

# The grammaticalization of postpositions in Old Hungarian

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## 1 Introduction

- It has been a long held view that many Hungarian postpositions/case suffixes (Ps) originated in possessive constructions with the locative case marked possessee losing its nominal status and becoming a locative element. Zsilinszky (1992) lists 50 postpositions to be present by the late Old Hungarian period.<sup>1</sup>
- Grammaticalization process: there is (i) morphophonemesis reduction (e.g. *belen* > *ben*; *belől* > *ből*), (ii) semantic bleaching (original nominal meaning lost), (iii) categorial change (N >P)
- Main claim: In Old Hungarian (OldH) (period: 896-1526), some of the grammaticalizing elements are in an intermediate stage between N and P; they are AxialParts (as defined by Svenonius 2006). They still have some of their nominal properties (namely, a number feature), so they can appear in possessive-like structures.
- Structure of the talk:
  - Section 2 introduces the data.
  - Section 3 deals with the structure of PPs and AxialParts.
  - Section 4 discusses the grammaticalization process.
  - Section 5 concludes.

## 2 The data: Old Hungarian PPs

### 2.1 The class of Ps

- Hungarian has postpositions and case suffixes.<sup>2</sup> One class of postpositions, those Ps that take complements without a case marker, share most of their properties

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<sup>1</sup>The research presented in this talk is supported by the Hungarian National Research Fund (OTKA 78074)

<sup>2</sup>There are spatial and non-spatial Ps/suffixes, but most of the ones relevant in this talk have a spatial meaning.

with oblique case suffixes and have been argued to belong to the same category = Ps (É. Kiss 1999, 2002).<sup>3</sup>

- Common feature of these Ps: possessive origins.
- The reconstructed construction is N N+case, where the case ending can be locative, lative or ablative, thus giving rise to the three-way partition of Ps by OldH.
- Most of the oldest spatial Ps are in this system.

- (1) a. a ház-ban / a ház mögött  
the house-INE / the house behind.at  
'in the house / behind the house'
- b. a ház- ba / a ház mögé  
the house-ILL / the house behind.to  
'into the house / (to) behind the house'
- c. a ház- ból / a ház mögül  
the house-ABL / the house behind.from  
'from the house / from behind the house'

- Possessive constructions: The assumption is that proto-Hungarian had unmarked possessive constructions. OldH (and ModH as well) has agreement marking on the possessee OR dative case on the the possessor and agreement marking on the possessee (“doubly-marked”)<sup>4</sup>

- (2) a. Wimagguc uromc isten kegilm-e-t ez lelkiert  
pray.1pl lord.1pl god mercy-3sg-ACC this soul.for  
'Let us pray for our Lord God's mercy for this soul' (Lord's Prayer)
- b. De az hews vala ysten-nek angala  
but the hero was god-DAT angel-3sg  
'But the hero was God's angel' (Jók 15)

- Zsilinszky (1991): the fact that PPs appear in possessive-like constructions is suggestive of their possessive origins; the old relationship between the two parts “lives on”

- (3) ysten-nek felewl-e  
God-DAT from-3sg  
'from God' (Jók 29)

<sup>3</sup>Asbury *et al* (2007) argued that postpositions with case marked complements, locative adverbs and particles are also on the extended projection of the PP.

<sup>4</sup>The texts used are LP = Lord's Prayer, around 1195; Jók = Jókai-codex, after 1372/1448; Fest = Festetics-codex, before 1494; Bécsi = Bécsi-codex, after 1416/ copy from 1466; Jord = Jordánszky-codex, 1516-1519

- Historical grammars describe the process as the possessee becoming a more grammatical element as it loses its original meaning and the possessive relationship becomes oblique.
- There are postpositions which are becoming suffixes (e.g. *balól/belől* > *-ból/-ből* ‘out of’, cf. (4)) in OldH.

- (4) a. *kezebelewl*  
hand.out.of  
‘out of/from his hand’ (Jók 60)
- b. *parisbalol*  
Paris.out.of  
‘out of/from Paris’ (Jók 28)
- c. *az langbol*  
the fire.out.of  
‘out of/from the fire’ (Jók 43)
- (5) *gimils-ben*  
fruit-INE  
‘in fruit’ (LP)
- (6) *vilag-bele*  
world-ILL  
‘into the world’ (LP)

## 2.2 Variation in Old Hungarian

- Some elements exhibited a variation typical of possessive DPs: the P could appear with a dative marked complement and bearing an agreement-marker or in the ‘regular’ P construction.
- All data in (7)-(9) come from the same text (Jókai-Codex, after 1372/copy from 1448), showing that the two forms were really present at the same time, and since it is not possible to find any rule as to the use of one form or the other, we can assume that they are in free variation.
- The ‘regular’ use of the P is exemplified in the (a) examples and the ‘possessive’-like use of the P is shown in the (b) examples.

- (7) a. *keues bezed vtan*  
little talk after  
‘after some talk’ (Jók 122)
- b. *ez bezedek-nec vtan-a*  
this talks-DAT after-3sg  
‘after these talks’ (Jók 25)
- (8) a. *az barátok-nak aztal-a elewt*  
the monks-DAT table-3sg in.front.of  
‘in front of the monks’ table’ (Jók 84)

- b. baratok-nak elewtt-e  
monks-DAT in.front.of-3sg  
'in front of monks' (Jók 84)
- (9) a. Sokak felet  
many above  
'above many' (JókC 114)
- b. minden-nek felett-e  
everything-DAT above-3sg  
'above everything' (Jók 79)
- The Jókai-codex is the first longer written texts we have (written after 1372, the copy is from 1448). This is the first text where we find a considerable number of Ps (both w.r.t. types and tokens). Sebestyén (2002) cites the following data: the codex contains 21 818 words; there are 39 different postpositions in 351 tokens.
  - Sebestyén (2002) gives a list of Ps with the number of their occurrences (cf. the table below). Altogether there are 404 tokens of Ps and 78 of them (19.3%) are in the “possessive-like” structure.
  - There is no dative-variation with the suffixal postpositions (cf. also Sebestyén 2002 for the observation).
  - The variation is found in other text from these centuries as well. Zsilinszky (1992) gives a list of the 50 Ps from late OldH and their occurrences, where we see the same variation based on several texts.
- (10) a. een zyvem-nek alatt-a  
I heart-DAT under-3sg  
'under my heart' (Fest 396)
- b. Jordan vyzee-nek elvöl-e  
Jordan water-DAT over-3sg  
'over the river Jordan' (Jord 176)
- c. Abel-nek helyett-e  
Abel-DAT place.in-3sg  
'instead of Abel' (Jord IIIa)
- d. a nep-nek közepett-e  
the people-DAT middle.at-3sg  
'in the middle of the crowd' (Bécsi 21)
- e. viadal-nak miatt-a  
fight-DAT because.of-3sg  
'because of the fight' (Bécsi 19)

- Possible analyses:
  - Since these Ps developed from nouns in possessive constructions, the variation has often been simply put down to a case of analogy in the Hungarian

<b>P</b>	<b>N + P</b>	<b>N-DAT P-agr</b>
alá ‘under.to’	2	0
alatt ‘under.at’	5	4
által ‘over’	1	0
-vel egyenben ‘with together’	3	0
elébe/eleibe ‘to front’	3	4
ellen ‘against’	17	5
előtt ‘before’	19	14
elől ‘(from) over’	2	0
felé ‘towards’	4	0
felől ‘from’	3	3
fölött/felett ‘above’	2	18
-hoz képest ‘with respect to’	1	0
kívül/kül ‘outside’	10	1
kör(ny)ül ‘around’	0	2
közben ‘between’	7	0
közt/között ‘between, among’	25	2
közül ‘from among’	19	0
mellé ‘beside.to’	1	0
mellett ‘beside.at’	7	2
miatt ‘because of’ <sup>5</sup>	49	46
mögé ‘behind.to’	2	0
mögött ‘behind.at’	1	0
nélkül ‘without’	16	0
óta ‘since’	2	0
-vel öszvén ‘together with’	6	0
szerint/szerént ‘according to’	14	0
szerte ‘across’	3	0
után ‘after’	40	23

Table 1: Postpositions in Jókai-codex

literature (Benkő 1980; Zsilinszky 1991): the doubly-marked possessive construction is very frequent in these old texts (arguably for stylistic reasons), so there is an analogical push to use it in PPs as well.

- **However**, if these elements are Ps, that is if they are already grammaticalized elements rid of their nominal properties, then the fact that they can have a dative-marked complement and can agree with that complement is not accounted for. The analogical push can only apply because the elements still have nominal features.
  - One could also say that there is a P with a nominal complement and one with a dative complement (and agreement marking).
  - **However**, this would duplicate things in the lexicon unnecessarily. These Ps developed in constructions where the nominal was not case marked and similarly their complements have no case-markers in Modern Hungarian either.
  - Could it be a case of degrammaticalization? The seemingly grammaticalized elements are nouns again, having nominal properties.
  - **However**, (i) they do not show other nominal properties; (ii) degrammaticalization is theoretically problematic.
- This kind of variation is not present in Modern Hungarian (ModH). There are some cases where it is possible to have the P agree with a dative marked complement, but then it is obligatorily extracted from the PP (cf. É. Kiss 2002).

- (11) a. \*a ház-nak mellett-e  
           the house-DAT beside-3sg  
           ‘beside the house’  
       b. \*az autó-nak után-a  
           the car-DAT after-3sg  
           ‘after the car’

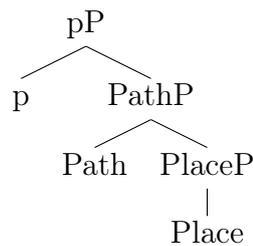
- (12) János [után-a]<sub>i</sub> futott [az autó-nak [~~utána~~]<sub>i</sub>].  
       John after-3sg ran the car-DAT  
       ‘John ran after the car.’

### 3 Axial Parts

#### 3.1 The structure of PPs

- The structure of PPs can be rather complex. Minimally we need to structurally distinguish between locative and directional Ps (cf. Koopman 2000; Den Dikken 2003; Svenonius 2004), and a position for “more functional” elements (cf. Van Riemsdijk 1990).

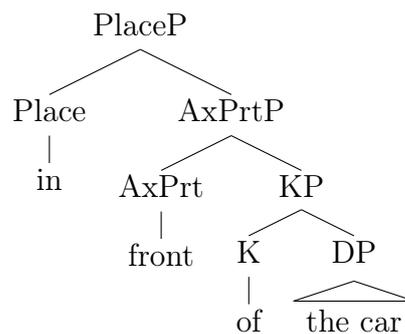
(13)



- Svenonius (2006): there is a projection, AxialPart, in the extended PP hosting a group of categorially ambiguous elements that exhibit both nominal and adpositional properties. These elements mostly refer to regions or “axial” parts of objects (hence the name), and we find them in various different languages. Their syntactic properties classify them partly with nouns and partly with Ps, and their syntactic projection is in-between those two as well.

- (14) a. There was a kangaroo in **front** of the car. (AxPart)  
 b. There was a kangaroo in the **front** of the car. (N)

(15)



- Svenonius (2006): in English, AxialPart cannot be pluralized, modified, replaced by a pro-form or moved away, Ns can.
- As Svenonius claims, AxialPart elements have some nominal features, and these features can be different in various languages. AxialParts can be prepositional (e.g. Persian, Tzeltal) or postpositional (e.g. Korean), with different nominal features.
- The semantic class of elements Svenonius (2006) argues to be AxialParts is involved in the observed variation in OldH.
- Asbury (2008) argues for the presence of AxPrtP in (Modern) Hungarian PPs (although the postpositions are never in AxPrt), partially based on their nominal origin. My analysis claims that AxPrtP is present in OldH PPs: this is how their marginally nominal nature is accounted for. However, since these elements are Ps in ModH, AxPrtP is not necessarily active in ModH PPs.

### 3.2 N > AxialPart > P

- Claim: we are dealing with a grammaticalization process in OldH which is in a transitional state. In Old Hungarian some of the “postpositions” are actually AxialParts
- AxialParts in OldH do not have determiners, they cannot be modified, they have no plural form. The only nominal feature they seem to have is a person feature, which allows them to agree with their dative marked complement. But they do not agree in number with their complement.

(16) barat-ok-nak elewtt-e  
 monk-pl-DAT in.front.of-3sg  
 ‘in front of monks’ (JókC 84)

- Historically the first step of the process is then N > AxialPart. The OldH elements that take part in variation are AxialParts. In these cases the locative/lative/ablative case suffix is the P head.

(17)

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graph TD
  PlaceP --- tte["-tte"]
  PlaceP --- AxPrtP["AxPrtP[3sg]"]
  AxPrtP --- fele["fele-"]
  AxPrtP --- DP
  DP --- mendennek
  
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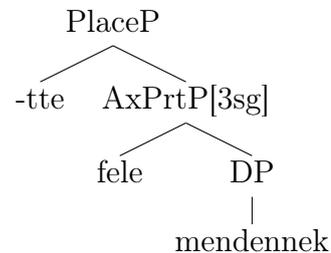
- In the second step, the morphological border between the case suffix (i.e. the P element) and the AxialPart element becomes oblique, and the whole unit gets reanalyzed as the P head.
- The grammaticalization then proceeds from case-marked possessive nouns to case-marked AxParts to Ps. I will turn to the mechanism of this change in the next section.

## 4 Grammaticalization

- This is a grammaticalization process which results in a lexical item losing its nominal properties and becoming a (semi-)functional element.
- There is morphophonological reduction (when becoming suffixal, Ps are monosyllabic), semantic bleaching (no nominal reference) and category change (N > AxPrt > P) involved in the process.
- The change is similar to other syntactic changes where lexical heads are reanalyzed and become functional heads generated under a functional node (cf. Roberts and Roussou 2003).

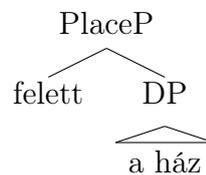
- Proto-Hungarian: historical linguists suggest we should reconstruct a possessive structure under PP
- Old Hungarian

(18)



- AxPrt will move into Place, since Place is a suffix
- Those structures that have the AxPrtP can have agreement marking: AxPrt has a person feature, the 3rd person agreement percolates up onto P. The AxPrt head is already a grammaticalized element, it is not a Noun.
- Those Ps that are becoming suffixal at this point are already Ps (generated in the P head), hence they do not take part in the variation.
- Modern Hungarian

(19)



- The item *felett* is base generated in P. It has no nominal features.

## 5 Conclusions

- This analysis shows that the structure and changes of the Hungarian PP fit in with the analyses proposed for other languages and that the grammaticalization of P elements is parallel to that of other functional material.
- The variation in the data can be explained by assuming a semi-postpositional head in the structure as an intermediate step in the grammaticalization from N to P.
- The change takes place at different times with different items: Some of the postpositional elements are already on the way to becoming suffixal in the first texts from the 13th century, which I take to indicate that they are Ps. Other elements, which take part in the illustrated variation, seem to have some nominal features for much longer.

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