

Hungarian

An Essential Grammar



Carol Rounds



London and New York

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Hungarian

An Essential Grammar

This is a concise, user-friendly guide to the most important structures of this fascinating language.

All students of Hungarian, whether beginners or at intermediate and advanced levels, will welcome its clarity of presentation and jargon-free explanations. It is ideal for those studying independently or following a taught course.

Topics include:

- Verbal prefixes
- Aspect and tense
- Word-formation mechanisms
- Linking vowels
- The case system and its uses
- Word order

Appendices include the formation of irregular verbs, complete noun declensions and irregular noun patterns.

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Carol Rounds lectures in Hungarian at Columbia University, New York.

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Preface

This book is designed for all students of Hungarian – but perhaps especially for those who have been told it is too hard to learn. College students, business men and women, people of Hungarian heritage or spouses of Hungarians can use this book as an anchor in their quest to master the intricacies of Hungarian.

The Hungarian language is complex, wonderfully expressive and like no other language you know. This book guides you through the patterns of building words, phrases and sentences with clear explanations and paradigms. What at first seems complex to the Hungarian student becomes a regular and predictable – and therefore a *learnable* – pattern used to inspire your own Hungarian expression. Have fun with it!

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Abbreviations

abl.	ablative
acc.	accusative
adess.	adessive
all.	allative
caus.-fin.	causal-final
dat.	dative
delat.	delative
def.	definite
distr.	distributive
elat.	elative
ess.-for.	essive-formal
illat.	illative
indef.	indefinite
iness.	inessive
instr.	instrumental
intrans.	intransitive
lit.	literal(ly)
nom.	nominative
part.	participle
pl.	plural
pl1	first person plural
pl2	second person plural
pl3	third person plural
poss.	possessive
pres.	present
relat.	relative
s1	first person singular
s2	second person singular
s3	third person singular
sg.	singular

Abbreviations

sociat.	sociative
sublat.	sublative
superess.	superessive
sy	somebody
term.	terminative
transl.	translative

PART I

*Alphabet, pronunciation
and vowel harmony*

Alphabet

Hungarian uses the Roman alphabet in addition to some diacritics placed over some vowels. The accent mark(s) above the vowels indicate that the vowel is ‘long’ – see the pronunciation section to follow. Some consonants are digraphs, i.e., they consist of two letters; one consonant (*dzs*) is a trigraph. Although they are written with more than one letter, digraphs (and the trigraph) are each individual letters of the alphabet.

a á b c cs d dz dzs e é f g gy h i í j k l ly m n

ny o ó ö ő p (q) r s sz t ty u ú ü ű v (w) (x) (y) z zs

Unless found in the spellings of foreign words, the letters *q*, *w* and *x* are not used; the letter *y* is found only in old spellings (pronounced as the letter *i*) and in digraphs.

Chapter 2

Pronunciation

2.1 Consonants

2.1.1

Many of the consonants in Hungarian are pronounced as in English. All consonants are pronounced – there are no silent letters. The following are the consonants pronounced differently from those in English.

c as in cats	cukor ‘sugar’ ecet ‘vinegar’
cs as in church	bocsánat ‘excuse me’ csal ‘deceive’
g (always hard) as in go	igen ‘yes’ gaz ‘weed’
j as in yes	jó ‘good’ fáj ‘hurt’
r trill the tongue on the top of the mouth	kérem ‘please’ ró ‘carve’
s as in she	este ‘evening’ sárga ‘yellow’
sz as in sat	szervusz ‘hi’ asztal ‘table’
zs as in azure	garázs ‘garage’ zseb ‘pocket’

2.1.2 The palatal series

The following four consonants are palatalized, i.e., they are pronounced with the tongue gliding off the top of the palate.

gy similar to a <i>dy</i> sound as in <i>during</i>	magyar ‘Hungarian’ gyár ‘factory’
---	---

ly as in yes (thus the same as the Hungarian letter j)	személy ‘person’ lyuk ‘hole’
ny as in canyon	kenyér ‘bread’ nyár ‘summer’
ty similar to a <i>ty</i> sound as in <i>studio</i>	kártya ‘card’ tyúk ‘hen’

2.2 Consonant length

All consonants can be long or short. Long consonants are written as double consonants and are pronounced approximately twice as long as short ones. Great care should be paid to differences in length; it can change the meaning of a word, e.g.,

szeretem I love him/her vs. **szerettem** I loved him/her

Length of digraphs is indicated by doubling the first consonant of the digraph. For example, a long **sz** is written **ssz**: **vissza** ‘back’; long **ny** is written **nny**: **lánnyal** ‘with a girl’, etc.

2.2.1 Lengthening of consonants before j

The consonants **d**, **gy**, **t**, **ty**, **n**, **ny** are pronounced long when preceding the letter **j** (though this is not represented in the orthography):

ad + ja	→ adja	[addja]	s/he gives it
hagy + ja	→ hagyja	[haddja]	s/he leaves it
mutat + ja	→ mutatja	[mutattja]	s/he shows it
báty + ja	→ bátyja	[báttja]	his/her brother
kíván + juk	→ kívánjuk	[kivánnjuk]	we wish it
any + ja	→ anyja	[annja]	his/her mother

2.3 Voicing and devoicing of consonants

Consonants can be classified as voiced and unvoiced. The following are the voiced and unvoiced consonants of Hungarian: