

Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Humanities

PhD dissertation

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**The history of the Hungarian
versification until the end
of the 16th century**

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PhD Thesis

The subject of the study

The dissertation examines the most common metrical conventions of Hungarian poetry which have come into existence until the end of the 16th century. These are as follows: syllabic, quantitative and free verse. The aim of the examination is the description the origin, the functioning and the rules of the listed traditions.

Methodology

The study has two methodological grounds. On the one hand, it is based on the metrical typology of the RPHA, on the other hand it uses the description of the Mordvin versification worked out by Roman Jakobson and John Lotz. Based on these grounds the study builds up an own model called Régi Magyar Agy ('Old Hungarian Brain'). The model is a virtual verse generator that uses metrical components to think through the theoretically possible metrical forms and to select those that seem to be useable for one reason or another. Hypothetically, the metrical forms that Régi Magyar Agy found useable are the forms of Hungarian poetry that have come into existence till the end of the 16th century. The study divides these forms into two groups: metrical forms that were realized by the generator more than ten times are called likable forms the others acceptable forms. The model proceeds from the hypothesis that in respect of metrics Régi Magyar Agy is empty but it might has non-metrical limits, sympathies, antipathies. Chapters Two to Six try to answer the question what considerations are made by Régi Magyar Agy as it defines a metrical form likable or acceptable.

The first chapter explains the necessity of the model. The main direction of the Hungarian prosody researches is described by the first chapter as a system of preconceptions growing out of questions of history of ideas. After the summery of the system it examines how that ideology came into existence and developed which defined the aim, the object and the method of the researches.

The metrical traditions examined by the study

Despite of the fact that the theoretical separation and systematization of the metrical traditions began around the end of the 18th century, and so the metrical devices during the examined period were considerably freely formed by the poets, there are clearly recognizable nodes within the traditions.

Syllabic verse

The second chapter surveys the most important tradition of old Hungarian versification, the syllabic verse. First, it gathers the metrical components of the syllabic verse, second, it analyses the rules that define the relationship of them. The analysis focuses on four main aspects. First, it counts the number of the given structure. Second, it describes the genre-system of the poems that

use the form. Third, it assigns the presence of the form. Fourth, if there is any, it compares the Hungarian text with its foreign-language origin. The result of the examination is that all forms of old Hungarian syllabic verse have their origin in Medieval Latin syllabic poetry.

Quantitative verse

Unsurprisingly, the examination of the old Hungarian quantitative verse comes to an end with a similar result. After the enumeration of the metrical components the chapter reviews the likable and the acceptable structures. The overview follows the order of the genres-system. Based on the examination it seems that the quantitative metrical forms which were implemented in practice are chosen by Régi Magyar Agy after the knowledge of the antic quantitative tradition.

Free verse

The third and the fifth chapters survey the free verse-tradition that came into existence around the tradition of the syllabic and the quantitative poetry.

After the description of the metrical components of the free verse tradition that seem to be close to the syllabic poetry the third chapter analyses the genres which, in connection with the free form, are likeable or acceptable for Régi Magyar Agy. The examination reveals first, that the form occurs most frequently in such verses which belong to the liturgical or para-liturgical genres, second, that many of these poems have a Middle Latin original text that uses the same form. The other frequent genre is the spell, these verses have usually no foreign language original, but if they do the original is Latin as well. Based on these the chapter originates the form in the Middle Latin influence and proposes that the spells could be understood as the folk version of the liturgical genres.

The fifth chapter examines the corpus of the free verses that seem to be close to the old Hungarian quantitative poetry. The examination follows the previous considerations (i.e. number of the poems in the examined corpus, genre-system of the corpus, enumeration of the metrical components, dating of the poems, and, if there is any, the relationship between the original text and the Hungarian translation). The comparative examination has no satisfying results. The translated texts usually do not follow the form of the original, if they do, the model is not quantitative. Consequently, the quantitative-type free verse seems to be the own invention of Régi Magyar Agy. In connection with the *Cisio* of Kolozsvár which uses a German original the chapter ends with a hypothesis. The hypothesis proposes that the quantitative-type old Hungarian free verse could have been developed under the influence of the similar German metrical tradition.

German metrical influence?

The last chapter of the study tries to make probable this hypothesis. It raises the question whether the German knittelverse that was frequently used as a replacement of some quantitative forms has any influence on old Hungarian poetry. First, the chapter surveys the corpus that was set up after the metric characteristic of the German knittelverse, second, it examines those poems

which raise the suspicion of the influence of the German tradition in question. The result of the examination reveals that, although there is not a single poem in these corpuses that is translated from the same German form, the poems that have been chosen on the basis of the metric characteristic of the knittelverse, in one way or another, often have a German relation.

Results

The results of the study are double, theoretical and practical. The traditional Hungarian research describes the greatest part of old Hungarian metrical forms as a unified, ancient and organically developed tradition (called “old Hungarian national verse rhythm”). In the light of the study, old Hungarian versification rather seems to be a fragmented tradition that came into existence under the influence of Middle Latin and partly Middle German poetry. The practical result of the study is that it makes possible to improve the RPHA database, the metrical part of the plan which aims to build a new database is based on the theoretical results of the study.