

## ALPHABET & VOWELS

But the demand is for Hungarian , so let's start with the sound system and the alphabet:

There are 7 pairs of vowels in Hungarian, spelled:

a á e é i í o ó ö ő u ú ü ű

The accented vowels are long, the others (including ö ü) are short. I shall be writing the long umlaut ő with the tilde and the long umlaut ű with the circumflex, for the simple reason that they are simpler to write on my keyboard - in any case, many Hungarians do the same. You can look up the proper Unicode characters for these letters if you wish.

As for the pronunciation of the vowels, the long and the short vowels are pronounced alike, with the exception of the pairs a / á and e / é.

a = [Q], more or less. It is closest to English a in all. Ex: alma 'apple'.

á = [a:], like French cave, Spanish or Italian casa. Ex: ár 'price; flood; awl; 100 sq.m.'

e = [E], like English e in pet (but not the way the Australians or NZs pronounce it!); or like French sept. Ex: ember 'man, human being'.

é = [e:] - like French été, but longer; or like English say, but without diphthongization. Ex: szél 'wind [n.]'

For the other vowels, the long and short versions have the same quality - they only differ in quantity. I shall try to give the equivalents of the long vowels - it's easier to find foreign equivalents:

í = [i:], i = [i]: Like English sea, but with no noticeable diphthongization. Exs: szív 'heart'; visz 'he carries'.

ó = [o:], o = [o]: Like North American English boat, but with no diphthongization; or like French saute. Exs: ló 'horse'; lovak 'horses'. NOTE: Word-final -ó is always long, there is just one word with a word-final short -o: the interjection nono! 'don't do it!' For Hungarians, even Torontó has a long final -ó.

ő = [ø:] (I don't know the SAMBA for this!), ö = [ø]. If you know German, it's like German ö. Or French beurre. If you must use an English analogy, as in British English pearl. Exs: nő 'woman; it's growing'; lövök 'I shoot'. NOTE: The word-final length rule is even more absolute: any -ő at the end of the word must be long.

ú = [u:], u = [u]: Like English oo in moon, but with no noticeable diphthongization; or like French tour. Exs: túl 'beyond'; fut 'he is running'.

ű = [y:], ü = [y]: Like German ü, or French u in dur. Exs: tű 'needle'; fül 'ear'.

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That's it for the vowels. No real diphthongs (except for recent loanwords like autó 'car', Európa 'Europe'), no schwas, no tones. Stress is strong and always on the first syllable.

## CONSONANTS

Today I will cover Hungarian consonantism.

Some preliminary remarks:

1. Voiceless stops are not aspirated.
2. Dental consonants are truly post-dental, as in most European languages - none of this alveolar stuff you find in English.
3. Word-final voiced consonants remain fully voiced, unlike in German, Dutch and most (all?) Slavic languages.
4. Just like neighbouring Slavic languages, Hungarian has a full range of palatal consonants. But palatalization as a conditioning process does not exist: any consonant, palatal or not, can occur before any vowel.
5. Consonants can be single or doubled, and the distinction is phonemic: néz 'he looks', nézz 'look [imperative]'.  
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The list of consonants, in traditional spelling order, is as follows:

b c cs d dz dzs f g gy h j k l ly m n ny p r s sz t ty v z zs

Of these, b d h k m n p t v and z call for no explanation.

c cs dz and dzs are affricates - essentially [ts] [tS] [dz] and [dZ], respectively.

gy and ty are alveolar palatal stops, similar to what you hear in British English dune and tune. But they are definitely unitary phonemes, and despite their "asymmetrical" spelling they are truly a voiced-voiceless pair, articulated in the same place in the mouth. The IPA symbol for gy is a dotless <j> with a line drawn through it, the one for ty is /c/.

j and ly are different spellings for the same phoneme: IPA /j/, or English /y/ in yard. There was a time when ly was the palatal lateral heard in some varieties of Spanish <ll> (and Catalan, right, Izopiru?) and in Portuguese <lh>, but this is no longer the case. But it is important to know which spelling to use: spell bagoly 'owl' as \*bagoj, and you'll be surely labelled illiterate - Hungarians are a lot stricter on this kind of thing than English speakers.

l has the same light/dark distinction that you have in British English, and - just as in English - this is an allophonic, not phonemic distinction. Normally, /l/ is "light" before a vowel and "dark" before a consonant or word-finally.

ny - Izopiru would be glad to learn that this has the same pronunciation as in Catalan. This is the palatal nasal sound spelled ñ in Spanish, gn in French and Italian and nh in Portuguese.

r - this is the trilled consonant you hear in Italian, Spanish and Russian. Have a lot of fun pronouncing it - trill away! I was 7 when I learned how to pronounce it, I still remember the trill (and thrill) of it.

s and sz - these consonants have the opposite value from Polish: <s> = /S/ and <sz> = /s/.

zs = /Z/, as in English pleasure, or the way French, Italian and Catalan pronounce <j> and <g> before e,i.

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The letters <q> and <w> are not used except in very recent loanwords (w mostly in the physical measurement unit watt and the common word for toilet, WC /ve:ts:e/; q only in foreign names). The letter <x> is relatively common in words of Latin and Greek origin: export, hexaméter, etc.

The letter y is used to denote a palatal consonant: gy, ly, ny, ty. In addition, it commonly (but not always) replaces word-final -i in family names. When so used, it tends to denote the name of a noble family: Esterházy (where the <s> represents /s/, against the normal rules of the language), Csáky and so on.

## LESSON 1

### (a) Simple sentences

Ez könyv. - This is a book.  
Az könyv. - That is a book.

Ezek könyvek. - These are books.  
Azok könyvek. - Those are books.

Commentary:

There is clearly no need for a verb in sentences expressing identity. At least not in the present tense.

There is also no need for an article in such sentences. That does not mean that there is no indefinite article in the language - there is. But we'll get to it another time.

### (b) Simple questions.

Ez könyv? (with rising intonation). - Is this a book?  
Igen, ez könyv. - Yes, this is a book.  
Nem, ez nem könyv. - No, this is not a book.

Ezek könyvek? - Are these books?  
Igen, ezek könyvek. - Yes, these are books.

Nem, ezek nem könyvek. - No, these are not books.

Mi ez? (with rising intonation). - What is this?

Ez könyv. - This is a book.

Mik ezek? - What are these?

Ezek könyvek. - These are books.

Ez könyv, de az nem könyv. - This is a book, but that (over there) is not a book.

Ez könyv, és ez is könyv. - This is a book, and this, too, is a book.

És ez mi? - And what is this?

Ez is könyv. - This, too, is a book.

És ezek? - And these?

Ezek is könyvek. - These, too, are books.

Ezek nem könyvek, ezek füzetek. - These are not books, they are exercise books (notebooks).

Ez is füzet? - Is this also an exercise book?

Igen, ez is füzet. - Yes, this too is an exercise book.

Nem, ez könyv. - No, this is a book.

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Sorry about the simple-mindedness of the sample sentences, but I think that it's best to start simple-minded, so the simplest patterns are acquired without any explicit explanation.

## LESSON TWO

I will continue to keep things simple.

This will reinforce the impression I am trying to create: although Hungarian is an agglutinative, highly-inflected language, it can express simple ideas very simply. A few well-chosen, unmarked (or, little-marked) morphemes can be enough. We can still do without verbs:

A könyv piros. The book is red.

A könyv kék. The book is blue.

A könyvek pirosak. The books are red.

A könyvek kékek. The books are blue.

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What happens if we switch the adjective and the noun around?

A piros könyv. The red book (could be the title of something).

A kék könyv. The blue book.

A piros könyvek. The red books.

A kék könyvek. The blue books.

The alert reader may have noticed that adjectives agree in number with the noun they are complementary to, but remain in the singular when they qualify them.

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Let's introduce some people:

Ez a fiú. This is the boy.

Ez a lány. This is the girl.

Ezek a fiúk. These are the boys.

Ezek a lányok. These are the girls.

A lány okos. The girl is clever.

A fiúk okosak. The boys are clever.

A fiú nem okos. The boy is not clever.

A lányok nem okosak. The girls are not clever.

Az okos lány magyar. The clever girl is Hungarian.

Az okos fiú nem magyar. The clever boy is not Hungarian.

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Here we are at the end of LESSON 2, and we have still not seen a verb! And all the sentences are well-formed, with the exception of a few noun phrases. The latter illustrate the fact that qualifiers always precede the noun. Thus the famous free word order is not really free word order at all:

ADJ. + NOUN = Qualifier + Qualified (e.g. the red book)

NOUN + ADJ. = Statement ascribing quality to the noun (e.g. the book is red).

### **LESSON THREE**

I will still keep things simple. It's time to tackle verbs, but I will show that the unmarked form of verbs is used for the 3rd person singular, present tense (with no definite object, but that complication is for the future!).

New vocabulary:

egy - one; a/an (the definite article) [NB: this is one of the few irregular spellings of the language - the word is pronounced with a double voiced palatal stop, as if spelled \*eggy]

az ember - the person, man (as German Mensch)

a férfi - the man (male adult)

a nő - the woman

a kutya - the dog

a macska - the cat

az egér - the mouse

az élet - life  
az isten - God

jön - comes  
megy - goes  
fut - runs  
lát - sees  
hall - hears

szép - beautiful

Thus:

A lány fut. The girl is running.  
A fiú jön. The boy is coming.

A fiú lát egy kutyát. The boy sees a dog.  
A kutya lát egy fiút. The dog sees a boy.

Jön az ember. (There) comes the man.  
Megy a nő. (There) goes the woman.

A férfi hall egy macskát. The man hears a cat.  
A macska hall egy egeret. The cat hears a mouse.

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## GRAMMATICAL POINTS

1. Articles have now been formally introduced. The definite article ("the") is a before a consonant, az before a vowel. You may recall from LESSON ONE that az also means "that" (the demonstrative pronoun) - the relationship is clear. Note that as a demonstrative the word is always az, even before a consonant:

az kutya - that is a dog  
a kutya - the dog

The indefinite article is egy, identical to the numeral "one".

Articles are used more like they are in French and German, less like in English: for example, the definite article is required before abstract nouns:

Az élet szép. Life is beautiful.

Also, the indefinite article is not needed in expressions like:

Az könyv. That is a book.

It's not wrong to say "Az egy könyv", but if you say it like that there may be an emphasis on

there being other books in the world. This may be trivial, but there is definitely a difference between:

Az Isten. That is God.

Az egy isten. That is a god.

I'd expect that no monotheist would normally use the second option!

2. I have also introduced the first of many declensional endings: the accusative -t. This must practically always be used for the direct object (the few exceptions will come up eventually). We have seen the plural -k already, so - rather than bore people with intricate rules - I will go through the nouns we have covered so far, and provide both the corresponding accusative and plural endings (you can also have both together, but that's for another time). When both endings are added on to the bare stem, I shall just use a hyphen:

könyv: könyvet, könyvek (book)

fiú: -t, -k(boy)

lány: lányt, lányok (girl)

ember: embert, emberek (person, man)

férfi: férfit, férfiak : (man (male adult))

nő: -t, -k (woman)

kutya: kutyát, kutyák (dog)

macska: macskát, macskák (cat)

egér: egeret, egerek (mouse)

élet: életet, életek (life)

isten: istent, istenek (God)

The morphophonemics are quite complex - see if you can see some patterns already.

3. The verbs are all simple ones. Note that in the present indicative (e.g. fut) they can correspond to both the English simple present ("he runs") and the continuous present ("he is running").

4. A point of syntax: When the verb precedes the subject (e.g. jön a lány "there comes the girl"), this is a marked expression - there is an emphasis on the action, rather than on the person.

## LESSON FOUR

The verb "to be" (**lenni**), **personal pronouns and negation.**

New vocabulary

lenni - to be

tanár: tanárt, tanárok - teacher

szép - beautiful, pretty

itt - here

ott - there

már - already

The verb "to be" in the present tense, with attendant personal pronouns:

én vagyok - I am

te vagy - you [sing.] are

ő van - he/she is

mi vagyunk - we are

ti vagytok - you [pl.] are

ők vannak - they are

(Personal endings in bold)

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## GRAMMATICAL AND USAGE POINTS

1. Clearly, the verb "to be" has a suppletive present tense.

2. There are three main uses of "lenni":

(i) Identity + characterization: okos vagy "you are clever", tanár vagyok "I am a teacher".

(ii) Physical location: itt vagyok "I am here", ott vagytok? "are you there?"

(iii) Existence (English there is/are, French il y a): Van itt kutya? "Is there a dog here?" (in fact it means "are there dogs here?"), vannak ott lányok? "are there girls there?", igen, vannak "yes, there are".

3. With meaning (i), the verb is omitted in the 3rd person singular and plural (in the present tense, at any rate): ő okos "he/she is clever", ők tanárok "they are teachers".

4. Negation is always expressed by using the negative particle "nem" before the verb: nem vagyok tanár "I am not a teacher", nem jön a fiú "the boy is not coming".

5. There are special combined forms for expressing negation + verb with the 3rd person forms of the verb lenni:

nincs(en) - is not

nincsenek - are not

Examples: itt nincs kutya "there is no dog here", nincsenek ott "They are not there".

"Nincsen" sounds (to me) a bit more formal than "nincs", but I don't think there is a systematic difference between the two forms.



Since the verb "to be" is not used in the 3rd person for the identity/characterization meaning, nem simply precedes the adjective or noun being negated:

Nem tanár - He/she is not a teacher.

Nem okosak - They are not clever.

6. "Lenni" has no auxiliary function in Hungarian to express continuous ("he is coming") or perfect ("il est allé") tenses. It is used, however, with the dative to express the meaning "to have", but this will be discussed at another time.

7. The 6 personal pronouns are mostly self-explanatory. There is no gender distinction in the 3rd person.

Ő (he/she) and ők (they) are used for human subjects only. For animals, objects and abstract nouns the demonstrative pronouns az ("that, it") and azok ("those, they") are used: az nem jó "it's not good", azok szépek "they [animals, things, ideas] are pretty".

The 2nd person pronouns and the corresponding verbal forms (sing. and plural) are used pretty much like French "tu" and German "du/ihr". You would use these forms to address children, close family members, friends, members of your peer group at university or in the workplace, animals and God (assuming you speak to the last two). Exact rules of usage are of course quite intricate. Other people you would normally address by third person pronouns/verbs and/or through the use of various appellatives (occupational titles etc.). But let's leave this issue to some other time.

8. Personal pronouns are not necessary in unmarked speech - the verb ending already specifies both the person and the number of the subject. If you do use a personal pronoun, it's for emphasis or contrast:

Ő jön? - Is HE coming? (I already know what others are doing)

Te már itt vagy? - Are you already here? (What about the others?)

Én itt vagyok - I am here (as opposed to others who should be, but aren't...).

These contrast with unmarked forms:

Jön? - Is he coming?

Már itt vagy? - You are already here? (Mild surprise)

Itt vagyok - I am here. (Just a normal statement).

## LESSON FIVE

New vocabulary

állni - to stand

futni - to run

köpni - to spit

ülni - to sit

ajtó - door

alma - apple

asztal - table  
bor - wine  
bűn - sin, crime  
fecske - swallow (the bird)  
gólya - stork  
hír - news item  
kert - garden  
szék - chair  
tető - roof  
út - road

nagy - big, large

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### Verbs

Last time I provided the present paradigm of the verb "to be". Today, I shall do the same for a few common verbs:

állni (to stand): állok, állsz, áll, állunk, álltok, állnak

futni (to run): futok, futsz, fut, futunk, futtok, futnak

ülni (to sit): ülök, ülsz, ül, ülünk, ültök, ülnek

köpni (to spit): köpök, köpsz, köp, köpünk, köptök, köpnek

Some comments:

1. -ni is clearly the ending of the infinitive.
2. There is a connecting vowel between the stem and the ending in 4 out of the 6 forms. The nature of this vowel depends on the vowel(s) in the stem: if the stem vowel is a back vowel, the connecting vowel is a back vowel: o, u or a. If the last stem vowel is a front vowel, the connecting vowel is also a front vowel: ö, ü or e. This is a manifestation of vowel harmony, a typical feature of Uralic and Altaic languages. The rules for vowel harmony in **Hungarian** can be quite complex - all I can say is that for simple verbs such as the ones here, it is predictable.
3. There is no ending in the 3rd person singular - this is the unmarked form.
4. Where the forms of állni precede a consonant (e.g. állnak 'they stand'), the double consonant is preserved in spelling, but it is reduced to a single consonant in pronunciation (/a:lnOk/). This is an example of a general principle of **Hungarian** spelling: try to keep the spelling of a morpheme uniform throughout the inflectional and derivational patterns.

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Locative endings

We have already had the accusative ending -t. To be able to say simple sentences, we must now introduce some nominal endings indicating location.

Hungarian does not have prepositions. Instead, it uses declensional endings and postpositions to denote what prepositions denote in the European Indo-European languages (unlike, say, Hindi and Japanese, which are more like Hungarian in this respect).

The first ending I introduce is -n. It means "on", so it will be easy to remember (this is normally called the SUPERESSIVE case - don't let this deter you from learning it!)

When a noun ends in a vowel, the ending -n is generally simply added on to the noun:

ajtó (door) - ajtón (on the door)  
tető (roof) - tetőn (on the roof)  
fiú (boy) - fiún (on the boy).

One special rule: if the last vowel is a short -a or -e, this becomes long before the ending -n:

alma (apple) - almán (on the apple)  
fecske (swallow [the bird]) - fecskén (on the swallow)

When the noun ends in a consonant, a connecting vowel must be inserted between the consonant and the -n ending. This time we have three possibilities (-e-, -o-, -ö-), which obey vowel harmony in a more complex way. Basically:

1) if the last stem vowel is -e- or -i- (short or long), the connecting vowel is -e-: kert (garden) - kerten (on the garden), hír (news [may be singular in Hungarian]) - híren (on the news);

2) if the last stem vowel is -a-, -o- or -u- (short or long), the connecting vowel is -o-: asztal (table) - asztalon (on the table), bor (wine) - boron (on the wine), út (road) - úton (on the road). [Note the useful mnemonic here - the English preposition "on" can be translated by the Hungarian ending -on! ];

3) if the last stem vowel is -ö- or -ü- (short or long), the connecting vowel is -ö-: könyv (book) - könyvön (on the book), bűn (sin, crime) - bűnön (on the sin, on the crime).

## EXERCISE

See if you can give me the Superessive of the nouns introduced in previous lessons:

ember - person, man (as German Mensch)  
férfi - man (male adult)  
nő - woman  
kutya - dog  
macska - cat  
élet - life  
isten - God  
tanár - teacher  
egér - mouse

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Some sentences with the superessive

We can now combine some newly acquired nouns and verbs to make meaningful sentences:

Állok az úton - I stand on the road.

Széken ülsz? - Are you sitting on a chair?

Van bor az asztalon? - Is there wine on the table?

Fecskék ülnek a tetőn - Swallows are sitting on the roof. [Title of a Hitchcock movie?]

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Important grammatical point.

I have used the term "case" to describe the accusative and the superessive so far. Note that, unlike in Indo-European languages, there is no case agreement between a noun and the adjectives qualifying it:

Látok egy piros könyvet - I see a red book.

A nagy asztalon nincs bor - There is no wine on the large table.

## **LESSON SIX**

Cardinal and Ordinal Numbers

egy 'one' ~ első 'first'

NOTE: egy has an irregular pronunciation - it is spelled with a single <gy> but is pronounced double, as if spelled \*eggy.

kettő 'two' (reduced to két- in (most) compound numbers) ~ második 'second'

három 'three' ~ harmadik 'third'

From here on, the suffix -(linking vowel)dik is used (notice the vowel shifts for ordinal formation - these are due to morphophonemic alternations seen in many aspects of grammar).

négy 'four' ~ negyedik 'fourth'

öt 'five' ~ ötödik 'fifth'

hat 'six' ~ hatodik 'sixth'

hét 'seven' ~ hetedik 'seventh'

nyolc 'eight' ~ nyolcadik 'eighth'

kilenc 'nine' ~ kilencedik 'ninth'

tíz 'ten' ~ tizedik 'tenth'

NOTE: Numerals between 11 and 19 are formed as follows:

11 - tizenegy ~ tizenegyedik (11th) (not \*tizenelső!)

12 - tizenkettő ~ tizenkettődik (12th) (not \*tizenmásodik!)

13 - tizenhárom ~ tizenharmadik (13th)  
etc. (all of these forms consist of the units 1-9 being added to the superessive of 10; i.e. Hungarians say: 1 on 10, 2 on 10 etc.)

Note: első and második are never found in compound numbers.

húsz 'twenty' ~ huszadik 'twentieth'

NOTE: Numerals between 21 and 29 are formed as follows:

21 - huszonegy ~ huszonegyedik (21st)

22 - huszonkettő ~ huszonkettedik (22nd)

23 - huszonhárom ~ huszonharmadik (23rd)

etc. (all of these forms consist of the units 1-9 being added to the superessive of 20; i.e. Hungarians say: 1 on 20, 2 on 20 etc.)

harminc 'thirty' ~ harmincadik 'thirtieth'

NOTE: From here on, right up to 100, numerals are very simple: the decads followed by the units, e.g.:

31 - harmincegy ~ harmincegyedik (31st)

32 - harminckettő ~ harminckettedik (32nd)

etc.

negyven 'forty' ~ negyvenedik 'fortieth'

ötven 'fifty' ~ ötvenedik 'fiftieth'

hatvan 'sixty' ~ hatvanadik 'sixtieth'

hetven 'seventy' ~ hetvenedik 'seventieth'

nyolcvan 'eighty' ~ nyolcvanadik 'eightieth'

kilencven 'ninety' ~ kilencvenedik 'ninetieth'

Now, five other noteworthy numerals are the following:

száz 'hundred' ~ századik 'hundredth'

ezer 'thousand' ~ ezredik 'thousandth'

millió 'million' ~ milliomodik 'millionth'

milliárd '[US] billion' ~ milliárdomodik 'billionth'

billió '[US] trillion' ~ billiomodik 'trillionth'

Note the continental patterns for 1E9 and 1E12.

Compound numerals are very easy, as is natural for an agglutinative language:

1956 - ezerkilencszázötvenhat

Above 2000, a hyphen is inserted between groups of 3 digits, counting from backwards:

2567 - kétezer-ötszázhatvanhét

However, this does not apply to numbers with three zeros at the end:

3000 - háromezer

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Some further notes:

1. As for the irregularities in the ordinals, in the case of első 'first' and második 'second' we have suppletion, with the ordinals being related to elöl 'in front' and más 'other'.

2. On kettő vs két (two), usage is as follows:

- kettő is used:

-- in enumeration (egy, kettő, három = one, two, three);

-- when used as a noun: ketten jöttek - two (people) came (the -en form is a special case used only with numbers which may have the same ultimate origin as the superessive, although not always identical to it: négyen is both "four of them" and "on four", but for száz 'hundred' the special form is százan 'one hundred of them' while the superessive is százon 'on one hundred');

-- in arithmetic: kettő meg (or plusz) három az öt 'two plus three equal five'

- két is used as the attributive form: két fiú 'two boys', két alma 'two apples'.

3. You will note that in Hungarian the singular is used after numerals: két alma, not \*\*két almák. This is a very important difference between Hungarian and most IE languages [apparently, Welsh is like Hungarian]. The accompanying verb is also in the singular: Jött (not \*\*Jöttek) két fiú 'two boys came'.

4. The fractional numbers are:

fél 'half'

harmad - third

negyed - quarter

ötöd - one fifth

etc.

These are combined normally with cardinals:

egyharmad - one third

kétötöd - two fifth

There is a special form for one and a half: másfél (lit. 'other half'; remember that the word for 'second' is derived from más as well: második)

5. This is a good opportunity to introduce time measurement.

The key nouns are:

óra 'hour, o'clock'  
perc 'minute'  
másodperc 'second'

Normally the forms are as expected:

egy óra - one o'clock  
hét óra - seven o'clock

In everyday usage, the 12-hour clock is used, so that egy óra can mean 1 am or 1 pm. The 24-hour clock (e.g. tizenhárom óra = 13 o'clock) may be heard in military and timetable language.

For fractions of hours, the hour referred to is the hour to come, not the hour just passed - this, I believe, is identical to German usage:

negyed hét ("quarter seven") - 6:15  
fél hét ("half seven") - 6:30  
háromnegyed hét ("three-quarters seven") - 6:45

6. To denote the time at which something happens, Hungarian has a special case ending -kor, which does not follow vowel harmony rules. It is clearly based on the agglutinated form of the noun kor 'age, epoch'.

Thus you say:

egykor jön 'he comes at one o'clock'  
háromnegyed hatkor itt van 'he is here at 5:45'  
ötör itt lesz 'he'll be here at 5'

You can also add -kor to óra 'o'clock':

öt órakor még itt volt 'at 5 o'clock he was still here'.

## LESSON SEVEN

Possessives

Unlike IE languages, Hungarian expresses possession by adding a personal suffix to the end of the noun. You could say that Hungarian conjugates its nouns.

Because of vowel harmony considerations, as well as other morphophonemic changes, the vowel preceding the possessive suffix varies. Let's see the patterns for 3 types of nouns: consonantal endings with front and back vocalism, and vowel ending. The paradigms will be:

könyv (book), lány (girl, daughter), alma (apple).

The forms are (I will furnish a translation for only the first two forms for each paradigm):

könyvem (my book), könyved (your book), könyve, könyvünk, könyvetek, könyvük.

lányom (my daughter), lányod (your daughter), lánya, lányunk, lányotok, lányuk.

almám (my apple), almád (your apple), almája, almánk, almátok, almájuk.

Note the intrusive -j- in the 3rd person (sing. and pl.) of nouns ending in -a: this is needed because Hungarian does not like hiatus between vowels, and a form like \*\*almáa would be impossible to pronounce.

So let's see how possessives work in simple sentences:

A kutyám jó. My dog is good.

Itt van a lányod? Is your daughter here?

Fut a macskája. His/her cat is running.

Nagy a kertünk. Our garden is large.

Hol van a kutyátok? Where is your all's dog?

A tanáruk amerikai. Their teacher is American.

There are some irregularities with some nouns. One important example is *fiú* (boy, son). The possessives are:

fiam (my son), fiad (your son), fia, fiunk, fiatok, fiuk (as opposed to *fiúk* 'boys').

Supposedly, regular possessives of the same noun are used colloquially for 'my boyfriend etc.':

*fiúm* (my boyfriend), *fiúd* (your boyfriend), *fiúja* (her boyfriend). I don't know to what extent this formation exists in the plural - Hungarian girls don't like to share their boyfriends, I hear...

Personal pronouns with possessives

To emphasize the identity of the possessor, the personal pronoun can precede a possessive form. Let's do this for the sentences shown above:

Az én kutyám jó. It is my dog that is good.

Itt van a te lányod? Is your daughter here?

Fut az ő macskája. His/her cat is running away.

Nagy a mi kertünk. Our garden is large.

Hol van a ti kutyátok? Where is your dog?

Az ő tanáruk amerikai. As for their teacher, he is American.

Note that in the 3rd person plural the singular *ő* is used, not the plural *ők*, in front of the possessive. There are other cases as well where Hungarian uses the singular where in IE languages you would expect the plural - in all these cases other features (e.g. the -uk ending) specifies plurality.



## Definite (objective) conjugation

Without getting into this can of worms, it will be difficult to develop meaningful sentences.

Basically, all finite verb forms in Hungarian come in two varieties: definite and indefinite. Let's take some new verbs and conjugate them with the endings we have had so far (see Lesson 5):

ütni (to hit): ütök, ütsz, üt, ütünk, üttök, ütnek  
látni (to see): látok, látsz, lát, látunk, láttok, látnak

The above are the indefinite forms. To make the definite forms, you have to use a different set of endings:

ütni (to hit): ütöm, ütöd, üti, ütjük, ütitek, ütik  
látni (to see): látom, látod, látja, látjuk, látjátok, látják.

If you compare the endings of the definite forms with those of the possessive, you'll see that they are very similar.

Quick overview of when to use the definite and when to use the indefinite forms:

### 1. You use the indefinite form:

#### a. when there is no object:

Ki jön? - Who is coming?

Előbb ütök, aztán kérdezek - I hit first, then I ask (questions).

#### b. when the object is indefinite:

Látok egy kutyát. - I see a dog.

Láttok valamit? - Do you see something?

### 2. You use the definite form:

#### a. when the object is definite:

Látom a kutyát. - I see the dog.

Üti a labdát? - Is he striking the ball?

#### b. When the object is in the possessive (even if it's not preceded by the definite article):

Látom kutyádat. - I see your dog.

#### c. To express a 3rd person definite object (no personal pronoun needed):

Látod? - Do you see him/her/it?

Ütjük. - We are hitting it.

Thus we can use these resources of the language to express very simply the following distinction:

Nem látok. - I don't see (i.e. "I can't see")

Nem látom. - I don't see him/her/it.