

VIROVEC VIKTÓRIA: **How did the ‘*politeness effect*’ develop in the case of two Hungarian adverbs, *majd* ‘later’ and *talán* ‘perhaps’?**

Introduction. The Hungarian adverbs *majd* ‘later’ and *talán* ‘perhaps’ are seemingly very different. While *majd* usually indicates futurity (or used as an *almost*-approximator), *talán* ‘perhaps’ is considered to be an epistemic-inferential adverb indicating the speaker’s uncertainty. Interestingly enough, they share many properties. For example, it is argued that *majd*, when it expresses futurity, carries pragmatic functions like uncertainty and delay in present-day Hungarian (Kiefer 2012: 428). Moreover, they also share a special property that I will call the ‘*politeness effect*’. By using these adverbs¹, it is possible to make an utterance politer.²

- (1) Vidd *majd* el a levelet!
bring.IMP.2SG later PRT the letter.ACC
‘Please take the letter with you.’

Kiefer (2012: 435)

- (2) a.nézzük *talán/ esetleg/ *feltehetőleg/ *valószínűleg* akkor ezt a
see.IMP.3SG perhaps/possibly/presumably/probably then that the
sebhelyet.
lesion.
‘You have mentioned that a burn can be seen on her hand, let’s (perhaps) see that lesion.’
year: 1978–Bereményi Géza: p. 201
- b. Nézzte: *talán/ esetleg/ *feltehetőleg/ *valószínűleg* ígérjen rá a
lets.see perhaps/possibly/presumably/probably promise.IMP.3SG PRT the
bérére.
salary.POSS.3SG.ON
‘Listen: (perhaps), offer him a higher salary.’
year: 1926–Kosztolányi Dezső: p. 44

Furthermore, *majd* and *talán* are not unique in this respect, other Hungarian epistemic modal adverbs, like *esetleg* ‘possibly’, and future referring morphemes like *fog* ‘will’, *lesz* ‘will be’, and *kell* ‘must.FUT’ can also be used to make a request politer (see e.g. Virovec (submitted)). I believe that this phenomenon could be explained by the fact that speakers associate uncertainty with the use of future-referring morphemes and epistemic-inferential adverbs, and being uncertain is connected to indirect, weaker, and softer statements which are all important in politeness strategies. In order to strengthen this hypothesis, I analyze data collected from different periods (middle and modern Hungarian) to see how this special effect developed.

Research Questions. **How did the “*politeness effect*” develop?** · What differences could be identified between the uses of these adverbs in middle and modern Hungarian? · How could these differences account for the different functions they had/have in middle and modern Hungarian?

Methods. The middle Hungarian data has been collected from The Old and Middle Hungarian corpus of informal language use (OMHC), and the Hungarian Historical Corpus (HHC). I am planning to identify all the different uses of *talán* and *majd* that were present in middle Hungarian and contrast them to their uses in modern Hungarian. I am also planning to give the frequency of these various uses in middle and modern Hungarian and

¹Kiefer (2012) refers to *majd* as an adverbial particle, thereby signalling both its adverbial and pragmatic functions.

²This function of *talán* has also been discussed by Kugler (2010).

compare them. In order to do that, I collect data from the Hungarian National Corpus (HNC). I am planning to analyze 500 randomly selected hits.

Results (partial). Examining the data collected from OMHC, it can be said that *talán* was used to make a suggestion or request politer even in middle Hungarian.

- (3) a. *Talám* ha armistitium lenne, rákérdeznénk.
'If there were a truce, we should probably ask it.' year: 1706–1062787
- b. Asszony szőrnyően mentegette magát, hogy le nem teheti, mivel egy penzi sem legyen, hanem a Tanut kerte vala, hogy *talán* le tehetne.
'The woman tried to justify herself, that she cannot pay, because she hasn't got any money, she, therefore, asked the eyewitness if he could possibly pay (instead of her).' year: 1750–1063123

In the case of *majd*, the data examined so far (mainly from OMHC), do not contain any examples in which the use of *majd* facilitates the '*politeness effect*'. However, I could identify uses that are different from its use in present-day Hungarian.

As opposed to its present-day Hungarian uses, it was used:

- *as an almost-approximator* very frequently,³
- *to make promises*,

- (4) Ha be adod az Kezedet, *majd* olyan Zsák pénzt adok, hogy az Gyermekek sem költi el.
'If you agree to do that, I will later give you such a big pot of money that even your children would be unable to spend it.' year: 1752–1063632

This use (4) is considered to be marginal in present-day Hungarian. Kiefer (2012) argues that the use of *majd* indicates uncertainty and that the speaker is not really committed to carrying out the action which is incompatible with the illocutionary act of making a promise.

- *to talk about certain events whose event-time is proximal to the utterance time*

- (5) Csak nyergelyetek, *maid* el megyünk Szegedre,....
'Just saddle (the horses), we are going to Szeged later.' year: 1734–1063121

These data seem to suggest that *majd* did not indicate uncertainty, and the delaying effect of it might not be as prominent in middle Hungarian as it is in modern Hungarian.⁴ If it were the case, we would not expect it to be used in utterances like (4) and (5).

Conclusion. The data analyzed (so far) seem to suggest that *talán* was able to make an utterance politer even in middle Hungarian, while *majd* could not. Pragmaticalization as a diachronic type-shift from truth-condition to use-conditional content. The starting point of the process is a *conversational* implicature that is derived in a *specific context* and driven by *extra linguistic factors*. If a conversational implicature is generated frequently enough, it becomes conventionalized (see ex. Davis & Gutzmann (2015)). The truth-conditional meaning of *talán* 'perhaps' indicates uncertainty, therefore it can imply indirectness, and consequently politeness. However, it is plausible that, in the case of *majd* (expressing futurity), the temporal component was more prominent at an earlier stage of its development, and its pragmatic functions (uncertainty, delay) developed later. If we assume that expressing uncertainty is inevitable for a morpheme to be able to develop the '*politeness effect*', we would expect that it is present initially.

³*Majd* in this use has been (almost) entirely replaced by *majdnem* 'almost' in present-day Hungarian. This phenomenon has been discussed in details in Halm (to appear).

⁴According to the Hungarian Etymological Dictionary (Benkő 1970: 819), the semantic development of *majd* was as follows: *itt* 'here' → *most* 'now' → *rögtön* 'very soon' → *később* 'later' → *majd* 'some time later'

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