

# Diachronic Evidence and the Relation between Interrogative Markers and Focus

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## 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 nēkoꝋc  
tell-IMP.2SG-PRT we.DAT

**ha** te vag x<sup>c</sup> istēn<sup>c</sup> 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) kērdēꝋkeduē / **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 aꝋoꝋnal 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

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