The emergence and fall of Hungarian complex tenses

1. Aim

The majority of Uralic languages, including the Ob-Ugric sister languages of Hungarian, only have two tenses: past and non-past. Hungarian, however, also had complex tenses marking both tense and aspect (i.e., present perfect, past continuous, and past perfect) throughout the first five hundred years of its documented history, and, as will be argued, throughout the preceding five hundred years, as well. This talk aims to answer how the complex tenses evolved in the language, and why they disappeared after one thousand years. It will be claimed that complex tenses arose through the reanalysis of Proto-Ugric agreeing participles under the influence of similarly constructed West Old Turkic finite verb forms, whereas the disappearence of the morphological encoding of viewpoint aspect was the consequence of the grammaticalization of telicity marking by verbal particles.

2. The standard view of the origin of Old Hungarian complex tenses

Since complex tenses are atypical among Uralic languages, and the Ob-Ugric sister languages of Hungarian do not have it, traditional historical grammars of Hungarian (Benkő 1991, 109-110; Kiss–Pusztai 2005, 367-368) claim that they arose under the influence of Latin in the Old Hungarian period (896-1526); they were created by translators for the rendering of various Latin tenses; they remained rare in the written language, and they never became part of spoken Hungarian. The talk will refute this view, arguing that (i) Latin influence is unlikely because Latin has no complex tenses in the active voice, and the complex tenses of Neo-Latin languages are also different from those of Old Hungarian. The OH temporal auxiliary is the copula,which is marked for tense or mood; aspect and agreement are marked on the lexical V:

(1) *én   mond-t-am   vala*
     I   say-PERF-1SG be-PAST
     'I had said'

(ii) The low frequency of the OH past continuous and past perfect is similar to their frequency in other languages. (iii) The complex tenses were not only present in translations; they are attested in private letters, and still exist in the most archaic dialects. The perfect conditional (*én mond-t-am vol-na* I say-PERF-1SG be-COND) has been preserved in Standard Hungarian, too.

3. The influence of Turkic

In the 7th-8th centuries, prior to their settlement in the Carpathian Basin, Hungarian tribes formed parts of various Turkic tribe alliances; according to contemporary sources, the Hungarian tribal elite was bilingual. West Old Turkic has been shown to have had a significant impact upon Hungarian vocabulary and Hungarian morphology (cf. Róna Tas 2011). Unlike Latin, Old Turkic does have complex tense forms (Erdal 2004, 244-246), which are structured in the same way as OH tense forms, with the lexical verb bearing aspect and agreement suffixes, and the copula bearing a tense or mood suffix:

(2) *öŋdün sözlä-di   är-di*   (3) *te -di   -miz är -sär*
     he   say -PAST be-PAST   say-PAST-1PL be -COND
     'he had said'   'we would have said'

In the sole descendant of West Old Turkic, Chuvash, the tense-marked copula is agglutinated to the lexical verb bearing the agreement suffix, whereby in the past perfect verb forms, agreement appears in the middle of the morpheme complex (Bereczki 1983):

(4) *kalar-ӛm*   'I said'
     kalasatt-ӛm-ččӛ   'I had said'

Three Uralic languages (Udmurt, Komi, and Mari), whose speakers have shared the habitat of the Chuvash for the past 1000 years, have also developed complex tenses of the OH and Old Turkic type (Bereczki 1983). The fact that all and only the Uralic languages that came into

close contact with West Old Turkic developed complex tenses suggests that the Uralic proto-language had a pattern that was susceptible to reanalysis as a finite construction of the type used in West Old Turkic.

4. How did the reanalysis take place?
As will be shown, OH, and the Uralic languages, in general, mostly use non-finite complementation. If the subject is pronominal, it can be dropped, and the non-finite verb bears an agreement suffix indicating its person and number. OH had a verbal noun derived by -*t*, which is attested in the first OH document (5), and is still in use (6):

(5) *hadlava   chol-**t**-a-t* (1192)   (6) *hazafelé   men-**t**-ünk-ben* (Modern H)
     hear-PAST.3SG dy-ing-3SG-ACC   homeward go-ing-1PL-in
     'he heard his dying [that he would die]'   'in the course of our going home'

The verbal noun derived by -*t* could/can be used with the copula, e.g.:

(7) *nem vala nyug-**t**-om*
     not   was   rest-ing-1SG
     'I had no resting [there was no resting of mine]'

It is the construction in (7) that could be reanalyzed under the influence of West Old Turkic as a finite verb form, with -*t*- functioning as a perfectivity morpheme. The past tense copula with a zero 3SG agreement morpheme was reanalyzed as an auxiliary+past complex. This was followed by the development of a present perfect paradigm, derived by the omission of the auxiliary marked for past tense. Another development was the dropping of the -*t*-perfectivity morpheme, which led to the evolution of a past imperfective paradigm. I.e.:

(8) *mentem vala* ([verbal noun+subject agreement] + [copula+past+3SG])
     → **reanalysis**
     → *mentem vala* ([V+perfective+subject agreement] + [auxiliary +past] 'past perfect')
     → **extension**
     ↱*mentem* ([V+perfective+subject agreement] 'present perfect')
     ↳ *megyek vala* ([V+subject agreement] + [auxiliary+past] 'past imperfective/continuous')

5. The disappearance of complex tenses
From the 16th century, the -*t* perfective suffix is losing ground to the -*a/e* past tense suffix, eventually supplanting it. The system of complex tenses is getting confused. Often both the lexical V and the auxiliary get the same -*t* suffix (*mond-**t**-am vol-**t*** 'I had said'. The functional differences of simple past, present perfect, past perfect and past continuous are disappearing; the various past tenses are only used for stylistic effects. Modern Hungarian only has a past tense marked by -*t*, and a morphologically unmarked non-past. The talk will argue, based on É. Kiss (2006), that the disappearance of the encoding of viewpoint aspect is due to the evolution of telicity marking by verbal particles. In the first OH documents, verbal particles are still sporadic, however, in the 14th-16th centuries the use of verbal paticles becomes general in sentences describing inherently bounded events. This makes the marking of viewpoint aspect redundant. Consequently, in the extended verbal projection, the the verbal particle is reanalyzed as an aspect marker, the -*t* perfective suffix is reanalyzed as a past tense suffix, and the OH temporal auxiliary, carrying the past tense morpheme, disappears. I.e.:

(9) [TP *val+a* [AgrP … [AspP…-*t* … [PredP PRT …]]]] → [AgrP … [TP…-*t* … [AspP PRT …]]].

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