Conditions on Borrowing: The Balkan Subjunctive in Hungarian

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The talk shows that the Balkan subjunctive, an areal phenomenon spreading from a Greek epicenter, involving the replacement of the infinitive by a truncated finite subjunctive clause (Joseph 1983), has reached Hungarian via Romanian. In Moldavian Hungarian, a Hungarian dialect in Romania, the truncated subjunctive (*Kell-ett men-j-en* need-PST.3SG go-SUBJ-3SG 'He needed to go') has completely replaced the agreeing infinitival complement of impersonal (raising) modals and is an optional alternative to the infinitival complement of modal control verbs. In Standard Hungarian, it is an optional alternative to the agreeing infinitive. Its appearance is an instance of structural borrowing that took place between typologically distant languages and involved no lexical borrowing (contra Winford 2005).

The talk discusses what made this particular construction of Romanian grammar liable to adoption by Hungarian. The following factors are claimed to have supported its borrowing:

1. A similar tendency in the host language. A similar tendency has been displayed by Hungarian since the 12th century: parallel with the restructuring of the grammar from head-final to head-initial, different forms of non-finite subordination have gradually been replaced by finite subordinate clauses (Bacskai-Atkari & Dékány 2014). Infinitival clauses have survived as complements to modal predicates, but their finite alternatives have also appeared.

2. Related structures in the host language. The contexts where the truncated subjunctive clause has appeared traditionally allowed both complete subjunctive clauses and truncated infinitives. Truncated infinitives, projecting up to AspP, complement impersonal modals that avoid primary stress by attracting the verbal particle of their infinitival complement into the stress position preceding them. Particle climbing is only allowed from infinitives with no operator domain (no FocP or NegP):

(1) a. [$_{AspP}$ *Fel$_i$ kell* [$_{AspP}$ t$_i$ *hív-n-om$_j$*   [$_{TP}$ t$_j$ [$_{VP}$ pro t$_j$ *János-t*]]]]
            up   needs   call-INF-OBJ.1SG   John-ACC
        'I need to call up John.'

   b. *Fel$_i$ kell* [$_{FocP}$ **CSAK EGYSZER* [$_{NegP}$ * *nem* [$_{AspP}$ t$_i$ *hív-n-om*   *János-t*]]]
       up needs   only once   not   call-INF-OBJ.1SG John-ACC

3. Semantic equivalence and formal similarity of the original and the loan constructions.
Agreeing infinitive phrases and subjunctive clauses are semantically equivalent: both have dependent tense and both have a subject of their own eliciting verbal agreement.
Both the dative subject of the inflected infinitive and the nominative subject of the subjunctive verb can be pro-dropped, in which case their case difference becomes invisible.
The agreement paradigms of the infinitive and the subjunctive verb are partly identical; the infinitival and the subjunctive complements often differ only in a single phoneme:

(2) a. *Meg kell kér-**n**-em.*   (3) a. *Jó   lenne   el-men-**n**-ünk.* (4) a. *Muszáj el-men-**n**-etek.*
        PRT   needs ask-INF-1SG   good would.be off-go-INF-1PL   necessary off go-INF-2PL
        'I need to ask him.'   'It would be good for us to leave.'   'You got to leave.'

   b. *Meg kell kér-**j**-em.*   b. *Jó   lenne   el-men-**j**-ünk.* (4) a. *Muszáj el-men-**j**-etek.*
        PRT   needs ask-SUBJ-1SG   good would.be off-go-SUBJ-1PL   necessary off go-SUBJ-2PL
        'It's necessary [that] I ask him.' 'It would be good [if] we left.'   'It is necessary [that] you leave.'

4. Frequency. Hungarian dialects from east to west have integrated the truncated subjunctive to gradually decreasing degrees, which enables us to reconstruct its spreading, and to separate true borrowing from the language-internal extension of the borrowed pattern. Borrowing appears to have started in the most frequent one of the contexts involving an agreeing infinitive (the complement position of *kell* 'needs').

Limits of borrowing. The distribution of the Balkan subjunctive is not identical in Hungarian and Romanian. E.g., in Romanian, the truncated subjunctive clause can be used with aspectual verbs and even with the future auxiliary, while in Hungarian it cannot. This is attributed to the lack of semantic equivalence between the two forms: the subjunctive clause has its own tense, even if it is dependent on the matrix tense, whereas the infinitival complements of aspectual and temporal verbs share the tense of the finite verb.

References

Joseph, Brian. 1983. *The Synchrony and Diachrony of the Balkan Infinitive: A Study in Areal, General, and Historical Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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