

# A crash course in Hungarian

WWU Linguistics Club, Spring 2008

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## 1. GENERALITIES ABOUT THE LANGUAGE

### 1. The Hungarian language (**a magyar nyelv**)

- belongs to the Finno-Ugric group of languages (which also includes Finnish and Estonian)
  - is related to some other obscure Uralic languages (spoken in Siberia; some extinct)
  - is unrelated to the Indo-European family of languages
  - is estimated to be one of the hardest European languages to learn by foreigners
  - is spoken by approximately 15 million people around the world, of which 11 million in Hungary; there is a large Hungarian minority in Romania (approximately 1.5 million), smaller minorities in other countries in Europe that were once part of the Kingdom of Hungary; several hundred thousand speakers in the United States

2. The Hungarians migrated to the Carpathian Basin at around 896 under the leadership of Second Grand Prince **Árpád**. Their language was therefore influenced by the Slavic languages (**tégla**-brick; **Karácsony**-Christmas). Some of the Slavic languages also borrowed words from Hungarian (**csizma**-boot; **ásó**-spade-are essentially the same in Croatian/Serbian). At around 1000, **István király**-King Stephen has turned the Kingdom of Hungary into a westernized Christian state. Consequently, Latin becomes influential on Hungarian. The proportion of the word roots: Finno-Ugric 21%, Slavic-20%, German-11%, Turkic-10%, Latin and Greek-6%, Romance-2%, uncertain origin-31%

3. Hungarian is an *agglutinative language*-it relies heavily on suffixes and prefixes. Unlike English (where prepositions are common), Hungarian uses only *postpositions*. Examples:

- **reggeli után**-(word by word) *breakfast after*-after breakfast
- **jegy nélkül**-(word by word) *ticket without*-without ticket

## 2. THE ALPHABET AND PRONUNCIATION

The alphabet is an expanded *Latin* one with several characteristic features (e.g., to represent long/short vowels and additional sounds of the language). The stress always falls on the first syllable of the word.

- There are 14 vowels:

-Short vowels

**a**-like the sound in awe; **akar**-to want; **apa**-father

**e**-like the sound in bed; **ember**-man

**i**-like the sound in feet; **minden**-everything

**o**-like the sound in bold; **hol**-where

**ö**-like the sound in the French heureux; **köszön**-to greet

**u**-like the sound in foot; **kulcs**-key

**ü**-like the sound in the French musée; **fül**-ear

-Long vowels

**á**-like the sound in car; **láb**-foot

**é**-like the sound in way; **ég**-sky; **testvér**-brother/sister

**í**-like the sound in bleed; **híd**-bridge

**ó**-like the sound in rode; **hó**-snow

**ő**-like the sound in the French feu; **nő**-woman

**ú**-like the sound in tool; **új**-new

**ű**-like the sound in the French mur (long); **fű**-grass

The vowels are either *somber*-a, á, o, ó, u, ú or *clear*-the others. Generally speaking a Hungarian word contains only vowels that are either somber or clear, although there are exceptions: **kocsi**-car.

- There are 25 consonants:

-Simple consonants

**b, d, f, g, h, k, l, m, n, p, r, t, v, z**-pronounced and written as in English; **q, w, x, y**-do not belong to Hungarian, appear only in family names or foreign words

**c**-like the sound in tsar; **cím**-address

**j**-like the sound in yes; **jár**-(he) walks

**s**-like the sound in shake; **sok**-a lot

-Double consonants

**cs**-like the sound in chess; **csak**-only

**gy**-pronounced like dy; **magyar**-Hungarian

**ly**-like the sound in yes; **lyuk**-hole

**ny**-like the sound in the French agneau; **nyit**-to open; **anya**-mother

**sz**-like the sound in stop; **szív**-heart

**ty**-like the sound in the French Étienne; **tyúk**-chicken

**zs**-like the sound in vision; **zseb**-pocket

**dzs**-like the sound in jet; **dzsessz**-jazz

-Geminates

They are all pronounced long; formed by two phonetically identical consonants. Examples:

**semmi**-nothing; **arra**-that way; **könnyű**-easy; **hosszú**-long...in the geminates that come from the double consonants only the first letter is doubled!

- Hungarian does not distinguish between feminine and masculine.

-Definite article

**a**: in front of words that begin with a consonant; **a város**-the city

**az**: in front of words that begin with a vowel; **az orvos**-the doctor

-Indefinite article

**egy**: literally meaning one; **egy könyv**-a book

- The plural is marked by **-k** (preceded by a connecting vowel if the word ends in a consonant, so that the rules of vocal harmony are fulfilled). Examples:

**úr**-sir...**úrak**-sirs

**villamos**-tramway...**villamosok**-tramways

**nyelv**-language...**nyelvek**-languages

**kapu**-door...**kapuk**-doors

BUT words that end in a or e lengthen the final vowel as in

**éjszaka**-night...**éjszakák**-nights

**kecske**-goat...**kecskék**-goats

### 3. FIRST STEPS IN HUNGARIAN

- **Én, te, ő (ön), mi, ti, ők (önök)**-I, you, he/she (polite form), we, you, they (polite form)

- **lenni**-to be: (én) vagyok, (te) vagy, (ő) van, (mi) vagyunk, (ti) vagytok, (ők) vannak

The verb **lenni** can be omitted when the subject is in the 3rd person: **Álex okos.**-Alex (is) smart.

- *To have* corresponds in Hungarian to *to be at*. The person (that possesses) receives the dative suffix **-nak, -nek** and the object possessed the possessive suffixes **-m, -d, -ja, -je, -nk, -tok, -tek, -tök, -juk, -jük**

Examples: 1) **Autód van.**-(word by word) *Car-your is*-You have a car. 2) **Álexnek autója van.**-*Alex to car his is*-Alex has a car.

- **Számok**-numbers: **nulla** (0), **egy** (1), **kettő, három, négy, öt, hat, hét, nyolc, kilenc, tíz** (10)

- **Számok 11-20: tízenegy, ..., tízenkilenc, húsz** (20)

- **Számok 21-30: húszonegy, ..., harminc** (30)

- The days of the week: **hétfő, kedd, szerda, csütörtök, péntek, szombat, vasárnap**

- Conjunctions: **és**-and; **vagy**-or; **is**-also; **de**-but

- **Igen**-yes; **nem**-no; **itt**-here; **ott**-there

...some useful expressions...

1. **Szia! (Szervusz!)-Hi! Viszontlátásra!**-See you! (Bye!)

2. **Jó regelt (napot, estét, éjszakát) (kívánok)!**-Good morning (day, evening, night) (I wish you)!

3. **Mi a neve?**-*What name your?*-What is your name? **Árpádnak hívnak.**-My name is Árpád OR (word-by-word) Árpád-dat. they call.

4. **Árpád Bényi vagyok.**-*A.B. am*-My name is A.B.

5. **Beszél itt valaki angolul?**-Does anyone here speak English? **Egy picit!**-(I speak) a little! **Nem tudok magyarul.**-*Not know Hungarian*-I do not know Hungarian. **Nem értem.**-*Not understand.*-I do not understand.

6. **Mit csinálsz?**-What are you doing? (right now) BUT **Hogy (még) vagy?**-How are you? How are things? **Jól vagyok, köszönöm (szépen).**-I'm fine, thank you very much (literally, thank you beautifully).

7. **Van pörkölt nokledival?**-*Is goulash gnocchi-with?*-Do you have goulash with gnocchi? **Igen, van!**-Yes, there is! **Nem, nincs!**-No, there is not! **Nem baj. Kérek egy étlapot.**-No problem. I'd like a menu (please)...but if you are lucky and get to eat some goulash, then perhaps you need to know...**Jó étvágyat!**-Bon appétit! **Nagyon finom volt!**-It was delicious! (or if it's really really good, use: **Bomba jó volt!**) **Egészségére!**-To your health! (Make sure to accentuate the first syllable otherwise you risk to provoke some serious laughs with **Egész seggedre...**)

...and more (randomly chosen useful words or expressions)...

**Szomjas vagyok**-I'm thirsty; **Éhes vagyok**-I'm hungry; **(Én) iszom valamit**-I drink something; **(Te) eszel valamit**- You eat something; **Én akarok**-I want; **Én akarnék**-I'd like; **John tanul**-John learns; **Kérem szépen**-Please; **kávé**-coffee; **kenyér**-bread; **sör**-beer NOT **medve**-bear; **(fehér, vörös) bor**-(white, red) wine; **tej**-milk; **Mennyibe kerül?**-How much it costs? **Hol lehet venni?**-Where can I buy?; **Hány?**-How many?; **Tessék mondani, hol van a múzeum?**-Can you please tell me where is the museum?; **mikor**-when; **Nyugat-Washingtoni Egyetem**- Western Washington University

*Minden jót kívánok! Viszontlátásra!*