

# Teaching the Hungarian accusative case to native speakers of Swedish – problems and solutions

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**Abstract.** The accusative case has a widespread use in Hungarian, as it marks direct objects, and it is also used to form certain types of adverbials. In standard Swedish, nouns used as direct objects are never marked, and expressing the direct object function is linked to invariant structural positions in sentences, while traces of (formal and functional) accusative remain in active usage for personal pronouns only. Besides, the Hungarian accusative usually causes extra difficulties for Swedish native speakers because of the resemblance of the Hungarian accusative suffix  $-(V)t$  and the Swedish suffixed definite article  $-(e)t$  for neuter nouns in singular. The paper demonstrates different types of mistakes made by Swedish university students learning Hungarian, comparing their difficulties to those of other students having Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic or Finnish as mother-tongue. A similar issue concerning accusative in the South Saami language is presented as well. The paper also discusses how the Hungarian accusative can be effectively introduced to Swedish learners.

**Keywords:** *accusative, direct object marking, definiteness, Hungarian as a foreign language, North Germanic languages*

## Vengrų kalbos akuzatyvo mokymas švedų kalbos gimtakalbiams: problemos ir sprendimai

**Santrauka.** Šiame darbe aptariamos klaidos, būdingos vengrų kalbos akuzatyvo formų besimokantiems vieno Švedijos universiteto studentams. Akuzatyvo linksnis plačiai vartojamas vengrų kalboje tiesioginiams papildiniams žymėti ir tam tikrų tipųrieveiksmiams sudaryti. Šiuolaikinėje bendrinėje švedų kalboje daiktavardžiai, vartojami kaip tiesioginiai papildiniai, užima nekintamą vietą sintaksinėse struktūrose, bet nėra žymimi galūnėmis. Švedų kalboje (formalaus ir funkcinio) akuzatyvo formos vartojamos tik su asmeniniais įvardžiais. Šie kalbiniai faktai ir tipologiniai skirtumai lemia tam tikrus sunkumus švedų gimtakalbiams mokantis vengrų kalbos akuzatyvo. Aptariami sunkumai yra panašūs į tuos, kuriuos patiria ir kitų (pavyzdžiui, anglų, olandų, prancūzų, ispanų) kalbų gimtakalbiai. Vis dėlto priežastis, kodėl vengrų akuzatyvas dažnai sukelia papildomų sunkumų švedų (iš dalies ir danų arba norvegų) kalbos kalbėtojams, yra kita. Akuzatyvo priesaga vengrų kalboje yra  $-(V)t$ . Švedų (taip pat ir danų bei norvegų) kalboje  $-(e)t$  yra labai dažnai vartojama priesaga – tai vadinamasis priesaginis apibrėžiamasis artikelis, žymintis vienaskaitos niekatrosios giminės daiktavardžių apibrėžtumą. Švediškai kalbantys studentai itin dažnai tapatina šią švedų kalbos galūnę su vengrų kalbos akuzatyvo priesaga ir todėl vengrų akuzatyvą vartoja net ir su apibrėžtais subjektais. Be to, daugelis mokinių akuzatyvą vartoja su tiesioginiais papildiniais tik tada, kai jie yra apibrėžti. Straipsnyje pateikiami tipiniai įvairius klaidų tipus iliustruojantys pavyzdžiai, surinkti iš

vengrų kalbos besimokančių švedų studentų rašto darbų Upsalos universitete. Problemos, su kuriomis susiduria švedai, taip pat lyginamos su kitų studentų, kurių gimtoji kalba yra danų, norvegų, islandų ar suomių. Taip pat pristatoma akuzatyvo linksnio vartoseną pietų samių kalboje. Straipsnyje aptariama, kaip švedams galima tinkamai paaiškinti vengrų kalbos akuzatyvą.

**Raktiniai žodžiai:** *akuzatyvas, tiesioginio papildinio žymėjimas, apibrėžtumas, vengrų kaip svetimoji kalba, Šiaurės germanų kalbos*

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The problem

This article focuses on a specific problem met by Swedish speaking learners of Hungarian (more precisely learners having Swedish as a mother-tongue), namely mastering the correct usage of the accusative case in Hungarian. The accusative case has a widespread use in the Hungarian language, as it marks direct objects; it is also used to form certain types of adverbials (see, e.g., Rounds 2009: 91; Keszler 2017: 193). In modern standard Swedish, on the other hand, nouns used as direct objects are never marked, and traces of (formal and functional) accusative remain in active usage for the personal pronouns only (Hultman 2003: 93). Based on these basic facts and dissimilarities, difficulties of teaching the Hungarian accusative to Swedish native speakers do not seem to differ from teaching it to native speakers of other languages, such as English, Dutch, French, Spanish and so on (see, e.g., Szili 2006: 170; Szabó 2010). The reason why Hungarian accusative usually causes extra difficulties for Swedish (and sometimes even Danish or Norwegian) speaking learners lies in something else: the main problem is caused by the resemblance of the Hungarian accusative case suffix and one of the Swedish suffixed definite articles, as described in section 2.

### 1.2. The aims

The main aim of the paper is to present the specific mistakes made by Swedish learners of Hungarian after the Hungarian accusative has been introduced. In the section 3, the different types of mistakes are demonstrated with typified examples that are based on mistakes found in tests written by students learning Hungarian at Uppsala University in Sweden. Another aim is to compare the Swedish learners' difficulties to those of other students having Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic or Finnish as mother-tongue – the findings are presented in the section 4, including a very similar issue concerning the usage of the accusative case in the South Saami language. The article also aims to discuss how Hungarian accusative can be explained effectively to learners whose mother-tongue is Swedish, Danish, or Norwegian, and to present what kinds of exercises seem suitable for practicing its use – see the section 5.

### 1.3. The data and methods

It is of great importance to emphasize that findings in this paper are not based on a pre-planned case study with exact statistical figures about the subjects and the corpus/data in the study, aiming to present the relations/correlations between certain groups of subjects and certain linguistic phenomena. As stated above, the primary aim is to describe a problem that has not been written about. However, some details about the data collection are provided below.

Data were collected during the past 15 years (2008–2023) from a total of approximately 500 students studying Hungarian at Uppsala University. Around one-third were male, and two-thirds were female students. As for the students' age, about 30% were in the age range 18–30, ≈ 55% were in the range 30–50, while ≈ 15% were older than 50. The data collection had different sources: written and oral tests, written

essays, and oral presentations. Once again, it is important to highlight that the data do not come from targeted tests that were designed for research purposes. All the above-mentioned sources were produced by the students as part of the normal education program. Data collection regarded only sources produced during the students' first year of study, representing the CEFRS levels A1 and A2 (students starting Hungarian studies at Uppsala University cannot choose their level; everyone starts with the beginner course).

The data collection method consists of gathering different kinds of errors related to the usage of the accusative case, as found in the different sources. The data analysis method focuses on systematizing the types of errors, investigating their nature and identifying possible causes.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. The accusative case in Hungarian

When it comes to teaching the Hungarian accusative case, difficulties met by all learners can be divided into two main categories: (1) how to form accusative in Hungarian and (2) how/when to use accusative in Hungarian. The Hungarian accusative case suffix is  $-(V)t$  (Rounds 2009: 89), and the  $-t$  can be added to the noun stem either directly or preceded by a certain linking vowel, taking into account vowel harmony (see Tables 1a and 1b). Choosing the right linking vowel and/or knowing when a linking vowel is needed can be problematic, and – according to the stem types – changes in the stem may also occur (difficulty type 1), but on this level, there is no difference between learners on the basis of their mother-tongues. Differentiation between students with different language backgrounds can be made when it comes to functional usage (difficulty type 2). If nouns are not marked in some way when used as a direct object in the learners' mother-tongue, then it may be difficult for them to understand right away when to use the accusative case (Szili 2006: 170; VanPatten, Borst 2012: 93).

**Table 1a.** Accusative singular in Hungarian with no change in the noun stem

Nominative singular	Accusative singular	Meaning
<i>nő</i>	<i>nőt</i>	woman
<i>bor</i>	<i>bort</i>	wine
<i>kert</i>	<i>kertet</i>	garden
<i>elnök</i>	<i>elnököt</i>	president
<i>vár</i>	<i>várat</i>	castle, fortress
<i>ország</i>	<i>országot</i>	country
<i>diák</i>	<i>diákat</i>	student

**Table 1b.** Accusative singular in Hungarian with changes in the noun stem

Nominative singular	Accusative singular	Meaning
<i>fa</i>	<i>fát</i>	tree
<i>mese</i>	<i>mesét</i>	tale
<i>kő</i>	<i>követ</i>	stone
<i>ló</i>	<i>lovat</i>	horse
<i>tó</i>	<i>tavat</i>	lake
<i>kéz</i>	<i>kezet</i>	hand
<i>madár</i>	<i>madarat</i>	bird
<i>terem</i>	<i>termet</i>	room
<i>ökr</i>	<i>ökröt</i>	ox
<i>álm</i>	<i>álmot</i>	dream

In addition to the eventual problems caused by morphological characteristics (i.e., how to form the correct forms of different nouns in the accusative case), the issues with the functional usage may be the biggest challenge while mastering the correct use of the accusative case. Of course, this generalisation applies not only to Hungarian, but to all the languages making use of the accusative case to mark direct objects.

## 2.2. The accusative case in Swedish

In contemporary standard Swedish, nouns used as direct objects are not morphologically marked. Instead, such functions as expressing a direct object are expressed by word order (see, e.g., Hultman 2003: 292–293; Holmes, Hinchliffe 2003: 460, 475). Morphological object marking is restricted to personal pronouns (compare examples (1) and (2)) and to the indefinite pronoun *man* ('one; you; they; people in general'), which becomes *en* when used as a direct object (Hultman 2003: 93; Holmes, Hinchliffe 2003: 114–120, 148), as demonstrated in examples (3) and (4).

- (1) *Peter ser en buss.*  
Peter see.PRS.3SG ART:INDEF bus.NOM  
'Peter sees a bus.'
- (2) *Peter ser mig.*  
Peter see.PRS.3SG PRO.1SG.ACC  
'Peter sees me.'
- (3) *Man kan aldrig veta.*  
one.PRO can.PRS never know.INF  
'One/You can never know.'
- (4) *Vem hjälper en i nöden?*  
who help.PRS one.PRO.ACC in need.DEF  
'Who helps one/you in need?'

This system described above is very similar to the one that can be found in numerous other languages, such as English, Dutch, and several Romance languages. Native speakers of these languages may have difficulties when trying to master the correct use of the accusative case as a marker of direct objects in languages like Hungarian, German, Latvian, and Lithuanian.

## 2.3. Expressing definiteness on nouns in Swedish and in Hungarian

In modern standard Swedish, there are two grammatical genders: common gender (*utrum*) and neuter (*neutrum*). Definiteness can be indicated on nouns through suffixed articles (see, e.g., Hultman 2003: 66–67; Holmes, Hinchliffe 2003: 47), as illustrated by the examples below where only singular forms are presented. In the common gender, definiteness is expressed by *-(e)n* in the singular, whereas in neuter *-(e)t* is used:

- UTRUM: *en bil* 'a car' → *bilen* 'the car'  
UTRUM: *en flicka* 'a girl' → *flickan* 'the girl'  
NEUTRUM: *ett bord* 'a table' → *bordet* 'the table'  
NEUTRUM: *ett bete* 'a pasture' → *betet* 'the pasture'

In Hungarian, on the other hand, definiteness can be expressed by a definite article, a preposed free morph, just like in other European languages, such as English, French, and German (Szende, Kassai



### **Type A**

ENG: I see a table.  
SWE: *Jag ser ett bord.*  
HUN: *Látok egy asztalt.*  
Students: *\*(én) látok egy asztal*

In the case of type A, the direct object is indefinite; thus, the Swedish neuter noun is used without the suffix *-et*, which would mark definiteness. This may be the reason why certain students use the nominative case for the Hungarian noun even if it is used as a direct object. With the direct object noun being unmarked in Swedish, some students do not feel the need to use a suffix in this context. Of course, one might say that this statement is unfounded: if the nominative is the first form of a noun that students learn, they might simply overuse it regardless of their mother-tongue. However, this argument can be defeated by the existence of types B1, C1 and D1. Another issue arises here, involving the unmotivated and, in this instance, incorrect use of the Hungarian personal pronoun *én* (1SG). Since Hungarian verbs are conjugated and have distinct forms for all persons, the use of the personal pronouns lacks motivation unless stressed and used as focus or topic.

### **Type B1**

ENG: I see the table.  
SWE: *Jag ser bordet.*  
HUN: *Látom az asztalt.*  
Students: *\*(én) látok (az) asztal(a/o)t*

### **Type B2**

ENG: I see the book.  
SWE: *Jag ser boken.*  
HUN: *Látom a könyvet.*  
Students: *\*(én) látok (a) könyv*

In the case of type B, the direct object is definite, leading to the Swedish noun with the suffix indicating definiteness: *-et* for the neuter noun in B1 and *-en* for the common gender noun in B2. Students are more likely to use the accusative case in Hungarian in the case of B1, where the Swedish noun carries the suffix *-et*. Even though it might not be evident how to add the accusative suffix *-t* to the Hungarian noun (with or without a linking vowel), the use of the *-t* itself is the most important part. Although B2 is also marked in Swedish, the suffix *-en* does not prompt students to associate it with the Hungarian accusative suffix, often resulting in a preference for the unmarked nominative form.

Another issue may arise from the absence of a definite article in the Hungarian translation: even if students use the accusative case as shown in B1, they often do not feel the need to express the definiteness with a separate word. This omission may be attributed to students mistakenly considering the Hungarian accusative suffix as a supposed equivalent of the Swedish suffixed definite article. A related problem involves certain students failing to conjugate the Hungarian verb correctly. In Hungarian, transitive verbs exhibit two distinct conjugations depending mostly on the definiteness or indefiniteness of the direct object (Rounds 2009: 16–17), and students often use the indefinite verbal ending, even when the definite conjugation should be used when the direct object is definite.

### **Type C1**

ENG: The table is green.  
SWE: *Bordet är grönt.*  
HUN: *Az asztal zöld.*  
Students: *\*(az) asztalt (van) zöld*

### Type C2

ENG: The book is green.  
SWE: *Boken är grön.*  
HUN: *A könyv zöld.*  
Students: *\*(a) könyv (van) zöld*

In the case of type C, a definite noun is used as a subject, so nominative is the right case to choose in Hungarian. Since definite nouns are marked with the suffixed article in Swedish, students often use the accusative case ending in Hungarian even if the noun in question is used as a subject and not as a direct object. This happens mostly when the Swedish noun is a neuter noun, marked with *-(e)t* (type C1), but it is not typical with common gender nouns (type C2). In addition to the disturbing similarity between the mentioned Hungarian and Swedish suffixes, another possible explanation may be that during the process of acquiring a new grammatical feature, the learner may undergo a phase of overgeneralisation, in which they overuse the new feature in non-obligatory contexts (Long 2010; Long, Robinson 1998). Once again, the lack of the definite article in the Hungarian translations can also be occasionally noticed.

Another, unrelated, issue involves the incorrect use of the predicate in Hungarian: the copula verb (*van* = be.PRS.3SG) is not used in this sentence type. Instead, a noun/adjective is used predicatively in the third person (both in singular and in plural) in the present indicative, the copula verb being used only in other persons and other moods and/or tenses.

### Type D1

ENG: The child sees the table.  
SWE: *Barnet ser bordet.*  
HUN: *A gyerek látja az asztalt.*  
Students: *\*(a) gyereket lát(ja) (az) asztalt*

### Type D2

ENG: The girl sees the boy.  
SWE: *Flickan ser pojken.*  
HUN: *A lány látja a fiút.*  
Students: *\*(a) lány lát(ja) (a) fiú*

In sentences of type D, there is a definite noun as a subject and a different definite noun as a direct object. In this case, some students would use the accusative case suffix in the Hungarian translation not only for the direct object but also for the subject, mostly if the definite nouns in question are neuter nouns in Swedish (see type D1). When one of the definite nouns in question is not a neuter noun (D2), nominative is preferred in the Hungarian translation. Regardless of the grammatical gender of the definite nouns in the Swedish sentences, the definite articles are sometimes missing in the Hungarian translations. As mentioned above, the incorrect choice of verb conjugation (definite vs indefinite) can be a further issue.

### Type E1

ENG: The boy is sitting on the chair.  
SWE: *Pojken sitter på stolen.*  
HUN: *A fiú a széken ül.*  
Students: *\*(a) fiú ül (a) széken / székre*

### Type E2

ENG: The child is sitting on the table.  
SWE: *Barnet sitter på bordet.*  
HUN: *A gyerek az asztalon ül.*  
Students: *\*(a) gyereket ül (az) asztalon / asztalra*

Type E reveals something new and equally interesting, namely that other kinds of accidental similarities may not have the same impact. The English construction “on the chair” can be rendered in Hungarian by *a széken* (see E1), where the word *szék* ‘chair’ stands in the superessive case. The superessive case in Hungarian is expressed by the suffix *-(o/e/ö)n* (Rounds 2009: 95), a suffix that might remind Swedish students of the Swedish *-(e)n*, the suffixed definite article for common gender nouns. For some reason, this resemblance usually does not cause any problem for the students. The reason may be attributed to the use of a preposition in Swedish: the students seem to understand right away that this Hungarian suffix is needed when we have certain locative expressions, which is also clearly marked in Swedish by the preposition *på* ‘on(to)’. On the other hand, choosing the right case ending might be a challenge at first, as there is no difference between “on” and “onto” in Swedish; both can be rendered by *på*. In Hungarian, however, “on” is expressed by the superessive case, while “onto” is expressed by the sublative case (having a completely different suffix *-ra/-re*; Rounds 2009: 94). It is important to point out that even in type E2, where the locative construction includes a definite neuter noun in Swedish, the suffixed definite article *-et* does not seem to cause confusion, and students tend not to use the accusative case in Hungarian. The preposition *på* seems to be a stronger element in the construction, students try to find its counterpart in Hungarian, instead of trying to find a match for the Swedish definite ending. As usual, the correct use of the Hungarian definite article can also be a problem, as mentioned earlier: it is a common issue, regardless of the structure it should be used in; thus, the article can be lacking in the Hungarian translations in any part of a sentence. Finally, one more problem can be observed here, an issue not related to our subject matter – namely, incorrect word order. In Swedish, the finite verb usually occupies the second position (Holmes, Hinchliffe 2003: 460), whereas in Hungarian, it usually follows the focus (Kiefer 2006: 119). The focus, followed by the finite verb, can be located in various positions in a sentence depending on several factors, e.g., they can be preceded by the topic (É. Kiss 2004: 8, 77).

## 4. Contrastive case studies

Most students learning Hungarian at Uppsala University have Swedish as a mother-tongue, but, every year, we also have students with a different language background. During the last fifteen years, I also had the opportunity to collect data from native speakers of Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, and Finnish.

### 4.1. Swedish versus other North Germanic languages

In the North Germanic languages, the definiteness of nouns is expressed according to a similar pattern, based on the use of etymologically identical suffixed articles (Barðdal et al. 1997: 302; Skrzypek 2009). This fact could suggest that mistakes made by learners with Danish, Norwegian or Icelandic as a mother-tongue are identical to those made by Swedish native speakers – at least as far as the use of the accusative case in Hungarian is concerned. Surprisingly, this is not always the case – or, at least, not as often as one might expect, especially among native speakers of Icelandic. Thus, when exploring plausible explanations, we must distinguish between two different cases: one being the case of Danish and Norwegian speakers, and the other one being the case of Icelandic speakers.

In my opinion, the fact that native speakers of Danish and Norwegian seem to have problems with Hungarian accusative less frequently may be related to differences in the pronunciation. If we look at the definite singular forms of neuter nouns in Swedish, Danish and Norwegian (bokmål), we can see that these share the same ending *-(e)t*. On the other hand, this similarity is valid only in writing. See the forms below with their pronunciation:



SWE	<i>huset</i>	‘the house’	[‘hʉ:sɛt]
DAN	<i>huset</i>	‘the house’	[‘huːsəð]
NOR	<i>huset</i>	‘the house’	[‘hʉ:sɛ]
SWE	<i>bordet</i>	‘the table’	[‘buːdɛt]
DAN	<i>bordet</i>	‘the table’	[‘boːrəð]
NOR	<i>bordet</i>	‘the table’	[‘buːrɛ]

We can see that the written ending *-t* is realized as a /t/ sound only in Swedish. This seems to be important, because in standard Hungarian, the accusative suffix *-t* is always pronounced as /t/. This means that the similarity of the Hungarian accusative suffix and the Scandinavian suffixed neuter definite article manifests itself both in writing and in speech only in Swedish, while this similarity is restricted to writing in Danish and in Norwegian.

As far as Icelandic is concerned, the above-mentioned similarity does not really exist in writing either. See the forms below:

ISL	<i>húsið</i>	‘the house’	[‘huːsɪð]
ISL	<i>borðið</i>	‘the table’	[‘pɔrðið]

A further explanation why Icelandic native speakers tend to have less problem with the correct use of the accusative case in Hungarian may also be due to another fact. In Icelandic, although there is no difference between nominative and accusative for neuter and strong feminine nouns, there is a clear difference between masculine (both in singular and plural, whether strong or weak) and weak feminine nouns (in singular). See examples (7), (8), and (9) below:

- ISL *hvítur köttur* ‘white cat’ (with nom. sg.)  
 (7) **Ég sé hvítan kött.**  
 I see.PRS.1SG white.ACC.SG cat.ACC.SG  
 ‘I see a white cat.’

- ISL *bláir bílar* ‘blue cars’ (with nom. pl.)  
 (8) **Ég sé bláa bíla.**  
 I see.PRS.1SG blue.ACC.PL car.ACC.PL  
 ‘I see blue cars.’

- ISL *íslensk kona* ‘Icelandic woman’ (with nom. sg.)  
 (9) **Ég þekki íslenska konu.**  
 I know.PRS.1SG Icelandic.ACC.SG woman.ACC.SG  
 ‘I know an Icelandic woman.’

As can be observed in these examples, the difference between the nominative and the accusative manifests itself even on adjectives in certain forms, namely in masculine (strong or weak singular and strong plural) and in feminine (singular, both strong and weak ones).

All these characteristics of the Icelandic language contribute to a better understanding of the Hungarian accusative case among Icelandic students.

## 4.2. The case of Finnish

Finnish is a Finno-Ugric (Uralic) language, just like Hungarian. In Finnish sentences, nouns used as a direct object are usually marked. As a matter of fact, direct object marking in Finnish is far more complex than in Hungarian: depending on the nature of the direct object, it can be marked either with the accusative or with the partitive case (Karlsson 2008: 158). As for the Finnish accusative forms,

the singular is identical with the genitive singular, whereas the accusative plural is the same as the nominative plural. This characteristic of the Finnish noun declension is the reason why many Finnish grammars do not mention accusative as a separate case, but they simply enumerate the different functions of the genitive singular and the nominative plural, among which we can find the capacity to mark direct objects. However, accusative is always distinguished as a separate case in the description of the personal pronouns because these are not identical with forms in any other cases (see, e.g., ISK 2004).

Due to the fact that a direct object is in some way marked in Finnish, native speakers of Finnish usually do not have issues of functional usage with the Hungarian accusative. When it comes to confusion caused by eventual similarities, we can notice that the accusative plural (the same as the nominative plural) suffix in Finnish is *-t*. However, this fact does not usually cause any confusion in Finnish learners of Hungarian, which may have several explanations. One potential reason may be that Finnish students think of the ending *-t* mostly as a plural marker – let us remember that this ending marks the nominative plural as well. Another solid reason can be that accusative plural in Hungarian is formed by adding two suffixes to the noun stem (Rounds 2009: 111), one that marks the plural form of the noun (*-k*), followed by the accusative suffix (*-t*). The differences between nominative singular and plural (used as subject) on the one hand, and accusative singular and plural on the other hand, are shown in the example sentences below, both in Finnish and in Hungarian.

Nominative singular and plural marking the subject:

ENG	The <b>car</b> is white.	/	The <b>cars</b> are white.
FIN	<i>Auto on valkoinen.</i>	/	<i>Autot ovat valkoisia.</i>
HUN	<i>Az <b>autó</b> fehér.</i>	/	<i>Az <b>autók</b> fehérek.</i>

Accusative singular and plural marking the direct object:

ENG	I see the <b>car</b> .	/	I see the <b>cars</b> .
FIN	<i>Näen <b>auton</b>.</i>	/	<i>Näen <b>autot</b>.</i>
HUN	<i>Látom az <b>autót</b>.</i>	/	<i>Látom az <b>autókat</b>.</i>

### 4.3. The case of another Finno-Ugric language: South Saami

South Saami is a Finno-Ugric language – just like Hungarian, Finnish and Estonian – spoken in Sweden and Norway. I do not mention this language here in order to exemplify experiences with Saami native speakers learning Hungarian. The reason why South Saami is included here is because, interestingly, Swedish-speaking learners of South Saami seem to have problems that are similar to those experienced by Swedish speaking learners of Hungarian while mastering the correct use of the accusative case. (I would like to thank my colleague, Torbjörn Söder, teaching different varieties of Saami at Uppsala University, for drawing my attention to this phenomenon.)

The accusative case is expressed by the suffix *-m* in South Saami (Bergsland 1994: 59), and this nasal sound is quite close to the nasal *-n*, which can express definiteness in Swedish on nouns of the common gender in the singular (see subsection 2.3.). This closeness of the two endings and the already mentioned fact that nouns used as a direct object are not marked in Swedish (see subsection 2.2.) lead to a certain confusion in native speakers of Swedish learning South Saami, resulting in the use of the accusative case in positions where it is not needed, e.g., on definite subjects (where nominative should be used).

There is another surprising phenomenon that is well worth to be mentioned here: even some native speakers of South Saami tend to use the accusative case where it is not motivated (as mentioned by

Söder). In my opinion, their motivation is related to the lack of definite articles in South Saami. It must be pointed out that all native speakers of South Saami are at least bilingual; besides Saami, they all speak Swedish or Norwegian, and these North Germanic languages can easily influence Saami speakers' Saami idiolects on all levels. As opposed to Swedish or Norwegian, which can express definiteness on nouns through the use of the suffixed definite article, there are no means in South Saami to do so. Bilingual Saami speakers are used to differentiating between definite and indefinite nouns when expressing themselves either in Swedish or in Norwegian, which is something they cannot do in Saami. This fact may be one of the factors stimulating the use of some linguistic markers that are meant to express definiteness. This may be especially important on subjects or other parts of the sentence representing the topic.

To give a concrete example, the South Saami word *bijle* (nom.) can be used either as 'a car' (cf. SWE *en bil*) or 'the car' (cf. SWE *bilen*) – the exact meaning depends on the context; see example (10). When used as a direct object, it must be used in the accusative form *bijlem*, as in example (11). According to Söder, the type presented by example (12) is sometimes used to express the content that normally is expressed by the type shown by sentence (10).

- (10) *Bijle*        *lea*            *tjaebpie.*  
 car.NOM    be.PRS.3SG    beautiful.PRED  
 'The car is beautiful.'
- (11) *Manne*        *bijlem*            *åastam.*  
 I.NOM        car.ACC        buy.PRS.1SG  
 'I buy a/the car.'
- (12) *Bijlem*        *lea*            *tjaebpie.*  
 car.ACC    be.PRS.3SG    beautiful.PRED  
 'The car is beautiful.' (cf. SWE *Bilen är vacker.*)

## 5. Problem solving

Taking into account the problem described above, there is an inherent necessity to address it within the framework of education. When explaining the usage of the accusative case in the Hungarian language to Swedish students, be it in the classroom or through written grammars and other forms of educational materials, I have observed that emphasizing certain points of view and giving preference to certain types of exercises may be effective in mitigating the common confusion that often arises. This section gives a few examples of possible means by which the accusative-related comprehension issues can be resolved more easily. The ideas presented here are based on the characteristics of the Swedish language, and the nature of the encountered mistakes, lacking a specific theoretical foundation in existing literature. They proved to be effective in the classroom setting in the last 8-9 years compared to earlier experiences of where no specific attention was paid to students' mother tongue(s). This effectiveness is evident in the relatively reduced occurrence of different mistakes following the introduction of the Hungarian accusative.

### 5.1. Sentences with personal pronouns as direct objects

As mentioned earlier, direct object marking exists in the Swedish language as well, even if restricted to the level of personal pronouns. The very first step when explaining to Swedish students how the accusative case should be used in Hungarian is to help the learners to recognize direct objects in Swedish sentences. To emphasize the presence of direct object marking in Swedish, it is beneficial to highlight

many examples in Swedish in which the direct object, typically represented by a personal pronoun, is more or less easily recognizable. Translating such sentences from Swedish to Hungarian can speed up the learning process and efficiently guide Swedish students to a stage where they possess a robust understanding of the necessity of the accusative case.

ENG:	They love <b>us</b> .
SWE:	<i>De älskar <b>oss</b>.</i> (SWE: <i>vi</i> = 1PL.NOM, <i>oss</i> = 1PL.ACC)
HUN:	<i>Szeretnek <b>minket</b>.</i>
ENG:	We love <b>them</b> .
SWE:	<i>Vi älskar <b>dem</b>.</i> (SWE: <i>de</i> = 3PL.NOM, <i>dem</i> = 3PL.ACC)
HUN:	<i>Szeretjük <b>őket</b>.</i>

However, we should keep in mind and draw learners' attention to the fact that the indirect object can be unmarked in Swedish, just like in English, whereas in Hungarian it is usually marked with the dative case. Let us look at the examples below where the indirect objects appear in bold, and the direct objects are underlined.

ENG	Peter gave <b>us</b> <u>a book</u> .
SWE	<i>Peter gav <b>oss</b> <u>en bok</u>.</i>
HUN	<i>Péter adott <b>nekünk</b> <u>egy könyvet</u>.</i> (DAT ↔ ACC)

In this case, the role of word order in Swedish should also be discussed, pointing out the completely different nature of word order in Hungarian. In Hungarian, nouns used as direct or indirect objects are clearly distinguished, most often through the use of different cases. Unlike Swedish, word order usually does not play any role in Hungarian when discerning such elements of a sentence; such grammatical functions are not linked to invariant structural positions in a sentence. On the other hand, the order of major sentence constituents is of crucial importance with regards to other important factors, e.g., when the topic, the focus, and their relation to other elements of the sentence should be expressed. In other words, the functions associated with word order in Hungarian are not grammatical but logical (É. Kiss 2004: 2). Thanks to the (only) seemingly freer word order in the Hungarian language, the four parts of the last-mentioned Hungarian sentence (*Péter adott nekünk egy könyvet.*) could stand in any position within the sentence, and yet the different versions of the sentence would remain grammatically correct. However, some of the variants would have different topic and focus – depending on which part of the sentence comes right before the finite verb, and which one is in the sentence-initial position, the positions after the finite verb being interchangeable with no impact on changing the semantics. By drawing the learners' attention to the different roles of word order in the Swedish and in the Hungarian language may be of help when emphasizing the need to mark nouns used as direct objects in Hungarian.

When introducing the Hungarian accusative case to Swedish students, to translate simple sentences from Swedish to Hungarian with only personal pronouns as a direct object may help Swedish learners to master the correct use of the accusative case in Hungarian.

## 5.2. Sentences with personal names as subject and as direct object

Certain proper nouns, e.g., personal names, are not used with suffixed definite articles in Swedish. When introducing the accusative case to Swedish learners, it may be helpful if the teacher presents some simple example sentences in which both the subject and the direct object are a personal name. This way, the learner cannot be influenced by the eventual *-(e)t* ending on Swedish nouns used as subject or direct object. Furthermore, the above-mentioned basic rules of Hungarian word order (as seen in 5.1.) can also be introduced. The teacher can explain that, e.g., the simple sentence “Anna loves Peter”

can be rendered in Hungarian as *Anna szereti Pétert*, but it can also be used with a different word order, e.g., *Pétert szereti Anna*. These two versions of the same sentence can exemplify that it is not the word order that creates a direct object within the sentence, and, thanks to the accusative case, it is obvious which part of the sentence is used as the direct object. At the same time, the teacher can also demonstrate the differences in basic word order rules between Swedish and Hungarian (initially avoiding intricate details, primarily to highlight distinctions). This can be achieved by presenting all six possible variants of the same sentence in Hungarian (see the sentences below, with the direct objects in bold).

ENG: Anna loves **Peter**.  
SWE: *Anna älskar **Peter***.  
HUN: *Anna szereti **Pétert***. / *Anna **Pétert** szereti*. / ***Pétert** szereti Anna*. /  
***Pétert** Anna szereti*. / *Szereti Anna **Pétert***. / *Szereti **Pétert** Anna*.

Translating simple sentences from Swedish to Hungarian with only personal names as a subject and as a direct object may also help Swedish students to have a better and quicker understanding of the correct use of the accusative case in Hungarian.

### 5.3. Repetitive drills

Repetitive drills, based on simple sentences (including a subject, predicate/one finite verb, and direct object exclusively) may also be of great help. This is particularly effective when initially addressing definite and indefinite direct objects separately. This approach facilitates a more efficient introduction of the two verb conjugation types (indefinite and definite conjugation), which hinge on the definite or indefinite nature of the eventual direct object.

As an example, consider the “fill in the gap” exercise shown in Figure 1 below. The repetitiveness in such exercises can help learners in getting used to several key aspects: (a) the importance of recognizing direct objects expressed by nouns; (b) understanding that the necessity of using the accusative case is not contingent on definiteness; (c) acknowledging the necessity to use the accusative case with basic transitive verbs; (d) discerning the necessity of choosing between the two conjugation types; and (e) mastering the formation of the accusative form for different nouns.

Veszek egy <u>AUTÓT</u> (autó).	'I am buying a car.'
Anna vesz egy <u>HÁZAT</u> (ház).	'Anna is buying a house.'
Nézünk egy <u>FILMET</u> (film).	'We are watching a film.'
Kérsz egy <u>SZENDVICSET</u> (szendvics)?	'Would you like a sandwich?'
Megveszem az _____ (autó).	'I am buying the car.'
Anna megveszi a _____ (ház).	'Anna is buying the house.'
Nézzük a _____ (film).	'We are watching the film.'
Kéred a _____ (szendvics)?	'Would you like the sandwich?'

**Figure 1.** “Fill in the gap” exercise to practice the use of the accusative case in Hungarian, separating definite and indefinite direct objects

## 6. Conclusion

As outlined in this paper, mother-tongue speakers of Swedish learning the Hungarian language often encounter different challenges in mastering the correct use of the accusative case in Hungarian. One set of issues may be related to the fact that in modern standard Swedish the direct object is determined by

the fixed word order. This holds true only when the direct object is not expressed by a personal pronoun or the indefinite pronoun *en* (*man* in the nominative). Apart from this problem, which is typical among learners whose mother-tongue does not mark direct objects, another specific problem can be identified among Swedish learners. This specific issue, discussed in the paper, stems from the formal similarity between the Swedish suffixed definite article *-(e)t*, used on neuter nouns in singular, and the Hungarian accusative suffix *-(V)t*. Among Swedish university students learning Hungarian, it has been observed that some of them tend to use the Hungarian accusative suffix only when the direct object in the corresponding Swedish sentence is a definite neuter noun (marked with the article *-(e)t*). Additionally, it has been observed that a definite neuter noun used as the subject in a Swedish sentence is often translated into Hungarian by Swedish students with a noun in the accusative case.

A very similar phenomenon has been observed among Swedish students learning South Saami, where the Swedish suffixed definite article on common gender nouns *-(e)n* appears to interfere with the use of the South Saami accusative suffix *-m*. This phenomenon in South Saami has also been observed among native Saami speakers, and the main reason behind the problem might not exclusively be related to the formal similarity of the suffixes. It is much more likely that this is primarily related to the fact that South Saami does not distinguish between definiteness and indefiniteness in nouns. Speakers of South Saami (being bilingual in Saami, and Swedish or Norwegian) – just like the Swedish studying South Saami – feel a need to mark definiteness on nouns used as subjects. This does not apply to Hungarian, as the Hungarian language can express definiteness, for example, with articles. However, it has been noticed that Swedish learners of Hungarian sometimes make the same mistake, i.e., they do not use the definite article in Hungarian on a definite subject, opting for the accusative instead of the nominative case – presumably to express definiteness.

In the paper, I have also tried to present some ideas about possible explanations and different types of practical exercises that have proven to be effective to help Swedish students to master the correct use of the accusative case in Hungarian. Highlighting the differences in direct object marking between Swedish and Hungarian seems to be very important in the introductory phase. It is important to help learners to recognize direct objects in Swedish sentences before they start doing the translation into Hungarian; using only personal pronouns as direct objects in an early stage can also be very effective. In this matter, explaining the basic differences regarding word order rules between Swedish and Hungarian seems to be equally helpful. When it comes to trying to avoid the incorrect use of the accusative case as a marker of definiteness, translation exercises with only personal names as subjects and direct objects may also be an efficient help at an early stage. Finally, exercises contrasting the difference between the definite and the indefinite verb conjugation in Hungarian are also recommended, as the different conjugations are used depending on the definiteness of the eventual direct object.

### List of abbreviations

ACC – accusative	HUN – Hungarian	PL – plural
ART – article	INDEF – indefinite	PRED – predicative
DAN – Danish	ISL – Icelandic	PRO – pronoun
DEF – definite	NEUT – neuter	PRS – present
ENG – English	NOM – nominative	SG – singular
FIN – Finnish	NOR – Norwegian	SWE – Swedish

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