

# Where does the Hungarian question particle –e belong to?

Special case: *volna* 'would have'

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# Introduction

## Declarative sentence

Meg kellett volna locsolni a virágot.

We should have watered the flower.

## Interrogative sentence

Meg **kellett-e volna** locsolni a virágot?

Meg **kellett volna-e** locsolnia virágot?

Should we have watered the flower?

The **question particle –e** changes the grammatical mood of a sentence to interrogative. It means that: „The speaker wants to know that...”

***Volna*** is the 3rd PS conditional form of the substantive verb.

- 3rd (past) conditional in Hungarian:
  - Expresses: unreal/ hypothetical/ (past) situations
  - Formed by: Past tense of the verb + *the auxiliary verb volna* 'would have'
- the auxiliary verb is always behind the main verb -> no other word between them

- (1) Vet-t-em            volna            kenyér-et,        ha        lenne            pénz-e-m.  
 buy-PAST-1SG    PAST.COND    bread-ACC,     if        PRS.COND       money-POSS-1SG  
 I would have bought bread, if I had money.
- (2) \*Vettem            kenyéret        volna,            ha        lenne            pénzem.

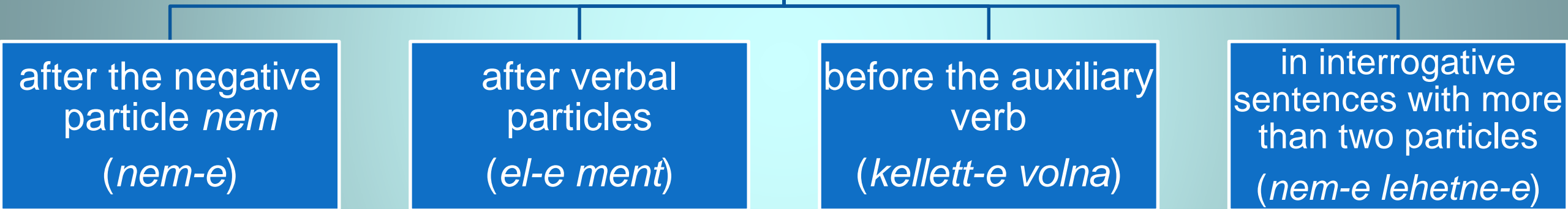
**The main question of our presentation:**  
**Where does the question particle –e “belong to”?**

Does it belong **to the inflected verb?**  
 Or **to the auxiliary verb *volna*** of the complex predicate?

**The questions in the literature so far**

Anita Schirm (2006) considers the structure *verb question particle -e+ volna* **the non-standard form.**

According to her, the question particle *-e* cannot be used:



Native speakers are prone to use the question particle between the main verb and the auxiliary verb to put emphasis on the main verb (Schirm 2006: 150).



- Kálmán (2015) argues that the reason why native speakers put the particle –e in front of *volna* 'would have' in *feláldoztam volna* (I would have sacrificed) that the main verb in the structure is *feláldoztam*. "Past tense conditional verb forms" are the only ones in the Hungarian conjugation system that do not have a suffix at the very end referring to the subject's person and number (ie. the personal pronoun). So their place is very unique.
- He further argues that the structure – *main verb* + *volna* - can be considered a two-word structure. The word *is* 'too' fits into these structures and the following sentences sound natural for most of the Hungarian speakers.

(3) *Őrült is volnék.*

*'I would be crazy too.'*

(4) *Hoztam is volna, ha lenne nekem.*

*'I would have brought it too, if I had it.'*

- If *is* 'too' can appear before *volna* 'would have', then the *question particle* -e can appear between the main verb and the *volna* too (Kálmán 2015).

→ Researchers do not agree on this problem.

**Our study**



## Methodology

- online questionnaire (Google Form) filled by 170 Hungarian native speakers
- 24 sentences → 12 sentences in which the particle *-e* were between the verb and the *volna* and 12 sentences in which the question particle followed *volna* (they formed 12 sentence pairs).
- The native speakers had to evaluate the sentences in a scale ranging from 1 to 5 (from unacceptable to maximally acceptable).

## Purpose

- to determine which structure sounds better for the native speakers of Hungarian

## Hypothesis

- **H1:** The native speakers of Hungarian will prefer those sentences in which the main (and inflected) verb is followed by the question particle *-e* to those in which it follows *volna*.
- **H2:** Respondents will make consistent decisions, they have a preference.

## A few examples

- (5) a. Gondoltad-e volna, hogy megnyeri a versenyt? 3.5 (1.5)<sup>1</sup>  
b. Gondoltad volna-e, hogy megnyeri a versenyt? 2.01 (1.3)

*'Did you think that he would win the competition?' →*

- (6) a. Meg tudtad-e volna mondani, hogy mennyi az idő? 2.8 (1.6)  
b. Meg tudtad volna-e mondani, hogy mennyi az idő? 2.3 (1.5)

*'Could you have told me what the time is?'*

- (7) a. Nem kellett-e volna meglocsolni a virágot? 2.9 (1.5)  
b. Nem kellett volna-e meglocsolni a virágot? 1.9 (1.2)

*'Shouldn't you have watered the flower?'*

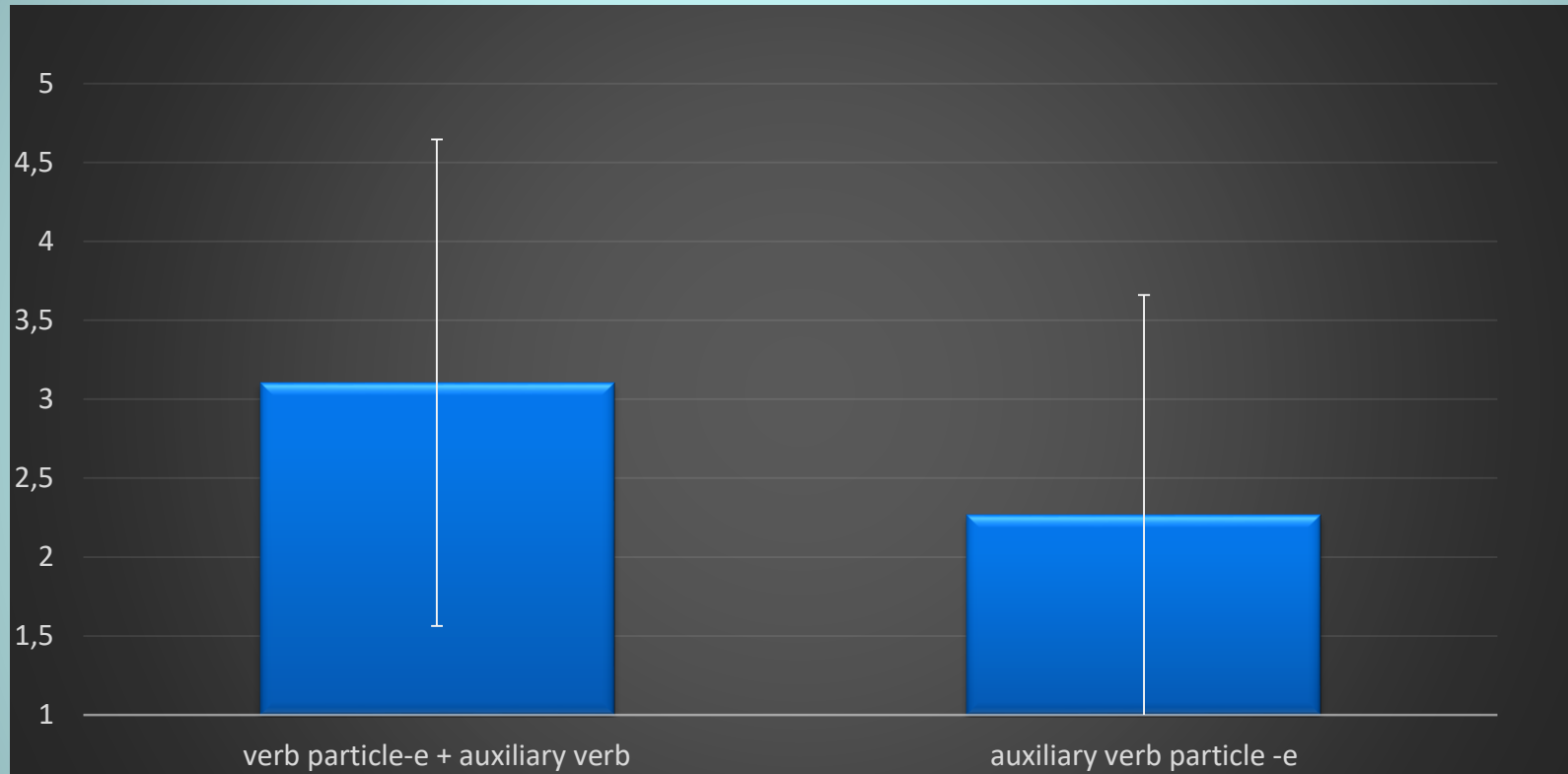
In 11 cases out of 12, the respondents rated the first sentence statistically significantly more acceptable than the second one. Our results can be found in the Appendix.

<sup>1</sup> Mean (standard deviation)

## A few examples

- (6) a. Sikerült-e volna a vizsga, ha többet tanulsz rá? 3.4 (1.6)  
b. Ha többet tanulsz rá, sikerült volna-e a vizsga? 2.5 (1.7)  
*'If you had learned more, would you have passed the exam?'*
- (7) a. Lehetett-e volna másképp csinálni? 3.8 (1.4)  
b. Lehetett volna-e másképp csinálni? 2.6 (1.5)  
*'Could it have been done differently?'*
- (8) a. Jánost izgatta-e volna, ha kinevetik? 2.9 (1.5)  
b. Ha kinevetik, az izgatta volna-e Jánost? 2.4 (1.4)  
*'Would it have bothered John, if he had been ridiculed?'*

**We compared those sentences which contained the inflected verb + *volna* + the question particle -e to those sentences in which the inflected verb+ the question particle -e + *volna* appeared in this order**



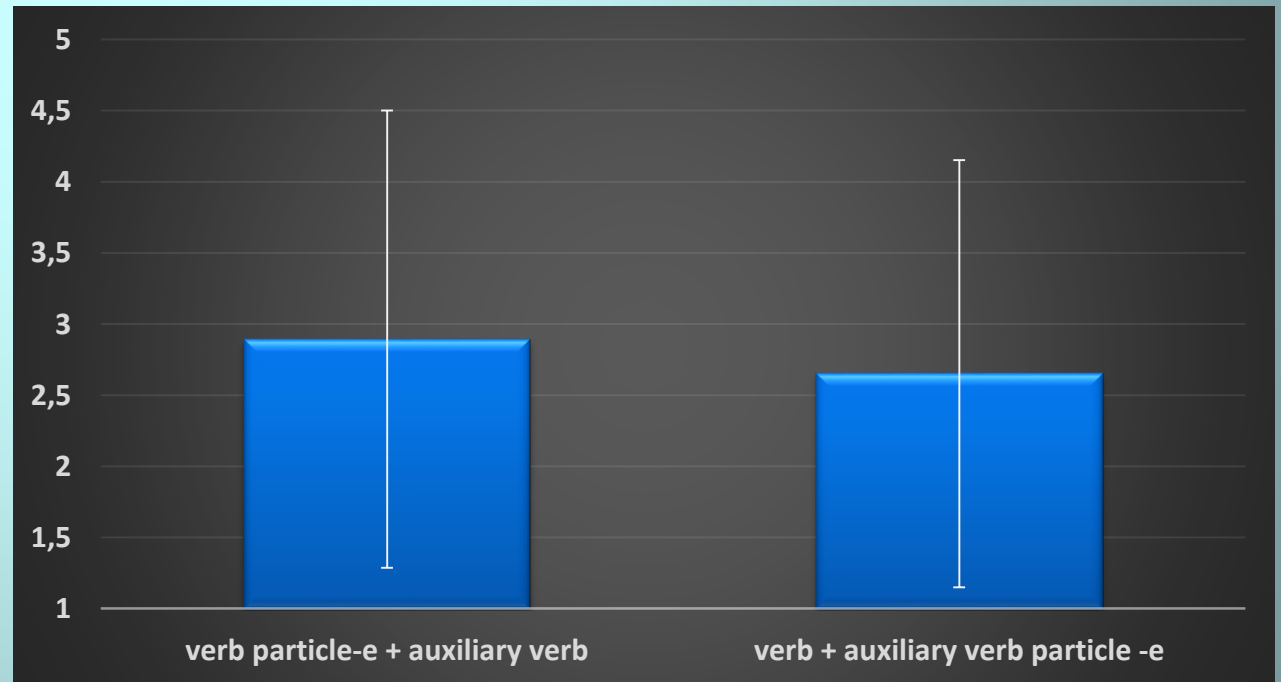
**H1:** According to our results sentences in which the **question particle follows the main and inflected verb are significantly more acceptable** (paired t-test:  $t(1858) = 18.463$ ,  $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ ).

✓ **It proves our first hypothesis.**

# However...

- (9) a. Ha nem látják, elemelte-e volna a kincset? 2.9 (1.6)  
b. Elemelte volna-e a kincset, ha nem látják? 2.7 (1.5)  
*'If they didn't see it, would he have stolen the treasure?'*

This is the only case (out of 12) in which **we did not find statistically significant difference** between the sentences of the pair (paired t-test:  $t(168)=1.5573$ ,  $p>0.05$ ).





# Other interesting data to consider

- When the verb particle-*e* + *volna* was in the first clause of the sentence: 2.9 (1.6)
- When the verb particle-*e* + *volna* was in the second clause of the sentence: 2.9 (1.5)

There is no significant difference (t-test:  $t(688.17) = 0.85522$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

- When the *volna* particle-*e* is in the in the first clause of the sentence: 2.6 (1.5)
- When the *volna* particle-*e* is in the in the second clause of the sentence: 2.2 (1.4)

The sentences were generally more acceptable in which the *volna* particle-*e* was in the first clause of the sentence (t-test:  $t(634.78) = 3.7653$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).





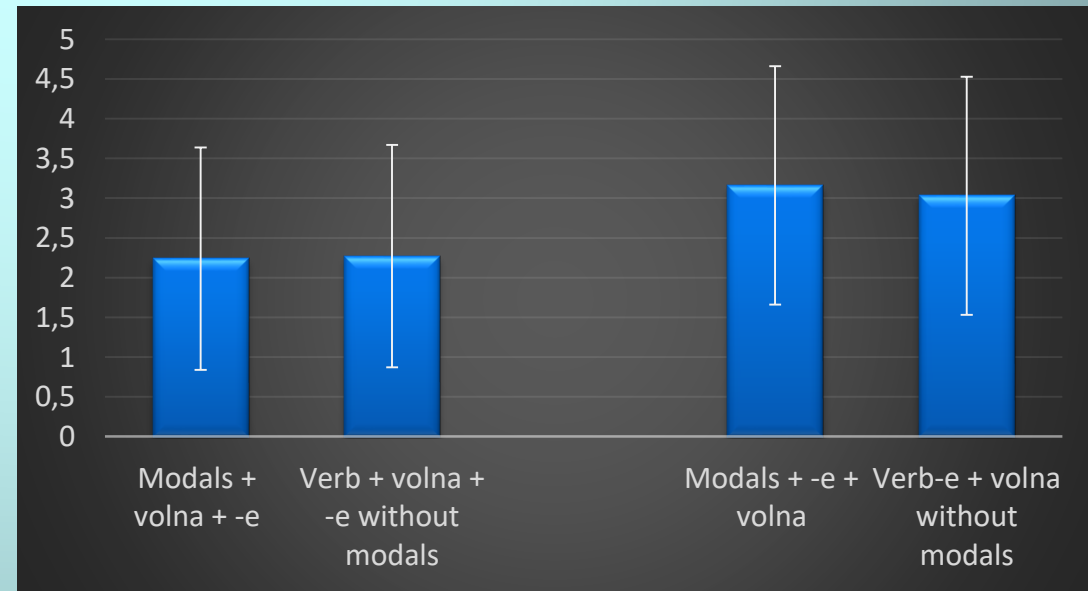
## Other interesting data to consider - With or without modals?

- Modals + *volna* + *-e* (Ex. *Kellett volna-e*): 2.2 (1.4)
- Verb + *volna* + *-e* without modals: 2.3 (1.4)

We did not find statistically significant difference between these structures (t- test,  $t(1461.8) = -1.042$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

- Modals + *-e* + *volna* (Ex. *Kellett-e volna*): 3.2 (1.5)
- Verb + *-e* + *volna* without modals: 3.03 (1.5)

We did not find statistically significant difference between these structures (t-test,  $t(1371.4) = 1.7241$ ,  $p\text{-value} > 0.05$ ).

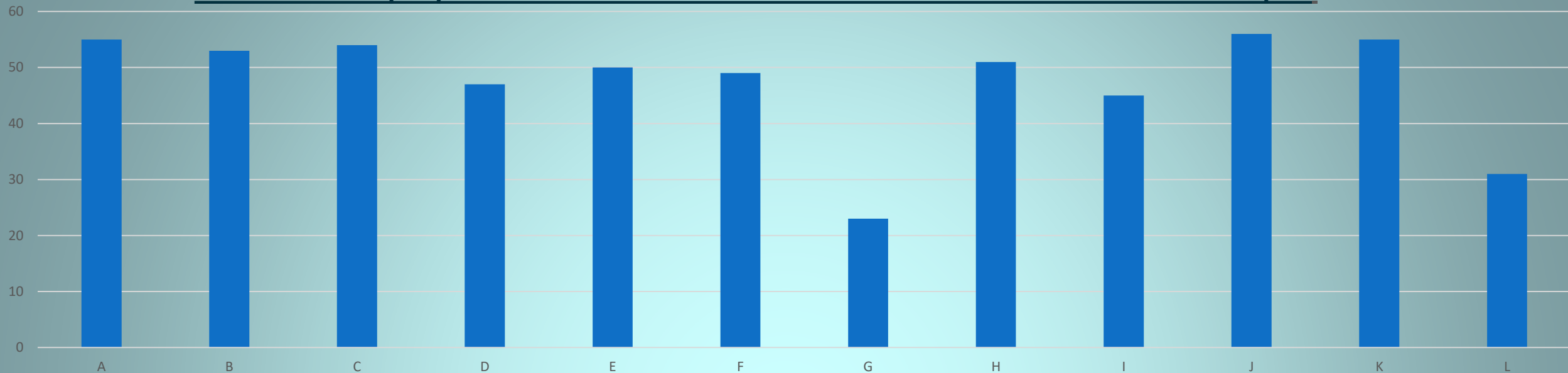


# Individual preferences

In order to determine the individual preferences:

- For each person, the number assigned to the first sentence of each sentence pair was subtracted from the number assigned to the second sentence (first sentence: *verb + particle -e + volna*; second sentence: *verb + volna + particle-e*).
- Thus, for each person, we got 12 numerical values ranging from -4 to 4.
- To get how many people have always chosen “the same version” (or at least could not decide between the two), we examined whether the signs of the numbers (within a single person’s data) were different or not. If the signs were not all the same, it meant that once they rated the first sentence better, but in the case of another sentence pair they considered the another “type” more acceptable compared to its counterpart. Zeros meant that they could not decide and we considered it a consistent decision.
- On the next slide, we present how many native speakers did not find any difference between the sentence pairs, so **how many people found both sentence equally acceptable**. (In this model, these measurements indicate the number of zeroes that was assigned to the sentence pairs.)

## The number of people who did not feel difference between the two sentences of the pair.



A. Meg tudtad-e volna mondani, hogy mennyi az idő?

B. Az ajánlott eljárást alkalmazták-e volna?

C. Jánost izgatta-e volna, ha kinevetik?

D. Gondoltad-e volna, hogy megnyeri a versenyt?

E. Sikerült-e volna a vizsga, ha többet tanulsz rá?

F. Nem kellett-e volna meglocsolni a virágot?

G. Lehetett-e volna másképp csinálni?

H. Ha nem látják elemelte-e volna a kincset?

I. Mertél-e volna ellenkezni?

J. Nem hívtunk meg, de akartál-e volna jönni?

K. Az célszerűbb lett-e volna, ha cserélünk?

L. Jónak látta-e volna, ha maradok?

Meg tudtad volna-e mondani, hogy mennyi az idő?

Alkalmazták volna-e az ajánlott eljárást?

Ha kinevetik, az izgatta volna-e Jánost?

Gondoltad volna-e, hogy megnyeri a versenyt?

Ha többet tanulsz rá, sikerült volna-e a vizsga?

Nem kellett volna-e meglocsolni a virágot?

Lehetett volna-e másképp csinálni?

Elemelte volna-e a kincset, ha nem látják?

Mertél volna-e ellenkezni?

Nem hívtunk meg, de akartál volna-e jönni?

Ha cserélünk, az célszerűbb lett volna-e?

Ha maradok, azt jónak látta volna-e?

# Do people consistently prefer one version to the other?

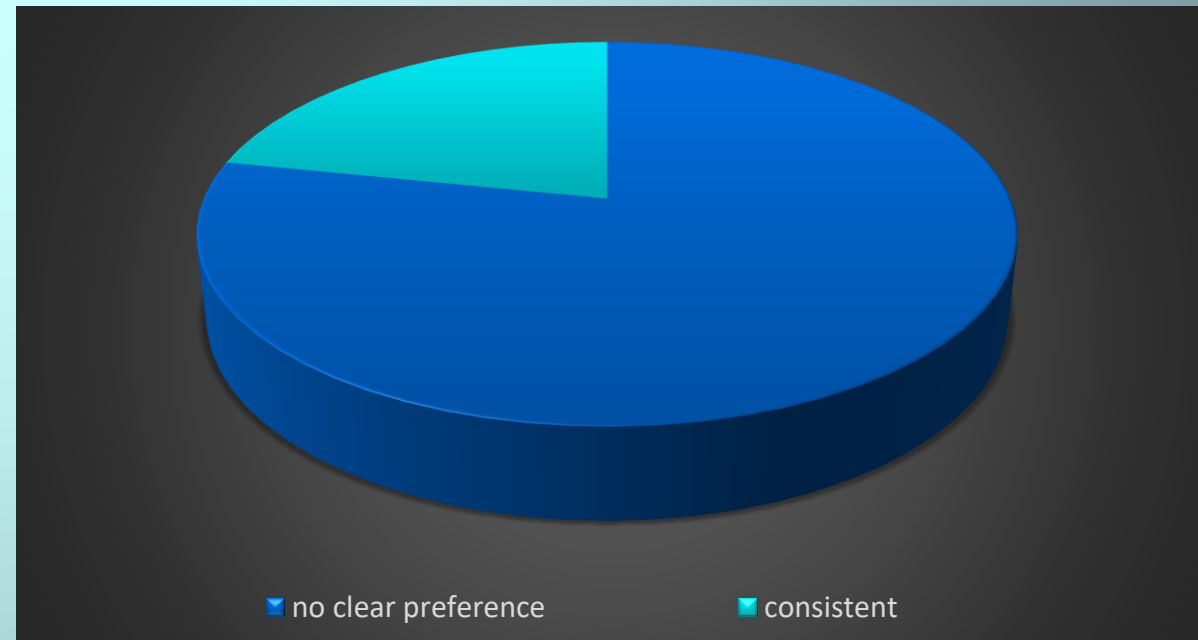
- **133** had **no clear preference**.

(In their cases, the numbers that we got had different signs, which indicates that they did not prefer the first or second sentence in the pair.)

- **37** people were **consistent**, they consistently judged the first or the second sentence better. (The signs were always the same or zero.)

- **Only 3** of those people who were consistent preferred the answer “**verb+volna-e**” version.

- **2** people **did not see any difference** at all between the two sentence types. (In their cases, the numbers were only zeros.)



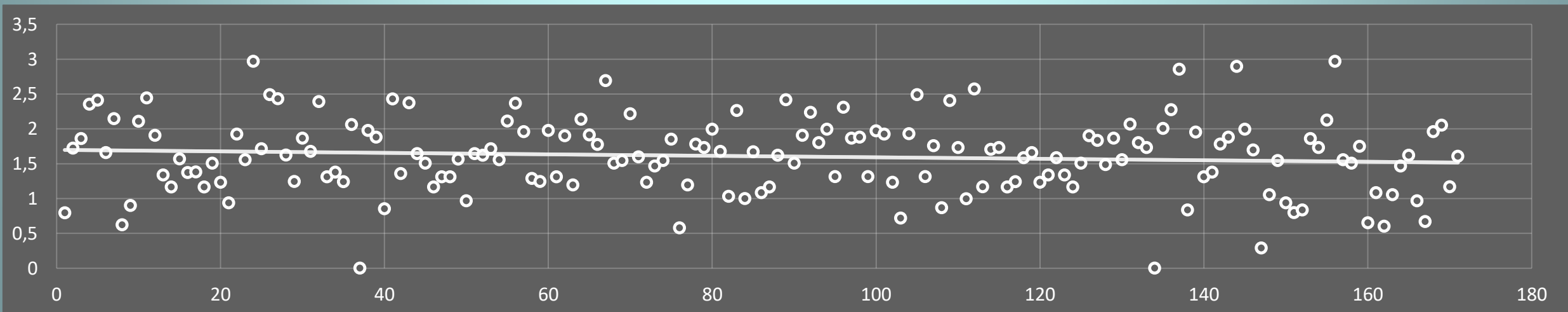


# The degree of consistency

- We wanted to determine the extent to which people make consistent choices by calculating the standard deviation of the differences experienced per each person.
- In 21 cases the standard deviation was under 1, so they chose relatively consistently.
- In the case of 32 people the standard deviation was above 2, so they did not make consistent choices.

**The mean of the standard deviations (calculated per person) was 1.62 and 87 people are above the average. (The standard deviation of the overall data was 1.96.)**

**H2: Based on the previously summarized data, we conclude that people do not make consistent decisions.**



# Conclusion/ Questions to be answered

- We came to the conclusion that most Hungarian native speakers tend to prefer the structure *verb + -e + volna* to the structure *verb + volna + -e*, but most of them do not have a clear preference.
- Of the 37 people who consistently chose the same version, 32 opted for the structure *verb + -e + volna*, and only 3 considered *verb + volna + -e* better.

## Further questions:

- What are those variables that affect acceptability?
- What is the source of inconsistency?
- To determine these variables, the gathered data require further analysis.

## Plans:

- We will investigate this further in the future, and we plan to examine the use of the *particle -e* with the *negative particle* (Ex. *Nem-e lehetne-e?*).



# Questions

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me:

- Kamilla Sándor: [lillakamilla007@gmail.com](mailto:lillakamilla007@gmail.com)

## References

- Kálmán, László. “Jól hangzott is volna, ha nem így mondtam volna” [It would have sounded good, if I hadn't said so], *Nyelv és Tudomány* [Language and Science], 23. Apr. 2015, <https://m.nyest.hu/hirek/jol-hangzott-is-volna-br-ha-nem-igy-mondtam-volna>
- Schirm, Anita. “Az -e kérdő partikula nyomában” [Tracing the question particle –e], In: Sinkovics, Balázs (ed.): *LingDok 5., Nyelvész-doktoranduszok dolgozatai* [Student papers in linguistics from the 5th LingDok Conference], Szegedi Tudományegyetem Nyelvtudományi Doktori Iskola, Szeged, 2006, 131–153

# Appendix

1. Meg tudtad-e volna mondani, hogy mennyi az idő? 2.804734 (1.45274)
2. Meg tudtad volna-e mondani, hogy mennyi az idő? 2.272189 (1.446423)
3. Az ajánlott eljárást alkalmazták-e volna? 2.87059 (1.43323)
4. Alkalmazták volna-e az ajánlott eljárást? 2.538462 (1.47196)
5. Jánost izgatta-e volna, ha kinevetik? 2.87574 (1.480811)
6. Ha kinevetik, az izgatta volna-e Jánost? 2.366864 (1.433557)
7. Gondoltad-e volna, hogy megnyeri a versenyt? 3.497041 (1.543513)
8. Gondoltad volna-e, hogy megnyeri a versenyt? 2.011834 (1.340701)
9. Sikerült-e volna a vizsga, ha többet tanulsz rá? 3.384615 (1.58865)
10. Ha többet tanulsz rá, sikerült volna-e a vizsga? 2.242604 (1.365069)
11. Nem kellett-e volna meglocsolni a virágot? 2.976331 (1.546704)
12. Nem kellett volna-e meglocsolni a virágot? 1.952663 (1.189291)
13. Lehetett-e volna másképp csinálni? 3.828402 (1.37153)
14. Lehetett volna-e másképp csinálni? 2.579882 (1.48639)
15. Ha nem látják, elemelte-e volna a kincset? 2.893491 (1.607429)
16. Elemelte volna-e a kincset, ha nem látják? 2.650888 (1.500798)
17. Mertél-e volna ellenkezni? 3.130178 (1.514093)
18. Mertél volna-e ellenkezni? 2.094675 (1.337386)
19. Nem hívtunk meg, de akartál-e volna jönni? 3.04142 (1.532796)
20. Nem hívtunk meg, de akartál volna-e jönni? 2.153846 (1.210077)
21. Az célszerűbb lett-e volna, ha cserélünk? 2.840237 (1.552046)
22. Ha cserélünk, az célszerűbb lett volna-e? 2.053254 (1.35515)
23. Jónak látta-e volna, ha maradok? 2.810651 (1.515674)
24. Ha maradok, azt jónak látta volna-e? 2.266272 (1.369345)

## Paired t-test:

1-2: Paired t-test:  $t(168)=3.7782$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.05$

3-4: Paired t-test:  $t(168) = 2.3148$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.05$

5-6: Paired t-test:  $t(168) = 3.3472$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.05$

7-8: Paired t-test:  $t(168) = 10.098$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.05$

9-10: Paired t-test:  $t(168) = 7.5211$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.05$

11-12: Paired t-test:  $t(168) = 7.5794$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.05$

13-14: Paired t-test:  $t(168) = 7.5639$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.05$

15-16: Paired t-test:  $t(168)= 1.5573$ ,  $p\text{-value}>0.05$

17-18: Paired t-test:  $t(168) = 6.5864$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.05$

19-20: Paired t-test:  $t(168) = 6.6039$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.05$

21-22: Paired t-test:  $t(168) = 5.5429$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.05$

23-24: Paired t-test:  $t(168)= 3.2678$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.05$

Válaszadó		szórás	23.	2.969542	56.	1.288057	89.	1.800673	122.	1.898963	155.	0.651339
1.	0.792961		24	1.712255	57.	1.243163	90.	1.99241	123.	1.831955	156.	1.083625
2.	1.723281		25.	2.490893	58.	1.977142	91.	1.314257	124.	1.484771	157.	0.603023
3.	1.858641		26.	2.430862	59.	1.311372	92.	2.309401	125.	1.864745	158.	1.05529
4.	2.35327		27.	1.623688	60.	1.898963	93.	1.864745	126.	1.556998	159.	1.466804
5.	2.412091		28.	1.243163	61.	1.193416	94.	1.880925	127.	2.065224	160.	1.621354
6.	1.658312		29.	1.864745	62.	2.137331	95.	1.314257	128.	1.800673	161.	0.965307
7.	0.621582		30.	1.676486	63.	1.912875	96.	1.969464	129.	1.729862	162.	0.668558
8.	0.900337		31.	2.391589	64.	1.775251	97.	1.922751	130.	0	163.	1.959824
9.	2.108784		32.	1.311372	65.	2.691175	98.	1.230915	131.	2.005674	164.	2.050499
10.	2.443296		33.	1.378954	66.	1.505042	99.	0.717741	132.	2.274696	165.	1.167748
11.	1.906925		34.	1.240112	67.	1.544786	100.	1.928652	133.	2.855086	166.	2.969542
12.	1.337116		35.	2.059715	68.	1.595448	101.	2.490893	134.	0.834847	167.	1.831955
13.	1.1645		36.	0	69.	1.230915	102.	1.314257	135.	1.954017	168.	2.712206
14.	1.566699		37.	1.977142	70.	1.466804	103.	1.758098	136.	1.378954	169.	2.35327
15.	1.370689		38.	1.880925	71.	1.544786	104.	0.866025	137.	1.78164	170.	1.556998
16.	1.381699		39.	0.852803	72.	1.850471	105.	2.405801	138.	1.880925	Összes szórás átlaga emberenként	1.617662
17.	1.1645		40.	2.429303	73.	0.57735	106.	1.729862	139.	2.895922		
18.	1.505042		41.	1.356801	74.	1.193416	107.	0.996205	140.	1.99241		
19.	1.230915		42.	2.374103	75.	1.78164	108.	2.570226	141.	1.696699		
20.	0.937437		43.	1.505042	76.	1.732051	109.	1.167748	142.	0.288675		
21.	1.922751		44.	1.1645	77.	1.99241	110.	1.705606	143.	1.05529		
22.	1.556998		45.	1.311372	78.	1.676486	111.	1.732051	144.	1.544786		
			46.	1.311372	79.	1.029857	112.	1.1645	145.	0.937437		
			47.	1.564279	80.	2.261335	113.	1.240112	146.	0.797724		
			48.	0.965307	81.	1	114.	1.585923	147.	0.834847		
			49.	1.642245	82.	1.669694	115.	1.658312	148.	1.858641		
			50.	1.621354	83.	1.083625	116.	1.230915	149.	1.732051		
			51.	1.712255	84.	1.1645	117.	1.337116	150.	2.124889		
			52.	1.556998	85.	1.621354	118.	1.585923	151.	2.968267		
			53.	2.110579	86.	2.416797	119.	1.337116	152.	1.556998		
			54.	2.367712	87.	1.505042	120.	1.1645	153.	1.505042		
			55.	1.959824	88.	1.906925	121.	1.505042	154.	1.749459		



# Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere and great gratitude to my teacher Viktória Virovec for her support and her assistance with the statistics.

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