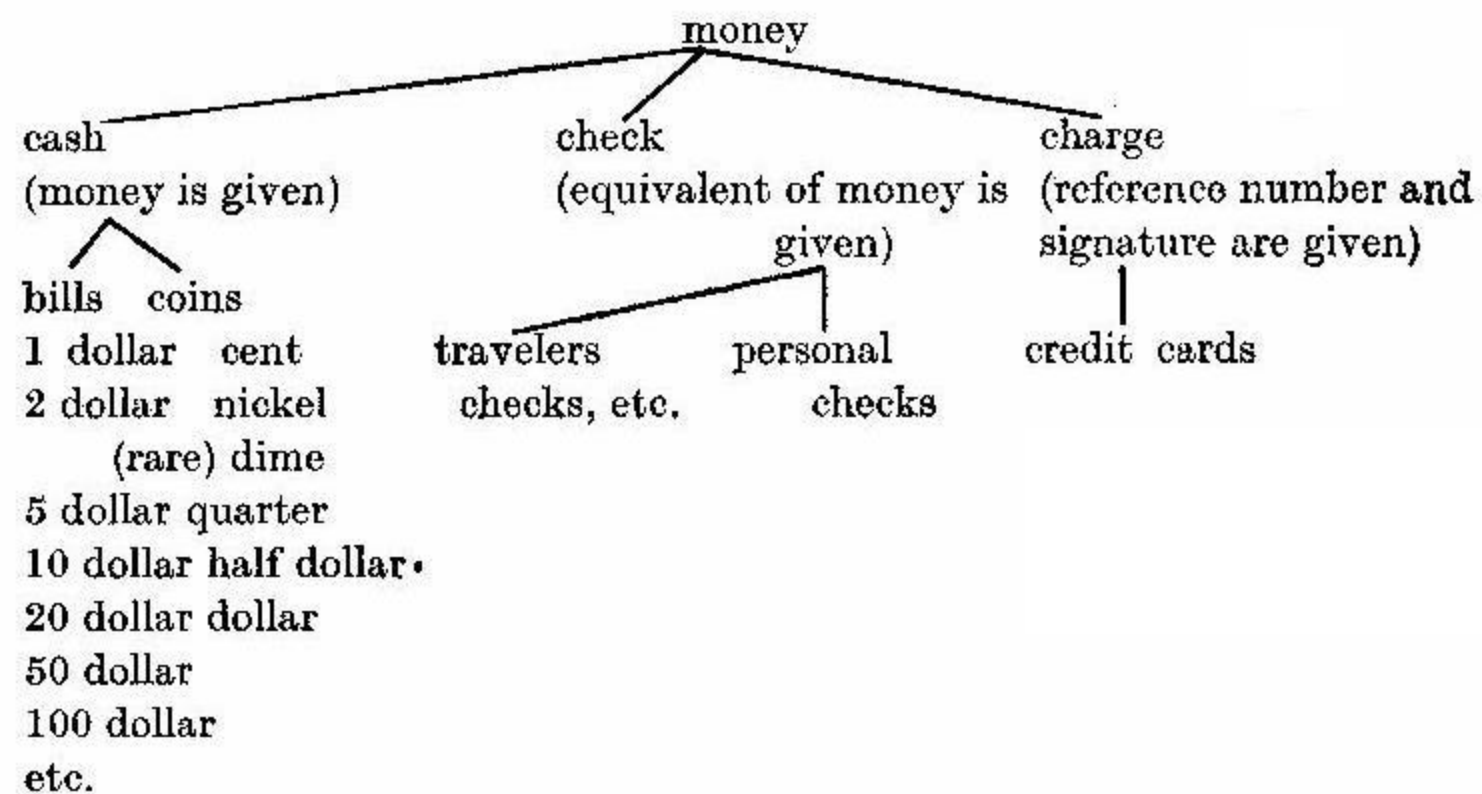| rain				
drizzle	shower	downpour	hail	sleet

Note that in the case of *öböl* one term in Hungarian is contrasted with six in English, *hullám* with seven; in the case of *eső* the Hungarian subordinate terms are fully motivated with the exception of *felhőszakadás* (none in English), and note the important difference in English not considering *hail* and *sleet* to be forms of *rain*.

The various equivalents of the highly polysemous *óra* are the following:

óra									
(tan) óra	fali óra	torony óra	inga óra	ébresztő óra	zseb óra	kar óra	villany óra	gáz óra	viz óra

instrument

time	time measurement	utility measurement
	not portable portable	

hour	lesson class period	clock			watch			motor		
		wall clock	church clock	pendu-lum clock	alarm clock	pocket watch	wrist watch	electric meter	gas meter	water meter

It is highly interesting from a morphological point of view to compare the various forms of money, and also the divergent taxonomies; the taxonomic hierarchy is much simpler in Hungarian since a number of (especially American) payment modalities are not known in that country. (In order to save space the Hungarian monetary system is contrasted with the American forms of money. In theory, British usage differs from American in not using the credit card system).

As is seen below, Hungarian uses motivated terms (containing the general term) to denote the various forms of money, whereas English exhibits a great variety of forms, especially in adjectival uses. So Hungarian is not only contrasted with a geographically restricted dual system (British and American), but also with a variety of payment modalities and unmotivated terms.

```
                        money
        cash           check              charge
   (money is given)  (equivalent of money is  (reference number and
                          given)           signature are given)

   bills   coins   travelers   personal   credit cards
   1 dollar  cent  checks, etc.  checks
   2 dollar  nickel
        (rare) dime
   5 dollar  quarter
   10 dollar half dollar
   20 dollar dollar
   50 dollar
   100 dollar
   etc.
```

```
                        pénz
   készpénz                      csekk
   (money is given)         (equivalent of money is given)

   bankjegy        fémpénz

   10 forintos     10 filléres
   20 forintos     20 filléres
   50 forintos     50 filléres
   100 forintos    1 forintos
   500 forintos    2 forintös
                   5 forintos
                   10 forintos
```

pénz — money

aprópénz	papirpénz	visszajáró pénz	pénz-pénzügyi-	pénztárca	készpénz
coin cash change	(bank) note paper money	change	money-monotary pecuniary financial finance fiscal	wallet purse	cash

Another interesting domain is that of *ut, utazás — travel*. The Hungarian terms are in derivational relationship and are interchangeable, and have a number of equivalents in English. The 'travel' hierarchy reveals an interesting
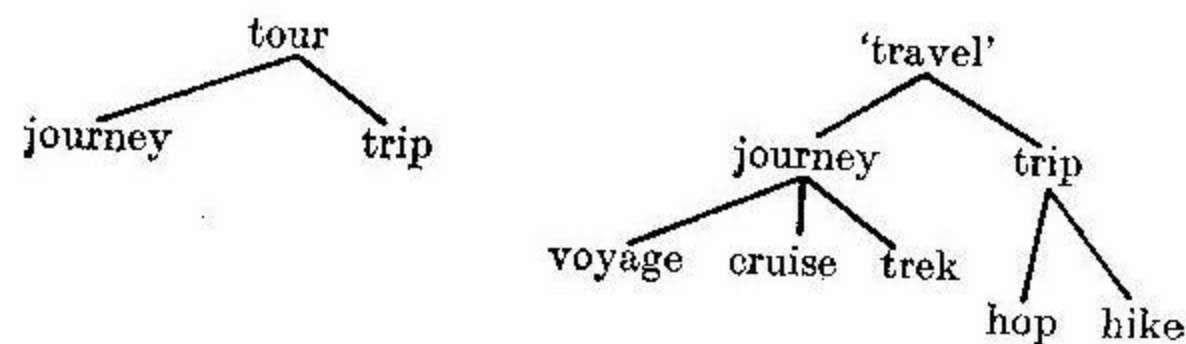
aspect of the sub-super relationship; the apparent interchangeability or roles in some cases:
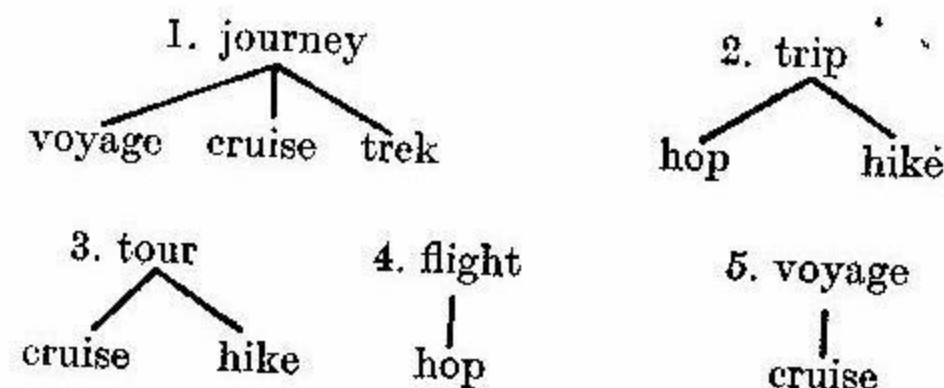
```
        trip                flight
   flight cruise trek    trip journey tour
```
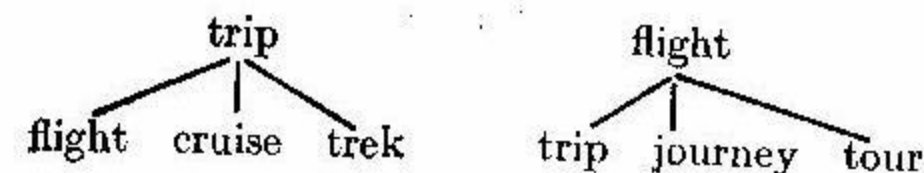
It is also true of *tour/flight, voyage/trip*. In order to find possible hierarchies, let us assume that the following is true:

	length		shape		medium		
	long/short		round/linear		air	sea	land
	(+)	(−)	(+)	(−)			
journey	+		0		0	0	0
trip	−		0		0	0	0
tour	0		+		0	0	0
voyage	+		0		−	+	−
cruise	+		+		−	+	−
flight	0		0		+	−	−
hop	−		−		+	−	−
trek	+		−		−	−	+
hike	−		+		−	−	+

The "more super" term might be considered that with more zeros in the matrix, since zero implies generality. The number of features is, however, sometimes equal (*tour* vs. *journey, trip*). Thus, there is no criterion for a single hierarchical arrangement:

```
            tour                         'travel'
   journey        trip           journey            trip
                            voyage cruise trek    hop  hike
```

Instead, it seems to us that we are dealing with several hierarchies:

```
   1. journey              2. trip
   voyage cruise trek      hop    hike

   3. tour        4. flight      5. voyage
   cruise hike      hop              cruise
```

Hierarchies 1. and 2. can be combined since *journey* and *trip* have the same superordinate (the hypothetical "super-super" 'travel'), and 1. and 5. since *cruise* is subordinate to *voyage*. However, this leaves three distinct hierarchies which cannot be consolidated since none of the "head supers" is subordinate to any other. We must thus work with the notion of multiple hierarchies. Terms which are directly subordinate to more than one superordinate (*cruise*<*voyage*, *tour*; *biks*<*trip*, *tour*) will participate in more than one hierarchy.

Some conclusions.

We have been concerned with the problem whether English and Hungarian have words for concepts that we chose to call superordinate and subordinate (hyponyms), and also with the problem of the utilization of linguistic resources for naming these concepts. The former is a product of historical-cultural factors, including language contact, and the latter depends on the structure of the language. In the case of English such a product is the relative abundance of structurally discrete lexical items (simplexes), where in Hungarian derivational relationships among corresponding lexical items are more typical. Our material suggests the following generalizations:

i. In the basic layers of the vocabulary, among high-frequency words one often encounters discrepancies in the structuring of lexemes in the superordinate and subordinate spheres. These discrepancies are manifest in several ways: *a.* one language not having a general, superordinate term; *b.* there is a difference in the number of hyponyms; *c.* using *A* as *a*. (It seems to us that English has such a vast and highly specialized vocabulary that it can 'afford' to use specific lexemes for the subordinate concepts and frequently no word on the superordinate level, whereas Hungarian seems to favour either the polysemous use of generic terms or circumlocution containing the generic term).

ii. Hungarian has a more detailed inventory for the expression of kinship relations, mainly by a predilection for specialization by age and sex.

iii. The Hungarian terms in many cases are clumsy and resort to paraphrase, but are mostly morphologically or semantically (or both ways) motivated; the relations between superordinate — subordinate, hyponym vs. hyponym are always evident, transparent, easily recognizable and easy to learn. The terms in English exhibit much less motivation; the relations between superordinate — subordinate and on the hyponym-level are loose or cannot be morphologically inferred. The connective links between conceptually related terms are difficult to grasp, to sense a coherent framework that would help in language learning. The lack of motivation is undoubtedly due to the large proportion of foreign words in the whole of the vocabulary of the English language. In Hungarian, on the other hand, there are proportionally less words of foreign origin and linguistic motivation plays a much greater role in the structure of the vocabulary.

It was also pointed out that the number of lexemes in a particular domain can be attributed to the divergent traditions in the way of life of the peoples concerned and to several differences in the geographical and climatic conditions.

iv. The question whether such 'problem words' as the ones presented above should be taught contrastively or non-contrastively in foreign language courses is rather difficult to answer, as there is evidence that the contrastive method does not appear to be better than the non-contrastive. It seems that a combined method is superior to both the contrastive and the non-contrastive method.

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