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ON THE MIXED LINGUISTIC STATUS OF MEDIEVAL CHARTERS¹

The main problem with the use of medieval language sources is that there is no source in which we could have a completely consistent language version. The mixed feature of the individual sources may have originated from the mixing of the writer's own dialect and the literary norm, the fluctuations of the author's own language version independent of normal effects, and the joint manifestations of the language version of different individuals. When considering the value of the language historical source of the medieval Hungarian charters, these aspects can be applied to any of our later sources as well.

Keywords: literary norm, charters, historical dialectology.

Introduction

The primary and direct source materials of studies in Hungarian linguistics and historical dialectology have been represented, besides some other points of orientation (such as the contemporary dialect data, the names of tribes, the loanwords etc.), by data found in linguistic records. The source value of data in linguistic records used in historical dialectology, however, may often be questioned, just as we may also use the historical dialectological testimony of indirect sources, (including today's dialects, related languages, loan elements, proper names, and linguistic commentary, publications) only with caution. In this paper I address only one aspect of the issue, namely the mixed linguistic status of medieval sources and its role in research in historical dialectology.

One of the main reasons of problems related to the use of linguistic records is that we have no such records that would reveal a completely uniform and consistent linguistic status. Loránd Benkő writes that the internal dichotomies of certain linguistic records may derive from the mixture of the writer's own linguistic status and the literary standard, the fluctuations in the writer's own linguistic status, and the combined presence of the linguistic status of different individuals (Benkő 1957: 37–44). In this paper I discuss the source value of medieval charters in historical linguistics by investigating these factors.

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The effects of the norm before the 16th century

The normative rules emerging explicitly mostly after the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries (i.e., with the appearance of the intelligentsia) resulted in the mixed linguistic status of several Hungarian linguistic records. The emerging literary norm could only partly suppress the author's own linguistic status in most of the cases, which resulted in numerous fluctuations, and in several cases even hypercorrection (Benkő 1957: 39–42).

Géza Bárczi, however, argues that the effects of the norm had been present sporadically before this period as well. In his opinion, it was already during the late Old Hungarian Era (from the middle of the 14th century to the first third of the 16th century) that two such language versions began to emerge that point towards linguistic uniformization from a phonological perspective: one of these is the type he refers to as the “monastic language”, in which the use of *ö* (as opposed to *ë*) is strikingly typical despite the fact that they were especially the areas using *ö* that came under Turkish rule in the 16th century and thus codices reflecting this linguistic feature were destroyed in the highest number. The other example in his opinion was related to the royal chancellery and the royal court. He argues that the royal chancellery developed a uniform sound marking system in its own practice, what is more, it also strived for the uniformization of word forms (1963/1975: 189).

Bárczi also attributes the Latin-like use of verb modes and tenses appearing in translations (and partly also in original Hungarian texts) adjusted to particular rules to the early impact of a standard, along with the Slavish translation of Latin nonfinite verb structures, the preference for dual possessive structures (*háznak a teteje* form vs. *ház teteje* ‘the roof of the house’) or the use of the plural after a numeral attribute (e.g., *hét fõ bűnök* vs. *hé fõ bűn* ‘seven deadly sins’) (Benkő 1957: 39–42, Bárczi 1963/1975: 186–187). Based on the listed examples, he argues that during this era concepts like linguistic correctness and incorrectness began to emerge in the minds of writers. As a result a linguistic standard was beginning to appear that “demanded a separate, written syntax resembling Latin as opposed to the spoken sentence and also excluded certain dialectal phenomena” (1963/1975: 188). The question rightfully appears, however, to what extent the strict insistence on the original Latin text and its Slavish translation could be considered as the result of a standard.

The effects of the norm before the middle of the 14th century

At the same time, however, we also need to add that in terms of the era prior to the appearance of a more significant intelligentsia, we might as well suppose that the written corpus created by a few literate people showed much more consistency than the products of later ages (cf. Benkő 1980: 81). According to Loránd Benkő, our earliest linguistic record in this regard is the “Halotti beszéd” ‘Funeral Sermon’ (recorded at the end of the 12th century), and it stands out from our early sources especially due to the great precision and consistency of its sound marking system (Benkő 1980: 72, Kis 2018a: 37, 2018b: 58).

Dezső Juhász argues similarly in this regard and states that the ability to write in the medieval ages presupposed a high level of literacy and the professionalism of those involved in the creation of written texts (e.g., those working at the chancellery, scribes at places of authentication, writers of religious texts of religious orders) did not only mean a strive for correct writing but also manifested itself in the use of templates of different text types. Juhász also adds that those able to write encountered the varied language use of different regions, and among others it was this linguistic experience and the use of templates based on written traditions that together resulted in the fact that early written documents reflect the living language through some kind of a filter (Juhász 2018: 315–316).

Benkő's idea in connection with the background of proper names using *ö* in the first Gesta (Anonymus' *Gesta Hungarorum*, An.) including Hungarian names (that survived in a 13th-century copy) is in line with this in the sense that we can probably suppose a conscious written endeavor behind it (2003: 159). He thinks that this opinion is supported, on the one hand, by the fact that the anonymous author of the Gesta paid a lot of attention to the appearance of historical loyalty and therefore he did not want to allow the *ö* features of his own dialect to surface in the spelling of names deriving from dialects using *ě* in his age and very well known by him. On the other hand, the writing of proper names from regions using *ě* with *ö* (e.g., with the letter *u*) was spreading in the general practice of scribes of charters in the 12th and 13th centuries (e.g., *Vértés* 1226: *Wertus*, *Szepes* 1332: *Scepus*, *Eger* 1317: *Egur*; *Temesvár* 1323: *Thumuswar*, Benkő 2003: 160). Anonymous could have adapted to this practice, and at the same time, as a prestigious member of the chancellery he himself could have contributed to its formation (Benkő 2003: 160, cf. Benkő 1996: 229–230, Juhász 2018: 324).

In connection with the early (11th-13th century) linguistic records, Juhász expresses a stronger position already, as based on the low degree of the use of *ö* (and *ü*) in these. He believes that the norm of the chancellery could have supported the use of labial forms to a certain level, e.g., “Halotti beszéd” ‘Funeral Sermon’ (recorded at the end of the 12th century): *num* [*nöm* ~ *nüm*] vs. *nem* (2018: 324). According to Benkő, the high level of linguistic and written status of early linguistic records is also indicated, among others, by the fact that the occasional consonant assimilations (certainly present at that time already) are not marked (1980: 81).

It may not be far-fetched to suppose the strive for standardization and the presence of normative rules from the perspective of orthography either behind the fact that the length of the sound *é* (which usually has no sign) in the early Old Hungarian Era (from the 11th century to the middle of the 14th century) could in some cases also be marked by the *ee* letter combination, what is more, due to some reason, in the spelling of certain names, name constituents or common words this type of writing is especially preferred compared to other elements. István Kniezsa calls our attention (1952: 55–56) that in the recording of the *Kér*, *Nyék*, *Szécs*, *Bél*, *Hét*, *Pél*, *Lég*, *Péc* names or name constituents, and in that of the *ér* ‘streamlet’ common noun

the spelling of the *é* sound as *ee* is quite frequent, if not general; however, we also need to add that this solution is just as typical in the writing of the *bérc* ‘crag’ geographical common noun and the names including the *Szék* name constituent (e.g., *bérc* 1247: *beerch*, HA. 3: 33, *Kisakasztó bérce*, 1329: *Kysakasztó beerchy*, HA. 3: 53, *Brizó bérce* 1331/1394: *Brizoubeerche*, HA. 3: 34, *Szék* 1237: *Seeclac*, KM-Hsz. 1: 254; *Szék* 1307: *Zeek*, HA. 2: 26).

Dualities present in the given dialect type

The linguistic fluctuations deriving from the same author may also be the result of dualities present in the given dialect type (Benkő 1957: 14). It seems straightforward that just as today, it is true in historical times also that the old and new phenomena coexist in a synchronic section in the same language version, as linguistic changes obviously do not occur suddenly, from one moment to another. The simultaneity of phenomena, however, may be characteristic not only of certain dialect types but this diversity is also the basic characteristic of the individual’s linguistic status. The mixed nature of the author’s linguistic status does not merely mean that the fluctuations of the given dialect types result in the duality of the individual’s language use, but it may happen that the author uses that kind of “mixed dialect” in the documents that is based on the mixture of dialect types spoken at his different places of residence. However, as we have no opportunity in connection with the early Old Hungarian Era (from the 11th century to the middle of the 14th century) to specify those cases in which the linguistic fluctuations are the result of the dualities of the dialect type and those in which we can see the traces of the mixture of different dialects, this issue may only be addressed at present only theoretically (Benkő 1957: 37–38).

The mixture of the linguistic status of different people and different eras

At the same time, it is also obvious that the mixed linguistic features of our linguistic records are due to the fact that manuscripts and documents often do not survive in their original form, thus in this case we may consider the mixture of the linguistic status of different people and different eras in them.

Originality is an especially important factor in the case of the products of legal written documents because a significant part of our charters from the 11th and 12th centuries have survived only in the form of copies, transcripts or forgeries, which has a major influence on their source value in historical linguistics.

To what extent the linguistic material of the copied linguistic record represents a mixture cannot be separated from the question as to what degree those copying the documents used the opportunity for changes. In this sense we can identify major differences between the copiers of both charters and codices. Of course, it is not a negligible detail either how often the given manuscript was copied by a different person as it seems plausible that the more authors left their mark on a linguistic record, the more diverse it became linguistically. As for these modifications and fluctuations, we also know that they primarily appear in terms of phonology and orthography. According to Róbert Kenyhercz, the frequency of differences of

a phonological nature may also be related to the fact that such dualities probably did not cause any problems when issuing, copying, and later using these charters as these were not considered to be differences that would have undermined the legal authenticity of the charters even to a minor extent (Benkő 1957: 43, Kenyhercz 2016: 10, 13).

1. Thus, as a result of these inconsistencies, the dating of charters that have not survived in the original is rather uncertain (cf. Szamota 1895: 129, Jakubovich–Pais 1929: XXIV, Hoffmann 2007: 20, Kenyhercz 2016: 9), and as such, their more detailed study may provide important insights not only into the distinction of the charter’s chronological layers but also the description of dialectal dichotomies.

I will introduce the historical dialectology aspects of the detailed philological analysis of these types of charters through a specific example, the analysis of the *kökény* variants of the *kökény* ‘blackthorn’ lexeme, using the dialectal *í*. In order to prove the authenticity of data in charters that have not survived in the original in terms of historical dialectology, the analysis of the entire context of the remnant is needed, i.e., that of the Latin text including the remnants and the other remnants. The procedure was developed by Melinda Szőke in her monograph (cf. Szőke 2015). In my opinion, this is closely associated with the positioning of the specific dialectal features of the given lexeme within a historical dialectology framework, meaning that we also need to consider the historical dialectology features typical both at the time of the original charter and the copy.

The early forms of the *kökény* lexeme using *í* (with the letter *i* or *y*) provide an excellent illustration for this because these regularly appear in the 11th–13th centuries only in copied charters. Thus we might rightfully question whether these can automatically be linked to the chronological layer of the original charter (*Kökény kereke* +1015/158//403/PR.: *Kuchinkereby*, +1015/+158//XVII.: *Keuchin* Kereow, DHA. 1: 73, *Kökény-mező* 1231/1397: *Cukynmezey*, *Kökényfő-kút* 1243/1354: *Kukynfeukut*, OklSz. 533). Our suspicion that these forms using *í* were created only as a result of the later transcriptions is further justified by the experience that the other records of *kökény* with the *í* form from other, original charters can also be found in the 14th century the earliest (e.g., *Kökényér* [XIV.]: *Kwkiner*, HA. 1: 101, 1328: *Kukynheer*, Gy. 1: 862, 1337: *Kukiner*, 1337: *Kwkyner*, Gy. 1: 862, 1347: *Kuukyn*, Z. 2: 244, *Kökény-szarv* 1356: *Kukynzarw*, OklSz. 533).

It is also an important circumstance when studying the possibly earliest *Kökény kereke* remnant that the other data with the *í* form present in other lexemes first appeared in written sources only in the 13th century (e.g., *Perény* 1299: *Peryn*, KMHsz. 1: 222, *Zebegény* 1280: *Zebegin*, KMHsz. 1: 250, *Hidvége* 1287: *Hydwyge* KMHsz. 1: 129, *Vezekény* 1240: *Vezekyn*, KMHsz. 1: 299). Such a supposition regarding this datum is underlined also by the other remnants of the charter. The forms of the different remnants of the charter using *é* (with the letter *e* or *é*) exclusively as recorded in different copies also stand as witness to the interpolation of *Kuchin*, *Keuchin* later than the 11th century or to its phonological or orthographic distortion

(e.g., *Dédtelke* +1015/158//403/PR.: *Dedteluke*, *Hetény* +1015/158//403/PR.: *Heten*, *Hethen*, +1015/158//XVII.: *Chethen*, *Hethén*, *Három-körtvély* +1015/158//403/PR.: *Harumkurtuel*, +1015/158//XVII.: *Haromkörtvély*, DHA. 1: 74–75).

2. The description of the regional features of the phonological dichotomies during early Old Hungarian Era (from the 11th century to the middle of the 14th century) cannot be examined independently from the fact that (as Dezső Juhász and János N. Fodor write) the remnants found in the charters do not necessarily reflect the dialect of the particular place (cf. N. Fodor 2008: 129–133, Juhász 2018: 314). Géza Bárczi notes that “even in the case of perfect identification, there is very legitimate doubt whether the phonological form of the toponym recorded in the charter truly reflects the language of the same region” (1951: 6). The idea that the remnants found in charters might as well characterize the language use of the issuing authority first appeared in Hungarian publications on historical dialectology in the works of László Papp, who argues that “we need to consider it also in the case of original charters that their remnants may be typical linguistically of the chancellery of the issuing authority or a notary of the chancellery”, and he is especially skeptical about the usability of copies in historical dialectology (1959: 6).

I think that with the study of charters that have survived in different copies we really cannot confirm it without any doubt to what extent the relevant remnants may be linked to the language use of areas designated by the names and to what extent they may reflect the dialect of the chancellery of the issuing authority or one of its notaries. With a more detailed study of the different copies, we may mostly register the differences of the given remnants only, in most cases leaving the question whether they reflect phonological or orthographic changes open. In the absence of the original charter, it obviously cannot be our task either to decide which of the copies is closest to the original in terms of phonology and orthography. Of course, behind the phonological or orthographic changes affecting particular remnants there could be other influences besides that of the authority issuing the charter: such changes may also indicate the fluctuation of the particular phenomenon in the given dialect (cf. N. Fodor 2008: 129–133).

In a case, however, when several remnants of the same charter are modified in the same way as a result of copying, we may suppose that the change is more likely to be due to the copier of the charter (cf. Benkő 1957: 38). Thus, for example, in the 1347 version of Béla IV’s charter dated 1268 we can register the *é* version (with the letter *e*) of several names consistently (1268/1347: *Erchen*, *Semlekus*, *Kurtuelus*, *Vegag*, HA. 3: 61, 63, 67). As opposed to this, in the 1383 copy made in the Buda chapter the *í* forms (with the letter *i* or *y*) of the same names appear (1268/1347/1383: *Erchyn*, *Semlykus*, *Kurthuillis*, *Vygag*, HA. 3: 61, 63, 67). Thus in this case we can ascertain it more easily that the people copying the charter had a different attitude to the original text; however, based on our current knowledge we cannot decide whether the 1268 charter used the *í* or the *é* variants (as from the 13th century we have abundant examples of the *í* dialectal forms from elsewhere also).

Continuing this line of thought, we cannot decide either whether it was the person copying the 1347 charter who adopted the spelling of *Erchen* and other remnants to his own dialect and the developing norms, or to the contrary, the language version of the author of the 1383 charter obscured the original forms using *é*.

Conclusion

I believe that the above examples clearly indicate that the consideration of the factors influencing the mixed linguistic status of early sources is necessary not only theoretically. Based on our knowledge so far, several additional research areas may be opened that could play a significant role in the description of various features from the perspective of historical linguistics and historical dialectology.

On the one hand, we should keep in mind the argument according to which the alignment with an emerging norm should be considered as a major factor in connection with the mixed linguistic status of sources from the 15th and 16th centuries, however, there are more and more signs indicating that the heterogeneity of sources from the 11th century could also be partly shaped by the normative efforts manifesting themselves in various aspects (cf. Benkő 2003, Juhász 2018, Kis 2018a,b). The emphasis on this guideline could be especially important in the description of linguistic phenomena that have a special role according to the norm. The detailed analyses of sources that have not survived in their original form from the perspective of historical linguistics and historical dialectology could also contribute to the more differentiated treatment of data, as we have seen in recent research in these areas (e.g., Szőke 2015). Thus the in-depth philological analysis of these types of charters can in many cases contribute to making studies in historical dialectology (and within this historical phonology and orthography) more precise. This also means that the results of analyses in phonological historical dialectology could also provide useful additions when trying to link data in charters of an uncertain chronological status to a chronological period.

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