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**Colloquial**

# **Hungarian**

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# **Colloquial Hungarian**

The Complete Course  
for Beginners

Carol H. Rounds and Erika Sólyom

First published 1988

by Jerry Payne

Second edition published 2002

by Routledge

This edition published 2011

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada

by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Rounds, Carol, 1959–

Colloquial Hungarian: the complete course for beginners / Carol H. Rounds and Erika Sólyom. — 2nd ed.

p. cm. — (Colloquial series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

(pbk: alk. paper) — (pck: alk. paper) — (ebk: alk. paper) — (cde: alk. paper)

1. Hungarian language—Textbooks for foreign speakers—English.

2. Hungarian language—Spoken Hungarian. I. Sólyom, Erika, 1969– II. Title. PH2129.E5R68 2010

494'.51182421—dc22

ISBN: 978-1-138-94986-7 (pbk)

Typeset in Avant Garde and Helvetica

by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong

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# Preface

## Magyar – Magyarok

### Hungarian – Hungarians

Hungarian is a fascinating language quite different from most other European languages. It is the westernmost member of the Finno-Ugric language family, having Finnish, Estonian and several less-well-known languages as its distant cousins. In addition to the approximately 10 million speakers in Hungary proper, several million native Hungarian speakers dwell in the neighbouring countries of Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Austria and the Ukraine.

Hungarian is challenging for the adult language learner for two main reasons: English and Hungarian share very little common vocabulary, so each new word you learn will look very different from its English counterpart. Some loan words from English and other languages are easier to recognise than others: **bank**, **telefon**, **posta** are some obvious ones, but until you get the knack of Hungarian spelling, words like **szendvics** ‘sandwich’ and **menedzser** ‘manager’ may make you pause, though their origins are clear. English has even borrowed a word from Hungarian: ‘coach’ comes from **kocsi** (a word used nowadays in Hungarian to mean anything from ‘coach’ to cars or train carriages). Although more words from other European languages are being adopted by the Hungarian language all the time, the bulk of the vocabulary is as rich, varied and home-made as Hungary’s folk traditions.

With a few exceptions, the written language mostly reflects the pronunciation of words; thus, from a phonetic point of view, Hungarian is quite easy to master. It is the structure of Hungarian that is the big challenge, as it shares few common elements with the Germanic, Romance and Slavic languages of its neighbours. Hungarian is a so-called ‘agglutinative’ language, meaning that several endings can be attached (‘glued’) to a root word to change not only its meaning



in a sentence but also its role. Instead of using prepositions, Hungarian adds a case ending; and instead of expressing possession with a word such as 'my' or 'your', Hungarian adds an ending. You will see that your fluency in the language takes shape not only with the number of words you learn but also with how long you can make them!

After several millennia travelling across the steppes and central Eurasia, the Magyars settled in their current homeland in the centre of Europe in AD 896. From their earliest times and throughout known history they have always been in close contact (for better or worse) with a large variety of peoples and languages. In modern times – perhaps especially since the change of government in 1989 – Hungary can be considered the bridge between East and West from a political, economic, cultural and religious point of view. Linguistically, however, it stands quite alone in central Europe.

## Colloquial Hungarian

Every step of the way, we have endeavoured to make this book lively, contemporary and relevant to the daily encounters of the language learner. Whether you have business or relatives in Hungary, or are desirous of studying its exquisite language and culture for other reasons, this book is meant to equip you with situational savvy, up-to-date vocabulary and expressions and a clear outline of the rules of the language and its structure.

We have included a variety of settings (in restaurants, hotels, family homes, shops, etc.) in order to introduce not just vocabulary but also other communicative strategies to use in any potential interaction. We consider several levels of politeness combined with formality and informality. Whether engrossed in conversation with an anonymous taxi driver or the man/woman of your dreams, it is important from a communicative standpoint to set the correct tone by using the appropriate level of address. Thus you will be sure to engage your partners in dialogue and not embarrass them or yourself. You can rely on the family of characters in this book to lead you through both ordinary and extraordinary days and nights – just follow their lead, and follow their story through to the end.

Each chapter includes a setting with dialogues approached from different age and formality levels. The exchanges are taken from

conversations you can expect to hear or have on any typical day in Hungary. (None of the characters in this book are based on real-life characters – any resemblance is pure coincidence.) The grammar and vocabulary explanations that follow are meant to give you a broad and simultaneously exact understanding of the grammatical material presented in the dialogue. A good approach to using this book to your best advantage is to go back over each chapter: reread the dialogues and reassess their use of the grammar points presented. No doubt each reading will reveal another layer of clarity; actively observe case endings, verb conjugations, word order. Follow the audio material closely; although to be understood you need not have a native accent or perfect grammar, the closer you are to attaining these the more engaging your dialogue will be. Remember that language learning is a combination of patience, repetition, desire, repetition, time and repetition.

And then go out and practise it: if you do not know any Hungarians today it is easy to meet one tomorrow. Best of all, spend some time interacting with the wit, charm, warmth, depth, sophistication and earthiness of Hungarians at home in Hungary. **Jó utat!**

# Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the following people for their help in preparing this book. First and foremost, I thank my co-author, Erika Sólyom, whose fresh outlook gave me pleasant surprises at every turn. From the very beginning she has been the Kornél to my Dezső: a rewarding and refreshing collaboration all the way. My former teacher of Hungarian, Dan Abondolo, as well as my past and present students have done much to contribute to the grammatical approach adopted here and I am indebted to their teachings. I especially wish to thank John, Emerson and Marion for their unflagging support and great humour.

Carol Rounds

I wish to thank my co-author, Carol Rounds, for this wonderful collaborative experience. I thank Carol for her insight and support from the beginning to the very end. As for the preparation of the third edition, I especially thank her for being a great colleague and friend during the entire process, especially at the beginning. Back then, she showed me where the sunny sky was even though my eyes saw only rain falling on the ground. And there she was, holding an umbrella! I am also greatly indebted to the students and colleagues at the University of California's Education Abroad Program at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. Without the professional support of Antal Örkény, Hédi Turai and Péter Kenéz, my teaching Hungarian as a Foreign Language experience would not be the same as it is now. All my former students played an integral part in the new edition of our book. Their footsteps are echoed on the forthcoming pages. Special footsteps and acknowledgements belong to: Nish Gheewalla, Ben Harguth, Colin Quigley, Flavio Aita, Art Minas, Tyler Derheim, Bülent Şimşek, Joann Collier, Joanne Kim and Mo Akbar Sharifi. Finally, very special thanks go to my immediate family. Köszönet édesanyámnak

és édesapámnak. To Faruk: for his love and patience. And most importantly to Jázmin: for being my understanding ‘mamukám’ whenever I had to go and type these pages instead of playing or painting that butterfly.

Erika Sólyom

Finally, we owe a common debt of thanks to Sophie Oliver and the rest of the editorial team at Routledge for their guidance and fortitude during the preparation of the first manuscript. We also thank Samantha Vale Noya and the rest of the editorial team at Routledge for all their help in the preparation of the third edition. Thank you for making this such a pleasant experience!

Carol Rounds and Erika Sólyom



# Introduction

Hungarian is not at all difficult to pronounce, and you will find that, for the most part, the words are pronounced as they are written. The alphabet is almost the same as in English – although some diacritics are added over the vowels to indicate their pronunciation, and some letters look more like clusters of consonants than single letters. Once you memorise their sounds, however, you will find that the one-to-one correspondence of letters to sounds makes pronouncing Hungarian words easier than trying to figure out how some English words are pronounced. To add to the ease of pronunciation, all words have their stress on the first syllable – no exceptions.

## The Hungarian alphabet (Audio 1:2)



The Hungarian alphabet is composed of the following forty-four letters:


**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**

The marks above the vowels indicate that the vowel is pronounced longer than its counterpart without the marks – more on that in the pronunciation guide to follow. Some consonants consist of two letters; one consonant (**dzs**) consists of three. Although they are written with more than one letter, these consonants are considered individual letters of the alphabet. 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 Hungarian letter **i**) and in the palatal series (as described below). One last word on spelling: the capital letters look the same as the lower-case letters, including all the diacritics and accents: **Á, É, Ő, Ü**, etc.

## Consonants (Audio 1:3)

Many of the consonants in Hungarian are pronounced as in English. The following is a guide to pronouncing those consonants that are different from English.

	Hungarian	Meaning	Pronounced as in English
<b>c</b>	<b>cél</b> <b>ecet</b>	aim vinegar	as in <i>cats</i>
<b>cs</b>	<b>csal</b> <b>kocsmá</b>	deceives bar	as in <i>cheese</i>
<b>g</b>	<b>garázs</b> <b>igen</b>	garage yes	(always hard) as in <i>go</i>
<b>j</b>	<b>jó</b> <b>hajó</b>	good boat	as in <i>yes</i>
<b>r</b>	<b>remek</b>  <b>barát</b>	splendid  friend	trill the tongue lightly on the ridge right behind your upper row of teeth
<b>s</b>	<b>só</b> <b>este</b>	salt evening	as in <i>she</i>
<b>sz</b>	<b>szia</b> <b>asztal</b>	hi table	as in <i>sat</i>
<b>zs</b>	<b>zseb</b> <b>mazsola</b>	pocket raisin	as in <i>pleasure</i>

 These are the palatal consonants (so-called because they are pronounced with the tongue gliding off the top of the palate): (Audio 1:4)

	Hungarian	Meaning	Pronounced as in English
<b>gy</b>	<b>gyűrű</b> <b>magyar</b>	ring Hungarian	similar to a <b>dy</b> sound as in <i>during</i>
<b>ly</b>	<b>lyuk</b>  <b>hely</b>	hole  place	as in <i>yes</i> (thus the same as the Hungarian letter <i>j</i> )
<b>ny</b>	<b>nyár</b> <b>lány</b>	summer girl	as in <i>canyon</i>



<b>ty</b>	<b>tyúk</b>	hen	similar to a <b>ty</b> sound as in <i>studio</i>
	<b>kártya</b>	card	

Finally, when pronouncing **k**, **p** and **t**, try to release the consonant without the puff of air that an English speaker normally provides. These consonants are ‘unaspirated’ and pronounced more as the French would pronounce them.

## Consonant length: long and short consonants (Audio 1:5)



All consonants can be pronounced as long or short. Long consonants are written as double consonants and are pronounced approximately twice as long as short ones. When practising the pronunciation of long consonants, try simply to rest on the consonant without releasing it, then move on to the rest of the word. Listen for the difference in length and pay close attention; length of the consonant can change the meaning of a word, e.g., **szeretem** means ‘I love him/her’, but **szerettem** means ‘I loved him/her’. You see how the difference in consonant length can change the tense of the verb – not to mention the state of affairs of your love story.

The length of consonants written with two letters is indicated in spelling by doubling only the first letter. For example, a long **sz** is written **ssz**: **vissza** ‘back’; long **ny** is written **nny**: **lánnyal** ‘with a girl’, etc.

Listen carefully to the audio material to hear the differences in length of consonants in the pairs listed below:

<b>ebem</b>	my dog	<b>ebben</b>	in this
<b>pocak</b>	tummy	<b>cuccok</b>	things, stuff
<b>hajam</b>	my hair	<b>hajjal</b>	with hair
<b>akar</b>	wants	<b>akkor</b>	then
<b>Tisza</b>	Tisza (name of a river)	<b>vissza</b>	back
<b>sietek</b>	I am hurrying	<b>siettek</b>	they were hurrying
<b>megy</b>	(s)he goes	<b>meggy</b>	sour cherry
<b>meny</b>	daughter-in-law	<b>menny</b>	heavens

## Voice assimilation

For some of the consonants of Hungarian, their status as ‘voiced’ or ‘unvoiced’ is important. (Voiced consonants use the vocal cords in their pronunciation, unvoiced consonants do not.) The following are the consonants affected by voice assimilation according to this feature:

voiced	<b>b</b>	<b>d</b>	<b>g</b>	<b>gy</b>	<b>dz</b>	<b>dzs</b>	<b>z</b>	<b>zs</b>	<b>v</b>
unvoiced	<b>p</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>k</b>	<b>ty</b>	<b>c</b>	<b>cs</b>	<b>sz</b>	<b>s</b>	<b>f</b> <b>h</b>

The above consonants are at work in the rule of voice assimilation: if two consonants are next to each other within a word and they are different from each other with respect to the voiced/unvoiced distinction, the consonant on the right will influence the consonant to its left such that a voiced consonant will voice an unvoiced consonant and vice versa. Thus, for example, a (voiced) **z** to the left of an (unvoiced) **t** will be pronounced as its unvoiced counterpart **sz**, as in the word **azt** ‘that, acc.’, pronounced [aszt]; the (unvoiced) **t** to the left of a (voiced) **b** will be pronounced as its (voiced) counterpart **d** as in the word **kertben** ‘in a garden’, pronounced [kerdben].

As you can see from the chart above, the consonants **m**, **n**, **ny**, **l**, **r** and **j** are not affected by voice assimilation. Although the letter **h** can never be voiced, it can cause voiced consonants preceding it to become devoiced. Finally, although the letter **v** can be devoiced to **f**, it cannot trigger the voicing of an unvoiced consonant (i.e. **hatvan** ‘sixty’ is pronounced as written).



## Vowels (Audio 1:6)

Like consonants, vowels can also be either long or short. Length is indicated by long marks over the vowel. For two sets of vowel pairs, **a–á** and **e–é** there is a difference not only in length but of quality in the vowel as well. For all other vowel pairs the difference is primarily of length. Perhaps the most important advice about pronouncing vowels is this: don’t swallow them; give both long and short vowels their full due.


Vowel	Approximate pronunciation	Hungarian	English
<b>a</b>	<b>aw</b> as in <i>awl</i>	<b>fal</b>	wall
<b>á</b>	<b>aa</b> as in <i>baa</i>	<b>ár</b>	price; flood
<b>e</b>	a sound between the <b>a</b> in <i>bat</i> and the <b>e</b> in <i>bet</i>	<b>reggel</b>	morning
<b>é</b>	<b>ay</b> as in <i>say</i> , but without the <b>y-</b> sound (diphthong) at the end	<b>vér</b>	blood
<b>i</b>	<b>e</b> as in <i>he</i>	<b>ki?</b>	who?
<b>í</b>	a longer version of the above, as the <b>ee</b> in <i>green</i>	<b>víz</b>	water
<b>o</b>	<b>oh</b> as in <i>note</i>	<b>ok</b>	reason
<b>ó</b>	a longer version of the above	<b>jó</b>	good
<b>ö</b>	purse your lips as though to say <b>oh</b> but say <b>eh</b>	<b>zöld</b>	green
<b>ő</b>	a longer version of the above	<b>nő</b>	woman
<b>u</b>	<b>oo</b> as in <i>food</i>	<b>tud</b>	knows
<b>ú</b>	a longer version of the above	<b>út</b>	road
<b>ü</b>	purse your lips as though to say <b>oo</b> but say <b>ee</b>	<b>fül</b>	ear
<b>ű</b>	a longer version of the above	<b>fű</b>	grass

## Intonation (Audio 1:7)



Related to pronunciation is the rise and fall or melody of a phrase. You will find as you listen to the language that in the beginning, the phrases may have a ‘flat’ intonation. The more familiar you become with the spoken language, however, the more you will appreciate the subtleties of Hungarian intonation. As you start speaking the language, try to imitate the intonation as well as the pronunciation of the sounds – you may have to tone down the melodic line of your native language to accommodate Hungarian’s subtle intonation. Keep the following intonation patterns in mind.

Declarative sentences have a primarily descending intonation:

 **Az újságok jobbra vannak.**      The newspapers are to the right.  
**Szép idő van.**      The weather is nice.

A phrase containing a question word has a higher rise on the question word:

 **Milyen idő van?**      What is the weather like?  
**Hol vannak a gyerekek?**      Where are the children?

A yes–no question has a rise–fall intonation pattern where a high rise in pitch is found on the penultimate syllable of the sentence, and there is a sharp fall on the last syllable:

 **Szép idő van?**      Is the weather nice?  
**Eljössz ma este?**      Are you coming tonight?

The intonation pattern may be the only way to differentiate between a statement and a question – the order of words doesn't change, only the intonation.

In yes-or-no questions with fewer than three syllables, the rise in intonation takes place on the final syllable followed by an immediate drop:

 **Ez az?**      Is this it?  
 **Kedves?**      Is she nice?

The rise–fall intonation pattern is not easy the first few times. But keep practising: it doesn't take long for it to become quite natural. Most of all, try to avoid the (American) English tendency of rising high in intonation at the end of questions – or any other phrase.

Now let's get on to learning the rest of the language.

# Unit One

## Családok

### Families

In this unit you will learn:

- to identify and ask questions about people and objects: **Ki? Mi?**
- to identify nationalities, countries, and professions
- the third-person singular and plural pronouns: **ő, ők**
- the definite and indefinite articles: **a(z)** and **egy**
- how to form the plural of nouns and adjectives



## Dialogue 1



### A külföldi család The family from abroad (Audio 1:8)



Zsolt asks Ildikó about the New York family visiting Hungary.

- ZSOLT Ki ő?
- ILDIKÓ Ő Fekete Gabriel. Tanár. Ő az apa.
- ZSOLT Az apa magyar?
- ILDIKÓ Igen. Budapesti.
- ZSOLT A *Gabriel* magyar név?
- ILDIKÓ Nem.
- ZSOLT Hogy mondják magyarul: *Gabriel*?
- ILDIKÓ Gábor.
- ZSOLT Óh, persze. Egy tipikus magyar név.
- ILDIKÓ Igen, tipikus férfi név.

- ZSOLT *Who is he?*  
 ILDIKÓ *He is Gabriel Fekete. He's a teacher. He is the father.*  
 ZSOLT *Is the father Hungarian?*  
 ILDIKÓ *Yes. He's from Budapest.*  
 ZSOLT *Is Gabriel a Hungarian name?*  
 ILDIKÓ *No.*  
 ZSOLT *How do you say Gabriel in Hungarian?*  
 ILDIKÓ *Gábor.*  
 ZSOLT *Oh, of course. It's a typical Hungarian name.*  
 ILDIKÓ *Yes, a typical man's name.*



## Vocabulary (Audio 1:9)

<b>a(z)</b>	the	<b>ki</b>	who
<b>apa</b>	father	<b>külföldi</b>	foreign(er)
<b>budapesti</b>	person from Budapest	<b>magyar</b>	Hungarian
<b>egy</b>	one, a	<b>nem</b>	no
<b>fekete</b>	black	<b>név</b>	name
<b>férfi</b>	man	<b>ő</b>	he, she
<b>Hogy mondják magyarul?</b>	How do you (lit. they) say in Hungarian?	<b>óh</b>	oh
<b>igen</b>	yes	<b>persze</b>	of course
		<b>tanár</b>	teacher
		<b>tipikus</b>	typical



## Dialogue 2



### Foglalkozások Professions (Audio 1:12)

Zsolt continues his questioning . . .

- ZSOLT *És ő? Ő is amerikai?*  
 ILDIKÓ *Igen. Ő Max. Ő amerikai egyetemista.*  
 ZSOLT *És ki ez?*  
 ILDIKÓ *Mike. Ő is amerikai. Ő nem egyetemista, hanem fiatal zenész.*  
 ZSOLT *Az anyja Melanie? Ő is magyar?*



A Gabriel név  
magyarul Gábor.



Az anya Melanie.  
Ő filmrendező.



Mike zenész.



Max egyetemista.



Angela amerikai.

ILDIKÓ Igen, az anya Melanie, de ő nem magyar. Csak Gabriel magyar, Melanie pedig amerikai. Gabriel tanár, és Melanie filmrendező.

ZSOLT Ez egy érdekes család.

ILDIKÓ Szerintem is.



- ZSOLT *And him? Is he American too?*  
 ILDIKÓ *Yes. He is Max. He is an American college student.*  
 ZSOLT *And who is this?*  
 ILDIKÓ *This is Mike. He is American, too. He is not a college student; rather, he is a young musician.*  
 ZSOLT *Is the mother Melanie? Is she Hungarian, too?*  
 ILDIKÓ *Yes, the mother is Melanie, but she is not Hungarian. Only Gabriel is Hungarian, and Melanie is American. Gabriel is a teacher and Melanie is a film director.*  
 ZSOLT *This is an interesting family.*  
 ILDIKÓ *I think so, too.*



## Vocabulary

<b>amerikai</b>	American	<b>fiatal</b>	young
<b>anya</b>	mother	<b>filmrendező</b>	film director
<b>csak</b>	only	<b>foglalkozás</b>	profession, job
<b>család</b>	family	<b>hanem</b>	but, rather
<b>de</b>	but	<b>is</b>	also
<b>egyetemista</b>	college student	<b>pedig</b>	and, but, however
<b>érdekes</b>	interesting	<b>szerintem</b>	I think [that] . . .
<b>és</b>	and	<b>zenész</b>	musician
<b>ez</b>	this		



## Dialogue 3



### **A Túró Rudi automata** The Cottage Cheese Candy vending machine **(Audio 1:14)**

An American student asks about what he sees at the university.

- MIKE *Mi ez?*  
 ZSUZSI *Ez a büfé.*  
 MIKE *Mi az?*  
 ZSUZSI *Az egy Túró Rudi automata.*

- MIKE Érdekes. És mi ez?
- ZSUZSI Ez egy tanterem. Az pedig egy iroda.
- MIKE És ez mi?
- ZSUZSI Ez (egy) ceruza, és ez (egy) toll. Az pedig (egy) füzet.  
Ez (egy) asztal, az (egy) szék.
- MIKE Mi az ott?
- ZSUZSI Az ott a tábla, az az ablak, és az egy könyv. A könyv egy magyar-angol szótár.
- MIKE *What is this?*
- ZSUZSI *This is the snack bar.*
- MIKE *What is that?*
- ZSUZSI *That is a Túró Rudi vending machine.*
- MIKE *Interesting. And what is this?*
- ZSUZSI *This is a classroom. That, on the other hand, is an office.*
- MIKE *And what is this?*
- ZSUZSI *This is a pencil, and this is a pen. That, though, is a notebook. This is a table, that is a chair.*
- MIKE *What is that there?*
- ZSUZSI *That over there is the blackboard, that is the window and that is a book. The book is a Hungarian–English dictionary.*

## Vocabulary



<b>ablak</b>	window	<b>iroda</b>	office
<b>angol</b>	English	<b>könyv</b>	book
<b>asztal</b>	table	<b>mi</b>	what
<b>automata</b>	vending machine	<b>ott</b>	there
<b>az</b>	that	<b>szék</b>	chair
<b>büfé</b>	snack bar	<b>szótár</b>	dictionary
<b>ceruza</b>	pencil	<b>tábla</b>	(black)board
<b>füzet</b>	notebook	<b>tanterem</b>	classroom
<b>hol</b>	where?	<b>toll</b>	pen



## Language points

### No verb 'to be'

The above dialogues illustrate the kind of sentences where there is no verb 'to be'. These are sentences in which the subject is the third person and is identified in the predicate as being an adjective or noun. Although there *is* a third person of the verb 'to be', it is used in other kinds of sentences – which you will meet in the next unit.

### Third-person singular pronoun Ő

The word **ő** means both 'he' and 'she'. If the context is clear, however, it may be omitted entirely:

<b>Ő filmrendező?</b>	Is she/he a director?
<b>Filmrendező?</b>	Is she/he a director?

### Definite article a(z)

The definite article 'the' is **a** before words beginning with a consonant; it is **az** before words beginning with a vowel:

<b>a tanár</b>	the teacher
<b>az anya</b>	the mother

### Indefinite article egy

The indefinite article **egy** translates as 'a, an' and is used similarly to the article in English. However, it need not be used as often as its English counterpart; it may be omitted when identifying someone or something:

<b>Gabriel (egy) tanár.</b>	Gabriel is a teacher.
<b>Az (egy) toll.</b>	That is a pen.

## Making adjectives of place names

In Hungarian, it is common to describe a person's origin or current residence with an adjective. To form the adjective, simply add the letter **-i** to the end of the place name; the resulting adjective, with few exceptions, is never capitalised:

<b>Amerika</b>	<b>amerikai</b>	American
<b>Budapest</b>	<b>budapesti</b>	a person from Budapest
<b>New York</b>	<b>new york-i</b>	a person from New York
<b>Róma</b>	<b>római</b>	a person from Rome

## The position of **is**, 'too', 'also'

The word **is** must always come immediately after the word(s) to which it refers: the new information in the sentence. It is pronounced as though it is a part of the preceding word, thus it receives no stress. Listen to the dialogue again for the correct pronunciation of **is**.

**Ez szótár. Az is szótár.**

This is a dictionary. That is a dictionary, too.

**Gabriel magyar. Ő amerikai is.**

Gabriel is Hungarian. He is American, too.

In the first sentence, the new information is not the notion 'dictionary', but 'that' as opposed to 'this'. In the second sentence the new information is the fact that Gabriel is not just Hungarian, but American too. He is a Hungarian American.

## Hanem, pedig, de

In the dialogues you came across three different words that can all be translated 'but', though they all differ slightly from one another.

**Hanem** is used as a corrective and always follows a **nem** clause:

**Ő nem egyetemista, hanem zenész.**

He is not a college student, but a musician.

**Pedig** means ‘however, though, on the other hand’ and is always found in the second position of its clause.

**Az ott füzet, ez pedig könyv.**

That is a notebook; this, however, is a book.

Of the three, **de** is most like the English ‘but’, and it offers a contrast and/or a new outcome or information regarding the previous clause:

**Mike is kaliforniai, de nem santa barbarai.**

Mike is also Californian but not from Santa Barbara.



## Exercise 1

Translate into Hungarian:

- 1 Who is he?
- 2 What is this?
- 3 This is a notebook; that, however, is a book.
- 4 Anna is a teacher.
- 5 Ildikó is a mother and a musician, too.
- 6 He is an American student.
- 7 She is not a photographer but a film director.
- 8 That is the Hungarian–English dictionary.
- 9 This is not a pencil, but a pen.
- 10 Is this a classroom?



## Exercise 2

Where are they from? Make up sentences along the following pattern:

Példa: John, London → **John londoni.**

- 1 Sevda, Isztambul
- 2 Mark, Kalifornia
- 3 Jackie, Amerika
- 4 Afinata, Afrika
- 5 Stefano, Róma
- 6 Pierre, Párizs
- 7 Ágnes, Szeged
- 8 Carol, Canada
- 9 Olga, Moszkva
- 10 Tamás, Sopron
- 11 István, Szombathely
- 12 Ildikó, Debrecen

## Dialogue 4



### Budapesti barátok Friends from Budapest (Audio 1:16)



CSilla asks about the family from Budapest.

CSILLA Kik ők?

PÉTER Ők a szülők.

CSILLA Ők amerikaiak?

PÉTER Nem, ők nem amerikaiak, hanem magyarok.

CSILLA Ki ő?

PÉTER Ő Szabó Zoltán.

CSILLA És ez itt, ő Szabó Zoltánné?

PÉTER Igen, ő Szabóné Egri Zsófia.

CSILLA Ők tanárok?

PÉTER Nem, nem tanárok. Zoltán jogász, Zsófia pedig antropológus.

CSILLA *Who are they?*

PÉTER *They are the parents.*

CSILLA *Are they American?*

PÉTER *No, they are not American, but Hungarian.*

CSILLA *Who is he?*

PÉTER *He is Zoltán Szabó.*

CSILLA *And this one here, is she Mrs Zoltán Szabó?*

PÉTER *Yes, she is Mrs Szabó, Zsófia Egri.*

CSILLA *Are they teachers?*

PÉTER *No, they are not teachers. Zoltán is a lawyer and Zsófia is an anthropologist.*

## Vocabulary



**antropológus** anthropologist

**itt** here

**jogász** lawyer

**-né** Mrs

**szabó** tailor

**szülő** parent



Zoltán jogász.

Zsófia magyar.  
Ő antropológus.

Lilla fiatal tanár.



## Dialogue 5



### **Diákok és tanárok** Students and teachers (Audio 1:18)

Mike is still discovering his surroundings.

- MIKE Zsuzsi!  
 ZSUZSI Tessék.  
 MIKE Mik ezek?  
 ZSUZSI Ezek füzetek, újságok, papírok és ceruzák.  
 MIKE Ezek is ceruzák?  
 ZSUZSI Tessék?  
 MIKE Ezek is ceruzák?  
 ZSUZSI Nem, ezek nem ceruzák, hanem tollak. Azok ott az új diákok és tanárok – fiúk és lányok, férfiak és nők.  
 MIKE De jó! Új ismerősök! Új barátok!
- MIKE Zsuzsi!  
 ZSUZSI Yes.



- MIKE *What are these?*  
ZSUZSI *These are notebooks, newspapers, papers and pencils.*  
MIKE *Are these pencils, too?*  
ZSUZSI *Excuse me?*  
MIKE *Are these pencils, too?*  
ZSUZSI *No, these are not pencils, but pens. Those people over there are the new students and teachers, boys and girls, men and women.*  
MIKE *Great! New acquaintances! New friends!*

## Vocabulary



<b>barát</b>	friend
<b>De jó!</b>	How great! That's great!
<b>diák</b>	student
<b>férfiak</b>	men
<b>fiú</b>	boy
<b>ismerős</b>	acquaintance
<b>lány</b>	girl
<b>nő</b>	woman
<b>papír</b>	paper
<b>tessék</b>	yes, I'm listening, go ahead
<b>tessék?</b>	excuse me, what did you say?
<b>új</b>	new
<b>újság</b>	newspaper

## Language points



### Vowel harmony

Vowel harmony is a concept and set of phonological rules that promises to be your first true challenge in learning Hungarian. English has nothing like it, but it is crucial to understand vowel harmony right from the beginning; without it, you won't be able to make a plural, conjugate verbs or do anything even slightly complicated. It is easy

to learn – it's just a slightly different way of thinking about words and vowels.

In the preface we mentioned that Hungarian is a language that 'glues' words and their endings together. What we didn't mention is the vowel harmony that occurs while adding these endings. In a nutshell, **vowel harmony is the mechanism used to maintain the same or similar quality of vowel sound throughout individual words in Hungarian – no matter how many endings are attached to a word.** The process involves first determining what kind of vowels are in the root word and, second, choosing the ending that best matches the quality of those vowels. First, you need to know how to classify the vowels before you can make them harmonise.

## Vowel classification

Hungarian vowels are classified according to *front* vs. *back* vowels and *rounded* vs. *unrounded* vowels. These terms come from describing the tongue position in the mouth and the roundedness of the lips, respectively.

Back vowels:	<b>a, á, o, ó, u, ú</b>
Front unrounded vowels:	<b>e, é, i, í</b>
Front rounded vowels:	<b>ö, ő, ü, ű</b>

Unless it is a foreign word or a recent loan word into Hungarian, most words contain only back vowels or only front vowels. Examples of back vowel words include **újság** 'newspaper', **magyar** 'Hungarian', and **angol** 'English'. Front vowel words include **egyszerű** 'simple', **ismerős** 'acquaintance' and **fűzet** 'notebook'.

## Neutral vowels

Even though the status of **e, é, i** and **í** is hotly debated in linguistic circles, for the purpose of vowel harmony let us consider them neutral; that is, although they are inherently front, they may (and often do) occur in back vowel words. In most cases, these 'mixed' words are considered back vowel words such as **papír** 'paper', **diák** 'student', **szomszéd** 'neighbour' and **fiú** 'boy'. If a word contains only neutral

vowels, it is considered a front vowel word (though there are numerous exceptions – they'll be pointed out in the vocabulary lists).

## Adding endings

### Back vs. front vowels

Because vowel harmony is maintained throughout the whole word, most endings have front and back vowel variants, e.g., the dative case **-nak** (back vowel) and **-nek** (front vowel). Thus, if a word contains back vowels, it attaches back vowel endings; should the word contain only front vowels it can attach only front vowel endings.

### Rounded vs. unrounded vowels

Although most endings have only front vs. back variants, several of them have three variants. For such endings (including the plural discussed below) there is one back vowel variant, but two variants for front vowel words: rounded and unrounded. You will use the rounded variant if the *last* vowel of a front vowel word is rounded; use the unrounded variant when the *last* vowel of a front vowel word is unrounded. An example of an ending with the three-vowel choice is the plural **(o/e/ö)-k** to which we now turn.

## Exercise 3



Identify the following words as taking back vowel, front unrounded or front rounded vowel suffixes.

- |          |          |            |
|----------|----------|------------|
| 1 család | 6 jogász | 11 nyelv   |
| 2 diák   | 7 ablak  | 12 füzet   |
| 3 gyerek | 8 szék   | 13 ismerős |
| 4 zenész | 9 fiú    | 14 asztal  |
| 5 tanár  | 10 lány  | 15 ez      |

## The plural of nouns

The plural of nouns is formed by adding a **-k** to the end of a word. When added to nouns ending in the vowels **a** or **e**, the vowel is

lengthened to **á** or **é**, respectively; when added to nouns ending in any other vowel, the vowel remains unchanged:

college student	<b>egyetemista</b>	<b>egyetemisták</b>
cup	<b>csésze</b>	<b>csészek</b>
parent	<b>szülő</b>	<b>szülők</b>

When adding the plural **-k** to nouns ending in a consonant, a linking vowel is needed. The linking vowel choice is **o/e/ö**; vowel-harmony rules determine which vowel is required.

If the noun is a back vowel word, the linking vowel **o** is required:

teacher	<b>tanár</b>	<b>tanárok</b>
table	<b>asztal</b>	<b>asztalok</b>

If the noun is a front vowel word and the last vowel is unrounded, the linking vowel **e** is required:

artist	<b>művész</b>	<b>művészek</b>
notebook	<b>fűzet</b>	<b>fűzetek</b>

If the noun is a front vowel word and the last vowel is rounded, the linking vowel choice is **ö**:

acquaintance	<b>ismerős</b>	<b>ismerősök</b>
fruit	<b>gyümölcs</b>	<b>gyümölcsök</b>

## Summary: linking vowels for plural of regular nouns

*Linking vowel choice o/e/ö*

<i>Back vowel word</i>	<i>Front vowel word</i>	
↓	Last vowel is	Last vowel is
↓	unrounded	rounded
<b>o</b>	<b>e</b>	<b>ö</b>

This is the pattern for regular nouns; any exceptions are pointed out in the word lists. You have learned three nouns thus far that do not conform to the regular pattern: **férfi: férfiak**, **könyv: könyvek**, **toll: tollak**. In compound words, the last word of the compound dictates

vowel harmony (e.g., **tankönyv** is comprised of the words **tan** 'learning' and **könyv** 'book' and adds endings rules for **könyv**). We will see some other patterns later for different noun classes and adjectives.

## Exercise 4

Form the plural of the following nouns.



- |                |                |           |
|----------------|----------------|-----------|
| 1 szék         | 6 filmrendező  | 11 gyerek |
| 2 tanár        | 7 szülő        | 12 ablak  |
| 3 zenész       | 8 család       | 13 tábla  |
| 4 egyetemista  | 9 antropológus | 14 füzet  |
| 5 csésze 'cup' | 10 jogász      | 15 nyelv  |

## Dialogue 6



**A magyar nyelv szép** The Hungarian language is beautiful (**Audio 1:20**)



Mike and his mother Melanie have a discussion about the Hungarian language.

- 
- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| MIKE    | Milyen a magyar nyelv?   |
| MELANIE | Szép! A magyar nyelv nagyon szép!  |
| MIKE    | Milyenek a magyar-angol szótárak?  |
| MELANIE | Azok nagyon jók, de elég drágák!   |
| MIKE    | Milyen könyv ez?   |
| MELANIE | Ez egy új és érdekes regény. Azok is regények. Azok is érdekesek, de nem újak.                                       |
| <br>    |  |
| MIKE    | <i>What is the Hungarian language like?</i>  |
| MELANIE | <i>Beautiful! The Hungarian language is very beautiful!</i>  |
| MIKE    | <i>What are Hungarian-English dictionaries like?</i>   |
| MELANIE | <i>They are very good, but rather expensive.</i>   |
| MIKE    | <i>What kind of book is this?</i>  |
| MELANIE | <i>This is a new and interesting novel. Those are novels, too. Those are interesting also, but they are not new.</i> |
-



## Vocabulary

<b>drága</b>	expensive, dear
<b>elég</b>	rather, fairly
<b>jó</b>	good
<b>milyen</b>	what kind of?

<b>nagyon</b>	very
<b>regény</b>	novel
<b>szép</b>	beautiful, nice



## Language points

### The plural of adjectives

Adjectives preceding the nouns they modify do not agree in number; thus, there is no plural agreement in adjectives preceding a noun. However, adjectives forming the entire predicate must agree in number with their subjects; thus, if the subject is in the plural, the (predicate) adjective must be as well. It is only under these conditions that you will need to form the plural of adjectives.

As with the noun, the plural of adjectives is formed with a **-k**, although it is not attached exactly the same way as with nouns. When required, adjectives use the linking vowels **a** (for back vowel words) and **e** (for front vowel words). Note that for adjectives, there is only front/back vowel harmony with no unrounded/rounded distinction.

For adjectives ending in the vowels **a** or **e**, the vowel is lengthened to **á** or **é** when adding the plural **-k**.

dear	<b>drága</b>	<b>drágák</b>
black	<b>fekete</b>	<b>feketék</b>

For adjectives ending in **i/ú/ű**, a linking vowel **a/e** is required before the plural **-k**.

American	<b>amerikai</b>	<b>amerikaiak</b>
simple	<b>egyszerű</b>	<b>egyszerűek</b>
long	<b>hosszú</b>	<b>hosszúak</b>

Some adjectives ending in **ó/ő** take the linking vowel **a/e**, some do not and some take either ending; it is difficult to predict.

good	<b>jó</b>	<b>jók</b>
comprehensible	<b>érthető</b>	<b>érthetőek or érthetők</b>

Adjectives ending in a consonant form their plurals by using the linking vowel **a/e** before the plural marker **-k**. (Compare with nouns which use the linking vowel choice **o/e/ö**.)

tall	<b>magas</b>	<b>magasak</b>
interesting	<b>érdekes</b>	<b>érdekesek</b>

Thus far you have learned one exception to this rule, **fiatal**: **fiatalok**.

Further exceptions will be pointed out in the word lists.

Examples (notice the patterns of agreement):

<b>A füzet új.</b>	The notebook is new.
<b>A füzetek újak.</b>	The notebooks are new.
<b>Ez (egy) új füzet.</b>	This is a new notebook.
<b>Ezek új füzetek.</b>	These are new notebooks.
<b>Az asztal alacsony.</b>	The table is low.
<b>Az asztalok alacsonyak.</b>	The tables are low.
<b>Az (egy) alacsony asztal.</b>	That is a low table.
<b>Azok alacsony asztalok.</b>	Those are low tables.

## Exercise 5



Learn some common and useful adjectives – they are given in antonym pairs below. Form their plurals.

tall	<b>magas</b>	low, short	<b>alacsony</b>
long	<b>hosszú</b>	short	<b>rövid</b>
fat	<b>kövér</b>	thin	<b>sovány</b>
beautiful	<b>szép</b>	ugly	<b>csúnya</b>
cheerful	<b>vidám</b>	sad	<b>szomorú</b>
wonderful	<b>gyönyörű</b>	awful	<b>szörnyű</b>
fast	<b>gyors</b>	slow	<b>lassú</b>
expensive	<b>drága</b>	inexpensive	<b>olcsó</b>
good	<b>jó</b>	bad	<b>rossz</b>

## Exercise 6



Translate into Hungarian.

- 1 The boys are cheerful.
- 2 Those are tall girls.
- 3 The books are expensive, but the newspapers are cheap.



- 4 These are awful!
- 5 They are interesting teachers.
- 6 The Hungarian language is not simple, but it is wonderful.
- 7 The blackboards are long and the tables are long too.
- 8 What are the children like? What are the parents like?

## What is an adjective? What is a noun?

For the purposes of adding the plural, consider ethnonyms (the word for a person's ethnicity – not always identical with his or her nationality) as nouns unless they end in the letter **-i**. Any nationality or other identification of origin ending in the letter **-i** declines as an adjective.

Nouns: **magyar, angol, finn, horvát**, etc.

Adjectives: **budapesti, bostoni, amerikai, londoni, kanadai**, etc.



## Exercise 7

Form the plural of the following ethnonyms.

African	<b>afrikai</b>	German	<b>német</b>
Brazilian	<b>brazíliai</b>	Italian	<b>olasz</b>
Canadian	<b>kanadai</b>	Japanese	<b>japán</b>
Chinese	<b>kínai</b>	Mexican	<b>mexikói</b>
Croatian	<b>horvát</b>	Polish	<b>lengyel</b>
Czech	<b>cseh</b>	Russian	<b>orosz</b>
English	<b>angol</b>	Senegalese	<b>szenegáli</b>
Finnish	<b>finn</b>	Swedish	<b>svéd</b>
French	<b>francia</b>	Swiss	<b>svájci</b>

## Ki? Kik? Mi? Mik?

Note that the words **ki** 'who' and **mi** 'what' have regular plurals **kik** and **mik**. Compare the following sentences:

<b>Ki ez?</b>	Who is this?	<b>Kik ezek?</b>	Who are they?
<b>Mi ez?</b>	What is this?	<b>Mik ezek?</b>	What are these?

## Cultural notes



### Names

In Hungarian, names are in the reverse order compared to English. The person's family name (**vezetéknév** or **családi név**) comes first, and his or her given name (**utónév** or **keresztnév**) comes last. For example, 'John Smith' in Hungarian would be **Smith John** or with a more local flavor, **Kovács János**.

In addition to birthdays (**születésnap**), Hungarians also celebrate namedays (**névnap**). Each day in the calendar corresponds to one or more names. Women's first names, some of which have English equivalents, include: **Ágnes** (Agnes), **Anikó**, **Csilla**, **Emőke**, **Eszter** (Esther), **Hajnalka** (Dawn), **Hedvig**, **Ildikó**, **Judit** (Judith), **Katalin** (Catherine), **Lilla**, **Piroska**, **Szilvia** (Sylvia), **Zita**, **Zsófia** (Sophia), or **Zsuzsanna** (Suzanna). Male first names include: **Ákos**, **Antal**, **Botond**, **Gergely**, **Imre**, **István** (Steven), **Károly** (Charles), **László** (Leslie), **Mátyás** (Matthias), **Mihály** (Michael), **Pál** (Paul), **Sándor** (Alexander), **Szabolcs**, **Tamás** (Thomas), **Tibor**, **Zoltán** or **Zsolt**.

For married women, the assertion of her marital status is in flux. Traditionally, the **-né** suffix is added to her husband's name and indicates the 'Mrs' marital status. Accordingly, Mrs John Smith would be **Smith Johnné** or, as the Hungarians would say **Kovács Jánosné**. For short, you can simply say 'Mrs Smith': **Smithné** or **Kovácsné**. There are increasingly more alternatives in addition to this traditional practice. Married women may keep their maiden name (**leánykori név**), or they may combine it with their husband's first name as we saw in the dialogues. Thus, Mrs Zoltán Szabó (who may keep her maiden name, **Egri Zsófia**) may use the following names: **Szabó Zoltánné** or **Szabóné** or **Szabóné Egri Zsófia**. Moreover, it is not uncommon to see the combination **Szabó Zoltánné Egri Zsófia** or, more simply, **Szabó Zsófia**. With all these choices with names, good luck to the language learner and the genealogist!

# Unit Two

## Az egyetem és a diákok

The university and the students



In this unit you will learn:

- the verb 'to be': **van**
- more personal pronouns: **én, te, ön, maga, mi, ti, önök, maguk**
- word order, negation, questions
- formal and informal address



### Dialogue 1



#### Az egyetem The university (Audio 1:21)

John and Réka discuss their surroundings as they take the tram to the university.

JOHN Mi ez?

RÉKA Ez egy villamos. Az pedig egy busz.

JOHN A budapesti villamosok sárgák?

RÉKA Igen, a régi villamosok is sárgák és az új villamosok is sárgák.

JOHN A new york-i taxik is sárgák! [*turning his head to a tram stop*] Mi az?

RÉKA Az a megálló. Nem a buszmegálló, hanem a villamosmegálló.

JOHN Itt van az egyetem?

RÉKA Igen, itt van balra.

JOHN És mi van ott jobbra?

RÉKA Nem tudom.

JOHN A '*Nem tudom*' hogy van angolul?

RÉKA A '*Nem tudom*' angolul: 'I don't know.'

JOHN Köszönöm.

RÉKA Szívesen!

JOHN *What is this?*

RÉKA *This is a tram. That, however, is a bus.*

JOHN *Are the Budapest trams yellow?*

RÉKA *Yes, the old trams are yellow, and the new trams are also yellow.*

JOHN *New York taxis are yellow too. What is that?*

RÉKA *That is the stop. Not the bus stop, but the tram stop.*

JOHN *Is the university here?*

RÉKA *Yes, it is here on the left.*

JOHN *And what is that there on the right?*

RÉKA *Nem tudom.*

JOHN *What is 'Nem tudom' in English?*

RÉKA *'Nem tudom' in English is 'I don't know'.*

JOHN *Thank you.*

RÉKA *You're welcome.*

## Vocabulary (Audio 1:22)

**angolul** in English

**balra** on/to the left

**busz** bus

**egyetem** university

**hogy** how

**jobbra** on/to the right

**köszönöm** thank you

**megálló** (bus or tram) stop

**nem** I don't know

**tudom**

**sárga** yellow

**szívesen** you're welcome

**taxi** taxi

**van** see Language point

**villamos** tram

