

University of Szeged
Faculty of Arts
PhD Programme on Linguistics
Department of Hungarian Linguistics

Balázs Sinkovics

**Linguistic variables, language changes
and normative regulations**

Abstract
PhD Dissertation

Szeged
2010

Introduction

The Hungarian language community is strongly normative. The speakers assess and disapprove language forms used by other speakers', and consider certain forms and structures wrong and better to avoid that even they themselves use. Some non-standard variants are strongly stigmatized, some are less so.

In my dissertation I follow language cultivation studies retrospectively. I have chosen to discuss studies on the (bAn), (amely) and (végett) variables, the stigmatized Hungarian declarative conjugation (so called “suksük” conjugation) and the verbal prefixes. Following the language cultivation regulations I attempt to trace the “history” of these structures: when they were first stigmatized, and how their judgement changed over time. I also study to what extent the prescriptive rules (and their changes) fit the language usage of the significant writers of the age.

The different aspects of literary Hungarian have been studied by several scholars. István Szathmári (1968) examined the role of early grammars in the history of the literary language, Loránd Benkő (1960) carried out a research on writings in the Enlightenment era, and also studied how Protestantism and protestant schools affected the formation of standard language (1999a, 1999b), and also studied the language formulating activities of Kazinczy Ferenc (1982). Some details of the development of literary Hungarian, and the

impact of dominant poets and writers are discussed in several studies of Szathmári (summarised in Szathmári 2005).

I discuss the history of linguistic variables – (bA) and (bAn), (ami) and (amely), stigmatised Hungarian declarative conjugation (ie. suksük), (miatt) and (végett) and verbal prefix neologisms – to which prescriptive superstitions and advice is connected. These variables were in the focus of language cultivators' interest for a long time. I think, with studying these variables I will be able to track the changes of prescriptive rules, their relation to the variables, and I will be able to contrast them with the writings of dominant writers. When choosing these five variables I also considered that these language structures receive great public attention – they are discussed in language cultivation debates, laypeople's opinion, Internet forums. In today's Hungarian these five variables are stigmatized to different extent. With the historical analysis I would like to find the earliest date of stigmatisation. I will present the arguments the rulemakers use, and show whether they provided reasons from inside or outside the language to disapprove one or the other variant. Finally I study whether there is any shift of language usage towards these rules.

Methods

I examined philologically the most important grammars and works about correctness from the 16th to the 20th centuries, and the studies of the journals *Magyar Nyelv*, *Magyar Nyelvőr*, *Magyarosan*, *Édes Anyanyelvünk*. I tried to explain, how old the prescriptive rules are. The stigmatization appears always earlier, as the first written data occurs.

I compared the prescriptive rules with the authentic authors' works, because the rules were based on their usage. I have selected for example Gáspár Károli, Albert Szenci Molnár, Péter Pázmány, János Apáczai Csere. As the stigmatized indicative mood (*suksük*, *szukszük* form) did not occur in literacy, I decided to complete my corpus of personal letters and depositions, since that works often contain characteristics of informal spoken language.

The linguistic variables

The (bA) and the (bAn) variables

The inessive (bAn) has two variants: the standard [bAn] and the non-standard [bA], while the illative (bA) also has two variants: the standard [bA] and the hypercorrect [bAn]. These two variables show stable variation from the 15th century. In written language the inessive and illative cases are differentiated, while in speech only the [bA] variant is used. According to standard language usage, *-ba/-be* ending is used

to answer *Where to?* and *-ban/-ben* is used to answer *In where?* questions. Since the 15th century *-ban/-ben* ending has *-ba/-be* variants, and the *-ba/-be* ending has hypercorrect *-ban/-ben* variants.

During the 16—18th centuries standardisation was getting stronger in written documents, however, in speech the inessive *-ba/-be* variant is still widely used even today. In grammars, the standard inessive [bAn] and the illative [bA] forms are strictly separated. The prescriptive rule to govern the usage of these forms is known from the end of the 18th century.

The *ami* and *amely* conjunctions

The two variants of (amely) is [amely] and [ami], and the standard variant of (ami) is [ami], while the hypercorrect variant is [amely]. The rules of these two conjunctions are well-known from the beginning of the 19th century, and are part of the first academy grammar. If the noun is present in the main clause, *amely* is to be used, if only a pronoun is present, *ami* is to be used. However, during the 19th century the [ami] variant of the (amely) conjunction is spreading, and appears even in formal styles. The prescriptive rules to regulate the usage of this structure appear from the middle of the 19th century. There are two types of prescriptive regulations here:

some prohibit the use of the *ami* conjunction, while others say it can be used to refer to a noun.

3. The postposition *végett*

The postposition *végett* has two usages in Hungarian: it only means ‘in order to’ (postposition of purpose) in standard Hungarian while it may mean either ‘in order to’ or ‘because of’ (postposition of cause) in non-standard usage. The postposition *végett* arose in the 16th century, and it was mostly a postposition of purpose but I have collected some data from the 16th century onwards, in which it is used as a postposition of cause. *Végett* as a postposition of cause has been stigmatized in the literature of language cultivation since the middle of the 19th century. In this section I present the data and explain the uses and functions of *végett* with special attention to data where only the larger context makes it clear whether *végett* is used as a postposition of purpose or a postposition of cause. In some cases even the larger context did not provide sufficient information to decide the meaning.

4. A stigmatized Hungarian indicative mood

In this chapter I examine two highly stigmatized nonstandard variants (the so called *suksiik* and *szuksziik* forms). I discuss their origin, spreading in dialects, and when they became stigmatized. In standard Hungarian *t*-final verbs maintain a difference between

indicative and imperative forms: *lássa* ‘see-3Sg.-Imp.Def.’ and *látja* ‘see-3Sg.-Ind.Def.’; *halassza* ‘postpone-3Sg.Imp.Def.’ and *halasztja* ‘postpone-3Sg.Ind.Def.’. In nonstandard Hungarian the two forms are neutralized: both are realized in the form of standard Hungarian imperative.

We have clear data for the stigmatized variant since the late 18th century. It should be mentioned that it could be used earlier, but we have not any written data.

The stigmatized variant was spreading at the time (or maybe later) when the Hungarian language was codified. It got into the language of the urban lower classes in the late 19th century, and we have data that it was stigmatized at that time. In the literature of language cultivation it was only a stylistic regionalism but later it became stigmatized in the 1930’s. Today it is the most stigmatized nonstandard form in the Hungarian speech community.

5. Verbal prefixes

Since the end of the 19th century Hungarian language cultivation has been writing critically about so called “unnecessary verbal prefixes”. According to the language cultivators a prefix is unnecessary if the verb has the same meaning with or without it. In one class the prefix makes the verb perfective, although the verb has perfective aspect without it, too: *pótol* ‘replace; make up’ ~ *bepótol* ‘replace;

make up'; *jelentkezik* 'present oneself, report' *bejelentkezik* 'present oneself, report'. In the other class the speakers replace the prefix with another one, but the meaning does not change according to the language cultivators: *megszüntet* 'stop, cease; abandon' *beszüntet* 'stop, cease; abandon'.

I have collected verbs which have been disapproved in the reference books of language cultivation in the last hundred years. I suggest that although most of the verbs are really new, their rise was not unusual. The prefixes are not unnecessary, because there seems to emerge a new rule in Hungarian. Namely a verb is perfective if it has a prefix. In the other case, if an old prefix is replaced with a new one, not only the new form remains, but the old one too, and they will develop different meanings later.

Conclusions

One method to measure the influence of language cultivation is to examine how speakers' attitude change with respect to sociolinguistic variables. All the variables discussed in this thesis have variants that are stigmatized to some extent. The most stigmatized of them, I believe, are the *suksík* and *szukszük* forms, of which *szuksziik* is slightly less stigmatized.

The following variables are placed second: (bAn) along with (bA) and (ami) along with (*amely*). Hypercorrect directional *-ban/-ben* is also found in the utterances of

speakers who otherwise try to use standard Hungarian, in an effort to avoid stigmatized locative *-ba/-be*.

Using *végett* as a postposition of cause is placed third. Although it is disapproved in stylistic or usage guides, it is only criticized by speakers who are more concerned about language use. Newly prefixed verbs such as *beijed*, *befél*, *bealszik* belong here, too, of which speakers disapprove some but not all. Since most of the newly prefixed verbs come from slang, it is unclear whether speakers disapprove of the verbs or slang in general.

Destandardization is a new challenge for language cultivators. They may react to it either by 1) criticizing the deviations from the norm, or 2) by adjusting the standard to the new forms, accepting its variability and being more tolerant towards variations in general. There are examples of both but the second option seems to be the better choice in postmodern societies where plurality and variation are highly valued.

With respect to the examined variables, the norms of the standard, codified in the 19th century, should be amended. As for the variables (bA) and (bAn), language cultivation should emphasize the differences between written and oral language and explain that following the norms of written language is not required in educated speech. I believe the same applies to the use of *végett* as a postposition of cause.

Concerning the variables (ami) and (amely), it has been advised by several authors from Nagy J. Béla via Rácz Endre to Nádasdy Ádám that the choice between *ami* and *amely* when referring to a lexical noun should be stylistic rather than grammatical. The stigmatized indicative forms are wide-spread in several dialects. Here, language cultivation should emphasize the differences between the standard and the dialects, extending the acceptance of dialectal features from pronunciation to morphology (prestige planning). It should be explained that standard is not the only correct variety and speakers who do not use it are not necessarily uneducated.

The evaluation of newly prefixed verbs in language cultivation could set an example of how to preserve the “flexible stability” of the standard. Several of the newly prefixed verbs are not deprecated in the handbooks of language cultivation but record them of cases of creative language use and notes about their use are mostly stylistic.

References

Benkő Loránd 1960: *A magyar irodalmi írásbeliség a felvilágosodás korának első szakaszában*, Budapest, Akadémiai.

Benkő Loránd 1982: *Kazinczy Ferenc és kora a magyar nyelvtudomány történetében*, Budapest, Akadémiai. = *Nyelvtudományi Értekezések 113*.

Benkő Loránd 1999a: A protestantizmus hatása a magyar irodalmi nyelv fejlődésére, in *Nemzet és anyanyelve*, Budapest, Osiris, 207–14.

Benkő Loránd 1999b: A magyar nyelvi standard kialakulása, in *Nemzet és anyanyelve*, Budapest, Osiris, 214–28.

Németh Miklós 2008: *Nyelvi változás és változás társadalmi és műveltségi tényezők tükrében. Nyelvi változók a XVIII. században*, Szeged, JGyF Kiadó.

Szathmári István 1968: *Régi nyelvtanaink és egységesülő irodalmi nyelvünk*, Budapest, Akadémiai.

Szathmári István 2005: *A szűkebb és a tágabb haza nyelve. Népnyelvi és irodalmi nyelvi tanulmányok*, szerkesztette Tátrai Szilárd és Tolcsvai Nagy Gábor, Budapest, ELTE BTK Mai Magyar Nyelvi Tanszék.

Publications in this topic:

1. A vonatkozó névmások (*aki, ami, amely*) használatáról – régi és mai nyelvtanaink és a nyelvművelő munkák tükrében, in Büky László szerk.: *A mai magyar nyelv leírásának újabb módszerei VI. Nyelvleírás és nyelvművelés, nyelvhasználat, stilisztika*. Szeged, 2004, 123–133.
2. Állítsátok meg a suksükölést! – Egy nyelvhelyességi ítélet kialakulása, in Benő Attila – Szilágyi N. Sándor szerk.: *Nyelvi közösségek – nyelvi jogok*, Kolozsvár, Anyanyelvápolók Erdélyi Szövetsége, 2006, 298–311.
3. Az igeiktők jelentésmódosító szerepe és a nyelvi norma, *Nyelvtudomány* 2 (2006) 165–186.
4. A suksükölő igeragozás történetéből, in Büky László – Forgács Tamás – Sinkovics Balázs szerk.: *A nyelvtörténeti kutatások újabb eredményei V*, Szeged, 2008, 203–213.
5. Az anyanyelv változatai magyarországi középiskolai tankönyvekben, in Csernicskó István – Kontra Miklós szerk.: *Az Üveghegyen innen. Anyanyelvváltozatok, identitás és magyar anyanyelvi nevelés. A VI. Nemzetközi Hungarológiai Kongresszus azonos című szímpoziumán elhangzott előadások anyaga*. Poliprint Kft. – II: Rákóczi Ferenc KMF, Ungvár – Beregszász, 2008, 30–55.

6. A végett névutó története, *Nyelvtudomány* III–IV (2007–8), 203–218.
7. A nyelvváltozatok és a nyelvművelés, in Borbély Anna, Vančoné Kremmer Ildikó és Hattyár Helga szerk.: *Nyelv-ideológiák, nyelvi attitűdök és sztereotípiák*, Budapest – Dunaszerdahely – Nyitra: MTA Nyelvtudományi Intézet, Gramma Nyelvi Iroda, Konstantin Filozófus Egyetem Közép-európai Tanulmányok Kar, Tinta Kiadó, 2009. 101–110.
8. Felszólító móddal egyező kijelentő módú igealakok a magyar nyelvjárásokban, in Németh Miklós – Sinkovics Balázs szerk.: *Tanulmányok Szabó József 70. születésnapjára*, Szegedi Tudományegyetem Magyar Nyelvészeti Tanszék, Szeged, 2010, 169–177.