

Reconstructing the decoupling of case and agreement in Old Hungarian: Evidence from epithets and names as syntactic fossils¹

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The interdependence of accusative case and object agreement has changed dramatically during the history of Ugric languages. While Proto-Ugric exhibited full interdependence (mediated by topicality), this connection has loosened in the extant Ob-Ugric languages (Mansi and Khanty) and it is severed completely in Late to Modern Hungarian. In this paper, I introduce new, hitherto unreported empirical evidence (from nicknames and family names that preserve archaic syntactic features) for an intermediate stage of Early Old Hungarian (which predates our earliest written records) where case assignment was still a function of topicality but object agreement was already a function of definiteness. In addition to providing insight into an unrecorded stage of Hungarian, my findings also contribute to a more thorough understanding of the connection between case, agreement and information structure in Ugric and beyond.

1 Introduction

According to Baker (2015) case and agreement can be (A) interdependent, (B) partially independent or (C) independent. É. Kiss (2020) argued that within the Ugric family, extinct Eastern Mansi and reconstructed Proto-Ugric exemplified (A), the Ob-Ugric languages of today (Mansi and Khanty) display (B) and Modern Hungarian is an example of (C). In Eastern Mansi, only topical objects elicited verbal agreement (so-called object agreement) and only topical objects received accusative case. In the other Ob-Ugric variants, while verbal agreement is still a function of topicality, all objects are assigned structural accusative case independently of their discourse role. In Modern Hungarian, all objects are assigned structural and morphological

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accusative case, and object agreement on the verb is triggered by definite objects² (independently of discourse function): thus, both agreement and case assignment are fully independent from discourse function. É. Kiss (2020) also argued that this change (A->B->C) is due to the loosening of the strict SOV structure of Proto-Ugric: the increasing frequency of post-verbal objects in Ob-Ugric (SVO) and the development of a discourse functional left periphery (Top Foc V X*) in Hungarian.

As far as the Ob-Ugric languages (dialects of Mansi and Khanty) are concerned, the diachronic pathway has been mapped in great detail (É. Kiss 2020). However, with Hungarian, this has proved more difficult as Late Old Hungarian (the earliest period from which we have surviving texts, 12th C) had pretty much the same system in terms of accusative case assignment and object agreement as Modern Hungarian. Fossilized constructions detectable in Late Old Hungarian (SOV non-finite embedded clauses with non-case-marked objects) and in Middle Hungarian (variable object agreement with topical indefinite objects) led É. Kiss (2020) to argue that Early Old Hungarian must have been similar to 19th-century Eastern Mansi (and, thus, reconstructed Proto-Ugric) having SOV word order, with topicalized objects eliciting verbal agreement and receiving morphologically realized structural accusative case.

In my paper, I introduce new, hitherto unreported empirical evidence for an intermediate stage between the hypothetical Eastern Mansi-like Early Old Hungarian and Late Old Hungarian (of which we have textual evidence). Personal names (such as nicknames or nickname-derived family names) often preserve archaic features of phonology, morphology, and even syntax (for the latter, cf. Layton 1990 and Bower 1998). Of peculiar interest for us is the cross-linguistically well-attested strategy of turning a clause-sized element into an adjective or noun without any morphological marking. This is mostly used to create slurs or nicknames based on a characteristic trait: a typical and defining attitude, disposition, or activity:

- (1) *know-nothing* ‘does not know anything’ -> ‘ignoramus’ (English)

² In Late Old to Modern Hungarian, definite objects elicit object agreement (this is also called the definite conjugation paradigm) whereas with an indefinite object or no object altogether, there is no object agreement (this is also called the indefinite conjugation paradigm):

- (i) *Mari ír-Ø.*
 Mary write-3SG
 ‘Mary is writing.’
- (ii) *Mari egy cikk-et ír-Ø.*
 Mari a paper-ACC write-3SG
 ‘Mary is writing a paper.’
- (iii) *Mari élet-e főműv-é-t írj-Ø-ja.*
 Mari life-3SG magnum.opus-3SG-ACC write-3SG-OBJ
 ‘Mary is writing her magnum opus.’

For more detailed accounts, consider Coppock (2013, 2022) Bányai (2017), Bartos (2000, 2001), Den Dikken (2004), É. Kiss (2013b, 2017) a.o.

- (2) *vau-rien* 'is worth nothing' -> 'useless person' (French)

Such epithets often develop into family names and are preserved as such:

- (3) *Shakespeare, Makepeace, Drinkwater* (English)
(4) *Boileau* (= *boit l'eau* drinks the water -> teetotaler) (French)

Modern Hungarian has a set of such epithets/names which preserve a peculiar syntactic pattern: a non-casemarked object followed by a verb carrying the object agreement suffix:³

- (5) *hús-(nem)-esz-Ø-i*
wine-not-drink-3SG-OBJ
'wine-lover/teetotaler', lit. 'drinks (not) wine'
(6) *ló-dönt-Ø⁴-i*
horse-topple-3SG-OBJ
'strong enough to topple a horse', lit.: 'topples horse'

This pattern is unexpected as in Modern Hungarian, objects are obligatorily overtly accusative-marked independently of their informational structural status (topical or otherwise) or their definiteness. As I will argue below, these fossils represent an earlier stage of Hungarian where accusative case assignment was still a function of topicality (with only topicalized objects receiving accusative case, as is the case in Proto-Ugric and all the Ob-Ugric varieties), but object agreement was already a function of definiteness and not of topicality (similarly to the situation in Late Old to Modern Hungarian). This suggests that Hungarian traversed a different path than its Ob-Ugric sisters: the agreement-topicality link was severed first and the case assignment-topicality link was severed later:

³ This strategy is not limited to transitive verbs with an overt object. Sentences (i) without an object (ii) or with a silent pro object (Hungarian being a pro-drop language) have also been turned into epithets (cf. the Appendix):

- (i) *jö-tt-Ø-men-t-Ø*
come-PST-3SG-go-PST-3SG
'(he/she) came and went' -> 'rootless newcomer, carpetbagger'
(ii) *pro-hány-Ø-ja-vet-Ø-i*
it-scatter-3SG-OBJ-throw-3SG-OBJ
'lobs it around and scatters it wide' -> 'careless, negligent'

⁴ The 3SG subject agreement suffix is phonologically null (silent) in Hungarian. All the other subject agreement suffixes have are non-silent.

Table 1. Topicality, agreement, and accusative case assignment in the Ugric Languages

	Proto-Ugric, E Mansi	E & N Khanty, N Mansi	Reconstr. Early Old Hungarian	Modern Hungarian
Object agr. is a function of:	Topicality	Topicality	Definiteness	Definiteness
Acc. case is assigned to:	Topical objects	All objects	Topical objects	All objects

That is, in this reconstructed stage of Early Old Hungarian, in-situ (non-topicalized) objects received nominative case, and moved (topicalized) objects received accusative case, similarly to Proto-Ugric and the Ob-Ugric languages. However, as far as object agreement was concerned, Early Old Hungarian was more innovative: in a departure from Proto-Ugric and the known Ob-Ugric varieties, object agreement was already sensitive to the [+definite] feature, as opposed to [+topic]. Such a change from [+topic]-sensitivity to [+definite]-sensitivity is a cross-linguistically well-attested phenomenon (facilitated by the shared component of specificity/givenness, cf. Givón 1975:158) and it is a development that is orthogonal to whether *v* is a soft or a hard phase head.

The paper is organized as follows. In Chapter 2, I discuss the landscape of case and agreement in Ugric and the challenge of Hungarian. In Chapter 3, I present the new evidence: archaic syntax preserved in names and epithets. In Chapter 4, I put forward my proposal formulated in terms of dependent case theory and phases, and address two potential challenges to my analysis. The conclusions are given in Chapter 5. Appendix 1 contains the full list of all the relevant names and epithets I compile from a broad range of sources.

2 Case and Agreement in Ugric, and the Challenge of Hungarian

Ugric languages constitute a branch of the wider Finno-Ugric family (which is itself part of the Uralic family). Ugric languages include the Ob-Ugric languages: critically endangered varieties of Mansi and Khanty spoken in Western Siberia (around 2 thousand and 14 thousand speakers, respectively); and Hungarian, spoken mostly in Hungary, neighbouring countries and the wider diaspora (around 13 million speakers).

The landscape of accusative case assignment and object agreement in Ugric has been mapped by É. Kiss (2020) in considerable detail. Following Baker's (2015) taxonomy, É. Kiss (2020) argued that within the Ugric family, extinct Eastern Mansi and reconstructed Proto-Ugric exhibit a total interdependence of case and agreement, the Ob-Ugric languages of today

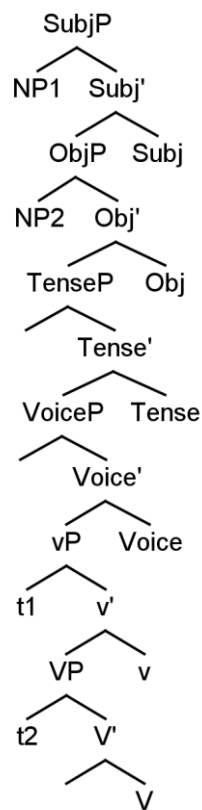
(Northern Mansi and Northern and Eastern Khanty) exhibit a partial interdependence and Late Old to Modern Hungarian is an example of total independence.

The link connecting case assignment and object agreement in Ugric is information structure. In Eastern Mansi (Kulonen 1989, Virtanen 2012, 2015), the most conservative (and by now, extinct) Ob-Ugric dialect, there is a complete fusion of topicality and argument hierarchy. The word order is strictly SOV. Subjects obligatorily function as the so-called primary topic of the clause (so much so that in case a subject is not appropriately topical, being non-referential or non-specific, obligatorily passivisation occurs involving the demotion of the subject to a by-phrase and the promotion of a referential or specific object to subject position). Discourse-old objects are accusative-marked and elicit object-verb agreement (7a), whereas discourse-new objects are uncase-marked and do not elicit object-verb agreement (7b):

- (7) a. *pro ððw-mø öät kont-iil-ø̃m.*
 1SG door-ACC NEG find-SG-1SG
 ‘I don’t find the door.’ (Eastern Mansi, Virtanen 2014: 405)
- b. *Kom jowt-nyððl wø-s.*
 man bow-arrow take-PST.3SG
 ‘The man took a bow and an arrow.’ (Eastern Mansi, Virtanen 2014: 407)

É. Kiss (2020) argues that discourse-old objects are extracted from the verb phrase (VP) and moved to a so-called secondary topic position, where they enter into an agreement relation with the verb and are assigned accusative case; whereas discourse-new objects remain in situ within the VP, do not enter into an agreement relation and fail to receive accusative case. Considering these facts and other evidence (such as adjunct placement patterns), É. Kiss (2020) proposes the following structure for Eastern Mansi (and reconstructed Proto-Ugric):

(8)



Subjects are base generated in the specifier of vP (t1) and moved to the specifier of SubjP (NP1). Discourse-old (topical) objects are base-generated in the specifier of VP (t2) and moved to the specifier position of ObjP (NP2). Discourse-new objects are base-generated in t2 and remain there. The heads of the subject phrase and the object phrase (Subj and Obj) are spelled out as subject and object agreement suffixes.

É. Kiss (2020) provides an account for the case-marking properties in terms of dependent case theory (Marantz 1991, Baker 2005), making the crucial assumption that vP and SubjP represent two phases⁵, i.e., two separate spellout domains for case assignment. In case the object is topicalized, it ends up in a single domain with the subject (SubjP, meaning the span from V to SubjP, since vP, being a phase, has already been sent to spellout and is thus, in essence, invisible for further syntactic operations): since nominative case goes to the subject, the

⁵ According to standard generative assumptions, the derivation of a clause proceeds in a bottom-up fashion and by phases: roughly speaking, a phase is a chunk of syntactic structure that is considered closed (impenetrable) for further syntactic operations: once a so-called phase head (such as v) has been inserted, the sister (complement) of that head becomes impenetrable: no element can leave it by movement and its contents become inaccessible for operations involving an element external to the phase (Chomsky 2001).

topicalized objects receives accusative case.⁶ If the object remains in situ, it ends up being the only NP within its spellout domain (vP) and thus, it receives nominative case.

In other, more innovative and non-extinct variants of Ob-Ugric (Nikolaeva 1999, Csepregi 1997, 2019, Asztalos, Gugán & Mus 2017, Riese 2001, Skribnik 2001, Sosa 2017, Filchenko 2007, Bíró & Sípócz 2017), verbal agreement is still a function of topicality. However, the link between accusative case assignment and topicality is severed. All objects are assigned structural accusative case independently of discourse role: pronominal objects are overtly accusative-marked, whereas lexical objects have a phonologically null allomorph of the accusative morpheme. (This means that morphological accusative case is still partially correlated to discourse function, as pronominal objects are likelier to be topics than lexical objects.) Consider (reproduced from É. Kiss 2020:411):

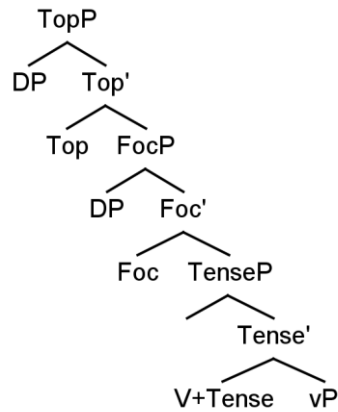
- (9) a. *Vera* *liiw-at* *wū -a-təγ*.
 Vera she-ACC know-PRES-SG<3SG
 ‘Vera knows him/her.’ (EK, Márta Csepregi, fieldwork)
- b. (We are good friends. He understands me. And, conversely:)
Ma *liiw-at* *toηəmtə-λ-əm*.
 I he-ACC understand-PRES-1SG
 ‘I understand him.’ (EK, Sosa 2017: 180)

Personal pronouns are typically topical, and in such cases, they elicit verbal agreement (9a). Non-topical pronouns emerge in contrastive contexts, and they fail to elicit verbal agreement (9b). Independently from topicality, however, the pronominal objects are structurally and morphologically accusative-marked. To account for these patterns, É. Kiss (2020) argues that the innovative Ob-Ugric dialects have the same basic syntactic structure as Eastern Mansi (and Proto-Ugric), with the difference that vP and SubjP are not separate phases, i.e., they do not form independent spellout domains. This means that independently of topicality, the object is always in the same domain as the subject (and c-commanded by it), and as a result, it always receives accusative case.

In contrast to its Ob-Ugric sister languages, Modern Hungarian is no longer SOV and it has a richly articulated discourse-functional left periphery, with dedicated and movement-derived topic and focus positions:

⁶ “If there are two distinct NPs in the same spellout domain such that NP1 c-commands NP2, then value the case feature of NP2 as accusative unless NP1 has already been marked for case.” (Baker 2015: 48)

(10)



An object can thus be found in one of three positions. Discourse-functionally neutral objects remain in situ (within the vP), in a post-verbal position; focused objects are preverbal and induce particle-verb inversion; topical objects are also preverbal but they do not induce particle-verb inversion. Consider:

- (11) a. *Mari el-olvas-t-a-Ø⁷ a könyv-et.*
Mary PRT-read-PAST-OBJ-3SG the book-ACC
'Mary read the book.' (discourse functionally neutral, definite object)
- b. *Mari el-olvas-ott-Ø egy könyv-et.*
Mary PRT-read-PAST-3SG a book-ACC
'Mary read a book.' (discourse functionally neutral, indefinite object)
- c. *Mari a könyv-et olvas-t-a-Ø el.*
Mary the book-ACC read-PAST-OBJ-3SG PRT
'It was the book that Mary read.' (focus-moved, definite object)
- d. *Mari egy könyv-et olvas-ott-Ø el.*
Mary a book-ACC read-PAST-3SG PRT
'It was a book that Mary read.' (focus-moved, indefinite object)
- e. *Mari a könyv-et el-olvas-t-a-Ø.*
Mary the book-ACC PRT-read-PAST-OBJ-3SG
'As for the book, Mary read it.' (topicalized, definite object)
- f. *Mari egy könyv-et el-olvas-ott-Ø.*
Mary a book-ACC PRT-read-PAST-3SG

⁷ The 3SG subject agreement suffix is phonologically null, indicated as Ø.

‘As for a certain book, Mary read it.’ (topicalized, indefinite object)

As can be seen in (11), in Modern Hungarian, all objects are assigned structural and morphological accusative case, and object agreement on the verb is triggered by definite objects (independently of discourse function): thus, both agreement and case assignment are fully independent from discourse function.

É. Kiss (2020) argued that the gradual separation of agreement and case from topicality was due to the loosening of the strict SOV structure of Proto-Ugric: the increasing frequency of post-verbal objects in Ob-Ugric (SVO) and the development of a discourse functional left periphery (Top Foc V X*) in Hungarian. As far as Ob-Ugric languages (dialects of Mansi and Khanty) are concerned, the diachronic changes have been mapped in great detail (É. Kiss 2020). Hungarian, however, has proved to be more of a challenge since Late Old Hungarian (the earliest period from which we have surviving texts, 12th C) had the same system in terms of accusative case assignment and object agreement as Modern Hungarian. It is only through some fossilized constructions that were still detectable in Late Old to Middle Hungarian that we have been able to gain some insight into the case and agreement system of undocumented Early Old Hungarian.

The constructions include SOV⁸ non-finite participial embedded clauses with non-case-marked (or nominal-marked)⁹ objects in Late Old Hungarian:

- (12) [*ŕ è gondol-uan*] *yme vr-nac angala ièlen-e-c nèk-i*
he this think-PTCP lo Lord-DAT angel-3SG appear-PST-3SG DAT-3SG
‘Him having thought this, the Lord's angel appeared to him.’
Munich Codex (1416/1466): p. 8 verso)¹⁰

The other relevant fossilized construction is variable object agreement with topical indefinite objects. While in Modern Hungarian, indefinite objects fail to trigger verbal object agreement, up until Middle Hungarian, topical indefinite objects (such as relative pronouns with a topical antecedent) had the potential to do so:

- (13) *Boldog asszony az olyan, [aki-t gyermek-estől együtt vesz-ik meg]*
happy woman that one who-ACC child-SOC together buy-3<3PL PRT

⁸ In terms of surface word order, Modern Hungarian exhibits mixed word order. Informational structurally neutral sentences are VSO or VOS, but due to the prevalence of topicalization, SVO, OVS, or indeed SOV or OSV are also amply attested. SVO is the most frequent surface word order (as subjects are likelier to be topicalized than objects). It has been argued recently that Hungarian is still an OV language below the surface (Halm 2021), this, however, does not affect the generalization concerning surface word order.

⁹ In Hungarian, nominal case is morphologically unmarked.

¹⁰ Cited by É. Kiss (2020:417).

‘Happy is the woman who is bought together with her child.’ (Literally: ‘Happy is the woman whom they buy together with her child.’) (Mikes 1794: 136)¹¹

Based on these data, É. Kiss (2020) argued that Early Old Hungarian must have been similar to 19th-century Eastern Mansi (and reconstructed Proto-Ugric) having SOV word order, with topicalized objects (and only topicalized objects) eliciting verbal agreement and receiving morphologically realized structural accusative case.

3 New evidence – Archaic syntax preserved in personal names

Personal names (such as nicknames or nickname-derived family names) often preserve archaic features of phonology, morphology, and even syntax (for the latter, cf. Layton 1990 and Bowerman 1998). Of peculiar interest for our purposes is the cross-linguistically well-attested strategy of turning a clause-sized element into an adjective or noun without any morphological marking. This is mostly used to create epithets or nicknames based on a characteristic trait: a typical and defining attitude, disposition, or activity. Such constructions are attested in a variety of languages (see examples in the introduction). Modern Hungarian has a set of such epithets/names¹² which preserve a peculiar syntactic pattern: a non-casemarked object followed by a verb carrying the object agreement suffix:

(14) *bor-(nem)-isz-Ø-sza*

wine-not-drink-3SG-OBJ

‘drinks (not) wine’ -> ‘wine-lover / teetotaler’

(15) *hús-(nem)-esz-Ø-i*

meat-not-eat-3SG-OBJ

‘eats (not) meat’ -> ‘meat-eater / -avoider’

(16) *ló-dönt-Ø-i*

horse-topple-3SG-OBJ

‘topples horse’ -> ‘strong enough to topple a horse’

(17) *maga-hány-Ø-ja-vet-Ø-i*

self-scatter-3SG-OBJ-throw-3SG-OBJ

‘scatters and throws self’ -> ‘boastful’

¹¹ Cited by É. Kiss (2020:422).

¹² Altogether 56, all of which are listed in the Appendix.

The availability of reflexive objects (17) indicates that these are underlyingly full sentences with a syntactically active 3SG subject:¹³

- (18) *pro*_{3SG} *hús nem esz-Ø-i* (*Early Old Hungarian)
 she meat not eat-3SG-OBJ
 ‘She does not eat meat.’

The obligatory verb-final word order and the position of the negator (O Neg V) reflect the reconstructed word order of Early Old Hungarian (É. Kiss 2013a). The absence of verbal particles is also indicative of an archaic, pre-Late Old Hungarian provenance.

Given the meaning of these sentences, the object is unlikely to be a discourse-old topic: these epithets can be used to characterize someone without any preceding discourse context. Note also that in Modern Hungarian, a full-sentence equivalent would have a non-topicalized, in-situ object:

- (19) *Az unokám nem esz-Ø-i meg a húst.*
 the grandchild.1SG not eat-3SG-OBJ PRT the meat.ACC
 ‘My grandchild does not eat any meat.’

This leaves the option that object agreement here is already sensitive to definiteness (as it is in Late Old Hungarian). The question at this point is whether it is reasonable to assume that the object in sentences such as (18) is indeed definite. Note first that the reflexive pronoun *maga* ‘self’ is indisputably definite (20) in Late Old to Modern Hungarian:

- (20) *ki magát alazanga felmagasztatic*
ki magá-t aláz-and-Ø-ja fel-magaszt-at-ik
 who self-ACC humble-FUT-3SG-OBJ PRT-exalt-PASS-3SG
 ‘Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.’
 Vienna Codex 246, mid-15th C (Late Old Hungarian)

Focusing on the examples with non-pronominal (i.e., lexical) objects, one has to note that the lack of a definite article does not signal indefiniteness: Early Old Hungarian, similarly to most Uralic languages, lacked articles (definite or indefinite) altogether: definite articles are a Late Old Hungarian development (cf. I. Gallasy 1992, Bakró-Nagy 1999, Egedi 2013, 2014).

A more relevant common characteristic of these sentences is that they provide a general characterization of the subject’s attitude/disposition/relationship with regard to the object:

¹³ Since the 3SG subject agreement suffix is phonologically null in Hungarian (Old and Modern alike), there is no way to gather direct morphological evidence for its presence or absence.

whether she eats meat / drinks wine / topples horses in general. In other words, the object is generically interpreted. Crucially, in Hungarian, singular definite DPs can freely receive a generic interpretation (see also (19) above):

(21) *János szőrén ül-Ø-i meg a lovat.* (Modern H)

John hair.3SG.on sit-3SG-OBJ PRT the horse.ACC

‘John rides horses without a saddle.’

(22) *Mari szeret-Ø-i a bort.* (Modern H)

Mary like-3SG-OBJ the wine-ACC.

‘Mary likes wine.’

Thus it is reasonable to assume that the generically interpreted object in (20) was indeed definite in Early Old Hungarian too (cf. Egedi 2013:378 for a detailed argument), and object agreement on the verb was indeed triggered by definiteness.¹⁴

These fossils thus arguably represent a stage where object agreement was already a function of definiteness (and not of topicality) and non-topicalized lexical noun phrase objects were morphologically non-casemarked. This latter fact may either indicate that non-topicalized objects were not assigned accusative case (as in Eastern Mansi and reconstructed Proto-Ugric) or that objects in general were assigned accusative case, the exponent of which in the case of lexical nouns was a phonologically null accusative morpheme (as in Eastern Khanty, Northern Khanty and Northern Mansi). The fact that in (17), the reflexive pronoun has no visible case marking supports the former position. This suggests that Hungarian traversed a different path than its Ob-Ugric sisters. In Hungarian, the agreement-topicality link was severed first and the case assignment-topicality link was severed later; whereas in Ob-Ugric, the case assignment-topicality link was severed first, and the agreement-topicality link is still intact (cf. Table 1 above).

¹⁴ When the object is lexically specified as indefinite (such as the universal quantifier *minden*), or there is no object at all, we witness a lack of object agreement (OBJ), as expected:

(i) *minden-tud-Ø*

everything-know-3SG

‘knows everything’ -> ‘know-all’

(ii) *ingyér-ád-Ø*

for.free-give-3SG

‘gives without asking for anything in return’ -> ‘munificent, generous’

4 Analysis

In this chapter, I first present my proposal: I argue that Early Old Hungarian was conservative in having a Proto-Ugric-like syntax where the minimal verb phrase formed a separate case assignment domain; however, it was also innovative in that object agreement was already sensitive to definiteness (as opposed to topicality). Afterwards, I discuss two potential challenges to my proposal: I will argue against the possibility of an incorporation analysis and provide an account for the underrepresentation of the *-ja* allomorph of the OBJ object agreement suffix.

4.1 A dependent case analysis of Early Old Hungarian

To recapitulate, É. Kiss (2020) proposed the following sentence structure for (conservative, strictly SOV) Ob-Ugric (see (8) above):

(23) [_{SubjP} Subject [_{ObjP} Topical object [_{Voice P} [_{vP} [_{VP} Non-topical object]]]]]

Non-topical objects remain in-situ inside the minimal verb phrase (VP), whereas topicalized objects move to a position external to the extend verb phrase (vP). Furthermore, proposing a dependent-case style analysis (Baker 2015), she argued that the interdependence or otherwise of accusative case assignment and topicality is a function of whether SubjP and vP are separate domains for case assignment. If they are (in other words, if *v* is a hard phase head), then non-topical objects, being in a separate case assignment domain from the subject, receive nominative case, whereas topical objects, being in the same case assignment domain as the subject, receive accusative case (Proto-Ugric, Eastern-Mansi). This is shown below:

(24) [-----case ass. domain 1-----] [----case ass. domain 2-----]
[_{SubjP} Subject [_{ObjP} Topical object [_{Voice P} [_{vP} [_{VP} Non-topical object]]]]]
 NOM ACC NOM

If *v* is a soft phase head then the whole Subject Phrase (SubjP) forms a single case assignment domain. In this case, only the subject receives nominative case and the object receives accusative case independently of whether it has been topicalized or remained in situ (Eastern and Northern Khanty, Northern Mansi, Late Old to Modern Hungarian):

(25) [-----case assignment domain-----]
[_{SubjP} Subject [_{ObjP} Topical object [_{Voice P} [_{vP} [_{VP} Non-topical object]]]]]
 NOM ACC ACC

I argue that in the stage of Early Old Hungarian that is preserved in the nickname construction under discussion, the sentence still had the structure shown in (24), and *v* was still a hard phase head (as it was in Proto-Ugric and Eastern Mansi): non-topical objects, being in a separate case assignment domain from the subject, received nominative case (and thus no visible case marking, as nominative is morphologically unmarked in Hungarian).

Object agreement, on the other hand, was already sensitive to the [+definite] feature, as opposed to [+topic] (in a departure from Proto-Ugric and the known Ob-Ugric varieties). Such a change from [+topic]-sensitivity to [+definite]-sensitivity is a cross-linguistically well-attested phenomenon (facilitated by the shared component of specificity/givenness, cf. Givón 1975:158) and it is a development that is orthogonal to whether *v* is a soft or a hard phase head. In other words, the case-agreement-topicality link can, in effect, be broken down into two independent links: the case-topicality link and the agreement-topicality link. Since these two are independent, any one of the two can be severed independently of the other: there is no ‘natural order’ in which the severing of the two links is supposed to happen. And indeed, both of the logically possible orders have been instantiated diachronically: by Ob-Ugric (Mansi and Khanty) on the one hand, and Hungarian on the other.

4.2 Against an incorporation analysis

Before concluding, there are two potential challenges to our analysis that need to be addressed. The first one concerns a potential alternative analysis. Since the objects in the construction under investigation are non-case-marked and they directly precede the verb (unless a negator intervenes), one might be inclined to propose an object incorporation analysis. However, such an analysis is manifestly unfeasible for a variety of reasons. Consider first that incorporated objects in Hungarian fail to elicit object agreement (unlike the objects in our construction):

(26) a. *Mari meccs-et néz-Ø.*

Mary match-ACC watch-3SG

b. **Mari meccs-et néz-Ø-i.*

Mary match-ACC watch-3SG-OBJ

‘Mary is watching a match.’ (=‘Mary is engaged in match-watching.’)

Also, incorporated objects are obligatorily accusative-marked (certainly in finite clauses, with non-finite clauses, there is dialectal variation¹⁵):

- (27) a. *János meccs-et néz-Ø.*
 John match-ACC watch-3SG
 b. **János meccs néz-Ø.*
 John match watch-3SG

And, crucially, modified objects are attested in the construction under discussion, which in itself excludes an incorporation analysis:

- (28) a. [*egyéb szesz*]-isz-sza¹⁶
 other spirit-drink-OBJ.3SG
 ‘drinker of other spirits’
 b. [*csak víz*]-isz-sza¹⁷
 only water-drink-OBJ.3SG
 ‘drinker of water only’

4.3 The underrepresentation of the *-ja* allomorph

In Late Old to Modern Hungarian, the object agreement suffix (OBJ) is subject to allomorphy conditioned by (i) the subject agreement suffix and (ii) by the vowel quality of the verbal stem. In case the subject agreement suffix is 3SG (phonologically null), OBJ has two allomorphs in standard Modern Hungarian: *-ja* (which attaches to stems with back vowels) and *-i* (which attaches to stems with front vowels):¹⁸

¹⁵ In non-finite clauses, non-case-marked incorporated objects are attested in some dialects (I would like to thank Katalin É. Kiss for drawing my attention to this):

(i) *Megy-ek szőlő kapál-ni.*
 go-1SG vine hoe-INF
 ‘I am going out to hoe the vines.’

¹⁶ The full locus is the following (<http://forum.index.hu/Article/viewArticle?a=103469583&t=9048586>, created on September 16th, 2010, retrieved on January 18th, 2023):

(i) *Szerintem bor-, sör- és egyéb szesz-isz-Ø-sza közönsége*
 according.to.me wine beer and other spirit-drink-3SG-OBJ audience.3SG
könnyen össze is dobhatná az erre valót.
 easily PRT too throw.POSS.COND.3SG.OBJ the this.for due.ACC

‘I think his wine-, beer- and assorted spirit-drinking audience could easily put together what is needed for this.’

¹⁷ The full locus is the following (Döbrentei 1842: 269):

(i) [*Berzsenyi*] *bor-nem-isz-Ø-sza, vagy csak víz-isz-Ø-sza volt.*
 Berzsenyi wine-not-drink-3SG-OBJ or only water-drink-3SG-OBJ was
 ‘Berzsenyi was a wine-avoider, or rather, someone who drank only water.’

¹⁸ For a detailed discussion of vowel harmony in Hungarian, cf. Rebrus & Törkenczy 2015 and references.

- (29) a. *Mari néz-Ø-i a naplementét.*
 Mary look-3SG-OBJ the sunset.ACC
 ‘Mary is watching the sunset.’
- b. *Mari bámul-Ø-ja a naplementét.*
 Mary gaze-3SG-OBJ the sunset.ACC
 ‘Mary is gazing at the sunset.’

In the surviving examples, verbs which elicit the *-ja* allomorph of the OBJ suffix are somewhat underrepresented: our corpus includes 56 epithets/names, which include 30 verbs, out of which: 19 are front stems with a front OBJ suffix (*-i*), 5 are back stems with a back OBJ suffix (*-ja*), 6 are back stems with a front OBJ suffix (*-i*). In tabulated format:

Table 2: Stem-OBJ patterns

		OBJ suffix		
		front	back	<i>total</i>
stem	front	19	0	<i>19</i>
	back	6	5	<i>11</i>
	<i>total</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>30</i>

There are two striking patterns here: (i) the relatively high frequency of the irregular back stem – front suffix combination and (ii) the resulting overall dominance of the front suffix (25 out of 30).

(30) below is an example of the irregular pattern: a case where we find the *-i* allomorph even though, certainly in the standard dialect, we would expect *-ja* (in line with vowel harmony patterns):

- (30) *szar-a-rág-Ø-i* attested but unexpected
 shit-3SG-chew-OBJ.3SG
- szar-a-rág-Ø-ja* expected but unattested
 shit-3SG-chew-OBJ.3SG
- ‘stingy’, lit. ‘chews his/her own shit’

What explains the availability and high relative frequency of this irregular pattern? I propose that there are two reasons for the emergence of this pattern. The first is that historically, in many non-standard dialects of Hungarian, OBJ only had a single allomorph *-i* (Szabó 1902, Melich 1913, Horger 1931, Imre 1971): this means that this pattern, while irregular in the standard dialect, counts as regular in many non-standard dialects.

The second reason is that a strong analogical effect might have helped the survival (and indeed predominance) of the *-i* forms in epithets: namely, the existence of an unrelated but homophonous adjectivizing *-i* suffix which also happens to be used in epithets:

- | | | | | |
|------|----|------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| (31) | a. | <i>csoszog-i</i> | shuffle.feet _v -ADJ | ‘foot-dragger’ |
| | b. | <i>ki-vagy-i</i> | who-be.2SG-ADJ | ‘pretentious’ |
| | c. | <i>vigyor-i</i> | grin _N -ADJ | ‘prone to an easy smile’ |

This *-i* suffix is clearly different from both the *-i* (OBJ) suffix and the standard diminutive suffix (which also happens to have the phonological form of *-i*). This epithet-*i* is omnivorous in the sense that it can attach to verb stems (31a), conjugated verb forms (31b) or even nouns (31c). It is non-harmonic, having a single allomorph (*-i*). Unlike the standard diminutive *-i*, it is non-templatic (the standard diminutive *-i* always has a two-syllable output: *aranyos* ‘cute’ -> *ari* ‘cute-DIM’). And, unlike the standard diminutive, it typically induces a change of word class, turning whatever input it receives into an adjective.¹⁹ But, crucially for our purposes, it is an *-i* suffix that features prominently in epithets, and as such, it may have played a reinforcing role by way of analogy, helping the spread of the dialectally available non-harmonic form (back stem – front vowel).

5 Conclusion

In my paper, I examined a peculiar syntactic pattern of Early Old Hungarian that was fossilized and preserved in certain epithets and names: a non-casemarked object followed by a verb displaying object agreement. I argued that these fossils represent crucial new evidence which helps us to reconstruct how case assignment and object agreement worked in Early Old Hungarian, a stage of Hungarian of which we have no written records whatsoever. I have shown that Early Old Hungarian represented a transitional stage between Proto-Ugric (where both case assignment and object agreement depended on topicality) and Late Old to Modern Hungarian (where both case assignment and object agreement are independent of topicality). In Early Old Hungarian, case assignment was still a function of topicality but object agreement was already a function of definiteness. This is a pattern that differs from what we have seen in other Ugric languages, where the agreement-topicality link was severed first and the case-topicality link

¹⁹ I am thankful to Péter Rebrus for discussion on the morphophonology of this diminutive suffix.

only later. My findings thus fill a gap in the history of Hungarian (and Ugric) and demonstrate the independence of the agreement-topicality link and the case-topicality link.

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Appendix 1

1. Non-silent object

<i>bor-(nem)-isz-Ø-sza</i>	wine-(not)-drink-3SG-OBJ	‘wine-drinker/avoider’	Benkő (1967) ²⁰
<i>ser-(nem)-isz-Ø-sza</i>	beer-(not)-drink--3SG-OBJ	‘beer-drinker/avoider’	Nagy (1880) ²¹ , forum ²²
<i>sör-(nem)-isz-Ø-sza</i>	beer-(not)-drink--3SG-OBJ	‘beer-drinker/avoider’	Farkas (2009), news ^{23,24}
<i>víz-(nem)-isz-Ø-sza</i>	water-(not)-drink-3SG-OBJ	‘water-drinker/avoider’	Döbrentei(1842),news ²⁵ , blog ²⁶
<i>tej-(nem)-isz-Ø-sza</i>	milk-(not)-drink-3SG-OBJ	‘milk-drinker/avoider’	blog ²⁷ , news ²⁸
<i>szesz-(nem)-isz-Ø-sza</i>	spirit-(not)-drink-3SG-OBJ	‘alcohol-drinker/avoider’	Toldy (1909), forum ²⁹
<i>vodka-(nem)-isz-Ø-sza</i>	vodka-(not)-drink-3SG-OBJ	‘vodka-drinker/avoider’	forum ³⁰
<i>üdösi-isz-Ø-sza</i>	softdrink-drink-3SG-OBJ	‘softdrink-drinker’	forum ³¹
<i>tea-isz-Ø-sza</i>	tea-drink-3SG-OBJ	‘tea-drinker’	Terebess (2000)
<i>kávé-isz-Ø-sza</i>	coffee-drink-3SG-OBJ	‘coffee-drinker’	
<i>hús-nem-esz-Ø-i</i>	meat-not-eat-3SG-OBJ	‘vegan’	Simonyi (1913)
<i>hal-nem-esz-Ø-i</i>	fish-not-eat-3SG-OBJ	‘fish-avoider’	Illyés (1964), forum ³²
<i>sajt-(nem)-esz-Ø-i</i>	cheese-(not)-eat-3SG-OBJ	‘cheese-eater/avoider’	Kurmai (2014), forum ³³
<i>kolbász-esz-Ø-i</i>	sausage-not-eat-3SG-OBJ	‘sausage-eater’	Sebők (1903)
<i>Ser-főz-Ø-i</i>	beer-brew-3SG-OBJ	‘beer-brewer’	Kujbus (2017), news ³⁴
<i>bor-szeret-Ø-i</i>	wine-love-3SG-OBJ	‘wine-lover’	Bacsó (1906)
<i>láb-a-tör-Ø-i</i>	leg-3SG-break-3SG-OBJ	‘leg-breaker’	news ³⁵
<i>Kar-tör-Ø-i</i>	arm-break-3SG-OBJ	‘arm-breaker’	news ³⁶
<i>bú-felejt-Ø-i</i>	sorrow-forget-3SG-OBJ	‘sorrow-free’	Endrei (1914)
<i>mark-a-pök-Ø-i</i>	palm-3SG-spit-3SG-OBJ	‘overconfident’	Simonyi (1876), Cz&F (1862)
<i>mark-a-köp-Ø-i</i>	palm-3SG-spit-3SG-OBJ	‘overconfident’	Korda (1884)
<i>maga-vet-Ø-i</i>	oneself-throw-3SG-OBJ	‘boastful’	Cz & F (1862-1874)
<i>maga-hány-Ø-ja-vet-Ø-i</i>	oneself-scatter-3SG-OBJ-throw--3SG-OBJ	‘boastful’	Cz & F (1862-1874).
<i>ingyen-les-Ø-i</i>	free-seek-3SG-OBJ	‘freebie-seeker’	Simonyi (1876)
<i>vám-les-Ø-i</i>	toll- seek -3SG-OBJ	‘toll-collector’	Simonyi (1876)
<i>Bér-les-Ø-i</i>	wage-seek-3SG-OBJ	‘eager to receive one’s wage’	Vörös (2009)
<i>péNZ-les-Ø-I</i>	money-seek-3SG-OBJ	‘money-grabbing’	Kaffka (1916)
<i>hurka-les-Ø-i</i>	sausage-seek-3SG-OBJ	‘sausage-seeker’	Sebők (1903)
<i>haszon-les-Ø-i</i>	gain-seek-3SG-OBJ	‘self-interested’	Czipott (2016), news ³⁷
<i>világ-dögönyöz-Ø-i</i>	world-punch-3SG-OBJ	‘world-beater’	Simonyi (1876)
<i>ló-dönt-Ø-i</i>	horse-topple-3SG-OBJ	‘strong enough to topple a horse’	Simonyi (1876)
<i>Kár-tesz-Ø-i</i>	damage-do-3SG-OBJ	‘damage-causer’	Vörös (2009)
<i>kár-ment-Ø-i</i>	damage-save-3SG-OBJ	‘damage-mitigator’	news ³⁸
<i>bunda-visz-Ø-i</i>	fur.coat-carry-3SG-OBJ	‘furcoat-wearer’	Kertész (1902), Kiss (1878)

²⁰ First attested in 1434.

²¹ 16th C attestation.

²² <https://forum.index.hu/Article/showArticle?t=1000031>, dated 2016.06.01., all websites were retrieved 2020.02.11. unless otherwise noted.

²³ <https://www.kisalfold.hu/sopron-es-kornyeke/a-sorissza-hrabal-sem-fogalmazhatta-volna-meg-szebben-az-alabbi-soproni-hirdetest-5342212/>, 2017.04.08.

²⁴ https://index.hu/kulfold/2016/10/03/oktoberfest_csokkeno_erdeklodes/, 2016.10.03.

²⁵ <https://www.kisalfold.hu/kisalfold/rabakoz/harminc-eve-folyik-a-vizcsapbol-5157934/>, 2016.06.30.

²⁶ https://okos-tojas.blog.hu/2011/03/12/bicebocakat_a_gatra, dated 2011.03.22.

²⁷ <https://naplo.org/index.php?p=hir&modul=irodalminaplo&hir=5644>, dated 2015.02.16.

²⁸ <https://www.delmagyar.hu/egyperces/egy-perces-negy-tejissza-fiver-361-eves-2971570/> dated 2012.08.02.

²⁹ <https://nlc.hu/forum/?id=1057&fid=441&topicid=8365&step=1&page=59>, dated 2003.07.21.

³⁰ https://forum.index.hu/Article/showArticle?na_order=&na_start=91&na_step=30&t=1001214, 1998.08.20.

³¹ <https://hup.hu/szavazasok/20150618/sor-erzekenység>, discussion forum entry dated: 2015.06.18.

³² <https://nlc.hu/forum/?id=1057&fid=441&topicid=104256&step=1&page=135> dated: 2007.06.12.

³³ https://forum.index.hu/Article/showArticle?na_start=27999&na_step=30&t=9048586&na_order=, 2010.11.01.

³⁴ [Szarvas Társadalmi és Szépirodalmi Lap, 1894.08.30](#) (newspaper article)

³⁵ [Zalai Közlöny, 1932.07.01.](#) (newspaper article)

³⁶ [Az Est, 1914.04.23.](#)

³⁷ [Bolond Istók 1880:75.](#)

³⁸ [Bács-Kiskun Megyei Néptújság, 1986.07.15.; Lévai Hírlap, 1910.05.28.](#)

<i>per-veszt-Ø-i</i>	lawsuit-lose-3SG-OBJ	‘lawsuit-loser’	Horger (1931), R. Vozáry (1911), Simonyi (1895). Dessewffy (1847) film ³⁹
<i>minden-tud-Ø</i>	everything-know-3SG	‘all-knowing’	
<i>száj-tát-Ø-ja</i>	mouth-open-3SG-OBJ	‘idle’	Simonyi (1895), Horger (1931)
<i>száj-(a)-tát-Ø-i</i>	mouth-3SG-open-3SG-OBJ	‘idle’	Korda (1884), Arany (1851)
<i>fasz-a-rág-Ø-i</i>	prick-3SG-chew-3SG-OBJ	‘miserly’	Benkő (1967), Illésy (1887); Korda (1885); Korda (1884), forum ⁴⁰
<i>szar-a-rág-Ø-i</i>	shit-3sg-chew-3SG-OBJ	‘miserly’	forum ⁴¹
<i>szar-a-facsar-Ø-i</i>	shit-3sg-squeeze -3SG-OBJ	‘miserly’	Benkő (1967), Bellosics (1890), Szalai (1957), forum ⁴²
<i>sonku-facsar-Ø-i</i>	spent.honeyc.-squeeze-3SG-OBJ	‘miserly’	Bellosics (1890), Kulcsár (1877)
<i>ruha-nyúz-Ø-i</i>	cloth-wear.out-3SG-OBJ	‘cloth-chewer’	Szvorényi (1847)
<i>üreg-jár-Ø-i</i>	hole-walk-3SG-OBJ	‘cloth-outwearer’	Csokonai (1791)
<i>deszka-rág-Ø-i</i>	board-chew-3SG-OBJ	‘board-chewer’	Csokonai (1791)
<i>bőr-rágód-Ø-i</i>	leather-chew-3SG-OBJ	‘leather-chewer’	Csokonai (1791)

2. silent pro object

<i>mindég-pro-kér-Ø-i</i>	always-it-ask-3SG-OBJ	‘demanding’	Endrei (1914)
<i>pro-alig-vár-Ø-ja</i>	it-hardly-wait-3SG-OBJ	‘eager, expectant’	Endrei (1914)
<i>pro-mingyá(r)-kér-Ø-i</i>	it-right.now-ask-3SG-OBJ	‘insists on upfront	En. (1914), Volák (1897), Éles (1898)
<i>pro-rögtön-kér-Ø-I</i>	it-right.now-ask-3SG-OBJ	payment’	Kertész (1902), Szűcs (1875)
<i>pro-tesz-Ø-i</i>	it-do-3SG-OBJ	‘doer’	Simonyi (1876)
<i>pro-hányja-vet-Ø-i</i>	it-scatter-3SG-OBJ -throw-3SG-OBJ	‘careless’	Benkő (1967)
<i>pro-most-kezd-Ø-i</i>	it-now-start-3SG-OBJ	‘procrastinator’	Kertész (1902)
<i>pro-les-Ø-i</i>	it-observe.closely-3SG-OBJ	‘peeper’	Kertész (1902)
<i>pro-hátul-kezd-Ø-i</i>	it-at.the.end-start-3SG-OBJ	‘Jewish (reads from right to left)’	Kertész (1902)
<i>pro-meg-mond-Ø-ja</i>	it-PRT-say-3SG-OBJ	‘outspoken’	Vörös (2009)
<i>pro-meg-ad-Ø-ja</i>	it-PRT-give-3SG-OBJ	‘pays her dues’	Vörös (2009) ⁴³

3. intransitive (no object)

<i>ingyér-ád-Ø</i>	for.free-give-3SG	‘munificent’	Simonyi (1878), Kertész (1902)
<i>jól-jár-(t)-Ø</i>	well-go-(PST)-3SG	‘did well, had luck’	Nagy (1880), En. (1914), Vörös(2009)
<i>jö-tt-Ø-men-t-Ø</i>	come-PST-3SG-go-PST-3SG	‘rootless newcomer’	Benkő (1967) ⁴⁴
<i>mingyá-meg-lesz</i>	soon -PRT-be.FUT.3SG	‘will be ready soon’	Simonyi (1878)
<i>fesl-ik</i>	fray-3SG	‘inept shoemaker’	Kertész (1902), Ihász (1881) ⁴⁵
<i>se-hall-Ø-se-lát-Ø</i>	neither-hear-3SG-neither-see-3SG	‘reckless’	Weöres (1955)
<i>nem-hisz-Ø</i>	not-believe-3SG	‘non-believer’	Kubinyi (1885), Simonyi (1909) ⁴⁶

³⁹ [Ralph lezúzza a netet](#) (Ralph Breaks the Internet); [Időcsapat](#) (Time Squad).

⁴⁰ „Tyúktartós és tenyésztős közösség” Facebook-group, 2021.07.29. (collected by: György Rákosi); also shortened as *faszari*.

⁴¹ <https://kritikustomeg.org/user/13605/lil-martin/kommentek/>, dated: 2010.10.30.

⁴² http://enmegmondtam.blogspot.com/2010/01/blog-post_22.html, dated: 2010.01.22.

⁴³ Other potential candidates: *Csórja* (steals it), *Hozza* (brings it), *Járja* (traverses it), *Tudja* (knows it), *Engedi* (lets it), *Keresi* (looks for it), *Lesi* (observes it closely/furtively), *Leveszi* (takes it down), *Méri* (measures it/portions it out), *Szedi* (collects it), *Veszi* (takes it).

⁴⁴ Cf. also *rossz-kor-jö-tt* (wrong-at-come-PST-3SG) ‘came at wrong time’. Veress (1900); *későngyütt* (nickname) – *későn-gyü-tt* (late-come-pst-3sg) ‘came late, latecomer’. Csomár (1881).

⁴⁵ Cf. also *Reszket* (nickname) – *reszket-Ø* (shiver-3SG) ‘shivers’, *Fázik* (nickname) – *fáz-ik* (be.cold-3SG) ‘is cold’. Szentmiklósy (1901).

⁴⁶ Attested in the 13th century. For several similar examples, cf. Kubinyi (1885) and Simonyi (1909).

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