

COMMENTS ON THE HISTORY OF NON-FINITE
VERB FORMS IN HUNGARIAN

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Abstract

In *A Historical Grammar of Hungarian* (Benkő et al. 1991; 1992), the chapters on non-finite verb forms (infinitives and participles) were written by the present author. In that book, conciseness, brevity and canonical style were required; due to lack of space, it was impossible for authors to give a detailed discussion of the points made and to motivate their decisions. In this short paper, a number of statements and formulations given there will be clarified; furthermore, an overall picture will be given about the historical system of non-finite verb forms in Hungarian.

1. Non-finite verb forms are not treated as a unitary category either in *The System of Present-day Hungarian* (Tompá 1961) or in the standard university textbook (Bencédy et al. 1968). They are discussed in three different places, under nouns, adjectives, and adverbs, respectively. That classification is not followed by most grammars today, although it still crops up occasionally in school grammars (e.g., Szende 1993).

In the majority of recent grammars and handbooks of Hungarian, non-finite verb forms constitute a separate part-of-speech category (Rácz–Takács 1987; Jászó 1991a; Galgóczy 1992; Balázs 1994). They are usually taught that way at Hungarian universities as well; they appear as an independent category e.g., in *A Manual of Hungarian Descriptive Grammar*, with the following remark: “It is noteworthy that non-finite verb forms are not taken to be a separate part-of-speech category in grammars of European languages; they are discussed as part of the category of verb. This is probably due to the fact that, in Indo-European languages, non-finite verb forms play a more important role in the conjugation system than they do in Hungarian. On the other hand, in Hungarian, infinitives and participles have a more dominant syntactic role than in other languages of Europe” (Faluvégi et al. 1994, 47–8). This statement is appropriate in descriptive terms; historically speaking, however,

the fact is that non-finite verb forms had a prominent role in the development of the system of Hungarian conjugation: “Non-finite verb forms had a major significance in the history of Finno-Ugric languages since their conjugations rested on those forms . . . It is no exaggeration to say that the emergence and development of the total system of the morphology and syntax of Finno-Ugric languages as it is today was in fact based on non-finite verb forms. . . . But the role of non-finite verb forms in the lives of Finno-Ugric languages is not merely historical and it did not come to an end with the development of some of them into tense and mood markers. The forms that had remained non-finite verb forms have kept their significance in **non-finite verb phrases** of highly diverse structure that are incorporated into sentences either as ornamental patterns or else as expressions of subsidiary actions that are in close relationship of some sort with the main action expressed by the sentence” (Kispál 1966, 19).

A *Historical Grammar of Hungarian* (Benkő et al. 1991; 1992) also treats non-finite verb forms as a separate part of speech. That this should be done was suggested to us by Éva Bottyánffy, whose manuscript study referred to Simon (1974) as the ultimate source of the idea. In fact, the author who first came to the conclusion that non-finite verb forms are to be seen as a separate part of speech was István Papp (1959, 1962). Also, Sándor Károly—by referring to “the system of non-finite verb forms”—had supported the idea of the establishment of that separate category (Károly 1956).

The term *igenév* ‘non-finite verb form’ is itself a specific Hungarian phenomenon. Károly (1956, 10) points out that grammars of Hungarian started using it as late as in the nineteenth century. The term *melléknévi igenév* ‘[adjectival] participle’ was coined by Sándor Imre, whereas *főnévi igenév* ‘infinitive’ and *határozói igenév* ‘adverbial participle’ were first used by Zsigmond Simonyi. The creation of those new terms was obviously concurrent with the process of reforming Hungarian grammar writing in the late nineteenth century. At that time, leading Hungarian grammarians—especially Zsigmond Simonyi and József Szinnyei—did not only renew the practice of Hungarian grammar writing but also gave it a specifically Hungarian flavour, one that is totally different from that of Indo-European grammars (Jászó 1991b). It is quite certain that the specific term was meant to emphasize the special character of Hungarian *igenév*. The unitary part-of-speech classification of non-finite verb forms was not insisted on in those grammars but only because Hungarian grammarians of the late nineteenth century were primarily interested in syntax and paid less attention to part-of-speech categories.

2. The main action or event expressed in the sentence is represented by the finite verb form (*verbum finitum*), whereas the subsidiary action or event is represented by a non-finite verbal construction. Such conjunctionless clauses involving non-finite verbal constructions were already characteristic of Proto-Finno-Ugric. The morphological means of subordination first emerged in the separate lives of the individual languages; the analytical type of sentence construction involving conjunctions can be seen as a secondary development. Nevertheless, “synthetic constructions (involving non-finite verb forms) had been retained in a number of languages (Vogul, Ostyak, Finnish)” (Rédei 1997, 40).

In a simple sentence, participles (or infinitives) are either attributive modifiers of nouns or subject/object/adverbial complements of verbs. Participles in *-ó/-ő* and in *-t ~ -tt* appear in noun phrases, whereas infinitives in *-ni* and participles in *-va/-ve*, *-ván/-vén* occur in verb phrases. Some participles in *-t* constitute an intermediate category in that their form would suggest that they belong to noun phrases but their function ties them up with verb phrases; these are the participle in *-atta/-ette*, as well as those exemplified by *lakoztában* ‘(while) dwelling (somewhere)’, *nőttön (nő)* ‘grow and (grow)’, and *jövet* ‘on the way here’ (lit. ‘coming’). The system of non-finite verb forms can be illustrated as in Table 1 (overleaf).

The classification in Table 1 is supported by the origin of non-finite verb forms. In fact, non-finite verb forms of Finno-Ugric descent fall into two groups: primary participles and gerund-based participles/infinitives. The group I call primary participles includes those involving the derivational suffixes *-ó/-ő* and *-t ~ -tt*; their structure is verb stem + participial suffix. The suffix of gerund-based forms, on the other hand, came about by the merger of an original participial suffix and a case suffix; the structure underwent reinterpretation of the type (verb stem + participial suffix) + case ending > verb stem + (participial suffix + case ending) > verb stem + new participial suffix. Thus, the two groups are as given in Table 2.

Primary participles are the oldest, they are found in most of the related languages, and their function must have been complex. The older a participle, the more complex its present function, and the more intricate its functional development. Participles in *-ó/-ő* and in *-t ~ -tt* occur in almost all conceivable functions of a participle. The functions of gerund-based participles/infinitives, on the other hand, are narrower, easier to circumscribe. It was because of the probable later emergence of gerund-based participles/infinitives that, in writing my chapters in Benkó et al. (1991; 1992), I chose the order primary participle, infinitive, adverbial participle.

Table 1
The system of Hungarian non-finite verb forms

NP	VP
participle in <i>-ó/-ő</i> [present participle]: <i>fírou aniath</i> 'weeping mother' (acc.) (ÓMS.)	infinitive in <i>-ni</i> : <i>Işuş . . . viş mezeiteni</i> 'coming to ladle water' (MünchK. 87va)
participle in <i>-t ~ -tt</i> [past participle]: <i>tilwt gimilftwl</i> 'from forbidden fruit' (HB.)	participle in <i>-va/-ve</i> [simultaneous adverbial participle]: <i>fugwa . . . ulud</i> 'holding . . . you are killing him' (ÓMS.)
participle of the <i>isten adta gyermek</i> 'God-given child' type: <i>David . . . zerzette zoltar</i> 'psalm written by David' (DöbrK.15)	participle in <i>-ván/-vén</i> [antecedent adverbial participle]: <i>ele menuen . . . lele</i> 'having gone to meet him . . . found him' (KTSz.)
participle in <i>-atta/-ette</i> : <i>şent fferenşzet lewlteuala egjhaş şeprette</i> 'he found St. Franciscus sweeping the church' (JókK.97)	
participle of the <i>lakoztában</i> '(while) dwelling (somewhere)' type: <i>şenanal lakoztaban yew hoşşa nemş . . . doctor</i> 'while dwelling at Siena, he was visited by a doctor' (JókK.95)	
participle of the <i>nőttön (nő)</i> 'grow and (grow)' type: <i>şõtşn şõtşek</i> 'they are coming and coming' (1526, cf. MNy. 6:448)	
participle of the <i>şövet</i> 'on the way here' (lit. 'coming') type: <i>Im bemenett . . . leltşk egh embşrth</i> 'as you go in, you find a man' (WinklK.135)	

Table 2
Suffixes of non-finite verb forms

Suffixes of primary participles: <i>-ó/-ő</i> < <i>*-k, *-p</i> <i>-t ~ -tt</i> < <i>*-tt</i>	Suffixes of gerund-based participles/infinitives: <i>-ni</i> < <i>*-n + *-i</i> <i>-va/-ve</i> < <i>*-m + *-i</i> <i>-ván/-vén</i> < <i>*-va/-ve + *-n</i>
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Participles involving *-t* must have emerged during the period of Ancient Hungarian. They come in various subtypes. The type in *-atta/-ette* as in *lakatta* 'when he dwelt, while dwelling' / *menette* 'when he went, while going' was functionally an adverbial participle (of time or state/condition). Formally, this type

was a person-marked participle. In Late Old Hungarian, its whole paradigm (except 1pl) was attested, whereas in present-day Hungarian it is totally unknown. The type *lakoztában* '(while) dwelling (somewhere)' is close to an adverbial participle; perhaps it forms a transition between a case-marked noun and an adverbial participle. There are several arguments supporting its interpretation as a participle, including, above all, the fact that there is no noun form **lakozta* 'his (state of) dwelling'. Therefore, the segmentation of *lakoztában* must be *lakoz* + *tában*, i.e., verb stem + unitary suffix, as in *lakoz* + *ván* 'having dwelt'. On the other hand, suffixes of this type are not characterized by merger (of both sound shape and meaning) as in gerund-based participles. In instances of *figura etymologica* of the type *nőttön* (*nő*) 'grow and (grow)', the participle is very much like an adverb; it is an unmodifiable, fossilized form. In the older literature, especially in that of the late nineteenth century, these forms were referred to as participles involving the suffix *-ton/-ten/-tön*, and quite rightly so. They are a rather mysterious type of participles. They do not occur in the codices, whereas in later popular usage they are quite frequent; instances we can cite from 16th century letters include *foglalton-foglal* 'occupy', *futton-fut* 'run', *írton-ír* 'write', *mondton-mond* 'say', *rabolton-rabol* 'rob', *szöktön-szökik* 'jump' (all: 'continuously, all the time, more and more'). Because of their later frequency (although mainly in popular usage) we can assume their earlier existence (cf. Kelemen 1956). At any rate, in view of the degree of merger of the elements of their ending (participial suffix + locative/modal case suffix), items of this type are more participle-like than those of the *lakoztában* type. Finally, adverbs of the type *jövet* 'on one's way here', *menet* 'on one's way there' are of participial origin, too. Sándor Károly also sees the participial suffix *-t* in them, and explains their emergence by reinterpretation (Károly 1956, 15).

The above NP/VP system is "transgressable", items may move in both directions and become more noun-like or more verb-like as time goes by. In older texts, participles involving *-t* plus personal suffix are frequent: *Hadlaua choltat* 'he heard of his death' (HB.). These are close to nouns since they can be independent lexemes (without the case suffix, that is): *holta* 'his death'. However, they are formally distinct from nouns derived by *-at/-et* (such as *gondolat* 'thought', *felelet* 'answer') in that they lack the low vowel that has become part of the latter suffix. Zsigmond Simonyi called them, very aptly, "infinitives in *-t*", since they are grammatical synonyms for infinitives occurring in accusative with infinitive constructions (Simonyi 1907). Similar arguments were given by Klemm (1928–1942). Rédei (1997) also takes the second word of the construction *Hadlaua choltat* to be a participle. However, it is beyond

reasonable doubt that in terms of suffixability and modifiability such forms closely resemble nouns. Participles can migrate not only towards nounhood but also towards verbhood. This claim is less well-established, although it arguably contains an element of truth. Concerning participles in *-ván/-vén*, it has been claimed that they were so independent of the main verb in the long and complicated sentences found in codices that their behaviour practically verged on having become a verb (Velcsov 1957).

The classification of participles in *-t* as summarized above is originally due to Fokos (1959). These forms are originally gerunds since they go back to case marked forms; thus, this is not a case of gerunds being used in the function of adverbial participles. The ability of participles to be further suffixed to form adverbials is a tendency going back to Finno-Ugric and going through the whole history of Hungarian. In later periods—sporadically in Late Old Hungarian, but increasingly more often in later times—primary participles also became capable of further suffixation. Forms made up by participles in *-ó/-ő* or *-t ~ -tt* plus adverbial suffixes (like *megadóan* ‘resignedly’, *rakottan* ‘(in a) loaded (state)’) are frequently used but this process has not led to the creation of novel participial suffixes. On the other hand, the oldest participles have thereby moved from the NP to the VP: *megadóan néz* ‘stare resignedly’, (*félig*) *rakottan álldogálnak* ‘they stand there (half) loaded’.

3. Explanations of the richness of function of non-finite verb forms are of two types. One is to trace the multiple functions back to a single function and explain the others from that single function; the other is to assume that there was complexity of function to begin with and operate essentially with splits. For instance, Sándor Károly claims that participles involving the suffix *-ó/-ő* were originally used in an active sense only and that the passive sense with all its shades of meaning, including participles expressing local, temporal, and instrumental relationships, came about from that original function (Károly 1956, 80–2), although he does not exclude “the other possibility”, either. That alternative explanation—in fact, an older view and one that is more firmly established in the literature of Finno-Ugristics—is that those participles originally exhibited a complex function, encompassing all later possibilities. The functional richness of Hungarian participles is, on that account, a preserved ancient feature. Similar views are held by Rávila (1945, 149–50) concerning the Finno-Ugric system of derivational suffixes, saying that this is the only way to explain the various meanings that suffixes of ancient origin have in the individual languages today. For participial suffixes, too—in view of the data

from related languages—the explanation involving original complexity seems to be more probably true.

Thus, we will assume that original participles were characterized by functional richness and undividedness and that in the course of the history of Hungarian that wealth of possibilities was exploited to a larger or lesser extent.

Functionally speaking, the most complex item must have been the antecedent of the participle in *-ó/-ő*. It was not only a participle but also a *nomen agentis*, a *nomen actionis*, and a *nomen acti*; i.e., as a noun, it may have referred to the agent, the action, and the result of action as well. It had both adjectival and nominal value. In constructions, it may have expressed subject, object, and adverbial relationships. (In my chapters in Benkő et al. (1991; 1992), I introduced the notions of subject and object relationships, and I drew a distinction between local, temporal and instrumental relationships on the one hand and the passive on the other, cf. Fokos 1963, 73–92). Almost the same amount of functional complexity was exhibited by participles in *-t ~ -tt*.

The functional richness of the two most ancient participles is illustrated in Table 3. (In *A Historical Grammar*, I also presented parallels from related languages alongside the Hungarian data.)

The nominal function of participles in *-t ~ -tt* is a rare phenomenon; this is understandable since, during the Ancient Hungarian period, nouns suffixed *-t*, *-at/-et* got gradually separated from the group of such participles. That functional separation was accompanied by formal separation: the vowel preceding the participial suffix—if it was retained—turned into a mid vowel, whereas that preceding the nominal suffix remained low and was reinterpreted as part of the suffix. That formal separation had not become firmly established even by Late Old Hungarian, cf. Jókk.51: *karhozattacnac* ‘for the damned’. No similar separation occurred in the *-ó/-ő* group. It would have been possible in the case of relics involving the suffix *-g*—if these are really variants of the participial suffix that had retained their original consonantal shape—, but this proved to be a dead end. In fact, such separation was not needed since the forms in *-ó/-ő* themselves were quite firmly established in their nominal meanings. That is exactly why word class shift is not necessary to hypothesize in their case; I would even venture the remark that there is no need for a separate “suffix of occupation” in items like *szabó* ‘tailor’, *hegesztő* ‘welder’, what we have is simply the participial suffix.

Table 3

The functions of primary participles

	PARTICIPLES IN <i>-ó/-ő</i>	PARTICIPLES IN <i>-t ~ -tt</i>
PARTICIPLE		
subject relationship:	<i>fírou aniath</i> 'weeping mother' (acc.) (ÓMS.)	<i>a· bozza lot vízèt</i> 'the water (acc.) turned into wine' (MünchK.86rb)
object relationship:	<i>En zeretew fyaym</i> 'my beloved sons' (JókK.114)	<i>tilvut gimülftwl</i> 'from forbidden fruit' (HB.)
continuous:	<i>lata ket allo haioth</i> 'he saw two motionless ships' (DöbrK.355)	<i>lewlteuala . . . seprette</i> 'he found him sweeping it' (JókK.97)
perfective:	<i>Es mōda vr mennèt ki tēriēzto</i> 'and said the Lord who had extended Heaven' (BécsiK.312)	<i>tilvut gimülftwl</i> 'from forbidden fruit' (HB.)
NOUN		
<i>nomen agentis</i> :	<i>Erizeu</i> 'one who guards', <i>Latou</i> 'one who sees' (TÖ.) ? <i>Keuereg, Keuerig</i> 'one who stirs' (DömAd.)	
<i>nomen actionis</i> :	<i>io es gonoz tudo fa</i> 'the tree of good and evil knowledge' (CIFU 1:75)	<i>David . . . zertzette zoltar</i> 'psalm written by David' (DöbrK.15)
<i>nomen acti</i> :	? <i>Gurguteg</i> [toponym] (ÓMOLv.56)	
local relationship:	<i>Farkashalowhely</i> 'wolf's sleeping place' (CD. 3/1:156)	(<i>Maria-nyugotta bukor</i> 'bush where Mary rested') (Nyr. 71:79) (a late instance)
temporal relationship:	<i>huffhagjo nappba</i> 'on Shrove Tuesday' (JókK.26)	
instrumental relationship:	<i>Kezerekeorra</i> [toponym] (OkISz.)	

The construction *isten adta gyermek* 'God-given child' can be given the following interpretation: 'a child who is God's donation', i.e., with the participle in a *nomen actionis* meaning. The participle in the construction is suffixed by *-t* plus personal suffix. Therefore, I do not accept the term 'verb/participle' for such forms, I consistently refrained from using it in my chapters. I would by no means subscribe to the view that it is a separate part-of-speech category (cf.

Faluvégi et al. 1994, 44), since—as we saw above—there are quite a number of ambiguous participles (*holta* ‘his death’ could be a noun/participle, *jövet* ‘on one’s way here’ an adverb/participle, and—if we accept Velcsov (1957)’s view concerning the occasional independent behaviour of *-ván/-vén*—those forms could also be verb/participles). In terms of suffixation, Hungarian participles behave in a uniform manner: they accept nominal suffixes (sometimes even the nominal plural marker: *rakvak* ‘they are loaded’, VirgK. 145), and that trend was even strengthened during the later history of the language. “Back-verbalization” does not fit the system and is in contradiction with the character of participles.

Table 3 furthermore suggests that the continuous and perfective functions were not separated in Ancient Hungarian and in Early Old Hungarian as sharply as they were later on. That is why I refrained from calling the two types of primary participles ‘progressive’ and ‘perfect’, respectively; rather, I referred to them by their suffixes (*-ó/-ő* and *-t ~ -tt*) or else by typical examples (*jövet*, etc.).

To summarize, we can say that non-finite verb forms definitely constitute a separate part-of-speech category (*igenév*) in Hungarian grammar. A larger number of forms can be categorized as participles than standard descriptive grammars tell us; additional types include VP-internal forms suffixed by *-t*. However, their ambiguous behaviour (suggesting transitional status) does not warrant creating new part-of-speech categories (like verb/participle) for them; that phenomenon is part of the functional richness that characterizes participles anyway. Let me note here that I do not recognize the category of ‘copulative participles’, either. In Benkő et al. (1991, 1992) I write about the derivational-suffix-like function of items like *való* ‘being (swhere, of/for sg)’, *volta* ‘his/her/its being (sg)’. In the early periods of the history of Hungarian, non-finite verb forms had a complex function. Therefore, no single (functional) label is appropriate to refer to them; it is better to speak of participles in *-ó/-ő*, participles in *-t ~ -tt*, etc. Whether such functional richness is still characteristic of them today, hence descriptive grammars of the present state of Hungarian should also employ such neutral terminology, is a matter for further research (cf. Kiefer 1992, 875–81).

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