

Vala-indefinites in Old Hungarian

The main contribution of this paper is a uniform analysis of Old Hungarian *vala*-expressions, as sentence-internal indefinites and as correlative pronouns with universal or Free Choice construals.¹ A dynamic analysis will be assumed, motivated by the behaviour of OH correlatives.

1. Hungarian indefinite pronouns are made up of a particle and a *wh*-indefinite. In OH *né*-marked specificity, *vala*-plain indefinites (VIs), *akár*-FC items and *sem*-*n*-words. They are analysed as ‘updated’ Kamp–Heim indefinites, viz. expressions with a free variable to be bound by a covert operator, their particle conveying information (feature content) as regards their binders (Kratzer–Shimoyama, Jäger, Biberauer–Roberts).

In OH VIs could be embedded under clausemate negation (as in (1-a)), and could have ‘polarity’ readings (as in (1-b)). They tended to be subordinate, syntactically or semantically (they did occasionally have wide scope). In the matrix they did not introduce a ‘viable’, topical discourse referent. They could convey specific readings (mostly in intensional contexts, or with unknown referents in extensional contexts). In Modern Hungarian *valaki* ‘someone’ or *valami* ‘something’ are PPI-s, and they can be epistemically and scopally specific.

The evolution of *vala*-indefinites can as a first approximation be described in terms of the model in Jäger (2010), deriving changes in interpretation from changes in feature values: *Valaki*, *valami* can be said to have lost a +valued AFFECTIVE feature. *Valaha* (lit. *vala*-if, ‘at some non-present time’) on the other hand has retained its +AFFECTIVE feature, which is not unexpected: the components of a paradigm can evolve separately.

‘Feature content’ for indefinites is assumed to be shorthand for licensing or binding conditions at the syntax–semantics interface (Kratzer 2005): Judging from ‘exotic’ cases like (1), VI-s in OH appear to be epistemic or polarity-sensitive indefinites; change for most of them appears to have involved the loss of the +Affective feature, leading to the ‘plain’ (PPI) indefinites of Modern Hungarian.

A closer look at a larger number of examples in OH codices, and checking the data against the criteria in Aloni–Port (EI book, 2015) has nevertheless revealed that VIs were in fact broad-spectrum indefinites, ranging from specificity to scoping under negation. That is, they were not exclusively epistemic indefinites, and there need not have been any principled reason (or any factor *within* their semantics) that prevented them from sharing the properties of specific, *né*-indefinites. The non-interchangeability of *vala*- and *né* indefinites was not a matter of their semantics (in the narrow sense of comparing the translations of lexical items). This is relevant for VIs in Modern Hungarian: their frequent specific use is not the outcome of a change in their (say) licensing or binding conditions.

This indicates a discrepancy between a feature-based analysis such as Jäger’s, and a more elaborate semantic study of indefinites and their operators. The assumption that an indefinite had an AFFECTIVE feature (set to +) need not imply anything about the behaviour of that indefinite in ‘positive’ contexts.

2. **Correlatives:** *Vala*- and *akár*-expressions from OH do not fully fit into a framework centred exclusively on indefinite *D*P-s: they often came with their own clauses. *Vala*-expressions could be relative pronouns introducing correlatives, and ‘operator’ and sentence-internal, ‘indefinite’ uses were in free alternation. (*Akár*- and the evolution of FC items will be set aside.)²

¹Discussion will be based on codices from the late OH period, from around the middle of the 14th century until the first half of the 16th.

²OH had a rich inventory of *wh*-based relative pronouns (Bácskai–Atkári, Dékány in É.Kiss 2014).

Vala-expressions in correlatives are problematic, since they contribute to maximal readings that (i) have to be derived in some manner and (ii) need to be related to sentence-internal, indefinite construals.

Vala-correlatives overwhelmingly expressed generalisations, universal or Free Choice readings. Episodic, definite readings, with established referents, are extremely rare (fewer than 10 in a corpus of 47 codices), and even these involve some modal element, e.g. the future tense in (2-b). The rarity of examples like (2-b) and the predominance of universal / lawlike or FC readings motivates a concealed conditional analysis (Andrews, Belyaev–Haug). (i) The semantic representations of the two clauses are linked with the material conditional.³ (ii) The universal reading of *vala*-expressions follows from donkey equivalences (Kamp–Reyle, Groenendijk–Stokhof). (iii) The link between the *vala*-expression(s) and matrix correlate(s) is an instance of discourse anaphora. To offer a sketch, (2) would be rendered as $(\varepsilon_x.[\textit{srv-god}(x)]) \rightarrow (\varepsilon_y[x = y; \textit{reign}(y)])$, where ε is random assignment and ; is dynamic merge (asymmetric conjunction).

According to such an analysis, *vala*-expressions are uniformly indefinites. Apart from theoretical benefits, this matches the data in late OH texts, where *vala*-indefinites and correlatives occur side by side. For instance, the Jókai codex (162 pages) contains 56 plain indefinite and 29 correlative *vala*-expressions.

A prediction of the conditional analysis is that definite, episodic readings are expected to emerge later (Belyaev–Haug). In Late OH and Middle Hungarian such readings may be correlated with the emergence and spread of a new relative pronoun with a demonstrative component, *a(z)-ki* ‘that-who’.

The concealed conditional analysis of correlatives appears to enable the integration of correlatives into a feature-based or operator-based system: The material conditional is but another operator that can bind a *vala*-expression. What remains unexplained is the need for the *vala*-expression(s) to move to the left edge of the clause. It is proposed that the concealed conditional analysis of correlatives needs to be supplemented with a syntactic (or at most interface) mechanism that compels the relevant *vala*-expressions to move to the left edge of the clause. This mechanism serves also to separate relative expressions from sentence-internal *D*Ps.

In surface syntax, *vala*-expressions in correlatives look like operators, whereas in the semantics they are bound by a covert operator. This can be a reflex of the history of *vala*-itself: Originally, it was a non-finite form of the verb *van* ‘is’, ‘exists’, and its grammaticalisation path could involve a stage when it was an existential/epistemic operator. In late OH however it was a concord marker in the sense of Kratzer–Shimoyama.

3. *Vala*-correlatives were in use well into the 18th century; in fact, the adverb *valahányszor* (‘*vala*-times’) to this day has a plain indefinite (‘a number of times’) and a correlative use (‘Whenever A, then B’). Other correlatives may have faded out of the language on account of the emergence of the relative pronoun *a(z)-ki* ‘that-who’. This detail was provided to stress that over-all, the interpretational options for *vala*-indefinites have to a large extent been influenced by the \pm availability of other, specialised forms, with the evolution of Negative Concord being perhaps the most important factor.

³The author is aware of current analyses that assimilate conditional sentences to correlatives. In the present work conditionals appear in the language of (dynamic) logic.

Examples

- (1) a. nē vala ot **valaki** a. kèt èl rèitezet ventol megvaluā
 not was there vala-who the two PRT hidden old-man-from except
 ‘There was no-one there, except for the two old men, who were hiding’ (Vienna c. 168–169)
- b. De zent fferencz ewnek[sic!] yewueset yogondolattyat es
 But Saint Francis he-DAT coming-POSS.3SG-ACC good-thought-POSS.3SG-ACC and
 kysalaszat annak elewtté meg tuda ewllekeben my elewtt
 strife-POSS.3SG-ACC that-DAT before-POSS.3SG PRT knew he-soul-POSS.3SG-INE what before
valamjyt nekj mondott uolna:
 vala-what-ACC DAT-3SG said COND
 ‘But Saint Francis knew in his soul about his coming, his thoughts and his strife, before he
 could tell anything to him’ (Jókai C. 77)
- (2) a. **valaki** iste(n)nec zolgal orzagl vgy mint orozlan
 vala-who god-DAT serve-3SG reign-3SG so like lion
 Qui seruit deo regnat vt leo
 ‘He who serves God reigns like a lion’ (Guary c. 11; Latin version in text)
- b. **Valakit** megapolandoc o az fogiatoc otèt
 vala-who-ACC PRT-kiss-FUT-1SG he that capture-IMP-2PL he-ACC
 (Judas to soldiers) ‘The one I am going to kiss, that’s him; take him’ (Munich c. 33rb)

Primary sources: • *Guary codex* (bf. 1495). Dénes Szabó, ed. 1944: *Guary-kódex*. Budapest. • *Jókai codex* (cca 1372–1450). János P. Balázs, ed. 1981: *Jókai-kódex*. Budapest: Akadémiai. • *Munich codex* (1466). Antal Nyíri, ed. 1971: *Müncheni-kódex*. Budapest, Akadémiai. • *Vienna codex* (cca 1416–1450). Gedeon Mészöly, ed. 1916: *Bécsi kódex*. Budapest.

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