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 transitive verbs taking infinitival complements can agree with the object of the infinitive, but intransitives 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), where transitive verbs are those that can take an accusative object and intransitive verbs are those that cannot.

The construction in question is shown in (1), with examples in (2) and (3).[1]

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

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

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

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

Anna igyekez-ett [$_{\text{INF}}$ *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)

[1] Abbreviations: 1 = first person, 2 = second person, 3 = third person, ACC = accusative, ADJ = adjective, COM = comitative, COND = conditional, COP = copula, DAT = dative, 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 [$_{\text{INF}}$ *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 [$_{\text{INF}}$ *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)

A. and **B**. show the main patterns that are discussed in the literature:

A. intransitive matrix verb

1. intransitive infinitive ➠ finite verb with SBJ agreement
2. transitive infinitive, INDEF/DEF.OBJ ➠ finite verb with SBJ agreement
3. transitive infinitive, 2.OBJ ➠ finite verb with *-lak/-lek* agreement

B. transitive matrix verb

1. intransitive infinitive ➠ finite verb with SBJ agreement
2. transitive infinitive, INDEF.OBJ ➠ finite verb with SBJ agreement
3. transitive infinitive, DEF.OBJ ➠ finite verb with OBJ agreement

Examples (2a–c) and (3a–b) correspond to points **A**.1.–3. and **B**.1./3., respectively. The main claim of this paper is that the empirical picture is more complex than illustrated by these examples. In particular, there is evidence that intransitive matrix verbs, that is verbs that do not by themselves take ACC objects, **can nevertheless agree with the definite third person object of the infinitive**. An example is shown in:

(4) **Intransitive matrix verb, transitive infinitive and object agreement**
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 patterns like (4) do so in analogy to the pattern in (3). The verbs in (2) and (4) do not generally have ACC direct objects

(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). I sketch an analysis of this mechanism in Section 4.

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) might either be less strong than expressed there or 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 (pattern **A**.2.) (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 (no ACC DO) verbs 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 (ACC DO) verbs 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 for a link to the full data set. 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]

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]

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]

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

… de most teljes ürességvan, 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]

… 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]

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.' (Kiss 1977)

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]

… *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]

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*

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]

… 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]

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 — finite verb — INF [312]

… a fogadás elvesztés-é-ért járó büntetés-ük-et ***készül-ik***
the bet loss-3SG-for deserved punishment-3PL-ACC prepare-3PL.OBJ
letölt-eni.
spend-INF
'… they were preparing to sit out the punishment they got losing the bet.'

(19) 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'

(20) finite verb — INF — OBJ [123]

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

The examples in Section 2 show that object agreement with *third* person definite objects is found with intransitive verbs like *próbálkozik*, *készül* and *igyekszik*. This is true for any combination of person of subject and object where object agreement is overtly coded.

Each cell in Table 1 with ✓ has at least one attested instance of agreement with an object of that person with at least one verb. In the empty cells in Table 1, the verb forms are intransitive anyway, so there is nothing to look for. Both singular and plural subjects can agree with 3rd person objects.

Agreement with 2nd and 3rd person The difference between agreement with 2nd and 3rd person objects is gradient, not categorical. In other words, the data shown in Section 2 indicate that object agreement between intransitive matrix verbs and 3rd person objects of the embedded infinitival exists, with any subject person — cf. Table 1.

↓ SBJ, OBJ ⟶	1	2	3
1SG		✓ (2c)	✓ (7)–(??)
1PL			✓ (13)–(??)
2SG			✓ (8)–(10)
2PL			✓ (15)–(17)
3SG			✓ (??)–(12)
3PL			✓ (??)–(??)

Table 1 Distribution of LDA with intransitive matrix verbs

3.2 Word orders

Examples with overt objects are coded with a permutation of [123], indicating the order of the finite matrix verb (1), the infinitive (2) and the object (3).

(21) a. [123]: (8), (11), (20)
b. [132]: (16)
c. [213]: (13), (17)
d. [231]:
e. [312]: (7), (12), (18)
f. [321]: (19)

The orders [312] and [213] mostly indicate focusing of either the object [312] or the infinitive [213] in the matrix focus position. Both of these orders lead to adjacency between the finite verb and the object[2] but object agreement is found without adjacency as well.

[231] order involves fronting both the infinitive, as a (contrastive) topic, and the object, as a matrix focus; a constructed example with the transitive verb *akar* is shown in (22):

(22) *Olvas-ni a könyv-et akar-om.*
read-INF the book-ACC want-1SG.SBJ>3.OBJ
'As for reading, it is the book I want to read.'

I do not see a principled reason for ruling out [231] (as in (22)) with an intransitive verb like *igyekszik*, *készül*, etc., given the range of data found with other orders shown in (21). However, checking around 500 examples of *akar* with infinitival complements did not produce any [231] orders either, suggesting that this order is generally rare, not just when the matrix verb is intransitive.

Interim summary: word orders Out of six possible permutations of the word order of the intransitive finite matrix verb, an object, and the infinitive, five are readily found. Orders are influenced by information structure, exhibiting focus and topic movement. Object agreement between an intransitive matrix verb and the object of the infinitive is thus not restricted to special word orders or special configurations of information structure.

[2] Maybe adjacency helps construing the object as an argument of the matrix verb; see Peredy (2009) for discussion w.r.t. object agreement.

3.3 Past tense

Den Dikken (2004) points out out that with verbs forming "come/go verb aspectual constructions" the grammaticality of object agreement, in particular 2nd person agreement, depends on tense. For example, *jön* can form a 1SG>2.OBJ form in the past but not the present tense, as shown in (23).

(23) a. *Jö-tt-elek* *meg-látogat-ni* (*téged*).
come-PST-1SG>2.OBJ VM-visit-INF you.ACC
'I came to visit you.'

b. * *Jö-lek* *meg-látogat-ni* (*téged*).
come-1SG>2.OBJ VM-visit-INF you.ACC
intended: 'I am coming 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:

(24) a. *Jár-lak* *meg-látogat-ni* (téged).
go-1SG>2.OBJ VM-visit-INF
'I go to visit you regularly.'

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

Preference for past tense: morphology? 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 2.

3.4 Extraction

Kenesei *et al.* (1998: 34) suggest that only predicates like *akar* 'want' and *megpróbál* 'try' can occur with question words like *mi-t* 'what-ACC'. (25) is a counterexample; note that there is no object agreement here since *mit* never triggers object agreement.

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

(25) *Mi-t* *igyekez-t-él* *elmond-ani* *nekem?*
what-ACC strive-PST-2SG.SBJ tell-INF I.DAT
cf. original 'What were you trying to tell me?'
(Paula Hawkins, *Into the Water*; translated by Tomori Gábor)

3.5 More on *jár*

jár, while generally intransitive, can be used transitively with locational objects straightforwardly (also with different VMs):

(26) a. *Jár-om* *az* *ut-am.*
go-1SG.SBJ>3.OBJ the way-1SG.POSS
'I am going my way.'

b. *Jár-ja* *az* *ut-já-t.*
go-3SG.SBJ>3.OBJ the way-3SG-ACC
'S/he is going his/her 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 (27).

(27) *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.'

4 Towards an analysis

To the degree that it is accepted, agreement between an intransitive matrix verb and the infinitive's object is *regular*, i.e. a definite second or third person object can trigger object agreement, but an indefinite object cannot. This is schematically shown in (28).

(28) a. [V-SBJ … [$_{\text{INF}}$ V DP-DEF]] ✔
b. [V-OBJ … [$_{\text{INF}}$ V DP-DEF]] ✔
c. [V-SBJ … [$_{\text{INF}}$ V DP-INDEF]] ✔
d. [V-OBJ … [$_{\text{INF}}$ V DP-INDEF]] ✖

Transitive matrix verbs show types (28b,c). Intransitive verbs can additionally show type (28a). But neither class would show (28d), e.g. object agreement with an indefinite object.

These patterns can be accounted for with a few assumptions:

- being intransitive, verbs like *készül*, *próbálkozik*, *igyekszik* etc. do not come with a ϕ-probe that can agree with an ACC object
- but when these verbs appear with infinitival complements, they are analogous to transitive verbs like *akar*, *fog* etc. which agree with a different verb's object
- this allows speakers to construe the *intransitive* verbs as having a ϕ-probe with infinitival complements

(29) a. Agreement with a definite third person object
… [$_{v\text{P}}$ v[uφ] [$_{\text{VP}}$ [$_{\text{XP}}$ V.INF DP.DEF]]]
✔ Agree
b. No agreement with an indefinite third person object
… [$_{v\text{P}}$ v[uφ] [$_{\text{VP}}$ [$_{\text{XP}}$ V.INF DP.INDEF]]]
✖ Agree
c. No probe on intransitive v
… [$_{v\text{P}}$ v [$_{\text{VP}}$ [$_{\text{XP}}$ V.INF DP.DEF/INDEF]]]

Transitive verbs only allow (29a,b), but not (29c). Intransitive verbs vary: speakers who treat them analogously to transitives allow (29a,b), others allow (29c), the "standard" case. But there is no way to derive a pattern like (28d).

4.1 Interim summary

If an intransitive with an infinitival complement has a ϕ-probe, it behaves like a regular transitive: if the infinitival complement's object is definite, it will agree; if the object is indefinite, it will not.

- agreement with objects of infinitival complements is regular
- the distribution of probes on intransitive verbs is more idiosyncratic
- intransitives do not have (ACC) objects, but subcategorisation for an infinitival complement can add a probe

➠ much of the variation in agreement lies in when there can be a probe

➠ differences between intransitive verbs: regularity of paradigms, possibly frequency?

➠ but the variation need not be in the syntax of agreement

5 Open questions

5.1 Second person agreement

(30) a. *Hagy-od* (*János-nak*) *meg-látogat-ni Péter-t.*
let-3SG.SBJ>3.OBJ János-DAT VM-visit-INF Péter-ACC
'You allow Péter to be visited (by János).'

b. *Hagy-lak* (**János-nak*) *meg-látogat-ni* (*téged*).
let-1SG>2.OBJ János-DAT VM-visit-INF you.ACC
'I let you be visited (by János).' (den Dikken 2004: 453)

Den Dikken (2004) suggests that the obligatory absence of *Jánosnak* in (30b) indicates that agreement with a third person and agreement with a second person are different, since *-lak/-lek* is blocked by the intervening DAT.

5.1.1 Individual speakers?

Another question is why and to what degree speakers *only* accept second person agreement but not third person agreement (or other patterns). This question has to be looked at by studying individual speakers in depth. The data above are more general and describe inter-speaker variation.

6 Conclusions

Intransitive verbs with infinitival complements can agree with the object of the infinitive.

- Agreement is found with third person definite objects and with second person objects
  - with any subject person
  - with different predicates
  - with different information structures and word orders
  - in the present and the past tense alike

➠ Object agreement need not be categorically different with third and second person objects

- Competing grammatical pressures can motivate agreement on intransitives
  - intransitive verbs do not select for objects: *contra* agreement
  - analogy to transitive verbs in the same contexts: *pro* agreement

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A Sources

See http://github.com/andrasbarany/icsh13/ for the full data set which also includes the search terms used in the MNSZ as well as their document identifiers, and URLs for the data from other sources on the internet.