The Hungarian definite article across time: an account of its spreading

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1 Introduction

Aims:
♦ to describe how the marking of definiteness changed diachronically in Hungarian
♦ to show that the spreading of the definite article was not balanced in all environments (to provide an explanation for this unevenness)
♦ to answer the following questions:
  ⇒ Why do certain contexts change more quickly in this respect?
  ⇒ Can we trace universal principles or tendencies behind the functional spreading of the Hungarian definite article?

Table 1. Historical language stages of Hungarian and types of sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proto-Hungarian</th>
<th>1000 BC – 896 AD</th>
<th>No written documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old Hungarian</td>
<td>896 – 1370</td>
<td>Sporadic records, glosses, a few short texts, e. g. Funeral Sermon and Prayer (ca.1195)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Old Hungarian</td>
<td>1370 – 1526</td>
<td>Mainly codices; translations of Latin religious literature + original Hungarian compositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Hungarian</td>
<td>1526 – 1772</td>
<td>Book printing; increase in quantity; New secular genres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methodological limits in diachronic studies:
♦ we cannot ask, we can only query corpora
♦ we cannot say that something does not exist, we can only say it is not attested
♦ no grammatical judgements, only frequency and proportions

2 Background and previous research

2.1 The early uses of the definite article

Grammaticalization: distal demonstrative modifier > definite article

Formal and positional equivalence, functional overlap ⇒ ambiguous readings:

\[ az\ \text{asztal} \] = ‘the table’ or ‘that table’?

The use of article in associative-anaphoric contexts!
(Himmelmann 2001: 833-834 see also Egedi 2013:372 for further examples).

[For the basic functions of the definite article (or any other grammatical strategy that encodes definiteness), see inter alia Lyons 1999, Abbott 2004]
(1) masod napon mykoron azon frater ewlne az aztalnal second day-SUP when that/same frater sit-COND.3SG the table-ADE neze zent ferencznæk kepere look-PST-3SG Saint Francis-DAT picture-POSS-SUP

‘on the second day, when the same frater was sitting at the table, he had a look at the picture of Saint Francis’ (Jókai C. 66)

The early article had a more restricted use: it only appeared when referential identification was not encoded otherwise (Egedi 2013, 2014) ⇒ pragmatic definiteness/uniqueness is marked

Absence of article in definite contexts:
– with proper names and with inherently unique nouns (2)
– noun phrases with generic reading
– with demonstratives (4)
– with an overt possessor expression (6) (8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OLD HUNGARIAN</th>
<th>MODERN HUNGARIAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(2) A nap-ot ke· es aʒ ido-t</td>
<td>(3) Azt a napot viszont, vagy azt az órát</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fènki nè tugga</td>
<td>senki nem tudja: nobody not knows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fem Ø mē-n⁰ angal-i</td>
<td>sem az ég angyalai, nor heaven-DAT angel-POSS.PL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fem Ø fiu hanēčac Ø at’a</td>
<td>sem a Fiú, hanem csak az Atya. nor son but.only father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Munich C. 30rb)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘But nobody knows the day and the time, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son, but only the Father. (Matt 24:36)

(4) ez kener-ek-re | (5) ez-ek-re a kenyer-ek-re |
| this bread-PL-SUB | this-PL-SUB the bread-PL-SUB |
| ‘onto these breads’ | ‘onto these breads’ |
| (Jókai C. 76) | |

(6) èn keɲer-i-m-êt | (7) az én kenyer-e-i-m-et |
| I bread-POSS.PL-1SG-ACC | the I bread-POSS-PL-1SG-ACC |
| ‘my breads’ | ‘my breads’ |
| (Vienna C. 182) | |

(8) az ēļet-n⁰ keɲer-è | (9) az élet-nek a kenyer-e |
| the life-DAT bread-POSS | the life-DAT the bread-POSS |
| ‘the bread of life’ | ‘the bread of life’ |
| (Munich C. 91ra) | |
2.2 The spreading of the definite article

The use of the article proportionally increased already within the Old Hungarian period (Egedi & Simon 2012):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codex</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
<th>a/az</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jókai Codex</td>
<td>after 1370/c.1448</td>
<td>22733</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vienna Codex</td>
<td>after 1416/c.1450</td>
<td>54423</td>
<td>2233</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guary Codex</td>
<td>before 1495</td>
<td>21714</td>
<td>1390</td>
<td>6.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Könyvecse</td>
<td>1521</td>
<td>8745</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>7.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazinczy Codex</td>
<td>1526-1541</td>
<td>20027</td>
<td>1437</td>
<td>7.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Spreading of article in different contexts: (Egedi 2013, 2014)
– no article can be attested with demonstratives and nominal possessors (the definite article appears in these contexts from Middle Hungarian Period)
– inconsistent use with inherently unique nouns and increasing use with generics
– steady increase with pronominal possessors!

3 An account of the spreading – in two parts

3.1 From pragmatic to semantic uniqueness

Spreading of article before inherently unique nouns and generics

(10)    Eleg Ø taneituän-nac hog legen mikent œ mèfler-e, enough disciple-DAT that be-SBJV like s/he master-POSS.3SG
es Ø zolga-nac hog legen mikent œ vr-a, and servant-DAT that be-SBJV like s/he lord-POSS.3SG
‘It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master’
(Munich C. 16va)

(11)    Eleg az tanoytwan-nak hogy czak ollyan mynt hw mèfler-ee, enough the disciple-DAT that only such like s/he master-POSS.3SG
es az zolga mynt hw vr-a and the servant like s/he lord-POSS.3SG
‘It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master’
(Jordánszky C. 383)

Matt 10:25 ➢ Munich Codex  1466 (composed between 1416 and 1441)
➢ Jordánszky Codex  1516 – 1519

Table 3. Basic conceptual lexical types of nouns (Löbner 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>–U</th>
<th>+U</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>–R</td>
<td>sortal nouns &lt;e,t&gt;</td>
<td>individual nouns &lt;e&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stone, book, adjective, water</td>
<td>moon, weather, date, Maria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+R</td>
<td>relational nouns &lt;e,&lt;e,t&gt;</td>
<td>functional nouns &lt;e,e&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sister, leg, part, attribute</td>
<td>father, head, age, subject</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Löbner (2011): semantic and pragmatic uniqueness; congruent vs. incongruent definiteness
Marking congruent determination is semantically redundant

An asymmetry may develop in the grammatical encoding of semantic and pragmatic uniqueness.

Two sets of articles in German dialects:
- Himmelmann (1997: 54-55): Rhineland dialects, North Frisian dialect
- Studler (2011) Swiss German
- Simonenko (forthcoming) Austro-Bavarian (an Upper German dialect)
- Schroeder (2006): Low German dialects next to the North Sea
  → opposition within PP expressions

New articles in some Slavic language varieties typically appear to encode pragmatic definiteness:

“New” articles in Slavic dialects to encode pragmatic uniqueness:
- Czardybon (2012): Upper Silesian dialect of Polish
- Breu (2004) and Scholze (2012): Colloquial Upper Sorbian (Slavic dialect)

Why? → analogical pressure to make nominal syntax uniform (Löbner 2011: 313)

Syntactically:
- a previous N-to-D movement replaced by the direct merge of an article?
- a previously licit null-head was not preferred any more and D had to be made "visible"

3.2 Articles with pronominal possessors: a syntactic puzzle

If a language acquires the syntactic category of definiteness and a DP structure develops, inalienable possessive constructions are more readily interpreted as definite, with the possessor treated as occupying a structural position related to definiteness. This structure usually extends to other, non-alienable constructions (cf. Lyons 1999: 280-281 and 323-324).

Lexical possessor expressions in Old Hungarian → in SpecDP.
- No demonstrative is attested when a possessor is present
- No article between the possessor and the possessed noun
NB. dative-marked possessors can always be external, or be extracted (cf. the overt resumptive pronoun strategy)

I. PRONOMINAL POSSESSORS CO-OCCUR WITH THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

Old Hungarian Corpus (http://omagyarkorpusz.ntyud.hu, Simon 2014)

Technical notes:
- only first and second person singular and plural possessors were considered in the query (cf. Barker 2000 about the definiteness of NPs with 1. and 2. person possessors)
- vocative uses as well as possessive predicates have been excluded
- modifiers are allowed directly before the head noun
Table 4. Pronominal possessors in three Old Hungarian codices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuscript</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>N.Px ‘könyvem’</th>
<th>ProN + N.Px ‘én könyvem’</th>
<th>Art + ProN + N.Px ‘az én könyvem’</th>
<th>Art + N.Px ‘a könyvem’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jókai Codex</td>
<td>after 1370/c.1448</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guary Codex</td>
<td>before 1495</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booklet</td>
<td>1521</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. PRONOMINAL POSSESSORS ARE CLEARLY NOT RESTRICTED TO MARK CONTRAST OR EMPHASIS

(12) Emèl’l’etecfel tv ẓemè-i-tek-et
  lift-IMP-2PL up you-PL eye-POSS-PL-2PL-ACC
  ‘Cast up your eyes’  
  (Munich C. 88rb)

III. PRONOMINAL POSSESSORS ARE OPTIONAL

IV. THE RELATIVE ORDER OF PRONOMINAL POSSESSORS + menden ‘EVERY’
Cf. Bende-Farkas Ágnes (2014: 99-100)

(13) es te menden èllenseg-i-d èluèznèc
  and you every enemy-POSS.PL-2SG parish-3PL
  ‘and all your enemies parish’  
  (Vienna C. 2)

(14) kÿ leen mỳndon te bodogsag-od-nak kencze
  who be-PST every you happiness-POSS.2SG-DAT treasure-POSS
  ‘who was the treasure of all your happiness’  
  (Czech C 99)

Consistent use:  
PR<sub>/proN</sub> menden N only in the first codices
menden PR<sub>/proN</sub> N in all the later codices

Proposal:

STAGE 1  
Early codices: Jókai C, Vienna C. Munich C.  
First half of the Late Old Hungarian period

♦ the article encodes pragmatic definiteness
♦ no article appears before pronominal possessors: Ø (én) könyvem
♦ demonstratives can appear before pronominal possessors: ez én könyvem
♦ plural agreement with a NOM/caseless possessor can be attested (15) ⇒ PR<sub>NOM</sub> in Spec,AgrP?

(15) èmber-ec kèz-ek-nèc múèëlkedèti
  man-PL hand-POSS.3PL-DAT action-POSS.PL
  ‘The acts of people’s hands’  
  (Vienna C. 114)

♦ PR<sub>/proN</sub> menden N order
There is a DP layer in definite NPs, but D may be phonologically null.
“DP structure is necessary for a language to have an article” (Lyons 1999: 323)

PR_{pron} in AgrP or in DP?

STAGE 2
Second half of the Late Old Hungarian period

- gradual spreading of article into semantically unique contexts
- the article may appear before pronominal possessors: 
  (az) én könyvem
- plural agreement with NOM/caseless possessors has been lost
  (no AgrP with nominal possessors, as suggested for Modern Hungarian in Bartos (2000))
- menden PR_{pron} N order

"Visibility" of D: either the specifier, or the head of the DP must be spelled out
(cf. Alexiadou 2004 for English syntactic changes)
- the use of the article increases before inherently unique nouns and generics
- demonstratives and lexical possessors \(\supseteq\) Spec,DP
- if there is a determiner-like element in the phrase \(\supseteq\) Spec,DP
- the definite article is the default filler of the D-head

PR_{nom} menden ‘every’ is not attested, only PR_{dat} menden ‘every’ (18)
\(\Rightarrow\) menden ‘every’ is in Spec,DP; only dative-marked possessors can be external/adjoined

(18) Es te zwewedbel wessed ký ez výlagh-nak mýnden kewansagath and you heart-POSS.2SG.ELA throw-IMP out this world-DAT every wish-POSS-ACC
‘Throw all the wishes of this world out of your heart’ (Érsekújvári C. 161r)
NB. The change is gradual!

A final question: Why did not $\text{PR}_{\text{proN}} > \text{determiner}$, as in "determiner genitive" languages (in terms of Lyons 1999: 130-134)?

- Pronominal possessors do not need to be overt, because of the redundant double marking (pronoun + Px). $\rightarrow$ In Stage 2: $\text{PR}_{\text{proN}}$ in AgrP rather than in DP

Conclusions

- After the definite article emerged in Hungarian, its spreading appears to be uneven in different contexts during the Old Hungarian period
- The directions of spreading reflect the change from marking pragmatic uniqueness to a more grammaticalized system in which semantic uniqueness is also encoded syntactically (this seems to be a universal tendency)
- An asymmetry has been revealed within possessives, where the more robust presence of definite articles in one type of constructions can be due to a transitional stage when the syntactic position of pronominal possessor expressions is ambiguous
- All these related phenomena point to the assumption that the overt realization of the DP layer started to be preferred from the Late Old Hungarian period

REFERENCES

Czardybon, Adrian 2012. The definite article in the Upper Silesian dialect of Polish. Talk given at the Workshop on "Semantic and Typological Perspectives on Definites", Düsseldorf, Germany (presentation 2012.06.01)

**PRIMARY SOURCES**

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**Érsekújvári Codex**

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**Jordánszky Codex**

**Kazinczy Codex**

**Könnyvese**
(=Booklet on the Dignity of the Apostles) Pusztai István (ed.), *Könnyvese a szent apostoloknak méltóságokról.* (Facsimile, transcription of the original record, with introduction and notes) Budapest: Magyar Nyelvtudományi Társaság, 1985.

**Munich Codex**

**Vienna Codex**

Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA No. 112828)