

# Hungarian Embedded Interrogatives from a Diachronic Perspective

## 0. Introduction

Modern Hungarian embedded yes-no interrogatives:

- obligatory interrogative marker *-e*
- optionally overt complementiser (*hogy* ‘that’)

(1) Nem tudom, (hogy) megérkezett-e Kati.  
not know-1.Sg. that Part.arrived-3.Sg.-Q Kate  
‘I don’t know if Kate has arrived.’

status of the interrogative marker:

- head of a Focus Phrase (FocP) – e.g. Lipták and Craenenbroeck (2008)  
→ attached to the most prominent element in the clause
- head of an Interrogative Phrase (IntP) – cf. Rizzi (2001)  
→ marks the interrogative nature of the clause

problem: based on contemporary data it is difficult to decide between the two options

→ proposal: considering diachronic data and related constructions

→ *-e* will be shown to be an interrogative marker

1. Introducing the historical data – embedded yes-no questions

periods:

- Old Hungarian (896–1526)
- Middle Hungarian (1526–1772)
- Modern Hungarian (1772–)
- Old Hungarian: *ha* ‘if’:

- (2) a. Kèrdlec teged az elø istènè hog mōgadīng nèkõnc **ha**  
 ask-1.Sg. you-Acc. the living God-Subl. that tell-Imp.2.Sg.PART we-Dat. **if**  
 te vag x<sup>c</sup> istènn<sup>c</sup> fia  
 you are Christ God-Dat. son-Poss.3.Sg.

‘I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.’ (Munich Codex (1466), 33va)

- b. & a vacnac kezet foguan viue øtet az vcan  
 and the blind-Dat. hand-Poss.3.Sg.Acc. holding took-3.Sg. he-Acc. the street-Sup.  
 kuuøl Es ø zemèibè hagapuan ø kezeit reia  
 outside and he eyes-Poss.3.Sg.III. spitting he hands-Poss.3.Sg.Acc. he-Subl.  
 vètuen kèrde øtèt **ha** mit latna  
 putting asked-3.Sg. he-Acc. **if** what-Acc. see-Cond.3.Sg.

‘And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought.’ (Munich Codex (1466), 44ra)

• Middle Hungarian: *ha* ‘if’ + *-e*

- (3) a. Kényszerítlek téged az élő Istenre, hogy mondd meg  
force-1.Sg. you-Acc. the living God-Subl. that tell-Imp.2.Sg. PREV  
nekünk, **ha** te vagy-e Krisztus, az Isten Fia?  
we-Dat. **if** you are-Q Christ the God son-Poss.3.Sg.

‘I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.’ (György Káldi’s translation (1611), Mark 26,63)

- b. És kezét fogván a vaknak, kivezeté őt a  
and hand-Poss.3.Sg.Acc. holding the blind-Dat. PART.took-3.Sg. he-Acc. the  
faluból, és annak szemeire pökvén, s  
village-Elat. and that-Dat. eyes-Poss.3.Sg.Subl. spitting and  
kezeit rátévén kérde őt, **ha** lát-e  
hands-Poss.3.Sg.Acc. he-Subl.putting asked-3.Sg. he-Acc. **if** see-Cond.3.Sg.-Q  
valamit?  
something-Acc.

‘And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought.’ (György Káldi’s translation (1611), Mark 8,23)

• Modern Hungarian: *hogy* ‘that’ or zero + *-e*

- (4) a. Megesketlek téged az élő Istenre: mondd meg  
PART.swear-Caus.1.Sg. you-Acc. the living God-Subl. tell-Imp.2.Sg. PART  
nekünk, te vagy-e a Krisztus, az Isten Fia?  
we-Dat. you are-Q the Christ the God son-Poss.3.Sg.

‘I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.’ (Neovulgata (1997), Mark 26,63)

- b. Ő kézen fogta a vakot, kivezette a helységből, és  
he hand-Sup. held-3.Sg. the blind-Acc. PART.led-3.Sg. the village-Elat. and  
a szemére köpve rátette a kezeit,  
the eye-Poss.3.Sg.Subl. spitting he-Subl.put.Pst.3.Sg. the hands-Poss.3.Sg.Acc.  
aztán megkérdezte tőle, **hogy** lát-e valamit.  
then PART.asked-3.Sg. he-Abl. that see-3.Sg.-Q something-Acc.

‘And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought.’ (Neovulgata (1997), Mark 8,23)

in short:

- (5) **ha**  $\Rightarrow$  **ha + -e**  $\Rightarrow$  **(hogy) + -e**

→ questions:

- where does the interrogative marker *-e* come from?
- why did *ha* disappear in favour of *hogy*?

## 2. More on the interrogative marker

interrogative marker *-e* marking [+wh] in main clause yes-no questions

as early as Old Hungarian

- (6) a. nēde tū incab nagobbac vattoc azocnal è  
 Q you rather greater-Pl. are-3.Pl. those-Dat. Q  
 ‘Are ye not much better than they?’

- b. & ha annép meg maradekinac zémécbèn nèhèznç lattatic  
 and if the.people PART remnants-Dat. eyes-Ine. heavy-Dat. see-Caus.3.Sg.  
 az napocban Midènem èn zèmèimbèn nehéz è  
 that days-Ine. Q my eyes-Poss.1.Sg.Ine. heavy Q

- ‘ If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes?’

the presence of the interrogative marker *-e* is optional in these cases (cf. É. Kiss 2002)

- [+wh] marked by the intonation ↔ embedded interrogatives
- if it were a Foc head (Focus marker), then it should be obligatory in main clauses too
- in Old Hungarian, *-e* not attached to a focalised constituent
- Focus can be marked by stress without *-e*

→ the interrogative marker *-e* was introduced into embedded interrogatives by way of analogy with main clause questions

→ question still: why is it obligatory in embedded clauses?

### 3. More on clause-typing

two types of embedded interrogatives:

- embedded yes-no questions
- embedded *wh*-interrogatives

embedded *wh*-interrogatives: *hogy* ‘that’ or zero + *wh*-element (from Old Hungarian on):

(7) a. Es megtartac èz íget õnaloc egymással kèrdezkeđuē /  
and PART.kept-3.Pl. this word-Acc. they-Ade. each.other-Com. questioning

**hog mi** volna micor halottaibol felkèlend  
**that what** be-Cond.3.Sg. when dead-Poss.3.Sg.Pl.Elat. PART.rise-Fut.3.Sg.

‘And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.’ (Munich Codex (1466), 44vb)

b. És az ígét magokban tarták, csak egymástól kérđvén,  
and the word-Acc. themselves-Ine. kept-3.Pl. only each.other-Abl. asking

**mi** az: mikor halottaiból föltámad.  
**what** that: when dead-Poss.3.Sg.Pl.Elat. PART.rises

‘And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.’ (György Káldi’s translation (1611), Mk 9,9)

c. Ők a dolgot magokban is tartották, de egymás között  
they the thing-Acc. themselves-Ine. too kept-3.Pl. but each.other among

arról tanakodtak, **hogy mit** jelent az: „amikor  
that-Del. wondered-3.Pl. **that what-Acc.** means that when-Rel.

halottaiból feltámad”.  
dead-Poss.3.Sg.Pl.Elat. PART.rises

‘And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.’ (Neovulgata (1997), Mk 9,10)

functions of *hogy* ‘that’

- simple embedded declaratives
- embedded imperatives
- embedded *wh*-interrogatives (*hogy* + interrogative pronoun)
- clauses of purpose (cannot alternate with zero)
- resultatives (*úgy+hogy*, *olyan+hogy* ‘so that’ – cannot alternate with zero)
- in Modern Hungarian: embedded yes-no questions (with *-e* interrogative marker)

→ *hogy* insensitive to [ $\pm$ wh], cf. É. Kiss (2002)

→ *hogy* is a general marker of subordination – this function evolved during Old/Middle Hungarian (cf. Bacskai-Atkari 2012a, 2012b)

embedded *wh*-interrogatives: [+wh] marked by the *wh*-element itself

→ no need for a complementiser marking [+wh]

→ if there is an overt complementiser, it marks subordination only → *hogy*

clause-typing associated with the subordinators (complementisers – C heads)

e.g. *hogy* ‘that’, *ha* ‘if’, *mint* ‘than’

- subordinator responsible for clause-typing may select exclusively for [+wh] or [–wh]

e.g. German *ob* ‘if’ introduces embedded yes-no questions

- (8) Ich weiß nicht, **ob** er kommt.  
 I know-1.Sg. not if he comes  
 ‘I don’t know if he comes.’

- subordinator responsible for clause-typing may select either for [+wh] or [-wh] depending on its function

e.g. English *if*, Old and Middle Hungarian *ha* ‘if’

conditionals: [-wh] ↔ embedded interrogatives: [+wh]

- (9) a. I don’t know **if** he comes.  
b. Ring me **if** he comes.

- subordinator responsible for clause-typing marks only subordination and does not select for [+wh] or [-wh]

e.g. Hungarian *hogy* ‘that’

#### 4. The relation between interrogative markers and clause-typing

syntactically two different projections

CP (Complementiser Phrase) – clause-typing (cf. Rizzi 1997)

IntP (Interrogative Phrase) – interrogative markers (cf. Rizzi 2001)

- complementisers marking only subordination do not have to be overt  
→ optionality of *hogy* ‘that’ in Modern Hungarian embedded interrogatives
- elements in the IntP: interrogative marker *-e* or *wh*-pronouns
- interrogative clauses: overt marker of interrogative nature has to be present
  - main clauses: intonation → overt *-e* in IntP optional
  - subordinate clauses: either an element in the IntP or a complementiser that unambiguously associated with [+wh]

double encoding: overt marker of interrogative nature different from the complementiser responsible for clause-typing

- embedded *wh*-interrogatives – (7)
- Modern Hungarian embedded yes-no questions – (4)

single encoding: same element associated both with clause-typing (subordination) and [+wh]

Old Hungarian *ha* ‘if’

diachronic change from Old to Modern Hungarian embedded yes-no questions

single encoding → double encoding

Middle Hungarian: *ha* ‘if’ + *-e* interrogative marker

intermediate stage

*ha* losing its function of marking [+wh] – role taken over by *-e*

→ role of an overt complementiser: solely marking subordination

→ *hogy* ‘that’ (general subordination marker) takes over this role from *ha*

### Conclusion

interrogative marker *-e* not introduced for marking Focus

fits into the system of clause-typing and interrogative markers

synchronic phenomena may be better understood when considering diachronic data as well

diachronic data reveal the system behind surface phenomena

### References

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