

The devil is in the details: Verb Modifiers in 16th-century Hungarian

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Background and claims

This is a snapshot of an ongoing study on the properties of verb modifiers (VMs) throughout the recorded history of Hungarian, both in neutral and in non-neutral, mainly negative sentences. Here we focus on Early Middle Hungarian and on neutral sentences.

The word order properties of verb modifiers (VMs) w.r.t the verb change: their preverbal position in neutral clauses becomes more and more consistent in time.

The VM position becomes more and more frequently occupied in an ongoing change. The syntax of VMs is the same from early on, however, what belongs to what we call a VM is broadening in time (cf. Hegedűs 2018).

Points of significant variation: (i) directional PP complements to some extent, but they are well on their way by the 16th c.; (ii) *kell* ‘must’ and *akar* ‘want’ and their infinitival complements; *fog* ‘will[*fut*]’ as well but its occurrence is much less frequent

Old Hungarian data

We looked at samples of the normalized texts in the Old Hungarian Corpus by targeted searches and then manual selection of the relevant examples.

type	No.	neutral preV VM %
verbal particle	100	100
bare object	99	67.68
N/Adj predicate	104	75
secondary pred with <i>consider</i> -type V	28	78.6
directional PP with ‘go’	101	24.75
<i>kell</i> ‘must’ + Vinf (with embedded VM)	67	65.67
<i>akar</i> ‘want’ + Vinf (with embedded VM)	65	18.46
<i>kell</i> ‘must’ + Vinf (no embedded VM)	31	22.58
<i>akar</i> ‘want’ + Vinf (no embedded VM)	34	11.76

Observations:

- verbal particles are 100 % preverbal, consistent with what Hegedűs (2018) found in the Munich Codex, supporting the claim that they were always different from regular arguments in the OV > VO change
- motion verbs with PP complements here do not include directional particles, only lexical PPs → these are preverbal to a much lesser extent than particles (as observed by É. Kiss 2014 for OldH already)
- “with embedded VM” = the V_{inf} has a VM, the % shows raising of the embedded VM (most often particle)
- “no embedded VM” = the V_{inf} has no VM, so the % shows raising of the V_{inf} to the preverbal position (*adni akar* ‘give-inf want’; ‘restructuring’)
- the number of *fog* ‘will[future]’ occurrences is very low in the normalized texts, no generalization can be drawn yet

- (1) és mindenk mennek vala ő városuk-ra
and all go.3pl be.pst he city.poss.3pl-sub
‘and everyone went to their cities’ (MünchK. 55vb)
- (2) és annak, ki akar teveled ítéletben vetekedni
and that.dat who want you.inst.2sg judgement.ine compete.inf
‘and to the person who wants to sue you’ (JordK. 368)
- (3) de Úrjézus Krisztus akará meg-vigasztalni ez ő hűséges lányát
but Jesus Christ wanted prt-comfort.inf this he faithful daughter.poss.3sg.acc
‘but Jesus Christ wanted to comfort this faithful daughter of his’ (JókK. 73)

Early Middle Hungarian data

The Middle Hungarian Corpus is fully normalized and contains data from a more informal register (no interference from translation). We made targeted searches for the various types of VMs/verbs, restricting our search to texts from the 16th century. Then the relevant examples were manually selected.

type	No.	neutral preV VM %
verbal particle	123	100
bare object	197	95.9
N/Adj predicate	178	98.3
secondary pred with <i>consider</i> -type V	8	100
directional PP with ‘go’	111	83.78
<i>kell</i> ‘must’ + Vinf (with embedded VM)	101	99.01
<i>akar</i> ‘want’ + Vinf (with embedded VM)	107	94.39
<i>kell</i> ‘must’ + Vinf (no embedded VM)	18	72.22
<i>akar</i> ‘want’ + Vinf (no embedded VM)	45	53.33

Observations:

- motion verbs with PP complements: the % of preverbal PPs has increased significantly
- “with embedded VM” = the V_{inf} has a VM, the % shows raising of the embedded VM (most often particle)
- “no embedded VM” = the V_{inf} has no VM, so the % show raising of the V_{inf} to the preverbal position
- the % of VM-raising to the finite verb has increased even in the case of *akar* ‘want’
- the % of V_{inf} movement to the finite V has increased with both verbs, too → it is still lower than the other VMs, but there is a change going on
- fog* ‘will’ has occurrences but relatively few neutral cases: VM-raising and V_{inf} -movement are common

- (4) Onnant el-menvén ment Bodonc-ra, és csakhamar utána nagy köeső lett
there.from away-gone went Bodonc-sub and soon after big hailstorm became
‘Leaving that place, she went to Bodonc and soon after there was a big hailstorm’

- (5) Megyen Vásárhely-re, onnét soha meg nem jöve, a pénz is oda-marada.
went Vásárhely-sub there.from never prt not came the money too there.to-stayed
‘(S)he went to Vásárhely, never came back from there, and the money was left there too.’
- (6) Akarnám értenem, mit végeztél. (7) kell kegyelmed előtt magamat mentenem.
want.cond.1sg understand.inf.1sg what finish.past.2sg must your.highness before self.1sg.acc plead.inf.1sg
‘I would want to understand what you managed to get done.’ ‘I must excuse myself in front of your highness.’

The syntax of VMs in the 16th century

Generalizations for 16th c. stage: The preverbal position of VMs gets generalized. The only remarkable exceptions are in two groups: motion verbs and auxiliary-like verbs:

- With motion verbs: particles are preverbal, but regular directional PP complements vary
- With auxiliary-like verbs, particles get raised to the VM-position of the finite verbs, while infinitival complements are not consistently there yet
- Non-verbal predicates in copular clauses seem to have undergone a quick change, but this is one point where the fact that the earlier texts were translations, while the 16th c. data are not, may be important. (The source Latin texts have V-initial predicates here.)

We assume that **VM-movement has been generalized:**

- VMs move to the preverbal position via phrasal movement.
- We assume the position to be Spec,PredP (following É. Kiss 2006 etc.), a low functional projection on top of VP; while VMs often have aspectual contribution, it is not always the case, but we want to maintain a uniform syntax for them;
We generally assume a two-step derivation (following Surányi 2009) whereby VMs and V end up higher, in TP, but it is the first step that is relevant for us.
- Syntactic change in the recorded period: Verbal particles are preverbal, so their position gets reanalyzed as a predicative position (as opposed to postverbal arguments), later more and more “VMs” move there.

What about the exceptions (or rather, late developments)?:

Motion verbs

- É. Kiss (2014) observes the difference with lexical directionals and attributes this to their more referential nature → While particles were not postverbal on the surface at any point, directionals followed the general VO reanalysis by OldH.
- This is undergoing quick change in Middle Hungarian, but we need more verbs and to look at 17th c. to see when it goes to completion.
- 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)

Auxiliary-like verbs

- kell* ‘must, need’ is the most grammaticalized from the earlier period;
- akar* ‘want’ changes its complementation during the MidH period, still has inflected infinitival complements in MidH; already used with inanimate subjects in MidH
- fog* ‘will[*fut*]’: its grammaticalization went through an intermediate inchoative stage (‘begin’); in Old and Middle Hungarian: it rarely takes an inflected infinitive, it has past tense and conditional forms optionally;
- They are becoming ‘restructuring’ verbs; stress avoidance is less typical; particle climbing is different

Outlook on negation

Old and Middle Hungarian show two word order patterns in negative sentences: VM – NEG – V and NEG – V – VM

- previous analysis (É. Kiss 2014): VM – NEG – V is head adjunction of NEG to V; NEG – V – VM is optional movement of the complex NEG+V head to NegP
- VM – NEG – V: only derivable from neutral VM – V order
- Expectation: the frequency of VM – NEG – V in negative sentences depends on the frequency of VM – V in neutral sentences.
- This is borne out with verbal particles and bare objects (so far not enough data with motion verbs)
- Nominal predicates markedly differ in negative sentences: in neutral sentences 98.3 % VM – V; in negative sentences only 42.3 % VM – NEG – V; there is a third pattern: 21.2 % NEG – VM – V ↔ we are still in search of an analysis here.

- (8) Zolna pedig nem elégséges leszen a kegyelmed búzája [...] elhordására
Zolna however neg sufficient be.fut the your.highness wheat.poss [...] away.taking.poss.sub
‘however, Zolna won’t be up to delivering your wheat’

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