

# The 1SG>2 suffix in Hungarian revisited: evidence from agreeing infinitives

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In Hungarian, the finite verb agrees with the subject (in person and number) and with the object (if any, in terms of definiteness). Pronominal objects elicit either definite or indefinite agreement, depending on the relative position of the subject and the object on the animacy hierarchy 1SG > 1PL/2 > 3 (cf. É. Kiss 2013 a.o.)

	finite verb											infinitive	
	type of object												
	none		nominal				pronominal						
			indefinite		definite		1	2	3				
1SG	-k	1SG.IND	-k	1SG.IND	-m	1SG.DEF	-	-lak	1SG>2	-m	1SG.DEF	-m	1SG
2SG	-sʒ	2SG.IND	-sʒ	2SG.IND	-d	2SG.DEF	-sʒ	2SG.IND	-	-d	2SG.DEF	-d	2SG
3SG	-Ø	3SG.IND	-Ø	3SG.IND	-ja	3SG.DEF	-Ø	3SG.IND	-Ø	3SG.IND	-	-a	3SG
1PL	-unk	1PL.IND	-unk	1PL.IND	-juk	1PL.DEF	-	-unk	1PL.IND	-juk	1PL.DEF	-uk	1PL
2PL	-tok	2PL.IND	-tok	2PL.IND	-játok	2PL.DEF	-tok	2PL.IND	-	-játok	2PL.DEF	-tok	2PL
3PL	-nak	3PL.IND	-nak	3PL.IND	-ják	3PL.DEF	-nak	3PL.IND	-nak	3PL.IND	-	-uk	3PL

Within this system, *-lak* 1SG>2 has long been a subject of intense debate, as it does not obviously fit either the definite or the indefinite paradigm. Many authors have treated it as an irregular form (Bartos 1999, 2001, É. Kiss 2002, Coppock 2013), while others regard it as part of the definite paradigm (Velcsóvné 1974, Havas 2004, Honti 2020). Bárány (2018) in turn regards *-lak* 1SG>2 as the only fully regular form, and all the other suffixes as deficient. Additionally, many authors assume that *-lak* 1SG>2 can be broken down into *-l-* (expressing 2 object agreement) and *-k-* (expressing 1SG subject agreement) (E. Abaffy 1991, Bartos 1999, den Dikken 2006, É. Kiss 2013, É. Kiss 2017, Havas 2004, Honti 2020, Hegedűs 2020). The categorial status of *-lak* 1SG>2 is also debated: while most authors analyze it as an agreement suffix, Den Dikken (2004) argues that the *-l-* part of *-lak* is in fact a clitic which expones the object itself.

The empirical focus of my talk is the somewhat unexpected appearance of the *-lak* suffix on infinitivals instead of the expected *-m* 3SG suffix (3). Consider:

- (1) *Be kell vin-n-em téged a kórház-ba.* infinitival subordination  
PRT must take-INF-1SG you.ACC the hospital.ILL
- (2) *Be kell, (bogy) vi-gye-lek (téged) a kórház-ba.* Balkan subjunctive  
PRT must that take-SUBJ-1SG>2 you.ACC the hospital.ILL
- (3) *%Be kell vin-n-elek (téged) a kórház-ba.* the focus of our talk  
PRT must take-INF-1SG>2 you.ACC the hospital.ILL  
'I have to take you to the hospital.'

While many speakers of Hungarian find (3) marked, one can easily find hundreds of attestations in various corpora (Hungarian National Corpus, Hungarian Historical Corpus, Google Books) and the internet. It is also not a recent development: mentioned as early as 1645 in the grammar of Geleji Katona (1645), it is amply attested from the early 19th century onward. Due to its widespread nature, it has also elicited the interest of prescriptive linguists (Grétsy 2008). Academic linguists have first noted this phenomenon at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Simonyi (1888) claimed that it was characteristic of Transylvanian Hungarian, this however was challenged by Horger (1931) who assumed that Simonyi might have confused the constructions under (2) and (3). Klemm (1925) notes the infinitival use of *-lak* without providing any analysis. Horger (1900) hypothesizes that the construction was invented by adherents of the early 19th century language reform (*nyelvhíjtás*) movement. Later, he departs from this implausible position and argues that the phenomenon is simply a performance error (Horger 1931). The fact that this construction is well attested in edited, cultivated texts (such as theatre plays and novels) make such an explanation unconvincing. Zolnai (1889) argues that the construction in (3) arose as a result of analogy: the use of *-lak* spread

spontaneously from the finite to the infinitival paradigm. While this is a plausible account as far as the mechanism of language change is concerned, it does not address what the availability of the construction in (3) reveals about the synchronic status, category and morphosyntactic position of *-lak*. In addition to the descriptive accounts discussed above, the phonology of the construction has been briefly discussed in a more theoretical vein by Honti (2000). Likewise, the phonology of this phenomenon has been the subject of a university seminar held by the late László Kálmán (pc). To sum up, while this construction has been known for some time, it has not yet been systematically explored from a morphosyntactic perspective. In our talk, we will attempt such an analysis.

Theoretical approaches to the verbal paradigm of Hungarian differ in their treatment of indefinite object agreement. Den Dikken (2004) a.o. assumes that finite verbs always project an object agreement layer (AgrOP), and in case of indefinite agreement, the exponent of AgrO is phonologically null. Bartos (1999) a.o. argues that in the case of indefinite object agreement, no AgrOP is projected at all with finite verbs. Since the infinitival paradigm lacks object agreement altogether, it seems plausible to adopt the position that infinitives lack AgrOP. This neatly explains the absence in the standard language of *-lak* from the infinitival paradigm: since *-lak* (or specifically, *-l*) is an exponent of AgrO, it cannot appear on infinitivals, which lack AgrO. However, as we have seen, some speakers do allow *-lak* on infinitivals. One possible explanation would be that these speakers speak a variant where infinitivals do have an AgrOP projection. However, this would predict the appearance of other AgrO-exponents on infinitivals, which is completely unattested:

- (4) \**Fel kell hív-ni-ja-tok az orvost.*  
 PRT must call-INF-DEF-3PL the doctor.ACC  
 ‘You have to call the doctor.’

A more plausible account can be drawn up by adopting Den Dikken’s (2004) proposal: if *-l* is indeed a clitic (and thus, not an exponent of AgrO), the absence of AgrOP does not preclude the appearance of *-l*. In this case, however, the challenge is to explain the variation: if *-l* qua clitic is in theory free to appear on infinitives, why is it that for most speakers, sentences such as (3) are strongly marked? This pattern might be a reflection of variation in the categorial status of *-l*: conceivably, *-l* is a clitic for some speakers and an agreement suffix for others. Another possibility is that infinitivals in Hungarian are resistant to cliticization, for a syntactic reason (argument clitics might be sensitive to the size of the (extended) VP that they attach to) or a PF reason. This would mean that *-l* qua clitic can be base-generated, however, it cannot attach to an infinitival form, leading to a crash in the derivation. Some evidence for this line of thought can be drawn from the well-known phenomenon of *-lak*-raising onto the matrix verb (É. Kiss 1987, Den Dikken 1999):

- (5) a. *Jö-tt-em meg-látogat-ni téged.*      b. %*Jö-tt-el-ek meg-látogat-ni t<sub>i</sub> (téged).*  
 come-PST-1SG.INDEF PRT-visit-INF you.ACC      come-pst-2-1SG PRT-visit-INF you.ACC  
 ‘I came to visit you.’      ‘I came to visit you.’

Plausibly, (5b) is an instance of clitic climbing: since *-l* (base-generated as the object of the infinitival) cannot attach to the infinitival, its presence leads to a clash unless it is evacuated and attached to the finite verb in the matrix clause. Note that the acceptability of (5b) shows significant inter-speaker variation: clitic raising is OK for some speakers but unavailable (or strongly dispreferred) for others. It seems thus that there are two points of inter-speaker variation (i) the availability of cliticization on infinitives and (ii) the availability of clitic-raising.

		clitic raising to matrix clause			
		allowed		disallowed	
cliticization on infinitivals	allowed	(3): ✓	(5b): ✓	(3): ✓	(5b): ✗
	disallowed	(3): ✗	(5b): ✓	(3): ✗	(5b): ✗

E. Abaffy E. 1991. *Igei személyragjaink eredetéről: vitás kérdések.* • Bárány A. 2018. *Person, case, and agreement: The morphosyntax of inverse agreement and global case splits.* • Bartos H. 1999. *Morfoszintaxis és interpretáció: A magyar inflexiók jeleségei szintaktikai bázisra.* • Bartos H. 2001. *Object agreement in Hungarian: A case for Minimalism.* • Coppock, E. 2013. *A semantic solution to the problem of object agreement in Hungarian.* NaLS 21(4). 345–371. • Den Dikken, M. 2004. *Agreement and ‘clause union’* • É. Kiss K. 1987. *Configurationality in Hungarian.* • É. Kiss K. 2002. *The syntax of Hungarian.* C UP • É. Kiss K. 2013. *The inverse agreement constraint in Uralic languages.* Finno-Ugric Languages and Linguistics 2. 2–21. • É. Kiss K. 2017. *The Person–Case Constraint and the Inverse Agreement Constraint are manifestations of the same Inverse Topicality Constraint.* • É. Kiss

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