Notes on long-distance agreement in Hungarian

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1 Introduction

Infinitival complements in Hungarian appear with different classes of verbs. It is usually said that verbs that can select for ACC objects ("transitive" verbs) can agree with the object an infinitival complement, but verbs that do not select for ACC objects ("intransitive" verbs) cannot (É. Kiss 1987, 1989, Kálmán C. *et al.* 1989, Kenesei *et al.* 1998, É. Kiss 2002, É. Kiss & van Riemsdijk 2004, den Dikken 2004, Coppock 2012, Szécsényi 2017, Szécsényi & Szécsényi 2018). The construction in question is shown in (1), with examples in (2) and (3).[1]

(1) **Matrix verb with infinitival complement**
[… finite verb [$_{INF}$ infinitive (object-ACC)]]

(2) a. **Intransitive matrix verb, intransitive infinitive**

János igyekez-ett [$_{INF}$ *bemen-ni*].
János strive-3SG.PST enter-INF

'János strove to enter.'

b. **Intransitive matrix verb, transitive infinitive**

Anna igyekez-ett [$_{INF}$ *meg-tanul-ni a vers-et*].
Anna strive-3SG.PST VM-learn-INF the poem-ACC

'Anna strove to learn the poem.' (Kenesei *et al.* 1998: 33)

c. **Intransitive matrix verb, transitive infinitive**

Igyekez-lek meglátogat-ni (téged).
make effort-1SG.SBJ>2.OBJ visit-INF you.ACC

'I am making an effort to visit you.' (É. Kiss 2002: 54)

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[1] Abbreviations: 1 = first person, 2 = second person, 3 = third person, ACC = accusative, ADJ = adjective, COM = comitative, COND = conditional, COP = copula, DEF = definite, DO = direct object, ILL = illative, INDEF = indefinite, INE = inessive, INF = infinitive, MNSZ = Magyar Nemzeti Szövegtár (Hungarian National Corpus), OBJ = object, PL = plural, POSS = possessive, PST = past, REFL = reflexive, SBJ = subject, SG = singular, SUBL = sublative, SUPE = superessive, TERM = terminative, VM = verbal modifier.

(3) a. **Transitive matrix verb, intransitive infinitive**

János meg-próbál-t [INF *bemen-ni*].
János VM-try-PST.3SG.SBJ enter-INF
'János tried to go in.' (É. Kiss 1989: 153)

b. **Transitive matrix verb, transitive infinitive**

Anna meg-próbál-ta [INF *meg-tanul-ni a vers-et*].
Anna VM-try-PST.3SG.SBJ>3.OBJ VM-learn-INF the poem-ACC
'Anna tried to learn the poem.' (Kenesei *et al.* 1998: 33)

It is generally argued in the literature that if the matrix verb cannot take an ACC direct object (DO), it will always show subject agreement even if the DO of its infinitival complement is a definite third person object, as in (2a,b). The only exception to this is claimed to occur with second person DOs, which allow the *-lak/-lek* object agreement form, as in (2c). With matrix verbs that do take ACC DOs, agreement on the matrix verb depends on the definiteness of the infinitive's DO.

The main claim of this paper is that the empirical picture is more complex than indicated by (2) and (3). In particular, there is evidence that intransitive matrix verbs, that is verbs that do not by themselves take ACC DOs, **can nevertheless agree with the definite third person object of the infinitive**. An example is shown in (4):

(4) **Intransitive matrix verb, transitive infinitive and object agreement**
OBJ— finite verb — INF [321]; MNSZ/doc#2886

... *hogy élet-em egyik legnagyobb hülyeség-é-t* **készül-öm**
that life-1SG.POSS one biggest idiocy-3SG.POSS-ACC get.ready
véghez vin-ni.
bring.about-INF
'... that I am getting ready to bring about one of the biggest idiocies of my life.'

I suggest that speakers who produce and allow structures like (4) do so in analogy to the structure in (3). The verbs in (2) and (4) do not generally have ACC DOs and do not agree with any non-subject argument, but the verbs in (3) have ACC DOs of their own and agree with them, or straightforwardly agree with the DOs of their infinitival copmlement (hence "long-distance" agreement).

In addition, I argue that the data shown below and found in corpora indicate that second person DOs of infinitival complements do not trigger object agreement more readily than third person objects, suggesting that there is a single agreement mechanism responsible for both. Differences in acceptability of second vs. third person objects in these contexts as reported by É. Kiss (1987: 227, 2002: 54), Kálmán C. *et al.* (1989:

61), den Dikken (2004: 451) are weaker than expressed there or they might be due to other factors, including verb morphology.

2 Data

(5) presents some intransitive predicates, which do not have ACC DOs, and which are said not to agree with the ACC object of their infinitival complement (see e.g. É. Kiss 1987: 226, É. Kiss 2002: 54, Kálmán C. *et al.* 1989: 60–61, Szécsényi & Szécsényi 2018: 79 on *igyekszik*, Kálmán C. *et al.* 1989: 61, den Dikken 2004: 449, 451 on *jön*, Szécsényi & Szécsényi 2018: 79 on and *készül*).

(5) **Intransitive verbs (no ACC DO) taking infinitival complements**
     igyekszik 'strive', *jár* 'go (regularly)', *(el)jön* 'come', *készül* 'prepare', *próbálkozik* 'attempt', *siet* 'hurry', …

(6) shows transitive verbs which take ACC DOs and which allow object agreement; whether agreement appears or not depends on syntactic and semantic properties of the object (Bartos 1999, É. Kiss 2002, den Dikken 2006, Coppock & Wechsler 2012, Coppock 2013, Bárány 2015, 2017).

(6) **Transitive verbs (ACC DO) taking infinitival complements**
     akar 'want', *fog* (future auxiliary), *megpróbál* 'try', *un* 'find boring', *utál* 'hate', …

2.1 Agreement of intransitive verbs with 3rd person objects

The intransitive verbs in (5) lacking ACC DOs can appear with both SBJ and OBJ agreement when they have infinitival complements, in what seem to be the exact same environments as the transitive verbs in (6). In this section, I illustrate a selection of attested examples with the predicates listed in (5) and subjects with different φ-features. The data are from the Hungarian National Corpus, the "Magyar nemzeti szövegtár" (MNSZ; `http://corpus.nytud.hu/mnsz/`) and other sources on the internet (see Appendix A). Each example is coded with a permutation of 123, indicating the order of the finite matrix verb (1), the infinitive (2) and the object (3).

2.1.1 First person singular subject, third person object

Clear examples of intransitive predicates that agree with a first person singular subject, as well as the object of the infinitival complement (glossed as 1SG.SBJ>3.OBJ) were only found for the predicate *készül* 'get ready'. This is partly for morphological reasons: the -*m* suffix is the syncretic exponent of 1SG.SBJ agreement in the past tense, where the distinction between object agreement and its absence is neutralised, as well as the

single exponent for first person subjects (with or without object agreement) for the class of *-ik*-verbs, which have a 3.sg marker *-ik* in place of the regular null marker. This rules out finding relevant examples for *igyekszik* and *próbálkozik*, for exampe. With *készül*, I have found a total of nine examples with the form *készülöm* shown in (7) out of a total of 30 examples with *készül* (29 with third person objects).

(7) obj — finite verb — inf [312]; Appendix A

A   *Windows XP-t*   **készül-öm**   *levált-ani*   *linux-ra*   ...
the Windows XP-acc prepare-1sg.sbj>3.obj change-inf linux-subl
'I am planning to switch from Windows XP to Linux.'

2.1.2 Second person singular subject, third person object

The verb forms expressing agreement with a second person singular subject and a third person object *-od/-ed/-öd* are not syncretic in the relevant configurations, and it is easier to find relevant examples for different predicates, for example *igyekszik*, *készül*, *próbálkozik*, and *siet*. In (10), the infinitive's object is *pro*, licensed by object agreement on the finite verb. In addition, the verbal modifier *meg*, selected by the infinitive *nyitni*, is spelled out in a higher position in the matrix clause, a property of some but not all transitive verbs in (6) (see É. Kiss & van Riemsdijk 2004: 18–22 for discussion).

(8) finite verb — inf — obj [123]; Appendix A

Bocs,   *ha*   *épp*   **készül-t-ed**   *betanul-ni*   *az*   *Oxford*
sorry if   just prepare-pst-2sg.sbj>3.obj learn   the Oxford
nagyszótár-at.
big.dictionary-acc
'Sorry if you were just preparing to learn the Oxford dictionary by heart.'

(9) finite verb — inf — obj (CP) [123]; MNSZ/doc#972

Hiszen   *mindig*   **siet-ed**   *kikér-ni magad-nak,*   *hogy*
since   always   hurry-3sg.Sbj>3sg.obj protest   that
ál-magyar   *len-né-l.*
fake-Hungarian be-cond.3sg-sbj
'Since you always hurry to protest that you're a fake Hungarian.'

(10) finite verb — INF — *pro* [12*pro*]; VM-climbing; Appendix A

    ... *de most teljes üresség van, ha meg **próbálkoz-od** nyit-ni.*
    but now complete emptiness COP if VM try-2SG.SBJ>3.OBJ open-INF

    '... but now it's completely empty if you try to open it'

2.1.3 Third person singular subject, third person object

Intransitive predicates are also attested showing agreement with a third person singular subject and the third person object of their infinitival complement. The following examples illustrate *készül* and *szándékozik* 'to intend'. Analogous constructions with *igyekszik* and *jár* are also attested in the data set.

(11) finite verb — INF — OBJ [123]; Appendix A

    ... *birtok-ba **készül-i** ven-ni az új föld-jé-t.*
    possession-ILL prepare-3SG.SBJ>3.OBJ take-INF the new land-3SG-ACC

    '... he wants to take his new plot of land into possession.'

(12) OBJ — finite verb — X — INF [312]; Appendix A

    *Barát-já-t **szándékoz-t-a** magá-val vin-ni.*
    friend-3SG-ACC intend-PST-3SG.SBJ>3.OBJ REFL.3SG-COM bring-INF

    'S/he intended to bring his/her friend along.'

2.1.4 First person plural subject, third person object

First person plural subjects are also found in the relevant constructions, shown here for *készül* and *siet*, and also attested for *igyekszik* and *szándékozik*.

(13) INF— finite verb — OBJ [213]; Appendix A

    ... *megválaszt-juk a ruhá-nk-at, megcsinál-juk a*
    choose-1PL.SBJ>3.OBJ the clothes-1PL-ACC do-1PL.SBJ>3.OBJ the

    frizurá-nk-at, az internetes húspiac-on is ugyanúgy elad-ni
    hair-1PL-ACC the internet.ADJ meat market-SUPE too likewise sell-INF

    ***készül-jük** magunk-at.*
    prepare-1PL.SBJ>3.OBJ REFL.1PL-ACC

    '... we choose our clothes, we do our hair, and in the same way we prepare to sell ourselves on the online meat market.'

(14) finite verb — INF — OBJ [132]; Appendix A

*Egy-egy ugrás-sal **siet-t-ük** utolér-ni a civilizáció-ban és a*
one-one jump-COM hurry-PST-1PL catch up-INF the civilisation-INE and the

 politikai előhaladás-ban a többi európai nemzet-ek-et ...
 political progress-INE the other European nation-PL-ACC

'We hurried to catch up the other European nations in civilisation and political progress with one step or another ...'

2.1.5 Second person plural subject, third person object

The following examples have second person plural subjects. (15), with *készül*, again shows a *pro* object. (16) and (17) are present and past tense examples of *igyekszik*.

(15) finite verb — INF — *pro*; Appendix A

*Mennyi-ért **készül-itek** ven-ni?*
how much-for prepare-2PL.SBJ>3.OBJ buy-INF

'For how much are you preparing to buy it [a computer]?'

(16) finite verb — OBJ — INF [132]; Appendix A

*... azon kívül, hogy **igyeksz-itek** ez-t a rémálm-ot*
 that apart that strive-2PL.SBJ>3.OBJ this-ACC the nightmare-ACC

elfelejt-eni, ...
 forget-INF

'... apart from the fact that you strive to forget this nightmare ...'

(17) finite verb — INF — OBJ [213]; Appendix A

*Mi-vel **igyekez-t-étek** megnyugtat-ni magatokat, amikor*
what-COM strive-PST-3SG.SBJ>3.OBJ calm-INF REFL-3PL-ACC when

 elhagyott a szerelmetek több év után?
 left the love-3PL several year after

'How did you try to calm yourselves when your lover left you after several years?'

2.1.6 Third person plural subject, third person object

Examples with third person plural subjects, agreement with third person definite objects (3PL.OBJ):

(18)   OBJ — INF — finite verb [321]; MNSZ/doc#901

    ... hogy valaki-k a Fővárosi Önkormányzat-ot meg-károsít-ani
    that someone-PL the capital.ADJ local.government-ACC VM-harm-INF
    szándékoz-zák vagy szándékoz-t-ák
    intend-3PL.SBJ>3.OBJ or intend-PST-3PL.SBJ>3.OBJ
    'that some people intend or intended to harm the General Assembly of Budapest'

(19)   finite verb — INF — OBJ [123]; Appendix A

    *Ezért a német lovag-ok a 14. század-ban **igyekez-t-ék***
    because of this the German knight-PL the 14th century-INE strive-PST-3PL.OBJ
    elfoglal-ni Litvániá-t is.
    conquer-INF Lithuania-ACC too
    'Because of this, in the 14th century the German knights strove to conquer Lithuania as well.'

3 Distribution of agreement

3.1 Person

Table 1 shows that object agreement with third person definite objects is found with intransitive verbs, in contrast to many claims in the literature. This is true for any combination of person of subject and object where object agreement is overtly coded. In particular, the difference between agreement with 2nd and 3rd person objects is not categorical: both can trigger object agreement. Each cell in Table 1 with ✔ has at least one attested instance of agreement with an object of that person. In the empty cells in Table 1, there are no distinct object agreement forms in the first place.

It is clear, however, that the overall frequency of long-distance agreement with these predicates that do not take ACC DOs is much lower than with transitive verbs like *akar*, for example. Table 2 shows the distribution of different person combinations for *igyekszik*, *készül* and *szándékozik* as well as *akar* from the MNSZ (disregarding examples from other sources). For the intransitive verbs, these are the total number of occurrences in both present and past tense, while for *akar* I randomly sampled 500 occurrences for each tense, with 371 present and 416 past occurrences remaining after re-

SBJ / OBJ	1	2	3
1SG		(2c)	(7)
1PL			(13)–(14)
2SG			(8)–(10)
2PL			(15)–(17)
3SG			(11)–(12)
3PL			(18)–(19)

Table 1 Distribution of LDA with intransitive matrix verbs

moving misclassified examples and duplicates. 1SG>3 is not taken into account because of syncretism of the relevant forms.

	1PL>3	1SG>2	2SG>3	2PL>3	3SG>3	3PL>3
igyekszik	84	17	13	0	84	148
készül	2	0	0	0	3	5
szándékozik	43	0	8	1	156	173
akar	50	13	31	3	437	253

Table 2 Distribution of person configurations for different verbs from the MNSZ

While the totals for each row differ strongly, the distribution of person forms in each row is relatively similar. Third person subjects are the most frequent for each verb. While this is probably partly due the nature of the texts in the corpus, it is worth noting that 1PL>3 forms are more frequent than 1SG>2 for each verb as well, even though 1SG>2 has been claimed to be the only grammatical form of long-distance agreement for intransitive verbs such as *igyekszik*.

3.2 Word orders

The examples in Section 2 show five of the six possible permutations of the order of the finite matrix verb (1), the infinitive (2) and the object (3), shown in Table 3.

	123	132	213	231	312	321
Ex.	(8), (11), (19)	(16)	(13), (17)		(7), (12)	(18)

Table 3 Distribution of word orders in examples from Section 2

Orders 312 and 213 indicate movement of either the object (312) or the infinitive (213) into the matrix clause, often as a focus. Both of these orders lead to adjacency

between the finite verb and the object in the majority of cases[2] but object agreement is found without adjacency as well. Order 231 involves fronting both the infinitive, as a (contrastive) topic, and the object, as a matrix focus; an attested example with the transitive verb *akar* is shown in (20):

(20) INF — OBJ — finite verb [231]; MNSZ/doc#2201

    ... de legyűr-ni ők-et valójában nem akar-t-ák.
    but overcome-INF 3PL-ACC really not want-PST-3PL.SBJ>3.OBJ
    '... but they really did not want to overcome them.'

I do not see a principled reason for ruling out 231 (as in (20)) with an intransitive verb like *igyekszik*, *készül*, etc., given the range of data found with other orders shown in Table 3. However, among the 787 examples of *akar* with infinitival complements, (20) was the only example with 231 order, suggesting that this order is generally rare, not just when the matrix verb is intransitive.

Table 4 shows the distribution of word orders for the four verbs from Table 2 with their proportions. Once again, the total numbers considerably differ for the intransitive verbs vs. *akar*, but the distributions are similar: 123 is the most common order for *igyekszik*, *szándékozik* and *akar*, with 312 the second most frequent.

	123	132	213	231	312	321	*pro*
igyekszik	174	36	5	0	93	6	32
készül	3	0	6	0	1	0	2
szándékozik	102	22	35	0	161	30	31
akar	361	50	35	1	221	7	112

Table 4 Distribution of person configurations for different verbs from the MNSZ

In sum, five word orders are attested for *akar* with infinitival complements as well as for *igyekszik* and *szándékozik* (see also the data in Section 2), with 231 being the only exception. Orders might be influenced by information structure, exhibiting focus and topic movement, but there do not seem to be any clear differences in the distribution of word orders for transitive or intransitive matrix verbs.

3.3 Past tense

Den Dikken (2004) points out that the grammaticality of object agreement, in particular 2nd person agreement, depends on tense with verbs forming "come/go verb aspectual

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[2]Maybe adjacency helps construing the object as an argument of the matrix verb (Peredy 2009).

constructions" . For example, *jön* can form a 1SG>2.OBJ form in the past but not the present tense, as shown in (21).

(21) *Jö-tt-elek*   / **jö-lek*   *meg-látogat-ni* (*téged*).
      come-PST-1SG>2.OBJ   come-1SG>2.OBJ   VM-visit-INF   you.ACC
      'I came to visit you.'   (den Dikken 2004: 451)

Other verbs with similar semantics and argument structure, like *jár* 'go (regularly)' can form 1SG>2.OBJ in both present and past, although as with all data presented here, there is variation in how acceptable these forms are:

(22) *Jár-lak*   / *jár-ta-lak*   *meg-látogat-ni* (*téged*).
      go-1SG>2.OBJ   go-PST-1SG>2.OBJ VM-visit-INF
      'I go to visit you regularly.'

A reason for why past tense forms like *jö-tt-elek* 'come-PST-1SG>2.OBJ' are more acceptable than their present tense counterparts **jö(l)-lek* 'come-1SG>2.OBJ' can lie in morphology. The present tense forms of *jön, megy, lenni* are irregular, while their past tense forms are regular, based on a single stem ending in *-t*. It is straightforward to form analogical (agreeing) patterns based on transitive forms in the past; this is not possible in the present tense — cf. Table 5.

	Present	Past	Present	Past
1SG	*jöv-ök*	*jö-tt-em*	*jár-ok*	*jár-t-am*
2SG	*jö-sz*	*jö-tt-él*	*jár-sz*	*jár-t-ál*
3SG	*jön*	*jö-tt*	*jár*	*jár-t*
1PL	*jöv-ünk*	*jö-tt-ünk*	*jár-unk*	*jár-t-unk*
2PL	*jöt-tök*	*jö-tt-etek*	*jár-tok*	*jár-t-atok*
3PL	*jön-nek*	*jö-tt-ek*	*jár-nak*	*jár-t-ak*

Table 5   Present and past tense forms of *jön* 'come' (irregular) and *jár* 'go (regularly)'

As den Dikken (2004) also mentions, *jár*, while generally intransitive, can be used transitively with locational objects straightforwardly (also with different VMs), for example in *jár-ja az útját* 'I am going my way'. In contrast to the predicates in Section 2, however, it agrees with the object of the infinitive in even fewer cases. An attested example is shown in (23).

(23) finite verb — INF — OBJ [123]; Appendix A

Két	*nap-ig*	*a*	*falu*	*nép-e*	*jár-t-a*	*néz-ni*	*a*
two	day-TERM	the	village	people-3SG	go-PST-3SG.SBJ>3.OBJ	watch-INF	the

     fölakasztott *ember-t.*
     hung   person-ACC

'The villagers went to watch the hung person for two days.'

It is not clear what causes different frequencies of long-distance agreement in the present and past tense, although morphological regularity arguably plays a role. For *igyekszik*, *szándékozik* and *akar*, past tense forms are more frequent in the MNSZ, although this is probably again influenced by the nature of the texts in the corpus. The ratios of past tense to present are roughly equal for *szándékozik* (1.14) and *akar* (1.18) but higher for *igyekszik* (6.69). This could be related to morphology as well: *igyekszik* has less regular present tense forms than the other verbs.

3.4 Summary

The main difference between typical long-distance agreement with a transitive verb like *akar* and the intransitive verbs surveyed in Section 2 is in the overall frequency of the constructions. The total occurrences of *igyekszik* (346) and *szándékozik* (381) with long-distance agreement in the MNSZ are a fraction of the total for *akar*. The distribution of long-distance agreement with respect to the person of the object (and the subjcet) as well as word orders does not seem to differ strongly for different verbs (see Tables 2 and 4). The fact that a range of verbs that do not take ACC objects appear in a long-distance agreement construction in the MNSZ and other sources on the internet clearly indicates that there is no general ban on object agreement with these verbs.

4 Towards an analysis

The data in the previous sections showed that agreement between an intransitive matrix verb and the infinitive's object, albeit much less frequent than with transitive verbs, is nevertheless *regular*, i.e. a definite second or third person object can trigger object agreement. The attested patterns are schematically shown in (24).

(24) a. [V-SBJ ... [_{INF} V DP-DEF]] ✔
      b. [V-OBJ ... [_{INF} V DP-DEF]] ✔
      c. [V-SBJ ... [_{INF} V DP-INDEF]] ✔
      d. [V-OBJ ... [_{INF} V DP-INDEF]] ✘

Transitive matrix verbs show types (24b,c). Intransitive verbs can additionally show type (24a). But neither class would show (24d), e.g. object agreement with an indefinite object. These patterns can be accounted for as follows. Verbs that do not take ACC DOs can be unergative (*igyekszik*, *siet*) or unaccusative (*jön*), suggesting that this property alone does not determine their behaviour with respect to object agreement. I assume that even if unergative verbs project a *v*P that introduces their agent, this *v* might lack a φ-probe that can agree with an ACC object.

When these verbs appear with infinitival complements, however, speakers can treat them as analogous to transitive verbs like *akar*, *fog*, or *un* which regularly agree with the infinitive's DO by construing the structures as having a φ-probe on *v*, independently of the type of matrix verb, allowing it to agree with the infinitive's object.

(25) a. Agreement with a definite third person object
          … [$_{vP}$ *v*[uφ] [$_{VP}$ [$_{XP}$ V.INF DP.DEF]]]
          ✔ Agree

      b. No agreement with an indefinite third person object
          … [$_{vP}$ *v*[uφ] [$_{VP}$ [$_{XP}$ V.INF DP.INDEF]]]
          ✘ Agree

      c. No probe on intransitive *v*
          … [$_{vP}$ *v* [$_{VP}$ [$_{XP}$ V.INF DP.DEF/INDEF]]]

Transitive verbs only allow (25a,b), but not (25c). Intransitive verbs vary: speakers who treat them analogously to transitives allow (25a,b), others allow (25c), the "standard" case. But there is no way to derive a pattern like (24d).

5 Conclusions

I have argued that verbs that do not take ACC objects can nevertheless show object agreement with definite ACC objects of their infinitival complements. While this possibility has generally only been acknowledged for second person objects (and first person subjects) in the literature, the data shown here indicate that the distribution of long-distance agreement with intransitive verbs is in fact much wider. This suggests that object agreement with second and third person objects should not be analysed as categorically different, as both are robustly attested in long-distance agreement involving intransitive verbs. It is also clear that while attested, long-distance agreement involving intransitive verbs is much rarer than with transitive verbs. This difference could be due to grammatical pressure against using verbs without ACC objects with object agreement morphology. On the other hand, analogy to transitive verbs in the same contexts can license agreement for some speakers.

Acknowledgments

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