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Vala-Indefinites and Covert Operators in Old Hungarian

This contribution discusses one class of indefinites in Old Hungarian (OH), aiming to show that one version of a theory that equates existential readings with disjunction (viz. Szabolcsi) is insufficient to capture their properties.

Hungarian indefinite (existential) pronouns consist in an indeterminate pronoun and a particle that earmarks their interpretation. In OH the particle *né-* marked specificity or topicality, *vala-* marked 'plain' indefinites, *sem/sen-* marked n-words (Ladusaw), and *akár-* marked dedicated Free Choice (FC) items. At the stage of OH with written records (11th to early 16th century) n-words (and Negative Concord) were not consolidated, and FC items marked with *akár-* typically occurred as sentence operators and not as sentence-internal DPs. (Cf. the papers in É.Kiss 2014.) *Vala-*indefinites typically occurred in syntactically or logically embedded positions, but they could occasionally acquire a specific construal. They could also serve as relative pronouns introducing correlative clauses; in such environments they had a universal or FC construal.

In a programmatic article, Szabolcsi proposes a mathematically precise implementation of the universal ≅ conjunction, existential ≅ disjunction thesis. According to Szabolcsi, the relevant particles are not themselves logical operators, they merely signal that the expressions containing the particle are to occur in the (immediate) scope of a covert operator (meet or join). It is in this context that Szabolcsi discusses MH expressions containing the stem *va-*, found in indefinites and in the disjunction *vagy* 'or'. *Va-*, can be said to point at a covert join operator.

The first problem in extending such an analysis to OH *vala-*indefinites is that it lacks the tools handle the full range of properties such indefinites exhibited: Being under clausemate negation, as in (1), having a FC/polarity construal (2), plus the occasional specific construal. In addition, the framework would have to be equipped with tools for diachronic analysis; e.g. in MH certain *vala-*indefinites can no longer occur under clausemate negation. [1]

(1)   **nē** vala ot **valaki**   a kèt èl   rèitezet   ventọl megvaluā
       not was there VALA-who the two hidden old.man-ABL except
       'there was no-one there, except for the two old men who were hidden'(Vienna Codex 168–169; 1416/1450)

(2)   melyet   **valaha**   lattam volna olynagÿ allatÿw   ez
       which-ACC VALA-if/when saw-1SG PAST such-big being-ADJ.SFX this

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[1](The MH counterpart of (1) only has the wide scope reading for the indefinite.)

'This is as great/significant as I have ever seen' (Jókai C. 22; btw 1372 and 1448)

A potentially more serious problem is that OH *vala*-indefinites could introduce correlative clauses, where they had a universal (or at least FC) reading, as in (3).

(3) **valaki** iste(n)nec zolgal orzagl vgy mint orozlan
VALA-who god-DAT serves reigns that-way like lion
Qui seruit deo regnat vt leo (Latin sentence in the codex itself)
'He who/Whoever serves God reigns like a lion' (Guary Codex 11; before 1495)

In addition, it is problematic for such a morphology-centred analysis to encompass *all* classes of indefinite pronouns: While n-words <u>could</u> be linked to a logical operation (complementation), it is hard to fit in OH *né*-indefinites, since the origin and the initial meaning of the particle *né-* has been a matter of debate (Gugán). (Even if *né-* indefinites could be accounted for in some way, an additional task would be to differentiate them from *vala*-indefinites or the emerging class of dedicated FC items.)

Returning to the thesis of specialised particles marking the need for a covert operator, one is reminded of alternative theories of indefinites (Kratzer–Shimoyama, Kratzer, Jäger, Biberauer–Roberts). These theories uniformly postulate covert operators that 'associate' with indefinites, so they all can be said to share a common conceptual core with Szabolcsi's proposal.[2] At the same time, they are sufficiently fine-grained to handle various kinds of indefinites; moreover, two of these accounts have been tailor-made for diachronic analysis. At the current stage of research we work with a version of Jäger's theory, couched in DRT: OH indefinites are Kamp–Heim indefinites bound by covert operators. The universal construal of *vala*-indefinites in correlatives follows from a covert conditional analysis (cf. Andrews, Lipták 2009). Their behaviour under negation and other (overt) operators is due to a blocking effect (the presence of the specific paradigm), as well as a 'deblocking' effect (the state of n-words and specialised FC items at the time).

Selected References: É.Kiss, K. ed. 2014: The Evolution of Functional Left Peripheries in Hungarian Syntax. OUP. Gugán, K. 2012: Zigzagging through Language History. FULL (full.btk.ppke.hu), Jäger, A. 2011: *Anything* is *Nothing* is *Something*. NLLT. Kratzer A. –Shimoyama J. 2002: Indeterminate Pronouns: The View from Japanese. Proceedings of the 3rd Tokyo Psycholinguistics Conference. Szabolcsi, A. 2015: What Do Quantifier Particles Do? L & P 38:1.

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[2]Relating these operators to disjunction is, we think, a mathematical problem.