

Word order change and the position of verb modifiers in Hungarian

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While Hungarian has changed from an OV language to a more regularly head-initial language (at least in the functional domains; see É. Kiss 2013, 2014), there is one particular syntactic configuration where this is concealed by an OV-compatible order. The preverbal position of various constituents, together called Verb Modifiers (VMs; e.g. É. Kiss 2006), such as (separable) verbal particles, secondary predicates and bare nominal objects, is more reminiscent of an OV type language than a VO type one. We examine the diachronic changes in the word order properties of these constituents, relying on corpus data from the 14th to the 18th centuries, and claim that the preverbal order of these elements is not a remnant OV property but a result of a syntactic reanalysis whereby complex predicates came to be derived in a functional projection.

It has been shown that VMs exhibit a varied word order pattern in Old Hungarian (896–1526): verbal particles were the most consistent in being preverbal neutrally, while e.g. directional (goal) complements or non-verbal predicates were relatively often postverbal still (see Hegedűs 2018 on data from the Munich Codex [1466]). By extending the empirical domain to Middle Hungarian (1526–1772) and taking into consideration various text types, including informal registers that can hardly display interference-phenomena in word order, we take stock of the distribution of verbal particles, bare objects, directional complements of motion verbs, non-verbal (nominal, adjectival and locative) predicates in copular sentences, dative-marked secondary predicates (with *consider*-type verbs) and infinitival complements of the most frequent auxiliary-like verbs (*fog* ‘will’, *kell* ‘must, need’, *akar* ‘want’). Our findings show that by the 16th century, there was further progress in the changes by which the preverbal position of VMs became generalized to all currently observable categories. We find only two remarkable exceptions to the neutral VM-V word order in Middle Hungarian: directional complements of motion verbs and infinitival complements of auxiliary-like verbs are sometimes postverbal even in neutral sentences (1)–(3).

- (1) Onnant **el-menvén ment Bodonc-ra**, és [...] **nagy kőeső lett**.
there.from away-gone went Bodonc-SUB and big hailstorm became.3SG
‘Leaving that place, she went to Bodonc and [soon after] there was a big hailstorm’
- (2) **Akarnám értenem**, mit végeztél.
want.COND.1SG understand.INF.1SG what finish.PAST.2SG
‘I would want to understand what you managed to get done.’
- (4) **kell** kegyelmed előtt magamat **mentenem**.
must your.highness before self.1SG.ACC plead.INF.1SG
‘I must excuse myself in front of your highness.’

We assume that the reanalysis of the preverbal position happened already in Old Hungarian as shown by the regular preverbal position of verbal particles (cf. Hegedűs 2018). The result of this is that despite the change of the head-finality in the language, verbal particles remained preverbal on the surface. This distinguishes Hungarian from English, where the OV > VO word order change also resulted in postverbal particles (see Kroch & Taylor 2000 on the diagnostic role of particles in word order properties; see also Elenbaas 2006).

We propose that the syntax of VMs is the same from early on; however, what belongs to what we may call a VM is broadening in time. In Middle Hungarian, the exceptions to the generalized VM-movement are due to (i) the different lexicalization of telicity with motion verbs, and (ii) the different lexical properties of auxiliary-like verbs, namely, that they can bear stress and do not necessarily undergo

restructuring with their infinitival complement. This goes along with changes whereby the aspectual system changes and particles become more frequent, and telicity is expressed by the VM+V complex (and not the verb alone).

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