

VALA-INDEFINITES IN OLD HUNGARIAN

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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*-indeterminate. 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)), and could have ‘polarity’ readings (as in (2)). They tended to be subordinate, syntactically or semantically. When 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 VIs are Positive Polarity items, 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.

‘Feature content’ for indefinites is assumed to be shorthand for licensing or binding conditions at the syntax–semantics interface (Kratzer 2005): Judging from cases like (1)–(2), 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 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. This indicates a discrepancy between a feature-based analysis such as Jäger’s, and a more elaborate semantic study of indefinites and their operators.

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 correlative clauses (ex. (3)). The semantic problem with *vala*-correlatives is that they contribute to maximal readings that (*i*) have to be derived in

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.

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 (4). The rarity of examples like (4) 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.² (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.

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: The Jókai codex (162 pages), for instance, contains 56 plain indefinite and 29 correlative *vala*-expressions. A correct prediction of the conditional analysis is that definite, episodic readings are expected to emerge later (Belyaev–Haug).

Old Hungarian *vala*-indefinites have been claimed to be wide-spectrum, multiple use indefinites. VI-s have been said to be essentially Kamp–Heim indefinites sensitive to underlying operators. ‘Plain indefinite’ and correlative uses can be handled without resorting to ambiguity (relying on one well-motivated additional assumption, the conditional analysis of correlatives).

Examples

- (1) nē vala ot **valaki** a. kèt èl rèitezet ventøl megvaluā
‘There was no-one there, except for the two old men, who were hiding’
(Vienna C. 168–169)
- (2) De zent fferencz ewnek[sic!] yewueset yogondolattyat es kysalásat annak elewtté meg tuda ewlelkeben mÿ elewtt **valamÿt** nekÿ mondott uolna:
‘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)
- (3) **valaki** iste(n)nec zolgal orzagl vgy mint orozlan
Qui seruit deo regnat vt leo
‘He who serves God reigns like a lion’ (Guary C. 11; Latin version in text)
- (4) **Valakit** megapolandoc ȝ az fogiatoc ȝtèt
(Judas:) ‘The one I am going to kiss, that’s him; take him’ (Munich .. 33rb)

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

²The author is familiar with current analyses that assimilate conditional sentences to correlatives. In the present work conditionals belong to the language of (dynamic) logic.

Selected References

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