

# Diachronic Evidence and the Relation between Interrogative Markers and Focus

Julia Bacskai-Atkari  
University of Potsdam, Germany

## The Problem

Interrogative marker: *-e*

Often claimed to be a Focus head  
(e.g. van Craenenbroeck & Lipták 2008)

But: independent from the notion of focus

- optional in main clause yes-no questions
- occurs even if there is no focus

Position: clause-internal; on the vP-periphery, usually attached to the verb

- **Diachronically:** *-e* appeared in a clause-final position
- **Non-standard dialects, or ellipsis:** *-e* does not always attach to the verb

Proposal: *-e* is a [+wh] marker head at the functional vP-periphery; foci located at the vP-periphery for different reasons

## The Modern Hungarian Pattern

Embedded interrogatives: no distinctive intonation  
(↔ main clause interrogatives)

Subordinator: optional C head *hogy* 'that'

- yes-no interrogatives: *-e* obligatory

(1) Nem tudom,  
not know-1SG

(hogy) megérkezett-e Mari.  
that PRT-arrived.3SG-Q Mary  
'I don't know if Mary has arrived.'

- *wh*-interrogatives: overt *wh*-element

(2) Nem tudom,  
not know-1SG

(hogy) ki érkezett meg.  
that who arrived.3SG PRT  
'I don't know who has arrived.'

Main clause questions: distinctive intonation

- *wh*-interrogatives: *wh*-element present
- yes-no interrogatives: *-e* is optional

## The Old and Middle Hungarian Patterns

Historical periods:

- Old Hungarian (ca. 896–1526)
- Middle Hungarian (ca. 1526–1772)
- Modern Hungarian (ca. 1772–)

- Old Hungarian embedded yes-no interrogatives: complementiser *ha* 'if':

(3) mōgadmīg nēkoŋc  
tell-IMP.2SG-PRT we.DAT

ha te vag xē istēnē fia  
if you are Christ God-DAT son

'tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God' (Munich Codex, from 1466)

- Middle Hungarian embedded yes-no interrogatives: complementiser *ha* 'if' + *-e*:

(4) mondd meg nekünk,  
tell-IMP.2SG PRT we.DAT

ha te vagy-e Krisztus, az Isten Fia  
if you are-Q Christ the God son

'tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God' (Káldi's translation, from 1626)

- Old (and Middle) Hungarian embedded *wh*-interrogatives: optional complementiser *hogy* 'that' + *wh*-element:

(5) kérdezkeduē / hog mi volna  
asking that what be-COND.3SG

micor halottaiból felkélend  
when dead-ELA up-rises

'questioning what the rising from the dead should mean' (Munich Codex, from 1466)

## More on the Evolution of the Interrogative Marker

Interrogative marker *-e*: appeared in Old Hungarian main clause yes-no interrogatives (optionally):

(6) nēde tu incab nagobbac vattoc a3ochnal ē  
Q you rather greater-PL are.3PL those-DAT Q  
'Are ye not much better than they?' (Munich Codex, from 1466)

Position: clause-finally, later clause-internally

Optional clause-initial particle (e.g. *nemde* 'isn't it', *minemde* 'isn't it')

Optionality of *-e*: distinctive intonation marks [+wh]

- if *-e* were a Focus head, then it should be obligatory in main clause interrogatives (exhaustivity)
- optional in Old/Middle Hungarian and in Modern Hungarian (cf. É. Kiss 2002) too
- clause-final position not linked to any designated focus position

## More on Clause-typing and Functional Left Peripheries

Clause-typing: traditionally associated with the CP-periphery (cf. Rizzi 1997)

Marking of subordination: in embedded clauses – also associated with the CP-periphery (cf. Rizzi 1997)

- **Single encoding:** one element responsible for the overt marking the type of the clause and subordination  
e.g. *ob* 'if' in German

(7) Ich weiß nicht, ob er kommt.  
I know.1SG not if he comes  
'I don't know if he is coming.'

- **Double encoding:** the element responsible for overtly marking subordination is different from the element overtly marking the type of the clause

subordination marker typically a general subordinator, e.g. *that*  
element overtly marking the type of the clause: may also be an operator (*wh*, relative operators)

e.g. embedded *wh*-interrogatives in certain German dialects (cf. Weiß 2013: 777–778)

(8) Ich weiß auch nicht, wer dass da gewesen ist.  
I know.1SG too not who that there been is  
'I don't know who was there either.' (based on Weiß 2013: 778, ex. 15a)

*Wh*-movement: targets the CP in English, German ↔ Hungarian: it targets the vP-domain

→ general subordinator + a *wh*-element: no Doubly Filled COMP Filter violation in Hungarian  
↔ certain German dialects, Middle English

Hungarian embedded interrogatives:

- double encoding in *wh*-interrogatives in all periods (optional C head *hogy* 'that' + *wh*-element)
- double encoding in yes-no interrogatives in Modern Hungarian (optional C head *hogy* 'that' + *-e*)
- single encoding in yes-no interrogatives in Old Hungarian (C head *ha* 'if' – German *ob*)

Middle Hungarian: intermediate stage in the transition from single encoding to double encoding

Functional left peripheries in Hungarian embedded interrogatives:

subordination: CP-periphery

marking of [+wh]: vP-periphery – evolution of functional vP-periphery during Old/(Middle) Hungarian  
initially: [+wh] marked by *ha* 'if' at the CP-domain; clause-final *-e*: head of a head-final CP

## Ellipsis, Non-standard Varieties and the Interrogative Marker

Position of *-e*: a functional v head – but also a clitic, usually attached to the verb

Elliptical constructions: verb absent → *-e* attaches to a preceding element

(9) Valaki elment, de nem tudom, hogy Mari-e ment-e.  
someone off-went.3SG but not know-1SG that Mary-Q went off  
'Someone left but I don't know whether it was Mary.'

Certain nonstandard dialects: no movement of the verb to the leftmost functional v head if there is a negative element or a particle in the specifier of that vP

(10) Nem tudom, (hogy) meg-e érkezett Mari.  
not know-1SG that PRT-Q arrived.3SG Mary  
'I don't know if Mary has arrived.'

Standard Hungarian: *-e* as a bound morpheme attracts the verb (except in ellipsis patterns)

## Conclusions

Co-occurrence of *-e* and focus: result of more general diachronic processes

Diachronic evidence: the presence/absence of *-e* is indeed in correlation with certain typological settings – the changes thereof predict the changes in the status of *-e*

Typological change in word order:  
cf. É. Kiss (2013)

SOV (Proto-Hungarian)  
↓  
"Top Foc V X" (Old Hungarian)

change can be observed in Old Hungarian too

→ change from predominantly head-final to predominantly head-initial projections

→ preference of finite over non-finite subordination

→ evolution and reinforcement of functional left peripheries (CP, vP)

- increased role of the general finite subordinator (*hogy* 'that') – cf. Bacskai-Atkari (2013)
- grammaticalisation of [+wh] at the vP-periphery

Changes in the expression of focus:  
SOV → "Top Foc V X"

- preverbal focus ← sentential stress  
cf. Szendrői (2001),
- highest [Spec,vP] position occupied also by other elements – negative, verbal particle  
cf. É. Kiss (2008)

Verb movement to highest v head: only with *-e*

- default: verb stays in the VP (cf. É. Kiss 2008)
- *-e* as a bound morpheme is a trigger  
↔ no such trigger in comparative subclauses  
→ degrading (Bacskai-Atkari 2013)
- in non-standard dialects: *-e* does not trigger verb movement if the [Spec,vP] is filled by a verbal particle or a negative  
↔ truly predicative XPs
- verb movement not necessary for *-e* – can attach to preceding constituent as a clitic

→ development of *-e* independent from focus

→ *-e* is an interrogative marker functional head

## References

- Bacskai-Atkari, Júlia (2013) *The Syntax of Comparative Constructions: Operators, Ellipsis Phenomena and Functional Left Peripheries*. PhD dissertation submitted to the University of Potsdam.
- van Craenenbroeck, Jeroen and Anikó Lipták (2008) On the Interaction between Verb Movement and Ellipsis: New Evidence from Hungarian. In: Charles B. Chang and Hannah J. Haynie (eds.) *Proceedings of the 26th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics*. Somerville, MA: Cascadia Proceedings Project. 138–146.
- É. Kiss, Katalin (2002) *The Syntax of Hungarian*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- É. Kiss, Katalin (2008) The structure of the Hungarian VP revisited. In: Szilárd Szentgyörgyi et al. (eds.) *Approaches to Hungarian 10*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. 31–58.
- É. Kiss, Katalin (2013) From Proto-Hungarian SOV to Old Hungarian Top Foc V X. *Diachronica* 30:2. 202–231.
- Rizzi, Luigi (1997) The Fine Structure of the Left Periphery. In: Liliane Haegeman (ed.) *Elements of Grammar*. Dordrecht: Kluwer. 281–337.
- Szendrői, Kriszta (2001) *Focus and the Phonology–Syntax Interface*. Doctoral dissertation. London: University College London.
- Weiß, Helmut (2013) Satztyp und Dialekt. In: Jörg Meibauer et al. (eds.) *Satztypen des Deutschen*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. 764–785.