

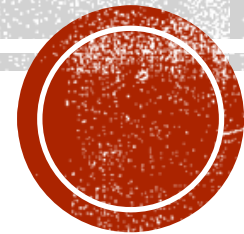
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# Hungarian modal existential wh-constructions in written language use - diachronic perspectives

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The presentation is dedicated to the memory of Attila Dobó and Gábor Székely.

# The structure of Modal existential wh-constructions (MECs)

Three main elements:

- (i) a predicate;
- (ii) a wh-pronoun;
- (iii) infinitive/subjunctive

- (1) a. *Nincs miről beszélni.*  
not\_is what.Del talk.Inf  
'There is nothing to talk about.'
- b. *Nincs miről beszélnünk.*  
not\_is what.Del talk.Inf.1Pl  
'We have nothing to talk about.'
- c. *Nincs miről beszéljünk.*  
not\_is what.Del talk.Subj.1Pl  
'We have nothing to talk about.'

# The structure of Modal existential wh-constructions (MECs)

- MECs can also take *tud* as the main predicate which can only be followed by an uninflected infinitive.
- The subjunctive mood is not accepted by all speakers (Šimík 2011, Prohászka 2021)

- (2)
- a. *Van kit meghívni.*  
is who.Acc invite.Inf  
'There is someone to invite.'
- b. *Van kit meghívnom.*  
is who.Acc invite.Inf.1Sg  
'There is someone for me to invite.'
- c. *Van kit meghívjak .*  
is who.Acc invite.Subj.1Sg  
'There is someone for me to invite.'
- d. *Tudunk kit meghívni / \*meghívunk / \*meghívjunk.*  
can.1Pl who.Acc invite.Inf / \*invite.Inf.1Pl / \*invite.Subj.1Pl  
'We can invite someone.'

# Word order

- Most frequently, the three elements follow each other in a specific order:
  - verb → wh-pronoun → subordinate verb
- However, the word order is not strict:

(3) *Menekülni* *viszont* *nincs* *hova*. (HHC, 9283005, 1943)

escape.Inf however not\_is where

'However, there is nowhere to escape.'

(4) *De általában* *nem* *volt* *fél* *ni* *mit*. (HHC, 9629113, 1947)

but usually no is.Past fear.Inf what.Acc

'Usually there was nothing to worry about.'

- MECs cannot be topicalized (Lipták 2003).
- As opposed to Lipták's (2003) claim, we think that subjunctives can only follow the pronoun

(5) a. \*?*Meneküljek* *nincs* *hova*.

escape.Subj.1Sg not\_is where

b. \**Nem* *volt* *féljek* *mit*.

no is.Past fear.Subj.1Sg what.Acc

# Word order

- It is also possible that elements are included between the main verb and the wh-word, or between the wh-word and the infinitive.

(6) a. *De nincs itt hol sírni* (HHC, 9462009, 1920)

but not\_is here where cry.Inf

‘There is nowhere to cry here.’

b. *Megint lesz mit a játékgepbe dobálni.* (HHC, 3153003, 2010)

again will what.Acc the slot\_machine.Ill throw.Inf

‘There will be money to gamble again.’

- Based on our data, complex structures do not occur in these internal positions (as opposed to the claims of Prohászka 2019)

(7) *Van Marit a szülinapjára mivel meglepnem.*  
is Mari.Acc the birthday.Poss.3Sg.Subl what.Instr surprise.Inf.1Sg,  
‘There is something with which I can surprise Mary on her birthday.’

→Such sentences do not occur in the data.

# Meaning of the construction

- Šimík (2011): a circumstantial possibility modality is typical of MECs.
- *Availability*: MECs express whether the availability of a proposition is possible or not.

(8) *Nincs mit ennem.*  
not\_is what.Acc eat.Inf.1Sg  
'I don't have anything to eat.'

# Aims

- Examining MECs as they appear in the written language of different periods of Hungarian
- Providing supplementary empirical (corpus-based) data; presenting interesting forms neglected by the literature.

# Construction Grammar (CxG)

- A usage-based holistic framework
- The patterns of language emerge from language data
- Constructions: conventional, learned form-function pairings at varying levels of complexity and abstraction (Goldberg 1995)
- “[a]ny linguistic pattern is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its form or function is not strictly predictable from its component parts or from other constructions recognized to exist.” (Goldberg 2006)
- MECs → constructions

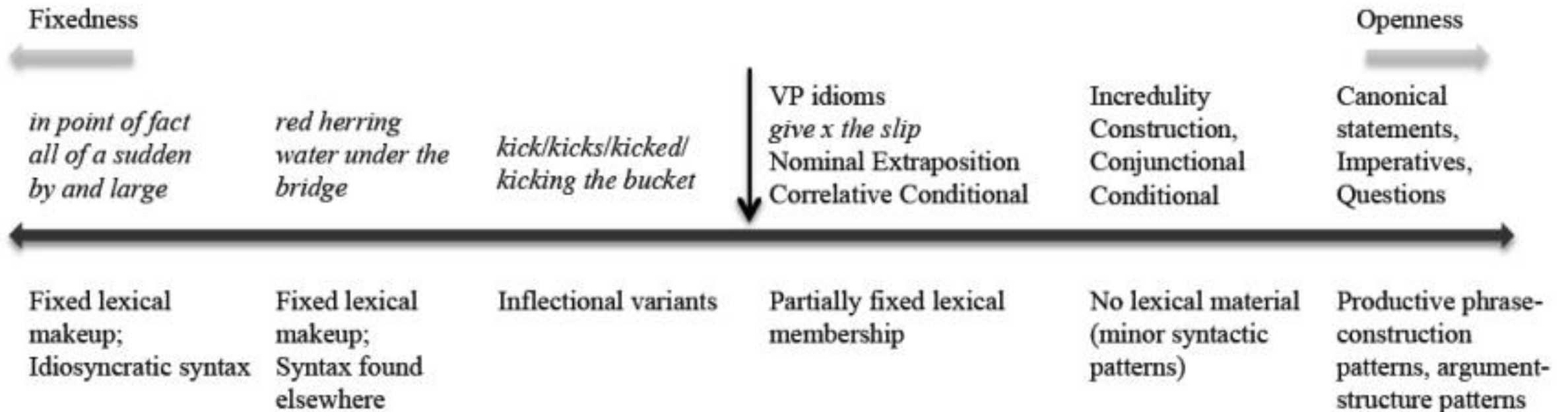


# Construction Grammar (CxG)

- Although the meaning of a modal existential construct can be interpreted compositionally, it is essential to know the specific context in which it appears.
- “Constructions are related to each other, not just in terms of smaller parts being combined into units, but also in terms of relations between constructions.” (Endresen & Janda 2020).

# Idiomatcity Continuum

Scale of idiomatcity by Michaelis (2017)



# Idiomatcity

- MECs can be divided into subgroups in terms of idiomatcity:

## I. MEC pattern with a „canonical meaning” (Šimík 2011)

(9) *Nincs miért mosolyognom az égre.*

not\_is why smile.Inf.1Sg the sky.

‘I have got no reason to smile.’

## II. Partially fixed idiomatic expressions:

(10) *Nincs mit tenni.*

not\_is what.Acc do.Inf

‘There is nothing left to do.’

(11) *Nem tudok vele mit kezdeni.*

no can.1Sg with what.Acc start.Inf

‘I don’t know how to deal with this.’

## III. Fixed lexical constructs with inflectional variants:

(12) *Nincs/ Van mit a tejbe aprítani/aprítanom.*

not\_is / is what.Acc the milk.Ill shred.Inf/shred.Inf.1Sg

‘There is/isn’t a plenty to bite on.’

# Research questions

- „Constructional change selectively seizes a conventionalized form-meaning pair of a language, altering it in terms of its form, its function, any aspect of its frequency, its distribution in the linguistic community, or any combination of these” (Hilpert 2013: 16)

## **Our research questions are the followings:**

- What have been the formal characteristics of MECs (predicate, wh-pronoun, infinitive-subjunctive, word order)?
- In what contexts have been the most frequent MECs used?

# Methods

mtf3

korpusz: MTSZ

Keresés

Lehetőségek:  
Kontextus  
Alkorpuszok

lekérdezés típusa: CQL

CQL: [word= "akad|van|volt|volna|nincs|nincsen|sincs|lesz|lenne|lett|legyen"]

alapértelmezett attribútum: word

Kontextus

- Corpus-based study
- The corpora:
  - Old Hungarian Corpus (OHC) (Simon & Sass 2012)
  - Old and Middle Hungarian Corpus of informal language use (OMHC) (Dömötör et al. 2017)
  - Hungarian Historical Corpus (HHC) (Sass 2016)
  - Hungarian Gigaword Corpus (HGC) (Oravecz et al. 2014)
- Advantages: large amount of data
- Disadvantages: not-balanced (Simon 2019)

# Problems

- The relative flexibility of MECs → manual selection
  - Technical problems:
    - Different query surfaces
    - Different query languages (OHC and OMHC: MQL, HHC and HGC: CQL)
    - OHC: partially annotated, HHC: not annotated
    - Large amount of data in HGC (with a very precise query expression more than 50 thousand tokens)
- our database is not totally exhaustive

**TMK Történeti Magánéleti Korpusz lekérdezőfelület**

Lekérdezés

Szerkesztő ▾ Leírás

>  bárhól ▾ műfaj tetsz. ▾ fejléc (pl. szöveg.azon., megye stb.) kezdőév záróév település Megjelenítés:  ▾

Mehet v2.3. - 2020.08.26. - [Emdros](#) - [Útmutató](#) - Kis/nagybetű nem számít  Max.   véletlen minta



# Old Hungarian

(896-1526)



# Data



- From OHC and OMHC: Bible-translations and private letters and testimonies of witnesses in trials
- 33 tokens
  - 29 in annotated texts of the OHC (as opposed to Szláovich (2018), who found 9 tokens)
    - 2 in Jókai Codex (from after 1370)
    - 10 in Munich Codex (1466)
    - 2 in Guary Codex (before 1508)
    - 14 in Jordánszky Codex (1516-19),
    - 1 in Bookle (1521)
  - 4 in OMHC (in private letters 1510-17).



# Formal properties: The predicate

- Substantive verb (26 tokens) + tud (6 tokens)
- New predicate: *elég (volt)*

(13) *mikoron elég volna mit enni s innia* (GuaryK - 074/14 - 3/320279)  
when enough be\_Cond what.Acc eat.Inf and drink.Inf.3Sg  
'when they had enough to eat and drink'

# Formal pro

- The status of the wh-word: forms from headless variant (Dékány 2021).
- Indefinite pronoun: in a neg
- An example with two inter

(14) *Szent János evangélista*  
Saint John evangelist  
*és csodálatában*  
and admiration.Poss3Sg.I  
  
'lit. The evangelist Sa  
anything'

- Since MEC was already a p  
function of the pronoun in



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# “Existential relatives”

- Lipták (2003): an a-prefixed relative-like pronoun can stand as well, instead of the wh-word. → one of the most peculiar characteristics of Hungarian (Šimík, 2011)

(15) *Van akit meghívjunk.* (Lipták 2003)  
is who.Acc invite.Subj.1Pl  
lit. ‘there is (someone) whom we can invite’

- In Old Hungarian: 11 tokens in Vienna Codex – 3 in conditional (!)

(16) *nincs, ki te nagyságod ellen álljon .* (BecsiK - 1/77/Eszt\_13/11 - 1/27630)  
not\_is who you greatness.Poss.2Sg resist.Subj.3Sg  
lit. ‘there isn’t anyone who can resist you’

(17) *és nem volt, ki káromlatot és megvetést tenne e népnek* (BecsiK 1/18/Jud\_5/17 - 1/15084)  
and no is.Past who blasphemy.Acc and contempt.Acc do.Cond.3Sg this folk.Dat

# „Existential relatives” – are they MECs?

- In Modern Hungarian: indicative is also possible! (although rare)

(18) *nincs aki egyfolytában piszkál és megmondja, hogy mit csinálj;*  
not\_is who uninterruptedly poke.Ind.DefObj.3Sg and tell.DefObj.3Sg that what.Acc do.Subj.2Sg

*nincs aki megegye a kedvenc ételed a hűtőből;*  
not\_is who eat.Subj.3Sf the favourite food.Poss.2Sg the fridge.Ela

*nincs aki jóindulatúan rendet rak a lakásodban* (HGC #81746122)  
not\_be who kindly order.Acc put.Ind.3Sg the flat.Poss.2Sg.Ine

‘lit. there is no one who keeps poking and telling you what to do; no one who eats your favourite food from the fridge; there is no one who will tidy up your apartment in good faith’

→ existential relatives: transitional constructions between MECs and relative clauses also in Old Hungarian.



# Formal properties: The infinitive/ subjunctive

- infinitive (22 tokens), subjunctive (10 tokens), conditional (1 token)
- the infinitive can also be inflected beside the already inflected modal verb (example 19) ← not allowed in Modern Hungarian.

(19) *hogy megkérdezvén őtet tudjak mit írnom* (JordK - 791/ ApCsel\_25/26 - 5/201731)  
that ask\_ConV he.Acc can.Subj.Sg1 what.Acc write.Inf.Sg1

- Not only in MECs (Dékány 2014) ! → familiar relationship with other infinitival constructions

(20) a. *Tudtok jó adományokat adnotok ti fiaitoknak* (MunchK - 68va/Lk\_11/13 - 3/278125)  
can.Pl2 good gift.Pl.Acc give.Inf.Pl2 you son.Pl.Poss.Pl2

b. *téged akarunk megtartanod* (FestK - 409 - 1/139410)  
you.Acc want.Pl1 keep.Inf.Sg2

- Inflection: unsystematic (21)

(21) a. *emberfiának kedig nincs hova fejét* *hajtani* (MunchK - 66vb/Lk\_9/58 - 3/276860)  
son\_of\_men.Dat but not\_is where head.Poss.3Sg.Acc bow.Inf

b. *nem tudja vala magát hova hajtania* (JokK - 17/9 - 1/164)  
no can.Sg3 be\_past oneself.Acc where bow.Inf.3Sg

- 12 out of 22 examples inflected: 3Pl (5 tokens), 1Sg (4 tokens) – 3Sg forms are mostly non-inflected (É. Kiss 2014).
- anti-agreeing (see Dékány 2012): in MECs not occur
- conditional (22)– it's frequency described by Kántor (2014), in subordination by Bácskai-Atkári (2014)

(22) *és nem volna mit ingyen ennének* (JordK - 479/Mk\_8/1 - 5/131651)  
and no be.Cond what.Acc nothing\_at\_all eat.Cond.3Pl

# Word order and the use of MECs

- **Word order:** relatively fixed:
  - no examples for left-dislocation of the infinitive
  - in 6 examples: the pattern is filled with adverbs between the wh-word and the infinitive
- **Use:**
  - in negative contexts (except for 3 tokens)
  - the most typical constructs express poverty, the subjunctive form of *eszik* 'eat' - 7 times, the syno
  - hapaxes → productivity
  - the most frequent types of Modern Hungarian
  - few examples from private letters suggest, that (23: a private letter from the nobleman Bökényi



(23) *Nincsen mit tennem, váltigen szégyenlem (...)*

not\_is what.Acc do.Inf.1Sg although shame.DefObj.Sg1

*nincsen kinek könyörögnöm, csak tekegyelmednek.*

not\_is who.Dat beg.Inf.1Sg only your\_grace.Dat

lit. 'I have nothing to do, my shame (...) I have no one to beg, only your grace'.



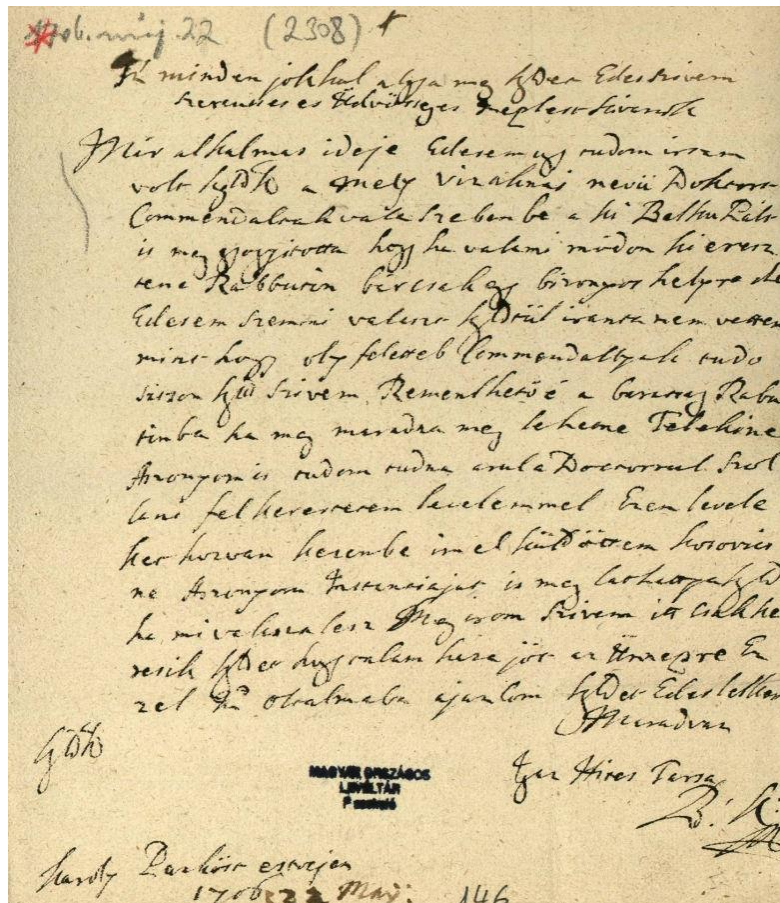
# Middle Hungarian

(1526-1772)





# Data



- Old and Middle Hungarian Corpus: court records (20 tokens) and private correspondences (150 tokens).
- Many items belonged to the same people. An outstanding number of tokens came from one person: Krisztina Barkóczy
- 26 tokens from the Old Hungarian Corpus (Bible translations)
- 196 items altogether.

# Formal properties: The predicate

- Substantive verb (119 tokens) + tud (77 tokens)
- The most frequent predicates are: *nincs* ('there is/are no...') (52 tokens) and *volna* ('would have been') (13 tokens)
- Considerably high number of negated verb forms: *nem volt* ('was/were not'), *sincs* ('were neither'), *nem volna* ('would not have been'), *nem lévén/lőn* ('there is/are no'), *nem lesz* ('there won't be')...

# The wh-word

- Dömötör (2020): the use of the pronouns with an a- prefix has started to spread during the Middle Hungarian period.
- MECs and existential relatives are different – we have excluded these from our analysis in this period.

# Formal properties: The infinitive/ subjunctive

- Only a few number of MECs with a subjunctive:

(24) a. *mindazonáltal vajjon miről meg emlékeztem ez országon* (OMHC, 1062865 1722)

nevertheless is what.Del preV remember-Subj.1Sg this country.Sue

‘Nevertheless, there is something I can remember of this country.’

b. *mert nincsen hová gyűjtsem gyümölcsimet* (Kaldi - 968/Lk\_12/17 - B/48577)

because is\_no where collect.Subj.1Sg fruit.Pl.Poss.1Sg

‘Because I have nowhere to collect my fruits.’

- É. Kiss (2014): the raising number of subjunctive forms
- However in MECs: the status of Infinitive in MECs strengthened.

# Formal properties: The infinitive/ subjunctive

- No difference in the number of inflected and uninflected infinitives.
- Inflected infinitive was still present next to the already inflected *tud* (last example: 1723)

(25) a. *ki miatt nem is tudok mit írnom.*

who due\_to no too can.1Sg what.Acc write.Inf.1Sg

‘Because of him/her, I don’t even know what to write.’

b. *hogy tudhassam magamat mihez alkalmaztatnom,*

so can.Subj.1Sg myself.Acc what.All adapt.Fact/Refl.Inf.1Sg

‘So that I can get myself used to something.’

# Word order

- Elements between the wh-word and the infinitive (mainly adverbs and particles (26a), but also arguments of the infinitive (26b))
- Left-dislocation (26c)

(26) a. *nincs is immár kinek mondanom*  
not\_is either now who.Dat tell.Inf.1Sg

I don't even have anyone to tell now

b. *nem tud nyomorult Leányával mit tenyi*  
no can.3Sg miserable daughter.Poss.3Sg.Instr what.Acc do.Inf

He/She cannot do anything with his/her miserable daughter.

c. *még parancsolni sincs már kinek*  
even command.Inf is\_no anymore who.Dat

'There aren't anyone to give commands to anymore.'

# Use of the construction

- MECs in private correspondences → new contexts
- Mostly used for describing one's inability to do something

(27) a. *A doktor felől most sem tudok kegyelmednek mit írnom.*  
the doctor from now neither can.1Sg your\_grace.Dat what.Acc write.Inf.1Sg  
'I can't write anything about the doctor now either.'

b. *és olyan fájdalmat szenvedett harmad egész napig,*  
and such pain.Acc suffer.Past.3Sg third whole day.Term (OMHC 1064388)  
*hogy nem tudott mit cselekedni fájdalmába.*  
that no can.Past.3Sg what.Acc do.Inf pain.Poss.3Sg.Ine  
'And he suffered from such a pain for three whole days that he couldn't do anything.'

- Šimík (2011): examples such as in (27a) are to be interpreted existentially.... However some cases of *tud* has a pure ability-meaning (27b) (Grosu 2014)

# MECs expressing bouletic modality

- (28) a. *A Hutásokról s egyébek dolgáról nincs mit írnom,*  
the glazier.Pl.Del and other.Pl case.Poss.3Sg is\_not what.Acc write.Inf.1Sg  
*Isten adjon erőt igazgatására.* (OMHC 1062913)  
God give.Imp strength.Acc manage.Poss.3Sg.Sub  
'I can't/don't want to say anything about the glaziers, may God bless you with enough strength to deal with them.'

→ MECs can also express bouletic modality



# Idiomatcity

- Some expressions started to become idiomatic:

(29) a. *Nincs mit tennem, fűttetnem kell.*  
not\_is what.Acc do.Inf.1Sg heat.Caus.1Sg must  
'I have no other choice, I have to heat.'

b. *nem tudtam mire vélni, hogy ennyi ideig*  
no can.Past.1Sg what.Sub believe.Inf that this\_much time.Term  
*Kegyed levele által sem adá tudtunkra*  
your\_grace letter.Poss.3Sg by neither give.Past.3Sg knowledge.Poss.1Pl.Sub  
'I could not understand why you hadn't let us know for so long.'



# Modern Hungarian

(1772-1920, 1920-2010)



## Nincs Hova Hátrálnunk

Oldal · 600 ember kedveli.

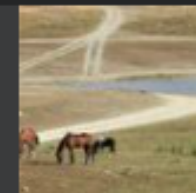
Ez az oldal az összefogás jegyében alakult.

- from the HHC Corpus with
- In HGC (from more than 50 in continuous constructions

Aug. 6. · Nincs mit inniuk és legelniük.

24.hu

Akkora a hőség Kazahsztánban, hogy tömegével pusztulnak el a lovak | 24.hu



244

4 hozzászólás

Üdv! A vizelet glükóz koncentrációja 0,8 mmol/l értékig normális, az ön lelete teljesen negatív. Ezzel valóban nincs mit foglalkozni.

Tetszik · Válasz · 46 p. · Módosítva

"Nincs mit tagadni, valamit nagyon elszámolt Katinka..."



Nincs miről gondolkodni, amiről írtok, az máshol már évek óta szokás.

36 p. Tetszik Válasz 2

Biztos van mit a Pfizernek tejbe aprítania az oltásoknak köszönhetően, de nem ezért hasznjuk a vakcinájukat, hogy legyen még több. Hanem azért, mert jól véd egy fertőző

# Formal properties: The predicate

- Lipták (2003): the available predicates that occur in MECs are *van* ('be'), *akad* ('occur'), *tud* ('can'), *talál* ('find'), *lehet* ('possible'), *nehéz* ('difficult'), *lehetséges* ('possible') and *képtelenség* ('impossibility') + *bír* ('stand')- Šimík (2011)
- In the HHC and HGC: the substantive verb – 70-75%, *tud* 25-30% percent, some examples with *bír* and *akad*, and two other new predicates: *győz* ('afford') and *mer* ('dare').

- (30) a. *Nem győziünk hova lenni a csodálkozástól* (HGC #278003449)  
no afford.1Pl where be.Inf the wondering.Abl
- b. *Itt nem mernék mit mondani.* (HGC #312871634)  
here no dare.Cond.1Sg what.Acc say.Inf

- We didn't find examples with *talál*, *képtelenség* and *lehetséges* (Lipták2003)
- Adjectival predicates: *nehéz* 'difficult' (*nem*) *könnyű* ('not easy'), *képtelen* ('unable'), *képes* ('able').

# Modal verbs in MECs?

- Šimík (2011): the use of a modal verb is exceptional in Hungarian, and besides *tud* there is no other modal verb that can be embedded in MECs.
- $\leftrightarrow$  Szlávich (2018): some data with *kell*, + we also found other verbs: *sikerül* 'manage', *akar* 'want', *szeretne* 'would like'

(31) a. *itt nem kell mit hozzászólni* (HGC #92353486)

here no must what.Acc comment.Inf

b. *a Fry's áruházláncoknak sem sikerül mit kezdeniük a HP üdvöskéjével* (HGC, #460014606)

the Fry's store.Pl.Dat neither manage.3Sg what.Acc begin.Inf.3Pl the HP mascot.Poss3Sg.Inst

c. *Én ezzel nem tudok és nem is akarok mit kezdeni.* (HGC #88190044)

I this.Inst no can.Sg1 and no also want.1Sg what.Acc begin.Inf

d. *Itt élek, nem nagyon szeretnék mit mondani.* (HGC #861943427)

here live.Sg1 no very would\_like.1Sg what.Acc say.Inf

- **Performance mistakes or anything else?** → construction grammar: evidence, that analogy is the main mechanism in language change.
  - idiomatical *wh-word+Infinitive* combinations have begun to “live an independent life” and can also appear beside modal verbs
  - ← in Old Hungarian, there were MECs already containing the modal verb *tud* ‘can’
  - ← familiar relationship with other infinitival constructions
  - ← high frequency of modal verbs within the infinitival constructions
- (Kalivoda (2018), collected all (1506) predicates with an infinitival argument: 70% of the examples contain one of the most frequent modal verbs)
- Infinitives in some possessive constructions (*van kedve, ideje, oka...+Inf*), MECs can also be present in such contexts (32).

(32) *Évekig nem volt kedvük mit kezdeni ezzel.* (HHC, 2005032 (1952))  
 year.Pl.term no be\_past mood.Poss3Pl what.Acc begin.Inf this.Inst

# Formal properties: The wh-word

- Lipták (2003): some wh-words, e.g. *milyen* 'what kind of', *melyik* 'which' and *hány* 'how many' cannot occur beside the substantive verb, only beside *tud*. However, in HGC, we found a dozen of examples with *milyen* (33)

(33) *Nem lesz milyen terméket exportálni.* (HGC #700410380)

no will\_be which\_kind product export.Inf

lit. 'There will be no product to export'

- Lipták (2003): multiple wh-words → MECs are free, headless constructions. – We also found some multiple wh-words in Modern Hungarian corpora, which are not characteristic of the earlier periods. (34)

(34) *Nincs mit mihez mérnünk.* (HGC #35220375)

not\_be what.Acc what.All measure.Inf1Pl.

# Formal properties: The infinitive/subjunctive

- In HHC:
  - 378 + 849 examples with the infinitive and the substantive verb (before and after 1920)
  - 107 + 348 examples with the infinitive and the verb *tud* 'can' (before and after 1920)
  - 35+42 examples with the subjunctive and the substantive verb (before and after 1920)
  - Inflection: 1772-1920    1920-2010

1Sg	38	1Pl	28
2Sg	9	2Pl	2
3Sg	61	3Pl	21
3Sg non inflected	219		

1Sg	94	1Pl	55
2Sg	18	2Pl	5
3Sg	182	3Pl	55
3Sg non inflected	440		



# Formal properties: Word order

- In HHC, 80%: structure is very strict, 30 cases: left dislocation
- Lipták (2003): some elements -- Dat subject – before the wh-item (example (35))
- In around 10% of the examples: other elements: discourse particles (*is* also', *hát* well), adverbs (*már* already, *majd* 'then' *még* 'still') and pronouns.

(35) *volt a presbiternek mit hallani* (HHC, 9487062, 1932)  
be\_Past the presbyter.Dat what.Acc hear.Inf

- Elements between the wh-word and the infinitive: infinitival modifiers or short adverbs.
- Šimík (2011): sluicing is also possible (example 36)

(36) *A férfi nem is dolgozik, mert nincs hol (dolgoznia).* (HHC 1034001, 1976)  
the man no also work.3Sg since not\_is where (work.Inf)

→ 2 lexicalized forms emerge from the data (37):

(37) a. *nincs miből (élni, kifizetni)*  
not\_be what.Ela  
b. *nincs mit (megköszönni)*  
not\_be what.Acc

# Use of the construction

- negations
- highly frequent patterns which are more idiomatic
- In the period (1772-1920):

(38) *nem tud hova lenni örömében.../ az örömtől...*  
no can.3Sg where be.Inf joy.Poss3Sg.Ine/ the joy.Abl  
'To walk on air.'

- is used to express an extreme intensive emotion, which is hard to control → not typical today, only in literary texts.

- In Modern Hungarian (from 1920) the most typical constructions are:

(39) a. *nem tud mit kezdeni (vele)*

no can what.Acc begin.Inf (with it)

b. *nincs mit tenni*

not\_is what.Acc do.Inf

c. *nem tudja hova tenni*

no can.DefObj.3Sg where do.Inf

	lemma	word	lemma	Freq	
p/n tud	mit	kezd	6946		
p/n tud	mit	mond	2103		
p/n nincs	mit	tesz	1679		
p/n tud	mit	tesz	1218		
p/n tud	mit	csinál	1155		
p/n van	mit	tesz	1101		
p/n tud	hova	tesz	656		
p/n tud	mire	vél	623		
p/n nincs	mit	csodálkozik	561		
p/n lehet	mit	kezd	523		
p/n nincs	miről	beszél	478		
p/n van	mit	tanul	445		
p/n nincs	mit	mond	431		
p/n nincs	mitől	fél	429		
p/n nincs	mit	csinál	429		
p/n van	mit	eszik	418		

- Example (40) discusses the consequences of the Hungarian change of regime. With this construct the speaker expresses the nation's inability to use the opportunities with the democratic transition.

(40) *az ország nem tudott mit kezdeni a történelmi sansszal.*

the country no can.Past.3Sg what.Acc begin.Inf the historical chance.Inst

- *Nincs mit tenni*: typically used in the informal register when the speaker wants to convey that s/he has no opportunity to act, or it is not worth making any effort and has already accepted this state. In addition, speakers often express their regret, at the same time indicating that they have no influence on the course of events.

(41) *Ha nincs mit tenni, fogadjuk el, és tanuljunk belőle.* (HGC #1192198523)

if not\_is what.Acc do.Inf accept.DefObj.Imp.1Pl and learn.Imp1Pl from\_it

lit. 'If there is nothing to do, let's accept it and learn from it.'



# Summary

- We can establish, that MECs were already “complete” for Old Hungarian:
  - the pattern was productive
  - the three compulsory elements were fixed
  - the core meaning of them was the same as in Modern Hungarian (to express that the availability of a proposition is possible or not)
  - they appeared mainly in denials
  - and were mostly infinitival in nature. Although the infinitive could also be inflected after the verb *tud*, it was not only characteristic of MECs but of other infinitival constructions with a modal verb in Old Hungarian → a close relationship with other infinitival constructions
  - the status of the *wh*-word was vague → familiar relationship with „existential relative”.
- Regarding word order, MECs were more fixed in earlier periods, than in Modern Hungarian, and there were fewer possible predicates → the *wh-word+Inf* combination begin to live a new, independent life besides other predicates – ANALOGY!
- The main constructional change: certain structures have turned idiomatic over time, which are the most frequent examples in today’s corpora → further research: idiomaticity-continuum of MECs

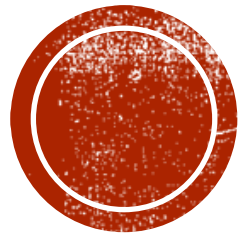
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